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Astrology, modernity and the project of self-identity

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ABSTRACT
This speculative and interdisciplinary article about Western and UK astrology recognises a fluid craft steeped in pre-modern 'magical' symbolism accommodating to differing degrees the modern, linear and literal. It embraces an open framework and employs personal experience that highlights the problems with self-understanding. Astrology may appear detached from its traditional religious foundation and has struggled for cultural legitimacy, but it offers a spiritual understanding, self-knowledge and self-determination. It divines a range of symbolic possibilities that encourages elective biography and instructs the project of self-identity. This in part assuages the existential need to find meaning, questioning established thinking and 'rational' cultural practices. Astrology embeds a spiritual outlook that co-exists with profane individualism and materiality highlighting dissonant modernity.

KEYWORDS Dissonance; divination; legitimacy; self-reflexivity; spirituality; trans-rational

The representation of modernity (the 'modern' age) as a 'progressive', linear and orderly system, expressed through secular and scientific discourses has generated much ambiguity. The counterpoint to this 'rational' thinking has been to reject these parameters of 'logic' in favour of modernity as a continuum of 'pre-modern' representations, which is subjective, reflective, symbolic and spiritual. These conceptualisations co-exist and collide to a greater or lesser extent creating disharmony and dissonance. A third relativist and 'postmodern' position exposes the deficiencies of modernity as a totalising and fixed understanding of the world (McLennan 1992). This article, which evaluates astrology in relation to legitimate culture, dissonant modernity and the project of self-identity, leans heavily on the latter two positions.

Hypothetically, modernity cannot be divorced from pre-modern or post-modern conceptualisations, as these theoretical systems operate together and influence each other (McGuigan 2006, 52). Max Weber illustrated the openness of human nature over a century ago in relation to religious belief and capitalist enterprise, whereby the accumulation of wealth serves the seemingly irrational or 'trans-rational' purpose of proving worth to God

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(Weber [1904] 1974). The relationship between 'rationality' and reactions to this process is a reflexive development of critique and counter-critique that exposes the contradictions of modern life. Reactions include existential anxiety and metaphysical ambition, as individuals attempt to find meaning in an excessively material world. This reflexivity (on personal feelings and motives) has exacerbated the overriding focus by individuals on themselves and the risks they navigate (Beck 1992).

UK astrology is a fluid cultural practice, which 'comprises a worldview that is religious' (Laishley 2007, 172) and beyond normative terms of reference. Practices include a permutation of: esoteric astrology, which expresses an active specialised knowledge of Western horoscopic craft; DIY (do-it-yourself) astrology, which includes aspects of craft, personal hunches and psychic agency; and popular sun-sign horoscopes produced commercially in the mass media. Historically, astrological methods have become increasingly objective, 'rational' and scientific in contrast to more subjective, creative and spiritual outlooks (Cornelius 1994, 195–200; Willis and Curry 2004, 60–3). The latter understanding accepts differing degrees of divination, a creative and trans-rational process embraced wholeheartedly by a minority of astrologers harking back to the symbolic basis of the craft, offering human agency.

For those who practice divination, destiny is negotiable (Cornelius 1994, 144), and the notion of divining and negotiating fate today exists as a marginal cultural practice. Historically, the association of astrological trans-rationality and politico-religious revolution with the seventeenth century English Civil War sullied the reputation of astrology prior to the Restoration and the modern age of scientific enquiry (Campion 2009: 50–51; Curry 1989: 45). And organised Christianity criticised divinatory astrology and its popularity as this detracted from its power and the impetus of the Protestant Reformation and Catholic Counter-Reformation (Curry 1989: 110).

Notwithstanding this, astrology embraces subjective hunches and creative interpretations of craft, divining the heavens and seeking a dialogue with fate (Cornelius 1994, 19–20). It sutures experience, possibility and choice, offering elective biographies, thereby contributing to the project of self-identity.

Pierre Bourdieu's cultural framework of legitimacy assists with understanding the continued interest in esoteric and popular astrology. Notions of the 'cultural omnivore' and shifts in patterns of consumption from legitimate exclusive tastes to include popular culture, offers broader individualised cultural profiles (Peterson and Kern 1996). Hence 'legitimate' cultural taste classified, for example, by religious and academic institutions, has morphed into a broader more ambiguous palette, although it still operates as a mechanism that reinforces specific knowledge, class hierarchies and social inequalities (Bourdieu 1990, 95–7).

Astrology in the UK was once 'legitimate' and 'highbrow', but since its de-legitimisation in the eighteenth century, it has struggled for public recognition (Curry 1989, 118–137). Today, due in part to the postmodern focus on

diversity and individual agency, omnivorous taste offers greater scope for astrological practices. Paradoxically, although the 'non-legitimacy' of astrology undermines its formal public acceptability, the spread of astrology has in many ways related to its lack of legitimacy.

It exposes cognitive dissonance created by incompatible individual actions, values, ideas and beliefs (Festinger 1957), which results in dissonant cultural profiles that reveal incompatibility between representations and reality, and epistemological and ontological concerns that relate to the real world and (post)modern lifestyles (McGuigan 2006, 83). As Deleuze and Guattari (1994, 59) envisioned, contrasting philosophical systems cohabit with their importance relative to an ever-changing present, a hallmark of the postmodern terrain.

Western astrology concerns phenomenology (individual experience), hermeneutics (interpretation), and has been described as 'inherently subversive', as it cannot be reduced to any single all-embracing theory (Willis and Curry 2004, 2). It includes notions of trans-linearity and trans-rationality, which respects the diverse understandings and user experiences that underpins the open theoretical stance taken in this speculative article. There is a range of evidence from astrological, cultural, historical, philosophical, psychological and sociological studies, with specific issues illustrated through a case study of practice. The methodology utilises experience, facts and hypotheses, but because there is no 'all-embracing theory of explanation' (Braude 2007, 155), it offers possibility.

