



STUMBLE STONES

Mourning and Memory – The Cultural Complex

A Testimony

Ruth Breuer

“Mourning is an essential process of the psyche, fundamental to the development of the individual, through the ages, as well as within families and cultures.”

“It has validity at both the individual and the collective level, in the intrapsychic and the interactive.”

“It involves pain, work and discovery”.

(P. C. Racamier, *Le génie des origines*, Payot, 1992)

Introduction

My aim is to present the concept of a cultural complex. We will see that while this is a new concept within the theoretical corpus of analytical psychology



Figure 1 *Felix Nussbaum, Self-portrait with Jewish passport - 1943*

according to Jung, it is one that anthropologists and ethnologists are familiar with. I hope to demonstrate the usefulness of the concept in the clinical work of Jungian analysis.

Above all, however, I wish to share a personal experience which will show how both the individual and the group identity of each one of us is formed by cultural complexes which cause pain, entail work and can eventually lead to a discovery.

A Personal Experience

On July 20th, 2011, I am with a group of 30 or so friends standing outside 22, rue Archimède in Brussels. Gunter Demnig arrives in his small van with his tools. An assistant accompanies him. I introduce myself. With no unnecessary preliminaries, he shows me the stumble stones, the Stolpersteine, which he has created in his workshop in Cologne. I feel the weight of them in my hands and read the text engraved on the plaque. Emotion overcomes me. We kneel down in front of the house and choose the best place to locate them. I prefer to put the stones side by side, rather than one above the other. The electric saw cuts noisily through the bit of paving stone, which must first be cut from the footpath. A cloud of dust blinds those gathered around. Demnig, down on one knee, clears out the space, inserts the stumbling stones, adjusts them, cements them into position, adds sand and water, steps back to check on his work, brushes off the stones, cleans them with a cloth. This quick, precise, professional work accomplished in silence, imposes intense respect and reverence on the assembled group. A sob is heard ...

Demnig tells me: “You can’t leave Felix Nussbaum out.”

Hearing these words, I know that the work which I commissioned from him has meaning for him as well, and that our gesture, which belongs to all who have taken part, is right and just.

This is the culmination of a story which began on my birthday in 2011, although it had been building inside me ever since chance dictated that I should be born into my particular family and cultural group.

As a birthday present, Parisian friends gave me the catalogue of the Felix Nussbaum exhibition at the Musée d'art et d'histoire du judaïsme de Paris (2010/2011) which had excited great interest in France and Belgium.

Although I knew his work, I did not know the life story of the artist. I discovered that Felix Nussbaum, a German Jewish painter born in 1904, went into exile in Belgium with his Polish-Jewish companion Felka Platek, herself a painter; that they got married in Brussels in 1937 and were deported to Auschwitz via the Dossin military barracks at Mechelen (Flanders); that they were in the last convoy to leave Belgium and were murdered at Auschwitz in early August 1944.

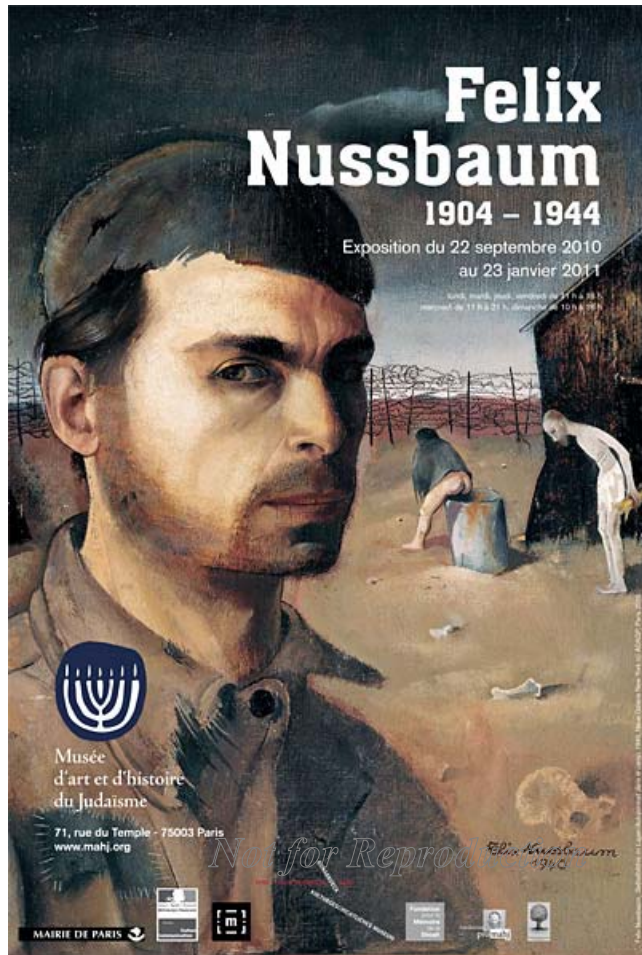


Figure 2 Felix Nussbaum Poster

Felix Nussbaum had recently turned forty. A few weeks later, Belgium was liberated. I was taken aback to discover also that for many years I had passed almost daily in front of the last house they had lived in. They lived there in hiding until they were denounced. The house at 22 rue Archimède, in Bruxelles-Ville, lies half-way between my own home and Schuman Square, where the

headquarters of our new Europe, a key player on the international stage and keeper of the peace between 27 European democratic countries, is now located.



Figure 3 Jew at the Window by Felix Nussbaum, 1943.

I suddenly became aware of the absolute necessity and clear personal duty of honoring the memory of these two artists. This is where they took refuge and where, as he felt the end of his life approaching, Felix Nussbaum painted increasingly poignant works, which still remain largely unknown in Belgium. The nature of the location lends itself symbolically to my undertaking. Which is what exactly?

A commemorative plaque? There has to be something better. I decide to have stumble stones laid – Stolpersteine. A stumble stone

is a small block of concrete, a 10 cm cube, with a brass plaque on top. The plaque is engraved with the words: “Here lived” followed by the name of the victim, date

of birth, the date and place of deportation, the manner in which they were killed and the date of their death, in so far as these facts are known.

