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GIORGIO DE CHIRICO'S METAPHYSICAL ART AND SCHOPENHAUER'S  
METAPHYSICS - AN EXPLORATION OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPT IN DE  
CHIRICO'S PROSE AND PAINTINGS

Volume 1

by

Barbara Heins

Thesis presented for the degree of Ph.D.  
in the Faculty of Humanities  
University of Kent at Canterbury

October 1992

To my parents.

## Abstract

The present thesis starts with an outline of the importance de Chirico attached to philosophy and shows that attitude in relation to the reception by his critics. The second chapter examines the informing principles of Schopenhauer's metaphysics in relation to de Chirico's theoretical writings. Subsequently there is a chapter on the figure of Ariadne, demonstrating how Schopenhauerian principles, mythical conceptions and Nietzschean rhetoric are synthesized in de Chirico's *Metaphysical Art* in a clear attempt to transfer the philosophical programme onto canvas. Chapter IV looks more closely at the labyrinthine nature of de Chirico's paintings and his novel Hebdomeros in accordance with the Schopenhauer-inspired philosophical background: the setting up of ontological puzzles, and the handling of space and time. There follows a discussion in Chapter V of the presentation of objects and figures in these labyrinthine spaces: their exemption from causality, and objectivisation in the attainment of the metaphysical other. The thesis concludes with an exploration of the artist genius against the background of Schopenhauer.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor Roger Cardinal for his advice and the broad-minded style of his supervision. Furthermore my thanks to Dr. Christa Buschendorf of the Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf, for both moral and academic support, in particular for taking the time to read an early draft of this manuscript and discussing Schopenhauer with me.

As far as the tracing of the books and catalogues necessary for the research is concerned I am very grateful for the friendly support of both the staff of the Courteauld Institute Library and the Victoria and Albert Museum Library. Of the Templeman library, University of Kent I must thank especially Steve Holland for his repeated computer researches. I must also mention with gratitude Flavia Gentile of the Accademia Italiana for her help with Italian texts.

For support with linguistic matters my thanks go to Cinzia Valente for proof-reading the Italian references and helping my Italian generally. My thanks, too, for proof-reading (as well as following up obscure references in Germany) to Prof. Dr. A. Heins.

For help with Volume II my thanks to Paul Flatman of Norwich, for his time and his expertise in the photographic and reprographic production.

For the processing and printing of the final draft I must mention thankfully Ottmar von Eittingshausen.

And finally: my warmest thanks to Michael, whose incredible patience and support never wavered.

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Abbreviations:

MP = de Chirico, Giorgio Il meccanismo del pensiero, (M. Fagiolo, ed.), Einaudi, 1985. Collection of articles, essays, poetry and short prose pieces of the years 1911-1943. The original title and date will be provided for each the individual reference.

NW = Nietzsche, Friedrich Nietzsche's Werke (G.Colli, ed.), de Gruyter, Berlin, 1969.

SW = Schopenhauer, Arthur Sämtliche Werke, I-V, (W.Frhr von Löhneysen, ed.) Suhrkamp, Stuttgart/Frankfurt, 1986.

Hebdomeros = always refers to the de Chirico Hebdomeros, 2nd edition, Flammarion, Paris, 1964, unless stated otherwise.

For other details see the bibliography.

Plates:

A chronological list of paintings and drawings selected for the present research is provided in Volume II. Volume II also contains a variety of colour and black and white reproductions of paintings and drawings that are discussed here.

In the text all titles are given in the English translation. The date is provided in brackets, e.g. The Victory (1927). Where available, there is a plate number added, such as The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon (1910, Pl.1). This number refers to the number under which an example is presented in the catalogue in Volume II.

## Preface

I arrived at my present topic in a roundabout way. For my MA thesis I had investigated the applicability of literary theory to painting. I became interested in the kinship between painting and literature and thus came about my present research. Giorgio de Chirico seemed to be the right starting point for such a venture given that he was both a painter and writer. I found that de Chirico's prose and paintings were not mere thematic mirror inventories of each other but that they were akin, too, in a characteristic handling of what could be generally described as structural, even individual rhetorical concerns. I felt that from here questions about the purpose behind this mode of representation became more important. It was at this point that I turned towards the exploration of the philosophical framework that motivated de Chirico to dub his art "metaphysical". The research in this area turned out to be so fascinating that it compelled me to shift the emphasis of my thesis. I did not abandon the notion of structural and rhetorical kinships; I was able to combine my former interest in dual media studies with what I found to be de Chirico's philosophical programme by illustrating how the latter is artistically transferred to both de Chirico's paintings and prose in the same, quite distinct manner.

## Introduction

A comparison of Giorgio de Chirico's paintings from the period 1910 - 1929 and his novel Hebdomeros published in 1929, shows a striking number of points of reference and association.

First of all there are thematic similarities: a two-level use in both of a labyrinthine dimension, such that at one level it constitutes the subject matter, at another level it is projected as an informing principle, a discourse.

Furthermore both text and painting incorporate de Chirico's attitude to the distinctive cultural presence of the artist such that the artistic refinement of acute sensibility is rare and legitimately bestowed as an attribute upon those of clairvoyance, in short, the artist genius.

Besides, far from being mere mirror inventories of motifs there are structuring considerations that show the kinship between the novel and the paintings. For instance, the manner in which time and space are evoked; the kind of disorganized (disorganizing) structuring of text and canvas.

However, there is a further over-arching link: de Chirico presents both media explicitly (the paintings) or implicitly (Hebdomeros) under the umbrella term "Metaphysical Art" - a qualification which seems to offer a broader, philosophical point of departure for any deeper understanding of de Chirico's work.

Related questions to do with the background of de Chirico's "Metaphysical Art" can be grouped in clusters: that is to say there are issues relative to the critical reception of de Chirico's work: what do the critics take to be the dominant influence upon de Chirico, given that de Chirico's writings

allude to the work of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Weininger; it is surprising that pre-Soby critics ignore such philosophical influences generally; but it is perhaps not surprising that post-Soby critics including Soby himself, while acknowledging a 19th century German philosophical influence, are in fundamental disagreement as to which philosopher might arguably be said to have had the most telling influence upon the shaping of Metaphysical Art.

Central to this cluster of questions is the simple one: what is the "metaphysics" in de Chirico's Metaphysical Art? Related questions here have to do with origin; from which philosopher of the three most commonly found in his writings does de Chirico derive his metaphysics?

A second cluster of questions relates to the figure of Ariadne frequently found in de Chirico's work: is this figure thematically related to Nietzsche's use of Ariadne? How does de Chirico's employment of the figure relate to the principle of organisation, namely the labyrinthine?

Moving from first principles, and the conceptual apparatus employed by the artist, a further cluster of questions arises to do with the paintings and the text as such: what is the function of space, time, object and figure in the work: how do such elements in the paintings and novel function; and how are all such features in both text and paintings related to the fundamental metaphysical-labyrinthine presence in the work?

Clearly there is reference in the following material that properly belongs to art-history, but the thesis is not art-historical. The thesis necessarily investigates philosophy but

only insofar as it is essential to clarify the central concept of metaphysics: there are no substantive references back beyond Kant and no reference is made to the rejection of metaphysics in Western Philosophy contemporary with the period of de Chirico's work dealt with here viz. 1910-1929.

Unarguably the range of reference that de Chirico draws upon means that any inquiry into fundamental elements of his work must likewise be broadly based. Thus the thesis is centrally a comparative investigation, a cross-deciphering, that draws upon English, French, Italian and German criticism and takes account of the theoretical writings, the novel and the paintings of de Chirico, thus exploring the artist's creative thought in both word and image.

## Chapter I: The Philosophical Background of Metaphysical Art<sup>1</sup>

### 1. The Pervasive Presence of Philosophy in de Chirico's Work

De Chirico manifests a concern with philosophy on various levels. First of all this can be observed in a very general manner in the consistently recurring references to philosophers in many titles of his drawings and paintings such as The Philosopher's Conquest (1913,Pl.19), The Grand Metaphysician (1917,Pl.56) and The Philosopher (1923).

Likewise in his novel Hebdomeros there are references to a certain philosopher named "Lyphontius" and his father who "... aussi avait été philosophe..."<sup>2</sup> Furthermore Hebdomeros himself "...se consolait toujours ... en spéculant philosophiquement sur divers problèmes ..." <sup>3</sup> Remarks about "l'aspect méditatif d'Hebdomeros" or "la pensée de l'artiste (sc. Hebdomeros) est

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<sup>1</sup>Within the context of this thesis the term Metaphysical Art will be preferred to the term Metaphysical Painting. This choice is primarily based on the fact that de Chirico most frequently makes use of this expression himself (compare headlines like Sull'arte metafisica or Arte metafisica e scienze occulte). Secondly, there are "political reasons": Carrà published in 1919 a book called Pittura metafisica which contained among other more general essays his ideas and definitions of Metaphysical Art. Although Carrà and de Chirico are often considered together as founders of the short-lived "scuola metafisica" there are in fact crucial differences in their understanding of the term 'metaphysical'. Compare the discussion of the critics in Chapter I.2.1. A more detailed discussion can be found in Lukach's essay 'De Chirico and Italian Art Theory' in De Chirico, W.Rubin ed., (1982), or F. Poli La Metafisica (1989). Finally, the term Metaphysical Art is sufficiently wide to allow the consideration of other artistic media that de Chirico worked in during his career, such as his poetry and prose.

<sup>2</sup>Giorgio de Chirico Hebdomeros, 2nd edition, 1964 (1929), pp.89-90.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p.197.

profonde"<sup>4</sup> and the recurring idea of disciples listening to his views, supports the image of the hero's philosophical nature. Hebdomeros identifies himself with a list of those superior minds that are "destinés à disparaître de la surface du globe, tout comme l'ichtyosaure et le mammoth"<sup>5</sup> such as "l'écrivain, le penseur, le rêveur, le poète, le métaphysicien, ... l'interrogateur d'enigmes... le voyant ..." (emphases mine).<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, the philosophical presence in de Chirico's work is supported by allusions to Greece:<sup>7</sup> the clairvoyant, the oracle, the questioner of enigmas, all of which maintain ideas to do with his preoccupation with insight and superior knowledge.<sup>8</sup>

This framework of motifs to do with oracles, prophecy, with ancient heroes and temples is, in its turn, complemented in de Chirico's theoretical writings by references to pre-socratic

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p.39.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p.198.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.; for other strong references to philosophers and philosophy in general compare as well de Chirico's poetry: Il signor Govoni dorme (1918), for instance, tells the story of a philosopher's repose and seclusion. Other poems like La volonté de la statue (1913/14) or Epodo (1917) take up the idea of meditation and contemplation.

<sup>7</sup>Although references to ancient Greece clearly predominate, they are complemented by allusions to ancient Rome (compare the numerous paintings revolving around the gladiator-theme eg. The Gladiators (1928), Gladiators in a Room (1928) etc.; besides, in Hebdomeros the disciples are frequently called gladiators or athletes; finally there are poems and short lyrical texts dedicated to the same motif: compare "Sur le Silence" (1924) "Bataille antique" (1933).

<sup>8</sup>Compare paintings such as The Enigma of the Oracle (1910,Pl.2), Morning Meditation (1912), The Fatal Temple (1914,Pl.26), The Prophet (1915,Pl.42).



philosophers, in particular Heraclitus who is quoted in connection with the omnipresence of "demons" and "enigma" as a mode of philosophical enquiry.<sup>9</sup>

But, obviously, the most noteworthy presence of philosophy in de Chirico's work is to be found in the very term that he attributed to his art: metaphysical. This term constitutes, clearly, a potent statement of the artist's philosophical intentions. It is - apart from labelling his art in general - specifically employed in a number of titles to his paintings, such as The Grand Metaphysician (1917,Pl.56) already mentioned above, Metaphysical Composition (1914), Metaphysical Self-Portrait (1913,Pl.13), Metaphysical Interior (1916) and Great Metaphysical Interior (1917) to name but a few examples. In Hebdomeros the attention is drawn to "aventures métaphysiques",<sup>10</sup> to "chercheurs métaphysiciens",<sup>11</sup> and the protagonist is found to "soliloquer métaphysiquement";<sup>12</sup> indeed, the entire development of Hebdomeros' interior dialogue is labelled a "cycle métaphysique",<sup>13</sup> which comes to its conclusion only in an encounter with "Immortalité".<sup>14</sup>

Besides the use of the term 'metaphysical' in his art de

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<sup>9</sup>Compare de Chirico in "Zeusi l'esploratore" (1918-19) in MP, p.81.

<sup>10</sup>Hebdomeros, p.217.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p.34.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p.216.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p.236.

Chirico adopts it elsewhere: for instance, a number of reviews and smaller articles are called "L'arte metafisica della mostra di Roma"(1918), "Sull'arte metafisica"(1919) or "Noi metafisici" (1919), (emphases mine).

Notwithstanding the ubiquity of the term and the wide reference to "philosophy" in de Chirico's work, he nowhere offers a detailed conceptual analysis that defines the "metaphysical" as employed by him.<sup>15</sup>

However that may be, de Chirico does offer a source of Metaphysical Art's philosophical foundation and one that is clearly detached from his native Greece: German 19th century philosophy. As revealed by the consistent references in de Chirico's theoretical writings on his art, it is notably Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Weininger who constitute the crucial foundations of his philosophical position.

Although it is not known with any certainty in which order he came across these three philosophers, it is likely that the first encounter with their ideas was roughly at the same time, namely as early as during his studies at Munich in 1906 -1910. There are biographical details which confirm the artist's sustained interest in these philosophical influences. For instance, the critic Wieland Schmied learned, during his contact

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<sup>15</sup>It needs to be noted that de Chirico's references to ancient Greece may derive less from any specific conceptual/philosophical background, but are as likely to be attributable to his childhood, which was spent in Greece. Thus although they supply vital motifs and images they may be more a personal pictorial "idiom" rather than a concept itself. Savinio talks about the Greek inspired iconography in terms of a "family language" (compare Baldacci "De Chirico and Savinio: Theory and iconography of Metaphysical Painting" in Italian Art, E.Braun ed., (1989), p.63).

with de Chirico in the seventies, that even in his old age the painter could still quote from their works.<sup>16</sup> Another example, frequently referred to by de Chirico critics, is a self-portrait from 1911<sup>17</sup> depicting the painter in imitation of the pose in which a famous Nietzsche photograph had been taken. Among the bequest of Alberto Savinio was found an edition of Schopenhauer's Parerga and Paralipomena which evidently formerly belonged to de Chirico: it even contains his handwritten French translation of the philosopher's poetry.<sup>18</sup>

More importantly, however, de Chirico's theoretical writings on art bear the mark of a continual regard for the three philosophers. Fagiolo, who compiled the only major currently available collection of de Chirico's texts, observes that their impact is manifest from as early as 1911 onwards, constituting an integral part of de Chirico's so-called formative period;<sup>19</sup> nor did he ever cease to allude to the presence of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Weininger in his later writings. In his memoirs he reiterates their important influence on his thought, though he distances himself from the formerly professed indebtedness to Weininger: "A few years ago ... I was interested in Weininger's work; later my interest diminished and now I confess that he does

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<sup>16</sup>W. Schmied, De Chirico und sein Schatten (1989), p.41.

<sup>17</sup>The portrait bears the inscription "Et quid amabo nisi quod aenigma est?"

<sup>18</sup>Further information about de Chirico's personal copy of Schopenhauer's Parerga and Paralipomena, including a publication of the poems in de Chirico's French translation, can be found in: MP, pp.38-39.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p.486.

not interest me any longer."<sup>20</sup> Nietzsche is variously praised and, as far as Schopenhauer is concerned, he says: "I have always kept an interest in the works of Arthur Schopenhauer."<sup>21</sup>

While these philosophical influences on de Chirico's thought can thus be factually established, it needs to be noted that most of the artist's references to them are of a very general and, at times, oblique nature. The artist often includes all three philosophers when writing about one philosophical dimension of his thought or work. Thus, for example, as far as Nietzsche is concerned, the fact that he is the most frequently mentioned by no means suggests that the actual content is exclusive to him, since de Chirico might attribute it elsewhere to Schopenhauer or

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<sup>20</sup>The original de Chirico memoirs Memorie della mia vita (2nd extended edition, Milan, Rizzoli Editore, (1962)) could not be obtained, I refer here to The Memoirs of Giorgio de Chirico Margaret Crosland transl., London, Owen, (1971), p.164.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.; This continued interest casts doubt upon all those suggestions that claim a sudden break with Metaphysical Art (compare A.Breton Le Surréalisme et la Peinture (1928); J.T.Soby Giorgio de Chirico (1955)): the painter's so-called "return to the classical" is seen here as sufficient evidence to understand de Chirico's work not as a unified body, but as divided into the early metaphysical and the later classical period. While it is true that de Chirico started to designate his work as classical, Paolo Baldacci shows that the terms "classical" and "metaphysical" are actually used synonymously by de Chirico. Thus in line with de Chirico's consistent recourse to his philosophical sources, Baldacci argues, that in spite of changes in style and subject matter, the overall objective remains the same. (Compare P.Baldacci "Giorgio de Chirico, l'estetica del Classicismo e la tradizione antica" in Giorgio de Chirico, Parigi 1925-1929, M. Fagiolo/P. Baldacci, Milan, (1982); likewise Baldacci's article "Le Classicisme chez Giorgio de Chirico" in Cahiers du Musée National d'Art Moderne, 11, Paris, (1983)).

Weininger, too.<sup>22</sup>

In other instances de Chirico isolates just one very particular aspect of one philosopher: for example, Schopenhauer's recommendation that statues be put on low pedestals to enhance their aesthetic presence.<sup>23</sup> Such reference, though suggestive of knowledge of and interest in the respective thinker, and definitely vital for any investigation of de Chirico's presentation of statues, by no means demonstrates conclusively that Schopenhauer contributed philosophically to de Chirico's concept of Metaphysical Art.

Indeed, one is left with a peculiar tension between the painter's ostentatious emphasis on the importance of philosophy in general and Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Weininger in particular on the one hand, and his refraining from discussing them in any conceptual depth on the other. Whether de Chirico's work was fundamentally inspired by Schopenhauer or by Nietzsche, or vice versa, whether Weininger contributed crucially, and to what extent de Chirico might have synthesized the various sources into a new pictorial philosophy, are thus difficult questions, but ones which require resolution. What is unarguably the case, however, is that de Chirico sought to make the philosophical, and more specifically the metaphysical dimension, an integral part

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<sup>22</sup>Compare, for instance, the issue of "revelation" that is variously associated with Nietzsche in "Testi teorici e lirici" (1911-15) MP, p.17 and in "Que pourrait être la peinture de l'avenir?" (1913) MP, p.31; as well as with Schopenhauer in "Que pourrait être la peinture de l'avenir?" (1913) in MP, p.31.

<sup>23</sup>Compare de Chirico's article "Sull'arte metafisica" (Valori Plastici (1919)) in particular the section "Estetica metafisica" in MP (1985), p.87.

of his whole work.

Against the background of material full of apparent tensions and overlaps it is perhaps not surprising to find that the critical exploration of the specifically philosophical dimension of Metaphysical Art proves to be far from conclusive or unified, if considered at all, among the critics of de Chirico's work.

## 2. The Philosophical Dimension of Metaphysical Art in the Light of Criticism

Evidently critics of de Chirico started to include a philosophical appraisal of the artist's work only gradually. For example, the early de Chirico criticism<sup>24</sup> almost unanimously ignored the philosophical stance behind Metaphysical Art often by simply absorbing his work into the respective ideological mainstream of contemporary avant-garde movements. As will be demonstrated in the following, it was not until Soby's publications on de Chirico in (1941 and 1955 respectively) that the philosophical aspect gained a gradual and ever-increasing significance in the evaluation of de Chirico's work.

### 2.1. The Early Criticism

Among the earliest publications on de Chirico is a small volume published by Valori Plastici.<sup>25</sup> It contains quotations of

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<sup>24</sup>The term "early criticism" will denote all those major critical texts on de Chirico that were written or published between 1910 and 1930 and that seem relevant to the present inquiry. While here only a few major examples will be referred to, a more comprehensive overview is provided in the bibliography.

<sup>25</sup>12 opere di Giorgio de Chirico, M. Broglio ed., Edizione Valori Plastici (1919); pages not numbered.

contemporary critics and artists accompanying twelve reproductions of de Chirico's pre-1919 work. Strikingly, none of the quotations contains references to any specific philosophical concept behind the artist's work, although in substance they all acknowledge to some extent its general concern with the nature of reality. Among the French critics<sup>26</sup> the main interest centres on the mystico-poetical quality of de Chirico's work: Étienne Charles praises "des idées de mystère et d'énigme"<sup>27</sup> and André Salmon "the tragedy"<sup>28</sup> in de Chirico's paintings; to Maurice Raynal, de Chirico "cherche dans une réalité particulière la forme d'expression pour son sentiment poétique".<sup>29</sup> Most interestingly Apollinaire, unarguably closest to de Chirico in his early Paris years, is quoted in praise of "la religiosité"<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>The volume contains quotations both by French and by Italian critics. Given that de Chirico spent his formative years in Paris and had his first exhibition and reviews in the French capital, championed particularly by his friend and mentor Guillaume Apollinaire, the French criticism will be discussed first. The first contact with Italian art criticism was not until 1914, and the first exhibition and reviews in Italy were not until after the first World War. Compare the accounts given by Lukach "De Chirico and Italian Art Theory" in De Chirico (Rubin ed., (1982)) and F. Poli La Metafisica (1989).

<sup>27</sup>Op.cit., loc.cit.

<sup>28</sup>Op.cit., loc.cit.

<sup>29</sup>Op.cit., loc.cit.

<sup>30</sup>Op.cit., loc.cit.; the idea of the religiosity in de Chirico's writing was to find strong support in Cocteau's Le Mystère Laïc from 1928. As the title of this document in note form already suggests, Cocteau considers de Chirico's art as a secularized mystery, more specifically as a kind of religious contemplative oeuvre. This oeuvre centres, according to Cocteau, on ethical questions. Without any evidence from de Chirico's writings or paintings he simply asserts that his intuitive understanding of de Chirico's art is: a "plastique morale" where biscuits witness the crime, where architecture is suspicious. In other words: "de Chirico ou le lieu du crime" - Cocteau's headline to the artist's work - expresses the implicit invitation to worship a-morality

in the artist's work.<sup>31</sup> Given that Apollinaire was the first to consistently promote and support Metaphysical Art he might, in addition, have laid the foundation for a curious reluctance among the early critics to read de Chirico in terms of particular 19th century sources of inspiration.

Similarly the Italian critics quoted in the *Valori Plastici* monograph do not contribute to an understanding of Metaphysical Art in terms of any specifically philosophical concepts.<sup>32</sup>

Soffici, for instance, emphasizes the fact that "la pittura di de Chirico non è pittura, nel senso che si dà oggi a questa

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in de Chirico's work. Quite how this ethical interpretation of de Chirico can find sufficient evidence remains unclear.

<sup>31</sup>That Apollinaire's promotion of de Chirico in these particular terms is not accidental to the selection of one particular quotation for the *Valori Plastici* monograph becomes clear on a closer inspection of the *Chroniques d'Art*, which contain Apollinaire's art criticism. The articles on de Chirico never touch the idea of de Chirico's avowed engagement with German 19th century philosophy. Quite clearly Apollinaire's interest in the mystic or occult "religiosité" in de Chirico needs to be seen against the background of his own involvement in Orphism: he championed representatives of the so called "orphyic cubists" such as Duchamps, Delaunay et al, who were seeking new modes of consciousness which often echoed or confirmed their mystical views. The specific use de Chirico made of religion can be seen - the numerous references to Greek deities, oracles and myths apart - in his reference to the New Testament Parable of the Prodigal Son in both his paintings (for instance, *Return of the Prodigal Son* (1924); *The Prodigal Son* (1922, Pl.72)) and *Hebdomeros* pp.151-162).

<sup>32</sup> The magazine *Valori Plastici* (1918-22) includes articles on the metaphysical in painting by the same Italian critics who are quoted in the present monograph. Relevant articles have been taken into account in the subsequent analysis. As Lukach points out the term "metaphysical" ranked high in the *Valori Plastici* time, although embedded in a concept of spiritual revival of (Italian) national values, culture etc., championed particularly by Carrà (Compare Lukach "De Chirico and Italian Art Theory" in *Giorgio de Chirico*, W.Rubin ed., (1982))



parola. Si potrebbe definire una scrittura di sogni."<sup>33</sup> (emphasis mine) Metaphysical Art is here interpreted as "dream-writing", an observation of the world as it is recorded by "nostra anima quasi addormentata".<sup>34</sup>

Then there is Papini, who says that de Chirico "... arrive au plus haut degré de clairvoyance ... une profonde valeur d'esprit, une valeur que ... on pourrait sans aucun malentendu appeler: métaphysique."<sup>35</sup> Clearly what particular value or concept informs de Chirico's metaphysics in Papini's view remains obscure.

Finally there is Carlo Carrà's statement recording that the artist's works "rivelano qualità belle di profonde osservazioni ricavate dalla fantasia e dalla natura."<sup>36</sup> In a sense it is hardly surprising that Carrà, who is more closely associated with de Chirico because of their mutual founding of the so-called Scuola Metafisica in 1918-19,<sup>37</sup> does not mention in

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<sup>33</sup>Op.cit., loc.cit.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.; Soffici was the first of the more established Italian art critics that took cognizance of de Chirico's work. Furthermore, as Lukach (op.cit., loc.cit.) argues, Soffici developed a mature futurist aesthetics which was very close to de Chirico's idea of Metaphysical Art. However, Lukach argues here without considering de Chirico's specific philosophical antecedents. Hence his embrace of Soffici's notion of dream-writing, which is conceptually at variance with the metaphysical programme in de Chirico (compare the references to the role of dream in de Chirico in the section on Breton and Schopenhauer respectively).

<sup>35</sup>Op.cit., loc.cit.

<sup>36</sup>Op.cit., loc.cit.

<sup>37</sup>The ex-Futurist Carrà met de Chirico during the war at Ferrara. There he largely adopted de Chirico's iconography. Directly after the war he held a one man exhibition with "his" new metaphysical style. Although de Chirico was evidently upset about this development he nonetheless agreed to a mutual exhibition in late

the Valori Plastici monograph the Schopenhauer-Nietzsche-Weininger background in de Chirico's work: although Carrà's painting followed temporarily that of de Chirico closely in style, Carrà was looking for a spirituality in painting which was reconcilable with his personal rediscovery of Christian faith and a revival of Italian classical painting. Thus he was interested in an interpretation of metaphysical painting which, although it touched in part the aesthetics of Metaphysical Art, did not agree with its informing principles.<sup>38</sup> However Carrà's interpretation of Metaphysical Art was clearly most influential in the Italian reception of Metaphysical Art;<sup>39</sup> in particular his book Pittura

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1919, where the idea of a "scuola metafisica" explained to the public the similarity in style and, allegedly, in objective.

<sup>38</sup>Compare Carrà in La Voce about the style "piu cattolico" and in Valori Plastici about "Mysticismo, Humanismo e Spirito cattolico dell'Arte Metafisica". In fact the differing interpretations of Metaphysical Art could form the subject of a separate thesis. Let it suffice to say presently that because Carrà had already a name in Italy as a major exponent of the Futurist movement his "conversion" to Metaphysical Art was the centre of interest, and his definition of what was to be included under the term "metaphysical" was more likely to be absorbed than that by the hitherto almost entirely unknown Giorgio de Chirico. Crucial to an understanding of the images of the Scuola Metafisica was, finally, the book Pittura Metafisica (Florence, Vallecchi Editore, (1919)) by Carrà: it dedicates only two essays to metaphysical painting excluding the de Chirico link. It was at that time that de Chirico became more active and started to publish articles containing his view on Metaphysical Art, clearly partly "in defense" of Carrà's interpretations and omissions. Compare F. Poli (1989) and Lukach (op.cit., loc.cit.).

<sup>39</sup>In The Pelican History of Art the 1990 reprint of the volume Painting and Sculpture in Europe 1880-1940 (first publ.1967) G.H. Hamilton writes: "De Chirico was the more original painter, but Carrà created the best definition of their common programme in his Pittura Metafisica (1919)" (emphasis mine). He selects the following quotation from Carrà's book: "we instinctively carry out an operation of knowledge preceding knowledge itself - this operation is nowadays called intuition, and here we move towards the metaphysical ... The creative spirit gropes somewhat like a sleepwalker in the fields of the absolute, but our trained sensibility comes into play when we are confronted with an art

Metafisica (1919), where he does not even mention de Chirico, might have determined much of the quite distinct reluctance to acknowledge the 19th century influence on de Chirico's paintings even up to the present day.

The major contemporary critics brought together in the first de Chirico monograph discuss Metaphysical Art in a largely non-philosophical manner.<sup>40</sup> The main tendency is to isolate the notion of superior insight and variously tie it in with psychological or mystical interpretations.<sup>41</sup>

Finally there is one other influential dimension of the early de Chirico criticism quite distinct from those French and

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that is susceptible to multiple interpretations" (p.394). Although this quotation does not entirely contradict de Chirico's programme, it hardly defines the programme of Metaphysical Art as practised by de Chirico. However, to Hamilton it is evident that "the word 'metaphysical'... need not to be tied to any specific philosophical system."

<sup>40</sup>Even Savinio, in this monograph supplying only the biographical information, refers in his numerous other Valori Plastici articles to the metaphysical in painting without making more than scanty references to philosophy, in particular to Nietzsche. It is curious though, that he supports under the umbrella "metaphysical" both Carrà and de Chirico, thus apparently not accounting for the difference in quality, the one being clearly more transcendental, the other immanent. Compare A.Savinio "Anadioménon" in Valori Plastici (1919-21), French-language edition I; repr. Paris, Editions Trans/Form, (1983).

<sup>41</sup>The only exception appears to be Roger Vitrac who, in addition to the suggestion of dream and magic in de Chirico's work, refers to Hegel: "Objets inconnus du *Mauvais génie d'un roi* ... berceaux blancs qui attendez derrière un mur incliné que l'oeil vous donne son apparence étonnée, n'êtes-vous pas le premiers concepts-concrets et mieux les premiers concepts-images que Hegel attendait en vain. Voilà donc cette apparition sensible de l'idée sans laquelle le métaphysicien allemand pouvait s'écrier: '*L'art dans sa plus haute destination est, et reste pour nous un passé.*'" (R.Vitrac Georges de Chirico (1927), pp.8-9). Although Vitrac's suggested delineation is interesting, there is no evidence whatsoever, that de Chirico knew, or intended to recreate, or spell out in paint, any of Hegel's concepts.

Italian critics discussed so far: the Surrealist movement.

Here the major critical exponent is clearly André Breton who was thought by Soby (1955) to have done "much to re-establish the importance of de Chirico's early paintings".<sup>42</sup> Given the longevity of the relevance of Breton's discussion of the artist's early work (particularly of the de Chirico presentation in his book Le Surréalisme et la Peinture from 1928), and the fact that the Surrealists helped de Chirico to a renewed publicity, it stands to reason that the Surrealist leader actually had an outstanding influence on the setting of the tone for subsequent reviews of Metaphysical Art. Thus his handling of de Chirico's Metaphysical Art is of special interest here.

What are the characteristics of de Chirico's art for Breton? Embedded in the idea of the revelatory power of dream<sup>43</sup> Breton finds in de Chirico's iconography ("dream-data") the power to reveal "les apparences extérieures les plus troublantes, comme tout ce qui, autour de nous, participe à la fois de la vie et de la mort."<sup>44</sup> And elsewhere he points out: "Le besoin de fixer les images visuelles, ces images préexistant ou non à leur fixation, s'est extériorisé de tout temps et a abouti à la formation d'un véritable langage qui ne me paraît pas plus

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<sup>42</sup> See Soby (1955), p.68; Although Soby thus praises Breton, he is critical towards the "scathing" remarks that the Surrealist leader makes with respect to the post-1917 de Chirico.

<sup>43</sup> Characteristically Breton dedicated the first of five published dream-analyses ("Clair de terre" in Poésie Paris (1971)) to de Chirico.

<sup>44</sup> A. Breton Le Surréalisme et la Peinture Paris, Éditions Gallimard, (1965, first publ. 1928), p.16.

artificiel que l'autre ..."<sup>45</sup>

Clearly reflecting the 19th and early 20th century discussion of ontology, Breton captures the essential spirit of de Chirico's art here. Notably Schopenhauer and Nietzsche were exponents of the idea that our empirical world was based on an entirely artificial mode of cognition which needed to be undone. (Compare Chapters I.2.3.3.2. and II.1.). From this point of view Breton's remark seems to conform strikingly to Ivor Davies's suggestion that Schopenhauer's notion of metaphysics "may be seen as a parallel, even a direct ancestor of the ... 'surreal'."<sup>46</sup> In reverse one finds that one of the main Surrealist sources, Freud, appreciated Schopenhauer's work very highly.<sup>47</sup>

However, in his appraisal of de Chirico's work, Breton drifts generally into his distinctive Surrealist psychology: his references to dream, for instance, which he associates so firmly with de Chirico's art, are clearly evidence of reading de Chirico through the Surrealist doctrines. This becomes particularly obvious if one compares the treatment of dream in later criticism: for example, Baldacci reads - in particular against the background of Schopenhauer's presence in de Chirico - the work of the latter as a "critique radicale du rêve". And indeed, there is evidence that while de Chirico understood that the dream could supply alternative images, his metaphysical programme was

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p.2.

<sup>46</sup>I.Davies "Giorgio de Chirico: The Sources of Metaphysical Painting in Schopenhauer and Nietzsche" in Art International Vol. XXVI (1983), p.53.

<sup>47</sup>Compare Freud on Schopenhauer in Gesammelte Werke, Vol.17, S.Fischer, Frankfurt, (1947-68), pp.143-144.

not based on the latter.<sup>48</sup>

While Breton clearly understands and promotes the ontological dimension in de Chirico's art, he does not enter the subject matter from a philosophical point of view but links it up with the Surrealist penchant for the psychology of the unconscious. An example might be Breton's remark on the fixation of the object in de Chirico: "L'object chez de Chirico, comment le situer? Sans répondant dans le monde extérieur, il n'a pourtant pas toutes les caractéristiques de l'imaginaire."<sup>49</sup> Thus being neither classifiable as phenomenological nor imaginary, Breton resorts to a psychological explanation: "Apollinaire m'a affirmé que de Chirico peignant alors sous l'influence de troubles cénesthésiques (douleurs abdominales, migraines) qui expliqueraient cette particularité."<sup>50</sup>

From here the hallucinatory quality of the early de Chirico paintings (up to 1919) becomes a celebrated source of inspiration of the Surrealist movement led by Breton: they are promoted as a staple part of Surrealist exhibitions with the effect that Metaphysical Art becomes in the public understanding simply proto-Surrealist or Surrealist with all the respective

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<sup>48</sup>Compare Baldacci (1983), p.21; he backs up his argument by de Chirico's introductory remarks in the article "Sull'arte metafisica" in Valori Plastici (1919): " curioso che nel sogno nessuna immagine, per strana che essa sia, ci colpisce per potenza metafisica ..." MP, p.83.

<sup>49</sup>Breton "Genèse et Perspective Artistiques du Surréalisme" (1941) in Le Surréalisme et la Peinture (1965), p.63.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

connotations to do with Freud,<sup>51</sup> Jung and any other kind of psycho-mysticism. In other words, Surrealism and metaphysics appear to be almost synonymous.<sup>52</sup> Consequently the post 1919, apparently more conservative de Chirico, is rejected, his metaphysical claims (judged in terms of Surrealist claims) ridiculed.<sup>53</sup>

In conclusion to the discussion of the very early de Chirico criticism it can be noted that it failed to take sufficient cognizance of the 19th century philosophy that factually informs de Chirico's work. Instead there are various voices, such as Apollinaire, Carrà and Breton, that were sufficiently powerful to establish interpretations of Metaphysical Art removed from any such background and which advocate generalized ideas of mysticism, spirituality or psychology. While none of these

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<sup>51</sup>Compare, for instance the review "The Visitation" by Robert Melville in London Bulletin No 18-20, June 1940, pp 7-8, who interprets de Chirico's architecture in terms of "feminine constructions".

<sup>52</sup>Indeed, it is here where one can find the reason why Metaphysical Art not only becomes absorbed in the Surrealist art movement but likewise remains associated with the early paintings only. Breton draws the line in 1917. (Compare Breton op.cit., p.13.)

<sup>53</sup>The relationship between de Chirico and the Surrealist leader Breton, was short and intense: initially Breton praised de Chirico and the latter responded very positively. In personal letters one finds that de Chirico even enthusiastically describes his so-called return to the classical to Breton, apparently not suspecting any adverse reaction. When de Chirico finally understood that his development meant scorn and mordant criticism on the part of his erstwhile supporters, he answered with various bitter polemics against Surrealism. Most notably in Hebdomeros there is a scene which seems evidently meant as biting irony against the Surrealist sympathy for the transforming mystery of twilight and night. This criticism though did not reach its target since with the publication of de Chirico's novel the interest of the Surrealists in de Chirico was re-ignited.

approaches are "incorrect", they fall short of doing justice to the clear philosophical stance that de Chirico evidently meant to inject into his work.

## 2.2. Soby: a Period of Transition in the de Chirico Criticism

Whereas the early criticism thus remained largely patchy, the first, more fully diagnostic, complex pieces of criticism including de Chirico's philosophical background, are Soby's monographs The early Chirico (1941) and, subsequently, Giorgio de Chirico (1955). Without doubt the latter publication still ranks among the most valuable sources of information about the artist and his work in general.<sup>54</sup> With respect to the presentation of the philosophical dimension of Metaphysical Art Soby clearly breaks new ground by the mere acknowledgement of it.

As will become clear in the course of the present investigation, Soby's Nietzsche-centred reading of Metaphysical Art surely set once more a trend for many subsequent approaches to de Chirico's philosophy. He dedicates a chapter to Nietzsche's impact on de Chirico, whereas Schopenhauer and Weininger are acknowledged alongside German artists important to de Chirico's work under the general rubric "Other Germanic Influences."<sup>55</sup>

In the introduction to Nietzsche Soby directs the attention to de Chirico's "... longing .. for a supernatural intensity of

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<sup>54</sup>Compare the bibliographies of recent books on 20th century history of art such as Painting and Sculpture in Europe 1880-1940 ed. G.Hamilton, 1990: Soby is named as the standard reference to de Chirico.

<sup>55</sup>J.T.Soby (1955), p.28.



expression":<sup>56</sup> according to Soby, this "must have" (emphasis mine) been clarified by Nietzsche's dictum that art makes life endurable.<sup>57</sup> In fact, the idea of art relieving life's struggle, which Soby highlights as a crucial, and apparently unique de Chirico-Nietzsche connection, is a common position variously expressed in the long tradition of philosophical discussion. Interestingly, Soby fails to point out that for Nietzsche, it was notably Schopenhauer who shaped his outlook on the specially redeeming effect of art: in Ecce Homo, Nietzsche's retrospective reflections about his earlier life and work, the philosopher criticizes himself for having taken over Schopenhauer's doctrines on metaphysics and art. Thus, if Soby wishes to argue that de Chirico proposed to invest his art with the powers of endurance, it is peculiar that he does not acknowledge the, possibly unmediated, influence of Schopenhauer here, but resorts instead to creating the impression of a uniquely Nietzschean philosophy meeting de Chirico's requirements.

Similarly Soby suggests, rather vaguely, that de Chirico was "presumably especially impressed by Nietzsche's The Birth of Tragedy and it is not difficult to imagine his poring over the words relating to the ideal artist ..."

<sup>58</sup>(emphases mine) - a presumption, for which he does not provide any evidence. Instead, Soby relies entirely on what he seemingly holds to be de Chirico's sensibility. In this manner he ultimately arrives at

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p.27.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

his conclusion that as to the premise of Metaphysical Art "we have only to look at one of de Chirico's early paintings to see that they propose a Nietzschean counter-reality based on reverie, incantation and dreams."<sup>59</sup>

These so obviously ill-supported inferences are subsequently fleshed out with - for Soby - two further instances of de Chirico's use of Nietzsche as "principal subjects" in his art. Among these Soby names the "lyrical re-appraisal of every-day objects ... suggesting an ulterior meaning behind surface appearances".<sup>60</sup> Interestingly this latter "subject" in de Chirico, attributed by Soby to Nietzsche, plays a major role in Schopenhauer's metaphysics, too. Indeed the concept of a re-appraisal of reality is whole-heartedly taken over by Nietzsche from Schopenhauer<sup>61</sup> in Die Geburt der Tragödie.<sup>62</sup>

With respect to Schopenhauer and Weininger, they are, in

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>Op.cit., pp.27-28; The other "principal subject" concerns the Nietzschean incantation of Stimmung during his Turin experience which is echoed in de Chirico's use of architecture.

<sup>61</sup>The Schopenhauerian presence in Nietzsche is only via implication established in Soby: he offers a quotation from Nietzsche where the latter observes "Schopenhauer actually designates the gift of occasionally regarding men and things as mere phantoms and dream-pictures as the criterion of philosophical ability" (op.cit., p.28).

<sup>62</sup>Besides, as has been already pointed out (I.1.;p.6), there are instances where de Chirico actually alludes to the very same concept by naming both Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, which suggests that the artist was familiar with this close philosophical kinship. Clearly, among Soby's suggestions only the "lyricism" can be rightfully attributed exclusively to Nietzsche. But this is, as are various other Nietzsche-related features, such as the use of tragedy, rather "methods" (Fagiolo in Giorgio de Chirico - der Metaphysiker, Rubin ed., (1983)) of expression than actual philosophical concepts.

Soby's presentation, unimportant from the point of view of any philosophical contribution. He does little more than report their general philosophical relevance for de Chirico and supply quotations that one can in any case draw from de Chirico's writings. In other words, Schopenhauer is mentioned in terms of statues on low pedestals, in his probable influence in shaping the "phantomic aspects of statuary", and de Chirico's professed interest in Schopenhauer's concept of revelation. (p.29). As to Weininger, Soby refers to him via a quotation by de Chirico who once designated him in an essay on Böcklin as "il piú profondo psicologo che io conosca"<sup>63</sup>(emphasis mine). Elsewhere Weininger's symbolic interpretation of geometrical forms is briefly mentioned in connection with de Chirico's use of triangular, and semi-circular shapes.

In short, while Soby acknowledges their presence in de Chirico's work, he clearly judges Schopenhauer and Weininger as being of minor importance in contrast to what he wishes to see as the major importance of Nietzsche. The latter is presented by him as a pervasive, though - as demonstrated - conceptually only superficially related, force in de Chirico. Given this rather light-weight treatment of de Chirico's philosophical antecedents, it seems odd that Soby nevertheless employs philosophy as a criterion to discriminate between de Chirico and Carrà.<sup>64</sup> If this

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<sup>63</sup>De Chirico "Arnoldo Böcklin" (1920) in MP, p.166.

<sup>64</sup> "... it is important to keep in mind the differences between them as artists. De Chirico ... had been nourished by Germanic and primarily philosophic sources, while Carrà, after he had begun to turn away from Futurism's violent experiments, had become immersed in the great Italian tradition of painting." Soby (1955) pp. 119-120.

difference in background is of such clear art historical magnitude, would not a closer inquiry into de Chirico's philosophical sources be justified?

Hence, while Soby has the merit of introducing the philosophical dimension into the discussion of Metaphysical Art, the specific links with philosophy remain relatively vague. First of all he does not make any fundamental conceptual inquiry; secondly he is clearly partial to a Nietzschean predominance and, thirdly, in his remarks on Nietzsche and Metaphysical Art, he emphasizes modes of non philosophical expression ("lyricism", "Stimmung", melancholy) rather than offering any philosophical analysis. Thus, although Soby's writings have, generally speaking, the positive effect of creating an awareness of the presence of the philosophical antecedents, the obscure quality of this inquiry will likewise have a lasting effect on the numerous subsequent explorations of de Chirico's work.

Furthermore, Soby declares de Chirico's metaphysical period to be finished by the 1920s: "As a painter ... de Chirico ... was more at ease as a classicist and exponent of technical virtuosity than as a metaphysician. No amount of prodding by the Surrealists or others could revive his youthful, inventive powers."<sup>65</sup> Thus once more, while exempting Hebdomeros, the artist's claim never to have broken with his metaphysical orientation is dismissed, without any inquiry into what constitutes de Chirico's concept of the metaphysical.

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<sup>65</sup>Soby (1955), p.162.

## 2.3. Recent Criticism

### 2.3.1. A General Outline

By contrast, the recent criticism displays a much stronger tendency to acknowledge the philosophical background of Metaphysical Art. There is hardly any account that does not mention this source of inspiration, perhaps among the most recent being that by one of the leading Italian art critics, Fagiolo, who maintains that de Chirico's work is "più una filosofia che uno stile".<sup>66</sup> However, there is undoubtedly a tendency to not go beyond the mentioning of a Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Weininger presence and thus the actual inquiry into philosophical concepts is marginalized. The most striking example of this type of criticism is perhaps that by the editor of the Catalogo Generale of de Chirico's work Claudio Bruni Sakraischik: while he acknowledges the philosophical background of Metaphysical Art, his presentation of de Chirico's work does not explore this philosophical background. Instead, he describes it in psychological terms, foregrounding the element of the artist's journey through life.<sup>67</sup>

Another example of the more recent criticism which does refer to the philosophical antecedents of de Chirico, without

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<sup>66</sup>M. Fagiolo Classicismo pittorico (1991), p.118.

<sup>67</sup> Compare C. Bruni Sakraischik Giorgio de Chirico, Rome, La Medusa, (1976): "I am sure that, as a psychiatric patient talks to the doctor about himself for hours, in order to free himself of his anxieties, so de Chirico made his auto-confessions by paintings, which probably had a therapeutic effect."(p.9; emphasis mine) And elsewhere Sakraischik dubs de Chirico's work "a mental journey" (p.19).

following up this reference, is provided by Pere Gimferrer.<sup>68</sup> Although emphasizing the philosophical dimension in de Chirico, he is far from embarking on any conceptual inquiry. Indeed, he ultimately sets aside the philosophical context and rather describes Metaphysical Art in terms of its "formal" characteristics, which he discerns to be "the absence of the human figure"<sup>69</sup> and "the polyphonic conjunction of different (artistic) voices".<sup>70</sup> As will become clear in the course of this analysis, all of these observations do actually have their place within the framework of an underlying philosophical stance: however, Gimferrer clearly ultimately fails to make this connection.

Among those reviewers who actually do get involved in questions concerning the possible philosophical underpinning of de Chirico's art one can discern wide differences in opinion.

### 2.3.2. Weininger-Related Criticism

The first distinction can be seen in the critical treatment of Weininger. There are many critics, like Rubin, Davies and Baldacci, who practically ignore his existence, or who treat his influence as an entirely marginal matter. By contrast critics such as Schmied,<sup>71</sup> Poli<sup>72</sup> and Lista<sup>73</sup> try to integrate Weininger

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<sup>68</sup>Pere Gimferrer De Chirico (Madrid 1988); here used in the English publication under the same title (London 1989).

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p.5.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p.19.

<sup>71</sup>W.Schmied (1989), pp.46-47.

<sup>72</sup>Op.cit., in particular chapter three: "Giorgio de Chirico. La formazione e la 'scoperta' della pittura metafisica".

together with Schopenhauer and Nietzsche in their analysis of Metaphysical Art.

Schmied even ventures to claim that according to a report by de Chirico's friend, Giorgio Castelfranco, the very term "metaphysics" had been inspired by Weininger.<sup>74</sup> According to Castelfranco "il termine *pittura metafisica* fu suggerito a de Chirico dal Weininger di *Intorno alle cose supreme ...* ove propone una metafisica come simbolistica universale, come definizione di ogni singolo nella totalità come definizione del profondo senso delle cose".<sup>75</sup> Yet, as Poli points out, this Weininger suggestion "si collega strettamente alla concezione schopenhaueriana dell'arte"<sup>76</sup>(emphasis mine). More specifically he refers to Schopenhauer's concept of aesthetic contemplation - developed in Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung - which enables one to break through appearances (the phenomenal world) into the true (metaphysical) condition of the world (see the discussion in Chapter III).

However, while it is true that Weininger's metaphysics is to be seen as largely derivative from Kant and Schopenhauer, this fact as such does not invalidate the claim that de Chirico might

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<sup>73</sup>G. Lista De Chirico Paris, (1991); in particular the chapter "The Poetics of Stimmung".

<sup>74</sup>As does Poli. Yet in contrast to Schmied, Poli attenuates the implication of this allegation by reiterating the notion that Weininger's philosophy was ultimately Schopenhauerian. In this connection, he even quotes in a footnote Cesare Cases' introduction to K.Kraus Morale e criminalità Rizzoli, Milan, (1976): Cases characterizes Weininger "come una versione parossistica di Schopenhauer" (op.cit., p.210.).

<sup>75</sup>Giorgio Castelfranco in Pittura Moderna, Florence, (1934).

<sup>76</sup>Poli (1989), p.84.

have adopted his metaphysical concept from Weininger, yet the connection arguably makes the Weininger position in de Chirico's work less fundamental: against the background of de Chirico's knowledge of a comparatively lucidly presented Schopenhauerian metaphysics, his embracing of Weininger's often unsupported concepts<sup>77</sup> as a foundation for his metaphysical programme appears doubtful.

Nonetheless, Schmied and Lista put forward compelling arguments in favour of Weininger's - at least temporary - importance for Metaphysical Art: referring to de Chirico's own observation in the Valori Plastici article "Sull'arte metafisica" (1919),<sup>78</sup> they suggest that de Chirico adopted from Weininger the attribution of a psychic reality to (in particular geometrical) signs. In Über die letzten Dinge Weininger suggests "da der Mensch zu allen Dingen in der Welt ein Verhältnis hat,

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<sup>77</sup>Weininger remarks, for instance, about his book Über die letzten Dinge: "Die Anschauung, welche diesem Buch zugrunde liegt, ist die der größeren Realität der psychischen als der physischen Phänomenen; wenn ich einstweilen auch noch außerstande bin, diese Grundvoraussetzung systematisch und methodisch vollkommen begründen oder einordnen zu können." Weininger, op.cit., p.123 (emphasis mine). Poli classifies Weininger's writings as "un atteggiamento teoreticamente contraddittorio e esistenzialmente fallimentare" but concedes that they could be considered as stimulating "sul piano estetico-artistico" Poli (1989), p.80. Interestingly, Schmied concedes that as far as Weininger's "universal symbolism" was concerned "so hielt es de Chirico mit Schopenhauer und Nietzsche..." Schmied (1989), p.47.

<sup>78</sup>"Giova qui ricordare alcune profonde riflessioni di Otto Weininger sulla metafisica geometrica '...L'arco di cerchio, come ornamento, può essere bello: esso non significa la perfetta completezza, che non presta più il fianco ad alcuna critica, come il serpente di Midgard che circonda il mondo. Nell'arco v'è ancora qualche cosa di incompiuto, che ha bisogno ed è capace di compimento -; *esso lascia ancora presentire*. Perciò anche l'anello è sempre simbolo di qualcosa di non morale o antimorale'." MP, p.88.



so müssen alle Dinge in ihm irgendwie vorhanden sein", <sup>79</sup> and he concludes that "jeder Daseinsform in der Natur entspricht eine Eigenschaft im Menschen...". <sup>80</sup> In other words, the various aspects of nature become interpreted "durch die psychologischen Kategorien im Menschen". <sup>81</sup> Thus man is a microcosm, and if he concentrates his will "so, daß alle Universalität seines Selbsts (und der Welt, denn er ist ja der Mikrokosmos) in den Augenblick gelegt wird, so hat er die Zeit überwunden und ist göttlich geworden." <sup>82</sup>

There are thus two main aspects relevant here: on the one hand the reading of the object world through psychological categories; and secondly the centering on the human being as a microcosm. As to the first there are firm examples in both de Chirico's writings and his paintings where there is a clear attribution of a psychological reality to the object world: for instance, while not taking up Weininger's most elaborate translation of the animal world in terms of psychological categories, <sup>83</sup> de Chirico talks about geometry and designates the

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<sup>79</sup>Otto Weininger Über die letzten Dinge (Vienna 1904); here referred to in an edition by Matths & Seitz Verlag, München, (1980); p.122.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p.57.

<sup>83</sup>In Weininger's treatise on "Metaphysik" he focuses on an animal psychology, whereby he explains that the dog is a symbol for the criminal (p.124), the horse for madness (p.134), the donkey for stupidity, the monkey a caricature of the microcosm, the snake - related to antimorality - (p.137); he looks into bird and vegetable life and non-organic nature - the latter containing remarks about starlight, night, smoke, the colours red, blue and white, mountains, rivers, seas and noon(p.139). Apart from one or two aspects (the horse; noon) none of these examples seem to

triangles as magical and mystical, even fear-inducing.<sup>84</sup> In his paintings, unarguably, the marked use of geometrical shapes is frequently linked with psychological conditions (compare The Enigma of Fatality (1914,Pl.29)). However, it needs to be noted that de Chirico's psychological attributions remain largely confined to fear, anxiety, melancholy, longing and, in a few exceptions, joy - in other words, he toys with the psychological "repertoire" of the traditional melancholic genius (compare the discussion in Chapter VI). Likewise the use of geometry in conjunction with psychic conditions associated with the inspired mind, in particular the artist genius, is clearly to be understood in a broader context. Against the background of de Chirico's arguably Dürer-inspired Melancholy (1912,Pl.5), Jean Clair discusses de Chirico's use of geometrical signs linked with melancholy in the Renaissance tradition. Under "the sign of Saturn" the two aspects connote for him the artist's struggle to overcome the limitations of the "mondo geometrico" (in Euclidean geometry artificially posited) and thus reach the metaphysical other.<sup>85</sup> In other words, while de Chirico might have been intrigued by Weininger's suggestions as to a reading of geometrical objects in psychological categories, it appears as though the corresponding references in the artist's work need to

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be even remotely present in de Chirico's work.

<sup>84</sup>"... le squadre ossessionarono ed ossessionano ancora la mia mente; le vedevo sempre spuntare come astri misteriosi dietro ogni mia raffigurazione pittorica". in MP, p.88.

<sup>85</sup>Jean Clair "Sous le Signe de Saturne - L'Allégorie de la mélancolie dans l'art de l'Allemagne et de l'Italie entre les deux guerres", in Cahiers du Musée National d'Art Moderne 7-8, Paris (1981), pp.176 - 207.

be treated with due caution.

The second aspect implied in Schmied's and Lista's argument, and, indeed, taken up by Poli, too, concerns Weininger's suggestion that man functions as a microcosm and thus there is a correspondence between man's inner and the outer world. For Schmied this is one of the features clearly taken up in de Chirico: "Was de Chirico an Otto Weininger fesselte, waren seine versteckten und offenen Hinweise auf die Entsprechungen der Außen- und Innenwelt",<sup>86</sup> and, referring to de Chirico's paintings, he continues: "die Dinge waren für de Chirico Äquivalente des Menschen, der fast immer abwesend blieb".<sup>87</sup> Clearly, the huge dummy figures of the 1920s (see the discussion in Chapter V) could be understood as an echo of this concept of the man-object world relationship. Here faceless creatures literally bear the architectural bric-à-brac of the human environment in their stomachs. Yet, as Poli rightly points out, the being that "ha tutto il mondo in sé"<sup>88</sup> is in fact quite specifically Weininger's genius. From here the critic points out one can read Weininger's concept as "un accentuazione esasperata dell'individualismo di Schopenhauer"<sup>89</sup> (emphasis mine). Indeed, as will be shown in greater detail in Chapter V.2.3.6., Schopenhauer refers to man as a microcosm; Weininger elaborates this thought into what Poli dubs "una concezione rigidamente

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<sup>86</sup>Schmied (1989), p.47.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid.

<sup>88</sup>Poli (1989), p.80.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid.

solipsistica dell'Io".<sup>90</sup>

Thus, clearly, in spite of evident connections, one needs to keep the Weininger influence in perspective: it can be shown that fundamentally Weininger adheres to a metaphysical concept shaped in the Kantian tradition. There are remarkable overlaps with Schopenhauer's philosophical writings, which, surely, de Chirico cannot possibly have failed to recognize. However, there are aspects of Weininger's work which indicate that he does have some direct relevance for *Metaphysical Art*. In particular Weininger's translation of the object world into psychological categories appears to have found a place in de Chirico's work. However, the discussion points towards a more Schopenhauer-orientated metaphysical programme in de Chirico's work than one wholly and convincingly set in a Weininger framework. Besides which, Weininger's strongly ethical tinge to his psychology - a point usually not broached by critics - does not appear in de Chirico's work in any prominent fashion.<sup>91</sup>

These points, together with de Chirico's later renunciation of Weininger, must lead one to understand his influence in more peripheral terms; hence it is no surprise that, generally speaking, the de Chirico criticism concentrates above all on Schopenhauer's and Nietzsche's relevance for *Metaphysical Art*. In the present discussion of de Chirico's work Weininger will therefore be considered in terms of a complementary

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<sup>90</sup>Ibid.

<sup>91</sup>While in Weininger's writings the use of the categories "moral" and "amoral" is ubiquitous, there are hardly any instances in de Chirico. An exception is perhaps an episode in *Hebdomeros*, where the artist talks about "moral food" (compare p.121 ff).

psychological, rather than an essential, contribution to any philosophical foundation.

### 2.3.3. Schopenhauer and Nietzsche-Related Criticism

Among those critics who do consider the philosophical foundation of Metaphysical Art, the majority attribute the essential contributions to Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. Yet it is only on the level of generality that such unity prevails: as far as the more detailed attribution of the respective influences are concerned one is faced with divided camps. On the one hand there are those critics ( and they are in the majority) who - following the example of Soby - attach a particular importance to Nietzsche's influence on de Chirico. On the other hand there are critics, notably Davies and Poli, who hold that Schopenhauer is to be regarded as the prime source for de Chirico's philosophy.

Very generally speaking, the emphasis on Nietzsche is shared by such major critics as Baldacci, Fagiolo, Fossati, Lista and Schmied. Yet their additional inclusion of de Chirico's other sources ranges from zero (Fossati) to the attempt at a balanced outlook (Schmied, who attempts to account for all three sources of philosophical inspiration) and, finally, to the inclusion of a comparatively strong focus upon Weininger (Lista).

Given this overridingly strong pro-Nietzschean background promoted by de Chirico critics, a recent broad appraisal of "Philosophy and Italian Painting between the Wars"<sup>92</sup> by Mario

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<sup>92</sup>Mario Perniola "Philosophy and Italian Painting Between the Wars" in Italian Art 1900-1945, Bompiani, Milan, (1989), pp.171-181.