In terms of structure, first, the article sets out a brief history of astrology predominantly in the UK and its estrangement from Christianity then explains divination as agency. Second, it situates Western astrology as an everyday cultural practice and delves into its legitimacy and notions of dissonance. Third, a case study of astrological practice highlights relevant hypothetical ideas and illustrates the complex project of self-identity. Fourth, there is contemplation of my own experience as a self-referencing astrologer, which offers alternative symbolic meaning. Fifth, by employing specific cultural commentators it evaluates dissonant (post)modernity in terms of rationality, acausality and types of individual. Finally, it recognises how astrology contributes towards subjectivities, notions of reflexivity and the project of self-identity. Astrology is employed to help give insight into the problems with reflexive modernity, agency and grounding the often unexpected and boundless scope of meanings, questioning the 'linear' and 'rational' relationship between experience, representation and reality.

Historical evaluation of astrology and divination

Ann Geneva described astrology as 'a unique divinatory and prognostic art embodying centuries of accredited methodology and tradition' (Cited in Willis and Curry 2004, 53). Formulated initially in Mesopotamia in 2000 BC

(Curry 2000, 3), astrology explained human observation of the phases of the moon and symbolic correspondence with ocean tides and the female menstrual cycle. It is predicated upon the 'pre-modern' relationship between the macrocosm and microcosm 'as above so below', the Hermetic notion that 'man' is made in God's image. The heavens divine 'His' will, a law of correspondence whereby the 'greater' (stars in the sky) mirror the 'lesser' (human activity (Davison 1975, 9)).

Western Astrology is a divinatory social practice that employs the 'heavens', influenced by oriental ideas and centuries of European cultural history, increasingly filtered and systematised through various techniques and philosophies. It exists in a post-Christian world and varieties include: openly divinatory practices, Hermetic, Aristotelian/Ptolemaic, Scientific and Psychological astrology (Willis and Curry 2004, 1, 65–75) with hybridity between formats. UK astrology helps formulate and reflect this myriad of Western astrological practices which have a global footprint.

The popularity of astrology came to prominence in the UK during the 'Halcyon Days' of the seventeenth century Civil War, when astrology was an aspect of Christian belief.[1] A 'middle-brow' esoteric astrology was devised which was a hybrid between 'popular', 'highbrow' and philosophical methods. It was more complex astrologically in terms of symbolism and more accurate in terms of astronomical calculation than 'popular' astrology (Curry 1989, 118).

Within esoteric practices 'judicial' astrology situates and predicts individual lives in relation to the stars, whilst 'natural' astrology focuses on the weather, natural disasters and worldly events (Curry 1989, 8–9), where, for example, eclipses portend the onset of war, pestilence and famine (Appleby and McCann 1989, 40–44). This conceptualisation illustrates the individual as part of a wider holistic cosmology rather than the central motif.

Prior to the seventeenth century a 'legitimate' philosophical and 'highbrow' astrology had drawn on theoretical astrology and Christian theology, ideas then steeped in established academic and renaissance thought (Curry 1989, 138). Eighteenth century rationalism and modernity encouraged the disappearance of 'highbrow' astrology and decline of 'middle-brow' esoteric astrology in the UK, which concurs with Lekeby's (2015) assessment that in Denmark 'highbrow' astrology was completely passé in the universities by the late eighteenth century. This created a schism between astronomy and Western astrology, which survived through 'popular' oral culture, almanacs of folk wisdom and superstition (Curry 1989, 95–117), calendars that typically included astrological information and prognostications (Curry 1989, 21). Astrology had lost its legitimacy and usurped the will of God rather than legitimately divined it (Laishley 2007, 173).

Astrology re-emerged from folk culture in the UK at the end of the nineteenth century, due in part to the popularity of the Theosophical Movement, which assuaged urban middle class demand for re-enchantment through 'psychology-cum-spirituality' (Willis and Curry 2004, 51–2). The association of astrology with agency, alternative and transgressive thinking, manifests itself through other historical associations. Alongside the Seventeenth Century English Revolution, this includes a modern person-centred psychological and psychoanalytic focus in the twentieth century that came to a head during the 1960s hippy counterculture and New Age Movement(s).

Methodologically, there is a crucial distinction between astrologers who treat the horoscope as literal, and those who see it more creatively and as a medium of possibilities. Here, literality refers to 'rational' quasi-scientific practices interpreted through fixed methods, whereas creativity fully embraces pre-modern and symbolic forms of divination (Cornelius 1994, xix). Divination can be understood as an on-going ritual dialogue with 'more-than-human-agents' or divinatory spirits (Curry 2010, 115), which gives weight to interpretation and individual agency, where finesse (divinatory intelligence) is required to unfurl meaning. This practice encompasses the unpredictable subjective, poetic and symbolic processes that occur during a chart reading, which contrasts with a controlled, objective and linear unfolding of events and narratives.

The anthropologist Evans-Pritchard ([1937] 1976, 1–17) explained divination in terms of asking closed questions about everyday issues, alongside a mechanism for judging a 'yes' or 'no' answer. Besides natal horoscopy (which represents a form of divination based on time of birth), a horary chart for a specific question can be constructed to divine the stars at the time of asking (Appleby 1985; Cornelius 1994, 106–134). This creative process shares similarities with the I Ching and Tarot, exposing the 'magical' moment of astrology when events predicted actually occur. Negatively, divination conjures up Rhinehart's ([1971] 1999) novel *The Dice Man*, and the story of a psychiatrist who makes life decisions on the throw of a dice (based on the author's own obsessive experience), which exposes existential anxiety. Notwithstanding this, astrological divination has a complexity and can operate beyond the intention of either astrologer or client, a 'more-than-human' divination as agency, as revealed by the case study.

