

**MA: Myth, Cosmology and the Sacred
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**Imagining the World:
Contemplating the Reality
of the Astrological Horoscope**

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Abstract:

My aim is to reflect on the 'reality' of the astrological horoscope¹ and the order of knowledge offered by it. Because the question strikes to the heart of astrological practice, the endeavour is potentially huge – I have chosen to focus on the broad division between literal and imaginative ways of viewing astrological information and to follow the views of a few notable writers in respect of the horoscope as imaginal landscape.

I will first explore a few key strands in the early development of the horoscope. From there, I will look at how Western astrology reflects the dichotomy in the Western mind between *mythos* and *logos*, symbolic and scientific modes of thinking, resulting broadly in two perspectives within its practice – the chart as an objective body of knowledge versus the chart as a device to engage the symbolic imagination of the astrologer.

I will consider a significant, but still somewhat controversial, viewpoint in contemporary astrology, which is the idea that all judicial astrology² is a form of divination. Pioneering this approach have been Geoffrey Cornelius, Maggie Hyde and Patrick Curry, who have all questioned the Ptolemaic inheritance of astrology as a form of natural science.

I will also explore an idea suggested by Nicholas Campion, that Baudrillard's 'simulacrum' might be a useful image in understanding the horoscope as an imaginary realm, created by human consciousness, which then obligingly 'works' in line with the expectations of the viewer. Although not a practising astrologer, James Hillman too questioned the objective status of the horoscope, offering an alternative image of it as a ritual container for psychological work.

¹ The astrology referred to in this essay is what is usually termed Western astrology, to distinguish it from Jyotish astrology, Chinese astrology, and the wide number of astrologically-related indigenous practices which grew up independently of the Western tradition. Wherever the term 'astrology' or 'astrologer' is used, this refers to Western practice.

² 'Judicial astrology' is distinguished from 'natural astrology', the former being the application of astrology to human affairs in which some kind of interpretation or judgement is required.

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Introduction

The roots of Western horoscopic astrology lie in the celestial divination practices of ancient Mesopotamia, with the horoscope emerging during the Hellenistic period out of the fusion of Babylonian astrology with Greek philosophy and the classical Greek conception of the celestial sphere, and incorporating elements of Egyptian magic and belief (Holden 1996, pp.12-13 and Barton p.30). The use of horoscopes has since continued in an unbroken tradition to the present day (Whitfield 2001, pp.7-8).

Variouly revered as high spiritual practice, mistrusted as heresy, and finally rejected by European Enlightenment thinkers, astrology has survived and adapted. The 17th and 18th centuries witnessed a rapid decline in its popularity in educated circles; within as little as 20 years (1660-1680), it ceased to be the dominant cosmological model. The reasons were various: the new astronomical discoveries of Copernicus, Kepler, Brahe, Galileo and others inevitably dismantled the old cosmology of Plato and Aristotle, but the Enlightenment also created an intellectual climate in which astrology's interpretive and symbolic modes of thinking no longer fitted, moving it into the intellectual margins (Campion 2000, p.69 and Cornelius 2003, p.1).

Notwithstanding this, it has survived, one might say quite remarkably³ and has been described by James Hillman as 'perennial' and 'archetypal' (Hillman, 1997) – in other words, persistent because its mode is somehow intrinsic to human thought and experience. Never wholly extinguished, it gained popularity with the rise of Theosophy at the end of the 19th century and in the 20th century through the incorporation of depth psychology and as part of a broader 'New Age' spirituality (Campion 2006, p.8 and pp.35-43).

The task of exploring the 'reality' of the horoscope, or indeed of astrology as a whole, is a massive undertaking – this dissertation represents only a scratching of the surface. As Nicholas Campion has observed 'There may, in fact, be no one such single thing as astrology but rather different astrologies', encompassing 'magical, religious or scientific' modes and applied by astrologers in different ways, from the objective task of forecasting of stock market movements

³ According to Campion, 23-37% of people in the UK read a horoscope column every week and over 90% know their birth sign, 'far more than know the name of the Chancellor of the Exchequer' (Campion 2006, p.9). This is no proof of astrology's reach as a serious endeavour of course, but some indication of its ongoing presence in the popular psyche.

to the more subjective field of personal development (Campion 2004, p.21). He quotes the astrologer Dennis Elwell: 'Astrology means different things to different people, and is big enough to accommodate many complementary, and even contradictory, opinions' (Elwell 1986, p.143 quoted in Campion 2004, p.21). Adopting Patrick Curry's all-embracing definition of astrology as 'the practice of relating the heavenly bodies to lives and events on earth, and the tradition that has thus been generated' (Curry 1999: 55 quoted in Campion 2004, p.21), he notes the distinction (rooted in Cicero's division of divination into 'natural' and 'artificial' (Campion 2008, pp.196-197)) between natural and divinatory astrology, the former based on observation of natural phenomena and the latter on the judgement of the astrologer, later termed 'judicial' astrology; these distinctions are central to a discussion of both ontology and epistemology in respect of astrological information (Campion 2012, p.16).

The horoscope is central to astrology, yet presents as intrinsically problematic. Designed to represent the sky, and its relationship to the earth, at a particular time and place, many of its components do not exist objectively; they are symbolic or imaginative representations. Other aspects of its functioning only have credence in the context of ancient notions of sympathetic correspondence within an interconnected animate cosmos. This raises the question of the horoscope as a pure product of the imagination with no basis in objective reality, even though this runs counter to the way many astrologers work in practice (Campion 2009, p.286).

Having said that, most contemporary astrologers, rationally inclined or otherwise, proceed from the basis that there is no causal link between earth and sky, but on the basis of sympathetic resonance between things deemed to be of a similar nature, within an interconnected cosmos – the so-called 'doctrine of correspondences' and 'doctrine of signatures', operating within the Stoic notion of *sympatheia* (Barton 1994, pp.103-104); this immediately creates a conundrum for scientific research, given the potential multiplicity of meanings inherent in any astrological symbol, which multiplies exponentially when it comes to interpreting the whole horoscope.

Astrology does not easily fit into recognised categories of knowledge. It has roots in celestial divinatory practice, but most contemporary practice revolves around a reading of the natal horoscope as if it offers objective knowledge of character and personal psychology. Some even regard it as a type of science which might respond positively to statistical testing – others assert that, because astrological symbolism is polymorphic, the horoscope does not lend itself to

testing but still offers an objective picture, albeit of a subjective reality (Willis & Curry 2004, p.10). There are still others who believe that the casting of a horoscope is an act of divination or a ritual act, the horoscope a complex artifice by which hitherto concealed psychological content might be brought to light. Within these broad outlines exists a variety of nuanced theoretical positions.

In the matter of scientific testing, the results have raised more questions than answers and created controversy on all sides. One might expect 'natural astrology' to lend itself to testing and offer replicable results, even if 'judicial astrology' is altogether more elusive. Findings such as Gauquelin's so-called 'Mars effect' offer only a very limited form of proof for astrology, as will be touched on in chapter 2. In short, there does not seem to have been a test devised so far which incontrovertibly proves astrology as most astrologers seem to present it.

This is perhaps not surprising, given the vast array of techniques, approaches and philosophical positions adopted by astrologers themselves (quite apart from the multiplicity of its symbols). As Garry Phillipson observes, 'individual astrologers may have quite different views of what astrology is and how it works – hence the diversity of views about what is and is not possible to do with it' (Phillipson 2000, p.115)⁴. In keeping with its traditional connection to Mercury as 'tutelary deity'⁵, astrology presents as multiple and diverse, which for many is no doubt part of its appeal but does not assist in the attempt to define its nature or working. We might also say that astrologers themselves have been reluctant to incorporate the limited positive results of the testing which has so far been conducted (at least, in respect of the Gauquelin research) – the idea of astrology as an ancient wisdom tradition and the internal coherence of the horoscope as an integrated model seem far more attractive in comparison.

As a practising astrologer, this is admittedly a highly personal quest, to confront the idea of the chart as 'not real' and whether this means that astrology itself has no value; I am myself caught between these two epistemological poles: astrology as 'objective', existing independent of the observer (which is essentially how most astrology is taught and practised), versus astrology as 'subjective' and the horoscope as an imaginative landscape of symbols, albeit set (rather confusingly perhaps) within a framework of precision data. The dilemma is not just my own; the

⁴ See also Champion 2006, p.7.

⁵ Mercury's Greek equivalent, Hermes, is described in line 16 of the Homeric Hymn to Hermes as '*polytropos*' – turning many ways.

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counterpoint between *mythos* and *logos* seems to have been present throughout the history of Western astrology, one manifestation perhaps of the split which Nietzsche envisaged between Dionysian and Apollonian strands in the Western mind (Nietzsche 2008)⁶.

Since the material is personal to me, I have found Jeffrey Kripal's notion of reflexive re-reading helpful to bear in mind (Kripal 2014, ch.12). As an astrologer, I am used to inhabiting a world where the question of the subject's validity hardly ever arises – within the self-reinforcing safety of the astrological community, sceptics of any kind tend to be dismissed or avoided, and the notion of the chart as 'not really real' tends to be regarded as a kind of heresy. A 'faith' re-reading of the material would acknowledge my view that astrology 'works' without my having to explain why; and indeed a 'faith' position is one which many astrologers effectively adopt. But it is a position which has tended to cut us off from sensible dialogue with anyone who holds a sceptical position. On the other hand, a 'rational' re-reading would fail to bear witness to the genuine feelings of spiritual alignment which can arise from living one's life in rhythm with celestial phenomena, and the joy experienced when the symbols of the chart are perceived as coming alive in the world, despite the fact that astrology tends to slip the noose in the presence of a statistical test. A reflexive re-reading acknowledges my position as an 'insider', but will also require me to reflect on some of the philosophical foundations of my own practice. For this reason, I have included an Appendix consisting of a short write-up of astrology in action which I hope will illustrate a few of the ideas presented.

Throughout the text, the terms 'horoscope' and 'chart' will be used interchangeably. The terms 'birth chart', 'natal chart', 'birth horoscope' or 'natal horoscope' refer specifically to charts for the moment of nativity.

⁶ I realise of course that there might be a number of alternatives between the opposing poles of scientific realism and imaginal construction – for instance that astrology may actually work as most astrologers suggest it does, because there really is such a thing as astrological correspondence within an integrated holographic universe and that this phenomenon exists independently of human consciousness. A fuller discussion of this, which brings the argument up to date with findings from contemporary science and consciousness studies, falls outside the scope of this essay, but would be a logical line to follow. A few core ideas have been explored by Garry Phillipson (Phillipson 2006).

Chapter 1: Conversing with Heaven: Philosophy, Science and Myth

The book of heaven – reading divine will

Western astrology began as a 'science of the cosmos', employing mathematics and observational astronomy in the quest to understand divine will (Campion 2008, p.52). Intrinsic to its development is a supposition that earth and sky are linked, and that both are held within an overarching cosmic order, at once both mysterious and measurable (Campion 2008, p.59). Emerging in Mesopotamia, astrology partook of both science and religion, reading the movements of the stars and planets as the communications of the celestial deities (Campion 2000, p.11). Historians emphasise the role of political and geographical insecurity in that part of the ancient world as a driver in the development of a system by which to read divine intention and gain a measure of control over the environment (Campion 2000, p.10); the Babylonians developed different forms of divination, of which astrology proved the most technically complex and enduring.

