



Postgraduate/Distance Learning Assignment coversheet & feedback form

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For completion by the student:

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support needs:
Yes/**No**

Assignment title: A Critical Comparison of Two JSTOR Papers.

Assignment due date: 11/12/18

This assignment is for the **1st** **2nd** **3rd** **4th** **5th** **6th** module of the
degree

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Signed Emily Robinson.....

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This essay critically compares and contrasts two JSTOR papers, using the search terms ‘Astrology’ and ‘Culture.’ The two papers chosen are of Dorothea McEwan, ‘Aby Warburg’s (1866-1929) Dots and Lines. Mapping the Diffusion of Astrological Motifs in Art History,’ *German Studies Review*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (May, 2006), pp. 243-268, and of Sarah K. Rich, ‘Francois Dallegret’s Astrological Automobiles: Occult Commodities for France in the 1960s,’ *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (2008), pp. 29-49. Astrology, as defined by Patrick Curry, is ‘the practice of relating the heavenly bodies on earth, and the tradition that has thus been generated.’¹ Terry Eagleton defines culture as ‘the taken-for-granted beliefs and predilections which must be dimly present for us to be able to act at all.’² This paper will consider these two terms via the themes of the separation of astrology’s understanding from its practice, astrology’s cultural association with trade and commodity culture, and class.

The first theme that is central to McEwan and Rich’s papers is the separation of astrology’s practice from the understanding of astrology. The papers’ subjects, Aby Warburg (1866-1929) and Francois Dallegret (1937-), both utilized the imagery of astrology in the works that McEwan and Rich focus on. McEwan’s subject, Warburg, was a German art historian known for founding a library of cultural studies (Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg) and influencing cultural theorists Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) and Theodor Adorno (1903-1969), as evidenced in contemporary scholarship, such as Anthony Grafton’s paper ‘Starry Messengers: Recent Work in the History of Western Astrology’, which connects Warburg’s work with Adorno’s later critiques of astrology.³ McEwan, the first archivist at the Warburg Institute, focuses on Warburg’s unfinished *Mnemosyne Atlas* (1929), a collection of astrological images meant to show the diffusion of these motifs over time (from the Classical era to the Renaissance) and space (from Eurasia to Western Europe), which Warburg mapped using dots and lines. Astrological images are defined in Warburg’s *Atlas* as any artistic or decorative representation of astrological symbols and their associated myths⁴. McEwan noted that Warburg aimed for the *Atlas* to be ‘an artery along which ideas coursed, semi-hidden, but vital for the health of the organism,’ which speaks to Eagleton’s definition of culture: both obscured, yet vital for action.⁵ Rich’s paper focuses on French Situationist Dallegret’s 1962 exhibition at the Iris Clert gallery of twelve automobile designs correlating with each of the twelve astrological signs, mimicking a car show and displaying the designs as a blueprint, in a promise of future reproduction.⁶ Guy

¹ Patrick Curry, ‘Astrology’, in Boyd, Kelly (ed.) *The Encyclopaedia of Historians and Historical Writing*, London: Fitzroy Dearborn (1999), Vol. 1, pp. 55-7 (p. 55)

² Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture*, Oxford: Blackwell (2000), pp. 1-31 (p. 28)

³ Anthony Grafton, ‘Starry Messengers: Recent Work in the History of Western Astrology,’ *Perspectives on Science*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (2000), pp. 70-83

⁴ Dorothea McEwan, ‘Aby Warburg’s (1866-1929) Dots and Lines. Mapping the Diffusion of Astrological Motifs in Art History,’ *German Studies Review*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (May, 2006), pp. 243-268 (p. 245)

⁵ McEwan, ‘Dots and Lines,’ pp. 243-268 (P. 251)

⁶ Sarah K. Rich, ‘Francois Dallegret’s Astrological Automobiles: Occult Commodities for France in the 1960s,’ *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (2008), pp. 29-49 (p. 29)

