

The Wednesday



Weekly Magazine of the Wednesday Group - Oxford

Editorial

Ecce Homo: Behold the Philosopher

We have been discussing the image of the philosopher over the last few weeks building up to the theme of philosophical biographies. The philosophical biography that we select here for discussion is Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo*. It is a philosophical biography par excellence. But it is also a fine example of the structure of philosophical thought that as Deleuze and Guattari explain is a combination of three elements that have to be taken together: the plane of immanence, the philosophical persona and the concept. They all come together in the writings of Nietzsche as a generator not only of philosophy but also of mythologies or of the thought that joins logos and mythos.

From Dionysus to Zarathustra to the Anti-Christ, there is a complex mix of mythology and philosophy. But when we finish reading the complete works of Nietzsche, or when we read the last book for which he saw the final proofs, *Ecce Homo*, we discover that we have been journeying into the life of Nietzsche – but which Nietzsche? The man or the thought? The mortal person or the immortal 'pure immanence'? It is a life that lends itself to literature, and a life that explains itself as pure thought and literature.

Kauffmann says in the translator's introduction to this book that it is the least discussed of Nietzsche's books. But given that Nietzsche thinks that philosophy is the confession of the philosopher, it is a mistake to ignore this short but important book. There are more and more biographies of Nietzsche busying themselves with facts and details which are the task of a good biography, but nothing comes closer to the spirit of Nietzsche than his own testament.

The titles of the book's chapters were written in a hyperbolic, shocking, style, and considering that Nietzsche collapsed mentally just after finalising the negotiation with his publishers, these gave people

the impression that it was a work of a madman or someone on the verge of madness. Where else could you find a writer opting for the headlines: 'Why I am So Wise?', 'Why I am a Destiny?' Kauffmann in his introduction defends Nietzsche by comparing him to Socrates and Goethe. But no other philosopher gave a full review of all his books in a form of a biography like Nietzsche did and perhaps the biography itself became Nietzsche.

Nietzsche identifies himself in this book with the two figures of Dionysus and Zarathustra. They speak for him and he speaks for them. He is the affirmer of life with the first and the herald of the coming of the Overman with the second. The Eternal Recurrence can be deduced from the life of the first and it is claimed by the second. The 'Death of God' thesis creates the plane of immanence for Dionysian and the end of Platonism.

Here, we not only meet the *Ecce Homo* as the philosopher but also the myth-creator. The myths create their own plane of immanence, nothing other-worldly, a philosophical persona – call it Nietzsche himself or the characters he creates a long with a list of concepts from the 'Overman' to the 'Will to Power'. These elements come together because their creator (or their representative on the plane of thought) is located in the here and now, on a plane of immanence where thoughts glide in different directions, making connections and producing new concepts. At the end of the book, Nietzsche signs himself as Dionysus. The unification of the philosopher and the myths he had created is final. That was literally the case. Nietzsche the man collapsed and was transformed into pure thoughts, a pure immanence.

The Editor

Visibility: The Two-in-One

In her book, *The Life of the Mind* (1971), Hannah Arendt highlights the connection and difference between the world of appearances in which we also feature as an appearance and the invisibility of the mind where we participate as a thinking ego. She observes how the outside world of appearances is internalized as impressions, and how the thinking ego can have sovereignty over this world of images abstracted from the external world of appearances. In this respect Hegel is like a monarch of all he surveys. This is not the world of appearances against which the foot of a Dr. Johnson could kick but a world of concepts separate from the physical world of gravity and law of cause and effect. The two worlds, the outer and inner, are separate while connected, and arguably constitute a single world.

WILLIAM BISHOP

The *thinking ego* can organize the concepts and images within this gravity-free, inner 'space' of the mind, while also conceiving a connection between them and the outer world. The pronounced difference between these 'two worlds' can be characterized as the difference between theory and practice. In this *two-in-one* the presence in the external world and an inner presence create a harmony when in tune but discord when out of tune.

