

In the Northern Winter 2007/8, NCGR released a journal dedicated to Psychological Astrology ([www.geocosmic.org](http://www.geocosmic.org)). Both Glennys Lawton and Brian Clark were invited to submit an article. Brian's article was on an astrological view of the importance of supervision. This article, along with some graduate students' reflections on supervision follow.

## ASTROLOGICAL SUPERVISION

Brian Clark

### **Abstract:**

*Psyche* is not exclusive to psychological astrology. When any astrologer engages with the symbols of the horoscope another dynamic is created which has the features of a psychological situation. Even the most pragmatic or technical astrologer will find the complexity of astrological symbols defy linear constructs. In this short article the author is an advocate for astrological supervision to help bring psychological awareness into the astrological consulting room. It is not a matter of being psychologically fluent, but reflecting on the in-depth encounter that occurs between an astrologer and their client.

For me the term *psychological astrology* is redundant, as astrology inherently is a matter of psyche. As Jung described, astrology was a projected psychology which used the sphere of the heavens as the screen where subjective images became objectified. The ancient Greek way of thinking about psyche was that it was soul, the breath of life, and over time the understanding of this transformed as more rational ways of thinking developed. Astrological imagery can also be used in a rational and literal manner; however, to me what is implied in the term psychological astrology is the metaphoric usage of astrological imagery to articulate complex life patterns. It is not an adaptation of psychological theory onto astrology, but the vigilant awareness that astrological images are microcosmic, and in the proper setting reveal potent patterning in individuals' lives.

What is generally meant by the terminology is the application of psychological theory to help amplify and articulate the complexity of astrological imagery, and in this way the amalgam of the ancient art of astrology and the modern specialty of psychology make powerhouse allies. A more psychologically sophisticated astrology was seeded by the work of C.G. Jung. In the midst of the last century, the maturation of this approach took shape under the guidance of Dane Rudhyar, while in the past two decades the work of Liz Greene and many others have helped to structure this new astrological style. To me the best usage of psychological astrology is in redefining the magical revelations of traditional approaches in a contemporary setting, free of psychological jargon. Unfortunately the usages of psychological terms such as ego, id, shadow, anima, persona etc. have become concretized, stripped of their metaphors and seen as literal features of the psyche, reducing psychological astrology to just another interpretive method, rather than the fluid interactive revelatory process it can be. Whether the practitioner uses horary, financial or traditional approaches in their consulting work, knowledge of psyche is most important. As soon as one engages with another in a discussion of the horoscope a psychological situation is created with all the complexities and demands of a counseling situation. Hence I am an advocate for supervision in the practice of astrology, for no matter what approach you take to explain the horoscope, psyche is served.

Astrological supervision is nothing new. We've all done it – at astrological conferences, with peers, in the classroom; we all listen and learn to be more competent at the art of astrology. Discussing our own charts and sharing our personal experiences help us to become more proficient at astrological analysis. However, in a professional capacity, something else emerges. A dynamic mixture of ethics and responsibility, professional boundaries and presentation, as well as the psychological impact of projection and transference all converge to influence our capacity to function effectively enough to articulate the diversity of astrological images. It is no longer just our ability to read the chart which makes a consultation effective, but the capacity to listen and maintain authority whilst at the same time allowing the client to remain in charge, be emphatic and understand the client's motives. As we become active as astrological consultants supervision can improve our performance as it supports and encourages us while confronting our blind spots, exposing our biases and offering new alternatives.

The purpose of astrological supervision is to improve our counseling expertise so we may do the very best we possibly can for our clients. It is essentially a 6<sup>th</sup> house requirement, part of the apprenticeship of becoming a counseling astrologer. The 6<sup>th</sup> house, as we know, represents the psychic sphere where we are able to gain access to coherence, one of the three great existential issues. These three issues are Power, Intimacy and Coherence. The 6<sup>th</sup> house assures coherence if we enter into the discipleship demanded of us here. We could view supervision in this way, as a discipline, which shapes our skills at imparting and sharing astrological insights. Without the 'super-vision', the third entity created between astrological counselor and supervisor, we are at risk of being drawn back into the chaos of the 12<sup>th</sup> house, where we are faced with our own unconscious familial stories, fantasies and complexes. It is these stories, fantasies and complexes that will become silent intruders to the consultation process if we remain ignorant of the dynamic taking place in the consultation.

In the 1980's, as my astrological practice became busy, I sought supervision since I felt I needed support for what was taking place in the consulting room. As an astrological counselor I had become witness, not just to the human being, but the human psyche as well. Each client's story seemed profound and I needed to talk about the issues when I was left feeling uncomfortable: domestic violence, sexual abuse, loss, death, rape, betrayal, terminal illness, deformity, retrenchment and financial hardship to cite a few. Even though I felt objective in myself, I was unclear about how to respond to issues surrounding adoption, terminations, affairs. How did I leave myself open to the hostile client and at risk with the borderline? The person I found for supervision was a psychologist, not an astrologer, but was very respectful of the astrological model. The astrological images were hooks for the complexes, rather than the complexes themselves therefore the sessions moved quickly beyond the astrological statements into the heart of the issue and the character of the situation. Identifying my own issues in the consultation process improved my ability to be able to use astrology more effectively.