One aspect of dissonance is the conflict resulting from the cohabitation of 'pre-modern' spiritual thinking and belief with 'modern' scientific and material 'reality'. Within astrology the co-option of esoteric and symbolic enquiry by scientific methodology (known as 'scientism' (Cornelius 1994, xxi)) recognises little grasp of plural methodology (Willis and Curry 2004, 93), and ignores client experience.[2]

Criticisms have beleaguered Western astrology, including St Augustine's famous Fourth-Century attack that dismissed divination as mediation by evil daemones whose aim is to imprison our souls. The daemon from Greek mythology mediates between gods and humans, a guardian angel guiding individual fortune, a concept co-opted by Christianity into the satanic notion of demon (Cornelius 1994, 194). This appropriation into a rigid binary classification of good and bad angel contributed towards modernist Cartesian thinking and a structural concept of destiny in Christianity that avoids agency and dialogue, hence the perceived moral dangers of divination as it meddles with the will of God.

Research by Bainbridge (2007, 264–266) has shown that religious institutions disapprove of astrology, as they perceive it to be irreligious, anarchic and lacking organisation.[3] Martin Bauer and John Durrant using empirical evidence from the *British National Survey of Public Understanding of Science* (completed 1989) recognised astrology as a compensatory practice, which reflects individual concerns in response to metaphysical unrest. It involves those who are educated, have intermediate levels of science and an alternative world-view, and there is a female gender bias, although very few believe in astrology (Bauer and Durrant 1997, 67–69). Munk (2015) who researched on-line astrological investigation in Denmark, concurred, as she found that it concerned well educated urban dwellers and a disproportionate number of females (75%).

The concept of 'takes', a trans-linear aspect of astrological divination, is related to the film industry and re-shooting the same scene (Cornelius 1994, 218–20). It allows the re-reading of a chart for phenomena that might be happening at the time of investigation or consultation. This poetic re-contextualisation allows space for self-reflection and creativity, which has been influential upon and in turn heavily influenced by Jungian theories of synchronicity and secret mutual connivance. Hypothetically, meaningful coincidences (synchronicities) may involve mutual connivance between the different actors (whether human or non-human) wrapped up in an overriding theory of acausality (Jung [1952] 1972). Notwithstanding this, synchronicities can express the agency of the astrologer and client to shape events (Braude 2007), offering a micro-focus rather than a modernist grand narrative.

There are also 'mis-takes' whereby the chart fails to ignite, which adds to the inconsistency of the process exposing divination to further charges of chance. This trans-rationality was captured by John Heaton's pithy comment that, 'astrology predicts but you can't predict when it is going to predict' (cited in Willis and Curry 2004, 63). An overly subjective reliance on the interpretation of craft, individual hunches and psychic drives readily signifies a fluid and spiritual astrological practice.

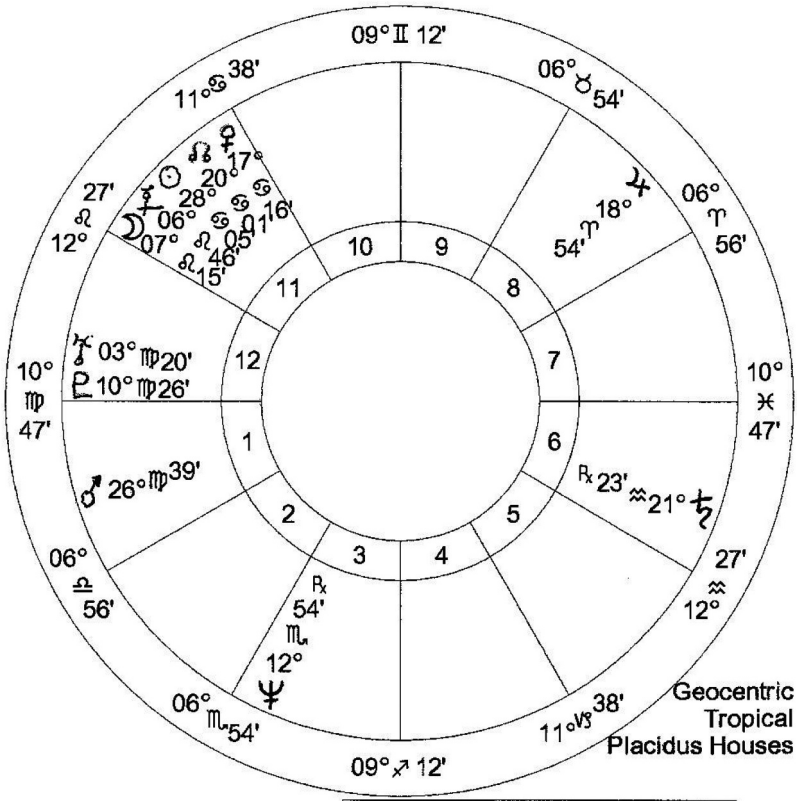
Profane everyday life: astrology, legitimacy and dissonance

Pierre Bourdieu's hierarchical classification of culture furthers a broad understanding of astrology as a cultural practice embedded in late modernity however much a caricature that denies vital agency. Legitimate 'highbrow' culture (knowledge filtered, for example, through expert gatekeepers from powerful institutions) offers status and distinction, whilst 'middle-brow' culture strives for legitimacy as it falls outside these hallowed walls. Popular culture lacks legitimacy, as it is 'lowbrow', functional and commercial culture, expressing individual taste (Bourdieu 1990).[4]

