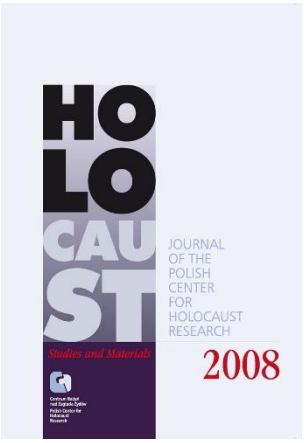

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Literature of the Personal Document as a Source in Holocaust Research (a Methodological Reconnaissance).

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Literature of the personal document as a source in Holocaust research

1.

No serious Holocaust historian has ever questioned the usefulness of personal notes of the victims, survivors' accounts, or memoirs and recollections, often written decades after the events in question. Therefore, it is not my intention to encourage researchers to use this type of sources, because this has been the case for a long time, indeed from the very beginning of scientific (not journalistic, essayistic, or anniversary) reflection on the Holocaust.[1] Yet, I would like to reflect upon: first the genre characteristics of text that belong to the so-called literature of personal documents, their specificity as a historical source in Holocaust studies; second, upon the methodological challenge this type of sources constitutes for (not only) the historiography of the Holocaust.

The question, therefore, is: what is the literature of personal documents for Holocaust historians, which in different forms gives an account of the experience; how do they use it in their research; how do they read such personal narratives?

A more general context for these considerations is provided by inspirations from the current theory of history.[2] Let me mention three names only. Hayden White focuses on the theoretical dimension of historical literature and points out that all narration consists in giving meaning to the world. But how, if at all, can one talk about such an event as the Holocaust, and, if so, what style should be employed – wonders White in his article *Fabularyzacja historyczna a problem prawdy,*[3] or *Realizm*

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[1] A pioneer sociological study on Holocaust testimonies is M. Borwicz's "Ecrits des condamnes a mort soys l'occupation allemande" (1939–1945) *Etude sociologique* (Paris, 1954), author's dissertation defended at the Sorbone in 1953.

[2] On the contemporary theory of history and narrativism see Topolski J., *Jak się pisze i rozumie historię. Tajemnice narracji historycznej*, Warszawa 1996; Domańska E., ed., *Pamięć, etyka, historia. Anglo-amerykańska teoria historiografii lat dziewięćdziesiątych (Antologia przekładów)*, Poznań 2002; K.L. Klein, "O pojawieniu się pamięci w dyskursie historycznym", Konteksty 3–4 (2003).

[3] Text published in: White H., *Poetyka pisarstwa historycznego*, ed. Ewa Domańska and Marek Wilczyński, Kraków 2002, 211 – 236. [original text: "Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth" in: *Probing the Limits of Representation, Nazism and the 'Final Solution'* ed. Saul Friedlander. Cambridge, Mass; London: Harvard University Press, 1992, 37-53 (*ibid.* a discussion: Carlo Ginzburg, "Just One Witness" and Amos Funkenstein, "History, Counterhistory, Narrative").

figuralny w strukturze świadectwa.[4] Frank Ankersmit deals with presentation, historical representation and historical experience. He analyses narrative logic, i.e. an assumed model of historical narration, which thus becomes a historian's construction, or a form of representation of the past, not the past "in itself". Ankersmit stresses the necessity of differentiating between description (characteristic of historical research) and narration and representation (characteristic of historical narrative). He also distinguishes between historical experience, which is a moment of direct historical experience and eliminates the distance between the past and the present, and historical narration, which by constructing an image of history, does emphasise this distance.[5] Dominic La Capra focused on remembrance and trauma, as he believes that all historians are, in a sense, psychoanalysts. La Capra claims that the traumatic experiences of 20th century history (primarily the Holocaust), suppressed for a long time, returned after a delay in the form of "remembrance discourse".[6]

2.

The notion of personal document has been developed by humanist sociology, and was introduced into the social sciences by Florian Znaniecki, who discovered that autobiography can be a valuable sociological material, and created the so-called biographical document method. It marked the transition from quantitative analyses, which subjected social processes and those involved to standardisation, to qualitative analysis, which focuses on the unique quality of human experience. Humanist sociology, by studying private letters or memoirs, can reveal moments of self-reflection of the subject and the process of biography construction by the individual, or, in other words, various autobiographical strategies of the author. Precisely, such biographical documents contain the "humanist factor", or the sense an individual gives to objects and situations, when interpreting the social reality, where they function and which they experience. "The autobiographical document method is such a type of sociological research, where to solve a given problem, only materials that contain people's accounts of their participation in events and processes in question,

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[4]Text published in: *Literatura na świecie* 1–2 (2004), 65–79 [originally published as:"Figural Realism in Witness Literature." Parallax, vol. 10, no 1, January-March 2004, 113-124.]

[5] See F. Ankersmit, *Narracja, reprezentacja, doświadczenie. Studia z teorii historiografii*, ed. E. Domańska (Kraków: 2004). A synthetic picture of the development of narrativism and Ankersmit's position in. E. Domańska, *Miejsce Franka* Ankersmita w *narratywistycznej filozofii historii*; Frank Ankersmit, introduction to the Polish edition (*ibid.*).

[6] D. La Capra, *Representing the Holocaust History, Theory, Trauma,* (Cornell University Press, 1994), *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (Cornell University Press, 1998) (one chapter from this book was published in M. Zapędowska's translation in: *Pamięć, etyka, historia…*, *op. cit.*, 127 – 162) [verify "*op. cit.*" on Chicago]; *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press) (one chapter in this book "Holocaust Testimonies. Attending to the Victim's Voice" is particularly pertinent to the issue at hand). See also a review of *Writing History, Writing Trauma* by N. Gross and G. Handwerk, *Criticism* (2002).

and based on those accounts, processes are described and hypotheses formulated," wrote Jan Szczepański.[7]

The notion of personal document invented by humanist sociology was transposed onto the theory of literature by Roman Zimand, who coined the term "literature of the personal document", which comprises autobiography in all its genres. The specific character of the literature of the personal document is determined by three fundamental characteristics: first, the blurred distinctions between genres and the ease with which they are crossed, rooted in personalised narration; second, the blurred opposition between "truth" and "fiction", rooted in the interplay between textual referentiality and principles of narrative composition; third, an enormous variety of genres and sub-genres. Zimand identifies two basic poles of literature of the personal document: "the world of writing about oneself directly" (i.e. the confession stance) and "the world of eye-witness testimony" (i.e. the witness stance).[8]

Accounts, diaries, memoirs and letters make up an internally varied constellation of texts, which is a broad area, with blurred borders that are difficult to grasp. It is also known under different names. Some use the general term "memoirs" that covers three fundamental sub-genres: memoir, autobiography and diary.[9] Others use the general formula of autobiographical text, distinguishing between its narrow and broad meanings. The narrow one covers memoirs and diaries (the so-called referential autobiographies, i.e. those that refer directly to extratextual reality and can

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[7] Quoted after K. Kazimierska's article "O metodzie dokumentów biograficznych", *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* 1 (1980), 11. A practical application of the biographical document method is a classical five-volume work of humanist sociology, *Chłop polski w Europie i Ameryce (The Polish Peasant in Europe and America)*, (1918–1920, Polish edition, 1976), co-written by Znaniecki and W. J. Thomas, and Józef Chałasiński, *Młode pokolenie chłopów* (1938, 4 vols). A comprehensive presentation of the biographical method and the biographist approach in sociology can be found in A. Rokuszewska-Pawełek, *Chaos i przymus, Trajektorie wojenne Polaków – analiza biograficzna* (Łódź: 2002). As regards Holocaust research, within this methodological inspiration and based virtually only on accounts and autobiographies the following books by Polish authors should be mentioned: Barbara Engelking, *Zagłada i pamięć: Doświadczenie Holocaustu i jego konsekwencje opisane na podstawie relacji autobiograficznych* (Warsaw: 1994), and "*Czas przestał dla mnie istnieć…*": *analiza doświadczeń czasu w sytuacji ostatecznej* (Warsaw: 1996); M. Melchior, *Zagłada a tożsamość. Polscy Żydzi ocaleni na "aryjskich papierach". Analiza doświadczenia biograficznego* (Warsaw: 2004). The 'trajectory' category has been employed in biographical experience research of the Warsaw Ghetto by M. Młodkowska, "Gettowe trajektorie: o zapisie osobistego doświadczenia w dziennikach z getta warszawskiego" (Abraham Lewin, Rachela Auerbach, Janusz Korczak), *Teksty Drugie* 1 (2001).

