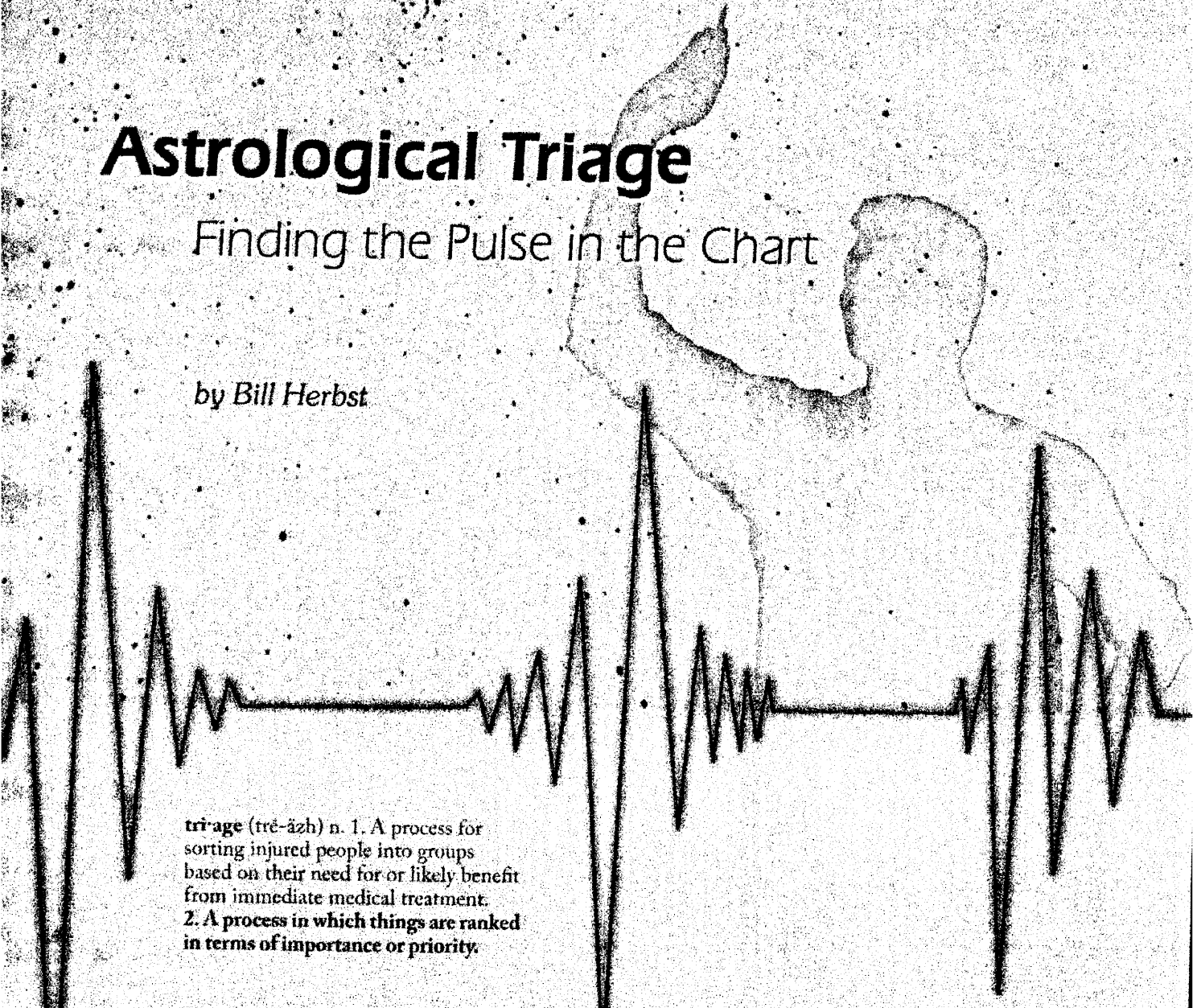


Astrological Triage

Finding the Pulse in the Chart

by Bill Herbst



triage (tré-ázh) n. 1. A process for sorting injured people into groups based on their need for or likely benefit from immediate medical treatment. 2. A process in which things are ranked in terms of importance or priority.

When confronting a universe as vast as that of astrology, students are frequently overwhelmed. They may be captivated initially by relatively superficial and simplistic astrology, such as interpretations of their basic "personality type" found in Sun-sign books. However their interest is piqued, though, they soon discover that astrology is *not* simple and straightforward. As students enter the world of more technical astrology, each textbook bought or article read leads deeper into dark woods where they often lose their way. The more students absorb, the more confused they can become. Sorting through the immense

amount of symbolic data contained in charts and the analytical techniques for interpreting that raw data can cause cortical brownout in even the brightest minds.

Since *all* the symbolic information in a given chart is at least potentially significant, how can students of astrology "separate the wheat from the chaff" to clearly comprehend the core meanings of a chart? As in medical triage, the challenge is to quickly assess which indicators are more essential and which are less so. It's not a question of "chaff," finally, but of varying degrees of "wheat." Focus on the essentials and let the rest tag along for the ride.

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Textbook delineations (to which students tend to devote a great deal of time and study) do not begin to address this issue. In fact, those combinations of two factors (e.g., Sun in Capricorn, Venus in the 8th house, Mars square Uranus, etc.) are often misleading in the overall scheme of interpretation. The implications of such limited, written delineations are frequently contradicted by other factors in the same chart. Further, even a mountain of such piecemeal delineations often results in little or no coherence. Masterful interpretation is not achieved by assembling delineations. The art of astrology involves learning to read the equivalent of medicine's vital signs. We need to monitor the heartbeat by finding the pulse in each chart, what "makes it tick."

Astrology embraces a diverse set of specialized disciplines that are literally and figuratively all over the map — natal astrology, progressions, relocations, synastry, horary, cosmobiology, harmonics, etc. Despite the breadth and specialization in astrology, however, most of those systems are based on common elements. (**Note:** The information in this article refers to natal astrology; much of it, however, applies to other types of astrology as well.)

Planets, Signs, Houses, and Aspects comprise the most fundamental building blocks of the astrological language. An understanding of cycles and their phases adds an invisible fifth element that informs and connects the other four. Within these interactive layers, and between them as well, a natural hierarchy of values exists. Not all astrological symbols carry equal weight. Some indicators are inherently more important than others for building a coherent interpretive framework from the ground up.

An astrological chart is essentially a blueprint, much like the wiring diagram of a circuit board that transforms energy for a specific purpose. Symbolic points in the chart represent the various components, each of which performs a spe-

The art of astrology involves learning to read the equivalent of medicine's vital signs.

cific function (somewhat like resistors or capacitors).

Planets and Other Points

The most important components come from the realm of planets. In a particular chart, a given planet (function) may be elevated in importance, less emphasized, or more prone to stress and breakdown. In all charts, however, a natural hierarchy of functional significance applies. We can divide the points in the chart into naturally weighted groups.

Historically, three points comprise the most important group, standing head and shoulders above the rest: the Sun and Moon (technically termed "lights" or "luminaries") and one point from the houses, the Ascendant (roughly equivalent to the eastern horizon). These are called "Power Points," and their supreme significance as functions is unquestioned. To those three, I would add a fourth point, the planet Saturn, for reasons detailed below.

