

*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 looks at the upcoming Uranus-Pluto decade within the longer perspective of humanity's collective evolution.

—Bill Herbst

STORIES WE TELL OURSELVES

More than any other archetypal symbols in astrology, Uranus and Pluto track step-by-step through their paired cycle the evolution of civilization into modernity. Time and again, the cycle reveals the onset, development, and extraordinary impact of radical, revolutionary ideas that reshape culture and change the ways human beings think about ourselves and our world.

At their quarterly points of activation, Uranus-Pluto cycles correspond to the upwelling of confrontations between the new and the old—rebellion and revolution, innovation and invention, intellect and passion, independence and repression, initiation and collapse, upheaval and violence. These shocking uprisings penetrate all the institutions of society—government, commerce, religion, science, education, the arts, etc. Our experience of community is shaken and stirred.

Such is the odd brilliance of the human intellect (Uranus) that it galvanizes deep emotions in the collective (Pluto) through ideas that signal new chapters in the mythic story of our human understanding of life. From the opposite side, primal eruptions from the collective unconscious (Pluto) spark new philosophies and social movements. When their time is ripe, these new ideas bubble up from the basic programming of our biogenetic heritage, crystallizing in the simmering stew of cultural myths and memes. History tends to attribute to specific individuals authorship of various religious reforms, sociopolitical theories, or commercial inventions, but in reality many people simultaneously assist in the gestations and births, all working on similar ideas at once.

Many terms are used to describe poetically the oceanic vibrations in which we all swim: zeitgeist, cultural ethos, collective unconscious, etc. When Uranus and Pluto are active together in this archetype field, the genius of individuality and the raw power of collectivity smash against each other, like tectonic plates. A volcanic eruption of mass change spews forth from deep within the psyche of humanity. Certain individuals ride the front edge of that wave, like chanticleers announcing the storm, while the rest of us are picked up by the engulfing flood and pulled along behind, whether willingly or not.

Because of the elongated eccentricity of Pluto's elliptical orbit, its angular relationship with Uranus does not progress through time with a uniform duration. Instead, the cycles unfold in alternating time-frames of approximately 115 and 140 years from one conjunction to the next.

The exact years when the last five Uranus-Pluto cycles began were 1455, 1597, 1710, 1850, and 1966. These dates represent crossroads or thresholds for collective humanity, critical-mass periods where the eggs of our new thoughts about life were hatched. The specific years of each Uranus-Pluto conjunction are not particularly critical in themselves, since they mark the center of periods that are often more than a decade in duration.

Often, however, the correspondences are uncannily precise. Consider, for instance, the invention of movable type in Gutenberg's printing press. The ability to mechanically print multiple copies of a book rather than laboriously hand-copying each volume was a watershed in the history of civilization, provoking unimagined changes in religion, science, education, and commerce. Gutenberg's first commercial venture was the publication of a mechanically-printed Bible, which occurred in what year? 1455. *Bada-bing, bada-boom.*

Or consider philosopher Rene Descartes, whose mind-body split ("*I think, therefore I am*") had a profound influence on changing the relationship of human beings to their physical world. Descartes was born in 1596, a single year before the next Uranus-Pluto conjunction, and his writings were at the center of the radical implications of that cycle in detaching humanity from nature.

Similarly, political theorist Jean-Jacques Rousseau was born in 1712, a mere two years after the following Uranus-Pluto conjunction of 1710. Rousseau's ideas were central to The Enlightenment; his thoughts on equality, freedom, and the social contract would influence both the American and French revolutions that so embodied the tenor of that cycle.

Karl Marx published *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848, two years before the 1850 conjunction. Richard Wagner's opera *Lohengrin* premiered in 1850. Herman Melville published *Moby Dick* a year later in 1851, the same year that the Taiping Rebellion began, which eventually caused the violent deaths of 20 million Chinese. In 1853, Commodore William Perry arrived in Edo Bay, commencing the reopening of Japan to the west.

All those events are anecdotal, however. Anyone with access to Wikipedia can compile similar lists. Specific incidents, however significant, are not the measure of the reshaping of civilization. They fail to reveal the scope and grandeur of the shocks implied by Uranus and Pluto in joint operation. At the heart of every Uranus-Pluto activation is an unexpected and radical transformation of the collective consciousness of human beings, a shift at ground level in our shared assumptions about who we are and our relation to the world around us.

