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Born into a World at War: Listening for Affect and Personal Meaning

“Problems of patienthood are caused by outer and inner conditions,” Erik Erikson tells us (1964, 89). Outer conditions of war, politics, economics, and culture affect our thoughts and actions, but they do not, without being filtered through inner life, cause them. Inner conditions of temperamental propensity, affect, fantasy, and conflict predispose us to behave in certain ways, but they do not, apart from encounters with external reality, cause us to do so. This is a duality that challenges psychoanalytic theory and practice, from work with individual patients to psychocultural, psychosocial, or psychohistorical analysis. In another duality, psychoanalysis begins from the individual and provides, in fact, the most comprehensive theory of individuality. Yet from the beginning, in both its accounts of patients and the self-analytic writings of its founders, psychoanalysis has focused on patterns of fantasy, neurosis, character, and development that are widespread and has brought cultural, social, and historical factors into its theoretical and clinical reflections.

My own work follows the Eriksonian precept. In *The Power of Feelings* (1999), I suggested that people create and experience social processes and cultural meanings not only materially and discursively but also psychodynamically—in unconscious, affect-laden, nonlinguistic, immediately felt images and fantasies that everyone creates from birth about self, self and other, body, and the world. Social and historical processes are given, and they will certainly lead to some patterns of experiencing (including those shaped by the family unit) in common, as I documented in *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978), but this experiencing will be refracted through personal

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individuality and be as much affective and nonlinguistic as it is cognitive and verbal.

Psychoanalytic listening, likewise, begins from a duality. In clinical work, the goal is to understand, and to help a patient to understand, his unconscious life—defenses, conflicts, fantasies, and affects that are importantly and by definition nonlinguistic—but even listening with the third ear must begin by attending to spoken words. The psychoanalyst then uses her own affects, as well as observation of the patient's nonverbal behaviors and communications, to find meaning. Secondary process language and narrative are only indicative of what is beyond and before in primary process feeling and thought.

In this paper, I describe how I have worked within these dualities of internal and external reality and primary and secondary process thinking to listen to and interpret stories of a group of people born toward the end of World War II. I point to the ineluctable individuality of historical experience while also emphasizing the consequences of belonging to a particular generation or age cohort. I suggest that history affects people psychologically no less than it does physically and materially, and that this psychological impact is registered emotionally and unconsciously as well as consciously and cognitively. Complementing a sociological insight into the relevance of cultural and historical conditions to an understanding of the inner life, the psychoanalytic study of individual subjectivities affords an enriched and fuller understanding of history and culture.

Specifically, I have explored affective and familial themes in first-person narratives about being born during World War II (Tymoczko and Blackmun 2000). These narratives were all written by members of the Harvard-Radcliffe Class of 1965, who were at the time of writing in their early fifties. As a member of this class, I furnished an epilogue to the book.¹ The contributors form part of a classic sociological generation, having been born almost without exception in 1943 and 1944, and then finding themselves at a particular time of life at the same institution, and having been affected by the social and intellectual currents of both the societies and period in which

they were born and those in which they came of age. I hope to show that by listening for affect we can find, within the wide variety of stories told by people from different backgrounds and countries, strikingly similar emotional themes and tonalities as well as retrospective constructions of their childhood selves. Filtered through unconscious as well as conscious parental communications, an affective psychocultural ethos seems to have permeated the experiences of this generation. Although they were preverbal infants and toddlers during World War II, and their families experienced the catastrophe in different ways, this war came to have a recognizably common living psychic reality for these individuals.

As my introductory quotation implies, I believe that those who wish to understand the intertwining of psyche and society in individuals owe a special debt to Erik Erikson—perhaps the most creative and far-ranging psychoanalyst after Freud, but one whose contribution as a psychoanalytic theorist and public intellectual is often forgotten and who has seldom been appropriately recognized within the field itself. Erikson articulates in a rigorous and systematic way how individual and cultural-historical experience become intertwined. He argues that history, society, and culture are pervasively involved in the organization and experience of self and psyche, animating fantasies, identity, and conflicts. My project thus illustrates Erikson's claim that history, social models, cultural prototypes, and images of good and evil all "assume a decisive concreteness in every individual's ego development" (1959, 18) and "appear in specific transferences and resistances" (29).

