

Psychoanalytic sociology and the traumas of history: Alexander Mitscherlich between the disciplines

Matt ffytche

University of Essex, UK

Abstract

This article examines the way aspects of recent history were excluded in key studies emerging from psychoanalytic social psychology of the mid-twentieth century. It draws on work by Erikson, Marcuse and Fromm, but focuses in particular on Alexander Mitscherlich. Mitscherlich, a social psychologist associated with the later Frankfurt school, was also the most important psychoanalytic figure in postwar Germany. This makes his work significant for tracing ways in which historical experience of the war and Nazism was filtered out of psychosocial narratives in this period, in favour of more structural analyses of the dynamics of social authority. Mitscherlich's 1967 work *The Inability to Mourn*, co-authored with Margarete Mitscherlich, is often cited as the point at which the 'missing' historical experience flooded back into psychoanalytic accounts of society. I argue that this landmark publication doesn't hail the shift towards the psychoanalysis of historical experience with which it is often associated. These more sociological writers of the mid-century were writing before the impact of several trends occurring in the 1980s-90s which decisively shifted psychoanalytic attention away from the investigation of social authority and towards a focus on historical trauma. Ultimately this is also a narrative about the transformations which occur when psychoanalysis moves across disciplines.

Keywords

psychoanalysis, history, social-psychology, the inability to mourn, Mitscherlich, post-war Germany, trauma

Corresponding author:

Matt ffytche, Centre for Psychoanalytic Studies, University of Essex, Wivenhoe Park, Colchester CO4 3SQ, UK mffytche@essex.ac.uk

Introduction: the father as both social and historical object

Much of the work emerging from psychoanalytic sociology and social psychology of the mid-twentieth century – including by writers such as Erik Erikson, Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse and Alexander Mitscherlich (who will be a particular focus here) – was concerned to understand, revise or defend the function of fathers. For psychoanalysis itself, from the 1920s to the 1950s, the father was a lynch-pin for various processes which had to do with the constitution of social authority (concepts such as the superego, the ego-ideal, guilt, and the emergence of social conscience, typically addressed the child's experience of the father). This was the narrative originally laid down by Freud (1913) in his forays into anthropology and then group

psychology (1921) in the 1920s. In *Totem and Taboo*, for instance, he had observed that ‘the problems of social psychology’ prove to be soluble ‘on the basis of one single concrete point – man’s relation to his father’ (Freud, 1913: 156). The social function of the superego pervaded work in postwar Britain (see Shapira, 2013, on the work of the Institute for the Scientific Treatment of Delinquency) and the US, where it played a key role in the work of Talcott Parsons. Parsons, for instance, asserted both ‘the peculiarly direct relevance’ of the superego for sociological theory (the superego ‘indeed, forms one of the most important points at which it is possible to establish direct relations between psychoanalysis and sociology’), as well as the symbolic significance of the father, ‘central in psychoanalytic theory’ and, ‘one of the obvious keystones of the social structure’ (1970: 17, 34-35).

The superego was likewise early on incorporated into studies of the family and social authority in Germany in the 1930s (Fromm, et al, 1936) and it remained an important feature of research when key members of the Frankfurt School relocated to America, in works such as *The Authoritarian Personality* (Adorno et al, 1950). In 1936 Max Horkheimer had mobilised Erich Fromm’s account of the ‘patricentric complex’ to argue that the bourgeois family – central to socialisation processes in modern society – produced an identification with fatherly authority which established guilt and submission in the child as irrational givens (Horkheimer, 2002; Fromm, 1991). The notion of the superego was thus crucial to the Frankfurt analysis that contemporary German society was engineering blind authority, rather than rational self-consciousness, which in part explained the failure of attempts at radical social transformation. However, in the mid-1940s this position was reversed in the light of subsequent analyses of fascism and mass culture (ffytche, 2016). Now Horkheimer (2004) maintained that enforced submission to the will of the father generated hostility in the child, and this was crucial for the development of critical attitudes towards society (an argument he continued to restate in the following years, see Horkheimer, 1949). The threat in the 1950s was not that of the 1930s – a ‘tyrannical’ superego transmitted by fathers to children – but a disintegrating superego, or fathers whose power was weakened or unmasked (Adorno, 1991; for more details of the shifts in Frankfurt School theorisation of fathers in the 1930s-40s see ffitche, 2016).

Many of the mid-century writers with whom I'm concerned here are interlinked through the Frankfurt school: Marcuse and Fromm, despite their hostility towards each other in the 1950s, were researchers there in the 1930s, while Mitscherlich, Director of the Sigmund Freud Institut, had close ties to postwar Frankfurt sociology. All of these authors were psychoanalytically-oriented to a greater or lesser degree, and to a certain extent the Frankfurt School was itself instrumental in reintroducing Freud's ideas in Germany after its eradication under Nazism (Meja, et al, 1987: 14). A landmark here was the 1956 symposium for the Freud centenary, co-organised by Mitscherlich and Horkheimer, and for which Marcuse was invited back from the US to deliver lectures alongside Erikson, Ludwig Binswanger, Michael Balint and other key psychologists of the period (Kauders, 2011).

However, the psychoanalytically-oriented sociology of postwar Germany needs also to be connected to its Anglo-American context. Firstly, because major figures such as Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, and Norbert Elias – as well as Fromm, Erikson and many German and Austrian psychoanalysts – were all in exile in America or England during the 1930s-50s. Secondly, because postwar German sociology more broadly had an international emphasis which drew from American models at both theoretical and methodological levels (Meja, et al, 1987: ix, 2-3). By the late 1950s and 1960s with which this article is concerned, cross-fertilisation between psychoanalysis and social theory was well-established, and psychoanalysis had a strong and organised presence in American culture, where, under slightly different terms, it also made its mark on social science and cultural theory through the work of Talcott Parsons, Margaret Mead, Lionel Trilling and others (see Parsons, 1970; Mandler, 2013; Trilling, 1967; ffytche, 2013).

One of the elements linking social-psychoanalytic perspectives across the German-American axis in the 1950s, despite the differences in the postwar environment, was this focus on the father, and specifically a powerful narrative about the decline of fatherhood as a point of social authority. Erikson and Marcuse both wrote about decaying paternalism and 'a general impoverishment of the father-son relationship' (Erikson, 1995: 284; Marcuse 1970), Mitscherlich addressed the 'invisible father' and the 'fatherless society' (Mitscherlich, 1969), David Riesman, a key voice in American sociology of the 1950s, who underwent therapy with Erich Fromm, traced the shift in

American character from being 'inner-directed' (modelled on the Freudian superego) to 'outer-directed', in which parents lack self-assurance and children are more likely to be engaged in 'bringing up father' (Riesman, 1950: 44, 49). To be sure, from the 1920s onwards, various currents within and beyond psychoanalysis had contested Freud's attempt to universalise the symbolic importance of the father, or to install the Oedipus complex as the necessary root of socialisation. This was true not only for Marxists such as Wilhelm Reich, but also for those neo-Freudians, such as Fromm and Karen Horney who dominated psychoanalytic inroads into the social sciences, particularly in America, because they saw cultural-historical factors as mediating Freud's more categorical conception of psychical agencies. The 'superego' was one of the concepts, like the 'death drive', which they found more unacceptable (certainly when conceived as a transhistorical formation). For Fromm (1990: 144), the superego describes '*authoritarian* conscience', but this is just one possible cultural form. A similar point had been advanced by the psychoanalytic anthropologist Geoffrey Gorer in his study of American society: one couldn't assume 'that family forms and the role of parents were identical everywhere'. In particular, the making of an American 'demanded that the father should be rejected both as a model and as a source of authority' (1948: 19).

Fathers, however, became a fulcrum for such mid-century accounts of society because their role, and the perceived influence of the family itself, was shifting. For Marcuse, the father-dominated family was being invalidated by society's direct management of the ego 'through the mass media, school and sport teams, gangs etc' (1970: 47); an idea one finds echoed in Erikson (1995) and Mitscherlich (1969). Riesman had likewise argued in 1950 that 'the peer-group and school now take over some of the functions previously performed by the family alone' (1950: 37). This potentially threatened the persuasiveness of the whole Oedipal approach to social analysis because, if the father was no longer the central figure against whom one rebelled, this indicated that socialisation processes were increasingly grounded outside the family (see Erikson, 1995: 267, for a typically negative account of the alternative offered by 'momism' in the Cold War US context).

