

THE METAPHYSICAL PARABLE IN GIORGIO DE CHIRICO'S PAINTING

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Introduction

At the beginning of our century, at the same time that a radical critique was directed at metaphysics (as well as attempts to destroy it) by both Heidegger and Logical Positivism, new research on metaphysics came into being in art, in one of the most important currents or avant-gardes: Metaphysical Painting, of which de Chirico was the coryphaeus and principal representative. Metaphysics, the name or title of a discipline belonging to philosophic tradition, is now applied to an expressly conscious way of making art, or to that which we call artistic poetics, or aesthetics. Why this title? How does de Chirico's painting situate itself with respect to what we usually call metaphysics?

Two fundamental concepts are necessary in order to answer this question: 1) Enigma (embracing that which de Chirico calls "revelation") and 2) Melancholy.

Together they constitute the principal of his representation, that is, of the artist's way of painting that he calls Metaphysical Painting.

Like Dürer, de Chirico felt he was born under the sign of Saturn and therefore considered himself melancholic. He deemed melancholy a fundamental state of conciseness through which every man who looks upon the mystery of life, at the meaning and final objective of all of our suffering, hope, illusion and sorrow, must pass. Meditations such as these are what led Schopenhauer and Nietzsche to melancholy. De Chirico would later confess: "Schopenhauer and Nietzsche were the first to teach me the non-sense of life and how such non-sense could be transmuted in art."¹ In this careful consideration on the meaning of existence, the artist fleetingly grasps a revelation of this "sense", which remains an enigma and can only be represented as enigma.

¹ De Chirico, *Noi metafisici*, published in «Cronache d'attualità» Rome, February 15, 1919; in evident reference to Nietzsche, whose writings the artist read between 1909-1911; See *Il meccanismo del pensiero*, edited by M. Fagiolo dell'Arco, Turin, 1985, p. 68; later published in *Commedia dell'arte moderna*, edited by J. de Sanna, Abscondita, Milan, 2002, pp. 13-18.

Melancholy and Metaphysical Experience

In his most famous youthful self-portrait, *Portrait of the Artist by Himself*, painted in 1911, de Chirico represents himself in the same position as a portrait of Nietzsche, in which the author appears in a window frame with his chin resting in his hand, a classical melancholic pose. *Et quid amabo nisi quod aenigma est?* is written in capital block letters on the lower edge of the window frame. On the lower left side of the frame we find the initials G.C. with the artist's full name *Giorgio de Chirico* and the year 1908 written above.² The position the artist portrays himself in is the same pose that Nietzsche liked to be photographed in, and in which Schopenhauer is also portrayed: the pose of melancholy. The blue sky fades into a wavering green, while the strikingly noticeable aesthetics accentuate the predominant sense of sadness in the representation. Melancholy seems to express a fundamental aspect of philosophy: the contemplation of the world, which places us in front of the enigma. De Chirico's melancholy is none other than the love of mystery and the desire to go beyond appearance and the immediate look of things. But what can man know? What can he see within the obscure mystery of existence?

Portrait of Alberto Savinio serves as a testimony to the fact that Giorgio de Chirico had all of this in mind while making his initial theorizations on metaphysics. Even here, the figure is set in front of a window framing a landscape. His brother is wearing dark coloured clothes that are not typical bourgeois clothes, but rather a kind of theatrical costume with a lace collar that makes him look like Shakespeare's Hamlet, bringing to mind the fundamental question: To be or not to be. In addition to this, the world of myth (note the Centaur) and of classical Greece, seen in the landscape, are dominating features of the painting. This also indicates a Nietzschean melancholic state of being and preserves its fundamental ideas: the tragedy of existence that dwells behind the apparently serene essence of classical Greece, a tragedy that goes hand in hand with the primal question of classic metaphysics, of being or not being, or rather, – being and nothingness –.

Enigmatic Representation

When considered with respect to myth, the enigma theme in this period's representation is inevitably tied to the oracle: *The Enigma of the Oracle* of 1910. The tragic serenity of the Mediterranean world that we find represented in this painting seems to be the clearest transcription of the Nietzschean text.

The Enigma of the Oracle

At the front left-hand side of the painting, a silhouetted figure seen from behind stands wrapped in a dark cloak. A recurring motif in all the early metaphysical paintings, this figure reminds one not only of Ulysses in Böcklin's *Ulysses and Calypso* that de Chirico certainly had in mind, but also of a

² This is how the artist signed his work during the first years in Paris. The title of this painting was made known, as has been demonstrated, on the occasion of de Chirico's exhibition in Milan in 1921. At the *Salon d'Automne* in Paris the painting was dated 1911. These dates have been reconstructed by Ester Cohen in *Pensavo ai racconti omerici... Carrà - De Chirico* (pp. 103-42), and *Giorgio de Chirico* (pp. 143-314) in: *La Metafisica: Museo documentario*, catalogue of the exhibition in Palazzo Massari, Ferrara, Grafis Edizioni d'arte, Casalecchio di Reno, Bologna, 1981, pp. 155-56; see also P. Baldacci, *Giorgio de Chirico: The Metaphysical Period, 1888-1919*, trans. Jeffrey Jennings, Bulfinch, Boston, 1997.

figure that inspired Böcklin himself, Casper David Friedrich's *Monk by the Sea*. The face of the figure, whom some consider to be a woman, Pythia, while others believe to be Ulysses, is facing downward as if looking within themselves. A curtain is suspended in the opening on the left-hand side of the painting, which, lifted by the wind, allows one to see the Mediterranean landscape of hills above the sea, white houses and a clear sky, outlined by the silhouette of the figure whose face is turned downward. It could be that the woman is looking downward to admire the view, although we can not tell because the figure's back is turned to us. The figure's resemblance to figures in the other paintings we will be looking at, gives us the idea that the figure is, in fact, looking within themselves. We do not know whether the woman has just left the temple and is meditating on an answer she has received from the oracle, or if she is simply meditatively looking at the sea and scenery in front of her. Although in this representation we find the way that de Chirico intends the construction of the Greek temple: terraces like theatre stalls placed in front of great scenes of Nature in which "tragic serenity".

Now, we can ask ourselves: just what is the enigma of the oracle, or the enigmatic or metaphysical dimension of the image? It exists in the tension between two parts of the painting, namely, between the area that opens onto the seascape with the silhouetted figure that seems to be meditating on something within, and the dark area, dominated by the black curtain that covers the divinity statue, like the Veil of Maya. Is it not here, in the contrast between the clearness and luminosity of the world visible from the terrace at the entrance of the temple, and the dark curtain covering the statue of the god, that the enigma or profound metaphysical dimension of the oracle exists? This painting seems to be an actual transcription in paint of the famous Nietzschean metaphor in *The Birth of Tragedy* in which, when attempting to focus on the sun, we turn away due to the impossibility of sustaining such a vision and dark spots form before our eyes; similarly, if one were to look into the profundity of our being, which is the depth of nothingness, upon taking our eyes from such horror luminous white spots would appear. For Nietzsche, the white forms are the Apollonian figures imagined by the artist's soul, the plastic forms of the sculptor and painter that spring from a unique ability of the spirit, which otherwise, manifest themselves through dream. The figure, with back turned like Casper David Friedrich's monk, hovers between the two scenes, the temple's interior – or the artist's Self –, and its exterior, which is in direct contact with nature, the landscape, the sea and the sky. It constitutes the focal point between the two scenes and, in its meditative and inner-directed demeanour, reflecting upon itself, it incarnates the tension between the plastic artist's soul fulfilled by the sight of the Mediterranean seascape, and the metaphysician's soul that has looked, as an oracle would, upon the depths of nothingness and has managed to re-emerge so as to look upon the classical "superficiality of the Greeks" with satisfaction. The enigma of the oracle is therefore none other than the profound metaphysics of the tragedy of serenity.

