

Connections, Links & Coincidences

or Stars, Conceptions and Virgins.

An Old Age approach.

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As a final assignment we want you to develop your own narrative for a sixth strategy regarding the creation of art. It has to be original and meaningful. You have to create your own context and meaning. Where required you can include existing art movements in your debate. We would like you to include a minimum of 4 existing artworks. You should create an interdisciplinary context with works from at least 3 different disciplines. We expect an approximate size of 4 pages.

1 Introduction

“Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent”. Premise? Request? Warning? Irony? Nobody knows exactly what the philosopher meant with this impossible (or indispensable) statement. A *credo* for a scientist, it seems to be what a philosopher should avoid — not to mention an artist exercising the opposite. Here, I will be talking about connections. Not about some connections but any connections. Metamedia? Perhaps, especially those which have been already there since their very act of establishment.

My story will run from top to bottom and back. For the connections fight for our attention or lie silent till they are disturbed by humans — premises of two different cosmogonies. The connections are the ones that act consciously — not the things connected.

I would like to describe a journey of seeking connections that are of importance and not necessarily important. My first example should explain what is meant here within this lexical difference.

2 Poetry

There are no doubts that poetry is the only true art (of course, until those doubts arise). But why exactly? Some recipients point to the fact, that poetry is explicitly not only about the topic it describes with words but also about the words themselves – their rhythm, colour and nets of meanings. To write a poem is not only to assemble

and order the carefully chosen words – they must concord in the external structure of rhyme and/or rhythm retaining independence of meaning or binding both those aspects playfully.

Who would expect that classical poetry would come back once again not because of ideas it enfolds together, but because how fierce is today the hunt for every hint of correlation.

Oh great muse, who guides the artist's soul,
Inspiring thoughts and deeds that make us whole,
From ancient times, the stars have held great sway,
Guiding us through life's twists and turns each day.

Twelve signs of the zodiac, each one brings,
A unique energy that the artist sings,
From fiery Aries, brave and bold and true,
To Pisces, sensitive, intuitive, and anew.

The stars align and their influence is strong,
Inspiring the artist to create and belong,
To the cosmic dance that is the grand design,
A tapestry of art that's truly divine.

So let us heed the stars and their bright light,
As we create and give of our artistic might,
For they are the guiding force that sets our course,
On a journey of self-discovery and artistic discourse.

CHATGPT, Impression on the prompt "Explain in the form of a Homeric poem how numbers of stars in Zodiac system influences the soul of an artist" [3].

The effort of bringing together all the divergent traces (astrological knowledge, style of Homeros, psychic inquiries) takes little to no time, timing being the part of the game as well. However the peak of astonishment is reached only by the fact that those links come into being altogether with the proper wording — the prompt itself or an observation may not suffice for poem as such.

But is the ability to tangle and verbalise an ability of an importance? A certain weights of signification clumps here and there for sure, but its center of existential gravity seems to slip away, pronouncing ease and efficiency instead of abiding the exigency of such coincidences' incarnation.

Coincidences are special types of connections which require reckonning with (or casting out) instead of mere clever discovery. They are insolently visible on earth and heavens. The art of impact not only seeks for any superficial connections — it also approaches the most blatant ones, rewarding with the sense of reconnection and religion.

In the synthetic Homeric artwork above, what is invisible to the reader is the prompt — an information about which motives are to be verbalized in order to generate flow of blackboxed correlations. I cannot get rid of impression that mere

existence of such a prompt dealt with such an apparent ease ruins the effect. The artwork is being created because of the prompt, not instead of it — the power of fatal coincidence is neutralized, audacious sow of a bear is approached as panda scared of sneezing.

We should only find a historical case, where generative abilities of CHATGPT and similar technologies (if yoked then to work for the sake of our thought experiment), shatter under the gravity of public performance. We shall witness how substituting the repressed coincidence with explicit prompt misses the point of art as such.