[8] Roman Zimand, *Diarysta Stefan Ż.* (Wrocław: 1990). As for analysis of written Holocaust testimonies in the light of their linguistic character and textual poetics, the following texts in Polish literature on the subject ought to be mentioned: the article by J. Jedlicki, "Dzieje doświadczone i dzieje zaświadczone", in: *Dzieło literackie jako źródło historyczne*, ed. Z. Stefanowski and J. Sławiński (Warsaw: 1978), and the essay by R. Zimand, "W nocy od 12 do 5 rano nie spałem". "Dziennik Adama Czerniakowa – próba lektury" (Paris: 1979). My analysis of personal document literature written in the Warsaw Ghetto can be found in *Text wobec Zagłady*. (O relacjach z getta warszawskiego) (Wrocław: 1997); I also analysed autobiographical notes written after the war in the article "Polscy Żydzi – strategie autobiograficzne", *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów* 4 (200) (2001).

[9] See A. Cieński, *Pamiętniki i autobiografie światowe* (Wrocław: 1992).

be analysed in terms of logical truth or falsehood). The broad one refers to literary autobiographies, where referentiality is mixed with fictionality, and factual account is inseparably intertwined with the creation of fictional reality.[10] Other authors treat autobiographism as a supra-gender category that belongs to non-fictional prose. The most distinguished exponent of such a position is Philippe Lejeune, whose works on autobiographical forms have become part of the canon of contemporary humanities. Lejeune's name is connected with his famous formula of the "autobiographical pact", which is a certain type of agreement between the author and the reader. Both the writers and the readers assume a fundamental identity of the author, the narrator and the main protagonist, which is indispensable to properly understand an autobiographical text. In other words – to use an example of a text that deals with the Holocaust experience – Calek Perechodnik, the author of *Spowiedź* (publisher's title, in first edition: *Czy ja jestem mordercą*?) is no doubt the same person as the narrator and the story's protagonist. Lejeune has also formulated the classical definition of autobiography, which became the centre of theoretical debate, and the author himself referred to this definition after many years to modify and deepen it. Autobiography is a "retrospective story in prose, where the real person presents their life, emphasising its individual fate, particularly the history of this personality."[11]

If we assume that autobiographical texts are an expression of the writer's stance, then – allowing for some simplification – it can be put in a bipolar scheme. On the one hand, it would be the stance of an eyewitness, who gives an account of a world of his personal experience, and, on the other, a stance of someone making a confession, not so much about the world around him as about himself.[12]

3.

A number of questions arise in the context of considerations on the status of literature of the personal document as a historical source. What area of cognition does it reveal; what and how does it tell us about humans and the surrounding reality; does it, and, if so, how does it allow us to grasp the real world? Leaving aside, for obvious reasons, detailed considerations on the cognitive status of autobiographical forms and their referential values,[13] let us outline two approaches to this issue.

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[10] S. Dubrovsky's position after: R. Lubas-Bartoszyńska, *Między autobiografią a literaturą* (Warsaw: 1993).

[11] This definition can be found in *Le pacte autobiographique* (Paris: 1975), first published in Poland in A. Labuda's translation in *Teksty* 5 (1975) and, subsequently, in a collective volume, P. Lejeune, *Wariacje na temat pewnego paktu. O autobiografii,* ed. R. Lubas-Bartoszyńska, transl. W. Grajewski et al. (Cracow: 2001).

[12] See M. Czermińska, *Autobiograficzny trójkąt. Świadectwo, wyznanie, wyzwanie* (Kraków: 2002). The author supplements the traditional dichotomy of testimony and confession with the challenge stance, manifested in the constant dialogic tension between the autobiographical subject and the reader. A model example of such a stance is Gombrowicz's *Diaries*.

[13] This issue is dealt with in detail in P. J. Eakin, *Touching the World. Reference in Autobiography* (Princeton University Press, 1992).

When we inquire about the subject matter of autobiography, we ask what it presents, represents, personalizes. If we assume that the dominant function of autobiography is its referentiality, then what it refers to will "actually be a life experienced", or "biography" – a description of facts, events, people, thoughts, which make up the author's life. In this context, the difference between "biography" and "autobiography" would be of the same character as the difference between a real object and its representation. Thus "biography", a life experienced, becomes material for "autobiography", a life narrated. Therefore the proper object of analysis of thus understood autobiography is not so much a life story as life itself, which emerges from this story. Such an attitude leads to researchers' "suspicious" treatment of autobiographical notes, their "subjectivism", limited cognitive perspective, their selective character, the fallibility of the author's memory, the impact of emotions and opinions that distorts the account's objectivism. It is not difficult to surmise that autobiographies are largely read by historians, who treat them as a valuable source, albeit marked by "subjectivism".

There is yet another way to treat the genre in question, which blurs the distinction between "biography" and "autobiography". The decision to write and the very act of taking notes, or, in other words, the autobiographical act, is not fulfilled in a perfectly private, separate, and thus simply fictional, nonexistent space of the isolated "I". The very use of language entails entering the domain of culture, which is filled with tension. The language of autobiographical text clashes the personal and the common; it sees a conflict between the intimate experience and the conventional modes of its expression. The autobiographical subject is not alone, as through language, role models and attitudes it becomes involved in culture. It faces what could be called culturally sanctioned identity models. Both the personality, which can be reconstructed in an autobiographical text, and the perception of the author's "I", are conditioned by history and culture. The development of autobiography can be viewed as an evolution of the theory of personality: from the "I" as a uniform and invariable phenomenon, to the "I" understood as an interpersonal and subjective construct: from the integral "I" to the fragmentary "I". From this point of view, autobiographical narration can be seen as a construction derived from the previous and, in a sense, intersubjective model of the autobiographical text, composed of a definite sequence of "autobiographical figures". These autobiographical figures, rooted in the cultural paradigm, can be ultimately traced back to the very rhythm of our lives, as our life – our intelligent existence among other things – has a narrative structure. Between the author's "I" and culture, there is, therefore, some feedback and reciprocal conditioning. A similar reciprocal conditioning and their (re)construction can be found between the cultural model of identity and the autobiographical text. Or one could say that autobiography represents not so much the biographical experience as the code in which this experience is represented.[14]

Thanks to Hayden White, an American philosopher of language, we know that the past, which is the content of memory, fuelling every autobiography and every

[14] I recapitulate here the main theses of P. J. Eakin, *Touching the World…* op. cit., particularly chapter 3, "Self and Culture in Autobiography: Model of Identity and the Limits of Language", 71–137.

historical work, does not manifest in itself, but only through language: testimonies, sources, documents and descriptions. Language is not a neutral medium and refers to reality in a number of indirect ways. Together with language, we inherit certain cognitive models, a cultural and social framework that determines types of speech formed in social communication, which we use in all kinds of situations. One's life story does not exist independently of its representation, i.e. of the written autobiography that tells the story. History as a picture of past events is not a simple representation of what happened, but it is a certain narrative construction, an object of a narration, organised according to accepted rules. Therefore, while one does not reject the actual existence of the extra-autobiographical world, one also questions the existence of something like a "record of the objective course of events." This "autobiography" does not refer us to "biography", but narrates it, does not represent something outside itself, but presents itself as narration recorded in text. Narration about one's own life is determined not only by ordering self-reflection, but also by the choice of a given narrative construction. Narration is then a fundamental way of giving sense to the world around us, as well as to our own life. It orders and interprets our experience of reality. What is crucial to such an interpretation of autobiographical forms is not the objective reference of the text, its cognitive representation of a given historical period or a given social group. The fundamental question, however, is the question concerning the project of understanding oneself, one's life and the world around, which is part of autobiographical narration.[15]

4.

