

Tuning into the Zeitgeist - Riding the Waves of Planetary Change

by Ray Grasse



Late in the summer of 1992, while working for a magazine outside of Chicago, I began feeling increasingly burned out by the long hours I'd been keeping for months on end and decided to just get away for a few days by myself. So, after talking it over with both my bosses, I managed to wrangle a few extra days around an upcoming weekend and rearrange a few other things in my schedule. It was all very spontaneous, but something about it felt right, as though this was exactly the right thing to do, and the best time to do it.

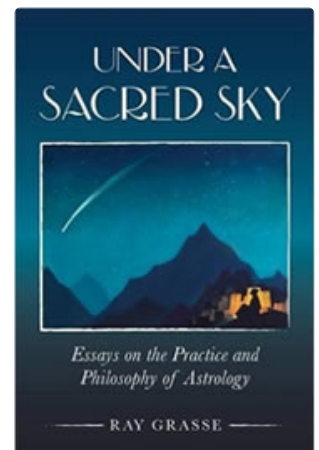
But where to go? I'd been thinking for some time about a historical site in South Dakota I'd read about years before, called Bear Butte. Of all the sites revered by the Native American Plains Indians, this one seems to hold a special importance — a 1,200-foot hill where 60-plus tribes from the United States and Canada still come to conduct vision quests and spiritual retreats. For some reason, something was calling me to this spot more than any other right now. So, late that following Friday afternoon after work, I headed out on the highway toward the northern Great Plains, the Black Hills fixed firmly in my sights.

Driving on just a little sleep, I managed to make it across the border of South Dakota sometime the next day, and eventually reached my destination. This whole area is rich in history, I came to learn, having played host to such iconic figures as Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, and Red Cloud. In 1857, a council of Indian nations met at Bear Butte to discuss the problem of white settlers putting down stakes in the region — but to little effect. Sad ghosts linger around these parts. After climbing to the top of the hill and spending some time by myself, interrupted only once or twice by other hikers coming along, I made my way back down and spent the next couple of days exploring the area around Bear Butte, including Mount Rushmore and the nearby city of Sturgis. After two whirlwind days, I got into my car and drove on back to Chicago, feeling noticeably rejuvenated.

It was just a few days later, after settling back in at work, that an odd thing happened. While conversing with a few individuals, both in person and over the phone, I discovered that at least three other people besides myself made the long trek to Bear Butte the same weekend I did, all completely independent of one another! That four different people would all be drawn to the same remote spot on the exact same weekend (and not even cross paths with one another) seemed startling to me, almost as though we were all pulled there by some unseen force. There's even some small irony in the fact that Bear Butte is just a proverbial stone's throw from Devil's Tower, the site where Spielberg filmed *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*—a movie about individuals mysteriously drawn to the same geographical spot by some unknown force. Irony, synchronicity—call it whatever you like.

I've had a number of experiences like this over the years, where I found myself attracted to a place or subject around the same time as others were, in ways that were difficult to explain. Not impossible, just difficult. And every one of these times, I've been reminded of the subterranean links that synchronicity always seems to hint at, as though our lives have been choreographed in ways we can scarcely imagine, with subtle connections drawing together seemingly disparate events and people into an organically unfolding tapestry.

And among other things, it's prompted me to wonder about the true nature of *thoughts*. What are they, really? And where do they come from? Are they simply generated by our brains, as most scientists



This essay is taken from Ray Grasse's book "Under a Sacred Sky" which can be ordered at [WessexAstrologer](http://WessexAstrologer.com) or amazon.com



claim? Or do we pick them up out of the ethers, almost like radio waves captured by a receiver? While still a teenager, I came across this intriguing quote attributed to anomalist Charles Fort (though its exact source is debated); it resonated with me then, and still does now:

"... ours is an organic existence, and...our thoughts are the phenomena of its eras, quite as its rocks and trees and forms of life are."

That crystallized my own view precisely, since I'd already wondered even at that young age whether my ideas might somehow be a product of my time and place, rather than something strictly personal to me. In that same spirit, I now had to wonder whether it was possible I'd simply tuned into the same "Bear Butte" wavelength those other three people had tuned into that weekend back in 1992. At the very least, it was food for thought.

The Zeitgeist

Philosophers have a word for this sort of thing — zeitgeist, or "spirit of the age." Throughout my life, I've noticed how different periods seem to exude distinctly different qualities or moods, and how certain ideas or achievements seem appropriate to their times. A shift in the group consciousness takes place, and suddenly a particular subject becomes all the rage, or certain themes start popping up in different places independent from one another. Historians have long mused over the curious way parallel developments arise simultaneously in independent fields, like inventions appearing at the same time or theoretical breakthroughs being conceived by different people simultaneously, such as Alfred Wallace and Charles Darwin both coming up with evolutionary theory, or Gottfried Leibniz and Isaac Newton both conceiving of calculus.

