

THE APARTMENT COMPLEX

PAMELA
ROBERTSON
WOJCIK, EDITOR



URBAN LIVING
AND GLOBAL
SCREEN CULTURES

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The background of the cover is an abstract architectural floor plan. It consists of a network of black lines of varying thicknesses that define various rectangular and irregular spaces, representing rooms and corridors. Some areas are filled with solid black, while others are white. The overall impression is that of a technical drawing or a map of a building's layout.

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URBAN LIVING
AND GLOBAL
SCREEN CULTURES

Pamela Robertson
Wojcik, editor

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgments ix

Introduction: What Makes the Apartment Complex? 1

PAMELA ROBERTSON WOJCIK

1. Palaces of Pleasure and Deceit among the Clouds:
The Depression-Era Cinematic Penthouse Plot 21

MERRILL SCHLEIER

2. From Walter Neff to C. C. Baxter:
Billy Wilder's Apartment Plots 44

STEVEN COHAN

3. Alain Resnais, Tsai Ming-liang,
and the Apartment Plot Musical 65

JOE MCELHANEY

4. Movement and Stasis in
Fassbinder's Apartment Plot 84

MICHAEL DEANGELIS

5. Housework, Sex Work:
Feminist Ambivalence at 23 Quai
du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles 105

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE

6. Home's Invasion:

Repulsion and the Horror of Apartments 126

VERONICA FITZPATRICK

7. Reattachment Theory:

Gay Marriage and the Apartment Plot 145

LEE WALLACE

8. "We Don't Need to Dream No More.

We Got Real Estate": *The Wire*, Urban Development,
and the Racial Boundaries of the American Dream 168

PAULA J. MASSOOD

Bibliography 187

Contributors 195

Index 197

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This collection emerged after I saw a scholar give a lecture on recent Latin American cinema using my book *The Apartment Plot: Urban Living in American Film and Popular Culture, 1945 to 1975*. Pleased that someone had taken up the term, I started wondering how other people would talk about the apartment plot and what it would look like in relation to other cinematic and historical contexts. I invited scholars I know and respect to take up the apartment plot, and I encouraged them to engage in a conversation with my book, to trouble the term, to argue with it, and with me. I am indebted to the scholars here, who helped expand my understanding of the apartment plot as well as the canon of what can be called apartment plots. I am also indebted to the contributors for their patience. As collections sometimes do, this one took a while and went through some changes over time. The writers gathered here graciously accepted all delays and all my apologies. Attendees at two panels on the apartment plot at the Society for Cinema and Media Studies provided helpful insights and excellent questions. Patrice Petro, as respondent, offered particularly astute observations and suggestions for the introduction. I am grateful to the anonymous readers whose cogent comments helped us improve the collection, and to our editor at Duke University Press, Courtney Berger, for taking another chance on me. And I am grateful to all potential readers for taking some time to read these essays, and hopefully to watch some apartment plots.

INTRODUCTION

WHAT MAKES THE APARTMENT COMPLEX?

PAMELA ROBERTSON WOJCIK

The Apartment Complex: Urban Living and Global Screen Cultures takes up the category of the apartment plot from my previous book, *The Apartment Plot: Urban Living in American Film and Popular Culture, 1945 to 1975*, to more fully explore the term and, at the same time, put some pressure on the category. This anthology is not intended to be a survey of apartment plots, nor should it be viewed as comprehensive. Instead, this book ruminates upon the following questions: How do different historical contexts modify the ideology of the apartment plot? How do variables of national or transnational context alter the genre? Do analyses of the apartment plot override readings associated with art cinema, auteurism, or traditional genres? Or, vice versa, how does a consideration of the apartment plot as genre make us see films associated with different national cinemas, particular auteurs, or traditional genres differently?

Some of these questions will be answered in the accrual of individual case studies as authors examine a range of films including classical Hollywood

films—such as 1950s films by Billy Wilder and 1930s penthouse plots—Taiwanese and French modernist musicals, Fassbinder films, queer British films, indie films, European art cinema, and the American television show *The Wire* (2002). Readers will decide if they find convincing readings of such films as *Weekend* (Andrew Haigh, 2011), *The Hole* (Tsai Ming-liang, 1998), *Why Does Herr R. Run Amok?* (Rainer Werner Fassbinder, 1970), *Repulsion* (Roman Polanski, 1965), or *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (Chantal Akerman, 1975) in terms of the apartment plot, or consider the films illuminated by the analysis. By reading about apartment plots across different national and transnational production contexts, readers may find resonances across the diverse selection of films. Many possible apartment plots, nations, subgenres, and auteurs are absent here. My hope is that those who find the concept of the apartment plot useful will discuss apartment plots in other contexts and add to the larger understanding of the genre. My goal here is to map out the parameters of the apartment plot and consider how different historical, national, and generic contexts may alter or expand its definition.

