

AMST 333
House and Home in America
Roger Williams University
M-TH 3:30 - 4:50
GHH 108

Michael R. H. Swanson, Ph. D.
Office: GHH 215 Phone: ext. 3230
Hours: M, T, Th, F 9:00-10:30
or by Appointment
mswanson@rwu.edu

Week of March 26, 2012

For Monday, March 26

Read, in Rybczynski,
Chapter 4, "Commodity and Delight," pp. 77 - 100

To date, we've seen how houses evolve from single roomed, semi-public affairs to multi-roomed structures which allow for intimacy through the creation of privacy, and we've located the origin of this idea in northern Europe, chiefly Scandinavia. We've also seen the feminization of domestic space occur, through innovations of the Dutch. This day we'll add a contribution to the American House, courtesy of the French.

Chapter 4 introduces us to the idea of comfort achieved through domestic furniture. The two terms, "Commodity," and "Delight" can roughly be equated with the ideas of functional and aesthetic qualities of things which furnish houses. An object demonstrates commodity if it accommodates itself to our needs, including our physiological needs. An object delights us if it maintains our interest and pleasure. About the time of the American Revolution we begin to expect our domestic furniture (at least some of it) to do both of these. Rybczynski suggests that in a world divided between "squatters" and "sitters" we need to be sure we don't assume one or the other of these postures is objectively superior to the other.

Internet Study Preparation Exercises:

1. [Visit the Metropolitan Museum of Arts American Decorative Arts](#) web site and locate the 1640 armchair, the 1740 Roundabout Chair, and the 1758 Easy Chair and think about how these demonstrate the evolution of the ideas of commodity and delight.
2. Take the [Virtual Reality Tour of the Hart Room](#), and consider the ways in which it does, and does not represent qualities we expect of modern domestic rooms. Note that you can explore the major elements of the room in detail by clicking on them.

For Thursday, March 29

Read, in Jackson,

9. The New Age of Automobility, pp. 157 - 171
11. Federal Subsidy and the Suburban Dream. 190 - 218
12. The Cost of Good Intentions, The Ghettoization of Public Housing in the United States, pp. 219 - 230

Notes on the Readings:

The numbering above is not a misprint. We're skipping Chapter 10. There's nothing particularly mysterious about what we'll be discussing. What you'll need to do is use some of your memory to tie this material into materials we've seen or discussed before.

Chapter 9:

So far we've seen that there are different physical configurations for suburbs, depending on the technology prevalent when they were formed. Railroad suburbs string out along the main lines of the railroad companies themselves, rather like beads on a string. Streetcar suburbs develop first along the lines of the streets, chiefly the principal streets connecting outlying towns with city centers. Because trolleys are capable of starting and stopping frequently, density is pretty uniform along the route, save at intersections between trolley lines.

Here, the task is to understand how suburbs created in response to the automobile are different from those which are created in response to the streetcar. We'll return to this again later, when we look at the development of the interstate highway system, and at the time in our history when two or more cars, rather than one or less, became common for all but the working poor.

Chapter 11:

We know that many people resent government assistance to the poor, and "Welfare Queen" is a political stereotype which has often appeared in American politics since about 1980. Government policy operating on behalf of the middle to upper classes is less often thought of or discussed in the public arena. We'll see the impact of government policies which influence who can own a home, why home ownership is considered a desirable public good, and why it might not be unfair to call this particular set of government policies "white collar welfare".

Chapter 12:

We've already seen how technology, combined with differences in the economics of different systems of transportation, began to segregate Americans by economic class from the earliest days of the modern suburb. This chapter will show how attempts to "do something for the poor" actually enhanced that separation. Zoning restrictions forbidding multiple family dwellings isolated many suburbs from housing "projects," which were modeled as stripped down apartment buildings. Remember some of the scenes from *Suburbs, Arcadia for Everyone*, to see alternative ways to provide adequate housing for the working poor. One doesn't have to warehouse people in hi-rises to provide decent housing for poor people.