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Objects and Media of the Home

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By asking how media and home relate through specific case studies, this set of Field Notes, entitled *Objects and Media of the Home*, provides a diverse global panorama of domesticity. We believe that in an age of ever accelerating mediatisation, representations of home objects offer a powerful lens to both well-established and lesser-known histories of modernity in the domestic space. This piece collects 10 short essays that explore the mediatisation of seemingly meaningless objects, like *dantels* (a Turkish handicraft) and doorbells, as the primary lens through which to problematise and re-categorise domestic modernities.

Keywords: home; media; domestic objects; 20th century

Introduction

Gregorio Astengo and Rebecca Carrai

How can (we make) an object speak? What are the methods and means by which we study domestic objects? Histories of modern architecture have typically centred on select models of domesticity — the bourgeois or middle-class household, the architect's home, the manifesto house, model homes and so on (Floré and De Kooning 2006; Friedman 2007; Scott 2013; Hopkins 2025; Woodham 2004). However, domesticity is a much broader and inclusive notion, made up of a myriad of seemingly unimportant actors and elements that gain value once contextualised and activated through the uses and customs of their specific realities. Media provides the filter through which objects acquire agency as carriers of meaning that determine, construct and validate these uses and customs (Colomina 1994; Rice 2007; Sparke 2008). Consulting a broad register of media, beyond official exhibition catalogues, guides or professional journals, allows us to read such a diverse and inclusive collection of domestic objects so as to understand how the realm of the everyday manifests itself in its spatial and historical context.

By simultaneously examining objects and media and their reciprocal relations, this set of Field Notes addresses domesticity as encompassing both spatial features — including those shaped by specific objects — and social actions aimed at nurturing the interior. Together with our contributors, we reflect on what objects can say about their broader socio-geographical and historical contexts and their specific domestic reality. The ten short field notes, 600 words each, that follow represent a wide geography and a focus on the 20th century, bringing flesh around the bones of this manifesto. Some studies centre around specific ordinary objects, such as escalators, refrigerators and tea sets, and dissect their material and cultural histories through processes of popular and mass mediatisation. Other contributions examine media output, such as home magazines, cookbooks and travelogues, and even translations of architectural essays, to shed light on the domesticities therein projected and constructed. Often, these two approaches are mutually interrelated, and the authors' interests in both domestic objects and forms of media converge. All ten contributions thus read forms of mediatisation of domestic objects as active components of broader processes of cultural, social and political transformation, considering how the home may be the most germane territory where such processes become visible.

Our approach builds on the media-focused, architectural analytical framework used by scholars of interior, design and architectural histories, creating a dialogue between these disciplinary fields and their respective methodologies. In recent years, more scholars have paid attention to objects and media. Previously occupying a marginal

position in architectural histories, media studies have recently assumed a more prominent role: from Beatriz Colomina's *Privacy and Publicity*, exploring renowned modern figures through their engagement with visuals, practices of archiving, and mediatisation (1994), to more recent studies, including Alina Payne's *From Ornament to Object*, which examines the architectural ornamentation of daily objects (2012), and Véronique Patteeuw and Lea-Catherine Szackas' *Mediated Messages*, which highlights the role of exhibitions, periodicals and media in postmodernism (2018). At the same time, there has been a surge in object-centred studies within design, art and related disciplines, from the *Provocative Objects* blog and talk series promoted by the Design History Society to the recently established Lise Meitner Group 'Coded Objects' at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence (Design History Society 2024; Lise Meitner Group 2023). Questions related to objects and scale have also appeared in curatorial architectural approaches, as notably demonstrated by Rem Koolhaas's dissection of architecture into *elements* at the 14th Venice Architecture Biennale in 2014. In addition to such a rich base of scholarship, our work continues in the footsteps of the European Architectural History Network (EAHN) Interest Group called Building Word Image, created a decade ago to formulate a field of study to examine how understanding word-image relationships can illuminate processes of architectural production (Hultzsch and Mejía Moreno 2016). In line with this scholarship, at a meeting of the same interest group at the EAHN´s biannual conference in Athens in 2024, we decided to expand the understandings of the domestic through a scaled-down and more inclusive prism of material evidence: ordinary objects and their mediatisation. By zooming in to the previously unnoticed, we hope to spread new light to more fundamental questions about how to study architecture.

These field notes build upon architectural studies that present a more multi-directional view of modern domesticity, including the roles played by agents often left out of architectural accounts, from homebuilders and furniture retailers to home economists (Carrai 2023; Eleb 2004; Myjak-Pycia 2025). Furthermore, we believe that histories of the modern home can be rewritten through the transformations and management of its material components. Architectural elements, such as doors and windows, as well as furniture and movable items, such as desks, sofas, electronics and even clothing items, are designed, appropriated or reinvented for domestic use. The rise of mass production and consumption has increased both the availability of these domestic objects and the production of mass media, from commercial catalogues to home magazines, from advertisements to cookbooks. Today, social media plays a growing role in this global circulation of objects, lifestyles, gender roles, spatial layouts and economic and cultural paradigms; it easily suggests new norms to readers

and viewers — and often even imposes those norms. In his often-referenced book on the history of modern interiors, Charles Rice says that domestic interiors are made up of two components, a 'doubleness of the domestic interior' — two registers, of material and immaterial things (2004). In studying interiors, we are invited to primarily look at their immaterial, visual representations, a focus that is especially present with domestic interiors, the privacy of which often casts a veil of mystery over their actual reality. In today's media environment, this reproducibility has been increasingly adapting to the logics of a culture driven by commercial empathy and immediacy. The contributions to these field notes examine this paradigm of modernity and argue that mediatised domestic objects do not necessarily follow an aesthetic and visual imperative. Instead, they allow more bodily or diachronic ways to engage with and consume the space of the home, which is revealed by studying them through the less apparent media of the home. Thus, while our ten essays do not include the study of phenomena such as TikTok reels or Instagram stories, a historical investigation on domestic objects and their media helps us to understand the preconditions of digital mass mediatisation, thus providing multiple lenses by which to overcome the increasingly uniform and exploitative logic of the algorithms of such platforms.

