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Building a Mystery: Giorgio de Chirico and Italian Renaissance Painting

Bryan Brazeau

*School of Cross-Faculty Studies (Liberal Arts), The University of Warwick, Coventry,
United Kingdom*

Address: School of Cross-Faculty Studies, Ramphal Building, 3.14, The
University of Warwick, University Road, Coventry, CV4 7AL

Email: b.brazeau@warwick.ac.uk

ORCID: orcid.org/0000-0003-2397-8020

ABSTRACT: In an infamous 1926 article in *La révolution Surréaliste*, André Breton roundly condemned Giorgio de Chirico, faintly praising his early ‘metaphysical’ works, yet rejecting the artist’s later production. This judgment has had a marked impact on criticism, which often separates the artist’s work into his early ‘metaphysical’ period and his production after 1919, when he proclaimed himself a *Pictor classicus* advocating a ‘return to the craft’ that focused on painting as a technical skill and the copying of Renaissance masters. Building on work of recent scholars, this essay investigates de Chirico’s relationship to Renaissance painting, arguing that his interest in early modern Italian masters predates his 1919 break with the avant-garde. Through an examination of de Chirico’s writings and early metaphysical canvases, the artist’s interest in Renaissance paintings is shown to be a constant thread throughout his early career, rather than a reactionary rejection of contemporary artistic currents.

KEYWORDS: Giorgio de Chirico, Surrealism, Renaissance, reception, Perugino, Raphael.

In un eclatante articolo pubblicato nel 1926 su *La révolution Surréaliste*, André Breton condanna Giorgio de Chirico, del quale lodava vagamente la prima produzione ‘metafisica’ ma ne rifiutava le opere successive. Questo giudizio ha avuto un forte impatto sulla critica, che spesso separa il lavoro dell’artista in due periodi: prima e dopo il 1919. Il primo viene definito ‘metafisico’, mentre il secondo comprende tutta la sua produzione dopo il 1919, durante il quale de Chirico si proclama *Pictor classicus* e si fa sostenitore di un ‘ritorno al mestiere’ enfatizzando la pittura come abilità tecnica e la riproduzione di maestri rinascimentali. Basandosi su studi recenti, questo saggio effettua

un'indagine sul rapporto fra de Chirico e la pittura rinascimentale, affermando che l'interesse di de Chirico per la pittura rinascimentale precede la sua rottura del 1919 con l'avanguardia. Un'analisi degli scritti e delle prime tele metafisiche di de Chirico dimostra che l'interesse dell'artista per la pittura rinascimentale si può considerare come un filo conduttore della sua carriera, e non il risultato del suo rifiuto delle correnti artistiche dell'avanguardia.

KEYWORDS: Giorgio de Chirico, surrealismo, rinascimento, novecento, Perugino, Raffaello.

Giorgio de Chirico's metaphysical paintings often depict unsettling scenes populated by hybrid figures and a dreamlike pastiche of bizarre objects. Such aspects of de Chirico's work contributed to his popularity among the early Surrealists. Yet, the artist's use of perspective and inclusion of architectonic elements in these early works also seem to reflect significant engagement with Italian Renaissance artworks by Andrea del Castagno, Masaccio, Perugino, and Raphael, a topic that has largely been ignored by criticism. This silence is due, in part, to the longstanding influence of a Francophile view of the avant-garde that tends to privilege the early pre-war Avant-Garde in Italy, while focusing on other cultural centres such as Paris, Berlin, and New York after WWI. The same approach is also present in discussions of the Surrealist movement, and in the critical reception of Italian futurism.¹ While de Chirico's interest in Renaissance artworks from 1919 onward is part of the broader European 'rappel à l'ordre' (return to order), the influence of Renaissance art in de Chirico's work has deeper roots that extend into his early writings and inform the artist's output during the metaphysical period (1910-1919), as this essay will show.²

De Chirico's interest in Renaissance art ran counter to many of his avant-garde contemporaries, who disassociated themselves from the artistic traditions of the past. As Peter Bürger and Raymond Williams have noted, many of these avant-garde modernist movements intended to break not only with previous artistic traditions, but also from earlier representational systems and the institution of art itself, often seeking radical change and a new social order.³ Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, the leading figure of the Italian Futurists, took this tendency to its logical extreme in the 1909 Futurist manifesto:

Musei: cimiteri!... Identici, veramente, per la sinistra promiscuità di tanti corpi che non si conoscono.. [...] Che ci si vada in pellegrinaggio, una volta all'anno, come si va al Camposanto nel giorno dei morti... ve lo concedo. Che una volta all'anno sia deposto un omaggio di fiori davanti alla *Gioconda*, ve lo concedo... Ma non ammetto che si conducano quotidianamente a passeggio per i musei le nostre tristezze, il nostro fragile coraggio, la nostra morbosa inquietudine. Perché volersi avvelenare? Perché volere imputridire? [...] Ammirare un quadro antico equivale a versare la nostra sensibilità in un'urna funeraria, invece di proiettarla lontano, in violenti getti di creazione e di azione.⁴

Modernist artistic movements that did not outright reject classical artistic traditions often assented to their recuperation only under the banner of the avant-garde as André Breton wrote in the 1924 'Surrealist Manifesto', where he claimed that the fifteenth-century Florentine painter Paolo Uccello could occasionally pass for a surrealist.⁵

Much like the Futurists and the Surrealists, de Chirico initially seemed to reject the artistic heritage of Italian Renaissance painting at the outset of his metaphysical period, despite the fact that he would have had access to a number of Renaissance masterpieces as he moved between Milan, Florence, and Paris from 1909-1911.⁶ In one of his letters to Fritz Gartz from 29 January, 1910, he disparages Michelangelo's 'composizioni gigantesche con molta gente nuda che cerca di superare qualche cosa'.⁷ But in 1919, de Chirico published a polemic about-face, giving himself the title of *pictor classicus* and exhorting his fellow artists to return to their 'mestiere' (craft) by learning to create their own colours and canvases and visiting museums to hone their stylistic

discipline when drawing.⁸ In 1921, de Chirico infamously included three copies of Renaissance paintings he saw in Florentine museums as part of an exhibition of his work in Milan.⁹ In the preface to the exhibition's catalogue, de Chirico claims that such copies will allow viewers to discover 'quel senso asciutto di materia pittorica, che io chiamo *olimpico* e che ebbe la sua più alta affermazione nell'opera del Botticelli e in quella del Raffaello peruginesco'.¹⁰

This sudden change caused Breton and the Surrealists to break with de Chirico in 1925, despite their admiration for his earlier metaphysical works. Such a division of de Chirico's production into pre-1919 and post-1919 periods, however, obscures his significant engagement with Italian Renaissance art in his early writings and metaphysical canvases. This essay will first consider the artist's approach to Renaissance painters such as Masaccio and Andrea del Castagno in his writings before moving on to a sustained analysis of how certain paintings by Pietro Vannucci (known as 'Perugino') and Raphael might have influenced some of de Chirico's early metaphysical compositions.