The stone is inserted into the footpath in front of the last known residence of a victim of the National Socialists: Jews, Romani gypsies, members of the resistance movement, communists, homosexuals, the physically and mentally disabled, Jehovah's Witnesses, Freemasons. The list of persecuted minorities is long.



Figure 4 Stumble Stones for a Freemason

I feel that I'd like to involve as many people as possible in my venture and so I contact almost a hundred friends, acquaintances and members of my family, from several European countries, to tell them what I am planning to do. Three-quarters of them get involved through their moral support, financial

contributions or presence at the ceremony.

I made sure I had the organizational support of the Association pour la Mémoire de la Shoah (The Belgian Association for Holocaust Remembrance), which had the first stumble stones laid in Belgium in 2009 and I also made the necessary contacts with the local council for my borough of Bruxelles-Ville.

The Stumble Stone – Stolperstein

The idea of a Stolperstein and its intellectual property are that of Gunter Demnig, an artist living in Cologne/Germany. The stones have to be commissioned from him.

In 1993, Gunter Demnig, who was born in Berlin in 1947, used a public art event to remind the city of Cologne of the deportation and massacre of the Romani and Sinti gypsies by the Nazis, and from that event came the idea for the stones. He laid the first ones illegally at the request of particular survivors. In no time at all, local authorities throughout Germany were adopting his idea and giving it their support. By now, many tens of thousands of stones have been laid, both in major cities and in the smallest of villages. There are also stones of remembrance in Austria – even in Braunau, Hitler’s hometown – and also in Poland, Italy, Hungary, the Netherlands, Norway and the Ukraine. Approximately forty have been laid in Belgium in the towns of Liège and Antwerp as well as in Brussels. Gunter Demnig crafts the stones in his workshop in Frechen, near Cologne. Whenever possible, he lays the stones himself, traveling with an assistant and all the materials necessary for his work as an “artist-paver”. He lays the stones in the presence of those who commissioned them: survivors or descendants, former neighbours, local residents, schools, institutions, museums, politicians, the media. And here, on this occasion, in the presence of my friends and myself.

“Stolperstein” – the word chosen by Gunter Demnig – means literally “stumbling block”. The stone or block over which one stumbles. The slight unevenness that it creates in the pavement unbalances the step of the would-be upstanding citizen. The walker’s attention is caught and he stops for a moment to read what is written on the stone. He feels a certain emotion. He reflects. In a discreet manner, just in passing, the memory of both the crimes and their victims is brought back into public consciousness.

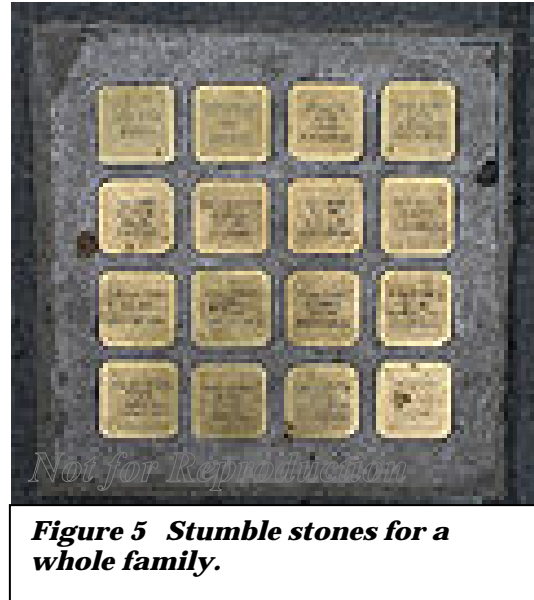


Figure 5 Stumble stones for a whole family.

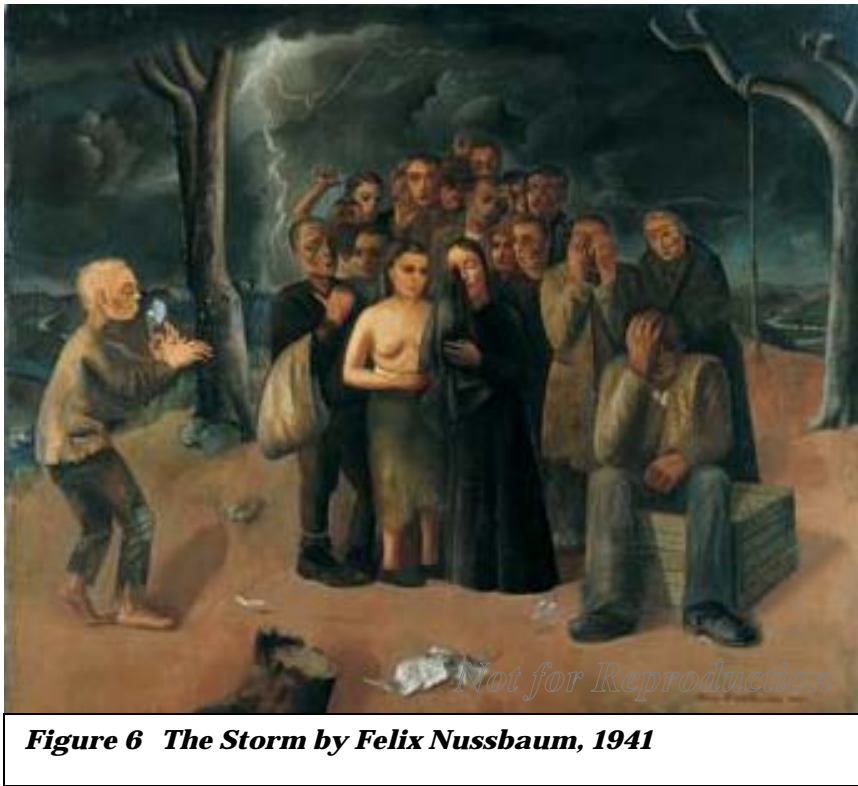


Figure 6 The Storm by Felix Nussbaum, 1941

Over time, the brass tarnishes. In Hamburg, people living close to a Stolperstein have been asked to keep it polished up with a metal cleaning agent: a gesture of renewal

which staves off indifference and oblivion.



