

DE CHIRICO AND DUCHAMP

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I was quite struck by the almost simultaneous mention of the names of Duchamp and Malevic on page 151 of Jole de Sanna's essay *Metaphysical Mathematics* published in the last edition of «Metafisica» (3-4). Although I do confess that I am not well enough prepared with regard to the geometric – mathematic themes discussed by Jole to carry on the line of investigation that our dear friend began, I admit that the de Chirico/Duchamp/Malevic link is not new to me, and that it inspires a number of reflections worthy of consideration.

Towards the end of the 1970s, following a request from Francesco Poli, I published a dossier entitled *De Chirico fra Duchamp e Malevic*¹ in a little magazine I was directing at the time. The association of these three names naturally had quite a different meaning back then. Following a period in which Conceptual Art and its derivatives had monopolised everyone's attention, several new trends were gathering force and bringing figurative painting back to the limelight: Transavantgarde, Anachronism and Cultured Painting, Quotationism, etc. In a word, the entire horizon of so-called Postmodernism.

In those years Renato Barilli expounded a fascinating theory of a de Chirican parable based on *absence*: after Metaphysics de Chirico went on to explore the Museum in the art of Raphael, the seventeenth century and Courbet, and eventually came full circle to revisit Metaphysics and quote himself and his earlier work in the 1970s. Much emphasis was placed on de Chirico's personal attributes as a Master of *art born from art*, along with his clear wish to found his artistic vision on tradition and memory rather than on nature.

De Chirico, who had been somewhat neglected after Duchamp was rediscovered in the 1960s, became an important point of reference once again, even for young emerging artists. Achille Bonito Oliva published a double-page article in «Art Dimension», in which de Chirico and himself faced each other in an imaginary dialogue, as if to support the theory that de Chirico was one of the tutelary deity of the Transavantgarde, or of that specific moment in history.

Yet the reasons for which Poli and myself were interested in this parallel were quite different. The idea, or ideas, that we wished to highlight were linked to an *analytic* de Chirico, whose painting proved to be not just an art born from art, but a painted reflection of painting itself; along with a certain similarity in de Chirico and Duchamp's attitude towards the use of objects. The French artist re-used objects as they were (for example in the ready-made) despite changing their names and means

¹ Francesco Poli, *De Chirico fra Duchamp e Malevic*, in «Studio G7» n. 2, February 1980 in the special supplement Dossier '70.

of employment, while de Chirico represented them as hermetic parodies for idea-guides within his work under the humble disguise of everyday objects used in still lifes².

With regard to Malevic, for whom collage is an important point of departure, and who seemed during the first Suprematist phase to carry out a sort of displacement and re-naming of geometric forms, similar to that effected by Duchamp with everyday objects, perhaps ever since his Alogist period (fig. 1). Further indirect evidence of this can be found in several works carried out in those years (1914-15) by the Russian artist Ivan Puni (fig. 2) – heretical disciple of Malevic and Rodcenko – which depict combinations of geometric forms, common objects and writing, all treated as though on a par with one another.

It could of course be noted that there is a fundamental difference between Duchamp's Dadaist technique and de Chirico's metaphysical one: the use of painting. De Chirico adopts traditional means, distancing the object to the meditative sphere of painted representation. Duchamp, on the other hand, wrenches the object from a real context and inserts it in an artistic one through a conceptual process. In this sense, the distance between the two artists seems too great to bridge.

From another view point – that of philosophical reasoning through which a banal object can be transformed into pure sign while taking on an entirely new significance – it is much easier to establish an analogy between the two. This new link should nonetheless, at least initially, be considered in the light of a method that a few artists adopted in 1912-1913 of *extrapolating* objects from the real world and reintroducing them in mutated form in the world of representation – or in the practice of *sampling* everyday materials beginning with the first collages.

Indeed Louis Aragon was most acute in observing: "Collage gives back the most authentic meaning to the old way of painting, preventing the painter from spiralling into narcissism, into art for art's sake, and taking him back to that magical practice which is both the origin and justification of those plastic representations banned by many religions"³.

This reference to magic, which justifies the artist's removal and manipulation of common objects, is interesting from at least two perspectives: a) because the painter is qualified for this practice; b) because during such manipulation the object loses both its function and its primitive meaning, to take on a new one – the one it must (magically) assume in the representation –. Obviously this second meaning should not simply depend on the positioning of the object within the work. For example, in Picasso's collage a newspaper fragment can represent an entire newspaper, as a sort of synecdoche; or a pipe (if cut in that shape); or it could simply be used as a background on which to draw or adhere new shapes. The method of attaching the fragments with pins is testimony, among other things, of Picasso's habit of moving the various elements around before deciding on the final composition. It is also a clear indication of the combinatorial nature and the thought processes involved in collage. The procedure seems almost a forerunner to the moving and manipulating of icons and texts with extreme fluidity and ease, today made common-place by the use of computers.