Hannah Arendt identifies a sense of inner company when in solitude and also the inner dialogue of thinking with a two-in-one condition, which she thinks was as a discovery of Socrates: the question and answer dialogue that travels but apparently with no guaranteed point of arrival. This *two-in-one* helps to explain the need for withdrawal from action (in the outer world) in order to think, and the return to the external world when thinking ceases, and where in the external world one can only act as one. It is the duality of the ego (I am I) that gives rise to *self-consciousness*, and this arguably distinguishes man from a god or an animal. This activity of thinking can also be seen as instrumental in raising *conscience*

from unconsciousness, so that not to think is to be unaware of a conscience. The celebrated daimon (as a divine connection) of Socrates can be seen to 'make sense' in this dialectical, conversational element of thinking where later on the daimon becomes internalized as the thinking ego (the 'I' of *consciousness*), which is able to converse with the 'I' of *self-consciousness* in the form of question and answer.

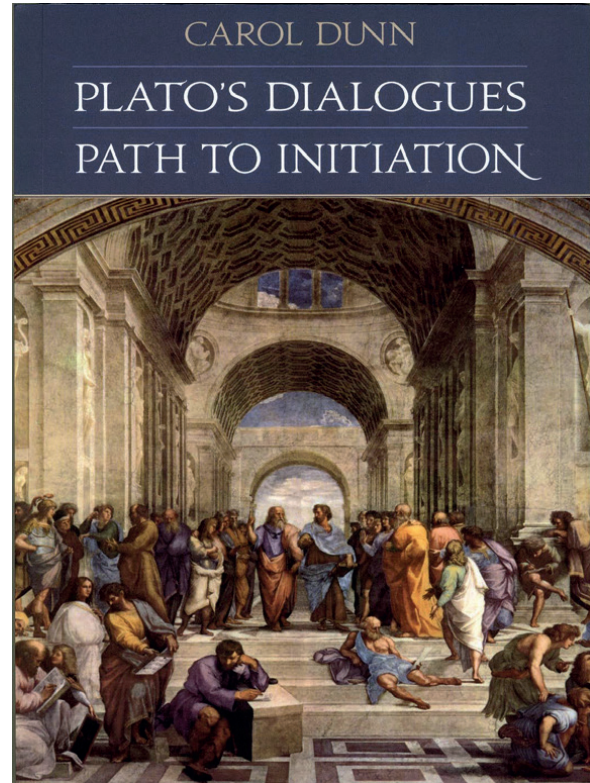
This thinking ego (which is to be distinguished from the self) when thinking, is said by Arendt to occupy the space between the flow of the past and future, which is the *timeless* space of the *now*, and since thinking deals with universals (essences) and not particulars, with thoughts that are timeless, they have no home. Indeed Arendt's text raises the question of where you are when in your mind: Is it *nowhere* because the universals it deals with have no particular *home*, unlike the particulars of the world of appearances? To be 'in one's mind' can be thought of as abstracted, taken out of the world, and to be in one's mind to *think* does extract one from activity in life. On the other hand to be 'out of one's mind' suggests



Hannah Arendt

imprisonment in the world of appearances that are full of sound and fury signifying nothing. Interestingly Arendt regards meaning as the province of *reason* as distinguished from *intellect* (a distinction made by Kant), which is concerned with knowledge. In this sense meaning is not identical with truth but is a faculty of the mind where the mind appears (or disappears) to have its own purpose. There is no direct language for this silent inner world so its language has to be borrowed from the world of appearances but transformed into metaphor, which connects the two worlds.

Arendt also draws attention to the link between thinking and being: Parmenides is quoted as saying that to think and to be *are* the same thing. Man is said to be *nous* and *logos*, silent contemplation and speaking, where *nous* is the divine element (reason) related to the heavens, while *logos* speaks of earthly things. Arendt regards the ‘timelessness of thinking’ (in the present) to be different from *eternity*, which is the limit where thinking collapses. Also she finds today the thread of tradition in philosophy broken, and this also applies historically to the ‘Roman trinity of religion,



Carol Dunn's book

authority and tradition’. What has been lost is the continuity of the past handed down from generation to generation, which makes consistent development possible, leaving only a fragmented past that has lost its certainty of evaluation. Her conclusion is that surviving *fragments* should not be discarded since they may scintillate, having endured through time in their timelessness.

