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VISIONS IN THE AIR: FLUIDITY OF SPACE AND MATERIALS IN THE BAROQUE AGE

Summary: The virtual polyphony of the Baroque age characterized in particular the religious art of the period, but found a highly fitting expression in the form of the theatre. The absolute power given to the image in order to lead the ideological and political reform of the Church very quickly acquired a much broader meaning, and moved into the sphere of the profane and political. It is the Baroque age that engendered the first moving image (credited to one of the greatest polymaths of the age – Athansius Kircher S. J.), and similar distortions of reality. Such fluid spaces forever existing on the threshold between reality and unreality were one of the main features of the literature of the age – from the satire of Grazian to the pure science fiction of Charles Typhaigne della Roche.

Keywords: Baroque, fluidity, illusion, reality, trompe l`oeil, anamorphosis, magic lantern

From classical antiquity onwards, visual art strove to create a multitude of illusions – of space, of power, of verisimilitude, and above all, of presence. The quest towards virtuality was hardly an early modern pursuit, but there was one period in our more recent history that placed a particular emphasis on the conquest and manipulation of the worlds of illusion – the Baroque.

If we were to select one quality that defines the great number of Baroque works of art, whether in visual arts, theatre or literature, it would undoubtedly be *the illusion.* This period opened a new epoch of virtuality in the history of European culture, making the sense of space and reality entirely fluid. It was a turning point in the way we understand and perceive the virtual worlds today. For the first time, the veracity of reality was criticized, analyzed and sometimes even annihilated.

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It is in this particular period that virtual realms were not only represented better and understood more profoundly, but their existence and their fabrication subsequently became an indispensable element of reality itself. More precisely, in this inconstant age reality became an increasingly fluid category, accommodating different forms of the virtual and imaginary. In such a worldview, dream, illusion and vision caried equal importance as the palpable world of matter. While in the previous epochs illusion was employed as a sign of virtuosity and an intellectual game, in the Baroque age social, religious and political instability engendered an increased interest in the oblique and illusory. As J. W. Evans famously wrote in his *History of the Habsburg Monarchy*: `Splendour and panache, however, are only half of the story. The other spring of Baroque art lay in insecurity, not confidence. It drew on illusion and allusion: on trompe l'oeil and indirect symbolical expression`.[1] *Trompe l'oeil* effects, anamorphosis, metamorphoses, visual riddles, textual riddles and other forms of elaborate conceits that Baroque art developed, not only echoed the age that created it but also formed the foundation for our own fluid sense of reality.

I FLUIDITY OF HEAVENS – THE ILLUSION OF INFINITY

The fluidity of space in the Baroque age was manifested most clearly in an increased research and elaboration of illusionism in visual arts. Like many phenomena in the Baroque, the interest in illusion, whether visual or textual, resided on a curious paradox. At the same time, this unstable vision of reality epitomized the insubstantiality of the world of matter and facilitated representations of the infinite realms of the Divine.

The scientific as well as painterly foundation for Baroque illusionism was already established and elaborated in the period of the Renaissance, as respectively developed in the artistic treatises of Alberti and Lomazzo, and in the feats of painterly virtuosity depicted in numerous palaces of the Italian city states. From Andrea Mantegna`s *Camera degli Sposi* (1465/1474), Baldesare Peruzzi`s *Sala della Prospettiva* in Villa Farnesina in Rome (1515-17), or Giulio Romano`s *Stanza dei Giganti* in Palazzo del Te (1532-4) Renaissance artists explored different forms of perspectival manipulation that enabled the spectator to experience a novel sense of reality. Even more importantly, they offered *the possibility of complete immersion*, as Oliver Grau pointed out, into the wide variety of virtual spaces.[2] While Mantegna in *Camera degli Sposi*, for the first time in the history of art and culture, opened the skies towards the infinite through the famous oculus,[3] Baldessare Peruzzi seemingly annihilated the walls that surrounded *Salla delle Prospettive*, and unfurled the vast prospects of 16th century Rome. These virtual vistas in Villa Farnesina were alternated with the real views of the Tiber, thus creating the mesmerizing interplay of the real and the unreal, of presence and apparition. On the other hand, Giulio Romano (1499-1546)

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1 J. W. Evans, *History of the Habsburg Monarchy 1550-1700: An interpretation*, Oxford, 1979, p. 443.
2 O. Grau, *Virtuelna umetnost* [*Virtual Art*], Belgrade, Clio, 2008, pp. 49-51. (original title: Oliver Grau, *Virtual Art: from Illusion to Immersion*).
3 See O. Grau, *op. cit.*, Belgrade, Clio, 2008, pp. 49-51 but also M. Cordaro, *Camera degli Sposi*, Abeville Press, Abeville, 1993.

JELENA A. TODOROVIĆ

went a step further and introduced a sense of instability into his virtual domains. He not only devised a credible virtual space that enveloped the spectator, Romano also manipulated the sense of illusion up to its very bounds.

