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I, Alex T Gormley, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Architecture in Architecture.

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The Seven of U.S.

Simulation And The American Suburb

A thesis submitted to the University of Cincinnati,
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The detached, single-family suburban home has come to signify the national residential identity of the American people for the past eighty plus years and has recently come under the scrutiny of critique. Suburban America has generated an immediate, unchecked, and untapped ecosystem which has continually defined and will continue to impact the appearance and discourse of housing in the United States. The creation of perverse worlds of architectural image and domestic commodity is the resultant of a culture of advertisement and the creation of idealistic portrayals of the authentic “American” way of life. Absurd versions of their predecessors, these homes have been replicated over the course of the past decades to the point of an almost sinful representations of the suburban paradigms. Through misinterpretation, this realm of pseuod-architectural endeavor has developed a neo-vernacular architecture embodying a distilled reflection of the typical American consumer mindset and the developer’s economic policy. This thesis seeks to analyze the suburban house as commodity, as image, and as propaganda, through seven lenses of focus centered around the idealistic representation of the postwar American suburb and its physical actuality. Through appropriation and recontextualization of these seven tropes, a series of seven canonical houses will be created in critique of the current suburban architectural culture. “The Seven” will become a fatal strategy with the aim to implode the pervasiveness of the contemporary simulated suburb.

This is an exploration towards the absurd.
I would like to thank my thesis committee, Aarati Kanekar, Kristopher Holland, Vincent Sansalone, and Nandita Sheth, for their guidance and support throughout the past two semesters.

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“Architecture may well possess moral messages; it simply has no power to enforce them. It offers suggestions instead of making laws. It invites, rather than orders, us to emulate its spirit and cannot prevent its own abuse.” ¹

“Owning a home is the pinnacle of the American Dream, the ultimate status symbol of the middle class. But is the dream in crisis? As the suburban single-family home has been endlessly multiplied and mass-marketed, it has become entwined with environmental catastrophe and economic crisis. Never before have we been so badly in need of a reconsideration of our cultural values and consumption from an architectural perspective.” ²

I.

ABOUT U.S.
Suburbia is the embodiment of an architecture of moral message with no power within itself to prevent the misreadings and reappropriations of its messages. The detached, single-family suburban home has come to signify the national residential identity of the American people for the past sixty plus years and has only recently come under the scrutiny of critique. The suburban landscape has become the creation of the perverse worlds of the builder’s architectural image and developer’s economic policy working together to create their version of idealistic “American” way of life. A context of limited architectural interrogation, the American suburb should now be seen for its ability to provide new inspiration to the contemporary residential discourse. This realm of pseudo-architectural endeavor has developed a neo-vernacular architecture embodying a distilled reflection of the typical American consumer mindset. The American home as become an image, a commodity, and a simulacra in the propaganda of its moral messages.

Since the 2008 stock market collapse triggered by a sub-prime mortgage crisis in the housing market, the idea of home ownership in America, a tenant of the American Dream, has been greatly challenged. For a new generation of Americans the idea of home ownership, or at least up to the standards of the previous generations, has been questioned due to the personal debt crisis, the diminishing and ever changing job market that has become uber competitive due to advancement in technology and the globalization of education. In recent years, a motion to move back into the urban areas of our cities has been seen offering gentrification to areas such as Cincinnati’s own Over the Rhine and Northside neighborhoods. While this urban movement is great for the revitalization of urban cores in cities, it leaves questions of what to do with the now degrading rings of suburbs around these cores. Assuming the American Dream of home-ownership and providing a better life for your children
continues, at some point the young professionals in these urban cores will seek a more permanent solutions for their living arrangements which can be found in the walkable suburbs neighboring the dense urban cores. This movement has a precedent which can be seen in the original development of these suburban communities as citizens wished to escape the dense, dirty urban living conditions for a more individualization suburban community. In short the American Dream is a hard dream to kill.

This thesis does not wish to provide criticism or judgement on the decision to create the suburbs or their success/failure; it is merely interested in positing reasonings behind the rise of the suburban single family dwelling and its future. The purpose of such a study will be to reveal the underlying systematic elements at play in the visual and spatial construction of the suburban home and illustrate the absurdity of the contemporary suburban condition in comparison. A series of houses will be designed with a focus on aspects of place/no-place, image, erasure, and sequential qualities of the “home”. The resultant series and analysis will establish a new precedent in the ongoing discourse and raise questions for the prospective home owner of the coming decades. This thesis is one which seeks to address the changing status of housing in the current climate of America and put forth new ideas on what a we truly desire in our suburban homes.

Houses provide an ideal typology for this study. Their formal unit and the spatial relation between each unit is an easy way to define a suburban area from an urban area or rural area. Houses have become one of the foundational building blocks of the American Dream and the American economy. They are objects of desire for many Americans, as well as an anchor point of the national identity and economy as we will later find out. The house is also an easily accessible medium to describe more complex concepts because a house holds a place within the collective memory of most Americans. In his essay ‘New or Perfect’, John McMorrough writes an interesting description of why a house makes an ideal medium for conceptual study while writing about the work of WOJR office’s (William O’Brien Jr.) propensity to use the house typology in the exploration of concepts. “The houses may not be homes, but they are always houses, and are, in turn, embedded in architectural expectations (such as scale, program, material assembly, etc.). Each of the houses is legible as an entity and provides a foil through which to elaborate a series of studied connections between geometry and building organization.”

McMorrough goes on to state that the use of this typology affords the work a legibility and legitimacy that does not require a high level of premise in the typology.

Recently we have seen an increase in the amount of conceptual studies of the single family house published by architects and spread through various blog and selective media outlets, which could be due to the very reason McMorrough is describing in the above quote. The Internet as a medium allows for greater accessibility for direct inquiry of the most robust questions of the contemporary condition. This in turn leads many to postulate on what questions of the house should we be asking and from what context do they surface? Pier Vittorio Aureli argues that over the past 15 years an entire generation of buildings whose character, scale and program were not determined by new answers to contemporary questions, but by the manner in which they were financed leading to an entire generation of the built environment which engages a context different than that of its predecessors. For this study, questions of the architectural relevancy of the American suburban house will be engaged while constantly addressing the current status of this realm of neo-vernacular largely governed by the economic policies of the developer. Aligned with the statements made by Aureli, this study seeks not to confront the notion of a market driven architecture but seeks to negotiate the systematic elements that lead to its rise in the American suburb and use them in a play against this system.

At the time this document was written the current pop-architecture climate has all but abandoned the suburban realm has the ongoing discourse of the negatives of sprawl and the homogeneity of the subdivision presents a
difficult case to argue against. Additionally, it becomes increasing hard for American architects to engage this subject in a critical manner as an unbiased study because the suburban ideal has now been heavy entrenched within the American psyche for over 80 years. Many American architects of today grew up in a suburban home themselves so when asked to interrogate this question they may find it hard to separate their personal identity from their childhood nostalgia. Similar feelings have been felt over the course of this very study. Perhaps this is a reasoning for the importance of a study to revisit the suburb.

The study of suburban architecture is an increasing relevant one to the architectural community because it seeks to address the elephant in the room. Around 79% of the population in America are currently living in areas which could be defined as suburban, and accounted for 91% of population growth between 2000-2015. For any architect interested in residential home design this number should be worrisome because it shows clearly that a majority of people are not currently finding value in the hiring of an architect when they can easily build their “custom” home with any developer or builder. The question after setting aside certain financial expectations becomes why are people buying into this suburban lifestyle and how has it perpetuated itself to this point in its existence. What makes people want to buy this hastily constructed builder grade homes which look no different than their neighbors?

To answer the question of what is the American suburban house post the collapse of the 2008 housing market, three lenses of investigation will be employed that are representative of the three stages of development of the suburban condition in the United States post-war. The three lenses for this study will be an analysis of the house as image, an analysis of the house as commodity, and an analysis of the house as propaganda in the form of the ultimate simulacra. The layout of this document will reinforce the distinction between the three phases and will be organized in the form of a triptych with the three visual sections being bookended by four written sections echoing the progression of the study. Through the illustration of each phase of the study into its individualized section, the complexity of the problem will hopefully be lessened so that the overall concepts of the study will be more accessible. In
order to do this however, a short introduction must be made to each phase so that the whole of the argument maybe understood before it is deconstructed.

**Lens 1**

**HOUSE AS IMAGE**

The replication over time of the image of the suburban house and its utopian image quality has been used to promote the ideal of suburban living to the masses. This replication and later appropriation of the traditional American (suburban) homestead came to a peak in the later years of WWII and the post war years with the marriage of advertisement agencies, architects, and government. The advertisement of the home creates the image of an utopian existence which then in a sense becomes a commercial life-world that the home owners buy into. In order to interrogate the latent themes and tropes of these images, the images must first be deconstructed so that the current aesthetic value they hold maybe erased. By using a method of visual collage as an inquiry, this visual library of representations maybe appropriated and recontextualized in order to illustrate the subconscious readings of these images. Through juxtaposition and erasure, the method of collage seeks to reengage this utopian subject matter in a way which create absurdist versions of the originals as well as providing a diagrammatic understanding of each trope.
**Lens 2**

**HOUSE AS COMMODITY**

The image of the suburban house in turn makes it into an object of desire thereby leading to its commoditization. Up until the 2008 collapse, the house constantly evolved from being just a mere residence to a status icon, which was necessary to secure a financial future to a near necessity in order to attain the American Dream. By turning the house into a commodity that is easily bought and sold depending on current life demands or stylistic concerns, the system took the home out of the house. Prior to the Great Depression and WWII, the family house was seen more as a heirloom, not a possession which would only be in the family for a few decades. In order to interrogate the notion of the house as a commodity, the tropes uncovered in the previous phase will need to be translated into the form of a functional house. This translation may mute the absurd nature of the tropes, but is meant to create psychical manifestations of each trope which would then be able to be bought and sold on the market as would any other suburban house. The starting point of each of these iterations will be the average house size and typical room types of the contemporary American house, to provide an ease of understanding for each house.