DE CHIRICO AND RENAISSANCE ART: A HEATED DEBATE

Scholarship is divided on the extent to which the works of Renaissance Italian artists influenced de Chirico's early metaphysical compositions. As Ara H. Merjian notes, critics have traditionally treated the metaphysical period as 'the benchmark of his talent, or, more precisely, the yardstick by which to measure its dissipation'.¹¹ This break between the 'early' de Chirico and his production after 1919 has enabled scholars neatly

to trace artificial distinctions between the artist's 'modernist' production, and his later interest in Renaissance art. Despite a great deal of criticism—which will be discussed below—this scholarly commonplace has remained quite persistent. William Rubin has attempted to discredit such critiques and re-assert the traditional perspective dividing de Chirico's work into two distinct periods, before and after 1919. De Chirico's engagement with the Italian Renaissance as an ideal pictorial model, Rubin argues, only appears in his writings after 1919. Rubin finds support for his argument in the multiplicity of vanishing points in some of de Chirico's metaphysical paintings, which, he claims, parodically '[subvert] the coherence of Renaissance perspective' and communicate modern malaise through a turning-inside-out of classical artistic tropes.¹²

Yet, this argument for artificial distinctions in de Chirico's oeuvre faces a great deal of opposition. Renato Barilli inverts the traditional model of periodization, claiming that the metaphysical period does not define de Chirico's art, but is rather a slight deviation from his regular artistic production. The artist's anti-modern tendencies post 1919, Barilli claims, may be read as a continuation of his stated goal during the metaphysical period: a search for *originarietà*, the original, unchanging forms of the material world.¹³ This view is echoed by Francesco Poli who claims that de Chirico's inclusion of museum copies in a personal exhibition represents an outright challenge to modernist valuations of unique individual creativity.¹⁴ Paolo Baldacci defends Barilli's thesis against Rubin's criticism, noting that the latter scholar errs by not only in ignoring one of de Chirico's early writings which favourably praises Andrea del Castagno, but also in his neglect of one of de Chirico's most important contributions to twentieth-century art: the creation and theorization of a modern classicism.¹⁵ Maurizio Calvesi,

supporting Baldacci's analysis, notes the influence of Giotto on the use of perspective and architectural elements present in de Chirico's early metaphysical works, underlining that this interest in Trecento art was also shared by some of de Chirico's contemporaries. Indeed, in 1910, Ardegno Soffici published an article in the September 22nd issue of *La Voce* wherein he defended the 'psychological' rather than 'geometric' perspective of Trecento artists such as Giotto in a manner similar to de Chirico's own defence of the metaphysical revelation.¹⁶ Moreover, Calvesi claims that the artist's colour palette and depiction of aerial space in these paintings demonstrate an early engagement with Renaissance masters such as Carpaccio, Tiziano, and Dossi.¹⁷

Recent scholarship on de Chirico generally agrees with the claims of Baldacci and Calvesi, noting the profound influence of Renaissance art throughout de Chirico's early career, rather than solely after his 1919 text advocating a 'ritorno al mestiere'. Keala Jewell argues that de Chirico's avant-garde tendencies use Italy's cultural heritage to 'engage in a savvy remixing of traditions' throughout his career.¹⁸ Merjian notes that de Chirico's Renaissance penchants are nearly impossible to separate from his modernism after 1912, but also suggests that the artist's appeals to Renaissance uses of perspective in his metaphysical paintings are mediated by a broader Nietzschean view of the Renaissance as the 'last great age' that embraced pronounced class distinctions, nobility of spirit, and an outlook that saw the world as permeated by a divine power.¹⁹

Despite this general re-evaluation of de Chirico's engagement with Renaissance art, few scholars—notably Calvesi, Merjian, and Fagiolo dell'Arco—have provided sustained close readings of de Chirico's metaphysical paintings that elucidate similarities with Italian Renaissance compositions.²⁰ In the following analysis, I will examine some

of de Chirico's early writings and several of his metaphysical paintings in order to explore the extent to which artists from the Quattrocento and early Cinquecento (such as Masaccio, Perugino, and Raphael) influenced de Chirico's metaphysical production.

DE CHIRICO'S WRITINGS ON RENAISSANCE ART

During his 1909 trip to Rome, de Chirico saw Raphael's *San Luca che dipinge la Vergine* (1510-1515). This painting, he would later write, inspired his first metaphysical revelation:

A me pare che la sorpresa, quel senso di stupore inquietante che ci procurano certe opere geniali, sia dovuto a un arresto, per noi, momentaneo della vita, anzi del ritmo logico della vita universale ... sotto la scossa della sorpresa, smarriscono il filo della logica umana, di quella logica a cui siamo abituati sin dall'infanzia, o per usar altre parole – dimenticano, perdono la memoria, la vita intorno a loro si ferma, e in quell'arresto del ritmo vitale dell'universo le figure che noi vediamo pure senza mutar forma materialmente, s'offrono ai nostri occhi sotto aspetto di spettri. Tale commozione provai la prima volta che entrai nell'Accademia di San Luca, a Roma, e vidi il *San Luca che dipinge la Vergine*.²¹

The source of this quotation is a short essay de Chirico wrote on Raphael in 1920. It is thus difficult to discern whether his interest in Renaissance art and the impact of Raphael's painting on his metaphysical compositions is genuine, or whether this piece

forms part of de Chirico's attempt to retrospectively assert his new classicist approach.²² The answer may perhaps be both, as de Chirico's writings from the previous decade demonstrate a profound appreciation of Renaissance art. During his early years in Paris, de Chirico composed poetry and wrote theoretical notes later collected by the Surrealists and now divided into three separate sets: the Éluard-Picasso manuscripts (owned by Paul and Gala Éluard and later gifted to Picasso in 1937), the Jean Paulhan manuscripts, and a set of writings owned by André Breton.²³

In a 1911 text from the Éluard-Picasso manuscripts, de Chirico authored a favourable review of an exhibition of Andrea del Castagno's work in Florence that year. As Gerd Roos notes, this short piece demonstrates de Chirico's close reading of Giorgio Vasari's *Vite de' più eccellenti pittori*, since the artist makes the same biographical errors as Vasari in his description of Castagno: namely, that Castagno was responsible for the murder of Domenico Veneziano in 1461 and lived through the Pazzi conspiracy in 1478 (Castagno actually died of the plague in 1457).²⁴ In the same piece, de Chirico praises the naturalism of Quattrocento artists such as Donatello for waking Tuscan art 'from the profound mystical dream into which it had been cast by the ascetic compositions of Giotto and his imitators'.²⁵ De Chirico's appreciation of Renaissance art in this period is linked to his negative comments concerning medieval compositions. The artist disparages medieval painting owing to its negation of worldly objects, its strangely blue and profound skies, and its solitary and melancholic landscapes, which wait with bated breath for a miracle.²⁶ For de Chirico, Masaccio broke from this tradition, inaugurating in painting the study of reality, while his student Castagno continued this development of realism.²⁷ In another fragment from the Éluard-Picasso manuscripts dated 15 June, 1913

de Chirico comments again on the Middle Ages, condemning artists who could not express what he terms a sense of 'préhistoire': 'the sacred shudder of the artist who touches a stone or a piece of wood, who polishes, feels, and caresses it with the sacred feeling that the spirit of a god dwells within it'.²⁸ In other words, de Chirico disparages medieval painting for not being sufficiently metaphysical. What de Chirico means by the use of the term 'metaphysical' is best summed up by Merjian: 'Metaphysical revelation [...] sits within the limits of physical reality. Redoubled in single things lurks a privileged insight, at once arcane and at large. [...] The heedlessness of architecture by the majority of the populace is the premise upon which Metaphysical vision depends, the habit from which it pointedly, if quietly, departs'.²⁹

Returning de Chirico's interest in the works of Castagno and Masaccio, this appears to have been more than a passing fancy. Both artists employ trompe-l'oeil architectural features in their paintings, and representations of architecture are central to de Chirico's metaphysical compositions. The theme of architecture emerges again in de Chirico's 1920 essay, 'Il senso architettonico nella pittura antica', where he praises the Greeks for their love of the portico and arcades.³⁰ Landscapes viewed through these architectural structures, he claims, acquire greater metaphysical value as they are solidified and isolated from the space that surrounds them: architecture completes nature.³¹ In this latter essay, de Chirico changes his opinion on Giotto. While in 1911 he had condemned the painter's 'ascetic' compositions as 'naïve visions and dismal nightmares of profoundly Christian thought', here he praises the painter's incorporation of architectural elements 'che lasciano presentire il mistero cosmico'.³² Though de Chirico does not mention Castagno or Masaccio in this essay, his statements on the role

of architectural elements could easily be applied to their works. In Masaccio's *Trinità* (1427), the columns on both sides frame and emphasise the receding passageway, whose coffered ceiling reinforces the openness and void of this space (Fig. 1).³³ The appearance of the crucifixion within this area lends a spectrality and a certain monstrosity to the crucified Christ, as noted by Robert Mills.³⁴

In Castagno's *Ultima cena* (c. 1445-1450), the columns and the sphinxes frame the space, further emphasizing the work's sense of depth (Fig. 2).³⁵ In his 1911 essay on the Florentine exhibition of Castagno's works, de Chirico comments that this painting has an air of classicism about it; the apostles have a calm and pensive air about them and the painting seems as if it were a meeting of Greek philosophers discussing enigmas.³⁶ For de Chirico, the architecture of the space seems to contribute as much to this sense of serene mystery as the figures themselves. Castagno's original use of perspective would also have appealed to the artist. As Tomás García-Salgado notes, a close examination of this painting reveals that the transversals appear to diminish increasingly and rapidly beyond what would naturally be expected from single-vanishing point perspective. This creates an uneasy tension in the painting and suggests that the ideal observer would have to be quite far away.³⁷ De Chirico's appreciation of experimental uses of perspective and architectural elements in these early Renaissance paintings in 1911 would soon be echoed by his own use of multiple, paradoxical perspectives and the important role played by architecture in his metaphysical paintings.

