

Getting an Angle on *the Axes of the Horoscope*

- Brian Clark

The Geometry of the Spheres

Two great circles, the Horizon and the Meridian, segment the horoscope into four pieces or quadrants (1). Each quadrant is separated from the other by an angle, which serves as a transitional zone between these areas of experience. The four angles formed are astrology's customary compass points of the horoscope. In the 20th century Edward Johndro proposed two accompanying angles (2) which were formed by the intersection of the ecliptic and the Prime Vertical, another great circle passing through the nadir, zenith, the east and west points of the horizon. The two angles of the Vertex and Anti-Vertex belong to contemporary astrology. While they receive mixed reviews or none at all in modern practice, I feel they are worth examining as they conform to the definition of angles and perhaps reveal an orientation to life, but one not as well articulated by the four traditional angles.

Therefore the six angles, which form the three axes that we will be concerned with, are the intersections of the following great circles with the Ecliptic:

Angle	Great Circle	Angle	Axis
Ascendant	Horizon	Descendant	Ascendant/Descendant
Midheaven	Meridian	Imum Coeli	MC/IC
Vertex	Prime Vertical	Anti-Vertex	Vertex/Anti-Vertex

Each angle points to a particular direction of life: the Ascendant is the easterly point on the ecliptic that rises over the horizon symbolizing an entrée, an emergence, a dawning. When the Sun is at this point dawn is breaking, a consistent image throughout world mythologies for being born, youthful awakening and the bringing of the light. Greek temples were orientated to this point to welcome the rising god. Hellenistic astrologers likened this to the ship's helm, a steerage metaphor for the Ascendant's role in maneuvering the ship of life (3).

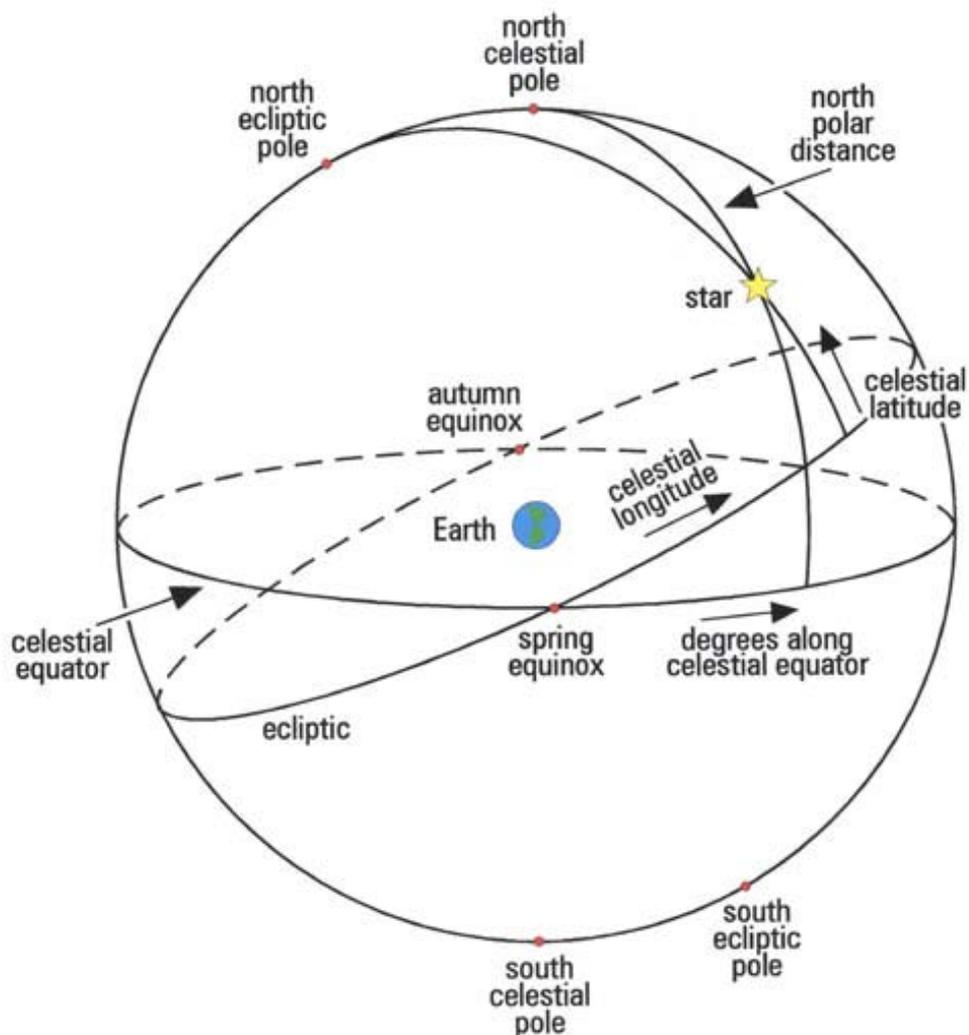
The Medium Coeli or the Midheaven, commonly known as the MC, is the apex of the ecliptic representing goal posts and brightly-lit summits. It is our own Master of Ceremonies. As the highest point on the ecliptic at that moment, the MC is something we look up to like the top of a cathedral spire or a ship's mast. It is the peak above, an uppermost limit and a symbol of something worth reaching for.

