



KOSMOS

Tracing Astrological Influences on Abstract Art



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Abstract

This dissertation examines whether or not astrology can be considered an early example of abstract art and how astrology has influenced Western visual culture since the medieval period through to the early 20th century. The argument presents the case that both disciplines desire to address the existential angst of separation and states that the practise of astrology does this through an intersection of cosmology, science and philosophy; whereas abstract art does this through the removal of physical representation and the use of an esoteric language. However, both disciplines are linked through the influence of Platonic thought and the desire to communicate a profound philosophic truth.

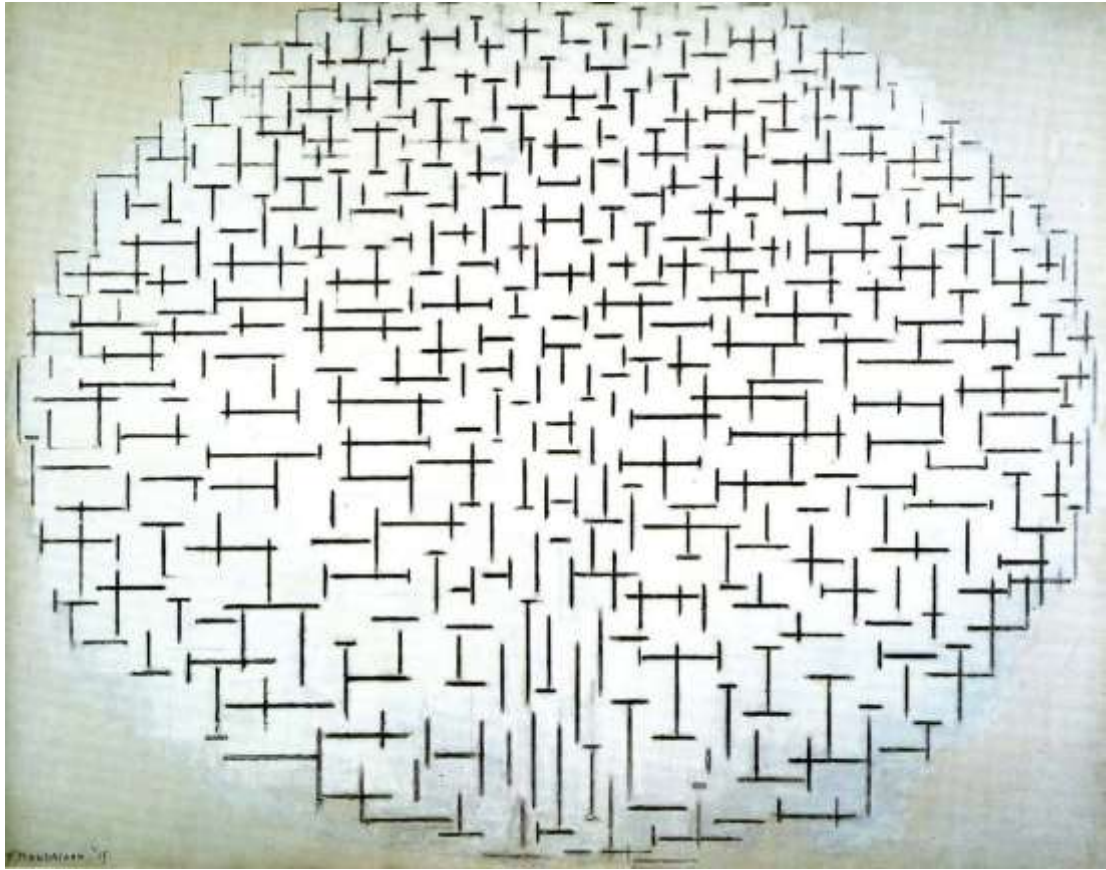
Thesis: Can astrology be seen as an early example of abstract art?

In order to answer this question, the structure of this dissertation will firstly define abstract art and will then provide a brief introduction to astrology. It will then proceed to place astrology within the context of Western visual culture and cite examples of work from the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and the Modern period. Through examining these works we will see evidence of the Platonic concepts that link ancient Classicalism through to early Modernism and have served to inform the development of both disciplines. On consideration of the evidence, this dissertation will then conclude whether or not astrology can be seen as an early example of abstract art.

Introduction

Astrology, with its roots in Hellenistic practise and Aristotelian theory presents a universal symbol of orderly beauty within a cosmological framework, uniting the macrocosm with the microcosm. The desire to achieve the ‘unity of a thing with itself’ is the quintessential philosophic challenge of the modern mind that finds subject separated from object. To the modern mind, the cosmos is impersonal and unconscious with its beauty portrayed as mere mechanistic matter in motion. Whereas to see the cosmos as an intelligent entity with an ability to communicate in a purposeful way, richly laden with deep symbolism and profound truth, is to run the risk of committing a basic epistemological fallacy: projecting what is human on to the non-human. However, this is a risk that not only astrologers and artists have been prepared to take, but also philosophers, theologians and historians because, in a world where human enlightenment has been achieved at the cost of human alienation, the need to conceptualise humanity’s position within the world, becomes of utmost importance by the late 19th century.

Modernism, in its esoteric form (*Theosophy*), coincided with the genesis of abstract painting and provided a profound motivating force for radical artists who were disenchanted with the materialism of the modern world. Artists such as Wassily Kandinsky (1866 – 1944) in Germany, František Kupka (1871 – 1957) in France, Kazimir Malevich (1897 – 1935) in Russia and Pieter Mondrian (1872 – 1944) in the Netherlands were more concerned with expressing eternal spiritual truths in a visual form than in creating landscapes and portraits for the general public. In his essay *The New Age: primal work and mystic nights* (1980) Norbert Lynton links the work of Kandinsky, Malevich and Mondrian to the work of Seurat (1859 – 1981), David (1748-1825) and Poussin (1594 – 1665) extending back in time to the metopes of the Temple of Zeus at Olympia. He cites the abstract pioneers as the true heirs to the history painting tradition due to it being the most elevated branch of Renaissance art. He sees abstract art as didactic and paradigmatic with its theoretical base rooted in ancient Classicalism, Platonic thought and geometry (Lynton 17). As artists began to incorporate iconographic motifs, esoteric symbols and pure geometric forms into their work they began to reference a body of spiritual, religious, philosophical and scientific writings through their use of crosses, triangles, squares and circles. An example of this can be seen in Mondrian’s *Pier and Ocean 4* (1914). Through the depiction of natural forms as abstract objects, Mondrian has used geometric configuration for the purpose of a spiritual enlightenment paradigm.



Pieter Mondrian, *Pier and Ocean 4* (1914)

The legacy of the abstract pioneers spread to many generations of 20th century artists who found new ways to express esoteric ideas but in the academic world, there was a decisive move away from referencing abstract art to the mystical and spiritual. By the 1940s, to use the word 'spiritual' when writing about the history of art was tantamount to heresy and dangerous to an artist's career. This was due to the associations between the occult, Fascism and Nazi Aryan supremacy during the 1930s and any intellectual artist, critic or historian who was keen to protect their credibility, disassociated themselves from mystical belief systems and focused instead, on purely aesthetic issues. It wasn't until the mid-1960s that a body of research on the origins of abstract art and its connections with the occult began. Robert Rosenblum's *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition: From Friedrich to Rothko* (1975) paved the way for a more receptive intellectual climate towards these ideas (Tuchman 13). This alongside the research of other academics such as Robert P Welsh who wrote about Kandinsky's and Mondrian's involvement with Theosophy, fed in to what was to become *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890 – 1985* exhibition and book edited by Maurice Tuchman.

SECTION 1: DEFINITIONS & OVERVIEW

Definition of Abstract Art

In his paper *On Abstract Art* (1936) Ivan W Brooks discusses abstract art from a philosophical point of view and argues that a work of art is more than a mere arrangement of colour and form. Brooks defines a work of art as a ‘manifestation of an ordered reality in the mind of the artist’ (Brooks 199). He makes the case that a scientist classifies details but it is the artist who captures the rhythm and in his quest to find a profound expression of truth, the work of art becomes a symbol of orderly beauty, limited only by the artist’s temperament, selection and response. Throughout history, many writers, artists, critics and philosophers have attempted to define what art is. In 1897 Leo Tolstoy wrote *What is Art?* and outlined many ideas from writers throughout the ages including Socrates (470-399 BCE), Plato (428-348 BCE) and Aristotle (384-322 BCE) to Winklemann (1717-1768) Baumgarten (1714-1762) Krause (1781-1832) and Hegel (1770-1831). Socrates is cited as subordinating beauty to the good and this is echoed in Aristotle’s demand for art to embody beautiful goodness that could affect people morally. Tolstoy refers to Baumgarten who presents truth as the object of knowledge and beauty as the object of aesthetic knowledge whereas for Winklemann the aim of art is beauty alone. For Tolstoy, truth and beauty are the same and he concludes that ‘art is the realisation of the idea, together with religion and philosophy, of bringing to consciousness the profoundest task of men and highest truths of the spirit’ (Tolstoy 17).

