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The Suburban Imaginary and Mass Media: A Reflection of its Construction and Disassembly in the so-called American Baby Boom Generation (1946-1974).

El imaginario suburbano y el Mass Media: una reflexión de su construcción y desmontaje en la generación del llamado Baby Boom en los Estados Unidos (1946-1974).

María de los Ángeles Castillo-Soriano[1], Alberto Canavati-Espinosa[2], Diana Isabel Maldonado-Flores[3]

[1]*Máster En Arquitectura, Arte Y Espacio Efímero, maria.castillos@udem.edu, Universidad De Monterrey, Monterrey, Mexico*
[2]*Máster En Teoría E Historia De La Arq / Etsab-Upc, jesus.canavaties@uanl.edu.mx, FARQ-UANL / UDEM, Monterrey, México*
[3]*Ph Doctora en Arquitectura, diana.maldonadofl@uanl.edu.mx, Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, Nuevo León, México*

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television,
Pop Art.

ABSTRACT

According to Cambridge Dictionary, the meaning of Suburbia is related to peripheral parts of a city where there are houses, but there is not a considerable amount of retailers, work places and leisure venues. Obviously this definition is understood from an elemental point of view, it is, since the ends of the 18th century according to the urban conditions of English and newly North American towns. Even so, throughout the last six decades, more specifically 1946 and 1974, there was an interesting, as well as a vast record of information regarding this peculiar sort of urban planning, so representative of a young and naïve post-war consumption society, that shaped a lifestyle that was envied as imitated abroad (with several local interpretations in all over the globe). However, these imaginaries, largely, have been built from the positivist perspectives of a society in the curb of its industrialization, but also as a result of the critical thinking, have mutated towards the disassembly and the demystifying of what once was considered the ideal way of making a new city from this outskirt urban-planning format. The role that cinema, literature and visual arts have played in the idealization, the projection, the construction and disassembly of Suburbia as an urban model of social aspiration, have been so influential in a large number of American families, who pretend to resemble the models shown in television media, and in certain way in literature, which has been a line of argument that gave rise to the advertising and programs in film and television industry. In this article there will be an approach about the role that both literature, cinema and art have played in the idealization, projection, construction and disassembly of the suburb as an imaginary of apparent social welfare for a large part of American society.

Palabras clave:

Suburbano,
planificación urbana,
imaginarios,
American Way of Life,
cine,
literatura,
televisión,
arte Pop.

RESUMEN

Según el Cambridge Dictionary, el significado de suburbio se remite a las partes periféricas de una ciudad, en donde hay casas, pero no hay una cantidad considerable de comercios, sitios de trabajo ni de solaz y esparcimiento; bien se comprende desde una perspectiva elemental, es decir, desde el último cuarto del siglo XVIII, sin embargo, a través de las últimas seis décadas, más específicamente desde 1946, y hasta 1974 (franja cronológica de la generación del Baby Boom) que tomaron lugar diversos recursos de información que hablan de este peculiar tipo de urbanización, representativa de la posguerra, y que dio forma a un estilo de vida que por un tiempo fue envidiado e imitado con sus respectivas reservas en otras partes del orbe. No obstante que estos imaginarios se han construido desde el tenor positivista de una sociedad industrializada, también han mutado hasta el desmontaje y la desmitificación de lo que antes se pensaba como el modelo ideal de ciudad. En este artículo se hará un abordaje acerca del papel que tanto la literatura como el cine y el arte han jugado en la idealización, la proyección, la construcción y el desmontaje del suburbio como un imaginario de aparente bienestar social para una gran parte de la sociedad estadunidense.

***Corresponding author.**
E-mail address: maria.castillos@udem.edu (María de los Ángeles Castillo-Soriano)

Introduction

This research article attempts to review the phenomenology of the North American suburban condition starting with the second postwar period until the political crisis of the early seventies, from the positions of media such as film, literature and art, which have been responsible for building discourses through various tribunes, from those considered as positivist, to those gestated from criticism and irony. Likewise, the broad media sphere, in its role as carrier of popular culture, has acted as a communicating vessel of a representative condition of the second half of the twentieth century, giving rise to appreciate the apparently banal, which in many occasions is only the tip of the iceberg of a deep discourse, and referenced to that which sometimes could be understood as sophisticated, intellectualized and even of scientific value. The chronological analysis is circumscribed in almost three decades (1946 to 1974), right at the end of World War II, which both in the political and socioeconomic sphere represented a turning point in the life model of practically half of the American families linked to the inertia of a system that encouraged consumption, where they aspired to belong to an incipient middle class. Likewise, another of the edges that are subtly revealed in the research is the gender condition that has implied the meaning of suburbia from the male perspective, but above all the role that women have played in its development for more than 150 years, from the end of the Industrial Revolution to the consequences of the Post-War generation.

The suburban being has been involved in a paraphernalia of desires and aspirations to be part of a seductive system that offers comfort and attractive products that symbolize a higher social status, where the television provides images and suggestive messages for the viewer, suggesting how he should dress, have fun, raise a family and what aspirations he has and even which candidate to vote for; being the spectacle the object of consumption (merchandise) that has reached the occupation of social life (Débord, 1957, 2005, p. 11). It is not enough, however, to emphasize that one of the nutrients of Pop Art is the strong load of advertising, both of products, of lifestyles, as well as of idols manufactured from the media Mainstream, which has also built the suburb through the massive obtaining of economic, political and social power in the times when the United States was going through the highest demographic peak in its history.

The object of desire lies in the fact that the suburb, for more than two hundred years, was an attractive pole of development for a bourgeoisie that aspired to better living conditions, but that after industrialization, became a massive building process in the outskirts of cities such as New York, Chicago and, later, Philadelphia. It would seem that this condition would be a way of associating with some preconceived ideas of success and social acceptance within a complex system of homogenization of consciousness, moreover, a system that far from creating a classless society, results in a society as conscious as it is obsessed with distinguishing itself from other groups through the status of what it possesses as well as what it aspires to (Kunstler, 1996, p. 28).