Through this set of field notes, *Objects and Media of the Home* contributes to ongoing revisions of modern histories of architecture. It addresses questions of modernity and modernisation by exploring lesser-known narratives about ordinary objects and media that can shed light on various domestic issues, from gender roles and family values to broader topics such as citizenship and urban life. The collection of field notes establishes a methodological framework for studying architecture that focuses on the reciprocities between domestic objects and their media, with a special fascination for their synchronic and spatial dimensions. We are interested not in objects or media alone but rather in their dialogue and the socio-cultural spatial analysis that originates from that dialogue. We draw from our interest and familiarity with studying objects and media from an architectural stance, from how the IKEA catalogue, through its virtual assemblages of objects and figures, has circulated globally consumed visions of ordinary domesticity to the ways in which early modern media has contributed to the dissemination and commodification of historical, urban and residential environments (Astengo 2024; 2021; 2020; 2016; Carrai 2024; 2023; 2021). We are interested in media and mediation both as a research focus and as a method; it is not just the medium itself but the mediating strategies employed through it that generate new spatialities and other understandings of the domestic. In this spirit, we have brought together a diverse group of voices equally engaged in experimenting with these analytical methods.

While building upon the previous work of the EAHN Interest Group Building Word Image, we have steered it towards the specific interaction between objects and media spaces. We have also placed greater emphasis on the role that media aimed at the lay reader-viewer can play in disseminating ideas of domesticity, and we have sought out overlooked figures and actors involved in that dissemination. Following the first meeting of the group under this new agenda in Madrid in June 2022 and a second meeting in Athens in June 2024, the Building Word Image group has increasingly welcomed overlooked and non-Western case studies that adopt plural methodologies, from archival research to oral histories and new readings of material artefacts. Puzzling questions for us included how specific forms of mass media have facilitated global mobility and transnational uses of domestic objects and spaces across cultural realities. We wondered how, through popular media such as advertisements and sitcoms, home objects have been instrumental in establishing specific spatial and cultural qualities of the home, its components and their uses, from the domestic popularisation of the Japanese *butsudan* to the Chinese dissemination of household refrigerators to the escalator as an object of cultural transposition in Weimar Berlin. We were curious to learn more about how certain types of historically specific mass media carry the seeds of neoliberal ideologies by, for instance, emphasising the role of the individual in engaging with homemaking, an aspect examined here in the context of Singapore's postwar public housing development. We wanted to question canonical authorships in architectural design and writing, exemplified by the study of Ise Gropius's neglected role in disseminating Bauhaus ideas in the English-speaking world. The *Objects and Media of the Home* Field Notes present these and other case studies as part of a diverse constellation of culturally determined cases of media-informed domestic paradigms illuminated by a global perspective on multiple modernities that emerges through an innovative object-oriented methodology. In all these ways, we believe familiar objects can speak different stories.

‘I’ll Get It!’: An Interdisciplinary Perspective on the Use of Doorbells in Popular Media

Joana Albernaz Delgado

Doorbells and their adjoining electrical paraphernalia, located at the threshold of the home **(Figure 1)**, carry material and sonic stories of modernity and domesticity as both designed objects and architectural fittings. As underrated appliances of the everyday, however, they have been left behind in conventional historical narratives. Interdisciplinary research methods can uncover forgotten layers of meaning in these objects. This piece contributes to this methodological approach by showing how examining television situation comedy (sitcoms) can be a method to reveal the engagement of doorbells with domestic space in the mid-20th century Western world.

Figure 1: Doorbell push buttons, Amsterdam. Photo by Joana Albernaz Delgado, May 26, 2023.

Situation comedy as a genre creates humour through exaggeration or disruption, but the fictional plots are inspired by reality (Curtis 1982: 7–9). Sitcoms therefore try to relate to audiences (Berman 1987: 6), exploring 'contemporary social beliefs' (Mintz 1985: 50), often through the use of domestic stories set within the home. By definition, sitcoms unfold around the same main characters and settings from one episode to another, becoming archetypes through the ability to represent the cyclical nature of everyday life. The doorbell, a domestic object and architectural element of the everyday, is almost unavoidable in such narratives. The following two examples were chosen for the strong message they convey about the power of this sonic object in the formation of domestic identities.

George and Mildred, a British sitcom from the 1970s, parodies a working-class couple that moves to a middle-class neighbourhood. A door chime, an expensive doorbell made of metal tubes or bars playing melodies instead of ringing bells that became popular in the late 1930s, is installed in their new house. George and Mildred's door chime plays the Westminster Chimes with a frilly vibrato, sonically reverberating their social ambitions and embodying, using Goffman's terminology, their self-presentation strategies, which they struggle to put in place to control what their neighbours think of them (Goffman 1959). However, in season 1, episode 3, of *George and Mildred*, titled '... And Women Must Weep' (1976), the neighbour, whose own doorbell plays an unpretentious buzzer, rings their bell and reacts to the unexpectedly long sound with confusion and embarrassment. The chime discloses George and Mildred's inability to escape their working-class taste through their misunderstanding of middle-class aesthetics.

In *Dennis the Menace*, an American suburban domestic comedy from the 1950s featuring the relationship between a feisty boy and his retired next-door neighbour, the sound of the doorbell conveys power negotiations at the threshold. The boy subverts his neighbour's doorbell, a ding-dong chime designed to replace nerve-racking rings, by keeping it chiming (season 1, episode 15, 'Dennis and the Rare Coin', 1960), exposing how the mutual influence between outside and inside worlds can be destabilised in different ways, including through the sonic (Plotnick 2018: 23–24).

The examples above demonstrate how distinct doorbell sounds connect differently with wider discourses about urban growth, mass culture, class and domestic identities. Indeed, the realism of the sitcom manifests itself in signifiers, such as physical surroundings, which reinforce and legitimise the norm (Miller 2000: 140), turning the sitcom's material presence into a mediated source of historical information. Within those surroundings, the doorbell functions as an agent in the social construction of reality, placing narratives in architectural space through its sonic existence. A doorbell exemplifies how sound and material culture are woven together in an interdisciplinary fashion, affirming the power of objects as historical sources.

Ise Gropius and the Domestication of Modernist Design in English-language Media

Alborz Dianat

A documentary film series on living healthily and affordably, released in Germany between 1926 and 1928, presents a vision of modern domesticity. One scene shows a metal tubular chair and desk equipped with a typewriter and telephone **(Figure 2)**. The strictly functional workspace features as part of a tour of the Director's House at the Bauhaus in Dessau, designed by Walter Gropius with Marcel Breuer. But Gropius, the school's founder, director and architect, was absent from the tour. Instead, his second wife, Ise Gropius, played hostess and domestic director in the scene. Under her control, the appeal of modern domestic design was being cultivated for a mass audience.

