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(Re)writing biography: Memory, identity and textually-mediated reality in coming to terms with the past

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Abstract

This paper is concerned with how biography, memory and identity are managed and displayed in a public confession of having been an informer for the *Securitate* (the former Romanian Communist Secret Police). Drawing on discursive psychology the analysis reveals how biographical details are produced by drawing upon categorizations of people, context and events, and organizationally relevant products such as the 'archive', the (Securitate) 'file', 'information notes' and personal notes. It is suggested that constructions of memory and identity are legitimated through a relationship with an organizational and personal accomplishment of accountability. The question guiding the analysis asks not why, but how remembering assumes the form that it does and how, ultimately, it can connect biography, memory and identity to the wider ideological context. It is shown that a process of (re)writing biography is located in the 'textual traces' contained in personal and 'official' records. Recollections, dispositions, intentions, moral character, are intertwined with a textually mediated reality in producing the public record of disclosure, the personal and political significance of what is remembered.

Key words: biography, discursive psychology, textually mediated reality, identity, memory, public disclosure, Securitate.

Introduction

This is a paper about the vagaries of biography, memory and identity in Eastern Europe, a paper on personal (and political) identity in a context of 'coming to terms with the past' in political transition. Transition from communism to democracy in Eastern Europe has been a period of re-appraisal and re-affirming of personal/political biographies from under the burden and legacy of the communist/post-communist past. One can make a distinction between 'coming to terms with the past' as a state driven, official moral/ideological course of action - a way of dealing with the (traumatic) legacy of the past – and 'coming to terms with the past' as an individually consented, moral/ideological course of action, as a way of dealing with a more personal (but nonetheless, political) legacy of the past. Here, I am interested in the latter.

This paper is concerned with the discursive management of biography, memory and identity in a letter written by a Romanian public intellectual detailing the context and consequences of being an 'informer' for the former Romanian Communist secret police, the *Securitate*, sent to one of the most important Romanian daily national newspaper. The context in which the letter was written was that of the public release of (and access to) the 'files' of the *Securitate*, and various other public statements (which I will refer to as 'public disclosures') from politicians, public intellectuals, journalists, clerics on their alleged complicity with the Secret police.

I draw on insights from discursive social psychology (Edwards & Potter, 2001; Edwards, 2006; Middleton & Brown, 2005, 2007; Wetherell, 2007) to analyze such instances of public disclosure as situated, observable, *accountable* discursive products where speakers and writers are seen as

engaged in a process of personal reflexive engagement (Smith, 2003) with biography, memory and identity. Discursive social psychology is a broadly social constructionist approach to social science issues that 'cuts across the traditional disciplinary divisions to provide a rich participant-based understanding of action' (Hepburn & Wiggins, 2007, p. 2). Discursive psychology treats talk and text as *discourse*, as 'primary mean' through which social actions are done and recognizes that issues of knowledge, blame, guilt, accountability, are an integral part of a variety of everyday and institutional settings. These issues are treated as *constitutive* features of those settings rather than *dependent* on a putative relationship to a reified perspective on either the setting or cognition. Discursive psychology offers a platform to critique 'assumptions of the kind of cognitivism which assumes that the explanation of human conduct is dependent on the understanding of prior and underlying cognitive processes and entities' (Hepburn & Wiggins, 2007, p. 6)

In this paper I follow discursive psychology's engagement with analytic perspectives reflected in people's constructions of social life and social practices. Discursive psychologists interested in the study of memory start from the assumption that memory is 'a key site where questions of personal identity and social order are negotiated' (Middleton & Brown, 2007, p. 662). This is a perspective that takes into account how processes of self-definition, accountability and moral character arise in processes mediated by textual forms (Smith, 1990a, b). Memory and identity have plural manifestations and cannot be easily collapsed into unitary representations or conceptualizations (Wertsch, 2002; Wetherell, 2007). The key to understanding these plural

manifestations is to locate concerns with memory and identity in individuals' 'own practices of accountability' (Edwards, 2006, p. 46; Eglin & Hester, 2003).

When one starts analysing what happens when people turn themselves into 'socially organised biographical objects' (Plummer, 2001) one realises that the individual is rather like 'a site, like institutions or social interaction, where flows of meaning-making practices or semiosis ... become organised' (Wetherell, 2007, p. 668). When analysing individual practices we are bound to invoke, in some way or other, the level of institutional and social interaction practices. Meaning-making practices become organised *within* a space that gets created at the intersection and interaction between individual and socio-cultural practices. On one hand, we can, perhaps, refer to the conditions surrounding the psychological ratification, legitimation and constitution of the individual *qua* individual (e.g. the various psychological categories purporting to describe the person and its internal cognitive functioning), whereas, on the other hand, we can refer to a plane where the individual is inextricably connected to a world which exists outside itself; a world of social practices to which the individual refers, but also *constitutes* at the same time.

