

DREAM, PRESAGE AND THE DISQUIETING IN DE CHIRICO'S METAPHYSICAL ART

Riccardo Dottori

The Spiritual Atmosphere of the Early 20th Century: the Disquieting (das Unheimliche).

In order to give an interpretation of de Chirico's Metaphysical Art from a strictly aesthetic rather than philosophical viewpoint we must first and foremost understand the relationship between his poetics and his personal existence and history; seek the essential motifs of his painting, such as the melancholy that transports us into that mood which lies between dream and wakefulness, with the "visions" and presages of which Schopenhauer speaks, the subsequent Nietzschean pathos of vision and enigma that leads to the artist's completely new poetics; and also a further motif, the theme of the uncanny which links de Chirico to his contemporaries Freud and Heidegger who are fundamental to explaining the moment of artistic pathos at the root of the enigma and of his creativity.

The spiritual inspiration we find in de Chirico's early metaphysical paintings is in fact something new in comparison with romantic apprehension, that is to say a mood, a *Stimmung*, typical of the early 20th century in Europe, which Heidegger would subject to his existential analysis; it is that feeling known as "*das Unheimliche*", complete disorientation, the uncanny, of which Freud also spoke in 1919, analysing and defining the subject in a brief essay, which Heidegger would later speak of in his fundamental work *Being and Time* (1927). Let us begin with Freud to identify the similarities and differences with respect to de Chirico.

Freud observes that the uncanny – *Unheimlich* – is defined on the basis of *heimlich* or *heimisch*, that is, on that which is familiar and everyday, that which we feel at home with, protected and safe. He also reveals that in spoken language, *heimlich* or *heimisch*, means the house that protects us and keeps us from danger, therefore the hidden, the occult. In other languages or in various authors' interpretations it even means the demonic, to the extent of arriving at its opposite, the *Unheimliche*. The essay is aimed at showing, in addition to how the second meaning of *heimlich* – the hidden or occult – can be identified in the uncanny, also how the disquieting, the anguishing and the spectral can be linked to the first meaning of *heimlich* seen in the manifestations of that which is familiar. A passage of the essay, that should be quoted, brings us directly to de Chirico:

"Once, as I was walking, one hot summer afternoon, through the deserted streets of a provincial town in Italy which was unknown to me, I found myself in a quarter the character of which could not long remain in doubt. Nothing but painted women were to be seen at the windows of the small houses, and I hastened to leave the narrow street at the next turning. But after having wandered about for a time without enquiring my way, I suddenly found myself back in the same street, where my presence was now beginning to excite attention. I hurried away once more, but only to arrive by another *détour* at the same place yet a third time. Now, however, a feeling overcame me which I can only describe as uncanny [...]"¹

¹ See. S. Freud, *Das Unheimliche*, in "Imago", Zeitschrift für Anwendung der Psychoanalyse auf die Geisteswissenschaften, hrsg. von Prof. Dr. S.

Freud continued his enquiry holding that the source of the uncanny is the continuous return to the same, the uniform or, more precisely, the involuntary repetition of the known that makes everyday aspects disquieting and dictates an idea of fate, of the inevitable, where we would be inclined to speak only of chance. He believes, therefore, that the uncanny can originate in the uniform repetitiousness of child psychology. Dominating in the unconscious, he believes, is the constrained repetition that precedes impulse and that probably depends on the intimate nature of these. So strong, is this, that it dictates the principle of pleasure and confers a demonical character to the different levels of psychological life. The uncanny therefore draws from this intimate constriction of repetitiveness and generates the phenomenon of that which “returns”. He in fact puts the disquieting in relation to the principal of repression and the return of that which has been repressed. It is a kind of animism of primitive psychic life that in each phase of individual development constitutes a mnestic residual of a reality that cannot *not* be known. All mental disease born of strong emotional excitement comes from something repressed transformed into anguish. In all states of anguish there is a group of that which is repeatedly anguishing: the disquieting, independently from there effectively being something anguishing or another sentiment or feeling producing it. This clarifies how that which is most familiar to us, the most safe and well-known, can in common language become disquieting: “for this uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and long established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression”.² Freud includes a quote from Friedrich Schelling that he had found in the Muret-Sanders dictionary: “*Unheimlich*’ is the name for everything that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light”.³

Freud considers that anything to do with death, corpses, the return of the dead and the spectral as greatly disquieting for man. A house is disquieting when we are told that ghosts appear in it. The disquieting therefore becomes the spectral element when we perceive the sign of death that appears in daily life and in that which is familiar. The “dis” in “disquieting” is the sign of the anguishing repression of that which is occult in quiet and familiarity, but that returns and reappears continuously. The concept of disquieting is thus identified with familiarity. This, as we shall see, explains the final paintings of the Metaphysical period, which have not been sufficiently understood, and which we will examine.

Such a state of mind is also described by de Chirico in his article *On Metaphysical Art* in “Valori Plastici”, which also appeared in 1919, in reference to Jules Verne: “But who could more cunningly than he grasp the metaphysical aspect of a city like London with its houses, streets, clubs, piazzas and squares, the spectral atmosphere of a Sunday afternoon in London, the melancholy of a man, a walking phantasm, such as Phileas Fogg...?”⁴

Heidegger also deals with the state of being of disorientation, this *Unheimlich*, as early as his first writings on *The Concept of Time* (1920), subsequently in his seminal work *Being and Time* and lastly in another work

Freud, V. 5/6, 1919, p. 311. English translation, J. Park, in *The Self and It – Novel Objects and Mimetic Subjects in Eighteenth-Century England*, Stanford University Press, California 2010. Previously noted by D. Guzzi, *Giorgio de Chirico, il mito, le armi, l'eroe*, catalogue of the exhibition of the same name with a contribution from R. Dottori, Municipality of Colonnella, Ed. Bora, Bologna 1998, p. 23.

2 See. Freud, *Das Unheimliche*, p. 313.

3 See. *Ibidem*, p. 312; the Schelling quote is found in F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophy of Mythology* (1857). On this theme, see G. Berto, *Freud, Heidegger. Lo spaesamento*, Bompiani, Milan 1999.

4 G. de Chirico, *Sull'arte metafisica*, in *Scritti/1. Romanzi e scritti critici e teorici 1911-1945*, edited by A. Cortellessa, Bompiani, Milan 2008, p. 289. Shortly afterwards he concluded that every thing has two aspects, “a current one, that we see almost always and what people in general see, and another spectral or metaphysical one, which only rare individuals can see in moments of clairvoyance and metaphysical abstraction”. English translation in this periodical.

that coincides with de Chirico's main themes, *What is Metaphysics?* (1929)⁵ The uncanny comes from the condition of estrangement that man experiences when, having abandoned himself to himself and fallen into the equivocal, deceptive tranquillity of the everyday, into anonymity, which Heidegger calls a state of "fallenness" in which man suddenly feels the alienating nothingness of "being thrown" into the world (*Geworfenheit*). It is the awareness of this being thrown into a moment of time and into a location in space, without being able to see any purpose, even though precisely for this reason we feel our *being-in-the-world* and the possibilities of a new existential project open up.

The disorientation that Freud and Heidegger speak of is first of all that of feeling the limits or nullity of our everyday being in the world; hence the anguish in which we realise all the nothingness of our finiteness and we feel our "being-in-the-world" slip away into nothingness. Yet it is precisely from anguish in being faced with nothingness, which in its final stage is understood by Heidegger as "being-towards-death" (*Sein zum Tode*), that the essential project of one's self arises and moves the spirit of the ordinary man no less than that of the artist. Being destined for death is commonly and erroneously translated as "being for death", as if it were a case of a will to die which lies at the origins of every war, as of suicide; whereas it is actually the last possibility belonging to the essential structure of our being, as its last potentiality that overcomes human fallenness into worldliness. Death is in fact the last threshold of our ability to be; with the thought of death we may grasp the last project of our existence and manage to overcome the root of anguish and the feeling of nothingness. All this however involves a new concept of truth and a new concept of time, or of temporality, which, as we shall see, were also fundamental to de Chirico.

In fact we must not forget that the period in which de Chirico developed his concept and the themes of his metaphysical painting (1910-1915) anticipates that of Heidegger's meditations on the destruction of classical ontology and of metaphysics in *Being and Time* (1927), which is to say we must not forget that Heidegger was de Chirico's contemporary (there is only a year between their birthdates, 1888 de Chirico, 1889 Heidegger). So not for nothing do the states of being revealed by de Chirico appear to closely coincide with those developed by Heidegger's existential analysis: anguish, the cure, being-towards-death, the inauthenticity of the world of "one says", "one knows", "one thinks" as against the authentic existence of those who take their own authentic being upon themselves, which is, in the end, the being included in its ultimate project, from the viewpoint of its supreme and total limit, which is that of death.

We find in de Chirico, much earlier than in Heidegger's *Being and Time*, an existential analysis centred on a sense of disorientation that assails us in our everyday world and the anguish in which everything seems to sink into nothingness, leading us to the gloomiest melancholy. This may be noted in the radical change

⁵ See M Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, Niemeyer, Tübingen 1927 § 40; "In Angst one has an 'uncanny feeling'. [...] Angst, on the other hand, fetches Da-sein back out of its entangled absorption in the 'world'. Everyday familiarity collapses. Da-sein is individuated, but *as* being-in-the-world. The talk about 'uncanniness' means nothing other than this". English translation *Being and Time – A Translation of Sein und Ziet*, SUNY Series Contemporary Philosophy, edited by J. Schmidt, translated by J. Stambaugh, State University of New York Press, New York 1996, p. 189. See also *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, GA, vol. 40, p. 160; additionally, *Prolusion* University of Freiburg, 1929, *What is Metaphysics?*, in Wegmarken, Klostermann, Frankfurt 1967: "In anxiety, we say, 'one feels uncanny'. What is 'it' that makes 'one' feel uncanny? We cannot say what it is before which one feels uncanny. [...] Anxiety makes manifest the nothing. We 'hover' in anxiety. More precisely, anxiety leaves us hanging, because it induces the slipping away of beings as a whole. This implies that we ourselves – we humans who are in being – in the midst of beings slip away from ourselves. At the bottom therefore it is not as though 'you' or 'I' feel uncanny". English translation, M. Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, edited by William McNeill, Cambridge University Press, New York 1998, pp. 88-89. On the theme of *Unheimische* in Heidegger and Freud, see G. Berto, *Freud, Heidegger, lo spaesamento*, Bompiani, Milan. 1999. On the theme de Chirico-Heidegger see my essay *On Philosophy and Painting: Giorgio de Chirico and "Desecrated Realty"* in "Metaphysical Art – The de Chirico Journals" n. 11/13, 2014, pp. 43-66.



fig. 1 G. de Chirico, *The Enigma of the Oracle*, 1910



fig. 2 G. de Chirico, *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon*, 1910

from his Böcklinesque manner of painting in Milan in 1909 compared to the paintings executed in Florence in 1910. *The Enigma of the Oracle* of 1910 (fig. 1) is the last of the works in which the Böcklin influence continues to be present. This painting still speaks of myth, classical Greece, presage and divination but also of a crisis of melancholy brought on as the artist himself stated by a prolonged intestinal illness together with a spiritual crisis following his reading of Nietzsche and that led to a radical change in his style. This came to light in the first actual metaphysical painting in which a sense of the Disquieting shines through and was to accompany him for another ten years as the inspirational motif behind all of his painting: *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon*, painted in 1910 in Florence (fig. 2).

