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A room of the mind: from the *studiolo* to the metaphysical room

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The aim of this article is to propose an approach to the “space of the mind” through the analysis of successive spaces built with scenographical techniques that can be found in some domestic rooms. Two rooms, conceived and built in Italy, separated from each other by half a millennium, were taken as a case study. These are the *studiolo* of Federico da Montefeltro and the *Stanza Metafisica* of Piero Fornasetti. The starting point is the *studiolo*, a type of private room that has its origins in the Renaissance, and while it has been blurred since then, its specific qualities has been applied to other spaces throughout history. The *studiolo* was the most intimate room in the house, dedicated to intellectual activity, and it was a representation of the individual. It was a space with the ability to translate the owner into another world—its authentic inner world—through the decoration and objects it contained. Usually, the *studioli* are lined with wood because of their ability to achieve a sheltered interior. At the beginning of the 15th century, carpenters and

artisans developed a way of working this paneling that clad rooms using the *intarsia* technique. This novel technique, together with the rise and development of the laws of perspective, conquered wooden flat surfaces by turning them into windows to other imaginary worlds that looked out onto the universe of the mind, allowing the penetration of a new fictitious space. One of the most paradigmatic cases of the time, which combines all these qualities, is the pair of *studioli* commissioned by Federico da Montefeltro in the ducal palaces in Urbino (1473–1476) and Gubbio (1479–1482), made up of embedded wood panels that display an extraordinary collection of objects, and interior and exterior visions that completely transform the original space. Almost five hundred years after the completion of Gubbio's *studio*, between 1955 and 1958, Piero Fornasetti created the *Stanza Metafisica*. This is a room capable of adapting to any space, able to grow and shrink, a scenography dedicated to meditation. The 32 wooden panels that form it, treated using a contemporary technique, take us to the same place of the mind, which is completely different from the Gubbio one. Full cabinets are now simply architecture without function, devoid of objects and references: black lines and pure geometry on a white background. The Fornasetti *stanza* gathers many of the qualities of the Renaissance *studio* and appropriates them, adapting it to the new techniques and conception of space. In conclusion, both examples reveal the existence of both a physical room and another metaphysical room—i.e., a fictitious space contained within a real space, built through technique and perspective. These are scenographies capable of being moved and adapted to disguise any room, transforming it into a space that is inhabited by the mind for an intimate, individual intellectual activity.

KEYWORDS: Studiolo; stanza metafisica; furniture; Piero Fornasetti; Federico da Montefeltro

Two Italian rooms in New York

In December 1983, Christie's New York auctioned the *Stanza Metafisica* ("Metaphysical Chamber") by Italian designer Piero Fornasetti¹ for \$68,500. This work, created in Milan between 1955 and 1958, is a screen decorated with imaginary scenography, painted on mobile wooden panels that form a room for solitary meditation.

A short distance from it, in room 501 of the Metropolitan Museum of New York (the MET), one could visit the permanent exhibition of the *studiolo* of Federico da Montefeltro, originally built in the ducal palace in Gubbio (Umbria, Italy), which was designed between 1479

and 1482 by Francesco di Giorgio Martini and acquired by the MET in 1939. The *studiolo*, a room dedicated to the private retreat and intellectual activity of the Renaissance prince, is lined with wooden panels that create a false perspective.

Thus, two built “rooms” come together in New York, with apparently no connection, both originally from Italy but designed 500 years apart. They are two decorations on wooden panels that create a room within another room; that is, they form an architecture that works as a wrapper tailored to the activity that takes place inside. They are both “mental spaces” conceived to transport the owner, in his privacy, to another particular world, his authentic inner world.

From a piece of furniture to a room

The idea of “room” as we conceive of it now—an independent space inside the house destined for a particular activity, does not appear until just before the Renaissance. Previously, domestic life was organized around a large family room, a single space where multiple activities took place, which contained the “hearth or stove, along with kitchen utensils, a table, stands, benches, empty barrels and bags of supplies, plus bedding, that is, some material to lie on but without a wooden bedstead or curtains” (Ariès and Duby 1987, 217). Occasionally, the family had a different additional space, the *camera* or *chamber*, a room connected to the hall but closed with a door, where a large canopy bed with curtains was placed.