Figure 7 Gunter Demnig laying stumble stones

A Jungian Reading

Why have these stumble stones, these commemorative paving stones, been so widely adopted? How is it that everyone immediately grasps their meaning and is moved by them?

Clearly, the stones have a representational value capable of forging a link between the conscious and the unconscious and of bringing about a new awareness. To my mind, they connect with the unconscious at the level where cultural complexes - which I will come back to later – are lodged.

Like Jung, we feel that words sometimes lack reality. Jung designed, illustrated and wrote out in beautiful script “The Red Book”. He constructed the Bollingen tower and sculpted in stone his research into the Self. He imbues this activity with unlimited significance when he says: *“A psychic reality is both physical and spiritual”* (cf.: The Secret of the Golden Flower, CW 8/1). We Jungians have the habit of sensing hidden meaning behind surface reality. I have attempted to decipher the Stolpersteine in this light.

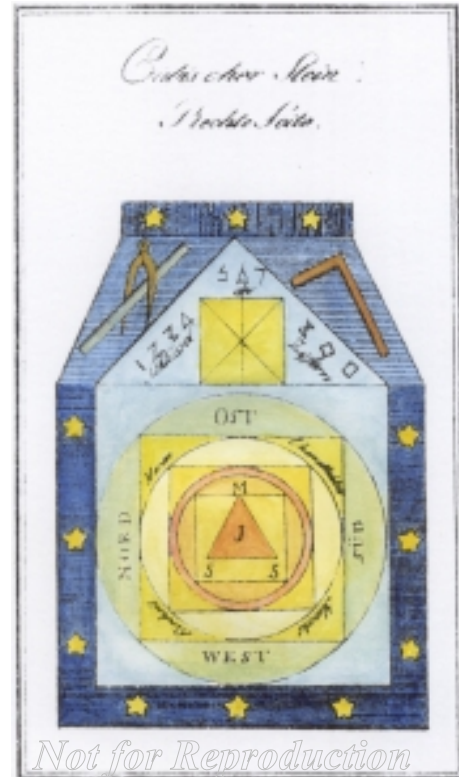


Figure 8 Cubic Stone

The stone: Three dimensional and indestructible, it signifies space-time to us. Due to its hardness, its stability, its durability, its ubiquity and its pre-formed appearance rich with all possible forms, the stone appears to man as a symbol of the sacred. In the vertical dimension, piled one on top of another, the stones can be used to build walls – the Berlin wall, the wall between Palestine and Israel, the wailing wall in Jerusalem. In the horizontal dimension, stones create the roads which lead one to another such as the Via Appia Antica. In our Jungian language, the lapis is the symbol of individuation and the Self.



Figure 9 *Deucalion and Pyrrha Throwing stones behind their shoulders in order to repeople the earth*

The Stolperstein is not a rough stone. It has been cut to become a paving block. It has demanded work.

The brass plaque that surmounts it is a 10 cm by 10 cm square. This perfect geometric shape evokes the cosmic circle which may enclose it.

The body of the stone is buried

in the earth of the pavement. It is set into the invisible, subterranean world on which the visible sky rests. The golden colour of the brass evokes the light. As a whole, it forms the eternal pair of earth-sky.

When he places his stones, Gunther Demnig, observed by those gathered around, accomplishes a physical task, which makes concrete all of these signifiers. The stone, recessed into the pavement with no intervening spaces, is palpable, tangible and



Figure 10 *Key stone*

beautiful. Demnig is a sculptor and metalworker, an artist-craftsman paver. In antiquity, his god would have been Hephaestus.

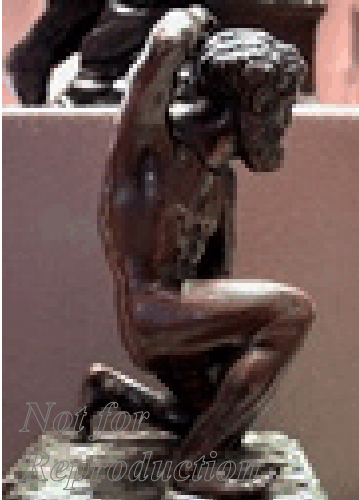


Figure 11 Hephaestus

Master of the arts and of fire, Hephaestus, the limping god, governs the industrious world of blacksmiths, goldsmiths and craftsmen in general. He is the master of fire and metal. He is an inventor for whom no technical miracle is impossible.

Demnig does not have a limp, but he wears a protective leather pad around the knee he rests on when working. One's gaze is automatically drawn to his leg. He wears jewels in his ears and a wide-brimmed hat hides his face. When he lifts his eyes, they reveal an expression of mischievous charm. Hephaestus must have had charm to seduce Aphrodite, the love goddess, and the most beautiful of his numerous companions.

Brass is an alloy of copper and zinc. Copper is attributed to Venus/Aphrodite. Its golden colour recalls the sun.

The word "alloy" shares its etymological root with "alliance", which is a pact between two people or groups of people. These paving stones aim to seal the pact to never again separate one from another by violence or brutality.

Beneath our feet, in anonymity, lie the victims of the holocaust, stripped of their dignity. Through the paving stones, they rediscover their name and their destiny, their individuality and their human presence. They belong, once more, to the community of men.

The stones had to be financed. I decided to make a broad appeal to my friends, colleagues and acquaintances, knowing that after having thought, felt and suffered, it often does one good to act. The result of my fund raising showed

that I made the right decision. We were offering the stones in memory of Nussbaum and Platek, and through them, to the memory of six million victims from over seventy years ago. In return, we receive their presence in our life today.

These amplifications around the stumble stones only occurred to me, one after the other, once the stones had been set into the pavement. As the stones were embedded in the earth, so they embedded themselves in me, and there they do their work. I need only accept and remain attentive. Over-interpretation would pin things down too tightly. Meaning vanishes when revealed.