With this painting there is a complete break with what we may still call a direct representation of reality. Here, in fact, we no longer have a sky with clouds as in *The Enigma of the Oracle*, indeed there is not even a sky but a completely empty space that opens up like a deep chasm before us in succession from green, which still lets the sign of light shine through, to midnight blue, the colour of cosmic space. This passage from light (yellow) to dark (Prussian blue) employs all the tones and half-tones of green which, precisely, is derived from mixing yellow and blue. Cosmic space, absolutely empty, without stars or other celestial bodies, forms the vault of a stage which the painter then tells us is Piazza Santa Croce in Florence, in which the other elements of the representation also have nothing likely about them: instead of the statue of Dante we see a headless statue whose hand rests on a tree stump; behind the low wall that encloses the inhabited scene we see the mast of a ship, as if this piazza were not in Florence but by the sea. The small church against which the wall abuts has a door closed only by a black curtain, and at the side of this there is another annexed building with the same door-opening closed only by a black curtain; between the top of the curtain and the upper limit of the two doors we see only emptiness, as if the church façade were no other than the wings of a stage. So the façade does not have a real door but only an opening. The headless statue, on close inspection, seems to be the figure of a man with his head so bent forward as to show only his neck, thus giving the impression of being decapitated; but might this be an illusion, or is the statue itself an illusion?

Two letters are inscribed on the plinth of the statue – the artist's initials G and C – but these do not represent his signature which instead we find at the bottom right. Therefore the statue is not Dante but the funerary monument of Giorgio de Chirico. Two fountains spurt on right and left of the statue's plinth: they are the two roads of the flow of time of which Zarathustra spoke to the dwarf he had carried on his shoulders

up the mountain and set down at a crossroads. The first is the way of infinite time in the direction of the past, the second, infinity's path towards the future. They meet at the crossroads where, as Zarathustra explains, its name is written: the Instant. It is the Instant in which awareness brings about their meeting, in which the eternal return of the same, eternity, takes place and is understood. The sepulchral monument or statue dedicated to Giorgio de Chirico constitutes the crossroads where his past, which belongs to memory, meets the future to which his fame belongs. On the right of the statue are two figures in 15th century costume who seem to be conversing: they are his mother, who weeps over his death, and his brother who instead is thinking of Giorgio's future glory. This painting shows us the effect produced by his reading of Nietzsche, especially the doctrine of Eternal Return. We now grasp that the entrance in the church facade, covered by a black curtain, is none other than a symbol of the entrance to the cosmic void, which is to say Nothingness, just as his funerary monument speaks of the death the painter sees before him. We can now understand why de Chirico wrote to Fritz Gartz, a fellow student at the Munich Academy, telling him that during "the last summer" (it was 1910) he had painted paintings that were formidable: "*Das was ich hier in Italien geschaffen habe ist nicht sehr groß oder tief (in dem alten Sinn des Wortes) aber furchtbar*", which may be translated as: "What I have created here in Italy is neither very big nor profound (in the old sense of the word), but *formidable*"; the best translation would be "fearful", "terrifying" but above all "Disquieting". The thought of the eternal return of the same carries with it the thought of one's own death, as well as the sense of the uselessness of all things, since everything eternally and in the same way returns, thus causing anguish, sadness, melancholy and not simply joy. In fact Zarathustra falls ill after grasping the meaning of the eternal return of the same, and de Chirico had the revelation of this painting while in a state of morbid sensibility following a long illness, as he recalls in the famous passage written in 1912.

The meaning of time is once more the theme of one of the first and finest metaphysical paintings. *The Enigma of the Hour* (1910 [fig. 3]), in which various dimensions of time are probed: the moment marked by the clock hands, which is to say measured, linear time, like the empty time of the traveller who counts the train arrival time; then the full time of the figure in the forefront on the right, looking within himself, which is the time of interior consciousness, and lastly the time of the small figure seen from behind in the upper window of the arcades who looks towards cosmic space; everything is fixed in the moment of reflection in which the figure bowed within himself becomes aware of the eternal return of the same. In conclusion, the fountain in



fig. 3 G. de Chirico, *The Enigma of the Hour*, 1910



fig. 4 G. de Chirico, *The Delights of the Poet*, 1913

the foreground, symbol of the continuous passage of time, is shaped like a coffin. But this awareness of the eternal return of the same which implies one's own death, for all that it is frightening or disquieting, always ends up by singing the song of Nietzsche for the joy of eternity, even if it is a joy mixed with melancholy. It is the joy of the autumnal light of Turin and walks along the Po of which Nietzsche speaks in *Ecce Homo*, considering it similar to a painting by Lorrain; this also explains the mast and sails in *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon*.

This calm joy of the melancholy of an autumn landscape is what the painter gives us in the third of this series of works, *The Delights of the Poet* of 1913 (fig. 4). The poet is Friedrich Nietzsche, whom in his letters to Gartz, de Chirico calls "the most profound poet", and the pleasures of the poet are therefore his own pleasures or joys. But what pleasures can one enjoy in a little deserted piazza, opposite a building that is clearly a station and where there is nothing other than a trapezoidal fountain which has increasingly the form of a coffin and where the water is dark green, which in painting is associated with fear and melancholy? The same dark green is found in the shadow on the right, also trapezoidal, and of course in the sky in accordance with the same scheme of pale yellow, or of light, which breaks down through all the shades of green into Prussian blue. All the fundamental colours are now secondary colours: the Naples yellow, or orange, of the illuminated piazza is derived from mixing with red; the same colour then uniting with blue becomes dark green in the shadow and fountain; whereas in the station building, and the wall behind which the train runs, the red of the bricks has become dark ochre through mixing with black. The master of enigmas also wanted to give us a slight indication on the basis of which we can discover his game: between the central building and the white arches and the ochre white on the left there is a small empty space, filled in the lower part by a strip of red. It is the counterpoint, in the harmony and symphony of colours, of the three fundamental colours, red, yellow and blue, with black and white that are the beginning and end of light. In this scene, where the arches on the left are a sort of illusionistic game in comparison with the solidity of the small neoclassical building, the painter conducts a play of space and light and colours, applied in large spans, to demonstrate even more his being outside the world of everyday reality. The joy of the poet, which is to say of Nietzsche, is the enjoyment of the autumnal light that gilds the whole piazza, formed by the mixture of yellow and red, the poet's favourite colours, the warm colours of life that struggle against the cool colours of death.

Dream, Presage and Revelation

As well as *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, *Ecce Homo*, *Human All Too Human*, *The Dawn* and *The Gay Science*, which de Chirico had got to know in part in Munich, there is another work by Nietzsche that had a decisive influence on him, or which opened up new horizons: *The Birth of Tragedy*. As has now been demonstrated by Victoria Noel-Johnson on the basis of discovery of the lending records of the General National Library of Florence, which de Chirico frequented in 1910-1911, the first book he read there was *The Birth of Tragedy* in French translation.⁶ The fundamental thesis that Nietzsche develops in this work is, as we know, that tragedy, as the supreme expression of Greek civilisation, arose on the basis of the Apollonian and the Dionysian, two terms linked not to concepts but to two artistic instincts in nature and two religious cults developed on the basis of these. The two types of art in fact have their basis not simply in sight and hearing but in two physiological states of human existence, the dream (Apollonian) and intoxication (Dionysian), one at the heart of the

6 See. V. Noel-Johnson, *De Chirico's Formation in Florence (1910-1911): The Discovery of the B.N.C. F. Library Registers*, in: "Metaphysical Art – The de Chirico Journals" n. 11/13, 2014, pp. 137-177.

figurative arts and epic poetry and the other of the art without images, music. It is from dream activity that the plastic artist draws ideal forms through which he can “philosophise with a hammer”: poetry itself, he declares citing a passage by Hans Sachs in the *Mastersingers*, is no other than interpretation of the true dream.⁷ Dream activity during sleep seems therefore to be the same as what in wakefulness had always been attributed to the imagination, on which art drew. So what does ‘true dream’ mean? What is the truth of the dream?

The first to ask himself this question in philosophy was, once again, Schopenhauer (called “the great Schopenhauer” by Nietzsche at the time of *The Birth of Tragedy*) in his *Versuch über das Geistersehen und was damit zusammenhängt*, an essay which appeared originally in *Parerga und Paralipomena* and was translated in French by Auguste Dietrich with the title *Essai sur les apparitions et opuscules divers, Première traduction française avec préface et notes par Auguste Dietrich*, Felix Alcan, Paris, 1912. Schopenhauer’s essay, often cited by de Chirico and also mentioned by Savinio as “a book called *Delle apparizioni e dei sogni* [On Apparitions and Dreams]”, was read by de Chirico in Paris at the time he was originally defining his own poetics in the *Éluard-Picasso* and *Paulhan Manuscripts*, (1911-1915), originally written in French, which also included drawings and sheets on which he traced the outlines of the ‘revelations’ of his paintings. A passage from the *Éluard-Picasso Manuscripts* which has been taken as proof that he had read the essay on apparitions, states decisively that music, which he had been practising with his brother Alberto Savinio, “cannot express the *nec plus ultra* of sensation”.⁸ This occurs instead within the province of painting that can make visible that which he has seen beyond the walls and the limits of the visible, which has manifested itself to him in a state of pathological hallucination that transcends normal seeing and that he calls ‘revelation’. In his view this is closely linked with presage and dream, and with this declares himself in favour of an Apollonian and not a Dionysian art. And touching precisely on the dream in another passage from the *Manuscripts* he tells us: “I believe that just as the sight of a person in dream is somehow a proof of his metaphysical reality, the revelation of a work of art is from certain viewpoints the proof of the metaphysical reality of certain things that sometimes happen to us, of the disposition in which *something* presents itself to our eye and elicits in us the imagination of a work of art; an imagination that sometimes awakes surprise in our soul, often meditation, and always the joy of creation”.⁹

Schopenhauer’s essay deals with problems of the paranormal with the pretext of supplying a scientific and metaphysical solution, and is therefore fairly obscure.¹⁰ It had some relevance for de Chirico inasmuch as it speaks of the concept of *presage* to which the cited text refers in dealing with prediction; presage is prediction, but is then linked to the concept of destiny, another theme of many metaphysical paintings, and to which the painter dedicated *The Enigma of the Oracle* (fig. 1), the first work with which his new art was announced.¹¹ In

7 See. F. Nietzsche, *La nascita della tragedia*, edited by V. Vivarelli, Einaudi, Turin 2009, pp. 24-25.

8 See *Scritti I/1*, cit., pp. 574-659, in the collection of Paul Éluard, whilst a second group belonged to Jean Paulhan. Partially published by J. T. Soby in English translation in 1955 and in the original language by M. Fagiolo dell’Arco in 1985. Published in full in the recent edition, *Scritti I/1*, these texts represent a fundamental reference regarding the development of de Chirico’s metaphysical poetics, especially as they contain drawings that refer to his early metaphysical paintings.

