

A Reader's Guide to Cosmocritic

By Kirk Little

As its name suggests, this website hosts articles which question some of the fundamental assumptions made by Western astrologers about their craft. In doing so, it suggests other ways of thinking about the nature of our stellar art. Being astrologers who are critics of astrology makes us a minority view of a minority view! But as all practicing astrologers know, our discipline has an image problem and something more: astrology finds itself in a cultural and epistemological cul de sac, unable to explain itself to non-believers, or to provide a convincing rationale for how it works. On this issue, there is no consensus among astrologers and that poses a problem for us all. Cosmocritic was born from this quandary.

To speak in market terms, our target audience is the great majority of contemporary astrologers, who subscribe to some variant of the sympathetic/harmony/resonance model of astrology; a non-casual or acasual model, if you will. More specifically, we speak to those astrologers troubled by our art's muddled state and hope to address their epistemological discomfort. To that end, we offer suggestions and alternatives, but no final answers.

One source of that discomfort is the legacy of twentieth century "scientific" astrology, at best a mixed bag for astrologers. On a positive note, it has forced astrologers to look elsewhere for validation: through a return to our tradition and a reinvigoration of philosophical exploration of astrological practice.¹ But the attention of our scientific critics has also dramatically undercut any pretensions to empirical justification for our claims. Amidst a few positive findings, research has revealed a vast body of scientifically unsubstantiated assertions.²

Those few positive findings hardly constitute the basis for sound astrological practice. The most robust empirical evidence for the astrological hypothesis, Michel and Francoise Gauquelin's massive statistical studies of planetary influence on human behavior did not succeed in producing better horoscopic astrology. Whilst that was not their intention, it is equally fair to say that no one in the astrological community has found a ready and practical application for their research. Interestingly, while there remain a small group of Western astrologers committed to seeing astrology validated, vindicated or at least improved by the tools of modern science,³ it would seem safe to say that most practicing astrologers do not base their horoscopic interpretations on the research they read in peer reviewed journals. In any event, as Geoffrey Cornelius has cautioned, "We should be careful not to overestimate the value of explanatory models in astrology."⁴

If, as seems the case, most contemporary astrologers reject the crude materialism of "scientific" astrology, it is not apparent that our dominant sympathetic/harmony model is any more convincing to our critics. Its softer form of determinism glosses over many important issues which are raised by those of us concerned with astrology's epistemological status. Although cosmic harmony or

¹ In addition to the revival of traditional astrology, the last thirty years have witnessed the translation (and retranslation) of many historical sources and a growing body of academic literature dedicated to interpreting that material. Fortunately, much of this research is increasingly driven by individuals familiar with and well-disposed towards astrological assumptions and practices.

² The original drubbing was summarized by Geoffrey Dean and his cohorts in *Recent Advances in Natal Astrology: A Critical Review 1900-1976* (Analogic, Subiaco, Western Australia, 1977) and updated with the 2016 publication of *Tests of Astrology: A Critical Review of Hundreds of Studies*. See: wout.heukelom@hetnet.nl

³ See <http://www.thekeplerconference.com/kepler-conf-speakers>; <http://astrologynewsservice.com/>

⁴ *Moment of Astrology: Origins in Divination*, (The Wessex Astrologer, Bournemouth, 2003) p. 89

resonance may appeal to our spiritual sensibilities as practitioners, this model is also problematic for the greater project of finding a place for astrology within modern thought.

Western astrologers practice under an ever increasing number of schools: Ptolemaic, Hellenistic, Islamic, Medieval, Renaissance, or Modern in its many forms. What this diversity of approaches share is a dependence upon the idea of the astrologer as a neutral, non-participating observing ego making objective judgments about objective events. This stance of objectivity opens all schools equally to a critique which questions that fundamental assumption.

Indeed, this “observing ego” approach has been the model which astrologers have tended to uncritically accept or simply adopt without much thought. Divinatory astrology or “astrology as divination” is predicated on a participatory model of the cosmos. Astrologers who embrace divination are active participants, not objective bystanders in a process of selecting symbolic possibilities. This process of engaging in symbolic participation obliterates, or least makes less clear the line between subject and object, between astrologer and client. To grasp why this matters is to raise a few questions about our interpretations: How do they arise? Does their significance lie in objective or subjective realms? To whom are they addressed and why does that matter? For the divinatory astrologer, statistical studies and empirical evidence are replaced by rituals and practices which arise out of the unique, non-replicable moment. One of those practice assumptions of the divinatory approach concerns the essential difference between speculative and realised interpretations. As I have written elsewhere:

Every good astrologer knows that all readings begin in the speculative mode. If we are prepared, at some point in all worthwhile astrological encounters, something transpires between the astrologer and their client, which moves the astrologer into the realm of realised interpretations. As the astrologer Geoffrey Cornelius has written, “The idea of symbolic realisation should be clearly distinguished from a rational inference involving symbols.” In the latter, “so and so has Saturn conjunct the Moon, therefore I infer he will be a melancholic character.” Whereas in the former, “we sense the Saturn-Moon ‘as’ the man’s melancholy. Such recognition is a spontaneous phenomenon and it has an absolute and undeniable quality to it.”⁵ In other words, the reading catches fire and both people are gripped by a process which draws them into a mysterious realm, where the real work takes place. This is the realm of the imaginal, where the horoscope’s symbols speak; they have a valence---emotional, spiritual, and even physical—which has resonance for both the astrologer and the client. Both participants become implicated in the symbols and are moved by them.⁶

