

Uranus-Pluto and the Murdoch Meltdown

a commentary by Bill Herbst

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I've been waiting all month to write a little about the ongoing meltdown of the Rupert Murdoch media empire, which began in Britain and has now crossed the Atlantic and spread to America.

I've already read two lengthy articles by other astrologers on this development. Both are worthwhile and thorough. Mine won't be nearly as in-depth about Murdoch, his family, or his history. I just want to write about the Big Picture, as usual. If you don't know who Rupert Murdoch is or what's happening around him, it's time for a trip down Google lane, because I'm not going to fill in all those holes in this piece. I assume that my readers will already be up to speed with most of it.

I don't think of the current revelations, investigations, and repercussions now underway as a "scandal," because the truly scandalous part of all this occurred over the past 25 years under the heading "media consolidation," during which Rupert Murdoch built his empire, and we watched as his insidious evil reached into every nook and cranny of western culture, poisoning one media company after another, and eventually ruining mainstream journalism.

To be perfectly blunt, I consider Rupert Murdoch to be a thoroughly reprehensible human being. Everything Murdoch touches becomes corrupt and tainted. His effect on our civilization has been to significantly lower its standards, gut its ideals, and make our day-to-day dealings with one another coarser, cruder, and altogether more unpleasant. I think it's probably safe to say that Rupert Murdoch's soul---that shrunken, shriveled piece of flotsam that passes for a conscience---is irredeemable. The elder Murdoch will simply never realize (nor even come close to realizing) the terrible nature of the wrongs he has perpetrated. And, as for remorse, we could wait until hell freezes over and get none of that from this old man.

Curiously enough, however, I don't lay the blame for all the tragic damage to our culture at Murdoch's own feet. *Is he a slimebag of Herculean proportions?* Yes, absolutely. *Is he culpable?* Sure, although his immense wealth and still considerable power will likely protect him from individual punishment. *Is he, however, the root of the problem?* No.

At the heart of the problem now exploding is the corporate culture that we allowed and even encouraged to take over since the 1980s. The very business climate we collectively put in place---both legally via passage of thousands of laws and practically through a gradual but concerted lowering of standards and ethical practices---not only allowed someone like Rupert Murdoch to dominate the scene, but virtually asked for it to happen. Murdoch is merely the particular hit man who showed up after we advertised for an assassin to blow out the brains of our society. Had Rupert Murdoch never been born, I assure you that some other cunning cretin would have performed

his role, since we made that role inevitable. No, the real culprit isn't Murdoch, but rather corporate culture itself, which has come to include all the major institutions of society.

This is where Uranus and Pluto enter the picture.

The roughly decade-long periods that occur every 30-50 years when the Uranus-Pluto cycle activates are marked by explosive upheavals and revolts (Uranus) aimed at some level of the collective where power has been concentrated but is largely insulated, protected, or hidden from view (Pluto). Usually, this power is "hidden in plain sight," meaning that anyone who cares to look can see how the power operates, but no one can seem to get at it or stop it from doing whatever those who hold the power choose to do with it. At least, not until Uranus rises up in sudden rebellion. Understand: Uranus does not challenge power itself. In fact, Uranus likes power. What Uranus does is to challenge the status of the elites in whose hands the power has been concentrated. Uranus tries to provoke a palace revolution to depose the king and somehow redistribute the king's holdings back to the people.

The sign of the zodiac that Uranus is passing through at the time of a given activation of the Uranus-Pluto cycle shows us the way that upheaval, rebellion, or revolution will be provoked. The sign occupied by Pluto reveals the particular kinds of concentrations of power, and, to some extent, the specific arenas in culture at which the revolution will take aim. Uranus is in Aries this time (as it was during the 1930s), so individual action will be paramount in fomenting revolution. We will likely see again (for both better and worse) the emergence of charismatic individuals who galvanize the collective desire for drastic change. Pluto is in Capricorn throughout the 2010s, indicating that the major institutions of government, business, and social organization (such as schools and hospitals, to name but two) will be the target of the revolution. The power of all such institutions to rule our lives will be challenged and frequently overturned.

Among the hallmarks of Uranus-Pluto decades is that these confrontations over concentrated power---who has it, and how it is used---become pitched battles. The forces in power do not simply roll over and die when challenged. No, they fight tooth and claw to maintain their power and positions of privilege, and they don't fight fair, either. They will use every means at their disposal---from overt to covert, and as sleazy as necessary---to undercut or squash the rebellion. The revolutions will not be easily defeated or beaten back, but we simply can't know in advance what the outcomes will be. Sometimes a kind of compromise is reached between the new and old, between reform and the status-quo, and between distributed power and concentrated power.

