Book Review

A new somaesthetic approach to Renaissance art in Florence

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In her research, Dr. Allie Terry-Fritsch has focused primarily on different forms of cross-cultural and multidisciplinary exploration with a somaesthetic perspective. Uncovering the embodied creation and perception in significant aspects of art history and analysing different modes of viewership has been one of her key endeavours. She is particularly interested in describing how the medieval and early modern communities acted as participants and interpreters of events and how they imbued these events with new meaning. She has published many articles and several books with original, stimulating and significant contributions to this topic.

In collaboration with Erin Felicia Labbie she has—among others—been both editor and contributor to the impressive book *Beholding Violence in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (2016), where the concept of beholding and the experiences of individual and collective observers of violence during the two periods are explored in new ways.

In her research, however, she has primarily been interested in the viewer's embodied and performative experience of both art and architecture in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Florence and in other parts of Northern Italy. Particularly the analysis of the political significance of embodiment in the viewers' perception of, and engagement with art has a central place in her investigations of these two periods. Another important publication in this field is *Fra Angelico's Public: Renaissance Art, Medici Patronage, and the Library of San Marco* (2012). In this book, she interprets Fra Angelico's frescoes at San Marco from the viewpoint of the Humanist community that once lived at the Observant Dominican Convent during the time of Cosimo de' Medici, between the 1430s and 1460s. She reveals the physical pathways—what she calls "a "humanist itinerary"—for the secular users of the library.

Somaesthetic Experience and the Viewer in Medicean Florence

Her latest book, *Somaesthetic Experience and the Viewer in Medicean Florence, Renaissance Art and Political Persuasion, 1459-1580.* (2020), provides not only a very nuanced interpretation of the theme indicated in the title, but also has a detailed account of the various philosophers' and Renaissance scholars' concepts of embodiment as a valuable source for shedding new light on the Florentine Renaissance. She shows how the body's epistemology and the embodied experience have gradually occupied an increasingly prominent place in Renaissance research.

In introducing her book, she starts by narrating two small, dynamic events that show the reader how art in the modern era has evoked a powerful experience in the viewer's mind and body.

She relates an incident that took place during a visit to the Uffizi Gallery in Florence with a group of her students. One of her students, who had been looking at Masolino's and Masaccio's expressive Altarpiece of Saint Anne, was so moved that she fainted.

She also quotes the renowned French novelist Stendhal's account of a very emotional encounter in Santa Croce in Florence with the powerful interpretation of Sibyl by Baldassare Franceschini, also known as Il Volterrano. Stendhal described this encounter as follows:

> *I had attained to that supreme degree of sensibility where the* divine intimations *of art merge with the impassioned sensuality of emotion.*[1]

These two sensory narratives serve as a stimulating prelude to the book itself and arouse the curiosity of readers.

1. Somaesthetics as a methodological practice in Renaissance art

She has organised her book in such a way that the overall theoretical considerations and the central aspects of her four interpretations of the embodied experience of Medicean artworks and the essay about live experience in the digital world are presented in the introductory chapter entitled *Activating Renaissance Viewer: Art and Somaesthetic Experience*. She rightly notes that "a comprehensive study of Renaissance somaesthetics is beyond the scope" of her book.[2] It would have been helpful to readers if her own aims, the theoretical discussions and the short useful presentation of the content of her book had been separated a bit more. They are presented as a result of the discussions of the art theoretical and art historical methods she uses and of the short presentation of the book's five rather original case studies. But this approach, in turn, provides readers with a nuanced insight into the origins and developments of the book's always precisely formulated theses.