When speaking of the suburb, it should not only be approached as a homogeneous model of urban configuration, but as the possibility of inevitable social marginality, or as the massive aspirational model of an emerging middle class; but as interpretations and connotations as disparate as they are worthy of analysis and reflection, approached from the North American perspective of the postwar period, when dreams took shape, passing through the strident media machine that, together with the naïve middle-class aspirations of American families, shaped the urban assemblage of cities throughout the length and breadth of the American Union, The automobile, in all its dimensions and variants, was the sovereign object of an endless system of arteries in growing demand, according to the principles of rationalization and specialization, by which the physical expansion of cities was based, without recognizing territorial or topographical boundaries,

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and even surpassing municipal limits (Amendola, 2000).

The suburb as an urban system for more than two millennia, has experienced various nuances since the Industrial Revolution, and since the second post-war period, it has spread hegemonically throughout the country at a time when it reached the crest of mechanization, which gave access to the purchase of automobiles and household appliances. This situation of apparent bonanza drove and forced the continuous consumption in order to sustain an economy in frank ascent. Likewise, other positions were developed that maintained a critical discourse on the growing life outside the suburbs, through literature and journalism; to cite a few examples, the posthumous novel The Conjuring of the Fools (Toole, 1980), The Revolutionary Way (Yates, 1961), In Cold Blood (Capote, 1965) and Lolita (Nabokov, 2002); who approach the periphery from a critical and sometimes hyper-realistic perspective, where they not only show a city as the process of transition from the American Dream to the American Way of Life, but also portray the subjugation to capitalism, through the narrative, where landscapes full of serialized and geometrically ordered subdivisions, strings of homogeneous dwellings, are recreated: Containers of memories of isolation and sordidness, rather than domestic introspection. In Edgar Allan Poe's short story, Arnheim's Domain, there is an allusion to the protagonist's self-absorbed life, his private fantasy and whimsy, which have license to express themselves openly, one of the initial goals of the suburb's creators (Mumford, 2014, p. 808). All this plethora of stories with their varied looks have become discourses that both cinema and literature, have been in charge of gestate with a diversity of interests, such as being the depositories of their advertisers and sponsors, and proselytizing vehicles of a huge system that demanded the continuous consumption of goods and services from what in 1969 would be called Product Positioning, to the imaginaries with marked ideological or political dyes that certain filmmakers and writers have raised, almost always in a critical and reflective tenor.

During World War II, the suburban condition in the United States underwent another of its changes due, in part, to the fact that during this period it was women who represented the great labor force. After the war, all those women workers were returned to domestic work while the large contingent of more than 12 million soldiers was gradually reincorporated into society, occupying the jobs that women had already gained during the war, a whopping 18 million jobs (Anderson, 2001). In addition, there was a marked increase in the birth rate since 1946, to such an extent that by 1959 alone there were approximately 50 million children under the age of fourteen in the United States alone (Gillon, 2004). On the one hand, the mass media exalted the advantages of belonging to a new community, with a new lifestyle, owning a house, shopping in supermarkets and having fun in new entertainment venues (drive-in movie theaters, bowling alleys, skating rinks, etc.), whose construction surfaces were and continue to be extensive.

On the other hand, critical positions were not long in coming and, although already during the 1950s, some marginal positions were already being put forward, they gradually took shape and spread among academic circles (sociologists, anthropologists, some architects, urban planners, and later writers, musicians and filmmakers) until recently where the critical and ironic vision of the suburban condition can be appreciated in the novel as well as in the feature films; These positions also contributed to the common idea that suburbia was a bastion of conformity, establishing a dialectical relationship with the intellectually vibrant metropolis (Giles, 2007, p. 327, 328). 327, 328).

Methodology

The logic of this research article is of a Historical-Explanatory nature, since it is from a long series of examples presented in a chronological and progressive manner, that a position is established in which the construction of the suburban imaginary has not only gone beyond the merely built and its

building and aesthetic-architectural implications, but has contributed to transcend to the symbolic and the elaboration of a discourse as proselytizing as well as detractor. Illustrations, editorial contributions, advertising campaigns, period journalism, visual arts, television and, finally, music and cinema are some of the resources that this research relies on to give way to a discourse that aims to provide an associative perspective on a fascinating and complex topic

The Background

The suburb has not only been represented by a large plot of land full of houses built in series, which vary only by the color of the facade or the lay-out, but also by the summary of a system that has enriched itself and has imposed as the only option its standards of consumption in order to provoke the purchase of automobiles, the construction of countless traffic routes as never before in history, the automation of domestic life and the artificialization of the environments that the city itself has generated since its beginning.

Figure 1. Imagen de Park Village East, Regent´s Park, dibujada por Tho H. Shepherd, publicada el 17 de enero de 1829 por Jones & Co. Temple of the Muses, Finsbury Square, Londres.

The suburb as an urban structure has been re-imagined and re-drawn by concepts of settlement in principle less territorialist and more of strategic zoning since the late eighteenth century in Great Britain, where wealthy families and in principle urban, decided to settle on the outskirts of large cities like London or Manchester, in luxurious villas and with a country atmosphere, where family life would be separated from business life, placing male and female roles in different places respectively, with men moving to urban centers to work, while women managed the household chores, as well as enforcing good manners, civility and the diaconate between the clergy and the home (Figure 1). The role of the church has been central in defining domestic roles as well as shared religious values, which led English bourgeois gentlemen, in order to follow the dogmas of the gospel, to isolate women in a bucolic world of Küche, Kirche and Kinder (Hohenberg, 1989). Note the environment in which novels such as Pride and Prejudice and Jane Austen's Sense and Sensibility were developed, in which the author, based on her own experiences, makes a delicate but forceful criticism of the female condition at the beginning of the 19th century within the context of the then called bourgeoisie.

On the other hand, the American educator, activist and writer Catherine Beecher generated more than twenty works, such as the classic The American Woman's Home (Figure 2), with her sister Harriet Beecher in 1869, aimed at helping the women of her time to accept their roles and vocations within the home, influenced by the English social model, under the ideological shelter of religion, specifically the evangelical Protestant denominations (Mc. Shane, 1990).

