

*astrological-cultural-spiritual-political
views & commentary...*

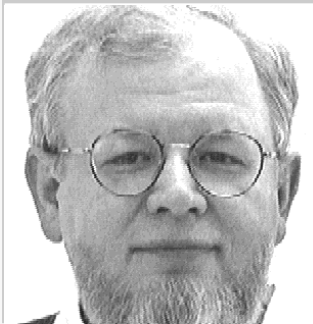
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THE HERBST NEWSLETTER



Thoughts, dates, & reminders about our lives as members of the craziest species on this lovely planet. Like a message in a bottle washing up on the sandy shores of consciousness...

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Dear friends,

This month's commentary moves on with the chronology to the most infamous chapter in the unfolding story of where we've been and where we're headed.

SATURN – PLUTO

In the April and May newsletters, I wrote about the dreams, illusions, and revolutionary ideals of the last two Uranus-Neptune cycles, the second of which began in 1988-1999. That period saw the sudden collapse of totalitarian governments, followed by a surge forward in technological innovation and religious orientation that changed the shape of society.

As the Uranus-Neptune cycle waltzed off center stage in the last year of the old millennium, fading again for awhile into the background of the archetype field, another pair of planets emerged to claim the limelight. The 21st century was ushered in by a crisis in the Saturn-Pluto cycle, and the shift in both tone and events could hardly have been more dramatic. Wild expansion (Uranus-Neptune) suddenly gave way to violent contraction (Saturn-Pluto).

At the end of the Cold War, America stood alone as triumphant victor. Our economic system—*capitalism*—had seemingly been vindicated, along with the equally high idealism of our form of government—*representative democracy*. And yet, we failed to see clearly that, just as totalitarian communism had imploded, we too were collapsing from within, both economically and politically. The exhilarating freedom many Americans had felt throughout the 1990s would soon vanish, to be replaced by cold fear, anguish, and mounting aggression. The shining New World Order turned out to be quite different than its proponents in the halls of government and corporate boardrooms imagined, or, at least, had promised.

Of all the paired outer-planet cycles, each of which brings particular evolutionary challenges, we human beings seem to have the most trouble with the combination of Saturn and Pluto. The urges within the human psyche that resonate to these paired archetypes are extremely difficult for us to integrate into our lives with grace or humility.

The ennobling and positive qualities offered by the two symbols—true maturity (Saturn) and authentic transformation (Pluto)—do not manifest easily through the habitual and compulsive patterns that so often rule us. Simply put, Saturn and Pluto require the hardest spiritual work human beings ever face. Especially when paired, they lay out a path so steep and daunting that only the most courageous and patient individuals among us ever reach the summit. Collectively, we have hardly even begun that climb. In the absence of such effort, Saturn and Pluto unleash in us a Pandora’s Box of anxieties from the realm of fear and dread, especially fear of others. Reacting to feelings of powerlessness, we revert to our basest survival instincts, pulling into an aggressive-defensive shell from which we then lash out in what too often escalates into orgy of destruction.

Here are the basics of the Saturn-Pluto dyad:

Cycle length:

varies from 31-38 years, with quarterly shifts every 8-9 years

Typical collective manifestations from past cycles:

The urge for power and domination over others

An upwelling of authoritarianism through group fear

The dark side of nationalism, patriotism, racism

Paranoia, xenophobia, ethnic cleansing

Cold ruthlessness by authority with public sanction

The need for certainty and the tendency toward absolutism

The brutalizing pathology of mob rule

Manipulation that threatens or leads to eruptive violence

The descent into destruction on a massive scale

Courage or perseverance during extreme hardship or against seemingly insurmountable odds

Moral or emotional staunchness, holding the line against repression

Throughout the 20th century (the first in which we were aware of Pluto), peace and security were shattered by an alternating pattern of violent mass warfare and economic depression. Time and again, the Saturn-Pluto cycle was active at critical junctures.

Saturn conjoined Pluto and began their first cycle of the past century from the summer of 1914 to the spring of 1916. The great cataclysm of World War One erupted. At the halfway point of that cycle, Saturn opposed Pluto in 1930-1932, which saw the low ebb of the Great Depression and the rise of the Third Reich in Germany. During the last-quarter square, from spring 1939 to spring 1941, World War Two exploded.

The second Saturn-Pluto cycle began from 1946-1948 and ushered in the Cold War. At the midpoint of that cycle, Saturn opposed Pluto from 1964-1967, and America sank into the quagmire of Vietnam, a direct result of paranoid anti-communist geopolitics.