When considering the relationship between art and astrology, and bearing in mind the quest to find a profound expression of truth within a symbol of orderly beauty, the following words by Oscar Wilde resonate and encapsulate the overt function of both art and astrology. During his imprisonment in Reading gaol, he wrote a 50,000-word letter to his lover Lord Alfred Douglas between January and March 1897, from where this quote is taken: ‘Truth in art is the unity of a thing with itself: the outward rendered expressive of the inward; the soul made incarnate; the body instinct with spirit. For this reason, there is no truth comparable to sorrow’ *De Profundis* (1897). Wilde’s definition of truth in art can also be seen in the astrological symbol that is used to represent the Sun in a horoscope, a circle with a dot in the middle.



In a paper titled *The Full Circle: Spirit in Matter* 2015, Patricia Godden states ‘The [circle] is a profound esoteric concept. Like spirit, the circle has no beginning and no end. The dot within the circle in the symbol of the Sun may be considered to be that part of the whole that is manifest in a physical body.’ Having defined the purpose of abstract art as the **unity of a thing with itself**, we will now look at the definition of astrology.

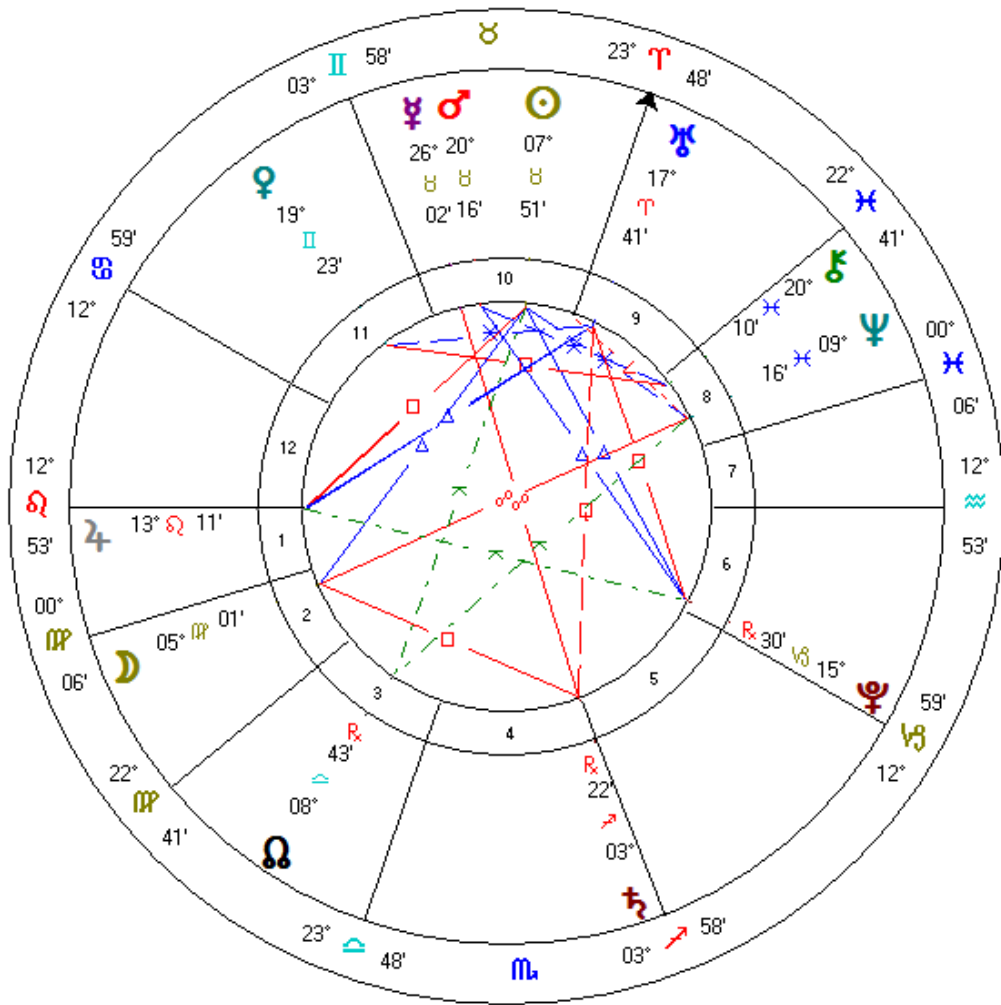
Definition of Astrology

Nicholas Campion, a leading authority on the subject has defined astrology as a **‘Hellenistic practice combining the use of horoscopes with an Aristotelian theory of celestial influence’**.¹ He explains in *Astrology and Cosmology in the World's Religions* that astrology assumes there is a significant relationship between the stars or planets and affairs on earth. ‘From this simple principle have developed all the many forms of astrology practiced or studied across the world. The word ‘astrology’ is derived from the Greek *astron* (star) and *Logos*. Logos is simply translated as ‘word’ so astrology is then, the ‘word’ of the stars’ and was interchangeable with the word ‘astronomy’ up until the 17th century (Campion 11). Essentially, the practise of astrology is the expression of astrological symbols that serve as a bridge between human life and the heavens. Whereas **natural astrology** is the observation of seasonal phenomena and natural influences deriving from celestial motions, **judicial astrology** uses interpretive judgements based on complex deductions from horoscopes. A horoscope is a mathematical diagram intended to represent the heavens and used to gain insight into the past, present and future. Overleaf is an example of a horoscope drawn up for 28 April 2015 at 12.20 in Aberystwyth. We can see that the Ascendant is 12° in Leo with Jupiter in the First House. The Ascendant is the Zodiac sign that was rising on the eastern horizon at the specified time.

When considering whether or not astrology can be seen as an early example of abstract art the first point to consider is the actual visual representation of the celestial bodies as portrayed within a horoscope. Looking at the example of the horoscope provided overleaf, just as a geometrical diagram using symbols to represent the placement of planets in the Zodiac and their relationships to each other, I would argue that this is an example of abstract art in the fact that it is striving to attain a sense of order and rational, it is a symbol of orderly beauty and through the universal analogy ‘things above as they are below’, it addresses the ‘unity of a thing with itself’. Not only are we looking at a map of the heavens and the position of the planets (from a geocentric perspective) at a specific time and place, but we are also presented with a manifestation of an ordered reality, richly laden with symbolism and mythology dating back to antiquity. The horoscope can be interpreted, with a little poetic license, as the intersection of subject and object, at a meeting point where cosmology, epistemology, science, philosophy and the art of interpretation come together to form a cosmic symphony.

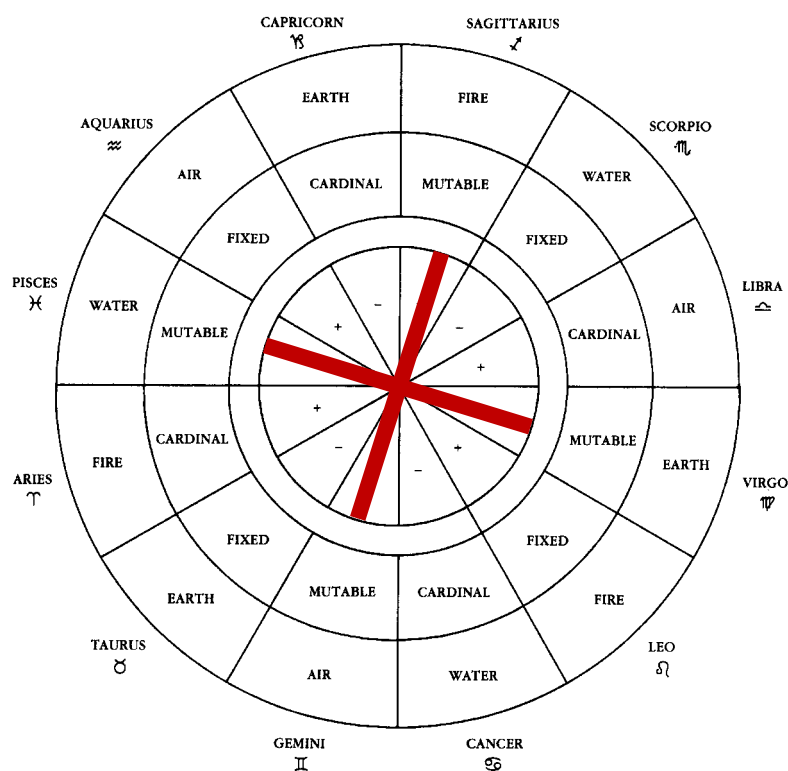
28 Apr 2015, Tue
12:20 BST -1:00
Aberystwyth, UK
52°N25' 004°W05'
Geocentric
Tropical
Placidus
Mean Node

The Ascendant
marks the cusp of
the first house

Solar Fire Horoscope for 28th April 2015, 12:20 Aberystwyth

Like many abstract works of art, the horoscope is made up of opposites, as each sign of the Zodiac is designated either male or female. Each of those signs are also divided into elements and in astrology these are fire, earth, air and water and then each of those elements are given qualities, cardinal, fixed or mutable. Each planet is represented by a symbol that is bestowed with its own unique qualities, as we have seen with the Sun being represented by a circle, that embodies spirit in matter containing the spark of the divine that is said to be in all living entities ☉. In the practise of astrology, each *planet* signifies aspects of our psyche, each *sign* of the Zodiac is imbued with its own rich mythology and each of the 12 sections with the chart, referred to as the *houses*, represent different stages of development in one life time. For example, the first house, representing the first 7 years of a child's life and the way in which that child will experience the development of their own sense of self.

