



## Narratives of Survival and the Politics of Memory

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### ABSTRACT IN ENGLISH

Narratives of survival illustrate a number of converging theoretical issues of importance for life-history writing. On the one hand, personal memory strives for connection with shared structures of thought: little stories seek to attach themselves to big stories. On the other hand, nation building shapes personal memory to serve its political grand narratives. In the interstitial space room must be found for the articulation of the experience of little individuals.

### ABSTRACT IN LATVIAN

Izdīvojušo naratīvi izgaismo vairākus dzīves vēstures rakstīšanā būtiskus un savstarpēji saistītus teorētiskos jautājumus. No vienas puses, personiskā atmiņa tiecas iekļauties dalītās domas struktūrās, proti, mazie stāsti tiecas pievienoties t.s. lielajiem stāstiem. No otras puses, nācijas veidošanās rosina personisko atmiņu kalpot tās lielajiem, politiskajiem naratīviem. Radītajā starptelpā ir jāatrod vieta mazo indivīdu pieredzes artikulācijām.

*Keywords:* Little stories, big stories, personal memory, national identity.

The subject of this conference issue provides an interdisciplinary meeting place for opposed and seemingly irreconcilable views. A while back the cultural Anthropologist Clifford Geertz wrote a chapter on the blurring of genres (1993). Nowhere is this more apparent than in the field of narrative, memory and identity. Here we find anthropologists, sociologists and political scientists grappling with issues of memory and representations of the past and archival and oral historians confronting issues to do with the co-construction of identity through dialogue. In the spirit of this blurring

of disciplinary boundaries, I would like to focus on some key theoretical issues that confront all of us who are interested in questions of memory, identity and narratives of survival. These issues are given a sharp edge in post-socialist life-writing, particularly so in the Baltic context. The oral history archive in Riga provides a version of the past suppressed during the Soviet period. However, it is also one which indirectly encourages a mono-ethnic view of national identity. Since 1992 over four thousand life history interviews (almost entirely Latvian) have been conducted, transcribed, digitalized and deposited in the national archive. The explicit aims of the archive are to document aspects of lives suppressed during the Soviet period and to contribute to an understanding of Latvian national identity. The Latvian national archive is, of course, subject to the same kinds of criticisms as national archives elsewhere. Such archives not only record national history and identity but also play a key role in shaping and formulating national identity. "Archives are the manufacturers of memory and not merely the guardians of it" (Brown and Davis-Brown, 1998, p. 22). By ordering and classifying memory archives serve to tell us where we belong and who we are (*ibid*: 30). This paper attempts to steer a middle course between memory and life narratives enlisted in service of the present and, on the other hand, memory as a source of personal growth and hindsight and as a way of expanding the moral community (Freeman 2009).

The work of psychologists has made it clear that memory is not simply a storage system, but involves imagination in important ways. Anthropologists have pointed out that memory cannot be apprehended directly but only metaphorically. But the move from memory as passive receptacle to memory as imaginative faculty has made it available to multiple uses and misuses. We know that representations of the past change according to the needs of the present: personal memory is unreliable, does not guarantee authenticity and is easily manipulated for social and political ends. Discussions of identity have been dismissed as "little more than portentous incoherence" (Gleason 1983, p. 931). Memory, in the Augustinian tradition of memory as a treasure trove, has been described as "the chocolate covered Madeleine on which we overdose" (LaCapra 1998, p. 14). Whatever the rights and wrongs of such accusations, we know that personal memory is fluid and easily influenced, collective memory is a reification, personal identity is but a comforting illusion of permanence, or a culture-bound category conveying a false sense of agency to Western humankind and national identity is an unjustified extension of individual identity. As Handler has argued "Collectivities in Western social theory are imagined as though they are human individuals writ large" (1994, p. 33). The very idea of memory is, as Crapanzano argues, a metaphor (2004, p. 69).