The Vertex is found in the Western part of the horoscope (4); its angularity is not as defined, being more mysterious, indefinite and less observable. It is sensitized to what is unable to be seen on the horizon of experience. It adds a third dimension to the nature of our interrelationships and opens us up to new perspectives on our significant encounters, concealed agendas and compelling rendezvous of our lives. .

Because the angles are formed by intersections of two spheres, they occur in opposing pairs. And you can't have one without the other. (5) Opposite the rising Ascendant is the angle of the Descendant, the setting point characterizing the approaching darkness, the end of the light. In Greek myth this was the land of the Hesperides, the nymphs of the evening located at the edge of the world. These Western maidens tended the orchard where golden apples grew from the grove of immortality, a gift from Gaia to Hera on her marriage to Zeus. The Descendant reveals to us the darker life-giving aspects of the soul not always visible in the daylight of consciousness; in a psychological way the angle proposes how we might deal with what is in shadow, especially when that is encountered in others.

Opposite the apex of the MC is the rock bottom angle known as the Imum Coeli or lower sky, commonly abbreviated as the IC, or as some students say, the '*I see*'! As the low point on the ecliptic, it is like a portal where the root finds its entry into the dark, cold earth. It represents the ballast on our ship of life, the dim depths from where we draw our sustenance.

The Anti-Vertex located in the eastern side of the chart complements its polar partner revealing a layer of self not visible at first glance, a hidden birth mark, an alter ego, an autonomous voice. Mining this angle often reveals untapped resources that support and sustain the personality.



Before we move on to look at the axes separately there is another metaphoric way of considering them, as proposed by Edward Johndro in his GEM dynamic field theory. G represents gravity, the MC/IC axis, a fitting simile for the pull of the past at our IC and the weight of expectations at the MC. E represents Electricity or the Vertex/Anti-Vertex axis, a figure of speech for the shock of self discovery at our anti-Vertex or the illumination of connection at our Vertex. Finally M stands for Magnetism symbolizing the attraction of others at our Descendant and the allure of our Ascendant.

The Ascendant-Descendant Axis: Self and Other

In the horoscope birth is generally equated with the Ascendant, as the eastern horizon is where planets actually rise into view. While life exists long before birth, it is birth that marks the beginning of life. Birth acknowledges our separateness, independence and individuality and commemorates the transition between the divine and the secular worlds. Similarly the Ascendant carries the aspects of our individual self, the way we greet life and conduct the soul's vital energies. It is the personality of the vehicle that carries us, often the first visible qualities others see in us. Hence others whose personal planets connect with our ascendant respond to us immediately.

The sign on the Ascendant, planets conjunct and the Ascendant ruler convey images about the atmosphere of birth and this includes the family condition at the time. Astrologically the Ascendant can reveal many things about peri-natal conditions as well as how we instinctually confront the world. Planets that are on the horizon, especially conjoining the Ascendant, symbolize not only conditions surrounding the birth, but how this energy is called upon every time a new beginning or transition occurs. The planet also illustrates the threads of a theme that run through the familial experience, as any ascending planet is met first by the family and is often thematic in family charts. In my experience it is common for the sign on the Ascendant to be repeated in siblings' and parents' charts especially on the horizon, meridian or via the nodal axis.