The Cultural Complex

This is what I did and what I experienced. Not that this initiative was a spontaneous action. Far from it. It was a personal working through of a specific cultural complex related

to my German identity. However, the resonance that this undertaking provoked amongst those whom I asked to join me, suggests the hypothesis that a cultural complex was constellated on a larger scale, at a group



Figure 12 *Destruction* by Felix Nussbaum, 1933

level. We had in fact formed a group of people who were moved and roused by the same drive “to do something”. On that day, I was very aware of the powerful emotion at work inside all of us.

The Theoretical Concept

Before going any further, it is essential first of all to explain the general theoretical concept of the cultural complex. I shall then present a particular cultural complex: my own, which I share with many Germans. This part will also be illustrated by two clinical vignettes from my own work as an analyst.

“Although the contents of the personal unconscious are acquired in the course of an individual’s life, the contents of the collective unconscious are always archetypes which are present from the beginning” (Jung, CW 9/2 Aion par 13).

We Jungians talk about two layers of the unconscious: on the one hand, the personal unconscious, where repressed or forgotten personal experiences and complexes are stored; and on the other hand, the collective unconscious which is the seat of instincts and expresses itself through archetypes. In our clinical work, we take both levels into consideration. But could there not be a third – the cultural layer?

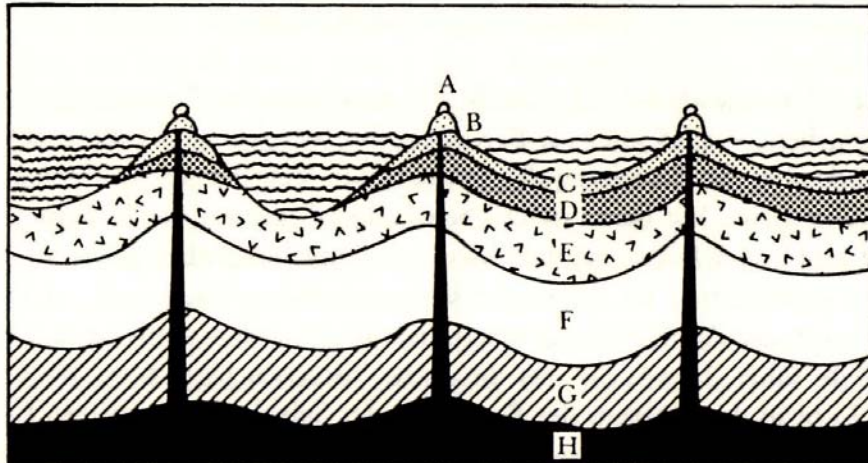


Diagramm 10

- A = Individuen
- B = Familien
- C = Klans
- D = Nationen
- E = größere Gruppen
(z. B. Der europäische Mensch)
- F = Ahnengruppen der Primaten
- G = Tierahnen im allgemeinen
- H = das »zentrale Feuer«

Diagram 10

A – Individuals

B – Families

C – Clans

D – Nations

E – Large groups (for example:

European man)

F – Primate ancestors

G – Animal ancestors in general

H – “Central fire”

In the 1925 seminars on the theory and methods of analytical psychology, Jung presented the above diagram called “The Geology of Personality”. If A (Individuals) represents the conscious, F, G and H are concerned with the collective unconscious (F – Primate groups, G – Animal ancestors in general, H – Central fire).

In my opinion, it is at levels B to E (families, clans, nations, extended groups such as European man) that cultural complexes are lodged.

In 1947, Joseph Henderson (1903 – 2007), one of the first great Jungians in the United States, wrote to Jung (whom he had met in the Twenties): *“I’m working on an essay ‘Protestant Man’, in which I am gathering the fundamental attributes of historical development of Protestantism and trying to put them together with the modern cultural complex appearing in our Protestant patients.”* Subsequently, throughout his teaching and writing, Henderson discussed the cultural unconscious. He thereby added an intermediary level, so to speak, between the two levels of the unconscious described by Jung. Implicit in Henderson's work but never explicitly spelled out by him is the idea that the cultural unconscious expresses itself through complexes, designated as cultural complexes.

Based on this work, Thomas Singer and Samuel Kimbles published in 2004 their first book on the subject entitled “The Cultural Complex – Contemporary Jungian Perspectives on Psyche and Society” in which they explore the idea more deeply from a modern viewpoint and explain its application. According to the authors, the cultural complex is associated with the same characteristics as the personal complex. It presents as a core charge of

energy and affects which pulls into itself every experience it possibly can. It collects experiences that confirm its existence and creates a storehouse of ancestral memories which, in their turn, nourish the complex in question. The cultural complex behaves as an independent entity and resists all conscious efforts to overcome it. It maintains a simplistic point of view, which dispenses with uncertainty. Its archetypal core does not allow for discussion. In the domain it occupies, it thus creates a rigid attitude, such that the individual and the group which are possessed by the complex feel totally justified in their belief. The individual can appear self-righteous, just as a group can appear arrogant to the rest of the world. The complex tends toward the projection of its undesirable side onto others. Its manifestations are accompanied by intense affects.

Singer and Kimbles demonstrate how this new concept allows for a refined observation of a specific layer of the unconscious. For the individual, it allows for a new perspective on the intrapsychic conflict generated by a lack of differentiation between individual identity and group identity or identities.

For a particular group, it offers both a new perspective on the identity of the group – its structure and the content of the group psyche - and on intragroup conflicts. For several groups, it allows one to define and understand the intergroup conflicts that set one group against another. By the word “group”, the authors mean nations, peoples, races, ethnic groups, religions, tribes, associations etc. right down to families, in other words, levels B to E in the Jungian diagram above.

