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**Towards an Embodied Astrology:
Embodiment as a Paradigm for Astrological Practice**

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INTRODUCTION

What is the role of the astrologer? As a supposed technical expert in matters pertaining to character, fate and destiny, we might expect him or her to be able to deliver definite answers to our questions about who we are, and what will happen to us in the future, from astronomically derived data. However, this can only apply if we are to accept the assumption, intolerable to most, that a person's character and future are non-negotiable, that fate is somehow fixed by the authority of immutable cosmic influences to which there is no appeal. To accept this as a pre-requisite of astrology, however, whether as critic or adherent, may be premature.

This thesis draws upon the work of scholars from a range of fields, whose conclusions support the radically alternative possibility that destiny is neither pre-ordained by divine dictate, nor subject to a predictable mechanism, but that it is dynamic, fluid, and capable of being shaped through deliberate acts of embodied participation. In respect of the continuity between Mesopotamian celestial divination and the later horoscopic astrology,¹ we are dealing with an activity that has its roots in a negotiated *relationship* with divine presences, a ritually orchestrated communication, between human beings and a plethora of gods and non-human beings known through their multifarious expressions in a natural world, which included the sky.

¹ Standard texts include: Rochberg, Francesca, *The Heavenly Writing* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 2004) [hereafter Rochberg, *Heavenly Writing*], Campion, Nicholas, 'Babylonian Astrology: Its Origin and Legacy in Europe', in Helaine Selin (ed.), *Astronomy Across Cultures* (London: Kluwer, 2000, pp. 509-553) [hereafter Campion, 'Babylonian Astrology']. Baigent, Michael, *From the Omens of Babylon: Astrology and Ancient Mesopotamia* (London: Arkana, 1994) [hereafter Baigent, *Omens*]. Contrary view offered by Pingree who claims astrology to be a proto-science invented by the Greeks. See Pingree, David, *From Astral Omens to Astrology, From Babylon to Bīkāner* (Rome: Istituto Italiano per L'Africa e L'Oriente, 1997) [Pingree, *Astral Omens*], pp. 21-30. For discussion see Willis & Curry, *Astrology, Science & Culture, Pulling Down the Moon* (Oxford: Berg, 2004) [hereafter Willis & Curry, *Astrology*], pp. 151-2.

A future open to negotiation with such other-than-human powers cannot, by definition, be one predictable solely by technical means. This thesis, then, develops the idea that astrology might more valuably be understood not as an imposition of abstract, technical knowledge, but rather as a participative act, a multi-sensorial dialogue with certain dynamic presences, visible and invisible, that draw us *bodily* into relationship. Embodied in the moment of engagement with its symbols such an astrology, it is suggested, may serve as a dynamic interaction through which a person's inherent relationship with the cosmos might reveal itself. I aim to develop the hypothesis that an embodied astrology, understood as a form of reciprocated experiential exchange, may be capable of revealing powerful *truths*, laded with *value* for those who experience them. Furthermore, I suggest that the realisation of these truths, within a *ritual* context,² might serve to re-connect its participants to an authentic relationship with their own phenomenological sphere of pre-theoretical experience, or *life-world*.³ Such an astrology would appear to require the astrologer to act not simply as a translator of esoteric knowledge, but rather as some form of dialogical mediator between worlds.

² "Ritual" is a complex term with different understandings. Broadly speaking, it is a form of intentional action or performance undertaken with respect for particular conditions of engagement. See, for example, Smart, Ninian. *Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World's Beliefs* (London: Fontana Press, 1987) [hereafter Smart, *Dimensions*], pp. 71-6; Rappaport, Roy, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) [hereafter Rappaport, *Ritual*], p. 27. We will develop this understanding further in due course.

³ Term coined by Husserl. The definition given will be developed further. For discussion see, for example, Moran, Dermot, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London: Routledge, 2000) [hereafter Moran, *Phenomenology*], pp. 181-6.

METHODOLOGY AND REVIEW OF PREVIOUS WORK

This thesis addresses the apparent lack of a coherent theoretical framework for astrology *in practice*, one that honours the *value* of the lived experiences of those who participate in it. It suggests that we need a new paradigm that might incorporate this, a paradigm of embodiment. Thomas Kuhn, in a formidable critique of the authority of scientific method, demonstrated that any claim to truth always requires a framework of inquiry, or consensus of perspective, which he termed *paradigm*.⁴ He showed that however broad the paradigmatic consensus it can never hold an absolute authority, being always partial, situation-dependent and value-laden. It is thus liable to *shift* when new understandings come to light that the old paradigm can no longer contain.⁵ This thesis seeks to be part of such a shift in the consideration of astrological practice, the old paradigms being concerned primarily with technique and rationalisation. I do not posit a technique of interpretation that might predict more accurately, nor a theoretical model to explain *how* astrology works. Instead, I accept that it *does* work (however one is to define that) for those who engage with it and seek to develop a methodological perspective that can articulate the value-rich *truths* that might be revealed through its embodiment in practice.

There are many theories to *explain* astrology as a *system of knowledge* and these exist within established philosophical, magico-religious, scientific or psychological

⁴ See Kuhn, Thomas S., *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1962).

⁵ *ibid.* Kuhn's undermining of the autonomy of scientific method is developed by, for example, Feyerabend, Paul, *Against Method: An Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge* (London: NLB, 1975); Midgley, Mary, *Science as Salvation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992) [hereafter Midgley, *Science*].

paradigms,⁶ the same paradigms within which its claims have been sanctioned against, undermined and ridiculed.⁷ However conceived, these conceptual structures, in their own way, all claim ontological and epistemological authority over the unsystematic contingencies of perception and perspective. This can be seen to hark back to Plato's privileging of the stable authority of *logos* and *episteme* over the unpredictable contingency of *mythos* and *doxa*.⁸ These latter are rendered epiphenomenal to the systematic workings of the former and, as we shall discuss, the very fact of our dynamic embodiment *in* the world is diminished or overlooked as a result.

There is no previous work available that relates specifically to an *embodied astrology*, and the validation of the embodied perspective by scholars of astrology is very limited. I will therefore be drawing upon a paradigm of embodiment already extant in other areas of scholarship. In doing so, I hope to make some tentative steps toward a methodological re-appraisal of astrology as an experientially efficacious practice. It is

⁶ See for example, within a neo-Platonic / Pythagorean philosophy, Addey, John, *Harmonics in Astrology* (Romford: L. N. Fowler, 1976); within a spiritual philosophy, see, for example, Leo, Alan, *Astrology for All*, Vol. I (Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2003 [1929]) [hereafter Leo, *Astrology*]; within a scientific paradigm, see, for example, Seymour, Percy, *Astrology: The Evidence of Science* (Luton: Lennard, 1988); within a Jungian psychological paradigm, see for example, Hamaker-Zondag, *Psychological Astrology: A Synthesis of Jungian Psychology and Astrology* (York Beach, ME: Weiser, 1990) [hereafter Hamaker-Zondag, *Psychological*].

⁷ Magico-religious injunctions include, Augustine, *The City of God*, translated by Rev. Marcus Dods (Edinburgh: Clark, 1978). Neo-Platonic philosophical objections include, Pico della Mirandola, Giovanni, *Disputationes adversus Astrologiam Divinatricem*, translated into Italian by E. Garin (Firenze, 1946); for discussion see, for example, Yates, Frances A., *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (London: Routledge and Kegan P, 1971); disputed by Johannes Kepler; see Rabin, Sheila J., 'Kepler's Attitude Toward Pico and the Anti-Astrology Polemic', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 1997 (Autumn), Vol. 50, No. 3, pp. 750-70. Modern scientific objections typified by, Bok, B.J., L.E. Jermone and P. Kurtz, 'Objections to Astrology: A Statement of 186 Leading Scientists', *The Humanist*, 1975 (Sept/Oct), vol. 35, no.5; also at <http://www.americanhumanist.org/about/astrology.html> [accessed 10/05/06]. Astrology has also been undermined within a psychological paradigm by, for example, Adorno, Theodore W., *The Stars Down to Earth: And Other Essays on the Irrational in Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 46-171. Certain of Adorno's conclusions have been disputed by Bauer & Durant's empirical research. See Bauer, Martin & John Durant, 'Belief in Astrology: A Social-Psychological Analysis', *Culture and Cosmos*, 1997, no. 1, pp. 55-71.

⁸ For discussion see Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, pp. 84-6, 104-5; Wadsworth, John, 'The Disenchantment of Western Astrology', forthcoming in *Journal of Nature and Religion* (2006).

my speculative thesis that the embodied paradigm might release astrology from abstract, cognitive paradigms, which reduce it to historical anachronism, testable science, *a priori* religious dogma or humanistic model of the psyche. I suggest that astrological practice might be an authentic way of being and acting in the world, *in its own right*, rather than a *pseudo* version of something else.⁹

Embodiment as a Paradigm

My theoretical framework of embodiment is developed primarily from the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty,¹⁰ who, in *Phenomenology of Perception*, posited that the primacy of bodily perception constitutes an authentic phenomenology of lived experience, prior to analytic reflection. What emerges out of this philosophy is the recognition that the capacity for thought can only be artificially separated out from one's embodied *being-in-the-world*, which constitutes the ground of all perception and the sensuous root of all cognitive reflection.¹¹ This philosophical perspective undermines all forms of idealism, from Plato's Ideal Forms to Descartes' *cogito*, which insist upon an *a priori* separation of spirit (or mind) from matter, subject from object.¹² Experiencing the world in terms of such dualisms is shown by Merleau-Ponty to be a process grounded in the body's own irreducible perspective upon the world, from which all supposedly pre-existent dualistic models emerge.¹³ Anthropologist Roy Willis echoes this idea drawing attention to the 'carnal architecture' of the cosmos, our cosmological constructs bearing remarkable

⁹ Curry acknowledges this. See Curry, Patrick, 'The Historiography of Astrology: A Diagnosis and a Prescription', in K. von Stuckrad, G. Oestmann and D. Rutkin (eds.), *Horoscopes and Public Spheres* (Walter de Gruyter, 2005) [hereafter Curry, *Historiography*], p. 273.

¹⁰ See, for example, Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, *Phenomenology of Perception* translated by Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 2003 [1962]) [hereafter Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*].

¹¹ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, p. xiv.

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ *ibid.*

conceptual similarity around the globe, appropriate to the ‘bilateral symmetry and sexual duality’ of our human physiology.¹⁴

Thomas Csordas, in his paper entitled, *Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology*,¹⁵ has proposed embodiment as a consistent methodological perspective, the body being ‘the existential ground of culture and the sacred’.¹⁶ He argues that embodiment admitted to the status of a paradigm should allow data and problems already analysed to be re-interpreted from other perspectives,¹⁷ being that ‘the pre-objective and pre-reflective experience of the body is already cultural prior to the analytic distinction between subject and object.’¹⁸

Csordas draws together Merleau-Ponty’s idea of the body as the existential ground of perception with Bourdieu’s notion of the ‘socially informed body’¹⁹ within an anthropological discourse of practice.²⁰ While Merleau-Ponty argues that any experience of the world can only be known from a particular embodied perspective,²¹ Bourdieu, in his *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, radically develops Mauss’s concept of the *habitus*.²² For Mauss the habitus constituted the underlying structuring of practices and representations collectively inculcated in our embodied responses to the world (not dissimilar in conception from Jung’s ‘collective unconscious’²³). Bourdieu

¹⁴ Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, p. 148, 137.

¹⁵ Csordas, Thomas, ‘Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology’, *Ethos*, vol. 18, no.1, 1990 [hereafter Csordas, ‘Embodiment’].

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 5, 23.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁹ Bourdieu, Pierre, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, translated by Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) [hereafter Bourdieu, *Outline*], p. 124.

²⁰ Csordas, ‘Embodiment’, p. 7.

²¹ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, p. ix.

²² Mauss, Marcel, ‘Techniques of the Body’, *Economy and Society* 2, 1973, pp. 70-88.

²³ See Jung, Carl Gustav, *The Collected Works, Vol. IX, Part 1, The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious 2nd* ed. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) [hereafter Jung, *Archetypes*].

takes this further, showing that in ritual behaviour, the lived body enacts *itself* spontaneously according to the dispositions pertinent to the moment of enaction, *drawing* on the patterns of the collective habitus, without being slavishly obedient to them, as in a ‘mechanical reaction’.²⁴

The body, for Bourdieu, is an irreducible principle, socially informed, mimetically attuned and ever-responsive to the conditions of the moment; the ground from which religious and cultural experience arises. As a ‘practical reactivation...opposed to both memory and knowledge’, the mimesis of the body in “religious” performance is one of temporally embodied identification, not imitation or representation based on cognitive memory or knowledge.²⁵ Such a realisation undermines established theories of religion. Eliade’s centralising ontology of the sacred as pre-existent to lived experience²⁶ and Durkheim’s notion of religion as social construction based upon a collective, cognitive misconception²⁷ are both called into question by Bourdieu’s insights into ritual practice.

Bourdieu’s paradigm of embodiment in practice situations is evident in the work of anthropologist Rene Devisch in his *Weaving the Threads of Life*.²⁸ In seeking to penetrate the ritual experience of the *Yaka* healing cults, he placed emphasis on the ‘production of meaning and regeneration of forces’,²⁹ moving closer to an

²⁴ Bourdieu, *Outline*, pp. 72-3.

²⁵ Bourdieu, Pierre, *The Logic of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) [Bourdieu, *Logic*], pp. 72-3. See also Mitchell, Jon P., ‘Performance’, in Christopher Tilley (ed.), *Handbook of Material Culture* (London: Sage Publications, 2006, pp. 384-401), p. 386.

²⁶ See Eliade, Mircea, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World Inc., 1959), p. 22-32.

²⁷ See Durkheim, Emile *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), pp. 76-125.

²⁸ Devisch, Rene, *Weaving the Threads of Life, The Khita Gyn-Eco-Logical Healing Cult Among the Yaka* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) [hereafter Devisch, *Weaving*].

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 5.

understanding of the contingencies of bodily enactment in these practices beyond that of mere representation. Opposed to script-oriented approaches to ritual, and critical of Victor Turner's analysis of ritual as symbolic social drama, Devisch finds the notion that symbols are primarily corporeal devices, not textual ones. This thesis will draw upon some of his important insights.

Embodiment and Animistic Participation

Merleau-Ponty, in *The Visible and the Invisible*,³⁰ introduces the idea of 'flesh of the world',³¹ as the dynamically cohesive medium of communication and transformation between 'my body and the world'; life being reflexively experienced at that interface of transgressional exchange.³² In reflecting his concluding remark about flesh that 'it is through the world first that I am seen or thought',³³ I will address the *more-than-human* nature of embodiment, drawing especially on David Abram's *The Spell of the Sensuous*.³⁴ Abram insists, 'we are human only in contact, and conviviality, with what is not human',³⁵ marking the important ecological turn that has developed out of Merleau-Ponty's theory. In pursuing Wood's 'relationalities of worldly engagement, both human and those of other creatures',³⁶ a cross-disciplinary inquiry is emerging out of the momentum that, Brown and Toadvine argue, drives ecological thinking and phenomenology together.³⁷ So within the paradigm of embodiment, we may indeed

³⁰ Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, *The Visible and the Invisible* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968) [hereafter Merleau-Ponty, *Visible*].

³¹ Merleau-Ponty, *Visible*, p. 248.

³² *ibid.*, pp. 248-9.

³³ *ibid.*, p. 274.

³⁴ Abram, David, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World* (New York: Vintage, 1997) [hereafter Abram, *Spell*].

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. ix.

³⁶ Wood, David, *The Step Back: Ethics and Politics after Deconstruction* (New York: SUNY Press, 2005), p. 151.

³⁷ Brown, Charles S. & Ted Toadvine, *Eco-Phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself* (Albany: State University of New York, 2003) [hereafter Brown & Toadvine, *Eco-Phenomenology*].

be broaching the possibility of an inherently pluralistic ecological ethic,³⁸ arising as participation with and respect for a living world. I will develop this idea with reference to animism, which is re-emerging as a valid cosmological or spiritual perspective, and one that is entirely compatible with the embodied paradigm. Animism is presented by Graham Harvey in *Animism: Respecting a Living World*,³⁹ as ‘one of the many vitally present and contemporary *other-than-modern* ways of being human [Harvey’s italics]’.⁴⁰

It is important also to mention the work of Lakoff and Johnson, who, in *Philosophy in the Flesh*,⁴¹ argue that the vehicle that moves us ‘in passionate spirituality’ is *metaphor*, and that it is the dynamism of the body, recruiting our abilities to perceive, move and feel, that is the underlying ‘neural mechanism’ of metaphor.⁴² Christopher Tilley’s *Metaphor and Material Culture*⁴³ is also pertinent to this study. Drawing on both Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology and Devisch’s rich appreciation of *ritual metaphor*, Tilley has recognised the way that the human body is metaphorically interwoven with both the social body and *cosmos*, as experienced by a particular local grouping.⁴⁴ In this regard he has developed the work of Ricoeur⁴⁵ and Black⁴⁶ on metaphor to incorporate their understanding within a paradigm of embodiment.

Tilley, whose insights have been gleaned from his phenomenological approach to the

³⁸ See, for example, Curry, Patrick, *Ecological Ethics* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), pp. 108-13; Abram, Spell, p. 68-9.

³⁹ Harvey, Graham, *Animism: Respecting the Living World* (London: Hurst & Co., 2005) [hereafter Harvey, *Animism*].

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. xxi.

⁴¹ Lakoff, George & Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999) [hereafter Lakoff & Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*].

⁴² *ibid.*, p. 568.

⁴³ Tilley, Christopher, *Metaphor and Material Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999) [hereafter Tilley, *Metaphor*].

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 33-40.

⁴⁵ Ricoeur, Paul, *The Rule of Metaphor* (London: Routledge, 1978) [hereafter Ricoeur, *Metaphor*].

⁴⁶ Black, Max, ‘More about Metaphor’, in A. Ortney (ed.), *Metaphor and Thought*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

landscape, identifies that in the act of ritual, the body, as ritual subject, can reach out beyond merely representational linguistic expression to release re-generative forces and disclose meaning within the life-world. The body then is recognised as a source of cultural creativity and innovation.⁴⁷

This leads us neatly into a consideration of astrology within an embodied paradigm. The astrologer who creatively participates with astrological symbolism, it may be argued, experiences the efficaciousness of astrology not through its *mere* linguistic representation, nor through its *a priori* spiritual ontology, but rather *in the act*; its embodied metaphors reverberating with meaning in a particular ritual context.

Astrology and Embodiment

Embodiment, as already outlined above, reveals itself as a rich, pluralistic paradigm and could be developed as an important critique of reductive scientific and psychological models and critiques of astrology. It lends support to the emerging academic discussion of astrology as an instance of ‘concrete magic’,⁴⁸ and the idea that has been developed from this by Patrick Curry (endorsed by Willis) in *Astrology, Science and Culture*, that the practice of astrology is a form of post-modern, pluralistic re-enchantment.⁴⁹ Both make reference to the necessarily embodied nature of the astrological experience without developing embodiment explicitly as a theoretical model. By emphasising the radical, pluralistic immanence of the emplaced moment, rich with potential meaning, Willis and Curry explicitly support Geoffrey Cornelius’s thesis of astrology as divination, which the latter expounds in *The*

⁴⁷ Tilley, *Metaphor*, p. 39.

⁴⁸ Weber, Max., in H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 282.

⁴⁹ Willis, Roy & Patrick Curry, *Astrology, Science & Culture: Pulling Down the Moon* (Oxford: Berg, 2004) [hereafter Willis & Curry, *Astrology*].

Moment of Astrology.⁵⁰ Cornelius distinguishes the realised interpretation from the merely speculative, the former clearly marked by its quality of divine, more-than-human embodiment.⁵¹ The idea of astrological symbolism being embodied through its manifold expressions *in the world*, is developed by Maggie Hyde in *Jung and Astrology*,⁵² who explores the oft-overlooked subtleties of Jung's divinatory thought and criticises the more reductive, popular applications of Jung's ideas currently extant in modern psychological astrology.⁵³

Gregory Shaw, in *Theurgy and the Soul*,⁵⁴ has discussed embodiment in the Platonic tradition in the form of Iamblichean *theurgy*, the 'work of the gods', as distinct from the more speculative *theology* as a mere 'discourse about the gods',⁵⁵ which lacked the power of embodiment as a vehicle for direct communion with the divine.⁵⁶ He shows how, for Iamblichus, every theurgic observance was 'a ritualised cosmology' which, as a 'divine service', restored 'a vital connection to the cosmos'.⁵⁷

Astrologer Mike Harding, in *Hymns to the Ancient Gods*, has explicitly developed a phenomenological approach to astrology,⁵⁸ which is of relevance to our study, but this appears to fall outside of the embodied paradigm and will be partially critiqued in this thesis.

⁵⁰ Cornelius, Geoffrey, *The Moment of Astrology, Origins in Divination* (Bournemouth: The Wessex Astrologer, 2003) [hereafter Cornelius, *Moment*].

⁵¹ This will be discussed later. See Cornelius, *Moment*, pp. 292-3.

⁵² Hyde, *Jung and Astrology* (London: Aquarian Press, 1992) [hereafter Hyde, *Jung*].

⁵³ *ibid.*, pp. 81-101.

⁵⁴ Shaw, Gregory, *Theurgy and the Soul, The Neo-Platonism of Iamblichus* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State Press, 1995) [hereafter Shaw, *Theurgy*].

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 5.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p. 25.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p. 23.

⁵⁸ Harding, Mike, *Hymns to the Ancient Gods* (London: Arkana, 1992) [hereafter Harding, *Hymns*].

As a possible exemplar of astrology operating authentically within a paradigm of embodiment, I will consider, in the latter part of this thesis, the practice of experiential astrology and astrodrama. I will reflect upon the work of practitioners who employ active participation with myth and symbolism through evocative speech, movement, drama, music, visualisation and other modes of artistic expression, as a way of exposing a ‘tacit knowledge’ that exponent of the practice Prudence Jones suggests, in *Creative Astrology*, ‘shapes the day-to-day experience of us all’.⁵⁹

Astrodrama was developed during the 1980s both in Europe and the USA. It involves groups of people, sensuously communicating symbolic resonances, such as those found in an astrological chart,⁶⁰ the symbolic constituents of which are revealed to participants through their dramatic enactment. In the only comprehensive practical guidebook to the practice, *Astrology Alive*,⁶¹ Barbara Schermer describes this work as serving not simply as a tool of abstract understanding, but as a way of experiencing a ‘vital, primal communion with that which is beyond’,⁶² describing embodiment a key factor in the work.⁶³ I will consider that through such *ritually orchestrated*, experiential participation with astrological symbolism, perceptions may emerge that allow phenomenological truths to be realised, truths that are of real value to those concerned. There is a complete lack of scholarly material, and relatively sparse popular literature, relating to this aspect of astrological practice and this thesis constitutes its first academic treatment.

⁵⁹ Jones, Prudence, *Creative Astrology, Experiential Understanding in the Horoscope* (London: Aquarian, 1991) [hereafter Jones, *Creative Astrology*], p. 1.

⁶⁰ Also called a birthchart, map, figure or horoscope. This is the abstract representation of planetary positions into a twelvefold division of the heavens, constructed for a particular moment in time.

⁶¹ Schermer, Barbara, *Astrology Alive: Experiential Astrology, Astrodrama and the Healing Arts* (Wellingborough: Aquarian, 1989) [hereafter Schermer, *Astrology Alive*].

⁶² *ibid.*, p. 16.

⁶³ *ibid.*, p. 34. She does not elaborate on this explicitly in her book.

TOWARDS AN EMBODIED ASTROLOGY

PART ONE: THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF EMBODIMENT

The Beginnings of Astrology

It is surely no co-incidence that the few astrologers who have expressed intimations compatible with the paradigm of embodiment see astrology either as a divinatory or magical expression. However, it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the complex issues that arise when entering into the debate as to astrology's core existential status. Rather, I am concerned to differentiate the prevailing philosophical discourses that have framed the rational parameters of that debate from the pre-analytical experience of an astrology that might deliver value as an efficacious practice.

Astrology's known origins lie in the Mesopotamian divinatory tradition, where both chthonic⁶⁴ and celestial omens could be potentially interpreted as a sign of divine communication.⁶⁵ Fate was drawn in the animated patterns of a culture's immanent experience of "natural" (here implied to include celestial) phenomena, inextricably linked with a plurality of divine beings, responsible for the associations between those phenomena and human society.⁶⁶ As Rochberg has demonstrated, the omen literature suggests that the omen was not deterministic but, rather, open to dialogical negotiation via a performative ritual appeal, or *namburbi*, (the undoing of the omen).⁶⁷ The Mesopotamian texts also indicate, however, the beginnings of a more

⁶⁴ Gods or spirits pertaining to the earth.

⁶⁵ Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, p. 58.

⁶⁶ See, for example, Rochberg, *Heavenly Writing*, p. 4.

⁶⁷ Rochberg, *Heavenly Writing*, pp. 50-2, p. 207; Baigent, *Omens*, p.87; Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, p. 58.

abstract, systematic codification of the heavens,⁶⁸ politically more authoritative, and, while not yet fully deterministic, suggestive of a move toward a more simplified, divine schema.⁶⁹ This tension between the more fluid spontaneous divinatory tradition and a codified doctrine of interpretation is one that has occurred throughout astrology's history.⁷⁰

In the development of Greek culture, we can distinguish between the spontaneous divination of the chthonic omens that populate the 'chanted tales' of Homer's oral poetry,⁷¹ from the determinism of the later Stoics, where all worldly things 'are established by a settled law'.⁷² In Homer we find the lives of gods and men unsystematically woven together 'in a general hotchpotch'.⁷³ By contrast, the authoritative rational conceptions of the later, *more literate* Greeks, from Plato's 'spiritual hierarchy',⁷⁴ to Aristotle's more naturalistic 'ladder of being',⁷⁵ preclude the 'messy mythicity', typical of oral traditions and older, aboriginal cultures.⁷⁶

Abram has shown persuasively how, in the cultural transition from orality to literacy, knowledge becomes captured 'in a visible and fixed form'.⁷⁷ Language, and

⁶⁸ Standard texts include: Rochberg, *Heavenly Writing*; Campion, 'Babylonian Astrology'; Pingree, *Astral Omens*; Baigent, *Omens*.

⁶⁹ Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, p. 59.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p. 60. This is one of the primary themes of Cornelius's *Moment of Astrology*; see, for example, Cornelius, *Moment*, pp. 81-97.

⁷¹ Abram, *Spell*, p. 104. Several authors have discussed the chthonic, incantative nature of Homer's poetry. See, for example, Parry, Millman, in Adam Parry (ed.), *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected papers of Millman Parry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971); Lord, Albert, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960); Abram, *Spell*, pp. 102-7.

⁷² Manilius, cited by Tester, Jim, *A History of Western Astrology* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1987), p. 32.

⁷³ Plutarch, cited by Calasso, Roberto, *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. 276.

⁷⁴ See, for example, Plato, *Timaeus & Critias* (London: Penguin, 1977), p. 9.

⁷⁵ See, for example, Aristotle, *De Anima / On the Soul*, translated by Hugh Lawson Tancred (London: Penguin, 1986), p. 68.

⁷⁶ Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, p. 58.

⁷⁷ Abram, *Spell*, p. 107.

specifically the language of omens, previously indistinguishable from the animate flux of sensuously engaged phenomena, becomes a contemplative presence in its own right and assumes an authority that supersedes that of pre-conceptual, intuitive experience.⁷⁸ He shows how this becomes more firmly established as phonetic, alphabetic writing systems, such as Hebrew and Greek, replace pictographic writing systems that depict sensuously discernible phenomena, and thus retain their metaphoric link to the more-than-human world.⁷⁹ Goody has shown how the advent of the written form co-emerges with the concept of linear time and the corresponding causal conception of originating, non-repeating *base points* in time.⁸⁰ The written form, as Greenhouse summarises, anchors such a base point in time and irreversibly disengages a *moment* in time from the experiential cycles of time to which it naturally belongs;⁸¹ in the ‘ritual time’,⁸² or ‘mythic time’,⁸³ that characterises an oral tradition.

We may observe such a literate imposition if we examine the astrological thesis of Ptolemy. His *Tetrabiblos*,⁸⁴ described by Neugebauer as the “‘Bible of Astrology’”,⁸⁵ was to become the most influential text in the western tradition. Long argues convincingly that Ptolemy’s thesis is actually an apologetic answer to Cicero’s neo-Platonic tirade against divination;⁸⁶ divination having already been reduced through

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 93-135.

⁷⁹ *ibid.* See also Havelock, Eric A., *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1986).

⁸⁰ Goody, Jack, cited by Greenhouse, Carol J., *A Moment’s Notice: Time Politics Across Cultures* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986) [hereafter, Greenhouse, *Moment*], p. 53; See also Eliade, *Myth*, pp. 102-30; Abram, *Spell*, pp. 194-7.

⁸¹ Greenhouse, *Moment*, p. 53-4.

⁸² Rappaport, *Ritual*, p. 222.

⁸³ Eliade, Mircea, *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 2005) [hereafter Eliade, *Myth*], pp. 20-1.

⁸⁴ Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, translated by F.E. Robbins (Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk: Loeb Classical Library Harvard University Press, 1940) [hereafter Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*].

⁸⁵ Neugebauer, Otto, *The Exact Sciences in Antiquity* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1969), p. 54.

⁸⁶ See Long, A.A, ‘Astrology: Arguments Pro and Contra’, in Jonathon Barnes, Jacques Brunschwig, Miles Burnyeat & Malcolm Schofield (eds.), *Science and Speculation: Studies in Hellenistic Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

Cicero's own reasoning, from a pluralistic, participatory initiative to a 'foretelling of events' assumed to have been *written* in advance.⁸⁷ Ptolemy accepts Cicero's definition and sets about removing ritual participation from the picture completely by fitting astrology within an Aristotelian framework of naturalistic forces or planetary influences. This is constructed, with no little rhetoric, around the objective astrological *quality* of a founding *seed moment* in time supposed to be indicative of a person's character and fortune in life.⁸⁸ This remains today the basic rationale for natal astrology.⁸⁹ Cornelius has labelled this largely uncontested assumption the 'doctrine of origin',⁹⁰ and has contrasted it with the older Greek tradition of *katarche*. This latter did not involve a fixed interpretation of a person's "beginning", (Ptolemy's thesis), but, as Cornelius suggests, the efficacious act of *making a beginning* in the moment of ritual engagement with the astrological omen.⁹¹ The *katarche*, completely ignored by Ptolemy, was expressed through a direct participatory initiative, an enquiry necessarily *involving* divine, more-than-human presences.⁹² The power of the *katarche*, based upon a showing of symbolism at the time of inquiry, Cornelius argues, 'comes precisely from its unique appearance "for us, here, now"'.⁹³

The aim of our discussion here, however, is not to bemoan the loss of an oral, mythic astrological tradition usurped by the imposition of time, literacy and abstract philosophical theories, but rather to consider whether the astrological *act* itself might re-enliven that same oral, mythic tradition that was never lost, but as Cornelius

⁸⁷ Cicero, cited by Curry, in Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, p. 60.

⁸⁸ Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, p. 17.

⁸⁹ See, for example, Greene, Liz, *Astrology for Lovers* (London: Aquarian Press, 1993), p. 9.

⁹⁰ Cornelius, *Moment*, p. 87.

⁹¹ *ibid.*, pp. 125-8.

⁹² *ibid.*

⁹³ Cornelius, cited by Curry. See Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, p. 59.

argues, simply driven underground, forced to lie about itself publicly in order to survive.⁹⁴

Cornelius holds a minority position in the astrological debate, however, and the quest for the objective verification of an astrological *mechanism*, which the prevailing cultural discourses demand, continues to be the yardstick by which the “Truth” of astrology is judged, by both its critics and many of its adherents. Its ongoing failure to deliver such a mechanism to the satisfaction of detached empirical scrutiny⁹⁵ compounds its implausibility and leaves astrology in a kind of ontological and epistemological no-man’s land.

Over its long history astrology, as a tradition, would appear to have been continually enriched by new layers of experientially realised astrological meaning.⁹⁶ It is Curry’s thesis that knowledge of this tradition, together with its technical implementation in the form of an accurately calculated horoscope, provides the ‘ritual requirement’ through which the unknown may reveal itself and new meaning (pertinent to the moment of engagement) be realised.⁹⁷ Within the embodied paradigm, the *truth* of astrology need only, *and can only*, reveal itself in such an immanent context, at a particular moment, in a particular place. As such, it is a *phenomenological* realisation, and it is to the discipline of phenomenology to which we now turn.

⁹⁴ Cornelius, Geoffrey, ‘Is Astrology Divination and Does it Matter?’, at <http://cura.free.fr/quinq/01gfcor.html> [accessed 18/04/06].

⁹⁵ For discussion, see, for example, Phillipson, Garry, *Astrology in the Year Zero* (London: Flare Publications, 2000) [hereafter Phillipson, *Year Zero*], pp. 124-66; Cornelius, *Moment*, pp. 42-79.

⁹⁶ See Brockbank, James, ‘Planetary Signification From the Second Century Until the Present Day’, *Culture and Cosmos*, 2003 (Autumn/Winter), vol 7, no. 2, p. 54.

⁹⁷ Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, pp. 62-3, 100.

Recovering a Phenomenological Perspective

Phenomenology has sought to reinvigorate philosophy by returning it to a consideration of the *concrete* nature of lived experience, in all its embodied richness. Husserl sought to undermine the basis of the empirical or positivist approach to knowledge about the world, which insists upon the *objective* verification of phenomena, by turning toward ‘the things themselves’ as they are experienced in their felt immediacy.⁹⁸ What marks phenomenology as such a radical departure from other philosophical discourses is that it allows the world to reveal itself through the perceiver’s own experience. This is a disposition that necessarily requires one to withhold belief as to what the experience means in any absolute way, at the risk of imposing one’s own non-contextual prejudice. For Merleau-Ponty, phenomenology is ‘a philosophy for which the world is always “already there” before reflection begins – as an inalienable presence; and all its efforts are concentrated upon re-achieving a direct and primitive contact with the world, and endowing that contact with a philosophical status’.⁹⁹

Phenomenology, as Merleau-Ponty conceives it, is primarily a philosophical approach, a way of being in relation to the world, though, in its Husserlian form, it has been employed largely as a research methodology, whereby the researcher attempts to bracket or suspend the thesis that constitutes their natural standpoint in order that another’s standpoint might be allowed to reveal itself.¹⁰⁰ This will be evident in my interviews with practitioners, to be discussed later, where my aim has been to enter into another’s world of experience and describe their account as faithfully as possible,

⁹⁸ Husserl, Edmund, *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy: Philosophy as Rigorous Science and Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man*, translated by Quentin Lauer (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), [translation of *Husserliana*, XXV, pp. 3-62], p. 21.

⁹⁹ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, p. vii.

¹⁰⁰ See, for example, Moran, *Phenomenology*, pp. 2, 148-52.

bracketing off my own prior assumptions as far possible, and resisting the temptation to explain away or psychologise their experience. This can be justified on the basis that there can be no authentic analysis without ‘accurate, judgment-free reporting’.¹⁰¹

As a method of analysis, however, phenomenology has its critics, who accuse it variously of a tendency toward solipsistic subjectivism, placing too much reliance upon intellectual intuition, and promoting a meaningless pseudo-metaphysics.¹⁰² Levi-Strauss has criticised phenomenology for maintaining a naïve, humanistic faith in the phenomenal evidence of consciousness, considered by structuralists to be notoriously unreliable compared to the invariant, unconscious structures that underlie human experiences.¹⁰³ Derrida, too, was suspicious of what he saw as a phenomenological attempt to revert to the authority of the supposedly pure, essential origins of the subjectivised moment, leading to a dualistic ‘metaphysics of presence’.¹⁰⁴ This critique, however, as Jack Reynolds argues, is answered by Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of embodiment.¹⁰⁵

This thesis endorses many of the criticisms of phenomenology as the systematic pursuit of an objective goal,¹⁰⁶ moving beyond Husserl’s aspirations for pure description and his seeking after the transcendental essence of phenomena, and toward a Merleau-Pontian ontology of the *always already* engaged perspective of embodiment. Heidegger also criticised Husserl, insisting that phenomenology must

¹⁰¹ Bowman, Marion, ‘Phenomenology, Fieldwork and Folk Religion’, *British Association for the Study of Religions Occasional Papers* (Cardiff: Open University, 1992), p. 1.

¹⁰² Moran, *Phenomenology*, p. 21.

¹⁰³ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ See, for example, Derrida, Jacques, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 49.

¹⁰⁵ For discussion, see Reynolds, Jack, *Merleau-Ponty and Derrida: Intertwining Embodiment and Alterity* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2004), pp. xviii, 55-82.

¹⁰⁶ Heaton, John, ‘Pyrrhonian Scepticism: A Therapeutic Phenomenology’, *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 1997, vol. 28, no. 1 (pp. 80-96), pp. 84-5.

be attentive to the *facticity* of human living, which takes the sought-after “essences” out of a time-less, place-less internal consciousness and puts them back into a temporal, concrete existence.¹⁰⁷

According to Curry, if one is to enter authentically into the world of astrological research, one needs to have had an experience of astrology revealing itself as being personally meaningful or valuable in a particular situation, or at least be open to the possibility that it might.¹⁰⁸ This does not mean that astrology must be permanently revealing itself to me, but that its authentic revelation should exist, in Heidegger’s terms, as an ever-present *possibility*.¹⁰⁹ Authenticity, for Heidegger, like perhaps the realisation of astrological meaning, can only arise as particular *moments* when we are most *at home* with ourselves and the world, a concrete sense of what Heidegger calls ‘mineness’.¹¹⁰ In Merleau-Ponty’s terms, these moments are realised when our perception is turned back upon ourselves and we recognise that we are genuinely connected to that which we perceive in a way that no longer renders us separate from it. In such moments, we can experience our *first-person-ness* without it becoming subjectivised and thus isolate from an erroneously assumed object.¹¹¹ For Merleau-Ponty, the world, as it is presented to his own consciousness depends upon his own contingent, temporally embodied existence. As he puts it, ‘[m]y existence does not stem from my antecedents, from my metaphysical and social environment, instead it moves out towards them and sustains them’.¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ See, for example, Polt, Richard, *Heidegger: An Introduction* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 79; also Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, pp. vii-viii.

¹⁰⁸ Curry, *Historiography*, p. 267.

¹⁰⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1962), p. 68. For discussion, see Moran, *Phenomenology*, pp. 239-40.

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹¹ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, pp. viii-ix.

¹¹² *ibid.*, p. ix.

We can thus reject abstract speculation as to whether astrology is true or false, for its relevance falls away within the embodied paradigm, and we can consider instead the accounts of those who have experienced its ability to *reveal* truths pertinent to their lives in particular situations and at particular times. As Merleau-Ponty insists, experience must always involve an experience *of* something, which can only be known from an embodied point of view, necessarily both *in* and *of* the world.¹¹³

Embodied Participation as a Critique of Dualism

The recognition of the embodied perspective stands in stark contradiction to any philosophy which assumes that one can stand outside of perceptual experience in the name of objectivity, and enjoy what Nagel has ironically called the ‘view from nowhere’;¹¹⁴ as Haraway puts it, ‘being nowhere while claiming to be everywhere equally’.¹¹⁵ This disembodied view assumes that one can stand outside of the politics of perspective, disregarding one’s embodied position in *relation* to other embodied positions, and somehow apprehend everything all at once. It is this assumption that one can hold an *apparently* disembodied view, so fundamental to the modern way of thinking, which inevitably reduces and thus undermines the rich, qualitative nuances of lived experience. This ‘dream of transcendence’, in Kane’s view, represents the attempt ‘to capture truth in a solitary idea’, disabling us from hearing the polyphonic stories of nature’s many and varied expressions, pre-empting our ability ‘to live *with* the earth, on the earth’s terms [my italics]’.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ *ibid.*, pp. vii-ix.

¹¹⁴ Nagel, Thomas, *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

¹¹⁵ Haraway, Donna, *Simians, Cyborgs & Women: The Re-Invention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991) [Haraway, *Simians*], p. 191.

¹¹⁶ Kane, Sean, *The Wisdom of the Mythtellers* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 1998) [hereafter Kane, *Mythtellers*], p. 255.

The mere possibility of objectivity, the indispensable requirement of scientific analysis, is rooted in a perspective that necessitates the fundamental “belief” in a world that is separated epistemologically and ontologically along the lines of subjective mental “experience” and objective, material “reality”. In his definitive polemic that came to define the modern scientific perspective, Descartes declared that there is nothing in nature that cannot be explained or that should give any cause to marvel.¹¹⁷ The Earth, so long associated with spirits, gods, goddesses and mysterious powers, with whom one interacted, was rendered by Descartes, (an important development in a longer process of secularisation), as nothing more than inert, dead matter, whose operation was one of mechanism, predictable, manipulable, conquerable.¹¹⁸

That division of mind (Descartes’ *cogito*) from matter (nature emptied of “cognitive” agency), allows the evolution of culture to be understood separately from that of nature, the latter becoming merely a backdrop or stage of human activity, a more-or-less blank canvas onto which human ingenuity may be projected.¹¹⁹ Tim Ingold, a prominent voice among others, has argued that nature can no longer be considered in opposition to culture, a virtually unquestioned philosophical imposition, which assumes subjective agency to be the preserve of human beings alone, rendering nature as passive object.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Descartes, Rene, in Roger Ariew (ed.), *Philosophical Essays and Correspondence* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000) [hereafter Descartes, *Philosophical Essays*], p. 319. For discussion, see Midgley, *Science*, p. 75.

¹¹⁸ See Descartes, *Philosophical Essays*, pp. 263-72. For discussion see, for example, Merchant, Carolyn, *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Liveable World* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 56.

¹¹⁹ Ingold, Tim, *The Perception of the Environment, Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London: Routledge, 2000), [hereafter Ingold, *Perception*], p. 20.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 40-60.

