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Play Time and Staycations: Constructing Domestic Tourism in Post-War France

In the humbling aftermath of World War II, France was confronted with vast physical destruction and fractured national morale, both of which were further amplified by the long process of decolonization. Given this climate, it might seem strange that concurrent with addressing basic material needs of depleted housing stock and spaces for industry, along with attempts to metaphorically “rebuild” the nation, the French government vigorously invested in building for mass leisure; however, domestic tourism policies and projects were spurred by practical social and political motivations, including to jumpstart a stagnant economy, counter the loss of more exotic colonial vacation locales, and fashion a new type of welfare state citizen through tourist practices “at home” rather than abroad with special provisions given to white, middle-class, nuclear families.

Although many scholars have investigated how post-war mass housing affected the construction of French identity and body politic, few have questioned how infrastructure for mass tourism did the same, despite the fact that prominent thinkers including Dumazedier and Lefebvre proclaimed that leisure and its attendant spaces constituted the era’s dominant social concern. Similarly, the immense scale, financial investment, and seasonal nature of intranational tourism enabled architects to test urban (regional planning), domestic (notions of the “home” and division of public/private), and structural issues (new materials, modularity, prefabrication, etc.), much as the colonies had previously served as experimental territories. Ultimately, these developments in leisure architecture filtered back into everyday spaces and informed urban design and housing practices throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. Yet a sense that the built environment was nothing more than a farce or mirage, as so trenchantly depicted in the films of Jacques Tati, inflected not only urban and suburban realms but rapidly developing and expanding tourist landscapes, as well.

This talk will focus on the French government’s ambitious mission touting the nation’s natural abundance and regional diversity from sandy beaches and verdant forests to snowy Alps via the construction of post-war tourism and leisure architecture. Such projects realized in the Hexagon during the *trente glorieuses* vacillated between futuristic and placeless utopias, nostalgic or “nativist” images of France, and reinterpretations of former colonies at the very moment the “real” sites to which they referred were slipping from French control. Thus, domestic tourist architecture operated at a crossroads between nationalization and decolonization and might be understood as attempting to create another, heterotopic world within France - simultaneously offering escape from reality while being firmly embedded within it.

BIO

Johanna Sluiter is a doctoral candidate in Art History at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University. In her research, she focuses on post-war French architecture and exhibitions, with specific emphasis on issues of leisure, decolonization, and city planning. Her writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *Guernica: A Magazine of Art and Politics*, *The Street Art & Urban Creativity Scientific Journal*, and The Museum of Modern Art's *Museum Research Consortium Dossier*.