- The Sun in any chart indicates the central source of power, the way the chart (or, in natal astrology, the person described) plugs into and absorbs life energy. It is our connection back to Cosmic Central. The Sun is the gravitational center of the life. Through expression of its sign and house associations, it performs the functions of integrity, coherence, and core meaning. The Sun is both the top dog and the bottom line in terms of life purpose.
- The Ascendant operates as the interface between the inner reality and the outer environment, revealing how the Sun's energy will be most naturally expressed. The Ascendant is the lens through which we focus our inner light and shine it into the world. The only exceptions to this are during brief moments of reactivity, when the Moon predominates, and extreme crisis, when the Sun takes over and expresses itself directly.

- The Moon shows the immediate, automatic, and first response to any stimulus from the environment. As a protective function, the Moon also reveals our day-to-day needs, how we nurture ourselves and others, and the ebb and flow of feelings in daily temperament.
- Despite its omission from the traditional Power Points, Saturn has always been considered crucial as the arbiter of time and maturity, the great teacher of limits and boundaries on the long, slow pathway to adulthood. More important even than its linkage with ambition and authority is Saturn's function as a reality indicator, showing in each chart where life bursts the bubbles of our subjective fantasies and makes us deal with what objectively is, as opposed to our personal projections of how we hope or wish reality could be. Saturn's cycles — especially those to the Sun, Moon, and angles — are among the most significant of all transits, revealing the skeletal structure of natural growth schedules, upon which everything else hangs. The first Saturn return around age 29 is frequently a life-changing crossroads, separating the end of extended childhood from the beginnings of true adulthood.

However emphatic other points in the chart may seem, these four are never trumped. Other planets may vie in a given chart for admission to the elite club, but these are permanent members. The Sun and Saturn are the alpha and omega of every chart — the beginning and the end. The Sun is the giver of life on Earth, and Saturn is the last body routinely visible to the unaided senses, so it represents the limits of the material world. The Moon and Ascendant modulate the Sun's energy within the defined Saturnian limits.

The second group on our weighted scale includes the rest of the traditional, visible planets: Mercury, Venus, Mars, and Jupiter. These planets tend to act as modifiers to the more central Power Points, in much the same way that adjectives refine nouns. Each has its own function, of course (which I'll forgo listing here), but unless elevated by their condition in a particular chart, they are far below the fundamental importance of the primary group. Three other points can be added to this group, those of the remaining

house angles: Midheaven (MC), Lower Heaven (IC), and Descendant.

The third group contains the outer planets — Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto — which act as wildcards or challenges to the basic operation of the system.¹

The last group includes all the other points: nodes, asteroids, Centaurs, fixed stars, Arabic Parts, etc. Individual astrologers may have personal favorites among this final group, which incline them to emphasize one or more of these points in their interpretative frameworks. For instance, Chiron is gaining increasing acceptance in astrology, in no small part because the Chiron return at age 50–51 seems, for many now-older astrologers, to carry as much impact as the Saturn return at 29. To list another example, many astrologers pay particular attention to the Moon's nodal axis, because of its metaphysical implications as a "spiritual" indicator of soul evolution, past and future (South and North Node, respectively). Despite their popularity, however, neither Chiron nor the Moon's nodes can be considered by any reasonable standard to carry the interpretive weight of the Sun, Moon, Ascendant, or Saturn.

Mangling the Hierarchy

The tendency to latch onto a minor point low in the hierarchy and elevate it to supreme status is a pitfall to which many students are particularly vulnerable. Once imprinted, that minor point always grabs the student's attention first, becoming the fulcrum around which the entire interpretation of the chart is constructed.

For new and inexperienced astrologers, especially, it's easy to imagine drawing up the chart of a friend, who then innocently asks you to sit down with him and "explain" or "interpret" his chart. It's one thing to understand the chart in your mind; it's quite another thing altogether to verbally perform in the setting of a "reading." If you've never done that before (or worse, tried a couple of times with embarrassing results), the challenge can be a real freak-out. Stage-fright alone is often withering, as are the sand traps and water holes involved in playing "cosmic authority." (Who among us shoots par on that mystical golf

course?) So, we take our best shot, so to speak, by going straight to whatever symbols or interpretive techniques we feel we know best.

I sympathize with students who fixate on certain lower-level points. If you're drowning in a sea of confusion, and a life preserver floats by — a symbol that you really "get," meaning that its implications and interpretation make clear sense to you — of course you will grab it and hang on for dear life. I presume that all astrologers, whether beginning students or experienced professionals, go through evolving phases in their understanding of astrology, periods when they are enamored with certain analytical indicators. That's natural. The trick is to integrate those specialized interests into the overall hierarchy of values and meanings in the chart.

In discussing these pitfalls, I do not mean to imply support for an institutionalized astrological dogma where certain points of view are outlawed. Every astrologer is and should be free to follow his or her individual inclinations or personal passions. Part of what makes astrology so rich is that it allows and even encourages divergent perspectives and unique skill sets among its practitioners. Developing a specialty can be very rewarding on many levels: boosting confidence, attracting clients, carving out a niche for oneself, etc. That said, however, obsession with a specific astrological technique or interpretive approach does *not* invalidate the fundamental hierarchy of values in the system as a whole. Fixation is a sorry substitute for a comprehensive understanding of the natural order in astrology.

Having defined a hierarchy of points, we can move on to astrology's three other elemental levels. Where do signs, houses, and aspects fit in the natural order?

Signs and Houses

Signs and houses are related. Each is a twelve-fold breakdown of an Earth motion. Signs are based on the yearly cycle of the Earth moving around the Sun. The tropical zodiac is Mother Nature's year projected into the heavens, describing seasonal phases. So, signs are a symbolic representation of sequential growth processes in life.

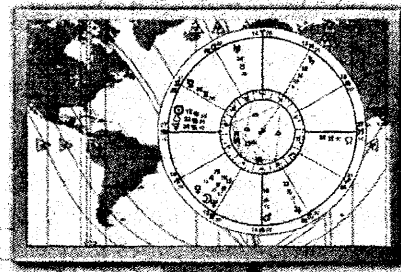
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Houses are based on the daily cycle of the Earth rotating on its axis — one 24-hour period, containing the alternating rhythms of night and day, up and down, rising and setting. Houses are a means of differentiating space as well as time.

Signs show *how* the functions of the planets and points manifest: urgently and fast (Aries), stolid and slow (Taurus), with careful precision (Virgo), social sensitivity (Libra), penetrating depth (Scorpio), or boundless enthusiasm (Sagittarius). Signs are processes or styles of living that define twelve different filters through which to interpret and interact with life.

Houses show *where* the functions express themselves: in the home (4th), at the office (10th), among friends (11th), or through illness and healing (6th). Houses are arenas of life experience that operate as twelve different doorways into manifestation.

Both signs and houses are frames of reference, ways of pinpointing objects or positions in the sky. Signs are collective, however, whereas houses are individual. When we locate a planet in a certain degree along the zodiac, this is a

moment *in time* that applies for everyone on the Earth. When Mars is moving through Aries, it's there for all of us. Conversely, when we locate a planet in the houses, we are pinpointing its position not just in time, but *in space* as well. When Mars is overhead (in the 10th house) for one person, it is setting (in the 7th house) for someone at a different location on the Earth. Therefore, signs refer to *collective time*, and houses refer to *personal space*.