An appealing example of embracing coincidences might be always found in the forgotten cultures. Let's then look to the East, and let us be amazed by recollection of Bizantine hymnography. An orthodox hymn may be conceived from crossroads between a specific official public event, religious memoir to the story from Old Testament, adoration of Christ as tortured but triumphant Saviour and — as if all of this was not enough to bear for the poet — compulsory references to other songs composed for a similar event from the past. A poetic form embracing all of those difficulties is called *Kanon*. It was always written for a specific feast. Despite having the main topic, it consisted of nine *odes*, each one referencing a different biblical canticle.

Τὸ πέλαγος Ἐρυθρᾶς
διατμήξας πάλαι
διὰ ξηρᾶς διήγαγε
τὸν Ἰσραὴλ ῥυσάμενος ·
νὺν δὲ Χριστὸς σαρκωθεὶς
ἐκ Παρθένου εἴλκυσε
λαὸν ἐθνῶν τὸ πλήρωμα
δομήσας ἐκκλησίαν
οὐρανότυπον τάγμα ·
διὸ αὐτῷ ᾄσωμεν
ὥς Θεῷ ἡμῶν, ὅτι δεδόξασται.

Of old, dividing the Red Sea,
He led Israel
over dry land
and rescued them.
Now Christ, incarnate of the Virgin,
has rescued the people,
the fullness of the Gentiles,
by building the Church, ordered
according to the heavenly pattern.
Therefore let us sing unto Him,
unto our God, for He is magnified.

Kosmas of Jerusalem, *irmos* of the Kanon for the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross [5].

The stanza above is the *irmos* (the beginning) from a Kanon for the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross by Kosmas of Jerusalem (8th century). Here, the First Song of Moses (*Hymn of Victory*, sung after the successful passage of the Red Sea in *Exodus*) is being paraphrased and transitions to the themes related to the feast.

It often happened that the hymn-writer had to compose a Kanon for a feast whose object could not easily be connected with the Hymn of Victory. In such a case the poet had to work out a solution which was satisfactory from both the liturgical and the artistic point of view. The solution could rarely be achieved in a short stanza; more space was needed to connect the object of the feast with the Passage of the

Red Sea. The Hirmus [*irmos* — AJD] was generally composed upon a paraphrase of the 'Passage', and in the following stanzas of the Ode the hymn-writer had to effect the transition to the object of the feast. There are only a few Kanons in which the hymn-writer succeeded in combining both the allusion to the Canticle and that to the feast in the Hirmus itself.'

Egon Wellesz, *A History of Byzantine Music and Hymnography* (Oxford University Press, 1962, p. 228).

As for the prompt, all coincidental connections are what causes the poem to originate. For human artwork the opposite is true — an artwork emerges *despite of* those coincidental connections. The pen of poet stretches the established rules, his imagination maneuvering within the hidden links and their mysteries, shifting the attention from the task to the result. It is how a mystery is exhibited — not by publishing its content, but by the mere courage to approach it.

3 Architecture

Although the previous example clearly relates to a festive liturgy and music, in this text it received a rather modest representation as a silent piece of poetry. Writing a poem, often a synonym of a private affair, may not be understood as an act of courage. This is why the next example from the Western border of the Mediterranean Sea shall recalibrate the scale of gesture.

The splendor and ornament of Villa Farnesina [4], a suburban residence of Agostino Chigi, affirms proudly the status of the rich senesian banker. Each loggia is covered in countless frescoes and paintings, commissioned from artists such as Raphael and Il Sodoma. The project itself was done by Baldassare Peruzzi.

One of the loggia is devoted to exhibit the whole series of coincidences which led to the happy and rich life of the Italian nobleman. In the symbolisms of mythological figures, their way they are positioned to each other and where they look at, a hidden historical event is encrypted. The scenario from the ceiling happened in a more literal sense on 29 November 1466, 9.30 pm. This is the time when Agostino was born. The characters from frescoes are representations of planets and stars, forming a unique grouping during the entire course of history.