**Lens 3**

**HOUSE AS SIMULACRA**

The American suburban house has now become the most 'real' version of itself; a hyperreal construction for image and commodity value. The pervasive feelings of nostalgia centered on the ideals of the American Dream and the prosperity of the post-war years have lead to an increased replication of various tropes resulting in the simulation of what was once the authentic suburban home. As Aaron Dresben wrote in Yale’s Perpsecta 48, "What was only a picture laden with nostalgia, a sort of dream, becomes reality. Indeed what is wrong with buildings that self-consciously edify, that are drawn from pretty pictures of a transfigured past, that invite use to forget the ugliness of the world we have created, in which we must make our way? Why not welcome such a remembering, which is inevitably also a forgetting?" The tools developed within the first two lenses have created a code of visual tropes which allow for the replication of the suburban reality in a form with allows an editing and amplifying of a utopian life world. Much like the work of artist Thomas Kinkade, suburbia is now a carefully crafted image of nostalgia, designed for mass market appeal. The ease of replication has caused an amnesiac loss of understanding of its origins while leaving consumers with a deep sense of uneasy familiarity with the subject. The manipulation of the image and commodity of the house by image creators (home builders, advertising agencies, U.S. government) is done in a way to align its procreation with the message they which to propagate be it the strength of Capitalism or the value of their brand. The house became a tool for propaganda and as a result has become a simulacrum of its original self.
To have a valid experiment in residence, one of the tenants of residential design must be fulfilled, that being the siting of the building. Without a site on which to respond, this series of experiments would be seen as ideological exercises and not investigations into the practice of ‘real’ architecture. By selecting Cincinnati as the context for this study, it allows for a great deal of site analysis and development, as well as the previous knowledge of place by the author and architect. Cincinnati, is the ideal context for its growing population and recent urban gentrification have drawn many young professionals into its urban core and nearby locales. As stated previously, it is the option of the author that in the coming years these young professionals will seek more permanent residence in the walkable suburbs in the hills surrounding the urban basin of Cincinnati. Cincinnati also is an emblematic city of the Midwestern region of American, known for its middle-class values and former industrial strength. The core values of the Midwest make the values of the clients in this study applicable to the greater context of American population, but does not in any manner claim to be the singular American vision.

With the site established the design of seven canonical houses may progress in order to come to a conclusion about what a possible future of residence may look like. Each house will have its own individual concentration and subject matter, but each will also tie into the general discourse which this thesis hopes to provide. As the best way to move forward from the current state of design, it is the author’s position that a critique of current practice must be posited in order to learn from history and progress in a meaningful way. With this mindset each house will be seen both as a criticism of current practice and a speculation on the absurd futures of these practices.

Much in the same way Dante in his purgatory related the sins back to love gone astray (excessive love, defective love, and perverted love) the story of the American suburb and its development could be seen as a long and tremulous love story which has captured the minds of the American people for the last seventy years. If the allegory of the sins of love are pushed further and applied to this study, seven tropes within the suburbs could be distilled and then related back to the seven deadly sins of the Roman Catholic church. These seven tropes were preexisting in the advertisement, film representations, and built environment of suburbia, before this study commenced and through the three investigative phases they presence became more and more clear. Each trope will be now associated with one of the seven sins and used to further articulate the each concept individually, allowing for a heighten of each sin in the culmination of this study. Each sin is rather complex but in order to begin the discussion, an attempt here will be made to write only a brief introduction to each.
**Pride.** A great deal of pride is projected on to the front facade of suburban dwellings, but does facade really end on the exterior. The concept of formal dining and living seen in many newer homes brings the public facade into the realm of the interior through the use of rooms meant only for entertain of occasional guests. A house designed around prideful living becomes a curio cabinet of the domestic condition.

**Envy.** A desire to reconnect with nature could be considered the initial ideal of suburban life, as the areas in the periphery of the city were seen as an escape from the dirt, crime, and congestion of the city center. This ideal is best seen in the desire for the perfectly manicured lawn and well maintained garden, large enough which the house can be set back within the lot. A house designed around a perverse love of the lawn and others lawns would become a showroom of the lush green carpet of the great outdoors.

**Wrath.** The freedom to property and the right to protect that property is a tenet of the American ideology and is manifested in the territorial acquisition of the lawn by the fence. Seen as statement to neighbors of the physical bounds of the property, this symbols continue throughout the property and into the house. In a world where borders are seemingly gaining strength, a house of wrath tries to protect its property at whatever costs.

**Sloth.** The invention of the automobile allowed for greater commuting distances in shorter amounts of times, leading to more land becoming available for development. Housing responded with the attached garage with in many cases today is the defining characteristic of the house. A house designed around the automobile takes the form two other automotive typologies, the drive thru and the highway. A house of convenience where everything is readily available to the automobile.

**Greed.** Coming out of WWII, the atomic family (male, female, and two children) was for the most part a realistic design principle to drive the scale and size of the house. Over the course of the last seventy years the relevancy of the atomic family has come into question, yet the scale allotted per person in the house has increased. Greed, in this case, is demonstrated through an accumulation of the gable form to its extreme and its replication that can seem endless.

**Gluttony.** The desire for a more egalitarian society and advancement in technology produced avenues for the mass production of previous stylistic, craft details. In today’s market this appliqué icons can be purchased and tacked on to the facade without any recognition of the historical context from which they were generated. The styling of a house has an immense impact on the perception of a house, too eccentric and the house takes on an air of disassociation, too minimal and the house becomes austere. A house of gluttony seeks take the role of architectural detail into the realm of fashion allows for increased customization and affect of sequence.

**Lust.** Living in the cities people are in constant contact with each other and the concept of voyeurism is an accept truth. When this is taken away in suburban context the desire is still there to know what the neighbors are really up to and desire what they have. This ideal manifests itself architecturally through the location, size, and shape, of the windows in the suburban context. A lustful house is constantly seeking to know what the neighbors are up to and is not afraid to unabashedly reveal parts of its inner working as well.
Upon completion of this study, this document will act as the summation of the findings and a proposal for future practice. By the conclusion of the case studies a better understanding of the “house post-collapse” will be held by the author and architect. The resultant houses rendered within this study will be seemingly idiosyncratic while feeding into the greater critique itself. The project is about a specific set of clients and the whole of American society at the same time. The Seven are themselves and we are the Seven. In the following sections the historical context will be illustrated and the methodology stated culminating in a conclusions of the theory presented in this thesis. The story of the Seven, the story of us, begins here.
II.

PRE-AMERICAN SUBURB

“If a path to the better there be, it begins with a full look at the worst.”

-Thomas Hardy, 1887
The first mention of the notion of suburbs as a concept comes from the Latin word *suburbium* and refers to the outlying parts of a city (normally beyond city walls) especially of Rome. From Roman times into the 17th century, the suburbs were seen as an area beyond the jurisdiction of the city and thus had an air of inferiority and licentious behaviors. The middle French term for suburb, *faubourg*, literally translates to “false town” describing the popular view of these areas being inauthentic, which can still be seen today in the criticisms written about them. In Shakespearean London to call a man a “suburbanite” was a serious insult and by this time the tinge of word suburban came with the connotations of having inferior manners and narrow views. Even in the industrial revolution, with its pull of rural populations to the cities, the negative connotations of suburban dwellers persisted.

The first contemporary/modern inklings of the suburban movement can be found in Ralph Waldo Emerson’s *Nature Addresses* (1836) in which he describes the beauty and inspiration found into nature to a society burdened by the populated cities of the Industrial Revolution. These brief lectures argued for man’s return to nature as a way to become more connected with God and one’s spirituality, while also adding a subtextual critique the growing mechanization of the world. “In the woods we return to reason and faith.”

Sparked by Emerson’s essays and lectures on the poetic beauty of man’s will to return to nature writers of the Transcendentalist movement began penning books and articles about an envisioned utopia outside the reaches of the polluted city. These books began to describe the ideal country villa as one outside the city limits, in close connection with nature and the garden, and with ample space to raise a family. Writers of the time were not creating these images without precedent, because many of their writings were describing the
sprawling country estates of the landed gentry in England and throughout Europe. What they were doing was for the first time imaging these residences on a smaller scale achievable by the highest ranks of the middle class. Around the same time as this awakening of the rural movement, Londoners were experiencing the Great Exhibition of 1851, held in the Crystal Palace. In a way these events can be seen as the birth of the middle class consumer-buyer because for the first time in history the new methods of production and global trade made the products of the world easily available to consumers. For the first time a new class of people (middle class) could now purchase more readily the previous generations’ objects of status at more readily accessible price points. This is a critical moment in the development of the founding principles leading to mass suburbia, as it harkens a change in how people attain relative status leading to later notions of status anxiety. The spectacle of the Crystal Palace could argued to be the world’s first suburban shopping mall given is ability to provide desirable objects to a population in one focused location.