Not only does the horoscope place each subject at the very centre of the picture, but it also captures the rhythm and movement of the planets as it makes a connection between the physical world and an abstract higher truth. In the diagram below titled, *Elements, Qualities & Polarities* we can see more clearly how the horoscope is divided up into the 12 sections and how each sign of the Zodiac is allocated its own unique characteristics. For example, we can see that 9th house in Sagittarius is a positive, masculine mutable fire sign and is in opposition to the 3rd house in Gemini that is also a positive masculine mutable sign but is in the element of air. Forming a cross to this opposition is the 6th house in Virgo that is a negative feminine mutable earth sign opposing the 12th house in Pisces that is a negative feminine mutable water sign.



Elements, Qualities & Polarities

This approach may present rather a radical stance to those unfamiliar with the practise and history of astrology, but through the course of this dissertation, I will set out to evidence the claim that the art of astrology can be seen not only as an early example of abstract art but also as having had a significant influence on the visual arts throughout Western civilisation. This will be evidenced through exploring the concepts that have informed the development of both disciplines, for example Platonic theory and the Theosophical school of thought. The table overleaf is to assist in categorising the common themes that create a link between astrology, Theosophy and abstract art.

Table of Reference

		Astrology	Theosophy	Abstract Art
1	A formless higher reality		✓	✓
2	The geometrizing of God and nature	✓	✓	✓
3	Connection between physical world and abstract higher truth	✓	✓	✓
4	The universe as alive and purposeful	✓	✓	
5	Observation of recurring patterns and seasonal phenomena	✓		
6	Cosmological framework	✓	✓	✓
7	Bridging the gap between humanity and nature	✓	✓	✓
8	Universe comprises of opposites	✓	✓	✓
9	Striving to attain a rational	✓	✓	✓
10	Symbol of orderly beauty	✓	✓	✓
11	Expression of eternal spiritual ideas	✓	✓	✓
12	Penetrate nature to reveal inner construction of reality	✓	✓	✓
13	Attainment of order is an artistic impulse in itself	✓	✓	✓
14	Universal Analogy: Things above as they are below	✓	✓	✓
15	Reflection as a fundamental premise	✓		✓
16	Cosmos as a counterpart and mirror of society	✓	✓	✓
17	Intricately connected universe made by a single creator	✓	✓	
18	Universe as a single living substance	✓	✓	✓
19	Cosmos as a spiritual entity – Anima Mundi	✓	✓	
20	Esoteric communication	✓	✓	✓
21	Spiritual belief system	✓	✓	✓
22	Symbols & patterns reveal meanings	✓	✓	✓
23	Grid theory of the cosmos	✓		✓

Astrology in Context

... human beings use the sky as a theatrical backdrop for their myths, rituals, religious and personal engagement with the cosmos. Nicholas Campion

In his book *Astrology and Cosmology in the World's Religions* (2012) Campion highlights the significant relationship humanity has had with the sky for millennia and he states that **there is no culture that does not have an astrology**. 'While the physical appearance of the constellations and the mathematical measurement of the planets apparent movements are non-negotiable, all other aspects of astrology are local and culture specific' (Campion 17). For example, in India they have a Hindu system of astrology referred to as Vedic Astrology or Jyotish, the 'science of light'. In Japan they have Onmyōdō the traditional Japanese esoteric cosmology, known as the 'yin yang' way and in China they have their own system of astrology, referred to as Tian Wen, 'sky patterns'. For the Aztecs, astronomical observation and knowledge were signs of sacred power and status and the paramount goal of scribes was to use what they saw in the sky to pattern time. Likewise, Aborigines placed social context and value systems on the location of the stars and believed that they had an intimate and pragmatic role in their culture. Campion goes on to state that societies with complex socio economic and political systems develop complex cosmologies in an aid to manage society and state.

Therefore, we can understand astrology in a similar vein to Brooks' definition of abstract art, in the sense that it is a 'manifestation of an ordered reality in the mind of the artist'. Campion reminds us that the 'fundamental premise of astrology is reflective' and quotes the Chinese historian Xiaochun Sun who says 'The universe was conceived not as an object independent of man, but as a counterpart of and mirror of society' (Campion 13). In order to provide some insight into the mechanical context of astrology, this dissertation will briefly refer to the constellations of the Zodiac (circle of animals) and provide a short history of astrology, before moving on to evidence the influence astrology has had on the visual arts during the Middle Ages.

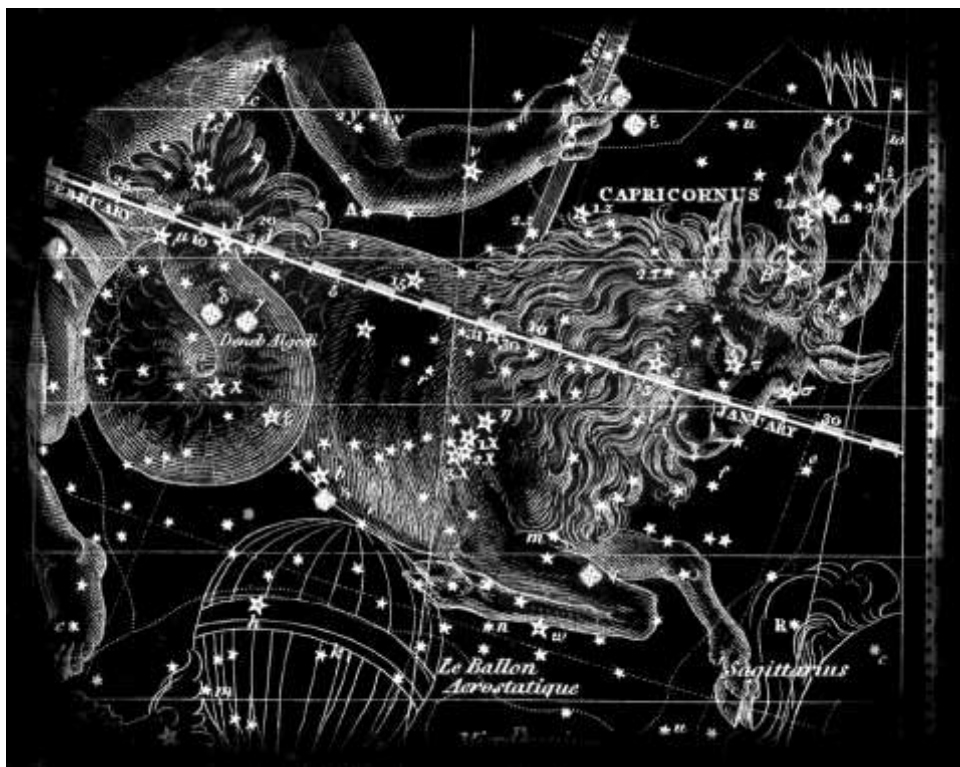
The Zodiac

As established in the 16th century by the mathematician and astronomer, Nicholaus Copernicus, it is the Sun and not the Earth that is at the centre of our solar system. However, when explaining the 'apparent' annual path of the Sun, it is necessary to accept that the Zodiac is seen from a geocentric perspective. The path of the Sun traces out on the celestial sphere a great circle in the sky that is divided into 12 signs of the Zodiac through which the Sun passes on its annual journey, as the diagram below illustrates (Parkers 16).



The apparent journey of the Sun is referred to as the Ecliptic and either side is a belt of 8° in which the Moon and planets also appear to travel. Technically, the Ecliptic represents the projection of the plane of the Earth's orbit out towards the sky (NASA Space.com). The Sun moves along the Ecliptic by 30° each month and the division of the Ecliptic forms the 12 signs of the Zodiac as described in Ptolemy's 2nd century book the 'Almagest'. Due to the rotation of the Earth on its polar axis once every day, at any given moment a certain degree of the Ecliptic will rise over the eastern horizon from the viewpoint of an observer and is referred to as the Ascendant (Faculty of Astrological Studies 40).

The Ecliptic passes through the 12 constellations that form the Zodiac, derived from the Greek, meaning ‘animal circle’. For example, Aries the Ram, Taurus the Bull, Cancer the Crab and Leo the Lion. Ancient astrologers were able to locate where the Sun was on the Zodiac by noting which was the last constellation to rise ahead of the sun or the first to set after it. As such each month, a specific constellation was referred to as ‘House of the Sun’. The constellation referred to as Capricorn is one of the constellations identified by Ptolemy and it is located in the Southern Hemisphere. It represents a creature that is both a fish and a goat and Capricornus means ‘goat horn’. *Capricornus* is often used when referring to the constellation, whereas *Capricorn* is used when referring to the sign of the Zodiac. There are 88 officially recognised constellations and 48 are known by their ancient names. After the 18th century more of the southern most parts of the sky were chartered by Nicolas-Louis Lacaille (1713-1762). He was one of the pioneers in astronomy who catalogued the positions of 9,766 southern stars in less than a year, while stationed in the South African Cape of Good Hope (NASA space.com).



