

CAN BILSEL

LECTURE

ARCHITECTURE LECTURE SERIES
2017, UNIVERSITY OF CYPRUS

ARCHITECTURE AND THE HOUSING QUESTION: Provisional Notes from a History-in-Progress



Photo by Paul Short, Istanbul, 2014

**FRIDAY 16 JUNE, 2017
19.00-20.30**

LEDRAS 68, 1010, NICOSIA
GROUND FLOOR EXHIBITION AREA
DEPARTMENT OF ARCHITECTURE



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Over the past decade architectural historians have come to understand postwar housing as the nexus between modern architecture and the organization of the modern state. A series of monographs have examined how architects working for the state bureaucracies transformed the way ordinary citizens lived, and how architecture conditioned the experience under the modern state in the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Hungary, Yugoslavia, France, and the UK. Together, these studies amount to a sea change in the way histories of architecture have been written, by moving away from the narrative of Modern Movement (the select works of a group of avant-garde architects) to an investigation of greater architectural networks and forms of production. Few of these monographs, however, have been willing to cross the national, regional, and political boundaries. Whereas a number of multi-authored edited volumes have recently emerged, they limit their scope to one of the political categories inherited from the Cold War in Europe, either the welfare state or socialism. Together these edited books contribute to the larger construction of "postwar architecture" read against the background of a bipolar political order. Relatively few studies address the architectural history of housing outside North America and Europe, and those who touch upon the topic are limited by the geographic boundaries they set for themselves, or follow the careers of modernist architects across the globe.

The lacunae in the critical scholarship to account for the recent changes is especially pronounced in large parts of Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America, where the housing question is being asked with a new sense of urgency. Although mass housing, standardization and prefabrication have returned with an unprecedented scale (with the scale of Asian production matching or exceeding European public housing of the postwar years), few of these countries are replicating the political model of the European welfare state. A different model of capitalist social engineering seems to be in effect in places like China and Turkey, with unpredictable consequences.

*In this lecture, I will sketch out the historiographic ambition of a book, *Architecture and the Housing Question*, which I am currently co-editing with Juliana Maxim—a collaborative project that features the work-in-progress of 15 scholars from across the world and an epilogue by Reinhold Martin. We start with the premise that the histories of housing are divided, not united, by being classified by political regimes or geographic regions. Nor are the categories of "public housing," "socialist housing," "mass housing," "suburban housing" universally coherent. In this book, we wish to go beyond the binaries of welfare/socialist, formal/informal, suburban/mass housing, and explore new intersections between discourses and architectures. Our book differs from others in that it does not discuss housing in relation to a single political ideology: welfare state, socialist regimes, or neoliberalism. An experimental thematic organization will allow us to include what had rarely been studied together: architecture and humanitarianism, the discourse of the habitat, suburban tract housing divisions, speculative mass housing developments, refugee camps, and the gated communities) without separating them into neatly organized functional types, or indexing them to a political or ideological model.*

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Can Bilsel is Professor of the History and Theory of Architecture at the University of San Diego. His research bridges the fields of the history and theory of modern architecture, urbanism, and housing, the history of archaeology and museum reconstructions, the history of architectural conservation, cultural theory, and postcolonial studies. He is the author of *Antiquity on Display: Regimes of the Authentic in Berlin's Pergamon Museum*, published in 2012 by the Oxford University Press. His most recent article, "Crisis in Conservation: Istanbul's Gezi Park Between Restoration and Resistance" appears in the June 2017 issue of *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*.

Bilsel received his Ph.D. in Architecture at Princeton University, a Master of Science degree from MIT School of Architecture, and a professional Bachelor of Architecture from METU in Turkey. He has received numerous awards including the Aga Khan Fellowship at MIT, the Whiting Fellowship in the Humanities at Princeton University, and was a visiting scholar at the Canadian Centre for Architecture in Montreal, and a fellow at the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles for two consecutive years. For nearly a decade Bilsel was the Chair of the Department of Art, Architecture and Art History, and the founding Director of the University of San Diego's Architecture Program. In addition to his tenured professorship at the University of San Diego, Bilsel teaches seminars in the PhD and Masters programs in Architecture and Urban Design at UCLA.