In his *Stanza dei Giganti* (1532/34), inspired by the Fall of the Giants from Ovid`s *Metamorphoses,* the grand imaginary architecture on his fresco collapses in front the very eyes of the beholder (fig. 1).[4] Pediments and pillars, crushed in divine wrath, are crumbling around the viewer, while monumental stones, hurled by *giganti,* seem to be flying ominously through the air. The sense of calamity is so evocative, so overwhelming, that the spectator feels inescapably drawn into the vortex of the catastrophe, totally immersed into the world that seems to be inescapably disintegrating. Constructed with great virtuosity, the imaginary spaces of Giulio Romano make the beholder question not only his/her own sense of reality, but also a greater sense of stability and order of things that seem so violently upturned on the walls of this room. Although inspired by a different set of concepts from those that would govern the fluidity of illusions in the Baroque age, these frescoes by Giulio Romano are disconcerting precursors of an equally disrupted world and man`s place in it, which would become dominant less than a century later.

Although technically the Baroque creation of optical illusions was constructed upon the very same principles already developed in the Renaissance, and used to create the described places, its function and its aim was significantly different. Great virtual compositions became one of the most important elements of the Post-Tridentine propaganda, engendering marvelous spaces in order to glorify the *ecclesia triumphans*. Already in the early Baroque the construction of the painted scenes was such that it enhanced the depth of the image while also projecting the painted scenery and objects to the very edge of the picture plane, making the beholder almost a part of the depicted scene. In two emblematic works of the period, painted in different styles but at exactly the same time, Michelangelo Merisi Caravaggio`s (1571-1610) *Supper at Emmaus* in the National Gallery London (1601) and Anniballe Carracci`s (1560-1609) *Assumption of the Virgin* in the Cerasi chapel in Santa Maria del Popolo (1600/1), the world of the Divine never appeared closer. Both paintings depict gestures that seem to invade the space of the beholder, its objects are often quivering on the threshold between the real and virtual domains, while the elements of architecture often deny the spatial limits of the canvas. A basket that is just about to fall, the chair that is just about to enter the space of the beholder, the figure of the apostle that is just about to step in front of the altarpiece: all these elements jointly-create a peculiar sense of spatial fluidity where the boundary between the real and virtual is more porous than ever before.

Such merging of the real and unreal fulfilled one of the fundamental demands of the Council of Trent, its pursuit of *compassio*, where the beholder ceased to be a passive and became a truly active participant of the sacred

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4   For Sala dei Giganti see P. Carabel, Breaking the barrier: Transgression and Transformation in Giulio Romano Sala dei Giganti, in *The Aesthetic Discourse in the Arts: Breaking the Barriers*, ed. Anna Teresa Tymeniecka, Springer science, 2000, pp. 19-35

narrative.[5] This expansion of the fluid realm that existed between the real and the illusory reached its highest potential in the complex ceiling paintings of the age. In this period, it was more important than ever to create a space that could be believed in, a space that could transport the faithful into the realm of Heaven. The fluidity of the barrier that separated the worlds of reality from those of illusion was tested to its limits, and it was particularly employed to visualise the spiritual concepts of the Jesuit order. Two grand ceilings of the age, which decorated the most significant temples of the Jesuits – Il Gesu and San Ignazio in Rome, respectively represent emblematic works in the history of fluid spaces of illusion.[6] Moreover, these sacred ceilings in Rome also served as the matrix for depicting the Heavens in the decades to come.

Constructed as a titular mother church of the Jesuit order in 1580, the imposing edifice of Il Gesu represents one of the cornerstones in the creation of virtual realms of the Baroque. The *Triumph of the Name of Jesus* by Giovanni Battista Gaulli (Il Baciccio) (1639-1709) is a triumph of the fluidity of spaces as well as materials. His frescoes extend beyond the picture frame and annihilate all the spatial parameters of the ceiling. The figures caught in mid-flight, or mid-fall, swirl above the heads of the faithful. Focused around the Christ`s monogram (and the main symbol of the Jesuits) in glory, the entire scene represents the flock of the faithful who are drawn by the Divine light and the swarm of the damned who are pushed into the abyss of oblivion. Not unlike its Renaissance predecessors, Gaulli uses the quadrature system to create a vivid impression of the infinite, but he also extends this illusion a step farther. He employs the painted stucco to enliven his figures and transport them not only geometrically, but also physically, into the space of the beholder. On the ceiling the painting becomes stucco, only to be returned into a two-dimensional surface of the ceiling, one material seamlessly flowing into another, the boundaries between spaces and mediums becoming obsolete. The effect of this metamorphosis, of flow of one dimension into another, the change of one state into another, is mesmerising. Like in a truly Baroque vision, the beholder is never certain what he/she perceives, the eyes becoming unfaithful witnesses.

At San Ignazio, the fluid incorporation of reality and infinity is embodied in the masterful creation by Andrea Pozzo (1649-1709), devoted to the glorification of the Jesuit order. What is attained by the fluidity of materials in the ceiling of Il Gesu, Andrea Pozzo achieves by the then unprecedented use of perspectival illusion. His vision of Heavens in glory is constructed on several levels and depths of virtuality. Angels, saints and other heavenly beings move in diverse directions and in several layers above the heads of the faithful. They seem to obliterate the confines of the architectural framework, making the space of the church and the space of the Divine one glorious fluid entity. However, his greatest legacy is not only confined to this

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5   For a general study of the Post-Tridentine world, see J. A. Maravall, *Culture of the Baroque: Analysis of the Historical Structure*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1980. See also a recent study of the concept of *compassio*: K. Steenbergh, K. Ibbett eds., *Compassion in Early Modern Literature and Culture*, CUP, Cambridge, 2021, pp. 44-63.