A quote from the omens contained in the Venus Tablet of Ammisaduqa from the mid-second millennium BCE points towards this:

In month XI, 15th day, Venus in the west disappeared. 3 days it stayed away, and in month XI, 18th day, Venus in the east became visible: springs will open, Adad his rain, Ea his floods will bring, king to king messages of reconciliation will send.

(Campion 2008, p.59)

This interplay between order and disorder is reflected in the Babylonian perspective on the celestial tableau as an interweaving of regular and predictable planetary cycles with unpredictable events such as auras around the Moon, a shooting star or the vagaries of cloud patterns (Campion 2008, p.59). Even in the Venus Tablet we see evidence of the gods (here Inanna, Queen of Heaven) being subject to an overarching cosmic order and the emergence of 'divination as an organized attempt to harmonize with the rhythms and cycles of a natural world in which deities should be understood [as] living natural forces' (Campion 2008, p.59).

Out of this arises the notion of divinatory dialogue – to read the writing of the gods in the 'book of heaven' (*shitir burume*) means to move in harmony with both divine will and natural order (Uzdaviny 2007, p.25). Destiny becomes knowable and negotiable, through reading the signs and taking appropriate action (Campion 2000, p.12).

The horoscope itself emerged towards the end of the first millennium BCE – the Greeks added the *horoscopus*, the 'watcher of the hour' (i.e. the zodiacal degree rising on the eastern horizon at the moment of birth) and the first known horoscope which incorporates an 'Ascendant' dates to 4 BCE (Campion 2000, p.22). The fusion of Mesopotamian omen-centred astrology and classical Greek philosophy in the period after the Alexandrian conquests, with elements from Egyptian magic and stellar religion, allowed the next great developments (such as the 'angles', 'houses'⁷ and forecasting techniques) to take place (Campion 2000, pp.9-10).

It is worth looking briefly at the major strands of Greek philosophy which informed this development, since it is the cosmology of Plato and Aristotle on which the image of the horoscope rests. There were four attempts in classical Greek philosophy to offer a model of the cosmos: these were provided by Plato, Aristotle, Zeno and the Atomists, the first three sharing the idea that the cosmos is alive and purposeful. These three came to dominate classical cosmology and thus had a profound impact on astrological theory (Campion 2012, p.149 and 2006, p.20).

A likely story

Plato's cosmology is laid out in the *Timaeus*, his cosmogonic account of the world. On this rests the classical Greek model of the cosmos as a living integrated whole, with everything connected via the *anima mundi* as 'organising principle' (Campion 2012, p.152). For Plato, the cosmos itself has a soul, indeed is made of soul, the ecliptic and the celestial equator being twisted out of 'soul stuff', and it is conscious, intelligent and permeated by divinity (Whitfield 2001, p.34):

This, then, in keeping with our likely account, is how we must say divine providence brought our world into being as a truly living being, endowed with soul and intelligence.
(*Timaeus*, 30b)

At the centre of the cosmos, absolutely still, was the Earth, with the planets moving in perfect circles and at perfect speeds in the heavens, since the sphere 'embraces within itself all the shapes there are' (*Timaeus* 33b).

Such was the strength of the symbolic meaning encoded in Plato's model, that the (literal) truth of the heliocentric solar system, discovered by Aristarchus in the 3rd century BCE, was not

⁷ The four angles are points where the observer's horizon and meridian intersect the ecliptic, as seen from the observer's viewpoint; the houses are subdivisions of a chart into twelve equal or unequal portions.

embraced until the time of Copernicus – as Campion points out, Arab astronomers in the 9th-12th centuries had all the evidence necessary to formulate a sun-centred model of planetary motion, but chose to remain with a geocentric model because of its symbolic meaning (Campion 1989, p.20). Generations of astronomer-astrologers made this philosophical model their starting point, in which irregular phenomena such as retrograde motion were simply made to fit. In the *Timaeus*, then, we find a founding image for the horoscope: a perfectly circular cosmos, interconnected within itself according to 'divinely determined, perfect mathematical and geometrical ratios' (Campion 2008, pp.153-3).

Plato was not concerned with whether the planets really did pursue perfect paths – indeed, the implication is that exact observation of planetary movement is likely to lead to error, because the manifest world is subject to continual change and cannot yield the truth (Campion 2012, p.153 & 2008, p.151-152). The image portrayed in the *Timaeus* is offered as a 'likely account' (*eikôs logos*) or 'likely story' (*eikôs muthos*). The universe that can be perceived by the senses is only an image, a 'becoming'-style approximation of true 'beingness', the truth of which cannot be described:

So we should accept the likely tale on these matters. It behoves us not to look for anything beyond this.

(*Timaeus* 29d)

Plato's cosmology served an overt religious function, to reconcile humanity with its divine origins (Campion 2012, p151). For a Platonic thinker, if no account of the world can be any more than a likely story, there can be no exact or consistent science of it; the truth can only be known through noetic modes of knowing beyond sense perception, through divine inspiration (Voss 2013, p.5 & pp.8-10) an idea which it might be worth keeping hold of in our thoughts about the 'reality' of the birth chart. Angela Voss describes this mode of knowing as 'a direct, unmediated intuition of supranormal apprehension which can often only be conveyed through a symbolic image or sacred text' (Voss 2013, p.10). For astrology, it infers that a birth chart can reveal the 'individual's spiritual state' (Campion 2000, p.29), but this knowledge is to be arrived at via abstract principles rather than physical reality (Campion 2012, p.153).

Aristotle and Ptolemy – towards a scientific model

Aristotle accepted the physical layout of Plato's model but rejected much of the allegorical content; in Aristotle's universe, the planets are 'secondary causes' or channels of divine will (rather than living expressions of it, as with Plato), and it moves from being the soul-infused organism that Plato conceived of to a mechanism with a transcendent creator (Campion 2008, pp.167-8). Aristotle was interested in physical observation, not philosophical contemplation, as the basis of knowledge (Voss 2013, p.2 and Tarnas 1991, pp.55-56).

Aristotle formulated an idea of causation, of a kind which was later rejected by post-Enlightenment science but has become woven into astrological theory. His notion of the 'four causes' suggests that the essence, nature, function and destiny or unfolding of a thing are all connected. In particular, the linking of formal and final causes (the Ideal Form or 'beingness' of a thing with its final shape or outcome), as applied to the individual, presages the astrologer Alan Leo's assertion that 'character is destiny' and the idea that the chart itself is a map which reveals both (Campion 2012, p.156 and 2008, p.170).

The Aristotelian model found its way into astrology specifically through the work of Claudius Ptolemy, who drew together the astrology of the ancient world in one master work, the *Tetrabiblos*. With Ptolemy, astrology became a natural science, inspired by Aristotelian principles of a cosmos operating logically and mechanically; as Tamsyn Barton describes, he de-personified the planets, looking always for clockwork motion and rational explanation (Barton 1994, p.104 & p.108 and Whitfield pp.55-61 & p.77). Even a brief foray into the *Tetrabiblos* reveals a complexity of techniques and ideas woven into an integrated system; astrology is presented as a science working along rational lines – although as Barton explains, one can hear the logic creaking as he attempts to make the unrulier aspects of the universe, such as retrograde motion, fit neatly into the formulation (Barton 1994, p.109). The temporal link between celestial events and earthly correspondence is directly made in the *Tetrabiblos*:

For the cause both of universal and of particular events is the motion of the planets, sun, and moon; and the prognostic art is the scientific observation of precisely the change in the subject natures which corresponds to parallel movements of the heavenly bodies through the surrounding heavens...

(Ptolemy 1980, p.221)

Myth and science

What seem to emerge from the ancient world then are different threads within astrological belief and practice, reflecting a broader core narrative within the Western mind: the tension between logic and imagination, sense-perception versus intuitive revelation, with history envisaged as a journey towards the triumph of the former over the latter (Campion 2012, p.148). Platonic cosmology was adopted by early Christianity but it is Ptolemy's scientific astrology which has persisted over the centuries as the main astrological model (Cornelius 2003, p.84). The Medieval revival of Aristotle's work, that made his the dominant philosophy in Christian Europe during the Scholastic period (ca. 1150-1450), in itself encouraged the splitting of astrology into two strands, to deal with the question of whether the soul is ruled by the stars. Thomas Aquinas reconciled astrology within a Christian context by separating natural astrology from judicial: natural astrology reflected the idea of a hidden underlying order in the natural world via correspondences and came to underpin both science and medicine; by contrast, judicial astrology involved the destiny of the individual and the influence of the stars on the human soul, and in Christian terms constituted forbidden knowledge gained via consort with daemonic forces (Campion 2009, pp.50-52).

The Renaissance revival of Neoplatonic and Hermetic philosophy once more offered the possibility of astrology as a means of reconnecting the soul to the divine, as exemplified in the astrological magic of Marsilio Ficino. Opposed to the deterministic and literal-minded astrology of his day, Ficino instead saw astrology as speaking only in metaphorical and symbolic terms, 'a magical and poetic interpretation running counter to the orthodox tradition' which produced a 'neo-Platonic astrology' (Cornelius 2003, p.xxii, p.2 & p.7). In his hands, the chart became a contemplative and spiritual device, offering the seeker a vision of the divine in a model where soul and stars are linked, not to determine one's fate but to harmonise one's life with the heavens through natural or sympathetic magic:

We see the spirit of Babylon re-emerging in Ficino's astrology....That's why Ficino's Book of Life is not a textbook full of descriptions of what planetary aspects or planets in houses mean, but a manifesto that talks about what we can do in particular celestial circumstances.

(Campion 2000, p.58).

This divergence between a 'scientific' version of astrology (the chart as a map of character yielding specific information which might, in certain circumstances, be used as the basis of

prediction) and seeing the chart as a form of divinatory dialogue or alignment with divine will, continues into contemporary times. But it is tricky territory – what might at first appear mythic and contemplative is not necessarily so; and what might at first appear scientific can in essence be working along mystical lines.

To illustrate the first scenario, the psychologisation of astrology in the 20th century introduced Jungian concepts and the extensive use of myth in unfolding the chart as inner psychological narrative. The chart thus becomes an inner map of the psyche, a contemporary (Jungian) reframing of the ancient notion of soul. Ptolemy, however, can still be seen as the underpinning of psychological astrology because it, too, is held by the temporal literalism of the birth moment, as if the psyche might be objectively read in the pattern of that moment (Cornelius 2003, p.82). Campion makes the point that most astrologers, including many of those inspired by Jung, proceed on the basis of a 'Newtonian' narrative, as if the chart possesses an objective status independent of the human imagination (Campion 2000, p.38 and 2009, p.286). Even psychological astrology then is essentially Ptolemaic. A quote from Howard Sasportas, a leading exponent of psychological astrology, might illustrate this (with a prosaic twist):

This is where the birthchart is uniquely useful, for it reveals the nature of our seed: it is our map or guide suggesting what the deeper, core Self has in mind for us. The birthchart tells us something about the kind of seed we are...lentil or avocado or a brussel sprout.

