Is the Consultation Space Sacred?

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ONGOING WORK


When a client comes to see an astrologer for a horoscope reading, the astrologer knows only the astrologically symbolic representation of the client’s life and its potential, not necessarily how it was or is being lived.

The client, on the other hand, brings to the place all their knowledge of the life they are living but no knowledge of the symbols of astrology that could be linked to their life.

Astrologer and client met in the chart reading place for an exchange of information.
BUT IT IS MORE THAN JUST INFORMATION EXCHANGE.

BEGINNINGS ...


I had a conversation with a friend who said, ‘What is it that you really love?’ and I said, ‘Well when I do astrology something happens that doesn’t happen anywhere else.’ (She pauses, then repeats it slowly) ‘Something happens that doesn’t happen anywhere else. There’s a kind of — … there’s an energy — … there’s a, as you would say, a flow of energy and a heightened perception, a heightened awareness, an exchange with another person that is of a very different nature than anything I do in my life.’ That’s when I was in my twenties that I came to it. So that’s how I chose.
Where do astrologers go when they read a chart?

Is it to a sacred place?

To an insightful place?

Edward S. Casey, an American philosopher and university professor, named meaningful places where personal enrichment could flourish as ‘thick places’. These were places where a person felt connected and assured, where a densely enmeshed infrastructure offered value and relationship. Indeed, Casey defined ‘place’ as ‘the immediate ambience of my lived body and its history, including the whole sedimented history of cultural and social influences and personal interests that compose my life history’.

Between July 2015 and July 2016, I interviewed seven astrologers who had each been practicing, writing and teaching astrology for twenty-five years or more and were all active within the community of western astrologers.

Demographics:
UK, France, Australia, and the US, with 5 of the 7 astrologers having been born in country different to where they now lived and practiced.

All interviewees defined themselves as professional astrologers in some way:
- astrological consultants
- teachers of astrology
- authors of astrological texts
- translators of astrological texts
- publishers of astrological texts
- publishers of astrological software
- entrepreneurs
- astrological business consultants.

Five of the seven astrologers were female.
All were over the age of 47.

Each of these astrologers has given me permission to use their real name.
In his *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, French sociologist Émile Durkheim differentiated between sacred and profane space.

He saw sacred space as **socially constructed**, a special place set aside and reinforced by ritual.

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**Brian Clark (Australia) – astrological author, teacher, and consultant:**

Practicing, writing and teaching astrology since 1975.

You are creating space for the client to enter...

I call it a sacred space, but I don't mean ‘sacred’ in terms that you're, you know, dressing up and bowing down and doing the right thing. I just mean ‘sacred’ in that you've created a space that's —... a temenos.

You've invited somebody into this space and in this space this is what we're going to do in this space. There's nothing else we're going to do in this space.
Melanie Reinhart (South African born, London-based) – astrological author, teacher, and consultant:
Practicing, writing and teaching astrology since 1975.

...the physical cleaning occurs in parallel with mental preparation..

My intention is to make myself ready, willing and able to make myself of service to this person or process, whatever that might mean...

PREPARING THE SPACE

Barbara Dunn (UK) – astrological author, teacher, and consultant:
Practicing, writing and teaching astrology since 1983.

If I know it's not a great time I won't — .... I will say to the client ‘Ring me back’, usually or — .... I often will do that because I’m trying to — ..... So in a way you’re almost electing the moment of interrogation if you do that. Sometimes clients say, ‘No I want to speak now’. They really insist on it. But I do try to steer people away from a very bad day. I say, ‘Ring me in a week.’
Meira Epstein (Israeli born, New York-based): astrological teacher, and consultant, and author/translator since the late 1980s.

I work like crazy before they come. I bring myself to a point where I say I'm under the skin of that person. ... I understand the energies to the point that I don't exist. When I start the session on that level Meira does not exist. I am that person. I’m so identified with that chart. I’m in their chart.

For these seven astrologers, the cleaning ritual was the shaper of their chart reading space.

It was a comforting and habituated pattern of behaviour that was undertaken as a preparation, not only of the physical space but also as a way of readying themselves.

In this regard they were reflecting what Kim Knott described as, ‘ritual takes place and makes place’.

In agreement with Durkheim’s idea of a socially created sacrality, Knott argued that it was the actions with which a person engaged, such as preparatory cleaning, that sacralised spaces and those embodied spaces could be ordinary, such as the homes and offices in which these astrologers saw their clients.

For Ian B. Straughn, sacredness was found in the practice rather than the physical surroundings and it was in the ‘learning, doing, repeating, and improving’ of the practice that the places in which this practice occurred became ‘ongoing vehicles for practicing place-making’.

PREPARING THE SPACE

Barbara Dunn (UK) – astrological author, teacher, and consultant:
Practicing, writing and teaching astrology since 1983.