Historians, in their studies, employ historical sources, and, on their basis, reconstruct past reality. As defined encyclopaedically, historical sources are "all sorts of traces of various manifestations of life and human action, a reflection of the historical process, and, as such – historical facts." Historical sources include: material relics (e.g. buildings, tools, weapons), linguistic relics (e.g. former names), iconographic images (paintings, pictures, including photography and film), tradition, and, finally – literature (manuscripts and printed materials), or all written sources, including the type of sources we are interested in: the literature of the personal document.[16] 19th and 20th century historiography formulated various definitions of sources as well as their different criteria of classification. One of the key issues here was intentionality. According to the German historian Johan Gustaw Droysen (1808 – 1884), sources proper are those that were consciously written by their authors (primarily historiographic literature), while the rest are the so-called "relics" (made to serve the immediate needs of their creators: documents, inscriptions, monuments, coins, etc.). For Marcel Handelsman, on the other hand, the chief criterion of classification is how a

[15] For more of these issues, H. White, *Poetyka pisarstwa historycznego (op. cit)*, and, from a different historical perspective, A. Gica, *Życie jako opowieść. Analiza materiałów autobiograficznych w perspektywie socjologii wiedzy*, (Wrocław: 1991).

[16] J. Topolski, "Historyczne źródła", in: *Nowa encyklopedia powszechna*, vol. 3 (Warsaw: 2004).

given source was made. Thus he divides sources into two types: written sources, the domain of historical studies, and unwritten sources (crucial for such disciplines as archaeology, anthropology, ethnography and ethnology). Jerzy Topolski proposed that sources be divided into two categories: addressed and unaddressed. Addressed sources have an author, who directs information to the reader, while the message has a persuasive character, e.g. it aims to persuade the reader that the information is true to convince him to accept the author's views. Unaddressed sources have not been made to inform anyone, so they are not addressed to anybody and hence lack the persuasive element.[17]

The classical division of written sources, presented for example in the frequently republished textbook for history students, is as follows. There are two main types: the first – descriptive sources (narrative); the second – documents and files, i.e. all sorts of documents and files produced by offices and institutions, including private ones. The former, i.e. descriptive sources, comprise historiographical sources (historical works from past eras, annals, chronicles, hagiographies, biographies, scholarly historical text); memoirs; journalistic sources (periodicals, newspapers, diaries, leaflets, propaganda materials, etc.), epistolographical sources (private and semi-private correspondence).[18]

Even a cursory survey of the traditional classification of written historiographical sources demonstrates that those types of texts we classified as literature of the personal document, are, in a sense, dispersed on its various levels. Thus disappears their specific character of a multi-genre whole, which constitutes a separate constellation of texts. Despite their internal variety, we can identify its common formula. This would be, first, the autobiographical stance (both the stance of "intimate confession" and the "witness stance"), and second, the procedure of recording, by various means and various discourse figures or narrative strategies, the experience of the individual "I", which reflects "the world and time".[19]

Furthermore, traditional historiography draws upon what Jerzy Topolski calls "the myth of historical source". He points out that the very term "historical source" has the form of a lexicalised metaphor, no longer perceived as one, and, in this case, the actual source, from where the stream flows. What, then, "flows" from a historical source? According to the logic of this worn-out metaphor, one would need to answer that, based on the original meaning of the word "source", what flows is something crystal clear as spring water. The water a historian draws from the source is the truth. In this sense, sources have a higher cognitive status than historical narration based on them. "This belief, which leads to a categorical differentiation between sources and historical narration, treating sources as depositories

[17] J. Topolski, *Jak się pisze i rozumie historię…*, *op. cit.*, 340–341.

[18] See M. Pawlak, J. Serczyk, *Podstawy badań historycznych. Skrypt dla studentów I roku historii*, 6th revised edition (Bydgoszcz: 1992),16–25.

[19] These words were borrowed from C. K. Norwid's poem *Aerumnarum plenum*. A broader context: "Czemu mi smutno i czemu najsmutniej, / Mamże ci ja śpiewać ja – czy świat i czas?…" (Why am I sad and why most sad / shall I sing it to you – or the world and time?…) reflects, in my opinion, the key confrontation, crucial to the autobiographical stance, between the "I" and "non-I" (i.e. the social character of language and culture).

of truth, I call the myth of historical sources," Topolski writes.[20] The author quotes two manifestations of the myth of sources. One is the canonical rule, which leads one to believe that being in possession of two independent sources that mutually corroborate information on the same fact virtually decides that it is true. What can be questioned here is both the very rule of two sources (is information from one source necessarily *a priori* incredible?) and the notion of their independence (the sources in question could be produced independently of one another, but their authors could have drawn on a common worldview). Another manifestation of the myth of sources is the belief that the more sources there are, the closer a historian gets to the truth. However, the cognitive value of sources cannot be determined *a priori*, but only with respect to a given item under research, or in other words, i.e. what the historian is looking for.[21]

Holocaust historiography puts the issue of quality and the manner in which historical sources are used in a specific perspective. If the postulate to seek the truth be regarded as an absolutely obvious basis for a historian, then this search for truth in the case of a Holocaust historian appears to be, so to speak, a double challenge. Like every cognitive process, it is subject to potential errors; hence the need to be extremely careful and competent in one's critique of sources and to exercise a certain degree of disbelief. But the Holocaust, regardless of how we understand the cognitive implications of its widely debated uniqueness,[22] is a source of additional "specific difficulties" for the historian.

These "specific difficulties" are discussed by Frank Ankersmit in his article "Pamiętając Holocaust, żałoba i melancholia".[23] He begins his argument with a thesis that has all the signs of intellectual provocation; writing about the Holocaust, apart from respect for the truth, requires something more: "both talent and tact, in order to know when and how to avoid the traps of inappropriateness." The category of appropriateness, borrowed from aesthetics, might help Holocaust researchers avoid dead ends one might find oneself in while searching for "the sole truth and moral good". Thus, facing such a challenge as the Holocaust, the historian should

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[20] J. Topolski, *Jak się pisze i rozumie historię…, op. cit.*, 337 (see chapt. 20 on these issues: "Źródła historyczne a narracja historyczna", 335–348.

[21] *Ibid.*, 337–338.

[22] See a synthetic and extremely instructive discussion of these issues in: A. Milchman, A. Rosenberg, *Eksperymenty w myśleniu o Holokauście.* Auschwitz i nowoczesna filozofia, transl. I. Krowicki, J. Szacki (Warsaw: 2003) (chapt. 3 "Holocaust – kwestia wyjątkowości"). The Polish part of this debate is best illustrated by the clash of two formulas: Zofia Nałkowska's "People brought this fate on people" and Henryk Grynberg's polemical formula "People brought this fate on Jews". See an extensive commentary on this controversy in: M. Zalewski "Ludzie ludziom…?" "Ludzie Żydom…?" "Świadectwo literatury?", in: A. Brodzka-Wald, D. Krawczyńska, J. Leociak, ed., *Literatura polska wobec zagłady* (Warsaw: 2000), 89–103.

