

Anxious Dwelling / Postwar Spaces



Prof. Robin Schuldenfrei

AH560 Seminar in Modern Architecture, Art and Design

CRN 25117

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schul@uic.edu

Postwar dwelling was fraught with anxiety. The workplace and domestic sphere alike engendered certain expectations regarding social behavior, modes of living, and forms of dwelling. This seminar investigates modern life as it was meant to be lived—reading American modernism’s euphoria in “easier living,” suburbia, and middle class conformity through its promoters (in advertising, magazines, television, and museum exhibitions) and detractors (cultural critics, sociologists) alike. Commodity culture and the economic retooling of civilian life joined forces, not only providing the material content of post war spaces, but also controls and expectations. The Khrushchev-Nixon “Kitchen Debate” exemplifies one episode in which anxiety over cold war geopolitics came to a head in consumer culture. The acquisition of new domestic goods not only relieved the unease felt between suburban neighbors struggling to keep up, but between political systems, each within its own “domestic” realm. This course exams the West and the Eastern Bloc not as binary systems, but in dialogue—*material* dialogue. It asks, how did modern architecture and its objects seek to fulfill the goals of capitalism and socialism? How did the idealism of social housing shape the built environment in both spheres? What role did material objects play in quelling or flaming the anxiety of mid-century modernism’s ordinary denizens? This course will examine the political stakes of domestic culture and the domestic culture of politics.

