

# Holotropic Research and Archetypal Astrology

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*In the concluding article in this section, Stanislav Grof addresses the interface between transpersonal psychology and the astrological perspective, describing his collaboration with Richard Tarnas and the connections they discovered between the planetary archetypes and the psychodynamics of the unconscious. This paper, previously unpublished, presents the remarkable evidence in support of archetypal astrology from Grof's research into non-ordinary states of consciousness over the last five decades.*

Psychedelic substances, in general, and LSD, in particular, can profoundly influence the functioning of the human psyche. Depending on the personality of the individual who takes them and on the “set and setting,” their effect can be extremely beneficial or deleterious. Two people can take the same substance, the same dosage, in the same location, and yet have radically different, even diametrically opposite experiences. For this reason, since the beginning of psychedelic experimentation, researchers have attempted to find ways of predicting what impact these substances would have on the person who takes them.

The effort to discover a method for predicting the reaction to psychedelics and the therapeutic outcome was one of the objectives of a large clinical study that our research team conducted at the Maryland Psychiatric Research Center in the 1960s and 1970s. We used for this purpose a battery of standard psychological tests, including the Minnesota Multi-dimensional Personality Inventory (MMPI), Shostrom's Personal Orientation Inventory (POI), the Rorschach Inkblot Test, our own Psychedelic Experience Questionnaire (PEQ), and others. This research confirmed my earlier findings at the Psychiatric Research Institute in Prague, Czechoslovakia, and the conclusion from the study of professional literature, that the results of the tests developed and commonly used by Western psychology were essentially useless in this regard.

Ironically, when after years of frustrating effort I finally found a tool that made such predictions possible, it was more controversial than psychedelics themselves. It was astrology, a discipline that, even after years of studying transpersonal phenomena, I myself tended to dismiss as a ridiculous pseudoscience. I came to realize, however, that astrology could be an invaluable tool in the work with both psychedelics and with other forms of non-ordinary (or “holotropic”) states of consciousness such as those induced by powerful experiential techniques of psychotherapy (primal therapy, rebirthing, and holotropic breathwork) or occurring spontaneously during psychospiritual crises.

The radical change in my attitude toward astrology has been the result of collaboration with psychologist and philosopher Richard Tarnas, my close friend and colleague. For over three decades, beginning in 1976, we have been jointly exploring the astrological correlates of mystical experiences, psychospiritual crises, psychotic episodes, psychedelic states, and holotropic breathwork sessions. This work has shown that astrology, particularly the study of planetary transits, can predict and illuminate both the archetypal content of non-ordinary states of consciousness and the timing of when particular states are most likely to occur. Our systematic study of the correlations between the nature and content of holotropic states and planetary transits convinced me that a combination of deep experiential therapy with archetypal psychology and transit astrology is the most promising strategy for the future development of psychiatry and depth psychology.

## **Astrology and Modern Western Science**

I am aware that this is a very strong statement, particularly in view of the fact that many mainstream scientists consider astrology, as I did myself, to be in principle incompatible with the scientific world view. Like many other esoteric systems, astrology was one of the victims of the rationalism and materialism of the Scientific Revolution. It was rejected not on the basis of scientific proof that its premises were false, but because of its incompatibility with the fundamental metaphysical assumptions of Western science dominated by monistic materialism. More specifically, there are several important reasons for the dismissal of astrology by materialistic scientists.

First, Western science portrays the universe as an impersonal and largely inanimate mechanical system, a supermachine that created itself and is governed by mechanical natural laws. In this context, life, consciousness, and intelligence are seen as more or less accidental products of matter. By contrast, the basic assumptions of astrology are that the cosmos is a creation of superior intelligence, that it is based on an inconceivably intricate deeper order, and that this order reflects a higher purpose. The astrological perspective closely reflects the original meaning of the Greek word *Kosmos* that describes the world as an intelligibly ordered, patterned, and coherently interconnected system with humanity as an integral part of the whole. In this view, human life is not the result of random forces ruled by capricious chance, but follows an intelligible trajectory that is in some way attuned to the movements of celestial bodies and can thus be at least partially intuited.

Second, because astrological thinking presupposes the existence of *archetypes*—timeless primordial principles underlying and informing the fabric of the material world—it recognizes a dimension of reality that cannot be detected using techniques of modern science. Under the influence of positivist materialism, science only recognizes the existence of hidden, invisible dimensions of reality if these can be made accessible through the use of devices that extend the

range of our senses, such as microscopes, telescopes, or sensors detecting various bands of electromagnetic radiation. The archetypal dimension clearly does not fall into this category.