6   For the concept of the virtual space in both works, see O.Grau, *op.cit.* pp. 49-55. See also M. Friedrich, *The Jesuits – A History*, Princ0ton University Press, Princeton, 2006, pp. 131-260.

Jelena A. Todorović

merging of realms in his ceiling decoration, nor to his almost miraculous church machinery (like the one used for the altar of San Ignazio in Il Gesu), but to the highly influential treatise on perspective that inspired the creation of heavenly realms throughout the Baroque world.[7]

The fluidity of Pozzo`s virtual spaces spread particularly through Jesuit churches, underpinning such curious creations like the fresco designed in bold foreshortening for the ceiling in the Jesuit church in Lucerne (1666-1677).

The painting, done by an anonymous artist, is constructed as the purest form of the Jesuit propaganda where the Jesuit triumph over protestants was brought to Heavenly glory in the image of the triumph of St. Francis Xavier. All the elements of the painting, the imposing edifices and the gathered audience are constructed in such a way that they guide the gaze of the beholder from the space of the church into the domain of the triumph of the saint who, not unlike Roman triumphators, was riding through the Heavens in a golden chariot pulled by exotic beasts. The power of this image, enhanced by the fluid sense of space, was even more poignant in the region where there was a constant dispute between the Protestants and Catholics. An equally powerful merging of the real and virtual was created in Jesuit churches across the Baroque world, from the imposing perspectives of the domes in Vienna and Lvov to ornate constructions in Dillingen in Bavaria, Innsbruck or Mexico City they jointly testified to the grand scope of the Baroque world and the universality of fluid spaces.

The effect of absorption into the fluid realities of Baroque heavenly visions was further enhanced with mirrors inserted into the illusionistic ceilings, as in the Mirror Chapel of the Jesuit College in Prague, or in the center of the dome fresco by Gottfried Bernhard Göz in the pilgrimage church of Birnau on Lake Constance. A real mirror placed in the hands of a painted putto sends a beam of real light through the painted shimmers of its divine counterpart, thus almost completely annihilating the barrier between reality and vision, and creating the supreme fluid space of the Baroque world. By inserting the physical element of illusion, the looking glass, the painter also allowed the viewer to perceive his presence among the heavenly spheres. The greatest aim of the Baroque immersive virtual worlds was thus attained, with reality and unreality inseparably intertwined.

The same transgression of the confines of the visible world that denoted the authority of both *ecclesia millitans* and *ecclesia triumphans* was also employed to communicate *powers stately* and *powers personal*. From the emblematic ceiling of Pietro da Cortona in Palazzo Barberini and Guercino's in Casino Ludovisi to the incredibly eloquent visions by Peter Paul Rubens on the vaults of the Banqueting House in London, the propaganda piece of John Thornhill in the Old Royal Naval College in Greenwich or Tiepolo`s masterpiece in Wurzburg: complex virtual spaces embodied visions of secular power throughout the early modern age.

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7   For the most encompassing collection of texts on the Jesuit order, see J. O'Malley ed., *The Jesuits: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts 1540–1773*, vol.1, Toronto, 1999.

Some of the most intriguing of fluid spaces can be found in the late Baroque fresco on the ceiling of the library of Eger in Hungary (1772). The otherwise plain vault of the library has been transformed by Johan Lucas Kracker (1717-1779) and Joseph Zach into a vertiginous view of an ornate flaming Gothic ceiling that soars above the heads of the beholders (fig. 2).[8] Around the edge of an entire vault the painter positioned imposing rows of figures representing solemn delegates at the Council of Trent. Seated in the pews incorporated in the illusory architecture, which masterfully continues the shapes of the molding on the library shelfing below, they share the space of the library and remind us of the momentousness of their decrees for the entire Catholic world. Thus, a peculiar fluid space is created where the pupils of the lyceum, as well as the visitors in the rich library, were made present and witnesses to one of the founding councils of the early modern age.

The concept of fluid reality created in the grand sacred and secular ceilings of the Baroque age became even more captivating when applied to reality itself.[9] In this period, there were also attempts to produce the same ambiguity of spaces, the same transgression of boundaries that we have analyzed in visual arts, only brought out into the exterior, the open space itself. Such compositions, like their sacred counterparts, also strove to offer the image of the infinite and the ideal, only this ideal was secular, not sacred. Often these architectural *trompe l`oiel*, these fluid realms, were placed in gardens and offered visions of Arcadia. Although the gardens themselves were construed to embody this realm of the golden age with their unification of the elements, an additional fluidity of their spaces only enhanced the effect.

One of the most influential of such creations was Borromini`s perspectival colonnade in the grounds of Palazzo Spada in Rome, which he built for Cardinal Bernardo Spada in 1630s.[10] Built in the small courtyard of the palazzo, the colonnade presents to the viewer the image of a grander and more monumental space. Although relatively small in scale, it offered the illusion of great distance for the beholder`s gaze, and was so well positioned that the illusion was maintained both when seen from the interior of the palace and from the garden itself. Here the device of perspectival manipulation was combined with the anamorphic illusion to achieve the trick of the eye and a rather peculiar perception of space.