The decade *after* a Uranus-Pluto activation is often characterized by a seeming reversal of the revolutions, where the existing powers-that-be seem to have won, in that they return with greater intensity than ever. But these subsequent wellings up of subterranean or unconscious power in the decade that follows are often the last gasp of a dying regime, which will be finally laid to rest at the next Uranus-Pluto activation.

The 1930s and 1960s

Consider the 1930s. Uranus was in Aries in last-quarter square (a 90° relationship) to Pluto in Cancer. Aries is aggressive, singular, and pointed toward action. In the collective sense, Aries can represent (among many other qualities) the will to warfare, and the rise of charismatic individuals who lead the redirection of power. Cancer represents home, family, and security, or, at the collective level, the emotional appeal of nationalism and racial stereotypes (meaning loyalty to one's clan or tribe, often accompanied by xenophobia).

While astrology clearly signaled the onset of the worldwide Great Depression (through the presence in the early 1930s of Saturn in Capricorn, which squared Uranus and opposed Pluto), the dominant astrological theme of the 1930s from the standpoint of Uranus-Pluto was the welling up of nationalistic fervor and the extreme empowerment of violent dictators (Hitler, Stalin, and Mao all rose to power in that decade, while Italy and Japan became aggressively militant). In the decade that followed, World War II signified the culmination of aggressive nationalism and the “final solution” of racism played out through the Holocaust.

Then consider the 1960s. When Uranus and Pluto came together in mid-Virgo to kick off their new cycle (which alternates between 115 years and 140 years total length, the current cycle being of the longer duration), the last gasp of institutionalized and “approved” racism was laid to rest in the civil rights movement. Racism itself did not end as a sad part of the human condition, of course, but society (as an expression of collective humanity) finally recognized and affirmed the validity of racial equality.

Virgo represents diet (meaning food), health (both in illness and healing methodologies), rational/pragmatic systems, diversification, and “purity” in general through discriminating intelligence. During the Uranus-Pluto conjunction in 1965-1966, Saturn was exactly opposite in Pisces, so the tenor of the 1960s revolutions were very much a Pisces-Virgo struggle. Pisces is faith, the power of belief, reunification, idealism, and the allure of perfect fantasies, which are sometimes escapist and/or illusory. So, we had revolutions in the 1960s between the real and the imagined, between purity through discrimination and perfection through faith and fantasy, between a rational understanding of complex systems and a mystical orientation toward the power of belief.

Since a new Uranus-Pluto cycle was beginning in the 1960s, with Saturn opposite both, a significant feature of the revolt was new versus old. That's always the case to some extent whenever Uranus-Pluto activates, but it is more pronounced at the beginning a cycle than at any other quarter, and the opposition to Saturn highlighted the polarity. So, we had a conflict between generations. The counterculture rebellion was led by young people aimed at the “impure” society created (or inherited) by their parents. The younger generation took aim at the older generation's acceptance of conformity and hypocrisy, sometimes by insistence on unreachable ideals.

The birthing of a Uranus-Pluto cycle is also marked by the “rediscovery” of certain ancient or universal truths, as if timeless wisdom were being “born again” in new forms. The 1960s witnessed the rise of what has come to be called “New Age”

spirituality, through an often ersatz interweaving of diverse elements seemingly cherry-picked from various ancient spiritual traditions. We also saw the resuscitation of fundamentalist fervor in all the major religions. And drugs were part of the youthful experiment in altered consciousness.

Similarly, organic farming and holistic medicine emerged anew, although both had their roots in ancient cultures. Juxtaposed against these endeavors was the massive expansion of mechanistic agri-business, which used oil to maximize yields, and high-tech allopathic western medicine. Each end of those paired conflicts synthesized the paradoxes of the Virgo-Pisces axis in different ways.

Science was galvanized during the 1960s in two especially noteworthy directions. Both were based on revolutionary leaps forward in the understanding of integrated systems (Virgo). One revolution took shape in the field of biology, with the onset of a new discipline called *ecology*, which challenged the assumption (of both religion and rationalism) that the earth was little more than a resource to be exploited. Ecology gave us the first institutional warnings about the dire consequences of blindly continuing our collective path of unlimited growth. The other revolution occurred in computer science, where accelerated development in programming languages and manufacturing sophistication (both Virgoan) enabled production of miniaturized, integrated circuits called *microchips* that would shortly thereafter result in the first true personal computers.