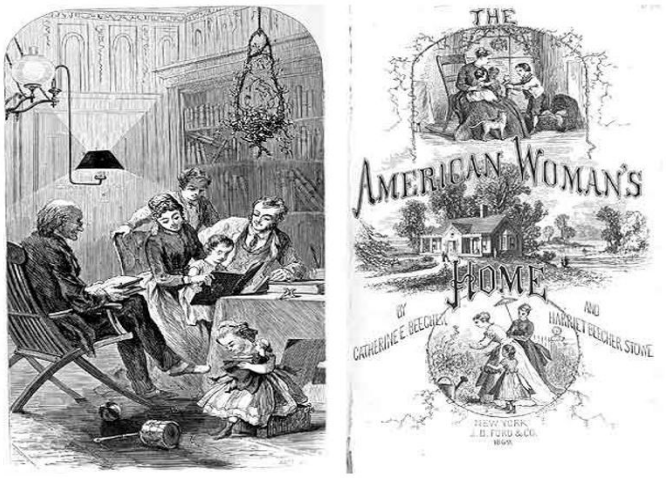

Figure 2. Cover image and illustrations of the book The American Woman's Home or, Principles of Domestic Science, de Catharine E. Beecher y Harriet Beecher Stowe (1869).

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Contemporary to Beecher and his book Treatise on Domestic Economy, appeared what is considered the first book to address the subject of landscape gardening from a scientific and philosophical perspective, A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening, by its author, Andrew Jackson Downing, who, like Beecher, defended the principles of living outside the city and above all, the virtues of the individual home (Jackson, 1985, pp. 63-64). To speak of the suburban form in its beginnings (specifically in London and Manchester), did not represent territorial expansion from an urban heartland, but was part of a subdivision that attempted to emulate country life, but which culturally and economically depended on the city; however, an alienation of the middle classes was taking place, especially in the industrial-urban sphere, which the bourgeoisie itself was propitiating (Fishman, 1994). As the evolution of the suburb is largely subordinated to the Industrial Revolution, it brought repercussions in urban expansion projects (Paris, Madrid, Vienna and Barcelona, among others), with radical changes, influencing Hausmann, de Castro, Cerdà, and years later Sir Ebenezer Howard, who gave rise to the Garden City, as well as Camillo Sitte and his work of aesthetic principles Der Städtebau nach seinen künstlerischen Grundsätzen (Construction of Cities according to Artistic Principles). Years later these urban plans were reinterpreted in various ways in North America, as was the case of Chestnut Hill, on the outskirts of Philadephia, established by Francis Pastorius in the late eighteenth century, Riverside, in Chicago, by Frederick Law Olmsted in 1869 (Figure 3), who suggested curvilinear roads in parks and housing areas, these being precursors of what would occur in developments such as Lakewood Park and the Levittowns in 1947 (Reps, 1965).

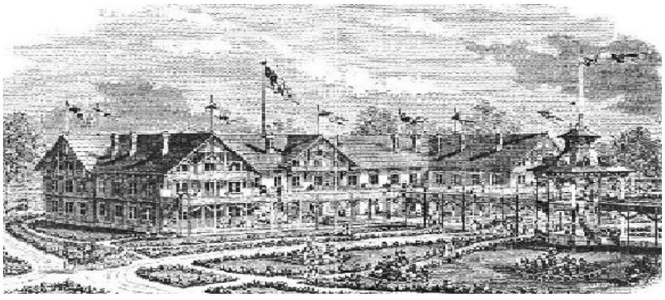

Figure 3. Image of the Riverside Hotel, in Riverside Illinois, a project by Frederick Law Olmsted.

The Jeffersonian Ideal And Its Consequences In The Suburban Habitat

One of the characteristics of the society of the thirteen North American colonies was the sovereignty of its municipalities; such condition motivated that on a smaller scale it had the same effect on the neighborhoods, and finally on private property, being taken to the most individualistic terrain, and becoming more important the protection of property, than that of the guarantee of freedom (Arendt, 2013, pp. 261-263); finally, resulting that after some time sovereignty is reduced to the house as an individual unit in the tenor of a predominant middle class (Tocqueville, 2013). Since 1790 it was proclaimed that the new society should be founded in an environment of equal rights and opportunities for development under the protection of productive property in the environment of agricultural and self-sufficient activity, by Thomas Jefferson, one of the most visionary and brilliant men of the independence of the thirteen colonies. This proclamation established that every settler would have the right to own a plot of land to build a house, work the land and generate the conditions for the adequate raising of livestock, as long as the productive activities allowed citizens to cohabit in conditions of territorial amplitude; totally opposed to the way in which the growth of cities such as London or Paris was taking place.

As the decades following the establishment of the new American state passed, cities such as New York, Boston and Philadelphia experienced the voracious inertia of the industrial revolution. These cities were influenced by the Regent's Park

model, the work of John Nash (1821), where one of its main features was the exclusivity it offered to the most privileged social classes, contradicting the Jeffersonian ideal and its principles of equity among the community. It should be noted that these precepts benefited members of Anglo-Saxon origin, and made clear the need for the slave resource to work large tracts of land as well as to make it productive. In the end, this ideal was gradually diluted until after the 20th century. In the postwar period, detractors and critics of this urban system began to appear, however, those who intellectually defended the essence of the suburb made mention of the Jeffersonian ideal, however, agricultural activity was in decline due to the great migration of people to the cities; this ideal has taken shape in the so-called American Dream, which later became the American Way of Life. Finally, the disappointment occurred when cheap, repetitive and poor quality houses began to be built, and the sense of the urban yeoman never took place (Kirschenbaum, 1970), while the speculative interests of the real estate sector were increasingly evident and the average citizen, in order to achieve a more comfortable life model, was forced to become part of the multi-million-dollar lifetime credit industry.

