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What's Shaking?: A Mythoimaginal Analysis of the 2010 Haiti Quake

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April 7, 2010

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“The soul of our civilization depends upon the civilization of our soul. The imagination of our culture calls for a culture of the imagination” (Hillman, 1975, p. 225).

“Perhaps we are like stones; our own history and the history of the world embedded in us, we hold a sorrow deep within and cannot weep until that history is sung” (Griffin, 1992, p. 126).

On January 12, 2010, the nation of Haiti was struck by a massive earthquake measuring 7.0 in magnitude, the largest in more than 200 years. With its epicenter just 10 miles from Port-au-Prince, the nation's capital inhabited by two to three million people, the quake devastated the island nation in less than a minute.

The human instinct is to place blame, to literally find the “fault” that caused this destructive event, resorting to Nominalism, (An)Nihilation, or Transcendence to name it, control it or make it go away quietly (Hillman, 1975). In the case of this massive calamity, some pointed to heaven, claiming God residing there was punishing the nation and people of Haiti; others pointed to Earth, to the anger of Gaia who was extracting her revenge for wronging her. In the end, it may surprise many to know the disastrous event was caused by the guileless work of innocent children.

Archetypal Rumbings

Myths, symbols, and archetypes—worldwide, cross-cultural symbols recognized throughout time and place without need for definition—can provide frameworks, storylines, foundations, or touchstones with which to compare or base events and circumstances in your personal life or culture (Jung, 1961). Archetypal Psychology takes the notion to a new level, a psychology of soul that is based on a “poetic basis of mind” (Hillman, 1975, p. xvii), starting “neither in the physiology of the brain, the structure of language, the organization of society, nor

the analysis of behavior, but in the processes of imagination” (p. xvii). These processes include image, archetype, and myth, each quivering with energy, drives, motivations, and actions: each autonomous entities, separate from our ego constructs and capable of entering into and carrying on relationships. Jung believed the ego itself is just one more archetype capable of autonomous action. This fixed view of psyche, our personality, must then give way to the multiplicitous, so-called psychopathological aspect of our self. Embracing the multitudinous self is a rekindling of the imagination in a world ensouled. Like the Cyclops’ single eye, regarding any event through a single perspective limits authentic meaning, reduces vast potentiality, sets boundaries, and distorts meaning to fit one singular understanding. A multiplicity of viewpoints is required instead.

Likewise, there are never simply two contrasting viewpoints or options when viewing the depth of human experience. The gods do not appear in isolation. They exist in relationship to each other, constantly dynamic and autonomous, in a polytheistic menagerie more like a kaleidoscope than two sides of a coin that encompass right and wrong, good and bad, black and white. In archetypal psychology, the image is the key—not for interpretation but for *interaction*. Myth, then, is a story of images interacting. Archetypal psychology is polytheistic, inviting awareness of the many divinities at work in our psyche (Hillman, 1975).

Temblor One: Personifying

The world has lost its aliveness. In an existence where everything except humankind has become bereft of soul, where animals, nature, and language are simply dead things, easily manipulated and casually assigned to fate or territorial designs, imagination has faded. As the growing battle between reason and imagination raged we became inured, no longer surprised or stimulated by image and emotion. The spontaneous envisioning, experiencing, and speaking of the existence of psychic presences is what Hillman (1975) defined as *Personifying*. It is the act of

ensouling, of recognizing the deities for themselves and giving them appropriate due so they can exist authentically and autonomously. By regarding them, we enter into relationship with them, allowing emotion to emerge. This is a way of knowing the invisible and allowing psychic reality to take shape, coming to consciousness of what already has us in its grip and seeing past the symptom to deeper understanding.

In the Haiti event where ground moved with such magnitude, clearly, Gaia, as Earth, was involved. Gaia's story from Greek myth featured her as the first to emerge from Chaos, the *prima materia* that existed before all else. Gaia gave birth to Uranus, the Sky, who then became her consort. Together, Uranus and Gaia procreated numerous children, the Titans—six males and six females, the three Cyclopes who each had one eye, and three sons known as the Hecatoncheires, named from “hecaton” (one hundred) because they each had one hundred arms and fifty heads. However, Uranus, as their father, was horrified by the appearance of his children whom he perceived as monstrous and he promptly banished them to a place deep within the earth where they could not escape (Atsma, 2008).

