The Roman House as Memory Theater:
The House of the Tragic Poet in Pompeii

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Reconstructions by Victoria I

Memory is a human faculty that readily responds to training and can be structured, expanded, and enriched. Today few, if any, of us undertake a systematic memory training. In many premodern societies, however, memory was a skill more valued than that of reading. This essay argues that memory played a vital role in the creation and reception of Roman pictorial ensembles in domestic situations.

If you were to train yourself in the ancient art of memory, you would begin by forming mentally a clear series of places. Three Latin rhetorical authors of the first centuries B.C. and A.D., the anonymous author of the *Ad Herennium*, Cicero, and Quintilian, recommended that one choose a well-lit, spacious house with a variety of rooms through which the mind can run freely. Begin by fixing the plan in your imagination; then order the ideas, words, or images that you wish to remember, placing the first thing in the vestibule (*fauces*), the second in the atrium, then more around the impluvium, into side rooms, and even onto statues or paintings. Once you have put everything in its place, whenever you wish to recall something, start again at the entrance and move through the house, where you will find all the images linked one to another as in a chain or a chorus. Once inside, you can start from any point in the series and move either backward or forward from that point, for it is the spatial order of the storage that allows for retrieval.[1]

This method of memory training reminds us how essential the built frame was for the Romans as an organizer of objects, thoughts, and experience. Ancient memory systems were spatial and material because, for a largely illiterate society, the visual process played a powerful role in receiving and retaining information. For Cicero, remembering was like reading and writing; he stated that we use places as wax and images as letters.[2] Although Cicero's analogy had been a common *topos* since the fourth century B.C., Romans made a systematic memory training the basis of an education. *Memoria*, along with *inventio* (discovery), *dispositio* (organization), *elocutio* (ornamentation through words or figures), and *actio* (performance in the manner of an actor, through speech and gestures), was one of the procedures of rhetoric, and thus a fundamental part of almost every Roman's schooling. Pliny the Elder, writing in the second half of the first century A.D., claimed that memory was the tool most necessary for life, but also the most fragile of human faculties. Trained in the architectural memory system, a thinker about to speak would employ the disciplined, yet spontaneously inventive method of visualizing an interior, filling it with images, and then moving through it. For, as Cicero explained, images are retained more easily than abstract thoughts, but they "require an abode."[3]

The decorated house became an obvious, easily reconstructable model for the architectural mnemonic of the late Republic and early Empire. For a Roman's house was perceived as an extension of the self, signaling piety to divine protectors and social and genealogical status to the world outside. The identification of the house with an individual is manifest in the recorded instances of *damnatio memoriae*, which included the destruction of the home as part of the programmatic eradication of a person's memory. In particular, the old form of the Italic *domus*—the very form adopted for artificial memory—was tinged with the past. The atrium with its smoky hearth, the *focus*, held busts and epitaphs of ancestors and a shrine to the indwelling spirit of the house,

[1] *Ad C. Herennium* 3.16–24 (ca. 86–82 B.C.), trans. H. Caplan, Cambridge, Mass. (1954) repr. 1968, 205–225; Cicero, *De oratore* 2.86.351–354, trans. E. W. Sutton, 465–467; Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 11.2.17–22, trans. H. E. Butler, IV, Cambridge, Mass., 1921, 221–225; P. Rossi, *Clavis universalis: Arti mnemoniche e logica combinatoria de Lullo a Leibniz*, Milan, 1960; H. Blum, *Die antike Mnemotechnik* (*Spudasmata*, XV), Hildesheim, 1969; Yates, 1–49; Rouveret, 303–379.

[2] Cicero, *De oratore* 2.86.353–355, trans. Sutton, 467; repeated by Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 11.2.21–22 (as in n. 1), 223. Quintilian is,

however, skeptical about the effectiveness of the architectural mnemonic for oratory: 11.2.23–26. On the frequent metaphor of memory as a wax tablet, see Yates, 25, 35–36; M. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, Cambridge and New York, 1990, chap. 1, fully explores the two "families of related metaphors: memory as a set of waxed tablets and as a storehouse or inventory," which she identifies as archetypal Western commonplaces, p. 19. W. V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, Cambridge, Mass., 1989, 267, estimates that about fifteen percent of Romans could read in the first century A.D.; see pp. 30–33 on the ancient belief in the negative effects of literacy on natural memory and on different kinds of remembering, especially the distinction between the continuous passage and bits of information.

[3] Pliny, *Historia naturalis* 7.24.88, trans. H. Rackham, *et al.*, Cambridge, Mass., 1942, 563–565; Cicero, *De oratore* 2.86.358, trans. Sutton, 469; H. I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, trans. G. Lamb, Madison, Wis., 1956. R. Barthes, "L'Ancienne Rhétorique: Aide-mémoire," *Communications*, XVI, 1970, 172–229, does not fully treat *memoria* but acknowledges its value as a mechanical process of transmitting stereotypes, precisely the value discussed in this essay; G. Manetti, *Theories of the Sign in Classical Antiquity*, trans. C. Richardson, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1993, 139–156.

the *Lar*, or "owl" of the ancestors. The *domus* interior thus invited certain kinds of memories, furnished anchoring points for them, and preserved them by holding them in place.[4]

Elevated to metaphor and internalized as private memory *loci*, the Roman house offers insight into a formative mental model. As recent studies have suggested, viewing schemata not only were adopted metaphorically by Latin rhetoricians, but rhetorical theory influenced Roman perception.[5] In learning the correct ways for "reading" the decorated house, educated Romans acquired certain attitudes toward the images it contained. The habit of disciplined recall and, most importantly, of *association* between the recalled parts was, above all, a creative activity. Cicero compared the making of memory images to painting a picture; the orator became a topographer of the imagination.[6] It follows that the dynamic, reciprocal relationship between concrete image and verbalized meaning within the architectural mnemonic might operate in the pictorial programs of Roman houses as well.

Seen in this way, *memoria* offers a new key to reading narrative ensembles: movement. Edwin Casey has argued that the body in motion plays a fundamental role in the process of remembering, for it "domesticates" space by attuning itself to the surroundings in order to "inhabit" and "feel at home" in past places. In maneuvering through the real or the imagined house, the viewer/orator selectively organizes the things around him. The body is not stationary, but a moving center in relation to which things constantly change position. I propose that the architectural mnemonic was a Roman modality requiring the active incorporation of a moving eye or body for the full comprehension of a visual narrative.[7]

For a Roman, exploration of the private memory house naturally carried with it much of the collective memory outside. In ancient culture, *memoria* was one of the primary means of transmission from one generation to another, and the key example, the *exemplum* or paradigm, was the common vehicle through which tradition was transmitted. The old-fashioned house and the inherited objects and legendary stories it contained connected age-old *exempla* in a new way.

For generations of scholars and visitors two thousand years removed, the Roman atrium-house has become an *exemplum* of Roman culture. As such, it is the site of a dialectic between historically remote periods and can act as a lens through which to perceive mechanisms of transmission. Scholarly investigation of the ancient interior is like a memory system in that we attach our ideas about Roman culture to its spaces and contents using the methods of labeling and matching. "Memory," then, encompasses an enormous range of meaning, from its broad synonyms of history, knowledge, and culture to the particular act or moment of recall and to the thing remembered. It can be a learned system (the architectural mnemonic), a person's natural faculty (in antiquity a sign of genius), an accidental flashback, a metaphor, or the collective guilt of a society (war crimes). The expansiveness of the concept opens up a field for the investigation of broad attitudes in, and about, the past and of our own assumptions and methodological tools in approaching it.[8]

The very artificiality of the memory house as an access device to information invites a comparison of the mental model with the material evidence of a contemporary atrium-house. The following paragraphs and images attempt to bring to mind a Roman place of the mid-first century A.D., the House of the Tragic Poet in Pompeii (VI.8.3–5). Today the architectural shell is stripped nearly bare, with just a few fading frescoes and black and white mosaics (Figs. 1–3). Since its discovery, this small house has come to be regarded as a veritable paradigm of the Roman *domus* and has enjoyed a rich afterlife, furnishing a kind of stage set for the projection of our own retrospective notions about Roman life and manners. Of the over two hundred homes in Pompeii deserving rescue, I pick this one because of its unique status and because of the modern delusion that we know it.

The ongoing, simultaneous restoration and deconstruction of the fabric and contents of the House of the Tragic Poet reveal a fascinating history of semiotic reception, and with it a great deal of irony. That an artifact so paradigmatic and so often displayed is also so much dismembered, neglected, and forgotten can tell us much about the selective workings of a modern collective memory. A close look at the remains shows that this "model house" is actually quite distinctive. The small atrium seems altogether too modest for the monumental figural panels simulated in fresco on its walls. To the nineteenth-century eye, the individual panels resembled the oil paintings one might see in a museum gallery, and in order to preserve them, a few years after their discovery they were cut out of their surrounding design and transported to an actual museum in Naples. With spoliation added to fantasy, today the house as a whole is in danger of entirely slipping from memory.

My aim is to secure the future of the house by recontextualizing the panels and assessing their original appearance as an ensemble. To demonstrate the spatial relationships, I use an experimental scale model (Fig. 21), and then extend the recontextualization into a computer model that allows us to

[4] On the Roman house as an extension of a man's memory and the ancient references on *damnatio memoriae*, see J. Bodel, "Monumental Villas and Villa Monuments," in *The Roman Villa: New Perspectives*, ed. A. Frazer, University of Pennsylvania Museum Press, forthcoming, and T. P. Wiseman, "*Conspicui postes tectaque digna deo*: The Public Image of Aristocratic and Imperial Houses in the Late Republic and Early Empire," in *L'Urbs: Espace urbain et histoire (Ier siècle av. J. C.–III siècle ap. J. C. (Collection de l'École Française de Rome*, XCVIII), 1987, 393–413. On the atrium as the locus for the display of ancestor busts: Pliny, *Historia naturalis* 35.2.6–7, trans. H. Rackham, Cambridge, Mass., 1952, 265.

[5] Each with quite different results: R. Brilliant, *Visual Narratives*, Ithaca, N.Y., 1984, chap. 2; E. W. Leach, *The Rhetoric of Space: Literary and Artistic Representations of Landscape in Augustan Rome*, Princeton, 1988; Rouveret, *passim*.

[6] Cicero, *De oratore* 2.87.357–358, trans. Sutton, 469–471. A. Rouveret, "Peinture et 'Art de la mémoire': Le Paysage et l'allégorie dans les tableaux grecs et romains," *Comptes rendus des séances. Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres*, 1982, 571–588.

[7] On "place-memory," see E.S. Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study*, Bloomington, 1987, chap. 3. For a refutation of the ancient prejudice against mnemonic devices as a form of "unnatural learning," see F. Bellezza, "Mnemonic Devices and Memory Schemas," in *Imagery and Related Mnemonic Processes: Theories, Individual Differences, and Applications*, ed. M. McDaniel and M. Pressley, New York, 1987, 34–55.

[8] On these issues, see J. Le Goff, *History and Memory*, trans. S. Rendall and E. Claman, New York, 1992. The translation from the French reveals the different nuances of "mémoire" as compared with the English "memory."

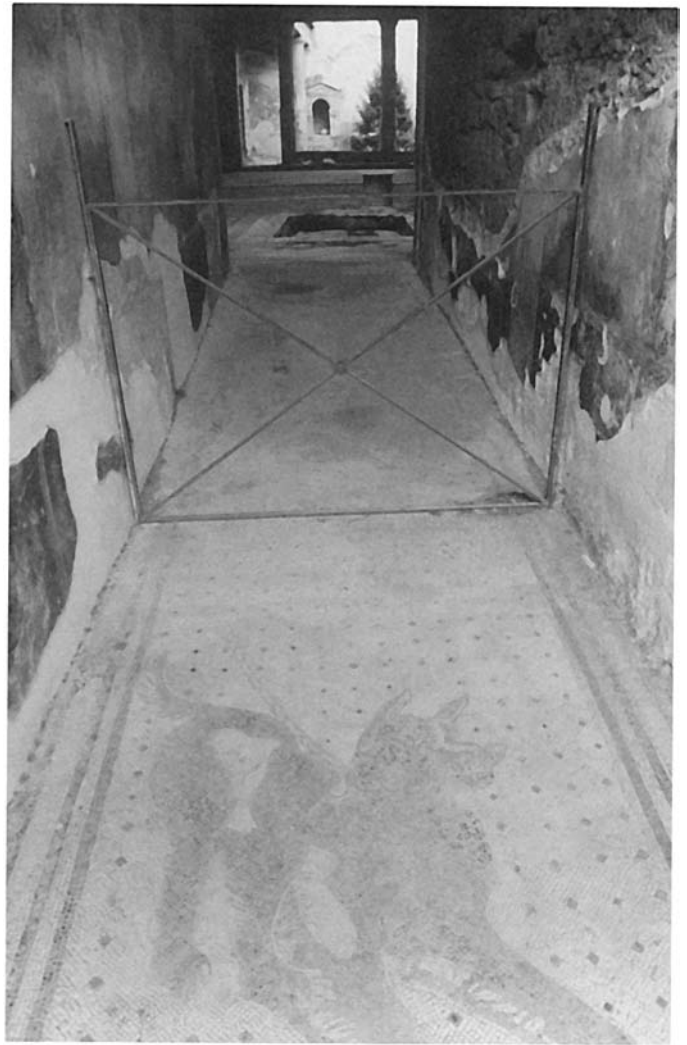1 The House of the Tragic Poet, Pompeii VI 8.3–5, view of the exterior in 1992

2 View of the atrium in 1992

3 View into the house from the entrance through the *fauces* to the atrium, tablinum, and peristyle

navigate inside the house in the manner of an ancient viewer (Fig. 34). Reconstructions naturally lead to consideration of the technological, and thus historical, ways "an era inscribes itself in memory, what strategies it employs to recommend itself to posterity."[9]

Rediscovery and Reception

Located on a major thoroughfare linking the forum and the romantic Street of the Tombs, the House of the Tragic Poet caused a sensation upon its discovery in November of 1824, for its plan and contents triggered associations with familiar ancient texts (Fig. 4). The sequence and complement of rooms seemed to exemplify the canonical plan described by

Vitruvius in his *De architectura:* a long *fauces* followed by a simple Tuscan atrium surrounded by small rooms, a raised tablinum and, beyond, a peristyle with Doric columns and a lararium, more small rooms, and a majestic triclinium.[10] Yet this habit of reading words or labels into the spaces of a Roman house, a method of excursus that dominated nine-teenth-century studies and persists today, has tended to obscure understanding of the actual remains.[11]

Early representations of the house express two desires.

[9] W. Kemp, "Visual Narratives, Memory and the Medieval *Esprit du System*," in *Images of Memory: On Remembering and Representation*, ed. S. Kuchler and W. Melion, Washington, D.C., and London, 1991, 88.

[10] Vitruvius, *De architectura* 6.3.iii, trans. M.H. Morgan, 176–180. Raoul-Rochette, 1–3, introduces the house with a long explication of Vitruvius's Roman plan; it should be noted, however, that the house lacks the grand entrance mentioned by Vitruvius 6.2, trans. Morgan, 182. In typical Bourbon fashion, the final, dramatic clearing of the site was reserved for the visits of eminent guests. On the discovery, see G. Minervini, *Bullettino archeologico napoletano*, no. 141, May 1858, 132–136; no. 144, June 1858, 153–158; no. 146, July 1858, 169–172; G. Fiorelli, *Pompeiano-rum antiquitatum historia*, Naples, 1860–64, II.121–135, III.57–61, 69, 71, 75. The house was quickly added to the tourist's itinerary: C. Bonucci, *Pompei descritta par Charles Bonucci; ou précis historique des excavations*, Naples, 1828, 105–115; D. A. De Jorio, *Guida di Pompei*, Naples, 1836,

99–100; E. Breton, *Pompeia*, Paris, 1869, 316–321; G. Fiorelli, *Descrizi-one di Pompei*, Naples, 1875, 118–120. For an analysis of the house, see J. Overbeck and A. Mau, *Pompeji in seinen Gebäuden, Alterthümern, und Kunstwerken*, Leipzig, 1884, 285–289; A. Mau, *Pompeii, Its Life and Art*, trans. F. Kelsey, London, 1899, 307–314. For full bibliography, see I. Bragantini, M. de Vos, *et al.*, *Pitture e pavimenti di Pompei. Regioni V, VI, Repertorio delle fotografie del Gabinetto Fotografico Nazionale, ICCD*, Rome, 1983, 164–175.