Maggie Hyde provides another way to appreciate the difference between participatory and non-participatory models of astrology in her discussion of Jung’s concept of synchronicity. Moving beyond the usual acceptance of this “explanation” for how astrology “works”, Hyde discovered a nagging ambiguity, which seemed to lie in the different ways it was invoked. At times, synchronicity described the connection between “the objectively observed psyche and objectively observed events”; this she dubbed Synchronicity I, which she likened to a non-participatory understanding of astrology. In Synchronicity II, as with the participatory or divinatory model, the synchronicity entails

⁵ *The Moment of Astrology, Op. cit.*, p. 293

⁶ In my book review of Rafael Nasser’s *Under One Sky*, I discuss the problematic assumption that twelve different ‘traditions’ may be usefully compared through blind “speculative” readings of the same woman’s horoscope. See: <http://www.skyscript.co.uk/revnasser.html>

“the subjective participation of the observing psyche (which) allows the realization of the Unus Mundus. You cannot stand outside looking in on the One World.”⁷

This second conception of the process of astrological interpretation accounts for the “odd” experiences all astrologers encounter of “wrong” charts working, as well as those times when the astrologer may find themselves implicated in the symbolism of someone else’s horoscope, which they are reading. Certainly, such phenomena would seem to undercut a strong causal model of astrology. For these reasons, divinatory astrology provides both an alternative mode of practice, as well as a basis for much of the critical thinking found on this website.

Site Overview

Collectively, the two site curators (Kirk and Garry) and the two site supporters (James and Patrick) have contributed to opening up this debate over the fundamental nature of astrology; several of our written contributions may be found herein. Broadly speaking, we think divinatory astrology offers the most coherent, though not the only model for horoscopic astrology. Much of the material we have posted reflects our desire to see its unique viewpoint more broadly disseminated and---more importantly---better understood. Other material has been posted because it offers contrasting views or because we believe it to be inherently important or historically relevant to this debate. This short guide solely reflects my thoughts on how the resources on this site may be used; obviously, readers are free to read what pleases them.

All of the authors have practiced astrology at some point; most of the articles written since 2000 are by individuals who have also engaged astrology as part of an academic pursuit, clearly one of the benefits of astrology’s return to the academy over the past fifteen years. The offerings on *Cosmocritic* range in scope from short journal articles to two multi-hundred page doctoral theses. Collectively, these pieces express a range of views, philosophical assumptions and beliefs about the nature of astrology. Not surprisingly, several of the pieces are at philosophical odds with each other. We make no attempt to reconcile those differences, however, I will note some of them in this guide. As curators, we both endorse the idea that experiencing the “dialogue” between and among the articles will encourage our readers to consider their own views.

Where to Begin?

Readers new to the debate over astrology’s epistemological status may find it helpful to read Garry Phillipson’s essay “**Modern Science, Epistemology and Astrology**” (2006). It is a useful primer on the key philosophical issues raised by the continued existence of astrology in contemporary society, one in which we astrologers are practicing in a cultural environment dominated by scientific materialism. Garry’s piece provides a guide for those who wish to understand the complex issues which undergird the arguments of the scientific case against astrology as well as those which may support a divinatory perspective. After surveying the essential conceptual ideas of the Cartesian/Realist position (that is, the philosophy underlying modern science) Garry examines whether the “new physics” of Heisenberg et. al. saves the day for a scientific explanation of astrology. Not surprisingly, for those who have followed the scientific testing of astrology, Phillipson makes it clear that a case for “Model 1: astrology as an empirical science” is “simply not viable as a complete explanation.” But what about Model 2: astrology as divination? This important essay builds on the work Garry did for his *Astrology in the Year Zero*⁸, especially in his lengthy engagement

⁷ *Jung and Astrology*, (The Aquarian Press, London, 1992) p. 128-9

⁸ (Flare Publications, London, 2000) For those unfamiliar with this text, it provides excerpts from lengthy interviews Garry conducted with thirty contemporary astrologers which are grouped around various themes:

with Geoffrey Dean and his cohorts, astrology's most prominent contemporary critics. We learn that Model 2 may be untestable, "which is not the same thing as saying it is untrue." That he starts his article with the empirical testing of astrology and closes with the Emerald Tablet of Hermes Trismegistus suggests the intellectual breadth of this piece. This essay pays rich dividends for those who follow his carefully constructed article. It also underscores the importance of understanding the challenge posed by divinatory astrology, which is where the reader should turn next.

Divinatory Astrology

By my reckoning, the chief merit of *Cosmocritic* is that it provides an unparalleled opportunity to access a variety of resources on divinatory astrology. Roughly half the articles take as their main focus an explicit advocacy of this model; moreover, some of the material is now quite obscure or difficult to access. Broadly speaking, some of the articles propose theoretical models (or variations on existing models), though some exemplify divination through practice. For those seeking to understand divination through practice, I would recommend starting with **Geoffrey Cornelius' "Is Astrology Divination and Does it Matter?" (1998)** as a succinct overview written by the person who is primarily responsible for this perspective's first modern formulation.⁹ Cornelius is best known as the author of *The Moment of Astrology: Origins in Divination* (1994, 2003).¹⁰ Readers looking to understand how Cornelius developed his views should turn next to his **"An Anti-Astrology Signature" (1978)** and move to his **"The Oslo Paper" (1982)** and **"Moment of Astrology" articles from 1983-86**. I have provided introductory essays to all of these contributions. Cornelius' **"Anti"** paper is truly a revolutionary document, which sought nothing less than to overturn one of the fundamental assumptions of western astrology: "an effect or a sign produced in a distinct moment of objective time relates the situation on earth and the state of the heavens at that moment."¹¹ Four years later, his **"Oslo"** paper laid out Cornelius' first tentative philosophical foray supporting his contention that astrology is best understood as a form of divination. Both the "Anti" and the "Oslo" articles lay the groundwork for his extended meditation on the state of modern astrology as embodied in the six **"Moment of Astrology"** articles published in *The Astrologers Quarterly* between 1983-1986; these eventually served as the basis for *The Moment of Astrology*.

