

What Now?

by Bill Herbst

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As the most divisive, exhausting, and unpleasant presidential campaign of our lifetimes ground down through its final weeks, the outcome seemed to me very uncertain. Like millions of Americans, I thought Hillary would probably win, but the various counter- and cross-currents buffeting that presumption were so strong that I kept to my original intention when I began writing about the election early in 2016 and made no public prediction concerning the outcome.

Now the election is over. A decision has been made. For the second time in 16 years, a Democrat won the popular vote, but a Republican prevailed in the Electoral College.

Tens of millions of people are excited and pleased about the outcome, and tens of millions of others are appalled and terrified.

In my perception, two emotions underpinned the campaign and the election. One was anger. The other was mistrust. Both of those emotions are characteristic of the Uranus-Pluto transit that constitutes the symbolic backbone of this decade.

Democrats won the so-called “popular vote” (which would be called simply “the vote” in almost any other country in the world), but lost the Electoral College, an arcane and anachronistic structure put into the U.S. Constitution two centuries ago by the Founding Fathers to counter their concerns about “mob rule.” As a result, Donald Trump is the President-Elect of the United States of America.

While most authoritative political sources anticipated a close election, most polls predicted a win for the Democrats. The polls were wrong. Their complex algorithms and reliance on historical precedents misread the underlying mood of the American voting public. They failed to realize the depth of dissatisfaction and anger in the zeitgeist, and the upwelling of revolt against institutions (indicated symbolically within astrology by the Uranus-Pluto alignment that is the hallmark of this decade, and about which I have written at great length). Half the country voted to “throw the bums out!” — with the “bums” being those in power and the entire political institution of government.

Whatever her intentions, Hillary Clinton was seen to represent the existing order, the status quo, business- and politics-as-usual, and the privileged powers-that-be. Conversely, for all the paradoxes and often agonizing contradictions of his

background and personality, Donald Trump was seen as the agent of change, the candidate who would shake things up and “drain the swamp.” That remains to be proven, of course, but it turned out to be a more powerful rallying call among the populace than most pundits understood.

Uranus-Pluto Again, Big Time...

When I began writing in 2005 (along with many other people) about what was then the coming decade of the 2010s, I felt strongly that the most critical astrological alignment of the decade would be the first-quarter square between the outer planets Uranus in Aries and Pluto in Capricorn. In my opinion, which was shared by many astrologers, this would be the most powerful symbolic event of the early 21st century, taking the impetus toward radical change begun in the 1960s and dramatically pushing those developments into concrete manifestation.

The symbolism of the transit indicated in no uncertain terms an extraordinary disruption of the status quo. In part, the Uranus-Pluto square implied that this would take shape through an inevitable clash — effectively a series of uprisings or rebellions from the grass roots upwards — aimed at the monolithic structures in society created and held by institutions and corporations. In addition, the transit implied that institutions themselves would falter badly, provoking even more outrage and opposition. These meltdowns would likely occur through overreach, corruption, malfeasance, failure to serve the public, and attitudes among the elites of oligarchic or plutocratic privilege. Both authority in general and economics in particular would be primary targets within the conflict.

The century began with 9-11 and subsequent invasions/wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. While these were precursors of the Uranus-Pluto alignment, they set the stage for what was to come. The next shots over the bow occurred in 2006, with the bursting of the real estate bubble, then again in 2008, with the sudden and catastrophic meltdown of the Big Banks due to their wild, unsound financial practices that were completely disconnected from the welfare of the population. That Humpty-Dumpty fall off the wall was addressed by All the King’s Horses and All the King’s Men by propping up those very banks and letting them continue on their merry way. No truly substantive reforms were put in place. No financial executives were prosecuted. The status quo protected itself and its own.

