

Banding Together

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This commentary may be premature, perhaps by years. Still, the subject is on my mind, and it's unquestionably relevant to the times that await us in America and the world.

Among the hallmarks of astrological cycle theory is the presumption that cycles begin with the germination of seeds. These seeds may represent new ideas and developments that have never been seen before, or they may be renewed formulations of previous manifestations updated in an evolutionary way. The old spiritual sayings that "*there's nothing new under the sun,*" and "*the more things change, the more they stay the same*" imply that renewal is more likely, probably through mutation or permutation, than brand spanking new.

Seeds planted in the spring may germinate dramatically, even explosively, as they send up shoots to reach the sun's rays and use that energy to put down deep roots. Other times the new growth is subtle, almost unobserved, as the young plants germinate more sporadically, over time, then struggle to claim a niche for space and nutrients within the existing landscape.

When, over the first years of this century, I began studying and then writing about the Uranus-Pluto transit that would become the dominant symbolic theme in the astrology of the 2010s, I realized early on that the first-quarter transition of the cycle was critical to understanding the meaning of what was then a coming decade and is now in its waning years. I'll return to that point and explain what I realized later in the commentary.

The beginning of any astrological cycle is analogous to spring planting — clearing the ground, fertilizing, laying out the garden, and getting the seeds in. The beginning of the cycle sets a tone and defines the essence of what will unfold over the entire cycle. The first-quarter phase change, then, is analogous to the transition from spring to summer, from planting to tending. The garden has been laid out and prepared, the seeds have germinated, and we shift into the phase of protecting the growing plants — watering, weeding, etc. — to maximize the chances of fulfillment at the halfway point of the cycle (autumn) in fruit or flower.

Astrologically, the spring phase is “hurry up and wait.” Ask any woman about the experience of giving birth, and she will confirm the urgency and intensity of the process. That’s probably an understatement. Technically, the actual beginning of an astrological cycle is akin to becoming pregnant. Gestation and birth follow, but usually later on during the New or Spring phase.

The current Uranus-Pluto cycle began in 1965-1966, and the transit covered an effective period from the early-1960s through the early-1970s. One might make a case that the final act of the Uranus-Pluto conjunction was Watergate and the subsequent resignation of President Nixon.

I’ve written about many of the revolutionary or counter-cultural manifestations of that era in previous essays, articles, and commentaries — organic farming, holistic medicine, computer technology, etc. — and I won’t reiterate all that here. Instead, I want to focus on one particular social development from the 1960s and early 1970s, that of communal living.

At the Life Magazine level, “communes” were primarily a Hippie phenomenon. Young people, often middle-class and college-age, created a “Back to the Land” movement with a strong bent toward simplicity and spirituality. Given the myths and memes of the times, one might think that many of America’s youth formed or joined communes. Not so. The vast majority of young Americans never came closer to a commune than seeing one portrayed in a Hollywood movie (“Easy Rider” comes to mind as a typical example). Millions of young Americans fell in love, got married, had babies, acquired jobs, and moved to the suburbs to live in the traditional social structure of family units. The communal phenomenon was limited to specific and limited subsections of the counter-culture. In short, it was a fringe manifestation.

With a small number of significant exceptions (one example would be The Farm in Summertown, Tennessee), most of these idealistic communal ventures failed or vanished by the beginning of the 1980s.

At this point, let me insert something that may seem from left field, but isn’t. Another old spiritual saying is *“When one door closes, another door opens.”* During the Mesozoic period, dinosaurs roamed the earth and dominated the ecosphere. For 175 million years, dinosaurs were the top dogs. There were, however, many other species. Small mammals occupied a minor niche, scurrying about on forest floors and savannah grasslands. When a giant asteroid slammed into the Yucatan peninsula 65 million years ago, the reign of the dinosaurs came to an abrupt end, along with many other of the “higher” life forms. That mass extinction, called the “K-T Event,” opened the door for the small mammals that survived to flourish and multiply. To make a long story short, the result of that evolutionary change is us.

OK, back to our story. For every person who looks back on the 1960s with fond memories of his or her personal experience and growth, another American looks back on that decade with loathing and horror. Millions of people absolutely hated the radical social experiments, protests, and upheavals of the 1960s, and a powerful backlash from traditional and conservative institutions followed, welling up in the 1970s and intensifying through the 1980s.

Judging from what happened in America during the final two decades of the 20th century, one might even assume that much of what began in the 1960s had been stamped out, crushed under the prodigious weight of backlash against it. High-tech, allopathic medicine clearly won out over natural, organic, and holistic medicine. Agribusiness beat the crap out of organic farming. Wholesale industrial extraction of earth resources continued far beyond our efforts at conservation. Acidification of the oceans and depletion of marine life increased, despite programs for sustainability. Getting rich by making tons of money took center-stage over living simply, and the excesses of conspicuous consumption swamped frugality. Movements toward racial equality and social or economic justice were beaten back as modern civilization continued the extreme polarization of haves versus have nots. And, in terms most relevant to the subject of this commentary, traditional social structures, such as families and churches, reinforced their presence in America and pushed communes to the very edge of society. Apparently we were headed toward a feudal civilization with a few lords and many serfs.

