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Introduction: Principles of *Decor*

The aim of this volume is to examine the interplay between decorative elements, architecture and action¹. Architecture organises the perception of decoration and vice versa. At the same time, spatial contextualisation lends decorative forms their social quality, because ‘space’ is only constituted through concrete actions. Decoration thus acquires an orientating role in relation to and through the people who populate spaces. In antiquity, this interrelation was underpinned by the idea of *decor/decorum*.

Decor and the notion of appropriateness

The concept of *decor/decorum* means that any kind of form should be appropriate (*πρέπον/aptus*) to its specific context². The definition of form and context can vary considerably, however. With regard to architecture, Vitruvius considers *decor/decorum* to be a central design category alongside *ordinatio* (order), *dispositio* (arrangement), *eurythmia* (proportion), *symmetria* (symmetry) and *distributio* (distribution)³. He thus adopts a producer perspective on architecture, decoration and actors. In this context, he names three levels on which *decor* is effective: *decor autem est emendatus operis aspectus probatis rebus conpositi cum auctoritate. is perficitur statione, quod graece thematismo dicitur, seu consuetudine aut natura*⁴. The categories of *statio*, *consuetudo* and *natura* are then explained further⁵, revealing the following levels of reference:

- When describing the term *statio*, Vitruvius discusses the relationship between form and (semantic) content in the broadest sense, emphasising the atmospheric fit of individual decorative forms. Here he offers the example of appropriate temple design, recommending that the geometrically conceived Doric order should be chosen for temples whose deities possess *virtus*, such as Minerva, Mars and Hercules. For the deities Venus, Flora, Proserpina and the spring nymphs, the floral Corinthian order is deemed appropriate, since graceful buildings are better suited to their nature. The Ionic order, however, occupies a middle position (*ratio mediocritatis*), combining the strict character of Doric (*severus mos doricorum*) and the delicacy of Corinthian (*teneritas corinthiorum*).
- *Consuetudo* can be associated with the notion of *convenientia*: the quality (*magnificus* vs. *inhonestus*) of a building should be coherent. A magnificent entrance hall, for example, should be adorned with an elegant interior.
- The term *consuetudo* also makes reference to culturally accepted, habitual norms. From Vitruvius’ perspective, *decor* can be expressed by adhering closely to established traditions. As

¹ The content of this introduction is based largely on the much more detailed theoretical reflections in my book on decorative principles in the Roman house (Haug 2020). Thanks go to Taylor Lauritsen for an intensive discussion on what structural form the text should take in this volume, as well as advice on the grammatical formulations that are appropriate in English.

² In recent research, the terms *decor* and *decorum* are frequently discussed: see Horn-Oncken 1967, 29–31; Knell 1985, 33 f.; Muth 1998, 54; Irmischer 2005, 31; Perry 2005, 31; Gros 2006; Sluiter – Rosen 2012, 6; Haug 2014, 219 f. In this context, the terms *decor* and *decorum* will only be used if the idea of ‘appropriateness’ is explicitly addressed. When it comes to forms of design, the terms ‘decoration’ or ‘decorative elements’ are used, which in English, unlike German (Dekor/Dekoration), have no aesthetically pejorative connotation.

³ Vitr. De arch. 1, 2, 1.

⁴ Vitr. De arch. 1, 2, 5: ‘*Decor* demands the faultless ensemble of a work composed, in accordance with precedent, of approved details. It obeys convention, which in Greek is called *thematismos*, or custom or nature’ (translation by Granger 1955, 27).

⁵ Vitr. De arch. 1, 2, 5–7.

- an example, Vitruvius points out that the traditional orders (Doric, Ionic) should be applied purely, without the characteristics of one style transferred to another⁶.
- The positioning and design of buildings should be adapted to the natural setting (*natura*). For Vitruvius, this is especially evident with respect to sanctuaries in which the sick are healed. They should benefit from the natural conditions of a place, he says, by making use of healing springs, for example. Appropriateness can also be expressed in the orientation of a building's individual rooms towards the compass points: '[T]here will be natural seemliness if light is taken from the east for bedrooms and libraries; for baths and winter apartments, from the wintry sunset; for picture galleries and the apartments which need a steady light, from the north, because that quarter of the heavens is neither illumined nor darkened by the sun's course but is fixed unchangeable throughout the day.'⁷ Here it is particularly clear that the notion of appropriateness encompasses both the architectural concept and its decorative features.
 - Connections between *decor* and nature are linked to a more far-reaching goal: appropriate design aims to achieve suitable conditions of use and perception. When Vitruvius claims that *pinacothecae* should be oriented towards the north in order to obtain steady light, he focuses on the users and perceivers of such rooms; in this case, the consistent lighting improves the perception of the images contained within⁸.
 - Finally, architecture (and its decoration) must be suitable for its (socially charged) use, as Vitruvius explains later in his treatise⁹. Houses with elaborate *vestibula* and *atria*, for example, need only be used by those who, by virtue of their profession, also have to reckon with public traffic in their house. Consequently, *decor* also becomes a social category.

Vitruvius thus recommends to architects that a building and its equipment should be 'appropriate'. Form should relate to content, individual decorative or architectural features should fit the appearance of the whole, decoration should be in accordance with traditional concepts of *decor*, architectural spaces and their *decor* should refer to the natural setting (in doing so they should match with modes of use and perception). Finally *decor*-spaces should meet the social needs of their users.