Max Weber argued that the reduction of nature's inherent mystery, plurality and concrete magic to a system manipulable by human means, constituted the 'disenchantment of the world'.¹²¹ For Hanegraaff this is buoyed up by social pressure exerted through a culturally established ideology of 'instrumental causality', which he describes as the tendency of the human mind to suspect that things that happen in the world 'must be the result of material causation'.¹²² As 'the dominant narrative of western society', he argues, this disenchanted worldview must be continually enforced in order to deny the spontaneous human tendency of participation.¹²³ In establishing its authority, the instrumentalist worldview then becomes the arbiter of truth to which apologists of previously enchanted pursuits such as astrology have to explain themselves, legitimating their practices, often by betraying their direct experience.¹²⁴

Curry has suggested that the history of astrology demonstrates such disenchantment via a series of compromises to a dominant objectivist measure of truth.¹²⁵ This can be seen in Ptolemy's rectification of astrology with Aristotelian natural philosophy, Aquinas's accommodation of naturalistic astrology¹²⁶ within scholastic Christian theology, and in the twentieth century by the appeal first to the hierarchical spiritual

¹²¹ Weber, Max., in H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 155.

¹²² Hanegraaff, 'How Magic Survived the Disenchantment of the World', *Religion*, 2003, no. 33, (pp. 357-80), [hereafter Hanegraaf, *Magic*], p. 375.

¹²³ p. 377.

¹²⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 377-8.

¹²⁵ Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, pp. 69-75.

¹²⁶ Pertaining to general, physical astrological influences; e.g. weather, the physical body, the fate of nations. Often distinguished from the more theologically controversial judicial astrology, pertaining to the reaching of specific judgments on an individual's fate by means of a personal horoscope. For discussion see, for example, Phillipson, *Year Zero*, pp. 115-6.

system of theosophy¹²⁷ and later, humanistic psychology.¹²⁸ Each of these concessions to *reason*, in their own way, have succeeded in reducing the more-than-human concrete polytheism of astrology's symbols-cum-daemons-cum-deities to a more understandable and controllable anthropocentric system, supposedly more palatable to religious or scientific authorities.¹²⁹ Astrologers today who contest that astrology should be objectively demonstrable as a mechanism for ascertaining truth, and that the revelation it affords might be rendered as a universal system, continue to be complicit in these compromises, for such positions preserve the disembodied Cartesian separation and deny the contingencies of participation with a more-than-human world.

It is worth remembering that the astrological map itself is a representation of the heavens from a particular *place* on earth at a particular *moment*. It is entirely perspectival and without the earth as perceptual ground, there could be no astrology. As both Curry and Cornelius have noted, the fact of this is heavily obscured by an almost exclusive astrological focus on objective time.¹³⁰ The cosmic divorced from the earthly perspective becomes an autonomous force, 'a 'Machine of Destiny',¹³¹ which confers absolute autonomy upon a cause-effect mechanism bound within a model of linear time, and bars the way to dialogue and a reciprocal engagement with the planets and stars and their manifest correlates in the world. However, when the cosmos is perceived phenomenologically in that it includes one's embodied involvement in moment and place, the heavens may become an experience 'at once

¹²⁷ See, for example, Leo *Astrology*.

¹²⁸ See, for example, Rudhyar, Dane, *The Astrology of Personality: A Reformulation of Astrological Concepts and Ideals, in Terms of Contemporary Psychology and Philosophy* (New York: Lucis, 1936) [hereafter Rudhyar, *Astrology*].

¹²⁹ Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, pp. 69-75.

¹³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 123. Cornelius, *Moment*, p. 304.

¹³¹ Cornelius, *Moment*, p. 173.

chthonic, cosmic and intimately personal’, a re-animated, re-enchanted relationship, indeed, ‘a drawing down [of] the moon’.¹³²

A key factor in phenomenological embodiment that breaks both the Cartesian and early Husserlian solipsism, is the realisation, facilitated through *movement* and *exchange*, of the facticity of our body-based experiential ontology, unavoidably inter-related, from the start, to other body-based experiencing “subjects”. When consciousness is realised as being manifest in and *through* embodiment, it becomes possible to appreciate that one’s actual embodied position in dynamic relation to the “other” is always in terms of *relationship* to one’s own partial perspective. Gibson determined this as the partial affordance that any so-called “object” of perception gives up to the perceiver, that supposed object being rich in participative, perceptual value, rather than a passive recipient of one’s objectifying attention.¹³³ Abram makes the seemingly obvious point that by varying my distance from other bodies and moving around them, I can appreciate these perspectives in a way that I cannot in relation to my own body, it being the ground of my perception.¹³⁴ Husserl was to eventually perceive in the dynamic relationship that movement affords, a relational affinity between other bodies and one’s own, which he terms *intersubjectivity*, identifying an associative empathy by means of which the embodied subject comes to intuitively recognise other non-human bodies as experiencing subjects.¹³⁵ Abram interprets Husserl’s notion of intersubjectivity, as being that which exists *between* self and other, and that which holds the cultural fabric of relationship for the life-world of

¹³² Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, p. 123.

¹³³ Gibson, James J., *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (London: Houghton Mifflin, 1979), pp. 127-43.

¹³⁴ Abram, *Spell*, p. 37.

¹³⁵ Husserl, Edmund, in Donn Welton (ed.), *The Essential Husserl: Basic Writings in Transcendental Phenomenology* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), pp. 135-60. For discussion, see Abram, *Spell*, pp. 36-9.

any cultural grouping together. Abram perceives the life-world as the embodied context for lived experience, constituting our immediate, pre-conceptual, pre-objective experience, that which is ‘peripherally present in any thought or activity we undertake’.¹³⁶

Astrology and the Flesh of Language

Merleau-Ponty conceived Husserl’s fabric of interconnectedness as the ‘flesh of the world’,¹³⁷ which he describes as a ‘massive corporeity’ which includes both what ‘one sees and touches’ as well as, in its ‘more agile’ expression, what is continuously *woven* between bodies.¹³⁸ As he puts it, ‘the flesh of my body is shared by the world, the world reflects it, encroaches upon it and it encroaches upon the world’.¹³⁹ That which the modern mind has come to view as mere “empty space”, Merleau-Ponty conceives as part of an evolving bodily field, a sensuous medium of communication; *language*. Flesh is an inextricable intertwining of the visible and invisible, the relationship between the two being that of *chiasm*, one being an isomorphic reversal of the other; it is described by Abram as a ‘vast living fabric’ of embodied dialogical exchange.¹⁴⁰ Merleau-Ponty’s designation of flesh is as neither mind, nor matter, but rather more like the older term ‘element’, in the sense that water, earth, air and fire were understood as elements, ‘a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being’.¹⁴¹ Similarly, for Abram, it is ‘the mysterious

¹³⁶ Abram, *Spell*, p. 40.

¹³⁷ Merleau-Ponty, *Visible*, p. 248.

¹³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 144.

¹³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 248.

¹⁴⁰ Abram, *Spell*, p. 83.

¹⁴¹ Merleau-Ponty, *Visible*, p. 139.

tissue or matrix that underlies and gives rise to both the perceiver and the perceived as interdependent aspects of its own spontaneous activity'.¹⁴²

Everything that may be described phenomenologically might be considered as flesh, everything that presents a *surface* to perception.¹⁴³ Within this paradigm of embodiment, language, *as flesh*, originates in our sensuous receptivity to the animate environment, communicative meaning being incarnate in our spontaneous, gestural responses to changes in the body's affective environment.

For Merleau-Ponty, language and the experiential perception of one's animate surroundings are co-emergent with one another; every perceivable gesture, sound or movement bears a meaning and that meaning has agency, as it is implicit in the words that are used to express it. Merleau-Ponty saw language as an essentially carnal phenomenon, not as an arbitrary representation or *sign*, of a particular emotion or feeling, but as a 'bodying-forth of that emotion into the world'.¹⁴⁴ Like spontaneous, responsive movement, so too must active, living speech be such a gestural "bodying-forth", and its meaning is therefore *immanent*, not representational.

The spoken word is a gesture and its meaning, a world...Faced with an angry or threatening gesture, I have no need in order to understand it, to recall the feelings that I myself experienced when I used these gestures on my own account...The gesture does not make me think of anger. It is anger itself.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Abram, *Spell*, p. 66.

¹⁴³ Priest, Stephen, *Merleau-Ponty* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 73-4.

¹⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 74.

¹⁴⁵ Merleau-Ponty *Phenomenology*, p. 214.

Astrologer Mike Harding, in his phenomenological exploration of astrological language, has suggested numerous examples of the language associated with planets and zodiacal constellations having developed alongside the phonetic lineage of words. His suggestion is that language itself calls upon a deep reservoir of astrologically symbolic expressions.¹⁴⁶ Thinking along *apparently* similar lines to Merleau-Ponty, Harding extrapolates the astrological meaning of Mars, the red planet, traditionally synonymous with the mythological god of war and the expression of anger and conflict. Harding argues that it is too simplistic to say ‘that the word *anger* “means” Mars or that *love* “means” Venus [Harding’s italics]’,¹⁴⁷ as this assumes an abstract, even arbitrary signification. He suggests that language itself ‘may have emerged from a desire to communicate a variety of instinctual, astrologically motivated sensations ...[and]... that astrology is embedded in all that has proceeded from it’.¹⁴⁸ He suggests that the vocalising *expression* of Mars, as an experiential phenomena, may be capable of liberating a whole range of metaphorical associations.¹⁴⁹

While he presents a fine phenomenological case for his conclusions, there is a problem here from a Merleau-Pontian perspective insofar as Harding is suggesting that language emerged ‘as an attempt to verbalise sensations that originated in the *inner* experience of astrological principles [my italics]’.¹⁵⁰ Language may indeed have evolved *in tandem* with astrological expression as our human bodies mimetically gesture and vocalise the dance of the cosmos, reciprocating in our neurophysiology, as Willis argues, ‘the very architecture of the cosmos’.¹⁵¹ However, Harding’s

¹⁴⁶ Harding, *Hymns*, pp. 151-61.

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 156.

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 156-7.

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.* p. 156.

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁵¹ Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, p. 146.

position still presupposes astrological meanings to be the *a priori*, and thus aculturally disembodied basis of experience, there being an existential gap between meaning and the imitation of meaning. Conversely, for Merleau-Ponty spoken words are active, sensuous presences and language cannot be genuinely understood in isolation from their reverberations. Likewise, the ongoing reciprocation with the cosmos may continually reveal new layers of astrological meaning, which subtly develop the tradition, but their revelation may be genuinely appreciable only in that moment of embodied engagement. The danger with Harding's position is that astrological meanings become conceptualised as literary forms, divorced from their spontaneous, evocative presence. As such, their sensuous origins become ghettoised in the past, and ironically, in Harding's construction, Mars ultimately does come to *mean* anger or some other literate concept. In this way, Harding's phenomenology reveals itself to be solipsistic, and, like Husserl's transcendentalism, vulnerable to the same external critique that, as we have seen, the embodied paradigm addresses.

Words, for Merleau-Ponty exist, not as inanimate symbols, but, in Edie's terms, as 'patterned sounds', the 'affective tonality' that conveys meaning through their living expression being untranslatable as a conceptual definition;¹⁵² words, vowels and phonemes are, for Merleau-Ponty, 'so many ways of singing the world'.¹⁵³ He rejects outright the idea, overwhelmingly prevalent in western thought, that language is an ideal, formal system, which can simply be detached at will from the *material* act of speaking or gesturing.¹⁵⁴ This constitutes his critique of Saussurean structuralism, for what is authoritative in language, he argues, is not its representational power but its

¹⁵² Edie, James M., cited by Abram, Spell, pp. 75-6. Edie considers Merleau-Ponty to be 'alone among philosophers of language in his sensitivity to this level of meaning'. (ibid).

¹⁵³ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, p. 217.

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.*, pp.174-99; see also Abram, *Spell*, p. 77.

relational and emotional impact, carried through speech.¹⁵⁵ Language is never a finished institution, as is evident in the way a child learns through his first attempts to speak, where the ‘whole of spoken language’ envelops him and ‘snaps him up like a whirlwind’.¹⁵⁶ While acknowledging language as an interdependent matrix of meaning, structuralism assumes *human* language to be primary, as opposed to (what Abram refers to as) ‘the sensuous perceptual life-world, whose wild, participatory logic’ *includes* human language only as an echo of its own organic cohesion.¹⁵⁷ From the perspective of structuralism, the commonality of symbolic associations is to be discernible through their cognitive representations, not their spontaneous, sensuous evocation within a *materially* contextual environment.

In applying structuralism to a study of cultural knowledge, anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss’s project was to decode different cultural stories to discern underlying patterns of relationship. He showed ‘how myths operate in men’s minds without their being aware of the fact...as if the thinking process were taking place in the myths, in their reflection upon themselves and their interrelation’.¹⁵⁸ He was persuaded (perhaps owing an unacknowledged debt to Jung’s notion of archetypes¹⁵⁹) that human myths and stories could be reduced to their basic *mythemes*, understood to acquire their value in relation to other mythemes.¹⁶⁰ Much indeed can (and has been) gleaned as to the ‘global-species dialogue of myth’¹⁶¹ from such a model, and this

¹⁵⁵ Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, translated by Richard C. Mcleary (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1964), [hereafter Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*], pp. 39-44.

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 40-1.

¹⁵⁷ Abram, *Spell*, p. 82-4.

¹⁵⁸ Levi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, Vol. 1 of *Mythologiques*, translated by John & Doreen Weightman (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 12.

¹⁵⁹ For discussion, see, for example, Kugler, Paul, *The Alchemy of Discourse: An Archetypal Approach to Language* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1982), pp. 34-46.

¹⁶⁰ See, for example, Henaff, Marcel, *Claude Levi-Strauss and the Making of Structural Anthropology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), p. 162-3.

¹⁶¹ Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, p. 32.

might be seen as a valid phenomenology of the *form* of the human experience. However, by focussing only on the form of myth, these cultural symbols risk being de-contextualised from their ongoing more-than-human performance *in particular places*, from where they originate and to where they belong.¹⁶² When the embodied value of a particular myth is rendered epiphenomenal to its structure,¹⁶³ the significance of its spontaneous sensuous presence, so alive in its ongoing *enactment*, runs the risk of being reduced to a literate psychological explanation of a cultural behaviour.

Structuralism remains the position of many contemporary astrologers who claim astrology as a language. Influential early Jungian astrologer Dane Rudhyar supposed that ‘pure astrology’ has no more meaning than algebra, *measuring* relationships between symbols ‘whose concreteness is entirely a matter of convention’.¹⁶⁴ In the same vein, contemporary practitioner Wendy Guy, following Rudyhar, describes astrology as ‘a system with an alphabet, words, grammar and sentences...ready-made associations which converge in specific archetypes.’¹⁶⁵ These formulaic understandings would appear to assume that astrological meanings are pre-existent structures that can simply be applied systematically to human character, regardless of their culturally embodied, or more-than-human context. While Derrida’s post-structuralism undermines the astrologer’s position by demonstrating that ‘there is nothing outside of context’,¹⁶⁶ that context remained for Derrida, an abstract, cognitive expanse; hence his suspicion of *all* proclamations of meaning. As Jonathon

¹⁶² For a full discussion, see Kane, *Mythtellers*, pp. 61-101.

¹⁶³ For discussion, see, for example, Ulin, Robert C., *Understanding Cultures* (Malden, Mass: Blackwell, 2001), p. 130-1.

¹⁶⁴ Rudhyar, *Astrology*, p. 51.

¹⁶⁵ Guy, Wendy, ‘The Language of Astrology’, at <http://www.astrologyzine.com/language.shtml> [accessed 1/3/06].

¹⁶⁶ Derrida, Jacques, *Limited Inc* (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1988), p. 136.

Culler pithily puts it, ‘meaning is context bound, but context is boundless’.¹⁶⁷ Yet Merleau-Ponty’s subtle phenomenological insight actually challenges both structuralist and post-structuralist positions to re-contextualise meaning from the irreducible, unavoidably perspectival and temporal place of embodiment. From this perspective, meaning is not only possible, but inevitable. Merleau-Ponty compares the body not to a passive object, but to ‘a work of art’,¹⁶⁸ a medium of poetic disclosure that *reveals* meaning in the world through its own spontaneous experience within its accompanying temporal and material boundaries.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Culler, Jonathon, *On Deconstruction, Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (London: Routledge, 1982), p. 123.

¹⁶⁸ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, p. 174.

¹⁶⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 174-5. See also Olkowski, Dorothea & James Morley (eds.), *Merleau-Ponty: Interiority and Exteriority, Psychic Life and the World* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press), p. 10.

PART TWO: THE POETICS OF EMBODIMENT

The Weave of Life

Merleau-Ponty presents his thesis through a series of evocative metaphors, as Jerry Gill has ably demonstrated,¹⁷⁰ and as other commentators have noted,¹⁷¹ his philosophy is actually a poetics, a validation of the incantative power of language.¹⁷² Gill shows how Merleau-Ponty's metaphor of 'the real as a closely woven fabric',¹⁷³ is employed to give a *sense* of the inextricably relational quality of experience. Merleau-Ponty stresses the interactive character of our existence and cognition, of 'intentional threads which attach us to the world',¹⁷⁴ that through reflection we can slacken in order to bring them to our attention, but from which consciousness can *never* withdraw to assume unity as its basis. Language, then, serves as the *network* of intentional threads through which our thoughts are woven together with the physical world, flesh being the common fabric that supports the ongoing weave, Gill describing a matrix or weaving loom from which arises simultaneously both our physical and mental lives.¹⁷⁵ The theme of weaving is clearly deliberate on Merleau-Ponty's part, as Gill concludes, and Abram stays consistent to Merleau-Ponty's choice of metaphors, for example describing language as a 'vast living fabric continually woven by those who speak'.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁰ Gill, Jerry H., *Merleau-Ponty and Metaphor* (New Jersey & London: Humanities Press, 1991) [hereafter Gill, *Merleau-Ponty*].

¹⁷¹ See, for example, Moran, *Phenomenology*, p. 432; Abram, David, 'Between the Body and the Breathing Earth: A Reply to Ted Toadvine', *Environmental Ethics*, 2005 (Summer), vol. 27, pp. 172-190. [hereafter Abram, 'Between the Body'].

¹⁷² See, for example, Manen, Max van, *Researching Lived Experience, Human Science for an Active Sensitive Pedagogy* (London, Ontario: University of Western Ontario, 1990), p. 13; Abram, 'Between the Body', p. 190.

¹⁷³ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, p. xi.

¹⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p. xv.

¹⁷⁵ Gill, *Merleau-Ponty*, p. 83-4.

¹⁷⁶ Abram, *Spell*, p. 83.

Language as an ongoing weave of flesh, releases itself from the shackles of the *apparently* static literary form and becomes active in the dialogical connectivity of life. Again, following Csordas, we can draw a fruitful correspondence with the anthropological discourse of practice.¹⁷⁷ This ‘weave of life’, as Rene Devisch demonstrates in his praxiological approach to *Yaka* healing ritual, is performed as an interweaving of physical body, social body and the body of the life-world. As both weaver and weaving loom, he describes *body* as the ‘major elaborating and transformative process and force that permits the transposition of meaning, structuring, and energies between the bodily, social and cosmological fields.’¹⁷⁸

Devisch observes that dancing and weaving are closely related activities for the *Yaka*; when they dance they also understand themselves to be weaving the vital flow of the cosmos.¹⁷⁹ In Merleau-Ponty’s terms, this might be seen as an evocative and affective expression of the language of flesh. There is form to their ritual, but it is not conventional, culture being present in an ongoing co-creation, that emerges out of the tradition but is not confined within its statics.¹⁸⁰ The *Yaka* are actively participating in a re-making of the world, their language communicated bodily, and its efficacy is in the inter-related acts of singing, dancing and weaving. As Devisch puts it, ‘[w]eaving is rhythm and rhythm underscores the weave of life...health is interwovenness’.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁷ Csordas, ‘Embodiment’, p. 7.

¹⁷⁸ Devisch, *Weaving*, p. 264-5.

¹⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p. 73.

¹⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁸¹ Devisch, *Weaving*, p. 160.

Weaving has traditionally been related to ideas about fate and destiny, epitomised by the ‘weaving Wyrð’,¹⁸² by the norms and valkyrs, who continually spin the flax and weave the tapestry of life.¹⁸³ As Alby Stone’s important analysis of North-European paganism demonstrates, fate should be understood not as something pre-determined at birth, but rather ‘as a steady, ongoing process, only fully completed at the end of a lifetime.’¹⁸⁴ Spinning and weaving are obvious metaphors for fate, order and pattern emerging from a ‘shapeless mass of wool or flax’,¹⁸⁵ and Stone concludes that while the *wyrð* sets in motion the pattern(s) of life, it imposes no ultimate design upon it. It is one’s participation in the ritual activities of *wyrð*, in the ongoing weave of life, that determines the *value* of that life, not the imposed will of a transcendent executive creator.¹⁸⁶ In a similar vein, the act of astrological divination may provide an opportunity for a similar kind of active, ritual participation. Astrologer Liz Greene has suggested that in the consulting room of the more sensitively attuned astrologer, dialogically receptive to ‘the unseen and unspoken psyche’, the forms of the three Greek Fates, Clotho (the spinner), Lachesis, (the measurer) and Atropos (the cutter) may be sensed ‘hovering dimly over the zodiacal wheel’.¹⁸⁷

Weaving, as a paradigm of participative human creative activity,¹⁸⁸ shows itself to be both metaphorically and praxiologically consistent with embodiment, reminding us that the facticity of our embodiment, far from enclosing a sense of discrete identity within a discrete body, affords an ongoing responsive relationship with the animated

¹⁸² Grimm, Jacob Ludwig Carl, *Teutonic Mythology* (Mineola, NY: Dover Phoenix, 2004 [1882]), p. 426.

¹⁸³ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ Stone, *Wyrð*, pp. 22-3.

¹⁸⁵ *ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁸⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 22-3.

¹⁸⁷ Greene, Liz, *The Astrology of Fate* (York Beach, ME: Weiser, 1984), p. 13.

¹⁸⁸ Thomas, Julian, ‘Phenomenology and Material Culture’, in Christopher Tilley (ed.), *Handbook of Material Culture* (London: Sage Publications, 2006, pp. 43-59), p. 54.

patterns we humans share with the aspects of life that we encounter. Abram insists that to identify with the body is not to confine awareness to a discrete, bounded object. Those boundaries are ‘open and indeterminate; more like membranes than barriers, they define a surface of metamorphosis and exchange’.¹⁸⁹

As Fritjof Capra acknowledges in his *The Web of Life*, that the structure of life is never fixed, but always dynamic; furthermore the pattern of organisation in a living organism can only be understood in terms of the ongoing embodiment that continually re-configures the relationship between the pattern and structure that exists beyond that of the individual organism.¹⁹⁰ We are, as Tim Ingold puts it, ‘immersed from the start’ and ‘like other creatures’, interwoven in webs of relationship, with other beings with whom we share our ‘dwelling-in-the-world’.¹⁹¹

The Metaphorical Hinge

Critiques of Merleau-Ponty’s ideas are few and far between, his work having featured less prominently than that of contemporaries such as Sartre and Heidegger. Moran suggests this may be due to the difficulties that philosophers have encountered in following Merleau-Ponty’s thought. These difficulties, Moran suggests, lie in his explicit use of the metaphorical mode to express his ideas.¹⁹² Rather than conceptual precision, the reader is confronted with a philosophical attempt to be “‘present at the birth of meaning” and to sing the world”’.¹⁹³ Abram is explicit however, in his support of Merleau-Ponty’s employment of metaphor, which, he argues, keep words

¹⁸⁹ Abram, *Spell*, p. 46.

¹⁹⁰ Capra, Fritjof, *The Web of Life, A New Synthesis of Mind and Matter* (London: Flamingo, 1997), pp. 155-6.

¹⁹¹ Ingold, *Perception*, p. 42, 155.

¹⁹² Moran, *Phenomenology*, p. 431

¹⁹³ *ibid.*; citing Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, p. 217.

from becoming fixed and convey instead a living *style* of discourse, ‘not an ossified set of terms’.¹⁹⁴ In a reply to Toadvine, Abram insists that ‘a genuinely ecological philosophy must simultaneously be a poetics’, lest the rift between the human being and the animate earth be perpetuated and human beings continue to listen only to themselves.¹⁹⁵ Toadvine acknowledges both Abram and Merleau-Ponty’s introduction of a “coherent deformation” into language, ‘crafting...a new mode of expression...introducing...a twist or shift that throws our habitual use [of language] off balance’.¹⁹⁶ The skilful and deliberate use of words is evocative and persuasive in its style and Toadvine appears almost to suggest that Abram is casting an incantative spell over the reader, reflected perhaps in the title of Abram’s book, *The Spell of the Sensuous*. Abram, indeed, is explicit about *spell*-ing as being part of the potent magic of the carefully woven juxtaposition of symbols, the sensuous power held in the flesh of language having been transferred to the written word, and capable of being poetically re-animated.¹⁹⁷ This is consistent with Abram’s attempt to reorient phenomenology away from dualism, solipsism and intellectualism, as part of the ‘struggle to disclose a new way of speaking’, aimed toward an ecological pluralism, rich in evocative metaphor.¹⁹⁸

Let us consider then the possibility that an active engagement with astrological metaphors might indeed serve, through their embodiment, to grant us experiential access to the *birth of meaning*. Metaphor, (from *metaphora*: carrying over),¹⁹⁹ has long been treated with suspicion, it having the power to transfer the meaning of a term

¹⁹⁴ Abram, ‘Between the Body’, p. 190.

¹⁹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ Toadvine, Ted, ‘Limits of the Flesh: The Role of Reflection in David Abram’s Ecophenomenology’, *Environmental Ethics*, 2005 (Summer), vol. 27 (pp. 155-170), p. 158.

¹⁹⁷ Abram, *Spell*, p. 133.

¹⁹⁸ Abram, ‘Between the Body’, p. 190.

¹⁹⁹ Tilley, *Metaphor*, p. 4.

from one sphere of understanding to another. In this sense it is considered the handmaiden of double-speak, the sworn-enemy of objectivism. Yet, at the same time, as Tilley argues, metaphors provide a basis for communities to both create and understand their collective experience.²⁰⁰ They appear to offer the possibility of an exchange of perspective, of movement between life-worlds, which may admit a profound shift in comprehension.

In conventional linguistics, the metaphorical mode is considered to be a figurative substitution, a mere decorative embellishment to the supposedly stable literal meaning of a word, a convoluted form of simile, employable as rhetorical device. Yet for the poet, astrologer, or alchemist whose metaphorical expression might unite Sun with gold, a lion or a king; the Moon with silver, water or fertility; Saturn with lead, age or fear, cannot be properly understood only in terms of their empirical similarity, without admitting a significant loss of meaning. For the alchemist the sun and gold share the same occult quality, or sympathetic relationship,²⁰¹ though this may be imperceptible to reason, which sees only a cognitive misrepresentation. To the astrologer, the Sun may reveal itself *as* a king, in a manner that cannot be explained away or reduced to an abstract literary technique.

Paul Ricoeur established the idea that metaphor actually works to violate established linguistic codes, creating a tension between the literal meaning of particular terms or symbols and the metaphoric meaning of the whole utterance.²⁰² He demonstrates how the “is” in an assertion such as “Achilles is a lion”, operates as a reflexive hinge,

²⁰⁰ *ibid.*, p. 10.

²⁰¹ See, for example, Thorndike, Lynn, *History of Magic & Experimental Science Part IV* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), p. 418.

²⁰² Ricoeur, *Metaphor*, pp. 156-7.

which holds the tension of sameness and difference, Achilles being both a lion and not a lion at the same time.²⁰³ The metaphor, by preserving the ‘metaphorical truth’ of the “is not” within the “is”,²⁰⁴ compromises Aristotle’s law of the excluded middle,²⁰⁵ presenting us instead, one might speculate, with the *included* middle. Language, having divested itself of the function of direct description, may, Ricoeur suggests, reach a *mythic* level, where ‘its function of discovery is set free’.²⁰⁶

This contrasts radically with Nietzsche who insisted that all truths are illusions, bewitched by a language of outworn metaphors, ‘drained of sensuous force’,²⁰⁷ and Derrida, who, in his boundless deconstruction of language, insisted that metaphor always ‘carries its death within itself’.²⁰⁸ Ricoeur, however, recognises the power of metaphor to revivify constituted language *in the act of its performance*. By introducing a spark of imagination, which forces thought to ‘think more’, metaphors are rendered animate agencies of hermeneutic transformation.²⁰⁹

In Merleau-Ponty’s conception, the revivification of language through metaphor requires an act of ‘operative intentionality’,²¹⁰ embodied through a particular perspective in a particular context. Let us consider, then, the possibility that the

²⁰³ *ibid.*, pp. 26-7, 249.

²⁰⁴ *ibid.*, p. 249.

²⁰⁵ See: Anon, ‘Law of Excluded Middle’, at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Law_of_excluded_middle [accessed 20/04.06] .

²⁰⁶ Ricoeur, *Metaphor*, p. 247.

²⁰⁷ Nietzsche, Friedrich, in Daniel Breazeale (ed. & trans.), *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche’s Notebooks of the Early 1870s* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1990), p. 84.

²⁰⁸ Derrida, Jacques, ‘The White Mythology’, in *Margins of Philosophy*, translated by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 271.

²⁰⁹ Ricoeur, *Metaphor*, p. 303.

²¹⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, pp. xx, 486. For discussion see, for example, Cooper, David E., *Existentialism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 84-5.

initiative of the astrological ritual provides just such a perspective, an authentic ‘phenomenology of origins’.²¹¹

Ritual Metaphor & the Realised Symbol

Curry argues that astrological symbolism constitutes a ‘special case of metaphor’ involving a ‘special kind of ritual’.²¹² So could a ritual engagement with astrological symbolism serve as the metaphorical hinge in the revelation of otherwise occulted (or hidden) meaning?

According to Abram, the very moment of authentically embodied perception, which requires the perceiver to sacrifice their objective or literate stance toward the perceived, permits an experiential shift of perspective in the very act of participation with the “other”.²¹³ Similarly, in Bourdieu’s theory of practice, the embodied performance of a ritual can be seen to effect a critical turning moment. This is known through a pre-conceptual, practical mimesis of the body or bodies involved, which, far from consciously representing what they perform, might spontaneously inhabit and, in that moment, *realise* the truth of a symbolic correspondence.²¹⁴ In Devisch’s observation of *Yaka* healing rites dramatically enacted ‘[r]itual metaphor’, the boundaries of which are set by specific material conditions, does not aim to impose a pattern of meaning or control, but rather ‘aims to disclose and activate one’.²¹⁵ For Devisch, ritual metaphor is ‘autoproduktive’ and thus affective in and through its

²¹¹ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, p. xx.

²¹² Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, p. 61.

²¹³ See Abram, *Spell*, pp. 31-72.

²¹⁴ Bourdieu, *Outline*, pp. 115-7; Bourdieu, Pierre, *The Logic of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 72-3.

²¹⁵ Devisch, *Weaving*, p. 43.

performance.²¹⁶ In such a way we might speculate that the truth of an astrological metaphor can only be revealed *within its performative context*, rather than through the decontextualised imposition of an interpretive dogma. Within an embodied paradigm the question, “what does this astrological signature *mean?*” in a non-applied, abstract sense, would seem to be an irrelevance.

As Ricoeur has shown, the revelation of ‘phenomenological truth’ necessitates the facility of *seeing as*, a combination of the experience of seeing, with an imaginative metaphorical engagement, simultaneously both an experience and an act at the same time.²¹⁷ *Seeing as* is a more-than-visual experience that is beyond voluntary control, manifesting, for Ricoeur, as the *sensible* act of poetic language.²¹⁸ As Lakoff and Johnson argue, metaphor requires ‘an embodied realism’ dependent upon our primordial experience of being in a body in an embodied environment.²¹⁹ Metaphor, they suggest, may invite (or impose) a non-literal ontology that cannot be described otherwise.²²⁰ Where semantics meets its limit, we are presented with ‘a phenomenology of imagination’,²²¹ the poetic image placing us in Bachelard’s terms ‘at the origin of the speaking being’.²²²

Cornelius argues that astrology, properly re-orientated as divination, unites experience and action through direct participatory engagement with its symbolism, returning it to the mystical tradition to which, he argues, it rightfully belongs.²²³ Similarly, in her

²¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 36.

²¹⁷ Ricoeur, *Metaphor*, p. 213.

²¹⁸ *ibid.*

²¹⁹ Lakoff, & Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*, p. 73.

²²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 72.

²²¹ Ricoeur, *Metaphor*, p. 214.

²²² Bachelard, Gaston, *The Poetics of Space*, translated by Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon, 1969), p. xix, cited by Ricoeur, *Metaphor*, p. 214.

²²³ See Cornelius, *Moment*.

discussion of the nature of astrological truth-telling through symbol, Angela Voss has sought to locate astrology ‘in a hermeneutic principle which enables us to articulate, and enter, the mystery of symbolic perception’²²⁴. She describes how through an engagement with allegory, being the metaphorical correspondence of astrological symbols to phenomena extant in the world, a tropological or moral ‘turning point’ (*tropos*) in interpretation occurs.²²⁵ Where knowledge unites with action so may be revealed not just an alternative astrological “text”, but rather a *context* for interpretation which necessarily includes the participation of the interpreter, ‘a turning back to *oneself* in order to understand’²²⁶.

Voss relates this *tropos* to astrological experience in terms of the symbol being made ‘manifest’ in a particular moment, such as ‘when you utter words you do not intend which shock you with their truth, or when you are moved by the meaningfulness of a synchronistic event which calls you to action’²²⁷. Cornelius, in the same fashion, distinguishes the ‘speculative’ from the ‘realised’ interpretation,²²⁸ the latter being the *seeing as* or the *making real* of what would otherwise be a purely rational inference. He highlights the difference between inferring a Moon-Saturn conjunction as *representative of* a person’s melancholic character, and *realising* Moon-Saturn as the person’s melancholia, made experientially manifest in a particular moment.²²⁹ This realisation, he suggests, corresponds with the affective arousal of sensuous emotion that facilitates a transmission between astrologer and client, the astrologer compelled

²²⁴ Voss, Angela, ‘From Allegory to Anagoge: The Question of Symbolic Perception in a Literal World’, in Nicholas Campion, Patrick Curry & Michael York (eds.), *Astrology and the Academy, Papers from the Inaugural Conference of the Sophia Centre, Bath Spa University College, 13-14 June 2003* (Bristol: Cinnabar Books, 2004) [hereafter Voss, *Allegory*], p. 2.

²²⁵ *ibid.*, p.4.

²²⁶ *ibid.*

²²⁷ *ibid.*

²²⁸ Cornelius, *Moment*, p. 292-3.

²²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 293.

to acknowledge that he is genuinely involved in the embodiment of the symbolism that passes between them.²³⁰

This suggests that we might look at astrological symbolism not as an explanatory model, but as an opening, a turning, through the ‘veil of allegory’,²³¹ to another way of understanding altogether. Interpretation might thus be realised as a sensuous experience, a live, embodied participation between the human participants (e.g. astrologer and client) and the mediumistic forms of *more-than-human* participation, granted the possibility of temporal embodiment *as* astrological symbols and invited to speak. By contrast, in denying the value of that participation and reverting to a finite *literal* interpretation, the gods (if indeed they had anything to say) are silenced, their expression predicted and thus taken for granted; astrological meanings become fixed as cognitive impositions, abstract linguistic conventions. Symbols thus understood, like Nietzsche’s metaphors, are indeed drained of sensuous power. As Cornelius suggests, astrology is founded on its allegorical tradition, and this can be learned in the same way that one learns the techniques of a craft, but, he warns, it should *not* be taken as the end result of interpretation, but rather as its starting point, its experiential birth.²³²

Harding’s phenomenology of astrological symbolism determines that the particular meanings of the planets and stars have developed their subtlety and precision on account of human beings’ instinctual response to (and expression of) heavenly movements, established through some form of continuous astrological tradition over

²³⁰ *ibid.*.

²³¹ see Murrin M., *The Veil of Allegory: Some Notes Toward a Theory of Allegorical Rhetoric in the English Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969).

²³² Cornelius, *Moment*, pp. 89-90 & pp. 124-43.

millennia.²³³ Formulated then into a horoscopic schema from a particular perspective at a particular moment in time, these symbols, experientially-laden with tradition, provide, in Cornelius's opinion, the symbolic vehicle through which a *daemon* might procure temporary embodiment, seize the mind, and speak the truth through 'compelling and inspired interpretation'.²³⁴

This is evident in the neo-Platonic theurgical practices described by Iamblichus in the 2nd century AD. Through ritual performance, theurgy invites a bodily experience of astrological principles, as Iamblichus puts it, 'bodies to bodies',²³⁵ constituting, in Shaw's words, a 'divine mimesis' or embodied imitation of the gods.²³⁶ Iamblichus suggests that gods and daemons are neither exclusively corporeal, nor incorporeal and can be temporarily 'carried in bodies, as in a vehicle'.²³⁷ The theurgic ritual of embodiment becomes, then, in Shaw's terms, 'a divine service',²³⁸ a 'concrete performance' that brings about 'the culmination of one's philosophical development'.²³⁹ The theurgic ritual was considered a cosmogonic act, 'the best of all of beginnings', which could restore one's vital connection to the cosmos²⁴⁰ and move the philosopher beyond what Shaw calls the 'discursive fantasies', that Iamblichus considered cut off scholarly, non-theurgic Platonists from an experience of the divine.²⁴¹

²³³ Harding, *Hymns*, pp. 151-7.

²³⁴ Cornelius, *Moment*, p. 305.

²³⁵ Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries of the Egyptians, Chaldeans and Assyrians*, translated by Thomas Taylor, 3rd ed. (London: Stewart and Watkins, 1968 [1821]) [hereafter Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*], p. 259.

²³⁶ Shaw, *Theurgy*, p. 23.

²³⁷ Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*, p. 65.

²³⁸ Shaw, *Theurgy*, p. 23.

²³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 129.

²⁴⁰ Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*, p. 212.

²⁴¹ Shaw, *Theurgy*, p. 130.

Roy Rappaport suggests that ritual is central to any human activity that involves participation with something outside of the human order,²⁴² while for Curry, it is a pre-requisite of even the most apparently secular astrological consultation in which something unknown is invited by the astrologer ‘to speak to the inquiry at hand’.²⁴³

It would constitute a category error to conflate such an understanding of ritual with a mere technique employed to achieve a particular objective, thus replicable and liable to Popperian falsification. The notion of a consistently replicable technique demands an idealistic state of *ceteris paribus* and thus ignores the contingencies of lived experience; this is typified by the disenchanted *control rituals* conducted by statistical researchers into astrology’s apparent claims.²⁴⁴ The embodied astrological ritual, by contrast, requires a multitude of contingent factors; the astrologer, other human participants (not to mention the more-than-human ones), and the conditioning particularities of the moment *and* of the place. Rappaport makes clear that ritual cannot be reduced to its material expression or presentation. ‘The manner of “saying” and “doing” is intrinsic to what is being said and done’.²⁴⁵ Edward Schieffelin describes ritual performance as the ‘creation of presence’,²⁴⁶ and Turner as an experience of *liminality*,²⁴⁷ located ambiguously outside of cultural norms of social or personal identity. This presence or liminality is immanent in the act, leaving nothing

²⁴² Rappaport, *Ritual*, pp. 3, 27.

²⁴³ Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, p. 62

²⁴⁴ See Phillipson, *Year Zero*, pp. 121-66.

²⁴⁵ Rappaport, *Ritual*, p. 38. Also cited by Curry in Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, p. 97.

²⁴⁶ Schieffelin, Edward L., ‘Problematizing Performance’, in Felicia Hughes-Freeland (ed.), *Ritual, Performance, Media* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 194.

²⁴⁷ The state of *liminality* refers to a boundary or threshold, which both delimits an entity or space, and is simultaneously permeable. For an expanded definition, see Turner, Victor, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Cornell, 1969) [hereafter Turner, *Ritual Process*], p. 94-6.

but ‘an empty husk’ in its wake,²⁴⁸ as the copycat researchers step in and futilely attempt to replicate it.

This experience of liminality or presence is powerfully documented by astrologer Darby Costello. Costello learned from African diviners how, through ‘working with the spirits’, she could create a sacred space, a ritual container that could, ‘when the energies were right’, become a space of transformation, in which her clients felt something happen that ‘shifted their attention in such a way that they could see their lives in a different perspective’.²⁴⁹ She describes a ‘moment of healing’ for both client and astrologer, an eternal interval where ‘the spirits speak’.²⁵⁰

The realisation of astrology working in practice, then, may be a moment of healing and transformation, as much as divination. It would appear to require the embodied participation of the astrologer and involves the movement from the literal, through the allegorical veil to the metaphorical revelation of Cornelius’s *daemonic* truth of the symbol, which may *or may not* be revealed in a particular situation, depending upon the exigencies of the moment. The astrological experience, as Curry suggests, cannot *always* be expected to deliver.²⁵¹

By articulating the value inherent within Cornelius’s *daemonic* participation, the astrologer would seem to be confronted with an ‘ethical symbol’,²⁵² which turns back upon the perceiver to facilitate a more-than-human revelation. The *tropos* of ritual metaphor would thus seem to release an inherently *ecological* ethic. Previously

²⁴⁸ Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, p. 98.

²⁴⁹ Costello, Darby, ‘Desire and the Stars’, at <http://www.ancientsky.com/desire.htm> [accessed 4/5/06].

²⁵⁰ *ibid.*

²⁵¹ Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, pp. 62-3.

²⁵² Cornelius, *Moment*, p. 305.

understood as an object of contemplation or manipulation, the symbol may suddenly become what Haraway has called a ‘boundary project’,²⁵³ inanimate artefacts become ‘material invitations into liminal experiences’,²⁵⁴ inciting an immanent recognition of the intertwining of meaning and materiality. Confirming Merleau-Ponty’s concept of the metamorphic reversibility of flesh, where life meets life,²⁵⁵ Brown and Toadvine recognise boundaries to be places not where things stop, ‘but where they begin’.²⁵⁶

²⁵³ Haraway, *Simians*, p. 201.