It’s being skilful in your trade. Like being a painter or any other trade really. *When you see it again and again you just know.*

INHABITING THE SPACE

Lynn Bell (American born, Paris-based) – astrological author, teacher, and consultant:
Practicing, writing and teaching astrology since 1972.

Remember, somebody’s coming with an intention to be seen in a non-normal way. They are coming with an intention to be seen. They’re coming with that intention for someone to give them information about themselves. *So as soon as I open that door that space is opened.*
INHABITING THE SPACE

Lynn Bell (American born, Paris-based) – astrological author, teacher, and consultant:
Practicing, writing and teaching astrology since 1972.

The space is a *vesica pisces*. With some people you have a very small overlap and with other people you have a much bigger overlap of—... presence, let's say.

INHABITING THE SPACE

Lynn Bell (American born, Paris-based) – astrological author, teacher, and consultant:
Practicing, writing and teaching astrology since 1972.

I think it *is* something more than me in the small definition of ‘me’, and whatever you call that or name that, it’s something that steps out the boundary of an ego identity, and within that unbounded space, the whole astrological consultation steps out of the normally identified ‘I’ space.
INHABITING THE SPACE.

Lynn Bell (American born, Paris-based) – astrological author, teacher, and consultant:
Practicing, writing and teaching astrology since 1972.

The space that opens between me and the other person allows this larger self to be present and within the presence of the larger self is something larger than ‘you and I’ or ‘us and them’ and that larger space, whatever we call it, is definitely present in the reading. And it isn’t ‘me’... (thinks for a moment) Yes! That’s a better response, do you see? ‘Divine’ just isn't the right word for that. It’s like channelling. It has the wrong connotations for the actual experience.

INHABITING THE SPACE

Roy Gillett (UK) – astrological author and consultant:
Practicing, writing and teaching astrology since 1977.

It’s being in the presence of an understanding which we’re sharing together.

I remove myself as an ego-attached human being with opinions and judgements out of the story so that the client’s life patterns, reflected within the astrology, can emerge.

If I do my job well, then within the space of the chart reading, the client feels completely comfortable expressing their most profound secrets or anxieties or worries.
IS IT A SPACE WHERE THE DIVINE APPEARS?

Wendy Stacey (New Zealand born, London-based) – astrological author, teacher, and consultant:
Practicing, writing and teaching astrology since 1987.

No! No way!! Definitely not. It disavows the astrologer.

It's not divinatory. It’s knowing people.

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IS IT A SPACE WHERE THE DIVINE APPEARS?

Roy Gillett (UK) – astrological author and consultant:
Practicing, writing and teaching astrology since 1977.

Let’s be humble about this. There’s nothing divine or special or anything about it. It’s something that is pure, for the benefit of others, it’s selfless, it’s beyond attachment, it’s honest, it’s true, it’s kind, it’s humble. You know? Let just the truth come through. As soon as you grasp onto spiritual meaning, that’s where all the problems of religion comes in.

What I’m doing all the time is trying to let the discipline of the chart inform and give authority in an appropriate way.
SUMMARY SO FAR... THE CONSULTATION SPACE IS:

1. a combination of the two people—astrologer and client—and the astrologer’s willingness to engage in and comprehend the questions posed by the client via the symbols of the horoscope. Thus as an energy constituted between astrologer and client, it agrees with Durkheim, who saw sacred space as **socially constructed**, a special place set aside and reinforced by ritual. Yet as Kim Knott argued, those embodied places could be **ordinary**.

2. achieved through the **overlap of space** between astrologer and client

3. contains the feeling of the presence of something bigger than both of them that only occurred by the astrologer **putting aside his/her ego identity**.

4. described as being of a **qualitatively different** experience to the energy felt in the astrologer’s daily life.

**ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE OF SPACE**

Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991)
In his 1974 book *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre, a neo-Marxist, existential philosopher, and sociologist, argued that the creation and meaning of urban space was a result of social processes that engaged with geography, landscape, and property and could be tracked through a history of change.

Perceived space (le perçu) consisted of the physical web of routes, systems, and networks of one’s daily routines located within an urban setting.
Conceived space (le conçu) was the space conceptualised by urban planners, cartographers, and social engineers.

Representational space or the lived space of the imagination (le vécu) was fed and nourished by the arts and literature and used the physical world of objects as its symbolic language.
Perceived space (le perçu) consisted of the physical web of routes, systems, and networks of one’s daily routines located within an urban setting. Conceived space (le conçu) was the space conceptualised by urban planners, cartographers, and social engineers.

Representational space or the lived space of the imagination (le vécu) was fed and nourished by the arts and literature and used the physical world of objects as its symbolic language.

‘Representational space is alive: it speaks. It has an affective kernel or centre: Ego, bed, bedroom, dwelling, house; or: square, church, graveyard. It embraces the loci of passion, of action and of lived situations, and thus immediately implies time. Consequently it may be qualified in various ways: it may be directional, situational or relational, because it is essentially qualitative, fluid and dynamic.’

