

Kepler Day Research Conference
Saturday 22 November 2008
Review by Alice Ekrek



Over forty people attended the 2008 Kepler Day Research Conference, held at Connaught Hall in Tavistock Square, London. This year, the event was organised by the Astrological Association (AA) with the help and sponsorship of the Sophia Centre, University of Wales, Lampeter (UWL) and the Research Group for the Critical Study of Astrology (RGCSA). Due to the generous sponsorship of these two organisations, it was possible to keep the ticket prices lower than previous years.

Eight speakers were selected by the Sophia Centre and the RGCSA to present their research on an aspect of astrology within the fields of humanities and/or social sciences. Many of the speakers presented qualitative as well as quantitative analyses of questionnaires and interviews they had conducted, as well as literature reviews and consideration of theoretical models. Wendy Stacey presented a sociological analysis of data sets of birth times, and Mick O'Neill provided an update on his statistical research on psi and the UK Lottery. Short abstracts of their talks are included below.

Nick Champion and Pat Harris were to chair the event, although Dr Harris was unable to attend due to unforeseen circumstances. Mike Harding took her place to chair the afternoon talks and a lively discussion at the end of the day.

Alie Bird

'Alie's Adventures in Astroland: an Ethnographer's Tale'

Drawing upon recent ethnographical experience in the western astrological classroom, this paper recommends social anthropology's trademark research method – participant observation – to academic students of astrology. Enlarging upon Bruno Latour's contention that anthropology is 'another name for empirical metaphysics' (from Latour, *Reassembling the Social: an Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 68), it is argued that there is a natural affinity between the knowledge products of reflexive anthropologists and of astrologers, past and present. Both are contextually framed, although those of the latter group are more often presented in the terms of absolute truth standards in a manner which hankers after the formal scientific recognition that the former group has long since eschewed.

Bernadette Brady

'Fate, a Curse or a Gift: a Report on a Survey on Determinism'

For the last eighteen months I have been surveying astrologers on their belief as well as their working approach to determinism within their astrology. With nearly 1100 astrologers having taken part in the project, the early analysis of the data, which is only just beginning, is showing some exciting results.

Frances Clynes

'Astrologers and Cyberspace'

In *The Digital Sublime*, Mosco states that cyberspace embodies a sense of being betwixt and between worlds. He also argues that the most popular myth of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is that cyberspace is a place where people can become rich, a view supported by other cyberspace theorists. This talk focuses on the concept of a dualistic cosmos and examines the history of this idea. It argues that cyberspace is a contemporary representation of this concept that has been with us for at least two and a half thousand years, and asks if astrologers' early adoption of the Internet was associated with this, or if astrologers are more influenced by the modern myth of cyberspace as a source of wealth.

Liz Greene

'Mystical Experiences among Astrologers'

This research project examines the nature and frequency of what are known as 'mystical' or 'peak' experiences or 'religiously altered states of consciousness' among a small sample group of astrologers. The results suggest interesting differences between the experiences of individuals involved with astrology and the experiences described in more general population surveys.

Chris Mitchell

'The Canvas on which our Art is Painted: Have Astrologers Lost Touch with the Night Sky?'

The word 'astrology' derives from the Greek meaning 'to tell from the stars', and in the popular imagination, astrologers are associated with 'star gazing'. This talk considers whether astrologers still feel a link with the night sky or whether they see an astrological chart as a purely abstract entity, and how their knowledge of the stars compares to that of a layperson.

Mick O'Neill

'The Paranormal, the Lotto and the Stars'

A possible link between paranormal phenomena and the stars was discovered in empirical data over ten years ago. This paper will present the results, so far, of this speaker's attempts to replicate the result, principally by getting volunteers to predict the UK Lotto individually. Today's experiment (10:25 above *) is an attempt to predict the winning numbers as a group. It is free to take part, but participants will share in the winnings from about £30 of tickets. The possible stellar link is complicated by its interaction with variations in the earth's magnetic field, called geomagnetic activity (GMA). A researcher's recent paper suggesting that the link is not in fact extraterrestrial, but due to GMA, will also be considered.

Lindsay Radermacher

'Martin Buber's Model of Dialogue and its Relevance to the Study of the Astrological Encounter'

Martin Buber (1878-1965) was a religious thinker, philosopher, teacher and scholar. As a formidable intellectual figure, he influenced and inspired many prominent thinkers in many different fields. His most famous work, *I and Thou* (1923), contains the core of his thought – namely, that the process of relationship is at the root of meaningful life. Using my construct of a 'human' and 'divine' dialogue within the astrological encounter, I will explore the connections between Buber's model and the astrological dialogue.

Wendy Stacey

'A Sociological Analysis of the Organisation of Time of Birth'

With the increase of intervened births, particularly caesarean sections, it is possible that the 'time of birth' has changed to a less random distribution over a twenty four hour period. How might we know what is driving this? Wendy's PhD, titled '*A Sociological Analysis of the Organisation of Time of Birth*', will include an historical look at birth times, a sociological perspective of obstetric practices, technological developments along with parents' knowledge and choice which has led to the medicalisation of childbirth. This will be discussed through the lens of Risk Society theory. Streamed through this talk, Wendy will also address the roller coaster of the highs and lows of being a PhD student.