

CULTURE AND COSMOS

A Journal of the History of Astrology and Cultural Astronomy

Vol. 12 no 2, Autumn/Winter 2008

Published by Culture and Cosmos
and the Sophia Centre Press,
in partnership with the University of Wales Trinity Saint David,
in association with the Sophia Centre for the Study of Cosmology
in Culture,
University of Wales Trinity Saint David,
Faculty of Humanities and the Performing Arts
Lampeter, Ceredigion, Wales, SA48 7ED, UK.

www.cultureandcosmos.org

Cite this paper as: Graham Douglas, 'Luis Vilhena and the World of Astrology', *Culture and Cosmos*, Vol. 12 no 2, Autumn/Winter 2008, pp. 43-58.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue card for this book is available from the British Library

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the Publishers.

ISSN 1368-6534

Printed in Great Britain by Lightning Source

Copyright © 2018 Culture and Cosmos
All rights reserved

Luis Vilhena and the World of Astrology

Graham Douglas

Abstract. This article consists of a translation of the introduction and conclusion to Luis Rodolfo Vilhena's book, *O Mundo da Astrologia: Estudo Antropológico* (*The World of Astrology: an Anthropological Study*), published by Jorge Zahar Editor (Rio de Janeiro, 1990), as part of the series: Coleção Antropologia Social, edited by Gilberto Velho, here translated and introduced by Graham Douglas.

1. Translator's Introduction

Luis Vilhena died in an accident in 1997 at the age of 33.¹ *O Mundo da Astrologia*, an anthropological study of Brazilian astrology and astrologers, was based on his MA thesis at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro; his influential book describing the history of the Brazilian Folklorist movement, *Projeto e Missao: O Movimento Folklorico Brasileiro 1947-64*, based on his doctoral thesis, was published posthumously.² While introducing Vilhena's work, which I came across by chance in a Lisbon bookshop, it is useful to mention two other theses covering the same topics. Alie Bird has completed a thesis entitled 'Astrology in Education: an Ethnography' at the University of Sussex, and Kirstine Munk recently submitted her thesis at the University of Southern Denmark, entitled 'Signs of the Times: Cosmology and Ritual Practice in Modern Western Astrology'.³ Another important publication

1 More biographical information can be found (in Portuguese) at: <http://luisrodolfovilhena.googlepages.com/home>.

2 Luis Rodolfo Vilhena, *O Mundo da Astrologia: Estudo Antropológico*, ed. Jorge Zahar (Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 1990); Luis Rodolfo Vilhena, *Projeto e Missao: O Movimento Folklorico Brasileiro 1947-64* (Rio de Janeiro: Funarte Fundação Getúlio Vargas, 1997).

3 Alison Gwendy Bird, 'Astrology in Education: an Ethnography' (PhD diss., University of Sussex, 2006); Kirstine Munk, 'Signs of the Times: Cosmology

which addresses astrology as a cultural phenomenon is *Astrology, Science and Culture: Drawing Down the Moon* by Roy Willis and Patrick Curry.⁴

These three academic studies adopt anthropological and cultural tools of analysis. The first two are based on field work interviews with astrologers and students of astrology. Each of the studies provides valuable discussion of the relation between the practice of astrology and the practitioner's sociological and religious situations and needs. Bird uses a distinction drawn by Charles and Suzi Harvey to label taught astrology in the UK as *real* and contrast it with 'merely derivative' and 'uninformed' astrology 'adapted for mass consumption'.⁵ Vilhena by contrast gives attention to the difference between created and consumed astrology using concepts derived from Georg Simmel and Herbert Gans.⁶

All three, Kirsten, Munk, and Vilhena, draw on the work of the early authors Émile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, but in different ways.⁷ Bird and Munk value these authors for their theorising of magic, while Vilhena is unique in using the analysis developed in *Primitive Classification* as a tool for examining the structure of the symbolic language of planets, signs, and houses. Vilhena shares this interest with Martin Budd and the present translator in their essays published in the

and Ritual Practice in Modern Western Astrology' (PhD diss., University of Southern Denmark, 2007).