Such narratives about the decline of fatherhood – whether as an emerging feature of modern democratic society, a sign of something gone wrong, or a breakdown of

Freudian universalism – form a starting point for my reflections here. But my object is a different kind of tension, invisible to all of the authors mentioned so far, but apparent with hindsight: this is the way in which the decline of fathers implicitly forms a hinge between two different versions of psychoanalytic social science, one inflected by sociology, the other more by history. The first dominates the 1950s and 1960s, the second starts to gather force during the 1980s and is ubiquitous from the 1990s onwards. By tracking the presence of history within these accounts one can gradually witness the attention shift – and the social-psychoanalytic frame along with it – from a narrative about father-child relations and how they structure the presence of social authority, to one in which parent-child relations will increasingly signal the transmission of historical experience, and particularly historical trauma (Caruth, 1995; Prager, 1998; Schwab, 2010; Frie, 2012; Frosh, 2013).

There is then a tension running through psychoanalytic sociology of the 1950s and 1960s over the kind of emphasis given to historical events in the analysis of social experience. More pointedly, to what extent were fathers considered as mediators of historical experience within psychoanalytically-informed accounts of society in the 1950s and 1960s? To what extent did such writers consider the experience of the Second World War as relevant to an understanding of father-child relations in the postwar environment? Until you get to Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich's (1975) *The Inability to Mourn*, the legacy of the Second World War itself isn't a large focus of attention. For one, the historical scale on which the psychoanalytic reading of society is constructed is sketched out in extremely broad terms, seeing the 1950s-1960s as the end-point in a set of changes going back to the early modern period. Fromm's narrative in *The Fear of Freedom* (2001) took off from an account of the Reformation, as did Riesman's (1950: 38); and this was even more obviously the case in Erikson's *Young Man Luther* (1993) in which the clinician read Luther's existential crisis against analogies drawn from his own clinical work with emotionally disturbed adolescents at the Austen Riggs Centre in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. In many of these works, then, there's a blind spot over the ways in which social concerns of the 1950s might relate back directly to experiences of the 1940s, rather than to transformations set in motion centuries earlier. The relevant historical scale, for Erikson, is 'the whole period of nationalism and invention which Luther helped to

herald and which Hitler helped to bring to its global crisis' (1993: 108). What is missing is the notion of the psychological resonance of recent events.

Where the war does enter in is in the form of *typologies* which feed into the formal analysis of contemporary conditions. Hitler recurs as a typological object, representing an extreme case of how the old model of authority could go wrong – or, how not to 'grow up'. Both Erikson's *Young Man Luther* and *Childhood and Society* use Hitler's childhood as a point of comparison in their portraits of the pathologies of modern adolescence (something Fromm (1997) will repeat in different terms in *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* in the early 1970s). Likewise accounts of peer group pressure, or life in mass society, are shot through with references back to fascism and the war: for Marcuse 'the jukebox in every bar' is a cry of desperation 'not to be left alone by the Big Ones' (1970: 49); Mitscherlich in 1963 found 'the deformation of life that takes place in slums and mass camps' recurring in the 'new slums springing up in tower blocks' (1969: 275).

However, in neither case were these authors tracking the impact of fascism *on* the generational experience of the parents, or the children coming to adolescence in the 1950s. Rather, the experience of fascism is read in terms of certain functions (the operation of 'the group', 'the father', 'the leader') which correspond to the analysis of social cohesion set out by Freud in *Group Psychology* in the 1920s, and then anti-social tendencies in the 1950s are read against the same Freudian account. What is not being addressed is the historical experience of the war as a determining factor shaping parent-child relationships for this generation specifically. This raises a question about whether there was something about the successful alliance with sociology which suppressed other aspects of the psychoanalytic base: for instance its concern with issues of remembrance or recollection.

This tension between sociological and historical models – along with questions about the function of the father and the superego, and the presence of the war in mid-century social-psychological accounts – can be focused through two texts written in close proximity. One is *Society Without the Father: A Contribution to Social Psychology* written in 1963 by Alexander Mitscherlich (Mitscherlich, 1969), the other is *The Inability to Mourn*, co-written by Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich and

published in German in 1967 (Mitscherlich and Mitscherlich, 1975). I will look at the arguments of each of these in turn before setting out my broader thesis about the effects caused by the transition from a psychoanalytic sociology, which sidelines recent history, to one that is increasingly centred on precisely this excluded history.

Society Without the Father

The account Mitscherlich developed in 1963 was very obviously aligned with the views expressed in popular works by Erikson, Riesman, Marcuse and others (he cites Riesman, Gorer and Erikson explicitly). There are a number of reasons for this – *The Lonely Crowd* and *Childhood and Society* were highly influential texts which reached a very broad reading public, but also, as Martin Dehli (2009) has pointed out, international recognition and contact with America were important factors in Mitscherlich's attempts to centralise his own position in the fraught field of postwar German psychoanalysis (see also Kauders, 2011: 394, on the reception of American sociology as instrumental for the 'Westernization' of German psychiatry and psychotherapy in this period). Mitscherlich establishes the importance of the family group for socialisation (1969: 137), and he singles out the father-son relationship, which holds a special position in a 'paternalist society' (1969: 140). Secondly, he argues that there is 'no substitute for the father relationship' which sows the seeds 'for the child's future independence of judgment and independence of character' (1969: 282) (precisely the line that Horkheimer took in the 1950s). However, paternalist cultures have transformed and fathers are becoming 'more and more functionless' (Mitscherlich 1969: 146), which means that many of the challenges that face the individual today cannot be met by following 'the pattern of internalized models'. This echoes Riesman's (1950) argument about the transition to outer-directed societies, as well as heralding the neo-Freudian conclusion that 'filial dependence and paternal authority no longer seem to be necessary and permanent' (Mitscherlich, 1969: 145).

The obverse of all this is that 'society nowadays is mass society' (Mitscherlich, 1969: 268), which Mitscherlich identifies as a 'sibling society', in which no particular individual holds power: 'We grow up from the power relationships of childhood, which are tied to persons, into an incomprehensible system of power relationships under which we spend our working life' (1969: 277). The 'gigantic army of rival, envious siblings' (Mitscherlich, 1969: 269) and the displacement of paternal authority

by ‘non-binding fraternal relations’ (1969: 278) here consciously invokes Freud’s (1913) hypothetical account of the birth of society in *Totem and Taboo* – the ‘fatherless society’ being the phrase Freud used to describe the immediate aftermath of the killing of the ‘primal father’, who had wielded authority over the pre-cultural primal horde (see also Federn (1919) for an earlier use of Freud’s ‘fatherless society’ to interpret civil unrest after the First World War).

Mitscherlich’s book develops some of these issues concerning ‘fatherlessness’ in a key chapter titled ‘The Invisible Father’, however, in the context, it isn’t entirely clear what this phrase intends. It could mean the absence of the father at home (because his life now takes place in the office); it could indicate the ‘superego’, the father who is invisibly internalised, whether or not he is present. But there is a third possibility – given that the book was written in Germany, and makes sporadic but clear references back to Nazism and the war, does this indicate fathers from the 1940s, killed in the war, or returning broken from POW camps, or otherwise deposed from positions of authority (and thus ‘invisible’ in the immediate postwar decade)? 140 pages in, Mitscherlich steps in to clarify that it means none of these:

the phrase ‘invisible father’ may suggest... the notion of an omnipotent, omnipresent, invisible God, but that is not what we are referring to... It may also suggest a father who has been really lost, as the result of a divorce, or a marriage that never took place, or because he was killed in the war. But that is not what we have in mind here. We are thinking rather of the disappearance of the father imago so closely associated with the roots of our civilisation, and of the paternal instructive function. (Mitscherlich, 1969: 141)

In the same year, Marcuse had declared: ‘In the most advanced sectors of modern society, the citizen is no longer seriously haunted by father images’ (1970: 52). It is striking that ‘or because he was killed in the war’ is slipped in as a subsidiary clause after fathers lost ‘as the result of a divorce’; it highlights the ease with which the broader narrative about the decline of a particular form of social bonding takes precedence over the more recent historical one (see also the discussion in Schneider (2008: 148), about the lack of interest in the ‘real fatherlessness’ after both world wars in Mitscherlich’s work).

