The Domestic Chestnut: Space, Place, and the Embodiment of Nature at Oplontis Villa A

by

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Dedication:

For my family.

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Abstract

Villa A at Oplontis is among the most carefully studied and impressive examples of a Roman coastal luxury villa. Located on a cliff overlooking the Bay of Naples, only a few miles from Pompeii, the villa was initially constructed in the mid-first century BCE and destroyed in the 79 CE eruption of Mount Vesuvius. Over its nearly two-century lifespan, the structure expanded to include nearly one hundred excavated rooms, an array of wall paintings spanning three out of the four Pompeiian styles, and was sheathed and populated with architectural and sculptural decorative stone. As the villa developed, its natural environment formed a constant, if ever-moving, presence alongside its artificial sphere. In this dissertation, I seek to investigate the role of an activated and embodied nature in establishing and perpetuating the lived aesthetic experience of Villa A.

In the first chapter I introduce the history of excavation and reconstruction at Villa A, focusing on the instability of the site when restricted to an architectural and artifactual view. I propose a closer investigation of the natural world as a way of accessing the lived experience of the villa as it stood in antiquity and introduce an emic conception of semi-sentient nature as an active participant in establishing the rhythms of daily life through a selection of Roman aristocratic texts. Finally, I look to postmodern theoreticians and scholars in the eco-critical humanities to bridge the modern binary between nature and culture and to conceptualize social relationships between humans and non-humans such as the elements of the natural world.

Chapters two and three approach the villa from the two perspectives of space and place to tease out the role of the local environmental setting in establishing an outdoor orientation at the site. In chapter two, I discuss the use of 2D mapping as a priming tool in archaeology, before using a series of maps and diagrams to establish the villa's relationship with its broader local topography and surrounding gardens. Together, these diagrams reveal the exterior orientation of the villa, with the bulk of the villa's rooms able to connect at least indirectly (i.e. through a semi-open portico) with the outdoors and a network of airflow pathways that outnumber the human-accessible paths through the space. Chapter three is a place-based, phenomenological approach to the villa's surrounding gardens geared towards gaining a better understanding of the effects of the bleeding edge between indoor and outdoor space at Villa A.

In chapter four, I move within the structure to more fully investigate the interaction and penetration of elements of the natural world with and within the representational, decorative sphere. I look closely at the paintings in rooms, 5, 20, and 4—the atrium, an interior garden, and the room that links them, showing the ways that painters evoked not only the forms, but also the textures and patterns created by the natural world within the painted sphere. I reflect on the process of abstraction and creativity that derived from natural inspirations, and the paintings' self-conscious play between mimesis and imaginative constructions.

Throughout these chapters I demonstrate that the natural environment plays three roles at Villa A, as a co-designer, medium, and font of forms and textures that serves as a springboard for the imaginations of patrons and artisans. Without its ecological context, the Villa is incomplete.

Chapter 1: Introduction

> The first great consideration is that life goes on in an environment. Not merely in it, but because of it, through interaction with it. No creature lives merely under its skin. Its subcutaneous organs are a means of connection to what lies beyond its bodily frame, and to which, in order to live, it must adjust itself, by accommodation and defense, but also by conquest. At every moment the living creature is exposed to danger from its surroundings, and at every moment it must draw upon something in its surroundings.
>
> John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (1934)
>
> Nature provides exceptions to every rule.
>
> Margaret Fuller "The Great Lawsuit: Man Versus Men; Woman Versus Women", *The Dial* IV (July, 1843)

I. Poioumenon Part I: The Domestic Chestnut

This project grew out of an encounter with the absence of an ancient plant. In the dusty heat of mid-afternoon, I descended forty-two shallow steps from the modern town of Torre Annunziata to land in the north garden of Villa A at Oplontis, toes on the ground level of 79 CE. Confronted by the patchwork facade of a portico still half-buried beneath a wall of pumice and ash from that year's famous eruption of Mount Vesuvius, I passed through a screen of columns and out of the sun. Roped-off doorways guided me towards the atrium, where the temperature dropped and the ceiling rose. Echoes amplified the trembling of corrugated plastic sheets installed above a retaining wall where the southern excavation boundary truncates the room; these translucent panes vibrated in time with accelerating traffic above and the rasping of weeds

that bristled behind them. I held a voice recorder in one hand, having set out to capture some aspect of the experiential qualities of the villa, to launch my dissertation on the multisensory properties of this well-documented and well-preserved site. Pausing to search for stillness had instead drawn my attention to the ways in which that experience was continuously mediated by modernity.

Of course, this is always the case: archaeology usually requires a little suspension of disbelief, with acknowledgements of uncertainty and irrecoverability lurking in qualifiers and footnotes or in the textural differences between weathered and fresh stone. But from my first encounter with archaeology, when my fingertips met a cool surface carved by an ancient hand, its lure had always been the opportunities to get close to the truth of things that endured. Artifacts, art, and architecture are the tangible fragments of the past, and I enjoyed the weight of solid evidence against my palm as well as learning to organize works by their date and place of manufacture and deposition—the pleasure and skills afforded by studying material culture. Now, it was the very sturdiness of the architecture of Villa A that directly confronted my fantasies of stepping into the past and reoriented my attention towards the substantial frames holding its fragments upright: poured concrete lintels, iron scaffolding with plastic couplers, neat tan brick

pilasters.[1] Distracted by the seams in the reconstruction, I started to think of the archaeological site primarily as an articulated skeleton: dead, with its joints artificially fixed in place.[2]

Then, almost immediately, the villa invited me back in—but not through the medium of its tangible ruins. The itinerary drew me into the busily painted, black-and-white striped portico surrounding a courtyard with a small garden, open to the sky (courtyard 32). At the center of the plot, a rough modern post marks a void left by the questing root structure of a tree destroyed in 79 CE. When a loose fill of lapilli was excavated, and the hollow wake of its decayed wood was cast in plaster under garden archaeologist Wilhelmina Jashemski almost two millennia later, the tree was revealed to have been, most probably, a chestnut, likely older than the villa itself.[3] A rectangular masonry fountain at its foot, added about a century after the villa's initial construction, is plastered and painted with colorful maritime and garden scenes. Its rear wall is

[1] The effect of the enforced articulation of the fragmentary villa through both its reconstruction and the introduction of museological elements to guide visitors safely through its rooms is an illustration of Derrida's *parergon* in three dimensions. In *The Truth in Painting* (1987), Derrida describes the *parergon* as *"*neither work (*ergon*) nor outside the work [*hors d'oeuvre*], neither inside nor outside, neither above nor below, it disconcerts any opposition but does not remain indeterminate and it *gives rise* [donne lieu] to the work. It is no longer merely around the work," (p. 9, trans. Duro, 2019). As noted by Duro (2019) in his historical contextualization of *parergon* as a critical term, Derrida's conceptualization of the frame as *parergon* is distinguished from other uses by the way "the text asserts the primacy of the frame" (note 5). This is a useful analogy in thinking about the relationship between reconstruction, conservation, and artifacts—in these cases, the contemporary interventions that operate as a frame are generative of how the audience perceives the work (e.g. the artifacts that are the subject of the museum).

[2] I follow Ingold (2015), pp. 22–26, in largely rejecting "articulation" as a descriptor of interconnectivity or "sympathetic union", suitable primarily for discussing the modern, postmortem rearrangement of the site rather than its living and connected state. Ingold proposes knots as an alternative paradigm for conceptualizing interior relationships in living systems. See especially p. 25, on the human body, where he writes: "Only much later did the joint come to mark a point of attachment and separation between discrete body parts, whether that body be of the animal on a butcher's slab or of the human on a dissecting table. And only in this anatomical apprehension, as a corpse, did the body come to figure as a totality assembled from components. This is an apprehension, however, that is divorced from life. For the living being, the joint – which, like the rest of the skeleton, was never assembled but has rather grown with the person to whom it belongs – is not so much an exterior connection of rigid elements as an interior condition of correspondent movement, bonded on the inside by means of a linear mesh of ligaments."

[3] Jashemski (1979): 290. The identification is based on the presence of two carbonized chestnuts in the strata of the courtyard's upper-story rooms. Ermolli & Messager (2014): para. 1242 identifies traces of chestnut pollen in samples taken from nearby *viridarium* 20, but emphasizes the insecurity of the context and notes disagreement about the precise age of the tree. In her initial publication Jashemski describes it as "probably almost as old as the villa", while Bergmann (2002): 93 states that it "clearly predates the architecture." Though I follow Bergmann in interpreting the tree as existing prior to the villa, its potential later incorporation into the architecture would alter the order of interactions, not the existence of interdependent relationships.

unfinished, however, a curve of bare brick tracing the outline where the masonry once met bark. On that afternoon, for the first time, I noticed that the architecture preserved an impression of the organic irregularity of the living tree, with a slight twist towards the northeast visible in the outline of its trunk.

Here was material evidence of correspondence between the villa's architecture and an element of the natural environment, a relationship, experienced by the occupants, that unfolded within the walls of domestic space from the earliest phase of construction to the latest.[4] Only part of the villa was—had ever been—captured in the stern facade of its architecture. My imaginative reconstruction of the place shifted, recentered on the now absent tree at its heart. How would the courtyard change with the sharp angles of architectural shadows replaced by dappled sunlight through leaves, bright spots dancing with every breath of sea breeze from the south? How would the space be animated by cicadas ringing and spiders dipping threads among the branches, by bees and pigeons bobbing in and over the eaves? In more academic terms, how would the cycles and variations of seasons, weather, and populations of flora and fauna affect the villa's spatial, aesthetic, and social operation, and could a better understanding of the role of the natural world in shaping domestic space reveal something about the ways in which that space was designed and experienced, both aesthetically and practically, beyond what artifice alone can communicate? These questions broadly align with ecocritical approaches to the humanities that recognize that "that the world we inhabit is not exclusively or presumptively the province of

[4] Thomas and Clarke (2009) outline three broad construction phases that align roughly with the traditional chronologies of its Second, Third, and Fourth Style paintings: a first phase circa 50 BCE, a large-scale renovation during the Augustan period circa 10 BCE, and major overhauls that included the construction of the east wing from 45 CE and beyond. The villa sustained damage in the 62 CE earthquake that affected the region, and had either been abandoned or, I believe more likely, was undergoing renovations (*and* possibly abandoned) at the time of its destruction. Courtyard 32 was originally constructed around 50 BCE, but the fountain and paintings that adorn both the inner and outer walls date to the Fourth style period, from around 45 CE.

human beings."[5] They seek to reframe culture as embedded within an environment that is active, communicative, and vulnerable to both human and nonhuman intervention, and acknowledge the anthropocentrism of the humanities as both inevitable and worthy of closer examination.[6]

I spent the remainder of my visit being struck again and again by the pervasive presence and yawning absence of natural elements.[7] Every other room seemed to be a garden or to open onto one, almost every wall painting included some reference to or reflection of the outdoor environment, tesserae tendrils curled across mosaic thresholds and even a live bird or two nestled out of sight up in the eaves of the atrium, occasionally trilling and fluttering wings. Missing were the original plantings, the fountains and the sound of running water, and the sight of sculpture set against the green of the lawns. Most dramatically altered was the villa's relationship to the surrounding landscape, inverted from prominence and integration into its surrounding topography to relative isolation in an archaeological trench below the level of daily life.

I left the site that day with a new interest in ephemera and a vague hypothesis in my pocket that Villa A had something to say about the relationship between the ancient Romans who built the sprawling structure and moved between its walls and the natural environment, and that investigating this relationship would yield a clearer sense of how the space unfolded as a sensorily rich decorative, social, and productive environment. My approach was to spend time thinking about Villa A and attendant scholarship in the light of this initial experience. I've called it getting lost in the site, and it prompted me to read broadly and draw on theoretical frameworks from across the humanities that reveal more complex relationships among humans, things, and

[5] Braddock (2009) 27.
[6] Recent eco-art historical scholarship includes Miles (2014), Ryan (2015), Lee (2019), and Stott (2020).
[7] I do not want to overplay the novelty of this idea, which was new to me in the moment but is not new. Many scholars have focused on the particularly rich natural environment at Oplontis, especially Jashemski (1979; 1992), MacDougall and Jashemski (1987), Bergmann (2002; 2016), and the entire first volume of the Oplontis Project publications edited by Clarke & Muntasser (2014).

nature that facilitate thinking about the way they shape experience of the world: social anthropology and geography in addition to art history and archaeology.[8] Over time, I ended up reflecting on the pathways through which scholars can come to know this site, along with the role of the natural world in establishing the villa's character. While the granular data that comprises what we know of Villa A evidences a concern and aesthetic interest in change that is rendered most visible by the triple role of the natural world as co-designer, medium, and representable form,[9] it turns out that Villa A, too, is—and has always been—ever changing.

II. Finding a Case Study: An Introduction to Villa A and its Dead

A project that begins with absence as its evidence is ripe for conflicts and paradoxes. The site itself is the first example. I chose to work on Villa A at Oplontis because the efforts of archaeologists, scholars, and officials in charge of Italy's cultural patrimony have made it one of the most accessible sites of the Roman world. Also known as the "Villa of Poppaea", the site was a sprawling estate on the coast of the Bay of Naples located between the buried cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum, originally constructed around 50 BCE and continuing to expand into the mid-first century CE.[10] Geological surveys have revealed that in antiquity the villa was positioned on a promontory above the water, close to a bend in the antique shoreline.[11] Before its destruction in

[8] My approach has been heavily influenced by the perspectives of Tim Ingold and Edward S. Casey, as well as other postmodernists. See chapter two for a fuller theoretical introduction.
[9] Braddock and Ater (2014) 2–3 discuss the way multiple registers play out in the contemporary artwork of Xavier Cortada, whose painting *Astrid* combines melted Antarctic ice, paint, and sediment on paper so that the imagery "creatively conjures the aerial maps and satellite images that scientists...use to represent the increasingly unstable environment of Antarctica". Braddock and Ater quote personal communication from the artist: "the works were made in Antarctica, about Antarctica, using Antarctica as the medium (provided to me by the very researchers who inform us about Antarctica)."
[10] Thomas and Clarke (2007). For discussion of the villa's potential ownership, see p. 8 below.
[11] Di Maio (2014).

the 79 CE eruption of Mount Vesuvius (whose flanks rise steeply only a few kilometers to the northwest), the building perched on the edge of a fourteen-meter cliff with expansive views of Surrentum and the island of Capri across the water to the south. Gardens along the southern facade led from the building to terraced ramps, which likely ended at a private landing on the shore below.[12]

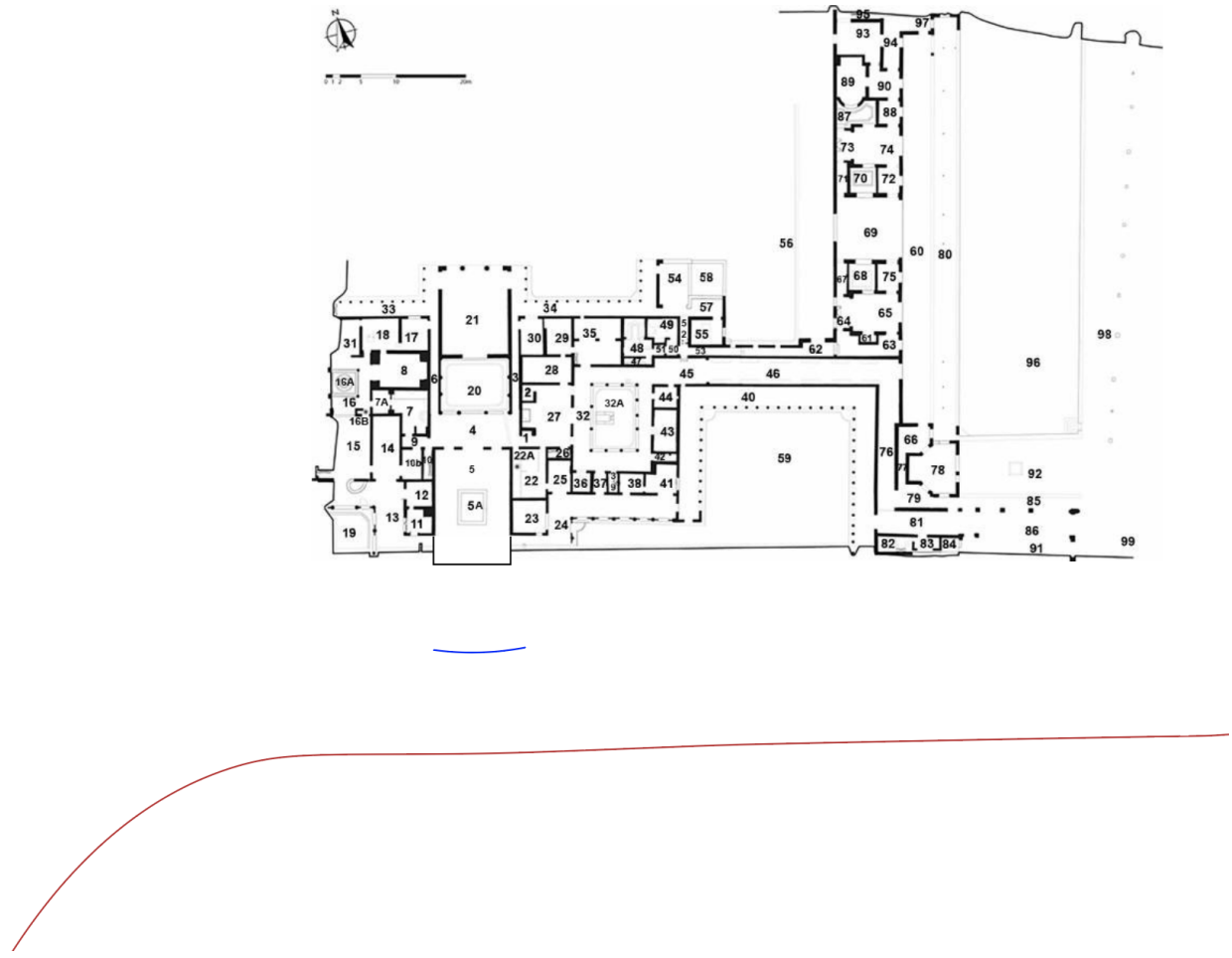

Fig. 1.1: Plan of Villa A with the south end of the atrium (5) reconstructed, approximate distance to the cliff edge (blue line), and pre-79 CE sand shoreline (red) marked. Adapted from plan by T. Liddell, the Oplontis Project.

[12] The seaward facade of the villa was partly cut by the construction of the Sarno Canal in the 16th century, and the canal wall marks the southern edge of the excavation boundary. Soundings taken by the Oplontis Project reveal evidence of terracing (Di Maio 2014), and similar arrangements appear in depictions of maritime villas at other sites (Bergmann 2002).

The structure itself has a long core suite of rooms that, when viewed from the roadside to the north, reverses the traditional plan for a townhouse as called for by Vitruvius in his discussion of villas, with a monumental propylon at the center of the facade flanked by porticos extending to the east and west and a double-height atrium at the farthest, southern end of the axis.[13] In the northwest sector, a series of small rooms, formerly a bath suite, surround a small peristyle (16), while the southern façade was lined with reception rooms, *cubicula,* and extended porticos with views of the water. Balancing the rooms around portico 16 across the villa's central axis on the east, the larger courtyard garden that housed the chestnut (32) is surrounded by a series of small storage rooms and connecting passageways, leading to its frequent identification as a service peristyle. The large north garden is bounded by a wing on the east, where a long series of reception rooms runs north-south alongside a massive swimming pool in a further garden.[14] Throughout, the villa was lavishly ornamented with architectural and free-standing sculptural elements, wall paintings spanning the second through fourth Pompeiian styles, revetments in marble and wood, and gardens that both surrounded and punctuated its walls. Though relatively few artifacts were found among the villa's ruins, the discovery of a fragmentary Lusitanian Dressel 14 amphora bearing the red *titulus pinctus* SECVNDO POPPAEAE (to Secundus, [slave] of Poppaea) has caused some scholars to link the property to the wife of Emperor Nero, Poppaea Sabina, whose family reportedly came from Pompeii.[15]

[13] The reversal of the traditional *domus* plan seen at Villa A, which calls for the atrium to be further removed from the main entrance than the peristyle, was not as simple as some other structures, since the water-facing southern facade, with the atrium closest to the shore, preserved the traditional townhouse structure for those arriving via the water. Wallace-Hadrill (2018) discusses Vitruvius' recommendations for the ideal villa with respect to the Villa of Mysteries at Pompeii, which does map more neatly onto the reversed style.

[14] With a proposed mirroring western wing, the villa's plan would look a bit like a squat trident.

[15] Gazda & Clarke (2016) 188, cat. 15, with further bibliography. The *titulus pictus* had been previously published by De Franciscis (1979) 231 and others, including Ciardiello (2007) 195.

Though uncertain, this potential link to the imperial family would suit the sumptuous decor and impressive scale of the villa. Taken together, these characteristics have made it a popular topic for academic research into the elite end of the broader phenomenon of Roman villa culture.

With a rich history of study and largely well-documented excavations, Villa A looked like a relatively solid framework upon which to layer a broadly phenomenological treatment: a known site whose ephemeral characteristics might be rendered more accessible by the abundance and solidity of its archaeological remains, providing an excellent means for exploring an issue of interest. But abundance poses its own kind of challenges. In Hugh Fulham-McQuillan's short story "Notes on Jackson and his Dead," a documentarian describes the process of filming a man, Jackson, whose every movement sheds a lifeless copy of his body frozen in its most recent pose; the story opens with the line "It is astonishing how quickly he fills up a room with all those past selves."[16] The analogy to archaeology is clear, a practice that is methodologically centered on catching the points of change and leaving moments of rest as an invisible in-between. Stratigraphy, phasing, the processes of charting the passage of time by looking at the steps by which one form (a hearth, a door, a house, a city) stopped being, and another took its place (a floor, a wall, a business, a wasteland)—all are very much like looking at the wake of bodies left as Jackson moves through the world. Time as measured by stratigraphy is not continuous, but fragmented; it layers up and fills the space, but the relationship between occupied space and time covered by it is not consistent. In Rome, for example, coring studies in the area of Sant' Omobono have discovered late bronze age materials a little more than 10 meters below the modern street level, a more than 3000-year span compressed into little more than 30 feet.[17] At Herculaneum, in contrast, the 79 CE streets are more than 45 feet below the modern ground

[16] Fulham-McQuillan (2019), 3.
[17] Brock & Terrenato (2016) 657.

level, a much shorter span of time padded out by the fill of multiple volcanic eruptions that produced meters in only moments. Moments of dramatic change leave a stronger footprint than years of lived experience in the soil.

Like the narrator of Fulham-McQuillan's story, for whom Jackson himself remains inaccessible at the same time that his past states are embodied, archaeologists interested in daily life often have trouble locating the actual subject of our interest and are often forced to settle for inferences drawn from a palimpsest of the impressions that frame it. Villa A, on a day without any construction activity, is not visible in the archaeological record. This makes it difficult to address the central question of this project; in order to understand how the lived experience of nature penetrated and characterized the site, it is important to have as clear an idea of the structure in its lived state as possible, even as that original remains stubbornly out of view. Instead, through imaginative efforts, phasing, reconstruction, acts of description and replication in both physical and digital media, there are many Villa As that I have gotten to know throughout this project. It is astonishing how an archaeological site multiplies and fragments through time and under observation from different angles. With so many versions of Villa A available to choose from, which one am I writing about? What follows is a discussion of several versions of this villa, all of which form part of the basis—the raw data—for this project.

A: The Phased Structures:

One of the advantages of working with archaeological sites preserved/destroyed in the 79 CE eruption of Mount Vesuvius is their unusually secure chronological endpoint.[18] In a matter of

[18] The date of the eruption itself is another example of a "solid fact" about the ancient world that dissolves upon closer inspection. The eruption was long thought to have begun on August 24th of 79, based on a date provided in a

hours, many of the bustling coastal communities of the shoreline around the Bay of Naples were reduced to rubble and buried beneath layers of volcanic debris. The seaside landscape that Cicero described as a *crater delicatus* was permanently and dramatically altered.[19]

The snapshots of this crisis, the extraordinary preservation that stemmed from the heat of pyroclastic flows and entombing rock and ash falls, provide vivid impressions of daily life that have fascinated the popular imagination for centuries. In Herculaneum's Insula Occidentalis house 1a, a carbonized rocking cradle survived, still holding the bones of a baby among scraps of bedding;[20] at Pompeii VII.1.36, eighty-one loaves of bread were found sealed in an oven, left mid-bake;[21] and bronze statuettes of the household gods still occupied the *lararium* of nearby house VI.16.7.[22] Above all, the grim gray figures of its victims, given shape as the negative space of their lost bodies is cast in plaster, have allowed us as voyeurs from the future to gaze indelicately at their last moments, while also connecting people of the present to the humans of the past with a startling emotional immediacy.[23] These encounters with ancient people,

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pair of letters by Pliny the Younger to the historian Tacitus, written about twenty-five years after the events, that detailed the activities and death of his uncle, the admiral and natural historian Pliny the Elder, as well as his own escape from the events. Despite scholarly suspicions that some time later in the autumn provided a more realistic date, based on the clothing worn by those killed in the eruption, the discovery of seasonal fruits and braziers, and even the seasonal wind patterns observed by volcanologists (Rolandi et al. 2008), public perception remained firmly based on the literary evidence until it was superseded by the discovery of a new piece of written documentation with a firmer authoritative claim. This was the widely publicized discovery of a charcoal inscription in new excavations of Regio V dated "the sixteenth day before the kalends of November," making October 17th the earliest possible date for the disaster (Lapatin & Kozlovski 2019).

[19] Cicero *Letters to Atticus,* 2.8.2

[20] Mols (1999) 163–65 on the cradle itself; Maiuri (1958) 344 on the bones, now lost.

[21] Della Corte (1965) 189–90.

[22] Boyce (1937) 57–58, no. 221.

[23] The impact of these findings have proven fruitful ground for art and poetry from the eighteenth century to the twenty-first, from Friedrich von Schiller's "Pompeii and Herculaneum", originally published in German in 1797, with its description of the immediacy of the excavations ("The earth, with faithful watch, has hoarded all! / Still stand the mute penates in the hall; / Back to his haunts returns each ancient god," lines 65–67) to American poet Jenn Blair's 2015 interpretation of the thoughts of Giuseppe Fiorelli during development of the plaster casting method in 1863 ("Some sculpt out of the air, but I persist in believing there are / forms already present, absences which are too telling— / a chance to become intimate with curdled hands…", lines 6–8). The romanticizing effect of encountering the ruins is perhaps best summed up by another poet, Charles Bernstein, who writes in his 2008

experienced as snapshots of interrupted daily life, give a vivid sense of the lived-in quality of the houses and the ongoing activity in the towns.

Despite its destruction during the same catastrophic event, Villa A is different, caught in a moment of uncertain transition rather than in a state of habitation. The gardens seem to have been overgrown and many sculptures and revetments were discovered in storage.[24] Only a few pieces of furniture were found, such as a bronze bed alongside a cache of oil lamps in room 31 off the western peristyle (16).[25] The villa's east wing had been partly stripped of its expensive revetments: an opus sectile floor and marble and wooden wall panels had been removed from the octagonal oecus 78 at its southern end; half of the opus sectile floor in its central and largest room, *oecus* 69, was likewise missing; six of the marble columns that had supported portico 60 along its eastern edge were discovered stored in the large reception room 21 at the center of the villa's northern facade.[26] Pits had been dug through the mosaic flooring of room 55 (one of which held an heirloom sculpture, a terracotta bust of a woman dated to the Hellenistic era), and a trench ran diagonally across the floor of room 4 and into adjoining room 22, which had been converted into a storeroom.[27] Casts of wooden features taken in rooms 5, 11, 12, 15, and other areas of the villa reveal that at the time of the eruption, windows and doors were shut tight.[28]

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piece "Pompeii": "...In Pompeii / The lava flowed and buried the people / So poems such as this could be born," (lines 12–14).

[24] On the gardens, see Di Pasquale et al. (2014) 1202. On the structures, see van der Graaff (2016) 68.

[25] On the bed, see Oplontis Project Online Database cats. 2009.031.09.00209-14. For a selection of the lamps, see Gazda & Clarke (2016) cats. 7–12 and the Oplontis Project Database cats. 2009.031.09.00216-227. The more than one hundred, regionally produced birds' head type lamps discovered in the villa have been dated to between 50–75 CE. Sooting around the nozzles shows that at least some were used prior to being set aside in storage, with an additional cache of lamps discovered in room 29 and many other fragments scattered throughout the property.

[26] On the find state and reconstruction of room 78, see Barker (2016); Clarke & Barker (2019). On the marble floor of room 69, see Barker (2016) and on the columns of portico 60 Moormann (2019) 1730–1742, 1748–1752.

[27] On the pits, see Cline (2019) 2946–2947. For the bust, see De Caro (1987) 126 and Gazda & Clarke (2016) cat. 6.

[28] Casts are still visible in rooms 11, 12, and 15. On the cast of the door between rooms 4 and 5, see Clarke (2014) 751.

It is not clear whether the villa stood in a state of abandonment at the time of the eruption or whether it was under heavy renovation. While it lacks the clear signs of ongoing construction—in contrast to sites like Pompeii's "House of the Painters at Work" (IX.12.9), where partly sketched underdrawings of frescoes and dropped pigment pots and paintbrushes signal sudden interruption—it is possible that the connecting rooms (72, 75, 88, 89, 90, and 93) that face onto portico 60 of the east wing awaited further ornamentation.[29] It is also possible that the villa had begun a renovation only to be abandoned partway through, with activity shifting from building to deconstruction.[30] What is clear is that nobody was home, and that the villa excavated was not the same structure that its latest tenants had experienced. Instead of the typical regional snapshot of sudden abandonment amid daily life, archaeologists discovered a site whose status in 79 CE remains ambiguous.

The post-eruption history of Villa A is shorter than for many sites around the Bay of Naples, as early discoveries in the area were left comparatively undisturbed until the middle of the twentieth century. Though no record exists, it is likely that Villa A was discovered but left unexplored during construction of the Sarno Canal, an artificial waterway commissioned in 1592 in order to bring water to the mills of Torre Annunziata, and whose path cut across the southern

[29] Esposito (2019) 447–451. A comparandum for the painting scheme of portico 60 is found at the nearby Villa Arianna A in Stabiae's room 12. A nearby set of adjoining rooms off the portico of the Stabian villa's great palaestra (E, L, M, and N), positioned similarly to the connecting rooms at Oplontis, bear wall decorations of attenuated architectural and vegetal schemes on top of brightly colored socles with a white upper that might serve as examples of what a more finished version of Oplontis' connecting enfilade might have looked like. These rooms, with paintings of a Flavian date, would likely mean that the villa's unfinished paintings date post 69 CE. See also Howe (2016); Guzzo (2004) for further information on the villas at Stabiae.

[30] The presence of the *titulus pinctus* SECVNDO POPPAEAE, discovered on an amphora stored in room 44 off the service peristyle (Gazda & Clarke (2016) cat. no. 15) is interesting. If we accept the speculation that it indicates possession of the property by Nero's wife Poppaea, its continued presence on site so many years after her death in 63 CE raises questions about the site's inhabitation after that date. Perhaps what we see is a renovation begun after the 62 CE earthquake, and then halted after her death, or even the death of Nero in 68. At this point, the villa may have lain in a state of abandonment or transferred to new ownership with another partial renovation underway at the time of the eruption a little over ten years later. If we accept an imperial political connection to the property, it is unlikely that the property would have been unaffected by their political fortunes.

facade of the building.[31] The first documented exploration of the site occurred nearly two centuries later, when in 1785 an early Spanish archeologist named Francesco La Vega briefly tunneled into the ruins, but was turned back by the presence of noxious volcanic gasses. In 1839–40, the Bourbon monarchy sponsored further excavation-by-tunnel, under Michele Rusca, whose workers dug through to the area of the service courtyard (32) and a nearby peristyle (40), cutting a rough passage through the wall between the portico and corridor 46 that is still visible today.[32] These explorations did not uncover the site or explore its full extent. Despite their limited nature, they left their mark on its remains, and the lack of documentation makes it impossible to ascertain the extent of their effect on the site.

Systematic excavations did not begin at Villa A until 1964. Digging under the Italian authorities continued over the course of the following decades, at first under the direction of Alfonso De Franciscis and later under Stefano De Caro and Lorenzo Fergola, with full-scale operations ending in 1984. This period saw approximately two-thirds of the villa unearthed, reconstructed, and prepared for opening to the public. However, there is only sporadic documentation from the early years of these works, with the earliest preserved excavation notebook dating to the end of 1971. As a result, much information about the original state of the villa, as well as the findings within, has been lost.[33]

A significant portion of the archival evidence that does remain from these early years consists of photographs taken by Stanley Jashemski while accompanying his wife, garden archaeologist Wilhelmina Jashemski, on her periodic visits to the site. The latter's pioneering efforts to investigate the archaeobotanical remains of Roman gardens, such as root cavities,

[31] Marasco (2014), para. 213–214.
[32] Clarke (2016a), 57.
[33] Clarke (2014), par. 736–737, 927–928.

pollen, and carbonized plant material, included studies of several green spaces at Villa A, which she conducted sporadically between 1974 and 1984.[34] Jashemski's early work in this field led to a continuous interest in integrating studies of the built and green environments at the site.

The relationship between Villa A and its environment, in particular, remained a major focus during the most recent phase of archaeological work, a collaboration between the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Pompei and the Oplontis Project, under the direction of John R. Clarke of the University of Texas at Austin. The Project began in 2005, with excavations at Villa A taking place between 2006 and 2010. Investigating the ancient environment formed only a part of this broad investigation: goals included the full documentation of the extant remains, as well as investigations below the 79 CE levels in order to gain a better understanding of the history of the buildings prior to the eruption.[35] Among the specialist studies conducted in conjunction with the Oplontis Project were Giovanni di Maio's deep core analysis that aided in reconstructing the pre-eruption landscape of the area, as well as further archaeobotanical studies that shed light on the area's ancient plant populations and their uses.[36] The born-digital first two volumes of the Oplontis Project's publication are the initial steps toward the larger goal of open access availability of the archaeological data, which includes the creation of a complete database of the villa's features and finds linked to a 3D digital model.[37] In contrast to the earlier excavation reports, the density of information provided by the Oplontis Project's publications, deploying a broad toolkit of archaeological methods and technologies to capture the villa from as many angles as possible, facilitates a granular analysis of the site.

[34] Gleason (2014).
[35] For a summary of the Oplontis Project excavations at Villa A, see van der Graaff (2016) 66–71.
[36] di Maio (2014) 662–692.
[37] Clarke (2012).

Although a comprehensive treatment of the villa's architectural features has not yet been published, both preliminary results published by Michael Thomas and John R. Clarke, and drawings available in the Oplontis Project's public facing database testify to the difficulty of organizing building activity at the site into distinct phases. The most up-to-date assessment divides the villa's building history into four or five phases with smaller renovations in between; this is based on analysis of its mixed masonry construction methods (twenty distinct types), wall painting and floor decorations, and pottery finds, with the earliest dated around the middle of the first century BCE.[38]

In this first phase, the villa's architectural core (rooms 21, 20, 4, and 5) over to the rooms around the service peristyle (32) and those off the southwest portico (15, 14, 12, 11, opening off 13) were built. The remnants of a deconstructed colonnade beneath the floor level of the space that later became the *atriolum* (16), just north of these, likely indicate a different arrangement of spaces in the villa's northwest sector during this initial period.[39] The remains of second style wall painting, dated to this same period, are still visible in rooms 1, 5, 11, 12, 14, 15, 22, 23, and 29.[40] At this stage the villa would have been more compact. Assuming a rough symmetry in its plan, the functional and ostentatious parts of the early villa would have been more evenly weighted than was the case in its subsequent development: the service peristyle at this point was off to one side rather than wedged in between multiple entertainment suites. Rooms with particularly important decorations (those worth preserving across the generations and still visible in 79 CE in rooms 5, 11, 14, 15, and 23) were meanwhile concentrated towards the south, with its water views and sea breezes.

[38] Thomas and Clarke (2007) 232. De Caro (2005) 378 proposes an earlier date for the complex, positing that the torcularium (82) at the south end of the east wing originally formed part of an older villa rustica on the same site.
[39] Thomas and Clarke (2007) 226.
[40] Gee (2019a) 73–91.

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Fig 1.2: Plan of Villa A marked with construction techniques. J. Galloway and M. Thomas (from Oplontis Vol. 2, fig. 4.1).

In terms of decorative effects, this iteration of the villa was also the most stylistically uniform of its phases, with its architecture and revetments set up within a short span of time and cultivating a consistent contemporary aesthetic. In some rooms, both pavement and wall paintings emphasized rich colors and bold geometry. In atrium 5, for example, a polychrome meander pattern surrounded the impluvium at its center. Here a band of swastikas and squares outlined in white and shadowed with polychrome sections in red, yellow, and green lends the band a three-dimensional effect against a black background.[41] The jewel tones of this mosaic resonate with the rich hues of red, gold, green, and purple that are highlighted in its wall paintings, which depicted two levels of architecture outfitted with recesses in the facade,

[41] Cline (2019) 2760.

projecting columns, and doors, ornamented with smaller objects such as landscape paintings (*pinakes*), hanging shields, vessels, candelabra, and masks. The paintings' attention to representing semi-illusory architecture in perspective was picked up in the meander patterning on the floor, which, as an optical illusion, appears raised in relief. The same meander pattern appears dividing two sections of the mosaic in *triclinium* 14, alongside a carpet of polychrome crosslets framed by a double black border near the doorways, and a carpet of jewel-toned, tessellated rhombuses, an illusion of shallow depth provided by outlines in black, white, and red.

The bright multicolor tessellations in *opus sculutatum* in nearby *oecus* 15 and niche 16b integrate large fragments of brightly colored limestone cut in irregular quadrilaterals and arranged in a loose, cheerful pattern against a white ground.[42] Though the limestone was available in nearby quarries,[43] the small inserts recall the colored stones that are rendered in aspirationally large quantities in the accompanying wall paintings. The surviving east wall of the room, painted with another elaborate architectural scheme, includes panels and trim painted in shades of red, purple, and yellow identifiable as imitations of imported stones, *rosso antico* (imported from Greece) and *giallo antico* (from Tunisia), that were at the time almost exclusively available for use in public building projects.[44] The resonance between these complex pavements and second style wall paintings, both in their interest in representing an illusion of depth through geometry and their evocation of the saturated, rich colors of the natural world, creates an immersive aesthetic experience of the kind offered by lavish public architecture within the villa space and highlights the artists' ability to render trompe l'oeil effects. Valuable natural

[42] Notably, the palimpsest of floor revetments visible in 16b includes both a small section of apparently original *scutulatum* floor against a black tesserae background as well as a later reinterpretation against a white background that may have made use of stone spoliated from lost sections of the earlier floor, as put forward in Cline (2019) 2825–31.
[43] Fant & Barker (2016) 126.
[44] McAlpine (2016) 113–15.

materials are utilized sparingly but evoked liberally, as is the language of public adornment. Together, the tension between artificiality and naturalism that plays out across both material and iconography in the villa's second style rooms suits contemporary cultural attitudes towards *luxuria* at a time when overt private displays of luxury led to moral censure, but access to luxury goods—usually the products of distant ecosystems and landscapes such as the exotic marbles referenced at Oplontis—served as an index of political and military power.[45] The stylistic uniformity evinced by the villa's earliest decorated rooms did not last, however, and the appearance of new styles as time went on continuously complicated and enlivened the villa's aesthetic operation, each iteration and change resulting in new relationships between its changing elements.

Later renovations to the villa, by default, complicated its aesthetic effect, owing to the layering and juxtaposition of multiple decorative styles as rooms were redone or added to the structure. It is interesting to note that, in addition to all the major rooms painted in the second style, sections of second style mosaics appear also in rooms 12, 16b, 27, and 28 showing that in some places flooring was retained even when the wall revetments (where they existed) were not. Apart from the small niche of 16b, all of the rooms in which the pavement alone became the oldest visible element, the mosaics have simple black and white patterns; tessera size, rather than a major stylistic difference, distinguishes them from later, third style pavements.[46] Their retention might be due to trends in floor design being outpaced by changing tastes in wall design, or might indicate that the costs of replacing a mosaic floor were higher than plastering a wall, leading to a greater conservatism with respect to floor design. But the pattern also indicates that

[45] On the Roman concept of *luxuria* and its entwinement with morality, private and public expenditures, and public identity, see for example Gazda (2016), Leach (2013), Weeber (2003).
[46] Cline (2019) 2791 explains that irregularly sized tesserae laid out in "consistently straight lines" are characteristic of the villa's second style mosaics.

the black and white mosaics may have been considered more suitable accompaniments for the more restrained aesthetic of the next era, in preference to the more colorful designs of *scutulatum.*

A major "third style" renovation took place sometime between 1 and 15 CE, which saw construction of the small courtyard (16) and the rooms around it (7/7A, 8, 18, and 31), the addition of flanking porticos to the north (33 and 34) and south (13 and 24) as well as the development of the rooms facing north into garden 56 (17, 21, and 30).[47] Seams in the second style painting of room 14 reveal that major alterations were made to room 10 bis, where doors leading to rooms 14, 10, and 12 were blocked up and the walls decorated with third style paintings.[48] Many wall paintings dated to this Augustan era renovation were themselves preserved or integrated into later repainting, and appear in rooms 8, 10 bis, 12, 17, 18, 22, 25, and 30.[49] This period's black and white mosaics left more of a permanent mark on the site, appearing scattered throughout the original core as well as new construction, and still preserved in rooms 3, 6, 8, 11, 13, 16, 17, 18, 21, 24, 25, 30 31, 33, 34, 41, and 54.[50] Another likely addition of this period was a portico stretching parallel to the later east wing across the north garden 56. A small cistern, presumably installed to collect rainwater off the slanted roof of this portico, was discovered near the entry to corridor 63 and included debris such as antefixes that matched the decorations of surviving porticos 33 and 34. It had been sealed in antiquity, testifying to its destruction well before the eruption.[51]

[47] Zarmakoupi (2014) 48–49.
[48] Thomas and Clarke (2007) 225.
[49] Gee (2019a) 61–65.
[50] Cline (2019) is a comprehensive catalog of the pavements, while Clarke (2019) 239–246 treats those of the Third Style.
[51] Van der Graaff (2016) 66–67.

In this period, the villa seems to have been centered on the north garden, with rooms occupying the current east wing oriented towards the west rather than assuming their final, eastward-facing configuration (see fig 1.2). The Augustan renovation included the construction of the bath complex and kitchen facilities, all requiring sources of water, making it likely that the curving canal that once snaked through the north garden, fed by an aqueduct and later buried beneath the planted surface, may be dated to this period as well.[52] The additions would have dramatically change the inhabitants' experience of the gardens and its surrounding rooms, the sound of flowing water reaching between its plantings and through the windows into rooms 17, 30, the cluster of rooms 54, 57, and 58 (destroyed in a later phase), as well as any that opened onto the destroyed portico. The more restrained decorative style of the Augustan period, in which the third style wall paintings are characterized by broad color fields, attenuated and miniaturized architectural details and "floating" figures, and sometimes include framed "panel" paintings of mythological scenes or landscapes, was layered in with the existing earlier decor.[53] In *triclinium* 14, for example, a blocked doorway through the eastern wall reveals that the second style paintings were patched up with imitations of the earlier style at the same time that the simple color fields and delicate ornamentation of the third style were deployed on the opposite side of the wall in corridor 10 bis, showcasing the flexibility of the artists who worked at the site as well as a conservative streak on the part of their patron.[54]

The impulses towards expansion, retention, and revitalization continued into the period marked by use of fourth style; there were at least two major renovations within these years. The

[52] Thomas and Clarke (2011) 373–74 describe a section of this feature discovered in trench OPK 3, close to the modern stairs that descend to the site and posit that it may have gone out of use due to disruption of the aqueduct, perhaps in the 62 earthquake.
[53] On the third style in general, see Ling (1991) 52-70; on the third style at Oplontis, see Clarke (2019).
[54] Thomas and Clarke (2009) 358–59.

changes continued to obscure and alter the effects of earlier construction and decorations. In addition to the revamping of the villa's existing spaces, the period between the mid-first century CE and the 79 CE eruption saw new work, the most intensive activity concentrated in and around its east wing. The current configuration of the rooms of the east wing, with rooms facing out onto portico 60, is dated around the middle of the first century (ca. 45 CE), and the impressive interior corridor 46 and portico 40 that connect it to the villa's core and the enormous *natatio* (98) that runs parallel to it were likely constructed around the same time.

A good example of the compressed and complicated picture of change during this period is evidence regarding the construction of *diaeta* 78, an octagonal entertainment space just south of the pool edge. In trench OP3, just below the southwest corner of the pool, debris similar to the material discovered in the north garden cistern (possibly belonging to the destroyed earlier portico was found alongside large fragments from the original third style paintings in room 8, far across the site to the west, testifying to its partial deconstruction and repainting prior to the deposit of this lower level fill.[55] When the Oplontis Project opened up a trench just to the south, against the eastern wall of the *diaeta*, the excavators discovered surprisingly deep foundations and a beaten earth construction level on top of a debris fill that included fourth style painting fragments that appear to come from elsewhere in the villa.[56] According to their interpretation, this means that debris was carted from other parts of the villa renovated in the fourth style to raise the level of the garden after 45 CE, and producing the beaten earth surface used during construction of room 78. Still later, but before the 79 CE eruption, the expensive wall revetments marble and paneled wood and the opus sectile floor that adorned room 78 were stripped out,

[55] Van der Graaff (2016) 68.
[56] Thomas and Clarke (2009) 361.

leaving only impressions and scraps behind.[57] The enormous pool that is one of the villa's most distinctive features likewise revealed a complicated history upon excavation, with finds demonstrating that the original was both longer and wider than the present structure, and two levels of pavement that signal different phases of construction.[58] It remains unclear whether the original version of the pool was replaced after or in preparation for the construction of the east wing. This means that, within a span of thirty years, another section of the villa was painted, deconstructed, its fragments collected and deposited, and room 78 was built, outfitted, and then finally spoliated. Somewhere in between, at least two versions of the nearby pool were built.

It is difficult to isolate moments of inhabitation within the information available, which paints a picture of dynamic and ongoing construction occurring throughout the villa's later years. The major earthquake of 62 CE caused extensive damage in the region and scholars have proposed that this catastrophe was responsible for disruptions to the villa's water systems, the destruction of certain areas (the north garden portico, rooms 54, 57, and 58), and the need for painting renovations.[59] This extra layer of non-anthropogenic change complicates the record further, making it uncertain which developments may have been made in response to the earthquake and which were independent. Counterintuitively, the more granular data available to shed light on changes during the villa's later periods makes it more difficult to construct a clean, phased timeline for the site's developments at that point.

In addition to the major renovations in the east, a majority of the villa's walls were repainted in those final years in the latest fourth style. Regina Gee has identified two separate workshops responsible for these paintings, with the first operating around 45 CE, and the second

[57] Barker (2016) 119–25.
[58] Thomas and Clarke (2007) 230–32.
[59] Van der Graaff (2016) 67–68.

coming in to patch, repair, and refresh the existing paintings across all three styles, probably after 62 CE.[60] The hands of painters from both workshops are evident on all of the villa's major exterior porticos (13, 24, 33, 34, 40, and 60), paintings that, being partly open to the exterior, would likely have weathered more quickly than those on the interior.[61] The later workshop also appears renewing and imitating existing wall paintings in the atrium (5) and oecus 15, and in fourth style interventions in rooms 17 and 8 (the latter replacing the fragments that found their way into a trench south of the pool).[62] The less refined paintings that decorate the villa's corridors and service areas have also been assigned to this later group of painters. Such intensive renovations indicate an interest in maintaining the property and updating it to suit the patron's needs, at least up until its final phase. For example, the addition of the final doors to the propylon facade of room 21, the largest of the rooms facing onto the north garden, clearly postdated the construction of the third style floor mosaics, as the marble hinge seats that would have supported them cut through the threshold designs.[63] This may indicate that the room once stood open to the garden, a covered extension of the outdoor space.