However, Vitruvius' remarks also suggest that what is regarded as appropriate can be highly controversial in each specific case. This applies in particular to his traditionalist view of wall painting. In *De architectura*, he adopts a rather critical attitude towards the late Second and early Third Styles¹⁰, offering an anecdote that focuses on the appropriate design and decoration of public buildings in two cities of Asia Minor¹¹. In this passage, he recounts a tale about the painter Apaturius of Alabanda, who painted the *scaenae frons* of the small theatre in Tralles. As is typical of the late Second Style, the painting abandoned the naturalistic idea of supports and weights. This 'modern' style of decoration received enthusiastic approval from the citizens. At this point, Vitruvius intro-

⁶ Vit. De arch. 1, 2, 6: *Ad consuetudinem autem decor sic exprimitur, cum aedificiis interioribus magnificis item vestibula convenientia et elegantia erunt facta. Si enim interiora prospectus habuerint elegantes, aditus autem humiles et inhonestos, non erunt cum decore. Item si doricis epistylis in coronis denticuli sculpentur aut in pulvinatis columnis et ionicis epistylis [capitulis] exprimentur triglyphi, translatis ex alia ratione proprietatibus in aliud genus operis offendetur aspectus aliis ante ordinis consuetudinibus institutis.*

⁷ Vit. De arch. 1, 5, 7: *Item naturae decor erit, si cubiculis et bybliotheccis ab oriente lumina capiuntur, balneis et hibernaculis ab occidente hiberno, pinacothecis et quibus certis luminibus opus est partibus, a septentrione, quod ea caeli regio neque exclaratur neque obscuratur solis cursu sed est certa immutabilis die perpetuo.* Translation by Granger 1956, 31.

⁸ Vit. De arch. 1, 2, 7.

⁹ Vit. De arch. 6, 5, 3: *Ergo si his rationibus ad singulorum generum personas, uti in libro primo de decore est scriptum, ita disposita erunt aedificia, non erit quod reprehendatur; habebunt enim ad omnes res commodas et emendatas explicationes.*

¹⁰ On the chronology of Vitruvius' treatise in relation to the chronology of the House of Augustus, see La Rocca 2008, 241f.; Ehrhardt 1991; Thomas 1995, 30f.; Lipps 2018.

¹¹ Vit. De arch. 7, 5, 5–7.

duces the mathematician Licynos, who criticises the painting by making a comparison to Alabanda. Its citizens were considered to be ignorant (*insipiens*) because they had violated what was proper and fitting (*vitium indecentiae*): they had erected statues of speakers in their gymnasium, while in the forum they put up statues of athletes. This argument, which clearly refers to the appropriateness of *decor*, convinced Apaturius, who then removed his painting. The fictive dispute reveals that what is considered appropriate by some may not be the same for others; indeed appropriateness is not subject to any socially uniform evaluation, and it does not correspond to invariable social norms¹². In fact, Vitruvius' critical take was not necessarily representative of the majority opinion in his own time. The Third Style, with its slender vegetal columns, monsters and hybrid beings, was coming into fashion, seemingly to the approval of most people. Particularly high-quality examples can be found in houses and villas associated with the Imperial family¹³.

Vitruvius' anecdote shows that the introduction of new visual formulas could give rise to discussions and conflicts. *Decor* became a form of persuasion¹⁴. Consequently, appropriateness was not an abstract norm – it was held in the eye of the beholder. Cicero points out that discussions regarding form and content took place between artists (painters, sculptors, poets) and customers¹⁵. The notion of appropriateness was constantly being renegotiated between the producers of decorative media and their clients. The attitudes of the latter are likely to have depended on their individual backgrounds, particularly their cultural knowledge and social affiliation.

The frames of perception: *decor* and its contexts

Given the preceding considerations, an understanding of *decor* cannot be deduced from the design of a single form (such as a capital). Instead, principles of design and perception can only be derived from the interaction between architecture, its decoration and actors. Each of these three elements in turn provides a 'frame' for the other two. From this general perspective, a more complex concept of *decor* and decoration can be developed. *Decor* receives its aesthetic quality and semantic meaning (and thus its potential to fit) through the medium in which it is produced, the architectural context in which it resides, its decorative setting and its association with particular actions or practices. In the following section, these four 'contextualising frames' will be considered further.

The medium

Decoration has an object character¹⁶ and thus possesses specific qualities such as size, material (including colour) and an extension in space. This character means that each medium possesses its own potential and limits of representation. A mosaic made of small stones, for example, has different aesthetic and representational qualities than a wall painting. Both media possess only a minimal extension in space, so they can be considered two-dimensional. Consequently, they differ considerably from three-dimensional decorative objects, such as altars or furniture. Above all, however, the medium itself produces a specific relationship to the spatial setting and the (body of the) human actor.

¹² Usually, *decor* is interpreted to represent such norms, see Perry 2005, 28–77; Hölscher 2018, 323.

¹³ Galinsky 1996, 192.

¹⁴ See Fitzpatrick Nichols 2017, esp. 148 f.

¹⁵ Cic. Off. 1, 147.