While in 1911 de Chirico marvelled at the calm classicism in Castagno and Masaccio's works, by 1920 it was Perugino's profound horizons and deep skies seen between arches and colonnades that embodied a 'magnifico senso di solidità e di

equilibrio' attainable solely by an artist with the eye of an architect and a builder.³⁸ The painter who deploys architectonic elements, de Chirico writes, is more than a simple realist who paints what he sees; he is reproducing human constructions within his paintings and using them to shape or alter his depiction of the natural world. How, then, should we interpret de Chirico's appreciation of Renaissance painting in 1920, after his alleged volte-face? As will be discussed below, the very same qualities of Castagno and Masaccio's works that de Chirico praised in 1911 and again in 1920 had a profound influence on the artist's own metaphysical paintings. De Chirico's interest in Renaissance art – particularly Perugino and Raphael—in the 1920s thus ought not to be read as a renunciation of his own earlier artistic production, but rather as a development of key elements found throughout his metaphysical canvasses.

PERUGINO AND RAPHAEL: PROTO-METAPHYSICAL PAINTERS

In 1920, de Chirico praised Perugino's work specifically for its metaphysical qualities:

Gli orizzonti chiari che il Perugino da fanciullo vide aprirsi davanti a lui dietro le case scure e i colli di Muiano, la solida magnificenza di quei cieli racchiuse più tardi, giunto nella piena maturità della sua arte, tra gli archi delle volte che sorgono dietro il suo San Sebastiano dardeggiato, fidiacamente metafisico, e anche in quel trittico della chiesa Santa Maddalena de' Pazzi ove pure le volte sprofondano nell'infinito e compenetrano il cielo alto e

lontano che sovrasta il deserto paesaggio umbro, ove svolgesi la tragedia della Crocifissione.³⁹

What is remarkable about this passage is de Chirico's rereading of Perugino as a proto-metaphysical artist, emphasizing his use of architectural elements and his depictions of landscape. When read within the context of the preceding analysis, these references to *San Sebastiano* as 'fidiacamente metafisico' (alluding to the renowned Greek sculptor Phidias) and the vaults of the *Crocifissione* rising up into the infinite suggest that de Chirico saw his interest in Renaissance painting as consistent with his metaphysical project, rather than as a reactionary renunciation of it. Close reading of de Chirico's metaphysical paintings confirms this assertion, demonstrating a number of similarities between the artist's early canvasses and Renaissance masterpieces by Perugino and Raphael, whom he would later praise.

Both Perugino's *San Sebastiano* (1500) (Fig. 3) and *Crocifissione* triptych (c. 1494-96) (Fig. 4) are structurally similar to Masaccio's *Trinità*: both contain the solid figure of a martyr as the focal point in the foreground framed by solid architectonic elements. These columns, arches, or volutes in the case of the *Crocifissione*, serve not only to frame the foregrounded figure but also to contain and delimit the deeply receding illusionistic backgrounds of these works.⁴⁰ Much like Castagno's *Ultima cena*, moreover, the architecture in these works furthers their trompe-l'oeil spatial illusionism, causing the space in these paintings to become co-extensive with the walls on which they might be hung. This is evident in the *Crocifissione*, where the architecture blends with the picture plane and further onto the wall supporting the fresco, ultimately creating the illusion of an architectonic window onto the space of the crucifixion which continues the

surrounding architecture of the chapter house, as noted by Pietro Scarpellini and Elvio Lunghi.⁴¹ One might also note the strong influence of Masaccio in the positioning of the crucifix within an arch held up by two slender columns. While in the *Trinità* the crucifix is much lower, centred between the two columns, in the *Crocefissione*, Perugino seems to blend the cross into its surrounding architectural structure; the vertical beam is centred between the two columns, while the transversal cuts the columns at the very point where they cease to be straight vertical lines and curve into the Romanesque arch above. As Marilyn Bradshaw notes, the fresco is ‘stripped to its essentials’, demonstrating the beliefs of Savonarola that religious images should be free from superfluous objects.⁴²

Perugino’s use of architecture in this work, then, serves not only to delimit the space of the Crucifixion from the calm rolling hills of the Umbrian countryside, it also enhances the fresco’s ascetic depth by organising the space he creates for the viewer through the separation of figures into three distinct groups (Saint Bernard and the Virgin Mary, Jesus and Mary Magdalene, John the Evangelist and Saint Benedict).⁴³ Such spatial organization is also evident in *San Sebastiano*. At first sight, one may be tempted to admire the serenity and tranquillity of the countryside that Perugino extends beyond the edges of the painting, yet the low wall at the back prevents us from remaining in this space. The receding tile pattern on the floor draws the viewer into the space of the martyrdom, suggesting that the viewer might also be complicit in the saint’s death. The asymmetry of the architectural elements in this painting also creates a sense of unease: while the architecture on the right is clean, atop the left column lies the beginning of a transversal arch with badly peeling paint. Below, on the same side, appears the base of a second column, awkwardly truncated to allow the continuation of the naturalistic

background. The architectonic elements in this work thus not only organise the space, they also disrupt and challenge its solidity, contributing to a sense of asymmetric and subdued anxiety in the work. Sheila Barker also notes this tension, arguing that Perugino here highlights the expiatory purpose of Sebastian's passion through the tension between the crucifixion and a 'paradisial landscape'.⁴⁴

Similar tensions are present in two of de Chirico's early metaphysical canvasses. The 1910 *Enigma of the Oracle* (Fig.5) was the first of the artist's metaphysical paintings to prominently feature architectural elements that create an austere sense of depth, denying the viewer access to a seemingly limitless space that recedes into the canvas.⁴⁵ Rather than framing his subject in the centre within architectural elements, de Chirico inverts the compositional model of Masaccio and Perugino's paintings. Here, the architecture of the brick wall occupies the central space while the two figures, the priest and the statue, are positioned almost as framing devices on the sides of the canvas. As Merjian has noted, the priest is copied from Arnold Böcklin's figure of Ulysses in *Odysseus und Kalypto* (1882).⁴⁶ The shadow cast on the leftmost edge of the brick wall, however, takes the shape of a classical column with a simple base and capital both composed of concentric circles ascending and descending respectively. This shadow suggests a column that lies beyond the canvas on the left side of the temple priest, framing both him and the Greek landscape upon which he gazes. Roger Rothman notes how de Chirico's transformation of Böcklin's Ulysses in this painting effects a 'spectacular negation of distance' by bringing the figure into a space that is 'continuous with that of the viewer.'⁴⁷

