

Archetypal Astrology and Transpersonal Psychology:

The Research of Richard Tarnas and Stanislav Grof

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In the mid-1960's, a young Czechoslovakian psychiatrist working at the Psychiatric Research Institute in Prague made some epoch-making discoveries concerning the fundamental structures of the human psyche. Working with a wide range of individuals involved in supervised LSD psychotherapy, Stanislav Grof and his clients encountered experiences that gradually and then irrevocably challenged the orthodox Freudian model in which he and his colleagues were working.

The content of the sessions suggested a far deeper understanding of the human psyche and the cosmos itself than had been previously imagined. After supervising 3,000 LSD sessions and studying the records of another 2,000, Grof eventually systematized a far-reaching model that accounted for the observations of his client's sessions, integrated the diversity of competing psychological theories, and reached into areas of human spirituality described by the great spiritual traditions of the world.

Stanislav Grof's Expanded Cartography of the Human Psyche

In 1976, Grof and his partner Christina developed a comparable non-drug technique for entering non-ordinary states of consciousness, which they called Holotropic Breathwork™ (from *holos*=“wholeness”; and *trepein*=“moving toward”). Throughout his long career of more than fifty-five years of research using powerful drug and non-drug catalysts, Grof discovered that individuals who enter holotropic states of consciousness have access to three broad layers of experience.

The first layer is referred to as the *biographical*. This layer contains most of the material known from conventional psychotherapy. Individuals confront traumas and conflicts left over from physical and sexual abuse, a hostile family atmosphere, sibling rivalry, or severe toilet training. They work through emotional deprivation and unmet needs in infancy, such as isolation in an incubator or lack of bonding. They also discharge traumatic energies and emotions from serious illnesses, operations, and accidents, an

important category of experiences missed by most of the major psychological schools. Especially significant were those that involved a threat to breathing such as partial suffocation, near-drowning, diphtheria, or whooping cough.

The next layer of experiences that individuals encounter, Grof termed the *perinatal* layer (from *peri*=“surrounding” and *natalis*=“birth”). Perinatal experiences are based around the experiences of birth labor and delivery, combined with dramatic encounters with dying and impermanence. As Grof’s patients worked through these experiences, their consciousness automatically opened out into ecstatic spiritual dimensions in the universe at large. Reliving the completed birth coincided with a profound spiritual rebirth and transcendence of the fear of death.

Beyond the perinatal layer is a broad category of experiences which Grof termed the *transpersonal* or Jungian layer of the psyche, as Jung was the first major Western psychiatrist to integrate transpersonal themes in his world view. In transpersonal states an individual has access to experiences normally considered outside the range of individual awareness. The most common are embryonic, ancestral, and phylogenetic memories; identification with other people, groups of people, or all of humanity; identification with the consciousness of animals, plants, or inorganic materials; past life experiences; identification with archetypes and mythological sequences; and encounters with the Universal Mind, Absolute Consciousness, and the Macrocosmic Void.

What follows is an introduction to Grof’s discoveries in the perinatal layer of the unconscious.

THE PERINATAL MATRICES

Grof found that the perinatal layer of the psyche tends to emerge in four broad, overlapping clusters of experience, he called the *Basic Perinatal Matrices I - IV*.

Basic Perinatal Matrix I - The Amniotic Universe, Union with the Mother

The experiences in Grof’s first perinatal matrix (BPM I) are based around the intrauterine

unity between mother and fetus. In a healthy womb, the conditions for the fetus are close to ideal. Oxygen and nourishment are supplied and waste products are taken away through the umbilical cord, and there is a continuous flow of warmth and meaningful connection with the mother.

Individuals who tap into these sequences in holotropic states relive specific biological details of fetal life, overlaid with experiences that share with the intrauterine situation a free-flowing lack of boundaries, such as identification with serene aquatic life forms, with the consciousness of the ocean itself, or with interstellar space. Equally common are experiences of blissful cosmic unity, which can take various cultural forms including existence in heaven, the Garden of Eden, *atman-Brahman* union, Elysian Fields, the Tao, *samadhi*, or *Tat Tvam Asi* (“Thou art That”). Grof referred to this category of transcendent melted states as *oceanic* or *Apollonian* type of ecstasy. Neptunian experiences are the most profound experiences human beings can have and satisfy our greatest need.

Grof further observed that these sequences are accompanied by memories that share with the uterine situation the qualities of undisturbed unity and connection. These include memories from postnatal life in which important needs are satisfied, such as harmonious periods in the family, good mothering, play with peers, and fulfilling love. There are memories of trips or vacations in beautiful natural settings, swimming in the ocean and clear lakes, and nature experienced at its best—“Mother Nature.”