(Sasportas 1989, p.5)

To illustrate the second scenario, as Geoffrey Cornelius suggests, the branch of astrology known as 'cosmobiology' captivates with its highly scientific terminology (Cornelius 2003, p.47) – Ebertin suggests it as 'that branch of astrology working on scientific foundations and keyed to the natural sciences' (Ebertin 1972, p.11). Alfred Witte's Hamburg School of 'Uranian astrology' espoused a similar vision of astrology as science. But it is clear that these schools are working with number as their main reference point, using a 'cosmogram' chart based on numerical resonance and incorporating hypothetical planets beyond Pluto which do not correlate with any known celestial bodies. Both schools emphasise critical analysis and testing but are not rooted in any contemporary notion of science (Cornelius 2003, p.47).

Chapter 2: Divination and the Working of Symbol

Judicial astrology as divine dialogue

We have seen that, from the beginning, there have been two broad strands within astrology, reflecting objective/scientific and subjective/participatory modes. The former is exemplified by Ptolemy's systematisation of astrology into an 'abstract theoretical structure' (Willis & Curry 2004, p.60), in Kepler's famous image of the 'baby' (the core of testable, scientific knowledge that might be provided by astrology) needing to be separated from the 'bathwater' (the rest of astrology's assumptions, unsupported by scientific proof), and in Francis Bacon's empirical reformulation of the discipline into an *astrologia sana*, a 'sane astrology...purged of its superstition' (Campion 2009, p.163). In a move which chimes with Kepler, Bacon believed in the physical influences of the planets but dismissed the rest of astrology as a product of the imagination (Bacon 1605, IV.11). We find our way eventually to the statistical testing of astrology in the 20th century and the scientific project to separate 'truth' from 'fabrication'.

The latter revolves around the notion of dialogue, an interplay between observer and observed – 'the grand conversation of earth and heaven' as the 'true business of astrology' (Willis & Curry 2004, p.3). It privileges the working of symbol over the image of the chart as a repository of objective knowledge. A particular understanding of this is offered in the view that all judicial astrology is divinatory, 'a dialogue with the divine in a postmodern, post-Christian, and newly reanimated universe' ((Willis & Curry 2004, p.1) not a 'misunderstood branch of objectivist science' (Willis & Curry 2004, p.23). As such it questions the conceptual foundation of most contemporary astrological practice. Leading this movement has been Geoffrey Cornelius, in his groundbreaking work *The Moment of Astrology* (2003).

Cornelius counters the idea of the natal chart as a map which offers literal and objective information: 'It is divination despite all appearances of objectivity and natural law' (Cornelius 2003, p.xxii). As such, the preoccupation from Ptolemy onwards with the moment of birth and the notion of the nativity (natal horoscope) as a map of character, is wholly brought into question. Cornelius reasserts the division of astrology into two categories, 'natural' and 'judicial' (or in this case, divinatory); he does not dispute that the former may be found to work along scientific lines and be amenable to scientific enquiry, but the latter is a form of divinatory

endeavour and it does not respond to testing because it does not offer objective information (Cornelius 2003, p.78). On this view, the chart becomes a device used to focus the imagination; its symbols are taken up as meaningful by the astrologer, as an imaginative metaphor for the current situation. In other words, astrology is an invitation to view a situation from a symbolic viewpoint and the casting of a chart a ritual to open awareness – a statement of intention on the part of both client and astrologer requiring a divinatory 'presentiment', a belief that such a process will yield the truth of things (Cornelius 2014, p.1). As such, the meaning is dependent on the current context and the intention of the astrologer interpreting it (Cornelius 2003, p.xxiii). Any chart (including a nativity) becomes 'a ritual in which the unknown...is invited to speak to the inquiry at hand' (Willis & Curry 2004, p.62).

As Cornelius says, '...the ground for the coming-to-pass of astrological effects or showings is *not founded in a coincidence in objective time* of heavens above and event below'; instead 'we should look in the direction of *significant presentation of the symbol to consciousness*.' (Cornelius 2003, p.38). It is thus anything but an empirical view of astrology, with the astrologer as neutral observer; it is an 'act of imaginative assignation by which we make time itself significant.' (Cornelius 2003, p.241).

One of the arguments used to support this way of perceiving astrology is the experience which some astrologers have attested to: when the wrong birth chart turns out to work perfectly well – indeed, may work better than the real birth chart (Cornelius 2003, p.230 and Phillipson 2000, pp.118-9). An example cited by Cornelius, concerning the prediction of the death of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, is interesting to follow. Pico had conducted a well-reasoned attack on the deterministic and mechanical form of astrology practised by the astrologers of his day (the *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricium*) which attracted a great deal of controversy. The astrologer Luca Gaurica later wrote of the prediction made by three astrologers that Pico would die in his 33rd year as the ascendant (the rising degree) directed onto Mars⁸ – the prediction, according to Gaurica, was the impetus for Pico's attack. It came to pass as the astrologers predicted – Pico died (probably of arsenic poisoning) a few months before his 33rd birthday (Cornelius 2003, p.15).

⁸ 'Directions' are a forecasting technique which, in this example, move the planets and angles forward through the zodiac by one degree for each year of life.

What seems interesting here is that in the chart (the one offered by Gaurica at least) the position of Mars turns out to be somewhat incorrect (Cornelius 2003, p.20). We might use this as a cue to apply the 'divinatory' idea to the death-prediction story. Astrological Mars, as an image of attack and defence, is a perfect symbol for the whole affair. The planet's actual astronomical position is, according to the divinatory thesis, not in itself relevant; its symbolism has been conjured and seems to have revealed itself in the relationship between the astrologers and Pico, unconsciously bound to each other through a disagreement that was of profound importance to both parties, and not least to astrology itself – there is passion in Pico's *Disputation* and anger displayed by the astrologers vindictively predicting his death. If one also takes astrological Mars as an image of *will*, it is perhaps not inappropriate that the form of astrology proposed by Pico is one which fully acknowledges the independent free will of the individual. Mars in the chart is not the cause – passion and anger (*disputation*) are the driving force, turning the astrologer's eye towards the symbol in the chart which most closely reflects the action.

Here, then, is Mars unconsciously invited into the picture of the 'wrong' chart and in the process revealing the essence of the human feelings working their way to the surface. From this perspective, the horoscope functions as a kind of mnemonic device (however unedifying in this case): a reminder to the soul to speak of a certain thing. The divinatory form proposed by Geoffrey Cornelius offers an a-temporal model, deconstructing the usual astrological idea of adherence to precise birth times, as discussed in the example of the 'anti-astrology signature' (Cornelius 2003, pp.22-41). In this spirit, the astrologers amongst us might be permitted to go so far as to say that the whole historical *rift* between deterministic and soulful forms of astrology, and the attempt by Ficino and Pico to *reinvigorate* the art, are also encompassed here by the symbol of Mars. The chart has performed a sleight of hand, as have the unwitting astrologers, revealing the human drama which is the real 'truth' of the situation.

A key move in the book is thus to confront astrologers with the idea that our presence is fundamental to the process: client and astrologer exist in a tightly-bound relationship in the moment, making an appeal to a 'higher authority' (or inner truth), whether they are conscious of this or not. Ptolemy's astrology as a 'science of causes' becomes a divinely-inspired 'art of signs', to echo Ficino's own terminology (Cornelius 2003, p.320 and p.8), resting on direct knowing, via inspiration, of the particular outworking of symbols in the specific case in question.

According to this viewpoint, in order to read a chart one must think symbolically, not just as a facility in translating symbols but in being ready to attribute meaning to what arises in the world as 'metalogue'⁹. The horoscope becomes an invitation to open awareness in a way which allows the deepest part of ourselves to speak to the matter at hand; it is not a description of the client's psychological profile. Crucially too, the astrologer becomes alert to the idea that the symbols of the chart in question may speak not only of the client's situation but also their own.

Seeing all judicial astrology as a form of divination does not of course necessarily release the astrologer from objectifying the circumstances suggested by the chart. Many horary astrologers work according to a very precise delineation of chart factors and their movement over time, and it is perfectly possible to adopt a 'Ptolemaic' rather than magical/symbolic approach to astrology-as-divination, as if the chart were a clockwork mechanism punching out destinies (Cornelius 2003, p.xvii). The first lines of John Frawley's *The Horary Textbook* might suggest something of this approach:

Horary is the art of drawing specific answers to specific questions from an astrological chart set of the time the question is asked. It is quick, simple and effective, providing concrete, verifiable answers.

(Frawley 2014, p.1).

There is a wide dividing line between approaching astrology as a ritual to open symbolic awareness and seeing a chart as a divination but reading it according to rules which act in themselves as a kind of '*scientia*' and couch the astrologer in the role of objective advisor. It does not particularly help us in our exploration of the 'reality' of the horoscope to question the Ptolemaic idea of the birth time as 'key moment' only to fall into seeing a horary or decumbiture or consultation chart¹⁰ as itself offering objective testable data. What is being suggested here by Cornelius is much more alarming for the average astrologer – he calls us to sacrifice the relative safety of an objective reading via metaphorical interpretation in order to enter the far trickier territory of the psyche.

⁹ A metalogue is a situation where that which is being spoken of seems to find its simultaneous parallel in lived events. The notion of the meta-narrative takes this one stage further and allows for the understanding of a situation through a narrative sequence of events which is understood as reflecting in miniature the dilemma of the seeker (and the picture of the horoscope at hand). An example of a meta-narrative is offered in the Appendix).

¹⁰ A decumbiture chart is one which is drawn up for the onset of an illness – the moment the client 'takes to their bed', i.e. acknowledges the illness and calls on the astrologer for assistance. A consultation chart is one which is drawn for the starting moment of a consultation – a concept which itself raises issues of 'right' versus 'wrong' charts on occasions when the client is late.

Separating the baby from the bathwater

Whilst we can be certain that it will indeed require a 'New Science' to accommodate astrology, we cannot evade the need for demonstrable, quantifiable evidence for astrological effects.

(Harvey 1987, p.74)

Much has been written about the subjection of astrology to scientific testing and opinion seems sharply divided on the outcome of such projects and of their appropriateness to astrology in the first place. Overall, the results have been mixed (Campion 2009, p.271 and Phillipson 2006, p.4) but are usually disappointing for astrology, sometimes spectacularly so, which does not bode well for the line of thinking that the horoscope is a repository of verifiable information.

It has not helped that scientific opinion of astrology is generally negative – indeed savage in many cases. Intellectual criticism re-emerged with Freud who 'restarted the war on astrology', believing it to be inherently dangerous and capable of destabilising society (Campion 2009, p.265), and exhorting Jung to assist him in creating 'an unshakeable bulwark...against the black tide of mud....of occultism' (Jung 1967, p.173). In the wake of Freud, astrology has often been cast by academic psychologists as a 'substitute religion' for those who have trouble coping with the real world (Campion 2009, p.266). This is echoed in Theodor Adorno's scathing attack on astrology as an 'ideology of dependence', in the physicist Robert Park's assertion that 'it arises from a breakdown in brain chemistry' and in the 1975 statement, co-ordinated by American astronomer Bart Bok and signed by 186 scientists, which denounced astrology as 'magic and superstition', appealing to the uneducated (Campion 2009, p.268 and Cornelius 2003, p.23).

Astrology clearly heats the atmosphere and leads otherwise intelligent scientists to offer statements which are polemical and subjective, rather than evidence-based. When the anti-astrology statement was released in 1975, for instance, the BBC asked some of the 186 scientists for an interview but all declined, saying they 'had never studied astrology and had no idea of its details' (Feyerabend 1990, p.23).

