

**Kostis Kourelis**  
**History of Domestic Architecture**  
**Wesleyan University, ARTS 637, Spring 2009**

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Class: Monday, 6:30-9:00 pm  
Email: [kkourelis@gmail.com](mailto:kkourelis@gmail.com)  
Tel: 860-685-0150

## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Domestic form has captured the cultural imagination throughout history. From Adam's house in paradise to Mohammed's house in Medina, from modernism's "machines for living" to postmodernism's "MacMansions," houses offer unique evidence for exploring the relationship between pragmatic shelter and social identity. This seminar offers a systematic introduction to the history of domestic architecture. We will learn about primitive huts, the Greek *oikos*, the Roman *domus*, the villa, the castle, the palazzo, the mansion, the plantation house and its slave quarters, Victorian suburbs, slums and tenements, bungalows, housing projects, postwar suburbs and post-industrial exburbs. At the same time, we will investigate how the discourse over physical form constructed social notions of dwelling and philosophical notions of being. We will read selected texts from literature, religion, philosophy, psychology and sociology to illuminate the fundamental role that huts, houses and hoods have played in shaping cultural history.

Sources to be studied include house architecture, primary and secondary scholarship related to the history of domestic architecture from antiquity to the present. The majority of the readings will be available as PDF documents on the course website. Two required textbooks are available at the bookstore.

Wright, Gwendolyn. 1981. Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America, Cambridge, Mass., pp. 93-113, 158-176.  
McAlester, Virginia and Lee McAlester. 1984. A Field Guide to American Houses, New York.

## **CLASS REQUIREMENTS**

Grades will be based on homework assignments (40%), class assignments and participation (40%) and a short final research paper (20%).

## **SCHEDULE**

### **1. The Primitive Hut**

**Jan 26**

Humanity's transition from a state of nature into a state of civilization has been narrated through the construction of the first dwelling. The origins of architecture have been theorized along with the origins of language. By investigating the "primitive hut" across cultures and theorists, we will set the stage for the discursive depths of a simple hut. We will look at both ethnographic huts, and also at

the foundations of architectural theory in Vitruvius (1st c.), Marc-Antoine Laugier (18th c.), Gottfried Semper (19th c.) and others.

- Vitruvius. 1<sup>st</sup> c. BCE. "The Origin of the Dwelling House," (2.1) from The Ten Books of Architecture, trans. Morris Hicky Morgan, New York (1914), pp. 38-41.
- Laugier, Marc-Antoine. 1753. "General Principles of Architecture," in An Essay on Architecture, trans. Wolfgang and Anni Herrmann, Los Angeles (1977), pp. 11-13.
- Oliver, Paul. 2003. "Shelter of the Nomads," and "Settling Down," chs. 1, 2, Dwellings: The Vernacular House World Wide, New York, pp. 20-63.

## 2. Oikos, Domus, Villa

Feb 2

We will start our historical survey by investigating the ancient Greek house from an archaeological point of view. The Greek *oikos* and the Latin *domus* gave birth to theoretical considerations from *oikonomia* (economy), equality, citizenship, democracy and the creation of the civilized *polis*. The Roman villa, our second building type, will reveal the relationship between the arts and domestic architecture. We will move away from the city and consider the house in a rural context as a unit of agricultural production and ecology.

- Thébert, Yvon. 1987. "Private Life and Domestic Architecture in Roman Africa," in A History of Private Life 1: From Pagan Rome to Byzantium, ed. Paul Veyne, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Cambridge, Mass. pp. 319-351.
- Rouche, Michel "Private Life Conquers State and Society," A History of Private Life 1: From Pagan Rome to Byzantium, ed. Paul Veyne, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Cambridge, Mass., pp. 419-451.
- Aristotle. 4th c. BCE. Politics III.6; VII.

## 3. From Castle to Palazzo

Feb 9

Chronologically, we move away from antiquity into the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Both periods have left us with two unique domestic forms. We will study the sociological dimensions of castles and palazzos, and, more importantly, how they contributed to the self construction of their elite occupants.