The Constellation of Capricorn



The Constellations

When looking at the constellations and researching the history of astrology, it demonstrates a remarkable leap in human imagination to be able to conceive constellations of stars as mythological creatures that embody abstract forms and archetypes resonating throughout all living beings. John Barrow refers to the sky as a natural canvas upon which humanity has drawn imaginary connections between stars and events on earth. In his book *Cosmic Imagery* Barrow writes ‘Some of humanity’s earliest written records show the phases of the Moon and tell stories that are fashioned by the appearance of the night sky. The rising and the setting stars, the great circles of stars around the Celestial North Pole in the northern sky, constellations of meaning, and the eclipsing of the Moon and Sun were the greatest events that ancient humans ever witnessed. They spoke of the reliability and regularity of the cosmos: its dark sky full of navigation beacons, their recurring movements of celestial clockwork by which to order one’s life and nurture the land (Barrow 8). This theme will be discussed in greater detail during the section that refers to the Labours of the Months.

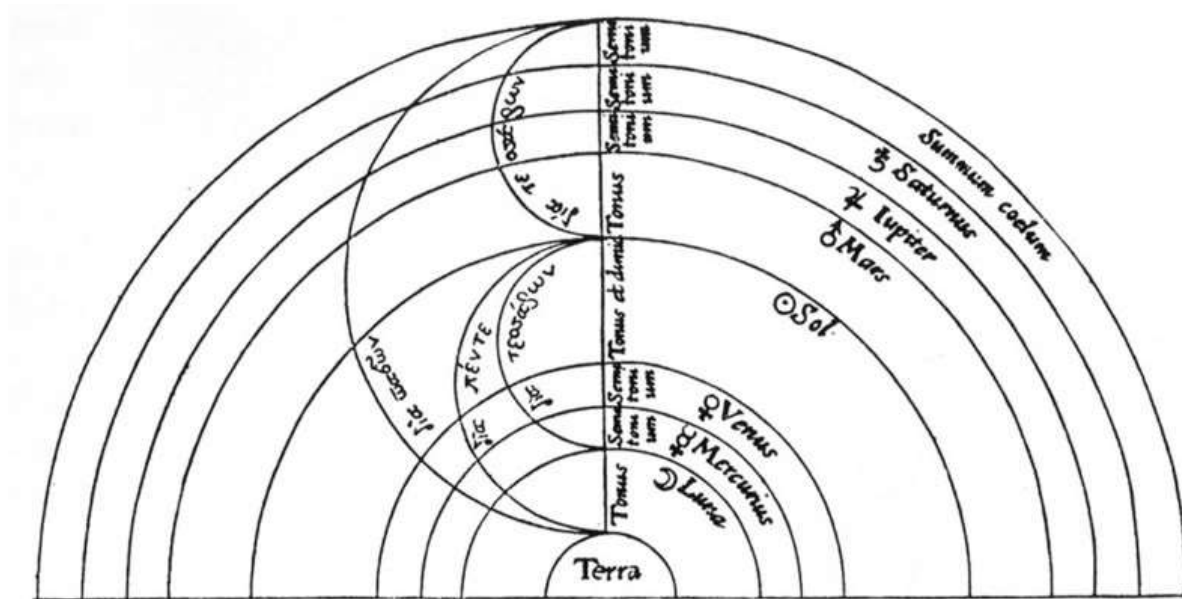
A Brief History of Astrology

Astrology can trace its beginnings back to 2,000 BCE in Babylon (southern Iraq, between the Arabian desert and Euphrates delta) with the study of events in the heavens, witnessing natural phenomena such as eclipses, comets and shooting stars. Initially the earth was regarded as flat and surrounded by a dome, carrying the stars. Around 700 BC, ideas began to change and the stars were thought to be stuck on a great rotating sphere, with the Earth at the centre and the Sun, Moon and planets moving independently. The stars were viewed with possessing spiritual powers that had been created for the guidance of mankind (Cowling 3). In contrast to this view, Classical Greece stood in direct opposition to the superstitious cultures of the East and the sceptical tradition emerged from Greek Rationalism. From this tension of opposites, emerged the dualistic struggle of light over dark, good over evil with Classical Greece being cited as the bedrock of modern Western thought, renowned for its achievements in maths, astronomy, political thought, philosophy and architecture.

Classical astrology's inheritance stemmed from a cultural fusion of Greek Platonism, Babylonian astrology and Egyptian astral theory. The Greek Polymath, Posidonius (135 – 51 BCE) is credited with making astrology respectable among the Roman intellectual elite in the 1st century and the creation of a technical astrology was disseminated throughout the Roman world and extended across Asia to China and Japan (Campion 150). The complex rules and calculations required for drawing up a horoscope were then set out by Ptolemy in the 2nd century BCE. Plato (428 – 348 BCE), like Pythagoras (570 – 495 BCE), followed in the footsteps of an intellectual tradition that understood creation through geometry (Campion 152). Around the 5th century BCE Greek cosmology diversified into the Philosophical schools of Plato (427 – 347 BCE) Aristotle (384 – 322 BCE) & Zeno (334 – 262 BCE) who saw the cosmos as alive and purposeful. This was in sharp contrast to the ideas of Leucippus (5th century BCE) who saw the cosmos as materialistic, constructed from tiny particles and developed the theory of Atomism. (Campion 148).

The Greeks used the word 'kosmos' to describe the notion of beauty, perfection and order and was traditionally supposed to have been first applied by Pythagoras. To discover kosmos in the world was to reveal kosmos in one's own soul (Tarnas 46). Not only can beauty, perfection and order be used to describe a work of art but we can also see the principle of 'kosmos' reflected in the Platonic model of the universe that was believed to be arranged according to musical harmonies and geometric forms. The Greeks understood the universe to be constructed in concentric spheres with the earth in the middle orbited by the Moon, Mercury,

Venus, Mars, Jupiter & Saturn, a model that prevailed until the Enlightenment in the 17th century.



The Intervals and Harmonies of the Spheres

From the beginning of the 14th century astrology was taught as an important part of the arts and science curriculum and included three distinct scientific disciplines (mathematics, natural philosophy and medicine) at the medieval universities in Padua, Bologna and Paris and served to integrate astronomy, geography and geometrical optics, with Aristotelian natural philosophy. This provided fundamental patterns of interpretation and analysis in pre-Newtonian natural knowledge (Daston 541).

In his book *The Copernican Question Prognostication, Scepticism & Celestial Order*, Robert Westerman refers to Newton's *General Scholium* to the 1713 edition of the *Principia* where he famously wrote 'This most beautiful system of the sun, planets, and comets could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent and powerful Being'. However, for Newton, the idolatry began when men started to worship the stars, and assign them human characteristics and powers. In its publication, Newton silenced the Moderns who were unable to provide theoretical explanations for astrology's predictive difficulties and as a result of this, astrology was deprived of new resources and credibility (Westerman 512). Astrology finally disappeared from the curriculum during the 17th century, however its history is central to understanding the transition from Renaissance natural philosophy to Enlightenment science (Daston 544).

Summary

When considering whether astrology can be considered as an early example of abstract art, this first section has: Identified that the modern mind *separates* subject from object and sees the beauty of the cosmos as mechanistic matter in motion; Highlighted that the price of human *enlightenment* has been at the cost of *alienation*; Assigned the desire to achieve *unity of a thing with itself* to both astrology and abstract art; Considered the visual representation of the horoscope as a *geometrical* expression of the position of the planets; Identified the *elements, qualities and polarities* that are contained within the horoscope; Highlighted the importance of *reflection* being a fundamental premise of both disciplines; Considered the idea of the sky being used as a *canvas* upon which to comprehend humanity's position within the universe and made reference to the philosophic Platonic schools of thought that extended into the 19th century teachings of *Theosophy*

However, upon consideration of the evidence above, the main difference between the two disciplines is that abstract art removes the illusion of 'reality' and attempts to depict the unseen truth that lies behind our visual comprehension. Whereas astrology while it also strives to depict the unseen truth, it does this through the opposite approach of projecting physical representation onto the astral, as we have seen through the depiction of the constellation *Capricornus* and in the *Atlas Coelestis* by Andres Cellarius in 1660, that is detailed below. The following section will focus on how astrology has been cited in works of art from the Medieval, Renaissance and the Modern period, beginning with the Labours of the Months.



Cellarius *Atlas Coelestis* (1660)

SECTION 2: CITING THE EVIDENCE

Background Information

Apart from a personal interest in the history of astrology, the motivation behind this thesis came from reading *Astrology and Cosmology in the World's Religions* (2012). Campion claims that 'Plato's cosmology, as set out primarily in *Timaeus* and *The Republic*, pervaded the religious climate of the classical world, was incorporated into Christianity, with the exception of awkward teachings (such as reincarnation) **and has continued to exert a powerful impact in the modern world, from Marxism to New Age Culture and Abstract Art**' (Campion 152). This claim provided the incentive to piece together evidence that would demonstrate the influence astrology has had on abstract art. The examples I have chosen to cite include: two medieval examples of the Labours of the Months, Raphael's *Philosophy (School of Athens)* and a selection of 20th century abstract works by Hilma af Klint. The reason I have selected these works of art, is because they demonstrate in an historical context, the influence astrology has had on philosophy, religion, science and art.