This matrix also has a difficult side, where the mother was under stress, using drugs or alcohol, or had ambivalent feelings toward the pregnancy. Individuals accessing these *toxic womb* memories relive the specific chemical and emotional conditions in the womb. These are accompanied by transpersonal experiences of a similar thematic type such as identification with fish in polluted waters, sequences of being invaded by aliens, experimented on by demonic entities, or suffering the influence of “bad karma.” Fully experiencing these toxic or rejecting womb experiences leads to deep healing and a sense of having consumed the toxic energies and karma. When unhealed, they are an important source of hypochondria and psychotic distortions of reality in later life. In milder forms, people may have a deep fear of rejection and an inability to emotionally bond with other human beings.

Basic Perinatal Matrix II - “No Exit” and Cosmic Engulfment

Grof’s second perinatal matrix (BPM II) is based around the onset of labor. The situation in the womb deteriorates radically as first noxious chemicals and then claustrophobic pressures dramatically interrupt the fetus’ blissful connection with the mother and alter its pristine universe. The cervix is not yet dilated and the fetus is pressed from all sides by the contracting uterine walls.

Individuals who access this layer of their psyche in holotropic states experience overwhelming feelings of “no-exit” entrapment, hopelessness, helplessness, victimization, and guilt that extend outward into their perception of the entire universe. They identify with the victims of all times and places, including populations devastated by famine and plagues, those who died in all the concentration camps and wars of history, or with all the mothers and infants who have died in labor. Natural themes that emerge include fish ensnared by an octopus, insects trapped in a spider’s web, or animals slaughtered in nature by predators.

Associated memories from postnatal life include situations that pose a threat to survival or bodily integrity such as war experiences, painful diseases, near drowning or episodes of suffocation, as well as accidents, injuries, and operations. Equally common are memories of imprisonment, brainwashing, or physical abuse. Individuals also relive severe psychological traumatizations such as an oppressive family atmosphere, threatening situations, emotional deprivation, rejection, and humiliation.

Archetypally, people influenced by BPM II report encounters with the Judging God or Devouring Mother accompanied by sequences of the Fall from Paradise, descent into hell, and cosmic engulfment. These are spontaneously depicted by the psyche in various cultural forms, relatively independent of the individual’s beliefs or culture of origin. This stage of birth is the prototype of experiences of loss, victimization, and lack of meaningful connection in human life; the pain of birth is where the separate ego is formed.

However, the difficult stages of birth are also a crucial and essential “transform station” where collective energies and karma can enter an individual lifetime to be experienced and worked through. Surrendering to Saturn’s no-exit experiences in holotropic states consumes their constricting pressure on the psyche and allows the process to move to the next stage. The paradox is that when we are emotionally stuck, we are stuck halfway between being uncomfortable and descending deeply enough into our unconscious pain to release it. The protective ego prevents us from suffering deeply enough to work through the inner material. Our first problem is the wound of birth and our consequent fear of death and dying. The bigger problem is our repression of that wound, a repression that can gradually impoverish the entirety of life.

Basic Perinatal Matrix III - The Death-Rebirth Struggle

Grof’s third perinatal matrix (BPM III) is based around the dynamic stage of labor, with the corresponding activation of powerful biological energies. The cervix is now open and the infant is slowly forced down the birth canal by uterine contractions that range between between fifty and one hundred pounds of force, a struggle for delivery that pits the mother and fetus in a synergistic effort to end the often excruciating suffering inflicted on each other.

Individuals working through this inner material experience a sense of titanic fight, activation of intense aggression, crushing mechanical pressures, and sadomasochistic feelings caused by suffocation. It is a documented biological phenomenon that choking creates a strange form of enforced sexual arousal, and that intense pain or torture, in general, also lead to an extreme form of ecstasy that transcends pain and pleasure. This is observed in individuals hanged on the gallows who frequently get erections or ejaculate, in the reports of concentration camp survivors, in the files of Amnesty International, and in the practice of autoerotic asphyxiation. The fact that our first sexual experience occurs in the context of the life-threatening suffocation and pain of delivery provides a logical basis for the formation of many sexual variations and dysfunctions in later life.

