

Book Reviews



Cine-scapes: Cinematic Spaces in Architecture and Cities. Richard Koeck. New York and London: Routledge, 2013. 224 pp., b&w illus.

As Richard Koeck correctly points out at the start of this book, “a considerable amount of critical thought has been dedicated to the exploration of the *architectural significance* of film” (p.3). Indeed, from Dietrich Neumann’s *Film Architecture* (1999) to Nezar Al-Sayyad’s *Cinematic Urbanism* (2006) to Merrill Schleier’s *Skyscraper Cinema* (2009), the scholarly field has been well populated with insightful accounts of how architecture and cities have been designed, depicted, criticized, and otherwise handled in the hundred-plus years of cinematic history. Even Koeck has, in the past five years, published three essays and an edited volume on the topic. What sets his past and present work apart, however, is that he is not only a professor of architecture but also a filmmaker, producing and directing mostly small, independent films for a myriad of purposes. *Cine-scapes*, Koeck’s first monograph, fulfills the promise of his earlier work by inverting the polarity of the dominant discourse: instead of asking how architectural design, theory and history have been manifested in film, Koeck asks the reader to consider how cinematic culture has shaped, and could further shape, real architecture and its reception.

The core argument of *Cine-scapes* is twofold. First, Koeck attempts to demonstrate the existence of conceptual and formal commonalities and links between the medium of film and the brick and mortar of urban space. Second, he argues that these commonalities resonate in the architectural experiences of a visually savvy, cinema-saturated public which dwells in and around cities while voraciously consuming moving pictures not only in theaters and at home but, increasingly, on streetcars, in school, in cafés, and just about everywhere. The audience is ready and willing; architects need only grasp and wield the tools of the filmmaker. Koeck makes an ambitious and impassioned case that is consistently thought provoking and at times convincing. There are, however, some problematic aspects of history and theory that he rallies in support of his two-fold argument.

The first part of the book, “Film, Mind and Body,” is a search for common ground between the filmic and architectural experiences of space and time. Virtual film space is inherently tied to narrative, but the real spaces of cities are also capable of telling stories, Koeck argues, partly because of the diverse building fabric present in most urban areas. This is partly a result of cities being animated both by singular, situational events and by repetitive, episodic ones — all of which weigh upon our cumulative, ongoing reading of architecture. Koeck also offers a compelling, if frustratingly brief, account of the practical ways in which cinematic memories can cross-pollinate the experiences of cities. Movies can, of course, shape our expectations of urban locations before we visit them. But more subtly, visual cues in architectural space can summon emotional and intellectual associations implanted in our minds by films containing similar spaces.

For this reader, Koeck could have dug a little deeper into aesthetic theory in his discussion of these issues. If he had, he might have confronted the picturesque — that Enlightenment obsession with the ways in which landscapes, architecture, and even other people can be experienced *like a picture*, cuing mental associations absorbed from literature and paintings. This might have substantially enlarged and enriched his fruitful analysis of the conscious and unconscious processes by which humans link real architectural

experiences with remembered virtual counterparts. The silvery veins of provocative, stimulating concepts in this part of the book are instead embedded in an impressively broad, if occasionally dense, exegesis of the past century's output of philosophical speculation on cognitive processes.

"Cinema, Architecture and the Everyday" provides the second portion of the book. Here Koeck seeks to demonstrate how "certain cinematic techniques and terms, such as 'sequences and events, movements and passages' can be used to think about architecture and urban spaces" (p.26). Essentially, filmmaking and film-viewing are presented as metaphors for the design and experience of cities. Koeck thus compares urban fabric that displays historic and spatial continuity (say, medieval buildings next to Renaissance buildings, all working together to define the same square) to filmic continuity, wherein time and space are conveyed in a naturalistic flow as opposed to being dramatically chopped up by the film editor. A contrasting juxtaposition of misaligned buildings is described as an "urban montage" generated by "urban cuts." These comparative analogies are interesting, but as Koeck himself reveals, they are problematic because one can use them to draw wildly different lessons. If one was a fan of Italian Neorealist cinema, for example, one might argue in favor of urban continuity and reject any sensational, Hollywoodesque "urban editing" that privileges the superficially exceptional over the quotidian and common: no Gehry interventions, please. On the other hand, if one was a fan of exuberant science fiction, one might — as Koeck vehemently does — demand that all new buildings, especially those in historic districts, respond to their context with the tried-and-true *shock of the new* to generate maximum narrative dynamic. The question is, even if the reader agrees that an architect's prime aesthetic imperative is to self-consciously weave historical narratives (and this reader does not), which of the countless possible stories should be acted out for the public? Should architecture portray the unbroken continuity of human hope and struggle, the violent glory of technological progress, or something else entirely?