The life force that is channeled through the Ascendant and spills into the 1st house is indicative of our early environment and the energy that is able to be channeled and focused towards the growing and forward-moving personality. Our immediate environment is our physical body which transports the self. The Ascendant is representative of how the vital life is channeled and how the body conducts energy. A way of thinking about the ascendant as a moving and luminous transitional zone is well articulated by Stephen Arroyo:

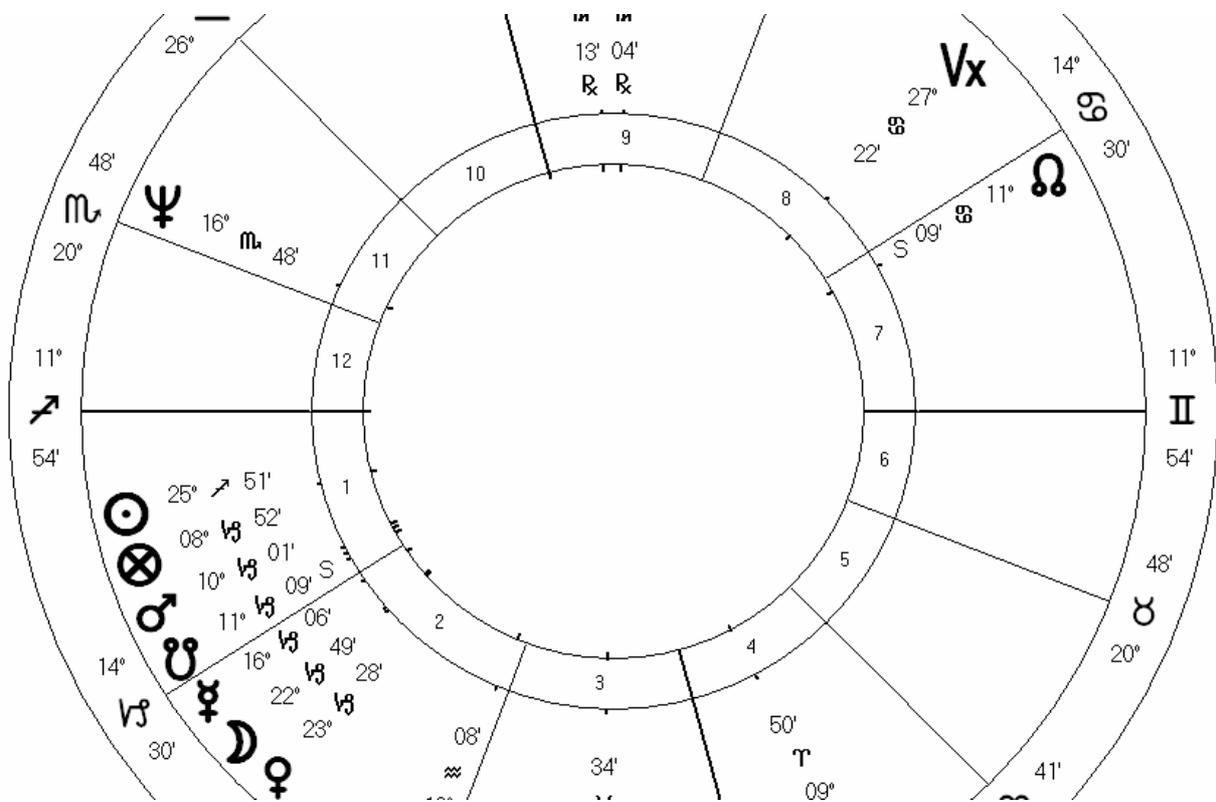
The ascendant symbolizes a way that the entire self is expressed so immediately and spontaneously that no mere words are capable of capturing its essence. It thus has an almost transcendent significance from the viewpoint of its importance in one's total integration as a fully functioning, dynamic individual. (6)

Howard Sasportas suggested birth and early family experiences were often constellated when working with the Ascendant. He described it as how we might hatch (7). In other words the Ascendant was how we opened the shell of the self into the world. Any planet on the Ascendant might tell a birth tale or a family story (8). However it is also a theme that is

awoken in each life transition since we constantly look through this archetypal lens at the world as we approach it.

