

Has the World Gone Mad?

Three is the formula of all creation

-- Honoré de Balzac

These are trying times. Even if you aren't a news junkie and even if you live off the grid somewhere in the woods, it is nearly impossible to miss the collective sense that huge changes, many unpleasant, are afoot. Television specials and YouTube videos show impending annihilation from asteroids, global warming threatens all of us, and a global economic collapse has begun to unravel our lives on countless levels

In such times when old paradigms don't answer questions and when the basis of what we believe seems to crumble, there is a tradition to call upon astrologers to give a larger context to collective and personal disintegration. The following is one astrologer's answer to this call.

I was trained as an architect. I have a tendency to see things structurally and to interact with the world in a practical way. This approach lends itself well to explaining foundational changes of the magnitude we are experiencing. Indeed, the deepest footings that provided support for the pillars of our beliefs now show catastrophic cracks. This in turn has led to the downfall of many institutions that formerly held up our shared roof. Collective beliefs have changed to such a degree and by such a large number of people that critical mass has shifted the ways we look at science, medicine, the environment, religion, education, and even the holiest of grails, free markets.

Those of you who are familiar with my work on relationships know about my love of the triangle as a metaphor of harmony that avoids oppositional tension. The triangle is, in Michael Schneider's words, *the definition of structure since it is the only polygon structurally rigid by virtue of its geometry alone.*

It is remarkable that taking apart a structure also requires a trinity. If you look closely at how a sidewalk cracks, you will see that this occurs along three-way joints. Crack an egg and find the same pattern of breaking. Look to our times astrologically and again you will find a triplicity of events that are breaking up our reality on all levels. It seems that King Neptune's trident is rousing the seas of change.

First, Pluto in Capricorn. As I have written elsewhere, Pluto is the most repressed and denied archetype in Western culture. Pluto represents the dark, transformative, mysterious, sexual, deadly and regenerative healing forces within us. Pluto describes these themes that we do not speak of easily but with which we may be obsessed. Obsession belongs to Pluto as well. When you find yourself in what astrologers call a Pluto phase, you feel as though you are in a meat grinder. A collective denial of the Pluto

archetype, expressed as a fear of death, a denial of our sexuality and as a repression of the dark and the feminine, has consequences. Pluto ends up meeting us at the door as we try to make a run for it.

Imagine then how some astrologers raised an eyebrow when in August of 2006 the International Astronomical Union announced the demotion of Pluto to a dwarf planet. To astrologers there are no coincidences, or rather everything is co-incidental: what occurs in the heavens also occurs on earth and vice-versa. As a symbolist I saw this move by the IAU, surely completely outside of the awareness of those who made it, as the ultimate repression of the planet and its astrological symbolism. But Pluto's energy is archetypal and therefore universal and personal at once. Demotion is not an option.

In 2008 it was a remarkable event that took place as Pluto entered the zodiacal sign of Capricorn. The last time this happened was in 1762. Anything touched by Pluto undergoes total transformation; therefore, we must understand the significance of Capricorn since it is this archetype which will go through complete rebirth, in each of us and in the world, over the next fifteen years. Pluto's notably unhurried speed means that the meat grinder crushes slowly. Capricorn is about pinnacles and how to achieve more height. To get to the top we need a solid footing, firm and well-engineered structures to climb, and of course discipline to keep going. Architecture as a discipline is under Capricorn. So are corporate structures and business. Pluto's entry into this sign means that any structure, whether a business or other organization, a government, your personal finances or even your actual house (or its financing), if such frameworks are not solid, they will crumble. Festering structures are being exposed everywhere. That is Pluto's gift. Notably, Barak Obama has been pointing out the need for a comprehensive overhaul of the infrastructure of the country. This is especially interesting because the US was founded with Pluto in Capricorn and in 2022 the US will have a Pluto Return, which means that Pluto returns to the same place in the Zodiac as in 1776. Astrologers look at planetary returns as new beginnings and also as reconciliations with the past.