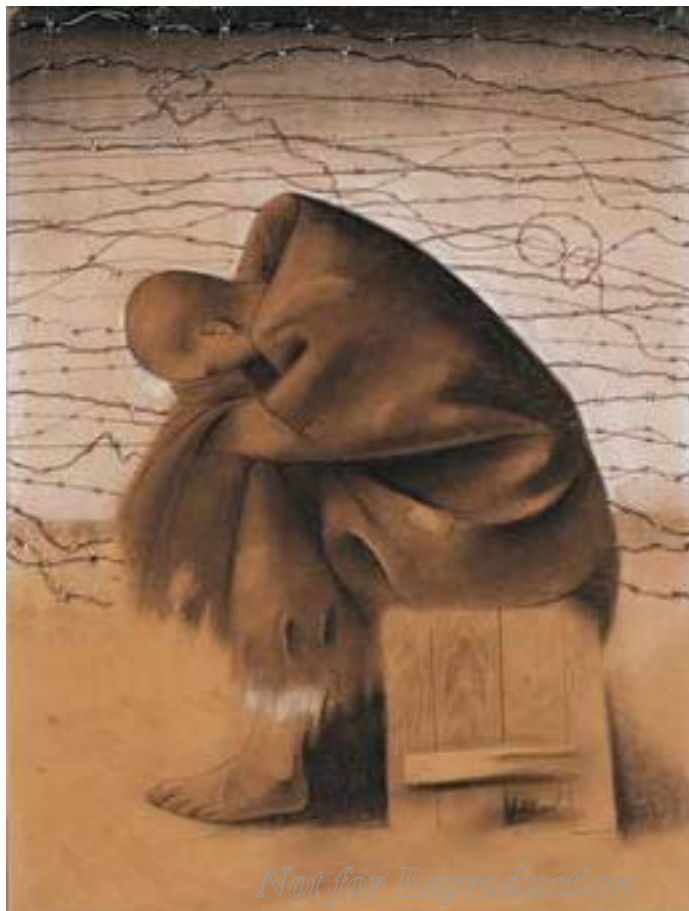
Interest in the psyche of groups is fairly new for Jungians. I can see at least two reasons why this approach, and therefore the concepts of a cultural

unconscious and, by extension, a cultural complex, has been neglected by them. One reason is the shadow of anti-Semitism that hangs over Jung. Articles he wrote and attitudes he expressed were, to say the least, unfortunate, and left the Jungian community particularly sensitive to any research into the differences between “groups”. After the war, very few Jungian researchers were tempted to take up the theme of “national character” or “cultural complex” for fear of being tarred with the same brush as Jung and accused of trying to justify the holocaust.

A second reason could be that, following Jung’s own example, Jungians traditionally focus on the introverted side of individuation, a focus seen as nobler, more worthy, than a preoccupation with the apparently shallower psychic life of groups.

In this respect, could we be here in the presence of a cultural complex peculiar to the Jungian community?

In four chapters, Singer and Kimbles systematically cover the areas in which the cultural complex can serve as a tool for a new and more refined understanding of the following: the group psyche, the group and individual



Not for Reproduction
Figure 13 Felix Nussbaum. Huddled Prisoner (detail), 1941.

psyche, the individual psyche and group individuation. The book is both an easy and a compelling read due to the fact that each chapter contains concrete examples, such as Puritanism in the U.S.A.; corruption as a cultural complex in Brazil; cultural complexes in the work of Freud, Jung and their followers; psychotherapy as a western cultural complex; collective traumas and cultural complexes in the Judeo-Christian heritage etc.

Amongst the authors of the articles figure such leading Jungian authorities as Astrid Berg (South Africa), Murray Stein (Zurich), Luigi Zoja (Rome), Thomas Kirsch (USA) and John Beebe (USA). In addition, they have all had, or currently have, administrative roles at the head of the IAAP (International Association of Analytical Psychology). I don't believe this is purely by chance. These men and women, who work at an international level, will be automatically confronted by cultural complexes. They will become aware of them and be obliged to learn how to deal with them.

The Cultural Complex of Germany and of Many Germans

I wish now to focus on a specific cultural complex, to look at Germans as a cultural group, and myself in particular, as someone who belongs to this group. I will also examine my motivation for having the stumble stones laid.

The specific cultural complex which I wish to address is common not only to many Germans from several generations, but to the nation as a whole as represented by its elected leaders, and to the entire post-war German people. This cultural complex has its origin in the unspeakable crimes committed during the era of the Third Reich. There was a time when Germans liked to see



Figure 14 Destruction of the Great Synagogue in Berlin during the "Kristallnacht", 1938

themselves as a nation of poets and philosophers. This cultural complex gave rise to a flattering group identity and was a source of pride and reassurance to the individual. This dangerously one-sided complex and the prevailing economic misery of the time, combined with a past consisting of several centuries of defamation and pogroms (not only in Germany, but equally in neighbouring countries) was poor preparation for seeing and understanding that “la bête immonde” the vile monster, had been unleashed with hate-filled depths and overtly criminal aims. This lack of comprehension made it impossible to consciously and collectively oppose the inhumanity, brutality and fanaticism of the National-Socialist regime.

Other factors, of course, came into play. Much has been written about this subjugation but nothing, and no one, has been able to truly explain how it



Figure 15 Nazi Soldiers

happened. The articles by C.G. Jung entitled “Wotan” and “After the Catastrophe” constitute one attempt, which was, if nothing else, at least original. (Jung, CW 10/10 Wotan, 10/11, After the Catastrophe)

This question is not the focus of my attention here, however. What I wish to talk about, is one of the consequences for the German people and for each individual German: the formation of a new cultural complex made up of shame, guilt and a

confusion which, initially, prevented awareness.

What one calls “collective guilt” is described by C.G. Jung as ”atmospheric guilt”, a “contamination” which cannot be escaped due to the simple fact that one lives and breathes this atmosphere, this particular culture.

The period immediately after the war was a time of shock and trauma: the



Figure 16 Frauenkirche in Munich

silences, the secrets, the “unsaid” rendered taboo the events of the past. The



Figure 17 The last 50 days of World War II, Munich

highest priority had to be given to rebuilding the country resulting in the famous “German economic miracle”. Keeping quiet and getting on with the task at hand used up all available energy and contributed to an initial and provisional recovery of the group and individual self-image. This was the only basis on which a process of increasing awareness, of grief, mourning and remembering could be undertaken.