Testing falls into two categories – firstly, enquiry into an individual astrological component or pattern, to test for statistical relevance, and secondly, testing the reading of charts by astrologers to see if they can be blind-matched to specific biographical material. An example of the former is the tests carried out by Michel Gauquelin (of which more in a moment); an example of the

latter is the Vernon Clarke tests, which initially gave positive results, later to be replaced by negative ones (Campion 2009, p.271).

Few tests carried out so far have verified astrology unequivocally. This does not, of course, mean that astrology has been falsified. From an astrologer's point of view, it is easy to sift through the litany of experiments and find fault with many of them – as indeed Cornelius suggests in his appraisal of several key pieces of research (Cornelius 2003, pp.42-79). For instance, the NCGR's¹¹ New York Suicide Study (Cornelius 2003, pp.50-52) examined charts of suicide victims to identify the presence of a common factor. It seems almost superfluous to suggest that the first task in such a study would be to become thoroughly acquainted with the literature on suicide, to ascertain, for instance, if there are any common *non-astrological* features. It is perfectly possible that suicide means different things to different people and that the circumstances surrounding it are thus entirely personal to each case – if so, it would arguably be fruitless to look for common astrological significators. Unsurprisingly perhaps, the research found no common signifier (Dean and Mather 1977, pp.558-560). Harding reminds us that Cicero, in one of his attacks on the 'Chaldean' art, asked if 'all those who died at Thermopylae were born under the same star' (Harding 2014, p.6) – presumably not, although a study of an individual chart, to try and understand the meaning of that individual's experience, might still be considered a worthy exercise.

As such, one wonders why suicide was chosen as a subject for testing and why the astrologers expected to find a signature for it. The study does not invalidate astrology, it merely suggests that there is no consistent astrological symbol for suicide. Suitbert Ertel encountered a similar problem when he tested a group of astrologers to see if they could determine the difference between charts of politicians and charts of painters – as if we might expect there to be an identifiable astrological signature for all politicians and all painters (Harding 2014, p.8). As Pat Harris observes, 'rubbish in, rubbish out' – and indeed, concerning testers in general: 'Scientists and academics have tended to focus upon an observation of astrology and, without properly researching the literature to find evidence or support for such an observation, set about testing it (Harris 2014, pp.12-13).

¹¹ The National Council for Geocosmic Research.

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Considering its polymorphous symbolism and complexity, it is possible that astrology is not amenable to testing, a line which indeed many astrologers take (Campion 2006, p.12). Within its particular symbolic field, one astrological symbol or chart component can mean a vast array of things, from the physical to the abstract (Mars, for instance, signifies guns and knives, but also sport, war, anger, disputations, strength, will and anything else which might be considered archetypally consistent with the core image of a warrior deity); it would be hard to pin anything in the chart down to just one meaning, even when detailed biographical information is available. Tests on time twins, for instance, are fraught with difficulty, unless one is content to search only for broad psychological themes running through both lives and not for literal specifics. It seems obvious to state that working with symbols only yields symbolic information.

The question also arises as to how one can one test a subject in which the astrologer themselves might also be considered a major variable; astrology is phenomenally diverse, encompassing a huge variety of techniques and approaches, and the astrological community is anything but a coherent body working to a set of universally-agreed principles and standards. Edward James makes a pertinent observation in response to Karl Popper's assertion that astrology 'is to be rejected because it fails to seek out falsifications'. James counters: 'if Popper means that astrology fails to put itself *as a whole* to the test then, he errs conceptually. For astrology claims to be a discipline or area of study, not a specific theory or law, and hence is no more to be falsified than physics or astronomy' (James 1990, p.24).

From this perspective, and bearing in mind the incident of Pico's Mars, one could say that each instance of 'scientific' testing of astrology might reflect, at least in part, the expectations and shortcomings of those who devise (and take part in) the tests, no matter how objective they have tried to be. The fact that astrology is so poorly regarded by non-astrologers, and that many astrologers seem keen for their subject to gain validity in the eyes of the world, makes any kind of experimentation a loaded enterprise for all involved. Pat Harris is one of the few astrologers engaged in serious ongoing astrological testing and research at PhD level. Her findings have proved favourable to astrology in the course of extensive investigation into female fertility and conception (Campion 2009, p.271 and Harris 2010), a field which arguably incorporates both natural and judicial elements – there are other research studies too, which seem to have proved

positive for astrology¹². Such studies suggest that the objective validity of the horoscope deserves further investigation and that there needs to be deeper consideration in the construction of research projects.

Seeing what you want to see: Gauquelin and Jung

Every question is a seeking. Every seeking takes its direction beforehand from what is sought.

(Heidegger 1996, p.5)

Many astrologers seem unmoved by attempts to test astrology. Perhaps this is unsurprising, given that much of the positive research only validates isolated factors. Such apparently insubstantial results seem unsatisfying, when compared to the complexity and sophistication of the horoscope. Perhaps worse than a negative result is a positive result which only partially proves astrology and leaves the rest in limbo.

This is the case with the research of Michel and Françoise Gauquelin, where the results offer a positive outcome only for a limited number of astrological features. It is much cited by astrologers as 'proof' of astrology, but the results clearly fail to endorse the whole horoscope. Gauquelin was sympathetic to Kepler's view that astrology should be reformed in accordance with scientific findings and that much of traditional astrological practice could have no possible meaning (Donahue 2006, p.580). Unlike Kepler, Gauquelin had no interest in astrology's philosophical basis but he similarly argued for a reformed 'neo-astrology' based only on verifiable evidence of planetary influences (Campion 2009, p.272). As he stated in *The Cosmic Clocks*: 'The superficial logic of all these systems was unfortunately nothing but superstition under a thin coat of mathematics' (Gauquelin 1973, p.55).

One early test was the 'test of opposed destinies' where he asked a group of astrologers to look at 40 birth charts, 20 of whom belonged to criminals, and separate out these latter from the 20 responsible citizens. The results accorded merely with chance (Gauquelin 1973, p.85). A number of tests followed which equally attempted to test the competence of astrologers (or clients) in identifying the correct chart; all ended in failure for astrology.

¹² A selection is given at <http://www.astrologer.com/tests/studies.htm> and <http://www.astrologer.com/tests/basisofastrology.htm#press>, the website of astrologer Robert Currey, as part of an overview of why he feels astrology should be taken seriously.

Reformulating his research objectives entirely, he set out to examine whether there was anything which a particular group of people might have in common (Campion 2009, p.272). Using the charts of 7,000 French people, he found that certain planets occupied a position just after rising and just after culminating¹³ at a frequency higher than chance, but only for those who were eminent in their profession. It later became known as the Mars Effect, verified by other researchers in subsequent retesting.¹⁴ The second phase of study established a correlation between parents and children in respect of a particular planet either rising or setting (the effect disappeared with surgical intervention). The third phase attempted to correlate lists of character traits with particular planetary positions (Campion 2009, p.273).

The results certainly accord with the nature of the planet in astrological symbolism (Mars for sportsmen, Jupiter for actors and politicians, and so on), but only the Moon, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn displayed significance – there was no correlation with the Sun, Mercury, Uranus, Neptune or Pluto – and then only in four specific sectors of the diurnal circle. The effect did not extend beyond eminence and tests showed no validity for the zodiac signs:

The signs in the sky which presided over our births have no power whatever to decide our fates...Confronted with science, modern and traditional astrology are seen to be imaginary doctrines'

(Gauquelin 1970, p.138)

Needless to say, even the Mars Effect has been severely critiqued by one group of researchers (Dean et al)¹⁵ as a possible 'artifact', a result of manipulation of birth data by parents (a nonsensical position, considering the data was recorded by French authorities several decades before the tests took place (Campion 2009, p.274-5 and Phillipson 2000, p.144)). Worse still, the results have never been taken up by astrologers on a practical level – Gauquelin's desire for a reformulated scientific astrology has not materialised. Much like the research by Nick Kollerstrom and Mike O'Neill, which revealed the importance of quintile and septile aspects at so-called 'eureka' moments,¹⁶ the implications have largely been ignored (Harding 2014, p.8).

¹³ i.e. crossing the observer's upper meridian. Less marked effects were observed for planets just after setting and just after anti-culmination or crossing of the lower meridian.

¹⁴ See, for instance, Ertel and Irving (1996) *The Tenacious Mars Effect*, London: Urania Trust.

¹⁵ Geoffrey Dean, Arthur Mather, Suitbert Ertel, Ivan Kelly and Rudolph Smit.

¹⁶ Kollerstrom, N. and O'Neill, M. (1996) *The Eureka Effect: Astrology of Scientific Discovery* London: Urania Trust.

On the other hand, we have the 'marriage experiments' which Jung writes of in *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle*, and which have been examined in relation to astrology by Maggie Hyde, showing a thought-provoking outcome (Hyde 1992, pp.130-134 and Jung 1997, p.19 and pp.30-32). Having rejected 'magical causality' as an explanation for supposedly chance groupings of events, synchronicity became an attempt to establish an acausal principle alongside those of time, space and causality (Jung 1997, p.20). Jung decided to investigate astrological contacts in the charts of married couples, based on the idea that conjunctions or oppositions involving the Sun, Moon, Mars, Venus, Ascendant and Descendant¹⁷ ought to show up a higher-than-average number of times (given my comments about the suicide study, and the fact that people must surely marry for all sorts of different reasons, this might be considered a questionable supposition).

Jung analysed 483 pairs of horoscopes for married couples, treating them in three separate batches as they arrived. The first set of 180 pairs showed a significant leaning towards Moon-Ascendant conjunctions between each duo of marriage partners. The next batch of data, 220 pairs of charts, showed a high proportion of Sun-Moon conjunctions; the final batch of 83 pairs showed significance for Moon-Moon conjunctions. The results proved for Jung a meaningful acausal link at work – i.e. synchronicity – although not astrology, since the three test outcomes were mutually antithetical. The results:

...actually fall within the limits of chance expectation, they do not support the astrological claim, they merely imitate accidentally the ideal answer to astrological expectation. It is nothing but a chance result from the statistical point of view, yet it is meaningful on account of the fact that it looks as if it validated this expectation. It is just what I call a synchronistic phenomenon.

(Jung 1952, p.477)

Suspecting that the psychic state of himself and his female co-worker had had a hand in the outcome, he ran the tests again, asking three women 'whose psychological status was accurately known' (Jung 1952, p.473) to blind-select 20 pairs of horoscopes from a random selection of 200 (Jung 1997, p.32).

¹⁷ The Ascendant is the crossing point of the ecliptic and the horizon, as seen by the terrestrial observer. It is entirely hypothetical, created by positional line of sight, but is taken by astrologers to be a key point in the chart – as noted before, it was originally termed the *horoscopos*, the 'watcher of the hour', with the term *horoscopos* eventually being applied to the whole chart.

The first woman was, according to Jung, 'in a state of intense emotional excitement' at the time of the experiment; she selected couples whose predominant contact involved Mars. The second he considered to be self-suppressive and 'unable to realise and assert her personality'; in her batch was a higher-than-average incidence of Moon-Ascendant contacts. The third he considered to have 'strong inner oppositions whose union and reconciliation constituted her main problem' – she chose couples with Sun-Moon conjunctions (Jung 1952, pp.474-475 and quoted in Cornelius 2003, p.77 and Hyde 1992, p.131).