In the end, none of the earlier phases of the villa exist outside of fragments, and today they are known largely through archaeological reconstruction and mapping. The villa's latest phase is the most visible, but also the most difficult to disentangle. The relative chronology of the site's features unfolds on a tight timeline; the information it provides is detailed but the overall picture remains blurry, a shifting impression that leads to further questions as much as it increases understanding about the structure's history. Was the east wing ever finished in its current configuration? Was the previous, larger iteration of the pool in use much prior to its

[60] Gee (2019a). See also Esposito (2019) 375–76.
[61] Gee (2019a) 73–75, 86–87, fig. 1.1.
[62] Gee (2019a) 66, 70–72; Thomas and Clarke (2011) 358.
[63] Cline (2019) 2849.

reduction in size? Was the propylon at some point fully open to the north garden, creating a continuous line of connection from the garden through *viridarium* 20 and room 4 before reaching the atrium doors? The villa's expansion and aesthetic upkeep over time offers significant information about the driving design trajectories of the villa, as well as the not always linear progression towards ever larger and more impressive features, but the moments rendered visible through archaeology are limited and it is not always possible to pin down the relationships between its various parts to allow for a confident reconstruction of the whole at any given point. Nonetheless, the changing face of the villa renders the ephemeral qualities of nature less foreign to the artificial realm, bringing the changes wrought in the artificial sphere into resonance with the ephemeral, embodied experience that characterizes discussions of the natural world. Despite the limitations presented by the necessarily fragmentary narrative of structural change presented by the villa's archaeological remains, the picture of change that emerges facilitates understanding the dialogue between an ever shifting and repeating ecological sphere and the way its material features were processed, refined, and fixed within the built realm, in which the passage of time, and its many manifestations, became enrolled among aesthetic operations.

B: The Recreative Fiction in Stone: The Archaeological Park at Torre Annunziata

At the Scavi di Oplontis, in the town of Torre Annunziata, Villa A now stands open to visitors, standing as solid and upright as on the day before the eruption. At the same time, visitors cannot pass through the same building that any Roman might have inhabited. Rather they can visit an extensive, structurally sound, and—whether intentionally or not—creative reconstruction, cobbled together from the remains of a heavily damaged original and reinforced

by mid-late 20th century construction materials and techniques. The Oplontis Project's efforts to tease out the story behind the villa's modern reconstruction and conservation through close study of the standing ruins and the partial photographic and written records of the early years of work on the site have revealed some of the factors that shaped the creation of the archaeological park.[64] By necessity, the villa's original excavators engaged in reconstruction even while digging continued, and they often made use of the ancient material to rebuild its crumbled walls, making it difficult in places to find the seams between ancient and modern masonry.[65] Archival photos from these early years reveal how different the villa looked before the reconstruction of its roofing and upper walls and make clear the sheer scale of destruction wrought by the eruption.

Image removed for copyright

Fig. 1.3: Archival photo showing the excavation of *oecus* 23 in 1967. From the Oplontis Project online database: https://hdl.handle.net/2027/fulcrum.cv43nx454.

[64] A detailed summary of their findings appears in Clarke (2014), esp 734–837.
[65] Thomas and Clarke (2007) 225.

One photo, which shows the ongoing excavation efforts in *oecus* 23 in 1967 (Fig. 1.3), can be used to provide a window into the process, as it offers telling evidence that the form of the building as it stands today doesn't fully correspond to the archaeological evidence that was unearthed. In the left foreground, a part of the crumbling outer wall of portico 24 is visible, top heavy and prevented from falling only by a supporting propped pair of logs, and demonstrating the challenges that the site posed to its excavators. While the upper levels of the second style wall paintings are visible on the east wall, the paintings on the north are still covered by a layer of hardened ash. Most interestingly, each wall appears to curve into a tympanum, signaling that the ceiling took the form of a cross vault.[66] Today, the room has a high, flat ceiling with the walls extending bare above the cornice, giving it a more open, hall-like atmosphere, and all traces of the vault have disappeared, altering profoundly the experience of the space.

Other dramatic interventions imitated the original architecture but attempted to erase the damage caused by the eruption, such as the re-erection of the columns of portico 33, which a documentary photo shows had been snapped like toothpicks by the first pyroclastic flow that hit the villa and were lying atop a thick swathe of lapilli (fig. 1.4). Still other efforts went further, cleaning up damage that was caused *prior* to the eruption, thus rendering the villa more complete than in its 79 CE state and obscuring some of the complicated history of its later years. Some of the reconstructive interventions, like filling in the trench cut through room 4, effected a practical purpose, making it safer for visitors to circulate through the site.

[66] Clarke (2014) 786.

Image removed for copyright

Fig. 1.4: Archival Soprintendenza photo showing the state of portico 33 upon excavation, Oplontis Database Cat. 2010.033.09.00670.

Others seem to have served primarily aesthetic aims: the impluvium in atrium 5, for example, had been torn out prior to the eruption (its state in 1970 seen in fig 1.5) and its mosaic meander border reduced to fragments; this was reconstructed as a complete basin with a raised lip and the meander was pieced back together by conservators.[67] While this choice rendered the atrium more impressive, a separate decision to set an arbitrary height to the ceiling in the same room actually diminished the volume of the space. Fragments of wall painting fragments that were stored rather than reattached to the wall in this room testify to the existence of a second register of architectural paintings that would have required a ceiling height higher by several meters than the (already lofty) reconstructed version in order to fit.[68]

[67] Cline (2019) 2760–61.
[68] Thomas and Clarke (2011) 378; Clarke et al. (2016) 73–74.

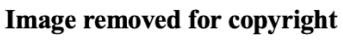

Fig. 1.5: Detail of the impluvium in 1970, before reconstruction. Oplontis Project Cat. 2009.005.08.00003.

Still other alterations mitigated damage that occurred in the modern period, despite efforts to stabilize the fragmentary and damaged structure, such as the total reconstruction of the south wall of room 29, which photos show must have collapsed after excavation, with its wall paintings and doorway displaced sometime after 1972.[69] The changes are visible in the side-by-side comparison between an archival photo from that year and one from 2014 (fig. 1.5): not only have the masonry draft lines from the upper zone disappeared, but the configuration of the reconstructed plaster is different. Still more indicative of a major change is the alteration in the line of masonry framing the door, which is visibly rougher in the later photograph; showing its reconstruction was from rubble rather than the coursed stone. As room 29 is one of the few not open to the public, there are no known photographs to help document this forty-two-year interval and clarify when these changes occurred or what happened to catalyze them.

[69] On portico 33, see Clarke (2014) 799–800, fig. 5.60; on room 29, 811–813, figs. 5.67 and 5.68.

Image removed for copyright

Fig. 1.6: Side by side comparison of the south wall of room 29 in 1972 (left) and 2014 (right). Sources: Oplontis Project Database cats. 2009.029.09.00207 and 2014.029.09.03077.

Some of the structural changes that resulted during this process are visible, either in the archival record, such as the examples discussed above, or in the standing structure itself, such as the poured concrete patches on many of its floors and the concrete lintels that define many of its doorways. Yet the invisibility of some known interventions, like the rebuilt masonry in room 29, makes it likely that at least some changes wrought by the reconstruction are unknown and cannot be recovered. The potential inaccuracy of the on-site reconstruction, despite its emotive power and advertisement as a visitable "Roman villa", prevents it from being used uncritically as a setting for evocations of the past. Though built from solid stone and on the footprint of the Roman site, the structure in the archaeological park does not replicate Villa A precisely, as it was in 79 CE or in any earlier period.

Alterations to the architectural design not only change the visual qualities of the villa and present a deceptively complete picture to visitors. They also set off a chain reaction that affects the environmental character of the space and prevents the site from serving as a straightforward basis for investigations into its other sensory qualities. For example, the acoustic qualities of rooms like *oecus* 23, with a modern reconstructed ceilings that do not follow the excavated evidence for their original state, are quite different from their ancient predecessor, preventing the space from serving as a soundstage (or the creation of a software filter that could be applied to studio recordings) that might facilitate a more holistic understanding of the room's aesthetic effects.[70] Despite the apparent solidity of the building, the archaeological site of Villa A presents not replication of its earlier state, but yet another phase of the structure, and one that erases, obscures, and spotlights some of its previous iterations—creating permanent mysteries in brick and mortar, but also continuing the living legacy of its changing architecture established within its ancient lifetime.

#3: Fragmentary Alternatives:

Since its excavation, data on Villa A has been widely dispersed. Without setting foot in Italy, it is possible to meet with one of the villa's several doppelgangers: a copy of the Oplontis Project's 3D digital reconstruction; scholar-artist Victoria I's physical miniature model of the site; museum exhibitions; a photo tour of its rooms in low resolution on the curated website of Jackie and Bob Dunn, "Pompeii in Pictures."[71] Written descriptions support imaginative

[70] Pentcheva and Abel (2017) developed a method of recording acoustic imprints via popping balloons within spaces they wanted to reconstruct (the Hagia Sophia) that enables more complex recordings taken elsewhere to be transformed to fit the acoustic pattern of the desired target.
[71] www.pompeiiinpictures.com

reconstruction: the summaries of archaeological work, guidebooks, travel blog posts. None of these substitute for the lost original or replace on-site experience of the archaeological park; all in their way filter out the effects of the natural world. Alternative reconstructions and documentation can compensate for the errors in the rebuilt site that are known, but can just as easily compound them, and the more comprehensive they appear, the more misleading small omissions and errors become. A few examples serve to illustrate the strengths and limitations of these surrogates for the experience at the archaeological site.

In 2016, a set of artifacts from Oplontis went on display in a traveling exhibition, "Leisure and Luxury in the Age of Nero: the Villas of Oplontis Near Pompeii," which sought to tease out the themes of *otium* and *negotium* (roughly, leisure and business) as they played out between the sites of Villa A and the neighboring industrial buildings known as Oplontis B.[72] The exhibition traveled to three museums across the United States: after an initial installation at the University of Michigan's Kelsey Museum of Archaeology in Ann Arbor, the show went on display at the Museum of the Rockies in Bozeman, Montana, and the Smith College Museum of Art in Northampton, Massachusetts. In each case, the installation presented a rendering of Villa A as a seat of luxury, made available to those interested and in the know on a temporary basis, and accomplished through a display strategy that mixed artifacts with reconstructions: printed wall appliqués that mimicked some of its paintings, display cases that evoked sculptural settings like the fountain planter in peristyle 16, and reconstruction of *cubiculum* 11 outfitted with benches for visitors in its niches (fig. 1.4).

[72] Gazda & Clarke (2016) 22. This exhibition was organized as a joint effort between the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology under curator Elaine Gazda, the Oplontis Project headed by John R. Clarke of the University of Texas, and with the cooperation of the Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali e del Turismo and the Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Pompei, Ercolano, e Stabia.

As is always the case in a museum setting, the artifacts on display were stripped of their archaeological context, and the process of curation involved framing them within a selective evocation that suited both institutional and curatorial aims.[73] By playing with the alignment of features within the gallery, adding artificial plants that evoked the "green architecture"[74] that once adorned the site, and playing a soft recording of garden sounds through speakers in the cubiculum, the installation aimed to guided visitors to experiencer an idealized atmosphere of *otium,* evoking in its artifacts the facets that aligned most clearly with the show's themes. Within the strict limitations posed by the gallery setting, this presentation tried explicitly to draw out the intended harmony that once arose between the villa's natural and built features. It could not, however, replicate *living* nature, only offer a still, unmoving version of it. As an exhibition targeted towards artifacts gathered from a specific archaeological context (rather than focusing on a particular medium, object class, or time period), the gallery was made to serve as a replacement for and extension of the sites that it described, one that gestured towards nature but could not actually include it.[75]

In the introduction to the exhibition catalog, Massimo Osanna, then head of the Special Superintendency for the Archaeological Heritage of Pompeii, Herculaneum, and Stabia, noted that most of the objects displayed had long been kept in storage and out of public view.[76] The Director of Excavations at Oplontis, Lorenzo Fergola, in the preface made explicit that he hoped that the project would draw more members of the public to the archaeological park, concluding, "Being able to present to the public a selection of the most important materials, including the

[73] Gurian (1999) 170–173, Dudley (2010) 4–10
[74] Bergmann (2016) 96.
[75] Ipads installed in the galleries provided opportunities for visitors to encounter the fuller context of the site beyond the reconstructions in the galleries; the digital reproduction used is discussed more fully below.
[76] Osanna (2016) 15.

stunning sculpture, adds an international dimension to the understanding of the archaeological heritage of Oplontis and will bring many more visitors to the site,"[77] thus setting up a dialogue between the gallery and source site.

Fig. 1.7**:** View of the "Leisure and Luxury" Villa A gallery in the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology from within the reconstruction of *cubiculum* 11, with the "fountain planter" supporting a statuette of Venus center right, and a display case in the shape of a *lararium* and wall appliques imitating "zebra stripes" in the upper left. Photo by the author.

The temporary presence of these artifacts in American institutions brings the characteristics of both into view: the gallery offers a protected sphere for display of the villa's moveable finds, but can only evoke targeted aspects of the original context from which they came, while the archaeological park, even in its patchwork form, communicates the power of place, but one that has been stripped of its contents and largely divorced from its relationship

[77] Fergola (2016) 16.

with local ecology. These two sites force visitors to use their imaginations in opposite directions, with museum visitors attempting to recreate the context of the villa environment from the objects discovered within, and villa visitors trying to imaginatively repopulate an empty shell with things and persons. Both reconstructions accomplish effects that the other cannot and their limitations are complementary.

If the immersive, evocative gallery setting, powered by the authenticity of its artifacts, extends a version of Villa A beyond its foundations on a temporary basis, other strategies for replicating the structure compress data that seeks to capture the site in a smaller, infinitely portable form: through digital representation. Digital artifacts have characteristics that set them apart from physical records, including editability, interactivity, and distributability, that challenge the ideas of authenticity and provenance that undergird traditional museological practice.[78] The process of creating each digital impression produces a new version of the villa, "decoupled from the original artifact",[79] which in turn can be copied, downloaded, shared, transposed, altered, and/or excerpted by anyone with access to the files. While it has emerged as the most flexible strategy for modeling architecture, the digital realm also represents the most radical break with viewing the villa as an embodied space. Limited to the visual sphere, the effects of environmental integration can be inserted into the model only insofar as they affect its appearance.

Online photographic databases like "Pompeii in Pictures" provide a selection of views of the site as framed by the lens of volunteer photographers. While the resolution of photos on Pompeii in Pictures is low, the coverage is extensive and it is possible to see a variety of views of almost every one of the villa's rooms. The website is free and accessible to anyone with an

[78] Kallinikos et al. (2013) 358–361.
[79] Garstki (2017) 726.

internet connection, and the pages dedicated to Villa A are especially easy to navigate, with a clickable plan that links to the photo page associated with each numbered space. While the website democratizes access to images of the villa, its digital interface is both partial (again capturing only the villa's sights and confined to the view through a photographer's lens) and guided by convention. The image pages are organized by ordinal room numbers, which had been assigned by the villa's excavators on the basis of the order in which their floors were uncovered rather than the relation among rooms.[80] Rooms 1 and 2, for example, were the first and second spaces to be assigned numbers during excavations, but they appear on either side of the room numbered 27 rather than adjacent to one another. The scrolling images on "Pompeii and Pictures" follow this arbitrary numbering system, thus scattering rooms that are associated with one another across different pages of the site. Clicking through the pages in order separates the images of the villa from their geographic context and spatial relations to one another, fragmenting the structure. The effect of an integrated structure is almost totally lost, to say nothing of its relations with the broader environment, which appears only unmoving as background to selected views.

The Oplontis Project's online database offers an even more comprehensive collection of images of the site, including medium-resolution images of almost every wall, archival photographs, hand-drawn illustrations of the walls and floors, and photos of associated artifacts for each numbered space. The archival photos capture ongoing work in the excavation of the site; the photos of its gardens, therefore, are photos of the excavation of the gardens. The more contemporary photos taken by members of the Oplontis Project team are focused on capturing neutral views of the villa's features, rather than its ambience, leading to an impression of the

[80] Clarke (2014) 739.

villa that is organized by category: walls, plaster fragments, floors, etc. In addition, the database is not easily searchable, and the public-facing link is buried in the Oplontis Project website, making this a less accessible resource for the general public. Similarly, a 3D digital model, developed by the Oplontis Project together with King's Visualization Lab, is intended for open access public use but, as of the time of writing, is still unpublished.[81] This model is designed to be navigable and flexible, enabling users to toggle between a photogrammetric reconstruction of the villa in its current state and a hypothetical reconstruction that includes adjustments to the modern reconstruction that incorporates the results of the Oplontis Project's studies.[82] The program is based on Unity gaming software and intuitive to use, presenting the villa in a first-person perspective. The in-game physics, however, are somewhat fantastical and occasionally error prone. Without conscious effort, I managed to get my avatar to leap across the roofs and also found my virtual self wading through the floors—feats that defy the physical properties of the place the model represents and highlight its artificiality. Select plants, such as those evidenced by Jashemski's root casts in the east garden, are represented within the model, but the broader environment is not (the villa still appears within a deep trench, the lawns are presented as dirt, and the natural forms are static). Like many digitizations, the model is haptically limited to the visual; it is an excellent tool for exploring vistas and pathways and includes a functionality that allows users to change the light and see the villa at different times of day, but it does not replicate the feeling of being at the villa or even in a gallery, which are sensorily immersive and do not induce an artificial separation between sight and other modes of perception.

[81] A version of this model was installed as part of the Kelsey Museum's "Leisure and Luxury" exhibition for limited public use.
[82] For a full description of the digital imaging project, see Clarke (2016b) and Clarke et al. (2016).

In its final form, the digital model is planned to link each feature directly to entries in the Oplontis project database, making it not only a representation of the villa, but, in the words of its creators "a tool for new research," "far outstripping conventional print publications."[83] While the model and database are undoubtedly useful, the claim of its superiority over written accounts reveals one of the major pitfalls that often accompanies projects in the digital humanities: the presentation of digital media as objective, the conflation of database links with transparency, and the suggestion of completion, when, in fact, it is based on data that, as demonstrated above, is not neutral. The spotty records of earlier years limit the database and model's ability to return the villa to an "original" state, while the current state photography freezes the villa in the liminal phase between inhabitation and abandonment represented by on-site reconstruction.

The Oplontis Project's open access digital publications, too, provide near comprehensive written documentation of many subsets of the site's features, but their presentation as an apparently complete catalog makes the rare omissions stand out. The first published volume, for example, helpfully presents catalogs of plants and animals represented on the villa's walls compiled by Massimo Ricciardi.[84] Both include tables that list the "identifiable" and "unidentifiable" specimens by rooms. Identifiable plants appear in rooms 5, 8, 14, 15, 23, 38, 60, 61, 66, 68, 70, 80, 81, 85, 87, and 92, unidentifiable plants in rooms 8, 14, 15, 32, 38, 60, 66, 68, 70, and 85.[85] No mention is made at all of painted plants (including garlands, plants along the socle, and plants integrated into central panel paintings) that appear in rooms 1, 4, 11, 12, 13, 16, 16b, 17, 18, 20, 22A, 24, 27, 31, 33, 34, 37, 40, 41, 46, 55, 76, or 79. The list of animal specimens is similarly incomplete, without a clear explanation of the selection criteria used to

[83] Clarke et al. (2016) 73.
[84] Ricciardi (2014a; 2014b).
[85] Ricciardi (2014a) tables 7.1, 7.2.

compile it. The catalog of wall paintings, written by Regina Gee, contains thorough and detailed entries, but omits the wall paintings in rooms 9, 52, 53, 54, 57, 62, 80, or 94, again without explanation.[86] While cross-referencing between the database, publications, and model can mitigate these omissions and fill in gaps, this requires both a lot of effort and a desire to look beyond whatever single version the user has encountered first. In other words, the more comprehensive and complete any single version of the villa appears to be, the more difficult it is for a member of the public to know that it is anything other than exhaustive unless they have already encountered the missing pieces in another rendition of the site.

In short, curatorial processes are at play in the creation of not only in recreations set within the museum, but also in digital replications and written works. In their attempts to present clear narratives and meet the challenges of the interpreting the excavation record and reconstructing the site, they create new impressions of the place that can, out of context, be mistaken for replicas of the original.

#4: The Lived-In Luxury Estate:

In the realms of both scholarship and tourism, Villa A is often used as an illustration of a broader elite villa culture that developed from the second century BCE onward and was enmeshed in the socio-political and economic changes wrought by the slow transition from republic to empire. This interpretation Villa A as a luxury property inhabited by its proprietor, family, guests, and an extended household of workers and slaves, at the height of its architectural development and adornment. This is the most appealing version for a study that involves the

[86] Gee (2019b).

villa's intended audiences in its discussion, where people and art, the building, gardens, and broader environment are all present and active. It is this villa whose leisure facilities are described in Bettina Bergmann's "Art and Nature at Oplontis" and Mantha Zarmakoupi's *Designing for Luxury on the Bay of Naples,* and represented by exhibitions like the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology's "Leisure and Luxury in the Age of Nero: The Villas at Oplontis near Pompeii", and whose practical domestic and agricultural functioning has been investigated by scholars Sandra Joshel and Lauren Hackworth Petersen in their inquiries into the lives of its population of slaves.[87] This version of the villa, however difficult to access given the constraints of the available models, offers the most promise for integrating ecological context into its study—even though Villa A does not always serve as a neat illustration of a binary between nature and culture (or luxury and productivity) as is often presupposed by broader narratives.

Elite Roman villa culture was enmeshed in, and has traditionally been interpreted through, the lens of historical developments that changed the behaviors of elite Romans between the second century BCE and first century CE. The Roman villas of this period have offered a vibrant topic, one that scholars have considered from economic, socio-cultural, and aesthetic angles, building their understanding through archaeological and textual documentation of hundreds of examples.[88] While the origins of this characteristically Roman architectural form remain in debate,[89] the villa's popularity and flexibility as a building type is certain: it flourished from the mid-second century BCE onward, especially along the Tyrrhenian coast, and spread across the empire—long outlasting the buried sites around the Bay of Naples like those at Oplontis. By the time that construction began at the site of Villa A, in the middle of the first

[87] Bergmann (2002); Zarmakoupi (2014); Gazda & Clarke (2016); Joshel & Peterson (2014; 2016).
[88] Marzano (2007) provides a comprehensive collection of known villa sites in Central Italy.
[89] Marzano (2007) 1–12; Becker & Terrenato (2012).

century BCE,[90] elaborate villas were already conceptually enmeshed in the moral beliefs, social structure, and political and economic roles of the landowning class, and had become places where Romans negotiated and explored their relationships to the environment against the backdrop of an ever expanding cultural territory.[91]

The earliest extensive written treatment of a Roman villa emphasizes the linked moral and economic dimensions of villa ownership by illustrating the traditional aristocratic values associated with keeping a country estate. Written in the second century BCE by the traditionalist soldier-farmer-statesman Cato the Elder, the *De agri cultura* is as much an exercise in aristocratic self-fashioning as it is a collection of farming principles and assorted articles of folk wisdom.[92] Importantly, the link Cato drew between moral uprightness on the one hand, and proper farming techniques on the other, serves as an indication of the importance of a rustic, ecologically focused sensitivity as part of the self-fashioning of Roman elites even in this early period.

The slow collapse of the Roman Republic under the stresses of repeated civil wars and the emergence of a string of ambitious and charismatic leaders including Sulla, Pompey, Caesar, and eventually the first emperor, Augustus was already underway by the time Villa A was first built.[93] First the shifting and perilous political situations of the civil wars, and then the establishment of an imperial family, led to changes in the ways that wealthy Romans spent their money and expressed their cultural status. A property outside of Rome, like Oplontis, might serve as a good place to ride out a dangerous political situation, while reduced competition for political power in the urban center facilitated the funneling of greater sums into private

[90] This date is based on the villa's earliest Second Style wall paintings.
[91] D'Arms 1984.
[92] Terrenato (2012), 85–86 with further bibliography; Reay (2012).
[93]

endeavors such as the accumulation and embellishment of country estates.[94] At the same time, the conquering sensibilities of Rome's great political leaders led to the elimination of local dangers, such as the pirates along the Campanian coast eradicated in 67–66 BCE by Pompey, which made such properties ever more desirable.

Despite great internal variety, villas were all drawn together by "a basic common denominator: the Roman elite ideology of landedness and the improvement of the mind by natural surroundings."[95] Though elite villas became both more popular and more elaborate, they never lost their moral associations or their ability to reflect on the character of their owners. The moral exemplum of the modest farmer with time to write (embodied in Cato's *De agri cultura*) remained popular into the imperial period; for example, it is a prominent aspect of Horace's self-portrayal in his Augustan era poetry. But the focus of villa life for the wealthy elites shifted heavily over time to the more relaxing side of the farmer-philosopher role. For many, the villa became symbolic of a state of productive retreat from the business of the city, the seat of *otium* (leisure) in contrast to the burdensome *negotium* (non-leisure) of the political realm, which by this point consisted of jockeying for imperial favor and granting favors to those further from the center of power. Inhabitants partaking in otiose activity, like those overseeing rural labor, were intrinsically connected with a villa's living surroundings and engaged in an attentive understanding of them. Villa owners might take a philosophical stroll through the gardens, take some time to write in one of their quiet and secluded *cubicula,* or entertain visitors with a banquet in an ornate reception room with a view of the seaside.[96]

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[94] D'Arms (1984) remains the most complete socio-cultural history of these villa owners, tracing the development of the Bay of Naples through time, and cites Strabo in its preface (vii–viii). Littlewood (1987) pairs the Strabo quote with the rise of oversized villas properties.
[95] Rothe (2018), 42.
[96] Zarmakoupi (2014) 88–90; Gazda (2016).

The multiple meanings ascribed to the term "villa" reflect these properties' roles as both ideological constructs and physical plants. What draws them together is that all forms of villa had at least a pretension to both comfort and productivity. This same combination of luxury accommodation and agricultural yield is reflected more explicitly in the writings of Columella, another agronomist writing in the mid-first century CE, who drew terminological distinctions between functional zones of the same villa complex: the *pars rustica* where production was centered, the *pars fructuaria* for storage, and the *pars urbana* for dwelling.[97] The integration of the household and its environment in the cultural conception of villas is also reflected by the idiomatic use of the phrase *in villa* as shorthand for being in the countryside in general.[98]

Spaces designed for cultivating pleasure and taking in decorative gardens abound at Villa A, which has been traditionally interpreted as a site with a near total emphasis on luxury over productivity. Within the ecologically grounded Roman mindset, however, productivity and luxury are not opposites. Early on in her treatment of the site, Bergmann writes that Villa A "obviously belonged to members of the elite; its grand architecture, marble sculpture groups, and stunning frescoes and mosaics, although made at different stages, each represent the current state-of-the-art villa design."[99] She goes on to stress that with each new development at the villa there were increased opportunities for resonance between its plantings and its artistic decorations and architectural layout. She focuses particularly on the development of the villa's two most dramatically framed axial views. The first is a vista stretching from the porticoed north garden 56 to grand reception room 21, *viridarium* 20, room 4, the atrium (5), and out onto the south seaside gardens; the second the enfilade of the east wing, where large reception rooms (64/65, 69. 73/74)

[97] Columella *de Re Rustica* 1.6.1.
[98] Percival (1976), 14.
[99] Bergmann (2002) 91.

alternate with *viridaria* (61, 68, 70, 87). Along these vistas, the repetition of sculptural elements, plantings, and colonnades, both across the physical space, and in its framing decorations, create an illusory interplay between the representational and real worlds that, as Bergmann writes, results in "multimedia variations on a valued theme of cultivation."[100] The prominence of landscape and garden imagery within the villa's representative sphere leads Bergmann to dub the space "a farm without its mess,"[101] a place that places a high value on *evocations* of natural abundance, but within a highly orchestrated sphere geared primarily towards luxury. Within this harmonious pairing of art and nature, it is easy to imagine members of the elite Roman class engaging in the activities that defined a life of *otium*. For solitary pursuits, they might cultivate their bodies by taking a stroll through the gardens or down to the beach, their minds by reading or composing in a quiet *cubiculum* to the sound of the waves or the chatter of the garden. Socially, the villa's multiple dining spaces and large, highly decorated reception rooms offered plenty of opportunities for the proprietors to entertain guests.

When Villa A is considered as a whole, however, there is no neat distinction between its productive facilities and those developed for elite activities. The villa was certainly alive with plants, not all of them practical. Archaeobotanical studies, especially of the north garden 56, east garden 98, and *viridarium* 20 provide evidence of fruit trees, myrtle, oleander, and cypresses, but these were planted on an ornamental rather than an industrial scale.[102] The only remains of animals discovered and recorded in situ were two dormouse skeletons in *viridarium* 70, which are more likely to have been caged specimens or the discarded remains of a meal in a nearby room than an indicator that such delicacies were being raised at the site.[103] However there are

[100] Bergmann (2002) 112; see also 103–109.
[101] Bergmann (2002) 119.
[102] Gleason (2014); Di Pasquale (2014).
[103] Pompeii Archaeological Park (2018) 34.

indications of productive activity scattered throughout the site. The villa's central peristyle (32) housed agricultural tools at the time of the eruption. A *torcularium* (82) is located near the southeast limits of the excavation and early pollen studies have provided evidence of olive trees nearby.[104] The parts of the villa that could most easily be ascribed to Columella's division of the *pars rustica,* as being involved with productive rather than leisure activities, are located far away from one another, with the press along the southern facade with a sea view and closer to the entertainment areas of the east wing than the central service peristyle. This peristyle itself, surrounded by storage rooms and cramped upper quarters that likely housed slaves, is a central feature of nearly all pathways through the site. It is impossible to pass from the east wing to the western part of the villa without either walking in one of its outdoor gardens or passing through the peristyle. Rather than separated out, the villa's productive areas, it seems, were integrated into the orchestration of display and self-fashioning at the site.[105] While the precise nature and scale of production at Villa A is unclear, the builders and decorators made an effort to integrate signs of productivity into prominent locations, while devoting the bulk of the villa's immediate natural surroundings and presence within the walls to the pleasures wrought by productivity.

In addition to the villa's resistance to the traditional categories through which it has been interpreted, and the difficulty of pinpointing temporal relationships between its many phases, there is an elusive quality that emerges from the remains themselves and suggests powerful ways in which indoor and outdoor environments interpenetrated. This integration between the villa's indoor and outdoor environments was effected through the interaction of the static decorations of its walls with changes in the world outside, leading to ever shifting valences of contrast and connection, developing from moment to moment.

[104] Ermolli and Messager (2014), 1227.
[105] Purcell (1995) discusses the phenomenon of productive display.

Given the evidence provided by Villa A, it is easy to understand why it has been used as an illustration of the kind of villa that represents elite consumption, rather than rural productivity. Yet, as we have seen, both the physical remains and scholarly renderings of Villa A render the site difficult to access, making it challenging to recreate moments within its lived experience. The complicated unfolding of the villa's building phases, with evidence of an even quicker succession of interlocking decorative schemes, points to a sustained interest in changing the relationships between aesthetic elements (including its exterior and interior gardens) as time unfolded. What remains constant throughout all of these changes, I argue, is the villa's relationship with the environment. As revealed by the chestnut tree growing at the heart of Villa A, living nature impacted the very placement of brick and mortar and must be considered an active participant in the creation of the site's rhythms of daily life. While at first glance, the void caused by a missing tree might seem ephemeral in comparison to the stones and plaster of the site, the tree presents as real an element in its creation as its concrete and mortar. Determining the significance of the presence of nature as actor requires first looking more deeply at relevant emic textual sources.

III. Active Nature in Roman Thought:

The argument for considering the elements of the natural world as active participants in the social and cultural sphere of the Roman world arises from the perspectives of Romans expressed in surviving art and literature. Evidence for complex and dynamic relationships between Romans and their natural environment abounds. Relations ranged from the cooperative to the adversarial, but all involved an acute awareness of non-human phenomena and cultures as

well as their impact on daily life. Let us return to the example of the chestnut tree at Oplontis and branch out from there to consider the conceptualization of other plants and other elements of nature.

In her brief discussion of the peristyle tree as part of the interactions between "Art and Nature at Oplontis", Bettina Bergmann relates it to the many accounts of Roman patrons who "preserved and incorporated a venerable tree into their home as a sign of *pietas*"[106]; this was a means to establish their own fidelity to, and cultivation of, the traditions of the family and state. Bergmann cites three similar examples: an epigram of Martial that describes a plane tree flourishing in a household atrium that had been planted by Julius Caesar; Suetonius' account of the first emperor, Augustus, transplanting a palm tree that had sprung up between the paving stones before his door into an inner court beside the household gods; and a poem by Statius that mentions a tree growing at the heart of the villa of one Manilius Volpiscus, probably a consul of the first century CE.[107] Drilling down briefly into these examples reveals that there is more at play in these stories than a subject-object relationship, with nature objectified and manipulated for the purposes of a household patron. The symbolism attached to trees emerges from multiple permutations of social relationships that could be established among a man, a house, and a tree.

The last case, that of the unspecified tree growing up through the multi-story hall in Volpiscus' villa, in some ways provides the closest analogy to Oplontis' chestnut; we encounter both of them when fully grown and without a clear indication of their origins. Statius' occasional poem, *Silvae* 1.3, was written within two decades of the Vesuvian eruption, during the reign of Domitian, and celebrates a visit to Volpiscus' property on the river Anio in Tibur (now the Aniene in the area of Tivoli). It takes the form of an extended ekphrasis that captures the almost

[106] Bergmann (2002) 94.
[107] Mart., *Ep.* 9.61; Suet. *Aug.,* 92.1–2; Stat., *Silv.* 1.3.61–64.

disorienting wonder of encountering the villa's natural and man-made features.[108] The poem begins with praise of the estate's situation in the landscape and its cool climate before exclaiming "how worn out we are from so many miraculous sights!"[109]–suggesting an almost wearying abundance of beauty. Statius then launches into an impressionistic list that, slipping between mythological and physical descriptions that refer to both the natural landscape and the man-made innovations and luxuries of the estate, eventually winds its way to the tree after sixty lines.

> Why wonder now at the joining roofs,
> or those that split level, divided into three chambers?
> Why [wonder] at you, tree who, protected in the middle of the household gods,
> rise up through the roofs and doorposts and into the flowing air,
> under what master would you not suffer the savage double-headed axe?[110]

As a whole, the poem extols the virtues of both Volpiscus and his property, allowing the glories of the villa to operate as a metonym for its owner's moral character.[111] This specific passage links the tree first with the household gods (*mediis servata penatibus*), then with the structure of the house, and finally cites it as an example of Volpiscus' forbearance and moral character for sparing it, in contrast to most potential masters, from the axe. Drawing connections between a healthy household, healthy cultivation of sacred traditions, and healthy elements of the natural landscape reflects well on the villa owner; Statius, as noted by Bergmann, elegantly deploys the tree as a sign of *pietas*. Mentioned only in passing, and explicitly given subordinate status,

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[108] Newlands (1988) 9–97, with further bibliography.
[109] Statius, Silvae 1.3.14: *quam lassos per tot miracula visus!*
[110] Statius, Silvae 1.3.57–61: *Quid nunc iugentia mirer / aut quid partitis distantia tecta trichoris? / Quid te, quae mediis servata penatibus arbor, / tecta per et postes et liquidas emergis in auras, / quo non sub domino saevas passura bipennes?*All translation are my own unless otherwise specified.
[111] Newmyer (1984) 5–6: "Statius sees in the buildings themselves qualities which in fact pertain to their builder, including quiet temperament, serene virtue, and reasonable luxury (*hic...fecundia quies virtusque serena / fronte gravis sanusque nitor,* 91–92)." Newlands (2002) 119–153 discusses the contrast between Horatian and Statian ideals of luxury.

Statius' tree at first glance seems to exemplify a Flavian-era emphasis, observed by many scholars, on nature as a pacified instrument for human use.[112] Yet the presence of the tree in the middle of the poetic description of the villa (reflecting its position within the house), where it is both the subject of direct address and granted agency by the poet (*te...arbor...emergis*), hints at an often elided corollary in which elements of the natural world can only be vulnerable, conquered, and pacified if they are first considered as living and at least semi-sentient, as at least potentially active participants in shaping the world.

This corollary—and the tension between nature as vulnerable to human control and as an agent in and of itself—emerges even more strongly throughout Martial's *Epigram* 9.61, also composed during the reign of Domitian in the late first century CE, a shorter occasional poem of twenty-two lines that celebrates an unnamed party at an estate near Cordoba. It opens with a sacro-idyllic description of the Spanish countryside, introduces the tree, then describes it as a place where fauns and dryads have frolicked, leaving behind remnants of a strewn across the ground. Martial finally returns to the tree as a symbol of the longevity and health of Julius Caesar's legacy. In the lines that describe and introduce it, the plane tree, whose biography begins with its transplantation and early cultivation, becomes a living extension of Caesar himself, taking on his characteristics and long outlasting the flesh-and-blood man:

> In the middle of its buildings, overspreading the whole household gods,
> stands the Caesarian plane tree with its thick foliage
> which the auspicious right hand of an unconquerable guest placed,
> and from that hand began to grow up a sapling.
> The grove seems to sense its author and master,
> so it flourishes and with its branches seeks the lofty stars...
> Oh beloved of the gods, oh great tree of Caesar,
> you need not fear iron or sacreligous hearths.
> You may expect everlasting honors for your branches:

[112] On the Flavian era in particular, see Newmyer (1984); Newlands (1988; 2002); Kleiner (1991); Pollard (2009); Heinen (2011). Marzano (2014) discusses the links between military conquest and horticultural conquest in the ancient world in general.

Pompeian hands did not plant you.[113]

As in Statius's verses, the tree in Martial's poem occupies an ambivalent status as a being, though its active side is more pronounced. It is interesting to note that the tree shifts from the role of object to subject more than once in the poem: we first meet it where it stands (*stat*), but in the next line an auspicious right hand had placed it (*posuit quam*), while in the following line agency is blurred when it is emphasized that the sapling springs (*coepit crescere*) from that hand (*ex illa...manu*). The poet then assigns the tree a tentative awareness and responsiveness, noting that it seems to sense (*sentire videtur*) its author and flourish in a kind of emulation. When Martial returns to address the tree directly in the final lines, he again treads a line between honoring the tree as a living extension of Caesar and reminding it of the contingency of its existence. Praise is followed immediately by a description of the alternative fate that might await a less fortunate tree, the chop of an iron axe (*ferrum*) or a fire that devours sacred things (*sacreligosque focos)*; the assurance of perpetual glories is followed by conjuring up the fate of Caesar's fallen rival Pompey. The tree's sentience, actions, and fate are framed as entirely reflective of Julius Caesar, rendered sacred by his touch alone. At the same time, the tree is the focal point of the poem, and Martial's final overt addressee. These characteristics make the tree a more important and authoritative presence in the house than the guests at the party, who are mentioned only in an account of the mingled detritus of their celebration, or more notably, the house's unnamed owner.

Once again, the tree serves as a semi-sentient symbol of *pietas.* Martial links it with the estate's sacred dimension by evoking it as a stage for the actions of divine and mythological

[113] Martial, *Ep.* 9.61 lines 5–10, 19–22. *aedibus in mediis totos amplexa penates / stat platanus densis Caesariana comis, / hospitis invicti posuit quam dextera felix, / coepit et ex illa crescere virga manu. / auctorem dominumque nemus sentire videtur: / sic viret et ramis sidera celsa petit… / o dilecta deis, o magni Caesaris arbor, / ne metuas ferrum sacrilegosque focos. / perpetuos sperare licet tibi frondis honores: / non Pompeianae te posuere manus*.

inhabitants[114] and through its introduction with the phrase *amplexa penates,* which, as in Statius' poem, links the expanse of the tree—the footprint of its shade—with the realm of the household gods. Notably in this case, however, the tree is a reflection of the *pietas* not of the proprietor, but of Caesar.[115] Caesar supplants the master of this otherwise anonymous house through the extended agency of his tree. While in Statius' poem the tree is, for the most part, an object, a reflection of Volpiscus, Martial's tree operates as an extension of both an individual and a dynasty,[116] manifesting the authority of its planter and perpetuating his legacy.

Suetonius' account of Augustus, by contrast, flips the chain of interactions around, with the tree catalyzing a relationship and the emperor adopting a reactionary stance. The anecdote appears midway through Suetonius' biography of Augustus*,* in a section devoted to the emperor's religious attitudes that highlights his particular sensitivity towards omens and natural prodigies. The budding, partial, and tentative agency of trees hinted at in Statius and expanded upon in Martial here comes into full form.

> But [Augustus] was indeed especially moved by portents. He transplanted a palm tree, sprung up in the joints between paving stones before his house, into an open court within the walls belonging to the household gods, and cultivated it with great effort so that it grew strong.[117]

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[114] Newlands (2011) interprets this emphasis on mixing the human and the divine, unusual for the author, as an intertextual reference to another poem of Martial's contemporary Statius, *Silv.* 2.3 that treats a plane tree on an estate at Rome. See especially 100–101.

[115] Roman (2010) 28–29. In its structure, length, and meter, this sacro-idyllic celebration of imperial dynastic success serves as a companion to an earlier poem in Martial's *Epigrams,* 9.59*,* likewise focused on a late Republican figure who appears as a poetic foil in the Augustan-era works of Catullus: Mamurra. The subject matter of the companion poem is contrasting: Mamurra gropes his way through a marketplace of exotic goods, practicing, in Roman's words, "consumer voyeurism" but unable to possess any of the things he puts his hands on, very unlike Caesar's ability to imbue his legacy upon a house with his own (highly emphasized) right hand. One potential reading of this contrast also lies in the difference in medium adopted by Mamurra (an interest in luxury goods) vs. Caesar, who by entrusting his legacy not to material things but living ones ensures its perpetual growth.

[116] Roman (2010) 29–30 discusses the way the identity of the planter is left ambiguous at first—a Caesarian—and only later becomes clearly associated with Julius Caesar in particular, allowing it to extend to the legitimate line of Caesars, including Martial's contemporary emperor Domitian.

[117] Suetonius, *Aug.* 92.1–2. *Sed et ostentis praecipue movebatur. Enatam inter iuncturas lapidum ante domum suam palmam in compluvium deorum Penatium transtulit, utque coalesceret magno opere curavit.*

In this story, the palm appears on its own between cracks of pavement that already belong to Augustus before the emperor brings the sapling into communion with his household gods in the compluvium (an inward-sloping opening in the roof). In associating the palm with the household gods, Augustus acts similarly to Martial's Caesar, in that the act of transplanting renders the tree sacred. But where Martial's Caesar used a tree to impress a symbol of his legacy on a host's home, Suetonius' Augustus assumes a debt of care, the adoption of a new cult object into his own. This remains part of the emperor's self-fashioning, a building of his identity through his association with a tree, but it also emphasizes acts of interpreting, rather than controlling, the actions of an element of the natural world.

Even when confined to the descriptions of trees incorporated in domestic spaces, the sources represent Roman relationships with elements of the natural world as complex and ambivalent. While the relationships presented differ in the kind and order of interchanges between person and tree and in the degree of influence the tree is represented as having, they all play upon the characteristic of longevity. Once the relationship has been forged, as demonstrated by Martial, it continues until the deaths of both parties. Household trees, like the chestnut at Oplontis, were *more* than a symbol of *pietas;* they could also serve as living extensions of human actions and even shape the actions of the humans around them.

If we broaden the scope to consider trees in other contexts, the impression that natural elements were participants as much as objects in the generation of culture between the second centuries BCE and CE, and the conviction that we should look to the botanical inhabitants of Villa A if we are to understand its human operation, becomes firmer.[118] In fact, the recurring association between classical rulers and botanical specimens led historian Laurence Totelin to

[118] On sacred trees in Roman religion in general, see Hunt (2016).

remark that ancient trees "occupied an intermediate position on the scale between object and individual."[119] In many cases, there is evidence that leaders purposefully cultivated relationships with plants as part of their official image. Just as the peristyle chestnut is far from the only tree discovered at Villa A, the transplanted palm is only one of many plants that feature in the mythologization of Rome's first emperor, for whom they feature in both later accounts of his biographers and within official iconography produced in his lifetime.

The anecdote about the palm in Suetonius' biography is immediately followed by another, in which the boughs of an ancient and dying oak on the island of Capri rejuvenated upon his approach, and the tree's action in (or reaction to) Augustus' presence prompted him to negotiate with the Neapolitans for control over the island.[120] Outside the bounds of the household, a tree could thus take on broader significance, as here, when standing in for an entire island. The species that Augustus most famously adopted as an attribute of his political persona was the laurel tree, drawing on its existing associations with victory and the god Apollo to further his image as a divinely sanctioned success. This symbolic association was embodied and perpetuated by a series of living trees with whom the emperor was said to have developed relationships, as well as in images that represented them. Two flanked the door to his house on the Palatine hill, an honor awarded by the Senate, since their placement recalled the facades of some of the city's oldest sacred structures.[121] The laurel sprigs that appeared on the reverse of

[119] Totelin (2012): 141. Totelin notes that the same conceptualization could apply to animals, stones, bones, etc.
[120] Suetonius, *Aug.* 92.3 *Apud insulam Capreas veterrimae ilicis demissos iam ad terras languentisque ramos convaluisse adventu suo.* Translation: On the island of Capri, the boughs of a very old oak, now lowered to the ground and wearied, grew strong upon his approach.
[121] Zanker (1988): 92–94. For further discussion of floral symbolism under Augustan influence, see also Flory (1995), Kellum (1994).

some Augustan coin issues carried the same symbolic force.[122] A grove at the ancestral villa of his wife, Livia, on the outskirts of Rome, likewise assumed a long-term political significance.

The details concerning this last group of laurels are illustrative of the kind of interactive chain that characterizes relationships between humans and trees in Rome of the first centuries BCE and CE. Legendarily, the grove was the yield of a portent that occurred when Livia was a girl, when a passing eagle dropped a white hen from its clutches into her lap.[123] The hen held a sprig of laurel in its beak, from which sprang the first tree of the grove. After serving as the source of triumphal wreaths and symbol of dynastic authority throughout the Julio-Claudian dynasty, the grove was said to have died with the disastrous reign and assassination of Nero, which brought the dynastic line to an end.[124] The purported catalyst for the planting of the grove was thus a natural sign; it was cultivated in response, its meaning clarified in retrospect and invested with authority by Livia's marriage to future emperor Octavian Caesar. The trees came to stand as both omens of the extraordinariness of Augustus' family and extensions of their legacy, their continued lives operating somewhere in the space between representing and perpetuating the family's success and eventual decline.

Augustus was not alone in his adoption of trees as part of his self-fashioning, nor were his biographers alone in depicting trees as parts of the identities of their subjects. Other "Botanizing Rulers" from the Mediterranean region, as Totelin puts it, included Herod the Great, the previously mentioned Julius Caesar, emperors Titus and Vespasian, the Persian king Xerxes,

[122] Zanker (1988) images on pages 92–93.

[123] Plin. *HN* 15.137–38.

[124] Flory (1989) discusses this story, which is found in multiple ancient sources, in depth, and traces the political lineage of dropped laurel sprigs to Augustus' drawing connections between himself and Caesar, as well as an archaizing religious bent. The veracity of the stories is less important than the fact that they were able to gain cultural currency.

the Mauretanian client-king Juba II, and some of the early Roman kings.[125] Temporally and geographically, this is a broad spread, and the ways in which the trope was narratively deployed and interpreted ranges widely as well. A different permutation of human-plant social relationships was apparent when Titus and Vespasian included a balsam tree in their 71 CE triumph,[126] celebrating victory over Jerusalem.[127] Pliny the Elder described the Flavians as "enslaving" the plant—deploying it as a living symbol of dynastic conquest over the Jewish people. The balsam here served as the proxy for a dominated foreign population, rather than operating as an extension or reinforcement of the leaders' attributes as with Augustus and his laurels. This is certainly an example of what Elizabeth Pollard termed "botanical imperialism,"[128] but again Pliny's account of the balsam's subjugation includes a coda that complicates the narrative of domination.[129] His note that "now the public treasury tends it, nor has it ever been more abundant," indicates an ongoing promise of care that accompanies the balsam's slavery and illustrates the propagandistic ideal that Roman rule acted for the betterment of its conquered populations. This is similar to the case of Augustus' transplanted palm, in which the act of moving a living plant establishes a relationship that is framed as mutually beneficial. The adjustment to the fountain to accommodate the growing tree at Oplontis likewise seems to demonstrate the care over time that defined the adoption of a tree.