Of course, the compositions of objects that de Chirico depicts in his metaphysical still lifes seem *in primis* to be bound to the significance that the objects take on once they are interlinked; as if the

² Salvador Dalí wrote: "With terrible calmness, Giorgio de Chirico shows us figurative suppositions born from the juxtaposition of multiple apparently inoffensive objects..."

³ Louis Aragon in *La peinture au défi*, March 1930, cited in *Les collages*, ed. Herman, Paris, 1965.

relationship created between different presences were to bring back, for example, a distant memory, the feeling left by a dream, or even a kind of magical *revelation*.

De Chirico said that “when a revelation occurs upon viewing a composition of objects, the work that appears in our thoughts is closely linked to the circumstances that brought about its birth”. A group of objects, incongruously juxtaposed in a way that would *not* be encountered in everyday life, would have just this power to take us to another dimension, to the heart of a new logic. The hypothesis of de Chirico as a “magical collagist of objects” (obviously in a metaphorical sense) thus becomes extremely meaningful, and consents a comparison to Duchamp’s *samplings* (for example the ready-made). The French artist, coming from a cubist tradition, could also have been inspired by and made radical use of the collage technique baptised by Braque and Picasso, particularly in his readymades. Unfortunately there is virtually no concrete evidence of this transition. Duchamp, during his cubist period from 1911 to 1913, is not interested in collage, but rather in decomposition and the resulting effects of dynamism and movement. As soon as there is some glimpse, albeit fleeting, of a technique similar to collage – in the *Roue de bicyclette* assemblage of 1913 – it becomes clear that Duchamp has already moved on from the questions explored by Cubism. Indeed the French artist has probably by this point already painted, or is about to paint, his first *Broyeuse de Chocolat* (1913/1914), moving closer to a poetics, which with the benefit of hindsight, we would have to call Dadaist.

Evidence of de Chirico’s interest in Cubism in those years – from his arrival in Paris until 1914 – is also somewhat presumptive. The thesis of William Rubin⁴ proposing a closer relationship between de Chirico and the Avant-garde (in particular with cubist still lifes) originates above all from spatial considerations, rather than the idea of collage. Rubin maintains for example that the “compression of space” evident in many metaphysical paintings could hark back to Cubism, and in particular to Picasso, along with “the light sources independent of individual forms”. Rubin also considers the multiple perspectives in pictures such as *Mélancolie du départ* to belong to a generically “modern” spatial awareness. The simultaneous presence of several vanishing points is thought to create an acute feeling of unease in the viewer.

Rubin considers some other spatial elements typical of the Avant-garde in those years and present in de Chirico’s works, such as inverted perspectives, to have been influenced by Matisse – see *Atelier rouge* from 1911, in which the French painter contradicts perspective with areas of flat colour unrelieved by chiaroscuro.

This thesis is evocative and one could even agree with it to some extent, although Pia Vivarelli’s more probable idea (already expressed at that time) of de Chirico having derived the idea of multiple perspectives from Giotto or from his pupil (Maso di Banco), as well as Jole de Sanna’s theory published in the last edition of «*Metafisica*», do in fact constitute a comprehensive challenge to it. According to Aragon, neither is there sufficient support for the theory of “magical sampling” in the indirect (and late) examples of a few collages carried out in a metaphysical context (Savinio, De Pisis, Sironi). These cases certainly point to a focused consideration of this technique, and of Cubism in general (along with Futurism of course). Nonetheless they seem to demonstrate a superficial and almost naïve appeal

⁴ William Rubin in *Giorgio de Chirico*, catalogue of the exhibition that opened in November 1982 at the Haus der Kunst, Munich, and then at the Centre Pompidou, Paris, from February 1983. The exhibition was organised by Rubin himself, together with Wieland Schmied and Jean Clair. In his text Rubin attempts to compare some of de Chirico’s mock scientific schemes (see *Le prophète*, 1915) and Duchamp’s “amusing physique” (*Giorgio de Chirico – der Metaphysiker*, Prestel-Verlag, Munich, 1982).

with regard to this new technique, still only partially explored, rather than the total disarticulation of the painting's meaning or the transformation of the significance of individual objects that we are referring to here. Indeed the real question is how a biscuit mould can completely transform itself, as we have already seen, into *sacred fish* in de Chirico's pictures; or how a hair comb can become the support for Duchamp's statement: "3 or 4 drops of height have nothing to do with savagery". Both artists offer us meanings superimposed on the objects from the *outside*, or according to a logic that can be understood only in part by putting together the structural elements of the context. The question must therefore be explored from the beginning, by following other leads.

