

***Film and Domestic Space: Architectures, Representations, Dispositif*, edited by Stefano Baschiera and Miriam De Rosa. Edinburgh UP, 2020, 241 pp.**

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Stefano Baschiera and Miriam De Rosa’s *Film and Domestic Space* arrived on my desk during the first wave of Covid-19 lockdowns, at a moment when attention had naturally turned inwards to the domestic interior. The book has therefore gained an unexpected sense of topicality. As the new constraints of physically distanced living have transformed houses and apartments into digitally networked hubs for home working and online social interaction, public and private space have blurred in unforeseen ways. More than ever, the home has become visible via media technologies. Through video calls and the ubiquitous array of the Zoom screen—now a staple of family hangouts, classrooms, and business meetings alike—images of other people’s homes have rarely been so present in our everyday lives. On television, broadcasting from home has offered glimpses into the domestic interiors of politicians, celebrities, presenters, and pundits—with the staging and semiotics of bookshelves even briefly becoming a topic of online debate (Guest). In short, the pandemic has not only produced a wide range of domestic imagery. It has also revealed domestic space as a site of media production as well as media consumption, bringing into focus how the home can operate as a type of moving image apparatus—or as Baschiera and De Rosa put it, as a *dispositif*. As their timely book shows, this exchange between screen media and domestic space has a varied and complex history.

The editors note in their useful introduction that domestic space is not a new subject for film studies. We might think, for example, of pathbreaking work by Elizabeth Bronfen on the home and nostalgia in Hollywood cinema, Pamela Wojcik on the “apartment plots” of mid-century New York, Merrill Schleier on the gendered tensions of high-rise living, or John David Rhodes on the ambivalent spectacle of the cinematic house. Domestic mise en scène is also important to scholarship on classical Hollywood melodrama, horror cinema, and the British heritage film, for example (Gledhill; Curtis; Higson; Vidal), and a competing edited volume, *Spaces of the Cinematic Home: Behind the Screen Door* (2015), stakes out similar territory to this book.

Nevertheless, Baschiera and De Rosa’s collection does bring something new to the table. It builds and expands on the literature—with an impressive roster of authors, including key scholars such as Schleier, Rhodes, and Laura Rascaroli contributing new material—and offers a rich set of case studies, many of which suggest new directions and possibilities. Though it is still broadly Euro-American, the collection pushes beyond the paradigm of mid-twentieth century Hollywood—which has provided such powerful images of domestic space for scholars such as Rhodes, Schleier, and Wojcik—to consider a broad range of historical and geographical

contexts (including less charted terrain, such as post-Soviet Baltic cinema) and a varied set of filmic practices, from cult cinema to gallery installations.

Research on domestic space has tended to divide into distinct, though sometimes overlapping, avenues of enquiry. Feminist scholars have long been interested in interrogating the domestic sphere and the gendered divisions of public and private space. At the same time, researchers working on architecture and cinema and “the cinematic city” have also been concerned with houses and apartments, especially as narrative devices, as filming locations, and in relation to the history of specific urban neighbourhoods and modes of social organisation. To put it another way, this approach has tended to view domestic space as “house”, “apartment”, or “housing” rather than domestic space as “home”. And from the perspective of technology and spectatorship, work on home viewing by scholars such as Barbara Klinger has also focused on the domestic sphere as a site of media consumption and reception. As Baschiera and De Rosa point out in their introduction, the case studies in this book often productively work across these divisions. Perhaps to accommodate these more fluid links, the book is not divided into sections, but the chapters flow coherently and, as the editors suggest, there are recurring themes and theoretical perspectives that allow the essays to speak to each other in different combinations.

The chapters by Rhodes, Schleier, and Rascaroli take an explicitly architectural approach. Building on his monograph, *Spectacle of Property: The House in American Film*, Rhodes addresses the ubiquitous presence of the Colonial Revival house in film and television. Grouping films through the lens of architectural style allows Rhodes to move beyond the limits of the single-film case study, making fascinating leaps between iterations of Colonial Revival architecture across different media forms—from classical Hollywood films such as *Holiday Inn* (Mark Sandrich, 1942) to exhibitions and television sitcoms. Ultimately, Rhodes argues, it is the very emptiness of the style that has allowed it to encapsulate the “national idiom” while also embodying through repetition the “endless fungibility of property relations in twentieth century capitalism” (17). The brief but fascinating material on the Colonial Revival house as the primary setting for 1950s sitcoms such as *Father Knows Best* (1954–60) generates questions about the conventional oppositions between film and television (and their respective relationships with the public and domestic spheres) that are not picked up elsewhere in the book, suggesting an interesting avenue for further work. Schleier’s essay, which is characteristically rich in contextual and historical detail, also attends to the particular qualities of the suburban house in post-World War II America. Schleier considers *No Down Payment* (Martin Ritt, 1957) as a typical yet transitional representation of suburban space and race relations in 1950s, paying close attention to the depiction of Japanese Americans and racist housing policies. Whereas Rhodes and Schleier use building style as a focal point, Rascaroli finds compelling conceptual correspondences between architecture and film via the frame and the act of framing. Using two somewhat disparate but nevertheless illuminating filmic examples—the essay film *Barbicania* (Ila Bêka and Louise Lemoine, 2014) and Chantal Akerman’s *No Home Movie* (2015)—Rascaroli shows how cinema “thinks, produces, and frames” (155) images of the house/home.