The functioning of the house reflected the social characteristics of the time, since personal privacy, as it is understood today, did not exist. Nevertheless, with the different political and cultural currents that accompanied the Renaissance, a new concept of the self was born. Humanism awakens the conscience of the dignity of the human being and his conception as a distinct, free, and responsible individual. People are now aware of themselves as individuals, and therefore, the desire to cultivate their inner life and their own thinking, to be alone in retreat, comes into being.

This vital need is transformed into an architectural need. In the house, private spaces start to appear, new independent rooms in which to carry out specific activities. In fact, houses “increase space by transforming into a room that until then were furniture items” (Ariès and Duby 1987, 211), since a large part of the domestic functions were associated with a piece of furniture located in the family room. Thus, the “study, cabinet, *bibliothèque* (shelf or library), and *écritoire* (writing desk or writing room) may still refer to items of furniture but they also designate rooms serving a particular, often private, function” (211). That is, a piece of furniture for a specific activity becomes a private room in the house.

In this context, the desire to have a private place of solitude for the individual emerges, a “room of one’s own.” However, it is not by chance that the modern sense of the individual and the appearance of a room to retreat into occur at the same time. As Michael Pollan

(2008) explains, “The new space and the new self actually helped give shape to one another. It appears there is a kind of reciprocity between interiors and interiority” (23). It is interesting to note that from the moment the house is divided into rooms, a room for individual retreat appears. That is, it is not a secondary function that the house welcomed over time; the need for a room of one’s own to retreat into for absolute privacy was fundamental. Of course, it was also a luxury that only wealthy families could afford. For this reason, they appear mainly in palaces and houses of the nobility, and usually, in the form of a small private study for householder, usually adjoining the bedroom. Privacy is associated with the realm of thought and secrecy, which is why these studios were secluded spaces, in which the owner took refuge in privacy, dedicated to intellectual pleasures, to the cultivation of thought, to contemplation, or for reading. It could be said that they were “chambers of thought,” rooms for the mind.

Making a room of the mind

This idea of the room is illustrated in the well-known drawing by architect Louis I. Kahn entitled “The Room” (Kahn 1971). On the drawing—as a title, or the writing above a vault—is written: “Architecture comes from The Making of a Room.” Later, Kahn defines the elements that make up the room; the lines of an architectural structure with arches that surround two people talking next to a window are intuited. The conversation between these two people is the center of the scene, and the action that gives content to the room defines its use and even its spatial form, since the ceiling arches seem to be derived from the reverberation and the position of the speakers. It is the human presence and activity that takes place that turns the space into a room. Kahn’s drawing shows that the room is defined by the function it hosts (Monteys 2014, 68–71). However, he goes further adding: “The Room is the place of the mind. In a small room, one does not say what one would in a large room.” The association of the room with the space of the mind is not new. There are many references in which space and mind always go together, as well as numerous metaphors that relate them. Especially in the mnemotechnic tradition, use was made of the so-called memory *loci*, places in which to situate objects and symbols associated with ideas and memories, so that when walking through these spaces, one could remember anything. These were spaces of the mind that, although not physically existing, had architectural qualities.

In his treatise on memory, Johannes Romberch defines the measurement that a memory locus should have, establishing that a person standing in the middle of the room should be able to reach all corners of the room (Yates 2005). This again refers to Kahn’s text in *The Room* concerning room size in relation to its activity. An intimate activity requires intimate dimensions, and there is nothing more intimate than the space for solitude and intellectual retreat, the space of the mind. In other words, the size of one’s room—the room of the



Figure 1

Saint Jerome in His Study. Antonello da Messina. Circa 1475. The National Gallery. Public Domain.

