

If Walls Could Talk:
A Case Study at Pompeii

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On my honor, I have neither given nor received any unacknowledged aid on my thesis.

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In the darkness you could hear the crying of women, the wailing of infants, and the shouting of men. Some prayed for help. Others wished for death. But still more imagined that there were no gods left, and that the universe was plunged into eternal darkness.

Letter of Pliny the Younger

The chaos and destruction caused by the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in 79 C.E. was felt throughout the Roman empire, a disastrous miracle which has uniquely preserved much of the ancient town of Pompeii. As a layer of ash settled over the colony, the city was frozen in time and left to the eager hands of many modern explorers. Beginning in the eighteenth century and continuing to the present day, audiences from far and wide have traveled to Pompeii, hoping to catch a glimpse of the ancient life which once filled its streets. Most are familiar with the plaster casts of those who did not manage to escape; however, from an archaeological perspective, a wealth of information lies at Pompeii which cannot be recovered anywhere else in the ancient Roman world. This paper will focus on paintings found in a single *domus* at Pompeii: the House of Marcus Lucretius Fronto. The rich decoration of this modest yet strategically positioned house can reveal much to the modern scholar about ancient value systems, cultural codes, and methods of interaction.

Ultimately, the Roman house was a public sphere, and its art reflected the wide and varied audience of clients and visitors.¹ As a politician, M. Lucretius Fronto was certainly interested in promoting certain ideologies and preferences, not only through his rhetoric and actions but also within his home. As a widely legible and available form of visual culture in Roman society, paintings bridge the gap of race, gender, and class, offering a personalized worldview in a universal language.² And, as Strong reminds us, Greek myth was often used as a narrative representation

¹ Eleanor Leach underscores the importance of ancient social dynamics in modern scholars' understanding of art and visual culture, pointing out that a better appreciation of social context will in turn increase comprehension of the paintings themselves. Eleanor Winsor Leach, *The Social Life of Painting in Ancient Rome and on the Bay of Naples*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 18.

² Leach, *The Social Life of Painting*, 7.

of cultural, moral, and behavioral paradigms. When linked together, these myths synthesize a world view on display in the “art gallery” of the Roman domus.³

Building upon the work of Bettina Bergmann, who shows the critical importance of memory in the creation and reception of Roman domestic painting, I will explore the complexity and multivalence of Roman collective social memory. As we move into the postmodern era, many classical art historians have begun to emphasize the many ways of encoding, seeing, and understanding, especially those that have occupied a peripheral status in historical analyses. I will explore the formal and thematic aspects of these paintings in order to better understand the nuance and intricacy of their subject matter and interaction with memory. I will investigate the presentation of binary threads for the sake of intellectual and mnemonic reflection among visitors, as well as the creation of a uniquely Roman narrative regarding love, loss, violence, and fate. Finally, I will propose that rooms four, five, six, and fourteen all served as *pinacothecae* rather than their traditional attributions of bedrooms or *cubicula*. Moreover, I propose that the active use of these galleries was one of the primary motivations for their creation.

³ Donald Emrys Strong, *Roman Art*, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1995), 32.

Background

Methodology

This paper will seek to expand upon the work of Bettina Bergmann, who used the House of the Tragic Poet in Pompeii to evaluate the interaction with visual culture in the ancient home. Understanding the Roman house as a kind of ‘memory theater’, or architectural mnemonic, Bergmann explains how the universal language of images came to exercise and test the audience’s memory of Greek and Roman mythology.⁴ Emphasizing the importance of the “semantic flexibility of images in combination” and the subsequent ability to stimulate a response in the viewer, Bergman shows how “recurring patterns function like a metrical scheme that relates the distinct stories to a familiar refrain composed of a few large, binary themes.”⁵ Literate, cosmopolitan viewers- familiar with epic, drama, art, history, and ethics- bathed their consciences in a flood of analogy and metaphor, basking in the multivalency and elasticity of meaning. Their experiences with visual culture in the domestic sphere were necessarily dynamic and profound, riffing on an unspoken milieu only partially available to modern scholars. Bergmann states:

The narrative program of the house thus transcends the necessarily linear reading of literary texts, a process that at the time was further restricted by the conventions of the papyrus roll. A spectator could ‘re-write’ the story in a variety of ways simply by starting the viewing in different places and moving around and within rooms in different sequences. While the associations of each panel and the multiple connections among them induced a virtual polyphony of themes, the visual repetitions were building blocks, like long and short syllables, which the viewer/poet/artist manipulated into a variety of configurations to create different rhythms or visual narratives. Since each of the individual images evoked a host of related associations arising from a few large, binary themes, the precise significance of any single ‘reading’ of the paintings was likely to vary in subtle ways.⁶

Using the methodology established by Bergmann, I will explore the House of M. Lucretius Fronto as a case study.

⁴ The concept of the memory theater has been recently popularized as a ‘memory palace’ in BBC’s *Sherlock*.

⁵ Bettina Bergmann, "The Roman House as Memory Theater: The House of the Tragic Poet in Pompeii." *The Art Bulletin* 76, no. 2 (1994): 245-6. doi:10.2307/3046021.

⁶ Bergmann, "The Roman House as Memory Theater," 254.

Inhabitants & Timeline

The House of M. Lucretius Fronto was owned by a politician from an old and prestigious *gens*, running for quinquennial at the time of the eruption.⁷ It can be ascertained from programmata along with the *cursus honorum* that Fronto had previously served as aedile and duovir; his house is attributed by and named for the unusual programma on its facade which is written in verse.⁸ Leach posits that “the small number of Fronto’s own programmata in contrast with thirty-one recommending [his running-mate] Polybius indicates that the aristocrat needed less public endorsement than his socially mobile freedman colleague.”⁹ A large hunt mural decorated the peristyle of the house, likely commemorating *venationes* which Fronto sponsored as a show of euergetism and social power. (Fig. 1) The checkerboard pattern used to decorate the upper third of the wall may indicate the patron paid for awnings as well; perhaps this is why Fronto needed little advertisement for the upcoming election.¹⁰

The first phase of the house is known in the fourth to third century BCE, although there is little archaeological evidence surviving from this period.¹¹ The second phase creates the structure of the house as we know it today, including the facade; a third phase renovates and rearranges the atrium. The fourth phase takes place during the imperial period, beginning in the first century BCE. It marks a major turning point in the building history of the house, most notably in the transition of room four to a triclinium; many of the floors in the home date to this period as well. Although his house is not conspicuously large, the paintings Fronto used to deco-

⁷ James L. Franklin, *Pompeii: The Electoral Programmata, Campaigns and Politics, A.D. 71-79*, (Rome, 1980), 145-6.

⁸ Leach, *The Social Life of Painting*, 176.

⁹ Leach, *The Social Life of Painting*, 184. Polybius was an imperial freedman sharing the bill with Fronto.

¹⁰ Leach, *The Social Life of Painting*, 131, 177, 218. Richardson believes that these scenes were painted by the artist Lucius due to their “absurdly long tails” and other details. Lawrence Richardson, *A Catalog of Identifiable Figure Painters of Ancient Pompeii, Herculaneum, and Stabiae*, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 149. Unfortunately, this paper will not have the space to analyze this impressive life-size mural.

¹¹ W.J. Th. Peters et al., *La Casa di Marcus Lucretius Fronto a Pompei e le sue Pitture*, vol. V, Scrinium (Rome: Dutch Institute, 1993).

rate its interior have been admired as “sumptuous” and “elegant”.¹² Clarke outlines the value of this house as a case study in Pompeii:

Despite its small size and location far from Pompeii’s fashionable center, the House of Lucretius Fronto’s late Third Style decoration is of incomparable refinement and beauty. From the *fauces* to the garden, a finely tuned decorative program articulates spatial hierarchies from the public to the private... Although space-saving compromises abound in the garden area the front of the house is a veritable jewel box. Along this visual axis the decorators orchestrated ensembles that increase in complexity.¹³

Location & Plan

The house was well-situated at V.4.a, located near two bakeries, a *caupona* (a type of bar), six *popinae* (another type of bar), two public fountains, a *fullonica*, and three public street shrines. Located on a most residential street just off a major thoroughfare, the house lies in the heart of a highly political neighborhood.¹⁴ (Fig. 4)

The layout of the house emphasizes *conclavia*, or suites, surrounding the larger open spaces of the house.¹⁵ This results in two major complexes: the peristyle with three reception rooms, and the atrium with at least three reception areas organized around the *impluvium*. (Fig. 2) The major axis of the house stretches from the *fauces*, past the claw foot marble table and through the *tablinum* to the peristyle. (Fig. 5) This sightline may not seem geometrically symmetrical but creates a kind of optical symmetry, delineating a clear sightline linking the hospitality centers of the *domus*.¹⁶

¹² He also notes the III Style paintings are higher in quality than their IV Style counterparts, possibly marking ‘golden age’ of family during creation of these paintings. Peters, *La Casa di Marcus Lucretius Fronto*.

¹³ John R. Clarke, *The Houses of Roman Italy: Ritual, Space and Decoration*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991), 146.

¹⁴ The neighborhood is clearly political from its unusually high ratio of graffiti to doorways. Ray Laurence, *Roman Pompeii: Space and Society*, (New York: Routledge, 2010).

¹⁵ Leach, *The Social Life of Painting*, 177.

¹⁶ Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Houses and Society in Pompeii and Herculaneum*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2010), 44. Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 270. Zanker notes that the claw foot marble table was likely imported from the East during the Republican period and was an important class marker.

Paintings

The house is best known for its Third Style paintings, which stereotypically introduce mythological subjects.¹⁷ Ling refers to the House of M. Lucretius Fronto as the *locus classicus* for late realizations of the Third Style, noting its “eclectic yet unified style and thematic complexity.”¹⁸ Zanker connects this aesthetic shift, “blending old and new in a novel synthesis of forms,” to the simultaneous rise of a new value system, citing seemingly ubiquitous moralistic fables as evidence.¹⁹ Clarke goes a step further in connecting the shift explicitly to the Augustan regime, grouping the miniaturistic detail, flatness, and restraint under Augustan idealism and imperial neoclassicism.²⁰

The atrium complex features four rooms with surviving figural decoration. In room seven (tablinum) are *Bacchus and Ariadne* (Fig. 6) and *Mars and Venus* (Fig. 7); in room six are *Narcissus* (Fig. 8) and *Pero and Micon* (Fig. 9) as well as two child portraits (Figs. 10-11); in room five are *Theseus and Ariadne* (Fig. 12), *Toilette of Venus* (Fig. 13), and an unidentifiable combat scene; in room four are *Orestes Slaying Neoptolemus* (Fig. 24) and a lost *Mars and Venus*. The peristyle complex features two rooms with surviving figural decoration. In room thirteen are *Bacchus and Silenus* (Fig. 15), *Pyramus and Thisbe* (Fig. 16), and a painting of unknown subject (Fig. 17). In room fourteen were *Rape by Poseidon* (Fig. 18), *Danae* (Fig. 19), and *Europa with the Bull* (Fig. 20).²¹ Several of these scenes appear extraordinarily similar to those found elsewhere in the city; scholars have posited that they may have been produced by a popular workshop.²²

¹⁷ However it does feature several paintings in the Fourth Style as well. Wallace-Hadrill, *Houses and Society*, 31.

¹⁸ Roger Ling, *Roman Painting*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2009), 60.

¹⁹ Zanker, *The Power of Images*, 282-3.

²⁰ Clarke, *The Houses of Roman Italy*, 126.

²¹ There are other surviving paintings in the house that will not be discussed this paper, including but not limited to the hunt mural in the peristyle and lararium paintings in the kitchen. Ling, *Roman Painting*, 147.

²² Additionally, they may have produced “deluxe” and “economy” versions of the same scene. Ling, *Roman Painting*, 129. Richardson believes the tablinum and room five were decorated by the Lucretio Frontone painter, whose works included multiple scenes at I.6.11 and I.8.17 as well as at Herculaneum. The work done in the House of M. Lucretius Fronto represents part of his later period. Richardson, *A Catalog of Identifiable Figure Painters of Ancient Pompeii*, 75-76.

Atrium Complex

Room seven, tablinum, figs. 6-7. The tablinum is a richly decorated example of the Third Style (Figs. 21-22); as the best known of those in the House of M. Lucretius Fronto, it garners much praise for its ornate and elegant decoration, as for instance in the words of Clarke:

Heraldic panthers, silver vessels, lyres, and swans pulling carts appears in the predellas of both walls, but their order reverses from north to south wall. This game of comparing mirrored schemes fixes the viewer in rapt amazement no less than does the refinement and exuberance of the room's miniaturistic ornament.²³

The tablinum retains two figural paintings: *Bacchus and Ariadne* on the south wall and *Mars and Venus* on the north wall. Both paintings are complex, multi-figural compositions, and they share the same purple, blue, and yellow hues against the red background. Ling sees the combination of this color palette with the "tripartite and depthless" arrangement of the figures as paradigmatic of the Third Style.²⁴ The composition of the paintings is symmetrical both within each work and throughout the entire room. Even the *klinos* (i.e., the couch/bed) which occupies the background of *Mars and Venus* repeats- albeit yoked to oxen- in the convoy of *Bacchus and Ariadne*.²⁵ The particular scroll style of the headboard in combination with the hairstyles and clothing of the figures date to the fourth century BCE by Peters, who posits that "the interest in the details of clothes and furniture indicates the copy of an older depiction."²⁶

Bacchus and Ariadne depicts Bacchus' triumphant return from wandering and exile with his new bride. For Ariadne, this scene represents an ending of suffering, articulated by Ovid during his explanation of March 8 in *Fasti* 3.²⁷ Although Ariadne sits furthest from the viewer, her direct outward gaze identifies her as a figure of prominence. Bacchus extends his cup while holding the *thrysus*, a staff topped with a pinecone which became symbolic of Bacchic ritual.²⁸ Two nude revelers (one male and one female) look on as the satyr Silenus rides his donkey at the

²³ Clarke, *The Houses of Roman Italy*, 151.

²⁴ Ling, *Roman Painting*, 122.

²⁵ These extended similarities force reconsideration of Richardson's theory that these paintings were not planned as a pair. Richardson, *A Catalog of Identifiable Figure Painters of Ancient Pompeii*, 71.

²⁶ Peters, *La Casa di Marcus Lucretius Fronto*, 216-18.

²⁷ Ovid, *Fasti* 3.

²⁸ *Bacchus and Silenus* (fig. 21) features same *thrysus*.

head of the procession. Peters understands the pastoral background (now heavily faded) to be representative of a Bacchic sanctuary.²⁹ F. Matz traces original scene to late fourth century BCE in Attica through the motifs of the woman with basket (nude figure on right) and the satyr with a double oboe (now lost but presumably on left).³⁰ A similar scene was located (although survives solely in drawings) in the House of M. Lucretius at IX.3.5. (Fig. 23)

Mars and Venus makes a fitting pair with the marital procession on the south wall, often identified as the wedding of these two immortal deities. Venus holds a mirror but looks directly out at the viewer while Mars leans over her shoulder and touches her breast; the two attendants on the far right appear in other Pompeian works, including *Pan* in the House of Jason at IX.5.18 (Fig. 24) and *Perseus and Andromeda* in the House of the Five Skeletons at VI.10.2 (Fig. 25).³¹ The central figure is the key to understanding the scene depicted. Venus, the goddess of love, was the wife of Vulcan, the smithy god; however, she was also having an affair with Mars, the god of war. If the viewer reads the central figure as Hypnos, or Sleep, then the scene depicts the night prior to the capture of the illicit lovers by a cuckolded Vulcan and put on display before the entire pantheon. However, if the viewer understands the central figure as Eros, or Love, then the scene depicts the wedding of Mars and Venus and the bed in the background suggests consummation, not rest. Either reading can be mapped onto the facing wall: displays of love (licit versus illicit) or divine weddings. Perhaps this ambiguity was purposeful in antiquity, chosen by the artist or the patron to stimulate intellectual engagement and conversation.

Mars and Venus also have strong connections to the imperial house (Mars was the father of Romulus and Remus, while Julio-Claudians traced their line back to Venus through Aeneas);³² Venus Pompeiana was the patron deity of the Roman colony Pompeii. This scene was generally popular in antiquity, with the first known pairing of Mars and Venus on an amphora fragment from the mid-seventh century BCE, where they ride together on a chariot of winged

²⁹ Peters, *La Casa di Marcus Lucretius Fronto*, 216-18.