Despite such continuity, however, *The Enigma of the Oracle* also brusquely curtails the viewer's curious gaze; on the right, the head of a mysterious statue rises above a closed black curtain. Behind the statue, a brick wall is open to a clouded sky. Both the curtain and the brick wall paradoxically permit de Chirico to create a sense of a continuous and profound background while preventing full access to the viewer, allowing her to see only fragments of the sky on both sides of the canvas. As in both *San Sebastiano* and the *Crocefissione*, the naturalistic fragments of the small city on the left and the sky on the right are assembled in the viewer's mind to create the sense of an infinitely profound vista beyond the architectural elements of the piece. As such, both Perugino's architectural frames and de Chirico's brick wall assume a greater solidity through their discrete finitude contrasted against the boundless horizon behind them. A further commonality between this painting and Perugino's *San Sebastiano* can be found in their floor tiling. In both paintings, this tiling helps determine the perspectival positioning of the viewer. While in Perugino's canvas the viewer is situated below the martyr, looking up at him as if he were on a dais, in de Chirico's painting the viewer is instead positioned slightly above the scene, as if she were viewing it from a stairway positioned slightly to the left of the canvas' centre. In both works, architectural elements serve to include the viewer within the interior space of the painting while denying her full access to the scene. While Riccardo Dottori claims that the tension in this painting provides a visual representation of the Nietzschean concept of 'the profound metaphysics of the tragedy of serenity', neither he nor other scholars to date have noted the possible influence of Perugino on this canvas.⁴⁸

Such a visual dynamic is also at work in de Chirico's *The Enigma of the Hour* (1910) (Fig. 6). Here, the tall Romanesque arches echo Perugino's *Crocefissione*; yet, instead of containing the Crucifixion, they are empty, revealing only a wall behind them and a small male figure in the second arch from the right edge of the canvas. Much like in *The Enigma of the Oracle*, the green-blue sky, visible through the windows in the wall behind the arches and in the upper gallery, contributes to the sense of a potentially infinite space beyond this structure, as does the tomb-like opening in the ground under the central archway. While in Perugino's works one could glimpse the countryside beyond the architectonic elements, in de Chirico's paintings these structures serve instead to frame the emptiness of the sky and earth, contrasting with the bold solidity of the building, whose temporal finitude is underlined by the clock in the upper gallery. Indeed, Thomas Mical has noted the intersection between spatial and temporal elements in this painting, underlining how de Chirico's use of repeated columns in this and other early works 'performs a critical revaluation of the spacing of time'.⁴⁹

These architectural elements also organise and separate the figures; the silhouette of a woman in a white robe—reminiscent of the soothsayer in *The Enigma of the Oracle*—stands outside of the structure, rapt in a pensive pause, while a man in a black overcoat stands at the top of the low stairs, on the edge of the arcade. The figure slightly to the left of the clock in the top gallery is gazing out onto the empty space beyond and replicates the process at work in the mind of a viewer acquainted with Perugino's paintings. While in Perugino's works, the viewer may assemble the calm fragments of the background into a unified whole, this painting precludes such a mental process through its situation of the viewer behind architectural elements that close her off from the

vanishing point, prohibiting the possibility of a gradually receding sky. The figures, furthermore, resist unification into a cohesive narrative such as the martyrdom of Saint Sebastian or the Crucifixion. Their discrete disconnect replicates the process of weaving together the spatial fragments that lie beyond and below the structure. Yet, such a resistance to unification and its contribution to the uneasy balance between spectral and solid forms in this painting relies upon a viewer's expectation that such unification is indeed possible within the same spatial and temporal plane—an expectation that Riccardo Dottori demonstrates may be rather difficult, if one considers the painting as a parable of Henri Bergson's reflections on the relationship between clock-time and the duration of internal time.⁵⁰ These works may thus anticipate an audience familiar with Perugino's canvasses in particular and Italian Renaissance art more broadly.

In his 1920 essay on Raphael, de Chirico comments specifically on the tension created by the architectonic elements in Perugino's *Sposalizio della Vergine* (c. 1503-04) (Fig.7). Here, the artist sees a Greek sense of metaphysical serenity: the communion between earth and sky seems to be attainable, complemented by the simple architecture of the temple.⁵¹ Despite this simplicity, he writes, 'il presentimento che spira a traverso il vuoto delle arcate e delle porte aperte del tempio, ha qualcosa di più turbante che nel quadro del Sanzio'.⁵² What this *qualcosa* might be is difficult to discern. In Perugino's version of the painting the temple's two lateral arches and central doorway frame a landscape which is nearly all empty sky, with the exception of a few tiny patches of grass at the bottom. This openness, framed by architectural elements, signals for de Chirico a disturbing emptiness and potentially infinite background in a way similar to his early enigma canvasses. Raphael retains the open central door of the temple in his *Sposalizio*

della Vergine (1504) (Fig.8), though he eliminates the three-arch structure, replacing it with a gallery enclosed by an arcade modelled in the round, prominently signing his name on the cornice.⁵³

While this change may have contributed to de Chirico's description of the painting as less disturbing, Raphael's composition remains for de Chirico a clear predecessor to metaphysical art:

Il *Matrimonio della Vergine* di Raffaello resta il quadro più completo e più profondo di tutta la pittura. Esso è forse anche il quadro più *greco* che ci sia; uso questa parola *greco* nel suo senso ermetico. È il quadro *misterioso* per eccellenza; misterioso nella pittura in cui non appare traccia di procedimento, misterioso nella composizione e nella costruzione, in cui sembra si concentrino gli elementi più inspiegabili ed occulti dei miti antichi, il mistero della divinità ellenica, ovunque presenti; la tragica oppressione della apparizione biblica e giù giù fino all'eco metallica, nei mattini sereni, delle campane su Roma cattolica.⁵⁴

This description of a mysterious canvas, strangely composed and embodying a profound sense of the religious mystery of the classical Greek pantheon bears a profound resemblance to de Chirico's explicit attempts at creating tension through a lack of narrative unification and the mythical classicism that characterised his early metaphysical production, as discussed above. Indeed, Merjian has speculated that the green orb in de Chirico's *Evil Genius of a King* [Le Mauvais génie d'un roi] (1914), may be an echo of the celestial globe held by the figure of Zoroaster in Raphael's *School of Athens*.⁵⁵

In Raphael's *Sposalizio*, architecture serves not only to frame nature, but to encase and to highlight the central vanishing point.⁵⁶ As John Shearman notes, 'the complex interpenetration of space and structure in the *Sposalizio*, and its stereometric rigor, impose... spatial energy across the piazza' resulting in both the temple and figure group possessing what he terms 'spatial transparency.'⁵⁷ Building on Shearman, we might describe this effect as follows; despite the soft landscape suggested through the middle door of the temple, the brightness of the cutout upsets the work's spatial depth. Although the vanishing point remains within this rectangle, the space seems to jump out at the viewer and flatten itself against the picture plane. This creates a telescopic effect which reinforces the solidity of both the architecture and of the blue sky in the background. It is only in a second moment that we realise that there is a scene occurring in the foreground.

Such a sense of shock is similar to de Chirico's description of metaphysical revelation, which he defines as 'quel senso di sorpresa e quasi d'inquietudine che si prova entrando a un tratto in una stanza che si credeva disabitata ed invece vi si trovano delle persone'.⁵⁸ The spectrality of these figures, opposed to the solidity of the temple and landscape, contributes to what de Chirico calls the 'metaphysical aspect' (l'aspetto metafisico). The first impression one receives in looking at a Raphael painting, de Chirico writes, is one of solidity:

quel benessere profondamente spirituale, sorta di ritmo consolatore, come se ci trovassimo in una stanza dalle architetture perfette, con nelle pareti grandi finestre rettangolari, tagliate in alto, per cui non si vede né angolo di natura, né

costruzione umana, ma solo il cielo sodo e disteso, e della vita non s'odono che i rumori lontani e confuse.⁵⁹

Such solidity and stability seems, for de Chirico, to intimate a certain eternity of the material world.⁶⁰ It is for this reason, he claims, that we are surprised and disturbed by these scenes, asking ourselves where we have seen them before, and experiencing a sense of *déjà vu*. De Chirico's *The Enigma of the Arrival and the Afternoon* (1912) also features an uneasy balance between solid architecture and spectral, dreamlike figures (Fig. 9). As in Raphael's *Sposalizio*, the viewer is immediately struck by the bright white structure in the background, yet a brown wall bars access to it. The symmetry of Raphael's composition is further destabilised in de Chirico's imitation by the incongruity of the sail, and the heavy stone building on the left. It is only in a second glance that the viewer notices the two small immobile figures standing on the edge of the chequerboard tile.