[23] This text, translated by A. Ajschtet, A. Kubis and J. Regulska, was published in: *Pamięć, etyka i historia…*, op. cit., and, subsequently, in a Polish edition of Ankersmit's selected works, *Narracja, reprezentacja, doświadczenie* op. cit..

"precisely refer to aesthetics and not to the category of factographic truth and moral good."[24]

Ankersmit's position falls within the scope of the discussion on the conditions of carrying out Holocaust history among contemporary theoreticians of history. The question is: what type of discourse is appropriate for Holocaust research? This debate could be described as a conflict between "historical discourse" and "remembrance discourse".

What then, according to Ankersmit, is "historical discourse"? Let us hear the author's own words: "History and historical discourse is usually aimed at describing and explaining the past. This is primarily expected of a historian. A historian usually achieves this by reducing whatever in the past appears strange, odd, incomprehensible to what is familiar, i.e. by showing the strange in comprehensible terms. This makes historical narration metaphorical in principle. For example, when Christ metaphorically calls himself 'the good shepherd', he thus explains the secret of his mission in familiar terms – in terms of the reality of the good shepherd. Metaphor is the foundation of historical narration and endows us with its principally aesthetic quality."[25]

However, one needs to ask here if thus understood "historical discourse" can describe the Holocaust phenomenon, and whether its application is acceptable or appropriate? Let us quote Ankersmit again: "Is there any already known reality to which we can reduce, or in terms of which we can explain, the Holocaust? Of course not. When we call Nazi crimes 'inexpressible' or 'unspeakable', etc., we mean that there is no reality or concepts which could be used to properly describe or present such crimes. . . . This is therefore the reason why an aesthetic awareness of high standards of 'appropriateness' convinced some historians and theoreticians that the discourse of historians should be replaced by the discourse of remembrance, so as to approach the Holocaust issue with utmost tact."[26]

"Historical discourse" uses metaphor, not narrowly understood as a so-called stylistic device, but a rhetorical trope. The most distinguished scholar of historical narration is Hayden White. He points out that the instruments a historian uses to give meaning to a course of events are afforded by language itself. White constructs an epistemological model, based on four "basic tropes": metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony. Each assumes a different type of ordering relations and is a different kind of filter. The historian transforms the strange und unfamiliar into the known and familiar, because it is dealt with by means of the above-mentioned tropes, i.e. archetypal patterns of understanding, which are the foundation for our knowledge of the world.[27]

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[24] Quotation from Ankersmit's article in *Pamięć, etyka i historia…*, op. cit..

[25] *Ibid.*, 164.

[26] *Ibid.*, 164–165.

[27] Hayden White, *Topologia, dyskurs i rodzaje ludzkiej świadomości,* in: *idem*, Poetyka pisarstwa historycznego… *op. cit*.

"Discourse of remembrance" says Ankersmit, is metonymic not metaphorical;[28] its natural element is proximity, adherence, the desire of and the search for contact. Metaphor is, in a sense, an intellectual appropriation or seizure of the object of cognition. Remembrance, governed by metonymy, initially heads for something, like a glance we cast ahead in order to be able to see anything at all. When we look, we "touch" with our glance what happens to be in our line or field of vision. We "touch" but we do not "appropriate". In this sense the "discourse of remembrance" does not destroy the aura of inexpressibility and respects the unspeakable reality which we associate with the Holocaust. Ankersmit puts it as follows: "The discourse of remembrance is an indexical discourse, it turns attention to or points at the past, surrounds it, but never attempts to penetrate it. . . . Access to the Holocaust is in this case more indexical and metonymic than metaphorical. Metonymy favours ordinary proximity, respects all unforeseen cases of our recollections, and, as such, is a definite opposite of the proud, metaphorical appropriation of reality. Metaphor claims the right to get straight to the heart of the matter, while metonymy points the way for us toward what happens and toward an adherence of an event, and so on, *ad infinitum*. Instead of cramming (past) reality into the matrix of metaphorical appropriation of reality, metonymy is characterised by combining networks of associations dependent upon our personal experiences with a number of other factors."[29]

5.

In the context of the conflict outlined above, between the "historical discourse" and the "discourse of remembrance", let us ask again about the place of literature of the personal document among historical sources; or more precisely, how Holocaust historians treat the sphere of autobiography, testimonies and accounts of survivors.

It seems that the most widespread stance, one that typifies traditional historiography, which is derived from as early as the positivist model of "scientism", with emphasis laid on the obligation to "describe the facts" and "explain" (opposed to "understanding"), regards the multi-genre autobiographical testimonies, textual notes and oral accounts as a supplement to standard historical sources. If texts from the domain of personal documents are to provide the historian merely with factual knowledge, then the fundamental evaluation criterion for such sources is their credibility and verifiability. Analysed from this perspective, autobiographical texts demand extreme care on the part of the historian, in the reading, in the meticulous

[28]Ankersmit employs two opposite notions of metaphor and metonymy as understood originally by Roman Jacobson, and which is most widespread in contemporary humanities. It is a concept of fundamental separateness of metonymy and metaphor, understood broadly as two interacting but opposite methods of development and composition of any utterance: "The metonymic mode is based on relations of adherence, the metaphorical mode those of similarity (...)" [*italics mine* – J. L.] See M. Sławiński, T. Kostkiewiczowa, A. Okopieńska-Sławińska, J. Sławiński, *Słownik terminów literackich* (Wrocław: 1988) entry "Metonimia", 308.

[29]Frank Ankersmit, Pamięć, etyka i historia, *op. cit.*, 166.

critique and in comparison with others. One might gain an impression that historians, call them "fact gatherers",[30] feel a certain discomfort when confronted with sources of the autobiographical type. The point here is not the understandable and obviously justifiable critical attitude to this type of source. The point, indeed, is the particular valorisation that emanates from these methodological declarations.

Krzysztof Dunin-Wąsowicz, in his description of sources on the history of Warsaw during 1939–1945, calls for caution and criticism as to the press, both the "reptile newspapers" – understandably so – and the underground press. According to the author, "The historian ought to be even more critical with respect to sources, so plentiful when one deals with the war and occupation. Among them are various chronicles, memoirs and accounts, both in print and in manuscript. This type of source, extremely valuable from the point of view of learning about the details, people, individual events, should be subject to particularly discriminating criticism when one deals with more general matters, which require a broader and deeper perspective. Every memoir or account is fraught with subjectivism, and this characteristic must be constantly borne in mind also in the case of numerous memoirs and accounts from Warsaw."[31]

Feliks Tych, in the preliminary assumptions for his study *Świadkowie Shoah. Zagłada Żydów w pamiętnikach i wspomnieniach*, claims that "the diaries, memoirs and recollections of Polish Holocaust witnesses" are "a most reliable source of information in the actual attitudes of Polish society to the Nazi murder of the Jewish nation." He gives a different valorisation of ex-post memoirs, as "they are marked by the time they were written in", and also subject to censorship. "Despite their flaws, post-war memoirs, particularly those that were published – cannot be ignored here," concludes Tych.[32]

Words like "fraught with subjectivism" or "flawed sources" sound pejorative, as they signify a defect, imperfection, something that is an obstacle or a burden for the historian, something one has to cope with. Traditional historiography classifies sources in terms of credibility. Thus the most credible sources are those that are the most objective (files, documents, etc.). Among the less credible, hence less valu-

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[30] Coined by Jan Pomorski, head of the Chair of Methodology of History at the Marie Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin, quoted in: A. Ziębińska-Witek, *Holocaust. Problemy przedstawienia* (Lublin: 2005), 57. This study, rooted in the Anglo-American narrativistic philosophy of history, is an example of a successful attempt at an application of tools elaborated in this tradition in Holocaust studies, an attempt which is cognitively valuable, and convincing from the literary point of view.