The Industrial Revolution not only had the impact of great advances in technology and science, but also changed the way in which the majority of the population lived and identified themselves. Prior to the late 17th century, most of the population produced the products they needed at home or nearby in the community. With the advance of industry this paradigm shifted towards the buying of necessary goods due to their abundance and a population shift for rural to urban. Not only were industrialized products now more readily available, but their proliferation lead to the growth of “luxury” items, or items which differentiate their owners from their associates. The growth of industry created a burgeoning middle-class whose wealth afforded them opportunities to escape the dirt and squalor of the industrialized city. Similarly to the ideal country villa, these luxury items were for the first time available to people outside the ranks of royalty and nobility. With this new found product accessibility, products were now sought after for their social implications and inherent status generating potential for the first time a condition of ‘status anxiety’. Similarly to the ideal country villa, suburban estates were now more
readily available to the newly formed middle class as a way to achieve a new level of status and escape the squalor of urban conditions. The perception of the suburbs has now reversed itself, and the movement to the suburban ideal as we associate it today began.

As suburbia expanded into the Victorian era, the live-work relationship came into question. Up until this point, work was done in close proximity to the home as a matter of necessity. But the growing Bourgeois class of merchants and professionals now challenged this notion as they romantically sought the peaceful, safe, and ‘clean’ suburbs seen as a more ideal house for their families and lifestyles than the squalid inner cities. These families did not simply replace the poor ring of tenants surrounding the city but jumped over them to the cheaply available open fields still within a short commute to the city center. It was around this time in which the transportation revolution began to shape how we would look at our cities as the advance from horse-drawn street cars to electric streetcars greatly improved the distances people were willing to live from their place of work.

Many suburban developments sprung up as far as five miles out of the city, the most notable being, Clapham, a village to the south of the Thames. This village featured a central green space surrounded by the large detached villas (with their own more private lawns) owned by many prominent figures of the time. Most of the new residents kept their city apartments but converted them more completely into places of business, and thus created the first mass instance of the modern commuter. Robert Fishman says it best in describing Clapham as, “the true suburban landscape… is a balance of the public and the private. Each property is private, but contributes to the total landscape of houses in a park.” The houses of the time were designed to advertise the status of the owner, construction at a larger overall scale with several small rooms each with very specific purposes. It is around this time in which we see the first use of the word, suburbia, harkening the coming of the future of the new authentic domestic condition.
“The myth of Manifest Destiny - which has imbued American architecture with a lasting sense of its own inevitability - still persists in the covert super modernity of today’s living environments.”21
The territorial acquisition of the rural wilds of North America has been engrained in our society since the first settlers arrived at the end of the 15th century. The concept of individual freedom through individual ownership of property has long been a part of the political doctrine of the United States of America. "Thomas Jefferson, the first mainstream American political theorist to attempt a schematic spatial representation of a national ideal of democracy, favored the model family farm over the model village." The ideal of the model family farm and homestead reflected similar themes of London's Bourgeois suburbs, but now became politically infused. Manifest Destiny, or the belief, "That it was the destiny of the U.S. to expand its territory over the whole of North America and to extend and enhance its political, social, and economic influences," furthered these political musings into a full-scale national policy. The suburban/rural homestead now became an icon of nation pride and conquest over the native/foreign previous residents. This later is reaffirmed during the wartime and post wartimes years in the newly constructed mass-American suburb and was used as a building block for the American Dream. These ideological look at the territory of America helped shaped how American saw the suburbs, because they fit into the city vs. rural native which ran through the founding of this country.

The first true, and by true I mean in our modern definition, American suburbs looked much like their English Victorian counterparts. "Derived from the English concept of the picturesque, this tradition distinguishes the suburb both from the city and from the countryside and creates that aesthetic "marriage of town and country" which is the mark of the true suburb." These suburbs formed on the far reaches of the American cities and became home to American’s own growing upper middle class. This type of suburb was made famous in the lavish, outlandish lifestyle of Jay Gatsby, in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s
The Great Gatsby. An interesting reference to the development of the suburb can be found in how Fitzgerald describes the rings of underdeveloped, slum-like first ring of suburbs which were skipped over in order to found new suburban developments.

“About half way between West Egg and New York the motor road hastily joins the railroad and runs beside it for a quarter of a mile, so as to shrink away from a certain desolate area of land. This is a valley of ashes – a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens; where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and, finally, with a transcendent effort, of men who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air. Occasionally a line of gray cars crawls along an invisible track, gives out a ghastly creak, and comes to rest, and immediately the ash-gray men swarm up with leaden spades and stir up an impenetrable cloud, which screens their obscure operations from your sight.”

During this growth of the Bourgeois suburbs after the victorian era, another form of the middle class suburb, one centered on the development of far reaching street car and public transit lines, was forming. These suburbs are characterized by a higher density than their bourgeois counterparts but still held true to the tenets of connections to nature and the family values they are constructed around. Interestingly, these very suburban areas today have become popular, as they offer a taste of urban living with their the walkable commerce districts and detached houses with individual small slices of manicured nature (lawns). The difference between streetcar suburbs and the bourgeois suburbs is that the prior has a much greater degree of socio-economic diversity shown by the presence of apartment blocks in close proximity to the detached houses. The Clifton neighborhood in Cincinnati, Ohio, is a superb example of a streetcar superb, while the Hyde Park, Ohio, can be seen as a good example of the 1920s evolution of the bourgeois suburb. Around the onset of the Great Depression, Americans were beginning to
recognize the social affluence and perceived viability of the suburb. This was all halted, however as the nation plunged into its worst financial disaster of it’s relatively young history. Similar to the cultural shock which Emerson’s essay had on the English middle class, the Great Depression changed society’s concept of the authentic lifestyle. From the stock market crash of the 1929 to the end of WWII, Americans now were programmed into a mentality of savings first among constant threat of shortages or unavailability of commodities.

But it was during this era that a new socio-political doctrine was established, that would have more impact on how Americans lived than Manifest Destiny of the previous epoch. This era represented a new American Dream being born. The new American Dream connected to the fight against fascism and exemplified the ideals of freedom, equality, and opportunity for every American. To go even further, the definition of opportunity meant the right to “a life of personal happiness and material comfort.” Franklin D. Roosevelt builds upon these principles in his Four Freedoms speech given to Congress in 1941, calling for the universal adoption and protection of the freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom from want, and freedom for fear. The purpose of his speech was to prepare the country for the break with non-interventionism and address the growing concerns of national security. What this also does is bring the domestic condition of the United States into the political realm again, this time on a global scale. The freedom for want, or as he put it, “Translated into world terms, means economic understandings which will secure to every nation a healthy peacetime life for its inhabitants—everywhere in the world.” Exalting the strength of the democratic-capitalist society above all others (growing strength of communism and fascism) as means by which to advance global civilization. Roosevelt’s speech went on to inspire the writing of Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in the statement of “the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing.” The concerns of the global citizen have now come to the forefront of politics in an unprecedented way, and are now issues of political-economic warfare.
PRIDE
70 - 71, 86 - 87
144 - 147, 214 - 219

ENVY
72 - 73, 88 - 89
148 - 151, 220 - 225

WRATH
74 - 75, 90 - 91
152 - 155, 226 - 331

SLOTH
76 - 77, 92 - 93
156 - 159, 232 - 237

GREED
78 - 79, 94 - 95
160 - 163, 238 - 243

GLUTTONY
80 - 81, 96 - 97
164 - 167, 244 - 249

LUST
82 - 83, 98 - 99
168 - 171, 250 - 255
HOUSE AS IMAGE
Life and property, being and having, person and thing are pressed up together in a mutual relation that makes of one both the content and the container of the other.\textsuperscript{30}

"For Nixon, superiority rested on the ideal of the suburban home, complete with modern appliances."\textsuperscript{34}
By the end of the war, America was primed for an ontological revolution sparked by the policies of the New Deal in the 1930s and newly signed Federal Housing Authority (FHA) and Veteran Affairs (VA) legislation. The newly expanded loan system brought the possibility of home ownership to the majority of the white middle-class for the first time in history. This loan system was used as a way to segregate the country as the southern democrats in Congress made sure to exclude African-Americans from the FHA and VA programs (women were excluded as well). Coming out of WWII, the country had a growing middle-class population armed with a savings-first mindset which was perpetrated by the government during the 1930s and through the early 1940s, through the enforcement of a doctrine of scarcity. The populous mentality was shifting to a new idea of being a citizen-consumer. This notion of citizen-consumer would be the fundamental part of a democratic-capitalist economy, and up until the Great Depression, this was an accepted truth for the success of the country. In the boom year before the Depression, people would buy what they needed to help drive the economy and were not programmed to desire anymore, but in order to prevent returning into a Depression following WWII policy makers decided that it was the duty of the citizen to become an insatiable consumer in order to continually drive the capitalist machine.