Calvesi has identified the sails in this painting as influenced by Carpaccio's *Sant'Orsola* cycle (1490/95) and Merjian has noted the similarity between the chequered tile in this work and the tiled floor in the second scene of Paolo Uccello's *Miracolo dell'ostia profanata* (1467-8).⁶¹ However, no scholars to my knowledge have yet observed that the tall round building in the background also bears striking similarities to the temple in Raphael's *Sposalizio*. Both structures feature an open door which telescopes the background forward beyond the figures onto the picture plane. Like the other *Enigma* paintings discussed above, the fragments of sky seen through the empty building on the left, the doorway of the round structure, the gap between the columns and the wall of this

structure, along with the open section of the wall on the right frustratingly suggest the possibility of an inaccessible background that both continues beyond the edges of the frame and recedes into the canvas.

Yet, *The Enigma of the Arrival and the Afternoon* also alters the earlier Cinquecento composition. While in Raphael's painting, the opening in the temple functions as a point that organises the composition, this is not at all the case in de Chirico's work. Not only is the vanishing point no longer framed by the emptiness within the door, the entire structure has been moved over to the left side of the canvas. Raphael's masterpiece is symmetrically balanced while de Chirico's leans heavily to the left of the canvas. The right side is devoid of all figures and structures except for part of the sail and the low wall. Whereas in Raphael's *Sposalizio* the two central figures are being brought together in marriage, the figures in *The Enigma of the Arrival and the Afternoon* stand near to one another, yet have their backs turned. As in *The Enigma of the Hour*, this canvas precludes connection between the figures or the establishment of a cohesive narrative. If de Chirico had Raphael's *Sposalizio* in mind when painting the *The Enigma of the Arrival and the Afternoon*, the two figures clad in red and black robes would appear to be an imitation of the group on the left in the middle ground of Raphael's composition. De Chirico's *The Enigma of the Arrival and the Afternoon* then, may perhaps be read as Raphael's piazza, deserted after the ceremony, where only these figures have lingered, their metaphysical spectrality contrasting with the heavy architectonic structures in this space.

RAPHAEL AND METAPHYSICAL REVELATION

De Chirico's early metaphysical paintings aim to elicit mysterious and mythical forebodings in the viewer similar to those that the artist read in Raphael's and Perugino's *Sposalizio* canvasses. De Chirico sees this stimulation of mysterious sensations as the proper task of great art. Indeed, he praises Raphael's capacity to 'spegnere ogni barlume di vita ... nelle figure dipinte, per rivestirle con quella solennità e quella immobilità, dall'aspetto sereno e inquietante'.⁶² De Chirico would later imitate several of Raphael's canvasses, copying his *La Muta* portrait (1507) in 1920 to exhibit it in the 1921 Milan exhibition, along with his *San Luca dipinge la Vergine* (c. 1525) in his 1927 *Le peintre de chevaux* (*The Painter of Horses*), which Maurizio Fagiolo Dell'Arco claims demonstrates de Chirico's desire to identify himself with Raphael in this period.⁶³ As discussed above, moreover, it was in his 1920 essay on Raphael that de Chirico claimed to have experienced his first metaphysical revelation upon seeing *San Luca dipinge la Vergine* in 1909. What ought we to make of this claim? De Chirico's 1920 essay on Raphael is certainly an attempt to re-inscribe the artistic influences in his early metaphysical paintings within a more traditionally classical genealogy. Yet, de Chirico's interest in Raphael as a proto-metaphysical painter does not originate in this period, but rather dates back to the early years of his metaphysical production.

In a section of the 1912 Paulhan manuscripts entitled 'Meditations of a painter' [*Méditations d'un peintre*], de Chirico describes the revelation that great art may engender in the viewer by presenting ordinary objects as new and unknown, thus revealing their true essence.⁶⁴ Several paragraphs below, the artist hesitantly claims that some classical canvasses can induce such revelation in the viewer:

The revelation of a work of art (a painting or a sculpture) can happen all of a sudden, when one least expects it, and can also be provoked by seeing something. In the first case, it belongs to a certain kind of strange and rare sensations which among modern men I have observed solely in Nietzsche. Among the ancients, perhaps (I say perhaps because I am sometimes doubtful) Phidias had this sensation when conceiving the physical form of his Pallas Athena, and Raphael had this sensation when painting the sky and the temple of his *Sposalizio*, which is at the Brera Pinacoteca in Milan.⁶⁵

Thus, already in 1912 de Chirico had taken notice of Raphael's painting, emphasizing the sky and temple as important elements of metaphysical revelation.

As Merjian notes, de Chirico's interest in Raphael dates back to the artist's time in Milan in 1909, an observation confirmed by de Chirico's reference to the painting's current location. While this earlier piece of writing may have been more hesitant than his later celebration of Raphael, one can already detect de Chirico's interest in and admiration of the artist from Urbino, particularly in his comparison of Raphael to Nietzsche, a philosopher whose thought was central to de Chirico's oeuvre and whom the artist once referred to as the most profound of all poets.⁶⁶ The influence of Raphael's *Sposalizio* on de Chirico's metaphysical production thus emerges as more than the artist's own retrospective rehabilitation in 1920. Having seen the painting in 1909 and written about it in 1912, it is probable that de Chirico had this canvas in mind when painting *The Enigma of the Oracle*, *The Enigma of the Hour*, and *The Enigma of the Arrival and the Afternoon*, as the above analysis has demonstrated.

De Chirico's return to traditional painting and his copies of Renaissance artworks in the 1920s sparked the ire of many of his contemporaries, such as André Breton who, as Roger Cardinal points out, published a crossed-out reproduction of the artist's *Oreste ed Electra* (1923) in a 1926 issue of *La révolution Surréaliste*.⁶⁷ In the magazine's next issue, Breton took an even more fixed aim at de Chirico, writing:

[...]the least that one can say [about de Chirico's works] is that the spirit is totally absent [from them] and that an impudent cynicism dominates them. The 'bowl of broth', followed naturally by many other bowls (Italy, Fascism, —we know one of his canvases was infamous enough to bear the title: 'Roman Soldier Surveying Conquered Nations'—artistic ambition, which is the most mediocre of all, even greed) quickly dissipated any enchantments. The complete amorality of the character in question [de Chirico] has done the rest. He would have us hesitate in judging his behaviour, by virtue of some unknown sentimental weakness, have us evaluate him with part of that emotion that his first works stirred in us! [...] Furthermore, we consider certain second-rate works such as his *Ritorno del figliol prodigo*, his ridiculous copies of Raphael, his *Tragedia d'Eschilo*, and many portraits with a receding chin and vain Latin motto as nothing other than the product of a mean spirit [méchant esprit].⁶⁸

Breton's rejection of de Chirico has had a marked impact on scholarship and criticism, which often focuses on the early de Chirico and rejects his post-1919 work as derivative.

Yet, as I have attempted to show, de Chirico's engagement with Raphael in particular, and Renaissance art more broadly cannot simply be read as a rejection of radical avant-garde movements such as Surrealism and Futurism. De Chirico's 1909 praise of Castagno and Masaccio's use of architectonic elements in their canvasses, his early metaphysical paintings, his citation in 1912 of Raphael's *Sposalizio* as metaphysically revelatory, his 1920 essay on Raphael, and his later copies of Renaissance images all testify to a continued and developing interest in Renaissance Italian painting throughout his career. This is, of course, not to ignore the marked difference between de Chirico's early work and his work after 1919. Rather, I hope to have sketched out several lines of continuity with regard to the artist's appreciation of early modern Italian painting. Moreover, several of de Chirico's metaphysical paintings not only demonstrate an artistic debt to the works of Perugino, Raphael and other Renaissance masters, but their metaphysical qualities also stand out in greater relief when considered alongside these Renaissance images.