Perniola sticks out in a very odd manner. The writer distinguishes de Chirico in terms of his qualities as an "Apollonian" artist from the "Dionysian" attitude of the rest of contemporary Italian abstract art.<sup>93</sup> Clearly Perniola suggests here a division between the traditional ideal of the Apollonian artist de Chirico, from the notion of the Dionysian re-introduced by Nietzsche in order to highlight the "new" image of the artist-genius in terms of a total, almost frenetic intuitionism. Thus Perniola implies a de Chirico image that appears to be curiously at variance with the promoters of the Nietzschean inspiration of Metaphysical Art: a mind inspired by Schopenhauer and the serenity, clarity and harmony of classical values.<sup>94</sup>

The article is symptomatic of the alternative position in de Chirico criticism: the attempt to point out the superior importance of Schopenhauer vis à vis Nietzsche. On a small scale, such a tendency can already be observed in Schmied, who suggests that de Chirico, in fact, "read" Nietzsche from a Schopenhauerian viewpoint.<sup>95</sup> Yet ultimately, Schmied claims that the core concept of de Chirico's metaphysics lies in the Nietzschean terms of creating "the illusion of the illusion".<sup>96</sup> Likewise, Baldacci

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<sup>93</sup>Ibid., pp.173-179.

<sup>94</sup>Compare Rose Pfeffer Nietzsche: disciple of Dionysus Cranbury, Associated Univ. Press, (1972): "Nietzsche's interpretation of Greek culture is in steep conflict with that of the great classicists of the eighteenth century. In the classic view it is not Dionysus but Apollo who is the central phenomenon of the Greek genius consisting in peaceful serenity and sublimity, clarity and harmony" (op.cit., loc.cit., p.38.).

<sup>95</sup>Schmied (1989), p.44.

<sup>96</sup>Compare Schmied (1989), p.55.

talks about the relationship between de Chirico and Schopenhauer, yet, as a rule, the main body of his articles and essays on de Chirico nonetheless take a strongly Nietzschean stance.<sup>97</sup>

Indeed, in any analysis of Nietzsche's philosophical contribution to Metaphysical Art it has to be kept in mind that Nietzsche largely adopted Schopenhauer's philosophical position in such important works as the early Die Geburt der Tragödie. Schopenhauer was seen as "Erzieher" and his metaphysical concepts were absorbed and recast in Nietzsche's idiomatic mixture of myths and lyricism which served him as models for the intuitive. However, eventually Nietzsche rejected Schopenhauer and, what matters more in the present context, the notion of the metaphysical, venturing even to call himself "der Anti-Metaphysiker par excellence". Although critics show that this rejection was never fully realized in his work,<sup>98</sup> Nietzsche's change clearly blurred, at least in large parts, the formerly so clearly traceable Schopenhauer lineage. Generally though, the consequence of this initial overlap and the latter rejection is that Nietzsche's position needs to be taken into account in any critical-interpretative exploration: do references to Nietzsche refer to the early "Schopenhauerian" Nietzsche or the later more

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<sup>97</sup>The article which relates de Chirico's Metaphysical Art to Schopenhauer's Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung is: P. Baldacci "Giorgio de Chirico, l'estetica del classicismo e la tradizione antica" in Giorgio de Chirico, Parigi 1924-1929 M.Fagiolo ed., (1982), p.13.

<sup>98</sup> Heidegger points out that in this attempt he ultimately slips into an unacknowledged metaphysics based on the fact that the demanded abolition of all systems necessarily becomes a system itself. Compare Martin Heidegger Nietzsche Vol.I, Pfullingen, Neske, 1961.

radically iconoclastic Nietzsche? Although rarely acknowledged by critics the fact that de Chirico often referred to Nietzsche and Schopenhauer at the same time suggests the painter's interest in the early work, and this, of course, demands that one addresses Schopenhauer in greater detail.

It is time to look more closely at what the critics make of the two philosophers' impact upon de Chirico. Given that Nietzsche is held to be the most decisive influence by most critics the examination begins with him.

#### 2.3.3.1. Nietzsche's "Method"

With the above caveats and cautions as to the philosophical complexities in mind, the critics' presentation of the Nietzsche in de Chirico's work often comes as a surprise : far from elucidating the complex interrelationship between the Schopenhauerian and Nietzschean philosophy, Nietzsche is often simply asserted as a point of departure for any de Chirico exploration. Surprisingly this inclusion of Nietzsche frequently starts not, as one would expect, with philosophical ideas but with biographical considerations such as Schmied's suggestion that de Chirico could identify with Nietzsche because of their mutual proclivities to frequent ailments and to fits of melancholia.<sup>99</sup> The identification is then supported with the reference to the melancholic artist in comparison to the Nietzsche photograph.<sup>100</sup> Likewise there is the standard reference

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<sup>99</sup>Schmied (1989), p.50.

<sup>100</sup>Compare Schmied (1989), pp.42-43.



to the onset of Nietzsche's delusion in 1888 (the year of de Chirico's birth) while he was in Turin and de Chirico's painting Turin 1888 (1914-15). While these references clearly illuminate biographical ties they do not bear any distinct clue as to the philosophical concepts underlying Metaphysical Art. The fact that it is Schopenhauer's notion of madness that de Chirico perceives as conceptually crucial for his metaphysical programme is rarely acknowledged (among the major critics only Schmied does) and discussed: thus it seems that for the critics the sensationalism of the myth of the mad philosopher Nietzsche simply overtakes the painter's methodological grounding.

Apart from the critics' concern with biographical coincidence, Nietzsche's presence is most frequently highlighted in terms of echoes of his use of myth and lyrical style. Quoting de Chirico, Fagiolo (1991) speaks of Nietzschean "methods". For instance, Nietzsche, intrigued by the revelatory power and the intuitive purity of pre-socratic culture, in particular Heraclitus's notion of enigma, makes enigma the main mode of rendering his teachings, the rendering of the inexpressible that can only be intuited.<sup>101</sup> The oracular sayings and bearing of his hero Zarathustra exemplify Nietzsche's view that the ordinarily inexpressible other can be transmitted via the power of enigmatic

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<sup>101</sup>In his line by line account of Heraclitus's writings C.H.Kahn shows that the philosopher sees the riddling of the oracle as a "mode of utterance" which "presents a plurality or complexity of meaning, so that reflection is required, and unusual insight, if the proper interpretation is to be discovered" (see Kahn The Art and Thought of Heraclitus Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979, p.123). Schmied (1989) suggests that enigma is for Heraclitus "die zentrale Denkform", which is later adopted by Nietzsche, and, through Nietzsche, by de Chirico (p.49).

codification. Language, habitually in the service of established schemes and concepts, is to be re-cast in new combinations to convey the messages of truth.

Baldacci (in Braun, 1989), Schmied (1989), Fagiolo (1991), Lista (1991) and Soby (1955) unanimously stress that enigma is a pervading feature of de Chirico's work, not only as nomenclature but as a method behind his pictorial arrangements (such as the bold juxtaposition of objects from widely different contexts, such as bananas and a marble torso) that have here the function of questioning reality.<sup>102</sup> Indeed Baldacci praises these as translations of the linguistic recasting that Nietzsche inaugurated. Dubbed by A.C. Danto as Nietzsche's "deviant speech",<sup>103</sup> de Chirico's juxtapositions (compare Chapter V.1.3.) indeed appear to be an echo of this method. Yet although enigma, in the Nietzschean sense, is meant to lead towards some sort of (metaphysical) insight, it does not itself constitute a concept of metaphysics. As Baldacci<sup>104</sup> rightly points out in his analysis of de Chirico, enigma acquires in *Metaphysical Art* the status of a crucial rhetorical or codifying device. In other words it is a means towards the metaphysical end - not itself that end.<sup>105</sup> It

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<sup>102</sup>Lista (1991) calls the use of enigma in de Chirico a "method of interrogation", p.43.

<sup>103</sup>Danto Nietzsche as Philosopher New York, Macmillan, (1968), p.41.

<sup>104</sup>Baldacci (in E. Braun ed., 1989), pp. 61-71; likewise his article "Le Classicisme chez Giorgio de Chirico: Théorie et Méthode" in Cahiers du Musée d'Art Moderne 11 (1983), pp.18-31.

<sup>105</sup>Similarly many critics dwell on de Chirico's interest in the Nietzschean effect of surprise, of sudden encounter with insight, truth etc., and his endeavour to recreate the effect of surprise in his paintings. Although - like enigma - this could be seen in the greater philosophical framework of the inversion of values,

is a procedure tailored here for an evidently essentially Schopenhauer-inspired metaphysics that demands the breaking of conceptual constraints to attain the metaphysical reality behind the appearance. In Nietzsche though, enigma appears to oscillate between this Schopenhauerian stance of his early years and the interpretation of the more mature work - namely that any revelatory operation involves only the discovery of another "illusion". This latter position does not, however, comply with de Chirico's own view, since he sees himself essentially as operating with a metaphysical "reality" behind appearances, not with Nietzschean "illusions behind illusions" (Schmied 1989), and thus clearly taking an essentially Schopenhauerian stance. Yet, while this conceptual attribution is possible, the undeniable fact remains that de Chirico wholeheartedly embraces and develops the Nietzschean manner of transposing a complex mixture of psychological and poetic thought into an artistically valuable mode. Thus de Chirico, arguably, derives an aesthetics from Nietzsche - which needs to be distinguished sharply from any philosophical concepts.

Indeed, this argument can be consolidated by examining another feature commonly associated with the Nietzschean background of Metaphysical Art: the use of the figure of Ariadne. Practically all critics refer to the fact that Ariadne was used by Nietzsche in his "Dionysos-Dithyramben", while in de Chirico Ariadne is frequently depicted in a central position (compare

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or counter-logic aimed at by Nietzsche, it remains in the way de Chirico uses it, primarily, not the concept of the metaphysical but a strategy.

Chapter III.1.). The link, it is suggested, lies once more in the idea of melancholy vital to both the philosopher and the painter. Yet only Fagiolo<sup>106</sup> explores in some detail how this association comes about: he points out the connection between The Soothsayer's Recompense (1913,Pl.10) - with its palm trees recalling the imagery of Nietzsche's Dionysos Dithyramben - and elsewhere the inscription "melanconia" at Ariadne's pedestal (compare Melancholy (1912,Pl.5)). For Fagiolo, the idea of melancholy provides the thread to an understanding of the artist's "spiritual attitude": namely that insight can be obtained via such a state.

While it is true that melancholy can be understood here as a means of insight, this is clearly not unique to Nietzsche: the idea of melancholy as a state of heightened receptivity has a very long tradition as Klibansky<sup>107</sup> demonstrates in his history of "Saturn und Melancholie". Indeed, there are critics who refer to the figure of Melancholy as an echo of Dürer's Melencolia I (Pl.94). Besides, as will be demonstrated, Schopenhauer, before Nietzsche, employed the idea of the melancholic genius as an integral part of his metaphysics.

What those critics who point to the de Chirico-Nietzsche link via the use of Ariadne fail to address though, is that it is not just the reference to insight but more Nietzsche's highly idiosyncratic interpretation of the ancient labyrinth myth related to Ariadne. According to Schmeling, who researches the

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<sup>106</sup>Compare Fagiolo in Rubin ed.(1983), pp.41-46.

<sup>107</sup>R.Klibansky,E.Panofsky,F.Saxl Saturn und Melancholie Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, (1990).

adaptation of the Knossos legend in modern literature, Nietzsche's treatment of that subject matter is outstanding inasmuch as he undertakes a "philosophische Neubewertung des Mythos"<sup>108</sup>. This re-evaluation starts with the fact that Nietzsche makes use of the legendary background by abstracting paradigms like the disorientation of the labyrinth, the fatal, swallowing nature of the Minotaur, the heroic quest of Theseus etc. He then re-organizes them in a manner which subverts the hermeneutic fixation of the original Knossos-legend. Thus for instance he makes Dionysos say to Ariadne: "Du bist ein Labyrinth";<sup>109</sup> or he leads Ariadne to observe that she contains the labyrinth, including the Minotaur, and will be fatal for Theseus.<sup>110</sup> Most critical evaluations of Nietzsche's imagery agree that there is not any one unified definition of the Ariadne figure in his work.<sup>111</sup> It can be shown that the Nietzschean re-organisations of the Knossos legend, their being telescoped into the Ariadne

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<sup>108</sup>W.Schmeling Der labyrinthische Diskurs : vom Mythos zum Erzählmodell Frankfurt, Athenäum, (1987), p.157.

<sup>109</sup>See "Klage der Ariadne" in Nietzsche Werke VI3, G.Colli ed., Berlin, de Gruyter, (1969), p.389.

<sup>110</sup>Nietzsche "Menschliches Allzumenschliches" in Nietzsche Werke (1969) Vol.VIII2, p.66: "'Ariadne', sagte Dionysos, 'du bist ein Labyrinth: Theseus hat sich in dich verirrt, er hat keinen Faden mehr; was nützt es ihm nun, daß er nicht vom Minotaurus gefressen wurde?'"', Ariadne: "'... an mir sollen alle Helden zu Grunde gehen; das ist meine Liebe zu Theseus: 'ich richte ihn zu Grunde.'"'

<sup>111</sup>The Ariadne image is employed for numerous purposes in Nietzsche, ranging from ethical questions to more general ontological concerns. It would go beyond the scope of the present thesis to look into these differences in detail. However, for further reading on the symbolism connected with the Knossos-legend W.Schmeling's (1987) and R.Pfeffer's (1972) accounts can be recommended.

figure, for example, are never innocent: they clearly serve to illustrate various points of his philosophy.

One of these points, we learn from Pfeffer, is that of the idea of Ariadne representing stillness and loneliness where truth is born. Although Nietzsche changed his notion of truth away from Schopenhauer, we noted that initially Nietzsche adopted Schopenhauer's idea of truth: in other words it was essentially a metaphysical truth.<sup>112</sup> But even without this clear identification, Nietzsche demonstrably manages to sum up a philosophical objective in an image: it is not only an arbitrarily chosen one, but via the telescoping technique it works organically: the labyrinth conjures up ideas of breaking through ordinary conceptual realities via its powers of disorientation, the eagerness to encounter the minotaur demonstrates Nietzsche's fatalistic attitude etc. As Schmeling suggests: "Es geht ihm (sc. Nietzsche) um den geistigen Ort des Menschen in einer Welt, die der Philosoph ... als eine labyrinthische erfährt. Er verfolgt erkenntnistheoretische Ziele, wobei der intellektuelle Weg der Wahrheitsfindung, weil auf widersprüchlichen 'Interpretationen' und 'Perspektiven'

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<sup>112</sup>For instance Ariadne's traditional symbolic significance as the goddess of spring and vegetation used to mark her festivals on Naxos by both the spirit of sadness and dissolution as well as joy and rebirth. In analogy Nietzsche's Ariadne, like Dionysus, becomes instrumental in the Nietzschean focus on tragedy: a dynamic force that both destroys (Theseus) and rebuilds (Dionysus), that perishes and is reborn and thus becomes an emblem for the quest of truth which can ultimately take place only in the union of the opposing forces. By contrast the later work does not attribute any redeeming qualities to Ariadne, but the quest for truth becomes subject to the same consuming mechanisms as life itself (see R.Pfeffer Nietzsche: Disciple of Dionysus Cranbury, (1972), pp.121-122).

basierend, selbst labyrinthisch, d.h. Mimesis der lebensweltlichen Existenz schlechthin, ist."<sup>113</sup>

This specific treatment and the choice of the labyrinth could clearly be interpreted in the light of an underlying philosophy: the breaking-down of conceptual barriers. Conceptually related to the enigma the labyrinth leads to disorientation and questioning. Once more we arrive at an essentially Schopenhauerian concept that in Nietzsche's rendering acquired a poetical translation into an established mythological fabric.

Hence if Fagiolo vaguely points out that Ariadne is the key to many of de Chirico's labyrinths, this seems only too true: it needs to be stressed though, that one is dealing here with methods of transposition and translation<sup>114</sup> - not with philosophical concepts as such, an issue that later critical surveys on Metaphysical Art demonstrably fail to address consistently.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup>Schmeling (1987), p.160.

<sup>114</sup>As will be demonstrated in the discussion of the paintings, de Chirico develops the labyrinth into a major stylistic device to express his philosophical thoughts.

<sup>115</sup>In more recent accounts, such as Marianne Martin's "On de Chirico's Theater" in Rubin ed., (1982), and Schmied (1989), the link between the theatricality in de Chirico's work and the importance Nietzsche attached to tragedy as a "dramatization of the metaphysical" (Roberts) is discussed, too. This issue will be broached in Chapter V.2.3.4. including Poli's (1989) references to the Schopenhauerian impact on de Chirico.

### 2.3.3.2. Nietzschean Philosophy

When it comes to the actual attempts to engage with philosophical concepts the critics' uncertainty is reflected in the scattered references to individual conceptual features. Among those the most frequently discussed are revelation, the hidden other, madness, or non-sense of life - all of which can be found, however, under the heading Nietzsche by some critics, and Schopenhauer by others.

The lack of a consensus is reflected thus in a curious set of attributions: for example, one of de Chirico's avowed core ideas, namely the hidden reality behind the ordinary (i.e the hidden other), is variously ascribed as Nietzschean "demon" or truth-providing illusion (Schmied) or the Schopenhauerian "pure object of cognition" (Baldacci). In this case these fluent borderlines already seem to indicate that the major concepts relevant for de Chirico stem, broadly speaking, from a phase where Schopenhauer and Nietzsche conceptually overlap. More precisely, it is the "early" Schopenhauer-inspired Nietzsche who is called upon with respect to such concepts.

While one can thus observe among the critics an in part complementary, in part exchangeable, use of Nietzsche with respect to Schopenhauer, there is a variety of exclusively Nietzschean concepts that critics attach to de Chirico's Metaphysical Art. Yet even with respect to these the critics turn out to be, in many cases, diametrically opposed. There is, for instance, Schmied who expressly rejects the idea that de Chirico was at all interested in Nietzsche's "eternal return" or his "will to power" and thus places de Chirico's interest in



Nietzsche very firmly in the latter's early philosophy,<sup>116</sup> Against this point of view Fagiolo,<sup>117</sup> Lista<sup>118</sup> and Baldacci<sup>119</sup> express their conviction that at least the "eternal return" constitutes a core concept of de Chirico's writing.

On the face of it the presence of the "eternal return" in de Chirico is most compellingly argued for by Baldacci: he understands de Chirico's reduplication and ante-dating of his own paintings as the practical conclusion to the Nietzschean "eternal cycle".<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>116</sup>Schmied (1989), p.44.

<sup>117</sup>Fagiolo "De Chirico and Savinio: From Metafisica to Surrealism" in Italian Art 1900-1945 (1989), p.136.

<sup>118</sup>Lista (1991), p.39.

<sup>119</sup>Baldacci "De Chirico and Savinio: The Theory and Iconography of Metaphysical Painting" in Italian Art in the 20th century E.Brown ed. (1989), p.69.

<sup>120</sup>Baldacci, *ibid.*; it needs to be noted though that Baldacci's argument does not rest solely on inferences drawn from de Chirico's paintings, but is based on quotations from *de Chirico's* brother Savinio. Like many of those critics supporting the view that Metaphysical Art is essentially Nietzschean his references to Savinio are his main source of theoretical underpinning. Despite attempts - in particular in recent years - to read de Chirico and Savinio as extraordinarily closely related in their objectives it begs the question whether this view can be substantiated: a simple comparison between de Chirico's and Savinio's iconography reveals that the latter fits much better the notions of the Dionysian struggle central to Nietzsche. Furthermore Savinio's writings in Valori Plastici, Baldacci's main source of reference here, is clearly characterized by a Nietzschean tone and line of argument. However, the Valori Plastici articles date from 1919 while de Chirico's first cognizance of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer dates from a time before 1910 - Schmied (1980) dates it around 1907/1908. At this time Savinio was a teenager while de Chirico was at the beginning of his twenties: which suggests that there was enough distance for de Chirico to form a view independent of his brother. Thus without the evidence of a conceptual and comparative analysis of Savinio's and de Chirico's work any argument based on references to Savinio's writings cannot possibly be put forward without cautionary remarks.

However, a closer scrutiny casts doubt upon the various "eternal return" interpretations: given that Nietzsche's cyclical movement is essentially a forward-looking concept, guided by a vision of the future,<sup>121</sup> the nostalgia evidently imbuing de Chirico's work appears to be antagonistic to this specific concept.

In this connection it is, furthermore, somewhat misleading that some critics, like Baldacci, talk not only about the Nietzschean Eternal Return but the Eternal Present,<sup>122</sup> a concept which connotes associations more easily reconcileable with the prevailing stasis of de Chirico's pictures. However, both the Eternal Return and the Eternal Present are, in fact, simply the different sides of one and the same coin in Nietzsche, in the sense that since, for the philosopher, everything returns, and so everything is latently co-present. In other words, in Nietzsche there is no halt, no moment of insight that is not of a fleeting nature. Thus de Chirico's various "shots" of frozen eternity, as well as his protagonist Hebdomeros arriving at a state out of time, appear to be entirely out of keeping with the Nietzschean eternal confinement to the circle.<sup>123</sup>

Another eternity-related concept frequently identified as an influential feature in de Chirico's art is Nietzsche's concept

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<sup>121</sup>Compare Roberts (1988), pp.213-214.

<sup>122</sup>Compare Baldacci, op.cit., p.69.

<sup>123</sup>It should be noted that in Über die letzten Dinge Weininger heavily criticizes Nietzsche's concept of the Eternal Return and attempts to prove that time and therefore life cannot return i.e. everything is subordinated to the principle of linearity.

of "der große Mittag". Fagiolo<sup>124</sup> and Schmied<sup>125</sup> point out, for instance, that this notion serves in Nietzsche as a trope designating the pivotal point of insight. In "Ecce Homo" Nietzsche explains the concept behind the image as "einen Augenblick höchster Selbstbesinnung der Menschheit ... wo sie zurückschaut ... und die Frage des warum? des wozu? zum ersten Male stellt ..." <sup>126</sup> In other words "der große Mittag" is a moment where a person becomes conscious of the perpetual cycle of life and the inescapability of it.

Accordingly, for some critics, de Chirico can be shown to embrace both the Nietzschean image and concept of the great noon-day by dint of the various sunlit urban vistas. The obvious counter-argument to his, namely that the clocks show afternoon time, is simply brushed away by Fagiolo as an instance of de Chirico's ambiguity.<sup>127</sup> Yet there are other examples which seem rather to explode than confirm the "noon-day theory": de Chirico's repeated references to "afternoon" in the titles (Ariadne's Afternoon (1913,Pl.12), for example), and the elongation of the shadows cannot possibly be indicative of noon.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>124</sup>Compare Fagiolo op.cit., p.141 and "De Chirico in Paris 1911-1915" in Giorgio de Chirico, der Metaphysiker W.Rubin ed. (1983).

<sup>125</sup>Schmied (1989), p.50.

<sup>126</sup>Nietzsche "Ecce Homo" in Nietzsche Werke VI3 (1969), p.328.

<sup>127</sup>Fagiolo in Rubin ed. (1983), p.42.

<sup>128</sup>Besides which, if the noon suggestion were to hold, why does only Lista report that Weininger sees in it a revelatory insight much more fitting to de Chirico's urban subject matter: the purity of form. Compare Lista (1991), p.27.

What is true with respect to the urban vistas here so oddly identified as pictorial translations of Nietzsche's "großer Mittag" is the fact that they do convey in their contemplative serenity the impression that ultimately some sort of insight could be achieved. But unlike the Nietzschean notion, it rather suggests an aspect of Schopenhauer's metaphysics that is revealed in the combination of sunlight and architecture and which will be discussed in detail later on.<sup>129</sup>

Another philosophical issue relevant for some critics with respect to the de Chirico-Nietzsche connection is the Nietzschean Übermensch. Whereas, as already observed elsewhere, Schmieid denies that anything related to Nietzsche's will-to-power doctrine was of any importance for the painter, there are reviewers who clearly think otherwise. Although Marianne Martin<sup>130</sup> does not expressly identify de Chirico's The Grand Metaphysician (1917, Pl.56) with the Übermensch, her connection of de Chirico's monumental figure with the Übermarionette by the Nietzsche-inspired stage director, Edward Gordon Craig, clearly implies the conceptual kinship.

More directly Lista suggests the presence of the Übermensch<sup>131</sup> in de Chirico whereby he blends the notion with that of the genius and with what he sees as Weininger's idea of the artist-seer<sup>132</sup> or priest.<sup>133</sup> Without exploring the specific

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<sup>129</sup>Compare Chapter II.

<sup>130</sup>M. Martin "Reflections on De Chirico and Arte Metafisica" in Art Bulletin Vol.60 (1978), p.345.

<sup>131</sup>Lista (1991), p.39.

<sup>132</sup>Ibid.

concept of the Übermensch, he thus vaguely reduces this area of de Chirico's work to figures with special insight. The notion of the genius undoubtedly ranks high in de Chirico's work (one might think here only of de Chirico's frequent associations of the genius and the metaphysician, or the full title of his novel Hebdomeros -le peintre et son génie chez l'écrivain; compare the further discussion in Chapter VI), it always seems to be suggestive of the contemplative ability to gain metaphysical insight from the surrounding object-world. This is altogether unlike a much highlighted aspect of the Nietzschean Übermensch viz. the overcoming of good and evil: here the main objective is of an ethical nature.

In conclusion it can be said that generally the Nietzsche-orientated de Chirico criticism clearly does not elucidate in any integrated conceptual manner the philosophical inspiration informing Metaphysical Art. What it does do is to point towards de Chirico's adoption of various psychological, poetical and rhetorical features from Nietzsche's work. Furthermore, those philosophical concepts attributed to the more mature Nietzsche - i.e. the philosopher emancipated from Schopenhauer - clearly do not rank prominently in the artist's work. On the contrary, as has been demonstrated, those philosophical ideas transported through Nietzschean tropes hark back to his early Schopenhauer-inspired work. What one is left with is the question of whether

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<sup>133</sup>Ibid., p.24; clearly the idea of the artist-seer or artist-priest is by no means unique to Weininger, but has its tradition in Greek mythology. Schopenhauer and Nietzsche make extensive use of it. Quite why Lista attributes it with respect to de Chirico so decidedly to Weininger is not clear.

(Schmied's suggestion) de Chirico did read Nietzsche from an essentially Schopenhauerian point of view.<sup>134</sup> Arguably this is the case and thus the answer demands that one takes a closer look at the critics' perception of Schopenhauer's influence.

#### 2.3.3.3. Schopenhauer Reception

In spite of the strong hints of the Schopenhauer presence in *Metaphysical Art*, Schmied does not follow up such hints, but merely discusses aspects of Schopenhauer such as his notion of madness - which, as pointed out above, is attributed to Nietzsche by other critics.

Ivor Davies,<sup>135</sup> however, highlights Schopenhauer's possible significance for *Metaphysical Art*; he undertakes to show that it was in the first place "Schopenhauer ... who more subtly gave *Metaphysical Art* its name and lineaments".<sup>136</sup> Davies manages to raise within the limitations of his review article some illuminating points. For instance, he points out that, given de Chirico had read Schopenhauer, he could not possibly have failed to notice that his entire philosophy builds on metaphysics.<sup>137</sup> Indeed, if one follows up Davies's suggestion, Schopenhauer's whole conception of the world as will and idea turns out to touch

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<sup>134</sup>Schmied (1989), p.44: De Chirico blieb der Schopenhauerschen Grundstimmung verhaftet, ja, wir dürfen behaupten, daß er auch Nietzsche von Schopenhauer her gelesen ... hat."

<sup>135</sup>Ivor Davies "Giorgio de Chirico: The Sources of *Metaphysical Painting* in Schopenhauer and Nietzsche" in Art International Vol. XXVI (1983), pp.53-60.

<sup>136</sup>Davies, op.cit., p.53.

<sup>137</sup>Ibid.

the very heart of the immanent metaphysics that de Chirico implied when he defined his use of the word "metaphysics" as "beyond the physical, outside our ordinary vision and our common experience"(translation mine).<sup>138</sup>

But whereas Davies's argument is delimited by the scope of the review, it is Poli in Arte Metafisica who more decidedly takes a pro-Schopenhauer position. His main argument concentrates on a definition of Metaphysical Art that philosophically ultimately harks back to Schopenhauer's concept of the world as representation<sup>139</sup> and the process of revelation through contemplation that the philosopher advocates as the key to the metaphysical other: "Con un riferimento soprattutto a Schopenhauer, per lui la verità del mondo come rappresentazione va cercata oltre o dietro all'aspetto fenomenico degli oggetti (che è illusorio) nelle essenze che si <<rivelano>> in essi, qualora si sia in grado di cogliere la loro dimensione <<metafisica>>, attraverso una particolare disposizione contemplativa, nella dimensione riflessa della mente."<sup>140</sup>

De Chirico's concept of revelation, expressedly linked to Schopenhauer by the artist himself, is particularly presented against the Schopenhauer background by Poli.<sup>141</sup> At the same time

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<sup>138</sup>De Chirico "L'Europeo chiede tutta la verità a de Chirico" (interview) in L'Europeo Milan, 30th April 1970, p.36.

<sup>139</sup>Poli (1989) starts off his definition of Metaphysical Art by suggesting that the metaphysical, even if attributed to Weininger as by Giorgio Castelfranco, ultimately "si collega strettamente alla concezione schopenhaueriana", i.e., the distinction of the world as will and representation (pp.81-84).

<sup>140</sup>Ibid., p.77.

<sup>141</sup>Ibid., p.84.

he indicates variously that references to Nietzsche and Weininger go back to first principles established by Schopenhauer. For instance, de Chirico's suggestion that Nietzsche's "metodo" to clear everything of anthropomorphism, Poli puts into the philosophical context: "In questo caso il <<metodo>> di Nietzsche ... si ricollega anche a quanto scrive Schopenhauer riguardo all'annullamento del soggetto nell'oggetto della contemplazione..."<sup>142</sup>

However, Poli's reading of *Metaphysical Art*, persuasive to this point, remains unexplored, inasmuch as he restricts himself to just the basic Schopenhauerian concept (with a focus on "revelation") and a couple of de Chirico quotations. In the course of his argument these serve as the groundwork for his major comparative study of de Chirico's work and the scenographers A.Appia and E.G.Craig,<sup>143</sup> which discusses the notion of the genius and the objectivisation of the human being in specifically theatrical terms. Similarly, the subsequent exploration of de Chirico's use of, for instance, space and time are not discussed against a specifically Schopenhauerian background. In other words, the full implication of Poli's

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<sup>142</sup>Ibid.; likewise de Chirico's concept of seeing everything anew in the revelation (*MP*, p.19), Poli shows to be a Nietzschean proposition "di derivazione schopenhaueriana" p.211; as to Poli's view on the Weininger - Schopenhauer relationship compare the discussion in Chapter I.2.3.2.

<sup>143</sup>Ibid., Chapter IV; however, he takes as a point of departure Schopenhauer's idea that the theatre can render the will visible: "Ist die ganze Welt als Vorstellung nur die Sichtbarkeit des Willens, so ist die Kunst die Verdeutlichung dieser Sichtbarkeit, die Camera obscura, welche die Gegenstände reiner zeigt und besser übersehen und zusammenfassen läßt, das Schauspiel im Schauspiel, die Bühne auf der Bühne im "Hamlet." *SW I*, p.372 (emphasis mine).



philosophical suggestions is not followed up, but becomes absorbed in more general discussion.

Yet, while Poli fails to establish an integration between de Chirico's philosophical position and its presence in his paintings, his approach suggests the hitherto rarely acknowledged and unexplored magnitude of Schopenhauer's presence in *Metaphysical Art*. His discussion clearly sets the agenda for further inquiry from a predominantly Schopenhauerian position.

### 3. Conclusion

It has been demonstrated that for a long time the de Chirico criticism largely ignored the essential grounding of de Chirico's work in 19th century German philosophy, notably the evident presence of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Weininger.

Even with the growing attention to the philosophical sources of his work from about the time of Soby's monographs onwards, there has been a mainly one-sided investigation of the matter in favour of a Nietzschean interpretation. These Nietzschean readings of *Metaphysical Art* are demonstrably diffused by a mingling of biographical, philosophical and stylistic considerations. They do not take account of the conceptual proximity of Nietzsche's early work and Schopenhauer, and they fail to separate de Chirico's use of a Nietzschean style or imagery from the contentious application of his philosophy.

More persuasive are suggestions by more recent critics who argue that behind de Chirico's references to Nietzsche and Weininger there is a basic Schopenhauerian foundation to *Metaphysical Art*: this is in tune with those key remarks of de

Chirico's, that persuasively establish the coincidence between Metaphysical Art and Schopenhauer's metaphysics. Indeed, as has been demonstrated, most philosophical/conceptual interpretations of de Chirico in terms of Nietzsche are either unsustainable with respect to the pictorial evidence or turn out to be Schopenhauerian in substance. Against that background it can be argued that Nietzsche's and Weininger's presences maintain a largely non-conceptual "codifying" quality. However this claim, and the question as to what extent a definition of Metaphysical Art in terms of Schopenhauer moulds the understanding of de Chirico's paintings, still needs to be explored.

## Chapter II. De Chirico and Schopenhauer's Metaphysics

Having established the gap in the de Chirico criticism with respect to Schopenhauer, the following part of the thesis will attempt to elucidate the relationship between the metaphysical in de Chirico's art and Schopenhauer's concept of the metaphysical. Some of the concepts that form the subject of this inquiry have only been alluded to or briefly discussed in the preceding chapter but now require a deeper examination.

### 1. Axiomatic Conditions

Following Kant's distinction of the world as phenomena (appearances) and noumena (things-in-themselves), Schopenhauer distinguishes between what is merely appearance and what is essentially real. He posits that our perceptions are simply cloudy appearances, derivative phenomena generated by mechanisms of our mind - the entire structure of our known world is ultimately only a secondary layer upon a primary essence that lies underneath: the metaphysical.

However, in contrast to Kant's rationalistic approach, Schopenhauer's argument about our knowledge of the world does not derive from the intellect as a condition of knowledge. On the contrary, to Schopenhauer, the intellect is responsible for distorting and obscuring our knowledge of the "thing-in-itself" by producing mere concepts. It is only through intuition that the "things" are directly perceived; and thus are provided the keys to the metaphysical mystery of our being.

Thus, instead of concepts, Schopenhauer uses "ideas" as the basis of his ontology. In doing so he associated himself with

Plato, who with Kant, constituted his philosophical model. In his talk of immediate intuition Schopenhauer means that process by which we gain access to the ideas: ideas that he claims to be not abstract but directly geared to our sense perception. As Roberts writes: "Schopenhauer claims that Plato's term for the ideas was in fact most appropriately translated by an expression like 'intuitable' or 'visible' ... he also called them (the ideas) ... 'phantasmata' or 'fantasy images'". And Roberts goes on to say of Schopenhauer that, once apprehended, these ideas would constitute the basis of "every true and original cognition ..." and which would go back to "'the primal source', the foundation for all concepts'".<sup>144</sup>

However, in accordance with Plato, these ideas are not directly evident in everyday experiences. Schopenhauer points out that since all phenomenality manifests itself in time and space and the individual itself perceives itself within the spatio-temporal context, man is concept-bound and unable to break through to the metaphysical other. Thus we are left with everyday objects that are merely pale shadows of their true selves, weakened by individuation and muddied by conceptuality. They are objects of discursive cognition but not of intuition. Our decadently conceptual habits prevent us from breaking through to that metaphysical other; the eternal models of the everyday objects which are mere copies.

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<sup>144</sup>Roberts (1990), p.167.

## 2. The General Grounding in Schopenhauer's Philosophy

Against the background of these axiomatic foundations of Schopenhauer's philosophy it is possible to observe, with respect to de Chirico, an echo of both the idea of the distinction between an everyday reality and an "other"; and likewise of the difference of insight into the metaphysical other according to man's level of "liberation" from conceptual constraints.

As to the former aspect, the critics point out that de Chirico attempts to present "das Scheinhafte der Realität"<sup>145</sup> or "l'aspect caché (métaphysique) de la chose";<sup>146</sup> and one may be reminded that de Chirico himself put forward the definition of metaphysical to mean "beyond the physical, outside our ordinary vision and our common experience."<sup>147</sup>(translation mine); elsewhere he claims that each object has two aspects: "... ogni cosa abbia due aspetti: uno corrente quello che vediamo quasi sempre e che vedono gli uomini in generale, l'altro lo spettrale o metafisico che non possono vedere che rari individui in momenti chiaroveggenza e di astrazione metafisica..."<sup>148</sup>

Setting aside for the moment the question of how far this view expresses itself in de Chirico's art, it can nonetheless be observed that very generally the metaphysical in de Chirico is laid out to meet the idea of an immanent duality of this world.

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<sup>145</sup>Schmied (1989), p.55.

<sup>146</sup>Baldacci "Le Classicisme chez Giorgio de Chirico" in Cahiers du Musée d'Art Moderne 11(1983), p.19.

<sup>147</sup>De Chirico "L'Europeo chiede tutta la verità a de Chirico" (interview) in L'Europeo, Milan, (April 1970), p.36.

<sup>148</sup>De Chirico "Pazzia e arte" (1919) in MP, p.86.

This very broad observation would, however, not be specifically Schopenhauerian in itself were it not for the fact that the second aspect, namely the necessity to break through conceptuality to arrive at the metaphysical other, forms a vital part of de Chirico's approach to his work. De Chirico's promotion of the stipulated anti-conceptual stance is rigorously laid out in a variety of statements: "Schopenhauer e Nietzsche per primi insegnarono il profondo significato dei non-senso della vita ...", and he appeals to the metaphysician to cleanse himself of all those things that left traces, memories or presentiments, in order to arrive at the "scheletro d'un'arte veramente nuova, libera e profonda."<sup>149</sup> Elsewhere he claims: "Ce qu'il faut surtout c'est débarrasser l'art de tout ce que y contient (sic) de connu jusqu'à présent, tout sujet, toute idée toute pensée, tout symbole doit être mis de côté."<sup>150</sup> Or he talks about his first metaphysical paintings: "... mes compositions n'avaient aucun sens et surtout aucun sens commun ..."<sup>151</sup> And, finally, he stipulates: "Voilà ce que sera l'artiste de l'avenir; quelqu'un qui renonce tous les jours à quelque chose; dont la *personnalité* devient tous les jours plus pure et plus innocente. ... tant qu'on subit une influence directe de quelque chose qu'un autre sait aussi, de quelque chose qu'on pourrait lire dans un livre ou rencontrer dans un musée, on n'est pas un artiste créateur

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<sup>149</sup>De Chirico "Noi metafisici" (1919) MP, pp.67-68.

<sup>150</sup>De Chirico (1911-1915), MP, p.18. Compare in this connection Schopenhauer's claim that life is but a dream and that all its supposed causality and sense is in fact the result of manufactured abstract ideas (SW I, pp.46-50).

<sup>151</sup>Ibid., p.18.

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Doubtless, de Chirico aims here at a distinction between a somewhat "muddied", ordinary perception and the necessity to free oneself from the obscuring veil (Schopenhauer's "Schleier der Maya"?) in order to arrive at the new, metaphysical insight.

Together with his ever present appeal to eternity (which would be in Schopenhauerian terms the "idea" of time, i.e. not our empirical time which imposes a false sequentiality, and which is dubbed a "minotaur" in Hebdomeros), de Chirico's cryptic remarks about space and metaphysics ("Who knows the troubling connection between perspective and metaphysics?"), and his demand that we should rediscover the non-sense of this world, appear to be a programmatic adaptation of Schopenhauer's argument that only through the detachment from the "Satz vom Grunde" i.e. the conceptual constraints (time - space - causality) of our everyday life can the metaphysical other be experienced.

Similarly, de Chirico's endeavour to present in art everything, even man devoid of anthropomorphism,<sup>153</sup> as an object, can be understood as essentially Schopenhauerian. As the foregoing concern with time, space and causality it harks back to a liberation from conceptuality: here, the subject of inquiry is objectified; i.e. an objective view is taken, freed from the thrall of individuation that impairs the cognizance of the

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<sup>152</sup>Ibid., p.18; compare Schopenhauer: "Reines Subjekt des Erkennens werden heißt sich selbst loswerden; weil aber dies die meisten Menschen nicht können, sind sie zur rein objektiven Auffassung der Dinge, welche die Begabung des Künstlers ausmachen, in der Regel unfähig." (SW V, p.491.)

<sup>153</sup>Compare MP, p.19.

metaphysical other. The individual will (both in the object and the subject) is overcome and dissolved in a trans-individual will, which is a universal creative force.

The question arises how, according to Schopenhauer, one is meant to arrive at perceiving the world detached from conceptual constraints. One way to do this is via looking back at scenes and situations of the past. This nostalgic, backward-looking perspective shows everything unaffected by immediate passions and interest, thus purging the object of contemplation; in other words "alles Unwesentliche und Störende"<sup>154</sup> is omitted. As Roberts explains: in nostalgia "objects are remembered as they were, rather than in relation to the struggles and desires of personal interest." In other words, "disinterested observation could reveal the simple 'whatness' of the object, rather than its 'whys' and 'wherefores' - the essence ... rather than its categorical relations."<sup>155</sup>

Indeed, nostalgia figures very highly in de Chirico's work: even without any profound analysis of his paintings, there is the presence of nostalgia in some of the paintings' titles and in the novel. Critics agree that de Chirico's pictures are usually imbued with a sense of nostalgia. His looking back to Greece - incorporating both childhood memories and the notion of the Greek ideal - supports this felt sense of the nostalgic. Yet far from being purely autobiographical or a simple indulgence in past values, one can see that against the background of Schopenhauer

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<sup>154</sup>Schopenhauer, SW V, p.709.

<sup>155</sup>Roberts (1990), p.174.



this nostalgic mood imbuing de Chirico's work forms part of the underlying metaphysical programme; as a necessary condition to Metaphysical Art.

### 3. The Focus on Aesthetics

However, as Roberts rightly points out: "nostalgia seemed a poor guide"<sup>156</sup> for the attempt to overcome our difficulty that our observations of the world are inextricably linked to personal interest and the solution of the conceptual constraints. Besides, with respect to Schopenhauer, nostalgia does not give a very clear picture of the metaphysical "other". Yet there is a way out: in Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung Schopenhauer asks the question: "Welche Erkenntnisart nun aber betrachtet jenes außer und unabhängig von aller Relation bestehende, allein eigentlich Wesentliche der Welt, den wahren Gehalt ihrer Erscheinung, das keinem Wechsel Unterworfenen und daher für alle Zeit mit gleicher Wahrheit Erkante, mit einem Wort, die Ideen ... ?" And he gives the answer: "Es ist die Kunst, das Werk des Genius"<sup>157</sup> (emphasis mine).

The supremacy of the work of art as the key to a metaphysical understanding in de Chirico has already been alluded to in the discussion of Nietzsche (compare Chapter I.3.3.2.). However, it is more specifically in the revelatory power Schopenhauer attaches to art that de Chirico's interests can be focused: in general terms Schopenhauer's revelation consists of

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<sup>156</sup>Op.cit., loc.cit.

<sup>157</sup>Schopenhauer, SW I, p.265.

the total blanking out of the ordinary which happens when we "lose" ourselves entirely in the object of perception, so that no longer do reason and abstract thinking occupy our consciousness, but through calm contemplation the individual forgets itself, forgets its will. It is detached from all relations or contexts and so is the contemplated object: "... dann ist was also erkannt wird, nicht mehr das einzelne Ding als solches; sondern es ist die Idee, die ewige Form ...: und ebendadurch ist zugleich der in der Anschauung begriffene nicht mehr Individuum ...: sondern er ist reines, willenloses, schmerzloses, zeitloses Subjekt der Erkenntnis"<sup>158</sup> (emphasis mine). In other words, the perceiving subject detaches himself from the spatio-temporal constraints of the world, and thus views the world from a position somehow exterior to the world which, for Schopenhauer, corresponds to Spinoza's eternal standpoint.<sup>159</sup> Interestingly, Baldacci remarks that de Chirico used the term "revelation" to note the actual moment of selection, the moment when, as Schopenhauer puts it, the artist became the "pure subject of cognition".<sup>160</sup>

### 3.1. Aesthetics and the Genius<sup>161</sup>

But more specifically, Schopenhauer's concept of the

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<sup>158</sup>Schopenhauer, SW I, p.257.

<sup>159</sup>Schopenhauer translates Spinoza's "mens aeterna est, quatenus res sub aeternitatis specie concipit" as "der Geist ist ewig, sofern er die Dinge unter dem Gesichtspunkt der Ewigkeit auffaßt." SW I, p.258.

<sup>160</sup>Baldacci in Braun ed. (1989), p.62.

<sup>161</sup>The genius as such will be fully discussed in Chapter VI.

metaphysical revelation through art depends entirely on the notion of the genius. A large part of his reflections on "Die Platonische Idee: Das Objekt der Kunst" is devoted to this link.<sup>162</sup> With references back to Aristotle on the one hand and Goethe, Wieland and Novalis, on the other, Schopenhauer offers the specific characteristics of the genius, such as clairvoyance, superiority over the ordinary observer, intellectual loneliness, and melancholy and madness as states indicative of the genius's reach into the metaphysical condition. He describes the genius as that person, in short, who arrives at the state of insight by a specific manner of viewing the world: "er sieht .. überall Extreme .. Er erkennt die Idee vollkommen ..."<sup>163</sup>

Arguably de Chirico broadly adopts Schopenhauer's position concerning the nature of metaphysical revelation: referring to Schopenhauer's Parerga and Paralipomena he says, for instance, that "une oeuvre d'art vraiment immortelle ne peut naître que par révélation."<sup>164</sup> And he adds: "C'est peut-être Schopenhauer celui qui a le mieux défini et aussi, pourquoi pas, expliqué un tel moment lorsqu'il dit ... : 'Pour avoir des idées originales, extraordinaires, peut-être immortelles, il suffit de s'isoler si absolument du monde et des choses pendant quelques instants que les objets et les événements les plus ordinaires nous apparassent comme complètement nouveaux et inconnus, ce qui

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<sup>162</sup>Compare Schopenhauer SW I, p.264.

<sup>163</sup>Schopenhauer SW I, p.277.

<sup>164</sup>De Chirico 'Que pourrait être la peinture de l'avenir' (1911-1915) in MP, p.31.

révèle leur véritable essence.'"<sup>165</sup> The detachment from ordinary spatio-temporal and intellectual forces enables de Chirico's metaphysician to understand his environment in its true being. De Chirico himself, after an illness "dans un état de sensibilité presque morbide", experienced such a rare moment which rendered the Dante statue at Santa Croce as a new, enigmatic experience: "J'eus alors l'impression étrange que je voyais toutes les choses pour la première fois."<sup>166</sup>

If, for Schopenhauer, the insight of the genius itself is that of a man "in dessen Kopfe die Welt als Vorstellung einen Grad mehr Helligkeit erlangt hat ..." <sup>167</sup> exactly this kind of special insight is taken up by de Chirico, who introduces the term "clairvoyance" as the unique property of the metaphysician. Elsewhere he describes metaphysical revelations as showing the hidden substance of the world in a manner similar to the penetrating force of X-rays<sup>168</sup> - a degree of refined artistic sensibility that Schopenhauer understands as the transcendence of our "gewöhnliche Betrachtungsart"<sup>169</sup> turning towards "das Wesentliche, die Idee ..." <sup>170</sup>

The exceptional lucidity of the metaphysician, the artist-creator in de Chirico's work, is supported by the motifs of the

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<sup>165</sup>Ibid.

<sup>166</sup>Ibid., p.32.

<sup>167</sup>Schopenhauer SW V, p.92.

<sup>168</sup>Compare de Chirico "Pazzia e arte" (1919) in MP, p.86.

<sup>169</sup>Schopenhauer SW I, p.275.

<sup>170</sup>Ibid., p.265.

ancient Greek seer or divinator – thus moulding the clairvoyance of the Schopenhauerian genius into the fabric of ancient Greek culture.<sup>171</sup> In Hebdomeros, the protagonist is dubbed a genius – compare the subtitle "le peintre et son génie chez l'écrivain"<sup>172</sup> (emphasis mine). And there is the frequent use of the eye in de Chirico's paintings,<sup>173</sup> which (against the background of the present findings) could be said to recall Schopenhauer's Weltauge, the pure cognition of the genius whose eye can "das Aufgefaßte durch überlegte Kunst ... wiederholen ..."<sup>174</sup>

### 3.2. De Chirico's Conceptual Modification of the Schopenhauer Programme

However, it is not without very conscious alterations that the artist adopts Schopenhauer's metaphysical claims. Thus, for instance, in Schopenhauer's metaphysics, tragedy is central to the representational arts, not painting. While tragedy, or more generally the theatrical, figures highly in de Chirico's work (compare the discussion in Chapter V.2.3.4.),<sup>175</sup> it is clearly painting that is the medium central to his concern. In fact the

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<sup>171</sup>The use of Antiquity needs to be seen clearly both in the light of de Chirico's childhood in Greece (see footnote p.7) and of Nietzsche's prominent re-evaluation of Antiquity.

<sup>172</sup>Compare Hebdomeros (Collection Bifur) Paris, Éditions du Carrefour (1929). However, in the second edition (Paris (1964)) of the novel the subtitle is excluded.

<sup>173</sup>And, indeed, in his writings there are allusions to the eye, such as "Bisogna scoprire l'occhio in ogni cosa" (MP, p.81). See the discussion on pp. 211-212.

<sup>174</sup>Schopenhauer SW I, p.266.

<sup>175</sup>Compare as well Poli (1989), who offers an extensive discussion of the theatricality in de Chirico's work.

importance of painting even overrides the very core of Schopenhauer's aesthetics: music. Music is central, argues Schopenhauer, inasmuch as it does not act as an artistic vehicle towards the will, i.e. the thing-in-itself, but is itself envisaged as the unmediated profound creative force that lies beyond any ideas and appearances.<sup>176</sup> In de Chirico's article "Méditations d'un Peintre", by contrast, the artist argues against this viewpoint. Ultimately he departs from the supremacy of music, while replacing it at the same time by the claim that the truly profound metaphysic can be captured only by the timeless visual representation: "La musique ne peut pas exprimer le nec plus ultra d'une sensation. Après tout on ne comprend pas bien à quoi la musique se réfère. Après avoir écouté n'importe quel morceau de musique, l'auditeur a le droit de dire et peut dire: 'Qu'est-ce que cela signifie?'"<sup>177</sup> By contrast, in painting "avec un tableau de qualité profonde, cela est impossible: on doit devenir silencieux quand on l'a pénétré dans toute sa profondeur. Alors lumière et ombre, lignes et angles et tout le mystère du volume commencent à parler."<sup>178</sup> By this substitution of painting for music as the ultimate access to the metaphysical, de Chirico puts Schopenhauer's metaphysics at the service of his specific artistic objectives.

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<sup>176</sup>Schopenhauer explains that among the arts music is a special case: "Musik ... ist ... keineswegs gleich den anderen Künsten das Abbild der Ideen, sondern Abbild des Willens selbst, dessen Objekt auch die Ideen sind ..." (SW I, pp.372- 375.)

<sup>177</sup>De Chirico "Que pourrait être la peinture de l'avenir" (1911-1915) in MP, p.32.

<sup>178</sup>Ibid.

The supremacy of painting per se in Metaphysical Art is reiterated in one of its truly climactic creations, The Grand Metaphysician (1917,Pl.56), where easel-like structures and set-squares form part of the monument to metaphysics and to painting. Given the background to Schopenhauer's favouring music this solution is clearly interesting. Music's origin, Schopenhauer maintains, is completely independent of concepts. As Roberts explains: "although it is intuitive, it is, like Kant's mathematics, pure intuition, and, like mathematics, is mainly concerned with numbers and the general laws and structures they encompass." And he adds: "This generality, however, is not abstract and conceptual". He quotes Schopenhauer: "... Music ... resembles geometrical figures and numbers, which, being the general forms of all possible objects of experience and applicable to all a priori, are nonetheless not abstract, but intuitive and fully determined".<sup>179</sup> Thus de Chirico's resort to geometrical shapes in The Grand Metaphysician (1917,Pl.56) can, surely, be understood in terms of an emphasis on the general Schopenhauer principle that combines a-conceptuality and intuition: de Chirico's painting exemplifies that principle.

Other basic adjustments de Chirico makes to Schopenhauer's metaphysics clearly relate to this major modification. For example, at a superficial glance, the artist distances himself (at least from the point of view of terminology) from the objective of Schopenhauer's revelations of the other, namely the

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<sup>179</sup>Roberts (1990), p.176.

ideas. In an article of 1919, de Chirico declares that if one replaced the Schopenhauerian "naissance d'idées originales, extraordinaires, immortelles" by the phrase "la naissance dans la pensée d'un artiste d'une oeuvre d'art"<sup>180</sup> there would be a strong kinship between Schopenhauer's views and his own.<sup>181</sup> The felt need for such changes of terminology could be accounted for by the fact that the use of the term "Ideas", or more specifically "Platonic Ideas" in Schopenhauer's writings on art gives rise to considerable confusion: as Young explains, Plato considers art as "a dangerous sophism; something that seduces us away from the mental toughness to face up to 'truth and reality' and into a self-indulgent realm of fantasy and illusion."<sup>182</sup>

To de Chirico, at least, this negative interpretation of Plato's attitude towards art is powerfully present: "Platone, generalissimo del pompierismo filosofico, relegava l'arte tra le sensazioni della piú bassa sensualità. Per lui arte significava piacere volgare, e non pensava il disgraziato che filosoficamente parlando ogni manifestazione umana ha per meta il piacere o la felicità, che dir si voglia. Ciò che egli antipone all'arte: la riflessione e la virtù sono pure sensualità anche quelle in quanto che hanno per meta il raggiungimento della felicità."<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>180</sup>Ibid., p.31.

<sup>181</sup>De Chirico talks here more specifically about Schopenhauer's remarks about the nature of revelation in art.

<sup>182</sup>J. Young Willing and Unwilling: A Study in the Philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer (1987), p.94.

<sup>183</sup>De Chirico "Noi metafisici" (1919) in MP, p.67.



Indeed, Schopenhauer himself supposes Plato's attitude towards art to be "die Quelle eines der größten und anerkannten Fehler jenes großen Mannes".<sup>184</sup> The reason why Schopenhauer nevertheless calls upon the seemingly contradictory use of Platonic terminology has, according to Young, its origin in Schopenhauer's "endeavour to refute Plato by describing art in just those terms which, for Plato, render an activity respectable and of the highest importance."<sup>185</sup>

Thus de Chirico's clear distinction between Schopenhauer's "birth of ideas" and his "birth of the artwork" turns out to be not a fundamental conceptual difference between the two approaches but is de Chirico's strict attempt to avoid running together his expressed artistic purpose and a supposedly art-adverse Platonic metaphysics. Indeed, the otherwise basic kinship between de Chirico's thought and the Schopenhauerian "idea" may be supported by the fact that elsewhere their respective terminologies resemble each other closely: Schopenhauer's labelling of the ideas under the heading "second aspects" of "the world of representation"<sup>186</sup> clearly matches strikingly de Chirico's formula that in his *Metaphysical Art* "the second or spectral aspect of the object world" is revealed.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>184</sup>Schopenhauer SW I, p.301.

<sup>185</sup>Ibid.; Young goes on to point out that for Schopenhauer Plato's "hostility to art ... is based on the view that the object of art is always the particular, never the universal ..." To Schopenhauer, by contrast, "... what is significant in art is never 'the particular... as such but the universal in it'."

<sup>186</sup>Compare the very title of Schopenhauer's Book III.

<sup>187</sup>In the present discussion Schopenhauer's ideas are not regarded as belonging to a separate ontological domain distinct from the ordinary perceptual object, as Brian Magee argues in The

So far it is possible to say that on the theoretical plane there are crucial correspondences between de Chirico's and Schopenhauer's philosophy. It transpires that not only the generalized ontological system has been absorbed by the painter, but, more importantly, the aesthetic focus has been adopted. Indeed de Chirico's theoretical writings show that the artist was involved with a concept which can be shown to be essentially Schopenhauerian. In particular his references to the supremacy of painting and the concept of "ideas", if read against Schopenhauer's philosophy, reveal the adaptation process of the philosophical concepts that come to be known as Metaphysical Art. There are, however, more aspects on the theoretical plane which show de Chirico's to be crucially linked with Schopenhauer's concepts.

#### 4. A Code Towards the Metaphysical

While the art of the genius gives ultimate insight there are of course conditions where the ordinary perception can be diverted without, however, reaching fully into the metaphysical other. One of these conditions has already been mentioned: nostalgia, which has, so to speak, a filter-function. Through retrospection the object of contemplation is temporarily liberated from the immediate concerns and conceptual constraints

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Philosophy of Schopenhauer (1983). Instead, Schopenhauerian ideas will be regarded in the light of Julian Young's interpretation as "perceptual images which are used as 'representatives of concepts'." Following Schopenhauer's suggestions, Young believes that "... the Ideas might just be ordinary perceptual objects ... their universality having to do ... with the selectiveness of attention paid to them by the observer." Young op.cit., p.93.

of the contemplating subject.

Likewise, in dream it is possible to reach into a sphere detached from the immediate constraints of empirical reality. However, Schopenhauer is quick to point out that dream is nonetheless tied into its very own code and conceptual constraints. Indeed, he goes so far as to suggest that what we perceive as empirical life is but a dream. That de Chirico was well aware of the "relative" merit of the dream experience becomes clear in the remark: "è curioso che nel sogno nessuna immagine, per strane che essa sia, ci colpisce per potenza metafisica." And he continues: " Il sogno però è fenomeno stranissimo ed un mistero inspiegabile ma ancor piú inspiegabile è il mistero e l'aspetto che la mente nostra conferisce a certi oggetti, a certi aspetti della vita."<sup>188</sup>

Hence there is the painter's complying with a concept that Schopenhauer presents as derivative from the pure and blissful state of aesthetic delight and which is consequently but a "deceptive illusion".<sup>189</sup> Nonetheless the potential of diversion from the ordinary (experienced through dream and nostalgia) is used, in particular in Hebdomeros. Nostalgia and dream are featured next to contemplation and the final arrival at a state of ultimate knowledge.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>188</sup>De Chirico "Sull'arte metafisica" (1918) MP, p.83.

<sup>189</sup>Young(1987), pp.86-89.

<sup>190</sup>Compare Hebdomeros: Hebdomeros "... se plongeait en de profondes méditations; doucement, devant chaque souvenir du passé, le rideau se leva. Hebdomeros se laissa aller avec joie à cette nostalgie; c'était un de de ses principales faiblesses d'avoir toujours une certaine nostalgie du passé ..." (p.85).