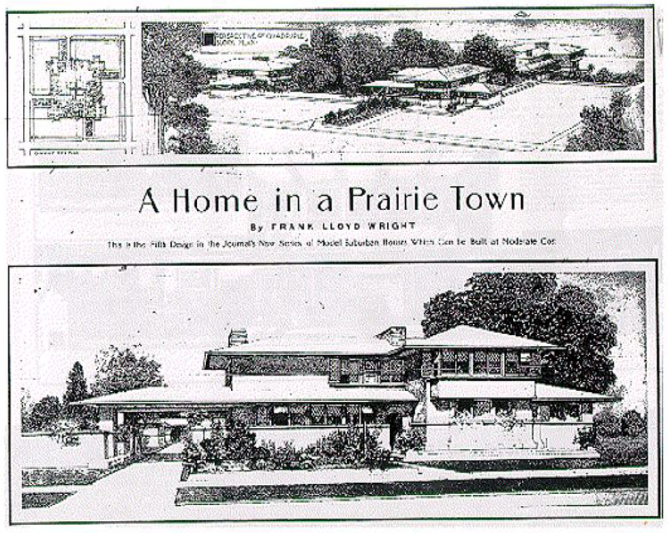

Figure 4. Image from the article A Home in a Prairie Town, by Frank Lloyd Wright, Ladies' Home Journal, February 1901.

Another strategy to idealize suburbia was advertising, especially through magazines and newspapers, in the late nineteenth century, when Frank Lloyd Wright sold the concept of the Prairie Houses of Oak Park with works such as the Winslow House and his own studio house to emerging bourgeois families in the city of Chicago when they were published in Ladie's Home Journal in February and July 1901, as well as fifty more projects until 1920 (Figure 4). Such work had such an impact that the Aladdin Company was founded in 1906 as the pioneer in producing custom homes. Meanwhile, Sears Roebuck Company, a major department store chain originally from Chicago, published in 1908 a catalog of prefabricated houses called curiously Sears Modern Homes, which was a great success throughout the United States until 1940, and which developed more than 370 different models for all budgets, this being an opportunity to democratize access to buying a home. Likewise, it is from the first mobile homes designed by Spartan Trailer Homes in 1946 (Figure 5), that the family can move from one trailer park to another, giving rise to part-time housing developments. In Dover, Massachusetts, prefabricated living quarters were already being produced as early as 1892 by the Hodgson Houses company; however, this company did not begin building houses and garages until 1908, when they published their first catalog. It is from the beginning of the twentieth century that gradually the new urban landscape of the American Union would be plagued by the new Prefab construction culture.

Figure 5. Advertising image of Spartan motor homes showing the Spartanette Tandem model.

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The incessant need for mobility of a growing middle class were, among other things, factors that defined a lifestyle that both the cinema and the incipient television industry capitalized on through entertainment, not only creating a new advertising culture, but also building the consciences of millions of families that would form the new communities, which aspired to a status dictated by materialistic aspects where appearances tended to a superficial heterogeneity (product customization), as well as the provision of intellectually digested products, ready for sale and consumption, from television programs, TV series, news programs, to the advertised consumer goods themselves (Figure 6). The increasingly powerful medium of television constructed the concept of suburbia based on the imaginary of large families appearing in television series, talk-shows and advertising, with the main target market being the inhabitants of urban peripheries, especially in large cities such as Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston or Phoenix. Likewise, in a period of no more than a decade, families became suburban-minded due to the emergence and consolidation of television as a mass entertainment medium as a result of the competition between the ABC, NBC and CBS television networks; the suburbs became the desired place to live since the families of the sitcoms lived there as well (Kotler, 2005, pp. 534-535).

Figure 6. Advertising image of Frigidaire refrigerators in the 1950s.

The Chronicle Of A New Middle Class(Tized)

The new patterns of family life in the postwar American suburban landscape were based on a shared and induced belief among the Caucasian middle class that an adequate lifestyle required a provider father (although he is the one who theoretically shares his leisure with wife and children), a homemaking mother who would never attempt to share, much less compete with her husband's role; and finally, a house. After World War II, the demographic and territorial growth of the large suburbs was much greater than that of cities such as New York, Chicago, Boston and San Francisco during the 19th century (Fishman, 1987, p. 182). The short film Levittown (Levitt, 1947) explains not only the great future that awaits American society, but also emphasizes between the lines the values of the new average family in the United States (Figure 7), which would form part of a new consumer system whose incentives were, among others, the financed purchase of cars, household appliances and the acquisition or remodeling of houses based on prefabricated construction systems. The documentary mentions that - The Quiet Revolution continues in the same way that the great construction industry provides better homes for the modern American model of life - The Levittonwns phenomenon begins in Long Island, NY (1947), whose main clientele were war veterans who benefited from federal aid in the GI Bill initiative. After the great success this model is applied in Pennsylvania (1951) and New Jersey (1958), but with houses for people of higher economic income, through more spacious and expensive models (Esguevillas, 2014). It is likely that the so-called Jeffersonian Ideal has had its consequences and has been transformed into this vision of the new Yeoman of the twentieth century, except that the latter would not be working the land beyond the work of ornamental gardening in apparently large gardens without physical divisions that are made uniform through repetitive portions of lawns along the planting of houses and their respective flowerbeds adjoining the street. The new middle class is in the process of homogenization and also its pretensions, dreams and illusions with which the message of the socio-racial uniformization is also clear, being the Anglo-Saxon the one aspiring to a better life and to enjoy the sweetness of the so-called American dream.

Figure 7. Aerial image of the display of houses that were built in Levittown, Nassau, NY.