The detailed presentation of her interpretation of somaesthetics both as a philosophical and art-historical methodological practice is placed first in this chapter. One of her central views is that during the Renaissance, which was surrounded by culturally-established boundaries, "viewers were encouraged to forge connections between their physical and affective states, when they experienced art". They were stimulated by both visual art and architecture on an almost daily basis. She thus focuses mainly on an in-depth analysis of "how viewers in Medicean Florence were self-consciously cultivated in somaesthetic experience." She alludes here to Richard Shusterman's somaesthetics, which is without a doubt one of her most important philosophical foundations (A.T., 22-23). This is particularly true of his concept of "the soma as a living, purposive, sentient, perceptive body" and of the embodied experience. She is also inspired by one of the basic concepts of his somaesthetics:

> *"Somaesthetics offers a way of integrating the discursive and nondiscursive, the reflective and the immediate, thought and feeling, in the quest of providing greater range, harmony, and clarity to the soma – the body-mind whose union is an ontological given but whose most satisfying units of performance are both a personal and cultural achievement."*[3]

1 M. De Stendhal, *Rome, Naples et Florence en 1817*, Paris: Deluna, 1817, 302.

2 *Allie Terry-Fritsch Somaesthetic Experience and Viewer in Medicean Florence* 2020, hereinafter abbreviated AT., 29

3 Se Richard Shusterman, Thinking through the Body. Essays in Somaesthetics,New York: Cambridge University Press: 2012, p. 141 and "Somaesthetics and the Revival of Aesthetics", Filozofski Vestnik , volume, letniks XXVIII number/Stevilka 2, 2007, p. 149.

And like Shusterman, she has a vital focus on lived experience and its influence on self-knowledge. She also interprets, in her own way, his perception of the aesthetic experience never being passive, which means that an artwork cannot be completed until the viewer has experienced and interpreted its particular qualities.[4] This is why it is important for her that there is always an intense interaction between the artwork and the viewer and the viewing experience.

This means that art as experience requires both the artist and the person experiencing the works to operate on an open platform with a high level of visibility. And her thinking through aesthetic experience "as an active and self-reflective practice (..) draws attention to the dynamic interplay between the self, sensory stimuli and societal conditions and aspirations" (A.T, 23). By providing these important insights into the embodied creative process, she has been able to reveal new aspects of Florentine Renaissance artworks and to focus on new values of aesthetic experience and interdisciplinary perspectives.

In constructing her somaesthetic methodological practice for Renaissance art history, she has also been inspired by the theory and practice of contemporary performance art. This especially true of the fruitful collaboration with contemporary performance artist and theorist Scott Magelssen. She learned a great deal about the production and use of space in the interpretation of visual art through a cross-listed Art History and Performance Studies seminar on visual culture and social justice at The Bowling Green State University in Ohio in Fall 2011. This knowledge and practice was deepened through the collaboration with the very experienced site-specific installation artist Leigh Ann. In collaboration with her, she has inspired a group of students to work with large-scale immersive installations with bodily and emotional engagements. In doing so, Allie Terry-Fritsch has gained first-hand knowledge of the process of performing in all its details. She also gained an insight into how performance artists often challenge the audience to think in new and unconventional ways and disrupt the conventions of traditional art in many surprising ways. This insight also resulted in her being able to uncover new aspects of the somaesthetic experience in the Florentine Renaissance. Or in her own words:

> *"her book draws on scholarship from the fields of ritual and performance studies to consider embodiment as both ´an act of doing' and a way of 'knowing'. She quotes J.L. Austins's famous dictum 'saying is doing'"*(AT., 25-26).

However, the somaesthetic experience of art during the Renaissance does not factor in worldviews of Shusterman or the performing artists.

The study of the relation of the body and mind has, however, always been—and continues to be—a prominent theme for generations of Renaissance scholars such as Michael Baxandal and Ernst Gombrich, among other outstanding researchers. These researchers do not always use the word "somaesthetic", but Terry-Fritsch chooses to apply it to their interpretations of the body-mind relation because these interpretations contain so many of the features characteristic of somaesthetics. This includes the concept of art that is rooted in various ways in an embodied and interdisciplinary experience and focuses on interactive dialogue with viewers and their surroundings.