Identification, transference, parataxic distortions and parallel processes, arising out of the unconscious, are probable when we are working with a person in consultation, or indeed in the classroom. You will recognize one possible scenario. We draw up the chart for a client and we register – hmm, this person has a Saturn/Mars theme – same as ours, perhaps Moon in Cancer square Neptune in Libra, same as ours. About this time there should be a giant red flag waving in front of our eyes! The possibility of identification with our client has been magnified and we are at risk of losing perspective, authority and boundary. What do we do when a client undergoing a major Pluto transit stirs unresolved grief in us? How do we differentiate between our feelings and the client's projection?

Similarly in the classroom, as those of you who teach astrology will have already experienced, projection, projective identification etc. occurs. To teach in an ongoing classroom environment it is helpful to understand group dynamics. With 15 or over, there is often a strong possibility for the group to express itself through one of the students in the group, assigning the role of scapegoat onto that individual. Projections onto the educator will also occur. The idealized ones feel best but they turn quickly, while the negative ones are often hard to shake. Understanding the nature of these projections will allow effective and gentle management, which ensures the smooth running of the class and an optimum learning environment.

In our Astro\*Synthesis Diploma program supervision is part of the 'core' program. Students are required to participate in at least nine supervision sessions in a small group environment. Each week a student brings a case to discuss. They have transcribed part of the consultation, received the client's permission to present it, highlighted their concerns and articulated what they feel they need to examine about the case. The focus of these discussions remains with the astrological practitioner and the issues that arise for them in the consultation process. These issues will range from confidentiality to boundaries with personal biases and beliefs, difficult clients and situations, loss and suffering, triumphs and disasters all brought out into the open. As each case is discussed the student is more able to recognize their part in the process and become more conscious of not only where their own blind spots affect the process, but improve skills at listening, linking and feeding back. With supervision psyche is honored by the student becoming subtly aware of its powerful patterning and synchronicity.

As facilitator of the group, my mandate is to empower the student to become more at ease with process. In the student's chart we can often see where the transference has taken place but generally the astrology is not the issue. The issue is to recognize our own responses and the scope of our expertise at dealing with these issues.

On reflection supervision helped me to become more confident and focused. Ironically it made me less attached to the astrological information and more alert to what was being revealed through interaction with the client. It helped free my astrological analysis to listen to what the astrological image was revealing, so the client could lead and I could follow offering the astrology pertinent to their need. So much of my astrological learning and theory had to be deconstructed in the presence of the client. Through this progression I recreated my own style; with great reverence to both psyche and horoscope I act as a go-between, a process that feels more akin to the revelatory nature of astrology.

Clients turn to astrologers because their worldview embraces astrology and they are seeking its wisdom and revelation. Supervision helped me recognize that effective work is done in creating rapport with the client's predicament, not necessarily offering a checklist of their chart's ingredients. As well, it helped me to instill the confidence that the chart would reveal itself even in the most difficult circumstances. In listening while consciously holding the image of the horoscope I felt something more was created other than my own astrological analysis.

Astrological supervision in a formal setting is relatively new in the astrological field. However today, unlike those many years ago when I sought supervision, there are many experienced astrologers with counseling and psychotherapeutic training who are able to support the novice practitioner to recognize the unconscious elements that exist underneath the consultation. Some astrologers have felt uncomfortable with this approach, preferring terms like coaching or mentoring. In psyche's sense, supervision is not inspecting or evaluating another's methods, but is designed to bring about awareness to the delicate practice of chart consultation, animating the images of the horoscope for the client's comprehension.

As mentioned part of the Astro\*Synthesis Diploma requires participation in a supervision group. Below are two recent Diploma graduates (2008) who reflect on their participation in a supervision group.

**Lyn O'Donnell, Astro\*Synthesis Diploma Graduate**

I really got a great deal out of the supervision classes. I also felt there was a lot of support within the group. It was a fabulous opportunity to share our experiences and learn from each other. You can identify the themes in the chart but not necessarily always see the underlying themes and in this respect, I found the input from the group very insightful. I don't think you can necessarily learn everything about counselling from a text book, and I found being part of the supervision group to be a very positive and supportive learning experience.

**Cath Howard, Astro\*Synthesis Diploma Graduate**

It was very helpful to hear other people's insights and experiences, down to the simple things like managing time and money, and setting up the right environment. I not only gained a lot astrologically, I picked up on many new ways to look at the symbolism in a chart and new ways to approach a chart dynamically. The simple sharing of experiences, including that of the supervisors, was very valuable.

Working as an astrologer in a one on one setting can be isolating, being able to share and discuss experiences is very important. Especially being very early on in most of our careers as astrologers, it is good to realize that others have very similar difficulties and anxieties to work through, which all comes with experience. Personally, I had been doing astrology consultations very part time over about a two-year period before I attended the supervision classes. This I think was of benefit for me, rather than presenting my very first case, as some in the group did.

I found the supervision environment very positive, a shift from being in a class setting as students with teachers, to feeling that you were amongst colleagues, supervisors included. Which is a reflection of, not only the wonderful experience and knowledge of the supervisors, but also the way they were able to encourage a very supportive and safe environment to be in. The whole process was invaluable, I learnt a lot about myself as a practitioner. The consultations I have done since being through the supervision process have felt different. I feel I have opened up to a new level of confidence allowing me to explore a chart with someone in a whole new way that is very positive and beneficial.

Overall the supervision process for me was amazing and has played a very important part in my career as an astrologer. It has highlighted the importance of staying in contact with practicing colleagues for support. I have found new confidence, new inspiration and renewed energy to put into my work as an astrologer.