Erikson's thinking, however, is not historically or socially determinist. With a clinician's sensibility, he highlights individual usages of cultural contributions to identity that are deeply implicated in selfhood, formed in part through identifications with parents, and related in complex ways to life goals that may be pursued or shunned. These culturally and historically infused components of identity are tied up with affects including shame, guilt, and fear and with defenses such as denial, projection, and reaction formation. They take particular form or present particular challenges depending on when in the developmental life cycle they are experienced.

Erikson explores specifically how the cataclysmic events of World War I, World War II, and immigration are drawn into unconscious fantasy life and inform his patients' inner worlds and identities. *Childhood and Society* (1950) has case vignettes drawn from children born during World War II and from war experiences—the “Son of a Bombadier,” for example, who, left at home with his mother and female relatives while his father was first disparaged, then became a war hero, and was finally killed, tried to form a masculine identity; or the marine who froze as he was supposed to fire a gun and subsequently developed a severe war neurosis. Speaking directly and indirectly in “Identity and Uprootedness in Our Time” (1964) to the experiences of many born in the war years, Erikson investigates the psychologies of refugees, immigrants, and migrants. He explores the consequence of losing one's place in historical and generational continuity, of losing one's native language and country, as well as—especially relevant in the case of World War II—losing many family members and the very physical space of home and community. Displaced persons, he suggests, must somehow try to preserve identity in the face of radical historical change. For the immigrant, there is no continuity of generations and tradition. Uprooted people have a “basic hope for recognition and [a] basic horror of its failure: the dead, the stillborn identity” (1964, 95).

My own attachment to Erikson is itself probably a psychohistorical product. My interests in matters of childhood, culture, and psyche were first awakened when I read *Childhood and Society* early in my college career. As an undergraduate, I cut my social scientific teeth in the interdisciplinary Harvard Social Relations Department, which sponsored Erikson's hugely popular undergraduate course on identity and the life cycle as well as being a center of psychological anthropology.

Equally significantly, it seems likely that, just as Freud's psychosexual theories and attention to repression bear the mark of prewar Viennese culture, so Erikson framed his developmental theories—and found his most poignant early clinical cases—partially among the very cohort born just before, during, and after World War II. I am thinking specifically of his multifaceted theory of identity, which Erikson

promulgated and documented decades before the concept became popular in academia and politics. Identity for Erikson is inextricably personal and socio-cultural. It is also multiple, as we continue to find clinically in the many fragmentary, overlapping, partial transferences that emerge over the course of therapy or analysis, and as is likewise confirmed by research and theoretical work in social science and the humanities. Erikson, then, with empirical and clinical accuracy, gives us a prescient picture of the complexities of identity that resonates closely with contemporary thought and that seems truly universal.

But Erikson also writes of identity as a more integrated phenomenon, such that his concept moves closer to a concept of self. By “ego identity,” Erikson (1959) means an objective quality or consolidation of selfhood—what he calls an ego synthesis—which includes a subjective, confident sense of continuity in time, a personal selfsameness, as well as a sense of self and continuity that is dependent upon being confirmed and recognized by others as a particular individual in a particular universe. Identity here includes but is more than the sum of identifications with others. It is measured not just descriptively, in terms of the multiple aspects of identity that go into any psyche, but as an achievement, an enduring synthesis, something that is established and comfortable; and it contrasts with nonconsolidation, or identity diffusion. Identity issues are found throughout the life cycle, but they are for Erikson a particular challenge at adolescence, when a young person should integrate previous particular identifications and develop a general identification with his or her culture and life setting.

The other side of identity is identity crisis or diffusion. The notion of an identity crisis grew out of the quite specific historical circumstances of Erikson’s attention to the adolescent’s epigenetic task, and it emerged as central in his thinking in the late 1950s and 1960s, just when the World War II cohort was coming of age and when other commentators remarked on that generation’s alienation and politicization. Erikson’s writings on the identity crises of youth often seem to lose both the historical and individual specificity of his other writings. What he otherwise saw as an issue for the life cycle—

identity, in the sense both of selfsameness and of multiple historically specific, fantasy-imbued identifications—becomes tied to a specific class- and race-based cultural crisis and is then reuniversalized as a necessary life stage. But as we reflect on the disruptions and transformations in early life for those born into a world at war, we can rehistoricize this concept. Just as being born during the war—*not* being “baby boomers”—is our cohort’s defining experience, so Erikson is, I believe, the war babies’ paradigmatic psychosocial theorist.