Coming from a somewhat different perspective on the ‘*fragmented*’ works of Plato, Carol Dunn introduces what may be for many a new way of re-envisioning his dialogues. Her approach to Plato’s account of the dialectic of Socrates conceives Socrates (including Plato) as having a comprehensive purpose beyond the unsettling one of posing questions and seeking definitions. In her book, *Plato’s Dialogues – Path to Initiation* (2012), Dunn argues that Socrates had experienced mystical illumination (mentioned in the Diotima section of Plato’s *Symposium*) and his divinely appointed vocation was to inspire the citizens of Athens to care for their souls.

Dunn suggests from available evidence

that Socrates was following in the tradition opened up to the West by Pythagoras – a tradition foreign to Greece but alive as *mystery tradition* particularly in Egypt, where Pythagoras is thought to have gained initiation into the mysteries. The young playwright, Plato, was so dramatically affected by the phenomenon of Socrates that he devoted his life to communicating what he understood to be his essential message. Carol Dunn argues that all of Plato's dialogues (the collected edition) were intended as a complete work where each separate dialogue would constitute a chapter, so that the complete works would act as a path following the *good* and leading toward initiation in the religious sense where knowledge and practice activate one's divinity to possibly find expression in mystical transcendence, which in itself is incommunicable. This was what is thought the school of Pythagoras aimed at, utilizing the *quadrivium* of mathematics, geometry, astronomy and music, which Plato adopted as his curriculum for educating the guardians (in the *Republic*).

Keeping in mind Kant's distinction between *reason* and *intellect*, Plato in his 'divided line' analogy indicates that *reason* as the highest faculty can reach to the boundary of the intelligible world, but *intellect* (*understanding*), on a lower level, is unable to reach the metaphysical level attained by *reason* since its cognition is restricted to the world of appearances and logic. It would seem that apart from the philosophers of Neoplatonism, later thinkers had generally lost the ability to *experience* the metaphysical domain as *real*, hence its eclipse as a generally acknowledged dimension of reality. The *intellect*, as understanding, has its province within the world of becoming (appearances) and therefore forgets and loses consciousness of the *unchanging* world of Being. Even Aristotle appears to have lost experience of the metaphysical and concentrated his considerable intellect on physics, the natural

world and logic. It was to this juncture between Plato and Aristotle that Heidegger (a mentor to Hannah Arendt) directed his distinction between *logos* and *logic* where the *logos* (with its meditative thinking connected with reason and Being) became transformed (or disfigured) into logic (that strictly applied to the world of change or appearance).

Although that particular turning point of attention from the spirit to the material world can be seen as a decline from *logos* to *logic*, it can also be regarded as a necessity in the process of the evolution of consciousness. The material world of appearances is indeed an engaging world in itself but it is worth considering that it is only one side of the coin of *reality*. Without its complement and source it would not be, and there would be *nothing* rather than something, and where then would we be? Indeed what a convinced *materialist* in our world of appearances tends to ignore in the dialogues of Plato, if indeed these works would be given due regard, is their specific references to God, the immortal soul as a spark of the divine, reincarnation (transmigration) and the law of cause and effect (karma). These all pertain to the metaphysical world inhabited by the *Good* as a *Form*, and yet they enact their drama on the stage of *appearances* where 'all the world's a stage'. According to Plato (when carefully interpreted) God is both transcendent and immanent: beyond the world and yet also within it as manifestation, a belief known as panentheism, which goes right back to ancient India, the source of Hindu scripture).

It does appear that for Plato, as for Socrates, there were not two worlds, but two-in-one. The *idealist* recognizes one of these and the *materialist* recognizes the other; both of which have meaning, but the *realist* recognizes the two as an inseparable unity, which the idealist and materialist separate and cleave one-sidedly to only one of the separated parts. Of course what is *invisible* has no honoured place in a science of the world of appearances, and



Heidegger



Thomas Aquinas

a world with brute facts has little place in an idealist's world of invisible thought in the mind's nowhere.