4 Roy Willis and Patrick Curry, *Astrology, Science and Culture: Drawing Down the Moon* (Oxford: Berg, 2004).

5 Charles Harvey and Suzi Harvey, *Astrology* (London: Thorsons, 1999), p. 245.

6 Georg Simmel, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (New York: The Free Press, 1954), [hereafter Simmel, *Sociology*]; Herbert Gans, *Popular Culture and High Culture: an Analysis and Evaluation of Taste* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), [hereafter Gans, *Popular Culture*].

7 Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. J. Swain (New York: Free Press, 1966 [1915]); Marcel Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, trans. R. Brain (London: Routledge Classics, 2001 [1902]); É. Durkheim and M. Mauss, *Primitive Classification*, trans. R. Needham (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963).

Radical Astrology Papers, which appeared in London in 1986, to unanimous lack of acclaim.⁸

Vilhena notes five distinct structures linking the zodiac signs, including their sequence around the year, which is rarely treated in detail by astrologers, (Walter Sampson is an exception).⁹ In using Claude Lévi-Strauss's structural analysis he avoids an over-reliance on the four elements which seems to be characteristic of Jungian psychological astrology.¹⁰ It is worth mentioning here that although Lévi-Strauss was often critical of Jung's approach to myth it is probable that he was also influenced by him, (see Eugene D'Aquili and Richard M. Gray for an interesting discussion).¹¹

All three studies found astrologers prone to factionalism and to having ambiguous attitudes toward scientific thinking, which seems to offer them the possibility of gaining respectability but only at the price of applying statistical research to their work. This reference to factionalism suggests that many astrologers might usefully be viewed as belonging to what Mary Douglas identified as Small Group environments, in her Grid – Group Theory.¹² Small groups are described as high on social intimacy (Group +) and low on hierarchy and separation of roles (Grid –). They typically lack objective criteria to classify and structure their beliefs about the world, leading to an uncritical tolerance (in theory) for all varieties of practice, but also a ruthless rejection of those who deny a

8 Martin Budd, 'Astrology and Semiotics I: Saussure', pp. 3.1-3.22, and Graham Douglas, 'Astrology and Semiotics II,' pp. 4.1-4.32, both in *Radical Astrology Papers*, ed. Radical Astrology Group (London: privately published, 1986).

9 Walter Sampson, *The Zodiac: A Life Epitome* (Whitefish, Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2003 [London: The Blackfriars Press, 1928]).

10 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, Vols. 1 and 2 (1985), [hereafter Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*].

11 Eugene D'Aquili, 'The Influence of Jung on the Work of Lévi-Strauss,' *J. History of Behavioral Sciences*, Vol. 11, no. 1 (1975), pp. 41-48; Richard M. Gray, 'Jung and Lévi-Strauss Revisited: An Analysis of Common Themes,' *The Mankind Quarterly*, Vol. 31, no. 3 (Spring 1991), <http://home.comcast.net/~richardmgray/jungandlevistrauss.htm>.

12 Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1970), and M. Douglas, *Essays in the Sociology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 1982).

small number of basic truths. In practice the accompanying instability of interpretation frequently leads to emotional disputes.

The multifaceted nature of astrological language, which both Bird and Vilhena identify, could serve as a cue to consider the existence of *multiple astrologies*, another theme Curry discusses in detail in the *Radical Astrology Papers*.¹³ The polarity of divination *versus* science can also be used to describe these varieties of astrological practices, due to the uniquely flexible language of astrological symbols, which allows some to operate as pure diviners, while others can employ it as a stable symbolic system amenable to objective statistical study. One conclusion that is evident from these discussions is the usefulness of anthropology and cultural theory as rich sources of analytical tools for understanding astrology and astrological practice in its social context.

All these authors face the problem of how astrology creates meaning for its practitioners in the postmodern world, and while Bird takes a mainly philosophical and epistemological approach, Vilhena is more interested in how his informants construct meanings in their lives using astrology. In doing this he would no doubt have profited from recent work, which Bird refers to, especially by Benedict Anderson on communities of knowledge and Arjun Appadurai's subtle description of the social texture of knowledge production.¹⁴

It remains to clarify some technical terms mentioned by Vilhena, and indicated at 1 and 2 in the text which follows.