Watergate and the eventual resignation in disgrace of President Richard Nixon represented the closing act of the “1960s”---the last hurrah of an ebbing revolt, in a sense. As the 1970s went on, major backlash developed against the civil disobedience of the 1960s (felt by many to be “lawlessness”). The nascent movements of organic farming, holistic health, and New Age spirituality were either co-opted by the mainstream or forced underground. Agri-business and high-tech medicine grabbed the limelight, while fundamentalist religion spread like wildfire. The drug culture devolved from marijuana and psychedelics toward cocaine and heroin first, then later meth-amphetamine. Meanwhile, medical pharmaceuticals thrived and grew hugely powerful as part of a surging corporate triumphalism.

Now, 40 years later, we see the results of the corporate takeover of America and the world. The ruling elites have worked long and hard to undermine our social and economic equality, with stunning success. Our government is now effectively an oligarchy, meaning rule by an elite few, and a plutocracy, meaning rule by the wealthy. Corporate interests and the ultra-rich call the tune. Fascism is defined as business and government being in bed together, and that unholy marriage is what has come to pass in America. Business is able to dictate to government the removal of restraints or social safeguards. When business corporations take great risks and win, they use government to allow them to keep *all* the profits, rather than returning a portion of those profits through taxation for the benefit of society. When business corporations take great risks and lose, however, they use government to bail themselves out at our expense. It’s a helluva game. Whether mega corporations win or lose, they still win. And in both cases, the rest of us lose.

Uranus and Pluto, however, are about to throw a monkey wrench into that well-oiled machinery, disrupting radically the cozy arrangements of “business-as-usual” for those in positions of power and privilege.

From mid-2012 until late-2015, Uranus and Pluto will jockey for position around a 90° arc between them. Seven times over that period, they will be exactly perpendicular. That event---called a *seven-pass transit* in astrology---is unprecedented in recent history. Only two previous Uranus-Pluto transits were comparable: a seven-pass transit from 1755-1758 that set up the American revolution, and a nine-pass transit from 1496-1500, that marked the beginnings of colonization of the western hemisphere by Europeans. The 2010s will be just as important.

Pluto in Capricorn

Pluto moves through Capricorn from January 2008 until January 2024. Pluto is the astrological symbol for death and subsequent rebirth. Sometimes it is stealthy and invisible in operation, like the radioactive fallout from Chernobyl or Fukushima. When provoked by Uranus, however, Pluto tends to be more spectacular---symbolically akin to the volcanic eruption that spews magma from below the surface or the earthquake caused by tectonic plates shifting deep within the earth’s mantle. It “reveals” (often violently) whatever has churned beneath the surface of apparently calm reality, hidden from view, and in so doing destroys the entire landscape, at least temporarily.

When Mount St. Helens blew in 1980, the devastation was awesome. The entire landscape for miles around the volcano looked like a moonscape. Seemingly everything was destroyed, then covered over in a thick coating of brown mud and gray ash. But not *everything* was destroyed. Seeds remained, and many animals that sensed the imminent eruption fled to a safe distance. As quickly as one year after the catastrophe, Mother Nature had already rushed in to start refilling that super-fertile void. Huge fields of wildflowers burgeoned. Millions of tiny new 4” pine trees stuck up through the mud. Animal tracks crisscrossed the entire territory. Renewal of life had begun.

Still, renewal is not guaranteed after Plutonian assassinations. When Pluto moved through Scorpio in the 1980s, sex met death through the AIDS/HIV epidemic. Sexual diseases had existed previously throughout human history, of course, but they were demographically limited and often treatable. After the onset and worldwide spread of the AIDS scourge, however, the landscape of sexuality changed, apparently forever. Even today, certain parts of Africa are still decimated by HIV, and “safe sex” is a permanent necessity everywhere.

Prince William Sound, site of the Exxon Valdez oil spill in 1989, is still contaminated to this day, more than 30 years later. So, while destruction is fairly certain with Pluto, subsequent renewal is only a possibility dependent on many unknown variables.

With Pluto in Capricorn, social institutions---especially those involving economics and government---are the prime targets for eruption, meltdown, or collapse. And the

bigger the institutions, the greater the possibility for disruption. As soon as Pluto entered Capricorn in 2008, we witnessed the crisis of a complete financial meltdown in the banking industry. 40 years of looneytunes monetary policy and financial chicanery suddenly went belly up, causing a chain reaction where every major investment bank was about to go insolvent.