In the conclusion to *Cine-scapes*, Koeck transcends his previous assertions and confesses that there is a big difference between a set designer and a screenwriter. Postwar attempts by modernists to orchestrate human behavior "failed spectacularly," and we should perhaps revisit the Renaissance belief that "it is the work of a designer to *set the stage* for social interactions," rather than vaingloriously strive to direct human lives (p.158). A stage will, of course, lend meaning to the activities that it frames and supports, but it cannot master the puppets. Cinema's resistance to improvised performance, on the other hand, makes it a problematic metaphor for civic life, and as Koeck demonstrates in a variety of fascinating ways, emerging screen technologies are enabling cinema to invade our urban stages with uncertain consequences. The creative possibilities are limitless, but so are the threats. How will human dramas maintain their dignity in the face of constant commercial breaks? How will social events transpire at all

when our minds are plugged into individual, hand-held virtual spaces, even as we bodily inhabit spaces that are ostensibly shared? These are important questions, and not only for architects. Koeck does our field a service by asking them in this innovative, if incomplete and somewhat inconsistent, book.

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The Peranakan Chinese Home: Art and Culture in Daily Life.
Ronald G. Knapp; photography by A. Chester Ong. North Clarendon, VT: Tuttle, 2013. 160 pp., b&w and color illus.



The many qualities of the Peranakan Chinese home and house form, a true hybrid of Chinese, Malay and colonial architecture, are well captured in this new book by Ronald G. Knapp, which includes the most beautiful photography by A. Chester Ong. Fortunately, many of these old homes have stayed within individual families over the years and have been kept in relatively good shape or

renovated with sensitivity. This book captures the rich color and texture of these old homes as well as the complexity of the union of Chinese and Malay culture. It is most refreshing to see so many examples of the interiors, furnishings, and material culture of houses, which are not typically represented in architectural books.

These homes were the product of the wedding of Chinese men to Malay women in colonial Malaya. Unlike Chinese sojourners in other parts of the world, these men frequently adopted the local culture and expressed their cross-cultural union in their homes. Generally, Chinese men did not adopt foreign cultures and integrate them with their own. Chinese men who migrated to work abroad much more typically intended to return to their home villages in China. Therefore, the sheer act of establishing such a commitment and integrating with the local culture to create these Peranakan homes reflected a certain progressive change of attitude.

The photography, in addition to being very rich in color, captures the essence of the spaces as well as the feeling of the homes. For example, it shows unusual details such as Chinese motifs in the plaster around windows and doors, local flora depicted on column capitals, and the use of decorative tiles on exterior walls. Every page demonstrates the fine craftsmanship that was typical in southern China.

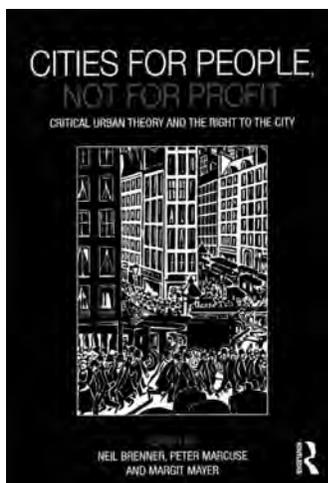
The exteriors of the buildings, meanwhile, exhibited Western architectural motifs designed to allow the buildings to blend in with other colonial structures. Such cultural ambiguity was present inside as well, where the interior layouts included both Western and Chinese reception and dining rooms. For successful Chinese men, this doubling of spaces served as both a gesture toward Westerners and a source of pride. The traditional Chinese reception hall, found in almost all old homes in the southeastern provinces of China and in Southeast Asia after World War II, was lined with chairs on both sides and a tall table in the middle facing the entryway. On or above the table were ancestral tablatures or a deity flanked by scrolls of couplets hanging from the wall. The use of metal railings and the circular metal stairs, originally imported from Scotland, were very much in mode among these grand homes. Later, similar circular wood stairs were introduced.

What makes this book so compelling is that the fine examples of carvings and workmanship, typically found in traditional homes in China of this period, are now mostly destroyed. Young people growing up in China today have no idea what their grandparents' homes were like. This book may help restore a sense of these spaces. For Chinese scholars interested in ancestral homes and architecture, it also provides an excellent visual document of the material culture of the Peranakan home — as well as (by extension) traditional homes in China in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

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Cities for People, Not for Profit: Critical Urban Theory and the Right to the City. Edited by Neil Brenner, Peter Marcuse, and Margit Mayer. London: Routledge, 2012. Xii + 284 pp., b&w ill.



Early in my doctoral studies, I was sternly admonished by a fellow seminar student for critiquing a text because it failed to be what I wished it to be, rather than evaluating it on its own merits. It is a useful point which I have struggled to keep in mind ever since. This struggle is epitomized in many ways by my reading of Neil Brenner, Peter Marcuse, and Margit Mayer's anthologized collection *Cities for People, Not for Profit*.

The book, published in 2012 by Routledge, is a spiced-up collection of articles that originally appeared in a special issue of the U.K. journal *City* in 2009. The special issue was designed to explore the increasing commodification of urban environments in cities of the global North and the role of a “critical urban theory” in challenging the current status quo (in the spirit of full disclosure, I am now a member of the editorial board of *City*, but was not at the time of the special issue). Most of the core articles and authors remain, including Margit Mayer on the “right to the city” in urban social movements, Oren Yiftachel on “grey space” and critical theory, and Kanishka Goonewardena’s fascinatingly erudite “eight theses” on space and revolution. The collection includes two of my favorite pieces by two of my favorite young(ish) urban writers: Justus Uitermark’s skeptical yet heartfelt exploration of Amsterdam as a supposedly “actually existing just city,” and Tom Slater’s brave and breathtakingly honest critical examination of the life’s work of the London-gentrification scholar Chris Hamnett. Both the Uitermark and Slater pieces are fantastic works of urban criticism — one aimed at an often idealized city, the other at a noted and prolific scholar (who would reply in the pages of the same journal).

