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ACCOUNTS OF A TROUBLED PAST: PSYCHOLOGY, HISTORY, AND TEXTS OF EXPERIENCE[1]

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ABSTRACT

The article considers the contribution that discursive psychology can make to the study of accounts of a troubled past, using, as relevant examples, testimonies of Holocaust survivors and confessions of collaboration with the secret police in communist Eastern Europe. Survivor testimonies and confessions of former informants are analyzed as instances of public remembering which straddle historical and psychological enquiries: they are, at the same time, stories of individual fates, replete with references to psychological states, motives and cognitions, and discourses of history, part of a socially and institutionally mediated collective struggle with a painful, unsettling, or traumatic past. Also, the examples point to two different ways in which archives are relevant to the study of human experience. In the case of Holocaust survivor testimony, personal recollections are usually documented in order to be systematically archived and made part of the official record of the past, while in the case of collaboration with the security services, it is the opening of the 'official' archives, and the fallout from this development, that made the confessions and public apologies necessary. The article argues that discursive psychology's emphasis on remembering as a dynamic,

[1] The extract from the testimony of Holocaust survivor Joan B. featured in this article was published with the permission from the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, based at Yale University Library. The authors are grateful to the Yale University Library staff and the Manuscripts and Archives department for granting this permission, as well as to anonymous reviewers on their comments and suggestions.

performative and rhetorical practice, situated in a specific social and historical context offers a particularly productive way of exploring the interplay between personal experience and the institutional production of historical knowledge, one that helps to address some of the challenges encountered by psychologists and historians interested in researching accounts of troubled past.

KEWORDS*: Discursive psychology, archive, testimony, experience, confession*

Since the 1960s, historical enquiry underwent an important shift towards a greater recognition of personal accounts as a relevant historiographic source, one that complements the hitherto privileged documentary evidence as the basis for historical reconstruction. An obvious example is the rise of the oral history movement which, by foregrounding personal experience, brought about a profound 'change in the way that history is written and learnt, in its questions and its judgments, and in its texture' (Thompson, 2000, p. 83). Also, historians have begun to engage more reflexively with letters, diaries, and other personal documents, but also with media reports and interviews, transcripts of judicial inquiries, court testimonies and similar sources.

Greater engagement with accounts of experience inevitably invites an interdisciplinary approach, one that draws on theoretical and methodological insights from across the social sciences and humanities (Bornat, 2013). The potential contribution of psychology to this interdisciplinary project should be obvious: the study of personal accounts invariably touches upon issues that are of inherent psychological interest. These include, first and foremost, the dynamics of human remembering through which accounts of experience are mediated, but also things like intentionality, agency, affect and emotion, identity and subjectivity, and so on

(Middleton and Brown, 2005; Brown and Reavey, 2015; Reavey, 2010). Moreover, there is a longstanding tradition of engagement with experience and subjectivity from a psychological vantage point: from classic perspectives drawing on personality (e.g., Allport, 1965) to modern phenomenological (Smith and Osborn, 2003) and poststructuralist (Gemignani, 2011) approaches; from a discursive respecification of psychological concepts (Edwards, 1997; Potter, 2012a) to the more recent focus on embodiment (Brown et al., 2011).

In spite of the shared interest in accounts of experience, the work of psychologists and historians appears to have progressed in parallel, without much evidence, or promise, of convergence (Tileaga and Byford, 2014). In fact, when it comes to studying experience, the interests and objectives of psychologists and historians are sometimes even presented as incompatible (e.g. Felman & Laub, 1992, Goldhagen, 1997). One reason is that the two disciplines have different foci, and different priorities. Psychology, in the main, places the emphasis on the *teller*, the individual 'behind' the account, their internal psychological mechanism or their personality, disposition and subjectivity. This has defined the approach of research on personality (Allport, 1965), psychohistory (Elovitz, 2014, McKinley-Runyan, 1984), trauma (Gemignani, 2011, Felman and Laub, 1992), and cognitive psychology (Conway & Jacobson, 2012, p.61, see also Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000). By contrast, in most historical research, at least that which is not manifestly biographical, accounts of experience are consulted to shed light not so much on the teller, but on the *event* being described. A personal account – a testimony, a diary, a letter, a newspaper, radio or television interview – is deemed useful in so far as it can fill in the gaps, provide illustrative examples, or throw a different light on some aspect of the past.

In the present article we consider the contribution that discursive and rhetorical approaches in psychology might make in the quest for a more interdisciplinary take on the study of accounts of experience. Discursive psychology is an evolving and multifaceted perspective, with a number of strands, and different analytical foci (Tileagă & Stokoe, 2015). For the most part, contemporary discursive psychology involves a close examination of the minutiae of routine talk and interaction, drawing on the analytical techniques of conversation analysis (see Potter, 2012a). However, historically, discursive psychology has also involved a broader, critical analysis of rhetoric and argumentation, and focused on the way in which wider social and political discourses inform how people construct their experience in talk and text (Augoustinos & Every, 2010; Billig et al., 1988; Weatherall, in press; Wetherell, 1998, 2007; Wetherell & Potter, 1992).

Discursive psychology has already featured in this journal through the 2014 Special Section on applied discursive psychology (Lester, 2014a). However, while the contributors to that issue deliberately focused on the application of this approach to concerns which are manifestly *psychological* - body talk and identity (Wiggins, 2014), blame and accountability in family therapy interaction (O'Reilly, 2014) and the negotiation of what constitutes 'normal' behavior in the context of therapy with children with autism (Lester, 2014b) - we turn our attention to a different set of issues and a different set of data. We look at the way in which discursive psychology can be used to examine accounts of personal experience which are produced 'for the record' and which are, by their very nature, as much about personal biography as about reconstructing, or reinterpreting, historical events.

