

opa MEMBERS ONLY

Reclaiming Embodiment

Astrology through the Lens of Feminist Phenomenology

by Iris J. Gildea



What is feminist phenomenology, and what does it have to do with astrology?

If you're new to this field of inquiry, I'd like to introduce it here. If you're not, I invite you to journey with me and become curious about its relevance to astrology. Feminist phenomenology is part of my work as a trauma theorist, professor, and astrology coach. It is deeply connected to the current **Taurus-Scorpio nodal axis** because feminist phenomenology has everything to do with **embodiment**.

Before getting to that, however, it's helpful to know a little bit about my perspective. Like many, I came to practice astrology professionally later in my life. Bringing Evolutionary Astrology (EA) into my coaching practice was not a big jump. I've trained in the expressive arts and have a PhD in Comparative Literature, with additional studies related to theories of the self and ways of knowing. Integrating astrology into my work felt like I was receiving the language to speak about previously missing concepts.

I'm sharing this because—as someone who studied many disciplines before coming to astrology—I am fascinated by what happens when we integrate humanities and social-science-based insights with astrology. In my case, this involves weaving astrology with feminist phenomenology and feminist trauma theory. I believe incorporating these fields of inquiry can creatively contribute to individual and collective embodiments of healing and transforming systems to achieve greater equity.

Defining Feminist Phenomenology

Let me introduce a little more clearly what feminist phenomenology is. Many books are written on the subject, but I will do my best to explain it in a few paragraphs. Simply put, feminist phenomenol-

ogy is a branch of Western philosophy that emerged formally in the 20th century. As Helen Fielding writes, its basis is that "*consciousness exists in the body.*" As a discipline, it recognizes how Western culture—the cultural framework I work within—has engendered a split between mind and body due primarily to colonial and patriarchal influences.

By **patriarchal**, I refer to a system of society that revolves around male-centered paradigms of power and control.

Feminist
phenomenology is a
school of thought that
recognizes our bodies as
sites of consciousness
that provide rich ways
of meaning-making.

Such ideologies of power and identity are then internalized and normalized by populations at large to varying degrees. **Colonialism** is an outgrowth of patriarchy as the dominant male culture acquired control over geographical areas and populations through occupation, oppression, and exploitation. The ideologies of colonialism and patriarchy ripple outward and impact every institution of social organization and meaning-making. As a result, Fielding says, "*philosophical ideas loom over us and threaten to produce reductive imperatives about the seemingly true nature of consciousness.*"

Feminist phenomenology is a school of thought that recognizes our bodies as sites of consciousness that provide rich ways of meaning-making. Biological, environmental, psychological, emotional, cosmological, and social interaction fields like

race, class, and gender are living matrices that inform and co-create our consciousness. Yet a paradox arises because we are not taught to listen to, understand, or center the ways of knowing the body's consciousness in Western culture.

Feminist phenomenology suggests we become aware of a co-creative mechanism of embodiment. It invites us to be curious about how our body-psyche relationship impacts different ways of knowing and meaning-making than those traditionally privileged in the dominant society. For centuries, the body and its wisdom have not been consciously included in the meaning-making equation that dominates knowledge-making institutions—formal or informal.

When I apply a feminist phenomenological lens to astrology, I become curious about how archetypal interpretations have been influenced by the dominant traditions of patriarchy and colonialism. Western culture has emphasized rational thought and logic, effectively silencing the body's affective input and contribution to our *knowing* and responses to life.

The late African-American theorist bell hooks talked about how—despite our best efforts and continued unlearning—it is nearly impossible that ideologies of colonialism, patriarchy, and white supremacy do *not* unconsciously impact interpretive frameworks of individuals and systems of meaning-making. Astrology is one such interpretive framework and meaning-maker.

Astrology bridges and blends the gaps and chasms humans have created between science and art, the body and the mind, male and female, "success" and "failure." Although the practice of astrology offers ways to evolve *with* the cosmos, its frame of meaning-making is impacted by the humans who do the interpreting and the cultural forces that shape human thought. Feminist phenomenology reclaims an

Astrology bridges and
blends the gaps and
chasms humans have
created between
science and art, the
body and the mind, male
and female, "success"
and "failure."

integrative and embodied lens of interpretation by listening to the body to unlearn ideologies centered around patriarchal and colonial “power-over” models—power over other humans, species, and nature.