Following Erikson, in listening to the autobiographical stories told by my classmates, I paid particular attention to the intertwining of individual and cultural-historical experience, trying to understand how transpersonal forces became involved in the experience of self and enlivened private fantasies and conflicts. My goal, then, was not to find either external or internal causes or constraints, but rather, as the psychoanalytic sociologist Neil Smelser puts it, to stress “clinical inference about uniquely convergent *patterns* of forces in the individual’s psyche . . . the internal representation . . . of that reality” (1987, 198–99). I wanted to elucidate these patterns without losing individual specificity. In short, I listened for affect—the emotional tonalities of the various contributions as well as the consciously described feelings—and for transference templates—the unconscious, immediately felt but not narratively constructed pictures of self and other that seemed to affect the contributors’ views of the world. I listened for conflict and resistances, for when I thought a contributor was avoiding something or covering it up, so that what I picked up didn’t quite hang together. And I kept in mind the use of the self, or my own countertransference—the fact that it was I, and not just anyone, listening to these stories, and that they evoked affects and memories for me as well. I explored society and history through my own individual senses. My listening showed that people bring personal interpretations to unconsciously as well as consciously transmitted cultural and historical circumstances and to parental fantasies and identity. Through psychoanalytic listening—in a way that I hope to re-create for the reader of this paper—my conception of the effect of war was broadened, and my sense of the consequences of being born during the war was decentered.

I was born in January 1944, so I was five months old on D-Day and a year and a half on V-E Day. During a trip to France in the early 1990s, I visited Omaha and Utah Beaches. From a childhood visit, I remembered vividly the concrete bunkers and gun emplacements left by the Germans, which it had been so bizarre to find on a beach. On this occasion, however, I also noticed and was riveted by various memorial monuments. These pillars had inscriptions on top such as "In Memory of the 248th Engineering Division of the U.S. Army, landed June 6, 1944," or "In Honor of the Men of the 126th Division of the United States Marines, landed June 6th, 1944," followed by lists of all the men who had died during that invasion. I began to cry and could not stop weeping. Since before memory I have been mesmerized by footage of the D-Day landings, those men with weapons and vehicles rising out of the waters onto the beach. When I first began working on my epilogue, I was not sure if this was my fantasy image of the D-Day landing: how can men and vehicles rise up out of the waters? I was certainly too young to have seen such footage in contemporaneous newsreels, but they are nonetheless imprinted in my memory. Nor do they have personal familial resonance: my father was a physicist who worked locally during the war on the development of microwave radar tubes.

One dream from my training analysis was particularly vivid and returned to again and again. It resurfaced in my memory as I wrote about being born into a world at war. In my dream I am standing up in my crib. My mother and my (male) analyst's mother (or perhaps, as dream images float around, it was a senior woman analyst from my institute), both dressed in unmistakably 1940s suits and hats, are going off to Times Square to celebrate V-E Day. In this dream, World War II again enters my unconscious via cultural images, but this time accurately pinpointed, at exactly the right time in my life, about one and a half, when babies can stand up in their cribs to be picked up, or, as in this dream, not to be picked up but to be left behind. These events that happened in World War II have thus not simply entered my fantasy life in dreams and day images, but even as an adult they place me at the right age in the historical setting. The dream portrays loss and abandon-

ment, as well as exclusion from the exciting photo images of those V-E Day celebrations. My mother did not, she says, go into Manhattan from Long Island to celebrate V-E Day, and she was a full-time stay-at-home mother (though, after she read my paper, she did recall picking me up on V-J Day and telling me what an important day in history it was). But loss, as I will describe presently, is prominent among the affective themes that this war seems to have evoked in my age mates.

Another set of associations is relevant, arising from the actuality of the effects of World War II on my life. My father's coworkers in New York were mainly non-Jewish scientists from the West, and shortly after the war, in 1947, we moved to California, where even as late as 1961, when I graduated from high school, I was the only Jewish girl in my class and one of a few Easterners. I was thus a Jewish New Yorker who grew up in California and who as a preschooler wanted to be a cowgirl (or cowboy). Playing "King of the Mountain" with my friends, we yelled "Bombs over Tokyo!" having no idea what it meant. As I got older, I puzzled about why most of my friends thought World War II took place in the Pacific and was against Japan instead of taking place in Europe and being about Hitler and the Jews. To return to the context of dream and screen, to this day I am attached to train travel (trains originally took us West and, every few years, East to visit relatives). I feel that I truly belong in the East and mourn every return to the West, though I have lived almost my entire life in California. In New York City itself, I alternate between feeling warmly and completely at home and feeling sadly adrift and desolate.