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[125] Totelin (2012), esp. 140–141 proposes a distinction where Roman rulers present themselves as exerting power over or through the trees they associate with, while cultivation and garden labor are primarily reserved for "Hellenized" kings. While this interpretation broadly aligns with the sources he cites, it is only an excessive engagement with horticulture that takes on these connotations. Hands-on cultivation as a religious act was a well-established elite practice, as noted above.

[126] The modern scientific name for this plant, which was prominent in the Bible (it features, for example, as one of the ingredients for Temple incense), is *commiphora gileadensis*.

[127] Totelin (2012) 121–125, on Pliny *HN* 12.111–113.

[128] Pollard (2009).

[129] Pliny *HN* 113: *seritque nunc eum fiscus, nec umquam fuit numerosior.* For another example of plants displayed as trophies, see Pollard (2009), an interpretation of the gardens of the *Templum Pacis* as an imperialist project.

In other cases, it seems likely that the reported botanical relationships were apocryphal or embellished by later narrators to strengthen their own version of a leader's persona. Both categories demonstrate the currency and comprehensibility of not quite equating people with, but relating them to, plants to a contemporary Roman audience. Associations with plants were not always used to further a positive image. In Tacitus' account of the emperor Claudius' third wife, Messalina's adultery and punishment, he presages the tale with an episode in which she is prominently linked with the vine and grapes of the god as she celebrates Bacchic rituals in her home—a twist on the importation of plants into the household, here used to highlight her promiscuity and unpredictability rather than her piety.[130] The reported botanical associations of prominent Roman women often suggested the negative qualities of wildness and unpredictability – the very opposite of Augustan harmony, other examples including historical figures like Messalina and imaginary ones, like the witches of Juvenal's satire set in the Gardens of Lucullus.[131] That is not to say that men were immune to unflattering connections with flora; descriptions of the Persian king Xerxes treating a plane tree "as if it were a loved woman" aligned him with stereotypes of eastern luxury and effeminacy,[132] while multiple stories of the destruction of tall plants by Rome's infamous final king Tarquin the Proud and Miletan ruler Thrasybalus emphasized their tyrannical tendencies and disregard for life.[133] Taken together, these anecdotes display the extreme ends of the spectrum of social relations between humans and plants: unpredictability, excessive fondness, and excessive force are all able to be expressed through representations of their interactions. Social relationships with botanical specimens

[130] Newby (2012): 354–355, on Tacitus *Ann.* 11.31.
[131] Juvenal *Satire* 1.8, discussed in Johnson (2012).
[132] Totelin (2012): 123, with further bibliography.
[133] Livy *Ab urbe condita*, 1.54 on Tarquinius Superbus; Herodotus *The Histories,* 5.92f and Aristotle, *Politics,* 3.1284a tell the story of Thrasybulus, and Periander, with the roles reversed in Aristotle's account.

unfold in narrative after narrative, and they serve to both characterize prominent figures and foreshadow their patterns of interaction with other humans.

Roman religious practice offers many examples of the penetration of nature into the rhythms of daily activity. Though varied, the rituals had animistic roots and often centered on the patterns and irregularities of nature. The Latin word *religio,* carrying an idea of "cultivating the correct form of *social* relations with the gods,"[134] already contains within it an acknowledgment of the limitations of human culture and control. The cultivation of these relations with the divine sphere was often filtered and communicated through the vicissitudes of the natural world. Sanctuaries were bounded places usually marked out by their natural features, where a *templum* could be a patch of ground or a stretch of sky. At Oplontis, the household lararium (27) was placed on an east–west axis with the tree, in a room adjoining the peristyle, making explicit the connection between natural features and the divine sphere of the household. Public practices of divination such as augury and the taking of *haruspices* relied on the flight patterns of birds and the growth of an ideal arrangement of organs in animals. Such practices rested on an attentional stance with respect to one's natural surroundings, a knowledge built from experience and interaction over time, as well as a respect for the limitations of the human ability to control outcomes.

With religion "embedded in all institutions and activities" in the Roman world,[135] to the point where some scholars question whether an emic conceptualization of religion as a separate sphere existed at all in antiquity,[136] it is not surprising to find similar attitudes towards the active participation of elements of the natural world in other aspects of Roman culture such as the

[134] Scheid (2013), chapter one. See also Scheid (2003) 22–23.
[135] Beard, North, & Price (1998) 42.
[136] Nongbri (2008).

military and political spheres. There is a surfeit of examples, from representations of military campaigns to engineering projects.[137]

Even from this limited assortment of examples, it is clear that ancient Romans from the late Republican through to the early and mid-imperial periods conceived of human relationships with the environment as complex, involving more than a straightforward separation between the human and natural spheres or the reduction of nature to passive object. Roman writers and monument builders alike recognized that the natural elements they discussed or portrayed were themselves actors, and they acknowledged that the actions of other living things[138] shaped their own experiences. Such relationships are social. This leads to the issue of how to describe relationships that cross the boundary between humans and non-humans, to describe the social without making it exclusive to the thinking human individual as summed up by Descartes' Enlightenment cliché "Cogito ergo sum". Here, postmodern thinkers with an interest in questioning such strict categorizations can be helpful.

[137] A few examples include the prominence of the landscape in the war commentaries of Julius Caesar, imperial construction projects such as Domitian's Via Domitiana bridging the Volturnus River. Trajan's Dacian conquests illustrate the marriage of military and engineering feats through their common concern with dominating and improving the landscapes. His bridge over the Danube features prominently in both literary accounts of his reign and on the monument that most overtly embodies the meeting of nature, engineering, and military success, the Column of Trajan. On the imperialistic uses of landscape features in Caesar's *Bellum Gallicum,* see Krebs (2006; 2018). On the monumentalization of engineering projects as triumphs over nature, see Kleiner (1991) and Doherty (2012), 540. On the development of architectural depictions on the Column of Trajan (somewhat illustrating the converse of its messages about the natural world), see Thill (2010).

[138] Totelin (2012): 141. Earth and stone and water seem to qualify as living things in addition to flora and fauna.

IV. Not Just for People: Broadening Social Relations

A material turn in cultural studies has led to a widespread interest in considering the biographical qualities of objects: understanding that objects have lives, and can shape the lives of both humans and other objects. While scholarship has less often explicitly extended this idea to the populations of the natural world, the tendency to objectify the natural world in modern western thought facilitates its application. Theories regarding the agency of objects operate in multiple ways. Anthropological studies of gifting, for example, focus on how objects can act as physical embodiments of relationships and extend the agency of the giver beyond their body, in a manner similar to that accorded to the trees of Augustus and Caesar discussed above.[139] These serve to solidify and extend social relationships between humans, but their agency in shaping the relationships themselves goes largely unremarked.

Bill Brown's "Thing Theory" is one approach that steps into this gap, theorizing that neutral inanimate objects become "things" when they draw human attention, usually through breaking or malfunctioning, when they object, or throw themselves in the way of human intentions.[140] Things thus move from a state of objectification into one that where they influence human responses and begin to establish relationships, albeit sporadic ones, between the material world and human experience. Chris Gosden builds upon this framework by noting the ways in which objects shape one another, influencing human behavioral patterns, such as the movements of a potter at the wheel, and thus shape their own development over time.[141] Social relationships

[139] Mauss (1954) 46 sums up this idea with the phrase "by giving one is giving *oneself".* Interestingly, Mauss' ideas as set forward in his well-known essay "The Gift" have been seen to have grown partly out of Mauss' interest in the Classical world, though he applied the framework more generally. See Raccanelli and Beltrami (2018) 196–201.
[140] Brown (2001).
[141] Gosden (2005), especially 195–197, with further bibliography.

between humans and things are therefore not restricted to moments of disruption, or acting as deliberate extensions of individuals, but they can also be seen to shape human actions and perpetuate themselves. These object-centered frameworks shift partly away from anthropocentric conceptions of the social and largely restrict their interest in such interactions to brief moments in time, rather than capturing relations as an ongoing flow of interactions.

The contemporary archaeological theorist best known for working on more fluid relations between people and the material world is Ian Hodder, whose "entanglement theory" proposes that neither humans nor things can be conceived of as having a stable state, that "there are only flows of matter, energy, and information."[142] While theoretically compelling, with no end point in sight it is methodologically difficult to establish boundaries on any given study using Hodder's formulation. Thinking about the interdependence of things and humans, the relationships between people and the material world, inevitably leads the researcher down rabbit holes of ever-increasing specificity, as the participants in these interactions seem to dissolve into one another or breakdown into their constituent parts. This is why in choosing a theoretical framework to suit the evidence at hand, I have turned away from Hodder's conceptualization of human-thing relationships as "entanglements" and towards the similar framework developed in parallel by Tim Ingold, focused on "correspondence," which deliberately allows for the continuity of recognizable lives among the changes wrought by their ongoing social relationships. In other words, Ingold's formula recognizes that lives have a kind of integrity even as they are shaped by their social worlds.

Ingold developed his theory of correspondence as part of an ongoing project in what he describes as "linaeology", the study of lines, which in turn grew from earlier work, such as his

[142] Hodder (2012), 4.

well-known "Taskscapes".[143] He has treated the subject in two monographs, several articles, and a series of lectures, following it across disciplinary lines and a broad swath of topics—including walking, longing, and the weather.[144] The result is a language that acknowledges the importance of social relationships that combine humans, humans and non-humans, and non-humans, and facilitates discussion of their functions. From the outset, Ingold defines lives as things that cling to one another, and proposes the line as the basic element of clinging. Lives then, human and non-human, are bundles of lines, and their connections can be conceptualized as their knotting together in a meshwork.

Ingold's choice of knotting as "the fundamental principle of coherence" makes it distinct among theories regarding the social lives between humans and things. In knotting together, lives are altered in course but not in substance.[145] As Ingold explains, knotting

> is the way in which contrary forces of tension and friction, as in pulling tight, are generative of new forms...The stickiness of the knot is not a thickening or coagulation that sets it off, as a thing in itself, over and against the world. For its topology is such that one can never determine what is on the inside or on the outside. Knots don't have insides and outsides; they have interstices. Their surfaces, rather than enveloping their material mass, lie between the lines that make them up.[146]

The lines that constitute a knot thus continue to live their own types of lives, continue rooting forth and seeking further entanglements, even as they are joined with one another. Social connections are not limited to instances of absorption or melding, and the meeting of social lives does not entail a loss of differentiation between their ways of being, even as they respond to one another. Neither party is absorbed by or into the other, but the two strands go along together. The kinds of social relationships represented by the resulting "meshwork" are built upon three modes

[143] Ingold (1993).
[144] Ingold (2015; 2016; 2017a; 2017b)
[145] Ingold (2017a) 4–5 contrasts the joining of lines in knots to the joining of blobs, which lose their ability to be told apart when brought together, their edges dissolving upon contact.
[146] Ingold (2017a) 4.

of operation that Ingold introduces to replace the more anthropocentric triad of volition, agency, and intentionality—which themselves effectively limit the establishment of social relationships to those in possession of something approximating a human mind. These are the more universally accessible principles of habit, agencing, and attentionality.

The three ideas are closely linked, with habit expanding upon the ideas of John Dewey to represent experience as "doing-undergoing," highlighting the ways that experience itself affects change in the one who goes through it. Ingold draws a parallel to the operation of the middle voice in ancient languages, writing that "to enact an experience...is to always be already inside of it."[147] The term "agencing" arises from the need to establish a way of describing the transformative effect of undergoing something without placing the volition inherent in "agency" onto other involved parties. "Attentionality" captures the kinds of movement in which experiencers are "pushing out into the flux of things," led not by intentionality but through following the paths of habit, like a walker adjusting to changes in the surface of the ground or a builder seeking out the best terrain to support their project.[148]

Conceived in this way, social relationships can be formed among very different kinds of lives. The lines of lives can knot together, a connection that brings them close even as they carry on in their distinct ways, allowing each to affect others outside of any intentional plan. A tree can thus tangle with the artifacts and inhabitants of a villa, taking on new roles, its course altered by its association with humans, without losing its distinctiveness as a tree. The presence of the tree, in turn, is enough to elicit a response from the humans in its vicinity without its effects rendering the respondents passive. Ingold's formulation synthesizes many approaches to understanding the

[147] Dewey (1932), discussed in Ingold (2017a) 8–10.
[148] Ingold (2015): 137.

biographies of non-humans and the engagements between people and things, while also deflecting some of the criticisms leveled against postmodern theories that they dissolve the boundaries between different kinds of actors with differing levels of consciousness.

The description of the social lives of lines resonates strongly with the ancient depictions of human-botanical associations discussed above. In the Roman narratives, humans are set apart from other kinds of lives, but biographical qualities built out of established social relationships could be attributed much more broadly—to trees and other plants, animals, birds, rocks, rivers, and winds. Approaching ancient sites equipped with a framework that allows for such relationships opens up new pathways to understanding Roman perceptions and experiences of the environment. Even at their most imperialistic, Roman accounts of the natural world show an awareness of other forms of being; even in their ability to be conquered, natural elements are closer to people than objects. With this conception in mind, this dissertation seeks to present yet another version of Villa A, one that relies as much on the information communicated by the natural features that surround and permeate the site as on its built features and seeks to understand the complex relationships that emerge between its natural and artificial spheres.

V. Chapter summary

In what follows I start from far away and move closer, beginning with the distant view from above and eventually passing within the villa's walls to investigate its representational sphere, all with an ecological focus. The next two chapters roughly follow philosopher Edward S. Casey's distinction between "space" and "place", with the first approaching the structure from a traditional spatial perspective and the second adopting a phenomenological approach. Chapter

two begins where a visit to the villa begins nowadays—primed by plans and maps—and adopts a series of spatial approaches that illustrate the villa's orientation towards the outdoors and its integration with its surroundings to reveal how the natural world shaped its structure and operated as a co-designer of the space; emphasis is placed on the importance of airflow in creating non-human access paths through the site that in turn affect its sensory experience. Chapter three picks up at the entrance to the site, where two-dimensional plans give way to a more multidimensional, embodied experience of place—inclusive of history and multisensorality, in contrast to space—in the villa's north garden. It adopts a broadly phenomenological perspective, considering the garden as a site for the dynamic gathering of lives, expanding upon the blurring of boundaries between indoor and outdoor areas, and discussing the differing roles of artifice and nature in guiding the perception of time at the villa's property. Here, natural features operate as both designer and artistic medium, building upon their role as established within a broader spatial discussion. Chapter four moves within the villa's walls, looking first at the way elements of nature featured as a decorative medium, describing the interior texture of its rooms in terms of the recognizability of their connection to the source in nature. I then turn to the way that painters used contrasts between abstraction and mimesis to create complex compositions evocative of the changing effects of the natural world with which they are so often intertwined. Overall, this dissertation seeks to fully integrate the ecological sensitivities evinced through emic representations of elements of the environment in both text and art into its archaeological remains, and to reveal the ways in which the villa's aesthetic operation relied on its connections to the natural world.

Chapter 2: Space and Design at Villa A

I. Villa Visit Part I: The Bird's-Eye, X-Ray View

In this chapter, I consider the Villa's relationship to its broader topography, beginning at a distance, just as it is experienced by a tourist on a first visit to the site. Visitors who arrive at Villa A are offered a complimentary guide booklet along with their tickets.[149] It is sixty pages, beginning with a brief background on luxury villas, followed by an introduction to the local excavations of Oplontis and short entries for many rooms intended to help visitors better reconstruct the space in their minds; the booklet closes with a glossary of Roman building terms and rules for visiting the park. It also includes twenty-seven images of the plan of Villa A. Pamphlet in hand, it is impossible to get lost or become disoriented. No matter what dark niche a tourist might poke their head into, the map can carry them back to daylight by the quickest route. In case a visitor might not refer to the guide before heading down into the excavation area, a large placard attached to the railing, just to the left of the stairs, is there to catch their eye and expose them to the villa's interior—sliced open to reveal its viscera—on the descent. It is almost impossible for a modern visitor to enter the site without encountering a labeled, two-dimensional representation of its layout first.

Plans make things approachable, soften any surprises the architecture has in store, and allow visitors to remain aloof by privileging them with a bird's eye, and an X-ray, view. They let

[149] Pompeii Archaeological Park (2018), "Guide to the Oplontis excavation".

us approach the past from a distance in the form of its cleanest contours and facilitate thinking about the villa as designed for intended effects rather than in its messy, irregularly maintained, ever-weathering reality. Because they flatten architecture into two dimensions, plans can also be a little bit dangerous: they seek to communicate places, in all their experiential and historical dimensions, in this simplified idiom of geometric space, and they manage to look very official while doing it. The problem is not with maps themselves, but with their presentation and tacit invitation to acceptance as objective truth, as well as their tendency to fully flatten or entirely elide the villa's natural surroundings.

As discussed previously, very little about Villa A is simple or objectively describable in static terms, and the maps provided by the archaeological site are likewise specific in their intent and effects. For example, the rooms follow a different numbering system than the one mapped out by excavators and used in this project, one that guides visitors through the highlights, beginning with the atrium; the destroyed portico on the east side of the north garden appears, but is not explained in the brochure or reconstructed on site;[150] room 8 is titled as the *calidarium,* a label that obscures its renovation in later phases and foregrounds the earlier form of the space in its Augustan-era configuration.[151] Before a visitor sets foot into the place itself, they are primed by the maps they encounter on the way to see Villa A as an exemplar of the most beautiful architectural forms and artistic works that elites around the Bay of Naples could produce. While the brochure summarizes up-to-date scholarship and introduces the villa's complex history it still

[150] The destroyed portico is visible on the plans but is neither reconstructed nor mentioned in the entry for "Viridarium 25" (north garden 56).

[151] Pompeii Archaeological Park (2018) 17. The entry under the heading of "Calidarium" opens with the claim that "The villa was equipped with a private bath, like many residences that belonged to members of the wealthiest families during the time," before describing the architectural features that facilitated hot air circulation, only adding the vague qualifier "At a later stage it was transformed into a sitting room" as an afterthought. Apart from basins in the kitchen (7) and latrine areas (47-51), there are no extant baths at Villa A; if the villa maintained a private bath complex in later phases, it must have been located beyond the excavation limits.

encourages viewers to believe that "[The villa's] importance lies in the rich pictorial decorations and in the organization of the spaces based on perspective axes, symmetries and backgrounds with gardens that are richly decorated with statues and fountains."[152] The productive and storage capacities of the villa are largely ignored in this narrative; the gardens are relegated to serving as mere settings for art, rather than as important contributing elements to the aesthetic environment; the site's importance is linked explicitly to its abundant wealth of decoration. In order to serve as a model, ambiguities are erased. Phases of inhabitation, revealed through excavation, are amalgamated: the plan simultaneously displays a bath complex in the western courtyard and a swimming pool off the lavish, stone encrusted east wing. These two features that did not coexist simultaneously within the villa's lifetime but express what might be expected of a place manifesting the height of elite culture and commonly associated practices like private interior bathing and taking advantage of impressive outdoor waterworks that suffused elite domiciles with the beauty and benefits of the region's ample water supply. There are many layers of interpretation, and reduction, in something that looks as innocuous as a map.

II. What is a Map?

As evidenced by the materials presented to the visitor to Villa A, when encountering archaeological sites, maps are inescapable. This is because, as observed by Piraye Hacıgüzeller in her discussion of the mapping practices at the site of Çatalhöyük, "archaeological practices are inherently spatial: information about and documentation of the location of

[152] Pompeii Archaeological Park (2018) 10.

archaeological things, phenomena, and practices are crucial components of archaeological fieldwork processes."[153]

Image removed for copyright

Figure 2.1: Google maps view from outside the fence of the archaeological park, with the eye-level placard of the villa's plan beside the steps visible through the fence in the upper left.

At the same time that Classical archaeology has been undergoing its "spatial turn",[154] the digital technological revolution has propelled a fluorescence of systems for capturing and representing geometric space; computer technologies that made grappling with space easier coincided with scholarly interest in space as a concept and its social operation.[155] Of special significance to

[153] Hacıgüzeller (2018) 272, with further bibliography.
[154] Russell (2016) 16-17 discusses the spatial turn in classical archaeology with a more comprehensive bibliography.
[155] Lefebvre's *The Production of Space,* first published in 1974 and translated into English in 1991, might be seen as kicking off a theoretical interest in space, followed by scholars such as Soja (1989; 1996), Foucault (1986), and Casey (see below), among others. Studies of Roman space specifically include Wallace-Haddrill's 1988 article "The Social Structure of the Roman House". More recent treatments that offer synthetic approaches to Roman space include Russell (2016) on the blurring between public and private space and Hartnett (2017) on the Roman street.

archaeological practice has been the popularization of geographic information systems (GIS), which has led to an efflorescence of digital technologies for use both in the field and in presenting the results of research.[156] Meanwhile, debates regarding the often presumed objectivity of digital methods and mapping in a post-Enlightenment western-oriented society have flourished in the fields of archaeology, geography, and the humanities more broadly.[157]

One strand that has emerged from this discourse is Non-representational Theory (NRT, also known as Non-representational Thinking, or More-than-representational Theory), a critical framework that treats all representations "as presentations that are involved in constituting reality."[158] Within this framework, the only thing that can go *wrong* with spatial modeling is presenting it as objective, complete, or "correct," which would depict the archaeological process not as the generative practice that it is, but as a replication of a past that is in large part, irrecoverable.[159] While these broader debates have only begun to reach the discipline of Classical archaeology, they have the potential to reveal the maps that the field has adopted as central to its practices as at once a less objective and a more powerful interpretative tool than we might expect.

Across the next two chapters, I follow philosopher Edward S. Casey by distinguishing between "space" and "place" as modes of conceptualizing the relations that answer to the question "where".[160] Space refers to the "absolute and infinite as well as empty" realm, an arena of geometry and abstraction into which places can be slotted, while place is phenomenological,

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[156] Verhagen (2018) provides an overview of the recent history and directions of spatial technologies in archaeology, with further bibliography.
[157] Gillings et al. (2018).
[158] Hacıgüzeller (2018) 271; see also Anderson and Harrison (2010).
[159] In his discussion of performance and the archaeological imagination, Shanks (2012) 149 stresses the idea that "at the heart of the archaeological imagination is creative practice that cuts across science and the humanities, the past and the present."
[160] For further explorations of space and place, see Casey (1993; 1996; 1997; 2001; 2011).

historical, and generated through experience.[161] While Casey's binary is useful for distinguishing between two modes, as the title of his 1993 book *Getting Back into Place* implies, he also roughly aligns these two categories with historical moments, equating place-based thinking with pre-enlightenment conceptualizations and placing the beginning of the supremacy of space-based thinking during the Enlightenment. *Within* the pre-Enlightenment world of the Romans, however, there was an appreciation for fixed concepts of geometric space that coexisted with more experiential modes.[162] The archaeology visible at Villa A and other ancient sites display this interest in the mathematical geometries of space: the rectilinear and symmetrical planning of parts of the complex evidence the planning ability of its makers.[163]

Thus, while this chapter focuses on the interpretation of space, and the next addresses the experience of place, these two conceptual realms are, of course, entwined. While archaeological maps may appear to represent space "as the decentered, neutral, actual reality of the landscape",[164] experience lies at their root and the results are as much an artifact of the perceptual filters of those who make them as an impression of the locational information they seek to communicate. Often at an archaeological site, excavators plant flags along the bleeding

[161] Casey (1996) 14. Although Casey is concerned with place primarily as it relates to human bodies, I opt for a more open interpretation in which places can exist, even in their historical forms, without living human presence (a cemetery or garden doesn't cease to be a place simply because no living humans are currently within to experience it, and humans are not the only beings with bodies that experience, as any curious jumping spider or attentively listening deer evidences in their behavior).

[162] Talbert and Unger (2008) provides an introduction into ancient and medieval cartographic practices. Favro (2006) 31 discusses the Augustan placement of the *Milliariaum Aureum* (golden milestone) and Severan construction of the Umbilcus Urbis Romae (navel of the city of Rome) as monumentalizations of the city of Rome's placement at the center as an icon of the empire. Both foundations provided not only symbolic centers for the empire, but also marked points from which roads were measured. Another indication that a concept of measurable space was important to the Romans is the Severan Marble Plan, a 1:240 scale plan of the ancient city rendered in stone. Trimble (2008) discusses the plan not only as evidence of cartographic practice, but also of mapping as a social and ideological practice within the Roman world, a balance between measurement and observation on the one hand, and values and priorities on the other, once again highlighting the blending of a more social experiential sphere with an interest in scientific renderings.

[163] For examples of geometry in Roman architectural design, see e.g. Jacobson (1986),

[164] Valdez-Tullet (2018) 182.

edges of two textures of soil, topographers step in to record geolocational information that captures the resulting polygon, and modelers then layer the data into GIS, with each step imposing a little more order and fixity onto the line of separation.[165] An iterative process of interpretation results in the product that the public sees. At the same time that it creates legible information, the map that results from this chain of actions reflects the processes of exploration that the workers have collaboratively undergone.

In this chapter, I join in what Mark Gillings has neatly called "the ontological shift away from an unquestioned assumption of the *map-as-spatial-truth* to focus instead upon the *map-as-process*".[166] I explore the tradition of archaeological mapping by juxtaposing a suite of spatial interpretations and maps of Villa A. Rather than presenting maps as illustrations or reflections of the villa, I create a series of diagrams that, in their creation, help facilitate thinking about the villa's relationship with the environment, revealing its alignment with major landscape features, general orientation towards the outdoors, and its structural flexibility to respond to daily changes in its surroundings. I adapt several spatial modeling strategies in order to bring these features to light: I strip back the computational aspects of space syntax and instead integrate the rooms into a model that tracks the air circulation in the villa's interior and highlights the penetration of the outdoors within the walls, and try throughout to reduce the sheen of objectivity provided by the numeric outputs of software-driven algorithms; I thus add an axis to Andrew Wallace-Hadrill's conceptual mapping of domestic spaces along the axes of grand–humble and public–private as I focus on the ways that the villa's exterior orientation and foregrounding of natural features intersected with its establishment of socio-spatial hierarchies; and I explore map-making as a

[165]Opitz et al. (2016) loc 33-38 describes the Gabii Project's data flows and the development of increasingly digital methods of recording over time.
[166] Gilling et al. (2018) 4, with further bibliography.

thinking process, advocating for a more transparent, multimedia, and targeted mapping practice in Classical archaeology.

III. The Villa from Above: The Setting and Overview

Fig. 2.2 Google maps image of the gulf of Naples with Villa A's orientation marked in red (left) and zoomed in view of Oplontis Villa A and B in turquoise squares (right), showing a slight change in orientation due to the curve of the ancient shoreline.

Looking at Villa A from above (figs. 2.1, 2.2), it becomes clear that the structure both extends outward into the landscape and invites the landscape into its interior. In figure 2.2, two aerial views of the location of Villa A (marked with the red flag in both images) reveal facets of the site's relationship to its surroundings. From farther away, the topographic setting of the villa is easier to grasp: the villa is close to both the shoreline and the base of Mount Vesuvius' conical slopes. It stands near the edge of a volcanic plain bordered by an arc of ridged mountains from the north-east to the south-west—the Monti Picentini, part of the Apennine range that runs along the spine of the Italian peninsula, and the Monti Latteri that run along the Sorrentine peninsula.

The closer view reveals the villa's relationship to its more immediate surroundings: in antiquity, it was aligned with the shore at the back of a gentle bend in the coast,[167] the curve of which is rendered partly visible in its relationship to the contemporary site of Oplontis B (fig. 2.2, far right, outlined in blue). Oplontis B was initially discovered during the construction of a school gymnasium in 1973 only about 300 meters from the ruins of Villa A. There, Italian archaeologists unearthed a two-story complex, along with the skeletons of 54 individuals killed in the 79 CE eruption and a wealth of archaeological remains, which centered on a peristyle courtyard that housed more than 1,200 stacked amphorae. Initially labeled a *villa rustica,* a commercial villa lacking the overdeveloped domestic quarters of its more elite counterparts like Villa A, it now appears that the ruins formed part of a waterside commercial complex in a small urban settlement.[168] Despite the change of opinion as to function, Oplontis B is often presented as a foil to Villa A, a functioning site supporting rustic labor and commerce in contrast to Villa A's complex committed to luxury for its own sake.[169] Though set lower in the landscape, closer to the ancient sea level, Oplontis B fronted the same shoreline (close enough that only one or two large properties would fit between them). Villa A and Oplontis B would almost certainly have been intervisible, the latter set atop a cliff less than an atrium's length from the edge and commanding views of the water and the coast along to the Sorrentine peninsula with the island of Capri just behind.

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[167] See Di Maio (2014) for a full explanation of the geoarchaeology of Oplontis. While the shore curved fairly dramatically just southwest of the villa's excavated area, it also sloped more gradually towards the southeast, with the commercial complex of Oplontis B (only about 300 meters distant) is located further south where the shoreline extended further into the bay.

[168] van der Graaff (2016), 69-71; Thomas (2016), 160-162.

[169] The clearest example of this contrast is the Kelsey Museum's exhibition "Leisure and Luxury in the Age of Nero: the Villas of Oplontis near Pompeii" (Gazda and Clarke (2016)), which focused on Oplontis B as representative of "negotium" in contrast to Villa A's cultivation of "otium". This distinction solely applies to the elite inhabitants of the space, as even the least productive villa was a site of labor for its slave and workers, and while Villa A's productive capacities seem limited, they are not separated from its leisure areas. See the discussion on the introduction.

The aerial maps reveal the villa's relationship with local topography and provide rough indications of the conditions that might be expected to obtain there. Settled between the natural features of mountains, fertile plains, and the sea, the villa was positioned at a confluence of environments that allowed it to take in an appealing variety of landscape views. With its raised height, it would have caught the westerly sea breeze, but because the villa was sheltered towards the back of the gulf, it would have been relatively protected from strong storms coming from the south. It was also conveniently close to a road that must have connected the shoreline settlements between Herculaneum and Pompeii, within eyeshot of the small urban trade center at Oplontis B, and only a short traveling distance from the city of Neapolis to the north (modern Naples); beyond lay the Cape of Misenum, and the resort town of Baiae with its beaches and hot springs, though these would have been out of sight behind a promontory.

While these aerial maps reveal the villa's physical relationship to local topography, they raise questions about the effects and possible considerations behind the siting of the villa. The perspectives of Roman villa owners and observers as preserved in written works provide insights, however limited in scope, into the value placed upon natural features such as those that surrounded Villa A during successive planning stages.. The siting of Villa A fulfills three criteria that emerge as especially important in ancient discussions of optimal habitability: a temperate and pleasant climate, topographic variety, and convenience.

In written accounts, the climate in which a domestic structure is built often ranks first in the list of considerations. Vitruvius leads with this criterion at the beginning of the first chapter of Book VI in his Augustan era manual *de Architectura*, when speaking of private housing: "For homes to be placed rightly, we must first consider in what regions and climates of the world they are built...the placements of buildings ought to be directed with respect to the conditions of the

land and the changes of the sky."[170] As the chapter goes on, Vitruvius goes further, diving into geographic determinism as he links the climate of different regions with the physiological and cultural characteristics of the peoples that dwelled in them. Describing the southern inhabitable regions as hot and dry, and the North as cold and wet, with Italy in the temperate middle, Vitruvius constructs a narrative of Roman superiority rooted in the benefits of the Italian position (as he sees it) at the center of the world.[171] By his reckoning, the position of the sun and the temperatures of one's homeland not only dictate proper strategies for building but penetrate through construction right into a person's very character. Italy's optimal location was judged to lie at the root of both Romanness and Roman success; taking advantage of its advantages lay at the heart of the proper building process.

About a century later the Younger Pliny's famous epistolary description of his Tuscan villa would, too, open with an extended commentary on the local climate and its impact on the

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[170] Vitruvius VI.2.1: *Haec autem ita erunt recte disposita, si primo animadversum fuerit quibus regionibus aut quibus inclinationibus mundi constituantur...ad eundem modum etiam ad regionum rationes caelique varietates videntur aedificiorum debere dirigi conlocationes.* Geographic determinism was a common thread in many ancient Greek and Roman texts. The idea that place determines the features of those within it is prevalent in the Hippocratic treatise *Airs, Waters, Places,* Aristotle's *Politics,* Pliny the Elder's *Natural histories,* and is contravened in Strabo's discussion of Rome as a great city despite its lack of proper topographic features to facilitate its success, with the geographic divisions reinforced but their importance (and especially the significance of Rome) questioned in Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*. For discussions of the afterlife of these ideas and their transmission into modern colonialist and racist attitudes, see Wear (2008) and Walsh (2018).

[171] Vitruvius VI.1.10-11 *Cum ergo haec ita sint ab natura rerum in mundo conlocata et omnes nations inmoderatis mixtionibus disparate, veros inter spatium totius orbis terrarum regionesque medio mundi populus Romanus possidet fines. (11) Namque temperatissimae ad utramque partem et corporum membris animorumque vigoribus pro fortitudine sunt in Italia gentes. Quemadmodum enim Iovis stella inter Martis ferventissimam et Saturni frigidissimam media currens temperatur, eadem ratione Italia inter septentrionalem meridianamque ab utraque parte mixtionibus termperatas et invictas habet laudes. Itaque consiliis refringit barbarorum virtutes, forti manu meridianorum cogitationes. Ita divine mens civitatem populi Romani egregia temperataque regione conlocavit, uti orbis terrarum imperii potiretur.* (Trans: "Since, therefore, these matters have been thus arranged by nature of things in the world and all of the peoples separated by the boundless mixture of the clime, the Roman people possesses the true territories, the space in the whole orb of the lands and the regions, that is in the middle of the earth. For the people in Italy are the most temperate in both respects: with the limbs of the body and the vigors of the mind as a strength. For in the same way that the star of Jupiter is moderated, running between hottest Mars and coldest Saturn, by the same reckoning Italy, has unbeatable esteem and a moderate climate between the north and south on either side. Thus they break the bravery of the northern barbarians with their counsels and with a strong hand, the plans of the southerners. Thus the divine mind placed the citizenry of the Roman people in a surpassingly temperate region, that it might become master of the direction of the circle of the world").

well-being of its inhabitants, ostensibly written in response to an equally concerned correspondent.[172] Pliny takes pains to distinguish between the "heavy and pestilential" (*gravis et pestilens*) air along the Tuscan coast, and his inland villa beneath an "Apennine, most healthful of mountains" (*Appennino saluberrimo*). While the sea air around Tuscany might have been sluggish and unsanitary, the area around the Bay of Naples was prized for its dominant westerlies, as described in a letter by Seneca from the Neronian era: "Nevertheless the greatest comfort of the villa is that it has Baiae across the wall; it lacks the disadvantages of the town and takes advantage of its pleasures. I myself know the advantages of the villa; I believe it is suited for the whole year round. For it runs up against the west wind such that it captures the westerly breeze and denies it to Baiae. Not foolishly, it seems, did Vatia choose this place."[173] Statius, in the later first century, drew the association between the west wind and coastal Campania in

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[172] Pliny the Younger, *Epist.* 5.6.1-3 *Amavi curam et sollicitudinem tuam, quod cum audisses me aestate Tuscos meos petiturum, ne facerem suasisti, dum putas insalubres. Est sane gravis et pestilens ora Tuscorum, quae per pitus extenditus; sed hi procul a mari recesserunt, quin etiam Appennino saluberrimo montium subiacent. Atque adeo ut omnem pro me metum ponas, accipe temperiem caeli regionis situm villae amoenitatem , quae et tibi auditu et mihi relatu iucunda erunt. Caelum est hieme frigidum et gelidum; myrtos oleas quaeque ali assiduo tepore laetantur, aspernatur ac respuit; laurum tamen patitur atque etiam nitidissimam profert, interdum sed non saepius quam sub urbe nostra necat. Aestatis mira clementia: semper aer spiritu aliquo movetur, frequentius tamen auras quam ventos habet. Hic senes multi: videas avos proavosque iam iuvenum, audias fabulas veteres sermonesque mairorum, cumque veneris illo putes alio te saeculo natum. Regionis forma pulcherrima. Imaginare amphitheatrum aliquod immensum, et quale sola rerum natura possit effingere. Lata et diffusa planities montibus cingitur, montes summa sui parte procera nemora et antiqua habent.* (Trans. "I am pleased at your care and worry, since when you heard I was intending to be at my Tuscan properties during the summer, you urged me not to do so as you suppose them to be unhealthy. Truly, the coast of Tuscany is heavy and pestilential where it is extended along the shore, but these properties are withdrawn at a distance from the sea, and indeed they lie underneath an Appenine, most salubrious of mountains. Since you put in writing your every concern on my behalf, accept this description of the temper of the sky, the setting of the region, and the delight of the villa, which should be entertaining for you hearing it and to me relating it. In winter the sky is cool and frosty: it rejects and casts off the myrtles, olives, and other trees that rejoice in constant heat; nevertheless it allows laurel and even brings it forth a most shining specimen; now and then it kills them, but not more often around our city of Rome. The climate is wonderfully moderate in summer: the air is always moved by some breath, but more frequently has breezes than winds. Hence the many old men: you see grandfathers and great-grandfathers of the youths, you hear the old stories and discourse of the ancestors, and when you come you will think yourself to have been morn in another century. The form of the region is most beautiful. Imagine an amphitheater so immense, and of a kind that only the nature of matters could make. The extensive and broad plain is ringed with mountains, the mountains have deep and ancient glades on their highest part.")

[173] Seneca *Epistles* 55.6-7: *Hoc tamen commodissimum in villa, quod Baias trans parietam habet; incommodis illarum caret, voluptatibus fruitur. Has laudes eius ipse novi; esse illam totius anni credo. Occurit enim favonio et illum adeo excipit, ut Baias neget. Non stulte videtur elegisse hunc locum Vatia.*

describing a scene from the opposite side of the bay, at the Sorrentine villa of Pollius Felix, where the favorable weather turns to a sudden passing squall: "the fine westerly was soaked by the heavier south wind".[174]

Within Italy, the region of Campania was especially renowned for its healthful and favorable climate, in addition to its beauty and productivity, and it makes sense that elites who were concerned with the effects of air quality and temperature would seek it out as a setting for their properties. The praise for temperate weather so prominent in Vitruvius appears in Pliny the Elder's *Natural Histories* as well, where, owing to Italy's "looser air" and moderate climate, it is "as if it were always spring or autumn." Pliny suggests these climes are more conducive to producing lightning than other regions, and that Campania in particular is as likely to see it in the winter as in the summer.[175] Italy is thus painted as the most temperate place on earth, with Campania at its center. Pliny makes the same point in his introduction to world geography as well, where he highlights the region, alongside the city of Rome, as an example of perfection:

> "[How should I describe] the coast of Campania in itself, there the fruitful and blessed loveliness, as if the work of rejoicing nature were all in one place? And then the everlasting vital healthfulness, such temperate skies, such fertile fields, such sunny hills, such harmless woodlands, such shady groves, such bountiful stocks of forests, so many breezy mountains, such fertility of fruits and vines and olives, the fleece of the herds so renowned, the necks of the cattle so plump, so many lakes, such fullness of rivers and springs pouring over all of it, so many seas, ports, and the lap of the lands lying open everywhere to commerce, just as if the land itself were running eagerly into the sea for the help of mankind! [176]

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[174] Statius *Silvae* 3.1 72-73: *tenuis graviore favonius austro / immaduit.*

[175] Pliny *HN* 2.55: *Vere autem et autumno crebriora fulmina, corruptis in utroque tempore aestatis hiemisque causis, qua ratione crebra in italia, quia mobilior aer mitiore hieme et aestate nimbosa semper quodammodo vernat vel autumnat. Italiaeque partibus iis, quae a septentrione descendunt ad teporem, qualis est urbis et campaniae tractus, iuxta hieme et aestate fulgurat, quod non in alio situ.* (Trans. "Truly lightning is more frequent in the autumn, its causes impeded in the periods of both summer and winter, for which reason it is also frequent in Italy, because the air is looser with a milder winter and showery summer, as if it were always spring or autumn. And in those parts of Italy that descend from the north towards the warmth, like the district of Rome and Campania, lightning strikes equally in winter and in summer, which is not the case in other places.")

[176] Pliny *HN* 3.40-41: *Qualiter Campaniae ora per se felixque illa ac beata amoenitas, ut palam sit uno in loco gaundentis opus esse naturae iam vero tota ea vitalis ac perennis salubritas, talis caeli temperies, tam fertiles campi, tam aprici colles, tam innoxii saltus, tam opaca nemora, tam munifica silvarum genera, tot montium*

Again, Pliny frames Campania as the natural epitome of Italy's advantages, a list of which immediately follows and sheds more light on the value ascribed to natural and climatic features. The ideal landscape, according to Pliny, is one that is healthy and temperate, safe from natural dangers, with a variety of landscape features and an abundance of crops and animals, and which is above all, welcoming to humans, both visiting and dwelling in its lands. Campania, and especially its coast, embodied these qualities and therefore held a great attraction for potential property owners. Villa A was well positioned to take advantage of Campania's delights: the broad and sheltered bay with ports at Herculaneum and Pompeii in either direction on the coast, the cool mountains ringing a volcanic plain with rich, easily worked soil that yielded abundant and specialized crops,[177] beachfront access to the sea and only a short distance along the road from the hot springs of Naples and Baiae or from the Sarno river just south of Pompeii. In the hottest summer months of June, July, and August, the gentle west wind (*favonius*) was predominant; it settled in the months of April and September, and largely blew from the north and north-east during the winter months.[178] The south wind, *auster,* known in antiquity for bringing rain and storms, was less dominant year-round.[179]

In addition to its surrounding natural features, the coastline that unfurled within the panoramic vistas from Villa A's property hosted a dynamic mix of villas, settlements, and green space; the area was described by Strabo during the Augustan era as being so built up with urban, domestic, and cultivated spaces so closely commingled that it appeared like a single city.[180]

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adflatus, tanta frugum vitiumque et olearum fertilitas, tam nobilia pecudi vellera, tam opima tauris colla, tot lacus, tot amnium fontiumque ubertas, totam eam perfundens, tot maria, portus, gremiumque terrarum commercio patens undique, et tamquam iuvandos ad mortales ipsa avide in maria procurrens!

[177] Falernian wine, for example, was harvested on a mountain near Naples.

[178] Rolandi et al. (2008).

[179] Statius *Silvae* 3.1, for example, names the *auster* as the bringer of the storm that soaks the west wind. Though Statius' poem depicts a storm along the Campanian coast, he takes note that it is expected to be short in duration with a return to fair weather after.

[180] *Strabo Geography 4.5.8*

Strabo's vision of the region resonates with the culmination of the Elder Pliny's praise of the Italian landscape and its emphasis on cooperation and harmony between nature and commerce. Signs of human occupation and trade were seen as an extension of natural bounty, of the "eagerness" of the landscape to support human affairs, which were in turn neither disruptive of nor separate from the ambient environment. Strabo likewise emphasized the integration of artificial and natural elements, describing a city that is defined by green space in addition to commercial outfits and housing. Conversely, his remark on the dense occupation around the Bay of Naples serves as a reminder that, like many other "country" estates along the bay, Villa A was not isolated in a wild paradise, but rather connected with nearby bustling urban and economic activities.

The proximity of the luxury estate of Villa A and the more industrial sector of Oplontis B—both fronting the shoreline—sheds light on Strabo's observation that the coastal vista had the effect a cityscape. The intermingling of grand villas and structures associated with a working waterfront meant that sites like Villa A were never far removed from many aspects of the very city life from which they are so often considered as escapes. At the same time, Strabo's remark implies that the expansive, green spaces that surrounded these villas were not alien to the concept of an urban landscape, but that cultivated nature had a firm foot in the city as well. Rural and urban space were not opposites, but points on a spectrum that was conceptualized, overall, as a product of nature.[181] Rather than the proximity of Oplontis B to Villa A being a negative feature,

[181] In addition to Strabo's blending, Cicero's *De natura deorum* ii.152 offers another example of a Roman conception of human activity as an extension of nature, rather than separate from it; Even as Cicero lists the ways in which humans control the landscape, he frames this action as an attempt to create a version of nature within the broader natural sphere: *Terrenorum item commodorum omnis est in homine dominatus: nos campus nos montibus fruimur, nostri sunt amnes nostri lacus, nos fruges serimus nos arbores; nos aquarum inductionibus terris fecunditatem damus, nos flumina arcemus derigimus avertimus; nostris denique manibus in rerum natura quasi alteram naturam efficere conamur.* (Trans: "Moreover all of the conveniences of the earth is at the command of man: we delight in fields and mountains, ours are the rivers and lakes, we sow the crops and trees, we give fertility

Strabo's conceptualization invites us to speculate that the separation of leisure space from indications of labor was perhaps not as important as we might expect. Along with scattered remarks like Seneca's appreciation of a villa with easy access to Baiae, it implies instead that the surrounding landscape's invitation to urban trade and development—its convenience—played an important role in the siting of the ancient villa.[182] Rather than an *escape* from the business of town, a villa should be just distant enough to tune out that hustle and bustle when desired, but still close enough to reap all of its attendant benefits.

IV. A Closer Look at the Graduated Facade

A desire for the interpenetration of the built and the natural environments, that is, for connectivity rather than separation, is visible in the construction of the villa complex as well. Its overall form, as viewed from above, is not that of an architectural block: rather it appears as a series of overlaid strips. Figure 2.3, which depicts the footprint of the villa's roofs in relation to the immediate cliffside and beachfront shoreline, draws attention to the relation between its walls and its most immediate surroundings. Contributing to the effect of connectivity between the landscape and architecture are the villa's graduated facades; these interlock with surrounding gardens in a distinctive crenelated pattern.

The walls that meet the north garden (56) take a total of twelve sharp turns to cover the two extant sides of the perimeter (the northern façade and outer, western wall of the east wing), thus both extending the length of the interface between the architecture and gardens and pulling

to the earth through the induction of waters, we enclose, direct, and avert the streams; at last, we try to make with our hands another nature in the nature of things.")

[182] Seneca Epistle 55.7.

pockets of green space into the villa's architectural embrace. While sections of the villa's southern facade lie beyond the boundaries of the excavated area, if the unearthed garden spaces 19, 59, and 91 are imagined as having extended beyond their current dimensions to the cliffside and having connected to one another, the southern facade is revealed as another zig-zagging line, with the walls turning eleven times between the western edge of portico 13 and the southeast corner of space 86, likely a pergola structure (85), and then across a small lawn (92) from the southern end of the east wing's massive swimming pool (96). Even the elongated straight edge of portico 60—which, together with the poolside walkway (80), gives contour to most of the villa's eastern facade—is cupped by walls that change direction nine times.

Fig. 2.3 Plan of showing the outline of likely roofed spaces of Villa A in orange, with excavation boundaries (arbitrary boundaries) marked in beige, the southern end of the atrium restored, the approximate cliff edge (based on the geoarchaeological section in di Maio (2014)) in brown, and the approximate waterline at sea level marked in blue. Adapted from plant by T. Liddell.

Rather than adopting a more closed-form plan, like a rectangle, which would increase the interior floor space relative to its perimeter, the planner created an elongated, variegated facade, complicating the interface between the surrounding garden and the architecture so that it operates like a budding fractal whose borders always dissolve under closer inspection into smaller versions of its overall pattern.[183] The many perforations in the villa's roofs similarly work from inside the perimeter to make the villa a more topologically complex shape, with eight gaps allowing the sky to spill inwards. This arrangement maximizes the rooms' exposure to natural light and fresh water and air. With its ribbon-like floor plan designed to take fullest advantage of opportunities for outdoor exposure, the structure of Villa A from above looks almost a little bit organic—stretching into and aligning with the landscape. The villa can thus be seen as embodying architecturally the social concepts put forward by Tim Ingold: as the villa's lines reach further into the landscape, it builds upon social relationships formed with its surroundings, becoming further entwined with the outdoors and its accompanying populations and rhythms. The villa becomes not a discrete architectural unit "set over and against" its environment, but very much a part of it.[184]

[183] This represents a luxury of space not available within an urban context. As is visible in Pompeii, even the largest and most extensive dwellings within the city walls are limited by the organization of city blocks. Houses that show evidence of expansion into multiple properties over time, but remain constrained within their blocks include the House of the Faun (VI.12.2), House of the Menander (I.10.4), House of Octavius Quartio (II.2.2), and House of the Centenary (IX.8.3). In all cases, however, extensive space within these limitations was given over to creating outdoor areas. Even within the constraints of blocks, the vast majority of Pompeian houses are irregularly shaped, rather than rectangular.