³⁰ F. Matz, *Eine Gemaledekopie aus Pompeji*, (1952).

³¹ The outward gaze of the attendant matches the direct gaze of Ariadne on the facing wall.

³² Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, 1.4.2. Ovid *Fasti* 4.

horses (identified as Ares and Aphrodite in their Greek context).³³ (Fig. 26) However, this scene was especially popular among Pompeians, with quite similar compositions found at I.7.19 (Fig. 27) and in the House of the Punished Cupid at VII.2.23 (Fig. 28).³⁴

Room six, gallery figs. 8-11. The function of this room has been highly debated by scholars, often identified as a child bedroom.³⁵ For now, I will refer to it as a *cubiculum*. The room features two mythological figural paintings set against a yellow background; *Narcissus* on the north wall (Fig. 29) and *Pero and Micon* on the south wall. These paintings reduce the number of figures to one or two, and make a limited attempt at background. The paintings share the same blue, green, and red tones; even the gaze and posture of Narcissus and Pero seem to mirror one another. Additionally, two child portraits feature on the west wall, on either side of the doorway.³⁶ (Fig. 30) Scholars do not fully understand the portraits; the right shows a boy dressed as Mercury, while they cannot agree if the portrait on the left is a girl or a boy. Peters recognizes the portraits as a memorial to deceased children.³⁷ I will later return to this issue when discussing function of the rooms.

Sogliano describes *Narcissus* as “one of the most pathetic Narcissus figures.”³⁸ The scene portrays the young boy suffering punishment for his cruelty to the nymph Echo. Narcissus stares at his reflection, cursed to fall in love with his own image. Transformed to a flower, Narcissus mythologizes the origin of the daffodil flower. The myth was one of the most popular included in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, and frequently appears in paintings at Pompeii.³⁹

³³ Thomas H. Carpenter, *Art and Myth in Ancient Greece: A Handbook*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 2006).

³⁴ Richardson sees the scene in VII.2.23 as a later copy of the scene found in the House of M. Lucretius Fronto; he says the revised version is an attempt to “better balance the picture.” Richardson, *A Catalog of Identifiable Figure Painters of Ancient Pompeii*, 10-11.

³⁵ Peters, *La Casa di Marcus Lucretius Fronto*, 336-338.

³⁶ Richardson sees all the scenes of this room, including the portraits, as produced by the Iphigenia Painter. If the many works attributed to him have been positively identified, then he was among the most prolific artists in Pompeii. Richardson, *A Catalog of Identifiable Figure Painters of Ancient Pompeii*, 129.

³⁷ Peters, *La Casa di Marcus Lucretius Fronto*, 336-9.

³⁸ Peters, *La Casa di Marcus Lucretius Fronto*, 332-4.

³⁹ Narcissus translates to daffodil in Greek. There are possibly as many as 50 depictions in Pompeii alone. Simon Price and Emily Kearns, *The Oxford Dictionary of Classical Myth and Religion*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 368.

Pero and Micon depicts a myth far less commonly known throughout the Roman empire. In fact, finding even three representations of the myth at Pompeii is impressive.⁴⁰ The painting in the House of M. Lucretius Fronto shows Pero feeding her imprisoned (understood through window at top right) father, Micon, from her breast as described by Valerius Maximus in Book V of *Memorable Doings and Sayings*.⁴¹ Pero's actions of charity and proper use of the body directly contrast with Narcissus' self-obsession and improper actions. Moreover, Pero's purposeful removal of her garments and altruistic motivation clash with the garments of Narcissus, which slip away from his body due to his egotistical nature. Pero's retainment of self-control underscores Narcissus' deficiency.

Pero and Micon further includes a painted inscription, comprised of three elegiac couplets describing the depicted myth.⁴² Whether an original conception or a quotation of poetry lost to us today, the inclusion of the painted inscription indicates a clear interest in literature and Greek mythology.⁴³ Peters posits the scene copies a wooden pinax which could have decorated the Temple of Pietas in the Forum Holitorium of Rome by 191 BCE. His theory is supported by the setting of the myth: Micon was supposedly imprisoned in the Forum Holitorium.⁴⁴

Room five, gallery, figs. 12-13. This cubiculum preserves three Third Style figural paintings: *Theseus and Ariadne* on the west wall, *Toilette of Venus* on the east wall, and a combat scene on the north wall above the doorway. *Theseus and Ariadne* and *Toilette of Venus* employ a color palette of light blue, yellow, purple, and grey against a black background. The horizon line of Theseus' labyrinth matches Venus' wall against the sky.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Similar scenes at IX.2.5 and Naples Museum. Peters, *La Casa di Marcus Lucretius Fronto*, 335.

⁴¹ This depiction of charity is also quite popular after antiquity.

⁴² Quae parvis mater natis alimenta / parabat Fortuna in patrios vertit / iniqua cibos aevo dignum opus est / tenui cervice seniles asp[ice ia]m / venate lacte re[plente tument]q[ue] simul voltu fri(c)at ipsa Miconem pero / tristis inest cum pietate pudor. CIL IV, 6635c.

⁴³ The inclusion of the inscription likely indicates this painting needed further explanation than the others; maybe it was rare in its own day as well. Peter E. Knox, "Ovidian Myths on Pompeian Walls," in *A Handbook to the Reception of Ovid*, ed. John F. Miller and Carole E. Newlands, (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 45.

⁴⁴ Peters, *La Casa di Marcus Lucretius Fronto*, 334-6.

⁴⁵ Peters, *La Casa di Marcus Lucretius Fronto*, 208-9.

Theseus and Ariadne presents a continuation narration of myth. Ariadne stands on the right, next to the entrance of the labyrinth, offering Theseus the ball of thread that will guide him back to safety. Theseus stands on the left, heroically nude save for the bandage dangling from his right hand, which implies the wounds suffered by the champion in his battle against the Minotaur.⁴⁶ Afterwards, Ariadne and Theseus fled Crete together, but he abandoned her on Naxos. Myths vary widely on the fate Ariadne, but include death in childbirth, murder by Artemis, suicide, and rescue by Bacchus; Ovid's *Heroides* 10 dramatizes the suffering of Ariadne on the island of Naxos.⁴⁷ Peters reads the gray column in the foreground as a marker for a sanctuary of Bacchus, foreshadowing Ariadne's eventual fate. Additionally, he notes the hairstyle possibly looks to the fourth century BCE; as in the tablinum, this could indicate the copying or modifying of an older image.⁴⁸ A similar composition can be found in the tablinum of the House of the Ancient Hunt at VII.4.48, as well as in the *caupona* at I.12.3.⁴⁹ (Fig. 31, 32)

Theseus and Ariadne was an extremely popular subject in both Greek and Roman art from the fifth century BCE until the third century CE. Two very early representations, a plaque from mid-seventh century Corinth as well as a mid-sixth century shield relief from Olympia reveal the early foundations of the myth (Fig. 33-34). The Francois Vase, circa 570 BCE, depicts Ariadne in a joyful dance with the youths and maidens rescued by Theseus (Fig. 35); an Attic hydria from Vulci, dated to 470 BCE, explains away Ariadne's abandonment as Athena/Minerva guides Theseus off stage right while Bacchus/Dionysos simultaneously sweeps Ariadne away (Fig. 36). These images offer a positive explanation for the negative actions of Theseus; however, our *Theseus and Ariadne*, especially when seen alongside the *Bacchus and Ariadne* (Fig. 6), focuses on

⁴⁶ And possibly foreshadows the mental and emotional wounds Ariadne will suffer upon the loss of Theseus, prior to her rescue by Bacchus.

⁴⁷ Price, *The Oxford Dictionary of Classical Myth and Religion*, 51, 549. Ovid *Heroides* 10 is also an interesting foreshadowing of his own exile.

⁴⁸ Peters, *La Casa di Marcus Lucretius Fronto*, 207-8.

⁴⁹ Richardson believes the scene from the *caupona* was produced by the Lucretio Frontone painter. Richardson, *A Catalog of Identifiable Figure Painters of Ancient Pompeii*, 74.

the ethics of Theseus' actions and his questionable status as a hero.⁵⁰ This painting appears five times elsewhere in Pompeii, seemingly "coming into vogue" around 10 CE.⁵¹

Toilette of Venus does not present the viewer with any particular myth, but depicts the goddess of love escorted by her attendants in a pastoral setting. Venus is naked from the waist up, contrasting with the clothed female figure of Ariadne while paralleling the heroic and divine nudity of Theseus. Her yellow and purple robe is notably similar to the purple and yellow robes of Theseus which lie on the ground alongside his club.⁵² The love goddess and romantic myth make a internal pair within this room; externally, the figure of Venus recalls *Mars and Venus* (Fig. 7), just as the figure of Ariadne recalls *Bacchus and Ariadne* (Fig. 6), both located in the tablinum. A similar scene appears at I.11.15/9.⁵³

The combat scene above the doorway has faded heavily, although Peters sees two warriors advancing from the right and three similar warriors on the left, as well as two boats on the right side of the painting, an altar covered with fig trees at the bottom, and a possible city landscape. He also notes the figures appear quite small in comparison to the landscape.⁵⁴ The scene possibly recounts a Trojan battle, or more generally contrasts love with war (again recalling *Mars and Venus*, Fig. 7).

Room four, winter triclinium, fig. 14. The winter triclinium, so named for its position within the house, off-set door and and *lecti tricliniales* niches located in the north and south walls, featured two figural paintings. The better preserved of these two paintings, located

⁵⁰ Corresponds to Tom Carpenter's conception of Greek sixth century pottery. Theseus' treacherous behavior in abandoning his savior does not seem to have been acceptable to the poets who were responsible for polishing his image at the end of the sixth century, and several red-figure vase-paintings suggest the means to found to cast him in a better light. Carpenter, *Art and Myth in Ancient Greece*, 164.

⁵¹ Peters, *La Casa di Marcus Lucretius Fronto*, 207-8.

⁵² This contrast between Venus and Ariadne is deepened by the viewer's understanding of Ariadne as a object and Venus as a woman of power (ie, subject). Peters also sees a connection to the toilette scene in the Villa of the Mysteries. Peters, *La Casa di Marcus Lucretius Fronto*, 208-9.

⁵³ Richardson believes this copy was produced by the Lucretio Frontone painter, along with the abandonment of Ariadne and a lost subject found in the same room. However, the picture was stolen from excavations in 1977. Richardson, *A Catalog of Identifiable Figure Painters of Ancient Pompeii*, 74.

⁵⁴ Peters, *La Casa di Marcus Lucretius Fronto*, 209-10.

on the east wall, can be identified as *Orestes Slaying Neoptolemus*. Unfortunately, the *Mars and Venus* which once adorned the facing wall has vanished, appearing only in excavation reports.

Orestes Slaying Neoptolemus depicts Neoptolemus, son of Achilles, heroically nude and leaning on the altar, while Orestes attacks from the right. The figures appear in a symmetrical, quincunx pattern. Hermione's pose of distress, combined with her clutching of the *patra* and the overturned table signal the disarray and chaos of the scene.⁵⁵ It was said that Menelaus, a Greek king, gave his daughter Hermione to Orestes (son of Agammenon and Clytemnestra) despite her betrothal to Neoptolemus; when Menelaus decided to keep his promise to Neoptolemus, Orestes became enraged and killed him in the act of performing a sacrifice at Delphi.⁵⁶ The temple alongside a large gold tripod and snake in the background mark the location of the action, matching the account given in Euripides' *Andromache* and other literary sources.⁵⁷ The scene may also be understood as a visualization of Ovid's *Heroides* 8.

Mars and Venus was already badly damaged at the time of excavation, however Sogliano identified the "well-known group of Ares and Aphrodite." Mars was seen heroically nude alongside Venus draped in a red cloth which must have closely matched those seen in *Orestes Slaying Neoptolemus*. The composition could have been similar to those found in the House of Mars and Venus at VII.9.47 (Fig. 37) or in the House of the Epigrams at V.1.18 (Fig. 38). The repetition of the Mars and Venus motif throughout the house underscores the emphasis on love and war within the myths it accompanies. The divine couple perfectly balance the violence and death onset by the romantic affairs of Orestes and Neoptolemus. In the same way that Mars must struggle for his love with Venus, hindered by her legitimate husband, Orestes must struggle for his love with Hermione, through the slaughter of Neoptolemus and exile in Argos.⁵⁸ Hermione serves as an even better foil for the powerful goddess Venus than her counterpart Ariadne. She

⁵⁵ Peters, *La Casa di Marcus Lucretius Fronto*, 329-31.

⁵⁶ Myths vary as to which male was betrothed to her first. Hyginus Fragment 123; Price, *The Oxford Dictionary of Classical Myth and Religion*, 257, 371.

⁵⁷ Euripides *Andromache* 1085-1165.

⁵⁸ Peters, *La Casa di Marcus Lucretius Fronto*, 331-2.

exemplifies the woman treated entirely as an object for the desires and satisfaction of men, from her father to her two suitors.

Peristyle Complex

Room thirteen, summer triclinium, figs. 15-17. The summer triclinium occupies a central position in the peristyle complex, decorated with three figural paintings: *Bacchus and Silenus* on the east wall, *Pyramus and Thisbe* on the west wall, and *Seated Woman* on the south wall. All three compositions feature two figures; *Bacchus and Silenus* and *Pyramus and Thisbe* share a color palette of gray, yellow, and red.

Bacchus and Silenus, also known as *Hermaphroditus and Satyr*, has unfortunately suffered heavy damage. The face of the two figures no longer survive, although the thrysus and young depiction of Bacchus match the qualities found in the *Bacchus and Ariadne* (Fig. 6) while the stout figure of Silenus seems to parallel the figure seen riding a donkey. Silenus (known as the educator, companion, and caretaker of the young Bacchus) seems to play a *cithara* while Bacchus himself emerges heroically nude.⁵⁹ A similar scene appears in The House of L. Caecilius Iucundus at V.1.26, although there Silenus holds a *tympanum* rather than a *cithara*.⁶⁰

Pyramus and Thisbe has also not survived well, with much of the paint heavily faded.⁶¹ The myth occurs almost exclusively in Ovid, who tells of the couple's furtive romantic meetings.⁶² At one such meeting, Thisbe happened upon a lion fresh from the kill and dropped her cloak as she ran away. Pyramus found the cloak of Thisbe with blood from the lion and, assuming the worst, commits suicide; Thisbe finds him in his last moments before following him in death. The scene depicted in the House of M. Lucretius Fronto shows Thisbe in the act of dis-

⁵⁹ Price, *The Oxford Dictionary of Classical Myth and Religion*, 497.

⁶⁰ Richardson believes both the painting at V.1.26 and the scene in the House of M. Lucretius Fronto were painted by the Marco Lucrezio Painter. Richardson, *A Catalog of Identifiable Figure Painters of Ancient Pompeii*, 155.

⁶¹ Peters, *La Casa di Marcus Lucretius Fronto*, 351-2.

⁶² Ovid *Metamorphoses* 4.55.

covery; her bloody cloak lies in the foreground, just in front of Pyramus' body.⁶³ (Fig. 39) Similar compositions can be found in the House of the Restaurant at IX.5.14-16 (Fig. 40), House of Venus in a Bikini at I.11.6 (Fig. 41), and House of Octavius Quarto at II.2.2 (Fig. 42).

Seated Woman has fared the worst of all three paintings. Only one photograph of the painting survives, and several theories have been posited as to its subject matter. At the time of excavation, it was possible to identify a seated woman looking downwards. Scholars have proposed an identification of Venus fishing, a common scene at Pompeii; alternatively, Mau sees the woman reading and identifies her as either Phaedra (accompanied, then, by Hippolytus) or Galatea (with Polyphemus).⁶⁴ Either of the suggestions by Mau would fit well. Hippolytus was the son of Theseus, cursed by Venus to be loved by his stepmother Phaedra, who killed herself after his rejection.⁶⁵ Polyphemus was a Cyclops who fell in love with the beautiful nymph Galatea and killed her lover Acis.⁶⁶ Both myths match the theme of star crossed love and tragic fate seen both within this room and elsewhere in the house.

