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THE AESTHETICS OF ARCHITECTURE
BEYOND FORM

Edited by Miško Šuvaković and Vladimir Mako

International Association for Aesthetics
Association Internationale d'Esthétique

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DOME BEYOND ITS LIMITS OR HOW DEEP IS YOUR LOVE¹

Jelena Mitrović and Vladimir Milenković

Abstract

Unlike other archetypal figures, a dome (gr.: *Θόλος / thólos*) could never be understood as an object. This does not mean that in this specific case the relevant understanding of architecture has reached its limits. This is an *absolute form*, a typological category creating the shape *par excellence*. Symbolically, it describes and establishes the limit of the relevant world, the celestial sphere, outside of which the shapeless abundance of space appears in the blue depth. Thus, the impression of the dome as a symbolic form is no longer associated with the matter – delusion arising from the habits of everyday language.

¹ This text is a part of tripartite study on the dome – architectural term associated with spherical geometry and sublimity as ontological feature of the form that corresponds methodological instance of absolute space. Morphological capacity of the dome is exposed in its etymology, which transposes the architecture of the sky, taking this shape as part of the whole and the whole within. The first of three parts, *The Architecture of Dome: Mapping the W/Hole*, explores the architectural capacity for geometric materialization of the sky in the age of virtual decomposition of shape into function of endless exposure to the unknown. The second text, *Architectural Sublime: Dome Above Dome* includes symbolic processing of the sublime architectural place, which equally to geometric distribution of the dome and linear character of its path determines the universal character of things. The central position of the third part, *Dome Beyond Its Limits or How Deep Is Your Love*, is given to the sensibility of the shapes questioned from the perspective of archetype, and its radiance becomes the expression of inability to round things up. Instead of beauty and the universal law of proportion, the first becomes the place of eccentricity and tension of personal spatial feeling. Therefore, today, instead of concave feeling for the space above, where historically speaking the dome is its geometric paragon, the position outside of the borders of the projection of the dome is marked by distancing in space and time expressed in increasing numbers.

We have been forced to request, whenever we hear the word shape that it needs to be the shape of something, thus, the that material substrate requires to be exported into something. In case of the dome, which in both Greek and Latin languages signifies *sky* or *hemisphere*, *celestial sphere*,² the possibility of the impression arising from the image of the object is lost, casting the doubt that we think of the shape, and not of its building material. The form as the limit of the highest rank brings us back to the repetitive observation of the distance where the idea of spatial depth is dematerialized. Outside of the range of the dome, on the other side of the border sometimes overstepped by architecture, there is the space that tries to escape from spherical geometry, offering chaos or endless transparency of the blue. Architecture achieves synthesis with all other forms once it is in antithesis with itself. It is confronts its main quality, reason, until security and geometric frozenness of the space start peeling, and the construction starts to show emotions and restlessness of the entire culture. Symbolically, the dome represents geometric border which melts with layers of color and light, and with occurrence of newly awaken love towards nature and structure of a period conscious of its own decline. The issue of lack of object is raised as the proposal of a new understanding of architecture, which cannot be separated from the subject, selecting the cases from the history of architecture where the space ceases to be a rational measure, transcending to the feeling that radiates arched surfaces. It is interesting how in its enigmatic immanence, the character of these compositions has remained permanently contemporary.

I Introduction to Beyond

In the context of the architecture oriented towards infinity, the Pyramid at the Grand Louvre in Paris, designed by I.M. Pei, 1983, represents the paradigmatic expression of unlimited opening of culture, as well as

²Θόλος / (thólos) m (plural θόλοι): (architecture) dome, vault; (astronomy) vault, sky; (anatomy) body cavity. (lat.): *tholus*, *hemisphaerium*, *convexum*; above the dome: *ecce in firmamento*.

an expression of internal aggregation - the symbol of integration and convergence. As per historical rule of repetition, the arts of the world are united in a common house, where the *roof* or the *overhead sky*, resembling the immense universe, can no longer be embraced. The simplest and perfect picture of synthesis such as the pyramid, designed to simultaneously represent both the structure and the sign - the shape and the moment of its decomposition, in the night sky against the dark arch, becomes the very shape of the light. It is not just a reflection of Egyptian eternal monuments that evoke geometric image of the constellations, reminding us that the Earth is also one of the stars. Construction of the first pyramids was an expression of the unconscious synthesis in humans, so it remains the symbol of unity in ascension. With civilization stepping forward to the new millennium, the optical figure of construction becomes the driving force of the construction of space - morphology that is not dynamic in itself - starting from the shape that symbolizes stability, but also takes on dynamic features by opposing everything traditionally perceived as static. The Museum Hall has been the scene of cultural treasure enclosed in gallery "boxes", but as of now, it will play the role of a driving force that, as a symbol of individuality, inner outlook on the word, strengthens the ideas of development of personal and collective consciousness.