Finally, I was reminded recently of the sadness and displacement that for me are associated with the period of World War II when I went to an exhibit at the DeYoung Museum in San Francisco of the work of Chiura Obata, a Japanese-American artist. I had known and loved a book of Obata's stunning paintings of Yosemite (the place where, my mother reports, she finally felt at home in California), so I was thrilled to see the originals. In the next rooms, however, were Obata's drawings and paintings of the Tanforan Racetrack on the San Francisco Peninsula, the "transportation center" where he, despite being a professor at Berkeley, had been first interned,

along with other Japanese-Americans, and then his stunning renderings of Topaz, Utah, the internment camp, which combined gorgeous sunsets with barbed wire. As on Omaha Beach, I wept and could not stop.

My memories document the singularity of my historical and social experience while concomitantly reflecting patterns that result from belonging to a particular category of people. As I have put it elsewhere (1999), certain collective experiences demand psychological processing and response, but this psychological processing and response will be individually created. In the case of those born during World War II, these experiences arise in the shadow of this upheaval. Constituting, as I have noted, a finely tuned birth cohort, the members of the Class of 1965 form part of a classic generation, although this concept needs to be defined by more than just chronology. As the sociologist of knowledge Karl Mannheim (1928) puts it, “individuals of the same age are united as an actual generation in so far as they participate in the characteristic social and intellectual currents of the society and period, and in so far as they have an active or passive experience of the interactions of forces which made up the new situation” (304). Mannheim suggests that people born during a particular era, by virtue of living in the same “historico-social space” or “historical life community,” have common experiences that lead to common ways of knowing and perceiving.

The writers in *Born Into a World at War* found themselves at the same college in the same period of history, but they have few common cultural or historical origins. Differences in background are as prominent as the similarities. We find in the group those who most stand for the great destruction and genocide wrought by the Nazis—the children of German and East European Jews born to parents who were in hiding, or had fled to other unsafe countries, or had reached the United States. Other accounts, however, remind us that there were also children born in countries occupied by the Japanese, as well as non-Jewish children born into countries occupied by the Germans, whose relatives likewise died in concentration camps. The son of a German war widow gives us insight into the effects of the war on some German women and children,

and a Japanese-born woman describes what it was like to make do as a child in her native country. (We do not, for political reasons and in cultural practice, call German and Japanese children born during World War II “survivors,” but they most certainly were.) One narrative reminds us of the outrageous American internment of U.S. citizens and immigrants of Japanese origin. This Sansei son lived in an internment camp with his mother and other family members while his Nisei father was in the U.S. Army in a strategic role in the Pacific. Life stories from both European- and American-born writers document how closely the experiences of the generation born during World War II could be tied to the Cold War that followed immediately—fathers who disappeared for political reasons into Polish jails or fled Slovenia during partisan fighting, leaving wife and child behind. One writer filters a childhood in war through his experience as an English child in a bombed-out city with food shortages. Many others experienced the effects of war through the mobility of their families or the absence or loss of fathers.

Members of this “generation” were thus born to Jewish Holocaust refugees or those in hiding. They were born in Germany and in countries invaded by the Japanese. They were born in England, Japan, Slovenia, and Uzbekistan, and their place of birth might or might not be the birthplace of their parents. They were born throughout the United States, where fathers were sometimes in the army, where some mothers worked in Rosie the Riveter jobs while others, whose husbands were in the army, went home with their children to create extended families with parents, while other fathers, like mine, did war work. And we find, over and over, accounts of displacement—from relatively untraumatic moves such as mine across the United States, to refugees fleeing and hiding, to moves from Ukraine to Uzbekistan to the United States. Our generation was not born during postwar prosperity to intact families with optimistic parents, but, in all cases, to families in which the parents were, more or less globally, affected by war. In the most tragic cases, families were torn apart and destroyed, leaving few survivors. In other families, fathers were often far away when a child was born or for some time

afterwards, and mothers—often far from home themselves—were worried and overwhelmed. When families moved, it was not, as it became later, primarily part of a general pattern of American mobility or a function of job transfers in a growing economy, but because of dislocation, war, and its immediate aftermath. It would not be surprising if Erikson developed the notion of identity crisis with this migrant, refugee, and mobile generation in mind.

