

Making of the Modern World 15

Lecture #4: The Age of Anxiety and
the Shock of the New

“Waiting for the Barbarians” by C.P. Cavafy

What are we waiting for, assembled in the forum?

The barbarians are due here today.

Why isn't anything going on in the senate?

Why are the senators sitting there without legislating?

Because the barbarians are coming today.

What's the point of senators making laws now?

Once the barbarians are here, they'll do the legislating.

Why did our emperor get up so early,

and why is he sitting enthroned at the city's main gate,

in state, wearing the crown?

Because the barbarians are coming today

and the emperor's waiting to receive their leader.

He's even got a scroll to give him,
loaded with titles, with imposing names.

“Waiting for the Barbarians” by C.P. Cavafy

Why have our two consuls and praetors come out today
wearing their embroidered, their scarlet togas?

Why have they put on bracelets with so many amethysts,
rings sparkling with magnificent emeralds?

Why are they carrying elegant canes
beautifully worked in silver and gold?

Because the barbarians are coming today
and things like that dazzle the barbarians.

Why don't our distinguished orators turn up as usual
to make their speeches, say what they have to say?

Because the barbarians are coming today
and they're bored by rhetoric and public speaking.

“Waiting for the Barbarians” by C.P. Cavafy

Why this sudden bewilderment, this confusion?

(How serious people's faces have become.)

Why are the streets and squares emptying so rapidly,
everyone going home lost in thought?

Because night has fallen and the barbarians haven't come.

And some of our men just in from the border say
there are no barbarians any longer.

Now what's going to happen to us without barbarians?

Those people were a kind of solution.

“The Unknown Citizen” by W.H. Auden

(To JS/07 M 378

This Marble Monument

Is Erected by the State)

He was found by the Bureau of Statistics to be
One against whom there was no official complaint,
And all the reports on his conduct agree
That, in the modern sense of an old-fashioned word, he was a
saint,
For in everything he did he served the Greater Community.

“The Unknown Citizen” by W.H. Auden

Except for the War till the day he retired
He worked in a factory and never got fired,
But satisfied his employers, Fudge Motors Inc.
Yet he wasn't a scab or odd in his views,
For his Union reports that he paid his dues,
(Our report on his Union shows it was sound)
And our Social Psychology workers found
That he was popular with his mates and liked a drink.

“The Unknown Citizen” by W.H. Auden

The Press are convinced that he bought a paper every day
And that his reactions to advertisements were normal in every
way.

Policies taken out in his name prove that he was fully insured,
And his Health-card shows he was once in hospital but left it
cured.

Both Producers Research and High-Grade Living declare
He was fully sensible to the advantages of the Instalment Plan
And had everything necessary to the Modern Man,
A phonograph, a radio, a car and a frigidaire.

Era of Innovation

- “The lost generation” (Gertrude Stein)
 - Disillusionment after WW I
 - Social Change in Europe after the War
 - Fordism
 - Radio and Telephone
 - Epistemological Crisis
 - Pessimism over idea of human progress
 - Spengler, *Decline of the West*
- “The world had changed less since the time of Jesus Christ than it has in the last thirty years.”

-Charles Péguy

Loss of a Moral Compass

- “weakness” of democracy
 - Carl Schmitt: “Liberalism, with its contradictions and compromises, existed...in that short interim period in which it was possible to answer the question “Christ or Barabbas?” with a proposal to adjourn or appoint a commission of investigation.”
- Religion discredited for many
 - Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)
- Turn towards Existentialism
 - Formative years of Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), Albert Camus (1913-1960)

Erich Remarque

- “While they continued to write and talk, we saw the wounded and dying. While they taught that duty to one’s country is the greatest thing, we already knew that death-throes are stronger. But for all that we were no mutineers, no deserters, no cowards—they were very free with all these expressions. We loved our country as much as they; we went courageously into every action; but also we distinguished the false from true, we had suddenly learned to see. And we saw that there was nothing of their world left. We were all at once terribly alone; and alone we must see it through.”

Relativism in the Physical World

- Albert Einstein (1879-1955)
 - Theory of Special Relativity
 - Neither time nor space absolute values, vary with observer
- Werner Heisenberg (1901-1976)
 - The Uncertainty Principle
- Concepts extended to humanities, social sciences
- Who can say where we are going and what is the point anyway?