The transparent pyramid in the Louvre stands as a metaphor for mapping of the celestial depth, perceptually disjointed and heterogeneously represented, but mystically or metaphysically united arch, since the structure of the dome literally symbolized the *mathematical* or *philosopher's sky*, and the best example of it in the old world was the Pantheon (Pantheon, Rome, 113–125 AD), by bringing all the gods together.

In the new era, Brunelleschi's dome over the Florence Cathedral (Santa Maria del Fiore, 1420-1436) overtopped the hills around the city, much like the perspective machine depicting space as a whole and united. Its architect Pei insisted on removing the roof of this structural pyramid,

making it entirely from translucent glass, in order to make it seem more ephemeral, weightless, as the basic element of architecture entering the weightless state, revealing the modern gap between individual and civilization, the tension towards the personal and subjective experience, as opposed to the objective certainty of mathematical reason. At the same time, the loss of mass signifies the loss of the center, the decline of perspective, the escape of figures in space and time, the unstoppable opening and disappearing in the depth of the vault without objects. This is the iconic equivalent of the necessary eccentricity of the modern man's place of existence. (**Frame 1**)



Frame 1. Only Lovers Left Alive. Jim Jarmusch. 2013. 01:04:54

Frame 2. The Dreamers. Bernardo Bertolucci. 2003. 00:35:57

Refusing to make a precise choice between opposite values, Pei realizes its structure so that it lives eternally in duplicity and destabilizing of the effects. Metaphysical character of the Louvre pyramid reflects much like the art of Amarna, creating a connection between the “capital of modernity” and the new city built by Akhenaten, a pharaoh *intoxicated by the love of God* as a pure spirit. He believed the God to be radiating light and warmth in all beings, and he chose the artistic symbol of the sun that vertically casts its rays to represent it.

In a city ruled together by Akhenaten and Nefertiti, which, like the sight of dawn,³ was placed on untouched land that had not known another god before, unlike traditional Egyptian temples and their hypostyle halls, the spacious new sanctuaries were open to the sky and were lit by the sunlight. The civilization of Amarna lasted barely a hundred years. During this time, pharaoh, who called himself the *servant of Aten*, who was not only the first individualist but also the first modernist in the world history, made a Turn, thus the new art directly confronted the rigidity of the official style. He literally transformed naturalism into an art program, along with his personal struggle against the priests, the guardians of the gigantic edifice of the past and the entire religious tradition. The figures from this period reflect the assertion that the old approach towards the proportions is dead, because displaying and building in those proportions relied on their progress on separation from sensibility, while they (since) oscillate between the world of senses and thinking, never confronted with the analyzed object, but always in a self-contained movement, making entire wall surfaces radiant on their own and detached from the center. (**Frame 2**)

A newfound love for truth was discovered in the Thutmose Art Atelier (1350 BC) when the bust of Queen Nefertiti was found, as an unfinished and thus even more contemporary profile of a woman with the immanence of the gaze which, as a suggestion of a new anthropology, expressed the moment when the subjective experience of the reality became more real than the apocryphal truth of the eternity. This uncompromising sensitivity and intellectual tension of the portrait is equated with the smile of Mona Lisa, (the one who rules the Louvre), but the spatial sense of relief of the Akhenaten's era is closer to the experience of the visual impressionist. In this instance, the language that can defeat the unstable state of reality transforms a character into an intellectual operation of artistic contours that fades under the superior

³ The city was called Akhenaten (or Akhenaton - transliterations vary) which meant "the Aten's (or solar) horizon". Akhenaten intended to move the Pharaoh's tombs to the royal Amarna valley on the east side of the Nile, as the symbol of dawn, instead of the west coast that used symbolize evening and sunset.

order of things. The glass pyramid, as it maps the celestial depth, symbolizes the decay of the visible horizon - the temporal and spatial release of the building sinks with the loss of its ontological core and the awareness that by glancing at the stars one may face its own finality. Akhenaten's migration to modern times, which ended with the dawn and dusk of monotheism, is unmatched in a history marked by love for the world, even if we can only see it from the position of eternal beauty.