Labours of the Months



Illustration from The Book of Hours *Très Riches Heures*

Labours of the Months are an example of visual depictions of seasonal occupations and serve to evidence the lineage of astrology's influence on visual art throughout Western history. The illustration above is an example of how the Labours of the Months have been depicted in *Très Riches Heures* a 15th century illuminated manuscript commissioned by the Duke of Berry and extravagantly illustrated by the Limbourg brothers around 1410. In the semi-circle section above the main picture of the peasants labouring in the field we see reference to canonical times for prayer incorporated within a cosmological framework depicting the position of the constellations during the summer months of June and July. To the left hand side are the Gemini Twins and to the right hand side is Cancer the Crab. Inside the middle sphere is the Sun God Phoebus holding the Sun in his hands, travelling through the sky, enthroned in a chariot drawn by winged horses. The Limbourg brothers used a wide variety of unusual colours such as *vert de flambe* (green) from crushed flowers mixed with *massicot* (yellow) and *azur d'outreme*, an ultramarine (blue) made from lapis lazuli, that was extremely expensive (Web Gallery of Art)

There are many variations of the Labours of the Months in areas across Europe in both religious and secular settings and their occupations vary in accordance with the latitude and local climate. For example, in Southern Europe, harvesting begins earlier in the year. A typical arrangement would illustrate the following monthly labours:

Date	Zodiac Sign			Labour
21 March – 20 April	Aries		The Ram	Pruning / Planting
21 April – 21 May	Taurus		The Bull	Hunting
22 May – 21 June	Gemini		The Twins	Hay Harvesting
22 June – 22 July	Cancer		The Crab	Wheat Harvesting
23 July – 22 August	Leo		The Lion	Wheat Threshing
23 August – 23 September	Virgo		The Virgin	Grape Harvesting
24 September - 23 October	Libra		Scales	Wine Making
24 October - 22 November	Scorpio		Scorpion	Gathering acorns
23 November – 21 December	Sagittarius		Centaur	Butchery / Bakery
22 December – 20 January	Capricorn		The Goat	Feasting
21 January – 19 February	Aquarius		Water Carrier	Keeping Warm
20 February – 20 March	Pisces		The Fishes	Gardening

The occupations depicted are mostly agricultural and are associated with the landed class and their labourers. Feasting and drinking scenes appear in either December or January in all European countries and are associated with major festivals in the Church year (V&A web). James Carson Webster's *The Labors of the Months in Antique and Medieval Art* (1938) is a study of the Labours of the Months beginning with the Hellenistic frieze of Agios Eleutherios in Athens. He traces the development of representations of the 12 Months in Roman and provincial Early Byzantine art until 1200 and reveals a recurring pattern involving two elements: the first from astronomy and the 'desire to make more memorable the movement of time, to introduce some sense of order, of commemorate recurrence' and the second was 'humanistic, reflecting man's life on earth' (Gunzberg 110). According to Webster, Labours of the Months emerged in sculptured friezes as 'illustrations', around the second or first century BCE. The months were personified using human figures in 'constant quiet pose' and the seasons were distinguished according to what people were wearing. By the 12th century, Labours of the Months were well established and found in carvings, doors, façade reliefs, illuminated manuscripts, stained glass windows and on the floors of many Romanesque and Gothic churches.

Illustrations from *The Très Riches Heures*



Pisces / Aries



Cancer / Leo

Fountain Maggiore

Another example of the Labours of the Months can be found depicted in the sculptural narrative of the Fountain Maggiore in Perugia. The fountain was built in 1278 by Nicola Pisano and Giovanni Pisano to commemorate the free commune of Perugia and is situated between the Cathedral and the Palazzo dei Priori in Perugia.



Nicola Pisano & Giovanni Pisano *Fountain Maggiore*, Perugia (1278)

The fountain has 3 basins and is decorated with a matrix of sculptures and reliefs that depict civic life, Roman mythology, Biblical scriptures, prophets and saints as well as the Labours of the Months. The lower basin is divided into 24 panels and each has 2 reliefs. In the first 12 panels, the reliefs show human figures engaged in seasonal activity and they are all accompanied by an inscription in reference to the sign of the zodiac, appropriate to the month.

Panel	Detail
1 – 12	The Labours of the Months
13	The Guelph lion and legendary Gryphon, symbols of Perugia
14 – 17	The Seven Liberal Arts & Philosophy
18	Two Eagles
19	Adam and Eve and their banishment from Eden
20	Episodes from Samson's life
21	Lions
22	Episodes from David's life
23	Episodes of the life of Romulus and Remus
24	Two fables by Aesop

In the picture below we see depicted the occupation of making wine and on the left panel, above the person crushing grapes, are a pair of scales, representing the sign of Libra that occurs between 24 September and 23 October.



Detail from the 7th panel on the lower basin reliefs on the Fountain Maggiore



Detail from the 13th panel on the lower basin reliefs on the Fountain Maggiore

The middle basin is made from the red stone of Monte Subasio placed within white frames. In between each panel are 24 statues, a combination of civic, biblical and mythological personifications. The design of the fountain shows a move away from traditional medieval iconography and is an anticipation of the Renaissance that is to follow. Darrelyn Gunzburg makes the case in *The Perugia Fountain: Fontana Maggiore* (2011) that the fountain was built at a time when Scholasticism was the dominant form of theology and philosophy in the Latin West. Scholasticism aimed to reconcile Christian theology with the Greek philosophy of Aristotle. As a religious order, Scholasticism provided a narrative of biblical history alongside the Liberal Arts in order to educate people about the natural world and the nature of religious experience, thereby encouraging a more direct relationship between humanity and the divine. Gunzburg interprets the sculptural narrative of the fountain with its reference to the Labours of the Months, the Zodiac and the orientation of the images on the lower basin, as a religious artefact (omphalos) that connects the townspeople with both the sky and the earth. She cites the appearance of the Chronograph of 354, a late Roman code, when there was a movement away from passive personification towards active representation of scenes of contemporary life quoting Webster's research as revealing a transition of image representation between the 4th and 9th centuries. This was a period of metamorphosis from the assertion of nature 'the simple idea of ripening fruits, a growing of grain, of blooming flowers, of birds which appeared in the spring' to the human capacity to capitalise on this bounty of nature emphasising 'daily activity which fed him and played a part in his salvation' (Gunzburg 110).

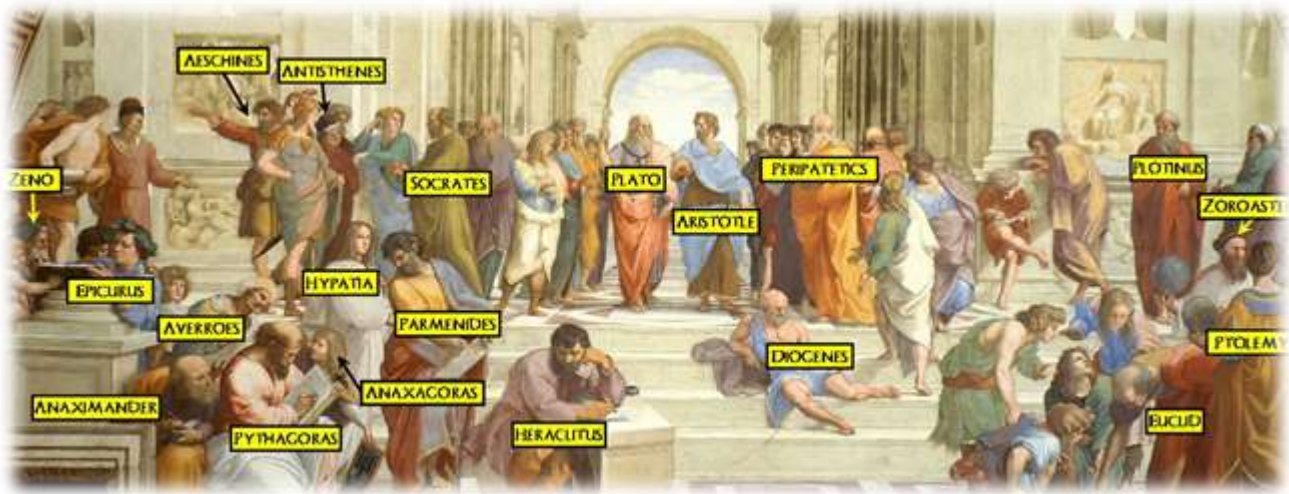
The Labours of the months and the Perugia Fountain are just two examples of medieval art and sculpture that reflect the continuing theme of humanity's desire to make connections between events in the heavens and activities on earth. If the overt function of astrology is to reconcile self with the divine, then it could be argued that these works of art are attempts to reconcile the separation of man from nature. However, it isn't really until the Industrial Revolution of the 19th century that a cultural existential angst comes to fruition but, its roots can be found at the end of the 15th century, when Humanism becomes an overtly paganizing force within Christian society. In his book *Pasison of the Western Mind*, Richard Tarnas argues that a distinctive new Western culture, marked by individualism, secularity and creative innovation originated during the Italian Renaissance and lay the foundation for the modern character (Tarnas 227). Therefore, the next section will examine Raphael's fresco *Philosophy* that epitomises the height of the Renaissance and Neoplatonic thought through a fusion of Humanism and Christianity.