The colonnade Borromini created was also greatly evocative of the Renaissance and early Baroque stage designs, and above all, of the famous Teatro Olympico in Vicenza. However, this was a stage of a different kind, a stage of the Baroque world where cardinal Bernardo Spada moved with great ease. The cardinal commissioned the colonnade to be a space of power and ideal harmony deeply linked with his important public role in Rome. In his work Borromini offered him both, by creating such an ambiguous space in his garden, a stage of multiple illusions.

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8   For the works of Johan Lucas Kracker, see A. Javor, *Johann Lucas Kracker: Ein Maler des Spätbarock in Mitteleuropa*, Imhof, Budapest, 2005.

9   A recent discussion on the illusion and reality in the Baroque can be found in H. Hills ed., *Rethinking the Baroque*, Ashgate, Harmondsworth, 2011, 11-36.

10 For Borromini`s colonnade at Palazzo Spada, see R. Wittkower, J. Montagu and J. Connors*, Art and Architecture in Italy, 1600–1750: Volume 2: The High Baroque, 1625–1675,* Yale University Press, 1999, pp. 58-9.

JELENA A. TODOROVIĆ

Recreating Arcadia in the Baroque garden through illusive virtual spaces was also achieved through a rarely discussed, albeit important feature – *tromp-l`oeil* paintings that served as a backdrop for those verdant microcosms. Like the gardens themselves, these illusions were never just bucolic land, but often included an antique ruin or triumphal arch to accompany the idea of the garden as not just a condensed space, but also condensed time of the macrocosm.

Due to the highly ephemeral nature of such designs, they have been discovered only through textual and visual descriptions, and only recently have been the subject of detailed research.[11] One of the major exponents of these garden illusions was Jean Lemaire, a French painter educated in the Baroque Rome, while Salomon de Caus (1572-1626), a notable garden designer and a hydraulic specialist, dedicated an entire chapter in his treatise on perspective to such endeavors.[12] When visiting Cardinal Armand Jean du Plessis, on 24th February 1644 the famous diarist and chronicler of the age left an interesting record:

> (one of the grand alleys) leads to the Citroniere, which is a noble conserve of all those rarities; and at the end of it is the Arch of Constantine, painted on a wall in oil, as large as the real one at Rome, so well done, that even a man skilled in painting may mistake it for stone and sculpture. The sky and hills, which seem to be between the arches, are so natural, that swallows and other birds, thinking to fly through, have dashed themselves against the wall. I was infinitely taken with this agreeable cheat.[13]

This practice was particularly close to the Baroque worldview, where reality and illusion, and often a multiplicity of illusions, as in the contemporary Wundekammer, inseparably coexisted. Therefore, to create a perspectival illusion of the garden, in a garden which, by its very concept, is a construct, a deception, was to fashion a polyphonic experience of space. The visitor to such a garden, like the one that was visited by John Evelyn, or the one painted at Hotel Fiubert at Quai de Celestines in Paris, or those created by Salomon de Caus, saw the illusion of the arcadian microcosm that each Baroque garden strove to embody, and yet of another illusion, the boundless illusory spaces inhabited by fantastic structures depicted on the end walls of such enclosures that so closely reflected the equally fantastic garden statuary.[14] Most often these illusions were designed to `pierce the blind wall` and augment the scope of the garden, but sometimes they were added to enhance the dissolution of spatial boundaries so often attained in the interiors of the Renaissance and Baroque villas, as exemplified in Veronese`s Villa Moser or previously mentioned Peruzzi`s Villa Farnesina in Rome. By creating such porous spaces where the interior and the exterior, the real and the imagined, past and present, seamlessly overlapped, they embodied the purest fluidity of space, of time and of vision that designated so deeply this curious age and would implicitly influence our own perceptions of space.

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11 For the trompe l`oeil in the Baroque garden, see L. Morgan, <u>The Early Modern Trompe l`Oeil Garden</u>, *Garden History*, 33 (2005) pp. 286-293.
12 L. Morgan, *op.cit*, pp. 288-290.
13 John Evelyn, as quoted in L. Morgan, *op.cit*., pp. 286.
14 *Ibid.*, pp. 288-295.

II REALITY AS A FLUID CATEGORY

Not all fluid spaces of the Baroque denoted the infinite realms of the ideal, they were often subtle reminders of the instability of existence and the fragile quality of reality. The religious upheaval and political insecurity and overwhelming anxiety of the age were expressed in a cultural fascination with illusion. Such increased uncertainty of being and existing vividly presented the fluid sense of space in different distortions of the real: from subtle indications of the ephemerality of the physical world, to the diverse forms of visual riddles, to anamorphosis and the first moving images.[15] They all testified that reality was not a solid category, but prone to doubt, to mutation and sometimes even to disintegration. In this cultural climate, truth appeared illusory: there was no truth, only another form of illusion. As in the Baroque halls of mirrors, it was often difficult to distinguish between the different layers of apparitions. Faced with an image within an image, a narration within the narration, with one appearance flowing into another, the Baroque viewer was facing a world resembling a majestic Wunderkammer where all times and all spaces eternally overlapped. However paradoxically, this elusive polyphonic world, as we shall describe further, was used as a moralizing tool by the Protestants and Catholics alike.