The current cycle began in 1981-1983 and brought the Reagan presidency, with its “supply-side, trickle-down economics” and huge military buildup. In addition, the first significant acts of anti-U.S. terrorism in the Middle East took place with the bombings of the American Embassy and Marine barracks in Beirut. Though outraged, the American public considered these attacks to be aberrations, rather than the harbinger of a long cycle that would build over time. During that period, the Soviet Union was embroiled in its own futile mayhem in Afghanistan.

The first quarter of that Saturn-Pluto cycle in 1992-1994 saw the botched World Trade Center bombing. At the time, most Americans still couldn't be bothered to care much, since we were enamored with Uranus-Neptune techno-dreams and economic expansion. The Clinton presidency, which had surfed into town on a wave of liberal optimism, was already contracting from the pressures of hard-line conservatism and fundamentalist religious backlash heating up the culture wars. Health care reform had been quashed in 1992, and Clinton saw the handwriting on the wall when the Democrats lost control of both Houses of Congress to the Republicans in 1994.

The cycle culminated at the halfway point from August 2000 through May 2003, and we all remember what happened during that period: the 9-11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in 2001, the retaliatory U.S. invasion of Afghanistan one month later, and then the hopelessly deranged invasion of Iraq in 2003. We know now what many of us suspected all along, that the Bush administration had been looking for any excuse to invade Iraq since the neocons took office in 2000.

So much has been written by astrologers (including me) about the timing and meanings of the 9-11 attacks that we need not reiterate all those thoughts here. What's important in the context of this essay is not the attacks themselves, but our national response to them.

I would hazard a guess that perhaps 50 million Americans retained their sanity after the shock and grief of 9-11. These thoughtful people lobbied for patience, restraint, and non-military means of dealing with the crisis. Much of the rest of the country, however—including nearly everyone in politics and the mainstream media—went crazy. Absolutely bonkers. They circled the wagons, beat the war drums, and screamed for payback in a display of military power so tragic and wrong-headed as to rival Europe in 1914.

I was among the 50 million who opposed blind retaliation through military force, as were most of my friends and, I imagine, the bulk of my current newsletter subscribers. We felt that 9-11 was a crime, not a war, and should be dealt with accordingly, through international cooperation and law enforcement. For an extraordinary moment in the aftermath of the attacks, the heart of the whole world opened to America in an outpouring of goodwill and sympathy. We longed for our country to take a long, hard look at itself. Perhaps we could correct our complicity in fostering global conditions that virtually guaranteed a repeat of the mass violence of the previous century. Sadly, Saturn opposite Pluto made it unlikely that we would look inward or turn the other cheek, and instead strike out with a vengeance. Collectively, we were still not far enough along to handle those energies wisely.

I wasn't writing publicly at that point, since my own life was in desperate straits. When I started up the newsletters again via email in July 2002, my first commentary was about Saturn-Pluto. Here is a section from that newsletter (#43):

In society, Saturn represents structures and institutions of culture, as well as the restraining control of traditional authority to maintain the status quo. Saturn is conservative and cautious—the “order” side of law-and-order, which includes the pecking order of culture from the top down, from groups that are privileged and powerful all the way to those considered marginal or disenfranchised. Saturn is the “business” of life, especially through the economic commerce that runs the world.

By contrast, Pluto represents total transformation, the urge for complete change that bubbles away in the collective and wells up from time to time in the cultural equivalents of earthquakes, tidal waves, and volcanic eruptions. To get rid of the old and make way for the new, Pluto is extreme and cathartic. This is purging in profound endings and beginnings—death and rebirth.

Saturn and Pluto are not gentle, and they do not play well together. Saturn is cold and harsh; Pluto is intense and destructive. When they pass through opposite points in the heavens, as they have three times over the past century, long-held and pent-up frustrations polarize against the existing order. The irresistible force of momentum (Pluto) confronts the immovable object of inertia (Saturn). Tectonic collisions challenge the status quo authority, which reacts by stubbornly

retrenching and becoming repressive. But such resistance serves only to make the assault on the ruling order more sweeping. Both become more ruthless as the conflict escalates beyond any expectations. Repercussions take years to be fully realized.

We should be ashamed of ourselves. The fact that we're not, at least not visibly, is telling. Our government's response to the crisis [of 9-11] has been to ignore business scandals, throw out the Bill of Rights, and create an ersatz and perpetual "War on Terror" that suits certain powerful elites. I worry less about terrorists than I do the privileged "patriots" in elected office... who serve only themselves and their cronies rather than the public good."