This all changes as the country begins to come out of the war and needs to find a way to sustain the economic boom it experienced as a result of the wartime efforts and factory output. At the same time the country was experiencing a housing crisis as it had to deal with soldiers coming home from war and wanting a home of their own. Many advertisements of the time show soldiers dreaming about these detached dwelling units as something worth fighting for and a bit of encouragement in the devastation of war. As President Hoover predicted a decade earlier, “Housing Americans was… a big, big
business, and American banking, real estate, and transportation interests were intimately involved.” Once the government saw the housing of Americans as the economic impetus the country needed to avoid a postwar slump, it did everything in its power to promote it. Through the signing of legislation making home loans and credit more readily available to a mainly white, segment of the population and encouraging the housing industry to begin advertising this rebirth of the Manifest Destiny, now tied with the American Dream, through economic means, the housing of Americans indeed became big business and led to the future racial segregation and ‘white flight’ of suburbia. American self segregates.

The immediate postwar years saw a boom in the suburban populations around major cities throughout the country. This movement out of the city came at the disadvantage of the urban populations as funding shrank in relation to the population. “Between 1947 and 1953 the suburban population increased by 43 percent, in contrast to a general population increase of only 11 percent.” This was due in large part to the preferential treatment of the detached suburban house over other typologies in the VA and FHA loan grants. So why would the government be so eager to push a new population of veterans, among other predominately white families, out to the fringes of the cities abandoning century old developments. The answer is a complex one that will develop over the course of the 20th century and it deals a lot with the image of the American lifestyle as the global standard and the marriage of democracy and capitalism. The country now puts demands onto its citizens to become consumer producers, or to continually buy newer products to sustain an economic model of continual growth. The lending of money facilitates this as the country now enters into an era of consumer debt which won’t be challenged until the 2008 economic depression. By promoting the suburban home as the new standard American dwelling, the society now embraces the ontological change from a nation of needs to a nation of wants. This change in being has drastically altered the history of the country and its effects will not be truly felt by the masses until the 2008 collapse.

With mass migration to the suburbs and the change in the consumer nature of citizens in the United States, the ontological change was cemented in our society. Prior to the war, Americans first identified with an ethnic group or religious affiliation. With the white flight, these identifications gradually faded away – further dividing the urban mostly people of color from the suburbia mostly ‘white’ grouping. In his book, How East New York Became a Ghetto, Walter Thabit describes how real estate agents would parade black couples as prospective home buyers around neighborhoods they wanted to “block bust” and within two-years this neighborhoods would reverse from primarily white to primarily black. Neighborhoods in dense urban areas even came to be identified with certain groups to the point that just by saying an area of the city, someone could immediately identify the lineage of a person. Ethnic and religious identifications can still be seen today, however in the birth of a consumer culture our identification is far more linked to what brands we buy and where we shop, the symbolic exchange value we associate to products.

People now are judged by what brand of car they drive, what kind of cellphone they have, and what builder they used to build their house among other things. This can be seen today in how people identify themselves as either an Apple user or a Windows user, opening themselves up to the wide range of cultural identifications and criticisms of each. This phenomena has grown over the past century due to marketing and branding techniques and a growing affluence anxiety. In the early stages of the American suburb, where you choose to live in the newly developing hierarchy of suburbs, could have a profound impact on the public image of yourself and family. The impact of the symbolic exchange and sign value given to certain homes has greatly shaped how Americans view one home in comparison to another. A simple example being the concept of curb appeal. Once the mass market machines took hold and controlled the image representation and association of new build homes, this image became a propaganda of sorts. Americans have now brought into this image-based lifestyle, reversing the century old notion of suburbia being this negative place and in turn placed it on a pedestal as a vehicle to obtain
American popular culture advertising can be partly to blame for this evolution as its portrayal of the suburban lifestyle in an idealistic method made it the most desirable aspect of the American Dream. The advertising industry now sold the suburban lifestyle as a glamorous utopia full of products of desire and the suburban house as a passage into this sphere of affluence. The concept of the nuclear family as the social unit of the suburbs is propagated throughout the mass imagery of the suburban lifestyle. Americans have now come to identify that this family unit is a desirable aspect of an all-American lifestyle, an authentic lifestyle. But what does it truly mean to be an authentic American suburbanite? Is it to identify yourself as middle-class? Even at this point this topic was beginning to be questioned by those living in suburbia.

“You know what it means to be middle class?” Sam would joke with his friends. “It means that your kids look out the front window to keep track of who’s got more.”

So how now do we identify ourselves if we cannot identify with previous ethnic neighborhoods of the urban cores or the socio-economic class system which we as American both detest due to its inegalitarian structure and embrace due to its ability to evaluate ones status over that of our peers.

At this point in history Americans now base a huge part of their identity and perceived authenticity on the material products which they surround themselves with. This is reflected in news articles arguing for the affluence of the suburban lifestyle, “The typical suburbanite, Newsweek asserted, is fast becoming “a man of property. His savings may be in the form of equities in house and appliances, but month by month he is becoming a man of substance.” If a man is now a man of property then his house as evolved from being a spatial construct of domesticity life into an image, a product, a commodity, which is to be bought and sold as though it was the same as any other product of the house. The initial concept of citizens of product is not a bad as it elevates the masses to new realms of prosperity and seeks to create
a more equal division of wealth across society for those in society which were
given access.

If American citizens become citizens of property, they then are able to pay
taxes and perceived to make valuable contributions to society. However, the
inverse side to property and the suburbs proliferation of the concept is that
citizens now become tied to the markets viability and the mass consumer
culture. "As suburbanization gave a majority of Americans for the first
time ever the opportunity to become people "of property," it also seems to
promise a surefire way of incorporating a wide range of Americans into a mass
consumption-based middle class." This is part of the ontological shift seen in
Americans as the country sought new ways to identify itself in the aftermath of
WWII and the growing notions of the nation as a superpower. It also signals
what is to come in the economic, political and educational division of urban
and suburban America.
"First, in a couple of years, we’d move out of Ferncrest Village (it’s really pretty tacky there, you know). We wouldn’t go straight to Eastmere Hills - that would look pushy at this stage of the game; we’d go to the hilly section of Scrubbs Mill Pike.... Then, about ten years later, we’d finally build in Eastmere Hills."
Following the war, popular culture institutions such as magazines and museums sponsored multiple programs aimed at the promotion of new modern ideas of domesticity living and promote a new culture of design. The most famous of these programs, Art and Architecture Magazine’s Case Study program, enlisted the services of well-known architects of the California modernist movement to design a series of houses which would be shown to the public through the magazine but also in in-person showings at the beginning of occupation in order to promote new notions on what a house could be. gathering of that mass of material that must eventually result in what we know as “house-post war.” Through this call to action a question was raised, What is the house post-war and what are it’s new materials and methods? The questions raised by these programs are results of the time period and of modern architects questioning what will the future hold for the suburban home? In the 1940s and 1950s, Americans became hooked on the glamorous premonitions of science fiction writings predicting technologies which fueled their desires to live the utopian lifestyle these images were selling.

At its core, the announcement for the Case Study House Program can be seen through the series of seven questions posed by the editor. One, how can site be analyzed in relation to work/schools/neighborhood conditions and individual family need? Two, how will changes in materials and material practices change the meaning of house? Three, will we cling to the past symbols of the “house” or we will abandon them for new meanings moving forward? Four, can we make a house for the average man’s standards, can we make a building that is of its time, and what are American’s standards today? Five, what has man learned in the last five years and how will it impact the design of houses? Six, can such a house be capable of duplication and in no sense be an individual performance? And seven, what new materials will be
selected and what old materials will be selectively rejected? In summary, this study is questioning established traditions in residential architecture and proposing a progressive study into what new advancements in manufacturing and the creation of plastics can have on the American home. After the initial media promotion, the houses were to be occupied by full-time tenants and be fully functioning. The study could be seen as a quest to appropriate the new materials and technologies that had fueled the American war machine, and recontextualize them into the realm of post-war domestic bliss.

Another of these residential programs was MOMA’s version of the case study house program in which it built a full-scale house in its courtyard and charged patrons a separate entrance fee to visit. This home was highly trafficked and was used to promote the ideas of the future of suburban living to the urban museum goers. The house was so iconic in its portrayal of the future of living that it was used multiple times as a backdrop for magazine covers and advertisements. Although at the time these programs seemed to just be propaganda for the new modern home, which in a way they were, they also now brought the house into a realm of culture which until this point it had yet to be included. They have now redefined the house, and architecture in general, as being fully embedded within postwar consumer culture and allowed the house to become a display case for the multitude of domesticity products on sale. A commercialized version of its 1800s self, with all the modern amenities which money could and a growing sense of inauthenticity brought on by its superficial materiality.

This foray of the house into the realm of commerce harkens back to the 17th century before the realm of business and domesticity concerns became separate entities, one of the driving forces of the initial push to from the first Bourgeois suburbs. The key difference of the mid-nineteenth century version is that the business aspect is now on the side of the consumer and not the producer. This creates one of the first glances of the inner turmoil of the suburban construct as its foundational ideals are challenges by its market image.