In fact, there are two centres of gravity in this psychosocial narrative, both of which act to downplay the presence of the war as central to an account of social disaffection in the 1950s. One is the longer timescale of historical analysis, about the decline of the paternal function in European modernity; the other is the exclusive attention psychoanalysis paid to maturational processes in the child, in particular around the formation of the superego. Although, by dealing with the childhood of the 1960s generation of parents, Mitscherlich implicitly refers contemporary problems back to the 1940s, at the same time his focus brackets out the historical context, abstracting a more generic account of Oedipal ties in the family. We shift typically from the socio-historical over to the psychology of infant development.

Without a strong attachment to the father in the early years – goes the argument – there is no strongly internalised self-motivating conscience, or critical instinct: the ‘child grows up into an adult with no visible master, exercises anonymous functions, and is guided by anonymous functions’ (1969: 278). This is Mitscherlich’s explanation, in 1963, for ‘the striking inaccessibility of many young people, their provocative manners, their indifference to the values of their elders’ (1969: 141). He called this youth generation the ‘nobody’s children’ (1969: 285), repeating his term ‘Niemandskinder’ from an earlier article for *Die Neue Zeitung* (Mitscherlich: 1956): they ‘live in the moment with no sense of history’ (1969: 285). ‘No sense of history’ here derives in part from Riesman’s account of the lonely American individual, detached from tradition, rather than referring to a specific problem of the postwar generation who have not been able to come to terms with *that* history. Both the sociology and the psychoanalysis are acting in concert here to squeeze out the relevance of the war as a point of reference for anxieties and rebelliousness amongst German youth of the 1950s and 1960s. One might contrast this portrait of apathy and lack of historical connection with Ulrike Meinhof’s warning in 1961 that ‘the narrowing gap between the fronts of history and politics, between the accusers, the accused and the victims, haunts the younger generation’ (Meinhof, 2008).

The Third Reich does have a series of walk-on parts in Mitscherlich’s book, but only to serve that general narrative about the declining role of the father. For instance, he uses a gang-leader from Luis Buñuel’s film *Los Olvidados* to provide an example of

the failure of ‘socialising identification’, and then adds in passing: the same failure ‘is discernible in every detail in Hitler’ (Mitscherlich, 1969: 143). Perhaps the most interesting reference to the war lies in Mitscherlich’s suggestion that at the end of the Nazi regime, the great majority ‘extinguished their memory of it’ (1969: 284-5) – this is used as evidence for the weakness of identifications made outside the father-son relation. Mass leaders leave so little trace behind when they disappear because ‘the idealisation to which they were previously subjected involved no libidinal relationship with the object, but only with the state of infatuation’ (1969: 291). For this reason, ‘the Führer idol that was so frenziedly worshipped vanished so completely from the scene after its collapse...’ (1969: 282).

The Inability to Mourn

This provides a good way into the co-authored *The Inability to Mourn* (Mitscherlich and Mitscherlich, 1975), published in Germany just four years later in 1967. I’ll point out quickly some of the major changes the Mitscherlichs brought into this account, which still essentially presents itself as piece of social psychology (it is subtitled ‘Principles of Collective Behaviour’). Most obviously, as the authors make clear in their Introduction, the mourning of the title refers specifically to what should have happened in Germany at the end of the war, so the history of the 1940s is introduced as a focus for reflection from the start. The 1967 work is also more acknowledging of the specific ways in which *this* generation in particular grew up with absent or failing fathers: both fathers who were killed or taken prisoner, and those who fell from their pedestals as a result of defeat. Most significantly of all, if the 1963 account led one to believe that the fascist experience faded away overnight, now there is a much greater sense of the opposite: its unconscious *persistence*. The authors argue, for instance that, ‘fragments of this worldview have been... preserved quite undisturbed’ (1975: 30); ‘it was magnificent to be a chosen people. Indeed, for a great many, this belief... has still not been refuted’ (1975: 16).

If the earlier book wanted to secure a more standard narrative about the weakness of fathers and the superficial nature of identifications in modernity, now the Mitscherlichs were alleging the unchallenged continuity of certain kinds of identification *at unconscious levels*. This brought with it a new technical focus on ‘denial’, which testified precisely to the powerful nature of the psychological

entanglement which was now actively warded off (rather than, as in the previous book, melting away). Finally, a new psychoanalytic reference point emerges in the prominence given to Freud's (1917) 'Mourning and Melancholia', alongside *Group Psychology*, the hypothesis being that 'had Germans "taken note" of the reality as it actually was', at the end of the war, then 'they would have succumbed to mass melancholia' (Mitscherlich and Mitscherlich, 1975: 44). Ironically, here it is the absence of melancholia that is pathological, whereas in Freud's clinical text melancholia is the pathological counterpart to normal mourning (see also Schneider, 2008: 141-3, on the conceptual misuse of Freud in this text: for Freud, the goal of mourning was forgetting, rather than recollection). Unlike *Society Without the Father*, then, this appears to be a book about the impact of recent history and about mourning, addressing itself to a contemporary German audience which has 'failed to make any searching attempt... to understand the terrifying past' (1975: 10). The authors argue that 'if what came *after* is to be understood, it must be considered in conjunction with what happened before' (1975: 14) – namely the disastrous and 'brutally aggressive proclivities' (1975: 13) revealed in the period of the Third Reich.

Various works written since the 1990s (including Santner, 1990, Bohleber, 2007, Schwab, 2010, Frosh, 2013) see the Mitscherlichs as having inaugurated an extremely influential trend of psychoanalytic reflection on historical mourning. For Santner, *The Inability to Mourn* anticipates 'the rhetoric of mourning which has come to occupy the semantic field of so much critical theory in recent years' (1990: 7); while Schwab observes that, after September 11, the Mitscherlichs' book 'became timelier than ever' (2010: 12). However, I'll go on to argue why I think this way of situating the Mitscherlichs' text as speaking directly to the concerns of the 1990s and 2000s is misleading.

Many of these contemporary accounts register that there is more than one object of mourning implied in the title phrase 'inability to mourn'. Early on in the book, and as part of the stinging moral critique that sets the whole analysis going, the Mitscherlichs point to the Germans' inability to mourn their victims: 'Neither the millions of lives lost in the war nor the millions of Jews slaughtered can prevent most Germans from feeling that they have had enough of being reminded of the past' (1975: 13). But as their analysis unfolds, it is clear that psychologically this is a secondary issue – the

consequence of a prior failed mourning, whose occasion was ‘above all [Hitler’s] disappearance as the representation of the *collective ego-ideal*’ (1975: 23). It is the inability to mourn the relation to Hitler which is intended, rather than mourning for the dead. The Mitscherlichs argue the Führer had ‘made it possible for Germans on a nationwide scale... to believe that their infantile fantasies of omnipotence could be realised’ (1975: 23), thus his fall ‘involved a traumatic devaluation of the ego-ideal with which identification had been so extensive’. With this sudden reversal ‘the ego of every single German individual suffered a central... impoverishment’ which created ‘the prerequisites for a melancholic reaction’ (1975: 26). However, this reaction never materialised because the German people defended themselves against it. Mourning for the victims of Hitler’s aggression could only come later, after the defence against this first failed mourning was worked through. The Mitscherlichs stress here ‘an order of psychic priorities’ (the point is picked up by Lifton, Santner and others).