Raphael *Philosophy (The School of Athens)*



Raphael, *Philosophy (The School of Athens)* (1508 – 1511)

Philosophy is situated in the Stanza della Segnatura (Room of the Segnatura) in the Vatican Library and was painted by Raphael during the High Renaissance between 1508 and 1511 at the same time Michelangelo was painting the Sistine Chapel ceiling. Raphael was commissioned by Pope Julius II to paint a series of 4 frescoes representing the four branches of human knowledge titled, *Theology, Poetry and Justice*. This commission signified a remarkably liberal attitude of the Catholic Church that allowed Humanist classical ideas to be promoted alongside the teachings of the Church. *Philosophy* is an astonishing matrix of Western culture as it integrates philosophy and science with Hellenism, Scholasticism, Humanism, Platonism, Aristotelianism and Pagan myth (Tarnas 229). For example, the architecture is inspired by Roman antiquity, as depicted through the use of coiffured barrelled vaults and the Pagan statues of Apollo and Athena situated on the left and right of the gathering, signify the origins of Western philosophy. Apollo is the God of Sun, Music and Poetry and Athena is the Goddess of Wisdom who oversees the practical affairs of man. We can see that this fresco links in with Tolstoy's reference to art as 'the realisation of the idea together with religion and philosophy of bringing together the profoundest task of men and highest truths of the spirit' (Tolstoy 17).



In the fresco, Raphael has assembled the greatest philosophers from Classical Greece in a grand agora and incorporates the use of linear perspective, thereby creating an illusion of space, through the use of perfect geometry and the golden section. He has depicted Pythagoras on the lower left, busy scribing and absorbed by the laws of harmony, music and mathematics; Euclid, on the right hand side, is shown holding a compass and is demonstrating what can be measured. Ptolemy is holding a planet alongside Zoroaster who holds up a celestial orb and Heraclitus, the ‘weeping philosopher’ portrayed by Michelangelo, is shown in deep contemplation. When Giorgio Vasari described *Philosophy* in *Lives of the Artists* he remarked ‘Among them is Diogenes with his cup lying on the stairs a most preoccupied and thoughtful figure which for its beauty and disorderliness of garments deserves praise.’ ‘Raphael also adorned this painting with perspective and many figures completed with such a delicate and soft style that it caused Pope Julius to destroy all the scenes painted by other masters from the past and present, so that Raphael alone would be honoured above all those who had laboured on the paintings which had been done up to that time.’ Vasari’s writing can’t be taken as the gospel truth, however, as he was writing during the Renaissance, this lends his work a certain credibility.

In her book, *Influences: Art, Optics, and Astrology in the Italian Renaissance*, Mary Quinlan-McGrath explains that the fresco as a whole, represents both the mystical and the moral dimensions of a theology based on the science of the heavens and she points out that in *Lives of the Artists*, Vasari refers to *Philosophy* as ‘Astrology’. This is because during the Early-Modern period, astrology was the highest ‘Scientia’ known, with its roots in elemental chemistry, physics, mathematics as well as its endorsement of an intricately connected universe made by a single creator. Astrology was considered both implicitly and explicitly ‘natural theology’ (Quinlan-McGrath 195).

The main focus of the composition is between Plato and Aristotle. While Plato points up to the sky, holding a copy of *Timaeus*, Aristotle, Plato's student, points down towards the earth, holding a copy of *Ethics*. The division of the two philosophers epitomises the crucial debate: Plato's argument is abstract and declares that we live in a realm based on mathematics and pure form and ideas whereas Aristotle's argument is practical and declares that we should pay attention to what can be seen and observed. Quinlan-McGrath states, 'Plato's *Timaeus* is the book that sowed the seed for the modern study of the heavens but Aristotle's *Ethics* provided the basic theories of physical astrology and proclaimed learning as the central feature of a just and ethical society on earth' (Quinlan-McGrath 195).

The Renaissance was a time when Humanist scholars and artists flourished. It was a period fuelled with classical theories and a time that embraced the enrichments of life afforded by personal wealth. For example, Cosimo de Medici commissioned Marsilio Ficino to translate the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the complete works of Plato.ⁱⁱ The entire texts of *Timaues* and *The Republic* were available for the first time and contained teachings on cosmogony, the soul's origins and return to the stars as well as references to the planets and cyclical recurrence. In *Timaues*, Plato presented the notion of a craftsman God who impressed form onto unformed matter and the generation of the world could be described in terms of geometrical figures. In *The Passion of the Western Mind*, Tarnas states that Plato repeatedly recommended astronomy as especially important for the attainment of philosophical wisdom and believed the only way to understand the cosmos was through the discipline of pure mathematics and abstract thought. Tarnas describes the heavens as a celestial realm that seems to express the very image of transcendence, possessing an order of time suggestive of eternity itself (Tarnas 48). In *History of Western Astrology* Campion states 'Platonism contributed to a significant strand of scepticism which taught that only pure mathematics and abstract thought could assist an understanding of the cosmos' (Campion 152). These statements, demonstrate the importance of Plato's argument that underpins the framework of Western thought.

Hilma af Klint

When looking to evidence the parallels between astrology and abstract art, I have chosen to highlight the work of a female artist, Hilma af Klint (1862 – 1944), whose work was not seen internationally until 1985 at the Los Angeles County Museum, at *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890 – 1985* exhibitionⁱⁱⁱ. Her public persona was that of a landscape and portrait artist, however privately she painted abstract works of art inspired through her skills as a medium, using automatic drawing and writing to assist her designs.



Af Klint *Altar Painting, No.1* (1905)

Af Klint's ground breaking paintings make reference to her observations of plants, human relationships and cosmic evolution and were created at the beginning of the 20th century before the dawn of abstract art in Russia and Europe. *Altar Painting No 1* forms part of her series of *Paintings for the Temple* that chart the different stages of human life: childhood, youth, adulthood and older age and they represent a final stage of original oneness using a geometric aesthetic. In *Altar Painting No 1* she shows the sun as radiating out from the darkness of space, with light beams creating a spectrum of colour contained within the framework of a pyramid. In 1907 she created a series of monumental work entitled *The Ten Biggest* and these are characterised by ovals, circles and serpentine lines in bright colours.

As Klint's paintings are not abstract in the sense that we would associate with the work of Kandinsky or Mondrian, they are more a process of abstraction. She places shells and spiral motifs alongside geometric shapes to depict a spiritual world of essential form found throughout nature, shifting from big to small, thereby mimicking the rhythm of the journey from the macro to the micro. However, the organic forms of her early work developed later into a more rigorous geometricism, as seen in *The Swan, No 17 Group IX, Series SUW* painted in 1914.



Klint *Chaos 2* (1906)



Primordial Chaos (1906)

The *Primordial Chaos* series was a seed that inspired and informed over 200 abstract paintings. In *Chaos 2* af Klint presents the genesis of the universe as a storm in a primordial soup. She places the motif of a shell, representing evolution, at the centre of the picture and we see that it is linked to a star by a ray of light, surrounded by dangerous sea water on a dark and stormy night. She uses colour as part of her division with yellow representing male, blue representing female and green representing the merging of the two. The fact that af Klint descended from a naval family who were experienced in navigation, cartography, mathematics and astronomy, served to underpin her own desire to explore, understand and explain new 'unseen' and uncharted territories. Described as a Swedish 'occult' painter she practised mediumship and received instruction from a spirit guide by the name of Amaliel. Her work is primarily about conveying the messages she received through Amaliel, as well as her own desire to shed light upon existential issues.

Af Klint trained at the Royal Academy, Stockholm in 1882 and her interests included maths, botany and Theosophical theories of evolution. She read Helena Blavatsky's (1831-1891) two major works *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine* and her rich visual imagination was stimulated not only through her interest in Theosophy but also by her interest in Rosicrucian symbolism and occult chemistry. She took inspiration from the basic tenets of Theosophy that referred to a formless higher reality; the geometrizing of God and nature and a meaningful connection between the appearance of the physical world with the abstract forms of higher truth.



Group 6, No 15 from the Series (1908)

In *Group 6, No 15* she deals with the theory of evolution through her depiction of a cosmic-erotic universe revealing a multi-tumescient form encapsulated within an oval womb, decorated with her trademark motifs the spiral and the shell. Af Klint considered the knowledge of duality and the struggle between male and female to be the fundamental idea behind all creative power and expression of that creation. Formal elements and colours in her paintings can be related to this struggle, as seen in her Swan series. In many religions and mythologies, the swan represents the ethereal and stands for completion in the alchemical tradition, but Af Klint uses the swans to represent harmonious oneness after the struggle between dualities has been resolved.



Final Picture from the Series S.U.W. / Swan (1915)



The Swan No 17 (1915)



The Swan, No 17, Group IX, Series SUW 17 (1914 - 1915) *Untitled, No 22, from the Series SUW 17 (1914 - 1915)*

In 1914 af Klint began to work on a smaller scale with watercolours and oils. Looking at 4 of the paintings taken from the Swan series of 24 that she did, we can see the transition she made from representational to abstraction. In accordance with Theosophical ideals she tried to depict different places of experience through horizontal divisions of the picture plane. In *The Swan, No 17, Group IX, Series SUW 17* she has taken the struggle between the two swans, the yin and yang, into a new realm represented through the use of opposites and division. The yellow and blue represent male and female with the blue curve dominating / protecting the yellow curve who in turn is wrapped protectively around the inner semi-circle painted in red. They form a relationship in direct opposition to the black and white, day and night aspect of the other side of the circle.