9 See. *Scritti I/1*, cit., *Paulhan Manuscripts*, pp. 651-652.

10 See W. Bohn, *Giorgio de Chirico and the Solitude of the Sign*, in which he examines the passages of Schopenhauer’s complex discourse in which the philosopher says that inasmuch as dream is an intuitive, non-rational perception it contains greater precision than this. Additionally, as this is a form of communication that depends on will, it is considered as a thing in itself, as an authentic metaphysical reality; in “Gazette des Beaux Arts”, CXVII (133), Paris 1991, pp. 171-172.

11 This painting certainly predates *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon*: the clouds we see here indicate a real landscape. These would disappear from the sky that would become a vault of the void of cosmic space where we find the fictive construction of a nightmare landscape, dreamlike or unreal.

fact this painting is alluded to in one of the lyrical prose pieces in the *Manuscripts*, from which we learn that the figure with his back turned is the philosopher Heraclitus, much loved by both de Chirico and Nietzsche.

In this painting we see a figure from behind, facing the threshold of a temple set on an eminence and with his eyes cast downwards. The view on the right hand side is closed by a black curtain behind which we see the head of a god. On the left another black curtain, raised by the wind, reveals the Mediterranean landscape of the valley below and the sea. The two parts of the painting with their respective curtains are divided in the centre by a red brick wall, whilst the floor is paved with archaic-age stone slabs. The wall marks the division between interior and exterior, in this case of the temple and in other cases of the piazza and lastly of the room, a theme that would remain constant in all of de Chirico's painting. But given the chlamys and the stone slabs we naturally think of a Greek temple and of Nietzsche's work on tragedy, and therefore of the division between the Apollonian mood, characterised by the vision that the plastic artist has in dreams, and the Dionysian, given by the curtain opening to joy on the bright Mediterranean landscape. The figure seen from behind is enveloped in a chlamys and is looking downwards, as if searching within himself and meditating on the response of the oracle. It is refers clearly to the figure of Ulysses meditating on his own destiny after the response of the oracle in Böcklin's painting *Ulysses and Calypso*. A lyrical prose piece in the Paris *Manuscripts*, therefore at the time the artist was reading Schopenhauer, in which he speaks precisely of presage, and moreover his text on Böcklin, allow us to identify this figure with Heraclitus, much loved by de Chirico and by Nietzsche, and held to be a vaticinator:

“One of the strangest and deepest sensations that prehistory has left us is the sensation of presage. It will always exist. It is like an eternal proof of the non-sense of the universe. [...] Thinking of these temples consecrated to marine deities and built along the coasts of Greece and Asia Minor, I have often imagined vaticinators attentive to the lament of the wave which in the evening withdraws from the Adamitic earth; I have imagined them with head and body enveloped in a chlamys, awaiting the mysterious and revelatory oracle. Thus I once also imagined the Ephesian meditating in the first light of dawn beneath the peristyle of the temple to Artemis of the hundred breasts.”¹²

This identification is even clearer in his text on Böcklin in which, speaking of the strange psychic phenomena of the ‘revelation’, which brought about his metaphysical paintings, he says that he took the figure of Ulysses from Böcklin to represent Heraclitus.¹³

12 G. de Chirico, *Scritti I/1*, cit., Éluard Manuscripts, *Le sentiment de la Préhistoire*, p. 625.

13 G. de Chirico, *Arnold Böcklin* in “Il Convegno”, I, May 1920, pp. 47-53; now in *Scritti I/1*, p. 708: “Strange and inexplicable phenomena on which Heraclitus had meditated under the arcades of the temple of Diana in ancient Ephesus; and possibly his hydroptic figure in such moments took on the sovereign pain of the Ulysses that Böcklin portrayed standing on the rocky shore of the island of Calypso”. In a recent monograph, *La nascita della metafisica nell'arte di Giorgio de Chirico*, Edizioni del Centro ellenico di cultura, Milan 2011, author N. Velissiotis identifies for the first time the statue behind the curtain as the Hermes of Praxiteles that de Chirico had seen in the Olympia Museum (*The Memoirs of Giorgio de Chirico*, Peter Owen, London 1971, p. 13). He also sees in the icon of Böcklin's Ulysses (the figure seen from behind) the Argonauts ready for departure to new faraway places, as in the earlier 1909 painting *Departure of the Argonauts*. With regard to the location portrayed in the painting, he remarks on the similarity of the piazza of a hilltop village in Pelion, Makrinitza, near Volos, also called “the balcony of Volos”. In 1993, F. Benzi identified the image as the temple of Athena Nike on the Acropolis in *I luoghi di de Chirico*, in *Giorgio de Chirico - Pictor Optimus*, exhibition catalogue edited by F. Benzi and M. G. Tolomeo Speranza, Rome 1993.

A saying from Heraclitus has come down to us as such: “The god whose temple is in Delphi does not say and does not conceal (*oute legei, oute kriptei*) but indicates (*semainei*)”.

The meaning of the oracle is therefore always ambivalent: *oute legei*, that is, it does not speak simply, does not have the form of saying proper to logic, yet it does not conceal, which means that over and above its apparent non-sense there is an authentic meaning that may be presaged, grasped only by those who know how to understand the concealed indication it gives, reveals; in the same way at the origin of the true work of the artist there is a revelation, an indication of meaning, the presage.

For Schopenhauer presage is the third stage of dream, this understood as global phenomenon, that is, as the dream of the sleeper, as the phenomenon of somnambulism and lastly as foretelling, presage or clairvoyance. Schopenhauer understands the first two stages of the dream of the clairvoyant as *theorematic* dream, which exactly predicts an event, and *allegorical* dream in which the foreseen event is concealed in allegorical or analogical form. The third stage of the clairvoyant dream, which has not reached the level of memory and of which however there is some sign in consciousness, is precisely the presage, which for him is almost always a sad presage “because in life sadness is always greater than joy”, which is to say the ominous feeling of impending disaster.¹⁴

As we have said, Schopenhauer intends to give a scientific, i.e. physiological explanation and then a metaphysical explanation of the phenomena of dream, somnambulism and clairvoyance. Setting out from the basic phenomenon of the dream, that is, from visions that come not from external but solely internal stimuli, which is to say from the ganglionic system, he proposes to explain how it is that through these internal stimuli both our sensibility and consciousness can have authentic relationships with the external world, precisely as occurs in the case of sleepwalking. This involves the reconstruction of the entire physiology of the dream and the authentic distinction between sleeping and waking consciousness.¹⁵

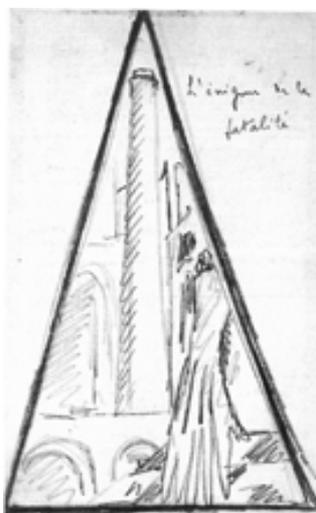


fig. 5 G. de Chirico, study, *The Enigma of Fatality*, 1914



fig. 6 G. de Chirico, *The Enigma of Fatality*, 1914, , Kunstmuseum, Basel



fig. 7 G. de Chirico, *Study*, 1914

14 See A. Schopenhauer, *Parerga und Paralipomena*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, Hrsg. von Wolfgang Freiherr Von Lohneysen, Frankfurt 1963, vol. IV, p. 310.

15 See *Ibidem*, pp. 291ff. Schopenhauer's explanations have been analysed in depth in my essay: 'Quid est rerum metaphysica?', in *G. de Chirico. Nulla sine tragoedia gloria*, edited by C. Crescentini, European Study Convention Proceedings, Rome 1999, Mascheitto Editore, Florence 2002, pp. 165-200, in particular pp. 176-178.



fig. 8 G. de Chirico, study, *Still Life – Turin Spring*, 1914



fig. 9 G. de Chirico, *Still Life – Turin Spring*, 1914



fig. 10 G. de Chirico, *Study*, 1914

So de Chirico seems to follow Schopenhauer as far as his treatment of the phenomenon of presage is concerned, a phenomenon which in the painter's view has belonged to humanity since the most distant origins of myth, although we realise that he is moving in a wholly different direction with regard to the physiological explanation given in the *Essay on Apparitions*. Clearly what interests him is the metaphysical dimension of presage which he wants to unite with the phenomenon of revelation, therefore seeing in it that insight into the enigma of time and life which opens our sense of destiny and which lies at the heart of the metaphysical artwork. Like the work of art, presage remains a revelation that explains the meaning of our life and reveals our path and destiny. He calls this insight "revelation", that arrives unexpectedly like a vision in which, with regard to a state of things given by *aisthesis* at a phenomenal level, suddenly strikes us with what invisibly keeps them together and *indicates* their *destination*, which is to say the direction or the sense in which they are going in order to find fulfilment.

This indication of direction or our destination is already symbolised in the drawings inserted in these manuscripts, as in drawing n. 4 (fig. 5), by a zinc glove pointing down to a chessboard, the one on which the destinies of man are played. The drawing consists of a triangle in which these elements are inscribed¹⁶ and the title appears at the top of the sheet: *L'énigme de la fatalité*, which would also be the title of the canvas derived from this drawing in 1914 (fig. 6). In another drawing of the same period, n. 21 (fig. 7), the glove would be replaced by an arrow, on the left side of the book set on the table with two eggs.¹⁷ The title of the book is, *The Adventures of Pinocchio*. Both the glove and the arrow in the two paintings indicate the same thing, the arrow of time and the road that is our destination, everything following a logic of signs which is not the logic of language and ordinary thought but a logic that may be developed, in painting and philosophy, by setting out from an infantile mentality, which is to say subverting the order of ordinary representation of reality and drawing near to madness. The new painting and philosophy which this must express are shown to

¹⁶ The drawings in the *Manuscripts* are numbered here 1-29, according to the order in which they appear in *Scritti II*; drawing n. 4 is found on p. 278. The zinc glove is mentioned also in a lyrical text *Zeuxis the Explorer* in "Valori Plastici", I, 1918, in this periodical.

¹⁷ See *ibidem*, p. 640.