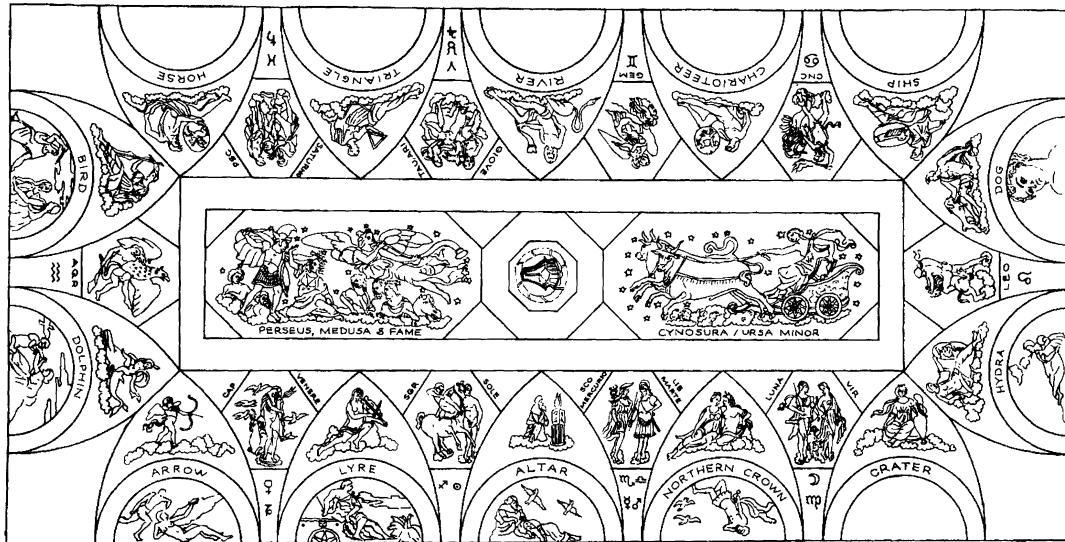


Figure 1: Villa Farnesina, diagram of the ceiling and pendentives.

But one cannot think that the relation between stellar arrangements and mundane fortune is enough to track the coelestial connection between those two. This is precisely why the frescoes depict not one, but *two* horoscopes. The second horoscope is included within the fourteen pendentives (*vele*) and is notated using different, extra-zodiacal system, denoting Chigis date of *conception* on 29 November 1466 at 2.30 pm.