[184] See Ingold (2015) esp. 4-5; 14. This outward reaching mode in architecture was named by Casey (1996) 109-145 as the "hermetic" style, where forms encourage movement along linear routes versus "hestial" forms that encouraged inward gathering (a circular room is more "hestial" than a "hermetic" straight portico, though as Casey notes many buildings have combinations of both forms and encourage both kinds of movement). Villa A, with its long porticos and near total lack of rounded spaces (with the exception of the rounded wall between garden 87 and room 89) heavily emphasizes movement along axial lines rather than gathering.

The villa's overall alignment with the shoreline is notable, and was emphasized by terracing efforts in antiquity.[185] It has been proposed that Villa A might originally have been a symmetrical structure with an (unexcavated) west wing mirroring the (excavated) one on the east.[186] Yet the responsiveness of its overall form to the environment, as well as the only partial symmetry characteristic of other large villas[187] lead me to believe that it is more likely the structure to the west would have continued to unfold in concert with the curve of the shoreline, not least to maximize its vistas. The chestnut tree that once stood at the center of courtyard 32, which possibly predated construction at the site, was aligned with the midpoint of the axis line drawn from the northern end of room 21 to the original southern limit of atrium 5. If the angle of the shoreline established the roughly east-west orientation of the villa, and the tree determined the midpoint of its north-south extension (prior to the later construction of the east wing), the villa's orientation can be said to have been guided by pre-existing natural features. Such features were in turn cultivated in order to maximize their harmonious relationship with the building. Just as the overall benefits of the Campanian coastal climate, natural features, and convenience drew villa proprietors to purchase land parcels along its shores, particular natural features of the property were similarly singled out and integrated into the construction of the building. An awareness and appreciation of the natural world on the part of the villa's patrons and builders on both the macro- and the micro-scale is evidenced in the results of the construction. Stretching along and actively enveloping its surroundings, Villa A demonstrates that its builders designed the structures in response to the landscape, making the climate and local features co-designers of the space. The villa, a developing entity (as archaeology has revealed), displays the strategies

[185] Di Maio (2014) 682.
[186] Clarke (2018) 76.
[187] E.g. Villa Arianna and San Marco at Stabiae, Villa of the Papyri at Herculaneum, as well as the villas represented in wall paintings from Pompeii. See Gazda (2016) 34-36 for comparanda.

adopted in order to continue to maximize this dynamic over time, the principle of collaborating with nature to enhance experience, is seen to be an ongoing one.

V. The Villa in X-Ray Vision

Another means of estimating the interpenetration of outside and inside, is to consider the floorplan from above, by looking as if with X-ray vision through the villa's roofs.

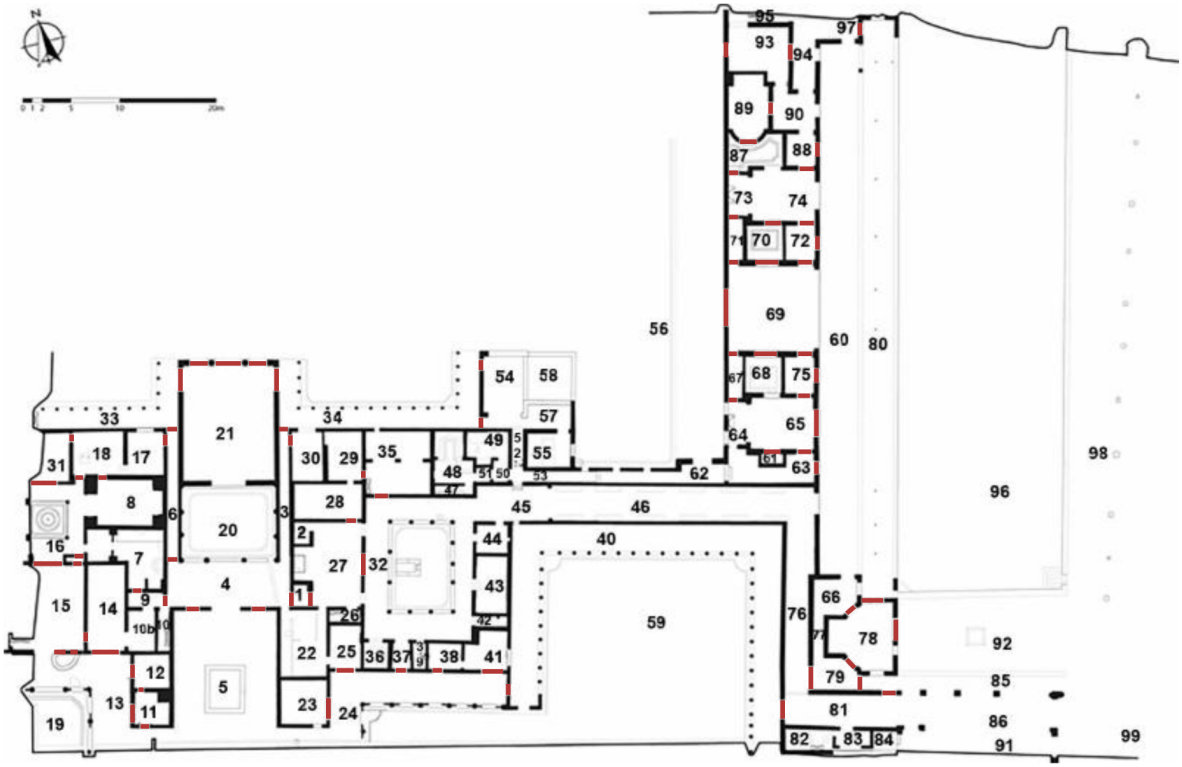

Fig. 2.4: Plan of Villa A with known locations of closeable windows and doors marked in red. Adapted from plan by T. Liddell.

The effects of the outdoor orientation are both clarified and complicated by the partitioning of its interior walls, windows, and doors. This vantage point allows consideration of how room arrangement, function, and decoration—factors that have traditionally featured in scholarly

efforts to establish a hierarchy of space within the structure—correlate with the villa's overall tendency towards increased connectivity with the outdoors.

In the villa's latest pre-eruption phase, an extensive system of interior partitions allowed separation between many of the villa's rooms and a gradation of accessibility to the outdoors; surviving thresholds and sills are visible in figure 2.4. In response to these indications of potential for enclosure, and to provide a rough illustration of how the villa's porous outer surface affected its interior layout, I have categorized the villa's numbered spaces—both unroofed outdoor areas and roofed rooms—by their level of relative exteriority[188] on an adapted version of the Oplontis Project plan (fig. 2.5).[189] Level 1 spaces (white) are unroofed, while level 2 spaces (yellow) are roofed but permanently open to the exterior on at least one side. Examples include colonnades and the roofed sections of the atrium—places that preserve enough evidence to determine that there was no permanently installed architectural barrier to separate them from the elements. Level 3 spaces (green) are those with direct access to unroofed, exterior space, but with likely potential for temporary enclosure, like a window or door. Level 4 spaces (blue) are those with access via windows or doors to the roofed but partly exterior spaces of level 2, and

[188] The terms interiority and exteriority in this chapter are used to refer to physical properties of the place: areas with stronger connectivity to the outdoors have a higher level of relative exteriority compared to those space with a higher level of interiority and fewer, smaller, or no direct connections to the outdoors. These terms are intended to refer to a sliding scale of connectivity in contrast to the strict binary presented by indoor/outdoor or interior/exterior. Their resonance with terminology used more frequently in philosophy to refer to the state of the self in contrast to the material world, however, is not unwelcome, as the negotiations between the interior self and exterior material world are similarly concerned with questions of agency, the orders of cause and effect, and relationships forged between humans and non-humans. See, for example, Johnson (1999); Wambacq and van Tuinen (2017); for a use closer to my own, see Breyer (2019).

[189] For the purposes of this map and discussion in this dissertation, I have broken some numbered rooms on the plan into smaller sections, in cases where only part of a room is roofed or the numbered room is divided by tall walls. Thus room 5 becomes 5a (unroofed) and 5 (roofed), 16 becomes 16a (unroofed) and 16 (roofed), 32 becomes 32a (unroofed) and 32 (roofed). The kitchen is subdivided into 7 (east section) and 7a (west section), and room 22 into 22 (east section) and 22a (west section) along dividing walls. I also refer to the extant upper story room above courtyard 32 as 42A to reflect its connection to staircase 42. This leads to a total number of 106 numbered spaces, of which 13 are surrounding gardens whose full extent are unknown, outdoor features, and ruined rooms. Of the remaining 94 spaces within the perimeter of the villa's standing walls, 8 belong to level 1, 11 to level 2, 24 to level 3, 34 to level 4, and 16 to level 5.

level 5 spaces (purple) are those with direct spatial connections only to other interior spaces (levels 3, 4, or 5). The relative levels of exposure assigned to each of the villa's spaces, as represented also in the accompanying table (fig. 2.6), are representative of the highest evident level of potential enclosure; in other words, the map above is designed to err in the direction of underestimating the effects of the outdoor connection to avoid overstating the case. Each color-coded level should be thought of more as the lower edge of a range of potential exposure, rather than a firm categorization.[190]

Fig. 2.5: Plan of Villa A with relative exteriority levels. Adapted from plan by T. Liddell.

[190] The exception to this is the potential for some of the windows at Villa A to have been glazed. While the artifactual finds and architecture have not yet been fully published by the Oplontis Project, I have been unable to find any references to window glass in their public database or any other publications of the villa. Windows that may have been glazed (potentially only admitting light and not air) might have been in the following rooms, which are currently labeled as level three, but could be further interiorized by the removal of their window connections to unroofed spaces: corridors 46, 53, 67, and 71, and rooms 72, 75, and 88.

Level of Exteriority	**Space numbers within category:**
Level 1 (unroofed) white	5a, 16a, 19, 20, 32a, 54, 56, 57, 58, 59, 61, 68, 70, 87, 80, 85, 91, 92, 96, 98
Level 2 (roofed; partly open) yellow	4, 5, 13, 16, 24, 32, 33, 34, 40, 60, 86, 99
Level 3 (closeable windows and doors to exterior) green	21, 42a, 46, 52, 53, 55, 62, 64, 65, 66, 69, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 78, 79, 81, 83, 84, 88, 89, 93, 97
Level 4 (closeable windows and doors to level 2, semi-exterior) blue	1, 3, 6, 7a, 8, 9, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16b, 17, 18, 22a, 23, 25, 27, 30, 31, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 63, 76, 90, 94
Level 5 (interior) purple	2, 7, 10, 10b, 22, 26, 28, 29, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 77, 82, 95

Fig. 2.6: Table of numbered spaces within each level of relative exteriority.

In the diagram, there is a notable discrepancy between the number and the amount of floorspace in rooms at different levels of exteriority. Immediately apparent is that a clear majority of the villa's rooms have at least the potential to be opened to embrace the outdoors directly, and the size of the surrounding gardens make unroofed space the runaway leader in terms of total area of the site. Yet the more archaeologically secure distinction between rooms of levels 2 and 5—those with partial permanent exposure and those with no opportunity for outdoor exposure—particularly highlights the way the villa's built spaces are weighted towards connection with (and the influence of) the outdoors. There are sixteen fully interior rooms in the

villa, and only eleven that are roofed but permanently open to the outdoors. Yet those eleven spaces occupy more than three times the total floorspace given over to the more numerous fully enclosed rooms combined. There is also an interesting distribution of the rooms around levels 3 and 4, the spaces that open directly onto the exterior and those that open onto a buffer zone of partly enclosed space. First, a majority of rooms in the villa's western section belong to level 4, opening onto porticos, with a partly interiorized zone separating them from unroofed space. The villa's east wing is dominated by label 3 spaces, interfacing more directly with the outdoors. Windows connect these rooms (64/5, 69, and 93) to the north garden while the series of small *viridaria* that punctuate its center (61, 68, 70, 87) open not only onto the major reception rooms to their north and south, but also on the small connecting hallways (67 and 71) to the west and smaller reception rooms (75, 72, and 88) to the west. This might suggest that, as a later addition, this difference shows a change in preference over time. The rooms of the east wing can almost all be thrown open onto outdoor spaces, while the earlier rooms in the west open onto the shade of covered walkways. Perhaps the multiple frames provided by the windows and doors of reception rooms that looked out through colonnaded porticoes before reaching the gardens beyond were more fashionable during the earlier period, replaced in the later period by the more direct alternation of *viridaria* and reception rooms that characterized the east wing, constructed towards the end of the villa's lifespan. It may also indicate that less of a buffer to the outdoors was desired or necessary in the north-eastern sector of the villa compared to the rest: this area has less natural exposure to both the sun and the sea breezes. This might indicate the seasonal use of different parts of the villa, or an inbuilt flexibility so inhabitants might take advantage of spaces dependent on different weather conditions.[191] On a day with a cold breeze coming off the

[191] Many villas seem to have served as seasonal properties and might have only hosted a small number of retainers throughout the year. The seasonal unfolding of Villa A is discussed more in chapter three.

sea, the sunlight captured by the sheltered light wells of the east wing would presumably have made a more attractive setting for a banquet than the triclinium (14) overlooking the sea to the southwest, buffered by its sheltered portico (24) as it was.

Additionally, there is only one section of the villa where there are rooms that require inhabitants to pass through another interior space in order to reach one that connects more directly to the outdoors (the chain of level 5 rooms). In the latrine area, rooms 47 and 48, the small and large toilets, are only accessible via the small antechamber 51, which in turn opens off an outer antechamber, 50. This antechamber also leads to both a small, heated room (49) and finally to corridor 52, which connects the passageways between the east and west wings to the north garden. Apart from the corridor, all of these rooms lack any connection to the outdoors, with the latrines the most interiorized spaces in the entire villa. The small size of these rooms, and their less than glamorous function, seems to indicate a positive correlation between the relative exteriority of spaces and their placement in a hierarchy according to function.

Other rooms of level 5 include the kitchen (7) and apparent storage spaces (22) and short passageways (10, 10 bis, and 77). None of these spaces ranked among the villa's most luxurious or were designed for lingering at leisure.[192] The villa's larger halls and long walkways, on the other hand, tend to be more open to their surroundings, indicating that a closer relationship to the outdoors formed an integral part of rooms of representation and served to distinguish them from less prominent areas.

This situation seems to align fairly neatly with a long-lived guide to the social hierarchy of Roman domestic space: Andrew Wallace-Hadrill's treatment of "The Social Structure of the Roman House", and its discussion of how the conceptual placement of spaces in Roman

[192] For an overview of research into Roman toilets, see Janson, Koloski-Ostrow, and Moormann (2011).

households along the axes of Grand-Humble and Public-Private express their roles in enacting the social hierarchy of Roman domestic activity.[193] In establishing these axes, Wallace-Hadrill drew upon both the appearance of these two modes of spatial differentiation in the works of Vitruvius and their evidence in archaeological settings. The use of axes to illustrate these modes derived from a desire to avoid accidentally equating the two variables. As Wallace-Hadrill explains, "It is possible to move in either direction along either of the two axes at the same time. An area may be public and grand (the magistrate's atrium) or private and grand (his triclinium or cubiculum)."[194] These categories have the advantages of being intuitive and flexible, with grander spaces encompassing those that are more impressive by modern aesthetic standards, whether due to being more intensively decorated, as a result of their imposing scale, or their evident material expense.[195] Examples of grander spaces at villa A include atrium 5 and portico 60, while humbler spaces—those with less ornamentation or overt service functions—include kitchen 7–7a and the small rooms surrounding peristyle 32.

The resultant diagram also creates a conceptual map in two dimensions that matches Wallace-Hadrill's focus on floor plans as the primary illustration for understanding spatial relationships. Certainly, the public-private distinction is less pronounced at Villa A than in the Roman townhouses that are the objects of Wallace-Hadrill's study, as the countryside location of villas renders them by default more private than their urban counterparts. Yet this dynamic is

[193] Wallace-Hadrill (1988); Wallace-Hadrill (1994) especially 38-39.
[194] Wallace-Hadrill (1988) 55.
[195] A weakness of Wallace-Hadrill's approach is that it draws an equivalency between figural painting and grandness that replicates a traditional collector's preference for these images despite the popularity during the Roman period of non-figural decorations. Squire (2017) discusses the history of being excerpted that has often caused Roman paintings to be divorced from their contexts, with framed central panels often separated from their non-figural frames, which, as Squire argues, are equally important to the overall composition. Frederick (1995) 267 points out that Wallace Hadrill's hierarchy of painting types implicitly follows a literary hierarchy based on subject matter and genre that sets the framed compositions of mythological scenes in the third and fourth styles equivalent to epic at the top of the hierarchy.

nonetheless made somewhat visible by variation in capacity among rooms that share levels of ornamentation, such as more intimate *cubiculum* 11 and larger nearby *oecus* 15, both extensively decorated with Second Style wall painting and located along the villa's southwest facade. While it may seem like the criterion of exteriority already has a place within Wallace-Hadrill's range of "public-private", the use of courtyard and gardens in the villa interior makes it necessary to consider a range of "outdoorness" as a another independent range, a Z-axis addition to the model that moves the diagram from the Cartesian plane into three-dimensional space.

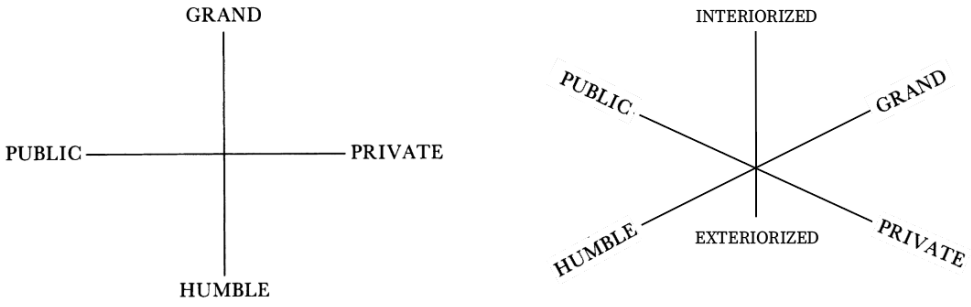

Fig. 2.7: Wallace-Hadrill's original diagram (left) modified with a third axis (right).

In the amended model I propose, rather than sitting in one of the quadrants of a plane, each room occupies one of the octants determined by three variables: greater or lesser luxury, privacy, and exteriority. The three-dimensional nature of this new model also highlights the fact that social space unfolded not only along the horizontal, two-dimensional level captured in house floor plans, but included depth. Rather than thinking of the house as a plane with paths that connect rooms, the addition of a third dimension suggests a closer alignment among the spaces under consideration, in which height plays an important role. Room 21, for example, is rendered grander by its monumental entrance and size, more public by its fronting on the north garden,

and more exterior by its connection to only outdoor spaces (*viridarium* 20, north garden 56, and the partly exterior porticos 33 and 34). The small latrine room 47, on the other hand, is humbler due to its lack of decoration and small size, more private by its distance from entrances to the villa building, and is the most interiorized room in the complex. All three of these variables contribute to determining the way each space was integrated into both the social fabric and natural landscape of the villa and the way its visitors would have experienced the space.

To get clearer a sense of how rooms in the villa might be ranged along this Z-axis, and of how the various levels of connectivity between the villa and the outdoors operated, I draw inspiration from the mathematical approaches of Space Syntax, which have gained traction in Classical archaeology as a means of measuring and representing spatial connectivity through the metrics of intervisibility and accessibility.[196] Traditionally, accessibility is measured in graph form, either using convex spaces or walls to divide a plan into numbered nodes. Connections between spaces—usually doorways, which are easily visible in plan—are represented by lines connecting the two relevant nodes, termed "edges". The resultant access graph facilitates thinking about the pathways that connect the rooms within a given space. These graphs can then be justified from a single entry point or "root" that represents the world outside the space under consideration, resulting in a "j-graph" that measures the distance of every node in the network from that single entry point. From these graphs, it is possible to calculate several indices of

[196] Spatial syntax is a primary example of a methodology that frequently makes use of computer technology to map relative accessibility (interconnectivity) and intervisibility of rooms or convex spaces based on two-dimensional plans. Hillier and Hanson (1984) provides an introduction to the application of spatial syntax in the archaeological spheres. For an example of the theory's application within a villa context, see Longfellow (2000), esp. 25–30; in a domestic context, see Grahame (1997) on the House of the Faun in Pompeii and Stöger (2015) on insulae at Ostia. For critiques, see Osman and Suliman (1994). It's also worth noting that the reliance of spatial syntax on identifying convex spaces to relate to one another doesn't function well when it encounters concave shapes, such as doughnuts, which, by existing architecturally (e.g. The Maritime Theater at Hadrian's Villa) call into question the ability of these models to capture even flattened versions of reality. This is an interesting critique, but it needs fleshing out much more fully to make the heart of what you are saying clear to your reader. Spell out why it doesn't work well.

integration, most commonly the "real relative asymmetry" (RRA) value of each node by measuring the distance between each node and every other node and dividing the results by the total number of spaces minus one. A higher RRA value thus equates to a room with fewer connections to other rooms, less integrated into the whole by the measure of human accessibility.[197]

A similar set of software driven methodologies has emerged to measure the relative visibility of spaces within a given set of confines, grouped under the label "Visibility Analysis." Once again starting with a digital version of the structure's plan, a grid is placed over the plan that divides it into equally spaced and sized "isovists".[198] Using a software program like the open source DepthmapX , created by Alasdair Turner of the VR Centre for the Built Environment at UCL (University College London), it is possible to calculate the viewsheds from each isovist, that is whether each isovist is intervisible from every other one, and so to generate a heat map with the most intervisible sections of the grid color coded in reds and oranges and the least intervisible color coded in blues and greens.

A computer generated access graph and visibility analysis of Villa A appear in Naglak and Tucker's analysis of the villa's maritime paintings in the Oplontis Project's second volume.[199] As shown in their work, the visibility map of the entire site is overwhelmed by the villa's extensive outdoor spaces, which appear as the most highly visible "rooms" of the property; the map largely obscures any differences in visibility within the structure itself, which appears mostly in shades of blue. This is another reflection of the importance of the villa's outdoor spaces to the experience of those dwelling within its walls, a stark illustration of the size

[197] A lengthier explanation of the space syntax and its use in Pompeian settings appears in Anderson (2005) esp. 48-50.
[198] This type of visibility analysis first appears in Anderson (2005) esp. 50-53.
[199] Naglak & Tucker (2019) 537-541, figs. 7.6-7.8.

and openness of the villa's gardens in comparison to the structure itself, built on a smaller scale. A second visibility graph confined to the walls of the villa better registers nuances in accessibility among the villa's interior rooms. Yet the usefulness of the access and visibility graphs, when limited to the areas within its walls, suffers owing to the partial state of the villa's excavation, with many of the least integrated and least intervisible areas of the villa being those closest to the excavation boundaries. The computerized models run into limitations due to their attempt to treat the villa as a contained shape, when the site itself resists such conceptualization both in its original construction, as a partly exteriorized structure, and due to its state of partial excavation, which does not allow for a complete reconstruction of the way its partitioned spaces related to one another. Likewise, the convention of a single point of entry from which all other values are calculated provides an artificial constraint when applied to a villa that had multiple points of entry on all known facades. In doing so, these models prioritize human movement as the sole index of connectivity despite the appearance in the villa's plan of many gaps and openings between rooms that were not designed to be walked through, including its many windows.

With that in mind, I present below a modified access graph I built that displays the connections between rooms grouped by their level of exteriority. Unlike a traditional access graph, which uses a single point of entry to represent the outdoors, and weights all other spaces in terms of their distance from this so-called "root", this version attempts to capture the topological complexity of the villa by elevating all outdoor access points (level 1 spaces) to the top level—a full root system.[200]

[200] The topmost and bottommost rows on the graph represent, respectively, the few outdoor numbered spaces that connect only to other outdoor spaces, and the few fully interior spaces that only connect to other fully interior spaces.

This approach not only maps human access, but also air circulation, as I outlined in the introduction, because the graph's edges are not limited to representing passable doorways, but they include windows of all sizes as well. It shows how air could spill from perforations in the ceiling and through intercolumnations, doors, and windows, providing a connectivity between spaces in the house that existed beyond human mobility but within the broader sensory sphere: relating parts of the interior through sights, sounds, and smells. These features likewise condition the experience of the gradation of accessibility implied by Wallace-Hadrill's axis of public to private spaces and made explicit in Space Syntax's concern with points of entry, guiding or offering contrasts to the paths available for walking.

The modified graph is not weighted by relative connectivity as determined by the number of connections to a given node; instead a rough indication of how closely connected each space is to its immediate surroundings is provided by the line weight (thickness) of the connectors. Rooms with multiple connections (e.g. a doorway and a window) or rooms undifferentiated by walls are represented by the thickest lines, passable doors and large windows represented by medium thickness, and smaller windows represented by the most attenuated. While these distinctions divide a spectrum of possibilities into somewhat arbitrary categories, they provide an indication of the qualitative aspects of accessibility within the confines of what can be rendered legibly in a two-dimensional model. An increased number of perforations between two spaces, like the stacked windows that connect the east wing *viridaria* to flanking reception rooms to the north and south, visually signals a closer relationship between the two spaces than the single, small windows that connect the same gardens to flanking passageways to the east and west.

The results, though tangled, show that the bulk of connectivity takes place nearer to the outdoors, both in terms of the weight of the connective bonds between adjacent areas and in

terms of the diminution in the number of connections for rooms that are more interiorized, compared to those that are more directly in touch with the outdoors. While not easy to see in two dimensions due to the sheer number of spaces at the villa and the proliferation of connections among them, it is possible to gain a sense of some aspects of the villa's structure, where small suites of interconnected rooms are drawn together by its more exteriorized spaces, with the surrounding gardens pulling farflung suites together. The north garden (56), for example, provides common air to rooms 21 and 93, while the most efficient interiorized route between the two spaces passes through seventeen other rooms, and it is impossible to avoid passing through either the central peristyle, through linked porticos 24 and 40, or the expansive lawn of the north garden, when walking between the east wing and the villa's central and western sections.[201] The entanglement of the graph highlights the rough correlation between interconnectivity and exteriority, with rooms less frequently connected directly to one another and more frequently grouped around a common, fresh-aired circulatory space.

[201] From room 93, it is impossible to fully avoid spending some time exposed to the outdoors and reach a destination of room 21. Passing south through rooms 90, 88, 74, 72, 69, 75, and 65, one would reach room 63, where one must either pass through to the west into corridor 62 or turn east into portico 60—a level 2 portico. Following the western path, corridor 62 continues into corridor 53 before meeting the short perpendicular passageway 52. Here, it is possible to reach room 21 most quickly by walking towards the north garden into portico 34, but to maintain the interiority of the route, a walker would turn south into the broader corridor 45, which leads directly into the semi-exterior peristyle 32. Passing through the courtyard, a walker would continue west through the lararium 27, small passageway (1), room 4, and long corridor (3) to finally arrive at the large oecus off the north garden. This long route maintains the possibility of avoiding the outdoors as far as possible.

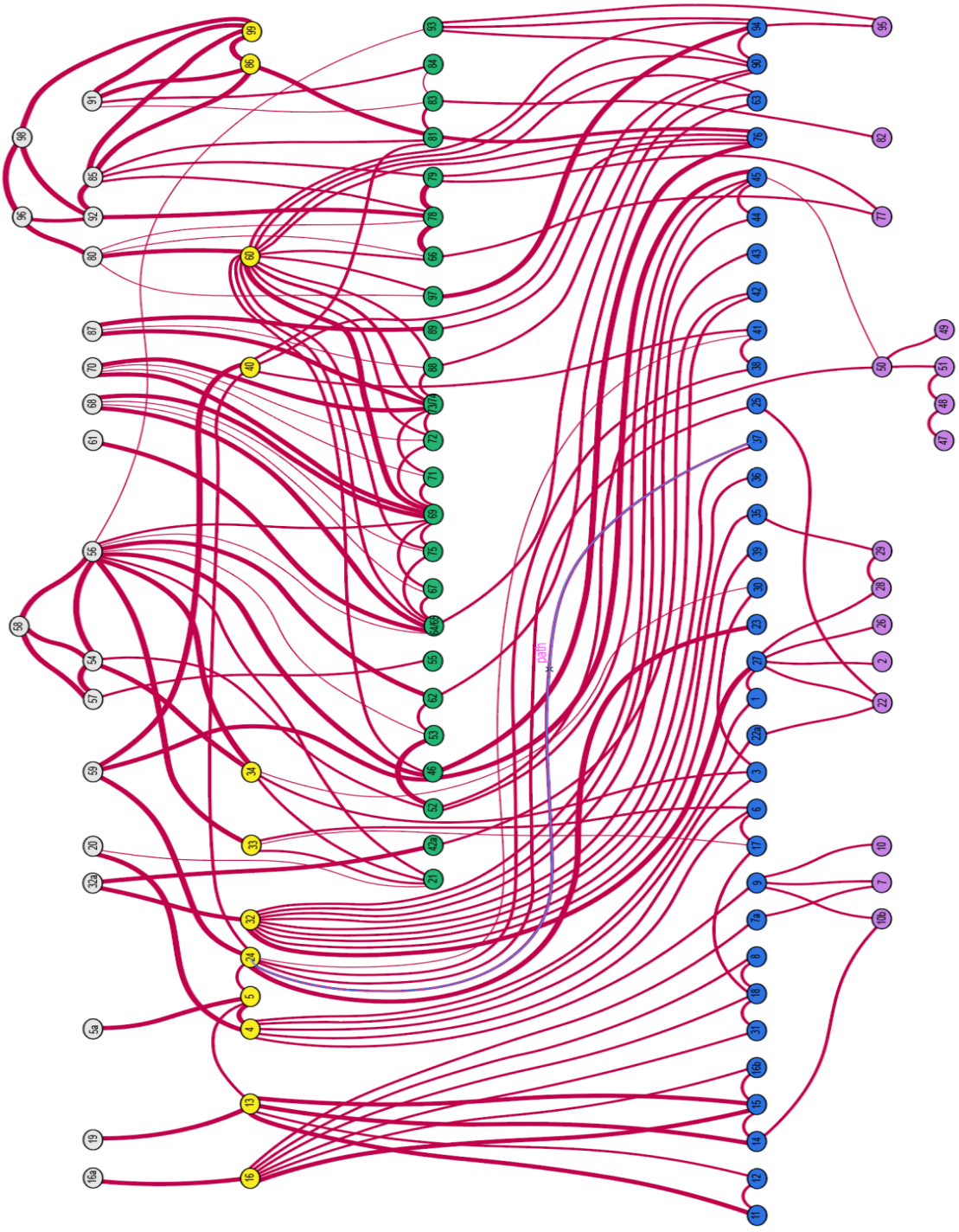

Fig. 2.8: Modified access graph of Villa A's numbered spaces, adjusted for exteriority level. From the top down: level 1 spaces (white) represent unroofed space, level 2 (yellow) roofed but partly exposed spaces, level 3 (green) nodes represent spaces with the potential to be enclosed or open directly onto the outdoors, level 4 (blue) those with the potential to be enclosed or open directly onto level 2 spaces, and level 5 (purple) nodes represent spaces that lack any direct connection to the outdoors

While a traditional access graph is a useful (though limited) measure of human circulation patterns, the modified access graph is an illustration of the more complicated patterns of sensory connection driven by the villa's orientation towards the outdoors. While this reveals the density of pathways that connect the effects of the natural world to the villa's interior space, there is still the question of how the more subjective measure of grand-humble might play against the variable of exteriority, if there are patterns in the relationship between luxury and outdoorness that emerge from the site. While physical proximity to the outdoors serves as a useful benchmark for starting to think about the degrees of correspondence between architecture and its environmental surroundings, it is not the only evidence for these relationships between the architecture and natural world at the villa. It is also important to explore the ways that different levels of interiority and exteriority interact with patterns in the deployment of the villa's decorations, which represent one index for an internal hierarchy of spaces, in order to investigate how the representational sphere is activated by connections to the natural world.

Fig. 2.9: Plan of Villa A with undecorated plain masonry or white plastered walls (orange) and simply decorated (red) walls highlighted. Adapted from T. Liddell.

Because the relative "grandness" of decorations is difficult to describe objectively, and rests on the assumptions of an art historical tradition that privileges the study of figural over other types of decoration, I choose to focus solely on one measure of luxury: wall revetments (which are the most common decorative feature at the villa). I adopt an index of complexity rather than aesthetic judgment to distinguish between them, on the assumption that more complex schemes would have required greater time to execute, and therefore a greater expenditure, than their simpler counterparts.[202] Thus the categories in this section should be considered solely as an approximate indication of where, at some point in the villa's biography, a patron decided to provide extra expense to see that the ornamentation went beyond simple arrangements of color fields and stripes to include more complex iconography of any type or evidenced a greater material cost than painted plaster alone.

To that end, this diagram (fig. 2.8) highlights in orange the villa's walled spaces that have either no extant wall plaster or those with remains of plain white plaster only. Although rooms 21, 64, 65, 69, 73, 74, and 78 also lack complex painting, they all bear traces of wall revetment in marble or wood, a comparatively lavish expense compared to painted plaster that sets them apart from the other areas of the villa that qualify, in their current state, as comparatively undecorated. Of the remaining set of seventeen undecorated spaces, only rooms 7a, 35, 36, 39, 43, 44, and 84 do *not* belong to the category of most interiorized spaces (Level 5). Similarly, only six of the sixteen Level 5 rooms bear evidence of wall decoration. These are corridor 10b, rooms 22, 29, and 49, corridor 77, and room 95—the latter of which notably sits at the edge of

[202] The costs of many parts of the building and decorative process remain obscure, and the workshop organization and practices of painters in particular have proven difficult to tease out. Flohr (2019) uses Pompeii as a case study in reconstructing models of consumer demand for high quality decorations and finds that opportunities for specialization were common, perhaps more so than in other parts of the empire. Flohr adopts a clear preference for figural designs as the locus of specialization.

the excavation boundary, with the full extent of its spatial connections and true level of exteriority unclear. Together, this marks a very high correlation between fully interior and undecorated spaces.

The rooms highlighted in red, a mixture of spaces ranging from Level 3 to Level 5 (the three interior levels), bear comparatively simple painted wall decorations. Spaces 3, 6, 32, 42, 42a, 52, 53, 62, 63, 67, 71,83, 94, and 97 are all dominated by striated black and white paintings often referred to by modern scholars as "zebra stripes".[203] Though many scholars interpret the motif as imitation stone work, particularly a simulation of black and white breccia, zebra stripes are distinctive both in their resistance to confident identification and in their graphic impact.[204] Such paintings became extremely popular throughout the Bay of Naples area and beyond during the fourth style period, and are the single most popular type of decoration at Villa A,[205] where they appear as an all-over design, paired with a plain color field or incorporated into more complex schemes within discrete, tessellated fields, (examples of the latter are not included in this diagram as the rooms where they appear, 1, 4, 45, 46, and 76, have decorations that are overall more complicated than those included). Variation is achieved by alternating the orientation and contour of the stripes as well as the degree of visibility of the artists' brushstrokes, which range from careful to deliberately uneven and rough to evoke different textures.

The remaining rooms in this category are decorated with simple arrangements of color fields and bands:[206] corridor 9 has a faded green lower and middle zone, divided by a dark band

[203] Gee (2019a) 80-83.
[204] McAlpine (2016), esp. 115.
[205] See Rauws (2015) and Goulet (2001) for further discussion of the zebra stripe phenomenon.
[206] The effects of these color fields are restrained in comparison to more complex arrangements that create vivid, shifting effects, such as those on display in cubiculum B at the Villa Farnesina in Rome as described by Barham (2021).

from a plain white upper, room 22 preserves a black socle divided from a white upper by a red band, with faint remains of a simple candelabrum scheme in gold (making its admission in the category of "simple" decoration arguable[207]), and room 49 has a red lower and middle zone below a white upper. Rooms 72, 75, 88, 89, 90, and 93 all have colored socles divided from a plain white upper and middle zone by a contrasting band and may arguably belong to yet another category. These are closely affiliated with portico 60 and its wall paintings of vines populated with birds, insects, and animals, which are similar in style to the decorations in another enfilade of rooms (E, L, M, N) opening off the great peristyle at nearby Villa Arianna in Stabiae.[208] The rooms bordering the *palaestra* at Villa Arianna are in turn arranged similarly to the rooms of east wing bordering pool 96 at Villa A. Given the late construction of the comparable rooms at Villa Arianna, I believe the colored socles and white middle and upper grounds of the rooms along Oplontis' east wing may be partially finished paintings from its latest renovation, which would have been made more complex by the addition of vegetal frames had they been completed. If this is the case, these six rooms bordering portico 60 would also be removed from the category of simple decoration.

The inclusion of relatively simple decorations with the set of undecorated spaces only confirms the correlation between less-decorated spaces and a higher level of relative interiority. The sole fully interior room (level 5) *not* included among the undecorated or simply decorated rooms is corridor 10bis, which is indeed painted in a simple third style scheme, but with rosettes and multiple colors of banded framing to raise its level of complexity beyond the parameters of

[207] I have chosen to include room 22 among simpler decorations partly because the rooms 22 and 22A were separated in a later period by a partial wall, marking a clear repurposing of the space into a storage function. In earlier periods, a single room with wall paintings may have stood on the spot with a cohesive painted design. Gee (2019b) 2387-2392 discusses the difficulty of reading the remaining paintings.
[208] See Howe (2016); Guzzo (2014) for further information on the villas at Stabiae.

the present map. On the other end of the spectrum, the sole space that is partly open to the outdoors (level 2) that *is* included among the less extensively decorated rooms is peristyle 32, identified by many as a service area on the basis of its proximity to small storage, workspaces, and cramped upper story rooms as well as finds of agricultural tools in the garden at its center.[209] Here, I would argue that the simplified decoration of the portico walls and columns is intimately connected with the garden paintings adorning the interior walls of the garden at its center (32a), whose association raises the level of decorative complexity of the area overall and resonates with this unusually integrated service area's locational prominence within the villa complex.[210] While the few exceptions deserve closer scrutiny, the vast majority of the villa's spaces that are either undecorated or only simply decorated are less integrated with their outdoor environment than rooms that were more intensively ornamented. Apart from some of the reception rooms in the east wing (63, 75, 72, 88, and 90), all of the rooms that face directly onto the villa's porticos or are extensively decorated exist in close connection to the outdoors; the famous second style paintings of the western, older part of the villa all would have been experienced (on an ideal day) alongside the effects of nature.

So far, then, Villa A reveals itself to be consciously and emphatically oriented to local topography and designed to take advantage of the local climate. Its interface with its immediate surroundings is extended and a series of openings and perforations increase the potential

[209] Joshel & Petersen (2014; 2016) discuss the lives of slaves at the villa.

[210] Joshel and Petersen (2016) 150-151 claim the peristyle unequivocally as slave space, as well as the working, storage, and sleeping rooms grouped around and above it. In the latest publication of the Oplontis Project, the area is referenced consistently as a service quarter, with Benefiel (2019) 2007-2008 noting that the peristyle area has the most graffiti in the villa and 2023 linking the frequency of graffiti written in Latin (versus Greek) in the courtyard area to its association with a lower class as one example. While the discovery of gardening tools in the garden at the courtyard's center and association with low rooms fitted with shelving for storage and cramped upper story quarters seem to signal a relationship between the space an service activities at the villa, the zebra stripe decorations do not (*pace* Joshel & Petersen) seem to signal the peristyle's lower status within the complex. The popularity of this motif and its adoption in the highly integrated, highly visually prominent areas of the peristyle and corridors 46 and 76 imply that the zebra stripes motif was meant to be seen and admired by elite guests and slaves alike.

exposure of most of its rooms to the outdoor air, while the bulk of its decorative energy was directed towards spaces that are more exteriorized. The flexibility and significance of many of these openings, however, has not been fully addressed.

Just as is the case with the software-generated maps that the methodology of Space Syntax produces, my diagrams have locked their subject in one state—with everything (all doors and windows) as open as possible—and presented that as if it were a permanent condition. The villa's ability to respond to evanescent temporary conditions through the partitioning of its closeable windows and doors requires a different kind of map to capture it.

VI. Circulation as Sculpture:

I have constructed another map that underlies all of the diagrams included and discussed so far, but it doesn't fit on the page. The process of creating it and the questions and challenges that each successive iteration posed generated much of the written content of this dissertation; they prompted me to investigate the site of Villa A more deeply and to explore new areas of theoretical research, especially in the realms of geography and philosophy.[211] It is also the only version of the villa-as-map that can be changed to track the ways the villa could be changed, and that is able to capture the flexibility worked into the design of the villa so that it might respond to conditions and control its relationship with the outdoors. This manipulatable map, the longest running of this project's explorations of mapping as a process, is a "string sculpture."

[211] See Lee (2018) on mapping as a form of experimental archaeology.

Fig. 2.10: Detail and view from below of the string sculpture.

The artifact may be regarded as is an enhanced physical version of the modified access graph in figure 2.7, designed to hang from the ceiling and capture more specific information than would be legible in two dimensions. It is an example of art as inquiry, described by Tim Ingold as a process in which "the conduct of thought goes along with, and continually answers to, the fluxes and flows of the materials with which we work. The materials think in us, as we think through them. Here, every work is an experiment...in the sense of prising and opening and following where it leads. You try things out and see what happens."[212] Thinking through making entails being open to guidance by problems posed by working with materials themselves. I prepared several earlier prototypes of the string sculpture, beginning with hand-drawn attempts

[212]Ingold (2013) 6-7.

at creating a traditional j-graph for the villa with multiple entry points, and the final version was guided in part by questions that arose through working with materials: how could a two-dimensional representation capture movement not confined to the ground plane but swirling through the depth of three-dimensional space; how permanent should connections be between each node; what material best represents the stretch and pull of air circulation moving through the structure for the connectors; how might one encode the uncertainty and incompleteness of an archaeological site into a map?

Version three, reflective of my current thinking, is an attempt to answer these questions and encode both uncertainty and flexibility into the structure (as well as to make it more attractive as an object[213]). In its fully connected state, it displays a map of the airflow through Villa A, justified by level of relative exteriority, with all of its windows and doors open, with medallions representing the villa's numbered spaces connected by ropes that carry information about the nature of the interface between the nodes they join. Once again, the top level of medallions represents all of the villa's roofless spaces (level 1), the second register all of the villa's semi-exterior spaces (level 2), the central register those spaces with optional connections directly to the outdoors (level 3), the fourth register those spaces with option connections to semi-exterior space (level 4), and finally, the lowest registers represent spaces that connect only to other indoor areas (level 5), with the chain of rooms leading to the latrines hanging below the rest. By reducing the vertical distance between levels one and two, and between levels three and four, the map visually signals the relationship between relative exteriority and the number of

[213] In the introduction of *Re-Mapping Archaeology,* Gillings et al. offer a six-point "manifesto" for considering the role of map-making in archaeological processes. Point five is one that serves here (pp. 11-12, emphasis in the original): "**There is nothing wrong with maps that are argumentative, discordant, disruptive, playful, provocative or simply beautiful.** This is because we need to come to terms with the fact that the point of making/interacting with a map is asking new questions about the world and experimenting with the building of new relations."

rooms through which air must pass from the outside to reach each space, or, conversely, the number of rooms through which a person must pass to reach fresh air. At the top two levels (1 and 2), the connection to outdoor air is direct, while the middle two levels (3 and 4) might require movement through one room, depending on the state of partitioning. Level five rooms, hung the lowest, always require movement through at least one room in order to reach even the option of meeting with outdoor air.

In addition to signaling the presence of a connection between the two nodes attached at either end, the rope connectors provide qualitative information as well. Unlike the two-dimensional graph, where multiple connections between spaces were represented as a single thick line, the physical model captures each connection individually, with multiple strands often connecting the same two medallions, with the result that it is able to capture a much more robust network of connectivity between the villa's spaces. Each type of connection is represented by a different shade of blue: light blue for windows (not easily passable by humans), bright blue for doorways (easily passable by humans), and dark blue for "other", a category that includes intercolumniations, holes, and places where two rooms interface without any intervening wall or only a half wall. The backdrop from which all of the nodes hang is likewise rendered in shades of blue, purple, and gray, and white to represent visually the link between the sky and the substance whose paths are measured by the connectors, whose blue hues balance continuity with legibility.

Plied with each blue connector is a second strand that indicates the potential for the connection to be severed. Black string indicates that there is enough archaeological evidence to indicate that there was a permanent, architectural installation that could divide the two spaces (e.g. hinge plates that indicate a door hung in a doorway or that shutters hung in a window

frame), while white indicates that there is enough archaeological evidence to conclude that there was no permanent, architectural installation dividing the two spaces (e.g. a continuation of the pavement through a doorway without hinge seats of any kind, or the gaps between columns in the porticos). In the many cases where there is insufficient archaeological evidence to determine whether or not two spaces could be closed off from one another in antiquity, gray is used to indicate uncertainty. Finally, the thickness of each connector provides a rough indication of the size of each opening, with larger windows, doors, and intercolumniations represented by thicker ropes than smaller ones. While this last qualitative factor is limited to an approximation, rather than an exact representation of the relative size of openings, it nonetheless provides a clearer indication of the relative weight of each opening onto any given space, with larger openings providing greater intermingling of the air between the two spaces as well as directing the attention of viewers towards particular interfaces with other areas.

To encode flexibility, I turned to clasps, which allow for connections at both possible and certain points of potential enclosure to be temporarily severed, while permanent openings remain fixed in the form of knots. This simulacrum of the villa is more like a tool. It allows one to explore the knock-on effects of possible changes, like closing a particular door, and to conceptualize the ways in which the villa and its connections might have changed from day to day. The result is a structure balanced between geometric and organic lines—one that brings out the villa's ability to marry the principles of spatial design with the ebb and flow of the natural world and to chart its contributions to experience within the space. There are sections of the villa, such as the mirroring sets of rooms to either side of room 21 off the north garden, where the air circulation patterns likewise mirror one another, forming symmetrical loops of connected rooms that hang from a central, common node (in this case, the north garden itself). On the other hand,

the structure viewed as a whole looks a little bit more like a nautilus shell, with the connections between rooms spiraling towards the center.

The string sculpture is a map—a spatial representation—but also a site that one can stand within and experience, that has a history, even phases. It captures more information than translates passably into a two-dimensional diagram, and it is easier to think with because of its manipulability and size (occupying a footprint of approximately six feet by three feet). The reduced amount of detail in the diagrams inserted in this chapter renders them legible within the strictures of a written text, but the string sculpture, able to be manipulated, arguably best captures the structure of Villa A. Though complexly enmeshed, it ties together into something like a series of gathered petals from the stem of the sky, where you can pluck at a single node and see it pull a fold of associated spaces from the budded, spiraling cluster. While some rooms are clustered closely around outdoor or semi-outdoor circulatory spaces, causing them to move together closely when pulled, there is a knock-on effect that ripples throughout the whole of the villa's flexible structure, as the air connections eventually lead from the outdoors in spiraling paths throughout the whole.

The ability to disentangle parts of the villa that could be separated from one another by windows and doors reveals that some of the villa's most powerful aesthetic effects resulted from connection with the outdoors. The flexibility of architectural boundaries at Villa A in turn allowed the villa's human inhabitants to control the degree of exposure of certain spaces, a process that unfolded in correspondence with environmental conditions. This is visible in areas such as axially aligned rooms that frame *viridarium* 20, and in later additions to the villa like the enfilade of garden and entertainment rooms in the east wing, where the powerful effects of elongated visual lines that expand the rooms in a series of overlapping planes are dependent on

the state of optional partitioning; only on a glorious day would these glorious views achieve their maximum impact.[214] An increased degree of exposure, while heightening the sensory effects prized by villa owners for both their private pleasure and public presentation, comes with increased vulnerability.[215]

VII: Spaces and Places

In sum, the orientation of the villa's spaces towards connection with the outdoors shows that it was built to take advantage of the coastal Italian climate and environment, facilitating and resisting the effects generated by natural rhythms through the flexible partitioning of its architecture. The movement of air throughout the structure was encouraged by its permeability, but exposure could be carefully regulated by those within. The connection between the natural and artificial spheres was not only a visual, decorative choice, but codified the potential patterns of activity at the site. As this chapter has shown, both interior and surrounding gardens permeate the villa's architecture, minimizing its interiority. Many of the villa's most insulated areas are those with the most convincing claim to logistical and storage functions, including the kitchen and latrines, while many of its grandest entertainment and show spaces were closely entwined with the outdoors (e.g. atrium 5, oecus 78). Doors and windows provided ways for villa patrons to control their environments on a temporary basis—with elongated views that took in a variety of built and natural features drawing upon connectivity to the outdoors to reach their maximum effect. Partitions allowed some rooms to be used more comfortably when nature proved less

[214] Bergmann (2002); (2016): 101-107; Thomas (2016): 82-84.
[215] In the words of Dewey (1932) that serve as the epigraph of the dissertation: "At every moment the living creature is exposed to danger from its surroundings, and at every moment it must draw upon something in its surroundings."

cooperative, but the default position of closure mechanisms would, in most cases, have been open. The villa was thus geared to take advantage of the climate and topography, and it was built to mitigate the vagaries of the weather and human needs. Just as the close presence of Oplontis B would have counted as a positive indication of the environment's conduciveness to human affairs, the ability to respond to the ephemeral conditions of nature facilitated Villa A's ability to include so many open and connected spaces in its floor plan without sacrificing its use for shelter.

