The body of architecture and its images

by
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Introduction | Abstract

The technical reproduction of images has eviscerated something fundamentally corporeal to the appreciation of artwork and of the architecture that contains it. Prior to its reproducibility, the experiencing of artwork required a full body commitment, even when the artwork itself was two-dimensional, the experience was a three dimensional one. It always required physical presence and bodily engagement; whether it was walking towards it, around it or looking up to get a better view. One would have to engage with the kinesthetic capacity of our body to appreciate the work or get a full picture of the meanings and techniques behind the images. In the cases when artwork was integrated into the built spaces, such as that of frescos and plastered paintings, conditions for viewing may not have been optimal. Sometimes the spatial configuration may have impeded a full view, or the lighting conditions might not be equal throughout, which could cause strain in the viewer. As such, it also demanded the engagement of senses other than the visual: the sense of smell and tactility provided by the architecture that housed it, as well our sense of balance and orientation,[1] all contributing to the experience of the artwork images. There was also an increased awareness of the architecture that housed the artwork, given how integral the artwork was to the space that supported it, and thus to the experience of the appreciation and communicative capacity of the artwork itself.

The experience of artwork that could not be reproduced was by its very irreproducibility demanding of the viewer a commitment to engage with it using all our senses, not only the visual register. Given its bodily dimension, the artwork was essentially understood as three-dimensional, because that was the only way to experience it; with the body, with motion. Even the artwork of frescos that was itself two-dimensional wasn't ever really experienced as two-dimensional because it was always intimately tied to the architectural space that housed it and by the bodily movement needed to appreciate it.[2] Artwork became disassociated with its physical architectural space once it could be reproduced and exhibited elsewhere, or seen in a book or a screen.

This paper aims to address this particular facet of the reproduction of artwork, and loss of dimensionality introduced by technical and digital reproducibility. The shift in viewing modes, in the spectator, and in the space is explored by zooming into three moments in history with a punctual

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[1] Or kinesthetic sense, also known as proprioception
[2] Not just epitomical examples like the Sistine chapel, which clearly need to be experienced in its physical space, but also other pieces such as the Monalisa for instance, that required a physical presence; required walking around it, seeing its smalls stature, commenting on its position on the wall, the other paintings around it.

glance into the changing conception of images, and our relationship to them and the space that contains them. The comparison is not intended to be exhaustive, rather it is aimed at contraposing very specific aspects of the following three moments; first, the Renaissance under the heading of "Unified Body"[3]; second, the beginning of the 20th century with the advent of art's reproducibility, under "Disembodied Body", and lastly the end of the 20th century "Fragmented Body", which also tackles our contemporary condition.

       This paper aims to be a philosophical inquiry into the character of the architectural space that makes viewing artwork images possible, and how the shift of viewing and change in the spectator is paralleled by a shift in the conception of the body.

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[3] The term "body" used in the title and headings, is explicitly referring to the double connotation of the body of architecture meaning the material of architecture itself, and that which it houses, and referring to the physical body which is necessary (mostly) for the comprehension of the artwork that is housed by architecture.

I. Unified body

The way artwork is displayed and images are appreciated goes hand in hand with the conception of the architecture that houses them. Leaving aside for the moment the important distinction between building and architecture, our built environment has always played a pivotal role in the way we appreciate artwork.

This first section will focus on the conception of architecture and the images that it houses from the period of the Renaissance, inspired mostly by Vitruvius and his disciples. During this time architecture was understood as unified and held by rules of symmetry and proportion modeled on the human body. The display of images up to this point was intimately tied to the architecture that sheltered them.

1.1 Celestial versus universal: artwork fully integrated into architecture

The influential writer and cardinal of the counter reformation, Gabriele Paleotti, who set out the church's views on the proper role and content of art in his *Discourse on Sacred and Profane Images*, is a key figure in the understanding of the critical role that images played prior to the renaissance. For Paleotti, images had the capacity to communicate more rapidly than text, as well as reaching a much wider audience than texts could. In this sense, images are more immediate and transformative, with the capacity to change people's thoughts and beliefs. In other words, as seen from a man of the Catholic church, the power of images is that they have the ability to *convert*. Images for Paleotti were a very powerful tool and architecture played a critical role in his conception of the power of images.

Images of this time, prior to the possibility of reproducing them photographically or by other technical means, are built into the spaces of churches and chapels, integral to the architecture that houses them.[4] As such, one *experiences* these images just as one experiences a three-dimensional space; there is a clear parallel between the experience of a space and the experience of the artwork integrated in it. One is meant to 'educate' the other; to enhance their communicative capability with such force as to be able to, according to Paleotti, have the capacity to change people's belief systems.

In Paleotti's time, images were integrated with the three-dimensional religious architecture, such as in the churches and public buildings- and they needed to be in order to have the visceral bodily effect that was hoped they would, tied to ritual of the Catholic church. Indeed, there seems to

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[4] Images here, prior to reproduction, refer to artwork in general

be a parallel between the movements and rituals that a Catholic person must do to receive the body of Christ during communion, and a person experiencing an artwork in a Church. In this sense the images of Christianity were three-dimensional because they were tied to the three-dimensional space that contained them. As soon as images can be reproduced in two-dimensional form they lose the third dimension. If we were two-dimensional entities these would be more comprehensible, but given that we are three-dimensional the reproduction of images has eviscerated something very essential to how humans experience the world with our bodies.

1.2 The Image of a Unified Body: The Vitruvian man

The writings of Vitruvius, the first century BC roman architect and author of the influential treatise on architecture, *De Architectura* or *The Ten Books on Architecture*, were rediscovered in the renaissance by people like Leon Battista Alberti, Sebastiano Serlio, Andrea Palladio, who through their own treatises gave new life to Vitruvius' texts. In his treatise on Architecture, Vitruvius covered a wide range of topics related to the built environment, focusing on the "optimal proportions" of things, with a lengthy portion dedicated to the design of temples, most of which are based on the optimal proportions of the human body. Architecture was understood as a unified body, ordered through an appreciation of the human body as its regulating system. Vitruvius claims repeatedly that he was "writing the body of architecture"[5] and that his work was a "perfectly ordered corpus".