People facing this layer of their psyche also encounter scatological materials such as blood, mucus, and sometimes feces and urine; demonic energies; and purifying fire,

referred to as pyrocatharsis. In this process, they experientially identify with both victims and perpetrators, reflecting the fact that in the dynamic stage of labor the situation is not hopeless and the individual begins to identify with the intense propelling energies of the uterus itself. These sequences are accompanied by dramatic physical manifestations including profuse sweating, projectile vomiting, frantic motor phenomena, and explosive discharges of aggression. “Individuals also release enormous amounts of tension in physical tremors, twitches, jerks, and complex twisting movements that resemble the infant’s positions during labor. Many of these obstetric details, such as breech birth or use of forceps, can later be independently verified.

The transpersonal side of the experience includes sequences of temptation, sacrifice, purgatory, and Judgment. Individuals also confront or identify with deities such as Shiva, Kali, or Hercules performing his Labors, or with dying-reviving figures such as Persephone, Christ, Osiris, or Dionysus. The experiences in this matrix culminate in a type of intense driving arousal that transcends pain and pleasure, which Grof referred to as *volcanic* or *Dionysian* type of ecstasy. Facing this material in supportive contexts is followed by dramatic experiences of spiritual breakthrough and the disappearance of symptoms that had been resistant to all previous approaches.

Much of Pluto’s action in an individual’s lifetime can be seen as a replay of birth, an attempt by the psyche to work through, complete, and integrate the experience. The psyche has an almost relentless tendency to create and draw toward itself experiences that match the experiential quality of the unconscious inner material. Thus, a person with leftover trauma from choking in the birth canal will unconsciously create situations of high stress, with “no room to breathe” or “the world closing in.” These patterns can persist indefinitely until the material is faced on the level from which it originates—as powerful leftover emotions from within the psyche.

Biographical memories associated with this matrix include struggles, fights, and adventurous activities such as active attacks in battles and revolutions, experiences in military service, rough airplane flights, cruises on a stormy ocean, or hazardous car driving. People can relive, in fast sequence, highly sensual memories of carnivals, amusement parks and nightclubs, wild parties, or orgies. Other memories include experiences of seduction or sexual abuse, and in females, delivering of their own

symptoms. These are accompanied by feelings of heightened vitality, redemption, forgiveness, brotherly and sisterly feelings, and a high value placed on warm human relationships. People become interested in finding meaningful work, in living a less complicated way of life with “minimum consumption, maximum satisfaction,” and in acting in synergy with others to solve urgent ecological and other shared problems. At the same time, their own unique personalities become more self-assured and they have critical attitudes toward the abuse of power.

Grof found that individuals who work through the leftover emotions from birth and access the rebirth matrix automatically discover within themselves what he calls “intrinsic human values.” These include a sense of higher responsibility, positive ethics, and utmost respect for life. This clinical discovery supports the timeless Buddhist axiom that when we remove the arrow of suffering, compassion follows automatically.

Memories associated with this matrix include escapes from dangerous situations, the end of wars, survival of accidents, or overcoming of severe obstacles by active effort. Recalled scenes of nature include the beginning of spring, the end of an ocean storm, or sunrise.

Richard Tarnas’ Archetypal Astrology

Grof’s research into the deeper layers of the psyche shed important new light on human psychopathology and healing, as well as sexuality, culture and spirituality. But an additional piece of this new consciousness paradigm was yet to be discovered. In 1976, the psychologist and cultural historian Richard Tarnas, working closely with Grof at the Esalen Institute in California, made some dramatic and unexpected correlations between Grof’s clinical work and the principles of *archetypal astrology*. Tarnas discovered remarkably precise correlations between the four perinatal matrices and the archetypal meanings of the planets Neptune, Saturn, Pluto, and Uranus: between the experiences of Grof’s clients under the influence of a given matrix and the classic descriptions of astrological archetypes found in the astrological literature.

Furthermore, Tarnas found that the unfolding of the birth chart in time revealed when a specific perinatal matrix was more likely to be activated in an individual’s inner life.

children.

Basic Perinatal Matrix IV - Rebirth and Separation from the Mother

The fourth perinatal matrix (BPM IV) is based around the completed delivery and birth, as the infant “leaves the life-threatening confinement of the birth canal and begins separate biological existence.” Although in many ways the variable experiences in the early days of life—including hunger, thirst, heat and cold—are less ideal than the intrauterine state, compared to the agony of the birth canal, the post-natal situation is experienced as an ecstatic liberation and reconnection with the nourishing Feminine principle.

Individuals engaged in deep self-exploration under the influence of BPM IV experience a cluster of themes centered around breakthrough and transcendence. The experiences of driving volcanic arousal and suffering of the previous stage eventually reach the extreme limit, culminating in a sense of total failure on every imaginable level—physically, emotionally, intellectually, morally, and spiritually. Individuals feel that they have hit the absolute rock bottom of existence, an experience usually referred to as *ego death*.

