

Postgraduate/Distance Learning Assignment coversheet & feedback form

**THIS SHEET MUST BE THE FIRST PAGE OF THE ASSIGNMENT YOU ARE SUBMITTING
(DO NOT SEND AS A SEPARATE FILE)**

For completion by the student:		
Student Name: Cole Prots		
Module code: HPCA7015 Module title: Introduction to Cultural Astronomy and Astrology	Student ID number: 2430008	Educational support needs: Yes/No
Module tutor: Nicholas Campion		
Assignment due date: 27 Nov. 2025		
If your module has multiple submissions please indicate which piece of work this is. 1 st ☐ 2 nd ☐ 3 rd ☐ 4 th ☐ 5 th ☐ 6 th ☐		
I confirm that this is my original work and that I have adhered to the University policy on plagiarism. Signed		
Email submission: if you are submitting this form via email, please tick this box ☐ (as a substitute for your signature) to confirm that you agree to the above declaration.		

Assignment Mark

Final Mark

WILL BE
GIVEN ON
TURNITIN

NB. All marks are provisional until confirmed by the Final Examination Board.

PLEASE NOTE: ALL COMMENTS WIL BE POSTED ON TURNITIN

For completion by Marker 1 :

Comments:

Marker's signature:

Date:

For completion by Marker 2/Moderator:

Comments:

Marker's Signature:

Date:

AGREED INTERNAL MARK (where necessary):

Comment on process of arriving at agreed mark:

External Examiner's comments (if relevant)

External Examiner's Signature:

Date:

Essay based on a Sky Journal

Introduction

In a letter to his brother, Vincent van Gogh closes with 'Be clearly aware of the stars and infinity on high. Then life seems almost enchanted after all.'¹ After describing his daily life and mundane experiences, he offers a profound observation that reframes this potential monotony as something closer to spectacle. Van Gogh, through his work, encourages a fantastical approach to viewing the natural world, most notably through his stylistic paintings seen in works like *The Starry Night*.

This paper compiles qualitative observations of the sky, specifically the phases of the moon, and how they relate the words of van Gogh. This paper argues that, while the moon's visible phases did not consistently produce observable behavioural changes in my urban environment, the practice of nightly lunar observation reframed everyday social encounters as moments of enchantment, fulfilling Van Gogh's claim that looking 'at the stars and infinity' can re-enchant life.

Methodologies

From October 21 to November 20, I observed the phases of the Moon across a single lunar cycle. A lunar cycle, as reported by Dane Rudhyar, begins the new moon, moves through the waxing crescent, first quarter moon, waxing gibbous, reaching the halfway point at the Full Moon, followed by the waning gibbous, last quarter Moon, and finally the waning crescent before returning to the New moon.² For the purposes of this paper, I am reporting on my observations from New Moon to Full Moon.

The study adopted a reflexive qualitative approach: I recorded sensory detail, emotional responses, and concurrent social observations (notably nightlife scenes). Through adopting a reflexive approach to my qualitative research, I was able to consistently keep my subjective point of view at the forefront of my observations, while taking into account that this subjectivity would impact the outcome of my research.³

Limitations include urban light pollution and skyline obstruction, which restrict celestial visibility, and the short duration of one lunar cycle; these factors are made explicit in the interpretation of the data.

The New Moon to Waxing Crescent

I started my observations during the Libra New Moon. New Moons are often associated with new beginnings, fresh starts, and initiation points where experiences build over time. Dane Rudhyar mentions that the new moon type is 'eminently subjective, impulsive, and emotional' and that this period is 'instinctive, youthful, essentially unconscious and irrepressible activity'.² My early excerpts, however, contradicted this idea, as I found my observations to be monotonous and restrictive.

¹ Gogh, Vincent van, and Ronald de Leeuw. *The Letters of Vincent Van Gogh*. London: Penguin Books, 1997, p.392.

² Rudhyar, Dane. 2013. *The Moon: The Cycles and Fortunes of Life* (Literary Licensing)

³ Bell, J., Waters, S., & Johnson, H. (2018). *Doing your research project* (8th ed.). Open University Press.

“The wind is blowing slowly. Planes are flying high, not a star in the sky. One of the downsides of living in NYC is that the pollution makes it difficult to see anything, especially on a cloudy night like tonight.”