The problem with that scenario is that it doesn't take into account the way cycles work. During the New Phase (the first 90° of a cycle), what is untried and developing may not seem successful at all. The nascent social structures with their new ways of being, doing, and relating may struggle for survival and even appear to be completely extinguished. But they're not dead. Like the small mammals running around the forest floor trying to avoid being stepped on by giant dinosaurs, they're waiting for an extinction event to open up an evolutionary door that will allow them to flourish and eventually flower.

When does this "extinction event" occur within an astrological cycle? At the first-quarter square, the transition from the spring phase to the summer phase. And that's what been happening in the symbolism of the Uranus-Pluto first-quarter square alignment during the 2010s.

In terms of the Uranus-Pluto alignment, the "extinction event" is the failure of traditional institutions that no longer serve the common good, as well as the accompanying loss of faith and trust in those institutions on the part of the public. The very bigness of modern civilization, with its huge scale and hyper-complexity, may be its downfall. In addition, the plutocratic elites, who own the overwhelming bulk of wealth and property and control most of the power, face a mounting rebellion from those who have less. The showdown between the haves

and have-nots may not be a fair fight, but it's likely to be a long-term struggle that will go on throughout the rest of this century.

A sizable percentage of human beings, perhaps even a majority, believe that modern civilization can continue indefinitely without our making any fundamental changes in society, commerce, and our relations with each other and the planet. Time will tell if they're correct.

On the other hand, another segment of the population sees clear and mounting evidence that civilization may be in the throes of a long-term breakdown that is likely to accelerate in the decades ahead and carries profoundly alarming implications for humanity and life on earth.

Each view has its champions and extremists. Some die-hard capitalists in the former camp lobby for free markets, total deregulation, and the privatization of all resources. At the other end of the scale are the "Doomers." No less an authority than Guy McPherson, a respected professor who has compiled an exhaustive list of climate change studies, predicts a sufficient rise in global temperatures to make the extinction of humanity inevitable by the end of the 2030s.

Those who have read my essays, articles, and commentaries over the years know where I stand.

Even those who feel that civilization will survive essentially intact, however, are likely to agree that humanity faces serious challenges and daunting times over the coming years into and through the 2020s.

The subject of this commentary is not the future of civilization. Instead, I'm concerned with the question of our individual lives in the years ahead and how we might maintain a degree of personal safety and maximize the possibility for fulfillment in lives worth having.

Only a tiny percentage of the so-called "G.I. Generation" that lived through and fought World War II is still alive, and those few who are left will be leaving soon. My own post-World War II generation of "Baby Boomers" are either entering or already well into our seniorhoods. The more recent generations that followed, right down to the "Millennials," are facing a very different situation than we encountered in our youth.

Regardless of our age or generation, how are we to survive and prosper over the uncertain years and decades ahead?

The symbolism of the Uranus-Pluto cycle, now entering its first-quarter "summer" phase, suggests strongly that the time is coming again for fuller, more mature expression of certain of the experiments begun in the 1960s and 1970s. Banding

Together is one of the phenomena from that bygone era that may be ready to re-emerge from apparent obscurity in a more robust and practical form. The spiritual rebellion and "Back to the Land" movements created in our youth that were part of the mythology of the 1960s are no longer relevant as fringe manifestations of an emerging counter-culture. Instead, finding moderately like-minded people with whom to cohabit and organize our social activities is likely to become a mainstream option in the years ahead to address human problems for which we'll need to find workable solutions.

Those of my peers who are well-off financially or still part of multi-generational family units will continue to live as they have. To some extent, their wealth protects them from the ravages of difficult life-circumstances, and their families, composed mainly of adult children and grand-children, provide them with a built-in social group for companionship and mutual support. As elders, they may often find themselves in the position of providing sustenance and shelter for their less privileged offspring.

Tens of millions of other Americans, however, occupy a very different niche. I count myself among this group. We are unmarried, divorced, or widowed, have no children or cohesive families, and find ourselves alone here in Act III of our lives as we enter or move through our seniorhoods. We may still work to make a living, or we might be retired, but we get by on distinctly limited resources, since we are not among the wealthy in the upper strata of society. What will happen to us as our culture undergoes the nearly inevitable contractions that lie ahead? What can we do to maintain our lives, make a meaningful contribution to collective well-being, and promote personal fulfillment over our waning time on earth, whether that time is measured in years or decades?