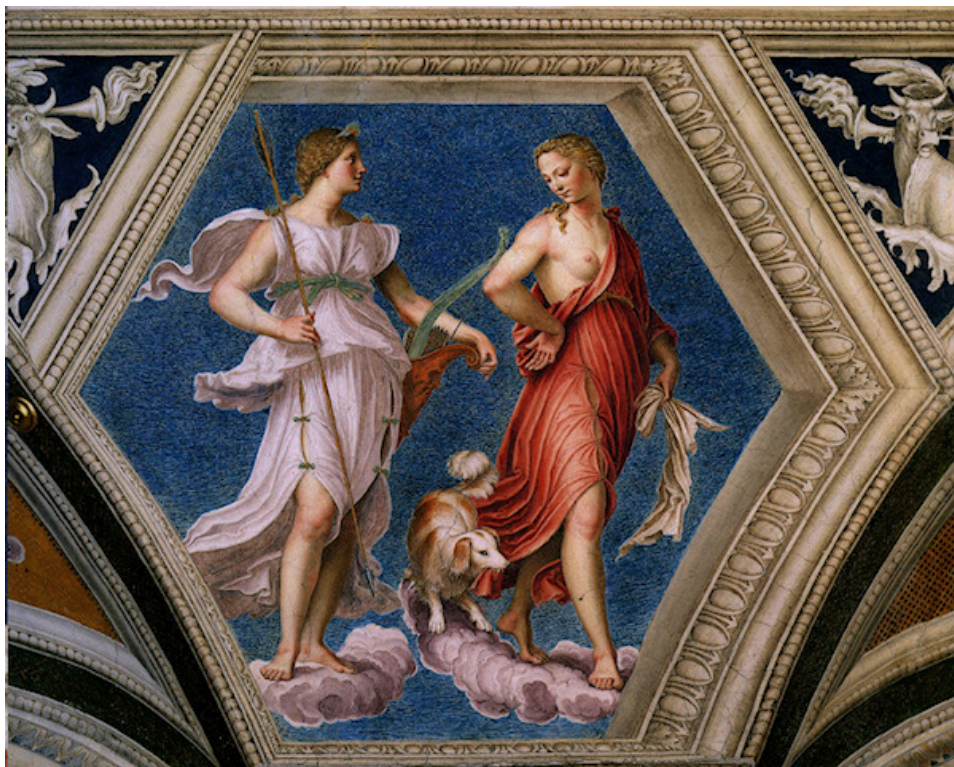


Figure 2: Villa Farnesina, Moon visiting Virgo in the birth horoscope.

As astrological calculations suggest, that day the Moon (*Luna*) was visible in the constellation of Virgo, making her the so called *ascendant* at conception. Virgo's special place is commemorated both in the positioning of additional extra-zodiacal figures, other additional paintings as well as in poems, that were written at the time to commemorate villa and its rich patron.

But let us dare to notice an important lack in the Villa Farnesina representations. No account survived, what the stellar position meant for the faith of Agostino Chigi. It turns out, that predicting the future was not necessarily the main task of astrology. What astrological knowledge captures, is the uniqueness of an important historical event, whose traces are left in the sky above (as we today believe that a certain radiation was left after the Creation itself). For astrology is no magic: what it tries to achieve is to simultaneously posit a human in the coordinates of space and timeline — and promise, that every even most minor existence left its trace somewhere in the skies.