In *Untitled, No 22, from the Series SUW 17* (1914 - 1915) she has depicted three planes of experience in her painting: There is a lower plane, representing the underworld where elementary beings challenge the physical and mental balance; a middle plane, the physical reality where we strive to reach harmony in life; and a higher plane of grace that is the astral. Only the middle of physical reality can be observed with the physical eye (*The Spiritual in Art* Fant 160). These realms could also be associated with both astrology and the Christian Trinity. We can see that a red cross unites the earthly plane to the astral and the elemental planes, signified in astrology by Cardinal, Fixed and Mutable or as in Christianity, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.



Untitled, No 22, from the Series SUW 17 (1914 - 1915)

As an historical phenomenon, af Klint's work is of significant interest. Despite working in isolation due to only speaking one Scandinavian language and having to nurse her mother, there are distinctive parallels between her work and the mainstream abstract pioneers at the turn of the 20th century. Unlike Kandinsky and Mondrian who were both interested in the spiritual, af Klint's work is not primarily concerned with the abstraction of colour and shapes for their own sake, as she was more interested in portraying the unseen. Spiritual searching was an essential element to many abstract pioneers but unlike af Klint, Kandinsky and Mondrian did not claim to incorporate the act mediumship into their work. Kandinsky did have an interest in the occult and in 1911 published *On the Spiritual in Art*, marking his move away from Expressionism and

gradually leaving visible reality behind. Mondrian on the other hand strived for a purely spiritual expression of eternal ideas and reduced his compositions into a series of vertical and horizontal lines, incorporating primary colours.

In *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890 - 1985*, Tuchman draws parallels between af Klint and the mainstream abstraction pioneers in as much that they all received professional training before the turn of the century; had a belief in the spiritual as the main concern for visual creation and had familiarity with occult sources. However, unlike Kandinsky and Mondrian, af Klint worked in isolation without knowing anything about the abstract art emerging on the Continent, and yet she arrived at similar results. 'She even developed a pictorial technique, **parallel representation**, also employed by Kandinsky. This alone demonstrates the visual potential of the Theosophical teachings, that for these artists, with fertile imagination, visual creativity, and perhaps a suitable lack of inhibition – the esoteric fantasies of Theosophy provided a rich source for pictorial discoveries.' (Tuchman 143). Parallel representation can be suggested with representation of figural forms being on the verge of becoming completely abstract. 'The technique of parallel representation constitutes one possible path to the complete elimination of visible reality. Of the two renderings, the material one merely has to be suppressed to make the image non-representational' (Tuchman 142).

Two examples of Kandinsky's technique of parallel representation can be seen here. In *Lady in Moscow* (1912) the parallel representation of a material reality is seen with an occasional influx of spiritual atmosphere whereas in *Black Spot* (1912) there is a spiritual atmosphere with occasional references to a material reality.

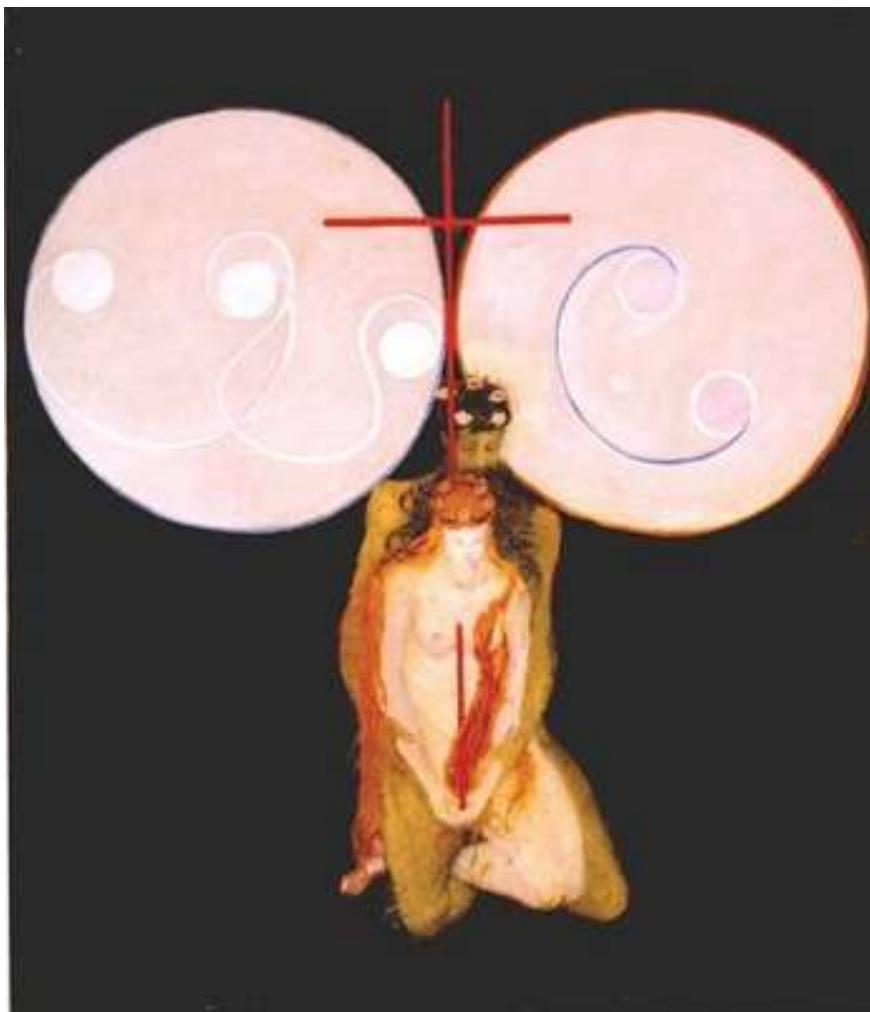


Kandinsky *Lady in Moscow* (1912)



Kandinsky *Black Spot* (1912)

An example of af Klint's parallel representation that predates Kandinsky, can be seen in her picture *First Large Series No. 6: Silence* (1907) where we see material reality surrounded by an influx of spiritual atmosphere through the depiction of a male and female figure. The couple are situated between two circles of light but find themselves simultaneously surrounded by the void of darkness. What links the couple to the spirit world and the light, is the cross that (worryingly) appears to impale the female figure between her breasts. According to Blavatsky in *The Secret Doctrine: A Facsimile of the Original Edition of 1888* the cross is a 'sign that the fall of man into matter is accomplished'. Here we see how through her work, af Klint has united spirit and matter through the cross impaling the material body and placing her own motifs within the circles of light above the couple. She uses the W shape (created by the two hook shapes) on the left hand circle to signify matter and the U shape on the right hand circle to signify spirit. Af Klint was predominantly concerned with painting the unseen and here we are able to see how she has fused the physical world with the abstract and united the two worlds through faith in the unseen, as depicted by the cross.



First Large Series No. 6: Silence 1907

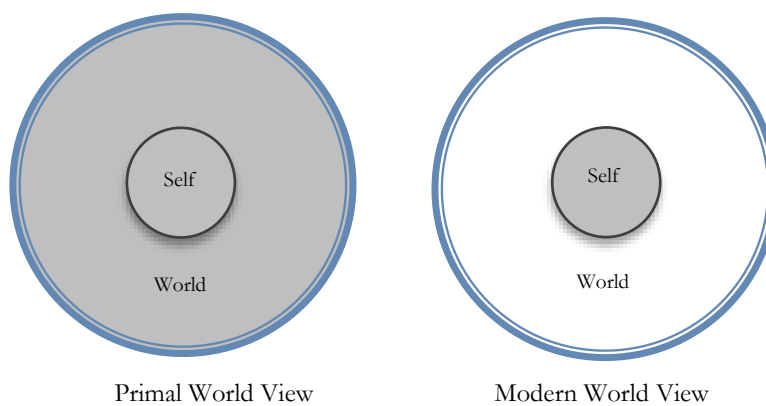
Summary

When considering the influence astrological principles have had on visual Western culture spanning the transition from the Medieval to the Modern Period, and seeing what parallels can be drawn between the two disciplines, this second section has: Identified the reference to *canonical times* for prayer presented within a cosmological framework; Shown examples of how the Labours of the Month were depicted in both *religious and secular* contexts; Demonstrated the importance of marking the *movement of time* and reflecting *activity* on earth; Highlighted the aspiration of Scholasticism's aim to encourage a *direct relationship* between humanity and the divine; Enabled a better understanding of the *cosmos* through the discipline of pure mathematics and *abstract thought*; Cited astrology as having been regarded as the highest Scientia with its roots in elemental *chemistry, physics, maths*; and made the case that astrology continues to have a powerful impact on the modern world as its history is central to understanding the transition from Renaissance natural philosophy to the Enlightenment science of the Modern world. Finally, through examining the work of af Klint, the parallels that can be drawn between the two disciplines include: their aspiration to *depict the unseen*; their endorsement of *geometry*; the acknowledgement of creation stemming from the fusion of *masculine and feminine* energy and the representation of the different layers of existence that include the *elemental, physical and astral* bearing significance with the Holy Trinity and spirit and matter being *unified* through the cross.