The tendency to interpret the world in terms of archetypal principles first emerged in ancient Greece and was one of the most striking characteristics in Greek philosophy and culture. The archetypes can be seen from several different perspectives. In the Homeric epics they took the form of personified mythological figures, as deities, such as Zeus, Poseidon, Hera, Aphrodite, or Ares. In the philosophy of Plato, they were described as pure metaphysical principles, the transcendent Ideas or Forms, that possessed independent existence of their own in a realm not accessible to ordinary human senses. In modern times, C. G. Jung brought the concept of archetypes into modern psychology, describing them primarily as psychological principles.<sup>1</sup> For all Jung's efforts, however, and despite his attempts to formulate his theory based solely on empirical observation of the psyche, the existence of archetypes is usually either ignored or summarily dismissed by the scientific establishment.

Third, another major obstacle for seriously considering astrology is the exclusively deterministic thinking in Western science. The universe is seen as a mechanistic chain of causes and effects and the principle of linear deterministic causality is considered to be mandatory for all processes in the universe. One major disquieting exception to this rule, the origin of the universe and the question of the "cause of all causes," is seldom mentioned in scientific discussions. Deterministic causality is the only type of influence many critics of astrology can usually imagine and take into consideration. And the idea of a direct material effect of the planets on the psyche and the world is, of course, implausible and absurd.

Finally, the emphasis that astrology puts on the moment of birth does not make any sense in academic psychology and psychiatry, which generally do not see biological birth as a psychologically relevant event. Academic and clinical psychiatrists typically use a very narrow conceptual framework limited to postnatal biography and the Freudian individual unconscious. They do not usually recognize the perinatal level of the unconscious pertaining to the deep-seated memory of the birth trauma and its powerful influence on the adult personality and biographical experiences. The rejection of the psychological significance of birth is based on the highly questionable assumption that the brain of the newborn cannot register the traumatic impact of the birth experience, because the process of myelination (formation of the fatty myelin sheaths covering the neurons) in his or her brain is not fully completed at the time of birth.

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1. For more on the evolution of the archetypal perspective from ancient myth to modern psychology, see Richard Tarnas's "Archetypal Principles" in this issue of *Archai*, 23–35; and C. G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, in *Collected Works*, vol. 9,1, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1959).

## Evidence for Astrology from Holotropic Research

Since the 1950s, however, several decades of systematic research of holotropic states have generated vast amounts of data that undermine these basic assumptions of materialistic science and bring supportive evidence for astrology. These observations reveal:

1. the existence of transpersonal experiences that point to an ensouled cosmos permeated with consciousness and creative cosmic intelligence
2. the possibility of direct experience of spiritual realities, including archetypal figures, motifs, and realms, and empirical validation of the authenticity of these experiences
3. the critical psychodynamic importance of the birth experience for the psychological development and life of the individual
4. the existence of synchronicities that represent an important and viable alternative to the principle of mechanistic causality
5. the striking correlations between the psychodynamics of the birth process and the planetary archetypes associated with the four outer planets
6. the extraordinary predictive potential of astrological transits for the nature, timing, and content of holotropic states of consciousness
7. the recognition of the profound connections between the archetypal pattern of birth charts and COEX systems in the individual psyche
8. the relationship between astrological world transits and patterns of incidence and diagnosis of psychopathology.

**1. Evidence for an ensouled cosmos:** The study of holotropic states of consciousness has brought strong evidence that transpersonal experiences cannot be dismissed as irrelevant psychotic products. The fact that these experiences apparently provide access to accurate new information about various aspects of existence strongly suggests that they are phenomena *sui generis*. We have observed innumerable cases in which subjects described information about past eras or specific historical events, or detailed subjective descriptions of animal behavior or plant life, that the individual had not known nor had access to prior to the experience, yet which proved upon subsequent research to be accurate. Challenging the most fundamental assumptions of materialistic science, transpersonal experiences suggest that human consciousness is continuous with the inner nature of the universe, which from this perspective appears to be a unified web of events in consciousness permeated by interiority and intelligence. Such experiences provide empirical evidence suggesting that the individual human psyche is part of a greater psyche that has no boundaries and is essentially commensurate with all of existence. They thus confirm a basic tenet of many esoteric systems, including astrology, that the microcosm “mirrors” the macrocosm. This notion, which appears completely absurd

from the perspective of mechanistic science, has in recent decades received unexpected support from several new theories and developments in the sciences. The development of lasers, optical holography, David Bohm's holographic model of reality in quantum physics, and Karl Pribram's holographic model of the brain have suggested radical new possibilities concerning the relationship between the part and the whole.<sup>2</sup>