Psychoanalytic theory and listening are attuned to both individuality and commonality. Among the narratives, manifest content and personal and family uniqueness preserve individuality in all its contextual and internal richness and variation. At the same time, psychoanalytic listening, including the use of my self, even with people from such widely varied backgrounds and experience, enabled me to find—as Mannheim would predict—common perspectives in affect, conflict, and fantasy. These included a pervasive sense of loss and depressive affect, silences and explosions, occasional defensive mania, preoccupation with father-absence, and the taking of mothers for granted. I also could see the very different ways that history and culture are experienced. People bring personal interpretations to parental fantasies and identity and to unconsciously as well as consciously transmitted cultural and historical circumstances. In each individual case such personal interpretations help generate identity—who someone is or becomes. They filter conscious and unconscious parental transmissions and culture and media through reconstructions and memory, and through the immediate sense of being.

World War II assumed decisive concreteness in the life of anyone born into it, but it was a different war for each person. And although we can elucidate various psychic and narrative themes that characterize many people's experiences, we can never predict their exact effect or outcome, even when it comes to how a family will react to losing members in the concentration camps. The "same" event or experience—*Kristallnacht*, being the child of Holocaust survivors, being a survivor oneself—can be undergone and handled in many different ways. Among the children of survivors, we find a

range from ebullient optimism and a claim that all is right with the world, to simple relief at having survived, to emotional frozenness and painful depression. In some families, there is silence and occlusion of a loss that is too painful to acknowledge. Other families, by contrast, rather than mourning their losses, celebrate survival and make cheerful, positive thinking a goal. One writer whose uncle was killed in Auschwitz, and whose parents endured ten years of separation, describes how his father called these the “happiest ten years” of his life, and claims that his parents led a “charmed” existence, but he also suggests that his parents may have displaced the intensity of their losses and fears into preoccupied concern for an ill child (Stolper 2000, 80).

With respect to commonalities, one writer, whose comment struck me very much, expresses a cultural-affective tonality when he remarks that he considers himself a subdued and reserved pre-baby boomer. Indeed, these accounts do not in general display the buoyant optimism that we associate with baby-boomers and their sense of limitless possibility. Members of this generation and cohort, moreover, seem self-aware about their historical location: we are not postmodern. Many of us participated in '60s politics, but although we may have claimed never to trust anyone over thirty, these accounts, perhaps especially those from the children of immigrants, portray a kind of piety and obedience, an orientation to and concern for our parents and attempts to support them and do what they wanted.

Psychoanalytic listening suggests that we attend to childhood, an admonition that we take, as psychocultural scholars, particularly from Erikson. While calling upon psychoanalysts to theorize how history assumes decisive concreteness in the individual psyche, Erikson makes a complementary demand upon historians and social scientists: “Students of history continue to ignore the simple fact that all individuals are born by mothers; that everybody was once a child; that people and peoples begin in their nurseries; and that society consists of individuals in the process of developing from children into parents” (1959, 18). Childhood does not determine the rest of life; but in childhood, we are forming our selves. At this time,

the personal filtering of history, through our parents especially, is as likely to be nonverbal as verbal, less able to be weighed and cognized than later learning or learning from less emotionally important people.

The 1943–44 birth cohort is made up of people whose direct experience of the war was while they were babies and toddlers. Their stories attest to the psychic weight of early childhood, the deep affective resonances of experience that cannot at the time—and only sometimes afterwards—be named. An American-born Gentile who in adulthood came to be obsessed with the Holocaust remembers at two years of age her own personal catastrophe of simultaneously losing mother and father. Mother left for several months to take care of her own suddenly sick mother in another state, and father retreated into work. She remembers World War II news and music on the radio, as she wandered about their apartment desolate. One of our country's most well-known psychologists describes with great candor how he manages early feelings of terror and loss. He cannot sit through violence in movies, skips sections on violence in books, and has shied away from or avoided entirely the study of affects in his professional work.