II Dome, Inside the Beyond

In the time of decadence of the Renaissance artistic forms, English Poet John Donne wrote: "*And, O, it can no more be questioned, that beauty's best proportion is dead*",⁴ thus approaching the beauty in a Baudelaire way, recognizing it in the constructive and compositional decomposition of the rational world. In architectural sense, the structure of that world was represented by a sphere. The art that reflected the disharmonies of space, expressing the forms that contradicted their own stability, contained the first account of its end. At that moment, the allegory of the night sky came to life in the architecture of the dome, and the design of space was dominated by the pictorial principle of fresco painting, which in the medieval Serbian tradition was known as *biographical painting*. Painting space comes to life whenever a rational measure of architecture, achieved and organized by the laws of perspective, loses its significance for historical reasons. It is replaced by a decentralized art form, forced to slide in the world of metaphor, and to move between two stylistic worlds, belief in a being and belief in an illusion.

⁴And, O, it can no more be questioned, / That beauty's best proportion is dead, / Since even grief itself, which now alone / Is left us, is without proportion. [*An Anatomy of the World: The First Anniversary* (305), John Donne (1572–1631). *The Poems of John Donne*. 1896.]

Such a turn occurred in Manasija, the endowment of Despot Stefan Lazarevic,⁵ one of the last masterpieces of a long medieval construction tradition that ceased with the breakthrough of the Ottoman Empire. The more the forts of Manasija became stronger and harder, in comparison to its predecessors, and the more its exterior was reduced to stable, simple, rigorously treated walls, the more its interior became vividly sparkling and shimmering with golden-blue, linear fresco style, called ephemeral by many critics in relation to the traditional, Byzantine, archetypal way of portrayal. They are dominated by dark blue and gold, the colors that more than others facilitate, open and dissolve shapes. Surfaces cease to be surfaces (walls and vaults), dematerializing in the night blue revived by the stars, haloes and entanglements of moved figures.

Blue, which is the least material of all the colors,⁶ has the capacity to dematerialize everything it encloses, optically breaking down the opaque surface of the wall and transforming it into a pure effect of depth. In its night-dark blue, it symbolizes what the pyramids signified on Earth in their perfect geometry - the path to infinity, the transition to a dream, or the transposition from the real to the imaginary. As an immovable area, or the territory of the unreal, imagination and dream, the interior of Manasija in itself resolves the contradictions of the architecture of a distinctive construction style, born in a state that loses its power from the outside forces. Fearless and indeterminate everywhere but within, the space under the dome loses its architectural and structural features in the play with its golden and linear scenes, as the *celestial cap* loses its shape against the blue expanse of the night sky.

We are facing the denial of belonging to this conflicting world for the sake of a peaceful Eternity that is superhuman or inhuman. One can easily imagine the conceptual creator of this building under its vault,

⁵ Manasija or Resava (1407-1418), the despot of Stefan Lazarevic's despot Sedan selected the most significant memories of the Serbian high school and determined the civic culture that remained called "Moravian Enterprise."

⁶ Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (Auckland, NZ: The Floating Press, 2008), 83.

and, as described by Kandinsky, “the power of profound meaning is found in blue, and first in its physical movements (1) of retreat from the spectator, (2) of turning in upon its own center. The inclination of blue to depth is so strong that its inner appeal is stronger when its shade is deeper.”⁷ Golden light that penetrates this matrix is a symbol of knowledge, of truth, of earthly immortality. Instead of the natural penetration of moonlight, the golden color of the interior becomes the medium and weapon of light, which is the ambivalent preciousness of a lone subject, the artist on the shaky grounds, but his eyes raised to the stars.

Manasija surpassed other churches of Morava School of Architecture in its height: its proportions are elongated in style, and the walls supporting the dome, representing, according to the symbolism of architectural forms in Orthodox monasteries, columns that “hold the sky above the earth”, lose the mass at the expense of the depth of color and pictoriality of moved figures, sinking into the simulation of new scenes instead of the archetypal roundness of form.⁸ In the fourteenth century, instead of forms radiating mystical immanence, the painting composition became a factor of the whole, due to which the principle of interior space presents the necessity to replace the illusion for what it is. Together with the certainty of rational perception of the world, the principle of the identity of spatial structure and static balance disappears, where each form had its place in the construction, and strict, geometric spatial form was the only substance where the sublime could be recognized and gifted to the world.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ The vault itself loses that golden wholeness of the world in which, according to the example of Hagia Sophia, even after Roman pantheistic times, the dome represented the sky and space as the only whole. Although this space was degeometrized, moving from rational to mystical treatment, the new immanence of gold fulfilled the game of symbols and made them even more interconnected. The dome of Hagia Sophia, which would become a distinguished model of the Orthodox temple, was the pinnacle of the volumetric unity of the radiant and composite space, which led Proclus Lycaeus to make a new definition of space as nothing but the finest light.