Interestingly, the new life that was given to his text by renaissance architects was also linked to the production of new *images[6]* that were created as a means to illustrate Vitruvius' text. However, these images often embodied their own agenda, distinct from that of the roman architect. In the first chapter of Book Three, Vitruvius articulates the links between architecture and the human body, discussing proportion, the role of the circle and the square geometry as organizers of architectural proportions made analogous to those of a perfectly proportioned male body, now known as the *Vitruvian Man.* However, this man described textually by Vitruvius in *DeArchitecttura*, is known mostly through the translation into an image drawn by Leonardo da Vinci almost a millennium afterwards. Vitruvius' original description of the ideal proportion of man was not, that we know of, ever accompanied by an illustration. It is known that Vitruvius favored words over drawing. Indeed,

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[5] Vitruvius, Writing the Body of Architecture, Indra Kagis McEwan, p.6
[6] "Images" here also encompass drawings

in the entire body of ten books there are a total of four drawings.[7] Vitruvius' description is directed at providing a template or a *diagram* that can be instrumental to the architect who is designing temples, and who must do so according to strict rules of symmetry and proportion governed by the human body. Indeed, the floor plan for the ideal temple emerged from this diagram.[8]

Da Vinci's Vitruvian Man image, and the subsequent versions which have been reproduced so exhaustingly, invariably show a standing naked man actively illustrating the geometrical proportional relationship between the body and geometrical figures of a circle and a square. It is an undeniably three-dimensional body. However, it is worth paying closer attention to Vitruvius' original words:

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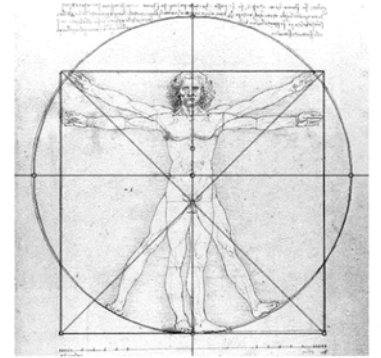
> *Then again, in the human body the central point is naturally the navel. For if a man be placed flat on his back, with his hands and feet extended, and a pair of compasses centered at his navel, the fingers and toes of his two hands and feet will touch the circumference of a circle described therefrom. And just as the human body use a circular outline, so to a square figure maybe found from it. For if we measure the distance from the soles of the feet to the top of the head, and then apply that measure to the outstretched arms, the breath will be found to be the same as the height, as in the case of playing services which are perfectly square.*[9]

While the Vitruvian Man of the Renaissance is invariably illustrated as a standing figure, Vitruvius' description clearly has the man lying down, "*placed flat on his back",* illustrating the geometric proportions described in a more passive disposition: he is a man with no thickness, a two-dimensional geometric figure used to illustrate proportion and symmetry. His purpose seems to be that of providing a planimetric organizing tool; something to be mapped on a floor plan for the correct layout of its proportions. In a sense, the textual man described by Vitruvius is more abstract and two-dimensional than the three-dimensional standing Vitruvian man of the Renaissance.

The fact that Vitruvius' description had the man lying down indicates a direct correlation between the idealized proportions of the human body and the regulating geometries of the floorplan

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[7] This is according to McEwan. However, more importantly, in describing the qualities that architects should have, the ability to write for Vitruvius comes first, followed by the ability to draw which occupies a secondary position: "*He [the architect] should know writing, be skilled in drawing and trained in geometry.*" Indra Kagis McEwan, *Vitruvius, Writing the Body of Architecture*, p.17
[8] While we are specifically discussing images, in the context of this paper, drawings and diagrams are images.
[9] Vitruvius *The Ten Books of Architecture*, Book 3: On symmetry. Page 73

for idealized architectural organization. It is the square and the circle in plan, not in elevation, that regulated the proportions of the architecture for Vitruvius.

Indeed, for the Greeks and Romans of Vitruvius' time, it was the floor plan that was the driver of architectural organization, with *regulating lines* that connect and subdivide in the "optimal" proportions relating to the idealized proportions of the human body. The *image of architecture* emerged from the diagram - the floor plan. Yet, that which was supposed to regulate that floor plan is shown by most renaissance drawings as a vertical standing man. Indeed:

> *Leonardo's figure, like the images that appeared after it in architectural treatises and illustrated editions of Vitruvius, says more about Renaissance humanism than about the geometrical footprints of Roman humanitas.*[10]

It is curious that the famous image of the Vitruvian man that is so present in our conception of Vitruvius himself, is in fact *obscuring* the text rather than clarifying it. While the main role of images that accompany texts seems to be that of clarifying the text, in this case the image was produced so many years later that it is imbued with the preoccupations present at the time of its production. Indeed, images are necessarily imbued with the preoccupations present at the time of its production. This is not to say that: "*Leonardo and his successors got it wrong, but rather to stress how easily the images can obscure the text and, more importantly, the historical specificity of its signified matter.*"[11] In other words, what seems to be obscuring the intent of Vitruvius is in fact illuminating of the Renaissance and the humanistic concepts of images during that time. We don't know what the drawing would have been like had it been drawn by Vitruvius himself, but we do know it would have had a more direct relationship with a floor plan than with an elevation. Maybe closer to the illustration made by Francesco di Giorgio Martini, where the body is quite literally inscribed inside the floor plan of a church. However even Martini's drawing shows the figure in a standing position.
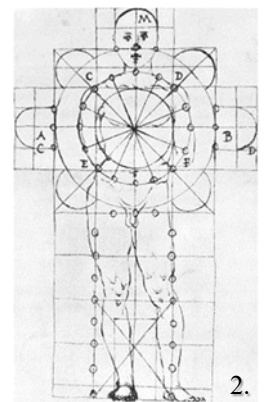
The change which provoked illustrating the Vitruvian man as standing instead of lying down, may have been a consequence of the invention of perspective; a technique of drawing that mimics human cone of vision providing a realistic perception of depth. Perspective technique elevated the human point of view to a privileged position in artwork, furthering the humanistic agenda as well as transforming the perception of images in general. With perspective,

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[10] Indra Kagis McEwan, *Vitruvius, Writing the Body of Architecture*, p. 156
[11] Ibid., p.365

the human point of view becomes central and dominant, because this is the most faithful representation of how humans perceive space and depth. As the human dimension becomes more dominant, the change of emphasis from floor plan to perspective seems a natural one.