However, there is a third aspect to this psychoanalytic account, and this concerns an even more anterior object of mourning. Hitler’s death and devaluation ‘implied the loss of a narcissistic object’ (1975: 24) – but his image had been psychically internalised to compensate for earlier developmental losses. Maturation of the ego generally involves a more realistic assessment of the parents – a process which is liberating, but also involves a ‘painful parting with these figures from childhood’, as well as the dissolution of their ideal image (1975: 221, 205). The child at this point searches ‘for new narcissistic value by way of new identifications’ (1975: 205). According to the Mitscherlichs, the generation entering adolescence in the 1930s was psychically driven to internalise the Nazi’s omnipotent versions of parental identifications because they lived in a time and a place in which parental imagoes were being too quickly and ruthlessly devalued. These inflated images of social authority were thus compensating for fathers who appeared too insubstantial to convey the requisite moral and social fibre into the psychical life of the developing child. This chain of psychical losses is conditioned by historical contexts, then, but leads ultimately to an account of the innate traumas of development, rather than being about the catastrophes of war – the loss of homes and family, the destruction of cities. It is a very different account of loss, for instance, from that given at the opening of WG Sebald’s *On the Natural History of Destruction*: ‘Today it is hard to form an even partly adequate idea of the extent of the devastation suffered by the cities of

Germany in the last years of the Second World War, still harder to think about the horrors involved in that devastation' (2003: 3).

The Mitscherlichs' analysis is in fact much closer to *Society Without the Father* than at first appears. If, under the National Socialist regime, 'the child was wrenched out of its familial identifications at an early age' and 'paternal and family standards and values that did not harmonise with the new ideology were devalued and persecuted' (1975: 210), this was simply an exacerbation of what had been happening to traditional social hierarchies since the end of the nineteenth century. 'Tradition was the very thing the Nazi regime had most lastingly destroyed' (1975: 11) – but, tradition was already in the process of being destroyed, and continued to be destroyed in Western society in general. 'The youth of today', they write, referring to the 1960s, 'may well have suffered similar deep and typical injuries to a system of values built on identifications' (1975: 216).

Historical Versus Developmental Trauma

The Mitscherlichs are sticking fairly closely here to a more clinical and classical Freudian assumption that psychoanalysis deals with drives, which operate in individuals according to specific psychical processes. These arouse inner conflicts (for instance with the demands of reality) and defensive responses against conflict, which may affect the development of longer-term psychical structures (the formation of the superego as the outcome of Oedipal conflict in childhood is perhaps the classic example of this). Psychoanalysis is concerned with the timing and nature of these internal events and with immediate family life to the extent that it is structurally implicated in them. It had been very little concerned, until the 1970s, with the direct impact of historical disasters on psychical life. With the exception of specific debates about war neuroses and trauma during the First and Second World Wars (see Freud, 1920; Ferenczi et al, 1921; Kardiner, 1941; Leys, 2000; Shephard 2002; Loughran 2017) psychoanalysis had generally excluded the possibility that events experienced in adult life could of themselves cause neurosis. As Robert Jay Lifton observed in the mid-1990s, 'adult trauma is still a stepchild of psychoanalysis' (Caruth, 1995: 142).

An interesting lesson can be drawn here from German psychiatrists' responses to the symptoms of camp and Holocaust survivors during the later 1950s when the Federal

government's new law of restitution (passed in 1956) opened a legal window for compensation claims for psychological damages (thus survivors began to seek psychiatric assessment). The controversy over these claims was very much live in the decade preceding the publication of the Mitscherlichs' book (see for instance Grubrich-Simitis, 1981; Pross, 1998; Leys, 2007; Herzog, 2014, 2016). But what concerns me here is the irony whereby assumptions about neurosis were often mobilised *against* claimants by German psychiatrists who refused to accept the possibility that chronic psychological trauma could be caused primarily by the psychological impact of *external* events, or events experienced in adulthood rather than childhood (see Herzog, 2016, for a critical exploration of the key arguments between 'rejecters' and 'sympathisers' with the claimants).

German psychiatry, despite its anti-Freudianism, shared certain general ideas about neurosis with psychoanalysis, as well as sometimes still borrowing from Freud when circumstances suited. For both, the origins of psychological trauma, where not traceable to the infliction of organic damage, was presumed to lie ultimately in inner, rather than outer causes, whose roots lay in the experience of early infancy. But if claimants had a pre-existing disposition to neurosis going back to infancy, then the responsibility for the trauma lay in most cases beyond the Nazi period covered by the restitution laws. As Vienna-born psychiatrist Wolfgang Lederer, who worked with survivors in the US, wryly observed: 'The [F]reudian concept of neurosis... proved surprisingly useful' – he 'could be understood as supporting the idea that neurosis attaches itself in a purely external and almost accidental way to the adult trauma, but does not derive in a direct and internal way from it' (Lederer, cited in Herzog, 2016). Or as an official government publication from 1960 put it: 'Only on the ground of a particular psychic and personality structure can damaging experiences lead to manifest illnesses. *The actual experience, as dramatic as it may seem, can thus not be considered to have any causational importance*' (Herzog, 2014: 140, emphasis in the original).

The point here is not to implicate the Mitscherlichs in the reactionary and anti-Semitic tendencies in German psychiatry in the 1950s and 1960s – their book is from the start a tirade against the superficial nature of Germany's response to the suffering of its victims, and it contains an unforgettable polemic against these medical evaluation

procedures: ‘there is little difference in principle between the *form* of this administered compensation to survivors and the forms of administered slaughter of a whole ethnic group’ (1975: 65). What the comparison does bring out, however, is the way in which the psychoanalytic frame in the 1950s and 60s, as much as the psychiatric one, characteristically excluded the notion of *historical* trauma from its narratives of psychopathology. The suffering that has to do with the lasting reverberation of traumatic historical events, experienced at whatever age, simply does not appear within the Mitscherlichs’ book – or it does so only very peripherally, for instance, in the fleeting acknowledgment that after 1945 ‘young men in Germany confronted nothing but rubble’ (1975: 218, this, however is not a statement of the authors, but embedded in a quotation from the writer and publisher Karl Markus Michel). One reason for this, which will be discussed in the next section, is that it was only more properly in the mid-1960s and 1970s that such notions of psychical trauma due to historical events began gradually to be medically documented and shared more widely, by psychoanalysts working with second generation Holocaust survivors and psychiatrists working with Vietnam veterans.

What does appear in the Mitscherlichs book, what they dwell on painstakingly, are reconstructions of ‘familial conflicts’ and ‘inner problems of character’ resulting in defences against affect, or the disabling of critical intelligence, or ‘regressive attachments’ to passivity and intellectual conservatism. In one vignette, a boy ‘was so affected and hurt by the birth of a brother at the very height of his Oedipal conflict that he withdrew inwardly from both his parents’. He was determined ‘never again to be the loser in a rivalry conflict’ (1975: 213), though inner ambivalence, both towards his father and towards Nazi ideals, protected him to a certain extent from feelings of loss and guilt at the end of the war. By contrast, ‘the collapse of the Third Reich entailed a further loss of worth’ in another patient, but this develops on the basis of a pre-existing internal conflict, which the Mitscherlichs tie to the long-term decline of the paternal imago, rather than the immediate circumstances of the war. This inner ‘old uncertainty and fearfulness made him behave subserviently to the newly evolving society’ (1975: 215).

There are three aspects I want to emphasise here. One is that, in this book, the language of violence typically crops up in relation to the trauma of internal Oedipal

processes, rather than indicating 'external' destruction. After the collapse of the Third Reich, one patient 'was *shattered* by the recognition of her father's weaknesses'; or a young person's 'internal equilibrium is *shaken by the violent upheavals* of the biological maturation process' (1975: 216, 190, my emphases). The second is that the failed mourning which the authors are trying to explore here has a specifically clinical and developmental nuance (rather than referring to private or social rituals of grief): 'only by slowly detaching oneself from lost object relations... can a meaningful relation to reality and to the past be maintained' (1975: 65). The 'past' invoked here means childhood and the primary analytical focus is on the relation to the parent, the quality of the emotional bond and the nature of the identification. The task is to rescue subjects from illusion (narcissism, omnipotence) and restore them to reality. It is a problem of *maturation* in the classical psychoanalytic perspective, and for this kind of analysis much of the historical context and details of Nazism and the war become irrelevant.