Manasija is dominated by the principle of similarity, duplication of the interior in itself, where former wholeness was transferred to the realm of imagination and separation - the principle of similarity, twice the separation of signs and reality, is used in biographical painting and poetry that encompasses it with its being.⁹ Manasija is not the lone case in the history of architecture when the painting took on the role of a formative element of the interior space of the dome, and instead of static construction created the effect of transparency of archetypal surfaces, negating their rational form, filling them with revived scenes. However, it is one of the most beautiful examples of this in the Serbian region, thanks to its patron and its chivalrous and poetic view of the world. The melancholy of this view is at the expense of the individual spirit, taking on the task of delaying the inevitability of the downfall of an empire.

Despot Stefan, who himself was a poet, seemed to have adopted a view of the troubled artist's world and rid himself of the burden of great prospects. Decentralization of the state had already taken place, when the stability of the medieval space disappeared and the surfaces dematerialized with gold spoke of everything that could have been archived, such as the supply for the future objective moment of history, whether as a technique or religion, science, law or art. **(Frame 3)**

Could architecture really have been so free-spirited as to dare to disrupt its own order created by centuries of upgraded builders' knowledge and everything that was perceived as rational? The architectural light of Manasija does not depend on realistic lighting, but on the structure that it produces in conjunction with the effect of the moving composition of the frescoes, reflections that gold, as the technique of light itself, leaves on the dark blue background. On the other hand, its facades do not shine white color due to the material as much as due

⁹Despot Stefan Lazarevic was a poet, and his most famous poem, *The Letter of Love* (1404 or 1409), is filled with motives of transposition, flight, and losing of weight that offer necessary elegance to the poetic text and provide secrecy to subtle feelings.

to the formal organization - elongated proportions, thin walls, almost curved garlands - that creates and radiates white light with a high frequency of flickers. Horizontals sink into the ground, while the dome and the bell tower merge with the sky inside, and the niches, the interlacings, reduced plastic and garlands evoke the vibrant luminism of the last Byzantine renaissance.



Frame 3. *Game of Thrones* “Dragonstone” (Season 07 Episode 01).
Jeremy Podeswa. 2017. 00:50:08

Frame 4. *Le Mépris*. Jean-Luc Godard. 1963. 01:19:44

III Love, the Crisis of Beyond

There is something structurally unfinished in the towers with the bastions that formed the walls around the Manasija monastery, where each of them was supposed to continue in the next one, while still being different from the previous one. This unfinished and therefore modern feature is also reflected in the open perimeters of the forts, their dismantled bases and various volumetrics. They spontaneously integrate into the natural architecture of the park, matching the colorful geometry of the painted surfaces of the walls inside the monastery church. A similar turn in the means of form, one that could only provide unity between interior and exterior, is found in one of the most beautiful Houses of the last century, Casa Malaparte, designed by architect Adalberto Libera around 1937 for an eccentric writer, journalist and diplomat

Curzio Malaparte. Permanent interruption, but also a permanent trace of the horizon framed in the composition of window openings, where, in the airy depths, the sky and the sea merge, as if it did not depend on the architectural will, but the continuity of this line was already marred by the picturesque rocks of Capri island, pre-applied by the trace of the geology of time. It was as if the house was envisioned so that it could be broken at any moment. Its owner and the client, who at one point took over the project from the hands of the architect, could not have wished for that break, but somehow anticipated it with a certain structural imperfection, the dimensions of windows that disturbed the harmony between the abundance of nature and calm, but inherently moved compactness of the shape, with its backbone which lowers and rises over Cape Punta Massullo without balance, achieving gravitational equilibrium through the willful disproportion of the entire composition.