So in the light of Socrates and Plato, and particularly within the light of the currently evolved state of the 'thinking ego', it is possible to identify Hannah Arendt's 'timeless nowhere' of thinking as a counter world similar to the relationship between the photographic negative and its printed manifestation as an impression from an archetype. This nowhere, no-time place can be conceived of as a portal to eternity, the soul's home in the bosom of God. But to advance through the portal will require more than the thinking-ego adapted to the land of appearances. Perhaps this is where enlivened sense-free thinking (the modern equivalent of Plato's *reason* with its intuitive potential) takes on significance. This is thinking that participates in its own process (the I am I) where thinking traverses its path back to its source in Being. This is quite easy to say, but may be difficult to comprehend, and even harder to practice. But as the long-term intention of the initiation process that Plato appears to allude to leads eventually and

potentially to *mystical illumination*, so the life that powers thinking can potentially lead the thinking-ego into the world of origins, forms, and immaterial beings, but this is where one departs from philosophy as ratiocination and sets sail into the sunrise of philosophy as embodied (or in this case disembodied) wisdom. In this respect it is interesting to recall that close to the end of his life of intricate scholarly philosophy, Thomas Aquinas had an overwhelming mystical experience, which may have allowed him to contrast the value all his life's work against the inexpressible effulgence of divine eternity.

Indeed as human beings we are currently in time but conceivably are also beings of eternity with an immortal soul. This is the unequivocal teaching of Plato transmitted through Socrates and earlier sources reaching far back in time. This can certainly be denied or disagreed with, but in that case philosophy would suggest an examination of one's assumptions and prejudices. Socrates would certainly have asked some searching questions to potentially shake the foundations of one's certainty!

A Sense Of Completion

There is a lot of discussion these days about the possibility of unending life. The big discussion is can one be happy in an infinite existence? I think the question is impossible to answer because we are all designed to make sense of things as short-lived creatures. There is however a need in all of us to find a sense of fulfilment or as I prefer to call it a sense of completion.

DAVID BURRIDGE

It might be argued that death is the prevailing fashioning force of our existence. Of course we all know we are going to die, and for some of us that ending is more imminent than for others. I do not however accept that this is the only means to authenticity as Heidegger argued in *Sein und Zeit*. There is a sense of completion that can be achieved by each of us in our own way, by focussing on the particular set of qualities and skills that we possess and creating accordingly. What we produce will give us a full sense of completion more significant to our Being than any awareness of the approaching end.

Of course focussing on this sense might raise moral issues. A right-wing extremist for example might feel he has achieved completion in promoting racism. I would argue our true sense of completion does require us to blend our selfhood with our social responsibility. Of course without society we would not exist and certainly would not be able to exercise any talent in a meaningful way. There is also a need to 'push out' beyond crude prejudices for the greater good of humanity.

I want to focus on two dimensions of the self which I believe are the critical paths to completion. I am going to lean on Maslow's *A theory of Human Motivation* (1943). I am not going to deliver a critique of the Hierarchy of Needs, just borrow two considerations: The need for self-actualisation and the need for esteem. I might be criticised for stepping out of the philosophy box, but that in my view is the best way to seek the Truth.

Maslow argued that even after all the basic needs are satisfied 'a new discontent and restlessness will soon develop, unless the individual is doing

what he is fitted for. A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write.'

These are obvious examples of talents which may drive an individual. Sometimes a person even prefers completion in this way rather than a comfortable life, pushing aside their basic needs. So the question to be posed is: is it within all of us to find actualisation of the self, even if we are not poets and musicians? I would argue it is. I may have inherent skills, whether they are carpentry, engineering or cooking etc. To find myself in the midst of a puzzling life requires me to search out my aptitudes and look for the opportunity to develop. The more I develop them, the more I will discover of my true self.