In my opinion, the idea of disarticulating everyday meanings through surprise and alienation – indispensable for reaching a superior level of understanding – derives from symbolist origins. The mentor of Zurich Dadaism, and subsequently Parisian Dadaism, Tristan Tzara, openly declared as much in a retrospective essay on the movement's heroic years⁵. Tzara reveals for example how the title of the magazine «Littérature» came from antithesis to Verlaine's verse "and all the rest is literature", and to having worked in the wake of the great tradition of poets such as Rimbaud, Lautréamont, Mallarmé. In 1922 Tzara published a short but intense piece on Lautréamont in «Littérature», claiming amongst other things that "Today it is obvious that Lautréamont will be the Rimbaud of contemporary poetry. *The dictatorship of spirit* presents itself with no worry with regard to melioration, which is a confirmation of intensity, channelling every thought towards a noble, precise, magnificent force, the only one worthy of interest: destruction". For Tzara, who had formed his ideas in the dramatic era of war, language was indeed becoming one of the main tools in the constraining of the human spirit, a social mechanism of oppression. Therefore it was only by targeting language, disarticulating and liberating it from its traditional logic, that one could hope to combat the perverse organisation dominating society. In this light, Lautréamont appears as a prime example, made even more attractive by his status of cursed and little-known poet. "The Count of Lautréamont", continues Tzara, "has overstepped the boundary between creation and madness. For him creation is still mediocrity. At the other edge is solemn *inarticulateness*"⁶. For Tzara, the interesting thing about Lautréamont's writings was his ability to destroy common sense, to reach a kind of *sublime absurdity*.

It is impossible to ignore the analogy between this viewpoint and some of de Chirico's statements. For example in the Éluard-Picasso manuscripts de Chirico maintains that the sense of premonition found in art work "must go completely beyond human limits: logic and good sense must be completely absent. In this way it will approach a dream-like state, and the mental attitude of a child". And further, "the revelation of a work of art, the intuition of an image, *must* represent something that has a sense in its self without a subject, *without any meaning* according to human logic" (Paulhan manuscript). In another piece published in «Valori Plastici» the artist also suggests a technique for disarticulating the common meaning of objects: "That madness is inherent to every profound manifestation of art is an axiom. Schopenhauer defines as crazy a man who has lost his memory. A

⁵ Tristan Tzara, foreword to *Dada painters and poets*, ed. Robert Motherwell, New York, 1961.

⁶ See also my *Miti romantici*, in which I argue that the main reason for Tzara's interest in Lautréamont is the famous series of the "Beautiful as" of the fifth *Song of Maldoror*. Here, when Lautréamont writes: "beautiful as the law of arrest of development of the breast etc...", he compares two terms which are completely unrelated – the second is probably copied directly from a medical encyclopaedia. Lautréamont thus works on the intervals, on the links between one image and another, creating an entirely new effect of alienation –. The passage of some of his images from the written page to the Dadaist drawing or photograph, beginning in the 1920s, takes place in a natural way with little need for translation: see the various references, for example by Man Ray, to the famous phrase: "Beautiful as the encounter of an umbrella and a sewing machine on a dissection table."

definition full of insight, as indeed that which gives logic to our everyday lives and actions is a continuous rosary of memories of the relationships between external things and ourselves, and vice-versa". The famous example of the necklace follows: de Chirico describes a banal everyday scene (a man in a room, his books, a canary cage, etc.) in which every element connects logically to the others, like the pearls in a necklace, set out in a certain order along the thread supporting them. Supposing, however, that this thread were to break and the pearls to fall from it and get mixed up, "Who knows", says the artist, "what surprise, what terror, and maybe even what sweetness and consolation I would feel upon watching such a scene".

Therefore, by combining everyday things in an illogical, unusual, *impossible* order, we are transported to a different, higher level of revelation. In practice, de Chirico suggests not focussing so much on the things themselves, but on the *intervals*, on the habitual links between us and them. By destroying and disarticulating these links, the sense of the same objects inevitably mutates, showing us the contours of a new logic: that of the madman, of the artist, of the prophet. After all, Tzara himself focuses less on words as such, than on the incongruous mixing of them, proposing, for example, a new form of poetry obtained through a random mix of words cut from newspapers.

