

THINKING MAGICALLY AND CRITICALLY:

Contemporary Astrology and Divination

"The seeds of future events are carried within ourselves. They are implicit in us and unfold according to the laws of their own nature." -- Lawrence Durrell, *The Alexandria Quartet: Cleo*



Today more and more people are using astrology to understand themselves and their relationships. They want to maximize their potential and realize their goals, but most importantly, they want to know what is going to happen to them and when. To what degree can astrology address these natural concerns?

There is still no coherent answer to the question of how astrology 'works', but the solar system itself is an ideal metaphor for the ever-changing interactions among people. If I can have a relationship with another person, why can't a planet have a relationship with another planet? If Gaia is considered to be an organic entity, then why not Mars or Saturn? People form systems of small collectives, constellating around an idea, a family, a cause -- always in motion, always in flux. Similarly planets are also constellating around a focus -- the sun. They too are in constant motion, changing their relationships relative to some fixed point -- such as the backdrop of fixed stars (as seen from our Earth perspective) or the zodiac -- and to each other.

The word 'horoscope' comes from the Greek horoskopos, whose roots mean 'looking at the hour'. To divine or predict an outcome requires a beginning, an origin. Ancient astrology had such a concept, which still prevails: the katarche. Katarche is a Greek word which, loosely translated, means an auspicious moment or beginning. It is from the origin of anything that its behavior and outcome can be predicted. Every second is a new beginning, and inherent in that beginning lies its pattern of maturity and fruition.

A horoscope is a fixed frame of spatial and temporal experience. It is a starting-point from which a systematic and predictable set of planetary movements can be plotted. For example, if a planet is a 1 degree Leo, we know it will be at 2 degrees Leo at a specific time in the future. If it is the moon's motion we are considering, it would be at 2 degrees Leo in a couple of hours; if the sun, in the next 24 hours; if Mars, then in a few days; if Jupiter, in a about 10 days; and so on.

We can also predict when the planet will return to the same point in the future. The moon will return to the same point every 27-1/2 days; Mars, every two years and two months; Jupiter, every 12 years and a few days; and so on out to the furthest known planet, Pluto, which returns to the same zodiacal degree every 245 years! On the other hand, since each planet has its own unique return period, the odds of two or more planets repeating an exact pattern are not great. Moreover the vast number of variables in this intricate planetary system means that the entire pattern in the sky never repeats itself exactly.

The planetary system is reflected in the individual psyche. Compartmentalizing the psyche, we can speak of the unconscious, the shadow, the imagination, the anger function, eros, archetypes, and so on. Just as

the solar system as a whole never reproduces the same pattern twice, no individual returns to exactly the same point again in his or her own life. The components remain the same; their arrangement is infinitely changing.

The most important point to understand about natal or horoscope astrology is that it is a system unto itself; thus it is verifiable only within its own context. We can certainly predict -- to within seconds of arc -- when a planet will be in a particular place in the sky. But are we able to predict exactly what will occur because of that position? The element of divination in astrology lies in the elusive quality of a moment in time. The mechanics are intricate and the magic is implicit. An astrologer employs both the magical and critical mind in his or her work.

Good professional astrologers are somewhat easier to find these days than they once were. Inquiry, word of mouth, and recommendation will help you find one. There are few rigorous standardized qualifications for astrologers, and even if there were, they would guarantee only technical competence rather than the quality of their advice.

Because astrology is still in the realm of caveat emptor, it is important to make sure you feel comfortable with the astrologer's reputation, background and manner in both astrology and counseling. Now there are several schools of astrology; some are run by individual astrologers, though a few have a faculty of experts attached to them. Some of these schools involve astrologers who have published books establishing their credentials in the field.

Many of the 'older' astrologers (those 45 and older) are brilliant autodidacts but have no published works to serve as credentials, even though they have founded their own schools of thought and study. The grandfather clause should apply here. Nor does publication always guarantee that a particular astrologer will be a good counselor. As with physicians, psychotherapists, lawyers, or indeed with any professional, you will need to find one who suits your needs and temperament.