1.3 The instrumental image: drawing

From the example of the Vitruvian man, as a drawing produced to illustrate content in a text, one is tempted to ask whether drawings are instrumental images? What defines a drawing and an image? There is a fine line between a drawing and an image, and while they are certainly not the same, for the purposes of this paper, this distinction is not a critical one. Hence, we will consider a drawing an image. What is important is to define, however, are the boundaries of what makes an image, an image, and what can clearly be discounted as a non-image.

According to a traditional account by Pliny the Elder, a first century A.D Roman writer, the invention of drawing started with the wish of a maiden to capture the figure of her departing lover: to do so she traced over the shadow of her lover which was being cast on the wall of the space they were in. This is the nature of architectural drawings which we were discussing earlier; they are projections- or projected images. Some images record things that are already made, much like television or photography, others might be intended as representations of something that will be made, such as floor plans of a building. However, there are other types of images as well; images which embody ideas, or possibilities. These images are generative; they are a process.

The image generated by the projected shadow, is such that it embodies in it the memory of the lover having physically been in the space. While the image is a two-dimensional representation of something that was three-dimensional, it is so tied to the space, that the experience of the image is itself tied to the physical, three-dimensional space. With the profusion of mechanical reproduction techniques, beyond reproductions made by artists, images lose their connectedness to the space, and in so doing they become flatter. Our experience of things is tightly connected to the architecture that houses those things and allows us to experience them. Walter Benjamin wrote about this relationship:

> *Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be.*[12]

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[12] Walter Benjamin "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936)

The loss of dimensionality in the experience of artwork is a direct consequence of the fast reproducibility of artwork. As seen from the eloquent illustration depicting the "Invention of drawing", when one wanted to preserve an image of something or someone important, it was projected, or drawn onto, the physical space, or a portrait was commissioned, but that portrait was always commissioned with a physical space for hanging it in mind. Sometimes entire rooms or spaces were built for this very purpose, from which the concept of a museum or art gallery emerged. At the beginning of the 20th century, there is a loss of dimensionality in the image and in the experience of the image or artwork, that went hand in hand with a *flattening* of the space that housed them. In the next section, to illustrate this point, we will explore what happened to the spaces that housed artwork that could be easily reproduced, and the emergence of the ubiquitous phenomenon of the white box space for artwork and black box for the projection of moving images.

II. Disembodied Body

If, as Vitruvius tried to teach us, the unified body of architecture was that which understands the tight-knit connection between the human body and the physical spaces that encompass that body, then a disembodied body emerges when the threads that keep them together begin to unravel, and one starts to disassociate from the other. For Vitruvius and the Renaissance masters inspired by his writings, man was the unifying body of architecture. This ingrained notion, however, did not remain uncontested.

This seems to be what has happened at the beginning of the 20th century with the possibility of reproducing images by technical means. While images have always been reproduced by fellow artists, the rapid reproduction of these images allowed for almost complete disassociation between the artwork and the space where it is being shown. Indeed, the intent seems to be to push this disassociation to the extreme. But the relationships we are looking at are not simply the dual relationship between the space and the artwork, rather it is a three-way relationship that includes the space, the artwork and the subject appreciating the artwork. So how does one disembody a subject?

The next section aims to shed some light on the methods used to both disembody the subject experiencing an artwork and also to disembody the architecture containing the artwork. The first aspect has to do with the subject's sensorial appreciation of the images and the space housing them, while the second aspect relates to the three-dimensional quality of the space itself, affected by the loss of sensorial completeness.

2.1. Flattening of spaces for viewing images

Our experience of things is tightly connected to the built spaces that house those things, allowing us, subjects, to experience those things, objects. This notion applied to the appreciation of images illustrates the importance of built space that enable the subject to be affected by the object. It is the vehicle with which appreciation can occur.

> *There is always an intermediary place between us and objects, a womb in which the object becomes sensible (...) It is in this intermediary space that things become capable of being sensed. (...) It is only outside oneself that something becomes capable of being experienced: something becomes sensible only in the intermediate body that lies between the subject and*

the object.[13]

This "intermediary place" that Emanuele Coccia is referring to in the quote above, seems to be the built environment -the architecture- that houses the objects which we experience.[14] Here too, there is a metaphoric use of architecture as a body, an intermediate or an instrumental one, that allows the subject to experience the object under the notion of *the sensible*. But what is the sensible?[15]

The sensible is the compendium of faculties that enables us humans, as well as non-human animals, to interact and appreciate the world external to our body. Our senses are the way in which we interface and make *sense* of the world: touch, taste, sight, smell, hearing; these are the main five senses which we associate with our bodies interacting with the world. In the case of appreciation of images, which is the focus of this paper, we have seen that in certain punctual moments in time and place, such as religious artwork in Europe, the appreciation of artwork was tightly tied to the space that housed it, causing it to be an experience that engaged almost all of our senses.[16]

> *Images-what the sensible life is made of-do not have a pure mental or psychic nature. If it were so, we could simply close our eyes to see, feel, and taste the world. We would not need sounds to hear, nor would we need to hurl ourselves to the skin of the objects to feel the surface of the world or have to place food upon our tongue to taste its flavor.*[17]

However, with the mechanical reproduction of artwork, sight became much more dominant than the other senses, which were intentionally excluded. As we shall see, spaces became flatter and senses became more distinct; sound became a negative aspect of these spaces, as did texture and other sensorial variations. One seemed to be required to behave in a particular way, conditioning our experience of the work of art. Often referred to as an "aesthetic device"[18] the gallery for viewing images and the auditorium for viewing moving images have the capacity to profoundly condition our attitude toward the work of art.

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[13] Emanuele Coccia, *Sensible Life,* p.14-15

[14] Coccia is not strictly speaking referring to architecture, so this is slightly taken out of context and used to make a point specific to this paper. He often refers to the "mirror" as that something which exists in a different place from subjects and objects, and which has an intermediate nature.

[15] For Coccia: "*The sensible, that is the being of images*". His conception of the sensible is a bit broader and more layered than the use made of the term here, where the correspondence is between the sensible and the ability to sense using our senses.

[16] With the possible exception of taste, although all our senses are intimately connected and it is hard to conceive of smell without taste, and vice versa.