Although the result is not quite the same – that is, the destruction of traditional language – de Chirico, in the search for a new revelation, is also forced to destroy the old logic of figurative painting, as Tzara had quite understood.

The sources that we have mentioned could theoretically have been known to Duchamp as well, although there is no concrete evidence that the French artist followed this route. In any case Duchamp shows a certain respect for symbolist artists, in particular the men of letters: his admiration for Mallarmé, for example, is well known. "Modern art", said Duchamp, "should follow the direction advised by Mallarmé: it should be an intellectual expression, and not simply sensual. I am disgusted by the expression 'stupid as a painter'... There is at least one more reasonably sure link between Duchamp, *ante litteram* Dadaist, and a certain character who in a way belongs to late Symbolism, but can at the same time be placed with Duchamp himself among the precursors to Surrealism. The man in question is Raymond Roussel, a writer little known to the general public yet extremely interesting, whom André Breton was wont to consider alongside Lautréamont as "the greatest mesmerist of modern times". Although it is impossible to prove that there was direct contact between Duchamp and Roussel, it is certain that Duchamp knew his work, as clearly proven by several of the artist's comments, as well as external testimonies⁷.

There are without a doubt several similarities between Duchamp's work from 1913 and some aspects of Roussel's. The writer is most often quoted on the course he demonstrated in his *Nouvelles impressions d'Afrique*. In this technique, the writer ideally places two sentences of homophones with different meanings at both the beginning and the end of an adventure story: with the two divergent meanings the plot thus becomes an attempt to reconcile and link the two situations, straddling the wide gap in the sentence's two possible meanings. The subsequent recourse to puns and word play

⁷ See Octavio Paz in *Aparencia desnuda*: "Duchamp himself has referred many times to that memorable night in 1911 in which – accompanied by Apollinaire, Picabia and Gabrielle Buffet – he went to the representation of *Impressions d'Afrique*". Paz also quotes the following statement by Duchamp: "Basically, the one responsible for my glass work *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, even*, was Raymond Roussel. From the moment I watched his play I was immediately aware of the possibilities offered by his conception. I realised that as a painter it was better to be influenced by a writer than by another painter. And Roussel showed me the way..."

has obvious links to Duchamp's work and the habitual way of reasoning of the French artist. However, I have personally always been more struck by the similarity between Roussel's ambiguous terminology (used for example to define fantastical visions in his *Locus Solus*) and that used by Duchamp in his *Large Glass*.

In the second chapter of Roussel's novel, published in 1914, the protagonist, Professor Canterel takes his guests to visit one of the *wonders* of his estate. It is clear from the way he deals with the situation that Roussel is reconstructing a sort of "work in progress" rather than describing an object or situation that is immediately comprehensible in its entirety. On a vast plane, we run first of all into a paving tool made entirely of metal, denominated *demoiselle* (maiden) or *bie* – in Italian it is called a *mazzeranga*, more commonly known as a *berta* or *battipalo* (pile driver). The Italian language, therefore, also maintains the allusion to the feminine contours of the *demoiselle* (*berta*), owing to the shape of the first tools of this kind. In the story this tool is *banging* from a little yellow hot-air balloon. Next to the *berta* there lies a pile of human teeth "offering a great variety of forms and colours", from bright white to yellow, from brown to black, in every possible nuance. At this point it becomes clear that the role of the *berta* is to drive the teeth into the ground. Indeed, like fragments of mosaic the teeth are used to form an image: "a true painting, as yet without form".

The *tableau* represents a knight (from *ritter*, a German knight) dozing in a crypt on the shore of an underground lake. A kind of cloud of smoke rises above his head in which a dream appears. By way of a complex mechanism, the *berta* rises up to move and arrange the teeth to plant them in the ground to complete the mosaic. At this point the description of the mechanisms of the tool and the hot-air balloon, embellished by numerous complex devices invented by Canterel (needles, lenses, exhaust pipes etc.), takes up a narrative space of its own, alongside a second narration (the story of the German knight), thus multiplying the levels of discourse and possible meanings of the entire chapter.