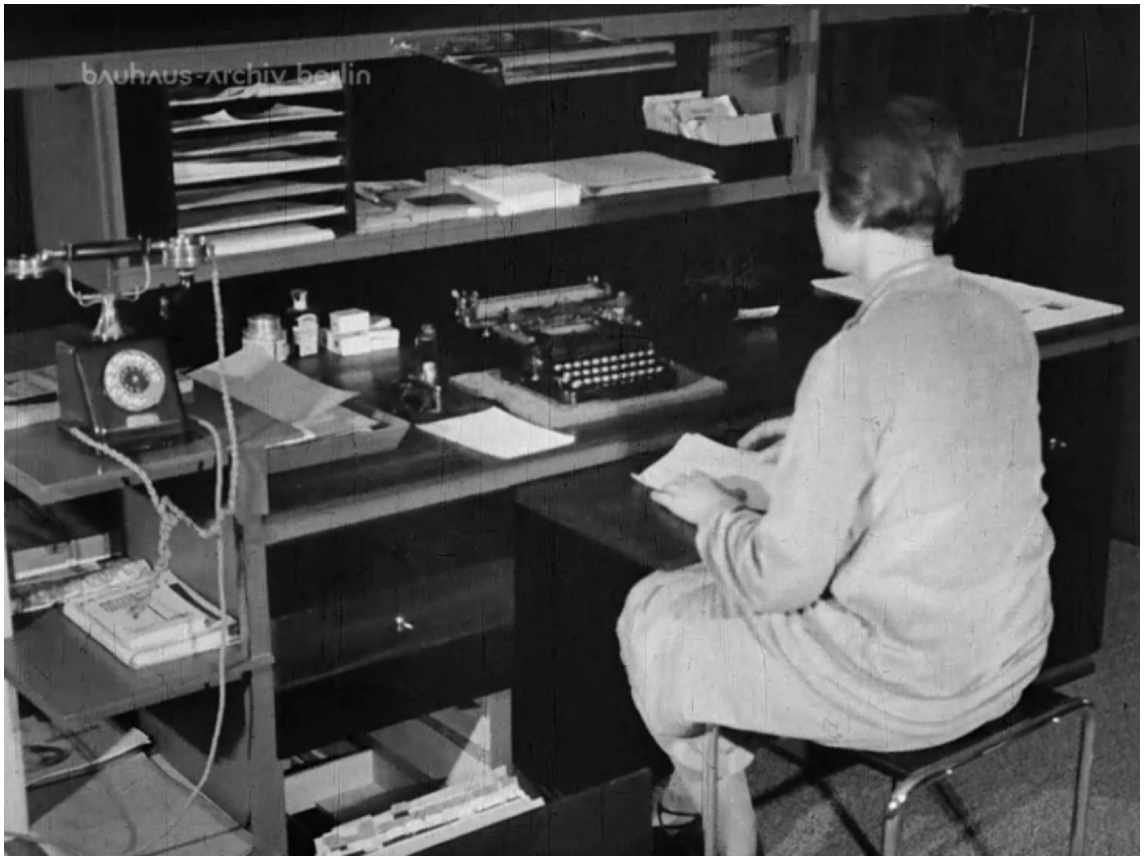

Figure 2: Ise Gropius at a desk designed by Marcel Breuer, in the Director's House, Bauhaus Dessau, designed by Walter Gropius. Still from *Wie wohnen wir gesund und wirtschaftlich?*, Part IV: Neues Wohnen (Haus Gropius), directed by Richard Paulick (Humboldt-Film GmbH, 1926). Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin.

Ise Gropius's role as the Bauhaus's public relations representative has been recognised, but her responsibility over *domestic* design is yet to be fully appreciated — particularly in the English language. Unlike her husband, she was proficient in English from an early age and sensitive to those cultural differences that required the adaptation of domestic design so as to resonate with audiences in Britain and the United States.

In May 1931, after meeting Ethel Power, the editor of the popular American magazine *House Beautiful*, Ise Gropius published an article in it called 'Modern Dwellings for Modern People'. In this article, she targets the magazine's large and predominantly female audience, declaring that standardised objects would not mechanise the individual but rather provide 'new zest and greater richness to [life's] free and untrammelled enjoyment'. She guides her readers to look at individual objects and the composition of interiors, recommending simple steps for the public to follow to enhance modern life. Alongside an image of another functional working space, she encourages readers to expel the 'overwhelming number of useless things' in their homes (Gropius 1931). With a woman communicating the advantages of modern design to female readers generally responsible for design in their own homes, the authorship of 'Madame Gropius' mattered.

In 1934, Walter and Ise Gropius emigrated from Nazi Germany to London, where they lived for two and a half years. Their most vital promotional pursuit in this period was the production of a book: *The New Architecture and the Bauhaus* (1935). While the book is credited to Walter Gropius, Ise Gropius led its production, merging various articles by her husband into a manuscript that was then delivered to the British translator and critic P. Morton Shand (Harding 1980). Ise Gropius accepted advice from Britons to remove theoretical sections and to appeal to audiences suspicious of extreme functionalism by reducing the severity of statements around standardisation. Though initially resistant to comprehensive changes, she later reflected that the edited book brought a 'difficult subject closer to English understanding'.[1] The strategy was successful, as the text enticed readers with modern conveniences while retaining comfort in their homes. A review in the BBC's popular magazine *The Listener* foregrounded the book's stance against 'dehumanisation' and 'the tyranny of standardisation' (McGrath 1935: 774).

The creative influence and impact of Ise Gropius's promotion has been neglected. Her journalism refutes accusations that modern design — furniture and interiors in particular — was incompatible with comfort and domesticity. The emergence of modernist design in consumer consciousness can be seen as a response to these publicity strategies, with media used as a bridge to twist the appeal of household objects. In these terms, it was *Ise* Gropius doing the pioneering, building an appealing aura of domesticity and femininity to contrast the supposed severity of masculine modernism.

The *Indian Delights* Cookbook: Connecting Afro-Indian Kitchens in Apartheid South Africa

Amina Kaskar

The *Indian Delights* cookbook is beloved by many South African Indians, holding deep sentimental and cultural nostalgia. The utensils, ingredients and recipes that it contains represent the legacy of migration and the rich pluralism of the Indian Ocean area.

In a chaotic world often divided by differences, finding moments of connection is vital. Objects can symbolically unite communities, reminding us of our shared humanity and fostering care and compassion. This was particularly important during Apartheid South Africa (1948–1994), when the state institutionalised racial discrimination through systematic segregation, imposing a rigid hierarchy that flattened diverse cultural experiences. The Women's Cultural Group, a group of Muslim Gujarati women in Durban, founded by Zuleika Mayat in 1954, put *Indian Delights* together as a way to reconnect with their cultural past, which had been disrupted by the fragmentation caused by imperial regimes (Vahed and Waetjen 2010). The first edition of *Indian Delights* in 1971 was highly successful, selling 175,000 copies in South Africa to a predominantly Muslim Indian market. Over the years, three subsequent editions were released, in 1979, 1982 and 1999, and included a wider selection of hybrid South African dishes for a more diverse group of women.