But of course the self is not an isolated entity. We need others both for somewhere to deliver the output of our skills but also to satisfy our deep need for esteem, that we all have (assuming we are not psychopaths). As Maslow puts it: 'All people in our society (with a few pathological exceptions) have a need or desire for a stable, firmly based (usually) high evaluation of themselves for self-respect, for self-esteem and for the esteem of others.' So it seems that it's not enough to be good at something to find completion. We want other's opinions to be part of that completion. Without this, the social self will be incomplete.

This social blending would not be a problem if we lived in a free, balanced and caring society. But in every society and to varying degrees we are bound by authority. If there's no freedom to express oneself or defend one's self against injustice then the self will not find true completion and his skill



Fromm

will turn into nothing more than a slavish activity. So social justice plays a big role in the completion of the self.

On the other side of self issues there is of course selfishness or greed. As Fromm pointed out in his book *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*: 'The desirable is what is necessary'. Greed might be related to self-interest. The self needs to survive and this is a fundamental drive. Self-interest is understandable, we seek self-completion and this involves often putting our needs first. But what of the successful businessman who manifests his self-motivation by amassing a fortune by stealing millions of pounds from his employees' pension fund?

So we come back to the thought is man good or evil? If he is essentially evil then the completion of self would be a very dangerous outcome, then it would better if man was curbed by fear and what the self could achieve would need to be heavily controlled – by Whom?

On the other hand, if man is inherently good then part of his achievement would be the realisation of



Maslow

the good in him. A humanistic judgement of ethics is to work rationally towards a healthy individual and deal with dysfunctions as if they were matters that required healing like a doctor would deal with an illness. As Fromm put it in his book *Man for Himself*: 'Man's main task in life is to give birth to himself, to become what he potentially is. The most important product of his effort is in his own personality.'

So, if I am going to find self-completion I will of course seek to discover and fulfil whatever skills and abilities I think I have. I will also seek to build relations which will generate esteem, something that is critical for my actualisation. I will also be as honest as I can about my moral weaknesses and strive to be better. There is one important capability in all this that we need to develop and that is what I would call: 'reflectivity'. We are more than just a driving force, chained to our desires. We can stand back and reflect on what may be good outcomes and how they are to be achieved. What is better, what is worse? Moral reflection will help us achieve true self-completion.

Death and the Philosopher

‘Take flight each day and leave ordinary time behind. Become eternal by surprising yourself. This effort is necessary, this ambition is real... sorry, If people everywhere felt the same way as a small number, and became as nature meant for them to be: blameless, irreproachable, and lovers of wisdom,...they would know nothing of the things that cause grief and fear, be so filled with the causes of joy and well-being that there would be no single moment in which they would not lead a life full of joyful laughter; indeed the whole cycle of the year would be a festival for them.’ (Philo of Alexandria).

NONA FERDON

For Philo, philosophising meant that philosophy was a mode of existing in the world, a mode of existing which had to be practised at all times and the goal of which was to transform the whole of the individual’s life.

If it is true that philosophy subjects the body’s will to live in the higher domains of thought, it can rightly be said that philosophy is an apprenticeship for death. As Socrates puts it in the *Phaedo*: ‘it is

in fact...that which those who go philosophising correctly or in training for death, that to them of all men death is less liable.’

‘When, however, a man is not gone to sleep before he has awakened his rational faculty and regaled it with excellent discourses and investigations, concentrating himself on himself, having also appeased the appetitive part and calmed the irascible part, ...once he has calmed these two



La Rochefoucauld



Montaigne

parts of the soul, stimulated the third, in which reason resides... It is then that the soul best attains to truth.' (Plato: *The Republic*)

To present philosophy as 'training for death' was a decision of importance. For anyone who takes philosophy seriously, this Platonic dictum is profoundly true. It has had an enormous influence on Western philosophy and has been taken up by philosophers from Epicureans to Heidegger. As la Rochefoucauld said, 'neither the sun nor death can be looked at directly.' And the only ones to even attempt to do so are the philosophers.