In a similar way, the articulated structure invented by Duchamp for his *Large Glass* (fig. 3) places two parallel incidents side by side: the construction of a complex mechanism, model of all the *bachelor machines* of the twentieth century that at the same time hides or reveals a symbolic event (*The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even*). The latter, it is presumed, is mysteriously bound to Duchamp's personal vicissitudes, in particular to his labyrinths that are tortuous psychological mechanisms. Arturo Schwarz, trader and serious scholar of Duchamp's work, makes a link between the artist's entire production of readymades and the incident of the *Glass*, revealing possible meanings from psychological and hermetic viewpoints. Regarding the use of terminology, it is worth noting how Canterel's *demoiselle* or *bie* correspond to terms such as *plough*, *wasp* or *Hanged Female* used by Duchamp – also names for the *Bride* (fig. 4), which, as we will see, is referred to elsewhere with the term *widow*, and in the mechanisms representing her in the *Large Glass*⁸. Also worth quoting, with regard to Roussel's various lenses, are Duchamp's *Oculist Witnesses*, along with the entire series of optician's tools linking the upper and lower parts of the *Glass*⁹, like the *Kodak magnifying glass*.

⁸ In *ibid.*, Octavio Paz cites the following phrase by Duchamp: "The Hanged Female is the *form in its normal perspective* of a Hanged female of which it may be possible to find the *real form*", and adds: "Thus the forms of the Bride are just an appearance, one of her possible manifestations. Her authentic form, her true reality, lies elsewhere. Duchamp said that it is the projection of a three-dimensional object which, in turn, is the projection of an (unknown) four-dimensional object. The Bride is the copy of a copy of an idea".

⁹ Here it is worth remembering the question posed by Maurizio Calvesi: why *oculist* and not *ocular* witnesses? Because they are ocular witnesses of the occult – *occulist witnesses*.

It is almost as though they wanted to allude to a new role that sight was taking on, an indirect role played out not only on a visual level but also a conceptual one.

In the previous essay on the relationship between de Chirico and two important symbolist painters, Böcklin and Klinger, we have seen how in many of de Chirico's works, the unpredictable choice of objects (for example the "horrible" pink glove in *Chant d'amour*), "without any meaning according to human logic", take on a "sense of premonition" only when incongruously juxtaposed with other objects. For example the wilful vicinity of the glove, the ball, the head of Apollo, the archways, etc., constitutes a kind of mysterious revelation, in the web of analogies and interconnections spun by the different presences. It is obvious that each of these objects comes to take on its new true/probable meaning in relation to the artist's experience, in a form as yet not transparent even to himself. Through his *object theatres* de Chirico visualises kinds of "moods" that are in no way psychological explanations. It is the force of these sensations, rather than their ultimate meaning, that the artist tries to communicate to us. In the end, every metaphysical interior, every juxtaposition of objects, has for him the value of an intuition, the revelation of a secret memory, or the rebuilding of a distant atmosphere.

Although they are not dominant icons, instruments relating to optics or to eyesight in general appear with a certain frequency in de Chirico's work: for example spectacles, which take on great paradoxical significance in pictures such as *La nostalgie du poète*, e *Portrait de Guillaume Apollinaire*. Here the spectacles are actually those for people with impaired vision, and thus something of an oxymoron, to be considered in relation to the Second vision attributed to poets and prophets. In other paintings such as *Ange juif* (fig. 5) and *Le salut de l'ami lointain*, some kind of apotropaic eyes appear (the "Cretan eye" that de Chirico mentions in *Zeus the Explorer* and in *Hebdomeros*), once more suggesting the magical and not purely physiological quality of vision. At other times, the glasses seem to allude to shop signs (see *La sérénité du Savant*, fig. 6) and thus fall into the category of those *signs* that the city seems, obscurely, to reveal to the painter. Other signs of this nature are hands and arrows (for example in *Nature morte*, *Turino printanière* and *Le jour de fête*), on the same level as the chimneys and archways in their ability to bring about a sort of metaphysical ecstasy¹⁰. In other works these signs are in the form of mysterious letters, such as the X which appears in the above-mentioned *Sérénité du Savant* as well as in the *Portrait de l'artiste* of 1914, acutely linked by Fagiolo dell'Arco to an important passage from Nietzsche's *Gay Science*. The philosopher uses this letter of the alphabet as a metaphor for an itinerary that has almost reached an end: the moment *prior to discovery*¹¹.

Yet other paintings feature blackboards and pictures placed on easels (*Le philosophe et le poète*),

¹⁰ Compare what the artist writes in a 1919 text published in Rome in *Ars Nova* III, 3: "Nobody has ever thought, for example, to evoke the spectres of cities, things, monuments, furniture, machines; to penetrate the fantastical aspect of scientific and industrial instruments". And a little further on: "Consequently, a hyper-materialization of the things surrounding us, as well as our own beings, could lead us to the top of the ladder that leans against the wall of the unknown, and we would be able to observe this phenomenon with curiosity, of course, but also with that strange happiness that I would call *metaphysical ecstasy*: this feeling never fails to mark the discovery of a new land".