Memories and identities come into being at the intersection of different social practices of remembering and forgetting, and within the nexus of our relations to other people, as well as informal and formal institutional settings and narratives of the past. Treating identity and memory as social accomplishments entails mapping the various cultural resources available to individuals to make sense of their own identities and their relationships with others in various social situations. When one starts considering the nature and

the various personal/political implications of self-disclosures in the public sphere, one cannot help noticing that the all-pervading way in which individuals engage with the process of re-appraising, re-evaluating memories and identities caught in the institutional web of the *Securitate* is to use oneself as an 'ethnographic exemplar' (Gergen & Gergen, 2002) to accomplish, what some researchers have called, an 'auto-ethnography' of the struggle between private and public, personal and political memories and identities. It is argued that this auto-ethnography cannot be accomplished without relying on a documentary version of reality (Smith, 1990a; Prior, 2004). The authoritative version contained in the documents and records of the *Securitate* can be said to be a significant dimension of mediation in the (re)creation and (re)writing of biographies, memories and identities. Re-evaluating and negotiating identity transformation is not just a matter of self-consciously remembering facts, but reordering, reinterpreting, re-imagining actors and events, re-feeling and re-contextualizing experience, establishing new relations and perspectives between what one *was* and what one *is.* In the public sphere, narratives have to be constructed with a view to provide the person with the possibility of (re)constituting a 'usable past' that serves some personal, but also a political identity project (cf. Wertsch, 2007). As Fine and Fields argue,

> 'narratives are often the means through which individuals engage in the self-reflexive process of identity construction. The stories people tell about themselves reflect on the self ... how people locate themselves in space, time, and social networks generates identity for self and others. The opposite is also true—the way individuals or groups are situated in others' narrative also works to impose identity from the outside' (2008, p. 139).

My concern is with how this re-evaluation and negotiation is publicly displayed and what is the upshot of personal recollections and identity reappraisal when these become dominated by impersonal and highly stratified versions of the past (cf. Middleton & Brown, 2005).

Narratives of guilt and compliance

The process of soci0-political change and transformation in transition and post-transition Eastern Europe has not brought with itself an automatic process of memory liberation (Andrews, 2000; Galasinska & Krzyzanowski, 2009; Tileagã, 2009). Across various sociopolitical contexts, the process has been fraught with tensions, dilemmas, paradoxes and ambiguities of memory in individuals' attempts to construct new, viable, acceptable identities for themselves, but also for the polity they were inhabiting (see *inter alia*, Konopasek & Andrews, 2000; Gallinat, 2006, 2009).

One of the main concerns of researchers has been with understanding and analyzing the changes of individuals' biographies, memories and identities brought about by political changes. A relevant and close example to my current concerns is research conducted by Barbara Miller (1999, 2003) on Stasi informers. She analyses a series of 'narratives of guilt and compliance' in East Germany attempting to offer a soci0-psychological account of identity management and 'coming to terms' with a politicized past. These narratives are interpreted by using psychological categories and theories such as cognitive dissonance, selective memory, and so on, and relying on common explanations in terms of socialization, double morality, double standards,

accepting political lies. To this, Miller adds the element of 'social and psychological undesirability of having been an informer' which leads people to 'apply a sort of "can't have been" approach to their own personal history' (Miller, 1999, p. 110). She contends that 'informers must first identify themselves with the terminology used to define their past actions and re-evaluate and re-define their self-image and personal history in order to incorporate these structures' (ibid., p. 111). But how is, *in situ* and in detail, this identification achieved? What does it entail? It might well be that the issue is not merely that of 'identifying with the terminology used to define their past actions...', but to show how vocabularies (of action, motive, etc.) that include or make reference to various technical terms, categories and organizationally relevant products (the surveillance 'file', 'information notes', various 'Reports', and so on) are actually displayed and deployed in the process of re-defining self-image and personal history. While valid within their own terms, Miller's interpretations seem to paper over the issue of how narratives of 'guilt and compliance' can be conceptualized as social accomplishments of individuals in the management of memory and identity, public accountability and moral character.

Narratives of self-image redefinition should not be exclusively seen as moves to preserve self-esteem or save face. It is true that 'since the existence of a Stasi file potentially defines the private and public life of former informers, the confrontation with this aspect of an individual's past can potentially result for them not simply in a re-acquisition of their biography, but in its complete redefinition' (Miller, 1999, p. 129). But what seems to be missing is the question of how is this 're-acquisition of biography' accomplished? How is the re-definition of informers' self-image *mediated* by

organizationally relevant products such as the Secret Police 'file', the official, and also the personal 'archive'?