Although technical possibilities of the perspectival manipulations and tricks of vision remained the same as in the previous centuries, the Baroque gave new understanding to the act of vision itself and consequently to the understanding of illusion. In the Post-Tridentine age that gave the image absolute preeminence over text, that bestowed on the image the supreme role in the sacred and secular propaganda, it is not surprising that the act of seeing and perceiving would be so important for understanding the Baroque attitude towards reality. In order to make the visual means effective, in order for the `transient to comprehend the eternal` – the image ought to be clear and legible. The seeing assured the understanding of the ultimate truth of faith, of power but also of reality itself.[16] Montaigne devoted a large part of his essays to the nature and credibility of perception, and the same concept was very much discussed in the contemporary literature. The Spanish poet Grazian called the sight the *Divine sense*, while Calderon famously declared that *the transitory cannot comprehend the eternal, and to come to its knowledge one needs the visible means*.[17] Their compatriot Suarez de Figueroa wrote that *in sum, among the senses that serves the soul, it is through the eyes that many affects enter and exit*.[18] This importance bestowed upon the act of seeing was also evident in the proliferation of treatises on optics, there were many works by Jesuit fathers. Moreover, this was the period when the painted *Allegories of Sight* became a rather [19]frequent topic and equally present in the Catholic and the Protestant countries. Some of the finest examples were cre-

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15 On reality and illusion in the Baroque world, see J.A. Maravall, *op.cit*, 260-271 and H. Hills, *op. cit*., pp. 11-36.

16 See J.A. Maravall, op.cit, 225-261. For the role of images and likeness in the Post-Tridentine world, see C. Benzan, Coming to light at Sacro Monte in Varallo: the Sacred Image al vivo in Post-Tridentine Italy, *Ad Vivum? Visual Material and the Vocabulary of Life-Likeness in Europe before 1800*, T. Baffe, J. Woodal, C. Zittel, eds., Brill, Leiden, 2019, pp. 224-247.

17 Calderon quoted in J.A. Maravall, *op.cit*., p. 252.

18 Suarez de Figureoa quoted in J.A. Maravall, *op.cit*., p. 253.

19 Baltasar Gracian, *Obras Completas*, Aguilar, Madrid, 1960, p. 672.

Jelena A. Todorović

ated by Rubens, Breughel the Elder, Jusepe Ribera or Pietro Paolino, where the multitude of allegorical objects testified to the omnipotence of the act of seeing.

On the other hand, the same age understood that the act of seeing, as well as the reality it perceived, was not reliable, it was as faulty and erroneous as the man himself. Even the eyes cannot be trusted, or as Grazian wrote, one needed *eyes upon very eyes to see what they see*. Vision, already for the Baroque man was a dual, even sometimes a multiple thing – it embodied at the same time the act of illusion and disillusion. Therefore, the use of optical illusion in this age did not have only the function of a riddle or amusement, it also gave a subtle commentary of the fluid state of the world itself.[20]

The most direct exponent of such understanding of the fluid nature of reality was the increased production of trompe-l`oeil paintings that reached the highest level of virtuosity among the Dutch artists of the age. In the still-life painting by Adriaen van der Splet (1630-1673), now at the Art Institute of Chicago, the fluidity of reality was only subtly introduced. His *Trompe l`oeil with Still Life and Curtain* (1658) (fig. 3) could be classified as a typical Dutch flower still-life, where the abundance of diverse blooms stood for the eternal fusion of time, where all seasons and all times were united. But the artist added to the painting a shimmering taffeta curtain on a brass railing that covers only one quarter of the image. Despite the fact that such curtains were common in contemporary interior decoration, hiding the works from dust, sunlight or unwanted gazes, here it denoted something utterly different. It was introduced to emphasize the uncertain nature of the perceived image, to unveil the real fluidity of the reality depicted, but also to remind the beholder that his/her own reality was equally fragile. Through such simple means, it was not only the credibility of the virtual space of the painting that was put into question, but also the solidity of the entire world of matter.

The same device, a false curtain as a sign of transgression of spatial boundaries between the real and the virtual was used in the still life by Cornelius Norbertus Gysbrechts (1525-1in the National Gallery of Denmark,[21] thus denoting the popularity of this visual trick. Far more audacious was another manipulation of vision and space by the same author, who was a true virtuoso in this field. Throughout his career, Gysbrechts painted numerous illusory still lifes representing overflowing cabinets, sweeping false curtains, ingeniously overlapping pieces of elaborate writing, while his abundant tables often depicted vanitas compositions that contained somber messages on the transitoriness of both nature and man. This particular trompe l`oeil, *Vanitas Still Life* , from a private collection, unifies these two genres, thus becoming a veritable essay on the ephemerality of existence. The painting presents a grand display of *memento mori* symbols: a lush bouquet of the most fragile of flowers, sheet music, an antique sculpture, an extinguished candle, an hour-

20 For the optical illusion in the Baroque age, see The Social Role of the Artifice in J.A. Maravall, op.cit., pp. 225-251. For the more detailed study of the optical illusions in the early modern age, see the collection of essays L. Zirpolo ed., *The Most Noble of the Senses": Anamorphosis, Trompe-l'oeil, and Other Optical Illusions in Early Modern Art*, Zephirus Publications, New Jersey, 2016, H. Grootenboer, *The rhetoric of perspective: Realism and illusionism in seventeenth-century Dutch still-life painting,* University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2005.