It is still going on at every level:

individual – such as my laying of the stumble stones for the couple Nussbaum-Platek in my immediate environment - as well as at the public and group level. It was in this context that the German chancellor, Angela Merkel, said on June 5th, 2009, when accompanying President Obama on a visit to the Buchenwald concentration camp:

“The perpetual remembrance of the holocaust, and the breakdown of civilization which it represents, is an integral part of the German reason of state (raison d’Etat).” (http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-President-Obama-German)

This cultural complex has determined my life as “a child of the war”, which is what I feel myself to be, and which I am, due to the place and date of my birth. And it was the underlying reason, although unconsciously so, why I left Germany once I had completed my studies as an interpreter, and why I moved to Brussels, the provisional capital of the emerging new Europe. I cherished an idealised vision of this Europe. To me it seemed to promise the coexistence of former enemy countries in a lasting peace. And I still believe in it, though slightly disillusioned. Over the years, I have become aware of this complex. I have explored it both in analysis and in the outside world.

Clinical Vignettes

In my experience as both analysand and analyst, the conscious awareness of personal and cultural complexes occurs in the course of a Jungian analysis. Their integration frees up vital energy which had previously been bound up in the complex but is now available for future development. The psyche may always be inhabited by a great range of complexes, but their movement into consciousness allows for transformation, as much for the individual person as for the group. In the clinic, I take care to distinguish between the three layers of the unconscious, each one having its own weight and importance, even if they are intertwined and constantly interact, as the following clinical vignettes will show. The vignettes are taken from therapies conducted with German clients.

Madame A

Madame A was born at the start of the war. When she was still a little girl, not yet at school, her father died on the Eastern Front. Afterwards, she idolized a

father of whom she had almost no memory, making him into a hero, the perfect man. He was a young soldier, a member of the Party and enlisted in the Wehrmacht. He distinguished himself at the Front. In my mind's eye, I see a young, well-built man, blond and blue-eyed. Today, I would say that my mental

picture of him was that of one of the young officers described by Jonathan Littell in "The Kindly Ones".

According to Madame A, her younger brother is "a loser" and her mother a shallow shopkeeper who



Figure 18 S.S. Officers

quickly remarried. She herself lives with a man whom she bullies and who, in turn, bullies her and she openly wishes he were dead. She has had lung cancer and lives in constant terror that it will return, even though she has been in a stable remission for more than ten years. We are more or less the same age. My own father was not a soldier but he was interned and reported missing. I was four at the time. My father came back alive.

I don't have a good relationship with Madame A. I lack empathy for her, criticize her to myself for not being feminine, for lacking sensitivity and further, for being in the grip of a battling animus.

I now know that with my personal history, I entered into collusion with her and her history. I clearly had no more insight into my “child of the war” history than she had. I was in the grip of my highly emotionally charged cultural complex, in other words, with the image of young Nazis, proud to be soldiers, who caused so much suffering, drowned Europe in blood, and brought shame and guilt down on Germany “forever”. Without thinking about it, this is what I felt. I was incapable of imagining an individual soldier, the father of a child who could idolize him, love him and cry for him. I felt myself confronted by soldiers in general, by THE Wehrmacht, which I owed it to myself to abhor.



Figure 19 St. Paul's Cathedral London, 1941

Despite my professional ineptitude, after many years of hesitation, Madame A made inquiries with the Red Cross and learnt that her father had been identified and buried at the front where he fell. After a further period of great anxiety, she decided to visit the military cemetery where, according to photos she had received, there was a memorial stone inscribed with the names of those German

soldiers who had fallen in that area. She undertook the journey to find her father again and returned devastated. Her father's name had been left off the memorial

by mistake. She was promised that the omission would be seen to straight away, but the harm was done.



Figure 20 *Soldiers almost underground*

It was only at this point that I was able to emerge from the cultural complex which had dominated my thinking and held me back. Finally, I was able to relate to her search for a beloved father, to her despair as an abandoned little girl, to the new loss after her journey and the emptiness in which she had been lost all her life.

This personal experience of mine and the deficiencies in my relationship with my client which I profoundly regret, show that, just as Singer and Kimbles explain, it is often difficult to identify a cultural complex. Moreover, at the time that this work was done, the concept as such had still to be developed. Analysts like ourselves tend to take the patient's history into consideration and look for additional amplification. Such amplification can, however, go too far and blur the very concrete impact of a cultural complex presenting both in the patient and in ourselves.

Partly as a result of this intense new awareness, I undertook a period of analysis, during which I wished to focus very specifically on this complex. The analyst was in agreement with my request and we immersed ourselves in this dark, collective zone to try to shed some light on it. One day, he asked me: “Would you like me to tell you my own story?” I should add here that he was Jewish and of my generation. I felt catapulted out of the secure frame which was supposed to contain my work on the cultural complex and the suffering it had caused all my life. I was insufficiently advanced in my elaboration of the complex to take him up on his proposal.

Today I have a better understanding of what I would describe as “acting out”: The cultural complex which I wished to bring to the surface in myself had, probably, triggered a corresponding complex in the analyst. This reconnected him with suffering and confusion which were both his own and mine, his patient’s. Once again: collusion. Cultural complexes are formidable in their autonomy and tenacity.

Madame B

Madame B, also German, was born in the sixties and is much younger than Madame A. Two generations and a lot of time have gone by. I have aged. A process of exploration has been widely undertaken, a process which I have been able to put to good use in my clinic.

After a fairly short period of therapy, Madame B began to talk about the Jews in her village. She told how her parents used to be on good terms with their Jewish neighbours, particularly with one family, to whom they gave food and

firewood from their small farm during the cold winters of the war. This particular Jewish family ran the village shop, which they were eventually forced to close and had to start wearing the yellow star. From this moment on, her parents apparently stopped showing any interest in their neighbours. One day the family disappeared. Madame B was very angry with her parents. She was ashamed of them and put herself in the position of the Jewish family. She asked her mother for explanation of their behavior (her father had passed away). She demanded an expression of regret, and excuses as a form of recognition of this betrayal. A great number of sessions were dedicated to this subject.