These ideas are certainly not new to astrology. Evolutionary astrologer Maurice Fernandez discusses the division of matter and spirit and what he sees as an evolutionary call—and need—to reorganize society’s often binary split between them.² Feminist phenomenology asks us to not only think about this split but to come into embodied ways of understanding how we *unconsciously* manifest this split in the structures of our inherited interpretive frameworks. Simply *relearning* a presence of embodiment is often a lot of the work of healing from trauma and past wounds.

Dialoguing with Astrology

How does all this philosophy play out in day-to-day interpretations of zodiacal archetypes?

Bringing feminist phenomenology into my work has expanded the breadth of my EA practice. For instance, when I work co-creatively with clients, I often reshape some traditional and interpretive lenses of the archetypes. I’ll use the zodiacal sign of **Cancer** as an example of this creative (and feminist) reshaping in action.

Many of my clients with strong Cancer signatures come to me with an experience that their “failures” are aligned with their Cancerian ways. Various sources have taught them that they are *too emotional, too sensitive, poor communicators*, etc. Now, of course, every archetype involves a shadow side. Even working with shadow and light implies an established binary, a model of categorical thinking that we can trace

There are good reasons
to get curious
about astrological
delineations, which are
taught as foundations
of the archetypes.

back to linear thinking and the division of power developed in colonial and patriarchal frameworks where other *ways of knowing* were erased. Feminist phenomenology calls for a paradigm of integrative being.

There are good reasons to get curious about astrological delineations, which are taught as foundations of the archetypes. In this example, a traditional interpretation of Cancer is flavored with the pervasive presence of patriarchal and colonial interpretive frameworks. Historically, these frameworks detached the body from the mind and detached emotion from reason. They erased how the body can work in concert with the mind and—perhaps more importantly—with the earth.

As astrologers, I urge you to reorient your view. We can come into the body, into breath, and into the feeling of how the element of **water** comprises being in this world—water in our bodies and this planet’s body. *What changes when we do this?* As feminist phenomenologist Astrida Neimanis writes:

Blood, bile, intracellular fluid; a small ocean swallowed, a wild wetland in our gut; rivulets forsaken making

their way from our insides to out, from watery womb to watery world: we are bodies of water.³

What changes when we listen to the rhythms of water flowing between our bodies and the earth?

How does this listening change the interpretive function of data, knowledge, meaning, and life purpose?

Do these changes impact a delineation of archetypes converging and diverging in a horoscope?

Cancer does not speak the dominant language of rational linearity. It expresses the language of the emotional body, the psyche, and the primordial womb. It is a language that is simultaneous with emotion and can shift like the ocean’s tides fluctuate with the changing moon. It is not a sign of deficiency or feeling too much. It is simply different from what has been centered as “normal” and expected—the dominant linear, explicit, and rationally direct structures of language and performance.

This feminist consideration has significant implications for the zodiac as a whole. For example, it might influence how we interpret **Mercurial** knowledge, whether related to Virgo’s processes or Gemini’s curiosity, and how Mercury works with the meaning-making structures of other archetypes.

Cancer’s non-explicit character is often aligned with the crab’s side-stepping ways. I live by the ocean. I have spent many hours watching crabs walk, trying to be with the movement of their rhythm amidst sinking sand and waxing and waning tides. I see and feel their way of being present within their ecosystem in their movement. I have heard of the crab’s ability and willingness to



GILDEA

amputate its limb to survive and its innate ability to regenerate that limb from within its crustacean embodiment. This creative drive and will to survive doesn't sound like an over-sensitive or confused being! It sounds like strength, purpose, and a deep inner knowing.

The lens of feminist phenomenology can be turned to Cancer's association with gendered stereotypes of motherhood. Yes, Cancer nurtures. Yes, the mothering principle is a dominant force of the archetype. But womanhood and motherhood are not the same thing. Imagine if the mothering principle was embraced and embodied by all, for ourselves and others.

Imagine if we all were taught from a young age that, regardless of gender, we have a womb of sanctuary within us—in the EA lens, a primordial womb. This is a womb to be defended fiercely, not out of

When we let our earthly
rooted flesh entwine
with our intellectual
renditions and
categorical distinctions
of meaning, we discover
we need other ways to
speak about the
body's implicit
rootedness in nature.

over-sensitivity, but because that womb is a connection to Spirit.