mind—should be according to the individual self. Therefore, going back to the appearance of different rooms in the house: when a piece of furniture designed for an intimate and nearly secret domestic function—like the locked desk where personal documents were kept—becomes a room, what shape and what characteristics does it acquire? The piece of furniture expands; turning into a living space, it acquires the necessary size for its user and becomes a “room.” This would seem to be a direct description of Antonello da Messina’s painting “Saint Jerome in His Study” from 1475 (Figure 1). The painting shows the saint at a kind of raised desk surrounded by bookshelves, a wooden habitable space located in the middle of a large empty Gothic nave. The scene in the painting illustrates this changing process, where a piece of furniture becomes a room, and the necessary change of scale to host an activity. Somehow, the scene can be

imagined in three steps, shifting from a specific activity in the middle of a large room, to an activity carried out in what might be called “habitable furniture” located in the middle of a large room, to an activity in a closed room. This new room, derived from a piece of furniture, in many cases, maintains the qualities and characteristics of furniture: it is made of wood; is highly decorated; contains drawers, doors, and mechanisms that allow its mobility, etc. Such a room becomes “something like furniture in which one lives” (Ariès and Duby 1987, 229).

Federico da montefeltro’s *studiolo*

The *studiolo* type, a small studio typical of Italian Renaissance palaces (Liebenwein 2005), is the direct result of a desk expanding until it transforms into a room. In the Florence region, this studio/room is actually defined as a *scrittoi* (writing desk), while the word *studiolo* is used to describe the piece of furniture that is a *cabinet* (Thornton 1997, 74). The *studiolo* was one of the most intimate rooms in the house and was dedicated to intellectual activity, but also had the important function of representing the individual who owned it. For this reason, it was decorated with a meticulously studied iconography that sought to embody its owner’s personality and aspirations. The space was able to transport anyone to the dweller’s innermost world through the ornaments and objects that it contained. The *studioli* were most commonly clad in wood, which would allow for the integration of different types of furniture, as well as imparting a cozy and sheltered interior owing to its thermal properties. In other words, the use of wood was not only a solution for insulation, but also made it possible to integrate furniture, benches, shelves, tables, seats, and cupboards, thereby forming a seamless entity.

Beyond material and functional properties, situating someone in a studio also meant enveloping them in an aura of invisible attributes. It was a way to represent non-physical traits—intellectual or literary genius as a moral virtue, both spiritual and intellectual in nature. This is reflected in numerous images and small illustrations in Renaissance iconography, in which certain characters were drawn onto desks and rooms with the intention of elevating them to the same level as classic authors and saints. It was intended to surround the person in a physical sense, in a material and sensorial way, but also in a psychological sense, with an aura of invisible attributes.

Of all the *studioli*, the two commissioned by Federico da Montefeltro are certainly the best preserved, and those that most accurately represent the characteristics and spatial aspirations of this type. The first was built in 1476 in Urbino, for the ducal palace. Started in 1468 by architect Luciano Laurana, construction on the palace was temporarily halted by the sudden death of Federico’s wife, Battista Sforza (Raggio 1996). However, after his political rise and appointment as Duke of Urbino, work was resumed under the supervision of Francesco di Giorgio. This is when construction of the



Figure 2

Studiolo from the ducal palace in Gubbio. Metropolitan Museum of Art. Public Domain.

studiolo was undertaken, and the project was completed in 1476. That same year, the same architect was restoring the ducal palace of Gubbio, an old 14th century fortress. After the first *studiolo*'s success and positive results, the duke decided to build another one in Gubbio (Figure 2), highlighting the importance of this space for him.

The rooms are nearly identical; they are very similar in size and composition, and the norm at the time for this type of space. On the upper part, under a coffered ceiling made of polychromatic wood, was a collection of paintings that represented an iconographic display of divine and human knowledge. The lower part was clad in wood paneling made using *intarsia*, an innovative technique with wood inlays developed in the early 15th century by carpenters and craftsmen, specifically to decorate this type of space. Using the *trompe-l'oeil* technique, they depicted images of cupboards, furniture, books, and objects, thus building a scenography—a fictitious set, reproducing the contents of a real studio.