Simmel contrasts subjective and objective culture, meaning by the first the wishes and beliefs of people in a society, as opposed to the technical means of communication and institutional social structures.¹⁵ When Lévi-Strauss talks of the 'inequality of signifier and signified' as being 'the guarantee of all art' he is adopting a term from Saussurean structural linguistics to say that when a word (the signifier) is used to express a

13 Patrick Curry, 'An Aporia for Astrology', *Radical Astrology Papers*, ed. Radical Astrology Group (London: privately published, 1986), pp. 5.1-5.15.

14 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Books, 1991); Arjun Appadurai, *TransUrbanism: the Right to Participate in the Work of the Imagination*, interviewed by Arjen Mulder (2003), <http://www.appadurai.com/pdf/transurbanism.pdf>.

15 Simmel, *Sociology*.

signified (mental image) it always runs away from the writer, calling up unknown associations in the mind of the reader, (and reflexively in the writer too), escaping all attempts to pin down stable meanings.¹⁶ In the post-structuralist period, which began in the 1960's, this became the central focus of hermeneutic criticism. It is interesting that in Vilhena's second book he was again focusing on the situation of a movement and a study (folklorism) which found itself excluded and dismissed by conventional science. In this case the sociologists, influenced by European and American traditions, rejected folklore studies as amateurish and unworthy of consideration as a science, at a crucial time in the intellectual history of Brazil, post-war and before the military coup of 1964. The folklorists insisted on the validity of data collected by amateurs who were untrained in social-scientific methods and simultaneously engaged in the transmission, as well as study, of local folkloric traditions.

We are grateful to Dona Cleonice Berardinelli, the author's grandmother for help and encouragement, and to the copyright holders Luiz Paolo Nogueira da Gama Vilhena and Sueli da Motta Paixao Vilhena, for permission to translate and publish these two extracts from Luis Vilhena's book.

2. *O Mundo da Astrologia*: two extracts

1. Introduction.

This book analyses the beliefs and representations of a group of people belonging to the middle class in Rio de Janeiro, and involved with the use of astrology. Astrology is a divinatory system that postulates correspondences between celestial movements and the character and life events of each individual. It arose probably, around the 2nd century BC, as a product of the association between Greek ideas and the beliefs of ancient Mesopotamian civilizations, and spread through the Roman world at the beginning of the Christian era.

Besides its Greco-Roman heritage it was preserved by the Islamic and Byzantine civilizations and introduced into mediaeval Europe and India. After its relative decline among European societies during the 17th

16 Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*; Claude Lévi-Strauss, *La Pensee Sauvage* (Paris: Plon, 1962), [hereafter Lévi-Strauss, *Sauvage*].

century,¹⁷ we have witnessed in the present (20th) century its return in large modern urban environments, where astrological consultancies flourish, and the daily press publish horoscope columns on a massive scale, that contain forecasts for the natives of each sun-sign. (see Appendix 2 for terminology).

At the beginning of my research I interviewed members of 3 groups who were studying astrology, which I will identify by the letters A, B, and C. The first two were led by an astrologer, Roberto (all names are fictitious. In Appendix 1 the reader will find a list of 23 interviewees, with their basic data and their relationship to the world of astrology), and I regularly took part in group A. Several members were part, with me, of a choir, that practiced twice a week. This permitted me more frequent contact, and I came to know them better.

A contrast to these groups, which were composed of people of 19-24 years of age, was provided by group C, which used to meet at the home of Alice, Roberto's mother. It was led by a different astrologer, and was composed of women of a range of ages, the youngest of whom was 38.

At this time I began my association with 'the world of astrology', initially through introductory courses which allowed me to begin to master the (symbolic) system shared by my informants. By the end of my research I had attended four courses, to which can be added congresses, workshops and discussion groups to which I belonged during my fieldwork, even after the other groups had dissolved.

Dealing with a world similar to that studied by recent work in urban anthropology, concerned with the life styles and world views prevalent among the urban middle classes (4), I took as my hypothesis the following question: 'To what extent can we say that astrology contributed to the development of one of those world-views?'

