

Critical Mass Approaches

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The focus of this commentary is on a single astrological cycle, the same cycle that I have written about in roughly 100 previous commentary essays: the Uranus-Pluto cycle, and specifically, the transit of its first-quarter square, which means that Uranus is one-quarter of the zodiac ahead of Pluto, as measured from our perspective here on earth. Critical mass in the transit will begin when Uranus reaches a point in the zodiac exactly 90° ahead of Pluto. The term in astrology used to indicate these exact alignments is "partile." This event, in June of 2012, is the first of a series of partile alignments, each of which is called a "pass." This first-quarter square between Uranus and Pluto is a seven-pass transit. All seven of those passes taken together comprise the entire critical mass period, from the first through the seventh.

Two previous major transits between Uranus and Pluto occurred within the last century. The first was in the 1930s (a five-pass last-quarter square), and the second in the 1960s (a three-pass conjunction).

The number of partile passes in each Uranus-Pluto transit during these three decades is meaningful, though not simple to interpret. I will list the dates of the various partile passes first and then discuss the overall meanings, as well as the similarities and differences in each of the significant decades.

Uranus-Pluto last-quarter square (1930s)

21 April 1932
2 September 1932
8 March 1933
4 November 1933
17 January 1934

5 passes with Uranus in Aries and Pluto in Cancer
21 months total duration of critical mass

Uranus-Pluto conjunction (1960s)

9 October 1965

4 April 1966
30 June 1966

3 passes with both Uranus and Pluto in Virgo
9 months total duration of critical mass

Uranus-Pluto first-quarter square (2010s)

24 June 2012
19 September 2012
20 May 2013
1 November 2013
21 April 2014
14 December 2014
16 March 2015

7 passes with Uranus in Aries and Pluto in Capricorn
33 months total duration of critical mass

The Astrology of Uranus-Pluto in the 2010s

Four qualities of dual planetary alignments carry obvious weight in determining the meanings and implications of a particular transit within a cycle. Other technical levels of such cycles can reveal additional interpretive layers, but the four explained below provide the core of the transit's meanings.

1. Planets

The first and most primary of these four qualities is the pair of planets involved in the cycle. Their archetypes—individually and in harness together—provide a basic understanding of the nature of the cycle.

Pluto is the archetype for destruction and renewal through the massive welling up of massive forces long restrained. Uranus symbolizes sudden and unexpected revolts and upheavals that challenge the status quo. Together, the activations within their shared cycle indicate periods where old worlds collapse and new worlds arise, whether for better or worse.

An accurate image for Uranus-Pluto transits is volcanic eruptions, which release long-held forces of inconceivable power. Magma can destroy, as in eruptions such as Vesuvius in the ancient world and Krakatoa in modern history, but they are also the means to create new land, as in the Hawaiian Islands.

I have written many times about the symbolism of Uranus, Pluto, and their shared cycle, so I won't reiterate that at length here, except to restate that the Uranus-Pluto cycle is the single most dramatic and powerful paired planetary cycle in all of astrology. No other two-planet cycles signal the predictable but always unexpected disruptions and discontinuities in the ways we think of ourselves and the world of which we are a part. Together, Uranus and Pluto signal both the best and worst expressions of human nature and earthly experience. If one is interested not so much in the smooth flow of history, but in the peak moments of profound, radical change (both brilliant and brutal, amazing and horrific) in human affairs, then the Uranus-Pluto cycle is the one to track.

2. Cycle Phases - Quarters

The second technical level of interpretation of transits is cycle phase. Each complete cycle contains four obviously critical alignments: conjunction (new phase), first-quarter square, opposition (full phase), and last-quarter square. Transits occur at many other points in the cycle as well (all based on the geometry of arcs, meaning various fractional proportions of the cycle), but the others (at 1/3, 1/5, 1/6, etc.—meaning trines, quintiles, sextiles, and so forth) carry considerably less symbolic importance and impact in literal correspondence. The points of the four quarters, however, are fundamental and immensely powerful in their correspondence to the nature and timing of major shifts in the reality of our collective sharing, meaning how civilization unfolds.

The four quarters are analogous to “seasonal” changes in the cycle, much like spring, summer, autumn, and winter in the calendar year. Each quarter of the cycle reveals characteristic processes in the archetype field, akin to the different farming/gardening activities that mark each season in of Mother Nature's year, especially in the temperate zones of climate, where the seasonal changes are unmistakably distinct. The transits that define those changes in the Uranus-Pluto cycle signal significant discontinuities or disruptions—sudden and often shocking transitional periods between one quarter that's ending and another that's beginning.