However, if the way to aesthetic consciousness can be diverted through such "deceptions", the work of art itself, Schopenhauer cautions, must make additionally sure that it does not arouse any appetites i.e. that it does not appeal to, rather than dispel the will of the individual. His reference to the charming, "das Reizende",<sup>191</sup> appears to have a specific resonance in de Chirico. Indeed, the notable absence of any sensuality in de Chirico's paintings and in his novel Hebdomeros might be attributed to Schopenhauer's rejection of any sensual elements in art. Schopenhauer argues that since art not only arises out of, but seeks to reveal, aesthetic consciousness, it follows that object-representations must never arouse appetites, i.e. aspects of the will. As examples he lists nudes in suggestive positions or representations of "mit täuschender Natürlichkeit aufgetischte und zubereitete Speisen, Austern, Heringe, Seekrebse, Butterbrot, Bier, Wein ..."<sup>192</sup> This rather bewilderingly profane enumeration in a philosophical context finds a striking correspondence in de Chirico: he makes his protagonist Hebdomeros scorn the obscenity of various prepared, juicy dishes such as strawberries, oysters etc. to the extent that he would even detest to look at their consumption.<sup>193</sup> The pervasive concern with so-called "moral" and "a-moral food" in de Chirico's novel can thus perhaps be understood as a literal transferral of Schopenhauer's reflections on falsified states of aesthetic consciousness.

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<sup>191</sup>Schopenhauer SW I, p.294.

<sup>192</sup>Op.cit., p.295.

<sup>193</sup>De Chirico Hebdomeros, pp.121-124.

However, while there are these instances that detract from the desired metaphysical effect of art, there are others which actually promote the metaphysical experience. Without proposing to give an exhaustive list of what Schopenhauer thinks fit or unfit for the metaphysical revelation, it is important to note that in the object world, it is architecture that he considers as particularly rich for the aesthetic experience; as far as the world of nature is concerned, it is the human being that he considers as having the most powerful metaphysical potential: in de Chirico's work both architecture and the human being are clearly his principal subjects.<sup>194</sup>

#### 4.1. Architecture - its Metaphysical Function

Although for Schopenhauer even the most insignificant object in the world possesses a kind of metaphysical potential - i.e. it can be viewed detached from the constraints of everyday perception, and thus reveal its metaphysical nature<sup>195</sup> - he claims

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<sup>194</sup>Compare the architecture in the paintings The Enigma of the Arrival (1912), Nostalgia of the Infinite (1913,Pl.14), The Grand Tower (1913,Pl.15), Gare Montparnasse (1914,Pl.24), The Purity of a Dream (1915,Pl.36), Evangelical Still-Life (1917), The Departure of the Argonauts (1920,Pl.69), Roman Villa (1922,Pl.70). For the human figure compare: Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon (1910,Pl.1), The Silent Statue (1912,Pl.7), The Enigma of a Day (1914,Pl.23), The Mannequins and the Rose Tower (1915,Pl.41), Hector and Andromache (1917,Pl.55), The Disquieting Muses (1918,Pl.59), The Troubadour (1923,Pl.73), The Prodigal Son (1926), The Archeologists (1927,Pl.89), The Gladiators (1928).

<sup>195</sup>Compare Schopenhauer SW I, pp.287-298; de Chirico's notion that a few cubes and little boards suffice for the experienced artist to create the perfect artwork, or that there is a "visible metaphysics" in a biscuit or an angle (MP, pp.66-83), chimes in neatly with the Schopenhauerian view of the metaphysical of the ordinary.

that there are instances where the metaphysical has a particularly strong presence, such as in the human being, nature, the built environment and - as has already been discussed - art. Notably architecture, sky, sea, and landscape are associated by Schopenhauer with "sublime" experiences of the metaphysical.<sup>196</sup>

Evidently, de Chirico does not concern himself expressly with a particular notion of the sublime; however, his marked interest in architecture and immense skyscapes - tied in with his metaphysical objectives - strikingly resembles Schopenhauer's suggestions.

In the article "Il senso architettonico nella pittura antica",<sup>197</sup> de Chirico discusses architecture, nature and metaphysics. In classical art from the ancient Greeks to Giotto, Poussin and Claude Lorrain, there are, for de Chirico, the joys of mystical spirituality and metaphysics revealed in a bare geometrical environment. From this "fact", de Chirico suggests, originates the "senso architettonico", a kind of architectonic manner of viewing the world. For de Chirico, the classical painters thus viewed, for instance, nature "con occhio di architetto e di costruttore":<sup>198</sup> accordingly the sky was understood as a *cùpola* or vault, and the open architectural elements were in turn considered as framing or condensing the metaphysical effects of landscape or as a means to integrate the

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<sup>196</sup>Schopenhauer SW I, pp.285-294.

<sup>197</sup>De Chirico "Il senso architettonico nella pittura antica" (1920) in MP, p.100.

<sup>198</sup>Ibid., p.101.

human figure. "L'architettura completa la natura",<sup>199</sup> de Chirico writes, and this "completion" brings about the unfolding of the magic of the universe or the drama of the human race.<sup>200</sup>

Moreover, on a basic level, architecture is viewed very strongly by both Schopenhauer and de Chirico in the tradition of the aesthetics of Romantic idealism from Winckelmann to Lessing: they advocate a passionate interest in Classical architecture and art.<sup>201</sup>

In his extensive notes on architecture, Schopenhauer joins, for instance, in the discussion on the complementary function of "Stütze und Last".<sup>202</sup> De Chirico similarly refers in "Il senso architettonico ..." to the individual parts of a construction complementing each other and therefore enhancing the significance of the building.<sup>203</sup>

Like Schopenhauer's typical 19th century praise of the economy of ancient Greek architecture or "Baukunst",<sup>204</sup> de Chirico praises in "Classicismo pittorico" the classical artist for his ability to "sopprimere masse e forme inutili" in order to

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<sup>199</sup>Ibid., p.100.

<sup>200</sup>De Chirico refers in this connection especially to Claude Lorrain's rendering of nature.

<sup>201</sup>Compare, for instance, Schopenhauer SW II, pp.527-537 (Zur Ästhetik der Architektur), and de Chirico throughout his work but most intensely in "Il senso architettonico nella pittura antica" (1920) in MP, p.100.

<sup>202</sup>Schopenhauer SW I, pp.302-308.

<sup>203</sup>De Chirico "Il senso architettonico nella pittura antica"(1920) in MP, p.102.

<sup>204</sup>Ibid.

"rendere appariscente il contorno dello spettro".<sup>205</sup>

However, among many ideas common to the climate of the time Schopenhauer develops a variety of quite specific suggestions beyond a very general spiritual importance attached to the art of building and Romantic aesthetics. These specific points discussed by Schopenhauer can be shown to be present in de Chirico's work.

Thus for Schopenhauer, some examples of architecture, such as the vast (but bounded) spaces of St.Paul's in London or St.Peter's in Rome, remind us of the "verschwindenden Nichts" of our existence in space and time.<sup>206</sup> Together with the night-sky they are instances of what he calls the "mathematical sublime" ("das Mathematisch-Erhabene"<sup>207</sup>). To speak in terms of Schopenhauer's theory, the feeling of the sublime is produced when the object of contemplation (here: architecture) stands in some hostile or threatening relationship to the will (here: symbol of comparative insignificance of human existence), the awareness of which leads the perceiving subject to the feeling

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<sup>205</sup>De Chirico "Classicismo pittorico" (1920) in MP, p.228.

<sup>206</sup>Schopenhauer SW I, p.293.

<sup>207</sup>Ibid., p.291; the other form of the sublime in Schopenhauer is the so-called "dynamic sublime" where the terribleness of the object makes us aware of our insignificance and dependence on nature's forces and the universe. As examples he lists rocky landscapes, the roaring sea or the desert.



of elevation beyond himself.<sup>208</sup>

Obviously, many features of this concept of the sublime raise questions with respect to de Chirico's art: does the uncanniness conveyed in many of his paintings constitute assent to Schopenhauer's requirement that the feeling of the sublime is tied in with an awareness of the hostility of the object? Does Schopenhauer's "mathematical sublime" function as a stimulus to all those paintings that are dominated by vast urban vistas, where architecture and infinitely receding skyscapes complement each other in their awe-inspiring effect?

Indeed, such interpretation suggests itself in the numerous "urban" paintings where de Chirico depicts extended vistas with such compelling deep perspective and grand, tower-like buildings: the beholder is made to lose himself in the infinite extension of space.

Moreover, the odd relationship between the typically dwarfed human being and the built environment in de Chirico's paintings appears to confirm the Schopenhauerian claim of architectonic menace and sublimity: "das Gefühl des Erhabenen entsteht ... durch das Innewerden des verschwindenden Nichts unseres eigenen Leibes vor ... Größe ..." <sup>209</sup> Thus architecture constitutes for Schopenhauer an art form that can lead to contemplative insights

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<sup>208</sup>In contrast to the beautiful, where the consciousness is wholly absorbed by the object of contemplation, Schopenhauer's notion of the sublime admits an awareness of the will. The subject is aware of the threat and feels elevated beyond himself, his person i.e. he does not react emotionally such as by trying to flee from the danger. Compare Schopenhauer SW I, pp.289-291.

<sup>209</sup>Schopenhauer SW I, p.293.

about the human condition caused by the "Kontrast der Unbedeutsamkeit und Abhängigkeit unseres Selbst".<sup>210</sup> This effect seems to be virtually demonstrated in paint by de Chirico in such pictures as Nostalgia of the Infinite (1913,Pl.14), or The Enigma of a Day (1914,Pl.23),<sup>211</sup> where de Chirico shows forcibly the minute status of the human figure against the infinite horizontal extension of road or piazza, the daunting verticality of the buildings and the awesome infinity of the sky.

Another aspect strongly suggestive of a Schopenhauerian inspiration is de Chirico's handling of architecture and light. Already in his articles, small pieces of prose and in his poetry, de Chirico refers to urban architecture and the presence of light and shadow. In his paintings architecture is always coupled with a strong sunlight that produces a startling interplay of brightness and geometrically exact shadows cast by towers and arcaded buildings. Schopenhauer puts a special emphasis on the peculiarly revelatory relationship between light and architecture.<sup>212</sup> He suggests that a strong, sharp illumination accentuates the proportions of buildings and, in turn, the architecture throws back, and thus enhances, the beauty of light to the effect that the beholder becomes "losgerissen und emporgehoben" to the state of "will-less subject of cognition".<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>210</sup>Ibid.

<sup>211</sup>However, Schopenhauer issues the cautionary remark that painted architecture does not have so strong a metaphysical effect as the "real" architectural experience. Ibid., p.309.

<sup>212</sup>SW I,p.294.

<sup>213</sup>Ibid.

De Chirico in turn observes the special effect that the combination of architecture and light can achieve. He says, for instance, "rien que l'énigme de l'Arcade ...: le soleil a une autre expression lorsqu'il baigne de lumière un mur romain.. Il y a quelque chose (de)... mystérieusement plaintif ..."<sup>214</sup>

Given such clear conceptual congruencies between the painter and the philosopher's aesthetics and the mutual orientation towards the metaphysical other, architecture is clearly one of the principal foundations for the visual encoding of the metaphysical programme in Metaphysical Art and thus could be said to constitute a further absorption of Schopenhauer in de Chirico's work.

#### 4.2. The Human Figure

Next to architecture it is the human being that concerns de Chirico. For Schopenhauer: "...der Mensch (ist) vor allem Anderen schön und die Offenbarung seines Wesens das höchste Ziel der Kunst. Menschliche Gestalt und menschlicher Ausdruck sind das bedeutendste Objekt in der bildenden Kunst."<sup>215</sup> In its artistic presentation it is more beautiful (i.e. revelatory of the idea) than natural objects, since "der Genius, indem er im einzelnen Dinge dessen Idee erkennt, gleichsam die Natur ... versteht und nun rein ausspricht, was sie nur stammelt ..."<sup>216</sup>

As far as Schopenhauer is concerned, the higher up the

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<sup>214</sup>De Chirico (1911-1915) in MP, p.20.

<sup>215</sup>Schopenhauer SW I, p.317.

<sup>216</sup>Op.cit., p.314.

natural order, the more "expressive and suggestive" an idea.<sup>217</sup> Since man or the idea of humanity ranges highest in the natural order, their artistic presentation clearly expresses the most powerful objectivisation of the will i.e. the metaphysical essence of the world.

However, the selection of the human figure itself as a central concern is clearly not uniquely Schopenhauerian. It is so only in connection with the fact that de Chirico proposes to show human figures characterized by "assenza umana nell'uomo".<sup>218</sup> Along the same line is the painter's claim already referred to, namely to rid everything of anthropomorphism.<sup>219</sup> These remarks can clearly be understood in terms of Schopenhauer's notion of "objectivisation".

Whereas such a concept of objectivisation (in representation) can be more readily conceived of with respect to things that are already objects in common understanding (such as architecture), Schopenhauer's concept of the object-character applied to the organic world is a different matter. He suggests that the observation of the metaphysical quality of a flower implies that the entire being of the plant (its bud, blossom, fruit etc.) is present at once. In other words Schopenhauer proposes a kind of type, or in his words, an idea, that clearly

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<sup>217</sup>Op.cit., p.315.

<sup>218</sup>"Sull'arte metafisica" (1919) in MP, p.86.

<sup>219</sup>De Chirico "Que pourrait être la peinture de l'avenir" (1911-1915) in MP, p.31.

transcends the immediate attraction of futile beauty.<sup>220</sup>

From here de Chirico's treatment of the human figure, his use and interweaving of shadow, statue and marionette need to be explored: there is a clear retreat from traditional figure-renderings; and against the Schopenhauerian background it may be possible to understand them as explorations of the idea of the human - a hypothesis that will be examined in detail in V.2.

#### 4.3. The World as Metaphysical Alphabet

As the foregoing sections have demonstrated, there are clearly conditions in which the perceiving subject has some access to the metaphysical: there are objects, or, better, elements, which are more or less forthcoming in their revealing metaphysical potential. As to the latter the preceding survey of architecture and the human figure isolated two of de Chirico's most recurrent iconographical elements which at the same time are highly praised by Schopenhauer for their metaphysical potential. Indeed, it is striking that de Chirico's art so clearly builds on what appears to be a limited stock of elements; Jouffroy even suggests that a computer analysis of Hebdomeros would bring out a set of "vocabulary" that corresponds exactly to the iconography

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<sup>220</sup>Schopenhauer SW V, p.496: "Was nun aber das Objektive solcher ästhetischen Anschauung, also die (Platonische) Idee betrifft, so läßt sich diese beschreiben, als das, was wir vor uns haben würden, wenn die Zeit, diese formale und subjektive Bedingung unsers Erkennens, weggezogen würde wie das Glas aus dem Kaleidoskop. ... bei allem Wechsel (haben) wir doch nur die eine eine ... Idee der Pflanze eine Einheit von Knospe, Blume und Frucht ..."

of the paintings.<sup>221</sup> While this would need closer examination, the repetition and recourse to specific material is striking. Against the background of the architecture/human figure findings, the question is whether de Chirico - in addition to working in an artistic medium that lends itself to access to the metaphysical other - selected only that which offered easy access to the metaphysical, or that which lent itself most readily to artistic intuition.

In this connection it is interesting to note that classical art, with which he identifies Metaphysical Art,<sup>222</sup> has for de Chirico "la tendenza a ridursi solo all'alfabeto religioso dei segni che formano il contorno d'una figura, ad'un oggetto."<sup>223</sup> (emphasis mine). In his writings on metaphysical aesthetics, de Chirico reiterates the special knowledge of the "initiates" to metaphysical insight: they are acquainted with "i segni dello alfabeto metafisico"<sup>224</sup> (emphasis mine). His metaphysical alphabet, consists, at least partly, in the arguably psychological<sup>225</sup> presence (gioie e dolori) of such architectural or construction elements reaching from the general city aspect

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<sup>221</sup>D.Porzio "Der Schriftsteller und Zeichner" in Schmied ed., (1980), p.122: "Bei einer Erfassung aller Wörter des Textes (Hebdomeros) mit dem Computer würden als häufigste erscheinen: Atmosphäre, Traum, Rätsel, Nachmittag, Sonnenuntergang, Arkaden, Tempel, Metaphysik, Lauben, Kentauren, Züge."

<sup>222</sup>Compare the findings of the identification of metaphysical with classical art by Baldacci (1983) op.cit., loc.cit.

<sup>223</sup>De Chirico "Classicismo pittorico" (1920) in MP, p.225.

<sup>224</sup>De Chirico "Estetica metafisica" (1919) in MP, p.87.

<sup>225</sup>Clearly the idea of the psychological presence is borrowed from Otto Weininger's universal symbolism of the object-world.

to details such as porticoes, rooms or street corners, or the surface of a table. If that is the case then such a psychological presence would possibly also account more broadly for the use of recurring elements in de Chirico's art and the possibility of synthesizing and pictorially summarizing the metaphysical. At all events, the very term "metaphysical alphabet" is suggestive of a limited code with which the deciphering of the world is possible.

Once again Schopenhauer's presence might have served as an inspiration for the idea of a philosophically grounded "metaphysical alphabet" in de Chirico. In "Über das metaphysische Bedürfnis des Menschens" Schopenhauer claims that metaphysics is to experience as thoughts are to words. Thus the deciphering of the world - which metaphysics for Schopenhauer purports to undertake - can be compared to the deciphering of an "unknown alphabet".<sup>226</sup> In other words: in contrast to previous (and as far as Schopenhauer is concerned, failed) philosophical systems, such as those of Spinoza, Leibniz or Wolf, Schopenhauer does not handle his philosophy as a mere abstractum, but as "angeschaute Wirklichkeit".<sup>227</sup> By this approach he is supplied with the "correct alphabet" from whence everything gains sense and significance: for those who know the "letters" from which the idea of man can be read, the world will not appear new and developmental, but as a variety of appearances against the background of an immutable "Unendlichkeit". And he concludes: "So

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<sup>226</sup>Schopenhauer SW II, p.238.

<sup>227</sup>Op.cit., p.239.

läßt meine Lehre Übereinstimmung und Zusammenhang in dem kontrastiven Gewirre der Erscheinung dieser Welt erblicken."<sup>228</sup>

Doubtless, given the demonstrated strong conceptual delineation between de Chirico and Schopenhauer, it is conceivable that de Chirico adopted Schopenhauer's notion of an "alphabet", too. Given de Chirico's repetitious iconography, it could be argued that he selected aspects of the artistic framework of the metaphysical put forward by Schopenhauer: the "code" for his revelatory objectives is found in architecture, construction-work, sculpture (and, indeed, painting itself) and put into a "syntax" of the Schopenhauerian "sublime" i.e. here the mathematically precise dislocations that lead to (the presentiments of) infinities.

A fine example for a possibly Schopenhauer-inspired de Chirico codification might be the painting Metaphysical Self-Portrait (1913, Pl.13): the delimitation of the picture on the top right and an architectural frame on the left direct the beholder's gaze towards a square opening. The opening shows the bottle-green sky cut vertically by two slender red chimneys. On what might arguably hint at a slope in the fore- (and middle) ground are two plaster-feet, a scroll and an egg, all of which would defy the power of gravitation by their immobility and elongated black shadows. On the wall at the right a gigantic X completes the enigmatic composition.

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<sup>228</sup>Ibid.; however, in Schopenhauer's view the metaphysical does not constitute the final solution to the enigma of the world. This would have to be approached without mediating representations i.e. directly via the object.



On the one hand there is surely the more traditional symbolic meaning of egg and scroll to be deciphered, whereby the former is generally understood as sign of revival or rebirth, the latter connoting learning, knowledge, or insight.

On the other hand there is the typically de Chirico-Schopenhauer vocabulary applied so as to maximize the metaphysical effect of the painting: there is the evocative architecture/nature delineation, the interplay of sunlight and shadow within the architectural framework and, the only identifiable reference to the human being, the plaster feet that hint at the ideal of Greek sculpture. Everything is governed by the principle of objectivisation. The artist "translates himself" into his alphabet.

However, most strikingly, the oversized X recalls a passage in Schopenhauer's Parerga and Paralipomena, an edition of which was in de Chirico's possession: "Das Ding an sich bedeutet das unabhängig von unserer Wahrnehmung vorhandene, also das eigentlich Seiende. .. Kanten war es = X; mir Wille."<sup>229</sup> It appears as though Schopenhauer's formulaic reduction of the relationship between Kant's thing-in-itself and his notion of the will might have been used by de Chirico to inject this intangible presence into his art. The X thus boldly acknowledges the will, though in its codified quality only to the initiate.

Clearly though, while there are demonstrably strong indications of a Schopenhauer presence, this codification of the metaphysical in art seems to contradict the very basis of

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<sup>229</sup>Schopenhauer SW V, p.109.

Schopenhauerian philosophy, since it does not come across as intuited, but as the product of a very carefully guided selection and focusing upon a combination of iconographical elements. Indeed, the very suggestion of an alphabet seems too systematic and, as a matter of fact, conceptual for the metaphysical as promoted by Schopenhauer. Furthermore, although clearly at variance with his own advocacy of non-sense in art, de Chirico backs this conceptual penchant with admiring remarks about other painters, for example their picture constructions were so rigidly planned, he asserted, that the effect was lost if one moved anything just a centimeter.<sup>230</sup> Hence, paradoxically, non-sense and concept seem to be both vital for de Chirico's Metaphysical Art.

However, far from contradicting Schopenhauer's programme this apparent paradox is only too consistent with it: the artist genius is always characterized by two abilities. Firstly by the intuition already discussed, and secondly the ability to transfer this intuition into the work of art. Interestingly, with respect to painting, de Chirico remarks that no painting resembles the picture the genius received at the time of the intuition. Indeed, Schopenhauer suggests that, since the genius has to work within the concept-tied world of appearance, his art is necessarily subject to the laws of space, time and causality.<sup>231</sup> In other words he cannot help but work conceptually with the objective to recreate an intimation of the metaphysical that will be received as beyond the reach of conceptualisation. From here the apparent

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<sup>230</sup>Compare de Chirico "Arnoldo Böcklin"(1920) in MP, p.168.

<sup>231</sup>Compare Schopenhauer SW I, p.266.

paradox in de Chirico's suggestion proves to be a necessary condition of the (metaphysical) work of art.

## 5. Conclusion

Largely on the basis of de Chirico's theoretical writings so far it has been demonstrated that there are powerful links with Schopenhauer's philosophical programme. The Schopenhauerian ontology is evidently absorbed by de Chirico's thought inasmuch as it supplies the starting point for his distinction of the ordinary perception and the metaphysical other. Like Schopenhauer de Chirico advocates the necessity to do away with conceptual constraints, which consist essentially in time, space and causality.

Beyond, Schopenhauer's focus on art and the genius as key mediator between the world of appearance and the world of ideas is largely echoed in de Chirico. While there are modifications, such as de Chirico's replacement of the Schopenhauerian supremacy of music by postulating the supremacy of painting, and his attack on the "Platonic ideas", it can be demonstrated that they are all to safeguard the status of painting in the metaphysical programme without severing the basic links between the Schopenhauerian programme and the painter's Metaphysical Art.

Indeed, within the metaphysical aesthetics promoted by Schopenhauer, there appear to be aspects which make many features of de Chirico's approach to art immediately intelligible in terms of the acclaimed "metaphysical": in particular the use of architecture and the focus on the human figure in its "objectified" state appear to have caught the painter's

imagination, since these aspects become the most prominent features of his Metaphysical Art.

However, while these theoretical links between de Chirico and Schopenhauer can be established, the crucial question now concerns the practice: how did the painter transfer this metaphysical programme onto canvas? As pointed out, the intuition, being the condition for the metaphysical experience, cannot be exactly repeated in the work since the painter has to re-create its effect within the limitations of the world of appearance. Thus the anti-conceptual stance demands a conceptual approach which might already show itself in the use of such "metaphysically potent" elements as architecture and the figure.

Thus the further issue of the possibility of the liberation from the conceptual in the conceptual in de Chirico's work remains. The attempt to resolve the puzzle forms the subject of the following chapter, and begins with an examination of the "metaphysically potent" figure of Ariadne.

### Chapter III. Ariadne and the Quest for the Metaphysical

To show how de Chirico transferred his metaphysical theory to the practice of painting it is necessary to begin with a series of paintings which show one of the artist's most consistently used figures and which Fagiolo declared to be a "key figure"<sup>232</sup> of de Chirico's work: the figure of Ariadne. Already discussed in connection with Nietzsche (Chapter I.2.3.3.1.) and identified generally as an emblem for the quest of metaphysical truth, the following analysis will review the Ariadne paintings from the point of view of their more specific philosophical grounding in Schopenhauer, considering, in particular, the formal devices of representation. It will be interesting to test, as well, whether one can derive any specific parameters which could be generally applicable for the analysis of de Chirico's work.

#### 1. The Ariadne Paintings

De Chirico's figure of Ariadne<sup>233</sup> is typically represented

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<sup>232</sup>Fagiolo in Rubin ed., (1983), p.26.

<sup>233</sup>From the years 1912/1913, Fagiolo (1984) lists at least eight paintings and drawings of the Ariadne figure. Not all of these carry the reference to Ariadne in their titles. However, the typical posture of the figure cannot be mistaken. On the other hand there are differences in the style of execution. The painting Melancholy (Pl.5) dated by Soby 1912 and considered as a Dürer-inspired forerunner of the Ariadne (Fagiolo dates Melancholy as 1914) shows a reclining figure presented in a relatively ornate fashion: details of the hairstyle, jewelry, and the rich folds of her Greek robe are very striking. In other paintings, such as The Silent Statue (1912,Pl.7) the execution is far more abstract: as Rubin (1982) suggests, Cezannesque and, indeed, cubist influences lead de Chirico to assemble Ariadne from spatial planes, the softly modelling chiaroscuro gives way to a crude finish of dark, angular zones. From the 1917 drawing of Ariadne one can see sharp contrasts: her hitherto evident statuesque appearance is modified by substituting her head with

as a reclining statue on a low pedestal. In The Lassitude of the Infinite (1912,Pl.8) she is presented from an elevated point in the distance. In other depictions the distance is reduced considerably such that in The Silent Statue (1912,Pl.7) the beholder is abruptly confronted with a close-up of the figure: although she is presented as reclining, one arm is raised to support and frame her head.<sup>234</sup> Her facial features remain rather abstract; the overall impression is that of serene sleep.

Although the distance and angle of the Ariadne presentation varies considerably, another feature common to all paintings in the series concerns the context: the figure is invariably in the centre of an empty square. The square is delimited by various prop-like set features, such as a red brick wall in Ariadne's Afternoon (1913,Pl.12), a building reminiscent of a neo-classical station in The Soothsayer's Recompense (1913,Pl.10), or long rows of façades with gaping black arcades as in The Lassitude of the Infinite (1912,Pl.8).

Complementing the rigid geometricity set up by the urban iconography are shadows, the blackness of which is so stark and

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one of de Chirico's (by then typical) faceless mannequin heads. Her pedestal is replaced by a pile of set-squares, rulers and geometrical bodies. During the 1920s, the Ariadne figure becomes incorporated into various stylistically more traditional paintings as, for instance, the Romantic depiction in Roman Landscape (1921). However, parallel to these transformations de Chirico always returns to the earlier style as the paintings Italian Square from 1926 and 1929 testify. According to Schmied (1980) the artist even started to model Ariadne in clay and later on in bronze from 1940 onwards.

<sup>234</sup>In a drawing of 1917 the close-up of Ariadne appears as though penetrated by x-ray: here, although maintaining the typical pose and the sleeping aspect, the statuesque has given way to a general bric-à-brac construction uncannily reminiscent of a skeleton.

discriminating, that they acquire the status of proper iconographical elements in themselves. As can be demonstrated in Ariadne's Afternoon (1913,Pl.12) shadows often have no apparent or only an ambiguous source: the shadow on the chimney to the left is cast by an obscured object or building. In the middleground there is a shadow that appears to be cast by the brickwall, although it does not quite match this low construction. Is it perhaps cast by a building that remains hidden to the eye of the beholder? Furthermore, as the shadows of the two chimney-like objects in the background testify, shadows are often cast at angles which contradict any notion of one unified source of light.<sup>235</sup>

There are various further distinguishing features characterizing more closely the individual Ariadne paintings (trains, shadow-like human beings, towers, sailing vessels etc.), but generally the two consistent features throughout are the figure itself, and the special quality of the context in which the figure is placed: the architectural context.

## 2. The Transfer of the Metaphysical into Formal Devices

If we look back to Schopenhauer from here it is clearly, once more, the staple ingredient of architecture and the figure of the human being that are the major points of reference in the Ariadne series of paintings. As noted in Chapter II.1.3. both aspects were promoted by Schopenhauer as metaphysically

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<sup>235</sup>The implication of this manifestation of a non-unified source of light are examined in the discussion of "time" in Chapter IV.3.

particularly "potent".

As far as architecture or the built environment is concerned, neo-classical buildings, porticoes, columns, chimneys, walls and - to complement the urban setting - the town square are relevant here. Interestingly all of these "urban props" are not only in themselves metaphysically powerful, but their potential is clearly enhanced by the purposeful association of architecture and sunlight. As pointed out in II.1.3., for Schopenhauer this specific association is to be understood as particularly revelatory: he suggests, that a strong, sharp illumination accentuates the proportions of the architecture and, in turn, the architecture enhances the power and beauty of light to the effect that the beholder becomes elevated to the state of "will-less subject of cognition."<sup>236</sup>

Against this background, it is clearly not merely coincidental that de Chirico makes this association the dominant iconographic ingredient in the series: the shadow of the surrounding architecture, together with that cast by Ariadne's pedestal itself, structure in each case the entire space around the figure and envelop her in the rigid angular counterpointing of dark and light, while she remains fully exposed to the glaring sunlight. Thus the conditions for understanding the entire scene in terms of a metaphysical otherness in the Schopenhauerian sense are clearly carefully laid out.

Moreover, de Chirico injects a further, clearly metaphysical effect, derived from his handling of shadow and light on

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<sup>236</sup>Schopenhauer SW, I, p.294.



architecture: by deliberately presenting the shadows cast by the architecture at various slightly different angles he contradicts the idea of one single source of light. The implication is, of course, that the supposed afternoon sunlight does not reflect the continuum of the earth movement captured in one instant like a photographic snapshot. On the contrary: the different angles suggest various instances of time in a random montage. Continuous time, empirical time, dismissed by Schopenhauer as a mere illusion is diffused and arrested, if not dispersed and virtually frozen into a paradox, an enigma of time.

Furthermore Ariadne's urban context is at no point stable. It is clearly marked by what is habitually described as de Chirico's hallucinatory use of perspective: the beholder is introduced to the squares in The Lassitude of the Infinite (1913,Pl.8) and Square with Ariadne (1913,Pl.9) from an elevated viewpoint, which, in conjunction with the exaggerated deep perspective, accentuates the powerful diagonals leading towards the vanishing point. This both heightens the awareness of a "constructed" picture space and creates a sense of vertigo. Furthermore, there are carefully constructed contradictory vanishing points in Joys and Enigma of a strange Hour (1913,Pl.11) - as are to be found as well in all the Ariadne presentations. In other words, the Schopenhauerian postulate of breaking through pre-established modes of the spatio-temporal appears here in the form of a distinct subversion of the traditional Euclidean concept of space. Thus the figure of Ariadne becomes suspended and framed in an environment subtly detached from the ordinary manner of perceiving and thus she can

be said to reveal her true metaphysical qualities.

Along with these distortions of time and space - which in themselves already defy logic and causality - there is a marked manipulation of logical relationships via juxtapositions: in Ariadne's Afternoon (1913,Pl.12) the juxtaposition of a 19th century red brick tower with a white tower reminiscent of an oversized Doric column creates a semantic confusion; the appearance of the train and the sailing vessel sharing the same horizon clearly subvert common logic. Indeed, as Calvino puts it, such paradoxes are designed to liberate: "La ville de pensée ne suggère pas telle ou telle pensée, elle n'oblige pas à réfléchir sur les apparitions et les rencontres dans les rues..." And he continues that the entire set up, the chosen objects and props "y sont disposés pour distraire l'esprit des émotions, des passions et des contingences extérieures."<sup>237</sup>

More precisely, together with the paradoxical use of shadows and perspective, the paradoxical juxtapositions in Ariadne's urban context complete what could be read in Schopenhauerian terms as a detachment from the empirical orders of space, time and causality: of the breaking away from conceptual constraints. In other words, they function in terms of an artistic transposition of de Chirico's underlying metaphysical programme.

### 3. The Figure of Ariadne

As far as the figure on the pedestal is concerned it is known from de Chirico's writings that he strove to adopt

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<sup>237</sup>Calvino (1983), p.13.

Schopenhauer's cryptic dictum that the aesthetic, and indeed, metaphysical value of a statue, is greatly enhanced if it be put on a low pedestal.<sup>238</sup> Ariadne's pedestal is very low as can be observed in Joys and Enigmas of a Strange Hour (1913,Pl.11), so that the impression is created that she is almost at the same level as the two distant, shadowy silhouettes of human beings.

However, while this specific issue of the pedestal demonstrates one more instance of the pervasive influence of Schopenhauer in de Chirico's work, it is clearly marginal in terms of the general metaphysical programme transferred to the work of art. Of greater interest is clearly the fact that Ariadne is presented as a statue.

As has been demonstrated by critics the model for Ariadne derives from a depiction in a book on ancient sculptures by Salomon Reinach.<sup>239</sup> For Martin this derivative use of the Ariadne figure constitutes "a deliberate four or five-fold removal from the phenomenal human presence"<sup>240</sup> and thus the figure "personifies an abstract human ideal or paradox or both".<sup>241</sup> Baldacci holds

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<sup>238</sup>"Schopenhauer ... consigliava ai suoi conterranei di non porre le statue dei loro uomini illustri sopra colonne e piedestalli troppo alti ma di posarle invece su zoccoli bassi, 'come si usa in Italia, diceva, ove alcuni uomini di marmo sembrano trovarsi al livello dei passanti e camminare con essi.'" (de Chirico 1919 in MP, p.87; his quotation refers to Schopenhauer's "Parerga und Paralipomena" SW V.)

<sup>239</sup>Compare: Salomon Reinach Répertoire de la Statuaire grecque et romaine, E.Leroux, Paris, (1905). For a more detailed account of de Chirico's references to ancient statuary compare E. La Rocca "L'archeologia nell'opere di de Chirico" in Giorgio de Chirico 1888-1978 (P.Vivarelli ed.) Vol.I, pp. 32-39, Rome, de Luca, (1981).

<sup>240</sup>M.Martin op.cit., p.349.

<sup>241</sup>Ibid.

that the adaptation of a work of art (the actual ancient monument) through a book on ancient art and its final transferral into paint demonstrates a systematic removal of the figure from reality through what he calls "aesthetic 'filters'".<sup>242</sup> Evidently, Ariadne's presence as a statue in a painting represents an oddity, at the very least a reflexive idea of a work of art within a work of art, and a telescoping of the ancient into a new context. But is it specifically metaphysical?

Clearly against the background of a very literal transposition of Schopenhauer's aesthetics one can start to understand the motive for resorting to "aesthetic filters", removal from reality, reflexivity, and attempts to telescope various art-historical epochs. As pointed out in the preceding chapter Schopenhauer suggests that for the attainment of the metaphysical it is necessary to liberate the object from conceptual constraints; in other words to "objectify" it. Although clearly to be understood in more abstract terms, this notion of objectivisation (i.e. becoming objective; making something into an object) clearly represents - if taken literally - a difficulty if applied, for instance, to the highest category that yields metaphysical insight, the human being in art.

However, the attempt to arrive at an approximation of objectivisation may explain de Chirico's penchant for the almost exclusively statuesque presentation of the figure in the Ariadne series, or the increasingly dissective strategy of depicting

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<sup>242</sup>Compare P. Baldacci "De Chirico and Savinio: The Theory and Iconography of Metaphysical Painting" in Italian Art (E. Braun ed., (1989)), p.64.

bric-à-brac mannequins and sculpture hybrids. In all cases the double meaning of "objectivisation" seems to have been the guiding principle to be exploited: first of all the artist adopts an objective stance by adapting Ariadne "through" aesthetic and temporal "filters". And secondly Ariadne's statuesque quality literally makes her an object (in both the representation of her as a statue; and as a shaped arrangement of pigment on an area of the canvas). Thus de Chirico's Ariadne clearly acquires an enhanced metaphysical significance: suspended within a context of spatio-temporal and causal subversion, she emerges in an "objectified" state. Furthermore, her statuesque presence points, qua implication, towards an essential requirement of the quest for the metaphysical programme: to adopt the objectivity of ingenious insight.

#### 4. The Absorption of the Mythical Background into the Metaphysical Programme

While the foregoing discussion shows that the Ariadne paintings reflect a transferral of the Schopenhauer- inspired programme, it must be remembered that the mere name of the figure ties the paintings into the implicit mythical context of the Knossos legend. As pointed out in Chapter II.2.3.4.1., Nietzsche makes use of the myth to transfer his philosophical ideas: Ariadne becomes an emblem for philosophical thought.

However, given such suggestions as that by Fagiolo, namely that the Ariadne myth and "auch im weiteren Sinn ... das Labyrinth zu einem neuen Interpretationsschlüssel für die

Malstruktur und die imaginäre Methode des Künstlers wird",<sup>243</sup> the question arises whether the magnitude of the inference is not far more specific than the suggested Nietzschean use.

Of course, to follow up such a claim as Fagiolo's, one needs to establish if there are any other references that could lead to the conclusion that such a mythical "key" has been used. Such a mythical dimension is not necessarily to be confined to the narrow sense of a thematic adaptation but equally to a very abstract transposition of certain paradigmatic aspects of the story.

While there is a wide variety of methodological approaches to the legendary material in art,<sup>244</sup> the present investigation

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<sup>243</sup>Fagiolo in Rubin ed., (1983), p.43.

<sup>244</sup>Clearly there are various approaches to what is commonly called the "labyrinth research". For instance, Hocke's thesis is grounded on "... was im Wesen diese manieristische Urgebärde der Menschheit sei ..." (Hocke 1957, p.18) He offers a range of examples of erotic and delusive artistic utterances that are suspended between rationally calculated and Dionysic overtones (compare the chapter "Daidalos und Dionysos" in Hocke (1959), p.204). In other investigations it is stressed that the labyrinth cannot be treated as a fixed, inflexible aesthetic organism but it is shaped and re-shaped in the flux of various adaptations which can largely be shown to be reactions against established artistic expressions. As Thalmann points out, the mannerist is typically the reformer of an art that is historically overcome (compare M. Thalmann Romantik und Manierismus (1963)), and Arnold Hauser sees the phenomenon as an expression of both spiritual/religious and political/economic changes (A. Hauser Ursprung der modernen Kunst 1979). More exclusively linked with the individual is Navratil's view: he establishes a connection between the labyrinthine form and mental disorder: the preferred mannerist motifs of the spiral, the mask and death as symbol of the impenetrable ("des Undurchschaubaren") are to be found in both the art of the sane and the insane (compare L. Navratil Schizophrenie und Sprache - Schizophrenie und Kunst (1976), p.178 and p.260).

will attempt to follow Wolfgang Schmeling's suggestion<sup>245</sup> (in principle, though not in any detail) of a reading of the labyrinth in general paradigmatic terms, which ensures that one covers most of the thematic, structural (compositional) and individual semantic aspects.

#### 4.1. The Mythical Background

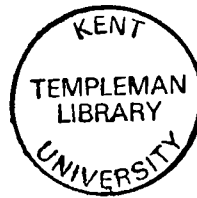
While the Ariadne paintings clearly acquire a heightened sense of intelligibility by the mere reading against Schopenhauer's philosophical position, the thematic reference provided by the name Ariadne points towards an additional or complementary mythical significance.

Ariadne is ordinarily seen in connection with the so-called Knossos legend,<sup>246</sup> where she is a mediating key figure: as the

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<sup>245</sup> Using the example of literature Wolfgang Schmeling shows that in the 20th century the labyrinth and labyrinth legend have gradually been absorbed as a structuring principle, a paradigm that echoes the estranged labyrinthine situation of modern man. He argues that the reader is likewise submitted to it by the various dead-ends and concatenation of modern discourse (W.Schmeling, 1980). Whatever way into the subject matter of labyrinth use and adaptation one chooses, the labyrinth research never restricts itself to the mere investigation of the Minotaur's den, the legendary construction itself. The set of characters connected with the ancient story, i.e. Daedalus, Theseus, Ariadne and others, serve as complementary symbolic and structural fields of association. Indeed, one merit of Schmeling's investigation lies in the fact that he shows that it is possible to "read" the legendary labyrinth-related characters conceptually, i.e. in terms of their paradigmatic qualities reaching across the spectrum of the symbolic and the functional and thus supplementing the semantic/functional importance of the labyrinth. This approach seems to be not only very neat and persuasive but by virtue of its expressed paradigmatic element is wide enough to accommodate a vast range of material. Thus without adopting any of Schmeling's details the general idea will dominate the present approach.

<sup>246</sup> Generally speaking the labyrinth legend is not based on one specific source. The multifarious ancient texts, though they all centre on the Minotaur and his labyrinthine abode, do not suggest



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a narrative unity, nor any precise beginning or ending. Thus in the following the presentation of the constituents of the labyrinth legend needs to be considered as an "ideal" text; the inclusion or exclusion of certain elements here is due to the relevance or lack of relevance in the present context. (The information is adapted from the following secondary sources: R.Graves The Greek Myths:1 (1960; first publ. 1955); G.F.Creuzer Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker (1973; first publ.1843); F.Frontisi-Ducroux Dédale (1975); Frazer The Golden Bough (1890-1915)).

1a The creator of the labyrinth:

Daedalus, the famous Athenian artist and architect, who lived in exile in Knossos, delighted Minos and his family with the animated wooden dolls he carved for them. Given this wonderful ability he was requested by the Queen Pasiphaë to realize her amorous desire for a bull, a gift of Poseidon. He thus constructed a wooden cow in which Pasiphaë could approach the bull. From the connection between the bull and the Queen of Minos sprang the Minotaur, named Asterion or Asterius. In order to cover up the scandal Daedalus was requested by the king to build a labyrinth, an intricate complex of rooms and floors, that conceals the Minotaur. After learning about Daedalus's part in the Minotaur scandal Minos imprisoned him in his own labyrinth, from where he escaped by the aid of artificial wings.

1b. Theseus and Ariadne, the challenge of the labyrinth

In requital for the death of Androgeus, Minos ordered that at every ninth year seven Athenian youths and seven virgins were to be sent to the Cretan labyrinth where they were devoured by the Minotaur. Some say that Theseus - out of pity - went deliberately when the tribute was due for the third time, other sources claim that the lot had fallen on him. The daughter of Minos, Ariadne, fell in love with Theseus: "I will help to kill my halfbrother, the minotaur ... if I may return with you to Athens as your wife." With the aid of a magic ball of wool, a present from Daedalus, Ariadne indeed helped Theseus to survive his adventure. Other sources suggest that Ariadne gave Theseus a wreath of light obtained from a god. When Theseus re-emerged from the labyrinth he left Crete with Ariadne. However some days later he left her asleep on the island of Naxos. The reason for this remains a mystery. Some say that he deserted her in favour of a new mistress; others suggest that he feared the scandal, others again think that Dionysus had conveyed his claims on Ariadne in Theseus's dreams and cast a spell on the latter that made him entirely forget her. In yet other versions Theseus married Ariadne. On their way to Athens they were surprised by a heavy storm and Ariadne -already pregnant- feared for her child and asked to be set ashore. Theseus was consequently driven away from the island by a heavy storm. Ariadne is said to have died in childbed or hanged herself.

However that may be, Dionysus's priests at Athens affirm that when Ariadne found herself ashore, she broke into bitter laments: she had feared on Theseus's behalf; she had deserted her parents



daughter of the King of Minos, she witnesses how Athenian youths are sacrificed to the Minotaur, the grotesque outcome of her mother's adulterous relationship with a bull. The Minotaur is kept in a prison, which is an ingeniously devised maze created by the artist Daedalus. When Theseus is to be sacrificed to the Minotaur, Ariadne begs from Daedalus a device to rescue the young man with whom she has fallen in love. Ariadne obtains a thread by the aid of which Theseus manages to find his way out of the labyrinth, once the Minotaur is slain. After Theseus's rescue from the Minotaur and the labyrinth, Ariadne flees with Theseus. Yet instead of marrying her, he abandons her while she is asleep on Naxos.

And it is here where de Chirico picks up the story: without doubt Ariadne's resting pose throughout the various pictorial variations of the figure is suggestive of that legendary abandonment on Naxos. Indeed, in a way her pedestal makes her appear as though she is reclining on a tiny island among the urban scape. Furthermore it could be said that the various means of transport frequently inserted into the scenery, namely the sailing vessel and the train, are oblique hints at the departing lover Theseus.

Evidently, Ariadne's abandonment captures the aspect of

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and motherland for the love of him. She then invoked the whole universe for vengeance, and Zeus assented. Sources say that Dionysus came to Ariadne's rescue and married her. As far as Theseus is concerned his return is accompanied by the performance of the crane dance (a kind of re-enactment of his labyrinth experience), which consists of labyrinthine evolutions, trod with measured steps. It is a dance he was introduced to at Knossos, where Daedalus had built for Ariadne a dancing floor marked with a maze pattern, copied from an Egyptian labyrinth.

grief about her role in the labyrinth episode: her role as mediator between Daedalus's artful ingenuity and the worldly heroism of Theseus has not been rewarded. Thus the melancholic air with which the scene is commonly suffused in de Chirico's paintings is only too appropriate.

However, and far more important, de Chirico, by selecting this specific point of the story, not only invokes Ariadne's past i.e. Daedalus, the Minotaur, the labyrinth and Theseus, but likewise suggests what is going to happen at her awakening: the legend reports that her lamentation and her call for vengeance to the gods captures the attention of Dionysus, who then descends and marries her.

Hence the moment of Ariadne's slumber can be said to depict her suspended between two orders: the worldly represented by Theseus and that of the divine, embodied by Dionysus.

It is, of course, tempting to re-interpret this pregnant moment of suspension in terms of de Chirico's metaphysical programme as an interlude between the ordinary and the metaphysical.<sup>247</sup> Ariadne would thus become, in addition to all those other qualities traced in connection with Schopenhauer's metaphysics, an emblem for the process of metaphysical insight itself - which refers back to the Nietzschean reading.

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<sup>247</sup>De Chirico is generally very interested in creating a curious "cliff-hanger" effect. He suggests that his metaphysical painting can be characterized by the fact that something is about to enter the rectangle of the canvas: "L'opera d'arte metafisica è quanto all'aspetto serena; dà però l'impressione che qualcosa di nuovo debba accadere in quella stessa serenità e che altri segni, oltre quelli già palesi, debbano subentrare sul quadrato della tela." (1919) MP, p.86.

##### 5. The Mythical Paradigm and the Metaphysical Programme

Yet, if Fagiolo associates Ariadne not only generally as a key-figure of the work, but more specifically as providing a key to the de Chirico labyrinths, he touches on an important inference: Ariadne points back to the heart of the Knossos legend, the labyrinth. And it is here where de Chirico can be seen to develop the Nietzsche-inspired image from a level of comparative generality (Ariadne = melancholy = insight/quest for metaphysical truth) into a refined tool: his built picture sets have generally been dubbed "labyrinths".<sup>248</sup> Notably those paintings clustered around the year 1914, in particular the "Italian square" series, attracted much notice and stamped de Chirico's reputation as a painter of a "labyrinth of streets and squares".<sup>249</sup> In other words: urban scenes that produce the impression of the observer being sucked into an architectural maze.<sup>250</sup> Indeed, in spite of wide open planes, de Chirico's early cityscapes are always suggestive of a hermetic universe where the same architectural constructions are encountered over and over again without the opening vistas being suggestive of any relief from the immanent tension. Notably paintings like The Fear

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<sup>248</sup>Compare Fagiolo in Rubin ed. (1983); likewise Italo Calvino "Voyage dans les villes de De Chirico" in Cahiers du Musée d'Art Moderne 11, Paris (1983), pp.8-17.

<sup>249</sup>Calvino, op.cit., loc.cit.

<sup>250</sup>Compare Alain Jouffroy in "Die Metaphysik des Giorgio de Chirico" in De Chirico - Leben und Werk (W. Schmied ed.), (1980), pp.79; Jouffroy describes the labyrinthine confusions of a labyrinthine de Chirico city; he observes that, paradoxically, the labyrinth is and is not since ultimately "finde ich mich immer wieder, wo ich mich verirrt hatte, und erkenne das wieder was ich nicht kenne" (p.81.).

of Departure (1913,Pl.21) or The Enigma of Fatality (1914,Pl.29) bring about the distinct feeling of being led into claustrophobic maze-constructions and appear to explain what the dark entrances to arcades depicted in other earlier paintings conceal.

This general labyrinthine association has demonstrably a firm grounding: the cityscapes that are perspectively and logically out of kilter and endlessly repeat themselves in the paintings are, through the Ariadne presence, thematically and structurally identifiable as labyrinthine. For de Chirico the labyrinth becomes a means to express the anti-conceptual stance which is the basis of Metaphysical Art: in its disorientating quality time, space and causality are subverted. In de Chirico's interpretation the centre of the labyrinth bears the objectified figure of Ariadne, a centre of the metaphysical revelation into which the beholder is invited like a Theseus figure.

#### 5.1. Ariadne and Hebdomeros

If Ariadne constitutes the link to the labyrinthine in de Chirico's paintings it is arguably the case that the protagonist in de Chirico's novel Hebdomeros constitutes the Labyrinthgänger. His movement through the fictional universe of the novel is clearly the condition of a Theseus-like wandering through the labyrinth: Hebdomeros enters "cet étrange immeuble",<sup>251</sup> he ascends a staircase while his anxiety is increasing: Hebdomeros "avait l'impression de monter chez un dentiste ou chez un médecin pour maladies vénériennes ... il chercha à surmonter ce trouble en

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<sup>251</sup>Hebdomeros, p.5.

pensant qu'il n'était pas seul ..."252 He and his two companions arrive in a vast room where gladiators are exercising; then they move on: "encore des portes capitonnés et des corridors brefs et déserts"253 and "puis tout à coup: la société",254 an entrance to a salon. In the course of the novel it becomes increasingly difficult to identify a homogeneous spatial universe; however, the initial "visit" assumes the character of anguished flight and the labyrinthine feel of Hebdomeros's movement is consistently maintained: through such elliptical reports as Hebdomeros fleeing from one town only to end up in what appears to be exactly the same place again; through descriptions of geometrically laid out cities;255 or in Hebdomeros's path through a palace: "une fois qu'on avait monté cet escalier solennel, qui du parc conduisait à l'intérieur du palais, une fois qu'on s'était engagé dans cet inquiétant labyrinthe de corridors, de vestibules, d'antichambres et de salons... il fallait à tout prix prendre un guide et s'adresser à un major-dome en redingote qui vous précédait pour vous montrer le chemin."256

However, it is not only on the thematic level that the labyrinth has a strong presence. Domenico Porzio, for instance, refers to an introduction to Hebdomeros by the critic G. Manganelli: "Die Fabel von Hebdomeros entwickelt sich wie ein

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<sup>252</sup>Ibid., p.7.

<sup>253</sup>Ibid., p.10.

<sup>254</sup>Ibid.

<sup>255</sup>Ibid., p.77.

<sup>256</sup>Ibid., p.169.

wucherndes Labyrinth, ein Gebäude, das sich vermehren, neue Flügel, Quartiere, Ein- und Ausgänge planen kann ..."<sup>257</sup> Praised by Porzio as an exemplar of fantastic and experimental literature,<sup>258</sup> it is, indeed, on the structural plane that de Chirico's novel complements the labyrinthine quality of the thematic plane: the ordinary narrative order is broken up into a sequence of small narratives. A continual episodic branching out of the protagonist's thought processes creates virtually dead-end situations: the narrative comes to an abrupt halt and is picked up elsewhere. Likewise any unified spatio-temporal or logical framework is continually defied.

Schmeling attributes "narrative disorder" to a typical 20th century penchant for adapting the labyrinth not in the traditional thematic manner but by converting it, via the process of paradigmatic abstraction, into a strategy of discourse. Thus as in de Chirico's paintings where compositional and semantic labyrinths are set up that, although not necessarily thematically linked to the Knossos legend, nonetheless retain their paradigmatic presence, we are here confronted with a narrative that on the level of discourse complies with the idea of a labyrinthine presence.

However, as in the case of Ariadne, the mythical palimpsest (both in its thematic and its structural quality) in Hebdomeros is not an end in itself but tied in with the philosophical programme: the reader is introduced to a Minotaur invested with

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<sup>257</sup>Porzio op.cit., pp 120-121.

<sup>258</sup>Ibid., p.121.

the regalia of Saturn, that is, hourglass and scythe. And the explanation is provided that this is "ce minotaure que les hommes appellent le temps ..." <sup>259</sup> As noted in II.3.4., for Schopenhauer spatio-temporal constraints prevent metaphysical insight. Thus, appropriately, de Chirico translates this philosophical stance in and through an aspect of the mythical framework: the minotaur "Time" prevents the process of "discovery"; the process which "rend la vie possible" and reconciles one with "sa mère l'Éternité". To gain this "reconciliation", "Time" has to be overcome- the minotaur has to be slain.

This interpretation widens out to include structural features of the novel: the temporal dislocations appear now in terms of breaking through the concept of time - leading the reader towards the "other" (liberated) state. At the end of the narrative the reader witnesses how Hebdomeros has reached his goal, which is, at the same time, the objective of de Chirico's metaphysical programme: he enters a state permanently beyond time through the encounter with Immortalité. <sup>260</sup>

Thus Hebdomeros undergoes a process of initiation or transition. <sup>261</sup> It is the legendary hero Theseus who is usually associated with paradigms for other states of transition i.e. birth/death, death/re-birth etc.: Kerényi, for instance, claims that the successful passing through the labyrinth symbolizes the

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<sup>259</sup>Hebdomeros, p.226.

<sup>260</sup>Hebdomeros, pp. 236-237.

<sup>261</sup>See the knot metaphor used in Hebdomeros (pp.80-81): the protagonist compares life, dream and death with the tying and untying of a knot- the ultimate aim is to opt out of this cycle.

hero's ability "sich durch den Tod unendlich durchzuwinden."<sup>262</sup>

Ultimately one thus arrives at a more general mythical framework, namely the paradigm entrance/exit leads to the cosmogonic idea of cyclical development: "la mort initiatique réitère ce retour exemplaire au Chaos, pour rendre possible la répétition de la cosmogonie, c'est-à-dire préparer la nouvelle naissance".<sup>263</sup> And de Chirico adds that "... chaque aventure initiatique de ce type finit toujours par créer quelque chose, par fonder un nouveau mode d'être ..." <sup>264</sup> Clearly in the given case the initiatory adventure ends with metaphysical insight.

From that point of view the beholder himself is not so far removed from Hebdomeros. Papini very perceptively remarks that de Chirico's paintings turn the beholder into a Theseus-like entity. And indeed the strategies employed in the work, as well as the intention, namely to give an intimation of the metaphysical, put the beholder into a rite-de-passage pattern not unlike that of the ancient hero.<sup>265</sup> Indeed, such a reception is

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<sup>262</sup>Kerényi "Labyrinth-Studien" in Humanistische Seelenforschung, Wiesbaden, (1978), p.100.

<sup>263</sup>M.Eliade Aspects du mythe, pp.227-228. Clearly in such a scheme the antagonism life vs.death is temporarily obliterated in the ritual re-enactment and the consciousness of new creation. Creation in a cosmogonic sense would find here its symbolic expression in the creation of a new human culture (in Athens) through Theseus.

<sup>264</sup>Ibid., p.275.

<sup>265</sup>Basically Theseus can be associated with the idea of overcoming or the archetypal idea of initiation. The way through the labyrinth becomes an analogy to a specific phase of the process of initiation: drawing on a modified version of Edmund Leach's triadic scheme of initiation (Edmund Leach Kultur und Kommunikation (1978)), Schmeling points out that the Theseus-story is composed of three stages: a period of imbalance (the threat of the sacrifice to the Minotaur), a period out of society and time (In the labyrinth), and finally re-establishment of



reflected by Calvino who puts himself in the role of the Labyrinthgänger through de Chirico's paintings: "Je ne sais pas comment je suis arrivé ici." <sup>266</sup> He continues "Je me sens enfermé dans ce labyrinthe de rues et de places, je continue à passer sous les mêmes places, je continue à passer sous les mêmes portiques, à rôder autour des mêmes tours, à me heurter aux mêmes murs de brique." <sup>267</sup> And, later, "Parfois je pense que, si je poursuis encore le chemin que cette ville m'indique, j'arriverai à recomposer quelque chose qui s'est brisé; d'autres fois, en revanche, il me semble qu'une séparation définitive a été consommé. Mais une séparation entre quoi et quoi? Je ne le sais pas." <sup>268</sup>

However, while the labyrinth clearly constitutes a crucial presence in Hebdomeros and many of the earlier paintings, it does not appear to have a continuous relevance in de Chirico's work on a broader scale. What one could call "city-labyrinth" eventually seems to collapse into itself (like The Fête Day (1914,Pl.30) or The Evil Genius of a King (1914,Pl.32)), to be

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social balance (return to Athens) ... (Schmeling (1980), p.32 ff.). Indeed as Philippe Bourgeaud observes: "His (Theseus's) temporary union with Ariadne and the passage of the labyrinth are the signs of crisis, of liminal experience from which he emerged to define in culture and cult new relations with the gods: the relation of a human kingship within the framework of a classical city." (Philippe Bourgeaud "The open entrance to the closed palace of the king: the Greek labyrinth in context" in History of Religion14/1 (1974), p.18; emphasis mine.)

<sup>266</sup>Calvino (1983), p.9.

<sup>267</sup>Ibid., p.15.

<sup>268</sup>Ibid., p.17.

condensed or dismantled in corners of rooms (as in the various versions of the Metaphysical Interior around 1917) and eventually merge with figures (as in The Reading (1926,Pl.84)).

Yet, if the architecture that was previously identifiable with the urban labyrinth is transferred to the stomach of dummies (that, in turn, assume the central role previously assigned to the Ariadne statue on the stage-like, open squares), the idea of the labyrinth has not been abandoned: it has been transformed from the ancient Greek notion of the built labyrinth to the more general archetypal idea of the labyrinth as the "stomach of the world".<sup>269</sup> Indeed Alain Jouffroy's description of de Chirico's earlier work as being productive of labyrinthine confusion is clearly still applicable if only on a semantic level: in these sculpture-architecture hybrids the basic labyrinthine paradox of disorientation and recognition is summarized.<sup>270</sup> The strange

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<sup>269</sup> According to Schmeling, the archetypal "mystery" of the enclosed space exemplified in evocations of labyrinthine caves, stomachs, intestinals or subterranean constructions, can be found throughout the tradition of labyrinth-reception, from ancient mythologies (Hades), Christian myth (Dante's Inferno), Romantic views of the world (Novalis's "Ofterdingen"), to modern ideas of alienation (Kafka "Der Bau"), from psychoanalysis (Freud, Jung, Eliade) to semiotics (Umberto Eco). See: W. Schmeling (1987), pp.69-70.