'Middle-brow' esoteric astrology utilises judicial horoscopy (the construction and interpretation of an astrological chart) and translates an assortment of signs and symbols to construct meaning, as applied in the case study. In natal horoscopy the astrologer applies the symbolic significance of the birth chart to the individual's life, a multivalent and elastic construction-in-progress. This revolves around 10 planets (with specific symbolism, for example Venus for relationships and Mars for aggression) and planetary aspects (the combined effects of planetary symbolism). These are situated in 12 zodiac signs (with related symbolism), within 12 houses (the different arenas of physical life shown as segments on the chart wheel). Other meaning relates to the chart shape and influence of sensitive points including Midheaven and Ascendant (the top and Eastern/left-hand points of the chart respectively (see Figure 1)). The horoscope is a link between the sacred heavens and profane earth (Laishley 2007, 181).

In the UK, astrology developed in the twentieth century as modern person-centred humanistic astrology influenced by Rudhyar's (1936) systematic association of astrology with psychology, Leo's (1925) theosophical development of the craft as an admixture of Western occultism and Eastern mystical thought (York 2007, 410) and Jung's (1956) mythopoeic psychoanalysis. By the 1980s, psychoanalytical astrology (Green 1984) as practiced by the Centre for Psychological astrology (founded 1983) concentrated on meaning-making through the individual's internal self within an Aristotelian/Ptolemaic astrology of destiny. Whilst divination (Cornelius 1994), as practiced by the Company of Astrologers (also founded 1983) recognised astrology as symbolic, spiritual and trans-rational. The ultimate psychological position is that the birth chart is not the spiritual soul but aligned to the secular self with planets expressing individual psychological functions, whilst the wider world is either ignored or recognised as a projection of the self (Willis and Curry 2004, 74). These systems and related permutations highlight the variance of 'middle-brow' esoteric astrology.

At the same time the rise of popular sun-sign forecasting in newspaper and magazine columns (now telephone services and Internet sites), simplified the rigour of esoteric astrology. A typical criticism is that it lacks finesse



Pl	Planet	Position	Elem	Digni	Ru
☽	Moon	07°♌15'	Fire		☉
☉	Sun	28°♋05'	Water		☽
☿	Mercury	06°♌46'	Fire	Fall	☉
♀	Venus	17°♋16'	Water		☽
♂	Mars	26°♍39'	Earth		☿
♃	Jupiter	18°♈54'	Fire		♂
♄	Saturn	21°♒23'℞	Air	Ruler	♄
♅	Uranus	03°♍20'	Earth		☿
♆	Neptune	12°♏54'℞	Water		♂
♇	Pluto	10°♍26'	Earth		☿
☊	Node	20°♋01'	Water		☽
Mc	Midheaven	09°♊12'	Air		☿
Asc	Ascendant	10°♍47'	Earth		☿
⊗	Part Fortn	19°♍56'	Earth		☿

Figure 1. Female client horoscope (details withheld).

and treats the entire population as one of twelve zodiac signs (for example, Leo, the courageous leader or Gemini, the hyper-talkative communicator), through a form of de-individualisation. It may engender a fatalistic engagement leaving responsibility determined through the stars, which lacks agency, context and reflection, although this does not necessarily mean it is less authentic or more falsifiable (Willis and Curry 2004, 65). Critically, DIY

astrology employs a blend of esoteric craft alongside individual psychic hunches and methods associated with popular astrology. The difference between esoteric 'middle-brow' and popular DIY practices is the extent of craft and working within the parameters of astrological symbolism, meaning that the categorisation of middle-brow and popular culture is somewhat arbitrary. Esoteric astrology is wide-ranging as it employs individual psychic hunches whilst on the other hand there are certificated courses that strive for greater legitimacy.[5]

For the many habitual users who consult popular sun-sign columns, typically read as entertainment, the extent of self-reflection is unclear. However, forecasters may divine an uncannily accurate prognosis of everyday events exposing trans-rationality.

The notion of legitimacy is complex with all blends of astrology struggling for consistent results and recognition. Braude (2007, 177), a non-astrologer observing his wife's astrological practice, concluded that her success at predicting events was more to do with her psychic agency than craft. He concurred that false theories can generate correct predictions and that rational scientific explanations can be inadequate, another conundrum that navigates paradoxical and dissonant late modernity.

The postmodern de-differentiation and collapsing of cultural classifications recognises omnivorous taste as crossing cultural forms (Peterson and Kern 1996). This unique personalised pattern of self-reflective consumption embraces a range of culture (marginal, ethnic or occult), which may lack legitimacy, but expresses tolerance towards other values.[6] Critically, omnivorousness is a disposition pursued by the self-assured who will transpose and extend their 'non-legitimate' knowledge across domains to actively appreciate variety, which itself is a form of expertise and distinction (Lizardo and Skiles 2012, 265–266). This hypothetically explains the esoteric astrological tastes of well-educated consumers.

Lahire (2008) developed omnivorousness out of a concern with those with a limited but distinct palette of cultural interests, in favour of dissonance steeped in cultural lifestyle and self-distinction for all. The eclectic variety of individual preferences and practices that have replaced the uniform patterns of cultural interests and tastes concerns risk and creates internal tensions (Lahire 2008, 181–182). Dissonant cultural profiles result from the internalisation of legitimate cultural hierarchies, where objectivity associated with aesthetic distancing through detachment proffers distinction, which is incompatible with a subjective immersion in culture (Bourdieu 1984, 34).