When one reads narratives of the kind that Miller or I have collected, what seems to be at stake is not so much reducing and relativising feelings of guilt, but managing 'moral self-assessment' (Edwards, 2006) and moral accountability, discursively producing disposition and moral character. What this observation makes relevant is the importance of considering and studying the categories, practices and relations that participants themselves make relevant in the course of confronting different aspects of their own past.

There is always a risk to overstate the power of formal organizations (Middleton & Brown, 2005) and their impact in memory's revision of the past. One should not discount the creative practices that provide the seeds for the numerous possibilities of resisting the 'archontic power' (Derrida, 1997) of the Communist state and its secret police: the everyday activity of individuals preserving personal notes, various documents, photographs, diaries (sometimes, audio or video recordings), developing their 'own archives as memory devices' (Featherstone, 2006, p. 594). Personal archives, as official ones, manage the tension between remembering/forgetting and, in this case, an (oppressive) textually mediated reality (Middleton & Brown, 2005; Derrida, 1997; Lynch, 1999).

One cannot hope to understand 'coming to terms with the past' as a socio-cultural, political and ideological phenomenon if one does not engage closely with the relationship that gets established between a person's biography, memory, identity, organizationally relevant products and an organizational accomplishment of accountability. It is not enough to conceptualize 'coming to terms with the past' by hinting to a process of 're-

acquisition' and redefinition of biography, which, in turn, is described and explained in terms of psychological processes and mental states. One also needs to understand the *nature* of this 're-acquisition' and redefinition of biography including, but not limited to, how people are (or feel) 'compelled' by authoritative versions of the past (those mediated by the practices and records of the *Securitate* in this particular case) and the ways in which individuals engage in a struggle to recapture, reclaim and rewrite the 'archontic' power of the official 'record' of the *Securitate*.

Textually mediated reality

The *Securitate* (alongside other similar institutions of social control and state ruling in Eastern Europe, and elsewhere) can be considered as the quintessential example of textually mediated production of domination, coercion and oppression in the service of hegemonic political order. For the *Securitate*, the individual was formed as a category of knowledge (Albu, 2008) under the aegis of a textually-mediated reality (Smith, 1990b) and network of mediated activities (Middleton & Brown, 2005, 2007). This made it possible to bind people into a social order and reality represented by the archive and hegemonic power of the communist State (Oprea, 2002).

To have a 'file' with the *Securitate*, to have 'collaborated' is linked to an organizational accomplishment of accountability creating a special identity and moral character for whoever was located in the records. The *Securitate* has created an 'archontic infrastructure' (Middleton & Brown, 2005), where categories of knowledge, memory and practice, but also individual

biographical 'durations' become collected as an expression of a relation of ruling and of a ruling, institutional/state order (Smith, 1999).

What I refer to as 'archontic infrastructures' (Middleton & Brown (2005; Lynch, 1999) are 'formal assemblies of technical procedures' (Middleton & Br0wn, 2005, p. 177), brought off by 'technical mediation, the embedding of social practices of remembering in formal classifications and standards' (p. 177). What is granted by the infrastructure frames the expression and positioning of individual acts of remembering or forgetting. The 'archon' (the *Securitate*), is the one that 'rules' over the archive, it is charged with its safekeeping. In this context, safekeeping does not stem from a desire to preserve the past in formal terms, but rather to construct an authoritative version of reality that can ultimately control, transform, and ultimately, corrupt the individual indexed in the files. The continuous maintaining and updating of files on so many people was feeding a broader bureaucratic structure, that of the Communist state. To be a person of the Socialist Republic of Romania meant that you were irretrievably attached to and irremediably defined by that archontic structure. It also meant that, as an individual, you were 'forced' to engage with that structure (and its internal mechanism) in order to make sense of your own memory, biography and identity (Middleton & Brown, 2005).

'Information surveillance dossiers', 'information notes', 'reports' and other organizationally relevant products need to be conceived as elements in a 'network of relationships' that gets established between people, practices and institutions. Personal/political narratives become defined in relation to an

intricate 'network of mediated activities' (Middleton & Brown, 2005, p. 147) around surveillance and state control.