**2. Empirical support for the existence of archetypes:** Holotropic states provide direct experiential access to spiritual or numinous dimensions of existence, including the archetypes. This is important because the concept of archetypes is essential for astrology, as it is being understood here. As we have seen, in the twentieth century, C. G. Jung resurrected the ancient idea of archetypes and introduced them into modern depth psychology in the form of psychological principles, primordial organizing patterns of the psyche. He and his followers explored and described in great detail the important role that archetypes play in the life of individuals, nations, and nature. Many professional articles and books, as well as popular literature written by authors with a Jungian orientation, suggest that our personal characteristics and behavior reflect the dynamics of powerful archetypal principles and that we enact typical archetypal themes in our everyday life.<sup>3</sup>

Most academic psychologists and psychiatrists have so far considered Jung's idea of the archetypes to be unfounded and speculative and have refused to take it seriously. However, modern consciousness research has confirmed the existence of archetypes beyond any reasonable doubt by showing that in holotropic states of consciousness they can actually be directly experienced. I have published in other contexts case histories illustrating how transpersonal experiences involving archetypes can provide new information about mythological realities of cultures unknown to the experient and open new therapeutic possibilities (Grof 1985, 1988, 1992, 2000, 2006).

An important characteristic of the archetypes is that they are not confined to, and do not originate from, the human brain, but operate from transcendental realms and exert a synchronistic influence on both individual psyches and events in the physical world. The marriage between astrology and archetypal psychology based on Jung's work represents an extraordinary advance in both fields. It brings the mathematical precision of astronomy into the interior and imaginative world addressed by depth psychology, enriching enormously the possibilities of theoretical speculations as well as clinical predictions.

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2. See, for example, Michael Talbot, *The Holographic Universe* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991), and David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* (London: Routledge, 1980).

3. See, for example, Jean Shinoda Bolen, *Goddesses in Everywoman: A New Psychology of Women* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984), and *Gods in Everyman: A New Psychology of Men's Lives and Loves* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989). See also Joseph Campbell, *Myths to Live By* (New York: Bantam, 1972), and James Hillman, *Re-Visioning Psychology* (1975; repr. New York: HarperPerennial, 1992).

**3. Psychological significance of birth:** The work with holotropic states has corrected the astonishing misconception of much academic psychiatry that the only way that biological delivery can have any consequence for the individual's mental condition, emotional life, and behavior is if it has caused irreversible damage of brain cells. I have observed on innumerable occasions that this challenging experience leaves a powerful imprint of emotions and physical feelings that, in interaction with postnatal events, are instrumental in the development of various emotional and psychosomatic disorders. In addition, the overall pattern of our birth also tends to be reflected in the way we handle vicissitudes in our life and approach demanding tasks and projects. There is also impressive evidence that what I have called the *perinatal matrices* in the psyche of individual people can play an important role in engaging these individuals in collective sociopolitical events and cultural movements (deMause 1982, Grof 1998, 2000). These observations bring important support for astrology, which has long attributed major significance to the moment of birth as the symbolic precursor of one's overall life pattern. They are also related to another basic tenet of astrology that precisely defines the relationship between large-scale events and happenings in individual lives. Astrological evidence has long suggested that major movements and occurrences in human history are correlated with planetary positions and their mutual interrelations. It has also suggested that the degree and nature of participation of individuals in these collective events and the specific incidents in their lives reflect their personal planetary transits, which represent the relationship between the world transits and personal natal charts.

**4. The phenomenon of synchronicity:** The tendency to think in terms of direct causal influences is one of the major reasons why astrology has been so vehemently rejected. I remember one of my discussions with Carl Sagan about transpersonal psychology during which he heatedly told me and others: "Astrology is total hogwash; as I am standing here, I have more influence on you than Pluto." He clearly thought about this subject in terms of masses, distances, gravitational forces, and other physical terms. This is an approach that completely misses the point. Critics of astrology like Carl Sagan do not understand that astrologers are using a sophisticated paradigm that assumes a synchronistic relation between the planets, the human psyche, and the external events. To understand astrology, we must think in synchronistic terms.