[11] On early 19th-century treatments of the Roman house, see P. Pinon, "L'Invention de la maison romaine," in *La Laurentine et l'invention de la villa romaine*, Paris, 1982, 11–51. On the habit of labeling spaces of the house: P. Allison, "The Relationship between Wall-Decoration and Room-Type in Pompeian Houses: A Case Study of the Casa della Caccia Antica," *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, v, 1992, 235–249.
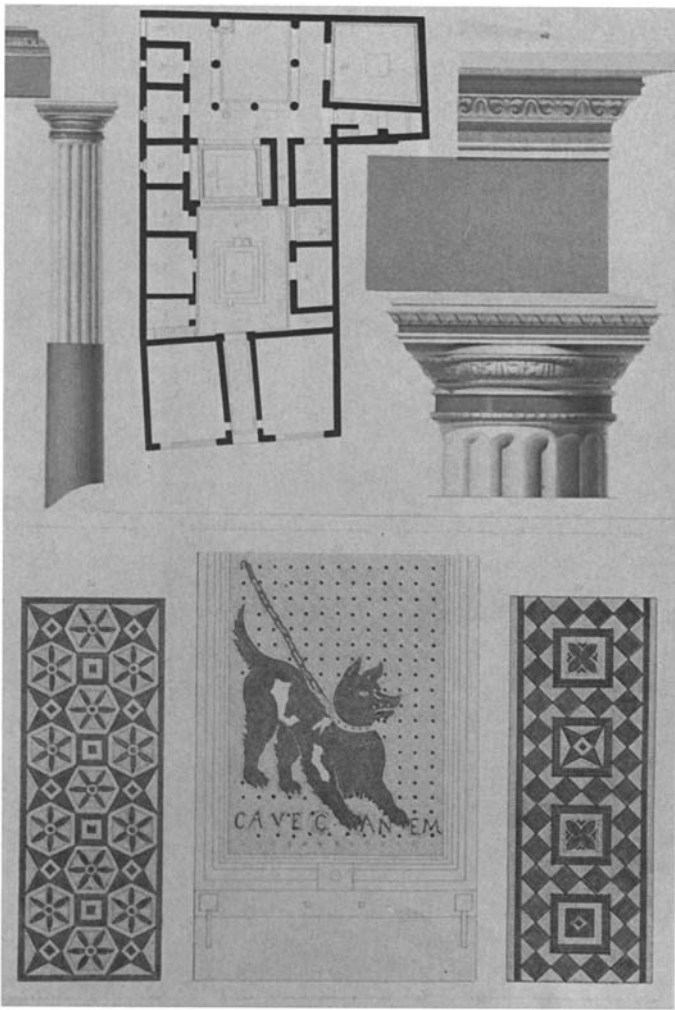
4 Frontispiece from F. Niccolini, *Le case ed i monumenti di Pompei disegnati e descritti*, I, Naples, 1854–96

First, the urge to document and record the remains as they were found informs the volumes of H. Roux Aîné and J. Barré (1839–40), W. Zahn (1829, 1859), and F. Niccolini (1854–96), as well as numerous loose engravings, watercolors, and temperas. The most thorough treatment to date is still that by the Frenchman, D. Raoul-Rochette, whose text of 1828 with its watercolors and drawings, now itself fragmented and divided between Rome and Paris, offers invaluable evidence of the house before its disassembly, weathering, and final rebuilding.[12]

The other desire was a creative, or rather re-creative, urge to make the fragment whole, seen in the engraving by Sir William Gell, whose *Pompeiana* of 1832 became a best-selling handbook for English tourists (Fig. 5). Using a pane of glass, Gell traced an original drawing of the house, outfitted the

interior in period style, and inserted the ancient Pompeians themselves. This reanimation of the house inspired the dwelling of Edward Bulwer-Lytton's protagonist Glaucus in *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1832), which was dedicated to Gell. Carefully described in all its parts, parts given Latin names, Bulwer-Lytton's verbal reconstruction would spawn numerous additional examples in prints, paintings, and films for the next century.[13]

In France too, archaeology and fiction combined to reproduce the house. A photograph by Alfred-Nicolas Normand, architect of Prince Jerome Napoleon, is today an important document of surviving details in 1851; yet his aim was not to record the house but to use it as a model in designing the prince's Pompeian Palace on the rue Montaigne in Paris. There Jerome Napoleon and his friends emulated what they imagined had been a Pompeian life of elegant leisure by dressing in togas and enjoying ancient skits. Gustave Boulanger captured just such a scene in his *Rehearsal of "The Flute Player" in the Atrium of the House of H.I.H. The Prince Napoleon*, 1861 (Fig. 6). The composition is freely based upon the mosaic emblema from the tablinum floor of the House of the Tragic Poet (Fig. 7), and was rendered in an academic, illusionistic style that captured the palace's amalgam of past and present just as the ancient Roman house had appropriated the forms of the more ancient Greek culture.[14]
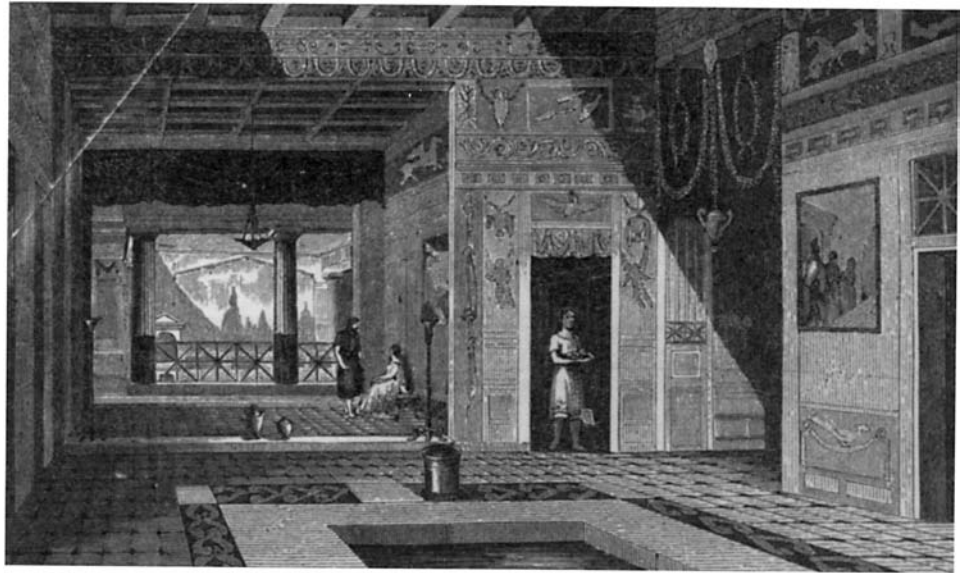
Indeed, it was the very illusionism of the decor in the House of the Tragic Poet that stirred the nineteenth-century memory of another literary source, Petronius's *Satyricon*, written about the time the interior was decorated.[15] The

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[12] H. Roux Aîné and M. L. Barré, *Herculaneum et Pompéi. Recueil général des peintures, bronzes, mosaïques, etc.*, Paris, I, 1840, 94–103; II, 1839, 216–225; III, 1840, 3–5, 30–31, 56–57, 90–91; W. Zahn, *Die schönsten Ornamente und merkwürdigsten Gemälde aus Pompei, Herculaneum und Stabiae*, I, Berlin, 1829, pls. 20, 23, 33, 43; III, 1859, pls. 10, 17, 42, 59; F. Niccolini, *Le case e i monumenti di Pompei disegnati e descritti*, Naples, 1854–96, I, 1–16, pls. 1–6; D. Raoul-Rochette, *Choix des monuments inédits*. I. *Maison du Poète Tragique à Pompéi*, Paris, 1828.

[13] W. Gell, *Pompeiana: The Topography, Edifices and Ornaments of Pompeii, the Result of the Excavations since 1819*, I, London, 1835, 142–178; II, 95–122; the reconstruction of the atrium: pl. XXXVII, 96–99; E. Bulwer-Lytton, *The Last Days of Pompeii*, London, 1832, chap. 3. To this list must be added at least four built models of the house, including one made for Mussolini's Mostra Augustea of 1938, now in the Museo della Civiltà Romana; see Bragantini, 164, and B. Andreae, "Modelle pompejanischer Bauten," *Pompeji: Leben und Kunst in den Vesuvstädten*, exh. cat., Villa Hugel, Essen, 1975, 215, 250. On the European reception of Pompeii, see W. Leppmann, *Pompeii in Fact and Fiction*, London, 1968; E. C. Corti, *The Destruction and Resurrection of Pompeii and Herculaneum*, London, 1951; R. Trevelyan, *The Shadow of Vesuvius: Pompeii AD 79*, London, 1976; R. Brilliant, *Pompeii A.D. 79: The Treasure of Rediscovery*, New York, 1979, and on this house: 107–108, 141–173; *Pompéi 1748–1980*, 11–56; *Pompéi. Travaux et envois des architectes français au XIX siècle*, exh. cat., École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris, 1981; *Pompei e gli architetti francesi dell '800*, Naples, 1981.

[14] *Alfred-Nicolas Normand: Architecte, photographies de 1851/52*, exh. cat., Archives Photographiques de la Direction de l'Architecture, Paris, 1978, 19, no. 54; Prince Napoleon's Palace: T. Gautier, *Le Palais pompéien: Études sur la maison greco-romaine*, Paris, 1861; M.C. Dejean de la Batie, "La Maison pompéienne du Prince Napoléon Avenue Montaigne," *Gazette des beaux-arts*, LXXXVII, 1976, 127–34; *The Second Empire 1852–1870: Art in France under Napoleon III*, exh. cat., Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1978, 63–64; on Boulanger: 59–60.

[15] The paintings of the House of the Tragic Poet have been dated, by style, both to the Neronian and the Vespasianic periods. I follow the Neronian dating based on the close similarity between features of the surrounding decoration, in particular the black frieze of the atrium, and that of the Temple of Isis in Pompeii, whose restoration is securely dated by an inscription to A.D. 62. An execution after A.D. 68 would not substantially alter my interpretation. On the problematic dating of the Fourth Style: V. M. Strocka, "Die römische Wandmalerei von Tiberius bis Nero," *Pictores per provincias (Aventicum* V), 1987, 29–44; R. Thomas, "Zur Chronologie des dritten und vierten Stils," *Kölner Jahrbuch für Vor- und Frühgeschichte*, XXIV, 1991, 153–158; R. Ling, "German Approaches to Pompeii," *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, VI, 1993, 331–340.

5 Reconstruction of the atrium by Sir William Gell, *Pompeiana,* London, 1835, II, pl. 36

fictive house of Trimalchio and that of the Tragic Poet share a number of striking features. The mosaic in the *fauces,* for instance, recalls the scene in which Encolpius is tricked by a painted dog on the vestibule wall with the words "Cave Canem" written beside it (Figs. 3 and 4). Raoul-Rochette related the mosaic dog to the Neronian taste for naïve realism satirized by Petronius. Later, more literal-minded archaeologists were stumped when they could not identify any living counterpart for the image, a dilemma that was finally resolved when Giuseppe Fiorelli found a hollow containing the bones and chain of a dog of the same breed. The reception of the dog illustrates the nineteenth-century tendency to read a found image both *from* a text, Petronius, and *as* a text, in this case a zoological one.[16]

The animated atrium, inspired by the growing contrast between the vacant architecture and knowledge of the vivid dramatic scenes it once contained, became a frequent vehicle for fantasy about Roman habits. Henry Thédenat's history of Pompeian private life (1927) features an engraving by M. Hoffbauer in which the Tragic Poet himself has come to life (Fig. 8). Wearing a tragic mask, he gestures dramatically while reciting to musical accompaniment before a female

audience. The grouping again revives the satyr play recital of the tablinum floor mosaic (Fig. 7), while the dancing figure to the left of the "Tragic Poet" is excerpted from another famous Pompeian mosaic with a scene of New Comedy from the so-called "Villa of Cicero."[17]

As an *exemplum* of the Roman *domus,* the House of the Tragic Poet continues to invite completion and elaboration. On the cover of a French archaeology magazine of 1987, the titles of feature articles about restoration accompany a cropped, glossy reproduction of a nineteenth-century water-color reconstruction of the atrium by Niccolini (Fig. 9), thus adding another layer to a classical prototype which like a template has come to form our mental image of a Roman house. And a souvenir book currently on sale at the entrance to the excavations of Pompeii displays its colorful interior inhabited by figures cribbed from the walls of other famous houses, so that "Menander" from the peristyle of the House of the Menander (I.10.6) sits like the Roman patron awaiting his *clientes* in the tablinum, while the elegantly draped female from the Villa of the Mysteries frieze approaches the impluvium (Fig. 10). In populating the spaces with famous touristic and art-historical icons, modern designers unconsciously mimic the mechanics of an ancient memory system.[18]

The function of the house as a frame for action has begun again to engage scholars seeking to understand Roman life. The early renderings of the House of the Tragic Poet are

[16] Petronius, *Satyricon* 29.1, trans. J.P. Sullivan, 46. On the parallel with Trimalchio's house, see Raoul-Rochette, 3; S. d'Aloe, *Les Ruines de Pompéi,* Naples, 1852, 95–99. On Trimalchio's house as typical of the Neronian period: G. Bagnani, "The House of Trimalchio," *American Journal of Philology,* LXXV, 16–39; P. Veyne, "Cave Canem," *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome. Antiquité,* LXXV, 1963, 59–66. For a good general discussion of Trimalchio and the taste of the Fourth Style in Pompeii, see P. Zanker, "Die Villa als Vorbild des späten pompe-janischen Wohngeschmacks," *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts,* XCIV, 1979, 521–523. On the plaster cast of the dog, see T. Warscher, *Key to the "Topographischer Index fur Pompeji" of Helbig,* IV, Rome, 1935–53, 374a–396. The same impulse to validate persists into the 20th century: A. Maiuri, *La Cena di Trimalchio di Petronio Arbitro: Saggi testo e commento,* Naples, 1945, 154, compares *Satyricon* 29.1 to the mosaic from the *fauces* of the House of Paquius Proclus as well as to skeletons found in the House of the Menander. For an eerie modern commentary on the products of excavation and their simulacra, see Allan McCollum's multiple castings of *The Dog from Pompeii:* R. Kalina, "Lost and Found," *Art in America,* LXXXI, June 1992, 99–101.

[17] H. Thédenat, *Pompéi. Histoire—vie privée,* Paris, 1927, Fig. 63. For the Dioscurides mosaic from the "Villa of Cicero," see M. Bieber and G. Rodenwaldt, "Die Mosaiken des Dioskurides von Samos," *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts,* XXVI, 1911, 1–22.

[18] The imagery of the House of the Tragic Poet continues to enjoy a life independent of its role in scholarly discourse and tourist memorabilia. The name was recently given to one of Steven Holl's "melancholic residences" at Seaside in Florida: J. M. Dixon, "Seaside Ascetic," *Progressive Architecture,* August 1989, 59–115 (my thanks to Steven Brooke for this reference), and also to the epic poem by the Czech poet Vladimir Janovic, who brings to life the figures from the Satyr Play mosaic in the final hours before Vesuvius erupts: V. Janovic, *The House of the Tragic Poet,* trans. E. Osers (1984), Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1988.

6 Gustave Boulanger, *Rehearsal of "The Flute Player" in the Atrium of the House of H.I.H. The Prince Napoleon*, oil on canvas, 1861. Versailles, Musée National du Château, MV 5614
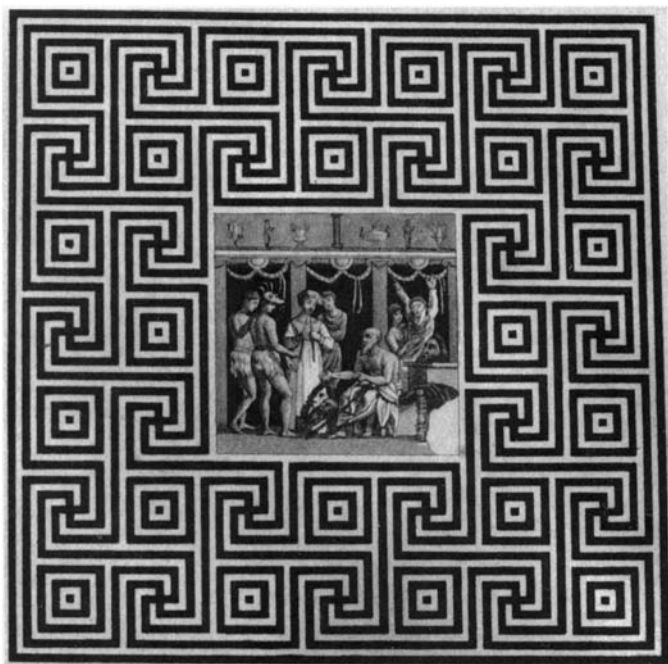
7 Watercolor of original mosaic floor design in tablinum. From D. Raoul-Rochette, *Choix des monuments inédits*. I. *Maison du Poète Tragique à Pompéi*, Paris, 1828, pl. 19

step, shifts back to the east. The play with proportion and optical illusion in the traditional sequence of rooms continued through the actual garden, which was further extended by a trompe-l'oeil mural on the terminating wall depicting blue sky and green trees.

Early tourist views also acknowledge a second axis in the house from the back door through the peristyle to the monumental triclinium (Fig. 11). A lithograph by G. Gigante of the mid-nineteenth century captures the viewpoint of an ancient diner lying in the triclinium, with visitors milling around the peristyle and a voyeur peering through the back gate. Gigante emulated the Roman habit of framing views with doors and columns, even shifting the "Sacrifice of Iphigenia" toward the lararium in place of the original garden painting.[19]

Scholars have recently looked to this dual orientation within the Roman house for clues about social patterns of behavior.[20] Already a century and a half ago, Raoul-Rochette established that the House of the Tragic Poet divides into two parts along separate axes, and that these two zones accommodated different activities (Fig. 12). His sectional views show, above, the long axis from the front door on the left through the grand reception spaces of the atrium and the tablinum to the peristyle at the far right; and below, the secondary axis from the back door through the peristyle to the large

quite suggestive of such actions in their tendency to repopulate certain spaces. For example, the repeated selection of two main viewpoints in the House of the Tragic Poet corroborates new hypotheses about the social structure of the Roman house. The primary view leads from the *fauces* through the atrium, and then the tablinum, to the focal point of the lararium at the back of the peristyle (Figs. 5, 8–10). This "public axis," accessible to the ancient visitor and, when doors were open, visually to the passerby on the street, was extended in typical Roman fashion by an oblique alignment of broken axes; the tablinum, raised a step, lies slightly to the west of the atrium, while the peristyle, raised still another

[19] On the views by G. Gigante, see L. Fino, *Ercolano e Pompei: Vedute neoclassiche e romantiche*, Naples, 1988, 126–157. On the framing of views within the house, see H. Drerup, "Bildraum und Realraum in der römischen Architektur," *Römische Mitteilungen*, LXVI, 1959, 147–174; many of Drerup's ideas are recapitulated with diagrams by L. Bek, *Towards Paradise on Earth: Modern Space Conception in Architecture. A Creation of Renaissance Humanism* (*Analecta Romana Instituti Danici, Supplementum* IX), Odense, 1980; for an exhaustive study with reconstructions, see F. Jung, "Gebaute Bilder," *Antike Kunst*, XXVII, 1984, 71–122.