Birds, Fish, Humans

Sudden collective changes of direction are common in nature. Consider huge schools of fish swimming together in the oceans or great flocks of birds soaring together in flight. We have all seen how these groups can instantaneously reorient, turning together on a dime, as if all members of the school or flock received an invisible but irresistible instruction to alter their direction at the same moment and in precisely the same manner. What mechanism triggers such shifts—telepathy? group instinct? mirror neurons? ultra-sensitive sensors? We don't understand well the instruments behind this mysterious dance of simultaneous

mass change, and our languages to explain it are sorely inadequate. Still, we see its undeniable operation in innumerable species.

At the human level, and in the longer duration of cultural evolution, this dance is messy and difficult. If fish and birds experience inner conflict and resistance to messages of change, we don't see any evidence of it. The sense of belonging and obedience to the group dynamic in those species is apparently very complete. In human beings, however, the urgent messages to collectively change direction are greeted with every conceivable reaction among individual members, from instant acceptance and passionate embrace of the new to hard-bitten resistance and stubborn refusal to budge from the familiarity of the old.

This conflict occurs not merely between individuals, but within each person as well. Since the sudden provocation toward mass change synchronized to Uranus-Pluto activations arises on so many different levels of human experience at once, each of us affirms the new direction in some areas of our lives while denying it in other areas. Almost no one is a total revolutionary or a total reactionary. We are custom-tailored in these inner divisions, lobbying for change in some arenas while decrying it in others. Variations in the individual weave of our temperamental tapestries are nearly infinite.

Our reactions also shift over time. Changes we initially rush to adopt may prove fleeting. The majority of those in the counterculture who lived in communes in the 1960s were gone by the 1980s, having returned to the fold of more standard living arrangements. Conversely, waves we resist may later overtake us. Remember the furor in the mid-'60s over the Beatles' mop-tops? All the hair jokes about "can't tell the boys from the girls." Well, by the mid-'70s all those comedians had long hair and sideburns, and by the '80s Nascar dads in the Old South sported mullets. The sexual hot buttons of gender anxiety had moved on.

Some people may be galvanized to care deeply about one particular issue while remaining aloof from other movements in the matrix of change. Others either participate in or resist revolutions without much of a clue as to what deeper currents underlie the turbulence swirling around them. They are sucked in or kept out by personal circumstances or family imprints or the social pressure of friends and peers, unconsciously adopting slogans, casting votes, yet never truly sensing what is at stake. And, of course, certain individuals remain entirely untouched by the whirlwinds, going about their day-to-day lives as before, perhaps observing from the sidelines, perhaps not.

The Stories We Tell Ourselves About Ourselves

All of that is part of the grand panorama of Uranus-Pluto times. Different strokes for different folks. Beyond the particular decades where the cycle's quarterly activations erupt, however, a longer, more subtle, and often unseen process of change unfolds, where the core meanings of each Uranus-Pluto cycle seep into our psyches, moving the bell curve of collective consciousness, altering our assumptions, beliefs, and attitudes about the nature of our shared reality.

Enduring human concerns exist, of course, as all the great writings of the past millennia demonstrate. Plato, Shakespeare, and Lao Tzu are as relevant today as in their own times. Love and hate, loyalty and betrayal, ideals and corruption, work and family, birth and death—all these are permanently embedded in the continuum of human experiences. But not everything is the same now as in earlier epochs. In the 15th century, people discussed the ebb and flow of seasons and weather, as always, but no one had so much as a thought about global warming. That is a new element in the plot. And wherever one stands regarding accelerated climate change, the idea itself and its shocking broader implications carry undeniable power in the evolving story of humanity charted by the current Uranus-Pluto cycle.

Each of the last five Uranus-Pluto cycles—from 1455 to 1966—changed the stories we humans tell ourselves about ourselves and our role in the cosmos. Every one offered its own particular additions in moving forward the plot of our mythic story.