The Apartment Plot as Genre

To begin a consideration of the apartment plot as a genre, at a minimum, we can identify cycles of apartment plots in fiction, film, and television. As Amanda Klein suggests, film cycles “are a series of films associated with each other through shared images, characters, settings, plots or themes.”¹ While Klein argues that cycles must be financially viable and have “public discourses circulating around them,” which would not be true, as such, of the apartment plot, she also describes cycles as often serving as proto- or pre-genres. In this sense, the apartment plot seems to be a genre that has developed out of a few prominent cycles. In her book *Apartment Stories*, Sharon Marcus identified cycles within the literary genre of apartment plots.² In nineteenth-century Paris, as Baron Haussmann’s modernization of the city transformed the structure of apartments, Marcus finds a cycle of apartment plots as a subgenre of the realist novel; and in nineteenth-century London, the rise of subdivided homes creates a cycle of supernatural or haunted apartment plots. My book on the apartment plot examined a cycle of American films between 1945 and 1975. Bracketed by the end of World War II, on one end, and New York’s municipal and financial crisis in the 1970s, on the other, this cycle emerged as the status of the

city was up for grabs due to the rise of suburban domestic ideology and white flight, on the one hand, and, on the other, a massive postwar urban building boom tied to New York's emergence as the cultural capital of the United States.

In television, the apartment plot has been a consistent mode, even a cliché, since *I Love Lucy* (1951), and including *Mr. and Mrs. North* (1952), *My Little Margie* (1952), *My Friend Irma* (1952), *Make Room for Daddy* (1953), *The Honeymooners* (1955), *Love on a Rooftop* (1966), *Occasional Wife* (1966), *Family Affair* (1966), *The Odd Couple* (1970), *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (1970), *Diana* (1973), *The Jeffersons* (1975), *One Day at a Time* (1975), *Three's Company* (1977), *Seinfeld* (1988), *Melrose Place* (1992), *Friends* (1994), *How I Met Your Mother* (2005), *Rules of Engagement* (2007), *New Girl* (2011), and more. More a consistent subgenre than a single cycle, the apartment plot has been a crucial unacknowledged mainstay of television.

More than merely a cycle, I argue, the apartment plot in film is a genre. At base, apartment plots are narratives in which the apartment figures as a central device. This means that the apartment is more than setting, but motivates or shapes the narrative in some key way. In *The Apartment* (Billy Wilder, 1960), for example, the plot hinges on C. C. Baxter (Jack Lemmon) loaning his apartment to a coterie of married men in hopes of advancement at the office. In *Rosemary's Baby* (Roman Polanski, 1968), when Rosemary (Mia Farrow) and Guy Woodhouse (John Cassavetes) rent an apartment in the chic gothic Bramford apartment building, they come into contact with their neighbors, the Castevets (Sidney Blackmer and Ruth Gordon), who initiate a satanic takeover of Rosemary's body to produce Satan's spawn. Thinking of the apartment as key to the plot eliminates many movies in which the apartment is only setting, such as Woody Allen films. In calling it a plot, I am not suggesting that every apartment plot will follow the same trajectory of events, but that the narrative could not occur without the apartment.

In an apartment plot, not only the space but also the temporality of the apartment structures the events. The temporality of the apartment may relate to the character's being young or single, but, more specifically, in terms of plot, the temporality of the narrative is usually shaped by the temporality of the apartment: beginnings or endings marked by characters moving in or out. Think of the beginnings of *Rosemary's Baby*, *It Should Happen to You* (George Cukor, 1954), *In the Mood for Love* (Wong Kar-wei, 2000), *The Visitor* (Tom McCarthy, 2007), *The Science of Sleep*

(Michel Gondry, 2006), or *The Landlord* (Hal Ashby, 1970), in which the narrative begins with the main character moving into a new apartment. Or consider the endings of *The Apartment*, *Klute* (Alan J. Pakula, 1971), *Rear Window* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1954), *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* (Rainer Werner Fassbinder, 1972), *Sidewalls* (Gustavo Taretto, 2011), or *Bed and Sofa* (Abram Room, 1927), in which at least one central character exits the apartment, dead or alive, at film's end. *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (Blake Edwards, 1961), *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* (Rainer Werner Fassbinder, 1974), *Apartment Zero* (Martin Donovan, 1988), *Dark Water* (Hideo Nakata, 2002), and *The Tenant* (Roman Polanski, 1976) are bracketed at the beginning and end by scenes of characters moving in, then out. There is a contradiction between the sense of dwelling—that characters are identified by and with a place of residence—and the sense that one's place is constantly changing, which relates to the sense of transience in the apartment plot.

In addition to having a narrative motivated by the apartment, the apartment plot is an urban genre. In distinction to the other major urban American genre, film noir, the apartment plot accentuates domestic urbanism. Film noir situates action in public spaces—police stations, diners, hotels, bars, phone booths, cars, streets. As Edward Dimendberg notes, much of film noir registers the failure of the protagonist to achieve an ideal of home: “The protagonists in *film noir* appear cursed by an inability to dwell comfortably anywhere.”³ In contrast, the apartment plot situates the urban inside the home, mobilizing urban themes of sophistication, porousness, contact, and encounter within the apartment.