[20] Wallace-Hadrill, 55–56; *idem*, "The Social Spread of Roman Luxury: Sampling Pompeii and Herculaneum," *Papers of the British School at Rome*, LVIII, 1990, 146–192; J. Clarke, *The Houses of Roman Italy, 100 B.C.–A.D. 250: Ritual, Space, Decoration*, Berkeley, 1991.
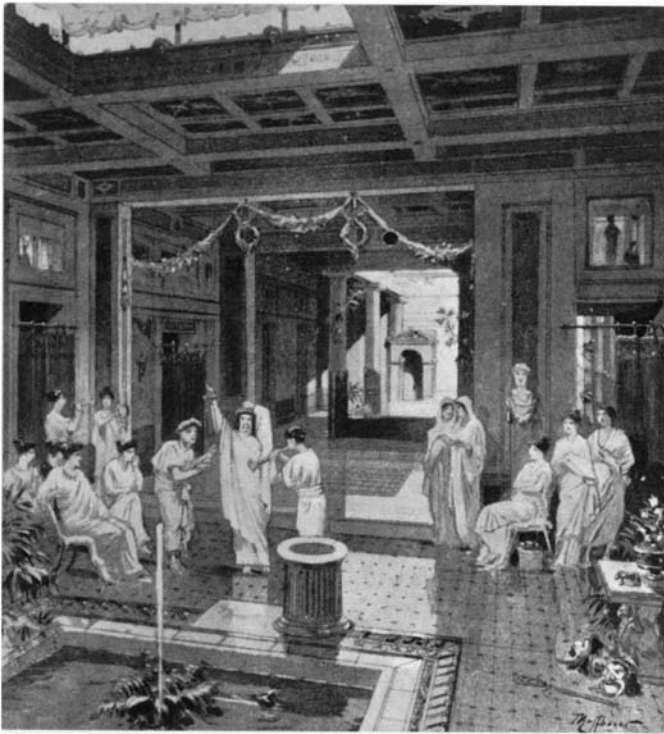
8 Reconstruction of atrium with the "Tragic Poet" reciting, by M. Hoffbauer. From H. Thédenat, *Pompéi. Histoire—vie privée*, Paris, 1927, fig. 63
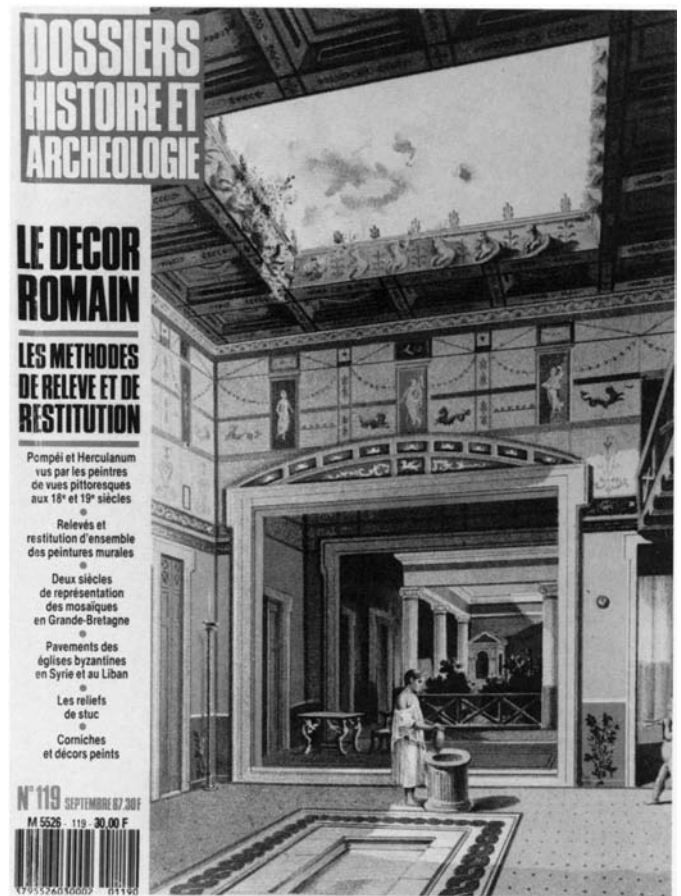
9 Cover of *Dossiers histoire et archéologie* no. 119, September 1987, Paris, with reconstruction of atrium after Niccolini, IV, pl. III

10 Modern reconstruction of atrium peopled with figures taken from paintings located elsewhere in Pompeii. From A. C. Carpiceci, *Pompeii 2000 Years Ago*, Florence, 1977, 29 (souvenir book)

triclinium, an area for more intimate affairs, probably requiring special invitation.

In fact, the architectural and social distinction between the two parts of the house was subtly coded on walls and floors (Fig. 13). The rooms in the front part of the house are linked by a red dado and yellow walls, while the back rooms around the peristyle have black dados and red walls. The important rooms—the atrium, tablinum, and large triclinium—share yellow walls, but in their dados adhere to their respective parts of the house, red in the front, black in the back. The simple color coding in the house worked to both unify and separate spaces, a principle that operated in the placement of narrative panels as well. Thus the three privileged spaces also received the monumental, epic scenes, while small idyllic moments decorated the more intimate rooms (see plan, Fig. 33).

The layout of the House of the Tragic Poet seems to agree with Andrew Wallace-Hadrill's social "axes of differentiation" within the Roman house; on the one hand, the back, "private" suite is set off from the front, more public side, while the "grand" rooms are linked to distinguish them from the "humble" ones. The rapport among rooms, evident in their disposition and decor, is also an indicator of rhythms of movement and perception throughout the house. I focus here on the experience of the grand axis of the house, namely the atrium, the tablinum, and the peristyle, with a few

sidelong glances into the smaller adjoining rooms.[21] This is the axis of the architectural mnemonic.

The Mythological Panels

The House of the Tragic Poet is remembered by many today more for what it is missing than for what remains. A few years after its discovery, six out of over twenty panels were removed from the house and taken to the Naples Museum, where they are now on display. These all belonged to the eastern, better-preserved side of the house. But their selection was based not solely on the state of preservation, for several fine examples were left *in situ*. Rather, they were chosen for their literary associations, primarily with Homer's *Iliad*.[22]

All the panels are large, roughly four feet wide by four feet high, with figures that are three-quarters lifesize. The first panel that would have been seen on the right upon entering the atrium depicts the Olympian couple Zeus and Hera on Mount Ida (Fig. 14). Their arms entwined, Zeus persuades his modest bride to lift her veil and reveal her face, which she turns suggestively to the viewer. This canonical scheme, seen in a metope from Hera's fifth-century B.C. Temple at Selinus (Fig. 15), celebrates that liminal passage in a woman's life from invisibility to exposure, virginity to marriage.[23]

Next on the right, the quintessential Greek hero Achilles sits before his tent and reluctantly releases his concubine, Briseis, whom his friend Patroclus, seen from behind, leads off to the king of the Greeks, Agamemnon (Fig. 16). Holding up her veil to dry a tear, Briseis also turns her glance outward, in another moment with a long visual tradition.[24]

11 Lithograph of tourists in peristyle seen from triclinium 15, by Giacinto Gigante, ca. 1830. From L. Fino, *Ercolano e Pompei, vedute neoclassiche romantiche*, Naples, 1988, 129

Of the following panel in the sequence, only half survives (Fig. 17). Here Helen, unveiled but like Briseis with lowered head, takes the momentous step from her homeland onto the ship that will carry her to Troy; Paris may have been seated on the ship waiting to be joined by the Greek queen, as on a second-century A.D. Roman relief (Fig. 18), thus completing yet another pairing of a seated male and a female in transition.[25]

From the tablinum wall came a scene of Alcestis hearing the news that her husband, Admetus, may be spared death if another dies in his place (Fig. 19). The noble wife, seated in the center, will magnanimously offer herself. For some, the

[21] Wallace–Hadrill, 77–96. The other rooms will be treated in a future study of the whole house.

[22] On the detached panels, which are widely considered to be exemplary of the Fourth Pompeian Style: F. Inghirami, *Galleria Omerica*, I, III, Florence, 1831, 1836; A. Trendelenburg, "Die Gegenstücke in der campanischen Wandmalerei," *Archäologische Zeitung*, XXXIV, 1876, 80–83; G. Rodenwaldt, *Die Komposition der pompejanischen Wandgemälde*, Berlin, 1909, 198–206; Herrmann-Bruckmann, 313–320; M. Gabriel, *Masters of Campanian Painting*, New York, 1952, 35–50; M. L. Thompson, *Programmatic Painting in Pompeii: The Meaningful Combination of Mythological Pictures in Room Decoration*, Ann Arbor, Mich., 1960, 55, 67–69, 158, 168, 173–174, 179, 219, 236, 240; K. Schefold, *La Peinture pompéienne. Essai sur l'évolution de sa signification* (*Collection Latomus*, CVIII), Brussels, 1972, 209–217.

[23] I use the Greek names of gods as they appear in the original texts to avoid confusion about the depicted stories; it is of course possible that a Pompeian viewer learned the stories through Romanized versions and would have identified "Zeus" as "Jupiter," "Hera" as "Juno," and "Aphrodite" as "Venus." On this panel: A. Kossatz-Deissmann, "Hera," *LIMC*, IV, 1988, 659–719. Herrmann-Bruckmann, pl. 11. Notice that the invited eye contact with the viewer is a Roman addition. On Hera as a model for brides and wives, see *Iliad* 14.153–353, trans. R. Fagles, 374–381. A. Klinz, *Hieros Gamos*, Halis Saxonum, 1933, 89–111; P. E. Slater, *The Glory of Hera: Greek Mythology and the Greek Family*, Boston, 1968. Alternative identifications of the pair have been Chronos and Rhea, Zeus and Thetis, Peleus and Thetis.

[24] *Iliad* 1.326–408, trans. Fagles, 88–89. A. Kossatz-Deissmann, "Achilleus," *LIMC*, I, 1981, 37–200; *idem*, "Briseis," *LIMC*, III, 1986, 157–167. Herrmann-Bruckmann, pl. 10; G. Lippold, *Antike Gemäldekopien*, Munich, 1951, 77–81. The visual record begins with a 5th-century B.C. white-ground kylix by the "Briseis Painter" showing Achilles and Briseis on one side and Agamemnon and Briseis on the other: P. Hartwig, *Die griechischen Meisterschalen*, Berlin, 1893, pl. XLI; G. Roden-

waldt, "Zu den Briseisbildern der Casa del Poeta Tragico und der Mailander illustrierten Ilias," *Römische Mitteilungen*, XXXV, 1920, 19–26; R. Bianchi-Bandinelli, *Hellenistic-Byzantine Miniatures of the Iliad*, Olten, 1955, 118; D. Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements*, Princeton, 1947, 46–49; G. Frangini and M. Martinelli, "Una scena della storia di Briseide: Il papiro Monacense 128 e la tradizione iconografica," *Prospettiva*, XXV, 1981, 4–13. G. D. Kemp-Lindemann, *Darstellungen des Achilleus in griechischer und römischer Kunst*, Bern and Frankfurt, 1975.

[25] Herrmann-Bruckmann, pl. 3; L. Kahil, "Helene," *LIMC*, IV, 1988, 498–572, refutes the identification of this figure as Chryseis with a survey of other representations, including a nearly identical panel found in a nearby Pompeian house (V.2.14). K. Schefold and F. Jung, *Die Sagen von den Argonauten, von Theben, und Troia in der klassischen und hellenistischen Kunst*, Munich, 1989, 124, point to the precedents on Etruscan urns and concur that Paris must have been on the ship. In this relief from the Esquiline Hill, Paris extends his arm to help Helen onto the boat, while other representations show him seated behind a servant who helps her on board. R. Hampe, "Alexandros," *LIMC*, I, 1981, 494–529, no. 9, pl. 381.
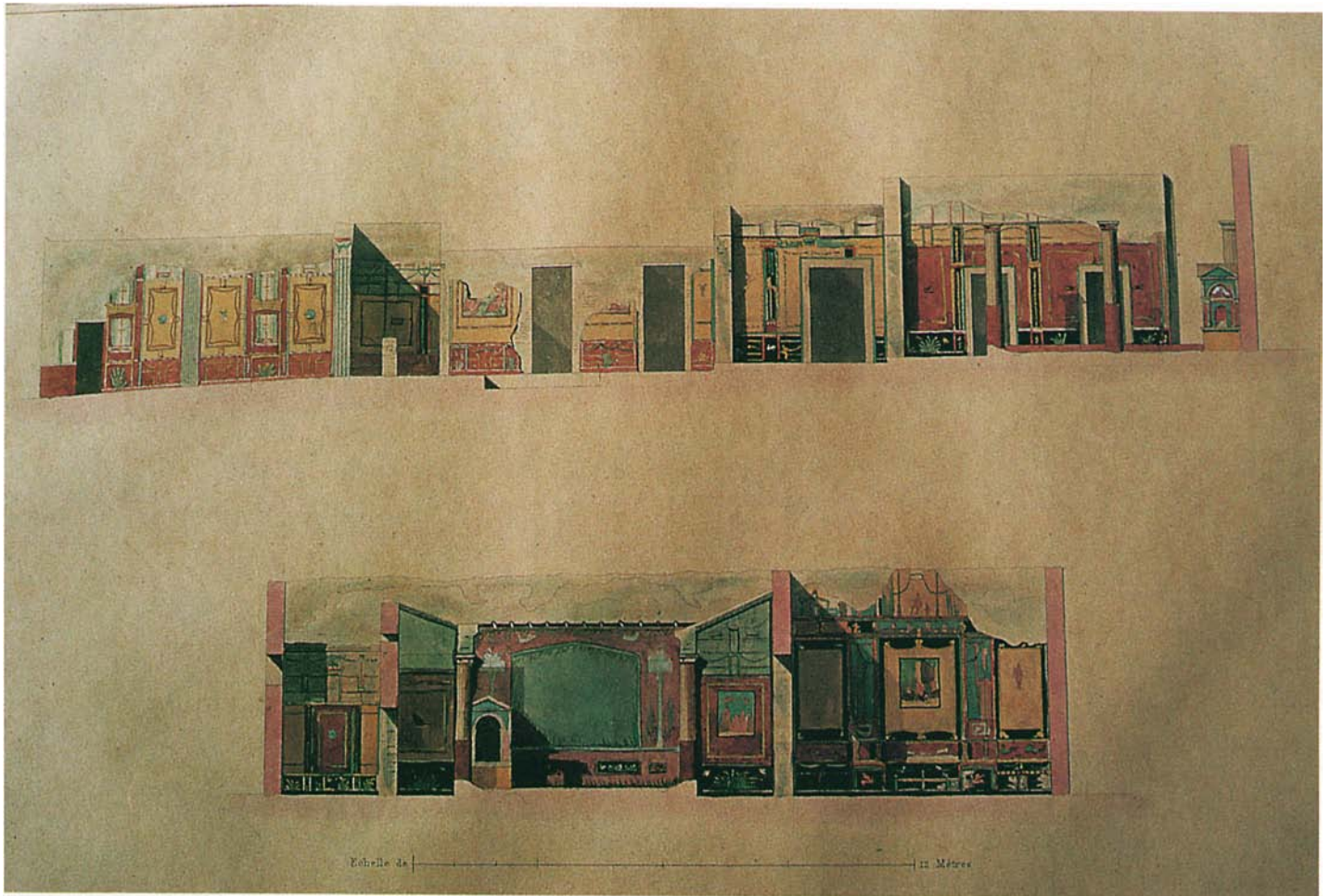
12 Sectional views: above—main (north/south) axis; below—secondary (east/west) axis. From Raoul-Rochette, pl. 2

13 Axonometric plan showing color coding of decorative schemes, by Victoria I
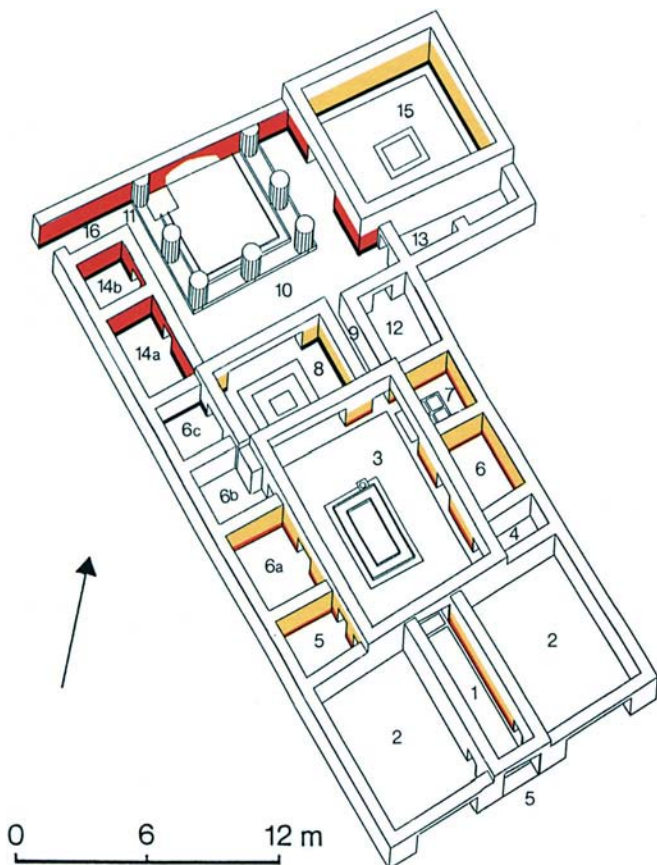
14 Hera and Zeus, 1.53 × 1.30m. Naples, Archaeological Museum 9559

dramatic moment may have recalled a performance of Euripides' *Alcestis,* a popular play in Italy since the fourth century B.C., as South Italian vases attest. For most Romans of the mid-first century A.D., it seems the Greek heroine had become a sign, an *exemplum* of the ideal wife.[26]

Removed from the peristyle was a panel showing another premature death of a woman and, as in the atrium, a decisive moment before the Trojan War (Fig. 32). Iphigenia, in vulnerable nudity, is about to be sacrificed by her father,