The creation of this market image of the suburban house, through case study programs and mass advertisement, was also used on a global scale to politicize the suburban house. “Expertly designed images of domestic bliss were launched to the entire world as part of a careful orchestrated propaganda scheme.” Coming out of the war, the United States (and capitalist thinking) had found its new adversary in the USSR and the Communist ideology. The United States government now saw the ability to use the newly mass advertised American suburban lifestyle as a weapon to fight communist notions at home and abroad. By circulating images promoting the wealth and affluence of the typical American family (according to these advertisements, white and middle-class) the United States economy was perceived to be stronger than those rivals in the communist block due to the luxurious it afforded its citizens. What these images were trying to convey is a sense of status anxiety to all those not included in the democratic-capitalist culture, without acknowledging that in many of these cultures, specifically those of communism, the concept of property and status had all but been erased. The government of the United States of America was so serious about this issue that it employed the ranks of many famous architect’s of the time such the Eames and Buckminster Fuller, in order to create images of American domestic bliss.

“Envy: that is what the American exhibition seems to have been designed to produce (despite vigorous details by Nixon in his debate with Khruschev: “We do not claim to astonish the Soviet people”) - yet not envy of scientific, military, or industrial achievements but envy of washing machines, dishwashers, color televisions, suburban homes, lawn mowers, supermarkets stocked full of groceries, Cadillac convertibles, makeup colors, lipstick, spike-heeled shoes, hi fi sets, cake mixes, TV dinners, Pepsi-Cola, and so on.”

To some assent it seems that our mass media portrayal of the suburban house had its success in the creation of envy. In 1959, the government built a model home in Moscow for an exhibition on American culture in cooperation with
the Soviet government. This model house was visited by millions and was to become the stage set for the famous “Kitchen Debates” between vice president Richard Nixon and Nikita Khrushchev. The seemingly natural occurrence of the debates was a highly calculated move that placed the two within the confines of the house (a propaganda image itself) to discuss and debate the viability of the American lifestyle in comparison to the Soviet lifestyle. The Americans wanted to use this debate to prove that the appliance and product-based affluence of the suburban home proved the superiority of the capitalist system. Although Khrushchev refused to believe the level of affluence was possible for the typical American citizen. What this meeting brings to a climax is the notion of the house now moving past just being a commodity and an image, but also a weapon of propaganda. A weapon used by the government to fight a war that would rage on throughout the rest of the century, a war for the proliferation of American cultural and political dominance.

Back home, the mass media images of the suburban home brought about an increase demand of the suburban form of living and the associated lifestyle. The proliferation of these ads showed that the political ideology of the time bought into this notion that housing is the vehicle by which to drag the country out of years of depression and total war. “What was good for housing was good for the country.” The post war culture of mass consumption was created in contrast with the previous decades’ discourse of frugality and thrift, and the country bought into these notions completely. Citizens were convinced that personal indulgence would not be an overindulgence, but be a requirement for the maintenance of the health of the future of the national economy in the post war years.

As suburban development continued, demand for newer and more stratified living units were desired by the masses. Acquiring new brand name products or upgrading current houses weren’t always guarantees to quench this thirst for status and on a larger level, the health of the national economy. The recognition of the of home building as an incremental part of the health of the
nation's prosperity can be referenced in the beginning of the measurement of housing starts beginning in the 1950s. This measurement is still used to this day as a measurement of the health of the economy and is taken on a monthly basis.\textsuperscript{9} As President Hoover had predicted during the Great Depression, housing had become big business and the political culture of the time allowed this business to thrive. The government's involvement in this realm of the private life of its citizens came in the form of the increased access to FHA loans which greatly subsidized the cost of a mortgage for the returning GIs during the years following WWII. FHA and VA loans heavily favored new suburban housing starts over every other application type furthering the implementation of mass suburban culture.\textsuperscript{49} The impact of this housing boom lead to the largest jump in homeownership rates ever recorded. By 1960 one out of every four homes were built in the 1950s, leading to 62% of Americans claiming they own a home.\textsuperscript{50} The home has now been turned into a mass commodity available to a greater population of consumers than ever before, and in doing so spurred increase demand for the related commodities to fit into the house (appliances, furniture, automobiles, etc.) Mass suburbia can be seen solely as the product of the union of a capitalist-democratic agenda in postwar America and this creation lead to a long lasting era of spending and prosperity than ever seen previously in the United States.\textsuperscript{50}

During WWII and years immediately following, admen and architects teamed up together to create images of an ideal postwar landscape meant to persuade the populous of the validity of these newly constructed image of the suburban reality. These images were meant to give hope to the citizens and soldiers who witnessed the horrors of the war and give them something “worth fighting for.”\textsuperscript{51} Experts of bought fields crafted images depicting an egalitarian landscape full of prosperity and commodity which stood in contrast to the way most Americans were living at the time. Using these images, the advertising agencies also sought to associate their productions with the cutting edge modernist architecture of the time. Some of the most famous practitioners the spanned the gap between the realm of admen and architecture, dealing with the creation of images and the occupation of such imagery, were Charles and Ray Eames. The Eames were experts at the crafting of images as referenced by their many films and documentation of their work, and in a way their house, Case Study House No. 8, can be seen as a translation of the creation of an architectural image into a crafted space.\textsuperscript{52} The design of the house by the Eames was done through the creation of diorama like boxes which were then filmed to create various spaces within the house. Using a highly flexible steel frame (almost a large scale version of their storage furniture pieces) the images of domesticity created and constructed could be displayed to the general population of American’s searching for the future of domestic architecture in America.\textsuperscript{53} “Architecture as building gives way to architecture as crafted image.”\textsuperscript{54} This disruption of the previous notion of architecture brings about concepts of the proliferation of plastic-image based constructions which we call houses, but a truly just cheaply built, utilitarian structures not meant to outlast the lifespan of their inhabitants due not to the longevity of materials but the lack of a rigorous assembly of these materials. In a sense, the proliferation of the architecture image as home furthers the notion of architecture as commodity and architecture as a propaganda, because it give these two concepts a medium by which to operate. Has a house just become a plastic mass produced product with a political goal in mind?

At times it seemed as though the house has just become little more than a receptacle for the domestic objects of everyday life, and a display case for ones achieved affluence. This can still be seen today and is even questioned by the Pritzker prize winning architect Peter Zumthor when contemplating the true purpose the architecture has for a house, “And I got to wondering whether the job the architecture had set itself here was to create these receptacles to house objects.”\textsuperscript{55} In a sense, Zumthor is speaking to notions of what is the pursue of architecture’s grand gestures if it’s only true pursue is to house and shelter its inhabitants from the surrounding whether. This stripping down of architecture to its bare essentials is in a way what the construction of mass suburban housing by developers only interested in the profit margin is creating. By
creating houses based around concepts of commodity and images to mask their true economic drivers, Zumthor’s question of the purpose of architecture seems all the more relevant. Is a house just meant to be the receptacle of a client’s possessions, and can a dream house be created through the addition of dream possessions into a house? Can suburban architecture which is so devoid of true architectural meaning still provide its occupants a degree of status only attainable through the acquirement of its commodity?

Notions of suburbia as a method for the attainment of higher status is as old as the concept itself. Going back to the Victorian time previously described, the attained of status was directing correlated to the size of the home and size of the lot, somewhat tied into the distance away from the city, as well as the stylistic selected for the architecture of the house. These notions of Victorian architecture, style, size, and lawn, are all still prevalent today and are still tied to the status symbology of suburban architecture. Although these values have reaffirmed themselves in today’s suburbia, in postwar suburbia the use of cheap materials and mass produced housing units counteracted the proliferation of said values. In 1950, 89 percent of exterior wall construction used cheap and simple wood, but by the mid 50s more homes began to be faced with more prestigious materials such as brick, stone, stucco, etc. But even still by this point only a third of new homes were receiving these “high end” materials. Perhaps this explains the desire by these newly adopted suburbanites to move into the older, better established suburbs, furnished with more traditional built homes, and out of the mass produced living conditions in which they currently resided in.

As mass suburbia progressed the movement between suburban communities disrupted the brief period of egalitarian society which it created. Citizens slowly realized that they wanted to be surrounded by people of similar socio-economic status both as a result of racial and ethnic tensions which had followed them from the urban conditions, and to not have to constantly compete with the Jones’ of a different socio-economic scale. This stratification
of the American suburbs is propagated by the constant engine of a capitalistic
society where reinvention of the image and commodity of the suburban house
to drive the profitability of the housing industry. The continual building of
higher quality homes, along with the continual development of cheaply built
homes, and the growth of older more established suburbs gave citizens the
opportunity to choose what type of suburban communities they choose to live
in. This choice, a heralding quality of capitalist society, was not necessarily
negative in the sense that it provided a freedom of movement to suburban
residents.

“First, in a couple of years, we’d move out of Ferncrest Village (it’s really pretty
tacky there, you know). We wouldn’t go straight to Eastmere Hills - that would look
pushy at this stage of the game; we’d go to the hilly section of Scrubbs Mill Pike.…
Then, about ten years later, we’d finally build in Eastmere Hills.”