The textually mediated reality of *Securitate*'s various means of controlling people can be seen as providing the 'conceptual framework in terms of which the world is reported upon' (Prior, 2004, p. 379). Recollections, stories of identity transformation are mediated by the 'textual traces' (Smith, 1990b) contained in personal and official records. Being categorized or self-categorizing oneself as an 'informer', 'being informed on', or 'being under surveillance' relies on a 'documentary version of reality' (cf. Atkinson & Coffey, 1997; Prior, 2004). Documents, records, and so on, are not simply an aid to remembering and identity construction, but mediators of a rhetoric of identity and memory. The individual can position this documentary version of reality within a personal, biographical time and duration, and at the same time, is positioned by it within a flow of practices and organizationally accomplished public accountability (Wetherell, 2003). A documentary version of reality can also offer a location to speak or write from, constituting the person as a reflexive agent putting forward a commentary on the tensions between how identity is experienced and how it comes to be represented.

For most people whose complicity with the *Securitate* was 'demonstrated' in some way or another, there was always a hope that the 'files' will be able to 'fill in the gaps in [their] biographical understanding ... make it whole' (Miller, 1999, p. 129; see also Kulczycki, 2009). This kind of account can be read as pointing to the *function* of the 'file'(s) in making biography 'whole', in settling the story of identity transformation. An alternative reading

would draw attention to the way we use mediational objects to establish a relationship to some aspect of our past (Brown, Middleton & Lightfoot, 2001), to how the inner character of our experiences, identities, memories, practices become transformed, transfigured, become 'extended outwards and reflected back at us', that is, '*objectified*' (Middleton & Brown, 2005, p. 672, italics in original). As Prior (2004) argues, 'documents are never inert ... they frequently serve as active agents in schemes of human interaction – agents to be recruited, manipulated, scorned or hidden' (p. 388).

Data and analytic approach

As we know from many other socio-political contexts (the McCarthy era in the United States; South Africa's post-apartheid Truth and Reconciliation; Stasi informers in East Germany), detection and disclosure is certain to bring with it various forms of identity transformation. One can understand the socio-psychological dynamics of identity, memory and biography reconstruction in such contexts only if one treats identity transformation as a subtle, situated, social accomplishment, a matter for members of society to negotiate and make sense of. To the issue of how individuals retroactively remember and interpret their past (and engage with) personal (and political) history one needs to add the question of how remembering, biography and memory are being reconstituted, displayed and entangled in a space of public visibility and accountability. Recollecting personal past experience is suffused not only with our and others' words and experiences, but also with a range of 'mediating artefacts' that can be used for various purposes, including as

'evidential basis for various inferential claims' (Middleton & Brown, 2005, p. 143). These mediating artefacts (whether of personal or institutional nature) bear the mark of the personal and social/ideological/institutional context of creation and use.

A discursive social psychological approach (Edwards, 2006; Middleton & Brown, 2005; Wetherell, 2007) can help one understand how individuals engage with memory and identity in talk and text as a social accomplishment, public, *accountable* practice. I draw on a kind of discourse analysis that attempts to describe configurations of identity, memory and biography at the intersection of textually mediated reality (Smith, 1990b) and networks of mediated activities (Middleton & Brown, 2005, 2007). Discursive and sociocultural psychologists have been among the first to understand that memory, remembering and forgetting 'is better understood as a site of contestation between competing voices than as a body of information that is somehow encoded, stored and retrieved' (Rowe, Wertsch & Kosyaeva, 2002, p. 99; cf. also Middleton & Brown, 2005; Wertsch, 2002; Brockmeier, 2002). Stories of identity, memory and biography are an integral part of *who we are*, and they are, at the same time, action oriented and rhetorical, attending to issues of action, agency, motive, accountability, alternative readings and identities (cf. Edwards, 1997).

Data for this paper come from a letter sent by a Romanian public intellectual to a major Romanian newspaper, a 'confession' of having been an informer for the *Securitate*. Data are part of a wider project looking at the politics of 'regret', the social production of disclosure and reconciliation with the past in public avowals of 'collaboration' with the *Securitate* from an

extensive collection of public statements made by politicians, public intellectuals, journalists, and clerics on their complicity with the Communist Secret police between 2000 and 2009. Although public statements of 'regret' could be found even before the year 2000 (for instance, the confession of a well-known public intellectual, Alexandru Paleologu, who soon after the Revolution confessed having 'collaborated' with the Secret Police), most of the public statements featured in media and news interviews, newspaper articles, letters sent to newspapers, radio and television panel debates, acquired prominence with the creation of The National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives' (CNSAS) and the public being granted free access to the archives of the former *Securitate*.

