

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

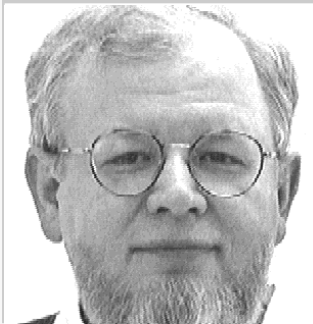
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# THE HERBST NEWSLETTER



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,

In the chronology of astrological events leading from the past up to 2012, the series is now in the present and aiming toward the future. Things ought to get interesting in the commentaries from this point on, since we will soon move again into speculative territory. For now, however, I'll write about our current situation, which—as everyone is well aware—is already quite strange.

## SATURN - NEPTUNE

When Saturn finally separated from its opposition to Pluto after May, 2003, the archetype field of the outer planets took a short breather. In the real world, the aggressive-defensive conservatism of Saturn-Pluto still held sway with considerable momentum, given how many logs had been thrown onto that fire since the triggering events of 9-11. But no more new fuel would be available after May, 2003.

Almost immediately, the apparently successful military invasion of Iraq went straight to hell in a handbasket. From that point on, as the numbers of American casualties steadily mounted into thousands killed and tens of thousands wounded (either physically or psychologically), one could feel the shift in the winds of public opinion. No longer driven by Saturn-Pluto vengeance, support for the occupation gradually eroded among the American populace. The spiraling downturn of our fortunes in Iraq (in both luck and dollars) paved the way for the next major outer-planet alignment: Saturn opposite Neptune.

Curiously, in a twist of cosmic irony, the trigger for the beginning of the Saturn-Neptune period was not the tragic debacle in Iraq, but the equally needless destruction of New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina. The outrage at our government over the folly of Iraq that had been almost entirely missing from the mainstream media—due to the restraints of jingoistic patriotism—was finally released by the drowning of New Orleans, perhaps because of a similar patriotic impulse. It was as if indignity had been sublimated, like water backing up into an underground aquifer, only to break through the unconscious dam of denial when the levees of The Big Easy were breached.

One could write at great length about the many qualities of Saturn opposite Neptune that subtly infuse the collective archetype field. Like hitting a vein, this is a motherlode of poetic insight. Before moving into the specifics, however, let's back up and take a look at the big picture.

## Outer Planet Logic

For astrologers who watch the stately progression of outer-planet cycles, this is a fascinating decade. The three outer planets discovered since the birth of modern science (Uranus in 1781, Neptune in 1846, and Pluto in 1930) are currently aligned in a small arc of the ecliptic, about 45 degrees or one-eighth of the heavens. Pluto is in late Sagittarius, about to move into Capricorn; Neptune is now deep into Aquarius, and Uranus is moving into middle Pisces. In 2012, Uranus will pass into Aries, increasing its arc to Pluto to one-quarter of the zodiac. That's the big event for which we are waiting.

In the meantime, however, Saturn—on the other side of the heavens—is progressively moving opposite each of the outer planets, coming to culmination in those three cycles. Saturn takes about two and a half years to move through each sign of the zodiac. As it passed through Gemini, Saturn opposed Pluto from 2001-2003. Now, moving through Leo, Saturn opposes Neptune from mid-2005 to mid-2007. Then, in Virgo, Saturn will oppose Uranus from late-2007 to mid-2011. (Dates are based on 10° orbs.)

The outer planets are wildcards. They represent a bridge between *earthly* perspectives (as defined by our place in the local solar system) and the encompassing *galactic* consciousness of the Milky Way, the spiral galaxy in which our Sun is but one star among billions. How are those levels of awareness different?

Imagine someone born and raised in the tiny farming village of an isolated Amish or Mennonite community, who has never seen an automobile or a television and has interacted with only 100 people through his entire life, all of whom share similar beliefs. He knows that a larger world exists, but he's never experienced it. Then imagine that this farmer is somehow transported to a major metropolis and finds himself wandering the streets of New York City.

The stable reality of rural life would be dwarfed and shattered by the complexity, accelerated pace, and sheer impersonality of urban existence in a big city. The shock would be exhilarating, dizzying, and transforming. After the initial trauma and what might be a long period of disorientation, adjustment would occur over time, and our provincial farmer would probably change dramatically. Even if he returned eventually to his village, the farmer would never be quite the same person he was before. To quote the refrain of a World War One song about American doughboys coming home from France, "*How you gonna keep 'em down on the farm after they've seen Patee?*"

Outer planets challenge the mundane status quo of our individual and collective lives. They change the rules and make us question our most basic assumptions. Sometimes this overturning is welcome, like visiting exotic foreign lands. Other times the shift is traumatic, as if our home had burned down. Indeed, this is the very essence of outer-planet symbolism, to disrupt (Uranus), melt away (Neptune), and finally destroy (Pluto) even cherished beliefs from our family imprints and social conditioning. As the future becomes the present, the past is rewritten.