The general aim of her book is to provide a critical analysis of a select group of works in Medicean Florence that were activated by the performative participation of the viewer. It is through a very precise analysis of the "environments in which somaesthetic experience occurred

4 Shusterman, Richard, "Intellectualism and the Field of Aesthetics. The Return of the Repressed?" *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 220, 2002, p. 331.

and reconstruction of embodied scenarios of viewer engagements took place herein", that the book is able to consider "art through embodiment and suggests an art-historical somaesthetic of style" (AT, 29).

In addition, the somaesthetic experience that she analyzes in her book is not spontaneous, but carefully developed by both the patron and the artist. She thus seeks to show how "certain Renaissance patrons tapped into the performative potential of art" and uses "the somaesthetic experience as a means of constructing Political Communities in Medicean Florence"(AT, 29). Therefore, the body-mind is not only reinserted into the historical process of viewing, but highlights at the same time the various persuasive strategies that Renaissance patrons used.

She has chosen to analyse four somaesthetic experiences of works of art in Renaissance Florence. They are "arranged chronologically to provide a broad view of patronage tactics in Medicean Florence between the mid-fifteenth century and the end of the sixteenth century" (AT, 40).

And precisely this focus on the somaesthetic experience of Renaissance viewers and the consistency in Medici patronage means that she has been given the opportunity to present new interpretations of several of the famous Renaissance projects in or in the proximity of Florence.

2. Somaesthetic experience in the *Chapel of the Magi*

Her first new interpretation of the somaesthetic experience in Medicean Florence emerges clearly in her analysis of *The Chapel of the Magi*. This chapel was created by Michelozzo inside the Palazzo Medici and decorated lavishly by Benozzo Gozzoli and Fra Filippo Lippi in the 1450s. Although the amount of detail in her new interpretation of the *Chapel of the Magi* is overwhelming, she has nevertheless managed to recreate the historical context it was once a part of, but which has so far been rather overlooked. She reveals the often surprising connection between the decorations of the floor, the ceiling and the walls and Cosimo de' Medici's political appropriation of the cult of the Magi in Florence together with his highlighting of the ideals of the city and the supreme place and authority of his own family. She has revealed previously rather hidden relationships between patronage and style in all the decorations in the chapel. This includes her nuanced analysis of the eastern wall of Benozzo Gozzoli's painted cycle of the sumptuous *Procession of the Magi*. It visualises the processional drama, staged in Florence on the 6th of January to honor the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles as represented by the Magi, also called the three holy kings, the wise men (Matthew 2:1–12) or the Florentine Epiphany celebrations.

In this part of the cycle, the mighty Cosimo de´ Medici (1389-1464) appears as the pious and righteous ruler, riding in the foreground of the picture on a brown mule (Figure 1). It is obvious that "the brilliance of the shimmering surfaces of the breastplate and bridle signals" him as the most important of the citizens behind the Magi. He is the key to the decorative and dynastic program and is surrounded by his family, government officials and holy men. They are dressed in costumes of costly material and the inclusion of gold draws the eye of the beholder to the important part of the narrative. It is not only the Medici's wealth and power on display here, but also their dedication to the ideals of the city-state, religious piety, their pride over their victory, over tyranny and their resultant freedom. It is another example of the way the somaesthetic experience of the visitor functions as a strategy for political persuasion. The three Holy Kings, also called the Magi, wear glittering costumes and precious crowns on their heads. They ride majestically on the right side in the foreground of the picture.

Figure 1 *Benozzo Gozzoli.* View of the eastern wall of the painted cycle of the Procession of the Magi. *1459. Mixed media. Chapel of the Magi, Palazzo Medici Riccardi, Florence.*

The unity of the artistic decoration in the chapel has emerged first and foremost because it was designed in every detail with the somaesthetic experience of visitors in mind (AT, 57-58). The visitors, who came mostly from the upper classes, are key players in the sensory and embodied experience of the artistic interpretation of the Magi procession and the other elements of the decoration of the chapel. The sumptuous floor tiles function as standing markers for the visitors and guide their movements through the chapel's space. They are encouraged to walk the same path as the Medici. Allie Terry-Fritsch's unveiling of the coordination of the serpentine composition of the wall paintings with the movement of the viewers, which actually inspired them to follow the very powerful procession in fictional reality, is an original observation. This observation stands in contrast to many interpretations of the "Renaissance spectator, who is given spectral dominance over a spatial continuum from a fixed position"(AT, 94).