The fact that she kept coming back to it finally caught my attention. I listened in a different way and learned, in stops and starts at first, and then in a great outpouring of pain, that she had been abused and violated by a cousin and his father, her uncle, her mother's brother, and that all the family knew that the two men were inclined to this behaviour. Her mother, apparently, must have known about it. And yet, despite everything, throughout the years relations between their two families had remained warmhearted. Betrayal!

If, in the years between Madame A's therapy and this therapy, I had not become aware of the collective complex in myself, we would probably have remained trapped together at the level of the collective cultural history without differentiating it from her personal history of abuse as a child, under the very eyes of her family.

In the case of Madame B, the cultural complex appears to be mixed up with her personal history. She presented herself to me as identifying with the fate of the Jewish neighbours who had been deported and doubtless murdered, to the

indifference of her parents. Through their fate, she found a way to express her own anger, her revolt, her accusations and her desolation. The archetype which possesses Madame B is that of the executioner-victim or the predator-prey.

The cultural complex, of which she is unaware, allows her to slide effortlessly back into the history of village life and her family by identifying with the victims of the time. Her personal suffering is unconsciously located in the village and assimilated into the violent events of the war.



Figure 21 Pearls (Mourners) by Felix Nussbaum, 1938

At this level, a process of mourning can take place. Mourning for the illusion of innocence and the goodness of her parents, for the morality of the village and the German people as a whole. Mourning, in fact, for all of these group identities. As she subsequently approached the personal level, Madame B became aware of the importance of her own suffering as an individual, and was finally able to start to grieve - as if one mourning process

facilitated another, thanks to the disentanglement of the situations. In the course of the therapy, Madame B felt a desire for autonomy emerge and a potential for aggression which had been stultified up until then. First, this discovery made her feel guilty and afraid. Today, it helps her enormously to manage her creative life as an artist.

The Cultural Complex: pain - work - discovery

To recap: the cultural complex is at the intersection of the intrapsychic and the interactive. It is part of the identity of the group as well as that of the individuals who belong to it.

Pain

I believe that the vignettes I've presented clearly show that a cultural complex is a retraction of energy. At its origin, there is often an emotional shock, a collective trauma or a group experience repeated over time. Research has been conducted into why one event rather than another should create a cultural complex. One of the researchers, Vamik Volkan, talks of a "chosen complex".

Let us look, for example, at the Islamist reaction to the denigration of Arab culture since the Middle Ages, or the proclamation of an "axis of evil" at the time of the September 11th attacks.

One present-day example, closer to home, is the difficulty in communication between the Walloon and the Flemish in Belgium. Looked at from the perspective of a cultural complex, one could probably find the underlying reasons. If, with the goodwill of those in power, the population could be made aware of the complexes and accept their existence, then work through them and overcome them, the pathway to a harmonious coexistence could open up. The task is a delicate one. There is the central question of collaboration during the German occupation on both sides of the linguistic. The defensive effect of a cultural complex is to compartmentalise the group or individual psyche concerned by splitting or denial and to repudiate the event which causes the

problem, which leads to behaviour shaped by hidden rigid structures. A cultural complex develops in the relational field. In our clinic, the interpersonal dimension, the transference relationship, is evidently, more than ever, an indispensable tool when dealing with complexes. The vignettes A and B clearly demonstrate this.

Work

“Discovery is only possible by virtue of loss”. P.C. Racamier, *Le génie des origines*, pp. 26-28

The work consists of allowing the cultural complex to become conscious because unexamined connections have created restrictions which maintain unawareness. Freud, and subsequently Paul-Claude Racamier talk of mourning. According to Racamier, mourning arises, not only from the loss of an object, but also from every kind of detachment, such as having to let go of a set way of thinking and being—for example, by liberating oneself, for example, from a complex which is part of a group identity with all of its deceptive security. (*Le génie des origines*, p.26)

In the General Index to the Collected Works of C.G. Jung (Vol.20), the word “mourning” does not appear. But we are familiar with the concept of sacrifice, which we define as renunciation of the regressive attachment to that which is past and dangerously hinders psychic growth. In the case of the cultural complex, the renunciation of an attitude or opinion, of an “a priori” is demanded, despite the fact that it constitutes the link between members of the group and

forms part of their individual and their group identity. This gives us an idea of the size of the task.

One very impressive attempt at collective work on a cultural complex is that of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa. At the time of the International Association of Analytical Psychology Congress (IAAP) in Capetown, South Africa, in 2007, apartheid had been abolished since 1991. But what remained of it? Without doubt, a cultural complex was present in the South-African society and in the men and women who composed it. As participants at the congress, we had the opportunity to watch films on the work of this commission which, at the instigation of archbishop Desmond Tutu, had been active for many long years. The judicial procedure consisted of bringing together those who had committed crimes with those who had been their victims. It was a question of affording the latter the chance to speak in the language of their choice (there are more than 25 official languages in South Africa, and it was considered essential to allow each person to speak in their mother tongue), of hearing what their killers or torturers had to say in reply, and more specifically, of hearing if they admitted to having committed the crimes and showed genuine regret. Afterwards, it was up to the victims or their survivors to forgive if they wanted to, or were able to. The stakes were very high: there could either be a seemingly protective shutting down around the evil suffered, or an opening up towards those who were the enemy.

Everyone who saw those images was shocked, shaken by the suffering and the struggle it took to “sacrifice” vengeance and hate in the name of love for one another: an almost inconceivable sacrifice.

Imagine a group of analysts weeping together at an international congress and you will have an idea of the impact it had.

I have in my possession the protocols of certain trials which Madame Vera Kattermann let me keep. She is a German psychoanalyst belonging to the second generation after the holocaust. She has conducted research into the transmission of collective trauma and the possibility of working through a violent past, in the manner of South Africa. Her particular interest is in the extent to which our work as analysts on individual trauma can be of value to the group, and in whether the process of mourning accomplished by an individual can contribute to “healing” the collective.