The cookbook reflects the cultural hybridity of recipes and stories exchanged among Indian, African, Afrikaans, Chinese, Portuguese and Spanish women in local markets — swapping a paella recipe for chicken curry or coconut nests for mango achar. Through the blending of people, cultures and ingredients, *Indian Delights* unified food spaces; women circulated between homes and markets, breaking down the urban boundaries enforced by apartheid and compressing the space between kitchens. **Figure 3** illustrates the constellation of objects and recipes contained in *Indian Delights*, highlighting how the cookbook connected women across segregated Indian townships in Durban, depicted by the grey and hatched patches, as well as across South Africa and the world.

The knowledge that contributed to the book was gathered across Durban, a challenging task due to apartheid's restrictions on movement and the customs surrounding family and religious life. These women devised strategies to navigate the city, using their kitchens as experimental sites for new recipes. This transformed private households into vital public spaces for economic work and social performance.

Indian Delights reveals a temporal space-making. Women travelled with specialised ingredients and utensils, turning each kitchen into a unique space for collective cooking performances. Material registers and spatial sequences were reconfigured according

Figure 3: Afro-Indian diasporic objects reflected by the cooking practices in *Indian Delights*, connecting women across segregated areas across Durban, South Africa and the world. Illustration by Amina Kaskar.

to different technologies and dwelling types. The act of communing extended beyond shared resources and created a self-defined community of women negotiating access and creating new social contracts. By reproducing Afro-Indian cooking practices in semi-public/private spaces, *Indian Delights* confronted the separations women faced in their homes. As Bell Hooks describes them, these homes were sites of 'radical potential', where women could affirm their identities and values, seeking comfort within and asserting themselves outwardly (1990). They became alternative spaces of knowledge production centred around conviviality.

When a woman uses *Indian Delights* to cook a biryani, she connects to a wider community of women sharing similar pleasures and needs. Much like other diasporic objects such as the prayer mat, *Indian Delights* establishes a personal sanctuary for the user, whether for cooking or reflection, symbolically transporting her to a sacred realm. Through this object, bodies scattered across time and space are connected, emblematic of advocating for unity within a larger system of resistance for racialised brown and black bodies. The heritage encapsulated in *Indian Delights* is profound. Although just an object, it serves as an important threshold that connects the private world of the kitchen with the public lives of women. It represents a broader sense of family and community, linking individuals to larger networks engaged in shared labour and solidarity across the world.

Social Setting in South Africa's Black Urban Society: Tea Sets as Cultural Identity

Nokubekezela Mchunu

Since the early 20th century tea sets have been valued not only for their utility in serving tea but also as important ornamental objects. Drinking tea represents a persistent concept that intertwines utility and sociality, rooted in practices that have continued for centuries. This is evident in the history of its consumption in China, where it was revered as a plant with practical applications in healing before becoming a symbolic recreational drink associated with social and religious rituals, as well as notions of elitism (Ukers 1934). Similarly, in 17th-century Britain, tea was introduced to upper-class society as a curative beverage prior to it being marketed as a social drink (Rappaport 2017). Once a luxury import, tea eventually became widely available to all classes in Britain, with the elite shaping the etiquette and accoutrements used in its enjoyment, thereby influencing its consumption.

The Ngilima Collection in Johannesburg, an archive of photographs by Robert Ngilima of early to mid-20th-century South African township homes, captures a unique glimpse of how tea set culture manifested in Black popular culture. The majority of the archive comprises photographs of working-class clients dressed formally and posing alongside a novel household item such as a phonograph or an extravagant piece of furniture **(Figure 4)**. Placing one's tea set conspicuously at the foreground of studio photographs became the typical indicator of elevated class and the assumed pose of photographs taken in homes. This is demonstrated in articles of celebrities in popular lifestyle magazines such as Drum, established in the early 1950s during apartheid, that showcased the Black, urban experience. Ngilima often photographed clients who did not own the coveted household items in his own township home. The proximity to modernity represented a lifestyle that many aspired to, and a photographic souvenir confirmed their fleeting access to it. Tea sets appear regularly in his photographs, primarily as props placed in the centre of the photograph; clients occasionally pretend to sip from empty teacups. The tea sets also often appear in glass display units, and their prominence was heightened when displayed with other decorative pieces.

In the early 20th century, in newly independent South Africa, as part of an empire-wide marketing effort, British-owned print media and advertisers heavily influenced tea-drinking trends (Switzer 1988). An archetype of the ideal tea drinker emerged in time, identifiable by their modern British clothes, tea etiquette, Christian piety and other indicators of middle-class domesticity in the home. In the 1930s, issues of a Black national newspaper, *Bantu World*, an illustrated embodiment of such a character: large sketched portraits of a central figure alongside a headline, accompanied by an expository cartoon strip with an expanded storyline. The first ambassador, 'Mr. Tea Drinker', was

Figure 4: Two women posing in front of a decorative tea set, Johannesburg, South Africa. Ngilima Archive, University of the Witwatersrand Historical Papers Research Archive, Johannesburg (1940–60).

the picture of modernity, with a three-piece suit with a pocket square and always drank tea from a teacup with a saucer. This positive portrayal of the black body in the media reflected the socially acceptable standards of beauty upheld by influential male figures in the African press, intelligentsia who played a significant role in disseminating and consuming news, opinions and entertainment (Switzer 1988).

Over the years, Mr. Tea Drinker was joined by his wife and two children in the adverts, supporting his role as head of a Christian family unit that lived in an urban area. By the 1940s, young wives had taken over the social signposting in the tea adverts. The slogan, 'Give the bride a tea set' appeared in a cartoon drawing of a woman wearing a bridal gown and veil. The bride with her tea set associated newly-wed Christian families with the distinctly domestic object. By the 1960s, Black urbanites with elevated social status, such as musicians and beauty queens, were used in corporate

marketing to represent tea-drinking culture. When they were interviewed in their homes, an ornate tea set usually appeared in the foreground. In their tea campaigns, advertisers presented the utilitarian act of drinking a beverage as a cultural ceremony that was incomplete without the accompanying accessories or adopting predefined characteristics. Although this strategy was typical of colonial racial capitalism of the former British empire, the campaigns coincided with an emerging culture of Black modernity in a post-independent South Africa. Tea culture was adapted by Black urban society as a part of stylised display and portraiture culture. Tea sets, as props and accessories, became ornaments that symbolised their upward mobility and personalised cultural sophistication, often independent of the tea itself. In this way, empty cups, teapots and their accessories contributed to a stylistic photographic and display culture in black homes.