But equally we are urged that, “Collective traumas have no geographical or cultural limitation” and that they open up new possibilities of moral sensibility and universalism (Alexander 2004, p. 27). So how can we determine the nature and uses of narratives of survival? Do they restrict or enlarge our concepts of human identity and experience? Or, can they do both? Do they promote understanding or do they lend themselves to abuse? Is compassion only possible in certain specified and favourable social circumstances as a recent volume on the subject argues? (Berlant 2004). Or is it a universally accessible human attribute? Does the aestheticization of experience heal or can it harm and exploit as Struk suggests?

Georg Simmel in his essay on *The Stranger* comments on the contingency and volatility of nearness and remoteness and the rapidity with which one can be transformed into the other. In this transformation there is a move from the particular to the general. Or in the vocabulary of this conference autobiographical narratives of survival are transformed into aesthetic objects. I want to look more closely both at how narrative promotes nearness and understanding and how it can also create distance from suffering.

In writing about Aristotle’s conception of tragedy, Nussbaum introduces the term “the social benefits of tragedy” (1992, p. 267). Pity works both to pinpoint what is of value in human life and to connect one to others. Thus she writes: “And in granting pity to another, the pitier acknowledges that these things indeed have importance” (Nussbaum 1992, p. 266). And later, “Thus in pity the human characters draw close to the one who suffers, acknowledging that their own possibilities are similar, and that both together live in a world of terrible reversals, in which the difference between pitier and pitied is a matter far more of luck than of deliberate action” (ibid: 267).

However, as Boltanski reminds us the politics of pity is riddled with complexities. Boltanski borrows the theatrical metaphor of the spectator from Adam Smith. But what Boltanski describes as “the topography of interiority” provides a clue to the intricate nature of the processes involved (1993, p. 44). This topography has a triangular structure and includes an observer, a reflector and a rapporteur. “To the observing spectator must be added an introspector who can enter within the person looking to consider the effects on him of what he is seeing, to become aware of his feelings and to inscribe them within the final account which is to be communicated to others. The person who reports and the spectator are no longer one and the same. The former is detached from the latter. Actually he reports both on what the spectator sees and the spectator’s impressions faced with what he sees; on how he is affected by it” (1993, pp. 43–44).

The object of pity is the suffering of another, which by definition, is not ones own. The suffering is thus once removed and imaginatively represented in “abated” form. Narrators are aware of this according to Boltanski and, therefore, “abate[s] its expression so as not to exceed the possibilities of the spectator’s attention and so as not to exhaust his patience” (1933, p. 39). There is thus a deliberate curtailment of the expression of suffering in order not to alienate the spectator. Too much emphasis on relentless suffering might weaken the reader’s engagement with the text. Thus, for example, in gulag narratives torture and interrogation are represented as a battle of wits between the torturer and his victim. Awareness of the different elements involved in the expression and spectatorship of suffering offers an insight into the literary shaping of narratives of survival.

But why venture into this deeply compromised theoretical and ethical terrain? My answer, as someone who aspires to practice a humanistic brand of Anthropology, is that narrative is of central importance in people’s self understanding and reconciliation to suffering and to where they belong. Whatever the semantic histories and uses of these concepts, narrative is hugely important for individuals; it is an indispensable conceptual tool for marking out the relationship between self and other and for grafting the self onto the universal as Merleau-Ponty described (1964, p. 52). In short, I will be arguing that we need to aestheticize experience in order to survive.

Narratives of survival are privileged sites for exploring the relationship between suffering and identity and the reconstitution of the connection between self and other. Narratives of survival destabilize the clear-cut dualistic thinking about memory and identity. Theorists fall into two categories: the primordial and the interactionist. “For primordialists identity is deep, internal and permanent; for interactionists/optionalists identity is shallow, external and evanescent (Gleason 1983, p. 920). Similarly memory theorists can be categorized in this way. A recent volume on Memory entitled *Tense Past* (Antze and Lambek 1998) claims “Our book is less about memory than about “memory”. That is to say about how “the very idea of memory” comes into play in society and culture and about the uses of memory in collective and individual practice. Put another way, it is less about the silent effects of memory than about the invocation of memory, including talk about the silent effects” (Antze and Lambek 1998, pp. xv). The Italian oral historian Luisa Passerini in her introduction to a volume on *Memory and Totalitarianism* writes: “We can remember only thanks to the fact that somebody has remembered before us, that other people in the past have challenged death and terror on the basis of their memory. Remembering has to be conceived as a highly inter-subjective

relationship” (Passerini 1992, p. 2). But, of course, this raises the question of how memory ever gets started. There has to be someone, a free spirit if you like, who is able to remember without the help of others. So how is this achieved and what are the kinds of connections made here?