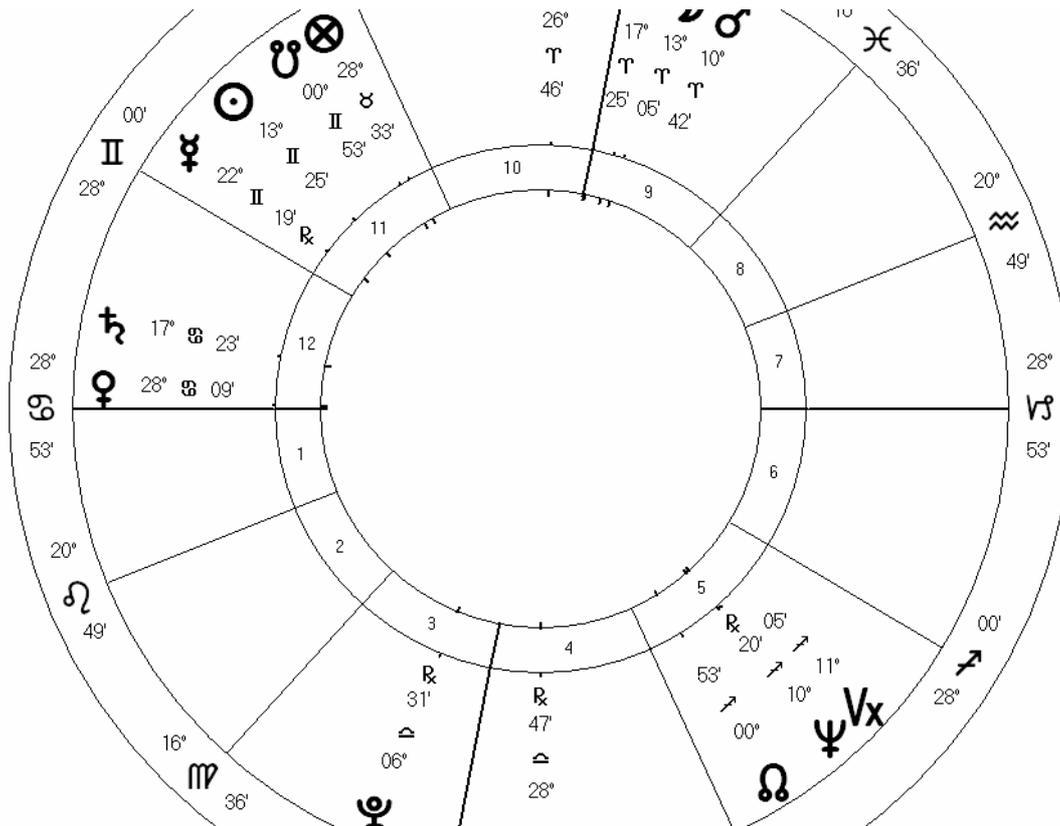
If how we might approach life is characterized at the Ascendant, then what we attract from life is met at its polar opposite, the Descendant, the gateway to relating. Being opposed to what is ascending this angle is often experienced as what is muted, shadowy or foreign. The Descendant represents 'other', generally an equal other involved with us in a contract or a commitment. However other can also refer to the poorly lit aspects of the inner self, qualities that are seeking consciousness. As we are more inclined to identify with the qualities of the Ascendant, the polar qualities described by our Descendant are left to drift out into the world finding safe harbour with those we feel attracted to or drawn towards.

Brad Pitt



The Descendant is symbolic of qualities attractive in others yet perhaps still unconscious in ourselves. Since the Descendant is on the visible horizon its shadowy qualities are often illuminated by the vibrancy of another. Hence it is no surprise that the Descendant sign is often the Sun, Moon or one of the angles of our partner. This is certainly apparent in Brad Pitt's chart: he has 11 ♏ 54 on his descendant; Angelina's Sun is 13 ♏ 25, only two degrees away. Angelina's descendant is 28 ♏ 53: Brad's Venus Moon conjunction is close by at 22-23 ♏ (9).

