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Beyond Perspective. Salviati's *Bathsheba goes to David*

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Abstract
Among the *capricciose et ingegnose invenzioni* that made Francesco Salviati a famous and discussed mannerist painter, a special place is occupied by *Bathsheba goes to David* he painted in 1552 in the fresco cycle at Palazzo Ricci in Rome. He depicted Bathsheba four times while approaching a towered alcove via a sinuous staircase: one can see her climbing the stairs, entering David's room and joining him as four subsequent moments overlapped in the same picture. Such a narrative device has remote origins but appears unusual in an artistic context theoretically dominated by the perspective representation. A perspective should be like a photograph: an instant projection of three-dimensional space from a centre on a plane. Time flowing should be conceptually excluded from such a representation. Even the fictive architectural background Salviati painted, responds to no canonical perspective construction: the stair follows a curved geometry that is hardly detectable and incongruous with the human figures depicted on. But the little painting is only part of a wider anti-perspectival visual program in which the whole hall is involved to move the observer along invisible narrative tracks.

Keywords
Francesco Salviati, Palazzo Ricci, Sala dei Mappamondi, Bathsheba and David, Representation of time in space, Fictive architecture, Perspective decoration, Optical illusions, Trompe l'oeil.

Introduction

> "For Cardinal Riccio of Montepulciano he painted a most beautiful hall in his Palace in the Strada Giulia, where he executed in fresco various pictures with many stories of David; (…) to put it briefly, the work of that hall is all full of grace, of most beautiful fantasies, and of many fanciful and ingenious inventions; the distribution of the parts is done with much consideration, and the colouring is very pleasing. To tell the truth, Francesco, feeling himself bold and fertile in invention, and having a hand obedient to his brain, would have liked always to have on his hands works large and out of the ordinary"
>
> Giorgio Vasari

Giovanni Ricci and Francesco Salviati

Giovanni Ricci from Montepulciano (1497? -1574) was a self-made man, a great organizer and a business man. Praised by Cardinal Alessandro Farnese for the "celerity with which he uses to come and go" (Nova 1980, 30), Cardinal Ricci was an eclectic collector of curious objects, as well. His long stay as apostolic nuncio in Portugal had allowed him to gather rich objects as Chinese porcelains and possibly scrolls and exotic animals such as parrots and cats; but his collection, as well as the decorations of his palace, were primarily a means to gain social prestige and to influence policy and, secondarily, a source of valuable gifts for his friends. (Hirst 1979)
Despite being a man *senza lettere*, Ricci was acutely aware of the role of architecture as a device for the representation of power: it is testified by his choice to settle in the wealthy Florentine district in Rome, in the unfinished Palace of the most influential Roman architect of his generation, Antonio da Sangallo the Younger, just after his death in 1552 (Fig.1, 2). After ordering Nanni di Baccio Bigio to expand and complete the palace (Frommel 2003), Ricci asked Francesco Salviati for decorating the *Sala dell'Udienza d'Inverno* or *Sala dei Mappamondi* possibly inserting the images of the most important pieces of his collections.
The Florentine Francesco de 'Rossi (1510-1563) had settled in Rome between 1531 and 1539, where he had taken the surname of Cardinal Salviati. After some works in Florence and North Italy he had came back in 1548 to stay almost uninterrupted till his death. It is not necessary to repeat here his biography but it is important to underline a few aspects of his many talents. His artistic education through drawing (Monbeig Goguel 1998) intertwined to create a curiosity toward archaic and unusual technics of expression, like mosaic and marquetry, he learnt from his frequent travels (Cheney 1963) as well as his familiarity with some North European artists. (De Jong 1992; Dacos 2001) Since his first roman works, (Hirst 1961) like the *Visitazione* in San Francesco a Ripa (1531), his theatrical experience as a scene-maker in Florence (Giuliani 2001; Van Eck and Bussels 2011)

combined together his uncommon knowledge of antique and modern architecture. (Baudino and Bertero 2008) Vasari considered Salviati simply "the greatest painter active in Rome from 1547 till his death" (Vasari) and the pictorial cycle of Palazzo Ricci (Cocke 1980; Nova 1980; Catalucci e Cipparone 2007; De Jong 2010) is commonly considered one of his masterpieces.

The fictive architecture of the Hall

As in many other contemporary cycles, Salviati took indication from the Books of Samuel for the iconographic program of the pictorial cycle of Ricci's hall and used the identification between the client and the biblical figure of David to summon his humble origins and the rise to power.[1] According to Richard Cocke, "Salviati's frescoes are to be understood as an education program for both the Cardinal and his unruly son" (Cocke 1980, 199). In the scenes of Bathsheba the cardinal might have found a sort of public penitence and redemption. But Jan L. De Jong (2010) has recently suggested that, considering the enduring difficulties that Francesco's bad character had brought to him, autobiographical reasons are also to be considered as a support of such a program. In the end, the meaning of the warning and the scandalous example are counterbalanced by an overall sense of righteousness and glory expressed throughout the cycle.

The Hall was a difficult site, with three windows on the East side, two on the South side and three doors on the other two. (Fig.3) Salviati devoted each wall to a specific character (Saul, Bathsheba, Absolom and David), but there is no chronological reading order, neither clockwise nor counter clockwise, not even within a single wall.

Such a choice has something in common with a certain idea of space that convinced his close friend Vasari to propose an History of Art by deconstructing places in single knots to be reconnected by the movement of the subject.[2] It might be caused either by the presence of the many openings in the walls or by the idea of imposing upon the visitor a planned trajectory: following the timeline of the episodes would be quite a tortuous way along the Hall (Catalucci e Cipparone 2007, 96-97). Anyway it has the consequence of destabilising the visitor's expectations and settling a fictive atmosphere.

Depicted walls show a general division into horizontal bands: a tall basement with herms and panels to frame the doors with above a shelf with painted pottery from Sacchetti's collection; then a dark background marked by Ionic columns and figures surrounded by garlands around the main picture frames and, just under the wooden ceiling, a decorative frieze. But each wall also presents a certain autonomy in the organization of the iconographic material as Salviati inserted with empirical determination a number of *trompe-l'oeil* paintings that are variously dimensioned and surrounded by gilded frames and aedicule or apparently hung as scrolls. (Fig.4)

The pictorial structure of the Sala dell'Udienza is so elaborate and illusory that an observer can hardly say what should be *above* and what *below*. Here "Salviati runs from the perspective system based on optical data for natural vistas (…) and alters the ratio in favour of the figures." (Monbeig Goguel 1998, 43) Such an approach is probably fuelled by his participation in "a circle of artists and intellectuals concerned with the issue of central perspective and the multiplication of points of view as a theme involving an ordered proliferation of constituent elements of space" (Monbeig Goguel 1998, 34-35). Sandro Benedetti identified such a layered approach in Michelangelo's architectures: especially the works of his pupil Jacopo del Duca[3] show a common matrix with Salviati's way of organizing fictive architecture and pictures in his cycles in both Palazzo Farnese and Palazzo Ricci.