The new pieces that were added to the original journal issue are a true smorgasbord. They include an interview with David Harvey, an attempt to connect theory to practice from long-time U.S. community organizer Jon Liss, and a detailed analysis by Neil Brenner, David Wachsmuth, and David Madden of the potential contributions of actor-network theory to critical urban theory. The result is an erudite compendium which makes for a fantastic teaching text for a doctoral seminar. Even though the articles are now five years old (some are even older), they remain an excellent introduction to key aspects of our trade, from how to write a critique, to how to incorporate disparate ideas from the depths of social theory or a variety of subdisciplines (see, for instance, Katherine Rankin’s fusion of urban theory and development studies). Key aspects of the subject — gentrification, displacement, “creative cities,” housing rights, social movements, etc. — have also not lost importance, and these contributions by some of the leading scholars in the field should hold their value for years to come.

A more complex issue surfaces, however, when one considers the text as a political contribution; and it is here that the terrain becomes more rocky and the aforementioned admonishment more relevant. In a series of articles in *City* (“Cities for People, Not for Profit — From a Radical-Libertarian and Latin American Perspective,” 2009; and “Marxists, Libertarians and the City: A Necessary Debate,” 2012), Marcelo Lopez de Souza excoriated the editors for two key failings: a narrow and heavily Marxist reading of the history of urban theory, and a limited and highly Northern focus. The latter critique was to certain extent addressed by Mayer in a rebuttal (“Moving beyond ‘Cities for People, Not for Profit,’” 2012). It should also not come as a surprise to *TDSR* readers, given the current

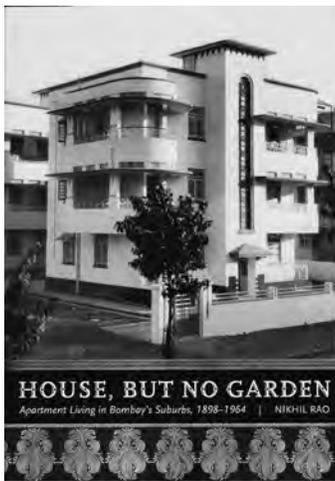
and much-needed focus on the geography of theory described by Ananya Roy in her 2009 *Regional Studies* piece “The 21st-Century Metropolis: New Geographies of Theory.” But it is de Souza’s former critique, having to do with ideological intent, which I found surprisingly spot-on. This involves not simply the focus on commodification, but a telling of the history of “critical” urban theory which is too much Frankfurt School and Harvey/Castells/Lefebvre, and not enough everything else.

Perhaps this is the problem with turning a special issue into a book. In the journal, the work was fresh and provocative, and the neo-Marxist leanings of the editors were simply a part of what made it exciting. The initial series helped provoke years of further writings and additional debates. But, as a book, this material feels a tad uninspiring, overly erudite, and “academic.” Its density and obsession with the Frankfurt school push the text further from the stated goal of “developing the relationship between practice and theory” (as Mayer wrote in her 2012 rebuttal), despite the presence of the Liss piece. Instead, the book seems content to educate and theorize more than provoke and inspire. Alas, perhaps I am being unfair, criticizing a smart, well-edited, and solidly crafted collection for not being the kick in the pants critical urban studies needs to produce. But that is a subject for another article entirely.

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House, but No Garden: Apartment Living in Bombay's Suburbs, 1898–1964. Nikhil Rao. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013. 312 pp., 53 b&w photos, 2 tables.



Nikhil Rao’s *House, but No Garden: Apartment Living in Bombay’s Suburbs, 1898–1964* is a welcome addition to the growing body of work chronicling Bombay’s development in the twentieth century. This now includes Gyan Prakash’s *Mumbai Fables*; Thomas Hansen’s *Wages of Violence: Naming and Identity in Postcolonial Bombay*; Prashant Kidambi’s *The Making of an Indian Metropolis: Colo-*

onial Governance and Public Culture in Bombay, 1890–1920; Sandip Hazareesingh’s *The Colonial City and the Challenge of Modernity: Urban Hegemonies and Civic Contestations in Bombay City, 1905–1925*; and Mariam Dossal’s *Theatre of Conflict, City of hope: Mumbai, 1660 to Present Times*.

Through its examination of Bombay from 1898 to the postcolonial period, Rao’s book fills a void in the historiography of the colonial city, which to date has been overwhelmingly focused on the nineteenth century. By departing from this standard periodization, it adds value to our understanding of the modernization of the colonial city. And by analyzing the suburban experiences of South-Indian migrants, it departs from older colonial scholarship, which is largely focused on the European experience.