The letter is divided by the writer in two parts - the 'Essence' (see Tileagă, 2009 for a discourse analytic account of the 'Essence') and the 'Existence'. The letter is described by the newspaper as a 'harrowing document'. It is placed under 'Current affairs' (Actualitate) with the gist prefaced by the author's name: 'Am turnat la Securitate' (I have been an informer for the Securitate). One can note an apparent reversal of Sartre's Existentialist principle: 'existence precedes essence'. For existentialists, existence and actuality come first, essence being derived afterward. Although the 'essence' of the matter comes first ('I have been an informer'), the 'existence' is the most elaborate account, takes the most part of the letter. The letter (and disclosure contained in it) is suggestive of an identity transformation. This can be likened to a self-degradation ceremony (see Garfinkel, 1956 on degradation ceremonies). The essence of a self-degradation ceremony is: *I call upon you to bear witness that I am not what I appear!* From the outset the writer declares himself to be a certain sort of degraded

person, a person of a lower identity in the relevant group's scheme of social types – an 'informer'. This self-degradation can be seen as displacing identity into the public sphere, opening the self to others, to a public space of judgment.

The letter (and especially its second part, the 'Existence') signals that it is time to take stock and re-visit the biographical and commemorative underpinnings of that *identity* transformation (including the *transformation* process itself). The 'Existence' offers a chronological/biographical journey – from the first encounters with the Securitate, through becoming an informer to, ultimately, being put 'under surveillance'. The gist of the 'Essence', that can be summarized as 'I have signed an engagement of collaboration and with the Securitate … and I informed the Securitate in writing about some of my friends and acquaintances … without confessing and without apologizing', is not the whole story. The biographical trail of identity transformation is opened up in the 'Essence' but is expanded and contextualised in the 'Existence'. The analysis considers extracts from the 'Existence' where concerns with biography, memory, identity and a documentary version of reality are made relevant by the writer as the story unfolds.

Analysis

Whereas the relevant concern of the 'Essence' was to place on the 'record' *having been* an informer, one of the main concerns of the 'Existence' was the issue of *becoming* an informer. 'My first encounters with the Securitate' and 'How I became an informer' are both subheadings of early sections of the letter. Together with the categories first introduced in the

'Essence', these subheadings can be said to trigger the selection and identification of relevant descriptions of context (spatio-temporal), the cast of characters, activities, responsibilities, organizationally and personally relevant products, and relationships between these elements. What is immediately relevant is the accountability of past actions: not only how things happened, but also when (in relation to the biography of the writer), where, and in relation to whom? Extract 1 is an example of these concerns.

Extract 1

"On the 24th February 1976, whilst I was in the 12th grade, the County Council Iasi of the Ministry of the Interior, Division I/Youth has emitted a single copy, strictly confidential document signed by lt.maj. Viziteu Florin ... On the 2nd of March 1976, lt.col. Rotaru writes "There are grounds for cautioning". Another lt.col. writes "Agree", without a date. On the 3rd of March 1976, the proposal is approved by a colonel with an indecipherable signature ... The reference to the document "S" send by I.J. Bacau corroborates my suspicion that I had a DUI[1], maybe from December 1974 ... I was finally called at Securitate, at its headquarters on Triumfului Street – a name which always seemed to me enormously cynical. On the 29th March 1976, I was getting to Triumfului Street with some courage, hoping that I would be able to get away with yet again a "serious warning", formulated in an official setting ... I don't know if it was then that I signed the informer engagement, but it is for sure that it is then that I yielded to pressures and I have become a snitch. Probably at the same time I have received the conspirational name "Valentin". Anyway, I have found at CNSAS[2] the following olograph document, undated (it is probably from the 29th March 1976), which I cite in its entirety, correcting tacitly two-three small errors ..."

In extract 1, very specific details are offered – references to dates, persons, places and documents. The relevance of what gets mentioned in the story of becoming an informer is given by the 'categorial resources made available by the initial characterization of the event' (Eglin & Hester, 2003, p. 13). But the identity of the narrator is also at stake. As Lynch and Bogen argue, 'the relevant identity of the narrator, the legitimacy of his actions and the extent of his responsibility for those actions are made ... apparent by his

selection and arrangement of terms describing the setting and series of events in the story' (1996, p. 166).

The personae relevant to the story are the *Securitate* officers. They are personalized, identified, made relevant to the story and the biography of the narrator. They have names, responsibilities, hierarchically positioned within an organizational framework. More importantly, they are presented as standing in some relation to organizationally relevant products ('strictly confidential' documents) and activities (agreeing on courses of action, etc.). In so doing the writer provides instructions for making his *becoming* an informer rationally accountable and understandable in the context of *Securitate*'s activities. Organizationally relevant categories and category-tied activities provide for the relevance of the responsible actors and trajectories of action related to 'becoming an informer'. Organizationally relevant products (the documents signed by the Securitate officers; the cross-referenced document 'S'; the DUI – 'Information Surveillance Dossier'; the olograph document) are adduced as a resource for *pointing* to the kind of activity being undertaken by the Securitate (surveillance, recruitment, etc.).