The hundred arms of each of the Hecatoncheires immediately bring to mind the hundreds upon hundreds of arms of the slaves on which the nation of Haiti was built. The first ship delivering African slaves arrived around 1510. Three centuries later, almost one million African slaves, more than in any other Caribbean island, had been shipped to what was then called Hispaniola in order to maintain its status as the chief supplier of sugar to France along with coffee, cocoa and indigo ("The World of Toussaint Louverture.," n.d.).

In 1804, slaves pulled off the only successful slave revolution in history, breaking the chains with France to form new nation called Haiti. The name, meaning “mountainous land,” came from the Taino and Arawak Indians who inhabited Haiti before the Spanish arrived, but who quickly died out completely under harsh conditions of forced labor and deadly new diseases

("Haiti," 2010). Ironically, the English word "mountainous" contains the word "taino," and the legacy left by the Taino for a country once called a jewel in the crown of European colonialism due to its riches and abundance (Viall, 2005) sounds eerily similar to "Hades," the name for both the Underworld, and the god who rules it, a god that is also linked to wealth and riches (Hillman, 1979). Indeed, over its history, life in Haiti has been an underworld experience for its inhabitants, most of whom were dashed onto its shores in slave ships from Africa. In a bizarre revolt of the classical myth in which Hades abducts and violates the budding maiden, Persephone, it is the beauty and youth of Hades that has been violated over the course of time. Exploited, battered, and abused by various colonizers from wealthy countries including Spain, France, and later the United States, the land, the culture, the economy, and the inhabitants all suffered greatly on several fronts.

One of the first and foremost to bear the pain alongside the island's inhabitants, shedding topsoil as surely as the slaves shed lifeblood, was Gaia herself. By the time the liberated slaves inherited the island in 1804 and divided it among themselves, they had inherited an environmentally challenged landscape due to centuries of heavy agricultural demands and deforestation. Domination and exploitation by foreign nations have taken their toll. France demanded excessive compensation from the budding new nation before conceding to recognize her, ultimately leaving Haiti with a mountainous body of debt that like the mountainous peaks of its body. Much of the levy came out of timber from Haiti's lush forests continuing decades of lucrative export for furniture (Viall, 2005). Other taxes were waged against the farmers who could barely scrape out a living from their small plots of land, the soil quickly and increasingly sapped through erosion. The farmers, too, eventually turned to the trees as a last resort, decimating them for charcoal which they could use or sell for fuel (Bourne, 2008, September). Though in 1950, 25 percent of Haiti was still covered with trees, current studies show only 1.4 percent of Haiti's land is still forested. From the air the border with the Dominican Republic is clearly demarcated, the

brown muddy fields of Haiti abruptly bursting to green verdant life just out of reach . Today, 71 percent of the energy used in Haiti, even for cooking, still comes from charcoal (Bracken, 2004).

"*Tè a fatigue*," ("*The earth is tired*") 70 percent of Haitian farmers say (Bourne, 2008, September). Those who can no longer keep roots in the soil are moving to the cities in droves dejected and deforested themselves, looking for work where there is none to be had. Unemployment rates hover around 70% (Viall, 2005) and some have fallen to the dangerous and devastating practice of feeding their hungry children mud cakes made of dirt and shortening to fill their empty bellies because they cannot afford a plate of rice (Katz, 2008). All along, Gaia gave where she could, but she was also growing weaker and more uncomfortable, her symptoms increasingly amplified. The so-called "monster" children Uranus banished to her depths were not helping.

Temblor Two: Pathologizing

Hillman (1975) suggests the *infirmity* of the archetype is essential to complete the "necessary patterns" found in myths through psychologizing. It is impossible to be a full human being without the psychologizing movement of the psyche, without a falling-apart. Soul is rediscovered through symptoms which, administered to in a healthy way, lead to "tending" rather than a tendency to "fixing." "If the gods reach us through afflictions," Hillman asserts, "then psychologizing makes them immanent, opening the psyche for them to enter" (p. 106); then the question becomes not "whether you suffer", but "how you suffer." Gaia, in her distress, cries tears of pain that manifest in raging flood waters, sobbing down the ravaged mountainsides without the soft handkerchief of trees to stem them back. Her heartache heaves along the last vestiges of the topsoil that covers her nakedness, revealing the gaping wounds of bedrock below, and drowning hundreds of humans in the wake—or perhaps the waking--of her grief.