This is almost immediately followed by visions of blinding white or golden light, peacock feathers, and the inside of great halls and cathedrals. Individuals experience sequences of the end of wars or revolutions, the discovery of medicine and technology that benefit all humanity, and global liberation. Archetypal themes include slaying the dragon, capturing the Golden Fleece, or drinking ambrosia with the gods on Mt. Olympus. People can identify with the completed death and rebirth of deities such as Christ, Osiris, Persephone, or Dionysus, experience an ecstatic reunion with Divine Consciousness in the form of God, of the Great Mother Goddess personified as Isis, Parvati, Demeter or Mary, or in a more abstract form as a loving and compassionate presence. They also experience what Grof termed *Promethean* ecstasy, as electrifying cosmic insights burst into their consciousness.

Individuals who reach these experiences have a sense of profound spiritual awakening, transcendence of the fear of death, and dramatic disappearance of physical and emotional

Thus, people who enter powerful holotropic states during a major Saturn transit—either from transiting Saturn or to natal Saturn—are likely to encounter elements of the second perinatal matrix (“*No Exit*” and *Cosmic Engulfment*). When Uranus is activated, people in holotropic states will tend to experience themes from the fourth perinatal matrix (*Rebirth* and *Separation from the Mother*).

For years, Grof and his colleagues had looked unsuccessfully for some kind of diagnostic system—such as the DSM categories, Rorschach, and others—to predict the inner experiences of their clients in deep self-exploration. Decades later, when Tarnas discovered and systematically applied the Rosetta Stone of archetypal astrology to this problem, Grof had to ironically concede that the one successful predictive system turned out to be something that was even more controversial and beyond the purview of conventional science than LSD psychotherapy. But the correlations they observed were dramatic and consistent. Whether the catalyst was Holotropic Breathwork™, a psychoactive substance, or a spontaneous eruption of the unconscious contents, transits provide, in Grof’s words “the only system that can successfully predict both the content and timing of experiences encountered in non-ordinary states of consciousness in experiential psychotherapy” (Cycles and Symbols Conference, San Francisco, 1990).

This discovery was a kind of unexpected cosmic validation of both Grof’s work and the deeper principles of astrology, two independent streams of research that corroborated what increasingly seemed to be universally preexisting, *a priori* patterns of consciousness. Tarnas’ research validated the universality of the perinatal matrices and connected their unfolding with the empirically tangible movements of the planets.

What follows is a brief introduction to Tarnas’ research. However, before exploring these correlations there are several issues and clarifications that need to be addressed:

1) *Holotropic States vs. Everyday Life*

It is important to remember that the planet-BPM correlations apply to the experiences of people who have entered deep holotropic states of consciousness, rather than in everyday life. People who access holotropic states under a powerful Saturn transit are likely to experience elements of BPM II (“No Exit,” Cosmic Engulfment), but they may or may

not experience BPM II themes from day to day. Of course, what seems to happen is that the condensed perinatal energies and emotions that would ideally be experienced and consumed in condensed form in a single session will, in everyday life, be spread out and experienced in a diluted form over the course of weeks, months, or years. Instead of experiencing the BPM II feelings of “no-exit” engulfment, entrapment, meaninglessness, and isolation in a powerful healing session, a person might experience a vague sense of ongoing pressure, encroaching threat, and dissatisfying routine that essentially passes as normal life.

2) The Alignments of Uranus-Pluto and Uranus-Neptune

Although the planet-BPM correlations are striking, there are many other factors that seem to determine the content of holotropic sessions. These include the simultaneous activation of other personal and world transits; how many previous sessions people have undergone and what material they have already integrated; the set and setting of their sessions; the level of trust with their sitters; and possibly the Universal Mind’s apparent need for variety and unpredictability of experience.

Of these factors, the dominant archetypal field reflected by the prevailing world transits is one of the most important. To preface this next point we need to review Tarnas’ research into cycles of outer space exploration. In *Cosmos and Psyche* (2006), he documents the varying emphases in technology and space exploration that occurred during the last two major alignments of Uranus-Pluto and Uranus-Neptune:

"The difference between the Uranus-Pluto conjunction period of the 1960s and the Uranus-Neptune conjunction of the 1990s is instructive. The Sixties saw the titanic achievement of the first manned space flights and climaxed in the Moon landings, which required the deployment of unprecedentedly powerful technologies of propulsion to break through the gravitational pull of the Earth and to reach intended destinations in outer space. The entire trajectory, from the first flights by Gagarin and Shepard in 1961 to the last Moon landing in 1972, took place precisely during the only Uranus-Pluto conjunction of the twentieth century. By contrast, the most exciting advances in the exploration of space during the 1990s was largely centered on and made possible by the technological breakthrough of the Hubble Space Telescope and the flood of unprecedented images and

new vistas of the cosmos that it afforded, with immediate consequences for cosmological theory and the astronomical imagination."