Angelina Jolie

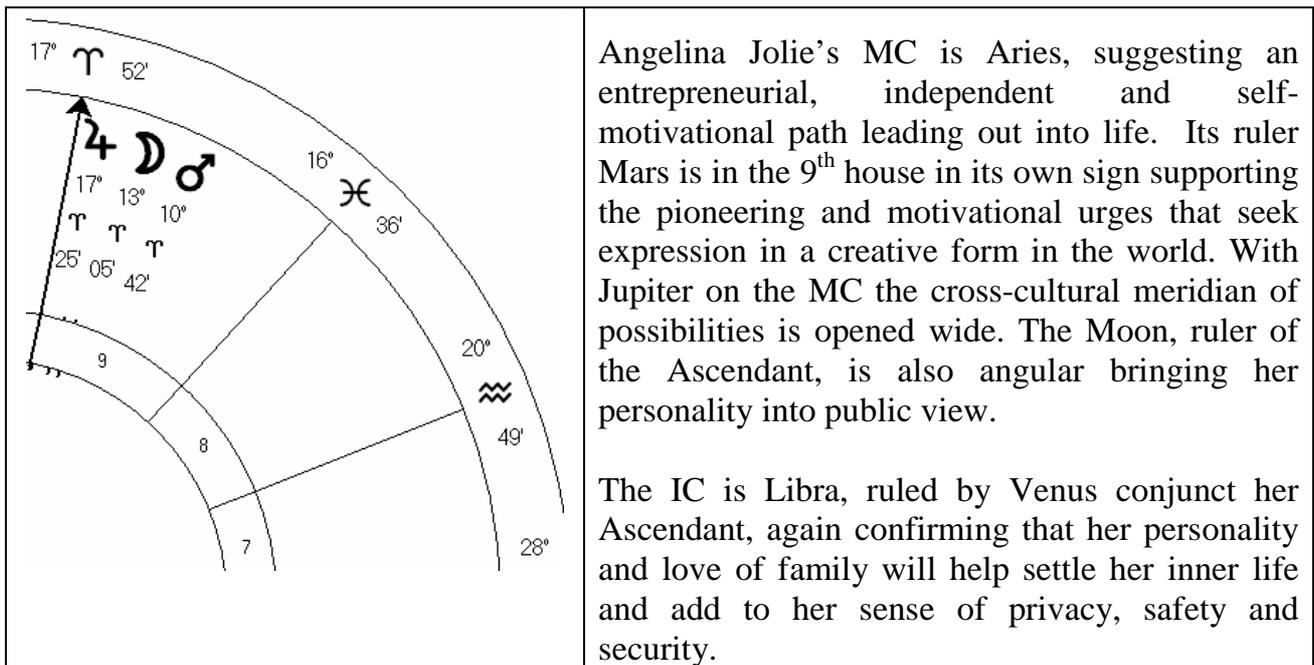


The MC – IC axis: Private and Public

Unlike the plane of the Ascendant Descendant, the MC IC is up and down. The horizontal axis of the Ascendant Descendant implies being side by side suggesting equal relationships between the self and other whereas the vertical nature of the MC IC suggests top and bottom and therefore hierarchy and authority. A power differential exists along this axis. The IC is private space while the public area is the MC. Like the spinal column, the MC IC supports the whole horoscope. At its base is the IC which is rooted in the instinctual self and the familial gene pool; at the top is the MC, opening out onto the world at large. From earliest times this was the parental axis, the mythological pair of opposites that support, foster, shape and socialize the self in the world.

The IC is base camp; hopefully a secure, well-supplied and boundaried base, from where the summit is visible and reachable. The IC anchors the self to its inner and private world so that the door to the outer and public world at the MC is securely hinged. The IC describes the family atmosphere and qualities that are the founding principles for internal security. Hence the IC symbolizes what helps to secure, us, how we feel safe and loved. The ruler of the IC is both guide and a resource in developing the internal strength to feel in safe hands while planets on the IC are the internal forces that shape our sense of shelter and protection. When outer planets cling to the IC, forces beyond the familial and personal have an effect on our security systems.