Salviati here organized the general decorative program in overlapping layers of different quality and apparent material that in some cases seem to ignore each other as well as the irregular openings below. The result looks like a palimpsest, a *tabula* on which cards, textiles and pictures are casually disposed, like some Dutch vertical

[1] In the same years David starred in various decorative cycles in Rome and its surroundings such as Palazzo Barberini, Palazzo Santacroce at Oriolo, and Palazzo Caetani in Cisterna.

[2] "In *Le Vite*, Giorgio Vasari proposed the urban model of Florence as the only one possible that is the same we find today in all touristic city guides: a city made of points, monuments, works isolated from their context and mutually connected by straight roads (…). Through the practice of artistic description he imposed a way to look at the city from which the *civitas* and all manifestations of its implicit collective *vinculo* were almost totally erased". From Franco Farinelli, *L'evoluzione della città degli uomini*. Conference in Palermo, 22 March 2011. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZAX0kI6Sn6g (transcribed and translated by the author).

[3] In Jacopo Del Duca's designs between 1570 and 1580, Benedetti identified three different formal processes: composition with either multiple or synthetic of overlapping layers, composition with simple juxtaposition of elements, composition with synthetic intertwinement. Benedetti, Sandro, 1973. *Giacomo del Duca e l'architettura del Cinquecento*. Roma: Officina, pp. 53-57 (translated by the author).

trompe-l'oeil still life. Finally, these walls look like – in a rather disconcerting way – our computer desk-top, on which we see programs dialog-windows opening and randomly overlapping each other.
Salviati based his compositional technique on a pragmatic collage of figures enlarged from his many copies, from the drawings of study or from new sketches purposely made from statuettes and figurines that he commonly used for his compositions. Moreover "Salviati consistently reused models created for his other paintings as well as borrowed from other artists" (Nova 1992, 88). This could be the main reason, despite the amount of his drawings preserved, why we don't know drawings directly connected to the frescoes for Palazzo Ricci (Monbeig Goguel 1998, 39).
Such an assemblage methodology would justify the lack of architectural studies as well as might contribute to Salviati's polycentric organization of walls, which has the effect of leaving the observer at the mercy of a multiplicity of symmetries and points of view. If Renaissance perspective could be defined as the result of a collective artistic effort to synthesise a formula to measure, picture and reduce an incommensurable place to the vantage point of a still observer, Salviati put in scene here an anti-perspective space.
Spectators are prevented from the opportunity to fully participate to the fictive space. The poor visibility, implicit in the layered depicted structure, forces them to an intellectual work of reconstruction of the depicted tectonic system in order to give, for example, a constructive and logical role to coloured ribbons held by figures and wedged under the entablature that implausibly support the apparent weight of the big paintings.
In the apparent metamorphosis of colours and shapes, "with the almost cinegraphic fade-outs and plays with causality" (Jaffe 1998, 347), a visitor is forced to move, oscillating from one side to another. The unusual panoramic proportion of the central paintings, for example, force the viewer to step back as much as possible in order to embrace their width with a single glance, whose view angle is more than 70° wide. Moreover larger paintings do not present perspectival constructions: depth is rather evoked by the progressive reduction of figures and forms. At the same time, the extraordinary level of detail of the frescoes offers several levels of reading as a function of observer's distance. We can consider the case of the painted scrolls that flank the large central painting. From a distance the observer can appreciate only the main representation, stiff as a fixed picture; at a shorter distance the coloured spots that surround it take the form of grotesques and *all'antica* landscapes; close to the wall the viewer can finally decipher the horizontal sign above as a wooden tube with a little rope and the whole picture appears as painted on a soft scroll.
But Salviati adopted also visual narrative expedients concerning directly the perspectival structure of the single picture, as can be seen in *David learns of the death of Absolom*. (Fig.5) Here the beard and the colours of clothes make clear the identification of the character in the foreground – David learning the sad news – with the one in the background, sitting on the throne and expressing the resulting pain. The latter is sitting in an *other* space, far away from the foreground's one, filtered by steps and seven free-standing columns and marked by a different light *alla bernina*, coming from a hidden window. It looks like a picture within a picture, where time flows in the depth direction, perpendicular to the reader, supporting the hierarchy of reading from the foreground to background.
Salviati had already studied this kind of *flat layered spatiality* in the cartoon of *Joseph explains Pharaoh's dream of the fat cows* of the tapestry cycle woven between 1546 and 1554 for Cosimo I Medici. Pharaoh's hall is only partially visible through the frame of a door while outside a garden crowded with figures is also framed by a rich architectural frame made of two horizontal mouldings and two pilasters dressed in garlands and decorations. The dream appears as an image projected into a rectangular window behind the Pharaoh sitting, according to an existing custom in the Flemish tapestries (Kliemann 2001, 298). But the dream is mainly the pretext to represent different dimensions and times in a single picture by deceiving the perspectival structure of space. Salviati used figures and drapes to hide the intersections between planes and to reduce the visibility of all lines concurring to the central vanishing point (Fig.6). His malicious play of vertical layers has the consequence of making the space immeasurable and incommensurable: by censoring the optical depth, a mental and temporal depth surfaces from the fragmented space. All those layers imply different places and times, as well, just like sliding scenes on a theatrical stage[4] or early Donatello's *Feast of Herod* on the Baptistery of Siena (1427), possibly being itself inspired to a stage design (Lang 1980, 70).

[4] The technique of scene shifting was introduced in the Teatro Mediceo in Florence by Bernardo Buontalenti at the end of 1580s and perfected only at the beginning of XVII century by Giovanni Battista Aleotti in Ferrara. See: Povoledo, Elena, 1969. Origini e aspetti della scenografia in Italia. Dalla fine del Quattrocento agli intermezzi fiorentini del 1589, in Pirrotta, Nino, *Li due Orfei*. Torino: Einaudi, 1975, pp. 335-460.

In the Hall of Palazzo Ricci such an anti-perspective principle is somehow extended to the whole parietal organisation but in the same context he also achieved an innovative narrative technique of depicting time into space in order to describe the episode of *Bathsheba goes to David*.

Bathsheba and David

The north wall, perhaps the less constrained by openings, is dedicated to Bathsheba and dominated by the central large *Bath of Bathsheba*. *Bathsheba goes to King David* is instead a narrow painting on the right side of the *Bath*. (Fig.7) It is the completion of a story that spans three lines in the book of Samuel,[5] but as Nova said, "the fresco of 'Bathsheba who goes by David' would be enough to put Francesco Salviati among the greatest artists of the Italian Renaissance, and to justify the mythical fame that accompanied him after death." (Nova 1980, 46).

Observing it together with the Bath, few relationships surface. The tower seems ideally but not geometrically associated with the nearby architectural scenes of the central picture in virtue of the colours and the common light direction. The horizon line of *Bath* coincides with the height of the eyes of the first Bathsheba at the foot of the tower, but here their visual relationships end and start the many peculiarities of the charming little *scroll*.

