

MYTHIC PASSAGES
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What Do You See?

by Creative Director, [Honora Foah](#)

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My favorite moment from the James Hillman, Jean Houston, Deepak Chopra event *War, Peace and the American Imagination*, that Mythic Imagination institute did in partnership with the Alliance for the New Humanity and Emory University, was when someone from the audience asked Hillman whether the archetypes were evolving.

Hillman said right off the bat something like, "How would I know? This is the sort of thing God knows." But then he leaned forward in his chair and in a kind and curious way, asked, "But what does this question mean to you?"

The essence of that question was in most of the responses I have heard to the event since then. The program seems to have been a Rorschach test, and this makes me feel encouraged — filled with courage and hopeful we are on the right track.

There have been many enthusiastic comments, including, 'This is among the very finest events I have ever attended in my life', but after that, no one seems to have heard or taken away the same thing.

This is from a young woman at Emory in an email to her professor:

"Most importantly...I am sad I did not get to share my experiences from the talk last Tuesday. I am not sure if anyone else went (what a shame if they didn't!)...I will talk to you more about this in person because I cannot express to you how much seeing and hearing from them touched me in a very strange but certain way. I can't wait to hear your feelings on it."

What we are trying to do with our work here at MII is to engage people in experiences and conversations under and over politics. It is not that politics is not important or should be ignored; it's that issues of war and peace, of joy, of wealth and poverty, of meaning should not be confined to political and material terms. We conceive of our work as providing different theatres where metaphor, image, imagination, creativity, can recombine so that as feelings and ideas work their way into the material and political realms, they have been fed by the real wellsprings of human capacity. We hope for people to reconnect to the world as a whole, the animals, plants, rocks, the many varieties of cultures, the nature of story, the risks of re-imagining, and the truth of authentic feeling.

So, when I ask people what did you think of the 'War, Peace' event, I am delighted to find that one was disturbed by any clapping at all about particular comments Hillman or Chopra made because it indicated the audience was still partisan; that one thought Chopra and Hillman disagreed, and another that they perfectly complimented each other. One loved the part about strategies for non-violent conflict resolution, and one liked the poetry of 'Peace is Sexy'.

One liked Jean Houston singing and one didn't. One thought there should have been more synthesis between Chopra and Hillman's views, and another thought having the two just resting beside and inside each other was perfect.

One was terribly worried that if Hillman was 'right', then war was inevitable and there was no hope. Another thought that if Hillman was 'right', then we had a chance to consciously balance the god of war with the gods of other aspects of life, thereby preventing the god of war from dominating our lives: thus there is hope.

There was nourishment, but each seemed to take it up for an individual purpose. For me, this is the real deal. When something results in a person becoming more herself, more true, more able to take up the responsibility of thinking for himself, of coming to her own conclusions, the happier I am.

Deep down, I feel we are all necessary. If people are persuaded or coerced rather than stepping into the character and strength that is their own personal contribution, then we, as a world, as a community, will be bereft of something that we need. But food, mentoring, encouragement, room to breathe, pressure to come to a decision, challenge, compassion, and patience are something that must be provided for each of us to become as powerful and clear as possible.

I think that may have been the experience I was having while walking through the crowd that night. They weren't fired up and about to turn into a mob, they were fired up and turning into themselves. Amazing.