[17] Emanuele Coccia, *Sensible Life,* p.11

[18] Gabriele Pedulla, *In Broad Daylight*, p.17-18

Moviegoers today find themselves in a position not unlike that of the contemporary art enthusiast who takes for granted the rarified and somewhat icy atmosphere of the gallery because this is the only environment with which he associates an exhibition.[19]

There is still a persistent conception that the optimal way of viewing artwork is a white box and the optimal way of viewing a movie is the black box. These are understood as neutral backgrounds designed to incite a specific behavior of reverence and ritual in the viewer. When entering such spaces, one tends to know how to behave; lowering one's voice and quietly focusing on that which is meant to be viewed. There is an assumption that there is a singular "right way" to experience a movie defined by a particular relationship between the image or moving image, the spectator and the physical environment that houses them. We associate these environments with the artwork without realizing that it took many decades and many variations before we landed on these seemingly stable typologies and for them to establish themselves as the singular way of consuming images, or moving images.

Interestingly, these two typologies seem to have paralleled themselves in time, and what is referred to as the golden age of the "white box" coincided with the most glorious season of the "black box", from the 1920s until the 1970s"[20] The crisis that artwork has gone through with its mechanical reproduction is similar to that of the cinema now that the golden age of cinema is behind us. Much like artwork, movies can now be experienced without the apparatus of the cinema (on our streaming on our tablets, computers, and phones), which has put the going to the cinema in crisis.[21] The art gallery or the auditorium can profoundly influence the viewer's reaction to the content being housed or shown, by imposing precise styles of *viewing* and of *listening*.[22]

However, this inspires the following question, what is the optimal physical condition for spaces that house images and how are they designed to induce in the spectator a specific kind of behavior and elicit a particular kind of experience? The next section aims to address this question, encompassing the experiences of traditional artwork from the museum or gallery to the experience of the moving image, as developed in the mid twentieth century.
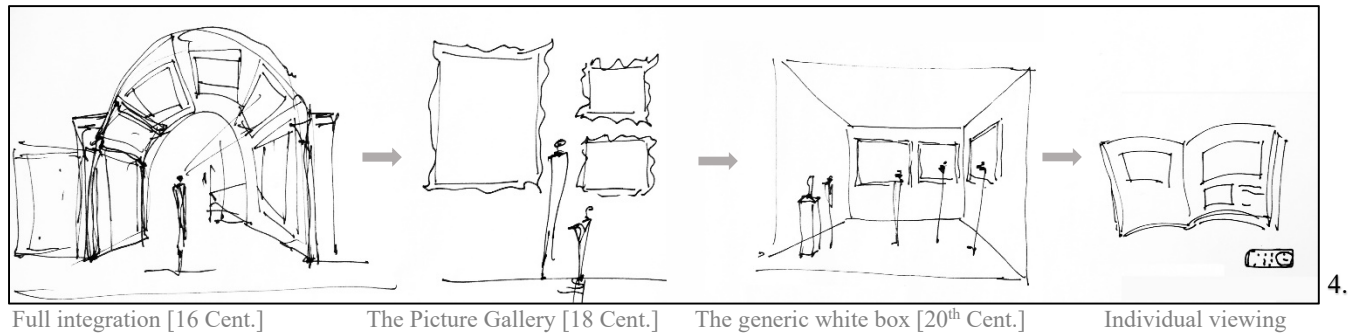
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[19] Gabriele Pedulla, *In Broad Daylight*, p.26
[20] Ibid., p.17
[21] It has been reported that 2016 was the worse year for movie income since the 1920s
[22] Gabriele Pedulla, *In Broad Daylight*, p.17-18

2.2. The emergence of the White Box space for images

Full integration [16 Cent.]   The Picture Gallery [18 Cent.]   The generic white box [20th Cent.]   Individual viewing

The architecturally integrated artwork up until the sixteenth century, that was discussed earlier in the paper, gave way to the "picture gallery" of the eighteenth century where artwork was used to adorn and enhance interior spaces. Thus, while full integration was no longer dominant, there was a reciprocal relationship between the space and the image contained in it insofar as one is used to enhance the other: the picture adorned the spaces, the space enabled the picture to be contemplated with a particular environment, or *aura*[23], around it. However, the relationship is no longer held by a tight fit as the two are no longer codependent on one another. There is a slight dissociation between the space and the artwork: the artwork gets framed allowing for its easy transportation and relocation making the space that houses it become associated with temporality rather than permanence. The artwork's appreciation in that specific location is a temporary one, even if it ends up staying there for an entire lifetime, there is now the possibility for removal and relocation. Images and space for contemplation of images are no longer coupled together as in the case of the frescoes of the Renaissance or the mosaics of the middle ages in religious and public places. And as a consequence, the space becomes a little more two-dimensional.

With this separation between image and space, there is a distancing between the spectator and the image, giving way to the typology that is most taken for granted, the white cube. Here the walls, ceilings, and floors are deprived of any color beyond a neutral white or grey, resulting in complete dissociation between the artwork and the space. As we arrive to the white cube as an aesthetic device of modernity, it becomes more specifically about vision, and not the complete sensorial experiencing which the architecturally integrated artwork of the sixteenth century demanded. This typology seems

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[23] This is an explicit reference to the work of Walter Benjamin "*The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*". While Benjamin's text is of huge value to the development of the ideas in this text, there is also an understanding of the work of art which this text moves away from in favor of a multifaceted understanding of how art can be appreciated. To quote Gabiele Pedulla: "*Contrary to what Benjamin thought, there is more than one way to appreciate the work of an architect, to go to the theater, or to look at a painting. If this were not the case, there would be no need for aesthetic devices like the dark cube in the first place.*" *In Broad Daylight,* p.73

to be designed to have a specific ritualistic effect on the viewer; a sense of reverence towards the images on the wall, demanding complete and full visual attention from the spectator, and complete negation of the other senses.

This typology is still dominant in contemporary museums and art gallery spaces and often assumed as the default generic condition for viewing artwork images un-obfuscated by other environmental factors related to the space. With the flattening of the walls, there is a loss of dimensionality to the experience of the work of art itself. There is an increasingly less three-dimensional quality to the image, because our experience of the space that houses it is more distanced; our senses -other than vision- are not as engaged. There is something about its whiteness and "purity" that makes the spectator behave in a particular way; there is a tendency to leave more distance between the viewer and the artwork, and very often talking in a whisper as if it were a place of worship.