The general organization of the two pictures follows the same iconographic scheme of other representations of David and Bathsheba,[6] in which a building or tower occupies the top left half of the canvas and Bathsheba is at the bottom right corner like Cranach's versions of 1526 and 1534.[7] The same could be said for the *Bath*, whose organization is similar to other preceding paintings, such as Van Heemskerk's and Paris Bordon's ones.[8] But if considered in itself, *Bathsheba goes to King David* is unique. While many works show David observing Bathsheba while bathing, we could find neither one showing the woman going to David, nor even one showing their sexual meeting. The epilogue of the story was always considered implicit in the vision of a naked woman under the gaze of the King, even in those works in which David is depicted as a small figure in the background (indeed unable to see anything at all).

Salviati's choice to devote an apposite picture to the adulterous epilogue of the episode and to collocate it in a Roman environment, has rightly raised some thorny questions about the historical reactions to a similar image in the hall of a Cardinal, during the Council of Trent and after that Erasmus and other foreign prelates had expressed sharp criticism about the advisability of indecent images in Roman Curial environments (De Jong 2010, 91-92). But even more questions are possibly raised by Salviati's choice of depicting Bathsheba four times in the same pictorial space, while climbing the stairs and into the alcove, where she appears in the arms of the King.

This *stroboscopic* technique for representing a figure in motion or, simply, a same character at different times, had been widely used in the miniatures and medieval codices as well as in sacred images painted for educational and warning purposes inside and outside the churches. (Colonnese 2012, 307-) One may think that the spread of linear perspective from Florence had contributed to conceive the projective image as a kind of photograph that freezes everything in a proportionate and measurable space. But actually artists had always had the need of depicting complex events in time and space, often on very small surfaces.

Many Renaissance artists had always found efficient and convenient to adopt the strategy of depicting the same character several times in the same pictorial environment. It happened frequently at the beginning of the perspective age, like at the Brancacci Chapel in Santa Maria del Carmine painted by Masaccio and Masolino (1424) or, in a much more virtuous way, in the faded *Flood* painted by Paolo Uccello in Santa Maria Novella (1447) that was copied by Salviati around 1528[9], but also in Botticelli's drawings of Dante's Divine Comedy,

[5] "And it came to pass in an evening ride, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon. And David sent and inquired after the woman. And one said, is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite? And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him and he lay with her; for she was purified from her uncleanness: and she returned unto her house". Book of Samuel, 11:2-4.

[6] For an analysis of the pictorial tradition of the Biblic episode between XVI and XVII century: Van Sluijter, Eric, 2007. *Rembrandt and the Female Nude*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, pp. 334-341.

[7] *David and Bathsheba* (1526), Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Gemaldegalerie; *David and Bathsheba* (1534), private collection.

[8] Between 1540 and 1549 Paris Bordon executed at least three versions of David and Bathsheba: *David and Bathsheba* (1540-49), Baltimore, Walter Art Museum; *Bathsheba bathing* (1549), Koeln, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum; *Bathsheba bathing* (1552), Hamburger, Kunsthalle.

[9] Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts graphiques, Inv. 1971 recto.

drawn after 1480 but never completed. Pontormo's *Joseph in Egypt* (1518) is to be identified as the main reference for Salviati's *Bathsheba*, both for the theatrical mock atmosphere of the whole and for the four episodes of Joseph's life depicted in the same incoherent space. Moreover Pontormo, by *dressing* the two sons of Joseph in the same way, gave an observer the impression of a single child depicted four times while ascending the tower. (Colonnese 2012, 322-323)
Salviati was considered a master of perspective, who "reduced to perfection the method of drawing perspectives from the ground plans of houses and from the profiles of buildings" (Vasari). But in the years he was in Palazzo Ricci, Salviati was possibly re-elaborating old visual models to depict time and movement in space in order to make them become part of the new method of representation. Another evidence comes from Marcello Fagiolo who noticed that, in the *Creation of animals* at Chigi Chapel in S. Maria del Popolo (1552-54), Salviati depicted birds with vibrating wings as a stroboscopic stratagem to visually evoke their motion in a way that resembles Leonardo's studies on flight (Fagiolo 2004, 223).

1, 2, 3, 4 Bathsheba
In the small picture of *Bathsheba* (Fig.8.a), Salviati had only one episode to describe but he chose a narrative strategy that was usually adopted to gather together distant events. The innovative use of such a visual device lies in the intent of breaking down the flowing of time in critical moments, in order to express the perplexity and the feelings of the woman. He operated a transformation from a continuous system made of homogeneous time and space into a discrete system of different times and spaces separated and connected at the same time by the staircase steps like elementary portions of time and space.
Bathsheba looks wary, furtive and deeply undecided. In the first three figures she turns constantly her gaze in the opposite direction of her feet, as if she is afraid of being seen or rather waiting for someone to stop her. Her four figures seem to state that 'every moment is a good moment to stop and do the right thing'.
Perhaps the number four is simply an homage to Pontormo's *Joseph* or to some other reference; perhaps it refers to the antique tragedy division in four acts, called *protasis*, *epitasi*, *catastasi*, and *catastrophe*. As in the Greek Theatre the figure seems to be the subject of a metamorphosis from a three-dimensional and coloured human being into a sort of transparent shadow. The first figure has just passed a crossroads of stairs and seems to look with kindness and melancholy the other way. The second figure seems to look back in sadness and circumspection. The third figure is already two-dimensional, a flat silhouette against the sky, at the upper end of the staircase. The fourth figure is nothing but a body melted in another in the shadowy alcove.
Salviati could have partially designed this sequence of women to produce a sort of erotic artifice, a gradual preparation to the final embrace. Bathsheba's body follows the serpentine line of the *bella maniera*: it is the decorative line from the many grotesque metamorphoses; a doubly curved line that can be interpreted as a small snake or like an ascending helix; the line that reminds of Michelangelo's twisted torso inspired by a triangular flame; the line that Leonardo had associated with the two natures of the flame, as convex and concave, solar and lunar; the ideal line of motion as indicated by Lomazzo; the line so elegantly explored by Parmigianino; the line that, two centuries later, William Hogarth will raise as a symbol of Beauty itself.
A general fictive quality seems to take precedence over the spatial and structural coherence of the pictorial environment also in virtue of the symbolic and kinetic value of the staircase, the dominating element of the architectural representation. (Fig.8.b) The steps at the base of the picture are a recurring motif of Salviati, who often painted them to suggest not only a theatrical atmosphere but an implicit invitation to the viewer to rise, at least virtually, on the event stage. But here the staircase becomes the dominant theme of the whole picture. The open staircase leading up the tower perhaps comes from Pontormo's *Joseph* or from Andrea del Sarto's panel (*Joseph interprets the dreams of Pharaoh*, 1520) both painted for the Salvi-Borgherini nuptial room. Fully locked up to the tower, the staircase seems to come off as it descends and hover in the air like a flying carpet: it seems free of static and geometric duties and only instrumental to the rhythm of the visual narrative: a scenery to suggest a looming destiny in an otherworldly and dreamlike space, where nothing can stay the same.
Perhaps here the serpentine line constitutes a strategy to escape from the constraints of a geometry that in those years is translating into a rigid and oppressive rule. What is certain is that the trajectory of Salviati's floating stair is an unknown and uncanny architecture but its lazy gait, which gives the impression of creeping into space (Giordano 1999, 77), seems to prefigure the joyous geometric exaltation of the XVII century staircases.
The sinusoidal curve of the staircase seems to blend in with the rounded top of the balustrade and down with the shadow line drawn from the folds of Bathsheba's robe. It produces a unique multi-curved continuous linear system that ties optically together the four figures, the staircase and the whole composition, permeating with dynamism and expectations. Moreover the first two figures produce a rotational movement as they look like the