[26] M. Schmidt, "Alcestis," *LIMC,* I, 1981, 533–545; *idem,* "Admetus," *LIMC,* I, 1981, 218–221. Herrmann-Bruckmann, 21, pl. 13. Alcestis is portrayed as the wife of Admetus in *Iliad* 2.714, and as a loyal self-sacrificing wife in Euripides' drama, performed in 438 B.C., and Plato, *Symposium* 179, trans. W. Hamilton, London and New York, 1951, 43–44, which may have inspired her Roman image. See Propertius, *Elegies,* 2.6.23, trans. H. E. Butler, London and New York, 1912, 70, and Juvenal, *Satires* 6.652, trans. P. Green, Harmondsworth and New York (1974), repr. 1982, 151. Accius wrote a revised *Alcestis* for Italian audiences in the 2nd century B.C.: R. Beacham, *The Roman Theatre and Its Audience,* Cambridge, Mass., 1991, 123. Schefold (as in n. 25), 177–81, discusses the myth as a symbol of marriage and notes close parallels to this scene in south Italian vase-painting. R. Garner, *From Homer to Tragedy: The Art of Illusion in Greek Poetry,* London, 1990, 64–78, notes Plato's analogy between the deaths of Alcestis and Achilles' companion Patroclus. Deceased women were often portrayed as Alcestis on their tombstones: H. Wrede, *Consecratio in Formam Deorum. Vergöttlichte Privatpersonen in der römischen Kaiserzeit,* Mainz, 1981. It is noteworthy that the other Pompeian examples of this scene were found in nearby houses, one also in a tablinum (VII.12.28), another in the peristyle of the House of the Epigrams (V.1.18).
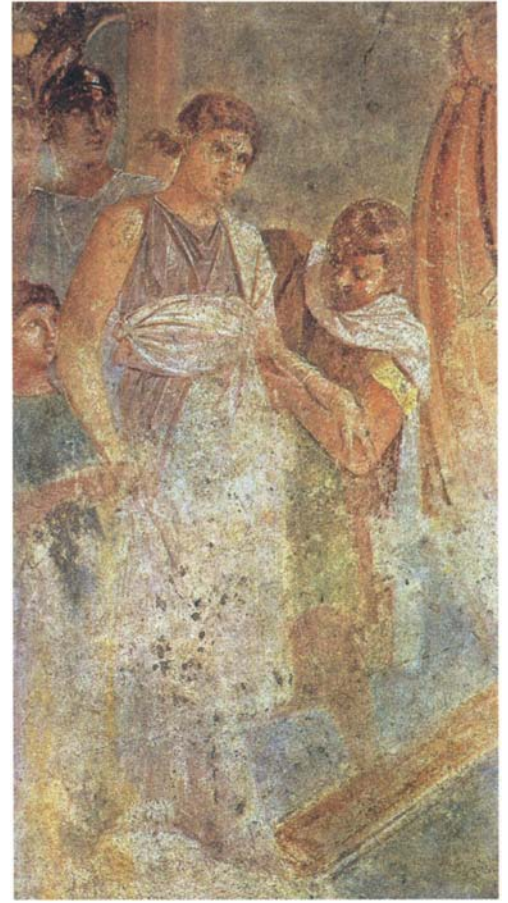

15 Metope from Hera's Temple at Selinus, 5th century B.C., 1.62 × 1.04m. Palermo, Museo Nazionale
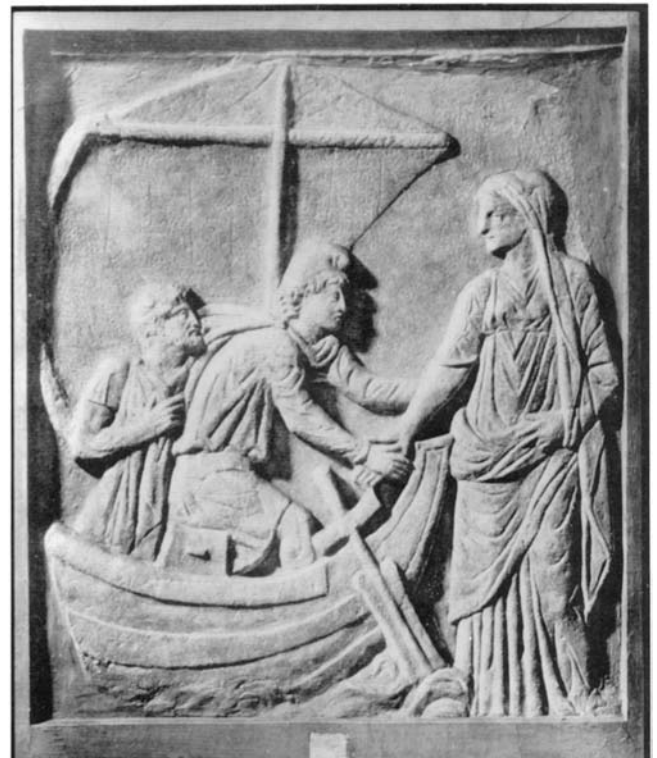
16 Briseis and Achilles, 1.27 × 1.22m. Naples, Archaeological Museum 9105

17 Helen (and Paris?), 1.16 × .58m. Naples, Archaeological Museum 9108

Agamemnon. Calchas the seer holds his right hand to his mouth, signaling divine revelation. Again, the high point had famous classical precedents, in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* and Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis,* as well as in a renowned painting by Timanthes, in which the artist, unable to depict the depth of Agamemnon's grief, covered the king's face with a mantle, just as the muralist has done here.[27]
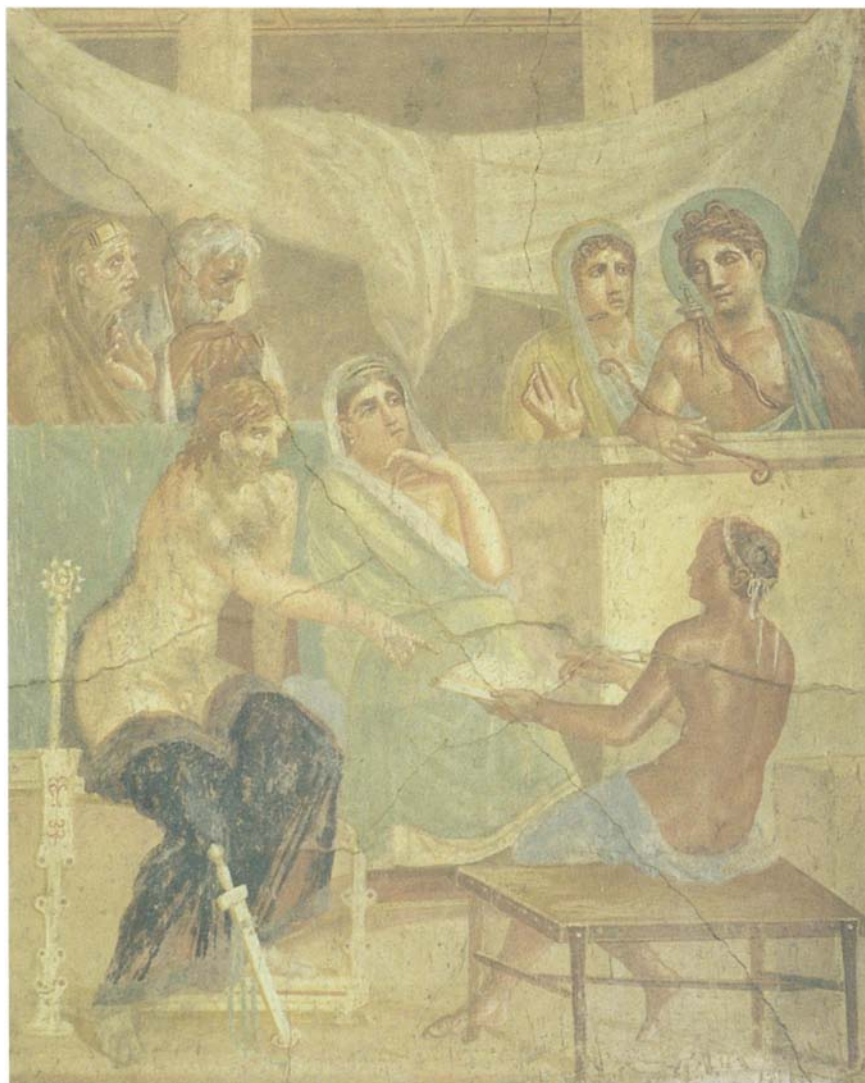
Finally, one more panel added to the house's fame: a mosaic *emblema* from the tablinum floor capturing a rare backstage moment, the preparations for a Greek satyr play (Fig. 20). An actor puts on a Silenus costume while an elderly choragos instructs a flute player and two actors dressed in
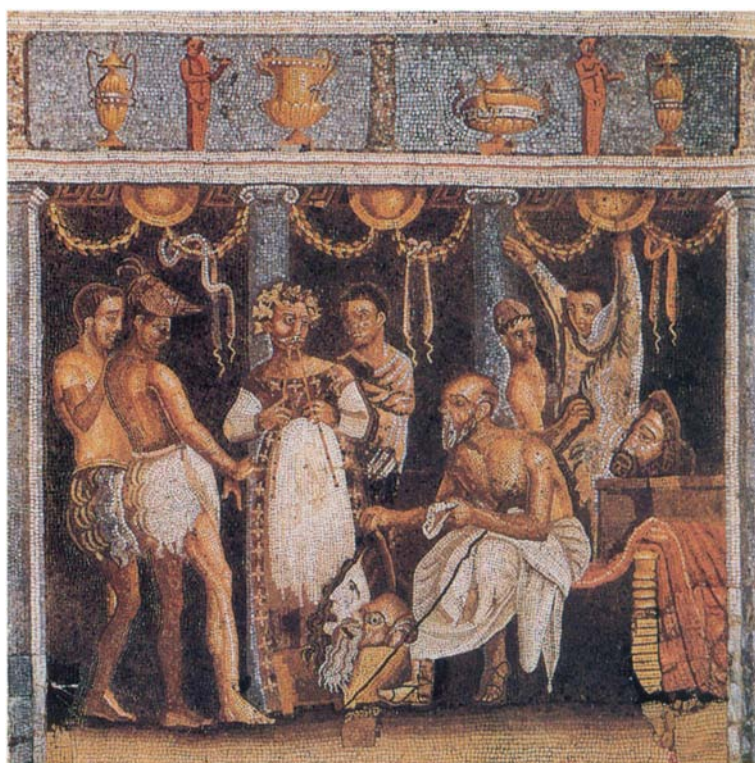
[27] Pliny, *Historia naturalis* 35.36.73–73 (as in n. 4), 315. L. Kahil and P. Linant de Bellefonds, "Iphigeneia," *LIMC,* v, 1990, 706–729. O. Touchefou, "Agamemnon," *LIMC,* i, 1981, 256–277. Herrmann-Bruckmann, pl. 15, 23–24. The iconographic tradition includes three "Homeric bowls" illustrating scenes from Euripides' play: K. Weitzmann, *Illustrations in Roll and Codex. A Study of the Origin and Method of Text Illustration,* Princeton (1947) (rev. 1970), 32, 43, fig. 10; and close parallels on Etruscan urns: Schefold (as in n. 25), 148–53; A. J. Prag, *The Oresteia: Iconographic and Narrative Tradition,* Chicago, 1985, 61–67. The sacrifice was as popular in Latin literature as in art: J. M. Croisille, "Le Sacrifice d'Ifigénie dans l'art romain et la littérature latine," *Latomus,* xxii, 1963, 209–225. Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 1.84–100, trans. R. E. Latham, Harmondworth and New York (1951), repr. 1979, 93, evokes an image very like this panel. See also Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 12.27–34, trans. R. Humphries, Bloomington, Ind. (1955), rev. 1983, 286.

18 Abduction of Helen, Roman relief, A.D. 2nd century. Vatican Museum, Lateran Collection, 9982

19 Alcestis and Admetus, 1.55 × 1.33m. Naples, Archaeological Museum 9027

20 Satyr play mosaic from tablinum, .54 × .55m. Naples, Archaeological Museum 9986

goatskin loincloths. Beside them lie a Silenus mask and two tragic masks.[28]

It was these panels that inspired the names "The Homeric House," "The Iliadic House," and finally "The House of the Tragic Poet," and made the parallel with the fictive house of the *Satyricon* even more compelling, for this also was filled with Homeric tableaux.[29] Today the individual pieces appear in a new order in the Naples Museum. As each has grown in fame, their original structural frame has deteriorated and the remaining panels have fallen prey to the elements, so that their program in the original ensemble has been forgotten. A reunion seems timely. By drawing together the extensive visual record, it has been possible to reinsert, hypothetically, the fragments into their context (Fig. 21). The modern model created by the artist Victoria I combines the archaeological record with her reconstitutive visual inventiveness to clarify the arrangements of narrative scenes and to suggest ways that the ancient spectactor might have encountered them.

In the process of putting the interior back together, the metaphor of the memory house seemed particularly apt. Not only did the original movement through the rooms resemble the ancient practice of a trained memory, but the steps in reconstruction constituted a process of remembering, just as it must have been for the designers of the House of the Tragic Poet as they copied parts of the past and brought them into a whole.

Two sources were crucial for the recontextualization of the paintings. First, Raoul-Rochette's watercolors accurately locate the panels in the house (Figs. 12 and 22). Then, a series of stunning temperas done by Francesco Morelli in the 1820s and preserved in the archives of the Naples Museum depict in detail the decorative system of the atrium walls (Fig. 23).[30] From these one can see how the separate panels had been visually unified by a red dado, a yellow middle section, and a black frieze with intricate scrollwork, so that the walls could be reliably simulated. Morelli's paintings of the fragments from the south and west sides of the atrium are the only legible surviving record of the now-vanished series, whose order is corroborated by the excavation accounts. By comparing these fragments with panels from other sites, most of the missing scenes can be identified. Surprisingly, the emergent ensemble deconstructs the identity of the House of the Tragic Poet as an exclusively "Homeric house" and substitutes a more eclectic program for it.

To one's left upon entering the atrium, Morelli recorded a fragment figuring a nude Aphrodite in an outdoor setting, her garments fluttering around her and a dove at her feet (Figs. 23b, 24). The goddess may have stood across from a seated male lover, either Ares or Anchises, or formed part of a triad flanking a central figure. Since Morelli's recording shows her smaller in scale than Hera and Zeus, she probably appeared in a larger group, perhaps displaying her charms in a Judgment of Paris, for which there survive numerous parallels, including a panel in the Naples Museum (Fig. 25). A Judgment would present another seated male and neatly key in with the other precipitating events of the Trojan War in the room.[31]

Next to this panel and directly across the room from Achilles and Briseis was a dramatic marine scene which Morelli found preserved in its lower half (Figs. 23d, 26, right). There Eros, riding on a dolphin, carries a heavy trident; to his right a triton emerges out of the sea, and to his left are visible a horse's hoof and the remains of a woman seated on a man's lap. A contemporary panel from Stabia is nearly identical (Fig. 26, left): it depicts the abduction of Amphitrite by Poseidon. Disarmed of his trident by Eros, the sea-god charges forward on his sea horse with the virgin nymph on his lap. Amphitrite is nude like Aphrodite, but seen from behind; her white skin poses a stark contrast to the tanned torso of Poseidon. Significantly, she looks out of the picture like the women in the panels across the room. This scene would be anomalous in a Homeric series, for the event figures neither in the *Iliad* nor in the *Odyssey*. Yet thematically, it harmonizes well with the stories around it.[32]

Only a few overlapping feet and a bit of drapery remained of the sixth and last panel in the atrium, but the wide stance, the presence of a sandaled foot, and the red cloth give it away (Figs. 23f, 27, left). The panel depicts the Wrath of Achilles which has been ignited by Agamemnon's removal of his Briseis: this is the true subject of the *Iliad*. The composition appears in other Pompeian examples, including a lost panel from the Temple of Apollo just across the street which allows a hypothetical reconstruction (Fig. 27, right). Achilles, drawing his dagger, is held back by Athena, who advises him to use words rather than deeds against Agamemnon; the king sits, poised for self-defense.[33]

[28] E. Pernice, *Die Hellenistische Kunst in Pompeji*, VI, Berlin, 1938, 98, 171; Herrmann-Bruckmann, 22–23. M. Bieber, *The History of the Greek and Roman Theater*, Princeton (1939), rev. 1961, 20, suggests the seated choragos may be Aeschylus himself.

[29] Petronius, *Satyricon* 29.9, trans. Sullivan, 47.

[30] On F. Morelli: *Pompei 1748–1980*, 44, 188–190.

[31] A. Delivorrias, "Aphrodite," *LIMC*, I, 1981, 2–151. If Aphrodite appeared with her consort Anchises, the panel would have formed a literary pendant to that of Hera and Zeus, as both unions are subjects of Homeric Hymns; to Aphrodite: v.76–200, Hesiod, *The Homeric Hymns and Homerica*, trans. H. G. Evelyn-White, London and New York, 1914, 407–421. For another close visual parallel, but in mirror image, see the Judgment of Paris from the House of Meleager: R. Herbig, *Nugae Pompeianorum: Unbekannte Wandmalereien des dritten pompejanischen Stiles*, II.2, Tubingen, 1965, pl. 215.

[32] S. Kaempf-Dimitriadou, "Amphitrite," *LIMC*, I, 1981, 724–735. The name first appears as a personification of the sea in *Odyssey* 3.91, trans. R. Lattimore, New York (1965), repr. 1975, 53, but is not included in Homer's catalogue of Nereids in *Iliad* 18.39–48. In Hesiod's *Theogony* 930, trans. A. Athanassakis, Baltimore and London, 1983, 36, she is mentioned before Aphrodite as the honorable Olympian wife of Poseidon and mother of Triton. For the Stabia panel: G. Cerulli-Irelli, *Pompejanische Wandmalerei*, Stuttgart, 1990, pl. 174. Other close parallels are a panel found in Pompeii (IX.5.14), and a later Tunisian mosaic; see L. Ennabli, "Les Thermes du Thiase Marin de Sidi Ghrib," *Monuments et mémoires, Fondation Eugène Piot*, LXVIII, 1986, 1–59, pl. VII.