Although the early suburbs initially behaved as structures separate from the urban center and became alternate entities, the urban patches expanded physically for the same reasons as in the postwar period, and increasingly independent of the urban cores, the suburbs have lost both their significance and their function as satellites of a central city. The suburb now becomes the heart of the most rapidly expanding elements of 20th century economy and culture, as both center and periphery are swallowed up in what seems to be an endless network of multi-central regions (Fishman R, 1987); with the risk that it loses its legibility, or that it mutates its way of being perceived. However, since the peripheries cease to be peripheries and give way to other peripheries that are geographically more distant, social structures have had to become heterogeneous both in terms of family roles and models that break the once traditional hegemony and in terms of the racial conditions of the formerly called minorities; It is also necessary to understand the way in which the social fabric has diversified since the first post-war suburbs have become part of the districts closer to the center, due to the exponential growth of the cities that have left them in a privileged position, being for more than two decades now, attractive precincts for independent professionals, artists and communities of people with ways of life different from the already traditional systems of consumption. The idea of surplus value that was speculated at that time was theoretically coherent with the concept of exclusive community, and with the absolute control of urban and domestic environments; However, it is worth mentioning that for many years the communities of architects and urban planners conscious of the responsible exercise of the city and buildings (except for a few cases such as Nuns Island in Montreal and Lafayette Park in Detroit, by Mies van Der Rohe and Ludwig Hilberseimer), were left aside while traffic engineers, real estate developers and, ultimately, neighborhood committees, made the decisions on the territorial expansion of these peripheral zones as well as the socio-economic profiles that should predominate.

In the media field, architectural and urban design conditions appear most of the time as stereotypes or clichés, depending on the era in which the specific broadcast environments were created; For example, if we focus on the images of a television series from the 1960s, backgrounds appear that show architectural environments with the nostalgic concept of apparently bucolic spaces that have long promoted the concept of the suburban (Figure 8), but with the great attraction of an American interpretation of modern architecture, always equipped with artificial air conditioning, gadgets and household appliances, flowerbeds, as well as large and comfortable automatic transmission automobiles (Macburnie, 1995).

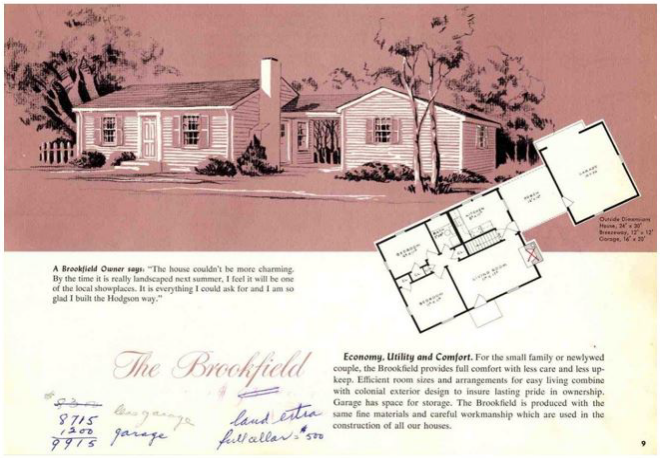

Figure 8. Image of the Hodgson Houses promotional brochure from 1954.

The new average American family, described above, required a house within a homogeneous community that was kept away from blacks and Latinos, some other ethnic groups (all those outside the Anglo-Saxon stereotype), and the poor (Marsh,

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1994, pp. 40-48). It was also said that any man who did not own or live in a house in the suburbs was abnormal and even maladjusted, as was any woman who aspired to a career and lived in an inner-city apartment. Such campaigns were driven by the housing policies of the U.S. federal government. Meanwhile, Spiegel argues that the suburbs emerge as nondescript, domestic wastelands centered on female consumption, while the city is the domain of male reason, publicly visible life and the authentic production of culture (Smith, 2002, pp. 359-367). In the United States, the suburban home is the most important means of separating women and thus, diminishing their status both individually and socially, yet many of the activities that remunerated family status were performed by women through arduous housekeeping (Hayden, 2002, pp. 68-69).

Figure 9. Photograph Woman's Dilemma, by Nina Leen, for Life magazine, June 16, 1947, page 105, showing the visualized work of a housewife for a week.

However, the return of women to the home represents an area of opportunity where they are the focus of attention, a new kind of productive activity within the trenches of the community: various product lines emerge to facilitate household chores and order, as well as cosmetic supplies, household appliances, encyclopedias, etc., with the purpose of strengthening the family economy, energizing the female role in a new economy that demanded a large and diversified consumption (Figure 9). One of the precursors was Earl Tupper, the creator of the Tupperware brand of plastic containers, who in 1944 brought these products to the market and they were not so successful until 1951, when he hired Brownie Wise, a Detroit housewife, who, based on her idea of making home sales through demonstrations called Home Party Sales (Figure 10), the brand's representatives arranged the sale effectively, so that customers would buy and have fun, usually within the home environment, to such an extent that by 1954, the company's profits had tripled (Clarke, 2000). Subsequently, this happened to other brands such as Avon, Stanhome, Mary Kay and others between the 1950s and the 1980s. The media have illustrated the condition of good family men, of a productive and patriotic society, without leaving aside their loyal wives, almost always belonging to the growing Anglo-Saxon middle class segment (Smith, 2002).

Figure 10. Representative picture of household sales among suburban housewives.

From An Apparently Infantile Vision Of The World To The End Of Innocence

It would seem that the illusion offered to the future American middle class was part of a positivist inertia, in order to take capitalism to its highest levels, invading the environment with advertising, stimulating a strong competitiveness to obtain more material satisfactions, while on the other hand, it propitiated a strong state of intellectual mediocrity, as well as an attractive comfort zone that was translated into the socio-spatial conditions, from the

introspective domestic scale of the houses, to the large-scale spaces such as shopping malls, which have not only created shopping occasions, but have also created the city and its environment where it did not exist before, to the large-scale spaces such as shopping malls, which have not only created shopping occasions, but have also created the city and its environment where it did not exist before, with a centrality, a public dimension and something approximating human density, precisely everything that the expanding suburbs lacked, not to mention the feeling of controlled and aseptic environments, attributing to themselves the role of social center of the community (Crawford, 1992, p. 23). 23). What was perhaps not clearly stated at the time was the incessant need for a system that was growing out of control and out of control and needed to generate high rates of consumption, especially with the instrument of financing so that there would always be money circulating in the environment, favoring consumerist recidivism. A territory of more than nine million square kilometers and a population of 180 million inhabitants in 1960 (of which more than a quarter were distributed on the east and west coasts), was an attractive area of opportunity for repopulation, even more so when the economic prospects were seen as excessively positive (Bureau, 2015). Faced with an avalanche of housing demand, the only solution was strategic planning by means of standardized construction systems, with materials and products made to unified measurements, with the purpose of drastically lowering their costs, making long-term loans with low interest rates not only feasible but highly profitable for banks.