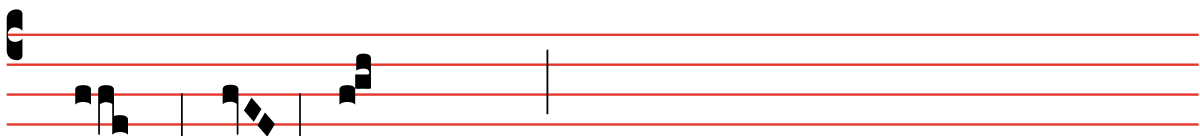
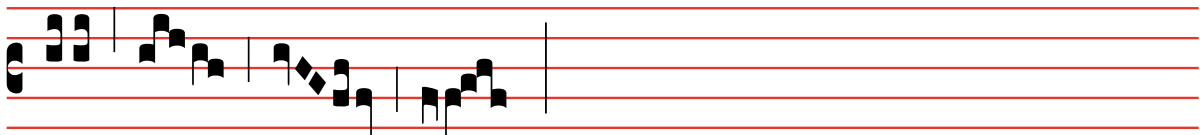
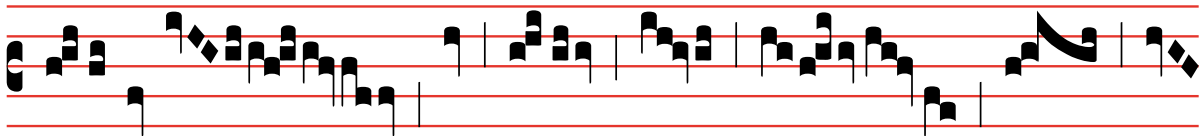
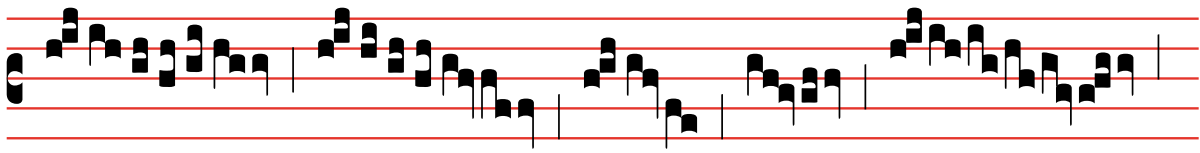
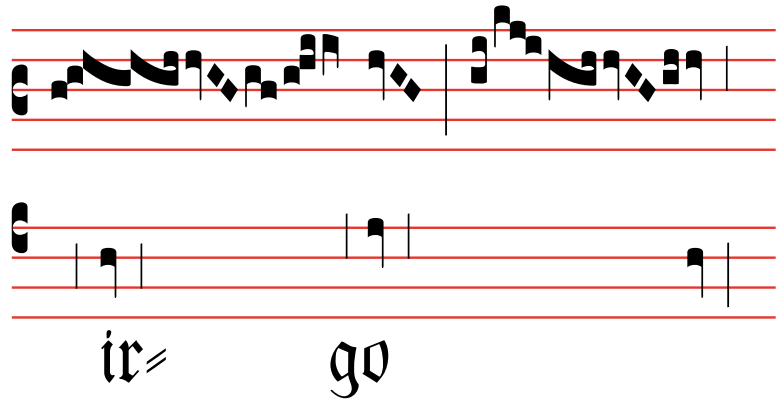
Chigi's courage to erect this lapidary Villa and friability of astrological secret of speculation. Despite the economical impetus of the Villa, the message about a special connection of extraordinary banker with coelestial resolutions is meant to be somewhat hidden. Chigi's connection to Virgin is too personal to be leaked, for a leak may result in the loss of its special circumstance. Mythological culture codes, astronomical treatises and the height of the ceiling protect this coelestial coincidence not to shout too loud. The Virgin's commemoration is more suggested by the study than signalled for the spectator.

4 Music

So far we discussed the inobedience of poetry and visual arts to the famous philosophical adage. The mundane connections find their proclamation the more they are repelled from the form. In the meantime, we accused CHATGPT of lack of courage when dealing with coincidences (an accusation proper for human to raise if an existential threat to the machine cannot be proved).

The last voice in the discussion will be then taken by the most shameless of all arts, for it directly contradicts Wittgenstein's prohibition. The last example that I will use posits itself in the middle of the timeline between Kosmas of Jerusalem's *Kanon* and Chigi's coelestial loggia, but it will use the trope pronounced in both of the artworks.

In this moment I advice to listend to the provided recording. It contains an excerpt from the liturgical Western music of 12th century sung by *Ensemble Organum* and Lycourgos Angelopoulos. An original plainchant of this piece is sung by the lower voices in much stretched span of the timing. The higher voice sings a contrasting melody (*discantus*) to the plainchant. The piece is an example of *organum* — an improvisatory liturgical practice of the times of first cathedrals. Many of *organa* were notated down and assembled in the book *Magnus Liber Organi*. This organum is based on the melody of a gradual for feasts related to Virgin Mary *Benedicta et Venerabilis*. The chosen fragment is sung upon only one word: *virgo* (virgin). On the next page, I created an edition based on *Magnus Liber Organi* with this excerpt.



LEONINUS, Organum *Benedicta et venerabilis*: *copula* and *discantus* on the word "Virgo"
engraved from *Magnus Liber Organi* [by me — AJD] [1].



Only one word — *Virgo* — brings back the old story of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary (brought already by the Bizantine *kanon*). A commentary of a similar nature to the one expressed about astrology must be upraised here with regard to the theology of *Theotokos*. The message behind this story does not limit itself to the frivolous concession, that the “supernatural happens”, especially when unexpected or disbelieved. Through the Conception, and afterward Passion and Ressurrection, something about the world itself is told — a certain existential vision of ontology — but distilled to the point that God himself must intervene for the story to hold up and make any sense. The Conception is — heretically speaking — a proper moment of hierogamy, where “what above and below” becomes united as never before.