The apartment plot is not only set in the city: it maps the protagonist's identity into his or her spatial location. Apartment plots tend to use aerial shots or other mechanisms to lay out a larger urban space before narrowing to focus on the apartment as a microcosm of the city. In this sense, the apartment plot suggests that each story is one among the millions possible, like the tagline for the TV show *The Naked City* (1958): “There are eight million stories in the naked city. This has been one of them.” However, the apartment is never broadly representative of the city, but instead marks class and shows residential differentiation, or the idea that similar people live near one another (so that some people and some neighborhoods are excluded from the apartment plot). In mid-twentieth-century America, the apartment plot told only certain stories about mainly white, middle- to upper-class people living mainly in Manhattan's Upper East Side or West Side or Greenwich Village, rarely Harlem and never Brooklyn or Queens,

let alone smaller cities such as St. Louis. Thus the space of the apartment not only motivates action but projects and delimits a character's identity, in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, and class.

Further, the gaze in the apartment plot needs to be understood as an urban gaze. As Marcus suggests, voyeurism is endemic to apartment life: "Apartment houses destroy private life by making each apartment simultaneously function as an observatory, theater, and mirror in which the residents of one apartment spy on those of another, providing unwitting spectacles for each other, and see their own lives reflected or inverted in their neighbors."⁴ The apartment engenders passive spying, in which neighbors observe each other's lives with varying degrees of investment or attention. *Rear Window* makes this voyeuristic gaze its plot. *Pillow Talk* (Michael Gordon, 1959) shows the elevator man as an observer who tries to stop maid Alma (Thelma Ritter) from drinking so much. In *Cactus Flower* (Gene Saks, 1969), next-door neighbor Igor (Rick Lenz) witnesses Toni Simmons (Goldie Hawn) attempt suicide through the airshaft window and breaks in to save her. The urban gaze relates to the in-between status of the apartment as neither fully private nor fully public. The public privacy that Jane Jacobs identifies as central to the urban experience balances people's desire for some privacy and anonymity in the city with their desire for contact, enjoyment, or help from people nearby, or contact without entanglement.⁵

Beyond voyeurism, the apartment plot also hinges on eavesdropping. As both a theme and a device, apartment plots emphasize the porousness of urban life and of the apartment itself, in terms of sound as well as vision. Characters can sometimes see but not hear each other, and sometimes hear but not see. This enables mistaken identities, as when the doctor who lives next door to C. C. Baxter in *The Apartment* believes Baxter is a play-boy because he hears parties in Baxter's apartment when Baxter's work-mates use his apartment for their affairs. The anonymity of urban life is emphasized not only through offscreen sound but also through use of the telephone as a device to create a fissure between sound and body. In *Pillow Talk* and *That Funny Feeling* (Richard Thorpe, 1965), when characters meet who know each other only via the telephone, as disembodied voices, they do not recognize each other, thus enabling a mistaken identity plot.

The porousness of sound is only one form of porousness in the apartment plot. Space is both porous and permeable: doors and windows are less barriers than airlocks, or spaces of transition between places. Thus, the

apartment plot often features open doors and windows and shows characters entering apartments unannounced and uninvited. Think of Kramer (Michael Richards) entering Jerry Seinfeld's apartment in *Seinfeld* or Lisa (Grace Kelly) gracefully entering Thorwald's (Raymond Burr) apartment through the front window in *Rear Window*.

In addition, the urban is defined in the apartment plot via simultaneity and synchronicity. Simultaneity allows us to see characters and apartments as separated but also creates the conditions of encounter. Encounter and contact are key to the urban generally, and crucial to the apartment plot. Devices such as crosscutting, widescreen, and split screen serve to show the relationship between apartments and produce the possibility of encounter. In *Pillow Talk*, for example, a split screen links characters played by Doris Day and Rock Hudson as each takes a bath, their toes appearing to touch at the center divide. *Any Wednesday* (Robert Ellis Miller, 1966) shows the triangulated relationship of Jane Fonda's kept woman, her lover, and his wife in split screen. Other films use scenes shot through open doors to show action in two apartments simultaneously. In *The Courtship of Eddie's Father* (Vincente Minnelli, 1963), for example, open doors show widower Tom Corbett (Glenn Ford) in one apartment, on the phone, calling his single neighbor Elizabeth (Shirley Jones) across the hall, for a date, as his son Eddie (Ron Howard) stands between the two open doors, beaming as a proud matchmaker.

Because the possibility of encounter dominates the apartment plot, whether to romantic or dangerous effects, the apartment plot features a lot of improvisation, masquerade, and play. Partly, this has to do with the possibility of encounter, insofar as masquerade enables anonymous encounters; partly with the sense of anonymity afforded by the city, the idea that nobody knows you, so you can be anyone; and partly with a conception of urbanism articulated by Jane Jacobs and Henri Lefebvre that views the city as "replete with improvisation" and "the moment of play and the unpredictable."⁶ Numerous plots hinge on a character pretending to be someone else. This dominates variants of the apartment plot linked to romantic comedy, such as *That Funny Feeling*, *Pillow Talk*, *Any Wednesday*, *Lover Come Back* (Delbert Mann, 1961), and *Bells Are Ringing* (Vincente Minnelli, 1960), but also appears in the film noir apartment plot *Scarlet Street* (Fritz Lang, 1945) and the thriller *Wait until Dark* (Terence Young, 1967).