[31] Krzysztof Dunin-Wąsowicz, "Warszawa w latach 1939–1945" in: S. Kieniewicz, ed., *Dzieje Warszawy*, vol. V (Warsaw: 1984), 11. One should note, however, that Tomasz Szarota feels no compulsion to apply any special technique when dealing with diaries, memoirs, accounts or recollections; he does not exhort one to be particularly cautious or critical. Both published and unpublished diaries, chronicles and memoirs, he used as sources for his book on the everyday life in occupied Warsaw, which are treated as one type of available historical source and discussed in the preface as equivalent to other types of sources. See Tomasz Szarota, *Okupowanej Warszawy dzień powszedni. Studium historyczne* (Warsaw: 1988), 9.

[32] F. Tych, *Długi dzień zagłady. Szkice historyczne* (Warsaw: 1999), 11.

able, sources are all kinds of records that are "fraught with subjectivism", i.e. the entire literature of the personal document.

The issue of "objectivism" and "subjectivism" of sources that document the Holocaust was confronted by historians already at the time when it took place, or in the very eye of the cyclone. This theme is taken up by Emanuel Ringenblum, the author of the concept and co-ordinator of the Underground Archive of the Warsaw Ghetto. In his description of the methods and the scope of Oneg Shabbat, Ringelblum also presents its assumptions and methodological directives. He emphasizes the aspirations to "objectivism" and the ambition to "obtain as precise and as comprehensive picture of events as possible", the efforts to "have the same event by the largest possible number of people . . . [in order to] extract historical truth, the actual course of events."[33] Information for further processing was collected through surveys, interviews, conversations, often hiding, for conspiratorial reasons, the true purpose of these operations. It is characteristic that Ringelblum, who tries so hard to be objective, goes so far as to allow or even encourage the revealing of personal feelings: "We have always taken care to obtain direct accounts of each event, of the true experience. That is why Oneg Shabbat materials . . . are so fraught with subjectivism."[34]

The Holocaust historian cannot ignore numerous autobiographical accounts (hence "filled with subjectivism") and does not want to do that, being aware of their value. This confronts him, however, with a challenge, aptly characterised by Dominic La Capra. He pointed out the dramatic tension between the pursuit of objective reconstruction of the past and the need to give empathetic reply to past horror, a reply given, in a way, on behalf of the victims and survivors. One characteristic and potent example of the clash of the discourse of remembrance and factographic discourse is La Capra's analysis of the accounts of Dora Laub, an Auschwitz survivor. She talks about a *Sonderkommando* revolt she witnessed. The events in question are played out as if "here and now", in front of the survivor's eyes. "I saw four chimneys start to burn and blow up" – she says. Historians who saw a videotape of Dora Laub's account did have doubts as to the facts presented. Her account, historically speaking, was unreliable. It has been determined beyond doubt that during the revolt only one crematorium chimney was blown up.[35]

Raul Hilberg noted one event which might be an apt comment on problems with the verification of Dora Laub's accounts. It is, however, a certain reversal of the former example. The survivor tries to communicate, as objectively as possible, his or her experience, focusing on the facts, on topography. A memory record is to be mapped onto a universal, objectivized language of a spatial model. In the Ghetto Defender's Kibbutz near Haifa, one can find a model of the Treblinka death camp, built by one of the survivors. After completion, he asked Abba Kovner, the legendary

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[33]E. Ringelblum, *Kronika getta warszawskiego. Wrzesień 1939 – styczeń 1943*, ed. A. Eisenbach, trans. from Yiddish by A. Rutkowski (Warsaw: 1983), 479.

[34]*Ibid.*, 483.

[35]See D. La Capra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore: 2001), 87–88.

poet and fighter from the Vilna Ghetto, to look at his work and express his opinion. Kovner examined the model carefully and pronounced: "Something is missing." "But what," asked the artist, "the fence is in the right place, the barracks are situated where they stood, even the S-shaped path to the gas chambers has the same shape, as does the very building of the gas chamber. What could be missing then?" "The horror is missing," replied Kovner.[36]

"Subjective" accounts of the victims reveal what can hardly by found in the "objective" documents, a painful and wounded memory. We touch here upon La Capra's fundamental notion of trauma. Traumatic past, or, in other words, the wound of the Holocaust experience, is suppressed and repressed. There are, generally speaking, two ways to free oneself from trauma. The negative way is the "acting out" of the trauma, and the positive one is its "working through". Someone afflicted by a deep trauma cannot free themselves from the past that plagues them, invades their present, and blurs the distance between the past and the present. The acting-out of the past consists of a constant and inevitable repetition of the trauma, in constant repetition of those experiences. The positive way to overcome a trauma is its "working through". This entire process, as with La Capra's entire conception, derives from psychoanalysis. A person suffering from trauma attempts to develop a distance toward his or her own experience, and to separate traumatic past from the present and the future. "For the victim, this means the ability to tell oneself: "Yes, this is just what happened to me once. This was tormenting and overwhelming, perhaps I will never manage to free myself from it, but what I am going through now is something different than the torment of the past."[37]

What are, therefore, or what could be, the testimonies of Holocaust survivors for historians? Can they be treated merely as "receptacles for facts", and research reduced to "collecting" or "fact gathering"? In positivist methodology of history, the object of research is historical fact, i.e. a definite event from the past, and the historian's task is to establish these facts beyond dispute. Within the very notion of historical facts lies an unspoken belief that, first, what has been established and called fact, did actually happen; and second, that it has the status of autonomous and independent reality, separate from the cognitive process and the cognitive subject. But since the anti-positivist breakthrough in the humanities, an active role of the subject in the constitution of the object of research has been generally accepted. Therefore, history is not a "thing in itself", but a construction made by the historian on the basis of indirect information, which he must interpret and structure.[38] Witold Kula elucidates this as follows: "Historical fact is a scientific construction, as . . . a given set of phenomena delineates chronological, geographical and substantial

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[36]See Raul Hilberg, "I Was Not There", in: B. Lang, ed., *Writing the Holocaust* (Holmes & Meier: New York – London: 1988), 21.

[37]Quoted in: A. Goldberg's interview with D. La Capra in 1988 for the Shoah Resource Center, in which La Capra characterizes the notions of "acting-out" and "working through". See "The Multimedia CD", "Eclipse of Humanity" (Yad Vashem, Jerusalem: 2000), 2–3 (33).