[33] *Iliad* 1.222–259, trans. Fagles, 85–86. For a drawing of the fragment, see Trendelenburg (as in n. 22), 83. Other close parallels in Pompeii include a wall mosaic from the House of Apollo (VI.7.23) and a fragmentary panel from the House of the Dioscuri (VI.9.6–7). The significance of this scene in Roman versions of the Trojan cycle is clear from its inclusion in the *Tabula iliaca* (Capitoline Museum no. 316): A. Sadurska, *Les Tables iliaques*, Warsaw, 1964, 26, pl. 1, and in the *Ilias ambrosiana*: Bianchi-Bandinelli (as in n. 24), 432.
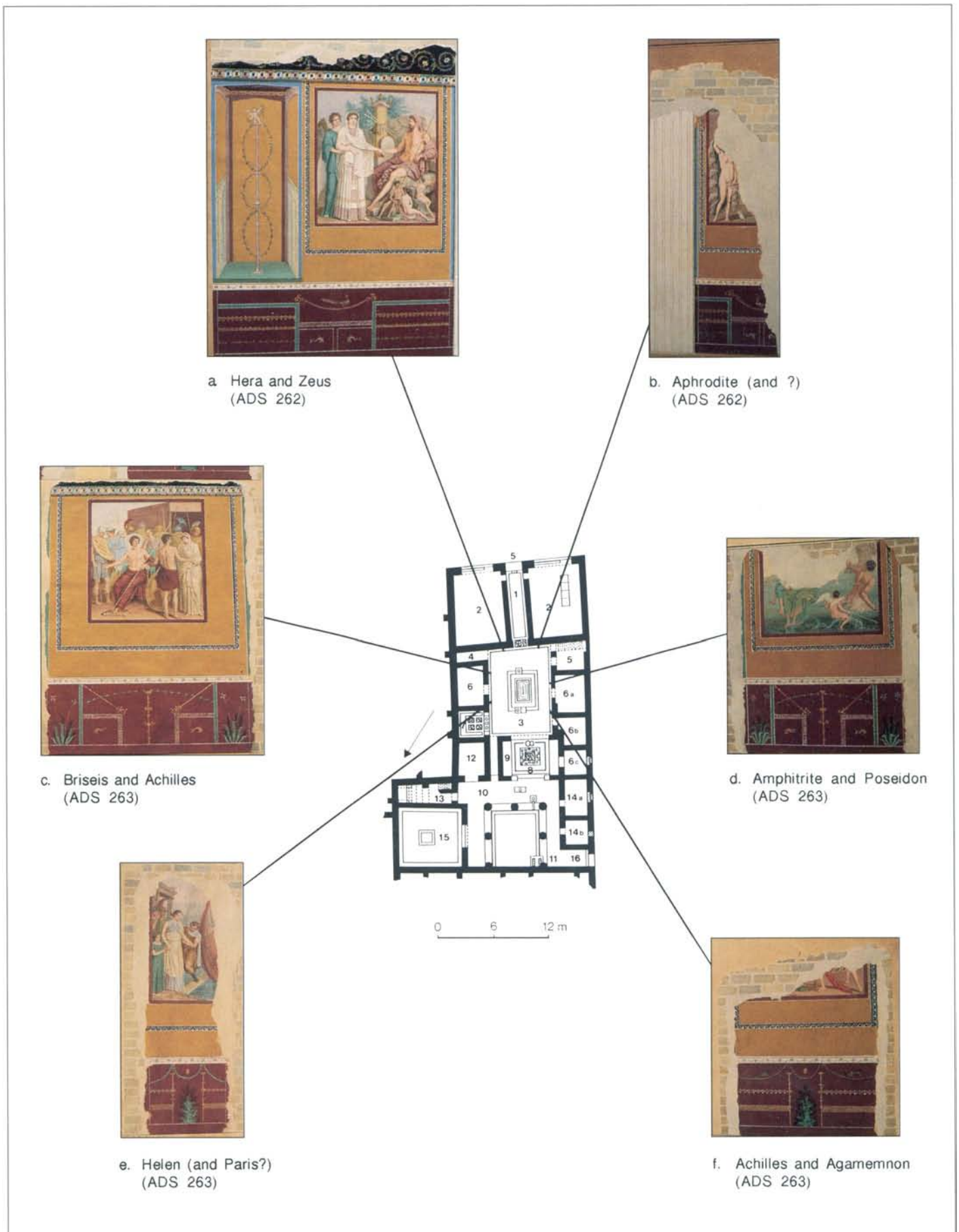
21 Reconstructed three-dimensional model, by Victoria I. View of atrium with painted panels in place (photo: Sam Sweezy)

22 Watercolor view of atrium showing paintings on walls before removal to Naples. From Raoul-Rochette, pl. 4

a   Hera and Zeus
    (ADS 262)

b.   Aphrodite (and ?)
     (ADS 262)

c.   Briseis and Achilles
     (ADS 263)

d.   Amphitrite and Poseidon
     (ADS 263)

e.   Helen (and Paris?)
     (ADS 263)

f.   Achilles and Agamemnon
     (ADS 263)

0   6   12 m

23 F. Morelli temperas of atrium walls, located on plan in original positions, by Victoria I

24 Aphrodite (and ?). From Morelli, ADS 262

25 Judgment of Paris, .60 × .58m. Pompeii V 2.15, triclinium 1. Naples, Archaeological Museum 119691

26 Amphitrite and Poseidon. Left: painting from the Villa di Carmiano, Stabia, Antiquarium 503; right: Morelli tempera, ADS 263

The Atrium Ensemble

The six panels of the atrium are neither chronologically sequential nor are they drawn from a single source. Was there a logic to their display? One must ask if these exquisitely executed scenes would have been chosen haphazardly for such an important space as an atrium or painted there without serious thought. The patron clearly made a substantial investment in a relatively permanent decor. The

27 Achilles and Agamemnon. Left: Morelli tempera, ADS 263; right: drawing of lost panel from Temple of Apollo, Pompeii VII. 7.32. From H. Overbeck, *Die Bildwerke zum thebischen und troischen Heldenkreis*, Stuttgart, 1857, pl. 16.4

walls show the highest level of Roman fresco technique, built up in several layers of expensive pigments with a final coat for polish, as Vitruvius recommends.[34] The high value of the paintings, shown by the investment and the level of skill, is borne out by their visual and thematic coordination.

If we analyze the arrangement on a "purely formal" level, it is immediately evident that the panels were composed in relation to each other and for this space. Color, postures, and costumes linked the scenes (Fig. 28). Throughout the series, dark-skinned, heroic men draped in purple or red sit near pale, upright women clothed in pastels. In the foregrounds, figures turn in space to create deep circular groupings, while active onlookers in the backgrounds inject a dramatic response (a popular device of the Fourth Pompeian Style). Repetitions of gestures such as the interlocking hands among figures, and of details, like the brilliant metal of

objects and armor and the cameo rings (thought by one scholar to be the family seal, which would make the figures "portraits" of the actual Pompeian inhabitants), bound the scenes from within, while the surrounding blocks of yellow, the continuous black vine frieze above, and the intricate designs of the red dado below gave them a cohesive frame.[35]

The obvious compositional connections within Roman ensembles have often led scholars to conclude that any logic for their disposition was purely "formal" or "visual" rather than thematic.[36] This assumption is based upon the relatively low status accorded to the craft of wall-painting by some Roman writers, but even more so upon modern attitudes about interior decoration and supposed distinctions between public and private art. Thus while historians recognize the complexity of imperial monuments, in which meaning often arises from the very dialectic between form and content, in

[34] Vitruvius, *De architectura* 7.3.6–11, trans. Morgan, 206–208.

[35] On the rings: d'Aloe (as in n. 16), 95–99. On spectators: D. Michel, "Bemerkungen über Zuschauerfiguren in sogenannten pompejanischen Tafelbildern," *La regione sotterata dal Vesuvio: Studi e prospettive (Atti del Convegno Internazionale 11–15 Novembre 1979)*, Naples, 1982, 537–598. For a detailed formal analysis of the shared style of these panels, see Gabriel (as in n. 22), 35–49, who identifies a "Tragic Master" by the "intense feeling of drama expressed by his figures," his technique for conveying transparency through white lines on top of solid color, his tonal perspective, and even suggests that he used the same model for the heads and hands of various figures in the atrium panels.

[36] The debate stimulated by Karl Schefold's deep interpretations of mythological "programs" in Roman houses continues. K. Schefold, *Pompejanische Malerei: Sinn und Ideengeschichte*, Basel, 1952; review by A. Rumpf, *Gnomon*, XXVI, 1954, 353–364; M.L. Thompson, "The Monumental and Literary Evidence for Programmatic Painting in Pompeii," *Marsyas*, IX, 1960/61, 36–77; J. P. Darmon, "La Fonction du décor domestique romain: Reflexions sur les aperçus de Karl Schefold," *Peinture murale en Gaule: Actes des séminaires AFPMA 1982–83*, Oxford, 1985, 137–140. R. Ling, *Roman Painting*, Cambridge, 1991, 8, 135–144. Recent studies have argued for erudite programs, some even in modest homes: Brilliant (as in n. 5), chap. 3; T. Wirth, "Zum Bildprogramm in der Casa dei Vettii," *Römische Mitteilungen*, XC, 1983, 449–455; M. Strocka, "Götterliebschaften und Gattenliebe. Ein verkanntes Bildprogramm in Pompeji VI 16, 15," *Rivista di studi pompeiani*, III, 1989, 29–40.
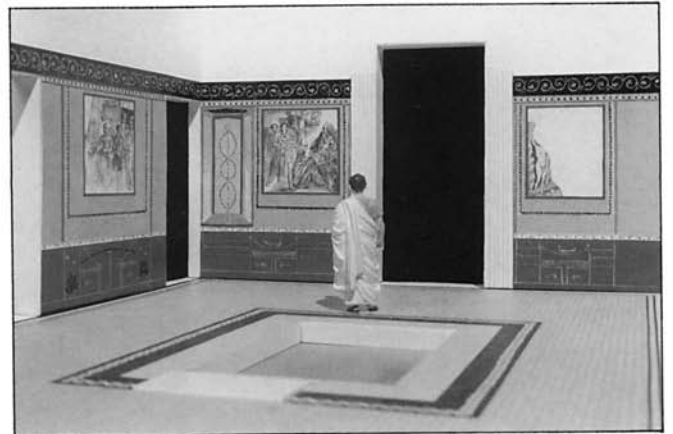
28 Two views of reconstructed model. Above: southeast side of atrium with paintings now at Naples; below: southwest side, with Morelli tempera of Aphrodite, Stabia painting, and composite of Morelli tempera and Temple of Apollo drawing (photo: Sam Sweezy)
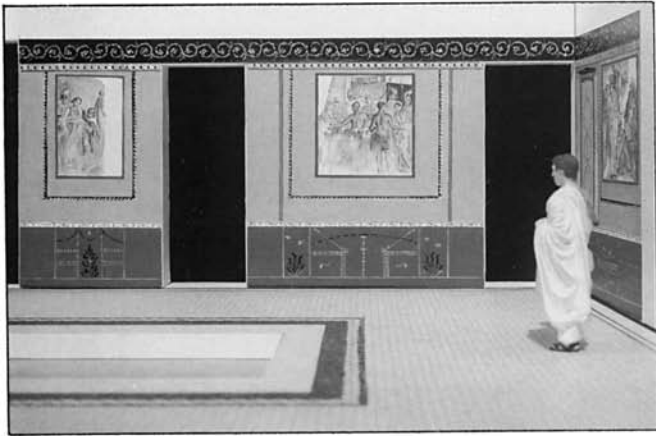
a.

b.

c.

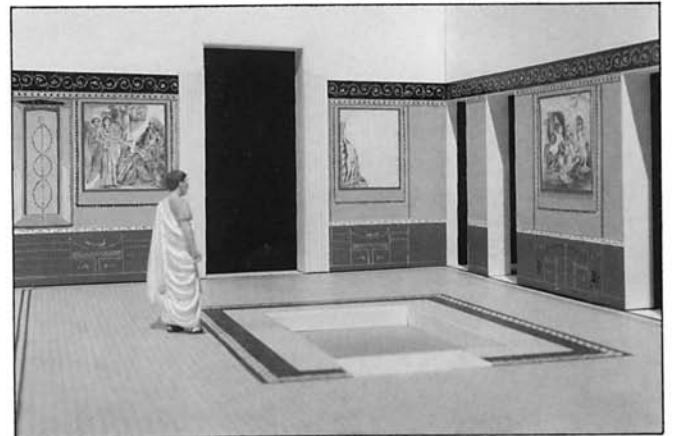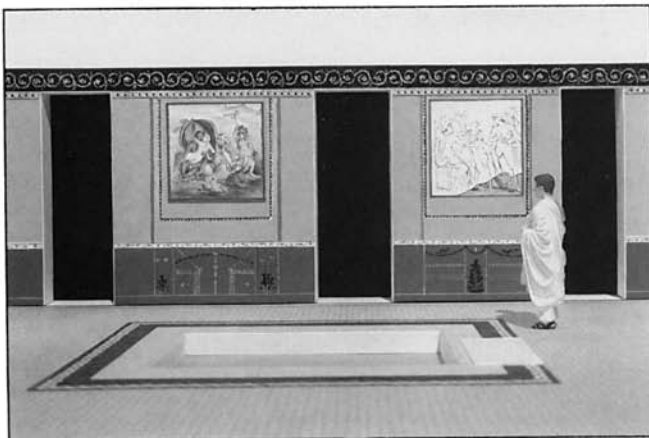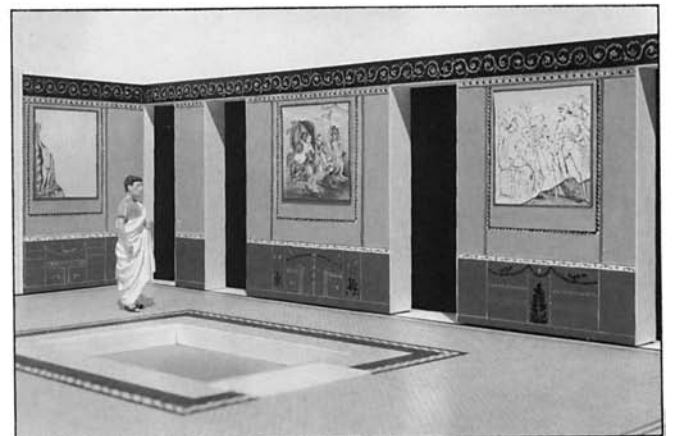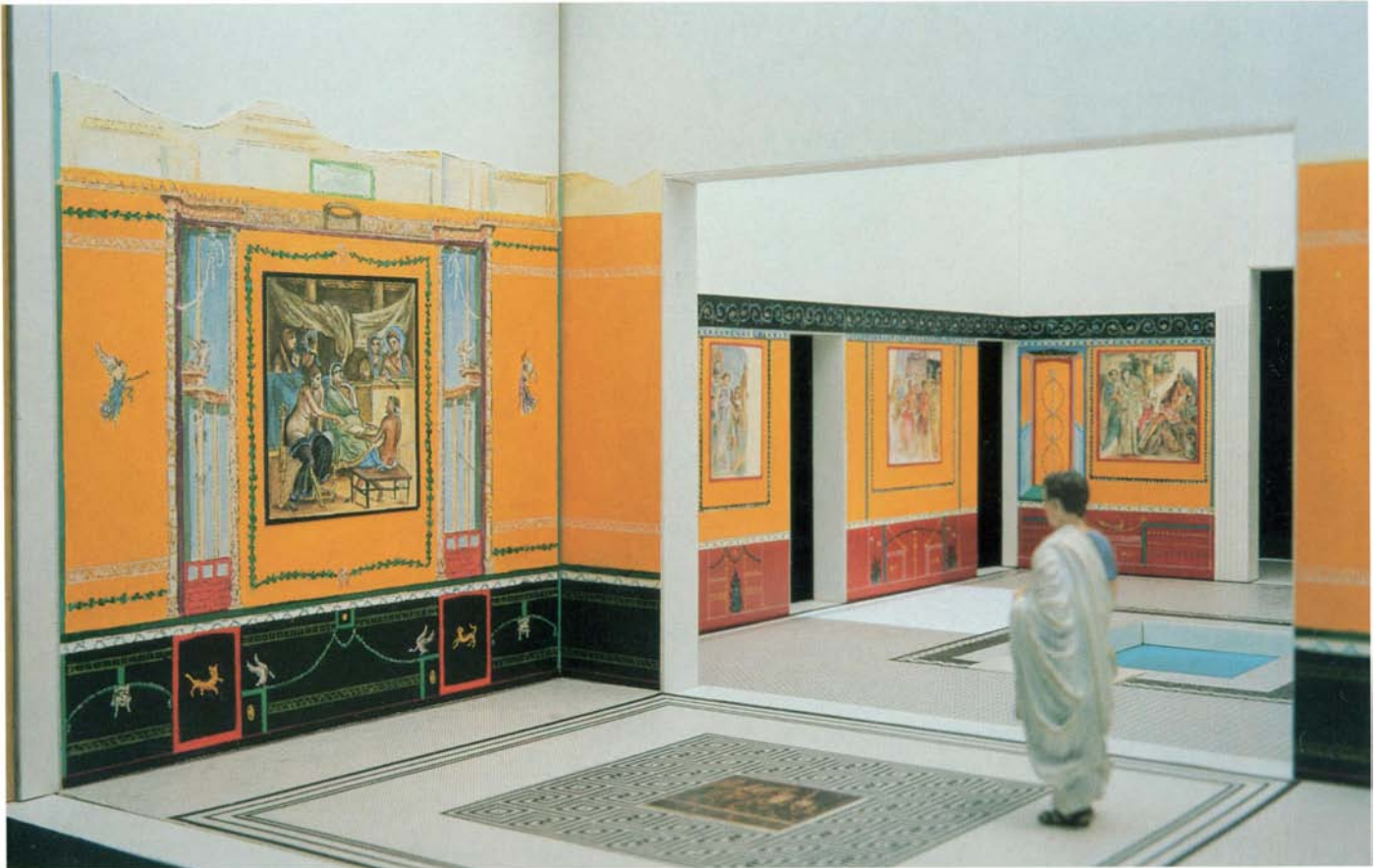d.

e.

f.

29 Possible viewing itinerary around atrium (photo: Sam Sweezy)

30 View from tablinum into atrium (photo: Sam Sweezy)

31 Tablinum as seen today with painting of Alcestis and Admetus removed to Naples; viewed from room 6c

the domestic sphere the Romans' visual literacy and their creative use of pictorial signs and devices for certain cognitive operations have been underestimated.[37] Because in an ensemble such as this one, the meanings are not on the surface, but are implicit and allusive, many would deny their existence. The decor of the House of the Tragic Poet shows, I believe, that it was precisely the semantic flexibility of images in combination that was considered effective in stimulating viewer response.

Remarkable about the formal parallels in the atrium, which Mary Lee Thompson saw as "painters' puns," is how they can vary in expressive content.[38] The same position or gesture takes on new meaning in a certain combination or context, depending upon the identity and circumstance of the signifier. Hera and Briseis, for example, resemble each other in their dress, modest posture, even in their hair and facial features; moving outward from the same corner of the atrium, they could be mistaken for the same woman seen at different moments (Fig. 23, a and c). Yet their status and situations are far from similar: as the divine bride approaches her husband, the slave Briseis, just one more trophy of the Greeks, is about to be removed from the scene and from her master. The next two panels on this wall offered another provocative correspondence. Briseis and Helen, visually linked by their common stances and lowered heads as well as by their similar backgrounds of buildings and helmeted soldiers, are both escorted away by a man grasping an arm; both appear on the outer edge of the picture, Helen on the left and Briseis on the right, so that, seen in place, they seem to turn toward each other and form a kind of closed diptych (Fig. 28, above). On one level, these are all women in transition, joining or leaving the men they love. (Briseis was even deemed a "second Helen" in ancient analogy, as she too was taken from one man and given to another). But for those who know their stories, the formal resemblances invite consideration of the very different situations of the three women—Hera, the goddess bride and model for wives; Briseis, torn prize of war; and Helen, the abducted and adulterous queen. The compositional formula serves as a prod to remember, compare, and reason, just as in the ancient memory system, "punning images are used to make orderly association."[39]

If similarities stimulate the recognition of difference, visual contrasts invite the viewer to weave patterns of connec-

tions. For instance, the panels on each side of the atrium were visually linked to contrast with those on the other side. Entering the atrium, the focal points of the panels on the left were the nude figures of Aphrodite, Amphitrite, and Achilles, while on the right Hera, Briseis, and Helen stood heavily clothed (Fig. 28). Once inside, the viewer could turn around and see the two panels flanking the entrance as an antithetical pair (Fig. 21): the modestly attired Hera and the alluringly posed Aphrodite visualize the popular Roman *topos* that pitted chastity against eroticism. The juxtaposition also recalls Hera's entreaty to Aphrodite to help her seduce Zeus on Mount Ida: "Give me Love, give me Longing now, the powers you use to overwhelm all gods and mortal men!" But any Roman conversant in his *Aeneid* also would recognize in these pendants the two conflicting forces behind their Trojan hero's fate: Juno (Hera) was the bane of Aeneas's pursuits, because she harbored anger at his mother, Venus (Aphrodite), for winning in Paris's judgment.[40] Their rivalry led the goddesses to take opposite sides in the Trojan War.