We are about to shift into the next phase of the current 1966 cycle. The rumbles from below have already begun and will continue to crack the surface, like pre-shocks, until critical mass is reached and the edifice of civilization is again rocked to its core. 2007 is the final year of a confused stasis, like a Salvador Dali dada painting of melting clocks. The fog of the past four years of Saturn opposite Neptune is reaching its last peak. Reality and illusion have intertwined so completely that none of us knows anymore what is true or false. Everything we read, hear, or see feels like a lie, especially when offered up by those in authority. The great Tower of Babel is sinking into the sucking quicksand of cynicism. Seemingly everyone is corrupted, and the cacophony of shrieking opinions is giving us all a collective migraine.

But that will end as 2007 fades out, to be replaced by the rising tide of Uranus square Pluto already underway. As Saturn moves into opposition to Uranus in 2008, and then last-quarter square to Pluto in 2009, confusion will be replaced by stark clarity. Economic and political eruptions will shock the system, gearing up for a decade-long assault to the status quo. Those who have long cried out for change will get their wish, although probably not in the ways they imagined in their cherished dreams. The manifestations of Uranus and Pluto are by their very nature unpredictable, unexpected, and utterly surprising.

The human species has an amazing talent for adaptability. Over the next decade, that ability will be tested as never before, as crises emerge that will force us to begin the necessary reinvention of ourselves and our societies. Who we thought we were will change.

The past 5,000 years of civilization—which might be called the period of Empire—were shaped by the collective equivalent of the “terrible twos,” the brief phase of early childhood development where identity is based on ownership, possession, and power: *Me – My – Mine*. In our dealings with each other and the earth, civilization reflected this infantile orientation. Until very recently, however, only our relationships with each other were marred by squabbles over who controls what, and who dominates whom.

Over the last two centuries, the sheer scale of the human footprint has grown gargantuan, and now it is not merely our relations with each other that reflect an infantile and tragic narcissism. Our collective immaturity threatens all the life-systems of the earth itself.

Were our challenge only the reduction of human suffering in taking better care of each other, I doubt that we would make much progress. Empire has produced an astonishing body of philosophy, law, religion, and other bogus justifications that keep us mired in our dilemma of ownership and hierarchical power, so while individual human beings may be sensitive to and moved by the suffering of others, the day-to-day institutions of commerce, politics, and social organization are not. A kind of psychic grid-lock exists that lobbies for each of us to remain in our own bubble of self-centeredness, insensitive to the repercussions on others and the world around us of the ways we live.

Ownership, property, and possession are not going away, of course. Territoriality and its ramifications are deeply embedded within the human psyche’s genes and memes. But so is sharing. So is generosity. Empire and the predatory economic globalization currently in vogue have obscured that sense of balance. In regarding the earth as nothing more than a resource to be plundered, we have lost the sacred sense of belonging. No one owns the earth and the sky, but we reward those who claim to and let them use that pretense to control and subjugate others. The frenzy to privatize and commodify everything is evidence of how far we have fallen from grace.

The laws that govern ownership and the benefits and responsibilities of property, along with the economic and financial systems that regulate all commerce, were not handed down on stone tablets from on high. Human beings enacted those laws and created those systems, and human beings can change them. This is not about philosophical frameworks, such as capitalism or socialism, libertarianism or fascism. The real world confounds such “pure” ideologies and always contains bits and pieces of every theoretical “ism.” Our challenge is not abstract. Instead, we desperately need workable, pragmatic agreements that restore some semblance of harmony and balance to humanity and all the other life-forms on this blue-green ball we call home.

What makes the 21st century historically unique in increasing our chances of finally moving beyond the infantile stage of ownership, possession, power, and domination—all so characteristic of Empire—is the fact that we have fouled our own nest. The unlimited exploitation, poisoning, and destruction of our earthly environment have reached critical mass. The infinitely complex and interactive life-systems of our planet are now disturbed to the point of their—and our—imminent collapse. The first-quarter square of Uranus in Aries to Pluto in Capricorn will awaken us to that reality.

Collapse is coming. Perversely, this is good news, since human beings don't change until we have to. And with that crisis comes the possibility for humanity to evolve finally beyond the infantile and into the next stage of maturation. I don't pretend to know what that will look like, but I do think that human beings from future centuries will gaze back on our time shaking their heads in disbelief, almost as if we were a different species entirely. I hope they can say at least that we pulled back from the brink of our own madness to rediscover the gentler human qualities of reverence and humility.



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