

The Judder Effect

By Maggie Hyde

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In this edition of the *Journal*, p.50 contains a full-page advert which is not reproduced here.

THE JUDDER EFFECT

Astrology and Alternative Reality

By Maggie Hyde

Apart from the efforts of scientific astrologers, many astrologers accept that for the most part, you can't 'prove' astrology, believing that since you either see it or you don't, there is little to be done to convert the sceptic. The truths of astrology, whether in a counselling session or in the exactitude of a horary judgement, are 'just-so', non-repeatable one-offs which it would be irrational to subject to statistical analysis.

There is, however, an approach which astrologers sometimes take in the hope of bringing their practice in from the cultural wilderness, which aims for striking and dramatic demonstrations in one-off examples.

'Sporadic and true predictions are a sure-fire way to alienate people from astrology'.

Rather than statistical evidence, they aim for successful astrological predictions, through which the truth of astrology will be so self-evident that the skeptics will roll over in awe. If only we could prophesy in advance the fate of a ship, the winner of a horse-race, or the unexpected outcome of a football match or election, then it will be proof positive that astrology works. I would like to put forward the very opposite position to this. Sporadic and true predictions are a sure-fire way to alienate people from astrology, and the more singular and dramatic they are, the more they will choke people off.

On the surface, in the eyes of the general public astrology is equated with prediction.

No matter how much we might carp on about the purpose of transits and progressions being rooted in 'retrodiction', or insist that the truth which emerges in the astrological discourse is a poetic insight, the truth that moves, and so on and so forth, for the non-astrologer, whether your reading of the symbols is factually accurate, especially beforehand, is what appears to verify astrology. The problem with a factually correct prediction is that it raises the spectre of an unerring fate, written by the stars. But are the general public as won over by determinism as we sometimes might think? Perhaps not.

Company Futures

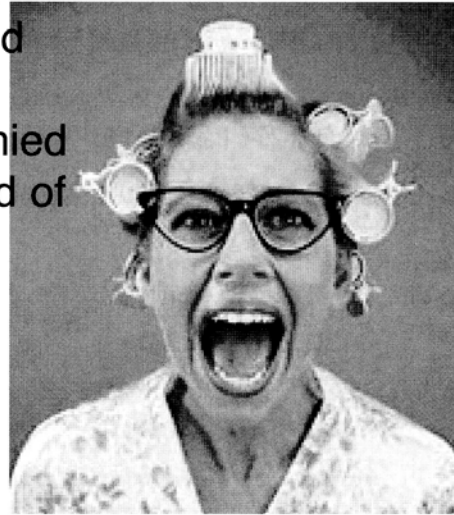
I have made many shots at public prediction myself, particularly in my 'Company Futures' column which ran weekly for fourteen months in the financial pages of The Observer newspaper. The usual

format was to focus on the legal incorporation horoscope of one company, together with the astrology of the CEO's day of birth, and in 250 words outline key issues about the company and where it was going. The main purpose was to show symbols at work, for example Iceland, born under fixed water Scorpio, British Airways a long-distance Sagittarian, Boots the chemist a healthy Virgo-Scorpio combination, and so on. Although there was quite limited astrological data to go on, and my own knowledge of companies and the markets is somewhat patchy, the column held its own compared with more orthodox financial analysis.

'The 'judder' is disturbing and unpleasant, a physically nauseous feeling, accompanied by disorientation and a mood of resistance'.

Sometimes my predictions were plain wrong, but many times they were significantly right. For example, in the 15 October 2000 issue about British Telecom, I commented that with Mars progressed square Pluto and Saturn crossing his Sun, Sir Iain Vallance, its CEO, was "unlikely to see out his contract to July 2002. He may be wise to fall gracefully on his sword next spring, before outside pressure forces his hand" [1]. He was forced out by the shareholders on 26 April 2001. On the other hand, the proposed Rover buy-out by venture capitalists, Alchemy, involving a promised revamp of the MG sports car by John Moulton, was a much more elusive and illusory symbolism, dominated by Neptune: "Moulton, with his degree in chemistry, well knows that Mg (magnesium) conjures up the bright flash that distracts the audience while the magician performs his sleight of hand. MG at Longbridge? Puff! Now you see it. Now you don't". [2] Unfortunately, it was the whole Rover-Alchemy deal which went up in a sudden puff of smoke, not just the promise of the MG, and it is still not clear to me from Alchemy's horoscope why Moulton didn't pull that one off.