Although some details provided are presented as *biographically* relevant ('On the 24th February 1976, whilst I was in the 12th grade...') and carefully remembered, the actual detail of having signed the 'engagement' at the *Securitate* headquarters is apparently, 'not remembered': 'I don't know if it was then that I signed the informer engagement, but it is for sure that it is then that I yielded to pressures and I have become a snitch. Probably at the same time I have received the conspirational name "Valentin"'. The document is introduced into the story with 'anyway', as a seemingly separate dimension

from the previously told story. 'I have found…' implies a dimension of discovery. The document was present in the archives to be reckoned with, but needed to be discovered first and then put to use. The document is, in a way, invoked to help settle the matter. But the issue is not that of the actual detail (of what he did or did not do at the time), but how his identity was *transformed*, what he eventually *became*, an 'informer' for all (organizational) practical purposes! Through a reflective commentary ('it is probably from the 29th March 1976'), the document attesting the transformation is *positioned* in a network of relevant biographical details. Only *identified* (with a date, source and author) can it be linked with the biography of the writer and the process of identity transformation. One can see how, through their *use*, the Securitate records *as* organizationally relevant products mediate the constitution of a relation between the identity and biography of a person and an organizational accomplishment of accountability. They constitute an identity and moral character for whoever is located in the record. The identity of the narrator, the character and gist of the story, the relevance of what is already *on the record* and what is *becoming the record* is posited on that *relation*.

Extract 2

"I don't remember whether and about whom I was asked immediately for information notes. But I have found at CNSAS an Annex Report Note to nr. 00592/7 from 18.01.1979 written by cpt. Campeanu Corneliu, counter-information officer of U.M. 01241 Ineu (where I completed my military service between October 1978 and March 1980) the following paragraphs: On 29.03.1976 Antohi Sorin was recruited as a collaborator of the Securitate organ receiving the conspirational name of 'Valeriu' (in fact, 'Valentin'; my note) and has been used for information surveillance at the professional training course of Tehnoton plant in Iasi … Antohi Sorin has provided a number of ten information notes from 16.04.1976 to 15.05.1978, all containing general information about the general mood of the class."

Once the category 'snitch', ('informer') is on the record, category-tied activities, such as writing 'information notes' become relevant, appear on cue (Eglin & Hester, 2003; Sacks, 1995). One can notice how retrospective knowledge claims are handled in sensitive ways (see Edwards, 1997) and organizationally relevant products are there to substantiate the point ('I don't remember if and about whom ... but I have found at CNSAS an Annex Report Note...'). As was the case with extract 1, the document is not a simple aid to remembering 'forgotten' details, but rather a mediating tool between the person's identity and biography and an organizational accomplishment of accountability. The document is not presented unaccompanied by a reflective commentary. We find out that 'Ineu' is the name of the place where the writer has completed his military service (dates are relevant, *biography* is on the record, again) and that his conspirational name is in fact 'Valentin' and not 'Valeriu' (the name in the document is treated as a small mistake, but one without consequence). What is especially relevant in this case is the detail of the number of information notes written and the nature of their content. The document becomes significant for the inferences on the moral character of the person that it makes available (and is invoked to substantiate his other claim from the 'Essence', of not having harmed/injured anyone of those on whom he provided information notes)[3].

'I don't remember ...' ('I don't know ...' in extract 1) do not imply that whatever is not remembered was previously known. Such expressions have been seen as useful 'evasive manoeuvres' (Edwards, 1997) and not a report of the writer's cognitive state (Lynch & Bogen, 1996). Although the narrator might be seen as evading remembering directly and faithfully the issue of how

many notes were written and what was their tone and content, apparently, the matter of the issue is not evaded, but it is substantiated with reference to a relevant organizational product (an annex to a report). In this way, personal memory is indexed as 'practically unavailable' (Lynch and Bogen, 1996) for scrutiny.

In both extracts, the archive is a potential place of discovery (Featherstone, 2006), from where biographically and institutionally relevant products can be carefully selected to support the perspective offered by the narrator. We are not told about when and how discoveries took place, but what is important are the *inferences* that can be drawn from the adduced evidence with regard to dispositions, intentions, moral character of the person. The narrator can *point* to documents for the inferences they make available. There is a clear sense that documents are being *called upon* not simply as props to a sluggish and failing memory, but tailored precisely for the occasion of their use and with regard to the current concerns, in-the-writing of the story. In the apparent 'absence' of personal memories, documents constitute and at the same create a 'public standard of memorability' (Lynch and Bogen, 1996).