Room fourteen, gallery, figs. 18-20. Unfortunately, the paintings of this cubiculum have vanished from visitors of Pompeii today. What little information does survive on the three paintings that once decorated this room is entirely textual; Peters indicates the presence of *Europa with the Bull*, *Danae*, and *Rape by Poseidon*.

Europa was raped by Zeus when he took the form of a bull and carried her off to Crete. She bore him three children, including Minos, father of Ariadne.⁶⁷ Peters notes that Europa appeared in the nude in this painting; this scene is popular in Pompeii.⁶⁸ (Fig. 18)

Danae was raped by Zeus when he took the form of a golden shower and impregnated her with Perseus. She was cast away in a chest by her father (who had been told a prophecy that his

⁶³ Richardson postulates this scene was produced by the painter Lucius, who also likely produced the hunt mural of the garden. His argument is based in the style of tails. Richardson, *A Catalog of Identifiable Figure Painters of Ancient Pompeii*, 149. The apparent nudity of Thisbe may strike the viewer as unusual but makes sense both in the context of the story and alongside the nude Venus representations.

⁶⁴ Peters, *La Casa di Marcus Lucretius Fronto*, 350-1.

⁶⁵ Identification as Phaedra could connect genealogically to Europa in room fourteen. Clarke, *The Houses of Roman Italy*, 264; Euripides *Hippolytus*, Ovid *Heroides* 4.

⁶⁶ Clarke, *The Houses of Roman Italy*, 225; *Iliad* 18.45 and *Metamorphoses* 13.738.

⁶⁷ Ovid *Metamorphoses* 7.681, Aeschylus Fragment 99.

⁶⁸ Peters, *La Casa di Marcus Lucretius Fronto*, 352-3.

daughter's child would kill him) but survived on the island Seriphos.⁶⁹ Sogliano notes that the scene painted in the House of M. Lucretius Fronto shows the fisherman Dictys discovering the chest with Danae inside.⁷⁰ (Fig. 19)

Nothing is known of the scene including Poseidon aside from the inclusion of his trident. (Fig. 20) However, the room clearly focuses on scenes of divine rape and echoes the powerlessness of mortal women seen in *Bacchus and Ariadne*, *Pyramus and Thisbe*, and *Hermione*.

⁶⁹ Hyginus Fragment 63.

⁷⁰ Peters, *La Casa di Marcus Lucretius Fronto*, 352-3.

Analysis

The paintings in the house of M. Lucretius Fronto are all drawn from a clear set of themes, meant to interweave a complex narrative throughout the rooms for inhabitant and visitor stimulation. The aesthetic connections among the paintings of a given room, based especially in composition and color palette, encourage the audience to search for links and/or disparities. As such, the analysis of themes and recurring motifs in this particular house would clearly benefit from a structuralist analysis, pulling from key theorists such as Levi-Strauss, Barthes, Bakhtin, and Kristeva.⁷¹ This methodology will allow for examination of both myth and depiction, offering a fuller understanding of the dualities that organize and link the numerous stories of Fronto's home.⁷² Anne D'Alleva offers an excellent summarization of the role of myth in structuralist thought:

Myths are important because they provide a logical model capable of overcoming contradiction. How is that we live in a world that encompasses life and death? Beauty and ugliness? Selfishness and altruism? Violence and peace? Myths seek to explain these opposing concepts because every culture organizes its view of the world through pairs of opposites...according to Levi-Strauss, you should look not at why A is A, but at how A is to B as C is to D.⁷³

One can clearly see these concepts at work in the House of M. Lucretius Fronto. Within individual compositions, throughout each room, and in the *domus* as a whole, binary themes form the basis of the house's decoration. Overarching binaries include: men versus women,

⁷¹ Claude Levi-Strauss was a French anthropologist and linguist working in the Amazon in the twentieth century; he posits that myths are variations on basic themes, "reduced to a small number of simple types if we abstract from among the diversity of characters a few elementary functions." He coined the term "mytheme," referring to basic units assembled according to known rules resulting in standard myths. Roland Barthes was a 20th century French cultural critic; he adds that myth is represented as natural rather than constructed, allowing them to justify dominant beliefs, values, and ideas. He is well known for his concept of "the death of the author," or the idea that there are no fixed, pre-given meanings in any artworks.

Mikhail Bakhtin was a 20th century Russian linguist who coined the terms "monologia" (having one fixed meaning) and "heteroglossia" (having many flexible meanings).

Julia Kristeva created the term "structuration," or the idea that structures are fictions we create in order to interpret the world around us.

⁷² The use of a structuralist methodology does not mandate that the artists in the House of M. Lucretius Fronto closely followed each detail of the literature cited; rather, the viewer can recognize the distinction between the synchronic, or basic structure of the myth, and diachronic, or specific details included in any particular representation. Just as language changes and evolves, structuralist art analysis allows for the expansion, editing, and translation of a myth. Anne D'Alleva, *Methods & Theories of Art History* (London: Laurence King, 2012).

⁷³ D'Alleva, *Methods & Theories of Art History*, 128.

mortal versus divine, love versus war, and hero versus villain. Moreover, the paintings of this house pull from a clear set of myths. The vast majority of the scenes depicted feature in Ovid, and the Trojan War cycle seems to be a major influence as well.⁷⁴ Knox has suggested the owner or designer of the House of M. Lucretius Fronto may have admired and seen himself as an iteration of Ovid, “arranging contrasting tales for narrative effect and intertextual (or perhaps intratextual) commentary.”⁷⁵ The literary parallels for the scenes chosen in addition to the poetic painted inscription overtop of *Pero and Micon* (whose author and context of creation are completely unknown) may offer some credence to this theory and offer an explanation of subject matter and arrangement choices. Additionally, the strong textual base of the paintings would not have been lost on ancient audiences, who likely commended the owner for his intimate knowledge of Greek mythology. Although not depicted in this house, myths such as the Judgment of Paris and the Abduction of Helen were well-known by literate and educated Romans, and could have easily been called to mind by the repetitive Mars and Venus motifs and abduction scenes present alongside Iliadic characters such as Neoptolemus and Orestes.⁷⁶

Perhaps the contrast of love and war is the most extensive binary within the *domus*. The duality of passion is juxtaposed in the repeated motif of the divine Mars and Venus, which signifies the eternal union of violence and intimacy. (Fig. 7) The divergence of love and death features prevalently in room four, where Orestes and Neoptolemus battle to the death for the betrothal of Hermione. (Fig. 14) *Theseus and Ariadne* emphasizes tragic love while hinting at the violence which occurred inside the labyrinth through the bandage dangling from Theseus’

⁷⁴ *Bacchus and Ariadne* pulls from *Fasti* 3; *Narcissus*, *Europa with the Bull*, and *Pyramus and Thisbe* are popular myths from the *Metamorphoses*; Hermione and Ariadne are featured in *Heroides* 8 and 10 respectively (further indicating the owner/designer was interested in the consideration of women as well); *Orestes Slaying Neoptolemus* and *Europa with the Bull* are featured in ancient Greek plays (Euripides’ *Andromache* and Fragment 99 of Aeschylus, respectively). The possibilities offered for the lost painting in the summer triclinium would offer further evidence: the myth of Hippolytus and Phaedra is included in Euripides’ *Hippolytus* as well as *Heroides* 4; the attempted seduction of Galatea by Polyphemus is recorded in the *Iliad* and the *Metamorphoses*.

⁷⁵ Knox, “Ovidian Myths on Pompeian Walls,” 45.

⁷⁶ Aphrodite/Venus was the goddess who enticed Paris and started the Trojan War. “Nerds” of the day may have even thought of the *Odyssey*’s *Pero*, who supposedly was the nymph to turn Narcissus to a daffodil; although a different character than the *Pero* depicted here, the shared name is an imaginative connection.

hand. (Fig. 12) *Bacchus and Ariadne* (Fig. 6) recalls *Theseus and Ariadne*, contrasting abandonment with eternal union. The Bacchus figure (albeit sans Ariadne) in the peristyle complex serves as a foil for the calamity of Pyramus and Thisbe, and may well have accompanied another solo Venus, or Mau's suggestion of Polyphemus/Galatea or Hippolytus/Phaedra. (Figs. 15-16) Room six emphasizes proper versus improper passion: Narcissus' love, although clearly separate in its reflexive nature, meets the same tragic and fatal end as many others in the house, while Pero's love nourishes her father back to life. (Figs. 8-9)

And yet, the difference between right and wrong is not always so clear; the binary of heroism and villainy often questions which character should fulfill each role. Although Theseus was a celebrated hero, the subject matter in room five forces the viewer to recall his abandonment of the innocent princess and question his ethos. (Figs. 12-13) In room four, the sacrilegious slaughter of Neoptolemus (emphasized by the overturned table and temple in background) pushes the audience to consider Orestes' status as either a hero or a villain.⁷⁷ (Fig. 14) If the observer reads the *Mars and Venus* as the night before their entrapment by Hephaistos/Vulcan, the familiar punchline of Hephaistos/Vulcan becoming the laughingstock rather than hero would have come to mind, although only hinted at in the scene depicted.⁷⁸ (Fig. 7)

Venus does not merely make a fool of her husband, however; her supremacy as a divine being repeatedly asserts itself throughout the *domus*. In room seven, she clearly opposes the mortal (but soon to be deified) Ariadne.⁷⁹ (Figs. 6-7) Reinforcement of the same contrast between the immortal Venus and human Ariadne in room five may indicate the powerful role the goddess plays both in Ariadne's suffering as well as her eventual rescue. (Figs. 12-13) However, the matching colors of Theseus' and Venus' robes should not be overlooked, which in combination with his heroic nudity foreshadows his divine status. Hermione's role as an object rather

⁷⁷ Especially considering that Orestes is already a questionable character- although Neoptolemus isn't doing great either.

⁷⁸ A textual ambiguity creates a double entendre in the *Odyssey's* telling of the myth: when Hephaistos calls his fellow deities to laugh at the amorous couple he has trapped, they all end up mocking him for being cuckolded. *Odyssey* 8.267.

⁷⁹ The contrast of their consorts, Bacchus and Mars, is a well-known one, as the deities are often seen as two different realizations of the same impulse.

than subject in room four forms a parallel with the suffering of Ariadne, putting her in direct contrast with the Venus figure on the facing wall. (Fig. 14) However, in room thirteen, the divine versus human males that draw the viewer's attention: Bacchus' everlasting youth parallels Pyramus' premature death. (Figs. 15-16) Moreover, *Bacchus and Silenus* may well call to mind *Bacchus and Ariadne* (Fig. 6), allowing for contrast of Ariadne's eventual deification and Thisbe's adolescent suicide. In room six, the young boy and old man encounter contending fates: Narcissus will die from wasting away while the old man gains nourishment in a time of crisis. (Figs. 8-9)

Finally, the parallel of male and female is a critical one. In room seven, each painting features a couple of male and female, with male and female attendants neatly interspersed and balanced throughout the composition. (Figs. 6-7) In room six, Pero's gender contrasts both with that of Narcissus and her father Micon. (Figs. 8-9) In room five, the power of the male hero Theseus vastly outweighs that of the female victim Ariadne. (Figs. 12-13) In room four, the binary of men and women maps onto the action: the male figures comprise the center of the action while the central figure in myth, Hermione, crouches in the lower right corner, obviously distressed and in danger but seemingly unable to act. (Fig. 14)

Although this paper cannot allow space for an in-depth feminist analysis of the subject matter chosen for decoration in the House of M. Lucretius Fronto, it is important to note that repeated imagery of the helpless woman dominated by the powerful male can be connected to the hierarchy of gender in the Roman social order. The constant presence of such violent sexist imagery throughout the majority of the colony Pompeii (as well as many others) certainly had an effect on the ethos and behavior of its audiences. Koloski-Ostrow outlines this concept well:

As a spectator of these scenes, the viewer sees not just anatomical differences between men and women, but social difference as well. The men (or gods) who control the women or men of suffering possess more than the penis. They wield the phallus, the ultimate symbol of the male Roman social order. The house owners who commissioned such scenes for their own domestic stages thereby created a painted script with subtle, and not so subtle, messages of control easily legible to visitors and members of their own households. Such mythological images strongly suggest that an inherent 'language of power' is painted symbolically in these houses, mainly for the pleasure of male viewers presumably, which emphasises anew the authority of the *dominus*. Distinctive gen-

der differences are depicted in a visual 'language of power' for the pleasure and use of the *dominus* in these houses.⁸⁰

The use of such imagery may have also reinforced the hierarchy of gender within a particular household, evoking recognition of the accepted social order and inhabitants' place within it. Serving as a base for economic production and property distribution, the family was incredibly important to domestic life in Roman society, increasingly so during the Augustan period.⁸¹ The *dominus* could have been the designer of the decorative scheme, selecting imagery that would serve as a permanent reminder of his authority. However, he also chose paintings that insinuated the power and devotion of the proper woman; this presents most readily in *Pero and Micon*. (Fig. 9)

Taken as a whole, these paintings create a broader narrative of love, loss, violence, and fate. The atrium complex focuses heavily on Mars and Venus motifs and the development of the Ariadne plotline, while the peristyle complex looks closely at the plight of earthly women and the domination and violence of male sexuality. The comprehensive role of fate in the collection of myths seen in the House of M. Lucretius Fronto neatly maps onto Barthes' conception of representations as natural rather than constructed, allowing them to justify the dominant beliefs, values, and ideas of the time.⁸² In the Julio-Claudian era, these would have included pious action, justice and morality, and grandeur. Binaries of love, heroism, mortality, and gender became more and more salient as emperors declared themselves living deities and families reorganized according to Augustan moral reforms.

This paper cannot attempt to establish specific viewing routes throughout the House of M. Lucretius Fronto, although it is possible to observe that both the atrium and peristyle complex feature their own entrance. While the preferred entry and route for guests or clients cannot be ascertained, we can infer that viewers most likely moved from one complex to the other.⁸³ A

⁸⁰ Ann Olga Koloski-Ostrow, "Violent Stages in Two Pompeian Houses: Imperial Taste, Aristocratic Response, and Messages of Male Control," in *Naked Truths: Women, Sexuality, and Gender in Classical Art and Archaeology*, ed. Ann Olga Koloski-Ostrow and Claire L. Lyons, (London: Routledge, 2000), 257.

⁸¹ Suzanne Dixon, *The Roman Family*, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 3, 29.

⁸² D'Alleva, *Methods & Theories of Art History*, 127.

⁸³ The openness and location of rooms with painted decoration on main axis indicates their public function.

viewer who spent time in the atrium might note the repetition of the self-centered male in Narcissus and Theseus. While reclining in the winter triclinium, she could think back to the pride of Narcissus while gazing upon the hubris of Orestes and Neoptolemus. Maybe she will connect the cuckolding of the unseen Hephaistos/Vulcan with the romantic entanglement of Orestes and Neoptolemus, realizing it was Venus herself who caused the Trojan War and connected the two men through fate. If she enters room five before the tablinum, the message of *Mars and Venus* becomes increasingly poignant; after considering the power of love and its misfortune, the goddess' mistake seems all the more foolish and significant. Having encountered the counterbalance of *Bacchus and Ariadne* in the tablinum, she will recognize repeated figures in *Bacchus and Silenus* in room thirteen. This narrative thread is not singular— there are many unseen characters that a well-read viewer may have pondered when seeing these paintings, including Clytemnestra, Aigisthos, Agammemnon, Achilles, Hector, Andromache, Helen, Adonis, Paris, Peleus, Perseus, Andromeda, and many more. The multivalence and complex layering of myth and image in the house, and many others in Pompeii, is not coincidental; it is the result of careful planning to articulate the political and social *mores* of its owner and would have impressed ancient audiences just as it does modern ones today.

Ancient viewers were visually literate in both narrative and propaganda, and displayed paintings and other art forms, including tapestries, sculptures, and mosaics, at Pompeii and throughout the empire. The rapid increase of *pinacothecae*, or painting galleries, in Pompeian homes aligns with the onset of Third Style wall painting.⁸⁴ The austerity of the Third Style allows the central panels, typically mythological, to become the focus of a room.⁸⁵ Van Buren traces the figural panels to an old tradition of *pinakes* (e.g., votive tablets), understanding painted inscriptions and graffiti to recreate the *stylopinakia* (e.g., inscribed tablet). He defines *pinacothecae* as “rooms or buildings specially designed for the housing and exhibition of self-contained central pictures,” positing that such rooms, which serve no other clear purpose, “may be accorded a

⁸⁴ Eleanor Winsor Leach, *The Rhetoric of Space: Literary and Artistic Representations of Landscape in Republican and Augustan Rome*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 377.

