

# Film and Domestic Space: Architectures, Representations, Dispositif

Edited by Stefano Baschiera and Miriam De Rosa

Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020, pp. 256

DOI [10.13130/2036-461X/16424](https://doi.org/10.13130/2036-461X/16424)

As Atxu Amann Y Alcocer and Flavio Martella have highlighted in *The Architectural Review*, by having the public space become a synonym of danger and harm to public health, the Covid-19 pandemic has led us to rediscover the home as a central place in our lives, 'a crucial structure from which to weather the crisis'.<sup>7</sup> Suddenly, our houses have had to become at the same time the only appointed place for labour, leisure and personal life. The theme around which Stefano Baschiera and Miriam De Rosa's edited collection revolves is thus today more topical than ever. Indeed, *Film and Domestic Space: Architectures, Representations, Dispositif* contributes to the growing literature addressing spatiality and cinema by attempting to foreground the complex and multifaceted — yet still understudied — relationship between domesticity and film. As they state in the introduction, with this collection Baschiera and De Rosa aim to show the various ways in which one can represent and conceive of 'domestic space as an architecture, that is, a place to be practised, inhabited, built by a spectator who will feel and acknowledge her/his empowerment towards spatiality' (p. 6).

This objective is achieved through a selection of essays that look at domesticity within a rich array of audiovisual works. From horror films to female-fronted biopics, from road movies

to essay films, each chapter investigates the broader topic of domestic space and cinema in relationship to a different film genre. However, rather than considering more broadly the chosen cinematic form, most chapters adopt a case study formula and offer close readings of a few individual titles. An exception is Iain Robert Smith's essay 'What Is Cult When It's at Home? Reframing Cult Cinema in Relation to Domestic Space'. Indeed, Smith not only looks broadly at cult cinema, but also does not discuss the representation of domestic space in these works. It examines, instead, domestic space as the place of home viewing, in order to show how fruition in this context can impact on how cult cinema is understood and theorized. In terms of geographical contexts, too, some variety can be identified in the range of filmic texts discussed in Baschiera's and De Rosa's collection, even if the focus of most chapters tends to be either on American or European productions. For instance, the chapter by Lukas Brašiškis and Nerijus Milerius addresses the less explored Baltic cinema, while De Rosa's own essay looks at the most recent works of a filmmaker of non-Euro-American origins, namely the Israeli Amos Gitai Weinraub.

Finally, richness and variety can be identified in *Film and Domestic Space* also at the level of the points of view adopted to explore



domesticity within the various contributions. For instance, we can find chapters that embrace an architectural angle and thus consider the home as the house. This is the case for John David Rhodes's essay, wherein the representation of the Colonial Revival house is discussed by looking at an array of US audiovisual productions ranging from the wartime comedy *Christmas in Connection* (Peter Godfrey, 1945) to the sitcom *Father Knows Best* (1954-60). Another example is the chapter by Laura Rascaroli, who, focusing on two essay films that comment on the house and its structuring function – namely *Barbicania* (Illa Bêka and Louise Lemoine, 2014) and *No Home Movie* (Chantal Akerman, 2015) – discusses how the medium of cinema can frame images of the house/home.

Various are, however, also the chapters that look at the domestic space from the perspective of gender, going at times beyond the clichéd binomial of domesticity and the feminine. Anna Backman Rogers' chapter on *Carol* (Todd Haynes, 2015) is emblematic in this sense, arguing that lesbian desire in this film is figured as 'an affective and emotional history that plays out in liminal spaces between the social and domestic stratifications determined by patriarchal law' (p. 72).

Finally, in *Film and Domestic Space*, one can even find audience-oriented approaches, as in the aforementioned essay by Robert Smith or in the one by Beth Carroll, which analyses the domestic soundscape of those haunted-house horror films like *The Shining* (Stanley Kubrick, 1980) and *Paranormal Activity* (Oren Peli, 2007) that problematize the idea of the home as a safe space.

If a criticism can be moved to Baschiera and De Rosa's collection it is that, despite their intention to create 'a bridge between the representational reading of domestic space that is at the heart of the existing

scholarship with that centred on the idea of *dispositif*' (p. 6), the notion of domestic space as *dispositif* ultimately remains mostly an undercurrent. Only in a couple of chapters it is actually foregrounded, one of them being De Rosa's essay, in which the work of Amos Gitai Weinraub becomes the point of departure for showing how the space of the installation can return a sense of home.

Overall, however, *Film and Domestic Space* is a rich and thought-provoking edited collection that successfully manages to show how domestic space is far from being a stable concept. It also makes apparent how a full understanding of the interplaying of domesticity and cinema necessitates the dialogue between a set of different conceptual and methodological approaches. Baschiera and De Rosa's volume will thus likely trigger further developments in this emerging sub-field of spatiality and cinema, especially in the wake of the centrality that the Covid-19 crisis has brought the house to acquire in our lives.

Cristina Formenti  
[Università degli Studi di Udine]

## Notes

<sup>7</sup>Atxu Amann Y Alcocer and Flavio Martella, 'Public House: The City Folds into the Space of the Home', *The Architectural Review*, 4 June 2020, <https://www.architectural-review.com/essays/public-house-the-city-folds-into-the-space-of-the-home> [accessed 2 July 2021].