This chapter uses mapping as a practice that can reveal lines of inquiry in the present. Daniel Lee, an advocate for experimental mapping in archaeology, claims this new strategy for mapping as "conceptualising archaeological places and activities as *sites of production* (rather than *sites of reduction* or *reconstruction*)"[216]; he draws a contrast between the traditional impulse to use maps as illustrations of objective fact and their potential to generate new ways of looking at sites. The various diagrams in this chapter produce new versions of Villa A, each targeting a specific aspect of the structure and its environment to develop a perspective on its relationship with its natural surroundings and to reveal the multiple ways in which the structure evinces an impulse to blend, rather than separate, the artificial and natural worlds.

The maps capture large-scale trends evident in spatial projections of the site, such as the villa's extended interfacing with its environment, the emphasis on both human passage and the circulation of air in areas with a more intimate and permanent connection to the outdoors, and a tendency to decorate more intensively spaces with a closer relationship (both visual and sensory) to the natural world. They raise lines of inquiry followed on a narrower scale in the next chapters: what might the phenomenological effects of increased exposure to the outdoors at the

[216] Lee (2018) 143.

villa have been? How did elements of the natural world connect with and change the experience of its artificial constructions? How did the relationship between the representational sphere and the natural sphere develop within the villa's rooms at different levels of exteriority? How did an awareness of the natural world pervade the decorative strategies adopted by the villa's patrons and builders? In the next section, I zoom in more closely to look at the interfaces between indoor and outdoor space to consider the effects born of the villa's architectural and decorative emphasis on proximity to the exterior. Additionally, I transition into thinking about the place in multiple dimensions, adding a greater emphasis on the effects of depth and experience in time to a discussion that has still mostly focused on creation and interpretation of two-dimensional plans. Spatial thinking, that which is rooted in the abstract, absolute geometrization of space, emerges from the villa in plan: its areas of symmetry, gentle shifts in axis, the precision of its measurements. There is plenty of evidence that ancient builders could and did plan their projects mathematically. At the same time, the construction was in many ways guided by the environment: laid out to access views of prominent local features, to interlock with surrounding and interior gardens, and to facilitate comparisons between the moving tableau of nature and the still decorations on its walls. This environmental sensitivity balanced the impulse to alter nature, as builders shaped elements to suit their desires, terracing down the cliffside to the shore and planting in rows that imitated architectural lines. There appears to be an ongoing negotiation between human and non-human elements that allowed the villa to reach the heights of its aesthetic and social effects. The site presents not only both geometric and phenomenological understandings on the part of its creators, but also a curiosity and interest in the way the two were constantly merging with one another.

Chapter 3: Approaching the Villa: An Embodied Perspective

I. Villa Visit Part II: From Plan to Place

In this chapter, I begin to step away from maps to take a closer look at the phenomenological qualities of the gardens that are so intimately connected to the villa's architecture. Once oriented to the villa's outline and background, a visitor has to set aside the brochure with its insistent set of plans to safely descend the steps to the level of the ruin. A last glance down over the railing reveals the contours of the north garden, or what's left of it: a patchy lawn with a broad strip of well-trodden dirt running from the bottom of the stairs to the great window of oecus 69 in the east wing, the low gray stumps of a few plaster root casts poking up among the ranks of squat young trees and isolated bushes.[217] An informed viewer, perhaps primed by Wilhelmina Jashemski's 1978 plan of the villa with all of its excavated root cavities and planting beds marked, might be able to trace the lines of its former plantings and pathways over what remains. Only part of the garden is known. An excavation boundary slices across its northern end and through the rooms of the east wing; the walls and garden to the west are swallowed beneath a wall of volcanic ash and debris. The southern and eastern boundaries are

[217] Gleason (2016) 1084-1090 explains the reconstruction history of the garden. Since its excavation, the north garden has undergone multiple replantings. The first, in 1981, reflected the results of Jashemski's excavations, with box hedges lining the paths and individual plantings of laurel, oleander, and plane trees at intervals. Modern works in the garden necessitated replanting in 2010, when the box hedges were replaced by reed fences and planting beds filled in to reflect images that appear in garden paintings. The fences have since been removed, and only the young trees serve to roughly outline the paths. The effect is much less ordered than previous iterations.

architectural: the outer walls of the east wing and the villa's northern facade. On the north facade, twin porticos framing a monumental propylon at the entrance to room 21 make it seem likely that at least the main core of the villa appeared symmetrical from the garden.[218] The lawn, as the plan reveals, was sectioned into a series of planting beds lined by pathways running across the garden's expanse.[219]

Fig. 3.1: Section of Wilhelmina Jashemski's 1978 plan of Villa A with root casts, showing north garden 56 and immediate surroundings, overlaid on google satellite image of the site in 2021 (north at the top), showing current positions of trees.

[218] Some scholars (e.g. Thomas (2016) 78) even surmise a possible mirroring west wing to match the enfilade of rooms on the east, though many excavated marittime villas, such as the Villa Arianna and Villa San Marco in nearby Stabiae, as well as the suburban Villa of the Papyri at Herculaneum unfold asymmetrically, with mirroring sections but overall adhering to a more sprawling plan.

[219] Publications of the north garden include: Gleason (2014): paras. 963–67, 997–1008. On Jashemski's excavations: Clarke (2014): paras. 842–865; MacDougall and Jashemski (1981): 42–45; Jashemski (1979): 289–314. Although the precision of identifications based on roots remain in debate, all species identifications referenced here are based on Jashemki's hypotheses. On critiques of plant identifications based on root cavities, see Gleason (2014) 991 with further bibliography.

A broad avenue ran east-west across the length of the garden, aligned with the northern edge of the propylon and delineating two raised beds cupped by porticos 33 and 34 and edged with small plants identified as a box hedge, punctuated with small trees.[220] A narrow walk extended at a right angle up the center of the lawn. Still faintly visible in the trees that shade the lawn today, in antiquity it was likely lined with more box hedges, which were interspersed irregularly with small trees. Statue bases discovered on the beds to either side seem to correspond with a set of four centaur sculptures discovered in storage in the western portico (33).[221]

In the east, a pair of broad walkways ran north-south parallel to the wall of the east wing, separated by a strip of garden with evenly spaced, large plantings identified as plane trees that would have been about a hundred years old at the time of destruction.[222] In between, two diagonal paths to the north-west and north-east diverge from a point near the corner of portico 34, where a large root cavity seems to mark the location of an oleander cluster of the same age.[223] While the box edging continued along the north-east path and the western side of the north-west path, on the latter's eastern side another set of sculptures stood in a row: four portrait herms, at least three of whose bases were also surrounded by plants.[224] It remains unclear whether in antiquity the paths were grass-covered or of beaten earth, and whether the planting

[220] Gleason (2014) 963.

[221] De Caro (1981) 88 noted that both of the male sculptures have hollowed-out channels that enabled them to serve as fountains, which led him to suggest that they were originally housed as part of a proposed fountain that adorned the intersection between major paths at the center of the garden. Their removal from the context of a fountain, for which they are equipped, is explainable as part of a greater redirection of the villa's water resources towards the east wing pool (96). See also Van Der Graaff (2016), 67. Gazda and Naglak (2016): 136–138 discuss the sculptures more fully.

[222] Jashemski (1987) 71.

[223] Gleason (2014) 1000.

[224] Gleason (2014) 1002-1006.Apart from the large oleander plant at the southern end of the walk, these plants have not been identified specifically, though the presence of root cavities surrounding the bases are documented.

beds where no root cavities were found were grassy lawns or were planted with groundcover that would have left few traces.

What is evident from Jashemski's surface and root cavity studies is that the garden was home to a variety of botanical species, with sculpture and architecture playing against a lively multimedia environment.[225] Even now, in what is a palimpsest of modern replantings, the silvered leaves of olive trees contrast with the sunbeaten grass and deep green oleander plants, light and shadow riffing on their variegated shades. These give a sense of the way that cycles of growth orchestrated by the planters and dependent on climate must have meshed with the more rapid and unpredictable changes of weather and the apparent fixedness of its artificial decorations.

From above—whether in plan or in person, imagined as it was in antiquity or viewed in its current state—the garden looks comprehensible enough, rationally planned. Experienced at ground level, though, the abstract absolutes of east and west give way to the relativity of left and right, above and below. The garden swallows up its visitors and they breathe it in. It becomes impossible to comprehend the whole simultaneously, and necessary to make decisions about where to turn and move next: to duck inside the nearest doorway that leads into the structure, to wander over towards the yawning propylon at the center, to cross the garden towards the great gap in the far wing to get a better look at the shining marble trim of the pool beyond. The garden itself keeps changing, from the little clouds of dust kicked up by the heels of those who traverse

[225] Jashemski (1979). Robertson (1991) advocates for the consideration of plants as an artistic medium, emphasizing the need to adjust artistic practices seeking perfection and control in order to embrace the living potential of the medium. Artist Rebecca Louise Law's floral installations bring these ideas to fruition: she strings fresh flowers into elaborate, colorful environments that envelop viewers in natural beauty, and re-uses the dried flowers from older installations in later works in order to promote ecological awareness and make use of the flowers' full lifecycle. Her description of the work makes it clear that she had fully adopted the idea that plants serve as an artistic medium to be worked with rather than fully designed: "Flowers are my paint and I work with space as my canvas, but as you enter any installation you are taken back to nature's divine beauty" (https://www.rebeccalouiselaw.com/about).

it to the gentle swaying of thin branches in an almost imperceptible hot breeze. The transition from plan to place is from two to four dimensions: the additions of depth and time begin to blur the boundary lines that seem so clear against a white page in plan and are still perceptible when viewed from above and far away.

In the previous chapter, looking at Villa A from a spatial perspective showed how the climate and topographic situation shaped the design of its architecture and allowed an initial reconstruction of how the movement of outdoor air through its interior spaces conditioned inhabitants' experience, especially in its larger and more highly decorated rooms. In this chapter, I discuss the villa's gardens as places, experienced in unfolding time, and I adopt a perspective that is based in embodiment and phenomenology in order to understand how these gardens operated as a border zone between the villa's architecture and its more distant surroundings.[226] I begin by considering gardens as a category which invites a phenomenological treatment, before turning to the question of how designers drew and blurred the boundaries between the gardens, the villa's structures, and the world beyond. Finally, in order to understand the effects of this connectivity, I make the attempt to reconstruct the experience of moving through the villa's largest excavated garden, north garden 56, discussing its aesthetic as shaped by cooperation between the natural world and artificial interventions.

II. Down the Garden Path to Phenomenology

In antiquity, gardens surrounded the villa on all known sides. In addition to the north garden (56), associated with the approach to the property from the road, other large gardens,

[226] Brück (2005) provides a review of phenomenology in archaeology.

today partially surviving, were to be found on its eastern (80, 85, 92, 98) and southern (19, 59, 91) sides as well, running up against its porticos and the walls outside, and framed by its windows and doors from within. There seems to have been no way to get inside the villa without meeting one of its gardens; even the potential tunnel entrance (36) from the shore to the service peristyle lands with a view to an interior garden (32A).[227] As inescapable features of the site, the gardens of Villa A command attention. But gardens are difficult to write about in a linear fashion, both because they contain multitudes of entities (of plants, flowers, vegetables, rocks, grains of sand, etc.) and also because their existence is bound up with the passing of time.

The tendency of gardens to slip away from the scholar trying to discuss them has even drawn attention as a phenomenon in itself. For example, in his 1993 article "On the Conceptual Analysis of Gardens," James Elkins closes with a discussion of the connections between the effects that gardens seem to have on their visitors and the lack of scholarly consensus about how to define them critically.[228] He writes:

> I have been heading toward the conclusion that gardens are like mild soporifics, inducing a frame of mind or habit of thought, over which we have little control...On the one hand, the garden seems to induce a kind of dreamy reverie, so that writers are less likely to keep to a single topic, and more likely to free-associate a chain of topics...On the other hand, the garden seems to limit the writer's awareness to those passages in which they are enumerating similar concepts. Transitions from one exposition to another are lost, and their only trace is their absence. Something of the same kind happens when we slump in an easy chair, and cannot be sure how many times we've fallen asleep, or how long we have slept before waking.

As Elkins observes, gardens seem to exert an unusual amount of control over those who seek to write about them. Yet their resistance to circumscription is part of what makes them such

[227] Apart from any who were born within its walls in antiquity, the sole exceptions to the rule that the gardens form the first impression of anyone present in the villa are its early excavators, for whom the exterior gardens (roughly equivalent with ground level) were among the last of its features to emerge in each given sector. On the tunnel, which has not been fully explored but reaches at least 10 meters, see Di Maio (2014) 664; Clarke (2014) 868. It is directed towards the cliff edge and believed to connect to the terraced ramps that led down to the shore.
[228] Elkins (1993) 216-218.

tantalizing places to think about, and scholars have come up with multiple ways of conceptualizing their distinctiveness and drawing out their particular qualities.

A few years before Elkins made his observation about the strange state induced by writing about gardens, Michel Foucault, preoccupied by the idea of categorizing different kinds of space, lumped gardens into his grouping of "other spaces" or heterotopias, places that "have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect."[229] Gardens, both wild and cultivated, straddle the opposition between human territory and the space of nature, while being fully part of neither realm. Foucault writes that ancient gardens are perhaps the oldest example of "contradictory sites": "capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are themselves incompatible."[230] In other words, like a theater stage or art gallery, their designs can be altered to evoke someplace new within the constraints of the same patch of measured space. For example, the survival of many statue groups designed to evoke mythological time and space within their confines, such as Niobids, attest to a kind of spatial slippage between the garden as ornamented property and as a realm where the divine and dangerous are realized.[231] Gardens even served more literally as theatrical stages for mythological performances that seemed to transport the realm of the garden into another place and time. Varro, for example, narrates an experience of dining out of doors in a cultivated woodland, during which the proprietor called forth a slave dressed as Orpheus to summon trained beasts to the sound of his horn, both a literal expression of control over the property and an elision of the local landscape with the realm of myth.[232]

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[229] Foucault (1986) 22.
[230] Foucault (1986), 25-26.
[231] Newby (2012), esp 363-373.
[232] Von Stackleberg (2009) loc. 1592, citing Varro *Res Rusticae* 3.13.2-3.

Because these "heterotopias" rely on cultural relationships with more conceptually settled spaces, they are culturally specific and change over time.[233] In Roman gardens, this was made visible in the expansion of the meaning of the frequently used Latin term *hortus,* which, though it initially referred to small household gardens, came by the mid-first century BCE to encompass a range of planted spaces inclusive of the vast urban pleasure parks of the city of Rome and well as both luxurious and modest private gardens.[234] Because heterotopias invert relationships with the spaces they reference, they often serve as sites of crisis or deviation from social norms.[235] Thus, gardens were often deployed in Roman literature as settings for illicit or perilous activities, such as the gathering of witches in Horace's Satire 8 and the execution of Emperor Claudius' third wife Messalina in her prized Gardens of Lucullus after a failed coup.[236] Finally, because heterotopias simultaneously exert their spatial separation from and conceptual connections to other types of places, they balance permeability and boundedness.[237] The dynamic qualities of Foucault's heterotopia map well onto what we know of Roman gardens. With gardens reflecting both cultural values and anxieties, ranging from productivity to licentiousness, and holding the potential to offer multiple experiences, to exist as many places at once, materially changing from moment to moment, it is not surprising that they are difficult to discuss in an orderly fashion.

The garden's resistance to any circumscription in meaning has persisted into the twenty-first century. Characteristics similar to Foucault's heterotopias are evoked in John Dixon Hunt's

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[233] Foucault (1986) 24.
[234] Von Stackleberg (2009) loc. 213-339 provides an in depth study of the many meanings of *hortus* over time.
[235] Foucault (1986) 26.
[236] Von Stackleberg (2009) loc. 1933-1942 discusses the association of Roman gardens with the "transitional processes of sex and death" with their liminality and attractiveness to characters such as witches. On the many layers of meaning in the garden setting of the death of Messalina, see also Pagán (2014) loc. 1404.
[237] Foucault (1986), 27.

more formal definition of the garden as offered at the opening of his volume *Greater Perfections*: *The Practice of Garden Theory,* a book written in 2000 with the goal of establishing a more solid theoretical framework for understanding these unruly sites. Hunt's definition might be summarized as follows: a demarcated plot of ground, related to but distinguished from its surroundings, changing with time and societally specific, combination of organic and inorganic materials (selected for "practical, social, spiritual, aesthetic" reasons) and dependent on human maintenance.[238] In other words, a garden can be defined as the site of an ongoing negotiation between a human impulse towards organization and the resistance of natural materials to curatorial control.[239] In the end, Hunt's theory lands in much the same place as Foucault's, with a different vocabulary. Once again, a contemporary scholar derives inspiration from the Classical world. Drawing upon Cicero's description of the cultural landscape as *alternam naturam,* translated as "Second Nature,"[240] Hunt designates First Nature as the wilderness and the garden as Third Nature, a space that is simultaneously representative of the other two types.[241]

[238] Hunt (2000), 14-15. The lengthy definition is worth quoting in full, both because Hunt claims it should be taken as a whole and because it illustrates the difficulty of pinning down the topic: "A garden will normally be out-of-doors, a relatively small space of ground (relative, usually, to accompanying buildings or topographical surroundings). The specific area of the garden will be deliberately related through various means to the locality in which it is set: by the invocation of indigenous plant materials, by various modes of representation or other forms of reference (including association) to that larger territory, and by drawing out the character of its site (the *genius loci*). The garden will thus be distinguished in various ways from the adjacent territories in which it is set. Either it will have some precise boundary, or it will be set apart by the greater extent, scope, and variety of its design and internal organization; more usually, both will serve to designate its space and its actual or implied enclosure. A combination of inorganic and organic materials are strategically invoked for a variety of usually interrelated reasons—practical, social, spiritual, aesthetic—all of which will be explicit or implicit expressions or performances of their local culture. The garden will therefore take different forms and be subject to different uses in a variety of times and places. To the extent that gardens depend on natural materials, they are at best ever-changing (even with the human care and attention that they require above all other forms of landscape), but at worst they are destined for dilapidation and ruin from their very inception. Given this fundamental contribution of time to the being of a garden, it not only exists in but also takes its spatial character from *four* dimensions. In its combination of natural and cultural materials, the garden occupies a unique place among the arts, and it has been held in high esteem by all the great civilizations of which it has been a privileged form of expression."

[239] Von Stackelberg (2009), 6.

[240] Another translation might be "the other nature", which is an idea I will return to later in this chapter.

[241] Hunt (2000), 33-36.

Giovanni Ferrari, another contemporary scholar interested in the resistance of gardens to the imposition of meaning, proposes as one reason that "the elements of the gardener's art are lives...living things are among the gardener's materials."[242] This somewhat paradoxical statement reinforces the tension inherent between the garden as an arena of human intervention and a gathering of lives (or "living things") that have been, as in the social conceptualizations of Tim Ingold, knotted together through association even as they continue along their own paths of growth.[243] This perspective opens up an important avenue in understanding the particular importance of gardens among the cultural constructs of human society: the garden's tendency towards, in the words of Hunt, "dilapidation and ruin"[244]—death or a return to unimpeded wilderness—is a result of its being a place of contesting human and non-human agencing.

Toward the end of his critique of garden writing, Elkins observes that "the text keeps turning away when it is time to conclude, or develop an argument, or create a transition to another schema. It is the moments of articulation that are lost, and they become readable as 'written' by the garden itself."[245] Though he doesn't expand further on this idea, I think it offers something of an unintentional justification for the wandering writing that seems to be a side effect of thinking about gardens, with all their gaps and tangents, uncertainties and resistance to solid theoretical frameworks. Because the garden is not solely a product of human culture, because it does not have a single author, gaps in human description are inevitable, even a gesture of respect, an acknowledgement of our incomplete ability to control or grasp them. Gardening is an art where the media never quite sit still and have their own motivations. In writing about a

[242] Ferrari (2010), 34.
[243] Ingold (2015) 22-26 writes that "knots establish relations not of articulation but of *sympathy.* Like lines of polyphonic music, whose harmony lies in their alternating tension and resolution, these parts…are not simply linked by connections of exteriority."
[244] Hunt (2000) 15.
[245] Elkins (1993) 218.

given garden, it is hard to choose whether to capture multiple facets at a single moment or to focus upon a single facet across time, as neither option approaches the reality of experiencing a place that, to combine Hodder and Ingold,[246] is a loose entanglement of many lives.

Phenomenology is a theoretical umbrella that is well suited to studying activated spaces like gardens, as it seeks to understand experience through consideration of conscious subjective perception and the material world.[247] Phenomenology grew out of the early 20th century philosophical works of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, whose interests lay in consciousness and its connections to the lived world. It was later expanded upon by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, whose focus on perception within an "incarnated mind"[248] set the stage for understanding perception as embodied and part of the broader world, and has since been put to use across a variety of disciplines, including recent applications in Classical archaeology, where attention had been given to sensory experience in the ancient world.[249] What phenomenological approaches have in common is an interest in breaking down the divide between subject and object, and the argument that "embodied engagement with the material world is constitutive of existence."[250] They thus require attention to both the physical reality of the environment and to the culturally specific interpretations of sensory phenomena.

Though phenomenology, in its emphasis on the meeting between consciousness and the material world, has tended to be anthropocentric, only a little extension of its ideas render it apt for thinking about gardens and the role of the natural world in constituting experience within

[246] See the discussion in the introduction, pages
[247] Merleau-Ponty (2005) xi emphasizes the unpredictability of the real world and the rootedness of phenomenology in the material sphere, writing "The real is a closely woven fabric. It does not await our judgement before incorporating the most surprising phenomena, or before rejecting the most plausible figments of our imagination."
[248] Merlau-Ponty (1964) 3.
[249] On applications in archaeology, see Brück (2005) with further bibliography; for examples of its use Classical archaeology in particular, see the Senses in Antiquity series edited by Shane Butler and Mark Bradley (paperback collection 2019) and Platts (2020).
[250] Brück (2005) 46.

them. Contemporary studies in eco-art history and the broader ecocritical humanities—a disciplinary strand that seeks to examine constructed categories like "nature" and "culture" in the same way that phenomenology has approached human-object relations—provide ways of thinking about experience not only as generated by human relationships with objects, but also with other living populations.[251] By first acknowledging, and then stripping away, the common contemporary western assumption of human exceptionalism and separation of the environment, the eco-humanities offer an avenue for a more inclusive understanding of the embodied experience of the garden, one that is attuned to its many populations that co-author its lived sensory sphere. This non-hierarchical approach resonates with the anthropological model of the social meshwork proposed by Tim Ingold and discussed in the introduction, in that it does not elide differences between different kinds of being while it allows them to truly interact with and affect one another. An ecocritical phenomenology does not solve the "problem" of a lack of linearity in garden writing, but rather operates on the premise that embodied processes are not linear. The garden unfolds cyclically (like the seasons), simultaneously (like multiple sensory stimuli) and linearly (from birth to death), all while immersing the bodies of those within it so that a single entity can never experience the whole of it at once.

III. Boundaries and the Extent of the Gardens

One common conclusion that emerges from scholarly treatments of gardens is that they are distinct from other kinds of space and that boundaries enforce that separation. Across all of

[251] For a summary of anthropological contributions to "a better understanding of the interdependence of nature and culture", see Kockel (2010) 1. Patrizio (2018) organizes a call for an ecocritical art history around the theme of non-hierarchy in order to emphasize the elements of the natural world not as objects of study but as "actants in art" (p. 8).

the previously discussed attempts to define and conceptualize the garden, there is a general agreement that the term refers to something different from other kinds of space—the house, the sanctuary, or the city plaza. Foucault and Hunt equally emphasize that the garden is somehow bounded, and at the same time contains an internal multiplicity, born out of its ability to reference, reflect, represent, or invert other kinds of space and out of its living nature.[252] According to these definitions, gardens are internally unstable, but spatially contained.

Scholars of Roman gardens have similarly focused on boundaries.[253] There is ample evidence that attests to their emic importance in Roman antiquity as well. Boundaries had a traditional accompanying god, the ithyphallic Priapus, who was responsible for both the fertility of the growing space and for warding off the dangers of trespass by animal or human thieves.[254] Garden paintings make liberal use of reed latticework and low masonry fences to mark boundaries.[255] At the House of the Golden Bracelet in Pompeii (VI.17.42), the lower zone of the garden paintings in *oecus* 32 is decorated by a band of gold-colored hatching with polygonal cutouts onto greenery behind, that functions like a reed fence marking off the painted scene with its lush vegetation, dynamic birds, and sculptural elements like painted herms and hanging masks.[256] The nearby House of the Marine Venus (II.3.3), named for its large garden paintings showing the goddess lying in a shell and accompanied by twin figures of Cupid, features a slightly abstracted version of the reed fence in its lower zone as well; each diamond pane of the

[252] Hunt (2000) 14; Foucault (1986) 7-8.
[253] Von Stackelberg (2009) loc 154-164; Pagán (2006) loc 184.
[254] Megow (1997) 1028-44.
[255] Despite their status as representations, garden paintings have often been used to glean information on garden design and have been used as evidence since the publication of Pierre Grimal's *Les Jardins Romains.* For more recent examples, see Von Stackleberg (2009) 29-31 and Bergmann (2016). We should expect garden paintings to resonate with their real counterparts enough to be recognizable, but there are different goals for a painting vs. a real garden. The painted gardens are often represented as panels, echoing the partition of non-garden paintings, and framed in similar ways; the gardens function as another type of framed composition.
[256] Pugliese Carratelli and Baldassare (1996) 118-129.

lattice houses a single heart shaped (ivy?) leaf.[257] At the House of the Ceii, also in Pompeii (I.6.15), a masonry wall, painted red and bedecked with clusters of ivy, separates viewers in the rear garden from a landscape resplendent with wild beasts.[258] Both lattice and masonry walls also appear in the most famous set of Roman garden paintings, those from Livia's Prima Porta villa just outside Rome.[259] Here, an inner cordon of finely meshed reed appears in the lower foreground, separated by a narrow planted walk from the zig-zagging stone *pluteus* that divides viewers from a further plane of lush, tangled growth. The archaeological remains of Roman gardens, too, often contain evidence of such boundary walls: a series of dense small cavities in the gardens at the Villa Arianna at Stabiae testify to the use of lattice fencing at the site, while in more urban settings like Pompeii, high walls could be found surrounding the urban gardens, like those at the House of Octavius Quartio (II.2.2) that could only be glimpsed through a gate at the property's rear entrance.[260]

But there is also evidence that suggests that some Roman garden boundaries were sometimes symbolic as much as practical. While Columella, in a poetic tangent to his *De re rustica*, and following Vergil, recommended that farmers hew a statue of Priapus out of a tree trunk to adorn their rustic gardens, many other poets of the Augustan era and first century CE took such statues as the vector and target of their satire, including Catullus, Martial, and the authors of the *Carmina Priapea.*[261] There is a tension between the god as a protector and manifestation of the sacred dimensions of the garden and as a figure revealing the impotence of

[257] Pugliese Carratelli & Baldassare (1991) 137-143
[258] Pugliese Carratelli & Baldassare (1990) 464.
[259] Jones (2013); Kellum (1994) 215.
[260] On Villa Arianna, see Gleason (2014) 1086-1090. On the House of Octavius Quartio, see Clarke (1991) 193-207.
[261] Hunt (2011) 34; Columella *De re rustica* 10.31-32; Vergil *Georgics* 4.110-111. On the *Carmina Priapea* as an evocation of the lowered status of Priapus in an urbanized context, see Uden (2010).

rustic traditions. In the *Carmina Priapea*, in one noteworthy example (87), a story is told from the perspective of one of these guardian statues. The animated carving begins by evoking his rustic origins in (comically) lofty terms, then boasts of his properties and abilities, before finally addressing a thief and having his role usurped by the *vilicus* (overseer), who breaks off his large wooden phallus to use as a club to chase off the interloper.[262] While comic in nature, this poem attests to a certain kind of ambivalence toward the boundary-maintaining efficacy of the traditional, god-statue as well as his living sentience. Similarly, the types of low barriers that appear in garden paintings might neaten the edges of planting beds and provide a visual marker of the space allotted to a garden, but they would not keep out a determined thief—whether human or not. Outside of urban settings like Pompeii, the evidence for effective physical barriers is limited.[263] In Seneca's letter 55 to Lucilius, an account of a villa by a passerby, the writer mentions a wall that divides the property from the nearby resort of Baiae, but he is evidently able to see into the front gardens and facade of the property from the roadside well enough to describe them.[264] The tension between permeability and enclosure that Foucault ascribed to heterotopias emerges from these accounts. A visual accessibility competes with physical barriers, causing the garden to send mixed signals about whether it invites a viewer to enter or prevents them from trespassing.

At Villa A, the archaeological evidence for garden boundaries is limited and that which does exist falls on the ambiguous end of the range of effectiveness. A masonry wall much like the image at the House of the Ceii separated room 4 from *viridarium* 20, and the garden at the

[262] Uden (2010) 195-197.
[263] See, for example, the tall walls surrounding the garden of the House of Octavius Quartio (II.2.2) or the large vineyard next to the Caupona of Euxinus (I.11.10).
[264] Seneca *Ep.* 55.6: *Baias trans parietam habet.* ("[The villa] has Baiae across the wall").

center of peristyle 32 from the surrounding colonnade.[265] The beds in both these gardens and in the windowed *viridaria* (68, 70, 87) of the east wing were lined with low concrete barriers and a drainage canal.[266] While these barriers mark the edges of garden beds and garden areas visually, none are impassable. Entrances are cut into both of the colonnaded walls, as well as into the largest of the *viridaria* (87) to facilitate access.[267] There are no entrances into *viridaria* 68 and 70, which are enclosed by walls cut with windows on all sides. Nonetheless, the sills of large windows to the north and south of each garden that pierce the walls of the reception rooms are low enough for a person of average agility to climb over them, either for the purposes of caretaking the space or in an unexpected breach of social norms. The final two interior gardens present differently. Another large window leads into *viridarium* 61, at the southern end of the east wing's enfilade of reception rooms, but the bed is raised nearly to the sill level and the space is only a small light well, making it almost possible to reach across the garden to touch its painted back wall. The last interior "garden", 16A, appears at the center of the western tetrastyle (16), where a marble planter fountain rises to floor level from the recessed pool.[268] None of the villa's gardens are emphatically separated from adjoining areas by their walls; even those without entrances have large windows that allow the sights, sounds, and scents of the garden to spill into adjoining rooms.

While walls delineate most of the interior garden spaces, they are not the only kind of boundary. Nothing is known of the possible walls of the exterior gardens at Oplontis, as the outer limits of each lie beyond the limits of the excavation. With little archaeological evidence

[265] Pugliese Carratelli & Baldassare (1990) 464.
[266] Jashemski (1979) 292, 306-308.
[267] Although the architectural volume of the Oplontis Project has not yet been released, Gee (2019b) mentions these entrances as part of her descriptions of the wall paintings in each of these rooms. On viridarium 20, 2383; on peristyle 32; 2502; on viridarium 68, 2641; on viridarium 70, 2647; on viridarium 87, 2712.
[268] Jashemski (1979) 292-3.

available, it is necessary to resort to a broader perspective on how its gardens might be distinguished from and related to their surroundings. This is where a phenomenological approach becomes especially useful, enabling scholars to generate a sense of how a place might be experienced, drawing on a broader array of data than the presence or absence of the expected spatial indicators. Phenomenology sheds more light on the way surviving gardens communicated with those who found themselves within them. Edward S. Casey is one scholar who has adopted a phenomenological approach to human relations with landscape, whose work often centers the role of "place" in culture and rests on a distinction between the measurable concept of "space" and the marriage of geography and phenomenology that is "place". Casey acknowledges the individuality not only of gardens, but of all places in "their singular configuration and unrepeatable history."[269] As part of his long-term interest in developing both a history and a vocabulary for considering the kaleidoscopic significance of space, time, and bodily experience, Casey developed a flexible way of conceptualizing and describing the boundaries of ever-changing, living environments in his article in answer to the fundamental question "Do Places Have Edges?"[270] He shows that places indeed have, or rather fulfill, their own edges, and he adopts a directional terminology to capture the importance of movement and change in their construction. As Casey demonstrates, edges of places are not necessarily equivalent to those ascribed to objects, or to the elements of a plan, but are rather embodied signals of change in the status of places.[271] These might be linear and artificial, like a wall, or scattered, like shifts in population.[272] He defines edges as a set of directional endpoints: the *terminus a quo*, the limit from which a place signals its end, and the *terminus ad quem*, the limit towards which a place

[269] Casey (2007) xvii.
[270] Casey (2011; 2017).
[271] Casey (2011) 70-71.
[272] Casey (2011) 69.

extends.[273] The edges of places thus "contain, define, and arrest movement" and "move us from one place to another."[274] This more flexible categorization of boundaries resonates with the separation between the gardens and other areas seen at Villa A, which even at their strongest simultaneously invite viewers' gazes and invade their sensory sphere even as they keep them from walking into the space.

Movement can be physical, visual, or both, and its emphasis in this context resonates with Tim Ingold's conceptualization of lines knotting and casting off from one another in the social meshwork, as outlined in the introduction.[275] Like the social participants in a meshwork, the rooms that open up onto the garden signal their difference from the gardens at the same time that they go along together, linked through shared characteristics like air exchange and intervisibility; they are related in a way that entwines their two ongoing lives, but does not completely unite them into a single entity. A phenomenological boundary is part of a social negotiation between material signals and perception, rather than a barrier that fully separates one realm from another. In Casey's formulation, the way that edges are shared between places allows them to operate in both constraining and traversable mode simultaneously, allowing places defined by them to manifest their differences and emphasize their connectedness at once. Their joining, like the knotting of Ingold's lines, both retains the individuality of each space and links them together into doing-undergoing through time.[276] Since, in Casey's words, "place is eventmental to its core," both places and their embodied edges are subject to the same dynamic processes as other phenomenological constructs.[277] The relative strength of a boundary marking

[273] Casey (2011) 67-68.
[274] Casey (2011): 68.
[275] See introduction, 57-60.
[276] Ingold (2015): 22–26 on knots and joining.
[277] Casey (2011): 70.

a place edge is derived from a combination of its palpability and fixedness, and some of the signals at Villa A are quite muscular, such as its walls, its coast, its windows and doors that provide obvious markers of separation built into the structure. Nonetheless, all boundaries in Casey's formulation are subject to change over time and through the perceptions of people moving through space, including its architectural features.

The dynamic quality of the relationship between place and edge emerges as an orchestrated theme from the extant remains where the villa's exterior gardens meet the architecture.

IV. Where Does the Garden End and the House Begin?

While the gardens' exterior boundaries lie beyond reach under volcanic debris and modern construction, the limits where the garden meets architecture are mostly extant. In Casey's terminology, the walls of the villa provide a solid *terminus ad quem* for these gardens, a place at which the expanse of the dynamic garden ends and other spaces begin. But the prolongation of the architecture that interfaced with the surroundings, as discussed in the previous chapter, acted to pull pockets of garden space in towards the structure, especially noticeable with the green spaces embraced by the three-sided colonnades of porticos 33 and 34 flanking the central propylon of the north garden.[278] The structure of the porticos themselves heightened this effect in three dimensions, drawing air between its columns to fill its space from ceiling to pavement with the scents, sounds, and sensations of the garden. The surviving decoration of the walls hints at the deliberation with which Roman artisans avoided erecting any

[278] See discussion of this area in chapter 2, pages 76-77.

linear boundary between indoor and out. This section concerns the painted porticos that link the exterior gardens to the villa's structure, beginning with the two in the north garden, before turning to the three porticos of the south gardens (13, 24, and 40) and finally to portico 60, bordering the pool gardens of the east wing.

A. The North Garden

The walls surrounding the north garden are punctuated by a series of openings that give onto a variety of far-flung rooms within the villa's sprawling plan, allowing the garden to tie these diffuse interior spaces more closely together. This is especially visible in the modified access graph of the previous chapter (fig. 2.7), where connections to garden 56 lead in all directions from its node, linking, for example, room 93 in the northwest corner of the east wing closely together with portico 33 at the villa's extant western end.[279] These many openings enticed viewers to gaze upon selective glimpses of gardens through the villa's architectural shell. From the center of garden 56, the architecture offered axial water views in two directions. To the east, the massive window into *oecus* 69 at the center of the east wing extended all the way to the ground level of the north garden, with the marble clad swimming pool (96) lined with garden statuary and ornamental trees visible through the opening beyond.[280] To the south, a sightline of more than 40 meters ran through the heart of the propylon of room 21 though *viridarium* 20 and its extension room 4, and probably to the sea beyond the southern end of the atrium (5). Though the axis appears straight when viewed at eye level, the plan reveals that it is set on a slight

[279] Chapter two, 94, fig 2.8.
[280] A recreation by Victoria I that shows the placements of these statues and their accompanying trees is provided by Bergmann (2002), fig. 1, pls. IIa, b, and c.

diagonal in order to further emphasize the vista's length.[281] The glint of light across the water would provide a tantalizing glimpse of the pool to the east and the bay to the south, alternative views to the sloping cone of Mount Vesuvius that would have loomed behind viewers to the northwest.

Each opening in the villa's facade represents a *terminus a quo,* an end point from which movement into new places within the villa property begins. As the axial views pull viewers' attention through the structure even as their bodies might remain stationary in the garden, these openings also pull the garden into its interior—its air, soundscape, light, and scents diffusing within. The walls, serving both as hard physical edges and as invitations into a visual realm that extends the garden within the representational sphere, serve as both a *terminus ad quem* for the end of the garden *and* a *terminus a quo* into the figurative realm. With the walls both halting and inviting movement beyond the garden space, the linear edges of the north garden are considerably less solid than they initially appear.

Further amplifying the effect of blurring the edges between the architecture and garden are the simulated gardens painted in the surrounding rooms. Apart from minor details, the decoration of the two porticos of the north garden appear to be twins, sharing rough dimensions, color schemes, and column and flooring types.[282] Their pavements are step up from the ground level of the garden, with black and white mosaic floors lined with a lip of Luna marble at their outer edges slightly elevating those within the porticos above the greenery surrounding them, even as they are almost wholly exposed to the elements.[283] The porticos reflect one another across the monumental pilastered facade of room 21, which juts forward between them into the

[281] Bergmann (2016) 99.
[282] The details of the painted plants on the socles, as well as a series of faded still-life paintings located at the center of the main panels, differ.
[283] Cline (2019) 2907 ff.

garden space. The architectural connection with the garden and attention to reflective symmetry carry over into the paintings along the long rear walls, which are visually reflective of the perforated colonnades opposite them.[284]

The painted scheme of the portico walls consists of three horizontal zones and a series of vertical panels (fig. 3.2). A low socle with a black background runs continuously along the base of the wall, while the central zone alternates between wide and narrow panels, with each narrow section a rectangle of white above a red base, and each broad section alternating between red and yellow color fields. The upper zone is mostly lost, though some fragments of its lower reaches display evenly spaced vertical red stripes on an overall white background. These existing fragments are perhaps indicative of an original simple red-on-white masonry scheme showing drafting lines in color against courses of white "blocks" of stone,[285] as is visible in other upper zones of the villa.[286] The blocks of faux masonry highlight the architectural construction of the wall, emphasizing in paint an exaggerated version of the blocks used to create it.

Fig. 3.2: Left: detail of a *durchblick* from portico 34 with faded architectural decoration and candelabrum. Right: Portico 34, view looking southeast from the north garden. Photos by the author.

[284] Barker & Fant (2019) 1908-9 notes the matching marble trim borders of the two porticos, while Cline (2019) 2900-12 discusses the pavements, and Gee (2019) 2508-2520 the paintings.
[285] Laidlaw (1985) provides an introduction to the first style and its effects.
[286] More complete examples appear in rooms 1 and 85.

The broad sections of the central zone provide a brightly colored backdrop for the portico, with each block of alternating color trimmed by an inner rectangular border in now-faded white secco, mimicking drafting lines. These panels, too, enforce the solidity of the wall through their opaque coloration and evocation of solid construction materials as they emphasize the flat surface of its construction.[287] The narrow sections in between mimic the spacing and coloration of the columns opposite, but upon closer inspection reveals each to be a *Durchblick*: a narrow, window-like painted "view through" the wall.[288] Rather than the white blocks they appear to be from a distance, they display on closer inspection fragmentary architectural motifs in shades of brown paint, a pair of two story colonnades converging towards the distance, now faded almost beyond recognition.[289] Though the details of the compositions are lost, the inclusion of imaginary architecture in the porticos' iconography makes explicit the interest of the villa's builders and decorators in layering inner and outer spaces. Rather than a continuation of architecture, these glimpses make the villa appear as a structure without depth, a portico wall that gives way to further porticos stretching outwards into a lightly defined exterior realm. It links the space of the portico to both the real and represented exterior, connecting the physical garden to imaginary vistas "through" the wall, where further elaborations of the architecture appeared to stretch into the distance. The scheme also sets up a contrast between the immediate graphic impact of the paintings and what they reveal upon closer viewing. The inclusion of *Durchblicke* simultaneously evokes the solidity of the opposite screen of columns, with their matching color, approximate size, and spacing, and perpetuates a figurative reversal of the scheme, serving as a

[287] This effect is characteristic of paintings of the Third (and sometimes Fourth) Style.
[288] Bergmann (2016): 100. On *durchblicke* in general, see Ling (1991): 79–81, with further bibliography. The term was developed in Drerup (1959) as part of an investigation into the relationships between real and pictorial space in Roman houses.
[289] Gee (2019b) 2509.

representation not of architectural elements but of architectural "voids" extending into spaces beyond. The middle zone of the paintings thus sets an edge to the extent of the semi-exterior portico, marking a very solid *terminus ad quem* for the garden against the indoors. Simultaneously, it presents an imaginary continuation of the gradient between outside and in, making the garden penetrate within the very skin of its architectural features.

The lowest register, the porticos' black socles, present decoration on yet another plane, one that projects virtually outwards from the wall rather than appearing to pierce its architecture. This plane is occupied by a series of painted plants, birds, vessels, and rosettes, divided by white and red frames that follow the vertical divisions of the zones above. Often overlooked, socles with painted plants are among the most common decorative elements in this villa and beyond, bringing the image of planted rows into the interior of buildings all around the Bay of Naples, from luxury villas like Oplontis to workshop dwellings in Pompeii.[290] These specific examples present an overall design of alternating broad zones populated by roughly evenly spaced plants and birds, and narrow abstract pedestals supporting candelabras, decorated with floating designs or with painted vessels set before them. The populations of this intermediary plane, existing between the painted architectural wall and the portico itself, frames the portico with a facsimile of a garden on the inside (including its plant, bird, and sculptural populations) which is juxtaposed with the real garden on the outside.

[290] See further discussion of these types of paintings in chapter four.

Fig. 3.3. Composite photos (from east to west) of the socle of portico 33 with plant paintings. Photos by the author.

The populations of the imaginary garden deserve more detailed discussion. In portico 33, the narrow panel at the eastern end is illegible, but it is possible to make out the designs within the broad section beneath the windowsill of room 17. Four short palmette-shaped plants appear there, two with thick spatulate leaves sprouting from a central point and two bushier specimens with multiple leaves per stalk appearing in alternation. At the western end of this section, where the window ends, is a partial red panel where the socle returns to its normal height with a larger, much faded plant approached by a brown winging songbird in flight from the right. This is followed by a short section decorated with a white lekythos, standing on the white frame, its single handle turned to the right. The following section, aligned with one of the yellow central panels of the portico, houses a single large and sprawling plant. Its stalks appear to curve outwards and upwards from the white framing line, dipping below and in front of it before

branching up. Each stalk is covered with clusters of alternating oval leaves, and a trilobed budded flower emerges from the end of at least one. Another songbird alights on a lower right branch, brown wings still outstretched. The narrow section to the west houses a roughly circular, now illegible, emblema. Continuing west there is another broad section showing a single plant, this one a tall palmette with thick lanceolate leaves interspersed with thin leaves shoots tipped with red flowers. There may have been a bird originally to the left of the plant, where the paint is very worn, and another brown bird in profile approaches one of the flowers on the right. In the next narrow frame stands a krater, made distinctive by its earlike handle (only one of the original two survives), bell shaped body, and outwardly curving lip. In the next broad section, the large plant is lower and its individual stalks are clustered, making it difficult to tell them apart. Each stalk is lined with closely spaced heart-shaped leaves in shades of yellow, green, and gray. Two songbirds occupy the same frame, one with wings fully outstretched flying from the left and one perched on a sprawling tendril of the plant with wings folded in at its sides and facing back left. The following narrow section houses a miniature gryphon in a heraldic stance facing left, wings partly folded, and the following broad one is poorly preserved, with the remains of a plant with a fan shape and small, spiky leaves on narrow stalks at its center. In the final pairing of narrow and broad sections at the portico's preserved western end are a rounder-bodied lekythos with the handle to the right and a final sprawling plant attended by birds. This is a bushy plant with thick spatulate leaves that appear to project outwards slightly where they cross the groundline, and narrow taller stalks fanning outwards from its central point. Another brown songbird approaches on the wing from the left, but the bird on the right is long necked, long-legged, long-billed, and thick bodied—a marsh bird rather than a tree dweller—striding in from the right. The frontal plane is completed by the addition of narrow golden candlesticks, which take the shape of reeds,

that run up the center of each *Durchblick,* as if set atop the "pedestals" created by the narrow sections of the socle.

What are the effects of all these features? Again, the socle paintings have slightly different graphic and iconographic impacts. They are balanced between artificial regularity and unpredictability. At first glance, all plants conform roughly to a palmette shape. Where the wall is uninterrupted by windows, they have a clear visual rhythm, with one large specimen set roughly at the center of each broad section aligned with colored panels in the central zone; beneath the window, the plants shrink in size to accommodate the sill but retain the same overall fanning form and regular spacing. This repetitive design emphasizes the porticos' functions as ambulatory spaces, reinforcing the punctuated architecture of the colonnade.[291] Viewed more closely, however, no two specimens precisely match. Even those plants that share characteristics, such as similarly shaped leaves, are arranged slightly differently, lending each plant the appearance of organic expression. The birds, caught in different positions of action, appear about to spring into motion or just arrested, each slightly different, while some of the plants appear to spill over the ground lines, bursting out of their frames. They also add another layer of animated representational space between the viewer and the wall, further complicating the building's edge, which now appears to lie between two imaginary places. That is not to say that a Roman viewer would have been tricked by these paintings into believing that real, grotesquely large plants grew between their bodies and a wall perforated by narrow outlooks onto distant monumental architecture. The paintings present an intellectualized illusion, not an optical one.[292]

Rather than literally appearing to extend space, they offer an abstracted version of phenomena in the visual field, calling attention to the real flexibility of the boundary between

[291] Leach (2004) 34.
[292] Leach (2004).

villa and garden. Stylized and unidentifiable as they are, they do not simply execute illusionism any more than they do naturalism, with the plants and birds conforming to merely broad visual categories (e.g. songbird, flowering bush) rather than being botanically or anatomically correct specimens.[293] Instead the plants prompt viewers to consider relationships between reality and fantasy in the garden and along its border. The paintings render permanent what is fleeting, and in doing so elide the distinction between architectural and natural space.