The “metaphysical chamber”

Piero Fornasetti's *Stanza Metafisica* (Figure 3) is a screen composed of 32 mobile wooden panels decorated with a surrealist architectural design of volumes, corridors, and stairs. Panels are hinged together, allowing them to be positioned in different ways according to the user's needs. It “was conceived... as a place dedicated to meditation, where one or more people may stay and gather their thoughts, whether creative or religious or of some other kind.



Figure 3

Piero Fornasetti seating inside the Stanza Metafisica. Courtesy Archivio Fornasetti via Wikimedia Commons.

Modern man is losing this important habit” (Casadio and Fornasetti 2009, 448).

This room also originates from a piece of furniture—in this case, a screen. Fornasetti was interested in ways of organizing interior space using screens or partitions, so he researched their origins, techniques, and styles. During the early Middle Ages in Europe, screens of all kinds of materials began to appear, to separate beds for the nobility who slept in the same room, thus establishing a degree of privacy. In Italy, they were called *para vento* because of their use to prevent drafts in churches. Meanwhile, Fornasetti was passionate about Japanese culture and was fascinated by its screens, which he called his “favorite children” (Casadio and Fornasetti 2009, 431). In fact, part of *Stanza*’s scenography was previously used in a four-part screen entitled *La scaletta*.

Fornasetti considered these screens as modular and interchangeable pieces of furniture, blank canvases, and theatrical curtains all at the same time. They were light, mobile elements, referred to in textile terms, which could travel with the owner and create different environments. In a series of photographs published in 1949 in the magazine *Domus* (“Paraventi Di Fornasetti” 1949), Fornasetti introduces



Figure 4

Extended elevation of the Stanza Metafisica. Photograph credits: Phillips.



Figure 5

Extended elevation of the studiolo. Authors work. Image based on public domain photographs by the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

screens with plant motifs as small gardens inside a room while arranging those representing decorations and architectural motifs in the garden. In a way, this was a project about an interior within an exterior, and vice versa, and it highlights the screen's capacity to transport and transform an environment, but also its ability to create a new one and become a room in itself. "The screen of thirty-two panels that constitutes the room could assume larger or smaller dimensions by adding or removing panels, and could be adapted to the walls of a given room ... It can cover the walls entirely ... it can be used in the dining room rather than in the bedroom. On a given day, it would be used to create a setting within a setting; for example, in a large living room, it could be used to close off the space for conversation near the fireplace ... or for a dinner or a party" (Casadio and Fornasetti 2009, 448).

A wooden decoration: physical

One of the first things we discover when we compare the two works is that both spaces have similar dimensions. If we spread out the 32 articulated panels that make up Piero Fornasetti's *Stanza Metafisica*, the total dimensions would be 16 m long and 2.49 m high (Figure 4). Federico da Montefeltro's *studiolo*'s extended paneling is about 20.4 m long and up to 2.68 m high (Figure 5). The height/width ratio for the *Stanza* and *studiolo* was almost the same for both rooms: 0.15 for the *Stanza* and 0.13 for the *studiolo*. They practically have identical proportions, considering that they were designed over five hundred years apart (Figures 6 and 7). In fact, if we eliminate the threshold and sill widths of the *studiolo*'s door and window in Gubbio, the floor surface for both rooms is almost the same.

Once again, this coincidence reveals how the size of one's room is made according to the individual, as previously discussed. Consequently, it could be said that both the *Stanza Metafisica* and the *studiolo* form a scenography capable of enveloping the occupant

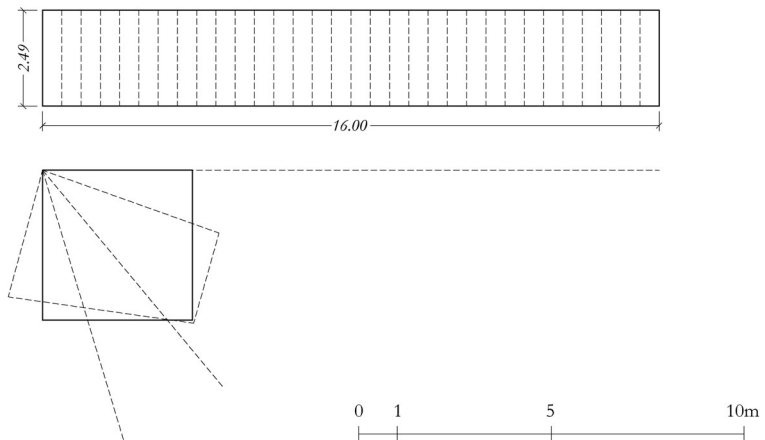


Figure 6
Elevation showing the panels of the Stanza Metafisica. Plan showing possible configurations of the screen. Drawing from the authors.