There is something in common between the framed sequences of sea-celestial depth and the line of the house, where the flat roof rises pyramidically toward the garden, defying the structure to the horizon, creating the distance with the surrounding, which seems unfinished due to the interruption caused by the war. However, the house was designed so that it could be completed only by the interruption of that life which, in the grand parlor, by the panoramic windows facing the fireplace and the stone floor, so loftily expressed the tragedy of its own incompleteness: the building that was born as a piece of history.

It is, by all means, only a coincidence, as a sign of faith, that Libera's late works, the only tragic ones in his life's work, despite their exceptional quality, were left to decay.¹⁰

¹⁰ Despite its exceptional quality, Adalberto Libera's Cinema Airone in Rome, has not escaped a sad fate - due to declining cinema ticket sales, the building was turned into nightclubs until its appearance was severely damaged. The original ceilings were first destroyed in a reckless adaptation, leading to the current state when the building is deserted, despite many attempts of structural recovery by a local political committees or cultural associations. A Forgotten Masterwork: Cinema Airone in Rome by Libera with Capogrossi (1952-56), socks-studio.com.

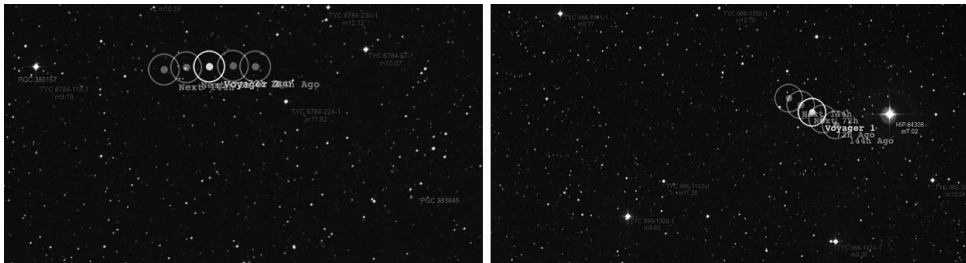
It took a genius such as Jean-Luc Godard to use the film to present the unity of form and life - that condition where mortar penetrates through cracked, deliberately stripped brick-color, like a living tissue through wounds on the skin. In doing so, he wanted to capture the beauty of the structure in a fragile state of decomposition caused simply passing of time, as if the great architectural monuments were not eternal but lived their natural life, just like everything else that exists in this world. Its theatricality, as entirely Italian feature of architecture, came to the fore through Godard's specific artistic placement of criticism - if there is no continuity between the theoretical truth of modernism and operational practice, this gap should be overcome by abolishing the distinction between reality and illusion. It seems that the illusion does not exist by itself, but that it is something quite realistic. The stage for such a play is the nature, as Godard lavishly proves with the film (*Le Mépris*, 1963), in which this house, not so much incorporated into the landscape, as it is emphasized with it in the same way, and thus played a leading role.

The dome outside its own borders could be compared with the depth of blueness of that natural stage that connects separate positions, inside and out, that cannot be captured in a single view. There is not only one view, but the film reveals how much the authors of the house, thinking both of the architecture and the owners, took into account a psychological space that is not based solely on real vision, but also on the memory of what had been seen and the anticipation of what would be seen.

Here, the spatial continuity is only the pyramidal stream of thoughts that emerges at the same time connecting its differential sequences. In the film, they stand by the masks from the ancient theater, declaring the director's verdict for the house, placing it side by side with the ancient Roman architecture. The idea was to create the unfinished building, just as the building damaged by time, as a piece of antiquity, like Propylaea as a temple that did not exist because it was never planned.

Stripping away its geological stratification, time has made it a broken history that has surfaced. It is the stage of a drama where the love of beauty comes to light, sensing an excessive cinematic sublime end, the end beyond reality. **(Frame 4)**

The symbolic role, assigned here to the architecture seems to describe the reverse reality of Pei's pyramid creating the Louvre in its new synthesis. These are the monuments, but at the same time, they lose their monumentality to the erosion of the real life, focused on continuity of every kind. Just as from the dual architecturality of the pyramid, no distinction can be made between reality and the scene, the transparent vault or open sky, the shape and abundance of shapeless, transparent depth – and the entire area is overflowed by bluish, the most material of all colors. Thus, it functions like the mirror of Napoleon's idea, which united Egypt and Europe with final love, ancient and modern era, time and duration, classical forms and shapes of modern life.