¹⁶ See more recent art historical approaches, e. g., Belting [2001] 2011.

The architectural context

The material relationship between architecture and *decor* can take different forms:

- Decorative features can be considered an integral part of architectural constructions: examples include fluted columns, capitals and ornamental roof tiles¹⁷.
- Architecture can function as a carrier of decoration, as in the case of wall paintings, stuccoed ceilings and pavements. These elements are designed specifically for the architectural frame to which they are attached. Such decorative features can showcase the architectural order of a space (e. g., by simulating a real wall structure), or they can obscure such a reference (by evoking an illusion to ‘open’ the wall, for instance). Most often, decoration plays with both strategies. For example, the First Style simulates a real ashlar wall, but the allusion to this wall is at the same time obscured in multiple ways – by the insertion of ornamental bands, for example. Conversely, the Second Style unfolds an illusionist architectural image on the wall, and yet fictitious architectural elements, such as painted columns, often refer to the architectural structure of the room.
- The connection between semi-mobile decorative objects, such as sculptures, tables, *puteals* or altars and their architectural setting is somewhat looser. Their positioning can be planned in the course of the building and furnishing process, but objects can also be integrated later on, and, once installed, their location can be changed. Sometimes their placement is determined by functional conditions (*puteals*, for example, due to their association with cisterns). In any case, architecture works as a visual frame for the objects contained within and vice versa: decorated objects organise and structure the perception of the architectural setting.

In all three of these cases, decoration is created in a specific medium that, through its material, size and spatial placement, occupies a specific position within its architectural setting and enters into a specific relationship with the human body. If, for example, a smaller-than-life-size sculpture is presented in a line of sight or movement within a house, an adult viewer can easily overlook it and perceive it as an ‘ornament’ of the room. A figurative wall painting experienced at eye level demands a more intense perception and can be experienced as a ‘counterpart’ to the viewer, while small pictures on the dado or in the upper zone of the wall become ‘framing’ elements. Decorative elements that are connected to an architectural frame thus reckon with certain viewing postures. The relationship between semi-mobile objects and architecture is less defined. The former’s connection to the body of the perceiver is even more immediate: a *lectus* equipped with decorative elements is intended for a particular use, and a terracotta lamp must be taken in the hand.

The decorative setting

Decorative elements not only have a concrete position in relation to architecture, they also interact with other decorative elements. In antiquity, this applied not only to individual ornamental forms, but also to images. At the same time, ancient decorative spaces were densely filled, so that single images took up subordinate positions, forming part of a broader ensemble. Yet research in the tradition of Erwin Panofsky focuses only on the iconography of individual images¹⁸. This emphasis neglects the images’ embedding into more complex decorative settings and consequently they are assigned a status that they did not possess in ancient perception. Against this background, it is important to consider the interplay of all decorative elements that provide a visual framework and

¹⁷ Andreas Grüner has criticised the separation of tectonically determined and purely decorative ornamentation made in research (Grüner 2014). In fact, this first category constitutes an ‘integrative’ relationship between architecture and its decoration.

¹⁸ Panofsky 1939, 3–31; 1975, 36–50. On methodology, see Eberlein 2008, 179–182.

order for the perception of a space. This interplay not only achieves an aesthetic effect, but also becomes relevant on a semantic level, as meaning only arises from the interaction between the individual elements.

A visual structure and hierarchy is created by the spatial-architectural location of the decorative elements and their relationship to one another. Traditional research drawing on Immanuel Kant's reflections on aesthetics describes such hierarchies by referring to a particular notion of 'image' and 'ornament': the image becomes the central (research) object, the ornament its *parergon*¹⁹. This does not correspond to the ancient conception of these terms, however.

In antiquity, the term *ornamentum* assumed the meaning of 'adornment' in the most comprehensive sense. It was therefore not conceived of strictly as a counter-concept to 'image'. Statues could function as the *ornamenta* of a theatre²⁰, *signae* and *tabulae pictae* could become the *ornamenta* of a city²¹. The ancient terms *imago* and *pictura*, unlike *ornamentum*, referred to the more specific phenomenon of representation. They were placed in a defined relationship to one another by Vitruvius²²: while *imago* referred to what was depicted in an image, *pictura* described the skills and techniques employed to produce a pictorial object²³. The two terms represented the difference between image and picture carrier. In ancient understanding, *imago* did not coincide with reality, but was defined, as Gottfried Boehm puts it, by its iconic difference²⁴. Its meaning went beyond mimesis; it displayed something that was absent. Visual representations manifested themselves materially (as *picturae*), but they transcended the factual to produce meaning (as *imagines*)²⁵.

Against the background of these ancient terms, it is not possible to identify a systematic difference between image and ornament (in their modern sense). Instead, the following features are important for the relational production of pictoriality²⁶: the semantic complexity of the representation (e. g., a narrative mythical image vs. a single figure); the syntax of the image (a complex composition vs. repetitive patterning); the design of the image boundaries (frame vs. no frame); the position within the decorative ensemble (central vs. marginal); the size of the presentation; the colour range (bichromy vs. polychromy); the image volume (three-dimensional, relief, two-dimensional); the exceptionality or conventionality of the pictorial form.