Through the Epiphany rituals represented on the walls – for example in the *Procession of the Magi* – the visitors get both an intense religious experience and a sensuous understanding of the Medici family and its power and authority, but also of its ethical and social values. The Medici colours of red, white and green supplemented by layers of gold create an intense impression of vibrant life, which also appeals strongly to the visitor's mind and body and strengthens their perception of the ideals of Florentine civic humanism. This secular point of view is the very well-documented and largely original main theme in Allie Terry-Fritsch's interpretation of the decorations in the chapel.

Her analyses of the religious aspect of the somaesthetic experience is especially linked to her description of the rituals first and foremost in the procession of the Magi in the piazza of San Marco with about seven hundred participants and which appears as a kinetic drama. But the actual content of the contemporary understanding of Christianity is only included in short form. Marsilio Ficino and his attempts to connect Neoplatonic and Augustinian theology could possibly be part of the Medicean concept of Christianity. Cosimo de' Medici supported Marsilio Ficino's tolerant, and humanized Christianity. "Plato was introduced as a gateway to St. Paul."[5] And many Renaissance artists, including Titian, were influenced by Ficino's theology, particularly his concept of the relation between celestial and terrestrial love.[6] Titian visualises the "Neoplatonic belief that love, a principle of cosmic 'mixture', acts as an intermediary between heaven and earth."[7]

The unity in not only the *Procession of the Magi*, but in all the other decorations on the walls and on the floor in the chapel has emerged first and foremost because it was designed in every detail with the somaesthetic experience of visitors in mind. Allie Terry-Fritsch's nuanced descriptions of how visitors' bodies and minds are activated by the decorations in the chapel are inspired not only by her studies in the various theoretical and case studies in somaesthetics experience in art, but also by her engagement in contemporary installation art.

Donatello's bronze sculpture entitled *Judith* (1457-1464), was centrally located in the garden of the Medici palace on Via Larga (fig. 2) during their period of government. Allie Terry-Fritsch's somaesthetic interpretation of Judith is more tightly structured and has therefore a clearer profile than her analysis of *The Procession of the Magi*. The statue was raised on a column, which had two inscriptions. Historians have traditionally interpreted the statue of *Judith* as a symbol of Cosimo de' Medici and his son Piero's efforts to highlight their political identity in the 1450s and 1460s. Judith proudly swinging the lethal sword over Holofernes's head to deal the final blow, has consequently been understood as "the embodiment of mal Medici political power" (AT, 117). Such an interpretation may be correct, but the sculpture contains several layers of meaning. Allie Terry-Fritsch uncovers one of these and she manages to find a new analysis of both the statue of Judith and its many visual connections with the surroundings – both in the present and in the future. She takes her starting point in the interpretation of the Jewish heroine suggested by Lucrezia Tornabuoni de' Medici. She was the mother of Lorenzo de´ Medici and was both a poet and a prominent intellectual and administrator, who her son described as being "an instrument that took great many hardships away from me" (AT, 119). Several scholars have – albeit briefly -– pointed out that there is a connection between Donatello's statue of Judith and Lucrezia's description of the Jewish heroine in *The Story of Judith, Hebrew Widow*, written in the 1470s. However, through a closer analysis of Lucrezia's sacred narrative of Judith, Allie Terry-Fritsch succeeds in presenting a new interpretation of Donatello's sculptural interpretation of Judith. She perceives it as "an embodiment of female Medici political power and a tool for the construction of political communications through somaesthetic cultivation" (AT, 120). Lucrezia's description of Judith has a performative and visual character and appeals directly to the senses and the romantic imagination of readers or listeners. It was probably read aloud