The Enigma of Time

In this act of transcendency and careful consideration on human existence, time is an essential element (the same is true with regard to clairvoyance). But just what is counted time, the split second, the present fixed by the hands of the clock in the representation: what does its constant appearance within the image mean? Its presence is felt by de Chirico and he presents it to us like an enigma.

The Enigma of the Hour of 1911 shows a building with an arcade that doesn't seem to be inhabited. It could be a railway station or simply a construction whose purpose is none other than to delimit the scene. In the lower lodge, seen in profile, a man wrapped in a heavy overcoat seems to be walking along, while in front of the building on the left we see the silhouette of a woman wrapped in a long white robe who is turned towards the spectator but with her head lowered as if in inner thought. Once again we find the classical reflective pose of the introverted figure, a constant in all of de Chirico's early paintings and which, as we have already stated, is taken from the iconography of Caspar David Friedrich. This figure is placed in relation to the figure on the right, who might be waiting for a train. Up in the lodge there is another figure that is barely visible, like a dark spot against the background. Therefore, the human figure is seen in three different positions: from the front, the back and in profile. The three figures form a hypothetical triangle in the image. At the woman's side a fountain is open on the ground like a tomb; this too is another oft-recurring theme.

Why then the enigma of the hour? The enigma does not derive from the fact that the clock marks 2:55 p.m. and the shadows cast by the building and the woman, appear to correspond, due to the colour of the light, to late afternoon or twilight. So, in what does the enigma of the hour consist? Could it reside in the triangle formed by the three figures, since the triangle is, like the square ruler, an enigmatic figure for de Chirico? Or could it be that the human figure turns upon itself, since we see it frontally, in profile and from the back, like the arms turning on a clock, thus signifying a circular dimension of time, rather than a linear one?

The enigma is one and the same with the metaphysical dimension of time, or the metaphysical dimension of the hour, a present that is not time running between past and future, but rather a fullness of time that high noon represented for Nietzsche. Time marked by the wheels of the clock, the fleeting moment, does not correspond to the real duration of time, as Bergson was demonstrating in those years. The hands of the clock do not represent the real time of these human figures looking within themselves, the empty time, like the time spent in a railway station, time which is flattened by the arrival of the train on one side and the striking of the clock on the other. It is a moment in which the woman's inner observation belongs to the real duration of the shadows cast by the late-afternoon light and represents moreover, the enigma of the hour, the true circling and returning of full time into itself, with respect to the figure that paces up and down and whose movement represents only empty, linear time. As a metaphysical-enigmatic dimension, the enigma of the hour seems to prefigure Heidegger's analysis regarding that which is at the base of every theory of metaphysics, in particular Greek metaphysics: the presence of the being. As a primal form *time* is basic to the question on the meaning of existence, not as a simple presence belonging to the *being* and around which it flows, but as a fundamental presence due to our action of anticipating the future. In fact, in this painting we find another essential motif with regard to the existential-phenomenological analysis of the question on time, as the awareness of being: the fountain open like a tomb in front of the building with the clock. De Chirico too, envisioned the perspective of death as anticipation to the totality of our future and its ultimate limit in which the totality of our being – the fullness of time – unfolds. It is in "being for death", as Heidegger described it, namely, a fundamental ecstatic dimension of temporality, in which our authentic sense of being unfolds.

The Enigma of the Poet. The Space and Aesthetics of Metaphysics

Executed shortly afterwards *The Delights of the Poet* of 1913 is a painting dense with lyricism. Due to its perspective setting the fountain has a trapezoidal form that is the typical shape of a sarcophagus. Here too, we find a building with a clock marking time in the back ground and the white silhouette of a woman on the right. Just what are the pleasures to be had in this completely empty scene? It is typical piazza with a railway station, delimited by a building with porticoes and a clock that reads two o'clock in the afternoon. A train can be seen puffing behind the wall. Barely perceptible on the right is the wispy white-clothed figure of a woman who looks more like a ghost or statue than a human being. Rather than vanquishing the solitude and the melancholy of the empty piazza, this figure accentuates this feeling. Open in the centre of the empty piazza, the sarcophagus-fountain – a clear and lively portent of death – is a threatening element. Hence, where does the poetry of the painting reside? It is found in the way the space of the piazza is divided and enclosed by the arcades that mark the shadows and tune the colours. The architecture of the piazza, the primal aesthetical construction of lived-in space, is where the poetry of de Chirico's paintings exists: the delights of the poet. Indeed, de Chirico's writes: "The absolute awareness of the space an object must occupy in a painting, as well as the space that separates the objects, establish a new astronomy of things attached to the planet by means of the fatal law of gravity. The meticulously accurate and prudently calculated use of surfaces and volumes constitutes the aesthetics of metaphysics".³

Therefore, this metaphysical dimension is not a purely plastic dimension, even though it manifests itself aesthetically, namely as a collection of architectural principals pertaining to the piazzas and the cities of Italy. By this, what de Chirico means is that the signs themselves model and give life to this metaphysical dimension: the way in which such metaphysical depth is organised is nothing but aesthetics, and consequently, the aesthetics of metaphysics. According to him, the Greeks knew how to model the lived-in and experienced space in a way that was non-plastic, a way that was, in fact, aesthetical: "it is in the city's construction, in the architectural shape of the houses, piazzas, gardens and public passages, the ports and railway stations etc. that the foundations of great metaphysics reside. The Greeks, guided by an aesthetic-philosophic sense, regarded such constructions with a certain scruple: the porticoes, the shaded walkways and terraces raised like theatre stalls in front of Nature's great scenes (Homer, Aeschylus), the tragic serenity".

According to de Chirico, the aesthetics of metaphysics comes into being as the result of a lyric sentiment that models space and constitutes the architectural poetry of the city and its piazzas, of the presence of the human in space. This occurs by means of the signs in the de-"sign" that coordinate and give the space life, and in doing so achieve more than simple architectural principles: as aesthetic elements they give form to our world and thus give form to our life and our very civilization. "For us, these signs constitute a kind of moral and aesthetic code in our representations; furthermore, with our clairvoyance we construct a new metaphysical psychology of things in paint". This, of course, is the meaning of Greek

³ See *Il meccanismo del pensiero*, cit., p. 88. This passage is extremely important although it hasn't been sufficiently taken into consideration by scholars. It shows that the author had a wider knowledge of German philosophy than Schopenhauer and Nietzsche who are commonly cited and that his acquaintance with Kant e Schiller should also be considered.

identity with regard to “beauty” and “good” and constitutes their aesthetic approach to the world, or to be more precise the fact that beauty, or the *aesthesis* of beauty, was the principle of Greek civilization. Therefore, the aesthetics of metaphysics connotes metaphysical architecture, which is also referred to as architectural poetics. But not the simple lyricism that results from the poignant perception of a geometrically moulded structure of a piazza, but actually the very *poiesis*, or the “making” of the painter as he achieves in pictorial space the architectural space that he himself has perceived as lyrical and which has formed the object of his own *aesthesis*. We can now distinguish between the aesthetic aspect of metaphysics and the poetics of metaphysics that here, is to be understood as the *poiesis* of artistic activity, which de Chirico calls “architectural poetics”. This poetics is not limited simply to the architectural poetics of the Italian piazza and does not construct or schematize the metaphysical dimension of space and time, but rather, the metaphysical dimension of human existence, of life and history. It regards themes such as anguish, the unconscious moments of our existence and dream, also understood as revealing and premonitory of the future and destiny. But all of this brings us back to de Chirico’s melancholy, to a point where we can consider his architectural poetics the result of this melancholy.