The linear edges of the north garden thus deliberately dissolve into edgelessness, both establishing and undermining the villa's solid boundaries and highlighting its integration into the landscape. In turn, the garden and its attendant characteristics and associations reach into the domestic space of the villa, its population of plants, animals, and statuary embedded into the walls via fresco, and seeping through perforations in its architecture. The tension between place edge and place transition, built into the twin directional termini of Casey's definition of place boundaries, is put into play beyond embodiment in the north garden area, through a representation of space that echoes experience. Edges in the north garden manifest themselves and in turn are questioned, complicated by the design of the porticoes. In the context of the garden, a type of space characterized by contradictions, blurring between reality and imagination, and interaction between human-made and natural elements, it makes sense that its edges, too, might be multifaceted.

[293] Ricciardi (2014) presents a catalog of painted plants at Villa A, but omits these examples from his list. Nonetheless they resonate with other plant paintings grouped into his section on "unidentified specimens."

B. The South Garden(s):

The gardens visible from Villa A's southern, seaward facade were elevated above the shore, framing the villa's architecture for an audience of passing ships and probably welcoming visitors arriving by boat from a likely landing point on the beach below.[294] From the north, they extended outwards from the facade before meeting the sharp edge of the cliff, giving way visually to the bay beyond. Like the boundaries along the north garden, the walls meeting the south gardens were adorned with painted porticos punctuated by windows and doors. Flanking the southern facade of the atrium, itself destroyed by the construction of the Sarno Canal, are two similar porticos, 13 to the west and 24 to the east. Unfortunately, the gardens themselves in this area remain a mystery, as the porticos are located close to the excavation boundary and no root cavities were documented at ground level to provide an indication of planting patterns.[295]

The surviving architecture nonetheless provides some evidence of the relationship between the architecture and exterior. Unlike the border with the north garden, the extant porticos of Villa A's southern facade are asymmetrical: the westernmost portico 13 has a deeper porch, more widely spaced columns, and is further recessed to the north than the similarly decorated, pendant portico 24 on the opposite side of the atrium. Both of these porticos feature short walls that partly encase each column, except for the two that align with the opening to large *oecus* 15. These extension walls provide more shelter within the covered walkway and protect the rooms opening onto the porticos somewhat from southerly winds and the heat of the summer sun, while the gaps between them, overlapping with the windows and doors of adjoining rooms,

[294] Di Maio (2014) 678-683.
[295] Jashemski (1974) 296-297 mentions a cavity of a branch of a large tree in garden 19 "at about the height of a man".

are sufficient to offer a view of the bay or gardens from within. Again, apart from the two columns flanking *oecus* 15, which were of brick covered with fluted white plaster, the inner half of the columns of the porticos were painted with a multicolor scale pattern spiraling around the shaft, with each scale divided along a vertical axis and painted half in white and half in purple, red, green, or yellow, while the outer walls and columns were covered in white fluted stucco. The paintings on the inner walls are reminiscent of those from the north garden in their paratactic design: repeated red panels outlined with a textile-inspired border and a white upper zone picked out with architectural details, stylized hanging garlands, and miniaturized bucrania, above a black socle.[296] Plants may have once adorned the socles of both porticos, as they did in the north garden, but are only preserved in portico 24.[297] With their brightly painted interiors and white plastered exteriors, molded into fluting on the columns, these porticos would have shone in the sunlight from a distance while offering flashes of color from their wall paintings to those venturing nearer. The two western porticos of the southern gardens thus first repeat several of the strategies for establishing a dissolving edge encountered in the north garden. Multiple planes of imaginary space contribute to making the villa's walls seem thin; they appear only to divide the gardens from another undefined exterior beyond the textile-like panels where the upper-zone architecture floats in space. Painted plants in permanent bloom adorn the socles, embedding simulacra of the plantings of the real garden into the surface of the wall. The porticos are punctuated by windows and doors that lead to multiple rooms on the interior and extend the garden's air paths through the gaps between its column-encasing walls.

Nonetheless, these porticos emphasize their architectural solidity more than those in the north garden did, exemplifying the way that phenomenological boundaries differ in their effects.

[296] Gee (2019b) 2294-2296.
[297] Gee (2019b) 2404-2406.

For, from within the portico, the painted columns and their extension walls frame the gardens through geometric elaboration and contrasting colors. The red background of the painted extensions stands out from the greens and blues of the (presumed) lawn and bay beyond, each panel decorated with a golden candelabrum in the center, emphasizes the constructedness of the portico colonnade. Rather than the portico serving as an extension of the garden space (one that leads into further imaginary porticoed garden spaces), as the open colonnades of the north garden do, the openings to the outdoors here evoke the narrowness of the *Durchblicke* in their painted schemes, presenting the gardens themselves as views through a wall. While still hinting at the inter-permeability of the garden, the pictorial world, and the architectural interior, the directional signals of the garden's end are more clearly expressed by the semi-enclosure of the portico. Each narrow gap between the columns offered a separate vista of the shoreline, with the seascape framed in the distance through the sheltering portico and whatever green elements decorated the intervening plane of the garden.

If the two western porticos off the southern gardens express a firmer architectural stance than those in the north, the merging of garden and architecture nonetheless reaches a height in the most dramatic extant feature of the southern facade: the long, asymmetrical three-sided portico 40 that offers a path between the rooms of the villa's core and its east wing. Its 38 brick columns, encased in molded, fluted plaster and painted white, do not have any protective architectural extensions and are thus more open to the air. The wall paintings are similar in effect to those of the nearby porticos flanking the atrium and the porticos of the north garden, and again offer opportunities for viewers to contrast their paratactic design with the details of the compositions.[298] The central zone alternates between broad red and narrow black panels above a

[298] For a full description, see Gee (2019) 2541-44.

black socle that follows the divisions of the central zone. The upper zone depicts architectural framing picked out with garlands, floating depictions of animals, and small landscape and still life paintings set just above each narrow central panel.[299] Set amongst architectural framing that hints at depth through perspectival recession, these paintings add another layer to the pictorial space, a *mise en abyme* of imaginary realms within imaginary realms filled with imagery of the natural world.[300] The details of each scene differ; still visible on the north wall are miniature landscape paintings showing a mass of colonnaded buildings atop a tall platform, surrounded by the sea with pointed, cypress-like trees in the background and an up-close still-life depicting indeterminate foods (perhaps eggs or shellfish) in a bronze bowl.[301] Representing both broader landscapes and the fruits of cultivation in miniature form, these framed paintings are located above eye-level, requiring viewers to pause and look closely in order to make out the details. Painted plants and birds again appear in the broad panels of the socles, appearing to sprout from a thin white ground line close to the floor and providing a frontal plane populated with living specimens that appears to stand before the solid panels of the central zone. The perspectival architecture of the upper zone, meanwhile, suggests the depth of space behind the solid plane, visually reducing the bulk of the structure to only a thin line between exterior spaces. The paintings thus carry through the visual strategies deployed to blend the edge of the north garden while adding new layers of complexity to its visual decorations that further extend the figurative zone between outdoor and in.

The garden itself contributes the strongest layer of blurring between the architecture and its surrounding landscape. As the portico is further recessed from the shoreline than the rest of

[299] For a full treatment of the villa's landscape paintings, see Clarke (1996).
[300] Squire (2017) 222-224. This phenomenon is further discussed in chapter 4.
[301] Gee (2019b) Figs. 21.444, 21.448.

the southern facade, excavation revealed a large expanse of garden 59, embraced on three sides by its colonnades.[302] Root cavities and planting pots documented under Jashemski's direction in 1975 and 1976 again reveal the contours of the garden in its heyday.[303] Two sets of evenly spaced root cavities were discovered in this garden, running parallel to the arms of the surrounding portico and mostly aligned with its columns, apart from those at the corners, and surrounding a slightly raised bed at the center. Between the two plantings, Jashemski identified the contours of a beaten earth path. The outer set, about two meters distant from the portico edge, contained larger, well-established shrubs or fruit trees. The inner set consisted mostly of paired planting pots embedded in the earth just beyond the lip of the portico's pavement. Each pair consisted of a pot oriented upward containing plants the size of shrubs and one angled towards a column, likely used to train smaller plants, such as ivy, to grow upwards around their shafts. The use of the iconic architectural forms of the portico as a scaffolding for greenery here provides a dramatic demonstration of the blending between architecture and nature. The effect was a colonnade sheathed in a living cloak of tendrils, a walkway bordered by a blooming fence, a metamorphic architecture that appeared to spring organically out of the growing earth, even as it dissolved into it. The architecture becomes, from the outside, subsumed by the growth of the garden, while from the inside tendrils would have reached around the columns and provided a vegetal frame through which to view the outdoors. Seen from the sea, the shining white facade of the porticos flanking the atrium would have contrasted with a portico that served as a scaffold to nature.

[302] Jashemski (1979) 293-296.
[303] Gleason (2014) provides a complete summary of Jashemski's findings. On *ollae perforatae* in particular, see paras. 1027-1032.

C. The East Garden

The areas that comprise the eastern garden of Villa A, the outdoor spaces numbered 98, 92, 80, and portico 60, surround the immense swimming pool (96) that unrolls along the eastern wing from the northern excavation boundary almost to the northeast corner of room 78. Only on the far side of the pool were root cavities discovered, where a series of planted trees paired with statues lined its eastern edge.[304] The statues stood, from the perspective of the villa, just in front of the trees, which would have framed them with vegetation and provided living backdrops for each sculpture. The portico opposite (60) was lined with gray Lesbian marble columns;[305] rather than the portico serving as a substructure for vegetal effects as in portico 40, the columns showcased the natural texture of imported stone, a reminder that natural features extend beyond flora and fauna and are inclusive of the mineral sphere. This scale of marble deployment in a private context is highly unusual, with almost twenty metric tons of stone on display in this area alone.[306]

The wall paintings of portico 60 differ significantly from those in the previously discussed porticos, presenting a comparatively light and delicate effect. Like the columns, the low socle was lined with gray marble for the whole extent of the portico, showcasing the smoothness and faint variegated designs of the expensive natural substance and establishing a material resonance between the painted surface of the wall and the screen of columns opposite. Both the central and upper zones are backed in white, and the decorative elements are painted with an airy delicacy across the surface. Once again, the central zone is divided by framing

[304] Gleason (2014) 1009-1024.
[305] Moormann (2019) 1748-1752.
[306] Fant & Barker (2016) 130.

elements into broad and narrow panels with miniaturized framed landscape and still life scenes in the center. The framing elements, however, are rendered very differently. At the center of each broad panel where the socle meets the plaster surface, a painted vessel or basket sprouts two vine-like tendrils to either side and a peacock feather in the center. At the outer corner of each panel, the vines meet and begin to twist upwards around thin foliate staffs, before they turn in curving swags towards the upper center of the panel. Where the two tendrils meet in each panel, a hanging ornament, such as a rhyton, dangles vertically. Each panel is symmetrical, and the elements are regularly spaced, but the details of the vegetal frames differ from panel to panel. In one panel, the leaves curling from the frame are the five-pointed, dark green variety recognizable as ivy. In another, round blue flowers with long stamens like bindweed poke out from the spiraling stem, clustered among fat teardrop shaped leaves.[307] Each vegetal frame is populated by a variety of animals and insects: a butterfly and pheasant-like bird are perched amongst the ivy frames, while a lizard and frog lurk amongst the bindweed, for example.[308] While the painted size of these insects and amphibians roughly matches their real-life counterparts, some animals are miniaturized to fit among the delicate frames, like the pressing and grazing goats and gazelles depicted standing on the slopes of the lower frame.[309] The effect again plays with setting features of the natural world within representational space, this time by creating a figurative realm that elides the distinctions between scale and habitat. The plants growing into frames appear to defy gravity, like the weightless fauna that appear to interact with them. The foliate staffs have sections of vertical gold that give way to bushy stalks of clustered green leaves, displaying a

[307] Ricciardi (2014a) 1107, fig. 7.28.
[308] Ricciardi (2014b) 1145. A similar effect is visible in the lower register of the Ara Pacis in Rome (see Barham (2015) 172 ff) and the Eumachia building in Pompeii (Reinfjord (2011) 19; Dobbins (1994) 649).
[309] Ricciardi (2014b) figs. 8.15, 8.16, 8.17, 8.24.

transformation or sheathing of an architectural detail in greenery. Overall, the paintings display a detailed rendering of the natural world that behaves according to artificial rhythms.

The paintings of the rear wall of portico 60 represent an abstracted version of the real-life vegetal frames that appear in portico 40 in the representational realm. Vegetation takes the place of the architectural frames that divided the paintings of the other garden porticos into a rhythmic succession of panels. The plants follow a regular, even trajectory of growth, with the undulations of the vines mirrored across each panel into a perfect symmetry, but each leaf and flower presents itself in a slightly different form, and the painters have taken care to vary the shades of green used to represent the leaves, lending each frame a sense of organic growth and individualism. Like the garden itself, the paintings reward closer inspection, their populations coming into view in moments of pause and attention. They signal the rewards that await a closer observer of the real garden, even as their overall design encourages movement along the bright walkway.

In each of the villa's surrounding gardens, the signals marking the edge between the structure and the garden are to some extent blurred. The architectural, botanical, and representational realms echo and intertwine with one another, creating a border that extends, first literally, and then figuratively, the interface between the indoors and out. The phenomenological edges directing movement between the gardens and architecture give way to one another: the *terminus ad quem* of the walls gives way to a *terminus a quo* into representational space—the paintings—and the real space of the interior through the perforations of windows and doors onto further rooms. At Oplontis, despite the emphasis on gardens as bounded spaces in definitions of gardens both modern and ancient, the line between the villa and the exterior gardens is constantly in question, shifting between material and represented meetings of nature and artifice. The

connectivity between the two is noteworthy and upends any expectation of a clear delineation between domestic space and the garden. Boundaries exist, and vary in their clarity, but a persistent interest in undermining the distinction between the two realms exists, whether through the transformation of architecture into a surface for the continued growth of the garden or the transformation of vegetation into architectural frames in paint.

What are the effects of this connectivity? Even in the absence of tall walls demarcating the space, the gardens nonetheless signal their difference from surrounding areas; they were recognizably gardens even to excavators working with nothing but soil contours, debris, and the holes left by the roots of its lost plants. As demonstrated by Casey, the signals of place need not be walls, but can be more diffuse, like the beginning of a new population.[310] The scattered signals of change and the garden's defining populations filled out the center of the space and consisted of both man-made elements and the living organisms—both plant and animal—that inhabited the area. Based on this framework, it is possible to construct at least a plausible range of experiences that might have taken place within the site and generated its difference from other places. It stands out materially from its surroundings: unlike wilderness or a built interior, the garden itself was adorned with a distinctive blend of planting, paths, and sculpture, contributing to an atmosphere where nature and the domestic sphere begin to blend. These same features also served to characterize different areas of the garden, directing the movements of visitors' eyes and bodies between its various internal zones and reinforcing variety as a primary aesthetic condition of the villa environment.[311]

[310] Casey (2011) 70.
[311] See Barham diss. (2015), Sachs diss. (2019) on the prominence of *varietas* in Roman aesthetics.

V. Experience in the North Garden

The following sections focus on teasing out the phenomenological signals of the north garden in particular, the largest and most extensively excavated of the villa's many examples: its internal zoning, its populations, and its unfolding over time. The largest of the villa's excavated planted spaces, the north garden, signals internal differences between sections of the garden through the angling of its paths, its plantings, and the placement of sculptures. Jashemski provides a good overview of the garden's planted structure, even though the precision of the identification of ancient plant species on the basis of root casts remains in debate.[312] The overall rhythms are nonetheless clear, with relatively small plants and fruit trees bordering the central paths, with a line of taller shade trees along the east wing, and larger, sprawling bushes, perhaps flowering oleander, in between, bordering the outer paths.[313] The size and density of the plantings varies across the garden's expanse, and, together with its intersecting pathways, divides the space into several distinct, though closely related zones. Though incomplete today, it seems likely that the central path that ran in front of and on an axis with the monumental double-height propylon of room 21 was joined by two flanking diagonal paths from the outer ends of porticoes 33 and 34 at its center.[314] Branching away from the extant eastern diagonal is another path that diverges slightly from the axis of the villa's core rooms, angled towards the northeast, the planting bed between them taking on a trapezoidal shape. This angle gently separates the section

[312] Gleason (2014) 974-1036 covers the process of root casting at the villa, with further bibliography on the method. Jashemski (1979; 1993).
[313] Jashemski (1979) 297-306.
[314] Only parts of the central and eastern diagonal path lie within the excavation limits. De Caro (1987) posits that this was the original setting for the four centaur sculptures discovered in storage in portico 33 and whose bases were unearthed along the central path, where they would have adorned an ornamental fountain at the intersection of the gardens' paths. Depending on the garden's original extent towards the north, it is possible that the intersection marked only the middle of a larger X formation.

of the garden in front of the west wing from the areas to the east, providing, in Casey's terminology, a *terminus ad quem* for the garden's central zone as its beds diverge. Similarly, the positioning of the taller shade plants towards the edge of the east wing and shorter specimens towards the probable original center of the expanse distinguishes these areas from one another. A zone between these two evidences less regular plantings of large bushes and smaller trees in the two beds to either side of the path angled away from the center of the northern facade.

While the precise effects of these plantings are impossible to reconstruct, given that the garden was overgrown as excavated and in view of the limitations regarding the identification of its plants, in the following sections I will focus on the experiences evoked by the intersections between architecture, plantings, and sculpture within its different sections.

A. Temporality in the Eastern Sector

In the eastern sector, the trees were spaced evenly in a line, shading broad twin paths that emphasized the area's walkability. Root clusters show that small plants outlined the footprint of the ex-portico that once lined the western edge of the east wing, and which once would have provided a *terminus a quo* for the garden's extent, guiding garden visitors to stay on the path. When the portico stood, these trees must have reinforced the rhythm of the colonnade, spaced roughly three intercolumnations apart along its length. If the trees outlived the portico to stand without it, they would have provided a natural substitute for the structure, covering the walkways with shade along the north garden's eastern end. The trunks of trees, both a possible original inspiration and material for columns in the distant past, are here planted in imitation of their

rhythmic effect.[315] The regular spacing of these trees would contrast with the individuality of each specimen as well, with multiple specimens of a particular plant type illustrating both shared and distinguishing characteristics. For plane trees, for example, the leaf shape, overall coloration, and growing style of all the trees would be similar, but the patterning of the bark on the trunks, the arrangement of leaves, and the specific shape of the branches would differ from tree to tree.

The southernmost two trees were aligned with the partly destroyed set of rooms at the eastern end of portico 34. While the western wall of room 54, shared with the portico, still stands, the remaining walls of rooms 54, 57, and 58 stand at half height or below, and were destroyed in antiquity prior to the eruption. Root cavities in room 58 testify that it was used as a raised flower bed in its latest phase, planted likely with rose bushes.[316] This raised bed was walled off from the rest of the garden, but shared the same air and provided a pendant planting across the broad east-west walkway to the angled garden bed between the shade trees and the eastern diagonal path, where large clusters of roots likely mark the location of flowering oleander that was encouraged to grow liberally.[317] Floral low-medium height bushes seem to characterize this trapezoidal bed, with less emphasis on regularity in the plantings and more on the contrast between the architectural lines of the building and paths and the clustered ornamental plantings of the beds.

So far, mostly for the sake of convenience, I have treated all of the gardens' signals of place as static. But gardens are continuously changing, and the experience of them is ephemeral. Their living elements were always in motion, subject to visible and rapid cycles of growth and

[315] Vitruvius V.1.3 makes an explicit connection between the tapering of columns following the forms of natural trees.
[316] Gleason (2014) 1008; Jashemski (1992) 297.
[317] Gleason (2014) 1000 reports that Jashemski's root identification consultant, Prof. Carlo Fideghelli, believed this mass of shrubs to be as much as a hundred years old.

decay. Plants react to daily changes in the environment: flowers opening towards the sun, stems flexing in the breeze, leaves catching and deflecting the blows of raindrops. They also have preferences—such as thriving in full sunlight or partial shade, flourishing in salty soil or only in tropical conditions—that mean human gardeners can only orchestrate, rather than fully control their creations. This again recalls Ferrari's assertion that "the elements of the gardener's art are lives",[318] which highlights the tension between the weight of a gardener's work and the limitations of human intervention.[319] These limitations hamper attempts to capture their visual and sensory effects as well, as their changing features make it all but impossible to encapsulate their effects through the medium of descriptive language. The garden's internal, interlocking clockwork is one of its most distinctive features, and generative of much of its sensory milieu.

Many painters and writers of ancient Rome demonstrated a sharp awareness of the behaviors of these other lives and strategies for shaping them in turn. As mentioned in the introduction, Cato the Elder's agricultural manual of the mid-second century BCE provides our earliest substantial literary account of farming. While the existence of archaeological analogues to the rustic, so-called Catonian villa described in *De agri cultura* remains in doubt,[320] the text assumes a conceptual framework in which religion, agricultural practice, and the interlinked behaviors of individual crops and the larger environment are commingled. This framework undergirds the description of Cato's idealized villa and the activities within, from the first moment of the owner's arrival at his property, when he is supposed to sacrifice to the household

[318] Ferrari (2010), 34.
[319] The results of this coordination between the natural tendencies of plants and the orchestration of the gardener is made visible by the results of Jashemski's excavations as well, particularly in the slight irregularity and overgrowth of plants along the edges of the path. This overgrowth makes sense in the context of other evidence for the villa's inactive state at the time of the eruption. While the edges of the path are slightly irregular as a result, the overall lines remain clear even after abandonment, showing that the gardener's interventions continue to affect growth patterns even as they began to break out of the planned arrangement.
[320] Marzano (2007); Terrenato (2012).

gods before making an inspection of the facilities,[321] to Cato's many instructions for the timing of planting and harvesting, to his descriptions of the changes signaled by plants or elements of the natural world. While there are abundant examples in this text to choose from, a few are sufficient to illustrate his awareness of the reliance on large scale seasonal and astronomical phenomena on the one hand, and the smaller scale changes among growing things on the other. In section 131.1, the author instructs the ideal farmer to feed a sacrificial meal to their oxen and begin ploughing when the pear trees flower,[322] linking agricultural practice to the seasonal signs on the ground. Towards the very beginning of the text, Cato combines a reliance on astronomical signs as well as the visible changes in trees in a discussion of when to harvest different types of wood, observing patterns in trees seeding and shedding their bark as indications of passing time.[323] Cato's writing marks only the beginning of an ongoing theme in Roman writing about conceptualizing the passage of time through gardens. As noted by Victoria Pagán in her discussion of literary impressions of Roman gardens, a similar interest in the interconnectedness of the garden and the stars appears in Columella's *De re rustica,*[324] a verse treatment of gardening that dates to the Neronian period of the first century CE and, as mentioned above, is thus roughly contemporary to the latest period of intensive construction at Villa A. The roughly

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[321] Cato *de Agricultura* 2.1: *Pater familias ubi ad villam venit, ubi larem familiarem salutavit, fundum eodem die, si potest, circumeat; si non eodem die, at postridie.* (Translation: "When the Paterfamilias comes to the villa, once he has greeted the family *lares,* he should take a spin around the estate on that same day; if not on that same day, then the day after.")

[322] Cato, 131.1: *Piro florente dapem pro bubus facito. Postea verno arare incipito. Ea loca primum arato, quae rudecta harenosaque erunt. Postea uti quaeque gravissima et aquosissima erunt, ita postremo arato.* (Translation: "He should give a sacrificial meal to the oxen while the pear trees are flowering. Then he should begin the spring ploughing. He should first plough those places that are dry and sandy. Afterwards, he should plough last those places that are heaviest and wettest.")

[323] Cato 17.1: *Robus materies, item ridica, ubi solstitium fuerit ad brumam semper tempestiva est. Cetera materies quae semen habet, cum semen maturum habet, tum tempestiva est. Quae materies semen non habet, cum glubebit, tum tempestiva est...Ulmus, cum folia cadunt, tun iterum tempestiva est.* (Translation: "Oak wood, and also that for vine stakes, when it is the winter solstice, then it is always ripe. Other woods that have seeds are ready for harvest when the seed is mature. Those trees that do not have seeds are ready when they shed their bark...The elm, when the leaves fall, then it is ripe a second time.")

[324] Pagán (2006) pp. 26-28.

two centuries between the publications of these two texts are a testament to the longevity of these concepts in the literary imagination, and to continued human attention to the behaviors of the natural and cultivated elements of the environment visible from their properties.

While it is impossible to fully capture the dynamic qualities of the garden in writing, the observations and advice offered by ancient writers concerned with shaping the lives of growing things underline the importance of keeping temporality at the forefront of our imaginations when considering a space like the eastern sector of garden 56. Plane trees, for example, would sprout their ripening spiked fruits in the spring, spread their leaves through fluorescent green into the deep olive of late summer, and then shed them, browned and curling at the edges, in the fall. The irregular cracking of their bark would leave shifting mottled patterns on the trunks as the trees accumulated new rings of growth each season, broadening their trunks and branching their boughs ever upward and outward from their roots. Roses bloomed in the spring, while oleander primarily blooms in the late spring and early summer in Campania, peaking in June, with bright pink and white five-petaled flowers with their edges curled at jaunty angles erupting in bundles from the end of stalks bristling with small, lanceolate leaves. When they fall midsummer, the petals billow in carpets and drift on the ground, no doubt collecting in gutters and banking against walls. The bounty of the landscape would thus unfold across the seasons.

In addition to the changing face of the garden's plants, the space would also have played host to a variety of fauna. Insects such as butterflies, moths, and grasshoppers, and amphibians including frogs and lizards all appear within the villa's wall paintings, perhaps indicating especially common inhabitants of its gardens.[325] The rose beds and oleander would have attracted pollinators like honeybees. Beyond their practical importance in maintaining the health

[325] The moth appears as a graffito in corridor 10 (Benefiel (2019) 2016; Benefiel & DiBaisie Simmons (2019) 2060-2062) while the other specimens all appear in the paintings of portico 60. These species are all native to the area.

of gardens, bees carried multiple symbolic associations in the ancient world.[326] Two strands of association with particular longevity were the connection between bees and poetic activity and between bees and souls.[327]

As poetic messengers—in Varro's words "the flyers of the Muses"[328] who "only alight on the sweet smelling"[329]—their voluntary presence in the garden would strengthen their associations with writing as a form of productive *otium.* An inhabitant of the garden educated in rhetoric might recollect the story of bees creating a honeycomb in the mouth of the Greek odist Pindar while he slept, reflecting the sweetness of the poet's gift for words[330] or hope for similar sweet inspiration to alight on their own lips. Bees' association with the transportation of souls and cycles of birth and death,[331] such as the legend that new swarms of bees were born from the carcass of a dead ox,[332] draw attention to the cycles of birth, growth, and death that accompany the garden's seasonal unfolding. Attention to mortality was not excluded from the world of *otium* either, as exemplified by Horace's Augustan-era ode that exhorts listeners to "pluck the day, believing as little in the future as possible."[333] Both associations resonate with the garden as a transitional space, where the divine is close by and passage between states of life and death are always in flux.

The Roman interest in life stages is also evident if we dwell for a moment on a notoriously elusive sense—scent—which is not only difficult to capture in relation to the ancient

[326] On religious associations, see Thomas (1978); on ancient apiculture, see Whitfield (1956); On bees in Vergil, see for example O'Bryhim (2018), Kitchell (1988).
[327] Horsfall (2010) 41-42.
[328] Varro *Res Rusticae* 3.16.7 "*volcres Musarum"*
[329] Varro *Res Rusticae* 3.16.6.
[330] Horsfall (2010) 41 mentions that the same tale was told of Plato as well.
[331] Horsfall (2010) 40.
[332] Two accounts of this appear in Vergil's Georgics. See Habinak (1990).
[333] Horace *Odes* 1.11: *carpe diem, quam minimum credula postero.*

world but also almost impossible to describe in the impoverished vocabulary that English has developed around it.[334] In her discussion of the perception and significance of scents of flowers and plants in the Classical world, Jane Draycott notes the effusion of a variety of scents from the natural world described as pleasant by Roman writers and cites an evocative epigram of Martial in which the poet compares the fragrant kisses of a lover to a list of other odors.[335]

> Like the apple respires as a young woman bites into it,
> like the breath that comes from Corycian saffron,
> like the silvered vineyard froths with the first bunches,
> like the grasses are redolent when a sheep has just grazed,
> like myrtle, like an Arab harvester, like worn amber,
> like fire smells, pallid with eastern incense,
> like soil when lightly flecked by summer rain,
> like a garland rested on hair damp with spikenard,
> so your kisses are fragrant, savage young Diadumenos.[336]

As Draycott suggests, these smells represent a broad range of apparently pleasant sensations that emanate from the materials of the natural world—from exotic spices and oils to local fruits and fields.[337] There are some commonalities in the effects they evoke, though. The burst of acidic sweetness from the torn apple skin and fresh-cut grass represents the release of the inner essence of those beings. The scent of earth is awakened by the rain, amber's by friction. The spice of saffron and musk of nard oil recall the sweat of labor in a distant field. Together, these are the smells of activated nature. They are intimate (as appropriate for the topic) because they represent the commingling of the aerial emissions of lives. While Martial elides breathing with both smelling and emitting odors, a broader connection between breathing and living is also at play

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[334] Bradley (2014) provides an introduction to the study of smell in the ancient Mediterranean and its inherent challenges. Majid & Burenhult (2014) compares English with the richer scent-associated vocabularies in Jahai language spoken by a group of hunter-gatherers on the Malay Peninsula.
[335] Draycott (2014) 61-62.
[336] Martial *Epigrams* III.65. *Quod spirat tenera malum mordente puella, / Quod de Corycio quae venit aura croco; / Vinea quod primis floret cum cana racemis, / Gramina quod redolent, quae modo carpsit ovis; / Quod myrtus, quod messor Arabs, quod sucina trita, / Pallidus Eoo ture quod ignis olet; / Glaeba quod aestivo leviter cum spargitur imbre, / Quod madidas nardo passa corona comas: / Hoc tua, saeve puer Diadumene, basia fragrant.*
[337] Draycott (2015) 62-63.

that emphasizes the temporal dimension of these scented moments. Between the swelling potential of a vineyard and the heady immediacy of ignited incense, the kisses of Diadumoenos are like the fresh exhalations of lives in the time between ripe and fresh-plucked.

The appreciation for the sensory effects of an awakening through contact that emerges from Martial's catalog of pleasant scents is a category of experience that does not map neatly onto contemporary experiences of the same materials. Scents of becoming—from the budding of species unfurling across the seasons to the sweat of gardeners laboring to maintain their health and order, would have characterized this garden. The seasonality and living nature of the space would have ensured the continuity of the garden's production of pleasant sensory stimuli, from scents to sounds.

The fauna of the garden, drawn by its planted populations, thus contributed to the activation of the place, carrying a moving suite of cultural and conceptual associations in and out of its boundaries. Their presence not only conditioned the intellectual and emotional experience of the garden but controlled its sensory sphere as well. Bees, for example, would buzz about the flowers, both providing a drone to the soundscape of the garden and creating movement among the flowers even in the absence of a breeze as they nodded beneath the alighting bodies of the insect. Birds, too, feature heavily among the villa's paintings and would have contributed to the garden's sensual fecundity, flashing their colorful plumage as they flew above, trilling and scratching as they foraged in the greenery. The residencies of these winged and legged creatures might be more transient than the planted living specimens of the garden, but in aggregate would have dramatically conditioned a visitor's environmental experience of the space as they freely moved throughout, imbuing the environment with their movement and energy. Each species

follows its own clock of growth and decay, all interlocking with, and choreographed by, the seasons and climate.

Those attuned to this mixture of cyclical and rapid, unpredictable changes would have felt the contrast with the relative solidity of constructed elements, like sculpted pieces, placed in the garden. While the life of a household might include some activities prompted by environmental cues, these were translated into a human timescale. In the garden, the different life cycles of the elements unfold together in a single space, and human visitors are confronted by both relative impermanence and durability, their time scale one of many. The life of a bird unfolds much more quickly than a human one, for example, while the life of a tree is slower—and potentially much longer (fig. 3.4). The plantings in Villa A's north garden bring these differences to a visitor's attention through contrast between the garden's materials—the durability of stone and the ephemerality of a flower—as well as the relationships between them established by their arrangement and resonances with iconography.

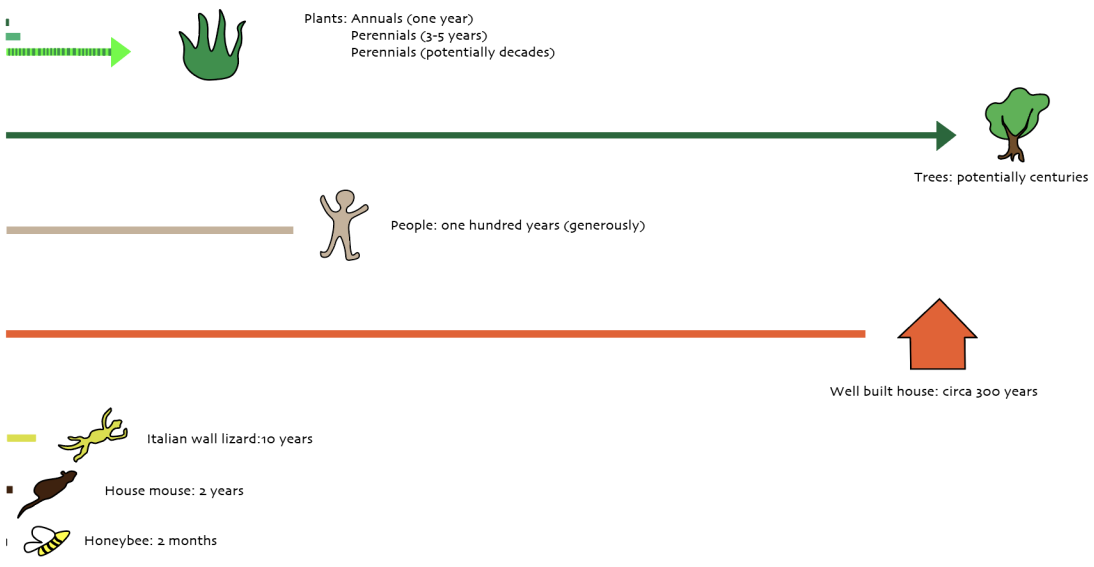

Fig. 3.4: Comparative life spans of some garden inhabitants.

The relationships between the longevity of the garden and the villa's architectural structure were strongly expressed in its eastern sector. The regularly spaced, mature trees that created a natural shaded walkway parallel to the wall of the east wing appeared as a slowly growing form of architecture that relied on a presumption of longevity to maximize its effect. The architectural portico that once stood just behind this line of trees would have heightened the contrast between the comparative fixedness of the built structure versus the longevity of the growing one. The taller the trees became, the longer the villa appears to have stood on healthy soil, scaling down in size as the trunks and branches widened and lengthened. The tree at the center of the courtyard (32), too, must have been visible rising above the roofs surrounding the peristyle from the north garden, another sign of the cultivated longevity of the estate. By predating the architecture itself, the peristyle chestnut even confers upon the villa a quality of longevity that reaches beyond its structural age. Taken together with the ephemerality of the scents and sounds produced by its permanent and transient populations of plants and animals, the passage of time is itself on display in the eastern sector of the north garden.

B. Populations in the Central Sector

The now western, originally likely central, zone of the north garden is further enhanced by the addition of sculpture to its plantings and pathways. The narrow central north-south walkway was originally bordered on both sides by small plants and the slim trunks of fruit trees, the mixed hedge turning ninety degrees where the walk intersected the broad east-west walkway.[338] A similar hedge lined the diagonal path angled towards the expanse's center as well,

[338] Gleason (2014); Jashemski (1979) 302-306.

but here, statues were installed: four marble heads cut for insertion into herms and two associated herm bases were discovered in situ nestled among the greenery. These comprise two portraits, a Julio-Claudian woman and boy, as well as two deities, Venus and a child Dionysus.[339] These herms were spaced evenly, lining the eastern edge of the inwardly angled path. Their presence highlights the separation of the garden into zones, as they stand with their backs towards the eastern section and face the center. A second set of sculptures discovered where they had been stored in portico 33 are also likely candidates for one-time placement within the north garden, as three of their associated bases were discovered on either side of the central walkway. These four sculptures represent a group of centaurs equipped for a dinner celebration: a centauress carrying a turtle-shell-bodied lyre and plectrum, a centaur carrying a club and crater, another centauress carrying a small deer and club, and finally a centaur carrying a boar and club, each of which will be discussed further below.[340] Their plinths each take the form of columnar acanthus plants, a strategy that visually integrates the statues with their leafy setting and emphasizes the appropriateness of their iconography to the garden realm. The addition of paint would likely have furthered these effects, with any color on the plinths blending into the greenery surrounding their bases and vivifying the features of the centaurs themselves.[341]

[339] I follow the identifications in Gazda & Naglak (2016) 143-144, fig 13.14.
[340] Moormann (2019), cats. 11-14, para. 1340.
[341] Barham (2015) 181 discusses the effect of paint in rendering the reliefs in the lower register of the Ara Pacis an illusory plane of decoration that appears to grow out of the ground, heightening its effects.

C. Four Herm Busts

The presence of sculpture introduces an artificial, semi-permanent population into the garden's dynamic mix.[342] Placed in a row, this assemblage of four herms would have greeted visitors with an orderly, restrained presentation that echoed the aesthetic rhythms of its planted surroundings and added rich layers of association to the environment. Like the ground plants and trees whose root cavities line the edges of the pathways, the overall form of each herm repeats, but the details of each idealized head differ and would have invited closer viewing.

A person walking from the northeast corner of portico 34 towards the center of the north garden would encounter the four herms lining the path on the eastern (right) side, beginning with the portrait head of a Julio-Claudian woman. Set into a pillar of contrasting striated gray marble, the woman has a placid expression.[343] Her features are distinctive, with a small chin, large eyes, and a long nose with a slightly arched bridge. Her wavy hair, parted in the center and drawn into a braid at the nape of her neck, dates the portrait to the Tiberian era.[344] A person would next encounter a herm bearing the head of Aphrodite.[345] The goddess is depicted with deep set eyes, a straight nose, and a slightly prominent, tucked chin. Her hair is parted in the center, wavy locks turned up around a fillet; part is gathered into a bun at the nape of her neck, and some is shown tied into a knot at the top of her head. Next to Aphrodite is a herm depicting a young Julio-Claudian boy on a plinth of blue-gray marble.[346] The boy shares the distinctive wedge-shaped head of portraits of the Julio-Claudian family, as well as hair that falls in distinctive diverging

[342] The apparent reuse of the centaur sculptures in a new context testifies to the antique practice of modifying and moving sculptures.
[343] Moorman (2019) 1385-1389 provides a complete description and bibliography.
[344] Moorman (2019) 1388.
[345] Moorman (2019) 1360-1366.
[346] Moorman (2019) 1395-1400.

locks over the brow.[347] His ears are large and slightly prominent, and his rounded cheeks, small nose, and pinched mouth all contribute to his youthfulness. His head is tilted slightly to the proper left. The last herm in the sequence bore the head of a child Dionysus atop a plinth of African marble.[348] Unlike the serene expressions of the other herms in the row, the child deity smiles broadly, showing his teeth. A crown of round flowers wrapped in a fillet whose ends lay gently over each of the boy's shoulders sits atop his hair, a single curl emerging from beneath its edge to lay across his forehead.

As a walker moves away from the structure of the house would thus encounter images of a mortal woman, a divine woman, a mortal boy, and a divine boy, evenly spaced in immediate juxtaposition. This arrangement establishes a loose equivalency between the deities and mortals, lending a sense of immortality through association to the humans depicted.[349] The placement of the portrait heads into the bodies of herms would have lent the statues a further sacred association. Herms were a sculptural form imported from the Greek east, where they originally served as sacred boundary and crossroad markers and were usually topped with the heads of deities, especially the traveling god Hermes, or heroes.[350] The mix of human and divine imagery on display at Villa A has been interpreted in this light as potentially highlighting the divine ancestry of the villa owner's family or drawing allusions to their apotheosis.[351]

The familial resemblance between the two portraits of mortals also recall the specifically Roman tradition of ancestor portraits. Usually wax, these were traditionally displayed in the atria

[347] Moorman (2019) 1396. This similarity does not necessarily entail that the portrait depicted a member of the imperial family, as their styles were widely adopted.
[348] Moorman (2019) 1379-1384.
[349] Gazda & Naglak (2016) 143.
[350] Rubio (2018) 313-316.
[351] Gazda & Naglak (2016): 143-144.

of Roman townhouses.[352] In the typical plan of an elite *domus*, a narrow street entrance opened onto a spacious atrium, which was open to the public for conducting business with the head of the household and, being visible from the street, was decorated to impress.[353] More private rooms were often arrayed around a garden located behind the *tablinum,* an official reception space at the back of the atrium, whose greenery could be glimpsed from the public atrium but not publicly accessed. In a typical country villa, this axis was often reversed (an architectural strategy advanced by Augustan author Vitruvius and evidenced at Oplontis), with the atrium removed to the back of the house and the garden and reception space facing the road.[354] With the garden replacing the atrium as the public face of the villa, it is not surprising to see it assume some elements of display, akin to ancestor portraits, adapted for the environment. The idea of a garden's exterior features facilitating comparison to a villa's atrium appears explicitly in Seneca's *Epistle* 55 in a description of two man-made grottos in the roadside garden of a property near Baiae, whose size causes him to compare them directly to the lofty rooms.[355]

Yet rather than a simple extension of the interior domestic realm into the garden, the setting of the garden once again becomes a realm where the suggested rules of reality could be suspended, where humans and deities could be displayed as equals, as would be inappropriate in an atrium. As the walker passed them in succession, moving further from the house, the sculptures would have seemed to come further to life, with the statues farther along exhibiting greater animation than those close to the building. The women in the first two portraits face straight ahead with placid, idealized expressions, while the mortal boy's slightly turned head

[352] Flower (1996) chapter seven.
[353] Wallace-Hadrill (1994) 45-47.
[354] Clarke (2018), 77, citing Vitruvius 6.5.3.
[355] Seneca Epistle 55.6: *Speluncae sunt duae magni operis, cuivis (cuius) laxo atrio pares, manu factae, quarum altera solem non recipit altera usque in occidentem tenet.* Trans: There are two caves of great labor, equal to the size of any atrium, made by hand, one of which does not admit the sun, while the other ever holds it in the west.

hints at a liveliness that is fully realized in the laughing figure of the child Dionysus, furthest into the garden.

The placement of these herms within the landscape also literalizes the role of the garden statuary in the creation of villa boundaries, marking the difference between the outdoor space that serves as an extension of the villa and that which exists outside of its sphere. The herm as a hellenizing element in the garden was also suitable for the garden in its function as a site of Roman elite leisure. About a similar set of four herms lining the garden in Pompeii's House of the Ephebe, Barrett has written that they "not only demarcate space but also mark the garden as suitable for learned discussion and contemplation."[356] The presence of herms points to the garden's liminality, encourages and displays a patron's inclination towards cultivated activities, and acknowledges and enhances the garden's sacred associations, in addition to marking an endpoint where one area of the garden ends and another begins.

D. Four Centaur Fonts

While the precise placements of the four centaur sculptures discovered in storage are impossible to reconstruct with absolute certainty, the corresponding bases discovered to either side of the garden's narrow central path likely indicate that they once flanked this approach.[357] Whatever their exact position, their pendant design recalls the rhythm and repetition of the herm portraits displayed nearby, and these sculptures once again evoke the mythological associations of the garden. In contrast to the herms, whose mostly stiff forms introduced architectural rigidity to the garden, the centaurs are all captured mid-movement.

[356] Barrett (2017): 321, with further bibliography.
[357] De Caro (1987).

The two male centaurs each have a well-muscled torso and are depicted rearing on their back two legs. One cradles a krater in his proper left arm and rests a knotted club on his right shoulder,[358] where the paws of his panther skin cloak are knotted in place around his neck. He is fully bearded, with a crown of wild locks, and his face is expressive, mouth slightly agape as he gazes slightly upward towards the distance. He lifts the left foreleg slightly higher than the right and his tail is caught mid swish. The second male centaur balances a boar carcass over his left shoulder, which originally served as a fountain conduit,[359] and again wears a panther skin and holds a club in his right hand over his shoulder. His face has deep set eyes beneath heavy brows; he sports a thick forked beard, and his hair is similarly rendered in a wild snarl of curls He likewise rears up with his left hoof slightly higher than the right.

The two female centaurs are likewise depicted with muscular torsos above rearing horse bodies. The first carries a small deer over her right shoulder—also originally a water conduit—and a club cradled in her left arm.[360] Her head is turned to the right, with a tangle of thick curls framing her face and hanging down the back of her neck. An animal skin is slung across her right shoulder, crossing between her breasts and hanging down along the back of her horse body. Her companion bears a turtle shell bodied lyre in her left hand and a plectrum in her right. Like her female companion, she rears with her right hoof higher than the left. Her face is turned to the right and her gaze is pitched slightly downwards.

Each sculpture is full of movement, the slightly parted lips and windblown curls contributing as much to their vivacity as their rearing poses. With their hybrid bodies, the

[358] Moorman (2019) 1336-1343.
[359] Moorman (2019) 1332.
[360] Moorman (2019) 1326-1329.

presence of the centaurs contributes to a blurring between the human and animal realms.[361] The centaurs' attributes likewise emphasize their existence on the boundary between culture and the wild: the crater and lyre of a civilized banquet as well as the rustic clubs and fruits of the wild hunt. They recall the bucolic side of nature as well as its orgiastic and dangerous associations. Again they are well suited to the liminal space of the garden and effectively set the stage for the kind of activities—like a banquet—one might expect within the villa itself.

Taken together, the two statue groups reinforce the villa's role as both an extension of the family's political and economic standing, and as a retreat from the affairs of the urban domain. The two groups of statues mirror one another in the pendant pairings—two men and two women—but reinforce different garden-related traditions. The herm group confirms and even exaggerates the claims of status of the patronal family, infuses the garden with the inspiration for pursuing hellenized *otium*, and emphasizes links between humans and the divine realm. The centaurs invite the visitor into an environment of mythologically tinged *otium* amidst an everchanging display of the bounty of the natural world, blending the sphere between human culture and uncivilized wilderness.

Smaller plants would have grown around the angular edges of the stone monuments, furthering the appearance of rootedness in the landscape and visually integrating the garden's natural and artificial elements. The antique form of the herms would have been emphasized by the visual passing of time marked by plant growth around them—another display of longevity that knits together Roman ancestral iconography, models of Hellenized social sophistication, and the temporality of the garden. The stone centaurs would have presented themselves for detailed

[361] Newby (2012) 367 discusses the balance between mythological garden statuary as embodying the Dionysiac, unfettered side of the garden and the danger inherent within these myth through a discussion of Niobid statue groups. López and Mayorga (2018) discusses the combination of centaur and musical iconography, in the Classical world, and musical associations as mollifying elements to the barbarism associated with centaurs in general.

inspection, their iconography drawing upon the garden's mythological associations and its potential to serve as a home for nymphs, a source of abundance, and a potential stage for violence. Maybe a living rock dove took flight from where it nestled in the crook of a centaur's arm, a flash of gray that momentarily seemed to bring the stone sculpture to life before it returned to its apparently permanent stillness. The artificial works placed into the expanse bring the presence of slower, structural time into the garden at the same time that the garden begins to grow around them, swathing them in its own rhythms.

These artificial populations provided a permanent audience for the unfolding of the garden as well, inhabiting it throughout the seasons and when no humans were occupying it. Just as the visual strategies deployed along the portico edges of the gardens expanded the interface between the garden and architecture into an imaginary realm, the sculptures populate its extent with their potential slippage between the realms of myth, reality, and history. If painted, their vivid colors would add yet another level to their potential for lifelike expression, even potential momentary confusion between the statue and a living being through the perceptive lens of a distant viewer, perhaps glancing over from between the plane trees near the east wing in the garden's eastern sector, or gazing out through the window of room 17 through the colonnade of portico 33.

To a visitor sharing the garden with these inhabitants, their presence creates a series of playful riffs on the nature of reality within its confines. They might be momentarily transported into a seemingly mythological realm, suspending disbelief upon an encounter with the mythological inhabitants that made the garden their home, or have their attention drawn to the blurring between the divine inhabitants of the garden and the human proprietors of the house.