Saturn's cycles with each of the outer planets show our human attempts to integrate profound or radical change into the existing structures of ordinary earthly reality. Mother Nature has her rules, too, and those natural laws often contradict our schemes and dreams. Saturn says that new ideas, thoughts, and feelings are all well and good hypothetically, but they've got to fit into the reality of *this* space and time on the earth, or they will eventually be rejected as false. And Saturn guards that gate, letting through only what fits.

This tug of war ebbs and flows between the old and the new, between what is and what could be. Every time Saturn begins a cycle with one of the outer planets, some new impulse pushes at the limits of human experience. The earthly laws are stretched under that pressure. Will this new impulse successfully cross-fertilize with reality, or will it be rejected? A seed may grow into a plant, but will it bear fruit? Will it prove viable for reproduction? We can't know for sure until the halfway point in the cycle.

All three of the current cycles of Saturn to the outer planets began during the 1980s as new emotional impulses, moved forward into concrete manifestation in the 1990s, and are reaching culmination in this first decade of the 21st century. Here at the halfway point, we discover which of our schemes and dreams withstand the crucible of hard reality. Some of our theories and fantasies will be crushed between Saturn's mortar and pestle. Others will pass through, integrating into the evolving structure of life on earth.

In the logical progression of outer-planet archetypes, Uranus is first in line to challenge Saturn with enlarged perspectives. Its revolutionary impulses toward freedom and individuality poke holes in our personal and social limits. Next, Neptune's universalizing impulses toward unity and oneness dissolve the boundaries of ordinary reality, and finally Pluto's destructive impulses toward decay and rebirth incinerate the walls and sweep away the ashes.

What is significant and curious about the current outer-planet alignment, however, is that the expected sequence is *reversed*. First we get *destruction* (Saturn-Pluto, 2001-2003), then *dissolution* (Saturn-Neptune, 2005-2008), and last comes *revolution* (Saturn-Uranus, 2008-2011). Is that sensible? No, but getting human beings to evolve is a tricky business—we resist change like crazy, even when it's in our own best interests—and that reversal is just the way life is unfolding right now. Who knows? Maybe it'll work better to pull the rug out from our stubborn ignorance and clinging to outmoded ways.

So, having already witnessed the wholesale destruction of Saturn opposite Pluto in the first half of this decade (9-11, real wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, class wars in politics, and the aggressive decay of social discourse), we have moved into Act Two of the melodrama, the dissolution phase of Saturn opposite Neptune. Much of what we collectively came to believe over the past 25 years is unraveling before our eyes as Saturn continues to assert its power of rejection.

Does trickle-down economics work? Are free markets really the answer? Is the outsourcing of American industry and the corporatization of our society a wise strategy? Should religion and politics be merged? Will computers and technology transform society for the better? Is terrorism really the new scourge? Can the American military effectively police the world? Are environmental scientists correct concerning the harmful effects of human activity on the ecosphere? Could disease pandemics of immunoviruses sweep the planet?

All these questions trace their origins to the 1980s, when they were seeded as new beliefs. They have all manifested to some degree. Now, in the first decade of the 21st century, the cycles with which these ideas took root are reaching their halfway points. By the end of this decade or shortly into the next, we should know which are true and which are false.

## **The Bursting of Bubbles**

Saturn-Neptune cycles operate much like the inflation of a hot-air balloon. They begin with new dreams or visions that heat up in our imagination. Then, as the visions are turned into narratives and gradually implemented, the balloon of reality expands. We leave the ground, lifting off to soar gracefully into the heavens. Such is the great power of the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves. They can be almost literally uplifting when they achieve popular acceptance. Television and mass media are among the most powerful purveyors of dream narratives the world has ever seen.

But reality can hold only so much fantasy. If we continue to huff and puff on our dreams (as humans have a marked tendency to do), the balloon of reality expands past its natural limits of elasticity, resulting in *exaggeration* and *distortion*. Reality is bent out of shape. Eventually, one of two consequences occurs: Reality contracts, slowly deflating our hyperextended dreams back toward pragmatism; or the balloon itself bursts, rending the fabric of reality as our overinflated vision collapses instantaneously. Either way, we come back to earth. The question is one of soft versus hard landings.

The current Saturn-Neptune cycle began in 1988-1990 in Capricorn, so it has much to do with economic dreams and visions that merge government with business. Throughout the 1990s, this merger heated up the economy. The stock market shifted from equity investment into speculation in internet and tech stocks. At the first-quarter square from March 1998 to April 2000, that bubble reached wild exaggeration

and extreme distortion, and then seemingly burst. I say “seemingly” because the Jupiter-Saturn conjunction in Taurus that year indicated a pullback correction, but we were not yet at the halfway mark of the Saturn-Neptune cycle.