Ariadne and Melancholy

In one of the first works painted in Paris in 1912, now part of the Estorick collection, in a dark piazza illuminated slightly by the light of a sun that has already set, we find a statue of a woman wrapped in a large tunic, lying on a low pedestal. According to Soby, de Chirico made a plaster model of Ariadne to copy from.⁴ Although the rather rudimentary model can surely be linked to certain paintings such as *The Lassitude of the Infinite*, it can not be linked to this painting or successive paintings. Therefore, the scholars who believe that this Ariadne derives from Reinach’s Ariadne seem to be correct.⁵ The title of the painting in Latin *Melanconia* is inscribed in capital block letters on the pedestal. The statue is situated in front of a grey building that is totally immersed in shade, of which we see three archways and an upper floor that is a dark red colour due to the dusk. Three windows on the upper level are closed and are represented as black rectangles. The overall look of the building reminds one of Böcklin’s *Three Arcades with a View onto a Landscape* (1872). The building, which occupies over three-quarters of the background, casts a dark shadow near Ariadne. On the left-hand side of the image there is the grey arcade of a lodge; it is the corner of a building of which nothing else is visible. Through this archway we see the all-but-empty space in the background in which a wall is perceived, or a faraway hill marking the horizon (a memory of the hills of Turin). A faint light filters through the space between the corners of these two buildings, in which two distant figures, a man and a woman with a long dress, cast long thin shadows. But the protagonist of the

⁴ See J. Thrall Soby, *Giorgio de Chirico*, 2^a ed. MoMA, New York, 1966, pp. 55 and 61; Soby compares this Ariadne with a Greek statue in the Vatican Museums, p. 61. This would be the only statue of Chirico made in Paris before 1939-40, cf. P. Baldacci, *Giorgio de Chirico e la scultura*, in: AA.VV., *De Chirico, le sculture del Centenario*, Allemandi, Turin, 1995, pp. 7-35.

⁵ See M. Fagiolo dell’Arco, *De Chirico. Gli anni '20*, Exhibition catalogue Verona, Palazzo Forti and Galleria dello Scudo, December 14, 1986 - January 31, 1987; Milan, Palazzo Reale, March 7 - Aprile 18, 1987, Electa, Milan, 1987; in which Salomon Reinach’s (1858-1932) model of Ariadne from *Répertoire de la statuaire grecque et romaine* is reproduced in Baldacci’s article *De Pisis da de Chirico, gli anni '20*, pp. 27-31. Cf. L. Lecci in the Cremona exhibition catalogue, *Il Grande Metafisico. Giorgio de Chirico Scultore*, edited by F. Ragazzi, Electa, Milan, 2004, p. 72.

painting is another: it is an invisible human figure hidden behind the pilaster on the left-hand side, of which we see the long shadow falling parallel to the heavy shadow of the statue. Who is this invisible spectator? It is the painter himself, Giorgio de Chirico, who in 1912 is wandering about in an Italian piazza while his mother and brother (the small figures in the background) wait for him in Paris. He is alone and overcome by melancholy, which is condensed in the classical statue in front of him. Is this an outer mirror to his inner soul? And is this piazza actually the mirror of his painter soul, ruminating on Böcklin and the torment of the painter, to a point where his external self is none other than a shadow of his inner self?

A later painting may give us a clue to who the invisible spectator might be: *The Melancholy of a Beautiful Day* of 1912-13. The scene is the same, even if in this painting there is a lot more light, which enters the scene from right to left (this is the direction in which the shadows fall, which is the opposite direction of those in the other painting). The two small figures are no longer present, but the figure hidden by the archway is: it is again the figure from the enigma of the oracle, with its head lowered and gaze directed within himself; the clairvoyant, or the artist, or philosopher Heraclitus-Nietzsche-de Chirico, who looks neither at the wall nor into the distance, nor to the statue on its right. Everything that is to be seen is seen within, as his melancholy, which is materializing in this moment. Or better, he looks within himself in order to set the revelation which will be made into a representation. Soon, it will be night and he will be nothing but a mute shadow, witness to the spectacle of his own melancholy. Yet within this solitude – which is the solitude described to us by Nietzsche that regards the inner state of the soul, the discussion with oneself –, the wonderful colours of an autumn sunset manage to create a space continuously pulled between illusion and the construction of reality, taking one outside the painting to where the musicality of colour and the continuous recurrence of signs and marks reign, in the purest sense of modern art. Very similar to this painting is *The Joys and Enigmas of a Strange Hour* (1913). We did not hear of enigmas in the other titles of this subject; here the enigma is consciously associated with Ariadne, or to melancholy, like in the self portrait of 1911 *Et quid amabo nisi quod enigma est?* A red tower with no windows reigns behind the statue of Ariadne, while beside her there is a fortress wall with a big tower. Behind this wall there is an unmoving train, the smokestack of which spits out a cloud of vapour. In the distance where the long arcade reaches almost to the horizon, two slender figures talking to one another cast thick shadows. Has someone gone to collect a relative at this unreal station with a red Baroque tower? It is evening, but an unreal light illuminates the red tower and the lodge that looks like a theatre stage-set in front of a red curtain. The light is, in fact, stage lighting or that of a dark room and the flooring of the scene is the colour of the desert. The wall attached to the tower has something strange about it: it should be the surrounding wall of the fortress-station, but the buttresses are on the outside instead of being hidden on the inside. Therefore we don't know where we are: on the inside or on the outside of the station. Are we in France and is this the tower of the train station where de Chirico arrived and was picked up by his brother Andrea, or are we still in Italy⁶, while his mother

⁶ On the origin of the red tower, M. Calvesi proposed that it refers to a tower in Faenza or Bologna, seen through Dino Campana's *Canti Orfici*, or as theatre scenography as shown in the review by C.A. Quintavalle at the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna in «Panorama» 7/12/1981; see M. Calvesi *La metafisi-*

and brother wait for him in Paris?⁷ Or is de Chirico mixing departures with arrivals due to the joy of the thought of seeing his brother again and is it this that the enigma consists of? What can be done with the statue of Ariadne, of the melancholy placed in the forefront? The enigma or enigmas must carry a more profound meaning than the simple mixing of inside-outside, departure-arrival and reality-fiction (stage-set). The tower with the train, or the station, are in fact, the voyage and the voyage is Ariadne, because Ariadne is a labyrinth in which one risks getting lost and into which one enters as if on a voyage. Another painting executed the same year says as much: *The Anxious Journey* in which we see a train behind a labyrinth made of lodges and concentric archways, giving us the impression of getting lost as if they open in front of us in order to swallow us up.⁸ Thus, Ariadne as melancholy, is a generator of anguish.