21 The National Gallery of Denmark SMK, Inv. no. KMSsp811, https://open.smk.dk/artwork/image/KMSsp811

glass and on top of everything else, a gleaming white skull in its very centre; even the niche where the entire composition is placed is cracked and weathered. The notion of ephemerality is reflected in them all – in the almost immaterial petals of flowers, in the slithering sand that seeps in the hourglass and in the swirling smoke on the candle. Its beholder is reminded that music, however divine, is the most ephemeral of all arts, and that even the greatest empires have vanished into oblivion. Time does not spare anyone. Although this painting can be read almost as a glossary of vanitas motifs, it introduces a particular element in trompe l`oiel. Gysbrechts depicts this entire memento mori compendium on a canvas that seems to be curling and slowly peeling off its frame. While showing the greatest of his skills, the artist uses the art of illusion to create a highly fluid space where the viewer questions not only the reality and illusion of what he sees, but also perceives the illusory quality of his/her own existence. As if echoing the verses of his contemporary, William Drummond:

> Triumphant Arches, Statues crown'd with Bayes,
> Proud Obeliskes, Tombes of the vastest frame,
> Colosses, brasen Atlas of Fame,
> Phanes vainelie builded to vaine ldoles praise;
> States, which unsatiate Mindes in blood doe raise,
> From the Crosse-starres unto the Articke Teame,
> A1as! and what wee write to keepe our Name,
> Like Spiders Caules are made the sport of Dayes:
> All onely constant is in constant Change,
> What done is, is undone, and when undone,
> Into some other figure doeth it range;
> Thus moves the restlesse World beneath the Moone:[22]

Both Drummond's reader and Gysbrechts' viewer are reminded of their ephemerality through very similar motifs of statues, papers, music. *Triumphant Arches, Statues crown'd with Bayes, Proud Obeliskes, Tombes of the vastest frame,* are equally fragile in front of the restless flow of Time. They all are meant to learn that not only space and time are flowing; the fluidity lies in the very heart of things as *All onely constant is in constant Change.*[23]

What Gysbrechts and his contemporaries achieved through trompe l`oiel effects was elaborated in another technique that inaugurated an even greater fluidity of space – anamorphosis. Much more acutely than the other techniques of illusion, anamorphosis with its insecurity of vision, as well as the instability of presence it produced, profoundly befitted the Baroque worldview. It possessed an undisputable ambiguity; it was fluid in its very essence. By the wonder it produced and the miraculous metamorphoses it displayed, it also embodied one of the fundamental principles of the Baroque aesthetics, the concept of the marvelous. While in the age of the Renaissance, when it was first fully explored, anamorphosis was mainly used as a visual and moral metaphor (like the one used in Holbein`s famous double portrait of the ambassadors) in the age of the Baroque this function was further explored, but it was also employed to allegorically denote the instability of the world opposed

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22 William Drummond, `The Instabilitie of Mortall Glorie`, in Drummond, William. *The Poems of William Drummond of Hawthornden: With Life, by Peter Cunningham.* London: Cochrane and M'Crone, 1833, p. 88.

23 Drummond, *op.cit.,* p. 88.

JELENA A. TODOROVIĆ

to the only stability existing – faith itself. The material world was fluid, slippery, distorted as much as the anamorphic image prior to correction. And the corrective agent, the desired oblique mirror, offered the new vision of the world transformed by the power of the Church. As the guardians and disseminators of the absolute truth of the Church, the Jesuits inevitably were the order to give its particular contribution to the fluid worlds of anamorphosis.[24]

It was Mario Bettini/Betinus (1582-1657), a Jesuit mathematician, who left a most direct illustration of such understanding in his optical treatise (1646). Bettini used the most unlikely subject of the eye of Cardinal Colonna, the patron of his scientific work, to illustrate the process of anamorophosis.[25] Distorted to grotesque proportions, the eye was used not only as a witty model of optical illusion but also as an allegory of the pastoral work of this prelate, as Bettini emphasized in the *subscriptio* to the image Collegit et Collocat `to reassemble and rearrange` or to `correct and transform`.

Therefore, it is hardly surprising that the majority of treatises devoted to optics, illusion and, consequently, anamorphosis were written by some of the key prelates of the age, and it was a Jesuit, Gaspard Schott, who gave anamorphosis its name. Among the important exponents of anamorphosis research were, respectively, distinguished figures of Counter Reformation Europe: the aforementioned Mario Bettini, the famous Athanasius Kircher S. J. and Jean François Niceron. Although far less known than his more notable Jesuit contemporaries, due to his early death at the age of 33, Jean François Niceron (1613-1646) wrote the first comprehensive treatise devoted solely to anamorphosis, which influenced deeply both Kircher and Bettini. Niceron was a member of the Minim order in Paris, and devoted his entire life to extensive research of this curious subject matter.[26] His treatise *A Curious Perspective or The Artificial Magic of the Marvelous Effects* (1638) was mostly concerned with different tricks of vision and the fluidity of spaces these processes produced.[27] Niceron in his treatise gave detailed instructions on how to produce different manipulations of appearances, as he called his *miraculous images*, and how *distortion and deformation give birth to the image of beauty*. These optical devices, he hoped, like Mario Bettini himself did, would also imply a moral, not only visual, art of correction.