⁸⁵ Wallace-Hadrill, *Houses and Society*, 51.

name more specific and more appropriate in place of such current denominations as *triclinia* and *oeci*.⁸⁶ These galleries appear in architectural sources, namely Vitruvius. Their placement balances the peristyle and atrium, and they tend to spread evenly across both complexes.⁸⁷ I would propose that rooms four, five, six, and fourteen all served as *pinacothecae* rather than their traditional attributions of bedrooms or *cubicula*.⁸⁸ The figural decoration and location of these rooms just off the main axis and sightline of the house suggest their public function, while their rich decoration and immediate remodeling following the earthquake of 62 CE indicate their importance. These rooms were not used merely for sleep and rest, but functioned as a *cavum aedium* complex, defined by Mau as a suite of rooms used for reception and leisure.⁸⁹

Moreover, I propose that the active use of these galleries was one of the primary motivations for their creation. It would be obvious to state that images exist to be seen; a more nuanced analysis can examine how active participation in viewing these paintings allows for an “intellectual reanimation” of the myth. The distribution of paintings within the home suggests that repeated viewing and extended contemplation was encouraged; areas where visitors would spend longer amounts of time, for instance a triclinium or tablinum, were often far more richly decorated than spaces used primarily for traffic, such as the atrium or fauces.⁹⁰ Due to the heteroglossic nature of Greek and Roman mythology (that is, its flexibility and adaptability), there is a colossal number of possible readings the viewer may find within a given composition. When allowing for the comparison and contrast among the paintings within a house, this number becomes almost infinite. As Leach puts it, “The strength of visual interrelationships overrides differences among story lines to the point where diverse stories contribute to a new synthesis.”⁹¹

⁸⁶ Van Buren also connects *pinacothecae* with the ancient text *Imagines* by the Philostrati, which employs an architectural analogy to present a series of myths; he also links the galleries to the late Republic and early imperial ostentation throughout the empire. A.W. Van Buren, “Pinacothecae: With Especial Reference to Pompeii,” *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 15 (1938): 70.

⁸⁷ Note the rooms theorized to be *pinacothecae* in the House of M. Lucretius Fronto meet several of his more particular specifications, including northwards orientation for even light throughout the day. Vitruvius 1.2.7, 6.5.1-2.

⁸⁸ Peters, *La Casa di Marcus Lucretius Fronto*, 403-6.

⁸⁹ Leach, *The Social Life of Painting*, 21.

⁹⁰ Clarke, *The Houses of Roman Italy*, 150.

⁹¹ Leach, *The Rhetoric of Space*, 363.

When a viewer faces two images, the formal similarities initiate examination of textual or thematic similarities, while formal dissimilarities have the opposite effect. Particular juxtapositions may be chosen to emphasize specific elements or reveal new details of a myth or character. The placement, subject matter, color palette, composition, and included or excluded aspects of each painting are not random, but ideological in nature. The viewer can interact with and deliberate on the painting to her degree of ability; the illiterate political client can at least understand the paintings on a basic level, while a senatorial dinner guest can appreciate the complex and highly educated arrangement of decoration in the house.⁹²

⁹² Leach, *The Rhetoric of Space*, 379.

Conclusion

The House of M. Lucretius Fronto was a bustling space, full of life and activity. A politician such as Fronto would have entertained guests regularly, and his home would have served as more than a place to eat and rest. It was a public, economic space, meant to display not only his personal wealth but the prosperity and power of his family. The *pinacothecae* throughout the ground floor of the home were likely only one of the methods employed to attain this goal; while the use of detailed, colorful, and popularly styled paintings show off the disposable income and tasteful inclinations of the owner on their own, they inevitably would have been combined with furniture, statuary, ceramics, cloth, and wood decorations that have disappeared. Even so, it is possible to ascertain from the available evidence that the owner and residents of this home were surrounded with examples of both proper and improper love and violence alongside the inevitability of fate. Following structuralist theories, the viewer can infer that these designs likely pulled from the dominant social and cultural order of the first century CE at Pompeii and possibly throughout the Roman Empire. Nevertheless, the explicit multivalence of the imagery combined with the “intellectual reanimation” of the viewer prevents even the most experienced scholar from successfully advancing any one set interpretation of the visual material preserved in this house.

These paintings were created to be more than simply seen: they were meant to be contemplated, engaged with, and argued over. They can serve this role now more than ever, but unfortunately many paintings at Pompeii, including those in the House of M. Lucretius Fronto, have suffered heavy damage from exposure and lack of preservation. Despite its importance, the cultural heritage of Pompeii is disappearing, making the work being done there more important than ever.⁹³ (Figs. 43-44) As Bergmann puts it: “That an artifact so paradigmatic and so often displayed is also so much dismembered, neglected, and forgotten can tell us much about the selective workings of a modern collective memory.”⁹⁴

⁹³ Sogliano’s excavation photographs of *Bacchus and Silenus* and *Pyramus and Thisbe* reveal the extent of deterioration in this house alone. <http://www.pompeii-sustainable-preservation-project.org/?lng=en>

⁹⁴ Bergmann, “The Roman House as Memory Theater,” 226.

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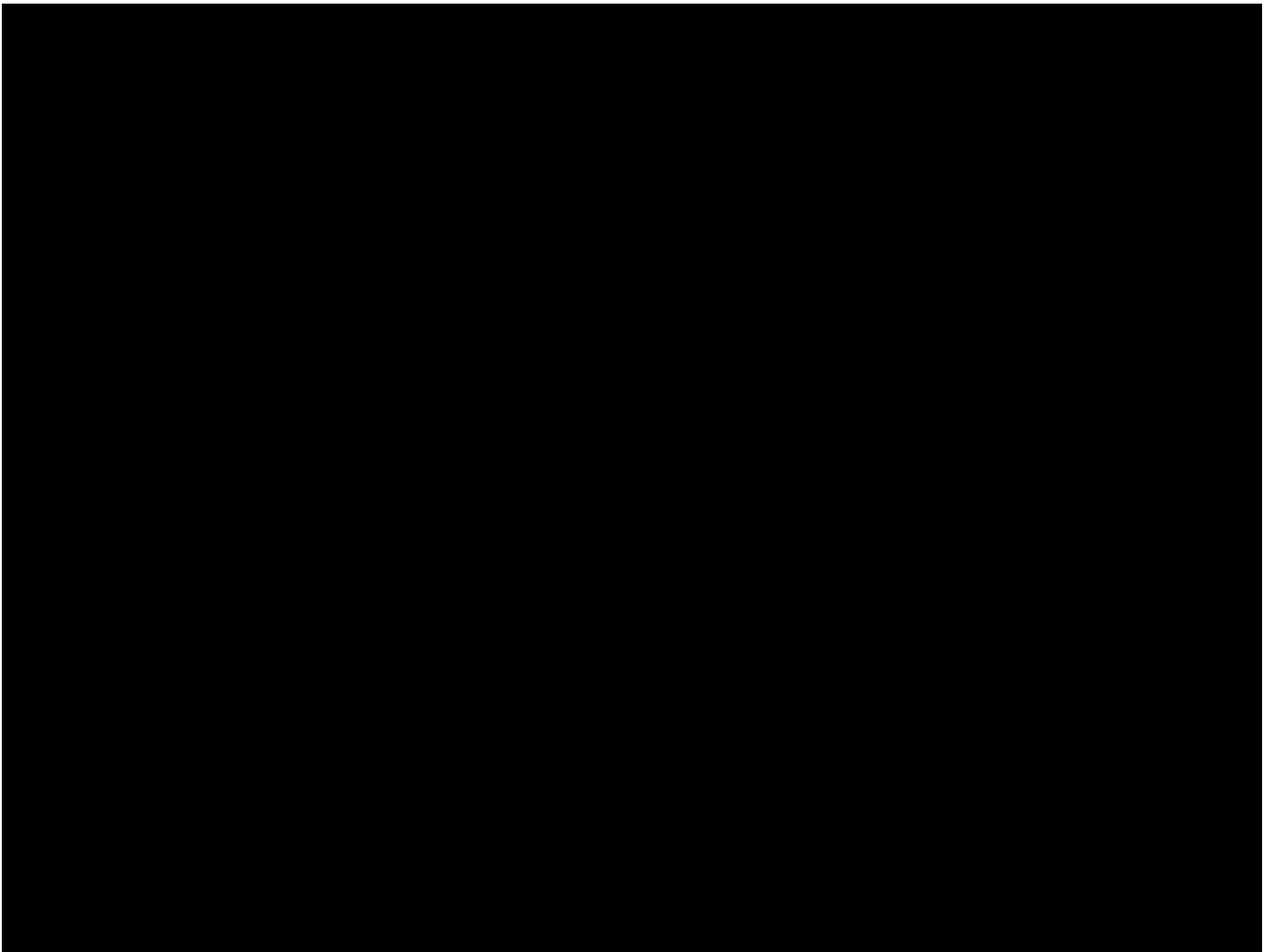
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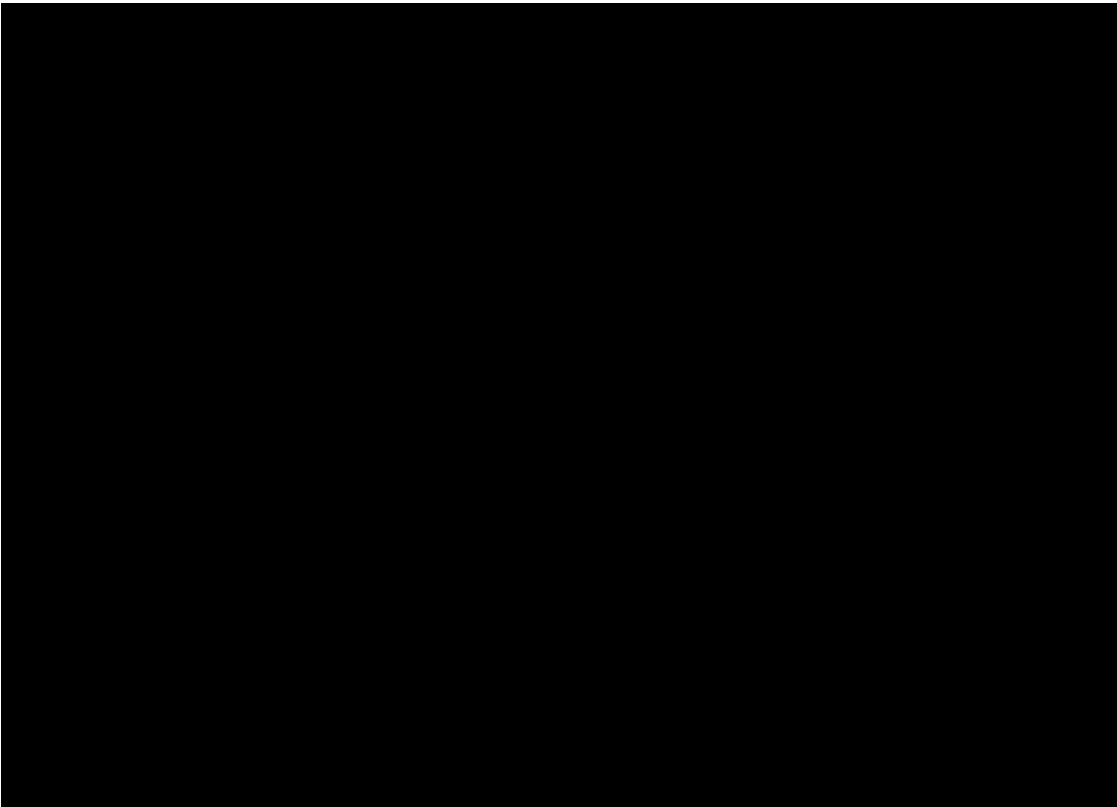
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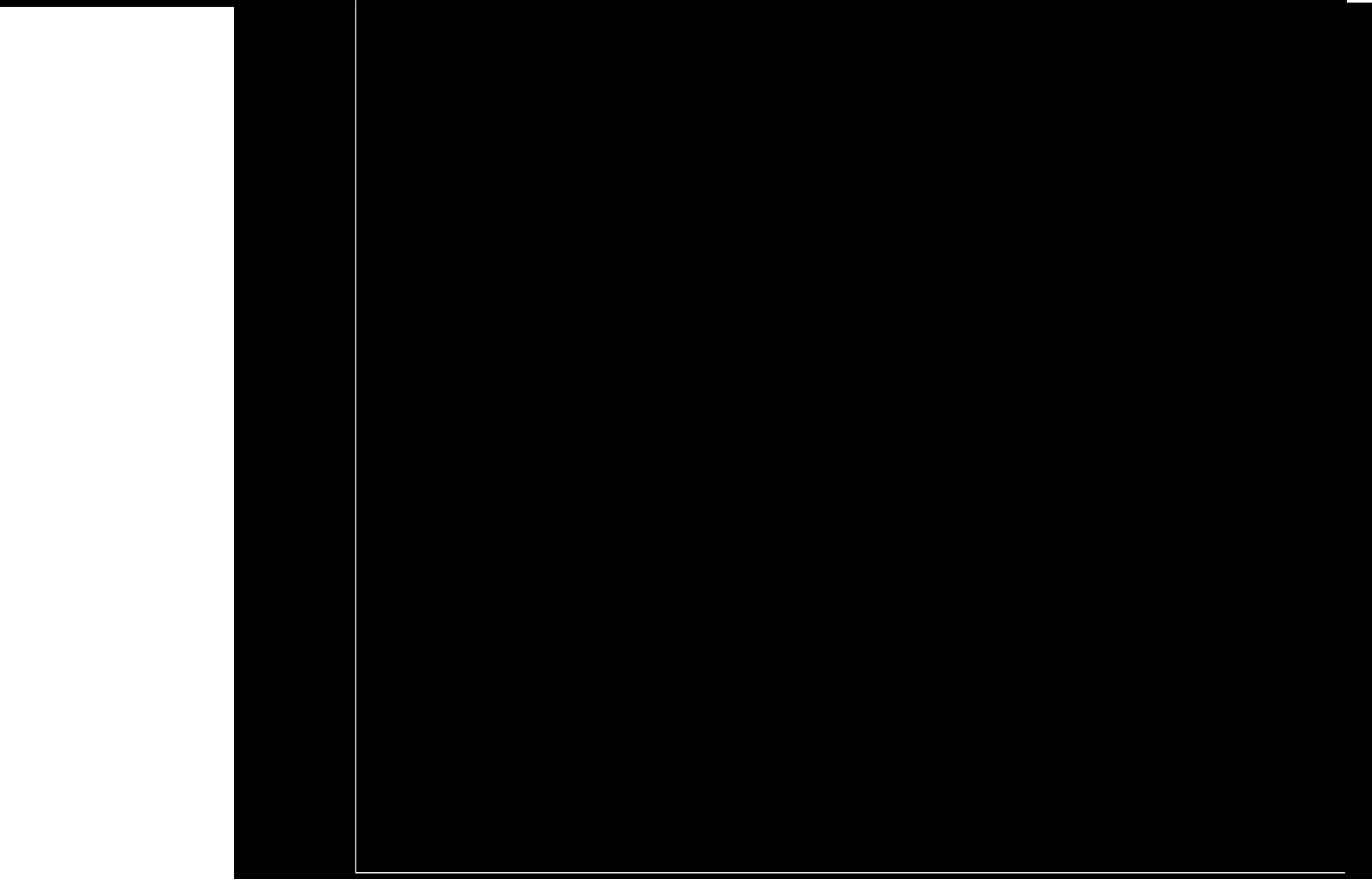
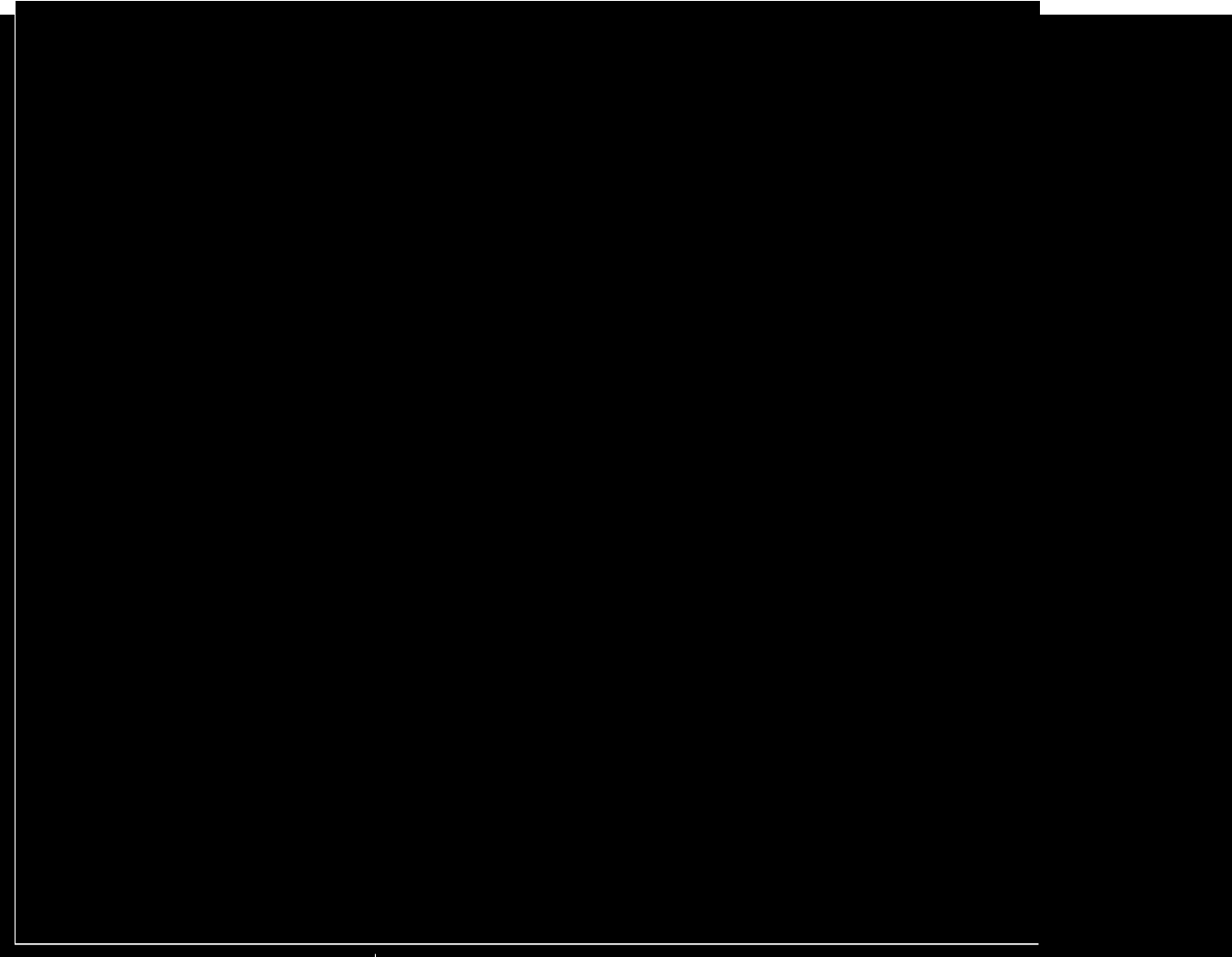
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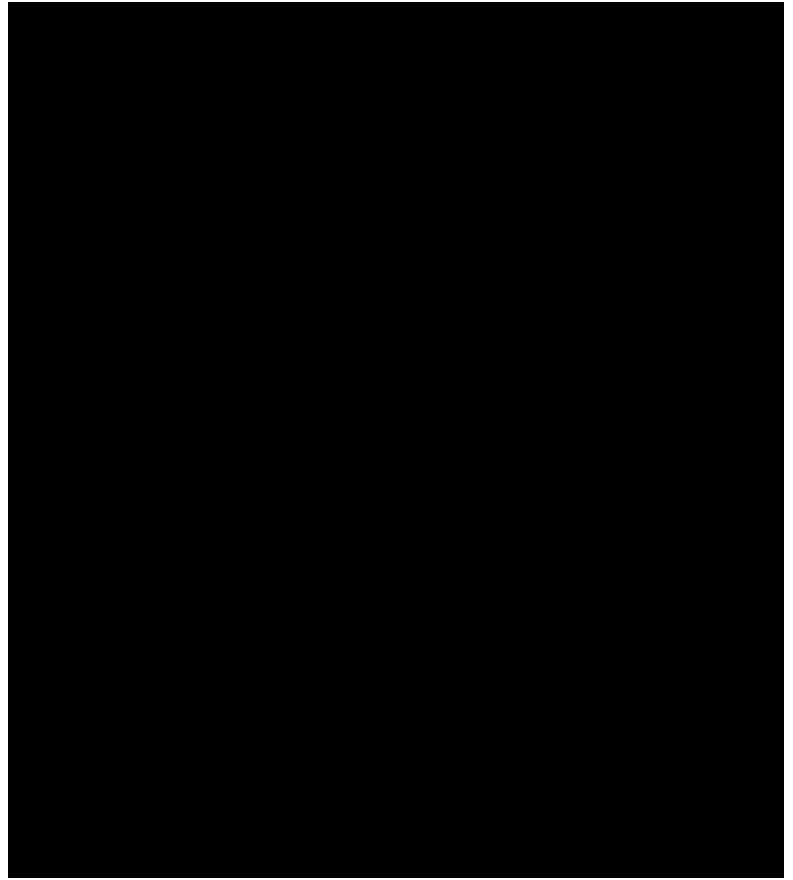
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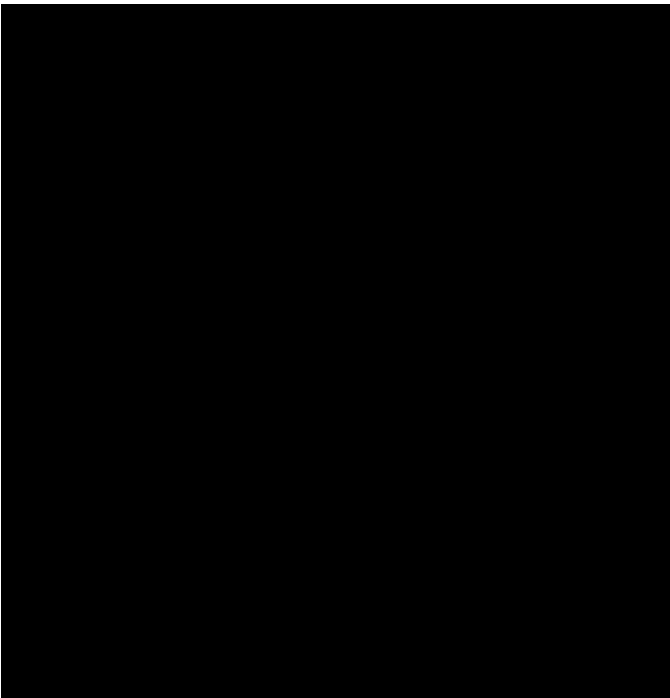