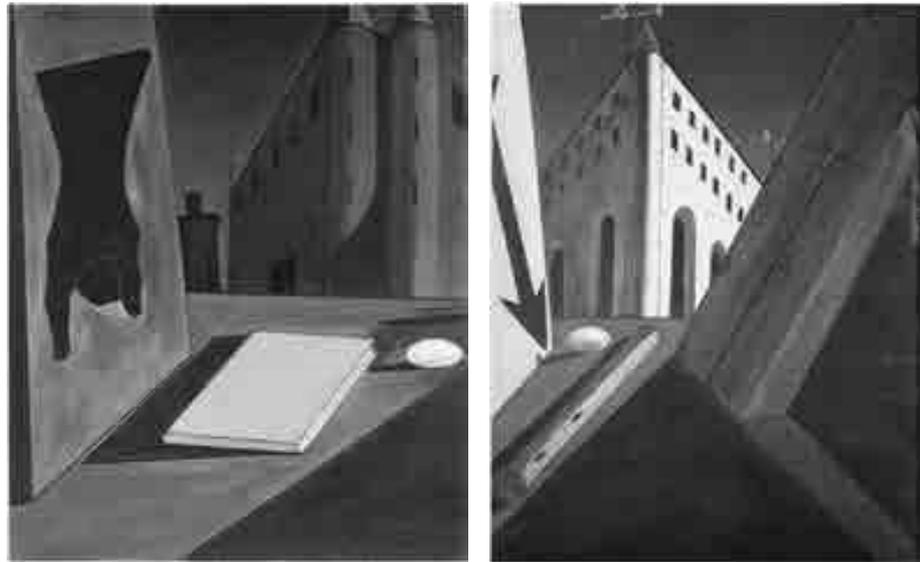


fig. 11 G. de Chirico, *The Destiny of the Poet*, 1914

fig. 12 G. de Chirico, *The Fête Day*, 1914

us in drawing n. 23 (fig. 8), in which the glove is attached to the left margin of a window which gives onto a piazza, dominated in the background by a castle; the glove gives us the outline of a hand with the index finger pointing at the window ledge on which there are a book, two eggs and an artichoke, whilst around the corner we just glimpse an equestrian monument;¹⁸ the drawing was developed in the 1914 painting *Still life – Turin Spring* (fig. 9) which has the same elements except that the window is no longer a rectangle but a trapezium. The book has become *Thus Spake Zarathustra* as we see from the colour yellow of the cover which is that of its French translation. The window is the window of Nietzsche's room overlooking Piazza Carignano, with the Savoy palace and the plinth of the equestrian monument bearing the name of Vittorio Emanuele II. The artichoke is an image taken from an anguishing dream that de Chirico had, and indicates the harshness of the sufferings of Nietzsche's life, while the egg is the symbol of birth and death (it should be noted that there were two eggs in the drawing).

In drawing n. 24 (fig. 10) the same window is depicted with the same glove on the left and the view over Palazzo Carignano, whereas the equestrian monument is seen from behind and we only see the enormous silhouette of the rider that seems almost like a building in the piazza. A cube set on the ground in the piazza bears three cannonballs in the rapidly sketched drawing.¹⁹ This drawing refers to the 1914 painting *The Destiny of the Poet* (fig. 11), meaning the destiny of Nietzsche, whom the painter called the most profound poet in a 1910 letter to his friend Fritz Gartz,²⁰ and who is represented by a small black shadow which appears

18 See *ibidem*, n. 23, p. 642.

19 See *ibidem*, n. 24, p. 643.

20 This letter is of great importance for the dating of the beginning of Metaphysical Art, which is something completely new, not only for de Chirico but for European painting in its entirety. The letter forms part of de Chirico's correspondence after his return to Italy (1909-1911) with his friend from the Munich Fine Arts Academy. The letters were published in the original German for the first time by G. Roos based on poor-quality photocopies. The present whereabouts of the original letters is unknown. I translated the letters in Italian and they were published for the first time both in Italian and in English translation in "Metafisica. Quaderni della Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico", n. 7/8, 2008, pp. 551-558 and 559-567. The letter appears with two dates, one of which is cancelled: Florence 26 [24 Julliet cancelled] *Januarii* 1910. Following the greetings, de Chirico writes: "Do you know for example what the name of the most profound painter who ever painted on earth is? [...] his name is Arnold Böcklin, he is the only man who has painted profound paintings. Now, do you know who the most profound poet is? You will probably say right away Dante, or Goethe or yet

on the right, as in the previous painting. The book and the egg are the poet's eternity and incumbent death. Of the same period, the first half of 1914, we have a last painting *The Fête Day* (fig. 12), a synthesis of the three previous drawings. In fact here the arrow reappears on the left ledge of the window, indicating the poet-philosopher's destiny. The book is replaced by a rolled parchment, a sign of the long posterity awaiting him and which brings him close to the parchments through which the works of Heraclitus came down to us. Palazzo Carignano seems to wedge into the window as if to split it in two. In fact the sides of the window are bending towards the floor as if it were crumbling and swallowing them up. The feast day is therefore the day when Nietzsche, from his room in Piazza Carignano, wrote to Jacob Burckhardt in Basel the letter in which his poet's spirit entered into divine madness.

It is the letter of 6 January 1889, stamped 5.1.1889 [sic!], which we quote solely for identification of the paintings in question. The letter begins as follows:

“Dear Herr Professor, first of all I would much rather be a professor at Basel than God; but I have not dared to be selfish enough to forgo the creation of the world. You see how many sacrifices one has to make where and when one lives. – And nevertheless I have rented a student's room opposite Palazzo Carignano (in which I was born as Vittorio Emanuele) and which moreover allows me to listen at my desk to marvellous music beneath me, in the *Galleria Subalpina*.”

In the postscript to the letter he further writes:

“I go everywhere in my student's jacket, I slap people on the back and say: *everything OK? I am god, I made this caricature*. ... Tomorrow my son Umberto is coming with dear Margherita, whom I shall receive here in shirtsleeves. The rest for madam Cosima... Ariadne... who from time to time is brought here by enchantment.”²¹

He was however aware of his paranoia to the extent of finishing the letter with this sentence:

“You can make any use whatever of this letter as long as it does not damage my reputation in Basel.”

others. – This is totally misunderstood. – The most profound poet is Friedrich Nietzsche”. Concerning the double dating, the cancelled date “24 Julliet” indicates simply that the letter was written *after* 24 July 1910, and therefore the date of “26 January 1910” is to be considered an error. The correlation of all 12 letters in the epistolary attests that the letter in which de Chirico announced his discovery of Metaphysical Art was written at the end of 1910, precisely on 26 December. This analysis also confirms the dating of the first metaphysical works as painted in Florence during the second half of 1910. P. Baldacci and G. Roos' erroneous interpretation of the date of the letter as January 1910 led them to wrongly backdate the birth of Metaphysical Art by one year. A discussion on Baldacci and Roos' theory was published in P. Picozza, *Giorgio de Chirico and the Birth of Metaphysical Art in Florence in 1910*, “Metafisica” n. 7/8, *cit.*, pp. 56-92; see also R. Dottori, *From Zarathustra's Poetry to the Aesthetics of Metaphysical Art*, *ibidem*, pp. 117-138; P. Picozza *Betraying de Chirico: the Falsification of de Chirico's Life History over the last Fifteen Years*, in “Metafisica” n. 9/10, pp. 28-60. With regard to Baldacci and Roos' position, see G. Roos, *La vie de Giorgio de Chirico. Un'autobiografia di Angelo Bardi del 1929*, in “ON-Otto-Novecento” n. 1, 1997, pp. 1-22; Id., *Giorgio de Chirico e Alberto Savinio. Ricordi e documenti. Monaco Milano Firenze 1906-1911*, ed. Bora, Bologna 1999; P. Baldacci, *Novità sul fronte de Chirico: la pittura metafisica è nata a Milano nel 1909, e non nel 1910*, a review of Roos's book in “Giornale dell'arte”, December 1994; Id. *De Chirico – The Metaphysical Period*, *Bulfinch*, New York, 1997; P. Baldacci, G. Roos, *De Chirico*, Padova Palazzo Zabarella, 20 January-27 March 2007, Marsilio Venice 2007. For a brief summary of the question, see. K. Robinson, *Florentine Period 1910-1911: Biographical Chronology and Documentation*, in “Metaphysical Art – The de Chirico Journals” n. 11/13, 2014, pp. 129-136.

21 See F. Nietzsche, *Werke in drei Bänden*, Hrsg. von K. Schlechta, Munich 1966, pp. 1351-1352.

In de Chirico's view Nietzsche had a presage of his destiny, just like that of being a destiny for his own time and his own world. At a level of consciousness greater than dream, as in a 'daydream', presage shows us the meaning or direction of events in accordance with the metaphysical reality hidden to the logic of reason.

This destination is the meaning, and at once the fatality, because it is not established by man but has only appeared to him.

But there is in the end a way of interpreting dream and presage which is not Schopenhauer's and which does not therefore regard his presumed access to the metaphysical reality of will but rather the explanation of the relationship between wakefulness and sleep that Sigmund Freud was developing in those years, allowing us to unveil the mechanisms on the basis of which it is constituted and to penetrate the secrets of our psyche, just as for Schopenhauer it allowed us to penetrate the secrets of the metaphysical world, which is to say the Will. Now, since for de Chirico revelation is linked to presage, and presage for Schopenhauer is the most advanced stage of the dream, we may wonder if the psychic mechanisms of dream as he read them in Schopenhauer might also offer us some possibility of explanation for what de Chirico calls 'revelation' and which constitutes the original vision of the metaphysical work of art. But we may also ask ourselves whether we might not receive greater light from Freud, not from a non-metaphysical but from an artistic viewpoint.

This, because the dream work is, in its processes of condensation and shifting, a process of depiction and above all a representation by symbols, and this may therefore make us think that it is closely related to the symbolic production of the metaphysical paintings. We may then ask ourselves if the relationship between unconscious, preconscious and conscious, of which Freud speaks, can give us some explanation of the moment of revelation, the origin of which de Chirico cannot explain. In fact, de Chirico tells us that revelation comes suddenly, in a wholly spontaneous way and already complete in its visual content, so much so that the artist need only trace out its lines on the canvas. Which might lead us to believe that at the origin of an artwork, especially in painting since it produces images, there is even in a wakeful state the same unconscious activity that lies at the heart of the production of images in dream activity: and precisely, that activity which uses or invents images to express thoughts. Unconscious production of the work in a wakeful state would in fact be the idea adopted in 1923-1924 by the entire world of surrealist art, becoming for them, who originally referred directly to de Chirico, the very principle of the work of art, automatism.²²

Automatism, in Breton's view, was the very principle of surrealism, and was thus defined in his Manifesto: "Surrealism. Psychic automatism by which it is proposed to express, be it verbally or in writing or in other ways, the real functioning of thought. The dictates of thought in the absence of any control carried out by reason, outside of every aesthetic and moral consideration". As Maurice Nadeau puts it in his *Histoire du Surréalisme*, Freud, de Chirico and Picasso were acknowledged as the idols and masters of the movement.²³ The problem however is whether this automatic exercising of thought, which they held to be parallel to

22 On the back cover of "La révolution surréaliste" it is openly declared: "This first issue of the surrealist Revolution offers no definitive revelation. The results obtained by automatic writing, the recounting of dreams, are included but there are no results of research, experiences or works carried out: for all of this we must await the future". Following a foreword by J.A. Boiffard, Paul Éluard and Roger Vitrac, which defends the relating of dreams every morning in the family and proclaims that 'realism means pruning projects, surrealism means pruning life', the question is posed as to whether suicide is a solution, and lastly the padlocks of the unconscious are opened with the telling of dreams by de Chirico, André Breton and Renée Gauthier, and automatic texts by Marcel Noll, Robert Desnos, Max Morise and Louis Aragon, etc.