This point about maturation is also transposed by the Mitscherlichs onto a broader developmental narrative about German society itself, which has suffered a disabling of growth at the institutional level. What the Mitscherlichs deplore is 'creative stultification', an 'inability of [city] planners to implement new concepts', a 'blockage of social imagination' (1975: 11, 10, 13) which they perceive as *the* problem of Germany: a problem of growing up, rather than of recovering from shock. This society is unable yet to think with the freedom of an adult. And this is the third point: this is not a society continually plagued by the *horrors* of the past, by a recurrence of what has been witnessed, so much as crippled by failures of identification which occurred in childhood, and in the home, and left their mark 'on the subsequent character structure of the members of that generation' (1975: 217-8). Germany's problem now is an absent future and a lack of emotional life. It's a narrative of detachment, passivity, conservatism and the disappearance of affect which is replaced by 'authoritarian administrative routines and sterile patterns of reaction' (1975: 27). But what will follow, in literature of the 1980s and 1990s, is a concern with a past that is not affectless, apathetic or de-realised, but troubling and hyper-realised, whose ghostly persistence will not leave the present alone – as Caruth described it: 'the overwhelming events of the past repeatedly possess, in intrusive images and thoughts, the one who has lived through them' (1995: 151).

The New Discourses of Trauma and Mourning

The object here is not to fault the Mitscherlichs' radical intervention in West German moral debate about the war, which thrust their work into the foreground of conflicts between students and authorities at the end of the 1960s (see Habermas, 1989; Kauders, 2011; Kohut, 2012). It is instead to try and pinpoint how different the terms of their analysis are from what comes after. What is being missed when contemporary writers credit the Mitscherlichs with originating an influential new discourse about historical trauma and mourning is the nature of the paradigmatic shift which takes place some years after the publication of their 1967 book, within which quite a different language begins to be spoken, connecting psychoanalysis and mourning not just to processes of infantile development, but directly to memories of adult suffering and the broader historical experience of disaster.

Some of the elements contributing to this shift have been mentioned already. One is the increasing emergence of Holocaust survivor testimonies, which began to feature in psychoanalytic work with patients of the second generation in the 1960s, but in greater numbers only in the 1970s and 1980s, and which has continued to emerge (now as third generation accounts of trauma) to this day (see Bergman and Jucovy, 1982; Luel and Marcus, 1984; Langer, 1991; Felman and Laub, 1992; Moses, 1993; Kogan, 1995; Volkan et al, 2002). Milestones here were the meetings organised by William Niederland and Henry Krystal in America in the mid-60s, leading to collections of articles such as *Massive Psychic Trauma* (Krystal, 1968; see Leys, 2007; Herzog, 2016), as well as the founding of the 'Group for the Psychoanalytic Study of the Effect of the Holocaust on the Second Generation' (1974) which produced the studies published as *Generations of the Holocaust*, edited by Martin S Bergmann and Milton E Jucovy in 1982. Bergman and Jucovy credit Niederland's concept of 'survivor syndrome' in 1961, and Grubrich Simitis' 'Extreme Traumatisation as Cumulative Trauma' (1979) as important influences on their work, as well as further articles by Winnik, Krystal and Wangh from 1968-9 – the point being that 'children of survivors had been seen in consultations, treated with psychotherapy or psychoanalysis for some time; but until the late 1960s there was no acknowledgement of a possible connection between their problems and the traumatisation of their parents' (Bergmann and Jucovy, 1982: 35).

The second, associated factor was the elaboration of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder as a diagnostic category at the end of the 1970s (entering DSM III in 1980) which formalised and medicalised ideas about the traumatic effects of external events, including rape and military combat alongside natural disasters and serious accidents. In 1987 the list of stressors in DSM III-R was extended to specify ‘torture’ and ‘death camps’, as well as sudden destruction of one’s home or community, and ‘learning about a serious threat or harm to a close friend or relative’ (APA, 1987: 247-8). These were precisely the kinds of sources of long-term psychological damage which had been excluded or side-lined in psychiatric and psychological accounts of the 1950s-60s.

The literature on PTSD and ‘trauma’ since the 1980s is vast, ranging across medical and psychiatric texts, as well as commentaries and redeployments of the term in the social and human sciences, and within all of these areas its implications have been debated and contested (see Leys, 2000; Lerner and Micale, 2001; Shephard, 2003; Fassin and Richtman, 2009 for overviews of the first two decades of the literature). I’ll note just a few significant points relevant to the impact of trauma discourses on psychoanalysis. First, the sufferings of second generation Holocaust survivors were elaborated at first relatively separately (and psychoanalytically) from the more psychiatric work on PTSD, although key contributors to the psychiatric notion of trauma, such as Robert Jay Lifton, were versed in psychoanalysis and drew on its vocabularies (see Herzog 2016 for an attempt to better integrate the histories of post-Holocaust trauma and PTSD). By the time Lifton wrote the Preface to the US translation of *The Inability to Mourn* in 1975, his own work with Vietnam vets could be mapped over the symptomatology of Holocaust survivors, as well as those from Hiroshima in part because accounts of these symptoms were emerging at the same historical point. But this broader perspective on trauma had not been available to the Mitscherlichs themselves in 1967.

Second, the response from within psychoanalysis to the trauma debates remains extremely divided. On the one hand, Freud had proposed early in his career that certain neuroses, including hysteria, were caused by traumatic sexual incidents or acts of abuse in childhood which underwent repression and needed to be consciously

recovered in order to effect a cure. However, this explanation, known as Freud's 'seduction theory', was soon displaced by the theory more properly associated with psychoanalysis, in which sexual drives *inherent* in the individual are in conflict with the developing ego (Leys, 2000; Prager, 1998). It was this idea that was mobilised by Ernest Jones and others to explain shellshock in the First World War (as a hysterical reaction afflicting in particular those soldiers who, due to their infantile history, were predisposed to neurotic reactions, see Shephard, 2002). When trauma took off as a psychiatric diagnosis in the 1980s, some analysts were keen to link together Freud's pre-psychoanalytic sexual trauma theory and the writings on shellshock with the much later psychoanalytic work on Holocaust survivors and contemporary investigations of PTSD, giving rise to a sense of continuous engagement with trauma and history. Thus Werner Bohleber stated in his 2007 keynote address to the first International Psychoanalytic Congress to be held in postwar Berlin, that 'psychoanalysis began as a theory of trauma' (329), and that from Freud's 'Remembering, Repeating and Working Through', through the two world wars and into work on remembrance with the children and grand-children of survivors, it had periodically committed itself to processing the repercussions of real events. But others have seen trauma theory as generating an inherently anti-psychological and anti-psychoanalytic model – for Prager, for instance, the trauma talk which dominates 'the new social psychology' as well as the mental health community, involves society in 'an assault on subjectivity itself' which replaces the interpretive self with a focus on the determinative impact of history on individuals (1998: 132-3).

One additional complexity, which the psychoanalytic discussions of trauma tend to obscure, is whether the kind of work on traumatic memory associated with sexual trauma, and later, shellshock, and which is based on notions of sudden shock or surges of affect, can be merged descriptively with the suffering of Jewish civilians in the Holocaust, which included the more pervasive threat of death, violence, torture and degradation, as well as witnessing the death of family members and the bureaucratically administered destruction of communities. To what extent had such a temporally and socially extended form of disaster ever formed part of the psychoanalytic model of psychological damage? As the psychiatrist Kurt Koller observed in 1958: 'The topic is new, there is no precedent'; furthermore, the fate of the Jews should 'in no way be compared with accidents that happen to people... [or]

to injuries sustained in military service' (Herzog, 2016; see also C. Fred Alford, 2011). What is noticeable in articles such as 'From Concretism to Metaphor' (1984), a landmark study by German psychoanalyst Ilse Grubrich-Simitis, is how new and unorthodox the focus on the origins of trauma 'outside' appears, which in the 1980s still needs to be carefully argued for. Grubrich-Simitis was at pains to establish that these patients were 'at the mercy of apocalyptic *external* events' (1984: 307, emphasis in the original), and suggests the need to go as far back as Freud's pre-psychoanalytic work when he was 'still mainly concerned with real traumatic events... an exogenous disturbance in the parent generation' (1984: 308-9) in order to find a model. There simply was no precedent for this kind of interpretation within psychoanalysis itself.