Okay, that's cool. But what relative weight do we give to signs and houses in the natural hierarchy? In the horseracing terminology of "win, place, and show," *planets* clearly cross the finish line first. But which level takes second place — *signs* or *houses*? That's a difficult question to answer. Which is more important, time or space? Collectivity or individuality?

In my opinion, signs are the most overemphasized element of astrology. They are discussed and written about more than any other level. One reason that signs are so popular is that they are generic and easily accessible. In natal astrology, we can identify the sign positions of many planets in someone's chart even without a birth time — just by the day, month, year — yet still come up with a fairly exhaustive inventory of what are commonly called "character or personality traits." For many

students, delineations of planets in signs are the first meanings they study in depth, at least partly because so much of the mass-market astrological literature focuses on that level.

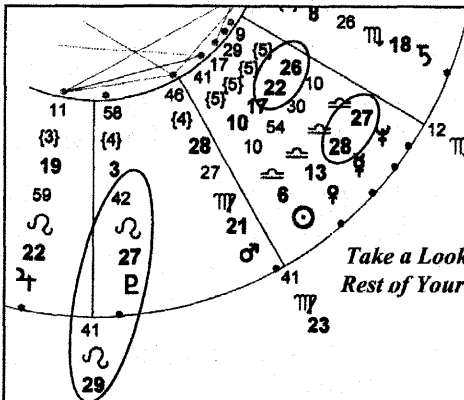
Houses, on the other hand, lend depth and specificity to real-world, serious interpretation. They are customized to an individual life in ways that (to me, at least) are so much more revealing.

Happily, we need not elevate either element above the other. Signs and houses work together in interpretive technique through the structure known in classical astrology as *dignification*. Each of the major planets is associated with certain signs of the zodiac in one of four ways: *rulership, detriment, exaltation, or fall*. (Due to limited space in this article, I'll address only the first of these four traditional categories: rulership.)

A planet is the "ruler" of the sign with which it shares most qualities in common. Most students learn rulerships early on: The Sun rules Leo, the Moon rules Cancer, Saturn rules Capricorn, etc. Planets are assumed to be "strongest" when placed in the sign they rule. Some astrologers use an equivalent system with the houses, but those associations don't apply nearly as well. Saturn may well be "strengthened" in Capricorn over Cancer, but it's definitely *not* "stronger" in the 10th house than it is in the 4th. People have just as much trouble with ambition and career when Saturn is natively in their 10th house as they do with personal security and family when Saturn is in the natal 4th.

So, rulership might incline us to conclude that signs are more important than houses, because of their closer connection to planets/points, or at least the major planets, which are the most important points. That conclusion is deceptive, however. When we put together all three elemental levels of planets, signs, and houses in a given chart and then apply rulerships, houses rebound impressively. The reason lies in the magnificent interpretive subtlety and texture that emerge through the understanding and use of what are termed "occupied" and "ruled" houses.

If the Sun is in Aries in the 7th house, then we look for Leo in the



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chart — the sign naturally ruled by the Sun — and discover that Leo is on the 11th-house cusp. The Sun “occupies” the 7th house, but it also “rules” the 11th house. That tells us not only that the central life purpose (Sun) will be expressed through committed, equal partnerships or marriage (7th), but also that the partner will need to be a friend (11th) as well. Another interpretive level of the same configuration might be that dealing with the public (7th) is central (Sun) and that such dealings will most naturally occur through organizations (11th) to which the person belongs.

Put the Sun in the 7th house again, this time in Pisces, and Leo will likely be found on the 12th-house cusp. That combination produces a very different set of possible interpretations. Marriage (7th) is now tied to acts of selflessness (12th). Partnerships (7th) could be fantasy-based (12th), producing either ecstasy or insanity. The partner might be psychologically or physically ill. Contracts refuse to conform to logic, and commitments become devotional.

Both hypotheticals place the Sun in the 7th, but notice how different the interpretations are!

Through this technique, signs become the connective tissue that defines the matrix of relationships between planets and houses. Interpretive depth and subtlety take a dramatic leap forward. In the chart, whole worlds open up that were previously invisible to the student’s eyes.

But wait, we’re just getting started. Even the interpretive worlds of occupied and ruled houses pale in comparison when we factor in aspects.

Aspects

Aspects in astrology are arcs based on fractions of the circle: 1/2, 1/3, 1/4, 1/6, etc. When two planets/points are angularly separated by one of these special arcs — 0°, 90°, 120°, or 180°, for instance — they are said to be “in aspect.”

Aspects show how the individual points in each chart are hooked together into a kind of functional circuitry. (Remember the old gospel tune, “Dry Bones”? “Your backbone connected to your shoulder bone, your shoulder bone connected to your neck bone, your neck

**The Sun is both
the top dog and
the bottom line in
terms of life purpose.**

bone connected to your head bone ...” Aspects are a little like the connective tissue of sign rulerships, only *much* stronger. House connections revealed through sign rulerships have a marvelous subtlety, whereas aspects carry a direct and often profound impact.

Aspects are very helpful for rearranging the planetary hierarchy when appropriate. This is most obviously the case when less important planets are aspected to one or more of the four critical points at the top of the list:

- Any planet in aspect to the Sun is involved in the essence of the life purpose and the motivational engine that propels us forward.
- Any planet in aspect to the Moon is involved in daily temperament and the ebb and flow of automatic responses and short-term needs.
- Any planet in aspect to Saturn is involved in personal defense, long-term ambition to overcome obstacles, and necessary duties or self-restraint.

- Any planet in aspect to the Ascendant is involved in the natural and active self-expression of the native.

The tighter the orb of these aspects, the greater allowance should be made for increasing the weight of the lesser planet involved.

The nature of the aspect is also significant. With the major aspects at least, planets/points can be connected in any of three ways: *conjunct*, where their functions are fused and operate as one; in *soft aspect* (trines or sextiles), where their functions are separate but cooperative, implying smooth habituation and steady durability; or in *hard aspect* (squares and oppositions), where the functions are polarized, tied together stressfully, causing mutual exclusivity and alternation — as if two people with conflicting viewpoints were struggling at a podium for control of the microphone.

Here are examples from natal astrology of how the three categories work:

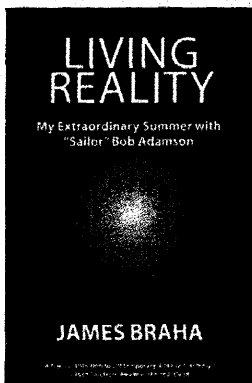
- Sun *conjunct* Uranus indicates a life purpose that is inherently radicalized and eccentric. Individuality and originality are themselves central themes in the core meaning of the life.
- Sun *trine* Uranus indicates a life purpose that is augmented by individuality or originality, which adds new and unusual

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dimensions that are easily integrated into the core meaning of the life.

- Sun square Uranus indicates a life purpose that is highly charged with inner conflict between authority and rebellion. The core meaning of the life may be conservative at times, but it will be disrupted by explosions of radical individuality, implying sudden and dramatic shifts in life direction.

We Interrupt This Broadcast for a Word from Our Sponsor ...

Right about now, I can imagine that some readers are thoroughly bewildered. I can almost hear students thinking, "Bill, I thought you were going to simplify interpretation for us, but all you've done is make it more complicated than ever!"