Richard Tarnas and I have jointly presented our findings concerning the relationship between the psyche and the cosmos in numerous graduate level academic courses at the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS) in San Francisco, as well as in transpersonal training workshops and public seminars. The first thing we have always sought to make clear before any discussion of this material is that in talking about correlations of experiences and events with planetary movements and aspects, we do not in any way imply a linear causal influence of celestial bodies on human psyches or occurrences in the material world.

A more plausible way one can think about astrology can be illustrated by a simple example. When I look at my watch that has the correct time and it shows that it is seven

o'clock, I can infer that all the watches and clocks in the same time zone that show the correct time will also show it is seven o'clock. I can further assume with reasonable certainty that, if I turn on the television set, I will be able to see the seven o'clock news or that my arrival will be expected at the restaurant where I had made a seven o'clock reservation. This naturally does not mean that my watch has a direct influence on other watches and clocks in the environment, that it causes television news, or interacts with the consciousness of the restaurant personnel. All these events are simply synchronized in relation to astronomical time, a hidden dimension that is operating "behind the scenes" and cannot be directly perceived.

In the same way, the thinking underlying astrology suggests that in the universal scheme of things the movements of the planets and the geometrical aspects they are making are correlated with the hidden archetypal dynamics that shape the events in the phenomenal world. The planets' visibility allows them to be used to infer what is happening in the world of the archetypes, or using the above example, what "time" it is in the archetypal world. In turn, their angular relation to the positions of the planets in our natal chart (*transits*) seems to indicate how this situation might manifest in our personal life.

The *principle of synchronicity* as a significant alternative to linear causality was first comprehensively described by Jung. According to him, synchronicity is an acausal connecting principle that refers to meaningful coincidences of events separated in time and/or space.<sup>4</sup> While Jung had a general interest in peculiar coincidences in life, he was primarily interested in those particular sets of coincidences in which various external events were meaningfully connected with inner experiences, such as dreams, fantasies, and visions. He defined synchronicity of this kind as a "simultaneous occurrence of a certain psychic state with one or more external events which appear as meaningful parallels to the momentary subjective state."<sup>5</sup>

Because of the deeply ingrained modern belief in deterministic causality as a central law of nature, Jung hesitated for many years to publish his observations of events that refused to fit into this mold. He postponed publication of his work on this subject until he and others had collected literally hundreds of convincing examples of synchronicity, making him absolutely sure that he had something valid to report. It was also important for him that he was encouraged to develop his concept of synchronicity by two pioneers of modern physics, Albert Einstein and Wolfgang Pauli.

In the work with holotropic states, the occurrence of striking instances of synchronicity is so common that it leaves no doubt about the fact that it represents an important alternative to mechanistic causality as a connecting principle. In meditative practice, psychedelic therapy, holotropic breathwork, and spontaneous psychospiritual crises ("spiritual emergencies"), the fantasy material emerging from the unconscious often enters into complexly creative interplay with various aspects of consensus reality, coinciding with

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4. See C. G. Jung, *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle*, in *Collected Works*, vol. 8, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960).

5. Jung, *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle*, par. 850.

external events in ways that strongly suggest an underlying connection of meaning that is not simply being projected by the individual. This phenomenon challenges our most fundamental assumptions about reality since it calls into question the sharp distinction we usually make between the inner and the outer worlds.

A typical example is the incidence of extraordinary synchronicities in the lives of people in holotropic therapy who are involved in reliving and consciously integrating the memory of biological birth—a process that I have found to be fundamental to psychological transformation and the resolution of various forms of physical and psychological pathology. During holotropic sessions, when the process of inner exploration takes participants close to the experience of “ego death” but does not reach completion, these individuals often encounter in their everyday lives a striking accumulation of dangerous situations, injuries, and accidents. It is important to emphasize that I am referring here to events that are caused by other people or external circumstances and are not the result of self-destructive tendencies of the subjects themselves.

When these people experience full ego death and psychospiritual rebirth by consciously working through the unresolved trauma of biological birth, such situations tend to clear up as magically as they developed. It seems that at this stage of personal transformation the individual has to deal with the theme of destruction and loss, but has the option to experience it either as an inner process or as a real life event. This is exactly what astrologers observe in regard to the effect of difficult planetary transits, when the deeper roots of potentially destructive unconscious behavior patterns associated with these transits can be brought to conscious awareness and worked through in therapeutic sessions rather than encountered in one’s dealings with the world.