The book also challenges the Eurocentricity of canonical histories of suburbanization, which are mostly histories of American and European suburbs. It employs a careful analysis of land, housing and communities to extend understanding on this topic to include the suburbanization of Bombay. In particular, Rao claims that the growth of apartment living was the dominant cultural, architectural and urban attribute of Bombay’s expansion from 1918 to 1960. Her work here provides nuanced insight into Bombay’s cosmopolitanism by substantiating how suburbs became socio-spatial sites for the reshaping of migrant identities through a delicate negotiation between caste, ethnicity, language and class.

Rao’s first chapter, “An Indian Suburb,” explores the Bombay Improvement Trust’s (BIT) formation in 1898, its slow and difficult process of land acquisition, and its subsequent regulation of new development and street layout. The BIT’s activities eventually expanded the urban periphery to create new suburbs such as Matunga, Sion, Dharavi, Mahim and Worli in areas once considered the rural fringe. Rao chronicles how the BIT established new forms of land tenure and standardized leaseholds in these areas, and in the process created a new system of land valuation. This was based on proximity to the city, rather than *toka* — an older system based on revenue from agricultural production. Rao underscores how this important transformation unhinged the previous relationship between agricultural productivity and land value. As the BIT shaped new suburbs through land consolidation, street layout, and standardized leaseholds, the market price of land became increasingly dependent on location and connection to the city.

In chapter 2, “Peopling the Suburbs,” Rao addresses how South-Indian migrants began moving into the buildings in Matunga from the 1920s on. These migrants had no ties to older Bombay neighborhoods, and were therefore open to moving to the new suburbs, a choice the more established residents of the city resisted. This chapter dwells on how Matunga became a South-Indian hotspot and developed a distinct identity as a politicized ethnic community in the 1930s.

With the growth of the Dadar-Matunga suburb, the Bombay flat became synonymous with middle-class life. The third chapter, “The Rise of the Bombay Flat,” illustrates how this architectural type was domesticated as a marker of identity. What distinguished the flat from earlier typologies was its self-contained design and attached toilet. Yet, while the toilet undoubtedly enabled new regimes of personal hy-

giene, it occupied a conflicted position in the middle-class cultural imagination. It was perceived simultaneously as a source of pollution, which needed to be segregated from food preparation and the kitchen, and a site where the body could be cleansed of impurities. Rao claims that the cultural inclusion of the toilet within the home was the definitive attribute that established the flat as a normative middle-class dwelling.

Continuing with the theme of indigenizing the flat, the fourth chapter, “The Spread of Apartment Living,” recounts how the residents of Dadar-Matunga ascribed new meanings, functions and definitions to the spaces of the apartment building. The interior of the Bombay flat was adapted to its residents’ lifestyle through a set of practices that included ascribing multifunctionality to spaces originally designated as monofunctional. The fluid use of interior spaces, the disaggregated bathroom, and the sharing of lobby space between neighboring flats were all ways the Bombay flat was adapted from its English origins to migrant life. The Bombay flat was also distinct from its English counterpart on the outside, where a compound mediated the relationship of building to street.

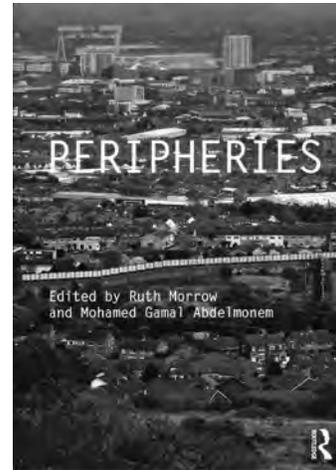
Chapter 5, “Southern Indians to ‘South Indians,’” examines how immigrants from the south negotiated regional, caste and linguistic differences to identify themselves with a larger group — that of the “South Indian” — which Rao calls a “metacategory.” While the migrants still asserted caste and linguistic differences in domains of marriage and dining, expedience dictated that they transcend their differences to form metacaste cooperative housing societies.

The replication of the suburbanization process that was inaugurated in Dader-Matunga in Salsette provides the topic for the sixth chapter, “Towards Greater Mumbai.” This registers the fundamental changes in the formative and operative mechanism of the cooperative society, which began as a caste-based institution. In particular, the cooperative society was transformed by the arrival of new migrant communities, particularly Sindhis and Punjabis.

The book is a remarkable history of the processes through which migrant ethnic communities may recalibrate their sense of self and community — in this case through their encounter with a new building type, the modern apartment block. It also gives the reader insight into how urban communities were shaped through suburbanization. *House, but No Garden* is extremely valuable for urban and architectural historians, especially those interested in colonial cities, South Asian cities, and South Asia.

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Peripheries. Edited by Ruth Morrow and Mohamed Gamal Abdelmonem. London: Routledge, 2013. Xiv + 277 pp., b&w illus.