This type of public astrology raises many issues, and friends have rapped my knuckles for it, suggesting that it gives the public a completely wrong idea about astrology, letting it appear as if 'the truth is out there', objectively written in the stars without the involvement and participation of the astrologer. This is not an inconsiderable argument,



but the task of finding a voice for true astrology in the media is such an overwhelming one that I tend to take what I can get and try to run with it. With this particular astrological work I was pleased to have the opportunity to pioneer a weekly column that was NOT based on Sunsigns, but on actual horoscopes, and which appeared in the financial section of a serious national newspaper.

The *Observer* column is an intriguing example of the theme of this article. Just as we live by the sword and die by the sword, this column came in on a singular prediction and went out on a singular prediction. I was asked to write it initially because one of its editors had heard about a casual prediction I made in the autumn of 1999. Having studied the horoscope of Microsoft and Bill Gates, I mentioned that Gates would relinquish his powers or get out of Microsoft in some way in early January 2000. This was based, amongst other factors, on his progressed Ascendant moving to a conjunction of Pluto. In mid-January, Gates surprised the financial world by standing down as Microsoft's chief executive. On the basis of this prediction I was offered the job, and no matter how much I tried to play this down as a lucky hit, it cemented the belief that astrology makes accurate predictions.

The following year, in the New Year issue (7 January 2001), I was asked to look at the general state of the markets in the coming year, rather than a specific company. I felt that there would be wild swings during the year but against orthodox predictions, there was no sign of an imminent melt-down. I outlined some main themes and key dates to watch for market movements. The first of these was based on the Jupiter-Neptune trine on 5 April and I commented on this "The markets seem set to stay buoyant during the next six months, with a big lift around 5 April". This is pretty basic astrology, and any textbook will point to this reading for a Jupiter-Neptune trine. On the day of the trine, a significant change in the markets occurred, and I will quote the BBC News On-line Business report on this:

" Powerful surge for US stocks: Thursday 5 April. The leading stock market index in the US, the Dow Jones Industrial Average, jumped 403 points, its second biggest points gain ever. And the technology index, Nasdaq, surged 8.5%, the third biggest percentage rise in history".

I was unwise enough to gently comment on the prediction in the following issue of Company Futures. On being reminded of it, one

editor said he felt "really spooked". The new business editor, a city man who had only been in the job for a few weeks and whom I had never met, ditched the column within two days.

Anyone who has written astrology columns knows that surviving a new editor is a perilous affair. Changing the astrology page is an easy way for an editorial new broom to sweep clean, but I believe that in this case, the demise of Company Futures was due to more than getting rid of the foibles of a previous editor. I would put it down, instead, to the 'Judder Effect' [3].

The Judder

When an astrological prediction, or occasionally a striking piece of non-predictive astrology, manifests, it spooks people and gives them what we have come to call at the Company of Astrologers the 'Blackett Judder', in honour of Pat Blackett who insisted on naming the phenomenon. She believes that this is more than just a shiver down the spine. It is disturbing and unpleasant, a physically nauseous feeling, accompanied by disorientation and a mood of resistance. It is opposite to the joyous, uplifting thrill which an astrologer gets from seeing a pertinent and remarkable piece of radical symbolism

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played out. The judder is like a parallax problem, a misalignment of reality which occurs when a person tries to fit disturbing experiences into their usual framework of how the world works. It is a severe type of what psychologists call cognitive dissonance, in which things feel askew in the attempt to fit together paradoxical possibilities.