"The Hubble Telescope of the 1990s captured public attention more than any scientific venture since the space program and Moon landing of the 1960s. The Promethean principle of technological breakthrough and liberating advance associated with Uranus was vividly present in the major space activities of both decades, but the activities of the 1960s had a distinctly Plutonic quality and potency while those of the 1990s were distinctly Neptunian, when nearly all such efforts were concerned with electronically transmitting new images, which radically shifted the cultural vision and stimulated the cosmological imagination, revealed the previously invisible, opened up the possibility of new and multi-dimensional realities, and aroused feelings of cosmic wonder and spiritual awe. Even the space station, one of the few space projects of this era that involved astronauts rather than instrumental probes and telescopes, was of a different character from that of the 1960s' feverishly competitive "space race." Instead, the space station constituted a multinational collaborative effort, one dedicated to forming globally cooperative and collective living arrangements in space, themes that distinctly echo the idealistic, boundary- dissolving, utopian impulses of the Uranus-Neptune complex."

"Interestingly, efforts during the 1990s to repeat or extend the manned space explorations of the 1960s consistently collapsed while the more archetypally apt observational activities flourished. Conversely, just as the Uranus-Neptune conjunction approached the 20° point in 2004, the Hubble Telescope, in the absence of regular maintenance, began to lose its functionality. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration provisionally decided to cut funding for the future maintenance of the Hubble Telescope in favor of future manned space expeditions to the Moon and Mars, which it has scheduled, coincidentally, for the period when Uranus next moves into alignment with Pluto in the 2010s" (*Cosmos and Psyche*, pp. 436-437).

This remarkable pattern that Tarnas observes in the varying approaches to space exploration can also be applied to understand cyclical patterns in the exploration of inner space in holotropic states. During the period in the early to the middle 1960s, when Grof and his colleagues were observing, in their clients, the full range of perinatal unfolding—the same period that began the manned space flights and accelerating breakthroughs in

rocket propulsion—the dominant archetypal complex activated in the collective psyche was the Uranus-Pluto conjunction of the Sixties (1960 – 72). As Tarnas writes, Uranus-Pluto alignments coincide with powerful upsurges of Dionysian, erotic, aggressive, creative, evolutionary, and emancipatory energies, themes that are so fundamental in the perinatal unfolding. Decades later in the Nineties, when many people were bypassing the more elemental, organismic, instinctual, and cathartic aspects of the perinatal layer and gaining direct access to transpersonal states—the same period as the opening of unimaginable new cosmic vistas afforded by the Hubble Telescope—the prevailing archetypal field was symbolized by the Uranus-Neptune conjunction (1985 – 2001).

In general, the basic psychological direction of Uranus-Neptune alignments is up and out, while the basic thrust of Uranus-Pluto is “down and through.” Tarnas documents that Uranus-Neptune alignments regularly coincide with encompassing shifts in vision, cosmic ephiphanies, revelations of the numinous, and spiritual awakening in the collective psyche. In contrast with Uranian cultural breakthroughs with an obsessive, elemental, and explosive Plutonic character, Uranus-Neptune alignments coincide with Promethean cultural waves with a more spiritual, mystical, and unitive quality.

This pattern of direct access to transpersonal states was the basic trajectory in the series of holotropic experiences documented by Christopher Bache in his classic of the Uranus-Neptune era *Dark Night, Early Dawn* (2000). In a series of powerful inner sessions, Bache gained access to some of the most transcendent realms of human experience, including Absolute Consciousness. He also experienced some of the basic patterning and transpersonal components of the perinatal matrices.

Based on the experiences of Bache and others, we can tentatively say that, as well as facilitating far-reaching journeys into the transpersonal realms, Uranus-Neptune alignments can grant access to the transpersonal side of the perinatal matrices—their basic patterning, structure, context, and meaning—but not necessarily their more biological, organismic, instinctual, and cathartic features. This Plutonic material, as we have seen, includes sequences of profuse sweating, hypersalivation, projectile vomiting, twitches, tremors and jerks, episodes of choking and suffocation, explosive discharges of aggression, orgiastic sexual arousal, and passing through purifying fire—and, when completed, a permanent transcendence of the fear of death.