Last year we saw the largest collapse of the housing market in history. The implosion of this market brought about a worldwide downturn of powerful economies. Further, the notion of peak oil was also no longer laughed at as a doomsday prediction by tree huggers. As oil prices approached \$150 a barrel we collectively woke up to the fact that economies built on fossil fuel had no future. Oil prices have of course come back down, but do you think they will stay where they are? As Pluto marched on through the year, deeper and darker secrets around the issues of power were revealed, culminating in the exposure of Bernie Madoff's massive pyramid scheme and Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich's attempt to sell a Senate seat. The common themes here are text-book Capricorn: money, capitalism, power brokers, status, fame and ambition. When the infestation of greed, the obsession with power and the demise of the once powerful become commonplace, then Pluto has entered the scene. Whatever is rotten to the core, whatever secrets we think we can hide, no matter what we run away from, Pluto reminds us that there is no dark corner to hide in because that is where Pluto already resides. Vice President Dick Cheney's late-year televised sanction of torture certainly reminds us of Pluto as well.

Before Pluto's discovery in 1930 and prior to his role of creating awareness of the most repressed and naturally forceful, obsessive and life altering experiences in us, Saturn played this part in our psyches. Both planets/archetypes are akin to Carl Jung's notion of the *Shadow*, those "bad things" we deny in ourselves but point out gladly in others. Both also have to do with endings and death and bring about fear and cold sweats. The countless victims of Madoff's Ponzi scheme, while seeing their fortunes vaporized, are also forced to face the reality that they were happily "earning," without questioning, exorbitant returns on their investments. Alan Greenspan once called such behavior *irrational exuberance*.

The first of the fractures in our three-way crack is our realization that whatever we thought was solid needs to be inspected solidly. No matter how powerful and seemingly permanent the structures in our lives have been, if they are rotten at the core, they will come down.

Second, Pluto and Uranus. Pluto, *Lord of the Underworld*, is your ability to change and rise from ashes like the Phoenix. Uranus, is your *Internal Disturber*. Never satisfied with the status quo, Uranus is the universal force of instant and radical change originating in a deep restlessness and insatiable curiosity. Key words for Uranus include: inventive, radical, contrary and breakthrough. We can readily see that any alignment of Uranus and Pluto would suggest radical transformation and explosive change. The last time these two planets lined up next to each other was in the mid 1960s. It is well documented just how radical this era was and not just in the US.

In the years 2012-2015 Uranus and Pluto square off in the heavens, forming between them—in astrological terms—a stressful relationship called a *square*.

Interestingly, a few years before the Pluto/Uranus square of 1876-1877 there was a significant economic depression in Europe that eventually spilled over to the US with the failure of the Jay Cooke banking firm. As Cooke was the top investment banker for the Northern Pacific Railroads and also the guarantor for the government's Civil War loans, this failure began a collapse of the US economy. The New York Stock Exchange closed for 10 days after Cooke's fall, credit everywhere dried up and foreclosures became commonplace. Factories closed all across the land. Over 18,000 businesses failed between 1873 and 1875 and unemployment reached 14 percent by the time the Pluto/Uranus square was exact in 1876. Workers who kept their jobs suffered a 45 percent cut in their wages. This economic cataclysm is now referred to as the *Panic of 1873*. Then, during the Pluto/Uranus square of 1932-1933 the Dow reached its lowest level of the Great Depression at just over 41. (Note: the source for some of this data is Wikipedia).

As we look at the current economic times and compare what we now see to these previous references we note that there are always hugely powerful individuals and seemingly untouchable institutions that "simply can't go under." A common phrase used

today, whether for Freddie & Fannie, the auto makers or Wall Street banks is “too big to fail.” Then these powerful structures begin to crack and collapse. When I was getting my MBA in 1988 the notion that Lehman Brothers and Bear Stearns would be gone in twenty years was simply inconceivable.

But Pluto/Uranus can penetrate anything. Their combined force is immense and often amazing. We must understand that this is a revolutionary energy, something my colleague Ray Grasse has called “the breaking in of the untamable.” At times this energy feels like a river of lava moving down Main Street destroying everything in its way, unstoppable, larger than life, outside of our control. At times it feels more instant, indeed like a meteorite hitting us rending us powerless. Uranus also speaks of “We The People.” There is a new collective sense that the status quo is simply no longer tolerable. Many referred to the recent election as a revolution. I found an interesting aspect of the recent election cycle the references to “redistributing the wealth” and the old standby communism. Astrologically we can understand that revolution and reinvention are absolute. The antithesis to the current system is not a backwards move to another system that also didn’t work. We are challenged to invent a new one.