<sup>270</sup>Quite clearly, Daedalus's art and actions although primarily characterized by an ethical ambivalence (i.e. he always appears to achieve a paradoxical effect of being productive of good and evil: the dolls amuse Ariadne, but inspire Pasiphaë to ask for help for her amorous desire; the labyrinth helps to conceal the product of this desire, but becomes a place for regular sacrifice of youths etc), can on a more abstract level always be reduced to the basic structure: construction vs. destruction. Frontisi-Ducroux's attempt to derive the symbolic value from the anthroponym "Daidalos" itself proves to be fruitful here. For instance the adjective "daidaleos" is used in ancient texts in such technical-aesthetic sense as "well-formed" (Frontisi-Ducroux Dédale, p.41 ff.) and can be shown as a paradigmatic feature in adaptations : "Les diverses techniques mises en oeuvre pour la réalisation du 'daidalon' parissent pensées selon un même modèle

effect is not unlike that of the city labyrinth, where Jouffroy observes: "(sc. ich) erkenne das wieder was ich nicht kenne" (p.81). In other words a further (labyrinthine) inducement to perceive the world "metaphysically".

Thus, it might be tenable to view de Chirico's paintings in terms of shifting labyrinth concepts, where various levels - thematic, compositional or semantic - are employed in accordance not only with a clear attempt to subvert ordinary conceptual orders but likewise with typical features of the labyrinth.<sup>271</sup>

## 5.2. Builder of the Labyrinth: Daedalus

While it is possible to derive the thematic and structuring presence of the labyrinth in de Chirico's work from the Ariadne figure, there is of course another aspect which is closely related here: paramount to the Knossos legend is the famous artificer Daedalus.

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intellectuel. L'accent y est mis, semble-t-il, sur la relation entre l'ensemble et les parties. Découpage et assemblage en constituent les axes privilégiés."(ibid., p.61.)

<sup>271</sup>This hypothesis can, indeed, be confirmed in de Chirico's written work that clearly undertakes to do both: point to the legend thematically and re-interpret it on various levels of his prose. First of all there are a few scattered thematic hints. For instance, in a later prose piece, Une Aventure de Monsieur Dudron (1945), de Chirico talks about the "fil d'Ariane" for finding his way through this world to the ultimate aesthetic inspiration. Among de Chirico's poetry one finds an early poem entitled Great Forest of my Life (1911-1915). Schmied (1989) points out the implied reference to Dante's labyrinthine world. Indeed the opening passage of Dante's Divine Comedy ("Midway upon the journey of our life/I found that I had strayed into a wood/So dark the right road was completely lost.") appears to be strongly resonant in de Chirico's image of his life-forest, gloomy with fears and yet on the whole beloved by the writer.

Clearly Daedalus's art has a powerful bearing on reality: it is through his art that the monstrous Minotaur is conceived; it is through his art that a part of the world is ordered by the dictates of the labyrinth. Similarly de Chirico undertakes to employ art for new insight into an other; in other words he undertakes to broaden the confines of "our" reality.

However, it is Daedalus's legendary artifices that ensure his fame. Initially he was said to have delighted the court with his manufacturing of artificial figures, for example, dolls for Ariadne, and the artificial cow for Pasiphaë. However, given the negative effect of his ingenious activities (the Minotaur, the building of the labyrinth which becomes a place of sacrifice), he always stands for both artistic ingenuity and powerful destruction.<sup>272</sup> And it is this running together of destruction of the traditional and ingenious innovation in de Chirico's figures that Hocke takes as his argument for awarding de Chirico a place in his book Die Welt als Labyrinth (1957):<sup>273</sup> he takes

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<sup>272</sup>Compare Schmeling (1980) about Daidalos as "komplexes Zeichen für schöpferische Ingeniösität und destruktive Dämonie zugleich", p.36 ff.

<sup>273</sup>René Hocke shows that the entire mannerist tradition, reaching from the 16th/17th century, via Romanticism into the 20th century, can be understood - if at all - in terms of only one ordering principle: the labyrinth and labyrinth-related features. Hocke's title of his book about mannerist painting, Die Welt als Labyrinth (1957), and the subtitle of the corresponding book on literature, namely "Sprach-Alchemie" and "Esoterische Kombinationskunst" (Manierismus in der Literatur (1959), suggest that his psycho-anthropological approach considers both the labyrinth's metaphoric-thematic as well as its more abstract-structuring presence in art. In the light of his presentation the mannerist "Ausdruckszwang" leads to deviations and irregularities that include such presentations as de Chirico's figure-montage. Compare Hocke (1957) on de Chirico's "Manichini" Hector and Andromache (1917,Pl.55), p.118.

the painter's presentation of the legendary couple Hector and Andromache (1917,Pl.55) by way of a reductive mannequin scheme as an instance of "daidalic" forces at play. Strikingly, as already observed with respect to the Ariadne figure, Hocke's mythical interpretation clearly offers a generalized paradigm that accommodates what was found to be a philosophically motivated aspect of de Chirico metaphysics i.e.the transformation of the human being to statues and mannequins that harks back to the Schopenhauer-inspired objectivisation programme.

While in de Chirico's work only a single drawing is named Dédale (1927,Pl.81) it is striking that this Daedalus figure is practically identical with drawings of de Chirico's "génie" Hebdomeros. Hebdomeros, in turn, is commonly considered as the alter ego of the artist himself, at which point one needs to consider the vast range of self-portraits of the artist depicted clearly again and again in the role of the inspired artist, the "pictor optimus" who loves the "rerum metaphysica".<sup>274</sup> In turn, this centrality of the genius and the work of art was presented in Chapter II.3.1. as part of de Chirico's Schopenhauer informed metaphysics.

## 6. Conclusion

Through the analysis of the Ariadne series one can see that two lines converge in de Chirico's art: on the one hand there is the artistic transferral of the metaphysical programme by means of a specific selection of iconographical material and formal

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<sup>274</sup>Compare Schmied (1989) "Die vollendete Fremdheit: de Chirico in seinen Selbstbildnissen" pp.61-65.

considerations. The Schopenhauerian postulates of detachment from empirical space, time and causality are brought together with the critically important ideas of architecture, the human figure etc. However, de Chirico's choice of a specific figure from mythology brings in a second line on which the paintings need to be read: Ariadne invokes the myth of the labyrinth, Daedalus, the Labyrinth builder, Theseus, the Labyrinthgänger and the Minotaur.

Not surprisingly these two lines form a most homogeneous picture of the metaphysical programme: while Ariadne is the bringer of truth and an emblem for metaphysical truth, leading the recipient Labyrinthgänger on his quest for truth, the labyrinth becomes identified with the urban setting and the spatio-temporal disorientation. Being itself highly conceptual the labyrinth nonetheless leads the Labyrinthgänger to suspend the ability to apply his conceptual apparatus.

Likewise the implicit presence of Dedalus appears to reflect or complement the requirement of the metaphysical programme of an artistic mediator between the empirical and the metaphysical other through art: the genius. And it is the genius figure of Hebdomeros that links the prose to the paintings: the figure undergoes a Theseus-like rite in the process of his labyrinthine experience. Clearly the figure of Ariadne (passive but crucially important) and Hebdomeros (active and likewise central to the metaphysical programme) taken together yield those specific parameters which, arguably, can be applied to de Chirico's work and its metaphysical programme.

#### Chapter IV The Labyrinth: Structuring the Metaphysical

In the preceding chapter it was argued that Ariadne supplies the key to the labyrinth in de Chirico's work: this reading applies to both the thematic as well as to the *formal* level, where the labyrinth structure was identified as the main principle of organisation.

With respect to the latter, the foregoing outline showed examples of the labyrinthine and indicated that de Chirico's later work was to be structurally likened to the main labyrinth characteristics, namely the intricacy and complexity of the spatial lay-out. It was argued that the disorientating effect was used to suspend the empirical spatio-temporal universe, which thus translates one of the foundations of de Chirico's approach to the metaphysical in his art.

However, if the labyrinth is to be read as supplying exploratory parameters, it does not follow that the sufficient conditions are the complexity and intricacy of the labyrinthine pathways where the Labyrinthgänger is to lose himself: the labyrinth is characterizable as an artificial,<sup>275</sup> typically architectonic, construction set apart. Furthermore it is a hermetic, contained space.<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>275</sup>Daedalus's artifices clearly manipulate reality: as the artificial cow for Pasiphaë enables her union with a bull and thus the creation of the Minotaur, the labyrinth enables Minos to not only keep the Minotaur imprisoned, to create a space apart for ritual sacrifice, but to deprive the Labyrinthgänger of the application of his skills of orientation for the purpose of survival.

<sup>276</sup>I refer here to the classical Knossos-style labyrinth. As Holländer (1970) rightly points out the labyrinth as purely geometrical, combinatory structure has in fact two basic manifestations: "Geometrisch gibt es ... zwei Klassen von Labyrinth, solche, deren Prinzip die unendliche Teilbarkeit

In the following it will be shown that each of these labyrinthine properties can be traced in de Chirico's art as a device to transfer the metaphysical programme on to canvas. To start with, the subsequent investigation will look into de Chirico's attempt to create within his metaphysical worlds labyrinthine spaces, visibly constructed, artificial settings to highlight the tension between the artifice and reality and therefore to invite the beholder-reader into the underlying ontological discourse.

Secondly, the interior intricacy and complexity will be explored in greater detail, to show de Chirico's attempt (even if unable to shed all conceptual constraints)<sup>277</sup> to render as relative all the established notions of time and space.

And, finally, the hermetic quality of de Chirico's labyrinthine worlds will be investigated, leading to the subjects of the finite and infinity, and the eternal qualities of the metaphysical other.

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ist, und solche, die auf unendlicher Multiplikation beruhen. Die einen sind äußerlich begrenzt und im Inneren kunstvoll unterteilt, die anderen beziehen sich auf die Unendlichkeit des Raumes." And he notes: "Die Stadt hat mannigfaltige Wege innerhalb der Grenzen, die Wüste nähert sich räumlicher Unendlichkeit, und der Dschungel ist räumlich ausgedehnt wie eine Wüste und andererseits in sich mannigfaltig verzweigt, also eine Labyrinthform, in der sich beide Grenzfälle treffen." Holländer "Ars inveniendi et investigandi" in Wallraf-Richartz Jahrbuch XXXII, Köln, (1970), p.224.

<sup>277</sup>Compare the discussion of Schopenhauer in Chapter II.



### 1. The Labyrinth as Artifice: a Discourse on Reality<sup>278</sup>

As was pointed out in Chapter III, Schopenhauer suggests that it is the work of art that gives access to the metaphysical other. What makes de Chirico's paintings stand out as specifically metaphysical is the fact that there is a deliberate initiation into the discussion about the nature of reality by dint of using the artifice within the representation of the work of art. Those early canvases, which lead Calvino, Fagiolo or Jouffroy to point out the strong presence of the labyrinthine in de Chirico, do not reveal the labyrinth as artifice because it is painted: de Chirico's architectonic representations are suffused with a very conscious sense of mannered construction. Such construction creates a heightened sense of contrived artificiality.<sup>279</sup> In the Ariadne series, as well as in most other canvases from between 1911 and 1914, the architecture is identifiably neo-classical, the individual building is pared down to essentials. In an almost naive, flat, anti-naturalistic rendering, these buildings pre-empt any strong sense of a realistic setting. At the same time it cannot be said that de

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<sup>278</sup>In the present chapter the major part of the labyrinth discussion will largely exclude the discussion of objects and figures in the paintings. They will be dealt with separately in Chapter V.

<sup>279</sup>This is in contrast to the Surrealist labyrinths of Yves Tanguy discussed by Holländer (op.cit., loc.cit.): Tanguy's biomorphic forms in Infinite Divisibility (1942), Buffalo, N.Y., Albright-Knox Art Gallery) and Multiplication of the Arches (1954), New York, Museum of Modern Art) are in no way designed to make the beholder aware of a specific labyrinthine artificiality; they determine the entire picture, there is no "outer" where the labyrinths are contained. De Chirico, however, strongly emphasizes the labyrinthine separateness and its artificially contrived qualities.

Chirico simply indulges in abstraction, since, despite the move towards simplification, the geometrical-cultural sense of the architectonic is never abandoned.

However, while the architectural iconography is thus simplified in the extreme, this stylistic decision is complemented in the labyrinth construction: the individual parts of the setting are visibly arranged or set up to create the urban context. For instance, the paintings The Melancholy of a Beautiful Day (1912,Pl.6), The Pleasures of the Poet (1912) and Joys and Enigmas of a Strange Hour (1913,Pl.11), show on the left hand side of the respective square a building, the neo-classical façade of which is a recurring iconographical element in de Chirico's paintings: this architectural iconography is not only stylistically pared down to essentials, but is shown to be a mere façade. As Schmied puts it: "oft scheint es, als wären die Fassaden oder Arkaden wie verschiedenen 'Prospekte' auf die Bühne geschoben";<sup>280</sup> and he observes that in these de Chirico paintings "Wände wirken wie Kulissen, Häuser mit ihren Torbögen erscheinen so schmal und funktionslos wie Potemkinsche Fassaden".<sup>281</sup>

Evidently, the painter's use of a limited set of such props as the Mediterranean building with peristyle, the flat-roofed neo-classical building, the arcade, the chimney, sunlit streets and squares,<sup>282</sup> supports the overall impression of an artificial

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<sup>280</sup>Schmied (1989), p.55.

<sup>281</sup>Ibid., p.56.

<sup>282</sup>Remember that de Chirico considered architecture as "the first principle of metaphysical aesthetics" (compare the section "Estetica metafisica" in "Sull'arte metafisica" (1919), MP, p.87); thereby he meets Schopenhauer's claim that architecture yields to a heightening of the metaphysical awareness (compare

set up that approximates in the individual case to theatrical scenery. Furthermore, taken together, the pictures give rise to the continuous sense of déjà-vu: as the Labyrinthgänger in the labyrinth, the beholder may turn from one painting to the next only to find that he has arrived at a scene he has encountered before. Moreover, with the frequently included far distant landscape (compare The Melancholy of a Beautiful Day (1912,Pl.6)), urban props acquire a strong sense of being a place apart; a construct set apart as detached as the labyrinth on Naxos. Here, however, the peculiarity that the labyrinth is a place apart in a painted world introduces the beholder into basic questions about the ontological status of the given.

Without doubt these observations find their correspondences in Hebdomeros: here the protagonist often flees, for example, from a specific urban location only to find himself in the same city again, "ou, plutôt, il avait l'impression que ce fût la même car quelque chose était changé dans le plan des rues ..." <sup>283</sup> On another occasion Hebdomeros and his friends are said to emerge from the suburb of the city "qui étaient comme les coulisses de la ville" <sup>284</sup> (emphasis mine) - a suggestion of contrived theatrical separateness that is clearly comparable to the effect that de Chirico's early labyrinthine picture worlds may have on a beholder of his paintings.

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the discussion in Chapter II). Thus de Chirico's strategy to interlock painting and architecture may be understood as an emphatic way to bring across the metaphysical programme.

<sup>283</sup>Hebdomeros, p.63.

<sup>284</sup>Ibid., p.118.

Furthermore one finds in Hebdomeros variations of this contrived separateness: for instance, there are descriptions of landscape which clearly have the character of an artificial diaramic toy-world: "des millions et des millions de guerriers envahissaient le pays en passant à travers les vignobles; on aurait dit qu'ils suintaient par les fentes des roches, à travers ces montagnes en ronde-bosse, cartes d'un état-major hypothétique, criblées de caverne et que la lumière égale venant du plafond rendait encore plus vraisemblables"<sup>285</sup>(emphasis mine).

Similar ideas are realised in much later paintings and drawing, for instance the drawing The Grand Metaphysician (1918), where de Chirico's urban architecture is set up in a toy-like fashion within a room - which also reiterates once more the artificial aspects of those worlds one is led to identify with the labyrinth in Metaphysical Art.

Finally there are later examples of de Chirico's penchant for the urban setting, such as The Departure of the Argonauts (1921,Pl.69) or Mercury and the Metaphysicians (1920,Pl.68), where there is a clear emphasis on "fictional-legendary" scenarios: there are naked mythical heroes and demi-gods in the public squares, while once more the stage-set quality of the buildings (compare the box-like and hollow building on the left in Mercury and the Metaphysicians (1920,Pl.68), which has hardly any depth and thus comes across as mere façade) is emphasized. This is likewise taken up in Hebdomeros where "semigods" are described as mixing with the crowds, peopling those cityscapes

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<sup>285</sup>Hebdomeros, pp.111-112.

variously described as "coulisses". In each case the overall effect again is that of a contrived urban world, which is denied a univocal claim on reality: the artistic media - here the visual and the novelistic - contain varying aspects of artifice or fictitiousness blended with a sense of the ordinarily urban with the effect that de Chirico's sceneries again and again challenge the beholder-reader to inquire into their ontological status.

However, this intellectual challenge to the beholder-reader is offered in conjunction with the typical qualities characterizing the initiatory path of the Labyrinthgänger: on the one hand the passing through a distinct geometrical lay-out; on the other the arousal of the anxiety that the initiate to the Minotaur's den has to bear.

In the early urban paintings, for instance, there are the streets and squares whose resemblance with each other create, as pointed out, unarguably labyrinthine effects:<sup>286</sup> for instance, the Ariadne painting Joys and Enigmas of a Strange Hour (1913, Pl.11), The Rose Tower (1913) and The Enigma of a Day (1914, Pl.23), appear to belong to one universe, where buildings and shadow create geometrical patterns, while at the same time they channel the beholder's view towards the prepared sunlit areas. Likewise, while the dark shadows connote unfamiliarity and uncanniness, the half-concealed buildings frustrate the beholder's explorative view to the right. Indeed what de Chirico says about Giotto can be applied here: the "pietra geometrizzata"

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<sup>286</sup>A more detailed analysis of the labyrinthine spatiality and its significance for the metaphysical programme will be given in Chapter IV.2.

impels us to questions, and "le prospettive delle costruzioni s'innalzano piene di mistero e di presentimenti, gli angeli celano dei segreti..."<sup>287</sup> In other words, the architecture, the wide vistas and sharp angles, harbour as many secrets, doubts and surprises as the unexplored paths of a labyrinth: in such a way the beholder becomes the Labyrinthgänger.

Similarly there are in most of the early paintings black geometrical openings of doors, windows and arcades which emulate the geometrically designed, intricate array of pathways and openings in the labyrinth. In The Uncertainty of the Poet (1913,Pl.18) and The Enigma of a Day (1914,Pl.23), for instance, the gloomy, gaping arcades appear to belie the apparent openness of the settings: it is as though they are designed to exert some compelling psychological power which incites the beholder to consider them as potentially dangerous. Indeed, de Chirico suggests that the Roman arcade is fatality; its voice speaks in riddles. Drawing on Weininger's suggestions about the psychology of geometrical signs, de Chirico thus promotes the view that the arch fosters uncertainty, anticipation of danger, confusion;<sup>288</sup> the idea of the riddle (or enigma) being conceptually closely related to the labyrinth. Elsewhere the painter suggests that each window "avait une âme qui était une énigme"<sup>289</sup> thus continuing the move towards attributing a mysterious initiatory potency to all openings of the buildings.

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<sup>287</sup>"Il senso architettonico nella pittura antica" (1920) in MP, p.101.

<sup>288</sup>Compare MP, p.88.

<sup>289</sup>Compare (1911-15) MP, p.19.

In later paintings the vastness of the early urban setting seems to collapse into itself,<sup>290</sup> while the aesthetics of enigmatic openings creating "riddles", and the clearly labyrinthine feel of a confusing array of different, unexplored paths is retained. For example, the 1915 painting, The Purity of a Dream (Pl.36) contains high buildings that crowd the beholder's gaze and impose upon him a claustrophobic set of black arcades and angular window openings. Thus "the symbols of higher reality" (de Chirico), the geometrical forms, are working in a two-fold fashion: they suggest a further "beyond"; and they suggest riddle, fatality, drama and destiny. Both aspects complement each other perfectly in the labyrinthine mode.

However, while the examples cited so far concern only the outer aspects of the urban construction, the beholder is lulled further, into the interior: in such paintings as Good Friday (1915,Pl.37) or the The Anxious Journey (1913,Pl.20), the labyrinth becomes a closed space. In both cases the beholder is placed inside a gloomy building and finds that what appeared as a labyrinth of streets and squares is actually continued within the buildings. In Good Friday (1915,Pl.37) (the eye-catching still-life arrangement in the foreground apart), the beholder's gaze is guided from a lower position to what appears to be a kind of crossroads of arched corridors, each of which (according to de Chirico's metaphysical aesthetics) should be understood in terms of its enigmatic concealed other. The distinctly

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<sup>290</sup>Compare Calvino (1983), who divides de Chirico's labyrinth world into the early "agoraphobic" and the later "claustrophobic" - which might be compared to the different types of labyrinth geometry discussed by Holländer (see footnote 273).

labyrinthine quality is supported by the feel of enclosure.

In The Anxious Journey (1913,Pl.20) the beholder is positioned at the point where paths converge from different directions. Although two of these paths lead to the sunlit outside world, the menacing power of the numerous black arches suggest not only spatial, but equally a psychological disorientation.

This presentation of a labyrinthine setting that penetrates the outer plan of an urban world into an inner is taken up too with respect to Hebdomeros. Already a drawing titled Hebdomeros (1929,Pl.93) - possibly a sketch for a cover-design of the book - shows among blurred and somehow floating shapes a clear meander-pattern evoking a labyrinthine structure. In the novel's opening paragraph Hebdomeros enters a building from an urban environment where he is led - his anxiety increasing - up staircases and through passages with numerous doors. Further on in the narrative he is in a park full of trees around the trunks of which spiralling staircases wind.<sup>291</sup> The reader is made to follow the description of one of these snake-like ("comme un serpent géant") staircases - resembling very much the geometrically exact layout of a labyrinthine construction, and which disorientates the reader. And, in yet another sequence, Hebdomeros enters a palace, an "...inquiétant labyrinthe de corridors, de vestibules, d'antichambres et de salons ..."<sup>292</sup> Its complexity appears to correspond to the labyrinthine pathways of the inner spaces in

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<sup>291</sup>Hebdomeros, pp. 32-33.

<sup>292</sup>Ibid., p.169.



Good Friday (1915,Pl.37). Interesting though, in both, the paintings and Hebdomeros, the urban world is variously identifiable as a mere set of props; but once its openings are entered, it paradoxically yields vast interior labyrinths.

Yet, more importantly it is in Hebdomeros where one is made aware that the labyrinthine dynamics set up so far are to be pushed even further: within the "rooms" of Hebdomeros's memory the reader is introduced to two paintings. In the first, called "Caucase et Golgotha"<sup>293</sup> the hero sits near a broad road; in the second there is Mercury driving his flock of dreams into a tunnel.<sup>294</sup> Both paintings could clearly be interpreted in the present context: the former recalls the protagonist's journey, the tired wanderer, vaguely reminiscent of the theseic hero; the latter suggests, through the reference of the tunnel, a rite-de-passage paradigm related to the theseic labyrinth-initiation.

However, what is most striking is that de Chirico has refined the labyrinthine references even further: from the contrived labyrinthine city-plan into the inner of buildings and here (back?) into painting. The labyrinthine disorientation here becomes pure abstraction for the sake of a more condensed relativising of the nature of reality: the fiction, the labyrinth-city, the rooms, all lead to contrived openings which seem to take up the supposed reality and thus continue the intricate pattern of seeing through art, and through art (the metaphysical) reality.

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<sup>293</sup>Ibid., pp. 38-39.

<sup>294</sup>Ibid., pp. 147-148.

Even more impressively this strategy can be observed in de Chirico's paintings: for instance, the paintings The Dream of Tobias (1917,Pl.54), Metaphysical Interior (with Biscuits and Matches) (1918,Pl.57) or The Games of the Knowing (1917,Pl.58): all appear to be glimpses into the rooms behind the stern architectural façades encountered in the earlier paintings: yet, to the confusion of the beholder, they contain among other things a framed painting of an aspect of de Chirico's urban labyrinth iconography.<sup>295</sup> They thus create a Chinese-box system of paradoxical "artifice-realities". This finds another variation in the post-1920s paintings such as The Reading (1926,Pl.84) and The Archaeologist (1927): sculpturesque figures contain what appear to be relics of the neo-classical architecture of the early urban sceneries.<sup>296</sup>

It is as though the setting up of the labyrinth construct has come full circle: from distinguishing it as artifice within the immediate pictorial/narrative reality, *de Chirico* has maintained its presence. Furthermore the labyrinth's geometrical intricacy and its psychological presence introduce a sense of initiation through its manifestly artificial construction. Moreover, the artist's removal of the labyrinthine from the city into buildings that are mere façades is a clear instance of his manipulation of the parameters of empirical reality by the aid of artifice. But the reflexive exercise of developing the artificial construction of the labyrinth increasingly into a

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<sup>295</sup>Compare the more detailed discussion on space in Chapter IV.2.

<sup>296</sup>Compare the more detailed discussion of figures in Chapter V.2.

Chinese box system of artifice-contexts suggests a very abstract network of ideistic labyrinthine concatenations. The labyrinth thus becomes ultimately an abstract presence reiterating the tension between what is perceived to be real and the status of reality in the artistic set-up. Thus in general terms it leads the beholder to questions about the nature of reality, about the ontological status of the world, and, ultimately, about the role of the work of art. Indeed, for Calvino, by moving through the labyrinth of streets and squares "où s'ouvrent les espaces sidéraux des idées",<sup>297</sup> de Chirico's labyrinthine transpositions appear to demand the beholder's recognition of the manipulative forces of the artifice. Although still very general, such inquiry is clearly in tune with the Schopenhauer-inspired metaphysical programme.

## 2. Labyrinthine Spaces

As pointed out in Chapter III, Schopenhauer asserts that all phenomena should manifest themselves through the concepts of time and space. This implies that these concepts impede the direct, unmediated intuition of ideas: the appearances obscure the idea. To gain access to the metaphysical other it is necessary to break through these concepts and thus perceive the things anew, uncluttered by their conceptual constraints.

The following discussion of space in de Chirico's work will aim at demonstrating that the concept of labyrinthine space, its complexity and intricacy and power of disorientation, is employed

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<sup>297</sup>Calvino, op.cit., loc.cit., p.14.

systematically to subvert our empirical notions of space: space is no longer safe and predictable but breaks up into a disorientating ambiguity, and this forces the beholder to divert his mind from the rigid conceptuality of spatial thinking. However, as will be demonstrated, in analogy to the broadest characteristic of the labyrinthine space, namely its disunity in unity, de Chirico's spaces, while disorientating, form part of a homogeneous universe inasmuch as they are always to be read against the background of established spatial paradigms.

To start once more with the earlier metaphysical paintings, a consistently heightened sense of space is attributable to de Chirico's treatment of perspective. Strikingly, in his writings de Chirico suggests cryptically: "Qui peut nier le rapport troublant qui existe entre la perspective et la métaphysique?"<sup>298</sup> Far from expounding this in greater conceptual depth, the painter leaves the reader with the problem: what, in fact is the connection?

It has often been argued that de Chirico's paintings emanate such heightened spatial awareness as is only found in Renaissance painting. Indeed, the artist was clearly profoundly influenced by his Renaissance predecessors: he remarks that they looked "con spirito amoroso" into questions of perspective and "perfezionando le leggi della prospettiva";<sup>299</sup> so that they view the world "con occhio di architetto e di costruttore".<sup>300</sup> As Jean

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<sup>298</sup>"Courbet"(1925) in MP, p.254.

<sup>299</sup>"Il senso architettonico nella pittura antica" in MP (1920), p.100.

<sup>300</sup>Ibid., p.101.

Clair points out: "La perspective artificielle, telle que le Quattrocento en a codifié les règles, est bien cet instrument mathématique dont l'usage raisonné permet d'apprendre le monde visible et d'en tracer un *tableau* que posera comme équivalent de ce qui est vu."<sup>301</sup> But, he adds, "elle est aussi l'artifice qui, par delà le visible, nous introduit au discours sur le peu de réalité du monde, image d'un faux infini, elle crée l'illusion d'un espace par la seule combinaison de rapports de proportions"<sup>302</sup> (emphasis mine).

And it is this idea of the artificial space instigating a discourse on the nature of reality that provides a clue to the specific connection between perspective and metaphysics: the perspective operates as a tool by the aid of which the represented reality is both the understood equivalent of the seen, as well as being unveiled as an artificial concept (which, in turn, we are taught to accept as the only possibility of viewing our spatial realities). As Owen indicates: "ce ne sont pas les rayons-X mais l'utilisation de la perspective métaphysique qui libère l'aspect métaphysique des objets représentés"<sup>303</sup> (emphasis mine).

Indeed, de Chirico's acute awareness of the powerful role of perspective is reiterated throughout his career: for instance he repeatedly emphasizes the importance of the "absolute

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<sup>301</sup>Clair "Sous le Signe de Saturne" (1981) in Cahiers du Musée National d'Art Moderne 7-8, p.188.

<sup>302</sup>Ibid.

<sup>303</sup>Maurice Owen "Giorgio de Chirico et la Perspective Métaphysique" in Cahiers du Musée Nationale Moderne 9-11 (1982-1988), p.43.

knowledge of space", of "the precise and intelligently thought through use of planes and volumes" as the basic rules for his "metaphysical aesthetics".<sup>304</sup> However, as distinct from Renaissance perspective, de Chirico's eminently metaphysical use of perspective is "essentially modern and not nostalgically backward-looking"<sup>305</sup> inasmuch as it employs the model only to subvert it.

### 2.1. Vertiginous Expanses

In de Chirico's perspectival compositions of the earlier metaphysical paintings one finds that only a few paintings, such as the very early The Enigma of the Hour (1911,Pl.4a), actually obey the rules of perspectival "correctness". Other cases, such as The Pleasures of the Poet (1912), Gare Montparnasse (1914,Pl.24) or The Enigma of a Day (1914,Pl.23), while ostensibly conforming to the correct perspectival parameters, on closer scrutiny reveal that the perspective is subverted or, as Fagiolo put it, "irrationalized":<sup>306</sup> exaggeratedly steep flightlines, like those at the central pond in The Pleasures of the Poet (1912) not only create the illusion of a sloping<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>304</sup>Compare "Sull'arte metafisica" (1919) in MP, p.88: "L'impiego minuziosamente accurato e prudentemente pesato delle superfici e dei volumi costituisce canoni di estetica metafisica."

<sup>305</sup>Lukach, op.cit., p.36.

<sup>306</sup>Fagiolo in Rubin ed., (1983), p.52.

<sup>307</sup>Clearly, de Chirico's early squares could be understood as simple flat space projections. However, the lines that create the deep perspective easily seduce the beholder into perceiving the projection as "sloping". Compare Rubin's general remark about de Chirico's early work: "Die Renaissance - Perspektive projiziert einen Raum, der sicher und in hohem Maße begehbar erscheint. De Chirico's abschüssige Grundflächen schaffen im Gegensatz dazu

square but likewise "... créent l'illusion d'une grande profondeur spatiale ..." <sup>308</sup> a disconcertingly exaggerated sense of infinity.

In Gare Montparnasse (1914,Pl.24) the beholder, who is assigned an elevated viewpoint, is guided into the picture by the eye-catching brightness of the orthogonally constructed street on the right leading roughly towards a train in the far distance. <sup>309</sup> However, the lines of perspective do not meet in one point (the train), but converge with the line of the horizon on either side of the locomotive. Likewise the building on the left appears to follow its own perspectival codification with the line of the roof converging with the horizon in the middle of the left hand part of the horizontal line.

As Owen rightly observes, "la perspective de De Chirico n'est pas gouverné par un point de fuite unique." <sup>310</sup> A "dislocation spatiale" <sup>311</sup> is thus created through this lack of a unified vanishing point. The overall effect is - in spite of all the apparent rigidity and stasis of the architecture - that of a disturbingly vertiginous space gaping at the beholder who is vainly struggling to adapt the view to his established notions of spatiality.

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einen Raum, der ... seicht und schwindelerregend wirkt" (emphasis mine). Rubin (1983), p.52.

<sup>308</sup>Owen, op.cit., p.37.

<sup>309</sup>Interestingly Hebdomeros is leaning out of a window and looks at a city of geometrical perfection - is the beholder assigned a Hebdomeros-like position in the paintings?

<sup>310</sup>Owen, op.cit., p.33.

<sup>311</sup>Ibid.

Similarly Rubin (1983), in a schematisation of the main flightlines of the painting The Enigma of the Day (1914,Pl.23) shows that there is the generally compelling thrust into an exaggerated deep perspective supported by the diagonal flightlines of the white building on the left. However, again at variance with the strict logic of the traditional use of perspective, the perspective markers here do not create any one coherent vanishing point: the perspectival set-up of the building does not result in a flight point in but above the line of horizon; the lines of the shadowy building on the right meet at the foot of the chimney on the right. And Rubin concludes "Die multiplen Fluchtpunkte dieser Bilder zerstören die Kohärenz der Renaissance-perspektive, indem sie den Betrachter mit einem Netz widersprüchlicher, räumlicher Ausdehnung konfrontieren, die, psychologisch gesprochen, den anfänglichen Eindruck von Ruhe und Stabilität untergraben."<sup>312</sup> Interestingly Holländer observes with respect to de Chirico's handling of space, that the subversion is carried on through the creation not of vanishing points, but of entire vanishing areas ("Fluchtfelder"<sup>313</sup>) which enhance the effect of unreality of the picture space and plunge the beholder into scenes of a hallucinatory quality.

However, in this discussion of disjunctive perspectival correctness one needs to address the issue of what could be called an overall harmony in de Chirico's paintings: the beholder is able to read the perspectival information only against the

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<sup>312</sup>Rubin, op.cit., p.52.

<sup>313</sup>Holländer, op.cit., p.222.



background of established space-concepts. Thus, as a quasi sub-text, the perspectival correctness is a presence. The disjunctive is thus set against the integrity of the spatial order. This is perhaps particularly striking in The Enigma of a Day (1914,Pl.23) since a superficial glance could lead one to "read" the painting in terms of an orthodox spatial organisation. It is only on closer inspection that the subtle undermining of the established structuring of the picture space becomes apparent. Thus the perception oscillates between the ordered and familiar, and a novel, subversive presentation of space.

This "unhinging" of space from the empirically known is complemented by the use of shadows, traditionally employed to confirm the spatio-temporal reality of the pictorial representation. In de Chirico, the deep black shadows defy any traditional function: instead of conforming to one source of light their outlines seem to result from as many different sources of light as there are perspectival angles. For instance, in The Enigma of a Day (1914,Pl.23), the shadows cast by the human beings in the far distance of the middleground are clearly not in alignment with the sharp diagonality of the foreground shadow. Nor is there any logical relationship between these two and that shadow cast by the wagon situated in the middle of the square. Clearly this paradoxical use of shadows creates awareness: the breaking up of space always entails the breaking up of time. From an empirical point of view the shadow-paradox prevents any temporal fixation.

However, what matters for the discussion of space is that the shadows' gloomy darkness and the sharp angularity turn them

into independent iconographical elements - to the extent that they almost contribute as much to the beholder's spatial awareness as the buildings themselves.<sup>314</sup> Furthermore, in that they compound the spatial disorientation, the shadows take on at the same time a peculiarly ordering function: their mostly extensive, geometrical shapes sharply define and order large areas of the surface of the canvas. For example, in The Enigma of a Day (1914,Pl.23) the composition of the painting into three wedge-like areas starting from the lower left hand corner is strikingly supported by the foreground shadow which cuts diagonally across the foreground of the picture plane. A similar observation can be made in Mystery and Melancholy of a Street (1914,Pl.25), where the shadow on the right complements the geometric lay-out of the picture: together with the yellow street and the white building on the left, the shadow area formally constitutes a powerful compositional impact; a sense of overall harmonic order is achieved. Thus, as in the labyrinth, the built environment both orders its spatial lay-out and disorients the Labyrinthgänger. The shadow elements complement the use of architecture and perspective in both their ordering and their ultimately disjunctive function.

Another example of the subversion of space via a combination

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<sup>314</sup>Compare as well de Chirico: "Des visions hantent pourtant nos esprits: elles sont rivées à des bases éternelles. Sur les places carrées les ombres s'allongent dans leur énigme mathématique... partout c'est l'infini et partout c'est le mystère." (1913) in MP, p.24. Clearly here, too, shadows are rather understood as geometrical concepts then in relation to giving evidence of the presence of materiality. Does this use of shadows, indeed, suggest the relativity of material phenomena, which can, after all, only exist in space?

of perspectival distortions and shadows can be seen in The Departure of the Poet (1914,Pl.22). Clearly, the wide expanse in the middleground is virtually structured by shadows. While in the foreground the shadow on the right forces the beholder in to following the direction of the sunlit road, the dramatically thrusting shadow of a chimney virtually forks the way the beholder is invited to look: to the right of this shadow there is a sunlit way towards an area obstructed by the building; towards the left the beholder can follow the direction of the building to the left. Overall the shadow of the chimney itself appears to be a taboo zone, a "black hole" or psychological barrier in the canvas.<sup>315</sup> This surely exemplifies *de Chirico's* view that there are more "enigmas in the shadow of a man than in all treasures of the world": shadows, far from having a typical spectre-like second order presence, actively engage in the labyrinthine complexity of the surrounding world. They are perspectively superimposed on a network of architectonic perspective markers: like the latter, the lines of the shadows are incorporated in the set of conflicting angles that inform the multiplicity of flight points. The shadow presence thus ultimately supports the general concept of spatial dislocation.

## 2.2. The Narrowing of Space and the Loss of Ground

However, *de Chirico's* concept of space, while remarkable

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<sup>315</sup>Compare Hebdomeros (pp. 24-25) where the protagonist is prevented from leaving a room because the space between his location and the door is exposed to people's gaze. Similar to the shadow a psychological barrier structures the room into safe and restricted areas. *Hebdomeros* has recourse to memories for security.

already in these early examples, evolves into even more radical instances of dissolution in the following years. In 1914 the perspectival markers become more dramatically involved in the breaking up of space: for instance, The Fête Day (1914,Pl.30), The Evil Genius of a King (1914,Pl.32) or Turin 1888 (1914,Pl.31) all show a similar perspectival manipulation. It is as though the ground has been lifted at the far end: the effect of this illusion is to cut diagonally into the picture space like a slope. The beholder is at the bottom of the slope flanked on either side by shadows and/or buildings. At the same time the buildings, in spite of the evident perspectival upheaval, still retain the arched and rectangular opening so suggestive of the labyrinthine dynamics of a complex network of pathways. The overall effect is that of a dazzling instability.

Through these paintings the beholder gets (the generally more radical move towards relativisation of empirical space apart) an early intimation of the shift of the labyrinthine intricacy from the outer vastness of the city labyrinth into more markedly confined spaces: in all cases the beholder's position at the bottom of an illusory slope flanked by architecture/shadow barriers creates an effect verging on the claustrophobic. Instead of the habitual open vista, vast buildings confront the observer: even though the typically exaggerated deep perspective is employed, these buildings markedly frustrate the feeling of spatial infinity.

From here de Chirico takes the subversion further in the attempt to dissolve spatial stability into a more intensely delimiting, claustrophobic narrowness: thus paintings from 1915,

like The Purity of a Dream (Pl.36), or drawings like The Surprise (Pl.39)<sup>316</sup> are frequently marked by the absence of a "spatial grounding" for the beholder: one is plunged into a narrow "canyon" of architecture the depth of which remains unplumbable. In the drawing Statue and Perspective (1914,Pl.33) the beholder's position appears to have been adopted by a statue: its upper torso is visible among high rising architectural elements, that seem to crowd the figure. However, as in the two paintings referred to, the stabilizing ground is not included, which increases feelings of insecurity, anxiety and vertigo. In all cases these disorientating effects are once again supported by the combination of the labyrinthine perspectives and numerous gaping shadowy openings.

### 2.3. The Inward Movement: Implosion Continued

From 1915 to 1918 the move towards condensing space as well as its distortions becomes most strikingly apparent in the construction of figures and "Metaphysical Interiors". While the former will be discussed separately, the latter will exemplify here what could be called a labyrinthine implosion. As Owen puts it: "Après 1914, les peintures de De Chirico deviennent de plus en plus complexes et l'accent se déplace de l'espace ouvert des places vers les intérieurs".<sup>317</sup> And Schmieid observes a development of space which is "zwanhaft, in zunehmenden Maße komplexer werdend und verunsichernd, bis sie (die Raumsituation)

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<sup>316</sup>See as well Roman Villa (1922,Pl.70).

<sup>317</sup>Owen, op.cit., p.51.

schließlich wie ein Kartenhaus zusammenfällt."<sup>318</sup>

Without reflecting any strictly historical development, the paintings Melancholy of Departure (1916), Metaphysical Interior (with Sanatorium) (1917,Pl.53) and Metaphysical Interior (with Biscuits and Matches) (1918,Pl.57) give an impression of how this spatial manipulation is accomplished. In the two latter examples what is identifiably a room is exaggeratedly box-like. The distorted deep perspective acts as a constant reminder of the (artificial) infinity instilled here. The plain geometricity of the room's construction is interrupted by the quadrangle of a window, as in the case of Melancholy of Departure (1916) and Metaphysical Interior (with Sanatorium) (1917,Pl.53), and a door on the right of Metaphysical Interior (with Biscuits and Matches) (1918,Pl.57). In all these cases the manner of rendering it suggests a deliberate confusion: is this "really" an opening or simply a "picture" of an opening? In the former case the deliberately false spatiality of the box-like room would become relativized by the implied presence of an outer space: once more the beholder is trapped in a game with "reality" and artifice.

Yet the spatial character of these Metaphysical Interiors is most evidently manipulated by the inclusion of the bric-à-brac assembled within the confines of the rooms. There are diverse objects of sharp geometricity: set-squares, ruler, easels, as well as boxes in the Metaphysical Interior (with Sanatorium) (1917,Pl.53). These elements emulate the geometrical character of the general scenario and create a sense of

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<sup>318</sup>Schmied (1989), p.49.

continuation from the room environment.<sup>319</sup> More importantly though, their apparently arbitrary, unsystematic arrangement creates a multiplicity of smaller trajectories: thus space is locally broken down; the space has become a frozen point of instability.

These paintings offer a further spatial confusion: in the two paintings that are called "Metaphysical Interior", the painter includes disproportionately prominent paintings: in Metaphysical Interior (with Biscuits and Matches) (1918,Pl.57) there is in the background a picture of a house which repeats the glimpse of a house through the door opening on the right. In Metaphysical Interior (with Sanatorium) (1917,Pl.53) a vaster, almost romantic vista of a valley containing a park and a neo-classical building is presented. In both pictures the painting within the painting is countered by a collage of small, realistic everyday objects: biscuits, a small hoop, and in the Metaphysical Interior (with Biscuits and Matches) (1918,Pl.57), a box of matches is assembled on a quadrangular panel which is heavily framed. In another painting of this type, Evangelical Still-life (1916,Pl.50), a map is included in the collage on the right while on the left what appears to be a mock-vista of the night-sky is put into a similar frame as the collage.

The overall effect is that of disorientation: the beholder, Theseus-like, is led through competing layers of spatial

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<sup>319</sup>Schmied suggests that these geometrical objects do in fact invite the construction of further spaces: "Der Raum beschreibt ... in der Regel einen Innenraum ... angefüllt von Geometer - und Architekturgerät wie Dreiecken, Linealen, Zirkeln, Winkeln, Rahmen - Werkzeuge, die zur Konstruktion widersprüchlicher Räume einladen ..." Schmied (1989), p.48.

realities: "les intérieurs semblent hésiter entre une confusion des formes qui engendre la claustrophobie et la possibilité d'ouverture vers le lointain, vers un paysage infiniment vaste. On pourrait décrire ces peintures comme un aménagement du chaos."<sup>320</sup> More forcibly than in any of the paintings discussed before the beholder is here confronted with a virtual discourse on space and reality: first of all space is present in varying degrees of subversion, namely the distorted box-like room (together with the allusion to an obscure outside), the confusing array of bric-à-brac, and the comparatively realistic space of the picture within the picture. As Schmied put it with respect to the paintings within the paintings, the beholder becomes "verunsichert" through references "die auf eine ganz andere Realität verweisen, in deren naturalistische Ordnung er gerne entfliehen möchte."<sup>321</sup>

Secondly, and with a similar effect, there are "particles of reality"(Holländer) inserted: such as the idea that a painting in a room makes the latter more distinctly real, that an outside relativizes the inside, or the biscuits, matchbox and map could act as a kind of anchorage (Barthes (1977)) in one particular agreed reality. In their juxtaposition none of these particles of reality constitutes a stable frame of reference but they all clash "...in wohlberechneten Zusammenstößen verschiedener

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<sup>320</sup>Owen, op.cit., p.51.

<sup>321</sup>Schmied (1989), p.48.



Gedankenketten ..."<sup>322</sup>

Jointly these two subversive strategies bring out a whole network of relativisations with respect to questions of ontological status. More specifically the Schopenhauerian concept of breaking through the pre-established formulas of our empirical reality into the layer of the metaphysical is here artistically embodied.

#### 2.4. Relativisation Continued : the Exchange of the Outer and the Inner and Spatial Condensation

After 1919 de Chirico variously re-employs and re-interprets the different spatial solutions to his metaphysical programme elaborated in the earlier work<sup>323</sup> as well as reverting to more traditional spatial concepts. The one clear continuation of the earlier work consists in the systematic relativizing of space and reality within the box-like rooms. Rooms become the universe within which de Chirico displays, for instance, columns and a rock (compare Columns in a Room (1927)); or the furniture and the floorboards of a room are presented within the vast expanse of nature (compare Furniture in the Valley (1927,Pl.87)). In My Mediterranean Room (1927,Pl.88), by contrast, an ordinary room - in the foreground on the right looms a bed -contains houses,

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<sup>322</sup>H.Holländer "Ars inveniendi et investigandi: zur surrealistischen Methode" in Wallraff-Richartz Jahrbuch, (1970), p.202.

<sup>323</sup>Compare the paintings Italian Square (1926) or The Grand Metaphysician (1925) which exactly repeat the early period though the colours do not have any longer the glaring brilliance but have given way to more mellow hues in tune with the romantic influences the artist absorbed here.

water instead of a carpet, and trees are virtually invading its centre. Calvino muses: "Extérieur et intérieur échangent leur rôles. Les colonnes et les arbres s'entassent dans une pièce; les fauteuils et les armoires à glace reposent dans les prés. Est-ce pour me faire renoncer à la penser du dehors? Pour exclure que le dehors existe? La ville (sic) de pensée interdit-elle que l'on puisse penser à quelque chose en dehors de la pensée?"<sup>324</sup> Indeed, de Chirico's spatial manipulations initiate a mental revision of established concepts of space: once more the confined space and the ideas of inner and outer incite the beholder to adapt his sense of "fixed" spaces: space becomes fluid, exchangeable and protean, submitting the beholder to continual mental adjustments which are not unlike the challenge the Labyrinthgänger faces in his movement through the unfamiliar spaces of the labyrinth. Thus space, having become detached from ordinary expectations, ceases to define and fix the interpretation of the visual experience. Objects, such as the furniture in Furniture in the Valley (1927,Pl.87) are given the possibility of being seen in their "whatness", their metaphysical quality (compare the discussion in Chapter V).

In other paintings (e.g. The Trophy with Head of Jupiter (1929)) the environment appears traditional, vaguely suggestive of an ancient Greek landscape. Yet elements which create in other paintings space, i.e. architecture, as well as the figures peopling de Chirico's vistas, are assembled here collage-like into a condensed block in the centre: it is as though the

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<sup>324</sup>Calvino op.cit., loc.cit., p.15.

implosion initiated over a decade before has come to a halt in a massive monument to the breaking down of space. The condensed block itself admits now only a kind of "semantic space". The elements traditionally associated with specific spatial settings, in particular the urban world, are here isolated from that space with the effect that their connotations create only intangible mental spaces, while the pictorial "reality" defies such efforts.

Interestingly, it is in Hebdomeros that one encounters these trophies and here they are described in almost divine terms, as mountains that are "immortelles" and that "surgissaient au milieu des chambres et des salons".<sup>325</sup> While the exact symbolic reference needs to be analysed separately (see Chapter V) it is interesting that these "spaceless" mountains are described as eternal or immortal: this is consistent with the notion that the collapse of space brings about a collapse of our empirical time too, thus creating something eternal outside space and time. At all events, the object set up for contemplation in a context of spatio-temporal relativism is to be regarded as eminently metaphysical in the Schopenhauerian sense.

## 2.5. Space and the Mythical

One feature much discussed by de Chirico's critics concerns de Chirico's reversion to more traditional styles, which includes of course the re-application of the "correct" Renaissance perspective and thus is often considered as coincidental with the end of the metaphysical programme. While it is not here the

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<sup>325</sup>Hebdomeros, p.77.

place to unravel all the arguments of this dispute, it may be nonetheless demonstrated that de Chirico's re-adoption of the traditional does not at all contradict his claim to a consistently metaphysical nature of his work, but, as Schmied holds, can be identified in terms of continuity.<sup>326</sup> Likewise Baldacci claims: "même lorsque de Chirico revient à une perspective orthodoxe, par exemple dans les années vingt, son espace n'est jamais un espace véritable".<sup>327</sup> The question arises in how far this detachment from the empirical space is attained?

Clearly the artist retraces his steps to more conservative styles, notably to Romanticism (the soft, lush brushstroke and warmer colours as opposed to the previous flat and glaring renderings) and Classicism: yet the "organic" link with the spirit of the earliest canvases cannot be denied: Mercury and the Metaphysicians (1920, Pl.68), for instance - although more detailed and warmer in colour than the earlier Italian Squares - shows clearly an urban lay-out similar to these. Even the prop-like character of the building on the left and the arcades on the right are retained. But while the perspective is rather conventional and thus no hallucinatory effect is created, the beholder is nevertheless carried into a sphere different from his empirical condition: the figures, both statue and people, which will be discussed elsewhere in greater detail, are taken from what appears to be a fantastic-mythological sphere which transports the Roman square into a realm of classical legend.

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<sup>326</sup>Schmied (1989), p.28.

<sup>327</sup>Baldacci (1983), p.29.

Similarly The Departure of the Argonauts (1920,Pl.69), while drawing on the spatial expanses and the exaggerated deep perspectives, and thus following up the attempt at creating a hallucinatory vision of space, is anchored firmly by the prominent figures in the category of legend and mythical spaces.

This strategy is more forcibly exploited in Roman Villa (1922,Pl.70) where the familiar idea of crowding the foreground with buildings is combined with a disproportionately huge rock situated directly behind. Once more, though, instead of major perspectival distortions, the picture space defines itself most prominently through the encounter of human beings, statues and a god on a cloud. Hence again a fantastic, mythologized space is created which does not claim to constitute an equivalent of a perceived reality: on the contrary (see Chapter IV.2.1.) the choice of the topic semantically fixes the space as continuous with the classical past. De Chirico no longer needs the spatial upheaval to demonstrate his point, since the legendary dislocation works equally well for his metaphysical undertaking: it here foregrounds the ideal and indeed already immortal images of antiquity. They are as types beyond time and space which are shown to be continuous with the modern urban environment.

## 2.6. Hebdomeros and Spatial Disorientation

Evidently, Hebdomeros relies on the continuity between the classical and the modern urban world. There is for instance the sight of some "porte solennelle"<sup>328</sup> which reminds the protagonist

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<sup>328</sup>Hebdomeros, p.129.

of "les formes de ces temples et de ces sanctuaires ..." where "un mot magique brillait dans l'espace comme la croix de Constantin et se répétait jusqu'au fond de l'horizon, pareil à la réclame d'un dentifrice: *De Iphoï! De Iphoï!*"<sup>329</sup> Elsewhere centaurs people the scene.<sup>330</sup>

However, space in the novel is more prominently characterized by dint of a formal organisation comparable to that detected in the paintings. One striking feature of Hebdomeros is that the artist manages to transfer not only a general sense of spatial disorientation but likewise continually conveys the sense of reality-disorientation that so strongly determines the paintings.

While no one-to-one correspondence between de Chirico's novel and the paintings should be suggested, the similarities are striking: if the paintings' subversive quality needs to be read against the background of a "correct" Renaissance perspective, the specific character of the novel is similarly revealed against the background of traditional conceptions of narrative harmony and causal/temporal sequentiality. The novel is marked by a continual unannounced zig-zagging between the protagonist's vision (reported through the narrator) and the narrator's perspective, as well as a whole range of different degrees of spatial "literalness". From here its apparently chaotic structure, with its elliptic time patterns, locational disorientation and chain of associations developing into anti-

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<sup>329</sup>Ibid., pp.129-130.

<sup>330</sup>Ibid., pp.94-95:

climactic dead-ends, is best described as a "labyrinthine discourse" in the loose sense of the term used by Schmeling (compare Chapter III).

There are what can be characterized as dead-end situations which reflect the gradual movement into the interior of the paintings. For instance, the reader is introduced to Hebdomeros entering a building from a city;<sup>331</sup> within the buildings he goes through corridors<sup>332</sup> until - after three episodic diversions into reminiscences - he enters a room. In this room there is a piano, the inside ("ses entrailles compliquées"<sup>333</sup>) of which reveals a potential drama: "... on imaginait aisément quelle catastrophe c'eût été si un de ces chandeliers chargés de bougies à la cire rose et bleue était tombé dans le piano avec toutes ses bougies allumées..."<sup>334</sup> It is as though all the previous descriptions of space culminate in the idea that this piano interior could be ruined: the movement through space and the drift of the narrative are abruptly curtailed here. Likewise the references to piano, piano-player and music, which give the scene a distinct atmospheric colouring, end in a cul-de-sac: the pianist plays without making a sound and there is the almost flippant observation that, after all, one did not see this piano-player at all.<sup>335</sup>

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<sup>331</sup>Hebdomeros, p.5.

<sup>332</sup>Ibid., p.10.

<sup>333</sup>Ibid.

<sup>334</sup>Ibid., pp.10-11.

<sup>335</sup>Ibid., p.11.

Another example, already referred to in Chapter III, shows Hebdomeros fleeing from the hotel into the park.<sup>336</sup> In the park there is a tree with a spiralling staircase on top of which "King Lear" "se platformisait"<sup>337</sup> in order to watch birds.<sup>338</sup> Lengthy observations about the enigmatic nature of birds ensue which virtually dissolve the description of the far more striking space metamorphosis. There is no reference back to the location.

In another instance the reader is made to follow Hebdomeros into a room. There, like the "rideau d'un théâtre", the wall opens and Hebdomeros witnesses "des spectacles".<sup>339</sup> As in the paintings of the Metaphysical Interiors the room appears to contain either paintings inviting contemplation or Hebdomeros's imagination widens the room and opens memory channels. Elsewhere he is subject to visions of the possible other, the "woman clad in white", the "sublime" which seem to anticipate the contents of his final vision that leads to his encounter with Immortalité.

Other examples where the references to space in the narrative are clearly designed to confound the reader is the invasion of ant-like warriors already alluded to in IV.1. as an instance where the artifice character of the scenery invoked here is emphasized. The warriors "envahissaient le pays en passant à travers les vignobles ..." - this dramatic war-scene incorporating vine-yards is subsequently reduced to a mere toy-

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<sup>336</sup>Ibid., p.32.

<sup>337</sup>The treatment of object and figures will be discussed in Chapter V in greater detail.

<sup>338</sup>Ibid., p.33.

<sup>339</sup>Ibid., p.26.



like dimension when it is described as a view that "... la lumière égale venant du plafond rendait encore plus vraisemblables."<sup>340</sup> Quite clearly the reference to the lamp does not make the scene more "vraisemblable" to the reader but leaves him with a paradox.

In yet another part of the novel<sup>341</sup> the reader is introduced to Hebdomeros fleeing in a boat in the room (compare My Mediterranean Room 1927,Pl.88),<sup>342</sup> hoisting himself to the window-sill from where he beholds a city of geometrical perfection (compare the painting Gare Montparnasse (1914,Pl.24).<sup>343</sup> Hebdomeros's memories lead the reader into the rooms in the city where the trophies are set (compare Chapter IV.2.5.). It is as though space is here the space set aside for occult worship or contemplation.

Obviously the narrative oscillates between perceived, fantastic, occult, memorized, dreamed, incantated, metaphoric and "real" locations, whereby each is treated on the same level in the narrative: the reader is left in the dark about which is which; there is no qualitative difference between the description of what Hebdomeros perceives, dreams, memorizes, or sees in

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<sup>340</sup>Ibid., pp.111-112.

<sup>341</sup>Ibid., pp.76-78.

<sup>342</sup>Ibid., p.76: "Il fit en barque le tour de sa chambre, repoussé toujours dans le coin par le ressac et, enfin, faisant appel à toute son énergie ... il abandonna son frêle esquif et se hissa jusqu'à la fenêtre qui était placée très haut comme la fenêtre d'une prison."

<sup>343</sup>Ibid., pp.76-77: "...il embrassait d'un coup d'oeil tout le vaste et réconfortant panorama de ces palestres mosaïquées de rectangles, de carrés et de trapèzes blancs ..."

pictures. As already suggested there are descriptions of paintings included in the flow of the novel, the presentation of which does not create any difference from other observations. Like the frame marking de Chirico's paintings within paintings (see the discussion in Chapter IV.1. and IV.2.4) it is here only the provision of the explanation (i.e. this is a painting) that creates delimitations and thus makes the space distinguishable from other spaces in the novel.

It stands to reason that this free use of 'spatiality' across the limitations of the empirical, forces the reader to establish for himself strategies of adjustment to survive his experience. *Since this undertaking is continually denied him, he is clearly intended to be left with feelings of similar disorientation as previously observed in the paintings.* Once more this labyrinthine disorientation on the spatial level is not incidental but needs to be seen in alignment with de Chirico's metaphysical programme. Like the pictorial mode, the novelistic mode offers a medium to recreate space distinct from the empirical reality and thus ultimately hint at the presence of the metaphysical other.

In all cases the objective appears to be an experiment with ontological fixation. As Clair rightly points out with respect to de Chirico and his later followers, they make use in their painting of the "dispositive perspectiviste des Renaissants: ils le réalisent, ils le réinventent, ils rédecouvrent son étrange séduction - pour manifester non plus son pouvoir d'évidence mais

sa charge d'énigme ..."<sup>344</sup> Clearly the same applies to the prose: the narrative mode is used only to be subverted and thus reveal the enigma of the metaphysical.

### 3. The Labyrinth of Time

As already indicated in the preceding section, the concept of space cannot be seen independently of time. Space, for instance, can only be experienced in time. As was suggested in Chapter III time plays in de Chirico's work an important role. In his novel he dubs his minotaur "Time", his paintings are suffused with references to time such as clocks, or titles like Autumn Afternoon (1914), Morning Meditation (1912) or Spring (1914). Critics talk, for instance, about eternity (Lista), the arrest of chronological time (Martin), about the interpenetration of past and present in de Chirico's paintings (Clair), and "immortality" is considered as a key (Schmied 1989) to Hebdomeros. How are these references to be understood in terms of the metaphysical, and in how far, if at all, are they labyrinthine?