John Addey's "Astrology as Divination" (1982) is a strikingly cogent critique of the divinatory perspective written by one of the UK's most prominent 20th century astrologers. An avowed Platonist, Addey was also a philosophical empiricist, who believed "efforts to ignore (the empirical element) not only impoverish astrological understanding—they divide astrologers from one another..."¹² His last published work, this article was not aimed at Cornelius per se. Although Addey

"Sun Sign Astrology", "Turning Stars into Money" and "Doubt in Astrology" are some of his intriguing chapter titles. It makes for compelling reading. Famously, (or for some astrologers infamously) his book also features interviews with Geoffrey Dean, Arthur Mather and three other "researchers" whose views provide a skeptical counterweight to many of the astrological notions served up at this dinner party; Dennis Elwell likened their inclusion to inviting Hannibal Lecter along for the feast! It is a seminal book which inaugurated astrology's first real engagement in modern times with its scientific critics. Significantly, it was published several years before astrology returned to the ivory tower of academia and has become a touchstone for several university courses.⁹ As I have explained in my introductory essay to the Oslo paper and the Moment series (found elsewhere on this website) there were important precursors to Cornelius' views, most notably those of Dane Rudhyar, who also rejected scientific and empirical models of astrology. Rudhyar, however, retained significant vestiges of the Ptolemaic model and nowhere in his writing did he use the word divination or invoke any of the ideas unique to Cornelius's divinatory model.

¹⁰ (Arkana/Penguin, London, 1994) and in a revised and expanded version (*The Wessex Astrologer*, Bournemouth, 2003). All further references are to the revised edition.

¹¹ *Moment*, op. cit., pp. 81-2

¹² Addey, in his Postscript, p. 43

did not name the object of his ire, he referred to “a rather pompous article” as the impetus to his own piece. He was no doubt referring to Gordon Watson’s “Astrology: A Spiritual Vehicle”, which had been published the previous fall in the *Astrologers Quarterly*. Watson was one of the key figures in the Astrological Lodge attracted to Cornelius’ heretical notions. In his piece, Addey takes square aim at horary astrology. The power of his critique is reflected in Cornelius’ eventual assertion that “it remains to the best of my knowledge the only substantial rebuttal that the current divinatory reinterpretation has so far drawn forth.”¹³

Addey’s essay raises significant concerns about astrology as divination. Fundamental to the divinatory perspective is a deep questioning of judicial astrology’s epistemological status as a science; in this there is nothing new. Whether the stars were signs or causes may be traced back at least to the Renaissance, if not further. During the 20th century, at several points, Dane Rudhyar expressed doubts about astrology’s scientific status; in his *Astrology of Personality* (1936) he asserted that “attempts at making astrology an exact empirical science by basing it on measurements of actual influences and rays are, if not doomed to failure, at least bound to explain or prove only a fragment of the entire body of ideas which constitutes and has always constituted astrology.”¹⁴ He rearticulated this stance in several of his books in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s.¹⁵ Still, this leaves open the question of how to best understand astrology. That is the challenge facing all of the authors whose work we host.

Maggie Hyde’s “The Judder Effect” (2001) should appeal to those who favor argument by demonstration. Her title suggests the spooky power that good astrological interpretation has on one’s belief systems; it is written in her unique and compelling style. Hyde’s article raises the important issue of public predictions and their effect (especially when accurate) on the public’s perceptions of astrology as an objective science making judgments about the world “out there”. Of course, Maggie’s gift for perceiving pertinent and radical symbolism is what creates the juddering effect on her readers.

To anyone seeking a more detailed discussion of Cornelius’s views, I will immodestly suggest they read my “**Defining the Moment: Geoffrey Cornelius and the Development of the Divinatory Perspective**” (2006). There is, however, no substitute for reading his *Moment of Astrology*, a work which merits serious study, along with Hyde’s *Jung and Astrology*.¹⁶ They remain, in my view, the two key Ur-texts to astrology as divination. Lest one think analyses such as mine are a recent phenomenon, I suggest they read **Patrick Curry’s** astutely critical assessment of the UK astrology ‘schools’ written as the battle lines were being drawn. His “**An Aporia for Astrology**” (1983) was published privately in May 1983 in *Radical Astrology: A Set of Discussion Papers: Astrology and Theory*, as one of six dense and scholarly papers put forth by this group. Easily the most readable of the bunch, it is the first modern intellectual taxonomy of modern astrological thought; he dubs Cornelius’ approach ‘Hermeneutic Astrology’, a very apt moniker. Even more, Curry’s philosophical analysis remains relevant, since two of the other schools he discerned: Psychological Astrology and Scientific Astrology continue to have their adherents. A revised version of his taxonomy may be

¹³ *Moment*, op. cit. p. 290

¹⁴ *The Astrology of Personality* (Lucis Publishing, New York, 1936) p. 45

¹⁵ See his *The Practice of Astrology*, (Penguin Books, New York, 1968) p. 11 and his *Person Centered Astrology*, (Aurora Press, 1976) p. 8

¹⁶ *Jung and Astrology*, (Aquarian/Thorsons, London, 1992)

found in his *Science, Astrology and Culture: Pulling Down the Moon*¹⁷, co-written with the anthropologist Roy Willis.