For Plato, he who has already tasted of the immortality of thought cannot be frightened by the idea of being stashed away from sensible life. For the Epicureans the thought of death was the same as the consciousness of the finite nature of existence, and it is this which gives an infinite value to each second. 'Believe that each day that dawns will be your last; then you will receive each unexpected hour with gratitude.' (Montaigne.) And Montaigne in one of his best-known essays stated that philosophising is learning how to die

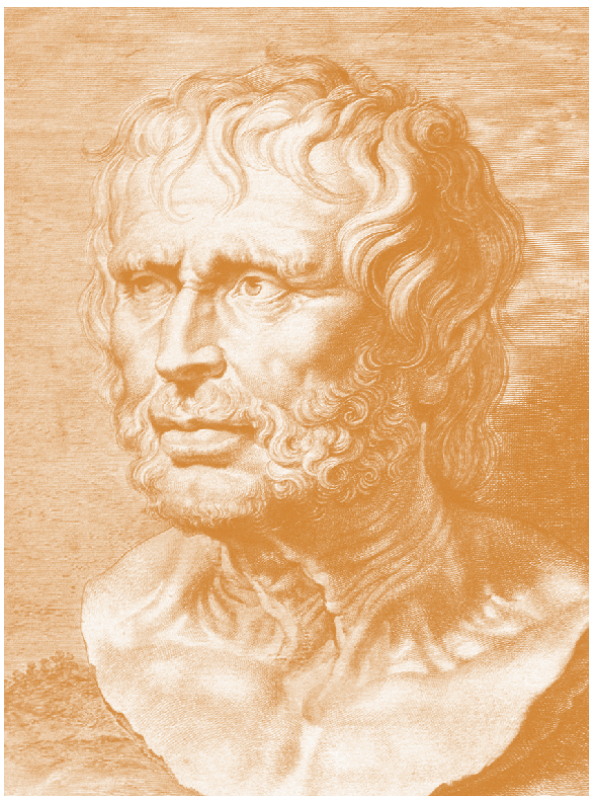
and, referencing Seneca, 'he who has learned how to die has unlearned how to be a slave.'

The thought of death transforms the tone and level of life: 'Keep death before your eyes every day... And then you will never have any excessive desire. The infinite value of the present moment, in which we must live as it were, simultaneously, both the first moment and the last, gives life its meaning.' (Montaigne).

We are to change from a vision of things dominated by individual passions to a representation of a world governed by universality and objectivity of thought. From the perspective of pure thought, things which are 'human, all too human' are foregone. The meaning of our existence resides in this contemplation of wisdom and eternity.

Philosophy as a way of life presented itself as a method for achieving independence and freedom, that state in which the ego depends only upon itself. We encounter this again and again in Socrates, among the Cynics, and Aristotle, and Epicurus, and among the Stoics. We find in all philosophical schools the same awareness of the power of the human self to free itself from everything which is alien to it, even if in Epicurean realism, historicism and cosmic consciousness was added to these fundamental dispositions. By cosmic consciousness, 'we mean the consciousness that we are part of the cosmos, and the consequential dilation of ourselves throughout the infinity of universal nature. Remember that, although you are mortal and have only a limited lifespan, yet you have risen, through the contemplation of nature, to the infinity of space and time and you have seen all of the past and all of the future.' (Metrodorus - from the notes of students of Epicurus.)

For anyone who takes philosophy seriously, however, this Platonic dictum is profoundly true - it has had an enormous influence on Western philosophy and has been taken up even by such adversaries of Platonism as Epicurus and Heidegger. Compared to this formulation, philosophical verbiage both of the past and present seems empty indeed. In the words of La Rochefoucauld, 'neither the sun nor death can be looked at directly.'



Seneca

I Understand Sadness

Years pass as solidly as stones on an ancient path.
I understand sadness, it is the sky we live under...
Cancer cells multiplying in the darkness
of bone marrow have no purpose.
They neither single out the wicked,
nor allow a cure for someone,
because she is beautiful, intelligent or good.
Cancer is a storm raging furiously around us,
its lightning can strike anywhere, anytime.
Nature is our mother in whom we find shelter.
Hovering above the luxurious grass is the glow
of tipsy-gold buttercups. The baby-blue
air is breathless, only moved
by the beat of the swallow's wings.
I am thinking about the coming days,
not years anymore.