As a coda, we might note that Raphael's influence on the surrealists was also recognised by one of de Chirico's contemporaries. In his 1922 painting, *Au rendez-vous des amis*, Max Ernst represents several artists he considered as important surrealists, such as André Breton, Paul Éluard, Louis Aragon, and Giorgio de Chirico along with several figures he deemed influential on the movement such as Leo Tolstoy, Fyodor Dostoevsky and Raphael (Fig. 10). M.E. Warlick and others have noted that Raphael's presence suggests a parallel between this painting and the Cinquecento master's *Scuola di Atene* (1509-11) and *Disputa* (1509-10).⁶⁹ Yet, the placement of Raphael's head on the left is balanced by a counterpart head on the right: that of de Chirico, facing Raphael. While Thomas Gaehtgens has interpreted this pairing as Ernst paying homage to two venerated

Italian artists, we might ask in light of the preceding analysis whether Ernst was not also playfully gesturing toward de Chirico's continued admiration of a Renaissance master whose works had a marked influence on his artistic production.⁷⁰

 Notes

*Many thanks are due to colleagues and interlocutors who helped refine and improve this essay. Mark Russell, Rebecca Carnevali, Martina Piperno, Paola Roccella, Gioia Panzarella, and Nicola Lucchi read various drafts of this article and provided helpful feedback. Ara Merjian first introduced me to the work of Giorgio de Chirico in an engaging graduate seminar at NYU and gave constructive feedback on an early version of this essay. I am also grateful to the two anonymous reviewers and the editors of *The Italianist* whose careful comments and suggestions further ameliorated the clarity of this piece. Funding for licensing rights and reproductions in this article was generously provided by the Greg Wells Legacy Fund, the Humanities Research Fund, and the School of Cross-Faculty Studies at the University of Warwick.

¹ Richard Cork, *The Bitter Truth: Avant-Garde Art and the Great War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994); Gerard Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Thomas Hunkeler, ‘Cultural Hegemony and Avant-Gardist Rivalry. The Ambivalent Reception of Futurism in France, England and Russia’, in *The Invention of Politics in the European Avant-Garde (1906-1940)*, ed. by Sascha Bru and Gunther Martens (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2006), pp. 201-16; Günther Berghaus, ‘Le Futurisme Mondial: Reception and Adaptation in International Futurism’, *Revista de história da arte*, 10 (2014), 182-89.

² For a discussion of how de Chirico’s polemical essay might be situated within broader European artistic contexts, see Anne Verger, ‘Le groupe des Sept: l’italianité retrouvée’, *Italies*, 6 (2002), 591-97; and Salvatore Vacanti, ‘Giorgio De Chirico and the “Return To Craft”’, *Metafisica*, 5-6 (2006), 433-58.

³ Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 60-64; Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists* (London and New York: Verso, 1989), p. 14.

⁴ Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, 'Fondazione e Manifesto del Futurismo', in *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, ed. by Luciano De Maria (Milan: Mondadori, 1983), pp. 7-14.

Similar sentiments were expressed several years later by the well-known French poet, Guillaume Apollinaire who condemned all academic art and non-contemporary artists in *L'Antitradition Futuriste: manifeste-synthèse* (Milan: Direction du mouvement futuriste, 1913).

⁵ André Breton, 'Manifeste du Surréalisme (1924)', in Breton, *Manifestes du Surréalisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), pp. 11-64 (pp. 33-35). On the relationship between Italian Futurism and Surrealism see Herbert S. Gershman, 'Futurism and the Origins of Surrealism', *Italica*, 39.2 (1962), 114-23.

⁶ For de Chirico's biography and artistic career see Wieland Schmied, *Giorgio de Chirico: The Endless Journey* (New York: Prestel, 2002). On de Chirico's classical education, see Paolo Baldacci, 'Giorgio de Chirico: l'estetica del Classicismo e la tradizione antica', in *Giorgio de Chirico: Parigi, 1924-1929: dalla nascita del Surrealismo al crollo di Wall Street*, ed. by Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco and Paolo Baldacci (Milan: P. Daverio, 1982), pp. 13-80.

⁷ Giorgio de Chirico, 'Letter to Fritz Gartz, January 29, 1910', cited in Gerd Roos, *Giorgio de Chirico e Alberto Savinio: Ricordi e Documenti: Monaco, Milano, Firenze: 1906-1911* (Bologna: Bora, 1999), p. 310.

⁸ Giorgio de Chirico, 'Il ritorno al mestiere', *Valori Plastici*, 1 (1919), 15-19 (repr. in Giorgio de Chirico, *Il meccanismo del pensiero: critica, polemica, autobiografia*, ed. by Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco (Turin: Einaudi, 1985), pp. 93-99).

⁹ These were copies of a work by Dosso Dossi, of an unfinished version of Raphael's *Parnaso*, and of Michelangelo's *Tondo Doni*. It is unclear which work of Dossi's was copied by de Chirico. As J.T. Soby notes, de Chirico would later copy Dossi's *Partenza degli argonauti* (1510) in his 1923 *Partenza del cavaliere errante*. See de Chirico, *Il meccanismo*, pp. 462-63, n. 223; James Thrall Soby, *Giorgio de Chirico* (New York: Arno Press, 1966), p. 159.

¹⁰ Giorgio de Chirico, 'Prefazione', in *Il meccanismo*, pp. 223-24 (p. 223).

¹¹ Ara H. Merjian, *Giorgio de Chirico and the Metaphysical City* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), p. x. See also, James Thrall Soby, *The Early Chirico* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1941); Maurizio Calvesi, *La metafisica schiarita* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1982); and Joan M. Lukach, 'De Chirico and Italian Art Theory, 1915-1920', in *De Chirico: Essays*, ed. by Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco and William Rubin (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1982), pp. 35-54.

¹² William Rubin, 'De Chirico and Modernism', in *De Chirico: Essays* (1982), pp. 55-79 (p. 55).

¹³ Renato Barilli, *Tra presenza e assenza: due modelli culturali in conflitto* (Milan: Bompiani, 1974), p. 269.

¹⁴ Francesco Poli, *La Metafisica* (Rome: Laterza, 1989), p. 124. On de Chirico's classicism as a response to avant-garde painting, see also, Michael Taylor, 'Between Modernism and Mythology: Giorgio de Chirico and the Ariadne Series', in *Giorgio de Chirico and the Myth of Ariadne* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2003), pp. 12-50.

¹⁵ Baldacci, 'Giorgio de Chirico: l'estetica del Classicismo e la tradizione antica', p.57.

¹⁶ Calvesi, *La metafisica schiarita*, p. 58.

¹⁷ Maurizio Calvesi, 'L'universo nella stanza', in *Giorgio de Chirico: pictor optimus*, ed. by Maurizio Calvesi, Fabio Benzi, and Maria Grazia Tolomeo Speranza (Rome: Edizioni Carte Segrete, 1992), pp. 15-44 (p. 34).

¹⁸ Keala Jewell, 'De Chirico's Heroes: The Victors of Modernity', in *Italian Modernism: Italian Culture Between Decadentism and Avant-Garde*, ed. by Mario Moroni and Luca Somigli (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), pp. 351-77; See also, Pia Vivarelli, 'Classicisme et arts plastiques en Italie entre les deux guerres', in *Les Realismes 1919-1939: exposition 17 décembre 1980—20 avril 1981*, ed. by Gérard Regnier and Marie-Odile Caussin (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1981), pp. 66-68.

¹⁹ Merjian, *Giorgio de Chirico*, pp. 35, 37, 48-49, 63.

²⁰ Calvesi, 'L'universo nella stanza', p.34; Merjian, *Giorgio de Chirico*, p.178; Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco, 'Il Tempo del 'Mystère Laïc'', in Fagiolo Dell'Arco and Baldacci (eds.), *Giorgio de Chirico: Parigi 1924-1929*, pp. 81-132 (p.89).