The apartment plot brings together these aspects of setting, theme, and stylistic devices to produce a philosophy of, or reflection upon, urbanism,

by exploring urban living's forms and possibilities, and thus produces an imaginary urbanism. As a philosophy of urbanism, the apartment plot not only represents certain cities, such as New York, but also creates an imaginary urbanism, or a fantasy of the urban beyond a particular locale. It maintains and celebrates the urban against forces of suburbanization, sprawl, and the destruction of the city.

The Apartment Plot as Intertext

The apartment plot is not a genre of production or consumption. Directors do not, to my knowledge, describe themselves as making apartment plots, and the apartment plot will not show up as a search term for genre on Netflix or Amazon. Rather, the apartment plot is a critical genre, named after the fact, like film noir. Similar to film noir, it groups together films that were made under different traditional genre categories. Where film noir grouped a relatively small set of genres—detective films, crime films, thrillers—the apartment plot traverses numerous traditional genres, including musicals, romantic comedies, horror films, and film noir itself. Rarely would one characterize a film only as an apartment plot. Often it operates as a genre modifier or hybridizer, to characterize something as an apartment plot musical or apartment plot romantic comedy. For some, this may preclude its being a genre; but as a critical term—as opposed to a production or consumption term—the apartment plot works to open up a film for an alternate critical analysis. To do this does not require that we deny the film's affiliation with another genre, but that we pay attention differently. In an apartment plot musical, for instance, we would not only see the myth of spontaneity, as famously analyzed by Jane Feuer, but would be able to think about how the myth of spontaneity works in terms of encounter and porousness or produces a philosophy of urbanism by imagining the urban itself, and not just certain characters, as available to spontaneity and synchronicity.⁷ An apartment plot horror film transforms the taken-for-grantedness of domestic space to remind us of the ghosts and past histories that rental properties carry and of the danger and risk of living in a world of porousness, permeability, and encounter.

As a critical genre, the apartment plot enables us to see affiliations across traditional genres. Moreover, because the apartment plot traverses so many other traditional genres, it invites us to consider how space sets the parameters for plots, themes, and ideologies of both individual films and

genres. Rather than think of certain genres such as the western, the road film, and the apartment plot as spatially determined, thinking of space as the primary key to genre in general opens up possibilities to rethink genres in spatial terms, not only to define genre according to setting but perhaps to consider how certain genres use framing or tracking shots, or where certain characters are situated within genres (in public or private space, indoors or out, etc.).

As I have previously argued, space and place are more than just one lexical choice among many; they are imbricated in signifying structures that are historically determined and that carry tremendous connotative and ideological weight related to issues of sex, gender, class, race, the body, individuality, family, community, nation, work, pleasure, capital, and more. If we think of the apartment as motivating action, we can consider not only what the apartment enables that, for example, the home or the road or a ranch or a Broadway stage does not, but also what can't happen in an apartment: What are the limits of an apartment plot? Who can and cannot be represented within an apartment plot? The apartment plot reminds us of the ways in which space shapes our experiences, worldview, and opportunities.

As a critical genre, the apartment plot also shows affiliations across various auteurs. A consideration of the apartment plot reveals a preponderance of apartment plots in such directors as Wilder, Hitchcock, Polanski, Minnelli, Tashlin, Fassbinder, and Akerman, enabling us to deepen our understanding of their authorship, on the one hand, and, on the other, to see affinities among directors that an emphasis on the unique auteur may obscure. At the same time, analyzing films as apartment plots reveals hitherto unnoticed auteurs who work consistently within the apartment plot, such as Richard Quine (director of *Pushover* [1954], *My Sister Eileen* [1955], *Bell, Book and Candle* [1958], and *Sex and the Single Girl* [1964]) or Gene Saks (*Barefoot in the Park* [1967], *The Odd Couple* [1968], and *Cactus Flower*).

Because the apartment plot intersects with other genres and in the oeuvre of auteurs, we can view it as an intertext that creates correspondences among a wide variety of texts. So, as we acknowledge musicals such as *Bells Are Ringing* or *The Hole* as apartment plots, we not only invite consideration of how the musical informs the apartment plot and vice versa, as well as affinities between those musicals and others, but must also consider their relation to films that traditional genre analysis would

demarcate as unrelated, such as the horror film *Rosemary's Baby* or the satire on race relations *The Landlord*.

Contextualizing the Apartment Plot

Apartment plots are imbricated by discourses of race, class, sexuality, gender, nation, and religion, and they speak from within systems of power, privilege, and capital. This collection, then, seeks to examine how the philosophy of urbanism shifts from 1930s America to 1950s America, to 1970s Berlin and Brussels, to late twentieth-century Paris, to twenty-first-century London, Taipei, and Baltimore.