The idea of periphery figuratively or conceptually evokes at once two interwoven conditions: first, an outward boundary condition; and second, a relational condition of something distinguished from its internal, dominant, center. When conceived as the former, the idea conjures other semantically related concepts such as fringe, edge and margin. Being peripheral in this sense

is equal to being excluded and limited in significance and importance. However, when conceived as a relational concept, the idea brings to mind issues of dominance and subordination, of resistance, and of limit and frontier. It also solicits questions such as, What is a limit? What lies beyond the frontier? What role does the core play in the framing of the limit? And, what role does the limit play in the transformation or subversion of the center?

Born out of an academic conference that took place in Belfast, Northern Ireland, in 2011, the edited volume *Peripheries* brings all these questions and concepts to light, particularly as they relate to architecture and urban studies. From this perspective, the book falls within a growing genre premised on exploring the various fluid concepts and paradoxes inherent in boundary conditions. Yet, unlike many other writings on the topic which frequently present these ideas in the abstract, the various chapters that make up this volume do not prolong theoretical discussions unduly. Rather, they present an excellent collection of well-researched, concrete case studies netted together both by an emphasis on examining the very nature and function of boundary positions, and by an insistence on interrogating the dichotomy between center and periphery, where some alternative means of reading, inquiry and debate are offered.

Like all edited volumes, the challenge for the editors of *Peripheries* was to find threads and themes that run through the publication and allow its various essays cohere, and then to draw out conclusions that move imagination and understanding forward. From this perspective, the editors have been to a great extent successful. In addition to its introduction and epilogue, the volume consists of fifteen research essays organized into four theme sections, each preceded by what the editors call “askant views,” or “interventions.”

Contributors to the first section examine the fluidity and binary relationship of center and periphery in selected spatial and temporal conditions. In each of the four essays the meaning of “periphery” is different — from being a conceptual topic related to place-identity to being an overlooked topic in architectural discourse. One essay looks at how the identity of an ordinary peripheral place, Barking, east of London, is constructed in relation to that city, one of the most central locations on the globe. The author of another uncovers the spatial manifestation of a common place at the periphery of the architectural gaze but at the very center of everyday life — the supermarket.

The authors of work in part two examine case studies derived from architectural practice. Overall, these consider how architects have dealt with overlooked, obsolete spaces at the edge of cities: from sprawl and new forms of urbanity, to obsolete and neglected industrial and heritage sites. It is in this section of the book in particular that contributors beautifully single out creative ways to revalorize urban edges and architectural peripheries in design imagination and practice.

Part three turns to people’s experiences, practices and responses to marginal positions. “Peripheral” here is understood as illustrating the more semantically slippery nature of the term: people at the margin of social power, prevailing social norms, or their historical time.

The last section is titled “Edge Readings” and is composed of four essays. The first two return to the theme of a binary relation between center and periphery. Using local archives and original sources, they chart how architectural ideas and practices move from the dominant center to the subordinate periphery. Perhaps my favorite two essays in the whole book are the last two here. Both offer unorthodox forms of spatial readings and representations. One examines murder scenes in Nordic and Tartan Noir novels. With the act of criminality at the edge of society, these literary murder scenes, it turns out, disclose much about contemporary society — and within this, lessons specific to architecture. The other essay charts how and where often-neglected sonic qualities territorialize sectarian spaces in the contested city of Beirut.

To ponder such complex issues related to peripheries at this historical moment is to give new urgency to the search for innovative design ideas. In this sense, the questions and ideas raised here revolve around fundamental issues that go beyond the specificities of the cases discussed. Do these emerging investigations of peripheral conditions signal an upsurge that will extend our epistemological frontiers (i.e., extend our ways of knowing the world and our field)? Are we actively seeking to redefine new boundaries while simultaneously transgressing them? Are these investigations and discussions merely intellectual fences that we must erect to make sense of an increasingly complex world?

Whether the issues related to peripheries explored here are simply intellectual, navigational devices or embody essen-

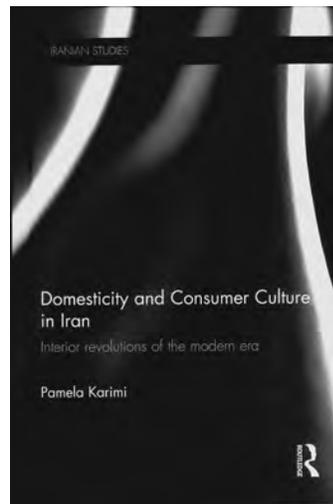
tial truths about the world, this volume carries a conviction that might never be provable. This is that peripheries are fundamental to human conditions; they can lead to a state of apathy and submission, but they equally serve as strategic sites for challenging dominant forms through innovative and creative methods of investigation.

Overall, this is a valuable volume and worthy of closer reading. I hope it will spur others to deepen the interrogation of other boundary and peripheral cases, pushing the limits of architecture and imagination to new frontiers.

Khaled Adham

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Domesticity and Consumer Culture in Iran: Interior Revolutions of the Modern Era. Pamela Karimi. London and New York: Routledge, 2013. 262 pp., b&w illus.