Having chosen to create the “global economy” in the 1980s, the elites decided to replace America’s manufacturing base with the “FIRE” economy (Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate). By the end of the first decade of this century, we’d sent the bulk of American factory jobs to other countries with cheaper labor, snidely referred to as the “Third World.” Meanwhile, education, medicine, and insurance all became rackets dedicated to maximum profit. The powers-that-be in government, business, and social institutions grew ever more divorced from the well-being and concerns of regular people (i.e., “the masses”).

As the Uranus-Pluto alignment approached, political movements arose — such as the Tea Party from the right and Occupy from the left — and made their presence felt in social protest. Over the active technical period of the transit, more grass-roots uprisings began that cast light on domestic violence, rape, and sports injuries, then culminated in the Black Lives Matter protests. Along the way, America's wealth disparity grew to epic proportions. Those in the top tier of the economic ladder profited hugely, while the middle and working classes stagnated or sank closer to poverty.

Through these initial years of the century, ordinary people's faith in authority and trust in institutions steadily eroded, sporadically becoming more visible, more intense, and much angrier.

When the Uranus-Pluto alignment made its seventh and final pass in March of 2015, some astrologers moved on, suggesting that the real-life correspondences of the symbolic cycle's active period would begin to wane. I disagreed. After extensive research to explore the correlations between astrology and American history, I believed firmly that the Uranus-Pluto transit would set a tone for the 2010s that would resonate not just during 2012-2015, when the transit was technically precise, but continuing past that and even growing in significance throughout the decade and beyond, well into the 2020s.

The national election we just held to pick our next Chief Executive and a percentage of our Congressional representatives has been arguably the most profound manifestation of the Uranus-Pluto symbolism we've seen so far. The repudiation of the existing political order amounts to a grass-roots rebellion. Yes, the Uranus-Pluto transit technically ended a year and a half ago, but the power of the symbolism to manifest dramatically is greater than ever and still growing. When the Democrats chose the slogan, "Stronger Together," I felt that they were in trouble, since the tenor of the times is definitely not unity or togetherness.

I've written about how the various Uranus-Pluto correspondences cannot be understood in simplistic terms of good or bad. Revolutions are not invariably positive and all institutions do not deserve to be overthrown. Societies exist with an ongoing tension between stable, dependable structures and provocative change in the ways we organize and run our affairs. Both revolutions and the status quo can be either progressive or regressive.

The Coming Trump Presidency

The only certainty in this upheaval is that things are going to change. While it seems likely that the country will move from a partially progressive to a largely reactionary social stance, at least in government and public policy, no one can be sure what a Trump Presidency will mean. The Republicans may encounter almost as much trouble with Mr. Trump as the Democrats do. Trump is not an ideologue. He is a showman, a TV star. He wants to be a Big, Can-Do, Do-

Everything President, along the lines of Theodore Roosevelt. Trump doesn't concern himself with how something gets done, and he will push, shove, seduce, and cajole to get what he wants.

But there's a fly in the ointment. Trump's chart runs smack into major difficulties starting in late December as Saturn reaches his Sagittarian full Moon and arrives in January opposite his Gemini Sun-Uranus. This means that he will have reached the halfway point in his life-purpose cycle at the same that he begins a new emotional needs cycle, events that are astrologically rare and hugely significant.

Trump's first cycle of life-purpose definition and expression was from age 27-56. In that cycle, he followed in his father's footsteps to pursue wealth and fame in New York real estate and wealthy society. His second life-purpose cycle, which began 13 years ago at the age of 57, revealed to him a new focus, that of becoming a global celebrity. That cycle is now reaching the halfway or harvest point. He has reached the summit. Now, he must start to live in and use what he built.

2017 is also the beginning of Trump's second Saturn-Moon cycle. He must redefine how he needs to present himself to feel comfortable and secure day-to-day over the decades ahead. In Trump's particular chart, this is about his on-stage persona — the character he's portraying himself to be. Where he once identified himself as an elite billionaire who reveled in his status as an outsider and an often crude loose cannon, now he must become a man of the people, at least in his self-created pose, and take on the awesome responsibilities of the highest office in the land.