Well, please hang in there with me. We're just about to get to the simplifying. To recap, we've established a

natural hierarchy of planets/points. In charts, the meanings of these points are revealed through various interpretive techniques involving signs, houses, and aspects.

The first way we'll move back toward simplicity is by removing all but the most important points from the charts of two well-known people and one infamous event.

Lucille Ball

For many decades, Lucille Ball was the Queen of American Television. From 1951 to 1957, she starred in *I Love Lucy*, the archetypal sitcom that has run continuously in syndication ever since.

Show business has two halves: *show* and *business*. Beyond the obvious fame of her huge stardom as a ditz "clown" comedienne, Lucille Ball was a tough, no-nonsense businesswoman. She became a force among the power players of Hollywood, paving the way for women who have followed in the long, ongoing struggle to be taken seriously and to achieve equality in male-dominated industries.



Her father died before her birth in 1911, but Lucille Ball made up in ambition what she lacked in parental protection. A strikingly beautiful redhead, Ball initially wanted to be an actress, but that desire was rebuffed, so she went into modeling instead. Being chosen as the "Chesterfield Cigarette Girl" in 1933 opened doors to Hollywood, however, and she was soon an aspiring ingenue in the studio system. Parts in 60 films over the next 15 years provided constant work but no breakthrough roles, leaving Lucille

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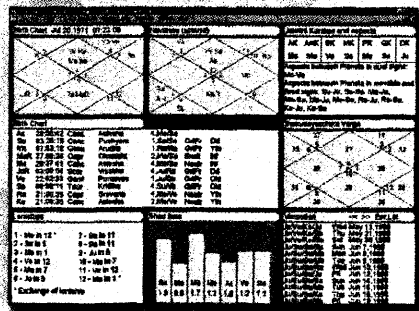
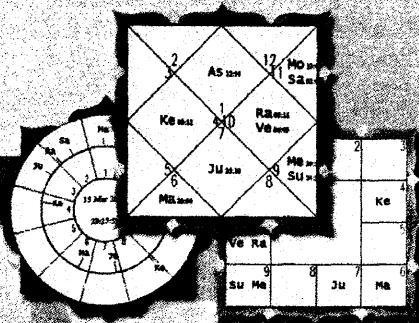
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Ball mired in second-tier supporting parts to more famous leads or as the less luminary star of many B-movies.

Along the way, in 1940, Ball married Cuban bandleader Desi Arnaz, and the two embarked on a tempestuous long-term marriage that would reshape their lives. Due to separations by work (and, in part, Arnaz's sporadic infidelities), the couple nearly divorced in 1945. In an effort to keep the marriage together, the couple turned to the fledgling medium of television, with the intention of creating a show where both partners could act together. *I Love Lucy* was the spectacular result.

Chart 1 (below) shows Lucille Ball's natal chart: a planetary splash pattern,² filled with aspects — grand trines and kite patterns galore, plus a major t-square. The chart is a potential quagmire for the astrological student, since nearly everything is connected. How do we make sense of that maze? **Chart 1a** shows the same chart in simplified form, highlighting only the essentials of the natural hierarchy — the Power Points, their main aspects to other planets, and the most significant houses.

If all we knew of Lucille Ball were her public persona, we might assume that the chart was "all business" — double Capricorn (Moon and Ascendant) for ambition, elevated Jupiter in the 10th for social success and recognition,

8th-house Sun for money and power, plus Sun in Leo and Saturn on the cusp of the 5th house to define a hardworking actress. Certainly all those textbook interpretations are reflective of her life.

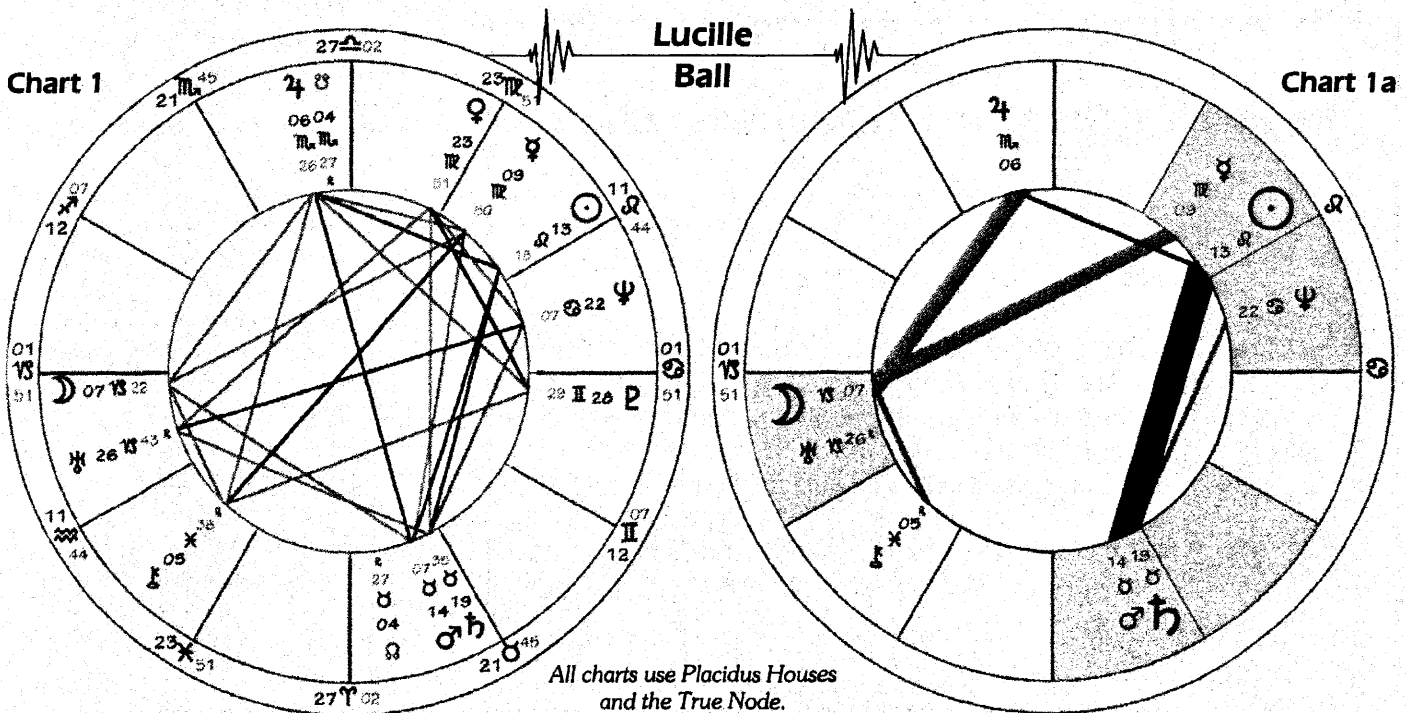
But look again at the essentialized Chart 1a. Lucille Ball's life path is definitely one of ambition, career, and performance. But the deeper story, the inner journey, tells of a great love in conflict. The obstacles to her cultural success pale in light of the deeply private melodrama of a romantic union that she reached for but that, once gained, she could not hold.