If the IC is the touchstone for our wellbeing then the MC is the touchdowns of our lives, the symbol of achievement and performance in the worldly sphere. I often visualize the MC as a path continuing out into the world. It is our career, not just in the literal sense of a field of employment, but in its sense of a course through history. The MC is the access to the unfolding path of our lives. I like to think of it as the professional, or what we profess to be. It is the soul's vow in the world anchored by the IC influenced by the familial inheritance and social opportunities. Astrological intelligence helps us to maximize the potential of this axis through understanding the images constellated here. Even as children we carry the image of what we want to be when we grow up; this is not a literal image but a soulful urge to be as creative and content as we can be in our own world.



The Vertex-Anti Vertex Axis: The Multi-Dimensional Self

The Vertex Anti-Vertex is the third axis and in a way stretches us into a third dimensional view of the self. It is no longer squared away, up and down, vertical or horizontal. Liken it to putting on some 3-D glasses to see the chart and all of a sudden something that seemed at arm's length is now right in front of you; what was in the background has come to the foreground. Subtleties are now more obvious. The Vertex's earliest associations were with what was 'fated' and beyond conscious control. From my experience this refers to the blind spot of the Vertex, the unseen qualities that arise through our relationships and transform who we are. Therefore what feels beyond our control and unbidden is an unconscious agenda coming to light. Ironically it is these relationships that have a lifelong effect and often change the course of our lives. My experience has led me to quip that the Vertex represents the relationships you can't get rid of. In other words they have dynamically altered who we are and how we relate.

The Vertex comes alive in synastry where its interconnection with planets or angles in other's chart is visible. Regularly I see this confirmation of a transformational encounter in chart comparisons. The sign on the Vertex represents those unidentified qualities, seemingly at odds with our conscious intent, yet of great value in the scheme of our lives. When the

Descendant and Vertex are in different signs there is a tendency to uphold the Descendant's characteristics and be blinded to those of the Vertex. However over time the unconscious agenda items of the Vertex become apparent and of great substance. When the Vertex and Descendant are in the same sign these qualities are intensified. Unlike the other angles that are the boundary zones to a new quadrant and house, the Vertex occupies a house. This can be delineated; the house position of the Vertex suggests the area of where the critical relationship will take place. Planets on the Vertex are influential forces that steer us towards a conversion through relationship.

Johndro and Jayne's early testing of the two angles favored the Vertex, hence it has become more widely recognized - leaving the Anti-Vertex languishing on the other side of the chart. But that is its nature: the unrecognized and often unseen resources that back up the personality, a bit like the haunting tones of the Webb Sisters that vocally back up Leonard Cohen. The Anti Vertex suggests the desires and urges that remain overshadowed by the Ascendant; values and resources that often lay untapped by the self. If they go unrecognized for too long they become a siren's song that lead us to a fateful encounter.

Once again, let's consider the charts of Brad and Angelina to demonstrate this axis. Brad has Gemini on the Descendant with the Vertex in Cancer in the 8th. Perhaps he is conscious of being drawn to lithe, gregarious, witty companions but is he aware of the Vertex's agenda to encounter a more intimate kinship? Angelina not only brings her Venus/Ascendant to his Vertex but also a family of six kids. Her Capricorn Descendant is probably conscious of her attraction to maturity and self-made success but what about the wider, more mystical needs of the Neptune-Vertex in Sagittarius? Brad's Ascendant is a nice fit here so maybe he brings some of that into their relationship. Angelina's Sun in Gemini is on her Anti-Vertex, a potent image of her heroic alter egos as well as the underlying charisma and creativity that might be disguised by the beauty of Venus rising. Brad's Venus-Moon conjunction in Capricorn is on his Anti-Vertex which suggests the essence of a receptive and caring authority underpins the cowboy persona of his Ascendant.

Getting an angle on our chart depends on where we are focused. Traditional astrology favored the Ascendant as the guiding principle of the life and its planetary ruler as the ruler of the chart. But in our complex time there are many angles on life. It is always important to consider and re-consider what angle we have on life.

Getting an Angle on the Angles with some key phrases

Our Ascendant or Rising Sign symbolizes.