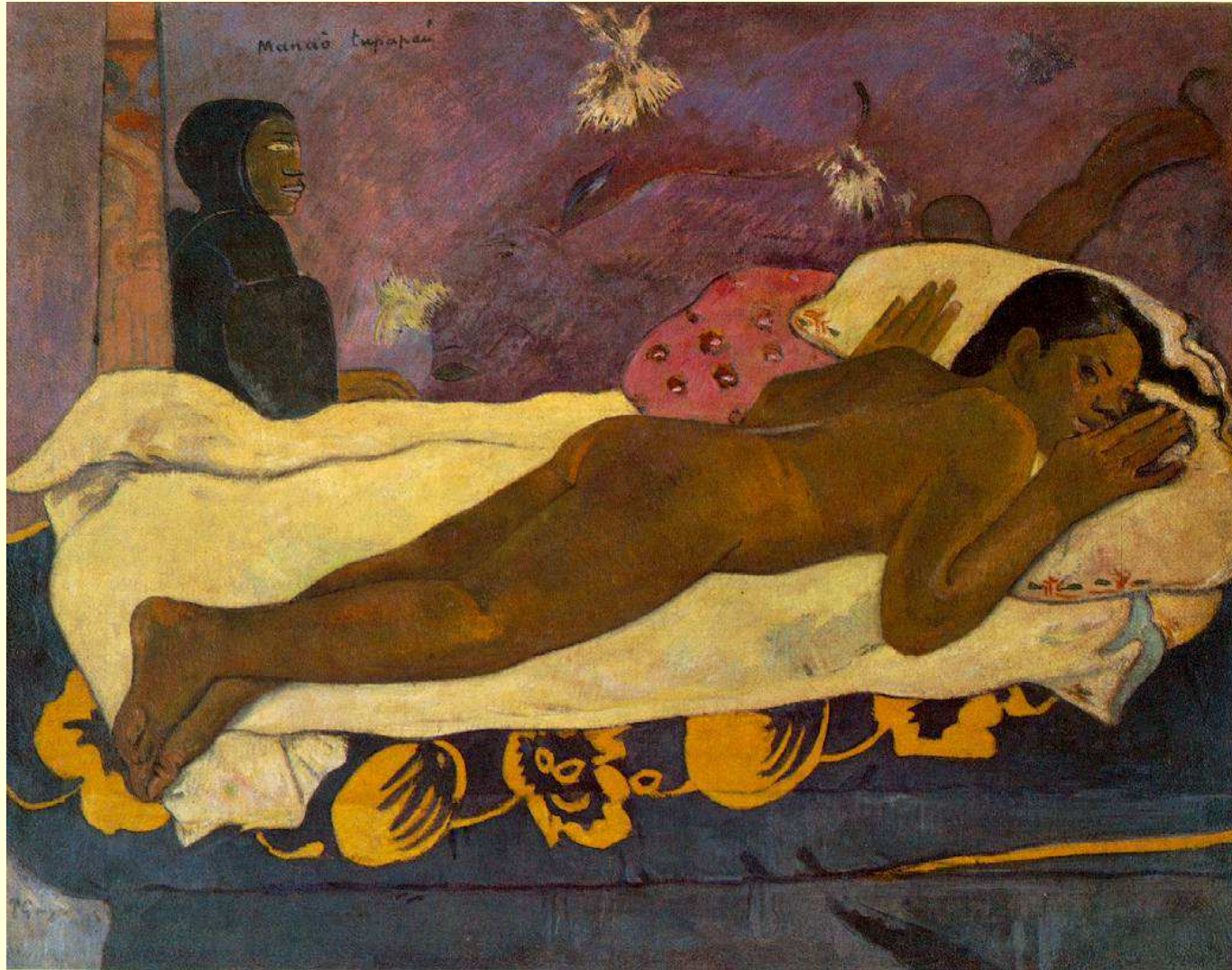
The Soul Explained?

- Sigmund Freud (1856-1939)
 - The life of the subconscious mind
 - Repression of sexual desires, fears
- Interpretation of Dreams
- Free Association
- Application to mythology, religion, literature, art, etc.
- Is rationality a myth?