James Brockbank provides a brief, but insightful commentary on Curry's essay in his **"Different Ways to Characterize Astrology" (2016)**. He questions whether the divinatory astrology tag has become as watered down as previous "explanations" used by astrologers to justify their practices. He asks "Would one fall into the divinatory 'school' of astrology simply by believing that astrology is a form of divination?" In a short span, Brockbank raises a host of issues which will bedevil anyone looking for an easy way to classify astrological belief. For instance, can neo-Platonic theory support both divinatory beliefs and those who oppose the divinatory model? Apparently, yes. Lest one think this is a trick question, I would recommend they absorb James' views before tackling some of the other essays on this website.

Bernard Eccles' forward looking essay **"21st Century Astrology: Judgement without Consideration" (2015)** is more concerned with astrology's continuing cultural survival; it is filled with those fascinating and idiosyncratic insights typical of this author. If Eccles is correct: that the transition to a digital age constitutes a disaster for astrology, none of the concerns of this website will matter. In his pithy assessment, "Astrology is not digital, not exact. It is analogue." Yet, he speculates that astrology could revert to simple omen reading. This is the kind of essay that keeps us on our toes and should not be missed.

Whither Now?

From here, the reader may pivot in several directions. The philosophically curious have a number of options. Several of the authors (Brockbank, Greenbaum, Hand, Phillipson, Radermacher and Rudhyar) explicitly take up the philosophical issues raised by astrology's epistemological status in contemporary thought. Brockbank, Greenbaum, Phillipson and Radermacher all seem to broadly accept astrology as a form of divination; beyond that, each author provides other ways to think about what we are doing when we cast and interpret a horoscope. Rudhyar's article is an important precursor to the contemporary debate on divinatory astrology, whilst Hand's two part essay summarizes astrology's philosophical confusion as it seemed a quarter of a century ago. I will examine each of these author's contributions briefly.

Garry's "The Philosophy of William James as a Context for Astrology" builds on his **MSEA** piece by exploring how James' views on supernaturalism and mysticism provides another means to explore some of the epistemological and ontological issues which are raised by viewing astrology as a form of divination. James was a complex thinker, simultaneously drawn to a philosophy of pragmatism and yet very interested in psychic phenomena and the altered states of consciousness engendered by religious and mystical experiences. This essay explores how astrologers may find support in their world view from unlikely sources—James was no fan of astrology—a strategy Garry favors in much of his writing.

Dorian Greenbaum's "Arrows, Aiming and Divination: Astrology as a Stochastic Art" (2010) is a superb example of how historical scholarship in the hands of a supporter of the divinatory perspective yields profound insights into both ancient and modern practice. Dorian is an expert on the history of astrology from the Graeco-Roman and Late Antique periods; her mastery of ancient sources has enabled her to move past descriptions of past astrological beliefs and to examine how those beliefs affected practice. Here she examines the consequences for viewing astrology as a 'stochastic' (meaning to aim at, or conjecture) versus a 'productive' art, such as pottery making, with

¹⁷ (Berg, Oxford, 2004), see Chapter 6, pp. 65-76 for the revised taxonomy

an emphasis on fixed methods. Using the metaphor of archery (with a nod to Eugene Herrigel of *Zen and the Art of Archery* fame), Dorian demonstrates how astrology must combine technique with intuition to arrive at good results. Of course, good results are not guaranteed: in her view, the 'astrology as science' model treats astrology as a productive art, whereas the stochastic model maps nicely with astrology as divination. The subtlety of her argument requires a close reading to appreciate the significance of her accomplishment.

Dissertations Which Support Astrology as Divination

Currently, we host four lengthy papers, one Masters, one MPhil¹⁸ and two Doctoral theses, all the products of astrology's return to the academy. For this reason, horoscopes are few and far between; none address the actual practices of astrologers, but concern themselves with the philosophical underpinnings of modern astrology. Three of them address aspects of astrology as divination; the fourth explores astrology as a "vessel of chaosmos, a chaotic, sympathetic cosmology in western culture".

Lindsay Radermacher's "The Role of Dialogue in Astrological Divination" (2011) For practicing astrologers wondering whether divinatory astrology can find any common ground with psychological astrology, this may be the place to turn next. It is an accessible MPhil dissertation which places dialogue at the center of a matrix of ideas generated by Cornelius, Hyde, Martin Buber and the psychologist Robert Hobson. As a practicing astrologer with more than thirty-five years of experience, Radermacher has gift for combining "the two strands of theory and practice" which are richly interwoven throughout this study. She takes seriously the notion that divinatory astrologers are engaging in a dialogue with the divine, however that is construed or understood. Thus, her creative engagement of Buber's concept of "meeting the divine in another person" juxtaposed with Cornelius' divinatory hermeneutics provides a powerful means of perceiving the astrological consultation as something more than providing celestial advice. Her discussion of Buber's I/Thou and I/It templates of religious dialogue provides a helpful analogue for astrologers hoping to clarify their role with clients. Similarly, she adapts Robert Hobson's "Conversational Model" of psychotherapy as one suiting the dynamics of an astrological consultation.

Lindsay is a lucid writer who provides just the right amount of information to develop her major themes: astrology, divination, dialogue and meeting. Her grasp of these subjects is both subtle and nuanced. She is preoccupied with understanding the central role of symbol in our work. Her opening chapters on the function of the symbol should be read by all practicing astrologers. She uses a series of polarities: Subject/Object, Doing/Being, Action/Contemplation to illuminate the difference between signs and symbols and in the process suggest the potential power of astrological symbols in a dialogue with a client. Her discussion of the birth chart as a third member of any astrological encounter will ring true to anyone who has ever conducted an astrological reading. Yet her discussion of its active "presence" is a singular contribution to understanding the unique dynamics of the astrologer/client encounter. In her reading, the dialogue generated by that encounter occurs "in the space between" the astrologer and their client, between the astrologer and their cosmos". Lindsay's work provides a bridge for those astrologers who perceive horary astrology as the only means of expressing astrology as divination.