In anyone's chart, these transits are significant and meaningful, setting a tone for the coming 15 years of the life-journey. In pragmatic terms, however, they are difficult transitions. Since Trump was born at the full Moon, both cycles change phase together, and their simultaneous activation corresponds to dramatically increased pressure, responsibilities, and — typically — blockage or opposition.

It's as if one has been driving down the road and comes to a railroad crossing where the gates are down, the lights flashing, and a long freight train is clickety-clacking its slow passage through the crossing. The only choice is to stop and wait — in this case, for an entire year.

In short, Trump is in for serious frustration in 2017. The American President is often called the most powerful person on the planet, but that power is not unlimited. Trump is about to run head-on into the hard lesson that our government has built-in checks and balances. We shall see how well he handles that. This is not to suggest that he will not wreak havoc. He may. But, whatever he does, he won't be a happy camper.

So, where are we now? I have two different perspectives: short-term and long-term.

In the Short Run

In the short-term of pragmatic reality, we're facing a situation where the country is divided into extremely polarized camps in a way not seen since the 1960s era of Vietnam War protests. It's not just the people against the government, it's the people against the people. The new federal regime will probably attempt to roll back much of the hard-won social progress we've made. This must be resisted at the ground level of citizen protest. We're in for a bad time, my friends, and not just for those who think that Donald Trump is a disaster for America. Even Trump's most fervent supporters and many others who voted for him will discover before too long that what was promised can not be delivered.

So far as President-Elect, for every step Donald Trump has taken toward sensible responsibility, he's taken two steps toward the abyss. Examples include naming Steve Bannon (the bat-shit crazy head of the alt-right web site, Breitbart.com) as his Chief Advisor, and considering the appointment of John Bolton (the posterboy of the Bomb-Them-All-Back-to-the-Stone-Age cabal of NeoCons who were fervent cheerleaders for the invasion of Iraq in 2004) to the critical Cabinet Post of Secretary of State. So much for even the pretense of sanity.

Populist, nationalistic, nativist, anti-globalization movements are mounting around the world: Brexit in Britain, Marine Le Pen's National Front in France, and Trump's election in America. These movements are typically conservative culturally, far-right politically and economically, often racist and xenophobic, and growing in power. They've suddenly gained a boost in legitimacy because of the American election and pose a serious challenge to the civilization that was rebuilt out of the ashes of World War II.

The creation over the past 50 years of a global economy built on free trade and consumption has changed the way human beings live and the very calculus of civilization, enriching those at the top while impoverishing many others below. The rising populist movements embrace much more, however, than mere dissatisfaction over wealth disparity and how the economic pie is sliced, although that's certainly a powerful motivating factor. They are fantasies about returning to a time that perhaps never was, but is certainly gone forever.

Are we headed for a civil war? I'd suggest that we've just been notified that it's on. I doubt that it will look like the war we fought from 1860-1865, but it's a civil war nonetheless. And it's quite likely to be one hell of a struggle.

In the Long Run

OK, so the short-term isn't looking great. What about the long-term? In the long run, I'm not sure that either of the two outcomes from the election would make much of a difference. Neither Hillary Clinton nor Donald Trump can save us from ourselves.

The 21st century contains a profound challenge, that of civilizational collapse. The question isn't how to prevent it, but rather, how to recover from it after it happens.

We are a monumentally immature, adolescent species. Hundreds of millions of human beings are loving, mature, and even evolving toward wisdom, but, taken as a whole, we are collectively like petulant children, fascinated with toys and driven by compulsions. Yes, we are smart, but collectively our intelligence is more clever and cunning than truly thoughtful.

What humanity has created over the past 300 years has brought us to the brink of disaster. We are no worse than human beings were millennia ago, but in those ancient epochs and even up until recently, there simply weren't enough of us to really mess things up. Our powers were limited, and our foolishness played out on a scale that could be absorbed by the earth. We played our games, but life went on.