Extract 3

"From Autumn of 1976, the Securitate officer who was in charge of me was a certain lt. Rotaru Vasile ... I have found in one of my notebooks a note from 6 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 of 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 on the same Rotaru towards the end of January 1977"

It was previously noted that the records of the Securitate crop up in the story for the kind of inferences they make available. But it is not only an official documentary reality that fulfills this function, but also one of a more personal nature (the narrator's own 'memory devices': personal notebooks and personal notes contained therein). Official documents, as well as personal notes can be considered as the foundation and interface that helps the narrator engage with its own 'dilemmas of remembering' and offer a commentary on his own identity transformation.

The rhetoric of 'discovery' in extract 3 is similar to the one identified in the first two extracts. This time it is the personal archive that is a potential place of discovery. Through a temporal shift, personal notes written at the time seem to offer access to a world of thinking, feeling and identity and can be seen as resources used to manage the distance/separation between individual experience, identity and events from the past. The facts of the matter are not simply remembered, but, in a way, 're-thought' or 're-felt' to use Shotter's (1990) terms. It can be argued that this 're-thinking' of experience relies on what might be termed a lay self-perception theory: 'I have written those things down at the time, so that's how I must have felt at the time/that's how I was reacting to what was happening at the time'. If I was 'concerned about my future' and 'how to escape them' it *must have been* because the Securitate, through lt. Rotaru, were after me'. Notice how the cited personal notes make reference to mental states ('I was *concerned* ...') and also contain moral positioning and evaluations (*Despicable* thing, but ...') that make available various inferences related the writer's moral character and

its agency. Using personal notes can be seen as a strategic attempt to make moral emotions (that carry inferences for moral character) *available* and *explainable* to both anonymous and non-anonymous parties (cf. Sacks, 1995), and position personal recollections into a (psychological) narrative of identity that can counter, as it were, the official version of the *Securitate* and manage the concerns of a potentially doubting, suspicious audience/readership.

References to personal notes not only offer an alternative construction of 'facts', but also an alternative, moral-psychological perspective on the self, one which is not present in the 'official' records. What is contained in personal notes offers a glimpse into a psychological world of feelings and moral emotions. There is also a sense that this is evidence 'unlooked for', which is to offer a version of events and actors 'as not having been worked up artfully' for the present argument (cf. Edwards, 2003, p. 34).

The narratives offered are not just examples of a struggle that involves the self-in-the-past versus the-self-in-the-present (see Murakami, 2007) or the 'irresolvable tension' created as individuals 'attempt to understand their continually changing states' (Phillips, 2007, p. 459). In the particular case of having 'collaborated' with the Securitate, the narrator shows an orientation to how describing the past is not a neutral matter, but implicates a range of potential (and sometimes, competing) accountable descriptions associated with being a certain *type of person.* He designs his account in ways that attend to the accountability of his own (and other people's) actions and moral character[4].

Extracts 4 and 5 express the dilemma of remembering, identity and biography in which the writer is caught. The social order that the *relation*

between an individual's identity and biography and a personal/organizational

accomplishment of accountability engenders is, for all practical purposes, a

moral order where inferences in terms of dispositions, moral nature, desires

or intentions (cf. Edwards, 2006) are, potentially, publicly ratifiable by

readers.

Extract 4

"I am convinced now, as I was then, that the Securitate was comparing my notes
with information collected by other means, including electronic surveillance.
That simple comparative exercise would have demonstrated them on whose side
I was, because I wasn't reporting the radical positions expressed by my friends …
on the phone, in public, in correspondence. Only the re-finding of my Securitate
dossiers (or theirs) from that time will bring a little emotional balance. Until
then, only penitence and persistence in a sentiment of culpability is left for me,
one that I had always experienced towards them"

Extract 5

"I had a last plan to run over the border shortly after finishing my military stage,
with the help of former comrades, which I trusted. But the plan did not
materialize somehow, in the end, they haven't left either … But I hadn't had the
courage to flee. I resigned to a 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 will 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."

In the 'Essence' the writer has been concerned with constructing

'disposition and intention as a way to fend off possible implications of being

seen as someone who would deliberately give information to the Securitate'

(Tileaga, 2009, p. 183). As other researchers have shown, there are 'moral

ambiguities condensed in memories' about the socialist past (see Gallinat,

2009). The relationship to the past is an unfinished business and, in this

particular case, the past and the identity of the person can only be made whole

through the mediation of a documentary reality: the 're-finding' of Securitate dossiers (extract 4) and the surfacing of 'dossiers regarding the 1980-1982 period' (extract 5).