The position I am advocating is less polarized. It seeks to embrace both the deeply personal and the intensely communal aspects of memory and identity. It also seeks to explore the relationship between the experiential aspects of narrative and the deeply felt need for its aestheticization.

So let me start with the ethnographic and narrative encounter: all researchers will be familiar with its emotional immediacy and power. Arthur Frank has identified this power in his distinction between “thinking with stories” rather than “thinking about stories” (1995 & 2001). So what is the difference? As I understand this distinction “thinking with” stories makes room for a greater degree of empathy with the storyteller, which in turn makes demands upon our moral imagination.

“Thinking with” stories is an experiential and transformative process. When confronted with the pain and suffering of others, stories exert a moral obligation on the listener not to turn away but to acknowledge and share (Morris 2002, p. 197). Much of the literature on “thinking with stories” has a theological resonance. It owes much to Buber’s distinction between *it* and *thou*, “How powerful is the unbroken world of It, and how delicate are the appearances of the Thou” (1970, p. 50). It also draws upon Levinas’s concept of face. Face, like the idea of voice, is at one and the same time both concrete and deeply metaphysical. Levinas writes that we only ever see the trace of the other and it is the mysterious otherness of the other to which we must respond as witnesses (1985, p. 95). Voice as the philosopher Ree argues is both physically expressive and symbolically communicative (1999, p. 2). So in contradiction to what many earlier philosophers have argued, Ree reminds us of contexts which break down the privacy of pain: gasping for breath in moments of anguish; howls of anger and the wailing of keening women, professional keepers notwithstanding.

Thus stories exert a claim or a call upon our moral imagination and compel us to listen. Whereas sight is associated with objectivity and the option of blotting out by shutting our eyes, hearing is associated with subjectivity and it is, of course, less easy to shut our ears. In this sense stories insist upon a hearing. But personal narratives do not come readily. Cavarero writes of the way who questions often collapse into what questions (2000). If we ask of someone who they are, it is easier to reply by describing what they are: for example, a teacher, a UK citizen, a white woman etc. But who questions can only be answered by giving a narrative account, a story of past experience and how they came to be the person that they are. A life story invites us to think with stories. By contrast if we

think about stories we do not engage the moral imagination in the same way. A good example of thinking about stories is William Labov's classic study of language use among inner city youths (1977). Labov's intention was to rehabilitate colloquial language, but in the process of analysis he succeeds in dismantling any power it might have had. In thinking about stories, in dismembering them he succeeds in reducing them.

Our informants expect us to think with their stories, they expect relational understanding, rather than duplication in our responses. This kind of relational response is difficult to pin down but I suspect it determines the difference between research that yields thin and thick descriptions and between short and long-lived narratives. So how does my discussion relate to narratives of survival? In the telling the experiences of which they speak may be experienced as if for the first time as Felman and Laub have argued for holocaust survivors (1992). This applies not only to holocaust survivors but is a more general feature of perceptual experience that slips so readily into memory without being fully registered in the present. The experience can be a deeply visceral one both for the narrator and the listener where the dual nature of the voice comes into full play. Whatever the subsequent destiny of the stories they command total attention, I would even say submission. This is where the theory of the mildly empathic, yet uninvolved, researcher breaks down. In such situations the feminist critique of faceless observers eliminating personal idiosyncrasies and substituting for each other strikes home.