Frame 5. Voyager 1 live position and data. Right Ascension: 17h 14m 33.3s Declination: 12°02'33.6" (J2000) Magnitude: N.A. (Estimated: JPL) Constellation: Ophiucus Sun Distance: 22,163,542,147 km [17.0 km/s] Earth Distance: 22,235,496,986 km [24.2 km/s]

Frame 6. Voyager 2 live position and data. Right Ascension: 20h 06m 41.0s Declination: -57°49'34.3" (J2000) Magnitude: N.A. (Estimated: JPL) Constellation: Pavo Sun Distance: 18,390,293,950 km [15.3 km/s] Earth Distance: 18,501,717,662 km [31.5 km/s]

IV The Beyond Number

Two world wars in the first half of the twentieth century made the Earth both unique and devastated. The strength of the machines was confirmed in the cruelest way as they moved the planet in another direction, so fast after that one fully modern Galilean event cast the shade on previous unbelievable experiences. The humankind was unable to follow the full intensity of numerous discoveries, and one of them is especially important for our subject. For the first time, due to the flight into the space, the sphericity of the Earth was seen through the human eyes. The latter departure to the Moon only confirmed the extraterritoriality of such an image. However, as if this event had not been seen as triumphant, people were still much more interested in the horizons on the Earth (Hannah Arendt, *Conditio humana*), despite the fact that the man would not remain attached to it forever. Even with the discovery of America, it seemed that all earthly trajectories had been proclaimed, and then another new age began with creation of its own paths. Through the intersection of the continents (the Suez Canal, the Panama Canal), all the seas were merged into one large sea, imaginary seas on the Moon were named as astronomical sceneries, ready for new Great Discoveries. Based on this, we can see that even after five hundred years, the real and symbolic capacity of travel on the Earth has not been exhausted, and the former dreams of going to the space have been replaced by an interest in creating a new picture of themselves.

In this sense, the truth that the discovery of the telescope has changed man's view of the Earth much more than the Cosmos has been repeated for many times by the "nervous" expectation of new ideas about life. Unlike before, this time THOSE images are scattered polycentrically, aiming at the depths of darkness, unlike previous blueness of the atmosphere. The pulsating numbers in the digital infinity of computer screens count down the real distortion of the horizon projected on the former illusions about the geometry of the Earth and its vault. We are

facing (whenever we wish to face it) the real time coordinates of Voyager 1 and Voyager 2, which, after forty years of expected and unexpected navigation, left the solar system, moving into the interstellar space. Thus, the biggest of all travelers were able to stretch, not only their own time and the space of the system from which they originated, but further confirmed the incomprehensible depth of awareness of the view of the Third Stone from the Sun.

Today, it is no longer about the invisibility of the planet from a distance that has been reached, but the question is what human knowledge of the unknown could be compared to. The evidence of the uniqueness of earthly life, perpetuated in gold, has never been further from their creator. The idea that something made by a man finally in a space consisting of the stars can easily be replaced by the unfinished dreams of cosmic proportions, and the images that still manage to reach us for the same glittering thoughts that unfold the glimpse into all the domes he has ever created or wished to create. (**Frame 5. Frame 6**)

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Frames

Frame 1.

Source: https://www.google.com/search?q=only+lovers+left+alive+car+scene+gif&tbm=isch&ved=2ahUKEwj9NzymffnAhWskKQKHbYTBG0Q2-cCegQIABAA&oq=only+lovers+left+alive+car+scene+gif&gs_l=img.3...6315.7210..7749...0.0..0.99.342.4.....0....1..gws-wiz-img.9LjBsHQw6I&ei=GZRaxquEM5KhkgW2p5DoBg&bih=581&biw=782&client=safari#imgcr=2RZNDex8-NWIMM (Last Access 29.02.2020)

Frame 2.

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GpFEYu6ScdI>

Frame 3.

Source: [https://www.pinterest.ie/pin/508977195379311743/?amp_client_id=CLIENT_ID\(&mweb_unauth_id=%7B%7Bdefault.session%7D%7D&simplified=true](https://www.pinterest.ie/pin/508977195379311743/?amp_client_id=CLIENT_ID(&mweb_unauth_id=%7B%7Bdefault.session%7D%7D&simplified=true) (Last Access 29.02.2020)

Frame 4.

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pduQ4l6Jkjo> (Last Access 29.02.2020)

Frame 5.

Source: <https://theskylive.com/voyager1-tracker> (Last Access 29.02.2020)

Frame 6.

Source: <https://theskylive.com/voyager2-tracker> (Last Access 29.02.2020)

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