We recall that for Schopenhauer the succession which to us makes the "Wesen der Zeit"<sup>345</sup> is in fact relative. Time is rooted in eternity, a notion which Schopenhauer calls a "Begriff ohne Anschauung" denoting a timeless being.

Thus time and eternity can be subsumed in the paradigms of world as appearance and world as will, the former constituting

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<sup>344</sup>Clair, op.cit., loc.cit.

<sup>345</sup>SW I, p.37.

the individual's *projected distribution and breaking down of* ideas,<sup>346</sup> the latter the realm of the ideas or the thing in itself in a-temporal detachment.

For the human individual, who is bound to the spatio-temporal constraints through the principle of individuation, the temporality is first of all resolved through birth (the entrance into time from eternity) and death (the re-entering of the timeless state). However, while alive, it is only the insight of the genius, who, through contemplative insight, can be lifted above the conceptual constraints and can perceive the world around him in terms of the ideas.

In the following the analysis of the presentation of time will start with Hebdomeros, where this Schopenhauerian position becomes most evident, before reviewing examples from de Chirico's paintings in terms of their treatment of time.

### 3.1. Hebdomeros and the Minotaur of Time

As was pointed out in Chapter III, it is in Hebdomeros that Time is called "the minotaur", and in that description it is even invested with the regalia of Saturn: hour-glass and scythe. At this basic level of observation it was suggested that the association of time with the minotaur, that is the monster to be overcome in the labyrinth, matches, in a figurative manner, the Schopenhauerian notion of the necessity to overcome time in order to reach insight. Indeed, the protagonist's journey ends at a point where he meets "Immortalité": "cette femme (qui) avait les

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<sup>346</sup>Compare Schopenhauer SW I, p.253.

yeux de son père"<sup>347</sup> and who suggests that Hebdomeros thinks about "her death and the death of her death".<sup>348</sup> Quite clearly Hebdomeros has reached timelessness: he has encountered Immortality through death<sup>349</sup> which always stands in the Schopenhauerian concept for the re-entrance into the timeless being whence everybody comes.

There is a variety of details in this carthartic ending of the novel that become intelligible against the background of the Schopenhauerian stance: the woman's (i.e. Immortalité's) eyes are "de son père", who appears to be deceased; in addition she calls him "brother", thus incorporating the protagonist in a curious family relationship. However, following the Schopenhauerian concept of time, this apparent oddity is consistent with the underlying notion of the relationship between time and the individual: by leaving or overcoming (chronological) time, Hebdomeros has left his individuality and entered the realm of eternal types, which all partake of immortality, indeed where all are one (family) in this timeless state.

However, if here the minotaur is Time and the goal is its overcoming and ultimate entrance into the state of permanent timelessness, how is time presented in the main body of the novel? It needs to be noted again that Hebdomeros, the protagonist, is described as a "genius" (see Chapter VI). Since

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<sup>347</sup>Hebdomeros, p.236.

<sup>348</sup>Ibid.

<sup>349</sup>References such as "J'ai bu mes dernières gouttes de belladone et de jusquiame" (Hebdomeros p.233) and then all anxieties in Hebdomeros are swept away towards the infinite, point towards such a reading.

the narrative is ostensibly<sup>350</sup> sustained by his observations, experiences and reflections it is perhaps no surprise that he does not follow ordinary temporal parameters. Although there are sometimes lapses into "l'ennui d'une vie réglée aux aiguilles du chronomètre",<sup>351</sup> narrative sequentiality is replaced by a continual process of dislocation which leads the reader into Theseus-like disorientation. More specifically, the narrative is characterized, as already noted in the discussion of space, by a continual shuffling between the protagonist's (fictional) reality, dreams, contemplations, reflections and memory which, following Schmied, create "...ein Muster vielfach verschlungener Reflektionen und Assoziationen..."<sup>352</sup> Although there are at times glimpses of a stable temporal framework through abundant allusions to seasons and sunsets and sunrises or to specific clock times of the day, on closer scrutiny these appear to be false tracks to an idea of temporal stability which is continually undermined: the oscillation and interpenetration between "real" and mental activities on the part of the protagonist lead the reader into conceptual dead-ends and eventually defy any possibility of retrieving any supposedly "correct" temporal framework. Any stable narrative link is perhaps found only at the level of Hebdomeros's "metaphysical cycle" relative to his memories, moods and speeches.

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<sup>350</sup>Clearly there is the omniscient narrator de Chirico whose voice is at times indistinguishable from that of his "hero" (Hebdomeros, p.236). Compare the discussion of the painter genius in Chapter VI.

<sup>351</sup>Ibid., p.136.

<sup>352</sup>Schmied (1989), p.65.

This technique of leading the reader away from any anchoring stability into a maze of conflicting time (and space) universes through the eyes of the genius is perhaps demonstrated most clearly in the scene describing Hebdomeros's dinner at a hotel where two other guests lead the conversation: "Toute en écoutant ces discours d'une oreille distraite Hebdomeros poursuivait un souvenir ..." <sup>353</sup> This "souvenir" consists in lengthy descriptions of childhood memories, entangled with mythical associations. These strands of memory narrative are only interrupted by Hebdomeros's occasional re-emerging to the level of parallel running action, i.e. the hotel scene: "à présent il fallait se lever et sortir" <sup>354</sup> but then he lets himself fall back into another "heure retrouvée". <sup>355</sup> And suddenly he is somewhere else, at an illuminated house "qui avait quelque chose d'une mairie et d'un collègue" <sup>356</sup> and one wonders if this is dream, memory or reality.

However, this specific example retains in large parts a comparative line of demarcation between retrospection and plot; such a "line", though, is, more often than not, blurred in the course of the narrative. Most experiences on the part of the protagonist, whether introspective, dream, memory or "real", are narrated in the same style without any indication that one might have slipped into a state removed from the assumed level of

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<sup>353</sup>Ibid., p.20.

<sup>354</sup>Ibid., p.23.

<sup>355</sup>Ibid., p.25.

<sup>356</sup>Ibid.,p.31.

reality. For instance, after having entered the building in the beginning, Hebdomeros and his companions finally enter a room. The scene in this room has a decidedly surreal, dream-like quality; it is described as "subaquatique":<sup>357</sup> there is a pianist who plays without making a noise and people moving about in slow-motion whereby they are each totally absorbed in a world of their own. And yet there are no suggestions that this specific scene is less "real" than the very act of entering the building where the "journey" began for the reader.<sup>358</sup>

In addition to the labyrinthine discourse organisation on the level of the relationship between each episode, there are, within the individual episodes, networks of inferential time-factors that further dissolve any fixed temporal classification: for instance, Hebdomeros's generalisations about families too prudish to talk about illegitimacy is combined with the evocation of a Niobe-like mother figure;<sup>359</sup> likewise the reference to the delphic temple written in the style of a toothpaste advertisement<sup>360</sup> or the mere evocation in the opening pages of a building which looked like a German consulate in Melbourne,<sup>361</sup> the atmosphere attached to going to a dentist or a doctor for

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<sup>357</sup>Ibid., p.11.

<sup>358</sup>Hebdomeros's journey may have begun before; the opening line "Et alors commença la visite de cet étrange immeuble ..." suggests as much. In other words the start of the narrative very consciously breaks into an existing time continuum.

<sup>359</sup>Compare Hebdomeros, p.127.

<sup>360</sup>Hebdomeros, p.130.

<sup>361</sup>Ibid., p.5.



venereal diseases<sup>362</sup> and the sudden entrance into a room where gladiators are exercising.<sup>363</sup> Clearly, as Baldacci remarks, "le mythe et la civilisation antique pénètrent dans le présent."<sup>364</sup> More specifically, it is the paradoxical combination of the trivial (of presumably 19th/20th century origin) with the mythical or classical which defies the temporal anchorage and creates strange vacuums in which the narrated scene seems to be suspended: the succession of the ancient and the modern has been synthesized in a timeless present.

At each level though, it is as if the reader is invited into the mind of the genius who, during his journey through life, sees beyond the limitations of the ordinary, the conceptual constraints, and perceives glimpses of the "other". Indeed it is only towards the end of the novel, during a spiritual fever of the protagonist, that the reader obtains a more explicit hint towards the underlying concept responsible for the disorientating quality of the narrative, namely "créer, rechercher, refondre, revivre, briser ces lois stupides que l'incompréhension humaine a créées (sic) à travers les siècles".<sup>365</sup>

Indeed the combination of the genius's temporary attempts to transcend time are more firmly put into context elsewhere where time appears to be eluded. For instance, there is the strong presence of the classical past and mythology: the

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<sup>362</sup>Ibid., p.7.

<sup>363</sup>Ibid., p.9.

<sup>364</sup>Baldacci (1983), p.23.

<sup>365</sup>Hebdomeros, p.190.

protagonist falls into what appears to be a mixture of memory and dream and remembers the eternal present of Greek culture: for instance, he recalls a building "parthénagogé, pédagogé, éphéagogé";<sup>366</sup> and he suggests that "en ces journées de suprême bonheur, le sens des points cardinaux et en général de l'orientation, disparaissait pour tout ce jeune monde de vierges-athlètes et d'éphèbes-gymnastes ..."<sup>367</sup>(emphasis mine). The narrative goes on to relate that these youths would be called, sooner or later, to govern the republic, to defend sacred oil, to sculpt statues, and it concludes with the observation: "oui, c'était clair, tout ce jeune monde vivait l'heure de son *éternel présent*."<sup>368</sup>

This reflection of Hebdomeros has several implications: first, according to Schopenhauer, it was in Greece where people were inspired to select the typical and convey artistically the metaphysical idea behind ordinary things. Thus the incantation of their culture signifies timelessness, which de Chirico conveys once more as a state of disorientation: a people without "compass", in a state of eternal present strongly indicates the detachment of ordinary spatio-temporal constraints. The losing of oneself in labyrinthine disorientation is clearly understood as a feature of the overall happiness.

Moreover, the retrospective view, i.e. memory, through which this scene is rendered, represents, according to Schopenhauer,

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<sup>366</sup>Ibid., p.27.

<sup>367</sup>Ibid., p.28.

<sup>368</sup>Ibid., p.29.

a possibility of seeing an event with greater clarity and precision than in the present, where one is distracted by immediate concerns (compare Chapter II). However, the fact that *Hebdomeros* "remembers" specific scenes from classical Greece suggests that he has a kind of cultural memory which truly transcends the limitation of his individuality.

The second aspect by means of which *Hebdomeros* pays homage to Schopenhauer, from the point of view of temporal considerations, is art. Once more the pattern of a disorientating time/reality scheme is employed.

First of all there is "un tableau fort curieux"<sup>369</sup> which *Hebdomeros* hung over his bed and which shows Mercury driving his flock of dreams; where the god goes is darkness and solitude as though into a vast tunnel surrounded by a sunny countryside with towns and ports etc. It is as though the picture is a mnemonic visualization of *Hebdomeros*'s own frequent dream (and memory) states which somehow exempt him from ordinary life. In other words the picture appears as a direct continuation of what happens outside the picture, making the dream another pathway through which the protagonist has to go.

However, more in tune with the specifically Schopenhauerian dictum that the work of art tears a moment from the flow of life and fixes it in eternity, is the reference in *Hebdomeros* to those works called "trophies" (see the discussion in Chapter II.2.) that are made by artists, the description of whom resembles the

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<sup>369</sup>Ibid., p.147.

ideals of ancient Greece.<sup>370</sup> These trophies are narratologically<sup>371</sup> and from the thematic point of view, taken out of the flow of events, of life, even of Hebdomeros's personal reflections: as de Chirico puts it "les chambres qui les (the trophies) abritaient étaient comme ces îles qui se trouvent en dehors des grandes lignes de navigation ..."<sup>372</sup> Lying outside the network of ordinary routes, the trophies are hermetically separated in special chambers; consistently they are "eternal". Yet, these objects of contemplation are to be reached only through "the city with the geometrical lay-out", hence, once again, the impression is created of labyrinthine pathways, constructions, concepts arrayed around a core of truth, a single goal: eternity.

### 3.2. Time in the Paintings

While Hebdomeros demonstrates the interdependence between breaking through time and the presence of the contemplating genius, the main body of the paintings seems to be more exclusively designed to look into the manipulation of established notions of empirical time.

Clearly, the last point raised in the discussion of Hebdomeros, the work of art as means to arrive at extra-temporality, broaches the problem already discussed in Chapter

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<sup>370</sup>Compare references such as "hommes aux proportions justes, parfaitement sains de corps et d'esprit", p.77.

<sup>371</sup>A close analysis of the passage reveals that the author very subtly manipulates the voice here: he switches from the iterative to the singulative with the effect that the description of the trophies stands out. The terminology follows the definition given by Genette in Narrative Discourse (1980).

<sup>372</sup>Hebdomeros, p.78.

II: namely that qua Schopenhauer's definition, art (paintings, sculpture) needs to be considered as isolating an aspect of life from the current of chronological time, thus representing already in itself an example of the overcoming of chronological time. Against this background de Chirico's concern with time within Metaphysical Art, its repeated elaboration and re-formulation, appears to be a constant reiteration and reminder to the beholder of the (metaphysical) importance of this artistic extra-temporality. As could be observed in the discussion of the use of artifice (Chapter IV.1.), the painter even resorts to a chinese-box system of painting within painting within painting so that one gains the *impression of the attempt to fix scenes in extreme states of detachment and remoteness from any empirical temporal framework.*

### 3.2.1. Time Flow versus Time Arrest

De Chirico's concern with time is introduced thematically in his early paintings by a massive presence of explicit references to time. For instance, there are titles such as The Enigma of the Hour (1911,Pl.4a), or more specific references to times of the day, Morning Meditation (1912), Melancholy of the Afternoon (1913,Pl.17), Ariadne's Afternoon (1913,Pl.12) or Pleasant Afternoon (1916), Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon (1910,Pl.1); and finally references to seasons, Autumnal Meditation (1911), Still-life. Turin in Spring (1914), The Double Dream of Spring (1915,Pl.40).<sup>373</sup>

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<sup>373</sup>Compare as well The Virgin of Time (1919,Pl.63). Here time is allegorized through the figure of a woman holding an hourglass in her right hand. Strikingly, the formal presentation of the

Apart from these more direct references to time, the titles also refer to such aspects as arrival and departure and journeying, which create, at a first reading, a sense of a heightened awareness of time as experienced on stations: compare, for instance, titles like The Departure of the Poet (1914,Pl.22), The Anxious Journey (1913,Pl.20), Journey without End (1914,Pl.27), The Joy of Return (1914), or Melancholy of Departure (1916).

Tied into the general context of the labyrinthine urban environment, the references to time are backed iconographically by motifs of clocks, trains and sailing vessels. For example, the clock, constituting for Hocke "das Auge der Zeit",<sup>374</sup> is central to the painting The Enigma of the Hour (1911,Pl.4a): central to the façade of what appears to be a neo-classical railway station there is a clock showing that it is 2.55 in the afternoon. In The Philosopher's Conquest (1913,Pl.19) a clock indicates the early afternoon (1.28 p.m.) while in the background a train is puffing. Similarly in the painting Gare Montparnasse (1914,Pl.24) there is a clocktower which indicates that it is early afternoon (1.28 p.m. again). In each case there are only a few minutes to the full or the half hour which perhaps indicates the tension before an event. Thus time becomes a major dramatic presence, subtly linked to the motif of journey by the ubiquitous presence of distant trains.

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figure gives additional resonance to the subject matter of the picture: as Fagiolo points out, it suggests a mixture "tra la statua classica e la figura rinascimentale" (Fagiolo (1984), p.105).

<sup>374</sup>Hocke (1957), p.79.

However, while all these features to do with time might lead one to assume that chronological time and its dynamic flux is referred to, this is, on the contrary, continuously defied: the clocks that always show some early afternoon hour are belied by the long shadows that indicate a late afternoon hour: in Gare Montparnasse (1914,Pl.24) one even gets the impression that the painting captures the early evening; the shadows definitely do not conform with the time indicated by the hands of the clock. Additionally, as was demonstrated with respect to Ariadne's Afternoon (1913,Pl.12), and which can be said to apply generally, shadows are cast at slightly divergent angles, so they are not indicative of any one time. Specific time thus becomes elusive and generally unstable: here it appears to be undefined time in the afternoon captured, almost frozen by the sunlit vistas.

Likewise the train and vessel are clearly captured in a curious time-warp: although the vessel is in full sail (see The Enigma of the Arrival 1912) and the trains emit smoke energetically (see Gare Montparnasse (1914,Pl.24); The Philosopher's Conquest (1913,Pl.19); and The Anxious Journey (1913,Pl.20)) there is no movement. An impression of stasis, supported by the rigid angularity of the spatial lay-out, prevails. Even the smoke from the locomotives is not dispersed but hovers thick and motionless over the trains.<sup>375</sup> In The Anxious Journey (1913,Pl.20) the stasis of the steaming train is enhanced

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<sup>375</sup>Schmied (1989) remarks: "die Diskontinuität der Zeit betrifft auch die Atmosphäre. Der Rauch der Lokomotive steigt schwer und senkrecht in die Luft, aber die Fähnchen auf dem Turm über den Arkaden flattern gleichzeitig in heftigem Wind: Gare Montparnasse, 1914."; p.25.

by presenting the locomotive front against a wall: the beholder's gaze is directed from inside his labyrinthine building towards the locomotive which appears like an arrested minotauric presence. As Poli observes "la scena metafisica è pervasa da un'atmosfera immobile, rarefatta e silenzioso, sa una strana assenza di azione..."<sup>376</sup>

Clearly, the overall impression is that the flux of chronological time is suspended: the clocks and the journey become symbols of a quest for time absolute. As in Hebdomeros, the journey of the protagonist is not predominantly presented as a physical movement but as a series of episodes culminating in contemplation of the "eternal present"; the beholder is here led from one instance of a-chronological time to the next.

### 3.2.2. A Network of Paradox

Alongside the use of direct references to time via journey and clock in a relatively familiar context of the urban street labyrinth, de Chirico develops a further device of "dissolving empirical time" which is to become a more autonomous strategy in the subsequent years: the use of the paradox via inference from his iconography.

Poli remarks that "elementi dal sapore antico ... convivono con elementi della società moderna ..." <sup>377</sup> Indeed, the "Diskontinuität der Zeit" (Schmied) manifests itself in that the pervasive use of neo-classical architecture blends, for instance,

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<sup>376</sup>Poli (1989), p.110.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid.



with red brick walls and chimneys (compare the discussion of Ariadne's Afternoon (1913,Pl.12). In The Song of Love (1914,Pl.35) there is, next to remnants of an ancient statue, a modern rubber glove; fresh fruit and marble-relics are combined in The Uncertainty of the Poet (1913,Pl.18); figures<sup>378</sup> in modern evening dress are shown in the neo-classical Italian villa while an ancient god flies above (Roman Villa 1922,Pl.70). In Furniture in the Valley (1927,Pl.87) modern style fauteuils and a wardrobe are arranged against the backdrop of a far distant classical Greek landscape, while there are ancient columns in an ordinary room in Columns in a Room (1927). Furthermore in the Metaphysical Interiors there are those pictures within the picture with Renaissance style architecture as well as modern factory buildings, pieces of soap or biscuits.

Apart from the individual semantic implication which will be discussed elsewhere (see Chapter V), this setting up of new relationships on the level of temporal inferences has the effect that time is here suspended. The inferred time scale leaves the beholder with paradoxical conclusions: he is not led to integrate the ancient and the modern, but is kept to-ing and fro-ing between conflicting temporal frameworks. In the way that the competing space concepts left the beholder in a conceptual maze, so the projected temporality leaves the beholder to struggle in an intellectual maze unless he abandons his established conceptual apparatus. Martin concludes: "Small wonder that

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<sup>378</sup>The presentation of figures constitutes the most interesting use of time among the post 1914 paintings; however, as pointed out, figures will be discussed separately.

chronological time appears to have stopped the clocks of de Chirico's terminals and buildings, for in his pictures, the infinitely elastic intuitive sense of eternity ... is evoked."<sup>379</sup> Indeed, it is as though in the network of paradoxical juxtapositions, the beholder is given the opportunity to discover things in a novel extra-temporality. One might quote here Hebdomeros: "... ce qu'il faut, c'est *découvrir*, car, en découvrant, on rend la vie possible en ce sens qu'on la réconcile avec sa mère *l'Eternité*."<sup>380</sup>

One major example of this "reconciliation with mother eternity" through the paradox of inferred time is perhaps Ariadne's Afternoon (1913,Pl.12). The painting is dominated by two areas separated from each other by a red brick wall. The lower area shows Ariadne lying on her pedestal. However, defying the rules of classical perspective, the figure on the pedestal appears to be almost jutting into the foreground of the picture, which is at variance with the perspective of the surrounding square. The statue is rendered in a modern, almost Cézannesque idiom with geometrical planes creating the facets of her body. To complete the tensions of the spatio-temporal universe in the lower part there are two shadows which are cast at different angles: the impression is created that the sunlight is emitted from different sources, or the moment captured here telescopes different phases of the sun-cycle into one.

Beyond the brick wall in the upper part of the painting, the

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<sup>379</sup>M.Martin op.cit., loc.cit., p.347.

<sup>380</sup>Hebdomeros, p.226.

tension between the classical and the modern prevails: a red brick tower (or chimney) - decked with flags blowing strongly in the motionless air - is juxtaposed to an equally flag-adorned tower that is, however, shaped like an oversized Doric column. The tension between the clearly 19th century brickwork and the implied classical tower is echoed in the dwarfed vehicles visible just above the brick wall at the foot of the two towers: a modern steam train and an old-fashioned sailing vessel are here opposed as though in a conscious attempt to continue the discourse on inferential time in a further area of human culture.

In addition to this paradoxical relationship of the various iconographical elements towards each other, temporal issues in Ariadne's Afternoon (1913, Pl.12) are put into relief by the overall composition of the painting. The brick wall is a clear line of demarcation separating the Ariadne figure isolated on the square from the upper part of the canvas. Two spaces open: a bounded one, where Ariadne is situated in the pictorial present, and an unbounded beyond. One could speculate that the result is a kind of two-level pictorial narrative: the first dealing with Ariadne's sleep, perhaps her legendary abandonment, the second with a world clearly apart from where she is physically situated. It is as though the upper part is representative of Ariadne's dream; in other words, similar to many scenes from Hebdomeros where the protagonist is described as sleeping and at the same time there is immediate access to his dream world, one is here allowed access to different levels of empirical and dream reality. As in Hebdomeros, the paradoxical juxtaposition of different and competing time-reality levels is exploited here on

both the iconographic and the compositional plane. Once more, in a confusing whirl of overlapping elements, the paradox of the incantation of different times on the level of the dreaming figure is not only emulated in the dream, but dream and non-dream narrative are equally accessible to the recipient through an ingenious act of interpolation: in such a manner time and its ordering causality are suspended.

### 3.2.3. The Use of Style: the Paradox Continued

Next to the paradoxical and disorientating time scale created by de Chirico's anachronistic selection of iconography, it is the strategy of counter-pointing different styles that continues the detachment from chronological time.

In the Metaphysical Interiors from between 1914-15 to 1919 one finds nautical maps, packets of soap, biscuits, grained woodpanels, all set in a confusing array of geometrical shapes and frames that are piled up inside rooms. Yet, in Metaphysical Interior (The Faithful Servant) (1916) or The Language of the Child (1916) there is a striking contrast set up between the stark unmodelled colour planes of the angular bric-à-brac typical of the early style and the metallic effect of soap wrappings or the detailed rendering of the biscuit: these latter objects are painted in a comparatively realistic manner. Likewise in Metaphysical Interior (1916) the framed panel of grained wood contrasts distinctly with the surrounding set-squares and rulers by virtue of its illusionistic sensuousness. This sensuous presentation becomes more strongly accentuated in a series of

1919 paintings, among which The Sacred Fish (1918,Pl.60) is probably the best example: if before there has been a general tendency to counter-pointing different styles within a single picture, it is here pushed to an extreme: the fish are clearly illusionistic, which, to Fagiolo, represents de Chirico's wish to "dipingere quasi 'pui vero del vero'".<sup>381</sup>

However, for Martin these stylistic interpolations constitute yet another of de Chirico's manipulations of time, more precisely a "painted representation of sensuously perceived time ..."<sup>382</sup> Following her argument these time evocations via the sensuous might perhaps be understood as a framing of past sense-experiences, a kind of memory of the biscuits, the colourfully wrapped piece of soap which is now presented in a context of geometrical signs of metaphysical timelessness.

Indeed, while the artist builds up sense memoranda which are closely linked to his experience, the majority of paintings which are characterized by stylistic interpolations of a more depersonalized, cultural magnitude. Among the Metaphysical Interiors, there are, for instance, the pictures within pictures that are decidedly anchored in Romanticism: Metaphysical Interior (with Sanatorium) (1917,Pl.53), Metaphysical Interior (with Lighthouse) (1918) and Metaphysical Interior (with Waterfall and Landscape) (1918) exemplify this.

After 1919 the artist begins to blend more subtly various

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<sup>381</sup>Fagiolo ed., (1984), p.104.

<sup>382</sup>Martin "Reflections on De Chirico and Arte Metafisica" in Art Bulletin Vol.60 (1978), p.352.

techniques from past epochs and masters.<sup>383</sup> In The Room of Apollo (Violin) (1920), for instance, there is a clearly identifiable Renaissance background space with a strong emphasis on the force of perspective. By contrast, the foreground is determined by a still-life of a score, a violin and a plaster cast.

Similarly, The Return of the Prodigal Son (1919, Pl.61) is ostensibly set in a Renaissance-style environment. However, the building on the far left is a soberly constructed, modern looking box; a still life, integrated on the lower right hand side, is counter-pointed on the left by an ancient plaster head that looks on while the two figures (in turn, presented in a Renaissance-style with overtones of classical statuary) embrace. Fagiolo notes "tra i molti riferimenti a Luca Signorelli, Piero della Francesca, i Ferraresi, l'antichità classica, resta della Metafisica la prospettiva non ortodossa ..." <sup>384</sup> and he points to the building "fantomatico" on the left hand side.

In other words de Chirico makes use of a variety of different artistic styles and reconstitutes and synthesizes or subverts them. However, while different styles are thus brought together, there is no attempt to blend them into a novel homogeneity. On the contrary as in the case of the juxtaposition of incongruent iconography, the borrowing from different styles is left open to inspection. The beholder is left to detect a continuation of paradoxical juxtaposition in stylistic concerns.

Moreover, if with regard to the illusionistic food and wood

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<sup>383</sup>Fagiolo lists more than twenty influences while claiming this list not to be complete. Compare MP, p.488.

<sup>384</sup>Fagiolo ed., (1984), p.105.

grain representations one can talk of the artist's memory, it appears as though taken together with the multifarious cultural references - be that via iconography or style - de Chirico creates a genuine theatre of memory<sup>385</sup>: "information" is visually fixed and assembled; the beholder is confronted with a wide span of cultural periods at the same time: succession and sequentiality are suspended via the co-presence of everything that has ever been (or which the artist deems culturally/personally worthwhile). Thus the beholder becomes situated at a nodal point where the different strands of human time - the Classical, Renaissance, Romantic and 20th century - are brought together in a moment of timeless present.

#### 3.2.4. The Continuity with the Classical

More decidedly than any other period, de Chirico uses the classical: as has been demonstrated, de Chirico's entire work is suffused with allusions to what is usually held to be the timeless ideal of classical Greece.

However, more markedly than any other period, the classical is not just a part of de Chirico's theatre of memory but is given a comparatively "undiluted" presence. Compare, for instance, the paintings Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon (1910,Pl.1), The Enigma of the Oracle (1910,Pl.2) and Autumnal Meditation (1911) where statues and temple-like architecture recreate a strong feel of Antiquity. Likewise in the 1920s The Departure of the Argonauts

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<sup>385</sup>Compare Frances Yates The Art of Memory London, Penguin, (1966).

(1920,Pl.69) and Pericles (1925)<sup>386</sup> bear witness to the importance de Chirico attached to the classical subject matter for Metaphysical Art. Similar to the allusions to gladiators and gods in Hebdomeros, these pictures come across as a kind of inventory of a cultural memory: they evoke pictures of a period when the cognition of the idea behind appearances was still uncluttered - which is, incidentally, the attitude that Schopenhauer adopted towards the classical.<sup>387</sup>

Thus de Chirico appears to evoke timelessness via reference to classical Greece or by creating continuity between the classical past and other cultural epochs reaching into the present. Yet in no case is his use of the classical that of a remote reminiscence. Instead, he engages the beholder in sharing the temporal interpolation: for instance, in Hermetic Melancholy (1919,Pl.62) a sense of extra-temporality is achieved by the mere presentation of a box-like object containing biscuits on the right, a colourful toy in the foreground, a stick leaning against a plain prop-like object on the left, all of which suggest in their unadorned simplicity a sense of the modern. Yet, these objects that appear to be staged on a kind of platform are not only introduced to the beholder but are at the same time shown

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<sup>386</sup>Not to mention all the copied and adapted paintings which are in the style of classical masters, or the various thematic references not only to Greece and mythology, but likewise to the Roman past. Most important as far as the latter are concerned is the gladiator series which practically dominates the work from about 1927 onwards. Likewise there is de Chirico's elaboration of the ancient-horse-at-mythical-shores topic (from 1926/27 onwards), which is avowedly "metaphysical", too, inasmuch it is continuous with the Classical.

<sup>387</sup>Compare Schopenhauer SW V, p.477.



to be contemplated by the melancholic god Mercury whose head, reminiscent of classical statuary, emerges "behind the scene", dwarfing the assembled objects to mere toys. The presence of the ancient god invests the scene with an air of mythical timelessness. But more importantly, since the god looks into the scene from a position "opposite" the beholder there is a paradoxical link established between the act of beholding in the present and the ancient mythical on-looker. Thus the present and the classical past appear to become one in a moment where time is suspended in the act of contemplation. The chronology of time is broken through the channel that is established between the timeless other and the present.

#### 4. The Hermetic Aspect of the Labyrinth

The foregoing discussion of the labyrinthine character of time and space in de Chirico's work ended with a reference to the painting Hermetic Melancholy (1919,Pl.62). The title points towards one aspect which will constitute the final point of discussion of the present chapter: the hermetic.

The classical labyrinth is a contained space, habitually delimited by a wall; it has usually one or more entrances or exits and thus cannot be described as totally sealed from the exterior. Nonetheless it has a curiously hermetic quality: as has been demonstrated in the foregoing discussion it follows its own spatio-temporal order, creating an enigmatic world apart. In other words the term "hermetic" is here meant to underline the rigid delimitations that constitute the labyrinth construction.

Clearly this hermetic quality becomes the more important

if one considers that it is countered by a labyrinthine intricacy that is infinite in combination and complexity. Thus the labyrinth becomes a metaphor for the contained infinity, a paradox of spatio-temporal dimensions.

Clearly, in de Chirico's work the labyrinthine complexity is counter-pointed by the continual attempt to show the hermetic character of the represented. For instance, Owen, in his comparative study of de Chirico's work and 6th century B.C. Roman art, draws attention to de Chirico's picture spaces: they not only correspond to the scenic depictions of a "maison de labyrinthe",<sup>388</sup> but likewise include the motif of a wall so as to suggest the border between two areas.<sup>389</sup>

Indeed, there are many examples of the inclusion of the wall in de Chirico's work: in The Enigma of the Arrival (1912) there is a wall obstructing the beholder's view towards the beyond. Later the motif of the wall recurs in the form of a red brick barrier: for instance, in The Fear of Departure (1913, Pl.20) the labyrinthine interior leads to a sunlit open space, which is, however, delimited by a wall. The detail of the wall is even retained in the slit-like glimpse of the outer through the narrow arcade on the right. A locomotive can be seen just beyond the wall on the left. The overall effect is of a claustrophobic labyrinthine interior, the outer environment is presented as delimited and delimiting to the Labyrinthgänger.

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<sup>388</sup>Compare Owen, who discusses the "Maison de Labyrinthe", a mural at Pompeii, as an example of scenic art found in de Chirico. Op.cit, loc.cit., p.35.

<sup>389</sup>Ibid., p.45 ff.

Similarly, in The Torment of the Poet (1914), the wall clearly separates the interior of the city labyrinth from the exterior, where trains puff and vessels sail and huge chimneys are juxtaposed; in the far distance there is the suggestion of a Mediterranean, possibly Greek landscape, with soft hills and sparse whitish dots like settlements.

And from the same period, almost all the various Ariadne paintings contain the wall as a clear barrier. Most noticeable is the wall in Ariadne's Afternoon (1913,Pl.12), which sharply defines two different areas in the picture space.

Interestingly, even in a painting which has a more collage-like character, namely Journey without End (1914,Pl.27), the wall motif is taken up: on the far right, behind the blackboard, the familiar red brick construction is visible.

While in the subsequent years the wall/urban labyrinth pattern is transferred and narrowed down to rooms<sup>390</sup> of the type already discussed with respect to the Metaphysical Interiors, the wall recurs in later paintings in the Romantic rendering Roman Landscape (1921), as well as on the far left of the painting Mercury and the Metaphysicians (1920,Pl.68).<sup>391</sup>

In Hebdomeros, the protagonist encloses himself in his room,

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<sup>390</sup>Especially with respect to figure presentation there is another type of delimitation to be discussed in conjunction with the figures: a kind of stage-like plateau, jutting into the often urban picture space at an angle that is at variance with the surrounding "props". The effect is that this space comes across as delimited: the suggestion is that were one to arrive at the far end of the plateau, one would be met with a precipice. Compare The Disquieting Muses (1918,Pl.59).

<sup>391</sup>Compare as well the recasting of earlier topics during the 1920s as various Italian Square renderings or the second version of The Grand Metaphysician (1925).

from where many of his observations/visions are "seen within" the delimitation of a wall. Likewise when he is in the hotel room the walls open on pictures of "eternal epebes".<sup>392</sup> By contrast, when the protagonist moves in the open, the sky is given a vault-like character via its designation as "plafond",<sup>393</sup> or is described as "un morceau de papier tendu".<sup>394</sup> It is clearly only when Hebdomeros meets "Immortalité" that the consistent presence of spatial delimitation is not thematized any longer.

What is striking in these examples though is that the delimitation in de Chirico's work, be it wall or ceiling, seems to always coalesce with the evocation of the infinite: the deep perspectives of the early de Chirico paintings compel the beholder to lose himself in the vastness of streets and squares only to be contradicted in this as a result of the artist's inclusion of a delimiting wall. In reverse Hebdomeros's mental journeys to, for instance, the eternal present of the classical past, have their starting point in the delimitation of a room. Similarly there are the Metaphysical Interiors harbouring, within claustrophobically close walls, the confusing array of bric-à-brac and art works, all of which seem to be bursting the limitations of their location.

Interestingly, Holländer argues that those picture spaces that are marked by a labyrinthine organisation involve, whether actually spelt out on canvas or not, a concern with barriers.

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<sup>392</sup>Hebdomeros, p.26 ff.

<sup>393</sup>Ibid., pp.72-72.

<sup>394</sup>Ibid., p.27.

The barriers concern the moment when the Labyrinthgänger is led to see that the "mathematically defineable entities (of the labyrinth) meet the borderline of human existence".<sup>395</sup> In other words, the labyrinth world threatens the person on the quest for (self-) knowledge through creating awareness of the disproportion between the finite nature of human existence and the unplumbable depth of the labyrinthine intricacy. Similarly Owen suggests in his analysis of the wall in de Chirico,<sup>396</sup> that it could be understood as indicative of a borderline between life and the realm of the dead, eternity.<sup>397</sup>

An example that clearly meets such an interpretation is The Enigma of Fatality (1914,Pl.29): a chequered floor is surrounded by the claustrophobic storeys of de Chirico's urban labyrinth-architecture. An oversized hand reaches over the building on the right and points towards the floor. Its design is reminiscent of

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<sup>395</sup>Op.cit.loc.cit.

<sup>396</sup>Owen, op.cit., loc.cit.

<sup>397</sup>See the corresponding motif in Surrealist writing: In Soupault's Les Champs magnétiques, for instance, a traveller is in a predominantly urban environment that, in the Surrealist idiom, could be said to stand for a kind of mental labyrinth leading the wanderer in his quest for self-knowledge. Not only de Chirico's early cities seem to be recalled in such descriptions as "... nous courons dans les villes sans bruit ..."(compare de Chirico's Melancholy (1912,Pl.5)) or "Les gares merveilleuses ne nous abritent plus jamais: les longs couloirs nous effraient ..." (compare Gare Montparnasse (1914,Pl.24)); but likewise the wall that is invoked has positively Chiricoesque qualities: "Un jour dont on ne sait plus la couleur, nous avons découvert des murs tranquilles et plus forts que des monuments." The enclosed, hermetic, quality of the wall is alluded to by the use of the metaphor "Les asiles d'aliénés sont peuplés de ces fragments de rêves qui conduisent les hommes devant un mur inexistant." In all cases presented here the wall seems to mark the borderline or frontier-state of insight, be that in terms of the aesthetically contemplative or the psychologically self-defining.

the metallic gloves of armour suits, which together with the colour, a cardinal-red, creates the impression of power, perhaps papal power, but at any rate an absolute and inescapable force.

Strikingly, the chequered floor is reminiscent of a chess board: the latter being for Holländer akin to the labyrinth due to their mutual potential for infinite combinations. But in the case of the painting the infinite combinations are suspended by the overawing presence of the hand, the only piece on the "board" here. It dominates the entire space for the Labyrinthgänger. By the use of the word "enigma" and "fatality" the title appropriately connotes the, qua definition, hidden, a perpetual quest that is married to fate: is this the human limitation that endangers the success of the search for insight and knowledge?<sup>398</sup>

Clearly, such an interpretation is loosely in tune with the underlying metaphysical programme. However, it is through Schopenhauer that the paradox of hermetic infinities in de Chirico's work can be focused more sharply in terms of the specific metaphysical venture.

In his discussion of the so called mathematical sublime (see the discussion of architecture in Chapter II.4.1.), Schopenhauer distinguishes two types of spaces: one "für die Wahrnehmung leeren Raum" and a " durch die Begrenzung nach allen Dimensionen wahrnehmbaren Raum".<sup>399</sup> This curious distinction between the empty and the perceptually delimited space he compares with the

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<sup>398</sup>Compare Hess, who suggests that in de Chirico's paintings "the aim is not the construction of a new space, but the disturbance of the human mind". Hans Hess Pictures as Arguments Sussex University Press, (1975), p.122.

<sup>399</sup>SW I, pp.292-293.

difference between the unbounded skyscape and bounded spaces such as, for instance, architectural designs like churches. It is specifically the vaults of St.Paul's and St.Peter's Schopenhauer has in mind here: for him such bounded constructions are of dimensions that bring about an awe-inspiring effect of spatio-temporality. Only through such delimitation does one attain in the human being a "Bewußtmachung von Größe":<sup>400</sup> it makes one both aware of one's will-bound status, as well as lifting one into the exhilaration of recognizing the presence of the metaphysical other. In other words, it is possible to say that, for Schopenhauer, the hermetic is a means, if not a necessary condition, for a specific manner of attaining awareness of the metaphysical.

Interestingly, Schopenhauer's describes this process of becoming aware of oneself and the bounded infinite as a dwarfing of the human in the face of architectural grandeur.<sup>401</sup> And it is here where de Chirico appears to have taken the cue from the philosopher once more and visualized it. In many of his hallucinatorily vast squares and streets of his urban labyrinth,<sup>402</sup> the beholder can observe people; their most striking characteristic is their minuteness, their mere shadowy presence, which is disproportionate to the bold (though bounded) expanse

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<sup>400</sup>Ibid., p.292.

<sup>401</sup>Compare as well The Pleasures of the Poet (1912), The Enigma of a Day (1914,Pl.23), Gare Montparnasse (1914,Pl.24).

<sup>402</sup>Compare, for instance, The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon (1910,Pl.1), Melancholy (1912,Pl.5), The Enigma of a Day (1914,Pl.23), The Departure of the Poet (1914,Pl.22), The Double Dream of Spring (1915,Pl.40).

of their built environment. Notably Nostalgia of the Infinite (1913,Pl.14) appears to exemplify the idea: a vast tower, rising in the middle of a sunlit square, appears to explode the delimitation of the vertical picture space. A shadowy wall with a portico bars the beholder's gaze from catching a glimpse of the area to the right of the tower. At the same time, the diagonals of the wall emphasize the general orientation towards a flightpoint in the centre of the picture space. This is, however, concealed by the tower. The impression of spatial delimitation is created among other things by a sky: it has a surprising solidity, resembling the descriptions in Hebdomeros of the sky as a taut piece of paper. However, most strikingly, there are two people standing in front of the tower: one could almost say that they are exposed to the environment, since their diminutive size gives them an ant-like insignificance. As Schopenhauer puts it, the immediacy of the spatial boundedness reveals the reality of the "verschwindenen Nichts unseres eigen Leibes vor ... Größe ..."<sup>403</sup> More crudely de Chirico appears to apply this idea in The Grand Tower (1913), which merely shows a huge tower, while two ant-like figures stand on a square which is bounded on all sides by a wall. It is as though the painter experiments here with the effect of hermetic enclosure, vertical infinities, and human presence.

One of the most impressive drawings confirming de Chirico's obsession with "hermetic infinities" is perhaps Vision (1923,Pl.75). Here one sees above a cityscape on the bottom third

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<sup>403</sup>SW I, p.293.



of the canvas not the free and unbounded expanse of the sky but the construction of a kind of scaffolding which structures and delimits the sky and thus creates the effect of "spatial immediacy".

From here it is no surprise that de Chirico praised the sense of viewing the world "in an architectonic manner" of the classical artist. His appreciation of the spatial immediacy in Raphael he explains by the aid of Leopardi's poem Cantico del Gallo Silvestre "ove il gallo con le zampe sulla terra tocca con la cresta il cielo."<sup>404</sup> And de Chirico comments: "Credo si debbano attribuire a una specie di ermetica comunione tra divino e umano; tra realtà logica ed inspiegabile apparenza metafisica."<sup>405</sup> The image of the cock stretching in elongated shadows of horizontal and vertical infinity, touching the sky is repeated in Hebdomeros.<sup>406</sup> And this image, observed by the protagonist, is clearly a further invitation to elevate the individual beyond itself in the awareness of the overawing sense of the eternal.

However, that the principle of spatial delimitation, the hermetic containment, is evocative of the metaphysical is clearly not restricted to the vast, urban or outdoor world: de Chirico makes sure that everything is shown in relation to hermetic enclosures. The best examples are perhaps the Metaphysical Interiors, which do not only contain bric-à-brac, but which, as

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<sup>404</sup>"Raffaello Sanzio" (1920) in MP, p.165.

<sup>405</sup>Ibid.; indeed, in the same article de Chirico praises Raphael for creating pictures where the sky creates the impression of a low ceiling.

<sup>406</sup>Compare Hebdomeros: "... les pied du coq touchaient le sol et sa crête les nuages ..." (p.72).

demonstrated, include frames, which in turn contain objects, that, thus isolated, become enigmatically transformed (see Chapter V). Thus in Hermetic Melancholy (1919,Pl.62), there is not only the reference to the classically styled figure in the background (arguably a reference to Hermes), but likewise there is a reference to the handling of space. Once more the impression of an interior is conveyed, but the sense of the hermetic is enhanced by the fact that things, a biscuit and a ring, are isolated for display in the box on the right. This box arrangement repeats conceptually all those boxes, frames and delimitations that can be found in the Metaphysical Interiors. Within each of these enclosures the enigma of the enclosed (be that object or picture) can unfold. The enclosed within the enclosed within the enclosed becomes so removed, so hermetic, that the enigma is absolute: as de Chirico writes "Il y a une chambre dont les volets sont toujours clos. Dans un coin un livre que personne n'a lu."<sup>407</sup>

Thus it can be said that the hermetic dimension in de Chirico's work is a consistent feature. It not only completes the labyrinthine strategy that Metaphysical Art appears to adopt, but likewise is a further vital device for the evocation of the metaphysical as such. This is achieved first of all through the spatial awareness that the hermetic enclosure brings about. The spatial awareness reveals the relative, phenomenal existence by comparison with the intimation of infinity. Most impressively this can be shown in the relationship between architectonic

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<sup>407</sup>"La volonté de la statue" (circa 1914) in MP, p.36.

grandeur and the human being. However, de Chirico exploits the aspect of spatial awareness as well on a smaller scale, by resorting to interiors, small scale geometrical enclosures within enclosures, which then, through the intense spatial immediacy, appear to bring out a novel enigmatic quality of the things placed in these variously removed enclosures. The hermetic is thus pregnant with ontological puzzles.

## 5. Conclusion

The artificiality, the intricate complexity and the hermetic dimension constitute the nature of the labyrinth as an abstraction.

It is possible not only to demonstrate in de Chirico's work that such labyrinthine parameters are employed on a sliding scale from a more immediate thematic transfer to an adoption of an abstract principle, but likewise it is possible to show that they are all used to transfer the Schopenhauer-inspired philosophy into painting and the novel Hebdomeros.

Artifice is consciously used to set aside the given from the "other". The given is artificial, whether it is the supposed reality of the outer world or the interior of buildings, whether it is in the prose or his paintings. De Chirico has compounded two kinds of artifice by drawing attention to artifice qua artifice. In this de Chirico employs the notions of space and time to refine further the nature of artifices. He subverts the beholder's expectations of both. In de Chirico's distortion of perspective the beholder must become acutely, uncomfortably, aware of the breakdown of reality. Likewise the beholder cannot

rely upon a consistent sense of time - whether by contradiction or anachronism de Chirico subverts the beholder's confidence in the empirical; in the novel the notion of linear time is abandoned for much of the narrative.

Artifice, space and time form a methodological trinity through which the labyrinthine is transferred to canvas: the outcome is a proper sense of that sought-after "other": the Schopenhauer edict of conceptual breakdown has been systematically transferred into an artistic language.

Finally, de Chirico underpins all three features of the labyrinthine by the inclusion of the essentially hermetic quality of the labyrinth. It appears, initially, as though it is designed merely to enclose - psychologically and physically - the Labyrinthgänger. However, the hermetic clearly counterpoints the subversion otherwise so systematically pursued in the presentation of space and time. Moreover, on closer examination, the hermetic turns out to be employed with a similar objective in view, namely to create a new awareness of spatio-temporality, and, ultimately, to lead to the essential attainment of a sense of the infinite.

Chapter V: Focal points: Objects and Figures

"...ogni cosa ha due aspetti, uno  
corrente quello che vediamo quasi sempre  
e che vedono gli uomini in generale,  
l'altro lo spettrale o metafisico che non  
possono vedere che rari individui in  
momenti di chiaroveggenza e di  
astrazione metafisica ..."<sup>408</sup>

While the foregoing chapter looked into the spatio-temporal conditions that de Chirico sets up in a manner of an all-encompassing labyrinth network, the present chapter will be concerned with the use of objects and figures that are presented as foci in this systematically subverted environment.

Among the objects in de Chirico's work there are first of all everyday objects such as soap or matchboxes,<sup>409</sup> toys,<sup>410</sup> food,<sup>411</sup> and furniture.<sup>412</sup> Besides there are geometrical bodies<sup>413</sup>

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<sup>408</sup>"Sull'arte metafisica" (1919) in MP, p.86.

<sup>409</sup>Compare Metaphysical Interior. The Faithful Servant (1916) or Metaphysical Interior (with Biscuits and Matches) (1918,Pl.57).

<sup>410</sup>Compare The Playthings of a Prince (1914), The Sailor's Barrack (1914), The Sacred Fish (1918,Pl.60), and Hermetic Melancholy (1919,Pl.62).

<sup>411</sup>Compare Melancholy of the Afternoon (1913,Pl.17), The Philosopher's Conquest (1913,Pl.19), Good Friday (1915,Pl.37), Greetings of a Distant Friend (1916), The Regret (1916,Pl.52), Evangelical Still-Life (1917) and The Sacred Fish (1918,Pl.60). Likewise in Hebdomeros there is a variety of references to food: see pp.120-123.

and symbols like the fish,<sup>414</sup> the shell or lyre<sup>415</sup> and the oversized eye.<sup>416</sup>

The presentation of figures ranges from human portraits to statues,<sup>417</sup> mechanical marionette<sup>418</sup> or spectre-like presences.<sup>419</sup> These are complemented by figure-object confluences, examples of which are most common among post-1920 paintings.<sup>420</sup>

The question arises how these object and figure representations are to be linked with the underlying metaphysical programme. Clearly, following the outline of Schopenhauer's metaphysics, the detachment from the conceptual constraints of space and time (here diagnosed as the backdrop to the object and

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<sup>412</sup>Compare Furniture in the Valley (1927,Pl.87) and Conversation (1927).

<sup>413</sup>Compare The Fête Day (1914,Pl.30), Turin 1888 (1914,Pl.31) or Mystery and Melancholy of a Street (1914,Pl.25) and the Metaphysical Interiors; likewise the drawing The Grand Metaphysician (1918). After 1918, the geometrical objects will be found as construction material for figures (see the discussion in Chapter V.2.).

<sup>414</sup>Compare The Sacred Fish (1918,Pl.60); Hebdomeros.

<sup>415</sup>Compare Portrait of Apollinaire (1914,Pl.28), The Tired Orpheus (1972).

<sup>416</sup>Compare the 1916 paintings: Greetings of a Distant Friend and The Pirate.

<sup>417</sup>Compare the Ariadne and Italian Square Series of circa 1913-14.

<sup>418</sup>Compare The Mannequins and the Rose Tower (1915,Pl.41), The Twisted Thinker (1915,Pl.44), Hector and Andromache (1917,Pl.55), The Grand Metaphysician (1917,Pl.56), The Troubadour (1923,Pl.73).

<sup>419</sup>Compare Mystery and Melancholy of a Street (1914,Pl.25), Metaphysical Vision (1924,Pl.79).

<sup>420</sup>Compare The Grand Metaphysician (1917,Pl.56), The Grand Metaphysician (1925), The Archaeologists (1927,Pl.89), The Reading (1926,Pl.84), or The Painter's Family (1926,Pl.85).

figure presentation) reveals objects and figures in their essential whatness, their being: the thing-in-itself. This revelation is due to the breaking down of spatio-temporal fixtures, which in its turn entails that the causal relationships of the phenomenal world are broken down, too. How far de Chirico's object and figure representation can be said to respond to this claim of metaphysical transformation needs to be established.

## 1. Objects

### 1.2. The Metaphysical in the Ordinary Object

Schopenhauer claims<sup>421</sup> that the metaphysical resides even in the most common-place thing. Among the ordinary objects that can be traced in de Chirico there is a whole range of food, from fruit<sup>422</sup> to slices of salami<sup>423</sup> and biscuits or cake;<sup>424</sup> besides,

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<sup>421</sup>Schopenhauer SW I, pp.297-298.

<sup>422</sup>Compare, for instance, the artichokes in Melancholy of the Afternoon (1913,Pl.17), The Promenade of the Philosopher (1913,Pl.16) and The Philosopher's Conquest (1913,Pl.19), the bananas and pineapples in The Transformed Dream (1913) and the apples in Good Friday (1915,Pl.37); as well as the fruit in a vast range of still lifes around 1923.

<sup>423</sup>Compare Still-Life with Salami (1919).

<sup>424</sup>Compare, for example, The Death of a Spirit (1916), The Cassata Sicilliana (1919).

one finds matchboxes<sup>425</sup> and yarn,<sup>426</sup> gloves,<sup>427</sup> soap-packets<sup>428</sup> and pieces of furniture.<sup>429</sup>

Contrary to what could be expected from objects that are avowedly "revelatory of their metaphysical other", these objects are not blurred or distorted, but are introduced with a striking clarity and precision. For instance, the rubber glove in The Song of Love (1914,Pl.35), the biscuits displayed in The Death of a Spirit (1916,Pl.51), or the furniture in Furniture in the Valley (1927,Pl.87) leave the beholder with no doubt as to what these objects are.

Yet, while these objects are so easily identifiable it needs to be noted that most examples are not illusionistic but come across as almost schematic: there are no adornments; they are rendered in the striking simplicity that corresponds to the surrounding architecture. It is as though once more everything is pared down to essentials so as to avoid ambiguity or anything that could detract from basic characteristics. Indeed, Baldacci calls this treatment of the object a reduction "à sa quintessence linéaire":<sup>430</sup> he suggests that it aims at a rendering of the object entirely in terms of its signified, purged from any

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<sup>425</sup>Compare Metaphysical Interior (with Biscuits and Matches) (1918,Pl.57).

<sup>426</sup>Compare The Projects of a Young Girl (1916).

<sup>427</sup>Compare The Song of Love (1914,Pl.35); The Projects of a Young Girl (1916).

<sup>428</sup>Compare Metaphysical Interior (The Faithful Servant) (1916).

<sup>429</sup>Compare Furniture in the Valley (1927,Pl.87) and Conversation (1927).

<sup>430</sup>Baldacci (1983), p.19.



interfering connotations.

In reverse there are later paintings where, through an emphatically illusionistic rendering of the object, a similar effect is achieved: for instance, The Sacred Fish (1918,Pl.60) distinguishes itself in that the two fish spread on a quadrangular plane are clearly illusionistic compared to the toy-like objects positioned nearby. Likewise the props creating the space, three wall-like partitions, starkly contrast with the fish through their almost naive bluntness. In consequence of this contrasting use of different styles of presentation, the fish not only catch the eye, but they are strangely detached from their environment and, paradoxically, more markedly exposed to the scrutiny of the beholder. In that sense, both the focus on the schematically reduced object as well as on such sharply defined illusionistic examples, leads the beholder to a confrontation with what Baldacci calls the irreducible object-signifieds.<sup>431</sup>

That such is the aim here is confirmed in an article where de Chirico demands: "Ridurre il fenomeno, la prima apparizione, al suo scheletro, al suo segno, al simbolo della sua inspiegabile esistenza."<sup>432</sup> And he continues that it is needed to "rendere appariscente il contorno dello spettro"<sup>433</sup> (emphasis mine). Clearly these "spiritual contours" of the object are to be associated with the arrival at the whatness, the thing-in-itself, which is the core of the metaphysical programme. For the inspired

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<sup>431</sup>Ibid.

<sup>432</sup>"Classicismo pittorico" (1920) in MP, p.228.

<sup>433</sup>Ibid.

artist the spiritual contours reveal themselves through his vision; the contours focus his concentration and thus make them emerge with a zoom-like immediacy and precision: "Il guantone di zinco colorito ... m'indicava coll'indice ... i segni ermetici d'una nuova malinconia";<sup>434</sup> or de Chirico describes: "il cranio di cartapesta in mezzo vetrina del parucchiere ... mi bruciava il cuore e il cervello come un canto ritornante."<sup>435</sup> Thus, clearly, the "transformation"<sup>436</sup> that the object needs to undergo to be understood in its metaphysical spectrality is not one that concerns an outer physical change but a redirection of the beholder's attention to its metaphysical core.

And it seems as though de Chirico, at times half-humorously, leads the beholder to re-view this principle of redirecting the attention to the core (of the object and the metaphysical programme): for instance, among his references to food he often focuses on a subject which appears to be almost a symbol of the object opening itself to metaphysical revelation: the artichoke which is most common to a series of paintings around 1913-14, such as The Promenade of the Philosopher (1913,Pl.16), Melancholy of the Afternoon (1913,Pl.17), and The Philosopher's Conquest (1913,Pl.19);<sup>437</sup> two artichokes are typically framed by a background of the familiar urban labyrinth with dark shadows and

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<sup>434</sup>"Zeusi l'esploratore" (1918) in MP, p.81.

<sup>435</sup>Ibid., pp.81-82.

<sup>436</sup>"Gustave Courbet"(1924) in MP, p.249.

<sup>437</sup> The artichoke plays a role in de Chirico's poetry, too. Compare, for example "La notte misteriosa" (1916 in MP, p.43) where the artist talks about "Due carciofi di ferro sulla tavola d'ocra."

dazzling perspectival incongruities. The odd choice of such context for the vegetable is heightened by the fact that there is a stark contrast between the plain unmodelled geometrical expanses of the environment and the multifaceted angularity of the artichokes. The latter complexity clearly compels the beholder's attention and reveals the artichokes' hidden symbolic significance: consisting of many layers, the first of which is simply pulled away and eaten until the inedible "choke" is reached and it finally yields its delectable "heart": this process of stripping away at the surface and the given puts it into a peculiarly parallel situation with the metaphysical quest for the idea behind the appearance.

#### 1.2.1. The Use of Objects and Context

De Chirico writes about objects in Paris: "vers elle émigrent non seulement les hommes, mais les *choses*, dans le sens latin du mot: *res*; choses curieuses, idées ... Là les choses trouvent leur scène et leur décor; transformées, rendues, plus mystérieuses et brillantes par le vaste fond gris de la ville qui sert de repoussoir, elles apparaissent dans un éclat nouveau."<sup>438</sup> The town, the labyrinth of street and squares, is called upon as one example of an appropriate background for "the things" to present themselves in their novel (metaphysical) splendour. As demonstrated, de Chirico makes an extensive use of the urban, alongside with room-like spaces, as a backdrop for his objects. Yet in this ostensibly domestic and safe environment the ordinary

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<sup>438</sup>"Salve Lutetia" (1925) in MP, p.274.

objects, according to Bruni, come across like "monsters",<sup>439</sup> and elsewhere he calls them "estranged".<sup>440</sup>

Clearly some of the "monstrosity" observed by Bruni is due to the manipulation of scale in the object presentation: in The Song of Love (1914), for instance, the rubber glove, plaster head and ball are almost equal in size to the architecture that creates their setting. Thus their inflated, colourful presence among the drab greyness of the buildings focuses the beholder's attention. They are imbued with a sense of drama, an intriguing feel of barely suppressed animation that clearly could be understood as menace: the objects take over the space of the human being: as though the modern, the urban and the domestic are labyrinthine equivalents and the object of menace so many minotaurs: these objects cannot be used - their presence has to be negotiated.

Indeed, there is a consistent move towards a systematic estrangement of the objects presented via clear manipulations of the settings in which they are presented: in Hebdomeros, for example, the protagonist is rowing in a boat through the rocky waters of his room.<sup>441</sup> Elsewhere there are trees described as passing through his room.<sup>442</sup>

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<sup>439</sup>Bruni (1976), p.11.

<sup>440</sup>Ibid., p.17.

<sup>441</sup>Hebdomeros "fit en barque le tour de sa chambre, repoussé toujours dans le coin par le ressac ..." Hebdomeros, p.76.

<sup>442</sup>"Maintenant les arbres qui avaient envahi les chambres et les corridors de sa (Hebdomeros's) demeure s'en allaient lentement vers le Sud; ils émigraient par groupes, par familles, par tribus ..." *ibid.*, p.124.

Such contextual dislocation is indeed a continuous presence in the paintings: oversized toys, food, reels of yarn, or as in The Song of Love (1914,Pl.35), a rubber glove are set against the grey townscapes. In The Purity of a Dream (1915,Pl.36) a painting of a tree in spring is positioned between two perceptively distorted gloomy buildings with black openings. In The Fête Day (1914,Pl.30) an egg and a flute are positioned on a surface that, relative to the surrounding architecture, could be understood as either flat or sloping. Such objects in such ambiguous positions condense the labyrinthine and compound the Schopenhauerian requirement of a conceptual breakdown.