In particular, we are interested in what Brown & Reavey (2015) have termed *vital memories:* aspects of the past which are simultaneously essential to a person's

identity and sense of self, and problematic, in that that they are painful, threatening or disruptive in some way. We will draw on our own research that looked at two very different kinds of 'vital memories': testimonies of Holocaust survivors (Byford, 2010, 2013, 2014) and accounts of involvement in state oppression in communist Romania provided in the context of (written) public apologies or disclosures (Tileagă, 2009, 2011, 2013a,b). We selected these examples for two reasons. First, they enable us to examine two dissimilar sources of 'trouble'. In the case of Holocaust survivors, 'trouble' stems from the traumatic nature of the experience, but also from the different expectations that come with being a witness to the Holocaust, all of which need to be attended to, and managed, in testimony. In the case of collaborators with the secret police, the main source of 'trouble' is the threat to honor, reputation and livelihood brought on by revelations about past transgression. This is an important difference because while the survivor has a reasonable expectation of a sympathetic audience, the assumed informant does not. This has significant implications for the way in which accounts are produced and interpreted, and how the 'troubling' aspect of the experience is managed rhetorically.

Second, the examples point to two different ways in which archives are relevant to the study of experience. In the case of Holocaust survivor testimony, personal recollections are recorded in order to be systematically archived and placed alongside other historiographic sources at the disposal of scholars, educators, the media and the general public. By contrast, in the case of collaboration with the Securitate in Romania, it is the *opening* of the 'official' archives of the security services, and the fallout from this development, that challenged a society's hierarchy of respectability and made the exculpatory accounts and public apologia necessary. Thus, rather than being part of a formal archive – apologies and disclosures are

usually made public in the form of open letters published in the media – the accounts of former informants bring into question, seek to reinterpret, and contest, a version of the past gleaned from archival sources. This distinction between our two examples enables us to explore two different ways in which accounts of personal experience become a matter of public record and get constituted as relevant material for studying the past.

Third, and perhaps the most important reason for choosing to focus on survivor testimonies and informants' apologies is that both types of accounts are manifestly both *psychological* and *historical*. They are accounts of historical events, yet within them psychological states (perception, identity, emotion, memory, trauma etc.) are all topicalized, made relevant, discussed and contested both by the protagonists (survivors or informants) and by those engaging with these sources: archivists, scholars, stakeholders and the general public. In fact, the psychological dimension is central to the status of these accounts as sources of epistemic authority - what the witness did or did not *see*, what the informant *remembers* or does not remember, etc. Through an analysis of illustrative examples from the two contexts, we argue that discursive psychology offers a platform for an interdisciplinary understanding of such accounts of experience.

DISCURSIVE PSYCHOLOGY, MEMORY AND (TROUBLED) EXPERIENCE

Over the past quarter of the century, discursive approaches in psychology have provided one of the most comprehensive challenges to mainstream psychology, offering radically new ways of thinking about psychological processes and entities, about cognition, emotion, motivation, memory, learning, identity, and so on. As a systematic, empirical analysis of talk and text, discursive psychology has also made

an important contribution to the wider recognition of qualitative research in psychology, although as Potter (2012b) acknowledges, its impact was felt least strongly in the US (see Tileagă & Stokoe, 2015 for an account of the variety, international and critical reach of contemporary discursive psychology).

At the core of the intellectual and empirical project behind this kind of psychological research is the critique of the traditional assumption that human thinking and behavior are 'ultimately dependent on putative individual entities', or internal states - beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, emotions and memories - which are analyzable through the application of specific (usually quantitative) methods (Potter, 2012b, p. 438). Instead, the emphasis is placed firmly on discourse, and the way in which 'people invoke, describe, ascribe, imply, and manage' psychological concepts, how they talk about them, and draw upon them, in the context of social interaction (Edwards, 2012, p. 427). One of discursive psychology's central assumptions is that psychological descriptions are mobilized to perform rhetorical work, and are, as such, situated in a particular social and interactional context. Discursive psychologist's task, therefore, is to examine people's descriptions of persons, events, intentions, interests, motives, etc., and analyze the discursive organization, and rhetorical function, of such descriptions.

The crucial issue differentiating discursive psychology from mainstream psychological approaches is the role of language. Discursive psychology does not treat language as 'a transparent medium for studying relations between cognition and reality' (Edwards & Potter, 1992, p. 31-32). Instead, it considers both as constituted in discourse and as the outcome of a complex mutual relationship between people, practices and institutions (Hepburn & Wiggins, 2007). As Potter & Wetherell (1987, p. 178-9) put it in one of discursive psychology's foundational

texts, 'much of the phenomenon of the mind is intersubjectively constituted, as the person speaks, writes, reminisces, talks to others, and so on'. Likewise, the 'world out there' is the product of an intricate process of construction, and argument, through which things, or versions of events, are worked up as 'real', 'factual', 'true', etc. (see Billig, 1987, Potter, 1996).

Also, in discursive psychology, discourse is understood as social action. It is a way of *doing things*, such as justifying or contesting a particular position or interpretation, managing one's own accountability, persuading others, addressing ideological dilemmas, and so on. In the case of psychological vocabulary, the emphasis is on how participants, or speakers, mobilize and orient to psychological entities and concepts, how they evoke and bring them into play on specific occasions of use, as they conduct relevant interactional 'business'. For instance, the claim to have been 'upset' or 'made angry' carries specific moral weight in the context of an argument, in the same way that talk of motives or attributions achieves specific interactional goals (Potter, 2012a). As Hepburn & Wiggins (2007, p.8) put it, psychological concepts or states are not 'something we have or we are' but 'resources for action'. This move from cognition to action recognizes psychology as more 'interactionally focused, dynamic and culturally specific'.

The relationship between language and psychology implicit in the discursive approach has important implications for work on accounts of experience. Discursive psychology sees remembering as a social practice, rather than an exercise of a specific mental faculty. As they remember and recount their experience, people draw on a host of available, shared cultural resources; they negotiate, and try and persuade others in the veracity of a particular version of the past, or a particular version of themselves. They make their memories 'available' or 'unavailable' for

public scrutiny; they attend to their own agency and accountability in troubling events and occurrences, they manage their claim to knowledge, and so on. Thus, discursive psychology seeks to extract the notions of 'remembering' and 'forgetting' from the sphere of cognition, and treats them as something that is accomplished in talk and text (Middleton & Edwards, 1990, p. 24, also Billig, 1999). One of the key advantages of the discursive approach is the explicit recognition of the situated and contextually contingent nature of experience. What counts as personal 'experience' is the product of culture, and the ways in which it is articulated and made intelligible and relevant is the outcome of a complex nexus of social, organizational and historical practices.