Sky Journal excerpt from 22, Oct. 2025, the day after the New Moon

In those early days of observation, there were no reports of feeling ‘enchantment’ as described by van Gogh. In my entries, I often reported seeing ‘the same murky sky’ I did the day before from the same location. The repetitiveness of my observations, in retrospect, aligns with many of the works produced by van Gogh himself that have staccato and repetitive brush strokes.⁴ Even the clouds in Figure 1 look like they could have been taken from a van Gogh painting.



Figure 1. Backyard view, Long Island City, Queens, NY. iPhone 15 photo, 22 Oct 2025, ~00:00.

After a week of observations, I found myself feeling similarly to Sarah Curtis, who writes about ‘becoming more detached from the moon.’⁵ The process of observing the moon felt counterintuitive when I could accurately infer what I was going to see every evening.

“The deep navy sky is lit up by a few stars and the glow of the skyscrapers. What is so enchanting about a constantly blue-grey sky? What inspires me when the heavens are dark? Myself? Others? No speckled stars adding depth to the endless abyss above me.

⁴ “Collection.” n.d. Van Gogh Museum <<https://www.vangoghmuseum.nl/en/collection>> [accessed November 26, 2025]

⁵ Curtis, Sarah. “Six Phases of the Moon.” *The Threepenny Review*, no. 174 (2023): 14–15. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27248961>.

Even the murky clouds are so tastelessly uninspired, often taking the shape of a haphazard stroke from a sickly paintbrush."

Sky journal excerpt from 27, Oct. 2025, during the Waxing Crescent Moon

The New Moon to Waxing Crescent, however, is when energy is starting to build, and according to Rudhyar 'a state of tension of a more or less acute character begins to appear.'² While my observations appeared in the moment to have a narrow view, the monotony had opened me up to a larger observation that most likely would not have taken place.

The First Quarter Moon

By the arrival of the first quarter Moon, I was 'exhausted by the sameness' of my observations. According to Rudhyar, the quarter moon phase 'symbolizes a crisis in relationship-an actional crisis which involves, both, the repudiation of what does not harmonize with the growing life, and the deliberate building of new structures.'² My personal crisis had led me to start exploring more phenomena in my environment. As of July 2024, New York City is home to 8.48 million people.⁶ If I was unable to see phenomena in the sky that enchanted my life, why not observe the parallels between the sky and the world around me.

Folklore and psychology have long been at odds with each other on whether or not the moon has an influence on human emotions. Psychiatric research states that 'there is no notable effect' on patients by the lunar cycle, whether that be 'general depression and anxiety,' or hospital admittance.⁷ The modern scientific understanding is that heightened states of being (particularly at night) were often associated with the moon phases because 'the light of the moon permitted outdoor activities that were otherwise impossible.'⁸

While the psychological perspective may omit the influence of lunar phases on human behavior, turning my attention to the millions of people around me sparked inspiration. Similar to Curtis' lunar reflections stating, 'Oh moon, forgive me. Forgive me my skepticism, my maternal failures, my distracted brain. Forgive me for forgetting I am tethered to this earth,' I found myself mournful for ignoring the full picture and focusing on one facet of the phenomenological experience.⁵

"Halloween. A huge party is happening today. So much joy, nonstop vibes, everyone is dancing and having a ki. This could be because of the holiday, but the first quarter moon just passed. The sky's rich navy blue hue is more beautiful tonight than it has been in other nights.

Sky Journal excerpt from 31, Oct. 2025, during the First Quarter Moon

Turning my observations to include the behaviors of people around me drew me to think about van Gogh's impressionist paintings. Impressionist paintings are made of 'short, broken brushstrokes that barely convey forms, pure unblended colors, and an emphasis on the effects

⁶ "No Title." n.d. Nyc.gov <<https://www.nyc.gov/content/planning/pages/planning/population>> [accessed November 25, 2025]

⁷ Gokhale, M. V., & Kumar, S. (2023). Moon and Health: Myth or Reality? *Curēus* (Palo Alto, CA), 15(11), e48491. <https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.48491>

⁸ Iosif, A., & Ballon, B. (2005). Bad Moon Rising: the persistent belief in lunar connections to madness. *Canadian Medical Association Journal (CMAJ)*, 173(12), 1498–1500. <https://doi.org/10.1503/CMAJ.051119>

of light.⁹ In my opinion these paintings, much like my observations of the moon, require both a narrow look at singular points as well as a stepped back view of the entire canvas to appreciate the beauty.