5 Fenlon, Dermot, *Heresy and Obedience in Tridentine Italy: Cardinal Pole and the Counter Reformation, Cambridge University Press* 1972, p. 2. On Ficino's theology generally see: Marsilio Ficino: *His Theology, His Philosophy, His Legacy,* ed. M. J.B. Allen and V. R. Rees, Leiden - Boston - Cologne 2002

6 Gabrio Pieranti, *Il neoplatonismo nell'arte rinascimentale*, in «*Arte e artisti*», vol. 2, cap. 3, Istituto Italiano Edizioni Atlas, 2011, pp. 2-11.

7 Panofsky, Erwin, *Studies in Iconology. Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (1939) Torchbook edition, 1962, pp. 151-152) and Else Marie Bukdahl, "Art and Religious Belief: 25 Lessons for Contemporary Theory from Renaissance and Baroque Painting, *The Journal of Somaesthetics* ,Volume 3, Numbers 1 and 2 (2017), p. 36-39.

in the garden of the Palazzo Medici where it activated the audience and revealed new aspects of Donatello's statue, which could be seen from several angles and therefore revealed different sides of the new interpretation.

Figure 2 *Donatello.* Judith and Holofernes. *1464. Bronze. Located between mid 1460 and 1495 in the garden of Palazzo Medici, today in the Sala dei Gigli, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence.*

By placing Donatello's statue of *Judith* in the Garden of the Medici, which symbolised their power and influence, and by incorporating Lucretia's narrative of her courageous action for her country, Judith becomes an "agent of civic authority" and an embodiment of justice and liberty in Medicean Florence. In the interplay between Lucretia's verbal and Donatello's sculptural interpretation, the active engagement of the audience was stimulated and they were able to see a connection between past and present. Judith's struggle for the liberation of Israel also became a

symbol of the Medici's efforts to maintain power in Florence and to ensure peace and justice. But it is now a woman who is exalted as a symbol of these ideals. Through Lucretia's performative text, Donatello's *Judith* is enlivened as a heroine who possesses nothing less than what Lucrezia calls "a manly heart", but who at the same time uses her feminine strengths, particularly her beauty, in her fight for justice, which "inspires a form of collective witnessing that would reinforce communal values"(AT, 149). She is therefore an early and courageous example of the "crossing of normative gender boundaries" (AT, 141). This correct view deserves a more detailed analysis.

3. Somaesthetics and Holy Land Devotion at San Vivaldo

Somaesthetic experience as a strategy for political persuasion has played a central role in the interpretations of *The Chapel of the Magi* and of *Judith* by Donatello. But in the analyses of the somaesthetic experience of the New Jerusalem of San Vivaldo, the religious aspect is highlighted and the understanding of performative Renaissance culture is therefore expanded. Throughout the fifteenth century the concept of the "New Jerusalem" focused on the celebration of the three Magi, the three Holy Kings. And there was also a close spiritual and political relation between the Holy Land and the Medici family. A "New Jerusalem" was, however, not constructed by the Medici family.

In 1494 the Medici were deprived of power and Girolamo Savonarola became the new ruler. He made Florence "the literal site of the New Jerusalem" and relegated the Pope and Rome to the background. The pope was angered and in 1498 Savonarola was convicted as a heretic and burned at the stake. In the years that followed, Florence gradually lost its influence. It was only when the Medici again regained power that its influence was restored. However, the dream of founding a "New Jerusalem" was already in progress in 1499. Franciscan friars led by Fra Cherubino da Firenze began building a pilgrimage site of a "New Jerusalem" in the dense forest of Camporena, located about 30 miles southwest of Florence at this time.