This interview shows a mindset that is pervasive throughout much of suburban
even to this day, and is in large part due to the consumer-producer construct
set up by the postwar marriage of democracy and capitalism in the United
States. The differentiation of suburban communities can be seen in how
certain towns or villages are seen as more desirable than others, or when a
new subdivision goes into a suburb and everyone flocks to move in. In
Cincinnati, Ohio, this can be seen in how once affluent suburbs such as
Mt. Healthy and Avondale, have now given way to the current centers of
suburban affluence, Mason and West Chester. However, the location of the
2017 Homearama in Landen, Ohio, gives a premonition that there is another
shift in this distribution coming. For the most part the creation of these new
models of home and improvements were based on interviewing the consumers
as to what they wanted in a new home. Publications interviewed housewives
to learn the desires of middle-class families’ homes, more bedrooms, space
to entertain, and a distinctive architecture. The allocation of space and the
stylistic mode of the home began explicitly tied to the status iconography of
the house. In fact, the FHA loan program even perpetuate this to a certain
extend by favoring certain iconic home types (Colonial Revival, Cape Cod,
Tudor, and Ranch) in the distribution of this home loans most likely for the
implied values and status which each style and typology provided. Citizens
were now buying the image of the house, along with its functionally, which was
created not only by the market differentiators but by the context in which the
home was located.
“Buildings had become images, and images had become a kind of building, occupied like any other architectural space.”

“Real estate has its root in appropriation - not for the sake of use, but for the sake of domination. By transforming the household, or even simple tools, into property, one not only invests them with economic value but also utilizes them exercise power over others who are dispossessed of these things.”
The evolution of home builder advertisement in the United State of America reflects the changing levels of home ownership and development of the American Dream seen over the last 75 years. The ideal of home ownership is one of the canons of the American Dream and its representation in the imagery of the companies, who produce the large majority of these homes, offer us insight into the cult of consumer domesticity that this country has become. Using four advertisements from various decades over the past 75 years, an analysis and comparison of the evolution of advertisement in the genre of American home builders will be formed. Using the book, Reading Images The Grammar of Visual Design by Kress and von Leeuwen, the four ads will be broken down into three areas of study. These categories are modality, the credibility of an image, representational techniques, how an image places its viewer in relationship to the objects portrayed, and composition, the organization of items in the advertisement. This analysis will result in an understanding of the development and evolution of this advertising genre and its relation to cultural aspirations of middle class American society.

Over the course of the past 75 years the representational modality of home advertisement has changed due to advancements in technology and changing rates of home ownership. In the text, Reading Images The Grammar of Visual Design, Kress and von Leeuwen state, “From the point of view of social semiotics, truth is a construct of semiosis, and as such the truth of a particular social group arises from the values and beliefs of that group.” To put it more simply in terms which relate to the genre of the American home builder advertisement, modality is used to gain your trust in the company by using various cultural values and beliefs established by society on what a desirable home should look like. The modality of home builder advertisements can vary from company to company but in general the modality has increased over
the past 75 years. For example, in fig. 57, an advertisement from the 1940s for the Swift homes company, a colorfully illustrated house can be seen in a nondescript suburban locale. The use of an illustrated image instead of a photograph and the use of saturated bright color, leads to the categorization of this image having a low modality. This low modality though doesn’t inhibit the image from being applied to the intended customer (post-war Americans) because it presents an idealistic image of the American dream house (a suburban home), with its white fence and green lawn. The extended depth of the image creates an image of the house as an object to be purchased just like the use of a high camera angle to sell domestic products, and adds to the lower modality of the image.

In fig. 58, an advertisement from the 1950s for National Homes, a highly saturated image of the exterior of a home is portrayed, again in an unidentified suburban location. Unlike its predecessor, this advertisement’s use of photography as a representative method creates higher modality from the viewer. Yet the use of overly saturated colors and a slightly extended perspective counteract to reality of the image, and swings it towards the idyllic. This advertisement reinforces the still strong notions of the American Dream, through the continued use of highly idealized images depicted what the culture at the time saw as the needs of the American society: fashionable home, entertaining yard, and fence (wall) to designate privacy and ownership. This all slightly changes in the 1970s, with the end of the Vietnam War and the energy crisis, home ownership has now become a more tempered version of itself. In fig. 59, an advertisement from Better Homes and Garden magazine depicting what is said to be “our readers favorite house plan,” the modality of the image is still relatively high due to the photographic qualities of the ad, but the more somber, muted coloring challenges this modality. In this ad, low color modulation and low contrast create an image that portrays a calm and comfortable home that doesn’t seem to be as proud as its predecessors, yet the images show offer a higher degree of modality then in previous ads. In today’s market the highest modality yet seen has become the norm in the various
advertisement of home builders. In fig. 60, an advertisement from Drees Home Builders website, a slightly enhanced photograph is the central part of the ad which gives the ad a relatively high modality. The slight enhancements to color and contrast do not break the reality of the image noticeably to clue the viewer in that the house may not actually look this good in person. The reasons for increase in modality from the 1940s is an evolution of what we consider the American Dream and how we would like it to be portrayed, as well as the changing demographics of the target audience of home buyers.

The way in which a creator of an advertisement of a house places the camera can lead to the development of the involvement or detachment of the viewer and creation of a power structure between viewer and object. “Producing an image involves not only the choice between ‘offer’ and ‘demand’ and the selection of a certain size of frame, but also, and at the same time, the selection of an angle, a ‘point of view’, and this implies the possibility of expressing subjective attitudes towards represented participants, human or otherwise.” These subjective attitudes are the visceral responses the producers of the images are wanting you to feel in connection with their product. Concerning the advertisements of the American home builders, many similarities can be seen throughout the decades. In fig. 57, the house is shown lower than the viewer, suggesting a high camera angle and the power is then held by the viewer. The long shot and oblique angle of the house in the advertisement creates a display of the house as a more objective entity than a spatial being. This representational technique reflects the 1940s emerging consumer culture and the desire to acquire objects, such as a house, car, and appliances. This changes slightly as we enter into the 1950s, as shown in fig. 58, the high camera angle is now replaced by a lower one, more at the eye level of a typical viewer (upon further study of the image one may notice that this view is elevated off the ground but I don’t think that is what is meant to be read in this advertisement). The introduction of an eye level point of view establishes a perceived equality with the house pictured, and creates a notion that this house is very approachable and affordable to potential buyers. The oblique angle
which the house is portrayed, at, similar to fig. 57, offers the viewer a degree of detachment from the image, and almost creates a voyeuristic viewpoint for the viewer. This is reflective again of the culture’s view of the house as a status symbol, and one that it to be viewed by your neighbors.

In recent years however this has been slightly altered, as new generations of home buyers want a slightly different image representation when they view advertisements of their future homes. In fig. 59, the oblique angle has now been exchanged for that of a frontal angle, implying advertisement has now shifted towards a more involved portrayal. For example, in fig. 59, the slightly elevated camera angle still gives the viewer power but also implies a first person point of view seen from the street, placing the viewer in the scene. The frontal view of the house reinforces this notion by almost centering the view on the entrances of the house as if to draw in the viewers imagination. This representational technique is only further developed in the most recent years seen in fig. 60, where we as viewers are placed at eye-level across the street from a new suburban home. This vantage point and frontal perspective immerses in the view and creates a degree of equality between us and the house; we may start to think this could be our house we are looking at. It can now be seen that over the course of the past 75 years, these types of advertisements have slowly evolved from representation techniques showing the home as an object, to techniques trying to place us within the contexts of the home the creator are wanting us to buy.

Composition is a central theme in all advertisement and visual communication forms, as it organizes information into hierarchies and relationships which help the viewer’s understanding of the underlying messages attempting to be portrayed. “The fundamental function of integration codes such as composition is textual. Integration codes serve to produce text, to place the meaningful elements into the whole, and to provide coherence and ordering among them.” The way in which images and text are arranged on a page also is used to give various parts more salience, attention-drawing capability,
in comparison to the rest of the ad and can be used to emphasize a point. Relating this concept to the advertisements of American home builders results in questions of what is being portrayed as the ideal in these advertisements and what level of salience due the creators of these ads give to the houses they are portraying. In fig. 57, the creator has positioned the house at the top of the page, emphasizing its role as the ideal in the ad and also in they current (1940s) American psyche. A plan and text description of the house is placed below this illustration of the house playing the role of the “real” in this ad, giving the viewer the hard information they need to know about this model of house. The larger size of the image in relation to the rest of the ad and its colorful nature lead to a greater salience and attention grabbing potential, this is what architects and developers like to call the “money shot.” The evolution of the “money shot” can be tracked through this series of advertisements, and it relates to the changing values of a society as it becomes more and more image hungry. In fig. 58, the house is again placed as the ideal in the composition of the advertisement as it is the desired object, and it is given higher salience over the rest of the ad. In this advertisement even though the image of the house is smaller in relation to its counterpart in the 1940s, the dark colors at the periphery of the image make the image a lot more pronounced and dominate over the rest of the ad. As with fig. 57, text and additional images (instead of plans) are presented as the “real” and give more information as to the process an owner will have to go through to have their own version of this model home.

In both fig. 59 and 60, the house is again presented as the ideal in the composition of the two advertisements, as it is still the end goal of the advertisement to sell these houses as products for purchase. And again, they reinforce the idea of the house as being a desired element of the American Dream still to this day. The difference and evolution in the latter to advertisements comes in the development of the salience of the “money shots” in both advertisements. In fig. 59, the exterior “money shot” photo of the house is given slightly higher salience than the interior shot due to the scale of both images, but given the higher contrast of the interior image its seen as having the second highest salience. The introduction of the interior “money shot” offers the view another idealistic image of the house and replaces the need for addition text. The concept of the “money shot” and large exterior image salience comes to its apex in fig. 60, where the image of the house now becomes almost 90% of the ad. This image replaces all need for additional text description, and is only joined in the ad by statements offering the personal nature of the home. This evolution of the exterior portrayal of the house and the greater salience of these images in their individual compositions reflects general trends seen in advertising over the past 75 years. A movement away from the secondary text as supplementary description and towards a large image of the house that lets the viewer imagine the rest of the information.