For the purposes of the present article, of particular relevance is the discursive work that looks at remembering that is *public* in nature. Lynch & Bogen's (1996) classic analysis of the memory work in testimonies produced during the 1987 Iran-contra congressional hearings highlights the importance of memory as a resource that people can draw upon and use for 'claiming, disclaiming, imputing, resisting, or discounting' a version of events, or for constructing, or challenging, a particular 'relationships between biography and history' (Lynch & Bogen, 1996, p.273). In the hearings, just like in the material that we analyze, accounts produced in the context of a very public act of remembering were effectively (re)constructing history, while also attending to matters that are deeply personal. It could be argued that discursive psychology provides a particularly suitable framework for examining this kind of remembering, where stories of individual fates are at same time discourses of history, and part of a socially and institutionally mediated *collective* struggle with a painful, unsettling, or traumatic past.

HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR TESTIMONY: BEYOND ACCURACY AND AUTHENTICITY

In this section we will look at an example of remembering that takes place in the context of a Holocaust survivor testimony. We will analyze in detail an extract from a single interview which forms part of the collection of the Fortunoff Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, based at the University of Yale. The Fortunoff Archive is one of three largest testimony collection projects in the United States, with around 4,400 recordings in its collection. Founded in 1981, it is also the first archive to have comprehensively embraced the audio-visual medium for capturing survivors' testimonies, paving the way for the subsequent video recording of tens of thousands of accounts of Holocaust survivors by multiple institutions worldwide (Hartman, 1995, Keilbach, 2013, Shenker, 2015).

The example we will look at is from the testimony by the survivor identified as Joan B. (T-82), recorded in 1980. Born to a German Jewish family in 1919, Joan B. spent the period between 1939 and 1945 in various Nazi concentration camps, including Theresienstadt, Auschwitz, and Eidelstedt camp in Hamburg. She was liberated by the allies at Bergen Belsen in 1945, and immigrated to the United States a year later.

There is a reason for choosing this particular testimony, over thousands of others in the collection. A specific episode from Joan B.'s Holocaust experience has attracted attention from scholars of survivor testimony. In it Joan B. describes a harrowing experience from her time at the Eidelstedt labour camp, when a Nazi official drowned a newborn baby shortly after it was brought into the world by one of the camp inmates. Several influential authors, all of them literary scholars with a specialism in Holocaust testimonies, have cited Joan B.'s account of this event as an example of traumatic Holocaust memory, treating it as an important source of insight into the inner working of the survivor's mind (Hartman, 2001, Langer 1991, van Alphen, 2003). In what follows we will contrast this interpretation with one informed by discursive psychological work on memory. Specifically we will argue that manifested in this brief episode and the way it has been

interpreted is an important tension that permeates literature on survivor testimonies. It is the tension between, on the one hand, the concern with the reliability of survivors' accounts and the role of testimonies as a source of evidence about the Holocaust, and, on the other hand, the focus on authenticity and the ability of testimonies to illuminate the unprecedented trauma suffered by survivors and victims (see Byford, 2013). In analyzing the extract we argue that rather than being seen as intrinsic, and competing, qualities of survivors' memories, accuracy and authenticity should be approached as closely intertwined, socially and culturally mediated concerns that survivors, and interviewers, attend to, and manage as they engage in the institutionally embedded practice of bearing witness.

Joan B.'s recollection of the killing of the newborn baby was first brought to public attention in Lawrence Langer's seminal book *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory*, published in 1991:

> 'One of the women in her group was pregnant and eventually gave birth. The commandant came to Joan B. and ordered her to boil some water. It was just like the films, she declares: "Boil water. But the water wasn't to help with the act of giving birth. He drowned the newborn in the boiling water." The appalled interviewer asks, "Did you see that?" "Oh yes, I did", the witness imperturbably replies. "Did you say anything?" the dialogue continues. "No, I didn't."' (Langer, 1991, p.123)

Langer, who was actively involved in Fortunoff Archive's project (see Shenker, 2015) cites this episode as a pertinent example of what he calls 'tainted memory' of Holocaust survivors. He evokes Joan B.'s apparent lack of emotional reaction to what she had seen to illustrate the uniqueness of the moral universe of the Nazi concentration camp which systematically undermined the values of empathy, altruism and humanity. Specifically, he uses the contrast between the 'appalled' interviewer and the 'unperturbed' survivor to highlight the 'experiential rift' (Shenker, 2015, p.23) that exists between the

survivor and her audience. A similar interpretation is offered by Ernst van Alphen (1997, 1999, 2003, 2005), who sees in Joan B.'s apparent lack of 'concern and compassion' (van Alphen, 1999, p. 32), a symptom of the trauma-induced disruption to the normal processes of remembering and comprehension, and a sign that the horror of what was observed had not been adequately 'worked through' or 'processed into understanding' (van Alphen, 2005, p.165). Likewise, Geoffrey Hartman (2001) cites the episode as an example of the survivors' 'honesty in facing their damaged lives' and the way in which the interaction between the survivor and the interviewer can help to illuminate the Holocaust experience.

Langer's, van Alphen's and Hartman's focus on the survivor's mental states (Joan B.'s apparent lack of compassion, the process of 'working through' a painful past and facing her 'damaged life') reveals the primary analytic concern with the inner world of experience. This approach reflects the basic rationale behind the Fortunoff Archive's testimony collection project. Ever since its inception, one of the main aims of the Fortunoff Archive interview has been to take the survivor beyond the comfort zone of a conventional event-focused narrative that simply records information about 'what happened' (Langer, following Charlotte Delbo refers to this type of remembering as 'common memory'). Instead, the interviews sought to penetrate into the 'nuanced layers' of the traumatic, 'deep memory' of the Holocaust, characterized by an emotionally wrenching return to the past (Langer 1991, Shenker, 2015). The episode with the baby is thus presented and analyzed as an example of how a traumatic, 'tainted memory' comes to light in a testimonial interview.