When we begin from and refer to childhood, we are very much in the modality of all the senses, not just in the mode of intellectual reflection. An Englishman, slightly older than the other contributors, focuses on the basic elements of daily life, those that matter to children. He remembers the physical realities of rubble in the street and rooms open to the sky. For him, “war’s end was associated with food” (Graham-White 2000, 108): you could get oranges and bananas. He ties current life experience to this period, wondering whether he is a light sleeper because of a childhood spent in one of the most bombed cities in England, and he contrasts “the” war with *his* war. *His* war was food shortages, two uncles missing in action, and German prisoners of war marched up the streets. As he puts it, “*wartime* in a child’s memory is not so easily stopped.” A German contributor also remember basics such as food and hunger, “the everyday struggle to make do” and find enough to eat (Katzlberger 2000, 119).

Psychoanalytic listening helps us to see how society and history assume decisive concreteness in the individual in the

form of specific transferences and resistances. It also allows us to trace salient affective and familial themes, patterns of subjectivity that in no case characterize all the contributions but are often found in several. What I first noticed was an emotional tonality common to many of the narratives. Members of this generation experience the world through what we might consider, loosely, a depressive lens. Not everyone is sad, and no one is sad all the time, but an elegiac tonality pervades the volume. Sadness and depression, and even in some cases a sense of emptiness and hopelessness, come, probably, from loss and mourning. This is especially clear in the accounts of those who left their native countries, not just the children of Jewish Holocaust survivors, but also those who fled Asian countries or countries being taken over by the Soviet advance. These were children born to parents trying to make it through the war under terrible conditions or, even in this country, to parents who had relatives still in Europe and who, after the war ended during their children's early years, learned more about their own familial losses as well as about the scale of the devastation.

A generalized sense of loss also seems to result from displacement. This is visible even in my own reactions—relieved later in my reactions to New York and to the Obata Exhibit—to a relatively benign postwar cross-country move with a mother who felt separated from her family of origin, even though we immediately developed many friends; but it is especially clear in those who, along with their parents, lost a native language, homeland, and culture. In addition to themes of loss that I infer to be filtered through parents, the children of soldiers—American soldiers, German and English soldiers, Slovenian soldiers—report the direct experience of loss of and separation from their fathers, as do those few contributors who describe one parent disappearing for a period of months or even years for family or political reasons.

The reasons for these latter disappearances may not have been directly war-related, but I note the accounts as part of the general affective and transferential tone I find in them. There was, I think, even for those born in the safety of the United States, a general cultural atmosphere of anxiety and fear about

the present and future that simply hung over the world during the infancy of this group, such that, before children could speak, this anxiety, along with love and concern, was communicated by parents. Narratives also describe puzzlement, about where fathers were, or why moves were happening, and we know that, especially for very young children, not knowing why things happen can lead to a sense of futility.

Another, more specific theme, though not found in as many narratives, is a sense of horror and coping with horror: holocausts in the generic sense as well as the actual Holocaust. Crashing, explosions, and massacres reappear in stories and associations. The shattering glass of *Kristallnacht*, along with the murder of relatives, is evoked in several accounts. A Chinese-American woman describes learning, first implicitly and then through being explicitly taught, about the rageful devastation and torture of the Rape of Nanking, while a Malaysian describes the brutal Japanese invasion of Malaysia. One woman's father worked on the Manhattan Project. Somehow, but as a girl she did not quite know how, he was involved in the largest explosion of all time, which her mother captured in poetry.

At the other end of the spectrum, silences are described, including a contribution from a professional musician who titles her contribution "Silence" (Oppens 2000). There turns out to be wide variation in how Holocaust and other survivor parents did or did not talk about their experience or what happened to family members. Contributors felt these silences and sometimes figured out the truth in adulthood through books, or they were told about successes and survivals, but not about those who did not survive. One says, "we never talked about the people who had disappeared, or sorrow or loss or thwarted ambitions or bitterness" (Tanz 2000, 135). Another claims, "the most important family events could not be discussed" (Oppens 2000, 123–24). A third describes his parents' "route of silence" (Gardner 2000, 202). This not talking, I imagine, was not only a conscious choice intended to spare the children but also a way for the parents to survive psychically.