Now, however, two factors have changed.

First, our big brains and cleverness have unlocked and unleashed awesome power. We now wield sufficient power to destroy not only ourselves, but Life as We Know It. I'm not talking about nuclear weapons, although those are certainly a real and present danger of staggering proportions. No, I'm talking about the day-to-day power used to conduct business-as-usual and the cumulative effects of those machinations on human beings and the planet.

Mother Nature, in her infinite wisdom, saw fit to take the many toxic elements on this planet and distribute them throughout the earth's crust, effectively making them harmless to Life. Human beings have dug them up, concentrated them, and refined them to a level of toxicity that is breathtaking (literally). What we have now is bad food, bad air, and bad water. The poison is now in our very bones.

Second, there are now so many of us. We are voraciously gobbling up all the resources and habitat on the surface of the planet, either stealing it or fouling it. We are living now in the midst of the greatest mass extinction of species since the Great Permian Extinction 250 million years ago. One quarter of the living species on the earth has vanished over the past three centuries. Friends, there's something seriously out of whack about a world with seven billion human beings and 400 Bengal Tigers. And we — human beings — made that happen.

Unless we become better citizens of this planet and wiser stewards of the environment, Mother Nature will destroy us, regardless of who occupies the White House. Life on Earth is based on the principle of ecological balance. If a particular species is too successful (as we have been), the imbalance produces natural and inevitable forces of correction. One way or another, that top-heavy species goes down. Well, right now, that's us.

Our species is brilliant in many ways. We're terrific at manipulating physical reality. We have more than enough testosterone to accomplish damn near anything. We are wonderful builders and industrious as hell. Our creativity can be stunning. We are capable of great heroism and sacrifice, as well as profound love.

What we're not good at, however, is addressing the fundamental problems of human nature. We're not good at getting along with each other. We haven't understood or altered our own proclivities toward violence and revenge, and we can't handle our own power. Families and intimate relationships are as often nightmarish and abusive as they are loving and respectful. The astounding capabilities of our brain's neo-cortex have not mollified the compulsive and aggressive drives of our brain stem.

There's an old joke: A man is walking down a street at night and sees a drunk on his hands and knees under a street lamp looking for something. "*What are you looking for?*" the man asks. The drunk slurs back, "*I dropped my car keys.*" So, the man begins to help the drunk look for his keys. After a couple of minutes searching to no avail, the man asks, "*Where did you drop your keys?*" The drunk points to a dark alley and says, "*Over there, in the alley.*" Astonished, the man asks, "*Then why are we looking here?*" The drunk looks at the man like he's crazy, then replies, "*Because this is where the light is.*"

Rim shot.

Human beings, and the modern civilization we've created, are like the drunk in the joke. We do what we're good at because we can. Meanwhile, we avoid what we're not good at. We distract ourselves from many necessary and critical realities, in part because they are often just too hard for us.

I realize that survival is a bottom line. You can't eat wisdom. If you live in a country such as America, where wealth is conspicuously and ostentatiously displayed everywhere, and yet you have barely enough money to pay your bills or take your kid to the doctor, you damn well might feel anger or resentment at what's happened in this country over the past 40 years. Eventually, you'll stop trusting those in power, who seem to have everything and ignore you.

Interestingly, those are the same people who voted for Ronald Reagan in 1984, Bill Clinton in 1992, George Bush in 2004, and Barack Obama in 2008. They just came out in droves and elected Donald Trump in 2016.

However Trump adjusts, adapts, and changes as he gets over the shock of becoming President (which I believe he didn't truly want or expect), his election and subsequent term in office will almost certainly accelerate our confrontation with civilizational collapse. In the long run, that may turn out to be a good thing, however perverse it seems.

With few exceptions, human beings don't change by choice; we change only when we are forced to change. The years ahead, starting in the early 2020s, will force us to change or else.