Within this approach to survivor testimony, the aspiration to capture the survivor's authentic emotional experience pushes the concern with the reliability of memory into the background. As Langer puts it, the 'troubled interaction between past and present' recorded on tape, 'achieves a gravity that surpasses the concern with accuracy' (Langer, 1991, p. xv). And yet, even in the context of a psychologically inflected, trauma-centered interpretation, the facts of 'what happened' are highly relevant. The reality of the central event in this episode – the witnessing of the drowning of the baby in boiling water – is taken for granted: this is the source of the traumatic experience, and the starting point for drawing inferences

about the witness's psychological state. Van Alphen (2005, p. 164) in particular emphasizes that Joan B. 'has seen what has happened to the newborn baby' and that this created a powerful 'visual imprint' in her mind, like an 'immutable photograph' or a 'visual recording', which decades after the event still has not been 'worked through' (Alphen, 2005, p.164).

By contrast, an historian encountering this episode might take a more cautious approach when it comes to the veridicality of the survivor's account. On the one hand, it is well known that babies born in concentration camps were often murdered shortly after birth, and there is some evidence, mainly from other testimonies but also from legal records, to corroborate Joan B.'s claim that two newborn babies were murdered in the days prior to the evacuation, most probably by drowning (Horowitz, 1994, Bodenstab, 2015). On the other hand, the available evidence contradicts the specific claim made in the testimony that one of the babies was drowned in boiling water. So, this element of the story might be set aside by a more skeptical researcher as an example of the kind of embellishment that is frequently encountered in survivor testimonies. Importantly, the *cause* of such embellishments is seldom of interest to historians, who are content to defer the questions pertaining to the nature of the "eroding," or "distorted" memory to psychologists, who are believed to have the relevant expertise and vocabulary to address them.

Let us now examine this episode through the prism of discourse analytic work on remembering. The first thing to note is that Langer analysis was based not on the transcript of the relevant section from Joan B.'s testimony but a brief description of what went on in the interview. Van Alphen and Hartman meanwhile relied entirely on Langer's account rather than on the original recording. This is not unusual in literature on survivor testimony: survivors' experiences, having been meticulously recorded and archived, are often disseminated, and analyzed, in the form of isolated, abbreviated summaries or vignettes, which sideline both the interactional elements of the interviews, and the broader context of their production (Shenker, 2015).

For our analysis we will follow the practice of discursive psychology and use the verbatim transcript, based on a video recording provided by the Fortunoff Archive (T-82, Joan B.). The extract has been transcribed using a simplified version of the Jeffersonian system, commonly used in discursive psychology (Appendix A for a summary of the conventions used in the transcript below).

Around twelve minutes into the hour-long testimony, Joan B. describes how in 1945, shortly before the evacuation of the labour camp where she worked as a cook, a building had collapsed, killing and injuring a large number of forced labourers and some guards:

Extract 1 (12:42 – 14:19)

1	Joan B:	Our comma:nding officer was ra:ging (.) And he had been in
2		a bad mood anyway. Because (0.5) two of the girls that were
3		there (.) had been pre:gnant. One had already given birth,
4		>the other one was about to give birth< (1.8) He:: made me
5		boil water (1.0) And I thought to myself (.) This is just like
6		you he:ar in films (1.0) Boil water (1.0) But the water wasn't
7		(.) to help with the:: ehh (0.4) act of giving birth. He
8		drowned the newborn in this boiling water. (0.5) Then he
9		came to me for a box (.) for margarine or something like that
10		and that was the coffin for the newborn baby=
11	Interviewer:	=°Did you see that?°
12	Joan B.:	Oh ye::s.
13	Interviewer:	°You saw him kill the baby?°
14	Joan B.:	Oh ye:s I did (1.0) Oh ye:s I did.
15	Interviewer:	°Did you say anything?°
16	Joan B.:	Did I say anything? No I didn't, but I knew that I would have
17		a chance (0.5) to say something (.) And I did. I will tell you
18		about it (1.6) Well anywa:y (1.0) the (.) injuries that the rest
19		of the girls had received was (.) was unbelievable (1.3) And
20		now we were in this (.) cattle car (.) with these (1.0) ahh
21		(1.0) near death people from this accident (0.5) and it took

22 (1.2) five days (.) to drive, or: be in the car (0.5) to::: travel
23 120 miles, that's all it was.

If we compare this extract with Langer's description, we can see that the latter contains a number of omissions. Joan B. brings up the murder of the baby not as an event that is particularly significant or traumatic in its own right, but as a way of accounting for the commanding officer's bad mood prior to the evacuation. In fact, she does not dwell on the story about the baby beyond answering the questions from the interviewer. Also, she resists the interruption to the chronologically ordered narrative by postponing the story about the baby until later ('I will tell you about it', line 17-18) and promptly returns to the description of the accident and the evacuation. 'Well anyway' (line 18), a common rhetorical device used to redirect a conversation to a different topic, signals this transition (see Billig, 1999). Langer also omits the detail about the commanding officer seeking out a box in the kitchen to be used as a coffin for the baby. Most crucially, in Langer's version, Joan B.'s response to the question 'Did you say anything?' ends with 'No, I didn't'. Yet we can see that Joan B. proceeds to provide a justification for why she did not protest (lines 16-23). Later in the testimony, she returns to this incident and explains how, while working as an interpreter for the British authorities after the war, she contributed to the tracking down and arrest of the commanding officer, whom she reported for the murder of the baby.

Langer's selective, and arguably misleading description of what is going on in the interaction was probably driven by his overall concern with delving 'below the surface' and identifying the brief snapshots of the elusive, 'deep memory' of Holocaust. This is reflected also in the fact that both the description of the episode and the subsequent interpretation focus overwhelmingly on what Joan B. *did not* say or do in the testimony: they foreground her accountability for not 'saying anything' at the time of the murder, and for the absence of an emotional reaction while recalling the event. In the context of the latter, the description

of the interviewer as 'appalled' emphasizes the inappropriateness of Joan B.'s 'unperturbed' response, pointing at an aspect of her memory that is analyzable as traumatic.

However, a closer scrutiny of the extract reveals a different set of concerns *for the survivor* and very different sources of accountability which are managed in the interaction. From the perspective of discursive psychology these aspects of the interaction constitute the main object on analysis: how survivors construct their account as valid and relevant, how they attend to their entitlement to the story as *theirs* and as part of their experience, how they manage their agency and role in the events, and deal with the accountability of being a witness to the horrors of the Holocaust.