In review then, the interplay of these two cycles—the Uranus-Pluto and Uranus-Neptune, or *Grof* and *Bache* cycles respectively—appears to be a major factor in determining whether the intensely Plutonic character of the perinatal matrices or the more transcendent Neptunian nature of transpersonal experiences dominates in the collective psyche during a given period. Tarnas points out, that with another powerful Uranus-Pluto alignment now activated—a 90° square from 2005 – 2020—researchers are likely to see a dramatic resurgence of classic perinatal experiences until at least 2020 or beyond.

3) *Transits vs. Aspects*

The planet-BPM correlation refers to transits rather than aspects. The timing of the activation of perinatal matrices in people’s inner experience is based on passing alignments rather than lifetime alignments. The spiritual logic behind natal aspects can only be said to be an unfathomable mystery, reflecting the higher imperatives, cosmic-game trajectories, and need for variety of experience of the cosmic creative principle.

4) *Interpenetrating Waveforms Rather Than Discrete Entities*

The planetary archetypes resemble complexly interpenetrating waveforms rather than discrete, separate entities. Every archetype exists in manifest or latent form in every perinatal matrix as well as in every particle of the universe. As Tarnas describes: “The basic BPM correspondence is an important and striking one, but many other nuances and complexities are involved that make it misleading to focus only on a simple one-to-one correlation between the four matrices and the four planets. After all, the entire process is Plutonic from beginning to end. It is also entirely Neptunian. The perinatal is the convergence point of the biological-instinctual-Freudian with the archetypal-spiritual-Jungian, and every matrix reflects that convergence—i.e., of Neptune and Pluto. Also the entire process is shaped by Saturn (as separation, incarnation, form, suffering, differentiation, etc.) and by Uranus (the unpredictable, the creative trickster, the introduction of change and the new into the timeless unity, etc.). Saturn is present even in positive BPM I experiences as the safe, bounded container.”

The simultaneous activation of multiple transits can further overlap the boundaries

between the BPMs. Of special interest are transits involving two or more of the planets Saturn through Pluto. In this situation, their corresponding matrices will be simultaneously activated, in complex combinations and alternations.

5) *Overlapping Layers of Experience*

The archetypes manifest in holotropic states in overlapping combinations that express the fantastically complex imagination of the cosmic creative principle. The perinatal matrices are important expressions of Neptune, Saturn, Pluto, and Uranus but not the only or highest ones. The basic experiential character of each matrix also has transpersonal (and biographical) expressions. An intense Saturn transit can activate experiences of BPM II, but it can also manifest as biographical memories of pain, suffering, and loneliness in the lifetime—or in transpersonal experiences such as reliving of a difficult past life, feeling the suffering of an entire human group, identification with a Saturnian deity, or with the monotonous labors of the Universal Mind burying itself into duality in order to keep itself entertained. This interpenetration and overlaying of biographical, perinatal, and transpersonal layers of the psyche is fundamental in Grof's descriptions of the Basic Perinatal Matrices. In the perinatal unfolding, it is ultimately the Divine or Absolute Consciousness who is incarnating itself into mortality and finiteness and then reawakening Itself during the processes of ego death and rebirth.

With these various distinctions and qualifications in mind, we can now briefly introduce Tarnas' breakthrough research.

Basic Perinatal Matrix I - The Amniotic Universe, Union With the Mother - Neptune

In review, then, Grof's first perinatal matrix (BPM I) is based around the union between mother and fetus in utero, with accompanying transpersonal themes of heaven, Paradise, unity with Divine Consciousness, and oceanic ecstasy. Tarnas was able to recognize that these multilayered experiences that Grof termed BPM I correspond precisely with the archetypal character of the planet *Neptune*. Their common denominator is situations in which the usual boundaries between self and other, self and nature, or self and Divine

have been transcended.

Tarnas observed that individuals with highly activated Neptune transits will tend to experience the world through the stencil of the fetus' blissful unity with the mother: including a sense of basic safety and belonging, unitive feelings with the cosmos, a stimulated inner life and dream life, and fundamental openness to spirituality. Of course, these correlations are much more pronounced in holotropic states, as opposed to everyday life. Difficult Neptunian states are related to toxic womb memories, where the lack of boundaries is experienced as confusing, deluding, weakening, or poisonous.