In later paintings, though the "backdrop" might be altered, the discrepancy between the object focused upon and the environment remains: in The Death of a Spirit (1916,Pl.51), for example, the typically crowded geometricity of the Metaphysical Interiors is given a focus by two biscuits which are isolated as exhibits among the surrounding chaos. They are virtually centred and framed by the disorientating environment. Similarly in The Regret (1916,Pl.52), a triangularly shaped framed plane displaying six biscuits represents a still point in an otherwise disturbing picture space, which on the left appears to correspond to de Chirico's claustrophobically cluttered interiors, while on the right echoing his vision of the outer urban world. The objects here are not any longer enveloped within any specifiable space concept but are suspended in a kind of spatial vacuum. Strangely, this appears to convey to the ordinary, if not in this case trivial, object an unexpected pathos.

Similarly in the much later picture Furniture in the Valley

(1927,Pl.87) the beholder is led to review the ordinary domestic environment in terms of an enhanced significance: the distant surrounding landscape, anchored through the far distant temple-like building in the realm of classical myth and legend, becomes the setting for floorboards on which a wardrobe and two armchairs, a carpet and a box are placed. Behind the armchair on the left there is the black outline of a piece of furniture, the triangular shape of the pediment of which echoes the architectonic style of the far distant temple. This gives a clue: it is as though the distant temple and this island of furniture become concurrent: both are isolated places of worship.

How distinct these contextual dislocations are in the service of revealing meaning, hitherto covered by ordinary relationships, becomes clear in de Chirico's remarks concerning the interaction between exhibit and the space it is allocated in a museum: "Lorsqu'en visitant un musée .. nous avons souvent l'impression que les statues nous apparaissent sous un aspect nouveau. La statue ... se montre sous différents aspects métaphysiques ..." and reveals "son côté fantômatique".<sup>443</sup> He explains the effects by referring to the impact of space: "Les lignes des murs, du plancher et du plafond séparent la statue du monde extérieur ..." and he stipulates that "pour trouver des aspects plus nouveaux et plus mystérieux nous devons avoir recours à des nouvelles combinaisons."<sup>444</sup> What de Chirico here describes for the statue and its environment he applies to his

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<sup>443</sup>"Statues, Meubles et Généraux" (1927) in MP, p.277.

<sup>444</sup>Ibid.

object presentation: a systematic decontextualisation designed to break through stable frames of reference and to create new meaning. Holländer observes with reference to this technique employed by de Chirico: the artist isolates "particles of reality" which he then puts into a (space-) context that itself cannot rely on any stable "frame of references". Thus the "Denkmal"-function is turned into an experiment with semantic expectations: the objects within the unexpected environment reveal new aspects and relationships "... in wohlberechneten Zusammenstößen verschiedener Gedankenketten".<sup>445</sup>

Thus the given, reduced to its structure and established in a new context, leads the beholder to the possibility " aus den Elementen des Bekannten Unbekanntes zu finden,<sup>446</sup> - an unknown, which de Chirico clearly understands as the sought-for metaphysical other. And it is clearly at this point where the presentation of the ordinary object in de Chirico is to be linked to Schopenhauer's claim that the detachment from space and time entails the severing of causal relationships: in de Chirico's treatment the object is consciously brought into a logically discontinuous context so that the conditions for the metaphysical revelation can happen and the object can be seen "as though for the first time".<sup>447</sup>

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<sup>445</sup>Holländer, op.cit., p.193; as Holländer rightly points out, this technique is typical of Surrealist art. He compares de Chirico's handling of space and figure/object with Duchamps, Ernst and Tanguy.

<sup>446</sup>Ibid., p.228.

<sup>447</sup>The philosopher likens the necessary detachment with perceptions experienced after a memory loss where everything is seen necessarily anew. And it is exactly this condition that de Chirico is aiming at. In his writings he refers to Schopenhauer's

Only then is it possible to experience what de Chirico dubs the "plastic solitude", which is the contemplative bliss that can be attained through a carefully conducted combination and construction of forms.<sup>448</sup> As the cult object is detached and set apart from its environment these incongruous objects in de Chirico are isolated and focused upon in their plastic solitude.<sup>449</sup> The objects thus appear to acquire a mysteriously grand symbolic significance normally not associated with such ordinary things.

This elevating of the ordinary in the process of contextual relocation is perhaps most succinctly developed in Hebdomeros: in one episode the *protagonist has reached a still point of his journey*, he has retired to a house and is without the company of his friends. An old huntsman supplies his daily food "un maigre oiseau".<sup>450</sup> This bird first of all serves as a topic for the protagonist's still-lives: "Hebdomeros chaque soir lui achetait un oiseau qu'il ne mangeait que le soir suivant, car il aimait dans ses moments de loisir, peindre des natures-mortes de gibier."<sup>451</sup> There follows a description of how Hebdomeros lays out

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discerning views about madness and signals that his objective is to create conditions where exactly this new, "unmuddied" viewing of the object is possible.

<sup>448</sup>De Chirico in "Sull'arte metafisica" (1919) in MP p.86.

<sup>449</sup>Compare Hess (1975), p.118: "We are looking into a frozen eternity of reality; all the objects are there, but they are only there, unrelated to anything. It is the fixity of the haunted image of a dream which is real, failing to connect with anything ..."

<sup>450</sup>Hebdomeros, p.120.

<sup>451</sup>Ibid.



and frames the bird for his artistic composition (as for instance "parfois ... il mettait de l'ouate autour, comme si c'était de la neige..."<sup>452</sup>) Afterwards there is a very detailed description of how he prepares and cooks the bird culminating in the description: "tandis qu'il cuisait il le retournait en le piquant avec une fourchette et en répétant à haute voix toujours la même phrase: 'Il faut qu'il sente la chaleur. Il faut qu'il sente la chaleur'" (emphases mine).<sup>453</sup> This almost incantatory chanting over the cooking bird projects an image of worship. The ordinary process of preparing food is channelled into an act of intense importance, blanking out everything else and raising seemingly commonplace details to a level of high - if not indeed metaphysical - importance. De Chirico describes in his article on metaphysics and the occult the ability of the primitive to unleash in certain objects the spiritual powers via encircling and framing, and the handling of the bird in his novel appears to be raised into a spiritual deed: the bird is first framed for the purpose of artistic contemplation and then cooked as an act of worship. As in the examples before, de Chirico gives "une forme plastique à la révélation..."<sup>454</sup>

Thus the ordinary object is elevated, a subject of contemplation. The necessary focus is brought about by creating a space apart. This sense of setting apart is most often accomplished in de Chirico's work by creating an aesthetic and

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<sup>452</sup>Ibid.

<sup>453</sup>Ibid., p.121.

<sup>454</sup>Baldacci (1983), p.19.

semantic distance between the object and its environment. From here it clearly is not only spatio-temporally but logically removed from its ordinary cognition and thus clearly corresponds markedly to the underlying Schopenhauerian distancing from the conceptual constraints which essentially determine our perception.

### 1.3. Paradoxical Juxtapositions

While Schopenhauer suggests generally that in order to arrive at metaphysical truth, established modes and concepts have to be abandoned, it is Nietzsche who develops a veritable rhetoric of his philosophical discourse along the lines of this claim. For instance, he claims that it is necessary "to speak aloud in forbidden metaphors, or in unheard-of combinations of ideas ..."<sup>455</sup> Likewise, in Zarathustra, Nietzsche abolishes all ideas of a transcendental metaphysics with the iconoclastic phrase "Gott ist tot" while enveloping these objectives within a rich rhetoric of the most unconventional tropes and allusions.

One of the more obvious transpositions of such Nietzschean rhetoric can be seen in de Chirico's use of titles relative to his paintings. There are numerous examples where the main subject of the painting seems to be far removed from the title denotation: for instance The Song of Love (1914, Pl.35) does not act as an explanatory comment but appears to consciously add to the enigmatization of the objects presented. There are not even remote connotations that would reasonably constitute a link here.

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<sup>455</sup>Compare Danto on Nietzsche, p.40.

A similar situation is given in Evangelical Still-Life (1917) or Metaphysical Interior (The Faithful Servant) (1916) where the beholder is likewise left to a denotation that, in common understanding, is not matched by what he is visually introduced to.

Another type of title can be seen in the title The Dream of Tobias (1917,Pl.54). Here a thermometer, showing instead of the usual degree scale the letters A I D E L,<sup>456</sup> is central to the composition, which once more corresponds in style to the crammed Metaphysical Interiors. On its right is a picture of arcades, on its left is a picture of a fish captured in a room. It is striking here that what most vitally relates to the title, namely the fish (see the discussion of the symbolism in Chapter V.1.5.), is marginalized. However, the thermometer and its enigmatic lettering, while totally removed from any immediate link with the title, takes over. It is once again as though the main object on display is consciously set at variance to the ostensible subject matter indicated in the title: the beholder is led to scan the picture for information that relates to "Tobias's dream" and thereby becomes sucked into the interior. Thus once more a Labyrinthgänger is left in an incomprehensibly scattered object world. In other words, the titles and the focal objects create semantic gaps which the beholder is left to bridge or to simply continue to marvel at. In such a way one of the metaphysical objectives is clearly achieved: the object is consciously re-

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<sup>456</sup>Fagiolo suggests that the letters A I D E L could refer to the name of de Chirico's deceased sister Adèle, or that they could be a reference to the Greek word "aidel" meaning "non vedere" (Fagiolo (1984, p.100).

viewed from the point of view of a potentially different significance from that which is ordinarily attributed to it.

This use of titles is complemented by the paradoxical juxtapositions of the iconographical elements. Clearly, in addition to situating objects in an incongruous setting, de Chirico exploits and pushes further the subversion of causality and logic by contriving a joint focus on ordinarily unrelated objects. Take once more The Song of Love (1914,Pl.35): here the juxtaposition of the plaster cast, the red rubber glove and the ball not only compels one to read these objects in terms of protagonists crowding an urban stage, but their joint presence leads to a process of mutual (semantic) emptying: their conventional significance, already reduced to an essence, becomes finally undermined in that they are free to enter novel relationships with each other.

Similarly Metaphysical Interior (with Biscuits and Matches) (1918,Pl.57) relies on the strangely dramatic potential of non-sensical juxtapositions: in the centre frame on the right, two biscuits, a toy and a box of matches are neatly arranged against a dark background. All objects come across as curiously detached, at once familiar and estranged for the beholder. Their union though creates a criss-cross of semantic relationships that defies any conventional notions of the assembled object.

In Greetings of a Distant Friend (1916), two biscuits are shown on either side of what appears to be a drawing of an oversized eye. Here the beholder is led so close up to this incongruous assortment of objects that their environment can only be determined by the different planes (divided through a network

of thin straight lines) on which the objects appear to be fixed. The ferocious stare of the eye imbues the biscuits with a peculiar life ordinarily not associated with them, as well as lulling the beholder into accepting that the sense here is the sum of the potential meaning generated by the given associations. Strikingly, the close-up is of such intensity as to suggest a greater "reality" in this visual paradox than in our empirical, lived reality.

In Hermetic Melancholy (1919,Pl.62) there is once more a stage-like setting. Different items are assembled: a brightly coloured, spherical object in the front, a stick leaning on the partition to the left and and a box standing upright and displaying two biscuits on the right. Interestingly, what catches the eye here are not so much the objects themselves but the shadows that are cast by them: to the left the stick casts its shadow across the wall and the floorboards and thus forms a sharply defined triangle.<sup>457</sup> More strikingly, there is the triangular shadow of the box on the right. It occupies the centre stage and thus commands the viewer's attention. It is this shadow that the figure, whose head and shoulders emerge from the back of the stage, appears to contemplate (hence the title) . Thus it appears as though all the semantic inferences to be drawn from the assembled objects are dispersed and absorbed in the central black shadow, which comes across as more meaningful than any object displayed.

Yet it is in paintings such as Still Life. Turin in Spring

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<sup>457</sup>Compare the discussion about the use and symbolic significance of the triangle in Chapter V.1.4.1.

(1914,Pl.35a) that the interplay of spatio-temporal and causal subversion is most impressively dramatized. A slope-like foreground is incongruously occupied by an artichoke, an egg and a book. The centre-background is taken up by a building jutting wedge-like towards the beholder. On the left is a statue of a horse behind a tilting white wall. On the wall a huge black hand is pointing down towards the sloping ground. *The picture appears to have (the perspective apart) two dramatic focal points: the pointing hand and the three objects resting on the illusory steep slope. The former emits once more a kind of menace, while the latter invites contemplation. The difference in mood creates an unresolved tension. As well as this feature there is a shadow on the upper right of the slope. Its source is concealed and thus adds a new kind of dramatic inference to the unresolved picture drama.*

De Chirico suggests "che qualcosa di nuovo debba accadere in quella stessa serenità e che alti segni ... debbano subentrare sul quadrata della tela";<sup>458</sup> or that there is a "profondità abitata"<sup>459</sup> which reflects the "drama of the cosmos".<sup>460</sup> All the paintings are suggestive; in the use of objects de Chirico creates the sense of impending danger. As indicated the danger that can be expected for the viewer is similar to the danger facing the Labyrinthgänger in the penetration of the minotaur's den: here the anticipation of what de Chirico calls the

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<sup>458</sup>"Sull'arte metafisica" in MP, p.86.

<sup>459</sup>Ibid.

<sup>460</sup>"Il senso architettonico nella pittura antica" (1920) in MP, pp.101-102.

"metaphysical fright" is a vital part of the incantatory set-up of objects. The juxtaposed objects evolve a wholly new "drama": not only do they signal the total abandonment of logic, but via the specific manner of presentation, the pared down object-signifieds are virtually liberated to enter novel semantic relationships of so powerful an impact that they really confound the beholder. Thus the stylistic framework is expressive of the philosophical stance. The Nietzschean "deviant speech" is adopted by de Chirico: together with titles, his pictorial juxtapositions of disparate elements become instantaneously productive of a novel, unexplored scope of significance.

And it is here that we enter the solitude of signs which de Chirico defines as eminently metaphysical since closed to human logic.<sup>461</sup> The beholder is left with the enigma of the object, with a sense of an unfamiliar unexplored otherness that he has yet to understand.

#### 1.4. The Use of Symbols

Apart from the ordinary objects raised to the level of metaphysical symbols, i.e. "simbolo della sua inspiegabile esistenza",<sup>462</sup> de Chirico uses a variety of established symbols and symbolic shapes. Unlike the everyday object, these latter iconographical elements are often interwoven with a wealth of connotations. How does de Chirico integrate these clearly conceptually established aspects into his metaphysical programme

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<sup>461</sup>"Sull'arte metafisica" (1919) in MP, p.86.

<sup>462</sup>"Classicismo pittorico" (1920) in MP, p.228.

without contradicting the Schopenhauerian requirement of the need to abandon conceptual constraints?

#### 1.4.1. Geometrical Bodies

Among those shapes most focused upon by de Chirico are geometrical shapes and bodies which are praised for their enigmatic quality by the painter. Notably the triangle plays an important role in Metaphysical Art. Traditionally the triangle points towards a variety of symbolic associations: as a stylized instrument it served as an attribute of the Muse Erato. In Christianity it symbolized the Trinity. During the Renaissance the eye,<sup>463</sup> symbolic of God before he was represented in human form, was occasionally framed by a triangle.<sup>464</sup> With reference to Weininger (compare Chapter I.2.3.3.), de Chirico suggests that this sign, the background of which is clearly already loaded with connotations to do with spiritual concerns, is productive of fear.

In his paintings the triangle plays a dominant role both as a frame and as a focal point. In The Fête Day (1914, Pl.30), notably, the triangular foreground shadow takes up the central position of the middleground, creating a void within the busy environment. In the presentation of the urban, such as in The

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<sup>463</sup>Interestingly, de Chirico associates the eye with "the demon in every thing: " *Bisogna scoprire* (sic) il demone in ogni cosa. Gli antichissimi cretesi stampava un occhio enorme in mezzo gli profili stecchiti si rincorrevano a torno i vasi ... Anche il feto d'un uomo, d'un pesce, d'un pollo, d'un serpente, allo stadio primo, è tutt'un occhio. *Bisogna scoprire l'occhio in ogni cosa.*" Compare "Zeusi l'esploratore" (1918) in MP, p.81.

<sup>464</sup>Compare Hall Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art London, Murray, (1986), p.118 and p. 308.



Enigma of a Day (1914,Pl.23) or Mystery and Melancholy of a Street (1914,Pl.25), the exaggerated deep perspective accentuates the impression of a division into triangular sections (the streets, the buildings etc.). Triangular shapes of all sizes and materials form part of the bric-à-brac focal points of the Metaphysical Interiors. Most markedly the triangle presence can be observed in the various versions of The Grand Metaphysician (1917,Pl.56 and 1925) and even more so in a drawing of the same title (1918) where not only the central picture space appears to be made of triangular shaped boards, but likewise the figure seated on the right is mainly constructed from what seems to be set-square-triangles.

It is, however, particularly in the use of geometrical shapes and bodies that a wider spectrum than the more obviously symbolic, drawn from a sphere of myth and religion, appears to be addressed. Concentrating the attention on geometrical bodies can likewise be seen in programmatic terms: it has been suggested that de Chirico was inspired by Dürer's Melencolia I (1514,Pl.94)<sup>465</sup> which Klibansky/Panofsky/Saxl read in terms of a tension between the artist's use of the geometrical tools of perspective and the limitation this very use of geometry imposes on the creative mind. Clair argues with respect to de Chirico that it is exactly here that the artist's metaphysical programme is to be seen in one line with Dürer's allegory.<sup>466</sup> Strikingly,

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<sup>465</sup>Both Clair and Fagiolo variously compare the prototype of the Ariadne figures, de Chirico's Melancholy (1912,Pl.5), to this Dürer engraving.

<sup>466</sup>Clair, op.cit, loc.cit.

from an iconographical point of view, this argument is compelling: in Melencolia I (Pl.94) there are spherical bodies and rhomboids, and instruments for measuring (like set-squares and rulers) consistently included in the composition. From here de Chirico's focusing on ostensibly totally neutral geometrical bodies in such paintings as The Fête Day (1914,Pl.30), The Sailor's Barrack (1914) or the foreground piece in The Disquieting Muses (1918,Pl.59) appears possibly as a reference to Dürer.

In other paintings, for example The Song of Love (1914,Pl.35), the ball positioned to the left appears to emulate the ball which is found in a very similar position in Melencolia I (Pl.94).<sup>467</sup>

Indeed even the girl's hoop in Mystery and Melancholy of a Street (1914,Pl.25) could be understood in terms of the art-historical discourse introduced by Dürer. Klibansky and Panofsky point out that Cranach takes over the Dürer fusion of melancholy and geometry.<sup>468</sup> In a series of Cranach paintings (Pl.95,Pl.96) *the iconographical element ball or globe is, however, levered through a hoop by putti*. Thus de Chirico's girl running a hoop in a highly geometricized environment is possibly a quotation from here. At any rate there is a high coincidence<sup>469</sup> between

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<sup>467</sup>As well as in the woodcut by Meister F.B (1560,Pl.97).

<sup>468</sup>Klibansky/Panofsky/Saxl Saturn und Melancholie 1990, pp.455-477.

<sup>469</sup>A full analysis of de Chirico's quotations from Dürer Melencolia I would be very interesting: apart from the figure itself which is found in Melancholy (1912,Pl.5) and the use of geometrical objects and tools which seems to echo the geometrical objects scattered around Dürer's Figure in Melencolia I, there are many other iconographical similarities such as the hourglass

these art-historical antecedents which concerned themselves with the tension between the rational and the mathematically exact, and the core of de Chirico's philosophical programme which is concerned to sever the limitations of artificially imposed concepts. Moreover, the geometrical shapes and bodies, including the hoop, are so markedly positioned as either dramatic or focal points in the paintings, that their importance as programmatic symbols suggests itself: the objective of the metaphysical exercise, surely.<sup>470</sup> As will be discussed in the second part of the present chapter, the relevance of the geometrical symbol merges with de Chirico's figure presentation to an almost totemic celebration of Metaphysical Art (compare Chapter V.2.3.6.).

#### 1.5. The religious/mythical Symbol

From the discussion of the geometrical shape, one can already see that de Chirico's use of traditional symbols leads to a complex network of superimposed significance. Indeed the more traditional the symbol, the more acute and immediate the sense of thematic and spiritual potentiality: de Chirico's use of the shell, the fish, the egg or the eye, have a powerful resonance in terms of a possible continuity between ancient myth

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(compare The Virgin of Time (1919,Pl.63) and the minotaur with hourglass in Hebdomeros, p.226), kabbalistic signs (compare the discussion in the present chapter), the building and the distant sea as in some very early (mostly around 1911) and some later paintings such as The Departure of the Argonauts (1921,Pl.69).

<sup>470</sup>Interestingly a similar focusing on a programmatic quotation from art-history can be traced in Hebdomeros: in one of Hebdomeros's numerous speeches to his disciples he tries to teach them how to view things so that they reveal their full creative potential. Thereby he focuses on Leonardo's suggestion of losing oneself in the contemplation of the object (see pp.87-88).

and religion and Metaphysical Art. As will be demonstrated, though, they function like the oracles de Chirico often refers to: they seldom speak univocally, but raise a whole range of questions and speculations - and thus further the enigma pertinent in de Chirico's metaphysics.

In Portrait of Apollinaire (1914,Pl.28), for instance, the shell and the fish are brought to the fore by placing them, collage-like, on a beige background that cuts diagonally across the otherwise bottle-green picture. Fagiolo points out that the conjunction of these two iconographical elements suggests a reference to the ancient Orpheus myth: the shell could be read as a reference to the lyre and the fish a symbol reminiscent of the story that Orpheus charmed the animals with his song.<sup>471</sup> The association with Apollinaire is of course not accidental since he promoted "Orphism", which had as its programme the purification of artistic expression in order to release the spiritual. Although de Chirico did not belong to this group his own artistic interest was on a similar plane: thus Orpheus as the ancient harbinger of truth and Theseus-like hero in his rite de passage through the underworld becomes a vehicle for his own purposes independent of all contemporary avant-garde ideas. The fish and the shell-lyre are frequently used in other, more exclusive and identifiably metaphysical, contexts such as The Fatal Temple (1914,Pl.26) or Spring (1914,Pl.34). Here both

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<sup>471</sup>Fagiolo in Rubin ed.(1983), pp.33-38. Fagiolo ignores here the more established symbolic significances of the shell (for instance, as attribute of Venus or, in Christianity, of pilgrimage)

elements are part of a collage-like arrangement.<sup>472</sup>

The Orphic presence symbolically indicated by the fish and lyre allows one to interpret other iconographical elements that de Chirico uses centrally for its cosmogonic inferences. Schmied argues, for instance, that the strange toy-like objects the artist focuses upon in The Evil Genius of a King (1914,Pl.32) and The Playthings of a Prince (1914) are references to the Zagreus child which had been devoured by the Titans. Zagreus's heart was rescued and from it Dionysus was recreated. Clearly the ideas of destruction, laying bare of essentials, and re-making are pertinent to the metaphysical in de Chirico and hence the cogent use of symbolic references to this myth. In this particular instance the underlying symbolism would shed some light on one of the most enigmatic paintings, namely I'll be there ... the Glass Dog (1915,Pl.35b): here the heart of an otherwise statuesque torso is depicted in a lively red, which concentrates most of the beholder's attention; a skinless hand with arteries visible dominates the foreground. The overall impression is that of a surgical reassembling of a body. The making of Dionysus?

However, while the symbols thrown into relief in de Chirico's work may stem from one specific mythical background there always remains an ambiguity: the painting The Sacred Fish

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<sup>472</sup>The Orpheus presence appears to shed light on such titles as The Troubadour (1923,Pl.73) attributed to one of de Chirico's mannequins: it connotes the connection between the metaphysical message and the enchanting power of the ancient singer. Interestingly in one of de Chirico's old age paintings when his power of vision was waning, he depicted a mannequin that had dropped the lyre and called the picture The Tired Orpheus (1972).

(1918,Pl.60) may, short of anything anchoring it to the realm of the orphic, be read in terms of the Christian use of fish. Indeed, in the 1917 painting The Dream of Tobias (Pl.54), de Chirico makes reference to both the Apocryphal story<sup>473</sup> of Tobias and the connected symbol of the fish. The latter could be understood here in the double sense of a reference to the fish with the healing powers caught by Tobias, or generally to the fish as symbol for Jesus Christ. Likewise in Hebdomeros the fish is not employed in a univocal manner: on the one hand there is the reference to a "big, black fish"<sup>474</sup> as a rather diffuse symbol of fear, yet on the other hand the narrative focuses elsewhere on biblical references, as for instance the scene when the protagonist preaches to a crowd so eager that he is ultimately forced to step into a fishing boat and to continue from there.<sup>475</sup>

Indeed, it appears as though the artist borrowed his metaphysical centre pieces from a wide spectrum<sup>476</sup> to produce such symbolically strange effects: the distinctiveness of the related story, myth or religion is somehow cancelled out while the spiritual essence of the respective symbol retains a generalized importance. An example here perhaps is the use of the eye in a

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<sup>473</sup>It is interesting that de Chirico's title refers to "the dream", which clearly does not feature in the Biblical story of Tobias. It is as though, continuous with the visual re-interpretation, an established motif is dislocated and re-cast here.

<sup>474</sup>Hebdomeros, p.16.

<sup>475</sup>Ibid., p.89.

<sup>476</sup>It would go beyond the scope of the present work to explore in each case all symbolic references; only a few examples will be provided to show the complexity of inferential material de Chirico draws upon.

series of paintings in 1916: Metaphysical Interior, Greetings of a Distant Friend, The Corsaire and The Jewish Angel (Pl.49). As the name of the first painting referred to here already suggests all these compositions are in the style of Metaphysical Interiors. Yet the artist concentrates on bric-à-brac so that the room environment becomes increasingly irrelevant, and, finally, in The Jewish Angel (1916,Pl.49) it is missing completely. Here the centre of the canvas is occupied with what looks like a monument of set-squares, easels and wooden plates through the top of which is placed the drawing of a gigantic eye: staring back at the beholder the eye thus dominates the entire composition.

What does the eye signify? Clearly the title The Jewish Angel (1916,Pl.49)<sup>477</sup> suggests primarily an Old Testament reading of the eye, where it signifies an early symbol of God the Father<sup>478</sup> before his representation in human form. However, within the context of de Chirico's work the eye symbolism can likewise be read as continuous with The Dream of Tobias (1917,Pl.54) inasmuch as the related story revolves around the loss and restoration of Tobit's eyesight. And finally the eye as symbol can be understood as a reference to primitive auguries and omniscience. In Schopenhauer there are references to the

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<sup>477</sup>Strikingly "the jewish angel" plays a role in Hebdomeros, too. Hebdomeros stares in the desert at the sand driven across the plain by the wind; he then suddenly sees it as smoke which takes the shape of a jewish candlestick, a tripod "qui n'avait que l'indispensable, le strict necessaire". This "jewish angel" then takes the soul of a dying general and disappears with him in the air. An ironic and conflated allusion to Old and New Testament belief interspersed with references to the occult (compare Hebdomeros pp.57-58).

<sup>478</sup>Compare Hall Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art (1986), p.118.

"Weltenauge"<sup>479</sup> which appears to be more closely related to eastern concepts of the eye. Indeed the latter interpretation is more in tune with de Chirico who suggests variously that the object of the metaphysician is not only to find the "daemon" in everything but likewise "the eye" in everything.<sup>480</sup> In any case the eye in de Chirico's paintings appears to remain deliberately ambiguous while a generalized feel of spiritual meaningfulness is clearly retained, in particular and more importantly for the argument here, the eye in each case commands the centre of attention.

Another example where de Chirico chooses from the outset a symbolism that is to be understood in a diffuse, enigmatic way, *rather than any one distinct reference, is his use of what looks like kabbalistic signs, although they do not appear to fit into any of the known categories of occult codification. They appear in the painting Spring (1914,Pl.34) on the scroll in the foreground, as well as adorning objects that the artist focuses upon in The Evil Genius of a King (1914,Pl.32). In The Fatal Temple (1914,Pl.26) they form part of a collage-like foreground piece which appears to be superimposed on a typical urban vista.*<sup>481</sup>

Interestingly though, in this latter example the pseudo-

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<sup>479</sup>Compare Schopenhauer SW I, p.266, 282 and SW II, p.479.

<sup>480</sup>Compare footnote 450.

<sup>481</sup>The pseudo kabbalistic sign will be retained throughout his career though increasingly as a mere addition that functions to heighten the generalized sense of mystery. Compare Good Friday (1915,Pl.37), the signs adorning parts of the wooden bric-à-brac in some of the Metaphysical Interiors and the second version of The Grand Metaphysician from 1925.



kabbalistic signs are paired with French words such as "vie", "énigme", "joie", "souffrance", "éternité d'un moment" and "chose étrange". All these words create, together with the incantatory power of the undecipherable signs, a sense of spiritual evocation. And yet the French terms constitute pillars of the Schopenhauer-inspired metaphysic;<sup>482</sup> and it is in Schopenhauer that one finds the remark that the occult is indeed tangentially related to (his) metaphysics.<sup>483</sup> However, for the uninitiated beholder the kabbalistic sign juxtaposed here with a variety of French terms or presented on a scroll in Spring (1914, Pl.34) create primarily the impression of the indecipherable presence of an other, a spiritual force that is called upon without any further specification.

#### 1.6. Summary

Suspended within a network of spatio-temporal subversion is de Chirico's object iconography. First of all there are ordinary objects that are subjected to a process of reduction to object signifieds. Moreover, they are set against a semantically incongruous background. In addition these objects are frequently juxtaposed with others, far removed from their ordinary semantic

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<sup>482</sup>In Schopenhauerian terms these seemingly unconnected words would gain the following coherence: life ("vie") is suffering ("souffrance") and enigma ("énigme") unless the inspired mind can transcend it. The flash of insight leads outside ordinary conceptual constraints into experiencing the eternity of the moment ("éternité d'un moment"). From here the familiar object can be perceived in a new manner ("chose étrange"). The awareness of having broken through the conceptual boundaries and obtained an intimation of eternity and the metaphysical other creates exhilaration or joy ("joie").

<sup>483</sup>Compare Schopenhauer SW III, p.457.

associations. The effect of this handling of objects is bafflement: the ordinary is elevated to a subject of contemplation revealing a surprising, often dramatic, presence. Besides which, the conscious use of paradox and unresolved tensions through incongruous material gives rise to a novel field of associations and images. Powerfully the Schopenhauerian claim, that the detachment from space and time goes along with a breakdown of causal relationships, is accomplished. While it is subject to dispute if this way of seeing the object anew is, indeed, to be linked with any metaphysical experience, it is evident that on the conceptual plane the outline of the Schopenhauer-based philosophical programme and the strategies of object presentation on canvas do match.

While the use of the ordinary objects clearly formally consolidates the metaphysical programme, de Chirico's use of symbols injects a more elusive, poetical dimension into his work. The symbolic objects used are largely icons drawn from Greek, Judaic, Christian or Eastern systems of belief. Thus though not tied to any one specific religious, mythical or programmatic background they nevertheless act as a continual reminder of the continuity between generalized spiritual concerns and metaphysics. They inject a sense of meaningfulness and create an atmosphere of sanctity and worship. In other words de Chirico erases the specific doctrinal contexts and, in a process of distillation, he retains only their generalized mystical dimension: they thus constitute the spiritual/poetical quality of the Labyrinthgänger's condition at the point of the metaphysical insight into the other.

## 2. Figures as Focal Points

In an article from 1918 de Chirico describes one of his metaphysical encounters with a figure: "Ieri, nel pomeriggio passando per una via che s'allunga strette e fiancheggiata da case alte e scure vidi apparire in fondo una collonna sormontata da una statua ... Visto così, tra quelle due pareti di pietra annerata - che parevano muri d'un santuario antico - il monumento assumeva un ché di misterioso e di solenne, e il passante tampoco metaficisizzante si sarebbe aspettato di udire la voce d'un nume vaticinare d'in fondo la piazza"<sup>484</sup> (emphases mine).

The experience related here, namely the appearance of a statue within a visual frame produced by the delimiting architecture of a canyon-like street is clearly reminiscent of those images projected in earlier de Chirico paintings such as Autumnal Meditation (1911). More importantly though, this account spells out the role of the figure as a dramatic, almost occult focal point, which emerges from the disorientating network of the labyrinthine terra incognita: the glimpse of the figure intimates a sudden, unexpected sense of a primitive sanctum. Once more the effect of framing<sup>485</sup> evokes in the ordinary a metaphysical

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<sup>484</sup>"Arte metafisica e scienze occulte" (1918) in MP, p.64.

<sup>485</sup>At a cursory reading the figure is focused upon in a variety of contexts, from the familiar townscape to stage-like scene arrangements as in The Mannequins and the Rose Tower (1915,Pl.41), and to the presentation of figures in the confinement of a room (compare The Return (1918), or The Archaeologist (1927)). Furthermore there are a variety of "close-ups" of mannequins and a range of portraits and self-portraits where the strategy of framing is retained by setting the depicted head up against the sharply lit square of a window opening (compare The Uncertainty of Life (1915,Pl.48), or Self-Portrait (1918)). Finally there are paintings as early as 1915 but notably

quality.

Undoubtedly though, de Chirico's description of the statue figure revealing its metaphysical aspect stands out, since it has overtones of sacral adoration that exceed those observable in the discussion of objects. Is the figure thus of greater importance in Metaphysical Art?

Clearly, for Schopenhauer, the human figure is both the most expressive subject and its representation the highest target of art (compare Chapter II). And, strikingly, de Chirico's work gives evidence that he shared this view with the philosopher: the presentation of the human form, as focal points of the urban labyrinth or built interiors, evidently ranks highest among de Chirico's topics - so much so that Holländer even suggests that the appearance of figures in space is to be called the "Leitmotif"<sup>486</sup> of Metaphysical Art.

However, what is so remarkable about the use of the figure in Metaphysical Art is not merely its quantifiable presence and the evident importance attached to it, but that through the years it never ceases to be in a state of metamorphosis: apart from straight portraiture,<sup>487</sup> the human figure appears as statue,<sup>488</sup> as

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in the 1920s where the figures themselves not are but contain a focal point. An example here is The Fatal Light (1915, Pl.47) where, through a hollow of the right hand mannequin-head a train becomes the dramatic focal point; in The Archaeologists (1927, Pl.89) elements of the architectural labyrinth so far constituting the urban environment can be found in the laps of heavy dummy-like figures.

<sup>486</sup>Holländer, op.cit, loc.cit., p.222.

<sup>487</sup>Compare in particular de Chirico's self-portraits of the years 1919-1920. Likewise Study - Nude with Black Hair (1913), Portrait of Mme Gartzzen (1913), Portrait of Carlo Cirelli (1915), and Metaphysical Portrait (Ernesta Tibertelli) (1918) to name but a

mannequin,<sup>489</sup> and as mannequins of different degrees of abstraction: as sculpture mannequin-hybrid<sup>490</sup> or hybrids with internalized environment.<sup>491</sup> The list can be rounded off with the presentation of the human being as mere shadow<sup>492</sup> (often as small background figures) and its disguise as a mythological and legendary figure.<sup>493</sup>

Similarly, in de Chirico's novel Hebdomeros the presentation of the human being is highly idiosyncratic: the hero's physique itself is never described; the reader can only identify him from within his stream of consciousness narrative. Interestingly Margaret Crosland, referring to the episode about Thomas Lecourt in Hebdomeros, compares the absence of description with the lack of individuality observable in de Chirico's mannequins.<sup>494</sup>

Otherwise descriptions of other human beings, though sparse,

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few.

<sup>488</sup>Compare Autumnal Meditation (1911), the Ariadne series and The Enigma of a Day (1914,Pl.23).

<sup>489</sup>Compare The Prophet (1915,Pl.42), The Mannequins and the Rose Tower (1915,Pl.41), The Philosopher and the Poet (1915,Pl.43), Hector and Andromache (1917,Pl.55), The Troubadour (1917) and (1923,Pl.73).

<sup>490</sup>Compare Ariadne (drawing, 1917), The Disquieting Muses (1918,Pl.59), The Grand Metaphysician (1917,Pl.56).

<sup>491</sup>Compare Oedipus and Sphinx (1920), Heraldic Mannequins (1926), The Painter (1927), The Archaeologists (1927,Pl.89), The Archaeologer (1927).

<sup>492</sup>Compare Mystery and Melancholy of a Street (1914,Pl.25), The Warriors (1924,Pl.80), Metaphysical Vision (1924,Pl.79).

<sup>493</sup>Compare The Virgin of Time (1919,Pl.63), Mercury and the Metaphysicians (1920,Pl.68), Pericles (1925) and the numerous gladiatorial presentations from the 1920s.

<sup>494</sup>Compare M.Crosland's introduction to Hebdomeros, pp.7-8.

are often markedly removed from any ordinary empirical expectations: there are episodes that focus on a man who is platformised,<sup>495</sup> stonemen that are alive<sup>496</sup> and gladiators as attentive disciples of Hebdomeros.<sup>497</sup>

J.A.Hodkinson draws attention to Hebdomeros's identification of gladiators with enigma:<sup>498</sup> "the gladiator is placed in a peculiar, ambiguous position of being both subject and object. Most Roman gladiators were slaves, someone's property - i.e. pure objects deprived of that minimal amount of freedom that distinguishes man from the animals... In the arena, however, the gladiator becomes the very incarnation of self-assertion, of the will to live by overcoming others, by asserting one's power over them. Here the gladiator becomes almost pure subject, in the active sense of the word."<sup>499</sup>

In principle Hodkinson points towards the very issue that appears to determine de Chirico's figure representation: the struggle between the subject, will-bound figure, and the objectified human essence. Unlike Hodkinson, de Chirico does not see the human being as an object in his art as something unfree, but on the contrary, he sees it as liberated from the blurring subjectivism of individuality (which is in Schopenhauer's terms

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<sup>495</sup>Compare Hebdomeros, pp.33-34.: "... il (Lear) se *plateformisait*; il devenait comme un gros morceau de bois non équarri ..."

<sup>496</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.137-140.

<sup>497</sup>*Ibid.*, for instance, p.9, p.185-189.

<sup>498</sup>"Gladiateurs! Ce mot contient une énigme"; *ibid.*, p.9.

<sup>499</sup>James A. Hodkinson introduction and translation to: Giorgio de Chirico Hebdomeros (1966), p.xii.

"nur die Erscheinung"<sup>500</sup>); hence the painter's appeal that we must show everything, even man, in its quality of "thing".

Thus the question arises whether de Chirico's metamorphic figure presentations are to be read in terms of the painter's quest for the most fitting way to present the objectified human being. Are they evidence of the painter's long-term struggle with the evolution towards a metaphysical core?

## 2.1 Shadows

In some instances the only figures that are identifiably human in de Chirico's paintings are introduced in a shadow-like fashion. In the urban squares of the two paintings Metaphysical Vision (1924,Pl.80) and The Warriors (1924,Pl.79), for example, only transparent shadowy figures are to be seen. They are mainly presented as mere outline - a black outline in Metaphysical Vision (1924,Pl.80) and sharply white contours in The Warriors (1924,Pl.79) - superimposed on the background of a dusky square with buildings in the far background; while the gladiators in The Warriors (1924,Pl.79) have, in spite of their transparency, a comparatively strong presence (due to the sharply defined armour and the muscular arms). The two figures clad in flowing Greek costumes, have a more floating insubstantiality about them, thus they are not unlike ghostly shadows.

In Self-Portrait (1920,Pl.64) the artist presents himself while on the right a white ghost-like silhouette of himself turns away from the artist and the beholder. Is this the artist's soul,

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<sup>500</sup>SW I, p.264.

as Schmied<sup>501</sup> and Fagiolo<sup>502</sup> suggest? Or are we more generally involved with what Martin advocates, namely that de Chirico here borrowed the significance of shadows as maintained by popular Greek superstitions. Referring to Frazer's The Golden Bough, Martin wonders if the fact that "especially in Greece great powers are attributed to the shadow cast by a man..." does not "lend additional force to the artist's oft-quoted pronouncement ... 'There are more enigmas in the shadow of a man who walks in the sun than in all religions of the past, present and future.'"<sup>503</sup>

It is interesting to compare, in this context, Schopenhauer who specifically discusses shadows in a chapter called "Über das Geistersehen": starting indeed from the ancient notion of the shadows of the underworld he suggests that such shadows can be understood as "Nachklänge dagewesener Erscheinungen dieser unserer in Zeit und Raum sich darstellenden Erscheinungswelt".<sup>504</sup> And he points out that while shadows are occurrences which "nicht die unmittelbare Realität eines gegenwärtigen Objekts beizulegen ist" they nonetheless have some sort of reality ("wiewohl ihm doch eine Realität beizulegen ist").<sup>505</sup>

The idea of a kind of echo of a reality which was once bound in time and space is interesting since, if transferred to de

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<sup>501</sup>Schmied (1989), p.62.

<sup>502</sup>Fagiolo De Chirico 1908-1924 (1984), p.105.

<sup>503</sup>Martin in Rubin ed. (1978), p.89.

<sup>504</sup>SW IV, p.343.

<sup>505</sup>Ibid.



Chirico's paintings, it puts his extensive use of shadow humans at a different level: they could all be interpreted as a step towards exploring the metaphysical spectrality of the human being. In the case of the gladiators and the figures in Greek costume they may, indeed, be meant in terms of ghost-like echoes of past appearances. In the case of de Chirico's self-portraits it could be a prophetic depiction, or the attempt to reinterpret the romantic notion of the shadow-soul in terms of a metaphysical spectrality.

De Chirico certainly suggests at one stage that there are "bien plus d'énigmes dans l'ombre d'un homme ..." <sup>506</sup> but the crucial point is that he contrasts this outstanding enigmatic potential with the words "que dans toutes les religions passées, présentes et futures", <sup>507</sup> De Chirico thus clearly dismisses conventional metaphysical systems here; he does not refer to some shadow soul but rather a quintessential eternal quality that stands outside any system of belief. <sup>508</sup> Indeed, one can see how the shadow does fit more formally into his metaphysical programme: the shadow is part of us, while at the same time not being identical with us, thus it corresponds to the metaphysical other which constitutes a condition of not-object or not-thing, while being part of it; besides which the shadow is always either before or after us both in space and time, thus forever elusive.

From here one can begin to understand why de Chirico

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<sup>506</sup>MP, p.12.

<sup>507</sup>MP, p.12.

<sup>508</sup>Ibid.; even outside philosophy.

consistently depicted human beings in his early paintings as shadowy figures. There is, for instance, the box-like forecourt in the painting The Great Tower (1913,Pl.15): in its centre two minute shadowy black figures are virtually dwarfed by the overwhelming grandeur of the tower. It is striking that in the glaring sunlight the figures lack substance: their bodies have the same shadow quality as the shadows they cast.

The diminutive quality of the figure in comparison to the tower behind recalls the Schopenhauerian concept of the human being exposed to the sublimity of scale and the awareness of its own nothingness (compare Chapter II.2.2). However, the distinct shadowy quality which recurs in many of the early paintings points once more to the idea that the shadow of a man is taken to be of a stronger metaphysical import than his substantial condition.

The most remarkable shadow in de Chirico, surely, is to be found in Mystery and Melancholy of a Street (1914,Pl.25). The figure of a little girl running a hoop along a sunlit street of de Chirico's typical mediterranean town-scapes of the early years stands out: she is a rare example of a figure in movement, unlike the inert stasis of de Chirico's other figure presentations. However, what in the present context is the most notable feature about her is that this lively figure is nothing more than a shadow. As in the distant figures of The Great Tower (1913,Pl.15), she is presented as a silhouette which in turn casts a shadow. The drama of the painting is that she is running her hoop into the direction of another shadow that is cast diagonally across her path by a hidden figure or object. This

shadow has a menacing presence: the source is not revealed. Indeed, on a closer inspection there is not one but two shadows, a larger shadow and a parallel, long, stick-like shadow. The overall effect is that the beholder is led to anticipate a dramatic encounter of the girl's shadow and the other two shadows,<sup>509</sup> the inevitability of which is instilled by the way the picture is laid out: a deep perspective, sucking forward, the menacing shadow on the right, buildings on either side etc. Thus there is a dramatic reversal: the shadows acquire a psychological potency which exceeds any of the "real" elements in the painting. Thus the overall message is: what is removed from reality bears a stronger presence to what is ordinarily accepted as part of reality.

However, while de Chirico makes of the shadow a metaphysical association, he would surely have known that in Schopenhauerian terms the shadow was never to be identified as that metaphysical other, but as a mere approximation, a kind of after-image of what has been but never representative of the (metaphysical) reality sought after. His further concern with the presentation of the human figure suggests that he was aware that much more was required to bring out the metaphysical essence. Thus he undertook to elaborate his presentation of the human figure by resorting to the presentation of statues.

## 2.2. The Statues

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<sup>509</sup>Compare Soby (1955) "One has the impression that even if she reaches the light, she is doomed for she is herself a shadow, perhaps retracing the steps which led to her dissolution, the image invested with the horror of ghostly re-enactment", p.72.

The early years of Metaphysical Art are particularly notable for the presence of statues, which could be said to "people" the squares and streets of "de Chirico City" (Gordon Onslow Ford).<sup>510</sup> It is important to hold in mind at this stage of the argument that it was a statue that gave de Chirico his first metaphysical revelation: "Par un clair après-midi d'automne j'étais assis sur un banc au milieu de la Piazza Santa Croce à Florence. Je venais de sortir d'une longue et douloureuse maladie intestinale et me trouvais dans un état de sensibilité presque morbide ... Au milieu de la place s'élève une statue représentant le Dante drapé dans un long manteau ... J'eus alors l'impression étrange que je voyais toutes les choses pour la première fois. Et la composition de mon tableau me vint à l'esprit ..."<sup>511</sup> (emphasis mine).

As pointed out in Chapter II Schopenhauer attaches to art the ability to bring about the apprehension of the "idea" since it does not show a mere instance ("was nur einmal da ist und nie wieder") of reality but "die Form allein ... welche schon ... die Idee selbst wäre".<sup>512</sup> He continues to distinguish between the picture and the statue by pointing out that the picture "leitet uns ... vom Individuo weg auf die bloße Form".<sup>513</sup> However, according to Schopenhauer, only the statue conveys "die rein geometrische Form allein, sie darstellend an einer

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<sup>510</sup>Quoted by Soby (1955).

<sup>511</sup>"Que pourrait être la peinture de l'avenir." (1913) in MP, p.32.

<sup>512</sup>SW V, p.498.

<sup>513</sup>Ibid.

augenscheinlich fremden Materie, dem Marmor".<sup>514</sup> The statue "... isoliert ... handgreiflich die Form."<sup>515</sup> In other words the statue assumes a superiority in conveying the metaphysical idea of what it represents by distilling the metaphysical while retaining the material presence.

Clearly, given that de Chirico presents statues within his pictures, we are faced generally from the start with a double effect: the work of art within the work of art clearly fulfils both the functions stipulated by Schopenhauer: it is as though the human form moves through a two-tier filter of artistic representation.

However, beyond this specific conceptual aspect it is vital to understand the use of statuary as a broader, carefully orchestrated and dramatized contribution to the metaphysical programme. For instance, if one "reads" carefully de Chirico pictures that include statues one can find that the entire design is tailored so as to bring out the strongest possible metaphysical potential. In Autumnal Meditation (1911) a statue is the focus of the composition. Contrary to what one would expect from an approach to a statue viz. a frontal view, the figure is shown from behind, which creates a disturbing sense of uncertainty: it is true that the pedestal, the apparent white marble texture, and the silent immobility, suggest the mere presence of a statue. However, at the same time, the figure is imbued with a curious sense of life: a truly meditative inertia.

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<sup>514</sup>Ibid.

<sup>515</sup>Ibid.

Once more this could be attributed to the rigid (here temple-like) architecture assuming as it does here, the function of a visual frame, and which appears to condense its entire psychological power.

While this early statue introduces a general strategy, namely to allow statues to be the main "characters" in the pictures, it is only around 1913/14 that de Chirico could be said to perfect his presentation of statues as focal points of both his metaphysical objective and his urban labyrinths. Notably the Ariadne series, discussed in Chapter III., testifies to this deliberate setting up of statuary: the Ariadne statue is left deserted on squares, encircled by architecture with gaping black impenetrable arcades, which recall the numerous conflicting labyrinthine pathways, by walls or by steeply angular shadows.

At the same time she is suspended in a network of conflicting perspectival arrangements and equally conflicting temporal suggestions (see the juxtaposition of the modern and the ancient in Ariadne's Afternoon (1913,Pl.12), and generally the conflicting angles of shadows) and thus, qua the definition extracted from Schopenhauerian philosophy, she is detached from the ordinary. One arrives at a dazzling hallucinatory effect where the figure's reclining form emerges as a peculiarly human presence which seems to contradict her stone condition.

However, the emerging power of a statue presence is more strongly felt in the painting The Enigma of a Day (1914,Pl.23): here the figure of what looks like a frock-coated 19th century Risorgimento politician is introduced. Once more the beholder is led to encounter the statue in the bare environment of the

recurring city motif: shadows, architecture, a wagon and two gigantic distant chimneys, dominate the scene, while the distorted perspective creates a hallucinatory feel. In the far distance two dwarfed shadow people can be seen in the glare of the sunlit square. It is, however, the statue that attracts the attention:<sup>516</sup> the posture, with the slightly raised hand, creates the impression that the figure is about to make a speech. Its gaze is directed towards the sunlit expanse of the vast square. Interestingly the power of this stone gaze is compounded by the detail of the glasses<sup>517</sup> worn by the figure. On the whole the figure commands a psychological power which, outside de Chirico's metaphysical programme, is quite unaccountable: the human presence asserts itself through stone.<sup>518</sup>

It is striking that once more the figure is not introduced full frontal but from its right side. Likewise in other sketches and other paintings of this frock-coated figure (compare the 2nd version of The Enigma of a Day (1914,Pl.23) and the drawing Statue and Perspective (1914,Pl.33)) de Chirico opts to show its back exclusively. It is as though these statues are not made for

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<sup>516</sup>The ultimate labyrinthine feel combined with an arrest through the figurative focus is perhaps best expressed in the drawing Statue and Perspective (1914,Pl.33).

<sup>517</sup>Since the figure is presented only in profile, the glasses may be interpreted as a nose. However, if one compares the painting with de Chirico's contemporary depictions of Risorgimento politicians, one finds that glasses are a typical feature here. See The Enigma of Cavour (1913) and The Serenity of the Knowing (1914), both of which are reproduced in Fagiolo (1984), p.88.

<sup>518</sup>Compare de Chirico's prose description: "La statue du conquérant dans le palais ... Partout la volonté du soleil. Partout la consolation de l'ombre. Ami au regard de vautour ... sur ton socle proclame ta victoire dans une pose de roi vainqueur." "La volonté de la statue" (1913-14) in MP, p.37.

inspection by the beholder but independently contemplate eternity. The beholder only chances upon them and catches a glimpse of their unexpected spectrality.

In Spring (1914,Pl.34) the beholder is not introduced to the imposing statue of what appears to be a statesman, or a known mythological figure, but to a doll-like figure of a child in terracotta. This time the stone effigy is displayed against a white screen, exposed to the sunlight as though to an examination by X-ray. The plasticity of the effigy is complemented by its own black shadow and which gives it a peculiarly spectral presence. Interestingly there is the typical wall and suggestion of urban architecture apart, a sailing vessel in the background and in the foreground a shell and a scroll with signs reminiscent of the kabbala. Is the ship a reference to Theseus? Are the shell and the scroll a reminder of the orphic, the poet seer who gains insight into the metaphysical? However that may be, the beholder is clearly invited to focus and to contemplate in that environment, so devoid of human life, on the material form of the human.

Another dimension of de Chirico's use of statuary can be found in the presentation of relics. For instance, the relics of marble statues become a synecdoche: there are plaster feet of Metaphysical Self-Portrait (1913,Pl.13) or a plaster head in The Song of Love (1914,Pl.35): both of which can clearly be understood in terms of the human presence in spite of their mutilated condition. Indeed it is particularly Greek statuary, created by an "objektiven, von idealer Schönheit erfüllten



Geiste",<sup>519</sup> that de Chirico favours for his purposes. Clearly, apart from being sanctioned by Schopenhauer's philosophy these models have already "proven" their universal character and endurance. Therefore it is not surprising that de Chirico's Portrait of Apollinaire (1914, Pl.28) substitutes the focus on his friend and mentor Apollinaire in the centre with what appears to be a stone figure which, but for the suggestion of balding, is reminiscent of an ancient bust. This figure is presented with sunglasses, which may suggest blindness and thus possibly represent an oblique reference to the inner sight of the poet-seer.<sup>520</sup> By contrast to this dominating figure in the foreground, only a shadow profile in the background shows the - in terms of the underlying metaphysical programme - volatile individuality of Apollinaire.

A further example of de Chirico's use of relics of ancient marble torsi is The Uncertainty of the Poet (1913, Pl.18) where a torso emits an uncanny human presence among the rigid angularity of the architecture and the triangular shadow jutting into the square. However it is here that the beholder is not only reminded of Classical beauty of with this torso, but likewise of the toll that time has taken: the headless, dismembered body has been subjected to damage and mutilation.<sup>521</sup>

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<sup>519</sup>SW V, p.477.

<sup>520</sup>Compare Tiresias: in Greek myth a blind Theban seer who was struck blind by Hera but given by Zeus the gift of unerring prophecy (The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature Oxford, Oxford University Press (1989), p.550). Apollinaire takes up the motif in his writings.

<sup>521</sup>Compare the Dutch engraving: Die Zeit nagt am Torso des Apollo Belvedere (1702, Pl.98;) where the figure of Saturn is standing in front of a mutilated torso; a head and a hand lie on the

In Hebdomeros there are various references to statues (compare Lyphontius' father<sup>522</sup> and the ancient warriors<sup>523</sup>), the most striking of which is an episode that focuses the narrative on the "stonemen" which are immovably fixed in wicker-garden chairs but which can communicate: " ... dans chaque jardin, étendu sur une chaise-longue, se trouvait un gigantesque vieillard entièrement en pierre ..." And the description continues: "Ces vieillards vivaient, oui, ils vivaient mais très peu; il y avait un tout petit peu de vie dans la tête et dans la partie supérieure du corps ... ils racontaient combien de fois ils s'étaient rués l'un sur l'autre en tenant leur fusil par le bout de canon ..." <sup>524</sup> They eventually "die" and their former state of reification is powerfully emphasized when they are broken into pieces and thrown into the valley.

Yet among all those statue presentations it is possibly the artist's gradual projected reification of his own person that most conclusively proves the importance of the statuesque as one of the major focal points in the labyrinthine transposition of his metaphysical programme.

In a poem, Epodo (1917), de Chirico announces that he himself will become like a statue on an Etruscan sarcophagus. In a 1920 self-portrait he presents himself together with the profile of his own marble-bust. The gaze of the bust is directed

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ground to the left.

<sup>522</sup>Hebdomeros, p.90.

<sup>523</sup>Ibid., p.22.

<sup>524</sup>Hebdomeros, pp.137-138.

away towards an undetermined infinite, beyond any concern for the here and now, while the figure of de Chirico himself looks quizzically back at the beholder. The difference between the truly objectified, supra-individual ideal and the reality of appearance (it should be remembered that is in itself only an illusion since it is painted) is acutely felt here.

Finally in a self-portrait of 1924 (Pl.78) de Chirico presents himself in the immediate state of petrification comparable to the "vieillards en pierre" of Hebdomeros: the torso is already presented as though made of stone while it is only the head which remains to be submitted to the process that will lead to the figure becoming a statue. On the face of it this metamorphosis is to be associated with the artist's projection of becoming immortalized in his fame.<sup>525</sup> However, one can clearly see the attempt to accommodate pictorially the breadth of the metaphysical programme: the artist as the inspired genius with insight into the metaphysical other, conveys an intimation of his own spectrality in the form of a self-transformation into that metaphysical other (see the discussion in Chapter VI).

In conclusion it can be said that de Chirico makes use of statues in order to initiate a systematic replacement of the more realistic rendering of the human figure. This preference for the statue can be linked with Schopenhauer's suggestion that the metaphysical quality of the human figure is more easily captured by a process of objectivisation which gives supremacy to form

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<sup>525</sup>Compare Schopenhauer and the "heroic life": "Dann bleibt er am Schluß, wie der Prinz in <Re corvo> des Gozzi, versteinert, aber in edler Stellung und großmütiger Gebärde stehen" (SW V, p.380).

rather than will-bound matter. Furthermore, by resorting to the use of classical statuary, the artist manages to present the human form without committing himself to the (in Schopenhauerian terms) constraints of individuality: the ancient statues are clearly models of eternal types and thus approximate to the essence sought for in the process towards metaphysical discovery.

However, while the use of statues for metaphysical purposes will be retained throughout his career, they are not the only figures to be focused upon in de Chirico's picture-worlds. De Chirico's desire to arrive at an interpretation of the human form that could be even more strongly understood in terms of his metaphysical programme leads us to his use of mannequin or marionette-like figures which followed his first extensive use of statues.

### 2.3. The Mannequins: an Outline

"... jeder (sc.muß) im großen Marionettenspiel des Lebens doch mitagieren und (sc.fühlt) fast immer den Draht, durch welchen auch er damit zusammenhängt und in Bewegung gesetzt wird."

(Schopenhauer)<sup>526</sup>

Evidently the shadows and statues did not entirely satisfy de Chirico in his endeavour to convey the metaphysical spectrality of the human being. If one recalls his radical stance towards this issue professed in various articles one can easily understand the motive force for further research into figuration:

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<sup>526</sup>SW V, p.495.

de Chirico says, for instance, that the metaphysical must have the same penetrating power as X-rays;<sup>527</sup> that the human figure had to be rid of "anthropomorphism" and that, paradoxically, "the absence of the human in the human" needs to be presented. As demonstrated in Chapter II these statements need to be understood against the background of Schopenhauer's conception of how to arrive at the "idea": namely by ridding the subject of inquiry of any constraining subjectivity and thereby gain release into conceptual objectivity.

De Chirico's subsequent focus on the mannequins gives evidence of his attempt at a transposition of figures towards objectivity. More than the shadow, and in contrast to the statue, the mannequins are *not tied to any particular period; secondly* their bodily abstractions and blank faces not only transcend individuality but create a curious double-effect: they are both object and figure. They capture as foci the full dramatic and psychological power, and can be understood, once more, as instances of insight on the beholder's path through the labyrinth of de Chirico's metaphysical world. For Lista, certainly "the mannequin, frozen into immobility within a practically enclosed space, eliminates the last traces of carnal potency embodied in the statue, with the result that the body itself becomes a 'thing'".<sup>528</sup>

However, any discussion of de Chirico's mannequins needs to

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<sup>527</sup>There are indeed some paintings which appear to attempt a "dissective", almost medical approach to the problem such as The Span of Black Ladders (1914) and The Games of the Knowing (1917).