same figure drawn from two opposing view-points[10]: their implicit rotation here takes the sense of a dance, "a sexual dance, amplifying a promiscuity that resonates with the petrified form of the ladder that recalls the plot, clinging around the pavilion" (Evans 1995, 190).
At the same time some psychological factors let the observer think of a representation based on the memory of a witness, such as the vision of a syncretic and nuanced Rome in which it is impossible to recognize a certain monument as well as the pictorial light coming from left, while the actual window enlightens the picture from the right. There is also to consider the choice of drawing Bathsheba's route from below upwards and from right to left, reversing the conventional reading sense as if the image were surfacing from the past (it must not be a coincidence that at least on three occasions I came across publications showing a mirrored image of the picture).

Geometric and perspective analysis
A perspectival restitution of the little painting has been attempted to enquire size and quality of the fictive architecture as well as its narrative role. (Fig.9) The first hypothesis of a central perspective is supported by the foreground elements represented with faces that are parallel to the picture plane. The lines, which contain the intersection edges between the foreground cubic elements and the steps, converge to a vanishing point that is out of the picture but appropriately placed before the inner corner of the hall. This means that the entire picture could have been constructed directly on the wall. Through that vanishing point we may draw the horizon line. The distance circle has been determined assuming that the treads of the first parallel step and the first orthogonal one in the foreground have the same dimension: the diagonals of this hypothetical square on the horizontal plan, with a reasonable accuracy, identify two equidistant points on the horizon line from the above mentioned central vanishing point.
After verifying the existence of a general perspectival structure, I came across some elements that challenge this structure. In fact, the number of licenses increased as long as I progressed in the metric evaluation of the pictorial space. Although the lower part of painting respects with a good coherence the rules of linear perspective, the upper part of the tower seems to accord to a different geometrical pattern or just to have been empirically adjusted to suggest its roundness. To confirm this latter hypothesis is the fact that the floor of the loggia is painted as if seen by a viewpoint below the horizon line. But the horizon line is above it and it should have been painted as if seen from above. In addition, the analysis of the ramp demonstrates that the images of steps edges are rigorously horizontal while they should have been travelled to different vanishing points on the horizon line.
Possibly the staircase itself is not the result of any rigorous perspective construction. The outer and the inner sinusoidal trajectories of the staircase as well as its lower moulding seem to have been drawn according to a same curvilinear shape, probably using a wooden *modano*, just rotated by a couple of degrees to switch from a curve to another. Possibly only a partial preparatory scheme was designed before painting: other compositional answers are to be looked for directly in the geometrical organization of the painting scheme. The rectangular painting is proportionate second height equal to twice the width. The tower occupies exactly the left half of the canvas. After dividing the two squares in two horizontal rectangles and tracing their diagonals, a *linear curved system* gets visible as it leans and flexes just in correspondence of these diagonals. Moreover the horizon line is collocated below the upper horizontal rectangle, according to a general vertical ratio of 1 to 3, with the vanishing point individuating the right upper corner of a square ending on the lower base of the painting.
Even in the lower part of the painting, where the perspective structure appears the most stringent, optical adjustments and perplexing corrections emerge to make the work of restitution troubled and conjectural. The number of steps of the first flight seems to have been changed from eight to ten. The steps were possibly thickened in the middle by rotating the eighth one to form an intermediate *box* for dissimulating their irregular rhythm. A strong perspective discrepancy emerges also from the relationship between the marble boxes and the steps. The boxes' height does not appear compatible with the overall height of the steps' risings. If the distant box upper face were as high as the nearer one – as it seems – then the steps of the second flight should cover the box and raise from the floor. (Fig.8.d)
Other dimensional incompatibilities result by comparing the steps with the first two human figures: the steps' risings appear to be extremely low. If the woman is 165 cm tall then the first flight rising would be averagely 4 cm high. Vice versa, if we would assume a step rising is 15 cm tall then the first female figure should be much smaller. (Fig.8.c) The analysis of the shadows offers ambiguous information, as well. Only the female figures

[10] Pollaiuolo had adopted such a stratagem to depict the archers in the *Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian* (1475), originally at the Santissima Annunziata in Florence, and still in 1573 Federico Zuccari did the same for the *Flagellation* he painted on the walls of the Oratorio del Gonfalone in Rome.

pragmatically bind the lower part with the upper part of the painting, but by assuming their proportional foreshortening we would have contradictive information about the position in depth of the tower.
The plan after the perspective restitution appears a strange fragment of a wider environment. It symbolically reminds us of a sort of *question mark* but it may also be intended as an allegory of the snake clinging around the Forbidden Apple, with the woman as a priestess of the original sin. The plan is an only partially reliable result but useful to have a geometrical evidence of the many *capricciose et ingegnose invenzioni* of Francesco Salviati. For example, the plan reveals that the entire picture corresponds to a visual angle of just 8 degrees on the horizontal plane and 16 degrees on the vertical plane, which is close to the 18° angle measured at the eye of a visitor entering the Hall from the opposite wall.
The plan is also useful to measure the overall discrepancy between the expected/perceived space and the geometrical/painted space. It also confirms that the oneiric sensations the painting transmits, are evoked not only by the unnatural repetition of the subject or the impossible staircase but also by the prospective inconsistencies and adjustments. Almost a virtuous change of representation methods and structures – pseudo-axonometric in the foreground, orthogonal projected in the middle and perspectival on the top - suggests different moods, spaces and times. Even if the staircase binds together the tower with the stepped basement, the absence of human figures ascending the steps emphasises the spatial and temporal separation between the three-dimensional foreground and the two-dimensional background.