The Full Moon

As my observations shifted to include the behaviors of people around me, I was reminded of a quote often said at the bar I work at. “The crazies come out during the Full Moon.” Recent reviews have concluded that most studies find no consistent effect of lunar phase on general depression, anxiety, or hospital admissions, though some studies report isolated associations (for example, with ‘non-affective psychoses on full-moon days’).⁷ Drawing on my observations, however, there is validity in both the psychological and esoteric views on lunar influence on human behavior.

The Full Moon is a time where ‘what is often felt is now seen. This may mean a revelation or illumination,’ and ‘some organic-psychic trouble may develop.’² My sky journal personified the Moon, almost as if it became a human to observe instead of an object in the heavens.

“The moon is full so she’s shining bright. The moon has a beautiful sheen to her, kind of like she’s saying ‘I’m here watching over you.’” Sky Journal excerpt from Tuesday November 4, 2025, during the Full Moon



Figure 2. Backyard view, Long Island City, Queens, NY. iPhone 15 photo, 4 Nov 2025, ~00:00.

The Full Moon not only lit up the night sky, but also lit up my senses, expanding my awareness to ‘all of the sights and sounds of the city I love.’ With my senses heightened, my

⁹ Samu, Margaret. 2004. “Impressionism: Art and Modernity,” Metmuseum.org, 1 October
<<https://www.metmuseum.org/essays/impressionism-art-and-modernity>> [accessed November 26, 2025]

attention was then quickly shifted toward the behaviors of others. On the evening of the Full Moon, I was able to observe a group of patrons at a bar in Manhattan I was performing at.

“They are not having it today. I dropped down in a split and hung upside down from the rafters for little more than a whisper. I feel amped, but everyone is keeping to themselves and their groups. At least the boys behind the bar and I are having fun.” Sky Journal excerpt from 5, Nov 2025, during the Full Moon

I snapped a photo (**Figure 3**) and noted ‘most people here are in their own world... also as if I’m the inconvenience,’. While writing this entry, JADE’s Angel of My Dream played over the speakers ‘it’s all bitter sweet, I will always want you and need you, you don’t care.’¹⁰

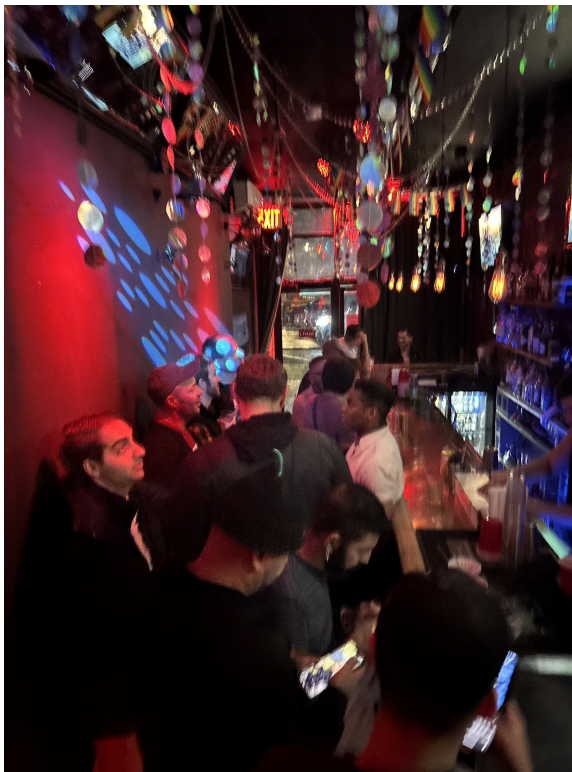


Figure 3. Bar view, The Toolbox, Manhattan, NY. iPhone 15 photo, 5 Nov 2025, ~00:00.

The song goes on to say ‘but it feels nice in the spotlight, when the camera flashes I act so happy, I’m in heaven when you’re looking at me.’¹⁰ The Full Moon in its own way was acting like a spotlight in that moment. During the Full Moon, ‘enlightenment becomes stronger,’ acting like a spotlight to the enchantment of the world that van Gogh wrote about.² It was in this moment I had the realization that while the patrons were not expressing themselves the way I anticipated, their enthusiasm for each other (presuming these were preexisting relationships) was astounding.