Let us look, first of all, at Joan B.'s account of the murder of the baby. In the version offered by Langer, this is presented as a mere description of a brutal crime, separate from the survivor's experience of and reaction to it. And yet, the description itself is a rhetorically complex discursive configuration, infused with issues of accountability. The episode begins with a depiction of the commanding officer's emotional state (lines 1-2). The references to him 'raging' and being 'in a bad mood' are significant: they act as the preface to the story and help to account for his subsequent actions. Also, the beginning of the description sets up the pregnancies as a 'problem' for the camp authorities, with the unfolding story revealing the horrific 'solution'.

Next, Joan B attends to her own role in the episode: 'He made me boil water. And I thought to myself. This is just like you hear in films. Boil water' (lines 4-6). Here, Joan B starts by reporting a relatively normal state of affairs based on expectations about what happens in childbirth. And yet, this precedes the description of an event that is extraordinary and troubling. The claim to ordinariness, and the transition from the ordinary to the extraordinary, has a clear rhetorical function (see Wooffitt, 1992, Potter, 1996). It constructs Joan B.'s reaction to the commander's request (and therefore her involvement in this brutal crime) as that of a naïve bystander, who simply followed the obvious and innocuous interpretation of what was going on around her, contained in the culturally available 'script' for childbirth. In other words, through the description she is doing 'being ordinary' (Sacks,

1984), presenting herself as unassumingly reacting to the unfolding situation, with the '*you* hear it in films' (line 5-6, emphasis added) signaling that anyone in that situation would have made the same interpretation about what is going on. Also relevant in this context is the reference to her own thoughts at the time: 'And I though to myself. That is just like you hear in films'(line 5-6). This kind of active voicing (Wooffitt, 1992) manages any stake the witness might be seen to have in working up her status as a bystander: she emphasizes this interpretation of events as part of her thought processes *at the time*, rather than as an after-the-event rationalization of her actions.

Furthermore, within the extract, we can see how, even in this very brief episode, Joan B carefully and subtly manages her accountability as a witness. Prior to the interviewer's direct question 'did you see that?' in line 11, Joan B. does not claim to have seen the baby, attended the childbirth or witnessed the murder. Only the boiling of the water ('he made me boil water', line 4-5), and the commanding officer's request for a box ('he came to me for a box for margarine…', lines 8-9) are reported as part of her immediate experience. Thus a subtle distinction is preserved between what the survivor had *seen*, and what she *assumes*, *believes* or *knows* to have happened. The careful negotiation between the two is not unusual in autobiographical accounts, especially those that are related to significant historical events. In such instances, witnessing is as much about the responsibility to tell the world about something important that happened, as it is about *seeing* it in the first place (Peters, 2001). In fact, Holocaust survivors have reported feeling that they are often *expected* to comment on events that lay beyond their immediate experience, and the limited vantage point (Waxman, 2006). In most testimonies (including lines 1-10 in Extract 1) survivors navigate delicately between direct experience and other forms of knowledge, meshing together what they have actually seen, or heard and what they gleaned from other sources, including rumor, conjecture, etc. (see Browning, 2003, Byford, 2010).

It is at this point that the interviewer asks what are, in fact, the pivotal questions in the extract: 'Did you see that?'/'You saw him kill the baby?'. Questions of this kind are

unusual in interviews with Holocaust survivors. In a legal setting – a police interview, or a courtroom – asking someone 'Did you see that?' is a common resource for differentiating first-hand knowledge from hearsay, and for establishing (or undermining) the credibility of a witness. There is little place for such questions in the much more supportive environment of a testimonial interview, especially when the focus is on capturing the survivors' reflections about, and struggle with, the past (Hartman, 2001). Although we cannot speculate on the interviewer's motives for asking these particular questions, there is evidence that similarly probing lines of inquiry have occasionally been pursued in order to provoke an emotional reaction, and trigger the 'deep memory' of the Holocaust (Shenker, 2015). This is certainly how Langer and van Alphen interpreted the question 'did you see that?'. They saw it not as challenging Joan B.'s credibility, but as interpellating her as an eyewitness, prompting her to revisit the horror of what she had seen, and reflect on her emotional and behavioral reaction.

However, it is debatable whether the *survivor* interpreted the question in the same way. Extract 1 reveals that throughout the interaction, the survivor remains firmly rooted in the domain of 'common memory', focused on a chronologically ordered, event-centered account (it is revealing that Joan B. comments on the emotional state of the commander, which is intrinsic to the story, but never on her own). This suggests that there may be a mismatch here between the emotion-focused agenda of the institutions conducting the interview (and researchers analyzing the testimonies) and the survivor's own understanding of what testimony should be about, namely about what happened in the camps (this mismatch is discussed in more detail by Shenker, 2015). In the context of the latter, the question 'did you see that?' has a different connotation. It disrupts the survivor's narrative, topicalizes the boundary between immediate experience and other sources of knowledge, and foregrounds the immediacy of visual experience as the foundation of the survivor's epistemic authority.

All this has implications for how we interpret Joan B.'s response to these questions. The initial 'Oh yes', later upgraded to 'Oh yes I did. Oh yes I did' is telling. As Heritage

(1998) has shown, the function of oh-prefaced responses is not just to 'supply emphasis to a response' (p. 326) but also to signal that the questioner has asked something that is 'unquestionable, or should not be questioned, or is "beyond question"' (p. 294). Joan B.'s response therefore suggests that she recognized this line of inquiry, and the assumption contained therein, as problematic or challenging. It also asserts the right to her own memory, and affirms that her story is tell-able, and believable. Thus, the 'Oh yes I did' should be read neither as an unproblematic confirmation of what the witness had actually seen, nor as an example of misremembering. It is, rather, an occasioned, functional device through which the survivor manages her accountability as a witness, and deals with a difficult, and in the context of survivor testimony, unexpected, and arguably inappropriate question.