Retreat from Realism in Art

- Photography makes realism irrelevant
- Art as creation, not reproduction
- Retreat to abstraction
 - Pablo Picasso (1881-1973)
- Influence of non-western styles—Gauguin & Tahiti
- Four modern styles to discuss:
 - Cubism—new assumptions about linear space
 - Futurism—the “beauty” of action, speed, movement
 - Dadaism—the art of spontaneity
 - Surrealism—the subconscious on canvas

Paul Gauguin, *The Spirit of the Dead Watching*



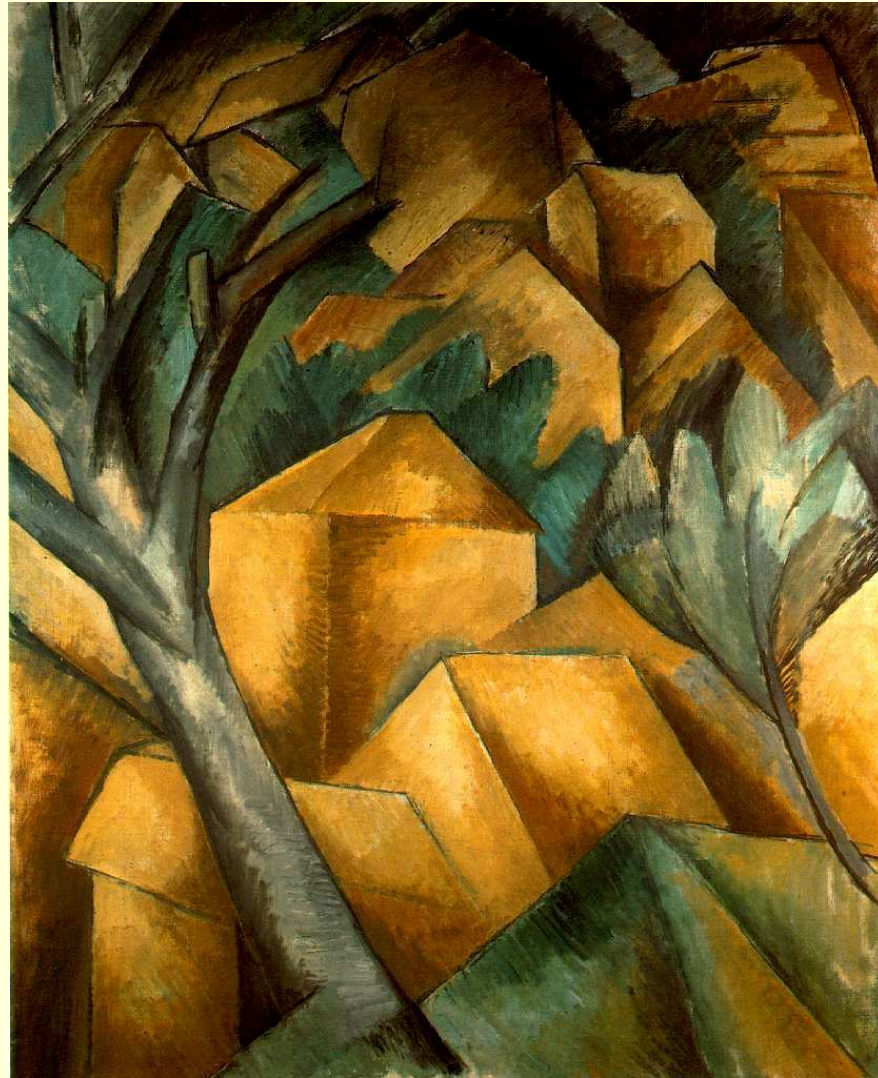
Pablo Picasso, *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. K. G.)*