Fear mongering is great fodder for 24-hour news channels and becomes self-perpetuating sensationalism. We must remember the key tenet of astrology: this energy is *within each one of us* and not something that is happening to us. We are not puppets on strings connected to the planets and they are not doing anything to us. Rather, this is the time to get in touch with Pluto, with Uranus and most of all with them as a duo. There are no good planets and no bad planets. Each planet within us offers a tremendous range of expression. I repeat my core mantra here: *You do the gods or the gods do you*. With this I mean that if you do not choose to actively engage with the Pluto/Uranus duo, they certainly will engage with you. Together they switch on a black light within us. As we know from being in black light, the whiter the object irradiated, the more absurd it looks. We usually associate white with pure and clean, but also with “whitewashed.”

The Greek god Pan, a wild and horned half-goat-half-man, often described with raging libidinous hunger, well represents the Pluto/Uranus energy. Pan is definitely not pure, clean, or white in that sense. The word *panic* also comes from Pan and that indeed is one way to respond to an inner surge of radical, sexual, free and hungering energy. There are several others. One thing necessary at this time in history is creativity. Since reigning in the goat-man is impossible, why not find his usefulness? Pan is an excellent planter of creative seeds. Stepping into Pan means turning consciously towards what turns you on. The second fracture in our three-way crack is the breaking in of Pan. How you allow him into your life is your choice.

Third, the Age of Aquarius. The broadest of all events underfoot currently is a shift of humanity from the age of Pisces into the Age of Aquarius. This is a process and not a sudden or even several-year event. There is an ancient astrological and philosophical notion that every two thousand years humankind shifts into a new age. Such a shift is now underway: from the Age of *Pisces* (the fish) to *Aquarius* (the water bearer).

During each such era the opposite astrological constellation is equally present in the signs of the times. Humanity struggles to reconcile the polarities contained in the oppositional tension. The opposite sign of Pisces is Virgo and the simplest way to describe the schism of the age we are leaving behind is the split between religion (including all beliefs, fantasy and imagination) versus science (including logic, rationality and the natural world). One of the tragedies of this split has been the notion that a holy life separates us from the physical world and so nature itself must be conquered, our lustful desires tempered. It then becomes “natural” to rape the earth for its riches. Our religious superiority makes us almighty and certainly above animals or other riches mother nature has to offer. In the age of Pisces, holy has become synonymous with a separation from what is natural.

Another mindset prevalent in the outgoing age is the idea of “top down.” Whether this be God looking down on us, a king ruling his subjects from his castle on the hill, or whether this be an organizational chart with a boss/figurehead singularly at the top, symbolically there is no difference. To keep the leader/figurehead in power, all these ideas are conveniently married with the notion that if you behave in a certain way you may one day achieve greater heights. Following your religion’s edicts, serving your king well, or climbing up the organizational ladder all promise a better (after) life. We can view any one of these top-down structures to see the collective illusion that is necessary to keep the system going. Bill Maher has looked at religion with a critical eye in his clever 2008 movie *Religulous* where he lays bare the collective illusion and unquestioned beliefs that are necessary to keep any top-down structure alive. From the astrologer’s perspective illusion and fantasy are Neptune’s realm. He is the ruler of Pisces (meaning that there is an affinity between the two), the age that we are collectively leaving behind.

Now along comes the age of Aquarius with its ruler Uranus who is, as we have seen, the universal disturber of all things. Key concepts for the Uranus/Aquarian archetype are also equality and how we related to everyone else, to the group. The idea of globalism—from a global economy, to global warming, to global communication and migration—is a distinct expressions of this new age. I would argue that the most distinctly Aquarian symbol to emerge to date is the Internet with its global information sharing. Moving from Neptune’s dreamy archetype to instant and lightning-fast Uranus is the astrological explanation of why our lives, and even time itself, seem to have sped up so dramatically. Today we expect everything instantly.

The other side of the Pisces coin is that when we believe without questioning we can become blinded, fanatic and duped. The other side of Aquarius includes that the Internet has also brought about identity theft and the possibility of a huge loss of personal anonymity. Speeding up our lives appears to have re-wired the brains of the next generation. When I look at my teenaged daughters I know that they are far more digitized than any previous generation, and this means that they are inadvertently part of a huge global system.

Uranus is also the most humanitarian actor on the celestial stage. His outlook is mental, detached, scientific and intuitive. The group and how we fit into the group we wish to affiliate with, this is our inner Aquarius/Uranus. With globalism, comes the increased realization that the one group to which we all belong to is humankind.