²⁵⁴ Brown & Toadvine, *Eco-Phenomenology*, p. 163.

²⁵⁵ Merleau-Ponty, *Visible*, p. 144-5. See also, Abram, *Spell*, p. 46.

²⁵⁶ Brown & Toadvine, *Eco-Phenomenology*, p. 163.

PART THREE: EMBODIMENT IN A MORE-THAN-HUMAN WORLD

From Phenomenology to Animism

The coming together of phenomenology and a more-than-human ecology takes us beyond Ricoeur's hermeneutic insights, which, while profound in their recognition of the active presence of the poetic mode, do not step out into the intellectually and theologically heretical possibility of the non-human "other" possessing ontological agency. The paradigm of embodiment, however, allows for this possibility, and invites the question of whether a certain type of engagement with astrology might constitute a form of animistic participation. Abram argues that at a spontaneous, sensuous level, prior to reflection or analysis, 'we are *all* animists [Abram's italics]'.²⁵⁷

The oft-maligned anthropologist, Lucien Levy-Bruhl, identified as *participation mystique* the idea that ostensibly inanimate objects, such as rocks, trees, mountains or artefacts, might be understood to be alive and capable of participating with the human experience. In his final analysis he concluded this to be a characteristic not only of primitive peoples (his original suggestion), *but of the human experience per se*.²⁵⁸ This animistic or so-called anthropomorphic way of approaching the world, whereby non-human entities may be perceived capable of communicative agency, admits of a metaphorical correspondence between persons and things, as Tambiah remarks, 'to the point of *identity* and *consubstantiality*'.²⁵⁹ As Devisch has identified, metaphor, ritually embodied through direct sensory engagement, can reveal 'synaesthetic

²⁵⁷ Abram, *Spell*, p. 57.

²⁵⁸ Levy-Bruhl, Lucien, *The Notebooks on Primitive Mentality*, translated by P. Riviere (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975 [1910]). Levy-Bruhl was criticised for originally imputing a lack of logic to the primitive mind, something he later retracted.

²⁵⁹ Tambiah, Stanley J., *Magic, Science, Religion and the Scope of Rationality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 86.

meaning and empowerment’,²⁶⁰ thus transforming (what an outsider to the ritual may still perceive as) an inanimate object into an evidently expressive power.

Cornelius’s realm of astrological signs and symbols, as we have seen, may suddenly reveal the very real, embodied presence of a planetary daemon. Such beings have long been illegitimised, however, first by religious and later by scientific and secularist hegemonies,²⁶¹ and even their reduction today to psychological archetypes by psychologists and psychological astrologers seems to constitute an attempt to keep them under control and make them acceptable to the prevailing worldview.²⁶² In reducing such sensuously discernible *presences*, necessarily plural, to aspects of the exclusively *human* psyche conceived as a whole and thus singular entity, we would appear to deny them the possibility of their own temporal subjectivity, while still privileging our own human subjectivity and assuming it to be stable.

With this in mind, we might consider Merleau-Ponty’s conviction that the other is not ‘an offspring of my spirit’ but ‘my twin or flesh of my flesh’.²⁶³ For Merleau-Ponty, therefore, the other’s body is ‘an unexpected response I get from elsewhere’,²⁶⁴ and it follows that the other’s dwelling elsewhere ‘deprives me of my central location’.²⁶⁵ Merleau-Ponty is radical in this respect, conceiving the mystery of the other as ‘nothing but the mystery of myself’²⁶⁶ and in this he acknowledges the ability “I” have to adopt perspectives other than my own. In his concluding remark on flesh, he

²⁶⁰ Devisch, *Weaving*, pp. 43-4.

²⁶¹ For discussion, see Hanegraaff, *Magic*, pp. 361-71; Willis & Curry, *Astrology* p. 52, pp. 93-6.

²⁶² For discussion, see Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, pp. 72-5.

²⁶³ Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, pp. 15, 22. Also cited by Moran, *Phenomenology*, p. 432.

²⁶⁴ Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World*, translated by J. O’Neill (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 134. Also cited by Moran, *Phenomenology*, p. 432.

²⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p. 135. Also cited by Moran, *Phenomenology*, p. 432.

²⁶⁶ *ibid.*

concedes, ‘my body is a seer’ and through the participative agency of the other, communicated through the flesh that we share, it is seen.²⁶⁷ In Abram’s terms, we might consider ourselves the organs of a world, that is perceiving itself through us,²⁶⁸ like the Koyukon people who live ‘in a world that watches, in a forest of eyes’.²⁶⁹ Abram challenges us to consider that in those embodied moments in our lives, we encounter the other in our experience, as alive, sensate, and personified, moving us perhaps to engage with this living world with proper respect and reverence.²⁷⁰

Abram’s thesis represents part of a growing body of scholarship, aimed at re-instating animism as a valid, even authentic, cosmological perspective, and as the basis not simply for abstract speculation but for responsive and responsible action in the world. Originally conceived at the turn of the twentieth century by early anthropologist Edward Tylor, as an erroneous attribution of spiritual agency to the essentially inert natural world, animism is being re-interpreted ‘from derogatory to critical term’,²⁷¹ in the light of increased phenomenological validation of differently embodied perspectives. The ‘new animism’, as it has been hailed by Graham Harvey and others,²⁷² is now being reconsidered both as a valid relational epistemology,²⁷³ and as ‘a way of learning to act respectfully towards and among other persons’, only some of whom are human.²⁷⁴ Personhood, according to Viveiros de Castro, entails perspectivity, the capacity to inhabit, and thus fully embody, a point of view other than one’s own, and is a matter of degree and specific context, rather than being the

²⁶⁷ Merleau-Ponty, *Visible*, p. 274

²⁶⁸ Abram, *Spell*, p. 68.

²⁶⁹ Nelson, Richard, cited by Abram, *Spell*, p. 69.

²⁷⁰ Abram, *Spell*, pp. 69-70.

²⁷¹ Harvey, *Animism*, p. 1.

²⁷² See, for example, Harvey, *Animism*, pp. 3-29;

²⁷³ Bird-David, Nurid, ‘Animism Revisited: Personhood, Environment, and Relational Epistemology’, *Current Anthropology* 1999, no. 40, p. S67-S91. [hereafter Bird-David, Animism], p. S67.

²⁷⁴ Harvey, *Animism*, p. xi.

distinguishing feature of a particular species.²⁷⁵ The idea that this animal, this tree, this plant, this rock, this artefact, or indeed this planet, could be perceived as being capable of holding as valid a perspective as that of a human person has immense implications, evidenced through the particular etiquettes, protocols, taboos and communicative stances that characterise animistic participation.²⁷⁶ Graham Harvey comments that, '[t]he relational ontology and interpersonal ethics of animists challenge dominant academic discourses about religion, metaphysics, education, ethics, place and perception.'²⁷⁷

Phenomenologist of landscape, Chris Tilley, acknowledging Merleau-Ponty as *the* philosopher of both animism and metaphor,²⁷⁸ considers, like Abram, that as humans we are inherently animistic, our primordial experience disclosing 'a field of phenomena that are all *potentially* animate and expressive [my italics]'.²⁷⁹ Tilley's use of the word "potentially" implies that there is a particularity to animistic expression, not necessarily a general or universal attribution. Animism may be as much about the sensitive discernment of *who* is a person and *what* is not, as this will not always be obvious.²⁸⁰ Irving Hallowell famously inquired of an unnamed old Ojibwe man whether all the stones in their immediate vicinity were alive. After a period of reflection, the old man replied, 'No! But some are'.²⁸¹

²⁷⁵ Viveiros De Castro, Eduardo, 'Exchanging Perspectives: The Transformation of Objects into Subjects in Amerindian Cosmologies', in 'Symposium: Talking Peace with Gods: Part One', *Common Knowledge*, 2004, vol. 10, no. 3, pp. 463-84, [hereafter Viveiros de Castro, 'Exchanging Perspectives'], pp. 466-7, 474.

²⁷⁶ Harvey, *Animism*, pp. 48-9.

²⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p. 49.

²⁷⁸ Tilley, Christopher, *The Materiality of Stone: Explorations in Landscape Phenomenology* (Oxford: Berg, 2004), p. 22.

²⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p. 30.

²⁸⁰ Harvey, *Animism*, p. xi.

²⁸¹ Hallowell, cited by Harvey, *Animism*, p. 33.

According to Bird-David, animists do not personify these other-than-human persons, and *then* socialise with them after the fact; personification and socialisation arise together.²⁸² As Evans-Pritchard put it, ‘a primitive man does not perceive a leopard and *believe* that it is his totem-brother [my italics]. What he perceives is his totem-brother’.²⁸³ This experience of *seeing as*, inherent to direct perception, is as evident with the Renaissance magician who *perceives* (rather than believes) a talismanic figure to be a god.²⁸⁴ Hanegraaff argues that this does not constitute a Tylolean error of reasoning, but rather a ‘spontaneous animism’, which bypasses the rational processing that belief requires altogether.²⁸⁵ It may, in fact, be presumptuous to assume that animists *believe* in more-than-human powers. Chakrabarty argues that belief requires a secondary attribution that takes us out of our lived experience and positions us within an objectifying discourse that denies us access to the experience.²⁸⁶ Rather, as Detwiler suggests, an animist’s “religion”, if indeed that is an appropriate term, may be more a ‘quest for ethical responsibility through communicative action’.²⁸⁷

It may be equally presumptuous to attribute to animists a disposition of blind faith. Rochberg observes, in relation to Babylonian celestial divination, that while a divine immanence could be perceived for example in a lunar eclipse manifest as the moon god *Sin*, “‘covered” in mourning’, celestial phenomena could equally well be referred to ‘without a hint of divine embodiment’.²⁸⁸ Furthermore, she marks the ability they

²⁸² Bird-David, *Animism*, p. 577

²⁸³ Evans-Pritchard, E.E, *Theories of Primitive Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p. 108.

²⁸⁴ Hanegraaff, *Magic*, p. 374

²⁸⁵ *ibid.*

²⁸⁶ Chakrabarty, Dipesh, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 242.

²⁸⁷ Detwiler, Fritz, “‘All my Relatives”’: Persons in Oglala Religion’, *Religion* 22 (1993, pp. 235-246), p. 244.

²⁸⁸ Rochberg, *Heavenly Writing*, p. 36.

had to think abstractly and theoretically.²⁸⁹ Likewise, anthropologist Alfred Gell discusses how a god may be revealed at one moment as a particular stone or statue, and at another as a possessed shaman or animal, and he is clear that the animist is perfectly cognizant to distinguish between divine and ordinary manifestations and to recognize the ever-shifting dynamics of other-than-human embodiment.²⁹⁰ Indeed, the distinction between animacy and inanimacy, he argues, may cut across the distinction ‘living and not-living’, ‘ritual animacy’ and the possession of biological life ‘being far from the same thing’.²⁹¹

The realisation of animacy, then, requires participation, it cannot be assumed. The animate other might be understood to reveal itself only in particular *moments* of engagement; as Gell suggests, through ritual.²⁹² The very point of those *realised* moments, like Cornelius’s realised showings of symbolism, is, as Curry puts it, ‘to allow contingency to take a form relevant to the exigencies of the moment’.²⁹³ Kane’s ‘mythtellers’, then, for whom animated patterns ‘think and speak’²⁹⁴ and Lord’s ‘singer of tales’ entering deeper into an otherworldly trance,²⁹⁵ are as much diviners of the moment as the suddenly inspired astrologer. With the weavers of fate hovering overhead, they engage with the “other” directly through the disclosure of their myths, songs or cosmic symbols, ‘composed not *for*, but *in* performance’,²⁹⁶ a performance that may, without warning, reveal a divine agency to whom one is inextricably related.

²⁸⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 174-5.

²⁹⁰ Gell, Alfred, *Art & Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 122.

²⁹¹ *ibid.*, pp. 121-2.

²⁹² *ibid.*, p. 122.

²⁹³ Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, p. 106.

²⁹⁴ Kane, *Mythtellers*, p. 60.

²⁹⁵ Lord, Albert, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960).

²⁹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 13.

Astrology and the Pluralism of Embodiment

Astrology is described by its modern practitioners primarily as a humanistic or psychological pursuit, which may or may not include participation with a more-than-human realm of animating presences beyond that of human origin. Very few contemporary astrologers talk openly of gods, goddesses, daemons, intelligent powers or spirits, except as aspects of the collective *human* psyche, and few seriously entertain the idea that astrology might involve a participatory dialogue or negotiation with divine beings.

The majority of psychological astrologers tend to *justify* the astrological planets as expressions of Jung's archetypes, categorised in their arrangements in the horoscope to make up a 'map of the psyche'.²⁹⁷ This is supported by Jung's conceptualisation of archetypes as psychic ordering principles drawn from the collective unconscious, and akin 'to the axial system of a crystal, which...*preforms* the crystalline structure in the mother liquid [my italics]'.²⁹⁸ He authorises the connection between gods, planets and archetypes stating, 'the planets are the gods, symbols of the powers of the unconscious'.²⁹⁹

As Hyde notes, Jungian astrologers have taken the archetypes to be the psychological underpinning of their astrological symbols.³⁰⁰ This raises important questions. Is the astrologer participating with the gods themselves or with the literate *explanations* of

²⁹⁷ For discussion, see Cornelius, *Moment*, pp. 298-300; Hyde, *Jung*; pp. 81-101; Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, pp. 72-5.

²⁹⁸ Jung, *Archetypes*, p. 79.

²⁹⁹ Jung, Carl Gustav, 'Letter to André Barbault, 26th May, 1954', *Letters* (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1954), p. 177.

³⁰⁰ Hyde, *Jung*, p. 88.

the gods? Furthermore, does the astrologer believe that he or she is capable of predicting, or indeed manipulating, how the gods/archetypes are going to respond in a given situation? Certainly, as objectified principles, one might assume that the archetypes have become interpretively manipulable, as the archetype is denied the autonomy to respond dialogically to the interpreter.

As ever, Jung is delightfully ambiguous on the subject, describing the archetypes elsewhere as ‘living psychic forces’,³⁰¹ numinous images ‘charged with emotion’,³⁰² as such, one might suppose them capable of autonomous agency. Having no material existence outside of the forms through which they manifest, they would seem more akin to the kind of shifting animate presences we have been discussing than his *a priori* ordering principles. Can we really dismiss the “other” as a human projection that can be understood or predicted, or should we concede to Merleau-Ponty’s unexpected response from elsewhere?

Jung, himself, was ever-awake to the unpredictable immanence of the other, and showed enormous respect to realisations of symbolic presence, embodied in particular moments of heightened sensuous awareness, such as when he discerned a mischievous face in his garden wall apparently deriding him.³⁰³ This persuaded Jung that the god Mercury had played a trick on him during his astrological marriage experiment and provoked him to recast his data, the effect of which was to radically alter his understanding of synchronicity.³⁰⁴

³⁰¹ Jung, *Archetypes*, pp. 156-7.

³⁰² Jung, Carl Gustav, *Man and His Symbols* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1964), p. 87.

³⁰³ This is reported by Marie Von Franz and cited by Hyde, *Jung*, p. 130.

³⁰⁴ See Hyde, *Jung*, pp. 121-39.

Hyde, argues that the planets-as-gods-as-archetypes model, employed by most Jungian-influenced astrologers, effects a psychological reduction by limiting the expression of an astrological symbol to a Jungian archetype.³⁰⁵ The diverse possibilities of the astrological Moon, for example, become centred around the different aspects of Jung's mother archetype.³⁰⁶ This might be seen as an attempt to resolve the rich metaphorical tension that exists between the moon and one's experience of the world, delivering instead a more familiar symbol of mothering as a core psychological explanation. Conversely, for Hyde, astrological symbols are a *root* in their own right, a core symbol, around which 'a certain set of images cluster' in dynamic and unpredictable arrangements.³⁰⁷ This supports Harding's view that Jungian archetypes have evolved out of root astrological instincts.³⁰⁸ Hyde goes on to stress the 'open-ended and abundant' nature of astrology's symbols, how the moon might equally be realised as 'flux and alternation, the child, the common people, the left, utensils, silver, cabbages, baths and bellies', among myriad other possibilities.³⁰⁹

As Curry notes, when the astrological birthchart is seen simply as an individualised map of the psyche, the planets are no longer divinities, wild and unpredictable in their expression, but domesticated functions of a person's so-called "inner" world; thus the outer world becomes nothing more than a passive, unconscious reflection of the privileged inner.³¹⁰ Hyde argues that astrologers use the physical world as a ritualised discursive framework through which to describe the human experience and then assume it to embody a pre-existent truth that they have discovered *about* the human

³⁰⁵ Hyde, *Jung*, pp. 88-9. For a description of the planets as symbols of archetypal drives see, for example, Hamaker-Zondag, *Psychological*, pp. 139-79.

³⁰⁶ See Hamaker-Zondag, *Psychological*, pp. 183-8.

³⁰⁷ Hyde, *Jung*, pp. 88-9.

³⁰⁸ Harding, *Hymns*, pp. 148-52.

³⁰⁹ Hyde, *Jung*, p. 89.

³¹⁰ Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, p. 74.

experience.³¹¹ This abstract interpretive move holds the subject-object divide firmly intact, compounds the idea of fixed pre-existent astrological meanings imposed upon the human experience and denies the planets their wild expression.

Curry considers the reduction of the outer world to a projection of the inner, to be an impoverishment of lived experience, the consequences being that universalism and monotheism become tacitly valued over polytheism, unity valued over diversity.³¹² This is strongly in evidence in twentieth century astrology with the rise in profile of the astrological Sun at the expense of the moon and the other planets. This is most obviously manifest in the newspaper sun-sign columns, but really has its root in the theosophical astrology of Alan Leo, whose attempt was to build an astrological philosophy around the ontologically stable principle of a central spiritual sun or solar logos.³¹³ As Leo's astrology developed into psychological astrology, the Sun became equated with Jung's archetype of the Self, the other planets becoming mere satellites, or sub-personalities, of the integrative Sun/Self.³¹⁴ Ironically this trend reveals a psychological heliocentrism in what is, irreducibly, a geocentric art, a monotheistic imposition within an essentially polytheistic framework.

Thomas Moore points out how Ficino considered monotheism to be an illness, whereby one god (or idea) comes to fixate itself in a singular kind of consciousness.³¹⁵ The Sun seems the most obvious candidate, though Ficino stressed that any of the planetary deities or daemons could become the object of undue

³¹¹ Hyde, *Jung*, p. 165.

³¹² Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, p. 75.

³¹³ Leo, *Astrology*, p. 11.

³¹⁴ See, for example, Greene, Liz & Howard Sasportas, *The Development of the Personality* (Boston, MA: Red Wheel / Weiser, 1987) [hereafter Greene & Sasportas, *Personality*], pp. 163-222.

³¹⁵ Moore, Thomas, *The Planets Within: The Astrological Psychology of Marsilio Ficino* (Great Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne Press, 1990), p. 57.

devotion, and recommended finding concrete ways of drawing in other kind of spirits, not as compensation but as a way of enriching a person's life.³¹⁶ Moore contrasts the degenerative impulse for integration or equilibrium, a way of compensating for imbalance, with the more imaginative act of *constellation*, aimed at 'making a cosmos of variety and multiplicity in one's psychological environment'.³¹⁷ This move is very much in evidence in the work of James Hillman, the post-Jungian founder of the more pluralistic archetypal psychology.³¹⁸ He sees value in astrology's ability to return events to the Gods, invoking 'a polytheistic, mythic, poetic, metaphoric sense of what is fatefully real'.³¹⁹ In a genuinely polytheistic astrology, Curry argues, no one planet's significance should usurp the authority of the others and there should be no need of an 'overarching meta-principle' capable of accommodating all differences and resolving all ambiguities.³²⁰

Greene, however, argues that astrology has always been *monotheistic*, positioning it squarely within a Greco-Roman worldview. The apparent plurality of the gods, she insists, is *merely* symbolic and representative of 'different dimensions of a single cosmos and cosmocrator';³²¹ the definitive philosophical statement for this is the astrological horoscope, a Greek introduction into the tradition, which *abstractly represents* the positions of planets and stars. For Greene, the horoscope is a psychologically unifying map of the psyche,³²² reflecting *a priori* mathematical and

³¹⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 57-8.

³¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 58.

³¹⁸ See, for example, Hillman, James, 'Psychology: Monotheistic or Polytheistic?', in David L. Miller (ed.), *The New Polytheism* (Dallas: Spring, 1981); also Hillman, James, *Revisioning Psychology* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1975).

³¹⁹ Hillman, James, 'Heaven Retains Within Its Sphere Half of All Bodies and Maladies', at <http://www.springpub.com/astro.htm> [accessed 15/01/04].

³²⁰ Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, p. 75.

³²¹ Sharman-Burke, Juliet & Liz Greene, *The Astrologer, the Counsellor and the Priest* Vol. 2 (London: CPA Press, 1997) [hereafter Sharman-Burke & Greene, *Astrologer, Counsellor, Priest*], p. 110.

³²² See, for example, Greene & Sasportas, *Personality*, p. vii.

spiritual principles derived from Pythagorean and Platonic Greek models that begin and end in unity; astrology, for Greene, is effectively a Greek invention distinct from the inherently pluralistic divine embodiment of the Babylonian omen tradition.³²³

The Greek horoscope, as a literate model of the heavens, does indeed constitute a *technical* abstraction from the more contingent (and phenomenological) visual astrology of the earlier Babylonian tradition, but the line being drawn by Greene seems unnecessarily harsh. Astrology can only be reduced *in practice* to a monotheistic spiritual system if we assume the *astrological act itself* to be a similarly reflective abstraction from the embodied participation of lived experience in a more-than-human world. Our discussion so far suggests otherwise. As Abram has shown, the cursive script that the heavenly bodies trace in their movements do not necessarily lose their contingent animistic qualities simply by being condensed into a literate, symbolic form;³²⁴ those symbols can be re-animated, re-inhabited and re-embodied through the participative metaphor employed by the inspired astrologer within a performative or ritual context. The meaning of a symbol can be revived and turned metaphorically to reveal its embodied truth *only in the act*, not in the abstract.

The Astrologer as Shaman?

With regard to the above, we might consider then that in the act of an astrological performance, there exists an ever-present Heideggerian possibility of pre-conceptual hermeneutic revelation, a momentary initiative that suddenly implicates all parties present in an undeniably sensuous, and necessarily connective experience. Roy Willis

³²³ Sharman-Burke & Greene, *Astrologer, Counsellor, Priest*, p. 110.

³²⁴ Abram, *Spell*, pp. 95ff.

reports of such during a consultation with astrologer Jane Ridder-Patrick;³²⁵ from a starting point of calm rationality, Willis records how the astrologer became ‘suddenly powerful and authoritative, as though someone or something was speaking urgently through her, something quasi-divine’. He describes her becoming a ‘priestess, possessed of Spirit’, who, in her ‘altered state of consciousness’ was suddenly able to see things and connect them together.³²⁶ For Willis, this experience provided a ‘momentary glimpse’ of a divine communication,³²⁷ and he cites it as an example of how the revelation of astrological meaning, freed from its formal justification as objective analysis, can become suddenly ‘warm-blooded, egalitarian, anarchistic and erotic’.³²⁸

Does this suggest that the suddenly inspired astrologer *herself* is subject to some kind of temporal other-than-human embodiment? Furthermore, might an embodied participation with divine agencies, daemons or presences, powerfully connect the client as well in a *joint* negotiation of destiny?³²⁹ In that moment Willis would seem to be identifying Ridder-Patrick with a role undertaken in traditional societies by the socially ambiguous figure that anthropologists have come to term *shaman*.³³⁰ For Viveiros de Castro, the role of the shaman in a particular society is specifically to ‘cross ontological boundaries’ and adopt non-human perspectives.³³¹ So is this what the astrologer was doing?

³²⁵ Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, p. 11.

³²⁶ *ibid.*

³²⁷ *ibid.*

³²⁸ *ibid.*

³²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 148.

³³⁰ Standard texts on shamanism include: Eliade, Mircea, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (New York: Pantheon, 1964); Jakobsen, Merete, Demant, *Shamanism: Traditional and Contemporary Approaches to the Mastery of Spirits and Healing* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1999); Harvey, Graham (ed.), *Shamanism: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Hutton, Ronald, *The Shamans of Siberia* (Glastonbury: Isle of Avalon Press, 1993).

³³¹ Viveiros de Castro, ‘Exchanging Perspectives’, p. 468.

In a personal email communication with Ridder-Patrick, where I had asked her to give her account of the consultation, she said she could not recall her specific experience, but admitted to a regular occurrence of something powerful happening in her work, which she supposed could be called an altered state of consciousness.³³² However she brushed it off fairly lightly with a remark about how it would probably be the case for people from all walks of life who were doing what they loved.³³³ So it could be argued that Willis is simply projecting his own expectations onto the situation, having been immersed in shamanic practices as an anthropologist for many years. However, to do so would be to insist upon the preservation of the phenomenologically unjustifiable subject-object divide and to fall into the trap of psychologising away what, for Willis, was an experientially real experience, which meaningfully moved him in that realised moment.

Ridder-Patrick's follow-on response reveals more however. She said she felt uncomfortable and embarrassed by Willis's description; while reluctantly admitting that there is something in what he said. Indeed she said she wished it had been kept secret. While not fully embracing Willis's claim of a divine embodiment, what Ridder-Patrick does acknowledge about her experience of working with clients in general is a heightened sense of rapport, which she describes in a markedly sensuous way, as 'a thickening of the atmosphere that I sense soundlessly in my ears, like a rushing, swishing movement'.³³⁴ She describes her normal identity becoming peripheral, distant, replaced by a sense of empathic communion with the client, and an

³³² Personal email communication.

³³³ *ibid.*

³³⁴ *ibid.*

overwhelming sense of love and connection.³³⁵ There would appear to be a lot more going on here than the systematic translation of literate symbols.

Ridder-Patrick's reference to the distancing of her normal identity, resonates with Hillman's conviction that the ritual of drawing up an accurate astrological chart provides the 'theurgic mumbo-jumbo' necessary to 'constellate psychic insight, focus intensity, elaborate a distancing procedure'.³³⁶ Might then an experiential engagement with the metaphorically distancing symbols of astrology in a particular context facilitate what Willis has called 'an innate species-ability to imaginatively and empathetically put ourselves in the place of the other'?³³⁷ Willis identifies this faculty, 'latent in some, patent in others' as being a *quality of relationship*, the enhanced instance of which should be considered *shamanic*.³³⁸ Alan Campbell suggests there is no such *thing* as a shaman, rather '[p]eople shamanize', acknowledging shamanism as an intrinsic human quality 'that admits of degrees'.³³⁹ We might speculate that those degrees may be enhanced at certain times of intensive engagement such as an astrological engagement, conducted with ritual intent.

There is not enough space here to discuss the complex issue of shamanism, nor the possible links between the astrologer and the shaman, an area which certainly invites further research. However, as we turn our attention now to the practice of experiential astrology and, specifically, the performance of *astrodrama*, we might consider the possibility that this type of empathetic ontological exchange, facilitated in specific

³³⁵ *ibid.*

³³⁶ Hillman, James, 'Heaven Retains Within Its Sphere Half of All Bodies and Maladies', at <http://www.springpub.com/astro.htm> [accessed 15/01/04].

³³⁷ Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, p. 139.

³³⁸ *ibid.*

³³⁹ *ibid.*, also citing Campbell, Alan, *To Square with Genesis, Causal Statements and Shamanic Ideas in Wayapi* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989), p. 106.

ritual contexts, is indeed an ability innate to the human condition. Practitioners of astrodrama, as we will see, would appear to presuppose just such an empathetic facility for inter-perspectival revelation through the medium of astrological symbolism; and not just for the astrologer, but equally for the other participants engaged in the performance. This would seem to support Willis and Campbell's hypothesis and suggests that the facticity of embodiment, so evident in astrodrama work, may provide the tacit metaphorical vehicle for the experiential realisation of symbolism.

EXPERIENTIAL ASTROLOGY & ASTRODRAMA: A CASE STUDY

PART ONE: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY & METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Our study now moves to an exploration of experiential astrology and specifically, the practice known as astrodrama. As there are no academic sources available, I have drawn upon on a combination of primary sources; practitioners' published material (books, articles, websites) and a fieldwork study comprising three in-depth, semi-structured interviews with recognised pioneers of astrodrama and its related practices. I am citing Jeff Jawer and Barbara Schermer by name (with their express permission³⁴⁰) as I am referencing their published material also. The third interview is with a well-known and highly respected astrological practitioner (cited anonymously) who is considered by Jawer to have been the most consistently active astrodrama facilitator since the practice began.

Experiential astrology, of which the ritualised group activity, astrodrama, forms an important part, is seen by many of its practitioners as being part of a broader movement in late 20th century astrology away from the practice of predicting a future, assumed to be fixed by an immutable fate, and toward a more creative, participatory engagement with destiny. According to Jawer, '[w]e have learned that our relationship with the heavens is ongoing and dynamic rather than fixed and rigid.'³⁴¹ For Jawer experiential astrology involves any form of direct experience with astrological symbolism that moves the participant down from the head and into the

³⁴⁰ Both signed an interview release form sanctioning the use of their names. For an example of this form, see appendix 3.2, p. 134. For standard interview release form see appendix 3.1, p. 133.

³⁴¹ Jawer, Jeff, 'Living the Drama of the Horoscope', at <http://www.asabovesobelow.com/creativeastrology/drama.htm> [accessed 9/2/06].

heart and body.³⁴² This reflects a concern among many experiential practitioners that astrologers tend to restrict the expression of the symbolism they work with by imposing a technical model of interpretation upon it. Jawer believes that most astrologers take this stance because they ‘want to abstract themselves from experience by the use of intellect and explanation’.³⁴³ In doing so, he suggests, they can easily forget their active participation in the interpretations they offer to clients. As examples of experiential astrology, he cites astrodrama, artistic exploration, guided imagery, planetary dances, planetary walks and singing charts.³⁴⁴

These more creative approaches to astrological work, according to Prudence Jones, began to appear in the 1970s, primarily influenced by the psychological revolution and in particular the Human Potential Movement, out of which the majority of experientially oriented astrologers emerged.³⁴⁵ Jones, editor of the book, *Creative Astrology*, describes how experiential astrology work employs ‘exercises in practical symbolism’ in which the ‘symbolic hinterland’ of astrology may be explored through role-playing, and through artistic and bodily expression. ‘Creative astrology’, as she defines it, ‘gives the power of interpretation back to the client’.³⁴⁶

Barbara Schermer’s book, *Astrology Alive*, published in 1989 and re-issued with two extra chapters in 1998, is still considered by practitioners to be the most practical guidebook on the subject. It was the first to specifically address the practice of

³⁴² de Prose, Janette, ‘The Riches of Symbolism, An Interview with Jeff Jawer’, *The Mountain Astrologer*, 2005, (Apr/May) no. 120, pp. 44-54 & 90-2 [hereafter de Prose, ‘Interview with Jawer’], p. 48.

³⁴³ *ibid.*

³⁴⁴ *ibid.* A selection of Jawer’s articles, many of which have appeared in the *The Mountain Astrologer*, can be accessed online at,

http://www.asabovesobelow.com/creativeastrology/articles_by_jeff_jawer.htm [accessed 15/04/06].

³⁴⁵ Jones, *Creative Astrology*, p. 7.

³⁴⁶ *ibid.*

astrodrama, which for Schermer, entails ‘the acting out of the horoscope’.³⁴⁷ It is seen as a participatory group experience designed to represent (or better, *re-presence*) the horoscope in a dramatic or theatrical form, whereby participants dynamically role-play astrologically symbolic situations by embodying what have been called astrological “energies” or archetypes.³⁴⁸ We will discuss the nature of these latter in due course.

The aims of experiential astrology are considered by its practitioners to be both educational and healing, conducive to ‘self-development and spiritual growth’.³⁴⁹ In respect of its educational applications, guided imagery or visual aids are regularly employed as ways of teaching astrology to students,³⁵⁰ while its healing aspects might be more appropriate to the performance of astrodrama, which is usually considered to be an emotionally cathartic or transformational experience.³⁵¹ Catharsis is defined in the Oxford Concise Dictionary as ‘an emotional release in drama or art’,³⁵² and Scheff argues that the capacity of games and drama to produce catharsis lies in the ‘aesthetic distance’, conceived as the extent to which the person’s attention is not taken up by the return of repressed emotions from past events.³⁵³ Scheff suggests, for example, that an audience member in a theatre production can become emotionally involved without fully surrendering their observer status, affording a division of attention

³⁴⁷ Schermer, *Astrology Alive*, p. 32.

³⁴⁸ See, for example, Schermer, *Astrology Alive*, p. 65-75; Jawer, Jeff, ‘Living the Drama of the Horoscope’, at <http://www.asabovesobelow.com/creativeastrology/drama.htm> [accessed 9/2/06].

³⁴⁹ Anon, ‘The Brighton and Hove Astrology Circle’, at http://www.planet-janet.com/astrology_circle.html [accessed 10/05/06].

³⁵⁰ See for example, Anon, ‘Faculty of Astrological Studies Summer School Brochure 2006’ at http://www.astrology.org.uk/assets/downloads/pdf/summer_school_brochure_2006.pdf [accessed 10/05/06].

³⁵¹ Schermer, *Astrology Alive*, p. 50-2.

³⁵² Fowler, H.W., & Fowler, F.G., in Della Thompson (ed.) *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Current English*, 9th Edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 207.

³⁵³ Scheff, Thomas J., *Catharsis in Healing, Ritual and Drama* (Berkeley & Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1980), p. 59.

between past distress and present safety.³⁵⁴ However in astrodrama, the experience is generally not constructed for an audience and would seem to require a far greater level of surrender of observer privileges from participants, particularly because they are not rehearsing a script, but responding spontaneously to the arousal of symbolism in the moment. Indeed the experience may be more akin to an older idea of catharsis as purgation, healing or cleansing (from the Greek *kathairō* meaning ‘cleanse’)³⁵⁵ through ritual enactment, akin to the type of ‘charismatic healing’ that Csordas discusses in *The Sacred Self*.³⁵⁶ The *distancing* process, as we have discussed, may be facilitated more through the creative tension of the astrological metaphor, the metaphoricity of the symbolism inviting one to release one’s normal social identity and enter into a more ambiguous liminal experience.

Psychodrama

Astrodrama’s methodology is drawn primarily from group psychotherapy, in particular Jacob Moreno’s *psychodrama*, which I will very briefly summarise here. Psychodrama invites participants in a group setting to spontaneously enact situations from their lives with the aim of effecting a cathartic experience in the actors.³⁵⁷ Moreno understands this to be an activity that employs dramatic methods to explore the truth of interpersonal relations (e.g. with family members) and private worlds, providing the actor with a multi-dimensional living space far broader than that which we are used to in normal everyday life, where fantasy and reality are no longer in

³⁵⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵⁵ Fowler, H.W., & Fowler, F.G., in Della Thompson (ed.), *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Current English*, 9th Edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 207.

³⁵⁶ Csordas, Thomas, *The Sacred Self: Cultural Phenomenology of Charismatic Healing* (Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1994), [hereafter Csordas, *Sacred Self*].

³⁵⁷ See Moreno, Jacob, *The Essential Moreno: Writings on Psychodrama, Group Method, and Spontaneity* (New York: Springer Publishing Company, 1987), [hereafter Moreno, *Psychodrama*], pp. 13-19.

conflict. Instead, in Moreno's terms, '[d]elusions and hallucinations are given flesh and an equality of status with normal sensory perceptions'.³⁵⁸ Moreno's use of words here reflects an assumption of there being a correct orientation of sensory perception under normal conditions, of which these delusions are errant forms granted temporary licence. That said, however, his methodology does actually invite these 'delusions' (however pejoratively conceived) to reveal themselves as having autonomous agency within the carefully delineated space, 'the stage', wherein the work takes place, a radical psychotherapeutic understanding for someone writing in the mid 1940s.³⁵⁹

Moreno describes how participants in a psychodrama experience enter *bodily* into the ontological realm of objects and persons to which their charismatic energy spontaneously draws them.³⁶⁰ Through engaging with this work participants are said to experience a form of existential healing manifest through a form of group empathy or catharsis, which Moreno understands as a reciprocation of love.³⁶¹ In terms of its *process*, psychodrama appears to share similarities with rites of passage rituals, common to indigenous cultures around the world.³⁶² Both involve separation from ordinary reality, rites of transition where the *initiands* experience a condition of liminality, marked by disintegration of normal social and cultural order and encounter with liminal entities of ambiguous and indeterminate ontological status. Finally, the psychodrama initiands experience rites of incorporation, where they are re-integrated into an everyday state of consciousness, and a 'catharsis of integration' is effected.³⁶³

³⁵⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

³⁵⁹ *ibid.*

³⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 17.

³⁶¹ *ibid.*

³⁶² See Gennep, Arnold van, *Rites of Passage* (London: Routledge, 2004); Turner, Victor, *The Ritual Process* (New York: Cornell, 1969). For discussion and critique, see Mitchell, Jon P., 'Performance', in Christopher Tilley (ed.), *Handbook of Material Culture* (London: Sage Publications, 2006, pp. 384-401), pp. 387-90.

³⁶³ Moreno, *Psychodrama*, p. 16.

Astrodrama

In astrodrama participants take on the roles, not of family members, but of the planets, astrologically animated or personified through a particular form of mythological or archetypal expression. Astrodrama is usually a contained experience, but can also be witnessed by outside spectators.³⁶⁴ For practitioner Kelley Hunter, the birth chart is like our life's play script with plots and sub-plots, and astrodrama is a form of '[e]xperiential play/work...that goes beyond words to evoke the archetypal dimension of astrology and its relevance to our immediate life situation'.³⁶⁵ Costume is an important element of the work for Hunter, (as with shamans who don masks or animal skins), and by fully entering into a particular role she considers it possible to call forth the power of the planets, with 'physical interaction and body response evoking knowledge'.³⁶⁶

Schermer suggests that astrodrama enables us to contact planetary energies through direct experience with the 'vital rhythms of their interactions', the horoscope itself becoming 'a moving field of planetary action: vibrant, interactive, deeply personal and alive!'.³⁶⁷ She describes how the 'embodiment' of symbolism enables astrologers to enrich their practice by leaving the chairs of their consulting rooms and expressing the astrological archetypes through movement and feeling.³⁶⁸ She also stresses the

³⁶⁴ Schermer, *Astrology Alive*, p. 33.

³⁶⁵ Hunter, M. Kelley, 'Clips from the ROOTS Scrapbook', *The Mountain Astrologer* 47, June 1994 (pp. 27-8), pp. 27-8.

³⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p. 27.

³⁶⁷ *ibid.*, p. 28.

³⁶⁸ Schermer, *Astrology Alive*, p. 34.

crucial role that ritual can play in experiential work and the strength of intention expressed through embodied group activity.³⁶⁹

With this in mind, it may be worth considering that the idea of catharsis, as discussed by Moreno, may be too *general* an idea to apply helpfully to the experience of astrodrاما, and we may be wise to follow Csordas who eschews ‘global “black box” mechanisms such as...catharsis...in favour of phenomenological specificity’ [Csordas’s quotes].³⁷⁰ Indeed the idea of a cathartic experience being a re-connection to a particular *root* or origin, may be more pertinent to the pluralistic particularity of embodying an astrological archetype, whether through a ritual symbol, or indeed through one’s own body.

The Extent of Experiential Astrology & Astrodrاما in Practice

My own informal conversations with members of the astrological community suggest that astrodrاما is a fairly marginal practice, while the broader applications of experiential astrology as a teaching aid have become more mainstream, as has the use of images and creative metaphors employed in psychologically-oriented consultancy work. In terms of written sources, there seem to be less magazine articles published now under the experiential banner than there were during the 1990s, when accounts by practitioners such as Schermer, Hunter, Moira Canes and Michelle Koffron, among others, were quite regularly featured in the publication, *The Mountain Astrologer*.³⁷¹ The overall impression from practitioners is that there is less astrodrاما being practised nowadays than there was in the 1990s.

³⁶⁹ Schermer, Barbara, ‘Downloading the Cosmic Mind: Group Rituals for 2000-2001’, *The Mountain Astrologer*, 2000, Aug/Sept, no. 92, pp. 22-8 [hereafter Schermer, ‘Downloading’].

³⁷⁰ Csordas, Thomas, *The Sacred Self: Cultural Phenomenology of Charismatic Healing* (Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1994), p. xiii.

³⁷¹ See, for example, *The Mountain Astrologer*, June, 1994, pp. 27-36, 89-93.

It is notable, however, that experiential astrology has been integrated into many astrology conferences and camps over the past twenty-five years on both sides of the Atlantic. Indeed, three of the most prominent astrological events of 2006 all feature experiential work. The upcoming 2006 Astrological Association Conference in York, features Derek Hawkins and Aashti Tousignant applying experiential techniques offering ‘keys to unify and heal family dynamics’.³⁷² Also this year’s ISAR *Heavens on Earth* 2006 Conference in Florence, features Schermer and Hunter, who will both be leading experiential workshops around the astrological themes in Botticelli’s paintings.³⁷³ Thirdly, the Faculty of Astrological Studies summer school at Oxford University features an experiential astrology module with Jane Ridder-Patrick.³⁷⁴ In addition, the Wheel of Astrologers summer camp in the UK has a prominent experiential dimension, including astrodrama workshops and, in 2005, an enactment of the Dance of Venus.³⁷⁵ In previous years, the Rainbow Circle and Oak Dragon astrology summer camps have also enjoyed a predominantly experiential emphasis, with astrodrama being a regular feature.³⁷⁶

³⁷² See Anon, ‘AA Conference Programme 2006’, at <http://www.astrologer.com/aanet/conference/conf2006/astrology-association-2006-conference.pdf> [accessed 11/03/06].

³⁷³ See Anon, ‘ISAR 2006: Heavens on Earth Symposium: Schedule for Financial Track in Florence, Italy’, at <http://www.isarastrology.com/2006/as-track.php> [accessed 11/03/06].