Debord (1931-1994), founder of the Situationist International movement, defined the Situationists as an 'autonomous organization of the producers of the new culture, independent of the political and union organizations which currently exist.'⁷ Though astrology was, according to Rich, Dallegret's 'chief organizing principle' and the subject of Warburg's *Atlas*, neither engaged with the 'practice' that Curry's definition of astrology provides⁸. McEwan points to Warburg's well-recorded skepticism of astrological practice, noting his interest in astrology as 'a block to enlightenment' that the 'good European' must fight.⁹ This is echoed in current scholarship; in her 2012 dissertation, Jennifer Zahrt claims that Warburg's image-based approach separated him from 'the interpretational nuances at work in other forms of astrological practice.'¹⁰ McEwan's paper, in conversation with her contemporary academic writings and being cited in Zahrt's dissection, is directed toward an academic audience. Rich introduces her piece with quotations from Theodor Adorno's 'Stars Down to Earth' and Roland Barthes' (1915-1980) 'Astrology'; Adorno claimed socioeconomic status to be the true subject of astrology, while Barthes claimed it to be the 'literature of the petit bourgeoisie.'¹¹ Rich structures her argument by utilizing relevant critiques as to better understand France's cultural understanding of astrology at the time of Dallegret's exhibition; as an art historian, Rich's inclusion of other thinkers indicates both an academic and art-centered audience, using the critiques as context to others who may not specialize in Rich's topic. Per Eagleton's definition, the critiques made by the Western European Barthes and (Warburg-influenced) Adorno do not focus on astrological practice, but on a taken-for-granted *cultural* understanding of astrology. In comparing McEwan and Rich's papers, it can be claimed that the cultural *assumptions* of astrology in 19th and 20th century Western Europe scholarship of Warburg, Adorno, and Barthes did not include an understanding of astrological 'practice,' as Curry's definition provides.

The second shared theme is astrology's cultural association with trade and commodity culture. McEwan writes that Warburg sought a '*practical* purpose of the cosmological oracular technique' by mapping astrological images alongside well-traveled trade routes to understand how the symbolic images were adapted and adopted by different circumstances from the Roman Empire, 6th to 12th centuries, and 12th to 15th centuries.¹² McEwan uses Warburg's 1926 correspondences with various historians, in which he inquired after trade maps of sea routes from Flanders to Italy, as Warburg 'needed these to indicate particular places of learning and

⁷ Guy Debord, 'Situationist Manifesto,' *Internationale Situationniste* #4, (June 1960), trans. by Fabian Thompsett, <<https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/manifesto.html>>

⁸ Rich, 'Automobiles,' pp. 29-49 (p. 30); Curry, 'Astrology,' pp. 55-7

⁹ McEwan, 'Dots and Lines,' pp. 243-268 (p. 248)

¹⁰ Jennifer Zahrt, 'The Astrological Imaginary in Early Twentieth-Century German Culture,' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 2012), pp. 73-101 (p. 83)

¹¹ Rich, 'Automobiles,' pp. 29-49 (p.29)

¹² McEwan, 'Dots and Lines,' pp. 243-268 (p. 248)

commerce, where old and new ideas collided.’¹³ By curating Warburg’s many correspondences and primary documents, McEwan displays her expertise and strong evidence of Warburg’s construction of the atlas with trade, not evidence of astrological practice, as his organizing principle. In contrast, Rich’s paper identifies the techniques and experiences of French post-war commodity culture that Dallegret’s exhibit reproduces for the consumer by comparing the exhibit to Jacques Maître’s (1925-2013) 1966 critique, ‘The Consumption of Astrology in Contemporary Society’.¹⁴ Rich claims that Dallegret utilized the magical thinking of astrology as a merchandizing technique, as identified in Maître’s work as a kind of ‘self-mysticism,’ by profiting from selling prints of each automobile’s design, with the Sun sign compelling the consumer to purchase under the guise of ‘destiny’ and ‘fit-ness.’¹⁵ Rich notes that Dallegret’s designs resemble blueprints, a plan for future production that will never take place; the life-size models showcased in the gallery were artistic prototypes, or as Rich refers to them, ‘fakes.’¹⁶ In contrasting McEwan and Rich’s papers, it can be claimed that Warburg’s use of trade routes as an organizational skeleton for his *Atlas*’ cultural ‘artery’ is similar in fashion to Dallegret’s parody of commodity culture as the blueprint, or backbone, for the astrological symbols he used in his critique.