Equally remarkable synchronicities are also associated with various forms of transpersonal experiences. Synchronistic events frequently accompany the reliving of what are felt to be past life experiences and they are also very frequent at the time of inner confrontation with archetypal figures and motifs. For example, when people involved in intense inner process deal with the themes of Animus, Anima, Wise Old Man, the Great Mother, or the Devouring Mother, appropriate human representatives of these figures often manifest in their everyday life.

Similarly, when a person has a powerful shamanic experience that involves an animal spirit guide, this animal can suddenly appear in various ways in this person’s life with a frequency that is beyond any reasonable probability. It has also been the experience of many people that when they become involved unselfishly in a project that has been inspired from the transpersonal realms of the psyche, extraordinary synchronicities tend to occur and make their work surprisingly easy.

**5. Correlations between the psychodynamics of the birth process and planetary archetypes:** The first indication that there might be some extraordinary connection between astrology and my research of holotropic states was Richard Tarnas’s recognition that individuals who experienced major psychological breakthroughs and awakenings tended at those times to be undergoing major personal transits involving the planet Uranus, often in combination with

Jupiter, while those undergoing more difficult and psychologically constricting periods tended to be undergoing transits involving Saturn. Eventually, he came to realize that this simple dichotomy was part of much more complex patterns of correlation involving all the planets and a wide range of psychological conditions and stages of transformation.

One particularly notable observation was Tarnas's realization that my description of the experiential patterns associated with the stages of biological birth showed astonishing similarity to the four archetypes that astrologers have empirically correlated with the four outer planets of the solar system.<sup>6</sup> My description of the phenomenology of four basic perinatal matrices (or BPMs), pertaining to different stages of the birth process, was based on clinical observations made quite independently many years before I knew anything about astrology.

By way of very brief summary: In both its positive and negative forms, the first perinatal matrix (BPM I) is unmistakably reflective of the archetype that astrologers link to Neptune. The positive aspect of BPM I includes the reliving of episodes of undisturbed intrauterine existence, as well as the concomitant experiences of dissolution of boundaries, interpersonal fusion experiences, oceanic ecstasy, cosmic feelings of unity, transcendence of time and space, and awareness of the mystical and numinous dimensions of reality. The negative aspects of BPM I are associated with regressive experiences of prenatal disturbances. Here the dissolution of boundaries is not mystical but psychotic in nature; it leads to confusion, delusion, a sense of chemical poisoning, bizarre metaphysical distortions, and paranoid perceptions of reality. This matrix also has a psychodynamic connection with alcoholic or narcotic intoxication and addiction. All these qualities, both positive and negative, are ones that astrologers associate with the Neptune archetype.

The second perinatal matrix (BPM II) represents the stage when the uterine contractions periodically compress the baby, but the cervix is still closed and there does not seem to be a way out (hence "no exit"). Prominent features of this matrix include the preoccupation with aging and death, difficult ordeals and hard labor, depression, oppression, constriction, deficit, scarcity, and starvation. This matrix also brings feelings of inadequacy, inferiority, loneliness, and guilt. It is associated with skepticism and a profoundly pessimistic view of existence, a shattering crisis of meaning, the inability to enjoy anything, and loss of any connection with the divine dimension of reality. In astrology, all these qualities have long been regarded as attributes of the more challenging side of the Saturn archetype.

The precise astrological correspondence with the experiential aspects of the third perinatal matrix (BPM III) is particularly extraordinary and surprising since this matrix represents an unusual combination of themes characteristic of the final stage of biological birth, including the unrelenting thrust of an elemental driving force, the unleashing of titanic energies, Dionysian agony and ecstasy, birth, sex, death, rebirth, elimination, and scatology. We should also mention here the motifs of volcanic eruptions, pyrocatharsis, purifying fire, and the

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6. I have recently learned that this correspondence was also independently noted by Dominique Levidoux, who has discussed it in numerous lectures in France over the years.

underworld—urban, criminal, psychological, sexual, and mythological. Astrologically, all these are regarded as attributes of Pluto, the archetype of primordial energy—the dynamic principle behind cosmic creation, the universal life force that propels evolution in nature and human society (*Kundalini Shakti* in Hindu mythology), as well as the energy of destruction (the devouring Mother Goddess *Kali*). Pluto is associated with the fundamental biological processes of birth, sex, and death, the transformative process of psychospiritual death and rebirth, and the instinctual forces in the body and psyche (the Freudian Id). It represents the chthonic elements of existence, the underworld, whether in the literal physical sense (underground, infrastructure of the metropolis), in the metaphorical sense (red light districts, organized crime), in the psychological sense (the unconscious), or in an archetypal, mythological sense in which the Roman god Pluto (the Greek Hades) was the ruler of the underworld – all themes that figure prominently in the phenomenology of the third perinatal matrix.