The garden played host to a changing, sensorily immersive theater that bet the boundaries of reality just as much as the borders between what is natural and what is artificial.

VI. Conclusion

Visitors to the north garden would have experienced the stimulation of their sensory and intellectual faculties in multiple ways. A rich visual array of paintings, sculpture, and seasonal and perennial plantings met them, activated by the scents and sounds of the populations drawn into the garden's environment. The paintings and sculptures, as well as some elements of flora and fauna, would have incited intellectual responses from those who encountered them, bearing cultural associations that emphasize the traditional activities of the garden and its role in the household. The passing of time is on display in contrasts among its various plants and populations and the built architecture; references were made both to the ancestral and mythological past and to the future in the promise of rejuvenation. As anticipated by Foucault and Hunt, the distinctiveness of the north garden is partly accomplished through its association with other kinds of spaces and its inversion of their forms, experience, and symbolic significance.[362] The garden references the household atrium with its frontal positioning and deployment of portraits and the villa's entertainment spaces, but the mixture of divine and human iconography upends the traditional expectations of familial self-presentation. It references the dangerous mythological realm with the iconography of centaurs but upends the expectation of their wildness by equipping them for a bucolic feast. The "green architecture"[363] of its geometrically organized plantings echoes the lines of the villa's architecture, but the individual

[362] See the discussion on page 116-118.
[363] Bergmann (2002) 99.

growth patterns of each specimen differed organically, and these lines were made up of materials beyond the full control of their gardeners, requiring constant maintenance to maintain their geometricity. The gardens' wildness, on the other hand, was contained, subverted, and shaped, just as the mythological creatures depicted in its sculpture were tamed. If wilderness and artificiality were opposite ends of a spectrum, what we see in the garden is their movement towards one another. This movement was accomplished partly through the use of natural materials to create artificial features and the alteration of artificial materials through the weathering and growth cycles of nature; partly through the arrangement of elements to establish contrasts and resonances between their materials and designs; and, most importantly, through relationships between its many elements that unfolded over time.

Without question, the gardens of Villa A present a phenomenological profile distinct from other kinds of space. Experiencing each of these gardens was to experience multivalency in action, with each day presenting new facets to inhabitants and each path leading to a different narrative with new characters. Those responsible for maintaining and decorating the garden maximized opportunities for evoking a pattern of overall symmetry and for insuring that distinction under observation that characterizes the species of the natural world; even painted plants maintain an individuality from specimen to specimen in imitation. Even in their strictly physical state, the gardens' rotating array of scents, colors, and textures provided a variegated tapestry of sensory phenomena; layer in the intellectual and cultural references stimulated by its populations and the garden becomes even more saturated with potential for conversation and contemplation. The boundaries of the garden are written by moments where one passes from space where interplay between nature and artifice are ongoing, into one where stability in relations is achieved.

As demonstrated in this chapter, and despite the cultural significance of boundaries and the importance of enclosure to definitions of the garden, at Villa A this rich sensory milieu penetrated into the architecture of the site, activating its interior spaces as well in a way that can only be captured through an experiential lens and does not translate into the maps and plants of the previous chapter. The next chapter will discuss the activation of these interior spaces and the continued role of the natural world in inspiring the decorative choices and conditioning the experience of the villa's rooms.

Chapter 4: Nature in the Interior

I. The Ornament of Nature

When visitors step inside the walls of Villa A, they are enveloped in an architectural surrounding that is encrusted in ornament. The most elaborate interior rooms in the villa almost rival the complexity of its outdoor areas, though they cannot fully replicate the combination of movement, cyclical changes, or spontaneity that characterizes time spent in a garden. Every surface provides an opportunity for artisans to show off their craft and patrons to deploy materials and images that announce their status as they enhance their domestic environment. No matter which style and period, decorations were planned to operate effectively within a given room, while intervisibility often allowed for ornamental schemes to play out across multiple rooms.[364] The all-encompassing, environmental aesthetic of these rooms resists description in a manner akin to gardens. In Roman domestic space, not all of the work can be seen at once, with parts of the surroundings behind, below, and above the viewer's range of vision at a given moment, and many decorations are integrated into the built structure, rather than being applied to its surface.[365] Floor mosaics, for example, are laid into the architecture and, through the depth of the tesserae and mortar preparation, add substance to the room. Removing a mosaic involves

[364] For examples of decorative schemes that play out across multiple rooms, see Bergmann (1994) on the House of the Tragic Poet and Bergmann (1996) on the House of Jason.

[365] Surface decorations (including furnishings, wall hangings, and moveable panel paintings and sculpture) rarely survive *in situ.* Exceptions, like the bronze sculptures discovered in the Villa of the Papyri in Herculaneum, were removed post-excavation and now appear in museum collections, where they are seen as works excerpted in a gallery setting, rather than integrated with their original environment. See Mattusch (2010) for a full discussion of these sculptures.

tearing up the floor. Similarly, Roman wall paintings executed even partly in true fresco penetrate into the plaster wall surface and become part of it, not moveable objects of art but ornaments that double as a room's material skin. The arts and their settings are thus inseparable, with the representational sphere as immersive as the architectural space. In this way, it is useful to think about the experience of Roman domestic art as more akin to visiting a site-specific installation than a gallery of collected paintings. Like an installation, which "addresses the viewer directly as a literal presence in the space…[and] presupposes an *embodied* viewer whose senses of touch, smell, and sound are as heightened as their sense of vision,"[366] a decorated Roman room is enveloping, and further activated by the presence of visitors. Within this immersive sphere, nature remains a major theme, its forms and textures adopted within the decorative realm.

In recent years, scholars like Bettina Bergmann have shifted emphasis from viewing Roman art in an excerpted state and toward a recontextualization of these works within domestic space.[367] Bergmann reacts to a historical focus on central panel paintings driven both by traditions in western art history and by the actual state of many of the best preserved Roman paintings, which were cut out from their surroundings during early excavations and now appear as framed compositions on gallery walls.[368] Additionally, scholars have both broadened the definition of what counts as decoration and raised awareness of the importance of ornamentation as an expression of Roman culture. Nicholas Purcell, for example, has persuasively argued for the prominence of the "romance of storage" in establishing an aesthetic of abundance, a

[366] Bishop (2005) 6.
[367] Bergmann (1996) is an attempt to recontextualize several of these panel paintings which now hang in the Naples National Archaeological Museum.
[368] Third and fourth style paintings are especially prone to this treatment, with their frequent division into panels with mythological or landscape scenes.

perspective in which works of art comprise not only statues and paintings but also the fruits of production and their associated facilities.[369] Lauren Hackworth Petersen has emphasized blurring the demographic distinctions between popular (*arte plebeia*) and high Roman art (*arte aulica*), presenting style as a choice between coexisting artistic modes, rather than hierarchically limited to particular demographics.[370] Nicola Barham has directed attention to the importance of viewing Roman art through a paradigm that privileges ornament, a perspective that "claims significance and focal attention for any form that can so lend beauty to impact the world around it,"[371] raising awareness of the importance of elements that were often overlooked in earlier art historical treatments, such as the upper and lower zones of wall paintings, to the whole artistic ensemble.[372] The interactivity and compounded aesthetic effects of all of the elements that contribute to a room's ornamentation in these spaces creates a dynamic environment that is both visually interesting and intellectually stimulating.

These effects are, in some way, all derived from the natural world and often play on the dynamics between environmental features and their transformation by humans. The role of the natural world in creating these compositions is manifold: even in places where nature itself is less present, it serves as model, medium, and inspiration in both the material and representational spheres. In order to illustrate the ways in which these roles intersect within the interior of Villa A in particular, and how the artistic atmosphere remains linked with the outdoors in this way, it is easiest to start with discussion of a specific set of rooms and the experience of moving through

[369] Purcell (2005) 160.
[370] Petersen (2015).
[371] Barham (2015) 3.
[372] Introductory treatments of Roman art are often separated by medium, like Roger Ling's *Roman Painting* (1990) or Umberto Pappaladro and Rosaria Ciardiello's *Greek and Roman Mosaics* (2012), while more general introductions like Ramage and Ramage's *Roman Art* (2014) often excerpt central compositions from their surrounding ornaments. As these texts are often the first extensive exposure of students to the art of the ancient world, they condition their readers to categorize and excerpt Roman domestic art by medium rather than considering whole environments.

them. I begin with a brief description of the interconnected rooms at the villa's core—room 21, corridors 3 and 6, atrium 5, *viridarium* 20, and room 4, which connects them, before turning to a more detailed investigation of the wall paintings in the latter space. These investigations reveal the surprising degree to which the imagery of nature penetrates the decorative sphere, with nature not only providing a font of imagery for mimesis, but also shaping non-figural ornamentation in the form of abstractions. Finally, I look at the way that patterns revealed in the decorative programs of the villa's core rooms play out across the villa's broader sphere, looking first at the deployment of imagery of flora and fauna, and then at the usage and depiction of valuable minerals like marble.

II. Into the Villa's Heart

The most efficient path from the central zone of the north garden into the villa's architectural heart runs along two long, narrow corridors with high ceilings that flank the monumental entrance to room 21 (3, to the east, and 6, to the west). Passing through the colonnade of portico 33 to the west, a moderately sized doorway leads to corridor 6. This first movement through architectural space is naturally illuminated only by the daylight spilling from the north garden behind and the doorway to room 4 in front. Only a few steps beyond the doorway from portico 33, the doorway to room 17 with its mosaic threshold opens on the right; just beyond this doorway, the corridor pavement changes beneath a visitor's feet from the mosaic of the portico into concrete and the gradient of the floor begins to slope gently towards the south.[373]

[373] See Cline (2019) 2753-2755 on the pavements.

The walls of the corridor are painted with a plain white upper zone topped by a simple banded stucco molding, also in white.[374] The lower zone is painted with tall panels, each framed with a red border, featuring black and white "zebra stripes" alternating among three configurations: straight vertical lines, straight diagonal lines, and curved diagonal lines, stretching the length of the room on both sides.[375] The framed panels evoke applied wall revetments, carefully measured rectangular insets of striated stone or wood, the crisp edges of their borders contrasting with slight irregularities in the spacing of the stripes.[376] As was visible in the exterior porticos of the gardens discussed in the previous chapter, the paintings establish a juxtaposition between the repetition of a paratactic design and variations that unfold as a viewer's body passes alongside the scheme.

The corridor is designed for movement: its wall paintings operate as a pattern, emphasizing the overall rhythmic effect of bichrome stripes framed in straight red borders over the iconographic specifics of each individual panel.[377] It is easy to imagine them lit by the dim flicker of an oil lamp, either carried by hand or placed as a stationary feature, in contrast to the walking body; the decoration of the hallways would have become almost animated, lines swimming in and out of the edges where light dissolved into shadow. The long walls are spaced just widely enough for two people to pass one another, and the gentle slope within the darker, narrow space created by tall walls facilitates a smooth, but dramatic transition from the bright

[374] Calosi (2019) 3150-3165.
[375] Gee (2019b) 2175.
[376] Gee (2019b) 2213 identifies the pattern as a "schematic representation of Carrara marble", though this identification assumes an inability on the part of the artists to represent the spidery quality of veined gray and white marble.
[377] As noted by Goulet (2001-2002) 59, these stripes frequently appear in fourth style in areas of high traffic or those that facilitate continuous movement.

open area of the north garden, through the dark confines of the tunnel-like hall, and towards the colorful and airy revelation of room 4 at its southern end.[378]

There, a doorway leads across a black stone threshold into the eclectic, interconnected environment at the villa's heart.[379] The sudden openness of room 4 contrasts with the narrowed experience of the corridor and is accompanied by a proliferation of ornamentation and an abundance of choices as to where to focus attention and where to move. At first glance, the room itself—rectangular, with longer sides running east west and a moderately high ceiling—is something of a supporting player to adjacent areas, integrating the experience of the space with its surroundings.

III. Looking South

For a visitor entering from one of the corridors leading from the north garden, one of the first features that comes into view is the opposite, southern wall of room 4, which in turn opens via a monumental tripartite doorway onto the double-height atrium 5. There, life-sized architectural paintings would have stretched two stories high along its continuous, long side walls, leading to a view out over the bay through its southern facade.[380] Even when closed, the enormous atrium doors signal the promise of something impressive beyond, creating a sense of architectural suspense. With the doors open, the impressive dimensions of the atrium dwarf room

[378] This strategy echoes the kind of kinesthetic architecture long recognized in religious settings, like the Sanctuary of Fortuna Primigenia where a series of terraced stairs and tunnels affects visitors' bodies and orchestrates their views as it moves them from the bottom to the top of the sanctuary. See Coarelli (1987) 43-55; Graham (2021) 178-182.

[379] The northern wall of room 4 also roughly aligns with the center of the north-south axis between the central propylon of room 21 to the north, and the likely limit of atrium 5 to the south, as established through explorations by the Oplontis Project, and shown in Di Maio (2014) fig. 4.17. Room 4 sits at the midpoint between the southern end of the atrium (past the excavation boundary) and the northern end of room 21.

[380] Moorman (2019) 110.

4, drawing attention away from the more immediate surroundings towards the atrium's long walls. These walls run three quarters of the length of the room, giving way in the south to passages that lead east and west to other parts of the villa. Their second style paintings, uninterrupted by any doors or openings, present a facsimile of a heavily ornamented, two-story columnar facade rendered in saturated jewel tones.[381] A forest of columns, varied in coloration and type, project forward from a wall that itself is outfitted with a series of niches and revetted with monochrome imitation stone panels in green, red, and purple,[382] imparting an undulating effect of the kind often deployed to ornament the *scaenae frons* of Roman theaters.[383] The depicted architecture displays an exaggerated version of the same impulse towards a complicated edge evidenced by the villa's real facades, as discussed in the previous chapters: the painted architrave supported by the lower register of columns turns directions twenty-four times across its expanse, the zigzagging structure lending the painted architecture an appearance of depth and movement.

Nestled between the columns, atop short flights of three steps, two tall double-leaf doors, painted with golden frames that surround porphyry panels, stand firmly closed. One of these, aligned with the impluvium at the very center of the room, is flanked by a pair of Corinthian columns ornamented with purple bands, marking it as a central focus of the composition. In the register above, as reconstructed on the basis of fragments discovered in storage, an open aedicula once framed a tall tripod silhouetted against a blue sky, providing a teasing visual hint of the precinct behind the shuttered doors.[384]

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[381] The following description is based partly on the reconstruction of the western wall by Martin Blazeby of King's College Visualization Lab for the Oplontis Project, Gazda & Clarke (2016) fig. 6.2.
[382] Gee (2019b) 2190-2201.
[383] See, for example, the facade of the Roman theater in Merida, Spain. Little (1956) draws connections between both second (architectural) style and fourth style paintings and theatrical settings.
[384] Clarke (2019) 645-649 discusses the discovery and reconstruction of these fragments.

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Fig. 4.1: Reconstruction of the atrium west wall (with modern ceiling height) by Martin Blazeby. From Gazda & Clarke (2016) fig. 6.1.

The door to the north is coded as a secondary, flanking entrance. It is partly obscured by one of its flanking columns—these Doric, with purple, orange, and gray whorls mimicking the texture of alabaster. A smaller peek through the architecture is afforded by a half wall in the register above, the rectangular gap framed by the wall and second story architrave offering a glimpse of a colonnade receding into the distance beneath a blue sky. There is a visual tension between the trompe l'oeil architectural scene, which looks as if viewers could step into the paintings, and the architecture as an impassable, colorful barrier between viewers and the promise of further space beyond.

This decorative scheme cleverly inverts the space of the atrium, causing the viewer within to be surrounded on all sides by indications that they are occupying an outdoor area: the visible garden 20 to the north, the shore to the south, representations of architectural facades to

the east and west, and the opening in the ceiling above. The sensory cues of exteriority—the scent of sea air emanating from the south, natural light streaming in from above, the visual rendition of closed doors within the paintings—play upon the public associations of the townhouse atrium as an extension of the public realm of the street. While both the canonical atrium as described by Vitruvius and atria in many surviving structures served a circulatory function linking together the rooms most associated with public business at the front of the house,[385] the example at Oplontis does not. Instead, it shifts its spatial connections to the rest of the villa's rooms out of sight into the highly integrated alae to the south and room 4 to the north.[386] This causes the atrium to operate as an extension of the exterior part of the villa—only partly sheltered, only indirectly connected to major circulatory paths through the structure, and with the views on all sides reach out towards either real or imagined exterior spaces. The atrium's transformation into a kind of garden, a liminal realm where the natural and artificial are passing into one another, provides a pendant to the partial domestication of the north garden as evidenced by its integration of sculpture with ancestral associations.

Despite the room's signaling of exteriority, explicit natural imagery is largely relegated to isolated elements within the dominant forms of architecture, many of which hint at the ability of humans to capture and tame elements of the environment. At the southern end of the western wall, for example, a painted silver *cista* (a lidded vessel) references the process of artificially rendering natural elements. The center of the vessel is bound with a circlet of golden leaves, arranged in linked wreaths around central green gems. "Fresh" green sprigs emerge from both the lower lip of the lid and top of the central band. Their small, alternating oval leaves evoke olive or laurel sprigs, while the golden imitations are larger and more regularized. The painter

[385] Wallace Haddrill (1988) 85-86.
[386] For an access graph generated for Oplontis, see Naglak & Tucker (2019) fig. 7.8.

both displays and references artistic skill, showing their ability to imitate nature, to evoke luxurious artificial materials, and to refine the forms of nature within the representative sphere. Even the greenery displayed has been cut and domesticized, communicating to viewers the subordination of nature to the human sphere.

On the same wall, a miniature urban landscape painting (*pinake)* appears perched on a painted shelf above the south door, the atmospheric blue sky that forms its background almost blending into the green "stone" course painted behind. This element, too, introduces some iconography of the natural world at a conceptual distance from the viewer, in the form of a painting within a painting. The simulacrum within a simulacrum is a common conceit in Roman wall painting, and is particularly effective in the Second Style, which hews closely to realism and imitation in its representation of architectural space. This self-referential replication creates the effect of *mise en abyme*, in which a work of art or literature contains a representation of itself that imperfectly mirrors the whole, drawing attention to the mediation of the artist.[387] Here, the miniature urbanized landscape, with colonnaded temple fronts and city gates,[388] offers a distant vista onto the same kind of public architecture represented at scale before their eyes and calls attention to the artificiality of the painted scheme as a whole, even as it represents a realistic diegetic element of the painting. The harmonious placement of artificial elements in a landscape setting within the *pinake* reifies the hierarchical structure of the overall scheme as well,

[387]This French term, which translates roughly to "cast into the abyss" was originally coined by André Gide (1944) to describe heraldry that depicts a shield at the center of a shield, though he quickly expanded the effect to include things like paintings that include mirror images or the literary trope of a play-within-a-play. While sometimes used to refer to implied infinite renderings of the same image (e.g. a painting that includes a copy of itself, which in turn includes a copy of itself and so on), in Gide's original formulation, a looser similarity in structure between the frame and the inset drives the creation of meaning, cf. Escobar (1993), 416. On the concept of *mise en abyme* in Roman art, see Elsner (2018), esp. 354-355; Squire (2013) 165-179.
[388] Gee (2019) 2194.

emphasizing the imposed order of built elements. These themes resonate further with the architectural environment and its framed views of the villa's landscape elements.

At first glance, therefore, the decorative scheme of the atrium emphasizes the grandeur of architecture, while a closer look reveals a secondary focus on the ability of artisans to both harness natural materials and even improve upon them in the deployment of both plants and minerals within the composition. For a person viewing the atrium after emerging from one of the corridors into room 4, the architectural focus of the atrium is even stronger than it is at the center of the atrium itself, as the paintings are the first features that come into view.

IV. Looking North:

Opposite the atrium, only a low plastered wall with a screen of four engaged, painted brick and stucco columns separates room 4 from *viridarium* 20 to the north, where an enormous rear window looks through onto room 21 and the north garden (56) beyond. This space presents another dramatic view drawing the eyes outward from room 4, and one that is in some ways opposite in effect to the architecturally focused decoration of the atrium I have just described.

The garden was surrounded by walls brightly painted with further garden scenes and contained a raised bed of planted fruit trees, providing a delightful green oasis in the middle of its architectural surroundings.[389] It had only one point of access, a small gap in the parapet wall in the northeast corner of room 4. Most of its square footage was occupied by a large planting bed with only a narrow drainage canal surrounding its raised surface. Jashemski's investigations turned up three root cavities likely belonging to fruit trees at each corner other than the southeast,

[389] Bergmann (2016) 96-101.

where the narrow entrance is located.[390] The placement of these ornamental trees framed, rather than obstructed, views through the space. Two flanked the central panels on the east and west walls, enhancing the prominence of the garden's wall paintings. Two framed the large window onto room 21, and one grew close to the western edge of the colonnade connecting the garden to room 4, allowing for views through the columns onto the center of the bed and the far wall. In contrast to garden 56 in the north, *viridarium* 20 was designed primarily to be looked at, rather than walked through.

The paintings in *viridarium* 20 have largely faded, but archival photography has aided in their reconstruction by modern scholars, and once again, for ease of discussion, I will be describing the reconstruction rather than the much degraded paintings that remain.[391] The parapet wall of the room's southern end is painted mostly black with a row of plants sprouting up from ground level, alternating between specimens with long spiky leaves and yellow flowers erupting from the ends of each stem, and more dramatically curved, lyre-shaped flowerless plants—as always, populated by fluttering and perched songbirds. Narrow zones divide the wall into three sections, aligned with the encased bases of the columns. The lower halves of these brick, stuccoed columns are painted red and their upper shafts shaped into white flutes. The lower, red section is painted with an overlay of climbing ivy, leaves clustered in bunches around narrow spiraling stalks that reach up above the level of the wall and around the columns, extending the paintings about a third of the way up the column shaft and emphasizing their integration with the architecture. Leafy clusters of ivy appear to spill over the top of the black sections of the wall as

[390] Jashemski (1979); Bergmann (2016).
[391] My description here is based on P. Baronio's reconstruction in Gazda and Clarke (2016): 98, fig. 9.1.

well, draping downwards in a movement that contrasts with the upward thrust of the line of plants below and the painted ivy climbing the columns.[392]

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Fig. 4.2: Reconstruction of the south wall painting of viridarium 20 by Paolo Baronio.

The northern wall, with its window facing onto room 21, continues the real, supportive colonnade of the southern wall in partly fictive form. Engaged brick quarter columns flank the wall at the far ends; like those opposite, the upper reaches of the columns are covered in white fluted stucco, while their bases, once again sheathed in ivy, are painted in a contrasting yellow. Two narrow yellow, ivy-covered blocks of color beneath the windowsill echo the patterning of the column bases in two dimensions, dividing the wall, like that opposite, into three vertical

[392] This mimics the real plants growing around architecture in portico 40 off the south garden, discussed in the previous chapter, pages 139-141.

sections. The socle that runs beneath the window between them is divided into two horizontal registers, red above black. The lower level mimics the decoration of the opposite wall, with painted plants spilling over the register's top edge at jaunty angles and palmette-shaped specimens sprouting up from the ground line, while the red upper register features an asymmetrical array of branches that appear to jut upward, creating a loose reflective symmetry with the hanging plants immediately below.

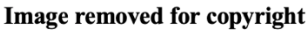

Fig 4.3: Reconstruction of the north wall painting of *viridarium* 20 by Paolo Baronio.

The flanking panels are framed fully in red, with similar plants continuing across the socles. At the center of each panel is a garden scene with a blooming tree, which appears behind a marble krater surrounded by vegetation that again appears to spill over the edge of the red frame. These scenes, set naturalistically in front of a sky-blue background complete with a songbird in flight, are framed by a swag of green garland that dips at the top to either side of a painted hanging mask, framing the views onto this fictive garden space with greenery.

The east and west walls present a near inverse to the overall color scheme of the north. Once again, the walls are divided into three vertical sections by engaged columns, with the flanking panels bearing pendant garden scenes. In contrast to the northern wall, the blooming trees of each side panel appear against a vivid red background and behind a low fountain with a square basin set atop a pedestal in the form of a crouching sphinx. Fronded ferns and leafy bushes cluster to either side and behind the fountains, placing the neatly aligned verticals of the fountain and tree within lush and curvaceous plant life that defies perfect symmetry. The draped greenery frames differ slightly as well, sloping linearly like a pediment from the masks at the center, rendering the green frames less naturalistic in their form in a way that resonates with the artificiality of their red backgrounds. To complete the color contrast, the plant-laden socles of these flanking sections pick up the black background of the southern and lower center of the northern walls, and the upper panels are framed in yellow.

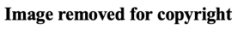

Fig. 4.4: Reconstruction of the eastern and western walls of *viridarium* 20 by Paolo Baronio.

The central panels of the east and west walls strike a balance between repetition of elements from other portions of the scheme and the introduction of new elements. Like the

flanking panels of the north wall, they open out onto a naturalistic blue background framed by swags of greenery, and a red background and socle that continues the painted plant motif. Round lipped kraters reappear in the center foreground, brimming with water, and tall, narrow plants with small, tightly clustered leaves appear to sway as they climb beside and behind. Behind each krater appears a very different kind of tree, however, leafless dwarf trunks, with the one on the eastern wall wrapped in a single spiraling vine. The bare trunks of the dwarf trees contrast not only with the blooming fruited specimens featured to either side and on the northern wall, but also with the leafy plants that surround them.

As a space designed primarily for viewing, rather than for circulation, the visual effects of the *viridarium* and its sensory spillover into the ever-connected room 4 are integral to the viewers' experience. In addition to the color-blocked patterning created by the alternation of red, blue, black, and yellow backgrounds, the differing details of the fountains, masks, plants, and birds depicted in each zone offer opportunities for viewers to compare and contrast the compositions, rewarding both casual and close looking in different ways. The visual cross-referencing–common to Roman domestic decorative schemes–provoked by the resonances and contrasts between the walls of *viridarium* 20 would have ranked among its significant features for antique audiences.[393] It renders the scheme both interactive and interesting, and, in the distinction among multiples, echoes the real individuality of things that grow, like the individuality of the planted specimens in the *viridarium* and north garden beyond. Though many details of these compositions are now lost, the strong play of visual resonance and dissonance

[393] Bergmann (2016) 101-107; (2019): 486-489. For other examples of visual cross referencing in Roman domestic settings, see Barrett (2017) esp. 314-322 on similar effects in the dynamic decorative environment of the House of the Ephebe at Pompeii; Bergmann (1994) on the House of the Tragic Poet at Pompeii;

caused by the interaction between the painted decorations and their physical surroundings remains evident.

The garden is surrounded by a colonnade that mixes engaged, in the round, and flat painted elements: the real columns of the south wall, the partial columns of the east and west walls, and the painted column "bases" beneath the sill of the north wall frame both real and imaginary openings onto further spaces. Glimpses of the monumental, two-story pilasters dividing room 21 from the north garden visible through the window reified the association between columns and adjacent exterior space and provided a visual continuity between the *viridarium* and the vista beyond.[394] The real views onto further planes offered by the southern colonnade and northern window are balanced by the painted garden views of the *viridarium* walls. Like the paintings of porticos 33 and 34, the lower registers of greenery sprouting at ground level appear to project outward from the wall, visually blending into the real planted bed at the garden's center. The brightly colored decorative planes that form the background to these plants emphasize the solidity of the existing architecture, while the framed panels above appear to open onto further space "behind" the wall, where yet more gardens grow so lushly that some even creep over the painted window frame. These fictive continuations of the garden space visually enlarge the real garden beyond its physical boundaries, presenting multiple plants in real and illusory architectural and natural spaces to viewers. The garden's placement in a recess of room 4, as well as its window looking towards the north garden, present a real version of this multiplanar environment that renders the illusory extensions in garden paintings plausible.

However, the flanking panels of the east and west walls, with their vibrant red backgrounds but equally illusionistic garden populations, offer a stark contrast to the

[394] Bergmann (2016): 97-99, citing Bartman (1988).

atmospheric naturalism of the central panels and contradict any burgeoning trompe l'oeil effects of the scene. Through association, the deliberate un-reality presented by the red garden scenes highlights the artificiality of the more realistic panels as well. The stillness of the paintings—water frozen mid-ripple, birds lit on a fountain rim that never flutter away, plants that curve as they grow towards the sun but never sway in any breeze—is simultaneously thrown into relief against the garden itself. The real trees of the garden, planted in front of the artificial garden scenes, would have created another set of contrasts that unfolded throughout the seasons, as the cycles of growth and decay played out against an ever blooming, bright, and static backdrop that presented an imitation of their forms. The viewer is simultaneously invited to imagine the *viridarium* as much larger than it is, outfitted with eight fountains and eight more trees, an abundance that would not realistically fit within the small plot at its center, and keyed into the illusion. The viewer is also confronted by a range of mimetic and stylized forms that draws attention to the ability of the painters to represent and even improve upon the forms of the natural world, and the limitation of their ability to capture anything but snapshots of the dynamic effects of change wrought by real nature. The quality of change that defines the aesthetic operation of real nature is instead transposed into the complexity of interactions among elements of the ornamentation, especially through the establishment of surface patterning of color fields (like the blue, red, yellow, and black backgrounds of its wall paintings), repeated textural patterning (like the sharp brushstrokes that evoke dense foliage in the framing garlands), and the layering of embellishments that causes the details to unwind before a viewer's eyes the longer they look.

V. Looking East and West:

The impressive vistas running to the north and south and their elaboration by surrounding life-sized architectural paintings and gardens (both real and imaginary) draw the gaze of viewers entering room 4 along the central axis and into these adjoining spaces. While the portals at the center of each of room 4's long walls lead the eye towards these larger, more visually impressive connections first, a series of smaller doorways are clustered to the sides of the room, inviting visitors to walk in any direction. A viewer might peek through the low door at the southern end of the eastern wall and see a vista through the close black and white striped walls of the small room 1, across the open mosaic floor of room 27, and through a window into the likewise striped peristyle 32; peek through the lower doorway just to the right across the corner into storage room 22; or glance through the doorway in the western wall that leads to a short corridor (9) that itself leads to three further rooms. Though the corridor to the west is short and plainly adorned, the enfilade to the east creates another impressively long axial view, in this case of receding planes of black and white stripes through progressively smaller openings (the low doorway, the large window above a short wall onto the peristyle, the taller colonnaded walls of the peristyle itself, and finally the outer wall of room 43, a storage space, with a small window set at or above eye level). These together create a variegated play between light and shadow, both in the alternating brightness of naturally lit and darkness of roofed rooms and in the striated black and white paintings that adorn them. This recalls the effect of narrow corridors to the north, with their narrow, striped corridors opening onto the brightly lit room 4, and exemplifies the refracted

continuity of design across multiple planes that characterize the views to the north and south upon emerging into that space.

VI. The Paintings of Room 4

While the first impression of room 4 is less overwhelming that that provided by its impressive neighbors, the invitation of its many doorways to explore further reaches of the villa and the room itself offers a bounty of decoration to viewers who dwell for a time within its walls. In its centrality to circulatory patterns through the villa and its function as a landing spot along the villa's most prominent visual axis, room 4 is among the most important at the villa. Painting styles that serve elsewhere in the villa as dominant elements here become gathered into a balanced (if busy) collection that highlights the various aesthetic strategies deployed elsewhere. The pattern of black and white zebra stripes seen in corridor six and through the doorway in the southeast leading to room 1 runs unbroken around the socles of all but the northern wall in this room, too.[395] The low dividing wall on the northern side, with its partly encased, plastered columns continues the motif of plants arranged in a row between ivy clad column bases that decorates the interior walls of the adjoining *viridarium*. The central zone is comprised of imitation stone panels that recall the colored marble prominent in the second style paintings of the atrium[396] and the white-ground upper zone is framed with attenuated architectural elements

[395] These recall the decorations in adjoining room 1 and corridors 3 and 6, as well as corridors 45, 46, 52, 53, 54A, 62, 63, 67, 71, and 76, peristyle 32, staircase 42, and rooms 83, 94, 95, and 97 in other parts of the villa. There is no painted plaster remaining on the lower zone of the southern wall to indicate decorative scheme, but the principle of relationship would indicate probably either a plain black socle as appears in adjoining atrium 5 or a continuation of the stripes from the eastern and western walls of room 4.

[396] McAlpine (2016) 117 suggests that fourth style paintings of marble in the villa signify lower status areas not designed for receiving guests, but their appearance in room 4 as well as monumental corridor 46 suggests that imitation marble still suited prominently visible parts of the villa, even as the use of real marble grew.

common to many of the villa's third and fourth style decorations, including the porticos off the north garden.[397] Its assemblage of motifs that more fully characterize other areas of the villa make room 4 an ideal launching pad for discussing the ways that the villa's designers incorporated and transformed elements of the natural world to create dynamic compositions that could sustain interest over time.

The real space of room 4 is a moderately sized box highly, but flexibly interconnected with its surroundings. It serves as a host to a much more complicated representational space that appears in the paintings on its walls and invites the viewer to look out to the connected *viridarium* 20, which would have always been visible through the colonnade.[398] The lower zones of the painting represent a revetted stone surface. In addition to the diagonal black and white stripes that line the socle, the central panels of the east and west walls present surface and color effects that imitate marble: in a red frame, two rectangular panels patterned with whorls and stripes in green and white flank a narrow, mottled yellow section with concave curves at the top and bottom. Apart from the yellow central panel, whose curved edges provide the appearance of a shallow niche receding into the wall, these paintings foreground surface effects over spatial perspective. The curved striations of the flanking panels contrast with the sharper angles of the striped socles below and the solid color fields of the frame that surrounds them, evoking the varied textures of decorative stone and the individuality of each slab.

[397] Similar white ground architectural schemes are visible in rooms 1, 16B, 22A, 25, 27, 41, 55, 66, 79, and 81, porticos 13, 19, 24, 33, 34, 40, and 60, peristyle 16, and corridors 46, 76, and 77. Mixed architectural and carpet banded schemes with different color backgrounds appear in the upper zones of rooms 8, 18, 37, as well as the central zone of room 31, and on many of the villa's preserved ceilings. This large group includes candelabrum style, architectural style, and hybrid examples.

[398] Regina Gee (2019), 2184 describes the tympanum atop the west wall that seems to set a likely line for the ceiling (one that restorers apparently followed) where the ceiling rises to a peak along the horizontal central axis of the room and the upper reaches of the walls were painted with simple masonry courses with red borders.

The solidity of these compositions, with only a hint of spatial depth, highlight the way that the room's side walls frame room 4 physically in contrast to the perforated surfaces of the northern and southern walls. They also contrast with the paintings of the upper zone, which complicate the spatial representation of the painted sphere. Light in color and more delicate in design, the painting in the upper zone on all four walls is rich in detail, rewarding multiple viewings in its playful blend of naturalistic, stylized, and non-figural renderings.

Image removed for copyright

Fig. 4.5 The upper left northern wall of room 4. Adapted from photo by P. Bardagjy. Oplontis Database cat: 2014.004.09.02937.

The spatial plane represented by these paintings seems to oscillate as the viewer's gaze lingers, with elements appearing to shift in plane. At the western end of the northern wall above the doorway to corridor 6, for example, a roughly rectangular section is outlined and divided into

three horizontal registers by four red bands edged in white.[399] A single attenuated aedicula, nearly in profile, occupies the left third of the two lower registers, with its nearer column and cornice picked out in shades of gold and brown. Immediately flush with the column to the inside of the structure, where a viewer would expect a second supporting column to appear, is another red stripe running vertically up to the cornice and then turning horizontally along its underside.

Nods towards realistic spatial representation, such as the addition of shadows in the cornice details and a brown patch representing the underside of the aedicula's ceiling, are undercut and complicated by the replacement of expected "structural" elements with an echo of the frame that divides the white space of the background into registers. The elision between non-figural frame and represented architecture is compounded by the placement of the aedicula with respect to the frame, with the band dividing the upper register from the middle appearing to pass behind the architecture, and the band dividing the middle register from the lower register appearing to pass in front of both the realistic and abstract columns.

The elements that decorate the central zone created by these horizontal and vertical divisions continue to play with the representation of perspectival space. Two inverted golden foliate staffs appear to hold up a schematically painted piece of drapery, a white ground framed by a red border with the image of a stylized bucranium at the center. The swag of its upper "hanging" edge is the only indication that this element of the paintings is designed to represent the medium of cloth, which contrasts with the more careful focus on using paint to achieve the surface effects of metal in the shades of gold and brown of the staffs that hold it up and the aedicula on the left. The lower, squared edge of the cloth is undifferentiated from the horizontal band dividing the middle and lower registers, making its design appear flush with the border and

[399] The upper edge of the highest register is mostly lost, but a red horizontal band of edging is visible near the western corner.

the plane of the wall itself. The inverted staff on the left, however, appears to emerge from underneath the aedicula, pointing downward from the upper left corner of the white space framed by the building and passing behind the columns. As Philip Stinson commented regarding the earlier Second Style paintings at Oplontis, here we see the simultaneous deployment of both convergent and parallel perspectives within a single section of a fourth style painting.[400] The effect when the painting is scrutinized is a shifting optical illusion where the aedicula appears simultaneously in front of and behind the painting's borders, and the foliate staffs appear to recede towards the distance even while they also hold up a piece of cloth flush with the surface of the wall, complicating the space of the representational sphere.

The variation in the level of naturalism seen in these representations of metal and cloth draws attention to the artificiality of the painted medium, presenting both the painter's ability to represent the forms and textures of nature and an interest in reducing them to their simplest recognizable forms. This interest in varying the level of naturalism is further visible in the two types of garland that appear within this section of the painting. A garland of leafy clusters runs in a wave pattern, draping downward beneath the aedicula and extending upward in an arch above the inverted staffs in the central section, clusters of green and gray spaced between little ribbons that appear realistic in their forms, but miniaturized and swinging upwards in defiance of physics. Above, in the top register, a smaller, more abstracted form of garland appears strung between the acroterion atop the aedicula to a red palmette perched on the border between the upper and middle registers, simple orange crosslets strung from a swagged ribbon in the same hue. The second garland appears to obey the physics of a leafy string, but the forms are both

[400] Stinson (2011), 404-405. Stinson 408-415 also notes the unusual complexity of perspective systems adopted by artists at Oplontis, highlighting the presence of Second Style painting schemes that involve multiple convergence perspectives, an anomaly that hints a particularly strong interest in blended perspectives at this site.

artificially colored, with a single shade of orange adopted for all, and simplified into a geometric pattern. This blurs the line between the artist's use of paint to represent greenery and use of greenery as an inspiration for abstract elements within the design. The contrast between faithful representation of nature and a creativity that moves beyond the parameters of reality draws attention to the artificiality of the medium of painting at the same time that it highlights the artist's skills in achieving naturalism, where that is the chosen mode. The display of representational skill is accompanied by an equal interest in transforming the forms of nature into simplified, geometricized elements that exist beyond the strictures of physical space. The juxtaposition of these two modes calls attention to the processes through which elements of nature are physically transformed into materials shaped by humans, bringing the materiality of the artistic process at all stages into conversation with the imagery produced through it.

Floating depictions of creatures both natural and mythological add further layers to this dynamic artistic scheme that elaborate upon and enhance the operations of the other elements in the design by continuing the theme of transformation beyond the spheres of architecture and plants. There are four examples within this section of the painting: a blue gray swan, facing left and in flight, which is framed by the cluster garland and foliate staffs in the central register; the schematic bucranium in dark golden brown that adorns the center of the hanging textile; a reddish-brown hippocamp that undulates towards the right in the lower register; and a golden griffin that ornaments the cornice of the aedicula in the upper register. These representations of animals raise a series of contrasts for viewers. The flying swan, represented miniaturized but as if alive and in movement, is immediately presented next to the bull's skull below, raising the contrast between life and death, as well as between creatures of the land and air. The griffin, which likewise presents the combination of the realms of land and air in its hybrid body, is

represented in golden colors as part of the architectural design, highlighting its mythical qualities in both the represented material and context. It depicts not a griffin, but a representation of a metal statue depicting a griffin within the medium of paint, a level further removed from reality than the swan. Another mythical creature, the hippocamp, is rendered in shades of brown and red that are naturalistic for the horse that makes up half of its body, and it appears, like the bird, above as a living element within the composition. Within the representational sphere, therefore, we see one mostly naturalistically represented example of local fauna, one naturalistically represented example of a mythological creature, and one statue of a mythological creature. Together, they represent a meeting of the three spheres of land, sea, and air, making the blank white background simultaneously stand in for all of these while representing none of them, and a range of realism: apparently living mythological and common creatures and those transformed through art into representational forms. The undefined spatiality of the architectural elements resonates with the habitat-less fauna populating the scheme. There are hints that this scene is a representation of exterior space with its outdoor architecture, diegetic decorations with a focus on the natural world (i.e. garlands, palmettes, and the statue of the mythological beast), and creatures. But there are as many indications that this is primarily an abstracted design: the flat white background, elements intersecting at bold angles, the individual framing of floating figures.[401] This compositional structure avoids pinning its populace into specific spatial relationships or placing them within a recognizable landscape setting. The result is that they

[401] As explained by Gertsman (2021) in the introduction to her edited volume of abstraction in medieval art, the modern meaning of abstraction in art as "non-representational and non-denotative…a form that signals the unrepresentability of what is really at stake" (p. 17). This definition resonates to a degree already with what we see in the Roman sphere, especially in the use of color fields to create variegated effects (as discussed in Barham 2021). I argue that highly stylized elements in Roman paintings, especially given their contrast with more carefully represented examples, create a range of abstraction as well. If, as I argue, much of the non-figural art draws upon natural forms and features rendered through a process of simplification and regularization--that is a process of stylization--then the abstraction of natural figures certainly operates as an index for the unrepresentability of change that characterizes real versions of natural features.

appear to be in an undefined space just beyond the wall, to oscillate between the plane of the wall itself and the promise of a stylized exterior beyond. Through representations of architecture, flora, and fauna that present a range of transformations—from local to mythologized nature to artificial creations—the presented environment challenges the boundaries drawn between these categories. Within the representational realm, the artists have shown themselves able to bypass the physical limitations of materials such as cloth, flesh, feathers, metal, and greenery at the same time that they express their virtuosic control over the materials of paint, plaster, and masonry that make up the wall's physical construction.

Moreover, though the color scheme and overall style is consistent across all four upper areas of the room's walls, the decorations do not run continuously around its corners. Garlands extend towards the corners of each wall, but do not meet across them, with the thin, bushy green garlands extending on the eastern and western walls converging at the corner at a lower point of the wall than the ribboned cluster garlands discussed above. The distinction between the style of garland and their lack of connection disrupts the continuity of the space, inviting a viewer to conceptually separate the four bounding walls that enclose them in room 4 and consider each as its own spatial universe, each with its own oscillating depth. This provides yet another avenue through which the room's visual sphere unfolds over time, imitating to a degree the complexity that characterizes real nature. While at a first glance, the room's upper zone presents as a cohesive tableau, a longer look multiplies the ways of perceiving and interpreting relationships among its many elements.

Room 4 sits at the confluence of two major axes: the rooms of representation that unfold to the north and south, and a more utilitarian corridor that leads between the kitchen and storage center of the villa. Just as the paintings discussed above reference other schemes in nearby rooms

of very different function, the pavement of the floor also highlights the mixing of these luxurious and utilitarian realms. A mixture of *cocciopesto* and *lavapesto* pavement with white tesserae inset as rhombuses in a grid pattern visually recalls the mosaics in nearby garden porticos, which feature black inset tesserae in grid patterns as part of their mosaic pavements,[402] but is texturally closer to the nearby concrete pavements in the dark hallways to the north and the small rooms to the east and west.[403] Rather than confining those who move within its walls, room 4 unspools into its surroundings, real and imaginary. As the walls provide real openings into the further realms of the attached *viridarium* and atrium, they provide fictive openings in four directions onto realms where the divisions between artifice and nature are visibly blurred. The paintings in the real adjoining rooms themselves appear to multiply the planes of interlocking spaces, providing teasing glimpses of further architectural and garden environments: the theatrical marbled facade of the atrium with colonnaded spaces beyond, the glimpses of fountain gardens on the walls of *viridarium* 20, the play between light and shadow on the walls of room 1 and peristyle 32. Simultaneously, the wall paintings in room 4 combine the illusionism of the second style paintings of the atrium and with the kind of self-conscious play with artificiality and naturalism that emerges from those in *viridarium* 20. Here, the juxtaposition of elements that represent a range of imitation and abstraction of natural features found in the physical environments creates a narrative of transformation, where the interior is continuously passing

[402] Lea Cline (2019) provides a complete catalog of the villa's pavements. The sole extant portico that does not repeat the grid mosaic pattern is 40, whose floor appears to have been removed in antiquity (loc. 2924).
[403] Unadorned concrete pavements are extant in rooms 26, 29, 35-37, 43, and 44 near the central courtyard 32, which is itself paved with a red cocciopesto floor with large inset cuts of variously colored marble, as is connecting corridor 45. Plain concrete floors also appear in the corridors and lavatories clustered to the northeast of the courtyard, including rooms 47-52, and corridors 46, 53, and 63, and in room 84 (with an olive press) and nearby exterior corridor 85 at the southern end of the east wing. A *lavapesto* floor with small chips of colored stone inclusions in rooms 94 and 97 hints to another potential cluster of rooms with similar construction materials at the northern end of the east wing where it disappears beneath the excavation boundary.

into the exterior and the artificial and natural are in flux. This is yet another layer of the mixing of these two spheres discussed in chapter three. Meanwhile, the visual and physical realms combine to surround room 4's inhabitants with simultaneous cues of interiority and exteriority.

With its permanent openness to *viridarium* 20, this room is also never quite the same space in two moments, changing with every shift in time and weather. The decorative scheme and architectural positioning of room 4 are among the most eclectic in the villa, and highlight connections between the exterior and interior, between the artificial and natural, between flattened abstract patterning and three-dimensional, naturalistic representation. These interests play out across multiple media within this small but complicated space, whose architectural blend of interiority and exteriority resonates with the interplay between naturalism and abstraction in the decorative scheme of the room's walls and floor.

The aesthetic experience of visiting room 4 and its associated places is driven in multiple ways by the relationships between people and the environment. In the physical sphere, its effects are generated by the material world of nature, transformed through artifice to various degrees, and the interpretation of the natural world—and its transformations—within the representational sphere. The self-conscious representation of artifice within these expressions on the part of their human designers testifies to their attentiveness to, and fascination with, both the raw elements of the natural world and the human ability to shape them, revealing a dynamic relationship between nature and culture, not in binary opposition, but continuously shifting into one another. This interest is perhaps more clearly represented through the diegetic representations of artistic practice within the paintings, such as the sphinx-shaped stone fountains in the *viridarium*, which simultaneously draw upon the forms of nature (wings) and represent them within a painting that highlights the artists' ability to evoke the natural material (stone) from which it is shaped. In the

following sections, I look at particular relationships that emerge from the aesthetic environment of room 4 and its surroundings and briefly explore the ways these play out across Villa A and within the complex history of the structure.as well as the dynamics and themes this spatial and ornamental node points to in the decoration as a whole.

VII. Imitation and Transformation of Natural Forms

The first way that the attunement of Roman artisans and designers to nature is expressed in the paintings of the core axis rooms, of which room 4 is the center, is through imitation of its forms within their compositions. As discussed above, at times Roman artisans exhibited great skill in replicating physical expressions of specific plants and animals. Indeed, this was enough to convey this information across two thousand years of difference and render their intended subject legible to modern viewers.[404]

At Oplontis, many depictions fall into this category. In *oecus* 23, for example, glass bowls brimming with quinces, plums, dates, and chestnuts are depicted perched on the illusory architrave.[405] These fruits of the fall harvest are immediately recognizable: in addition to defining the fruits' forms, such as the bulbous yellow bodies of the quinces, careful highlighting in white paint draws attention to their varying textures, such as the slick sheen of the dates and shining deep purple skins of ripe plums, rendering them as appealingly ripe-looking as possible within the medium of paint. In triclinium 14, a basket of green and purple figs perched on the lip of an opening in the architectural scheme even evokes the variable process of ripening, with one

[404] The garden paintings at the Villa of Livia at Primaporta, just outside Rome, are the most famous examples of highly specific garden paintings. Caneva & Bohuny (2003), Kellum (1994).
[405] Gee (2019b) 2393-2402.

each of the fruits bursting open at the end to reveal brilliant pink centers speckled with seeds.[406] The specificity of these renderings displays both the skill of artisans and aspirations of patrons. A full discussion of the identifiable depictions of plants and animals across the wall paintings of Villa A has been published by Massimo Ricciardi in the first volume of the Oplontis Project, where he identifies for twenty-two different kinds of plants and fruits, and five animals, by species and a further eight animals more generally.[407] Ricciardi's interest aligns with broader scholarly trends in the treatment of natural imagery, which tend to focus on instances where a clear identification is possible, for these invite comparison across contexts and facilitate interpretations of their appearance in art.[408] Some, like the laurels of victory, the peacock of Juno, and the eagle of Zeus, carried important cultural associations that would have been readily apparent to Roman viewers and are widespread enough to have drawn the attention of modern scholars.