The series of parallels and oppositions, both formal and thematic, continue in the pairs of facing panels across the room. Amphitrite and Briseis both engage the spectator by looking out of the picture, and the similar figures of Poseidon and Achilles, Triton and Patroclus, in the opposing scenes appear like visual echoes; yet while the nude Amphitrite is swept away in a passionate embrace, the draped Briseis reluctantly leaves her lover (Figs. 16, 26, 28). Likewise in the next pair, Helen and Achilles seem to move in unison in a parallel direction back toward the door, but in content, the queen being lured contrasts vividly with the hero being restrained (Figs. 17, 27, 28).

Such formal correspondences between opposite walls even extend to doublets of pairs facing pairs. The symmetrical closure created by the figures of Briseis and Helen on one side is thus repeated in the two panels directly across, where the inwardly inclined bodies of Poseidon and Achilles strike a similar balance (Fig. 28). This mirroring effect is reinforced by the designs on the dado. The single bush beneath the Helen and the Achilles panels serves to link these opposing scenes and distinguish them from the following pairs. The two bushes beneath the next facing panels of Briseis and of Amphitrite tie them to one another. And under the scenes of Hera and of Aphrodite, the dado design alters again, and an

[37] On the public/private problem, see E. Gazda, "Introduction," *Roman Art in the Private Sphere: New Perspectives on the Architecture and Decor of the Domus, Villa, and Insula*, ed. E. Gazda, Ann Arbor, Mich., 1991, 1–24; Paul Zanker argues for an absorption of political images in Augustan private art in "*Bilderzwang:* Augustan Political Symbolism in the Private Sphere," in *Image and Mystery in the Roman World*, ed. J. Huskinson, M. Beard, and J. Reynolds, Gloucester, 1988, 1–13, and in *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, Ann Arbor, 1988, chaps. 6 and 7. His attribution of meaning to styles like classicism and archaism in both public and private art is questioned by A. Wallace-Hadrill, "Rome's Cultural Revolution," *Journal of Roman Studies*, LXXIX, 1, 1989, 157–164, esp. 160–162.

[38] Thompson (as in n. 22), 21–22. A similar flexibility of memory images is described by Cicero, *De oratore* 2.87.358, trans. Sutton, 471: "The ability to use these will be supplied by practice, which engenders habit,

and by marking off similar words with an inversion and alteration of their cases or a transference from species to genus, and by representing a whole concept by the image of a single word, on the system and method of a consummate painter distinguishing the positions of objects by modifying their shapes."

[39] Carruthers (as in n. 2), 73. On Briseis as a "second Helen," see M. Suzuki, *Metamorphoses of Helen: Authority, Difference, and the Epic*, New York, 1989, 21–29. In *Iliad* 2.354–356, Nestor justifies the capture of women like Briseis as revenge for what happened to Helen. On Cicero's use of analogy in the *De oratore*, see E. Fantham, *Comparative Studies in Republican Latin Imagery*, Toronto, 1972, 140–175.

[40] *Iliad* 14.198–224; 24.25–30, trans. Fagles, 376–377; 589; Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.7, trans. A. Mandelbaum, New York (1971) repr. 1981, 1.

identical peacock stands below each panel as if in mirror image. Subtly, the subordinate designs of the framework interlace with the serial figural compositions.

If the scenes successfully simulate independent panels, a look at the room as a whole reveals unmistakably that they were also composed for this space. Yet this fact need not minimize their meaning. For the recurring patterns function somewhat like a metrical scheme that relates the distinct stories to a familiar refrain.[41] That refrain poses a few large, binary themes: love and war, passion and reason, gods and mortals, all played out in overlapping and interlocking groups (Fig. 28). Three panels feature Olympians in their distinctive and contrasting roles—Zeus and Hera, Aphrodite, Poseidon and Amphitrite, while Athena plays a role in a fourth. The three other panels conjure up the beginnings of the Trojan War: the Flight of Helen caused the war, and the Removal of Briseis incited Achilles' wrath, which led to his fight with Agamemnon and to mounting trouble for the Greeks.

Within this hierarchy of mortals and immortals, men and women relate in a variety of ways. Featured are the archetypal marriage of Zeus and Hera, the master-slave relationship of Achilles and Briseis, the adulterous union of Helen and Paris, and the abduction/wedding of Amphitrite by Poseidon. Indeed, sexual bonds resonate through the disparate scenes, and Aphrodite was operative in many of these relationships.[42] To the two goddesses flanking her, she had presented wedding gifts: to Hera the prominent veil, to Amphitrite a purple cloak and a gold crown; to Paris she had given Helen. The oblique connection between Aphrodite and Helen across the atrium space (Fig. 23 b and e) intersected with others, such as the two marriages of the brother gods Zeus and Poseidon (Fig. 23 a and d) and the two abductions of Amphitrite and of Helen (Fig. 23 d and e).

The visitor to the House of the Tragic Poet could have perceived myriad combinations in walking through this space—pairs, triplets, and diagonal cross-references from wall to wall—depending upon the chosen route. As in the architectural mnemonic, recollection was achieved through the association of the image with the idea. The Roman figure in our model demonstrates how only two or three scenes fell within the arc of vision at one time and how with a rotation or advance in space the connections would change and multiply (Fig. 29). But despite their apparent looseness, the formal and thematic arrangements of panels, and even of whole walls, corresponded to the well-known rhetorical principles

of *similtudo, vicinitas,* and *contrarium,* whereby things that are similar, near, or antithetical, provoke certain trains of thought. These simple and effective principles had been prescribed centuries earlier by Aristotle for memory, and they were prominent in the use of mythical tales by contemporary Latin writers.[43]

Perhaps most suggestive of the way the open-ended ordering of the stories "worked" is the triangular relationship evident among the panels depicting the Return of Briseis, the Abduction of Helen, and the Wrath of Achilles, (Fig. 23 c, e, f). In the *Iliad,* the violent encounter between Achilles and Agamemnon was the direct aftermath of the taking of Briseis, and the two scenes were combined in Aeschylus's Achilles trilogy, the *Nereides.* Although these serial episodes were placed diagonally across the atrium, visual devices such as the purple robes of the two seated leaders and the shields that are placed, like haloes, behind their heads, establish correspondences that underline the cause and effect of Achilles' anger (Figs. 16, 27, right). Compositionally, the Wrath of Achilles panel also mirrored that of Helen directly across (Figs. 17, 27, right), for if Paris indeed sat on the boat to the right of Helen, his position would parallel that of Agamemnon, and the discerning viewer could foresee Achilles' death at the hands of Paris, the Trojan prince, and perhaps even recognize a connection between Paris and Agamemnon: both had taken women from other men (Paris, Helen from Menelaos and Agamemnon, Briseis from Achilles) and Achilles himself makes an analogy between the two thefts. Helen and Achilles, both charismatic figures who stand apart from the rest in the saga of Troy, move back toward the entrance of the atrium, visually closing the series (Fig. 28). Yet Helen's step signifies the desire that will lead her on, while Achilles' passion is held back. Through these mortal agents, the goddesses Aphrodite and Athena pursue their different ends.[44] This triad, then, connects the two major turning points in the Trojan War: the original impetus to fight and the cause of anger between the Greeks and Trojans, the capture of Helen, and the temporary rupture among the Greeks, caused by Achilles' anger at the capture of Briseis.

Memory Theater

Thus reconstituted, the atrium, a traditional Roman space, emerges as a storehouse filled with stories of Greek gods and Bronze Age heroes. Here *memoria* became a means of appropriation, for the Roman architectural frame and the

[41] On Homer's metrical scheme, the formulaic type scenes of oral transmission, and structural correspondences linking scene to scene, see B. Knox, "Introduction," in *The Iliad,* trans. Fagles, 3–22.

[42] Schefold (as in n. 22), 209–217, actually interprets the atrium series as a Venerean program.

[43] Aristotle, *De memoria* 451b.18–20, trans. G. R. T. Ross, Cambridge, 1906, 109–111: in recollecting "we hunt for the next in the series, starting our train of thought from what is now present . . . or from something similar or contrary or continguous to it." On these principles of order and association in visual narrative: Brilliant (as in n. 5), 71; in memory: Yates, 34. On the same principles in domestic sculptural programs, with literary parallels from Ovid and Propertius, see R. Neudecker, *Die Skulpturenausstattung römischer Villen in Italien,* Mainz,

1988, 39–47. For the use of juxtapositions of similar and contrasting subjects in a didactic state frieze: E. D'Ambra, *Private Lives, Imperial Virtues: The Frieze of the Forum Transitorium in Rome,* Princeton, 1991, chap. 2. On the cultivation of Greek mythological *exempla* in Roman society: H. Jucker, *Vom Verhältnis der Römer zur bildenden Kunst der Griechen,* Frankfurt, 1950, chap. 2; G. Williams, *Change and Decline: Roman Literature in the Early Roman Empire,* Berkeley, 1978, chap. 3. On literary taste in Pompeii: M. Gigante, *Civiltà delle forme letterarie nell'antica Pompei,* Naples, 1979.

[44] *Iliad* 22.359–360; 9.337–345, trans. Fagles, 553; 262–263. Knox (as in n. 41), 45–46, links Achilles and Helen as especially powerful, godlike mortals.

32 Sacrifice of Iphigenia, 1.40 × 1.38m, Naples, Archaeological Museum 9112, relocated on wall of peristyle. (Digital reconstruction courtesy Boston Photo Lab.)

frescoes within it conserved not just the memory of those stories, but traces of the styles of lost Greek or Hellenistic encaustic panels that had been created centuries earlier. Visual models, then, were projected into this space, transforming the domestic and ancestral *focus* into an open reception hall, in this case, into a *pinacotheca* for the display of famous works of art.[45]

An atrium is an unusual site for the highly valued mythological panels, which are more often found in intimate dining rooms. Its decor may reflect the Roman private collections that became widespread, and were so hotly criticized by Latin writers, after the great pillaging of Greece in the second century B.C. Typical of the ambiguity of Roman painting, however, one cannot know if the frescoed simulation of the independent panels evoked a domestic collection or an elaborate display in a public portico or temple, if it indeed refers to another venue at all. Such collections, and the panels they contained, do not survive. In any case, the grandiose illusion surely enhanced the quasi-public role of the atrium as an area for family rituals as well as for the reception of business clients, and thus also the status of its owner. As has been amply demonstrated, the extroverted role of the paterfamilias (so brazenly enacted by Trimalchio) effected an elaborate iconography of domestic self-representation. It follows that a domestic pictorial display could be as programmatic or rich in content as one in the forum.[46]

Roman fictional accounts of the reception of such paintings make no clear distinction between those seen in homes and those in public. Everywhere, images, and especially those of Greek pedigree, exerted powerful stimuli to memory and reverie. Petronius reminds us of the presence of old masterpieces, and even of paintings of romantic scenes, in mid-first-century Campania, the very period and setting of the House of the Tragic Poet. Entering a picture gallery in the "Greek town" on the Bay of Naples, Encolpius sees wondrous works by the greatest painters of the Classical period—Zeuxis, Protogenes, and Apelles—and begins to fantasize about the stories of the "painted lovers"; at one point, he even cries out.[47]

Whereas contemporary writers like Petronius often isolate Greek signs within a Roman context, the story of the Trojan War, a legendary moment of confrontation and intersection between the two nations, blurred that distinction. The Romans had long claimed the Trojans as their ancestors, so that scenes of the paradigmatic war, even when represented in Greek texts or images, would be received by the Roman reader in a particularly relevant and immediate way. One thinks of Aeneas in Juno's sanctuary at Carthage, viewing scenes of the Trojan War that featured episodes of Achilles, all "set out in order": "With many tears and sighs he feeds his soul on what is nothing but a picture," and he begins a process of recollection, during which the events of his past life seem to come alive.[48] Indeed, the entire Roman epic dramatizes the hero's moments of remembering and forgetting, and spatial order and the analogy to Homeric precedent play key roles in his retrieval.

Plutarch reports an especially telling anecdote about the power of Homeric stories in paint. Porcia, trying to hide her despair at the impending separation from her husband, Brutus, breaks down upon seeing a painting of the parting of Hector and Andromache in Brundisium: "As Porcia looked at it, the image of her own sorrow which it conjured up made her burst into tears, and she went to see the picture time after time each day, and wept before it. On this occasion Acilius, one of Brutus's friends, quoted the verses from Homer which Andromache speaks to Hector: 'Hector, to me you are all: you have cared for me as a father, mother, and brother and loving husband. . .' (*Iliad* vi.429–430). Brutus smiled at him and said, 'But I shall not give Porcia the answer that Hector gave.'"[49] The passage captures well the intensely personal, internal response of the viewer, Porcia, and also the game of

[45] Vitruvius explicitly states, "Graeci atria non habebant" (6.7.1), and recommends spacious atria and *pinacothecae* only for men of rank with social obligations (6.5.2), trans. Morgan, 185, 182. On atria, see Wallace-Hadrill (as in n. 20), 166–170. The habit of decorating an interior with Trojan stories had a long history in Italy, one notable example being the François Tomb in Vulci. A later literary parallel for the location of panels in the atrium occurs in Apuleius's *Metamorphoses* (6.24.2–3), trans. W. Adlington, rev. S. Gaselee, London, 1915, 291, when the heroine Charite vows to dedicate in her atrium a painted panel depicting her escape with Lucius the ass from the robbers' den; seen there, the triumphant scene stimulates discussion. On Trimalchio's collection: N. Slater, "'Against Interpretation': Petronius and Art Criticism," *Ramus: Critical Studies in Greek and Roman Literature*, XVI, 1987, 165–176. On the Roman house as *pinacotheca*: A. W. van Buren, "Pinacothecae," *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome*, XV, 1938, 70–81; Schefold (as in n. 22), chap. 1, II, 50–52: "La Maison comme pinacothèque." On memory and the museum, see W. Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, London, 1992, 91–104. The role of the Roman home as museum inspired the creation of the J. Paul Getty Museum in Malibu, a re-creation of the Villa dei Papyri outside Herculaneum: N. Neuerburg, *Herculaneum to Malibu: A Companion to the Visit of the J. Paul Getty Museum Building*, Malibu, Calif., 1975.

[46] On the primary role of the paterfamilias in the *domus*, see Wallace-Hadrill, 44–97. On public collections, see R. Chevallier, *L'Artiste, le collectionneur, et le faussaire: Pour une sociologie de l'art romaine*, Paris, 1991, 132–177. For an idea of the complexity of multimedia displays in temples, see B. Kellum, "The City Adorned: Programmatic Display at the Aedes Concordiae Augustae," in *Between Republic and Empire: Interpretations of Augustus and His Principate*, ed. K. Raaflaub and M. Toher, Berkeley, 1986, 276–307.

[47] *Satyricon* 83, trans. Sullivan, 92–93. C. Jones, "Dinner Theater," in *Dining in a Classical Context*, ed. W. Slater, Ann Arbor, 1991, 185, acknowledges the danger of using Petronius's fictional text as a window onto Roman society, but sees value in the exercise. On the mix of "high" forms of literary allusion and "low" modes of popular art in the *Satyricon*, see J. Bodel, "Trimalchio's Underworld," in *The Search for the Ancient Novel*, ed. J. Tatum, Baltimore and London, 1994, 237–259.

[48] *Aeneid* 1.658–700 (as in n. 40), 16–18. On the ongoing "Banquet of Homer" and the Trojan War as a paradigm of social relations: Plato, *Republic*, 10, trans. G. M. A. Grube, Indianapolis, 1974, 239–263; Strabo, *Geographia* 1.2.8, trans. H.L. Jones, Cambridge, Mass. (1917), repr. 1969, 67–71; J. Overbeck, *Die Bildwerke zum thebischen und troischen Heldenkreis*, Stuttgart, 1857; K. Bulas, *Les Illustrations antiques de l'Iliade* (*EVS Supplementa*, III), 1929; F. Bömer, *Rom und Troia: Untersuchungen zur Frühgeschichte Roms*, Baden-Baden, 1951; K. Schefold, "Die Troiasage in Pompeji," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek*, V, 1954, 211–223; E. Gruen, *Culture and National Identity in Republican Rome*, Ithaca, N.Y., 1992, chap. 1. On its special popularity in the Neronian period: J. M. Croisille, *Poésie et art figuré de Néron aux Flaviens. Recherches sur l'iconographie et la correspondance des arts à l'époque impériale* (*Collection Latomus*, CLIIIX), Brussels, 1982; F. Gury, "La Forge du Destin: A propos d'une série de peintures pompéiennes du IV style," *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome. Antiquité*, XCVIII, 1986, 427–489, esp. 485–486.

[49] *Brutus* 23, in *Makers of Rome: Nine Lives by Plutarch*, trans. I. Scott-Kilvert, Middlesex, 1965, 242–243. Ann Kuttner alerted me to this passage.

verbal matching that Acilius performs by reciting the fitting Homeric lines from memory. For these three Romans, the archetypal farewell scene of the Trojan couple, as it was memorialized in Greek epic, becomes a foil for the present situation.

The anecdote also introduces an auditory dimension into the viewing experience. Ancient authors refer to guided tours of collections with detailed explications of paintings, and it is likely that in homes lively debates ensued about the myths depicted on the surrounding walls. The static image could even have been complemented by a moving tableau, as at Trimalchio's banquet where mimes called Homeristae enacted Homeric scenes with spears, shields, and theatrical blood, thereby blurring present with past time, tableaux vivantes with painted panels.[50] Remarkably, Jerome Napoleon's and Hoffbauer's early evocations captured the spirit of such intimate performances in the ancient home (Figs. 6, 8).