The Neptune-BPM I unitive impulse will then find specific expression through the other archetypes interacting with Neptune by transit. Neptune-*Sun* combinations tend to manifest as mystical feelings toward creativity, purpose, and the fathering principle—with the Neptunian Divine granting easier access to its masculine personas, such as Apollo, the Heavenly Father, or the Cosmic Sun. Neptune-*Moon* transits facilitate openings to unitive states of consciousness through human bonding, community, and motherhood, with the Divine more likely to reveal its compassionate Feminine faces, including Isis, Mary, and Kwan Yin. In general, when Neptune's energies are flowing positively in a person's psyche, the blissful and meaningful unity between mother and fetus becomes a prototype for peaceful, nourishing, and meaningful relationships in everyday life.

Figure 1: The Amniotic Universe - Neptune

Neptune is the seamless field of consciousness that underlies and permeates the entire cosmos. Tarnas realized that one of Neptune's manifestations in human life is the ecstatic unity between mother and fetus in utero—what Grof termed the Basic Perinatal Matrix I. If events in childhood reinforce the unitive fetal state, an individual will carry mystical overtones through his or her entire lifetime.

Basic Perinatal Matrix II - Cosmic Engulfment and “No Exit” - Saturn

Grof's second matrix (BPM II) is based around the early stages of labor, where the womb unity has been lost but the cervix is still closed, creating a “no-exit” situation for the

vulnerable fetus. These biological memories are also accompanied by transpersonal themes such as existence in hell, expulsion from Paradise, and cosmic engulfment. Tarnas recognized that these multilayered experiences that Grof termed BPM II correspond precisely with the archetypal character of the planet *Saturn*. Thus individuals strongly influenced by Saturn for a given period—and especially when they enter powerful holotropic states—will tend to perceive the world through the stencil of the contracting “no-exit” stage of birth. This can include feelings of constriction, limitation, deficiency, and challenge that require much hard work and patience to overcome, but when resolved also lead to a deep maturation, realism, and sense of personal responsibility.

The Saturn-BPM II energies will also specifically manifest through the areas of life symbolized by the other planets interacting with Saturn by transit. Saturn transiting the *Sun* can manifest as inhibitions in energy and vitality, as well as confrontations with the Divine in its contracting, judging, or negating Terrible Father expressions, such as Jahweh, Ouranos, or Cronos. Saturn transiting the *Moon* will tend to constrict people’s experiences of nurture, connection, and belonging, and reveal the repressive or demanding faces of the Divine in its feminine expressions, such as Mother Death, the Crone, or the Sphinx. When transited by Saturn, it is as if these archetypes will be in a kind of birth labor in the psyche, stuck inside the cosmic uterus until their energies are liberated. As that happens, Saturn’s focusing energy will resolve as a positive tempering and maturing of the Sun’s impulse toward self-expression and enthusiasm and the Moon’s impulse toward connection and gratification.

Saturn ultimately represents the forces of *involution* in the universe: the *hylotropic* or “moving toward matter” principle. The second perinatal matrix is an important transform station where Divine Consciousness becomes tied to physical matter, jammed into a mortal, finite human body in time and space.

Figure 2: Cosmic Engulfment and “No Exit” - Saturn

Saturn represents the principles of contraction, separation, boundaries, and time in the universe. Tarnas realized that, at the perinatal level of the psyche, Saturn manifests as the Basic Perinatal Matrix II. These experiences are based around the early stage of labor where the womb unity with the mother has been interrupted, but the cervix is still

closed and the fetus is stuck within the contracting uterus.

Basic Perinatal Matrix III - The Death-Rebirth Struggle - Pluto

The third perinatal matrix (BPM III) is based around the dynamic stage of labor, where the cervix is now open and the frail head of the fetus is jammed into the narrow pelvic opening by powerful uterine contractions. Accompanying themes include a sense of titanic fight and mythological battles, sadomasochistic arousal based on suffocation, confrontation with demonic energies, scatological materials, and pyrocatarsis—all in the context of an intense death-rebirth struggle.

Tarnas recognized that this complex mixture of experiences corresponds precisely with the archetypal character of the planet *Pluto*. The classic Plutonian themes, widely documented in the astrological literature, include a confrontation with the shadow side of human nature, issues around power and aggression, the problem of evil, sadomasochism, scatological materials, a confrontation with purifying fire, and sequences of breakdown, renewal and rebirth. Astrologers have long observed the deep regeneration and transformation that can occur when Pluto's shadow energies are faced and surrendered to internally. Of course, the possibilities of fully confronting the BPM III energies and benefitting from their healing effects is dramatically increased when people enter holotropic states of consciousness.