Already in that initial stage, it was clear that many of the similarities present in the discussions with interviewees flowed from the manner in which they took part in the world of astrology as 'students'. It was this activity that permitted the formation of networks that defined them as groups. I moved on then to interview individuals outside this last group, members of those classes that regularly made use of astrology. I was then able to note definite differences in the vision of astrology on the part of these informants, who limited themselves to consulting an astrologer, but had either no interest or no time to understand and become familiar with

17 S. J. Tester, *A history of Western Astrology* (London: Boydell, 1987); Patrick Curry, *Astrology, Science and Society* (London: Boydell, 1977).

how the astrological system worked. Other students I interviewed preferred self-study and placed little value on courses and conferences. I also interviewed four astrologers.

The literature on astrology is composed of three segments, which are numerically very different: a vast literature produced by astrologers, a smaller historiographical bibliography, and an almost non-existent production of sociological and anthropological work on the subject.

These readings brought me to the formulation of the hypothesis that, although each author, each historical period, and each social sector defined their own cosmological foundations and the specific use of specific types of astrology; their techniques and classifications present an extraordinary stability. This permanence exists in spite of—or because of—(astrology) having always appeared in syncretic environments, linked to other divinatory/curative systems and to beliefs of the most diverse origins; at times brought together under such headings as ‘esotericism’, ‘the occult tradition’, ‘the counter culture’, or ‘the new gnosis’. As the historian Brian Vickers reminds us, this ‘resistance to change’ is a trait of all occultism.¹⁸ The same tension emerges in the discourses of several of my informants: at one and the same time they emphasize pluralism, affirming the need to compare different astrologers and different books, so that each person can adopt the type of astrology that appeals most to them; yet they still reaffirm the antiquity of the system, over and above the dates recognized by historiography, reinforcing the unity of the subject and its fidelity to its origins.

Thus, the present work, which is concerned with the diffusion of a millennial movement in an extremely restricted sector of Brazilian society, is marked by this tension between the general and the particular, and between abstract and concrete analyses.

I begin in Ch. 1 from an analysis of the classifications on which astrological techniques are based, attempting to show that, like the structure of myths analysed by Lévi-Strauss,¹⁹ its structure remains constant across various versions.

Ch. 4 is devoted to my conversations with informants, seeking to point out the specific details assumed by the theory and practice of astrology in segments of the urban middle class, living in the south of Rio de Janeiro;

18 Brian Vickers, ‘Introduction. Analogy versus Identity: The Rejection of Occult Symbolism,’ in: *Occult and Scientific Mentalities in the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 7.

19 Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*; Lévi-Strauss, *Sauvage*.

making a global interpretation based on the particular version of symbolism that has been developed in these groups.

These two chapters represent original contributions to the study of the urban middle classes, which already possesses a respectable tradition in Brazil, as well as of astrology as an example of 'alternative culture' in general, which is a sector until now little-studied by the social sciences.

The remaining chapters represent a transition within the continuum established between these two poles, developing progressive contextualizations of the astrological system. All of these raise problems that require serious study in a larger work, but which here play only a subsidiary role. In ch. 2, for example, I discuss the nature of modernity and of the strategic role played by the middle classes in the articulation of those values in Brazilian society. Rather than comment on recent anthropological work on the subject, I will rely on the publications by Georg Simmel and Louis Dumont.²⁰ I will try to show how they can help us understand the ambiguous relation between modernity and astrology: although (re)-emerging within modernity, astrology presents a discourse marked by a critique of modern values.

In the development of this work, my initial hypothesis suffered some modifications. The effort to 'identify experiences (that were) meaningful enough to create symbolic boundaries (for the participants)',²¹ remains, although it is no longer linked necessarily to the delimitation of 'lifestyles'. We will see how the practice of astrology confers on each individual a specific vocabulary, a response mediated by the structure of astrology in his/her world view, that allows us to describe this practice as a 'synthesizing experience' (of the type) with which (previous) studies of the middle classes have defined their objects. Although only some of the informants belong to definite groups, they all maintain the most diverse relations with the world of astrology, which can be described, as I will attempt to do in ch. 3, as a large network, a category equally used in the

