

Uranus-Pluto: Still Potent

by Bill Herbst

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Having written more than 100 articles, essays, and commentaries since 2006 concerning the activation of the Uranus-Pluto cycle and its many meanings, I run the risk of repeating myself whenever I write more. That's a risk I deem worth taking, however, since this alignment represents the astrological backbone of the entire decade of the 2010s, the central thematic conflict underlying these turbulent times.

Of the ten major outer-planet cycles that comprise what I call civilizational astrology, the Uranus-Pluto cycle is the most dramatic in its correspondences and manifestations within and for civilization. No other cycle reveals such basic conflicts within organized human society, nor such far-reaching implications and consequences. At the first-quarter square we're experiencing during the 2010s, the cycle reaches its most energetic transition, a passage with both serious stresses and long-term repercussions.

Transits can be interpreted and understood through either of two different perspectives. One is the nature of the particular transit itself, in this case, Uranus and Pluto in square (meaning 90° apart, or perpendicular to each other). The other way is to analyze a transit as a particular point within a complete cycle, in this case, the waxing transition into the second quarter phase of a 139-year Uranus-Pluto cycle that began in 1965 and will continue until the year 2104.

Judged from the first perspective, that of the transit itself, the meaning of the Uranus-Pluto alignment will seem more explosive and unexpected, like a bolt from the blue.

We're talking about a war here, not a war between nations, but a war where humanity is pitted against itself. This war has many fronts and numerous facets and includes paradoxes and contradictions. A short list of the Uranus-Pluto conflicts that we're feeling and seeing during this decade include the poor against the rich, the powerless against the powerful, the disenfranchised against the privileged, plus social institutions and massive corporations against the individuals they are chartered to serve. Representative democracy as has been practiced for more than two centuries is in peril. The founders of America recognized the probability of such dangers, and they did what they could in the

Constitution to protect the young republic from them, but human nature made it inevitable that threats would arise, and they have.

As astrological symbols or archetypes, Uranus and Pluto cannot be reduced to the simplistic struggle of good versus evil. Both symbols encompass the entire range of human expression, from beneficent to horrific. For instance, Uranus can represent the rising up of individuality and the urge for freedom in grass-roots rebellions against the monolithic power of a state (Pluto). We have witnessed many such uprisings in this still-young century, including social and political movements such as the Tea Party, Occupy, and Black Lives Matter, among many others. In that dimension, whether the movements are seen as positive or negative depends on the values of the observer. My point is simply that Uranus is often the provocateur challenging the status quo of authority and the way society is organized and run, while Pluto in this particular dimension represents the mass power of the collective to structure society and limit change by restraining or repressing dissent.

At the other end of the scale, we see tragedies such as occurred recently in Las Vegas, where the suffering of a disturbed individual erupts into an explosion of violence against total strangers. This is a phenomenon of our times, a kind of vomiting up of hatred. In this, Pluto represents first responders, doctors, and law enforcement, all seeking to protect those in danger of harm, while Uranus is the deranged eccentric engaging in the violence.

My point is that the Uranus-Pluto transit is a two-way street in all its dimensions, which are neither simple nor straightforward. The manifestations extend all over the map, taking hundreds of different shapes, all interconnected through the complex symbolism. We cheerlead for those dimensions that please us, and we condemn those we don't like, according to our personal beliefs and our situations in society.

Viewed from the other perspective, that of the transit's phase within a complete cycle, the interpretation still presumes dramatic and potentially explosive events, but — seen in the context of longer historical development — the events are not necessarily unexpected. By definition, any transit involving Uranus will contain surprises and may occur in sudden and unexpected ways, but what happens can be understood to have obvious precedents, even if those had been lying fallow for a considerable time.

Much of what's happening in this decade as the Uranus-Pluto cycle enters its second quarter harkens back to the beginning of the cycle that occurred in the mid-1960s. Interpreted through seasonal imagery, the 1960s represented the beginning of spring, with roto-tilling, fertilizing, and planting of seeds in a metaphorical garden that was symbolically about dramatic, revolutionary change and the struggle over power and its use — by whom, for whom, and over whom.

The 2010s represent the shift in that cycle from spring to summer, where seeds planted in the garden (whether intentionally or not, and whether harmonious or conflicted) have germinated and are now growing into full physical expression as maturing plants headed toward bearing fruit. What began in the 1960s, roughly over the period from 1962 to 1973, is returning, not as a repeat of what happened then, but as the next phase of manifestation. Events and developments that occurred 50 years ago were the seeds for what is emerging assertively into concrete form in the 2010s.

The perpendicular alignment of Uranus and Pluto occurred seven times over three years, from mid-2012 through mid-2015. The fact that there were seven exact “passes” (rather than three or five, which are typical) is significant astrologically, implying that this event has significance beyond its expected potency for both individuals and society at large.

Some astrologers stopped talking and writing about the Uranus-Pluto alignment after the final pass in 2015, but I’m not one of them. My study of quarterly activations of the Uranus-Pluto cycle every 30 to 50 years over recent history (the past three centuries, essentially), indicates strongly that the exact period of the transit, while often revealing and precise — such as in the timing of The Reign of Terror during the French Revolution — is generally only the eye of the storm. The full impact of the transit is much longer than the period of its mathematical precision.

The “effective period” of this particular and very dramatic outer-planet transit extends far beyond the years 2012-2015, going as far back as 2007, when the “Uranus-Pluto effect” began, and continuing as far forward as 2021. In other words, the active “war” within humanity indicated by the transit covers more than a decade and will not wane (or permute into something else) until the 2020s settle in. Even after the transit’s effective end in 2021, the repercussions will continue. How we handle the challenges of 2007-2021 will have a great deal to do with what those consequences are and their shape in civilization.