The 50 million of us in this country and a billion others around the world who knew that American military aggression was morally wrong and pragmatically fated to backfire on us were vilified at the time. We were called cowards and traitors. We were accused by our own President and Vice-President of "disloyalty," of "giving aid and comfort to the enemy," of "not supporting the troops," of "not being patriotic," and of "hating America and our way of life." The right-wing, pro-war smear machine in the media and the blogosphere attacked without mercy and spared no one who dissented. The same Gestapo tactics continue even today among those on the hysterical right, even after subsequent events have unmasked their worldview for the hateful propaganda it is.

Saturn and Pluto are not innately evil symbols. The fact that the turnings of the Saturn-Pluto cycle have corresponded over the past century to eruptions of war and mass violence is not inevitable. Instead, those outcomes were the result of our own all-too-human frailty. Much of humanity is still unable to deal consciously with the shadow aspects of human nature, especially slavish obedience to patriarchal authority in government, society, and religion. The archetype of the "stem, punishing father we must obey" is all too deeply embedded in us.

This is not merely about the lack of wisdom of those in power at any given time. It's about all of us together and the terrible crimes we allow to be perpetrated in our names, sometimes passively, but too often with our active support and encouragement. Even people who are generally loving and otherwise wouldn't hurt a fly can be easily swept up in the great tidal waves of unconscious fear and belligerence that periodically sweep through the landscape of the collective human psyche when Saturn and Pluto combine.

Yes, Pluto is aggressive and ruthless, and Saturn is cold and harsh. These are not symbols of peace, love, and harmony. In a sense, Saturn-Pluto transits say, "*Kill the Father, or the Father will kill you.*" That's a family systems twist on the ancient Buddhist admonition: "*If you see the Buddha on the road, kill him, for he is not the true Buddha.*" Authority always attempts to enforce obedience. America needs more disobedience against illegitimate authorities and the corporate puppetmasters who keep them in place.

The next activation of the Saturn-Pluto cycle at its last-quarter phase in 2009-2011 will offer us that chance. Let's hope we rise to the occasion.

The Continuing Chronology

During the exact month that Saturn and Pluto culminated their three-year opposition in May of 2003, and Bush made his "yee ha!" cowboy landing—all dressed up in his macho military flight suit—aboard the naval carrier USS Lincoln. The Boy Wonder then proclaimed "victory" in Iraq in front of a huge banner that read "Mission Accomplished," while the mainstream media virtually drooled in praise. The tight Jupiter-Neptune opposition also occurring at that time heightened the sense of delusional optimism affecting the powers-that-be.

Ah, how quickly things change. The Saturn-Pluto cycle faded away, followed a month later by the end of the optimistic Jupiter-Neptune transit, and events headed downhill immediately. That summer the insurgency began, and Iraq descended into chaos. In Washington, seemingly endless government scandals slowly worked their way out of the bowels of secrecy and into public awareness: another tainted election,

the quagmire in Iraq, a jobless economy, bottomless deficits, the Medicare drug boondoggle, Senators and Congressmen caught with their pants down and their pockets lined with silver, preemptive war doctrines, illegal spying on Americans (brazenly authorized by you-know-who). And in a bizarre scene eerily reminiscent of Nero fiddling while Rome burned, Bush actually played guitar while New Orleans drowned. “Great job, Brownie.”

The full phase (autumn) of every astrological cycle represents the harvest of whatever was planted at the new phase (spring). So we went from the seeds of the reactionary Reagan years to the full-blown insanity of BushCo II. From “Morning in America” to “Midnight in Iraq,” we are reaping what we sowed. I wish it weren’t so, but we have to live with those repercussions until the last quarter transition I mentioned above, which comes in 2009-2011. At that point, we move into the extreme crises that will lead directly to the revolutionary Awakening of 2012-2015.

In the months to come, I’ll write about the extraordinary astrological configurations that will occur in 2009-2011 and their special relevance to the U.S. chart. Before that, however, we have other fish to fry, namely the Saturn-Neptune cycle that is affecting us now.

So, in the big picture of the evolutionary flow of archetypes, we’ve gone from the 1990s Uranus-Neptune exhilarating dreams through the 2000-2003 violence and repression of Saturn opposite Pluto, and now we’re in the “slogging through jello” phase of Saturn opposite Neptune, from mid-2005 through mid-2008, where the con games are revealed.

That sea of molasses—with its confusion, exhaustion, despair, disbelief, and disintegration—will be the subject of next month’s commentary.



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