Parents are not only filtered through emotional tone but found in children's mental representations. Here, fathers and

mothers appear differently. Fathers especially loom large in many accounts. Some sons idealize soldier-fathers and their brave exploits; other sons and daughters of soldier-fathers focus more on their fathers' absence. Mothers also participated in idealizing soldier-fathers as well as protecting them upon return from the demands of young children. Several writers describe the inability to connect emotionally with fathers until late in life or wistfully watching fathers who were able to form closer attachments to siblings born after the war or who had formed solid attachments with those born before. One contribution is titled "Wartime Separation, or Why It Took My Father Fifty-five Years to Get Used to Me" (Hayler 2000). The opening sentence in another contribution reads: "my sister, my mother, my grandparents, a dog—all inhabit my earliest memories, but my father is not there" (Lewis 2000, 285). One woman reports screaming in fear when she and her mother arrived after the war to join her father who was part of the occupying forces in Germany. In one painful narrative, a man describes the wrenching experience of his father simply disappearing for five years, when he got on a plane in Warsaw and did not disembark in Prague. In another narrative prefiguring the Cold War, a Slovenian partisan father disappeared for several months while fighting the Communists in 1944–45. A German draftee father sent his last letter in January 1945 and was presumably killed shortly thereafter. His son says, "being 'lost' is worse than dead" (Katzlberger 2000, 118).

It is no accident, I think, that psychological attention to "father-absence" peaked in the 1940s and 1950s. Not only during the war, but also during the subsequent Occupation, many fathers were not with their families, and many men were traumatized after they returned. The family culture that emerged in the postwar period, partly in reaction, radically accentuated the difference between mothers and fathers and kept almost all middle-class mothers in the home, while fathers worked long hours or went back to school on the G.I. Bill. Indeed, the phenomenon of "father-absence" even in physically "present" fathers, as well as the intensity of mother-presence, was one of the roots of my own early interest in the parental division of labor that resulted in *The Reproduction of Mothering*.

Mothers, in contrast to fathers, appear in more varied guises, but they are never a central focus of the narratives. Children of survivors tend to subsume them into the parental couple. Some describe with sympathy mothers who were depressed, distracted, or unable to cope easily, as were many mothers who raised children on their own with husbands away at war or under conditions of siege. Yet longing for their emotional presence is less articulated than that for fathers. Nor are mothers objects of equal curiosity and wonder. They are described in passing as taken-for-granted parts of an account of an activity or event. Only one woman describes the jobs held by her mother and other female relatives, and one or two mothers are focused on and portrayed as energetic and feisty.

It is probably an occupational hazard of psychoanalytic listening to magnify silences, shatterings, explosions, sadness, absence, and loss. It is also always a dangerous temptation to try to cut through the social totality to elaborate shared psychological themes, or to cut through the psychic complexity of any individual to pick out certain patterns or elements in common, both of which I have just done. So, before concluding, I think it is important to remind readers that the psychic processes I am describing belong to a very successful cohort, who made it, from all parts of the world and all manner of experience, to one of the best universities in the United States and who have taken their early childhoods and college educations into rich and fulfilling lives. Contributors acknowledge deep attachments to parents, and the stories from even the most traumatized families include accounts of resilience and the capacity to move forward. Many describe anxiety-inducing, but ultimately accepted, lessons from their parents about how to protect oneself from upheavals, to have, for example, portable professions, to learn many languages, to have concern for the world in the face of the nuclear threat. In one memorable instance, a Chinese immigrant father warned his daughter against political activity, because of his own experiences in China of the dangers that might arise, but he advised her that, if she had to go to the demonstration, she should be sure to sit in the middle!

Scholars and writers today wonder about how to represent the Holocaust—the major cataclysmic and tragic event of the twentieth century—or indeed if it can be represented at all. Considering as I have done the narratives of a few people born into a world at war in no way holds in mind the totality of this event with its all-engulfing horror. Rather, this essay suggests that attending to individual lives, and the patterns of affect and fantasy that they express, can give us a window into social and historical processes, even those on the scale of World War II. We do not, in so doing, “reduce” the historical and horrific to a set of individual experiences or psychologize it away. Rather, psychoanalytic listening gives depth and richness to what we analyze politically and historically.

As I was reading the essays for the volume *Born into a World at War* and considering my epilogue, I went to the Bay Area Jewish Film Festival. One film, Daniel Meyers’s *17, rue St. Fiacre*, described how two Jewish French children whose parents had been deported were saved and protected by a working-class Catholic woman in their small town. I was riveted and horrified, but experienced myself as watching a historical film about events that had taken place over fifty years ago. Then the narrator said, “On January 20, 1944, Charles Malméd [age five] was deported to Auschwitz. In his convoy, number sixty-six, there were 1,115 Jews. Two hundred and six were children. None of the children survived.” I was immediately there. That was the day on which I was born into a world at war.

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Note

1. The present essay is adapted and expanded from this epilogue.

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