The opposite sign of Aquarius is Leo. And if we follow the path of opposites again, the new schism we find is between our collective sensibilities and our personal wants. The Leo counter pull to Aquarius shows itself in the huge increase over the last few decades in self-exploration, therapy, the worship of hollow glamour, and unfettered selfishness. There has also been a marked increase in the search for our own “little tribe” or kingdom as many are uncomfortable with the idea of belonging to a global anthill.

The new model for this age is no longer top-down. This has huge implications for business. We got a sense of this when we recently watched top executives from Wall Street and the car industry appear before Congress. The archetype of the mogul with private jets and golden parachutes seems strangely, and suddenly, out of place. Companies that succeed in the Aquarian Age are small, nimble, adapt to change and opportunities quickly and look for win-win strategies because the notion is becoming clear that we are gliding through space on an increasingly shrinking blue globe. Raping the earth is also no longer a feasible business model so sustainability and renewable are the buzzwords of our time.

Ray Grasse has likened the new paradigm of co-operation to a jazz band. A group of skilled individuals perform together because each musician sounds better when playing with others. No one has to be the boss, each player gets solos and they play off each other. This has implications beyond business. Democracy, with one person one vote, is also a truly Aquarian idea. Even when fighting terrorism—where the cell and matrix idea now prevails—we are dealing with Aquarian/Uranian concepts. When an ideology holds together small independent cells of individuals, this is as difficult to collapse as a phone network. In either case, if one cell goes down, the system still functions and repairs itself via an alternate path. In the Aquarian model there is no center, no head per se.

Another example of the emerging Aquarian/Uranus age is the collective—and free—online dictionary Wikipedia, who’s founder Jimmy Wales’ vision is to: *Imagine a world in which every single person on the planet is given free access to the sum of all human knowledge. That's our commitment.* Or take the operating system Linux, a free system that, like Microsoft’s windows, can run your computer. There are tens of thousands of Linux programmers around the globe who share freely the small pieces they create. If you want a calculator on your desktop, someone wrote that software and you can have it. The whole notion of ownership is being reworked completely as we speak. The third crack in our foundation is therefore the collective realization that the old ways of owning and sharing power and wealth no longer work. We are all humans faced with our own extinction, regardless of race, religion or creed. Survival depends on coming together.

So now what? Wherever we look, businesses are closing and people are out of work. As we begin to realize that what we once knew is no longer valid, fear can easily creep in. Fear of the unknown is a universal human experience. Yet, creation emerges out of chaos, and from emptiness, from going deep within to recover dormant resources. When we build a house, we first dig a hole. The old foundations that once served our collective temple are now oddly in the way and strangely out of place. If we look at pictures from several decades ago, the clothes, hairstyles and architecture make us wonder and smile, yet they seemed completely right at the time. The current breaking up of our reality is simply far more dramatic than the changing of fashions and styles. Remember that Pluto is foundational and brings out the hidden and most repressed material in us. We must embrace Pluto and thereby face the death of our beliefs to once again face life renewed passion. We must also accept the collapse of structures that we once held sacred and that we believed were indestructible. Remember also that Uranus is the unique and quirky energy in all of us, embracing radically the absurd and unseen future.

Allow me to paraphrase Viktor Frankl, the holocaust survivor: “We can take any what if we know why.” Well, now you know the astrological “why,” why the world is seemingly falling apart at its seams. This is part of the natural order of things. Pluto and/or Uranus, the two most transforming archetypes we know, are involved in all three of the major cracks that are expanding. I recently heard an interview on National Public Radio with an editor of a Chinese newspaper, a man who constantly walks the fine line between writing about what he sees as the truth and imprisonment. He said that he saw three things happening in the media in his country: Control, Change and Chaos. The more a myriad of modern media are infiltrating people’s lives (astrologers call this the Uranus factor, as in technology and Internet) the less control the government has and this has led to a huge change, and ultimately to chaos which he welcomes. It is impossible to control chaos and out of chaos new forms of order appear. This is a good metaphor for what is happening in the world.

Allow the old to break away in whatever way you can. Question everything you believe in and dig a hole in the ground around your own foundations. Break up everything you feel you have needed for your safety. Then, begin to wonder what you might do with this hole in the ground, this new vessel and womb that reeks of earthy fertility and yearns to be seeded by your creativity. Finally, look around and notice just how many fellow humans are doing the same. Depending on what actions you take, for yourself and those around you, the next several years can be the worst of times or the best of times.

Laurence Hillman, January 2009