23 See M. Nadeau, *Histoire du Surréalisme, suivie de Documents surréalistes*, édition du Seuil, Paris 1964, p. 64, who also cites the photograph of Germaine Berton surrounded by all the members of the surrealist movement: Aragon, Artaud, the Baron brothers, Boiffard, Breton, Carrive, Cretil, de Chirico, Delteil, Desnos, Éluard, Ernat Gérard, Limbour, Lübeck, Milkin, Morise, Naville, Noll, Man Ray, Savinio, Soppault and Vitrac.



fig. 13 G. de Chirico,
Melancholy of an Afternoon,
1913

fig. 14 G. de Chirico, *The
Philosopher's Promenade*,
1914

the dream, can be placed on the same footing as making art: a problem that exists given that the origins of surrealism hark back to de Chirico and Freud.

But this problem has a twofold meaning: first of all, whether in a very broad sense some of the painter's dreams, in particular those of the period when he was forming his poetics, for example the dream of the two iron artichokes which is the basis for three important metaphysical works – *Melancholy of an Afternoon*, 1913 (fig. 13), *The Philosopher's Promenade* (fig. 14) and *The Philosopher's Conquest* (fig. 15), both of 1914 – might help us to understand some of de Chirico's works, in particular the secrets of his enigmatic representations.

Whereas in a narrower sense, which is what the surrealists claimed, whether the psychic processes described by Freud, such as automatism, condensation and repression, may effectively be the basis of a work of art: this would mean that the origin of the work of art may be found in the conflicts of the unconscious where the dream originates, in the same way as artistic activity, and on the basis of analysis of the dream activity get back to the secret meaning of these works of art, as at bottom Nietzsche himself thought with regard to the Apollonian moment in the figurative arts.

Freud, the Interpretation of Dreams and of the Work of Art

In reality, the meaning of automatism was certainly not considered by Freud to explain artistic production but the production of oneiric images on the basis of the unconscious, of its 'pleasure principle' and its conflicts with the preconscious which arise in the infantile stage and are not manifested in consciousness, and furthermore lie at the heart of hysteria and the neuroses, as may be seen very clearly from his basic text *The Interpretation of Dreams*.

The fundamental problem Freud sets himself in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, and of which he speaks expressly only at the end of the book, is that of the origin of oneiric production by the unconscious and the function it carries out. However, since the unconscious alone can do nothing, in order to operate it must be considered together with another system, the preconscious. After much reflection and having said that no absolute certainty can be assured, in the end he comes to the following conclusion: "Hence we must admit that two kinds of essentially different psychic processes participate in the formation of the dream; one forms

perfectly correct dream thoughts which are equivalent to normal thoughts, while the other treats these ideas in a highly surprising and incorrect manner". This latter process is the dream work proper, but from what does it derive? To respond he avails himself of the theory of hysteria that dates to the beginning of his studies. In hysteria too there are perfectly correct thoughts, equivalent to conscious thoughts, until they are penetrated by hysterical symptoms that produce incorrect thoughts: these are normal thoughts that have undergone an abnormal treatment and been translated into symptoms through four types of activity – *condensation, formation of compromises, superficial associations, concealment of contradictions* – proceeding in the direction of regression. From the theory of hysteria we therefore deduce the principle that: "such an abnormal psychic elaboration of a normal train of thought takes place only when the latter has been used for the transference of an unconscious wish which dates from the infantile life and is in a state of repression.

In accordance with this proposition we have construed the theory of the dream on the assumption that the actuating dream-wish invariably originates in the unconscious which, as we ourselves have admitted, cannot be universally demonstrated though it cannot be refuted".²⁴

The dream therefore does nothing other than continue the work that the unconscious already carries out in daytime, and the same production of incorrect thoughts, in which actual dream work consists, performs the function of completing what was not achieved in the daytime work. The problem is to know the causes of repression. Here Freud develops his hypothesis of two associative processes, primary and secondary association, of their relationship and of the conflicts arising therefrom in the psychic apparatus which fundamentally regulate not only oneiric production but the very development of the person. The first system therefore needs a second system that carries out the function of control and censorship of production and unconscious association, which is the system of the preconscious or of secondary association. In order that the second system may communicate and interact with the first it therefore needs control of all the mnemonic material to select the representations that are in the memory and use them to inhibit the excessive accumulation of excitation, to dispel those that produce excessive tension and excitation in the primary system, assailing the unpleasant memory in such a way as to avoid the freeing of displeasure; this of course is the principle of repressing unpleasant images that the preconscious carries out on the unconscious.²⁵

Defining the two systems and their relationship, which Freud calls primary process and secondary process, he speaks of the second system as the one that must inhibit in part or correct the processes of the first. The first strives for discharge of excitation to establish, thanks to the quantity of excitation thus gathered, an identity of perception; the secondary process abandons this intention in order to achieve instead an identity of thought.²⁶



fig. 15 G. de Chirico, *The Philosopher's Conquest*, 1914, The Art Institute of Chicago

²⁴ S. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, pp. 540-541.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 543.

²⁶ Freud himself says: "The entire act of thought is only an indirect path which goes from the memory of gratification, taken as representation with a purpose, to the identical investment of the same memory, which must be achieved passing by way of motor experiences. Thought must be involved in

Both dream and hysteria derive from these conflicts between the two systems and from repression²⁷, and in the end Freud maintains that only by introducing the sexual forces of pleasure and displeasure is it possible to fill the lacunae found in the theory of repression, identifying them in the motor experiences that lie at the heart of psychoneurotic symptoms; however he leaves open the question of whether the infantile sexual element is also the necessary requisite for explaining dreams, because it is undemonstrable, and admits that in having derived the dream from the unconscious he went beyond one step from the demonstrable.²⁸

Freud's most interesting observations for us come at the end of *The Interpretation of Dreams* when he tackles the problem of the relationship between the unconscious and consciousness as the more general theme of reality and dream. For him the problem is not, as for Theodor Lipps, that of explaining the unconscious from the viewpoint of consciousness but of considering the unconscious as the whole of psychic reality, of which the preconscious and lastly consciousness are only a part. The unconscious is not simply, as Lipps would have it, the general base of psychic life but the greater circle which contains the lesser circle of consciousness. And here Freud allows himself a truly metaphysical statement. "The unconscious is the true psychic reality; in its inner nature it is just as much unknown to us as the reality of the external world, and it is just as imperfectly communicated to us by the data of consciousness as is the external world by the reports of our sense organs".²⁹ Numerous dream activities are therefore attributed to unconscious thought active also by day. Thus Freud arrived at an observation that confirms what was established by Schopenhauer with his concept of presage, which would be adopted by de Chirico as the basis of his concept of revelation. Freud on this subject cites the examples of the poet Goethe and the physicist Helmholtz: "From the accounts of extremely productive men, such as Goethe and Helmholtz, we learn rather that the most essential and original part of their creations came to them suddenly, offering itself to their awareness in an almost completed state. On the other hand the contribution of conscious activity cannot amaze us in cases where a tension of all our spiritual forces is called for. But it is the much abused privilege of conscious activity to conceal from our eyes all other activities with which it cooperates".

Here Freud goes so far forward as to encounter Schopenhauer, speaking of the historical importance of dreams that for example led a military commander to carry out a daring undertaking that affected and changed history. Certainly this is not so much a foretelling of the future but in any case the sense of presage which Schopenhauer considers the third level of dream. Freud himself admits here that this is surprising only if we consider the dream as an extraneous power with regard to more familiar psychical forms, "no longer when one considers the dream as a form expressive of impulses on which in daytime there is the weight of resistance and at night could draw on reinforcements from deep sources of excitation"; and he concludes by

the paths of communication of representations without being disconcerted by their identity".

27 So Freud concludes: "the dream demonstrates that repressed material continues to exist also in the normal man, and remains capable of psychical performances. The dream itself is one of the manifestations of this repressed material. [...] What is psychically repressed, what in the waking life has been blocked in its own expression by the reciprocal elimination of contradictions and excluded from interior perception, finds in the nocturnal life, and under the rule of formations of compromise, means and paths for imposing itself on consciousness. [...] The interpretation of dreams is the royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious in our psychic life" (*ibidem*, p. 549).

28 See *ibidem*, p. 547-548.

29 *Ibidem*, p. 553. Against him, who maintains as a philosopher that consciousness is the indispensable characteristic of the psychical, he objects as a physician that the most complex and correct ideational processes found in a dream, to which one cannot deny the name of psychical processes, may take place without stimulating the consciousness of the subject. At this point however he must state that the philosopher and the physician are not dealing with the same thing.

identifying this power of the unconscious, revealed in dreams, with the daemonic: "But the respect with which the ancient peoples regarded dreams is a homage, based on a precise psychological insight, to the unsubdued and indestructible element in the human soul, to the daemonic power which furnishes the dream-wish, and which we find again in our unconscious".³⁰

The daemonic in this sense is what for Plato was simply *to deinon*, the terrible, but also the divine. At the end of his book Freud himself also admits that at bottom the ancient belief that the dream shows us the future is not wholly without a basis of truth, but not in the simple sense of foretelling: "Representing a dream to us as fulfilled, the dream certainly leads us towards the future; but this future, considered by the dreamer as present, has been shaped in the likeness of the past by the indestructible wish". Its process of symbolisation may lead us back through its meanderings to the original conflicts of man, in Freud's view conflicts of an incestuous nature, also revealed originally by the mythical world and Greek tragedy, *Oedipus* first and foremost, since the energy driving him is for Freud fundamentally sexual energy. Paul Ricoeur³¹ however has justly seen in this the limitation of Freudian thought: he always remains with a backward glance towards the past and therefore always sees development of the psyche in a regressive sense, never in a progressive sense as development of the infantile psyche towards the future.