Thinking about the apartment plot in a broader time period and more global context, the aspects of the genre—the basic themes and devices of the apartment plot—that I initially identified in *The Apartment Plot* stand. However, when we step outside the cycle of midcentury American films and consider the apartment plot in global context and into the twenty-first century, the philosophy of urbanism will differ because cities will mean different things in different locations and at different historical moments. As in any genre, the framework allows for different emphasis at different moments and in different historical and geographic contexts. (Think of changes in the western's ideology, for example, from the 1930s to the 1950s and in the present, as ideas about race and nation and violence have shifted.) The cycle of apartment plots in American film from 1945 to 1975 emerged because the meaning and status of urban living were undergoing a sea change, related to the rise of suburbanization, white flight, and the postwar building boom in New York. Even within that cycle, however, the subset of African American-centered films within the genre modified the philosophy of urbanism, to remind us that all residences—and their representations—are imbricated by discourses of race and class and speak from within systems of power and privilege. In a different vein, more recent films such as *The Visitor* and *Ghost Town* (David Koepp, 2008) transmute and negotiate issues of trauma, globalization, and immigration related to 9/11, absorbing and reframing themes of porousness, encounter, contingency, density, improvisation, simultaneity, and play in a new global context. Where *The Visitor* shows the utopian promise of contingency, encounter, and multiculturalism in an urban space for its white middle-aged protagonist, it also shows the dark reality of borders and surveillance for the undocumented immigrant couple who share his apartment. *Ghost Town*

reworks 9/11 as a literal ghost story to suggest that the work of mourning is ongoing and reminds us to honor the dead by telling their stories, but it also revives the sense of community and empathy engendered by the attacks, thus placing new emphasis on encounter and contingency.⁸

The Apartment Plot considered issues of wealth and poverty as vital to the differentiation of tenants. For example, different economic expectations met white single men versus white single women in midcentury New York representations. Single white women in the apartment plot were most often characterized by a forced bohemianism that made poverty seem cute and that delimited the temporality of women's experience in the city, marking it as a reprieve from the trajectory that would lead them into marriage and suburbia, and away from working and from homosocial friendships. In a different vein, black films transformed the understanding of the suburban option as one that is not rejected in favor of urban living, but as an option that specifically and prohibitively excludes black residents, thus rendering the black apartment more of a space of containment than of encounter or mobility.

Still, *The Apartment Plot* did not, on the whole, consider the issues of austerity and capital as underpinning the apartment plot across the genre. In a genre that offers ways of thinking about cinema and modernity and that is centrally concerned with real estate, capital thoroughly informs and contours the meaning and affect of the apartment plot. Whether dealing with the monetized sexuality of women in *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* or *Concussion* (Stacie Passon, 2013), issues of poverty and austerity in *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* and *The Hole*, the role of real estate as aspirational in 1930s penthouse films and the TV show *The Wire* (2002), or gentrification in *Weekend*, the global apartment plot links apartment dwelling to the operations of capital.

Placing the Apartment Plot

Considering the apartment plot in global context, we need to think not only about global production but also about global spectatorship and the kind of border crossing and transnational travel we are invited to do through the apartment plot. As Giuliana Bruno and others have suggested, the experience of travel and the experience of cinema similarly move viewers to other places. At the same time, Bruno suggests that film spectatorship involves a kind of dwelling: "Film spectatorship," she writes,

“is thus a *practice* of space that is dwelt in, as the built environment.”⁹ In Amy Lynn Corbin’s provocative analysis, assuming that all films are tourism, in that they place us “there, where I am not,” only some films maintain the touristic view by positioning viewers as outsiders, whereas others code the “landscape” as “familiar” and attempt to give viewers a “dwelling experience.”¹⁰ While the spectator still, according to Corbin, travels “there, where I am not,” she quickly settles into an insider’s experience or sense of what Edward Relph calls “vicarious insideness.”¹¹ Of course, one person’s exotic is another person’s ordinary.¹² But Corbin argues that films position us as outsiders or insiders in ways that exceed or override our familiarity. So, for example, a suburban narrative may work to position the viewer as an insider, familiar with the landscape, taking the setting for granted to focus on something else, such as a child’s friendship with an alien in *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (Steven Spielberg, 1982). Alternatively, a film that aims to critique the suburbs may alienate us from our familiar view, as when *Pleasantville* (Gary Ross, 1998) deploys black-and-white cinematography to differentiate the 1950s suburb from the present-tense sensibility of its teen protagonists. In Corbin’s analysis, when the film positions us as insiders, space operates as setting; when it makes us outsiders or tourists, space becomes plot.

Within the United States, given the dominance of suburban living, the apartment could be a touristic space for many viewers, and my emphasis on space as plot fits with a touristic positioning. However, for urban American or European viewers, the apartment dominates and would operate as familiar territory. But for spectators of the apartment plot in global context, we could imagine a spectrum of familiarity—so that a native New Yorker would not view *Rear Window* touristically but might view the British council flats in *Weekend* or the crumbling Taipei apartment block in *The Hole* as an outsider; and similarly, twenty-first-century viewers will find the penthouse apartments of *Susan Lenox: Her Fall and Rise* (Robert Z. Leonard, 1931) as potentially strange and distant modes of living.