In the same spatial context, even on the same wall, these modes of presentation can enter into diverse, even contradictory connections: 'images' with 'images', 'ornaments' with 'ornaments'. It is the visual location in relation to other decorative elements that generates image effects and image meaning, as well as decorative effects and decorative meaning. The interplay of decorative elements

¹⁹ On the history of this dichotomy in modern times, see Beyer – Spieß 2012; Squire 2018, 16–22.

²⁰ Plin. HN 7, 34: *Pompeius Magnus in ornamentis theatri mirabiles fama posuit effigies, ob id diligentius magnorum artificum ingeniis elaboratas.*

²¹ Cic. Verr. 2, 1, 58: *Dices tua quoque signa et tabulas pictas ornamento urbi foroque populi Romani fuisse.*

²² Vitruvius. De arch. 7, 5, 1: *Namque pictura imago fit eius, quod est seu potest esse, uti homines aedificia, naves, reliquarumque rerum, e quibus finitis certisque corporibus figurata similitudine sumuntur exempla.*

²³ Belting [2001] 2011, 10 f.; Grave 2015, 29–35 traces the pair of terms from antiquity to the Renaissance. Edmund Husserl explicitly mentions the differentiation of physical image, image object and image subject – see Husserl [1904/05] 2006, 21; on the question of *pictura/imago* with a slightly different interpretation, see Mitchell [1984] 2008; on the differentiation of seeing-in and seeing-as, see Wollheim 2003, which refers to the psychology of form; an extensive critical discussion of Wollheim's model can be found in Grethlein 2017, esp. 154–168.

²⁴ Boehm 1978, 118–138; Boehm [1994] 2006, 30. For a short explanation, see Beyst 2010: 'Gottfried Boehm uses the term "ikonische Differenz" in two quite distinct senses. In a first sense, it refers to the opposition between the "material support" and the "meaning" or "sense" ("Sinn") – in the sense of "representation" [...]. In a second sense, it refers to the difference between the representation and its model in the real world (in terms of signs: the referent, in terms of mimesis: the original). Thus, he talks about the "imaginary" in the image as of a "difference with the real" [...], or he states that the "content" ("der Gehalt") that is conjured by the "iconic difference" "means something that is absent" [...].'

²⁵ Gadamer 2010, 143.

²⁶ Some of the aspects are also discussed in Hölscher 2018, 299–333; see also Haug 2020, 540 f.

stimulates different forms of aesthetic perception as well as manifold meta-discourses. Architecture, images and ‘ornamental’ decorative elements work together in the creation of *decor*-spaces.

The relational negotiation of pictoriality thus simultaneously confirms the significance of the decorative system for perception: decorative systems provide a visual organisation of the space and also guide the attention of a viewer. In doing so, they hierarchise the visual space and contribute to the definition of the ‘iconic relevance’ of single decorative elements. However, a viewer can withstand these visual hierarchies, directing his/her attention towards individual decorative elements, thereby giving them a pictorial status.

The action context

The actions in which a viewer is involved create another important frame for the interpretation of decorative elements. Perception studies in the field of psychology suggest that the action context contributes significantly to the control of attention and motivates selective forms of perception²⁷. Martina Löw understands perception as a ‘simultaneous process of emanation by social goods and people and the perceptual activity of bodily sensing’²⁸. Both designed space and the perceptual disposition of the viewer play a decisive role²⁹. As Andreas Reckwitz notes, ‘[p]ractices of reception are [...] connected with corresponding practices of production’³⁰. The perceptual disposition of the acting observer can be accessed in two ways: human action can be analysed in a very general manner with regard to its body-related attitudes (static vs. mobile), or it can be considered with regard to more specific action scenarios.

Mobile and static actors/viewers

The accessibility, size and lighting of a room are important for the spatial placement of decoration, as well as for its perception. These factors inspire certain modes of movement and viewing positions, because perception and action are rooted in the body of the observer. Architecture and decoration are thus inscribed with a bodily dimension. There is a fundamental difference in whether *decor*-spaces are designed for a static or a dynamic observer³¹. David Ganz and Stefan Neuner have argued for a historicisation of the habitus of viewing³². They understand the peripatetic conception of space as a modern idea, including corresponding practices, while in pre-modern times an ‘optic regime’ prevailed. However, they admit that the decoration of spaces could also refer more or less explicitly to spatial practices in earlier periods. In fact, architectural spaces have always produced specific accessibilities and visibilities that pre-structure physical actions and viewing options³³.

The design of viewing options proves to be a highly cultural product. In antiquity, there was a pronounced awareness of the visibility and placement of buildings (Aufblick), the architectural experience itself (Durchblick) and the design of views (Ausblick). Ancient written sources, such as Cicero’s letter to his friend Atticus in which he discusses the quality of a window view, prove

²⁷ Goldstein 2008.

²⁸ Löw 2008, 41.

²⁹ Luhmann 1995, 17: ‘In der aktuellen Wahrnehmung und ebenso in der durch Imagination reaktualisierten anschaulichen Vorstellung geht es um das Ergebnis eines Simultanprozessierens einer Fülle von Eindrücken mit der Möglichkeit, Schwerpunkte der Aufmerksamkeit zu wählen, ohne anderes “aus dem Auge zu lassen”’.

³⁰ Reckwitz 2016, 176.