Tarnas found that the Pluto-BPM III energies will then find specific expression and inflection through the other planetary archetypes interacting with Pluto by transit. Pluto-*Mercury* transits tend to manifest as confrontations with deep shadow energies with a Mercurial emphasis on dark or blasphemous thoughts, exploded beliefs, and the emitting of profane or inhuman sounds. Pluto-*Venus* alignments can express themselves as confrontations with BPM III energies with explicit Venusian elements of enjoyment, pleasure, and sexual arousal. When combined with Pluto, these archetypes will appear to be in a kind of death-rebirth struggle in the person's psyche, until the leftover energies and emotions from birth have been worked through.

Figure 3: BPM III - The Death-Rebirth Struggle - Pluto

Pluto represents the inexorable forces of transformation and evolution in the universe. Tarnas recognized that, in the perinatal sequence, Pluto manifests as the dynamic stage of labor or Basic Perinatal Matrix III. Individuals accessing this layer of their psyche in holotropic states experience a relatively standard mixture of themes: a sense of titanic fight, sadomasochistic feelings, confrontation with biological waste products and decay, issues around the problem of evil, and passing through purifying fire or pyrocatharsis.

Basic Perinatal Matrix IV - Rebirth and Separation from the Mother - Uranus

The fourth perinatal matrix is based around the completed delivery, birth, and beginning of separate biological existence with transpersonal sequences of spiritual rebirth, transcendence of the fear of death, and reconnection with the Divine. Tarnas recognized that these breakthrough experiences correspond precisely with the documented archetypal character of the planet Uranus, and that they will occur in some form whenever Uranus is activated in a person's psyche. These include sudden, unexpected events that revitalize old patterns of consciousness, electrified feelings of enthusiasm and vitality, the resolution of difficult situations, and awakenings into new levels of experience. On some level, people will be in touch with the experience of the infant escaping from the constricting birth canal, with the accompanying feelings of rebirth, individuation, and separation from a fear-based mode of consciousness.

People may also display Uranus' energy in more partial or overcompensated forms such as manic acting out, chronic problems with authority, unreliability in relationships, or inability to make commitments. Uranus represents our impulse toward higher freedom. Its shadow side is rebelling against the wrong things without adequately facing our own inner material.

The Uranus-BPM IV energies will then find specific expression and inflection through the other archetypes transiting to or being transited from Uranus. Combined with *Mars*, their liberating impulse can take the form of explosive releases of leftover energy and aggression from the birth process, with themes of heroic rebellion, slaying the dragon, capturing the Golden Fleece, and liberation through active effort. Combined with *Neptune*, Uranus' urge for transcendence can manifest through sudden rebirths of

imagination, divine compassion, and reconnection with the Cosmic Womb.

Figure 4: Rebirth, Separation from the Mother - Uranus

Uranus represents the forces of liberation and awakening that break consciousness out of limiting patterns and reunite it with its higher divine source. Tarnas discovered that in the perinatal sequence Uranus manifests as the Basic Perinatal Matrix IV—the sequences of ego death, birth and rebirth that occur during deep and systematic self-exploration.

The Grof-Tarnas Perinatal Sequence

Figure 5: The perinatal sequence from: I) undifferentiated ecstatic union with the mother (Neptune); to II) “no-exit” cosmic engulfment (Saturn); to III) driving volcanic death-rebirth struggle (Pluto); to IV) ego death, rebirth and separation from the mother (Uranus).

Summary

Tarnas’ discovery of the thematic correlations between Neptune, Saturn, Pluto, and Uranus and the four perinatal matrices has expanded the theory and practice of astrology. Until they are confronted and worked through, the perinatal matrices function as meta-organizing principles in the psyche: filtering, attracting, and creating many of our most basic experiences of reality. On some level, we are held hostage by our fear of birth and death. It is important in this discussion to remember that the perinatal matrices are, by definition, always complexly interwoven with transpersonal elements—they are, in a sense, already the transpersonal.

Astrologers who are familiar with these deeper territories can offer broader levels of support for the experiences of others. Being personally comfortable with the sequences of psycho-spiritual death and rebirth, they can help put their client’s extreme inner experiences in context. In other words, whatever someone is going through, trust the process: This too shall pass. Surrendering deeply to the Saturn-BPM II feelings of

depression and entrapment automatically allows the process to move to the next stage. Actively processing Pluto-BPM III's intense dynamic energies inexorably leads to experiences of rebirth and transcendence.

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