One reason for the distrust of oral history lies precisely in its roots in face to face encounters. Because of a dependence on fieldwork oral historians are faced with the same problems as anthropologists regarding self and emotion and have to perform a fine balancing act between identification and indifference, between closeness and distance. Portelli is well aware of this when he writes of the fear that: "Once the floodgates of orality are opened, writing (and rationality with it) will be swept out" (1998, p. 64). Much of this literature rests upon an outdated view of emotion, heir to the enlightenment tradition that saw emotion opposed to reason. Damasio, a neurologist, has recently shown us that emotion is fundamental to proper cognitive functioning (2005). Different parts of the brain may stand in for cognitive deficits in other parts of the brain, but if the emotional centre of the brain is damaged the person is immobilized, unable to choose between alternatives. Let me give an example of what I mean from an interview with a countrywoman from Latgale born in 1930. The interview took place in 2003. I had asked her a factual question about the year in which her land was taken away and who was the local party boss at the time. She thought for a moment but then admitted that she did not know although she was sure someone else would help me. However,

she then said something for which no-one else could stand in. She sighed, "So many huge events in such an insignificant life!" This interchange encapsulates for me the uniqueness of emotional understanding and the impossibility of standing in for each other where emotional rather than purely cognitive failure is at stake. It may be that emotion has been feared because it threatens the self/other divide even though its suppression creates an ethnography of cardboard figures, or "outlines waiting to be filled" to use Geertz's apt description.

So narratives of survival exemplify in an intense form the ethical and emotional dilemmas of doing research on suffering. Everything that goes under Behar's title of the vulnerable observer comes together here. "In the midst of a massacre, in the face of torture, in the eye of a hurricane, in the aftermath of an earthquake, or even say, when horror looms apparently more gently in memories that won't recede and so come pouring forth in the late-night quiet of a kitchen, as a story-teller opens her heart to a story-listener, recounting hurts that cut deep and raw into the gullies of the self, do you, the observer, stay behind the lens of the camera, switch on the tape recorder, keep pen in hand? Are there limits – of respect, piety, pathos – that should not be crossed even to leave a record?" (1996, p. 2). Needless to say, Behar leaves her own question unanswered.

And yet we know that in most cases people want to leave a record. And here we move from one dilemma to another. One person tells a narrative of surviving to another, usually in a situation of emotional intimacy. But such narratives are the target of all the usual criticisms to do with unreliability and partiality that used to be levelled at oral historians by archival historians. And yet once told and recorded it is in the nature of stories to cut themselves free of their moorings and thus to put themselves at risk of other forms of appropriation. Not least is the dual loyalty of ethnographers to their informants and to the academic community.

Narrative performance and its textual transformation, I am suggesting, is but one example of the necessary interconnection between subjectivity and its striving towards structure. Rather like the metaphor that is used to illustrate the mind body relationship, they are the two sides of a sheet of paper. Anthropologists put so much emphasis on contextualizing story telling, precisely because stories are so readily detachable from their context. Indeed, we know that in a certain sense narrators want their stories to be detached from context, they want them to have a life that extends beyond their own life. Bauman and Briggs argue that the question we should be asking is: "What factors loosen the ties between performed discourse and its context?" (1990, p. 73). But when stories are released from the context of their telling, they come under the influence of other forces. And here, of course, all the questions that relate to issues

to do with the *politics of quotation* come into play. Stories like photographs can be put to uses for which the teller did not originally intend them as Struk has convincingly demonstrated (2004). Stories circulate, they invite readings and re-readings and their authors or narrators do not have control over their final uses or location. But they do have some control over their shape.

Let me give an example. Latvian narrators frequently remembered dangerous situations by switching from a singular to plural first person pronoun, from “I” to “we”, or by recalling folk or literary figures. Autobiographical/historical events are situated within cultural narratives. This kind of dialogic framing imbues the story-teller with moral courage: This is Uldis recounting his adolescent escape to Siberia to visit his deported godmother:

“And so in 1947, when I had turned thirteen, I had no money at all, nor any documents, I only took a little cup of sugar with me – I had a little white cup – and a loaf of bread. And I tried to sneak onto the Moscow train, the Riga-Moscow train ... And so I succeeded and reached Moscow ... well, of course, I was very dazed at first – I’d never seen such a large city. And besides I was very hungry, I had no money and no documents. And my spirit sagged. And then what? I remembered Annele, I remembered our Brigadere, I remembered Spriditis, because at one time I myself had played the part of Spriditis at school and also in the drama theatre when there was a children’s production. I myself played Spriditis. Because Spriditis had tremendous courage when he was allowed to recuperate a bit. And I had taken some postcards with me with views of Riga to cheer up my godmother and remind her of Riga and her homeland. And so I decided that perhaps I could trade the postcards ... And I sold them and then I could get something to eat again. And then I got back my spirit just like Spriditis. And then I thought, ‘No, I have to continue my journey.’”