Omnivorousness scrambles 'legitimate' and 'non-legitimate' cultural practices, which generates (dis)harmony, both internally (cognitive) as well as socially between people (Lahire 2008, 185–186). For example, trans-rational psychic astrological practices may contribute to dissonance by undermining

objective material rationality.[7] Moreover, due to the marginality of astrology, which lies outside official cultural zones (determined by academia and church), legitimacy is unable to operate and cannot enforce its discourse (Lahire 2008, 172).

Astrological divination offers freedom and agency for the astrologer and client/consumer where value is determined through satisfaction and observation of results rather than dictated by institutional principles and protocols. It reflects greater emphasis on individual taste and individualisation, whereby people take control of their fate and the accompanying risks and anxieties (Beck 1992, 76).

The empirical basis for astrology has been challenged by Shawn Carlson in 1981–2 at the University of California[8] using a badly designed double-blind test (cited in Cornelius 1994, 73–9) which may support its 'non-legitimacy', but it does not disprove its popularity and everyday use. Perhaps transgression and alterity increases its risqué appeal to the cultural omnivore.

Another key issue is the character of astrology, which as York (2007, 412) surmised has become secularised due to the declining influence of organised and institutionalised religion, a shift from an 'other worldly' to 'this worldly' focus related to an urban (post)modern lifestyle. The following case study demonstrates this.

Case study, London 1991: Pluto, control and fate

A bubbly female in her late twenties commissioned my astrological services. She was loath to offer any biographical information and all I knew was that she was a member of a right-wing political party. At the time, I was a relatively inexperienced but enthusiastic esoteric astrologer, so I constructed her natal chart and arranged a consultation.

Initially she was reluctant to speak her chart and back-story. I commented upon possible changes in her life as Jupiter (the great benefic planet associated with optimism) was active and this covered a range of symbolic possibilities, including sport, learning and foreign travel (also in this specific chart her personal relationships). Only then did she divulge that she had recently joined a gym and that her latest love affair had been short-lived. Her pressing concern was whether to move to Australia and if this would enhance her career and relationship prospects. She told me that her interest in right-wing politics related to her individualistic thinking, admiration for then Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, and need to network with like-minded people.

But this was not the focus of the chart. What had caught my eye was a stunning Pluto on the Ascendant (both at 10 degrees of Virgo) in hard semi-square (at 45 degrees) aspect to the Sun (at 28 degrees of Cancer) which rules

the twelfth house of imprisonment and is the universal signifier of the father (see Figure 1). I had been guided psychically and by craft as the Ascendant is a very powerful point on the chart.[9]

Pluto is a malefic planet that symbolises fate, death, power, trauma, obsession, seduction, secrecy and authoritarian politics. More positively, it concerns new beginnings, the process of change, unfinished business, the spirit world and psychoanalysis. Artists over the centuries have captured the 'Rape of Persephone' including the statue by Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1622) and painting by Peter Paul Rubens (1636–8) in which Hades (Pluto) abducts Persephone into his underworld. According to Greek and Roman mythology, when the god appears on earth he wears a helmet that makes him invisible, hence associations with autocracy, secrecy and control. The position of Pluto in this particular chart possibly refers to someone for whom relationships are power games, an individual with deeply held secrets in contrast to her extrovert manner. It was not surprising that she was interested in right-wing politics.

Eventually, after I had very diplomatically described the symbolism of Pluto, my client opened up and revealed the 'magic' of astrology. Her parents had divorced when she was a child, after which her father repeatedly abducted her from the UK to the USA over a period of ten years, the after effects of a bitter marital break-up. During this time she scalded herself badly with near fatal consequences, which required a series of skin grafts and periods of hospitalisation over several years (she showed me the scars). In the past five years, both her mother and sister had died and she had been involved in five car crashes within six months putting her life at risk. The astrological moment divined her story and I was able to match the symbolism to her experience, which my client found disconcerting. During the consultation she became agitated, demanding answers to sort out her material lifestyle and reiterated that she did not believe in astrology. She compounded this illustration of dissonance through a need for me to divine her life without her engagement. She chose not to express agency to elect her future or take personal responsibility by refusing dialogue, and re-iterated that astrology was pointless unless it answered her needs with my role to tell her what to do.

She was enacting the autocratic and negative symbolism of Pluto (but not its spirituality), which she had transferred onto me, manifesting another 'take' on the chart. She was displaying a 'Type 1 individual' character (Hőllinger 2004, 305). and I felt she needed to engage with a fuller symbolism of Pluto and the rest of her chart. These wider terms of self-reflection relate to an existential 'Type 2 individual',[10] and I expanded the narrative utilising other astrological possibilities. My client was neither interested in the astrology nor self-reflexivity, her concern was solely profane and in regards to future lifestyle and career possibilities in Australia. She bemoaned that her life had been fated and dismissed my advice to consult a psychotherapist to work through

this. Her lack of agency befits the powerful symbolism of a planet steeped in destiny and fate. The consultation aptly expressed the contradictions and inconsistencies of modernity as her conventional concern for future happiness and material success clashed with an unhappy past, which she appeared to disavow. The 'magic', which reflected my agency as an astrological diviner, had exposed a dissonant cultural profile which unsettled her. Moreover, her apparent distrust of astrology highlighted her perception of its 'non-legitimacy' exacerbating dissonance. It was a very unsatisfactory consultation with no further plans to meet.

My client's disinterest in working through the symbolic material to garner a broader self-produced narrative, and her narrow focus on future lifestyle showed her unwillingness to engage with either her own past or broader existential and philosophical concerns. It reaffirmed the historical secular shift from a spiritual to material astrology.