Imagine if we were taught to speak from this watery womb. We would have a different paradigm of meaning-making and life purpose.

A new paradigm would impact how astrologers interpret the archetypes aligned with Cancer, the 4th House, and the Moon. For instance, the 4th House may become an embodied womb of the psyche, related to family and much more than that—a fluid rootedness of spirit to soul.

What if learning to hear this conversation and the environments that are part of embodying this conversation is how we imagined "home"?

The Cancer example highlights how archetypes live and embody our enfolded realities. **Embodiment, in feminist phenomenology, does not mean that our bodies' ways of knowing need to be interpreted or translated into rational or linear thought. It means that we need to integrate different ways of knowing and being into the very organization of how we make meaning.**

In doing so, we invite a more equitable and diverse world. Yet—and this is the beauty of astrology—the archetypes already offer us this world, and our natal charts show us how we all come into this life with the potential to embody it. I find astrology is, in some ways, already aligned with feminist phenomenology. When we let our earthly rooted flesh entwine with our intellectual renditions and categorical distinctions of meaning, we discover *we need other ways to speak* about the body's implicit rootedness in nature. As with embodiment, philosophical and ordinary language can only take us so far in astrology. We need metaphors and symbols to incorporate affective and aesthetic encounters.

If and when such poetic, aesthetic, and affective ways of making meaning are equally integrated **into society's structures**, perhaps topics that are now *hidden* in the **12th House** will be able to step into the light. Maybe we will be more equipped to tap into different ways of being, ways that reflect rays of light and fog rippling through oceanic depths, a **Piscean** way of being that the body-psyche knows intimately.

From this perspective, the way we think about living with depression or the wounds of trauma can shift. When we relate to the world from an embodied way of being, binaries of normal and abnormal, good and bad, light and dark, can dissolve. This is not to romanticize struggle or devalue one's pain. It is to cease comparing 12th House experiences to ways of being entirely other than the ocean's fullness. It is to become curious about experiences from the *inside out* as we embody our fluid depths, crashing waves, and shallow tides—without a learned societal response to make them anything other than what they are. Embodiment takes time to learn and trust because colonial and patriarchal ideas and values dominate our society. Astrology offers the symbols and language to help us actualize embodiment when we detach it from either/or linear and cognitive determinism frameworks.

Embodying Taurus-Scorpio Insights

At this time, we are all experiencing the **nodal axis** transiting through **Taurus and Scorpio**. Many astrologers interpret the **South Node's journey through Scorpio** as a release of deep trauma. How we frame this and counsel clients regarding trauma is an incredibly sensitive and vital issue.

As a feminist trauma theorist, I have concerns about relying too heavily on traditional archetypes when discussing trauma with clients. This concern comes directly from how colonial and patriarchal ideas of healing and functionality unconsciously dominate Western psychological traditions.⁴ As I discussed with the Cancer archetype, we can adapt traditional psychological principles to astrology and unconsciously align the archetypes and their interpretations with patriarchal renderings of identity. *"By the book"* astrological interpretation does not center or validate the body's ways of knowing.

To consider traditional psychology in terms of its non-equitable roots is a heavy topic and could be a discipline all its own. Conventional psychological theories often do not speak with the body. More importantly, they do not know how to listen to the body's wisdom and how the body also communicates with the earth (and the cosmos). They are modes of meaning-making whose roots and history extend into a tradition that views the body and its earth-enfolded wisdom as inferior to the mind.

When aligned with traditional frameworks, somatic (body-based) approaches can fall into this binary trap of meaning-making by translating the body into pre-established structures of patriarchal and colonial meaning. The body calls for more integrative pathways.

The wisdom of embodiment is rising to the surface with the **Taurus-Scorpio nodal axis**. *Might we have an opportunity*

Conventional
psychological theories
often do not speak
with the body. More
importantly, they do
not know how to listen
to the body's wisdom
and how the body also
communicates with the
earth (and the cosmos).

to reclaim embodiment, free from traditions of patriarchy and colonialism? How might we come to feel embodiment as a vibrant and resourceful (**Taurus**) mode of meaning-making, individually and collectively?

Embracing the wisdom of embodiment might allow those who have survived and continue to survive depths of trauma—those who journey through the darkest waters of the soul— not to repress or fear such waters or judge the self as deficient. Incorporating feminist phenomenology into practice can aid astrologers and our clients in integrating our watery depths into an embodied and empowered earthly

groundedness. This is the **Taurus-Scorpio axis** reclaimed.