Below are the core meanings of the four quarterly transits and the phases for which they are the entry portals:

Conjunction (new phase or beginning of the initial quarter of the cycle):

Analogous to the end of winter and beginning of spring, this transit kicks off the entire Uranus-Pluto cycle, whose length will be roughly 115 years

or 140 years. What happens is that “seeds” are germinated in the collective that bring forth new and radically different social/cultural beliefs, ideas, practices, and structures. Revolts and revolutions rise up to challenge the status quo of civilization. For some of these revolts, the social implications are immediately apparent and long-lasting. For others, radical change seems only temporary, rising and then falling, usually because the status quo reasserted its dominance and quashed the rebellion. But even then, the implications of the seemingly failed revolutions reassert themselves later. When? At the first-quarter square.

First-quarter Square (the portal into the second quarter):

Analogous to the end of spring and beginning of summer, this transit brings a “flowering” into fuller manifestation of whatever seeds were planted/germinated in the springs. Whatever was seen initially as radical and experimental expands and proliferates into social practices that gain acceptability as “normal.” What was once theoretical becomes pragmatic. In the symbolism of the summer season of growth, what can and must happen does happen, not by choice but by the inevitable impetus of life to emerge into fullest expression possible.

Opposition (full phase or start of the third quarter):

Analogous to the transition from summer to autumn, this is the signal that harvest time has arrived. In farming terms, that means the urgency of getting in the mature crop for market or storage. In social terms, it means that the time of building infrastructure is over, and the full use of that structure is now imminent.

Last-quarter Square (gateway into the fourth quarter):

Analogous to the end of autumn and beginning of winter, this transit announces to us that something previously valuable to us is not permanent, but is, in fact, coming to the end of its usefulness. In farming terms, this is the “lying fallow” of winter recovery after three seasons of effort to produce good crops. But whether the crop was good or bad, the message is the same: lie fallow to prepare for next spring. In social terms, this means letting go of our attachments to whatever we worked to manifest during the earlier three quarters of the cycle. What was once new and vibrant has now become commonplace and banal. Though routines and structures may continue for a time, their meaning and value is diminishing. The last-quarter square jolts us to recognize this by creating uncertainty where ways of living were once stable, asking us to choose detachment over involvement and freedom over security. This transit often signals a kind of “last hurrah” for the old order, a desperate welling-up of the way things were, followed by rapid dissolution of outworn ideas and practices.

In light of this particular level of significance and meaning, the 1930s were defined by a last-quarter square Uranus-Pluto transit that marked the end of an epoch in the welling-up-last-hurrah of outworn ideas (colonialism, nationalism, racism), the 1960s by a Uranus-Pluto conjunction that began a new cycle of revolution and dramatic change, and the 2010s by a first-quarter square Uranus-Pluto transit that represents the “full manifestation and flowering” of revolutions from the 1960s that succeeded (computers and technology), and the “rising from the ashes” of baby revolutions from that era that were seemingly rejected by society (including ecology, holistic health, organic farming, “small-is-beautiful” commerce, social/economic equality, and international peace movements).

3. Passes

The third level of interpretation to reveal meaning and power of Uranus-Pluto transits is the number of partile passes within a given transit. Total passes are always an odd number.

One Pass:

Single-pass transits between Uranus and Pluto occur rarely, and only at conjunction. They represent a relatively brief shock of the new confronting the old that may go unnoticed at the time.

Three Passes:

More frequent than single-pass Uranus-Pluto transits but also limited. These occur most often at the conjunction. They correspond to greater impact in cultural events. Some disruption, but more meaning in implication.

Five Passes:

Though rare at the conjunction, five-pass transits are the most frequent number in the other three quarterly transits. Somewhat more powerful with greater impact than three-pass transits, tending to correspond with more chaos and disruption but less coherent meaning.

Seven Passes:

Exceeding rare. Immensely powerful (in part because the extra passes extend the total effective duration of the transit). Usually corresponds to a cascade of interconnected shocks that disrupt the status-quo.

Nine Passes:

Most rare of all. Almost literally world-changing.

The 1930s Uranus-Pluto last-quarter square was a five-pass transit, implying a dramatic breakdown of existing social structures accompanied by a welling-up of antiquated beliefs marked by more chaos than meaning.

The 1960s Uranus-Pluto transit was a three-pass transit *and* a conjunction, implying some social disruption but immense new meanings for what culture might eventually become.

The 2010s Uranus-Pluto first-quarter square is a seven-pass transit, implying huge disruptions as revolutionary ideas from 50 years earlier become critical to solving the massive breakdown of a status quo that has become unworkable.