Conclusions
The Hall of Palazzo Ricci is a significant example of a new taste in interior decoration that emerged in the fourth decade of the sixteenth century. Frescoed walls were no longer used to dissolve the boundaries of the room as in Giulio Romano's Sala dei Giganti at Mantua, neither to transform the hall into a loggia or a roof terrace, like in Peruzzi's Sala delle Prospettive, nor to virtually extend and complete the built environment, as Alberti brothers' quadrature painted in Vatican a few years later. In Palazzo Ricci depicted structures and objects produce only the suggestion of a layered depth in which perspective is called to play an ambiguous role.
A common principle seems to guide every aspect of Salviati's work for Ricci: the same principle guides the program of the frescoes cycle centred on single characters, with their chronological order to be found through motion; its iconographic translation onto the walls through overlapping layers that deceives the habitual hierarchies and prevent the observer from an optical perception of the depicted architectural structure; the disposition of the figures in the single pictures, often inspired to his (and his friends') conspicuous repertory; even some anatomies that look excessively stretched and twisted, beyond the actual possibilities of human body as if they had been drawn in progressive instants.[11]
It is the principle of the collage, the free assemblage of elements taken from elsewhere. Centuries before the Surrealists' strategies around the *objet trouvée*, Salviati's Mannerist approach seems quite aware of the semantic tensions that can be developed by assembling episodes and figures cut out of their traditional continuity. Such an inter-textual aptitude can be considered as a typical Mannerist strategy but Salviati seems to have developed it in a particular way. As a matter of fact, his method of work, concerning a massive use of models and figurines, was not only a way to spare time and share the artistic process with its collaborators but a strategy to involve the audience to an unaware aesthetic action.
Theatre experience had given him familiarity with the medium enough to establish an active complicity and ask his spectators, who were able to recognise some of the figures he used, for an "interpretative cooperation"[12] to complete the final sense of his work and to judge it as a critical synthesis of precedents artworks. At the same time he parasitized spectators' addiction to linear perspective in order to suggest distances, times and other mental dimensions (memories, dreams and so on) by hiding the foreshortening hedges of the perspectival box and letting the beholder decipher the depth of space from a game of two-dimensional layers, directly quoting the theatrical scenography strategies. And after perfecting the technique in small pictures, Salviati applied his formula for a flat layered polycentric spatiality to the entire pictorial cycle of Ricci's hall, in order to move visitors through space and time, both mentally and physically.
The visual experience of David's pictorial cycle forces the visitors to a continuous movement in order to collocate their eyes in the right point of view to optically embrace the scenes and decrypt smaller forms, as in an

[11] See the interpretation proposed by Russian director Ejzenštejn on Tintoretto's figures in: Ejzenštejn, Sergej M, 1985. *Teoria generale del montaggio*. Venezia: Marsilio, pp. 131-132.

[12] Umberto Eco pointed out "the very existence of texts that can not only be freely interpreted but also cooperatively generated by the addressee (the 'original' text constituting a flexible type of which many tokens can be legitimately realized). Eco, Umberto, 1995. *The Role of the Reader. Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, p. 3.

impossible anamorphosis; at the same time they are forced to an intellectual effort in order to understand the logical role of the depicted structural elements and figure out their hidden parts. Moreover, when the visitors focus on a single picture, depicted architectures and figures propose themselves as a variation of something they have already seen.
Bathsheba goes to King David constitutes the apex of this layered work, with the roundness of tower and staircase to put in scene an undecipherable space and the presence of four images of the same women to project the observer from an actual and optical space to a deformed psychological one in which Bathsheba's physical metamorphosis from body to shadow reminds all us the price for our humanity.

Appendix or a hypothesis on the route

There are several precedents of apparently casual distribution of painted episodes in frescoed cycles, the most famous being Piero della Francesca's *Legend of the True Cross* (1452-1466) in the church of S. Francesco at Arezzo. Another one is Giulio Romano's vault of the *Sala di Psiche* in Palazzo Te at Mantua, for which Daniele Arasse proposed a labyrinthine reading trajectory.[13] Properly the labyrinth may be an interesting key to justify the uncommon distribution of paintings on the four walls of Ricci's hall and would explain some other choices of Salviati, too. As already noted, the different size and highness of the 15 paintings, force observers to stand at variable distances from the walls and to move from one side to another of the hall. By adopting the centre as the starting point, a labyrinthine layout would accord to the route to a chronological ordered vision of the paintings. This hypothesis might seem quite arbitrary, but other elements could support it. An old tradition used to identify David as a new Christ and the labyrinth as a symbol of the believers way to salvation. At times of Salviati, this tradition were testified by the ancient mosaic floor of the church of S. Michele in Pavia, where the figures of David and Golia (like Christ and the Devil or Theseus and the Minotaur) were still visible close to the large circular labyrinth today partially lost. Moreover this tradition gave birth to a number of Flemish drawings and paintings in which the episode of David spying upon Bathseba from the upper part of a sumptuous palace, is associated to the presence of a labyrinthine garden with people playing *ludi d'amor* inside it. Salviati might have known some of these works painted by either Lucas van Gassel or Herri Met de Bles, known as Civetta and active also in Ferrara, where he died in 1560. [14]
If Salviati took in consideration this tradition, then the little painting of *Bathsheba goes to David* would represent the centre of the labyrinth as the key moment of the adultery. In this case, the strange palace of king David could be easily interpreted as one of those round towers placed at the centre of the vegetal mazes to offer visitors an high vantage point to see the tortuous way along the bushes, like the pavilion surrounded by an helicoid stair in the garden of Villa Pisani in Stra. Then the curious steps in the foreground would be quite justified and the city itself, painted as an irrational amount of monuments, would be an image of the world as a labyrinth in the catholic vision of a place of sin and perdition.

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Fig.3 Rome, Palazzo Ricci, Sala delle Udienze, Plan with interior elevations and position of *Bathsheba goes to David* (drawing by the author)

Fig.4 Rome, Palazzo Ricci, Sala delle Udienze, south-west corner (photo by the author)

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[13] Arasse, Daniele, 1985. Giulio Romano e il labirinto di Psiche. *Quaderno di Palazzo Te*, n. 3, 1985, pp. 7-18; Colonnese, Fabio, 2006. *Il labirinto e l'architetto*. Roma: Edizioni Kappa, 2006, pp. 94.

[14] Eleven known works form a quite homogenous group of paintings dedicated to the biblical episode of David and Bathsheba and most of them show a labyrinth in the garden of David's palace. All the pictures were originated in Flanders in the years between 1530 and 1560 and are commonly attributed to Lucas van Gassel, Herri Met de Bles, Andreas Ruhl and Jan van Amstel.