As I consider this nodal axis and the entwining of feminist phenomenology with astrology, I think of **Scorpio's** deep merging qualities in discourse with **Taurus'** grounding earth principles. Leaning into the earth—that is, our body—we can understand how we may have merged completely within the water-like fluidity of our psyche and the psyches of others. From this awareness, we can come to embody *boundaries* in ways that support ourselves, our deep relationships, and the enterprises rooted in those relationships.

This process involves listening to the body, and the body often speaks in a language that is not discursive, linear, or conventionally explicit. I think of this nodal axis as a call for **deep listening**—hearing the earth's heartbeat in our own, hearing the ocean's tidal shifts in the blood coursing through our veins. Listening and listening—awareness is the first step to allowing a scorpionic shedding.

As we shed old ways of being and build new boundaries, we may increase individual and collective self-worth (**Taurus**). We can release colonial and patriarchal paradigms of meaning-making wrapped in exploitive capitalism, and reclaim the Earth-rooted, Water-infused heritages inherent within astrology—heritages already infused with long-dominant **Air** and **Fire**.

The long transit of **Pluto through Capricorn** is a transformation of our systems of organization. These are systems that, given the transit's polarity to **Cancer**, are always in a relationship to our watery tides, waxing and waning, speaking with and through us, not afraid to amputate and regenerate because that is what we are here to do. Tanaaz Chubb of Forever Conscious writes, "There is hope that under this nodal placement we will see some positive changes to how we treat the planet and the choices we make for its future."⁵ I believe the **Taurus North Node can offer us the wealth and sturdiness of embodiment**, ultimately transforming our systems as well as individual life experiences.



MANTRAS for Embodiment and Healing Through the Zodiac

Embodiment asks us to let go of clinging to judgments of "good" or "bad." It can even take us beyond shadow work or the culture of diagnosis because it asks us to practice simply being with what is. Being with what is, ideologies and cultures of patriarchy and colonialism fall away, and what's left is the pulsing embodiment of the archetype. From here, genuine connections to ourselves, each other, the earth, and the cosmos unfold.

Working with mantras for the zodiacal archetypes, we can let go of conditionings unconsciously rooted in traditions of power related to gender, class, race, conventions of "success," and even the meaning of life. Use them yourself or offer them to a client with a particularly strong signature or a moon sign under tension. Please adapt the words, phrases, and imagery below to work for you or your client's particular embodiment and journey.

Aries, Fire in my spirit; I am primal force and drive.

Taurus, Earth in my being; I am grounded and rooted.

Gemini, Air in my seeing; I am curious, wisdom-seeking.

Cancer, Water in my making; I am a nurturing womb, free to flow.

Leo, Fire in my loving; I am my creative destiny let loose.

Virgo, Earth in my doing; I am purifying insight.

Libra, Air in my relating; I am a balancing thread.

Scorpio, Water in my soul; I am the intimacy of desire unbound.

Sagittarius, Fire in my seeking; I am an intuitive spark set free.

Capricorn, Earth in my climbing; I am systems of meaning-making, reclaimed.

Aquarius, Air in my knowing; I am the insight of interconnected being.

Pisces, Water in my dissolving; I am oceanic presence.

REFERENCES

- 1 Helen A. Fielding and Dorothea Olkowski (eds.), *Feminist Phenomenology Futures*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press (2017), p. vii.
- 2 Maurice Fernandez, *Neptune, the 12th House and Pisces: The End of Hope, The Beginning of Truth*. Victoria, B.C.: Trafford Press (2004), p. 122.
- 3 Astrida Neimanis, *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology*. London: Bloomsbury Academic (2016), p. 3. Accessed April 1, 2022, from <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781474275415>.
- 4 F or more on this topic, see Bonnie Burstow, *Psychiatry and the Business of Madness: An Ethical and Epistemological Accounting*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan (2015).
- 5 See <https://foreverconscious.com/intuitive-astrology-lunar-nodes-in-taurus-and-scorpio-2022-2023>. Accessed April 12, 2022.

Iris J. Gildea is a professor, trauma theorist, writer, and Astro-coach. She practices Evolutionary Astrology, and most of her work is at the intersections of embodied healing, arts-based ways of knowing, and environmental change.