It is important to emphasize that discursive psychology makes a point of not legislating as to the veridicality of a specific account, or in this case, determining definitively what it is that Joan B. might have seen, or what constitutes historical truth. Instead, the focus is on how a version of events is produced, constructed, worked up as factual, or authentic, in a specific interactional context. After all, remembering generally is an inherently dynamic, performative, and rhetorical practice, governed by conversational contingencies, and aimed at producing what in a specific context is 'an acceptable, agreed or communicatively successful version of what really happened' (Edwards & Potter, 1995, p. 34-5). In weaving a story of their past, survivors inevitably address particular (real or imagined) audiences, they orient and react to actual or anticipated skepticism or challenges, and mobilize different discursive resources to construct versions of events that will be recognized as authentic, sincere, reliable and valuable. The analytic focus is therefore on how survivors accomplish being a witness in a specific interactional, institutional, and social context.

Also, the analysis of survivors' memories of the kind outlined here implies that testimonies should not be examined as isolated pieces of text, or a window into survivor's inner experience. The manner in which Holocaust experience is organized in testimony is

not independent from the conditions of testimony production, from the assumptions and agendas of testimony collection projects, or from the status of testimony as an archivable, culturally relevant object. In other words, testimonies always reflect, while at the same time helping to shape, the ways in which a society, its institutions and publics (including scholars, archivists and academics) attribute relevance to individual life histories and negotiate what it is that is memory-worthy about the survivor's experience (Byford, 2014). Therefore, the act of remembering, its capture on tape or film and subsequent dissemination, interpretation and consumption should be treated as a set of dynamic, interacting social practices, which establish the survivor as a source of epistemic and moral authority, and help to sustain, or challenge, established cultures of Holocaust memory.

CONFESSIONS OF WRONGDOING: REMEMBERING AND TEXTUAL REFLEXIVITY IN COMING TO TERMS WITH THE PAST

We will now move on to examine the second example of troubled experience, namely accounts of collaboration with state oppression in communist Eastern Europe. The analysis that follows forms part of a wider project on politics of 'regret' in Eastern Europe, looking at public avowals of 'collaboration' with the Securitate, the former Romanian, communist, secret police (Tileagă, 2009, 2011, 2013a, b), and responses to moral transgression in the public sphere (Tileagă, 2012a). In this section, we will focus on a specific example of a confession of having been an informer for the Securitate, namely a public letter which a well-known Romanian public intellectual sent to a major Romanian newspaper in 2006. The letter was published amidst heated controversy in Romanian society over the identity and accountability of former informants (on the broader context of coming to terms with the communist past in post-communist Romania see Tismăneanu, 2008). In examining an example of such a letter, we approach it as a situated,

reflexive, commentary on a troubled, difficult, experience of, and with, the recent past. As was noted in the introduction, an important feature of this public letter (and, more generally, of these kinds of avowals), which makes it especially relevant to the topic of this article, and this Special Section, is that the management of the past is offered through an account which is profoundly personal while at the same time situated in the context of an encounter with complex institutional arrangements – the formal, official, archives of the Securitate.

The lengthy letter, which ran across eighteen pages, is divided into two parts: the 'Essence', which acts as preface to the 'confession' (see Tileagă, 2009 for a detailed account of this section) and the 'Existence', which the writer describes as the 'site of nuances and details', and which constitutes the main body of the letter. In the 'Essence', the writer expresses regret and declares himself to be a certain sort of 'degraded' person, an individual of inferior character - an 'informer':

> *Extract 1*
>
> 'I informed the Securitate in writing about some of [my] friends and some of my acquaintances, without warning them, without confessing to them post festum until my writing of this text, without apologizing, without assuming publicly this shameful past'

Through such an explicit admission, the letter is set up, from the outset, as a form of public 'self-degradation ceremony' (Tileagă, 2012b) which contains an admission, and an account, of wrongdoing. However, as the author himself goes on to explain, this is just a 'gist', a moral contraction, of a more complex story of transgression which is elaborated in the 'Existence'. There we find a biographical journey—from

the first encounters with the Securitate, through 'becoming' an informer, to, finally, being put 'under surveillance' by the Securitate. The 'Existence' contextualizes the 'gist' of the confession, through a more nuanced account of experience constructed around a public struggle with the accountability of an agentic and reflexive self. This struggle is formulated in terms of an 'interpretive autoethnography' (Denzin, 2014), where the 'subjects' (in this case the writer) 'speak directly for themselves', they are animators, authors, principals and protagonists of what they are describing (Edles, 2002, p. 156).

In revisiting past conduct, the author of the letter reflects on the status of the archive as a source, and ponders over the interplay (but also tensions) between three sources of evidence about the past: (1) the institutional, 'official', archive of the Securitate; (2) the author's memory; and (3) his personal archive: notes, photographs, letters, personal documents, etc. The excerpts used below are notable examples of how these three sources of evidence are mobilized rhetorically to manage accountability for past actions in the context of a confession of wrongdoing.

Thus, one of the central features of the 'Essence' part of the letter is an orientation to the status of the official archive of the Securitate:

Extract 2

> "I resigned myself to the lowest order morality, trying never to give information that would truly injure someone's interests, be it a friend or simple acquaintance. When the dossiers regarding the 1980-1982 period surface, I shall be able to prove this claim; I shall be able to complete the story that I start telling now. Until then, everything remains a simple excuse of an informer."

The official archive is presented both as an imperfect source of public and private knowledge (one that reveals only a partial, 'incomplete', story of the author's actions as an 'informant') and as a source that, in the future, holds the potential to validate his version of the past, transforming it from an 'excuse of an informer' to a 'proven' claim. This way, the writer effectively describes himself as a hostage to a potent institution (the Securitate), its methods of operation (collection, accumulation of 'facts', classification and archiving of records, etc.), and its continuing power over his biographical record, while at the same time setting up the archive as a continuous and unexpected site of discovery (Featherstone, 2006), that can facilitate the full accomplishment of the memorial journey. This dual role of the archive provides a way of managing accountability for past events and actions by attending to a specific (negative) function of the partially opened official archive: that of limiting and constraining the full revelation of the moral character of the writer.

However, in the letter, the process of managing public accountability for past events and actions, and reconstructing what 'actually' happened, when, and where, goes beyond the discussion of the constraints imposed by the workings of archives. The confession is presented as an exercise in self-examination, within which memories are 'prompted, prodded and examined' (Lynch & Bogen, 1996, p. 178), providing occasions for deconstructing and re-contextualizing experience. The 'availability' or 'unavailability' of personal memory is construed as an accountable dimension in reconstructing the past. Retrospective accountability is managed by attending to not-quite-remembered biographical details:

Extract 3

> "The first cautioning took place in our high-school, I don't quite remember the date. Was it the 4th March 1976?"