Commercialising Ritual: Accommodating Butsudan in Japanese Postwar Households

Yosuke Nakamoto

I recall as a child finding flyers from *butsudan* manufacturers neatly folded alongside car advertisements in the mailbox. Unfolding these flyers revealed a dense display of ornate *butsudan* in every size and style, ranging from compact, affordable models that could be purchased on the same day to elaborate, custom designs costing as much as a car. The Buddhist altar, or *butsudan*, has long been a spiritual gateway in Japanese homes, enshrining the Buddha and honouring deceased ancestors. It symbolises the Buddha's presence, a bridge between the living and the transcendent, a space to connect with past family members. Although it is as common in Japanese households as other appliances — rice cookers, washing machines, and refrigerators — the *butsudan* is distinguished by its functional as well as cultural and spiritual significance, reflecting religious devotion, social status and family identity.

The origins of the household *butsudan* are rooted in the spread of Buddhism, particularly through the Edo shogunate's temple registration system introduced in 1635. This system required common people to register with local Buddhist temples, forging direct ties between households and temples. Temples managed ancestral graves, while the *butsudan*, as a 'satellite temple', became integral to family life. As a spiritual extension of the temple, the *butsudan* symbolised lineage and identity and strengthened the household's affiliation with the temple. Through this network, temples reinforced mechanisms of religious and social governance, solidifying the *butsudan*'s status as an essential household item.

The phenomenon of commercialising *butsudan* may be traced back to as far as 1695, when Takagi Jin'emon founded the *butsudan* specialty shop Hiroya in Nagoya. Artisans skilled in shrine and temple carpentry began specialising in *butsudan* construction, contributing to a craft and market dedicated to these altars (Jeroen 2005: 226–228). Despite Japan's shift towards secularisation, beginning with the Meiji Restoration in 1868 and accelerating in the post-war period, the *butsudan* remained a quasi-mandatory feature in many households. Its enduring presence still reflects the cultural significance of ritual and belief in Japan, alongside a deep connection to familial ancestry despite the rapidly changing society. The *butsudan*'s evolution in modern Japan illustrates a complex interaction between belief and consumerism, showing how a symbol of spirituality has been absorbed into and redefined by the market. In post-war Japan, marked by rapid economic growth, the *butsudan* industry experienced increased expansion; this growth was driven by families seeking to preserve the continuity of

their lineage, which had been disrupted by Japan's involvement in World War II. The urban post-war reconstruction, along with rapid urban-industrial densification from the 1950s to the 1970s, resulted in smaller housing units provided by housing corporations. The shift towards compact housing synchronised with the nuclearisation of family units and often eliminated the presence of dedicated spaces for traditional *butsudan* altars. In response to these changing domestic landscapes, the *butsudan* industry adapted its design to meet new standards.

Manufacturers began offering a range of *butsudan*, from affordable, mass-produced models to luxurious artisanal pieces, as the nuclearisation of family units progressed and living arrangements diversified (Buddhist Culture Research Association 1980: 30). By the 21st century, manufacturers introduced compact, cabinet-like *butsudan* to accommodate the demands of urban living **(Figure 5)**. These designs, often placed atop a chest of drawers or integrated into a bookshelf, seamlessly blend into contemporary interiors, resembling ordinary furniture when closed. Renowned architects, such as Kengo Kuma, have collaborated with manufacturers to design modern *butsudan* pieces. Traditional, large and ornate altars have been reimagined as space-efficient, stylish designs that harmonise with modern living environments. This process of commercialisation represents a pragmatic response to changing lifestyles, enabling *butsudan* to maintain their ritualistic and symbolic significance while adapting to customers' demands.

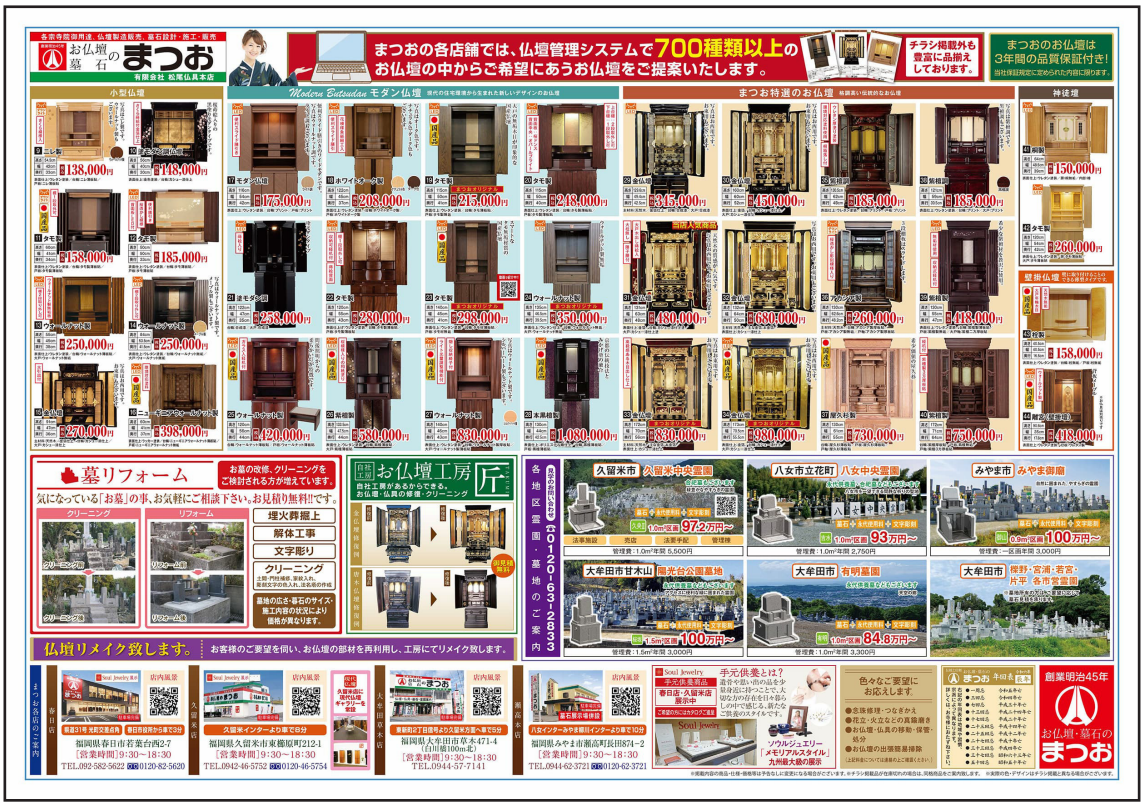

Figure 5: *Butsudan* in a catalogue of Matsuo Buddhist altar equipment, May 2024.