This happens in the arts, too, perhaps because creative types possess especially sensitive antennae for picking up on subtle trends streaming through the collective consciousness. I once read an interview with songwriter Paul Simon where he marveled at the coincidental way Paul McCartney composed "Let It Be" around the same time that Simon composed "Bridge over Troubled Waters," since the two songs were so similar in tone and completely different from everything else being played on the radio at the time — yet neither he nor Paul was aware of what the other was composing then. Another example would be Bob Dylan releasing his album *Time out of Mind* on the same day as the 9/11 tragedy, with one song on that album ("Mississippi") featuring the uncanny line: "Sky full of fire, pain pouring down." The release date for this CD was planned months in advance by corporate executives, whose decision-making was no doubt strictly practical in nature. So, what really was driving the decision about that release date?

The Astrological Key

Fortunately, astrologers have something of an edge in studying the zeitgeist, since they're able to chart its various waves and shifting currents with some degree of precision. More often than not, that changing mental-emotional atmosphere shows itself to be especially connected with the interactions of the slower-moving planets — in particular, Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto, though Saturn and Jupiter are sometimes involved, too.

For instance, in his book *Cosmos and Psyche*, Richard Tarnas points out that the famed mutiny on the *Bounty* took place exactly as the French Revolution was erupting in France thousands of miles away. These two events were uniquely parallel to one another in significance, involving nearly unprecedented rebellions against authority, yet there was no way the disgruntled sailors could have known about the French uprising unfolding far away; it's as if both groups were responding to the same revolutionary impulse streaming through the air at the time. But what was that, astrologically? Most likely, the result of a powerful opposition taking place between Uranus and Pluto, two planets traditionally associated with revolutionary energies whenever they join forces.



On that occasion, it was an opposition at work, stirring up turbulent feelings amongst the populace, but for many astrologers an even more profound agent of historical change is the conjunction between slow-moving bodies. During my own life, I've been lucky enough to witness two such pairings of the outer planets: the alignment of Uranus with Pluto during the mid 1960s and the conjunction of Uranus with Neptune during the early '90s. (Lest we take astronomical events like this for granted, keep in mind that there won't be another such conjunction between any two outer planets for rest of this coming century!)

Anyone who's lived through these two periods will know what extraordinary times they were in some ways — politically, scientifically, culturally. The '60s were a period of revolutionary fervor, when people around the world were exploring new ways of thinking about their lives and values. Men walked on the Moon, women and minorities were demanding their rights, and new artistic forms were breaking into consciousness. In popular music, Bob Dylan and the Beatles composed arguably their greatest work precisely as Uranus and Pluto joined forces in 1965 and 1966: Dylan came out with three of his greatest albums (*Bringing It All Back Home*, *Highway 61*, and *Blonde on Blonde*) within the span of those two years, while the Beatles produced *Help!*, *Rubber Soul*, and *Revolver* during that same span of time, with *Sergeant Pepper* following immediately on its heels the next year. This was a period when many other musicians and songwriters were hitting their stride, too, including the Rolling Stones, Joni Mitchell, Buffalo Springfield, the Kinks, and the Beach Boys, to name just a few.

The 1990s, too, were a fascinating time of new influences and revolutionary change, though in somewhat different ways. The Internet exploded into mass awareness during the 12 months following the exact conjunction of Uranus and Neptune in 1993 — and the world hasn't been the same since. The Hubble Space Telescope became operational in 1993, revolutionizing not only our understanding of the universe but our place in it. In the arts, the phenomenon of "world music" was climaxing, with artistic influences from around the globe suddenly becoming hot properties, exemplified by groups like Dead Can Dance. In the publishing field, previously obscure spiritual teachings were now filtering into the mainstream as a result of magazines like *Gnosis* and *The Quest*, along with books like Sogyal Rimpoche's *Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*. A pungent mood of exoticism permeated this entire decade, as exemplified by TV shows like *The X Files* and a growing fascination with mysteries of all types — shamanic, Native American, Egyptian, metaphysical.



The conclusion seems inescapable: The zeitgeist is richer and more creatively potent at some times more than others. During such periods, emotions run stronger, inspiration flows freely, and game-changing ideas present themselves like low-hanging fruit ripe for the picking. And once these periods have run their course, it's as if some phantom spigot has mysteriously turned off and those brilliant feelings and ideas are suddenly harder to come by. I once heard a yogi remark that the "truly great souls" choose to incarnate onto the Earth at powerful times in history, like the Italian Renaissance or Sophocles' Athens, because of the opportunities those times present. Difficult as that may be to prove, it makes a certain reincarnational sense, when you

stop to think about it. By analogy, would a budding world-class gymnast want to attend a strictly average athletic school or prefer to enroll in the best institution available? Likewise, would Albert Einstein be more likely to incarnate into a period that's totally out of sync with his abilities and skills—or one that offers the optimal circumstances for developing his brilliant ideas?