³⁷⁴ See Anon, ‘Faculty of Astrological Studies Summer School Brochure 2006’ http://www.astrology.org.uk/assets/downloads/pdf/summer_school_brochure_2006.pdf [accessed 10/05/06].
[accessed 11/03/06]

³⁷⁵ See Anon, ‘The Wheel of Astrologers: The Turning Wheel Astrology Camp, 25-29 August 2005’, at <http://www.wheelofastrologers.co.uk/astrologycamp.html> [accessed 11/03/06].

³⁷⁶ See Anon, ‘Oak Dragon Camps: What are Oak Dragon camps All About?’, at <http://www.oakdragon.org.uk/> [accessed 11/03/06].

Methodological Issues

My aim here has been to enrich my inquiry into the embodied paradigm in relation to astrological work, amplifying what is, in effect, a rolling hypothesis of what might constitute an embodied astrology. In common with *grounded theory*, my approach has sought to allow substantive concepts and hypotheses to emerge from the data.³⁷⁷

My initial, informal enquiries with practitioners indicated that the notion of experiential astrology is very broadly defined and often in quite radically contradictory ways. The question of how experiential astrology is to be defined cannot be my concern here, as it would entail an extensive cultural study in its own right, requiring a broad and inclusive fieldwork sample of both practitioners and participants. I am therefore making no attempt to objectively *represent* experiential astrological practice through this fieldwork and will not be drawing any general conclusions about the nature of experiential astrology as a whole.

I have concentrated instead upon those who have worked explicitly to develop the practices that constellate around the group activity, astrodrama. It is the value that the practitioners place upon the embodied aspect of the astrological experience that I am seeking to draw out and understand more fully through the interviews. Through the qualitative methodology I am employing for this pilot study I aim to allow further insights to emerge into the theoretical framework of embodiment that I have been developing in this thesis.

The interviews were loosely focussed around several basic themes; the relationship of the astrologer to astrology; how the astrologer distinguishes experiential astrology

³⁷⁷ Glaser, Barney & Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: The Strategies for Qualitative Research* (New York: de Gruyter, 1999), p. 34.

from other types of astrology, how the astrologer perceives his/her role, the role of the body and the type of experiences that embodiment afford, the importance of working in a group, the techniques employed, the ecological context for astrological work, and the relationship between astrology and healing.³⁷⁸ These questions acted as stimuli for conversation. The questions did not always arise in the same order but were covered fully in each case; I deliberately left the structure loose enough for the interviewees to talk freely about their practices.

A considerable issue that I anticipated, in the particular context of this enquiry, revolved around the understanding of what is meant by the word *body* and by *embodiment*. In normal usage, the word *body* might be expected to refer to a discrete, bounded physical entity, rather than the phenomenological understanding of the body as being that which opens out receptively through its intertwining with the phenomenal world. Likewise, *embodiment* may be understood in the more psychological terms of being “grounded in one’s body”; I did not anticipate that it would necessarily carry with it the implications of the paradigm of embodiment we have been discussing. I have been sensitive to possible misunderstandings therefore both in the way I have framed my questions and in the way I have interpreted the responses. By juxtaposing the question about the role of the body with other questions pertaining to group dynamics, ecology and healing I hoped to encourage an exploration of the wider implications of embodiment, without, of course, imposing my own theory. Thus while the problem of definition could be seen as a limitation, it could also be seen as an opportunity for fruitful exploration.

³⁷⁸ See appendix 2, p. 132.

The Insider Perspective

I have approached this study as both practitioner and researcher. As a practising astrologer myself, fully conversant with the art, and an experienced practitioner of astro-drama, I am continually persuaded of the efficacy and value of this work *in practice*. I am thus a fully acknowledged insider in this study and my perspective, following Pike, should thus be considered an *emic*, rather than an *etic* one.³⁷⁹ While I cannot pretend to adopt a neutral distance from that which I am exploring, I am employing a reflexive approach that allows me to be both critical of the material I am considering and self-critical of my own inevitable perspective.³⁸⁰ This involves ‘setting both belief *and* disbelief aside’,³⁸¹ and allowing what Ninian Smart has described as an ‘informed empathy’ to permeate the research situation.³⁸² In critiquing the *tabula rasa* approach to research, Wach contests, ‘We need not a blank sheet but an impregnated one, one that will preserve the pictures projected onto it.’³⁸³ By moving beyond the idealistic neutral stance of objective analysis, and guarding against the solipsistic tendency to uncritically relativise each individual account, I hope to learn from the empathic, non-linear experiences that inevitably flavour each relational encounter.

³⁷⁹ Pike, Kenneth L., ‘Etic and Emic Standpoints for the Description of Behavior’, in Russell T. McCutcheon, *The Insider / Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion* (London: Cassell, 1999), pp. 28-36.

³⁸⁰ See, for example, Babcock, Barbara A., ‘Reflexivity: Definitions and Discriminations’, *Semiotica*, 1980, vol. 30, no. 1/2, (The Hague: Mouton Publishers 1980), pp. 1-14; Hufford, David J., ‘The Scholarly Voice and the Personal Voice: Reflexivity in Belief Studies’, in Russell T. McCutcheon, *The Insider / Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion* (London: Cassell, 1999), pp. 294-310 [hereafter Hufford, *Reflexivity*].

³⁸¹ Hufford, *Reflexivity*, p. 304.

³⁸² Smart, *Dimensions*, p. xxiii.

³⁸³ Wach, Joachim, ‘The Meaning and Task of the History of Religions’, in Russell T. McCutcheon, *The Insider / Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion* (London: Cassell, 1999), pp. 82-94 [hereafter McCutcheon, *Insider-Outsider Problem*], p. 91.

PART TWO: THE INTERVIEWS ³⁸⁴

Relationship to astrology

All three interview participants are highly regarded, internationally renowned astrological practitioners, each with thirty years or more experience, and each has become known for their pioneering work with experiential astrology, including astrodrama. What was communicated to me most strongly by each practitioner was the passion that they have for the work they do and their dedication to it. Jawer considers astrology to be a key factor in how he describes his world,³⁸⁵ while for Schermer it is her ‘whole life’, and not a day goes by where she does not refer to the sky and to her chart; ‘[i]t’s intimate, it’s deep in my bones’.³⁸⁶ P1 describes how astrology stimulated his creative side; very early on in his career, he was considering which music should go with each planet and how the planets would dress.³⁸⁷ He explains how he was far more interested in ‘finding ways of evoking the archetype...speaking the archetype’ than in techniques of interpretation for which he cared little.³⁸⁸ The value placed upon working creatively comes across very strongly with all three practitioners.

Both Jawer and Schermer have busy astrological practices, one-to-one client work taking up more of their time than group work. P1 does less one-to-one work than he used to, but is by far the most active in terms of astrodrama work, choosing to work in depth with groups preferably over a period of time ranging from five days to two weeks. Of the three, Schermer and Jawer are the more widely published in the astrological press. All three were far more interested in the therapeutic value of

³⁸⁴ For the transcripts of the interviews see appendices 1.1 – 1.3 at the end of this thesis, pp. 108-28.

³⁸⁵ Appendix 1.1, p. 111.

³⁸⁶ Appendix 1.2, p. 120.

³⁸⁷ Appendix 1.3, p. 124.

³⁸⁸ *ibid.*

astrology, its potential to facilitate insight, healing and personal transformation; none were particularly interested in its predictive value. Jawer considers that astrological work should be an ethical, ecological and socially cohesive practice, expressing the view that astrology has no value *in itself* ‘outside of its social, ethical, moral, cultural context’.³⁸⁹ All three have experience working with different forms of psychotherapeutic process work, including psychodrama and bodywork. Schermer incorporates the teachings of Kriya Yoga, of which she is an initiate, into her astrological practice, drawing as well upon bio-energetics exercises and body psychotherapy.³⁹⁰

The Role of the Astrologer

Schermer considers her role as an astrologer to be entirely compatible with her role as a healer, psychotherapist, counsellor and guide, stressing the importance of having a psychotherapeutic background, when working in this way with the ‘sensitive parts of people’s souls’.³⁹¹ In groups she identifies her role as ‘director’ in astrodrama work, but maintains the aim of moving out of that role so she can ‘just facilitate from the outside’.³⁹² Jawer too describes his role in group work as being ‘a sort of creative director’,³⁹³ with the emphasis on keeping the environment creative, so he can ‘keep elucidating a more stimulating, more provoking discovery’.³⁹⁴ All three see themselves stimulating the creative process, both in groups and in one-to-one work. P1 describes giving ‘little impulses’ to get the participants going so that the group

³⁸⁹ Appendix 1.1, p. 113.

³⁹⁰ Appendix 1.2, p. 121.

³⁹¹ *ibid.*, p. 122.

³⁹² *ibid.*

³⁹³ Appendix 1.1, p. 114.

³⁹⁴ *ibid.*

dynamics can begin to take over.³⁹⁵ As well as setting up the space and offering his creative facilitation, he also sees his role as creating ‘a place of trust...so that everybody has the feeling it’s safe to do whatever comes in the moment’.³⁹⁶

Control or Discovery?

The issue of how much control an astrologer should exert in his work is addressed explicitly by Jawer and is strongly hinted at in the other two accounts also. The aim for Schermer, is to instil in a participant the sense that they are ‘the protagonist of their own unfolding horoscope’, and she seeks to ‘get the power to them’ as soon as she can.³⁹⁷ One of her primary techniques, even with one-to-one work, is to use image boards to facilitate those ‘lay astrologers who...don’t know astrology’ to access the symbolism quickly.³⁹⁸ The emphasis is on the facilitation of meaning by the astrologer, not an imposed interpretation. Jawer contrasts a control model of astrology with a discovery model,³⁹⁹ identifying his own approach with the latter and the astrological tradition of prediction and the quest for certainty with the former.⁴⁰⁰ He makes the startling comparison between a religious fundamentalist text and the astrological ephemeris,⁴⁰¹ ‘... there’s nothing more fundamental than an ephemeris. There’s absolutely no wriggle room as to the position of a planet...we are as bound up in that as...anyone else who’s looking for order...at a time when humanity is...desperately in need of creativity’.⁴⁰²

³⁹⁵ Appendix 1.3, p. 128.

³⁹⁶ *ibid.*

³⁹⁷ Appendix 1.2, p. 120.

³⁹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 2.

³⁹⁹ Appendix 1.1, p. 115.

⁴⁰⁰ *ibid.*, p. 118.

⁴⁰¹ The book of tables in which planetary positions are recorded. See, for example, Michelsen, Neil F., *The American Ephemeris for the 21st Century, 2001-2050 at Midnight*, 2nd ed. (San Diego, CA: ACS Publications, 1999).

⁴⁰² Appendix 1.1, p. 118.

Jawer highlights the dangers inherent in the literal interpretation of planetary positions and suggests that creative or experiential work can serve as an ‘antidote to the excesses of control’ of what he calls ‘talk astrology’. So for Jawer, the astrodrama situation provides a place to play and discover, rather than a place to seek right answers. He rehearses a view also found in his *Mountain Astrologer* interview with de Prose, where he criticises astrologers for their preoccupation with discovering the *right* interpretive technique. There are many techniques in astrological work and Jawer is critical of what he sees as the futile search for the ‘magic bullet’ that will predict more accurately and diagnose with more certainty.⁴⁰³ Jawer suggests that the astrologer’s fascination with technique reflects the emphasis on explanation rather than experience and ‘can be a flight from symbolism’. The ‘richness of astrology’, he suggests, ‘is in the *symbols*’.⁴⁰⁴ This idea that it is in the experiential *engagement* with the astrological data, and not the data itself that produces the “magic” is entirely consistent with one of the main themes of this thesis, namely that the pattern of astrological symbols are the *ritual origin* of meaning, not its end result.

P1 reflects a very similar disposition through the way he resists imposing his own astrological interpretation on the planetary configuration being enacted in the astrodrama, preferring to allow it to reveal its meaning through the group dynamic, emphasising that in (what he calls) ‘life work’, one must be prepared for surprises.⁴⁰⁵ What came across to me in the way he described this was a remarkable humility; an astrologer with thirty years of experience, prepared to suspend judgment on what a particular horoscopic signature might mean and really allow meaning to emerge within the group. For all his hands-off approach, however, he does carefully and

⁴⁰³ *ibid.*, & de Prose, ‘Interview with Jawer’, p. 49.

⁴⁰⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

⁴⁰⁵ Appendix 1.3, p. 127.

respectfully set up the conditions for this to happen, which he refers to as the ritual.⁴⁰⁶ He enables people to get into their particular role primarily through music and the accompanying invitation to move or dance, ‘then something starts happening with them...once they’re in their roles’, and often this is a ‘non-verbal sequence’, expressed more through body movement.⁴⁰⁷ The level of trust that P1 invests in the group dynamic is striking, but he stresses that this is only possible because a great deal of patient preparation has gone into setting up the conditions for the ‘real magic’ to start happening.

Embodying the Archetypes

The key area of inquiry in the interviews revolved around the question of embodiment in astrological work. In all three interviews, before I even came to raise the question of embodiment, the practitioners had introduced the idea of the body being a pivotal resource for meaning and transformation in the astrodrama experience. P1 described the experience of astrodrama as being one ‘grounded in the body, in the feelings, in the senses’,⁴⁰⁸ while Jawer explained how the body can elucidate the symbolism of astrology through direct experience, better than the analytical process.⁴⁰⁹ Jawer describes the planetary walks that he employs to get participants to bring an experience of the qualities of different planetary archetypes more fully into the body, ‘someone who has...an underdeveloped Saturn could...inculcate the qualities of the

⁴⁰⁶ *ibid.*, p. 126.

⁴⁰⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁰⁸ *ibid.* This comment appears to reflect the more psychological understanding of the body referenced earlier (p.78). However, P1’s later comments demonstrate a much richer understanding of the body’s symbolic role.

⁴⁰⁹ Appendix 1.1, p. 111.

planet...by being aware of the spine slowing down the walk and healing their contact with the earth when walking'.⁴¹⁰

Schermer too cites an example of how she might get participants of the opposite signs, Aries and Libra, to push bodily against one another to create a sense of what that opposition might feel like in their lives. Again, this is a non-verbal exchange where meaning is understood to arise through physical enactment. When prompted further about the role of the body, Schermer acknowledges that we all learn in different ways, emphasising how experiential astrology opens up multi-sensory ways of learning, using image and movement to really feel what it is like 'to be a Mars in Aries versus a Mars in Taurus' in a way that could not necessarily be grasped just by talking about it.⁴¹¹ Schermer's emphasis here is on learning astrology though there would seem to be considerable overlap with its healing and transformational value.

When prompted as to the role of the body, P1 describes how, through exposure to 'half an hour of music or visuals', the energy of the particular archetype 'would become more and more dense',⁴¹² by which he seems to be implying more and more *embodied*; note he is referring not simply to the *human* participant, *but the archetype itself*. When prompted by an earlier question as to whether by *archetype* he means a Jungian archetype, he answered negatively, and conceded that he was 'in need for a better word [sic]', the idea of *gods* being 'a bit awkward in our times', settling eventually on 'root energies or something like that'.⁴¹³ He considers that 'the more

⁴¹⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹¹ Appendix 1.2, p. 121.

⁴¹² Appendix 1.3, p. 126.

⁴¹³ *ibid.*, p. 124.

you go to the root...the more possibilities of expression you have'.⁴¹⁴ This reflects Maggie Hyde's earlier comment about the astrological symbol being a root in itself, pre-conceptual and thus irreducible to a literate concept such as a Jungian archetype. The embodiment of this root energy is described by P1 not as being part of a person's inner world or a psychological projection, but as a living presence in the room becoming embodied in its own right, through a participant, and recognised as such by the other participants provoking different bodily reactions in them. As he puts it, 'everybody feels within his body [sic] the feeling of the relationship to the archetype and you know straight away if this thing gives you power or if it makes you weak'.⁴¹⁵

In addition to Jawer's planetary walks, he also cites another fascinating way of embodying and evoking the planet-archetype, what he calls 'singing charts'.⁴¹⁶ He has the person whose birth chart is being enacted sit or stand in the centre of the circle, while the other participants take up their planetary roles around the periphery; he asks each person to make a sound that resonates the quality of the planet they are embodying in terms of its condition in the horoscope by sign, house and aspect. Jawer commented on the remarkable power of this experience, citing a particular example of a participant sounding 'Pluto in Virgo' such that it encapsulated the meaning of the planet in that situation in a way that was untranslatable in words.⁴¹⁷ Both this technique and the planetary walks can attribute their efficacy, according to Jawer, to the fact that 'the body tends to lie less readily than the mind... when we experience something in our bodies, it...takes root at a deeper level'.⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁴ Appendix 1.3, p. 124.

⁴¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 126.

⁴¹⁶ Appendix 1.1, p. 115.

⁴¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 116.

⁴¹⁸ *ibid.*

Astrology as Ecology

I was keen to explore in the interviews whether the practitioners perceive astrology within an ecological context, something I was aware that Jawer had already discussed in print. The idea of astrology *as ecology* has been postulated by Curry; the astrological engagement offering an authentic perspective particular to an immanent experience of place and moment that includes the cosmos.⁴¹⁹ Engaging with astrology, Curry argues, can remind us that the earth is our home (*ecos*) and that *home* has a cosmic dimension.⁴²⁰ In his article, *Astro-Ecology*, Jawer describes astrology as an ancient, cross-cultural means of connecting human lives with the collective cycles and patterns of the cosmos.⁴²¹ He reminds us that we belong to the earth and ‘cannot remain aliens on our planet when we use astrology’.⁴²² He adds to this in the interview by suggesting that ‘one of astrology’s...greatest gifts is that it puts us within nature’.⁴²³ He suggests that experiential astrology offers the possibility of a participatory relationship between the human being and the expression of the planetary energy, and equates this with the idea of an ‘ecological environment’.⁴²⁴

Schermer associates experiential astrology with ecology through Ficino’s ideas of cultivating *soul* by having participatory experiences with natural phenomena.⁴²⁵ She acknowledges the pluralistic nature of astrology, and describes how important it is for her to honour the gods, which she does through the rituals she conducts at specific, astrologically determined times of the day, at the altars she has positioned deliberately

⁴¹⁹ Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, pp. 122-4.

⁴²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 124.

⁴²¹ Jawer, Jeff, ‘Astro-Ecology’, at <http://www.asabovesobelow.com/creativeastrology/astro.htm> accessed, 15/03/06.

⁴²² *ibid.*

⁴²³ Appendix 1.1, p. 113.

⁴²⁴ *ibid.*

⁴²⁵ Appendix 1.2, p. 122.

in different parts of her house.⁴²⁶ She envisages a ‘co-creative process’ between human beings, and the gods, reflected in a reciprocal evolution through movement, perceiving a ‘real harmony...a real I and Thou resonating relationship between the gods and my life on earth’.⁴²⁷

In an earlier personal communication, she told me how she had made talismans under auspicious planetary aspects to her own birth chart, for use in personal ritual.⁴²⁸ In an article in *The Mountain Astrologer*, she emphasises the potency of conducting rituals at particular, astrologically significant moments, in significant *places*, in appropriately oriented ‘sacred space’ (e.g. a circle with a five pointed star and carefully placed protective powers), and with meaningful ritual objects to serve as talismans.⁴²⁹ This clearly resonates with the idea of drawing down the “energy” of the sun, moon and planets into a relationship of immanent participation, rather than relating to them as far-off distant bodies exerting some esoteric influence upon human destiny. That ritual moment, focussed either through prayer or meditation upon a particular planetary deity or through ecstatic dancing or drumming, she describes as being a ‘co-creative moment...a sense of connection to the cosmos’.⁴³⁰ The idea of the ecological relationship being an intimate engagement with a particular god or other-than-human presence in a particular situation comes across very strongly here. She clearly conceives of spirits as being autonomous entities who participate in the experience, warning of ‘mischievous spirits’ who might interfere if an appropriate closure of the

⁴²⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 122-3

⁴²⁷ *ibid.*

⁴²⁸ Personal communication.

⁴²⁹ Schermer, ‘Downloading’, pp. 24-8.

⁴³⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 27-8.

ritual is not effected.⁴³¹ Clearly, what Schermer is involved with here cannot easily be reduced to an exercise in psychological astrology.

Healing the Individual, Community & Cosmos

In all three interviews, there is a strong emphasis on the value of experiential astrology as vehicle for healing and transformation. The sense that I got from each of them was that the process of embodying the archetypes, or gods, was somehow facilitating a healing process both in the individual participants and in the group as a whole. While none of them referred explicitly to examples of *physical* healing of particular ailments, the impression that came across was that healing was occurring on many levels. Experiential astrology heals and transforms, Jawer insists, (echoing our earlier discussion) ‘by providing a pluralistic view of reality...[o]vercoming the absolutism of any singular perspective’.⁴³² This reconnection to the energy-releasing, core experience of the archetypes, is, he suggests, ‘limited by intellect or by a verbal process’.⁴³³ He further identifies as a limiting factor the over-personalised ‘psychological component’, which he believes the direct experience of the archetypes can ‘move us past’.⁴³⁴ He stresses that through role-playing or singing charts, or doing planet walks, the non-verbal element of experience is addressed and this can overcome the limitations of human language in a healing and therapeutic way.⁴³⁵ This is particularly effective in groups, he suggests, because it reflects the reality of lived experience and can bypass the power issues that can come up in one-to-one work. For Jawer, the idea of the de-contextualised individual provides a very limited view of reality, and he suggests that it is the presence of the group, the dynamics of

⁴³¹ *ibid.*, p. 28.

⁴³² Appendix 1.1, p. 118.

⁴³³ *ibid.*, p. 119.

⁴³⁴ *ibid.*

⁴³⁵ *ibid.*

movement, and the pluralistic exchange of perspectives that facilitates the healing process.⁴³⁶

Schermer combines kriya yoga spiritual exercises with astrological embodiment to counterbalance planetary energies and to effect healing and transformation,⁴³⁷ which, in addition to her group rituals, are clearly intended to serve a healing function. She has emphasised that the moment and place must be honoured for healing to occur.

The significance of *place* in astrological ritual drama is emphasised even more explicitly by P1, who talks about working in power places in nature, in old theatres, temples, cliffs or gorges and how he would light a fire there, do some chanting, drumming or a beginning ritual as a ‘straw to climb into the magic world’.⁴³⁸ He acknowledges his shamanic role in these rituals, describing them as shamanic rituals.⁴³⁹ P1 emphasises that the planetary gods had to have their temples placed only in certain places because they ‘naturally correspond’, and he observes how much more accessible the magical world is from these places.⁴⁴⁰ He cites an example of working with a group at the acropolis on the Greek island of Thassos during the Transit of Venus transit of 2004.⁴⁴¹ After opening up through a beginning ritual, a participant took the role of the Sun, standing on a marble slab, while another, playing Venus and dressed in appropriate garb according to her zodiacal placement, conjoined

⁴³⁶ *ibid.*

⁴³⁷ Appendix 1.2, pp. 121-2.

⁴³⁸ Appendix 1.3, p. 129.

⁴³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 130.

⁴⁴¹ *ibid.* This was an inferior conjunction of Venus and the Sun, when Venus passed directly in front of the Sun. See: http://sunearth.gsfc.nasa.gov/sunearthday/2004/index_vthome.htm [accessed on 15/04/06].

the Sun, mirroring the cosmic event. P1 played appropriate music for drawing the group further into this cosmic experience.⁴⁴²

P1 explicitly acknowledges the healing power of this type of work for *everyone* in the group. He stresses, however, that deeper levels of healing are more evident where groups have been together over longer periods. He even sees this type of ritual drama having a potentially healing resonance beyond the group itself. He compares his work to Moreno's *sociodrama*⁴⁴³ and discusses how the themes enacted in an astrodrama can have a spontaneous impact in the wider society, beyond the individual. However, while Moreno's idea of effecting social transformation required a cultural broadcast of the sociodrama through radio or television,⁴⁴⁴ P1 is suggesting that socio-cultural transformation can emanate directly from the contained performance. Indeed, it is considered to be the sacred containment of the ritual that gives the performance its transformative power.⁴⁴⁵ P1 refers to how he sometimes works with the horoscope of a nation or collective social or political institution and gets the group to express the archetypal themes for that horoscope, a type of experiential *mundane astrology*.⁴⁴⁶ This, he claims, can have a healing effect at a broad social levels. He notes that this healing power can be transferred to the animal and plant worlds also.⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴² Appendix 1.3, p. 130.

⁴⁴³ *ibid.*, p. 126. Sociodrama is designed to be more socially impactful than psychodrama. See Moreno, *Psychodrama*, pp. 18-19.

⁴⁴⁴ Moreno, *Psychodrama*, p. 19.

⁴⁴⁵ Appendix 1.3, pp. 130-1.

⁴⁴⁶ This relates to the political astrology of nations and social collectives. See Baigent Michael, Nicholas Campion & Charles Harvey, *Mundane Astrology, An Introduction to the Astrology of Groups and Nations* (London: Thorsons, 1984).

⁴⁴⁷ Appendix 1.3, p. 131.

P1 is keen to cite the healing and ecological value of astrology's inherent pluralism.⁴⁴⁸ This is reflected in his decision not to place the chart owner in the centre of their own enacted horoscope, so that they are always experiencing their drama from a particular perspective, resisting the idea of a central self that can somehow direct the other planets from a position of centralised authority. This seems to be a genuinely pluralistic approach, which honours the idea that life is always lived from a particular embodied point of view,⁴⁴⁹ and gives me the impression of being inherently shamanistic. P1 continually emphasises the need for a longer period of time than a day or even a weekend to build up the sense of safety and trust that can enable participants to enter fully into the unpredictable contingencies of the drama.

Jawer compares astrodrama work to an alchemical process, the container, or alembic being necessary to support the work; it must be strong enough not to crack under the pressure.⁴⁵⁰ He considers that we don't have 'a sacred framework, a philosophical framework in which to place ourselves in relationship to these archetypes', and can easily overlook the power we are actually dealing with, the archetypes being so much bigger than we are as individuals.⁴⁵¹ He really emphasises the importance of de-personalising astrology, 'experiencing the archetypes as archetypes',⁴⁵² and recognising too that our relationship to planetary energy is a two-way relationship, that an astrological relationship is a co-creative one which reverberates beyond the individual and the individual's horoscope; beyond even the human grouping, it

⁴⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁴⁹ Appendix 1.3, p. 127.

⁴⁵⁰ Appendix 1.1, p. 112.

⁴⁵¹ *ibid.*, pp. 112-3.

⁴⁵² *ibid.*, p. 112.

reverberates out into the cosmos.⁴⁵³ This constitutes, for Jawer, a genuinely ecological connection,⁴⁵⁴ intrinsically a healing connection.⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵³ *ibid.* See also Jawer, Jeff, 'We are the Transits', *The Mountain Astrologer*, June 1993, pp. 5-6.

⁴⁵⁴ Appendix 1.1, p. 113.

⁴⁵⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 118-9.

PART THREE: FINDINGS AND OBSERVATIONS

These interviews contain a notable richness of account in what were actually quite short conversations of about half an hour. Obviously, the major drawback of this limited pilot study is that I have not had the opportunity to work directly with any of the three practitioners and neither have I been able to collect responses from people who have participated in their work. However, as I have already stated, this is not intended to be a survey of experiential practice as such, but rather an exploratory inquiry to enrich an emerging theoretical framework. I would suggest that this has been achieved here.

A number of consistent themes reveal themselves in these accounts, such as the pivotal role of the body, movement, unscripted creative expression and the idea of astrological knowledge being communicated non-verbally, revealing a tacit knowledge that can be commonly experienced. The ecological and healing value of astrodrاما and its associated practices is consistently emphasised. It is also clear that the facilitation of the group requires the astrologer to release interpretive control and allow meaning to reveal itself through a combination of group dynamics and the embodiment of the astrological symbols, energies or archetypes. On this latter point, the problem arises, *in language*, as to what it is actually meant by these terms.

All three interviewees have acknowledged the pluralistic nature of astrology's symbols; indeed the multitude of perspectives afforded by its pluralism has been associated explicitly with its healing power. However the question of what these ritually engaged symbols actually reveal remains (perhaps necessarily) ambiguous and at times apparently contradictory. Participants have spoken primarily about

archetypes, also energies, or *root* energies; Schermer talks about the gods, whilst in the same breath about archetypes as evolving ‘psychological principles’.⁴⁵⁶ Jawer emphasises the importance of experiencing the ‘archetypes as archetypes’,⁴⁵⁷ which suggests he is granting them autonomous *being*, while his humanist stance perhaps dissuades him from talking about them as gods or daemons. P1 also resists calling them *gods*,⁴⁵⁸ but at the same time, he does not seem prepared to reduce the archetypes to aspects of the human psyche either. This makes me suspect that his choice of the term *archetype* may depend more on the demands of intellectual and social legitimacy through psychological language than on an intended exclusion of non-human agencies actually participating in the performance. What his caution does reveal, as with the other interviewees, is a sense of there being an interpretive gap between the way the experience of embodiment is being described and what *may* actually be going on. Again, I am limited in my ability to judge having not participated in their work.

If there is such a gap, however, then this may be because an experience of more-than human embodiment cannot easily be articulated outside of its sacred context. As Hanegraaff would argue, the after-the-fact description *must* be disenchanted, terminologically, so as to be accommodated within a conceptual framework that is culturally acceptable.⁴⁵⁹

The practices of both Moreno’s psychodrama and the instances of astro-drama and astrological ritual discussed in the interviews seem to accord well with a paradigm of

⁴⁵⁶ Appendix 1.2, p. 122.

⁴⁵⁷ Appendix 1.1, p. 112.

⁴⁵⁸ Appendix 1.3, p. 124.

⁴⁵⁹ See Hanegraaff, *Magic*, p. 378.

embodiment. The shared experiences, group catharses and revelations of embodied presences also appear to resonate well with Victor Turner's notion of *communitas*.⁴⁶⁰ This latter is conceived as an intuitively shared and socially levelling encounter with 'liminal *personae* ("threshold people"), who slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space'.⁴⁶¹ Turner, however, insists on separating these liminal *personae*, conceived still as human (albeit socially ambiguous) persons, from the symbolic forms that are being impressed upon them, 'by force of custom into the likeness of reality'.⁴⁶² Edith Turner rejects this symbolist approach to ritual as being a reductive psychological explanation for an experientially real phenomena, arguing from her own experience of *participating* in African healing ritual. Having had a direct, communally shared experience of more-than-human embodiment herself during such a ritual,⁴⁶³ she insists that symbols are not simply 'ritual markers', but rather 'liminal hedges or protectors' that enclose a secret which cannot be known from the outside.⁴⁶⁴ As Susan Greenwood argues, 'if an anthropologist wants to examine magic, then she or he must directly experience the otherworld,'⁴⁶⁵ therein realising the liminal not as a literate concept, but as an embodied, non-verbal reality. Victor Turner himself concedes that one cannot use worlds to speak directly *about* the spirit world, since one finds oneself in a non-verbal world.⁴⁶⁶ Yet, as Abram reminds us, one can use words to speak *to* the 'expressive presences' of that world.⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶⁰ See Turner, Victor, *The Ritual Process* (New York: Cornell, 1969), pp. 94-165.

⁴⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. 95.

⁴⁶² Turner, Edith, with William Blodgett, Singleton Kahona, and Fideli Benwa, *Experiencing Ritual. A New Interpretation of African Healing* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992) [hereafter Turner E., *Experiencing Ritual*], p. 11.

⁴⁶³ *ibid.*, pp. 54-82.

⁴⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p. 14.

⁴⁶⁵ Greenwood, Susan, *Magic, Witchcraft & the Otherworld: An Anthropology* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), p. 12.

⁴⁶⁶ See Turner, E., *Experiencing Ritual*, p. 9.

⁴⁶⁷ Abram, *Spell*, p. 71.

Likewise in the astrological rituals cited by the practitioners, symbols appear to be revealing themselves, apparently autonomously, through embodiment in the manner of Csordas's *phenomenological specificities*. They are described as having an unpredictable expression and controlling that expression, the astrologers' suggest, would be at the cost of creativity and the potential for the realisation of new meaning. In surrendering control within the liminal conditions of the astrological ritual, the symbols *may* be legitimately experienced as gods, spirits, daemons, liminal personae *in their own right*. Thus, as the ecological practice that each interviewee has acknowledged experiential astrology to be, one might anticipate there to be a disposition of *respect* (implicit in animistic ways of engaging with the world) that comes from including those more-than-human subjectivities as having autonomous ontological value within the ritual context. This respect came across to me in the interviews with the three practitioners in a way that it did not in Moreno's written account of psychodrama as cathartic hallucination. The astrologers' accounts would appear to lean more authentically toward a disposition of respectful animistic engagement.

Moreno, writing in 1946, considers the embodied presences of the psychodrama experience to be ultimately 'delusions', so, as in Victor Turner's model of *communitas*, Willis observes, 'the infra-social world of aliens, beasts and cosmic spirits - especially spirits - would seem to have no part'.⁴⁶⁸ The difference, however, is that while Turner, unlike his wife Edith, never actually took part in the healing rituals and experienced the other-than-human liminal personae, Moreno was a

⁴⁶⁸ Willis, Roy, *Some Spirits Heal, Others Only Dance: A Journey into Human Selfhood in an African Village* (Oxford: Berg, 1999), p. 118.

practitioner who has been compelled to rationalise his practice. Edith Turner acknowledges even of her husband that he swayed ‘between rationalisation and deep understanding’.⁴⁶⁹ Similarly, Moreno’s deep understanding, gained no doubt *through practice*, would have had to be couched (on account of his own conceptual framework as much as society’s) in the disenchanting language of psychology.

Could it be the case that an embodied astrological engagement moves us closer to that disposition of animistic respect for a living world than a process such as psychodrama? P1 has suggested that the astrological framework gives greater freedom for the archetype to ‘pop up with a theme’ than the psychological model, which he considers is much more controlled by the human framework of family relations. Without that frame, P1 insists, ‘you can end up anywhere’.⁴⁷⁰ While this is a general observation, it does suggest that P1’s way of working allows what he calls the ‘root energies’ a sphere of expression that is less impeded by human control. Perhaps, as we have discussed, the astrological symbol provides a metaphor-rich distancing from everyday literal concepts that can allow those pre-conceptual animate presences to express themselves.

Jawer also notes that attempting to control the archetypes by just talking *about* them as concepts doesn’t stop them from showing up and disrupting the order you have imposed; as in the example he cites of the supposedly non-experiential Pluto workshop.⁴⁷¹ However, what astro-drama seems to offer is a ritual container, Jawer’s alchemical alembic, which actually honours the presences and doesn’t simply seek to control them and manipulate them for human ends. The ritual then would seem to be

⁴⁶⁹ Turner, E., *Experiencing Ritual*, p. 29.

⁴⁷⁰ Appendix 1.3, p. 131.

⁴⁷¹ Appendix 1.2, p. 121.

more about preparing or aligning oneself to the unpredictable demands of Greenwood's "otherworld", rather than seeking to manipulate energies or forces for their instrumental use in *this* world.

The interviews I have conducted both support and enrich the emerging paradigm of embodiment for astrological practice. This encourages me to want to engage with further research at a more experiential level and to develop my theoretical framework through practice by adopting the role of participant researcher.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have suggested that an experiential engagement with astrological symbolism, perceived within a participatory paradigm of embodiment, may constitute an authentic phenomenology, which admits the possibility of more-than-human revelation and discloses one's life-world or cosmic sphere to be woven together into a cohesive fabric of dynamic relationships. This is an original thesis and so any conclusions drawn here must be considered tentative, inviting further research and consideration.

Of all philosophers, Merleau-Ponty would appear to have most effectively demonstrated the untenable imposition of idealistic dualism, his phenomenology dissolving the traditional dualities that artificially render distinct subject from object, perceiver from perceived, spirit or mind from body. Contemporary ecological thinkers such as David Abram, drawing particularly on Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of "flesh", conceive our human ontology to be necessarily subject to an ongoing encounter with the animated presences of a *more-than-human* world, and I have disclosed in this thesis original parallels with the seemingly animistic, and thus ecological nature of the astrological encounter.

Despite the disenchantment of the world, eloquently bemoaned by Weber, there would seem to exist a spontaneous human tendency toward animistic participation that the imposition of mind/matter dualism may have illegitimised, but has certainly never been able to eliminate. This work has drawn attention to the fact that within an embodied paradigm, the experience of animistic "otherness" may be an authentic

realisation, not a naïve cognitive error. We have discussed how an astrological symbol, whether manifest as planet, animal, tree, rock, human person, or literate artefact might, within a paradigm of embodiment, be authentically revealed in a particular context as possessing temporal, more-than-human agency, disclosing meaning and releasing animate forces that reach far beyond conventional linguistic representation.

We have explored how both phenomenological and praxiological approaches support the paradigm of embodiment as the existential ground of perception *and* cultural expression. Merleau-Ponty has charged the practice of philosophy with the restoration of the ‘power to signify, a birth of meaning or a wild meaning, an expression of experience by experience’.⁴⁷² In the same way, Devisch has charged anthropology with disclosing the ‘bodily’ ways in which people create and engage in a culture ‘from within its own genuine sources’.⁴⁷³ Might we not equally charge the practice of astrology, experientially performed within a necessarily embodied ritual context, with the power to involve its participants in meaningful revelation from within its own authentic sphere of activity? Indeed, should we not also entertain the possibility that the bodily enactment of an astrological ritual, as an authentic expression of the weave of the life, might actually reverberate out into the “weave” and be affective beyond its immediate sphere of activity? This claim invites further experiential and theoretical research.

As Curry has argued, the astrological map, as a literate artefact drawing upon millennia of accreted tradition, is the essential ritual prerequisite to the heart of a

⁴⁷² Merleau-Ponty, *Visible*, p. 155.

⁴⁷³ Devisch, *Weaving*, p. 2.

symbolic experience,⁴⁷⁴ revealed, as this thesis has explored, through its metaphorical turning. Astrology, engaged with in this way, may become *potentially*, a suddenly inspired moment of poetic embodiment facilitating ontological and epistemological transformation. This research could be developed through a qualitative fieldwork study with astrological practitioners to enquire into what actually happens, in their experience, when the astrological performance *realises* itself.

It has also been suggested here that the human body, as the primary metaphor for both society and cosmos *can*, when ritually engaged in relation to other bodies through symbolic astrological activity, be a source of healing, transformation and ecological reconnection to the world. This possibility is clearly evidenced in the accounts of the practitioners I have interviewed and this is an area of research that I intend to pursue.

We have considered astrology's appeal for legitimacy in a disenchanted world; Cornelius asking how else this particular form of symbolism could have survived 'without being in the corrupt position of *lying about itself* in some way in order to get by [my italics]'.⁴⁷⁵ This is apparent with astrologers who rely too heavily upon Jung's model of the psyche for their credibility. While still situated at the dubitable end of psychological discourse, the pseudo-rationalism of archetypes and the collective unconscious still presents a more acceptable scientific face than to have to acknowledge the temporal embodiment of ontologically ambiguous presences to whom respectful attention should be paid. While this latter possibility is far from absent in the rich and subtle ambiguities of Jung's own complex understanding, it

⁴⁷⁴ Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, p. 124.

⁴⁷⁵ Cornelius, Geoffrey, 'Is Astrology Divination and Does it Matter?', at <http://cura.free.fr/quinq/01gfcor.html> [accessed 18/04/06].

may risk being brushed over or actively ignored by Jungian astrologers in their quest for interpretive clarity and social sanction.⁴⁷⁶

One of the themes that has emerged out of the interviews with the three experiential practitioners is that they are each seeking to evoke an experience which lies *beyond* psychological explanation. Indeed a phenomenological disposition seems far more appropriate when considering the type of experiences that they each describe. It is also notable that these transformational experiences are being shared in a way that leads one to assume that it is not just the individual who is being healed or transformed, but something more beyond, something more-than-human.

Yet even among these practitioners who, perhaps more explicitly than other astrologers, are *realising their practices* in an experientially embodied way, recourse is still sought in systematic human constructs such as psychology or Platonic Idealism, as the only (apparently) available frameworks through which to justify their experiences.

One might suggest, then, that if astrology can more fully embrace the paradigm of embodiment, drawing on a phenomenology that admits the mystery and enchantment of animistic participation, rather than a psychology that insists on dualistic separation, then truthful legitimisation may follow somewhat more authentically. Perhaps we astrologers will feel less compelled to confine the extraordinary nature of our practices within such disenchanting conceptual frameworks and step into the full realisation of the concrete magic we are actually performing.

⁴⁷⁶ For discussion, see Hyde, *Jung*, especially pp. 81-101.

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INTRODUCTION

What is the role of the astrologer? As a supposed technical expert in matters pertaining to character, fate and destiny, we might expect him or her to be able to deliver definite answers to our questions about who we are, and what will happen to us in the future, from astronomically derived data. However, this can only apply if we are to accept the assumption, intolerable to most, that a person's character and future are non-negotiable, that fate is somehow fixed by the authority of immutable cosmic influences to which there is no appeal. To accept this as a pre-requisite of astrology, however, whether as critic or adherent, may be premature.

This thesis draws upon the work of scholars from a range of fields, whose conclusions support the radically alternative possibility that destiny is neither pre-ordained by divine dictate, nor subject to a predictable mechanism, but that it is dynamic, fluid, and capable of being shaped through deliberate acts of embodied participation. In respect of the continuity between Mesopotamian celestial divination and the later horoscopic astrology,¹ we are dealing with an activity that has its roots in a negotiated *relationship* with divine presences, a ritually orchestrated communication, between human beings and a plethora of gods and non-human beings known through their multifarious expressions in a natural world, which included the sky.