²¹ Giorgio de Chirico, 'Raffaello Sanzio (1920)', in *Il meccanismo*, pp. 159-65 (p. 164).

²² De Chirico's later work often attempted to falsify or back-date new paintings, a practice upon which the art world frowned. See the collection of interviews and newspaper articles on this topic contained in 'Il problema dei falsi', in *Giorgio de Chirico: L'uomo, l'artista, il polemico*, ed. by Mario Ursino (Rome: Gangemi, 2012), pp. 111-48.

²³ Silvia Loreti, 'The Avant-garde Classicism of Giorgio de Chirico, 1911-1915', in *The Legacy of Antiquity: New Perspectives in the Reception of the Classical World*, ed. by Lenia Kouneni (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), pp. 184-

215 (p. 187 n.16). See also Paolo Baldacci, *Betraying The Muse: De Chirico and the Surrealists* (New York: Paolo Baldacci Gallery, 1994), p. 31.

²⁴ Gerd Roos, *Giorgio de Chirico e Alberto Savinio. Ricordi e documenti, Monaco, Milano, Firenze: 1906-1911* (Bologna: Bora, 1999), p. 366; Giorgio de Chirico, 'Une exposition à Florence de quelques oeuvres de Andrea del Castagno', in *Il meccanismo*, pp. 5-9. On Vasari's error, see Patricia Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari: Art and History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 175-77.

²⁵ 'du profond rêve mystique ou l'avaient plongé les compositions ascétiques de Giotto et de ses imitateurs'. De Chirico, 'Une exposition', p. 5. Unless otherwise noted, all translations to English are my own.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.* The reference to Castagno as student of Masaccio occurs on p. 6.

²⁸ 'ce frisson sacré de l'artiste qui touche une pierre ou un fragment de bois, qui le polit, le palpe, le caresse avec le sentiment sacré que l'esprit d'un dieu y habite'. Giorgio de Chirico, 'Testi teorici e lirici', in *Il meccanismo*, pp. 10-30 (pp. 20-21).

²⁹ Merjian *Giorgio de Chirico*, pp. 4-5.

³⁰ Giorgio de Chirico, 'Il senso architettonico nella pittura antica', in *Il meccanismo*, pp. 100-03, (p. 100).

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² 'visions naïves et lugubres cauchemars de la pensée profondément chrétienne,' De Chirico, 'Une exposition', p. 5; De Chirico, 'Il senso architettonico', p. 101. For a rigorous analysis of the relationship between two of de Chirico's early metaphysical

paintings—*The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon* and *The Enigma of the Oracle*— see Calvesi, *La Metafisica Schiarita*, p. 58.

³³ On perspective projection and surface geometry in this painting, see Joseph Polzer, ‘The Anatomy of Masaccio’s *Holy Trinity*’, *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen*, 93 (1971), pp. 18-59. For a discussion that considers the relationship between Renaissance astronomical projection and Masaccio’s use of perspective, see Jane Andrew Aiken, ‘The perspective construction of Masaccio’s *Trinity* Fresco and medieval astronomical graphics’, in *Masaccio’s Trinity*, ed. by Rona Goffen (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 90-107.

³⁴ Robert Mills, ‘Jesus as Monster’, in *The Monstrous Middle Ages*, ed. by Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), pp. 28-54.

³⁵ Eckart Marchand has commented on how the architecture in this painting is meant to serve as a set of elements dependent upon the viewpoint of the beholder. See Eckart Marchand, ‘Monastic “Imitatio Christi”: Andrea del Castagno’s “Cenacolo di S. Apollonia”’, *Artibus et Historiae*, 24.47 (2003), 31-50 (p. 33).

³⁶ De Chirico, ‘Une exposition’, p. 7.

³⁷ Tomás García-Salgado, ‘Andrea del Castagno: última cena’, *Ciencia Ergo Sum*, 12 (2004-05), 291-98 (p. 294). On the ‘expressive nature’ of the architecture in this painting, see Andrée Hayum, ‘A Renaissance Audience Considered: The Nuns at S. Apollonia and Castagno’s “Last Supper”’, *The Art Bulletin*, 88 (June 2006), 243-66 (p. 254).

³⁸ De Chirico, ‘Il senso architettonico’, p. 101.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ On the role of architectural elements in Perugino's work as reflective of the tastes of a previous generation of humanists, see Francis Russell, 'Perugino and the Early Experience of Raphael', in *Symposium Papers Series V: Raphael Before Rome*, ed. by James Beck (= *Studies in the History of Art*, 17 (1986)), pp. 189-201 (p. 190).

⁴¹ Pietro Scarpellini, *Perugino* (Milan: Electa, 1984), p. 41; Elvio Lunghi, *Il Martirio di san Sebastiano di Pietro Perugino a Panicale* (Milan: Fabrizio Fabbri Editore, 2005), p. 74.

⁴² Marilyn Bradshaw, 'Pietro Perugino: An Annotated Chronicle', in *Pietro Perugino: Master of the Italian Renaissance*, ed. by Joseph Antenucci Becherer (Grand Rapids, MI: The Grand Rapids Art Museum, 1997), pp. 251-303 (p. 276).

⁴³ On the role of Perugino's figures in this composition creating a sense of depth against the empty sky, see Scarpellini, pp. 90-91.

⁴⁴ Sheila Barker, 'The Making of a Plague Saint: Saint Sebastian's Imagery and Cult Before the Counter-Reformation', in *Piety and Plague: From Byzantium to the Baroque*, ed. by Franco Mormando and Thomas Worcester (Kirkville, MI: Truman State University Press, 2007), pp. 90-131 (pp. 112-14). See also Louise Marshall, 'Manipulating the Sacred: Image and Plague in Renaissance Italy', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 47 (1994), 485-532 (pp. 493-96).

⁴⁵ For the purposes of this essay, I will not venture into the complex debates regarding the dating of *The Enigma of the Oracle* (1909/1910) and *The Enigma of the Hour* (1910/1911), though a tentative consensus appears to be emerging surrounding the dating of the latter painting to 1910. See Paolo Baldacci, 'Giorgio de Chirico, *The Enigma of the Hour* (1910): The First Conceptual Work of Art', *The Brooklyn Rail*, 1 May 2017

<<https://brooklynrail.org/2017/05/criticspage/Giorgio-de-Chirico-The-Enigma-of-the-Hour-1910-The-First-Conceptual-Work-of-Art>> [accessed 15 July 2018]. Regarding the *Enigma of the Oracle*, I have chosen to adopt the dating provided by Paolo Picozza and the *Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico* for the *Engima dell'oracolo* as it supports my reading of the influence of Perugino's *Crocefissione* fresco in Florence on the canvas. For an overview of the debate and evidence for the 1910 dating, see Paolo Picozza, 'Betraying de Chirico: The Falsification of Giorgio de Chirico's Life History Over the Last Fifteen Years', *Metaphysical Art* 9-10 (2010), 28-60; and Picozza 'Le Costanti della Storia: Vecchia e Nuova Falsificazione dell'Opera di Giorgio de Chirico. Il Caso Baldacci', *Metafisica* 11-13 (2013), 353-377. For the 1909 dating, see Paolo Baldacci, review of Gerd Roos and Wieland Schmied, *Giorgio de Chirico, München 1906-1909* (1994), *Il Giornale dell'Arte* (Dec. 1994); Baldacci, *De Chirico, The Metaphysical Period 1888-1919* (New York: Bulfinch, 1997); Baldacci, 'Una parola (quasi) definitiva sulla cronologia 1908-1910', *Studi Online* 4.7-8 (2017), 5-44 (p. 24-25).

⁴⁶ Merjian, *Giorgio de Chirico*, p. 17.

⁴⁷ Roger Rothman, 'Between Böcklin and Picasso: Giorgio de Chirico in Paris, 1909-1913', *Southeastern College Art Conference Review* 15.1 (2006), 5-15 (p. 9).

