Leisure, Body, and Building in Early Modern Europe
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Leisure presented early modern Europeans with a puzzling conundrum: leisure activities were supposed to offer mental and physical relaxation, but one had to be perpetually on guard against relaxing too far and so rupturing the boundaries of social expectation. This seminar explores how early modern Europeans navigated this conundrum through the spaces and practices with which they framed ambiguous leisure. It focuses particularly on domestic architecture as a primary site of leisure and one where the paradoxes of leisure strikingly emerge; house and household on an isolated estate might seem to offer physical and social retreat, but ambiguity, conflict, and tension lie at the heart of these domestic spaces. An interdisciplinary range of themes will be explored to evoke the early modern lenses for understanding leisure: court culture, stable yet unstable markers of social status, theatricality and its uncertainties, the blurry tension between private and public, problems and desirabilities of Classicism, and philosophical and scientific conceptions of the body.

Required Texts
Other readings will be available online at the course website and on reserve in the library.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1. Ambiguous, Paradoxical Leisure
Readings:
Ackerman, Introduction.

Week 2. An Updated “Otium” at the Florentine Villa
Readings:
Ackerman, Chapters 2-3.
Week 3. Defense Demolished: French Chivalric and Courtly Leisure
Readings:

Week 4. Work at Leisure: Palladio’s Venetian Villas
Readings:
Ackerman, Chapters 4-5 and Appendix.

Week 5. The Illusive Theatricality of Leisure: Papal Roman Villas
Assignment 1 Due
Readings:

Readings:

Week 7. The Social and Moral Corruption of Leisure: 17c English Theater
Assignment 2 Due
Readings:
Week 8. Relaxation as Discipline: Versailles and Hampton Court

Readings:

Week 9. Leisure Splintered in Early 18c Germany

Readings:

Week 10. Site-less Leisure: The English Landscape Garden

Readings:

Week 11. Leisure by Accident: Picturesque House and Estate

Readings:
Ackerman, Chapter 9.

Week 12. Transatlantic Ease (or Unease): American Colonial Architecture

Readings:
Ackerman, Chapter 8.

Week 13. STUDENT PRESENTATIONS ON FINAL PAPERS
PAPER ASSIGNMENTS

Assignment 1: Building Analysis (Due in Week 5, 3-5pp)
Imagine yourself as a fifteenth- or sixteenth-century visitor to a particular Italian villa or French château. Analyze your experience of the house, its certainties as well as its uncertainties – where are you most secure about how to move and interact with others, to what extent and what types of relaxation are evoked, in what ways (if any) does the house suggest conventional expectations of leisure, what aspect of the house and its site is most important to your experience and why?

Assignment 2: Research Paper Proposal (Due in Week 7, 1-2pp)
The proposal should describe the topic which you will research for your final paper: a projected hypothesis, the chronological and geographical limits of your study, your chosen method/approach (eg, focus on a particular aspect of a building like the plan, the extent of visual analysis, possible incorporation of historical context), the resources which you propose to use (eg, images of buildings, contemporaneous descriptions and other sources), and a discussion of how your essay fits within current scholarship in the field. Attached to this proposal should be a brief, annotated bibliography of 5 sources; the annotations should describe in 1-2 sentences how each source will be useful in your research.

Assignment 3: Final Paper (Due during exam week, 10-15pp)
Select and research a topic of your own choice based on the themes of this course. Types of topics include: individual building studies, analyses of one architect’s or patron’s houses, examinations of a building type (eg, villa, castle, garden building), or a thematic study of a group of buildings within particular chronological and geographical limits (eg, attitudes toward leisure and social status across England and Italy). Topics may also range beyond architecture – for instance, written and visual depictions of country houses and their sites.