Dream Homes and Heartache

Who among us, in his idle hours, has not taken a delicious pleasure in constructing for himself a model apartment, a dream house, a house of dreams?
—Charles Baudelaire

Throughout much of the last century, the Dream Home has been almost synonymous with the American Dream itself. But as the 2007-2010 subprime mortgage crisis dramatically highlighted, dreams of the “good life” in late capitalist societies can unexpectedly turn into nightmares. This course investigates the fantasies, disappointments, and psychopathologies—both everyday and aberrant—that have accompanied twentieth and twenty-first century experiences of dwelling. We examine a series of existing, or formerly existing, architectural spaces (from large scale housing projects to O.J. Simpson’s Brentwood estate and Donald Trump’s Fifth Avenue penthouse) alongside an array of artworks and narratives from literature and film that center on built environments. We also investigate how the fundamental human activity of dwelling has been thought about by philosophers, critics, psychoanalysts, sociologists, and urban geographers. Students’ research will explore how the problems associated with dwelling intersect with issues such as economic inequality, racial and sexual marginalization, creative and emotional growth or arrestation, and the everyday strategies involved in coping with large-scale social and political upheaval. Of particular importance to us will be the ways in which the private spaces people inhabit—even, or especially, when they are designed to embody their most sought-after dreams—fail to provide the sense of comfort and security associated, in the popular imagination, with "home."

David Markus is a Language Lecturer in the Expository Writing Program at New York University. He earned his PhD in Comparative Literature from the University of Chicago. At present, his research is centered on spatiality in contemporary art and literature, late capitalist economies of excess, and theories of gender and intimacy. His writing appears in publications such as Art Journal, Frieze, Art in America, Next City, and Flash Art.

Grade Breakdown

Essay 1: 20% (4 pages)
Essay 2: 25% (6 pages)
Essay 3: 35% (8 pages)
Presentation: 10%
Participation (including weekly short reading responses): 10%
COURSE SCHEDULE

Introduction: The Problem of Dwelling

Week 1
Lewis Lapham, “Castles in the Air,” *Lapham’s Quarterly* 10:1 (13-21)
Catherine Bauer, *Modern Housing* (5 page selection)

Species of Spaces

Week 2
Georges Perec, *Species of Spaces* (1-36)
Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (25-57)
Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (91-96; 115-118)

Other Spaces

Week 3
Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias” *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory* (330-336)
Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (110-117)

Living Inside Fantasy

Week 4
Essay 1 Due

Liam Gillick, “A Building on Fifth Avenue” (~5 pages)

Viewing material: Jennifer and Kevin McCoy, *BROKER* and other artworks

Week 5
J.G. Ballard, *High-Rise* (63-105)
Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (38-45; 108-129)

Viewing material: King Vidor, *The Fountainhead* (screenplay by Ayn Rand); Société Réaliste, *The Fountainhead*
New Domestic Realisms

Week 6   Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (232 pages)

         D.W. Winnicott, “Delinquency as a Sign of Hope,” “The Mother’s Contribution to Society,” “The Concept of the False Self” (~30 pages total)
         Alison Bechdel, *Are You My Mother?* (~25 page selection)

Viewing material: Xavier Dolan, *Mommy*

Gender and Space

Week 8   Essay 2 Due

Beatriz (Paul B.) Preciado, “Pornotopia,” *Cold War Hothouses* (216-253)

Viewing material: Chantal Akerman, *Jeanne Dielman, 23, Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*

Race and Space

Week 9   Mario Gooden, *Dark Space: Architecture, Representation, Black Identity* (~10 page selection)
         Toni Morrison, “The Official Story: Dead Man Golfing,” *Birth of a Nation’hood* (VII-XXVIII)

Viewing material: *O.J. Simpson: The Interview* (360 N. Rockingham Ave. house tour); *The People vs. O.J.: Episode 5 (“The Race Card”)
Uncanny Dwellings

Week 10  E.T.A. Hoffmann, “The Sandman” (~30 pages)
Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny” (~20 pages)
Anthony Vidler, The Architectural Uncanny (~10 page selection)

Viewing Material: The Stepford Wives; films of David Lynch

Ornament and Crime

Walter Benjamin, Reflections (64-65; 154-156)
Peter York, “Trump’s Dictator Chic” (~5 pages)

Viewing material: McMansion Hell website (http://mcmansionhell.com/)

Urban Development, or The Assassination of the City

Week 12  Samuel Delaney, Times Square Red, Times Square Blue (111-127)
Jane Jacobs, The Death and Life of Great American Cities (89-111)
Claudia Rankine, Provenance of Beauty (~10 page selection)
Robert Fitch, The Assassination of New York (~10 page selection)

Viewing Material: Marwa Arsanios, Falling is not collapsing, falling is extending
and other works from Hammer Museum exhibition; Adam Greenfield, Another
City is Possible (Webstock 13 Talk)

Concluding Weeks

Week 13  Presentations

Week 14  Final Research Essay Due