I had the opportunity to meet a lawyer who had spent three years working in Arusha on the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and I asked her why this kind of reconciliation between the parties involved had not been attempted: She had never heard of it!

In Jungian terms, one is faced with the question – both philosophical and



Figure 22 Intifada

empirical in nature - of transformable evil and absolute evil, evil en-soi.

Europe as a whole, the continent which was so sure of its superiority and its civilisation, carries the scars from the trauma of the bestiality of the two world wars.

The victors also remain scarred. My conviction of this is based on the participation by friends of mine from several European countries in my laying of the stumble stones, the powerful and palpable emotion engendered at the time in all the participants, the silent introspection, the shared tears. All seem to me to prove that the cultural complex has two poles. The victor and the vanquished, the executioner and the victim form an unhappy alliance.

My experience also showed me that a powerful gesture, such as a ceremony, is necessary in order to properly bring about a mourning process,



Figure 23 Intifada kids

and that the ceremonial act requires an official, a spiritual leader, a priest, a politician. The photo (figure 24) of Willy Brandt in Poland in 1970 falling to his knees at the sight of the memorial to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising is now part of the world heritage of humanity. For my friends and myself, it was an artist, Gunter Demnig, who officiated at this ceremony, reuniting those who, at that moment, felt ready to continue their mourning process by a concrete and significant act. The stumble stone guides ones steps towards overcoming the complex. In Jungian terms, I am tempted to talk about the transcendent function of this gesture.



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Figure 24 Willy Brandt Warsaw, 1970

To illustrate my comments on the cultural complex and mourning, I would like to quote here some of the spontaneous reactions noted during the laying of the stumble stones, far removed from the analyst's couch.

Madame C

Born in 1943, Belgian

"I'm the result of a love affair between a German soldier and a German-speaking Belgian woman. At the time of the Liberation, my mother was insulted and humiliated by the villagers. How did I know this? I never spoke about it with my mother. I think she could not cope with my need to understand because she had never got over the humiliation I caused her. Laying these stumble stones of remembrance with you and the others is deeply moving for me: It gives my

mother back her dignity – and gives me the right to exist. This act has opened up the wound, it has made me cry like never before, but I feel less tense, freed up. Mother died five years ago – such a shame”.

Monsieur D

Born in 1961, Belgian

“Why did I relate to your initiative with the stumble stones? For years I would have the same dream: civilians being bombed. I never understood where it came from. I couldn’t have any personal memory of bombing and my family hadn’t been directly affected by the war or the occupation.

Somehow it was enormously important to me to be present at the embedding of the stones. Why? After the concrete act had taken place, I understood that it was about nothing less than a human being’s individuality. My own had been crushed during my childhood, just as the civilian population had been indiscriminately bombed. I was very moved to observe how a group of people (my extended family?), by means of this collective gesture, restored to the artist his dignity, which had been trampled underfoot. And through him, mine was restored as well”.

L ‘Association pour la Mémoire de la Shoah

I collaborated with this association at an organizational level. In a press release they stressed the fact that a “non-Jewish German woman” had initiated the project. Why this precision? Had their contact with me touched on a

prejudice of their own? Am I right to hope that I have contributed a building block, in the literal sense of the term, towards a new awareness of a cultural complex, on the Jewish side this time? Was it possible to overcome the complex, at least in my own case? Can energy now start to circulate more freely between the members of the association and myself, and perhaps between our two peoples?

Three cousins of Felix Nussbaum

Living in Israel since the start of the thirties, they are the only survivors of the family, Felix Nussbaum's only direct relations. They are aged 88, 92 and 99. They inherited Nussbaum's paintings and have bequeathed them to the Felix Nussbaum Museum in Osnabruck, his home town. I told them of my plan to lay the Stolpersteine and asked for their permission. All three of them called me, each in their own time, each very touched and grateful. To the point of inviting me to Israel and even sending me an original photo (figure 26) from a family holiday in 1932. It shows Felix Nussbaum, aged 28 (back row, second from the left), his father (beside him on the left) and fifteen or so other people. We spoke in German, our shared mother tongue. Theirs was rich and lively, despite the fact that they have been speaking Hebrew and English ever since they emigrated at the start of the thirties. My tears melted my cultural complex like sun on snow, and I felt a whole new opening up of the soul.



Figure 25 Nussbaum Family, 1932

A Discovery

“Mourning has more to do with life than with death” P.C. Racamier (Le génie des origines)

The new awareness of a cultural complex, and its at least partial disempowerment by the process of mourning releases an energy which channels itself into more active, more positive and more creative areas. This energy becomes available for new discoveries about oneself at the unconscious level, as well as to the ego faced with others and faced with groups. It brings memory to life, which may be painful, but allows it to be fully integrated into the collective and individual history.

Stolpersteine are not inert monuments to the dead. They are elements at work in an urban space. They want to make you stumble, they want to create an obstacle on which your foot catches and then hurts a bit. They want to unbalance



Figure 26 Nazi boots on cobbles

the calm progress of the pedestrian, interrupt his movement, catch his attention, make him discover his own emotion and pause for thought.

The human dignity of the victims of National Socialism, trampled under foot, crushed by boots, is thus restored, case by case, in the name of one and all, by a simple paving block, by a golden stone.

2500 years ago, at the start of our Occidental civilization, Herodotus,



Figure 27 Stumble stones and girl's shoes

historian and chronicler of his era, was already worrying about collective memory and wondering about conflicts between groups from different cultures. Here is a quote from his “Histories”:

“Herodotus of Halicarnasse presents here his “Researches” so that the works of men and their most memorable deeds will not sink into oblivion, and with the aim of discovering why the Greeks and the Barbarians went to war with one another.”

Herodotus 484 (?) – 420 BC, Book 1-4: Histories



Figure 28 *Walking by stumble stones*

I wrote this article primarily for my grandchildren Marie, Gilles, Alicia and Nina. I would like to extend my warmest thanks to my friend and colleague Michel Harcq, Profondeville, for his suggestions and patient rereading of this article.

Ruth Breuer

Brussels, December 2011

Stephanie Giesen, translation

Horsham, May 2012

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