¹⁰ JADE, That’s Show Biz Baby, track 1, 2025, RCA, TIDAL Streaming

Many astrological schools of thought view the Full Moons as cleansing periods, where we 'say goodbye,' as we are increasingly aware of our emotional and external surroundings.¹¹ The following day I wrote 'the moon begins to wane today, and so do my expectations. Both the sky and people around me remain constant, and while they both might look the same on the surface they fluctuate day to day, offering small changes that are to be appreciated.'

Conclusion

Observing the phases of the Moon over a single lunar cycle was a clear catalyst for perceptual transformation and embracing ways to find enchantment in life. Given the short period of time I spent observing the moon, I was unable to support any substantiated claims that the phases of the Moon influence the behavior patterns of humans. However, the practice of observing the moon provided an interpretive lens that made the moments I wasn't observing the moon more enchanting. For future work, I recommend extending the proposed methodology at the beginning of this paper across multiple lunar cycles and locations. Combining qualitative measures with quantitative behavior logs could allow for more succinct conclusions on the relationships between moon phases and human behavior.

As I now interpret Vincent van Gogh's words, I believe them to mean that fluid awareness alters mundane experiences. Much like his paintings, being able to step back or take a closer investigation of his brush strokes will influence the experience of interpreting his art. My narrow view of what I was observing during this sky journal paralleled my restricted responses and limited enchantment, but concluded with an open mind.

"I am feeling a sense of relief today. As the lunar cycle comes to a close and the new moon is upon me I am thinking about what is next. While many of the night skies over the past month looked the same, the feelings have fluctuated and taught me much of how to turn inward when I am lost, and look for answers in the world around me."

Sky Journal excerpt from Thursday November 20, 2025, during the New Moon

My observations were led with assumptions, rather than an appreciation for the present moment. I've found that this month of lunar observation has given me a renewed appreciation for the unique and complex human experience. And when there is no moon to observe, or stars in the sky, listen to the natural flow of the city around me and allow that to inspire awe within me.

¹¹ The AstroTwins. 2024. "All about Full Moons in Astrology," Astrostyle: Astrology and Daily, Weekly, Monthly Horoscopes by The AstroTwins, Astrostyle by the AstroTwins, 13 December <<https://astrostyle.com/astrology/full-moons/>> [accessed November 26, 2025]

Sources

1. Bell, J., Waters, S., & Johnson, H. (2018). *Doing your research project* (8th ed.). Open University Press.
2. "Collection." n.d. Van Gogh Museum <<https://www.vangoghmuseum.nl/en/collection>> [accessed November 26, 2025]
3. Curtis, Sarah. "Six Phases of the Moon." *The Threepenny Review*, no. 174 (2023): 14–15. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27248961>.
4. JADE, *That's Show Biz Baby*, track 1, 2025, RCA, TIDAL Streaming
5. Gogh, Vincent van, and Ronald de Leeuw. *The Letters of Vincent Van Gogh*. London: Penguin Books, 1997, p.392.
6. Gokhale, M. V., & Kumar, S. (2023). Moon and Health: Myth or Reality? *Curēus* (Palo Alto, CA), 15(11), e48491. <https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.48491>
7. Iosif, A., & Ballon, B. (2005). Bad Moon Rising: the persistent belief in lunar connections to madness. *Canadian Medical Association Journal (CMAJ)*, 173(12), 1498–1500. <https://doi.org/10.1503/CMAJ.051119>
8. Rudhyar, Dane. 2013. *The Moon: The Cycles and Fortunes of Life* (Literary Licensing)
9. "No Title." n.d. Nyc.gov <<https://www.nyc.gov/content/planning/pages/planning/population>> [accessed November 25, 2025]
10. Samu, Margaret. 2004. "Impressionism: Art and Modernity," *Metmuseum.org*, 1 October <<https://www.metmuseum.org/essays/impressionism-art-and-modernity>> [accessed November 26, 2025]
11. The AstroTwins. 2024. "All about Full Moons in Astrology," *Astrostyle: Astrology and Daily, Weekly, Monthly Horoscopes by The AstroTwins*, *Astrostyle by the AstroTwins*, 13 December <<https://astrostyle.com/astrology/full-moons/>> [accessed November 26, 2025]