Bernadette Brady has argued that

... the horoscope for astrologers is a symbolic map of a person’s known environment, which flourishes through action and hence through time.

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**Perceived space** (le perçu) – the lived life of the client.

**Representational space** (le vécu) – the horoscopic space – the meeting of astrologer and client, where horoscopic symbolism merged with client experience to produce, for both the astrologer and the client, a flourishing dynamic.

**Conceived space** (le conçu) – evident to the astrologer drawing up the horoscope.
### Wendy Stacey (New Zealand born, London-based) – astrological author, teacher, and consultant:
Practicing, writing and teaching astrology since 1987.

That was the moment, I guess when she [the client] *(pauses)*... identified something. **She recognised her own self that she hadn’t up to that point.** And that was the moment that something happened. Something changes in the consultation, ... and it becomes less superficial and something more meaningful and a **much** deeper conversation happens. So it’s not chat, it’s connection, it’s **engagement.** And it’s Good Work. You know that’s when Good Work happens.

### Brian Clark (Australia) – astrological author, teacher, and consultant:
Practicing, writing and teaching astrology since 1975.

It depends on the engagement I have with the client. If there’s no engagement with the client, nothing happens. It’s like a dead sheet of paper. It’s two-dimensional. **When the client’s alive with me, it’s four or five dimensional.**

No, the chart doesn’t change. The chart is the chart. But the way the chart comes alive within my ability to use it — the chart is animated.

What these seven astrologers all recognised and conveyed was the point at which the client’s horoscopic landscape not only matched their inner landscape, it also illuminated it.

For in that matching came new insight, where fresh light was cast on the situation. At that point, these astrologers all felt that they became much more effective in their ability to offer meaningful information to the client and, as a consequence, the quality of the space of the chart reading changed.
In talking of actual landscapes, Belden Lane, professor emeritus of historical theology at St Louis University, has written of this experience as being ‘strangely welcomed by seemingly unreceptive terrain’, and of the huge physical reaction of recognition that followed when the external landscape matched one’s internal landscape.


‘When I came to New Mexico in 1960, I found the land which matched my interior landscape. The door separating inside and outside opened. What my eyes saw meshed with images I carried inside my body. Pictures painted on the walls of my womb began to emerge.’

Meinrad Craighead

‘The sacred does not simply present itself to our gaze: it reaches out to seize us in its searing grasp.’

Edwin Bernbaum


**DIFFERENTIATED SPACES**

... imaginatively fleshed out or encountered through the senses in a way that made them distinct, remarkable, and separate.

This encounter was multisensorial and deeply emotional.
### UNDIFFERENTIATED SPACES

... unremarkable and mundane and could not be reached via the senses.

This encounter was *multisensorial* and 
*deeply emotional*.

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### DIFFERENTIATED SPACES

... imaginatively fleshed out or encountered through the senses in a way that made them *distinct, remarkable, and separate*.

This encounter was *multisensorial* and 
*deeply emotional*.

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Spaces are *processes*, rather than objects, and both are affected by *history* and 
*changed by it over time*.

... unremarkable and mundane and could not be reached via the senses.

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Devotional or sacred spaces are generated by personal insight, metaphorical imagination, and ritual practice, but they were also generative, and exerted agency, shaping the people who shaped them.

Lynn Bell (American born, Paris-based) – astrological author, teacher, and consultant:
Practicing, writing and teaching astrology since 1972.

I dreamt that I was Mozart’s niece and I was giving a concert, but I didn’t know how to play the piano. However, when someone else sat down with me, I played beautifully in my dream. Now I can’t play the piano. I’ve never learned any music but in my dream I had this experience of playing but only a quatre mains — four hands. Only when another person played with me. And I think that my gift is a fourhanded gift [and] playing that particular music is something that only happens with the other person. So my gift is in the interaction with the other. (...) It is an other-related art form.
According to Durkheim, sacredness was inherently impermanent and had to be created and recreated anew each time through participation.

Émile Durkheim (1858-1917)

Meira Epstein (Israeli born, New York-based): astrological teacher, and consultant, and author/translator since the late 1980s.

I’m not comparing myself with Michelangelo, but when Michelangelo looked at a piece of marble, he already saw the statue in it. When a carpenter looks at a piece of wood, they know exactly how to cut it where the grain goes to get the right shape to do what it needs to do. In other words, when you know your material, how it behaves, you know you can chip it here but you can not cut it that way.
So ... is the Consultation Space Sacred?

- **Preparation as ritual.** (Émile Durkheim - a special place set aside and reinforced by ritual became sacralised).

- The encounter occurs in the **space of the ordinary** (Kim Knott).

- **Knowledge exchange becomes the storied landscape of the horoscope** (Belden Lane / Meinrad Craighead / Edwin Bernbaum).

- The **lived space of the imagination** (Henri Lefebvre’s representational space).

- **Spaces are processes and change over time** (Thomas Tweed)

- The horoscope as a **thickened place** (Edward S. Casey).