Pamela Karimi’s *Domesticity and Consumer Culture in Iran* is a thought-provoking examination of the intersection of domestic architecture, consumerism, and the social transformation of taste in twentieth-century Iran. An associate professor of Art at the University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth, Karimi earned a Ph.D. in the history and theory of art and architecture from MIT in 2009. As a result of her training there as well as her

pre-doctoral education in Iran, she is well situated to explore these diverse fields and produce a comprehensive, insightful work. Revolving around the development and transformation of domestic space, primarily in the major cities of Iran, the narrative moves forward chronologically from the late Qajar period to the end of the Pahlavi period, with an epilogue touching on some practices in the Islamic Republic.

The subject matter the book explores is well researched in different institutions and localities within Iran and in various collections and archives in the United States. It thus provides a new perspective on architecture, one that pulls into the discussion debates developed in other fields — for instance, cinema, economy, sociology, and the many interpretations and implementations of Shi’ism in modern Iran. These connections have rarely been explored in the field of Iranian studies. This book does this by looking not only at what court nobility did in terms of high culture (as has been the tradition in past

studies of Iranian architecture), but also at what the people did despite of, in resistance to, or in mimicry of high culture.

We thus read an architectural history of agency, of how the forces of modernity and rapid economic transformation were mediated by the active choices of ordinary people: middle-class housewives, merchant homeowners, prostitutes, street vendors, and bureaucrats of the British oil company. Still, it is telling that this bottom-up socio-spatial history cannot be completely divorced from how Iran's kings built, either historically and in contemporary times. Shah Abbas's Ali Qapu palace serves as an outstanding example. It speaks to the status of the monarchical tradition and the systematic ways that class structure has affected Iranian design and taste-formation for centuries.

In reading the story of ordinary people's architecture, one remains curious how exactly domestic spaces were used, how they were modified, and how housing was deployed as a means of protest. This became particularly relevant after the Iranian Revolution. Public lifestyles changed so radically at that time that they affected the very design and management of private spaces. For example, vestibules were needed to allow for the transformation of female appearance from public to private realms; new systems were required to police the privacy of domestic life; and spaces were needed to mediate gender relations in public. Yet, in the same vein, one might ask which, specifically, were the "traditional" spaces and practices that had once been modernized? This narrative need not depend on a teleology of progress from the "traditional" through "modernization." One could likewise ask why, in a historically hierarchical society like Iran, where modernization occurred primarily as a heavy-handed nation-building project, it should not be equally important to write an independent, bottom-up history of taste.

Karimi's excellent and multidisciplinary examination of Iranian architecture reveals another pressing concern in the growing field of Iranian studies: the question of how to properly merge visual culture with historically text-based and literature-privileging Iranian historiography. In this regard, however, the rare images, some of which are being published for the first time, do little justice to the rich text. Some floor plans appear to be diagrams instead of architectural drawings, and some captions fall short of describing the corresponding image (i.e., "map" is a literal Persian translation of a plan, which does not denote a floor plan). Larger images, perhaps colorful ones, would have helped further the discussion or shed new light on its theorization. In this book's design, the visual material seems to act more as an appendix to the text than a partner to it.

This disjunction between image and text hints at a more general concern. As pioneering works such as *Domesticity and Consumer Culture in Iran* push the conventions and become the norm, Iranian studies as a whole might want to revisit its priorities. This might perhaps involve coming to terms with the fact that not only literature, history, sociology,

and political science, but also art, architecture, cinema, and visual studies are at the forefront of ways of knowing. Technologies as well as attitudes will need to be updated to cater to this shift in the field. As a singular and important book, *Domesticity and Consumer Culture in Iran* tackles these and other issues from the perspective of domesticity and economy — both of which have rarely, if at all, cross-pollinated discourse on architecture and identity formation.

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Little White Houses: How the Postwar Home Constructed Race in America. Dianne Harris. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2013. 366 pp., illus.



In March of 1969, the *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* published a short article by John Maass — an art director and information officer in the Philadelphia City Representative's

Office and an architectural historian of the Victorian age — titled "Where Architectural Historians Fear to Tread." It was a damning indictment of the artificially narrow purview of academic architectural history, delivered mostly through simple acts of counting. Maass made numerous critiques, including that architectural historians seemed to care little for the technical aspects of architecture, less for urbanism, still less for "vernacular" building, and not at all for architecture's relationships to other arts and human sciences. But perhaps most damning was his documentation that of 461 articles published in the *JSAH* from 1957 to 1968, only eleven treated "Non-Western Architecture":

The entire field of Far Eastern architecture is represented by one article describing two buildings in Honolulu. . . . There can be no doubt that the assumption of white supremacy forms the basis for this unbalanced view of the globe. The ratio of 251:4:2 [articles on Western Architecture:articles on "Oriental" architecture:articles on architecture in Africa, Oceania and the Americas] corresponds with the Victorian scheme which divided the world into civilized, semi-civilized, and barbarous races.