So how does it arise? If astrology works, one's belief system would have to shift so radically to accommodate it that many people cannot make that shift. In other words, the judder forces an opening into an alternative reality. As its implications soak in, that opening yawns wider and wider, with unknown and terrifying implications. People do not want to go there. A little frisson between realities is fine, a bit of playfulness with a dream or coincidence perks up the coffee break, but when asked to take an alternative reality seriously, and to act on it, many individuals choose not to do so. The most extreme form of refusal leads to the denial of experience, including one's own. For individuals with a rationalistic attitude, the judder can be so uncomfortable that it is defended against by a powerful and distorted reinforcement of the 'norm'. This stance is typified in the irrational attitudes of parapsychology critics such as Susan Blackmore. These people are often wheeled onto TV programmes about psychics or astrology, supposedly to provide 'balance'.

Even experienced astrologers can be taken aback by an unpleasant judder and this can be the reason why beginners give up astrology. For both inexperienced astrologers and non-astrologers alike, the judder is sometimes linked to the uncomfortable appearance of a clockwork and fatalistic astrology. Astrologers who understand astrology as divination know that symbol systems don't work that way. Public symbol astrology is a hit and miss affair, a speculative symbolic game. It's a brushstroke, a haiku, an invita-

tion to roam in another frame of reference. But from the outside, it often grinds like the chilling wheels of the 'machine of destiny'[4], juddering its passengers out of gear.

It is not only prediction, or astrology, that makes people judder from an apparent, pre-ordained fate. The same response arises with any of the divinatory arts, from tarot to tea-leaves, which seem to be beyond rational understanding and control. This is compounded in astrology by the absurd certainty given by the ephemeris, the wrong equation of planetary motion with the unfolding of human

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destiny. But whatever divinatory form it arises through, resistance to the judder stems from its source being non-rational, and to it being ultimately rooted in occult phenomena. Freud knew this when he criticised Jung's astrological studies, accusing him of messing about with the 'dark tide of mud of occultism'. For most people, the alternative reality which arises from astrology and divination has to be kept at frisson level, and they allow the different worlds to juggle about just enough to give a little insight when they need it, but nothing more challenging.

So it seems to me that we can overstep the mark when we present others with another reality through astrology. Astrology lends itself to this dilemma more than other divinatory forms because of its remarkable ability on occasion to surprise and shock with exact dates. By doing so, as with the Jupiter-Neptune trine for *The Observer* feature, the cognitive dissonance leads to astrology's rejection. A business newspaper has a brief to

report from within accepted business parameters, dwelling in a reality of city analysts who are paid big bucks to analyse market trends through commonly accepted techniques and methods. It is a different discourse, and it can only very precariously allow itself to cross the gap opened up by divination. In our efforts as astrologers to improve astrology's credence, it may not be such a good idea to blast ahead with astrological machismo. Astrology needs a lot of good spin if it is going to come in from the intellectual cold, but this must bear in mind how to deal with the judder effect.

One wonders how far this effect lies behind the attacks on astrology by critics like Richard Dawkins. Pat Blackett, knowing he was an Aries, once emailed him and asked for further details of his birth data. His response is not original, but it is illuminating. He replied: "You ask me what sign I am? I am a DO NOT DISTURB sign". When astrology disturbs the rational worldview, it gives us all a judder.

Footnotes

1. *The Observer*, 15 October 2000. See www.companyguide.co.uk
2. *The Observer*, 26 March 2000.

See www.companyguide.co.uk

3. 'judder' Oxford Dictionary: (Esp. of mechanism) to shake noisily or violently; (of singer's voice) oscillate in intensity.

4. Geoffrey Cornelius, *The Moment Of Astrology* (Penguin Arkana, 1994).



Maggie Hyde is a founding member of the Company of Astrologers and edits the Company's fortnightly Bulletin. She has written Sunsign columns for many magazines, including Cosmopolitan, and is currently the Media Medium for the Media Guardian online (www.mediaguardian.co.uk). See also her work on financial astrology for The Observer on www.companyguide.co.uk.

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