Allie Terry-Fritsch has succeeded in creating a finely structured analysis of this monumental project. In particular, she has managed to portray in a nuanced and original way the pilgrims' diverse and often very strong somaesthetic experiences during the encounter with the Holy Sites and works of art that the "New Jerusalem" comprised.

The Franciscan founders of the "New Jerusalem of San Vivaldo" had both visited and carefully studied the topography of the holy sites of the real Jerusalem. During these studies, they experienced both bodily exertion and mental strain, which have always been highlighted as important components of a pilgrim's participatory devotional practices. But the Franciscans recreated the holy sites in ancient Jerusalem in an improved version, characterized by local stylistic features and materials. These interactive and contemplative spaces, which contained lifesize wooden or terracotta sculptures of biblical figures, were incorporated into the local romantic Tuscan landscape.

In four of the chapels located on Mount Calvary, the local Renaissance features emerge clearly. These are the frontispiece in the Chapel of Pie Donne, the framed portici in the Oratorio of the Madonna dello Spasimo (the fainting Madonna) and the semicircles over the doors in the Chapel of Andante al Calvario (Figure 3).The "New Jerusalem" was therefore also imbued with a local character and was completed in 1516. Only seventeen of the original thirty-four holy sites still exist, but archeological excavations have made it possible to get an impression of the remaining sites.

Figure 3 *To the left the* Chapel of Pie Donne*, in the middle* Oratory of the Madonna dello Spasimo *(Fainting Madonna). Far right* Capella dell'andante al Calvario *(For the pedestrian to Mount Calvary). San Vivaldo.*

The Franciscans had the task of guiding the pilgrims through the sacred sites in the "New Jerusalem" in the same order as their counterparts in the ancient Jerusalem. In her meticulous descriptions of the pilgrims' encounter with the architecture and the works of art in the individual holy sites, Allie Terry-Fritsch succeeds in portraying their vivid, sensual and very intense experiences in such a committed and visual way that the reader becomes almost as moved as the pilgrims and feels as if they are almost physically present in the artwork. This is due to the fact that artworks such as the sculpture group, *Thomas and the Disciples* (Doubting Thomas) were designed precisely "to foster somaesthetic experiences that heightened awareness of the pilgrims as a participant of the event" (Figure 4) (AT, 178). However, a more nuanced explanation is missing regarding the aspects of Christianity that not only this sculpture but also the other works of art in the "New Jerusalem" visualised. This is the aspect of the theology of the Franciscan friars, who at that time, despite discussions about the correct Christian goals, focused on poverty, humility, charity, prayer, simple living and following in the footsteps of Christ. It was precisely through the intense experiences of these pilgrims in their encounters with the many holy places and the works of art that were placed there, that these ideals and requirements became a living and demanding reality.

Figure 4 *Agnolo di Polo. attr. ad.* Thomas and the disciples *(Doubting Thomas). Groupe with lifesized terracotta sculptures. Mount Zion. San Vivaldo.*

To provide the reader with a contemporary impression of the very complex forms of active experiences that the pilgrim was afforded during meditations on the works of art in the ”new Jerusalem”, Allie Terry-Fritsch creates parallels with the sensory immediacy and physical participation inherent in contemporary installation art. She quotes Claire Bishop's description of the key aspects of the somaesthetic experience that installation art can create:

> *installation art creates a situation into which the viewer physically enters, and (..) addresses the viewer directly as a literal presence in the space (..) installation art presupposes an embodied viewer whose senses of touch, smell, and sound are as heightened as their sense of vision* (AT, 189).

Allie Terry-Fritsch also reveals very compellingly how the mental and physical meditation in the holy sites of the “New Jerusalem" provided pilgrims with a somaesthetic experience that was even more powerful than the one they had the opportunity to encounter in the actual holy land.

