Reception for the visitor group of the IPA Congress to Documenta on July 22nd 2007

Dear colleagues,

As chair of the Kassel Psychoanalytic Institute I am delighted, on behalf of our members, to be able to welcome you, visitors from different countries, to our Alexander Mitscherlich Psychoanalytic Institute. Your visit is a real honour for us and a great pleasure.

No doubt you will have noticed on your tour of the city that its appearance is characterised by post-war rebuilding. Please allow me some remarks on history. Before the second world war Kassel was one of the most beautiful cities in Germany. Some quarters of the city still remind us of that and old illustrations provide further evidence. Artists, poets and thinkers came from this city. The residential city flourished because of its industry. Kassel was one of the most important locations for the arms industry of the Third Reich. At the opening of the first IPA Congress on German soil after the war in 1985 the mayor of Hamburg said: Who states our Bach and our Beethoven has to state as well our Hitler.

As a consequence of the destructive National Socialist megalomania, also being produced in Kassel, the city was the target of a devastating bombing raid during the night of 22 October 1943. The official account of British Bomber Command reported: ‘Seven days after the attack, fires were still burning in Kassel and a smoky haze lay over the smouldering ruins of the city. The area of the inner city presented a scene of utter desolation and the destruction stretched as far as the industrial areas on both sides of the Fulda River and into the suburbs. In the oldest part of the city, the main business and shopping centres, between the river and the Königsplatz, not a single
building remained intact and only a few were still standing. In the areas bordering the old city and the new upper city, where there were many public and administrative buildings, and the lower city, where there were many business establishments, 96% of the total property was destroyed.’ Around 10,000 people died that night. Those who were born at that time are today 64 years old, if they survived. We know from our psychoanalytical treatments that external events from past and present encroach on the inner world and mix with our phantasies. We become witnesses to the way this mixture is handed on to following generations.

In 1967 Alexander Mitscherlich, after whom our institute is named, published a book called ‘The Inability to Mourn’, together with Margarete Mitscherlich, who will speak in Berlin. In it they described, how there had been no mourning in Germany for the loss of the identification with Hitler’s megalomania, an identification which had been extraordinary. Instead, in West Germany, the work of reconstruction was undertaken in all sorts of ways and with the generous support of the allies. The Kassel cityscape, which you have already seen, is a characteristic testimony to this inability to mourn.

Arnold Bode, a Kassel professor of art, made an attempt at recollection and reparation. In 1955 he invited the modern artists who had been banished by fascism back to Germany for the first documenta. He thus established one of the most significant exhibitions of contemporary art.

What Arnold Bode managed in the field of art, Alexander Mitscherlich achieved in a similar way as a psychoanalyst. Together with Fred Mielke he documented the Nürnberg trials of doctors, a work which is published under the title ‘Medizin ohne Menschlichkeit’ (medicine without humanity). Building on this foundation, Mitscherlich succeeded in re-establishing contact with international psychoanalysis at the start of the 50s.

When today, 62 years after the end of the National Socialist reign of terror, you are our guest to the IPA Congress and to the documenta, we are aware that your visit takes place against the historical background I have outlined, and we thank you for coming.

Our institute, which now has around 40 members, was set up in 1978. In the wake of the 68er movement a reform university was founded in Kassel, at which five
psychoanalysts were appointed professors. This connection to the university is a distinguishing mark of our institute to this day. Even if the wind of the zeitgeist is blowing against us, we are still represented at the university. And because this university trains neither psychologists nor doctors, our colleagues apply psychoanalytical knowledge and principles in the training of teachers, social workers and gerontologists. Kassel psychoanalysts have been active from the beginning in various fields of psychoanalysis. Our colleagues set up our private institute as I mentioned 29 years ago to train psychoanalysts, following the guidelines of the IPA. And we are part of the Deutsche Psychoanalytische Vereinigung, which was founded in 1950.

One of the founders of our institute, Prof. Eugen Mahler, combines art and psychoanalysis in his own person. We are glad that he is staying with us this evening. He is the creator of the works you have already seen in our rooms. Tomorrow he will accompany you to the documenta. You will also find works there by Charlotte Posenenske, who has had shows with Eugen Mahler and who is a representative of the modern art at this documenta. Is modernity our antiquity? asks Roger Buergel, the documenta director. You will be able to answer this question tomorrow.

There is one work which I would especially like to mention on this occasion. You perhaps noticed it during your tour of the city. It is an art carousel in Friedrichsplatz called: ‘The Exclusive. On the Politics of the Excluded Fourth.’ Andreas Siekmann is working on a problem which is very political but equally profoundly psychological. To the legislative, the judicatory and the executive we have, according to the artist, added an exclusive, which we use to exclude foreigners from the third and fourth worlds and keep them at a distance from us.

No doubt your psychoanalytical ears have already pricked up at the term ‘Excluded Third and Excluded Fourth’ and you have possibly been reminded of Erikson. In his model of the psycho-social stages of the human life cycle, exclusivity is the counterpart of the intimacy which is to develop at the stage of young adulthood. In personal development, Quote ‘There can be no intimacy without some exclusivity…and no generativity that does not exclude those whom one does not care for...
But, and this makes the problem: All this is related to man’s instinctuality, which has replaced the animal’s instinctivity in such matters of attraction and aversion – not however without the danger of libidinal and aggressive excess in collective as well as in private life. For the constant antithesis of a sympathetic and an antipathic readiness leads to that universal dividedness which in small and big matters makes of man an ambivalent animal.’ Erikson warns against ‘pseudo-speciation’, a term which, he says, ‘I have used to indicate that humanity is universally inclined to differentiate within itself a variety of sub-species – nations, races, classes etc.’ The danger of this pseudo-speciation lies in the fact that, ‘It invites a denial of human identification to groups of outsiders, who thus become expendable to the point of inviting annihilation.’

Dear colleagues, by your visit you are making a contribution to the search for ways of avoiding a repetition of the past. To remember, to work through and not to repeat – as psychoanalysts we know how hard that is. The documenta, where the main topic is the migration of form and therefore also the dialogue with the past and its manifestations in the present, offers many approaches to engaging us further and deeper with these questions. We hope that the visit to the art exhibition will be of personal benefit to you. On Wednesday you will be welcomed in Berlin by the chair of the Deutsche Psychoanalytische Vereinigung, Mrs. Schlesinger-Kipp, who comes from our institute and whose practice is in these rooms. We are rather proud of this fact.

We look forward to meeting you over the next couple of days and to carrying on our connection in Berlin.