James Brockbank's "The Responsive Cosmos: An Enquiry into the Theoretical Foundations of Astrology" (2011) is written by a proponent of divinatory astrology, who asks the simple question:

¹⁸ For American readers, the MPhil is halfway between an MA and a PhD.

What type of cosmology would account for the possibility of astrology working?¹⁹ Certainly not the bloodless scientific cosmos of natural law developed since the 17th century by astronomers and physicists. Indeed, Brockbank rejects the notion that astrologers should be elbowing their way towards a place at the table of science: “After forty years of largely unsuccessful test work and within a secular culture a new approach is required.” (p. 94) Rather than settle for the scientific scraps of the few positive empirical tests for astrology, James starts with the phenomena experienced at some point by most practicing astrologers---“wrong charts; reflexive charts; reflexive clients; lack of repeatability” (p. 9)---and constructs a cosmos which accounts for such things.

Wielding Occam’s razor, Brockbank creates a model of disarming simplicity. His Responsive Cosmos has only three defining characteristics: “The first is that of a non-human agency; the second is that the non-human agency is benevolent; and the third is that the non-human agency is sufficiently interested in the minutia of human lives to offer signs or responses which can be interpreted to obtain guidance.” (p. 90) This apparent simplicity is achieved by the modesty of his cosmological goals: he is not attempting to explain the complexities of stellar dynamics or the multi-variant aspects of physical and human worlds, but simply wishes to identify those factors which account for the possibility of astrological divination. He has no interest in fitting divinatory astrology into the framework of modern science.

Rather than attempt to summarize the contents of this wide ranging thesis, I will focus on a segment of James’ discussion of “Divinatory astrology and the scientific researchers”. This is the title of Chapter Five (pp. 138-195), the longest, and arguably the most important chapter of his thesis. Here he addresses a fundamental epistemological divide between how astrologers and their scientific critics understand and explain astrological experience. For Brockbank, “The Responsive Cosmos is a concept created to account for astrological experiences but the experience of the astrologers and scientific evidence are two entirely different matters.” (p. 144) How each camp defines astrological experience is the essential factor.

By building on the work of Phillipson and Curry, Brockbank examines how the researchers define astrological experience.²⁰ In his discussion of the scientific testing of astrology, Brockbank nearly equates divinatory and horary astrology. He notes that the researchers begin by separating astrology into “an informative part and a ‘spiritual’ part, testing the informative part and leaving the ‘spiritual’ part as untestable.” (p. 155) They dismiss “the paradigmatic astrological enquiry...as a question in the form of ‘What should I do?’” and insist that “horary enquiries are not ‘what’ questions at all, and are much more concerned with ‘how’ matters.” (p.139) For Geoffrey Dean and his cohorts, the astrological experience is something that can be tested to see if the astrologer is able to correctly predict the outcome of the horary question. They would take issue with Cornelius’ contention “Horary is being used not to predict the outcome but to change it. It is an active role for astrology, not simply passively reporting like a celestial weather forecast.” (p. 140; from *Moment*, 2003, p. 146) Since astrology appears to lack empirical support, the researchers conclude that the

¹⁹ Of course, there is nothing simple about how we define ‘working’. A client may be satisfied with a horoscopic reading which is not true in any meaningful sense, yet it has provided them with a sense of well-being to think they are part of an ordered cosmos. It ‘works’ for them. The epistemological rub concerns the question whether astrology must be able to provide true knowledge in order to work. Setting aside philosophical definitions of truth, the astrologer must still grapple with the uncertainty which comes from rendering advice based on symbols on a paper or screen.

²⁰ Specifically, Phillipson’s *Astrology in the Year Zero* (op. cit.) and Curry’s chapter 8 in *Astrology, Science and Culture* (op. cit.)

claims of astrologers amount to nothing more than the subjective reports of satisfaction made by their clients. For them, astrology clearly isn't working.

This scientific attitude towards astrology has deep historical roots and Brockbank notes

The position of the scientific researcher is reminiscent of the approach that Cicero takes when...he does not accept that divination is an attempt to interpret the will of the gods and argues that divination, if it exists, should be accountable in terms of the senses, art or philosophy. This, however, only illustrates the unbridgeable gap between our thesis and the argument of the scientific researchers. We are discussing matters which should be placed in different categories. (pp. 155-6)

Brockbank is essentially accusing the researchers of making a category error when they denounce astrology for not being a proper science.

What category astrology falls into is a bit harder to define, but comes down to its capacity to provide "pertinent guidance to the matter at hand. This alternative understanding proposes that we replace a natural law with an experience." (p. 148) In other words, human agency and judgment are fundamental to the astrological experience. There are no astrological laws, only singular astrological judgments which speak to a person in need: "if my friend's marriage breakdown coincides with a Pluto transit of his Sun, he does not have an astrological experience unless an astrological judgment is made...this is quite different to the approach of the scientific researcher who considers that what matters is whether it can be shown, regardless of any awareness one might have of Pluto transits, that there is a correlation between Pluto transits of the Sun and marriage breakdowns." (pp. 150-151) Brockbank's *Responsive Cosmos* supports the divinatory view that in essence astrology is fundamentally participatory and stands outside the causal whirring of the planets, so aptly named as the "machine of destiny" by Cornelius.