Consider that the hugely successful author, J. K. Rowling, was born precisely as Uranus was conjoining Pluto in 1965 and penned works that sold millions of copies. (Note, too, that the Harry Potter character sports a birthmark on his head resembling a very Uranian lightning bolt!) Likewise, Lana and Lily Wachowski, directors of the successful *Matrix* franchise, were born in 1965 and 1967, respectively, and gave birth to a film that spoke to audiences worldwide. The horoscopes of pop sensations like Taylor Swift and Justin Bieber show strong connections between their personal planets and the Uranus/Neptune conjunction of their era. Singer Bob Dylan was born on the heels of the extraordinary configurations of May, 1941.

Going back further, we find that J. R. R. Tolkien, author of the *Lord of the Rings* series, was born in 1892, during the epochal conjunction of Pluto and Neptune, as were other influential figures like Paramahansa Yogananda (1893), J. Krishnamurti (1895), and Buckminster Fuller (1895). And consider

how both Ludwig van Beethoven and Napoleon Bonaparte were born during an extremely rare grand trine in the 1700s between the three outer planets — Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto. In all of these cases, it's as though these individuals' relationship with the transpersonal planets gave them a finger on the pulse of those generational streams defining their era.

Final Thoughts

We've looked at a few of the powerful time-windows that have arisen in our past, and there are countless more besides these. However, while some periods may indeed be more energetic or truly revolutionary than others, it's important to point out that *all* periods have their own unique qualities and set of possibilities. Every era witnesses the rise of individuals who seem preternaturally attuned to the potentials of their time, with one decade witnessing the rise of Madonna and Mikhail Gorbachev, while another one sees the ascent of Lady Gaga and Barack Obama — and on it goes.

But in more modest ways, even the most obscure individual is a creature of their particular zeitgeist, their thoughts and drives reflecting the necessities of their native era. Is there any way to tell more precisely how someone is aligned to the zeitgeist? One method is to look at whether you were born close in time to any configuration involving the outer planets. Did you arrive in the midst of Uranus square Saturn? If so, then take a moment to reflect on how your life has been concerned with overturning conventional attitudes or structures. Or were you born when Saturn was conjuncting Jupiter? If so, then consider how your life has been involved in grappling with systems of religion, law, or morality.

For that matter, any relationship between a personal planet and the slower-moving ones can offer insights into someone's alignment with the shifting zeitgeist. For example, is your natal Venus conjunct transpersonal Neptune — as it was for singer and songwriter Joni Mitchell (born on November 7, 1943)? If so, then it's possible that your own artistic or romantic values have been attuned to more transpersonal currents of feeling throughout the culture, and in turn to Neptune's smorgasbord of angelic dreams or disappointing illusions. Or was your Mercury aligned at birth with Uranus in some way or another, as it was for Benjamin Franklin (who was born with an opposition between these planets)? Then, perhaps look to see how your own individual mind has been attuned to the futuristic and innovative trends of the unfolding zeitgeist.

It's even possible for someone to be attuned to the significant time-windows of the past, long before they were born. My own Venus is at 7° Gemini, which places it exactly on the zodiacal point where Pluto conjoined Neptune in the early 1890s. Curiously, since I was very young I've been powerfully drawn to the art and music of that period, to composers like Claude Debussy and symbolist artists like Jean Delville. In his book, *Horoscope for the New Millennium*, astrologer E. Alan Meece argues for the lingering effects of that rare once-every-five-centuries conjunction, showing how the horoscopes of various famous figures from the last few decades connect with that pivotal point in history, from John F. Kennedy to Bob Dylan. In other words, we're not just products of our specific birthday but the energies of overlapping horoscopes extending back through time, like a grand cosmic multilayered cake.



But I think it's important to realize that while we're all shaped by our times, we're not necessarily confined by them. That's because in a certain sense the zeitgeist is whatever we make of it, in terms of utilizing its resources for either constructive or destructive ends. You can hand some people the most expensive art materials and they'll still manage to create crappy art, while others working with the most meager of materials can still manage to concoct masterpieces. Likewise, a great soul can do wondrous things with the planetary potentials offered by their era, just as a less balanced mind can abuse or squander them. Charlie Chaplin and Adolf Hitler were born just days apart, and both were plugged into much the same generational stream (and the two of them even looked alike, interestingly enough). Yet, one chose to channel his talent for mass influence into great art, while the other steered it toward unprecedented death and destruction.

The famed yogi Paramahansa Yogananda once implored students to "rise above the age in which you are born." I'd suggest a slightly different variation: As long as we're right here and right now, why not make the most of it?