¹ Standard texts include: Rochberg, Francesca, *The Heavenly Writing* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 2004) [hereafter Rochberg, *Heavenly Writing*], Campion, Nicholas, 'Babylonian Astrology: Its Origin and Legacy in Europe', in Helaine Selin (ed.), *Astronomy Across Cultures* (London: Kluwer, 2000, pp. 509-553) [hereafter Campion, 'Babylonian Astrology']. Baigent, Michael, *From the Omens of Babylon: Astrology and Ancient Mesopotamia* (London: Arkana, 1994) [hereafter Baigent, *Omens*]. Contrary view offered by Pingree who claims astrology to be a proto-science invented by the Greeks. See Pingree, David, *From Astral Omens to Astrology, From Babylon to Bīkāner* (Rome: Istituto Italiano per L'Africa e L'Oriente, 1997) [Pingree, *Astral Omens*], pp. 21-30. For discussion see Willis & Curry, *Astrology, Science & Culture, Pulling Down the Moon* (Oxford: Berg, 2004) [hereafter Willis & Curry, *Astrology*], pp. 151-2.

A future open to negotiation with such other-than-human powers cannot, by definition, be one predictable solely by technical means. This thesis, then, develops the idea that astrology might more valuably be understood not as an imposition of abstract, technical knowledge, but rather as a participative act, a multi-sensorial dialogue with certain dynamic presences, visible and invisible, that draw us *bodily* into relationship. Embodied in the moment of engagement with its symbols such an astrology, it is suggested, may serve as a dynamic interaction through which a person's inherent relationship with the cosmos might reveal itself. I aim to develop the hypothesis that an embodied astrology, understood as a form of reciprocated experiential exchange, may be capable of revealing powerful *truths*, laded with *value* for those who experience them. Furthermore, I suggest that the realisation of these truths, within a *ritual* context,² might serve to re-connect its participants to an authentic relationship with their own phenomenological sphere of pre-theoretical experience, or *life-world*.³ Such an astrology would appear to require the astrologer to act not simply as a translator of esoteric knowledge, but rather as some form of dialogical mediator between worlds.

² "Ritual" is a complex term with different understandings. Broadly speaking, it is a form of intentional action or performance undertaken with respect for particular conditions of engagement. See, for example, Smart, Ninian. *Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World's Beliefs* (London: Fontana Press, 1987) [hereafter Smart, *Dimensions*], pp. 71-6; Rappaport, Roy, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) [hereafter Rappaport, *Ritual*], p. 27. We will develop this understanding further in due course.

³ Term coined by Husserl. The definition given will be developed further. For discussion see, for example, Moran, Dermot, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London: Routledge, 2000) [hereafter Moran, *Phenomenology*], pp. 181-6.

METHODOLOGY AND REVIEW OF PREVIOUS WORK

This thesis addresses the apparent lack of a coherent theoretical framework for astrology *in practice*, one that honours the *value* of the lived experiences of those who participate in it. It suggests that we need a new paradigm that might incorporate this, a paradigm of embodiment. Thomas Kuhn, in a formidable critique of the authority of scientific method, demonstrated that any claim to truth always requires a framework of inquiry, or consensus of perspective, which he termed *paradigm*.⁴ He showed that however broad the paradigmatic consensus it can never hold an absolute authority, being always partial, situation-dependent and value-laden. It is thus liable to *shift* when new understandings come to light that the old paradigm can no longer contain.⁵ This thesis seeks to be part of such a shift in the consideration of astrological practice, the old paradigms being concerned primarily with technique and rationalisation. I do not posit a technique of interpretation that might predict more accurately, nor a theoretical model to explain *how* astrology works. Instead, I accept that it *does* work (however one is to define that) for those who engage with it and seek to develop a methodological perspective that can articulate the value-rich *truths* that might be revealed through its embodiment in practice.

There are many theories to *explain* astrology as a *system of knowledge* and these exist within established philosophical, magico-religious, scientific or psychological

⁴ See Kuhn, Thomas S., *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1962).

⁵ *ibid.* Kuhn's undermining of the autonomy of scientific method is developed by, for example, Feyerabend, Paul, *Against Method: An Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge* (London: NLB, 1975); Midgley, Mary, *Science as Salvation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992) [hereafter Midgley, *Science*].

paradigms,⁶ the same paradigms within which its claims have been sanctioned against, undermined and ridiculed.⁷ However conceived, these conceptual structures, in their own way, all claim ontological and epistemological authority over the unsystematic contingencies of perception and perspective. This can be seen to hark back to Plato's privileging of the stable authority of *logos* and *episteme* over the unpredictable contingency of *mythos* and *doxa*.⁸ These latter are rendered epiphenomenal to the systematic workings of the former and, as we shall discuss, the very fact of our dynamic embodiment *in* the world is diminished or overlooked as a result.

There is no previous work available that relates specifically to an *embodied astrology*, and the validation of the embodied perspective by scholars of astrology is very limited. I will therefore be drawing upon a paradigm of embodiment already extant in other areas of scholarship. In doing so, I hope to make some tentative steps toward a methodological re-appraisal of astrology as an experientially efficacious practice. It is

⁶ See for example, within a neo-Platonic / Pythagorean philosophy, Addey, John, *Harmonics in Astrology* (Romford: L. N. Fowler, 1976); within a spiritual philosophy, see, for example, Leo, Alan, *Astrology for All*, Vol. I (Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2003 [1929]) [hereafter Leo, *Astrology*]; within a scientific paradigm, see, for example, Seymour, Percy, *Astrology: The Evidence of Science* (Luton: Lennard, 1988); within a Jungian psychological paradigm, see for example, Hamaker-Zondag, *Psychological Astrology: A Synthesis of Jungian Psychology and Astrology* (York Beach, ME: Weiser, 1990) [hereafter Hamaker-Zondag, *Psychological*].

⁷ Magico-religious injunctions include, Augustine, *The City of God*, translated by Rev. Marcus Dods (Edinburgh: Clark, 1978). Neo-Platonic philosophical objections include, Pico della Mirandola, Giovanni, *Disputationes adversus Astrologiam Divinatricem*, translated into Italian by E. Garin (Firenze, 1946); for discussion see, for example, Yates, Frances A., *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (London: Routledge and Kegan P, 1971); disputed by Johannes Kepler; see Rabin, Sheila J., 'Kepler's Attitude Toward Pico and the Anti-Astrology Polemic', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 1997 (Autumn), Vol. 50, No. 3, pp. 750-70. Modern scientific objections typified by, Bok, B.J., L.E. Jermone and P. Kurtz, 'Objections to Astrology: A Statement of 186 Leading Scientists', *The Humanist*, 1975 (Sept/Oct), vol. 35, no.5; also at <http://www.americanhumanist.org/about/astrology.html> [accessed 10/05/06]. Astrology has also been undermined within a psychological paradigm by, for example, Adorno, Theodore W., *The Stars Down to Earth: And Other Essays on the Irrational in Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 46-171. Certain of Adorno's conclusions have been disputed by Bauer & Durant's empirical research. See Bauer, Martin & John Durant, 'Belief in Astrology: A Social-Psychological Analysis', *Culture and Cosmos*, 1997, no. 1, pp. 55-71.

⁸ For discussion see Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, pp. 84-6, 104-5; Wadsworth, John, 'The Disenchantment of Western Astrology', forthcoming in *Journal of Nature and Religion* (2006).

my speculative thesis that the embodied paradigm might release astrology from abstract, cognitive paradigms, which reduce it to historical anachronism, testable science, *a priori* religious dogma or humanistic model of the psyche. I suggest that astrological practice might be an authentic way of being and acting in the world, *in its own right*, rather than a *pseudo* version of something else.⁹

Embodiment as a Paradigm

My theoretical framework of embodiment is developed primarily from the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty,¹⁰ who, in *Phenomenology of Perception*, posited that the primacy of bodily perception constitutes an authentic phenomenology of lived experience, prior to analytic reflection. What emerges out of this philosophy is the recognition that the capacity for thought can only be artificially separated out from one's embodied *being-in-the-world*, which constitutes the ground of all perception and the sensuous root of all cognitive reflection.¹¹ This philosophical perspective undermines all forms of idealism, from Plato's Ideal Forms to Descartes' *cogito*, which insist upon an *a priori* separation of spirit (or mind) from matter, subject from object.¹² Experiencing the world in terms of such dualisms is shown by Merleau-Ponty to be a process grounded in the body's own irreducible perspective upon the world, from which all supposedly pre-existent dualistic models emerge.¹³ Anthropologist Roy Willis echoes this idea drawing attention to the 'carnal architecture' of the cosmos, our cosmological constructs bearing remarkable

⁹ Curry acknowledges this. See Curry, Patrick, 'The Historiography of Astrology: A Diagnosis and a Prescription', in K. von Stuckrad, G. Oestmann and D. Rutkin (eds.), *Horoscopes and Public Spheres* (Walter de Gruyter, 2005) [hereafter Curry, *Historiography*], p. 273.

¹⁰ See, for example, Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, *Phenomenology of Perception* translated by Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 2003 [1962]) [hereafter Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*].

¹¹ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, p. xiv.

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ *ibid.*

conceptual similarity around the globe, appropriate to the ‘bilateral symmetry and sexual duality’ of our human physiology.¹⁴

Thomas Csordas, in his paper entitled, *Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology*,¹⁵ has proposed embodiment as a consistent methodological perspective, the body being ‘the existential ground of culture and the sacred’.¹⁶ He argues that embodiment admitted to the status of a paradigm should allow data and problems already analysed to be re-interpreted from other perspectives,¹⁷ being that ‘the pre-objective and pre-reflective experience of the body is already cultural prior to the analytic distinction between subject and object.’¹⁸

Csordas draws together Merleau-Ponty’s idea of the body as the existential ground of perception with Bourdieu’s notion of the ‘socially informed body’¹⁹ within an anthropological discourse of practice.²⁰ While Merleau-Ponty argues that any experience of the world can only be known from a particular embodied perspective,²¹ Bourdieu, in his *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, radically develops Mauss’s concept of the *habitus*.²² For Mauss the habitus constituted the underlying structuring of practices and representations collectively inculcated in our embodied responses to the world (not dissimilar in conception from Jung’s ‘collective unconscious’²³). Bourdieu

¹⁴ Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, p. 148, 137.

¹⁵ Csordas, Thomas, ‘Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology’, *Ethos*, vol. 18, no.1, 1990 [hereafter Csordas, ‘Embodiment’].

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 5, 23.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁹ Bourdieu, Pierre, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, translated by Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) [hereafter Bourdieu, *Outline*], p. 124.

²⁰ Csordas, ‘Embodiment’, p. 7.

²¹ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, p. ix.

²² Mauss, Marcel, ‘Techniques of the Body’, *Economy and Society* 2, 1973, pp. 70-88.

²³ See Jung, Carl Gustav, *The Collected Works, Vol. IX, Part 1, The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious 2nd* ed. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) [hereafter Jung, *Archetypes*].

takes this further, showing that in ritual behaviour, the lived body enacts *itself* spontaneously according to the dispositions pertinent to the moment of enaction, *drawing* on the patterns of the collective habitus, without being slavishly obedient to them, as in a ‘mechanical reaction’.²⁴

The body, for Bourdieu, is an irreducible principle, socially informed, mimetically attuned and ever-responsive to the conditions of the moment; the ground from which religious and cultural experience arises. As a ‘practical reactivation...opposed to both memory and knowledge’, the mimesis of the body in “religious” performance is one of temporally embodied identification, not imitation or representation based on cognitive memory or knowledge.²⁵ Such a realisation undermines established theories of religion. Eliade’s centralising ontology of the sacred as pre-existent to lived experience²⁶ and Durkheim’s notion of religion as social construction based upon a collective, cognitive misconception²⁷ are both called into question by Bourdieu’s insights into ritual practice.

Bourdieu’s paradigm of embodiment in practice situations is evident in the work of anthropologist Rene Devisch in his *Weaving the Threads of Life*.²⁸ In seeking to penetrate the ritual experience of the *Yaka* healing cults, he placed emphasis on the ‘production of meaning and regeneration of forces’,²⁹ moving closer to an

²⁴ Bourdieu, *Outline*, pp. 72-3.

²⁵ Bourdieu, Pierre, *The Logic of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) [Bourdieu, *Logic*], pp. 72-3. See also Mitchell, Jon P., ‘Performance’, in Christopher Tilley (ed.), *Handbook of Material Culture* (London: Sage Publications, 2006, pp. 384-401), p. 386.

²⁶ See Eliade, Mircea, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World Inc., 1959), p. 22-32.

²⁷ See Durkheim, Emile *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), pp. 76-125.

²⁸ Devisch, Rene, *Weaving the Threads of Life, The Khita Gyn-Eco-Logical Healing Cult Among the Yaka* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) [hereafter Devisch, *Weaving*].

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 5.

understanding of the contingencies of bodily enactment in these practices beyond that of mere representation. Opposed to script-oriented approaches to ritual, and critical of Victor Turner's analysis of ritual as symbolic social drama, Devisch finds the notion that symbols are primarily corporeal devices, not textual ones. This thesis will draw upon some of his important insights.

Embodiment and Animistic Participation

Merleau-Ponty, in *The Visible and the Invisible*,³⁰ introduces the idea of 'flesh of the world',³¹ as the dynamically cohesive medium of communication and transformation between 'my body and the world'; life being reflexively experienced at that interface of transgressional exchange.³² In reflecting his concluding remark about flesh that 'it is through the world first that I am seen or thought',³³ I will address the *more-than-human* nature of embodiment, drawing especially on David Abram's *The Spell of the Sensuous*.³⁴ Abram insists, 'we are human only in contact, and conviviality, with what is not human',³⁵ marking the important ecological turn that has developed out of Merleau-Ponty's theory. In pursuing Wood's 'relationalities of worldly engagement, both human and those of other creatures',³⁶ a cross-disciplinary inquiry is emerging out of the momentum that, Brown and Toadvine argue, drives ecological thinking and phenomenology together.³⁷ So within the paradigm of embodiment, we may indeed

³⁰ Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, *The Visible and the Invisible* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968) [hereafter Merleau-Ponty, *Visible*].

³¹ Merleau-Ponty, *Visible*, p. 248.

³² *ibid.*, pp. 248-9.

³³ *ibid.*, p. 274.

³⁴ Abram, David, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World* (New York: Vintage, 1997) [hereafter Abram, *Spell*].

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. ix.

³⁶ Wood, David, *The Step Back: Ethics and Politics after Deconstruction* (New York: SUNY Press, 2005), p. 151.

³⁷ Brown, Charles S. & Ted Toadvine, *Eco-Phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself* (Albany: State University of New York, 2003) [hereafter Brown & Toadvine, *Eco-Phenomenology*].

be broaching the possibility of an inherently pluralistic ecological ethic,³⁸ arising as participation with and respect for a living world. I will develop this idea with reference to animism, which is re-emerging as a valid cosmological or spiritual perspective, and one that is entirely compatible with the embodied paradigm. Animism is presented by Graham Harvey in *Animism: Respecting a Living World*,³⁹ as ‘one of the many vitally present and contemporary *other-than-modern* ways of being human [Harvey’s italics]’.⁴⁰

It is important also to mention the work of Lakoff and Johnson, who, in *Philosophy in the Flesh*,⁴¹ argue that the vehicle that moves us ‘in passionate spirituality’ is *metaphor*, and that it is the dynamism of the body, recruiting our abilities to perceive, move and feel, that is the underlying ‘neural mechanism’ of metaphor.⁴² Christopher Tilley’s *Metaphor and Material Culture*⁴³ is also pertinent to this study. Drawing on both Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology and Devisch’s rich appreciation of *ritual metaphor*, Tilley has recognised the way that the human body is metaphorically interwoven with both the social body and *cosmos*, as experienced by a particular local grouping.⁴⁴ In this regard he has developed the work of Ricoeur⁴⁵ and Black⁴⁶ on metaphor to incorporate their understanding within a paradigm of embodiment.

Tilley, whose insights have been gleaned from his phenomenological approach to the

³⁸ See, for example, Curry, Patrick, *Ecological Ethics* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), pp. 108-13; Abram, Spell, p. 68-9.

³⁹ Harvey, Graham, *Animism: Respecting the Living World* (London: Hurst & Co., 2005) [hereafter Harvey, *Animism*].

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. xxi.

⁴¹ Lakoff, George & Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999) [hereafter Lakoff & Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*].

⁴² *ibid.*, p. 568.

⁴³ Tilley, Christopher, *Metaphor and Material Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999) [hereafter Tilley, *Metaphor*].

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 33-40.

⁴⁵ Ricoeur, Paul, *The Rule of Metaphor* (London: Routledge, 1978) [hereafter Ricoeur, *Metaphor*].

⁴⁶ Black, Max, ‘More about Metaphor’, in A. Ortney (ed.), *Metaphor and Thought*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

landscape, identifies that in the act of ritual, the body, as ritual subject, can reach out beyond merely representational linguistic expression to release re-generative forces and disclose meaning within the life-world. The body then is recognised as a source of cultural creativity and innovation.⁴⁷

This leads us neatly into a consideration of astrology within an embodied paradigm. The astrologer who creatively participates with astrological symbolism, it may be argued, experiences the efficaciousness of astrology not through its *mere* linguistic representation, nor through its *a priori* spiritual ontology, but rather *in the act*; its embodied metaphors reverberating with meaning in a particular ritual context.

Astrology and Embodiment

Embodiment, as already outlined above, reveals itself as a rich, pluralistic paradigm and could be developed as an important critique of reductive scientific and psychological models and critiques of astrology. It lends support to the emerging academic discussion of astrology as an instance of ‘concrete magic’,⁴⁸ and the idea that has been developed from this by Patrick Curry (endorsed by Willis) in *Astrology, Science and Culture*, that the practice of astrology is a form of post-modern, pluralistic re-enchantment.⁴⁹ Both make reference to the necessarily embodied nature of the astrological experience without developing embodiment explicitly as a theoretical model. By emphasising the radical, pluralistic immanence of the emplaced moment, rich with potential meaning, Willis and Curry explicitly support Geoffrey Cornelius’s thesis of astrology as divination, which the latter expounds in *The*

⁴⁷ Tilley, *Metaphor*, p. 39.

⁴⁸ Weber, Max., in H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 282.

⁴⁹ Willis, Roy & Patrick Curry, *Astrology, Science & Culture: Pulling Down the Moon* (Oxford: Berg, 2004) [hereafter Willis & Curry, *Astrology*].

Moment of Astrology.⁵⁰ Cornelius distinguishes the realised interpretation from the merely speculative, the former clearly marked by its quality of divine, more-than-human embodiment.⁵¹ The idea of astrological symbolism being embodied through its manifold expressions *in the world*, is developed by Maggie Hyde in *Jung and Astrology*,⁵² who explores the oft-overlooked subtleties of Jung's divinatory thought and criticises the more reductive, popular applications of Jung's ideas currently extant in modern psychological astrology.⁵³

Gregory Shaw, in *Theurgy and the Soul*,⁵⁴ has discussed embodiment in the Platonic tradition in the form of Iamblichean *theurgy*, the 'work of the gods', as distinct from the more speculative *theology* as a mere 'discourse about the gods',⁵⁵ which lacked the power of embodiment as a vehicle for direct communion with the divine.⁵⁶ He shows how, for Iamblichus, every theurgic observance was 'a ritualised cosmology' which, as a 'divine service', restored 'a vital connection to the cosmos'.⁵⁷

Astrologer Mike Harding, in *Hymns to the Ancient Gods*, has explicitly developed a phenomenological approach to astrology,⁵⁸ which is of relevance to our study, but this appears to fall outside of the embodied paradigm and will be partially critiqued in this thesis.

⁵⁰ Cornelius, Geoffrey, *The Moment of Astrology, Origins in Divination* (Bournemouth: The Wessex Astrologer, 2003) [hereafter Cornelius, *Moment*].

⁵¹ This will be discussed later. See Cornelius, *Moment*, pp. 292-3.

⁵² Hyde, *Jung and Astrology* (London: Aquarian Press, 1992) [hereafter Hyde, *Jung*].

⁵³ *ibid.*, pp. 81-101.

⁵⁴ Shaw, Gregory, *Theurgy and the Soul, The Neo-Platonism of Iamblichus* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State Press, 1995) [hereafter Shaw, *Theurgy*].

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 5.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p. 25.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p. 23.

⁵⁸ Harding, Mike, *Hymns to the Ancient Gods* (London: Arkana, 1992) [hereafter Harding, *Hymns*].

As a possible exemplar of astrology operating authentically within a paradigm of embodiment, I will consider, in the latter part of this thesis, the practice of experiential astrology and astrodrama. I will reflect upon the work of practitioners who employ active participation with myth and symbolism through evocative speech, movement, drama, music, visualisation and other modes of artistic expression, as a way of exposing a ‘tacit knowledge’ that exponent of the practice Prudence Jones suggests, in *Creative Astrology*, ‘shapes the day-to-day experience of us all’.⁵⁹

Astrodrama was developed during the 1980s both in Europe and the USA. It involves groups of people, sensuously communicating symbolic resonances, such as those found in an astrological chart,⁶⁰ the symbolic constituents of which are revealed to participants through their dramatic enactment. In the only comprehensive practical guidebook to the practice, *Astrology Alive*,⁶¹ Barbara Schermer describes this work as serving not simply as a tool of abstract understanding, but as a way of experiencing a ‘vital, primal communion with that which is beyond’,⁶² describing embodiment a key factor in the work.⁶³ I will consider that through such *ritually orchestrated*, experiential participation with astrological symbolism, perceptions may emerge that allow phenomenological truths to be realised, truths that are of real value to those concerned. There is a complete lack of scholarly material, and relatively sparse popular literature, relating to this aspect of astrological practice and this thesis constitutes its first academic treatment.

⁵⁹ Jones, Prudence, *Creative Astrology, Experiential Understanding in the Horoscope* (London: Aquarian, 1991) [hereafter Jones, *Creative Astrology*], p. 1.

⁶⁰ Also called a birthchart, map, figure or horoscope. This is the abstract representation of planetary positions into a twelvefold division of the heavens, constructed for a particular moment in time.

⁶¹ Schermer, Barbara, *Astrology Alive: Experiential Astrology, Astrodrama and the Healing Arts* (Wellingborough: Aquarian, 1989) [hereafter Schermer, *Astrology Alive*].

⁶² *ibid.*, p. 16.

⁶³ *ibid.*, p. 34. She does not elaborate on this explicitly in her book.

TOWARDS AN EMBODIED ASTROLOGY

PART ONE: THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF EMBODIMENT

The Beginnings of Astrology

It is surely no co-incidence that the few astrologers who have expressed intimations compatible with the paradigm of embodiment see astrology either as a divinatory or magical expression. However, it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the complex issues that arise when entering into the debate as to astrology's core existential status. Rather, I am concerned to differentiate the prevailing philosophical discourses that have framed the rational parameters of that debate from the pre-analytical experience of an astrology that might deliver value as an efficacious practice.

Astrology's known origins lie in the Mesopotamian divinatory tradition, where both chthonic⁶⁴ and celestial omens could be potentially interpreted as a sign of divine communication.⁶⁵ Fate was drawn in the animated patterns of a culture's immanent experience of "natural" (here implied to include celestial) phenomena, inextricably linked with a plurality of divine beings, responsible for the associations between those phenomena and human society.⁶⁶ As Rochberg has demonstrated, the omen literature suggests that the omen was not deterministic but, rather, open to dialogical negotiation via a performative ritual appeal, or *namburbi*, (the undoing of the omen).⁶⁷ The Mesopotamian texts also indicate, however, the beginnings of a more

⁶⁴ Gods or spirits pertaining to the earth.

⁶⁵ Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, p. 58.

⁶⁶ See, for example, Rochberg, *Heavenly Writing*, p. 4.

⁶⁷ Rochberg, *Heavenly Writing*, pp. 50-2, p. 207; Baigent, *Omens*, p.87; Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, p. 58.

abstract, systematic codification of the heavens,⁶⁸ politically more authoritative, and, while not yet fully deterministic, suggestive of a move toward a more simplified, divine schema.⁶⁹ This tension between the more fluid spontaneous divinatory tradition and a codified doctrine of interpretation is one that has occurred throughout astrology's history.⁷⁰

In the development of Greek culture, we can distinguish between the spontaneous divination of the chthonic omens that populate the 'chanted tales' of Homer's oral poetry,⁷¹ from the determinism of the later Stoics, where all worldly things 'are established by a settled law'.⁷² In Homer we find the lives of gods and men unsystematically woven together 'in a general hotchpotch'.⁷³ By contrast, the authoritative rational conceptions of the later, *more literate* Greeks, from Plato's 'spiritual hierarchy',⁷⁴ to Aristotle's more naturalistic 'ladder of being',⁷⁵ preclude the 'messy mythicity', typical of oral traditions and older, aboriginal cultures.⁷⁶

Abram has shown persuasively how, in the cultural transition from orality to literacy, knowledge becomes captured 'in a visible and fixed form'.⁷⁷ Language, and

⁶⁸ Standard texts include: Rochberg, *Heavenly Writing*; Campion, 'Babylonian Astrology'; Pingree, *Astral Omens*; Baigent, *Omens*.

⁶⁹ Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, p. 59.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p. 60. This is one of the primary themes of Cornelius's *Moment of Astrology*; see, for example, Cornelius, *Moment*, pp. 81-97.

⁷¹ Abram, *Spell*, p. 104. Several authors have discussed the chthonic, incantative nature of Homer's poetry. See, for example, Parry, Millman, in Adam Parry (ed.), *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected papers of Millman Parry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971); Lord, Albert, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960); Abram, *Spell*, pp. 102-7.

⁷² Manilius, cited by Tester, Jim, *A History of Western Astrology* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1987), p. 32.

⁷³ Plutarch, cited by Calasso, Roberto, *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. 276.

⁷⁴ See, for example, Plato, *Timaeus & Critias* (London: Penguin, 1977), p. 9.

⁷⁵ See, for example, Aristotle, *De Anima / On the Soul*, translated by Hugh Lawson Tancred (London: Penguin, 1986), p. 68.

⁷⁶ Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, p. 58.

⁷⁷ Abram, *Spell*, p. 107.

specifically the language of omens, previously indistinguishable from the animate flux of sensuously engaged phenomena, becomes a contemplative presence in its own right and assumes an authority that supersedes that of pre-conceptual, intuitive experience.⁷⁸ He shows how this becomes more firmly established as phonetic, alphabetic writing systems, such as Hebrew and Greek, replace pictographic writing systems that depict sensuously discernible phenomena, and thus retain their metaphoric link to the more-than-human world.⁷⁹ Goody has shown how the advent of the written form co-emerges with the concept of linear time and the corresponding causal conception of originating, non-repeating *base points* in time.⁸⁰ The written form, as Greenhouse summarises, anchors such a base point in time and irreversibly disengages a *moment* in time from the experiential cycles of time to which it naturally belongs;⁸¹ in the ‘ritual time’,⁸² or ‘mythic time’,⁸³ that characterises an oral tradition.

We may observe such a literate imposition if we examine the astrological thesis of Ptolemy. His *Tetrabiblos*,⁸⁴ described by Neugebauer as the “‘Bible of Astrology’”,⁸⁵ was to become the most influential text in the western tradition. Long argues convincingly that Ptolemy’s thesis is actually an apologetic answer to Cicero’s neo-Platonic tirade against divination;⁸⁶ divination having already been reduced through

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 93-135.

⁷⁹ *ibid.* See also Havelock, Eric A., *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1986).

⁸⁰ Goody, Jack, cited by Greenhouse, Carol J., *A Moment’s Notice: Time Politics Across Cultures* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986) [hereafter, Greenhouse, *Moment*], p. 53; See also Eliade, *Myth*, pp. 102-30; Abram, *Spell*, pp. 194-7.

⁸¹ Greenhouse, *Moment*, p. 53-4.

⁸² Rappaport, *Ritual*, p. 222.

⁸³ Eliade, Mircea, *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 2005) [hereafter Eliade, *Myth*], pp. 20-1.

⁸⁴ Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, translated by F.E. Robbins (Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk: Loeb Classical Library Harvard University Press, 1940) [hereafter Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*].

⁸⁵ Neugebauer, Otto, *The Exact Sciences in Antiquity* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1969), p. 54.

⁸⁶ See Long, A.A, ‘Astrology: Arguments Pro and Contra’, in Jonathon Barnes, Jacques Brunschwig, Miles Burnyeat & Malcolm Schofield (eds.), *Science and Speculation: Studies in Hellenistic Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

Cicero's own reasoning, from a pluralistic, participatory initiative to a 'foretelling of events' assumed to have been *written* in advance.⁸⁷ Ptolemy accepts Cicero's definition and sets about removing ritual participation from the picture completely by fitting astrology within an Aristotelian framework of naturalistic forces or planetary influences. This is constructed, with no little rhetoric, around the objective astrological *quality* of a founding *seed moment* in time supposed to be indicative of a person's character and fortune in life.⁸⁸ This remains today the basic rationale for natal astrology.⁸⁹ Cornelius has labelled this largely uncontested assumption the 'doctrine of origin',⁹⁰ and has contrasted it with the older Greek tradition of *katarche*. This latter did not involve a fixed interpretation of a person's "beginning", (Ptolemy's thesis), but, as Cornelius suggests, the efficacious act of *making a beginning* in the moment of ritual engagement with the astrological omen.⁹¹ The *katarche*, completely ignored by Ptolemy, was expressed through a direct participatory initiative, an enquiry necessarily *involving* divine, more-than-human presences.⁹² The power of the *katarche*, based upon a showing of symbolism at the time of inquiry, Cornelius argues, 'comes precisely from its unique appearance "for us, here, now"'.⁹³

The aim of our discussion here, however, is not to bemoan the loss of an oral, mythic astrological tradition usurped by the imposition of time, literacy and abstract philosophical theories, but rather to consider whether the astrological *act* itself might re-enliven that same oral, mythic tradition that was never lost, but as Cornelius

⁸⁷ Cicero, cited by Curry, in Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, p. 60.

⁸⁸ Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, p. 17.

⁸⁹ See, for example, Greene, Liz, *Astrology for Lovers* (London: Aquarian Press, 1993), p. 9.

⁹⁰ Cornelius, *Moment*, p. 87.

⁹¹ *ibid.*, pp. 125-8.

⁹² *ibid.*

⁹³ Cornelius, cited by Curry. See Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, p. 59.

argues, simply driven underground, forced to lie about itself publicly in order to survive.⁹⁴

Cornelius holds a minority position in the astrological debate, however, and the quest for the objective verification of an astrological *mechanism*, which the prevailing cultural discourses demand, continues to be the yardstick by which the “Truth” of astrology is judged, by both its critics and many of its adherents. Its ongoing failure to deliver such a mechanism to the satisfaction of detached empirical scrutiny⁹⁵ compounds its implausibility and leaves astrology in a kind of ontological and epistemological no-man’s land.

Over its long history astrology, as a tradition, would appear to have been continually enriched by new layers of experientially realised astrological meaning.⁹⁶ It is Curry’s thesis that knowledge of this tradition, together with its technical implementation in the form of an accurately calculated horoscope, provides the ‘ritual requirement’ through which the unknown may reveal itself and new meaning (pertinent to the moment of engagement) be realised.⁹⁷ Within the embodied paradigm, the *truth* of astrology need only, *and can only*, reveal itself in such an immanent context, at a particular moment, in a particular place. As such, it is a *phenomenological* realisation, and it is to the discipline of phenomenology to which we now turn.

⁹⁴ Cornelius, Geoffrey, ‘Is Astrology Divination and Does it Matter?’, at <http://cura.free.fr/quinq/01gfcor.html> [accessed 18/04/06].

⁹⁵ For discussion, see, for example, Phillipson, Garry, *Astrology in the Year Zero* (London: Flare Publications, 2000) [hereafter Phillipson, *Year Zero*], pp. 124-66; Cornelius, *Moment*, pp. 42-79.

⁹⁶ See Brockbank, James, ‘Planetary Signification From the Second Century Until the Present Day’, *Culture and Cosmos*, 2003 (Autumn/Winter), vol 7, no. 2, p. 54.

⁹⁷ Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, pp. 62-3, 100.

Recovering a Phenomenological Perspective

Phenomenology has sought to reinvigorate philosophy by returning it to a consideration of the *concrete* nature of lived experience, in all its embodied richness. Husserl sought to undermine the basis of the empirical or positivist approach to knowledge about the world, which insists upon the *objective* verification of phenomena, by turning toward ‘the things themselves’ as they are experienced in their felt immediacy.⁹⁸ What marks phenomenology as such a radical departure from other philosophical discourses is that it allows the world to reveal itself through the perceiver’s own experience. This is a disposition that necessarily requires one to withhold belief as to what the experience means in any absolute way, at the risk of imposing one’s own non-contextual prejudice. For Merleau-Ponty, phenomenology is ‘a philosophy for which the world is always “already there” before reflection begins – as an inalienable presence; and all its efforts are concentrated upon re-achieving a direct and primitive contact with the world, and endowing that contact with a philosophical status’.⁹⁹

Phenomenology, as Merleau-Ponty conceives it, is primarily a philosophical approach, a way of being in relation to the world, though, in its Husserlian form, it has been employed largely as a research methodology, whereby the researcher attempts to bracket or suspend the thesis that constitutes their natural standpoint in order that another’s standpoint might be allowed to reveal itself.¹⁰⁰ This will be evident in my interviews with practitioners, to be discussed later, where my aim has been to enter into another’s world of experience and describe their account as faithfully as possible,

⁹⁸ Husserl, Edmund, *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy: Philosophy as Rigorous Science and Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man*, translated by Quentin Lauer (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), [translation of *Husserliana*, XXV, pp. 3-62], p. 21.

⁹⁹ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, p. vii.

¹⁰⁰ See, for example, Moran, *Phenomenology*, pp. 2, 148-52.

bracketing off my own prior assumptions as far possible, and resisting the temptation to explain away or psychologise their experience. This can be justified on the basis that there can be no authentic analysis without ‘accurate, judgment-free reporting’.¹⁰¹

As a method of analysis, however, phenomenology has its critics, who accuse it variously of a tendency toward solipsistic subjectivism, placing too much reliance upon intellectual intuition, and promoting a meaningless pseudo-metaphysics.¹⁰² Levi-Strauss has criticised phenomenology for maintaining a naïve, humanistic faith in the phenomenal evidence of consciousness, considered by structuralists to be notoriously unreliable compared to the invariant, unconscious structures that underlie human experiences.¹⁰³ Derrida, too, was suspicious of what he saw as a phenomenological attempt to revert to the authority of the supposedly pure, essential origins of the subjectivised moment, leading to a dualistic ‘metaphysics of presence’.¹⁰⁴ This critique, however, as Jack Reynolds argues, is answered by Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of embodiment.¹⁰⁵

This thesis endorses many of the criticisms of phenomenology as the systematic pursuit of an objective goal,¹⁰⁶ moving beyond Husserl’s aspirations for pure description and his seeking after the transcendental essence of phenomena, and toward a Merleau-Pontian ontology of the *always already* engaged perspective of embodiment. Heidegger also criticised Husserl, insisting that phenomenology must

¹⁰¹ Bowman, Marion, ‘Phenomenology, Fieldwork and Folk Religion’, *British Association for the Study of Religions Occasional Papers* (Cardiff: Open University, 1992), p. 1.

¹⁰² Moran, *Phenomenology*, p. 21.

¹⁰³ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ See, for example, Derrida, Jacques, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 49.

¹⁰⁵ For discussion, see Reynolds, Jack, *Merleau-Ponty and Derrida: Intertwining Embodiment and Alterity* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2004), pp. xviii, 55-82.

¹⁰⁶ Heaton, John, ‘Pyrrhonian Scepticism: A Therapeutic Phenomenology’, *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 1997, vol. 28, no. 1 (pp. 80-96), pp. 84-5.

be attentive to the *facticity* of human living, which takes the sought-after “essences” out of a time-less, place-less internal consciousness and puts them back into a temporal, concrete existence.¹⁰⁷

According to Curry, if one is to enter authentically into the world of astrological research, one needs to have had an experience of astrology revealing itself as being personally meaningful or valuable in a particular situation, or at least be open to the possibility that it might.¹⁰⁸ This does not mean that astrology must be permanently revealing itself to me, but that its authentic revelation should exist, in Heidegger’s terms, as an ever-present *possibility*.¹⁰⁹ Authenticity, for Heidegger, like perhaps the realisation of astrological meaning, can only arise as particular *moments* when we are most *at home* with ourselves and the world, a concrete sense of what Heidegger calls ‘mineness’.¹¹⁰ In Merleau-Ponty’s terms, these moments are realised when our perception is turned back upon ourselves and we recognise that we are genuinely connected to that which we perceive in a way that no longer renders us separate from it. In such moments, we can experience our *first-person-ness* without it becoming subjectivised and thus isolate from an erroneously assumed object.¹¹¹ For Merleau-Ponty, the world, as it is presented to his own consciousness depends upon his own contingent, temporally embodied existence. As he puts it, ‘[m]y existence does not stem from my antecedents, from my metaphysical and social environment, instead it moves out towards them and sustains them’.¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ See, for example, Polt, Richard, *Heidegger: An Introduction* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 79; also Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, pp. vii-viii.

¹⁰⁸ Curry, *Historiography*, p. 267.

¹⁰⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1962), p. 68. For discussion, see Moran, *Phenomenology*, pp. 239-40.

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹¹ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, pp. viii-ix.

¹¹² *ibid.*, p. ix.

We can thus reject abstract speculation as to whether astrology is true or false, for its relevance falls away within the embodied paradigm, and we can consider instead the accounts of those who have experienced its ability to *reveal* truths pertinent to their lives in particular situations and at particular times. As Merleau-Ponty insists, experience must always involve an experience *of* something, which can only be known from an embodied point of view, necessarily both *in* and *of* the world.¹¹³

Embodied Participation as a Critique of Dualism

The recognition of the embodied perspective stands in stark contradiction to any philosophy which assumes that one can stand outside of perceptual experience in the name of objectivity, and enjoy what Nagel has ironically called the ‘view from nowhere’;¹¹⁴ as Haraway puts it, ‘being nowhere while claiming to be everywhere equally’.¹¹⁵ This disembodied view assumes that one can stand outside of the politics of perspective, disregarding one’s embodied position in *relation* to other embodied positions, and somehow apprehend everything all at once. It is this assumption that one can hold an *apparently* disembodied view, so fundamental to the modern way of thinking, which inevitably reduces and thus undermines the rich, qualitative nuances of lived experience. This ‘dream of transcendence’, in Kane’s view, represents the attempt ‘to capture truth in a solitary idea’, disabling us from hearing the polyphonic stories of nature’s many and varied expressions, pre-empting our ability ‘to live *with* the earth, on the earth’s terms [my italics]’.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ *ibid.*, pp. vii-ix.

¹¹⁴ Nagel, Thomas, *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

¹¹⁵ Haraway, Donna, *Simians, Cyborgs & Women: The Re-Invention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991) [Haraway, *Simians*], p. 191.

¹¹⁶ Kane, Sean, *The Wisdom of the Mythtellers* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 1998) [hereafter Kane, *Mythtellers*], p. 255.

The mere possibility of objectivity, the indispensable requirement of scientific analysis, is rooted in a perspective that necessitates the fundamental “belief” in a world that is separated epistemologically and ontologically along the lines of subjective mental “experience” and objective, material “reality”. In his definitive polemic that came to define the modern scientific perspective, Descartes declared that there is nothing in nature that cannot be explained or that should give any cause to marvel.¹¹⁷ The Earth, so long associated with spirits, gods, goddesses and mysterious powers, with whom one interacted, was rendered by Descartes, (an important development in a longer process of secularisation), as nothing more than inert, dead matter, whose operation was one of mechanism, predictable, manipulable, conquerable.¹¹⁸

That division of mind (Descartes’ *cogito*) from matter (nature emptied of “cognitive” agency), allows the evolution of culture to be understood separately from that of nature, the latter becoming merely a backdrop or stage of human activity, a more-or-less blank canvas onto which human ingenuity may be projected.¹¹⁹ Tim Ingold, a prominent voice among others, has argued that nature can no longer be considered in opposition to culture, a virtually unquestioned philosophical imposition, which assumes subjective agency to be the preserve of human beings alone, rendering nature as passive object.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Descartes, Rene, in Roger Ariew (ed.), *Philosophical Essays and Correspondence* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000) [hereafter Descartes, *Philosophical Essays*], p. 319. For discussion, see Midgley, *Science*, p. 75.

¹¹⁸ See Descartes, *Philosophical Essays*, pp. 263-72. For discussion see, for example, Merchant, Carolyn, *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Liveable World* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 56.

¹¹⁹ Ingold, Tim, *The Perception of the Environment, Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London: Routledge, 2000), [hereafter Ingold, *Perception*], p. 20.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 40-60.

Max Weber argued that the reduction of nature's inherent mystery, plurality and concrete magic to a system manipulable by human means, constituted the 'disenchantment of the world'.¹²¹ For Hanegraaff this is buoyed up by social pressure exerted through a culturally established ideology of 'instrumental causality', which he describes as the tendency of the human mind to suspect that things that happen in the world 'must be the result of material causation'.¹²² As 'the dominant narrative of western society', he argues, this disenchanted worldview must be continually enforced in order to deny the spontaneous human tendency of participation.¹²³ In establishing its authority, the instrumentalist worldview then becomes the arbiter of truth to which apologists of previously enchanted pursuits such as astrology have to explain themselves, legitimating their practices, often by betraying their direct experience.¹²⁴

Curry has suggested that the history of astrology demonstrates such disenchantment via a series of compromises to a dominant objectivist measure of truth.¹²⁵ This can be seen in Ptolemy's rectification of astrology with Aristotelian natural philosophy, Aquinas's accommodation of naturalistic astrology¹²⁶ within scholastic Christian theology, and in the twentieth century by the appeal first to the hierarchical spiritual

¹²¹ Weber, Max., in H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 155.

¹²² Hanegraaff, 'How Magic Survived the Disenchantment of the World', *Religion*, 2003, no. 33, (pp. 357-80), [hereafter Hanegraaf, *Magic*], p. 375.

¹²³ p. 377.

¹²⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 377-8.

¹²⁵ Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, pp. 69-75.