Given the fact that we experience the world as three-dimensional beings, we can relate to the world in three dimensions. In losing the three-dimensional-ness of the artwork as linked to the space, the artwork and the space becomes more distinct. When it is more integrated with the physical space, as with church frescos, it feels more "3d" and so it is easier to appreciate and feel a part of. In dissociating the images from the space, the effect is that of distancing our sensorial body from it. The loss of dimensionality also contributes to making the experience of the artwork more abstract. As a result the contemplation of the image is more focused and unmitigated by sounds or smells or textures of the surrounding space that would cause a break from a pure visual contemplation of the image. In losing the authenticity there is also a loss of what Walter Benjamin calls the "aura" that all images have when coupled to the space that houses them. In turn, the architecture designed to house these images becomes more generic as a result.

In becoming a more specialized experience, focused on sight, there is a sense of disembodiment; the spaces are white, abstract, they entice us lose our sense of body, and become part of the image itself. There is a disembodied appreciation of the image that simultaneously separates us from ourselves, our sense of self, and joins us to the object. For this to happen the "intermediary space" referred to by Coccia needs to recede, fall behind our contemplation, and be as 'generic' as possible. However, what is generic for the appreciation of static images and considered to be ideal for most of the 20th century, is not what works as the ideal condition for viewing moving images, which will be the focus of the next section.

2.3. The emergence of the black box for moving images

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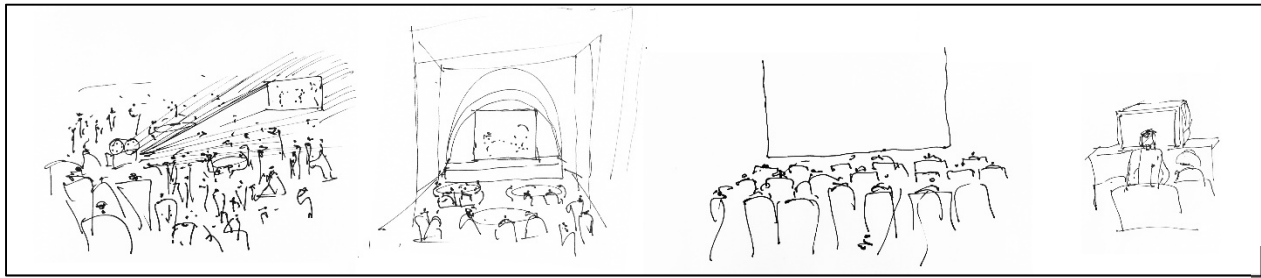
Full integration [19 Cent.]   Picture House [early 20th Cent.]   The generic black box [20th Cent.]   Individual viewing

In a parallel with the "white box" for viewing artwork images, the "black box" is still held as the paradigm for optimal viewing of moving images. However, a brief look at the history of this artform will show us that it took between twenty to thirty years of evolution for this particular viewing style, to establish itself as the singular way of consuming moving images. In the 1920s there still was no single viewing style for film. The "cinema" was where the projector was: in a cafe' or a temporary empty garage, under a circus tent, at a fair, on an improvised vaudeville stage. The picture house emerged as a paradoxical space, in which very different and often opposing functions were brought together in a single space. The viewer was not solely focused on the project image itself; the viewer was in some degree in a state of distraction while viewing the movie.

Arriving at the dark identity-less black box space of most contemporary movie-houses took some time, and yet it has persisted. Still today we associate to the movie-going experience with: total darkness, separation from the outside world, immobility and silence, and being in a large communal space with other strangers.[24] There is an implicit and socially-agreed upon understanding that as soon as images are projected on the screen, there are certain behavioral norms to follow and a "right way" to experience a movie and behave during the projection of it, which includes cutting off our senses that are not sight or hearing. How did this ritualistic behavior emerge? The shift in the kind of spectator was enabled by the shifting conception of movie typology as well as the architecture of the movie house itself. [25]

Initially, in trying to find the optimal architectural typology for projecting movies there was a push to assimilate the design of the first movie houses in the nineteen twenties, to known theater typologies which derived from Renaissance conceptions of the theater. These conceptions in turn

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[24] Gabriele Pedulla describes how these 6 elements are key in our conception of movie-going. "*The cinema experience is indissolubly connected to these six elements.*" *In Broad Daylight,* p.25-26

[25] "*A cinematic architecture and new model of spectator emerged hand-in hand with a profound change in movies.*" Gabriele Pedulla, *In Broad Daylight*, p.38

were deeply influenced by the writings of Vitruvius. In this seminal work, *The Ten Books on Architecture,* there are a few chapters dedicated to the "optimal proportions" for theater design. These are again based on the optimal proportions of the human body; the *unified body* discussed earlier, conceived through the universal *Vitruvian* man. These ideas were rescued by Renaissance architects of the sixteenth century, who in turn wrote treatises furthering Vitruvius' ideas, and in some cases also put these ideas to test with built designs for theater spaces. Alberti, Serlio, Palladio, are among some of the most influential. Although Leon Battista Alberti produced the first book-length architectural treatise of the Renaissance it was unillustrated, written in Latin, and designed to appeal to learned humanists and potential patrons of architects and builders. Serlio in his *Five Books on Architecture* pioneered the use of high quality illustrations to supplement the text, making it more accessible to a larger population.[26] Palladio also wrote a treatise, but his built work was a most eloquent expression of his ideas, like the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza, which was the first permanent theater of the renaissance, and as such established itself as a precedent worth following.[27]

6.

The concept of the optimal proportions of the human body exemplified by the aforementioned illustration by Leonardo da Vinci is also applied to theater design, as can be seen in the illustrations below.[28] Here we can see how the geometric diagram of the idealized perfect "vitruvian" body, inscribed inside a circle and a square, is transposed to the design of the theater floor plan. The same geometries of a circle and a square rotating inside it around a central point, are used in the diagram of theater design to subdivide and organize the space:

7.