[38]See W. Sokołowski, entry in: *Encyklopedia katolicka* (Lublin: 1989), vol. V, 14–17 and J. Topolski, *Jak się pisze i rozumie historię…*, *op. cit.* 342–343.

borders. . . . The greatest difficulties for the researcher lie in the delineation of the fact's final chronological border. The following question can be posited: where does the 'fact' end, and, where do the 'fact's consequences' begin? . . . one cannot classify a fact without knowing its consequences. Where does the chain of consequences end? Facts take place within a given substantial, geographical and chronological framework. A fact, once it has taken place, still lives in history, lives and changes. . . . Facts that are called here 'physical' [i.e. 'delivered by nature', such as the death of a human being – J. L.] are provided in an infinite number by historical sources. The historian places them in society, and by means of combining them, the historian uses them to construct what is colloquially called 'historical facts'."[39]

The author, a distinguished scholar of economic and social history of Poland of the 17th and 18th century, while in German-occupied Warsaw was confronted by the following dilemma: whether to go into the ghetto (due to the Jewish origin of his wife Nina née Jabłońska) or to flee to the east? He stayed on the "Aryan" side, where he kept a diary, found and published posthumously as *Dziennik czasu okupacji*. These several dozen pages of personal confessions, written at irregular intervals by a junior scholar, resemble a sketch for an autobiographical novel. Notes for planned academic papers, from books, preliminary formulations of theses and conceptions of research goals set for the future. Many years later, in his preface to Ludwik Landau's *Kroniki lat wojny i okupacji*, he expressed admiration about its objectivism, which gave this work "shocking significance". Although numerous memoirs written under the occupation "testify to the truth", their chief motif, however, is "individual human experiences". The excellence of Landau's *Kroniki*, according to Kula, "perhaps stems from a complete lack of personal tones, having eliminated anything that does not have general significance."[40] In the context of this position the notes of a 26-year-old historian, written under the occupation, bring a completely different aura – they are "saturated with subjectivism". On 23 July 1942 (the second day of the liquidation action in the Warsaw Ghetto) the diarist writes: "Yesterday, I could no longer write in the office. . . . What I find most tiring and exhausting during the occupation is the constant psychological effort I need to make all the time, just as all the time I need to breathe, and it has two parts: not to be afraid, and not to think about the atrocities taking place [around me]."[41] The next day he adds: "I am experiencing the most glaring denial of what I've written above. I cannot work, think, read or even sleep, I cannot divorce my thoughts from the atrocities around me. I can't even concentrate on writing these notes. . . . (I can't write. I'll go and put my shoes on)."[42]

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[39] W. Kula, "Rozważania o historii", in: *idem*, *Wobec historii* (Warsaw: 1988), 42–44.

[40] W. Kula, foreword to L. Landau, Kronika lat wojny i okupacji, vol. I: September 1939 – November 1940, edited for publication by Z. Landau and J. Tomaszewski (Warsaw: 1962), V.

[41] W. Kula, *Dziennik czasu okupacji*, submitted for publication by N. Assorodobraj and M. Kula (Warsaw: 1994), 45–46.

[42] *Ibid.*, 48. Kula worked as a storekeeper "in one of the strongest institutions in occupied Warsaw: the shoe factory of the Institute of Social Affairs (Instytut Spraw Społecznych, ISS). The ISS employed 100 Warsaw cobblers, with over 50 distinguished scholars and artists on its payroll." *Ibid.*, 57 (publisher's note).

What "historical facts" do we find in this witness's account? Won't a "fact collector" whose volumes were to produce a picture of the history of the Warsaw Ghetto, or – more broadly – of German-occupied Warsaw, put this diary aside, which was written *hic et nunc*, in disappointment or even disenchantment? All this depends on what we seek in autobiographical sources and whether we can listen to what their authors are telling us. Those intimate confessions of a diarist, overcome by the horror of pressing events he has no influence on and is separated from, is concluded by a trivial parenthetical phrase: "I'll go and put my shoes on." It is difficult to imagine a more bitter expression of this "misadaptation" or "incommensurability" of language when confronted with the "unspeakable". Is it not so that these ostensibly marginal notes, reduced to individual, particular experience, could render the essence of the fundamental dilemma facing the Holocaust historian?

What is needed here is a sceptical remark that would blunt the division between "historical discourse" and "discourse of remembrance", which would also cool the enthusiasts of the neo-Freudian or post-modernist approaches to Holocaust studies. This remark, which reflects both interests but also a certain healthy scepticism, compels one to look at such terms as "trauma", "working through" and "unspeakability", which fill scholarly discourse, including this study.

Erwin Lee Klein in his article, which is both erudite and, at the same time, distanced from the issues at hand, warns against abuse and intellectual shallowness brought about by the contemporary fascination with the category of remembrance in the methodology of history, or more broadly, in the humanities. The two contemporarily accepted concepts of remembrance, which often co-exist with one another are: the "therapeutic" concept (that draws upon Freudian terminology) and the "avant-garde" concept (related to post-modernism). As to the therapeutic concept of remembrance, some authors clearly tend to abuse it: "[they use] Freudian terminology in order to add value to sentimental autobiographical confessions. In the last few years, terms such as 'mourning' and 'working through' have reflected a dangerous tendency to accept elements of New Age discourse, and, as a result, for every monograph that attempts to give a diligent and reliable analysis of psychoanalytical traditions, there is an infinite number of self-therapeutic stories."[43]

There are also other types of abuse that involve the concept of avant-garde remembrance. It is related to post-modernism, which discovers in it the experience of "renewed enchantment" and "direct association", which replaces "history" or even becomes its opposite: "[memory thus understood] refers to the domain of the 'unspeakable': excess, taboo, darkness, loftiness, or the Absolute, accessible only to a handful of the initiated, who have a secret access code. . . . As James Berger pointed out in his analysis of the trauma theory and its fascination with the 'discourse of the unspeakable', part of the post-modernist lexicon appears to have been blurred recently, and assumes the form of 'traumatic – sacred – lofty otherness'."[44]

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[43]Erwin Lee Klein "O pojawieniu się pamięci w dyskursie historycznym", *Konteksty* (2003, 3–4), 48.

[44]*Ibid.*.

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Some authors of the monograph-scale Holocaust studies clearly separate autobiographical sources from other types of sources. We can see here "subjective" vs. "objective" echoes of the distinction. Thus Israel Gutman, for instance, in his list of sources for his history of Warsaw Jews sets apart archive sources, document collections and the press, dividing bibliography into two parts: 1) "diaries, memoirs and fragmentary studies" (with the literature of the personal document that concerns us here), and 2) "monographs, presentations and collections."[45] Levi Yahil, in her Holocaust monograph, gives primacy to "archive materials", then to "information compendia", "trial files", "collections of published documents", and then follow the so-called "primary sources", i.e. "memoirs, diaries and memorial tributes, contemporary literature", and "secondary sources, i.e. bibliographies, conference materials". Finally there are "newspapers, periodicals and annals."[46] Christopher R. Browning, in his latest book on mechanisms of the "Final Solution", divides the bibliography or published sources into three parts: 1) "document collections", 2) "memoirs, diaries, letters, speeches, personal accounts", 3) "secondary sources", including subject literature.[47] It should be borne in mind that Raul Hilberg, the author of a pioneering and at the same time classical work on the machinery of the Holocaust, uses primarily German sources. In the complete three-volume edition of this work of 1,273 pages, published in 1961, the entire bibliography is scattered in the footnotes, and apart from the bureaucratic documentation of the perpetrators, contains also "diaries, testimonies, memoirs, monographs and newspapers".[48]

It seems, however, that most historians do not make such distinctions in their scrupulously compiled bibliographies. Lucy Dawidowicz points to the abundance of "memoirs" and other autobiographical texts, which "compels the researcher to carry out a particularly rigorous selection." She does not, however, set apart these "memoirs", but includes them in the general bibliography, mixing them with other types of sources.[49] Martin Gilbert, in his book *The Holocaust. The Jewish Tragedy*, does not even give a separate bibliography, including all references in the footnotes. But, although it is not formally reflected in the bibliography, his work is based primarily on victims' and witnesses' accounts, it is fraught with extensively cited au-

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[45]I. Gutman, *Żydzi warszawscy, 1939-1943. Getto -podziemie - walka,* transl. Z. Perelumter (Warsaw: 1993) [1st Hebrew edition, 1982], 565–572.

[46]L. Yahil, The Holocaust. *The Fate of European Jewry, 1932-1945* (New York: 1990).