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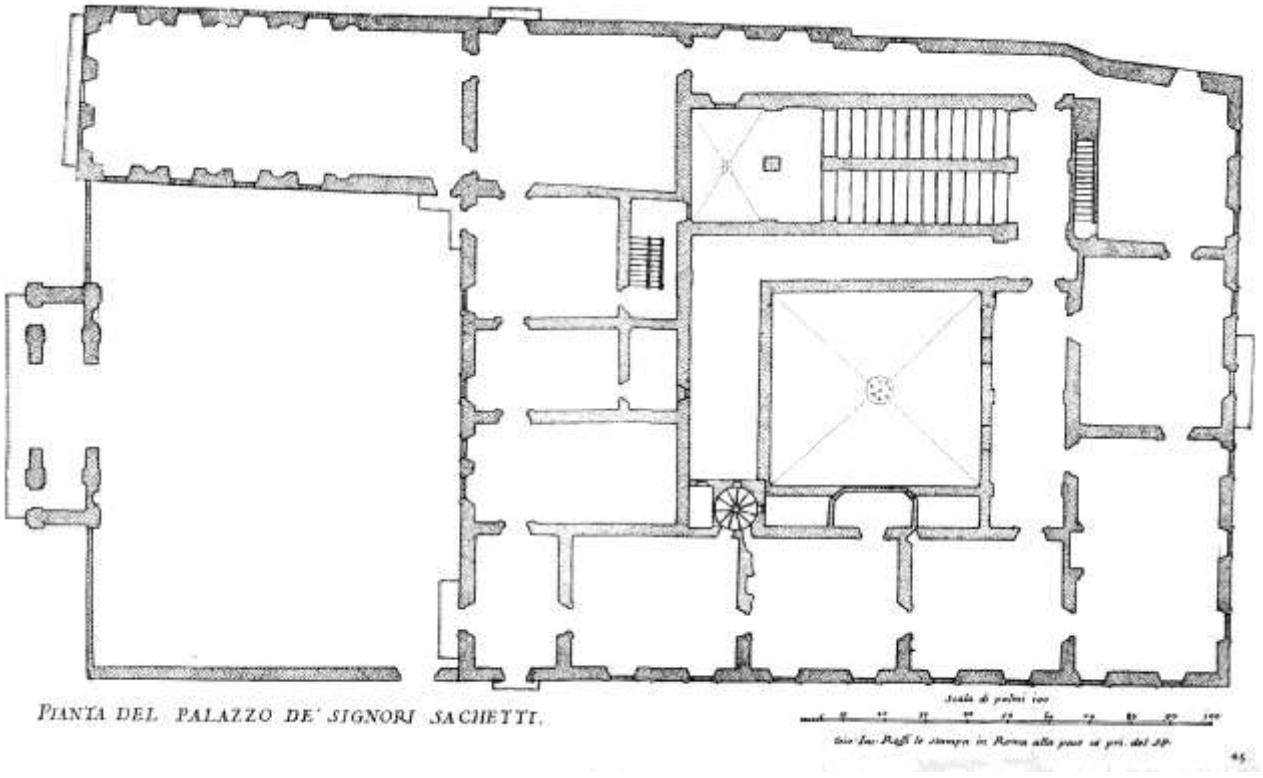
Figure 1



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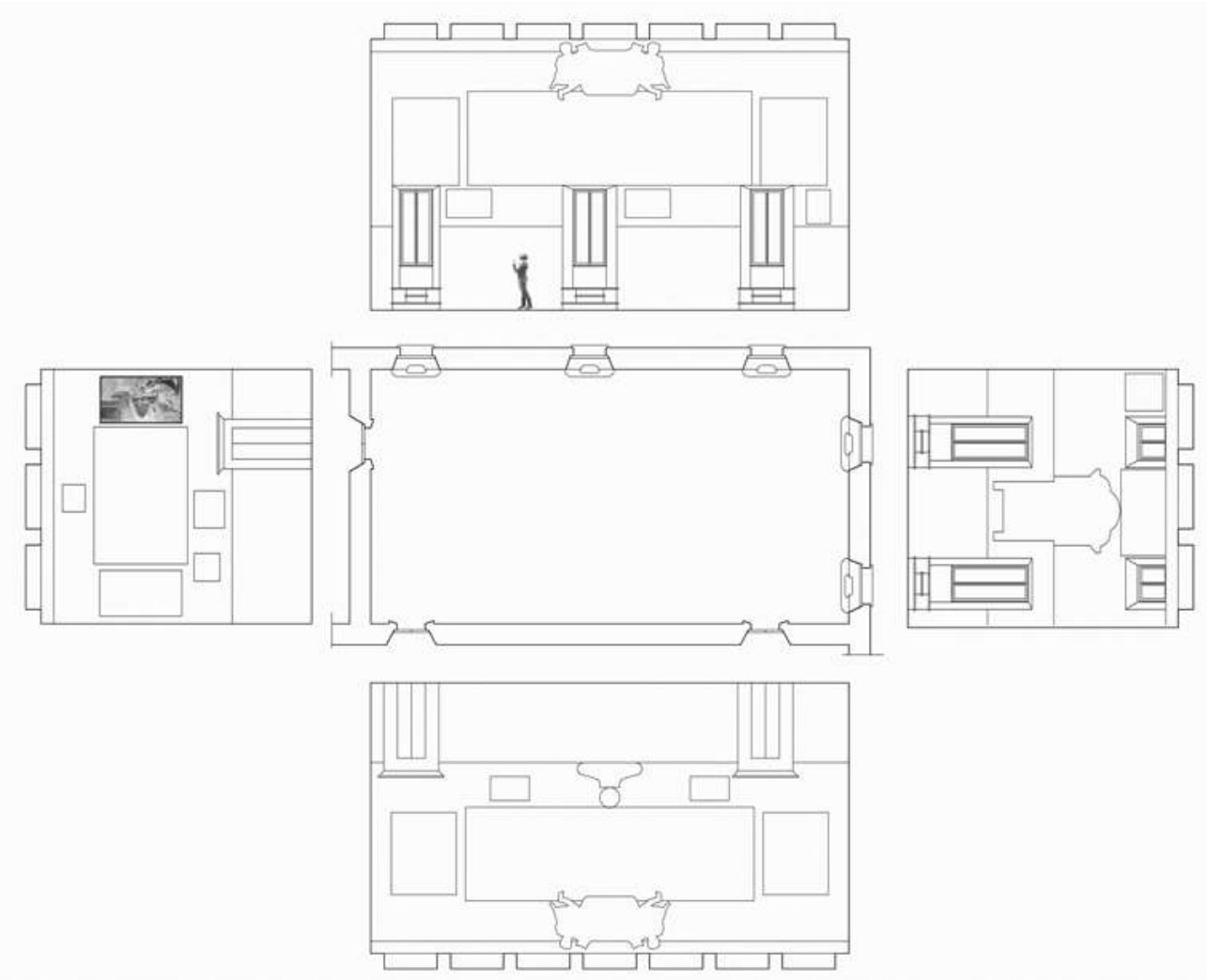