But in reality it is not this 'metaphysical' thesis of Freud's that can be positively used to understand both de Chirico and surrealism, because even if one wants to explain the unconscious that state of consciousness which de Chirico calls revelation through Freud, it is indubitable that the essential moment of the work of art, imagination, belongs, as he clearly says, to the preconscious. Granted also that the imagination may operate thrust by its conflictual relationship with the unconscious, it is also clear for Freud that the actual ideational moment belongs to the preconscious which strives for identity of thought and not for the identity of perception of the pure pleasure principle.

So, whether automatism, which corresponds to the original function of the unconscious, can effectively be the principle of artistic production is an extremely problematic question, not only because it lies at the heart of the psychology of the neuroses (de Chirico himself admitted that art bordered on madness³², but because we will never find an unconscious in its pure state, as Freud makes quite clear. The unconscious can never operate at ideational level without the preconscious, which is a second and subtler regulation of investment of energy, also capable of elaborating and employing the mnestic material of desire as censorship of the releasing of displeasure.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 554.

³¹ See the various lectures by P. Ricoeur held in Rome at the Convegni sulla Demitizzazione, organised from 1960 to 1997 (the year of Castelli's death) at the University of Rome and published in "Archivio di Filosofia", most of which were subsequently collected by P. Ricoeur in: *Il conflitto delle interpretazioni*, Jaca Book, Milan 1977, 2nd edition 1995. In one of the first of these lectures, *Herméneutique et réflexion*, in: *Demitizzazione e immagine*, "Archivio di Filosofia", Cedam, Padua 1962, Ricoeur speaks of the conflict of two different hermeneutics, one as archaeology of consciousness, which is that of Freud and Nietzsche, who always interpret consciousness from the viewpoint of its origin, and hermeneutics as eschatology, which is that of the phenomenology of religion and of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* that see consciousness from the viewpoint of the end to be achieved, where then the end as absolute knowledge of Hegelian Phenomenology is denied by the problem of evil; See *ibidem*, pp. 32-33. This theme is subsequently fully developed in the following lectures and in further articles collected in the book, including his *Interpretation of Freud*.

³² See, G. de Chirico, *Scritti/1, Sull'arte metafisica, Pazzia e arte*, cit., p. 289: "That insanity is inherent to every profound manifestation of art is an axiomatic truth. Schopenhauer defines a madman as one who has lost his memory. This definition is full of acumen seeing that the logic of our normal acts and our normal life is a continuous rosary of memories, of relations between things and ourselves and vice versa". If the web of these relations are broken, schizophrenia occurs as mental separation, but it is here that for de Chirico, Metaphysical Art becomes pertinent: "Who can tell then the astonishment, the terror, perhaps even the gentleness and consolation I would feel at this change of scene".

We cannot proceed beyond the themes of the relationship between the ideational processes, dominated by the principle of repression and investment of energy, and the perceptual processes which connect with the ideational processes; we can only note that for Freud, consciousness, understood as a sense organ “C”, is able to create a new qualitative series beyond that of the relationship between unconscious and preconscious, and with this a new regulation, the teleological regulation of thought, which can produce the overinvestment of energy on the movable quantity of pleasure. This constitutes man’s privilege over animals, and for de Chirico this also constitutes the principle of the work of art itself. In conclusion, the ideational process of the work of art is not on the same plane as the dream, as Freud conceives it, as fruit of the Unconscious alone, just as the original power of the Unconscious which, manifesting itself in dream, is able to presage or produce events, solve scientific and mathematical problems or compose poetry, cannot be traced back to pure sexual energy, the daemonic force that lies at its base or ends up as in Schopenhauer by being the manifestation of the original thing in itself, cosmic will, or becomes a mutilated, regressive principle of the development of the subject: but this can never explain either the dream itself or art. For Nietzsche and de Chirico the creativity of art, which they call revelation, is linked to the first of these two concepts.

Nonetheless from certain scholars including Willard Bohn, Paolo Baldacci and Gerd Roos, we hear that in the metaphysical paintings the cannons and cannonballs, the bananas, the chimneys etc., are sexual symbols, whilst the arches symbolise the female genitals. In any case, all analysts know that one cannot make suppositions about what the subject intended with his dream images except through direct analysis, which de Chirico did not undergo and obviously no longer can. These interpretations are actually outside artistic ideation: outside the narrative on which the paintings and architecture that comprise its language are set, outside the semantics of the signs the painter himself consciously uses, of the taxonomy of colours and the syntax of the shades of colour, and lastly of the ultimate goal of art, which is not driven by the regressive analysis of oneself that leads back to the conflicts of early infancy, but rather to the representation of what consciousness sees, feels and thinks as the meaning of its own existence, its own world, of history not only past but also future. So even if de Chirico were to employ symbols, sexual or otherwise, drawn from his dreams in his works, it is also clear that the process of symbolisation to which the dream corresponds is not on the same plane as that of the work of art. Art makes use of dream, but it does not follow the logic of dream or the symbolic associations of the unconscious.³³

On this subject we have the reflections of de Chirico himself, which clear the field of any equivocation in his considerations in *On Metaphysical Art* written in the “Valori Plastici” period and which centre precisely on the relationship between wakefulness and dream. His having originally thought in the Parisian *Manuscripts* of revelation, which lies at the heart of the artwork, as a phenomenon linked to presage, to an ancestral feeling of our prehistory, and having followed Nietzsche and his theory of Apollonian art as more or less equivalent to the power of dream, now leads us to say that that the artist needs continual control between the images that come to mind during wakefulness and those in dreams. “It is curious that in dream no image, however strange, strikes us for its metaphysical power; so we avoid looking to dream as a source of creativity; Thomas de Quincey’s methods do not interest us. The dream however is a highly strange phenomenon and an inexplicable

33 Making use of images found in de Chirico’s writings and paintings such as the ship, wave, sea, fish and birds, combining them with the writings and works of Savinio for a typical psychoanalytical interpretations, as Silvana Cirillo does in *Nelle adiacenze del Surrealismo. La “nave ammiraglia” di Giorgio de Chirico*, in: *Giorgio de Chirico. Nulla sine tragoedia gloria*, cit., pp. 165-64, is therefore absolutely inadequate for analysis of the artistic value of his oeuvre.

mystery, but even more inexplicable is the mystery and aspect that our mind confers on certain objects, certain aspects of life. Psychically speaking, the fact of discovering a mysterious aspect in objects would be a symptom of cerebral abnormality akin to certain phenomena of madness".³⁴

Madness in fact consists of mental separation, of losing the thread that links things together and ourselves to things themselves in the normal course of our perception and our memories. But when this thread is broken the artist has the possibility of that vision of a completely new face to things, of deep joys in what he sees. This is no longer Apollonian art but the pathos for a new world revealed to us, for the original presence of a world outside of logic, an apparent non-sense which is actually the revelation of a new sense that de Chirico calls "metaphysical".³⁵ Now, it is clear that behind this way of presenting one's work as akin to madness, like "the great madness", lies the awareness of a poetics and a wholly new *poiesis* in which the order of representation is completely skipped, as is never the case with a poetics that sets out from simple oneiric images. We should rather say that we are dealing with dream images realised and re-elaborated in the waking state, as a provocation by the dream that brought them, which acts on the artist and to which the artist's pathos reacts with his own *modus operandi*, making plain the new vision they have evoked. Hence the absolute freedom of the sign, its capacity for evocation and lastly the poetry of the work of art that de Chirico calls "metaphysical".

De Chirico well knew that this upsetting of the order of representation could not be easily understood (it was 1919 when he wrote these things, whilst the paintings date to 1913-1914) and therefore speaks of the "great madness" which is precisely that which does not appear to all but which "will always exist and continue to gesticulate and make signs behind the inexorable screen of matter".³⁶

At this point we shall analyse the three works featuring iron artichokes, which appeared to the painter in a dream and for which, once awake, as he himself says, he could give no explanation: *Melancholy of an Afternoon*, 1913, *The Philosopher's Promenade* and *The Philosopher's Conquest* of 1914 (figs. 13, 14 and 15). In the first they burst into the foreground of the metaphysical scene, set on a solid base of the same greenish colour, just as the shadow they cast on the rest of the scene is greenish, the more or less usual metaphysical scene, closed by a low wall with the train puffing behind it and, on the right, by greenish, gloomy arches; on the left the autumnal light shines in a Naples yellow triangle. Behind the wall, which divides the scene of the representation from cosmic space, stand a red brick chimney and a white tower, bearing witness to the anxiety of the infinite. The painting is so bare and deserted that its meaning is clear: Nietzschean melancholy pure and simple, reawakened by the dream appearance of the two artichokes, one of which we had already seen in *Still life – Turin Spring*, again an oneiric sign of suffering, of the pain and consequent melancholy that Dionysian man must bear. In *The Philosopher's Promenade* the allusion to Nietzsche is in the title, since for de Chirico Nietzsche was "the philosopher"; but here next to the two artichokes in the foreground, on a solid parallelepiped that almost entirely covers the scene, there is the plaster head of a deity. It is not Apollo, nor should we think of the Apollonian; perhaps Jupiter, perhaps the face of a river god – the Tiber or the Nile – that de Chirico noted in Rome in Piazza del Campidoglio or at the crossroads of Via Quattro Fontane. The

³⁴ See note 32.

³⁵ See *On Metaphysical Art*, cit: "One can deductively conclude that every thing has two aspects: a current one, that we see almost always and what people in general see, and another spectral or metaphysical one, which only rare individuals can see in moments of clairvoyance and metaphysical abstraction, like certain bodies, the impenetrable material of which the sun's rays cannot enter, can only appear under the strong artificial light such as X-ray for example". This is an additional reference to the original presence of being that Heidegger calls *Unverborgenheit* (unhiddenness) or the appearance of something prior to judgement, which substitutes the classical concept of judgement of the seen.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 289.



fig. 16 G. de Chirico, *Le Vainqueur*, 1914

face has an extremely rigid and serious expression, accentuated by the compactness of the element on which it stands; there is no train on the horizon and no hint of movement, everything is extremely rigid, like death. Melancholy, on the basis of oneiric stimulus, becomes metaphysical vision in wakefulness. Why is it entitled “the philosopher’s walk”? Because melancholy continually accompanied the philosopher’s walks in Turin, just as it accompanied the painter. And why is the next painting with artichokes entitled *The Philosopher’s Conquest*?

This painting reproduces drawing n. 28 of the *Manuscripts* (fig. 16) in which the simple title *Le Vainqueur* [the victor], appears at the bottom³⁷; instead of two artichokes the drawing has a bunch of bananas and, behind them, a cannon; in the painting two stone cannonballs are added. The rest of the painting is absolutely similar to the drawing, but in comparison with the previous painting it is much more full of life and animated, in

spite of the only inhabitants being two shadows in the background and flags just visible behind the loggia on the right. Behind the low wall in the background however there is a puffing train moving on the right and, on the left, a ship casting off with sails filled. Shadows and light contend for the space in improbable geometrical figures and in the background the sky, otherwise empty and starless, is almost entirely filled by two enormous columns that rise towards the infinite. In the drawing, on the left there is a palm tree; a huge clock, attached in an unreal manner to the loggia in a wrought iron frame, like a shop or restaurant sign, covers the remaining space almost completely, obscuring the cosmic void. It is instead the sign of the hour, the moment of time that passes and as moment is motionless: two minutes before 13:30; will the train arrive at the station at 13:30?