20 Simmel, *Sociology*; Georg Simmel, *The Metropolis and Mental Life* (New York: Free Press, 1950), [hereafter Simmel, *Metropolis*], www.gsz.hu-berlin.de/dokumente/georg_simmel-the_metropolis_and_mental_life.pdf; Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: an essay on the Caste System* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

21 Gilberto Velho, *Subjetividade e Sociedade: Uma Experience de Geracao* (Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 1986), [hereafter Velho, *Subjetividade e Sociedade*], p. 16.

literature on the middle classes, beside that of 'ethos group', to delimit its objects.²²

2. Conclusion

At the beginning of this work I stated that the main investment of work would be made in chs. 1 and 4, which correspond to the most general and most particular poles, respectively of my research. In this way I attempted to supply an interpretation of the structure and mechanisms by which the astrological system worked, in order to describe its practice in particular sectors of the urban middle classes in Rio de Janeiro, employing a number of studies that have been concerned with these sectors in recent years. In the intervening chapters, in turn, I have tried to build a bridge between these two objects, being forced to give only a brief treatment of such topics as modernity and the world of esotericism, of which much more remains to be said. Having taken this route in approaching my objects, I hope not only to have furnished descriptive data on areas so far little explored by the social sciences; but also to have shown the fertility of the application of theories that anthropology has developed in the various debates that were evoked in this work; these conclusions have the purpose of reviewing them and attempting to show their articulations.

Astrology, an erudite magico-classificatory system that demands the possession of advanced (*sic*) astronomical and mathematical knowledge for its practice, ends by being taken as an object of study principally in historiography. The particularist tradition of the latter accounts for the fact that the social sciences have never offered a global analysis of it. Faced with this, I have tried to take advantage of some suggestions of authors who, although mainly concerned with the analysis of primitive societies, or with discussing larger methodological issues, have taken astrology as an example of a classification system. Developing this hypothesis, I hope to have shown that the stability that it seems to present throughout its historical trajectory, and which is valued by its practitioners is related to the internal logic of these systems. The theories of Lévi-Strauss are shown to be particularly valuable here because they offer the possibility of questioning evolutionist approaches that refuse to recognise in astrology a system and a coherence similar to that presented by scientific knowledge.

22 Tania Salem, 'Familia em camadas medias: um revisao da bibliografia recente,' *Boletim do Museu Nacional*, Vol. 54 (1985), [hereafter Salem, 'Familia'], pp. 1-29.

For the French anthropologist, classificatory systems are characterized by an ‘attentive and meticulous observation entirely directed towards the concrete’, and we encounter in symbolism ‘at the same time its principle and its realization’.²³ Within the various appropriations that astrology has experienced and still experiences, what we find in the groups that I have investigated is justifiably based on the emphasis on its symbolic character. Lévi-Strauss has previously emphasized the importance of conscious models for structural analysis.²⁴ In the case of my research, as often happens in the study of complex societies, its importance (i.e. of its symbolic character) grows more significant due to the fact that the reflections of its practitioners on its representations are often made using reference points held in common with the researcher. In the case of symbolism, for example, we saw how Dan Sperber tries to relativise the semiological illusion present in various theories on the phenomenon in the West, including those of astrologers themselves, beyond indicating residues of these concepts in the interpretation that Lévi-Strauss gives of his own work.²⁵ On the other hand the groups studied occupy a particular place in the world of astrology, and I tried therefore to relativize the vision that they possess of the system in relation to those of others (groups). For this I referred to considerations on cultural capital, whose analogy with the consumption of astrology I explored, to show that the specificity of the position of my informants was similar to the abstract view of ‘high culture’ defined according by Gans as a ‘creator-oriented’²⁶ view.

One of the values of Lévi-Strauss’s theory is that it permits a postulation of the stability of the astrological system, without preventing us (from) recognising theoretically the modifications it presents in each of its applications. Contrary to Jung’s hypothesis of the Collective Unconscious, it does not attribute fixed symbolic contents, attempting on the contrary, to explain the regularity of the system through the *relations between the component elements* (Ital. translator). More than a vocabulary of signs and planets, it is the relations between these terms that constitute the stable element of astrology, (thus) conferring meaning

23 Lévi-Strauss, *Sauvage*, p. 294.

24 Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, p. 319.