Possibly her refusal to make decisions suggests a symbolic return to the helpless child abducted by her father or awaiting another traumatic skin graft and unable to make choices. Dissonance highlights the problems with agency and self-identification, and the tensions for clients accommodating change and electing the future. Self-reflexivity concerns not just responsibility and difficult decision-making, but acknowledgement of self and others, which may not concur with secular aspiration or self-identification. Moreover, her reaction to the 'magical' predictive process (however retrospective) questions the parameters and meaningfulness of agency.

Astrology in its mercurial fashion plays games and there can be a 'slipperiness' to interpretation that equivocates between a psychic or craft reading, and a life not-yet-chosen by the client or one one mapped out by the astrologer's take on the symbolism. Moreover, fixity through horoscopy offers security and reassurance for the client unlike the agency and risk accompanying an elective biography.

The self-referencing astrologer

The self-referencing astrologer reveals and manifests, 'the circumstances in which the astrologer has taken up the interpretation' (Cornelius 1994, 222). This trans-trational method and subjective understanding acknowledges my circumstances that correspond to this case study. This metaphysical ambition to make meaning revolves around the astrological symbolism of Pluto, the god of the Underworld and spirit world, and its transference which reveals strange synchronicities offering further 'takes'.

In 1991, at the time of the consultation, I was working on the psychiatric wing of a London prison with a reputation for its high suicide rate (Pluto's Underworld), and I worked for a further fourteen years in this penal establishment. The experience continually exposed dissonance between my ideal of

prison and the reality. Moreover, there was a chain of events over three years in which I underwent personal tragedy and a series of deaths (my stepsister (1991), father (1992) and great uncle (1994)) that had a powerful effect on my life and world view.

A further take regarding re-contextualisation refers to when I put together initial ideas for this article (around twelve years ago), which corresponded to the death of my mother (2010). My re-engagement with the article also related to recent research as my previous publication had concerned a narrative around Highgate Cemetery and burying the ashes of my great uncle (Clements 2017).

This creative self-referential take on the chart adds another dimension as meaning making and the project of self-identity is ambiguous, neither 'rational', nor totally negotiable or 'linear', exposing dissonant modernity.

Dissonant modernity: 'rationality' and the individual

Many cultural commentators have grappled with dissonant modernity. Max Weber for example, recognised individuals embedded in the inconsistencies of modernity trying to grasp the contradictions of belief systems. These may be testament to the failure and corruption of material worldly practices, which affect the growth of 'rational' structures thereby encouraging metaphysical unrest (Weber 1991, 122). Modern life is paradoxical and dissonant, the consequence of ordered schemas and material drives that are embedded in belief. The need for re-enchantment in our secular world as espoused by Weber is a theme taken up by Patrick Curry regarding the role of astrology (see Willis and Curry 2004, 86–88).

Theodor Adorno continued this leitmotif of enlightenment but criticised occult practices for invoking 'irrationality' in order to manipulate its consumers (Adorno 1953, 1951). He understood this phenomenon of believing and disbelieving at the same time, which also describes our relationship with advertisements, as promoting a non-critical authoritarianism that encourages psychological dependence (Adorno [1947] 1991, 85–6). Astrological forecasts contain a veiled threat that creates anxiety leaving the reader cognitively disorientated, a cyclical process that serves to fulfil the need for astrological counselling (Adorno 1994a [1953], 72). Although Adorno directed his bile at mass produced sun-sign newspaper columns, he made no distinction between this and esoteric astrology, and derided all occult practices as symptomatic of, 'the regression of consciousness to magic' (Adorno 1951, 178). His position fails to appreciate the contradictions and complexities of modernity, let alone any empathy for the perceptions of astrological users.

Habitual engagement with astrology may offer ontological security for the individual, manufactured through everyday routines, although this may increase existential anxiety due to the need to make choices from the various

identities and possibilities offered. Dissonance also results from the discrepancy between the 'real' self and the 'ideal' astrological imagery that concurs with a key postmodern strand of New Ageism, the individual search for self-perfection through self-analysis (Hőllinger 2004).

Walter Benjamin recognised the material and metaphysical as inseparable and mutually constitutive aspects of modernity, contradicting and affirming each other. He highlighted the need for mystical escape from the alienating effects of 'rational' capitalism, a phantasmagoria, which seduces and sates this need (Benjamin 2006, 40). His metaphorical thinking influenced by mysticism, Surrealism and poetry recognised how individuals cope with the uncertainty of modernity.

The flâneur or flâneuse (urban wanderer) embodies an altered spiritual reality, disenchanted with a materialistic and rationalised lifestyle, searching for a more existential and creative understanding. It describes an attitude towards knowledge that is alternative, bizarre and mysterious (Jenks [1999] 2006), which dissonance correlates to some extent with the cultural omnivore. Benjamin acknowledged the need for arcane and 'magical' everyday cultural practices to enable reflexivity, a hybrid of enlightened reason and fantasy to help us cope with our alienation (Benjamin 2006, 36). This non-conformity embraces the vagaries of late modernity with its patchwork of 'rational' and trans-rational positions, 'logical' and emotional responses. He epitomised dissonance personally through his fascination with the Kabbalah and Jewish mysticism, which sits uneasily alongside revolutionary and material Marxist intent.

Astrology offers an altered reality that encourages reflexivity, a 'magical' process of realisation similar to Benjamin's internal journey. It can help to frame our understanding of deeper primordial questions that formulate our knowledge and identity (Rojek 1997, 165). Willis and Curry aptly summed this up in relation to the commuter's everyday routine checking the mass mediated astrological forecasts:

> The moment when a reader on an Underground train is struck by the truth of an observation in his or her sun-sign column for the day is a divinatory moment: an experience however fleeting, of concrete magic and enchantment. (Willis and Curry 2004, 66).