Although Niceron did not commission any anamorphic works of art himself, his work inspired a fellow Minim monk, Emmanuel Maignan (1601-1676), who transformed the corridors of his convent at SS. Trinita dei Monti in Rome with grandiose anamorphic landscapes (fig. 4). A mathematician and philosopher himself, Maignan wrote treatises on sundials and astrolabes. In *Perspectiva oraria* vol. 3, he

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24 On the Jesuit fathers and their research on anamorphosis, see the collection of essays C. Gottler, W. Neuber, *Spirits Unseen, Representations of Subtle Bodies in Early Modern Culture*, Brill, Leiden, 2008. In particular, the essay S. Dupre, `Images in the Air, Optical Games, Magic and Imagination`, Gottler, Neuber, *op.cit*., pp. 71-93.

25 M.Bettini, Apiaria universae philosphiae matematicae […], Bononiae, 1645. For more information on Bettini's print, see H. Grootenboer, *The rhetoric of perspective: Realism and illusionism in seventeenth-century Dutch still-life painting*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2005.

26 For Jean Francois Niceron`s treatise, see critical translation by A. De Rosa, ed., *Jean François Nicéron. Perspective, Catoptric and Artificial Magic*, Aracne edizioni, Roma, 2013.

27 For Niceron, see L Massey, Picturing Space, Displacing BodiesAnamorphosis in Early Modern Theories of Perspective, Pen State University Press, Pennsylvania, 2007, pp. 56-61. See also S. Dupre, `Images in the Air, Optical Games, Magic and Imagination`, Gottler, Neuber, *op.cit.,* pp. 71-93. See also Maravall, *op.cit.,* p. 223.

gave his theoretical contribution to the art of anamorphosis, but also later made its practicaeds. l application.[28] The concealed meaning of his fresco, which curiously envelops the corridors of his convent at SS. Trinita dei Monti, is based upon the same principles as Bettini`s *Eye of Cardinal Colonna*. The distorted image the beholder perceives at first, a confusion of amorphic shapes, fluid lines and sinuous arabesques, was symbolically the true likeness of a flawed world, of a labyrinth of matter. Through the correct point of perception and following the beholder`s change of perspective, the real landscape is unveiled, an image of `corrected` and bettered world. For Maignan, as well as for Niceron and Bettini, only righteous deeds and virtuous acts could correct the erroneous fluid world we inhabit.

Belonging to the same order as Bettini, and being one of the most notable polymaths of his age, Athanasius Kircher S.J. (1602-1680) devoted one of his major works to optics, *Ars Magna Lucis et Umbrae* (1646) and devised not only diverse forms of anamorphic images, but also invented his famous *catoptic box* that combined two miraculous ways of creating fluid spaces – the mirror and anamorphoses. However, in the pursuit of the fluidity of places, Kircher went a step further than his fellow Jesuits and produced a machine that created the first moving images – *laterna magica*. Although for centuries Kircher was credited with the invention of this wonderous device (which most probably was the work of the Dutch scientist Christiaan Hygens in the 1660s), he certainly improved on its construction, as demonstrated in the illustrations of his treatise, and possessed and used several pieces in his renowned monumental Wunderkammer in Rome, *Museo Kircheriano*.[29] In his treatise *Ars Magna Lucis et Umbrae*, Kircher illustrated two machines that produced moving images, one the usual *laterna magica,* the other a pure invention of fantasy that combined mirrored light and a revolving cylinder with multiple images, which he aptly named a metamorphic machine. Whether this curious device was ever constructed and used we do not know, but it certainly introduced a new level of fluidity in the study of virtual spaces of the Baroque. The marvel and bewilderment with the new invention of *laterna magica* was so great that not only was it widely used to project strange and magical apparitions, but it became a desired collectors' item for their cabinets of curiosities. *Laterna Magica* was used to project fantastic, monstruous and devilish images, for the amusement at courts, but also for propaganda purposes.

It was the first time in the history of culture that a true fluid space could be created and something immaterial materialized in an equally elusive form. Moreover, it not only denoted a new chapter in the history of virtuality, but it also changed the contemporary attitudes towards time. The invention, however rudimentary, of the first moving image, the fashioning of movement existing and revolving *in time,* meant that, albeit symbolically, the flow of time was at last mastered and conquered.

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28 See *Devices of Wonder: from the World in a Box to the Images on a Screen*, eds. B. M. Staford, F. Terpak, exhibition catalogue, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, 2001, pp. 239-241.

29 See H. M. Gosser, `Kircher and the Laterna Magica: a Reexamination`, *SMPTE Journal* (1981), 90, pp. 972-978. See also W. A. Wagenaar, 'The true inventor of the magic lantern: Kircher, Walgenstein, or Huygens?', *Janus* (1979), 66, pp. 193–207.

JELENA A. TODOROVIĆ

EPILOGUE – THE DISILLUSIONMENT

In 1637 Gianlorenzo Bernini produced a pen and ink drawing, *Intermezzo in two Theatres*, which, although small in scale, had a profound importance for understanding the fluid state of reality and the nature of illusion in the Baroque. In this drawing there is a stage with an audience seated, facing the audience in the theatre. Which is the real audience, which one is illusion and which one reality, or most likely they are both unreal.[30] This drawing was created as a sketch for his famously controversial play *Due teatri* (1637) to present the notion of a play within a play. It was meant to show to the high clergy, and high society in Rome, that illusion was not only in the very heart of things, but that the boundary between the fictive and the physical space is more porous than ever imagined.