25 Dan Sperber, *Le Symbolisme en General* (Paris: Hermann, 1974).

26 Gans, *Popular Culture*, p. 36.

on each part. From this constant structure, different interpretations can be elaborated, and in the same way they can be appropriated by different world-views. Even new elements that have been incorporated into the system have tended to reproduce the existing structure.

The difference between science and magico-classificatory systems does not reside in the greater elaboration or complexity of the former, but in the raw materials used by each for its organization. Astrology works, not with concepts but with signs, or to use Bachelard's terminology, with images. The work of the latter, which went through several changes of position, at times can lead us to believe that the Four Elements of Empedocles—my principal example in the analysis of this part of the astrological system—would be by themselves, privileged objects for systematization at the concrete level. That would agree with the opinions of my informants on their archetypal and universal character. Against this type of hypothesis, it is necessary to re-affirm the contextual character of symbolic meaning.

It would be interesting in this sense to refer to the uses made of these representations regarding physical-ethical problems among the Brazilian working class, of Iron and Phosphorus, where we can understand their transformation, in Lévi-Strauss's terms, from concepts into signs. These two elements, which in Mendeléeu's table have an abstract and mathematized conceptual meaning, acquire, according to the description of these representations by Luis Fernando Duarte,²⁷ a new symbolic meaning. Thus Phosphorus, through sharing, in the Portuguese language, the same meaning attributed to 'objects that are routinely involved with obtaining fire', is allowed to overlap with ideas of 'heat' and 'light'.

There is no doubt that the presence of astrological concepts, which are opposed to the logic of scientific thought in modern society, illustrates the fragmentation which characterizes this society. Going beyond this statement, it could still be asked what the meaning of their presence is, and to what extent it allows us to reflect on the nature of modernity. Among the many implications that can be drawn from this question, I will just focus on a few.

I will begin by commenting on a fairly common response, formulated by observers of the growth of astrology, such as the historian and orientalist Georges Conteneau, who like the astronomer R. R. de Freitas Mourao, relies on the hypothesis that it would be an element of security

27 Luis Fernando Dias Duarte, *Da Vida Nervosa nas Clases Trabalhadoras Urbanas* (Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 1986), [hereafter Duarte, *Da Vida Nervosa*], p. 148.

and coherence in the middle of an uncertain world.²⁸ This is not a completely mistaken response, but it risks being simplistic. Every system of values and/or representations furnishes its users with certain reference points, or as Figueira puts it, a map.²⁹ On the other hand all maps imply, to a greater or lesser extent, some tolerance of fragmentation and difference.

This type of hypothesis expresses in the most direct way a supposition implicit in the analyses presented in Ch. 3, which attributes a deviant character to the practice of astrology in modern societies. In their various inclinations these analyses can be summarized according to the affirmation of Philippe Defrance, a member of Morin's group, according to whom: 'the diffusion of and attraction to astrology are a measure of contemporary uncertainties and confusions'.³⁰ The sectors that are characterized by this practice are, as concludes the *Retorno dos Astrologos*, 'areas of no culture', that possess 'fewer or weaker antibodies against astrology'; or present a situation of 'deprivation' as identified by the North American authors listed by Jorgensen.³¹ Astrology would thus be a mere reaction to modern values and their crisis; although—as I have already said—Simmel established that crisis is (the single factor) which most clearly characterizes modern culture.³²

In the last analysis, the weakness of the hypothesis that attributes the growth of astrology merely to a desperate search for a safe haven from the fragmentation of modern life resides in the fact that this system does not possess a unique group of values to guide its use, or even a cosmological foundation for its efficacy. We have seen that it can be

28 Georges Conteneau, *La Divination chez les assyriens et les babyloniens* (Paris, Payot, 1940); R. R. de Freitas Mourao, 'Importancia historica da Astrologia', *Jornal do Brasil* (1986), p.2; Caderno [supplement] B.

29 Servulo A. Figueira, *O Contexto Social do Psicanalyse* (Rio de Janeiro, Francisco Alves, 1981) [hereafter Figueira, *O Contexto Social*].