Prediction and Divination

The branch of astrology that perhaps most resembles divination is horary astrology. It is based on the premise that the answer is implicit in the question. A client can ask such questions as "Will I get the job?"; "Will the deal go through?"; "Is the house I am considering buying the right one for me?"; "Will the trip be successful?" The astrologer then casts a horoscope for the precise moment the question was asked and interprets for an outcome. In this way a good horary practitioner can produce remarkably accurate results.

A close relative of horary astrology is electional astrology, where the astrologer elects a time for beginning anything -- such as a project, a marriage, or a journey. This is a way of making one's life agree with the heavens, a means of aligning oneself with the cosmos by selecting the best positions of the planets for the venture.

Some astrologers feel that when clients ask for prediction or timing of an event, they are somehow reverting to Stoic fatalism or, through some weakness, are seeking answers 'outside' themselves. But ultimately a chart is not about externals. The planets don't "do" anything to a person; rather their relationship with an individual's past, present and future represents a natural affinity between inner and outer worlds. Predictive work can be helpful in encouraging a person to examine his or her strengths and

motives when facing serious life challenges or standing at a crossroads.

On the basis of an individual's personal history, experience, and potentials (including past responses to astrological cycles), a sensitive and experienced counseling astrologer can predict how trends in the future will unfold. For example, if we are looking at a Saturn transit now, we look back to previous Saturn transits to see what their history has been in that person's life, thus determining their future effects. Transits refer to how the positions of planets in the sky at a given time relate to the planets in the natal horoscope; for example, if at present Jupiter happens to be at the same degree of the same sign as the sun in your natal chart, Jupiter is said to be transiting your natal sun.

Using traditional methods, the astrologer can assess how the client will manifest the action symbolized in the horoscope; in this case a Jupiter-sun transit would have to do with how Jupiter, classically the planet of growth and expansion, relates to one's sun, the essence or core of one's being. There are many finely calibrated predictive techniques, literally hundreds in the history of astrology. Some of the more recent ones include secondary progressions, solar arc directions, and midpoint structures.

One predictive psychological tool involves comparing charts of people in a relationship. Once the horoscopes of the two individuals are compared, they are then blended to create a third chart called a composite. The composite chart is the meeting point of the two individuals' charts, creating a unique picture of the relationship as a living, breathing third entity with its own intent, personality, needs and demands.

The alchemy of this mysterious meeting of two psyches is reflected perfectly in the composite. Not only does it illuminate the relationship, but understanding it can also reduce the stress on each person to fill all the partner's needs. The composite is alive, and by looking at its aspects and transits we see what the relationship is undergoing and how each individual might respond to its needs. Couples find this work exceptional for understanding what they are undergoing and what they are likely to encounter in the future of their relationship as it evolves.

On Being Made of Our Future

As Durrell says in his quote at the beginning of this article, the seeds of our future lie implicit in ourselves. And implicit in the natal chart is the seed of that person's future, which the transits explicate and constellate.

As was said earlier, the natal horoscope is a map of the planets at a fixed time and location, while transits reflect the planets as we see them now, in current time. Transiting planets are an extension of the natal chart. As soon as a person is born, the planets begin to move away from their natal placements, providing an external measurement of growth and development. Just as the infant, cut from the umbilicus, begins its physical and psychological existence separate from the mother, after birth the planets 'separate' from the natal horoscope and begin to synchronously harmonize with the infant's experience of its new external world.

We are made up as much of our futures as we are of our pasts. We are drawn on toward what is normally considered an unknown future -- even though it is not completely unknown at all! Often what is going to happen is cryptically evident. The future is enciphered in planetary symbolism; deciphering and rendering

it in plain language is the work of astrology. We can see the transiting planetary positions for specific dates weeks, years, decades ahead. An astrologer may see that in two years' time a configuration of one or several aspects in the heavens will be in intimate relationship with natal planets in a horoscope. From this knowledge he or she can articulate the quality and character of the time.