Finally, the phenomenology of the fourth perinatal matrix (BPM IV)—the experience of emerging from the birth canal—is closely related to the archetype that astrologers have consistently associated with the planet Uranus. BPM IV represents the final stage of delivery where the discomfort and pressures culminate and are resolved in an explosive liberation. It is characterized by such features as the unexpected resolution of a difficult situation, breaking through and transcending boundaries, brilliantly illuminating insights, Promethean liberation and epiphany, sudden rising to a new level of awareness and consciousness, and radical freedom from previous constrictions. All these themes are associated by astrologers with the planet Uranus, representing the astrological principle of sudden change, surprise, rebellion against the status quo, revolutionary activity, liberation, spiritual awakening, and emotional and intellectual breakthrough. In addition, it governs sudden collapse of established structures, disruptive and destabilizing impulses and events, individualism and originality, revolutionary insight, creative genius, and invention. The shadow side of the Uranus archetype finds its expression in anarchy, unfruitful eccentricity, and indiscriminate acting out against limitations and laws of any kind, which corresponds remarkably to the clinical observation of perinatal experiences of BPM IV that have been inadequately processed – manic activity and inflation, irresponsible unconstrained behavior, ungrounded creative energy and anarchic acting out of various kinds.

**6. Correlations between Holotropic States and Planetary Transits:** Even more astonishing than these striking parallels between the phenomenology of the perinatal matrices and themes associated with the planetary archetypes was Tarnas's discovery that in holotropic states the experiential confrontation with these matrices regularly occurs at the time the individuals involved have important transits of the corresponding planets. Over the years, we have now been able to confirm this fact by thousands of specific observations.

For example, during Saturn-Pluto transits an individual in a holotropic session is more likely to have experiences of extreme oppression and constriction, of terror and dread, of impending apocalypse, and of the conflict between instinctual licentiousness and punitive

control, guilt, and shame. These transits are also associated with the confrontation with demonic power and with overwhelming forces of darkness. Together, Saturn and Pluto are associated with both the second and third perinatal matrices, and the transition between the sense of “no exit,” judgment, and eternal damnation associated with BPM II, to the purgatorial suffering and violent death-rebirth struggle associated with BPM III. In holotropic states of consciousness occurring during these transits, the phenomenology of both these BPMs such as choking and suffocation, or the immense psychosomatic pressures associated with constriction in the womb and the passage through the birth canal, is often evident.

Under Jupiter-Uranus transits, by contrast, holotropic states are more likely to be characterized by the experience of sudden release from a difficult or oppressive situation, creative breakthroughs, the unexpected joyous emergence into a new brighter world, or the expansive sense of new vistas and new possibilities to be explored. More problematically, this archetypal combination is also associated with the experience of giddy excitement and manic euphoria that can accompany the transition into BPM IV prior to the full resolution of the psychospiritual death-rebirth process.

When we use astrology in the work with holotropic states, the complexity of the interpretations increases with the number of planetary transits happening at the same time and with the number of planets involved in them. In many instances, two or more important transits can operate simultaneously and their energies can be in conflict with each other, producing complex combinations and dialectical fusions of the archetypal forces involved. A comprehensive interpretation requires an experienced astrologer evaluating a specific situation and looking at the natal chart and the transits as a unified field and an integral gestalt. Specific case histories of these extraordinary correlations will be explored in a later issue of the *Archai* journal.

**7. The Archetypal Basis of COEX systems:** Natal and transit astrology have also provided a deeper understanding of another important concept that has emerged from my psychedelic and holotropic research. I noticed very early in this work that emotionally relevant memories of my clients were not stored in the unconscious as a mosaic of isolated imprints, but in the form of complex dynamic constellations. I coined for these memory aggregates the name *COEX systems*, which is short for “systems of condensed experience.” A COEX system consists of emotionally charged memories from different periods of our life that resemble each other in the quality of emotion or physical sensation that they share.