Melancholy and Anguish

It may be that the theme of anguish is nothing but an elaboration on the theme of melancholy and represents an aspect of development in the artist's pictorial evolution. As we have already seen, melancholy mixes with nostalgia, and uneasiness can give rise to departure and to a voyage, while anguish enmeshes us completely, swallowing us in its formidable sensation of emptiness. Proof of this hypothesis can be found in the painting *Mystery and Melancholy of a Street* of 1914, which has been seen as representing anguish more than any other work. Although the mystery and melancholy it refers to is found outside the architectural and stylistic motifs that have dominated the images with Ariadne so far. The wall on the right is a shade of white that has nothing to do with the light that reverberates on it, but emanates its own light while all around is darkness. The sky in the background is extremely dark; its green colour rises gradually to grey, blue and black, indicating the depth of cosmic space. The piazza is not closed by a lodge or a wall marking the horizon; the horizon is reached by passing through the deep gorge formed by the building that runs to infinity on the left and the shadow on the right. The space at the back of the painting reaches us through this narrow chasm, which is ready to swallow us up.

ca scbiarita, Feltrinelli, Milan, 1982, pp. 76-79. Baldacci's identification with the Cecilia Metella funeral tower in Rome is more convincing, op. cit., 1997.

⁷ The identification of these two slight figures lost in the distance, present in many paintings of this period, is problematic. In the first metaphysical painting, *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon*, the two small figures to the right of the fountain can be clearly identified as the mother and brother of the painter who cry over his death, in front of the decapitated statue; cf. the interpretation of this painting in my article R. Dottori, *La nascita della Metafisica. Enigma di un pomeriggio d'autunno*, in *De Chirico, Metafisica del tempo*, edited by J. de Sanna, Ediciones Xavier Verstraeten, Buenos Aires 2000, pp. 63-82. These two figures can be seen as basic to successive small figures, which however, are difficult to distinguish if they are male or female. Given the melancholy that dominated the painter during the ten days spent in Turin for his military service and the consequent nostalgia for his mother and brother who were in Paris, both eventualities are possible. A male figure and a female figure are clearly identifiable in the painting already mentioned *Melanconia*. In the same catalogue, of which she is the editor, de Sanna put forth a different interpretation in her article *Analisi della forma III. Tempi. Iconografia*, pp. 23-52. In the two figures that greet each other in this painting, she sees de Chirico as being with his brother or a friend, reminding one of the influence Friedrich Nietzsche had on him in the formulation of Metaphysical Painting, derived from de Chirico's narration to Pikionis; cf. p. 33; or as a sign of social utopia, an element present, although not fundamental, in Metaphysical Painting; cf. pp. 30-31; It would be better to link this couple to the two Argonauts that greet each other in the painting *The Departure of the Argonauts* of 1909, thus the painting in question would allude to departure. However, such is not the case with regard to the two figures in all the other paintings.

⁸ I feel that to interpret this painting, based on its title, is a simplification if regarded only with respect to the risky trip de Chirico took from Turin to Paris in March 1912 to escape his military service, as Baldacci does, op. cit., 1997, p. 178, without looking at the anguish emanating from the labyrinth of archways that lean menacingly forward with a sharp corner facing us, almost obliging one to turn one way or the other; Soby, on the other hand, sees it as a clear description of a anguish-filled nightmare that can not be understood without a psychoanalytic description, cf. Soby, op. cit., p. 65; Rubin gives a different interpretation, considering it from a simple stylistic point of view, as proof of modernity against his pretext of classicism.

In addition to the elements that this painting has in common with other paintings, there is a yellow wagon with its doors open in the shaded area in the foreground, which is also ready to swallow us up, or swallow up the girl running toward it with her hoop. As Soby has rightfully remarked, the girl has no intention of reaching the wagon, but only to pass alongside of it in order to gain the sunny area.⁹ But the force of attraction the dark area holds for the girl, a mere shadow herself, is enormous and Soby admits that if the girl were to actually reach the sunny area, she would dissolve, as she is nothing but a shadow or ghost herself. Another menacing shadow, of a man and a cane, or possibly of a statue, projects itself on the plane. Who is it? Is this the mystery announced in the title? Is this the melancholy of an autumn Sunday afternoon in London that de Chirico read of in Jules Verne and could the shadow of the man with a cane be that of Phileas Fogg, as he strolls around London? It suffices to read de Chirico's words to think so: "Who better than he, knew how to capture the metaphysics of a city like London, its houses, its streets, its clubs, piazzas and squares. The spectral atmosphere of a Sunday afternoon in London, the melancholy of a man, a walking phantasm, as Phileas Fogg appears in *Around the World in 80 Days*?"¹⁰ The mystery suggested in these lines is the same as the spectral aspect of what de Chirico calls the x-rays of metaphysical vision.¹¹ In this spectrality, things lose their real consistence and the world slips away and is lost in nothingness, as shown by the well-known analyses of anguish by Kierkegaard and Heidegger. This suffices to conclude that the passage from melancholy to anguish is what is represented in this painting. In fact, melancholy draws us into a state of being where things appear spectrally, like the melancholy of Leopardi's Sunday afternoons dominated by "sadness and boredom". The spectral aspect evoked through melancholy, which as we have already seen is the sense of a lack of meaning in life, ends up drawing us into a new state of being, which as Heidegger has shown is not a question of mere atmosphere or Stimmung, as de Chirico will also call it, but an essential condition of our existence: anguish, which allows us to access the truth of being. Similarly, in de Chirico anguish removes things from their apparent solid stance and projects them onto a plane of spectral reality, which is the metaphysical plane of nothingness. By removing the human figure on one hand, while showing the interior drama of his thought process, of melancholy and anguish by way of signs (the fountain, the archway, the statue) de Chirico reaches a level of awareness with regard to his capacity to manifest his inner drama and thought process by renouncing the classic structure of representation and by releasing the elements he uses from their natural relationships in order to make them stand alone, like icons, in a world that is now apparently disconnected, in which the new meaning does not reside in convention or in nature but in the new connection the artist sees them in, which on one hand reveals and on the other hides, the transformed universe that his representation makes evident to him.

⁹ See J. Thrall Soby, cit., pp. 73-74. Soby is of the opinion that de Chirico was quoting Seurat's *Un dimanche après-midi à la Grande Jatte* (Soby certainly inspired Rubin in this regard), even if the circle is not seen here, the girl's pose and direction are the same. According to Soby, such a quote shows us that de Chirico was one of the first to grasp the hallucinatory force in Seurat's paintings and the fact that they catch that instant preceding their dissolution, or death. Regarding the extraordinary presence of such an image in ancient statues and Calvesi's interpretation see n. 18.

¹⁰ See *Sull'arte metafisica*, published in *Valori Plastici*, year 1, n. 4-5, April-May 1919, four years after this painting was painted. See *Il meccanismo del pensiero*, cit., p. 83; republished in *Commedia dell'arte moderna*, cit., pp. 26-30.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 85-86: "It can be deduced that every thing has two aspects: a usual one that we see most of the time, and that men in general see, and another that is spectral or metaphysical and that only rare individuals in particular moments of clairvoyance and metaphysical abstraction can see, like certain materials that can not be penetrated by the sun's rays but only by an artificial light such as the X ray".