Those mysteries, barely nor skillfully formulated above, would be doomed to silence unless they could be voiced another way. This is the role of melisma and a reason, why the word *Virgo* recieves such a care by the musicians, dead and alive, participating in the performance of this *graduale*.

Virgin, hierogamy, divine connections and polyphony of two voices in a concordant dance of happy harmonious coincidences. But where are the stars?

As we already concluded, the movement of coelestial bodies suffices for astrologers as a point of reference for sketching out the human condition. It was possible, because those movements are harmonious: perceivable as simple and predictable.

Let’s now seek the stars in this organal counterpoint. Singer responsible for voicing the *discantus* calls the text freely, above three drone notes (so called *organum purum*). Next line, something changes. The “drone” commits a slow but steady movement, repeating the three-note figure until very end of the excerpt (performers hold the last note). Above this *vox principalis*, the discant singer continue counter-melody, but in rhythmical sync with the lower voice. This part is called (familiarily enough) *discantus*. One can imagine that to achieve this specific harmonic timbre of pure fifths and octaves in focal points of the voices, the melody of the second voice (*vox organalis*) must be planned carefully, not to collide with the notes of *vox principalis*.

What is very characteristic for stars on the firmament — a predictable and cyclic movement of many different coelestial bodies — here happens as well. During the *discantus* part, the lower voice repeats twice its melody (after  *torculus* in the middle of the third system). However, as stars never follow each other, the *discantus* voice do not repeat itself. Instead, after the “lonely” *virga*  in the third system, its melody falls “out of sync”. Till the end of the excerpt voices *organalis* and *principalis* do not conclude their phrases together anymore. This is visible in the graphical outline of the rests (vertical thin strokes): in the second system, they align, whereas in the third and fourth they do not.

As sky connects with the earth, stars and music are guided by harmonies revealing symmetries to each other. It is worth noticing, that — as only the excerpt is shown of the whole piece — *this is not a coincidence* that the *discantus* steady meter takes over the music on the word *Virgo* for the first time in this *organum*. But, by the means of the melismatic singing, no mysteries are revealed *per se* and

no word content is misused. The word upon which the *melisma* is sung, can acquire as many extralogical meanings as the improviser holds breath in his lungs.

5 Conclusions

How the music completes the picture of connections? By the means of this art, the most profound topics can be approached without spilling even a letter. Does it count as “remaining silent”? Each of the example seemed to step over the ironic prohibition: prohibition of the direct awe, verbal exaltations and immediate revelation. Perhaps the poetry is the only true art because it can dare to step over even those limitations.

(...)

In vain piercing depths, we capture the darkest
Images. For the wave (that flows with no rest)
Unfolds closely not the riddles of being,

But our very face from distant seeing.
And all the Universe and frontiers are patched
With mirrored rays in which humankind is latched.

Adam Asnyk (1838 — 1897), *Over the Depths I* [translated from Polish by Artur Dobija] [2].

References

- [1] Anonymous. *Magnus Liber Organi*. late 12th or early 13th century.
- [2] Adam Asnyk. *Nad Głębiami*. Fundacja Nowoczesna Polska, 1924. ISBN: 9788328800465.
- [3] OpenAI. *OpenAI*. <https://openai.com/>. 2021.
- [4] Mary Quinlan-McGrath. “The Astrological Vault of the Villa Farnesina Agostino Chigi’s Rising Sign”. In: *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 47.1 (1984), pp. 91–105. DOI: 10.2307/751440.
- [5] E. Wellesz and American Council of Learned Societies. *A History of Byzantine Music and Hymnography*. Clarendon Press, 1961. ISBN: 9780198161110.