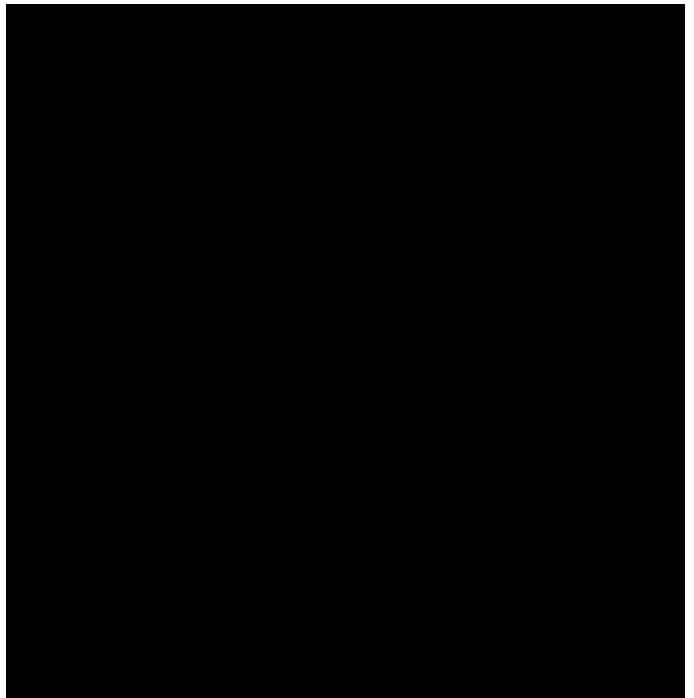
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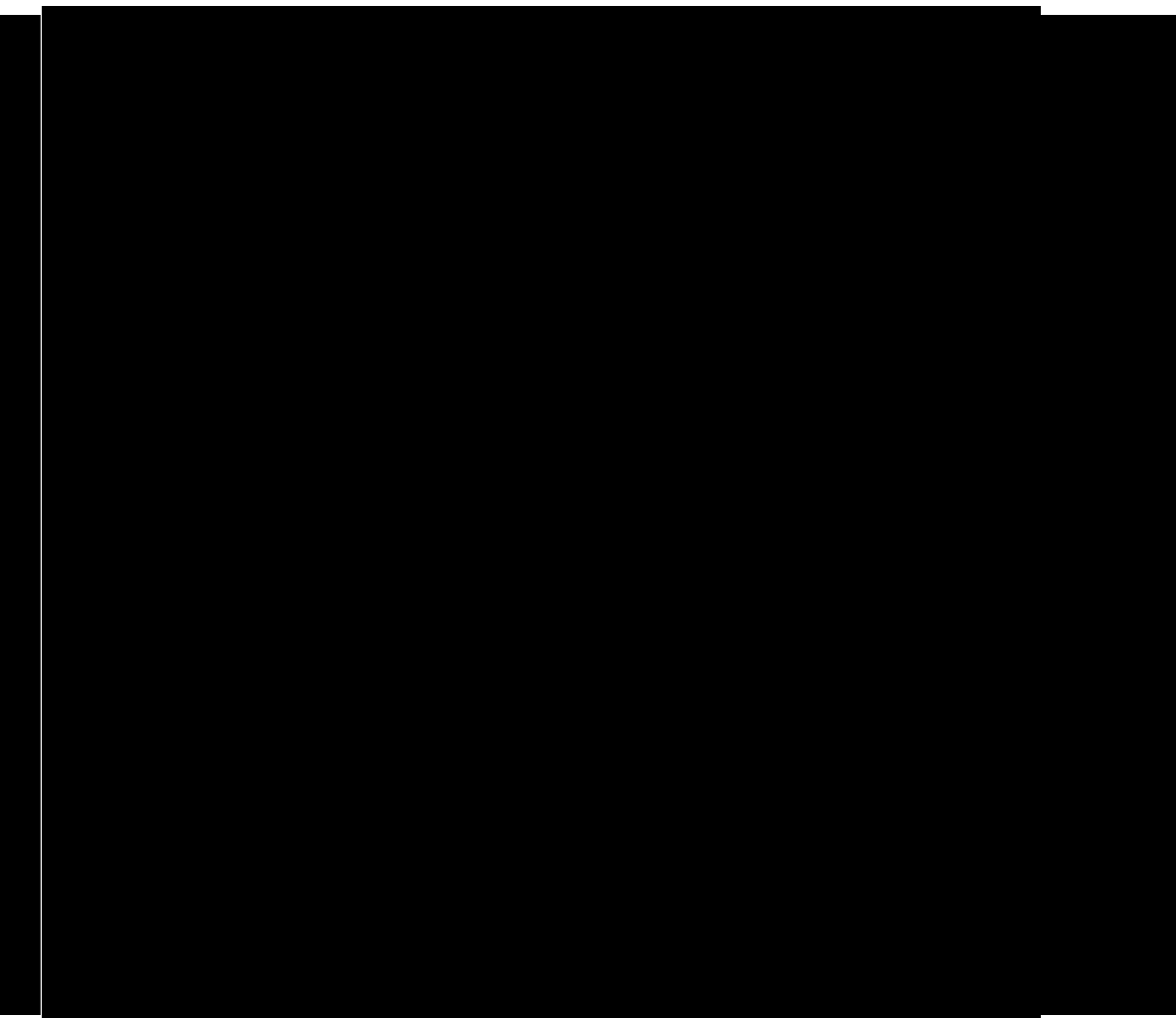