> *For Renaissance humanists, educating the public in the classical theater was part of a much more comprehensive project of recreating man in the likeness of the Greek and Roman*s.[29]

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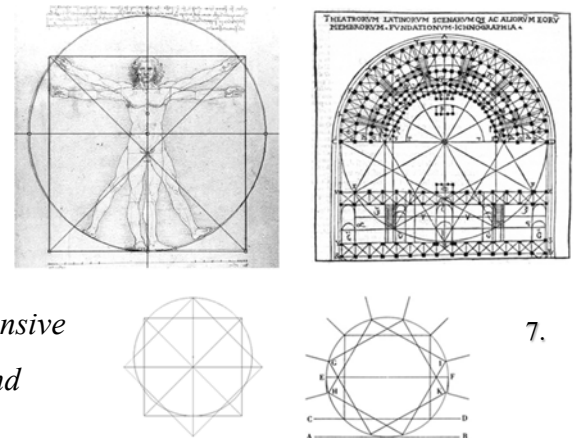
[26] Leon Battista Alberti, *The Art of Building in Ten Books*. c. 1450. Serlio: *Five Books on Architecture* c. 1611. Serlio wrote in Italian, and his treatise catered explicitly to the needs of architects, builders, and craftsmen. Palladio's *The Four Books of Architecture* was published in Venice in 1570

[27] The Teatro Olimpico was built in 1585, designed by Andrea Palladio was inspired by Greco-Roman typology.

[28] Theater design is covered in Book 5 of Vitruvius' text

[29] Gabriele Pedulla, *In Broad Daylight*, p.47

The sixteenth century Renaissance conception of architectural organization was departing from the idea of man as likened by gods. Rather than placing religion first, the human body was the center. It was the humanist unified body discussed earlier, that permeated most aspects of life in this time period.

The first designs of the space for cinema in the early twentieth century were initially inspired by this conception, in an attempt to bring the viewing styles of cinema and theater closer together and to elicit equal attention. As Alberti himself claimed: "*The architects only task was to put the spectators in a condition to see and hear effortlessly what was happening on stage.*"[30] This gave rise to the "*vitruvian spectator*"[31] who is defined as someone immersed in the experience of that which is unfolding on the screen, respectful of the physical and communal environment that holds the event, without succumbing to unnecessary distractions. By assimilating the architectural aspects of an Italian theater (with the double proscenium arch, the galleries, etc.) the goal was to assimilate the experience of going to the theater and elicit equal attention in the movie spectator as in the theater spectator. Thus, the physical environment was designed to seem familiar, recall behavioral associations, and thus instill tight control over the behavior of the spectator.

8.

> *Imitating the theater, the dark cube in fact aspired to propose itself as a place of absolute aesthetic experience that allowed only one legitimate activity: the contemplation of a film.* (...) *Suddenly, going to the movies was like going to church.*[32]

Certainly, the shift in the type of space was also enabled by the kinds of movies that required more attention, and were based on narration. However, they could not have emerged without a concerted effort to control the viewer's perception of space through the careful design and associative power that physical space has on the subject, and the subject's capacity to appreciate the object. As Pedulla reminds us, there is an awareness of the psychological effects that particular spacial designs can have over the user, and a: "*general acknowledgement of the psychological ends of architecture and its ability to control perception.*"[33]

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[30] Leon Battista Alberti, *The Art of Building in Ten Books*. In Latin, *De reAedificatoria* c.1443
[31] This is the title of a chapter in Gabriele Pedulla's book *In Broad Daylight*, p. 37-60
[32] Gabriele Pedulla, *In Broad Daylight*, p. 33
[33] Ibid., p.53

III. Fragmented Body

After decades of aiming to find its place movies seemed to have an established location in the black box space. The auditorium's principal objective for the vitruvian spectator was to impose on the audience a new attitude towards movies. By subjecting spectators to total darkness and voluntarily restricting freedom of movement, they submitting themselves to the controlled behavior associated with going to the theater. Yet, as any contemporary moviegoer knows, cinema is undergoing the same crises that artwork images did once they reached the age of massive reproduction. Given the prevalence of technology that allows the streaming of movies in our own homes, film is now reproducible, at the level of the individual, who is able to project a film without the apparatus of the cinema. Thus, the ceremonial quality of the cinema and its uniqueness [34] is now lost. It is no longer enough to just project a movie to entice people to go to the movies. Cinema is poised to find itself a new home in a new kind and of architectural space.

3.1 Architectural Space and Control: Kiesler and Freud
While movie theaters were initially modelled on the typology of the Vitruvian theater, this assimilation was already being questioned by architects and critics, and filmmakers of mid twentieth century. Not all architects or designers of these spaces agreed with using the theater as inspiration for the cinema. This was one of the factors contributing to it ultimately developing into something quite different. Indeed, Frederick Kiesler criticized this assimilation, claiming the movie house should be something else entirely:

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> *the cinema is a play of surfaces, the theatre is a performance in space, and this difference has not yet been translated concretely into any piece of architecture, neither for the theater nor for the cinema.[35]*

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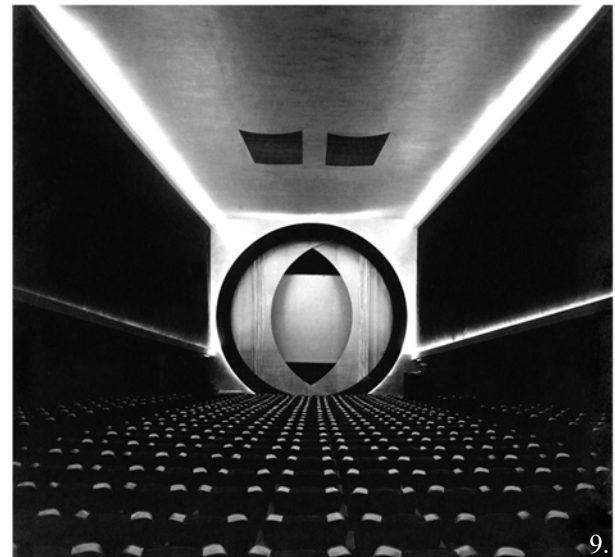
[34] the *aura* that Benjamin refers to when discussing art, although according to him film did not have aura at all.
[35] Friederick Kiesler quoted by Gabriele Pedulla, *In Broad Daylight*, p.51-52