The 1st, 4th, 5th, 7th, and 8th houses are the essential arenas of her life experience. The 1st contains the Moon and is ruled by Saturn. The 7th is ruled by the Moon. The 8th is occupied and ruled by the Sun. To these three we add the 4th and 5th, which are included because of the Mars-Saturn conjunction that tightly squares the Sun. Mars occupies and rules the 4th, while Saturn is effectively in the 5th. (**Note:** Cuspal zones — where the effective arc of a given sign or house transitions into the next — occur much earlier in houses than in signs. Traditionally, only the final 1°-2° of a sign are considered transitional. In houses, however, the last quarter of the visual space in one house represents a zone of gradual fade-out and fade-in to the next

house. The Gauquelin data support the view that the cusp is the strongest area of house influence, rather than the beginning of the house, whereas sign cusps operate more as entrances. Thus, in Lucille Ball's chart, Mars is late in the 4th house but rules the IC as a re-emphasis of the 4th, while Saturn is only 2° shy of the next cusp, thus definitely associated with the 5th.)

In this chart, the conflict between *eros* and *agape* is withering. Lucille Ball's 8th-house Leo Sun finds fulfillment only in union with another, who is as important to her as her own ego. The square from the Sun to the Mars-Saturn conjunction in Taurus pulls in the 4th and 5th houses in a planet/sign/house/aspect matrix that pits the longed-for conservatism and permanence of home, family, and stability against the impetuous, all-or-nothing intensity of sexual combustion through romantic flames. Fire versus earth. Passion versus possession. Loyalty versus betrayal.

The double-Capricorn Moon and Ascendant are revealing and misleading. They show Lucille Ball's temperamental ambition, a drive for conscious self-expression that was also an unconscious need — but obscured beneath that calculating, hard surface was a warm, beating, and often bleeding heart. Look to the other side of the chart. Neptune in the 7th is romantic

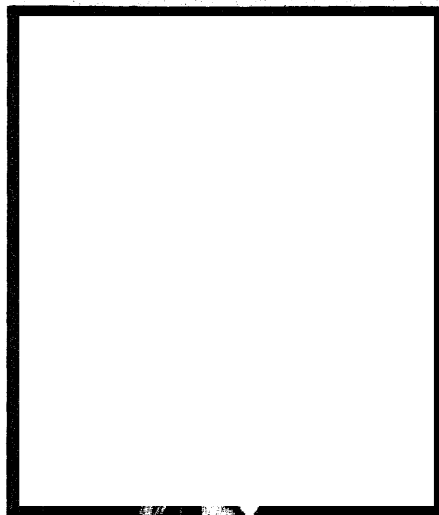


Astrological Triage

but easily deluded, prompting seduction followed inevitably by betrayal. How could one so seasoned in worldly cynicism (Moon and Ascendant in Capricorn) be so easily fooled in marriage? Her vulnerability wasn't hidden or kept secret; it simply operated in a different realm than her ambition. She tried to solve this dilemma by fusing together her own career with her husband's, but even that came undone.

All her long-held, hard-won, dogged ambition finally paid off (Jupiter in the 10th house sextile the Moon in the 1st), but even as Lucille Ball achieved the absolute pinnacle of outward success through recognition, fortune, and power, she could not reconcile the paradoxes of her central life purpose. I look at her chart and imagine that she would gladly have given up at least some of her success for more permanent happiness with Desi.

This is not to suggest that Lucille Ball failed in her life. Paradoxes are never resolved. If we're lucky, we arrive at a point of appreciation, respect, and acceptance. At the height of her fame, her marriage to Desi Arnaz ended in divorce, and both of their lives began a



long, slow fade from the limelight. They remained lifelong friends, however, and that may have been enough. One great but doomed love is all that most of us could handle anyway.

Arnold Schwarzenegger

Who would have imagined, while watching Arnold's painfully bad (and uncredited) bit-part performance in Robert Altman's 1973 movie, *The Long Goodbye*, that this awkward Austrian bodybuilder (and seven-time Mr. Olympia) — with his bulging biceps, glistening pecs, and comically thick accent — would rise to become not merely one of the biggest box office draws in Hollywood, but eventually the governor of

California? Whoa. No one underestimates Arnold now.

Chart 2 (opposite) shows Schwarzenegger's natal chart, and **Chart 2a** provides the contrast of the simplified chart.

Like Lucille Ball, Schwarzenegger is a Leo Sun and Capricorn Moon, and both of these people have Saturn in major aspect to the Sun, so we see uncanny parallels in the resoluteness of their disciplined ambitions. Both were largely self-created and willing to engage in self-parody, especially in the personae they adopted as performers.

The similarities end there, however. Whereas Lucille Ball's life purpose focused on union with a partner, Arnold Schwarzenegger's life purpose is primarily self-centered. That's not to imply that his marriage to Maria Shriver is unimportant; Saturn's rulership of the 7th house implies that committed partnerships are serious. The other three emphasized houses carry more personal implications. Schwarzenegger used his physical body (1st and 2nd) as the limestone block through which to build, sculpt, and perfect himself (6th).

He did so with almost inhuman discipline. The Sun-Saturn-Pluto conjunction in Leo in the 2nd house made for unbelievable drive, supported by his Capricorn Moon willingness to push himself as far as it took to succeed, whatever the cost in sweat, grit, and self-sacrifice. Schwarzenegger's chart is all about overcoming limitations, pushing the envelope to transform himself into a larger-than-life figure, both literally and mythically.

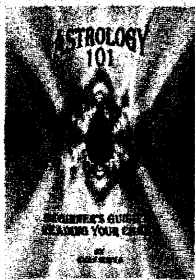
And what is success to Arnold? Money and power, essentially. Good health perhaps. Strength and fitness certainly. Schwarzenegger's primary life purpose (Sun conjunct Saturn and Pluto in Leo/2nd) is to rise from the dark pit of insecurity to the heights of gloriously positive self-esteem by applying extraordinary discipline to prove his worth, in the most densely physical ways possible, as the Man Who Has Everything. Or, at least, Everything He Wants, as we shall see momentarily.

I include Schwarzenegger's chart in this article because it illustrates an important principle of the natural astrological hierarchy, namely, that wildcards (exceptions to the rule) do exist and need to be factored in. One conspicuous combina-

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tion is missing from the simplified chart that is critical to understanding Schwarzenegger's basic nature and life story, as well as whatever destiny holds for him.

As seen in Chart 2, Mars conjunct Uranus in Gemini in the 12th house is a pairing not necessarily elevated in standard methods of assessing the hierarchy of meaning. In this case, however, we should definitely push that pair of symbols closer to the top. First, they are the leading planets of Schwarzenegger's bowl pattern.³ Second, with the exception of a waning quincunx to Jupiter, Mars and Uranus are nearly unspaced by the rest of his chart, thus they "stick out like a sore thumb." And third, they are effectively the only planets above the horizon (Mercury is a mere 1° above the Ascendant).

Most of all, Mars and Uranus deserve increased consideration because the rest of Schwarzenegger's chart is so deadly serious. That is indicated by all the core placements. This is one tough guy. But just when we presume that Arnold is all work and no play, that Mars-Uranus conjunction in Gemini/12th comes out of nowhere, providing an almost comic contrast in unexpected and shocking lightheartedness. Suddenly Arnold transforms himself from Mr. Serious to The Prankster, almost like a little kid just playing in the sandbox. This is a great social boon to Schwarzenegger, as

The chart and the real-life subject of the chart are necessary in tandem to produce an artful interpretation.

it leavens a very cold center. Mars and Uranus in Gemini can't provide much real warmth, but they sure do promote adolescent fun.