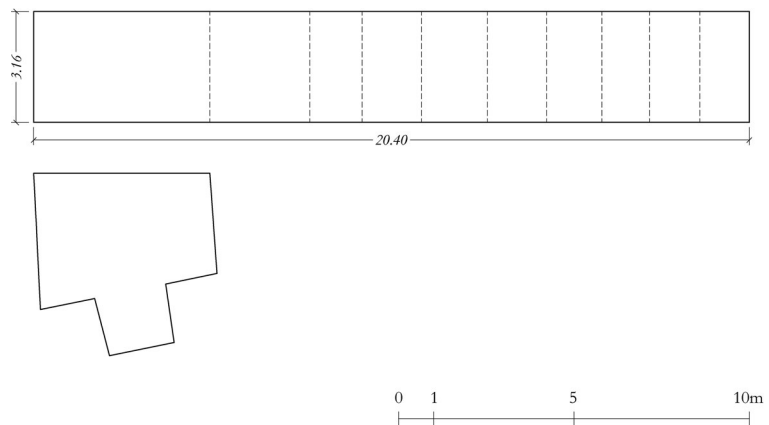


Figure 7
Elevation and plan of the studiolo in Gubbio. Drawing from the authors.

in a tailor-made space. However, despite having almost identical dimensions, both the material and physical presence are very different in the two rooms.

In Piero Fornasetti's work, the material presence is almost non-existent: it is a lithograph on transfer paper applied to wood and then varnished. Fornasetti used this printing technique in many elements he designed, such as screens, tables, chairs, desks, and cupboards. What is important in this process is transferring a drawing onto a surface and obtaining a result that is resistant to wear-and-tear, as well as a clean and washable finish. Fornasetti collaborated with architect Gio Ponti on many projects, including the so-called *Casa di Fantasia* (Ponti 1952), or Lucan apartment, without a doubt his most radical project. Here, practically all furniture and surfaces are covered by Fornasetti's imagery. He needs to give purpose to his creations, and

deliberately refuses all material properties that may cause deterioration with use. This printing technique allows him to put all the emphasis on drawing, which enables him to display his entire world. It reduces all variables and imposes restrictions, leading to total freedom. His creations multiply, and his drawings expand even more thanks to the mechanization of drawing through lithography and engraving techniques. As Gio Ponti once said, “What does Fornasetti give me? With a process of speed and prodigious resources, he creates the possibility of having ‘unique’ things—printing fabrics, chair by chair, panel by panel” (28). In a way, his drawings colonized the space.

For this reason, we can say that in the *Stanza Metafisica*, wood paneling is only a foundation. It provides a rigid surface and a way to physically connect the pieces, but it is insignificant beyond that because it is hidden. In other words, it is devoid of matter. Everything is built using grouped lines that define planes—which, in turn, create volumes. As we get closer, it becomes harder to grasp the drawing’s spatial conception; instead, lines become the defining element in this space: a mathematical and impersonal drawing that only reveals the artist’s hand in the lines and their small imperfections and tremors (Figure 8).

On the other hand, in Federico da Montefeltro *studiolo*, the material used is not merely a surface. Here, wood has many more inherent qualities: warmth, sound, smell, temperature, and texture. The drawing is actually determined by its material, since the wood’s intrinsic properties enable the use of the *intarsia* technique to achieve three-dimensional images on a surface. This inlaying technique, together with the development of the laws of perspective as well as the artistic use of the optical illusion *trompe-l’oeil*, converts wooden panels into windows to imaginary worlds: half-open rooms and cupboards that look out onto the universe of the mind.