Pablo Picasso, *Guernica*



Georges Braque, *Houses at l'Estaque*



Marcel Duchamp, *Nude Descending a Staircase*



Marcel Duchamp descending a staircase



Giacomo Balla, *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash*



Umberto Boccioni, *Dynamism of a Soccer Player*



Umberto Boccioni, *Dynamism of a Cyclist*



Umberto Boccioni, *The City Rises*



Marcel Duchamp, *L.H.O.O.Q.*



Marcel Duchamp, *The Fountain*



Meret Oppenheim, *Luncheon in Fur*



The Shock of the New

- <https://youtu.be/3JEx6CDW6-o>

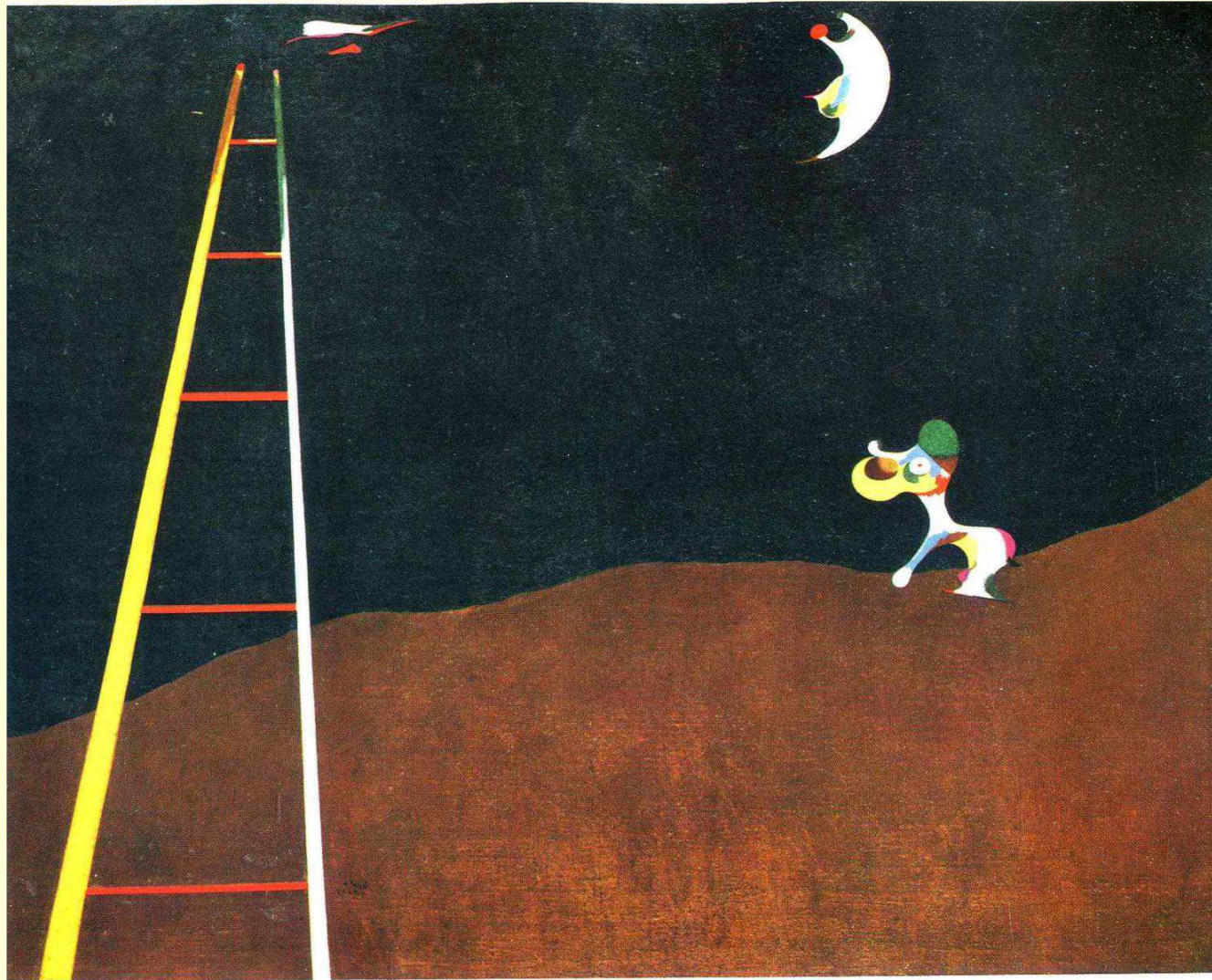
Giorgio DeChirico, *The Disquieting Muses*