The transformation of the *butsudan* from a central household fixture to a compact, commercial product offers insights into the evolution of spiritual practices within Japanese society. From a dedicated space in the traditional home, its role was recast more simply as a domestic appliance, adaptable to fit with the realities of contemporary Japanese life. While a sign of religious and cultural resilience, the modern reinvention of the *butsudan* as a marketable object of mass-production unmasks its instrumentalisation at the service of capitalist logics of consumption.

Our Home and the Mediation of Modern Lifestyles in Singapore

Jesse O'Neill

Since 1960, the Housing and Development Board (HDB) has overseen Singapore's public housing. Established to solve the 1960s housing crisis, the HDB supported the 1964 Home Ownership for the People scheme, largely focusing on high-rise blocks of flats and later working to improve urban leisure and public amenities in their new town developments. In their expanding scope, the HDB launched *Our Home* in 1972, a magazine for HDB occupants that consolidated urban policy and popular lifestyle aspirations (Huppatz 2018: 145). It ran until 1989.

By the late 1960s, when people could more readily own their own homes, several venues developed showcases of home decoration. Beginning in 1965, the Young Women's Christian Association began the annual *Ideal Home* exhibition, which included furnishing schemes for HDB flats ('YWCA Plans' 1965: 7). These were joined by the Chinese Women's Association's *For the Home* exhibition, beginning in 1969 ('For the Home' 1969: 5). The state began promoting ideas of 'gracious living' to capture ideals of sophisticated modern lifestyles (Koh 1974: 6), which the *New Nation* adopted in 1971 to embody domestic consumer practices ('Gracious Living' 1971; 11). *Our Home* drew upon these experiences of domestic advice, taking the form of a lifestyle magazine.

Our Home's articles addressed many subjects. It covered home crafts, childcare, beauty treatment and exceptional home decoration; images of the homes of artists and designers showed how the HDB's unfurnished apartments, which were received with their interiors architecturally raw, could be turned into 'gracious' homes for modern families. The magazine included recurring advertisements from companies like Nestlé and Sony and from Tang's department store, giving impressions of domestic consumer interests. But *Our Home* was also an official instrument by which to announce the HDB's architectural and social schemes, guiding people in the physical and cultural transformations, backed by the state, that were taking place around them. This included articles on public hygiene, politeness in high-density living, and information about the different cultural practices taking place in HDB environments. Two spreads from *Our Home* reflect its tone that swung from top-down instruction on housing design to bottom-up motivation for domestic interior furnishing **(Figure 6)**. The top one, from 1979, informs readers of new styles of architecture they will soon see in estates, which was key to public narratives of the HDB's physical and aesthetic improvements — or, the state serving the people by advancing modern living. The lower spread, from 1973, is an article about a musician's flat, advocating DIY methods and simple techniques for making the home a more enjoyable environment — or, the citizen accepting the state's ambition to enact a modern lifestyle. *Our Home* both

encouraged homeowners to develop personal lifestyle habits and reinforced state plans for a reformed and modern environment in independent Singapore.

Figure 6: *Our Home*: 'Seven New Facades' (August 1979) and 'The Do-It-Yourself Decorators' (January/February 1973). Published by the Housing and Development Board, Singapore. Photographs by Jesse O'Neill.

As a free magazine, *Our Home* entered many Singaporeans' homes, shaping impressions and values of Singapore's modern urban environment and guiding living habits to match state-sponsored aims of urban development. It delivered helpful instruction to residents about contemporary family lifestyles. However, as a designed object that mediated state-led architectural and social policies for transforming living patterns (Lees-Maffei 2009), it also actively constructed narratives about how Singaporeans should experience the new residential environments in which they were increasingly required to live.

Travelogues for the 'Industry of the Foreigners' in Cyprus

Savia Palate

In 1928, Maynard Owen Williams, the first *National Geographic Magazine* foreign correspondent, published the picture travelogue 'Unspoiled Cyprus: The Traditional Island Birthplace of Venus Is One of the Least Sophisticated of Mediterranean Lands'. The title echoes commonly expressed ideas among Western travellers visiting Cyprus during that time and depicts the island as a rural and primitive territory, lacking signs of modernity. Many of the photographs Williams took involved staging domestic human labour and dressing up locals with costumes to satisfy the tourist gaze. The caption for the image in **Figure 7** reads, 'It was with difficulty that the author persuaded these

Figure 7: 'Traditional costumes.' Photograph by Maynard Owen Williams from Williams (1928: 46), © National Geographic Magazine.

ultramodern daughters of the town headman of Lefkoniko and the village schoolteacher to wear outmoded costumes of Cyprus' (Williams 1928: 46; Philippou 2014: 52). Another travelogue, published in the British journal *Empire Review* in 1928, called 'Cyprus: Our Oldest and Newest Colony', appears to differ from Williams's perception. In the solely text-based article by Polson Newman, a British major who worked in Middle East colonies, the author writes that he was surprised to see that 'the conditions of life are almost entirely European … There is a certain air of solid comfort in Cyprus which is entirely lacking in most Eastern countries.' Newman's surprise, however, was paired with the plea that 'the Cypriotes are not at present capable of undertaking this development themselves', underlining the island's need for the British colonial government's know-how (Newman 1928: 342–49).

Both travelogues, among others published during that time, can be treacherous media if read alone. One may rely on them while researching 'tourism' in Cyprus in the early decades of the 20th century because of a striking absence of the term in local historical documents. What is found instead is the implication that the locals aspired to develop the 'industry of the foreigners' — an intriguing term that linguistically implies a sort of reverse, yet active, exploitation of the 'foreigner' for the locals' financial survival ([The Industry of Foreigners] 1927: 1). Even the early hotels on the island, the ones Newman was surprised to see when visiting Cyprus, were implemented by local entrepreneurs, after struggles to receive permission from the colonial government (Palate et al. 2021). The locals' involvement in advancing the 'industry of the foreigners', including their participation in staging their everyday life in a travelogue, can be read as a 'little act of resistance' (Given 2004: 10), a multi-scalar negotiation of seemingly domestic practices translated into a 'home-grown' economy that for the colonised population was perceived to be the 'medicine against poverty and misery' ([And a Little Venice] 1929: 3). Nevertheless, the industry of the foreigners rapidly shifted to the tourism industry as we know it today, entangled with commercialisation issues, geopolitical confrontations and neocolonial practices, and new forms of inequality. For a while, though, it was a rebellious act.