In the metaphysical works, hours are always marked in this way, as if one were waiting, or as if the time of those who arrive is never that of those who wait. While the philosopher’s walk was the contrary of what the title announced, that is, complete immobility, the pure interior journey in one’s melancholy, the conquest of the philosopher is the true walk through life, the conquest of reality in the passing of time and in the filling of space, and the hour is no longer the glacial hour of early morning (*The Enigma of the Oracle*) but the middle of the day. But how is this conquest linked to Nietzsche, and what is the meaning of the enormous clock that occupies half of the painting? A suggestion comes from Jean Clair: the clock is an image of the god Chronos, and the greatest hour of noon is the moment when time and eternity touch. This hour, this incalculable moment, marks time’s continuous turning and returning to itself, the eternal return of the same. This metaphysics of time that reveals to us the eternal return of the same is the dominion of the god Chronos which earns us eternity, with all the joy and pain it may involve. The bunch of bananas is replaced by the artichoke, sign of tragic and anguished suffering,³⁸ while the cannon with the two stone cannonballs that

³⁷ See *Scritti I*, cit., p. 647.

³⁸ In Paris de Chirico wrote a poem (Éluard *Manuscripts*, cit.): *A Life (Poem)* in which he speaks about seeing artichokes upon awakening: “Always the unknown: waking in the morning after a dream, obscure omen, mysterious oracle; what does dreaming of iron artichokes mean”; and again in the poem *One night*: “From my window I gaze at my illusions’ corpses / In the humid courtyard below. / Sensibility of iron artichokes...”; and lastly in the poem *Melancholy*: “Beauty of the tall red smokestacks. / Solid smoke. / A train whistles. The wall. / Two artichokes of iron regard me.”. These poems

surmount it is a sign of the power given by victory acquired through suffering. The colours are radiant and warm, in a word, alive, just as the palm in the drawing is alive, a presage of exotic lands.

The dream image is seen as the possibility of opening visions to us as if the materiality of the painter's description knocks on the doors of our psyche so that we might open up to these revelations. It is not a sign harking back to the hidden past of the Unconscious but rather a sign on the basis of which we have the presage of a future. Unfortunately it is a sad presage, as Schopenhauer has it, which has become true. The hour marked by the clock corresponds closely to the cannon and its stone cannonballs: it is the time of the Great War, the second half of 1914. De Chirico would remain in Paris until Italy entered the war in 1915 and he decided to return to Italy and present himself at the recruitment centre, ending up in Ferrara. Here a new episode of his painting would begin which however we should not wholly separate from the first. In fact already in Paris tailor's mannequins had entered de Chirico's painting, with the gradual shifting of the painting's theme from the outdoors of the piazza to the indoors of the room, which led him to tackle directly the theme of interiority and psychic experience. This takes us back to the theme of the uncanny, which is where we set out, and to analyse what is perhaps de Chirico's most famous painting which resulted in many disputes, both legal and market-related.³⁹



fig. 17 G. de Chirico, *The Disquieting Muses*, 1918

The Disquieting Muses

This celebrated composition, *The Disquieting Muses* (fig. 17), in which two mannequins together with a statue are depicted in the piazza of the Estensi Castle in Ferrara on a floor made of wooden planks that resembles both the deck of a ship and the interior of a tailor's shop with its mannequins, is no other than the hallucinated projection of the interiority of the soul, of the memory and its nightmares, onto the exterior of one of Italy's most celebrated piazzas. This conscious superimposing creates a more powerful and obsessive contrast than that of the industrial chimneys, towers and statues of the first metaphysical paintings, which also appear here in the background.

The solemn silhouette seen from behind with head bowed, which we find in the early metaphysical works, has become a strange being: the lower half is the torus of a Doric column and the upper a dressmaker's mannequin; an enormous head like a balloon marked with various metaphysical signs, the Greek *ch*, the first letters of Chirico, and two small Greek crosses, is also slightly bowed, giving an almost theatrical mien to the antique solemnity of the figure reflecting upon itself. It is the figure that appears in the painting *Le revenant* (1917-1918 [fig. 18]), the father who continually and distressingly returns to memory. De Chirico was aware of the title of Baudelaire's poem, and of course also of the theme, which he exploits in his own way.

In the painting, the bust of the mannequin partly reprises the figure of the nude bust of *The Child's Brain*

are from 1913 the same year as the paintings that portray these images, or icons, an event that further enlightens the *ekphrasis* that de Chirico himself continually carries out, passing from poetry to image, from the image to poetry.

39 See G. Rasario, *The Works of Giorgio de Chirico in the Castelfranco Collection: the "Disquieting Muses" Affaire*, in "Metafisica. Quaderni della Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico" n. 5/6, 2006, pp. 277-303.



fig. 18 G. de Chirico,
The Revenant,
1917-1918, Centre
Pompidou, Paris



fig. 19 G. de Chirico,
The Child's Brain
(*The Revenant*), 1914,
Moderna Museet,
Stockholm

(*The Revenant*), (1914 [(fig. 19)]⁴⁰ whose subject is a visionary or a philosopher with eyes half closed, next to a curtain which seems like a Doric column, and glancing at a book (*Thus Spake Zarathustra*, or *The Adventures of Pinocchio*); it is the figure of his beloved father, lost at the end of adolescence, Evaristo de Chirico, his real father but on whom he superimposes his spiritual father – Nietzsche – whose thought he followed in his life as an artist.

This same bust of the father, which refers to both the real and spiritual fathers and to which the features of Vittorio Emanuele II are also added with whom Nietzsche identified at the onset of his paranoia, in *The Revenant* constitute the upper half of the image, while the lower half is enveloped from the waist down by a tunic whose folds once more seem like the fluting of a Doric column, with the twofold and ambiguous effect of making it appear to be both enveloped in this drape and situated on a Doric column. Thus *The Revenant* is half-man and belongs to both the personal memory of his father, to the world of classical Greece in which he lived, and to the tragic myth evoked by Nietzsche, to such an extent that Nietzsche and his father end up becoming a single figure, set on a Doric column, in an image of great estranging effect, if not obsessive in its continuous returning.

Going back to *The Disquieting Muses* and comparing it with *The Revenant* we see that the figure on the left is the same as in the latter. The nude bust above a Doric column or drape is here seen only from behind, recalling the statue of Dante in *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon*.

The other muse (the artist's mother), wholly a mannequin, is seated in a triumphal attitude on a blue trunk from which a box and a coloured staff seem to have been taken, very similar to the appurtenances of a magician or conjurer. The stem on which the head should be screwed protrudes shiny and black, giving the mannequin's ample volumes the impression of being chopped off, mutilated. In fact its head, a great red balloon, is lying at its feet and bears the usual Greek *ch* seen on the face of the philosopher and the poet.

40 The painting's original title is *Le revenant*, as can be read in a letter de Chirico wrote to Gala Éluard on 10 February 1924: "I do not hide the fact that I do not like this title; for me, this painting is entitled *Le revenant* and that is what it is: *le Revenant*. There is something disagreeably mad and surgical about the other title that has nothing to do with the essence of my art". See, *Giorgio de Chirico Letters to Paul and Gala Éluard*, in "Metafisica. Quaderni della Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico" n. 1/2, 2002, p. 155.

Identification of this mannequin with the artist's mother is deduced on the basis of *Portrait of the Artist's Mother*, painted in Florence in 1911, in which she is depicted seated and with her hands crossed on her lap, in the same position as the mannequin's, above which there is a black oval similar to a lady's handbag. The head is firmly set on the ground: in fact it was Gemma de Chirico who always had to provide for the needs of her sons after their father's death; as Kierkegaard puts it, woman is "the administrator of finiteness". This truncated mannequin, with its head unscrewed and set at its feet, is all that remains of the seated or reclining statue in the Italian Piazza series, while the other mannequin on foot replaces the statue of the hero, politician, commander of the early metaphysical works. If this is the symbol of the solitude of the philosopher, the poet, the hero, as the politician, the seated mannequin that replaces the statue of Ariadne, melancholy, is the symbol of the artist's maternal side; both correspond to the two sides of his self, and this is why they are his muses, the constant grounds of his inspiration. What remains to be understood is why he should want to portray or identify them, albeit as tragic and even oneiric masks, in the figure of his father and mother.

The last muse (his brother or himself), situated in the shadow zone that a building in the square casts on this obsessive interior, is a statue but only in its body which still belongs to the external reality of space and time, that is, to history: its face is already mannequin, or already spirit. According to Wieland Schmied's interpretation it is Apollo in the act of inspiring, with his finger, the song of the Muses;⁴¹ it also pertains to Maurizio Calvesi's identification of Hebdomeros with Apollo, and to the presence of Apollo in both *Song of Love* and in the plaster bust with dark glasses, symbol of blindness and divination, which we see in the foreground in the portrait of Apollinaire. This may certainly be the literary motif of the painting, but de Chirico always denied wanting to make "literature" with his works. Instead, I believe that the disquieting Muses are the spirits of his family and his Self, and so have considered another interpretation.

To understand this painting we must in fact return to Schopenhauer, where we originally began, for whom the origin of the work of art – which for both he and de Chirico was thought of as "revelation" – arises due to the effect of the object, which is male, on the subject of the artist, which is female, and it is herein that the conception of the work takes place.

"The origin of a work of art has justly been called its *conception*. In effect this is, like procreation for the origin of man, the essential thing. And similarly it requires not only time but opportunity and the inclination of the spirit. The object on the other hand, like the male, exerts an ongoing act of procreation on the subject which is female. [...] If the inclination of the spirit of the subject is receptive, almost everything that comes within his perception will begin to speak to him, that is, to create in him a living, penetrating and original thought. It is thus that sometimes the sight of an object or an insignificant event has become the germ of a great and beautiful work of art."⁴²

41 See W. Schmied, *Giorgio de Chirico. Die beunruhigenden Muses*, Insel Verlag, Frankfurt a/M, 1993, pp. 70-71. In corroboration of his theory from the iconographic viewpoint he refers to the frescoes in Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara, in particular to one in the Salone dei Mesi [Hall of the Months] in which the corresponding signs of the zodiac are celebrated. The entire decoration of the hall (frescoes of only 5 of the 12 months still exist) was assigned to Cosimo Tura, and the May fresco (the month of Gemini, the Twins, whose corresponding deity is Apollo) was done by Francesco del Cossa. In the upper part, Apollo's triumphal entry followed below by the host of Twins and above by the procession of the Muses, three of whom are depicted entirely in the foreground. But from an iconographic point of view these three have nothing to do with the *Disquieting Muses*. As for the thumb and forefinger raised high to inspire the song of the Muses, this may well refer to the fact that Savinio was, precisely, a musician and poet.