For other contributors, images and narratives of home bring up questions of belonging, psychology, and interiority in relation to gender. Rather than reproducing received ideas that align the domestic and the feminine, both Anna Backman Rogers and Maud Ceuterick seek to complicate the relations between gender, sexuality, and the home. Through her close reading of *Carol* (Todd Haynes, 2015) as a “queer road movie”, Backman Rogers argues that the film powerfully renders its central lesbian relationship through a series of liminal spaces that

unsettle the oppressive heteronormativity of domestic space. Like Backman Rogers, Ceuterick dissects one suggestive film text—*Vendredi Soir* (Claire Denis, 2002)—that also flips the masculinist script of the road movie through its haptic aesthetics. Putting affect theory into dialogue with cultural geographers such as Doreen Massey, Ceuterick shows how the film domesticates the road and transforms the car into a place of dwelling. Alongside questions of gender, other contributors use domestic space as a way to reorient their approach to another traditional film studies concern, genre. Victoria Pastor-González examines the persistent domestic settings of a recent cycle of female biopics such as *The Invisible Woman* (Ralph Fiennes, 2013) and *To Walk Invisible* (Sally Wainwright, 2016), while Beth Carroll revisits the familiar territory of the haunted house film, paying special attention to the use of sound design to create sensations of “sonic entrapment” (105).

Though the book actively seeks to move beyond representation, the essays are nevertheless predominantly based on close reading of individual film texts, rather than addressing extra-textual questions of production, distribution, exhibition, and reception. Iain Robert Smith’s chapter on cult cinema is somewhat of an outlier in this respect. Smith takes an audience-oriented approach, tracing the migration of cult film culture from the ritualised, communal experience of “midnight movies” at fleapit theatres to the more characteristically private and individualised circumstances of home viewing. Because collective, participatory viewing was often associated with countercultural politics, Smith explains, cult cinema within the home has been widely critiqued. Yet from another perspective, the shift to home viewing has opened up access to cult movies beyond exclusive and often highly gendered subcultures.

Baschiera and De Rosa’s own chapters both productively address conceptual questions that are central to the book as a whole, though not always brought to the surface by the other authors. Baschiera’s principal concern is the tension between domestic space and urban space as overlapping categories. Writing about the French New Wave, Baschiera uses Henri Lefebvre’s idea of the “urban revolution”, noting that the transformation of postwar Paris did not “stop at the colonization of the streets but penetrated the intimacy of the domestic space” (172). Rather than seeing domestic/private and urban/public as opposed, Baschiera reframes them as different scales of the “urban”. This allows him to inventively re-read the New Wave classic *Cléo de 5 à 7* (Agnès Varda, 1962)—often celebrated for the female protagonist’s journey of self-discovery through the streets of Paris—in relation to the theatricality of the domestic interior. Whereas Baschiera is concerned with rethinking domestic space in relation to scale, De Rosa examines the complex interplay of diegetic space onscreen and the non-diegetic space occupied by the spectator, especially in the context of the museum or gallery. Her primary case study is Amos Gitai’s multimedia video installation, “Architectures of Memory” (Mole Antonelliana e Cinema Massimo, Torino, 2011–12). De Rosa examines the spatial design of the installation as an architectural experience, which reproduces a sense of “home” within the gallery basement. Through her analysis, De Rosa offers the book’s most concrete illustration of domestic space as *dispositif*, which is among the most innovative and intriguing ideas developed in the volume—though it would have been interesting to see it pushed further by other authors too.

At their best, edited collections can help to galvanise an emerging cluster of work around a specific topic and to catalyse further investigation into the area. In this case, Baschiera and De Rosa’s book will surely help further cement the domestic as a key concern within the wider “spatial turn” in film/media studies and to energise work in this specific sub-field. It also opens the door for further investigation into related areas: for example, issues of gentrification, the post-2008 housing crisis, or informal housing and global slums, as well as some of the

broader questions of domestic space and digital media that the Covid-19 pandemic has recently brought to the surface. Overall, *Film and Domestic Space* is a very well-curated and thought-provoking collection which brings together varied conceptual and methodological approaches to domestic space. It is a welcome addition to scholarship on space and place in cinema and an extremely useful resource for both research and teaching.

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