In this case, the craftsman’s drawing technique and precision define abstraction. To understand the *studiolo*’s assembly and process, looking closely at the surface will not suffice: you must penetrate it. For this reason, it is particularly interesting to see X-rays of the panels showing the back parts, how they were assembled, and the nails connecting the parts (Kemp, Raggio, and Wilmering 2000) (Figure 9). This is crucial for understanding the space, because without this material, the room would have been completely different. Here, everything is made of the same substance, which is defined by its own laws and techniques. As a result, a continuous and necessary whole is built. In this room, everything has the same importance. The *studiolo*’s inlaid wood paneling thus forms an authentic scenography that makes sense from a specific point in the room thanks to the laws of perspective, dissolving the limits of the room and making it possible to enter a new, fictitious space.

The symbolic space: metaphysical

Once inside these rooms, decorations represent other spaces. This is possible because of the perspectives and qualities of these scenes. In the *studiolo* of Federico da Montefeltro, the perspective is



Figure 8
Detail. Stanza Metafisica by Piero Fornasetti. Photograph credits: Phillips.

perfect, designed for viewing from a single precise vantage point—probably emphasized by the vision of Federico himself, who was blind in one eye. All the advances in perspective and the *intarsia* technique come together here, in addition to the room being built at a key moment, influenced by two of the most important figures in the development of perspective of that period: Leon Battista Alberti and Piero della Francesca. Alberti, who had theorized about perspective in his treatise *De pictura*, in 1436, was a close friend of the duke and spent periods of time in his Urbino palace (Raggio 1996, 8). Meanwhile, Piero della Francesca dedicated his treatise *De prospectiva pingendi* to Federico da Montefeltro—a treatise devoted exclusively to perspective, compiling Alberti’s ideas. Therefore, it is not surprising that the *studiolo* gathers all these references and puts them into practice.

As a result, an exact virtual space is constructed, one that transports the viewer to a room surrounded by half-open cupboards,



Figure 9

Detail. X-ray of the back parts in the panels. *Studiolo* of Federico da Montefeltro. In Raggio (1996, 39).

inside which we find a wide variety of objects that become an essential part of the scene. These constitute an iconography of knowledge and personality. They are not as important in themselves as they are in what they represent: the Renaissance humanist's desire for knowledge. They are symbols, and their meaning aspires to something larger that transcends mere functionality. Moreover, the objects are not physically present; they are representations and, therefore, part of a symbolic landscape, belonging to the universe of a specific and collective memory (Kirkbride 2008). Each of these images thus acquires an aura of mystery that envelops them.

Light and shadow are equally suited to Gubbio's room because they are simulated in a scene with an illusionist's effects. The light is

continuous, of an external moment. It is as though in this represented parallel world, there was no night or day, for light is always light and shadow is always shadow. The movement of the cupboard doors is always frozen. It is an exact instant, a world out of time, static, to move through with the mind. All of this is possible because it is based on pure geometry. Points and lines traced with infinite precision undergird contours that simulate objects and furniture. It is an outline that remains hidden to the eye, but it sustains the entire composition. Any failure in the drawing of these lines would entail immediate expulsion from this space of the mind.

Fornasetti's *Stanza* could be seen as nearly the opposite: only lines. A space formed by a straight, precise, and highly mathematical line should result in an exact space, a logical, geometric construction. However, the lines that support this composition are cut at the appropriate points, hiding the vanishing points, and distracting the viewer. If the apparent vanishing points are elongated, few would collide. It is a space that, in its perspectival inconsistency, captures the inhabitant and introduces him into the space, unlike in Gubbio's. If the vanishing points, planes, and volumes were as precise and consistent as in the 15th century *studiolo*, it would not be possible to keep the inhabitant within that metaphysical space. It is a maze, like Piranesi's prisons—like those imagined spaces depicting a reality but which escape from it, remaining outside of time, without references. It is simultaneously exterior and interior—perhaps more on one side than the other, and vice versa. It can be seen from the above, from below, and in elevation. It has scale for part of the way, then suddenly the reference is lost.