So on one level, the drudgery of 'rational' material practices becomes bearable through such a realisation, and on another level, this phantasmagoric escape reflects a disjointed and dissonant lifestyle.

Carl Jung attempted to explain 'magical' realisations psychologically and hypothesised that spiritual forces underpin the psyche and desire, where synchronicities connect the creative non-linear realm of understanding with archetypal humanity (Jung [1937] 1968, 42–3). His modernist notion of individuation, the process of establishing the complete autonomous and unique

individual, requires psychoanalytic strategies to help integrate then differentiate the individual psyche to enable self-realisation, an internal journey which astrology mediates (Jung 1956). A criticism of his theory of acausality is that it offers a totalising perspective, which denies individual agency and psychic realisation. Here, it may be germane to re-iterate that theoretical structures are possibly inadequate, as they do not stretch to cover our lack of understanding (Braude 2007).

Nonetheless, hypothetical notions of individuation (acausal or not) and the project of self-identity associated with reflexivity, help to shape the construction of individuality (the individual steeped in the philosophical and social). But as Richard Sennett critically surmised, the project of self-realisation encourages an excessive focus on the private individual detached from wider socio-cultural, public and political concerns (Sennett 1986), a dissonant and unbalanced trend towards an inward looking and self-orientated individualism promoted by psychological astrology.

New subjectivities: reflexivity and the project of self-identity

The narrative of self-actualisation encouraged by esoteric astrology is a pursuit of active individualised goals, dis-embedded from traditionally determined identity positions and re-embedded into self-produced biography. These self-defined new subjectivities that concern urban sophistication and liberation corresponds in part to those single-minded and self-absorbed characters primarily focused on their own needs and lifestyles. Self-perfection recognises that individualisation is freedom to continually reconstruct and finish the complete 'self' (Heaphy 2007, 87). So the self is a flexible, reflexive and aspirational project (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002), which embraces practical, existential and psychoanalytical ideas.

Consequently, astrology has mainstream appeal in a secular age as it embraces this shift from 'other worldly' to 'this worldly' orientations (York 2007, 412), which concerns individual lifestyle, relationships, careers and material considerations. It blends a range of multi-identities that formulate diverse personal profiles and encourages self-reflexivity offering possible future developments. It may include a lifestyle of self-interest predicated upon the notion of freedom as a disengaged individualism, epitomised by the case study.

Kellner (1992, 142) highlighted this fluidity as choice to, 'make – and then remake – one's identity as fashion and life-possibilities change and expand'. Besides a knock-on effect of excessive choice exacerbating existential anxiety, the plethora of possibilities also creates problems for the astrologer, as these identity positions may be contradictory and hidden, superficial and deeply held, or not yet realised. Correspondingly, religious identity has taken up a

more individualised and self-reflexive position eschewing collective understandings. There is a greater focus on subjectivities through spirituality and psychological self-help concepts, crystallising the 'modern' centre of religious identity (Klinkhammer 2017, 184–5).

The hypothetical range of 'projects of the self', which astrology mediates is a continuum that includes the urbane flâneur or flâneuse steeped in metaphysical ambition seeking self-actualisation, which represents a particular romantic notion of individuality through existential lifestyle. This philosophical exploration of autonomy articulates transgression and alterity, which is susceptible to New Age spiritualities (Hőllinger 2004, 306–7). These offer 'ideal' versions of the individual that reject mainstream Western educational, religious and capitalistic systems (Heelas 1997). As Heelas (1996) acknowledged when researching New Ageism, the importance of transformation associated with a self-orientated and inner-directed 'religion' requires degrees of self-responsibility within a broad spiritual understanding. This focus on inner subjectivities valorises the autonomous individual and revolves around a counter-cultural discourse that rejects mainstream social practices, steeped in traditional spiritual meta-narratives of 'timeless' wisdom (Heelas 1996, 70), reconfiguring Western occultism, Eastern mysticism and Jungian psychoanalysis.

In contrast, a less romantic 'take' recognises the project of self-identity as shaped by self-management and self-presentation whereby religious, occult or therapeutic frameworks provide the means for inscripting and transforming the soul (Rose 1999). Here meaning calculated by astrological judgement may operate as a connivance that makes people amenable to suggestion (concurring to some extent with Adorno's critique), which may reflect their ambition and self-absorption. In relation to new subjectivities, this can support self-managed 'regimes of truth' (Foucault 1991, 22–4), which in extremis encourages self-seeking individuals to engineer themselves, a manifestation of individualism that manipulates feeling, thought and conduct.

This particular 'take' on self-seeking individualism corresponds to Marshall McLuhan's critique of mediation processes in general. He recognised how such techniques and technologies anaesthetise and entrap us. His rumination over the myth of Narcissus, who found himself numb after mistaking his reflected image for somebody else, confirmed for him an alliance between the medium and the message (McLuhan 1964, 45–52). Here there may be a danger that self-referential processes engender narcissism whereby the self is lost. The imaginary reflected individual as devised by the medium of astrology and astrologer may appear as another person. This may seem far-fetched, but there may well be much alienation and dissonance created through individual (mis)recognition or (dis)avowal of the astrological self, which became apparent in the

case study. Natal horoscopy is eminently adaptable, embedded in socio-cultural, philosophical and psychoanalytic frameworks, which enables astrologers to shape astrology to articulate with user interests.