30 Edgar Morin, P. Defrance, C. Fischler, L. e Petrossian, L. *O Retorno dos Astrologos: diagnostic sociológico* (Lisbon: Moraes, 1972), [hereafter Morin et al, *Retorno dos Astrologos*] pp. 109-10.

31 Morin et al, *Retorno dos Astrologos*, p. 134; Danny L. Jorgensen, 'The Esoteric Community: an ethnographic investigation of the cultural milieu,' *Urban Life*, Vol. 10, no. 2 (1982), p. 403.

32 Simmel, *Sociology*; Simmel, *Metropolis*.

applied to a multiplicity of objects, and that different parts of the astrological world hold different opinions on the legitimacy of each of its uses. Thus astrology, based on the potentials it has, is associated with the world views of groups that ally themselves to it. The difficulty of making a definite 'diagnosis' on its growth as Morin and his team have tried to do, lies exactly in the polymorphism of this system.

So, abandoning (the) excessive (use of) judgements, the researcher must, furnished with an analysis of the properties of the astrological system, investigate how it is related to the world-view of each group. Duarte, while recognising that he relies on a limited bibliography, shows how it converges with the holistic conceptions that he wishes to identify in the Brazilian working class.³³

The world of astrology presents great heterogeneity and, when I attempted to map it, I made clear that I was privileging the sector with which I had most contact, which I called, following Morin, erudite astrology. We can understand that in Rio de Janeiro, as an example of what happens in other large modern cities, (astrology) is organized like a market, in which the circulation of symbolic goods is formally free, constituting a network based on 'choices' and 'affinities', and where the main limits imposed on individuals who take part in it are determined by the 'symbolic capital' of each person. Beyond the world-view that each individual or group incorporates into their astrological practice, this latter is equally influenced by their degree of belonging to this world, which is in turn determined by their level to which they have absorbed the astrological discourse. This belonging may be superficial or it may reach the point at which the language of astrology colours all the areas that make up the fragmented social life of big city dwellers. This same fragmentation produces, as we saw, a specific form of belief defined by Jean Pouillon, of which the world of astrology, to the extent it is illustrated by the area studied here, is a privileged example.³⁴

Although I have tried to diversify the type of interviewees, the majority, by choice, were students of the subject, in other words typical consumers of erudite astrology, those who occupy a central position in this world, which is assumed to be representative of the educated urban middle classes. Defined by Gilbert Velho as those who live *par*

33 Duarte, *Da Vida Nervosa*, pp. 208-9.

34 Jean Pouillon, 'Remarques sur le verbe "croire"', in: Izard, M. And Smith, P. *Le Fonction Symbolique: essais d'anthropologie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979).

excellence the experience of modernization in Brazilian society, they are characteristic of the non 'traditional' pole of these classes according to Tania Salem, who belong to this type of network, as defined above, where family and locality are only secondary determinants of its constitution.³⁵ This adaptation is not only due to their specific values, but also to sociological factors. The great majority of informants were studying, or had completed a course of higher education, mostly in the human sciences. As I showed, education, together with free time is one of the most important determinants of the 'taste-culture', in Gans's terminology. Contrary to what the conclusions of Morin's team appear to show, the group I have studied reveals (as can be verified in Appendix 1) a fairly high level of culture compared to the average of their society, also being influenced by psychoanalytic ideas. In the last analysis, a certain perseverance of reading and study is a necessary quality for a student of astrology. The participation of someone in the world of astrology shows the presence of a certain cosmopolitanism in their lifestyle, reflected in reading foreign books, or in Harold's case in meeting astrologers outside Brazil.

The responses that this study can provide on the growth of astrology therefore mostly concern these classes. Although we cannot suppose that my data provide a global portrait of astrological practice among these groups, we see that the discourse of informants shows a tension between a particularizing and a universalizing pole, which is characteristic of modernity itself, and which (the informants) seem to represent. On the one hand the system permits them to express a qualitative individualism, on the other they seek through the speculations that surround it to express a religious diversity. We can thus see how the speech of informants presents questions that can be found in other analyses of the middle classes.