Uranus, for his part, has anesthetized himself, preferring to look over his kingdom from the vantage point of sky without having to dirty his hands. As the lone God of most first-world countries, he is known by astrologers for his suddenness, capable of delivering unexpected insight or disaster, disrupting our view of reality but preferring to make change without regard to individual experiences or emotions. Associated with lightning, electricity, and the internet, he keeps his distance as much as he can (Casey, 1998).

Operating on an “out of sight, out of mind” (or out of *site*, out of mind) principle where image is eschewed, he knew he had done the right thing by burying those monster children with their fiendish deformities deep inside their mother, Earth, sweeping them under the proverbial rug. The further he could push the depressing, dark, and dirty things down where they belong, the less he need be conscious of them. Hades/Haiti is especially depressing, where the poverty is abhorrent and most of the population don't even have electricity, let alone access to a computer or the internet. Hades/Haiti's especially dark, with those dark-skinned people descended from slaves, the brutality and harsh conditions they survived still fresh in the memory of ancestors they worship with that ridiculous religion of theirs, voodoo, which they brought over on the slave ships from Africa: the one that honors the divine in everyday things and finds a symbol of its power in a simple mound of earth (Jaide, 2006, March 3). Little does Uranus realize that the persecution of voodoo in Haiti, the misunderstanding, the amplification and the proliferation of the thing that caused it to go underground in the first place, is increasingly manifesting as zombies far more real and dangerous in the first world countries where people go about their business numb and lifeless, inured to emotion and beauty.

Refusal to "wake up", ensures being "shaken" awake. The more that perceived “monstrosity” is hidden in shadow, the more destructive it will be when it emerges somewhere else as the “return of the repressed”. Over the centuries in Haiti, with every passing slight, every

oppression, every act of colonization that went unmitigated, and every act that violated Haiti and lined the pockets or provided power to the perpetrators, Haiti was forced further into darkness until it seemed as if even the shantytowns and slums in crowded Port-au-Prince were trying to crawl up out of the shadow onto hillsides in areas ironically named Cite Soleil (City of the Sun) and BelAir (Beautiful Air) ("Porte-au-Prince," 2010). Uranus, the Sky, with the “enlightening” position of his singular viewpoint, was comfortable with the status quo. Gaia, Earth, was not.

Temblor Three: Psychologizing

Psychologizing is the act of “seeing through” an event or phenomenon in order to perceive the psychological ground the experiencer is on. Discovering patterns that resonate with understanding of one’s own self occurs by awareness of myths and the divinities and characters that are the key personas in each of them. Downing (1999) points out that *mythos* means “story” through plot, action, or narrative and claims the myths choose *us* rather than the other way around. Thus, allowing the story to unfold rather than limiting it with labels and preconceived notions is critical. We can only benefit from knowing the wholeness of an archetype through all its shades of dark and light. Joseph Campbell said, that myth is “the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation” (Baring & Cashford, 1991, p. 305).

In light of this, what happens next in the myth of Gaia and Uranus is telling. Gaia entreats her son Kronos, one of her children, the Titans, to castrate and depose his tyrant father, Uranus. Kronos succeeds using a stone sickle provided by Gaia, liberating the children from their dark prison, and relieving Gaia of her discomfort and despair. However, once Kronos himself is seated comfortably on the throne, greedy and consuming, he returns the monster children to the dark dungeon of Tartarus, a place located even deeper than the underworld of Hades. Then, Kronos proceeds to swallow his own children birthed with his sister Titan, Rhea. Finally, he enters the

Titans into full-fledged war with the gods of Olympus. Ultimately, Zeus, leader of the Olympians, defeats the Titans with the help of the Hecatoncheires, newly liberated a second time, waging mighty battle with their hundred arms. The Titans themselves are exiled to the depths of Tartarus.