Solitude and Sign

In fact, de Chirico is convinced that there are two different dimensions of things: the first, a plastic solitude that precedes human presence like the world in the Tertiary Period, and a second that pertains to what he calls “the second life of *natura morta*” or “still-life”, namely a particular quality “of things” which, according to de Chirico can be found in certain works by Böcklin or Poussin, in which a plastic form that does not pertain to life and to human consciousness exists. Then there is “authentic solitude” or “metaphysical solitude”, which is the solitude of signs and is not an aesthetical dimension but is simply plastic. De Chirico states categorically: “something from which all possible logic relating to visual or psychic education is excluded a priori”. As well as: “As far as its appearance is concerned, metaphysical artwork seems to be serene; yet, it gives the impression that something new is about to happen in that very serenity and that other lines, beside those manifest, are about to enter into the rectangle of the canvas. Such is the revealing symptom of ‘inhabited profundity’.”

“Metaphysical solitude” in which all possible logic is missing, signifies that the signs, like oracle sayings, can only be picked up by means of an almost divinatory ability that has nothing to do with the laws of logic and that we can identify as an ability pertaining to the diviner-artist.¹² Seen in this way, the signs risk losing the specific characteristic of “sign” and become simple fragments of reality, or worse, fragments of psychic reality that present themselves in an association that is free, in which all connection between them is missing. This is why he speaks of the “solitude of signs”. The only meaning these “solitary signs” seem to hold is that of an oneiric association, which is how Surrealism interpreted de Chirico and how he is, still today, interpreted in psychoanalytical aesthetics, although we know that de Chirico was against assigning the dream a guiding role in the ideation of his work.¹³

Let us consider a striking painting of 1914, *The Philosopher's Conquest*, the iconography of which is complicated by a weaving and crossing over of signs that is not easy to untangle. What does it all mean? In the forefront of the painting the artichokes are the materialisation of anguish, positioned as they are on an ochre coloured stereometric cube (like a sign of metaphysical strength). Directly behind them on the left-hand side of the painting, a canon barrel and two cannon balls sit on a white parallelepiped. The year is 1914 and anguish looms for the imminent World War. On the right we find the typical archway that has an enormous clock sticking out like a sign that reads 1:28 p.m. The anguish for the imminent war amplifies the meaning of the hour on the clock, which dominates the scene and the hour is probably the hour of departure. Behind the wall in the background there is a train and a thick cloud of white smoke and two smokestacks between which a double-masted boat

¹² With regard to the sign losing its significance, Calvesi concludes by saying that the signs that remain in the composition denote a complete loss of meaning in the world, in the sense of Nietzsche's extreme nihilism. However, the signs are, inasmuch as eternal signs, the signs by which the clairvoyant arrives at an understanding of metaphysical reality. Here again, we find Heraclitus at the bottom of the “meaning of sign”. Calvesi has since re-adjusted this position, having understood that these signs are magic symbols that derive from Hermetics; cf. his article in the exhibition catalogue *De Chirico nel centenario della morte*, Venice, Museo Correr, 1988-1989, Mondadori-De Luca, Milan-Rome, 1988, pp. 9-33.

¹³ See *Sull'arte metafisica* of 1919 published in *Valori Plastici*, republished in *Il meccanismo del pensiero*, cit., p. 83 and in *Commedia dell'Arte Moderna*, cit., p. 26; which begins: “A continual observation of our thoughts and of those images that appear in our mind even when we are awake, but which are closely related to that which we see while dreaming, is needed. It is interesting that in dreams, no image, as strange as it might seem, strikes us for its metaphysical force and this is why we avoid looking to the dream as a source of creativity. Thomas de Quincey's methods do not interest us.”

with open sails, departs. Between the archway and the wall we see the slender shadows of two figures. Once more, they are the artist's mother and brother that he met up with upon arriving in Paris by train and who he might have to leave again, and a flag pole atop of which a flag nervously flaps, like a comment on the artist's state of being. Only by taking the painting in all at once with the elements that compose it, do we grasp the metaphysical depth or "inhabited profundity" of which the author speaks: space, time, light and life, the scope of one's inner conflicts and inner strengths, the obscure or luminous relationships of one's anguish and one's victories.

In the painting *The Uncertainty of the Poet* of 1913, there is a branch of ripe bananas and a white marble torso of a woman. The statue (which for Nietzsche is an Apollonian figure) is poised between past and future. It is not only a relic from the past, a fragment conserved for historic memory, but stands as a strong example of the ideal present exemplified by the puffing train. The time elapsed between the hour of the classical ideal and the present is condensed in the grey shadow of the building that embodies the history of civilization, which resides in the archway and the emptiness it brings to mind: an arc of space that corresponds to an arc of time, a skeleton of time that opens upon the void of an anguishing presence... or absence? Beyond the shadow and nightmare of the grey building, in the light of inspiration and song, two possibilities are given to the poet: the sweet, fascinating and exuberant exotic fruit and the hard, perplexing classical statue, which nevertheless shines with all the splendour and distinctness of marble, documenting a buried, yet rediscovered humanity. The two faces of the Apollonic and the Dionysian are symbolized, the double root of artistic activity that gives rise to the incertitude of the poet. It is thus that de Chirico speaks of his symbolisms in a 1913 consideration on metaphysics, entitled *A Vacation*: "[...] The archway is here to stay [...] The statue, the insignificant statue had to be raised. [...] Trains that pass. Enigma. The happiness of the banana (tree): luxurious ripe fruit, golden and sweet".

This celebration of classical serenity that gives rise to uncertainty in the poet is the secret and metaphysical depth of another enigmatic work of 1913, *The Transformed Dream*. The scene is the same: a space closed on the right by a typical building casting a dark shadow and a brick wall in the background behind which a puffing train passes. On a pedestal in the forefront there are two bunches of bananas and two pineapples with typical geometric shadows, and a plaster cast of a Greek sculpture of the head of Jupiter. Of course, de Chirico does not stop at the symbolic-enigmatic representation of the Apollonic-Dionysian theme; this is not the theme of the poet, the metaphysical dimension that the poet, the true artist, as well as the philosopher, manages to see or enjoy in reality.

Revelation is the ultimate meaning of de Chirico's concept of artwork and is achieved clearly in the most sublime of his paintings, *The Song of Love*. Let us take a look at the composition of this work which, with regard to the intensity of the enigmatic "speech" it achieves through absolute simplicity, possibly makes it the most beautiful of the metaphysical paintings. Here, it is as if de Chirico strove to reproduce with extreme precision and detailed realism that which Soby calls "disruption", a perturbation of reality which follows a kind of counter-logic.¹⁴ This observation comes close to Magritte's

¹⁴ See J. Thrall Soby, op. cit., pp. 76-77. Soby speaks of the drama of the still-lives, whose impact derives from the assortment of disparate elements that provoke a feeling of shock or surprise, as Apollinaire had noted. To this he adds: "What causes the disruption of conventional reality that is so remark-

affirmation that upon seeing the painting he declared that he had seen *thought itself*.¹⁵ As thought can never be seen, even Magritte's affirmation has some counter-logic to it. But can this counter-logic enable us to understand something, or rather, can it make us see something, in this case, *thought?* In what does this counter-logic consist? It has to do with the fact that the plaster cast is attached to an outer wall instead of being kept within the building, and especially due to the fact that it is enormous, as big as the building itself. The same is true for the glove hanging on the same wall instead of hanging in a kitchen¹⁶, or in a delivery room like a midwife's glove¹⁷. But the most disturbing aspect seems to be the coupling of an everyday object, an item used by housewives, with the bust of a divinity sculpted by an artist. A further element of alienation is found in the position of the green ball: what is it sitting on? Is it a parapet? Or a table, in the middle of an empty room in Paris?