Much in North American architectural history has changed since 1969, but not enough. With the ascent of

Dianne Harris to the presidency of the Society of Architectural Historians in 2010, however, further change was set in motion. A graduate of programs in landscape architecture, architectural design, and architectural history at the University of California at Berkeley, and currently a professor of Landscape Architecture, Architecture, Art History, and History, and Director of the Illinois Program for Research in the Humanities at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Harris has long been an outspoken scholar and critic. Arguing forcefully, often against the grain of the still substantially conservative culture of academic architectural history, she has done as much as any other contemporary architectural historian to push for an interdisciplinary, even counter-disciplinary approach to research and narration regarding the history of landscape, architecture and design. (In particular, one might note her article “That’s Not Architectural History! Or, What’s a Discipline For?” in the June 2011 issue of *JSAH*.)

Little White Houses is a race and class critique of the ubiquitous suburban homes that proliferated throughout the post-World War II United States. It is perhaps Harris’s most pointed argument yet for an alternative to architectural histories mired in the hermetic concerns (largely inherited from its father-discipline, art history) of formalism and biography. As she writes, the book is both an effort “to understand the ways in which postwar domestic environments became poignant ciphers for whiteness, affluence, belonging, and a sense of permanent stability” and a renewal of Maass’s and others’ challenges to the hidebound conventions of the “discipline” of architectural history. These conventions were perhaps best summarized by Nikolaus Pevsner’s imperious opening line to *An Outline of European Architecture*: “A bicycle shed is a building; Lincoln Cathedral is a piece of architecture.” (For a thoughtful and even-handed discussion of the disciplinary nature of architectural history, readers might turn to chapter one in Andrew Leach’s 2010 *What is Architectural History?*)

Harris’s book is divided into eight chapters, which treat, in turn, the norms that constitute “the ordinary postwar house”; the role of the publishing industry, particularly popular magazines, in establishing a normative rhetoric of domesticity; the graphic conventions of architectural drawing and illustration that realized an aesthetic of hygiene and uniformity; the mechanisms for enforcing “privacy” in suburban homes; the manufacture of taste and consumption of household goods; storage systems and the strategic display of goods to connote status; television; and the yard. Valuable aperçus pervade all of these, and Harris’s ingenuity in teasing out radical modern innovation, rapid historical change, and insidious ideological operations from the most mundane and familiar objects and arrangements is fascinating. She seems to transform the *heimlich* into the *unheimlich* with a deceptive ease that belies the intensive research and intellectual work underpinning her analyses.

Yet there is a question of method in all of this, which transcends the subject matter. Readers will hardly be sur-

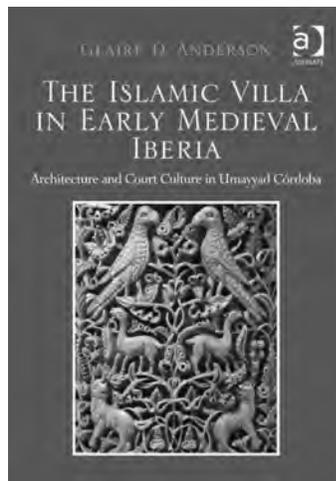
prised to discover that Harris’s heated introduction makes the claim that, in the wake of so many vanguardist and ideologically naïve histories of architectural modernism, it is the task of the architectural historian to turn to the much more important sociological and formal study of quotidian spaces and structures. Following a broad coalition of scholars who, beginning in the very same post-World War II period and continuing through the present, have staked out a spatial approach to sociological analysis (and above all Howard Winant and Michael Omi’s influential theories on the social construction of race), Harris seeks to expose the “spatial rhetoric(s)” of seemingly “invisible” aspects of the everyday. There is little original in this, no matter how admirable the aim, but Harris adds two significant twists to her method that will be fuel for debate.

The first twist is an appeal to Slavoj Žižek’s popularizing interpretation (in his 1989 *The Sublime Object of Ideology*) of Peter Sloterdijk’s difficult 1988 masterpiece, *Critique of Cynical Reason*. Here Žižek outlined his notion of ideological cynicism in order to make sense of the persistence of racist and class-based ideology in the face of otherwise withering critique. The second twist is Harris’s use of her own (Jewish) grandparents’ home in the San Fernando Valley as an object of analysis. This double move at once distinguishes Harris’s book from the well-known work on “whiteness” of scholars such as David Roediger (*Colored White: Transcending the Racial Past*), on which Harris’s work nonetheless relies, and the work of the very best historians of suburbia such as John Archer (*The Architecture of Suburbia: From English Villa to American Dream House, 1690–2000*). It also sets the book as a whole in opposition to critiques (many written in the headiest days of the influence of poststructuralism in architectural culture) of the whiteness of the International Style, such as Mark Wigley’s *White Walls, Designer Dresses: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture*.

Even for such a sympathetic reader as myself, however, the book is not without significant problems. The most important is a familiar historicist tautology that pervades the text. The book’s subtitle informs us that “the postwar home constructed race in America.” But is this really the case? What about the people who “constructed” the houses? Was it individuals, or groups, who performed this construction? And what about race constructing houses? In fact, Harris is a thoughtful and serious historian wrestling with a very slippery subject. Far from being a flaw inherent to Harris’s work, though, the claim made in the title and throughout the book is a necessary step for scholarly debate in a field that still struggles to address race at all. The conversations it will prompt in classrooms and in print will do much to push architectural history into that space into which it has feared to tread.