Government and the Federal Reserve stepped in to keep the game going (via the injection of trillions of dollars given to the banks under the “too big to fail” policy). Still, some banks vanished while others merged, and the whole financial landscape of the global economy was permanently altered. On top of that, the dubious “fix” of running the greenback printing presses 24 hours a day and funneling new money to the banks was not a solution, but just a temporary band-aid. Now, because of the immense added debt and lack of any substantive reforms, the financial industry is again teetering on the brink. Because of those and many other factors (peak oil, climate change, resource wars, etc.), the global economy is now in serious risk of coming apart at the seams.

At this point, the big banksters are still riding the wave of their initial rescue, acting with the same arrogance and hubris that characterized their attitudes over past decades. No significant or fundamental reforms of the financial system have been attempted, much less put in place. Obviously, it will take more than one crisis to awaken us to the necessity of real change in monetary policy.

Uranus in Aries is currently fast approaching its first 90° pass with Pluto, which will occur in June 2012. From that point all the way through the end of 2015, we can anticipate an increasing cascade of breakdowns in our economic, financial, and governmental institutions, as well as in such areas as education, medicine, and agriculture. The difference between 2008 and 2015, however, will be that the relatively simple reforms we avoided early will be supplanted by more extreme and perhaps draconian revolutions later.

Re-Enter Rupert Murdoch

What is unfolding now with Rupert Murdoch and his media empire, including News Corp. and all the other tentacle companies within his smarmy grasp, is a sneak preview of the kind of explosive meltdowns we are likely to see from 2012 through 2015 and probably beyond.

Did no one know about the secret bugging of emails by Murdoch-owned-and-run media companies? Was the buying off of police and politicians truly a secret? Hardly. Many people knew, including people in high places. But for the past two decades, Murdoch was insulated by his power. No one dared cross him for fear of the consequences to their position or reputation. When Murdoch said, “Jump,” even heads of state said, “How high?” Virtually everyone kowtowed to his Imperial Majesty Rupert.

Uranus in Aries has just put an end to that. Courageous whistle-blowing actions by outraged individuals pierced the “veil of secrecy,” cracking the formerly seamless face

of fascist control. Now, as investigations deepen and broaden, with new revelations emerging every day, that initial crack in the edifice is widening into a chasm, revealing for all to see the evidence of massive corruption, deceit, and illegality. Meanwhile, the rats are beginning in droves to flee Murdoch's ship, which is already listing badly and may soon sink outright.

If this were the French Revolution, Rupert Murdoch would simply be hauled off to the guillotine. Off with his head! Given that we're not living in the Reign of Terror, will he be punished in some lesser fashion? Probably not. Murdoch is an old man protected by his immense wealth who will likely go to his grave convinced that he was unjustly wronged and betrayed by those he trusted. But no matter. At least we'll be rid of him.

Will some semblance of mainstream journalistic ethics be restored in the aftermath? Will the sudden collapse of a monolithic empire eventually be replaced with smaller and more independent institutions that serve the public rather than manipulate it? In other words, now that Uranus has provoked Plutonian destruction, will renewal follow? We don't yet know the answer to that important question.

Now, imagine the possibility of other, even larger meltdowns---the Federal Reserve, perhaps, or maybe the IMF or World Bank. Imagine the collapse of the dollar and its replacement with a new and revamped system of national currency, or even diverse local currencies. Is this really possible in the years ahead? Yes. Not assured, mind you, but possible.

Pluto in Capricorn has already shown us the massive destruction it can wreak. The most recent example of Plutonian symbolism is the Japanese earthquake, tsunami, and meltdown of the Fukushima nuclear reactor. But Uranus---now fast approaching the critical mass point of perpendicularity with Pluto---has hardly even begun to fight. The economic, political, and social revolutions likely to be triggered have not yet begun in earnest. Some of them will no doubt be false steps, such as the possibility that political demagogues will emerge to enthrall us, leading down blind alleys that result in even greater suffering and tragedy. Other revolutions will be brilliant and amazing to watch as we rise Phoenix-like from the ashes of a civilization built on impermanent and often false foundations.

At this point, uncertainty is the order of the day. All we can be sure of is that life will change in the decade ahead. We can't even know in 2011 how dramatic those changes will be. They may unfold gradually and sporadically, one by one, giving us time to adjust and adapt, or shocking collapses might occur in thunderous tumult from many directions simultaneously, provoking major global crises and at least temporary chaos.

Finally---whatever happens and how fast or slow it unfolds---civilization is reaching the crossroads. Whether humanity responds well or badly to the challenges ahead will be judged by future generations.