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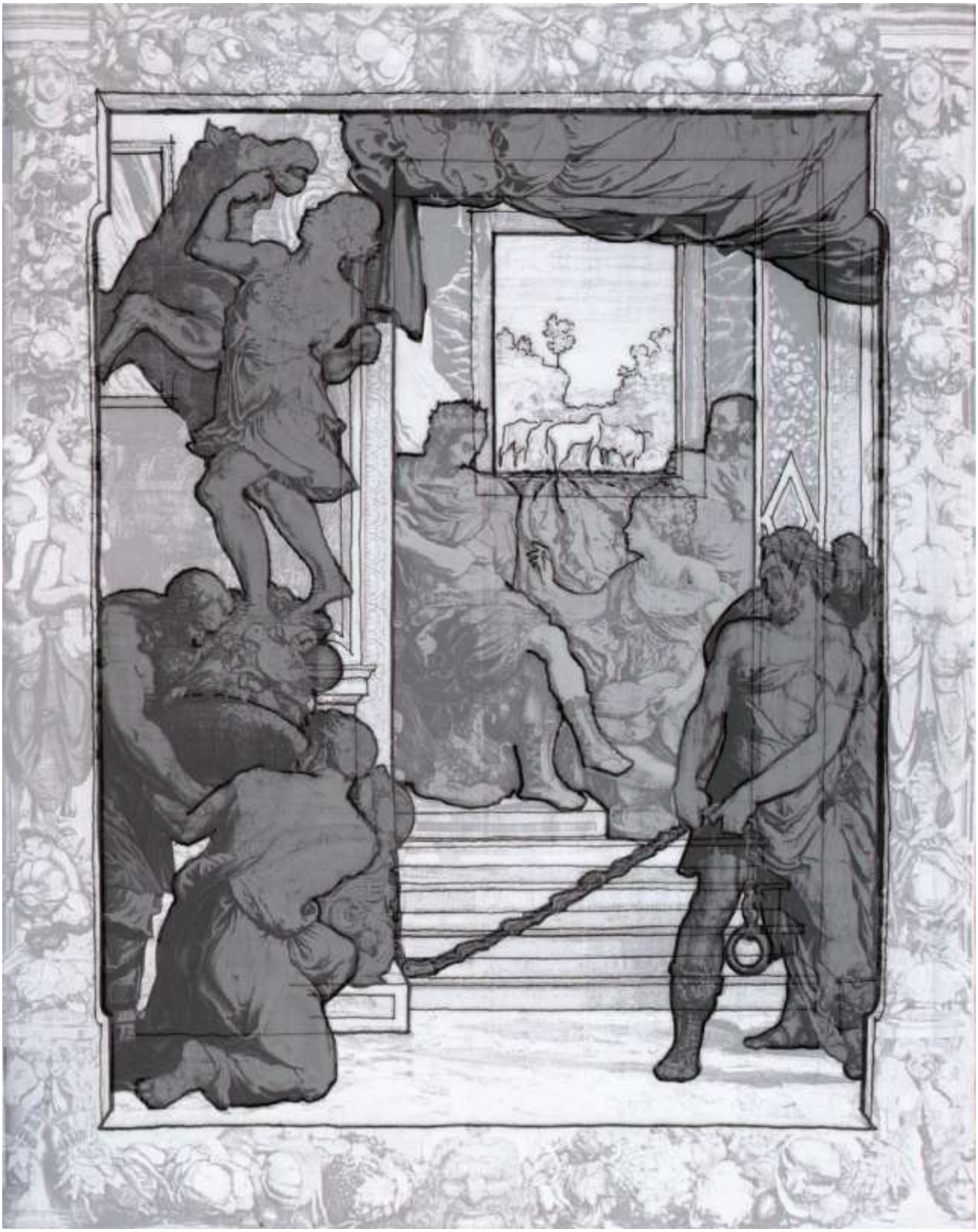

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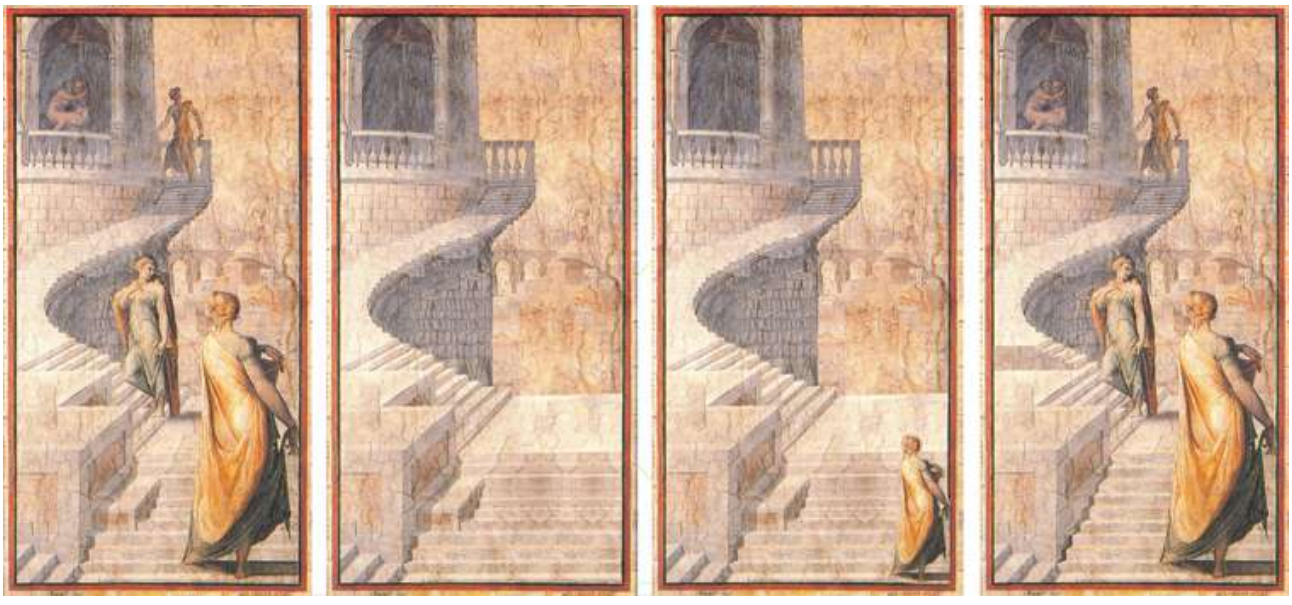

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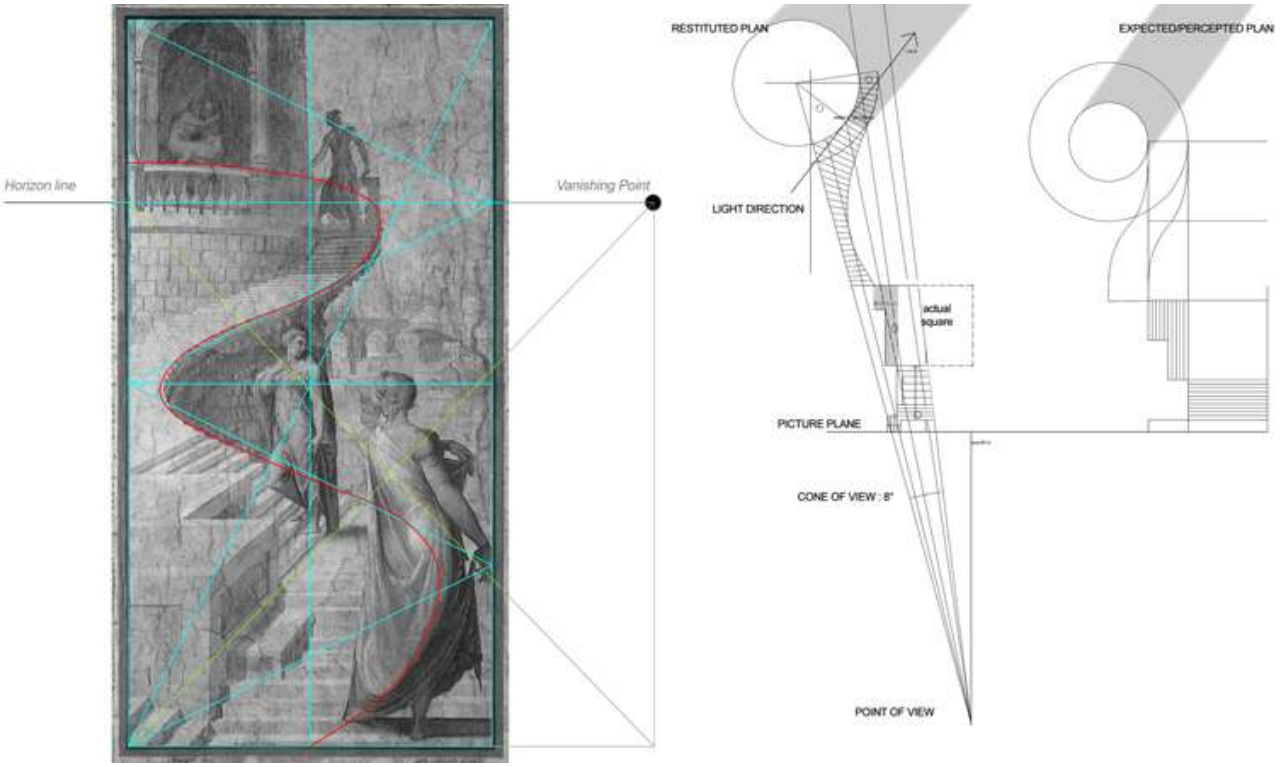