Does gravity warp space and time,
moved by the beat of the swallows
as they hawk midges over the field?
I listen to the constant drone of the hover flies,
the buzz of horseflies, the hum of the bees.
I breathe in that last summer's beauty as if
it were my last. I take in the bumblebee's view
across a lake of moving wild flowers,
the meadow brown butterflies
swarming over the grass, chasing each other ...



Eternity would not be long enough, if it was composed
of summer evenings like this...

The pain is resurging with the nausea. Tomorrow
will be another course of chemo and I think of autumn
descending quickly, as quickly as cancer cells multiply.
The swallows will have gone, a chiffchaff
might pass through, the last summer migrant.

The warm orange glow in the November afternoon, will I still see it?
I want to listen to the sigh of my feet in the frosted grass,
the shiftless hunting of voles, shrews and mice in the hedges.

Poem and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*

Haikus for New Times



CHRIS NORRIS

Turbine

from seed to grass-blade
turbine blade from crystal grown
these twin perfections

Attuned

lark's song sheer delight
engine on tune pitch-perfect
such sweet harmonies

Cranes

crane stands leg-steadied
cranes rise clean above skylines
such fine equipoise



Spiders

thread cast across void
this webcast sent who knows where
reckless conjecture

Airplane/Seagull

trundler on runways
earth-waddling heaven-winger
saddest of put-downs



Bat/Stealth-Bomber

blind but for radar
day-stricken or dark-shrouded
sleep-haunting flitters

Stealth-Bomber

Tappet

clack of woodpecker
loose tappet striking valve-seat
uncouth intruders

Blackhawk

No quarter given
lethality their life-blood
death's skilled machinists

Aerogel

sky-blue aerogel
lattice of near-nothingness
cosmic dust sweeper

AI

silicon sphinxes
how answer Siri's question?
they will outwit us

Poetry

Trojans

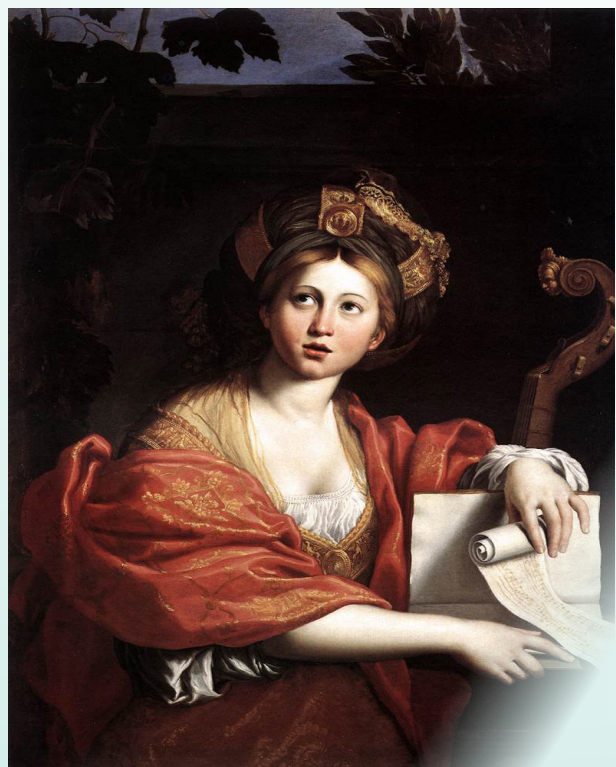
jet-trails write death-notes
sky spells out Cassandra's cry
we shall ignore it



Cassandra

Supercollider

each flash an impact
transuranic half-lives
nature's book not closed



Sybil

Sybil/Alexa

jar-shrunk prophetess
soothsayer boxed and flashing
uncanny voices

Radio

Ariel's domain
'the isle is full of noises'
all's telepathy

micrographia

one chip holds archives
print books tiny as match-heads
world in grain of sand

Centaur's

cross-species coupling
heart-valves from horse to human
Ixion's offspring

Ixion



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The Second Year

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