At the moment when the opportunities to legislate, plan, build and finally consume the new illusion of the modern American house began to emancipate, the society that was the repository of such yearnings had taken it not only as that great opportunity to get out, at least from a precarious and obsolete image, but that within a studied preconceived design system, they could create that which would be considered their dream house, but that within a studied system of preconceived design, they could create what would be considered the house of their dreams, seeing how many children they planned to have (no more than six), where the kitchen, living room and bedrooms should be located, as well as what coverings the exterior walls of the house in question should have. The large urban developers counted on attractive campaigns paid for by the federal government for the acquisition of real estate in such a way that the purchase process seemed to be child's play and, as a logical consequence, it was thought that the new life in the culture of comfort would be so easy and idyllic, and that the performance of the families in their new environments would be ideal for a perfect society of good manners. Although the offer of consumer products and services may seem attractive in a society in which its inhabitants incessantly seek to differentiate themselves from one another, it reaches its expiration date, since they finally end up homologating; the most palpable example is the superficial variety of typologies in the facades of houses, service buildings and shopping centers, as well as the vehicles that are part of a serially ordered and classified landscape.

Ironically, the suburban system is designed to define socio-economic distinctions of those who live in its boundaries based on how many square meters they can buy, what finishes and coatings will cover their homes, what additional services their communities have, as well as the brands of cars they park at the entrance of their homes; however, what lies beyond the crystallization of all those aspirations to have more possessions, results in an unstoppable desire for material accumulation with its respective territorial expansion. That which seemed to be the evolution of the environments in its various scales derives in a serious urban illegibility before the incessant standardization and classification of what according to the managers of progress should be the new city of the second half of the twentieth century; however, the punishment of the popularity of the suburb brought with it a massive location, which far from the welfare ideals of the eighteenth century, would result in a model of life that would not even

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become a cheap counterfeit, but a gloomy antithesis (Mumford, 2014, p. 809).

The disenchantment of the Manichean version of the Jeffersonian ideal did not take more than ten years after the postwar period to manifest itself in the periphery, in what seemed to be one of the model housing developments in the United States: Levittown (Pennsylvania), a system of subdivisions that together with Lakewood Park (California) contributed to redefining the figure of the new American house for an emerging middle class. In 1957, ten years after the start of the mythical Levittown, an event occurred that was as unlikely as it was uncomfortable for the neighbors of this development: for the first time, an African-American family moved in, which not only caused astonishment and bewilderment among the neighbors, but also triggered reactions of rejection and indignation; This event was recorded in the short film Crisis in Levittown, of the same year (Bobker & Becker, 1957), through a series of interviews with neighbors, mostly Caucasians, who openly expressed their reluctance to live with the newly arrived Myers family, believing that due to their customs and way of life, they would threaten the supposed harmony and gentleness of the community. Surely many situations like this took place during the expansion of the new American urban landscape, which would make us think of the beginning of the dismantling of an ideal, which in part failed, is still in force today; however, already in the mid-fifties, scholars of the urban phenomenon as Lewis Mumford and Reyner Banham, or institutes such as the Center for Human Relations and Community Studies at New York University, already raised critical analysis in the suburban dream and all that it represented.

How could a situation of such an apparently limited and reduced neighborhood scale not only arouse such a stir at the media level, what in principle was promulgated and sold as the solid materialization of the American dream? Is the suburb a mental construction to improve the coexistence of its inhabitants and make them better people through controlled environments and landscapes? Did the suburb become that place suitable for the new baby-boom generations or was it the crystallization of the pretensions of those who competed to improve their socio-economic profile?

The connotations that the suburb has had, could encrypt totally opposite messages, especially if what they try to relate this urban model with the perspective of literature and celluloid; for example, the controversial novel Revolutionary Road (Yates, 1961), which not only narrates the clichés, in principle apparently positive of the new American urban landscape, with its new architectural typologies and its scales of supposed spatial emancipation, at the same time as its protagonists: April and Frank Wheeler aspired to a better life; the one that the bulk of the middle class had clear in mind, but that according to the continuous loneliness and isolation in which April found herself, before the null relationship with her close neighbors, the resignation to assume their domestic roles, and the absorbing work that Frank performed in the center of the city; ended up increasing the detriment of their relationship until finally the novel takes a turn of dire consequences. However, in the materialization of the American Dream, during the same years, one could observe the aspiration of a society apparently naïve and eager to change its habits in an environment where an economic system was being generated and financed the infrastructure throughout the country (superhighways, railroads, airports, dams, etc.), and which even favored the development of the American Dream, dams, and even favored the development of entire thematic cities such as Las Vegas, Reno, Lake Charles and Atlantic City, which over the years forced the continuous consumption by society in order to maintain this lifestyle as well as to continue in unstoppable economic and territorial expansion (Figure 11). These factors also affected the fabric of the cities, from the implementation of avenues widening, with the consequent tábula rassa, the de-densification of urban centers, but above all the emergence of urban spots. This urban cartography, in principle, of neighboring cities hegemonically regulated by the centers, gradually became diluted in

zones hierarchized by consumer and entertainment activities, these being the backbone of housing developments as part of a reproducible system, both inside and outside the United States.

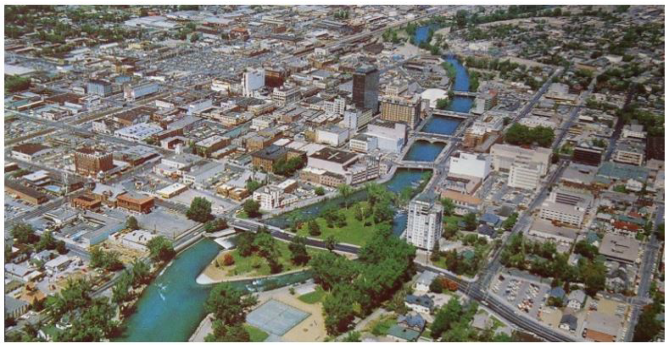

Figure: 11. Aerial image of the city of Reno, Nevada in the 1960s.