³¹ Underlining the relevance of movement: see de Certeau [1980] 2011.

³² Ganz – Neuner 2013, esp. 14.

³³ On the Renaissance court ceremonial, see Weddigen 2006, 37: ‘Räumlichkeiten werden mittels exklusiver und privilegierender Verhaltensnormen und Zugänglichkeitsregulierungen voneinander abgegrenzt und hierarchisiert’.

that great importance was given to static viewing postures and viewing axes³⁴. The perception of decoration and architecture that arises in the course of movement carries somewhat less weight in the textual sources, but as Susanne Muth has shown for Late Antique mosaics, it can be identified in the placement and orientation of the decorative elements themselves³⁵. Movement has immediate consequences for perception, as Heinrich Drerup has pointed out with regard to the Roman townhouse. The mobile observer is confronted with a visual ensemble ‘that does not communicate itself to an observer outside, but to those moving in the atrium, to the occupant of the house’³⁶. In movement, architecture is generally perceived spatially, rather than pictorially.

What is decisive, however, is the fact that neither all urban spaces nor all functional spaces (as in a house) are equally suitable for both modes of perception. Rooms of leisure and their decoration privilege static viewing positions, encouraging an intense mode of perception, while spaces of movement refer to mobile and thus more superficial forms of perception. It is therefore to be expected that within a house, spaces of leisure (e. g., *tablina*, *alae*, *triclinia*, *oeci*, *cubicula*) exhibit different decorative strategies than spaces of movement (*fauces*, *atria*, *peristylia*) or the façade, which is decorated with the passer-by in mind.

Action scenarios

If one wants to move beyond the basic postures that an observer assumes in space, more complex action scenarios must be analysed. In each scenario, a particular number of people are involved (creating a specific, socially-charged setting) who share a certain performative habitus (celebrative, as in ritual activities, vs. casual, as in daily cooking). They act within a synaesthetic environment (which includes noise and smell), and this complex arrangement is embedded in particular social discourses (sometimes several). These synaesthetic, social and semantic qualities of action scenarios are highly formative factors for the perception of *decor*-spaces.

In Roman archaeology, researchers have emphasised the ‘multifunctionality’ of various urban spaces time and again – especially with regard to the Roman townhouse. Assuming that potential actions provide an important framework for the perception of space and decoration, this means that one has to take the full range of possible actions and actor constellations into account. The atrium, for example, must have been perceived quite differently depending on the activity in which an individual was engaged. Thus, forms of (syn)aesthetic perception, as well as attributions of meaning, were dependent on the respective contexts of action. Precisely because of the complexity of conceivable actions, it cannot be assumed that all (or even some) activities were ‘mirrored’ in the decoration of a room.

However, some actions had a stronger impact on the ‘imagined space’³⁷ than others did, and their material arrangement took a more permanent form. In written sources, the *triclinium* is often described as a place of *convivium*, while everyday activities are rarely mentioned (although they must also have occurred). Consequently, one can assume that the decoration of such rooms was primarily conceived to be seen in convivial rather than everyday situations; daily activity disappeared from the scene. A similar phenomenon can also be seen in public spaces. The civic community considered the forum to be a place of ceremonial action. In this sense, state reliefs present the Forum Romanum as an imperial action context. Daily activities, such as legal undertakings, were not shown in these types of images (see de Angelis, this volume). But urban spaces may also

³⁴ Cic. Att. 2, 3, 2. See Drerup 1959, with a thorough discussion of ancient literary sources; also Haug 2020.

³⁵ Muth 1998, 61–63; 2018, esp. 412–419.

³⁶ Drerup 1959, 159.

³⁷ Lefebvre (1974) observes that urban spaces are socially produced spaces. On this basis, he considers the experienced space (*espace vécu*), the perceived space (*espace perçu*) and the imagined space (*espace conçu*) to be mutually interdependent.

have been shaped by ephemeral forms of design in response to specific situations and events. Paul Zanker showed this vividly with respect to the apotheosis of Roman emperors in the Forum. On these occasions, the monuments surrounding the forum piazza, such as the Temple of Divus Iulius, were perceived in relation to the *consecratio*, during which the entire forum transformed into a sort of ‘divine landscape’³⁸. Depending on the context of the action, therefore, different meaning potentials of *decor*-spaces could be activated³⁹.

Different modes of attention

The varied viewing postures and action scenarios that we can identify have an important impact on modes of attention. For the ancient world, the sources are too poor to permit these modes to be historicised⁴⁰. Instead, we can heuristically distinguish a range of prototypical (and thus potentially conceivable) attentional attitudes:

- *The interest-guided perception of an observer who is involved in an action.* In this case the action in which the observer is engaged has great influence on the direction of attention and interpretation of stimuli⁴¹. As actions are charged with affects, the place in which the action occurs is also emotionally charged⁴². The action setting leads to a specified and emotionally-occupied form of attention and creates a particular, situationally-induced understanding of *decor*. However, as various actions can take place in the same *decor*-space, different perceptions can be stimulated. Depending on the context of the action, distinct ‘meaning potentials’ of decorative ensembles can be activated.
- *The casual perception of a space in its entirety.* The viewer engages with a visually organised (and hierarchised) *decor*-space. His or her perception is guided by the architectural layout and the decorative arrangement – especially the placement of images. Visual contrasts help to organise perception. The attention directed towards the individual decorative element remains relatively weak⁴³.
- *Focused attention on individual decorative elements.* Viewers are able to direct their attention towards individual decorative elements. The decoration of (urban) spaces is designed for this type of perception. Based upon their placement and eye-catching design, decorative elements (images, in particular) attract the attention of the viewer. An intense aesthetic and semantic perception of the decoration was probably intended (by both artists and their clients), but represents an unusual scenario in everyday life.