¹²⁶ Pertaining to general, physical astrological influences; e.g. weather, the physical body, the fate of nations. Often distinguished from the more theologically controversial judicial astrology, pertaining to the reaching of specific judgments on an individual's fate by means of a personal horoscope. For discussion see, for example, Phillipson, *Year Zero*, pp. 115-6.

system of theosophy¹²⁷ and later, humanistic psychology.¹²⁸ Each of these concessions to *reason*, in their own way, have succeeded in reducing the more-than-human concrete polytheism of astrology's symbols-cum-daemons-cum-deities to a more understandable and controllable anthropocentric system, supposedly more palatable to religious or scientific authorities.¹²⁹ Astrologers today who contest that astrology should be objectively demonstrable as a mechanism for ascertaining truth, and that the revelation it affords might be rendered as a universal system, continue to be complicit in these compromises, for such positions preserve the disembodied Cartesian separation and deny the contingencies of participation with a more-than-human world.

It is worth remembering that the astrological map itself is a representation of the heavens from a particular *place* on earth at a particular *moment*. It is entirely perspectival and without the earth as perceptual ground, there could be no astrology. As both Curry and Cornelius have noted, the fact of this is heavily obscured by an almost exclusive astrological focus on objective time.¹³⁰ The cosmic divorced from the earthly perspective becomes an autonomous force, 'a 'Machine of Destiny',¹³¹ which confers absolute autonomy upon a cause-effect mechanism bound within a model of linear time, and bars the way to dialogue and a reciprocal engagement with the planets and stars and their manifest correlates in the world. However, when the cosmos is perceived phenomenologically in that it includes one's embodied involvement in moment and place, the heavens may become an experience 'at once

¹²⁷ See, for example, Leo *Astrology*.

¹²⁸ See, for example, Rudhyar, Dane, *The Astrology of Personality: A Reformulation of Astrological Concepts and Ideals, in Terms of Contemporary Psychology and Philosophy* (New York: Lucis, 1936) [hereafter Rudhyar, *Astrology*].

¹²⁹ Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, pp. 69-75.

¹³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 123. Cornelius, *Moment*, p. 304.

¹³¹ Cornelius, *Moment*, p. 173.

chthonic, cosmic and intimately personal’, a re-animated, re-enchanted relationship, indeed, ‘a drawing down [of] the moon’.¹³²

A key factor in phenomenological embodiment that breaks both the Cartesian and early Husserlian solipsism, is the realisation, facilitated through *movement* and *exchange*, of the facticity of our body-based experiential ontology, unavoidably inter-related, from the start, to other body-based experiencing “subjects”. When consciousness is realised as being manifest in and *through* embodiment, it becomes possible to appreciate that one’s actual embodied position in dynamic relation to the “other” is always in terms of *relationship* to one’s own partial perspective. Gibson determined this as the partial affordance that any so-called “object” of perception gives up to the perceiver, that supposed object being rich in participative, perceptual value, rather than a passive recipient of one’s objectifying attention.¹³³ Abram makes the seemingly obvious point that by varying my distance from other bodies and moving around them, I can appreciate these perspectives in a way that I cannot in relation to my own body, it being the ground of my perception.¹³⁴ Husserl was to eventually perceive in the dynamic relationship that movement affords, a relational affinity between other bodies and one’s own, which he terms *intersubjectivity*, identifying an associative empathy by means of which the embodied subject comes to intuitively recognise other non-human bodies as experiencing subjects.¹³⁵ Abram interprets Husserl’s notion of intersubjectivity, as being that which exists *between* self and other, and that which holds the cultural fabric of relationship for the life-world of

¹³² Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, p. 123.

¹³³ Gibson, James J., *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (London: Houghton Mifflin, 1979), pp. 127-43.

¹³⁴ Abram, *Spell*, p. 37.

¹³⁵ Husserl, Edmund, in Donn Welton (ed.), *The Essential Husserl: Basic Writings in Transcendental Phenomenology* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), pp. 135-60. For discussion, see Abram, *Spell*, pp. 36-9.

any cultural grouping together. Abram perceives the life-world as the embodied context for lived experience, constituting our immediate, pre-conceptual, pre-objective experience, that which is ‘peripherally present in any thought or activity we undertake’.¹³⁶

Astrology and the Flesh of Language

Merleau-Ponty conceived Husserl’s fabric of interconnectedness as the ‘flesh of the world’,¹³⁷ which he describes as a ‘massive corporeity’ which includes both what ‘one sees and touches’ as well as, in its ‘more agile’ expression, what is continuously *woven* between bodies.¹³⁸ As he puts it, ‘the flesh of my body is shared by the world, the world reflects it, encroaches upon it and it encroaches upon the world’.¹³⁹ That which the modern mind has come to view as mere “empty space”, Merleau-Ponty conceives as part of an evolving bodily field, a sensuous medium of communication; *language*. Flesh is an inextricable intertwining of the visible and invisible, the relationship between the two being that of *chiasm*, one being an isomorphic reversal of the other; it is described by Abram as a ‘vast living fabric’ of embodied dialogical exchange.¹⁴⁰ Merleau-Ponty’s designation of flesh is as neither mind, nor matter, but rather more like the older term ‘element’, in the sense that water, earth, air and fire were understood as elements, ‘a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being’.¹⁴¹ Similarly, for Abram, it is ‘the mysterious

¹³⁶ Abram, *Spell*, p. 40.

¹³⁷ Merleau-Ponty, *Visible*, p. 248.

¹³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 144.

¹³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 248.

¹⁴⁰ Abram, *Spell*, p. 83.

¹⁴¹ Merleau-Ponty, *Visible*, p. 139.

tissue or matrix that underlies and gives rise to both the perceiver and the perceived as interdependent aspects of its own spontaneous activity'.¹⁴²

Everything that may be described phenomenologically might be considered as flesh, everything that presents a *surface* to perception.¹⁴³ Within this paradigm of embodiment, language, *as flesh*, originates in our sensuous receptivity to the animate environment, communicative meaning being incarnate in our spontaneous, gestural responses to changes in the body's affective environment.

For Merleau-Ponty, language and the experiential perception of one's animate surroundings are co-emergent with one another; every perceivable gesture, sound or movement bears a meaning and that meaning has agency, as it is implicit in the words that are used to express it. Merleau-Ponty saw language as an essentially carnal phenomenon, not as an arbitrary representation or *sign*, of a particular emotion or feeling, but as a 'bodying-forth of that emotion into the world'.¹⁴⁴ Like spontaneous, responsive movement, so too must active, living speech be such a gestural "bodying-forth", and its meaning is therefore *immanent*, not representational.

The spoken word is a gesture and its meaning, a world...Faced with an angry or threatening gesture, I have no need in order to understand it, to recall the feelings that I myself experienced when I used these gestures on my own account...The gesture does not make me think of anger. It is anger itself.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Abram, *Spell*, p. 66.

¹⁴³ Priest, Stephen, *Merleau-Ponty* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 73-4.

¹⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 74.

¹⁴⁵ Merleau-Ponty *Phenomenology*, p. 214.

Astrologer Mike Harding, in his phenomenological exploration of astrological language, has suggested numerous examples of the language associated with planets and zodiacal constellations having developed alongside the phonetic lineage of words. His suggestion is that language itself calls upon a deep reservoir of astrologically symbolic expressions.¹⁴⁶ Thinking along *apparently* similar lines to Merleau-Ponty, Harding extrapolates the astrological meaning of Mars, the red planet, traditionally synonymous with the mythological god of war and the expression of anger and conflict. Harding argues that it is too simplistic to say ‘that the word *anger* “means” Mars or that *love* “means” Venus [Harding’s italics]’,¹⁴⁷ as this assumes an abstract, even arbitrary signification. He suggests that language itself ‘may have emerged from a desire to communicate a variety of instinctual, astrologically motivated sensations ...[and]... that astrology is embedded in all that has proceeded from it’.¹⁴⁸ He suggests that the vocalising *expression* of Mars, as an experiential phenomena, may be capable of liberating a whole range of metaphorical associations.¹⁴⁹

While he presents a fine phenomenological case for his conclusions, there is a problem here from a Merleau-Pontian perspective insofar as Harding is suggesting that language emerged ‘as an attempt to verbalise sensations that originated in the *inner* experience of astrological principles [my italics]’.¹⁵⁰ Language may indeed have evolved *in tandem* with astrological expression as our human bodies mimetically gesture and vocalise the dance of the cosmos, reciprocating in our neurophysiology, as Willis argues, ‘the very architecture of the cosmos’.¹⁵¹ However, Harding’s

¹⁴⁶ Harding, *Hymns*, pp. 151-61.

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 156.

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 156-7.

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.* p. 156.

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁵¹ Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, p. 146.

position still presupposes astrological meanings to be the *a priori*, and thus aculturally disembodied basis of experience, there being an existential gap between meaning and the imitation of meaning. Conversely, for Merleau-Ponty spoken words are active, sensuous presences and language cannot be genuinely understood in isolation from their reverberations. Likewise, the ongoing reciprocation with the cosmos may continually reveal new layers of astrological meaning, which subtly develop the tradition, but their revelation may be genuinely appreciable only in that moment of embodied engagement. The danger with Harding's position is that astrological meanings become conceptualised as literary forms, divorced from their spontaneous, evocative presence. As such, their sensuous origins become ghettoised in the past, and ironically, in Harding's construction, Mars ultimately does come to *mean* anger or some other literate concept. In this way, Harding's phenomenology reveals itself to be solipsistic, and, like Husserl's transcendentalism, vulnerable to the same external critique that, as we have seen, the embodied paradigm addresses.

Words, for Merleau-Ponty exist, not as inanimate symbols, but, in Edie's terms, as 'patterned sounds', the 'affective tonality' that conveys meaning through their living expression being untranslatable as a conceptual definition;¹⁵² words, vowels and phonemes are, for Merleau-Ponty, 'so many ways of singing the world'.¹⁵³ He rejects outright the idea, overwhelmingly prevalent in western thought, that language is an ideal, formal system, which can simply be detached at will from the *material* act of speaking or gesturing.¹⁵⁴ This constitutes his critique of Saussurean structuralism, for what is authoritative in language, he argues, is not its representational power but its

¹⁵² Edie, James M., cited by Abram, Spell, pp. 75-6. Edie considers Merleau-Ponty to be 'alone among philosophers of language in his sensitivity to this level of meaning'. (ibid).

¹⁵³ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, p. 217.

¹⁵⁴ ibid., pp.174-99; see also Abram, *Spell*, p. 77.

relational and emotional impact, carried through speech.¹⁵⁵ Language is never a finished institution, as is evident in the way a child learns through his first attempts to speak, where the ‘whole of spoken language’ envelops him and ‘snaps him up like a whirlwind’.¹⁵⁶ While acknowledging language as an interdependent matrix of meaning, structuralism assumes *human* language to be primary, as opposed to (what Abram refers to as) ‘the sensuous perceptual life-world, whose wild, participatory logic’ *includes* human language only as an echo of its own organic cohesion.¹⁵⁷ From the perspective of structuralism, the commonality of symbolic associations is to be discernible through their cognitive representations, not their spontaneous, sensuous evocation within a *materially* contextual environment.

In applying structuralism to a study of cultural knowledge, anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss’s project was to decode different cultural stories to discern underlying patterns of relationship. He showed ‘how myths operate in men’s minds without their being aware of the fact...as if the thinking process were taking place in the myths, in their reflection upon themselves and their interrelation’.¹⁵⁸ He was persuaded (perhaps owing an unacknowledged debt to Jung’s notion of archetypes¹⁵⁹) that human myths and stories could be reduced to their basic *mythemes*, understood to acquire their value in relation to other mythemes.¹⁶⁰ Much indeed can (and has been) gleaned as to the ‘global-species dialogue of myth’¹⁶¹ from such a model, and this

¹⁵⁵ Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, translated by Richard C. Mcleary (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1964), [hereafter Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*], pp. 39-44.

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 40-1.

¹⁵⁷ Abram, *Spell*, p. 82-4.

¹⁵⁸ Levi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, Vol. 1 of *Mythologiques*, translated by John & Doreen Weightman (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 12.

¹⁵⁹ For discussion, see, for example, Kugler, Paul, *The Alchemy of Discourse: An Archetypal Approach to Language* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1982), pp. 34-46.

¹⁶⁰ See, for example, Henaff, Marcel, *Claude Levi-Strauss and the Making of Structural Anthropology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), p. 162-3.

¹⁶¹ Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, p. 32.

might be seen as a valid phenomenology of the *form* of the human experience. However, by focussing only on the form of myth, these cultural symbols risk being de-contextualised from their ongoing more-than-human performance *in particular places*, from where they originate and to where they belong.¹⁶² When the embodied value of a particular myth is rendered epiphenomenal to its structure,¹⁶³ the significance of its spontaneous sensuous presence, so alive in its ongoing *enactment*, runs the risk of being reduced to a literate psychological explanation of a cultural behaviour.

Structuralism remains the position of many contemporary astrologers who claim astrology as a language. Influential early Jungian astrologer Dane Rudhyar supposed that ‘pure astrology’ has no more meaning than algebra, *measuring* relationships between symbols ‘whose concreteness is entirely a matter of convention’.¹⁶⁴ In the same vein, contemporary practitioner Wendy Guy, following Rudyhar, describes astrology as ‘a system with an alphabet, words, grammar and sentences...ready-made associations which converge in specific archetypes.’¹⁶⁵ These formulaic understandings would appear to assume that astrological meanings are pre-existent structures that can simply be applied systematically to human character, regardless of their culturally embodied, or more-than-human context. While Derrida’s post-structuralism undermines the astrologer’s position by demonstrating that ‘there is nothing outside of context’,¹⁶⁶ that context remained for Derrida, an abstract, cognitive expanse; hence his suspicion of *all* proclamations of meaning. As Jonathon

¹⁶² For a full discussion, see Kane, *Mythtellers*, pp. 61-101.

¹⁶³ For discussion, see, for example, Ulin, Robert C., *Understanding Cultures* (Malden, Mass: Blackwell, 2001), p. 130-1.

¹⁶⁴ Rudhyar, *Astrology*, p. 51.

¹⁶⁵ Guy, Wendy, ‘The Language of Astrology’, at <http://www.astrologyzine.com/language.shtml> [accessed 1/3/06].

¹⁶⁶ Derrida, Jacques, *Limited Inc* (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1988), p. 136.

Culler pithily puts it, ‘meaning is context bound, but context is boundless’.¹⁶⁷ Yet Merleau-Ponty’s subtle phenomenological insight actually challenges both structuralist and post-structuralist positions to re-contextualise meaning from the irreducible, unavoidably perspectival and temporal place of embodiment. From this perspective, meaning is not only possible, but inevitable. Merleau-Ponty compares the body not to a passive object, but to ‘a work of art’,¹⁶⁸ a medium of poetic disclosure that *reveals* meaning in the world through its own spontaneous experience within its accompanying temporal and material boundaries.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Culler, Jonathon, *On Deconstruction, Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (London: Routledge, 1982), p. 123.

¹⁶⁸ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, p. 174.

¹⁶⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 174-5. See also Olkowski, Dorothea & James Morley (eds.), *Merleau-Ponty: Interiority and Exteriority, Psychic Life and the World* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press), p. 10.

PART TWO: THE POETICS OF EMBODIMENT

The Weave of Life

Merleau-Ponty presents his thesis through a series of evocative metaphors, as Jerry Gill has ably demonstrated,¹⁷⁰ and as other commentators have noted,¹⁷¹ his philosophy is actually a poetics, a validation of the incantative power of language.¹⁷² Gill shows how Merleau-Ponty's metaphor of 'the real as a closely woven fabric',¹⁷³ is employed to give a *sense* of the inextricably relational quality of experience. Merleau-Ponty stresses the interactive character of our existence and cognition, of 'intentional threads which attach us to the world',¹⁷⁴ that through reflection we can slacken in order to bring them to our attention, but from which consciousness can *never* withdraw to assume unity as its basis. Language, then, serves as the *network* of intentional threads through which our thoughts are woven together with the physical world, flesh being the common fabric that supports the ongoing weave, Gill describing a matrix or weaving loom from which arises simultaneously both our physical and mental lives.¹⁷⁵ The theme of weaving is clearly deliberate on Merleau-Ponty's part, as Gill concludes, and Abram stays consistent to Merleau-Ponty's choice of metaphors, for example describing language as a 'vast living fabric continually woven by those who speak'.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁰ Gill, Jerry H., *Merleau-Ponty and Metaphor* (New Jersey & London: Humanities Press, 1991) [hereafter Gill, *Merleau-Ponty*].

¹⁷¹ See, for example, Moran, *Phenomenology*, p. 432; Abram, David, 'Between the Body and the Breathing Earth: A Reply to Ted Toadvine', *Environmental Ethics*, 2005 (Summer), vol. 27, pp. 172-190. [hereafter Abram, 'Between the Body'].

¹⁷² See, for example, Manen, Max van, *Researching Lived Experience, Human Science for an Active Sensitive Pedagogy* (London, Ontario: University of Western Ontario, 1990), p. 13; Abram, 'Between the Body', p. 190.

¹⁷³ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, p. xi.

¹⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p. xv.

¹⁷⁵ Gill, *Merleau-Ponty*, p. 83-4.

¹⁷⁶ Abram, *Spell*, p. 83.

Language as an ongoing weave of flesh, releases itself from the shackles of the *apparently* static literary form and becomes active in the dialogical connectivity of life. Again, following Csordas, we can draw a fruitful correspondence with the anthropological discourse of practice.¹⁷⁷ This ‘weave of life’, as Rene Devisch demonstrates in his praxiological approach to *Yaka* healing ritual, is performed as an interweaving of physical body, social body and the body of the life-world. As both weaver and weaving loom, he describes *body* as the ‘major elaborating and transformative process and force that permits the transposition of meaning, structuring, and energies between the bodily, social and cosmological fields.’¹⁷⁸

Devisch observes that dancing and weaving are closely related activities for the *Yaka*; when they dance they also understand themselves to be weaving the vital flow of the cosmos.¹⁷⁹ In Merleau-Ponty’s terms, this might be seen as an evocative and affective expression of the language of flesh. There is form to their ritual, but it is not conventional, culture being present in an ongoing co-creation, that emerges out of the tradition but is not confined within its statics.¹⁸⁰ The *Yaka* are actively participating in a re-making of the world, their language communicated bodily, and its efficacy is in the inter-related acts of singing, dancing and weaving. As Devisch puts it, ‘[w]eaving is rhythm and rhythm underscores the weave of life...health is interwovenness’.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁷ Csordas, ‘Embodiment’, p. 7.

¹⁷⁸ Devisch, *Weaving*, p. 264-5.

¹⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p. 73.

¹⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁸¹ Devisch, *Weaving*, p. 160.

Weaving has traditionally been related to ideas about fate and destiny, epitomised by the ‘weaving Wyrð’,¹⁸² by the norms and valkyrs, who continually spin the flax and weave the tapestry of life.¹⁸³ As Alby Stone’s important analysis of North-European paganism demonstrates, fate should be understood not as something pre-determined at birth, but rather ‘as a steady, ongoing process, only fully completed at the end of a lifetime.’¹⁸⁴ Spinning and weaving are obvious metaphors for fate, order and pattern emerging from a ‘shapeless mass of wool or flax’,¹⁸⁵ and Stone concludes that while the *wyrð* sets in motion the pattern(s) of life, it imposes no ultimate design upon it. It is one’s participation in the ritual activities of *wyrð*, in the ongoing weave of life, that determines the *value* of that life, not the imposed will of a transcendent executive creator.¹⁸⁶ In a similar vein, the act of astrological divination may provide an opportunity for a similar kind of active, ritual participation. Astrologer Liz Greene has suggested that in the consulting room of the more sensitively attuned astrologer, dialogically receptive to ‘the unseen and unspoken psyche’, the forms of the three Greek Fates, Clotho (the spinner), Lachesis, (the measurer) and Atropos (the cutter) may be sensed ‘hovering dimly over the zodiacal wheel’.¹⁸⁷

Weaving, as a paradigm of participative human creative activity,¹⁸⁸ shows itself to be both metaphorically and praxiologically consistent with embodiment, reminding us that the facticity of our embodiment, far from enclosing a sense of discrete identity within a discrete body, affords an ongoing responsive relationship with the animated

¹⁸² Grimm, Jacob Ludwig Carl, *Teutonic Mythology* (Mineola, NY: Dover Phoenix, 2004 [1882]), p. 426.

¹⁸³ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ Stone, *Wyrð*, pp. 22-3.

¹⁸⁵ *ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁸⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 22-3.

¹⁸⁷ Greene, Liz, *The Astrology of Fate* (York Beach, ME: Weiser, 1984), p. 13.

¹⁸⁸ Thomas, Julian, ‘Phenomenology and Material Culture’, in Christopher Tilley (ed.), *Handbook of Material Culture* (London: Sage Publications, 2006, pp. 43-59), p. 54.

patterns we humans share with the aspects of life that we encounter. Abram insists that to identify with the body is not to confine awareness to a discrete, bounded object. Those boundaries are ‘open and indeterminate; more like membranes than barriers, they define a surface of metamorphosis and exchange’.¹⁸⁹

As Fritjof Capra acknowledges in his *The Web of Life*, that the structure of life is never fixed, but always dynamic; furthermore the pattern of organisation in a living organism can only be understood in terms of the ongoing embodiment that continually re-configures the relationship between the pattern and structure that exists beyond that of the individual organism.¹⁹⁰ We are, as Tim Ingold puts it, ‘immersed from the start’ and ‘like other creatures’, interwoven in webs of relationship, with other beings with whom we share our ‘dwelling-in-the-world’.¹⁹¹

The Metaphorical Hinge

Critiques of Merleau-Ponty’s ideas are few and far between, his work having featured less prominently than that of contemporaries such as Sartre and Heidegger. Moran suggests this may be due to the difficulties that philosophers have encountered in following Merleau-Ponty’s thought. These difficulties, Moran suggests, lie in his explicit use of the metaphorical mode to express his ideas.¹⁹² Rather than conceptual precision, the reader is confronted with a philosophical attempt to be “‘present at the birth of meaning” and to sing the world”’.¹⁹³ Abram is explicit however, in his support of Merleau-Ponty’s employment of metaphor, which, he argues, keep words

¹⁸⁹ Abram, *Spell*, p. 46.

¹⁹⁰ Capra, Fritjof, *The Web of Life, A New Synthesis of Mind and Matter* (London: Flamingo, 1997), pp. 155-6.

¹⁹¹ Ingold, *Perception*, p. 42, 155.

¹⁹² Moran, *Phenomenology*, p. 431

¹⁹³ *ibid.*; citing Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, p. 217.

from becoming fixed and convey instead a living *style* of discourse, ‘not an ossified set of terms’.¹⁹⁴ In a reply to Toadvine, Abram insists that ‘a genuinely ecological philosophy must simultaneously be a poetics’, lest the rift between the human being and the animate earth be perpetuated and human beings continue to listen only to themselves.¹⁹⁵ Toadvine acknowledges both Abram and Merleau-Ponty’s introduction of a “coherent deformation” into language, ‘crafting...a new mode of expression...introducing...a twist or shift that throws our habitual use [of language] off balance’.¹⁹⁶ The skilful and deliberate use of words is evocative and persuasive in its style and Toadvine appears almost to suggest that Abram is casting an incantative spell over the reader, reflected perhaps in the title of Abram’s book, *The Spell of the Sensuous*. Abram, indeed, is explicit about *spell*-ing as being part of the potent magic of the carefully woven juxtaposition of symbols, the sensuous power held in the flesh of language having been transferred to the written word, and capable of being poetically re-animated.¹⁹⁷ This is consistent with Abram’s attempt to reorient phenomenology away from dualism, solipsism and intellectualism, as part of the ‘struggle to disclose a new way of speaking’, aimed toward an ecological pluralism, rich in evocative metaphor.¹⁹⁸

Let us consider then the possibility that an active engagement with astrological metaphors might indeed serve, through their embodiment, to grant us experiential access to the *birth of meaning*. Metaphor, (from *metaphora*: carrying over),¹⁹⁹ has long been treated with suspicion, it having the power to transfer the meaning of a term

¹⁹⁴ Abram, ‘Between the Body’, p. 190.

¹⁹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ Toadvine, Ted, ‘Limits of the Flesh: The Role of Reflection in David Abram’s Ecophenomenology’, *Environmental Ethics*, 2005 (Summer), vol. 27 (pp. 155-170), p. 158.

¹⁹⁷ Abram, *Spell*, p. 133.

¹⁹⁸ Abram, ‘Between the Body’, p. 190.

¹⁹⁹ Tilley, *Metaphor*, p. 4.

from one sphere of understanding to another. In this sense it is considered the handmaiden of double-speak, the sworn-enemy of objectivism. Yet, at the same time, as Tilley argues, metaphors provide a basis for communities to both create and understand their collective experience.²⁰⁰ They appear to offer the possibility of an exchange of perspective, of movement between life-worlds, which may admit a profound shift in comprehension.

In conventional linguistics, the metaphorical mode is considered to be a figurative substitution, a mere decorative embellishment to the supposedly stable literal meaning of a word, a convoluted form of simile, employable as rhetorical device. Yet for the poet, astrologer, or alchemist whose metaphorical expression might unite Sun with gold, a lion or a king; the Moon with silver, water or fertility; Saturn with lead, age or fear, cannot be properly understood only in terms of their empirical similarity, without admitting a significant loss of meaning. For the alchemist the sun and gold share the same occult quality, or sympathetic relationship,²⁰¹ though this may be imperceptible to reason, which sees only a cognitive misrepresentation. To the astrologer, the Sun may reveal itself *as* a king, in a manner that cannot be explained away or reduced to an abstract literary technique.

Paul Ricoeur established the idea that metaphor actually works to violate established linguistic codes, creating a tension between the literal meaning of particular terms or symbols and the metaphoric meaning of the whole utterance.²⁰² He demonstrates how the “is” in an assertion such as “Achilles is a lion”, operates as a reflexive hinge,

²⁰⁰ *ibid.*, p. 10.

²⁰¹ See, for example, Thorndike, Lynn, *History of Magic & Experimental Science Part IV* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), p. 418.

²⁰² Ricoeur, *Metaphor*, pp. 156-7.

which holds the tension of sameness and difference, Achilles being both a lion and not a lion at the same time.²⁰³ The metaphor, by preserving the ‘metaphorical truth’ of the “is not” within the “is”,²⁰⁴ compromises Aristotle’s law of the excluded middle,²⁰⁵ presenting us instead, one might speculate, with the *included* middle. Language, having divested itself of the function of direct description, may, Ricoeur suggests, reach a *mythic* level, where ‘its function of discovery is set free’.²⁰⁶

This contrasts radically with Nietzsche who insisted that all truths are illusions, bewitched by a language of outworn metaphors, ‘drained of sensuous force’,²⁰⁷ and Derrida, who, in his boundless deconstruction of language, insisted that metaphor always ‘carries its death within itself’.²⁰⁸ Ricoeur, however, recognises the power of metaphor to revivify constituted language *in the act of its performance*. By introducing a spark of imagination, which forces thought to ‘think more’, metaphors are rendered animate agencies of hermeneutic transformation.²⁰⁹

In Merleau-Ponty’s conception, the revivification of language through metaphor requires an act of ‘operative intentionality’,²¹⁰ embodied through a particular perspective in a particular context. Let us consider, then, the possibility that the

²⁰³ *ibid.*, pp. 26-7, 249.

²⁰⁴ *ibid.*, p. 249.

²⁰⁵ See: Anon, ‘Law of Excluded Middle’, at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Law_of_excluded_middle [accessed 20/04.06] .

²⁰⁶ Ricoeur, *Metaphor*, p. 247.

²⁰⁷ Nietzsche, Friedrich, in Daniel Breazeale (ed. & trans.), *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche’s Notebooks of the Early 1870s* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1990), p. 84.

²⁰⁸ Derrida, Jacques, ‘The White Mythology’, in *Margins of Philosophy*, translated by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 271.

²⁰⁹ Ricoeur, *Metaphor*, p. 303.

²¹⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, pp. xx, 486. For discussion see, for example, Cooper, David E., *Existentialism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 84-5.

initiative of the astrological ritual provides just such a perspective, an authentic ‘phenomenology of origins’.²¹¹

Ritual Metaphor & the Realised Symbol

Curry argues that astrological symbolism constitutes a ‘special case of metaphor’ involving a ‘special kind of ritual’.²¹² So could a ritual engagement with astrological symbolism serve as the metaphorical hinge in the revelation of otherwise occulted (or hidden) meaning?

According to Abram, the very moment of authentically embodied perception, which requires the perceiver to sacrifice their objective or literate stance toward the perceived, permits an experiential shift of perspective in the very act of participation with the “other”.²¹³ Similarly, in Bourdieu’s theory of practice, the embodied performance of a ritual can be seen to effect a critical turning moment. This is known through a pre-conceptual, practical mimesis of the body or bodies involved, which, far from consciously representing what they perform, might spontaneously inhabit and, in that moment, *realise* the truth of a symbolic correspondence.²¹⁴ In Devisch’s observation of *Yaka* healing rites dramatically enacted ‘[r]itual metaphor’, the boundaries of which are set by specific material conditions, does not aim to impose a pattern of meaning or control, but rather ‘aims to disclose and activate one’.²¹⁵ For Devisch, ritual metaphor is ‘autoproduktive’ and thus affective in and through its

²¹¹ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, p. xx.

²¹² Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, p. 61.

²¹³ See Abram, *Spell*, pp. 31-72.

²¹⁴ Bourdieu, *Outline*, pp. 115-7; Bourdieu, Pierre, *The Logic of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 72-3.

²¹⁵ Devisch, *Weaving*, p. 43.

performance.²¹⁶ In such a way we might speculate that the truth of an astrological metaphor can only be revealed *within its performative context*, rather than through the decontextualised imposition of an interpretive dogma. Within an embodied paradigm the question, “what does this astrological signature *mean?*” in a non-applied, abstract sense, would seem to be an irrelevance.

As Ricoeur has shown, the revelation of ‘phenomenological truth’ necessitates the facility of *seeing as*, a combination of the experience of seeing, with an imaginative metaphorical engagement, simultaneously both an experience and an act at the same time.²¹⁷ *Seeing as* is a more-than-visual experience that is beyond voluntary control, manifesting, for Ricoeur, as the *sensible* act of poetic language.²¹⁸ As Lakoff and Johnson argue, metaphor requires ‘an embodied realism’ dependent upon our primordial experience of being in a body in an embodied environment.²¹⁹ Metaphor, they suggest, may invite (or impose) a non-literal ontology that cannot be described otherwise.²²⁰ Where semantics meets its limit, we are presented with ‘a phenomenology of imagination’,²²¹ the poetic image placing us in Bachelard’s terms ‘at the origin of the speaking being’.²²²

Cornelius argues that astrology, properly re-orientated as divination, unites experience and action through direct participatory engagement with its symbolism, returning it to the mystical tradition to which, he argues, it rightfully belongs.²²³ Similarly, in her

²¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 36.

²¹⁷ Ricoeur, *Metaphor*, p. 213.

²¹⁸ *ibid.*

²¹⁹ Lakoff, & Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*, p. 73.

²²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 72.

²²¹ Ricoeur, *Metaphor*, p. 214.

²²² Bachelard, Gaston, *The Poetics of Space*, translated by Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon, 1969), p. xix, cited by Ricoeur, *Metaphor*, p. 214.

²²³ See Cornelius, *Moment*.

discussion of the nature of astrological truth-telling through symbol, Angela Voss has sought to locate astrology ‘in a hermeneutic principle which enables us to articulate, and enter, the mystery of symbolic perception’²²⁴. She describes how through an engagement with allegory, being the metaphorical correspondence of astrological symbols to phenomena extant in the world, a tropological or moral ‘turning point’ (*tropos*) in interpretation occurs.²²⁵ Where knowledge unites with action so may be revealed not just an alternative astrological “text”, but rather a *context* for interpretation which necessarily includes the participation of the interpreter, ‘a turning back to *oneself* in order to understand’²²⁶.

Voss relates this *tropos* to astrological experience in terms of the symbol being made ‘manifest’ in a particular moment, such as ‘when you utter words you do not intend which shock you with their truth, or when you are moved by the meaningfulness of a synchronistic event which calls you to action’²²⁷. Cornelius, in the same fashion, distinguishes the ‘speculative’ from the ‘realised’ interpretation,²²⁸ the latter being the *seeing as* or the *making real* of what would otherwise be a purely rational inference. He highlights the difference between inferring a Moon-Saturn conjunction as *representative of* a person’s melancholic character, and *realising* Moon-Saturn as the person’s melancholia, made experientially manifest in a particular moment.²²⁹ This realisation, he suggests, corresponds with the affective arousal of sensuous emotion that facilitates a transmission between astrologer and client, the astrologer compelled

²²⁴ Voss, Angela, ‘From Allegory to Anagoge: The Question of Symbolic Perception in a Literal World’, in Nicholas Campion, Patrick Curry & Michael York (eds.), *Astrology and the Academy, Papers from the Inaugural Conference of the Sophia Centre, Bath Spa University College, 13-14 June 2003* (Bristol: Cinnabar Books, 2004) [hereafter Voss, *Allegory*], p. 2.

²²⁵ *ibid.*, p.4.

²²⁶ *ibid.*

²²⁷ *ibid.*

²²⁸ Cornelius, *Moment*, p. 292-3.

²²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 293.

to acknowledge that he is genuinely involved in the embodiment of the symbolism that passes between them.²³⁰

This suggests that we might look at astrological symbolism not as an explanatory model, but as an opening, a turning, through the ‘veil of allegory’,²³¹ to another way of understanding altogether. Interpretation might thus be realised as a sensuous experience, a live, embodied participation between the human participants (e.g. astrologer and client) and the mediumistic forms of *more-than-human* participation, granted the possibility of temporal embodiment *as* astrological symbols and invited to speak. By contrast, in denying the value of that participation and reverting to a finite *literal* interpretation, the gods (if indeed they had anything to say) are silenced, their expression predicted and thus taken for granted; astrological meanings become fixed as cognitive impositions, abstract linguistic conventions. Symbols thus understood, like Nietzsche’s metaphors, are indeed drained of sensuous power. As Cornelius suggests, astrology is founded on its allegorical tradition, and this can be learned in the same way that one learns the techniques of a craft, but, he warns, it should *not* be taken as the end result of interpretation, but rather as its starting point, its experiential birth.²³²

Harding’s phenomenology of astrological symbolism determines that the particular meanings of the planets and stars have developed their subtlety and precision on account of human beings’ instinctual response to (and expression of) heavenly movements, established through some form of continuous astrological tradition over

²³⁰ *ibid.*.

²³¹ see Murrin M., *The Veil of Allegory: Some Notes Toward a Theory of Allegorical Rhetoric in the English Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969).

²³² Cornelius, *Moment*, pp. 89-90 & pp. 124-43.

millennia.²³³ Formulated then into a horoscopic schema from a particular perspective at a particular moment in time, these symbols, experientially-laden with tradition, provide, in Cornelius's opinion, the symbolic vehicle through which a *daemon* might procure temporary embodiment, seize the mind, and speak the truth through 'compelling and inspired interpretation'.²³⁴

This is evident in the neo-Platonic theurgical practices described by Iamblichus in the 2nd century AD. Through ritual performance, theurgy invites a bodily experience of astrological principles, as Iamblichus puts it, 'bodies to bodies',²³⁵ constituting, in Shaw's words, a 'divine mimesis' or embodied imitation of the gods.²³⁶ Iamblichus suggests that gods and daemons are neither exclusively corporeal, nor incorporeal and can be temporarily 'carried in bodies, as in a vehicle'.²³⁷ The theurgic ritual of embodiment becomes, then, in Shaw's terms, 'a divine service',²³⁸ a 'concrete performance' that brings about 'the culmination of one's philosophical development'.²³⁹ The theurgic ritual was considered a cosmogonic act, 'the best of all of beginnings', which could restore one's vital connection to the cosmos²⁴⁰ and move the philosopher beyond what Shaw calls the 'discursive fantasies', that Iamblichus considered cut off scholarly, non-theurgic Platonists from an experience of the divine.²⁴¹

²³³ Harding, *Hymns*, pp. 151-7.

²³⁴ Cornelius, *Moment*, p. 305.

²³⁵ Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries of the Egyptians, Chaldeans and Assyrians*, translated by Thomas Taylor, 3rd ed. (London: Stewart and Watkins, 1968 [1821]) [hereafter Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*], p. 259.

²³⁶ Shaw, *Theurgy*, p. 23.

²³⁷ Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*, p. 65.

²³⁸ Shaw, *Theurgy*, p. 23.

²³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 129.

²⁴⁰ Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*, p. 212.

²⁴¹ Shaw, *Theurgy*, p. 130.

Roy Rappaport suggests that ritual is central to any human activity that involves participation with something outside of the human order,²⁴² while for Curry, it is a pre-requisite of even the most apparently secular astrological consultation in which something unknown is invited by the astrologer ‘to speak to the inquiry at hand’.²⁴³

It would constitute a category error to conflate such an understanding of ritual with a mere technique employed to achieve a particular objective, thus replicable and liable to Popperian falsification. The notion of a consistently replicable technique demands an idealistic state of *ceteris paribus* and thus ignores the contingencies of lived experience; this is typified by the disenchanted *control rituals* conducted by statistical researchers into astrology’s apparent claims.²⁴⁴ The embodied astrological ritual, by contrast, requires a multitude of contingent factors; the astrologer, other human participants (not to mention the more-than-human ones), and the conditioning particularities of the moment *and* of the place. Rappaport makes clear that ritual cannot be reduced to its material expression or presentation. ‘The manner of “saying” and “doing” is intrinsic to what is being said and done’.²⁴⁵ Edward Schieffelin describes ritual performance as the ‘creation of presence’,²⁴⁶ and Turner as an experience of *liminality*,²⁴⁷ located ambiguously outside of cultural norms of social or personal identity. This presence or liminality is immanent in the act, leaving nothing

²⁴² Rappaport, *Ritual*, pp. 3, 27.

²⁴³ Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, p. 62

²⁴⁴ See Phillipson, *Year Zero*, pp. 121-66.

²⁴⁵ Rappaport, *Ritual*, p. 38. Also cited by Curry in Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, p. 97.

²⁴⁶ Schieffelin, Edward L., ‘Problematizing Performance’, in Felicia Hughes-Freeland (ed.), *Ritual, Performance, Media* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 194.

²⁴⁷ The state of *liminality* refers to a boundary or threshold, which both delimits an entity or space, and is simultaneously permeable. For an expanded definition, see Turner, Victor, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Cornell, 1969) [hereafter Turner, *Ritual Process*], p. 94-6.

but ‘an empty husk’ in its wake,²⁴⁸ as the copycat researchers step in and futilely attempt to replicate it.

This experience of liminality or presence is powerfully documented by astrologer Darby Costello. Costello learned from African diviners how, through ‘working with the spirits’, she could create a sacred space, a ritual container that could, ‘when the energies were right’, become a space of transformation, in which her clients felt something happen that ‘shifted their attention in such a way that they could see their lives in a different perspective’.²⁴⁹ She describes a ‘moment of healing’ for both client and astrologer, an eternal interval where ‘the spirits speak’.²⁵⁰

The realisation of astrology working in practice, then, may be a moment of healing and transformation, as much as divination. It would appear to require the embodied participation of the astrologer and involves the movement from the literal, through the allegorical veil to the metaphorical revelation of Cornelius’s *daemonic* truth of the symbol, which may *or may not* be revealed in a particular situation, depending upon the exigencies of the moment. The astrological experience, as Curry suggests, cannot *always* be expected to deliver.²⁵¹

By articulating the value inherent within Cornelius’s *daemonic* participation, the astrologer would seem to be confronted with an ‘ethical symbol’,²⁵² which turns back upon the perceiver to facilitate a more-than-human revelation. The *tropos* of ritual metaphor would thus seem to release an inherently *ecological* ethic. Previously

²⁴⁸ Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, p. 98.

²⁴⁹ Costello, Darby, ‘Desire and the Stars’, at <http://www.ancientsky.com/desire.htm> [accessed 4/5/06].

²⁵⁰ *ibid.*

²⁵¹ Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, pp. 62-3.

²⁵² Cornelius, *Moment*, p. 305.

understood as an object of contemplation or manipulation, the symbol may suddenly become what Haraway has called a ‘boundary project’,²⁵³ inanimate artefacts become ‘material invitations into liminal experiences’,²⁵⁴ inciting an immanent recognition of the intertwining of meaning and materiality. Confirming Merleau-Ponty’s concept of the metamorphic reversibility of flesh, where life meets life,²⁵⁵ Brown and Toadvine recognise boundaries to be places not where things stop, ‘but where they begin’.²⁵⁶

²⁵³ Haraway, *Simians*, p. 201.

²⁵⁴ Brown & Toadvine, *Eco-Phenomenology*, p. 163.

²⁵⁵ Merleau-Ponty, *Visible*, p. 144-5. See also, Abram, *Spell*, p. 46.

²⁵⁶ Brown & Toadvine, *Eco-Phenomenology*, p. 163.

PART THREE: EMBODIMENT IN A MORE-THAN-HUMAN WORLD

From Phenomenology to Animism

The coming together of phenomenology and a more-than-human ecology takes us beyond Ricoeur's hermeneutic insights, which, while profound in their recognition of the active presence of the poetic mode, do not step out into the intellectually and theologically heretical possibility of the non-human "other" possessing ontological agency. The paradigm of embodiment, however, allows for this possibility, and invites the question of whether a certain type of engagement with astrology might constitute a form of animistic participation. Abram argues that at a spontaneous, sensuous level, prior to reflection or analysis, 'we are *all* animists [Abram's italics]'.²⁵⁷

The oft-maligned anthropologist, Lucien Levy-Bruhl, identified as *participation mystique* the idea that ostensibly inanimate objects, such as rocks, trees, mountains or artefacts, might be understood to be alive and capable of participating with the human experience. In his final analysis he concluded this to be a characteristic not only of primitive peoples (his original suggestion), *but of the human experience per se*.²⁵⁸ This animistic or so-called anthropomorphic way of approaching the world, whereby non-human entities may be perceived capable of communicative agency, admits of a metaphorical correspondence between persons and things, as Tambiah remarks, 'to the point of *identity* and *consubstantiality*'.²⁵⁹ As Devisch has identified, metaphor, ritually embodied through direct sensory engagement, can reveal 'synaesthetic

²⁵⁷ Abram, *Spell*, p. 57.