- Stalley, Roger. 1999. "Secular Architecture in the Age of Feudalism," ch. 4, Early Medieval Architecture, Oxford, pp. 82-101.
- Ackerman, James. 1997. "Palladio's Villas and Their Predecessors," ch 4, The Villa: Form and Ideology of Country Houses, New York, pp. 89-107.

## 4. Houses of Enlightenment

Feb 9

During the 18th century, the house became a site for enlightenment, sensual discovery, pedagogy, history and taste. We will read a short treatise, *The Little House: An Architectural Seduction*, by Jean-Françoise de Bastide (1758) and also consider the elements of culture in contemporary houses like Thomas Jefferson's Monticello, Neo-Palladian villas, the Adams style, and the Gothic fantasies of the Romantic movement.

De Bastide, Jean-Fran oise. 1758 (1996). The Little House: An Architectural Seduction, trans. Rodolphe el-Khoury, Princeton, pp. 57-116.  
Lewis, Michael J. 2002. "Romanticism," ch. 2, The Gothic Revival, New York, pp. 36-57.

## 5. Structures of American Life

Feb 23

When the first British settlers arrived in North America, they transplanted medieval European domestic traditions to a new continent. We will study the Puritan house of New England, the slave plantations of the South, and the company towns of industry. At this point, our story will take a particularly American (and familiar) flavor.

Deetz, James. "I Would Have the Howse Strong in Timber," ch. 5, In Small Things Forgotten: An Archaeology of Early American Life, New York, pp. 125-164.  
Upton, Dell. 1998. "An American Icon," ch. 1, Architecture in the United States, Oxford, pp. 16-55.

## 6. The Cult of Domesticity

Mar 2

Moving chronologically from the 18th and early-19th centuries into the late 19th century, we discover a radical shift in the conceptions of the house. The cult of domesticity and the functional specialization of the family are two new elements that continue to dominate our own concepts of home. We will investigate the Victorian cottages in the garden suburbs and the parallel development of domestic reform and welfare.

Wright, Gwendolyn. 1981. "Victorian Suburbs and the Cult of Domesticity," "The Progressive Housewife and the Bungalow," in Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America, Cambridge, Mass., pp. 93-113, 158-176.  
Beecher, Catharine A. and Harriet Beecher Stowe. 1869 (1975). "The Christian Home," from The American Woman's Home, or, Principles of Domestic Science, New York.  
Downing, Andrew Jackson. 1850. "Designs for Villas or Country Houses," in The Architecture of County Houses, New York, pp. 271-311.

## 7. The House Beautiful

Mar 23

An under-appreciated side of modern aesthetics is the cultivation of the house as a work of art. Stylistic eclecticism (Italianate, Carpenter Gothic, Queen Anne, Tudor, etc.), the Arts and Crafts movement, the House Beautiful movement, as well as growth of interior decoration as a field of feminine expression upstaged domestic life into the level of self-construction. The

Clark, Clifford Edward, Jr. 1986. "The House as Artistic Expression," ch. 4, The American Family Home, 1800-1960, Chapel Hill, pp. 103-130.  
McAlester, Virginia and Lee McAlester. 1984. A Field Guide to American Houses, New York.  
Gere, Charlotte, with Leslie Hoskins. 2000. "The Art of Decoration," The House Beautiful: Oscar Wilde and the Aesthetic Interior, London, pp. 76-95.  
Woolf, Virginia. 1927. To the Lighthouse, London, excerpts.

## 8. Being, Dwelling, Dreaming: A Theoretical Interlude

Mar 30

Before leaving the 19th century, we will take a chronological break and delve into deep theoretical waters. We will consider the modern house from the perspective of psychoanalysis, Marxism and phenomenology, reading house treatises by Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx and Martin Heidegger respectively. This will offer less insight into the architectural development of the house. Rather, it will remind us of the origin myths with which we started this class and let us appreciate the theoretical significance of the house in modern theory.