¹¹ This is an extract from the foreword to *The Gay Science*: "... (in this book) gratitude overflows at every moment, just as if the last thing you expected had actually happened, the gratitude of a convalescent... only great pain is the extreme liberator of the spirit, in that it is the master of the *great suspect* that makes every U into an X, a real, actual X, that is the penultimate letter of the alphabet before the last..." It is worth remembering that de Chirico himself recalls having read Nietzsche in Italy while recovering from an intestinal illness. At the end of the same extract, I would also note this phrase: "The fascination of all that is problematic, the joy incited by the X is too big for such spiritual and spiritualised men, because it does not always appear as a light that shines above the uncertainty of the problematic, above the dangers of insecurity...", which seems to link the X to the concept of the enigma. Regarding the curious iconography in this *Self-portrait*, which along with the X also features two feet, two fragments of statues linked by Fagiolo dell'Arco to Mantegna's *Saint Sebastian*; I would also mention that number 52 of the rhyming prelude to *The Gay Science*, entitled *Writing with feet*, in which the "scribe" foot that runs "on fields and across the page", and paradoxically, he too *writes*. Perhaps this alludes to a Dionysian *completeness* of the human body, which gives importance to the lower parts as well as the usual ones – the face, the head or at most the hands –.

inscribed with mysterious writings (*Le temple fatal*), perspective schemes that make mysterious links to the rest of the figuration (*Le double rêve du printemps*), or even the “pictures within pictures” that would open so many doors for the Surrealists, in particular Magritte¹².

This metaphysical instrumentation, which after 1916 would become more and more articulated complex, and in a certain sense abstract, seems to point to the absolutely *impossible* relationship between the objects represented. At the same time, the entirely fictitious place in which these objects are placed, among set squares, props and frames, stresses the irreducibility of the everyday role the objects previously played, while in their new function, through the increasingly complicated set-up they form, their relationship to the world of symbolic representation is revealed¹³. The picture within a picture in a certain sense represents the culmination of this process: it shows a painting that (like in a game of Chinese boxes) sends us back to another painting, not only evoking the tautological essence of every painting, which reflects on the nature of painting itself, but also making it impossible to measure the distance between the represented object and the *real* reality.

Paradoxically many of these dechirican themes are quite closely echoed in Duchamp's work: despite being part of a world of expression diametrically opposed to that of the painter from Volos, the French artist also seems to have contemplated the nature of things, leading him to a kind of *other* sight.

For example, if de Chirico alludes to *second sight* by depicting glasses for the blind, Duchamp shows us a comparable enigma in his 1920 work *Fresh Widow* (fig. 7). This little model of a “French window” with obscured glazing creates a kind of perverse double bind between the object and the title which describes it. Note also the play on words between *French window* and *fresh widow*: indeed the image of a widow can be paralleled to that of a window which the gaze *can no longer penetrate* because it is hung with black. As with de Chirico's glasses for the blind, this blinded window also requires a special kind of visual attention in order to discover and evaluate its true nature.

Beyond this interest towards a metaphorical viewpoint, which gradually takes over from a traditional one, it should be considered how the technique of extrapolating and moving objects from the everyday sphere to the world of representation follows similar rules despite the difference in intention. De Chirico seems to truncate the usual relationship that objects have with their normal context, transporting them outside to his city squares and then to places that increasingly reveal their betrayal of theatrical staging. In this regard it is also curious to note *what* de Chirico seems to think of the theatre, or of the cinema. In *Hebdomeros* for example he writes: “...a false beard on the screen becomes more real than a natural beard, just as a scene made of wood and cardboard is always more real than a piece of nature”. Much more than scenography! Here de Chirico is talking about fiction within fiction, which curiously always appears *more real than the real*. Again in *Hebdomeros*, talking of actors, de Chirico notes that “...they recite on those dusty boards, on those boards that, in spite of all the new ideas, changing tastes and customs, always have something dirty and shameful about

¹² Once more on the subject of de Chirico's multiple perspectives, conveyed by the artist in various ways, it could be hypothesised that the disarticulation of perspective hints at another way to read the logical disarticulation that occurs in dialogues between objects: each one seems to imply a point of view that does not correspond to the others. Magritte, on the other hand, plays with scale: for example the toy house next to the window (*inside* the room) identical to the real house that can be seen *outside* the window. In the painting the two houses are exactly the same.