This apparent incoherence is exactly the opposite, since it is conceived to be able to grow and diminish by adding or removing panels to adapt to the room without sacrificing its essence or ceasing to be the same space. This is perhaps the best and most innovative aspect of this study. In Gubbio, the disappearance of a panel or its placement in any other position would call into question the entire composition; in the *Stanza Metafisica*, this *is* its foundation: the variability, movement, and infinite possibilities only reinforce the essential character of the space.

The journey

The two rooms end up in New York, separated by a barely 30-minute walk through Central Park. As if they had a life of their own, each of the architectures, which represent the intellectual and artistic concerns of its time, follow the path intrinsic to it, in such a way that the individual history of each room enhances its personality.

In the case of the wood panels in the *studiolo*, the journey appears to have been an implicit element from the beginning, given the ease of dismantling and the high artistic value of the pieces. In some cases, it entails their transformation, as can be seen in one of the first documented works executed using illusionist effects, created

in 1414 by Arduino da Baese for Paolo Guinigi de Lucca. After his death, the panels were transferred to the *studiolo* of Belfiore de Leonello d'Este, and later, his brother Ercole d'Este reused them in the construction of two doors for his study in the Palazzo del Corte, in 1479 (Thomton 1997, 57).

On the other hand, tracing the steps of Gubbio's studio (Raggio 1996, 13–14), we can see how it resisted change. In 1874, Prince Filippo Massimo Lancellotti purchased wood panels in the *studiolo* to reinstall them in a room in his Frascati villa, but this never came to fruition. In 1877, Luigi Rizzo first restored them. The room then remained dismantled until 1937, when it was sold to the German collector Adolph Loewi, who moved it to his Venice gallery. There are photographs of this in which we can verify how the room is arranged in its original geometric configuration, albeit with a degree of reconstruction—a lost panel (Kemp, Raggio, and Wilmering 2000). Finally, after another restoration, it traveled to the property of Arnold Seligman, Rey & Co., and, in 1939, was acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of New York, where it was installed in 1941, also in its original geometry. While the paneled elements that Arduino da Baese designed for Paolo Guinigi were being transformed as they changed location, Federico da Montefeltro's *studiolo* does not change: it is incapable of adapting to any other container. In contrast, it forces the room that contains it to acquire its original form. The bond that perspective grants them is unbreakable.

While the *studiolo* does not admit changes, the *Stanza Metafisica* resists becoming fixed in one position in a single space. At each stop, it appears to be different. Winding its way from auction to auction, in just a few years it moved through galleries, private collections and expositions in Karlsruhe (“Notiziario” 1961), London, Los Angeles and New York.² In the latter city, it was auctioned three times: in 1983 at Christie's for \$68,500, in 2007 at Sotheby's for \$301,000, and in 2018 at Phillips for \$507,000 (Phillips 2018).

The *Stanza's* last stop before its final sale in 2018 was in the New York duplex of Trudie Styler and Sting, at 15 Central Park West. This time, it was arranged in three parts as three large paintings occupying one of the walls in the apartment, yet for the auction exhibition it appeared once again as a whole. In older photographs, it also appears in different manifestations: forming a sharp corner with Piero Fornasetti himself seated in the middle or as a background in a room furnished as a hall. This shifting nature is inherent in the designer's intention: “A person could change residence and there would be no need for him to lose the background of the settings in which he is accustomed to living. He could take his walls with him, as they are also washable and easily transportable” (Casadio and Fornasetti 2009, 448).

In fact, it seems that the mobile quality associated with furniture is implicit in all Fornasetti's production. His work resists being pinned down and remaining in one place. To a large extent, it is concerned with decorative and furniture objects. However, even the rooms are

conceived to be mobile, such as the study and dressing room of the home in Lucano that he designed with Gio Ponti, which sold at auction for £225,000, or the décor on the ocean liners *Andrea Doria* and *Conte Grande*, which travels constantly on the high seas.