For full reception of the painted or enacted stories, knowledge of the mythical paradigm was required, and classical Greece was again the primary filter through which the Bronze Age came alive. Greek tragedians, philosophers, and painters had reinvented the past in forms that are recalled in the Roman exhibit of the House of the Tragic Poet. Bernard Knox's words regarding the meaning of myth in fifth-century B.C. Athens also illuminate its revival in a small, hellenized Roman town in the first century A.D.:

Tragic myth . . . was a people's vision of its own past, with all that such a vision implies for social and moral problems and attitudes in its present. It was a vision of the past shaped by the selective adaptation of the oral tradition to forms symbolic of the permanencies in human nature and the human condition. It was rich in religious significance, for its interweaving of human action and divine purpose explored the relation of man to his gods. And the political, moral, and religious questions it raised were given a passionate intensity and a powerful grip on the emotions by their grounding in the loves and hates of family life.[51]

In the Roman world, tragic myth pervaded the very heart of family life, the domus.

The pictures in the atrium of the House of the Tragic Poet could prompt the recall of epic verses, of classical panels, of performances, and, not least, of the memory "imprint or drawing within us."[52] Eclectic and episodic, the decor consti-

tutes a kind of "memory theater," a collection of pictures with temporal dimension—pictures of the past. Memory, too, collects and reconnects moving fragments from the past, and the ancient writers were explicit about the relation between memory, theater, and painting. It is a relation that is manifest in the shared root of the terms mimus and mimesis, as well as in the imagines agentes, the "active images" that were employed in the memory system to trigger important thoughts or learned texts. Achilles, a general symbol of courage, was used as such a device as early as 400 B.C. The most effective imagines agentes, according to Latin rhetoricians, were actors in crowns and purple cloaks performing a dramatic scene.[53] The vivid similitude of the Tragic Poet panels with their figures dressed in crowns and purple cloaks may resemble such scenes (Figs. 14, 16, 19, 32), as well as actual performances at the local theater, where classical tragedies were a popular offering, or even the skits performed at home like those enjoyed at Trimalchio's banquet. Stories like Helen's and Briseis's, it is assumed, were also frequently presented as pantomimes.[54] The House of the Tragic Poet was a frame and a stage for spectacle, in which each exploration, speech, or performance was new and re-creative, bringing images of the past to life.

Thematic Polyphony within the House

The mode of viewing in the atrium differed from those in other parts of the house. The painting of Alcestis, for instance, would have been seen alone from the small room off the tablinum, or from the tablinum itself (Figs. 19, 30–31). From there, one could contemplate Alcestis's dilemma and connect her fate with those of the women beyond on the atrium wall, all of whom, like Alcestis, ultimately would be returned to their rightful place—Briseis to Achilles, Helen to Menelaos and, visible on the other side of the tablinum in the peristyle, Iphigenia to the land of the living (Fig. 32). Although these scenes might not have been seen with absolute clarity at a distance, their imagery could be recalled from recent passage, and thus they formed an associative web throughout the house.

In a similar way, reclining diners could study the tragedy of Iphigenia from a room opening onto the peristyle (Fig. 32, Fig. 33, room 12), and add her to the chain of women who throughout the house appear as the cause and cost of war: as booty, victims of abduction, and sacrifice, often in the name

[50] Best known of such "tour guides" is of course that in Philostratus's Imagines, trans. A. Fairbanks, Cambridge, Mass., 1931, written over a century later. At the performance, Trimalchio asks, "Do you know what scene they are acting?" and then proceeds to give a complete mishmash of the myths, confusing Helen with Iphigenia and Agamemnon with Paris: Satyricon 59, trans. Sullivan, 71. R.J. Starr, "Trimalchio's Homeristae," Latomus, XLVI, 1987, 199–200; Jones (as in n. 47), 188–190.

[51] B. Knox, Word and Action: Essays on the Ancient Theater, Baltimore, 1979, 23.

[52] Aristotle, De memoria 450b.11–20 (as in n. 43). On Aristotle's memory images, see R. Sorabji, Aristotle on Memory, Providence, R.I., 1972, 1–21.

[53] Cicero apparently based his imagines agentes on Aristotle's definition of tragedy: De oratore 2.87.358, trans. Sutton, 360; Yates, 9–11, 16–18. See also Ad C. Herennium 3.22 (as in n. 1), 221; Rouveret, 314; on Achilles: Rouveret 305–306. The use of the metaphor of memory theater here should not be confused with the Neoplatonic memory theater of the Renaissance, which was fueled by the current revival of the ancient theater but mixed magic and mysticism with Ciceronian rhetoric: Yates, 37–38, chaps. 6 and 7.

[54] Briseis and Helen both feature in Ovid's Heroides, which are thought to have been performed as pantomimes. On a pantomime of Briseis: E. Simon, rev. of A. Carandini, La secchia Doria: Una 'storia di Achille' tardoantica, in Byzantinische Zeitschrift, LX, 1967, 127–129. Roman spectators could also witness Greek myths as bloody masquerades in the amphitheater: K.M. Coleman, "Fatal Charades: Roman Executions Staged as Mythological Enactments," Journal of Roman Studies, LXXX, 1990, 67–73.
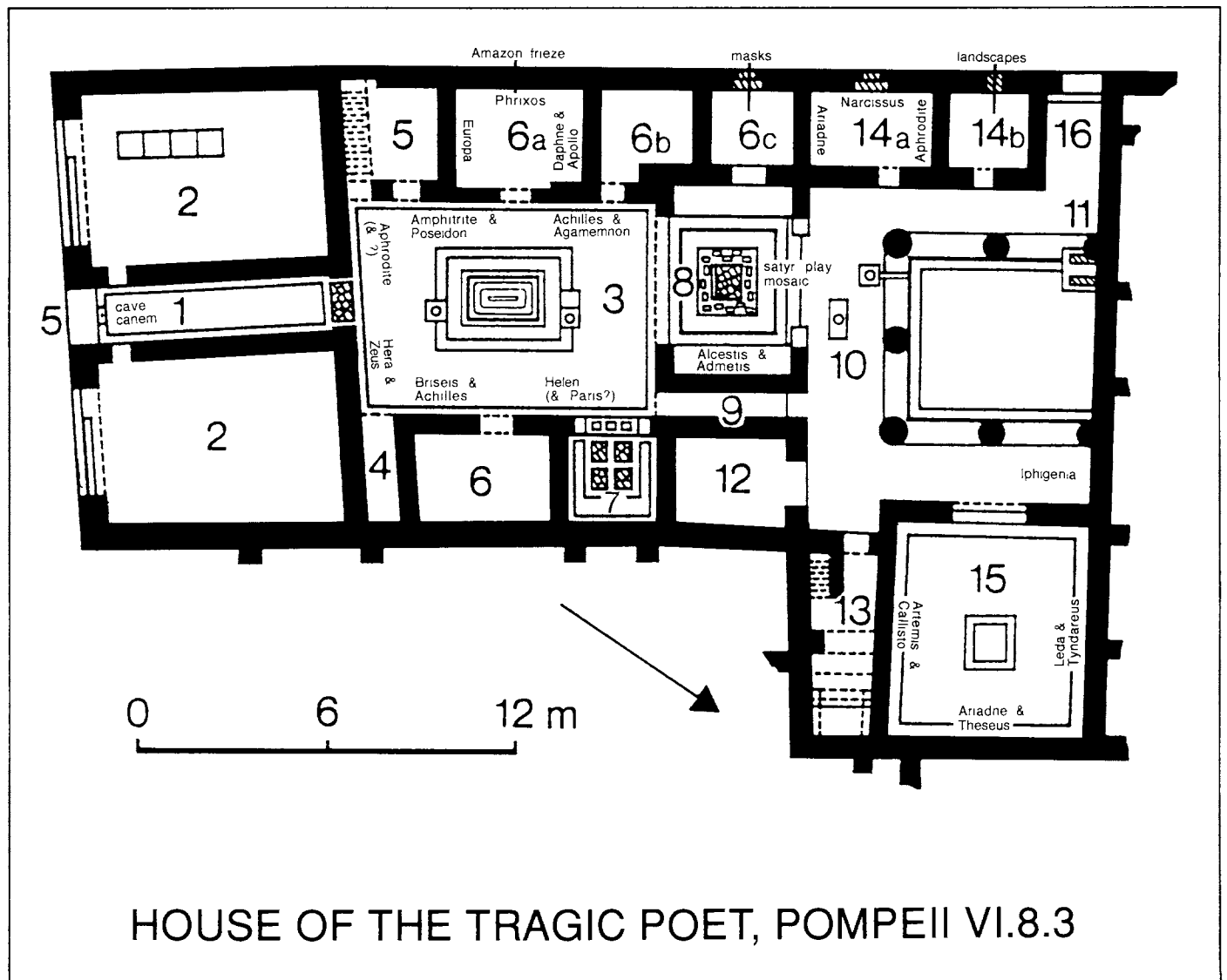
HOUSE OF THE TRAGIC POET, POMPEII VI.8.3

33 Plan showing locations of all figural scenes found in the house

of love or honor.[55] The compositional parallel between the naked figures of Iphigenia in the peristyle and Amphitrite back in the atrium (Fig. 26), both shown in the moment of being carried off, reinforced the persistent contrast within the house of exposed and confined women. There were other connections. Iphigenia, like Helen, was Argive; the sacrifice of her body to Artemis secured Greek success in the Trojan War; ostensibly, she died in order to save another woman, Helen. But her death was also a "maker of quarrels," for it brought down her father, Agamemnon, the king of the Greeks.

That same king could be seen in the atrium quarreling over the fate of still another woman, Briseis. The analogy

between Iphigenia and Briseis is made by Achilles himself when, after reconciling with Agamemnon, he wishes Briseis had died like Iphigenia rather than cause a fight between men: "Agamemnon—was it better for both of us, after all, for you and me to rage at each other, raked by anguish, consumed by heartsick strife, all for a young girl? If only Artemis had cut her down at the ships—with one quick shaft—that day I . . . chose her as my prize." Agamemnon blames their quarrel on Zeus, Fate, and Fury, and especially on Ruin, the eldest daughter of Zeus; even Zeus, he says, was blinded by Ruin in the form of Hera's guile, "feminine as she is." Achilles agrees, addressing the god directly: "Father Zeus, great are the blinding frenzies you deal out to men! If not, I swear, Atrides could never have roused the fury in me, the rage that would not die, or wrenched the girl away against my will."[56] In the epic context, the traffic in women

[55] The digitally reconstructed photo in Fig. 32 originated in two separate 35mm slides, one of the site and the other of the panel in Naples. Both slides were scanned and then imported into Boston Photo Lab's Kodak Premier Image Enhancement System. From here the two images were combined by digital artist John McKnight and then output on LVT high-resolution film recorder as a 4 × 5mm transparency.

[56] *Iliad* 19.56–60; 86–94, trans. Fagles, 490–491, 497.

can rupture or invigorate male bonds. Tension between the sexes, as that between gods and mortals, drives the plot, and it is a pervasive theme in this house as well.

Ancient poets regarded Iphigenia's sacrifice as an allegory of the bride for, deluded by her father about her imminent fate, she believed she was actually awaiting her groom, Achilles. Alcestis's fate too had been spoken on her wedding day; like Alcestis, Iphigenia would again see the light, and in this depicted moment, Artemis appears as a deer *ex machina* in the sky to rescue the young sacrificant. The theme of marriage, it should be remembered, was established at the entrance of the atrium with the panels of Zeus and Hera, the "wedding" of Poseidon and Amphitrite, and Helen's separation from her husband, Menelaos. The Iphigenia tale, like that of other women in the house, reveals the underside of civilized mores.[57]

The vivid story of Iphigenia epitomizes the complex lineage of the panels in the House of the Tragic Poet. Already by the fifth century B.C., the story existed in several versions and appeared in a range of media. Using a rhetorical *topos*, Aeschylus described the event as if he were observing a painting, but it may have been the *staging* by Euripides rather than a text or a work of art that inspired Timanthes' famous painting in the late fifth century B.C. Iphigenia's fate figured in the memory theater too: one exercise for memorizing a verse, we are told, was to visualize actors playing their roles in a performance of *Iphigenia*. And at Trimalchio's banquet, as *Homeristae* perform, the host reads from a Latin text and then narrates a plot summary in which Agamemnon marries Iphigenia to Achilles.[58]

The Iphigenia myth, therefore, is a reminder of how multiple interpretations were possible, and even expected, in the first century A.D. It would be rash to pretend to pinpoint a precise textual or visual source for the depicted scene. Greek myths had deep roots. Many followed a complex development over centuries, and the selective preservation of earlier mythological imagery offered the Campanian muralist a rich repertory of visual schemata. As a result, the hundreds of surviving Roman paintings with Greek stories show nearly infinite variations on stock compositions. How should one evaluate such formulas? Repetition of the same composition could imply an empty visual cliché, but that cliché could also be seen as an archetype of a collective memory, like a Homeric formula. Whether painters worked from memory or from pattern books, through which the

submerged model operated mechanically, the many versions of a story belong to a *koine*, a visual language with its own set of categories and frames of reference. The language was neither exclusively Greek nor Roman. For the viewer of painted walls in first-century A.D. Italian houses, the Greek stories may have become fully Roman.

If the pictorial repertory in the House of the Tragic Poet effected a thematic and formal harmony throughout the rooms, there are a surprising variety of ways in which the stories were presented. The quotidian house, like the memorial house, accommodated several "sub-frames of reference." Though the atrium paintings required a mobile pedestrian to survey the display in any detail, the single panels of Alcestis in the tablinum and of Iphigenia in the peristyle could be contemplated at length by a standing or a seated viewer. A third viewing mode, closely fitting the traditional notion of a Pompeian pictorial program, presented panels on three walls of a room to someone standing at the entrance or reclining on a couch within. Thus in the grand triclinium, one of the most lavishly decorated of its kind in Pompeii (Fig. 33, room 15), family and guests may have spent long hours reveling, enjoying entertainments, and debating philosophical themes prompted by the myths depicted on the surrounding walls.[59] And in the side rooms (Fig. 33, rooms 6a, 14a), an individual could have meditated on the relationships among the small romantic scenes or discussed them with a companion.

Yet even these chambered triads were not exclusive to their space, for the stories connected visually and thematically with others in adjacent rooms. Standing in the atrium before the Abduction of Amphitrite, one could have looked through an open door to the back wall of a small room (Fig. 33, room 6a), and glimpsed a panel depicting Phrixos saving Helle (Fig. 34 d, e). There, like an echo of the Amphitrite panel, appeared the same diagonal lunge of an animal's hooves emerging against a blue of sea and sky (Fig. 34 d, e). On the left wall of the same small room appeared a mirror reversal of this composition: at an oblique upward angle, now from right to left, a woman seated on the back of an animal charges over the sea (Fig. 34 f, g); it is Europa on the Bull, still another abduction, like that of Amphitrite. Finally, shifting over to the panel of the Wrath of Achilles on the right of the door, the hero's violent motion, like Poseidon's on the left, seems to continue in the painted frieze of the Battle of the Greeks and the Amazons on the upper wall of that same

[57] R. Seaford, "The Tragic Wedding," *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, CVII, 1987, 106–130. The cataloguing of types of women selected from Greek myths was especially popular in Latin poetry, see G. McLeod, *Virtue and Venom: Catalogs of Women from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, Ann Arbor, Mich., 1991.

[58] Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 247–251, trans. A. W. Verrall, London, 1904, 31. On the rehearsal of an *Iphigenia: Ad C. Herennium* 3.21.34 (as in n. 1), 217; Yates, 13–14.