The remembered narrative is intertwined with the story of Spriditis who becomes Uldis’s invisible companion. The story of Spriditis tells of an orphan banished from home who wanders through the forest and rescues a princess from the devil but rather than marry the arrogant princess Spriditis chooses to return to his farmstead, reassures Uldis and makes the possibility of his own return more real.

What we hear in Uldis’s narrative is at odds with both the primordial and the interactionist view of the self. To say that Uldis’ sense of self is deeply dependent upon others, that it is inter-subjective, is not in itself new. But the terms of that dependency are sought out by Uldis himself, the nature of the inter-subjectivity is not imposed from without. Narratives of survival do not draw upon primordial identities neither are they interactionist as that term is currently understood. Similarly, the memories of



which they speak are not simply plucked out of storage nor have they been shaped by social and political requirements as may happen later when they have transmuted in the process of being passed from one person to another. Instead, they move freely in an imaginary space, that freedom being in stark contrast to the absence of physical freedom of which they speak. To borrow an evocative phrase from Das, “pain needs to find a home in language” (1998, p. 25). These narratives also suggest the complexities and varieties of agency. The term inter-subjective, rather than collective memory, is so much better at encompassing the way we enter into imaginary dialogues with childhood friends encountered in books. Crapanzano refers to this as shadow dialogue, which goes on in parallel with the dialogues that we as researchers engage in with our informants (1992, p. 213).

Let me give you another example in which a biblical shadow dialogue seems to be going on. This is Milda recounting her return from the gulag.

“It was exactly 1950. The ticket was free. I had some money too. We spoke Latvian, being all Latvians together. I couldn’t speak Russian. Now the camp gates are open and I’m shown ‘Go there’. I go to one place and my ticket isn’t accepted. I go to a second, it isn’t accepted. At last, it’s accepted in a third place. I sit down and I think madness, how do I know where to go. The train moves a bit and then stops. Moves a bit and then stops. I am on my own. Everyone else was given at least ten years. Nobody had as short a time as me. I was the first to be set free. Because nobody proved my guilt...I didn’t know the language. And then I thought ‘Dear God, give me some companion who would take me to Moscow, to Riga. ‘Once I got to Riga I would know from there on. I must have looked terrible. Two young people come in the carriage. Russians, of course, and they give me such a look. I was sitting there alone. It wasn’t a cattle wagon, it was a carriage for humans. I look, they are coming back, they sit down opposite me and start to speak to me. I tell them I don’t understand, but they don’t give up. One of them has been in Riga during the German time and he knows a few words of Latvian. And they were on an official trip to Moscow. And so he spoke one word Latvian, one word Russian and so in two weeks we got to Moscow. And that time we were travelling forty days and nights to Komsomolsk and we got back to Moscow in twelve days. They brought me back to Moscow and showed me the Moscow Riga train. God has listened to all my prayers.”

This seemingly spontaneous piece of autobiographical narrative has all the hallmarks of literary writing. The impact of the account is intensified through repetition and biblical framing. It is no accident that Milda introduces the numbers three, twelve and forty each with biblical resonance. Similarly, the transmutation of two initially fearsome