4. The game *calcio* as a cultural artefact of somaesthetic experience

She chooses to conclude her thorough analysis of the somaesthetic experience and the viewer in Medicean Florence with a description of *calcio*, which functioned as a performative game in the social world of the Medici and in society as a whole. It was a ball game, which was an early version of football. It started in the *Piazza Croce* in Florence, which has always been its most famous playground, but it was also played in *Piazza Santa Maria Novella* (Figure 5). The basic objective of the game was to find a way to score a caccia, which was achieved by kicking the ball across the goal line of the opposing team (AT, 218).

Figure 5 *Giovanni Stradano.* View of a Calcio Match in Piazza Santa Maria Novella. *1561-1562. Fresco. Sala del Gualdrada, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence. I*

Her interpretation of this game is mainly based on the description that Giovanni de Bardi has presented in the *Discorso sopra il giuoco del calcio fiorentino* (Discourse on the game of Florentine *calcio*) (1589).

She is the first to present an in-depth analysis of Bardi's treatise and the imagery associated with it. Through this interpretation, readers are provided with not only a very nuanced depiction of the ball game, but also an accurate description of how it was used to highlight the ducal authority and ideals and the influence of the nobility in the sixteenth century in northern Italy. The book thus functions as a sort of performative space for the reader and an interactive tool.

A central premise of AliceTerry-Fritsch's analysis of the ball game *calcio* is her emphasis on Bardi's highlighting of its close connection with the archetypes of the ancient games in Athens and Rome, where precisely the bodily and mental dimensions of human beings were inseparable and where the goal was to improve the quality of our lives. According to Bardi, the game of *calcio* is based on the same body-mind relation and the same goals. It stimulated full-bodied, mindful viewer engagement that conveyed "an image and function of the well-ordered state", embodied the Grand Duke's noble authority and "inspires a love of *patria*" (AT, 235, 261).

Through the detailed analyses of Bardi's descriptions of the game of *calcio*, Allie Terry-Fritsch uncovers another aspect of the relationship between the viewers' somaesthetic experience and the political persuasion in Medicean Florence.

5. Renaissance Somaesthetics in a Digital world

In the epilogue to this book, Allie Terry-Fritsch changes track. She leaves the vivid historical space and enters the digital world, where she finds "a somaesthetic turn in contemporary, pedagogical tools", which can be used to interpret the Renaissance and engage virtual viewers (AT, 273). She is convinced that digital media have the remarkable capacity to represent – and render present – the parts of the art world that are not immediately accessible to the human eye. The digital media produce images in the context of more or less shared visual regimes that direct the gaze of the beholder, shape sensation, and create presence. She discovered the special capacity of digital media during the study of the often extremely poor conditions of viewing original artworks - for example Mona Lisa - in the Louvre, where masses of individuals are gathered waiting to get some glimpses of the original painting. First-hand somaesthetic experience of art is, of course, always preferable, but when the chances of realising these are so low, highly developed virtual technologies can create high-quality digital versions that can animate both works of art, the environment in which they are situated, as well as the people who go there, in many surprising ways. Such digital recreations of the original works can "offer viewers a time-based, sensuous understanding of the work of art that is streamlined and personalized" (AT, 283). Allie Terry-Fritsch adds:

> "*ironically, twenty-first century digital applications have the capacity to enable viewers to access a sensory driven understanding of these works that more closely resembles Renaissance experience than a visit to the real thing*" (AT, 287).

This is due to the ability of digital projects to transport the viewer to surprising and alternative positions within the space both in the artwork and its surroundings. She opens up a fruitful new discussion about the original works and the digital recreations.

Conclusion

It is impossible to do justice, in the limited space of a review essay, to the richness and depth of the ideas in this book. But I have tried to highlight and interpret some of the main themes and make some critical and also more in-depth observations. But the majority of Allie Terry-Fritsch's methodological considerations and her interpretations of the complex interplay in Medicean Florence between the artworks, the viewer and the surroundings, emerges very powerfully and convincingly. This also applies to her analyses of the renaissance somaesthetic in the digital world.

I thank *Wikipedia.org* for the publishing rights to Figures 1-5.