[59] On the triclinium, which will be explored in the larger study of the house: G. Rizzo, *Le pitture della casa del Poeta Tragico (Monumenti della pittura antica*. III, *Pompei, specimen*), Rome, 1935; Herrmann-Bruckmann,

25–27, figs. 5 and 6; G. Rizzo, *La pittura ellenistico-romana*, Milan, 1929, pls. XXXIX, CXXI–CXXII. The moments depicted on the side walls of the triclinium concern the after-effects of sexual union: on the left wall Leda and Tyndareus with the eggs (Sparta), on the right Zeus as Artemis with Callisto (Arcadia); in the center Theseus abandons Ariadne (Naxos). The compositions and subjects relate by analogy to those in the rest of the house, as, e.g., the abandonment of Ariadne with that of Briseis by Achilles. On the identification of Callisto: L. Curtius, "Zu Bildern in der Casa del Poeta Tragico," *Festschrift P. Clemen*, Düsseldorf, 1926, 94–120. The Leda wall was the most often reproduced part of the house in the 19th century, see Niccolini (as in n. 12), I, 6; *Pompei 1748–1980*, 62, fig. 8.
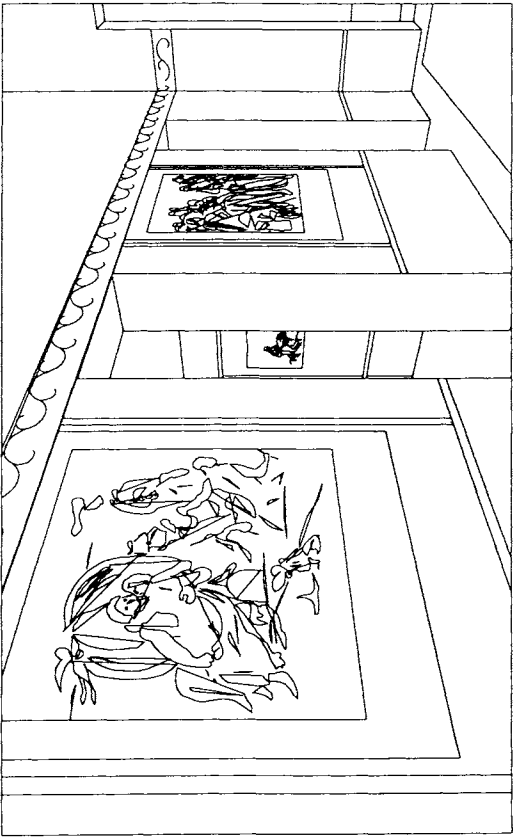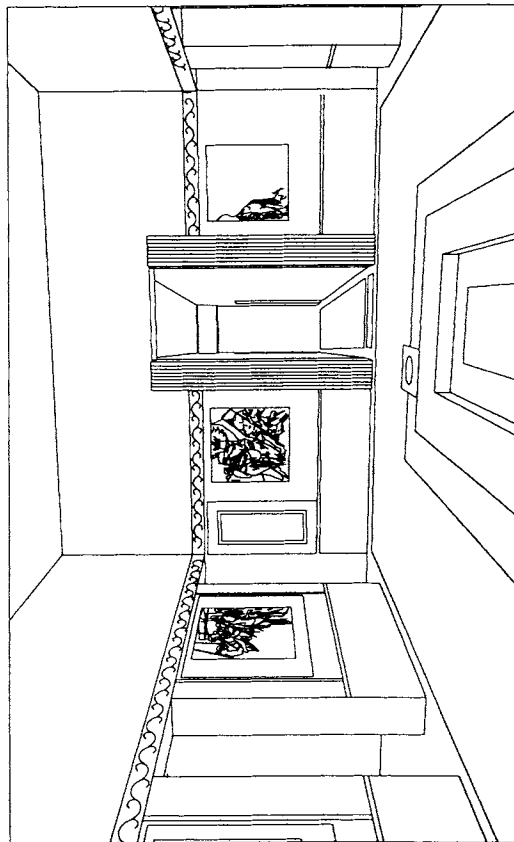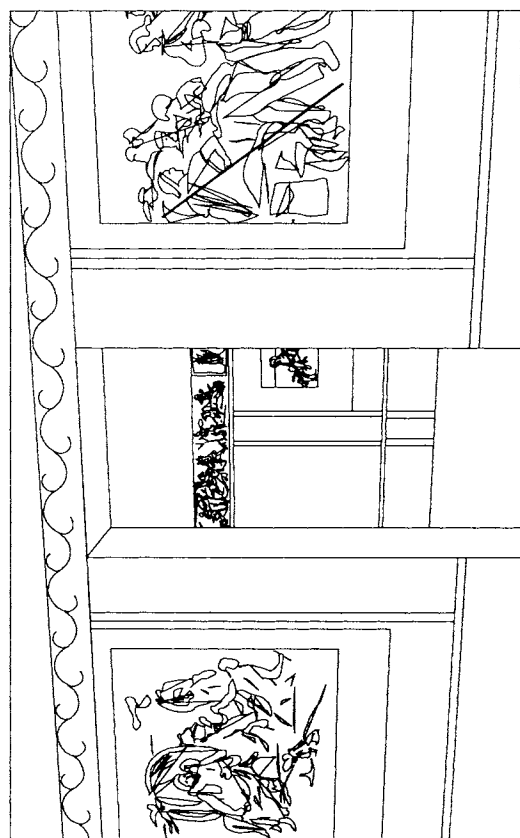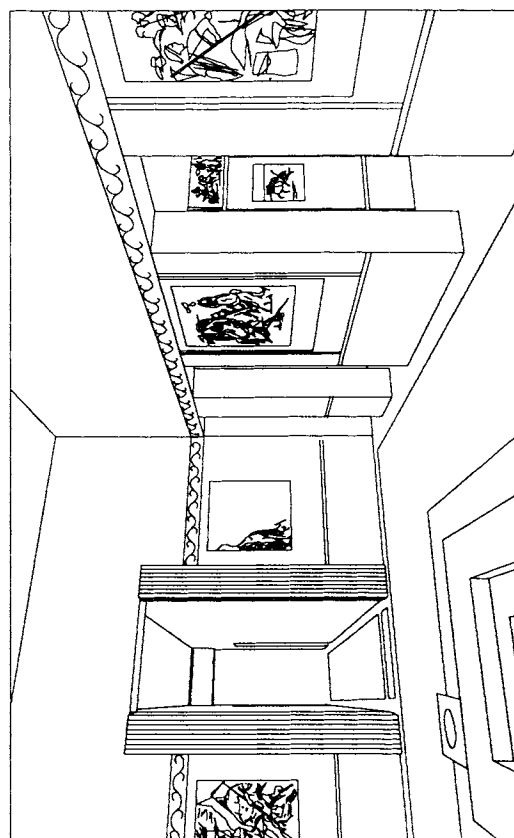
a.

b.

c.

d.

f.

e.

h.
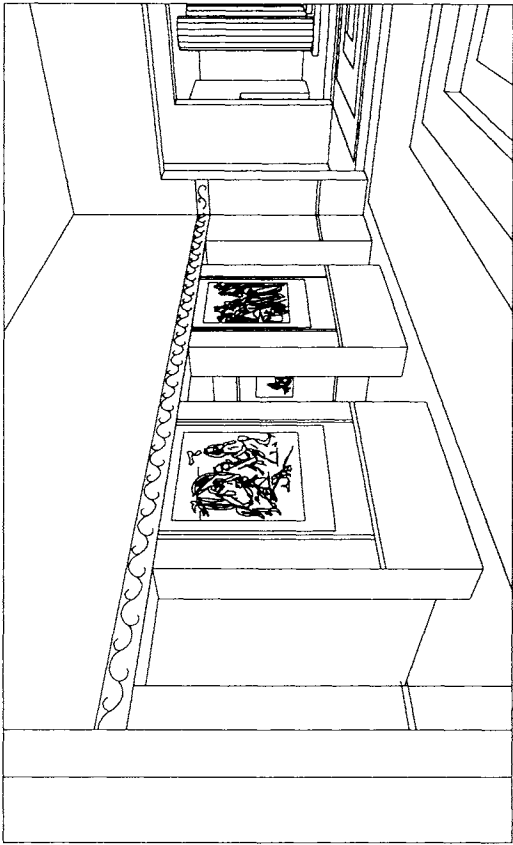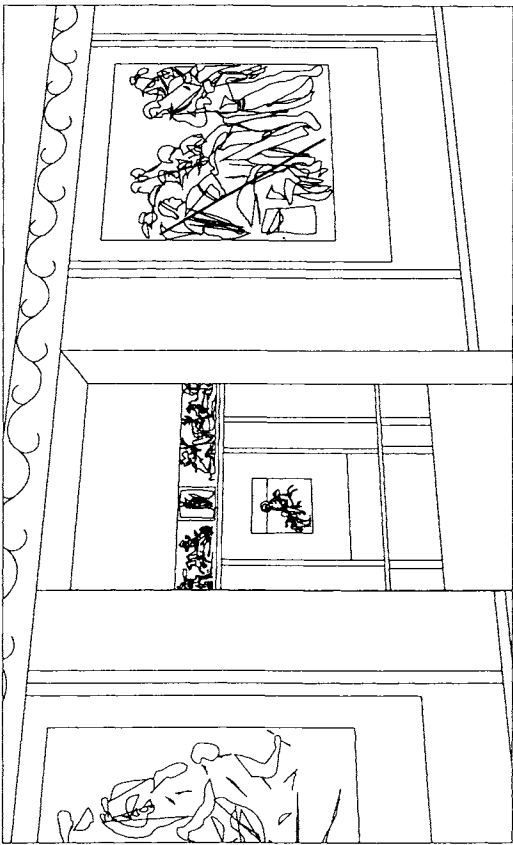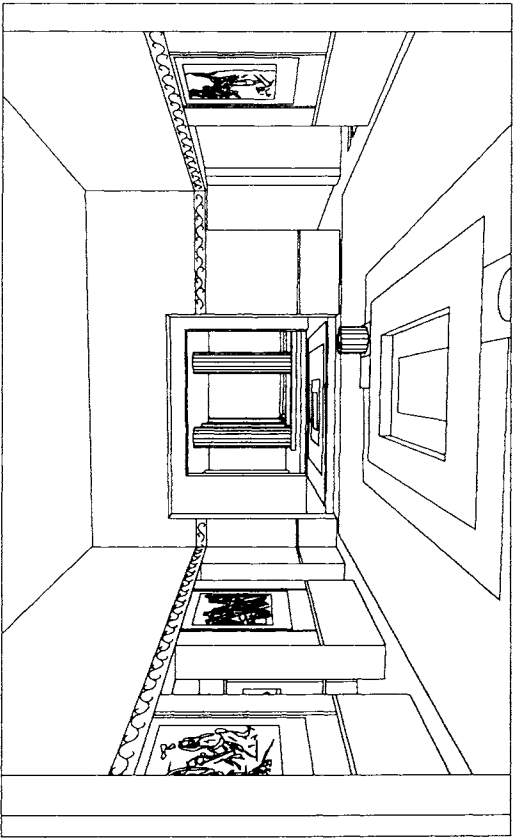
g.

34 Computer-generated sequence of views around atrium and into room 6a, by David Conant and Bill McCarthy

room (Fig. 34 d, e, f); it was a battle in which Achilles himself had participated.[60]

The paintings in the House of the Tragic Poet were set up for different viewing experiences depending upon their location, but they expanded narrative space into peripheral areas like the spreading chorus of memory ideas described by Cicero and Quintilian. Instead of confining the more valued paintings to private dining rooms, the designer of this house encouraged the movement of the spectator as if the house were an actual, material counterpart to the familiar mansion of memory. Recall the method of the architectural mnemonic: one begins by putting the things to be remembered in the vestibule, then in the atrium, next into side rooms, and finally onto objects. The spectator chooses a certain route and orders the viewing itinerary, but is ultimately constrained by the built shell and by the placement of paintings within it. In reality, each exploration of a house would differ, for exterior conditions such as light or rain introduced an erratic temporal dimension that could alternately vitalize or dull the appearance of the paint. And one must also imagine that the spectator was accompanied by a knowledgeable companion who provided a "second-hand visual literacy."[61]

Whatever the route, the images must have reactivated knowledge of the ancient stories. For the educated viewer, their arrangements could prompt open-ended analogies and contrasts, calling up epic, drama, art, history, and even—with the Stoics—contemporary moral questions. The narrative program of the house thus transcends the necessarily linear reading of literary texts, a process that at the time was further restricted by the conventions of the papyrus roll. A spectator could "rewrite" the story in a variety of ways simply by starting the viewing in different places and moving around and within rooms in different sequences. While the associations of each panel and the multiple connections among them induced a virtual polyphony of themes, the visual repetitions were building blocks, like long and short syllables, which the viewer/poet/artist manipulated into a variety of configurations to create different rhythms or visual narratives. Since each of the individual images evoked a host of related associations arising from a few large, binary themes, the precise significance of any single "reading" of the paintings was likely to vary in subtle ways. One thinks of the flexible memory of the oral poet or actor who improvised along known lines, producing a "new" version every time.

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[60] On the "Amazon room," 6a: Roux Ainé (as in n. 12), I, 1820, 94–103, pls. 56, 57; for a line drawing of the back wall: W. Zahn, *Neu entdeckte Wandgemalde in Pompeii*, Munich, Stuttgart, Tübingen, 1828, pl. 9. The Amazon frieze is recorded in watercolors by Morelli in the Naples Museum: *Pompei 1748–1980*, 38–39, 188–189, and in a drawing by Niccolini (as in n. 12), I, 5. It is noteworthy that all the small rooms on the west side of the house deal with water themes in simple, two-figure scenes that are commonly found in Pompeii (i.e., Venus Fishing, Narcissus). For other Pompeian houses with programs "spilling out" of rooms, see Wirth (as in n. 36), on the House of the Vettii (VI.15.1) and my essay on the House of Jason (IX.5.18): "The Pregnant Moment: Tragic Wives in the Roman Interior," *Sexuality in Ancient Art*, ed. N. B. Kampen (forthcoming, Cambridge University Press).

[61] Harris (as in n. 2), 34–35, on the importance of intermediaries for "reading."

Reanimation

This tour of the House of the Tragic Poet has been selective, excluding not only rooms and alternate routes, but also the floors, ceilings, statues, furniture, and small objects that would have added to a rich array of excerpts. Yet the architectural mnemonic includes placing the things to be remembered onto objects like statues and paintings, and there are hints that the thematic harmony among the paintings in the house extended to other media. For example, in the tablinum, a theatrical theme was evident in the floor mosaic, the scenic masks painted in the adjoining cubicle (Fig. 33, room 6c), and a marble statue of a satyr found nearby. In fact, the juxtaposition of the Satyr Play Mosaic and the Alcestis panel highlights a compelling historical link: in the fifth century B.C., Euripides made an unusual substitution, presenting his *Alcestis* in place of a satyr play as the fourth performance in his dramatic cycle (Figs. 19–20).[62]

The compositions of mosaic and painting are harmoniously coordinated, from the columns in the backgrounds to the focal frontality of Alcestis in the painting and of the wreathed aulos player in the mosaic; to the positions of the legs of the seated Admetus and of the choragos; and to the back views of the male figures (echoing those in the atrium panels), in the painting of the seated messenger and in the mosaic of the "satyr" standing on the left. The painter and the mosaicist clearly shuffled elements to coordinate the independent scenes in the tablinum. In a similar way, Boulanger, Hoffbauer, and the designer of the Pompeii souvenir book rearranged borrowed figures to animate the atrium (Figs. 6, 8, 10). This is the method of the architectural mnemonic, whereby one inserts *imagines* (figures) into *loci* (atrium, tablinum, etc.)—in antiquity figural panels onto walls and floors, in modern reconstructions the inhabitants of Pompeii into the architectural shell.

Within such a framework, it is tempting to imagine a visual dialogue among the various media and parts of the house. In the peristyle, the lararium could be seen as a thematic "pendant" to the Iphigenia panel at the opposite corner (Fig. 12, below). The actual altar, the center of the pious family cult tended by the paterfamilias, would thus be set against a mythical altar, implied if not actually depicted by the sacrifice of Iphigenia, as an archetypal image of impious family worship, perpetrated by the paterfamilias, Agamemnon. Indeed, the Roman paterfamilias was most likely a focal feature in the visual reception of the house. From the entrance, the visitor would have seen him seated on a dais in the tablinum, back-lit from the peristyle with the lararium prominent behind him, receiving calls from clients. His image would fit neatly into the scheme of seated males in the paintings of the atrium. And, like the seated choragos distributing masks on the mosaic below and Alcestis receiv-

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[62] The marble faun wore a goat skin and carried bunches of fruit: Fiorelli (as in n. 10), 123. On the *Alcestis* as a substitute for a satyr play: P. Riemer, *Die Alkestis des Euripides. Beitrage zur klassischen Philologie*, CXCV, Frankfurt, 1989, 1–5. Rouveret, 314, draws an intriguing parallel between backstage scenes like that in the mosaic and the actor's art of memorization.

ing news on the wall before him (Figs. 19, 20), he would have been enframed by a theatrical backdrop of columns. A living image thus would have completed the decorative program of the atrium, tablinum, and peristyle, like the "Menander" installed in just this place in the souvenir view of the house (Fig. 10).[63]

Imaginative restorations like these take one back to the impulse of earlier scholars and artists. Might this older habit of completing and animating the interior be more than a charming, naïve response to a ruin? Might it not offer a legitimate form of historical interpretation? The analysis put forward here suggests that the designer of the house considered the witness in motion as an essential factor in organizing the visual, psychological experience of the painted interior.

Each simulacrum of the House of the Tragic Poet created since its discovery revitalizes, through artificial means, a highly controlled environment. The three-dimensional miniature "object model" used in this essay was designed to convey an overall view of the relationship between pictorial forms and architectural space. The "occupiable model" of the architectural mnemonic, on the other hand, attempts to recover an imagined reality in human scale and sensible form. How might we envision the future memory of this house? The miming eye of the camera, with its confining two-dimensional format of photograph or slide, could be augmented by the kinetic possibilities of a video or a computer. Indeed, the routing systems used to retrieve, distinguish, merge, and store the information in a computer's memory seem to mimic the machinery of ancient memory systems. The sequence of computer-generated images of a "walk through" the atrium, in which each "still" represents a moment (Fig. 34), can only suggest the infinite flexibility of the computer as it allows the spectator to move through space in a continuous series of moments, changing station points, adding objects, and directing light sources. Like the watercolors and engravings, the computer creates a hermetic

environment that isolates the viewer and extends perception through three-dimensional constructs.[64]

Conclusion

The decor in the House of the Tragic Poet had no unitary program or meaning, but it was also not without meaning, and was thus more than "mere decoration." To be sure, the visitor must have responded immediately to the interior as a magnificent, visually harmonious ensemble. Some may have dismissed it as an example of conspicuous consumption among the Campanian nouveaux riches. I contend, however, that sustained contemplation of the arrangements exercised the educated viewer's memory by unlocking a variety of associations and inviting a sequence of reasoned conclusions. Three influential rhetorical and mnemonic models operated in this pictorial ensemble: epic and dramatic *exempla*, the artful juxtaposition of likenesses and opposites, and the role of movement for comprehension. By inviting, and stimulating, such an experience, the patron emerged as a cultured agent in the Roman creation of an ancestral past. It was (and always is) the spectator's own frame of reference that connected the intensely emotional scenes. Although that individual reception can never be fully recovered, reconstruction proves a powerful tool for gaining insight into ancient processes of thought and artistic creation. The story of the House of the Tragic Poet persuades one of the historical value of creative responses, in particular those of past artists, writers, and archaeologists who may have captured a lost bit of memory. Unlike that Greek singled out by Cicero for "preferring the science of forgetting to that of remembering,"[65] let us not forget what has been remembered.

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[63] For a modern, scholarly "repopulation," see Wallace-Hadrill, 43–44, 78, where he reminds us of the presence of servants placed strategically in doorways to prevent or direct access to more intimate parts of the house.

[64] "Walk-throughs" of Pompeian houses via computers were offered at the recent show funded by IBM: *Rediscovering Pompeii, Exhibition by IBM-ITALIA*, exh. cat., ed. B. Conticello, IBM Gallery of Science and Art, New York, 1990. On computer imaging as a promising tool for architectural reconstruction, see M. McCullough, W. Mitchell, and P. Purcell, *The Electronic Design Studio: Architectural Knowledge and Media in the Computer Era*, Cambridge, Mass., 1990.

[65] Cicero, *De oratore* 2.86.352, trans. Sutton, 465. The Athenian Themistocles "was endowed with wisdom and genius on a scale quite surpassing belief; and it is said that a certain learned and highly accomplished person went to him and offered to impart to him the science of mnemonics, which was then being introduced for the first time; and that when Themistocles asked what precise result that science was capable of achieving, the professor asserted that it would enable him to remember everything; and Themistocles replied that he would be doing him a greater kindness if he taught him to forget what he wanted than if he taught him to remember. . . . But this reply of Themistocles must not cause us to neglect the training of the memory . . ."; *De oratore* 2.74.299–300, trans. Sutton, 427.

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