Russian fellow travellers into good Samaritans also has biblical precedents. The language and substance of these accounts was shaped both by the narrators' past experience and the circumstances of the narration and by the existence of a hoped for, but as yet unidentified, readership. They both embody the author's intentions and join with other voices to appeal to a wider audience. The narratives illustrate the complexities of agency and the shortcomings of simply identifying agency with autonomy. As two cognitive psychologists (Schank and Abelson 1995) have written: "our old story is the means for understanding the new story, so overpowering the new story that we remember little of it. In this sense we cannot understand anything new" (p. 21). I would argue that we do understand new things, but that we do so with the help of existing literary frameworks. Toker in her book *Return from the Archipelago: Narratives of Gulag Survivors* is particularly good on this (2000). She is, of course, aware of the prevailing hesitancy about focusing on the formal aesthetic aspects of Gulag literature: the idea that form is trivial and detracts from substance. There is a general feeling that just as there is something morally repulsive about concentrating on the table manners of a starving person, so, too, there is something morally wrong in concentrating on the literary form of accounts of extreme experience. But Toker contends, "It is now ethically possible and, I believe, necessary to consider the writings of former prisoners as *artistic works* and to analyze not just the testimony that they represent but also their formal features" (2000, p. 8).

However, I would like to move away from the literary and structural consideration of these narratives to issues to do with their decontextualization. Both pieces of narrative were part of interviews conducted by myself. In Uldis' case the interview had been pre-arranged by telephone and took place in Riga. In Milda's case, since she had no phone, I arrived at the doorstep of her ground floor flat unannounced. Both interviews took place in the spring of 1992. I know that in both cases I had a strong sense of their physical presence. Face, limbs, hands and the texture of voice spoke to me as much as did the words themselves. But my physical memories of the interaction have faded and in their place I have only the words. I know that Uldis had a broken nose and that Milda's figure was stooped, but I would need to work hard to try and recover a sense of their presence. My experience here confirms the findings of psychologists who argue that once experience is translated into words, the experiential memory recedes and comes to be blotted out by the verbal translation. In this way oral history narratives straddle the divide which Ardener sets up between anthropology and history: "Unlike the historian the anthropologist does both the living and the

recording. The ethnography is a kind of slaughter of the experience and a dissection of the corpse. That increasing modern preoccupation with attempts to understand the generative elements of a living society, which is now becoming apparent, requires some appreciation of the exact point at which the opportunity for such an understanding both exists and vanishes – the exact moment of the slaughter” (1989, p. 94). Ardener’s words vividly describe the elusiveness of experience and the inevitable decontextualization of narrative. Moreover, this process is continuous. I have in the recent past received several requests from young historians enquiring about access to my tapes and/or transcripts. Some are archival historians who wish to add an oral history dimension to their work, others simply wish to augment their own stock of interviews. This kind of borrowing raises numerous ethical issues. But apart from the ethical dimension, it also highlights the affinity of stories with travel and movement.

The Harvard medical anthropologist and psychiatrist has introduced the term appropriation to describe this process. Over the past few years Kleinman has persistently pointed to the ways in which the appropriation, commercialization and commodification of suffering are a key feature of globalization. A part of this process involves “essentializing, naturalizing or sentimentalising suffering” (Kleinman and Kleinman, 1996, p. 2). And it also involves stripping the suffering of its context and often supplying it with a different context. So, for example, Kevin Carter’s prize-winning photograph of the famine in the Sudan depicts the emaciated bowed figure of a tiny infant in an empty depopulated landscape with a vulture hovering in the background. In this way man-made disasters are made to look like natural disasters. But Kleinman argues that, “There is no single way to suffer; there is no timeless or spaceless universal shape to suffering” (1996, p. 2). Each form of suffering is shaped by a specific history and social context.

Well, I would want to respond with both a yes and a no. For many centuries the archetypal Western epic of survival was divorced from its context and had to wait until the second half of the nineteenth century to be more firmly reunited with its context. The importance of Homer’s *Odyssey* lay not in its historical veracity but in its mythical and poetic power: “an idea of the past to which only the Muse had access (Hunter 2004, p. 261). The attempts to identify the geographical location of Troy and the controversies following Schliemann’s alleged discovery of 1870 came much later. However, the historical authentication of the events described neither adds nor detracts from the portrayal of the suffering of Odysseus. Rather Homer speaks to us of certain key elements of suffering including the need to be heard. Odysseus having returned home from his dangerous

peregrinations listens to the blind bard sing the story of Odysseus's life. Odysseus has not cried in the face of lived danger but it takes the voice of another to reduce him to tears: "So the famous singer sang his tale, but Odysseus melted, and from under his eyes the tears ran down, drenching his cheeks. As a woman weeps (1965, Book viii, lines 521–523). This extract from Homer points to the role of narrative memory in crystallizing emotional understanding. Living a life is not sufficient: it has to be told by another for the lived events to register.