The suburb as the result of a post-war political and socio-economic process, although it had a buoyant and widely accepted place in the consumer society, there were also critical positions, which although at the beginning were not so strident, have prevailed to this day, describing the characteristics of this type of urbanization, They also reflected on the probable consequences that sprawl could bring with it, such as socio-spatial segregation, environmental degradation, the emergence of interstitial spaces and the loss of legibility and imaginativeness on an urban scale (Lynch, 1998), where the small scale would be reduced to the technified comfort of the house; not to mention the suburban environments that generate their own consumption demands (Fishman R., 1994). 1994), giving rise to new market concepts or the so-called shopping malls (Figure 12), and since the late nineties, the Outlet Malls.

Figure 12. Aerial image of the Levittown Shopping Center, in the eponymous suburb (ca. 1957).

From Optimism To The Irony Of Suburbia In Art

The suburb as a thematic resource in the field of visual arts has had moments as interesting as divergent; from the apparently naïve vision of Norman Rockwell with his illustration Freedom from Want (Freedom from Want, 1943), first published on March 6, 1943 in the Saturday Evening Post where a family appears preparing for dinner on Thanksgiving Day. The image defines the state of optimism of a society that believes to be rooted in patriotism, as well as the reflection of a value system prioritized by the traditional family and the Christian religion (Figure 13); years later, this work represented the prosperity and abundance of American families, although in principle what Rockwell was trying to emulate was the hope of prosperity, fulfillment and union within one of the four freedoms that the American Constitution declares: the freedom to want (Halpern, 2006, p. 72). The hope for a better home was capitalized on as never before by real estate developers and speculators using visual resources such as these illustrations in magazines and panoramas, making them increasingly familiar in American popular culture.

Figure 13. Freedom from Want painting by Norman Rockwell, 1943.

Later, in the fifties, pop culture portrayed suburban life with sarcasm, making use of its anodyne aesthetic resources and its standardized, prefabricated and sometimes vulgar discourse, to re-contextualize itself in a political stance, but at the same time irreverent and anti-system, although it later became part of the same thing it criticized. Already in 1947 Richard Hamilton had produced what is considered the first work of Pop Art, the collage Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?, in which the most significant and apparently desired images of the consumer society appear, at least at that time; all of them within the domestic space, which gives us a reading of the condition of suburban life, with the clichés that represented the material consumer goods in vogue (Figure 14). In the field of music, San Francisco singer-songwriter and social activist Malvina Reynolds wrote the song Little Boxes, where she ironically described a society with pseudo-bourgeois pretensions living in nondescript and repetitive boxes that appeared to be mansions (Wellman, 1999).

Little boxes on the hillside,
Little boxes made of ticky tacky,
Little boxes on the hillside,
Little boxes all the same.
There's a green one and a pink one
And a blue one and a yellow one,
And they're all made out of ticky tacky
And they all look just the same…
Malvina Reynolds, Little Boxes, 1962 .

Figure 14 Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing? Richard Hamilton, 1947.

In 1964 Andy Warhol, together with a group of like-minded artists, participated in an exhibition called The American Supermarket, in which he showed a singular installation called Brillo Boxes (Figure 15), which consisted of screen-printed boxes of various dimensions with the graphic image of this brand of sponges, where he questioned not only the credibility of the discourse of modern art, but also that from the repetition of pre-existing visual motifs, a new aesthetic could be conceived, more critical and reflective, but covered with a sense of humor, in this case, focused on domestic life. Later, the artist Dan Graham carried out a research project, which resulted in the work Homes for America, published in Arts Magazine (Graham, 1966-1967), through a series of photographs showing rows of houses from a more abstract geometric perspective, where they appear to be minimalist art objects, alluding to the repetitive result of mass production, whose materials are industrialized (Figures 16 and 17). Graham himself, in 1974, proposes a discourse through several projects, where he dilutes the distinction between exterior windows and mirrors, cameras and screens, views and spectators, to suggest the volatility in the relationship between individual vision and social behaviors that occur in suburban life. The piece Picture Window, undermines the social codes that allow large windows, based on privacy to function more on social than natural premises (Figure 18). The artist placed a camera and a monitor on each side of the false window so that the visual, both outside and inside, would be limited to what is recorded on the cameras and thus condition the visuals only to what is framed, as a kind of controlled voyeurism (Isenstadt, 2006).

Figure 16. Article from Homes for America, by Dan Graham, Arts Magazine, December 1966, January 1967.

Figure 17. Images from the Homes for America project, (1967) by Dan Graham, Arts Magazine, December 1966 - January 1967.

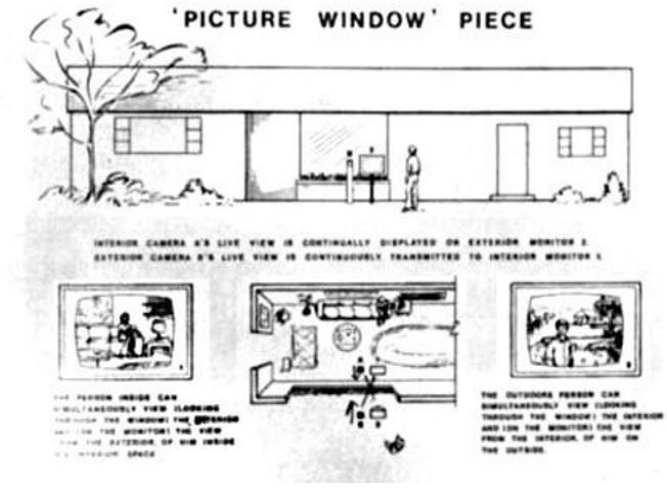

Figure 18. Article from the work Picture Window, by Dan Graham, 1974.