One significant option is to Band Together, whenever and wherever we can, and with whomever we find. In the best of circumstances, the "where" will be in moderately comfortable surroundings of social co-habitation, and the "with whom" will be with people we like or love. In these close-to-ideal settings, our lives may actually be better than they may have been earlier, when we were more independent and singular. The necessary sacrifices of cooperation, compromise, and perhaps living more simply will be well worth the effort. Friendship and mutual respect will be more important than romance and profound attraction. Getting along in practical terms will be of greater value than achieving mystical union.

Throughout my adulthood, I've met and interacted with thousands of individuals in America who felt a strong desire for deeper sharing and more loving social cohesion. Many of the ideas expressed in conversation took the form of creating intentional communities based on political, social, or spiritual ideals. People spoke of wanting to buy land or property where like-minded individuals could come together to live in harmony and work productively. Very few — if any — of these hopes came to pass, remaining instead unfulfilled dreams. They were all

swimming against the current of the times. In the 1980s and 1990s, the economic juggernaut of America's consumer culture tended to produce alienation. "Togetherness" may have remained a mythic ideal, but America was headed in another direction, promoted by advertising, where happiness was to be found in acquiring and having possessions rather than in human sharing.

The 2020s may change that condition of alienation, not because we undergo some sort of magical transformation into the spiritual recognition of our ultimate Oneness, but because we find ourselves in more difficult circumstances, where separateness works against us. In that kind of environment — where economics, politics, and degradation of the natural world make getting by more challenging — we could find ourselves in situations where forging cooperative alliances becomes critical for survival.

Banding Together in the years ahead will not look anything like the Back to the Land communes of the 1960s. It will occur in both cities and suburbs, because that's where available housing already exists and can be adapted or retrofitted most easily for small group living. Zoning restrictions will need to change, but this is not an insurmountable obstacle. Laws can be rewritten, and many existing laws will become irrelevant. Frequently, co-habitation will be *ad hoc* or informal and not subject to legal restraints. When people need to Band Together to live, they will find a way to do so.

Active participants in the new styles of Banding Together will tend to be adults, often those in seniorhood, although 20- and 30-somethings may also participate within their own demographic sub-cohorts. These small groups that come together in shared living situations will often be peer-based or age-centric, but multi-generational families may also find that Banding Together provides a definite advantage in maintaining a positive quality of life.

I'm not suggesting that this social movement will be easy or simple. Getting along together in relative harmony has always been among the most difficult of human endeavors. Given human nature and the uncertainties of our collective future, biological families will probably remain the seminal unit for shared protection. The emphasis on the zodiacal sign Cancer in the July 4th, 1776 chart for America (the Sun, Mercury, Venus, and Jupiter were all in that sign) implies that Americans are strongly family-oriented, and that blood is and will probably remain thicker than water. We will need more than biological families, though.

[Note: July 4th, 1776 — the signing of the Declaration of Independence — is not the only date used by astrologers for America's birth, and the time generally used — 5:10 p.m. local mean time in Philadelphia — has been disputed. That chart, called the "Sibly" USA chart, has proven to be relevant, sometimes even uncanny, in describing the American character and the paradoxes of our history. As a result, that date and time remain the most commonly used by astrologers for the birth chart of America.]

In situations that are less than ideal, we may find ourselves Banding Together not by choice, but by necessity. Failing health and exhausted financial resources will require dependence on others, perhaps enabled by the state. To borrow the words of Tennessee Williams' character Blanche DuBois in "A Streetcar Named Desire," many older people who find themselves alone and at risk will have to "*rely on the kindness of strangers.*" In those situations, some of the Banding Together may be less than pleasant.

Will there be casualties? Of course. Will some people fall through the cracks or be thrown under the bus? Yes. Inevitably, certain individuals who need help because they are alone will come to unpleasant or tragic ends. That sort of suffering in life's winding down is nothing new. Throughout human history, final chapters for individuals have often been unhappy or fraught with misery from illness, loss, or despair. The fearful specter of sad or painful outcomes is one reason why society doesn't generally publicize such endings. Civilization prefers dreams of happiness, even if they are illusions.

My focus here, however, is not on suffering, but rather on the reduction and minimizing of suffering. In my past writing, I've often stated my assumption that, over the coming decades, we're likely to see expression of both the very best and very worst of human nature. To me, the best of human nature includes the loving compassion and creative ingenuity that allows individuality and fosters togetherness. Of the many duality paradoxes that comprise human experience, individuality/singularity/independence versus collectivity/belonging/togetherness is close to the heart of who we are. We need both, and the coming decades give us another opportunity to refine and improve our understanding of how to reconcile these seemingly exclusive opposites.

How we Band Together in shared living situations and working communities as we re-localize in the decades ahead may be a significant factor in whether humanity is able to outgrow the long struggle with its own disturbed adolescence and move into more responsible and loving adulthood.