The importance of turning suffering into narrative, brings us back to issues to do with memory. Like the idea of self, memory is understood through a variety of changing metaphors. Two such metaphors are relevant to the debate about the appropriation of suffering and the disjuncture between experience and memory. One owes much to Saint Augustine, the other to Plato. The first most startling metaphor is of memory as a stomach. "We might say that memory is a kind of stomach of the mind, and that joy or sorrow are like sweet or bitter food. When this food is committed to the memory, it is as though it had passed into the stomach where it can remain but also loses its taste." And Augustine elaborates this metaphor, "Perhaps these ruminations are brought forward from the memory by the act of remembering in the same way as cattle bring up food from the stomach when they chew the cud. But if this is so, when a man discusses them – that is, when he recalls them to mind – why does he not experience the pleasure of joy or pain or sorrow in his mind, just as the animal tastes food in his mouth?" Our present response to this question in the light of psychoanalytic hindsight, must be that so often pain and sorrow are experienced in recollection with the same intensity and immediacy as the taste of food.

In *Theaetetus* Plato presents us with a different version of memory, connected to writing and using the image of the wax tablet:

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"And whenever we want to remember something we've seen or heard or conceived on our own, we subject the block to the perception or the idea and stamp the impression on it, as if we were making marks with signet rings. We remember and know anything imprinted, as long as the impression remains in the block, but we forget and do not know anything which is erased or cannot be imprinted" (p. 109).

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In the same tradition, Freud in his brief note on the Mystic Writing Pad claims, "Whenever I distrust my memory I can resort to pen and paper" (1925, p. 176). Or rather as Crapanzano claims, "Memory, its possibility, protects us from the overwhelming intensity of perception" (2005, p. 69).

We are presented here with two very different approaches to memory. For Augustine authenticity lies with experience. For Plato and much later for Freud, authenticity lies in what is inscribed on the wax tablet or in the written record. So how do these ancient debates about the nature of memory, namely the importance of lived experience versus the importance of writing, relate to narratives of survival? I think most of us have a fair idea of the answer. In a simplified and schematic form we can say that most writers on this topic fall into one of two camps. There are those who argue, in the tradition initiated by Adorno that true evil, the holocaust cannot be represented. Only those who have experienced the holocaust are entitled to speak of it and they are not with us. For others to do so betrays a lack of authenticity. And there are those, who urge the importance, indeed, the necessity of listening, recording and writing. The first position seems to me to be extraordinary in its denial of the possibility of communication and interpersonal understanding. The second position puts exceptional trust in the truthfulness and incorruptibility of the written word and we know, of course, that much of this trust is misplaced. But, despite their potential for misuse, appropriation and corruption, words and stories are the best we have to get along with and to understand the experiences of others. So let me draw to a close by offering you two narratives of survival from the gulag.

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“Prisoners know much more about what is happening in the world outside than free people. After all, a free person is isolated. He’s in his family and workplace - work, home, family, the theatre. But he’s very far from daily or nightly events. All those events are concentrated in prisons, whether they’re political or criminal. And you see, a great many peoples’ destinies flow together here - collide. How they behave, happenings. And in places of imprisonment people are very truthful. One can be dishonest for a month or two, but it won’t last longer. One has to be honest because otherwise one can’t exist. And here all the lies fall away. And that’s why they know much more about what’s happening; those who are on the inside of the fence than those who live on the outside.”

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“Everything was there, but no matter whether it was evil or it was good - it was all truthful. There was no theatre, no role play, no pretence. Everything was exactly as it is. All the festering wounds were open. But also all the clarity and light. Somehow that evened out much of the evil that was around.”

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I end with these two quotations because in their meditation upon the zone as a microcosm of the larger zone, they illustrate the fusion of individual and collective concerns and the fusion of life with literature.

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