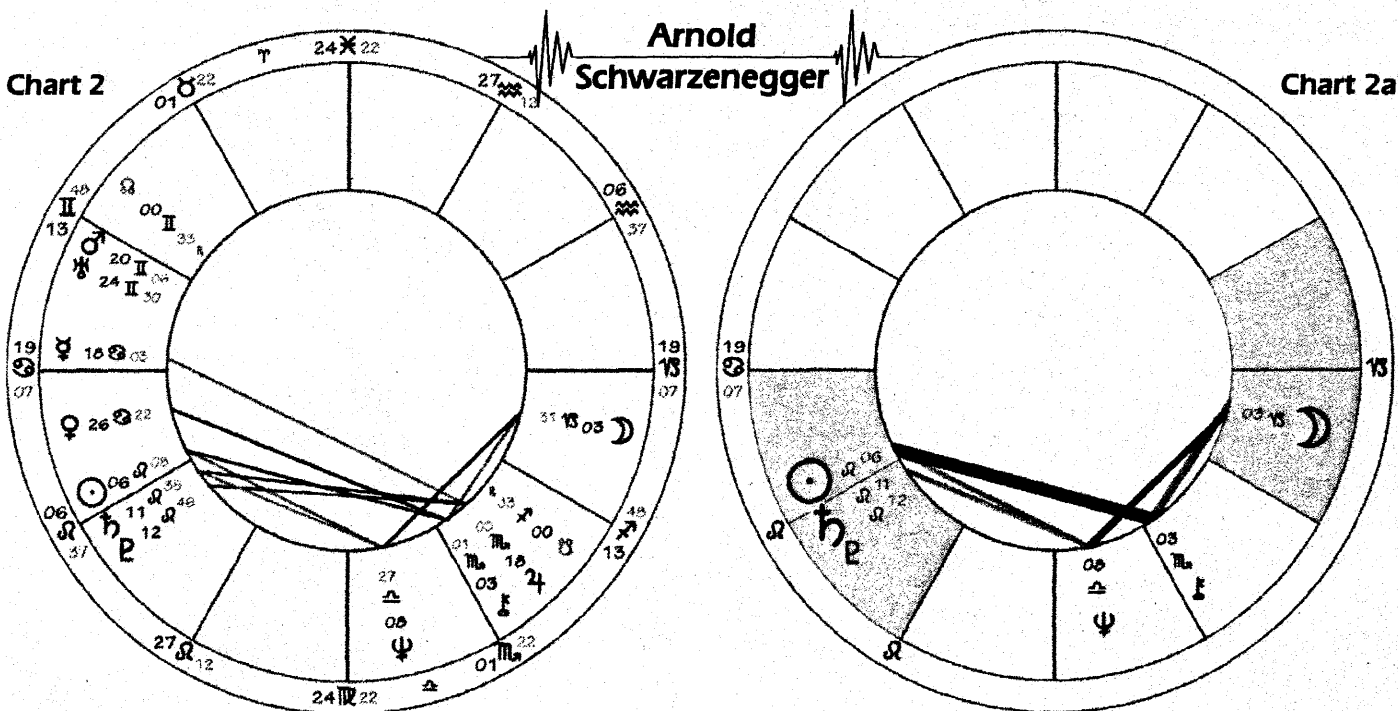
Two implications stand out with Mars-Uranus in Gemini/12th: One is that Arnold is more archetype than reality. In his Hollywood career as an actor, he wisely chose to play mythic or even "inhuman" characters. Think Terminator. He made himself into the archetype of maleness, an impressive if sometimes grotesque testosterone fantasy. This was not merely a result of natural endowment, but a calculated career strategy that Schwarzenegger manipulated magnificently into a star franchise. Subtlety is not part of his over-the-top persona, but so far (through the caution of Saturn with his Leo Sun), Arnold has usually understood when he went too far and needed to pull back into more human dimensions.

The second significant (and dangerous) Mars-Uranus factor is that what

Arnold wants is sacrosanct — *whatever* he wants, *whenever* he wants it. He is disciplined to a fault (Sun-Saturn-Pluto), but within that dutifulness Schwarzenegger makes time to go after whatever arouses him. Arnold wants a Hummer, Arnold buys a Hummer — or two or three. So, desire counts big-time, and not only in acquiring the possessions that symbolize cultural status and financial success.

Where the willfulness of Mars-Uranus becomes problematic is in Schwarzenegger's sexual history and attitudes about gender, specifically toward women. Schwarzenegger has gotten great mileage out of the admonition, "Don't be a girly-man." It's Arnold's number-one stock joke and a huge crowd-pleaser among his followers. Mars and Uranus lurking together in the 12th, however, can be troublesome. His public insults of California nurses have already cost him dearly. And some of the more private sexual episodes from his earlier life may eventually come home to roost in uncomfortable scandals that could adversely affect his public standing and political ambitions (which are, of course, boundless).

Precisely because the rest of Schwarzenegger's chart is so conservative, so driven by ambition, and so completely wrapped up in social success and acceptance, this wildcard factor



Astrological Triage

bears watching. Even if his act is clean now, Arnold's somewhat lurid past may return to haunt him in the future. Fantasy is all well and good, as is sexual playfulness, but Sun-Saturn conjunctions have a way of forcing reality to puncture dreams.

9/11 World Trade Center Attack

Our third example is not a person, but an event. No one reading this article needs an introduction to 9/11. That sunny morning in mid September 2001 is the most recent addition to the list of watershed moments, turning points, and great tragedies in American history — not merely because of its intrinsic significance, nor its sad status as a harbinger of the fear and revenge that followed, but also because millions of us witnessed the second of two airplanes crashing into the Twin Trade Towers live on television, as it occurred. We then watched, mesmerized, as the towers burned and later collapsed, obliterating the skyline of New York in smoke, dust, and debris.

More words have been written about 9/11 than any event since the assassination of President Kennedy in 1963. Astrologers contributed their