In the end, Jung came to believe that the researcher's own psyche somehow influences the outcome in the manner of 'a secret, mutual connivance ... between the material and the psychic state of the astrologer', a kind of psychic conspiracy between client, astrologer and cosmos (Jung 1952, p.478). As Roderick Main observes:

If, however, the astrologer's psychic condition can indeed participate in the arrangement of the material being considered, this means that astrology may be more a form of divination and less a form of science than many of its practitioners would like to believe.

This conclusion has in fact been drawn by some astrologers and has led to a serious reassessment of their practice (see Hyde 1992).

(Main, in Jung & Main 1997, p.32)

Jung left no record of either his statistical methodology nor the data used (Harding 1992 p.31), so we only have his take on the whole process. Further to this, he never considers that astrology's own theory of cosmic sympathies might adequately account for experiences of meaningful coincidence (Harding 1992, p.25). (One also wonders about Jung and the 'secret mutual connivance' involving three women whose emotional condition he purported to know – if the observer's own psyche is indeed at work, the last laugh is perhaps on the experimenter who imagines that he has removed himself from the experiment simply by handing over the data. If the results are intriguing on the subject of symbol, they are perhaps no less intriguing on the subject of Jung). But his conclusion is radical for astrology, firstly in rejecting astrology's own unique 'acausal connecting principle' and also in suggesting that the chart is not a map of objective truth but a device in which the unconscious seeks a projected image – 'we find the psychological facts as it were in the constellations' (Jung 1947, quoted in Campion 2009, p.255).

Space does not allow a deeper investigation of synchronicity, but it is unlikely to provide a satisfactory mechanism to explain astrology in its traditional format – this is, at least the

conclusion reached by Mike Harding, since it is 'too limited a concept...working in a random and sporadic manner...quite the reverse of astrology's practice and assumptions' (Harding 1992, p.34). On the surface synchronicity seems to chime with astrology's model of acausal orderedness in the world, but the astrological doctrine of sympathetic resonance across all levels of existence suggests that symbol permeates everything; as Harding states, astrological symbols are not confined to the unconscious, nor do they originate there (Harding 1992, p.28).¹⁸ Harding implies perhaps that astrologers should not allow themselves to be hoodwinked by a Jungian sleight of hand into conceding their philosophical territory quite so lightly – and certainly not by a man whose grasp of astrological practice and technique seems to have been relatively rudimentary (Harding 1992, pp.28-30). Jung's comment to Freud that his horoscopic calculations were bent towards the purpose of finding 'a clue to the core of psychological truth' and his assumption that he would eventually 'discover in astrology a good deal of knowledge that has been intuitively projected into the heavens' (Jung 1997, p.11) might be more akin to Kepler's separation of baby from bathwater, and seem unsatisfactory, arrogant even, to an astrologer for whom the human unconscious is not the first and last ground of astrological symbol.

Having said that, as both Hyde and Cornelius suggest, Jung's experiment does offer one suggestion for how symbol might work in the context of a horoscope – and it certainly raises the idea that 'meaningful coincidence' suggests *individual* (subjective) rather than universal (objective) meaning in an event. For Cornelius, it adds to the sum total of evidence emerging from the failure of scientific testing and points towards a 'psi' element, 'a mysterious agency at work in our astrology behind our everyday consciousness' (Cornelius 2003, p.76). Given that Campion suggests 'psychic collaboration' with the cosmos was intrinsic to Medieval and Renaissance astrology, and that practitioners such as John Dee and Cornelius Agrippa would have been perfectly happy to think of telepathy as part of an astrological consultation (Campion 2009, p.266), the researcher into astrology may need to find a way of encompassing a 'psi' level of experience if they are to come to a more complete understanding of astrology.

¹⁸ The links between astrology and Jung's concept of 'meaningful coincidence' have been explored by James Brockbank in his MA thesis (see Bibliography). His proposed model essentially moves along the same lines as the thesis of 'astrology as divination', as a non-causal model which is contrary to the 'continual influence' model preferred by most astrologers. He proposes that astrology does not make sense unless 'events are brought together by a transcendent power' (Brockbank 2003, p.57), which puts astrology and synchronicity at variance.

The ancient Greek notion of the *theoros*, alongside what Cornelius (following Palmer) identifies as the *hermeios*, is relevant on this level too, as complementary modes by which the meaning of an oracular experience might be understood. *Theoros* consults the oracle and receives the message of the deity in ordinary consciousness as a 'hermeneutic analysis' – it must decide how to act in light of the information (Cornelius 2014, p.4); *hermeios* is a different kind of seeing, arising from a "different" or out of the ordinary stage of consciousness' – it 'interprets from the concealed world' (Cornelius 2014, p.4 & p.5). The *theoros-hermaios* is then a double-consciousness which interpenetrates the astrologer-client dialogue, 'crossing between two realms, the other-worldly and the worldly' (Cornelius 2014, p.6). As Cornelius points out too, there is no surety in the information (Cornelius 2014, p.9) – an understanding of the oracle's message requires thought, intuitive insight: 'the omen or mantic utterance... was understood to require interpretation' (Struck 2004, p.166). As Cornelius terms it, if we see judicial astrology as divinatory then each reading of a chart constitutes a 'unique case', having meaning only in one specific context and no other (Cornelius 2003, p.188).

In light of Jung's notion of the 'secret mutual connivance', one begins to wonder about Gauquelin and whether he found only what he expected to find. He neither proved nor disproved astrology, which might suggest personal ambivalence, a middle no-man's-land where astrology is both true and not true, like Schrödinger's agonised cat. On a wider level, the result is ambivalent for both scientists and astrologers alike – the tests proved one small part, but not the whole, allowing the debate to continue raging.¹⁹ The title of Gauquelin's final book, *Neo-Astrology: A Copernican Revolution*, reflects his desire to reform astrology and reunite it with science – a rather grandiose project (Campion 2009, p.272). Following a nervous breakdown, he ordered all his files on the matter to be destroyed and committed suicide in 1991, aged 60.

One also wonders about the rationalist experimentation of Geoffrey Dean and his fellow researchers. Throughout their writings seems to weave the idea of astrology somehow falling from grace as it fails to prove itself to them in rational terms:

We started in much the same way as any astrologer starts – we calculated charts, saw that they seemed to work, and were hooked ... we began to make our own tests. That is,

¹⁹ It may be a step too far, but in view of the Martian theme of Pico and the death-wish astrologers, I am also intrigued that Gauquelin's findings go by the shorthand of 'The Mars Effect'. Champion suggests that the controversy raised by them, in both the scientific and astrological communities, is a direct descendent of those original inflammatory events of the 1490s (Campion 2009, p.272).

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we controlled for artifacts and other sources of error ... We were dismayed to find that artifacts and errors seemed to explain everything. Our beautiful world of astrology began to collapse.

(Phillipson 2000, p.125)

Underlying this is a division of astrology into 'subjective' and 'objective' – if it does not respond positively to testing, then it cannot be objective ('true') and is therefore subjective ('false'). (Phillipson 2000, pp.128-130)). The notion of a reflexive re-reading, Kripal-style, cannot be entertained in such a black-and-white world – thus the idea of astrology speaking its own kind of truth through personal engagement with its symbols never enters the equation. One wonders what Dean et al were doing during their decades of astrological study and the psychic energy it must have required to keep its symbols firmly at arm's length; in this spirit, the remark that 'none of us has vested interests in astrology, so there are no particular results we could 'hope' for' (Phillipson 2000, p.165) might require some unpacking.

Underlying these arguments, of course, is the assumption that nothing can be known except through scientific method – astrology might bring comfort and a sense of meaning, but it effectively does so through obfuscation and lies (Phillipson 2000, p.164-5). By contrast, it hardly needs mentioning that scientific method is not perceived universally as the sole arbiter of truth:

'...when scientists search for a cause, they tend to ignore the fact that causality is not a law which nature obeys, but the form of words in which science states its propositions about nature.

(Harding 2014, p.10)

Capra suggests a similar thing in quoting Heisenberg: 'What we observe is not nature itself, but nature exposed to our method of questioning.' (Capra 1997, p.40). Or put simply by Alexander Rupert, regarding the scientific age: 'We quite forgot that we were subjects trying to be objective' (Rupert 1994, p.3). If so, then what might apply to scientific researchers must also apply to astrologers – any theory about astrology's conceptual foundation is unlikely to be an objective reality ('nature itself') but an expression of our own expectations.

Chapter 3: An Astronomical Interlude

At this point, it might be worth reminding ourselves that the horoscope is not a particularly scientific image of the sky – the Hermetic maxim of 'As Above, So Below' is only true in a symbolic sense.

The zodiac, for instance, was invented by the Babylonians to systematise the stellar backdrop of the orbiting planets (Whitfield 2001, pp.15-21 and Campion 2006, p.17), now (due to precession of the equinoxes) entirely disconnected from its constellational origin and permanently hooked (in Western tropical astrology) to the equinoctial crossing points of the ecliptic and celestial equator. Indeed, it is only Ptolemy's adoption of the tropical zodiac over the sidereal that ensured the former became the primary reference system (Powell 2007, p.75). The zodiac developed from the early Babylonian star-catalogues, the so-called 'Three Stars Each', as a calendrical device to regulate the solar year (Whitfield 2001, pp.18-19 and Houlding 1997). It is a multi-cultural compendium of mythic images, the oldest dating to Sumerian times and others derived from Greek and Egyptian sources (Houlding 1997), incorporating the Babylonian religious number symbolism which informed the sexagesimal system (Campion 1994, p.88). We might think of Jung's comment to Freud concerning the projection of mythic images onto the sky or Pico della Mirandola's assertion in the *Disputationes*, that the zodiac signs are nothing more than an imaginative projection (Cornelius 2003, p.334).

Planetary positions in a horoscope are measured without reference to celestial latitude, meaning that their position in relation to the horizon can be deceptive – a planet which is above the horizon in the sky can appear below the horizon in the chart, if it has marked celestial latitude. This is illustrated in Fig.1 (p.29) where the planet (represented by the blue star) is above the horizon and should strictly appear in the 12th house of the horoscope, but will actually appear in the 1st house, below the horizon, because charts are calculated as if the planet is exactly on the ecliptic (i.e. the position of the red star, which has 0° latitude).²⁰

²⁰ A 'house' is a one-twelfth division of the circle of the horoscope, numbered from 1st house to 12th house moving anti-clockwise around.

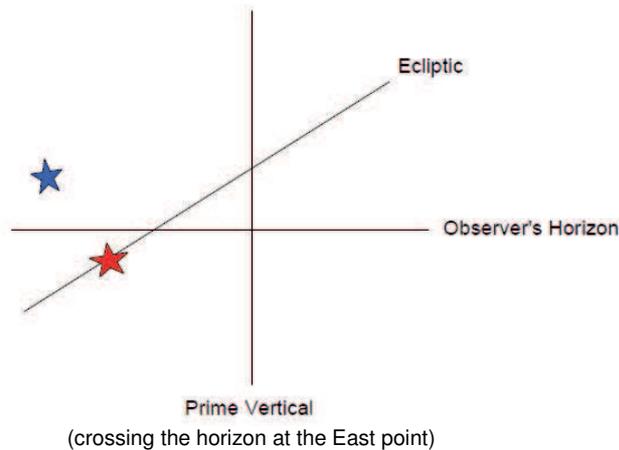


Fig.1

The phenomenon of retrograde motion, whereby planets are seen to slow down in the sky and then move backwards for a period of time, is similarly an illusion, captured in the horoscope and then read from a symbolic perspective. It only takes a moment's thought to appreciate that this is unlikely to be a 'real' phenomenon – if it were, one cannot imagine that transport officials would not have noticed. Something of a different order seems to be taking place: a symbolic reading of a phenomenon observed in the numinous tableau of the heavens, which is not true in any objective sense but which is taken up as meaningful.