- our individual horizon or viewpoint, the way we might be perceived, met or greeted by the world
- our approach to beginnings of any kind; how we enter into new experiences
- our self-image, how we present ourselves and project our personality
- our persona and the masks we employ to keep our self separate
- birth; how we enter life and subsequent life situations
- how we may spontaneously defend ourselves
- how we experience vitality and express the chi life force, body image, shape and movement

Our Descendant symbolizes:

- our reflected identity in the mirror of others
- qualities we seek in others and through our relationships
- shadow qualities reflected by partners or others in our lives; qualities seen in others that often are denied conscious life by us
- the equal other: close associates, intimate friends, life partners
- partnership; personal or business partners
- one-to-one contractual or committed relationships

Our MC symbolizes:

- our social-identity and public image; how society tends to see us
- status, reputation, the honors and titles given through our associations in the world
- what we may aspire towards achieving in our life; our highest goals or aspirations
- our contribution back to society
- profession or what we profess to be in the world; career or the course of life in the worldly arena
- parental influences on what to be in the world
- the vocation and pathway in the world

The IC symbolizes:

- our inherited identity or subjective self
- our private self and internal base of operations; our psychological roots
- early forms of security experienced in our family of origin
- the family atmosphere; the climate of our family home
- the inherited substance from the parents
- home or where we feel safe; our sense of belonging (or not belonging)
- inner security

Our Vertex symbolizes.

- hidden agendas in relationships, hence what is often seen as karmic or fated connections
- unbreakable bonds and the unconscious contacts in relationships
- issues and affairs beyond our control
- deep-seated, compelling and inescapable themes in relationship
- other-worldly, sensitivity to subtle realities
- relationships and experiences that change our life perspective

Our Anti-Vertex symbolizes:

- unseen qualities of our personality
- creative aspects of our individuality that may be overshadowed
- anchoring aspects of our character
- unacknowledged traits
- an alternate power or energy source

Endnotes

1. This tradition is summarised by William Lilly in *Christian Astrology*, Astrology Center of America (Bel Air, MD: 2004), 47-8: 'The whole Sphere of Heaven is divided into four equal parts by *Meridian* and *Horizon*, and again into four Quadrants, and every Quadrant again into three parts, according to other Circles drawn by points of Sections of the aforesaid Meridian and Horizon.'
2. Edward Johndro and Charles Jayne corresponded and developed the concept of the Vertex. For an interesting insight into E. Johndro see Bill Meridian's biography at <http://uraniatrust.org/edward-johndro> and "A Salute to our Heritage: What Makes a True Astrologer?" by Gavin Kent McClung, *Dell Horoscope*, June, 2000, 66-77.
3. See Demetra George, *Astrology and the Authentic Self*, Ibis Press (Lake Worth, FL: 2008), 90-3.
4. When the MC is near the solstice points (0♅ or 0♆) then the horizon aligns with the Anti-Vertex-Vertex axis. The closer the latitude is to the equator the more erratic the Vertex becomes. However a general rule of thumb is in moderate latitudes the Vertex generally falls between the 5th and 8th houses
5. While we may single out one angle, in essence they are a polarity and need to be seen as such. Dane Rudhyar succinctly suggests: 'The *principle of polarity* is the cornerstone of any sound astrological interpretation, and it is particularly in evidence when we deal with *axes* in a chart'. Dane Rudhyar, *The Astrological Houses*, Doubleday & Co. (Garden City, NY: 1972), 154.
6. Stephen Arroyo, *Astrology, Karma & Transformation*, CRCS Publications (Vancouver, WA: 1978), 211
7. Howard Sasportas, 'The Stages of Childhood', from *The Development of the Personality* by Liz Greene and Howard Sasportas, Samuel Weiser, Inc. (York Beach, ME: 1987), 32-6.
8. As an example, Pluto may be the life and death feeling surrounding labor or a peri-natal loss in the family that heralded the birth; Neptune might symbolize the uncertainty and complications surrounding the delivery, the bleary and bewildered sense of feeling lost in approaching a new destination; Uranus reveals the unexpected disconnection or severance that took place near birth or an abrupt sense of entry and feelings of disassociation. Saturn rising might suggest a long and difficult labor while Chiron on the horizon signals foreign feelings, a birth scar or a separation from mother.
9. Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie's birth data are A and AA rating respectively from Lois Rodden's Astrodatbank.
 - a. Brad Pitt December 18, 1963; 6.31 am CST; Shawnee, OK, USA
 - b. Angelina Jolie June 4, 1975; 9.09 am PDT; Los Angeles, CA, USA