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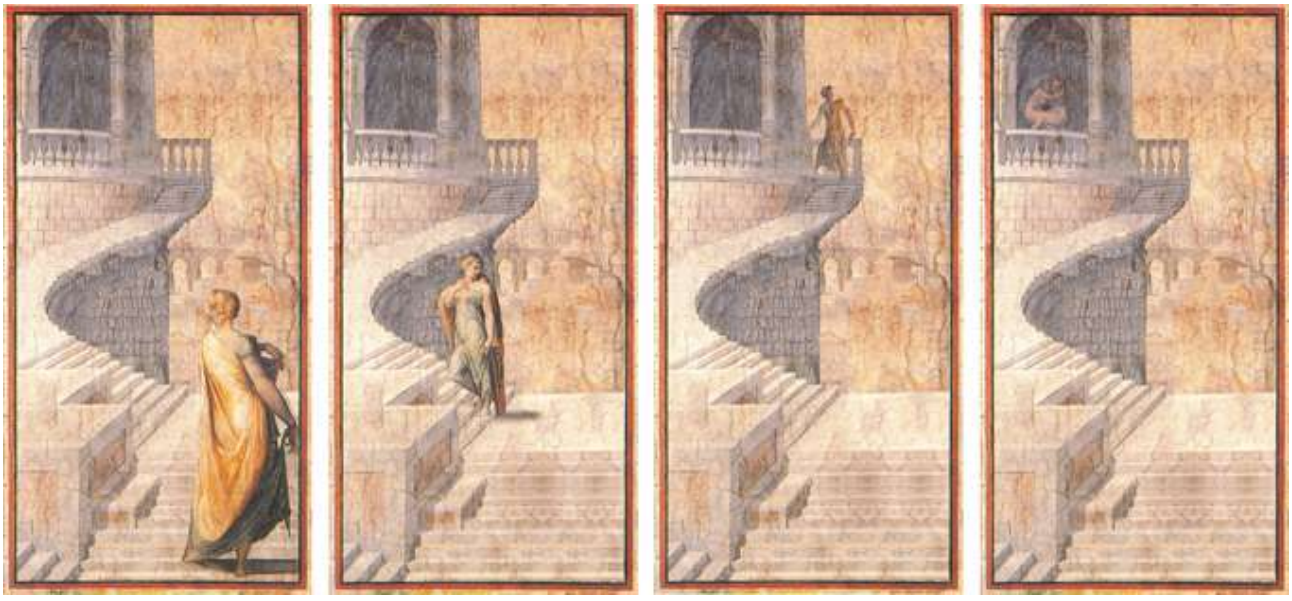

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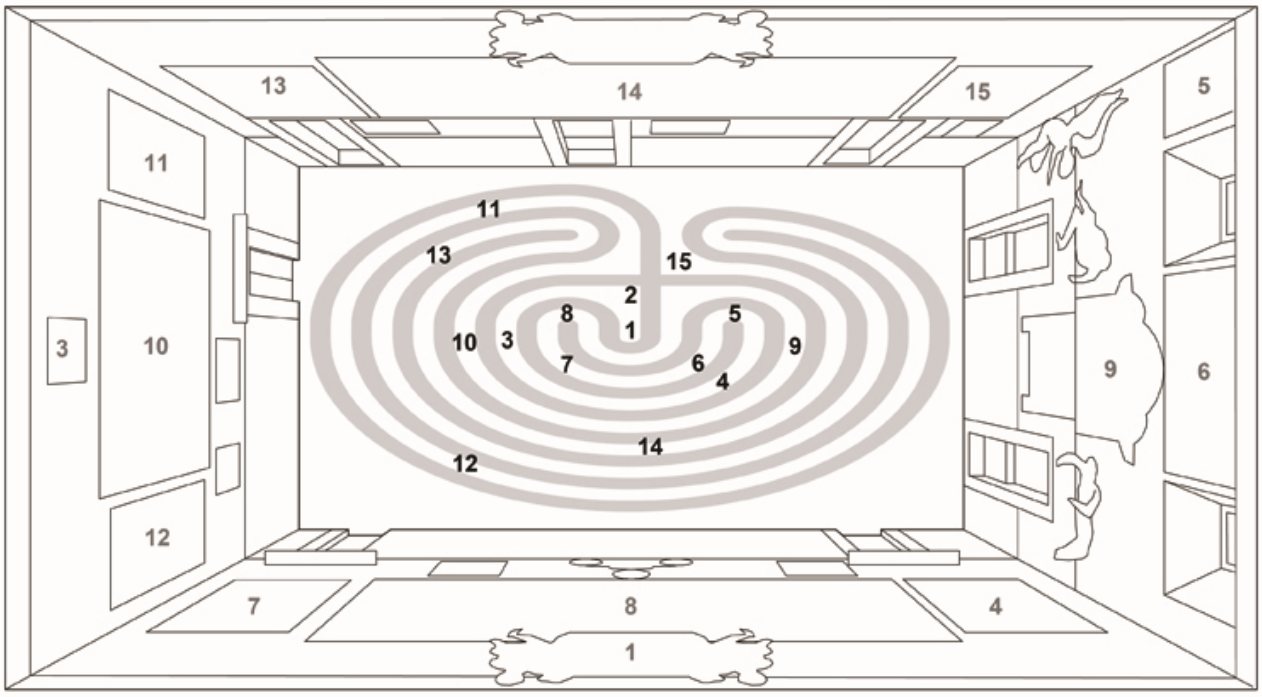

Figure 11