As a ruler, Kronos has tremendous influence in his realm as both a Titan and a senex, his Titan nature enormous, unbounding and seemingly unlimitable on one hand, reaching, grasping, and straining, toying with life through games and distractions. Titans appear to be unstoppable, requiring severe restrictions to reign them in, to repress their unbounded nature often replacing one rigidity with another while the whole scenario gets increasingly bigger, raging out of control. (Hillman, 2007).

The senex, on the other hand, is timebound, a builder of cities who manufactures money, avoiding emotion while living as if exiled from life. The senex is one who devours nature and children, swallowing the gods and leaving us with no other options or divinities to turn to save money, wealth, and consumerism (Hillman, 2005). The senex is linked to winter, night, dryness, coldness—processes from time and nature that are end-phases, thus Hillman argues, the senex is at the core of any complex. As a complex matures into dominance it becomes habitual and thus increasingly conscious until it is taken for granted, once more becoming unconscious. As Hillman points out:

We are least conscious where we are most conscious. . . close to the light our sight is shortest. Our destructivity is felt in the closest neighborhood and is the result of the shadow that issues from the very ego-center of our light. Out of its own light, the ego makes shadow; the ego is its own shadow; perhaps the ego is shadow. . . the senex represents just this force of death that is carried by the glittering hardness of our own ego-certainty, the ego-concentricity that can say “I know.” (p. 45)

This knowledge is power, making the senex child “the last to pity and the first to tyrannize” (Hillman, 2005, p. 267).

Gaia's innocent children, as an example, exiled by Kronos after their short taste of freedom, received no pity locked in Tartarus, the lowest of the underworlds. There, they were

motherless and alone. Haiti, something of an orphan herself, neglected and cast off where once she was one of the richest of the New World nations, is a country of orphans. In a locale where nearly half the population is under 18 years of age and wages barely top one dollar a day (Viall, 2005), orphanages, even before the January quake, were packed with upwards of 50,000 children, most of whom had at least one living parent who simply could not afford to keep them. Additionally, every year, as many as 250,000 children are “restaveks,” sent to “stay with” or are sold to less impoverished households who board them and often promise to send them to school in exchange for their labor (Melia, 2010, April 2). This is a compelling offer in a country where nearly half the people are illiterate ("Haiti," 2010). These unsuspecting children, like Gaia's own sons, have no voice and are frequently never sent to the promised school, instead kept under lock and key, neglected and abused, unwittingly reliving the centuries-old legacy of the slaves that were their forebears, uprooted from their homes and abducted to the underworld as surely as was young Persephone.

As the first country founded by slaves, Haiti is no stranger to Revolt. Nor is her alter-ego, Hades, who must prevent people from leaving the underworld. In its relatively short history, Haiti has suffered more than 30 coups d'etats (Bracken, 2004). Each time the country changed hands, new fingers found their way into the pie, taking whatever they could get their claws on and controlling the local population with a heavy hand. After the misguided attentions of the Spanish and French, even the Americans, who invaded for a 19-year period beginning in 1915—ostensibly to establish order after yet another coup-- commandeered what they claimed was unused land to establish rubber and banana plantations in for-profit schemes. Controversial reports suggest as many as 50,000 farmers were displaced in the process, and up to 3,000 killed by violent confrontations. Additional areas were deforested and topsoil sapped of its life force (Viall, 2005).

Gaia, too, had her turn at Revolt, convincing Kronos to depose Uranus who had imprisoned her children, then offering aid to Zeus to overthrow Kronos when he re-interred them.

Meanwhile, the children, abandoned, neglected, orphaned, finally had enough of the shadows and darkness. On January 12, 2010, they emerged from their confines in the deep abyss, clawing their way out and tossing a building with each of their hundred hands, effortlessly turning everything they touched to rubble like the charcoal remains of Gaia's cherished trees. With innocent but powerful arms that simply wanted to be free, they mangled concrete stones, deforesting the city as effectively as the countryside has been, leaving fissures, cracks, doorways and portals to the underworld in the city of Port-au-Prince. In less than a minute, they stood, the children, pure potentiality--still innocent in their outrage; guileless and blameless in their revolt. "Revolt," via the Latin word "revolvere", means to "turn around, turn back, return" (Etymology.com, n.d.). The desperate, empassioned emergence from the underworld had sent hundreds of thousands of dead to take their places, decapitating the once-royal Prince and throwing the portal wide open for the return of the repressed.