The soul knows this as well; it knows what it is to become. Rather like an orange pip knows it is to become an orange tree and not a grapefruit tree, so does the soul grasp its own destiny. We are always in a state of becoming, of individuation, and astrology is in many ways the best method of divining what is constellating on the horizon and how to get there. The astrologer can lead an individual to the edge of perception, showing him or her that which was imperceptible before.

Although coming transits don't force action, we are impelled forward by what lies ahead. It is rather like looking forward to a journey or a special event. We unconsciously prepare for the advent of an experience. Everyone has a story about how they "knew" something would happen, and retrospect has often shown how we have unconsciously prepared for a moment in time, whether of opportunity, completion, or even tragedy.

This 'knowing' is not supernatural, but reveals a deep affinity between nature and the instinctual self. Choice and volition are clearly present in an individual's life, but my experience also suggests that fate -- that which is written in the stars, spun, woven, and cut by the Moirai -- is also profoundly apparent. People do find themselves in situations which are destined. This is where the horoscope as an analytical and predictive tool is at its best: it can help one work through the timing and process of breaking through periods of prolonged stress or misery.

Prediction in Practice

The horoscope does not always relinquish the information we seek. It does not show what will happen, but what is probable. If we are living in accord with what is truly innate in us, what is probable will happen whether we like it or not. There are individuals who are more "on" than others, whose transits, progressions, and directions are in perfect sync with their spontaneous self-direction. A human being is not a clock, however, and changes in one's life do not always tick off as the transits occur.

When predicted probability for change, growth or movement forward is not being activated in people's lives, I have very often seen organic or psychic resistance to transformation. If they have become so isolated from their innate character that they are not "living their life". this "stuck" experience shows in the horoscope through a prolonged series of hard aspects which are at cross-purposes. This state of psychic conflict can result in a long stage of liminal transition. This experience is not always negative; such times of apparently frozen will and liminality can be a gestation period for new growth, and lingering on the threshold can mature the process of change.

On the other hand, there are times when depression or stuckness is a result of suppressing one's nature, when a person is ignoring an urgent message from the deep inner self. The suppressed urge will come out in the end, erupting into the environment as 'fate' or as an event that forces change.

Human delay is to be respected as natural and as part of the soul's own timing. But if an individual is living in denial, is chronically depressed, or is under the regular influence of a substance that interferes with the

communication between the unconscious and the conscious, it can be more difficult to make a correct forecast for that person. Here the individual is not being drawn forward by his or her future, but is resisting a natural unfolding. Opportunities for change may then go underground to await another time to emerge. The opportunity for renewed emergence will never arise in the same way, for the planets and the psyche will be differently arrayed.

The most undesirable outcome from delaying is that the creativity and spontaneity of the person might wither. This inhibition of natural growth can be a result of too many shocks, tragedies, and losses, especially if they are sequential, with little time to recover, process and absorb. This can lead to cumulative stress, creating a crisis both in soul and body. At such points depression or anxiety can be too profound a barrier between the intent of the unconscious and the conscious ability to enact the soul's need. Even at such times, though, the horoscope can show how to move through these difficulties and, more importantly, can indicate when the process is likely to complete its cycle. Timing for turning points is predictable, and discussing them can help shift the blockage.

Cultural issues also can obstruct people from fulfilling their deep inner needs. For instance, an Asian client of mine living in America is intellectually Western but viscerally Asian. He wanted to be divorced and live freely, but could not do so because his wife would lose face: she too is a professional, still living in their country of origin. They have lived apart for nine years, and he wanted me to tell him what to do.

His horoscope depicted a situation in which a decision needed to be taken; his soul, if it hadn't been constricted by his deep cultural ethic, would have divorced and carried on a Western life. I could only empathize with him, saying that fate had brought him to this crux, and that the choice was his. We could work to understand it more fully, and help loosen his resistance, but ultimately it was for him to decide. But he couldn't take the step of divorcing his wife and now lives with the knowledge that he has a special path of being posed between Self and culture. Their daughter, who lives with him in America attending university, will most likely be the one who is free to embody East and West; in her the twain shall meet.