We know from other paintings that the glove is associated with destiny: this is the message it carries. We can call the glove an icon of destiny and the bust an icon of life's beauty and the totality of Art that it represents.¹⁸ The icon's appearance can vary, as well as its force as a sign within the image. It is not without intention that the glove is hanging lower than the plaster cast bust, carrying our gaze downward inasmuch as it represents chance, happenstance, and causality, which are necessary parts of fate. It brings us back to earth, to day-to-day existence and carries with it a trace of its "frightfulness". It amplifies the dissonance with the classical beauty of the bust. In the third icon of the painting, the earth is present once more: the ball¹⁹, whose immediate reference is to a child's game, whereas its inner significance carries us in the direction of the cosmic game, driving us once more to embrace existence and to look above, toward the eternal beauty of the bust of Apollo. The triangle these icons form cause us to look continually from one to the other, from down low to up high, from above to below. The train on the left is the last icon: its meaning, the voyage; of directing oneself to a destination and following a goal. It runs parallel to the secret of existence: love, the theme of the song. The continuous running after a goal is what makes us turn with the world as it spins. It is also

able in *The Song of Love* is the fact that it is regulated by a foundation of severe plastic discipline. The counter-logic of the young Italian artist's iconography has been imitated by many painters, but rarely with such conviction as to be comparable."

¹⁵ Magritte saw a reproduction of the painting in *Les Feuilles Libres*; See M. Fagiolo dell'Arco, 1984, p. 91.

¹⁶ Calvesi sees the origin of this painting in an etching *The Alchemist's Laboratory in Voarchadumia contra Alchimia*, 1530, of the Hermetic Tradition, in which a glove is hanging on the wall of an alchemist's laboratory and a plaster cast of a person's face, probably that of an alchemist, is on the fireplace. See his theory on de Chirico's familiarity with Hermetic texts and the reproduction of this etching in the exhibition catalogue *De Chirico nel Centenario della nascita*, pp. 14-15. But even imagining that the artist knew of this work, it does not help us in interpreting the painting. With regard to the glove motif as a depiction of destiny, see *The Projects of the Young Girl*, 1916.

¹⁷ This is the interpretation given by Baldacci based on Apollinaire's statement in *Paris-Journal* July 4, 1914. See Baldacci, op. cit., 1997. It is necessary to take into consideration another of Apollinaire's writings (unsigned) dated May 24, 1914: "Recently Mr. de Chirico has dedicated himself to painting signs, for art galleries as well as for midwives" In the July 4th article there is no mention of signs for midwives, but it speaks only of *le gant rose*, the pink glove which gives the painting its subject. Is it really the midwife's glove? In the passage that Baldacci makes reference to, the glove is referred to simply as a "horrible item" and that is all. Therefore one must ask, is this the glove of a midwife? And is it truly to be placed in reference to de Chirico's birthday and thus his birth derives from a midwife's glove? One could assume so, but the text certainly doesn't tell us as much. More simply, M. Fagiolo dell'Arco limits himself to reporting this text as an indication of a new iconographic motif without putting it in relation with signs for midwives and without giving it this interpretation.

¹⁸ Soby is also of the opinion that even here the glove is tied to destiny, as in other instances in which it appears. See Soby, op. cit., pp. 75-76. (This theme derives above all from Max Klinger's series of drawings in which the glove is a protagonist; de Chirico's text on this artist is well-known). Baldacci's interpretation of the glove representing a midwife's glove, alluding to de Chirico's birth, and the Apollo, to a poet and artist, thus suggesting the painter himself, and that the painting was composed purposely in order to celebrate the artist's birthday is unacceptable for the previously stated reasons. Such interpretation takes all the expressive force from the painting, downgrading it to banality, and debases it even more by referring, as he suggests, to the archways as a symbol of the female vagina and the train as the male sex.

¹⁹ This identification with the earth seems to be dictated, in addition to the lines traced upon it, also by the lenses in *The Serenity of the Sage* (1914) for their compactness and colour that changes from green into ochre, the colour of the earth and the desert.

the eternal game hidden within, the intimate motif that moves the world and its authentic motive: the love of beauty. In representing beauty Art sings this love and in doing so, justifies the eternal pointlessness of our existence.

The painting's beauty consists in the realization of the representation of thought, in this case love, without descending into kitsch or banality. But we must not take this as conceptual art; de Chirico's representation is not founded on thought, even if its counter-logic has a certain inner logic. And we must not forget what Soby said: many have tried to imitate de Chirico's counter-logic in representation, but few have managed to do so with such conviction as he. The counter-logic in which the painting's secret charm resides is not founded on thought, but on something de Chirico calls revelation. The artist distinguishes between revelation and inspiration, affirming that inspiration is the work of men of great genius and is inexplicable without God's gift or "the grace that God concedes to someone chosen by Him as an instrument to disclose to men the expression of universal Talent". Revelation, on the other hand, is a phenomenon that is not linked to a superior talent but is an intuition or vision that precedes the work of art and its execution: "The moment in which man has a revelation can be defined as the moment in which he manages to perceive the existence of a world beyond that which is known to the human spirit. It is a world that human logic can not conceive and that does not exist for mortals [...]. This metaphysical world, which for us is inexistent, in other words, this world completely outside of experience and the concepts of the human mind and of which our mind perceives nothing, is the world that Nietzsche and Hölderlin made us see in certain poems and writings. Böcklin, Max Klinger, Previati, Picasso and Giorgio de Chirico have shown this world in painting in certain works of theirs. It regards an inexplicable world that intelligence can only sense through intuition but can not understand with logic. A painting executed by a painter after a revelation has occurred shows us the appearance of a world unbeknownst to us and strange. The making of such a painting could merely consist in a correct scheme, as the value of such a painting does not consist in its painterly quality, but in its spiritual content."²⁰

Conclusion

It is a question of looking at the world, not only the external world, but also the human world and the human subject itself, although doing so *independently* from the human subject. But is this possible? Rather, how is this possible? In a text written during this period de Chirico states: "It is necessary that thought break completely away from everything that is called logic and sense, and distant itself from all human affairs, in order *for things* to appear with a new aspect, as if illuminated by a constellation that shines for the first time." It seems that what de Chirico refuses of the man-subject is what philosophy and metaphysics saw as man's essential prerogative: logic and sense, which give form to reason, that is, the ultimate meaning of things, life and the universe. How is it possible to remove oneself from all of this, he asked himself. How can man do without his peculiar way of reasoning and of seeing things?

²⁰ This is what de Chirico tells us in his later writings of the 1940s that are collected in the book *Commedia dell'arte moderna*, 1945 (2^o ed. op. cit., pp. 159) attributed to his wife, Isabella Far; republished in *Il meccanismo del pensiero*, cit., pp. 403-404.

