

Introduction to the Presidency Day of the Conference

Thomas Singer, MD

United States

This second day of our conference will focus on The United States Presidency and some of the issues we are facing as a nation and as a world on the eve of our election which is only two weeks from now. The political energy in our country is about to explode and judging from the first day of our meeting yesterday, there is huge political energy in our virtual conference as well—perhaps also ready to explode on occasion....To mix yesterday’s references to Yeats and Blake, maybe some part of all of us “slouches towards Bethlehem” as in the image of **Nebuchadnezzar** that Joerg Rasche showed us on the first day.



Image 1 Nebuchadnezzar, 1795. William Blake

Life in the United States these past four years has become increasingly dire. Too many of our bodies have been ravished by COVID-19 and we have suffered a collapsing economy as well as unprecedented fires and storms that many experience as being of Biblical and apocalyptic proportions. Making it all much worse, a psychic pollution has taken hold of the land. A foul and divisive spirit infiltrates everything from immigration, to healthcare, to race, to the environment, to the economic divide, to issues of sex, gender identity and sexual orientation, to the US relationship to the rest of the world, and to the psyches of all the citizens of the world. It should not surprise us if some of that divisive spirit makes itself felt in our conference. “Fetid”, “Venal”, “Corrupt” and “Unhinged” are the words that keep coming to mind as I contemplate the spirit in our Presidency of the past four years.

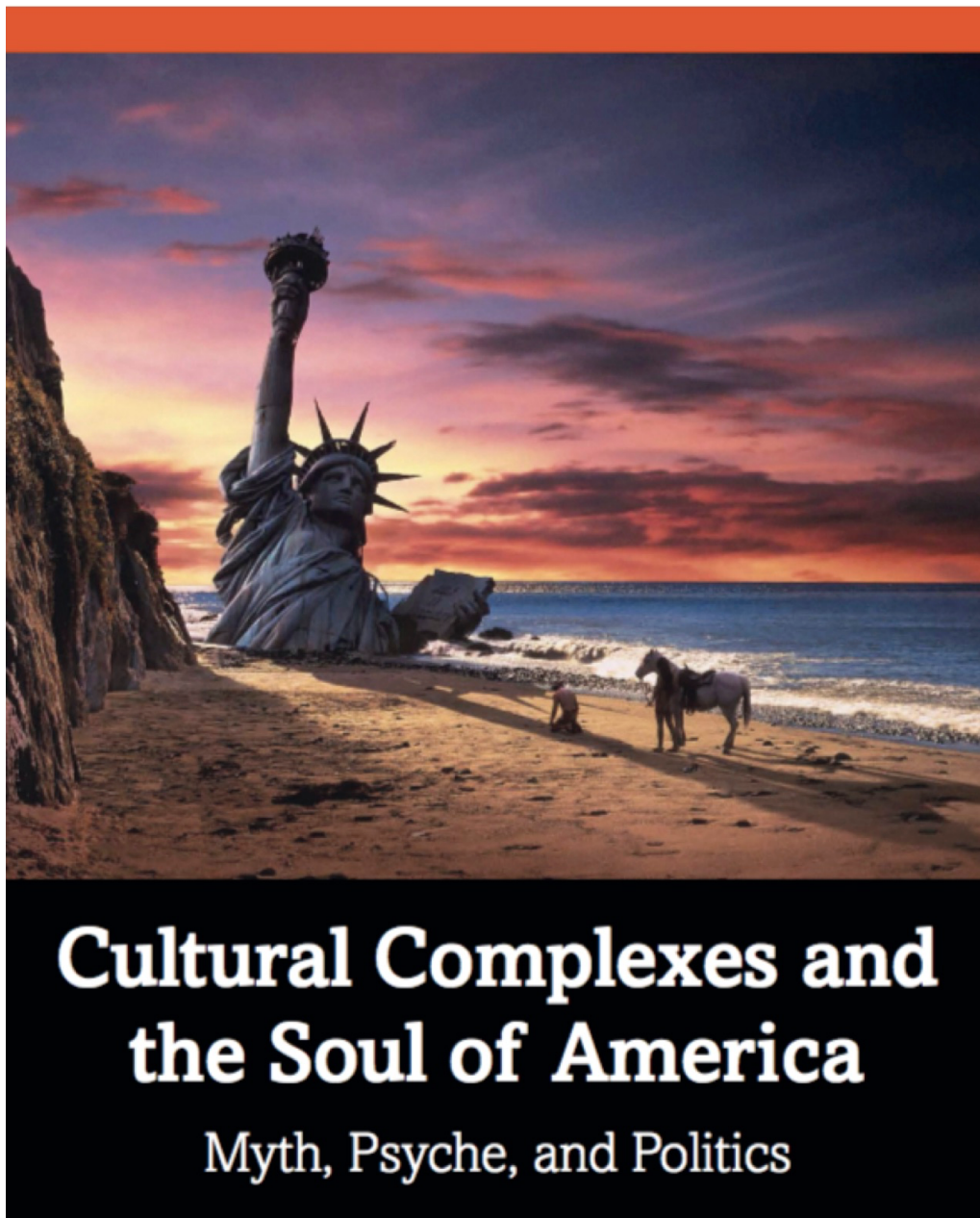


Image 2 Cover of Cultural Complexes and the Soul of America

Eight of the contributors to this conference have chapters in the recently published book *Cultural Complexes and the Soul of America*—a far ranging volume

about the United States and the current state of our national soul. I will be quoting a couple of those authors to introduce the day.