　　As mentioned earlier, the essence of a self-degradation ceremony is inviting others to witness that the person is not what it appears to be. But this self-degradation ceremony is not to be seen as an all-or-nothing process, a closed circuit of confession, guilt and remorse. The individual can also challenge, resist, or subvert the terms under the auspices of which it appears to and is judged by others. There is a sense that the label and negative inferences on moral character will stick until further documentary evidence is brought into play. One's 'own word' can be interpreted as an apologia for what one was, a strategic excuse or justification of past behavior. It is implied that only documents (a documentary version of reality) can bring salvation! The narrator's individual moral standing in the eyes of the others (especially his friends and acquaintances) is upheld by the implicit recognition that an ethical person is one that is not only passing judgments and critically assessing his own identity and biography, but also prepares itself to have judgment passed/expressed by others. This can be seen as the very foundation of an 'ethics of relationships' (Gallinat, 2009; see also Margalit, 2002).

　　Although a very thorough 'commemorative triage' (Middleton & Brown, 2005) was deployed, the personal story does not seem to be complete; there is a sense that *essential* rather peripheral details are still missing. And there is a sense that further evidence can *only come* from the 'archive'. It can be argued that it is the ideological nature and factual import of 'new' documents that makes them indispensable. What is not present, not yet available, but could *potentially* become the record is more significant than what is *already* on the

record. The written record seems to take precedence over members' own recollections (Atkinson & Coffey, 1997)[5]. At a more general level, Extracts 4 and 5 point to an ongoing tension between lived experience (and its appraisal by individuals) and experience as captured, reproduced, recycled, in organized/institutional state systems of surveillance[6].

Conclusion

In this paper I have sought to examine the relationship that gets established between a person's identity, memory and biography, organizationally relevant products and a personal/organizational accomplishment of accountability. I have argued that it is this relationship that mediates the reconstruction of personal history and moral character.

I have analyzed extracts from a letter written by a Romanian public intellectual containing a confession of 'collaboration' with the Romanian Communist Secret Police. Throughout the letter, the writer seems to be engaged in a process of 'personal reflexive engagement' (Smith, 2003), reconstructing a story of identity transformation by relying on both official and personal (organizationally) relevant products. The 'archontic infrastructure' of the *Securitate* and its operative archives is conceived and oriented to as a source and authoritative producer of official narratives, a formal mechanism that ensures formal control over individualized definitions of the past and the person. Akin to an ethnographer, the narrator retains the right to shift between the reflective commentary (the perspective of personal memory) and that of the organizationally ratified document, in order to compare and contrast the personal 'inside' and the organizational 'outside'.

Official documents and personal notes become 'dialogical objects', integral part of a conversation with the personal and political past. Invested with meaning and biographical relevance, they represent symbolic resources in the process of activating a reflexive/dialogical self (Bertau, 2007). They mediate the process of (re)constituting identity and memory by objectifying and (re)connecting the two at different points in time. Documentary evidence (whether personal or official) not only furnishes evidentiary sources for the narrative, but also makes a range of inferences available. It also points, reflexively, to the supra-individual accountability of the Securitate and its methods of information production, storage and control. 'Mea culpa' is not just a simple confession of guilt or remorse; it is part of a process of re-writing of identity and memory, a process that involves (and at the same time, *constitutes*) the various relationships and tensions that get established between individual and social/organizational memory.

Notes

1. Dosar de Urmarire Informativa - 'Information Surveillance Dossier'
2. Consiliul National pentru Studiul Arhivelor Securitatii –'The National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives'
3. The issue of 'not having harmed/injured anyone' by writing and providing information notes to the Securitate (and its relevance for the construction of the moral character of the informant) is a pervasive feature in many public accounts of 'collaboration' in Romania (but also in other countries too) and merits a separate analysis that goes beyond the scope of this paper.

4. Notice how place formulations are used as a way of organizing the telling of the story (Eglin and Hester, 2003) - the reference to 'Triumfului street', previously identified as the Securitate headquarters, the 'bachelor flat', who throws yet more questions (Rotaru's own? Or a 'conspirational' house?). Place formulations also provide for the accountability of persons and actions: where, with whom and doing what, is usually a paramount concern of surveillance work.

5. New 'discoveries' do not offer any default *guarantees* as to how the person and his/her acts are going to be perceived, and ultimately judged, by others. The discovery of potentially significant facts depends, on one hand, upon 'the contingent status of the fragments that found their way into the archive' (Featherstone, 2006, p. 594), and on the other hand, access (free or restricted) to the archives of the Securitate.

6. Middleton and Brown argue that there is always, an all-present 'tension between what is recalled and forgotten by technical mediation and the live concerns of members whose remembering practices are obliged to pass by way of such mediation' (2005, p. 164).

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