Kiesler pointed to some initial practical reasons for this, for instance; in a movie house, the first rows were no longer the best ones, as in the theater; the side seating provided by elegant boxes also become nonsensical for the viewing of a flat screen which is best viewed frontally; and similarly the typical fan-shaped seating of the theater house did not provide the best view for the flat screen. As such, some of the unnecessary theatrical elements began to drop away. Thus the assimilation that was taking place wasn't about it *looking* like a theater, but rather affording the same behaviors from the spectator that the theater afforded. Kiesler felt that what was: "*The most important quality of an auditorium for film was the ability to suggest concentrated attention*" and, importantly, allow the spectator to "*lose himself in an infinite imaginary space.*"[36] This is an important point worth remarking on briefly, and placing into the context of the time which will require a short detour into Freudian thought. Indeed, it is interesting to note that Kiesler and Sigmund Freud were both from Vienna and relatively contemporaries of one another; Kiesler being just thirtyfour years younger than Freud, implies that when he began his working years he was already in a fully Freud-imbued Vienna.[37]

The ability to lose oneself into an infinite imaginary space, implies that the feeling of containment that a movie house might initially engender, is replaced by a feeling of *oneness* when the spectator rests his eyes on the screen, putting him in a condition to "lose himself". In a parallel with Freudian psychoanalytic techniques, the consulting room of a psychoanalysts is a very tightly controlled space, set up to illicit a certain kind of behavior and response in the patient: the use of the couch, the controlled visual, auditory and tactile environment– is to simultaneously disorient and orient, confuse and enlighten, frighten and shelter the patient. It evokes simultaneous opposing –yet not contradictory- sensations which extract the patient from his or her particular perspective of reality and re-orients the patient into a state of fusion with the space itself. This, together with the words of the analyst, is instrumental in propelling the patient to *lose himself in the space*, allowing the space itself to recede and the words to come to the fore.

This feeling of oneness is similar to Freud's notion of oceanic feeling[38] which refers to a state of oneness with the universe associated with the baby's contentment during feeding at the breast. A successful analytic session embarks in free association and analytic interpretation in order to instigate

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[36] Friederick Kiesler quoted by Gabriele Pedulla, *In Broad Daylight*, p.52
[37] In *Elastic Architecture*, the author claims that Kiesler has taken an early interest in Freud, and his library showcased many of Freud's publications, including *The Interpretation of Dream*s. p.191
[38] Freud first refers to the 'oceanic feeling' in the opening pages of Civilization and its Discontents, in the context of letters exchanged with his friend, now known to be Romain Rolland: "*It is a feeling which he would like to call a sensation of 'eternity', a feeling as of something limitless, unbounded—as it were, 'oceanic'.*" p.11

transference and regression.[39] While all that visibly takes place in a session is the verbal exchange of words[40] environmental factors also play a key role and be conducive in triggering the regressive state. The space of analysis is not just a passive context for treatment; it is an active participant in the analysis. The room activates daydreaming while protecting and sheltering the daydreamer, functioning as a safe haven and shelter for the patient but also as a stimulant of regression. The aim of the spatial setup of the consultation room is to imbue the patient with a feeling of 'the uncanny'; concept developed by Freud in his 1919 paper of the same name. This oscillating movement between opposing states causes a reorientation, or *anamorphosis*, of the

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patient towards the primal oceanic feeling of oneness – towards a state of fusion with the space itself. In line with the primary narcissistic state of the infant, this feeling of oneness induces what is one of the goals in psychoanalysis: regression into the unconscious. It seems that Kiesler is making reference to the ability that physical environment has to create a palpable effect on the spectator; to put the spectator in a state of oneness with the space.

This experience could be compared to the experience that often gets attributed to observing a work of art, where one becomes fused with the object of observation.[41] This sense of fusion gets multiplied across scales with our contemporary ability to contemplate art in a variety of modes, at a variety of scales and intensities. This is very different from the unity experienced by the Renaissance viewer discussed earlier, it is a unity achieved through fragmentation. It is a fragmentation similar to Benjamin's conception of the fragmentary nature of film itself: with its ability to zoom in, slow down and manipulate through editing.

3.2 Architecture as an aesthetic device

The appreciation of artwork today is multifaceted and fragmented. Our screens and access to information allow us to have multiple scales of appreciation: we can look at the image of an art piece by zooming into its pixels on a computer or tablet, and also remotely experience the way in which the

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[39] Although beyond the scope of this paper, one could similarly look at the notion of transference as a fusion with the analyst; whereby the patient becomes identified with the analyst through the unconscious redirection of feelings without losing the awareness of the otherness of the analyst.

[40] As Lacan put it "reducing it to its bare truth (…) it is merely a question of words spoken". Jacques Lacan, "The Direction of the Treatment and The Principles Of Its Power" in *Ecrit: A Selection*, p.227

[41] For more on this, see Erwin Straus, in *The Primary World of Senses*, where he discussing this relationship as the subject and object fusing together into one during the appreciation of landscape painting: "*we gain access to the Mitwelt of an unfolding self-world that knows no clear differentiation of subject and object. Hence the more we absorb the more we lose ourselves in it.*" p.322

piece is being displayed by literally panning the globe on our screens to understand its context and physical location in the world. This is a fragmentation which emerges not as an opposition to unity, but rather from a repetition of different scales of appreciation, which overlap and juxtapose different information to create a unity of the fragmented. Our appreciation of images is fragmented through repetition and difference yet we can achieve a full understanding of the work of art through these multiple scales available to us.

However, there is still a persistent sensorial distance that these remote modes of appreciation instill. No matter how close we can zoom into an image on our screens, we will not be able to feel the texture of the space where it is hanging, or hear the quiet whispers of fellow visitors to the gallery, or be affected by the myriad environmental and physical factors that distracted the spectator of a fresco, as described earlier in the cases where artwork is fully integrated with the architectural space that houses it. Through our devices it is possible that we might gain access to aspects of the work that may not be available when visiting in person, but that intangible and yet highly present "aura" which one feels when in direct contact with an artwork image cannot really be substituted by any device.