The only nine-pass Uranus-Pluto transit over the past thousand years occurred in a first-quarter square from 1496-1500, which corresponded to the “discovery” of the New World by Columbus, and how that changed everything. Although many millions of people were living in the western hemisphere at the time (estimates vary widely among scholars, ranging from a low of 5 million to a high of 150 million people then residing in the North and South American continents), many in complex societies, and while numerous explorers from the east had already visited those continents, the re-discovery of the “New World” in the 1490s occurred at a time when Europe was ripe for revolution (Uranus) and eager for more power (Pluto). First-quarter squares are notoriously aggressive. Desire for more wealth (gold) galvanized European monarchies, and the accompanying Plutonian lust for empire through conquest, land, and empire created a frenzy of exploration and colonization. The fact that this “invasion” had tragic consequences for the indigenous peoples of the western hemisphere (in violence, enslavement, and decimation by disease) is testament to the brutality that sometimes accompanies Uranus-Pluto upheavals.

4. Zodiac Archetypes (the sign or signs in which the transit occurs)

The third layer of interpretation for Uranus-Pluto transits involves understanding the zodiac archetypes (meaning signs: Aries, Taurus, Gemini, etc.) invoked by a particular transit.

When a Uranus-Pluto cycle begins with a conjunction (as Uranus overtakes and passes the slow-moving Pluto), it kicks off a new cycle that will last approximately 110 years or 140 years. Those cycle lengths alternate—first one, then the other.

On rare occasions, a three-pass conjunction will span the end of one sign and the beginning of another, but, in most instances, only a single sign is involved. Here are the signs in which conjunctions occurred to begin the past five Uranus-Pluto cycles (and the next one in the future). One-year events in 1710 and 2104 represent single-pass transits, while two-year events are all three-pass transits:

1343-44 **Aries** (11-12°)
1455-56 **Leo** (13-14°)
1597-98 **Aries** (20-21°)
1710 **Leo** (29°)
1850-51 **Aries** (29-30°)
1965-66 **Virgo** (17-18°)
2104 **Taurus** (8°)

The conjunctions and subsequent New Phases of each Uranus-Pluto cycle represent head-on conflict between the new and the old. What is experimental, radical, and different confronts the established order and power of the status quo. Something new emerges into culture (or something old re-emerges anew after having been discarded and forgotten for a long time), and that newness is often overly idealistic, as well as raw and relatively unsophisticated.

Notice that the four Uranus-Pluto cycles that began before the 20th Century occurred either in Aries or in Leo. These are fire signs, so kinetic movement was emphasized each time. Improvements in travel and transportation were key to our emergence out of the Dark Ages and into the Renaissance and Enlightenment. Exploration of the earth's land masses was a key to all these cycles. The three cycles that began in Aries each saw significant leaps forward in the means and the will to warfare.

The 1960s cycle (in which we are now reaching the first quarter) signified an archetypal change—from fire signs to earth signs. Virgo is the sign of understanding how whole systems operate through an analysis of their interactive processes and connected components. Virgo is analysis and synthesis, poetically seeing both the forest and the trees, or, more correctly, seeing the trees more clearly to better understand the forests.

During that recent Uranus-Pluto decade (1961-1972), we saw the birth of many developments of huge import to our collective future. Two of particular note were the technology of computers and the science of ecology. Both have already changed our interaction with the world, and the coming century will see even more profound changes.

Health and diet are also Virgo concerns, and the 1960s birthed revolutions in both medicine and food, through holistic health and organic farming. These

challenges to the status quo were seemingly rejected by the culture in favor of high-tech western allopathic medicine, with its focus on management of symptoms through surgery and drugs, and on agri-business, with its focus of machine-managed massive monoculture through use of chemical fertilizers based on fossil fuels and the eventual development of genetically-modified foods, which threaten both health and the seed banks that took centuries to refine. Both allopathic medicine and agri-business (which are also Virgoan, but short-sightedly so) will likely give way in the decades ahead, because they are mega-enterprises whose apparent "efficiencies" are actually wasteful and disharmonious.

Opposition transits (marking the halfway point that is the portal into the full phase or harvest time of the cycle) occur, naturally enough, in opposite signs, so those transitions invoke the archetypal meanings of one of six axes in the zodiac. This is the phase where what was new and unproven is finally accepted as "normal" and "standard" through integration.

The last Uranus-Pluto opposition occurred in a five-pass transit over 1901-1902 on the Gemini-Sagittarius axis. The closing five years of the 19th century and first five of the 20th saw culminating revolutions that had been brewing for the previous 50 years in industrial invention (electric power), modern warfare (weapons development), travel and mobility (the automobile), theories of physics and psychology (Einstein and Freud), and the shift in first-world countries from primarily rural to substantially urban life. The full phase that followed the 1901-1902 opposition saw cityscapes reach for the sky.

The turn into the 20th century marked civilization's acceptance of modernity through devaluing of the traditional and embrace of the new, which played out more and more fully over the next 60 years.