The differing modes of attention described above always relate to one another, but one of them usually comes to the fore; this depends upon the design of the space, cultural habits, the intensity of the action situation and the interests and emotional state of the actor.

³⁸ Zanker 2000, 216; 2004.

³⁹ Zanker 2000, 214: ‘Wer an einer feierlichen Prozession teilnahm, wie sie etwa aus Anlaß bestimmter Götter- oder Kaiserfeste stattfanden, erlebte die Stadt anders als ein normaler Passant, der sich im Alltag an einen bestimmten Ort begab’.

⁴⁰ For modern times, see Crary 2002.

⁴¹ Goldstein 2008, 131–147, esp. 137.

⁴² Reckwitz 2012, esp. 41 f.; Kamleithner 2016; on affect Reckwitz 2016, 170: ‘Affekte werden nun nicht – wie es klassischerweise der Begriff der Emotion oder des Gefühls suggeriert – einem Individuum gewissermaßen als eine innere Eigenschaft zugeschrieben, als ein “tiefes Gefühl” das nur der Introspektion zugänglich ist. Sie müssen vielmehr den sozialen Praktiken selbst zugerechnet werden. Es ist die jeweilige soziale Praktik, zu der eine spezifische affektuelle “Gestimmtheit” gehört’. On 173: ‘Dem Affektbegriff [...] entspricht ein Verb, das einen Prozess beschreibt: eben den des Affizierens und Affiziertwerdens’.

⁴³ This form of perception is structurally comparable to that of a flaneur in urban space, as sketched by Georg Simmel for modern city life, see Zanker 2000, 216–219; Brilliant (1984, 15) also assumes such unspecified attention (or even lack of interest) as a possible attitude of perception.

Conclusion: conflicting categories

At the beginning of this introduction, I argued that Vitruvius defines the concept of *decor* as the appropriate design (including decoration) of architectural spaces. As shown above, appropriateness can refer to form and content, part and whole, spatial function, tradition, the natural setting or social needs. These categories are then organised, even hierarchised, by the interplay of medium, architecture, decorative setting and action context. Consequently, one aspect of appropriateness can come to dominate over another. Such conflicts can be examined from different perspectives – starting from the architectural context, from the decorative elements employed or from the action scenarios at play. This becomes clear when looking at some examples.

With respect to architectural contexts, a building's exterior decoration could be chosen for various reasons. The outer appearance of a temple, for instance, was typically defined by the colonnade at its front. The building's function was indicated by a conventional formula. But to what extent were the building's size, proportions and decoration (i. e., the order employed) related to its urban position, the deity venerated, modes of viewing or cult activities? If the design referred specifically to one of the options, others could recede into the background.

Regarding decoration, this book will show that in the Roman world a single image type, motif or ornament could appear in a broad range of contexts. As a consequence, the relationship between a particular image, its architectural/decorative setting and the action context took on a unique form in each case. This variety of possible embeddings of the same image attests to the different strategies employed to make *decor* appropriate to its context.

Finally, similar action scenarios could take place in a variety of spaces – the burning of incense at an altar, for example, occurred at both domestic and public *lararia*. However, these actions took on different aesthetic and semantic qualities as the spatial setting, its visual design and the potential audience changed.

As the medium, architectural context, decorative setting and action context equally contributed to the visual organisation of a space, the techniques employed to 'produce' appropriateness could vary in each instance. The forms of appropriateness outlined above could thus come into conflict with one another, overlap or reinforce each other.

This volume

The papers in this volume consider the aforementioned contexts of *decor* (medium, architecture, decoration, action context), with at least one of these aspects coming to the fore in each instance. Throughout, the authors seek to link their respective research topics to the main theme of the book, namely the principles of decoration that structure the spatial contexts in which they work and the concomitant 'appropriateness' of the decorative features present therein.

The contribution by **Francesco de Angelis** emphasises the role of action and attention with respect to the perception of *decor*. The Forum of Augustus' decorative programme presents imperial rhetoric in one of Rome's most important public spaces. However, this complex semantic programme was not necessarily important for all the forum's users; rather, it seems that commonplace daily activities occupied the attention of many viewers. *Vadimonia* recorded on wax tablets from Campania indicate that the various statues and monuments were employed as meeting points for individuals engaged in legal actions, demonstrating that jurisprudence was one of the forum's most important functions. However, this daily practice is not shown in historical reliefs, as de Angelis points out when discussing the Forum Anaglyphs, which depict only those monuments that are semantically relevant for the ceremonial actions in the Forum Romanum. Likewise, the decoration of the Forum of Augustus does not refer in content and form to daily practices, but to the ceremonial significance of the square. Apparently, not all action scenarios of the Forum of Augustus were

equally part of the visual decoration. While the judicial activities had no monumental counterpart, ceremonial activities were reinforced by their visual ‘framing’. The semantic choice made in the Forum of Augustus is echoed by the state reliefs in general, which refer to *virtus*, *clementia* and *pietas* but omit the fourth quality mentioned on the golden shield dedicated to Augustus in 27 B.C.: *iustitia*. By referring to some, but not all, of the functional qualities of the space, here the *decor* proves to be an expression of social and cultural values.