Giorgio DeChirico, *Mystery and Melancholy of a Street*



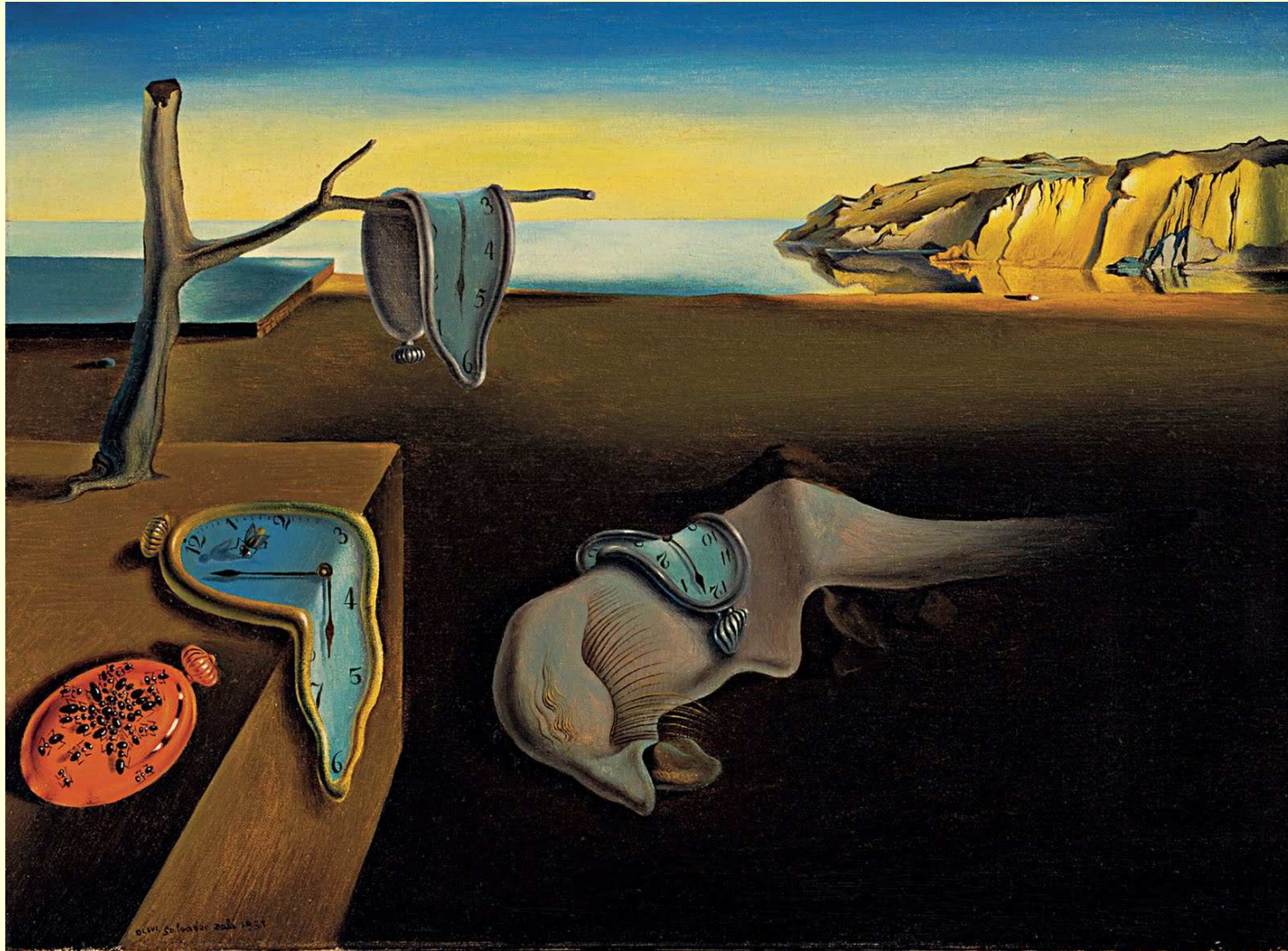
Joan Miro, *Dog Barking at the Moon*



Salvador Dali, *Metamorphosis of Narcissus*



Salvador Dali, *The Persistence of Memory*



Rene Magritte, *The Human Condition, I and II*



Un Chien Andalou

- <https://youtu.be/1YhmrD7J7ZI>