- Freud, Sigmund. 1925. "The Uncanny," in The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, ed. and trans. James Strachey, v. 17, London, 1953, pp. 219-252.
- Marx, Karl. 1867. "The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof," from Capital: An Abridged Edition, ed. David McLellan, Oxford and New York, 1995, pp. 42-50.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1954. "Building Dwelling Thinking," in Poetry, Language, Thought, trans. Albert Hofstadter, New York (1971), pp. 145-161; reprinted in Basic Writings, ed. David Farrell Krell, New York (1977), pp. 320-339.

## 9. A Machine for Living

Apr 6

Modernism envisioned a radical break with the traditional house. According to Le Corbusier, a house should be a machine for living. We investigate the fundamental role that dwellings played in the revolution of modern architecture, dwelling in both the innovative and common elements of this new style.

- Le Corbusier. 1923 (2007). Towards an Architecture, trans. John Goodman, Los Angeles.
- Curtis, William J. R. 1996. "The Image and Idea of Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye at Poissy," from Modern Architecture since 1900, 3rd ed., New York, pp. 274-285.
- Rowe, Colin. 1976. "The Mathematics of an Ideal Villa," in The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa and Other Essays, Cambridge, pp. 159-184.

## 10. Public Utopias

Apr 13

One of modernism's most powerful dreams was the eradication of industrial society's problems, namely the gulf between capital and labor, between the middle class and the proletariat. Modernists tackled society's foundations by rethinking public housing. We will study the utopian projects of public housing in early 20th century Europe and America.

- Wright, Gwendolyn. 1981. "Americanization and Ethnicity in Urban Tenements," "Public Housing for the Worthy Poor," Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America, Cambridge, Mass., pp. 114-134, 220-239.
- Curtis, William J. R. 1996. "The Ideal Community: Alternatives to Industrial Living," in from Modern Architecture since 1900, 3rd ed., New York, pp. 240-255

## 11. Private Dreams

Apr 20

The development of the post-War suburb altered the way that most Americans live. This transformation was fundamentally domestic. The single-owned private home was part reality, part fiction. We will study the creation of the suburb and its relation to both the American dream and the abandonment of cities (white flight). We will conclude with the last episode of this movement, the exburbs and MacMansions, and the effects of this private dream in the urban (neighbor)hood. We will attempt to correlate the hip-hop “crib” with phenomena as diverse as the sub-mortgage crisis, globalization, the abandonment of Projects and the movement of New Urbanism.

- Wright, Gwendolyn. 1981. “The New Suburban Expansion and the American Dream,” ch. 13, Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America, Cambridge, Mass., pp. 240-262.
- Nelson, George and Henry Wright. 1945. Tomorrow’s House: A Complete Guide for the Home-Builder, New York.
- Friedman, Alice T. “People Who Live in Glass Houses: Edith Farnsworth, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and Philip Johnson,” Women and the Making of the Modern House: A Social and Architectural History, New York, pp. 126-159.

## 12. Missing Home

Apr 27

In this final class, we will ask a simple question: Is the quest for “home” a legitimate or a self-deluding project for our times? In order to answer this question we will look at an odd array of case studies: house-museums, fantasies of vernacular, and the return-to-nature. Global warming and ecological concerns have put the design of houses back into the forefront of identity politics. We leave with an open question framed between fantasy and reality.

- Venturi, Robert, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour. 1972. “Ugly and Ordinary Architecture, or the Decorated Shed,” part 2, Learning from Las Vegas, rev. ed., pp. 87-103.
- Rybczynski, Witold. 1986. “Nostalgia,” from Home: A Short History of an Idea, New York, pp. 1-13.
- Colomina, Beatriz. 1998. “The Exhibitionist House,” in At the End of the Century. One Hundred Years of Architecture, ed. Russell Ferguson, Los Angeles, pp. 126-165.