There have certainly been attempts to re-introduce this bodily three-dimensional sensorial quality back into the experience of viewing images on screens, in order to make it "more real". The aim to re-introduce of the third dimension that was seemingly lost in photography and cinema, has sparked the proliferation of 3d movies or even cinema in four dimensions, where there is an uncanny attempt to envelope the spectator in a full-body sensorial experience. Enabled by technology, movie houses are aiming to reinvent the experience with *immersive* cinema, to make the experience more "real", more three-dimensional.

Paradoxically, with this attempt to provide a more realistic experience, we are constantly reminded of its artificiality. In 3d movies we are obliged to wear awkward glasses to perceive the three-dimensional information. If we were to remove them nothing but a blurred vision of what is being projected would be perceivable. Thus, in aiming to make the experience more *bodily* by adding the third dimension of space, we are only able to perceive it through a device that is external to our body, the 3d glasses. On the other hand, when we are provided with the added sensorial perks of a shivering seat, or a puff of air suddenly blowing in our face, rather than being immersed by the experience we are reminded of the absurdity of the artifice gone into creating the still awkward effect.

While this *4d* technology is still very much in development, with the advent of the digital in image making we are undoubtedly in a different place than when images became reproducible via

photography or film. It appears that the control is now in the hands of the spectator, able to choose between very different modes of viewership. What we have been able to see with this punctuated overview of a fairly extensive time period, is that the built spaces that have housed artwork, both still images and moving images, have served as aesthetic devices to either tightly, or more loosely, control and affect the spectator. As we have seen, different aesthetic devices condition our attitude towards the content of that device in different ways. It seems that the cinema and the art gallery are still in search for a new typology fit for the fragmented spectator.

How can we think about images in the same way now that we are in the post digital-reproducibility era? Virtual reality has been one of the new ways to experience images, whether of art, movies or of an entirely different nature, mostly related to gaming. But virtual reality relies on the wearing of devices, usually around the eyes, that shut the physical world out in order to experience an intangible world almost purely through a visual register. The privileging of the visual is exacerbated to such a degree in virtual reality that it denies the multi-sensorial body that enables us to navigate the world. Which might be why it is successful in gaming but not so much in the experience of art.

Architecture understood as an aesthetic device doesn't make sense in a world dominated by devices that one wears to shut the physical out. However, there are some interesting developments that acknowledge how physical space is essentially a human condition. Rather than making us inhabit a reality that is virtual, denying the body, it brings the virtual into our physical world, creating what is known as an "augmented reality". In augmented reality, we are not denying the physicality of our bodies. Instead of trying to mimic the physical environment virtually by shutting off the world, there is a re-framing of the physical with the introduction of the virtual. We see the physical anew. To some important degree, it signals a return to the appreciation of the physical environment in which our images found themselves prior to their irreproducibility. The images need the physical qualities of the space in order to be understood, there is an inter-dependence between the space and the virtual image that inhabits that space.

3.3 Concluding remarks

This paper aimed to be a philosophical inquiry into the character of the architectural space that makes viewing artwork images possible. The relationship between the space, the image and the spectator was explored punctually in three specific time periods: the Renaissance, the beginning of the 20th century and our current condition starting at the end of the 20th century. What emerged in the shifting

relationship between modes of appreciating images and the physical space that enables it, is the changing attitude towards the body - the physical human body-understood as our three-dimensional way to navigate the world. The common thread with which these punctual glances into our conception and appreciation of images has changed is the changing conception of our body. With the introduction of the digital, exacerbated to the point where it is mostly through digital screens that we consume images, an important question arises regarding the future of the images that we consume, and the rapidity with which we can do this: what is this shift telling us about our bodies and the spaces we design for them?

By zooming into the above three moments in history, we have traced a successive distancing from the physical body: going from a united conception of images, body and space, to a disembodied one separating body and space, to a fragmented one enabled by the pervasiveness of the digital. The comparison between these three moments was not intended to be exhaustive, but rather punctual and explicit. This method may certainly have overlooked important aspects of the appreciation of images and the spaces that house them[42] however, what this overview has revealed is that while we seem to be in a moment where almost everything can be experienced virtually, including artwork images, the evolution of digital technology is almost nostalgically pointing us back to the times when we depended on our bodies moving through space in order to appreciate the image. With the overabundance of reproduction techniques, enabled by the digital, we are paradoxically returning to the conception of images we had before images could be reproduced with the rapidity that contemporary methods allow. As we have seen, in virtual reality, the device is what controls our experience, but we are shutting off most of our senses by privileging the visual. While in augmented reality, we are not denying the physicality and the multi-sensorial quality of our world. Architectural space is still, curiously, the aesthetic device that it was during the Renaissance.

While there is no singular overarching conception of how images are to be experienced today, there certainly is an attempt to regain the loss of dimension implicit in image reproduction, by reintroducing the experiential and sensorial dimension back into the appreciation of art.

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[42] For instance, there was no mention of the important political dimension of the evolution of the spaces for viewing images, particularly in the case of Cinema, as a space for collective engagement. While hugely important, it would have diverted the paper from its emphasis and exceeded its scope, thus the omission was deemed necessary.

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ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Vitruvian Man, https://www.leonardodavinci.net/the-vitruvian-man.jsp#: p.4

2. Francesco di Giorgio Martini, *Drawing for a Church*. Original source: Scanned from The Evolution of Designs: Biological Analogy in Architecture and the Applied Arts by Philip Steadman Found in: https://leonardodavinci.stanford.edu/submissions/clabaugh/history/architecture.html: p.5

3. Invention of Drawing Pliny The Elder. https://greythenewblack.wordpress.com/2011/10/05/joseph-benoit-suvee-the-invention-of-the-art/: p.7

4. Sketches of the evolution of artwork display spaces, by author: p.12

5. Black box evolution sketches, by author: p.14

6. Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza by Andrea Palladio, www3.northern.edu/wild/th100/Olimpico2.jpg: p.15

7. Vitruvian Man and Theater Plan https://politicworm.files.wordpress.com/2009/11/ground-plan-ces1.jpg. p: 15

8. Italian playhouse theater. http://www3.northern.edu/wild/th100/Olimpico2.jpg.: p.16

9. Frederick Kiesler, Film Guild Cinema, found in http://cinematreasures.org/theaters/4699: p. 17

10. Freud's study desk at Bergasse 19, found in The Emergence of The Interior: Architecture, Modernity, Domesticity, p.43: p.15