In her brilliant preface to the book, Jules Cashford opens with a quote from Alexis de Tocqueville in whose tradition she follows:

America is great because she is good, and if America ever ceases to be good, she will cease to be great.

Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–1859), *Democracy in America*¹

Jules writes:

“The Statue of Liberty, looking out over the sea as a beacon of freedom, has offered the generosity of welcome to the world for over 150 years. It carries perhaps the most inspiring words ever to adorn a statue. They come from a poem by Emma Lazarus, written in 1883, and inscribed on a bronze tablet in 1903 and laid in the pedestal of the statue, seventeen years after the statue had been unveiled:

Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me. I lift my lamp beside the golden door!

However, the picture on the cover of this book, is of a very altered Statue of Liberty and is taken from the final scene of the film *The Planet of the Apes*—directed in 1968 by Franklin James Shaffner, set in the future of 3978, and starring Charlton Heston as the hero George Taylor.

[Ironically later in his career, Heston became the champion of the NRA—the National Rifle Association—which has led the charge to the unprecedented arming of America where there are now more guns than people—350 million guns for a population of around 330 million. – Tom Singer]

It is the vision of this ruined Statue of Liberty, now half buried in the sand, which allows our hero astronaut to recognize that he is on Earth and has been all the time. He had landed in the distant future, not on another planet as he supposed. Here in this final scene, he realizes that this grotesquely broken and abandoned statue can only have been brought about by humans at war with each other, leaving the planet to be ruled by apes with the “intelligence” of humans. The apes experiment on the humans in the same way that the humans had experimented on the apes.

Kneeling in the long shadow of Liberty’s arm reaching upward, the torch long dead—beckoning to no one, pointing to nowhere, the tiny figure bent over in awe and despair—all this tells us that this icon cannot be simply a *sign*, not for him nor for any of us. It is a *symbol*—which means, literally from the Greek, a “throwing together” of two worlds, whose union reminds us of the depths from which it came: those depths that—however we choose to describe them—are in themselves sacred and cannot fail to move us.”

Many attending this conference may feel that the symbolic image of the half-buried Statue of Liberty portrayed in as occurring in the year 3978 has come 1958 years earlier than the movie anticipated and that the current descent of America into greedy self-absorption, fragmentation and the devouring of itself and the rest of the world has already been under way for some time. Surely, in this election we Americans face the possibility of the ongoing dismemberment of our government and our people as we have known it with the swallowing of the Department of Justice, the Center for Disease

Control and Prevention, the Department of State, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Supreme Court by a rogue and corrupt Presidency. This rapidly increasing institutional dismemberment along with what Jung often warned about in individuals as “an abaissement de niveau mental” is occurring in our collective psyche and threatens to destroy our Statue of Liberty and all that it symbolizes. The only thing more frightening than Trump himself is the fact that some 40% of our fellow citizens adore him and believe that our inalienable rights to carry a gun and not wear a mask during a pandemic are the current American symbols of freedom and are supported by our Constitution and the Statue of Liberty. One can only conclude that the American understanding of freedom and liberty has gone haywire and that the current state of our inner and outer Statue of Liberty is in great peril, much like the final scene from *The Planet of the Apes*. We are in a profound state of fragmentation and the very yearning for the healing of the soul of America feels as though it, too, is on life support. Democracy in America is being swamped by the lust for power and the power of illusion. Christopher Hedges nailed it in the title of his 2008 book: *The Empire of Illusion: The End of Literacy and the Triumph of Spectacle*.

To more specifically introduce our first panel of the day, (Panel 4), “Leaders and Led, Populism, the Media; National and International Perspectives”, I also turn to our book and another modern de Tocqueville observer of the United States, Stefano Carta from Italy, who offers a uniquely Jungian perspective on our current American state of affairs as we approach election day.

Stefano writes:

“Trump looks very much like an archetypal trickster figure who, similar to the medieval king of Carnival, appears around the winter solstice when darkness triumphs and the sun is at its lowest point. This time marks the liminal time of death and, God willing, rebirth. It is a universal midnight, a nadir when everything may turn into shadow, a ghost. It is a time opposite from noon, the zenith when time is suspended and there are no shadows anymore in the world.

