

GIORGIO DE CHIRICO

*Carl Einstein**

De Chirico: a contraposition to Auguste Comte's positivism and to Italian liberalism against Courbet and democratic Luminism. De Chirico presents us with the features of a dreamlike mathematics; Cézanne created a tectonic structure of colour. Picasso founded a new and absolutely concrete constructive space; de Chirico – living on the periphery – composed a tectonic art of divinization.

Let us make reference to two names that may enable us in some way to illustrate de Chirico's situation: Böcklin and the pessimism of Schopenhauer, looking to the past: Uccello and alchemy, while living between Florence and Paris and dreaming among the likes of Paracelsus and Lautrèmont.

De Chirico revisited the archaic world, as did many young Italians. He fell in love with the initial magical objectiveness of art prior to the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation. He sets his subjective visions in opposition to a "History" that was rather disjointed and therefore contradictory.

For Cézanne, objects such as the cone, the cube and the triangle served a structural purpose; with de Chirico they obey a mystical, poetic passion (pathos) and an art of divination. De Chirico is in tune with his group of contemporaries in one aspect: the tectonic form of his dreams. It may be that today's romanticism consists in an excessive proliferation of numbers, the nature of which is yet to be fully understood. Science's 'quantities' – a poetic means of intuitive reason – begin to be magically transformed (enchanted) by artists. Here, however, number has but one meaning, which lies within its poetic transfiguration in the acquisition of form. This is perceivable in the fine arts, though as far as the decline of today's literature is concerned, there is an oscillation between a morbid Felix Dhan and a sort of escape from outdated slogans. Very few know the secret of liberal analogy.

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In painting, one knows intuitively that the norm is second nature to man – an essential intuitiveness in his make-up – just as his bones belong to his body.

Those who today refuse Cubism would surely have disapproved of Giotto and Masaccio in their day. Art has does not accomplish itself in sentimentalism and suggestive atmospheres. It should be taken into consideration once and for all that architecture, which has its roots in our ancestral bowls and tents, is in fact the mother of all fine arts, while keeping in mind that total invention is an exception to the rule, as art is, for the most part, a history of anonymous accidents with a brief market life. Dreams have the worth of quivering and evanescent reflections in a mirror. It has been forgotten that they may have had a particular meaning. From Picasso onward, dreaming begins to take place with precision. Precision is one of man's most human characteristics. Sentimentality is horse manure. Mathematics is the catharsis of those with no god. Although it has been some time now that a few individuals have endeavoured to individuate a deeper, vast and vivid meaning in numbers.

De Chirico could be described as a romantic of numbers and a classicist of form. He brought to maturity an interior vision that managed to tire and bring melancholy to his decisively Tuscan eyes. At this point, the classicist mentality became more evident. This classicism of de Chirico's likened itself to the archaic Italians, analogous to a widespread tendency that projects 'now' into the past, more deeply and with a yearning to grasp time itself.

In today's day and age, the only possibility to acquire clarity is to work with a discipline that aims at the identification of structure. It is only from here that it is possible to distinguish and classify the arts. The ability to recognise structure is our principal human characteristic and the means through which art can become autonomous. It is from here that de Chirico makes his move in the search of a lost Metaphysics, which he seeks to recreate.

De Chirico's images go beyond the light of day and are dominated by dualisms. It may be for de Chirico that day appears as a frozen and cloudy hell. Infantile shadows fly behind rolling circles in the dark, or mannequins' dreams that reflect the suffering of a hellish abandonment in the deathly solitude of an Italian piazza.

De Chirico's pessimistic dualism is evident in works where irony takes place between objects such as Zeus and a cauliflower. Their unity is the structure in which their contradictory content finds proportion. Geometry in de Chirico seems to be dream and premonition.

This is what interests us in de Chirico: his research and his knowledge of the elementary and mythical terms between the mathematical and the decorative. Something of the 1920's reflects in this.

In the meantime, the primitive world proclaimed itself pathetically through decoration without ever having taken the elementary conditions into consideration. This is important: de Chirico knows the complexity of the world of dreams and is nevertheless frightfully close to the real experience of dreams. Man is for him, the constructive mannequin of his visions.

I do not know why de Chirico's paintings seem tragic to me. In an accomplished tragedy we admire the triumph of the poet over his characters and the vicissitudes of life; ultimately it is through form that one appreciates this joyful superiority. In Greek tragedy, in this splendid worship of the gods, destiny's annihilation is confirmed, whilst form, our most intimately human and strongest characteristic, persists unscathed amidst the destruction.

With de Chirico, a piece of the Middle Ages comes to life, the depths of the Renaissance shine once again.

A vision of a subjective reality is characteristic to de Chirico, as well as an archaic atavism. Tectonic reminiscences and dreams that ultimately fall wearily into the past.

Around 1910, these Italians refused all other experiences, though shortly after they closed the walls of their old buildings tightly around themselves and professed all stories equal. Perceived in this is their tectonic number and proportion, which remain unchanged over time. Although this last undertaking failed. They were in fact dominated by dated visions; a historical atavism turned subjectively mythical. The persistence of this antiquated vision and the relapse into a galvanizing mythology became menacing the moment it protracted into divergent dreams.

De Chirico shows us that the contemporary artist reacts in a structural manner when dealing with the visionary domain. A subjective and romantic content is automatically countered by tectonics. This is characteristic: once again mathematics and numbers are brought closer to those areas of the soul that give form to myths. It is precisely in the Italians that this Pythagorean-Gnostic affinity is found. Mathematics makes its entrance as magical formula and fundamental intuition. It is from a technical meaning that one precedes to a mythical and sensitive meaning. The instruments of reason are used magically, though by necessity are made subjective through the absence of spiritual correspondences.

In de Chirico, geometry reacts as instinct and acts in a symbolic or literary manner. It is for this reason that his art belongs to some extent to the world of the Symbolists.

From a technical point of view, this day and age is wholly constructive, though still tends to loose itself in a shabby idyll when dealing with spiritual matters. In a few artists it has become apparent that order has a central and significant role and is not just something peripheral. The indication that dreams are rigorous images is invaluable in de Chirico. These dreams have been looked down upon for their rational content. If so, one must also rebuke the candid dreams of the ancients. The Greeks were underestimated and considered technical and capricious gymnasts, as if one wished to reduce the spiritual effort of the Italians to a fragment of colour or maintain that the colour manufacturer was the greatest painter. But these paintings of the ancient Italians are decisively more than a bit of good painting.

Translated by Katherine Robinson