What he was thinking of rather, is a complete surpassing of the idea of the subject in the classical meaning of the term, of the human subject that had been a fundamental instance of all philosophical-metaphysical thought, as well as all artistic production and every poetical vision of the world. Like Nietzsche who thought of a superman, and of a "beyond the human", de Chirico, following in his footsteps, thought along the lines of a "beyond the painting", and in doing so anticipated by twenty years Heidegger's radical criticism of the subjectivity of modern thought. In the years 1911-13 de Chirico already tells us: "What is especially needed is great sensitivity: to look upon everything in world as enigma, not only the big questions that one has always asked, why the world was created, why we are born, live and die, because it could be, as I have already said, that in all of this there is no reason at all. But to understand the enigma of certain things that are generally considered as insignificant. To feel the mystery of certain phenomena, the sentiments, the characteristics of a People, to a point where even genius creators are considered as things, very strange things that we turn around to see every side of. To live in the world as in a museum of strange things, full of strange colourful toys that change their aspect and that sometimes, like children, we break to see what they are made of and disappointingly find that they are empty."²¹

It is clear now that it is not simply a question of leaving oneself, but of going beyond oneself, which is clearly an action of going into oneself, just as it is clear that the reflection of the human subject within itself is intended as a looking within the human silhouette, as with the oracle's prophesy, the dream, or the state of unease or extreme tension that precedes revelation. Therefore, the human silhouette after having looked into itself, into its inner world, and after having discovered and then disposed of the statuesque mask of classical beauty, which is similar to the paralysing of time and to death, has ended up freeing primal urges that rather than placating the metaphysical disquiet they augment it, to an extreme limit where the subject doesn't recognize itself in anything but the anonymous mask or in the loss of the self. In *The Masks* (1918), is an oval and an empty head in which the enigmatic figure of a triangle marks a figure oscillating on the depths of nothingness. The Homeric humanity of *Hector and Andromaca* (of which many drawings, paintings and bronze statues were made from 1917 on) is reduced to a grouping (of great plastic value, at any rate) of ovals, squares and sticks that manage to express through a human model or *double*, the melancholy of the separation and the suffering of the defeated soul. The human silhouette has found in themselves this dense piecework of gears, of squares, geometry and the mechanics of present time, which have become an integral part, the body, soul and blood of contemporary humanity: a humanity in which de Chirico recognises himself and declares his legitimate self-portraiture or will to represent himself.

In his way of representing the tragic serenity of the Greek world, as well as in his will to grasp the "going beyond" of the all-too-human dimension, de Chirico is Nietzschean, although he no longer is with regard to the triumphal acceptance of this machine civilization as a result or epilogue of historic outcome (such is Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche in which the machine is seen as a teacher and the triumph of technology as the extreme realization of the desire for power, although

²¹ See *Ibid.*, *Testi teorici e lirici*, pp. 17-18.

the problem is whether Nietzsche actually interpreted the desire for power as science and technology, or rather, as art). The triumph of technology is not what is celebrated in this, but the anonymity of the self. Therefore the famous *The Disquieting Muse* of 1917 in which the mannequins and a statue inhabit a piazza in Ferrara with the Estense Castle in the background, with a pavement of wooden boards that makes the piazza look like the inside of a tailor's shop or like a ship's deck, is nothing other than the hallucinatory projection of an interior or of the artist's nightmares into one of his most famous *Italian Piazzas*, the one in which he was living at the time. With regard to the *Italian Piazzas* and the artist's melancholy, this oneiric superimposing creates a contrast that is much stronger and obsessive than the industrial chimneys and towers of the first metaphysical paintings.

The solemn silhouette seen from behind, with its face turned inward, has become a strange being, half statue and half tailor's dummy. Its huge head, like a ball, is marked by two lines and two crosses and is also bent slightly forward giving off an antique and solemn histrionic tone. The other muse, who is all mannequin, is sitting in a triumphal pose on a blue case out of which seem to have come a box and a coloured stick, similar to a magician's gadgets.²² The handle upon which its head should be screwed in place sticks out shiny and black, giving the mannequin's expansive figure a stunted look, as if mutilated. In fact, its big red elliptical head rests at its feet. Upon it the Greek χ that we have seen on the face of the philosopher and the poet, is traced. This stunted mannequin, with its head unscrewed and placed at its feet, is all that remains of the sitting or reclining statue of the *Italian Piazzas*. Situated in the shadow cast by a building upon this obsessive interior, the last of the muse is also a statue, at least as far as its body is concerned and thus still pertains to the external reality of space and time, of history. While its face, without any trace of human semblance, is a mannequin and thus belongs to the oneiric interiority of a subject who, free of its worries and hidden urges, is now going beyond its very self.

The red light of the sunset illuminates this Ferrara piazza as a nightmare-like interior. A strong and violent light projects itself in opposition to the shaded area of the piazza. The metaphysical dimension that emerges from this contrast of oneiric light and dark shadow is that of an art that by now can only represent the ghosts of its own uneasiness, the disquieting muse of the ghost of the human figure, a self-irony in which the "self" seems to have been totally absorbed into a face without eyes and without words. The metaphysical dimension is now a disquieting interrogative on the future of the subject from which only ghosts and automatons transpire. As such, Metaphysical Painting opened the road to Surrealism. In this *Italian Piazza*, the reality of Metaphysical Painting resides in the surreal dimension of the real world endowed with oneiric uneasiness. In 1925 *The Song of Love* marks René Magritte's passage to Surrealism, while *The Child's Brain*, another famous painting of 1914, the original title of which is *Le revenant* (the returnee)²³ whose theme is once again related to the visionary or the philosopher with half-closed eyes looking at a book and positioned beside a Doric col-

²² In her article *Analisi della forma III in Metafisica del tempo*, cit., p. 44, de Sanna interpreted the stick and coloured box as the projection or axonometric reversal of the navigational flag Z that indicates a return, placed on the deck of a ship.

²³ Letter from de Chirico to Gala Eluard 10/02/1924: "I am about to finish the *Trovatore* for your husband and the *Cerveau de l'enfant* for you. I do not hide the fact that I do not like this title; to 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 which has nothing to do with the essence of my art." See *Metafisica* n. 1-2, 2002, p. 155.

umn, struck Tanguy (who saw it in the window of Paul Guillaume's gallery from a passing tram) so strongly, it made him take the Surrealist path. It is a painting that Breton wanted at all cost and that he kept in his studio for almost half a century. For another half century it will be wondered if in this man with a moustache and small beard the painter intended to represent his father, the brain of the child or some writer, painter or philosopher²⁴, as if this was indeed important to understand a painting by de Chirico. Just as history has shown that Breton's condemnation of de Chirico's work after 1919 was not only unfounded but lacking in any real meaning.²⁵

When understood as freedom from the usual human way of looking at the world, this "going beyond" oneself is once again the theme of the last big painting executed during the artist's most creative period: *The Great Metaphysician* of 1917, of which a slightly more elaborate replicate dated 1922 is now at the National Gallery of Berlin. I don't think there is anyone who can enjoy this painting more than a reader of Hegel's *Logic* or Spinoza's *Ethics* or Leibniz's *Monadology*, not to mention the well-known metaphysical constructions found in modern thought from Descartes on. At the same time, this painting is both an irony and an anthem to all the great metaphysical constructions of the past. This is the intuition that de Chirico shows us: all great past metaphysics are represented in this enormous construction of boxes: material and strength, because on the boxes the usual parallel and crossing lines are drawn as symbols of magic forces. Upon these boxes support sticks, measuring squares (geometry and magic together) stand, and at the top, the head of a mannequin is raised: a double of the human figure. Human subjectivity is what this construction aims at, its apex and scope, its *meaning*. But it is still only the mask of the subject, its double, its ghost that dominates the entire construction. The great metaphysician is by now only the representation of a dream already dreamt or the first glimmer of an awakening in which we realize that everything that had caused us anguish fades away into the semi-shadow of the room, leaving only a memory of what has been. This memory liberates us from the anguish the same way that irony or spiritual movement does. The representation of all this – the painting – is exactly this irony of memory, the irony of the artist face to face with his *homo metaphysicus*'s disquiet, or the will for a complete construction of the world, which is the will to dominate the material and the forces that make up reality, as well as the reality of the human subject.²⁶