We can think about how a film situates us, makes us familiar, even if we enter as tourists. The Argentinean film *Sidewalls*, for example, opens with a voice-over narration over a montage of images of residential buildings in Buenos Aires. Discussing the seemingly chaotic growth of Buenos Aires—the incoherence of building styles, the sense of bad planning—the narrator claims that architects are responsible for a host of maladies, including stress, obesity, and anxiety, and he suggests that the chaos reflects

the inhabitants' own lack of direction and identity: "We live as if Buenos Aires were a stopover; we've created a culture of tenants." He describes the variety of apartments in the city, ranging from five-room apartments with balconies, playrooms, and servant quarters, to one-room apartments known as "shoeboxes," as a montage shows us examples of each. Acknowledging that "buildings are meant to differentiate between us," the narrator demarcates the hierarchy of front versus back apartments, high versus low, those marked letter A or B, and those marked with letters from the end of the alphabet. In four and a half minutes, he transports us from a touristic position, as outsiders who need to have Buenos Aires explained, to insiders, who can enter his apartment with some understanding that his fourth-floor shoebox, back apartment, in section H signals his low social status.

In the Japanese film *Dark Water*, likewise, we become situated in the apartment complex where single mother Yoshimi (Hitomi Kuroki) moves with her six-year-old daughter Ikuko (Rio Kanno). When Yoshimi and Ikuko are first shown the inexpensive apartment on the outskirts of the city by their real estate agent, Ohta (Yu Tokui), we see the dingy, unkempt building entrance as they do and discover the small vestibule office of the unfriendly apartment manager, Kamiya (Isao Yatsu), seeing the TV that shows him camera shots from around the building. We come to know not only the two-bedroom apartment that Yoshimi and Ikuko take, but the dirty hallways and elevators in their building, and the staircase up to the rooftop water tank that we visit several times over the course of the film. We become familiar with the growing water stain on Yoshimi's bedroom ceiling. Situated, we are not comfortable but conscious of the building's remoteness from the urban center, its shabbiness, and, increasingly, its creepiness as we, along with Yoshimi, become aware of strange occurrences, sounds, and dripping water, all signaling the ghostly presence of a girl who died under mysterious circumstances years before. We become dwellers in the apartment block so that our attention focuses on the supernatural events, not the touristic images.

If we think of dwelling as the place where one lives, then the global apartment plot will be primarily a touristic space for most viewers. However, if we take Edward Casey's notion of dwelling as built on familiarity and repetition—places one frequents as opposed to lives (and including such nonresidential spaces as malls)—then we can think of genre generally and the apartment plot in particular as a kind of dwelling space.¹³ As

Casey states, “Dwelling places offer not just bare shelter but the possibilities of sojourns of upbringing, of education, of contemplation and conviviality, lingerings of many kinds and durations.”¹⁴ If we differentiate between shelter and sojourn, dwelling spaces can be seen as anywhere we hang our hat. In terms of genre, we can think of the way in which certain spaces that we have never visited become familiar to us through our frequent visits. For example, we become familiar with the nineteenth-century American West via the western, and with the beaches of Southern California through numerous Hollywood beach movies, starting with *Gidget* (Paul Wendkos, 1959).

Regarding the global apartment plot, even as we see tremendous variance in the kinds of buildings, cities, economics, and cultures, the apartment plot provides a means to connect spaces across the globe. In *Sidewalls*, for example, we discover something about the specificity of apartment life in Buenos Aires when we are shown the practice of tenants illegally creating new windows in their apartments. In an exterior shot, we see Martín (Javier Drolas), the male narrator, standing in his newly cut illegal window, framed by an ad for men’s underwear (fig. I.1). Another shot reveals the female lead, Mariana (Pilar Lòpez de Ayala), at the point of an arrow in her window (fig. I.2). This sequence of events marks specific practices in Buenos Aires that may not exist in other locations, and that suggest both the poverty of living and the anything-goes mode of making space in the city. At the same time, these scenes also work within familiar patterns of the genre of the apartment plot. A shot showing the relation of the two lead characters to one another, in facing apartments that tower above two smaller buildings, adheres to the apartment plot’s generic practice of emphasizing simultaneity and synchronicity, and the promise that the two lonely inhabitants of shoebox apartments will join together (fig. I.3).

Similarly, while *Dark Water* shows specific aspects of Japanese life, in the way characters remove shoes upon entering the apartment, in the food shown when Yoshimi makes Ikuko dinner, in Ikuko’s school uniform, and in the use of a futon on the floor for a bed, it nonetheless situates us in familiar generic territory, as we encounter the ghostly presence who haunts the young girl and her mother through her intrusion into the space of their apartment, via the porous sign of water dripping from one apartment to another, through the pipes, and eventually in her visible presence in the room.