The chart contains many such imaginary pieces of information which do not as such exist but which reflect the viewpoint of a geocentric observer within the celestial sphere. Indeed, the chart only makes sense from one geographical perspective – it is entirely positional. The Greeks, for instance, introduced the idea of the houses and of the Ascendant and Midheaven, drawing on ancient Babylonian and Egyptian ideas of personal geography; relevant too was the meaning placed by the Egyptians on the daily passage of the Sun god Ra through the sky (Houlding 1998, p.11 and pp.17-19) – within the context of a personal horoscope, location and individual perspective become intrinsic.

We are reminded at every turn that the horoscope is in itself a symbol, expressing an ancient idea of 'cosmos' and an image of self-within-cosmos and cosmos-within-self – ordered, meaningful and with the observer at the centre, connected to the heavens: mundane and sacred interwoven. It stands in stark contrast to the modern scientific version of cosmology, which expresses no such sense of relationship or potential for participatory dialogue, no option for

personal involvement – 'the view from nowhere', as described by the philosopher Thomas Nagel. For Nagel, the view from nowhere is an objective view of the world, a perspective which can never be complete because it cannot 'transcend its particular point of view ... to conceive of the world as a whole.' (Nagel 1986, p.3).

It is perhaps this feature of astrology, that it is emphatically a view from somewhere (from 'mywhere'), which makes it attractive for those who feel a subjective sense of connection to the world around them. The *I-Thou* relationship of which Martin Buber wrote (Buber, 2000) or Merleau-Ponty's anti-Cartesian thesis in *Phenomenology of Perception* regarding the subjectivity of human perception via the mutual engagement of body, mind and world have both been called on as appropriate underpinning images.²¹ Astrology's philosophical foundation of sympathetic resonance in a soulful cosmos belongs to a pre-Enlightenment mindset; but the astrological model preserves into contemporary times the idea of a meaningful (geocentric, more particularly *homocentric*) place for each person, whose story can be told via the all-encompassing horoscope using the dramatic and affective language of celestial myth and the measured movements of planetary cycles. The question of whether the chart is 'real' or not may be a lesser consideration for many, in light of the larger metaphysical and emotional reality which astrology seems to encompass.

Including the knower in the known²²

There is perhaps some irony in astrologers believing themselves to be an intrinsic part of an integrated cosmos but at the same time seeking objective information from astrology. The division between natural and judicial astrology was made by Cicero, a sceptic, and was taken up in a Christian culture via Augustine and Aquinas as a way of separating the stuff of the material world from the stuff of the soul, so it is a Christian dichotomy rather than strictly an astrological one. Descartes echoed this when he said that 'the mind, by which I am what I am, is entirely distinct from the body' (Descartes 1968, p.547), suggesting that the physical world is somehow separate and the mind, from its supposed vantage point of pure objectivity, can use observation

²¹ For an in-depth discussion of Buber's notion of I-Thou and I-It in relation to astrology, see Radermacher, L. (2011) *The Role of Dialogue in Astrological Divination* (unpublished MPhil thesis (University of Kent) at www.theninthhouse.org). Patrick Curry notes the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and David Abram in relation to 'the perceiving and communicating body as the very ground of all human knowledge and experience' (Willis & Curry 2004, p.2).

²² Julian Jaynes 2000, p.86.

as the basis of certainty. (The death of his mother at the age of one and his own fragile health would, of course, have no bearing on the development of a philosophy of mind-body dualism).

Phillipson quotes the physicist K.V. Laurikainen:

It is natural, on the ground of Cartesian dualism, to come to the conclusion that the observer's effect on his test results can always be eliminated. The primary object in science is the idea that one can assume the 'external world' of matter to be totally independent of the 'I' – that is, the observer... (however) According to the Copenhagen philosophy concerning the interpretation of quantum mechanics, every observation must be viewed as an **interaction** between the 'observer' and the 'external world'. This idea **destroys the basis of the Cartesian distinction.**

(Laurikainen quoted in Phillipson 2006, pp.10-11 [emphasis in the original])

The astrologer is in a double-bind. Dividing astrology into natural and judicial, or natural and divinatory, suggests that there is a type of astrological effect which can be excised from human involvement and neutrally observed; but how might this be possible in an overall model of a cosmos where the individual is a reflection of the heavens on every level of experience?

So, of course, are the sceptical researchers:

...it is clear that the significant blind trials have not demonstrated that astrology works but only that astrologers work. Hence to adequately test astrology the participation of the astrologer must be eliminated. (Dean & Mather 1977, p.554)

Laying aside the idea that no one would consider keeping the music but eliminating the musician, it is, of course, just possible that (given the proliferation of opinion within the astrological community on absolutely everything) the truth is rather the other way round – astrology may work, but astrologers may often get it wrong.

Chapter 4: Imaginal Worlds

What has philosophy got to do with measuring anything? It's the mathematicians you have to trust, and they measure the skies like we measure a field.

(From *Dialogo de Cecco di Ronchitti* attributed to Galileo,
(quoted in Drake 1999, p.99)

We are left with a dilemma: on the one hand a literalist perspective, which proposes an objective truth (and suggests that we can grasp this without changing its nature) and on the other a perspective founded on relationship, where the psyche (soul, consciousness, whatever name we might use) is included as part of the system, a co-creator of the 'reality' experienced. This dilemma exists both between astrologers and the outside world, and also within the astrological community itself.

The idea of the chart as a purely imaginal or symbolic landscape also has provenance outside the divinatory model, in comments presented by two writers whose work has influenced astrology and which may be worth following up.

Entering Disneyland: the horoscope as simulacrum

In *A History of Astrology Volume II*, Nicholas Campion offers the notion of the simulacrum in relation to the world represented by the horoscope (Campion 2009, p.286). He suggests that 'astrology leads by creating theoretical frameworks with which the cosmos then cooperates' (Campion 2009, p.286). The horoscope is, in Campion's words, a 'hieroglyphic model of an ancient cosmos, using symbols which require the astrologer's active participation in the interpretive process, and which takes on a life which transcends the universe of modern science' (Campion 2009, p.286)

He links this directly with the historian David Brown's idea of two paradigms within Mesopotamian astrology: the *Enuma Anu Enlil*²³ paradigm and the Prediction of Celestial Phenomena paradigm – two ways of relating to the heavens which represent, firstly, the creation of a theoretical model which does not reflect the literal sky but is deemed to 'work' [the EAE paradigm] and secondly, strict empirical observation as a foundation for accurate prediction [the

²³ The *Enuma Anu Enlil* is a collection of omens from the Assyrian period (8th century BCE).

PCP paradigm] (Brown 2000, pp.105-112). The former (EAE) approach brought forth the zodiac (Campion 2008, p.48), a device for regulating the calendar which soon took on a life of its own as the repository of twelve mythic images each with its own rich narrative; the latter, designed to support prediction, became an important concept during the Assyrian period and Neo-Babylonian empire. Although Campion points out that Brown's hypothesis does not exclude theoretical speculation being underpinned by centuries of prior empirical observation (Campion 2008, p.48), he also observes that the meticulous recording of celestial events over a period of 700 years, from the Assyrian conquest in 911 BCE, failed to create an empirical astrology, giving way in time to the theoretical models of the Greeks (Campion 2008, p.76).

The term 'simulacrum' was used by the French philosopher and cultural theorist, Jean Baudrillard. Baudrillard identified three types of simulacra: firstly, a representation of the real which can be clearly distinguished from it (a map or a painting, for example); secondly, a representation which blurs the distinction between itself and reality; and the final type (which he called 'simulation') where the distinction between reality and representation breaks down entirely, until the representation becomes the reality and is free from all reference to the real – it becomes 'hyper-real'. He used the hypothetical example of a map which starts off as a representation of a real territory but ends up being treated as if it were the territory itself, instead of being merely a simulated model of it (Baudrillard 1994, p.124).

The classic example given by both Baudrillard and by the Italian writer Umberto Eco is Disneyland. For Baudrillard, Disneyland is 'a perfect model of all the entangled orders of simulation' (Baudrillard 1988, p.171). 'The objective profile of the United States, then, may be traced throughout Disneyland' but it also comes to disguise the fact that the 'real' America outside Disneyland is itself a simulation or hyperreality (Baudrillard 1988, pp.171-2). For Eco, reality has become intertwined with the American myth of happiness and abundance, to create the 'hyper-real' world of Disneyland (Eco 1986, pp.43-48).

The simulacrum then, when it is inhabited by people, springs to life and becomes fully functioning, developing its own internal integrity and logic, and 'working' in its own terms – it takes on a life of its own and becomes real, indeed it eventually becomes more real than the thing it is meant to represent.

‘The simulacrum is never that which conceals the truth – it is the truth which conceals that there is none. The simulacrum is true.’

(Baudrillard 1994, p.1 [attributed to Ecclesiastes...])

The images of simulacrum, simulation and hyperreality, and the take on Disneyland, are complex and embedded in a larger (and overtly critical) sociological and cultural take on the commercialism of Western (specifically American) society. To suggest a rationalist critique that astrologers are simply ‘...[participants] in a shared illusion’ (Harding 1992, p.12) would be a rather soulless enterprise, considering astrology’s ancient and sacred provenance.²⁴ But the core idea may be worth contemplating. Every time we look at a horoscope, we are obliged to suspend a scientific view of the world, and enter into a particular kind of paradigm. Patrick Curry, for instance, speaks of astrology as a quest for re-enchantment and places it alongside religious experience, art, music, poetry and the like, rather than with modern science – experiences which are ‘principally evocations of and responses to wonder’ (Willis & Curry 2004, p.88). He brings us back to the idea that enchantment (and astrology) place us ‘inside a song...an experience of the world as intrinsically meaningful, significant, and whole in a way that is fundamentally mysterious’ (Willis & Curry 2004, pp.87-88).

The simulacrum image applied to astrology might suggest, as with the EAE paradigm, that the cosmos ‘responds’ because we expect it to. It is a view of astrology as an act of creative and imaginative seeing in the context of a cosmos which is assumed to be responsive.²⁵

Mundus imaginalis

As an alternative to the starkness of the simulacrum image, we might take inspiration from the work of Henry Corbin, who talked of the *mundus imaginalis* of the Sufi tradition, an intermediary place between lived experience and ultimate truth or divinity – active imagination takes us to that place, as the seeker reaches for a deeper truth which cannot be known through the reasoning mind (Cheetham 2012, p.208). In this way, the horoscope can perhaps be seen as an imaginal landscape, not objectively or concretely ‘real’, but imaginatively real in both

²⁴ As Mike Harding says: ‘I do not believe that either the philosophy or the psychology yet exists to match the complexity and grandeur of the view that emerges as we begin to absorb the implications of astrology’ (Harding 1992, p.4).