One fundamental question that’s arising in the 21st century with increasing clarity is this: What is the meaning and role of individuality within modern civilization? For millennia, particular people who felt, for one reason or another, that they did not “fit” into the collective society could find a niche for themselves outside the normal. Now, however, technology (Uranus) has allowed the Deep State (Pluto) to extend the reach of its ability to keep tabs on and track literally everyone.

We are witnessing a technological revolution (indicated by the Uranus-Neptune cycle, which I’ve written about in other commentaries) that signals the death of privacy. Individuality can and will continue, but privacy is dead. Just laying low won’t be sufficient to keep probing by the Deep State at bay. Anyone who wants to live outside the electronic net of data-collection through the harvesting of

information about everything we buy or watch, everywhere we go, and whatever we do will necessarily have to exist on the extreme fringes of society, and carefully keep his or her tracks covered.

And that's only one arena among many that are relevant to the continuing expressions of the Uranus-Pluto cycle.

In general, whenever Uranus and Pluto align at the quarters of their shared cycle, stability and control are challenged in society. It's like having a jar with a screw-on lid. If the lid is screwed on too tight, meaning that Plutonian social conformity is too widespread or enforced repressively (either by the state or more subtly by social norms), Uranus will eventually come along to reintroduce the element of chaos into the formerly stable order. Uranus will unscrew and remove the lid, or, failing that, smash the jar to smithereens. Meanwhile, Pluto will amass and concentrate its deep resources to attempt to either maintain or restore order. Out of that struggle, a new structure will emerge. That new structure may be more or less stable, more or less diverse, and more or less repressive or tolerant. All those outcomes are based on variables only dimly perceived as possibilities during the effective period of the transit.

For instance, the debate about human-created climate change is over throughout most of the world. We did it, and we'd better do something to minimize it by shifting away from fossil fuels and reducing our heavy footprint on the planet. Here in America, however, the idea that industrial activity may need to be scaled back runs distinctly counter to one of America's two most powerful memes, that of freedom to pursue wealth through business. As a result, the world's biggest economy chugs along as if everything were fine on the climate front, and we can just go on degrading the natural environment forever.

And then we came to the summer of 2017 and watched massive hurricanes hit Texas, Florida, and Puerto Rico. Surely three such devastating disasters back-to-back-to-back over such a short period should be enough to wake up even America about the dangers of continuing on our current course, right? Maybe, but maybe not. Making the point that messing with Mother Nature is risky is one thing (astrologically, that's Uranian suddenness and unpredictability combined with Plutonian intensity), but reconciling that with an economic structure based on the expectation of infinite growth (that's Plutonian full-speed-ahead and more-is-better combined with Uranian insistence on freedom to do what we damn well please) is nearly impossible. Something's got to give.

Human beings are notoriously resistant to changing our habits and expectations. We tend to change only after we are forced to do so. If that holds true in our unwillingness to limit the global impacts of climate disruption by pulling back from destructive industrial activity, then we're in for a very bad time over the coming decades. The Uranus-Pluto transit will be over in 2020, but the repercussions will keep on coming to smack us, year after year, decade after

decade. If we don't restrain ourselves, destruction will do it for us. The kinds of dangers humanity faces, most of which are our own creation, are well-known and familiar to anyone concerned about our collective future. Nuclear war and global climate change are prominent on the list, but many other lesser disasters could wreak havoc and take out billions of us.

I sure as hell don't wish to be Chicken Little, running around with my hair on fire shrieking that the sky is falling. Humanity has muddled through so far, despite two world wars over the past century, and perhaps we'll make it through this century at least partially intact. I don't feel confident about that, however. My guess is that a significant percentage of the current human population, perhaps even a majority, is concerned mainly with the day-to-day challenges of ordinary life in providing for themselves and their families. They may possess an awareness in feelings, thoughts, and opinions about our collective state of affairs, even to the point of experiencing a certain ongoing background anxiety, but the exigencies of regular life keep them focused in the here-and-now of their personal and social arenas.

For the next three years, however, Uranus-Pluto implies the occasional but continuing intrusion of chaos that disrupts whatever normalcy we still feel, assume, or cling to. By the time we get to 2021, the very idea of normality will probably have taken quite a beating. From the limited perspective of individual lives, that's disturbing, and sometimes even tragic. From the larger perspective of the collective, however, such jolts are necessary and probably good. Why good? Because the status quo cannot hold together much longer. It's already coming apart at the seams as institutions break down. Over the coming decade, the old status quo will be replaced by a different or at least modified structure, either for better or worse. Whether or not we have a choice in a better or worse outcome for civilization can be argued either way, but Uranus-Pluto will continue to prod us to address serious questions: *What will it take for human beings to change the way we live on this planet? Can we scale back our presence to restore a greater sense of harmony with the biosphere and all life on earth? Can we make the family of life on earth more inclusive?*

Spiritual traditions dating back many thousands of years assert that everyone wishes to become conscious and loving, despite all the seeming evidence to the contrary. These traditions also suggest that awakening into grace happens one person at a time. As various new philosophies have emerged in civilization, our collective consciousness has shifted from time to time, but no profound awakening has yet occurred. Whether or not such a mass transformation can or might transpire over the current century is far above my pay grade. I don't presume to know. In the meantime, we can continue to do our individual work to open our hearts more widely, to amplify our compassion, and in so doing refrain from increasing the burden of unnecessary suffering in the world. Uranus-Pluto will spur us on in that effort through the sporadic shocks and revelations that will keep happening to awaken us.