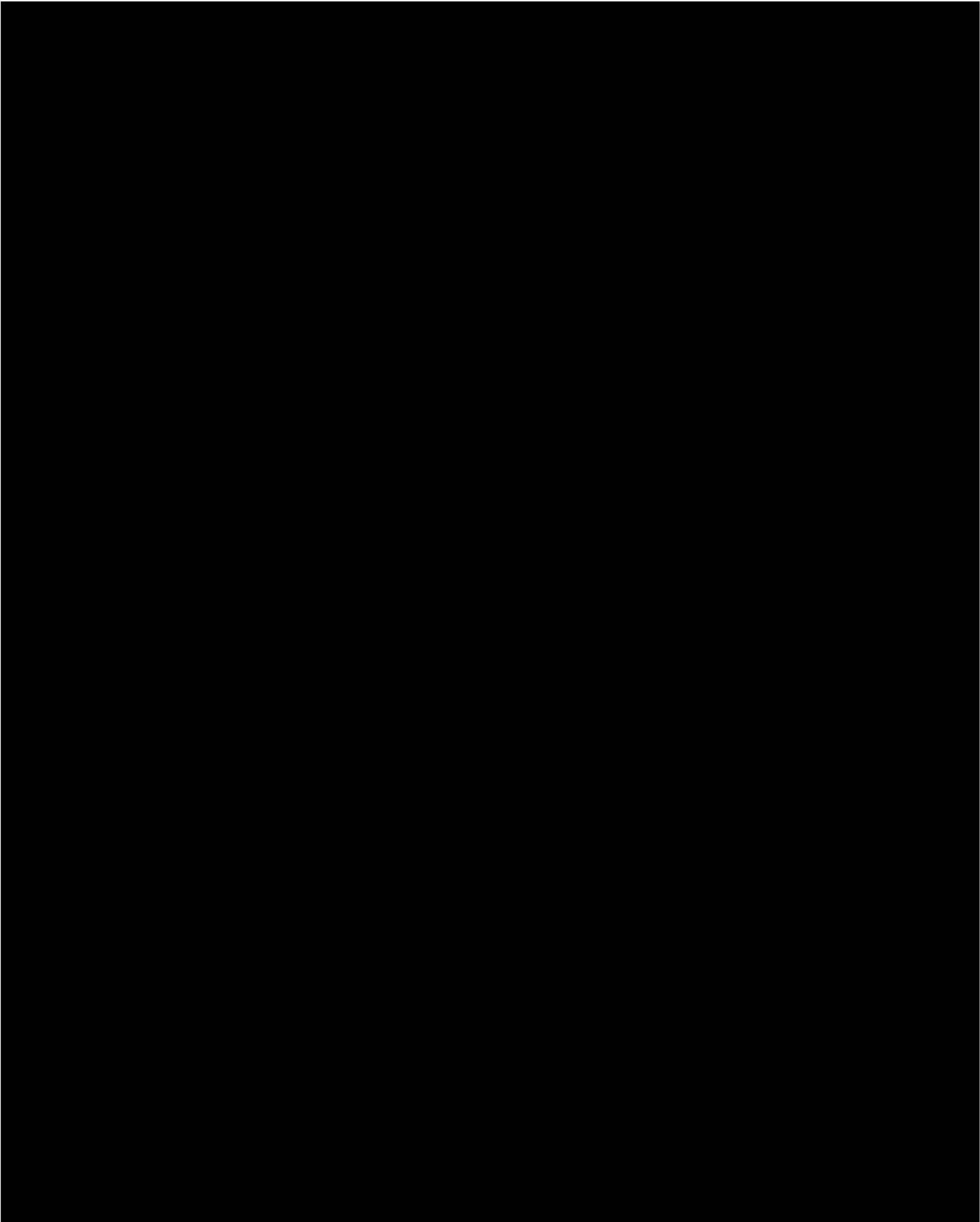
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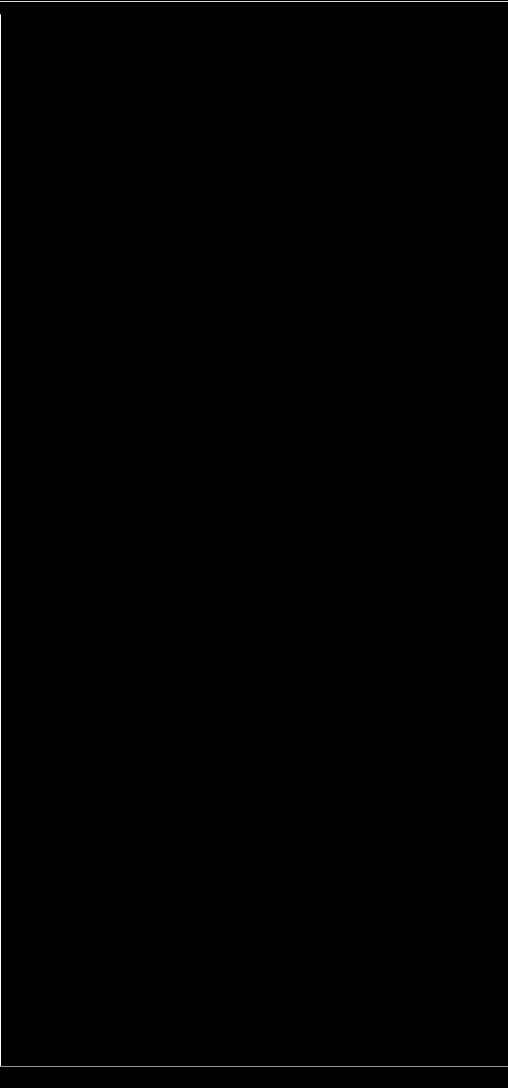
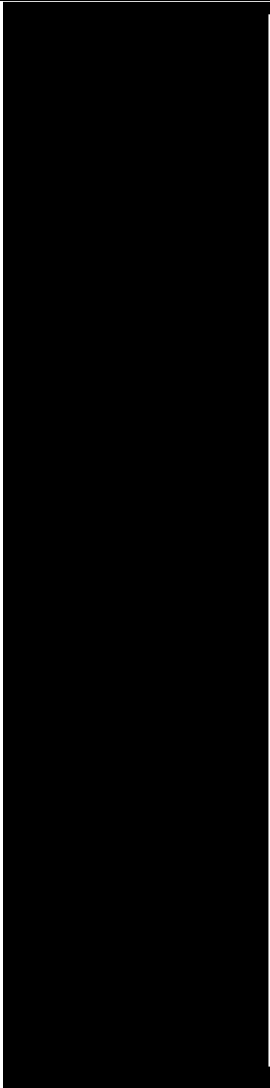
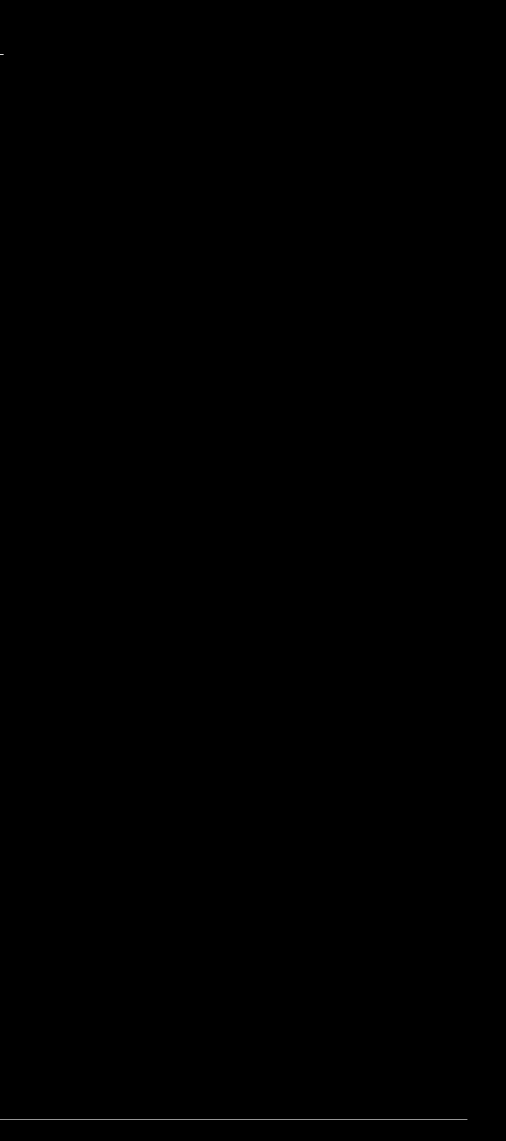
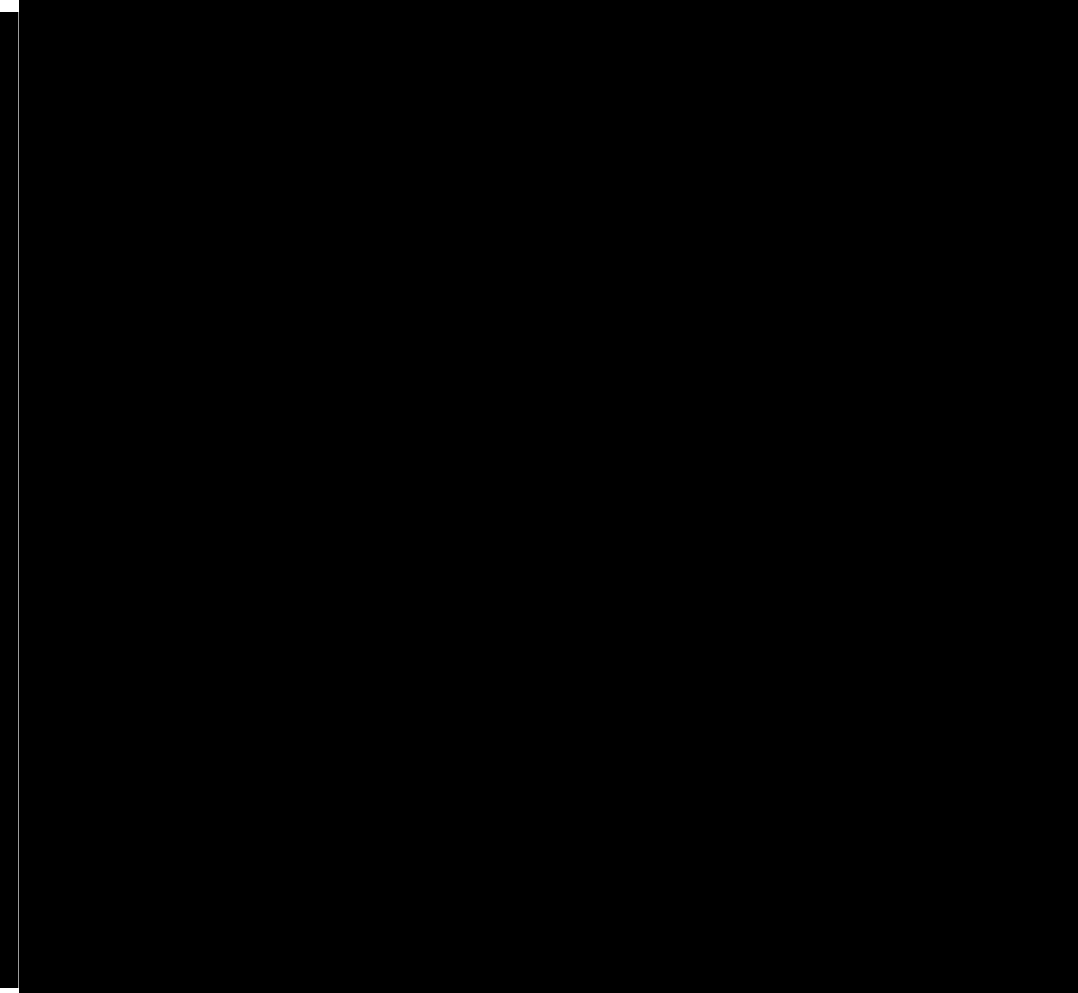


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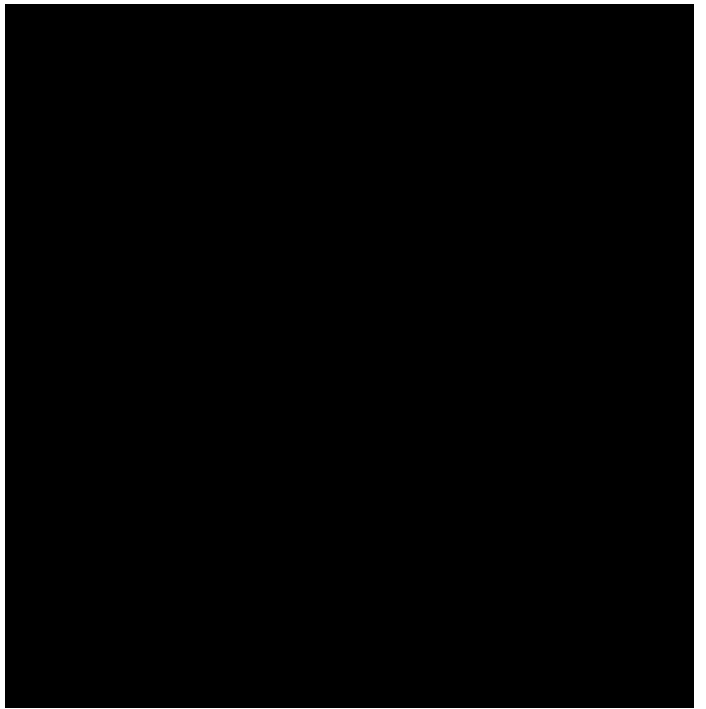