<sup>528</sup>Lista, op.cit, loc.cit., p.89.

distinguish between the different stages of development of these figures: in spite of a general similarity, one cannot legitimately construe de Chirico's mannequins as any one generalized type: their presence ranges from a first metamorphic emergence out of statues, to varying degrees of abstraction in 1917, to, finally, a re-merging with statue-figures in the 1920s. As the following discussion will demonstrate, these differences reflect de Chirico's ongoing struggle to express and re-present figuration as the idea of man, and, as will be demonstrated, the (metaphysical) unity of man and object, even man and the universe which is ultimately represented as the coalescing of *labyrinth and figuration*.

### 2.3.1. The Early Mannequins

The first mannequins<sup>529</sup> appear in de Chirico's work circa 1914. Soby notes: "In one painting belonging to the Apollinaire portrait group, namely *I'll be there ... The Glass Dog ...*, there appears at the right as if drawn on a blackboard, the by now familiar outline of a standing Victorian (sic.) statue. The statue is no longer presented as if it were of stone but as if it were a stuffed cloth figure with sewn seams. We are perhaps

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<sup>529</sup>The claims about the exact origin of the mannequins are controversial. Led by the arguments of R. Carrieri (Giorgio de Chirico Milan 1942) some critics strongly emphasize the mannequin's literary origins in Savinio's play La chant de la mi-mort. Soby (1955), by contrast seems dubious about this and suggests that de Chirico might have been quite simply inspired by the aspect of an artist's wooden model i.e. mannequin. Bohn ("Apollinaire and de Chirico: The Making of the Mannequins" in *Comparative Literature*, 27, no.2, (1975), p.159.), however, follows up again the Savinio inspiration and traces this back to Apollinaire's "Le Musicien de Saint-Merry".

at the beginning here of that metamorphosis from sculpture into mannequin ..."(emphasis mine).<sup>530</sup>

While the impression of stitched cloth gradually disappears there is a variety of paintings which evoke this metamorphic state: for instance The Torment of the Poet (1914) or The Journey without End (1914,Pl.27) where the figures are indeed a mix of allusion to classical statuary (compare the drapery) and of armless upper torsos which resemble the shape of a dressmaker's doll. Their blank faces, though only interrupted by black lines, are more reminiscent of the egg-shaped heads of artists' wooden models.

In The Double Dream of Spring (1915,Pl.40), however, one is introduced to the *mannequin* as a figure distinctly separate from the statue: the frock-coated statue on the left is looking into the picture space while a mannequin's head and shoulders are visible on the right: it is "peeping" around the corner of a building and seems to direct its eyeless stare directly at the beholder outside the canvas. The psychological intensity observed before in such paintings as The Enigma of a Day (1914,Pl.23) is dramatically transferred here to the mannequin, conducting its silent act of communication with the beholder.

Indeed, beyond this shift of dramatic presence to the mannequin, The Double Dream of Spring (1915,Pl.40) reveals a veritable discourse on the various artistic removes of figure representation in de Chirico: there are not only the statue and the mannequin, but likewise those shadow silhouettes of dwarfed

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<sup>530</sup>Soby (1955), p.98.

people so typical of the early period. At the same time de Chirico works here with the device of a painting (or, better, sketch) within a painting, which from the outset suggests a two-tier interpretation of reality: the geometrical focal point of the painting, is occupied by a sky-blue canvas with a sketch including various typical de Chirico elements. Beyond the delimitations of this painting within the painting, and a steeply sloping arrangement of wooden floorplanks, is another world: a blue sky, a vast sunlit space, distant hills and a shadowy building to the right. Both inside and outside the centre sketch there are the dwarfed shadow silhouettes and the statue, and other corresponding elements such as the vast square and the distant hills.

However, it is striking that although there are general similarities the sketch goes further and reorganizes the outer: the scene is superimposed with contours of architecture, iconographical elements such as the train, a cup on a pedestal, a distant temple on the hill, and the legs of a reclining Ariadne statue. It is as though this painting within the painting demonstrates the processes of reinterpretation. Only the mannequin, loitering in the "outside world" is exempt both from sketch and re-interpretation. Is it because it is already on the same level of abstraction as the elements in the sketch? Indeed there are conceptual similarities here: the mannequin is a result of a three-stage remove from reality inasmuch as it is evolved through the representation of the human figure as statue, as painted statue and finally it has become the present abstract figure. The sketch likewise depicts what is already re-presented:



namely the sunlit square in the background, not to mention the human figures in that square. In terms of the underlying metaphysical programme the mannequin and the sketch are not just works of art but abstractions of works of art and could, therefore, technically be interpreted as being even closer to the metaphysical essence. Be that as it may the present painting clearly outlines the evolutionary process involved in Metaphysical Art: the sketch and the mannequin representing a geometrical and dramatic focal points respectively and which concentrates attention on the central issue, namely the aesthetic removal from subjective perceptions.

### 2.3.2. The Head

It is interesting how the mere head of a mannequin can produce such a compellingly dramatic effect as in The Double Dream of Spring (1915, Pl.40). In spite of its blankness, which is interrupted only by lines converging in the centre of a circle, it has a powerful psychological presence. And it is exactly this featureless, egg-shaped head that becomes the focus of the mannequin presentation during 1914/1915. The Fagiolo catalogue<sup>531</sup> lists, for instance, more than half a dozen "close-ups" where totally anonymous mannequin figures are portrayed, not to mention the many pictures where the mannequin heads are just shown looming in the background or "peeping" round a corner of the metaphysical scenario to the beholder's outside reality such as in Nostalgia of the Poet (1914) or The Double Dream of Spring

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<sup>531</sup>Fagiolo (1984).

(1915,Pl.40). Indeed the use of such heads suggests that Schopenhauer's call for the dismissing of individuality has been taken to a further extreme: de Chirico does not deal here with ideal types as in the case of the statues, but he has become involved in totally obliterating the facial features in favour of mere form.

However, in lieu of identifiable facial features, the close-ups draw attention to linear adornments. The best example might be The Seer (1915) whose head is adorned with two curving lines and a small red star, like the single eye of the omniscient soothsayer. Bohn suggests here associations with the Apollinaire-inspired omniscient poet and seer from Les Chants de la mi-mort and he points out that these lines represented for Breton a scar.<sup>532</sup> Soby, by contrast, suggest they are "a single-eyed mask".<sup>533</sup> And Martin suggests that the linear bands "can be read as the overlapping bands of a horizontal eight, the infinity symbol."<sup>534</sup>

Clearly, while these lined faces, as well as the paintings where these lines are substituted by gaping holes (compare The Two Sisters 1915,Pl.46), are open to all sorts of interpretation, it cannot be denied that the faceless condition evokes both connotations of blindness and of a curious sense of clairvoyance; a spiritual "sight" (compare the discussion of insight in Chapter VI). Beyond that there is, however, the purely formal elaboration

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<sup>532</sup>Bohn, op.cit., loc.cit., p.161.

<sup>533</sup>Soby (1955).

<sup>534</sup>Martin (1978), p.349.

of these unusual facial adornments that testify to the further transposition of the metaphysical programme, the details of which will be discussed in the following.

#### 2.3.2.1. Masks and Lines

Among the mannequin "portraits" there are such paintings as The Prophet of the Wise (1915,Pl.45) and Orest and Pilade (1915) where the lines drawn across the egg-shaped heads repeat those observed in The Two Mannequins and the Rose Tower (1915,Pl.41). Instead of the circle, Oreste and Pilade (1915) is shown with two loop-like curves that cross in the centre of the "face". Likewise in The Prophet of the Wise (1915,Pl.45) two oblong outlines are crossed so as to indicate a focal point. Indeed the effect is once more that of a curious sightless stare at the beholder. The lines seem to take on an effect of a mask that mystifies the beholder as a result of its power of concealment.

However, in the "double-portrait" The Two Sisters (1915,Pl.46) the beholder is given to understand that behind the apparently masking lines there is hollowness: here only the figure looming in the background is presented with lines drawn over the face. In the foreground, by contrast, the head is adorned with a wig and the face is cut open vertically on either side of its supposed nose-line: one is reminded of two black porticoes of the kind so ubiquitously employed in de Chirico's presentation of architecture. The beholder is invited to gaze into black hollow openings that, again, paradoxically look out of the picture at the beholder. The effect is that of surprise and bewilderment. The un-masking does not reveal anything but

only appears to compound the sense of uncanny estrangement, that in turn leads further into the labyrinth of that unexplored other. Indeed, it is as though both the masking and un-masking leads to the same mystifying double effect: the recognition of the artificial, doll-like and lifeless; at the same time the masking and un-masking create an intense feeling of enigma and the uncanny, thus surely constituting intimations of the metaphysical envisaged by the artist.<sup>535</sup>

On the other hand, the question arises whether the artist's view put forward here projects the impossibility of any physical un-masking. This interpretation suggests itself given the existence of a painting which almost exactly imitates The Two Sisters (1915,Pl.46): this second painting is called The Two Masks (1916), the implication being, that even what appears to be un-masked is still a kind of mask. While this toying with different layers of masking is once more to be seen as an abstraction of the labyrinthine strategies employed by de Chirico, it is likewise consistent with the philosophical stance: only the genuinely un-masked aspect of the human being can be the "idea" of it.

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<sup>535</sup>Compare Schopenhauer: "Wir sehen einander an und verkehren miteinander - wie Masken mit Masken, wir wissen nicht, wer wir sind - aber wie Masken, die nicht einmal sich selbst kennen." Schopenhauer SW V, p.68. Compare as well the use of the mask in Hebdomeros: after having evoked "deliverance", a war-like situation seems to be resolved and people take off their masks: "Les masques qui cachaient les visages tombèrent l'un après l'autre. Hebdomeros fut vite rassuré; ces visages qu'il imaginait inquiétants au plus haut degré, avaient des expressions tranquilles et inspiraient la plus grande confiance." pp.170-171.

### 2.3.2.2. Through the Mannequins' Mind

However, apart from the mask connotations other mannequin "portraits" develop a further point that seems to be intelligible both in terms of a further transferral of the metaphysical into the visual as well as being a continuation of the labyrinthine quality the beholder is subjected to.

If, for example, in The Two Masks (1916) there are hollows in the head, the heads in The Fatal Light (1915;Pl.47) and Disquietness of Life (1915,Pl.48) are not only hollow but are open so that the beholder's main focus is narrowed to a vision through these heads: in the former work the silhouette of a train and the red brick wall can be seen; in the latter a glimpse of the sky through an open window can be caught. Indeed, it is as though the beholder is led to see literally through the mind of these mannequins and share their enigmatic introspection.

Interestingly in The Disquietness of Life (1915,Pl.48) the mannequin seems to focus its attention on a board with astronomical signs or a map of the night sky. At the same time the beholder's focus is channelled via a three-fold frame: the picture frame, the square of the window, which sharply sets off the mannequin's silhouette, and the hole in the head itself - all lead towards a glimpse of the sky beyond. A similar composition is used in the full figure painting The Philosopher and the Poet (1915,Pl.43): a mannequin is contemplating a board with astronomical signs while the beholder's attention is directed towards the glimpse of sky through the mannequin's head. Here the effect of a framed and geometrically divided focal point

is intensified in that the hollow in the mannequin's head has a grid-like character thus dividing the tiny patch of sky into small square segments, so to speak "geometricizing" it. The implication of these compositions is that the beholder and the mannequin are - conceptually speaking - viewing the same thing: the sky. Similarly Martin draws attention to The Astronomer (1915): the bust of the figure "is framed by a window, most of which like the 'windows' in his head and in his thorax opens onto the sky."<sup>536</sup> Moreover, Martin relates the sight of the "multi-windowed", neo-classical building through the window to the "multi-windowed or multi-eyed constructs of human imagination".<sup>537</sup> However, within this (labyrinthine) diversity of mental activity, there is a clear attempt to narrow the vision, to create a focus that is (paradoxically) shared by the beholder and the figure on the canvas.

Clearly, such contrived coincidence of the mental focus of the beholder and the artifice figure strongly recalls Hebdomeros: here de Chirico's narrative impels the reader to follow Hebdomeros' reveries and the direction of his contemplation; in other words, de Chirico makes the reader see things through the protagonist's mind. In both, the paintings and the novel, the beholder-reader is thus lured, Theseus-like, into a specific way of perceiving and thinking, which is orientated towards

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<sup>536</sup>Martin (1978), p.349.

<sup>537</sup>Ibid.; besides, Martin continues: "The sunlit outside is paired with the black picture of the easel within. Its night-time celestial image functions as yet another 'window', one which partly reveals the infinite and eternally incomplete charting of space and time, or creation."

metaphysical revelation. The "guided contemplation" set up in The Disquietness of Life (1915,Pl.48) and The Philosopher and the Poet (1915,Pl.43) is a case of instructing the beholder's attention by providing him with a distinctly defined focus.

However, the hollowness of the mannequin heads has further implications of a greater magnitude for de Chirico's metaphysical programme. First of all we are invited to take cognizance of the essential hollowness of the human figure, and secondly there is the suggestion that this hollowness is being filled with (aspects of) the universe (i.e. the sky) or, quite simply, the labyrinthine world de Chirico chose as the vehicle for Metaphysical Art. The human figure thus becomes a continuation of the props and vistas, it is nothing and everything at the same time and the beholder-labyrinthgänger is invited to "see" through this objectified truth.

### 2.3.3. The Process of Abstraction

Clearly the body of the mannequin undergoes changes similar to those observed with respect to the mannequin head. In the early mannequin representations the beholder is initially confronted with a state of metamorphosis, which, however, becomes ultimately recognizable as experiments with different degrees of abstraction in figure-representations. This development can be observed if one follows up the mannequin presentations from 1914 to 1917.

For instance, the two figures in The Mannequins and the Rose Tower (1915,Pl.41) appear to be arrested in a state of metamorphosis from the human being to mannequin: they have still

recognizably human legs (reminiscent of dancers or actors) which, as will be demonstrated, are not to be found in later depictions. However, their upper torsos are developed into heavy tailor's dummy-like shoulders; these heavy stumps, with the screw-like thread, clearly suggest that their erstwhile arms have been unscrewed (compare as well the drawing The Return 1917 where these threads are particularly obvious in the mannequin on the right). The figures are supported at their backs by what looks like a scaffolding of wood and wire construction. In spite of these clearly artificial, mechanical assemblages the postures of the two mannequins towards each other in the drawing The Duo (1915) - as well as other mannequins of that period such as the seated mannequin in The Seer (1915) - are very expressive in a human sense: the former successfully connoting communication if not affection and the latter a pensive meditative pose.

Yet, in The Twisted Thinker (1915, Pl.44) and the drawing The Philosopher and the Poet (1916) the mannequin bodies are already more visibly mechanical: the drawing shows the different parts that constitute the upper torso and the painting suggests an assemblage of armour-like elements which allow glimpses of a spiral interior and give an intimation generally of a mechanical hollowness.

This move towards an expressedly mechanical abstraction is taken up in a more defined manner around 1917. Here the style of the mannequin is more elegantly marionette-like whereby all suggestions of bodily assemblage are confined to what appear to be wooden elements. In The Troubadour (1917), for instance, the lower trunk and the chest seem to consist of wooden triangles



or set-squares and the joints between thigh and lower leg are identifiably mechanically assembled. Even more marked is this change in Hector and Andromache (1917,Pl.55) where the two figures convey the impression of an assemblage of wooden geometrical elements held together with a scaffolding in the back. The beholder is invited to inspect the parts such as set-squares or wooden triangles, club-shaped legs, stick-like planks and other geometrical bodies such as the conically shaped shoulder parts of the two creatures.

In the drawing Two Persons in a Square (1917,Pl.56a) the mechanical bric-à-brac assemblage is perhaps most impressively brought out: the two figures command the beholder's entire attention due to the dramatic jutting of angles and planes, which by this time supersede the perspectival grip of their mediterranean environment. The bodies presented here are strongly reminiscent of the bric-à-brac cluttering the Metaphysical Interiors and continue the labyrinthine confusion and dissolution in these rooms. In the case of the mannequin on the right, only the use of an oval or round upper part and the vague suggestion of body and legs seem to anthropomorphize the objects here and make it distinguishable from the Metaphysical Interiors. As Lista puts it, the mannequin is " ... a metaphor for the human body which is to say, the means of attaining "the thing" that is referred to as human. Having been the enigmatic shadow of an invisible presence, the spectral image of a statue, Man now, finally achieves the status of a thing".<sup>538</sup> The implication is of

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<sup>538</sup>Lista, op.cit, loc.cit., p.89.

course one of vital import for Metaphysical Art: the idea of presenting the human being in an "objectified" state has been accomplished and made accessible to the beholder, even the uninspired one, by a literal translation: the simple equation of object and human being is made tangible via the use of "reine geometrische Formen" (Schopenhauer).

Another effect of this geometrisation/objectivisation is, of course, the more acute association of the figure and the environment. As Hocke, for example, suggests with respect to Hector and Andromache (1917,Pl.55), they are "eine Geometrisierung der beliebten Maler-Gliederpuppen ... nicht nur damit man weiß, worum es sich handelt, sondern damit das Innere und Äußere relativiert wird."<sup>539</sup> (emphasis mine). And Martin observes: "De Chirico's metal skeletons seem to have transcended death; they have become invulnerable configurations of man-devised geometry and order, which in past epochs transformed untamed nature into the planned architectural spaces that they inhabit."<sup>540</sup> Clearly the relativisation of the inner and outer as a means to blur the conceptual lines of the phenomenal has already been observed with respect to the Metaphysical Interiors. In the case of the mannequin it is as though the geometricization of both the inner and the outer indicates a resolving of the human into the eternal idea of the human.

In addition to this conceptual puzzle though, de Chirico further highlights his mannequin mainly through a mystifying

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<sup>539</sup>Hocke (1957), p.118.

<sup>540</sup>Martin (1978), p.349.

theatricality, the discussion of which follows.

#### 2.3.4. The Locus Illuminatus

While all mannequin types discussed so far can be shown to be at varying stages of development towards abstraction there is one further feature which is common to all: the latent sense of theatricality characterizing their representations on canvas. As has already been found generally de Chirico's object and figure presentation come across as intermittent foci of a journey through an urban labyrinth or flight from a crowded room. While this focus on objects and figures often creates dramatic tensions which might be read in terms of the theatrical quality of a silent play (see the discussion of The Song of Love (1914,Pl.35) in Chapter V.1.3.), it is with respect to the figures that de Chirico exploits this effect more consciously.

In some cases, for instance, de Chirico's habitual use of the urban or room environment is adapted in a distinctly theatrical manner. There is the painting The Mannequins and the Rose Tower (1915,Pl.41) where two mannequins are placed in theatrical pose in a vast space, the theatricality of which (despite the presence of the urban iconography) is conveyed by the depiction of floorboards reminiscent of wooden stage constructions (compare the wooden boards in conjunction with deep spatial expanses in The Seer (1915), The Disquieting Muses (1918,Pl.59) and Hector and Andromache (1917,Pl.55)). An over-decorative flower arrangement on the left underlines the general impression of something being staged. Moreover the glaring light from sources on the right produces the effect of the figures being exposed to theatrical spotlights.

Within such a theatrical setting the two mannequins in The Mannequins and the Rose Tower (1915,Pl.41) are carefully positioned: they are virtually performing in the centre of the stage and their posture, the turning towards each other, is set up so as to convey to the "audience" the maximum view of their actions. The same can be observed in the case of Hector and Andromache (1917,Pl.55): the two mannequins are turning towards each other with a dancer-like grace. Although they appear to be almost embracing (an armless embrace) the bodies remain half-turned towards the beholder/audience. In the 1923 version of Hector and Andromache (Pl.74) the sense of performance and theatricality is heightened by the additional use of a curtain on either side of the apparently affectionately involved couple.<sup>541</sup>

Questions arise as to whether these theatrical arrangements contribute to de Chirico's metaphysical programme; do they not digress from the implied labyrinthine quality of his work?

In answer to the first question, it is possible to follow Poli<sup>542</sup> who suggests that it is indeed Schopenhauer who provided the basis for the inclusion of theatricality. He refers to the following statement by the philosopher: "Ist die ganze Welt als Vorstellung nur die Sichtbarkeit des Willens, so ist die Kunst die Verdeutlichung dieser Sichtbarkeit, die Camera Oscura, welche die Gegenstände reiner zeigt und besser zusammenfassen läßt, das

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<sup>541</sup>Compare the use of the curtain in the 1925 picture The Poet and his Muse (Pl.82) where a curtain is drawn back at the right hand side; likewise in the two self-portraits discussed in Chapter V.2.2.: in both cases a curtain is a vital prop.

<sup>542</sup>Poli (1989), p.85.

Schauspiel im Schauspiel, die Bühne auf der Bühne im Hamlet".<sup>543</sup>

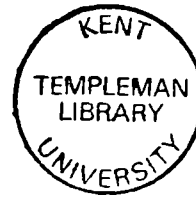
In other words the stage in the Schopenhauerian sense has a similar function as any artistic presentation such as painting and sculpture, namely a rendering of a world detached from the immediate restrictions of those conceptual constraints informing the empirical world. Thus, similar to the statue in the painting, the stage in the painting has a function of a further aesthetic filter through which reality is transmitted.

However, de Chirico's employment of the theatrical, of mannequins posing on a stage, needs to be seen in terms of a further aspect. Although in many cases no names are given to the mannequin characters or statues, there are such titles as Hector and Andromache (1917) or Orest and Pylade (1915) (compare as well The Disquieting Muses (1918) to be discussed in the following section) which suggest the re-enactment of a scene from Classical Greek myth and legend. In the case of Hector and Andromache (1917) the title refers to the myth of the ancient hero Hector who leaves for the final and fatal defence of Troy. De Chirico isolates from the story the scene of Hector's farewell to his wife Andromache.

Interestingly Schopenhauer claims that myth contains truth, abstract truth, among other things, about the "idea" of the human being. However, given that most people are unable to think in abstract terms Schopenhauer concludes, that one is in need "eines mythischen Vehikels ... gleichsam eines Gefäßes, ohne welches

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<sup>543</sup>SW I, p.372.



jene sich verlieren ... würden."<sup>544</sup> If myth is expressive of (metaphysical) truth and abstract concepts it is of course a further means to convey the metaphysical even to the mind that cannot deal with abstractions. Thus, in a re-enactment of mythical scenes, de Chirico might intend to bring "die Idee der Menschheit selbst ... zu deutlicher und tiefer Erkenntnis..."<sup>545</sup> Indeed, de Chirico "re-enacts" on canvas established mythical scenes yet by distilling their mystical significance and pairing it with his supra-individual figures he takes it away from any one specific doctrine or system (compare the discussion of symbols in Chapter V.1.4.) In turn, many of his paintings are not marked with any specific reference to a particular myth or legend. Yet, the nameless figure, the poet, the seer the archeologist etc. are raised to the same level of mythical solemnity as Hector and Andromache (1917,Pl.55). They are idealized immortalized, universalized and thus made into what André Breton called "a modern myth".<sup>546</sup>

However, it is impossible to read the theatrical mode used for the conveyance of the metaphysical without considering the likely influence of Nietzsche here, too. The frequently noted proximity between de Chirico's theatricality and the Nietzschean

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<sup>544</sup>SW II, p.805-807.

<sup>545</sup>SW V, p.492.

<sup>546</sup>And it is indeed to myth and legend that de Chirico will turn permanently in the later part of the 1920s: the myth of the Roman gladiator, the story of Jason and the Argonauts will take over and render the formal concerns unnecessary: the ideal classical form and the mythical envelop sufficiently for the incantation of the metaphysical.

development is based on the latter's association of metaphysics and Greek tragedy in his first major, Schopenhauer-inspired, work Die Geburt der Tragödie.<sup>547</sup> Nietzsche's description of the climactic event in Greek tragedy involving spectators and the appearance of a masked actor on the stage appears to be emulated in de Chirico's staging of mannequins.

Nietzsche says: "Unwillkürlich übertrug er das ganze magische, vor seiner Seele zitternde Bild des Gottes auf jene maskierte Gestalt und löste ihre Realität gleichsam in eine geisterhafte Unwirklichkeit auf."<sup>548</sup> In other words, the artistic presentation of the actor sets free a faculty in the audience with the effect that reality becomes spectre-like, and so the stage becomes the location where insight is possible. In analogy de Chirico's mute mannequin actors appear to be set up to instil in the beholder visions of metaphysical spectrality.

It is interesting, too, that the Schopenhauer postulate of effaced individuality, developed by de Chirico in his faceless mannequins, is taken up by Nietzsche and put firmly into the context of Classical drama: "Daß hinter allen diesen Menschen eine Gottheit sitzt, das ist der wesentliche Grund für die typische "Idealität" jener berühmten Figuren ... Griechen konnten

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<sup>547</sup>Compare Martin in Rubin ed. (1978), p.81, about theatricality in de Chirico: "... not just stage sets, but the reinvestment of painting with its original theatrical forces (not mere illusionism) ... transcendent forces of drama and tragedy in the Nietzschean sense..." Likewise Poli (1989) on de Chirico, and the scenographers, Appia and Craig, against the background of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche.

<sup>548</sup>Nietzsche 'Die Geburt der Tragödie' in NW vol.1, p.23.

Überhaupt keine Individuen auf der Bühne ertragen".<sup>549</sup>

Thus while de Chirico does not appear to go much further here in the Nietzschean doctrine,<sup>550</sup> it is possible to say that the use of the stage as "locus illuminatus" might have developed from a joint Schopenhauer and Nietzsche background. What matters at this point is that the stage is not merely an aesthetic variation of spatial illusionism but is to be read as crucially contributing to de Chirico's metaphysical programme.

However, while the stage acquires this clearly important function it does not invalidate the claim for an underlying labyrinthine organisation to de Chirico's work. In many "stage" paintings the props of the urban labyrinth are included as, for instance, in The Mannequins and the Rose Tower (1915,Pl.41) or Hector and Andromache (1917,Pl.55).<sup>551</sup> Thus it appears that the

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<sup>549</sup>Ibid., pp.106-107.

<sup>550</sup>There are arguments that contradict the assertion that de Chirico's theatricality was mainly derived from Nietzsche as, for instance, Martin in Rubin ed. (1978) maintains. First of all de Chirico almost entirely ignores the two protagonist forces Apollo and Dionysus that are key to the Nietzschean conception of Greek drama. Secondly de Chirico shows himself partial to the classical tragic poet Euripides: he depicts him variously, at times even including him in a self-portrait such as Self-Portrait with Bust of Euripides (1923,Pl.76). Yet it is precisely Euripides against whom Nietzsche launches a variety of attacks such as that he betrayed the most fundamental principles of Greek tragedy, that he introduces rationalistic principles etc. Most importantly Nietzsche criticises Euripides for having driven Dionysus, the genius of music, from the stage to rebuild the drama in the Apollonian form of a dramatized epic. Apollonian rationality, clarity and lucidity replace the mystifying depth of early tragedy. By identifying with Euripides de Chirico clearly adopts an adverse (Apollonian) position to the Nietzschean view, probably inspired by Schopenhauer's tempering ideas of balancing intelligent rationality and creative intuition.

<sup>551</sup>Compare as well The Song of Love (1914,Pl.35) and Battle of the Amazons (1927), the artificial "stage-light" in The Playthings of a Prince (1914), The Seer (1915) and Hermetic Melancholy (1919,Pl.62); the theatre curtain in The Philosopher (1923) or



stage, like the isolating square, or the room, is yet another focal point suspended in the labyrinthine concatenations of outer pathway and constructions.

An example of the interpenetration of an overall labyrinthine organisation and the stage as locus illuminatus, a place set apart for revelation, can be found in Hebdomeros:<sup>552</sup> the series of observations and small episodic narratives lead to an episode where a "tableau vivant" is staged; through this theatrical scene the protagonist is grasped by a sudden awareness: a flash of insight that clearly marks the turning point of his development. It is from there that the novel winds down to "the end of the metaphysical cycle", to the final absorption into the metaphysical sphere. Thus the labyrinthine path and the stage as a point of revelation are not mutually exclusive. As Schopenhauer puts it: "Wir tappen ... im Labyrinth unseres Lebensweges und im Dunkel unserer Forschung umher: helle Augenblicke erleuchten dabei wie Blitze unseren Weg."<sup>553</sup>

#### 2.3.5. The Synthesis

While the mannequin's abstraction and theatricality appear to eclipse for some time the statue figure representation in de Chirico's work, a reconciliation of these different approaches to the objectified figure presentation emerges in such paintings as The Disquieting Muses (1918,Pl.59) and The Prodigal Son

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in Self-Portrait (1924).

<sup>552</sup>Compare Hebdomeros, p.188.

<sup>553</sup>SW II, p.179.

(1922,Pl.72). According to Poli notably the latter, which was executed in a whole series,<sup>554</sup> "chiude idealmente il ciclo dei machini degli anni Dieci, con una chiara immagine programmatica."<sup>555</sup> Indeed, the embrace of two different aesthetic figure conceptions is impressively visualized. Unlike the sharp differentiation of statue and mannequin (and the dramatic emphasis on the latter) in The Double Dream of Spring (1915,Pl.40), mannequin and statue here share the dramatic attention of the picture-space: the mannequin son embraces the frock-coated father-statue in a grand theatrical gesture. The abstracted figure and the stone monument (having apparently just left the pedestal on the right) thus meet in a cathartic moment of heightened drama.<sup>556</sup>

The first indication of a merging between statuary and mannequin is the painting The Disquieting Muses (1918,Pl.59). Here three figures dominate a space once more both distinctly urban and distinctly theatrical: the ground, with the, by now,

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<sup>554</sup>Compare The Return of the Prodigal Son (1919,Pl.61), (1924) and (1926).

<sup>555</sup>Poli (1989), p.112.

<sup>556</sup>The question arises whether this re-enactment of the parable of the humble return of the prodigal son reflects the painter's own "humble" return to more conventional forms. Is this indeed an abdication of the independent mannequin in favour of the less abstract? Poli (1989) claims: "l'abbraccia fra il manichino metafisico e il marmoreo signore ottocentesco nostalgico è l'incontro nostalgico fra il presente e passato ... è l'annuncio di una volontà di ritorno all'ordine, nelle braccia della tradizione classica ..." (p.112). Without doubt The Prodigal Son series is clearly a conceptual return. Yet, on the evidence of contemporary paintings and, indeed, some earlier work it signals a return which is pregnant with compromise, or, better, synthesis.

typical floorboards, is slightly tilted so that the beholder gains the impression that the floor and urban props in the background belong to different spatial universes.

Common to the three "performers" here is the fact that their bodies are recognizably statuesque: the whitish-grey hues suggestive of stone or marble, the long flowing costumes, leaving a shoulder bare in the figure on the left, are once again reminiscent of classical Greek statuary. However, the heads of the three "muses" digress from the overall statuesque: the figures in the foreground and in the far background are adorned with heads shaped like punchballs and thus reminiscent of the blank eggheads of the mannequin. The figure in the middle has only a stump, more in keeping with the wooden necks of tailors' dummies. Its head, recognisably akin to the mannequin-type (note the black lines drawn across the face) is positioned tidily on the floor.

And yet in spite of their curiously reductive and assembled physique these three figures, more than any of the foregoing, do not seem to be in a state of metamorphosis; their inert presences suggest completeness. Here the painter has arrived at a synthesis that clearly serves the requirements of his metaphysical programme: the suggestion of Greek beauty and Greek notions of the ideal<sup>557</sup> in general, the more specific incantation of the myth

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<sup>557</sup>Compare again Schopenhauer: "Dieser griechischen Nation ganz allein verdanken wir die richtige Auffassung und naturgemäße Darstellung der menschlichen Gestalt und Gebärde... dieses kleine auserwählt Volk der Musen und Grazien war... mit einem Instinkt der Schönheit ausgestattet. Dieser erstreckte sich ... auf Gesichter und Gestalten, Stellungen, Gewänder." (SW V, p.477). Schopenhauer goes on to reiterate that the ancients will therefore always remain the guiding star of all the arts.

of the muses (who, it needs to be noted, traditionally oversee creative and intellectual pursuits) plus the enigmatic estrangement of the mannequin's face and headless condition, and the suggestion of hollow penetrability. In other words a synthesis is achieved of timeless ideal and modern objectified figure representation resulting in a novel figuration that comes across as a veritable "modern mythology". Indeed the silent, yet curiously communicative tension that seems to unite the figures, complements the conceptual synthesis: the figures come across as somehow "alert" or "ready" waiting for something beyond the reach of the beholder. But their patient watch suggests that they have the knowledge, that they know what is impending, that, exemplifying de Chirico's words, "something is about to enter the rectangle of the canvas" (emphasis mine). As a kind of modern agents of truth they are thus quite rightly given the attribute "disquieting" here.

However, the specifically metaphysical magnitude of this painting can be taken even further if one scrutinizes the seated figure in the middle in greater detail. Not only does it, despite the headless condition, exude the compelling power of a heavy earth mother figure, but a closer inspection reveals that her arms are neatly folded over a hole in her stomach. Clearly the use of holes has been discussed with respect to mannequin heads, as an indicator of their essential artificiality or of an unexplored other in the inner. In the present case the mannequin appears to have the contemplative, protective inertness of a

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pregnant woman who is nurturing life in her womb. Here however, it is not the physical life guarded but the metaphysical other, the immanent other which is hidden from the eyes of the ordinary man but nurtured by creative forces, the muse.

Incidentally it is precisely this attention drawn to the interior of the disquieting muse that appears to pre-figure the development of important characteristics in a type of figure in the twenties where the above interpretation appears to be confirmed. Already as far as the general shape is concerned there are many similarities between the seated figure in The Disquieting Muses (1918,Pl.59) and the heavy, mostly seated figures in such paintings as The Painter (1927), The Archaeologists (1927,Pl.89), The Reading (1926,Pl.84) and The Painter's Family (1926,Pl.85). The one most crucial difference is that these later mannequins are equipped with the typical mannequin head; they appear to almost burst the delimitations of the canvas. Indeed, the surrounding room becomes unimportant: it is not the vast expanse or the stage-like space that is important, but a sense of confinement. They are resting heavily in tiny armchairs or resting on the floor. The strong arms are too long for a body which is cloaked in a classical costume (compare Pl.89).

However, what is undeniably of supreme importance here is that where there is a hole in the stomach of the "disquieting muse", the 1920's mannequins have geometrical objects, architecture or parts of landscapes in their laps or open stomachs. In other words "... the mannequins are 'containers' of the evocative ... an accumulation beyond normal logic of the most

varied fragments of mythical and cultural memory".<sup>558</sup> Indeed, it looks as though what was hidden in The Disquieting Muses (1918,Pl.59) emerges here as elements which hitherto created the "outer world", cultural artefacts which invest these figures, in Baldacci's view, "with a sense of 'what always is'".<sup>559</sup>

In a puzzling process of inversion de Chirico places the parts of his architectural labyrinth within the figure, thus exploiting the analogy between the labyrinth structure and the notion of the concatenations of the human intestines.<sup>560</sup> Man and labyrinth are here, it seems, inextricably linked in a paradoxical union. This exploitation of the labyrinthine organisational/structural analogy is doubtlessly of considerable significance: the basic formal coincidence apart (labyrinth/intestine), there is the suggestion that conceptual distinctions between man and environment and subject and object are null and void, that man as microcosm reflects the macrocosmic fabric of the universe.

Indeed, in Schopenhauerian terms, this structural kinship is of course only a manifestation that, after the abolition of conceptual constraints, man is both object in the world as well

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<sup>558</sup>Pi Carlo/Ferrari eds. Giorgio de Chirico 1920-1950 (1990), p.62.

<sup>559</sup>Baldacci in Braun ed. (1989), p.68.

<sup>560</sup>Compare Schmeling (1987), pp.69-70. Schmeling demonstrates that the "archetypal mystery" of the enclosed space is often exemplified in evocations of labyrinthine caves, stomachs, intestines or subterranean constructions. This can be observed throughout the tradition of the labyrinth reception, from ancient mythologies (Hades), Christian myths (Dante's "Inferno"), Romantic views of the world (Novalis's "Ofterdingen"), to modern idea of alienation (Kafka's "Der Bau"), psychoanalysis (Freud, Jung, Eliade) and semiotics (Umberto Eco).

as subject containing the entire range of representation. The quality ("das Wesen") of the macrocosmic world is to be recognized in the microcosmic man since both are bound to the same all-governing will:" Diese Welt ist zugleich durch Wille und Vorstellung. Objekt und Subjekt sind relativ, nach Aufhebung des Satz des Grundes bleibt nur der Wille, denn das eigentliche Ding an sich ist übrig." Hence for Schopenhauer man is both, reflecting the essential quality of the world as well as being within the world of representation: "Jeder findet sich selbst als diesen Willen in welchem das innere Wesen der Welt besteht, so wie er sich auch als das erkennende Subjekt findet, dessen Vorstellung die ganze Welt ist. Jeder ist also in diesem doppelten Betracht die ganze Welt selbst, der Mikrokosmos, findet beide Seiten desselben ganz und vollständig in sich selbst."<sup>561</sup> (emphasis mine).

In brief the monumental architecture-sculpture hybrids as introduced in such paintings as The Archaeologists (1927,Pl.89) and The Reading (1926,Pl.84) constitute the logical conclusion of de Chirico's long-standing development of the metaphysical and figuration. Here the objectified figure is not merely sculpture or marionette but, in a triumphant monumentalism, the idea of human spectrality is translated through the interpenetration of man and the product of his culture, which is no more than an

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<sup>561</sup>SW V, pp.237-238; Schopenhauer concludes this observation, by pointing out that man and the world echo each other through the link with will and representation: "Und was er (der Mensch) so als sein eigenes Wesen erkennt, dasselbe erschöpft auch das Wesen der ganzen Welt, des Makrokosmos ... auch sie ist ... wie er selbst durch und durch Wille und durch und durch Vorstellung und nichts weiter bleibt übrig."

artifice maze. Evidently Ariadne's thread leads into the human being itself.

#### 2.3.6. Apotheoses

The foregoing section demonstrated that there is a development in de Chirico's figuration which ultimately leads to a reversal of inner and outer, of labyrinth and man, and synthesizes both in a monumental manner in a kind of hyper-objectivisation of the human being. Indeed the dummies discussed before seem to constitute a terminus of the development of a concept which he then puts next to other more traditional explorations of the human figure, such as the depiction of classical heroes or gladiators. In this de Chirico claims he does not divert from the metaphysical. And these moves are indeed cogent, if one considers that he resorts here exclusively to the established formula of classical beauty and subject-matter. The literal translation of "objectivisation" appears to subside.

However, what matters for this last section is that de Chirico very consciously highlighted his results in a few paintings that more than in any others appear to invite the beholder to an appreciation of his metaphysical programme. Examples range here from the powerful paintings The Grand Metaphysician (1917, Pl.56 and 1925) to the various depictions of "trophies" and The Painter's Family in 1926 (Pl.85) or the painting The Apotheosis in 1928 (Pl.91).

These paintings distinguish themselves from those previously discussed in that they consciously set up monumental effigy-like configurations that are suggestive of celebration or worship. In



fact the compositions in conjunction with their titles emphasize the arrival at an important insight and apotheosis (The Grand Metaphysician, Apotheosis) or a victory (Trophy). This leads to questions: did de Chirico try to create various points of destination in the beholder's journey through the pictorial labyrinths? Is one confronted here with the key to the labyrinthine quest?

To answer such questions one may look once more into Hebdomeros, where one of these "apotheotic" scenes induces the winding down of the hero's frenetic quest: the presentation of a tableau vivant by a group of gladiators suddenly makes him "understand".<sup>562</sup> Undoubtedly this insight leads the protagonist to decide to wait for the end of the "metaphysical cycle" at the end of which he appears to enter permanently the metaphysical other. Thus the novel points to the fact that there are, indeed, specific "scenes" or sights which offer themselves more forcefully than others to the experience of the metaphysical revelation.

Interestingly this scene enters the picture world in the 1928 painting The Apotheosis (Pl.91). Far from the conceptual finesse displayed in previous figure presentations, the beholder is here confronted with a rather simplistic and almost cartoon-like idealized group of warriors who, in spite of the faint indication of a distant horizon, appear to be frozen in a paradoxically spaceless environment. Their naked bodies, curls

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<sup>562</sup>Hebdomeros pp.188-189: "Le soir ... il assista au spectacle et *comprit tout*. L'énigme de cet ineffable groupe de guerriers ... qui formaient dans un coin du salon un bloc polychrome et immobile ... ne fut au fond compris que de lui seul ..."

and loincloths, as well the head of a horse and shields, inject the idea of the classical past, of heroes and gladiators which lift them into the sphere of timelessness and immortality.

However, what appears to be of importance is that the composition of the group is so rigid and condensed that the figures appear to form a block of wrestling limbs resembling battle scenes represented in stone in war memorials. Or, they recall the "bloc polychrome et immobile"<sup>563</sup> of that tableau vivant that induced Hebdomeros' insight. It is here that the human figure is not presented in terms of an assemblage of objects, but the objectivisation of the human is achieved by absorbing classical warriors in a monumental block that does not admit any individuality.

While the picture forms part of the attempt to focus on the human form, and to distil and condense it visually, it begs the question if this scene, so greatly emphasized through Hebdomeros and the grand title "apotheosis", meets (compared to other de Chirico canvases) the metaphysically high stakes. Together with the pictures of "trophies" (see the discussion in Chapter V.1.5.) where objects such as gladiatorial helmets, antique horses, heads of sculpture torsis, geometrical elements and hands raised in the victory sign are combined in a block-like bricolage, these paintings clearly constitute the attempt to present monuments to "what always is" (Baldacci). However, it is difficult to view them in terms of a triumphant conclusion to the previous work; arguably the mystical dimension so far consistently and

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<sup>563</sup>Ibid., p.189.

powerfully present in the Metaphysical Paintings, is overtaken by a sense of the over-explicit and the banal.

Visually of a far greater impact than the previous two examples, are the two versions of The Grand Metaphysician (1917,Pl.56 and 1925) and the painting The Painter's Family (1926,Pl.85). Both are more in tune with a sense of destination in the pictorial development of "objectified figuration" discussed in the foregoing sections.

The first version of The Grand Metaphysician (1917,Pl.56) is clearly a most compelling conclusion to de Chirico's journey through shadow-figures, statues, mannequins and marionettes: against the background of a vast square with typical Chiricoesque neo-classical architecture, the picture foreground is dominated by an effigy-like figure. Its base is made of geometrical elements, rulers, set-squares and other angular, seemingly wooden bric-à-brac, resembling the elements used in the Hector and Andromache (e.g. 1917,Pl.55/1923) paintings. These geometrical elements are joined in a kind of slender totemic sculpture-bricolage that is topped by the sculptured head and shoulders reminiscent of a plain marble statue. The unresolved tension between the soberly mechanistic and basic geometry of the objects and the sculpture-part imbues the figure with an aura of enigma and estrangement. This impression is supported in that the head is turned away from the beholder into the picture-space, thus eluding once again any inquiry into individuality. Moreover, in contrast to all other de Chirico figures encountered so far, the size of this figure clearly dwarfs, if not commands, its entire environment, architectural props included. Its grandeur appears

to reach the impact of the tower in Nostalgia of the Infinite (1913,Pl.14): the beholder is put into a humbling position in the face of the sublime grandeur displayed. Besides, the mere shadow of the "Grand Metaphysician" appears not only to dwarf but even to extinguish the sunlight on the building on the left, plunging it into a phantasmal shadow presence.

In brief, the overall impression is that of an extreme version of the pared down, objectified figure concept so startlingly present in de Chirico's early years. Beyond that the figure has a unique command, almost like a figure set up for worship. It is as though de Chirico intended to inject into the figure the sense of the shamanizing power of the metaphysician. The beholder has arrived at the medium through which he can get access to the metaphysical other: the artist genius, who has insight and the power of mediating this insight via his art.<sup>564</sup> The Grand Metaphysician (1917,Pl.56) is thus rightly both a work of art made of the basic geometrical elements that the artist needs for the creation of his world; and he is at the same time shaman, the person endowed with special powers and who transcends the limitations of the ordinary human being. He is both the object and subject of contemplation; the (artistic) world is in him and he is part of the world.

This impression is strongly confirmed in the drawing The Grand Metaphysician (1918).<sup>565</sup> On the right sits, as though on a

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<sup>564</sup>Compare Baldacci in Braun ed.(1989) who suggests that "the Grand Metaphysician" is to be compared with a totem, "... a kind of human tower of Babel ..." who "... denotes the composite knowledge of the new artist ..." (p.67).

<sup>565</sup>Compare the small reproduction in Fagiolo (1984), p.102.

throne-like elevation, a headless figure. This figure is so grand that it reveals the dimensions of its environment: high buildings that are by comparison toy-like, tiny ant-like human beings - and all this in the confines of a room. However, most importantly, the figure clearly consists of geometrical bric-à-brac, perhaps artists' tools, perhaps even the basic elements with which the overall picture is composed (compare the similarity between the elements of the body and the floorboards). And yet this state of artistic disembodiment does not lessen the commanding power exuded by the figure, although unlike the painted metaphysician it does not veer into occult adoration and worship.

Clearly the painted Grand Metaphysician is an apotheosis of de Chirico's metaphysical programme. It is complemented in later years by the visually less compelling, but conceptually no less important picture The Painter's Family (1926, Pl.85) which appears to put the idea of the metaphysical into a broader framework than the The Grand Metaphysician pictures do.

Forming part of the monumental mannequin-sculpture hybrids of the 1920s, The Painter's Family (1926, Pl.85) stands out primarily in that it is presented in the Christian iconography of the Holy Family: as in the depictions of Mary, Joseph and the Christ-child, the beholder is confronted with two seated "adult" mannequin-architecture hybrids, whereby the smaller, evidently female one, is holding a hybrid child. Like the parental figures, the child bears architectural relics in the region of its stomach.

In the background a painter's tools, a canvas on an easel

(showing the sketch of a mannequin) and a maulstick, complete the scene. It is as though the artistic studio-like environment is meant to create that sanctum which in Christian iconography is supplied by the humble stable.

The message conveyed here is one of almost coquettish self-adulation: the artistic activity as such is raised to a level of sacrality while the artist's figures are clearly the bearers of a messiah-like power. This power lies with a child which is both human figure and architecture, subject and object.

As distinct from The Grand Metaphysician (1917,Pl.56/1925) paintings, The Painter's Family (1926,Pl.85) this painting is more self-consciously tied to the heritage of occidental culture by the synthesis with Christian iconography. This divide manifests itself also in that the bric-à-brac in the mannequins' laps or stomachs is not merely geometrical but architectural. Thus more strongly than in The Grand Metaphysician (1917,Pl.56) there are attempts to universalize the inhering features of the artist: not only the comparatively narrow world of his tools and Euclidean geometry, but the entire cultural heritage, the man-made fabric of the surrounding world is included here. And the message is clear: the beholder is still watching from within the labyrinthine worlds of man-made constraints, while the figures have digested, internalized their position in the world: they are the world, and the world is in them.

### 3. Conclusion

In conclusion it is possible to say that de Chirico's figures are instances of a very conscious objectivisation

process, once again a strategy of removal from empirical reality. Against the background of the Schopenhauerian philosophy as outlined in Chapter II. they can be read in terms of the attempt to reach the essence, the metaphysical core of the human. Indeed in the various figure interpretations one does not only distinguish different Schopenhauer-inspired attempts to bring the metaphysical potential of the human figure to the fore, but, likewise, the manner of visual dramatisation of the metaphysical revelation in the human figure gives evidence of the artist's continual shaping and development of the philosophical dimension that informs his work.

Most remarkable in the evolution of the figures in de Chirico is that from focusing these figures within the urban labyrinth as statues and shadows there is a gradual telescoping of the geometricized object world into the figure presentation. After an interlude of embracing mannequins and statues - representative of two orders of objectivisation - and finally their synthesis, de Chirico's figures start to bear the focus within them: the elements that before constituted the props of their environment, such as architecture or simple geometrical shapes, are now inside them: the outside labyrinth has become the labyrinth of the human intestines. This "digestion" of culture appears to symbolize the centrality of man in relationship to the world: man is the microcosm in whom all (cultural) aspects are not only present, but shape the metaphysical essence of his being.

## Chapter VI. The Genius

As was mentioned in the discussion of the theoretical background, it is for Schopenhauer only the genius who is capable of intuiting the metaphysical other and of conveying it through his art to others.

In the following section it will be demonstrated that de Chirico's Metaphysical Art not only corresponds to the subversion of established notions of time, space and causality and thus invites the beholder to explore the metaphysical in the contemplation of his art, but implicates the presence of the genius and the aspects of insight linked to him. It will be shown that in the transferral of the genius concept to canvas, Daedalus, the archetypal artificer, is not so much present as a "maker" or craftsman, i.e. in his capacity of the execution of paintings, but rather, in a typical inversion of the mythical fabric, as a Theseus-like figure on a quest for the ultimate metaphysical experience. Arguably, however, the de Chirico self-portraits re-constitute the painter as an amalgam of Daedalus, Theseus and Labyrinthgänger, in short de Chirico as the artist genius. Before examining this hypothesis it will be necessary to explore the nature of the artist genius as presented by Schopenhauer and de Chirico.

### 1. General Characteristics of the Artist Genius

If one approaches de Chirico's view of the genius through his theoretical writings, one obtains primarily a generalized sense of his superiority; that mixture of extraordinary intelligence and sensitivity. This condition, in turn, is clearly



understood to isolate him from other people. He suggests, for instance, that in contrast to "l'uomo imbecile, cioè l'ametafisico",<sup>566</sup> the metaphysician, that is the "artiste créateur",<sup>567</sup> the "genio",<sup>568</sup> the "mago" or "alchimista",<sup>569</sup> constantly discovers new aspects and spectres and thus finds himself in touch with the "estetica metafisica".<sup>570</sup> These truly creative minds, he asserts, have great "sensitivity" and "peuvent sentir des choses inconnues, auxquelles la vue d'une personne ou d'une chose ne fait pas l'impression qu'elle fait en général".<sup>571</sup>

Such a powerfully elitist stance towards the inspired mind is characteristic of Schopenhauer. He remarks, for instance, that the most excellent works of every art form, the noble products of genius, must always remain a closed book to the dull majority of mankind.<sup>572</sup>

The elitism pervading Schopenhauer's views seems, in turn, to be exemplified by the protagonist of de Chirico's novel Hebdomeros: Hebdomeros is surrounded by "dull" crowds, that - in spite of trying very hard - never "understand".<sup>573</sup> Or the

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<sup>566</sup>Ibid., "Estetica metafisica" (1919), p.87.

<sup>567</sup>Ibid., "Testi teorici e lirici" (1911-1915), p.19.

<sup>568</sup>Ibid., "Noi metafisici" (1919), p.69.

<sup>569</sup>Ibid., "Augusto Renoir" (1919), p.150.

<sup>570</sup>Ibid., "Estetica metafisica" (1919), p.87.

<sup>571</sup>Ibid., "Testi teorici e lirici" (1911-1915), p.19.

<sup>572</sup>Compare, for instance, Schopenhauer's distinction between the genius and the ordinary mortal, by calling the latter pejoratively: "die Fabrikware der Natur" (SW I, p.268).

<sup>573</sup>Compare, for instance, the introduction of Hebdomeros and his friends, in particular pp.13-14: Hebdomeros fears any deep discussions with his friends since he is put off by their

protagonist more generally accuses mankind of being trapped by "ces lois stupides que l'incompréhension humaine a créées à travers les siècles" (emphasis mine).<sup>574</sup> Adopting an attitude typical of Schopenhauer's notion of the world of appearance being a kind of "muddied cognition", he chastises "des faux mouvements que l'humanité, depuis son enfance, a coutume de faire, qui ont faussé la route à la vérité ou ..."(emphases mine).<sup>575</sup>

By contrast to the mass of unenlightened people, the protagonist journeys steadily towards an encounter with "Immortalité", where he outstrips the constraints and narrowness of established concepts: for the first time he actually makes contact with another like-minded being and "Hebdomeros ... ne pensait plus ..."<sup>576</sup>

However, before this meeting with "Immortalité" Hebdomeros is clearly an outsider in the manner of the Schopenhauerian genius-outsider:<sup>577</sup> locked in his own superiority, with no like mind that could match or understand him. The speeches to his various audiences generally fail to elicit any response: thus his remarks have the quality of soliloquies and therefore constitute a continuation of his interior monologue. This important feature of de Chirico's protagonist presentation can be traced back to Schopenhauer's reflections on the relationship between the genius

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hysteria, and inability to cope with complex feelings.

<sup>574</sup>Ibid., p.190.

<sup>575</sup>Ibid., p.220.

<sup>576</sup> Hebdomeros, p.236.

<sup>577</sup>SW V, p.97 ff.

and his environment: "So kommt es denn oft vor, daß ein großer Geist seinem Monolog vor den in der Welt zu haltenden Dialogen den Vorzug gibt: läßt er sich dennoch einmal zu einem solchen herbei, so kann es kommen, daß die Leere desselben ihn doch wieder in den Monolog zurückfallen läßt, indem er den Interlokutor vergißt oder wenigstens unbekümmert, ob dieser ihn verstehe oder nicht, zu ihm redet wie das Kind zur Puppe."<sup>578</sup>

Schopenhauer's genius clearly understands and talks in terms of what the philosopher labels metaphysical insight or the "Welträtzel".<sup>579</sup> In accordance with this close delineation of the genius, metaphysics and enigma, de Chirico's extensive use of enigma as the mode and subject matter of his painting needs to be reiterated. As was mentioned before,<sup>580</sup> de Chirico adopted the enigmatic as a mode for his metaphysical probing: the paintings directly to do with enigma arguably present de Chirico's findings. He has discerned the puzzling quality of objects incongruously associated to belong to a single entity;<sup>581</sup> he has re-created the enigma of objects and figures as such; de Chirico has understood the relationship of architecture and shadow, sunlight and chronological time, "stimmung" and statue; the world has been his tableau vivant: he has seen that the enigmatic

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<sup>578</sup>Ibid.

<sup>579</sup>Schopenhauer SW I, p.577

<sup>580</sup>Particularly in Nietzsche's artistic transferral of enigma as a rhetorical device to his philosophical writings.

<sup>581</sup>Compare here as well Heraclitus, who is among the ancient philosophers de Chirico refers to: "...people do not understand how what is at variance accords ...with itself, an agreement in tension as with bow and lyre." For Heraclitus the element of agreement was the law of Logos.

quality of so-called reality turns out to be the insight into the metaphysical. Thus he can rightly take himself to be not merely the artist presenting the given: he is the genius who can offer to the beholder-reader what the enigmatic given implies: namely, the metaphysical other.

Accordingly, de Chirico asks in one of his self-portraits the question: "Et quid amabo nisi aenigma est?", hence presenting himself in the role of the artist genius whose whole being is permeated by the preoccupation with the enigmatic quality of this world. Indeed, if one adopts a broader view, the entire labyrinthine set-up in his art can be seen as his attempt to contain and reveal the enigmatic quality of a world that keeps the beholder suspended in the desire for a solution. Interestingly de Chirico thus educates the beholder through his pictures, his creations, to see "properly" and continue the journey of discovery. Similarly the protagonist of Hebdomeros clearly transfers his superior insight into metaphysical matters to the telling of stories that "educate" his disciples.<sup>582</sup>

However, while the general position of the genius towards the ordinary human being is thus identified as isolated, almost qua definition solipsistic and hermetic, there are the various states of revelation that determine his insights.

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<sup>582</sup>Compare Hebdomeros: the protagonist suggests that "... ses merveilles ... d'un ordre spéciale"(p.224) are due to "l'art de voir et de dire ce qu'on a vu" (p.225); and elsewhere the reader learns "ils (the disciples) le (Hebdomeros) prièrent vivement de leur raconter une de ces histoires parfaitement logiques en apparence et hautement métaphysique au fond, dont il avait le secret et le monopole." (emphasis mine, p.208).

## 2. The Journey towards Revelation: States of Heightened Awareness

In spite of the generalized sense of superiority displayed by the genius, Schopenhauer cautions that this does not mean that the genius could be continually in touch with the metaphysical other. He argues that the purely objective cognition of the world is only temporary, due to the strain that this exercise imposes upon the inspired mind.<sup>583</sup> In other words the genius's existence in the world of appearance is punctuated by intermittent attempts to capture glimpses of metaphysical perfection: a kind of recurrent mental branching-out into the metaphysical other. Such a "pattern" of mental activity has already been observed with respect to Hebdomeros, who appears to plunge in and out of the world of appearance (compare, too, the hotel-scene, p.21 ff), a movement that clearly determines the entire horizontal development of the novel. In order to understand if there are parallels to be found in the paintings, it is necessary to see how Schopenhauer differentiates between various conditions that lead to the mental detachment required here.

### 2.1. Contemplation

Primarily it is intuition, which enables the genius to become will-less, self-forgetting in the contemplation of the world: "Nur ..durch die.. ganz im Objekt aufgehende reine Kontemplation werden Ideen klar aufgefaßt, und das Wesen des Genius besteht eben in der überwiegenden Fähigkeit zu solcher Kontemplation: da nun aber diese ein gänzlich Vergessen der

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<sup>583</sup>Compare Schopenhauer SW V, p.495.

eigenen Person und ihrer Beziehungen zur Umwelt verlangt, so ist Genialität nichts anderes als vollkommene Objektivität."<sup>584</sup> And the philosopher suggests that the state of self-forgetting, of detaching oneself from the will, turns the genius into a "rein erkennendes Subjekt, klares Weltenauge".<sup>585</sup>

De Chirico's response to this specific notion of the genius is unmistakably Schopenhauerian. He, for example, praises Schopenhauer for having provided the best definition of revelation: "C'est peut-être Schopenhauer celui qui a le mieux défini et aussi ... expliqué un tel moment..."<sup>586</sup> And de Chirico goes on to quote from Schopenhauer's Parerga und Paralipomena: "'Pour avoir des idées originales, extraordinaires, peut-être même immortelles, il suffit de s'isoler si absolument du monde et des choses pendant quelques instants que les objets et les événements les plus ordinaires nous apparaissent comme complètement nouveaux et inconnus, ce qui révèle leur véritable essence' ".<sup>587</sup>

The mechanism of severing the present ties of causal interrelationships to see things anew, is clearly taken up here as one guiding principle of de Chirico's metaphysical revelation. And for the artistic presentation of the genius's contemplation there are many examples in Hebdomeros, where the protagonist contemplates the wall of his hotel-room, which then suddenly

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<sup>584</sup>SW I, p.266.

<sup>585</sup>Ibid.

<sup>586</sup>"Que pourrait être la peinture de l'avenir"(1913) in MP, p.31.