Temblor Four: Dehumanizing

Dehumanizing, for Hillman (1975), means getting at the radical "otherness" of the psyche. The deepest psychological experiences, including emotions, are not ours but almost seem to emerge from somewhere else, like a visitation, or a force breaking through a thin crust of earth from the otherworld. Hillman (2007) insists we must "de-literalize the earth" (p. 311) allowing its archetypal qualities to emerge instead. Because the earth has been literalized into the physical body, the body suffers, but the act of regarding the earth as a series of images presents a landscape of possibilities. Using the imaginative eye as a mythopoetic lens empowers the observer to become a participant, interacting and dialoging with "parts" by transforming them into "events."

In the aftermath of the Hecatoncheires' revolt, everything erupted into Chaos when their grandmother of the same name of the heard they were out and came to visit. The seat of the Haitian government had yet again been deposed with the devastated Presidential Palace, located in

the Champ de Mars plaza, crumpled as if it has been shot in the midst of a battlefield. Mars/Ares continued to frequent the site even days later when a huge tent city sprung up, conjuring images of an encampment of battle-weary warriors now fighting the elements and a future filled with despair ("Porte-au-Prince," 2010). Nearby, Toussaint Louverture International Airport (named for the former slave that led Haiti's slave revolt, whose name means "the opening" in French) was, in fact, closed to all but a tiny stream of air traffic while hundreds of planes carrying supplies circled uselessly in the sky, eventually turning away from Haiti while tens of thousands of people on the ground starved with no access to food. Just as ironic, Louverture himself had died of malnutrition in France where he was imprisoned after the rebellion he staged that ultimately cost him his life ("Porte-au-Prince," 2010).

In the midst of the ruined city, long lines of people snaked along roads where machines and cars formerly crawled, skirting the newly-made portals into the dark belly of earth as they waited for rations to fill their own cavernous bellies. Playing fields between the rich and the poor have been leveled completely as the most poverty-stricken residents staked their claims on patches of the formerly members-only golf course where they had never before been allowed to set foot. Now they call the posh place home. Hospitals were rendered inaccessible or destroyed completely, making the debate on healthcare in Haiti far more controversial and grave than the one taking place simultaneously in the U.S. Hundreds of thousands of individuals and families "found themselves" homeless, some wandering for days like ghosts, physically embodying the spiritual homelessness rampant in the realm of Kronos to the North.

For hours, days, disembodied voices echoed from the collapsed debris and the smell of decay began to permeate the air in earnest, evoking the hellish Tartarus where the Hecatoncheires were formerly detained, their childhood stolen by powerful father or brother figures who saw them with a monstrous eye. Survivors, desperate, outraged and grieving, barricaded roads with corpses

using human stones of flesh and bone to stop the living as surely as the dead had been stopped in their tracks. They made bitter cairns of decaying flesh to shore up their resolve, to reinforce their will to live, to contain their panic and despair. Elsewhere, bulldozers and trucks unceremoniously bit into the dead human stones echoing their earlier bite into the living body of Gaia. Far away in other lands, the zombies finally sat up and took notice of the horror of it all, the flood of images blinding them through the singular Cyclops' eye of Uranus' efficient technology box. Picking up their Blackberries and PDA's, they caved in to the incoming emotion, quickly and cleaning sending virtual nourishment through Public Displays of Affection, minting virtual funds by text message for their poor neighbors who now were clearly suffering. We are reminded that pathology is not wrong or right, but necessary. Tartarus, Hillman (1975) points out, is "the world under and within all life, and there souls go home" (p. 110). The shadow has power because it remains in the dark. Death takes us out of ordinary life into something deep and unknown and therefore, into ultimate meaning. Through affliction, pathologizing returns us to soul.