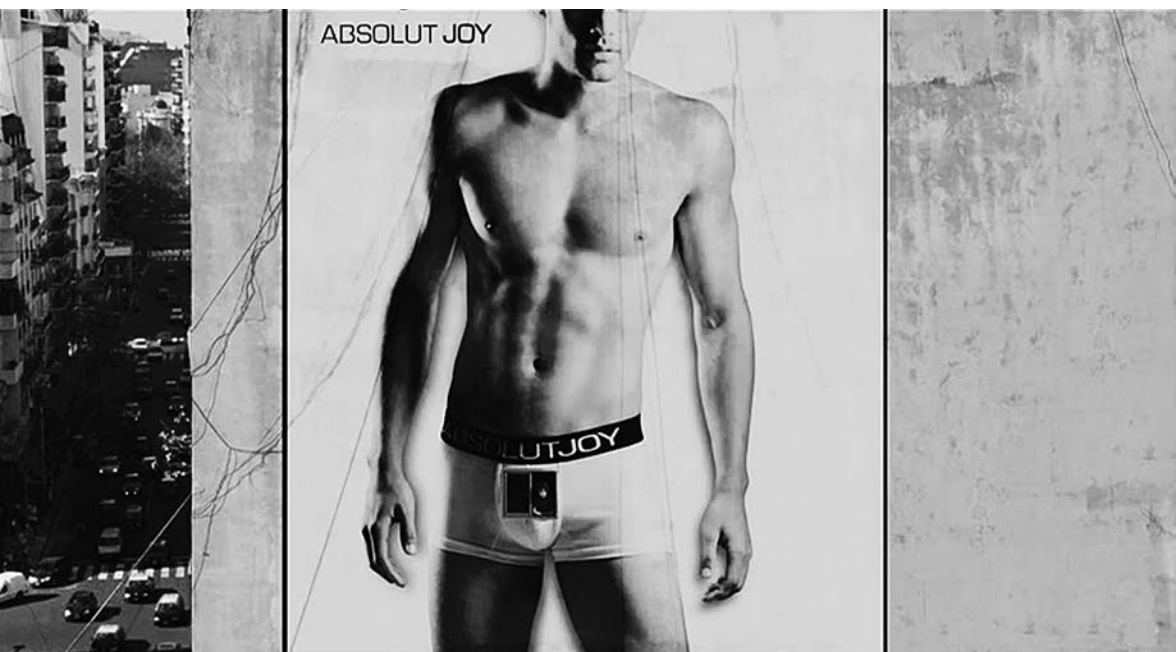


FIG. 1.1. Exterior shot of Martín's illegal window in *Sidewalls* (Gustavo Taretto, 2011).



FIG. 1.2. Exterior shot of Mariana's illegal window in *Sidewalls* (Gustavo Taretto, 2011).



FIG. 1.3. Martín's and Mariana's windows communicate with each other in *Sidewalls* (Gustavo Taretto, 2011).

Without losing sight of important differences, we can become vicarious insiders, inhabiting apartments across the globe, if only for a brief time. A consideration of the apartment plot reminds us of the spatiality of spectatorship, our own temporally marked dwelling in a space made familiar that allows us to dwell, if not be at home, across the global apartment complex.

Blueprints

The essays that follow each take up a different case study using the lens of the apartment plot as a critical tool for analysis. In Merrill Schleier's chapter on 1930s penthouse films, she argues that the penthouse is shown as "a sumptuous den of iniquity," peopled with characters who exist outside the traditional nuclear family, living in unorthodox and often immoral arrangements, especially self-indulgent, libertine married men and kept women (chapter 1). Frequently criminal spaces, penthouses are spaces of menace in which unfaithful and often criminal men attempt to control their domains but are punished for their acquisitiveness. In Schleier's reading, the penthouse films mark a shift in views of luxury living, away from the celebration of such spaces in the 1920s as sites of exclusive luxury and display, to a moralistic view in the 1930s, when Depression-era class consciousness rendered the penthouse a sign of overindulgence and moral compromise. Schleier contextualizes her readings of penthouse films using contemporary discourse in architecture, urban planning, shelter magazines, and real estate development.

Steven Cohan's essay retraces my steps in *The Apartment Plot* to consider mid-twentieth-century apartment plots; but his analysis offers a corrective to mine, focusing on the links, rather than the dissimilarities, between film noir and the apartment genre (chapter 2). He discusses the urban habitat of the single man as central to both genres and locates their intersection by looking at the films of Billy Wilder, an auteur associated with both genres. His intertextual analysis argues that Wilder's two noir films, *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) and *Double Indemnity* (1944), originate as incomplete apartment plots arising from intrusions upon a single man's domestic space, just as Wilder's two fully sustained apartment plots, *The Apartment* and *The Seven Year Itch* (1955), generally viewed as sex comedies, view urban bachelorhood from a cynical viewpoint more characteristic of film noir.

Joe McElhaney's chapter assays two modernist apartment plot musicals, the French film *On connaît la chanson* (Alain Resnais, 1997) and the Taiwanese film *The Hole* (chapter 3). McElhaney demonstrates how these two films hearken back to earlier musicals that mobilize the urban world as a hypothetical playground for romance and social success but also shows how the historical context and locale of each film problematize that notion. In the case of *The Hole*, set in a crumbling, dystopic Taipei, suffering a mysterious epidemic, McElhaney characterizes the film's final musical number as a magisterial representation of the musical's utopic impulses, as the Man Upstairs and the Woman Downstairs dance together in his apartment, facing either the end of civilization or their own imminent deaths. *On connaît la chanson*, set in contemporary Paris, does not, according to McElhaney, represent a world facing immediate extinction, but, immersed in a sense of French history, it nevertheless shows that such extinction was (and perhaps still is) immanent.