[47]Ch. R. Browning (with contributions by J. Mätthäus), The Origins of the Final Solution. The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939 – March 1942 (Arrow Books: 2005), 549 – 578.

[48]Raul Hilberg, *The destruction of the European Jews. Student edition* (New York – London: 1985), 341. The student edition contains a "selected bibliography" grouped according to thematic domains (the background; perpetrators and victims; the destruction process in the individual areas; camps; consequences and responses) and not according to source type.

[49] L. Dawidowicz, *The War against the Jews 1933-1945* (Penguin Books: 1990) 1st edition 1975. The author divides her bibliography, in a manner which is not clear to me, into two parts: part I is entitled "The Final Solution", part II – "The Holocaust".

tobiographical material. Gilbert tells the history of the Holocaust largely with the words of victims and survivors.

The most recent attempt at a comprehensive compilation of sources on the Holocaust on Polish territory, which contains both exhaustive information on institutions (the national and foreign archive networks, museums and private collections) and source typology, is Alina Skibińska's and Jakub Petelewicz's *Źródła do badań nad zagładą Żydów na ziemiach polskich. Przewodnik bibliograficzny* (in press). In the part "*Typy źródeł*" (source types), the authors, out of a total of fourteen types (all kinds of files, the press, official forms and leaflets, iconography), identify separately "narrative sources, correspondence and personal documents", where they include: "accounts"; "memoirs and diaries"; "belles-lettres"; "oral history"; "correspondence and personal documents". The greatest methodological problem here is, in my opinion, the presence of "belles-lettres" in the same group alongside "accounts, memoirs and diaries". Narrative prose born out of Holocaust experience requires more subtle differentiation, even though it is characterised by oversaturation of fiction with autobiographism and the blurring of borders between fiction and non-fiction. This is so particularly due to the large volume of documentation. This is most aptly rendered in the formula of "literature of testimony". To this category belongs the prose of Adolf Rudnicki, Bogdan Wajdowski, Henryk Grynberg, Primo Levi, Elie Wiesel, Charlotte Delbo, to mention but a few names.

Recently published encyclopaedic studies of Holocaust literature, i.e. of a concept that reaches beyond literature of the personal document that is under consideration here, bring the following genre divisions of this type of text. The 2002 *Encyclopaedia of Holocaust Literature* in the bibliography of Holocaust literature, covering only published books, lists five basic genre categories: 1) epic or fiction, 2) memoirs, 3) diaries, 4) poetry, 5) drama.[50] The 2003 two-volume encyclopaedia of Holocaust literature, which contains alphabetically ordered personal entries, lists the following genres: 1) archival documents; 2) autobiographies; 3) autobiographical narration; 4) biographies; 5) mixed genres (e.g. Art Spiegelman's *Maus*); 6) diaries; 7) drama; 8) epic or fiction; 9) history;[51] 10) letters; 11) memoirs/testimonies; 12) non-fiction; 13) poetry.[52]

It is now time to present our own typology of literature of the personal document, which records the Holocaust experience. Let us make a preliminary, most general division, according to two basic criteria:

A) Form of message and type of recording:

A.1. Written sources (texts),

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[50] See *Encyclopaedia of Holocaust Literature*, ed. D. Patterson, A. L. Berger and S. Cargas (Oryx Holocaust Series) (Oryx Press, Wesort, Connecticut – London: 2002).

[51] Category unclear. Most likely it refers to a historical narrative work or a chronicle, written by those who experienced the Holocaust themselves. Saul Friedländer's and Emanuel Ringelblum's names are quoted as examples.

[52] See *Holocaust Literature. An Encyclopaedia of Writers and Their Work*, vol. 1 – 2, ed. S. William Kremer, eds: E. Sicher (Ben Gurion University), M. Adamczyk-Garbowska (Maria Curie-Skłodowska University), H. Steinecke (Paderborn University) (Routledge, New York – London: 2003).

A.2. Oral sources or tape recordings (e.g. the 164 multi-hour accounts of prisoners of the Mauthausen–Gusen concentration camp, the "Karta" Centre) and VHS recordings (e.g. Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation, where between 1994 and 2001 52,000 accounts were collected, with the average running time of 2.5 hours).

B) Chronological division (when a given source was produced)

B.1. *Hic et nunc*

B.1. *Post factum*

Within both chronological areas, I propose the following genre typology.[53]

Texts produced *hic et nunc*

All texts of this type are determined by three fundamental parameters: threat, being locked in a borderline situation, and the ignorance of the outcome. They contribute to the author's cognitive perspective, influence both the expression and the form in which the Holocaust experience is recorded.

Diary and diary-chronicle. Diaries are dominated by exposition of private points of view, subjective description in individualised language to the point of employment of literary forms; the diary-chronicle is characterised by an attempt to cover a broader spectrum of observation, which reaches beyond individual feelings about the subject of the writing and the aspiration to objective description as well as a panoramic presentation of a picture of the life of a given community (e.g. Emanuel Ringelblum's or Ludwik Landau's Chronicles). We can find different diary types: the intimate diary represented for example by Abraham Levin's or Aron Cham Kapłon's notes, whereas Adam Czerniaków's diaries focus on public affairs and in the form of laconic notes describe a picture of the community, although both the construction of the text and the form of the language bear a visible mark of the author's individuality.

Memoirs. These are characterised by a certain distance to the described events and to the person who experiences them. This distance makes it possible to assume certain rules of composition and narrative strategy; it also enables disclosure or non-disclosure of excess knowledge; comment and assessment of events from the point of view of excess knowledge. The world in memoirs is indeed narrated somehow, i.e. cognitively ordered and habituated. Memoirs written during the war are, as a rule, written in hiding from a short temporal distance.

The time of described events and the time of writing increasingly approach one another (e.g. Marian Berland begins his memoirs in May 1944 by describing [his] experiences in the ghetto during the uprising in April and May 1943; Calel Perechodnik describes the liquidation of the Otwock ghetto [17–19 August 1942] exactly on its first anniversary. Stefan Ernest, on the other hand, takes his memoir account, which begins upon the closing of the ghetto [November 1940], to the day he decides to finish writing: 28 May 1943).

Letters. They are a separate group, easily discernible from the formal point of view. A large collection of letters kept in Ringelblum Archives was published by

[53] This is an extended and modified version of the typology presented in my book *Tekst wobec Zagłady (o relacjach z getta warszawskiego)* (Wrocław: 1997), chapt. "Poszukiwanie formuły".

Ruta Sakowska in *Listy o Zagładzie* (1977). There are also other collections of correspondence from the days of the Holocaust, both published, such as Wanda Lubelska, *Listy z getta* (2000) or Etta Hillesum, *Myślące serce. Listy* (2002), and those available in archives.

Accounts/replies to questionnaires/other sources. A good deal of this type of sources were produced in the Oneg Shabbat circle while compiling the Underground Archive of the Warsaw Ghetto. They recorded personal experiences of refugees, Jewish prisoners of war, and of children from orphanages and boarding houses.

Borderline genres should also be identified, among them: essay/non-fiction. They constitute a domain of texts, in which the elements of personal document and literature, referentiality and fictionality, attitudes to accounts and creation, are mixed. Here I would include texts by Leib Goldin, Samuel Puterman or Henryk Słobodzki (all from the Warsaw Ghetto). **Literary report**, e.g. Perec Opoczyński's from the Warsaw Ghetto or Józef Zelikowicz's from the Łódź Ghetto.