²⁵ James Brockbank explores the proposition of a ‘responsive cosmos’ at the heart of astrology in his PhD thesis ‘The Responsive Cosmos: An Enquiry into the Theoretical Foundation of Astrology’, arguing that astrology is divination rather than science, involving a ‘non-human agency’ from which guidance is sought (Brockbank 2011, p.5).

personal and collective consciousness, such that it works when one is imaginatively engaged but fails to respond when examined in the laboratory. The chart might present itself initially as a construct, a fabrication, but for anyone engaged in the process of astrological seeing, the world of the horoscope may be as real as any other – indeed more real, to the extent that it encodes a profoundly-held spiritual belief about the world, an intersection of matter and spirit.

Cornelius echoes Coleridge in making clear that this is not imagination in the sense of fantasy or image-making – it is Plato's 'mode of perception granted to the soul' (Cornelius 2014, p.15).

Corbin speaks of the *ta'wil*, the hidden inner meaning of the sacred text:

The *ta'wil* is essential symbolic understanding, the transmutation of everything visible into symbols, the intuition of an essence or person in an Image which partakes neither of universal logic nor of sense perception, and which is the only means of signifying what is to be signified.

(Corbin 1998, p.13)

The *ta'wil* is essential to breaking free from an empirical understanding of the world, away from *sharī'a* – the literal manifestation of religion as law – to enter into mystical experience; speaking astrologically, the language of myth and symbol moves us beyond the 'law' of rational evidence. As Titus Burckhardt writes, in describing Ibn Arabi's mystical cosmology as the underpinning of a hermetic astrology:

This symbolic perspective naturally does not depend upon the purely physical or spatial reality, the only one envisaged by modern astronomy, of the world of the stars; the geocentric system, being in conformity with the reality as it presents itself immediately to the human eyes, contains in itself all the logical coherence requisite to a body of knowledge for constituting an exact science.

(Burkhardt 2001, p.10)

There are perhaps thematic parallels also in the fields of sacred- and psycho-geography – for instance, Alfred Watkins' 'old straight track' as a vision of his relationship to an ancient landscape (Watkins, 1994) or Jocelyn Brooke's 'countries of the mind' where a personal story is magically woven into the most prosaic of locations (Brooke 1954, p.1) – i.e. where familiar territory takes on a heightened meaning through the visionary capacities of the viewer. The chart could then be seen as imaginal topography, acting as a truthful expression of the observer's relationship to the world.

‘A necessary theurgic mumbo-jumbo’

In an article entitled 'Heaven Retains Within Its Sphere Half of All Bodies and Maladies', James Hillman wrote the following:

“Two sorts of literalisms afflict astrology, so that astrology like psychoanalysis may run the risk of becoming a fundamentalistic faith. The first has to do with time.

Call it Temporal Literalism. It is reinforced by calculations, tables, exactitudes, minutes and seconds. It does not enough question the idea of time, but is caught by time. I think it possible to still do these mathematical calculations, but to regard them less as accurate measurements of time and rather as a ritual service, *a necessary theurgic mumbo-jumbo* to constellate psychic insight, focus intensity, elaborate a distancing procedure ... all this is a ritual to focus intuition and refine one’s skills rather than to present the truthful facts of what is actually taking place, or will, or has, in an unknowable invisible sphere, that other half beyond this world...

I think we need to deconstruct these literalisms...."

(Hillman 1997, p.3) [my italics]²⁶

The implication is that the chart is meaningless on its own – it is not 'real' in an objective sense but draws its meaning from being a ritual container, a device which primes intuition and moves one into the symbolic stance – it opens up symbolic sight. It is, in Hillman's words, 'a divine art, but not the art of divination' (Hillman 1997, p.4). The use of the word 'theurgic' seems deliberate and telling – the Neoplatonists developed the notion of theurgy ('god work') as ritual designed to connect the individual to the divine through the device of the (active) imagination (Shaw 2003, p.59 Churaqui 2014, p.22). So Hillman is suggesting that astrology, for all its complex mathematics, is an invitation to the imagination; it allows imagination to work and it is potent not because it is 'real' but because it is 'an archetypal phenomenon, that is widespread, timeless, emotionally compelling, deeply resonating and generatively resourceful' (Hillman 1997, p.1).

In this frame of mind, we can accept more readily the rather curt notion of a 'necessary theurgic mumbo-jumbo'. Theurgy is a very ancient notion of sacred ritual, setting the seeker in a relationship with the divine, from which he or she has been separated in the act of incarnating.

²⁶ The notion of birth times has always seemed problematic to me. Whilst I've not had many experiences of inadvertently working with the wrong birth time, I have had many clients over the years who gave their birth time as a suspiciously rounded figure. My own mother initially remembered my birth time as 'about 3.45am' but later said she might be mis-remembering. I pressed her on this (quite hard, I seem to recall), at which point she said 'well, it might have been nearer 3.50'. Looking back, I have no doubt she did this to please me – I settled on 3.48am. I have no idea if this really is the exact time, but the chart works obligingly well.

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One doesn't just turn up and do a theurgic ritual – it suggests a life of appropriate living, appropriate preparation for the work, the idea of making oneself a fit vessel.

The title of Hillman's article is a quote from Paracelsus, given in full in *A Blue Fire*:

The physician must have knowledge of man's other half, the half of his nature which is bound up with astronomical philosophy; otherwise he will be in no true sense man's physician, since Heaven retains within its sphere half of all bodies and maladies. What is a physician who knows nothing of cosmography?

(Hillman 1990, p.147)

One cannot miss the implication – that astrology, like Paracelsus' medicine, is potent because one half of it is located in the heavens and it involves 'the imaginal realm, the archetypal powers bearing the names of the planets and the myths portrayed by the constellations of the stars' (Hillman and Moore 1990, p.147). Indeed, Hillman states it for us unequivocally in the 1997 article:

Quite simply for me, astrology returns events to the Gods. It depends upon images taken from the heavens. It invokes a polytheistic, mythic, poetic, metaphoric sense of what is fatefully real. That's what makes astrology as a field, as a language, as a way of thinking, efficacious. It is the carrier into the popular mind of the great tradition that holds we all abide in an intelligible cosmos, thus giving to human questions larger than human answers.

(Hillman 1997, p.1)

This takes us as far as we can go away from the 'Newtonian' narrative which Campion talks of in relation to astrological practice, both historical and contemporary (Campion 2009, p.286). It is, in many ways, the position suggested by Patrick Curry in his support of Cornelius' divinatory thesis for astrology, where the astrological consultation becomes a ritual, rooted in the disciplines and traditions of craft horoscopy and made meaningful by the elegance and precision of skilful interpretation of symbols (Willis & Curry 2004, p.61).

Chapter 5: Concluding Thoughts

It seems unlikely that any investigation of astrology will be able to offer a neat answer as to what is going on. The horoscope, with its celestial images and myths, is not so easily caught. If the chart exists only as an emanation of the human unconscious, we might make a case that is no less real for all that, if imagination is truly as Rollo May conceived of it, the 'fountainhead of human experience'²⁷ or as Coleridge termed it, 'the condition for cognitive participation in a sacramental universe', capable of expressing the 'realities' of the imaginal realm (Gregory 2003, p.59). For Blake, indeed, 'Imagination is not a state: it is the human existence itself', as he wrote in his epic poem, *Milton*. To the extent that the imagination might be accorded a co-creative or demiurgic status, and to the extent that imagination might have the capacity to reveal the inner psychological and emotional realities of a situation using the symbols of astrology, then the 'magic castle' of the horoscope, with its mythic tales of gods and dragons, and its arcane terminology from an ancient time long past, is much more than a curious piece of outmoded artifice – it is a profound expression of relationship between human and divine worlds. Campion suggests that the origins of astrology are bound up with the very origin of human consciousness (Campion 2000, p.5); in this case, we might even say the longing for such a relationship is inextricably bound up with being human.

If we follow Hillman, astrology has a perennial attraction partly because it encodes the notion of 'cosmos' – it offers a sense of order and meaningful unfolding, in a world which can present itself as disordered and chaotic. Within this, the chart serves as an image of the meeting place of heaven and earth which gives divine credence to earthly endeavours and concerns. As Campion observes: 'Whereas science tends to regard the universe as devoid of meaning and conventional religion focuses on God, astrology maintains the ancient idea that the universe is in itself meaningful, that meaning and purpose are woven into its fabric' (Campion 2009, p.269).

In addition, it can offer us a set of myths by which we might know ourselves and connect to the world around us via shared narratives and stories – a way of connecting to inner reality and to the archetypal and the sacred through a highly-ritualised craft form; a 'practical mythology' (Campion 2006, p.11). Astrological seeing requires not only the appreciation of imaginative

²⁷ 'What if imagination and art are not frosting at all, but the fountainhead of human experience?' (Rollo May, quoted in Fox, M (2002) *Creativity: where the divine and the human meet*, Tarcher/Putnam p.149.

metaphor but a wholly different way of seeing the world, one which does not offer unequivocal answers but invites self-reflection through engagement with symbols. Astrology can then act at least as a repository of narrative knowledge, facilitating the emergence of a personal story when the time is right for its telling. It attests to the power of symbols, but also to the inner knowledge within each of us which will, left to its devices, search out the right set of circumstances in which the story can be told. As Harding suggests, astrology has much to offer the psychotherapist 'for initially providing a coherent framework in which to explore the condition of being human, the nature of 'what is going on' and 'what is being experienced' in a manner which allows for some approximation of objectivity' (Harding 192, p.19).

The question arises as to how we might approach the study of astrology and if this has any place at all within the academy. Does a researcher need to 'believe' in or practice it? It seems clear that years of immersion in astrology in the case of Dean et al has not opened up a more personal subjective experience of the working of symbol (Phillipson 2000, pp.124-166), so perhaps in order to do it justice one must at some point step over the safety line that demarcates an objective stance from a subjective one. On the other hand, when asked, astrologers are often heard to reply that they do not need proof of astrology because they see it 'working'; this is equally unconvincing to a non-astrologer. Jeffrey Kripal's reflexive position might indeed offer a way forward – subjective practice and critical thinking intertwined so that a third position is reached which somehow combines and transcends both.

Perhaps the only conclusion is that astrology is best approached and studied in its own terms, as a unique philosophy, rooted in a Mercurial assortment of ancient ideas and practices but still able to speak eloquently to a contemporary following. Mike Harding suggests this in the following passage:

Again and again astrology is described in the words of others; laid against this discipline or that theory to see how it might measure up, somehow always to be found wanting, and reluctantly or triumphantly set aside. Currently it is being stretched out on the analyst's couch, once again to check the closeness of fit.

(Harding 1992, p.4)

We might turn to Joseph Campbell for an echo of the vision first offered in the *Timaeus*, in relation to myth:

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Mythology is not a lie, mythology is poetry, it is metaphorical. It has been well said that mythology is the penultimate truth – penultimate because the ultimate cannot be put into words. It is beyond words. Beyond images, beyond that bounding rim of the Buddhist Wheel of Becoming. Mythology pitches the mind beyond that rim, to what can be known but not told (Campbell 1988, p.206).

For all those who accord status to myths, dreams and imaginal worlds, where symbols offer a glimpse of what is, in Hillmans' words, 'fatefully real', astrology might then also represent a penultimate truth, a language which gives narrative form to the most complex of human experiences.