Two other post-1970s developments helped to strengthen the sense – both within psychoanalysis, and in the human and social sciences more widely – that psychoanalysis was, and had always been, pre-eminently 'historical'. One was Jean Laplanche's theorisation of *Nachträglichkeit* or 'afterwardsness', a term which Freud had used mainly to mean 'delayed effect', but which Laplanche repurposed to indicate an element in the mother's desire whose meaning escapes the child, but is lodged in its experience as an 'enigmatic message'. For this reason, the adult looking back at his or her own past cannot fully assimilate it; it will always embed 'something that comes before – a message from the other' (Laplanche, 1992: 222). The second is Nicolas Abraham's 'Notes on the Phantom' and related pieces written in collaboration with Maria Torok which elaborated the notion of unspoken or silenced histories in the lives of parents which are transmitted, or 'encrypted', in the unconscious experience of the child (Abraham and Torok, 1994; Frosh 2013). By the late 1990s such new psychoanalytic theorisations had fused with older Freudian ideas and elements of trauma theory to create a distinctively psychoanalytic approach to the narration of historical violence and its repressed historical pasts (Bohleber's 2007 congress speech cites both Laplanche's enigmatic messages and Abraham's 'family secrets' in the context of trauma and collective memory). The notion of unconscious 'intergenerational transmission' was further developed in work with second and third generation Holocaust survivors and increasingly applied to the legacies of other violent conflicts (Volkan et al, 2002).

A final element feeding into this psychoanalytically-infllected discourse of history and trauma in the 1990s came from literary deconstruction, in particular through collaborations between Cathy Caruth, Soshona Felman and psychiatrist Dori Laub (Felman and Laub, 1992; Caruth, 1995), and via Derrida's engagement with the work of Abraham and Torok during the 1970s and 1980s (Derrida, 1986). In Derrida's work especially, terms relating to haunting (ghosts, crypts, the uncanny) merged with psychoanalytic vocabularies to form new critical concepts of 'historicality', informed by violence and remembrance (see ffytche, 2012). Derrida's *Spectres of Marx* (1993) was key in developing this quasi-Freudian reading of 'uncanny' history, which was taken up into the broader discourse on trauma and wounding by various cultural theorists in the humanities (Santner, 1990; Caruth, 1995; LaCapra, 2001; Schwab, 2010), but also in the social sciences (Prager, 1998; Gordon, 1997). For Santner (1990: 35), 'the legacies – or perhaps more accurately: the ghosts, the revenant objects – of the Nazi period are transmitted to the second and third generations at the sites of the primal scenes of socialization'; or as Schwab observed: 'Pervasive in violent histories is the transgenerational transmission of trauma, or, as Abraham and Torok put it, a history of ghostly haunting by the phantoms of a silenced past' (2010: 72).

This brief sketch of the connections between psychoanalysis and the new literatures of trauma and mourning covers many quite distinct initiatives which some authors attempted to integrate during the 1990s on the grounds that all were articulating aspects of the disturbed interaction between history and memory – whether this was the phenomena of latency and flashbacks associated with PTSD, the post-Holocaust work on the intergenerational transmission of experience, Freudian and Laplanchean *Nachträglichkeit*, or Derrida's and Abraham and Torok's revenants and encrypted histories. All emerged too late to feed into the Mitscherlich's analysis, which, as we have seen, is still dependent on a quite different set of reference points belonging to the social psychology of the 1950s and 1960s. What is also significant is that little of this literature of the 1980s and 1990s refers back to *The Inability to Mourn*.

The scarcity of reference to the Mitscherlich's in the first wave of clinical literature on the second generation (though see Grubrich-Simitis, 1981, for an exception) is also not because the Mitscherlich's were dealing with the children of perpetrators rather

than the victims. In fact, the drive to theorise the historical effects of Nazism on subsequent generations of Germans emerged concurrently with this phase of more intensive work on Holocaust survivor testimony, and the importance of reading and theorising these experiences in tandem was seen as crucial from the start. A section of *Generations of the Holocaust* was devoted to the children of persecutors – as Bergmann and Jucovy wrote: ‘When our group was founded in 1974, we knew that the study of children of Nazis was of equal importance to that of the problems encountered by children of survivors’ (Bergmann and Jucovy, 1982: 161). As much as psychoanalysts working on this material in the 1980s were keen to keep the pathologies of perpetrators and victims distinct from each other, in practice the terminologies and interpretations of psychological processes continually influenced each other: ‘remarkable similarities were discovered between the case histories of the children of the oppressed and those of the oppressors’ (Santner, 1990: 35). Survivors, in Grubrich-Simitis’ and Niederland’s accounts, as much as the Mitscherlichs’ Germans, experienced the pathology of events which ‘were continually derealized through... denial’ (Grubrich-Simitis, 1984: 308) – though the ethics and politics of these phenomena remain crucially distinct. At the same time, the Germans and other perpetrator groups gradually started to be seen as *also* subject to the traumas of recollection – of horrors, as well as guilt. As Schwab summed up more recently:

‘[Trauma discourses] have commonly focused almost exclusively on the victims of trauma. I think we need trauma discourses that look at the dynamic between victims and perpetrators and see that both of them are suffering from the psychic deformations of violent histories, albeit in different ways and with different responsibilities.’ (2010: 72) (for nuanced and critical reflections on the problems inherent in historicising the experiences of victims alongside those of perpetrators, see Frie 2012, 2014).

The combination of all these trends has, since the 1990s, forged bridges between the notion of historicity, historical events, trauma and the unconscious in ways which must have been simply unimaginable to the Mitscherlichs in 1967. Although of course there still remains much contemporary psychoanalytic writing which deals with the concept of trauma from the point of view of identification and the superego, the last two decades have also witnessed some very different kinds of integration taking place

between psychoanalytic commitments to understanding the internal meaning-making processes of the person, and sociological and historical observations on the psychical aftermath of violent conflicts. Work has emerged which foregrounds acts of decoding and recollecting a buried historical past, rather than the pathologies of character structure, or of authority (see for instance the essays collected in Harris et al, 2017). All of which leads to a new compact: not *psychoanalysis and sociology*, but *psychoanalysis with history and trauma*, as a way of understanding the pathology of present communities.

Fathers in History and in Fantasy

Before some concluding observations about the effects of the Mitscherlichs' adoption of social psychology, I want to return to the subject of fathers with which this investigation began. I have made broad claims about a paradigmatic shift in psychoanalytically-informed studies of society from concern with social authority and the superego, to a focus on the intergenerational transmission of history and trauma. But how did this manifest at the level of case-work in Mitscherlich's Germany in the 1970s and 1980s (Alexander Mitscherlich himself died in 1982)? What changes does one witness in the way fathers and their histories are depicted? Psychoanalytic accounts of therapeutic work with second generation Germans (the descendants of perpetrators) began to emerge right at the end of the 70s, including Simenauer's 'A Double Helix: Some Determinants of the Self-perpetuation of Nazism' (1978), Rosenkötter, 'Schatten der Zeitgeschichte auf psychoanalytischen Behandlungen' ['Shadows of Contemporary History in Psychoanalytic Therapy'] (1979), and Eickhoff's, 'Identification and its Vicissitudes in the Context of the Nazi Phenomenon' (1986). In such texts one finds the first inklings of a shift from the pathologies of bonding in the social group, towards external historical dimensions.