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The Islamic Villa in Early Medieval Iberia: Architecture and Court Culture in Umayyad Córdoba. Glaire D. Anderson. Fanham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013. 225 pp, 16 color plates, 80 b&w illus.



The elite of many cultures throughout history have built residences in the vicinity of cities as places of recreation and enjoyment of nature. In ancient Roman times, these were given the name *villa*. And in the centuries since, any similar structure has automatically been referred to as such by specialists and architects, despite the presence of other, more culturally specific terminologies. Such is the case

here, where the name “Islamic villa” is used in place of the more technically correct Arabic term *al-munya*.

Between the eighth and tenth centuries a surprisingly large number of suburban residential compounds of this type appeared on the Iberian peninsula. And the construction of *al-munya* (hereafter, *munya*) was particularly pronounced around the city of Córdoba, capital of the Umayyad emirs and caliphs in al-Andalus. These structures, of which very little remains, provide the subject of this book by Glaire D. Anderson, an associate professor at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Anderson uses a convergent analysis of architecture, ways of life, politics, agriculture, aesthetic ideas, and other matters to shed light on this little-known chapter in the history of the region.

As Anderson points out early on, not all of these suburban compounds were made from scratch. Some were renovations of existing structures dating to the Roman and late-antique periods. In chronicling these activities, she reports, “. . . Roman and late antique villas and estates which had passed into the control of Visigothic aristocracy may well have survived more or less intact into the Islamic period, thanks to the intermarriage between the newly arrived Umayyad military leaders and the local Visigothic elite” (p.16).

In her introduction, Anderson deals with the phenomenon of the villa, or *munya*, both generally and in terms of its most outstanding architectural details. After tracing this history in other cultures and time periods, she explores the evolution and nature of patronage that allowed this building type to flourish around Córdoba during the first centuries of Iberia’s Islamic occupation. She rightly emphasizes the role of the Umayyad emirs, who undoubtedly were seeking to rival their predecessors from Damascus. But she also calls

attention to a group, the *mawali*, within the court elite whose members were frequently not of Arab-Muslim origin, and who had often risen from being slaves to free people. After they had acquired high positions within the Islamic government, the emirs and caliphs sometimes bestowed *munya* on them (although in many cases the *mawali* were eunuchs, and so had no descendants to pass the properties on to).

The *mawali* were often responsible for palace activities related to artistic production and court etiquette, which made their residences a frame of reference on refinement and distinction for Arab elites. Indeed, the participation of these dignitaries in governmental tasks supported the Andalusian Umayyads when it came to confronting the unsure and unruly Arab-Muslim aristocracy. That same Arab aristocracy, however, eventually took its revenge on the *mawali* following the decline in caliphal authority under Hisham II — which in turn led to the decline of many of these properties.

Anderson next deals with the architecture. Hardly any *munyas* are intact today, and some are completely gone, making detailed analysis difficult. In addition to the lack of physical remains, it means Anderson has had to base her analysis largely on previous archaeological investigations and scattered written evidence. In Spain, a *munya* generally consisted of a main residence, with splendid decoration, accompanied by auxiliary buildings to service it and its attendant agricultural lands. The entire estate was generally surrounded by walls to protect residents and produce.

The best-preserved example of a *munya* today is the al-Rumaniyya. This was excavated at the beginning of the twentieth century, and although its main residential quarters were destroyed shortly thereafter, its surroundings remain intact. Only limited information was published in 1912 by Ricardo Velazquez Bosco, who excavated the main building. However, recent research by a German-Spanish archaeological team yielded information about a hall that probably served as a lookout pavilion (or *mirador* in Spanish). Based on this information, Anderson created computer renderings to help readers imagine the atmosphere of no-longer-existing structures. Although this graphic experiment is interesting and useful, it does not employ present-day capabilities, particularly in terms of light effects.

After reviewing the origin and nature of decorative elements, Anderson then attempts to describe the domestic atmosphere in the al-Andalus palaces. She invites the reader to appreciate the luxury and refinement these offered. This includes descriptions of daily etiquette among the aristocracy and the consumption habits of the court, including the uses of clothing, perfume, food and seasoning. An extensive use of texts, contemporary and from other periods, helps Anderson depict many of these refinements, as well as the life of the servants who made them possible.

Anderson also devotes a chapter to analyzing these estates’ agricultural features. A villa’s surroundings were mainly devoted to farming, which provided a source of in-

come for the owner. But productive lands were coupled with pleasure gardens surrounding the residence. Both relied on the control of water, a scarce resource in a dry climate.

Finally, Anderson describes the role these estates played in the social, cultural and political life of the time. Caliphs often used them as sites for law courts and feasts. The estates also provided meeting places for courtiers and intellectuals, as well as lodging for ambassadors and guests.

The Islamic Villa in Early Medieval Iberia provides a detailed and pleasant addition to literature on the Iberian peninsula, while expanding villa studies to encompass “non-Western” examples. It will benefit those interested in this type of architecture as well as in the life and material culture of the Muslim elite of al-Andalus. Architects, historians, and art historians, as well as scholars and students of medieval culture, will undoubtedly enjoy Anderson’s book.

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