It can be seen that over the past 75 years, changing techniques in the advertisements of American home builders have mirrored changing levels of home ownership and values of middle class America. There have been constants however, the house as the ideal, relatively high modality, and high to eye level viewpoints. These concepts all reinforce trust and involvement in the advertisement by the viewer and portray the house as something of desire, the American Dream. Increases in modality from the 1940s is an evolution of what we consider the American Dream and how we would like it to be portrayed, as well as the changing demographics of the target audience of home buyers. Representation techniques have also evolved showing the home as an object, to techniques trying to place us within the contexts of the home the creator are wanting us to buy. The composition of these ads have changed as well to give the images of the houses portrayed greater salience, feeding into a growing image-hungry society.

Through the methods advertisement, the nostalgia notions of the suburban home and its references to a vague form of Arcadia never achieved, the American home building industry has appropriated an American identity for its ale back to the American society. We as Americans have been sold on
a lifestyle which requires an extreme devotion to the tenets of this prescribe lifestyle. Once adopted it becomes increasing hard to challenge this lifestyle as it has been sold to us as the authentic national identity. A lifestyle all Americans should prescribe to. "Because the form of housing carries so many aesthetic, social, and economic messages, a serious misfit between a society and its housing stock can create profound unrest and disorientation." This can explain why it is so hard for us to critique the suburban construct as Americans, our identities are now so entrenched in it that it becomes hard to distill its qualities form our own. This construct could then be labeled as a lifeworld, an utopian construct produced through advertising that immerses its audience in an artificial world based around a product. The development of suburbia as an advertising lifeworld allows for a continuation of its story line, through the use of its founding principles, while the initial meanings and purposes have been altered. This is not meant to cast any judgement on the suburban lifestyle, however, but is merely to posit an argument for how this construct came to be and why it is so hard to dissect it.
P R I D E.

A great deal of pride is projected on to the front facade of suburban dwellings, but does facade really end on the exterior. The concept of formal dining and living seen in many newer homes brings the public facade into the realm of the interior through the use of rooms meant only for entertain of occasional guests. A house designed around pridedful living becomes a curio cabinet of the domestic condition.
EN VY.

A desire to reconnect with nature could be considered the initial ideal of suburban life, as the areas in the periphery of the city were seen as an escape from the dirt, crime, and congestion of the city center. This ideal is best seen in the desire for the perfectly manicured lawn and well-maintained garden, large enough which the house can be set back within the lot. A house designed around a perverse love of the lawn and others lawns would become a showroom of the lush green carpet of the great outdoors.
WRATH.

The freedom to property and the right to protect that property is a tenet of the American ideology and is manifested in the territorial acquisition of the lawn by the fence. Seen as statement to neighbors of the physical bounds of the property, this symbols continue throughout the property and into the house. In a world where borders are seemingly gaining strength, a house of wrath tries to protect its property at whatever costs.
The invention of the automobile allowed for greater commuting distances in shorter amounts of time, leading to more land becoming available for development. Housing responded with the attached garage with in many cases today is the defining characteristic of the house. A house designed around the automobile takes the form two other automotive typologies, the drive thru and the highway. A house of convenience where everything is readily available to the automobile.
Coming out of WWII, the atomic family (male, female, and two children) was for the most part a realistic design principle to drive the scale and size of the house. Over the course of the last seventy years the relevancy of the atomic family has come into question, yet the scale allotted per person in the house has increased. Greed, in this case, is demonstrated through an accumulation of the gable form to its extreme and its replication that can seem endless.
GLUTTONY.

The desire for a more egalitarian society and advancement in technology produced avenues for the mass production of previous stylistic, craft details. In today’s market this appliqué icons can be purchased and tacked on to the facade without any recognition of the historical context from which they were generated. The styling of a house has an immense impact on the perception of a house, too eccentric and the house takes on an air of disassociation, too minimal and the house becomes austere. A house of gluttony seeks to take the role of architectural detail into the realm of fashion allows for increased customization.
LUST.

Living in the cities people are in constant contact with each other and the concept of voyeurism is an accept truth. When this is taken away in suburban context the desire is still there to know what the neighbors are really up to and desire what they have. This ideal manifests itself architecturally through the location, size, and shape, of the windows in the suburban context. A lustful house is constantly seeking to know what the neighbors are up to and is not afraid to unabashedly reveal parts of its inner working as well.
“For the past fifty years, we Americans have been building a national landscape that is largely devoid of places worth caring about.”

“Single-family suburban homes have become inseparable from the American Dream of economic success and upward mobility. Their presence pervades every aspect of economic life, social life, and political life, in the United States, because the mass production of these homes, beginning in the late 1940s, was an economic activity of overwhelming importance that has transformed the American landscape.”
By the end of the twentieth century, the evolution of mass suburbia had reached what many would consider to be its apex. Housing remains to present day, an important part of the health of our national economy with the home construction industry accounting for 5% of the total national economic activity, 10% if you include the associated furnishings and appliances. The suburban home has now become so embedded in American Dream, that it has become hard for us to question the architectural construct of the suburban home in a subjective manner without stirring deep emotional attachments. The endless sprawl created by the suburban movement is mainly criticized for its tasteless appropriations of style, yet its endless rational division of the landscape has a certain beauty to it. Aerial images of the current status of suburban sprawl show the artificiality of the this landscape. A landscape in which the image and the commodity reign supreme. This current state of affairs evolved so far past its original founding principles that many today would question the origins of many of the traits that define our current realm of national residential identity. In many ways the American suburban condition has now become a farce of its original virtuous intentions, an absurd notion of it’s founding ideals.

The notion of absurdity is the philosophical concept that addresses the conflict of a human’s search of meaning and value in life and the human inability to find any. It does not necessarily refer to the illogical nature of a situation, but more situations which are out of human logic. The original founding principles are now considered to be absurd notions of themselves due to a process of erasure on their original meaning and proposes. This erasure then strips all of the natural meaning from the principles sign value, to use a Baudrillardian concept, delivers an empty, seemingly humanly illogical message through its most current appropriations. Once we are confronted
by these absurd notions, we are forced to either accept their messages as truth. This internal conflict is felt by those residing in suburbia, even if they have not overtly recognized it as feeling, and creates a resultant alienation that manifests itself in today’s suburbia. To overcome these perverse feelings of inadequacy, the American Dream is continually redefined and expanded passed its humble origins it a search by the masses to justify the suburban way of life. It is this tension arising from a conflict of interests which drives the current superficiality of the post-modern America suburb. Self and Bose evoke Heidegger in order to elucidate the true nature of this conflict that has impacted the majority of contemporary architecture.

“If Heidegger saw the nightmarish dimension in the modern process of rationalization, today we have gone even further. Our world-relation appears to us as commodified and without a pure ontological opening from which proper dwelling would still be conceivable.”

The American Dream has changed from the simple desire to have comfortable accommodations for a family to the desire to have the largest, most ostentatious displays of home ownership affordable and many times beyond that. The while size of the homes have grown larger and larger, the culture values which suburbia was founded upon can still be mined from even the newest iterations. The ultimate manifestation of this apex of the absurdity of mass American suburban culture are the McMansions, the monstrosities which have taken the concepts with created suburbia and distorted them to the point of a destruction of their origins. The word McMansion is first used in the 1980s as a response by architects to the proliferation of large scale homes being built by developers without the guidance of an architect. About.com defines a McMansion as, “McMansion is a derogatory term for a large, showy Neo-eclectic home, usually built by a developer without the guidance of an architect’s custom design.” These ostentatious houses are the realizations of an architecture based on image, commodity, and propaganda, where all three factors are trying to represent a status of the owner while simulating the historic tropes of suburbia. So are we only to blame the masses for the development of this version of late suburbia? How can we attack people for buying into a way of live that they believe will grant them a fulfilling lifestyle or that contemporary society advertises that they should have? The later makes a far greater impact on the proliferation of mass suburbia and the McMansion, this is the lifestyle we as Americans are sold on living in this country and it goes back to the absurdist distortions of the American dream. For example the ideal of the atomic family is now a mere refraction of itself as currently a typical American suburban household is composed of 2.5 people on average, a decrease from the 4-5 person atomic family. Not to even mention a drastic decrease from the pop culture TV family of the Brady Bunch whose patriarch was an architect.