Dantel and *Ören Bayan* Magazine

Sezin Sarica

A *dantel*, a Turkish word derived from French *dentelle*, meaning lace, is a traditional Mediterranean handicraft. It is a type of lace object produced through techniques such as crochet or knitting and a significant domestic tradition in Türkiye and in various other cultures. Reinterpreting *dantel* through an architectural lens reveals how this intricate craft embodies the representational dimensions of home routines within its socio-geographical context.

After the 1930s, the image of the Turkish woman began to be associated with ideas of modern architecture in Türkiye (Baydar 2002; Baydar 2007; Bozdoğan 2001). Despite this image of modernity, women were often restricted to domestic routines, regulated by the modern house that acted 'like a birdcage', a concept prevalent in both Türkiye and other contexts (Baydar 2002: 240). By the late 20th century, this duality persisted, with Cold War geopolitics shaping images of women. Consequently, women's magazines promoted home decoration routines as acts of idealised femininity and glorifying the domestic space (Gürel 2009: 706). One of these routines in Türkiye, *çeyiz*, centres around a collection of handicrafts brought into marriage.[2] The quality of domestic space was influenced by the display of these handicrafts. A *dantel* — typically an ornamental table cloth or doily — was one of the most significant objects in such displays, intricately knitted to complement other home objects, like cutlery. As a result, magazines featuring *dantel* patterns were highly popular, offering a variety of models with instructions for *dantel* knitting.

One of these magazines, *Ören Bayan* (meaning 'knitting lady'), was produced by the homonymous knitting yarn brand established in 1968. From 1975 onwards, Ören Bayan was published as a newspaper supplement, reaching many enthusiasts of handicrafts. The brand's distinctive logo features a woman with tightly bound hair engaged in knitting. Both the name of the brand and the logo highlight knitting as a historically gendered design practice. Accordingly, the photographs in the magazine depict various uses of *dantel*, reflecting its role in the daily routines of women and relations with other home objects **(Figure 8)**. A wide range of objects are part of these scenographies: *dantel* gracing a piano or the shelf of a kitchen cabinet, or adorning surfaces beneath staged objects: a coffee service, a cake, playing cards, opera glasses and make-up equipment, a whiskey decanter and glasses, a tailoring set, a book. The publishers of the magazine often printed photographs depicting *dantel* in foreign settings, in the company of objects in the home typical of Italy or France.

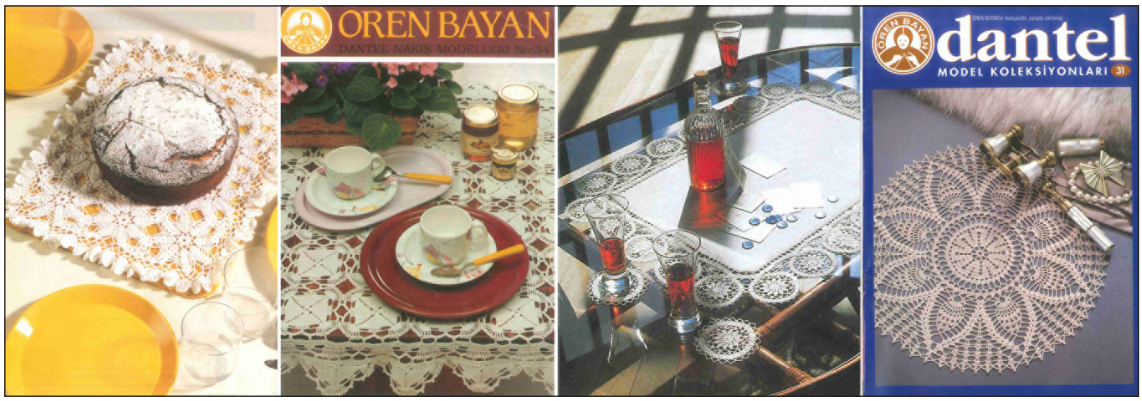

Figure 8: Two issues of Ören Bayan magazine, featuring *dantel* in home settings. The magazine issues are compiled from a *sahaf*, or bookstore, where most of the magazines are newspaper supplements or were given away with yarn purchases, often lacking specific publication dates or years.

These photographs present a blend of domestic routines that bring to light the invisible contrast between traditional expectations of modern women in Türkiye and the presumably Western-influenced representations of them. On the one hand, these photographs emphasise *dantel* as part of traditional housework, accurately reflecting the accepted 'domestic duties' women pursue in their personal space. On the other hand, the presence of *dantel* hints at leisure activities in domestic settings — such as drinking and playing cards or going to the opera — which did not necessarily reflect the experiences of most women in Türkiye. While these leisure activities misrepresented established societal norms, they also reflected a desired or hidden reality for many women in late 20th-century Türkiye. For these women, a blend of traditional crafts and evolving modern lifestyles allowed for greater self-expression and individuality beyond the borders of the house. *Dantel* thus acts as a mediator in its own right for a multiplicity of personal and spatial domestic relations, presenting tensions between the expectations and desires of women in postwar Türkiye.

Domesticating Cold: Globalisation and Mediatisation of Household Refrigerators in Treaty-Port China, 1920s–1930s

Zhengfeng Wang

Despite the widespread use of mechanical cooling technology for food preservation that began in the late 19th century, household refrigerators were still considered a novelty by the early 1920s. In the United States, New Deal policies (1933–1938) accelerated the formation of a mass market. The electrical modernisation of homes aligned with the broader agenda of civic improvement (Tobey 1996), and standardised designs embodied a 'social model of integration based on an ever-expanding middle class' (Nickles 2002: 727). Modernist architects viewed electric appliances as essential for rational kitchen designs, advocating ideals of order, hygiene, simplicity and labour-saving efficiency, though these concepts remained aspirational in many contexts (Van Caudenberg and Heynen 2004; Sugg Ryan 2018: 93–134). Nevertheless, the discussions surrounding refrigerators — what Peter Grahame (1994) terms 'textually-mediated objects' — played a pivotal role in shaping the discourse of modern domesticity.