All these examples show the ability of both rooms to move with their owners, albeit for different reasons and characteristics, as has been indicated. The interior scenography of the *studiolo* was not conceived to be moved once installed, but it was easily removable since the framework of panels made with the *intarsia* technique was prepared by the artisans in their workshop, and then placed on the walls of the *studiolo*. Their high artistic value allowed these richly decorated panels not to be lost but to be moved and reused in the private rooms of other nobles, trading with them. On the other hand, Fornasetti's *Stanza Metafisica* was a decorative device, thought from the first moment as a mobile domestic element, and therefore built like traditional screens with wooden panels linked with hinges that allow unlimited configurations, in addition to adding or removing panels. This ease of possibilities allowed multiple trips, and its adaptation to many spaces.

Both rooms made the journey to New York. However, there is another more important, intimate, and secret journey. The two rooms transport us to a space in the mind, a hidden place outside the world. On the surface, it is merely a question of wood paneling, a decorative element situated in a room, but instead, it launches us into another place, as if it were a dream inside a dream, a nexus between the real and the virtual. It is a journey to the same place, but is utterly different in each period. Over the course of these five centuries, everything has changed.

What once were cupboards filled with objects charged with specific meanings referring to the personal history and aspirations of the Renaissance humanist are now just empty space. It is not that in the symbolic landscape of Piero Fornasetti, these objects and spaces cease to exist. In fact, in many of his works, there are unmistakable references to Renaissance objects and optical perspective games—in particular, the *studiolo* of Federico da Montefeltro. They appear, for example, in the *Libri* and *Strumenti musicale* screens designed between 1952 and 1954, which represent, on the one hand, a *trompe-l'oeil* of shelves filled with books, and on the other, the inside of a closet containing old musical instruments, nearly identical to ones found in the panels in Gubbio and Urbino. However, precisely when he must design a space intended for this variety of introspection, he avoids all direct references. The license, amusement, and predominantly ironic references that Fornasetti allows himself in the screens and furniture as more ornamental and superficial elements become something far more profound, abstract, and austere when it comes to a space devoted to thought—reflecting, to a certain extent, a multitude of cultural trends and currents of the period.

If the da Montefeltro *studiolo* transports us to a mathematical and perfect perspectival space, Fornasetti presents us with the surrealist domain of the metaphysicians, with the same strange and incoherent

laws of perspective that we find in the paintings of Giorgio de Chirico, that same loneliness. It is an almost dream-like world of distorted realities, a functionless architecture, a desert of objects and references, black lines, and pure geometry set against a white background. While the foundation moves through the world and changes the owner, the metaphysical space it contains remains inalterable and frozen. It is subject to other laws, capable of transcending even physical ones and preserving its qualities despite the radical external actions to which they are subjected. The two rooms demonstrate this capacity for resistance and immutability.

Indeed, both examples reveal the existence of both a physical room and a distinct metaphysical room: in other words, a fictitious space contained within a real room constructed through the use of technique and perspective. We could almost speak of successive spaces, given that, in reality, they represent one room inside another that, in turn, creates another space. This virtual space is none other than the translation into reality of the place that one inhabits in one's own mind. Ultimately, it is a place for meditation, contemplation, and pleasing intellect.

These are settings capable of traveling and adapting that can disguise any room, transforming it into a space that ensnares us in its laws and acquires meaning in the mind. The "room of one's own" is a space fashioned in the imagination that provides the necessary outer garment to embark on a grand journey, which is nothing less than the journey into the inner self. This is the true journey—the only one that has any real meaning.

Notes


1. Christie's, New York, "Important 20th Century Decorative Arts including Arts and Crafts, Art Nouveau, Art Deco and Post-War Designs," December 17, 1983, lot 393.
2. "Exhibition of Fornasetti's Decorative Objects," The Tea Centre, London, September 17–October 3, 1958. Landesgewerbemuseum, Karlsruhe, January 31–March 4, 1962. "Important 20th Century Decorative Arts including Arts and Crafts, Art Nouveau, Art Deco and Post-War Designs," Christie's New York, December 17, 1983. "Important Design: The Life of Piero Fornasetti," Christie's Los Angeles, May 16, 1998. "Important Postwar and Contemporary Design," Sotheby's New York, November 16, 2007. For more information see Phillips (2018).

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