42 The passage is from the French translation of several writings in *Parerga and Paralipomena*, published with the title *Métaphysique et Esthétique, par*

De Chirico would originally explain the concept of “revelation” in this way, in a fundamental passage of the *Éluard Manuscripts*, repeated or transcribed in the *Paulhan Manuscripts*.⁴³ Indeed, when he describes his first revelation that took place in Piazza Santa Croce in Florence and provided the basis for the painting *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon*, he tells us that due to a long intestinal illness he was prey to a troubled sensibility and was struck and strongly affected by the statue of Dante in the centre of the piazza, so much so that he had a clear vision of the painting, his first revelation. Dante is the poet, the hero, the politician, as are Nietzsche, Cavour and Vittorio Emanuele II, who struck his psyche and were deeply engraved in his memory. In other words, they are the paternity of the creation of the work of art, the first of the disquieting muses; the second is maternity, the psyche of the artist which receives the impulse from the object, is fecundated and conceives, in a literal sense, the work of art.

What is in play here is the problem of the artist’s personal identity, of the *I am I*, which splits into the ego and superego, leading to the mother as the creative principle that creates the work; therein the artist frees Self from his higher and original Self by introjecting it in himself and developing it in his work. So de Chirico seems to have grasped the fundamental theory of Freud, the splitting of the Ego and the force that the relationship with father and mother always have on the psyche and the unconscious. Creation of the work of art is therefore merged with the question of paternity and maternity of the person, and ends up by including what was also for Nietzsche the question of questions, eternity or immortality.

We find this question posed in the conclusion to his novel *Hebdomeros* (1929), and also the answer which serves to identify the subject of this painting: the disquieting muses are the disquieting question on the Self and the other in itself as principle of one’s own Self, on paternity, maternity and immortality of the work of art and the artist, that is, of his self. Moreover the artist needs his other, his critic, the beholder who immortalises him, and at that time his brother was his critic and the one who shared with him the road of art towards immortality. His brother comes after their father and mother, whereas the painter himself does not appear on the scene except through signs representing him: between the first two muses and the third there is a sort of column shaft whose sides or faces bear the colours found in the picture: red, the yellow ochre or orange of the ship’s deck, the green of the sky, the blue of the chest on which the mother is sitting, black; the box with the coloured triangles is his box of colours which will be mixed to produce the real colours; the staff is the ruler for measuring shadows,⁴⁴ the painter’s instrument. If we think back to the first disquieting painting, the first metaphysical work, *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon*, we find the same figures we have here: the statue of Dante, or the artist’s father, his superego, with whom he then identified; his mother crying over the death of the son she bore, and his brother projecting his immortality into the future.

In fact at the end of the novel the narrator abandons himself to praise of the little mother of the Gracchi and her infinite love for her sons, when he wonders what is the reward for a lifetime’s work: “But the great

Arthur Schopenhauer, *Première traduction française, avec préface et notes par August Dietrich*, Felix Alcan Editeur, Paris 1909, pp. 145-146. The title comes in part from Schopenhauer, since among these writings there is one which Schopenhauer himself entitled *Metaphysik des Schönen und Ästhetik*, in French translation *Métaphysique du Beau et Esthétique*.

⁴³ See *Scrittii/1*, cit., p. 613.

⁴⁴ J. de Sanna interprets the staff and the box as a naval flag indicating the return, in *De Chirico - Metafisica del tempo*, exhibition catalogue, 4 April-12 June 2000, Centro Cultural Borges, Buenos Aires, Ediciones Xavier Verstraeten, Buenos Aires 2000, pp. 47-51. P. Walberg, interprets the box and staff as magician’s props in *La diffusione della metafisica e la sua influenza sul surrealismo*, in *L’arte moderna*, edited by F. Russoli, vol. 7, *Metafisica, Dada, Surrealismo*, p. 44. Neither of these interpretations seems to me sufficient for explaining the painting’s iconology. The staff appears in a Ferrara period painting, *Metaphysical Interior with Large Factory*, 1917, with a set square and fine sticks.

reward this evening is you, little mother of the Gracchi! You, little shepherdess with your legs wrapped in ribbons and your motherly hands, you, heavy gazelle, you, little mother..." Then, as throughout the novel, the scenes change continually until the final one:

"Once again everything slept in immobility and silence. Suddenly Hebdomeros saw that this woman had the eyes of his father woman; and he *understood*. She spoke of immortality in the great starless night.

... 'Oh Hebdomeros', she said, 'I am Immortality. Nouns have their gender, or rather, their sex as you said once with great finesse, and verbs alas, decline. Have you ever thought of my death? Have you ever thought of the death of my death? Have you *thought of my life*? One day, oh Brother...'

But she spoke no further. Seated on the trunk of a broken column, she placed a hand gently on his shoulder and with her and with the other she clasped the right hand of hero. Hebdomeros, his elbow on the ruin and chin in his hand, pondered no longer... His thoughts, in the sweet aura of the voice he had heard, yielded slowly and ended by wholly abandoning himself. He abandoned himself to the caressing waves of the unforgettable voice and on these waves set off towards unknown and strange regions...; set off in a warmth of sundown, smiling at cerulean solitudes..."⁴⁵

This is a typical example of *ekphrasis*, of exposing the secret of one's painting, in this case, *The Disquieting Muses*. Hebdomeros, which is to say the artist, sees his father's eyes in the eyes of that woman, of his mother, who has already been identified, the little mother of the Gracchi, of the two hero-artists, himself and his brother. His father's eyes pass into his mother's, fecundating her eyes, the receptiveness of her psyche, letting her see what the artist sees beyond the walls, the cosmic and historical mystery that is represented in every metaphysical painting; and thus, by way of these two disquieting muses, we have the conception of the work of art. Nouns, which is to say the first principles or the prime causes of the artwork, have their sex, male and female, father and mother; and verbs, the Verb incarnate that is the work of art, and all works of art as such, have their tenses: they have a past, their death, or they have a future, the death of their death, meaning immortality; but this is not a tense, or is it a tense like the others, the eternal present? Now it is immortality itself that speaks and asks: can you think of my life? To think of the death of death is to think not of the simple immortality of the work but of the life of art. "One day, oh brother...": one day brother we shall have this reply, we shall know whether or not we have been true artists.

The red light of sunset reflected on the Estensi Castle in the piazza of Ferrara illuminates the deck of the ship like a nightmare interior, and in particular the castle, the enclosure of our interiority, which is completely flooded by it. It is a paroxysmal, violent light that clashes with the shadow zone of the piazza, and

⁴⁵ See *Hebdomeros*, English translation, The Four Season Book Society, New York, 1966, pp. 140-141. W. Schmied deems that de Chirico painted *The Disquieting Muses* specifically to respond to Carrà's *Musa metafisica*, inasmuch as he was irritated by the way that Carrà had appropriated the visual language of his paintings without having understood their true inspiration, the true metaphysical muse. Schmied quotes from a letter de Chirico wrote to Carrà dated 10 June 1918 (postage stamp 30 June), after finishing the painting; the tone of the letter, which starts with "My very dear Carrà" and continues with: "we will have splendid days in which the beauty of newly discovered lands will rise up against the morning mists". Schmied considers the tone of the letter triumphal, deeming that de Chirico feels with this painting that he has managed to convey the true meaning of the metaphysical Muse to Carrà (*op. cit.*, p. 82). The letter is published in E. Cohen in *La metafisica - Museo documentario*, Ferrara 1981, p. 119, with comment on pp. 206-207. This passage of the letter in German translation appears on the back cover of W. Schmied's text dedicated to this painting.

the metaphysical dimension that emerges from this contrast of oneiric light and gloomy shadow is that of the interiority of art which can no longer represent other than the ghosts of one's disquietude, the disquieting muses of a humanity that from the classical ideals of beauty – the Estensi Castle – has gone on to be inspired by the anonymous face of the automaton, the mask, the mannequin, the ghost of the human figure, irony of itself which seems to have wholly absorbed the Ego in a face without eyes and without word. The metaphysical dimension is now a disquieting question about the identity of the human subject that reveals only the ghosts and nightmares of its own origin and its own destiny (one day brother...). The representation of the disquieting thus opened the way to surrealism. The reality of this metaphysical painting is in fact here, in this Italian Piazza, the surreal dimension in which oneiric disquietude assails the real world with its own interiority.

The derivation of Magritte's surrealism from de Chirico is confirmed by Magritte himself who declared that he wept on seeing the reproduction of *Chant d'amour* (1914) in 1924 and that he then began a new phase in his painting. *The Child's Brain (The Revenant)*, another famous painting of 1914, which we have already mentioned, so impressed Breton that he wanted to possess it at all costs and kept it in his studio for almost half a century. And for another half century one would wonder whether if in this man with moustache and goatee the painter had wanted to depict his own father, the brain of the child, or Victor Emanuel II, or some writer or philosopher. Certainly it is not this we need to know in order to understand what de Chirico's painting wants to tell us. It is rather a case of freeing the pictorial sign in an absolute way from its univocal semantic nature, of achieving more than one meaning and more than one referent, which is to say making it, more than a sign, the beginning of a discourse that can express the various values and meanings of self awareness, of one's own paternity and the maternity of the work, and one's future. Thus the oneiric side of the nightmare becomes, for consciousness, the beginning of artistic representation.

The bridge between dream and wakefulness which would lead to the achievement in art of the identity of the conscious and the unconscious, of dream and reality, and which Breton in the Manifesto of Surrealism of 1924 declared he wanted to build, calling it *surreality*, had already been contrived by de Chirico in this projection of the interiority of the nightmare onto the exterior of the Italian Piazza, of its monuments and statues. In this projection however, in which all the nightmares and disquietude, all the anguish and intimate drives of the subject are freed, it is not a simple liberation of the subject that is accomplished but rather a liberation from the subject itself.

This is the abandoning of the Modern and the passage to the Postmodern that de Chirico was first to effect. The irony implicit in the triumphal attitude of the mannequins, of the disquieting Muses that have taken the place of the melancholic figure of Ariadne, and that of the poet, the hero and the commander, just as they have taken the place of the completely self-absorbed look of *The Revenant*, is directed towards the subject; it is the overcoming, or better, the surpassing of an Ego that wanted to be the principle and meaning of its entire universe and instead discovers the disquieting dimension of its being in the world. This liberation from oneself restores the world of classical art only with the double of man, the one who is none other than the elusive figure of man who, freeing himself from his own nightmares and disquietude, at last frees self from himself to achieve the identity of man and artist, which is identity with self and with other-than-self, or with his other self, the brother who shares the journey of art towards immortality. His full identity is that of the family, the members of which he reduces to masks, in which he sees the disquieting symbols of his art; and freeing himself from the Disquieting with his activity as artist, he reduces them to masks.

Translated by David Smith