¹³ In an Éluard-Picasso manuscript de Chirico writes: “Live in the world as in a huge museum of oddities, of curious multicoloured toys that change appearance, and that, like children, we sometimes break into pieces to see what they are like inside, and discover in disappointment that they are empty”. A little later he adds: “There is no point in talking about history or the causes of this and that; all this describes but explains nothing, for the eternal reason that there is nothing to explain, and that the enigma always remains”; a phrase that somehow recalls Duchamp's “There's no solution because there is no problem”.

them. More than once Hebdomeros, meditating on undiscovered enigmas, asked himself this question: Why does the theatre always have something shameful about it? The reply is not given, maybe to highlight how even the most abstract theatrical staging (that of the *Disquieting Muses*, for example) will never be able to wipe out the sort of *original shame* that links metaphysical compositions to those unpleasant or pleasant, painful or happy feelings which are the basis of the *revelation* the objects represent. This is probably related to the *pudenda origo* evoked by Nietzsche in his *Gay Science* when talking, in fact, about appearances. Fabrizio Desideri, annotating Derrida on the question of pudenda origo, writes: "Truth, when interrogated and considered as a 'woman', is given as distance from one's self, appearing as the 'non-truth of the truth'... the veil reveals the appearance as distance". Indeed for Nietzsche "the immediateness of the appearance is *artifice*, it is *Kunst-werk*". On another level, the truth unveiled is no longer such.

In Duchamp's case the readymades (made of real objects) are *de-located* from their everyday place of origin, to a place (the artist's studio, the gallery) in which their primitive function is denied, radically transforming their very nature. The name of the object also gets changed, such as in *Trébuchet* (trap, obstacle), a readymade from 1917, which is simply a coat rack fixed to the floor instead of the wall. Duchamp, in an interview with Sidney Janis in 1953, explains that he had left the coat rack on the floor through lack of attention or untidiness, and in the end got so tired of stumbling over it that he fixed it to the ground. Jean Clair affirms, however, that its title, *Trap*, comes from chess-playing terminology, and that the explanation can be found in the treatise the artist wrote on the subject. In this regard, however, Schwarz also cites a sentence from Joyce's *Ulysses*, which describes a lady "with her high crooked French heels" who stumbles: "Tableau! That would have been a very charming exposé for a gentleman like that to witness", and defines the *Trap* as a three-dimensional play on words – a term used on other occasions by Duchamp himself. It is worth noting that in a few cases the French artist *hung up* the readymades, both to emphasise their new non-function, and also to distinguish them, notes Jean Clair, from traditional works of art, normally displayed on pedestals or attached to the wall. This is the case of *In advance of the broken arm* (1915), *Porte-chapeau* (1917), and of course *Unhappy Readymade* (1919), a gift to his sister Suzanne, an ephemeral work of which remains just one photograph, and which Suzanne immortalised in a little painting of her own.

Schwarz links this particular form of "hanging" of the object to the idea of the *Hanged Female*, and therefore yet again to the *Bride* in the *Large Glass*. Let us not forget that Roussel's *demoiselle* was also hanging up.

To sum up: if Duchamp only has to *indicate* an object (the well-known action of *pointing*) to declare it a work of art, what does he have to do to give it a different meaning from its original one? Irrespective of the complex problems that arise from Duchamp's much-discussed symbolism, it could be maintained that Duchamp also saw interrupting the relationship between an object and everyday life as the first step towards transforming it into a significant element within an expressive context. To reach this end, there are two fundamental steps: *dislocation* (as in the examples above) and *renaming*. The first consists in placing the object in an unfamiliar setting, in a way that emphasises its new allusive/expressive function. The second consists in *indicating it* in terms that – as Duchamp himself says – drag the spectator "towards airier regions".

De Chirico takes a somewhat similar step when, having gone out and bought a pink rubber glove at a department store, he takes it into his studio, and puts it into dialogue with the most *extraneous* object imaginable: the head of an ancient god. De Chirico thus removes the object from everyday