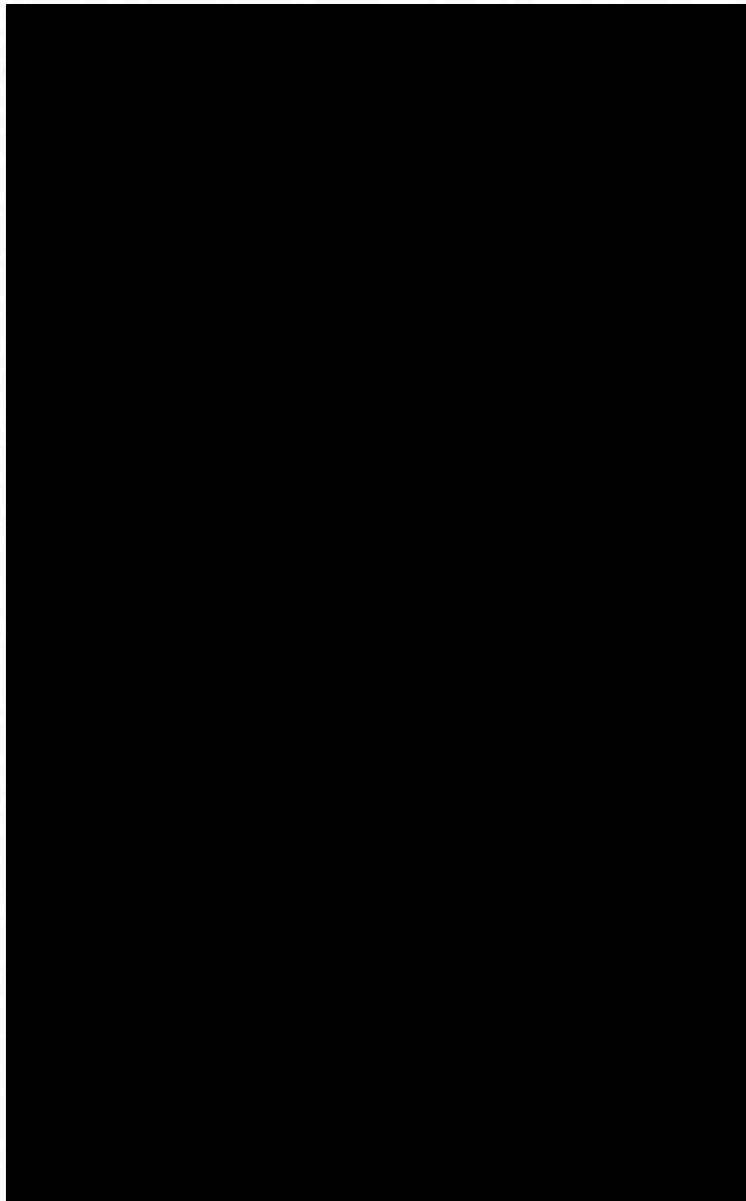
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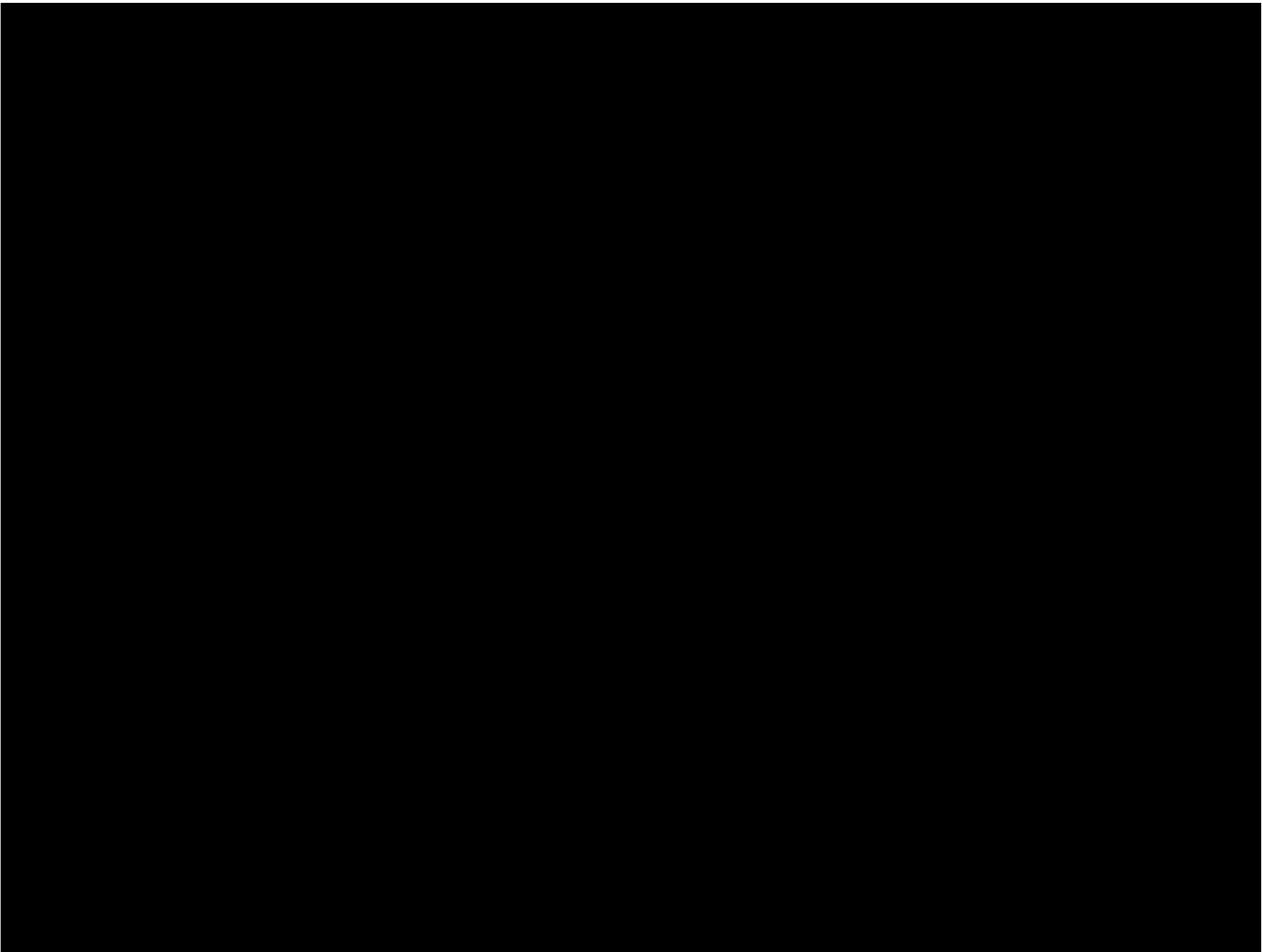
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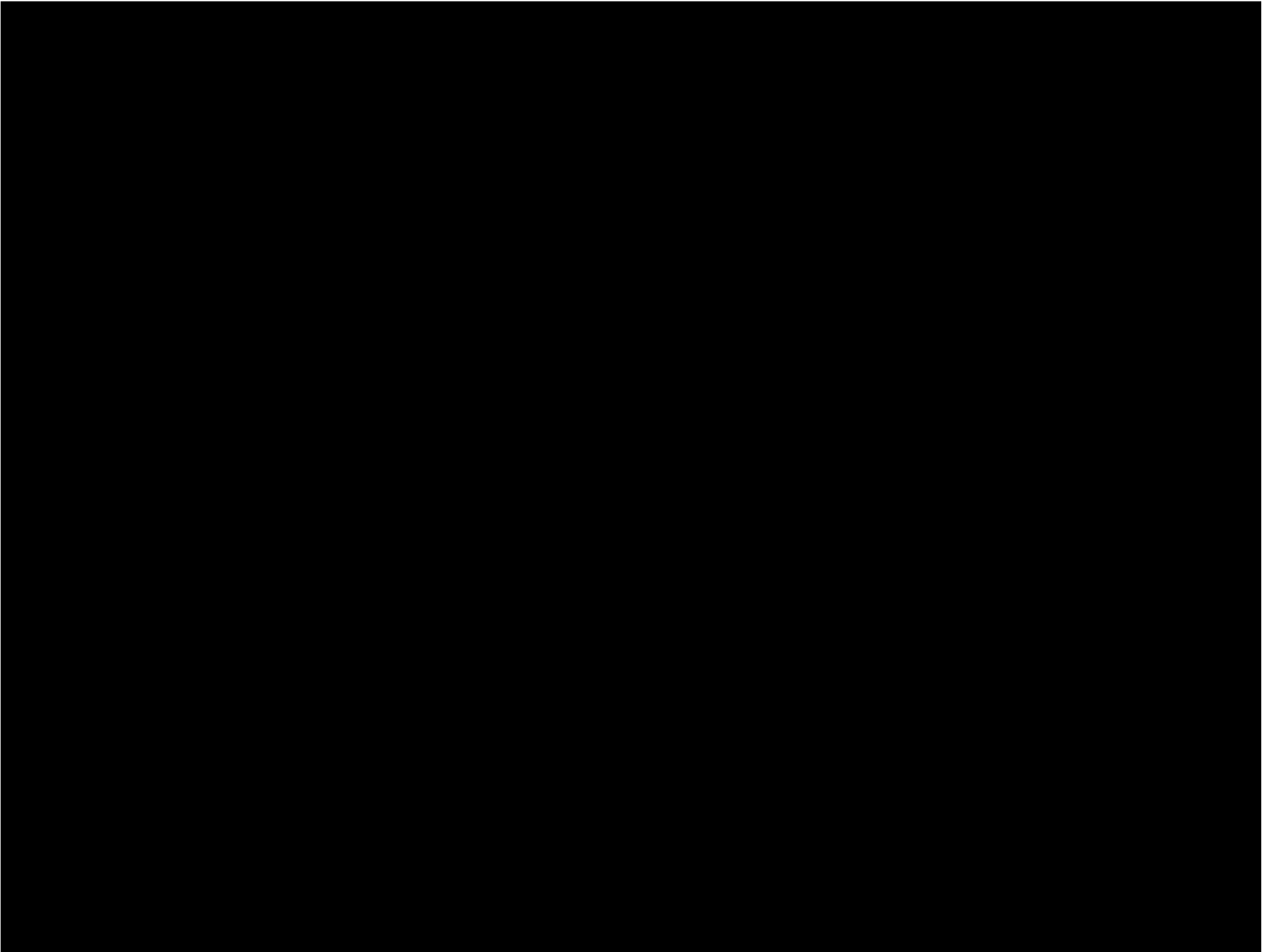
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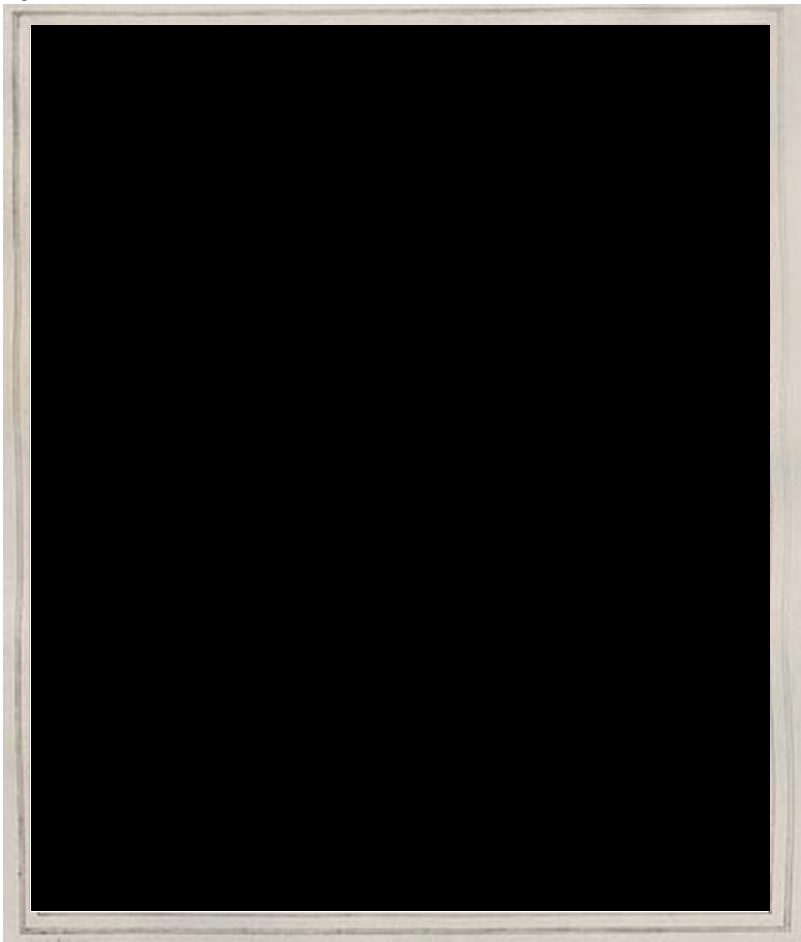
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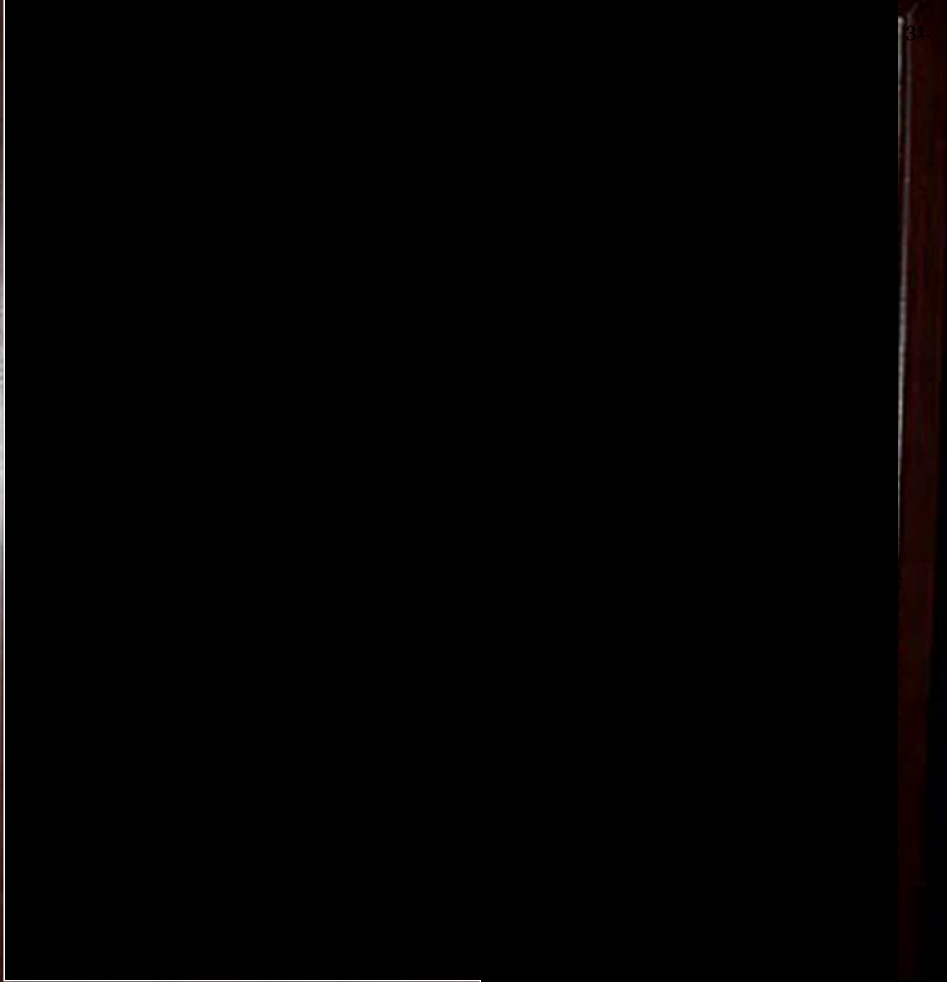


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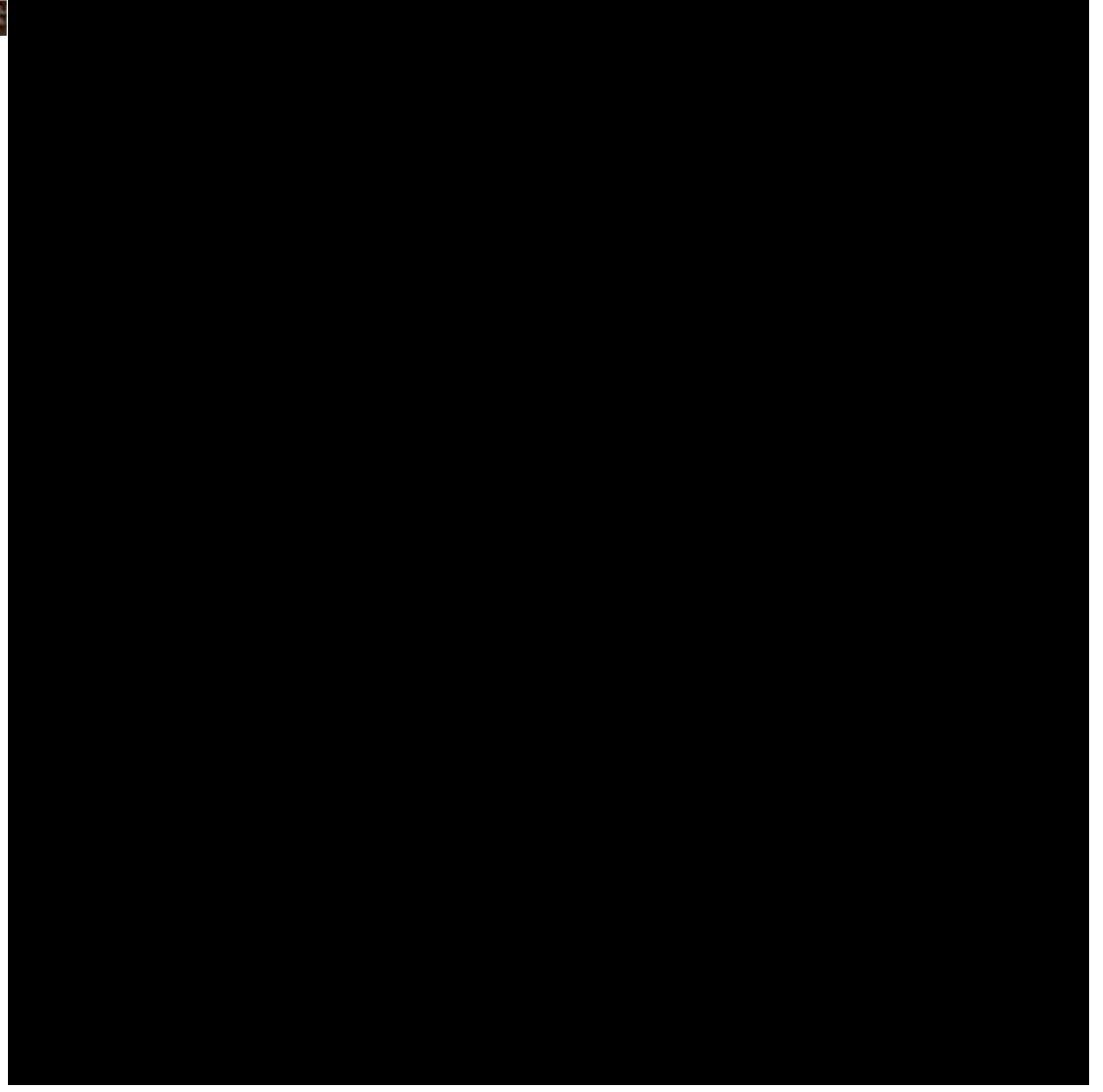