Hőllinger (2004, 305) using empirical research into New Ageism suggested two ideal types of individual, which corresponds to some extent with those outlined. Type 1 people who seek self-perfection through psychotherapy and rigorous self-discipline with the self central to this project; and more anarchic Type 2 characters who pursue esoteric self-knowledge through a more socially aware but morally inconsistent attitude.

Hypothetically, astrological collusion with the Type 1 client may well offer narrow secular terms of reference veering towards individualism, which revisits Sennett (1986) critique of self-realisation as egocentricity. It contrasts with the possible philosophical breadth of astrological analysis for the Type 2 individual that better recognises the mutually constitutive relationship between the individual and social as expressed theoretically by Jung's individuation. This individuality embeds the symbolic correspondence between the microcosm and macrocosm, and 'God's ideal' of social harmony. Reflexive modernity is a dissonant, risky and complex amalgam of contradictory socio-cultural processes that Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002, 23–30) distilled into a range of fifteen propositions, three of which are salient in terms of astrology. First, as an elective biography; second, as personal responsibility for life; and third, as a form of self-reflection encompassing the evaluation of wide-ranging and contradictory experience. With regards elective biography, natal horoscopy explores personal astrological symbolism and mediates future potential employing lived experience and symbolic possibilities. As clients are their own biographers reciting their life stories during a consultation this allows for a certain amount of negotiation of history, future outcomes and amplification of concerns. Personal responsibility is problematic if the client transfers this onto the astrology or astrologer rather than grasping the mettle, as detailed in the case study. In practice, astrology encourages dialogue and self-reflexivity, agency that contributes towards the project of self-identity and a 'life path'. Foucault's 'techniques of the self' adds value to the discussion (as suggested by a reviewer of an earlier version of the article). It develops an alternative framework of self-formation, resolving the problems of egotism by bringing together a self-focused individualism with self-awareness and existential reflection. The individual thereby acquires ethical agency and a breadth of understanding to 'account for different realities' by 'setting up and developing relationships with the self. . . . for the decipherment of the self by oneself'

(Foucault 1992, 29). Here we can unpack and re-pack the self more objectively using astrological symbolism beyond self-orientated individualism, thereby positively influencing our interaction with others.

Conclusion

Western and UK astrology consists of a permutation of esoteric, individual DIY and sun-sign formats, which offers multiple levels of engagement, from everyday meanings to more personal and philosophical insights. Trans-rational esoteric astrology today prospers enmeshed in hybrid gradations of psychological, scientific, DIY and popular profane craft. This fluid divinatory practice steeped in varying philosophies and degrees of crafted method, creative and psychic hunches, highlights agency, narrative and negotiation in the construction of self-identity, offering self-elected biographies.

The case study showed how in practice the astrologer mediates psychic hunches embedded in learnt craft, and it grounded some of the ideas presented, including the difficult choices surrounding individual definition and responsibility. It 'magically' revealed dissonance regarding biographical narrative and offered assistance towards the project of self-identity, although the client embodied conflict and resisted agency. It exposed a fatalistic and negative personal profile which dissonance was compounded through a disavowal of the past and refusal to take decisions regarding the future. The layered and everyday content of astrological practice and the difficulties negotiating fate, revealed the problematics within modernity in relation to belief and rationality. These trans-linear 'takes' of the chart, first during actual consultation, then through synchronicities regarding my situation at that time and later in relation to the initial idea for this article and development of the article, exposed other meaningful interpretations.

This article has taken the position that astrology cannot always predict and encourage self-reflexive engagement for clients. It may not provide a neat or overriding conceptualisation of life, but offers choices for individuals to help them unpack, elect and manage their continually unfolding existence however problematic. Self-identity constructed through self-reflexive practices offers risk, which exposes the contradictions of modernity and questions the parameters of agency and logic. Such agency ensconced in divination highlights the ambiguous 'legitimacy' of astrology.

Notes

1. An example is William Lilly, a renowned astrologer employed by Oliver Cromwell, who entitled his seminal book *Christian Astrology* ([1647] 1985).

2. Critically, scientism treats astrology as a pseudo-science offering a crude philosophy of life (Cornelius 1994, 197) as it expresses specific ideologies and discourses that delimit 'rational' frameworks (Lash et al. 1992, 3).
3. Astrological symbols are still visible in religious buildings showing the historical alignment of Christianity with the craft. For example, in the nave of Canterbury Cathedral there are defaced zodiacal symbols that are legible today and it is a moot point how effective this has been in eradicating astrology.
4. 'Legitimacy' is a paradoxical notion that refers to established protocols controlled by institutional thinking, in contrast to popular and individualised ones, which in turn influence them.
5. There are institutional Masters degrees in Occult Studies in certain UK universities which suggests legitimate aspiration.
6. Bourdieu did recognise diversity in relation to legitimate taste and the, 'exclusive appropriation which attests to the owner's unique personality' (Bourdieu 1984, 282), but his emphasis remained focused on institutional power.
7. The astrologers Maggie Hyde and Pat Blackett called this the 'judder effect' (cited in Willis and Curry 2004, 119–122).
8. Natal charts were distributed to astrologers without consultation with the volunteer clients or any information given. They were asked to prepare brief interpretations which were sent with two other volunteer chart interpretations, and clients were asked to choose their nativity (hence double-blind test). They were unable to select their own profile. This was compounded by a separate test that was undertaken whereby volunteers failed to recognise their own psychological profiles and should have alerted Carlson to review his methods.
9. There is synchronicity with my natal chart as I too have a hard Sun-Pluto aspect, which also suggests the possibility of transference regarding her father onto me.
10. Höllinger's typologies are explained later.

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