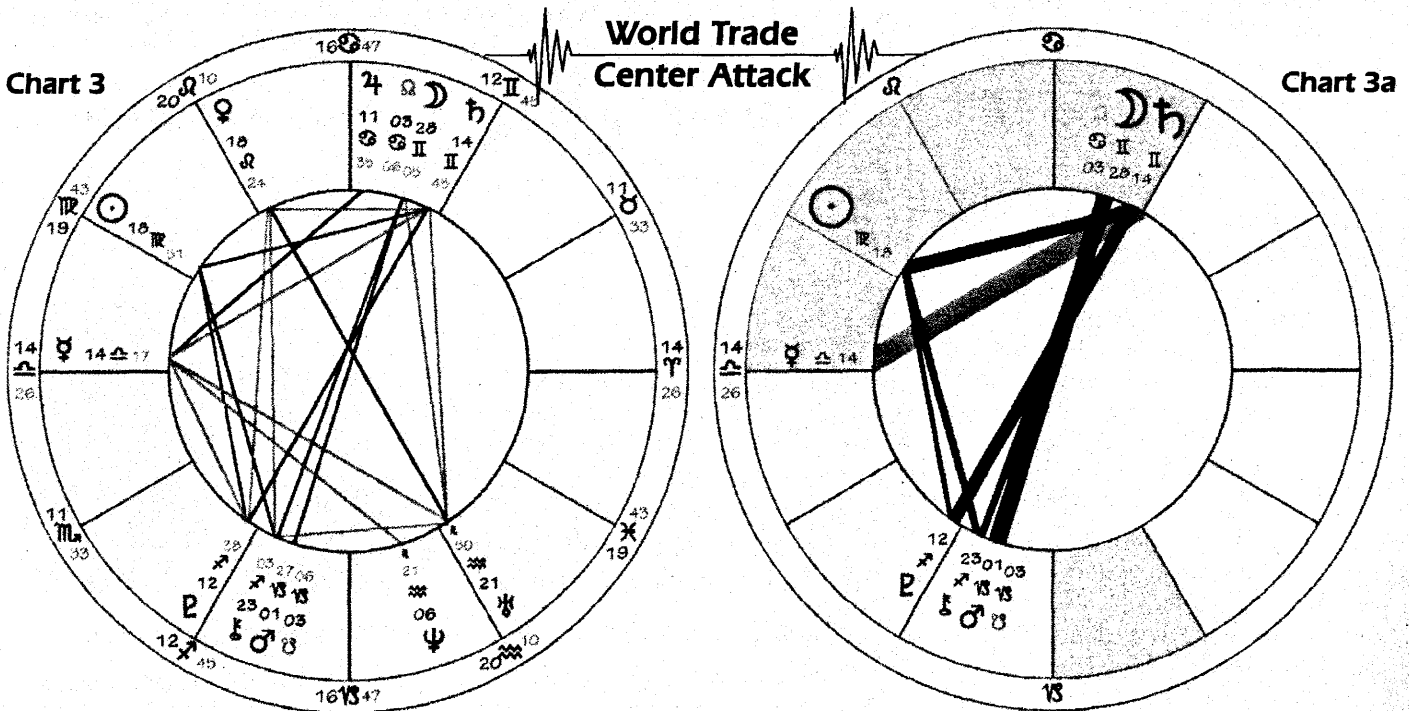
share, mostly by analyzing the chart for the moment and place the first airliner hit. These analyses dredged deep into the bowels of technical astrology, pulling out all the stops in the hunt for a "smoking gun" that would reveal the cosmic signature of meaning. Can we see the core meanings in the chart without recourse to complex or arcane analyses?

Astrology cannot accurately distinguish between the potential for meaning and actual events that occur in real life. Although many astrologers noted the dangers of the 2001 Saturn-Pluto opposition on the horizon axis of the U.S. Sibly chart, none of us could have

predicted the exact moment and precise nature of the tragic events that occurred. We are left to analyze the chart in hindsight, looking backwards via the rear-view mirror.

In pure abstraction, any chart could have myriad meanings, but we're dealing with real events as lenses. Those events shape the meanings in specific directions, allowing the chart to clearly emerge. Essentially, this is a feedback loop: The chart gives us a kaleidoscopic view of infinite possibilities for that moment in time and space. Then we look at real life, at what actually is. That reality highlights certain levels of the chart, bringing them into focus, which narrows the symbolic possibilities and sharpens our perceptions by adding implications that we can then apply back to the real-life events, which in turn change how we see those events. If we follow that loop around five or six times (or 90-100 times), our understanding of both the real events and the chart may end up quite different from our first impressions.

In other words, the chart and the real-life subject of the chart are necessary in tandem to produce an artful interpretation. Charts without a corresponding reality we can learn about are just symbolic abstractions. Exploring the reality is critical to understanding the chart. We look from one to the other, and each morphs in our vision into sharper, deeper



clarity. Some layers fall away while others rise into the foreground.

The final note to add is that your interpretation will be unlike mine, since the observer matters, and we see through different eyes. So the chart, the subject, and the observer create unique trifocal lenses. No two astrologers will ever interpret charts quite the same. That's part of what makes astrology so amazing; it's not "objective truth," but rather "creatively enhanced meaning." When we are reverent and thorough, we may get to some understanding that approaches the truth, or at least comes as close as mere mortals ever can.

Chart 3 (opposite) shows the regular chart for the World Trade Center attacks, and **Chart 3a** gives the simplified version. From my perspective, when held up against the actual events that occurred, the 9/11 chart refers to a message, a press release, or a teaching about home and the world and the new connectedness between those levels of life. The message is delivered as a karmic visitation, a nightmare of helplessness, retribution through violence, moral-

philosophical conflict, and profound misunderstanding. Two possible paths are indicated in the aftermath, either toward armed camps marked by parochial unconsciousness, extreme propaganda, and further vengeance, or toward an eventual reconciliation through increased tolerance, mature understanding, and global healing that are long overdue and crucial to civilization's future. Sounds grandiose, right? Well, let me break down all of that into bite-sized chunks:

First, look at the emphasized houses in Chart 3a: the 4th, 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th. Saturn rules the 4th, Saturn and the Moon occupy the 9th, the Moon rules the 10th, and the Sun rules the 11th and occupies the 12th.

What an odd and unusual alignment! The last four houses of the upper hemisphere, the 9th-12th, symbolize the realm of collective or shared experience, life in the outer world of society and culture. These are contrasted with the 4th, the most personal, subjective, and private area of roots and family. The 9th-12th houses are, at their broadest, international in scope, while the 4th is

local to the point of provinciality. Here we have big world and small world, public and private, the future played against the past.

At every level imaginable, this chart has to do with home and security as personal comforts confronted by the impersonal evolution of civilization as a whole. In the 20th century, wars had already disrupted hundreds of millions of private lives, homes, and families elsewhere in the world, and finally, in 2001, that shock came to the United States. The suicidal hijackers were saying, "Since you will not leave our homelands alone, we will attack you in yours!" To many Americans, unaware of the extent to which the American empire — economic, political, and military — has reached into every corner of the world (and sometimes very unpleasantly for those affected), this message seemed utterly perverse, but it was no less obvious on that account.

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the terrible, gut-wrenching jolt of seeing our own soil violated — this time in the sacred castles of New York and Washington. We thought we were safe (4th house) from the havoc of the world (9th–12th), but we found out that the world is shrinking very fast, and everyone's home, both here and abroad, is now vulnerable. The U.S. will never again be completely secure (4th) until we reorder, reorganize, and re-envision the world (9th–12th) as a safe place for all.

The Moon is in Gemini in the 9th house, conjunct its own North Node and ruling the Midheaven. Mars opposes the Moon from Capricorn/3rd, conjunct the South Node. The aggression (Mars) was a response (Moon) to what the attackers saw as the provocation of America's ongoing military presence in the Middle East, a message (3rd/9th) concerning the sanctity of Muslim homelands (Cancer Midheaven). The message has implica-

tions for the future (North Node) but is concretely delivered via means that are from the past (South Node in the 3rd) — namely, through intentional physical violence aimed at institutions and government (Mars in Capricorn), with real people important only as statistics of incidental collateral damage, merely a tally of blood in defining the cumulative impact. The attackers didn't care who they killed; the more people dead the better, in their gruesome arithmetic.

By turning airplanes into missiles (or, more accurately, *spears*), the attackers used primitive Martian means to deliver the message that their needs are not being met and that they don't want their lands ruled by America. Into this protest was woven an additional message of religious fundamentalism (Saturn in the 9th): "Oh, and by the way, we don't like your religion, either!" Mercury on the Ascendant and trine Saturn suggests that this message was delivered bluntly but effectively, as if by shouting to make oneself heard.