Texts produced *post factum*

There is a fundamental opposition between texts written *hic et nunc* and those written *post factum*. It is rooted in extra-textual reality (the caesura of the end of the war, the radical change of external circumstances and the author's existential situation), but it clearly exerts an influence on the structure of the text itself. There is a correspondence between the impassable border that separates war time from peace time and the tension between communication roles that can be reconstructed: that of "reporting witness" (or an author writing there and then) and the "remembering survivor" (or an author writing after the war). Two types of experience of being beset, of being thrown into a situation of all-pervasive horror, of being doomed, and the experience of survival, which brings "external" security, but leaves an internalised horror – the wound of remembrance.

There are certain fundamental structural determinants of post-war textual testimonies: various ways of habituating the past (memoir narration as a therapy of remembrance), patterns of autobiographical construction of "I" (a certain distance, revealed level of knowledge of reality and criteria of its assessment), criteria of reference, organization and valorisation of thematic material (from biographical adventures of the private "I" to the existential formula of human being-in-the-world; from a record of individual memory to patterns of collective memory).

An important role in the interpretation of these texts is played by the time of their writing. Some are very early texts, written shortly after the war, e.g. Władysław Szpilman's memoirs, prepared by Jerzy Waldorf, *Śmierć miasta* (1946), while others are even considered "late", e.g. Michał Głowiński's *Czarne sezony* (1998). Post-war survivors' memoirs form a stream of texts, which flows, so to speak, irregularly, sinks in deep, as if an underground river, later to surface as extensive flood waters. Different stages of writing and publishing of Holocaust testimonies (depending not only on the psychological state of their authors, but also upon the political and

ideological situation), find their reflection in the types of autobiographical strategies which can be reconstructed in these texts.

Post-war literature of the personal document is extremely extensive. It forms a veritable nebula of texts, among which, according to the genre's dominant features, and not according to accomplishment of the pure genre model, one can identify such forms as memoirs that describe the Holocaust experience, e.g. the shockingly succinct *Wspomnienia lekarki: szpital w gettcie, łączniczka ŻOB* by Adina Blady-Szwajgier (1989, officially published under a different title: *I nic więcej nie pamiętam*, 1994), or the extensive and even meticulous *Krzyż i mezuza* by Helena Szereszewska (1993). Some of these texts take the form of autobiography of the survivor (attempts at a comprehensive story of the author's life determined by the Holocaust experience, often accompanied by a pre-war prologue and post-war epilogue, such as: Natan Gross, *Kim pan jesteś, panie Grymek?* (Hebrew edition–1986, Polish edition–1991) or Janina Bauman's diptych, *Zima o poranku. Opowieść dziewczynki z warszawskiego getta* (Hebrew edition–1986, Polish edition–1989 and 1999) and *Nigdzie na ziemi* (English edition–1988, Polish edition – 2000). Memoirs are limited to a selected theme, period, group of people or type of activity, and are mostly published in periodicals.

Another group of texts comprises induced sources, i.e. accounts given before historical committees (the Central Committee of Polish Jews, later the Jewish Historical Institute, as well as those produced decades after the war as a result of "journalistic investigation", e.g. Anna Bikont's *My z Jedwabnego*, and testimonies given during court trials (e.g. in the so-called "August trials" or those to do with the Jedwabne murder).

Among borderline genres we can find the following forms: conversations (e.g. Hanna Krall's *Zdążyć przed Panem Bogiem* [1977], Anka Grupińska's *Po kole. Rozmowy Gruzińskiej z żołnierzami Getta Warszawskiego* [2000], Barbara Engelking's *Na łące popiołów. Ocaleni z Holocaustu* [1993] or Rudi Assuntino's and Włodek Goldkorn's *Strażnik. Marek Edelman opowiada* [1999]); reconstructed memoirs (e.g. Maria Czapska's *Gwiazda Dawida* [1975], Henryk Grynberg's *Pamiętnik Marii Koper* [1993] and, together with Jan Kostański, *Szmuglerzy* [2001], Joanna Wiszkiewicz's *A jednak czasem miewam sny* [1996].

Postscript

One short chapter in Jan Tomasz Gross's *Neighbors*, entitled "A New Approach to Sources", contains a methodological postulate that refers to the "technique of the oven-era historian"[54]. It is worth recalling in this conclusion of considerations on literature of the personal document as a source to Holocaust studies. One reason is because the reactions it caused among scholars resemble, in a sense, the abovementioned clash of "historical discourse" and the "discourse of remembrance".

[54] The "oven era", i.e. the Nazi period, with particular emphasis on concentration camps, crematoriums and ovens, where corpses were burned (transl.).

In the heated controversy surrounding *Neighbors*, one could hear allegations of betraying methodological principles or even ignorance of basic historian's techniques. At best, the postulate of a new approach to sources was branded an "uncritical attitude to arbitrarily chosen sources" and rejection of "historian's or even reporter's techniques".[55] At worst, it was reduced *ad absurdum*.

What was Gross's point then? He wrote that, when faced with the Jedwabne murder, the historian ought to "radically revise the approach to sources":

> "When considering survivors' testimonies, we would be well advised to change the starting premise in appraisal of their evidentiary contribution from a priori critical to in principle affirmative. By accepting what we read in a particular account as fact *until we find persuasive arguments to the contrary*, we would avoid more mistakes than we are likely to commit by adopting the opposite approach, which calls for cautious skepticism toward any testimony *until an independent confirmation of its content has been found*. . . .This methodological imperative follows from the very immanent character of all evidence about the destruction of Polish Jewry that we are likely to come across. All that we know about the Holocaust – by virtue of the fact that it has been told – is not a representative sample of the Jewish fate . . . these are all stories with a happy ending. They have all been produced by a few who were lucky enough to survive. Even statements from witnesses who have not survived – statements that have been interrupted by the sudden death of their authors, who therefore left only fragments of what they wanted to say – belong to this category. For what has reached us was written only when the authors were still alive, about the "heart of darkness" that was also the very essence of their experience, about their last betrayal, about the Calvary of 90 per cent of the prewar Polish Jewry – we will never know".[56]

One could put together a lengthy list of such documents, which contain accounts written in situations of being beset, locked away, excluded, in the face of overwhelming and irreversible fate, pressed by horrific events which posit a direct and constant threat to the author's life. One feels inclined to say: *in articulo mortis*. The particular conditions in which such accounts are produced is perhaps most aptly described in the diary of Irene Hauser, who was deported from Vienna to the Łódź Ghetto. "It's a miracle that my hand is still writing" – we read on one page of her miniscule notebook in hardcover with a brass lock.

Such texts both record borderline experiences and the extreme conditions they were written in. The act of writing and the moment of experience merge. The temporal distance between experience and its expression become blurred. Reality, in a way, touches the text and leaves an indelible mark. Literature of the personal document, by essence, is immersed in the concrete "here and now" of the moment of writing. However, in the case of the texts under discussion, the circumstances

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[55] Jacek Żakowski's claim in an interview with Professor Tomasz Szarota, Gazeta Wyborcza (18–19 November, 2000)

[56] Jan T. Gross, *Neighbors: the Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (New York: Penguin, 2001), 92–94.

of writing not only determine the content, but are also a necessary condition for the text to exist; they decide on the author's existence as well and the chances for the text to be preserved. Those sheets of paper that reach us contain a certain message, which, as if an object salvaged from a disaster, is marked by a certain kind of authenticity, a particular kind, because it belongs to the objects themselves, rather than to their verbal representation. The words we read are marked profoundly, to their very core, eating through the paper with rust, a foul smell, corruption.

I would treat Gross's postulate not as an anarchic rebellion against the canon of scholarly methodology, an expression of cynicism or manipulation of historical truth. Isn't Gross simply trying to tell us that there are such Holocaust testimonies which lead us into the heart of darkness, which is a journey we should not, and must not, shield ourselves from?

Key words
Holocaust, methodology of history, memoirs, diaries, accounts.