<sup>587</sup>Ibid.

opens like the curtain of a theatre;<sup>588</sup> or he becomes absorbed by the contemplation of blinds in the Prefect's house, until they, too, suddenly acquire profound meaning.<sup>589</sup>

More importantly though, de Chirico clearly implicates contemplation in his paintings. First of all there are the very early paintings such as The Enigma of the Oracle (1910,Pl.2) or Autumnal Meditation (1911) where the bowed heads of the statuesque figures suggest a sense of contemplative inertia. In later paintings, the mannequins take over the presentation of the contemplative mode: for instance, in The Philosopher and the Poet (1915,Pl.43) the seated mannequin in the foreground, with its head inclined towards a board which appears to display a picture of the night sky, clearly evokes again the sense of contemplation. Other pictures that strongly exemplify de Chirico's emphasis on contemplation are The Disquieting Muses (1918,Pl.59), as well as the monumental mannequins of the 1920s such as The Archaeologists (1927,Pl.89), where the sense of inertia and contemplation is powerfully supported by their featureless faces and which suggest their total detachment from any distracting influences.

And finally, and most importantly, there is what has been analysed as a general staple feature of de Chirico's paintings, namely the continual attempt to objectify and sever generally conceptual constraints. In the light of the conditions required

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<sup>588</sup>Compare Hebdomeros, p.27.

<sup>589</sup>Ibid., p.186.: Hebdomeros is described as liking these blinds very much and "il restait parfois des demi-heures entières à les regarder et à se perdre en rêveries devant eux; on y voyait des sites paisibles, pleins d'une tranquille poésie ..."

for the revelation through contemplation these aspects can only be interpreted in terms of an invitation to contemplation to the beholder; and a proof of the painter's own detachment, his statues of genius or, as Baldacci puts it, with reference to Schopenhauer, "subject of cognition".

## 2.2. Madness/Loss of Memory

There are, however, further variations of the states of heightened sensitivity on the part of the ingenious mind which are taken up by de Chirico. For instance, in the Valori Plastici article "Sull'arte metafisica" de Chirico states: "Che la pazzia sia fenomeno inerente in ogni profonda manifestazione d'arte ciò è una verità d'assioma."<sup>590</sup> And he adds: "Schopenhauer definisce il pazzo l'uomo che ha perduto la memoria."<sup>591</sup> Madness, powerfully connected with the genius through the Romantic tradition, is here understood in specific Schopenhauerian terms. Hence the revelation of the "aspetto metafisico delle cose"<sup>592</sup> is described in terms of a disconnection of the stable relationship of the individual and his environment. Similar to the experience of aesthetic perception, time, space and established links are disrupted. Here, however, it is more specifically an instance of memory loss. Schopenhauer points out that this shattering of the memory in the madman manifests itself in particular in a kind of living in the past, a past which is full of gaps, where fiction

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<sup>590</sup>De Chirico MP, p.85.

<sup>591</sup>Ibid.

<sup>592</sup>Ibid.



and fact are mixed and which is finally brought into connection with the present: "Irrereden bezieht sich immer auf das Abwesende und Vergangene. Vergangenheit steht da mit Lücken ... dem Vermischen von Wahrem und Falschem. Die Gegenwart wird in einen fingierten Zusammenhang mit der Vergangenheit gebracht."<sup>593</sup> Yet, contrary to ordinary expectations, this loss of spatio-temporal and causal links between the objects of contemplation does not blur or falsify cognition, but makes everything appear as though "in hellem Lichte".<sup>594</sup> Indeed, as demonstrated in the discussion of the paintings, the handling of space, time and causality clearly approximates to the condition of madness described by Schopenhauer here. In particular Schopenhauer's reference to the connection of past and present fabricated in madness matches strikingly those de Chirico paintings where iconographical material of the past is juxtaposed with modern elements.<sup>595</sup> That de Chirico associated his paradoxical, disjunctive compositions as the product of the mad genius is perhaps most strongly expressed in the painting called Turin 1888 (1914,Pl.31) which is commonly read as both a reference to his own birth-year and the year and the place where Nietzsche lost his mind.<sup>596</sup>

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<sup>593</sup>Schopenhauer SW I, pp.274-275.

<sup>594</sup>Ibid., p.277.

<sup>595</sup>Compare Ariadne's Afternoon (1913,Pl.12) where a modern and classical style chimney are juxtaposed; the figure amalgams where the classical torso is integrated with modern-looking features such as The Disquieting Muses (1918,Pl.59); or the Return of the Prodigal Son (1919,Pl.61) where different cultural periods are brought together.

<sup>596</sup>Compare Schmied (1989) about Turin 1888: "1888 - Jahr der Geburt des Künstlers und zugleich Jahr höchster Schaffenseuphorie wie auch Augenblick der Umnachtung des Mannes (Nietzsches), den er am meisten verehrte: das Zusammenfallen dieser beiden Daten

Moreover, there are in Hebdomeros various suggestions that the protagonist's mind - were he to intimate his observations to anyone - would be rated as deluded, as mad. For instance, Hebdomeros mused that he would like to tell the owner of the hotel "qu'il avit l'horreur des panoramas et qu'il n'aimait que les chambres, les bonnes chambres où l'on s'enferme, rideaux baissés et portes closes; et surtout les coins des chambres et les plafonds bas; mais il ne souffla mot de toutes les préférences qu'il avait, craignant de n'être pas compris et craignant surtout qu'on le prit pour un aliéné et qu'on ne le signalât aux autorités médicales du pays" (emphases mine).<sup>597</sup> Thus all the allusions to Hebdomeros in his room, in bed, which lead to the episodic branching out of the novel, can be linked to the state of madness: yet what for the ordinary person is simply a medical condition, is for Hebdomeros clearly a condition leading to artistic creation. The protagonist isolates himself with his objects of contemplation, in order to experience the metaphysical. As Levi puts it: "... metaphysical experience is reserved for a few (geniuses) in a state of absolute and total separateness (intuition)."<sup>598</sup> Hence against what is held to be "rational", Hebdomeros establishes as his preferred atmosphere a quasi-mystical hermeticism in which he can be metaphysically absorbed. With respect to de Chirico's paintings one finds an

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konnte nicht Zufall sein, mußte schicksalhafte Bedeutung haben"(p.59). Likewise Fagiolo (1984) refers to the onset of Nietzsche's delusion around 1888, but suggests beyond that "de Chirico, nato nel 1888, si reincarna in quell'anima" (p.92).

<sup>597</sup>Hebdomeros, p.53.

<sup>598</sup>p.Levi in M.Di Carlo/C.Gian Ferrari/ P.Levi (eds., 1990), p.21.

echo of this "mad" wish to contemplate in enclosed spaces in particular in the Metaphysical Interiors, as in the trophies and gladiator paintings, all of which are marked by the choice of rooms as places where the artist assembles and sets up material for contemplation.<sup>599</sup>

However, de Chirico remarks "... le tableau ne sera pas une reproduction fidèle de ce qui a déterminé sa révélation mais il lui ressemblera vaguement ..."<sup>600</sup> and he observes "l'opera geniale, nata dello sforzo progressivo, umana, reale, si trova nello stesso tempo sopra i limiti invisibili delle cose eterne."<sup>601</sup> Indeed this distinction between the actual metaphysical cognition of the genius and the limitations imposed by its recreation or transfer to the canvas, is emphasized by Schopenhauer, too. He notes "... bei der Ausführung ist auch der Wille und der Satz vom Grunde wieder tätig ... welchem gemäß Kunstmittel zu Kunstzwecken gehörig angeordnet sind."<sup>602</sup> It is here where reason, intelligence<sup>603</sup> and artistic skill are required - in addition to the previously explored intuitive experience. Madness is not to take over entirely but, evidently is only admissible if creatively employed.

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<sup>599</sup>Compare generally the discussion of the hermetic in Chapter III.

<sup>600</sup>"Testi teorici e lirici" (1911-1915) in MP, p.10.

<sup>601</sup>"Le scuole di pittura presso gli antichi" (1920) in MP, p.128.

<sup>602</sup>SW V, p.494.

<sup>603</sup>In both de Chirico's general writings (including his autobiography) and Hebdomeros references to intelligence, talent and superior minds are abundant.

### 2.3. Melancholy

Given the suggestion that the artist cannot but work within the confines of causal relationships, it is perhaps no wonder that de Chirico uses such a highly sophisticated concept as the labyrinth to introduce what is bound to appear as paradoxical: a metaphysical other that is liberated from conceptual constraints. It is, to follow the Schopenhauerian interpretation, the very problem that governs the genius: his powers of expression are trapped within the limitations of the world of appearance. And yet only within such constraints (be that language or the limitation of paint on canvas) can the genius express the outcome of that contemplative state viz. the metaphysical other.<sup>604</sup> De Chirico's genius derives a verification that the other is a viable metaphysical objective through a subtle double-placement. De Chirico creates the visual/pictorial elements before the observer in such a way as to show the literal break-up of the conceptual constraints relative to causality. The second placement is that implied structuring of acausality: the logic is such that his strategy of representation (the labyrinth) is the unstructuring of conceptuality, that itself provides the structure of the metaphysical insight. From which, in the case of de Chirico's art, it is clear that the work of art can never

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<sup>604</sup>The expression about that other, and the non-expressed absorption of that insight of which the other is constituted, is a logical divide that is more often associated with religious experience: eschatology struggles in much the same way. De Chirico's answer to the need of "faith" about the other's existence, integrity and function, is met with pictorialisation - for Schopenhauer it was met with music. Whether the "other" is the same for Schopenhauer, de Chirico or the religious mystic, though, is an area of discussion best left to philosophers of religion.

be the thing-in-itself.

And it is this paradox, continually to be reckoned with while at the same time positing transcendence of conceptuality, that plunges the artist into another psychological condition characteristic of the genius and which ultimately leads to further insight: melancholy. Schopenhauer explains, with a reference back to Aristotle,<sup>605</sup> that the genius is usually of a melancholic disposition. The reason is that the greater the insight into the other, the more tragic will appear to him the limitation of the here and now. It is in this sense that it is crucial to note that de Chirico's figure Melancholy (1912, Pl.5) is commonly held to be a reference to Dürer's Melencolia I (Pl.94) since the latter is often understood as programmatic: in spite of all the instruments of perspective which are meant to give him the power to show the world as it is, the depicted Renaissance artist genius is shown in a melancholic gloom. This gloom is attributed to the fact that these skills nonetheless are insufficient to attain the metaphysical in the artistic representation. In other words, the insightful artist genius realizes the limitations of Euclidean geometry in the face of the other.

As Clair<sup>606</sup> points out, de Chirico ventures to draw an analogy here, indicating by his Melancholy (1912) the plight of the modern artist who, though not concerned any longer with a

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<sup>605</sup>Schopenhauer (SW II, pp.493-494) refers to Problemata 30,I, which was mistakenly attributed to Aristotle. (Compare Sir David Ross "Aristotle" in The Oxford Classical Dictionary (1969)).

<sup>606</sup>Clair, op.cit., p.188.

transcendental other, is still struggling to show the "true" reality, not the Euclidean ideal space, but another reality where space and time have become relative.

However, the melancholic state the artist is thrown into is at the same time curiously pregnant with potential for new insight; thus revelation can be achieved: "Dies ist daraus zu erklären, daß, da der Wille seine ursprüngliche Herrschaft über den Intellekt stets wieder geltend macht, dieser unter ungünstigen persönlichen Verhältnissen sich leichter derselben entzieht; weil er von widerwärtigen Umständen sich gern abwendet, gewissermaßen, um sich zu zerstreuen, und nun mit desto größerer Energie sich auf die fremde Außenwelt richtet, also leichter rein objektiv wird".<sup>607</sup>

Thus it is only consistent that de Chirico, the artist genius, had, for instance, his first metaphysical revelation in "ungünstigen persönlichen Verhältnissen", namely in a state of "melancholic and morbid sensitivity" after a disease.<sup>608</sup> The Dante statue (then) in front of Santa Croce became metaphysically translated into the painting The Enigma of the Oracle (1910, Pl.2) introducing, with its combination of neo-classical building, square and statue, the first stage of metaphysical painting's typical attributes.

And it is this mediating quality of the melancholic that de Chirico cultivates in his pictures throughout his subsequent work. There is first of all a generalized indication of the

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<sup>607</sup>SW II, p.494.

<sup>608</sup>Compare "Que pourrait être la peinture de l'avenir" (1913) in MP, pp.31-32.

melancholic, attributed particularly to his early pictures through the choice of titles such as Melancholy (1912), Melancholy of Departure (1914), Mystery and Melancholy of a Street (1914), Hermetic Melancholy (1919) etc.

Strangely these rather contemplative, almost stern and somehow uncanny pictures, together with the title-references to melancholy, seem to contradict de Chirico's writings, where Metaphysical Art is frequently designated as "l'arte gioconda".<sup>609</sup> How can art be both melancholic and gay? Yet, it is exactly this apparent contradictio adjecto which reveals yet again the de Chirico-Schopenhauer affiliation: the suggested gay feature is one the artist expects,<sup>610</sup> namely that pleasure to do with the grasp of an "idea": the cognition of a truth behind apparently ordinary street-scenes, the realisation of an impending danger. The inspired mind is thus thrown into the paradox of experiencing in his insightful melancholic state of mind a sense of exhilaration about this insight.

However the melancholic is most pertinently expressed by references to afternoon and autumn: although traditionally

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<sup>609</sup>Compare "Noi metafisici" (1919) in MP, p.68.

<sup>610</sup>Although one might consider this an echo of Nietzsche's Die fröhliche Wissenschaft, it is in Schopenhauer's aesthetics that one can trace the more succinct association between art and gaiety. In SW II, pp. 490-494, Schopenhauer points out that by conveying true beauty and feelings of the sublime, art manages to convey feelings of exhilaration and exaltation. We are led to see through the eyes of the artist genius and derive pleasure from that penetrating purity and objectivity. To see the world in this manner is so intoxicating since one can adopt for once the genius's "Gesichtspunkt der Ewigkeit" (p.258). However, since the genius experiences both, the happy elevation of the sublime and the basic misery of the world of appearance, his arts reflects both, the gaiety and the melancholy of that cognition.

associated with the "homo melancholicus",<sup>611</sup> afternoon and autumn gain a specific significance inasmuch as it is through Nietzsche's descriptions<sup>612</sup> of the beauties of the urban "Stimmung" that de Chirico's attention is directed to these aspects. The "Stimmung" referred to frequently by the painter is based on the descriptions provided by Nietzsche about the autumn afternoon in Turin: for the philosopher they had an enigmatic attraction, an inexplicable mystery which is perhaps best associated with that moment of the day when sunlight and shadows envelop the world in a particular atmosphere that, more than any other hour of the day, readily yields for the beholder a revelatory experience.<sup>613</sup> De Chirico's references to afternoon via shadows and clocks as well as his numerous title references to autumn, are thus indicative of the presence of the melancholic genius through whose eyes the beholder is made to see the world

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<sup>611</sup>Klibansky, Panofsky, Saxl, op.cit., pp.47-49.

<sup>612</sup>Compare Nietzsche's letters from Turin in 1888, particularly those to Heinrich Köselitz in Nietzsche Briefwechsel (Januar 1887-1889) III/5, G.Colli ed., Berlin, de Gruyter (1984).

<sup>613</sup>Interestingly Lista is the only critic to suggest that de Chirico's "Stimmung" stems from Schopenhauer: "From Schopenhauer he (de Chirico) also learnt more about the peculiarly German notion of *Stimmung*, a word used specifically to describe the unity or, rather, the momentary and reciprocal integration, which create a fusion between the subject's state of mind and the atmosphere inherent in his immediate physical environment." (p.29) Although this definition is very suggestive, there is indeed no evidence that de Chirico adopted the term "Stimmung" from Schopenhauer; he habitually mentions it with reference to Nietzsche. What is correct though, is that this notion of "Stimmung" becomes another Nietzsche-inspired means to translate (into language or into paint) Schopenhauer's metaphysical revelation. As pointed out in II.4.1., architecture constitutes for Schopenhauer something which yields more easily to the metaphysical other. Thus Nietzsche and his urban poetics of "Stimmung" are just the right vehicle for such an idea.



on the borderline between the empirical and the latent eternal other. Interestingly in Hebdomeros the "metaphysical cycle" draws to an end at five o'clock in the afternoon in September, and the reader observes Hebdomeros in the moment suspended before the ultimate insight. In brief, here is another strong indication that the mental state of the melancholic genius is coded in the generalized autumn/afternoon paradigm.

In later paintings the melancholic becomes more specifically tied in with the depicted figures. So there is for instance the 1919 picture Hermetic Melancholy (Pl.62) where, framed by prop-like boxes, the bowed head of an idealized male figure emerges from a generally gloomy picture-stage. With the eyes turned to the ground the figure appears to be absorbed in the melancholic contemplation of the black triangular shadow of the stage. This posture, the bowed head, identified in Section 2.1. as a sign of thoughtful contemplation, now seems to acquire an additional meaning: inertia and contemplation are wrought together with melancholy. Thus in the Ariadne series of paintings, the reclining Ariadne is presented with her head in her hand so as to underline her contemplative absorption, as well as her melancholic gloom. Notably the painting Melancholy (1912,Pl.5) suggests that association between posture and psychological state. Similarly in Great Figures (1926) and The Poet and his Muse (1925,Pl.82) the figures resting their heads in their hands come across as melancholic thinkers. It is as though, apart from coding the melancholic as an insightful state of the afternoon/shadow paradigm, the artist projects objectified figures of superior insight who are, additionally, portraying the

crucial gateway to the insight derived from that state: Ariadne awaits the divine (Dionysus' arrival is impending), Hebdomeros meets "Immortalité". It is not necessarily the case, however, that de Chirico attributes genius to Ariadne: rather it is the genius of the artist that is presented; in his insight into her subsequent role and general mythical significance he can be identified with his protagonist Hebdomeros whose genius allowed him to understand that tableau vivant: hence the deep metaphysical difference between Ariadne and Hebdomeros: the former does not take part in revelation; Hebdomeros, the genius, is involved in the revelation of the divine.

#### 2.4. Departure and Arrival: Intermittent Excursions into the Metaphysical Other

What can be observed generally through this brief exploration of de Chirico's work alongside Schopenhauerian notions of artistic revelation is that not only the novel but likewise the paintings can be read as a series of instances where the condition for revelation is projected: contemplation, madness and memory-loss, melancholy, or simply the isolation of the intuiting genius are the recurring features in the work of art, either in a more oblique coded manner or more explicitly as genius figures involved in the journey towards the metaphysical other. As in the novel (which, in spite of its attempt to break with sequentiality, retains the impression of a long line of juxtaposed mental experiences) the paintings acquire here the quality of a sequence.

Indeed, by analogy with the fictitious mental journey of

Hebdomeros, de Chirico's paintings may be understood as the result of the artist's transferral of his ingenious insights into paint, as well as a meditation on the various states of insight: contemplation, melancholy, madness are aspects that are evidently implicated in the painter's representations. Together with the recurring allusions to departures and arrivals it is as though the painter pictorially describes the journey of the genius: a setting out into the state of insight, and the continual return to the world of appearance. Against the background of that interpretation, titles such as The Enigma of the Arrival and the Afternoon (1912) and The Enigma of the Arrival (1912) acquire a symbolic resonance for the metaphysical programme. Afternoon, here qua definition, associated with melancholic insight, coalesces with the arrival of the genius. In a moment of spiritual integration, the enigma of the world is revealed. Likewise titles such as Journey without End (1914,Pl.27) could be understood in terms of the artist genius's quest for metaphysical truth. The iconography in the early paintings frequently shows a train (compare Gare Montparnasse 1914,Pl.24) and a sailing vessel (compare The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon 1910,Pl.1) compounding through their inclusion the arrival and departure pattern. These match de Chirico's early prose texts where it is repeatedly suggested that it is time "to depart": "Bouchez-vous les oreilles, le coup va partir",<sup>614</sup> " ... il faut partir",<sup>615</sup> and "Siamo esploratori pronti per nuove partenze ...

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<sup>614</sup>MP, p.26.

<sup>615</sup>MP, p.34.

l'ora ... 'Signori, in vettura!'"<sup>616</sup>

Besides, there is the Argonaut theme, that is both present in very early and later Metaphysical Paintings. For instance, the various versions of The Departure of the Argonauts (1909) and (1920,Pl.69) clearly refer to the classical legend of Jason and the Argonauts setting out to gain the Golden Fleece. In de Chirico's rendering the Argonauts are seen to be setting out on their adventure. A parallel to his own attempt to find the metaphysical other? Fagiolo, for one, suggests a close identification between the reference to the Argonauts and the de Chirico brothers.<sup>617</sup>

It is striking, indeed, that many of the later paintings are characterized by the injection of a more complex mythical or legendary "journey": for instance, de Chirico's focus on Hector and Andromache. Apart from a few paintings showing Hector alone in deep thought, the couple are shown in an embrace. Against the background of the legend, the beholder is bound to interpret this embrace as the farewell before Hector goes into the fatal battle to defend Troy. Thus once more one deals with a special departure: he is embarking on a journey that constitutes an initiation into another state of being.

Likewise the gladiators are symbolic of an impending transition from one state of being to another. Fagiolo, for instance, writes about the gladiators: "Quanto al significato generale può essere quello della lotta vitale che è governata da

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<sup>616</sup>"Zeusi l'esploratore" (1918) in MP, p.82.

<sup>617</sup>Compare Fagiolo.(1991) "Formazione di un mito" p.105 ff.

un arbitro (un tema eracliteo), ma la vera scoperta è quella del tempo fermo, ritrovato, all'interno di una temi più insidiati dal conflitto vita-morte."<sup>618</sup> The rediscovery of immobile time, eternity, is achieved in the gladiatorial destiny. In de Chirico's presentation of gladiators the battle with life and death is immanent. Thus, once again, the departure from the world of phenomena is implied.

In the paintings dealing with the Prodigal Son topos the subject of return is explored. Following the biblical story,<sup>619</sup> the son left his fathers house; he squandered his fortune, sank to poverty and returned, penitently, home to a forgiving father. Thus the son underwent a process of initiation which is confirmed by what the father says to his other son: "Your brother here was dead and has come back to life, was lost and is found."<sup>620</sup> Similar to Theseus who re-emerges from the labyrinth, the prodigal son re-emerges from his (self-) exposure to sin: the minotaur he had to overcome was himself. At this point the interpretation leads one straight into Nietzsche's appeals to overcoming.<sup>621</sup> However, as was shown in Chapter V, the reconciliation, the return, is marked in de Chirico with a reconciliation of two artistic orders, the classical, and his own idiosyncratic geometricization of the human. It is as though the initiatory experience brought about the final synthesis required to arrive at the metaphysical.

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<sup>618</sup>Fagiolo (1986), p.154.

<sup>619</sup>Luke 15:11-32.

<sup>620</sup>Ibid.

<sup>621</sup>Compare Roberts (1990), p.211 ff.

While this list of references to journey is far from exhaustive, it can be observed that the motif of the journey is consistently present. Each reference retains its original resonance as far as the journey motif concurrent with the struggle between two states of being or awareness is concerned. Otherwise, however, it appears as though the choice of examples is not one that insists on its specific cultural origin: on the contrary, the co-presence of the Prodigal Son and Hector and Andromache appears to make the question of cultural belonging relative. Among the various references nothing but the filtering out of essential truth appears to matter. Thus these evocations of the journey are a continual reference not to the mere movement in space but to the journey of the hero, the genius, and his excursions into the metaphysical other. However, as already observed with respect to the discussion of symbols, the quotations from myth and legend inject a sense of the mystical. The spiritual importance of the metaphysical venture of the genius is thus continually elevated to a status that approximates to the divine.

But it is in The Grand Metaphysician (1917,Pl.56) where the adaptation of the mystical as a means to transfer the metaphysical finds its most condensed and independent expression. De Chirico's monument to the metaphysician has all the attributes of a god-like effigy. But it is not emblematic of another myth, religion or philosophy, rather it seems to incorporate the previous figures: the marble head reminds one of the various ancient gods and the body appears to be a summation of all the bric-à-brac of the other mannequin figures. Besides, if the other

figures induced a feeling of mystical presence, the "grand metaphysician" demands to be considered as the pictorial apotheosis of this presence. Not only is the metaphysician objectified, separate, imbued with an air of melancholy and towers over all ordinary things, but it is placed in a context which could be said to summarize and integrate the various features of de Chirico's metaphysical programme: first of all the figure is presented in a sunlit, urban setting that points towards Schopenhauer's notion of the revelatory quality of architecture and light (see the discussion in Chapter II.4.1.).

Then there is the subversive spatio-temporal framework of the setting: the hallucinatory spatial lay-out is determined by the exaggerated deep perspective and the toy-like proportion of the building on the left relative to the figure in the foreground (see the discussion of space in Chapter IV.2.1.).

A temporal subversion is achieved by the use of shadows cast at angles that contradict established notions of a single source of light. This point is further illustrated by the fact that the façades of the two buildings on either side of the metaphysician are both in shadow (see the discussion of time in Chapter IV.3.2.).

The figure of the metaphysician itself points towards the supremacy of the object by virtue of being made up of diverse objects which, in their totality, tower over everything else (see the discussion of objects and figures in Chapter V.). Furthermore, the assemblage of incongruous objects directs the attention to the conscious breaking up of established causal relationships (compare Chapters IV.3.2.2. and IV.3.2.3.). At the

same time both the style of the architecture and the marble bust at the top of the edifice suggest a generalized spiritual continuity with the classical (see Chapter IV.3.2.4.). And finally, as was argued in the present chapter, the grand metaphysician needs to be seen in terms of de Chirico's various references to the hero and genius, which here clearly, physically and psychologically, commands the scene.

Thus in a reflexive manner, de Chirico manages to make the painting The Grand Metaphysician (1917,Pl.56) the arrival at a comprehensive visual transferral of his metaphysical programme, whereby the figure of the grand metaphysician is indeed the incarnation of the idea of the inspired mind who has arrived at the end of his journey.

### 3. The Journey into the Past

Clearly, the conceptual inquiry into the genius leads one not only to see the genius as the necessary and sufficient condition for the experience of the metaphysical other, but likewise makes one understand de Chirico's presentation of his insights in terms of a horizontal projection of the genius's mental activity: the journey towards ultimate insight. Yet apart from the conceptual background to the genius mechanism of revelation, Schopenhauer clearly indicates a vertical axis which lays out his notion of the genius against the background of history.

For instance, Schopenhauer associates his geniuses - the poets, artists, philosophers - "mit dem Volk der Hellenen ... der



Musen und Grazien".<sup>622</sup> Elsewhere, his choice of categories suggests a transferral of various traditional notions of the genius: the Greek Muse, the Renaissance artist and the Romantic troubadour.<sup>623</sup> Moreover, he likewise suggests that all geniuses are heroes.<sup>624</sup>

Clearly Schopenhauer's loose associations of the genius with ideal figures of the past is to be understood in terms of his Platonic point of departure: he is looking for the Idea of the genius, an unchanging kernel which immutably remains unaffected by time. Thus, in Schopenhauer's estimation, the ancient Greeks in particular were blessed with the approximation to this Idea and thus "set the standard".

Clearly, de Chirico makes ample use of such historical genius prefiguration: in particular through the use of statuary, his references to ancient Greece and to the Romantic troubadour are only too plain. Likewise his generalized use of the hero genius can be demonstrated in numerous depictions of the ancient hero Hector as well as that of gladiators, which latter feature

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<sup>622</sup>This use of the Greeks, in particular Greek deities for the purpose of reference to states of insight is of course taken up and developed by the early Nietzsche in a grander, poetical manner. As in the case of the Ariadne it is reasonable to suppose that de Chirico actually adopted details for his visual and verbal presentation of the genius from the example of the Nietzschean use of this stylistic "vehicle".

<sup>623</sup>Schopenhauer refers back to Aristotle, Nettlesheim, Shakespeare and Goethe et. al., thus absorbing various facets of the heritage of the genius into his philosophy.

<sup>624</sup>"Und sehen wir denn nicht der besagten elenden Beschaffenheit des Menschengeschlechts entsprechend, zu allen Zeiten die großen Genies, sei es in der Poesie oder der Philosophie oder den Künsten, dastehen wie vereinzelt Helden, welche allein gegen den Andrang eines Heereshaufens den verzweifelten Kampf aufrechterhalten ... Jeder Heros ist ein Samson ..." SW V, p.554.

as well in Hebdomeros where they provide the foil for the protagonist's insights.<sup>625</sup>

However, while there are these generalized historical suggestions in Schopenhauer, the intensity by means of which de Chirico explores past cultures exceeds by far much that was said by Schopenhauer. There are the ancient god,<sup>626</sup> soothsayer,<sup>627</sup> muses,<sup>628</sup> and mythical heroes alongside troubadours,<sup>629</sup> poets,<sup>630</sup> painters,<sup>631</sup> philosophers<sup>632</sup> and 19th century politicians.<sup>633</sup> More specifically de Chirico juxtaposes his poets, painters and philosophers with gods, muses and prophets. He refers to mythical figures, for example, Orpheus the archetypal poet, and the Argonauts, Hector and gladiators, representing a lonely heroism akin to the lonely struggle of the genius.

What matters here is that they can all be identified with

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<sup>625</sup>" *'Gladiateurs! Ce mot contient une énigme ...'*"(p.9) and elsewhere there are the athlete-gladiators whose presentation of a tableau vivant leads Hebdomeros to insight (p.188).

<sup>626</sup>Compare The Enigma of the Oracle (1910,Pl.2).

<sup>627</sup>Compare The Soothsayer's Recompense (1913,Pl.10), The Prophet (1915,Pl.42).

<sup>628</sup>Compare The Disquieting Muses (1918,Pl.59) and The Poet and his Muse (1925,Pl.82).

<sup>629</sup>Compare The Troubadour (1917) and (1923,Pl.73).

<sup>630</sup>Compare The Pleasures of the Poet (1912) and The Poet and the Muse (1925,Pl.82), The Poet (1925,Pl.83).

<sup>631</sup>Compare The Painter's Family (1926,Pl.85) and The Painter (1927).

<sup>632</sup>Compare The Philosopher's Conquest (1914,Pl.19), The Philosopher (1923).

<sup>633</sup>Compare The Enigma of a Day (1914,Pl.23), The Departure of the Poet (1914,Pl.22) and The Joy of Return (1914).

the genius: in spite of this seemingly somewhat jumbled choice and their different cultural and epochal origin, de Chirico leaves no doubt as to the general kinship between them all. This kinship is indicated primarily by formal means: they all share the basic "material" i.e. the pictorial vocabulary that de Chirico draws upon. Thus there is the statue god from ancient Greece, and the frockcoated father of the Prodigal Son; there is the poet who is a plaster cast, and there are the heroes who are made of the same material as the Grand Metaphysician. The archaeologists, as has been demonstrated (compare Chapter V), not only bear the whole of the iconographical environment within them but are equally made of parts otherwise identified with the ancient muses.

The kinship emphasized through these peculiarly "organic" materials, and often paradoxical qualities, is enhanced in that they all appear in settings that closely resemble each other. The wide expanse or the claustrophobically delimited and confined space. Thus there is no hierarchy, but a juxtaposition of ancient god and poet, of mythological figure and philosopher etc. These paradoxical juxtapositions are clearly and purposely unresolved: they pull the god down to the same tangible here and now, and elevate man geniuses to god-like supremacy. Hence this pictorial interpolation conveys one clear general basic message: a levelling out of all differences. The poet and soothsayer, the archaeologist and troubadour, the painter and god, all belong in the same category. It is clearly the same sensitivity, the superior intelligence and insight that constitutes such figures and which thus requires them to be on one level. As Baldacci

rightly points out: already in the early period de Chirico paralleled the "prehistoric" (a reference, it seems, to a pre-literate or pre-civil period) phenomenon of hearing voices and sensing the demon in everything with the sensitivity of the metaphysician. With reference back to the practices of the ancients Baldacci says that "to translate this consciousness into art constituted the act of mystical revelation, which was subject to precise procedures and rituals."<sup>634</sup> And this is of course consistent with de Chirico's metaphysical programme: if time, that artificially imposed sequentiality, could be taken away, the ancient seer, the mythical hero, the Renaissance man and the modern artist would all come together in a single mould incorporating the idea of the inspired mind: the genius.

#### 4. De Chirico as Genius

As has been demonstrated, de Chirico not only shows the weaving in and out of states of insight in a horizontal manner, but he explores vertically the paradigm of the inspired mind drawing a straight line from the earliest expression of culture and art onwards. So far we have considered only the presence in the work: through the alter ego Hebdomeros, the connoted aspects of melancholy and madness in the paintings generally, and the depiction of genius; and the mystical interpretation of such a figure in particular through the figure presentation.

What needs to be considered is the thoroughly elliptical notion that underlies the stark presence of the genius here: de

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<sup>634</sup>Compare Baldacci in Braun ed. (1989), p.62.

Chirico, the artist, makes the beholder-reader partake of insight through art. In his art, his prose or paintings, he projects further geniuses who are involved in contemplation and through whose gaze one is invited to follow to yet a further sphere of discovery: thus he sets up an ever prolonged tunnel of visionary discovery.

But at the same time he re-directs the attention towards himself. In Hebdomeros de Chirico always emerges as the omniscient narrator who appears to share the insightful experiences of the artist. In many cases the reader is left uncertain as to whether he is following the protagonist's or the author's visions. Indeed this identification between Hebdomeros and de Chirico is reinforced if one looks at de Chirico's drawings where there is little difference between the presentation of Hebdomeros (1929,Pl.92), of de Chirico (1922,Pl.71) and, interestingly, of Daedalus (1925,Pl.81): all are presented with a serious, melancholic expression, the eyes directed towards some indefinable distance.

In his paintings de Chirico's presence is often emphasized by the inscription of his signature on the pedestals of the genius figures: in The Philosopher and the Poet (1915,Pl.43), for example, the signature is on the pedestal on which the philosopher is seated; in The Departure of the Argonauts (1921,Pl.69) it is to be found where the old man - Socrates ? - is leaning against a low pedestal; and in the 1924 picture of the Prodigal Son the pedestal again becomes the place where the artist introduces his signature. Does the artist identify with his insightful, objectified figures? The inscriptions on

pedestals ordinarily denote who the respective work is meant to represent.

However, the artist is presented most powerfully through his self-portraits which are, moreover, formidable examples of his integration into his own picture world. There is an early Self-Portrait (1913) where de Chirico introduces himself against the background familiar from Ariadne's Afternoon (1913,Pl.12): the green-blue sky, the tower in the shape of a gigantic Doric column and the delimiting red brick wall. The artist trapped in his own labyrinth as Labyrinthgänger?

In other paintings he presents himself isolated, framed, by for instance the square window-opening, thus treating his own person in the same manner as those objects framed and focused upon in his Metaphysical Interiors (compare Self-Portrait (1918) or Portrait (the Artist with his Mother (1919)).

Furthermore, there are self-portraits where his metaphysical programme is referred to by the questions "Et quid amabo nisi enigma est?" (Portrait of the Artist by Himself (1911,Pl.3) and "Et quid amabo nisi rerum metafisica est?" (Self-Portrait (1920,Pl.67)), thus once more tightening the link between his project, Metaphysical Art, and his own person as a discoverer of the metaphysical other. Incidentally, these two questions taken together with other captions such as "Mihi fama perennis quaeritur in toto semper ut orbe canar" (Self-Portrait (1924)) and "Giorgius de Chirico. Se ipsum."(Self-Portrait (1920,Pl.65)) take on a clear sense of self-aggrandisement in the style of

Dürer and Holbeinesque portraiture.<sup>635</sup>

And finally, de Chirico depicts himself in conjunction with busts of ancient gods,<sup>636</sup> tragic poets<sup>637</sup> and mythical figures.<sup>638</sup> Apart from this self-elevation via the association with classical figures, he is typically shown with that melancholic, static gaze that is to be associated with the genius.

Interestingly, Lista suggests that the artist presents himself in a continual state of metamorphosis here: the identification with gods, philosopher and mythological figure becomes a means "to dislocate his visionary faculties."<sup>639</sup> Indeed, as his figures appear to be partaking of diverse cultural backgrounds, de Chirico's association of his own person is equally varied and seems to point to a few essential characteristics he wishes to be known as having a share of: intellectual superiority, power of thought, clairvoyance and artistic sensitivity.

Most striking is that the artist does not omit any opportunity to invest himself with an air of the melancholic thinker. Schmied and Fagiolo point out, for instance, that the pose adopted by de Chirico in the 1911 Portrait of the Artist by Himself (Pl.3) quotes a famous Nietzsche photograph where the

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<sup>635</sup>Compare Michel Butor on the inclusion of inscriptions in portraits, in particular Dürer and Holbein, in Les Mots dans la Peinture, Geneva, Albert Skira Editeur, (1969), pp.39-50.

<sup>636</sup>Compare Self-Portrait with Bust of Mercury (1923,Pl.77).

<sup>637</sup>Compare Self-Portrait with Bust of Euripides (1923,Pl.76).

<sup>638</sup> Compare Self-Portrait (1919) or Self-Portrait as Ulysses (1924).

<sup>639</sup>Compare Lista (1991), p.24.

philosopher presents himself as the Saturnine thinker.<sup>640</sup>

By the year 1919 (the two most extensive periods of self-portraiture are about 1919 and 1922) de Chirico's self-presentations convey the impression of a psychologically tortured artist genius, the inquirer into metaphysical problems is taken up. In Self-Portrait ("Et quid amabo nisi rerum metafisica est?") (1920,Pl.67) the artist is holding a tablet with an inscription of the subject of his enquiry. His gaze is stern, the brow knitted and the corners of his mouth are drooping as though in the very melancholic state of doubt about the artistic conveyance of the metaphysical.

Then there are self-portraits already referred to in connection with the exploration of the presentation of the objectified figure (compare Chapter V.). In Self-Portrait (1920,Pl.64), for instance, a clearly anguished-looking artist points towards a book or a marble table, while at the same time his shadowy, featureless alter ego is detached and turned towards a (for the beholder hidden) infinite beyond the window-opening. In the other painting (Self-Portrait (1920.Pl.66)) de Chirico - his hand supporting his head - looks melancholically at the beholder while a marble-bust of the artist directs its eyeless stare to some undefined distance.

However, the urgency and sense of suffering and depression becomes even more apparent in the portraits of about 1924. While the earlier portraits were all arrested by a very rigidly angular background, the 1924 portraits are more dynamic due to somewhat

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<sup>640</sup>Compare, for example, Schmied (1989), pp.42-43, and Fagiolo (1984) p.80.



hazy, shaded backgrounds executed with lush brushstrokes - a visual irregularity that appears to reflect emotional upheaval. Such an impression is particularly confirmed in two Self-Portrait-versions from (1924) where the somewhat ruffled appearance of the artist adds to the sense of turmoil. In addition to these pictures there are romantic presentations of the melancholic artist before a dramatically cloudy night sky (Compare Self-Portrait (1924)) and which put de Chirico in the proximity of the Romantic notion Isabella Far attached to him: "Universalgenie".<sup>641</sup>

But what is common to all these portraits is the fact that they try to retain the sense of melancholy, anguish, struggle; while the emphasis is on the eyes, the stern look is suggestive of the penetrating insight of the artist-genius.<sup>642</sup>

However, conceptually, the most outstanding example of the painter's elliptical approach to Metaphysical Art is probably the Self-Portrait (1924, Pl.78): it shows the artist with a quizzically probing look at the beholder, his hair is ruffled again as though the artist has gone through some excitement and the corners of the mouth typically drawn downwards: thus once again connoting the artist's superiority, sensitivity, and his melancholic disposition. He is, furthermore, "staged" as the curtain on the right unarguably suggests. However, what is most

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<sup>641</sup>Compare Isabella Far (1968), p.6.

<sup>642</sup>Compare as well the portraits of other people: the melancholic is de Chirico's favourite mode of presentation as, for instance, in Metaphysical Portrait (Ernesta Tibertelli) (1918) or the diverse portraits of his mother such as Portrait of My Mother (1920) and Portrait of the Mother (1924).

important is that he is shown in a state of objectivisation: the lower part of his body is shown to have metamorphosed into the texture of his stone effigies; it is only his head that has not yet been included in the process of petrification. It is as though he is presenting himself as the object of cognition for the beholder; he is in the process of becoming detached from the world of appearance and entering the state of immortality.

Indeed, as one critic suggests, it is not just these but all of de Chirico's paintings that could be read as self-portraits.<sup>643</sup> As in the analysis of the metaphysical self-portrait each aspect points towards one function of his metaphysical being, so all the paintings are mere reflections of this and the figures are the continual projections of the genius idea. Or as Lista puts it: "Painting is showing - the painter himself has become the oracle and the canvas is nothing more than the riddle he wants to suspend in space."<sup>644</sup>

Clearly with the artist himself being the oracle projected onto canvas the journey of the metaphysician is at an end: the recognition that the mystery of creation is in himself and is partaking of the universal will. The artist has managed to objectify himself sufficiently on the journey through his own mind and become one with the non-sense of the universe.

For the beholder, mystery, enigma, labyrinthine disorientation will continue to reign and obscure the encounter with the metaphysical other. De Chirico's moves towards visual

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<sup>643</sup>Di Massimo/Ferrari/Levi eds., (1990), p.36.

<sup>644</sup>Lista (1991), p.82.

self-immortalisation suggest that he believes he, with his alter ego Hebdomeros, "understands". The changes identifiable in his self-portraits suggest that the artist's quest, his journey towards the metaphysical other, has come full circle. This journey clearly derived from his intuiting unknown, often occult, aspects of existence, whereby the labyrinth is both his and our inferential apparatus. The process of the paintings, and of the novel constitute a log of that metaphysical journey to the other. As the monument to the Grand Metaphysician is constituted of all those elements which are the basic elements and tools needed for the artist's transferral of his revelations onto canvas, i.e. to bring them into the empirical world, the artist himself is an amalgamation of the cognitive powers required to explore the depths of ingenious insight. He thus becomes the culturally derived compound of the artist genius: the great artificer and Labyrinthgänger at once.

## 5. Conclusion

De Chirico's presentation of the artist genius can be generally identified with a sense of superiority with which he invests both himself, as metaphysician, and the protagonist of his novel Hebdomeros. In that presentation Schopenhauer's sharp delimitation between the elevated inspired mind and the base, ordinary, human being is strikingly present.

However, the generalized sense of superiority apart, the artist genius in de Chirico can be identified more specifically through particular states of heightened awareness or metaphysical receptivity, all of which, in turn, form the subject of extensive

discussion in Schopenhauer: contemplation, madness, loss of memory and melancholy. These states of the perceiving subject are present both in de Chirico's theoretical reflections as well as constituting a presence in his paintings and novel. In other words: the states that are said to lead the artist to art are by de Chirico additionally thematized in the work of art.

This reflexive implication of the process leading to artistic creation is supported by de Chirico's emphasis on departure and arrival: it is as though the artist's paintings reflect intermittent excursions into the metaphysical other: a journey towards this metaphysical other as exemplified in Hebdomeros.

However, complementing the horizontal thrust of the artist's metaphysical discovery, is de Chirico's reach into the past: as though along a vertical line the artist genius presentation becomes closely associated with an ideal type, a classical figure that is to be likened to an essence. Thus it can be said that generally the presentation of the artist genius is tailored as the nodal point of two axes: the horizontal journey towards ultimate revelation and the vertical reach into past ideals.

And it is de Chirico's presentation of himself that most powerfully serves as illustration here: not only does he present himself in association with the Classical or the Romantic, but through the years the artist displays himself in states suggestive of clairvoyance; while the melancholic is a feature that he links notably with his persona.

Of wider importance though is the fact that there are examples where he attempts to transfer the entire complexity of

his metaphysical programme into his self-portraiture: as has been demonstrated he presents himself in the process of reification: as one who is about to leave the spatio-temporal constraints of the ordinary existence and enter the timeless existence of classical statuary. At the same time his face mirrors the psychological state required for metaphysical insight. In other words, in a powerfully elliptic exercise, de Chirico projects himself, the artist genius at the end of his journey.

### General Conclusion

The present thesis set out to examine the philosophical foundations of de Chirico's Metaphysical Art. Given that de Chirico himself acknowledges the philosophical nature of his work and its derivation from the 19th century sources of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Weininger, it is striking that the critical response has been so uneven. While the early criticism fails to elicit any coherent philosophical responses, the later criticism, starting with Soby, only hesitantly acknowledges the underlying philosophical dimension.

However, this acknowledgement does not present itself in a unanimous fashion: for as was demonstrated, the emphasis on the three declared 19th century sources of inspiration varies and the comparison of different critics often leads to suggestions that are contradictory. What stands out though, is that there is generally a stress on Nietzsche's presence. Even so, this marked inclusion of Nietzsche in the critical evaluation of Metaphysical Art is at points surprisingly non-conceptual: biographical coincidences and stylistic devices more often than not replace an inquiry into the informing philosophical apparatus.

Most importantly, those points that critics do isolate and identify as part of an overall Nietzschean philosophy in de Chirico can be traced back to the work of the early Nietzsche, which was philosophically considerably indebted to Schopenhauer.

And it is here that the question arose as to whether the unquestioned attribution of the basis of Metaphysical Art to Nietzsche was not too simplistic an approach. Schopenhauer, of self-acknowledged importance for de Chirico throughout his life,

provides a very clearly outlined metaphysics as the basis of his entire work, while Nietzsche comes to reject anything metaphysical after his emancipation from his mentor Schopenhauer. Remarkably, there are only a few critics who suggest that Schopenhauer might have provided the main conceptual source of inspiration: among these is Schmied, who although suggesting that de Chirico read Nietzsche from a Schopenhauerian viewpoint, nonetheless puts his main emphasis on a Nietzsche-inspired analysis of Metaphysical Art. More convincingly, Davies and Poli show that most of the attributions to Nietzsche and Weininger have their source in Schopenhauer. However, neither Davies nor Poli follow their suggestion up with a broadly based conceptual inquiry of the Schopenhauer presence in Metaphysical Art. One is left with the impression that Schopenhauer is, philosophically speaking, held to be the key to de Chirico's work, without this key function being investigated in any depth.

Hence, drawing on the discussion of critics and de Chirico's own theoretical writings, a working hypothesis emerged: that the informing philosophical apparatus of Metaphysical Art is essentially Schopenhauerian.

In a largely theoretical discussion, the main principles that inform Schopenhauer's metaphysics have been shown in relationship to de Chirico's theoretical writings. It can be demonstrated that there is a basic agreement from an ontological point of view: the differentiation of the ordinary world of appearance, and the metaphysical other as the "true" reality which constitutes the basis of Schopenhauer's arguments, can be linked with the founding principles of Metaphysical Art.

Moreover, de Chirico adopts Schopenhauer's suggestion that the deceptive appearance of the ordinary world is due to conceptual constraints; more precisely, those abstractions of time, space and causality. For Schopenhauer only the objectified, i.e. that which is independent from our perceptual constraints, yields the metaphysical other. De Chirico likewise writes about seeing things as objects in association with his metaphysical programme.

In addition to such links there is the centrality of the work of art in Schopenhauer's philosophy that is clearly adopted by de Chirico. The artwork, Schopenhauer stipulates, can intimate the metaphysical other without being the thing in itself. And it is the artist genius who thus mediates between the metaphysical other and reality. De Chirico, though in principle appearing to follow this line of argument, distances himself from that artistic medium that counts most for Schopenhauer: music. Instead he suggests that painting needs to be considered as the medium most apt to convey the metaphysical experience - thus clearly indicating a modification of the philosophical stance to accommodate his own artistic practice.

More directly, however, de Chirico adopts aesthetic considerations put forward in Schopenhauer's writings. Schopenhauer suggests, for instance, that there are certain phenomena that are more likely to reveal the metaphysical other: among many examples there are those such as architecture and the human figure; which are, incontestably, the two most important aspects of de Chirico's work.

Thus the theoretical discussion in Chapter II has shown a variety of conceptual lines where de Chirico's theoretical



approach and Schopenhauer's philosophy converge to the extent that a definition of Metaphysical Art in Schopenhauerian terms appears entirely justified. However, only an examination of the application of the conceptual apparatus to de Chirico's art would render this viewpoint conclusive.

Therefore the thesis turned towards an investigation of the paintings and the novel Hebdomeros and explored how de Chirico transferred the conceptual apparatus to his work. Clearly even a metaphysics which purports to do away with concepts cannot but resort to concepts if executed in such highly conceptual media as painting and writing.

Starting from the ubiquitous figure representations in de Chirico's work, namely the figure of Ariadne, it can be shown that there is an agreement between the use of a Nietzschean emblem of truth, the mythical implications of the Knossos legend, and the application of Schopenhauerian philosophy, in the light of which Ariadne might be interpreted as an objectified figure. The mythical and the Schopenhauerian presence are likewise found to coincide in Hebdomeros, where the Minotaur is called Time (which chimes in with the Schopenhauerian postulate of the overcoming of time) and where labyrinthine architecture is referred to. It appears as though, possibly inspired through Nietzsche's reinterpretation of myths to convey his philosophy, de Chirico might have transferred his Schopenhauer-inspired metaphysics to mythical parameters. This possibility is backed up in that the labyrinth, the central feature of the Knossos legend, echoes in its paradoxical nature the very conflict between the philosophical requirements and the artistic execution

with which de Chirico is faced: the disorganized (disorganizing) structuring of the labyrinth appears to fit the artist's undertaking to give an intimation of a metaphysical other beyond conceptual constraints yet within the confines of conceptually based media.

Hence the investigation of Schopenhauer's stipulation that empirical reality is but appearance. His demand that one must break through empirical space and time, is subsequently tested alongside a paradigm provided by the Knossos legend invoked by Ariadne, i.e. the labyrinth. It transpires that it is indeed possible to show that de Chirico used the labyrinth as a vehicle, both on the structural and thematic plane, to convey his philosophical stance in both his novel and his paintings. The labyrinth, as Daedalic artifice, as space apart, appears to be emulated in de Chirico's presentation of cities in terms of theatrical scenery, which thus instigated a discussion on the nature of reality and appearance. The discussion is continued in later paintings by a continual setting up of tensions between competing realities: here it is no longer the visual reminiscence of the labyrinth but the principle that is established in the presentation of the urban as labyrinthine artifice: to confound the beholder-reader as to the nature of reality. The beholder-reader becomes a Labyrinthgänger sucked into the ontologically questioned presence set up in de Chirico's work.

Another feature of the labyrinth exploited by de Chirico in transferring the metaphysical programme to his art has to do with space and time. The labyrinth, typically structuring the space so as to disorientate the Labyrinthgänger and to defy any

recourse to empirical data, becomes the location where the beholder-reader is made aware of the relativity of spatio-temporal concerns as Schopenhauer stipulates them.

As to space, it can be shown that de Chirico starts from the constructions of a city labyrinth that subverts the Renaissance notion of perspective to a gradual collapse of these spaces, so that the impression is produced that the beholder is losing his ground. Then there is a variety of pictures which show inner spaces, identifiably labyrinthine in layout. The move towards inner space is then continued within the confines of rooms where bric-à-brac is crammed in such a fashion that its jutting angles, its confused arrangement and lack of certainty are once more reminiscent of the labyrinth. At the same time this spatial condensation, together with glimpses of artificial "empirical" spaces in pictures within the picture, or through the windows of the rooms, brings forcibly to mind the artist's desire to render space as disorientating, as unstable, in brief, contrary to our experience: the beholder's expectations have been systematically undermined.

The spatial organisation of the paintings is echoed in Hebdomeros. Indeed, more strongly than in the pictures, the novel makes one aware of the interconnection of the various spaces: one follows the protagonist into buildings, to city-scapes, into long corridors and into his rooms which, in turn, open to show vistas of ancient Greece or simply recall his childhood. Mental and empirical space are treated as continuous so that once more space is no longer an absolute.

Connected to space is de Chirico's treatment of time: in the

novel, time is clearly the dimension that the protagonist is struggling against. From the outset, chronological time is suspended: the protagonist evokes times past and aligns them with what appears to be his present. Thus unusual continuities are created. That the ultimate goal is the state of timelessness is indicated through the minotaur called Time: an emblem of what is to be overcome. The end of the novel is the clue here: the resolution for Hebdomeros, the close of his metaphysical cycle, is attained in the presence of Immortality: a state transcending our human limitation, the truth that the metaphysical other exists.

Similarly, time in the paintings is presented as systematically subverted: as in the case of space, time leads the beholder into disorientation. Temporal paradoxes appear to be the main vehicle to defy any sense of empirical time; the unrelieved tension freezes the paintings and gives them a sense of being momentarily "outside" time.

Finally, as in the classical labyrinth, de Chirico injects into both his novel and his paintings a similar sense of the hermetic. Delimitations and the unfathomable combinations of the labyrinthine constructions appear to clash consistently. Once more it is Schopenhauer who shows this to be a vital aspect of conveying the sense of the metaphysical: his suggestion is that it is only delimitation that makes the human being aware of his insignificance in the face of metaphysical grandeur, whether that delimitation be space or time. Thus the hermetic enclosure is a means to directly capture the metaphysical presence in the human condition.

With spatio-temporality clearly being translated into de Chirico's pictures and novel, a further aspect to attain the metaphysical other requires dispensing with causal relationships. It is in de Chirico's presentation of objects that clutter the labyrinthine lay-outs of his pictures that one can observe this principle systematically applied. Ordinary, everyday objects are dislocated, estranged from their context and inflated in their proportions; objects are shown in paradoxical juxtapositions - clearly designed to be understood as detached from ordinary space-time and causality. As demonstrated this treatment makes many of these objects appear in a novel, quasi-mystical dimension, which confirms the eminently metaphysical character of the set-up. The same observation can be made of Hebdomeros. Furthermore there is a variety of symbols that de Chirico uses and that he appears to strip from their specific thematic background, while retaining their mystical presence. The overall impression is that while de Chirico denied any transcendent quality to his metaphysics, he nonetheless makes the mystical, the quasi-religious, into a vehicle to reiterate the special status of his metaphysical constructions.

Objects apart, what populates de Chirico's labyrinthine worlds are figures. And it is in the presentation of these figures that not only the elaboration of Schopenhauer's call for objectivisation can be shown, but likewise an organic development and evolution of Metaphysical Art can be demonstrated. It can be shown that de Chirico uses shadow-figures to illustrate metaphysical otherness. More ubiquitous and striking is the use of statues which totally replace any "living" figures: their

reified status shows them qua definition objectified. However, de Chirico resorts to a more radical schematization of his figures: by using tailors dummies and mannequins as models he drives his objectivisation to extremes. Individuality is obliterated in these faceless figures. Their objectivisation is rendered particularly impressive since their limbs appear to be made of the bric-à-brac that cluttered the metaphysical interiors. Finally de Chirico creates hybrid figures which are a cross between ancient statuary and his mannequin. The climax of this is The Grand Metaphysician where the objectified figure is elevated into an effigy apparently inviting worship and collapsing the notions of subject (the metaphysician) and object of perception (the human being).

However, de Chirico's attempt to present his figures as "objectified" is driven further in his post-1920 figures where the architecture and geometrical elements are shown as the dummies' stomachs. And it is here that one is made aware of the organic unity of the labyrinth paradigm: it is as though the labyrinthine cities are synthesized into the human figure, a kind of cultural intestines representing the apotheosis of the figure representations. Indeed conceptually these figures seem superior to what de Chirico himself designates as apotheotic, namely his block-like presentation of fighting gladiators in a room, which too one-sidedly relies on the reference to Greek ideals.

Finally, to complete the exploration of the transfer of the metaphysical concept to the paintings, the thesis turns towards the question of the artist genius as mediator between the metaphysical other and the artistic production. Through such

qualities of "mood", that is to say melancholy and contemplative stasis, de Chirico incorporates the presence of the clairvoyant into both paintings and text. Most important, however, is his self-presentation which re-confirms the centrality he attaches to the artist genius and which sums up in part his entire programme. De Chirico identifies not only with the saturnine artist, but likewise with such immortals as Greek gods and Euripides. He accomplishes the presentation of himself on canvas through various means: as whitish soul shadow, as marble bust and finally in the transitional state of petrification parallel to the objectivisation of his figures. Thus in association and presentation de Chirico impresses himself upon the beholder as indistinguishable from those mythic and historical personages in whom he found the state of genius to reside.

Generally speaking this thesis has sought to argue that de Chirico very rigidly sticks to one specific conceptual/philosophical framework which is, in both substance and objective, Schopenhauerian. This framework undergoes modifications, yet it can be shown to be consistently present from about 1910 to 1929, thus including paintings which are contentiously excluded from the designation "metaphysical", and de Chirico's novel Hebdomeros: both, the canvas and the written work, express and translate complex abstractions. Indeed, de Chirico's work can be shown as the evolution of a network of philosophical propositions. The reading of de Chirico in terms of a consistent development defies popular suggestions of a conceptual disunity. Yet it is only via the appreciation of the philosophical background that one arrives at the key to the

understanding of this unity.

Arising from this thesis and its central argument there are a variety of literary, philosophical and art-historical implications. Primarily there is the idea of transferring abstract philosophical concepts to art. Thus not only are de Chirico's paintings deservedly labelled Metaphysical Art but unarguably his novel Hebdomeros can be called a "metaphysical novel".

On a broader scale there are questions about how de Chirico's philosophical basis reflects upon his status as "proto-Surrealist". How far is Surrealism informed by philosophy without such being acknowledged? Clearly de Chirico's Schopenhauer-based approach may serve as a distinguishing criterion, for instance, in comparisons between him and his brother, Alberto Savinio. Generally speaking the relationship between Surrealism and its philosophical antecedents, whether mediated or unmediated, is clearly an area where much research is still required.

However, to come back to de Chirico, I'd like to conclude this thesis with a quotation which shows how much the artist tried to safeguard the special status of Metaphysical Art. Indeed, he secures his position as genius and puts any doubtful beholder in his place by referring to Schopenhauer: "... giustamente osserva Schopenhauer essere l'artista di solo talento uno che raggiunge un bersaglio apparente a tutti ma che pochi possono raggiungere, mentre che l'artista geniale uno che raggiunge un bersaglio che nessuno vede" (emphases mine).<sup>626</sup>

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<sup>626</sup>"Le scuole di pittura presso gli antichi"(1920) in MP, p.138. He refers to Schopenhauer SW II, p.504.



The implication is that, if the beholder does not "see" or understand the objective of (his) art, it is only proof of the artist's status as genius and his occupation with the metaphysical: for ordinary men, the metaphysical is an enigma, which, qua definition, will remain hidden.

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An asterisk (\*) signifies that the title concerned is an exhibition catalogue.

### Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in the text:

MP = De Chirico, Giorgio Il meccanismo del pensiero . Critica, polemica, autobiografia (M.Fagiolo, ed.), Einaudi, Turin, 1985.

NW = Nietzsche, Friedrich Nietzsche Werke, (G. Colli, ed.), de Gruyter, Berlin, 1969

SW = Schopenhauer, Arthur Sämtliche Werke, I-V, (W.Frhr von Löhneysen, ed.) Suhrkamp, Stuttgart/Frankfurt, 1986.

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