

METAPHYSICAL AESTHETICS⁴

The first grand principles of metaphysical aesthetics are to be found in the construction of cities, in the architectural form of houses, squares, parks, avenues, sea-ports, train stations, etc. The Greeks, guided by their aesthetic and philosophic sense, were quite scrupulous with regard to building: their porticoes, shaded walkways and terraces were raised as theatre auditoriums in front of the grand spectacle of nature (Homer, Aeschylus); the tragedy of serenity. In Italy we have admirable modern examples of such constructions, the psychological origin of which however remains obscure to me. I have meditated deeply over the problem of the metaphysical aspect of Italian architecture and all my work of 1910, '11, '12, '13 and '14 is related to this. Perhaps the day will come when its aesthetics (which now seem driven by mere chance) will become a law and a necessity for the upper classes and high-ranking leaders in public affairs. Only then perhaps will we be free from the horror of finding ourselves before monstrous apotheosis' of bad taste and invasive imbecilities as for instance the glaring monument to the Great King in Rome, otherwise known as the Altar of the Country, the architectural sense of which is equivalent to the poetic sentiment of the odes and orations of Tirteo Calvo.

Schopenhauer, who knew much about such questions, advised his compatriots not to put statues of famous men on columns or high pedestals, but to place them instead on low bases "as they do in Italy where men of marble seem to be on the same level of the passers by and walk among them".

The imbecile, that is, someone who is un-metaphysical, is instinctively drawn toward mass and height, to a sort of architectural Wagnerism. It is a question of innocence: these are men who are unaware of the terribleness to be found in lines and angles, and are attracted to the infinite, thus revealing their psychic limitations as closed within the same sphere of the feminine and infantile. But we who are learned in the signs of the metaphysical alphabet know what joy and what suffering are to be found in a portico, a street corner or in a room, on the surface of a table or within the sides of a box.

The limits of these signs constitute for us a sort of moral and aesthetic code of representation and, what is more, through the use of clairvoyance we are constructing in painting a new metaphysical psychology of things.

The absolute awareness of the space an object occupies in a painting and the space separating one object from another establishes a new astronomy of things that by the fatal law of gravity are attached to this planet. The meticulously accurate and prudently calculated use of surfaces and volumes constitutes the rules of metaphysical aesthetics. It will be helpful here to recall Otto Weininger's profound reflections on geometrical metaphysics:

"As an ornament the arc of a circle can be beautiful. This does not signify complete perfection that no longer lends itself to criticism, like Midgard's serpent that encircles the world.

In the arc there is still something incomplete that needs to be and has the potential to be completed; it invites presentiment. Hence the ring is ever the symbol of something non-moral or anti-moral."

(This thought made it clear to me the eminently metaphysical impression that porticoes and arched openings in general have always given me). The symbol of a superior reality has often been found in geometrical

⁴ G. de Chirico, *Estetica Metafisica*, a conclusive paragraph to *Sull'arte metafisica* in "Valori Plastici", a. I, n. 4-5, Rome April-May 1919; republished in *Commedia...*, cit., pp. 24-25. Published in English here for the first time.

figures. For instance the triangle served *ab antiquo* and is still used in the theosophical doctrine as a mystic and magic symbol, often awakening in one who looks upon it, even if unaware of this tradition, a sense of unrest, almost of fear (just as rulers have always obsessed my mind and still do; I would always see them arising as mysterious stars rising up behind each of my paintings).

Starting from such principles we can cast our gaze upon the surrounding world without falling anew into the errors of our predecessors.

We can also attempt all kinds of aesthetics, including that of the human figure, for whilst working and meditating on these problems, facile and fallacious illusions are no longer possible. Friends of a new awareness, new “philosophers”, we can finally smile with tenderness at the graces of our art.