The device of the shattering of illusion, of breaking even the fictive boundaries between the real and the unreal, the upturning of the established order, the use of narratives within narratives opened the most complex of the fluid spaces of the age. Their function was dual, they were meant to respectively break the sense of illusion and also to display its omnipotent presence. As in the drawing by Bernini, the revealing of illusion did not only shatter the magic of appearance but also furthered the sense of ambiguity and insecurity. The beholder could not distinguish any longer what was reality and what was the fluid world of fiction. In the period so deeply marked by political and religious insecurity and uncertainty, such an approach appropriately befitted the sensibility of this troubled age.

Although the famous canvas of Diego Velasquez *Les Menninas* could be used as an emblematic illustration of such a fluid sense of unreality, some of the most interesting examples were hidden among portraits and still lifes of the period. Both *Portrait of the Gentleman* (1650) by Philippe de Champaigne (1602-1674), preserved at the Louvre[31] and *Self-Portrait* by Esteban Murillo[32] (1617-1682), nowadays at the National Gallery, displayed the same subtle trick of breaking the illusion and creating a curious fluidity of space and presence in the process. Although the portraits, judging by their elements, appeared rather standard for the age, both portrayed figures intended to invade the space of the beholder and break the illusion within the illusion in the painting. Both figures stretch their hands beyond skillfully depicted illusionistic frames within the portraits themselves, thus indicating the instability of their painted likenesses and the equally illusory nature of the whole world of appearances.

ater sense of confusion and paradox was depicted in the intriguing still life by Cornelius Franciscus Gysbrechts *The Reversed Frame of the Painting* (1670), preserved at the National Gallery of Denmark.[33] Although we have discussed similarly ingenious visual tricks, and often in the works by the same author, here the no-

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30   See I. Lavin, Bernini and the Theatre in *Visible Spirit: Bernini and the Theatre*, vol.1, Pindar, London, 2007, pp. 15-33.

31   Louvre Museum Inv. No. 1145, https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010064799

32   The National Gallery London, Inv. No. NG6153, https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/artists/bartolome-esteban-murillo

33   National Gallery of Denmark SMK, Inv.no. KMS1989, https://open.smk.dk/artwork/iiif/KMS1989.

tion of trompe l`oiel was employed to an almost absurd level: the illusion is double, if not multiple. We are not viewing only an illusion of the reverse of the painting, most virtuously depicted, including the label with the inventory number, we are also aware of an even grander illusion, that of the existence of the true painting behind it. Turning this painting of the reverse of the painting only displays another, this time the real reverse of the canvas. Like Calderon`s *life as a dream*, here the beholder is increasingly aware that it was no longer possible to distinguish between illusion and reality, but most probably that reality has never existed at all.

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ФЛУИДНОСТ ПРОСТОРА И МАТЕРИЈАЛА У БАРОКНОЈ КУЛТУРИ

РЕЗИМЕ

Ако би требало да одаберемо једну особину која карактерише велики број барокних дела, било да је у питању визуелна уметност, било књижевност, или театар, онда би то сигурно била илузија и илузионизам. Барокно доба је отворило ново поглавље у историји виртуелности претворивши однос према простору и реалности у једну посве флуидну категорију. Можемо рећи да је то било време преокрета у схватању виртуелности, које је дубоко уграђено у наше данашње поимање овог феномена. Први пут у историји културе истинитост стварности је преиспитивана, анализирана, а понекад је потпуно потирана.

Полифонија виртуелности барокног доба посебно је била очита у религиозној уметности док је своје најбоље отеловорење нашла у позоришној уметности. Потпуна владавина слике, која је обележила барокну културу и католичку реформацију, веома брзо је надишла границе религиозне уметности и прешла у сферу световног и политичког. Управо је у ово доба настала прва покретна слика (за коју можемо захвалити највећем полимату тога доба Атанасијусу Кирхеру), док су слична изврзтања реалности била видљива у форми паноптичких кутија протестантске Холандије, као и у тродимензионалним просторним експериментима, попут лавирината и грота која су испуњавала вртове барокне Европе. Ови флуидни простори налазили су се на вечитој међи реалности и илузије, попут неких од највећих књижевних дела – Грацијанове сатире и чисте научне фантастике Чарлса Тифањ дела Роша.

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Сл. 1. Ђулио Романо, *Соба тит̄ана*, фреска, Палата Те (Palazzo del Te), 1532/34.
Fig. 1. Giulio Romano, *Stanza dei Giganti*, fresco, Palazzo del Te, Mantua, (1532/4)

Сл. 2. Јохан Лукас Кракер, *Таваница библиотеке у Ег̄еру*, фреска, Егер, 1772.
Fig. 2. Johann Lucas Kracker, *Ceiling of the Library in Eger*, fresco, Eger, 1772

Сл. 3. Адриан ван дер Спелт, *Trompe l᾽oeil Мртва природа са цветном гирландом и застором*, уље на платну, 1658, Уметнички институт Чикаго

Fig. 3. Adriaen van der Splet, *Trompe l`oeil still-life with a curtain*, oil on canvas, 1658, Art Institute Chicago

Сл. 4. Емануел Маијан, *фреске из цркве Света Тројица на гори* (Santissima Trinità dei Monti), средина 17. века

Fig. 4. Emmanuel Maignan, *Frescoes at SS Trinita dei Monti*, fresco, mid 17th century