The passage from the lowering to the raising is marked by feasts and rituals, like the Roman Saturnalia, the medieval Carnival, or, in America, Halloween, in which the underworld, the dead, the shadow, the antivalues, infiltrate the upper world and create a seemingly chaotic situation. This is what the alchemists called a *massa confusa*. The goal was to appease these darker forces and eventually allow them to be contained in their own world.

During Carnival the fool is made king, and the donkey celebrates mass... The thief is set free, and the just imprisoned, until the end, when the reestablishment of proper order marks the rejuvenation of cultural time. Elementary drives take over the more developed, spiritualized cultural symbols, and, in a somehow phallogocentric emergence of this archetype, Hermes's nature as the archetypal phallus acquires a central position.

In my opinion, Trump is the perfect king of such a Carnival, as he symbolically embodies all possible features of such a mad, mixed-up, upside-down world of antivalues, expressed through a unilateral phallic/machoistic way, starting from the frequent references to his penis to the use of women as pure debased prey. It is interesting to note that the deep, violent discrimination against women and their use as social partial objects exploded into increased consciousness at the same time (as Trump's ascension to the presidency), as if the “quality of the moment” (what the Chinese refer as the Tao), is presenting both mixed, oppositional sides of this issue.

As it happens with the upside-down king of medieval Carnival, who was chosen for his social, that is, sacred inferiorities and wounds (which in normal times would outcast him), this president projects an omnipotent image of himself, while being seemingly “mentally wounded.” In the sexually Puritan America, the king is a “pussy-grabber.” In the land of the self-made man, he inherited his patrimony from the Father, although he went to great pains to conceal that. In the land of opportunity created by immigrants, Trump confirms the archetypal idea that every other country may be a “shithole,” and that every non-American is dangerous. Yet he is married to an immigrant. In an American world, in which the Puritan/Pioneer was in a constant state of war against the (demonized) enemy, the King has befriended the United States’ traditionally most dangerous and obvious enemy—the Russians. In a culture in which a politician once could not be caught lying without serious consequences, the King is a dark, hermetic figure who spins the truth in almost every sentence he utters. This last point is particularly important, as it is connected with a systematic use of information to manipulate, distort, and confuse reality in order to create a regressed *massa confusa*, in which everything becomes unconscious—or nondiscriminated.

Yet, the king of antivalues delusionally still seems to defend the old archetypal organizing values: paranoid, he wants to build a huge wall to contain the (lost) infinite space of impurity. For this king, America is “first”—a grandiose, titanic, manic pretense, constantly paraded in order to deny reality. By creating a delusional claim of a menace from the space Without, Trump tries to re-create the old feeling of inflated identity in which everyone else is inferior and guilty or, at best, irrelevant. In fact, within this exalted Manichaeian differentiation, one of Trump’s mottos against Hillary Clinton was “Lock her up.” This implied a definition of the Other as ontologically negative, impure, inferior, *female*, and guilty—therefore someone to expel into space (in this case, the outside in the inside: the prison). We are the pure ones, destined to paradise; the Other is destined to nothingness.

In such a situation the denial of catastrophic global climate change, confirmed by every scientist on the planet, is quite understandable, as admitting it would imply the recognition that the United States is part of the “outside.”

Seen from the old archetypal vantage point, who would have ever imagined that someone like Trump could sit where Jefferson did? Yet this King is a “necessary” product of an archetypal development, in which the “Old World” is undoing itself into a chaotic carnival of antivalues mixed with the old ones. We should not underestimate the danger, as it is not certain that after a *putrefactio* there will be a real rebirth of a conscious ego. H. L. Mencken also anticipated the current American situation 100 years ago when he wrote with biting satire: ‘As democracy is perfected, the office represents, more and more closely, the inner soul of the people. We move toward a lofty ideal. On some great and glorious day the plain folks of the land will reach their heart’s desire at last, and the White House will be adorned by a downright moron.’”

We begin today’s meetings with the fervent prayer that the siege of our psyches and our government will come to an end. We hope that an outpouring of votes from the hearts and minds of Americans gives voice to a cry from the soul of America that will bring about a profound reversal of Trump’s Carnival. We urgently seek for the renunciation of his anti-values that will be replaced by a spirit of renewal in everything the Statue of Liberty symbolizes, including our wish to contribute positively to the healing of a world teetering on the abyss of catastrophe.

Thomas Singer (U.S.) is a psychiatrist and Jungian psychoanalyst practicing in San Francisco, California. He has been organizing the Presidency conferences at the C.G.

Jung Institute of San Francisco every four years since 2000. He is the editor of a series of books exploring cultural complexes in Latin America, Europe, Asia, Australia, and North America. His interests include studying the relationship between myth, politics, and psyche in *The Vision Thing* and the *Ancient Greece, Modern Psyche* series. He is the current president of National ARAS, an archive of symbolic imagery that has created *The Book of Symbols*.