Michael Feige’s paper explores the role of *decor* in economic action contexts using the example of *villae rusticae*, properties associated with oil and wine production in which one might not necessarily expect to find aesthetic enhancement. As it turns out, the productive operations that took place in these buildings were often hidden from public view. In some cases, however, the wine and oil-making facilities received particular decorative investment. In the Villa Magna near Anagni, the production space was arranged as a sort of theatre and outfitted with a floor of portasanta marble. The entire space seems to have been used for ‘ritual’ wine making and sacrifices, as well as for dining. In this case, the various functional apparatus associated with the production process became decorative features within a performative context. In other instances, production suites doubled as sales areas, and consequently the entire space was designed in an aesthetically pleasing way. Façade design also served as an external social marker of *villae rusticae*. Thus, economic spaces were decorated in a sumptuous way when they served as spaces for sale, with *decor* itself becoming a selling point. Against the backdrop of de Angelis’ contribution, it becomes clear that everyday activities such as production and sale could be aesthetically enhanced if these types of activities were intended to be the focus of actors’ attention.

Domenico Esposito reflects upon the choice of specific motifs and themes in Pompeian wall painting. His contribution shows that Nilotic scenes and representations of pygmies became particularly popular during the final years of Pompeii, when these subjects were produced by the Vettii workshop for elite homeowners and public commissions. The images appear predominantly in contexts where water or nature is involved: in public baths, but also in private *balnea*, *nymphaea* and gardens, as well as in *triclinia* and *cubicula* with garden views. Apparently, certain motifs and pictorial themes were selected for their ambient fit, rather than the public or private nature of the spatial context. The inclusion of a Nilotic scene (sometimes populated by pygmies) added an exotic component to the space, emphasising intermedial connections between real and fictitious water landscapes. However, these motifs also appear in other settings. In the Temple of Isis, Nilotic paintings can be associated with the broader Egyptian theme, indicating that the imagery could work on multiple levels. In contrast, the appearance of a Nilotic frieze in the Sanctuary of Apollo, where it was combined with battle scenes from the Iliad, possessed no obvious functional or semantic connection to the sanctuary. On the contrary, the pygmies may even have undermined the venerable atmosphere of the space. Thus, it seems that these types of images could adopt different meanings depending on the locations in which they appeared. The omnipresence of the Nilotic theme also shows how the repertoire of a single workshop shaped the visual landscape of the city.

Anne Kleineberg applies a phenomenological approach in an effort to understand a well-preserved sanctuary: the Flavian-period Capitulum at Brescia. Her contribution invites the reader to perceive, through the eyes of an antique supplicant, the architecture of this complex and the interplay of its various decorative elements. While an analysis of the ground plan alone would underline the strictly symmetrical layout of the sanctuary, Kleineberg’s approach shows that perspectives must have changed with every single step. If one entered the forum square from the south, the sanctuary could be seen on its central axis, enthroned high above. Approaching the wide, steep staircase at the north end of the forum, the temple disappeared from view. The sanctuary thus appeared all the more powerful when one reached the level of the upper terrace, where the individual encountered the symmetrical layout of the temple’s three *cellae* and flanking porticos to full effect. The deep *pronaos* created light and shadow effects, a technique also employed in the manufacturing of the capitals at this time. Entering the main *cella*, the *opus sectile* floor and rhythmic placement of pilasters on the side walls led the view along the axis towards the huge cult statue of Jupiter at the

back. All design elements were intended for the perception of the temple during a ritual act, where attention was focused on the main *cella* and the cult statue. Kleineberg's paper makes clear that this effect could be achieved not only by the sheer size and symmetry of the architectural setting, but also through the interaction of the various decorative elements that adorned it.

Johannes Lipps' contribution examines the relationship between architecture and *decor* in interior space, focusing primarily upon the tetrastyle *oecus* in the so-called House of Augustus on the Palatine Hill. This room possesses not only a sumptuous architectural arrangement, but also extravagant decorative features. With respect to the topic of *decor*, it is a particularly significant spatial context due to the interplay of wall, floor and ceiling decoration. Here, wall paintings work in conjunction with mosaics and elaborate stuccoed ceilings structure and organise the room visually. In particular, Lipps emphasises the important role that the ceiling, a rarely preserved feature, plays with respect to the overall aesthetic effect. Its three-dimensional stuccowork created light and shadow effects and its translucent white colour lent the room a feeling of airiness and luminosity. When considered alongside the other rooms with which the tetrastyle *oecus* forms an ensemble, it is clear that the design of ceiling decoration could vary dramatically, contributing to the creation of a social hierarchy of rooms. From Lipps' contribution it becomes evident that decorative elements possess a social quality. However, it is not the single decorative element but the entire decorative ensemble that creates the social value of a room.