Now, weeks and months later, with so many bodies recently buried in mass graves, the Earth feeds, nourishing herself, her stomach rumbling with aftershocks as she digests all she has taken in. The living who were left behind sleep in makeshift tents close to the earth, laying their limbs upon Gaia's breast in wonder at how things can change in an instant. The Hecatoncheires take it all in, blinking in the bright sunlight with their hundred eyes, each a lens that provides a different perspective, a new view of life, their hundred arms apiece equally powerful in building something new as tearing a prison apart.

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Aftermath

The Haiti earthquake was a massive shift of chthonic matter, stirring up millions of years of memories. Hillman (2007) reminds us that “cthon” is the deep inside place where Hades and Persephone welcome souls. Our bodies, in death, are delivered to the earth, *are* earth; our flesh, bones, organs reflecting and embodying the topography of the landscape around us: “Inside the earth; the earth inside” (p. 312). It is compelling to think that any forcible destruction of actual earth of outer soul is felt in the *inner earth*, the inner soul. The Cartesian duality that matter is dead has gradually shifted many modern cultures to a pervasive state of loss, of groundlessness, to a walking dead detached from both the inner and outer ground, from meaning and from earth.

The survivors of Haiti's quake experienced not only the slip-strike movement in the earth beneath them but a slip-strike in their own bodies, a sudden massive shift into a new position for most, a state of literal homelessness that represents the collective soul and the spiritual homelessness visiting itself upon our species and our planet. The history of Haiti is particularly conducive to this shift from the invisible to the visible, concretely shoving the reality into the face of shocked onlookers caught completely unaware. The slaves that are the ancestors of most Haitians were displaced from their homeland hundreds of years ago. The natives to the island where Haiti rests were long since sent underground by violence and disease, disappearing deep into Gaia's bowels with no longer a trace but her occasional shifting discomfort.

In the Biblical story of the Israelites who fled out of slavery and persecution in Egypt, they wandered, homeless, displaced, grieving for the earth they had left, but Hillman (2007) claims they also longed for a deeply *imaginal* ground into which they could take root. The dualistic effects of the Cartesian split between body and earth, psyche and nature, he insists, has led to literalization of earth as a *place*, and therefore also of the state of exile or displacement as literal *placelessness* instead of a viewing it as a *wandering* of *imaginal* context in which unlimited richness resides.

The ecological devastation in Haiti was perhaps a beginning, the uprooting of trees leading to groundlessness, an upswell that began deep in the earth and made its way up and out of the

chthonic depths until it reached the human trees, uprooting them where they stood in the streets and in their homes. But the uprooting has an intention which we can come into relationship with. The shift that occurred with the quake was an inevitable move to the balance the inner and outer, so the outer conditions reflect those of the inner, bringing them into a state of balance ironically called "*homeostasis*." Hillman (1975) calls integration of shadow an emigration. Consider the antitheses of what we culturally see as a stereotypical image of Haitian boat people, imagining instead boatloads of people from first world countries making their way into Haiti, a re-formed Haiti that once again represents the riches of her namesake, Hades. Finding the mythopoeic richness in and through the shift is where the treasure of Haiti, the treasures of Hades, lies.

Aftershock

Besides Haiti, there has recently been a considerable amount of increased activity from deep within the body of Gaia. Several large quakes have tumbled through Third World countries: Chile, China, Mexico, Turkey, Afghanistan; one in Indonesia today as I write this. Each time, I think about the children--innocent, wanting, un-lived lives filled with so much potentiality—pushed into shadow, wrongfully exiled, imprisoned in darkness, neglected, forgotten, hope deforested to the point of despair. Whether they are human children or the children of Gaia, manifesting as a mound of earth, a tree, a poppy or a pomegranate, or whether they are monsters that appear different than the rest: dark-skinned, many-limbed, mysterious—they are crying for release. That day will come when the children enter their strength, that moment of utter possibility that comes with being innocent and open to all possibilities, and they will emerge, potentially kicking and screaming, howling with outrage at being locked up. Until we turn a poetic eye to the disregard, abuse, and rampant neglect of the shadow, we risk experiencing the consequences of rebellion while being caught unaware.

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