Extract 4

> "I don't recall when I wrote my last information note nor do I recall who was it about, nor its content. Generally, I don't recall well the content of my information notes, apart from a few details and conviction that I haven't accused anyone of anything. It is very much possible that my memory, so affectively and emotionally loaded, has done on her own what I had decided under the burden of shame: to forget, to not recall these details unless in a nightmare … to live on, to reconstruct my life on other principles starting with 1982-1983…I haven't spoken about these issues because I wanted to be free for a while and to construct a new life before being caught up by my past … All those who have had something serious to hide will understand what I mean"

The first thing to note about these extracts is that the gaps in remembering, which the author of the letter acknowledges, are filled with reflections *about* memory. Memory is personified, presented as an entity with its own agency, one that plays its own part in the story (Extract 4). What is more, like people, memory is said to be prone to emotional bias. Rhetorically, and metaphorically, this is a powerful image that places the writer in a position of reasonableness – in this case, the reasonableness of not remembering. He portrays himself as not having a stake in not remembering potentially incriminatory details. Importantly, the issue here is not whether or not the author of the letter 'really' cannot remember the details, but,

rather, what this 'memory talk' accomplishes in a specific rhetorical context. As discursive psychologists have shown, 'I don't remember', 'I don't recall', are more than reports on a cognitive state; they are also ways of indexing (personal) memory as 'practically unavailable' for public scrutiny (Edwards, 1997, Lynch & Bogen, 1996). The use of a qualifier - e.g. 'I don't *quite* remember the date' in Extract 3 - adds, rhetorically, to the reasonableness of not remembering otherwise potentially relevant, but also highly specific details. Also, when examining texts such as this it is difficult, and perhaps unnecessary, to try and determine whether a specific instance of non-recall is an intentional, and conscious tactic used to deny responsibility, or a way of displaying sincerity, credibility, and in doing so managing moral character in the reporting of troubling biographically-relevant events. After all, the object of inquiry here is not a person's 'real' intentions, but the situated pragmatics of 'memory talk'.

Importantly, in the context of managing accountability for past transgression, the author of the letter moves back and forth between personal memory - a source of privileged information about subjective feelings, recollections and biases - and the archive - an external repository of biographical information

Specifically, archival material, although presented as flawed, or at least incomplete, is regarded as a resource that can be mobilized to 'fill in' the gaps in memory. Extracts below come from the section of the letter where the author discusses the period 1976-1978 (extracts 5 and 6) and the period 1980-1982 (extract 7). Each period is associated with a biographically relevant identity: the period 1976-1978 is associated by the author with being an 'informer', and subsequently, 'informer informed on', whereas the 1980-1982 period is associated with being 'reactivated' as an informer and under surveillance.

Extract 5

[…] I don't know whether it was then I signed the informer engagement, but I am sure it was then that I caved under pressure and became an informer. It was probably then that I received the conspirational name ‘‘Valentin.’’ Anyway, I have found at CNSAS the following olograph document, undated, (it is probably from the 29th March 1976), which I cite in its entirety, correcting two–three small errors . . .’’

In this extract the displayed unreliability of personal memory (manifested in references to ‘I don’t know’, ‘it was probably then’) is addressed by evoking an entry from the Securitate archive, whose fallibility is also clearly signposted (‘correcting two-three small errors’). In negotiating between the two sources, the writer works with and within a ‘dense intertextual field’ (Lynch & Bogen, 1996) that frames a very public act of reflection. In this context, the tone of the letter alternates between self-examination and self-interrogation, with the latter providing the means for managing inferences about the self, including possible perceptions of evasiveness, dishonesty, inaccuracy, and so on.

In addition to the official archives and personal memory, the author of the letter also invokes their personal archive as a source of information about the past. Their personal notes, documents and diary entries are brought into the discussion mainly in an attempt to reconfigure and subvert the ‘hermeneutic authority’ (Lynch, 1999, p. 82) of the official archive of the Securitate. Whereas the official archive embodies an impersonal, institutional, highly stratified versions of the past (Middleton & Brown, 2005), the personal archive opens up a potentially

unrestrained access to a world of ‘experience’, of documented and potentially publically available personal ‘thinking’ and ‘feeling’ about the world.

Extract 6

“I have found in one of my notebooks a note from 6th October 1976 from which one can infer that lt. Rotaru has been already looking for me: ‘I am increasingly concerned regarding my future. How on earth could I escape through their fingers?’. On the 2nd December I was writing that I was on Triumfului street to see lt. Rotaru, bumping into a colleague who was there for the same ill-fated reason; I quote: ‘Despicable thing, but if, forced, I have joined the game, there is nothing I can do’. On the 14th of December 1976 I was to meet lt. Rotaru, at 10, in what looked like a bachelor’s flat (his? a conspirative house?), just opposite ‘Cotnari’ restaurant. I have found a more elliptic mention of the same Rotaru towards the end of January 1977”

Extract 7

“If I did not had the courage to break ‘the pact with the Devil’, I was nonetheless hoping to make it inoperant. Therefore, as I was to feel unequivocally a bit later, I was feeling that I was ‘on the other side of the barricade’. Was I deceiving myself? Was this a way to manage my guilt, to suppress even from me the turpitude I was living? I do not think so, because I always felt guilty, it was very difficult for me to meet my friends eye to eye. And who knows whether I’ll be able to one day. I still feel guilty today, especially for having lied to them through omission.”

As we can see in extracts 6 and 7, the uncertain status of biographical details, events, people, and so on, is managed via an invocation of an everyday, common sense, psychological world of moral emotions (like 'concern' for one's fate, 'guilt', 'deceit') and evaluations of actions that carry implications for the moral portrait (and involvement) of the writer. The point of the analysis is not to speculate on whether the writer was indeed 'concerned', or emotionally troubled by discoveries made in his personal archive but to reflect on the pragmatic use of emotional states in reporting, describing and accounting for personal involvement in events. As Edwards argues, one of the key functions of emotion terms is in 'working up descriptions of human actions … and in handling accountability' (Edwards, 1999, p. 273). The deployment of emotion terms and evaluations sets up a certain kind of emotional scenario – one where the writer works up a rhetorical contrast between alternative descriptions and implications to do with his honesty, credibility, moral character, etc. Emotion terms and evaluations are invoked in a rhetorical context which attends to the uncertain status of guilt and accountability, and the practical "unavailability" of personal memory. Moral and emotional positioning is a way of staging subjectivity as a way into reorganizing and reframing the historical record.