The contribution by **Alexandra Dardenay** discusses the interdependence of architecture and decoration within *insula V* in Herculaneum. She analyses the role of *decor* in a dynamically changing architectural landscape, exploring how decorative principles work in a complex built environment. From this perspective, the following questions arise: where, and why, are decorative features of older phases maintained or new elements created? How do such decorative features refer to one another and to the broader architectural structure? As Wolfgang Ehrhardt already observed for room ensembles within Pompeian houses⁴⁴, achieving visual coherence was an important principle in dwellings with multiple phases of decoration. In spaces that were reconstructed or adapted over time, some decorative features were retained, some were destroyed, and others were reproduced, mimicking earlier styles of decoration. These varied approaches are particularly visible when older spatial configurations were adapted, producing new visual connections between architectural and decorative elements. The symmetrical organisation of space was another diachronic principle of decoration – when new visual axes were established, the decorative response was typically adapted to the contemporary conditions. Thus, decorative elements proved to be extremely adaptable to diverse spatial configurations.

Taylor Lauritsen's paper focuses on Campanian house façades. In the traditional model of the Roman house, which conceptualises the dwelling as an open and (semi-)public space, one might expect façades to be the carriers of lavish designs that displayed the social status of the homeowner to the outside world. But this is not the case, as Lauritsen shows. The monolithic façade was interrupted only by narrow windows and an entrance that could be closed by solid doors complemented by complex locking mechanisms. Often consisting of a two-dimensional 'closed' design, the opaque decoration applied to it seems to have emphasised this architectural arrangement, which was designed for the purposes of 'control'. This phenomenon becomes particularly evident in the final phase of Pompeii, when façades were decorated with a monochrome dado topped by a white/light grey upper zone, or with checkerboard or zebra-stripe patterns. These designs communicated that the house was a territory closed off from the outside world. On an aesthetic level, the nonfigurative, repetitive patterns also suggest a relatively low financial investment. Inside the house, comparable decorative patterns are often found in garden areas and *fauces*. These simple and clearly arranged designs did not indicate the social status of the house owner, as one might expect in the traditional model. Rather they reacted to more superficial viewing conditions in spaces of movement. In the

⁴⁴ Ehrhardt 2012, esp. 73–78.

case of the façades, appropriateness does not refer to the display of social status, but rather to the aesthetic reinforcement of the ‘closed’ architectural form on the one hand, and to the easy legibility for passers-by on the other.

Eric Moormann’s paper discusses the role of *decor* in a highly intercultural context: he re-evaluates the elaborate programme of painted scenes in the synagogue at Dura Europos. For the representation of central Jewish narratives, pictorial formulas are employed that are at home in the imperial visual language of the Hellenistic-Roman *koine*. The images thus fluctuate between two worlds: they give the Jewish narratives an appropriate visual form, but also serve the broader viewing habits of the population. Consequently, appropriateness of *decor* here lies in an ability to adapt to different, even competing cultural concepts.

Katharina Lorenz examines how various decorative elements interact not only on a single wall, but throughout an entire house. Using the Casa dell’Ara Massima as an example, she first analyses the interplay of mythological images within various rooms. With reference to the west wall of atrium (B), she draws on a different aspect of *decor*: the interaction not only of mythological images, but of all the decorative elements on a single wall. Here, real and painted architecture enter into a complex interaction. Three openings – the door to room (C), the pseudo-*tablinum* (D) in the centre of the wall and a niche-like space (E) – create real spatial depth. In the upper zone, this tripartite scheme is repeated by the figurative paintings: a faux window opening the view onto a landscape in the centre and two lateral projecting *aediculae* from which figures emerge. Thus, the wall plays a game with fictive and real architecture, as well as with fictive and real actors, the latter appearing on the ‘stage’ of the room. The interplay of decorative features becomes most effective in the lower register: a painting of Narcissus positioned within the pseudo-*tablinum* may have made reference to a water basin situated just below the panel. Here the architectural space not only organises intermedial references, but creates them; the space itself becomes a carrier of meaning. With regard to *cubiculum* (a) of the Casa di Pinarius Cerialis, Lorenz is able to show that this visual strategy can affect the design of mythological images: in this latter case, the mythological actors are no longer ‘contained’ within a picture field, but populate a painted *scaenae frons*.

Mantha Zarmakoupi addresses the relationship between built architecture, pictorial representations of architecture and architecture imagined in literary *ekphraseis* using the example of landscapes. All of these media are subject to ‘artialisation’, a process by which humans transform the natural environment into a cultural product. The physical landscape emerges through the process of viewing; images and descriptions of landscape emerge through the act of artistic creation. Their interconnectedness is testified by the appearance of similar elements in each medium (e. g., *villae maritimae*). In fact, artistic representations of villas grew substantially in popularity around the same time that their real-world counterparts began to populate the countryside in ever greater numbers (1st century B.C. – 1st century A.D.). However, Zarmakoupi’s contribution is able to show that this medial interconnectedness goes beyond such basic parallels: The paratactic placement of landscape vistas alongside painted scenes was employed to create a *mise en abyme* effect in villa porticos, as at the Villa San Marco in Stabiae. This visual strategy refers to a particularly immediate idea of appropriateness, in which the real place, the framed landscape view and the painted scene are all directly related.

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