⁴⁸ Riccardo Dottori, 'The Metaphysical Parable in Giorgio de Chirico's Painting', *Metafisica*, 5-6 (2006), 203-20 (p. 205). For another Nietzschean reading of this same canvas, see Willard Bohn, *The Rise of Surrealism: Cubism, Dada, and the Pursuit of the Marvelous* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), pp. 95-96.

⁴⁹ Thomas Mical, 'The Origins of Architecture, After de Chirico', *Art History*, 26 (February, 2003), 78-99 (p. 94, n. 47).

⁵⁰ Dottori, 'The Metaphysical Parable in Giorgio de Chirico's Painting', p. 206.

⁵¹ De Chirico, 'Raffaello Sanzio', p. 161.

⁵² De Chirico, 'Raffaello Sanzio', p. 161.

⁵³ Rona Goffen and Laurie Schneider have both remarked on the boldness of Raphael's unusual signature on the cornice of the temple (RAPHAEL.VRBINAS.MDIIII). John Shearman provides a detailed analysis of Raphael's use of architecture in the *Sposalizio* which shows how Raphael did not simply copy Perugino, but confidently developed his own perspectival designs. See Rona Goffen, 'Raphael's Designer Labels: From the Virgin Mary to La Fornarina', *Artibus et Historiae*, 24.48 (2003), pp. 123-42 (p. 126); Laurie Schneider, 'Raphael's Personality', *Notes in the History of Art*, 3.2 (1984), pp. 9-22 (p. 16); John Shearman, 'The Born Architect?', in *Symposium Papers Series V: Raphael Before Rome*, ed. by Beck, pp. 203-10 (pp. 205-208).

⁵⁴ De Chirico, 'Raffello Sanzio', p. 161.

⁵⁵ Merjian, *Giorgio de Chirico*, p. 178.

⁵⁶ Eun-Sung Kang has reconstructed Raphael's use of linear perspective, showing how the artist used practical geometry adapted to his own needs. See Eun-Sung Kang, 'Raphael's 'Annunciation' Predella Panel and a Perspective Drawing', *The Burlington Magazine*, 148.1241 (2006), 545-48.

⁵⁷ Shearman, p. 207.

⁵⁸ De Chirico, 'Raffaello Sanzio', p. 164.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

⁶¹ Maurizio Calvesi, 'L'universo nella stanza', in *Giorgio de Chirico: Pictor Optimus*, ed. by Fabio Benzi and Maria Grazia Tolomeo Speranza (Rome: Carte Segrete, 1992), pp. 15-44 (pp. 34-35); Merjian, *Giorgio de Chirico*, p.35.

⁶² De Chirico, 'Raffaello Sanzio', p. 159.

⁶³ Fagiolo Dell'Arco, 'Il Tempo del 'Mystère Laïc'', p. 89.

⁶⁴ Giorgio de Chirico, 'Méditations d'un peintre', in *Il Meccanismo del pensiero*, pp. 31-37 (p. 31).

⁶⁵ 'La révélation d'une oeuvre d'art (peinture ou sculpture) peut naître tout à coup, quand on s'y attend le moins et peut être aussi provoquée par la vue de quelque chose. Dans le premier cas elle appartient à un genre de sensations rares et étranges que parmi les hommes modernes, moi, je n'ai observé que dans un seul, Nietzsche. Parmi les anciens, peut-être (je dis peut-être car je doute quelquefois) que Phidias en concevant la forme plastique d'une Pallas Athénée, et Raphaël en peignant le ciel et le temple de son *Mariage de la Vierge*, qui est à la Pinacothèque de Brera, à Milan, eurent cette sensation.' Ibid., p. 32. Concerning Nietzsche's profound influence on de Chirico's work, see Merjian, *Giorgio de Chirico*, pp. 1-29.

⁶⁶ De Chirico, 'Letter to Fritz Gartz', cited in Roos, p. 310.

⁶⁷ Roger Cardinal, 'Giorgio de Chirico and Surrealist Mythology', *Papers of Surrealism*, 2 (2004), 1-6. The reference is to *La Révolution Surréaliste* 6 (1926), p. 32.

⁶⁸ '...le moins qu'on puisse dire est que l'esprit en est totalement absent et qu'y préside un cynisme éhonté. Le 'bol de bouillon', suivi naturellement de bien d'autres bols (l'Italie, le fascisme,—on connaît de lui un tableau assez infâme pour être intitulé: 'Légionnaire romain regardant les pays conquis'—l'ambition artistique qui est la plus

mediocre de toutes, la cupidité, même) a eu tôt fait de dissiper les enchantements. La complète amoralité du personnage en cause a fait le reste. Et il voudrait que nous hésitions à nous prononcer sur son attitude, en vertu de je ne sais quelle faiblesse sentimentale qui nous ferait reporter sur sa personne une part de l'émotion que ses premières oeuvres nous ont causée! [...] Aussi pensons-nous bien que de méchantes oeuvres comme son *Retour de l'Enfant Prodigue*, ses ridicules copies de Raphaël, ses *Tragédiens d'Eschyle*, et tant de portraits à menton fuyant et vaine devise latine ne peuvent être le fait que d'un méchant esprit.' André Breton, 'Le Surréalisme et la peinture', *La révolution surréaliste*, 7 (1926), 3-6 (p. 4).

⁶⁹ M.E. Warlick, *Max Ernst and Alchemy: A Magician in Search of Myth* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2001), p. 66; See also Uwe M. Schneede, *Max Ernst* (Stuttgart: Hatje, 1972), p. 71.

⁷⁰ Thomas Gaehtgens, 'Max Ernst and the Great Masters', in *Max Ernst: A Retrospective*, ed. by Werner Spies and Sabine Rewald (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 37-49 (p. 44).

FIGURE LEGEND

Figure 1. Tommaso Masaccio, *La Trinità*, 1427, fresco, 667 × 317 cm, Santa Maria Novella, Florence. Photo credit: © Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY

Figure 2. Andrea del Castagno, *L'Ultima cena*, c. 1445-1450, fresco, 453 × 975 cm, Sant'Appollonia, Florence. Photo credit: © Scala / Art Resource, NY.

Figure 3. Pietro Perugino (Vannucci), *San Sebastiano*, 1500, oil on panel, 170 × 117 cm, Louvre Museum, Paris. Photo credit: © Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.

Figure 4. Pietro Perugino (Vannucci), *La Crocefissione*, c. 1494-96, fresco, 480 × 812 cm, Santa Maria Maddalena De' Pazzi, Florence. Photo credit: © George Tatge, 2000/ Alinari/ Art Resource, NY.

Figure 5. Giorgio de Chirico, *The Enigma of the Oracle (L'énigme de l'oracle)*, 1909, oil on canvas, 42 × 61 cm, private collection, Turin. © DACS 2018. Photo credit: © Cameraphoto Arte, Venice / Art Resource, NY.

Figure 6. Giorgio de Chirico, *The Enigma of the Hour (L'énigme de l'heure)*, 1910, oil on canvas, 54.5 × 70.5 cm, private collection, Milan. © DACS 2018. Photo credit: © Scala / Art Resource, NY.

Figure 7. Pietro Perugino (Vannucci), *Lo Sposalizio della Vergine*, c. 1503-04, oil on wood, 236 × 186 cm, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Caen. Photo credit: © Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.

Figure 8. Raffaello (Raphael) Sanzio, *Lo Sposalizio della Vergine*, 1504, oil on panel, 170 × 118 cm, Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan. Photo credit: © Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.

Figure 9. Giorgio de Chirico, *The Enigma of the Arrival and the Afternoon (L'énigme de l'arrivée et de l'après-midi)*, 1912, oil on canvas, 70 × 86.5 cm, private collection. © DACS 2018. Photo credit: © HIP / Art Resource, NY.

Figure 10. Max Ernst, *Au rendez-vous des amis*, 1922, oil on canvas, 130 × 95 cm, Museum Ludwig, Cologne. © ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2018. Photo credit: © Snark / Art Resource, NY.