The whole of this thesis is marked by the clarity and logical consistency of Brockbank's arguments, which admittedly arise from the very neat and self-contained cosmos he has defined at the outset. Once readers accept his premises, there is much enjoyment to be gained by seeing how he uses his *Responsive Cosmos* to critique other recent theories of astrology, including "Bricolage and language games"---Mike Harding's view (Chapter Eight), "Astrology as a new science"---Bernadette Brady's Chaos theory (Chapter Nine), Dennis Elwell's "correspondences" (Chapter Ten), Richard Tarnas' "Archetypal astrology" (Chapter Eleven), and both divinatory and non-divinatory variations of Neo Platonic astrology (Chapters Twelve and Thirteen). Cornelius has been described as embracing a broadly Neo Platonic view, whilst John Addey is an excellent example of a non-divinatory Neo Platonic astrologer. I will suggest that reading Addey's essay along with Chapter Thirteen would enable the reader to see the importance of Brockbank's discussion. One might say there is fun for the whole family of astrologers.

Alie Bird's "Astrology in Education: An Ethnography" (2006) is a fascinating anthropological study of "real" (i.e. non Sun-Sign) astrology and how it is taught and learned across a range of educational programs in the UK. Written during the early high tide of enthusiasm for academic astrology, Bird's piece is now something of a time capsule, at least as regards her references to Bath Spa University and the University of Kent's post graduate programs in the study of astrology, but no less compelling for that reason. Written by an "insider" from the perspective of an academic "outsider" (the emic/etic viewpoints in academic terminology) Alie spent a great deal of time immersed in various astrological educational programs, speaking to fellow students, conversing with course conveners and making many astute observations along the way. What makes her work important is best apprehended in her summary judgment: "It is noteworthy that astrologers themselves seldom

concur with outsiders' judgements of the epistemological nature of their practice and its products: this discrepancy invites a consideration of knowledge and belief, both in general and in specifically astrological usage; the appropriateness of the customary opposition of these terms to each other, and of their respective association with science and religion, are assessed."²¹ She covers a lot of ground---from her experiences with adult education, to the Faculty of Astrological Studies, to the Astrological Lodge of London, to her time with the Company of Astrologers, in a dissertation that is written with grace and clarity. Rather than summarize its broad contents, I will draw attention to her material on divinatory astrology.

The bulk of that material is found in Chapter Five "Astrology as a Divination System" (pp. 74-101) in which she places astrological divination in the broader context of "divination practices found the world over" by adopting the constructs the anthropologists Philip Peek and Barbara Tedlock. "Divination", she suggests "is an ascription generally bestowed by an external commentator upon a set of practices with multiple indigenous purposes, hazily arcane methodology and justifications which---on the theorist's side---defy empirical corroboration." (p. 75) If it sounds as if her description could apply equally well to the witch-bone oracles of the Azande as to the one-off horary maps of Cornelius, you have the right idea. Throughout her writing, Bird has an acute awareness that the kinds of theoretical description she is engaging are the province of a tiny number of astrologers, but her use of them is both enlightening and a great deal of fun to read. Regarding Cornelius' appropriation of the divinatory moniker, she has this to say: "certainly the association has now been politicized to the extent that to admit its validity is---in many people's minds---necessarily to nail one's colours to this single astrological mast, given the absence in the astrological world of any formal system of citation, debate, and interchange of ideas that would counteract the *ad hominem* nature of its inherited patterns of allegiance." That said, she adds "But this is not to deny that Cornelius makes a convincing case for astrology as divination. And, as one would expect from one of the astrological magi, he illustrates his argument with some inspiring horoscopy..." (p. 78)

Her section on "The Horoscope as an Intermediary Divinatory Device" (pp.83-92) usefully discusses the ritual aspects of astrological practice, where she contrasts what happens there to the practices of a Tarot card reader. In addition to perceiving astrology's greater symbolic potential, she is not above admitting "it makes life a whole lot more interesting for its students, too, as I know from my own experience...I was encouraged to look at the relationships between the horoscopes of the disc-jockey John Peel and his all-time favourite pop song, the Undertone's *Teenage Kicks*, as well as for charts of the BBC for whom he worked over many years." (p. 86) More seriously, she notes, "The difference between the two systems is qualitative, in line with their distinct styles: whereas the Tarot reader will be looking to create a (scalar) mood, the astrologer will be interested rather in focusing upon (directional or vectorial) motivation, to borrow two terms from Clifford Geertz's model of religion considered earlier." (p. 84) Such insights either speak to you, or they don't. What they undoubtedly do achieve is the elevation of astrological theories to something more than the pseudo-profound mumblings of charlatans. I would suggest that the material in this section may be profitably set alongside Lindsay Radermacher's idea of the horoscope as an active presence in the astrological consultation.

Bernadette Brady's "Can astrology be viewed as an expression of chaosmos and is this the same phenomena currently being described by Chaos and Complexity theories?" (2004) was her Master's Thesis at Bath Spa University College; it became the basis for her 2006 book *Astrology: A*

²¹ Astrology in Education: An Ethnography Alison Gwendy Bird, D Phil, University of Sussex September 2006, Summary, no page number

Place in Chaos, which was revised and expanded for her 2014 book *Cosmos, Chaosmos and Astrology*. Chaos has been described along with relativity and quantum mechanics as the “twentieth century’s third great revolution in the physical sciences.”²² It offers a way of seeing order and pattern in seemingly random, erratic systems—say cloud formation or foam patterns at the bottom of a churning waterfall. Whereas relativity theory’s chief concern is “the universe at large”, and quantum theory “has to do with events in the realm of the very small, the subatomic world”²³, chaos theory concerns itself with deciphering patterns in everyday phenomena which we can see and touch. Ms. Brady asks whether astrology—another “theory” which detects pattern where others see only randomness—can profit from comparing itself with chaos and its accompanying complexity theories. Her essay is an exercise in lateral thinking, which contains some interesting theorizing and speculations.