Rather than the economy collapsing at that point, the Fed quickly patched the tear in the balloon by shifting the dream of economic expansion from the stock market into the housing market. The stock bubble was replaced by an even bigger housing bubble. But just like paper profits in stocks, the “wealth” created by the housing boom was not real. Actual wealth declined as Americans cashed in the equity on their homes. Savings continued to plummet while indebtedness soared. Meanwhile, low-interest mortgages and easy credit pumped up the supply of fiat money, provoking a frenzy of insanely escalating home prices.

Now we have reached the halfway point of the Saturn-Neptune cycle, and the exaggerated and distorted balloon of reality must either contract or burst. The housing bubble has already peaked and is reversing. Homes for sale are not moving as the once-giddy sellers’ market turns into a newly-chastened and very cautious buyers’ market. Again, the question is not whether we will come back to earth—that’s inevitable—but only how soft or hard the landing will be. If the real estate bubble bursts, as it may in some urban markets, or even if it merely deflates gradually, what will happen to tens of millions of Americans who have no equity in homes they paid too much for, cannot sell except at considerable loss, yet are saddled with mortgages that could force them into foreclosure or bankruptcy?

The Fed makes noises about holding down inflation, but in reality deflation is the true concern, so the money wizards will do a magic act on the public—mere prestidigitation, misdirection, and fakery. They will in fact depreciate the dollar steadily (which is inflation as policy), because that’s the only way to avoid foreclosures on those millions of American homes and keep the economy afloat.

## **Exhaustion and Disillusionment**

Besides exaggeration and distortion, the archetype field is now filling with other qualities of Saturn opposite Neptune. The two that seem most relevant from my viewpoint are *exhaustion* and *disillusionment*.

Collectively, we are exhausted, spent, and tired to our bones. This exhaustion means not only loss of vitality and energy, but also loss of optimism, loss of hope. A cumulative weariness has set in, and with it, pessimism. Those who pushed at something are tired of whatever they pushed at not giving way. Those who resisted are tired of resisting. This applies across the board, in all demographics and interest groups—Republicans and Democrats, conservatives and liberals, reactionaries and progressives, east and west, city folk and country folk. Exhaustion has set in for those in the center and those at the fringe. A wet blanket of unhappiness with the way things are has settled over the land. Nothing satisfies. The world itself now seems quite bizarre, and in ways that defy logic or common sense.

This weariness comes in part from lack of certainty. Nothing is clear. Collective and individual problems no longer have obvious or straightforward solutions, and, even in the rare cases where simple strategies might apply, we cannot marshal the resources to implement them. Goals are shrouded in fog, bogged down, and ideals seem empty, devoid of meaning. Our collective will is stupefied, as if paralysis had set in. Individual lives continue in all their wondrous diversity, of course—babies are born, couples fall in love, we get up and go to work as always—but fretful discontent is the general tone.

The symbolic metaphors of Saturn oppose Neptune are all around us. I read an op-ed piece last month that included this sentence: “We are adrift as a nation.” *Adrift*. Lost in the ocean with no rudder, no sails. Once aware of the astrology, it’s impossible not to notice the frequency with which Saturn-Neptune poetry pops up in print and broadcast media, in terms such as malaise, despair, confusion, hopelessness.

We are undergoing collective *disillusionment*. And that, strangely enough, is a good thing. Hypnosis has been the order of the day for a long time, and now the trance is slowly being broken. We’re not yet awake—that term won’t even begin to apply until Saturn opposes Uranus (2008-2011), and then the real awakening hits big time when Uranus squares Pluto (2012). But even now, the hypnagogic state of false

happiness, false passion, and false certainty is beginning to wear off. In mass terms, we're still drowsy, still somnabulistic, but not totally asleep. As a result, many of us are grumpy, to say the least. We don't like being roused from slumber, but it's grudgingly necessary.

Disenchantment is one of the crucial passages on any authentic spiritual path. Initially, many people are drawn to take their first steps down that road because some siren song lures us. A perfect world, perhaps, or an end to suffering. *Oh, it will be so wonderful when we reach heaven! (or enlightenment or satori or whatever...)* Whether it's the Rapture or 77 virgins or peace-and-love we hope may await us, we're beguiled by the fantasies. Along the way, however, we have to give up those illusions and dreams.

In collective terms, we're in limbo, waiting. This is the calm before the storm of Act Three, when Saturn opposes Uranus. That won't come for another year and a half, though. For now, patience is a virtue.



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