Appendix

This appendix offers two personal examples of astrological symbolism at work which I hope will illustrate one or two of the themes engaged in this dissertation. In particular, they seem to confirm (at least to me) the thesis of 'astrology as divination' and of the 'horoscope as theurgic mumbo-jumbo', whilst not in any way closing the door on the idea that a chart does indeed provide some sort of useful information about a person and the world they inhabit.

The first follows the notion of the 'wrong chart' appearing to work. For me the presence of the astrologer is so intrinsic to the act of reading a natal chart, I have come to see the consultation as an oracular experience in which client and astrologer are bound together at a particular moment in time. Both are players in an interwoven drama because both are 'seekers', whether they are conscious of this or not. It suggests something of the 'secret mutual connivance' of which Jung spoke, where the psychological material of client and therapist become entwined.

Crossing the subject-object divide: fathers and daughters

The astrologer presumes that he or she has a chart about someone but it also seems to be about something else. The 'something else' often turns out to be the astrologer.
(Hyde 1992, p.173)

I have had my chart read several times – the earliest readings used the Equal House system, with which I am most familiar.²⁸ I found each reading both accurate and empowering, confirming both the efficacy of astrology and the correctness of Equal House. But then I had a reading in 2005 with a well-known astrologer – I was expecting that she would also use Equal House, but instead she used the Koch system. I was thrown, because in that system a key group of planets 'moves house', from the 3rd to the 4th sector of the chart. What unfolded in the session was however instructive; I had come wanting to talk about my astrological 'career' but instead we talked about my father – and a great deal of long-dormant material emerged, buried since his death in 1989. Moreover, I quickly realised that I could only move forward once I had laid the past to rest in this way. It was like a thread being pulled from deep within, appropriate for the symbolism of this lowest house or sector in the chart, signifying to the astrologer matters

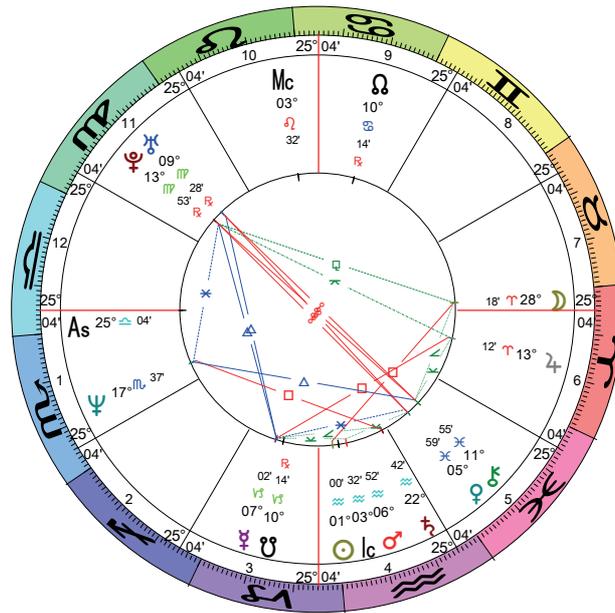
²⁸ Including the 'whole sign' system, astrology offers 15 different 'house systems' (methods of dividing the space of the chart into 12 portions, each related to a specific field of life experience) and astrologers argue continually over which is the 'right' one. Each is likely to produce a different picture for the individual, so it is impractical to do anything but choose one of them. See Holden, R.W. (1977) *The Elements of House Division* London: Faculty of Astrological Studies & Urania Trust.

connected to home, roots, ancestry and father. The experience certainly cured me of any confusion over which house system is the best one to use – in a spirit of astrology-as-divination, the 'right' house system is the one which the astrologer is using (not because it is technically correct, but because they are using it).

Geoffrey Cornelius has written about a phenomenon in divination and traditional healing which he terms the *chicane* – the diversion or sleight-of-hand which is sometimes used by diviners or witch doctors as a way of making something appear or disappear, to bypass the rational mind in order to connect with the 'truths' held beneath the surface, much like Jung's image of Mercurius (Cornelius 2010, p.120-121). I am also reminded of Lewis Hyde's observation that in the divination practices of the Yoruba people of Nigeria, it is the face of the trickster god Legba which is etched into the divining board – 'as it should be carved into the analyst's coffee table, alongside the box of Kleenex' (Hyde 2008, p.263).

To go back to the story, in my final year of formal astrological study, 1999, I conducted a reading for a client whom I will call Harriet. She had been adopted and had been through the long process of finding her birth parents with the help of the adoption agency – she was specifically motivated to find her father. It had taken two years to trace him, a long saga with many twists and turns. A couple of weeks after they had located him, but before she was able to make contact, she received the news from the adoption agency that he had died.

It was at this point that Harriet asked me to do her chart – in the papers released by the adoption agency there had been a note of her birth time. The reader will permit a little more astrological terminology at this point. In those days, I did not possess astrological software and all my charts were calculated by hand; the resulting chart had Libra on the Ascendant and a Sun-Mars conjunction in Aquarius in the 4th house, sitting at the very lowest point (the IC or 'imum coeli'). Additionally, the planet Neptune, in the sky at that moment, reached the same zodiacal position in Aquarius as the Sun. Following the Sun's astrological correspondence as an image of both self and father, and Neptune as an image of sadness, longing and incorporeality, it seemed a perfect signature for the loss of the father, and for the long odyssey of trying to find him only to discover that he wasn't to be found in any physical sense. In the session, we talked about how one might grieve for a person whose presence has come to dominate by virtue of its absence.



**'Harriet'
Natal horoscope**

I rediscovered the chart a couple of years later when I moved house – by that time I had software and I ran the chart only to discover that my original calculation had been incorrect. To this day, I have no idea how I managed it. In reality my friend has Scorpio not Libra rising, with (perhaps appropriately) Neptune on the Ascendant.

The year of the reading, 1999, was the 10th anniversary of my own father's death. When my father died in 1989, I had been estranged from him for about five years and we no longer talked or saw each other. We lived on opposite sides of the country. I only realised he was dying on the day it happened – I drove through the night to be at the hospital, but he died about 30 minutes before I arrived. So whose father is being talked about here? Like my client, I never had the chance to close the chapter and he remained a ghostly Neptunian presence, throughout my astrological training and the reading with my client, until he was conjured in the 'Koch house' reading in 2005 and finally laid to rest.

I am not suggesting that it does not matter about getting the wrong chart. Astrology, as a craft, demands correct procedure, correct protocol; whatever our view of the chart as real or not real, the craft and 'theurgic' ritual must be observed, so that it might be an appropriate container for the unconscious, with all its numinous power. On the surface, it presents as an example of sloppy calculation; but seen from another perspective, it becomes the vehicle by which an

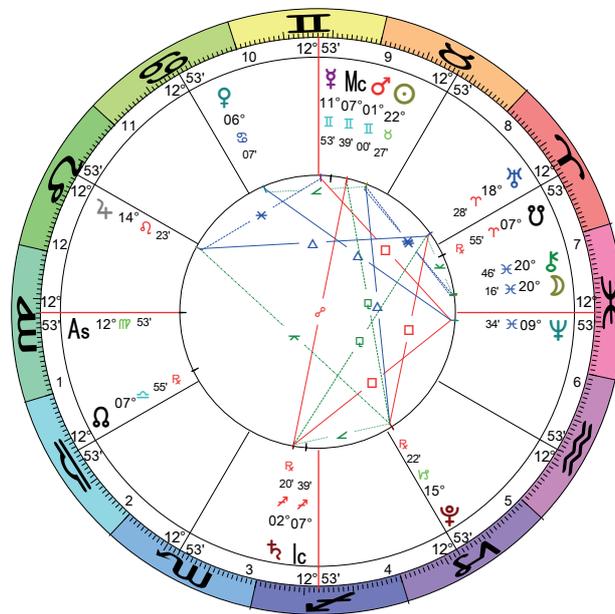
emotive theme crosses the border into conscious mind – facilitated by the *chicanery* of the poor maths and planets shifting house when one is busy looking the other way.

More chicane: road ahead closed...

Another example might serve to indicate the importance of how the interaction of astrologer and client influences the outcome of a chart reading, with again the chart then acting not so much as a repository of objective information, but as a device which the astrologer might use as a form of imaginative opening and linguistic enrichment. It is a story of a literal chicane.

My client, whom I will call Janet, booked a reading in May 2015; in her emails she was very circumspect about what she wanted to talk about in the session – just 'the 5th house and the 7th house'. One perhaps doesn't even need to see her chart at this point to know what is implied here – romance (5th house) versus committed relationship (7th house) might be one possibility.

The horoscope for the time of the appointment is given below:



Consultation chart for 'Janet'
2pm, 13 May 2015

The appointed time came and went – no client. After 20 minutes, she rang to say she was lost, with no satellite navigation, no map and only intermittent signal on her phone. I gave her directions. After a further 20 minutes she rang again to say there were road works and the road

into the village where I live had been closed. She was clearly panicking. In view of the high level of emotion in her voice, I wrote her words down verbatim: 'Oh my god, this is a disaster – I don't think it's going to happen.'

Again, I gave her directions – a diversion which took her another half hour to negotiate. Curious to know what was going on in the village, I ventured out to the main through road: road signs had been put up bearing the words 'road ahead closed.'

I could make a very good case for finding the signature for 'road ahead closed' in Janet's natal chart and I am not discounting this as a proposition – that the incident was an external manifestation of something in her innate makeup which could be foretold or read objectively from her chart. But there is at least in parallel the 'divinatory' take on this: that life is not determined by birth maps and that one must pay attention first and foremost to what is arising in the moment. I have not given the natal horoscope here partly for reasons of confidentiality, but also because the consultation chart spoke with at least equal eloquence – indeed, seemed to be the one thrown up by the chicane itself. If, as Ficino suggested, one's task is to fit one's life to the heavens, then the sky overhead should be taken by the astrologer as a metaphor for the current situation, to seek an answer, not to the question 'what will happen to me' but 'how should I act'.

The nature of the drama focused my mind on the Mars-Saturn-Neptune configuration – Mars in footloose Gemini opposed by Saturn in the 3rd house of transport, a perfect image of being held back by the road block; chart ruler Mercury in a tense connection to Neptune, an image of disappearing mobile phone signals and getting lost on the way.

As it transpired, Janet was indeed experiencing a major dilemma ('I'm lost'). She was engaged to be married in three months, but both she and her partner were getting cold feet; neither wanted to cancel the wedding but something clearly wasn't right ('road ahead closed'). On the scene had arrived a lover, and my client could not choose now between going ahead with union to a man who represented the 'straight' path of marriage and children, and throwing her lot in with the lover, who conjured for her the image of freedom and excitement 'off the beaten track'. In the road drama, Janet had had no choice but to take a diversion; happily, it also suggested she would get to her destination in the end, with patience and a willingness to consider an alternative route.

To some astrologers, both of these stories might seem unworthy – a transgression of allowing wrong charts and metalogues to speak louder than correct charts; it might therefore appear as a negation of the horoscope as a true thing. In this spirit, I am reminded of a comment from Patrick Curry, in a response to an article by Liz Greene entitled 'Is Astrology a Divinatory System?' (She argues against this conclusion, partly because astrology is 'based on the observation of natural phenomena and a relatively stable tradition of assigned meanings' and also because divination can be framed as just one of astrology's many historical guises (Greene 2008, pp.27-29)). Curry responds:

'...everything *essential* – or *important* (a weaker claim) – or *interesting* about astrology (an even weaker claim! but one still worth making) is divinatory.

(Curry 2009, p.77)

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