It is important to acknowledge, too, that we cannot assume Roman viewers recognized and distinguished among the plants and animals in the same way as modern scholars, as the categorizations of the natural world do not map neatly onto one another.[409] Present systems of taxonomy that we use to organize our understanding of relationships between flora and fauna were developed from the eighteenth century onward, using the Latin language but not always to

[406] Ricciardi (2014a) 1099, fig. 7.10.
[407] Ricciardi (2014a and 2014b), especially tables 7.1, 8.1, and 8.2, which list identifiable specimens by room. Ricciardi does not include birds in his studies.
[408] Examples of this kind of work include Caneva & Bohuny (2003) and Kellum (1994) on the Primaporta garden paintings; Von Stackleberg (2009) loc. 2318-2325 assigns secure-sounding identifications to plants that are represented schematically in the description of the paintings at the House of the Menander to propose their role in extending the garden visually; Jashemski & Meyer (2002) uses identifiable wall paintings species as evidence in reconstructing the natural history of Pompeii.
[409] In addition to difficulties in aligning ancient and modern nomenclature, as discussed by Hardy and Totelin (2016) 95-97, Pliny the Elder decried the difficulties of translating between Greek and Latin nomenclature within the same time period (*HN* 21.52), and Theophrastus wrote that many common plants remained without official names (*Enquiry into Plants* 1.14.4)

signify the same object as in antiquity. Beyond the difficulty in aligning naming systems for plants and creatures across cultures, modern viewers cannot know precisely which elements rendered an ancient image recognizable to ancient viewers. A black and white bird perched between two gilded columns in the architectural scheme of triclinium 14, for example, is not immediately identifiable by modern scholars, but is rendered with detail and specificity: a black feathered head with a white patch around the eye, a long, straight beak, black feathers on the wing and a white body. It is possible that the bird was completely recognizable to its ancient audience. Despite these challenges, it remains clear that there was a range of naturalization and stylization on display in the depictions of natural forms throughout the villa.

As Ricciardi emphasizes, recognizable images are outnumbered by many more in which "botanical [and faunal] characteristics are reproduced in a sketchy and stylized fashion that makes it difficult to link the image with real plants."[410] Though his use of the word "sketchy" perhaps betrays a preference for the more "careful" renderings that might be easily legible to modern viewers, the stylized specimens that he describes are so common at Oplontis that their presence demands attention as a phenomenon. The combination of both botanically specific, and non-specific, painted plants throughout the site, and even within individual wall schemes at Villa A, shows that the stylization is at least partly a phenomenon driven by choice and not solely a distinction between levels of painterly skill. The paintings in *viridarium* 20, discussed above, provide one example of a mixing of different levels of stylization within a single scheme, with carefully rendered trees designed to be identifiable; tangles of garden growth that create an atmospheric low wall of plants surrounding the trees that evokes the tangled wilderness;

[410] Ricciardi (2014a) 1098. On stylization in the representations of animals, see Ricciardi (2014b) 1145.

individual specimens of stylized plants forming a pattern on the socles; and heavily abstracted, linear leafy garlands framing the central panels.

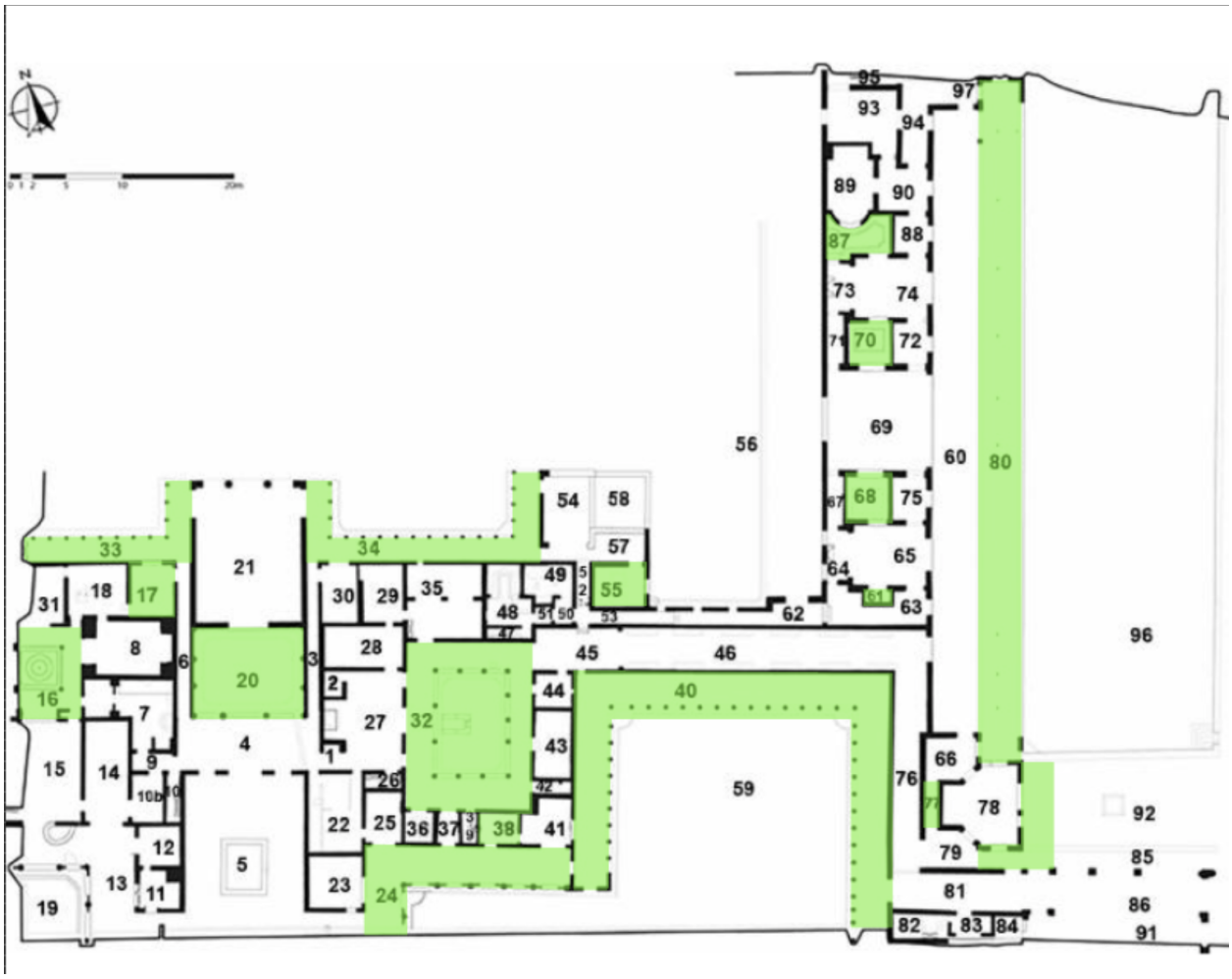

Fig 4.6: Spaces at Villa A with socle plants. Adapted from T. Liddell.

One category of plant paintings that are often relatively stylized, as discussed in the previous chapter, are those that appear on the socles on many of the villa's walls (fig 4.2).[411] Most of these paintings, which appear in around a fifth of the villa's rooms, are datable to the

[411] Extant examples appear in 19 of the villa's rooms. They are integrated into larger garden paintings or decorate half-walls in rooms 20, 32A, 61, 68, 70, 87, 85, 92, 80 and the exterior of 97, and appear separated into the lower zone in rooms 16, 17, 33, 34, 38, 40, 55, 66, and 77.

later, fourth style renovations to the villa, making them popular motifs throughout its final active years.[412] Their appearance near ground level in rhythmic arrangements evokes real plants growing out the ground as well as the lined plantings discovered in real gardens, but also distills the forms of plants into discrete patterns that mirror the flow of forms in the painted schemes above. These appear on the walls of all but one of the northern and southern porticos. In each case, these specimens are set against a black background and separated into groups or presented singly within white borders that frame the socle in alignment with horizontal divisions in the painted schemes of the central zone above. Their deployment in concert with the divisions in the wall schemes above help to maintain the rhythmic decoration of these spaces: they reflect imagery of the gardens that they physically blend with, further integrating the porticos into the garden realm, while also transforming natural iconography so that it blends with the idiom of geometric design.

They appear in another form on several of the walls surrounding the east wing. On the exterior walls of room 78, and the northern and southern niches at either end of space 80 that runs the length of the pool, evenly spaced oleander plants in full bloom rise behind a low latticework fence. Clusters of sharp, lanceolate leaves surround the stalks that erupt at the ends into bundles of pink and red flowers, rendering the plants botanically recognizable (fig. 4.3). The distinctive five-petaled flowers are represented in a stylized fashion, however: rather than arranging the petals in a circular pattern around a yellow center, the petals assume a sprouting configuration much like the spreading leaves on their stalks, stacked in pairs with reflective symmetry. These plants, though separated from the viewer by the gentle, see-through barrier of the low painted fence, appear in an unbroken line, blending into one another to form a leafy

[412] Room 17 has both third and fourth style paintings.

frieze. Each plant varies slightly in its height, the arrangement of leaves, stalks, and flowers, and a rich population of birds appears. The niches to the north and south of portico 60 rise only to half height, seeming to wrap the portico in a lush garden environment that partly blends the edges of the architecture again with their natural surroundings. The effect of the paintings on the exterior of room 78 are slightly different. An upper register of schematic red and white masonry blocks emphasizes the stone material of the walls whose lower stretches are covered in this continuous garden fantasy of ever-blooming oleander, making it appear that the foundations of the architecture rest on this scene of the natural world.

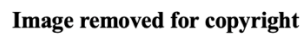

Fig. 4.7: Oleander on the exterior wall of room 78 at Oplontis (photo: Stanley Jashemski, 1978) and oleander growing in Morocco today (photo: wikimedia commons).

The association of socle plants with garden spaces, and their appearance as a sign of intimacy between the artificial and natural realms, is reified by their appearance in all of the villa's interior gardens. They appear in a manner akin to the porticos—against a black background within framed sections of the socle—in the small tetrastyle portico surrounding the planter fountain in the northwest sector of the villa (16/16a). In *viridarium* 20, as mentioned

above, they not only appear along the inner walls of the garden itself, but also along the outer side of the low wall that divides the garden from room 4, bringing the motifs that mark the passage between real and fictive garden space outward from the garden and transposing the realm of the garden into the adjoining room.

Fig. 4.8: The view south through viridarium 68 into room 64/65 and viridarium 61 beyond. Photo: Stanley Jashemski, 1978.

In the *viridaria* of the east wing, socle plants are integrated into larger garden schemes and used to create a multiplanar effect that carries out across four painted gardens and three intervening rooms (from north to south: garden 87, reception room 73/74, garden 70, reception room 69, garden 68, reception room 64/65, and garden 61). In these rooms, the unusually tall red socles run continuously around all four walls sprouting plants in two registers, one a few inches above the pavement and another above a horizontal seam in the plaster that runs at

approximately the height of an average socle. This banding reduces the optical illusion of the plants as an extension of the garden space from up close, but the alignment of the upper band of plants with the level of the windowsills (fig. 4.8) preserves the illusion of a lower band of plants when viewed through a window. The red background of the socles extends upwards into vertical bands, draped with thick vines of ivy, that divide the upper registers of the paintings into framed sections. These provide illusory views through the wall onto further garden scenes, each with a fountain set before a tree and surrounded by lush mass of plants against a yellow background. The socle plants, in contrast to the wild tangle that emerges in the garden paintings above, are evenly spaced across the wall, as if planted in a neat row. Each specimen in the lower register is aligned with one in the upper register. Beneath the marble krater fountain that adorns a panel next to the southern window in *viridarium* 68, for example, a plant with a fan of spiky, bladelike leaves and two stalks bearing white petaled flowers at the tips sits just above a tall, bushy plant with dark clusters of oval leaves. Variety is achieved not only through evoking different textures and forms of leaves and flowers, but also through coloring the plants in variegated shades of green, white, and yellow, all of which stand out clearly against the saturated red of the background.

Once again, the socle plants aid in achieving an integration between architecture and the garden, appearing to grow in front of the red walls of the garden just as the real plants in the center beds would have, and providing an intermediate illusory plane between the garden scenes that appear in virtual openings beyond the walls and the real space of the room. Unlike previously discusses examples, however, the double register of plants is unusual, and disrupts the plants' usual role in establishing a plausible plane of garden growth against the architecture. Though each specimen is carefully painted and individualized, their use as visual punctuation

rivals their illusory qualities. The upper register of plants appears to float above the lower register. From a distance, only the rhythm of the socle plants in clear, regular pulses of greenery visible through the openings between the garden rooms. Close up, the individuality of each specimen becomes clear, creating a balance between socle plants as iconographic elements and as part of the creation of an overall pattern that envelops viewers in an immersive, saturated ornamental realm. Not all examples of socle plants appear in spaces that are directly connected to gardens, however. Their presence in rooms 17, 55, and 77 brings a touch of the garden to these interior spaces. In each case, the paintings appear in their framed form against a black backdrop, a more organized and tamed composition of sprouting figures than appears in the unframed examples in the *viridaria* and east garden.

These paintings are notable for their punctuated repetition of, while perhaps not specifically recognizable plants, the broad gestures of plantlike forms. The way in which plants were stylized, their removal from botanical specificity but maintenance of a clearly identifiable "plantness" reveals the way that plant forms wormed their way into the imaginations of artisans. Their growth is most often shown branching into palmette shapes, branches of leaves reflecting outward in arcs from a central point of growth near the base of the wall, like the bladed marsh plants that appear beneath the window of room 17, or clustering in rounded clumps, like the balls of ivy that adorn the rear wall of niche 61 where the wall meets the earth (fig 4.5). Taken as a corpus, socle plants are notable for the artisans' interest in representing variations in symmetry, contrasting the linear and rounded leaves, and using variegated greens. They create an atmosphere of restrained energy, with each specimen arrested but subtle differences between them perpetuating a sense of movement.

Fig 4.9: Socle plants in portico 33 below the window to room 17 (left) and in *viridarium* 61 (right).

The variety of patterns that plants create seem to have fascinated Roman artisans. They not only imposed a form of order on nature with their rows of plants, but undermined uniformity by introducing elements of surprise, revealed upon closer inspection. The effect of patterning achieved by their repetition throughout the villa, and across long swathes of its walls, leads to a patterning that simultaneously draws upon repetition of natural forms and variation in natural textures. Such shifting effects, rich color fields that reflect the variation of natural textures, have been identified by Nicola Barham as a primary aesthetic achievement of Roman art, one whose appreciation falls within the Latin category of *varietas* so appreciated by ancient interpreters /connoisseurs of decoration.[413] While Barham focuses especially on the use of color fields to achieve an effect that "oscillate[s] between representational and non-representational modes,"[414] the socle plants at Villa A show that plants, too, could operate simultaneously as botanical representations and aid in establishing rhythmic variations in color and shape that evoke the partial and ever-emerging symmetries of the natural world.

Stylization allows the socle plants both to extend illusory garden space onto the walls of the house and to signal the immersion of natural features into the rhythms of decorated domestic

[413] Barham (2021).
[414] Barham (2021) 178.

spaces. They fully blend the natural and artificial spheres, with artificiality creeping into their forms even as they transport the shifting rhythms of nature into the domestic sphere.

Geometricized plants appear elsewhere in Villa A. The leaves of the acanthus plant, for example, had long been excerpted from the natural realm and become a motif in its own right by the time of Villa's A's construction. The lavishly curling acanthus leaves that decorated the Corinthianizing column capitals at the villa followed long tradition in their transformation into perfectly symmetrical architrave supports, for example.[415] The acanthus motifs that appear in the stucco moldings, in rooms 20, 74, and 97, are even further abstracted from the natural form: regularized, miniaturized, and strung together into repeating patterns filled with alternating fields of bright blue, pink, red, and white, recognizable only by the conventional curl of their leaves.[416] The reduction of plant-forms into the patterned displays of stucco extend beyond acanthus into other forms as well. Plant forms appear in twenty of the 32 rooms in the villa that preserve stucco moldings, with the trilobate shape of clovers, oval buds and symmetrical petals of lotuses, and sprawling palmettes arranged in colorful and delicate ranks at the seams between ceilings and walls.[417] In contrast to the plant paintings on socles, these natural forms are fully abstracted, distilled to only their most significant elements of shape and flow. The full ornamentalization of vegetal forms creates order out of nature.

Two bands of stucco visible in the south-east corner of the ceiling in room 74 (fig. 4.6), which was originally partly revetted in marble and flanked by two of the east wing *viridaria*,[418] display the final level of abstraction in form begun by the plants decorating the villa's socles. In the lower band, the blooming palmette form familiar from the socle plants has been further

[415] Moormann (2019) 1620-1623.
[416] Calosi (2019) 3537-8 on the stuccos in room 20, 4039-4044 on those in room 74, and 4112 on those in room 97.
[417] Calosi (2019) is a full catalog of the villa's *in situ* stucco moldings.
[418] Calosi (2019) 3984-4107.

regularized and simplified into identical shapes in raised relief and painted white, linked by undulating hills. In the upper band, the palmette shape loses much of its curvaceous form, emphasizing the symmetrical pyramidal shape of perfectly symmetrical opposite leaves on a branch.

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Fig. 4.10: Stucco in the south-east corner of room 76, showing geometrical patterns based on plant features. Photo F. Calosi, after Clarke & Muntasser (2019) fig. 23.244.

Combined within a single context, a whole range of plant forms, from the natural through naturalism and into abstraction, are displayed together, bringing attention to the ways in which they contrast and intersect, and to the mutual transformations that natural and human cultures act on one another and interconnect. With all these modes operating at once, an aesthetic environment is created that envelops inhabitants in variations on a theme of change—both

occurring within the place under the effects of nature, effected through the representation of natural forms across a variety of media, and depicted within the representational sphere.

VIII. Resonance and Abstraction of Natural Textures

Floral features are not the only natural elements that are integrated into the structure and aesthetic environment of Villa A. The villa is built from minerals, from the large chunks of stone and pozzolana in its masonry to the sliced and polished marble revetments that accented its architecture, as well as the pigments used to color its walls. Worked stone was further deployed as a decorative medium, with the villa's stone sculptures evoking forms from chunks of marble. It is also represented within its wall paintings in various states—polished and primed for display in and of itself, like in the alabaster columns of atrium 5, or as a vehicle for display, like the paintings of sphinx-shaped marble basins depicted in *viridarium* 20. The intersection between material and representational use reveals some of the ways that the Romans interpreted their own relationships with the mineral world, and the values ascribed to a ubiquitous aspect of the environment, one that they displayed extraordinary skill in transforming for their use.

The use of decorative stone at Villa A is linked with the broader social and economic developments of the first centuries BCE and CE. As Roman territories expanded, especially into the former Hellenistic kingdoms of the eastern Mediterranean, there was an influx of both wealth and exotic luxury goods and resources became available for public works. In this period, excessive luxury devoted to *private* holdings was subject to criticism, and some interpret the fantastical stone architecture visible in second style paintings to contemporary desires to evoke material wealth and ostentatious public architectural forms like colonnades while avoiding

accusations of moral excess.[419] As Lynley McAlpine writes, "it created the illusion of great luxury while carefully distancing the owner from accusations of luxurious depravity."[420] The exaggerated nature of second style paintings of the mid-first century BCE, which surpass even the most lavish known structures of the time, furthered both goals. The third style aesthetic of the Augustan era is often read as a reining in of visual excess aligned with the emperor's self-styled frugality as well as diminished public competition among elites as they fell in line behind the new uppermost echelon in society: the imperial family.[421] While access to marble for decorative use in domestic spaces increased slightly during this period, decoration in general tended towards subtlety and delicacy and mostly small amounts of stone were used in private contexts. During the Fourth Style period of the mid first century CE, however, the use of both local and exotic stone as decoration in private contexts seems to have burgeoned, as access increased and fashion shifted towards acceptance of the luxury.[422]

While the villa's internal changes followed broader trends, the site was consistently on the leading edge, with more than typical amounts of stone on display in every iteration.[423] In its earliest phase circa 50 BCE, the patron of Villa A not only had walls painted with representations of architecture in colorful and variegated stone (atrium 5, the adjoining rooms 11 and 23, triclinium 14 and *oecus* 15 next door), and using some of the most expensive pigments available, such as vermillion,[424] but also ordered alabaster thresholds and arranged the

[419] See the discussion of elite villa culture in the introduction.
[420] McAlpine (2016) 113.
[421] Ling (1991) 52-57.
[422] McAlpine (2014) diss. 77–83. The Emperor Nero (in power 54-68) particularly normalized the use of luxurious materials, as outlined in Gazda (2016) 33.
[423] For a full discussion of the villa's stoneworks, see Clarke & Barker (2019), Moormann (2019), and Barker and Fant (2019a and 2019b).
[424] Gee (2019a) 52–53.

installation of *opus scutulatum* floors in rooms.[425] During the Augustan renovations, the proprietors invested in greater amounts of architectural marble, but sourced more locally—white and bardiglio (gray and white streaked) Luna marble from what is now Carrara in northern Italy.[426] During this same period, the villa's proprietors continued to invest significantly in the mineral content of its wall paintings: the third style paintings in walls in rooms 8, 30, and 17 display large amounts of cinnabar in their pink and red pigments.[427] The villa's latest phases saw the most intensive use of large amounts of stone as a decorative material: wall revetments, *opus sectile* floors, fully carved columns and capitals of both local and imported stones adorned the rooms of the east wing, while many earlier stone trimmings and paintings were maintained and added to its western sectors. Most of the villa's fourth style paintings evoking stone, apart from the cinnabar red panel in room 31, were completed with less expensive pigments.[428] Overall, there was an intensification over time in the use of large quantities of recognizable stone, and evidence of some economizing with respect to mineral pigments in its later years that aligns with economic and social developments in the broader world, as the bulk of the patron's economic investment shifted to the deployment of quantities of decorative stone rather than to the creation of lavish paintings.

In earlier phases, when painted ornamental stone outweighed the presence of real ornamental stone, an appreciation for the bright colors and veined textures of marble emerged in the resonance between represented and real specimens. The *opus sculutatum* floor in *oecus* 15, for example, integrates fragments of colored limestone into a loose pattern against a background

[425] Barker & Fant (2019b) 1883-1887.
[426] Barker & Fant (2019a) 1828.
[427] Gee (2019b) 2222, 2362, 2465. While the cinnabar has blackened over time where it appears on the wall in the room, as is common with this pigment, the original vibrant pinkish red is visible on fragments, such as cat 105 in Gazda & Clarke (2016), 220.
[428] Gee (2019b) 2473–4 on room 31; Gee (2019a) 57.

of white tesserae. Each irregular large quadrilateral in green, orange, purple, or pink is surrounded by a frame of seven to eight smaller rectangular chips, roughly evenly spaced, in the same colors with the addition of black.[429] Though locally sourced, these small chips of colored stone resonate with the colors of large quantities of painted marble that appear in the accompanying wall paintings. These present a second style, immersive architectural scheme displaying a marble revetted facade that opens onto a leafy courtyard with a golden tripod set at the center, framed by a two-story colonnade that is visible receding into the distance through perforations in the upper sections of the facade wall. The white fluted columns that flank an open gate leading into the precinct beyond the wall rest atop shining green stone bases; deep red walls are depicted behind the columns; golden tones define the lintel of an arch that frames the tripod at the center of the composition; all three tones appear in the socle, painted like a stone podium projecting from the wall, that supports these elements. The marbles depicted in the images have been identified as exotic imported stones like the mottled red *rosso antico* of Greece and *giallo antico* of Tunisia,[430] and the reference to these costly items in the paintings elevates the local stone deployed in the pavement through association between their colors and textures and the luxuries depicted in paint.

While color is the primary vehicle for evoking the natural world in the decoration of room 15,[431] the second style paintings of *cubiculum* 11 are remarkable for their interest in representing the textures of exotic stone faithfully.[432] In the eastern niche of the cubiculum, the

[429] Notably, the palimpsest of floor revetments visible in 16b includes both a small section of apparently original scutulatum floor against a black tesserae background as well as a later reinterpretation against a white background that may have made use of stone spoliated from lost sections of the earlier floor.
[430] McAlpine (2016) 113–115.
[431] On the use of color fields to create varied, dynamic effects in Roman painting, see Barham (2021) on the Villa Farnesina.
[432] Barker & Fant (2019b) 1960–1961.

north and south walls imitate a solid stone surface (fig 4.11).[433] The whole of the wall is framed by two painted pilasters, lending a shallow depth to the composition. In the central zone, two yellow panels, each rectangular section trimmed with an inner border of white draft lines, are separated by a framing band of bright red, solid colored stone. An architrave that divides the central from the upper zone appears to project slightly from the plane of the panels' surface, a pink cornice resting atop a porphyry band decorated with a frieze of linked vegetal goddesses above a green band. Above the cornice are three courses of technicolor masonry: at the top and bottom, bright green beveled blocks alternate with square crimson blocks. Between is a course of beveled squared stone, every other block either a red and green brecciated stone or one in a heavily veined *giallo antico*. Each block is unique, the splotches and veins of contrasting colors following their own meandering patterns to create an effect that carefully mimics the texture of real stone.

This interest in surface patterning carries over onto the eastern wall of the niche as well, where a gap in the stone architecture is seen beneath a rock arch, flanked by columns that replicate the swirling brown whorls through a pale stone of alabaster. The rectangles of polished stone that form the wall's architectural decoration contrast with the irregular, jutting raw rock visible in the "outdoor" beyond, but carry through an interest in the shapeshifting, variegated surface textures wrought by nature.

[433] Gee (2019b) 2274-2278.

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Fig. 4.11. East alcove of cubiculum 11. Adapted from photo by Paul Bardagjy (Clarke & Muntasser (2019) fig. 21.101).

Not all of these colors and textures replicated the forms of nature, although the skill with which the artisans were able to render realistic depictions of alabaster and *giallo antico* prove that they could have done so had they wanted to. The red and green brecciated stone in the cubiculum is one example of the ways in which these natural colors and textures, so prized by Roman artisans, were, like the forms of plants and animals, translated into imaginary compositions that evoked, but did not replicate elements of the natural world. This type is an imaginary construction that does not correspond with any known type of real marble.[434] Though carefully painted to follow the textures of the natural material, the color combination is an original from the mind of the artist. Rather than merely seeking resonance with the real material, the scheme elaborates on nature in new ways, evoking one part of a natural material accurately

[434] Barker and Fant (2019b) 1961.

while abstracting another. The bright contrasting colors chosen for this effect establish variation within a visual pattern, picking up on the coloration of the veining in the *giallo antico* blocks but setting them against a background color that stands out, saturated, against their yellow backgrounds. Within the social sphere of the second style period that gave rise to these paintings, this remove from reality might be another way of avoiding accusations of excess or overweening ambition, while at the same time achieving a fantastical, immersive effect.[435] Aesthetically, it blurs the boundary between the creations of the artisans and the creations of the natural world, as becomes even more apparent in later additions to the villa.

Returning to look at the use of stone in room 4, for example, both as a material and as an image, we see an interest in the intersection between material textures derived from nature, representations of luxury natural materials, and representations that evoke natural textures but do not correspond directly to known varieties of stone found in nature. Room 4 is the only one of the villa's rooms in which "zebra stripes"[436] are relegated to the socle, where they fight for prominence with the colorful, variegated patterns of the painted marbles in the central zone. More often, they *are* the central feature of the space, with either a plain white upper zone or a delicate design against a white background accompanying them as decorative companions.[437]

These black and white striped designs, which are common not only in Villa A but in many fourth style contexts,[438] have provoked the curiosity of modern scholars, partly due to their apparent disconnectedness from an interest in naturalistic representation. While they often appear

[435] See McAlpine diss (2014) 123–133 on the historical and cultural uses of marble in the second style period and an interpretation of the way that fictive stone in Oplontis' oecus 23 creates a fantastical, deliberately unreal architectural environment. Barry (2020) 96-98 discusses the emergence of creative fictions from the first style evocations of lustrous marbles, comparing the occasional monochromatic images found in them to imaginary riffs on the fossiliferous stones they might have encountered.
[436] This is a modern term that reflects their effect, but no scholars interpret them as actual imitations of zebra stripes, an animal that was foreign to the Romans.
[437] See, for an example of the latter, the paintings in monumental corridor 46.
[438] Rauws (2015–2016) 54.

cursorily painted—with quick, visible brushstrokes—compared to the measured and precise geometries of wall paintings divided into panels or drafted into masonry schemes, these paintings are both common and prominent, attesting to their popularity. As noted by Crispin Goulet, "the zebra design was in fact more decorative in antiquity than it appears today,"[439] a neat summary that encompasses the divide between the frequent response of modern viewers to this graphic, who often feel the need to explain away the prevalence of this high contrast design, and the evident pleasure ancient Romans took in decorating their walls with it. As mentioned in the introduction, Sandra Joshel and Lauren Hackworth Petersen have linked the design with areas specifically set aside for servile activities, for example.[440] While many of the villa's smaller, cramped spaces are indeed decorated with this pattern (corridors 3 and 6 along the central axis; the narrow corridors 52, 53, and 62 near the latrines, and the small corridors 67 and 71 in the east wing), the motif also turns up in some of its more monumental areas, such as the central peristyle and the monumental corridor lined with upper story windows and benches that run between the peristyle and the east wing (45 and 46).

Long neglected by modern scholars, this motif has become a focus of attention, and is now most commonly identified as a representation of a heavily abstracted black and white stone.[441] While the patterns are graphically impactful, their effect is not derived from their

[439] Goulet (2001–2002) 53.

[440] Joshel & Petersen (2016); Petersen (2019).

[441] Maiuri (1958) 134 proposed Bardiglio and is followed by Gee (2018), e.g. 2167, while McAlpine (2014) 125–126 posits a type of Luna gray marble as an inspiration. Goulet (2001–2002) 55 argues that it need not represent any particular kind of stone found in nature. Personally, I am not sure it is always meant to represent stone at all and believe in some cases it may also be a schematic design drawing inspiration from exotic wood paneling. While the stacked blocks in peristyle 32 certainly evoke masonry construction, the wavy visible brushstrokes on the larger mirrored panels in room 97, for example, approach the appearance of a striped wood grain. I would like to suggest another potential practical reason for the popularity of these paintings, drawing on comparanda from another very sooty time in history: colonial America. Similar patterns of gray, black, and white stripes and chevrons appear on the walls and ceilings of kitchens of 18th century buildings in New England, such as the Old Manse in Concord and the Buckman Tavern in Lexington, Massachusetts, though with the local twist of being applied with corn cobs for increased texture. According to guides at the Old Manse, these paintings were applied because they masked the soot

imitation of a specific natural counterpart. At times, as in peristyle 32, the designs are highly linear. In the northwest corner of the room (fig. 4.7), the arrangement of striped rectangles into overlapping masonry courses is emphasized by their framing with contrasting yellow draft lines.

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Fig. 4.12. The northwest corner of peristyle 32, with linear zebra stripes. Photo: Ian Lycett King from pompeiiinpictures.com.

Each block is streaked vertically, horizontally, diagonally with straight stripes in black and white, blending slightly into gray where the two meet. In addition to blocks that bear a single orientation, several show diagonal stripes arranged in chevrons, with the stripes creating a mirrored effect across each half of the block, a technique often used to create symmetry between

and dirt of the kitchen and minimized the need to repaint these areas. Though the "zebra stripes" pattern appears in multiple contexts during the Roman period, many areas were those that would have relied on lamplight for navigation, making it possible that the pattern's popularity at least partly stemmed from its less frequent need for repainting or cleaning.

panels of marble revetments. While the designs are linear, the stripes are painted free-hand and there are irregularities in the angles and widths of the bands within the decoration, giving each block an individual character that is emphasized by their arrangement, such that each block is surrounded by others with differing orientations.

More complicated versions appear in linked corridors 53 and 62, with a pattern alternating between thick and thin stripes of black against a white background. In other cases, like the panels in room 97, the artisans emphasized blurring and curves, quickly painting a dense set of waves in alternating black and white so that the edges of the stripes appear to bleed into one another and reflecting them across both horizontal and vertical axes to create a series of nested undulating rhombuses within each red framed panel. This evokes the tessellation of natural materials, like the reflected veins of revetted marble slabs cut from the same section of stone. The zebra stripes of Villa A do not follow a single design but constitute a complicated corpus of different effects that can be evoked through alternating bands of black and white paint. Scholarly disagreements regarding the type of marble they represent indicate the irrecoverability of their identification as a specific type of stone. Amadeo Maiuri proposed Bardiglio, an idea followed by Regina Gee, while McAlpine has posited a type of Luna gray marble as an inspiration.[442] Goulet argues that it need not represent any particular kind of stone found in nature.[443]

[442] Maiuri (1958) 134; Gee (2018), e.g. 2167; McAlpine (2014) 125–126
[443] Goulet (2001–2002) 55

Image removed for copyright

Fig. 4.13 Zebra stripes on the north wall of corridor 62 (left) and 97 (right). Adapted from photos by Jackie and Bob Dunn from pompeiiinpictures.com.

The effects of the design need not represent stone at all. In some cases they may also be a schematic design drawing inspiration from exotic wood paneling, or even evoke the shadows of columns casting bands of dark against bright patches of light as they shifted and moved throughout the day. The oscillation in effect, and the multivalence of referents to the natural world (qualities of light and shade, tessellated stone patterning that creates nearly regular symmetries from the accidents of natural formation processes, the contrasting colors that arise pop forth from natural sources) creates an aesthetic in which variety is achieved not only visually, but in terms of the experiences they conjure up in turn. While the stacked blocks in peristyle 32 certainly evoke masonry construction, the wavy visible brushstrokes on the larger

mirrored panels in room 97, for example, approach the appearance of a striped wood grain.[444] Those in corridor 62 and the peristyle express linearity in their streaky compositions, while those in room 97 embrace curvature. Together, they evoke a full riot of textures that change in the light and set up contrasts that evoke the variegated unpredictability of the natural world without recourse to imitating any specific facet of it. The zebra stripes are a celebration of texture and contrast, creating a shifting design that interacts with the movements of both people passing by the walls and the changing environment of the villa's surroundings.

IX. Conclusion

While previous chapters treated relationships between the environment that unfolded outside and seeped within the Villa's rooms, this chapter shows that nature continued to serve as an inspiration, co-designer (in creating the forms that inspired these artisans), and medium through the expressions of artisans and patrons that penetrated its walls and floors. There is a continuous fascination both with the transformation of nature into the materials of the human sphere, and, conversely, with the reclamation of artifice by the natural world. Forms inspired by nature were geometricized into abstract motifs or represented as if rendered in alternate materials like metal and stone. Natural textures were evoked materially through construction methods,

[444] I would like to suggest another potential practical reason for the popularity of these paintings, drawing on comparanda from another very sooty time in history: colonial America. Similar patterns of gray, black, and white stripes and chevrons appear on the walls and ceilings of kitchens of 18th century buildings in New England, such as the Old Manse in Concord and the Buckman Tavern in Lexington, Massachusetts, though with the local twist of being applied with corn cobs for increased texture. According to guides at the Old Manse, these paintings were applied because they masked the soot and dirt of the kitchen and minimized the need to repaint these areas. Though the "zebra stripes" pattern appears in multiple contexts during the Roman period, many areas were those that would have relied on lamplight for navigation, making it possible that the pattern's popularity at least partly stemmed from its less frequent need for repainting or cleaning.

imitated, and abstracted into popular patterns. Meanwhile, the individuality of the organic world influenced its painters, who incorporated both apparent randomness and distinction into even imaginary specimens that they used to adorn the walls.

I argue that the sympathy of Roman artisans and patrons to the environment resulted in an awareness of the ultimate origin of the materials they used. Though technologically innovative, the artisans worked with materials that were usually within a few steps on the *chaine operatoire* from their raw state: even the synthetic pigment Egyptian blue was a heated combination of silica (sand), copper, and calcium carbonate (limestone or shell)[445] while an *opus signinum* floor might be created from ground terracotta (recycled tempered clay), mixed with pozzzolana (volcanic stone) and lime (burnt limestone) and water. A luxurious marble column would be even closer to its natural form: there is evidence that the quarried and roughed out pieces of large architectural marble were finished on site,[446] and, when worked, the material itself was on display, its effects heightened through shaping and polishing—a transformation into a more dramatic version of itself.

The display of natural forms, their transformation, and the demonstration of skill in extratcing geometries from them, all work together within the representational sphere to create an aesthetic that captures, to a limited degree, the kinds of dynamic change that characterize the outdoors. With their complicated collections of designs, they invite reviewing, presenting new facets of the composition wherever the eye and body moves. By incorporating the slight asymmetries of nature within the designs, the complex rhythms of the outdoor world are brought

[445] Siddall (2006) 24-25 with further bibliography.
[446] Fant & Barker (2016) esp. 126 discusses the transport of materials to the site, while Barker (2016) estimates the massive manpower required to deck the villa with all of its architectural marble—808 man-days for the column shafts in portico 60 alone (133)! Fant (2018a) 1849-1861 discusses local sculptural production and activities more generally.

indoors. Again and again as viewers move through the structure, they are presented with new variations on the themes of inter-transformation between nature and the human spheres, fueled by different combinations of plantings, paintings, sculpture, moldings, and vistas that unfolded into one another. The forms, materials, and textures of the natural world are interpreted, abstracted, and reimagined by the villa's designers, contributing to an environment in which viewers are encouraged to reflect on their relationships to the real and imaginary nature surrounding them.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

I. Summary

From the perspective of contemporary Ann Arbor, it is difficult to imagine the kind of basic intimacy with nature evinced by Roman sources. The architecture of the apartment towers and housing developments that I have watched climb into the sky in the town center and sprawl into the suburbs is designed to sever continuity between indoors and out. Air filtration systems replace the circulatory function of windows and colonnades; in a high rise, windows that open at all are rare. Such insulation makes it easier to hold nature at arm's length, to conceptualize, other, and abstract it, rather than to conceive of a more inter-related, ecological relationship with the environment.

At Villa A, the perspective of builders and decorators was evidently quite different. Theirs was an architecture designed to embrace the outdoors as far as possible, so that the comfort of safety from the elements came at the cost of its most visibly impressive features—sight lines that led from garden to garden, facades that blur the boundary between garden and architecture, decorations that evoke the dynamism and transformative qualities of nature, tall ceilings that open to the sky.[447] Art and nature do not present in binary opposition to one another in the villa, but as a fluid continuum, shifting into one another over time. This relationship makes nature a vital part of understanding this site as it was experienced in antiquity, and one that is

[447] The compluvium-impluvium style of roof was a common feature of Roman atria, though not a universal one.

difficult to capture through the favored modeling strategies (e.g. maps, digital databases, and even on site reconstruction) of archaeological sites.

Villa A becomes a richer site when its ephemeral qualities, driven by connection with nature, are weighed as heavily as its features in stone and concrete. Accessing the embodied climatological awareness at the heart of the villa's functioning changes our understanding of the site, rendering it a livelier, more complex place. In this dissertation, I began with a deconstruction of the archaeological site in order to demonstrate that even its most durable features are subject to interpretation and change, that even stone shares some of the ephemerality that characterized the villa's long-lost plantings and the breezes that reached its porticos off the bay. In chapter two, I adapted traditional spatial approaches to explore the villa's relationship with its surroundings through the medium of mapping, which pointed to the structure's orientation towards exteriority. I then turned from a distant overview to investigate the phenomenologically activated realm of its surrounding gardens, revealing their unfolding continuity of seasonal and daily change and the way that multisensory experience generated by the garden inflected the artificial features that populate it. The garden not only blends with the artificial realm, growing around statues and creeping up against, and even dominating, porticos, but, through its artistic populations, moves towards a mythologically tinged world beyond the physical. As the garden permeates the villa's interior, in chapter four I investigated the way that nature penetrates the artistic realm, both significatory and medial, of its decorative surfaces. Here, the local environment contributed not only as a participant in creating the villa's aesthetic, but also as a springboard for the imaginations of the artisans who worked within its walls to fulfill the visions of their patrons. The imaginary world within the paintings of the walls draws upon the spectacular arrays of nature and their transformation by human hands, presenting the

artificial realm as an extension, even the fullest realization, of a bountiful nature. These aesthetic evocations of the natural world range from mimesis, to those that capture its textures, to those that play with the shifting effects of light and shade and the saturation of its colors. Through each perspective—spatial, phenomenological, art historical—the villa communicates the depth of its enmeshment with the environment.

I have limited the focus of this project to a single site in order to tease out some of this richness, but, as is evidenced by the intermediary, semi-sentient role of natural features in the written and artistic impressions left by Roman thinkers, an environmentally focused approach can, and should, be applied much more broadly. Although Villa A, in all of its luxury, is unquestionably an elite site, whose patrons had access to resources far beyond the reach of the average Roman householder, it is unique primarily in its scale. Many individual features of Villa A are regionally widespread, creating similar effects in other localities. The popularity of plant painted socles, which adorn nearly a fifth of the villa's rooms, is evidenced in the broader sphere of Pompeii, where they appear in the same proportion of extant decorated buildings. At the House of the Menander (I.10.14), for example, one of Pompeii's grandest, they appear in the atrium, tablinum, and surrounding rooms in addition to both the interior and exterior of the low wall encasing the peristyle garden behind.[448] Just as the large peristyle garden creates an oasis of green within the urban grid of a small city, the plants on the socles signal the continuity between the world of the garden and the interior. Nor is the motif restricted to elite houses with pretensions towards a villa-esque size and elaboration. In the modest shop-house at IX.2.12, for example, a series of spiky, fan-shaped plants adorns the north wall of the outermost room, bringing a touch of the garden into the commercial realm.

[448] Ling & Ling (2005).

The villa's "zebra stripes," which have often confounded scholars looking to explain the aesthetic appeal of Roman art within a modern aesthetic hierarchy that elevates figural art above all other forms of decoration, are another set of motifs that flourished beyond this single site.[449] At Pompeii, they appear on the walls of a range of private and public structures, including the Stabian and Sarno baths,[450] the modest House of Maius Castricius,[451] and at a deluxe dwelling outside the Porta Marina gate, the so-called Villa Imperiale.[452] That both of these motifs appeared within the final years of the sites around the Bay of Naples [453] testifies to a flourishing and continued interest in evoking the natural world in new ways through the medium of paint, and an increasing interest in inducing the patterning and shifting effects of the natural world through abstracted elements within designs.

This means that, just like the architecture and the natural world itself, Roman relationships with, and conceptualizations of, the environment changed over time and were expressed in new ways. While I propose a version of Roman society in which attention to the natural world was more ingrained and fundamental to cultural production than a modern westerner might expect, the sources present a complex, rather than utopian suite of relations. The dominant pop-cultural representation of the Romans in contemporary western society is one that emphasizes a thirst for conquest and domination; this is only a limited view. Certain moments captured in the archaeological and literary record certainly do testify to the fact that Romans could conceptualize the environment as bending beneath the yoke of human will. On the Column

[449] See discussion in chapters four, pages 215 ff.
[450] Goulet (2001-2002) 51, fig. 2; 56, fig. 5.
[451] Benefiel (2010) 73.
[452] Goulet (2001-2002) 57, fig. 6; Rauws (2015-2016).
[453] Rauws (2015-2016) 53 place the zebra stripes from 50 CE onwards. Socle plants are characteristic of the fourth, and latest of Mau's Four Styles, appearing only in one Third Style room in the Villa of the Mysteries where they may be a later addition.

of Trajan, for example, the frieze presents the destruction of Dacian forests and construction of identifiably Roman stone buildings in their place to highlight their spiraling narrative of conquest.[454] In another instance, Statius embodies the voice of the Volturnus river, bridged by part of the via Domitiana, to praise Domitian as *victor perpetuus ripae*, the conqueror of the bank forever.[455] Yet in both of these cases, the assent of the River god serves an important role in paving the way for these conquests, with the personified Danube watching over the initial crossing of Trajan's troops in the lowest, most visible register of the column and actively accepting the rule of Domitian in Statius' poem.[456] Only in cautionary tales, like Suetonius' contemptuous account of Caligula ordering his soldiers to collect seashells to demonstrate their conquest of the ocean,[457] does a human attempt a one-way conquest over nature as if it were an object to be taken. Relations between humans and the environment were not always peaceful, but they were always *relationships* between two living participants, part of the social fabric of the Roman world of the first centuries BCE and CE. The existence of these relationships beyond Villa A, even beyond the domestic sphere, mean that there is ample evidence for the roles of the embodied environment in these periods that remains to be discussed.

II. Poioumenon Part II: Anxiety in the Anthropocene

It has been more than two years since I last stood in the peristyle courtyard of Villa A. Nature, this time in the form of a global pandemic, always has the last word. In the absence of the physical reinforcement of its faded walls and reinforced mortar, I have begun to imagine it

[454] Thill (2010).
[455] Kleiner (1991) 185 on Statius Silv. IV, 3.
[456] Coarelli (2000) identifies this scene on Trajan's column.
[457] Suetonius, *Caligula* 46.

automatically with its chestnut tree still standing, as a place with a living heart. I see the shadows of its branches raking across the courtyard walls, moving bands of shadow and lights cast against the variegated stripes of the columns, and a brown bird swooping before the curvaceous leaves of painted plants. These affect a continuous transformation between the walls acting as an imagistic continuation of the garden and a boundary between it and the built space. The rhythms of nature, its aesthetic of change, are echoed in the way that both its abstracted striped and garden paintings unfold over time and both mimic and transform elements of nature. The plants here are painted with care, their leaves shades in striations of different greens, each specimen individualized—a brown bird with a soft white feathered underbelly approaches the tall narrow stalks of round, white petaled flowers, their narrow grass-like leaves spiking upward, while another turns to look over its shoulder, perches on a clump of broad curling leaves like a simplified acanthus plant. Despite their differences, and their unpruned shapes, the plants are organized in a single row, without overlapping, evenly spaced in clumps of three, presenting a balance between the organization of cultivation and the chaos of wilderness. From a distance, their green coloration contrasts against the red background and transforms the forms of plants into a variegated pattern, not so dissimilar from the back and white stripes that surround the area, whose tessellated stripes evoke both the shadows of the tree branches and the striation of marble. I see the peristyle as activated by its affinity with nature.

At the same time, I have witnessed changes in the trees around me. Out the window, the canopies of poplar, birch, and oak trees have been devoured by exploding populations of brown tail moth, fueled by warmer temperatures in the late fall. In addition to their damage to the trees, the caterpillars of the moth drop irritating hairs that cause skin rashes and respiratory problems when touched or inhaled, making the outdoors where they have settled more hostile to humans.

This dissertation was written at a time when the overriding American relationship with the natural world was defined by anxiety and filtered through a scientific lens: in addition to a global pandemic, climate change threatens to alter the physical landscape and is already throwing the patterns of nature around which society has subconsciously organized itself out of order.[458] The crisis of anthropogenic climate change is most often communicated through numbers; statistics of incremental rises in sea level and average global temperature are among the most common indices used to present scientific findings regarding the urgency of impending climate change to the general public. While the crisis is much discussed, commitments to solutions follow far behind. Just as the abstractions of data and numbers have proven an insufficient tool in understanding the effects of the natural world at Villa A, they have not instilled enough urgency in the conversation to provoke widespread change. I believe that disconnection drives some of this reluctance, a trained inattention to and commodification of nature that is a departure from other ways of knowing that have defined many societies outside of the modern west, including that of the Romans. Connecting to a more embodied and integrated version of the environment might be one step in the right direction.

[458] Moore (2015) is a critical exploration of the anthropocene, an unofficial geological epoch linked with the indelible shaping of the earth through anthropogenic climate change. Nunez (2019) in National Geographic is an example of a popular scientific communication regarding this crisis.

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