The Sun in the 12th, under great pressure at the apex of a t-square with

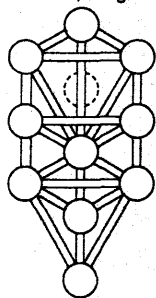
Saturn opposite Pluto, implies forced surrender, victimization, or helplessness. For everyone from firefighters and citizens in New York to the millions watching on television, the sense of helplessness was palpable. This was a nightmare (12th), more like a disaster movie than a real event. The media went nuts, rewinding the video clips to show the planes crashing into the towers time after time, which only increased the shock of seeming unreality. The towers were down, then they were up, then they fell, again and again and again.

People ask how this attack could have happened, given our supposedly sophisticated systems of civil and military air control and defense. The t-square in the 9/11 chart speaks directly to bureaucratic breakdowns and lack of coordination between various official chains of command. The Sun in Virgo/12th suggests that we were confused or not paying attention, and both Saturn and Pluto square the Sun imply conflicting or blocked lines of authority. More importantly, however, the t-square implies that we will probably never know the truth,

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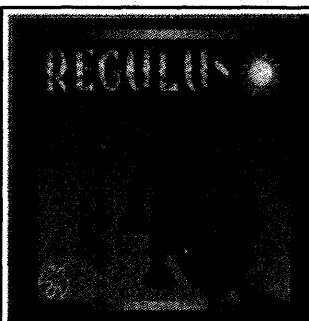
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which has been destroyed, classified as state secrets, or buried under a mountain of misinformation.

Beyond questions of how 9/11 happened, *why* did it happen? Why did the U.S. arrive at this tragic crossroads? Once again, by not paying attention (Sun in Virgo/12th) or, more subtly, by not living up to our stated idealism (Sun rules the 11th) and suffering the karma that comes from hubris or abuse of power (12th-house Sun severely afflicted by Saturn and Pluto). Much of the rest of the world is not pleased with the overreach of the Pax Americana. Obviously, that same excess pride and abusiveness also apply to Islamic militants. Killing does not lead to reconciliation. In addition, the 3rd-9th-12th t-square from mutable signs indicates the likelihood of serious misunderstandings, as though the adversaries don't speak the same language and cannot comprehend each other's respective motivations, intentions, or grievances.

In the aftermath of 9/11, we have seen those misunderstandings compounded on both sides by further wholesale slaughter. Unfortunately, diplomacy and communication (Mercury exactly on the Libra Ascendant in a grand trine with Saturn and Uranus, also in air signs) were jettisoned early on. The impulse to respond instinctively with military force (the Moon effectively in Cancer opposing Mars in early Capricorn) may have been pragmatically unavoidable, as was our government's retreat into fear and authoritarian measures, such as the Patriot Act — thus keeping the entire nation locked in the grip of the t-square involving the Sun, Saturn, and Pluto.

The 9/11 chart does offer other ways out of the cycle of violence, however: lawful respect for the sovereignty of others' homes and cultures (the 9th-house Cancer Moon rules the Cancer Midheaven and disposes the elevated Jupiter) and the disciplines of healing through compassion, understanding, and forgiveness (the Sun-Saturn-Pluto t-square releases into the Piscean 6th house). The fact that those paths have not even been considered by the powers-that-be on either side of the conflict is very sad and a profound loss for humanity. The essentialized chart displays all too plainly the tragic fashion in which 9/11 has played out.

As I stated earlier, your view may be quite different and equally valid, of course, but all I've written here is contained in the chart that my eyes see.

Conclusion

The natural hierarchy of meanings is finally about keeping astrology simple, or at least simple enough that we don't get lost in complexity. Common sense dictates checking the hierarchy first and returning to it whenever necessary, to stay grounded in the fundamentals.

A particular chart may rearrange the hierarchy to some extent. In extreme cases, the emphasis on one or two symbols is so dominant or skewed from the norm that the expected hierarchy seems to be overturned — trumped, as it were, by a wildcard. For instance, although we cannot assert that the Sun is *always* and *inevitably* more important than Venus in interpretive synthesis, we can presume that this will be true in more than 99% of all the charts we examine. In the rarest of cases, Venus's condition might be so critical in a given chart that it competes with the Sun for interpretive emphasis, but even there the Sun is still the indicator of central power, core vitality, and gravitational coherence in the chart. And it's darned difficult to trump that.

In the vast majority of charts, the natural hierarchy holds true and remains an invaluable tool for deciphering the function and meaning of whatever the chart describes, whether a person, a relationship, or an event.

In genetics, we are now learning that all life on Earth is composed of the simplest imaginable building blocks of genetic code. Out of that elegant simplicity, however, endless variations emerge, so that life eventually manifests in all its breathtaking complexity. Genetic code is 99% identical for all life forms on the Earth. The amazing and bewildering differences between species and individuals lie in the engineering of that last 1%.

The same holds true for astrology. Deciphering complexity begins with an understanding of simplicity and ends in organic wholeness. Wonderful interpretive subtlety can be achieved by remembering and applying the natural hierarchy of meanings. Good astrological triage requires it.

Chart Data and Sources

Lucille Ball, August 6, 1911; 5:00 p.m. EST; Jamestown, NY, USA (42°N06', 79°W14'); AA: Biographer Kathy Brady quotes birth record.

Arnold Schwarzenegger, July 30, 1947; 4:10 a.m. CED; Graz, Austria (47°N05', 15°E 27'); A: Doris Chase Doane quotes a colleague, from him in 1979.

World Trade Center Attack, September 11, 2001; 8:48:26 a.m. EDT; New York, NY, USA (40°N43', 74°W01'); news reports.

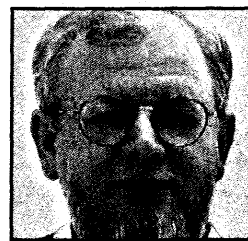
Notes

1. In my own practice with clients, I elevate the outer planets above the second group of visible planets, not because they are more important natively (they aren't), but because their longer and more potent transits carry profound significance in our individual human lives. Outer-planet transits are a critical part of my work.

2. Planetary patterns were originally written about by Marc Edmund Jones. They are based on general shapes the planets form en masse when dotted around the wheel. Jones defined seven planetary patterns: Bundle, Bowl, Locomotive, Seesaw, Fanhandle, Splash, and Splay. Each pattern reveals a characteristic psychological attitude that refines interpretive clarity. The importance of leading and trailing planets is associated with some patterns (Bundle, Bowl, and Locomotive), as are the concepts of the singleton (Fanhandle) and emphasis by hemisphere. Planetary patterns were designed for use with the traditional ten major bodies common to the astrology of the mid-20th century. The addition of many of the more recently discovered minor bodies — asteroids, Centaurs, etc. — tends to distort the patterns in the chart, making them less relevant and reliable for astrologers so inclined. Nevertheless, the basic principles of planetary patterns provide an insightful adjunct to overall interpretation.

3. See Note 2.

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Bill Herbst is an associate editor of TMA and a frequent contributor to the magazine. He recently moved to Olympia, Washington. The expanded 2nd Edition of his textbook, *Houses of the Horoscope*, will be published this fall by Serendipity Press. Contact Bill via e-mail at bill@billherbst.com, or visit his Web site at www.billherbst.com to read other essays, request a personal session, or subscribe to his free monthly e-mail newsletter.