True, many of these articles still share the terms of the Mitscherlichs' analysis – for instance the concern with 'unresolved Oedipal dynamics' and the trauma to adolescents 'when their defeated and completely powerless hero fathers returned to the families which until then had been fatherless'. The 'decline of the father image... was assumed to constitute the decisive experience that led to the worldwide student rebellions' wrote Simenauer in the 1970s (Simenauer, 1978: 411-12). However, what is noticeable is a greater emphasis on historical (not just developmental) relations

between the generations, and more detailed and intricate accounts of the interactions between history and life. For Rosenkötter, patients' identity crises appear as 'historically structured' (1979, 1024) – a clinical use of 'historically' which mirrors the Mitscherlich's references to the temporal thresholds of infant development. But Eickhoff's case history, also about identification, contains some interesting new departures and 'is characterised by the close interweaving of the life history of the patient and the historical background' (1986, 33) – so much so that the analyst introduced a chronological table as a postscript to the account, correlating key moments in the therapy, over the course of nearly 15 years, with public historical events. One of these named events was the publication of *The Inability to Mourn* itself, which coincided with the beginning of Eickhoff's involvement in the treatment of the patient.

Secondly, the topic of intergenerational transmission is more explicitly thematised: Eickhoff early on picks up the term from Kestenberg's theorisation of 'the "transmission" of the traumatic potential from one generation to the next' (1986: 34; also citing Grubrich-Simitis' 'From Concretism to Metaphor' and Bergmann and Jucovy's work). Along with this enters a concern with the temporalities of historical recollection within the therapeutic process. Thus Eickhoff makes much of the fact that information that the patient's father was a high-ranking member of Himmler's SS emerged only in the 117th session of the analysis. This alerts the author to the character of 'secret' histories, but also to the long time-scale in which one must await their emergence (which contrasts with the Mitscherlich's readiness to read silence as a developmental cutting-off from affect – a constitutional derealisation of the past – integrated into the very character structure of the first generation).

Thirdly, these authors are not yet incorporating Abraham and Torok's theorisation of family secrets, but secrets do thrust themselves into view as a problem connected to the specifically historical dynamics of material relating to the Nazi period. Reconstructions of the patient's life history, and the history of the therapy, are forced to interact with more public processes of the recollection and memorialisation, but also denial, of historical information. This shifts the clinical emphasis very slightly from internal drive mechanisms to the way in which public and private fantasies intersect and also mediate in both directions between the construction of the past and

the experience of the present. Particularly striking is the way such fantasies are beholden to – or subverted by – dynamics other than the clinical ‘transference’. Besides projecting the past onto the analyst, the past is also something which can be hidden or sought out in factual terms. There is a striking vignette in Simenauer’s article which deals with the way the patient gradually pieced together in her childhood the fact that her father had been in charge of liquidating assets left by the victims of the extermination camps in one of the Eastern territories, and at the end of the war had been killed by partisans (1978: 415). She evolved a plan to force open the drawer of her mother’s desk, which was always locked, in which she presumed she would find documents which would provide the proof which would either confirm, or destroy, her continued idealisation of her father, whom she wanted to feel was incapable of being a war criminal. ‘But when the desired opportunity arose, she suddenly gave up her long-cherished plans’ (1978: 416).

Simenauer’s account is still about idealisation, identification, ambivalence and denial – which links to the Mitscherlichs’ themes; but it is more complexly historical than theirs. We shift, significantly, from a causal account – the sins of the fathers visited on the children – to retrospective fantasies. It is the children and grandchildren who transmit, and attempt to sift the good from the bad, in narratives that cannot be straightforwardly told because of their difficulty, their trans-historicity, and the complexity of what is projected into them. One also gets a more fluid sense here of the inter-relationships between fantasies and historical narratives, and the way in which children were receiving broader cultural representations of the past, as well as the dynamics of historical narration within the family (since the millenium, there has been a surprising surge of autobiographical and oral history literature emerging from the third generation of Germans, as well as research critically analysing the disparities between the public and private transmission of historical narratives about the Nazi period; see for instance, Ustorff, 2010; Welzer et al, 2002). In Grubrich-Simitis’ account (which deals not with the children of perpetrators, but the experience of second generation survivors), the patient at a certain point will ‘start to investigate the parents’ past’ (1984, 310) and begin ‘to study historical sources, question relatives and friends’ (312). Thus the notion of what constitutes a psychical connection to the past is being extended far beyond the formation of the superego, and changes the way in which history is brought into the analytic frame.

Fathers are very much present in these accounts – one might note in connection with this the parallel emergence of a specific genre of ‘father books’ in late-70s Germany, often written by the children of Nazi perpetrators, and aiming to construct narrative accounts of the past, and of father-child relations, in place of fragments, denial, subterfuge and silence (see Schneider, 1984; Santner, 1990). No one in these texts argues that the power of the paternal imago has been weakened – rather, many of the subjects are perceived as living a dual life: their own and that of their fathers. Grubrich-Simitis draws on Kestenberg to describe a patient who was isolated ‘in the reality of her father’s past’ – sometimes ‘she *was* her father in hiding’ (302). This account of psychic mechanisms goes ‘beyond what we usually think of as identification’ (303), because of the degree of ‘immersion in another reality’, including the re-experience of another person’s historical experiences, whether these are conceived of as memories or hallucinations. The collaborative recovery of this *historical reality* becomes an important innovation in the therapy. In a chapter devoted to ‘history-related unconscious fantasies’, psychoanalyst and psychiatrist Vamik Volkan has more recently argued for the existence of fantasies ‘developed *solely* by the child from images of the traumatic experiences suffered by the large group or groups to which the child belongs’ – here the mental images of the history ‘become inextricably intertwined with the individual child’s... psychosexual conflicts’ (Volkan et al, 2002: 39-41).

The psychical unconscious for the Mitscherlichs contains unconscious forms of identification with the father, not unconscious pieces of the father’s history. There is also little sense that these analysands from the 1970s and 80s – whether the children of perpetrators or victims – are devoid of affect. Rather they appear to be linked to their parents by forms of fascination, ambivalence and compulsion. Finally, fathers are there as identifications, as absences, as perverse or incomprehensible figures, and, in a more classical way, as the object of ambivalent emotions. But they are no longer the lynch-pin of a social-psychological analysis of the pathology of authority. One of the things that arrives in sociology and history in the 1970s and 1980s, post the Mitscherlichs’ warning about the decline of the paternal imago, is precisely a feminist critique of patriarchy and of phallocentrism, and this significantly affects what

elements of the psychoanalytic paradigm Mitscherlich, as well as Horkheimer or Erikson, are able to transmit to new constituencies of the 1980s.

Diagnostics and Empathy

This article has not set out to argue for the alliance between psychoanalysis, mourning and history over the more sociological work. The rise of the ‘trauma empire’ has also been much criticised (Leys, 2000; Prager, 1998; Alford, 2011; Tresize, 2013, and many others). My purpose has instead been to point out the nature of the tectonic shift during the 1970s which affected the disciplinary alliances psychoanalysis had with sociology and history; and also to explore the ways in which these shifts created complex and often unnoticed transformations in the object of enquiry. One of these relates to the way fathers are at first central, but then become relatively marginal within psychoanalytic sociology; another is the way recent history is at first excluded, but comes to form one of the mainstays of psychoanalytic writing on the social.

I want to end by exploring one further consequence of the way in which the Mitscherlichs position themselves in relation to their subjects – as ‘social psychologists’ rather than psychoanalysts – and how this is again reversed in later work. Despite glancing references to ‘remembering’ and ‘working through’, *The Inability to Mourn* is not really concerned with therapeutics: the authors are rather diagnosticians, who stand at a distance from their subjects, and this is accentuated by their self-positioning as social scientists seeking to establish ‘Principles of Collective Behaviour’. Maintaining a tolerant or ‘therapeutic’ relationship to their subjects (subjects rather than patients) is not something the Mitscherlichs are actively setting out to do. They are remobilising psychoanalytic insights ‘beyond the clinic’ on sociological terrain, where the concepts take on a different critical rather than clinical function. As vehement social critics they are concerned more with pathology than cure – the book is very much a sustained polemic against German society. As Tilmann Moser (1992) has pointed out, what you get in *The Inability to Mourn* is a very awkward combination of the understanding analyst with a merciless prosecutor – the Mitscherlichs themselves described their method as ‘one of attack’ (1975: 68).