Michael DeAngelis, Annamarie Jagose, and Veronica Fitzpatrick each examine a European art cinema auteur, focusing on Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Chantal Akerman, and Roman Polanski, respectively. DeAngelis argues that using the lens of the apartment plot "provides keen insight into an elegant, kinetic system that [Fassbinder] devises to demonstrate, through a focus upon movement, a contention that fluidity and permeability in urban domestic spatial relations can never be politically neutral or universally accessible concepts, but rather mechanisms that are always already bound up in a self-perpetuating system of social relations harboring privilege and disadvantage" (chapter 4). In looking at Fassbinder's version of the apartment plot, DeAngelis suggests that we can see a crucial sociopolitical dimension of the apartment plot that deepens and expands upon the themes of the genre. Jagose contextualizes Akerman's film *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* as not only a feminist film but also, significantly, a film about Brussels (chapter 5). Locating the film in a moment when grassroots protests successfully challenged drastic plans for urban renewal, Jagose argues that "the chronotope of the interwar apartment in a chaotically modernizing Brussels affords a new perspective on an issue that also but differently animates the feminist film reception of *Jeanne Dielman*, namely, how to engage the dense particularities of spatiotemporal experience across historical difference." Veronica Fitzpatrick's essay examines Polanski's *Repulsion* (1965), the first of his "Apartment Trilogy" films, which also include *Rosemary's Baby* and

The Tenant (1976). Fitzpatrick argues that auteurist analyses have largely ignored the generic significance of these films' urban domestic spaces to focus instead on character psychology and art cinema narration. Her analysis finds *Repulsion* at the intersection of Polanski's authorship and two genres—horror and the apartment plot—to produce a form of domestic horror “in which horror within the home works to formally surface an as-yet-submerged encounter with past sexual trauma” (chapter 6).

In her book *Lesbianism, Cinema, Space: The Sexual Life of Apartments*, Lee Wallace situates the apartment as a post-Stonewall chronotope of lesbian spatial identity. In her analysis, the apartment “assists the possibility of an out lesbian life that is not limited to a subcultural or institutional environment”—as are the pre-Stonewall backdrops of bar, prison, school-room, and college—“but avails itself of the peculiarly hybridized nature of multiple-dwelling space.”¹⁵ In her essay for this volume, she revisits the gay apartment, noting that “many of the coordinates by which we plot lesbian and gay stories have changed, the most significant being the legal recognition of same-sex domestic partnerships and the partial absorption of a sexual subculture into the dominant marriage culture from which it had previously derived its outlaw status” (chapter 7). She argues that *Weekend* and *Concussion* are apartment plots that speak from within the framework of gay marriage but mark the historical shift and changing conceptions of urban gay identity as they do so.

The final essay in the volume examines the TV show *The Wire*. Though *The Wire* is usually viewed as a police procedural or crime drama or located within David Simon's oeuvre, Paula J. Massood links it to both the African American gangster film and the apartment plot (chapter 8). Massood asks, “If the gangster genre is as much about acquiring the American Dream (in the form of social and economic belonging) as it is about criminality, then what happens when that dream is directly connected to real estate?” While some may view the show as primarily about gangs, drugs, and urban poverty, Massood suggests that it is fundamentally about real estate, notably in the figure of Stringer Bell, the gangster who rules the local drug trade but who is also partner in B&B Enterprises, a development company with key holdings in Baltimore's gentrifying downtown area, and a striver whose own apartment marks him as having achieved, briefly, the American Dream at the center of every gangster narrative.

Each of these essays offers insights into both canonical and lesser-known texts. Taken together, they suggest the pliancy of the apartment plot as genre, its ability to hold various kinds of narratives from different subgenres and authors and in different sociohistorical and geographic contexts. They provide a way to rethink the work of auteurs and see anew texts that would otherwise be seen under different generic categories. Most importantly, they show the ways in which the space of the apartment can be mobilized to engage philosophies of urbanism consisting of multiple iterations, revisions, and reframings. We see the meaning and value of porousness, privacy, simultaneity, and encounter shift in different contexts. And we see connections among and between apartment plots that seem far from one another—located in different cities, different times, different genres—that nevertheless speak to each other across the apartment complex.

NOTES

1. Amanda Ann Klein, *American Film Cycles: Reframing Genres, Screening Social Problems, and Defining Subcultures* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 4.
2. Sharon Marcus, *Apartment Stories: City and Home in Nineteenth-Century Paris and London* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).
3. Edward Dimendberg, *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 7.
4. Marcus, *Apartment Stories*, 57.
5. Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961), 55–59.
6. Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 50; and Henri Lefebvre, “The Right to the City,” in *Writings on Cities*, trans. and ed. Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 129.
7. Jane Feuer, “The Self-Reflective Musical and the Myth of Entertainment,” in *Genre: The Musical*, ed. Rick Altman (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 159–74.
8. These two films are discussed more fully in Pamela Robertson Wojcik, *The Apartment Plot: Urban Living in American Film and Popular Culture, 1945 to 1975* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 272–76.
9. Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (New York: Verso, 2002), 62.
10. Amy Lynn Corbin, *Cinematic Geographies and Multicultural Spectatorship in America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 7–8.
11. Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion, 1976), 51–55.
12. Corbin, *Cinematic Geographies*, 8.

13. Corbin, *Cinematic Geographies*, 9; Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 114–15.
14. Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 112.
15. Lee Wallace, *Lesbianism, Cinema, Space: The Sexual Life of Apartments* (London: Routledge, 1990), 11.