The two intermediate quarterly transits are characterized by squares between Uranus and Pluto. The portals from spring to summer and from autumn into winter occur when the two outer planets are 90° apart and either widening that arc of separation (waxing toward full phase) or narrowing their separation (waning as they approach their next conjunction).

The Uranus-Pluto last-quarter square in the 1930s occurred with Uranus in Aries and Pluto in Cancer, both cardinal signs, implying crises of conflict. Even though that decade witnessed the Great Depression, the emphasis of the transit wasn't on economics *per se*. Cancer is about challenges to the survival or security of the clan, tribe, or nation. Aries can be about charismatic leadership, the aggression of warfare, or will toward conquest. So, the global economic collapse provided the impetus for Hitler to take power in Germany, with his vision of national identity through racial superiority and lebensraum—expansion to the east,

accompanied by conquest and enslavement of inferior peoples. In addition, the world war that ensued was conducted primarily under the authority of four charismatic and extraordinary individuals: Hitler, Stalin, Churchill, and Roosevelt.

Now in the 2010s, eighty years later, Uranus has travelled around the ecliptic once and is again in Aries, but this time Pluto has moved halfway through the zodiac into Capricorn. Like the cardinality of the Aries-Cancer square of the 1930s, the Aries-Capricorn square of the 2010s implies crises provoked by conflict, but this time not about family or clan, but about the organized, impersonal structures of society itself, meaning governments, corporations, and social institutions (education, healthcare, etc.).

The central symbolism of the imminent Uranus-Pluto transit is *inherently* economic. Commerce lies at the heart of civilization. Communities exist to provide goods and services to satisfy the needs and wants of people—for shelter, food, clothing, meaningful work, and the camaraderie of human fellowship. Capricorn represents the organization of these necessities into an overall social structure. With Pluto in Capricorn, destruction and recreation of society and its structures will occur to some extent. How much is uncertain and unknowable in advance. The larger and more complex the institution, the greater will be the likelihood of its breakdown into smaller and simpler units.

Because Uranus is in Aries, the ever-present possibility of aggression and even violence is higher than usual. If wars do erupt in classic conflicts between nations, they will most likely be motivated not by territorial conquest, but over control of natural resources (Pluto in Capricorn). Another source of possible violence is civil unrest and forceful repression by authorities eager to maintain control over populations in revolt. Whether this will occur and, if so, how extreme it might be are unknowns yet to be seen. The likelihood is that violence will occur sporadically and in pockets, in much the same way that the mayhem and chaos produced by natural disasters may sweep over a given locality but then subside as quickly as they began, leaving the survivors to restore social life in the aftermath.

While Uranus in Aries can signify aggression and even violence, it may also imply discovery and/or creation of brilliant and novel ways of addressing problems. Practical solutions can and will be found to many of the problems that arise over the coming years. These will not be applied, however, until after significant breakdowns have occurred. For instance, the current crisis in the Eurozone over Greek default is now sufficiently dire to provoke that kind of creativity. Whether it matters much will depend on how events unfold.

A further predictable manifestation of the symbolism of Uranus in Aries is that in the 2010s as in the 1930s, significant odds exist for the appearance of

charismatic leaders—pied pipers who galvanize support from a frightened public by promising simplistic responses to complicated problems. Whether these “leaders” come from the existing ruling order or emerge from revolutionary splinter movements, the results will be similar—false solutions and worsening conditions.

Those individuals and organizations who will come forth and actually address effectively our diverse challenges and changing situations will tend not be wedded to a particular philosophy nor claim exclusive leadership for themselves. Instead, they will work effectively to organize communities and cooperate with others to reconstitute commerce, probably on a smaller and more local scale.

Why smaller and more local? The natural targets for breakdown with Pluto in Capricorn are gargantuan structures, mega-institutions that no longer serve the collective (which is their true charter), but now seek mainly to perpetuate themselves and benefit the elites who direct and manage such corrupted organizations. Such organizations have enjoyed a long and seemingly glorious run over the past century, in large part because of easy access to plentiful resources obtained at minimal expense, but those days are coming to an end. Increased costs, limited resources, and corrupt leadership have combined to dramatically reduce their effectiveness and adaptability.

Because of the complexity of our current institutions and the networks of interdependence that connect them, the former benefits of large economies of scale have become vulnerabilities. Any failures of weak links in the chain caused by social, financial, or economic disruptions can derail the smooth operation of such seemingly impregnable institutions. Near-extinction of these dinosaurs is a real possibility in the years ahead. Large-scale operations are not likely to completely vanish, of course, but their massive power, corrupt influence in government, and *de facto* domination of society are likely to be profoundly challenged, with re-localization and smaller scale operations waiting in the wings as the natural and necessary antidote.

Small is beautiful in the decades ahead.