Each COEX has a basic theme that permeates all its layers and represents their common denominator. The individual layers, then, contain variations on this basic theme that occurred at different periods of the person’s life. All COEX constellations seem to be superimposed over and anchored in the trauma of birth and are dynamically related to one of the perinatal matrices, or a specific aspect thereof. However, a typical COEX system reaches even further and its deepest roots consist of various forms of transpersonal phenomena, such as collective historical experiences, past-life experiences, Jungian archetypes, conscious identification with various animals, and others.

The most recent refinement of my understanding of the COEX dynamics was the surprising discovery that the nature and content of important COEX systems in the psyche of an individual tends to show striking correlations with major planetary aspects in his or her natal astrological chart. In addition, the timing of the biographical events that constitute the various layers of COEX systems seems to coincide with great consistency with the periods when significant planetary transits were moving across precisely these natal aspects. These findings thus throw new light on the dynamic interconnections between the biographical, perinatal, and transpersonal constituents of COEX systems that I have repeatedly observed in my clinical work.

Because of these surprisingly consistent correlations, I have come to regard astrology, particularly transit astrology, as the long-sought “Rosetta stone” of consciousness research, providing an essential key for understanding the nature and content of holotropic or non-ordinary states of consciousness, both spontaneous and induced. While the correlations concerning past experiences are primarily of theoretical interest, examining current transits can be extremely useful in the work with individuals undergoing “spiritual emergencies,” and the possibility of making remarkably accurate predictions of the archetypal character of non-ordinary states based on future transits is an invaluable tool in the planning of psychedelic and holotropic sessions.

**8. World Transits and Psychological Diagnostics:** Theoreticians and clinicians in the field of psychology, trying to establish a fixed classificatory system of psychiatric diagnoses, have expressed their continuing frustration concerning the lack of correspondence between the description of the diagnostic categories and the actual clinical pictures they encounter in working with their patients. To date, we are currently on the fourth revised version of the official American Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-IV). Although there are many factors behind such revisions, from an astrological point of view, the continual changeability of the clinical picture is comprehensible, at least in part, in terms of the constantly shifting archetypal dynamics of the collective psyche, which are in turn seen to correspond with the shifting angular relations between the planets studied in world transits.

As Richard Tarnas’s research has shown, when two or more planets in their respective cycles move into certain major alignments in the sky at various periods of history, the combined archetypal field associated with these planets consistently tends to give such periods a certain experiential flavor and to determine, at an archetypal level, the underlying character of its *Zeitgeist*. This phenomenon is particularly significant and long-lasting when it involves combinations of the outer planets from Jupiter to Pluto, as in the Uranus-Pluto conjunction of the 1960s or the Uranus-Neptune conjunction of the late 1980s and 1990s.<sup>7</sup> At the time of such major planetary alignments for the whole world, the corresponding archetypal complexes can become personalized for individuals, particularly if they form major transits to

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7. See Richard Tarnas, *Cosmos and Psyche: Intimations of a New World View* (New York: Viking, 2006).

specific planets in their natal charts. Psychologically, these alignments can be reflected in tendencies towards specific emotional and psychosomatic disorders. As a result, psychiatrists from different decades do not encounter precisely the same phenomena as their colleagues from earlier or later times. Psychopathology, therefore, appears to vary according to the nature of the current world transits and the personal transits of specific individuals. This variation suggests a possible factor as to why the creation of a fixed, universally valid DSM-IV seems to be intrinsically problematic.

But that is not the whole story. In the annual courses that Richard Tarnas and I teach at the California Institute of Integral Studies, we discuss the major schools of depth psychology and analyze the astrological charts of their founders. It soon became apparent to us that the major planetary aspects in the natal charts of these pioneers—Freud, Jung, Rank, Reich, Klein, and others—closely paralleled the specific character of their psychological theories. The differences in their psychologies became intelligible as a reflection of their basic archetypal orientation, which was in turn discernible in their natal planetary alignments. Contrary to the conventional psychoanalytic self-image, it was clear that the various psychoanalytic pioneers were not able to study the psyches of their clients objectively and make general conclusions that would remain valid indefinitely. Rather, they inevitably saw the problems of their clients through their subjective perceptual stencils, or distorting lenses, corresponding to the planetary aspects in their own birth charts and their personal transits at the time of their clinical observations.<sup>8</sup>

With the exception of organically determined disorders, psychiatry does not have a fixed set of phenomena to study. The result of any research of emotional and psychosomatic disorders that are not organic is thus determined by a complex interplay of a number of factors, among which must be included the astrological chart of the researcher and his or her transits at the time of observation; the planetary aspects for the entire world that define the *Zeitgeist* of a particular period; and the personal transits that color the experiences of the clients.