SECTION 3: SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

Self and Separation

It can be argued that the overt function of both astrology and abstract art is to act as an aid in the reconciliation of self with the divine, the separation of self from object or as Tarnas describes in *Cosmos and Psyche* the transition from the primal world view to the modern world view. 'In the primal world view, intelligence and soul (the shaded area) pervades all of nature and the cosmos and a permeable human self directly participates in that larger matrix of meaning and purpose, within which it is fully embedded. Whereas in the modern worldview, all qualities associated with purposeful intelligence and soul are exclusively characteristic of the human subject, which is radically distinct from the objective non-human world' (Tarnas 18).



Humans have evolved over millions of years from a primordial chaos into a bipedular homosapien endowed with a complex brain, having lived in hunter gatherer societies and developed tools in order to assist with the division of labour and the domestication of plants and animals. From this humanity has grown into a world that has seen communities develop into urban areas, spawning the growth of a commerce and civilisation built upon hierarchy, religion, art, science and philosophy. In the transition from the primal mind to the modern world the development of tools and language marked the first separation. 'As soon as our species first developed linguistic symbolisation, we began to differentiate ourselves further from the world' (Tarnas 19). The primal mind does not separate subject from object, because it lives in a world permeated with meaning and sees significance in patterns from the flight of birds in the sky to the conjunction of two planets in the heavens. Even though the transition of the modern mind evolved over millennia, and I would argue that it was not until the Industrial Revolution that an existential crisis came to fruition. This trauma, spurned by the achievement of the Enlightenment, spawned a lineage of artistic movements from the Impressionism of the 19th century through to the Avant-Garde of the 20th century.

After the increasingly frightening effects of the 19th century, industrial revolution and consequent changes in the economic system, coupled with Charles Darwin's findings, people's faith in conventional religion was undermined and life was perceived as barren and devoid of meaning. Artists such as af Klint, Kandinsky and Mondrian found themselves in a disenchanted society that was caught up with metaphysical insignificance, the loss of spiritual faith and a frighteningly sublime relationship with nature. Reality and identity were seen as false prisons to be transcended and figurative painting was seen as limiting. Left disconcertingly free of any solid ground, artists rebelled against a spirituality destitute society, flouted traditional values and undertook an historic assault on traditional representation in art. Seen in this historical context, the rise of the Theosophical Society in 1890s was very appealing to people's need to make sense of a materialistic world seemingly devoid of spiritual meaning. A high proportion of visual artists involved with these ideas and beliefs wanted their art to express spiritual, utopian and metaphysical ideas that could not be expressed in traditional pictorial terms. Theosophy presented the aesthetic, cosmological and psychological aspect of Plato's thought in conjunction with Hermeticism and the Cabala and provided a framework for magic and astrology.

It is at this juncture we are able to see the thread of Platonic philosophy that links astrology to abstract art because it was the Neoplatonic theories of the Renaissance (a mystical version of Plato's philosophy) that became central to Western occult teachings. However, by the 20th century ideas that included reference to the spiritual became unfashionable and art criticism focused instead on the way a painting looked rather than what it meant. In his essay *Hidden Meaning in Abstract Art* Tuchman refers to the opposition in American society to the spiritual abstract connection during the 1930s. He cites Sheldon Cheney who wrote a popular history of mystical thought *Expressionism in Art* (1934) who spoke of a disdain for 'modern painters who try to isolate a geometrical order in 'abstract' pictures, or those who speak of revealing 'form' without serious regard to subject'. It was Richard Pousette Dart who noted that increasingly, Theosophical, mystical and occult beliefs came under suspicion because of their political associations, which were clear and well known, with Nazi Aryan supremacy. 'The perception of a link between alternative belief systems and fascism made critics and historians, reluctant to confront the spiritual associations of abstract art. Intellectuals interested in Modernist issues became more concerned with purely aesthetic issues' (Tuchman 17). This observation provides insight in to why the academic world has shunned the legacy of occult and spiritual teachings. Bearing in mind also, the 17th century's withdrawal of support due to an inability to provide theoretical explanations for astrology's predictive difficulties, we can understand why these teachings have become hidden.

Conclusion

When considering whether or not astrology can be considered an early example of abstract art, the following conclusions can be drawn:

Both disciplines desire to address the existential angst of separation and achieve the 'unity of a thing with itself' be that subject with object, self with divine or the transition from primal mind to the modern world. The practise of astrology does this through placing the subject at the centre of the question, an intersection of cosmology, science and philosophy, whereas abstract art does this through the removal of physical representation and the use of an esoteric language of symbols to communicate a profound truth. Where astrology risks the fear of losing credibility by committing an epistemological fallacy, abstract art risks the fear of losing meaning along with representation. Both disciplines remain however, misunderstood by the majority of the viewing public.

Through examining the evidence we have seen that the visual representation of a horoscope incorporates geometry, symbolism and science. This links astrology to the abstract pioneers whose work was rooted in ancient Classicalism and Platonic theory and through their depiction of natural forms as abstract objects they made reference to a spiritual enlightenment paradigm as seen in Mondrian's *Pier and Ocean 4* (1914). As well as geometric configuration, their use of iconographic motifs and esoteric forms referenced a whole body of spiritual, religious, philosophical and scientific writings, as seen in af Klint's *Paintings for the Temple*. Also, both astrology and abstract works of art incorporate elements, qualities and polarities. This is evidenced in the framework of a horoscope as well as the work of af Klint and her depiction of a Swan in *The Swan, No 17, Group IX, Series SUW 17* (1914 - 1915).

Linking back to the philosophical argument put forward by Brooks at the beginning, he stated that a work of abstract art is 'manifestation of an ordered reality in the mind of the artist' and is more than a mere arrangement of colour and form. Where the scientist classifies the details, the artist captures the rhythm but both are on a quest to find a profound expression of truth. We can see further similarities between the disciplines by returning to the Table of Reference that some highlights common themes that run through astrology, Theosophy and abstract art. Each discipline has a number of overlapping themes, such as the geometrizing of God and nature, the desire to make a connection between the physical world and an abstract higher truth, seeing the universe as alive, purposeful and comprised of opposites, an expression of eternal spiritual ideas and the quest to attain a rational within an orderly symbol of beauty.

The historical evidence as cited by Campion states that there is no culture that does not have astrology, and this fact in itself underlies the significance that humanity has placed upon the constellation of the stars. As evidenced in the Labours of the Months, we can see how in medieval times, linking agricultural activities with the zodiac placed importance upon the marking, measuring and deification of time. Likewise the Fountain of Perugia, influenced by Scholasticism brings together Roman mythology, biblical scriptures alongside astrological references. The sculptural narrative of the fountain is positioned at the very centre of civic life and acts as a religious artefact, connecting people with sky and earth.

With the commissioning of Raphael's *Philosophy (School of Athens)* Pope Julius II ensured that the culmination of human scientific, philosophical, religious and artistic achievements were celebrated and commemorated within a matrix of pagan and Christian cultural references marking the emergence of Humanism and served to lay the foundation for the modern character that comprised of creativity, innovation and individuality that came to prominence in the Industrial Revolution. The innovations of the late 19th and early 20th century also coincided with the work of an unknown female abstract artist, af Klint who signified a common desire to communicate with the unseen and portray what lies beneath the illusion of reality. The remarkable achievement of af Klint who worked in relative isolation, demonstrates the zeitgeist of a period of intense change, development, excitement and anxiety for many people, who turned to Spiritualism and Theosophy for comfort at a time when the world appeared to be falling apart.

Finally, we can conclude that apart from astrology and abstract art sharing many common threads, we can also see the zodiac as the first canvas that the human imagination used to interpret the constellation of the stars. However, the difference between the two is that the 20th century abstract pioneer removed the illusion of the physical to reveal the astral whereas early man projected the known physical onto the astral. To finish, I will leave you with the words of the mathematician, John Barrow who praises the profound significance of the stars: 'The slowly evolving map of the constellations has played a multifaceted part in human history. The stars have fuelled superstition, furthered scientific astronomy, aided navigation and created a sense of Oneness with the Universe' (Barrow 12).

Word Count (10,784)

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End Notes

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ⁱⁱ *Corpus Hermeticum* reached Western Europe in 1460. Marsilio Ficino's translation marked the emergence of Hermeticism in the Renaissance and was a synthesis of 'high magic' consisting of Neoplatonism, alchemy, astrology, magic and Cabala (Tauchman 374). *Corpus Hermeticum* deals with the soul's relationship with the heavens and Claudius Ptolemy's 2nd century compilation of rules for reading horoscopes, the 'Tetrabiblos' was significant because of the importance it was accorded in the Islamic Worlds and in Medieval and Renaissance Europe (*Astrology and Cosmology in the World's Religions* Campion 150).

ⁱⁱⁱ Af Klint's work is also currently being exhibited at the Serpentine Gallery in London titled *Painting the Unseen* (3rd March – 15th May 2016). Unfortunately, her work was excluded from MOMA's 2012 exhibition *Inventing Abstraction: 1910 – 1925* and according to the curator Leah Dickerman, af Klint 'disqualified herself by not having defined her paintings as art.' MOMA's thinly veiled anxiety of being associated with the occult, was probably the root cause for this exclusion. (Guardian web).

Picture on cover: af Klint *The Dove No 12* (1915)