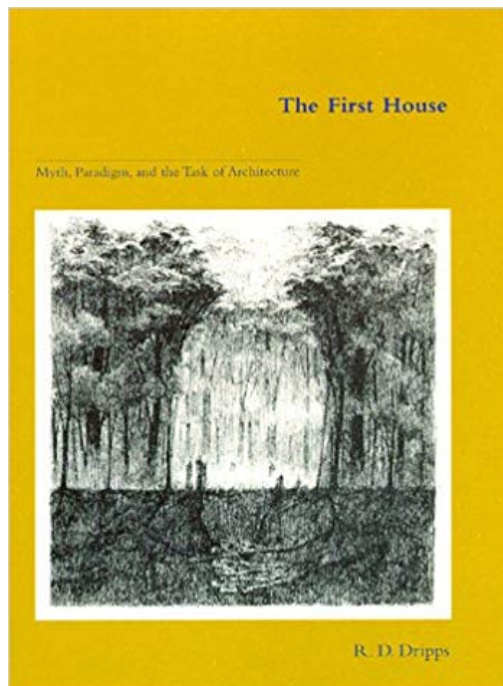


The First House: Myth, Paradigm, and the Task of Architecture *by* R. D. Dripps



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"*The First House* is the work of both great scholarship and sophisticated literary criticism. It is also the work of an artist that constructs a new dimension for architecture by giving Vitruvius' text a new and as yet unexplored dimension." -- Francisco Sanin, Professor of Architecture, Syracuse University

In the first century B.C., Vitruvius Pollio narrated a myth of the origins of dwelling. In a forest clearing, previously isolated and savage people gathered about the embers of a dying fire; from this gathering emerged political institutions, human language, and the construction of permanent shelters. R. D. Dripps finds in this story the foundation of an extensive theory of architecture still able to offer guideposts for architectural practice. Against any tendency toward theoretical disengagement or self-referentiality, Dripps argues that architecture must continue to address important political, cultural, and ecological issues. Ultimately, the role of architecture is to provide the structures that enable us to interpret the world and make it habitable.

The book engages in a series of explorations of Vitruvius's myth of architectural beginnings. The first chapter develops the elemental geometric patterning of Vitruvius's account (center and periphery, secure inside and untamed outside, the vertical stance of the human subject) as a diagram both for the private house and for the public space of the city. The second chapter examines the power of paradigmatic structures--both architectural and intellectual--to represent order and authority in human affairs. The third explores architecture's capacity to represent the public realm, and through representation to help effect public action. Chapter 4 seeks to reestablish connections between architectural order and the order of the cosmos, working back from myth-making to its significance for architectural and urban practice. The final chapter addresses the task of constructing as a part of public life, while a brief epilogue proposes a revision of the Vitruvian myth in the light of modern ecological thought.

Throughout, Dripps's intensive meditations on Vitruvius are supplemented by extensive notes that establish points of contact with a wide array of modern writers on myth, language, political theory, and the arts.



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