²⁵⁸ Levy-Bruhl, Lucien, *The Notebooks on Primitive Mentality*, translated by P. Riviere (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975 [1910]). Levy-Bruhl was criticised for originally imputing a lack of logic to the primitive mind, something he later retracted.

²⁵⁹ Tambiah, Stanley J., *Magic, Science, Religion and the Scope of Rationality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 86.

meaning and empowerment’,²⁶⁰ thus transforming (what an outsider to the ritual may still perceive as) an inanimate object into an evidently expressive power.

Cornelius’s realm of astrological signs and symbols, as we have seen, may suddenly reveal the very real, embodied presence of a planetary daemon. Such beings have long been illegitimised, however, first by religious and later by scientific and secularist hegemonies,²⁶¹ and even their reduction today to psychological archetypes by psychologists and psychological astrologers seems to constitute an attempt to keep them under control and make them acceptable to the prevailing worldview.²⁶² In reducing such sensuously discernible *presences*, necessarily plural, to aspects of the exclusively *human* psyche conceived as a whole and thus singular entity, we would appear to deny them the possibility of their own temporal subjectivity, while still privileging our own human subjectivity and assuming it to be stable.

With this in mind, we might consider Merleau-Ponty’s conviction that the other is not ‘an offspring of my spirit’ but ‘my twin or flesh of my flesh’.²⁶³ For Merleau-Ponty, therefore, the other’s body is ‘an unexpected response I get from elsewhere’,²⁶⁴ and it follows that the other’s dwelling elsewhere ‘deprives me of my central location’.²⁶⁵ Merleau-Ponty is radical in this respect, conceiving the mystery of the other as ‘nothing but the mystery of myself’²⁶⁶ and in this he acknowledges the ability “I” have to adopt perspectives other than my own. In his concluding remark on flesh, he

²⁶⁰ Devisch, *Weaving*, pp. 43-4.

²⁶¹ For discussion, see Hanegraaff, *Magic*, pp. 361-71; Willis & Curry, *Astrology* p. 52, pp. 93-6.

²⁶² For discussion, see Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, pp. 72-5.

²⁶³ Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, pp. 15, 22. Also cited by Moran, *Phenomenology*, p. 432.

²⁶⁴ Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World*, translated by J. O’Neill (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 134. Also cited by Moran, *Phenomenology*, p. 432.

²⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p. 135. Also cited by Moran, *Phenomenology*, p. 432.

²⁶⁶ *ibid.*

concedes, 'my body is a seer' and through the participative agency of the other, communicated through the flesh that we share, it is seen.²⁶⁷ In Abram's terms, we might consider ourselves the organs of a world, that is perceiving itself through us,²⁶⁸ like the Koyukon people who live 'in a world that watches, in a forest of eyes'.²⁶⁹ Abram challenges us to consider that in those embodied moments in our lives, we encounter the other in our experience, as alive, sensate, and personified, moving us perhaps to engage with this living world with proper respect and reverence.²⁷⁰

Abram's thesis represents part of a growing body of scholarship, aimed at re-instating animism as a valid, even authentic, cosmological perspective, and as the basis not simply for abstract speculation but for responsive and responsible action in the world. Originally conceived at the turn of the twentieth century by early anthropologist Edward Tylor, as an erroneous attribution of spiritual agency to the essentially inert natural world, animism is being re-interpreted 'from derogatory to critical term',²⁷¹ in the light of increased phenomenological validation of differently embodied perspectives. The 'new animism', as it has been hailed by Graham Harvey and others,²⁷² is now being reconsidered both as a valid relational epistemology,²⁷³ and as 'a way of learning to act respectfully towards and among other persons', only some of whom are human.²⁷⁴ Personhood, according to Viveiros de Castro, entails perspectivity, the capacity to inhabit, and thus fully embody, a point of view other than one's own, and is a matter of degree and specific context, rather than being the

²⁶⁷ Merleau-Ponty, *Visible*, p. 274

²⁶⁸ Abram, *Spell*, p. 68.

²⁶⁹ Nelson, Richard, cited by Abram, *Spell*, p. 69.

²⁷⁰ Abram, *Spell*, pp. 69-70.

²⁷¹ Harvey, *Animism*, p. 1.

²⁷² See, for example, Harvey, *Animism*, pp. 3-29;

²⁷³ Bird-David, Nurid, 'Animism Revisited: Personhood, Environment, and Relational Epistemology', *Current Anthropology* 1999, no. 40, p. S67-S91. [hereafter Bird-David, *Animism*], p. S67.

²⁷⁴ Harvey, *Animism*, p. xi.

distinguishing feature of a particular species.²⁷⁵ The idea that this animal, this tree, this plant, this rock, this artefact, or indeed this planet, could be perceived as being capable of holding as valid a perspective as that of a human person has immense implications, evidenced through the particular etiquettes, protocols, taboos and communicative stances that characterise animistic participation.²⁷⁶ Graham Harvey comments that, '[t]he relational ontology and interpersonal ethics of animists challenge dominant academic discourses about religion, metaphysics, education, ethics, place and perception.'²⁷⁷

Phenomenologist of landscape, Chris Tilley, acknowledging Merleau-Ponty as *the* philosopher of both animism and metaphor,²⁷⁸ considers, like Abram, that as humans we are inherently animistic, our primordial experience disclosing 'a field of phenomena that are all *potentially* animate and expressive [my italics]'.²⁷⁹ Tilley's use of the word "potentially" implies that there is a particularity to animistic expression, not necessarily a general or universal attribution. Animism may be as much about the sensitive discernment of *who* is a person and *what* is not, as this will not always be obvious.²⁸⁰ Irving Hallowell famously inquired of an unnamed old Ojibwe man whether all the stones in their immediate vicinity were alive. After a period of reflection, the old man replied, 'No! But some are'.²⁸¹

²⁷⁵ Viveiros De Castro, Eduardo, 'Exchanging Perspectives: The Transformation of Objects into Subjects in Amerindian Cosmologies', in 'Symposium: Talking Peace with Gods: Part One', *Common Knowledge*, 2004, vol. 10, no. 3, pp. 463-84, [hereafter Viveiros de Castro, 'Exchanging Perspectives'], pp. 466-7, 474.

²⁷⁶ Harvey, *Animism*, pp. 48-9.

²⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p. 49.

²⁷⁸ Tilley, Christopher, *The Materiality of Stone: Explorations in Landscape Phenomenology* (Oxford: Berg, 2004), p. 22.

²⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p. 30.

²⁸⁰ Harvey, *Animism*, p. xi.

²⁸¹ Hallowell, cited by Harvey, *Animism*, p. 33.

According to Bird-David, animists do not personify these other-than-human persons, and *then* socialise with them after the fact; personification and socialisation arise together.²⁸² As Evans-Pritchard put it, ‘a primitive man does not perceive a leopard and *believe* that it is his totem-brother [my italics]. What he perceives is his totem-brother’.²⁸³ This experience of *seeing as*, inherent to direct perception, is as evident with the Renaissance magician who *perceives* (rather than believes) a talismanic figure to be a god.²⁸⁴ Hanegraaff argues that this does not constitute a Tylolean error of reasoning, but rather a ‘spontaneous animism’, which bypasses the rational processing that belief requires altogether.²⁸⁵ It may, in fact, be presumptuous to assume that animists *believe* in more-than-human powers. Chakrabarty argues that belief requires a secondary attribution that takes us out of our lived experience and positions us within an objectifying discourse that denies us access to the experience.²⁸⁶ Rather, as Detwiler suggests, an animist’s “religion”, if indeed that is an appropriate term, may be more a ‘quest for ethical responsibility through communicative action’.²⁸⁷

It may be equally presumptuous to attribute to animists a disposition of blind faith. Rochberg observes, in relation to Babylonian celestial divination, that while a divine immanence could be perceived for example in a lunar eclipse manifest as the moon god *Sin*, “‘covered” in mourning’, celestial phenomena could equally well be referred to ‘without a hint of divine embodiment’.²⁸⁸ Furthermore, she marks the ability they

²⁸² Bird-David, *Animism*, p. 577

²⁸³ Evans-Pritchard, E.E, *Theories of Primitive Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p. 108.

²⁸⁴ Hanegraaff, *Magic*, p. 374

²⁸⁵ *ibid.*

²⁸⁶ Chakrabarty, Dipesh, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 242.

²⁸⁷ Detwiler, Fritz, “‘All my Relatives”’: Persons in Oglala Religion’, *Religion* 22 (1993, pp. 235-246), p. 244.

²⁸⁸ Rochberg, *Heavenly Writing*, p. 36.

had to think abstractly and theoretically.²⁸⁹ Likewise, anthropologist Alfred Gell discusses how a god may be revealed at one moment as a particular stone or statue, and at another as a possessed shaman or animal, and he is clear that the animist is perfectly cognizant to distinguish between divine and ordinary manifestations and to recognize the ever-shifting dynamics of other-than-human embodiment.²⁹⁰ Indeed, the distinction between animacy and inanimacy, he argues, may cut across the distinction ‘living and not-living’, ‘ritual animacy’ and the possession of biological life ‘being far from the same thing’.²⁹¹

The realisation of animacy, then, requires participation, it cannot be assumed. The animate other might be understood to reveal itself only in particular *moments* of engagement; as Gell suggests, through ritual.²⁹² The very point of those *realised* moments, like Cornelius’s realised showings of symbolism, is, as Curry puts it, ‘to allow contingency to take a form relevant to the exigencies of the moment’.²⁹³ Kane’s ‘mythtellers’, then, for whom animated patterns ‘think and speak’²⁹⁴ and Lord’s ‘singer of tales’ entering deeper into an otherworldly trance,²⁹⁵ are as much diviners of the moment as the suddenly inspired astrologer. With the weavers of fate hovering overhead, they engage with the “other” directly through the disclosure of their myths, songs or cosmic symbols, ‘composed not *for*, but *in* performance’,²⁹⁶ a performance that may, without warning, reveal a divine agency to whom one is inextricably related.

²⁸⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 174-5.

²⁹⁰ Gell, Alfred, *Art & Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 122.

²⁹¹ *ibid.*, pp. 121-2.

²⁹² *ibid.*, p. 122.

²⁹³ Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, p. 106.

²⁹⁴ Kane, *Mythtellers*, p. 60.

²⁹⁵ Lord, Albert, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960).

²⁹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 13.

Astrology and the Pluralism of Embodiment

Astrology is described by its modern practitioners primarily as a humanistic or psychological pursuit, which may or may not include participation with a more-than-human realm of animating presences beyond that of human origin. Very few contemporary astrologers talk openly of gods, goddesses, daemons, intelligent powers or spirits, except as aspects of the collective *human* psyche, and few seriously entertain the idea that astrology might involve a participatory dialogue or negotiation with divine beings.

The majority of psychological astrologers tend to *justify* the astrological planets as expressions of Jung's archetypes, categorised in their arrangements in the horoscope to make up a 'map of the psyche'.²⁹⁷ This is supported by Jung's conceptualisation of archetypes as psychic ordering principles drawn from the collective unconscious, and akin 'to the axial system of a crystal, which...*preforms* the crystalline structure in the mother liquid [my italics]'.²⁹⁸ He authorises the connection between gods, planets and archetypes stating, 'the planets are the gods, symbols of the powers of the unconscious'.²⁹⁹

As Hyde notes, Jungian astrologers have taken the archetypes to be the psychological underpinning of their astrological symbols.³⁰⁰ This raises important questions. Is the astrologer participating with the gods themselves or with the literate *explanations* of

²⁹⁷ For discussion, see Cornelius, *Moment*, pp. 298-300; Hyde, *Jung*; pp. 81-101; Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, pp. 72-5.

²⁹⁸ Jung, *Archetypes*, p. 79.

²⁹⁹ Jung, Carl Gustav, 'Letter to André Barbault, 26th May, 1954', *Letters* (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1954), p. 177.

³⁰⁰ Hyde, *Jung*, p. 88.

the gods? Furthermore, does the astrologer believe that he or she is capable of predicting, or indeed manipulating, how the gods/archetypes are going to respond in a given situation? Certainly, as objectified principles, one might assume that the archetypes have become interpretively manipulable, as the archetype is denied the autonomy to respond dialogically to the interpreter.

As ever, Jung is delightfully ambiguous on the subject, describing the archetypes elsewhere as ‘living psychic forces’,³⁰¹ numinous images ‘charged with emotion’,³⁰² as such, one might suppose them capable of autonomous agency. Having no material existence outside of the forms through which they manifest, they would seem more akin to the kind of shifting animate presences we have been discussing than his *a priori* ordering principles. Can we really dismiss the “other” as a human projection that can be understood or predicted, or should we concede to Merleau-Ponty’s unexpected response from elsewhere?

Jung, himself, was ever-awake to the unpredictable immanence of the other, and showed enormous respect to realisations of symbolic presence, embodied in particular moments of heightened sensuous awareness, such as when he discerned a mischievous face in his garden wall apparently deriding him.³⁰³ This persuaded Jung that the god Mercury had played a trick on him during his astrological marriage experiment and provoked him to recast his data, the effect of which was to radically alter his understanding of synchronicity.³⁰⁴

³⁰¹ Jung, *Archetypes*, pp. 156-7.

³⁰² Jung, Carl Gustav, *Man and His Symbols* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1964), p. 87.

³⁰³ This is reported by Marie Von Franz and cited by Hyde, *Jung*, p. 130.

³⁰⁴ See Hyde, *Jung*, pp. 121-39.

Hyde, argues that the planets-as-gods-as-archetypes model, employed by most Jungian-influenced astrologers, effects a psychological reduction by limiting the expression of an astrological symbol to a Jungian archetype.³⁰⁵ The diverse possibilities of the astrological Moon, for example, become centred around the different aspects of Jung's mother archetype.³⁰⁶ This might be seen as an attempt to resolve the rich metaphorical tension that exists between the moon and one's experience of the world, delivering instead a more familiar symbol of mothering as a core psychological explanation. Conversely, for Hyde, astrological symbols are a *root* in their own right, a core symbol, around which 'a certain set of images cluster' in dynamic and unpredictable arrangements.³⁰⁷ This supports Harding's view that Jungian archetypes have evolved out of root astrological instincts.³⁰⁸ Hyde goes on to stress the 'open-ended and abundant' nature of astrology's symbols, how the moon might equally be realised as 'flux and alternation, the child, the common people, the left, utensils, silver, cabbages, baths and bellies', among myriad other possibilities.³⁰⁹

As Curry notes, when the astrological birthchart is seen simply as an individualised map of the psyche, the planets are no longer divinities, wild and unpredictable in their expression, but domesticated functions of a person's so-called "inner" world; thus the outer world becomes nothing more than a passive, unconscious reflection of the privileged inner.³¹⁰ Hyde argues that astrologers use the physical world as a ritualised discursive framework through which to describe the human experience and then assume it to embody a pre-existent truth that they have discovered *about* the human

³⁰⁵ Hyde, *Jung*, pp. 88-9. For a description of the planets as symbols of archetypal drives see, for example, Hamaker-Zondag, *Psychological*, pp. 139-79.

³⁰⁶ See Hamaker-Zondag, *Psychological*, pp. 183-8.

³⁰⁷ Hyde, *Jung*, pp. 88-9.

³⁰⁸ Harding, *Hymns*, pp. 148-52.

³⁰⁹ Hyde, *Jung*, p. 89.

³¹⁰ Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, p. 74.

experience.³¹¹ This abstract interpretive move holds the subject-object divide firmly intact, compounds the idea of fixed pre-existent astrological meanings imposed upon the human experience and denies the planets their wild expression.

Curry considers the reduction of the outer world to a projection of the inner, to be an impoverishment of lived experience, the consequences being that universalism and monotheism become tacitly valued over polytheism, unity valued over diversity.³¹² This is strongly in evidence in twentieth century astrology with the rise in profile of the astrological Sun at the expense of the moon and the other planets. This is most obviously manifest in the newspaper sun-sign columns, but really has its root in the theosophical astrology of Alan Leo, whose attempt was to build an astrological philosophy around the ontologically stable principle of a central spiritual sun or solar logos.³¹³ As Leo's astrology developed into psychological astrology, the Sun became equated with Jung's archetype of the Self, the other planets becoming mere satellites, or sub-personalities, of the integrative Sun/Self.³¹⁴ Ironically this trend reveals a psychological heliocentrism in what is, irreducibly, a geocentric art, a monotheistic imposition within an essentially polytheistic framework.

Thomas Moore points out how Ficino considered monotheism to be an illness, whereby one god (or idea) comes to fixate itself in a singular kind of consciousness.³¹⁵ The Sun seems the most obvious candidate, though Ficino stressed that any of the planetary deities or daemons could become the object of undue

³¹¹ Hyde, *Jung*, p. 165.

³¹² Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, p. 75.

³¹³ Leo, *Astrology*, p. 11.

³¹⁴ See, for example, Greene, Liz & Howard Sasportas, *The Development of the Personality* (Boston, MA: Red Wheel / Weiser, 1987) [hereafter Greene & Sasportas, *Personality*], pp. 163-222.

³¹⁵ Moore, Thomas, *The Planets Within: The Astrological Psychology of Marsilio Ficino* (Great Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne Press, 1990), p. 57.

devotion, and recommended finding concrete ways of drawing in other kind of spirits, not as compensation but as a way of enriching a person's life.³¹⁶ Moore contrasts the degenerative impulse for integration or equilibrium, a way of compensating for imbalance, with the more imaginative act of *constellation*, aimed at 'making a cosmos of variety and multiplicity in one's psychological environment'.³¹⁷ This move is very much in evidence in the work of James Hillman, the post-Jungian founder of the more pluralistic archetypal psychology.³¹⁸ He sees value in astrology's ability to return events to the Gods, invoking 'a polytheistic, mythic, poetic, metaphoric sense of what is fatefully real'.³¹⁹ In a genuinely polytheistic astrology, Curry argues, no one planet's significance should usurp the authority of the others and there should be no need of an 'overarching meta-principle' capable of accommodating all differences and resolving all ambiguities.³²⁰

Greene, however, argues that astrology has always been *monotheistic*, positioning it squarely within a Greco-Roman worldview. The apparent plurality of the gods, she insists, is *merely* symbolic and representative of 'different dimensions of a single cosmos and cosmocrator';³²¹ the definitive philosophical statement for this is the astrological horoscope, a Greek introduction into the tradition, which *abstractly represents* the positions of planets and stars. For Greene, the horoscope is a psychologically unifying map of the psyche,³²² reflecting *a priori* mathematical and

³¹⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 57-8.

³¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 58.

³¹⁸ See, for example, Hillman, James, 'Psychology: Monotheistic or Polytheistic?', in David L. Miller (ed.), *The New Polytheism* (Dallas: Spring, 1981); also Hillman, James, *Revisoning Psychology* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1975).

³¹⁹ Hillman, James, 'Heaven Retains Within Its Sphere Half of All Bodies and Maladies', at <http://www.springpub.com/astro.htm> [accessed 15/01/04].

³²⁰ Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, p. 75.

³²¹ Sharman-Burke, Juliet & Liz Greene, *The Astrologer, the Counsellor and the Priest* Vol. 2 (London: CPA Press, 1997) [hereafter Sharman-Burke & Greene, *Astrologer, Counsellor, Priest*], p. 110.

³²² See, for example, Greene & Sasportas, *Personality*, p. vii.

spiritual principles derived from Pythagorean and Platonic Greek models that begin and end in unity; astrology, for Greene, is effectively a Greek invention distinct from the inherently pluralistic divine embodiment of the Babylonian omen tradition.³²³

The Greek horoscope, as a literate model of the heavens, does indeed constitute a *technical* abstraction from the more contingent (and phenomenological) visual astrology of the earlier Babylonian tradition, but the line being drawn by Greene seems unnecessarily harsh. Astrology can only be reduced *in practice* to a monotheistic spiritual system if we assume the *astrological act itself* to be a similarly reflective abstraction from the embodied participation of lived experience in a more-than-human world. Our discussion so far suggests otherwise. As Abram has shown, the cursive script that the heavenly bodies trace in their movements do not necessarily lose their contingent animistic qualities simply by being condensed into a literate, symbolic form;³²⁴ those symbols can be re-animated, re-inhabited and re-embodied through the participative metaphor employed by the inspired astrologer within a performative or ritual context. The meaning of a symbol can be revived and turned metaphorically to reveal its embodied truth *only in the act*, not in the abstract.

The Astrologer as Shaman?

With regard to the above, we might consider then that in the act of an astrological performance, there exists an ever-present Heideggerian possibility of pre-conceptual hermeneutic revelation, a momentary initiative that suddenly implicates all parties present in an undeniably sensuous, and necessarily connective experience. Roy Willis

³²³ Sharman-Burke & Greene, *Astrologer, Counsellor, Priest*, p. 110.

³²⁴ Abram, *Spell*, pp. 95ff.

reports of such during a consultation with astrologer Jane Ridder-Patrick;³²⁵ from a starting point of calm rationality, Willis records how the astrologer became ‘suddenly powerful and authoritative, as though someone or something was speaking urgently through her, something quasi-divine’. He describes her becoming a ‘priestess, possessed of Spirit’, who, in her ‘altered state of consciousness’ was suddenly able to see things and connect them together.³²⁶ For Willis, this experience provided a ‘momentary glimpse’ of a divine communication,³²⁷ and he cites it as an example of how the revelation of astrological meaning, freed from its formal justification as objective analysis, can become suddenly ‘warm-blooded, egalitarian, anarchistic and erotic’.³²⁸

Does this suggest that the suddenly inspired astrologer *herself* is subject to some kind of temporal other-than-human embodiment? Furthermore, might an embodied participation with divine agencies, daemons or presences, powerfully connect the client as well in a *joint* negotiation of destiny?³²⁹ In that moment Willis would seem to be identifying Ridder-Patrick with a role undertaken in traditional societies by the socially ambiguous figure that anthropologists have come to term *shaman*.³³⁰ For Viveiros de Castro, the role of the shaman in a particular society is specifically to ‘cross ontological boundaries’ and adopt non-human perspectives.³³¹ So is this what the astrologer was doing?

³²⁵ Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, p. 11.

³²⁶ *ibid.*

³²⁷ *ibid.*

³²⁸ *ibid.*

³²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 148.

³³⁰ Standard texts on shamanism include: Eliade, Mircea, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (New York: Pantheon, 1964); Jakobsen, Merete, Demant, *Shamanism: Traditional and Contemporary Approaches to the Mastery of Spirits and Healing* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1999); Harvey, Graham (ed.), *Shamanism: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Hutton, Ronald, *The Shamans of Siberia* (Glastonbury: Isle of Avalon Press, 1993).

³³¹ Viveiros de Castro, ‘Exchanging Perspectives’, p. 468.

In a personal email communication with Ridder-Patrick, where I had asked her to give her account of the consultation, she said she could not recall her specific experience, but admitted to a regular occurrence of something powerful happening in her work, which she supposed could be called an altered state of consciousness.³³² However she brushed it off fairly lightly with a remark about how it would probably be the case for people from all walks of life who were doing what they loved.³³³ So it could be argued that Willis is simply projecting his own expectations onto the situation, having been immersed in shamanic practices as an anthropologist for many years. However, to do so would be to insist upon the preservation of the phenomenologically unjustifiable subject-object divide and to fall into the trap of psychologising away what, for Willis, was an experientially real experience, which meaningfully moved him in that realised moment.

Ridder-Patrick's follow-on response reveals more however. She said she felt uncomfortable and embarrassed by Willis's description; while reluctantly admitting that there is something in what he said. Indeed she said she wished it had been kept secret. While not fully embracing Willis's claim of a divine embodiment, what Ridder-Patrick does acknowledge about her experience of working with clients in general is a heightened sense of rapport, which she describes in a markedly sensuous way, as 'a thickening of the atmosphere that I sense soundlessly in my ears, like a rushing, swishing movement'.³³⁴ She describes her normal identity becoming peripheral, distant, replaced by a sense of empathic communion with the client, and an

³³² Personal email communication.

³³³ *ibid.*

³³⁴ *ibid.*

overwhelming sense of love and connection.³³⁵ There would appear to be a lot more going on here than the systematic translation of literate symbols.

Ridder-Patrick's reference to the distancing of her normal identity, resonates with Hillman's conviction that the ritual of drawing up an accurate astrological chart provides the 'theurgic mumbo-jumbo' necessary to 'constellate psychic insight, focus intensity, elaborate a distancing procedure'.³³⁶ Might then an experiential engagement with the metaphorically distancing symbols of astrology in a particular context facilitate what Willis has called 'an innate species-ability to imaginatively and empathetically put ourselves in the place of the other'?³³⁷ Willis identifies this faculty, 'latent in some, patent in others' as being a *quality of relationship*, the enhanced instance of which should be considered *shamanic*.³³⁸ Alan Campbell suggests there is no such *thing* as a shaman, rather '[p]eople shamanize', acknowledging shamanism as an intrinsic human quality 'that admits of degrees'.³³⁹ We might speculate that those degrees may be enhanced at certain times of intensive engagement such as an astrological engagement, conducted with ritual intent.

There is not enough space here to discuss the complex issue of shamanism, nor the possible links between the astrologer and the shaman, an area which certainly invites further research. However, as we turn our attention now to the practice of experiential astrology and, specifically, the performance of *astrodrama*, we might consider the possibility that this type of empathetic ontological exchange, facilitated in specific

³³⁵ *ibid.*

³³⁶ Hillman, James, 'Heaven Retains Within Its Sphere Half of All Bodies and Maladies', at <http://www.springpub.com/astro.htm> [accessed 15/01/04].

³³⁷ Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, p. 139.

³³⁸ *ibid.*

³³⁹ *ibid.*, also citing Campbell, Alan, *To Square with Genesis, Causal Statements and Shamanic Ideas in Wayapi* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989), p. 106.

ritual contexts, is indeed an ability innate to the human condition. Practitioners of astrodrama, as we will see, would appear to presuppose just such an empathetic facility for inter-perspectival revelation through the medium of astrological symbolism; and not just for the astrologer, but equally for the other participants engaged in the performance. This would seem to support Willis and Campbell's hypothesis and suggests that the facticity of embodiment, so evident in astrodrama work, may provide the tacit metaphorical vehicle for the experiential realisation of symbolism.

EXPERIENTIAL ASTROLOGY & ASTRODRAMA: A CASE STUDY

PART ONE: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY & METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Our study now moves to an exploration of experiential astrology and specifically, the practice known as astrodrama. As there are no academic sources available, I have drawn upon on a combination of primary sources; practitioners' published material (books, articles, websites) and a fieldwork study comprising three in-depth, semi-structured interviews with recognised pioneers of astrodrama and its related practices. I am citing Jeff Jawer and Barbara Schermer by name (with their express permission³⁴⁰) as I am referencing their published material also. The third interview is with a well-known and highly respected astrological practitioner (cited anonymously) who is considered by Jawer to have been the most consistently active astrodrama facilitator since the practice began.

Experiential astrology, of which the ritualised group activity, astrodrama, forms an important part, is seen by many of its practitioners as being part of a broader movement in late 20th century astrology away from the practice of predicting a future, assumed to be fixed by an immutable fate, and toward a more creative, participatory engagement with destiny. According to Jawer, '[w]e have learned that our relationship with the heavens is ongoing and dynamic rather than fixed and rigid.'³⁴¹ For Jawer experiential astrology involves any form of direct experience with astrological symbolism that moves the participant down from the head and into the

³⁴⁰ Both signed an interview release form sanctioning the use of their names. For an example of this form, see appendix 3.2, p. 134. For standard interview release form see appendix 3.1, p. 133.

³⁴¹ Jawer, Jeff, 'Living the Drama of the Horoscope', at <http://www.asabovesobelow.com/creativeastrology/drama.htm> [accessed 9/2/06].

heart and body.³⁴² This reflects a concern among many experiential practitioners that astrologers tend to restrict the expression of the symbolism they work with by imposing a technical model of interpretation upon it. Jawer believes that most astrologers take this stance because they ‘want to abstract themselves from experience by the use of intellect and explanation’.³⁴³ In doing so, he suggests, they can easily forget their active participation in the interpretations they offer to clients. As examples of experiential astrology, he cites astrodrama, artistic exploration, guided imagery, planetary dances, planetary walks and singing charts.³⁴⁴

These more creative approaches to astrological work, according to Prudence Jones, began to appear in the 1970s, primarily influenced by the psychological revolution and in particular the Human Potential Movement, out of which the majority of experientially oriented astrologers emerged.³⁴⁵ Jones, editor of the book, *Creative Astrology*, describes how experiential astrology work employs ‘exercises in practical symbolism’ in which the ‘symbolic hinterland’ of astrology may be explored through role-playing, and through artistic and bodily expression. ‘Creative astrology’, as she defines it, ‘gives the power of interpretation back to the client’.³⁴⁶

Barbara Schermer’s book, *Astrology Alive*, published in 1989 and re-issued with two extra chapters in 1998, is still considered by practitioners to be the most practical guidebook on the subject. It was the first to specifically address the practice of

³⁴² de Prose, Janette, ‘The Riches of Symbolism, An Interview with Jeff Jawer’, *The Mountain Astrologer*, 2005, (Apr/May) no. 120, pp. 44-54 & 90-2 [hereafter de Prose, ‘Interview with Jawer’], p. 48.

³⁴³ *ibid.*

³⁴⁴ *ibid.* A selection of Jawer’s articles, many of which have appeared in the *The Mountain Astrologer*, can be accessed online at,

http://www.asabovesobelow.com/creativeastrology/articles_by_jeff_jawer.htm [accessed 15/04/06].

³⁴⁵ Jones, *Creative Astrology*, p. 7.

³⁴⁶ *ibid.*

astrodrama, which for Schermer, entails ‘the acting out of the horoscope’.³⁴⁷ It is seen as a participatory group experience designed to represent (or better, *re-presence*) the horoscope in a dramatic or theatrical form, whereby participants dynamically role-play astrologically symbolic situations by embodying what have been called astrological “energies” or archetypes.³⁴⁸ We will discuss the nature of these latter in due course.

The aims of experiential astrology are considered by its practitioners to be both educational and healing, conducive to ‘self-development and spiritual growth’.³⁴⁹ In respect of its educational applications, guided imagery or visual aids are regularly employed as ways of teaching astrology to students,³⁵⁰ while its healing aspects might be more appropriate to the performance of astrodrama, which is usually considered to be an emotionally cathartic or transformational experience.³⁵¹ Catharsis is defined in the Oxford Concise Dictionary as ‘an emotional release in drama or art’,³⁵² and Scheff argues that the capacity of games and drama to produce catharsis lies in the ‘aesthetic distance’, conceived as the extent to which the person’s attention is not taken up by the return of repressed emotions from past events.³⁵³ Scheff suggests, for example, that an audience member in a theatre production can become emotionally involved without fully surrendering their observer status, affording a division of attention

³⁴⁷ Schermer, *Astrology Alive*, p. 32.

³⁴⁸ See, for example, Schermer, *Astrology Alive*, p. 65-75; Jawer, Jeff, ‘Living the Drama of the Horoscope’, at <http://www.asabovesobelow.com/creativeastrology/drama.htm> [accessed 9/2/06].

³⁴⁹ Anon, ‘The Brighton and Hove Astrology Circle’, at http://www.planet-janet.com/astrology_circle.html [accessed 10/05/06].

³⁵⁰ See for example, Anon, ‘Faculty of Astrological Studies Summer School Brochure 2006’ at http://www.astrology.org.uk/assets/downloads/pdf/summer_school_brochure_2006.pdf [accessed 10/05/06].

³⁵¹ Schermer, *Astrology Alive*, p. 50-2.

³⁵² Fowler, H.W., & Fowler, F.G., in Della Thompson (ed.) *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Current English*, 9th Edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 207.

³⁵³ Scheff, Thomas J., *Catharsis in Healing, Ritual and Drama* (Berkeley & Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1980), p. 59.

between past distress and present safety.³⁵⁴ However in astrodrama, the experience is generally not constructed for an audience and would seem to require a far greater level of surrender of observer privileges from participants, particularly because they are not rehearsing a script, but responding spontaneously to the arousal of symbolism in the moment. Indeed the experience may be more akin to an older idea of catharsis as purgation, healing or cleansing (from the Greek *kathairō* meaning ‘cleanse’)³⁵⁵ through ritual enactment, akin to the type of ‘charismatic healing’ that Csordas discusses in *The Sacred Self*.³⁵⁶ The *distancing* process, as we have discussed, may be facilitated more through the creative tension of the astrological metaphor, the metaphoricity of the symbolism inviting one to release one’s normal social identity and enter into a more ambiguous liminal experience.

Psychodrama

Astrodrama’s methodology is drawn primarily from group psychotherapy, in particular Jacob Moreno’s *psychodrama*, which I will very briefly summarise here. Psychodrama invites participants in a group setting to spontaneously enact situations from their lives with the aim of effecting a cathartic experience in the actors.³⁵⁷ Moreno understands this to be an activity that employs dramatic methods to explore the truth of interpersonal relations (e.g. with family members) and private worlds, providing the actor with a multi-dimensional living space far broader than that which we are used to in normal everyday life, where fantasy and reality are no longer in

³⁵⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵⁵ Fowler, H.W., & Fowler, F.G., in Della Thompson (ed.), *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Current English*, 9th Edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 207.

³⁵⁶ Csordas, Thomas, *The Sacred Self: Cultural Phenomenology of Charismatic Healing* (Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1994), [hereafter Csordas, *Sacred Self*].

³⁵⁷ See Moreno, Jacob, *The Essential Moreno: Writings on Psychodrama, Group Method, and Spontaneity* (New York: Springer Publishing Company, 1987), [hereafter Moreno, *Psychodrama*], pp. 13-19.

conflict. Instead, in Moreno's terms, '[d]elusions and hallucinations are given flesh and an equality of status with normal sensory perceptions'.³⁵⁸ Moreno's use of words here reflects an assumption of there being a correct orientation of sensory perception under normal conditions, of which these delusions are errant forms granted temporary licence. That said, however, his methodology does actually invite these 'delusions' (however pejoratively conceived) to reveal themselves as having autonomous agency within the carefully delineated space, 'the stage', wherein the work takes place, a radical psychotherapeutic understanding for someone writing in the mid 1940s.³⁵⁹

Moreno describes how participants in a psychodrama experience enter *bodily* into the ontological realm of objects and persons to which their charismatic energy spontaneously draws them.³⁶⁰ Through engaging with this work participants are said to experience a form of existential healing manifest through a form of group empathy or catharsis, which Moreno understands as a reciprocation of love.³⁶¹ In terms of its *process*, psychodrama appears to share similarities with rites of passage rituals, common to indigenous cultures around the world.³⁶² Both involve separation from ordinary reality, rites of transition where the *initiands* experience a condition of liminality, marked by disintegration of normal social and cultural order and encounter with liminal entities of ambiguous and indeterminate ontological status. Finally, the psychodrama initiands experience rites of incorporation, where they are re-integrated into an everyday state of consciousness, and a 'catharsis of integration' is effected.³⁶³

³⁵⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

³⁵⁹ *ibid.*

³⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 17.

³⁶¹ *ibid.*

³⁶² See Gennep, Arnold van, *Rites of Passage* (London: Routledge, 2004); Turner, Victor, *The Ritual Process* (New York: Cornell, 1969). For discussion and critique, see Mitchell, Jon P., 'Performance', in Christopher Tilley (ed.), *Handbook of Material Culture* (London: Sage Publications, 2006, pp. 384-401), pp. 387-90.

³⁶³ Moreno, *Psychodrama*, p. 16.

Astrodrama

In astrodrama participants take on the roles, not of family members, but of the planets, astrologically animated or personified through a particular form of mythological or archetypal expression. Astrodrama is usually a contained experience, but can also be witnessed by outside spectators.³⁶⁴ For practitioner Kelley Hunter, the birth chart is like our life's play script with plots and sub-plots, and astrodrama is a form of '[e]xperiential play/work...that goes beyond words to evoke the archetypal dimension of astrology and its relevance to our immediate life situation'.³⁶⁵ Costume is an important element of the work for Hunter, (as with shamans who don masks or animal skins), and by fully entering into a particular role she considers it possible to call forth the power of the planets, with 'physical interaction and body response evoking knowledge'.³⁶⁶

Schermer suggests that astrodrama enables us to contact planetary energies through direct experience with the 'vital rhythms of their interactions', the horoscope itself becoming 'a moving field of planetary action: vibrant, interactive, deeply personal and alive!'.³⁶⁷ She describes how the 'embodiment' of symbolism enables astrologers to enrich their practice by leaving the chairs of their consulting rooms and expressing the astrological archetypes through movement and feeling.³⁶⁸ She also stresses the

³⁶⁴ Schermer, *Astrology Alive*, p. 33.

³⁶⁵ Hunter, M. Kelley, 'Clips from the ROOTS Scrapbook', *The Mountain Astrologer* 47, June 1994 (pp. 27-8), pp. 27-8.

³⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p. 27.

³⁶⁷ *ibid.*, p. 28.

³⁶⁸ Schermer, *Astrology Alive*, p. 34.

crucial role that ritual can play in experiential work and the strength of intention expressed through embodied group activity.³⁶⁹

With this in mind, it may be worth considering that the idea of catharsis, as discussed by Moreno, may be too *general* an idea to apply helpfully to the experience of astrodrاما, and we may be wise to follow Csordas who eschews ‘global “black box” mechanisms such as...catharsis...in favour of phenomenological specificity’ [Csordas’s quotes].³⁷⁰ Indeed the idea of a cathartic experience being a re-connection to a particular *root* or origin, may be more pertinent to the pluralistic particularity of embodying an astrological archetype, whether through a ritual symbol, or indeed through one’s own body.

The Extent of Experiential Astrology & Astrodrاما in Practice

My own informal conversations with members of the astrological community suggest that astrodrاما is a fairly marginal practice, while the broader applications of experiential astrology as a teaching aid have become more mainstream, as has the use of images and creative metaphors employed in psychologically-oriented consultancy work. In terms of written sources, there seem to be less magazine articles published now under the experiential banner than there were during the 1990s, when accounts by practitioners such as Schermer, Hunter, Moira Canes and Michelle Koffron, among others, were quite regularly featured in the publication, *The Mountain Astrologer*.³⁷¹ The overall impression from practitioners is that there is less astrodrاما being practised nowadays than there was in the 1990s.

³⁶⁹ Schermer, Barbara, ‘Downloading the Cosmic Mind: Group Rituals for 2000-2001’, *The Mountain Astrologer*, 2000, Aug/Sept, no. 92, pp. 22-8 [hereafter Schermer, ‘Downloading’].

³⁷⁰ Csordas, Thomas, *The Sacred Self: Cultural Phenomenology of Charismatic Healing* (Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1994), p. xiii.

³⁷¹ See, for example, *The Mountain Astrologer*, June, 1994, pp. 27-36, 89-93.

It is notable, however, that experiential astrology has been integrated into many astrology conferences and camps over the past twenty-five years on both sides of the Atlantic. Indeed, three of the most prominent astrological events of 2006 all feature experiential work. The upcoming 2006 Astrological Association Conference in York, features Derek Hawkins and Aashti Tousignant applying experiential techniques offering ‘keys to unify and heal family dynamics’.³⁷² Also this year’s ISAR *Heavens on Earth* 2006 Conference in Florence, features Schermer and Hunter, who will both be leading experiential workshops around the astrological themes in Botticelli’s paintings.³⁷³ Thirdly, the Faculty of Astrological Studies summer school at Oxford University features an experiential astrology module with Jane Ridder-Patrick.³⁷⁴ In addition, the Wheel of Astrologers summer camp in the UK has a prominent experiential dimension, including astrodrama workshops and, in 2005, an enactment of the Dance of Venus.³⁷⁵ In previous years, the Rainbow Circle and Oak Dragon astrology summer camps have also enjoyed a predominantly experiential emphasis, with astrodrama being a regular feature.³⁷⁶

³⁷² See Anon, ‘AA Conference Programme 2006’, at <http://www.astrologer.com/aanet/conference/conf2006/astrology-association-2006-conference.pdf> [accessed 11/03/06].

³⁷³ See Anon, ‘ISAR 2006: Heavens on Earth Symposium: Schedule for Financial Track in Florence, Italy’, at <http://www.isarastrology.com/2006/as-track.php> [accessed 11/03/06].

³⁷⁴ See Anon, ‘Faculty of Astrological Studies Summer School Brochure 2006’ http://www.astrology.org.uk/assets/downloads/pdf/summer_school_brochure_2006.pdf [accessed 10/05/06].
[accessed 11/03/06]

³⁷⁵ See Anon, ‘The Wheel of Astrologers: The Turning Wheel Astrology Camp, 25-29 August 2005’, at <http://www.wheelofastrologers.co.uk/astrologycamp.html> [accessed 11/03/06].

³⁷⁶ See Anon, ‘Oak Dragon Camps: What are Oak Dragon camps All About?’, at <http://www.oakdragon.org.uk/> [accessed 11/03/06].

Methodological Issues

My aim here has been to enrich my inquiry into the embodied paradigm in relation to astrological work, amplifying what is, in effect, a rolling hypothesis of what might constitute an embodied astrology. In common with *grounded theory*, my approach has sought to allow substantive concepts and hypotheses to emerge from the data.³⁷⁷

My initial, informal enquiries with practitioners indicated that the notion of experiential astrology is very broadly defined and often in quite radically contradictory ways. The question of how experiential astrology is to be defined cannot be my concern here, as it would entail an extensive cultural study in its own right, requiring a broad and inclusive fieldwork sample of both practitioners and participants. I am therefore making no attempt to objectively *represent* experiential astrological practice through this fieldwork and will not be drawing any general conclusions about the nature of experiential astrology as a whole.