In an even larger framework, when entire cultures are in the chaos of change, individual volition is diminished, swallowed by the collective. The individual becomes either voice or victim of the collective -- or both. Having done many horoscopes for culturally disenfranchised people, most recently those who had come to London from Bosnia, I found that their charts exemplified what their culture was undergoing. The transits in their charts expressly reflected individuals whose lives were entwined in a collective experience.

Prediction and Ethics

In predictive work, the consideration of ethics is paramount. For example, gratuitous predictions of death are flatly unethical. Death is so personal, mysterious, and usually so anxiety-producing that only the most self-realized individual can consciously know the time of his or her death and respond to it with any dignity or purpose. To state that an individual will die a 'violent death' or suffer 'death by drowning' or to postulate a time, as some astrologers have done, is violating a sacred, natural ethic. Moreover prediction of death in almost all cases is borderline.

Even so there are times when discussion of death is both helpful and healthy. I spent much time with a colleague who was dying of AIDS looking at the possible times in which he might become weakened. We both knew astrology exceptionally well, we both knew the illness, we were very close, and it was practical

to look at timing for trips to make and work to be done. The process also formed part of his spiritual preparation for death. The day of his death, when it came, was marked by astrological aspects that confirmed the spiritual 'correctness' of his passing at that time.

On occasion, I have consulted with a client about a death that has already happened. One woman found it incredibly profound to see the timing of her 21-year-old daughter's sudden death and to experience it in an astrological framework. It was part of her healing, assisting her in the grief process by helping her to see its larger meaning. Another family lost its father to a lingering topical illness; the survivors consulted about the effect it would have on each child individually so as to personalize the grief process and understand its long-term effects on their own lives.

The attempt to justify astrology through classical scientific methodology has resulted in unsuccessful attempts to isolate certain characteristics that cannot be quantified in this way. One cannot determine homosexuality from a horoscope; there are too many ways for sexuality to be expressed. I.Q. is not astrologically quantifiable, though mental quality and affinities are. Nor can evil be measured astrologically. In a television program aired last year, an astrologer claimed it was "inevitable" that O.J. Simpson would murder Nicole. This is patently impossible. There are many kinds of evil, none of which are located in astrological quanta. Evil, like death, sex, and other mysteries, comes in all shapes. Every sign, every planet, and thus every person has a shadow side.

Various kinds of illnesses have been said to be astrologically indicated. Is this true? Yes and non. Bipolar syndrome (manic-depression) can show up as a Jupiter-Saturn aspect; diabetes is reflected in the symbolism of Jupiter-Venus; depression or melancholy is a characteristic of Saturn; attention-deficit disorder may be a Mercury-Uranus theme; erotomania may have to do with Mars, Pluto and Venus. In this way, we might find themes, but we don't find absolutes.

One profound tool for astrological divination that remains to be mentioned is Astro*Carto*Graphy. An Astro*Carto*Graphy chart is made on a world map. Using an individual's birth data, it shows what planetary influences are strongest in particular parts of the world for that person. Though, as the saying goes, "no matter wher you go, there you are", it is also true that different aspects of the psyche are activated by certain locations. Someone may find, for example, that on a Mercury line in his or her Astro*Carto*Graphy chart, concerns with intellect, communications and wit predominate, while love, sexuality and esthetics occupy center stage on a Venus line.

We all know that travel changes perspective and awakens sleeping characteristics. So can moving to another part of the world; this is why Astro*Carto*Graphy is exceptional in helping one decide where to relocate. I have used it to advise companies where to open franchies or new branches, where to import from and export to. It is also unique in highlighting certain aspects of relationships: more often than not, someone close to us, friend or lover, was born on a significant line on our Astro*Carto*Graphy map, and they on one of ours.

In the right hands, astrology offers an elegant illumination of the human condition, enabling the practitioner to tease our innumerable issues in a client's life and give direction for the future. There may be nothing new under the sun, but the way we perceive things is always new -- and this is the greatest asset astrological counsel can offer.