Velho for example, suggested recently that an interesting element of Simmel's theory on modernity is his hypothesis, according to which there would be a dislocation between what the German sociologist calls a subjective culture and an objective culture, in which the development of qualitative individualism, through self-cultivation, technical progress and the heterogeneity of modern social life allow the cultural life of the

35 Velho, *Subjetividade e Sociedade*; Gilberto Velho, *Individualismo e Cultura*; *Notas para uma Antropologia da Sociedade Contemporanea* (Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 1981); Salem, 'Familia'.

individual to gain a relative autonomy in relation to the (individual as a) subject, who does not succeed in accompanying it.³⁶ Velho suggests that ‘for certain social groups’—referring thus to members of the middle classes analysed in this book—‘the development of subjective cultures, which attempt to reduce this dislocation, can be associated with their exercise of social activities’. I would like to close these final observations by showing how astrology can become, as it is in the group studied here, another possibility for this development.

Cultural heterogeneity has often been associated with historical periods in which astrology and esotericism were present. The former as we saw, was born in a clearly syncretic environment, while the latter is really a response to the diversity of religions which attempts to reveal their common inner identity.

Taking up the commentary I developed on the idea of 2nd-degree mapping proposed by Figueira,³⁷ we can say that this process takes as a reference point, not just the individual, as does psychoanalysis, but also the surrounding totality. The symbols which constitute the astrological system would be present in both the microcosm and the macrocosm – each one connected with the two opposing poles that I identified above in the discourse of my informants.

On the other hand, it is not only the starting point which is important, but also the form in which the re-mapping by astrology is carried out, (if we are) to understand its nature.

According to Simmel the rationality and impersonality that characterize urban life ‘tend to take away the real personal qualities of individuals and the incompatibilities between them’.³⁸ To preserve his singular self in harmony with the principles of qualitative individualism, modern man would sometimes be obliged to exaggerate his ‘distinguishing features so as to remain visible (*audivel* in original text) even to himself’. As we have seen, astrological self-cultivation provides another alternative. Through its language of classification the individual is able to regain the qualitative aspect of reality and symbolically relate to it. It is in this sense that we can understand the emphasis placed by informants on sensitivity and intuition in understanding astrological language. An extreme example of this tendency can be found in a writer

36 Velho, *Subjetividade e Sociedade*, p. 16.

37 Figueira, *O Contexto Social*.

38 Simmel, *Sociology*, p. 422.

cited by Arroyo, Husto Smith, who states that, after the mechanical conception of nature which prevailed from the 17th to 19th centuries, and the biological conception of the 20th, we are moving towards a psychological vision, 'with less determinism and more freedom'.³⁹

Even while privileging the particular and the individual over the totality, informants utilized symbolism as a fundamental ingredient. In doing so, without a doubt they move away from the principles which orient scientific thinking. The historical account offered by Koyré shows how the emergence of scientific thinking resulted from a renunciation of a global understanding of the structure of the cosmos in an attempt, as Lévi-Strauss put it, to control the inequality between the signifier and the signified, which characterizes human thought.⁴⁰ But this attempt is always limited, since that inequality is the 'guarantee of all art, all poetry and all mythic and aesthetic invention', which makes it possible to hope that 'the relation between symbolism and knowledge concerns common characteristics of both industrial societies and our own'.⁴¹ Thus astrology, such as it is practised by my informants, does not merely reveal an activity which is deviant and marginal. The emphasis in its antagonism to scientific values, which is part of the means used by the interviewees in constructing an identity, does not prevent them, as we saw in the previous chapter, from relating to modern values, where symbolism persists in various domains. Contrary to the theoreticians of occultism, it can be seen how astrology ends by being truly a vehicle that expresses and problematizes the tensions of these values themselves, even while apparently denying them.

39 Stephen Arroyo, *Astrologia, Psicologia e os Quatro Elementos*, trans. Maio Miranda (São Paulo: Editora Pensamento, 1984), p. 21.

40 Alexander Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), p. 240.

41 Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'Introdução à Obra de Marcel Mauss', in: Mauss, M.: *Sociologia e Antropologia* (São Paulo: EPU/EDUSP, 1974), p. 34.