There’s an interesting fusion of trends here, because, on the one hand, the focus on the superego, conscience and guilt already formed the main bridge between Freud and

sociology in this period, in the Anglo-American context as much as the German. Mitscherlich's *Society Without the Father*, Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd*, Parsons' *Social Structure and Personality*, and Erikson's *Young Man Luther* are all concerned with the socialisation of individuals, and they frame this through the shifting dynamics of authority and guilt. However, this psychosocial focus on guilt was then engaged in a different, more critical fashion, in the context of postwar German debates about moral culpability, which in turn inspired its own psychological literature (for instance Karl Jaspers' (2000) the *Question of German Guilt*, or Jung's (1964) 'After the Catastrophe' which takes up the question of shared European guilt).

The point I want to end with here is that there's something in the disciplinary alliance between psychoanalysis and sociology that dominated the 1950s and 60s that also reorients the function of psychoanalysis, which leans away from the exploration of subjectivity associated with the talking cure towards a cooler form of diagnostics; from individual histories towards collective typologies; and away from therapy towards a focus on pathology. The conclusion to the Mitscherlichs' volume emphasises exactly these three points, each of which, in its own way, inscribes a refusal of empathy within the socio-analytical frame. They write that (1) political science is the science of diagnostics; (2) the accumulation of individual patterns provides the psychoanalyst 'with the bridge to sociology'; and (3) 'the psychoanalyst's point of departure must always be the pathology of the individual' (1975: 297).

Just to pick up on the word 'empathy' here – which may or may not be counted as a necessary psychoanalytic resource, depending on whether one looks to Freud's descriptions of technique, or those of Ferenczi and Winnicott or the more contemporary relational school. That the Germans are incapable of empathy forms the brunt of the Mitscherlichs' diagnosis of postwar society, in which citizens are cut off from their emotional lives, detached and apathetic. Empathy, they write, is 'something Germans have shown thus far only in embryonic form in their cultural attitudes and, above all, in their political emotions' (1975: 64) – a statement that can be understood in its critical and moral context, but is curious all the same, given that it is Germans who coined the term *Einfühlung* (from which modern discourses of empathy are derived) and provided its initial theoretical impetus in the realms of both psychology

and aesthetics. What the Mitscherlichs don't consider is the degree to which a *refusal of empathy* is inscribed within the conditions of their own socio-diagnostic approach. The sociological lens itself performs a lot of work in detaching the representation of German subjects from the dynamics of their emotional lives (through abstraction, and the search for a general cultural logic of behaviour). This is in contrast to the clinical relation of analyst to analysand – which, at the very least, aims at closer knowledge of and involvement with the particularities of a person's emotional life, but which has regularly also been associated with a kind of interpersonal sensitivity or empathy.

An interesting comparison can be made here with a much later text by a psychoanalyst and historian engaging with German social history – specifically the life experiences of the generation born between 1900 and 1915, who were adolescents during the Weimar republic and party members during the Third Reich. They survived the hardships of the immediate postwar years to achieve prosperity in the 1950s and 60s, but also formed the silent affectless backdrop to the Mitscherlichs' *Inability to Mourn*. Thomas Kohut's *A German Generation* (2012), assembled out of an oral history project dating back to 1988-9 (Kohut himself joined the project in 1995) sets out to uncover the changing ways in which that generation experienced its own history, and subsequently its past. He focuses on interviewees' attempts to reflect back across the twentieth century, and appends his own essays and reflective analyses of how their narratives are shaped.

This is very much a post-1990s attempt at psychohistory, rather than psychoanalytic social psychology. But as such Kohut's book also manifests a very interesting disturbance over the issue of empathy. Whether or not empathy is a necessary part of the canonical picture of analyst-patient relations, and what it means in that context, is still being debated. Interestingly, Thomas Kohut's father, the radical psychoanalytic innovator of the 1960s and 70s, Heinz Kohut, saw empathy as definitive of the psychoanalytic field itself, insofar as it required thinking oneself into the patient's mind (Heinz Kohut, 1959, 1981). But from the nineteenth century onwards, empathy has of course also formed a reference point for historians debating the way in which we can inhabit the past. And it is as a historian (rather than as a psychoanalyst) that Thomas Kohut invokes the need for empathy at the beginning of his text: the interviews are generally congruent with an 'empathic approach' to subjective

experience (2012:16); ‘empathy is at the heart of the historical method and at the heart of history’s appeal’ (2012: 18).

Nevertheless, he worries that ‘lack of sympathy for the interviewees may have limited my empathy for them’ (2012: 17). Compare this with Grubrich-Simitis’ advice in the 1980s that: ‘the analyst has to overcome the inclination to withhold empathy, which sets in spontaneously even by indirect contact with the facts of the Holocaust’ (Grubrich-Simitis, 1984: 313; see also Frie, 2017). Grubrich-Simitis is here responding to the problem that psychoanalysts, like their patients, may have had too strong, and unconscious, a resistance to contemplating the traumas of history to allow that concrete material into the therapeutic process; for Kohut the problem has more to do with an unwillingness to enter the minds of the perpetrators. But might one infer from both these statements that one of the reasons for the turn of psychoanalysts to sociological work, rather than historical remembrance, in the 1950s and 60s, was that this allowed them to respond critically and polemically to the experience of Nazi Germany, via the analyses of pathological authority, without having to reimmerge themselves in the traumas of the period as it was experienced by individuals. And secondly, from the more abstract vantage point of sociological observations concerned with ‘types’ and ‘structures’, they were able to avoid some of the moral complexities thrown up around empathy by the use of psychohistorical methods.

But in 2012 the situation was far different from the 1960s, and Kohut feels more compelled to replace the Mitscherlichs’ critical stance – focused on unacknowledged guilt – with an analysis that turns on unacknowledged loss. In the last reflective essay of the book he in fact invokes the Mitscherlichs’ 1967 account in order to invert its terms. Rather than their inability to face up to their buried guilt preventing the Germans from mourning their losses (as Kohut reads the Mitscherlichs’ arguments), he proposes that: ‘the inability of Germans to mourn the overwhelming losses they had suffered, including the loss of the Third Reich, prevented them from experiencing guilt over its crimes’ (Kohut, 2012: 231). He continues: ‘From the Allied program of “de-Nazification” in the late 1940s to the reproaches of the younger generation and those like the Mitscherlichs in the late 1960s, the lack of empathic responses from the environment for the losses suffered by the Germans who had lived through the Third Reich worked to cut off their empathy for themselves – or for the victims of National

Socialism – and simply put them on the defensive.’ (232) Thus whereas for the Mitscherlichs Germany had not yet been able to ‘grow’ empathy in its damaged and affectless people, for Kohut it is the refusal of empathy in historians and commentators which has disabled the connection between generations and hampered ethical reflection.

In a further twist, one of the factors behind the psychological displacement of German loss and mourning, for Kohut, is the way in which the children ‘tended to project their own guilt over the Third Reich onto their parents, in the process avoiding having to empathize or even sympathize with their parents’ suffering’ (231). The question of how this history should be recovered, and the role of empathy within this process, remains particularly fraught, especially since the rise of counter-narratives from the alt right. But for the purpose of this article, and in conclusion, I want just to note again how what is at stake here, in the arguments over withheld or projected guilt, or withheld loss and missing empathy, turns on an issue of historical relationships, not sociological ones. And insofar as Kohut brings his psychoanalytic training to bear on this historical work, it is around these pitfalls and tensions in remembrance, and not – as it was for Mitscherlich, Erikson and other mid-century writers – through analyses of the logic of social authority, or the need to reconstruct it. The gaze of the psychoanalyst treading on sociohistorical ground is these days very much a temporal one – it is now less inclined to diagnose the pathologies of present social *structures*, and less likely to focus on the classical Freudian account of the superego as the prime bridge to social reality.

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Author Biography

Matt fytche is Director of the Centre for Psychoanalysis, University of Essex, and Editor of the journal *Psychoanalysis and History*. His book *Psychoanalysis in the Age of Totalitarianism*, co-edited with Daniel Pick, was published in the New Library of Psychoanalysis series by Routledge in 2016.