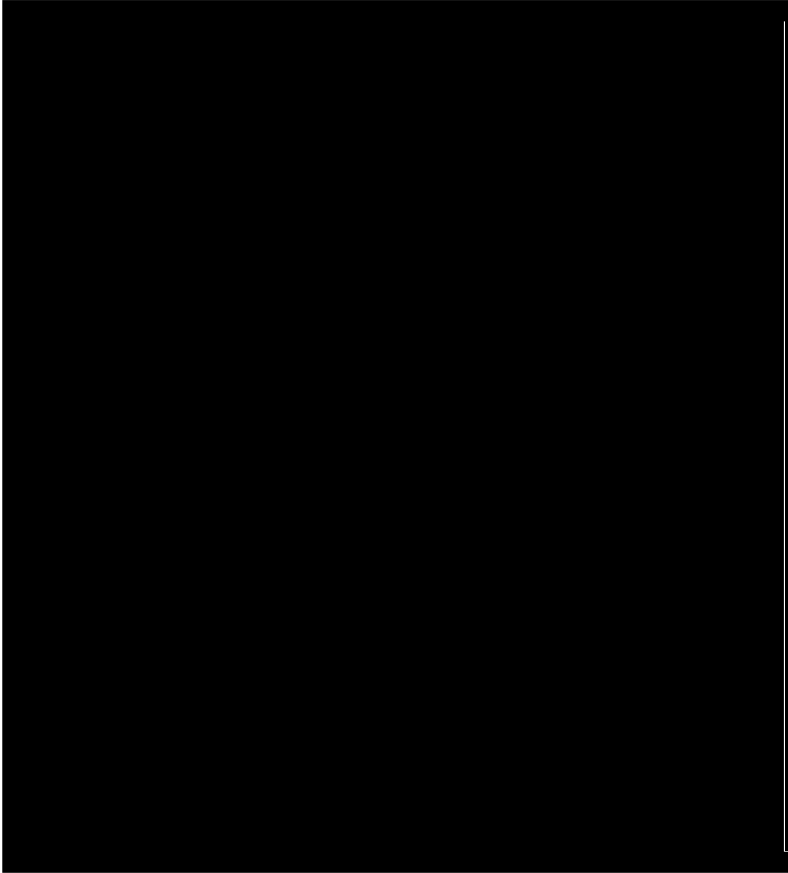


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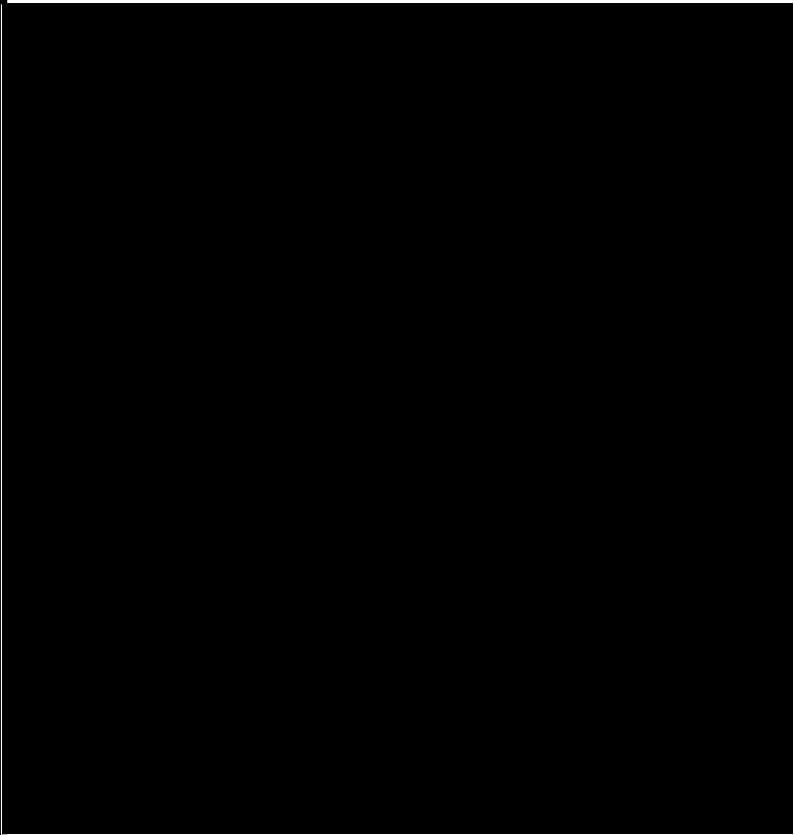
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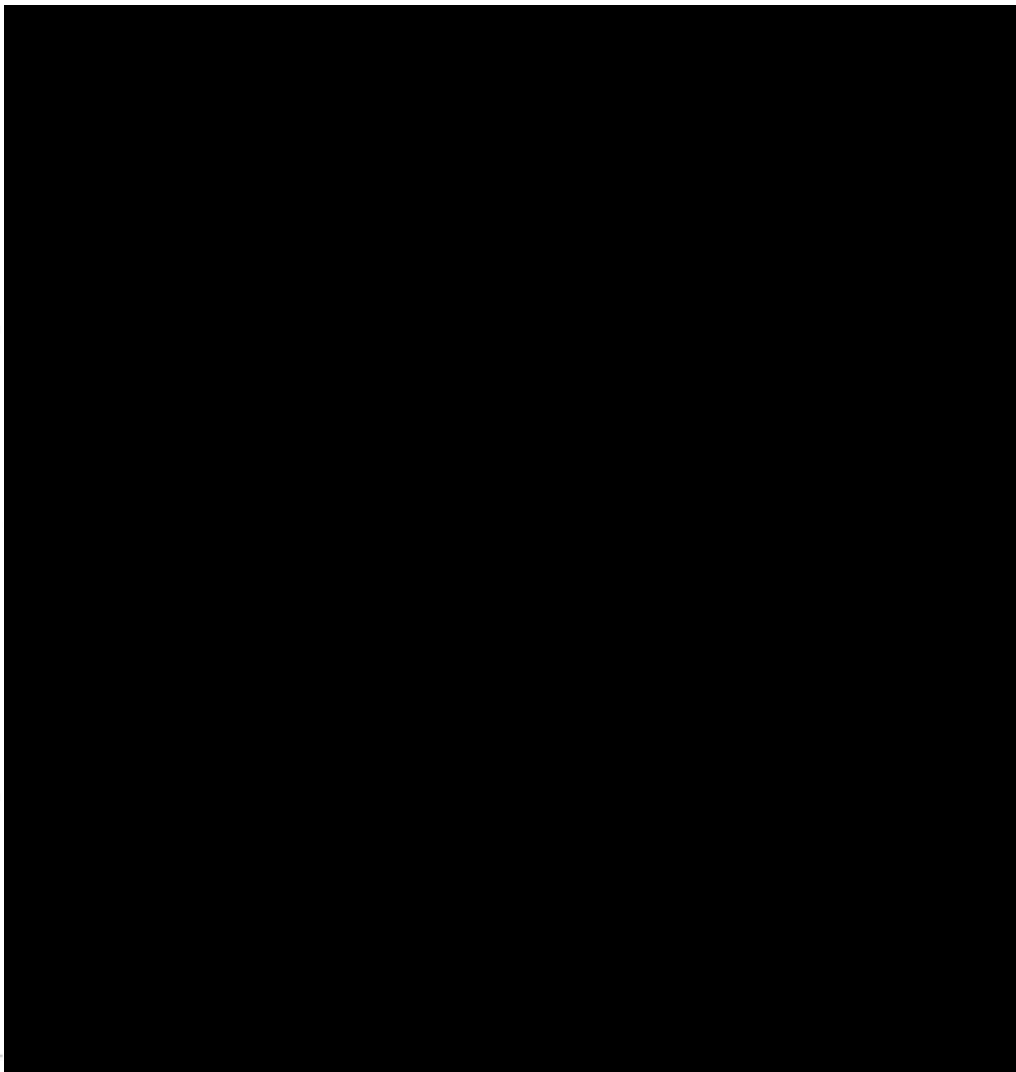
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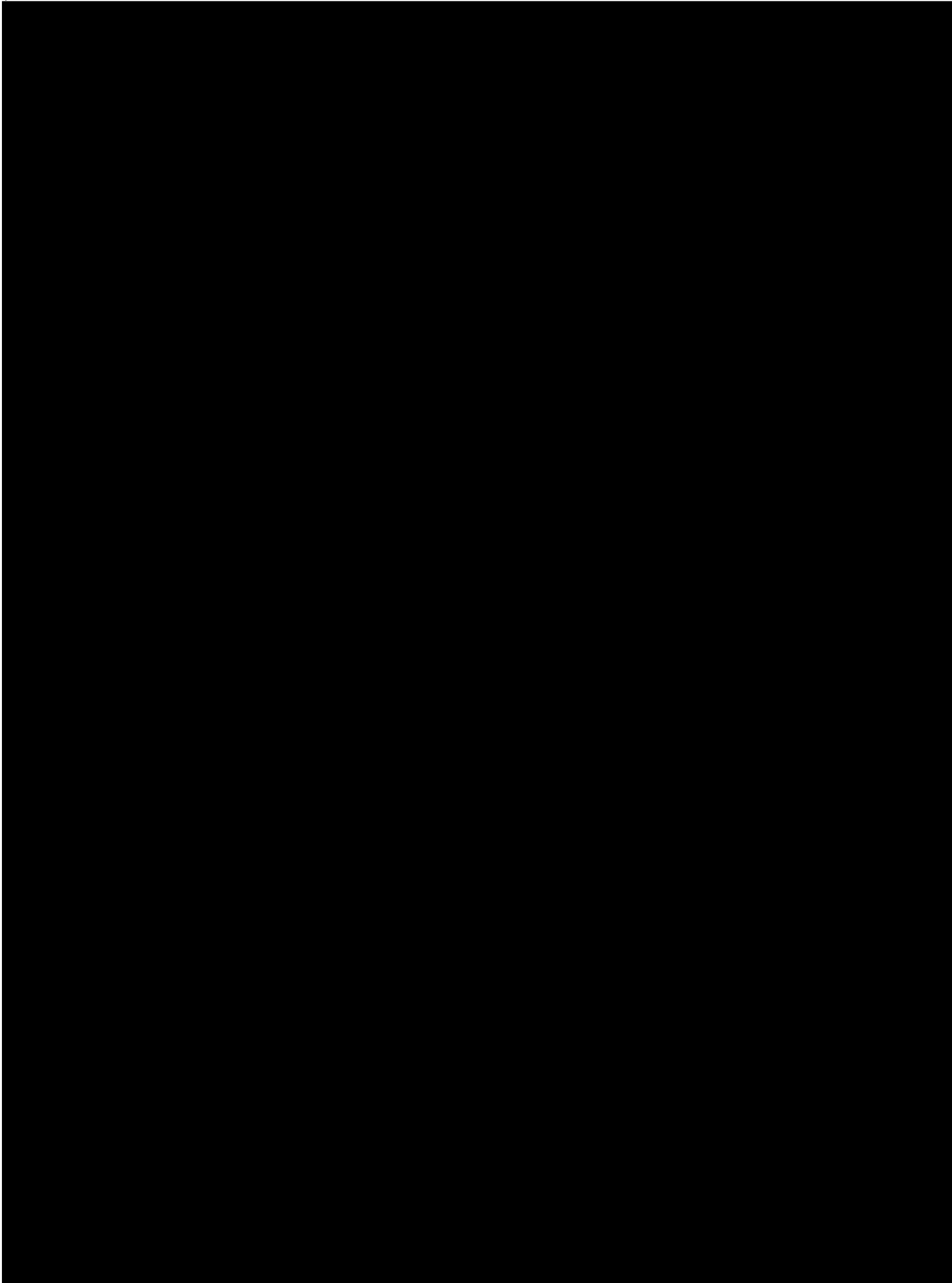


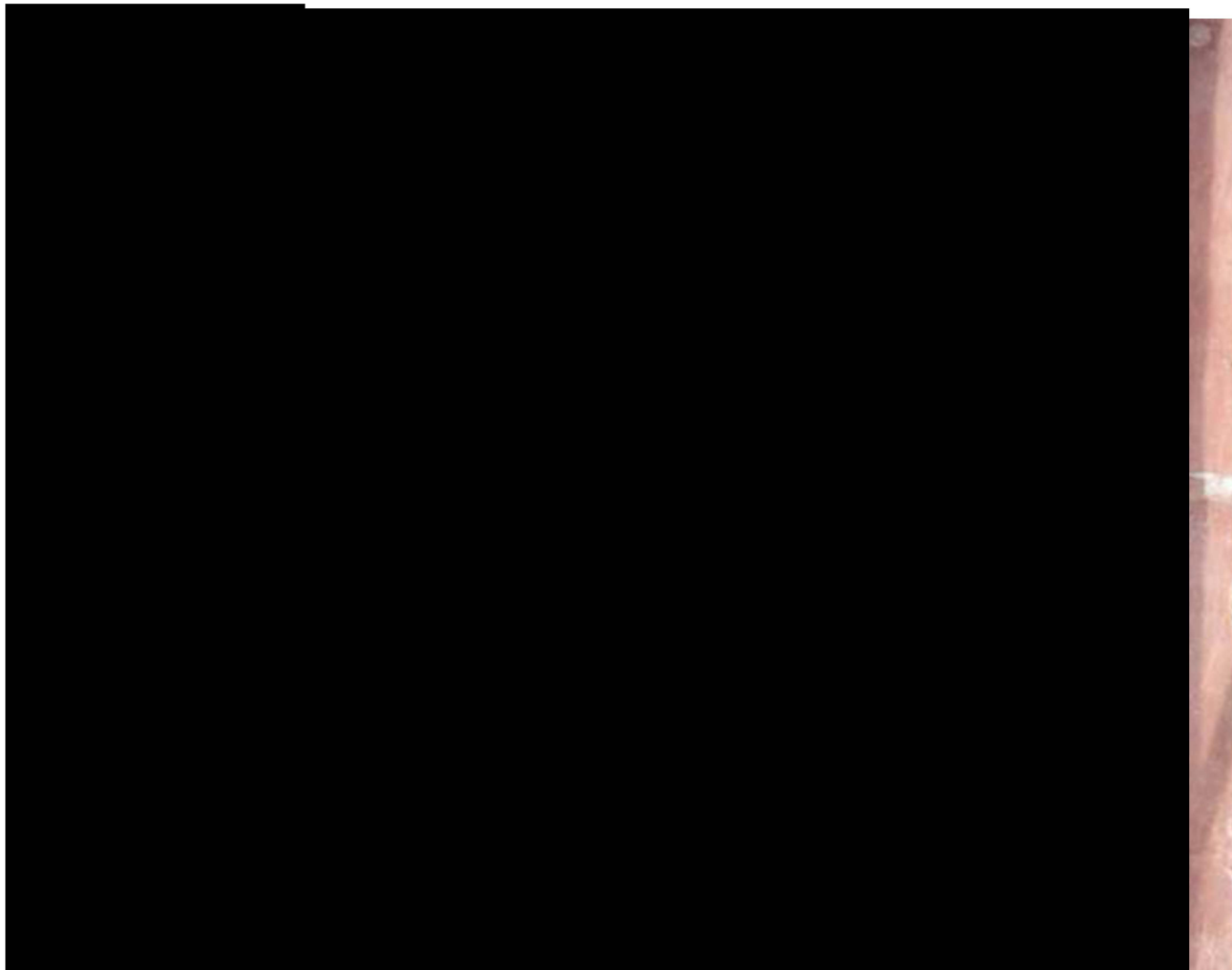
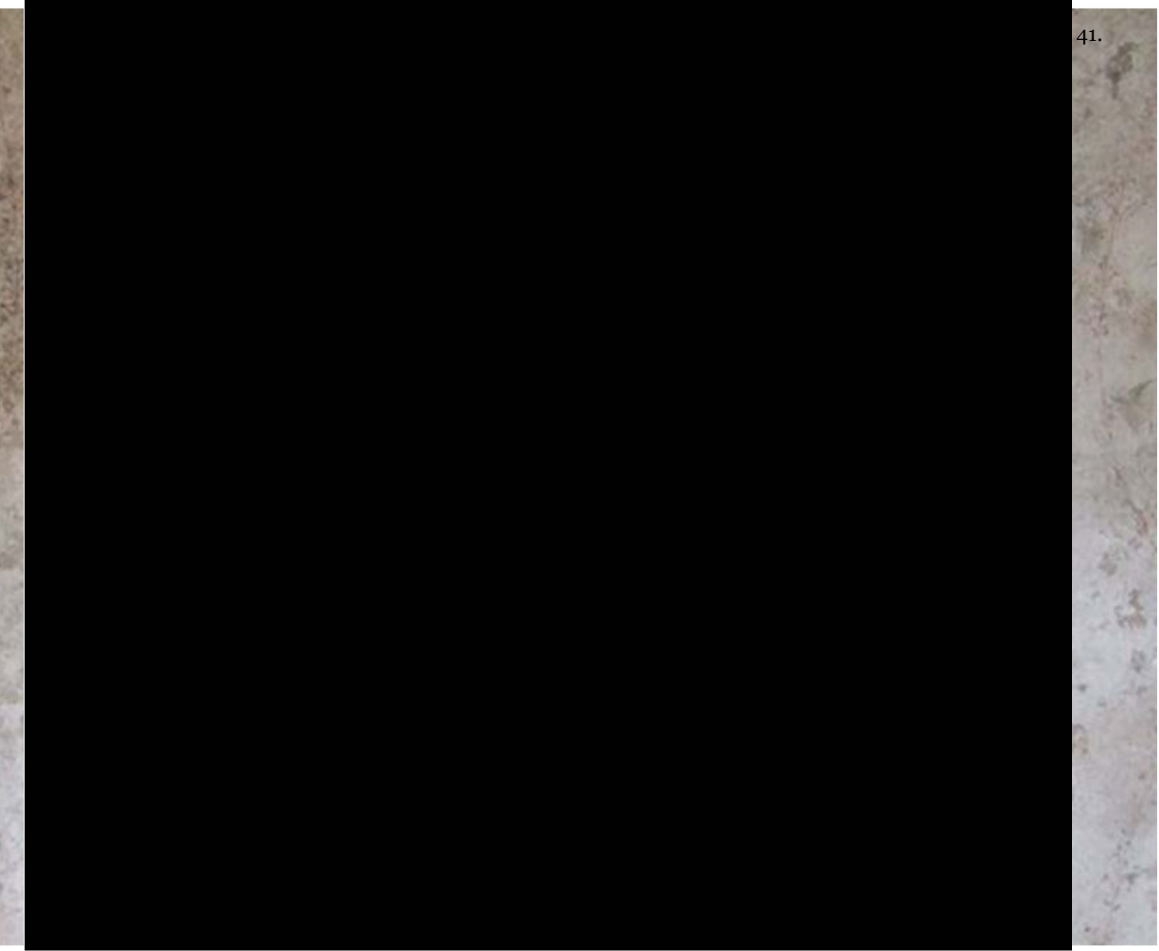
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