After having transited the route of metaphysical painting as the transcendence of representation into the enigma that animates metaphysical aesthetics, in his continuous "going beyond" (precisely into the enigmatic dimension) de Chirico could not but abandon metaphysical aesthetics to carry out a

²⁴ The same face appears in the drawing *The Revenant* of 1917 owned by Gala Eluard, (note that *The Child's Brain* is also known by the name *Le revenant*). The figure in the drawing has also been attributed to Napoleon III. In addition to the face, the curtain beside the male bust, which resembles a Doric column, appears in the drawing as a robe or as a column upon which the bust is posed. A similar coupling is found in the Muse on the left, bringing one to think that the two muse are a memory of his father and mother, given that the artist also painted his mother sitting down. Thus, the third muse is the painter's brother who was always present, along with the mother, as a disquieting figure. But the most important observation here is the derivation of the mannequin from the statue, the double of another double, closing the first metaphysical cycle, the *Italian Piazza*, the artist's memories and melancholy.

²⁵ Regarding the de Chirico-Breton relationship, see the correspondence and material published by J. de Sanna *Giorgio de Chirico – André Breton. Duel à mort and Giorgio de Chirico. Letters to André e Simone Breton; Letters to Paul and Gala Eluard; Paul Eluard-James Thrall Soby Correspondence*, in *«Metafisica»*, n. 1-2, 2002, pp. 146-160.

²⁶ I do not think that the mannequin, from its first appearance in the Parisian paintings to *The Great Metaphysician* executed in Ferrara, owes itself to a will to reconstruct the anatomy of the human figure as Dürer or Leonardo had endeavoured. I agree with de Sanna's interpretation that de Chirico is dealing with a problem of language with which he intended to compete with abstract art and Cubism, and I would say Dada as well, as the various articles published in *«Valori Plastici»* demonstrate. This new language should be seen essentially on a metaphysic-existential plane regarding de Chirico.

passage to a surreality and then to a hyper-reality of the subject. Here the great metaphysician's dream must break, or necessarily become trauma, nightmare and anguishing revelation, although not of the original dimension, the Greek tragedy of serenity, his childhood world, and not just the occult dimension of the mystery of existence, all of which were already destroyed by nightmares and ghosts that destroyed the subject. Behind the scene of metaphysical reality, which by now had become merely a stage-set reality in which inside becomes outside, the outside is closed-up in a room or upon a stage on which the tragedy or severance of our interior world is played out. If the mannequin's entrails become temples, fountains or piazzas, and if forests, lakes and boats are closed inside a room, it is not due to the fact that in the 1920s and 30s de Chirico was working on theatre scenography. Nor can it be seen as an involution of his imagination that had dared too much, and as such emptied itself to an extent that he could only retrace the path taken.

Actually, it is representation's primary order itself that has gone completely amiss, because the great metaphysician himself – the subject that puts order in reality, or the original terms regarding the representation of reality –, has gone amiss. The inner separation of the subject is a theme that another Italian spirit of the time, Pirandello, was dealing with, upsetting the habitual or out-of-use relationship between inside and outside. The extraordinary impression de Chirico had been subject to upon seeing some furniture taken outdoors and left in the street during a move, became the constant base of his themes in this post-metaphysical period, particularly during the 1920s. The furniture in the street was a sensitive image of the estrangement of inside to outside, the inside's loss of identity, the complete disorientation of private reality taken from its place of abode and made to confront a reality other than its own, such as direct sunlight, the noise of the street, the violence of atmospheric elements and the even greater reality of the indiscreet looks of everyone, the crowd, the public eye. If all this was possible, it was also possible for lakes or the sea to enter the closed room, into hotel rooms, and for entrails to become houses, fountains or piazzas, even if it these were the entrails of anthropoid figures or mannequins, as it also was possible for the floorboards of a tailor shop to become the stage upon which the tragic serenity of the Greeks was played out.

In fact there is no simply absurd representation of reality, a simply absurd representation of reality or pure estrangement of reality is not possible, neither pictorially nor thematically because such estrangement of an inverted or upset world always will reveal something to us, something pertaining to the real world. We do not merely have a "true world" that has become a fable, as Nietzsche wanted, as a consequence of the death of God and the process of European civilization. This "true world", the Platonic world of ideas, does not result simply in parody, and artistic representation is not the representation of this parody, as the paintings of the 1920s could make us believe. The metaphysical world, the world of transcendence, reveals itself exactly through this reversal of inside and outside, in the continuous mutation of the frame of reference that disturbs and upsets language itself. The real significance lies in the mannequin taking the place of the statue in *The Disquieting Muse*, and in the subject – the order maker of reality, the great metaphysician – becoming the bust of a mannequin. It is not merely the liberation from one's uneasiness and oneself but rather the achieving of an authentic dimension in which the self can look its hyper-reality in the face in such a way that the continuous reflection of inside and outside may reveal (through a Hegelian interpretation)

the completion of this reflection in oneself, of having reached oneself, of the serene repose within oneself, in the representation of this continuous inversion.

Anguish, disquiet and the enigma introduce themselves into metaphysical aesthetics and in doing so evoke the transcendence of reality, which has always been a part of classical metaphysics. However, the true significance of this transcendence is not just the reality of a world beyond this world – which can not be represented –. This transcendence is firmly anchored in our world, in the finite and to its representational order. This transcendence enters this finiteness, animating it, not only through its enunciatory ghosts and nightmares – the anguish and foreboding found in the pre-1914 paintings – but rather through a hyper-reality that, in the end, takes over the representation itself. This hyper-reality pours first of all into the subject, transforming the human into a phantasmal subject where it ends up invading the scene of the ancient Italian piazza, the metaphysical scene, which it transforms into an interior scene in which the destiny of the subject is played out. The statues are nothing but the very ghost of the human who wants to free itself from the fixedness of stone by searching for eternity in its double, which is no longer stone, flesh or spirit but a construction in which its disquiet and anguish takes form. The tragedy of serenity is the universal drama that plays itself out in these sudden scenes in which old distinctions are consumed. It is only by taking the form of an absurd human double, a surreal construction (in which the will to achieve a construction of the universe is represented and derided) that one can gain consciousness of the fact that an authentic transcendence is in this game of breaking the workings, wheels and mechanisms of everything that is real, allowing us to see that their ultimate reality is, in fact, a game constructed for us in which the only meaning resides in our acceptance and our participation in this game. The will to play and partake in this game, possibly destroying it to rebuild it, destroying ourselves to rebuild ourselves, making our very selves into a toy, a construction in which subject and object, interior and exterior get lost, and to live in this phantasmal hyper-reality that is both magical and tragic, is achieved through the acceptance of destiny's game as the ultimate meaning of every construction. This is the authentic transcendence of reality reflected in representation, which reveals itself in Giorgio de Chirico's metaphysical painting. It is a representation in which the will of the eternal and our anguish with regard to the mystery of existence is purified and placated, even for us, the spectator taking part in the game. This is the path the great metaphysician's representation points out to philosophy, and foreshadows the critique of metaphysics, or the will to destroy metaphysics, that another devotee of metaphysics, Martin Heidegger, will give voice to in the late 1920s.