relationships that previously gave it a context (department stores, its practical function) to make it take on new ones (its symbolic role, its *spectral* presence). Duchamp cannot take this second step, given that he does not weave relationships between several objects (perhaps excepting his *Bicycle Wheel* or, in part, his *Grinder*), and thus must trap the individual object in a complex web of word games; he has to therefore *rename* them in order to highlight their new nature, which in the end is – equally – a spectral one. Let us take note that from 1918 onwards Duchamp paid particular attention to the shadows created by his readymades (fig. 8), photographing them on the walls of his studio and painting them on the canvas destined for Katherine Dreier, *Tu m'* (1918). Even the retrospective exhibition held in 1964 at the Arturo Schwarz gallery, which had reconstructed the series of lost readymades, emphasised the artist's desire to draw more attention to the shadows on the walls than the objects present in the gallery. Coming back to the problem of naming – the relationship between image and word – it should be noted that this was not an uncommon topic in those years. Picasso himself had noted that the profile of a woman (drawn) or the letters w-o-m-a-n had the same capacity and role in evoking the idea of "woman" in the spectator. Rubber-stamped words appeared on cubist collages and paintings from 1913, alternating with images; and Malevic himself had exploited such techniques to achieve a particular objective of his own with his alogist compositions. Some of these paintings, indeed, combine not only pieces of collage and painting, but also written words. Furthermore, the painted images alternate a Cubist-Futurist style (or geometric images) with figurative details. Words, abstract forms and concrete forms (along with style and non-style) are thus placed on a par. The new language therefore ends up as a mix of incongruous elements, as yet unbeknownst to Malevic, this was a most Dadaist approach.

Coming at last to de Chirico's picture within a picture¹⁴ it should be underlined, as mentioned above, that although de Chirico used this technique to plainly demonstrate painting's great fiction (a perfect understanding of which is shown by Magritte in *Les mots et les images*, and later in the series *La condition humaine*), the idea that fiction within fiction could become more convincing than reality also gained force. Such an intuition is certainly not casual, not least because de Chirico focuses more on sensations inspired by images than on reproducing reality.

He seems thus to become the first painter to cite painting within a picture, just as one would quote a text within another, even if during the metaphysical phase the images represented in the pictures within pictures are never derived from other artists. At times they are geographical maps, images of factories or buildings. Thanks to this device, the picture opens up like a book of many stories – like a Hellenistic novel – or like a theatre piece where curtains open to reveal events going on in parallel to the main story (for example Shakespeare's theatre within theatre), enriching the overall meaning.

In Marcel Duchamp's case (beyond the above-mentioned self-quotation of his own readymades in *Tu m'*) it is natural to discern the most striking instance of this technique in his *Boîte en valise* (1941), a kind of portable Museum; a work containing other, miniature works, and at the same time a sort of rational autobiography. The *Boîte* (which is neither the first nor the only container used by the artist to present a work), has another interesting aspect: it contains a series of reproductions, of Duchamp's paintings from the pre-cubist phase onwards, of the *Glass*, and of the readymades. In

¹⁴ Here I would like to mention Jole de Sanna's theory about pictures that cover other pictures, explained in the last edition of *Metafisica*, as a hidden underside of a practice that de Chirico would go on to declare explicitly through the depiction of one or more pictures represented within a painting.

this way the *Boîte* seems to affirm a continuity of content through different styles, or non-styles, and perhaps even a relationship between apparently unrelated works. The *Glass* had already announced a similar agenda, showing in its lower part images recalling the mechanical and anti-emotional aspect of the first readymades (some maintain that the *Broyeuse de chocolat* painted as a *trompe l'oeil* is a kind of substitute for an overly-bulky readymade) and in the upper part, reproducing a detail from a cubist canvas. It is interesting to note that while breaking away completely from the tradition of painting, the *Glass* conserves a *trompe l'oeil* perspective in many details, as if to give a semblance of reality to the work's mechanical metaphor. Here it is worth observing how, according to Cocteau, de Chirico also used *trompe l'oeil* techniques "as a criminal reassures his victim".

It should be underlined, in conclusion, that beyond his use of the picture within a picture, all of de Chirico's – and in a certain sense also Duchamp's – work is nothing but a great self-quotation. Not only as the works produced in old age, quote, complete, and re-write works from his adulthood and youth, but that his entire production is basically a vast work of self-referencing.

De Chirico often paints images that appear to be *doubles* of paintings he has already done: *Les projects de la jeune fille* (1916, fig. 9) seems to be a sort of response to *Le chant d'amour*, just as *Le philosophe* of 1924 seems to be a "romantic" version of *Le cerveau de l'enfant*. The recent book of drawings by the artist, curated by the Giorgio and Isa de Chirico Foundation, clearly shows how drawings from the nineteen seventies often put forward meditations (rather than re-editions) of works from the past.

In a way, de Chirico himself offers us the key to this enigma in the *Self-portrait* (now in Toledo, Ohio) in which the artist fixes his gaze on his own bust that looks back at him "from the past to the future" as stated by Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco.

After all, the artist Duchamp of *Etant donnés* seems to leave, as the final act of his existence, an installation which is almost the final statement regarding *Large Glass*, a masterpiece left "definitively unfinished" at just 36 years of age.

Translated by Hannah Chapman