Whereas the official record/archive of the Securitate bears the trace of a system that produces institutional, formal, 'knowledge' about the person, memory and the personal archive are construed as repositories of psychological 'experiences' suffused with orientations to personal knowledge, subjectivity and individual feelings. The rhetorical appeal to personal documents and memories outline the epistemic distance between the official historical record (recorded and classified by the Securitate) and the writer's own reactions to the record. Establishing the genuineness, spontaneity, of these reactions is the work that descriptions in extracts

6 and 7 accomplish. The personal in contrast to the institutional is mobilized as a resource for the construction of an alternative, moral-psychological perspective on the self, where emotions mingle with personal, moral evaluations. The writer does not claim direct, privileged, access to actions in his own past but nevertheless orients to the idea that the knowledge he can produce is qualitatively different to the one contained in the official archives. What we have here is not simply an issue of personal reminiscence, but of situated, rhetorical, assemblage of descriptions and evaluations that manage accountability for remembering/not remembering, trustworthiness and motive, against a, still undecidable, historical record.

Producing the historical 'record' in the course of a confession for wrongdoing, like in our example here, presupposes orientations to accountability that straddle personal/psychological and formal/institutional dimensions. A situated self-examination passes through personal and institutional archives, which are mobilized rhetorically to offer the grounds for a memorial journey into a difficult or troubled past. Confessions of wrongdoing of the kind we have analyzed here are complex rhetorical accomplishments and not reducible to explanations in terms of face-saving and image restoration strategies. This rhetorical complexity calls for an analytic approach which can capture, successfully, the public, ongoing, 'history-producing work' (Lynch and Bogen, 1996) of individuals challenged by the accountability and consequences of an intricate nexus of social, organizational and historical practices.

CONCLUSION

In the present article we have drawn on insights from discursive psychology to analyze two types of accounts of a 'troubled' past: testimonies of Holocaust

survivors and confessions of wrongdoing by former collaborators of the Romanian security services. Both examples are intrinsically relevant to the topic of this special issue, namely the engagement of psychologists with archives. In the case of Holocaust survivor testimonies, we have shown how the broader debates about what testimonies are for, and about their historiographic and commemorative value, which guided the testimony collection projects from the outset and made testimonies inherently collectable and archiveable in the first place, are manifested in the testimonies themselves, as pragmatic concerns that survivors, and interviewers, attend to as they reconstruct a troubled past. Also, at the core of the dilemma of witnessing, and the polemics about witnessing, lies the distinction between the survivor as a psychological subject and the survivor as a historical witness. As we have attempted to show, the two are intrinsically connected. It is possible, and even fruitful, to treat both the speaker's subjectivity, and their status as a source of epistemic and moral authority as things that are accomplished in discourse, and situated in a specific interactional, social and historical milieu.

Similarly, in the case of confessions of wrongdoing, we were dealing with accounts which straddle the personal and the collective, the biographical and the historical. In this case, individual remembering and the rhetorical staging of self-examination, with all the psychological connotations attached to these practices, were offered as an alternative to, and argument against, institutional remembering reliant on official records. Crucially, while confessions and apologies are attempts to re-version history, they are also exercises in reputation management which seek to construct a particular public version of the self. In that context, 'remembering' and 'forgetting', but also the notion of the 'self' as a source of agency, are evoked and

oriented to, implicitly or explicitly, as an accountable theme, and something that needs to be managed rhetorically.

The central contribution that discursive psychology can make to the analysis of this kind of material is to show how accounts of experience can be interpreted and deconstructed in their own right. Accounts do not offer unmediated access to a person's mentality or inner world, just as language is never simply an interface between internal thoughts, motivations, memories or attitudes and external reality (Tileagă and Stokoe, 2015). Instead, both the inner world of experience and the external world of historical reality are constituted in discursive and social practice; they are situated rhetorical accomplishments. Equally, accounts of experience need to be seen, and analyzed, as social and cultural artefacts with their own history, mediated by specific institutional, social and political dynamics which determine whether, when and how an account, or a genre (like 'survivor testimony' or 'confession') becomes recognized as a meaningful, valid, or relevant, representation of the past.

Finally, it is important to reiterate the point that the full appreciation of discursive psychology's contribution to the analysis of the kind of data we presented in this article requires this approach to be seen as more than a 'free-standing set of data-generating and data-analytic procedures' (Potter, 2003, p. 784). For example, the today-dominant preference, among discursive psychologists, for naturally occurring, mundane conversations, or the application of the tools and techniques of conversation analysis, might not always be relevant when analyzing historical material. The interdisciplinary potential of discursive psychology lies elsewhere - in the multitude of its 'theoretical and metatheoretical assumptions' that place language center-stage, as the medium through which accounts of the past are

constructed or produced (ibid, p. 785). A discursive psychology sensitive both to details of language and rhetoric and the broader socio-cultural context within which accounts of experience are produced (and of which they are constitutive), can offer researchers a fresh epistemological and empirical focus. Most importantly, discursive psychology's emphasis on the social and rhetorical organization of situated human practices recognizes that historical and psychological aspects of human experience are constituted within each other. As such it provides the basis for addressing some of the challenges encountered by both psychologists and historians interested in researching human experience in an interdisciplinary way.

APPENDIX A

Transcription notations:

(2.0)	Pause length in seconds
(.)	Hearable pause to short to measure
°I know°	'Degree' signs enclose quieter speech
<u>yes</u>	Underlining indicates stress or emphasis in the speech
>faster<	Encloses speeded up talk
=	'Equals' signs mark immediate 'latching' of successive talk
I do::n't	Colons mark the elongation of the prior sound
Yeh,	Commas mark weak rising intonation
Yeh.	Stops mark stopping intonation

For a full list of transcription conventions see Jefferson (2004)

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