Brady’s thesis is organized into three sections. The first section builds a case for the presence of chaos and cosmos as historical principles which manifest during certain historical periods. She links Mesopotamian creation myths with the chaos principle, because they “reveal a world perceived as an interlinked web of relationships and patterns, signs and events, symbols and corresponding implications.” (p. 10) Since astrology’s historical origins lie in this region, she argues its “genesis was formed when the world view was supporting a chaotic, sympathetic chaosmos.” (p. 12) The cosmic principle arises with the development of Western philosophy—especially Platonic philosophy, thus providing a historical counterpoint which manifests as Order. Over time, we arrive at what Brady terms “the domination of cosmic thinking”. (p. 22) This dominance becomes apparent during the 17th century, as seen most directly in the work of Johannes Kepler.

The second section of her thesis provides an overview of chaos theory and a description of complexity science, including a discussion of fractals, bifurcations and how “change comes into a living system”. For those who have no familiarity with these theories, she provides a useful guide, including a glossary of technical terms.

Astrology per se does not make its appearance until the third section, where the reader is introduced to “Phase Portraits and Horoscopes”. This is Brady’s overt attempt to link complexity science and astrology. Intriguingly, what both astrology and complexity theory hold in common is the importance of beginnings. For astrologers, that manifests as a preoccupation with their central artefact, the horoscope. For chaos theoreticians, the concept of SDIC: Sensitive Dependence on Initial Conditions—small changes at the beginning lead to greatly different results—is a key factor in a phase portrait, which is a dynamic picture of an entire system. Brady argues that the horoscope of astrology is an ancient attempt at a phase portrait.²⁴ “It contains planetary patterns which act as attractors (an organizing principle in chaos theory) and, as suggested by the work of Greene, Leo and Rudhyar, astrologers attempt to read the quality of the ‘system’ from their maps.”²⁵ (p. 59) Putting

²² James Gleick, *Chaos: Making a New Science*, (Penguin Books, New York, 1987) p. 6

²³ Stuart Holroyd *The Arkana Dictionary of New Perspectives*, (Penguin, London, 1989) p. 64

²⁴ Though she doesn’t mention it, an astrological version of the SDIC principle may be seen in the first century AD astrologer Nigidius Figulus’ explanation for the different fates of twins in his potter’s wheel analogy: while the wheel was spinning vigorously, “he struck it twice with ink very quickly indeed in what he intended to be a single place. Then as the movement began to stop, the marks he had contrived were found quite a distance apart on the very edge of the wheel. ‘There you are!’ he said. See P. G. Stuart’s *Astrology: From Ancient Babylon to the Present*, (Amberly, Stroud, 2010) p. 28

²⁵ Here Brady is referring to the well-known contemporary “Jungian” astrologer Liz Greene (1946-Present); the early 20th century English astrologer, Alan Leo (1860-1917); and the 20th century American astrologer Dane Rudhyar (1895-1985), all ‘serious’ astrologers whose work in their day attracted wide attention. All continue to have their adherents.

astrology on a par with chaos science, she adds: “Just as chaoticians are creating a bifurcation encyclopedia astrologers also provides a corpus focused on this subject which any recognized works on predictive astrology will reflect.” (p. 62)

Brady’s thesis, the opening salvo in her long running attempt to re-establish astrology on a scientific basis by hitching its wagon to Chaos and Complexity theories, provides an intriguing counterpoint to the divinatory project. In her 2006 book, she describes astrology as a system which is able “to reserve its mystery and wonder through a form of divination, or pattern reading but without the causal gods.”²⁶ The interested reader may wish to read a critique of her views from a divinatory perspective contained in James Brockbank’s thesis on pages 233-238. As a teaser, consider this. Arguing from the standpoint of what he dubs a Responsive Cosmos, Brockbank thinks Brady’s “attempt fails because her theory cannot tell us why an astrological chart should have any relevance for a life or entity on earth. If in a world of chaos astrology does not yield to statistical methods there is no reason to assume it is relevant to our lives.” (pp. 235-6)

Divinatory Precursors and Non Divinatory Astrology

The publication of *The Moment of Astrology* in 1994 provides an important reference point for understanding the material we have posted. With the exception of Curry’s **Aporia** and Addey’s **Divination**, both of which addressed themselves to Cornelius’s work, the four pre-*Moment* contributions by Dane Rudhyar (1961), Rob Hand (1989), David Hamblin (1990) and Alexander Ruperti (1994) suggest different levels of dissatisfaction with astrology’s reigning paradigm at the time they were written. They serve as significant precursors to the material which has been produced since 2003—the date at which astrology returned to the academy. Rudhyar’s “**How Can Astrology’s Claims Be Proven Valid?**” (1961) and Alexander Ruperti’s “**The Meaning of Humanistic Astrology**” (1994) were written by two of the chief exponents of what came to be called Humanistic Astrology. Rudhyar hoped to align his “Person-Centered” astrology with the Humanistic Psychology of Abraham Maslow, essentially its spiritual cousin.²⁷ Analogous to how Maslow distinguished his psychology from the psychic determinism of Freud and B. F. Skinner’s Behaviorism, in the late 1960’s, Rudhyar and Ruperti were attempting to distinguish their views from what they perceived as the unexamined stellar determinism of the mainstream western tradition. Their thoughtful objections to the astrological scientism of their day is well expressed in these two essays. Certainly, their views are consonant with the divinatory perspective, however, they retain vestiges of more traditional approaches to astrology. Cornelius has acknowledged the influence that Rudhyar’s writing had on his views.