Between the 1920s and 1930s, American manufacturing firms expanding abroad introduced refrigerators to China's treaty port cities, which were open to foreign trade and residence. Local agents promoted their products through marketing campaigns and displays in department stores and showrooms, primarily targeting affluent consumers. While the emphasis on food hygiene, nutrition, childcare and domestic economics resonated with those educated in Western ideals (Schneider 2011), the portrayal of technological innovations in the modern home also projected a cosmopolitan vision (LaCouture 2021). For instance, a Frigidaire advertisement in a Chinese newspaper depicted men and women in traditional Chinese, Korean and Japanese attire admiring a row of refrigerators set against a backdrop of towering high-rise buildings **(Figure 9)**. This imagery also implied that the refrigerator, as a standardised and universal solution to food preservation, could be adapted to various cultural contexts. The advertisement further reinforced the Frigidaire's global stature, highlighting its long history, dominant sales figures, extended warranty service and commitment to serving customers worldwide. Owning an imported refrigerator, particularly from an internationally renowned brand, became a symbol of elevated social status and of an alignment with modern living standards.

Meanwhile, for those who could not afford such a luxury, media coverage on electric refrigerators fostered appreciation for the benefits of having a cooling device in the kitchen. Readers were introduced to the principles of heat transfer through journals

Figure 9: Frigidaire advertisement from the Chinese newspaper *Xinwenbao*, June 17, 1935.

and magazines and could follow step-by-step instructions to construct their own *bingxiang*, literally meaning 'icebox' and used interchangeably with 'refrigerator' in English at the time. These improvised devices ranged from repurposed flower pots to wooden chests. Today, while ice boxes have largely faded from American memory, the localised Chinese concept of *bingxiang* endures as a term for contemporary fridges.

From Berlin's Friedrichstraße to the Imaginary Harem: The Escalator at the Moka Efti Café

Sarah Wheat Ordu

The Moka Efti Café is often remembered in popular culture as emblematic of Weimar Berlin (Fuechtner 2020; Baer and Smith 2024). Yet it opened only at the end of the period, in 1929, survived throughout the 1930s, and closed after its home, the Equitable-Palast building, was bombed in 1942. The café is notable for its creative melding of new building technologies with orientalist aesthetics, offering the public the immersive experience of travel to an imaginary orient.[3] Through clever marketing, the Moka Efti's exoticism became synonymous with its escalator. A rare technology in Berlin at the time, newspapers report crowds stopping by solely to experience a moving staircase. Promotional materials depicting the escalator cemented the object as central to the café's branding, where technological novelty and orientalist fantasy were intertwined.

The escalator acted as a threshold and the first installment in a spatial narrative of travel and escape from the realities of Berliners' everyday lives. Entering the ground floor of the Equitable-Palast from Friedrichstraße, a bustling and brightly lit street, patrons stepped into a nondescript, dark space. Dark walls and niches framed the escalator and stairs at ground level. As one ascended the escalator (or climbed the adjacent stairs), thin white columns and archways gradually came into view. An electric light, centred on the landing above, guided the way and cast playful shadows in the space below.[4] After reaching the first floor, visitors entered a hallway resembling a train car, labelled the 'Moka Efti Express'. In a 1929 postcard, the corridor appears with wide rounded-corner windows framing backlit artificial landscapes, while a narrow oriental carpet directs patrons toward the café.[5]

In these spaces between occident and imaginary orient, the escalator and hallway physically and psychologically simulate a train. Similar to a train ride, the body remains stationary on the escalator while taking in the surrounding scenery. This physical pause created a mental separation from the hectic street outside and the space of leisure inside the café. Functionally, the escalator solved the problem of managing the flow of what the owner claimed were three thousand daily visitors (Wolffram 1996: 7), enabling continuous movement to the first floor. As guests ascended the escalator and walked down the hallway, they passed brightly lit scenes of empty landscapes, the Bosphorus and the Golden Horn, recognizable as scenes along the route of the Orient Express. Though not seated in a train car, visitors would receive the impression of rapid travel through the backlit scenery flashing by on either side. Together, the escalator and hallway contribute to a distancing from the outside world and a gradual immersive effect.

That this immersion was specifically meant to evoke a fantastical harem space is demonstrated in a surviving marketing brochure that provides a tour of the café. Although a harem woman is never depicted inside the café, her typified brand character is pictured on the title page. Dressed in garb that would have been recognisable to European audiences as 'oriental' — wide pants, a head covering, etc. — the cheery character manages to balance a tray of coffee while somehow also being captured mid-dance. She appears on the title page as if welcoming guests into the space. The following two pages of the brochure mimic the experience of the café's entrance through images of repeating arches that lead to a drawing of the escalator **(Figure 10)**. Taking up almost an entire page, this drawing of the ground-floor entryway has hazy borders, as if the escalator is a mirage that has appeared suddenly.

Figure 10: 'Rolltreppe Eingang Friedrichstraße (Escalator Entrance Friedrichstraße'. Urban Beaury, *Moka Efti Equitable: An Berlins Populärster Ecke.* Promotional brochure (Berlin, 1929): 5.

Escalators arrived in Germany relatively late compared to England and the US, with the first modern example installed in Berlin's Wertheim Department Store in 1896 (Cooper 1998: 76–78; Zrnić N. et al. 2024).[6] By the time Moka Efti opened in 1929, they had appeared in U-Bahn stations and Berlin's Luna Park, where the 'Shimmy Treppe' added a layer of danger and excitement to the experience. While not the first in the city, the Moka Efti's escalator was among the earliest — and perhaps the first — to be installed in a café or nightlife venue catering to a diverse clientele. Whatever the background from which patrons came, while riding the Moka Efti's escalator they could feel themselves 'technological[ly] cosmopolitan' (Elvins 2021: 80). This mix of references to adventure, travel, consumption and a hint of danger made the escalator a fitting symbol for the Moka Efti. The immersive spatial sequencing at the café's entrance set the tone for the interior environment, introducing a strong brand narrative before entrance into the café itself.

Notes

[1] Ise Gropius to Carola Giedion-Welcker, 7 December 1936, gta Archiv, ETH Zurich.

[2] Another home object with an interesting name, *gelin kafesi/çeyiz sandığı* (bride cage/çeyiz chest), is used for storing handicrafts and also plays a role in these domestic routines.

[3] This spatial image was an imaginary one. Any reference to 'the harem' in this essay is ahistorical in nature and reflects German fantasies about this space more than any accurate form of representation.

[4] *Moka Efti Berlin [Rolltreppe]*, 1929, Ansichtskarte, Berlin-Mitte-Archiv, Image Number 00024530, Inv. Nr. AK-8784, https://www.berlin-mitte-archiv.de/?36949198981710007605.

[5] *Moka Efti Express Berlin-Moka [Gang]*, 1929, Ansichtskarte, Berlin-Mitte-Archiv, Image Number 00005407, Inv. Nr. AK-1444, https://www.berlin-mitte-archiv.de/?36949198981710007605.

[6] The first escalator in Germany was probably in the Tietz Department Store in Cologne.

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