The image of psychiatry as a discipline that possesses concise descriptions of fixed and transtemporal pathological conditions and an armamentarium of specific remedies and interventions is an illusion. The only viable approach, given the shifting archetypal context, is to describe psychiatric disorders in terms of relationships and tools that can be used to analyze the situation at any particular time and characterize it in terms of the phenomenology of the experiences of the client and its relationship to the client's planetary transits. It is also necessary, as a corrective, to take into consideration the global planetary aspects and the researcher's own chart and transits.

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8. For examples of this phenomenon, see Richard Tarnas's article "The Ideal and The Real," in Section 2 of this issue of *Archai*, in which he briefly explores the expression of the Saturn-Neptune archetypal complex in the work of both Sigmund Freud and James Hillman.

## Implications of Holotropic Research and Archetypal Astrology

While all the above observations from transpersonal research point to a world view and personality theory that are in general consonance with astrology, the research into holotropic states has amassed a significant body of evidence that quite specifically supports the fundamental assumptions of astrology. However, modern Euro-American civilization is under such a strong influence of materialistic science that I can say from my own experience that it usually takes years of research of holotropic states and extensive personal exposure to them before one is able to break its spell and accept the radical revisions that have to be made in our understanding of the human psyche and the nature of reality to accommodate the new data. The vast array of challenging observations from holotropic states and astrology cannot be handled by a little conceptual patchwork or occasional cosmetic adjustment using minor *ad hoc* hypotheses. Rather, it would require a drastic overhaul of the modern world view, shattering and replacing the most fundamental metaphysical assumptions and beliefs of materialistic science.

The connections revealed by astrology are so complex, intricate, creative, and highly imaginative that, in my opinion, they strongly point to a divine origin. They provide convincing evidence for a deep meaningful order underlying creation and for a superior cosmic intelligence that engendered it. In addition, the findings of natal and transit astrology challenge the basic tenet of materialistic science that the universe is essentially meaningless and that it has no special connection with human beings.

This conviction that the natural laws offer no discernible purpose for human beings has been most explicitly expressed by cosmological physicist Steven Weinberg. “I believe there is no point that can be discovered by the methods of science,” he said in an interview. “I believe that what we have found so far—an impersonal universe which is not particularly directed towards human beings—is what we are going to continue to find. And that when we find the ultimate laws of nature they will have a chilling, cold, impersonal quality about them.”<sup>9</sup>

The image of a deeply meaningful, interconnected universe permeated by superior intelligence and including every individual in its intriguing script raises a very interesting question: Is there a comprehensive world view that could integrate the findings of natural sciences and modern consciousness research and, at the same time, incorporate astrology? Over the years, and not without struggle and tribulations, I have come to the conclusion that there is indeed a world view that can absorb and explain my experiences and observations from consciousness research, as well as embrace astrology. Needless to say, however, this differs diametrically from the belief system that dominates the modern Western civilization.

I have described this world view in my book *The Cosmic Game: Explorations of the Frontiers of Human Consciousness* (1998) and presented it also in a condensed form in a

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9. Steven Weinberg, in an interview for the PBS television show, *Faith and Reason* (<http://www.pbs.org/faith-andreason/transcript/wein-frame.html>; accessed May 27, 2009). See also Steven Weinberg, *The First Three Minutes: Modern View of the Origin of the Universe* (New York: Basic Books, 1998).

chapter of my book *Psychology of the Future* (2000). This vision of reality is based on experiences and insights from holotropic states and portrays the universe not as a material system, but as an infinitely complex play of Absolute Consciousness. Ancient Hindu scriptures describe a similar view of the cosmos, referring to the events in the phenomenal worlds as *lila*, the divine play. I have tried to show in my previous publications that this way of seeing the universe is becoming increasingly compatible with various revolutionary advances in new paradigm science (Grof 1985, 1998).

If the cosmos is a creation of superior intelligence and not a supermachine that created itself, it then becomes more readily plausible that astrology could be one of many different orders built into the universal fabric. It could be seen as a useful and even necessary complement to the field of science as it currently exists, rather than an irreconcilable rival of the scientific world view. Opening up conceptually to this possibility would make it possible to utilize the great potential that astrology holds as a clinical and research tool in psychiatry, psychology, and psychotherapy, as well as for a variety of other disciplines.

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