David Hamblin’s “**Astrology as Religion**” (1990), expresses a profound loss of confidence in the scientific model of astrology---something which had apparently bolstered his personal belief in astrology---to such a degree that he stopped practicing. Hamblin’s temporary²⁸ departure from the field exemplifies the difficulties astrologers experience operating in a metaphysically inhospitable environment. In this regard, Hamblin, best known for his writing on harmonics in astrology makes an interesting comparison with John Addey, the chief theorist for harmonics until his death in 1982.

²⁶ *Astrology: A Place in Chaos*, (Wessex Astrologer, Bournemouth, 2006) from the foreword.

²⁷ Rudhyar founded the International Committee for Humanistic Astrology on February 26, 1969 because he sensed that “many individuals, especially the younger generations, while fascinated with astrology, actually were asking for something that the ‘scientific’ analytic approach could not give them.” See his *Person Centered Astrology*, (Aurora Press, New York, 1976) p. 8

²⁸ He seems to have returned to the fray, but perhaps less as an astrologer than a number symbolist.

Addey stoically retained an allegiance to the scientific project of astrology, though certainly one guided by Platonic notions of Truth.

If anyone embodied the psychic split it means to be an astrologer in contemporary society, it must be the late Victor Mansfield. See his **“An Astrophysicist’s Sympathetic and Critical View of Astrology” (1997)**. A physicist by training and an astrologer by avocation, Mansfield was pained by the ignorant remarks made by both his scientific and astrological colleagues. He certainly understood the naivety of much astrological research, but he was also moved by astrological symbolism and could not accept the blithe rejection of astrology by his scientific friends. Taking a page from fellow physicist and friend of Jung, Wolfgang Pauli, Mansfield sought reconciliation in the Jungian principle of synchronicity. Whether you find this satisfying may depend in part on how you would square Mansfield’s approach with Maggie Hyde’s more nuanced understanding of the two-sided nature of synchronicity: the first of which appears to have a more “scientific” basis; the second seems to be rooted in divination.²⁹ Still, Mansfield’s heartfelt appeal to develop what he termed a “Theoretical Astrology” acknowledges what he correctly saw as a void in the field.

By contrast, **Robert Hand’s “The Proper Relationship of Astrology and Science” (1989-90)** represents a clear, if less terse assessment of astrology’s epistemological status a quarter of a century ago by one of our field’s leading thinkers. It is a testimony to the rich dialogue generated by astrology’s return to the academy that Hand’s piece now seems quite dated. To be fair, Hand’s views may have evolved since then, however, he has never openly embraced astrology as divination. This lengthy lecture was published over two issues of the *Astrological Journal*. It contains much talk (yes, this was the Carter Lecture) of reality systems and metaphysical assumptions about the universe; including “divinatory metaphysics” (see p. 311) which he loosely connects with chaos theory. This intriguing insight predates Bernadette Brady’s work by over a decade.³⁰ At this point in his career, Hand seems more partial to particle physics; naturally Heisenberg is invoked, but Hand asserts “we astrologers are a bit further along than even the followers of Heisenberg would want to go... (Since)...one cannot separate the observer from the observed because the two are a single continuous field.” (p. 314) In an aside, the reader gets a window into Hand’s early 90’s practice assumptions, when he reveals that he retains the right to cancel a consultation if “the birth data do not correlate reasonably with events”. This strongly suggests Hand has decided views on accurate birth times as being definitive determinants of useful readings. A couple of pages later, he acknowledges that “we have to agree that convincing readings of the wrong birth data are a real phenomenon.” (p. 315) Whether he had read any of Cornelius’ work at this juncture is not clear, however, Hand realizes that “wrong” charts working certainly pose a problem of a strictly causal form of astrology.

Part II continues in a similar vein, starting with his (yet unfulfilled) promise to someday write a book entitled “The Metaphysical Foundations of Astrology”. A few pages later, he insists “We also need to do scientific research. Why? Not to prove astrology, but because only by experimenting with experimentation itself, can we find out how to experiment.” (p. 98) Later, he informs us that “We need to create a new discipline from nothing.” By that, I assume he means we need to develop a new empirical basis for astrology, but he doesn’t quite say that. If so, this thought would be very consonant with Addey’s notion (and would echo Kepler) that astrologers need to clean out the Augean Stables and start over with solid research. Certainly it is antithetical to Cornelius’s “unique

²⁹ See her *Jung and Astrology*, op. cit., pp. 128-33; 164-71

³⁰ Though she does not reference him, Brady also makes the connection between chaos theory and divination, though in her case, it is “divination without the gods”. (*Astrology: A Place in Chaos*, op. cit.) Her stance, like Hand’s implies a metaphysical position.

case” formulation, which make the statistical testing of astrology an absurd exercise when it comes to judicial astrology. Perhaps the most relevant section is Hand’s plea for astrologers to become more familiar with their history, one area that has borne fruit since he published this piece. Hand concludes with this surprising thought, that astrology is “a branch of magick.” While this view is not that far removed from Cornelius’ formulation (see his Anti-Astrology” paper), it remains philosophically at odds with the rest of what Hand has to say.

Bon Voyage!

I wish you a pleasant journey as you navigate the site. Please note that a few articles have been added to the site as I was completing this essay; the interested reader will find a chronological list of recent additions on the front page. As curators, Garry and I welcome suggestions. Please let us know what you found useful and not so useful – you can email us at info@cosmocritic.com.

Kirk Little, November 15, 2016