I have concentrated instead upon those who have worked explicitly to develop the practices that constellate around the group activity, astrodrama. It is the value that the practitioners place upon the embodied aspect of the astrological experience that I am seeking to draw out and understand more fully through the interviews. Through the qualitative methodology I am employing for this pilot study I aim to allow further insights to emerge into the theoretical framework of embodiment that I have been developing in this thesis.

The interviews were loosely focussed around several basic themes; the relationship of the astrologer to astrology; how the astrologer distinguishes experiential astrology

³⁷⁷ Glaser, Barney & Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: The Strategies for Qualitative Research* (New York: de Gruyter, 1999), p. 34.

from other types of astrology, how the astrologer perceives his/her role, the role of the body and the type of experiences that embodiment afford, the importance of working in a group, the techniques employed, the ecological context for astrological work, and the relationship between astrology and healing.³⁷⁸ These questions acted as stimuli for conversation. The questions did not always arise in the same order but were covered fully in each case; I deliberately left the structure loose enough for the interviewees to talk freely about their practices.

A considerable issue that I anticipated, in the particular context of this enquiry, revolved around the understanding of what is meant by the word *body* and by *embodiment*. In normal usage, the word *body* might be expected to refer to a discrete, bounded physical entity, rather than the phenomenological understanding of the body as being that which opens out receptively through its intertwining with the phenomenal world. Likewise, *embodiment* may be understood in the more psychological terms of being “grounded in one’s body”; I did not anticipate that it would necessarily carry with it the implications of the paradigm of embodiment we have been discussing. I have been sensitive to possible misunderstandings therefore both in the way I have framed my questions and in the way I have interpreted the responses. By juxtaposing the question about the role of the body with other questions pertaining to group dynamics, ecology and healing I hoped to encourage an exploration of the wider implications of embodiment, without, of course, imposing my own theory. Thus while the problem of definition could be seen as a limitation, it could also be seen as an opportunity for fruitful exploration.

³⁷⁸ See appendix 2, p. 132.

The Insider Perspective

I have approached this study as both practitioner and researcher. As a practising astrologer myself, fully conversant with the art, and an experienced practitioner of astro-drama, I am continually persuaded of the efficacy and value of this work *in practice*. I am thus a fully acknowledged insider in this study and my perspective, following Pike, should thus be considered an *emic*, rather than an *etic* one.³⁷⁹ While I cannot pretend to adopt a neutral distance from that which I am exploring, I am employing a reflexive approach that allows me to be both critical of the material I am considering and self-critical of my own inevitable perspective.³⁸⁰ This involves ‘setting both belief *and* disbelief aside’,³⁸¹ and allowing what Ninian Smart has described as an ‘informed empathy’ to permeate the research situation.³⁸² In critiquing the *tabula rasa* approach to research, Wach contests, ‘We need not a blank sheet but an impregnated one, one that will preserve the pictures projected onto it.’³⁸³ By moving beyond the idealistic neutral stance of objective analysis, and guarding against the solipsistic tendency to uncritically relativise each individual account, I hope to learn from the empathic, non-linear experiences that inevitably flavour each relational encounter.

³⁷⁹ Pike, Kenneth L., ‘Etic and Emic Standpoints for the Description of Behavior’, in Russell T. McCutcheon, *The Insider / Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion* (London: Cassell, 1999), pp. 28-36.

³⁸⁰ See, for example, Babcock, Barbara A., ‘Reflexivity: Definitions and Discriminations’, *Semiotica*, 1980, vol. 30, no. 1/2, (The Hague: Mouton Publishers 1980), pp. 1-14; Hufford, David J., ‘The Scholarly Voice and the Personal Voice: Reflexivity in Belief Studies’, in Russell T. McCutcheon, *The Insider / Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion* (London: Cassell, 1999), pp. 294-310 [hereafter Hufford, *Reflexivity*].

³⁸¹ Hufford, *Reflexivity*, p. 304.

³⁸² Smart, *Dimensions*, p. xxiii.

³⁸³ Wach, Joachim, ‘The Meaning and Task of the History of Religions’, in Russell T. McCutcheon, *The Insider / Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion* (London: Cassell, 1999), pp. 82-94 [hereafter McCutcheon, *Insider-Outsider Problem*], p. 91.

PART TWO: THE INTERVIEWS ³⁸⁴

Relationship to astrology

All three interview participants are highly regarded, internationally renowned astrological practitioners, each with thirty years or more experience, and each has become known for their pioneering work with experiential astrology, including astrodrama. What was communicated to me most strongly by each practitioner was the passion that they have for the work they do and their dedication to it. Jawer considers astrology to be a key factor in how he describes his world,³⁸⁵ while for Schermer it is her ‘whole life’, and not a day goes by where she does not refer to the sky and to her chart; ‘[i]t’s intimate, it’s deep in my bones’.³⁸⁶ P1 describes how astrology stimulated his creative side; very early on in his career, he was considering which music should go with each planet and how the planets would dress.³⁸⁷ He explains how he was far more interested in ‘finding ways of evoking the archetype...speaking the archetype’ than in techniques of interpretation for which he cared little.³⁸⁸ The value placed upon working creatively comes across very strongly with all three practitioners.

Both Jawer and Schermer have busy astrological practices, one-to-one client work taking up more of their time than group work. P1 does less one-to-one work than he used to, but is by far the most active in terms of astrodrama work, choosing to work in depth with groups preferably over a period of time ranging from five days to two weeks. Of the three, Schermer and Jawer are the more widely published in the astrological press. All three were far more interested in the therapeutic value of

³⁸⁴ For the transcripts of the interviews see appendices 1.1 – 1.3 at the end of this thesis, pp. 108-28.

³⁸⁵ Appendix 1.1, p. 111.

³⁸⁶ Appendix 1.2, p. 120.

³⁸⁷ Appendix 1.3, p. 124.

³⁸⁸ *ibid.*

astrology, its potential to facilitate insight, healing and personal transformation; none were particularly interested in its predictive value. Jawer considers that astrological work should be an ethical, ecological and socially cohesive practice, expressing the view that astrology has no value *in itself* ‘outside of its social, ethical, moral, cultural context’.³⁸⁹ All three have experience working with different forms of psychotherapeutic process work, including psychodrama and bodywork. Schermer incorporates the teachings of Kriya Yoga, of which she is an initiate, into her astrological practice, drawing as well upon bio-energetics exercises and body psychotherapy.³⁹⁰

The Role of the Astrologer

Schermer considers her role as an astrologer to be entirely compatible with her role as a healer, psychotherapist, counsellor and guide, stressing the importance of having a psychotherapeutic background, when working in this way with the ‘sensitive parts of people’s souls’.³⁹¹ In groups she identifies her role as ‘director’ in astrodrama work, but maintains the aim of moving out of that role so she can ‘just facilitate from the outside’.³⁹² Jawer too describes his role in group work as being ‘a sort of creative director’,³⁹³ with the emphasis on keeping the environment creative, so he can ‘keep elucidating a more stimulating, more provoking discovery’.³⁹⁴ All three see themselves stimulating the creative process, both in groups and in one-to-one work. P1 describes giving ‘little impulses’ to get the participants going so that the group

³⁸⁹ Appendix 1.1, p. 113.

³⁹⁰ Appendix 1.2, p. 121.

³⁹¹ *ibid.*, p. 122.

³⁹² *ibid.*

³⁹³ Appendix 1.1, p. 114.

³⁹⁴ *ibid.*

dynamics can begin to take over.³⁹⁵ As well as setting up the space and offering his creative facilitation, he also sees his role as creating ‘a place of trust...so that everybody has the feeling it’s safe to do whatever comes in the moment’.³⁹⁶

Control or Discovery?

The issue of how much control an astrologer should exert in his work is addressed explicitly by Jawer and is strongly hinted at in the other two accounts also. The aim for Schermer, is to instil in a participant the sense that they are ‘the protagonist of their own unfolding horoscope’, and she seeks to ‘get the power to them’ as soon as she can.³⁹⁷ One of her primary techniques, even with one-to-one work, is to use image boards to facilitate those ‘lay astrologers who...don’t know astrology’ to access the symbolism quickly.³⁹⁸ The emphasis is on the facilitation of meaning by the astrologer, not an imposed interpretation. Jawer contrasts a control model of astrology with a discovery model,³⁹⁹ identifying his own approach with the latter and the astrological tradition of prediction and the quest for certainty with the former.⁴⁰⁰ He makes the startling comparison between a religious fundamentalist text and the astrological ephemeris,⁴⁰¹ ‘... there’s nothing more fundamental than an ephemeris. There’s absolutely no wriggle room as to the position of a planet...we are as bound up in that as...anyone else who’s looking for order...at a time when humanity is...desperately in need of creativity’.⁴⁰²

³⁹⁵ Appendix 1.3, p. 128.

³⁹⁶ *ibid.*

³⁹⁷ Appendix 1.2, p. 120.

³⁹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 2.

³⁹⁹ Appendix 1.1, p. 115.

⁴⁰⁰ *ibid.*, p. 118.

⁴⁰¹ The book of tables in which planetary positions are recorded. See, for example, Michelsen, Neil F., *The American Ephemeris for the 21st Century, 2001-2050 at Midnight*, 2nd ed. (San Diego, CA: ACS Publications, 1999).

⁴⁰² Appendix 1.1, p. 118.

Jawer highlights the dangers inherent in the literal interpretation of planetary positions and suggests that creative or experiential work can serve as an ‘antidote to the excesses of control’ of what he calls ‘talk astrology’. So for Jawer, the astrodrama situation provides a place to play and discover, rather than a place to seek right answers. He rehearses a view also found in his *Mountain Astrologer* interview with de Prose, where he criticises astrologers for their preoccupation with discovering the *right* interpretive technique. There are many techniques in astrological work and Jawer is critical of what he sees as the futile search for the ‘magic bullet’ that will predict more accurately and diagnose with more certainty.⁴⁰³ Jawer suggests that the astrologer’s fascination with technique reflects the emphasis on explanation rather than experience and ‘can be a flight from symbolism’. The ‘richness of astrology’, he suggests, ‘is in the *symbols*’.⁴⁰⁴ This idea that it is in the experiential *engagement* with the astrological data, and not the data itself that produces the “magic” is entirely consistent with one of the main themes of this thesis, namely that the pattern of astrological symbols are the *ritual origin* of meaning, not its end result.

P1 reflects a very similar disposition through the way he resists imposing his own astrological interpretation on the planetary configuration being enacted in the astrodrama, preferring to allow it to reveal its meaning through the group dynamic, emphasising that in (what he calls) ‘life work’, one must be prepared for surprises.⁴⁰⁵ What came across to me in the way he described this was a remarkable humility; an astrologer with thirty years of experience, prepared to suspend judgment on what a particular horoscopic signature might mean and really allow meaning to emerge within the group. For all his hands-off approach, however, he does carefully and

⁴⁰³ *ibid.*, & de Prose, ‘Interview with Jawer’, p. 49.

⁴⁰⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

⁴⁰⁵ Appendix 1.3, p. 127.

respectfully set up the conditions for this to happen, which he refers to as the ritual.⁴⁰⁶ He enables people to get into their particular role primarily through music and the accompanying invitation to move or dance, ‘then something starts happening with them...once they’re in their roles’, and often this is a ‘non-verbal sequence’, expressed more through body movement.⁴⁰⁷ The level of trust that P1 invests in the group dynamic is striking, but he stresses that this is only possible because a great deal of patient preparation has gone into setting up the conditions for the ‘real magic’ to start happening.

Embodying the Archetypes

The key area of inquiry in the interviews revolved around the question of embodiment in astrological work. In all three interviews, before I even came to raise the question of embodiment, the practitioners had introduced the idea of the body being a pivotal resource for meaning and transformation in the astrodrama experience. P1 described the experience of astrodrama as being one ‘grounded in the body, in the feelings, in the senses’,⁴⁰⁸ while Jawer explained how the body can elucidate the symbolism of astrology through direct experience, better than the analytical process.⁴⁰⁹ Jawer describes the planetary walks that he employs to get participants to bring an experience of the qualities of different planetary archetypes more fully into the body, ‘someone who has...an underdeveloped Saturn could...inculcate the qualities of the

⁴⁰⁶ *ibid.*, p. 126.

⁴⁰⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁰⁸ *ibid.* This comment appears to reflect the more psychological understanding of the body referenced earlier (p.78). However, P1’s later comments demonstrate a much richer understanding of the body’s symbolic role.

⁴⁰⁹ Appendix 1.1, p. 111.

planet...by being aware of the spine slowing down the walk and healing their contact with the earth when walking'.⁴¹⁰

Schermer too cites an example of how she might get participants of the opposite signs, Aries and Libra, to push bodily against one another to create a sense of what that opposition might feel like in their lives. Again, this is a non-verbal exchange where meaning is understood to arise through physical enactment. When prompted further about the role of the body, Schermer acknowledges that we all learn in different ways, emphasising how experiential astrology opens up multi-sensory ways of learning, using image and movement to really feel what it is like 'to be a Mars in Aries versus a Mars in Taurus' in a way that could not necessarily be grasped just by talking about it.⁴¹¹ Schermer's emphasis here is on learning astrology though there would seem to be considerable overlap with its healing and transformational value.

When prompted as to the role of the body, P1 describes how, through exposure to 'half an hour of music or visuals', the energy of the particular archetype 'would become more and more dense',⁴¹² by which he seems to be implying more and more *embodied*; note he is referring not simply to the *human* participant, *but the archetype itself*. When prompted by an earlier question as to whether by *archetype* he means a Jungian archetype, he answered negatively, and conceded that he was 'in need for a better word [sic]', the idea of *gods* being 'a bit awkward in our times', settling eventually on 'root energies or something like that'.⁴¹³ He considers that 'the more

⁴¹⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹¹ Appendix 1.2, p. 121.

⁴¹² Appendix 1.3, p. 126.

⁴¹³ *ibid.*, p. 124.

you go to the root...the more possibilities of expression you have'.⁴¹⁴ This reflects Maggie Hyde's earlier comment about the astrological symbol being a root in itself, pre-conceptual and thus irreducible to a literate concept such as a Jungian archetype. The embodiment of this root energy is described by P1 not as being part of a person's inner world or a psychological projection, but as a living presence in the room becoming embodied in its own right, through a participant, and recognised as such by the other participants provoking different bodily reactions in them. As he puts it, 'everybody feels within his body [sic] the feeling of the relationship to the archetype and you know straight away if this thing gives you power or if it makes you weak'.⁴¹⁵

In addition to Jawer's planetary walks, he also cites another fascinating way of embodying and evoking the planet-archetype, what he calls 'singing charts'.⁴¹⁶ He has the person whose birth chart is being enacted sit or stand in the centre of the circle, while the other participants take up their planetary roles around the periphery; he asks each person to make a sound that resonates the quality of the planet they are embodying in terms of its condition in the horoscope by sign, house and aspect. Jawer commented on the remarkable power of this experience, citing a particular example of a participant sounding 'Pluto in Virgo' such that it encapsulated the meaning of the planet in that situation in a way that was untranslatable in words.⁴¹⁷ Both this technique and the planetary walks can attribute their efficacy, according to Jawer, to the fact that 'the body tends to lie less readily than the mind... when we experience something in our bodies, it...takes root at a deeper level'.⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁴ Appendix 1.3, p. 124.

⁴¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 126.

⁴¹⁶ Appendix 1.1, p. 115.

⁴¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 116.

⁴¹⁸ *ibid.*

Astrology as Ecology

I was keen to explore in the interviews whether the practitioners perceive astrology within an ecological context, something I was aware that Jawer had already discussed in print. The idea of astrology *as ecology* has been postulated by Curry; the astrological engagement offering an authentic perspective particular to an immanent experience of place and moment that includes the cosmos.⁴¹⁹ Engaging with astrology, Curry argues, can remind us that the earth is our home (*ecos*) and that *home* has a cosmic dimension.⁴²⁰ In his article, *Astro-Ecology*, Jawer describes astrology as an ancient, cross-cultural means of connecting human lives with the collective cycles and patterns of the cosmos.⁴²¹ He reminds us that we belong to the earth and ‘cannot remain aliens on our planet when we use astrology’.⁴²² He adds to this in the interview by suggesting that ‘one of astrology’s...greatest gifts is that it puts us within nature’.⁴²³ He suggests that experiential astrology offers the possibility of a participatory relationship between the human being and the expression of the planetary energy, and equates this with the idea of an ‘ecological environment’.⁴²⁴

Schermer associates experiential astrology with ecology through Ficino’s ideas of cultivating *soul* by having participatory experiences with natural phenomena.⁴²⁵ She acknowledges the pluralistic nature of astrology, and describes how important it is for her to honour the gods, which she does through the rituals she conducts at specific, astrologically determined times of the day, at the altars she has positioned deliberately

⁴¹⁹ Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, pp. 122-4.

⁴²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 124.

⁴²¹ Jawer, Jeff, ‘Astro-Ecology’, at <http://www.asabovesobelow.com/creativeastrology/astro.htm> accessed, 15/03/06.

⁴²² *ibid.*

⁴²³ Appendix 1.1, p. 113.

⁴²⁴ *ibid.*

⁴²⁵ Appendix 1.2, p. 122.

in different parts of her house.⁴²⁶ She envisages a ‘co-creative process’ between human beings, and the gods, reflected in a reciprocal evolution through movement, perceiving a ‘real harmony...a real I and Thou resonating relationship between the gods and my life on earth’.⁴²⁷

In an earlier personal communication, she told me how she had made talismans under auspicious planetary aspects to her own birth chart, for use in personal ritual.⁴²⁸ In an article in *The Mountain Astrologer*, she emphasises the potency of conducting rituals at particular, astrologically significant moments, in significant *places*, in appropriately oriented ‘sacred space’ (e.g. a circle with a five pointed star and carefully placed protective powers), and with meaningful ritual objects to serve as talismans.⁴²⁹ This clearly resonates with the idea of drawing down the “energy” of the sun, moon and planets into a relationship of immanent participation, rather than relating to them as far-off distant bodies exerting some esoteric influence upon human destiny. That ritual moment, focussed either through prayer or meditation upon a particular planetary deity or through ecstatic dancing or drumming, she describes as being a ‘co-creative moment...a sense of connection to the cosmos’.⁴³⁰ The idea of the ecological relationship being an intimate engagement with a particular god or other-than-human presence in a particular situation comes across very strongly here. She clearly conceives of spirits as being autonomous entities who participate in the experience, warning of ‘mischievous spirits’ who might interfere if an appropriate closure of the

⁴²⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 122-3

⁴²⁷ *ibid.*

⁴²⁸ Personal communication.

⁴²⁹ Schermer, ‘Downloading’, pp. 24-8.

⁴³⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 27-8.

ritual is not effected.⁴³¹ Clearly, what Schermer is involved with here cannot easily be reduced to an exercise in psychological astrology.

Healing the Individual, Community & Cosmos

In all three interviews, there is a strong emphasis on the value of experiential astrology as vehicle for healing and transformation. The sense that I got from each of them was that the process of embodying the archetypes, or gods, was somehow facilitating a healing process both in the individual participants and in the group as a whole. While none of them referred explicitly to examples of *physical* healing of particular ailments, the impression that came across was that healing was occurring on many levels. Experiential astrology heals and transforms, Jawer insists, (echoing our earlier discussion) ‘by providing a pluralistic view of reality...[o]vercoming the absolutism of any singular perspective’.⁴³² This reconnection to the energy-releasing, core experience of the archetypes, is, he suggests, ‘limited by intellect or by a verbal process’.⁴³³ He further identifies as a limiting factor the over-personalised ‘psychological component’, which he believes the direct experience of the archetypes can ‘move us past’.⁴³⁴ He stresses that through role-playing or singing charts, or doing planet walks, the non-verbal element of experience is addressed and this can overcome the limitations of human language in a healing and therapeutic way.⁴³⁵ This is particularly effective in groups, he suggests, because it reflects the reality of lived experience and can bypass the power issues that can come up in one-to-one work. For Jawer, the idea of the de-contextualised individual provides a very limited view of reality, and he suggests that it is the presence of the group, the dynamics of

⁴³¹ *ibid.*, p. 28.

⁴³² Appendix 1.1, p. 118.

⁴³³ *ibid.*, p. 119.

⁴³⁴ *ibid.*

⁴³⁵ *ibid.*

movement, and the pluralistic exchange of perspectives that facilitates the healing process.⁴³⁶

Schermer combines kriya yoga spiritual exercises with astrological embodiment to counterbalance planetary energies and to effect healing and transformation,⁴³⁷ which, in addition to her group rituals, are clearly intended to serve a healing function. She has emphasised that the moment and place must be honoured for healing to occur.

The significance of *place* in astrological ritual drama is emphasised even more explicitly by P1, who talks about working in power places in nature, in old theatres, temples, cliffs or gorges and how he would light a fire there, do some chanting, drumming or a beginning ritual as a ‘straw to climb into the magic world’.⁴³⁸ He acknowledges his shamanic role in these rituals, describing them as shamanic rituals.⁴³⁹ P1 emphasises that the planetary gods had to have their temples placed only in certain places because they ‘naturally correspond’, and he observes how much more accessible the magical world is from these places.⁴⁴⁰ He cites an example of working with a group at the acropolis on the Greek island of Thassos during the Transit of Venus transit of 2004.⁴⁴¹ After opening up through a beginning ritual, a participant took the role of the Sun, standing on a marble slab, while another, playing Venus and dressed in appropriate garb according to her zodiacal placement, conjoined

⁴³⁶ *ibid.*

⁴³⁷ Appendix 1.2, pp. 121-2.

⁴³⁸ Appendix 1.3, p. 129.

⁴³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 130.

⁴⁴¹ *ibid.* This was an inferior conjunction of Venus and the Sun, when Venus passed directly in front of the Sun. See: http://sunearth.gsfc.nasa.gov/sunearthday/2004/index_vthome.htm [accessed on 15/04/06].

the Sun, mirroring the cosmic event. P1 played appropriate music for drawing the group further into this cosmic experience.⁴⁴²

P1 explicitly acknowledges the healing power of this type of work for *everyone* in the group. He stresses, however, that deeper levels of healing are more evident where groups have been together over longer periods. He even sees this type of ritual drama having a potentially healing resonance beyond the group itself. He compares his work to Moreno's *sociodrama*⁴⁴³ and discusses how the themes enacted in an astrodrama can have a spontaneous impact in the wider society, beyond the individual. However, while Moreno's idea of effecting social transformation required a cultural broadcast of the sociodrama through radio or television,⁴⁴⁴ P1 is suggesting that socio-cultural transformation can emanate directly from the contained performance. Indeed, it is considered to be the sacred containment of the ritual that gives the performance its transformative power.⁴⁴⁵ P1 refers to how he sometimes works with the horoscope of a nation or collective social or political institution and gets the group to express the archetypal themes for that horoscope, a type of experiential *mundane astrology*.⁴⁴⁶ This, he claims, can have a healing effect at a broad social levels. He notes that this healing power can be transferred to the animal and plant worlds also.⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴² Appendix 1.3, p. 130.

⁴⁴³ *ibid.*, p. 126. Sociodrama is designed to be more socially impactful than psychodrama. See Moreno, *Psychodrama*, pp. 18-19.

⁴⁴⁴ Moreno, *Psychodrama*, p. 19.

⁴⁴⁵ Appendix 1.3, pp. 130-1.

⁴⁴⁶ This relates to the political astrology of nations and social collectives. See Baigent Michael, Nicholas Campion & Charles Harvey, *Mundane Astrology, An Introduction to the Astrology of Groups and Nations* (London: Thorsons, 1984).

⁴⁴⁷ Appendix 1.3, p. 131.

P1 is keen to cite the healing and ecological value of astrology's inherent pluralism.⁴⁴⁸ This is reflected in his decision not to place the chart owner in the centre of their own enacted horoscope, so that they are always experiencing their drama from a particular perspective, resisting the idea of a central self that can somehow direct the other planets from a position of centralised authority. This seems to be a genuinely pluralistic approach, which honours the idea that life is always lived from a particular embodied point of view,⁴⁴⁹ and gives me the impression of being inherently shamanistic. P1 continually emphasises the need for a longer period of time than a day or even a weekend to build up the sense of safety and trust that can enable participants to enter fully into the unpredictable contingencies of the drama.

Jawer compares astrodrama work to an alchemical process, the container, or alembic being necessary to support the work; it must be strong enough not to crack under the pressure.⁴⁵⁰ He considers that we don't have 'a sacred framework, a philosophical framework in which to place ourselves in relationship to these archetypes', and can easily overlook the power we are actually dealing with, the archetypes being so much bigger than we are as individuals.⁴⁵¹ He really emphasises the importance of de-personalising astrology, 'experiencing the archetypes as archetypes',⁴⁵² and recognising too that our relationship to planetary energy is a two-way relationship, that an astrological relationship is a co-creative one which reverberates beyond the individual and the individual's horoscope; beyond even the human grouping, it

⁴⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁴⁹ Appendix 1.3, p. 127.

⁴⁵⁰ Appendix 1.1, p. 112.

⁴⁵¹ *ibid.*, pp. 112-3.

⁴⁵² *ibid.*, p. 112.

reverberates out into the cosmos.⁴⁵³ This constitutes, for Jawer, a genuinely ecological connection,⁴⁵⁴ intrinsically a healing connection.⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵³ *ibid.* See also Jawer, Jeff, 'We are the Transits', *The Mountain Astrologer*, June 1993, pp. 5-6.

⁴⁵⁴ Appendix 1.1, p. 113.

⁴⁵⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 118-9.

PART THREE: FINDINGS AND OBSERVATIONS

These interviews contain a notable richness of account in what were actually quite short conversations of about half an hour. Obviously, the major drawback of this limited pilot study is that I have not had the opportunity to work directly with any of the three practitioners and neither have I been able to collect responses from people who have participated in their work. However, as I have already stated, this is not intended to be a survey of experiential practice as such, but rather an exploratory inquiry to enrich an emerging theoretical framework. I would suggest that this has been achieved here.

A number of consistent themes reveal themselves in these accounts, such as the pivotal role of the body, movement, unscripted creative expression and the idea of astrological knowledge being communicated non-verbally, revealing a tacit knowledge that can be commonly experienced. The ecological and healing value of astrodrاما and its associated practices is consistently emphasised. It is also clear that the facilitation of the group requires the astrologer to release interpretive control and allow meaning to reveal itself through a combination of group dynamics and the embodiment of the astrological symbols, energies or archetypes. On this latter point, the problem arises, *in language*, as to what it is actually meant by these terms.

All three interviewees have acknowledged the pluralistic nature of astrology's symbols; indeed the multitude of perspectives afforded by its pluralism has been associated explicitly with its healing power. However the question of what these ritually engaged symbols actually reveal remains (perhaps necessarily) ambiguous and at times apparently contradictory. Participants have spoken primarily about

archetypes, also energies, or *root* energies; Schermer talks about the gods, whilst in the same breath about archetypes as evolving ‘psychological principles’.⁴⁵⁶ Jawer emphasises the importance of experiencing the ‘archetypes as archetypes’,⁴⁵⁷ which suggests he is granting them autonomous *being*, while his humanist stance perhaps dissuades him from talking about them as gods or daemons. P1 also resists calling them *gods*,⁴⁵⁸ but at the same time, he does not seem prepared to reduce the archetypes to aspects of the human psyche either. This makes me suspect that his choice of the term *archetype* may depend more on the demands of intellectual and social legitimacy through psychological language than on an intended exclusion of non-human agencies actually participating in the performance. What his caution does reveal, as with the other interviewees, is a sense of there being an interpretive gap between the way the experience of embodiment is being described and what *may* actually be going on. Again, I am limited in my ability to judge having not participated in their work.

If there is such a gap, however, then this may be because an experience of more-than human embodiment cannot easily be articulated outside of its sacred context. As Hanegraaff would argue, the after-the-fact description *must* be disenchanted, terminologically, so as to be accommodated within a conceptual framework that is culturally acceptable.⁴⁵⁹

The practices of both Moreno’s psychodrama and the instances of astrodrama and astrological ritual discussed in the interviews seem to accord well with a paradigm of

⁴⁵⁶ Appendix 1.2, p. 122.

⁴⁵⁷ Appendix 1.1, p. 112.

⁴⁵⁸ Appendix 1.3, p. 124.

⁴⁵⁹ See Hanegraaff, *Magic*, p. 378.

embodiment. The shared experiences, group catharses and revelations of embodied presences also appear to resonate well with Victor Turner's notion of *communitas*.⁴⁶⁰ This latter is conceived as an intuitively shared and socially levelling encounter with 'liminal *personae* ("threshold people"), who slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space'.⁴⁶¹ Turner, however, insists on separating these liminal *personae*, conceived still as human (albeit socially ambiguous) persons, from the symbolic forms that are being impressed upon them, 'by force of custom into the likeness of reality'.⁴⁶² Edith Turner rejects this symbolist approach to ritual as being a reductive psychological explanation for an experientially real phenomena, arguing from her own experience of *participating* in African healing ritual. Having had a direct, communally shared experience of more-than-human embodiment herself during such a ritual,⁴⁶³ she insists that symbols are not simply 'ritual markers', but rather 'liminal hedges or protectors' that enclose a secret which cannot be known from the outside.⁴⁶⁴ As Susan Greenwood argues, 'if an anthropologist wants to examine magic, then she or he must directly experience the otherworld,'⁴⁶⁵ therein realising the liminal not as a literate concept, but as an embodied, non-verbal reality. Victor Turner himself concedes that one cannot use worlds to speak directly *about* the spirit world, since one finds oneself in a non-verbal world.⁴⁶⁶ Yet, as Abram reminds us, one can use words to speak *to* the 'expressive presences' of that world.⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶⁰ See Turner, Victor, *The Ritual Process* (New York: Cornell, 1969), pp. 94-165.

⁴⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. 95.

⁴⁶² Turner, Edith, with William Blodgett, Singleton Kahona, and Fideli Benwa, *Experiencing Ritual. A New Interpretation of African Healing* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992) [hereafter Turner E., *Experiencing Ritual*], p. 11.

⁴⁶³ *ibid.*, pp. 54-82.

⁴⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p. 14.

⁴⁶⁵ Greenwood, Susan, *Magic, Witchcraft & the Otherworld: An Anthropology* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), p. 12.

⁴⁶⁶ See Turner, E., *Experiencing Ritual*, p. 9.

⁴⁶⁷ Abram, *Spell*, p. 71.

Likewise in the astrological rituals cited by the practitioners, symbols appear to be revealing themselves, apparently autonomously, through embodiment in the manner of Csordas's *phenomenological specificities*. They are described as having an unpredictable expression and controlling that expression, the astrologers' suggest, would be at the cost of creativity and the potential for the realisation of new meaning. In surrendering control within the liminal conditions of the astrological ritual, the symbols *may* be legitimately experienced as gods, spirits, daemons, liminal personae *in their own right*. Thus, as the ecological practice that each interviewee has acknowledged experiential astrology to be, one might anticipate there to be a disposition of *respect* (implicit in animistic ways of engaging with the world) that comes from including those more-than-human subjectivities as having autonomous ontological value within the ritual context. This respect came across to me in the interviews with the three practitioners in a way that it did not in Moreno's written account of psychodrama as cathartic hallucination. The astrologers' accounts would appear to lean more authentically toward a disposition of respectful animistic engagement.

Moreno, writing in 1946, considers the embodied presences of the psychodrama experience to be ultimately 'delusions', so, as in Victor Turner's model of *communitas*, Willis observes, 'the infra-social world of aliens, beasts and cosmic spirits - especially spirits - would seem to have no part'.⁴⁶⁸ The difference, however, is that while Turner, unlike his wife Edith, never actually took part in the healing rituals and experienced the other-than-human liminal personae, Moreno was a

⁴⁶⁸ Willis, Roy, *Some Spirits Heal, Others Only Dance: A Journey into Human Selfhood in an African Village* (Oxford: Berg, 1999), p. 118.

practitioner who has been compelled to rationalise his practice. Edith Turner acknowledges even of her husband that he swayed ‘between rationalisation and deep understanding’.⁴⁶⁹ Similarly, Moreno’s deep understanding, gained no doubt *through practice*, would have had to be couched (on account of his own conceptual framework as much as society’s) in the disenchanting language of psychology.

Could it be the case that an embodied astrological engagement moves us closer to that disposition of animistic respect for a living world than a process such as psychodrama? P1 has suggested that the astrological framework gives greater freedom for the archetype to ‘pop up with a theme’ than the psychological model, which he considers is much more controlled by the human framework of family relations. Without that frame, P1 insists, ‘you can end up anywhere’.⁴⁷⁰ While this is a general observation, it does suggest that P1’s way of working allows what he calls the ‘root energies’ a sphere of expression that is less impeded by human control. Perhaps, as we have discussed, the astrological symbol provides a metaphor-rich distancing from everyday literal concepts that can allow those pre-conceptual animate presences to express themselves.

Jawer also notes that attempting to control the archetypes by just talking *about* them as concepts doesn’t stop them from showing up and disrupting the order you have imposed; as in the example he cites of the supposedly non-experiential Pluto workshop.⁴⁷¹ However, what astro-drama seems to offer is a ritual container, Jawer’s alchemical alembic, which actually honours the presences and doesn’t simply seek to control them and manipulate them for human ends. The ritual then would seem to be

⁴⁶⁹ Turner, E., *Experiencing Ritual*, p. 29.

⁴⁷⁰ Appendix 1.3, p. 131.

⁴⁷¹ Appendix 1.2, p. 121.

more about preparing or aligning oneself to the unpredictable demands of Greenwood's "otherworld", rather than seeking to manipulate energies or forces for their instrumental use in *this* world.

The interviews I have conducted both support and enrich the emerging paradigm of embodiment for astrological practice. This encourages me to want to engage with further research at a more experiential level and to develop my theoretical framework through practice by adopting the role of participant researcher.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have suggested that an experiential engagement with astrological symbolism, perceived within a participatory paradigm of embodiment, may constitute an authentic phenomenology, which admits the possibility of more-than-human revelation and discloses one's life-world or cosmic sphere to be woven together into a cohesive fabric of dynamic relationships. This is an original thesis and so any conclusions drawn here must be considered tentative, inviting further research and consideration.

Of all philosophers, Merleau-Ponty would appear to have most effectively demonstrated the untenable imposition of idealistic dualism, his phenomenology dissolving the traditional dualities that artificially render distinct subject from object, perceiver from perceived, spirit or mind from body. Contemporary ecological thinkers such as David Abram, drawing particularly on Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of "flesh", conceive our human ontology to be necessarily subject to an ongoing encounter with the animated presences of a *more-than-human* world, and I have disclosed in this thesis original parallels with the seemingly animistic, and thus ecological nature of the astrological encounter.

Despite the disenchantment of the world, eloquently bemoaned by Weber, there would seem to exist a spontaneous human tendency toward animistic participation that the imposition of mind/matter dualism may have illegitimised, but has certainly never been able to eliminate. This work has drawn attention to the fact that within an embodied paradigm, the experience of animistic "otherness" may be an authentic

realisation, not a naïve cognitive error. We have discussed how an astrological symbol, whether manifest as planet, animal, tree, rock, human person, or literate artefact might, within a paradigm of embodiment, be authentically revealed in a particular context as possessing temporal, more-than-human agency, disclosing meaning and releasing animate forces that reach far beyond conventional linguistic representation.

We have explored how both phenomenological and praxiological approaches support the paradigm of embodiment as the existential ground of perception *and* cultural expression. Merleau-Ponty has charged the practice of philosophy with the restoration of the ‘power to signify, a birth of meaning or a wild meaning, an expression of experience by experience’.⁴⁷² In the same way, Devisch has charged anthropology with disclosing the ‘bodily’ ways in which people create and engage in a culture ‘from within its own genuine sources’.⁴⁷³ Might we not equally charge the practice of astrology, experientially performed within a necessarily embodied ritual context, with the power to involve its participants in meaningful revelation from within its own authentic sphere of activity? Indeed, should we not also entertain the possibility that the bodily enactment of an astrological ritual, as an authentic expression of the weave of the life, might actually reverberate out into the “weave” and be affective beyond its immediate sphere of activity? This claim invites further experiential and theoretical research.

As Curry has argued, the astrological map, as a literate artefact drawing upon millennia of accreted tradition, is the essential ritual prerequisite to the heart of a

⁴⁷² Merleau-Ponty, *Visible*, p. 155.

⁴⁷³ Devisch, *Weaving*, p. 2.

symbolic experience,⁴⁷⁴ revealed, as this thesis has explored, through its metaphorical turning. Astrology, engaged with in this way, may become *potentially*, a suddenly inspired moment of poetic embodiment facilitating ontological and epistemological transformation. This research could be developed through a qualitative fieldwork study with astrological practitioners to enquire into what actually happens, in their experience, when the astrological performance *realises* itself.

It has also been suggested here that the human body, as the primary metaphor for both society and cosmos *can*, when ritually engaged in relation to other bodies through symbolic astrological activity, be a source of healing, transformation and ecological reconnection to the world. This possibility is clearly evidenced in the accounts of the practitioners I have interviewed and this is an area of research that I intend to pursue.

We have considered astrology's appeal for legitimacy in a disenchanted world; Cornelius asking how else this particular form of symbolism could have survived 'without being in the corrupt position of *lying about itself* in some way in order to get by [my italics]'.⁴⁷⁵ This is apparent with astrologers who rely too heavily upon Jung's model of the psyche for their credibility. While still situated at the dubitable end of psychological discourse, the pseudo-rationalism of archetypes and the collective unconscious still presents a more acceptable scientific face than to have to acknowledge the temporal embodiment of ontologically ambiguous presences to whom respectful attention should be paid. While this latter possibility is far from absent in the rich and subtle ambiguities of Jung's own complex understanding, it

⁴⁷⁴ Willis & Curry, *Astrology*, p. 124.

⁴⁷⁵ Cornelius, Geoffrey, 'Is Astrology Divination and Does it Matter?', at <http://cura.free.fr/quinq/01gfcor.html> [accessed 18/04/06].

may risk being brushed over or actively ignored by Jungian astrologers in their quest for interpretive clarity and social sanction.⁴⁷⁶

One of the themes that has emerged out of the interviews with the three experiential practitioners is that they are each seeking to evoke an experience which lies *beyond* psychological explanation. Indeed a phenomenological disposition seems far more appropriate when considering the type of experiences that they each describe. It is also notable that these transformational experiences are being shared in a way that leads one to assume that it is not just the individual who is being healed or transformed, but something more beyond, something more-than-human.

Yet even among these practitioners who, perhaps more explicitly than other astrologers, are *realising their practices* in an experientially embodied way, recourse is still sought in systematic human constructs such as psychology or Platonic Idealism, as the only (apparently) available frameworks through which to justify their experiences.

One might suggest, then, that if astrology can more fully embrace the paradigm of embodiment, drawing on a phenomenology that admits the mystery and enchantment of animistic participation, rather than a psychology that insists on dualistic separation, then truthful legitimisation may follow somewhat more authentically. Perhaps we astrologers will feel less compelled to confine the extraordinary nature of our practices within such disenchanting conceptual frameworks and step into the full realisation of the concrete magic we are actually performing.

⁴⁷⁶ For discussion, see Hyde, *Jung*, especially pp. 81-101.

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**M.A. IN CULTURAL ASTRONOMY AND
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TOWARDS AN EMBODIED ASTROLOGY:

Embodiment as a Paradigm for Astrological Practice

JOHN DAVID WADSWORTH

ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to develop the paradigm of embodiment already extant in philosophical and anthropological discourse as an alternative theoretical framework through which to re-evaluate the practice of astrology. It problematises conceptual religious, scientific and psychological assumptions about astrology and advocates instead a phenomenological approach that admits, *in practice*, the potential for the pre-conceptual realisation of astrological symbolism, as an embodied poetics of lived experience.

In support of the argument, I will draw on the work of scholars whose theses support the idea that as human beings, we are always, already involved in an animistic participation with a more-than-human corporeal field, rich in agency. I will discuss how an embodied engagement with astrological symbolism might afford a temporal realisation of a greater than human perspective; furthermore, that it is realisable only within a contextualised moment of ecological perceptual cohesion, where traditional ontological and epistemological divisions are dissolved. I will address the issues this raises for astrology. Rather than being sought out only for his interpretive expertise, might the astrologer be confronted with a very different role, as a facilitator of embodied understanding?

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STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

I declare that this dissertation represents my own work, except where due acknowledgement is made, and that it has not been previously included in a thesis, dissertation or report submitted to the University or any other institution for a degree, diploma or other qualification.

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<u>TABLE OF CONTENTS</u>	page
INTRODUCTION	1
METHODOLOGY AND REVIEW OF PREVIOUS WORK	3
Embodiment as a Paradigm	5
Embodiment and Animistic Participation	8
Astrology and Embodiment	10
TOWARDS AN EMBODIED ASTROLOGY	
PART ONE: THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF EMBODIMENT	13
The <i>Beginnings</i> of Astrology	13
Recovering a Phenomenological Perspective	19
Embodied Participation as a Critique of Dualism	21
Astrology and The Flesh of Language	26
PART TWO: THE POETICS OF EMBODIMENT	33
The Weave of Life	33
The Metaphorical Hinge	36
Ritual Metaphor & the Realised Symbol	40
PART THREE: EMBODIMENT IN A MORE-THAN-HUMAN WORLD	48
From Phenomenology to Animism	48
Astrology and the Pluralism of Embodiment	54
The Astrologer as Shaman?	59
EXPERIENTIAL ASTROLOGY AND ASTRODRAMA: A CASE STUDY	
PART ONE: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY & METHODOLOGY	64
Introduction	64
Psychodrama	67
Astrodrama	69
The Extent of Experiential Astrology in Practice	70
Methodological Issues	72
The Insider Perspective	74
PART TWO: THE INTERVIEWS	75
Relationship to Astrology	75
The Role of the Astrologer	76
Control or Discovery?	77
Embodying the Archetypes	79
Astrology as Ecology	82
Healing the Individual, Community & Cosmos	84
PART THREE: FINDINGS AND OBSERVATIONS	89
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION	95
BIBLIOGRAPHY	99
APPENDICES	111