Also in 1974, Gordon Matta-Clark undertook one of the most risky exercises in the polyhedral terrain of art, architecture and social activism, when in his piece Splitting (1974), his intervention consists of cutting entire sections of a house in a suburb of New Jersey (Figure 19), to then work on the photographic archive that documents each of the cuts he made with an electric saw, This was the only record that remained, since the house had to be demolished due to risks to physical integrity, an argument that the artist took with irony as he questioned the prefabricated discourse with which families and their homes had been structured for decades in the North American suburbs (Canavati, 2010).

Figure 19. Photograph of the installation Splitting, by Gordon Matta-Clark, 1974.

In 1967 David Hockney portrayed the still of a stereotypical image of the summertime life of the Californian coast: A Bigger Splash, a composition with a sky-blue sky background, two palm trees, a house ad-hoc to the then mature Case Study Houses movement (seen in elevation), in the foreground a pool with a diving board and the effect of a splash on the water. While this painting does not exactly reflect the aesthetics of the suburbs of the masses, it does portray part of the aspirational imaginary of any middle-class American: the sun, the spacious house for garden parties, and what better if it has a pool (Figure 20).

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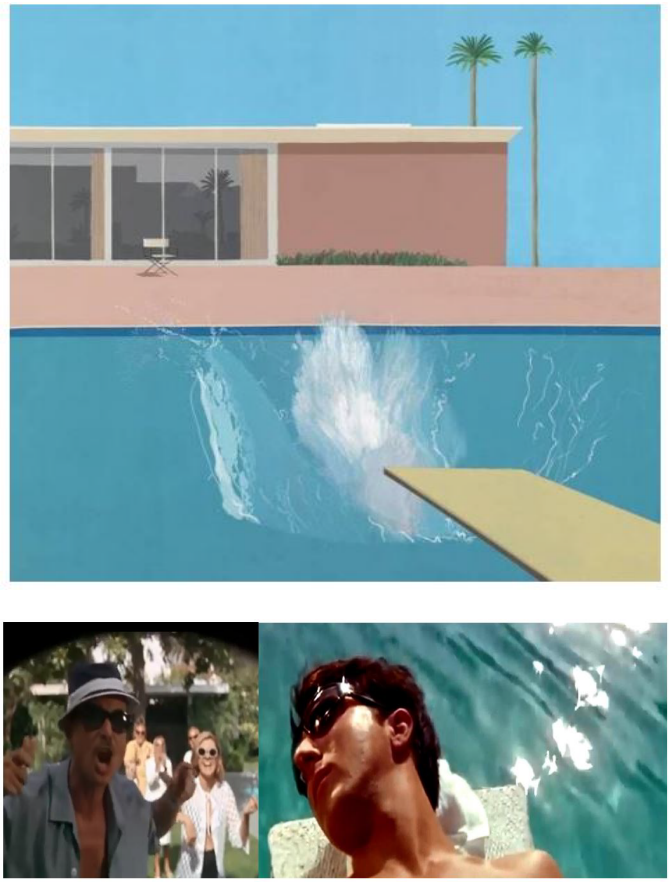

Figure 20. Image of the work A Bigger Splash (Hockney 1967)

Figures 21 and 22. Two stills from the film The Graduate (Nickols, 1967). Note that both the images of the painting and the photographs seem to keep the cliché of what should be the imaginary aspirational middle-class house in California, by the way, a hegemonic icon of the ideal suburban condition in the United States.

This work is coeval with the film The Graduate (Nichols, 1967), whose scene might seem analogous to Hockney's painting; where the protagonist, an upper-middle-class college student: Benjamin Braddock (Dustin Hoffman) throws himself off the diving board of his home swimming pool and then spends a long moment resting on the water before the complacent image of his parents (Figures 21 and 22); a crucial image to understand the tacitly ironic sense of humor towards a disrupted value system, rooted in material goods and socio-economic appearances in a country that was about to enter one of the most wearing political and social crises of its last fifty years.

Conclusions

Throughout the following decades and up to our contemporaneity, the approaches to the suburban imaginary have been so many and so divergent over the years, however it is undeniable that this state of mind has prevailed with clear tendencies towards criticism and an intellectual rethinking of what the city and its diverse forms of habitability should be directed towards. Just as theoretical positions and action projects for the responsible consumption of urban territory have been published, from the meta-utopian approaches of Frank Lloyd Wright and Usonia in 1927, the Plug-In-City and Walking City proposals of the Archigram group in 1964, and the Arcosanti urban laboratory of Paolo Soleri in 1970; these have ended only in prototypes, while metropolitan areas were expanding at an alarming rate. The fascination with suburban life, however, is in large part an obsession with taking possession of a plot of land, as we are made to see in advertising as a fundamental right of our freedom of possession, and although many definitions assume that sprawl is a phenomenon essentially detached from the urban core of the city, it is also important to note that whether it is low-density development or multi-level apartment blocks, it will still be an urbanization (Berger, 2006, p. 2), especially if this territorial occupation cannot be reversed. It apparently took many years to understand the state of alienation into which a large part of the population had fallen when a process of isolation took place, the result of a lifestyle totally dependent on the automobile, where the main envelope has been an artificial emulation of the bucolic environment seasoned with shopping malls, gas stations, but lacking urban spaces for socializing (Alcalá, 2014). In recent years, dramas such as Suburbia (Linklater, 1996), American Beauty (Mendes, 1999), Virgin Suicides (Coppola, S, 1999) and the comedy Superbad (Mottola, 2007), among many other films, demonstrate in part the critical thinking towards the degradation and

anonymity of the dark side of the periphery, which offers the opportunity to address the phenomenon of suburbia through a more recent perspective, but under a more multidisciplinary vision in an attempt to democratize the suburb, hoping in subsequent projects, the continuation towards a vision more akin to the context of the suburban territories, within the imaginary of the Latin American condition, whose approach is linked to a theme like this, however the causalities and events will be bounded in different times and circumstances.

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