Class is the third shared theme from McEwan and Rich’s papers, as it is a central theme in the works of Warburg and Dallegret. The subtitle of Dallegret’s astrological automobile exhibit is ‘the Automobile of the Elite,’ and which drew a connection between astrological symbols and elite conceptions of class. Rich argues that Dallegret’s show brought to life ‘a dissonance between the bourgeoisie mode of identity as something purchased,’ as represented by the car as a symbol of wealth, ‘and the older aristocratic mode of identity into which one is born’ which Dallegret symbolized through basing his designs on Sun sign astrology.¹⁷ In contrast, McEwan’s paper does not critique the class nor consumer culture of Warburg’s time, nor its explicit influence on Warburg’s research of astrological images. In presenting Warburg’s *Atlas*, McEwan identifies its three main sections: ‘Orientation,’ providing a night sky map with the zoological and anthropomorphic images of the constellations, ‘Exchange,’ showing the diffusion of astrological images, and ‘Social Integration,’ displaying a hand-drawn genealogy of the Tornabuoni-Medici family, who McEwan states can trace its origins from the 15th century to classical antiquity.¹⁸ In presenting astrological images (divorced from astrological ‘practice’), Warburg is visually associating the symbols of astrology with class by including the family tree of an elite trading family. Similarly, Rich finds further proof of astrology symbolizing a promise of preordained power, based on birth, in the horoscopes from a 1960 issue of *Paris-Match*, which

¹³ McEwan, ‘Dots and Lines,’ pp. 243-268 (p. 254)

¹⁴ Rich, ‘Automobiles,’ pp. 29-49 (p. 35)

¹⁵ Rich, ‘Automobiles,’ pp. 29-49 (p. 36)

¹⁶ Rich, ‘Automobiles,’ pp. 29-49 (p. 29)

¹⁷ Rich, ‘Automobiles,’ pp. 29-49 (p. 46)

¹⁸ McEwan, ‘Dots and Lines,’ pp. 243-268 (p. 256)

used popular celebrities to symbolize each sign. Rich argues that this ‘unification of star power [celebrity] and the power of the stars [horoscope]...allowed the reader to join the astrological court.’¹⁹ Rich asserts that astrology’s ability to ‘co-opt affections for the old’ made it a legible symbol of Situationist anti-capitalist critique, as Dallegret’s ‘automobiles investigated the ways in which consumer culture sells the future rather than tells it, repackaging the past’.²⁰ In contrasting McEwan and Rich’s papers, it can be claimed that Warburg similarly ‘repackages the past’ by presenting his *Atlas*’ astrological images in a context of maps and elite family connections, instead of placing it in the context of ‘practice’ and ‘tradition,’ per Curry’s definition, which provides evidence for Rich’s argument that post-war French commodity culture used astrology to entertain the fantasy of elite class status for the working class majority.

This essay compared and contrasted two papers that shared the subject matter of ‘Astrology’ and ‘Culture.’ This essay considered these two areas via the themes of the separation of astrology’s understanding from its practice, astrology’s cultural association with trade and economic consumption, and class. It found that through the comparison of McEwan and Rich’s papers, the 19th and 20th century Western Europe’s cultural (per Eagleton’s definition) understanding of astrology was one divorced from astrological practice (per Curry’s definition) and, instead, culturally associated astrology with trade and economic consumption, which allowed it to be a legible symbol in Dallegret’s Situationist critique of commodity and class culture.

¹⁹ Rich, ‘Automobiles,’ pp. 29-49 (p. 46)

²⁰ Rich, ‘Automobiles,’ pp. 29-49 (p. 49)

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