This evolution of taste can be expected with the passage of time, but it draws it’s roots from a rise in neoliberal economic schemes and the regulation of realm of suburbia from architects and into the hands of the developer. “The investor has no interest or say in the aesthetic qualities of home, its manner of occupancy or the lifestyle of its inhabitants. Their only concern is fiscal,” This is one of the leading causes for why we have seen the American suburb develop the way it has, developers and other financial agents cease to focus on the homes architectural viability in favor of the economic bottom line. They have traded architectural ingenuity for superfluous claims at being custom built and offering off the self options for the owner to select. These changes have now turned once important architectural and stylist values of a home into mere surface considerations on the frame of economically efficient replicas. Once the aesthetic valuation of a home as been striped away the implicit logic dictating its creation, in terms of architecture is also stripped away. Much has been written on the topic of the developer’s impact of the rise of suburbia so I do not wish to expand too much on this topic, however we should question how and why developer’s were able to sell this absurd notion of suburbia to the masses for decades.
As mention in the previous chapter, Authentic Americans, mass advertisement of the suburban home have a large role in the proliferation of the developer’s grand distortions. Since the developer’s intentions lay embedded within the realm of the capitalist market, its movements are heavily influenced by the threat of competition from other entities in the same market. That being said, the production of utopias and other marketing tactics in advertisement allows for the competitive edge in which these developers are searching for. The constant rebranding and use of marketing tactics provides the vehicle for the distortion of the suburban ideals, in the name of gaining a better market share. Potential consumers still buy into the moral messages the suburban home is selling, but are increasing finding that these messages are often times left unfulfilled. “Although rephrased in contemporary marketing terminology, the suburban ideal still retains the sense of an escape from complexity, age, fear, insecurity, imperfection,”

It is through a manipulation of the image of the suburban house in the contemporary advertisements which plays to the nostalgic tendencies of the American public hoping to relive the prosperous years of the postwar suburb. This constant replication of the image erases the uncensored, non-utopian instances experienced in the creation of the post-war suburb (segregation for example) and then sells the enhanced image of the new suburban home as a continuation of this utopian vision. This constant appropriation of the initial idyllic suburban condition is seemingly without end as to this day the constant churn of the capitalist market creates a realm of pseudo-architectural representations which are without a clearly defined terminus. In recent decades however, filmmakers and artists have come to challenge this ceaseless replication and erasure, confronting the notions of what is the “real” suburban condition.

In 1989, the film director Joe Dante delivered the hit comedy starring Tom Hanks entitled The Burbs which was based around the story of a suburban resident and his colorful neighbors investigating the strange occurrences surrounding the cul-de-sac’s newest residents. Moving beyond this film’s comedic style, the general message it is trying to deliver is a questioning of

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the social construct of contemporary suburbia and how in its veiled sense of individuality there is a fear of anything that breaks from the pervasive conformity. For example, the entire plot of the film is based around the neighbors’ suspicions that the new residents are up to no good due to the appalling condition of their home and lack of care given to their lawn. In 1999, director Sam Mendes introduces us to the subversive world beyond the public imagery projected by the typical suburban family in American Beauty as a typical suburban father reaches his breaking point and finds a perverse sense of self-realization and lusts after his daughter’s attractive friend. Similarly, David Lynch shows us that there is a darker side to the peaceful utopian image of the suburb in Blue Velvet and the TV series Twin Peaks. David Lynch creates cinematographic worlds which are completely familiar to the audience yet will quickly distort challenging the utopian societal fabric in which we are comfortable in identify with. This distortion is in a way a challenge to the pervasiveness of 1950’s moral ideals and an attempt at an awakening from the nostalgic depictions of suburban life. These nostalgic depictions of suburbia often times come back to the depictions seen in the TV series, Leave it to Beaver, which was filmed on a backlot film set at Universal Studios. This film set actually goes on to be used in the 2000s TV series Desperate Housewives, calling again subliminally the values we associate with the imagery produced by these representations of suburbia. “Rather then upholding the image and meaning of such houses as the model home of American virtue and normalcy scenarios like this rather suggest that they are merely facades behind which residents battle family problems and personal demons that don’t quite conform to 1950s’ era social and sitcom scripts.” The notion of the suburban home becoming mere facades brings with it comparison of the suburban street to that of a stage set, one in which each house becomes a character in the grand production of this version of the American Dream. A theater of the Absurd. It raises questions as to the value of the spatial over the image or does the image reign supreme? Has suburbia now become solely a society of the spectacle or a theatre of the absurd?

“The greatest misallocation of resources in the history of the world.”
- James Howard Kunstler

In 2008, the global economy experienced the worst economic recession since the 1930s Depression through the wartime years of WWII. In America, this crisis was propelled by decades of neoliberal policies which allowed for the eventual expansion the allocation of subprime mortgages causing a housing bubble. The housing bubble is a direct resultant of when housing prices become overinflated in comparison to the actual cost of production, causing an equity crisis for millions of Americans. The bursting of the housing bubble caused numerous situations where the value of the debt owed on a property by the owner now far exceeded the current valuation of that home. The crisis was further exacerbated when the government of the United States announced it would not be providing federal bailout money to the millions of citizens effected by this crisis, a crisis they had no control over. The government policies which lead to the growth and proliferation of the suburbs, have now seemingly caused its demise through an over-exaggeration of financial conditions. It should be mentioned to the previous point about the strong tie housing starts have with the national economy, after the bubble burst the country saw a 4% drop in the GDP (gross domestic production).

For the past 70 years, the American lifestyle has been funded based on the accumulation of credit based many times on the equity value of the suburban home. Now in the years following the financial crisis the country was faced with questions it had never had to answer before, is the American Dream dead? Are the suburbs dead? If you were to ask any of the new generation of urban dwellers who have made the move from the suburbs to the newly gentrified urban neighbors, they would most like tell you that the suburbs are in fact dead. However, by taking a quick drive through Cincinnati’s current furthest reaching suburbs, it becomes clear that this machine has not ceased its production. It merely went in a short hibernation and has now emerged as strong as it ever was. It should also be pointed out that the same
early suburban developments (streetcar suburbs, etc.) are now being sought after as the offer the perceived benefits of both a semi-urban condition and all the indicators of suburbia (detached homes, small green lawns, driveways, etc.). In recent years the American mindset has now seemingly hit the reset button to return to the collective consumer mindset pre-collapse and has seen a returned to the suburban landscape. Even the American Dream has altered to accommodate changing consumer taste and socio-economic conditions, the love of the suburban condition is still prevalent in part because of the years of investment into this idea of utopia. Popular culture depictions and advertisements are one of the reasons we have continued our love affair with the suburbs and the nostalgia we are sold along side it. “In the popular imagination as in the built environment, the “Leave It To Beaver house” still stands for a certain kind of suburban domestic dream and the popular media and images, cultural meanings and values we turn over and over again when trying to (re)construct it for ourselves. Once we understand that the suburbs have become so heavily embedded in the American collective memory, it becomes easier to understand why the return of the suburbs was inevitable. As James Howard Kunstler said, “We’ve put so much of our national wealth and even our identity into the idea of suburbia that we can’t imagine having to let go of it or substantial change it.”

The website, McmansionHell.com, uses a photo of Ronald Reagan as a logo for their website because brings to light the impact neoliberal economics had on the realm of suburban architectural development. This website is know for is detailed deconstruction and analysis of the Mcmansion trend in the form of an architectural critique on this typology. What this critique is really doing however, is speaking to this fact that, as a society, we are slowly coming to realization of what architects and planners have know for years. The unchecked growth of the dream house has gotten out of control economically, environmentally, and socially, in such a way that it is not working against the psychological and emotional creations of home and leaves its homeowners with a deep feeling of alienation. Much in the same way Marx spoke of a
person’s alienation from their Gattungswesen due to work or class, a modern suburbanite’s alienation comes from an adoption of a false architecture. As humans we derive a great deal of aesthetic pleasure from our surrounding and especially that of our own home, but in the absence of a deeper sense of aesthetic pleasure, we are left feeling more agitated than before we moved in. This seems to be the route of the problem citizens subliminally have with suburban developments, while they are sold on new suburban homes as contemporary replication of the 1950s nostalgia, this replication encounters losses in its translations. New suburban homes are seen lacking the ‘soul’ there predecessors had, the alienation Marx refers to now extends past the individual and into their dwelling. The question then becomes what were the principles upon which the suburban utopia was sold and how have the decades of market forces manipulated these principles into absurd shadows of themselves. The latter leaving residents with a deep seeded discomfort in their surroundings masked by the material pleasures of a live of spending and consumption.

Through an immersive study of suburban advertisements and representations in mass media, a series of seven foundational tropes have been discovered. These tropes are seen throughout the rise and development of suburbia seen throughout this paper, but truly came to surface visually during the years following WWII in the illustrative advertisements of this era of mass consumerism. This set of tropes is interconnected as it is at times hard to clearly distinguish differences between the tropes in advertisements, and at times their characteristics are so embedded into the image or the object that it becomes increasing difficult to distill them down to their origins. Most recently however these seven idioms has become much harder to clearly distinguish as a direct result to their constant re-appropriation is the images of the American home builders. These seven concepts will be explored more in-depth in later sections of this document, but they can be quickly explained as the following. One, a connection to nature; the desire to escape the crowded urban core and reconnect with a natural environment. Two, the love of the automobile; a citizens love for the industrial mechanization which constantly evolves to help make their daily easier and streamlines simple tasks for the greater enjoyment of life. Three, the atomic family; an evolution of the frontier family values to a more modern lifestyle which includes a father, a mother, two children, (normally a son and a daughter) as well a family dog for good measure. Four, the public facade; a desire to keep up appearances in the neighborhood and maintain or elevate ones status among peers. Five, the white picket fence; Manifest Destiny at a personal scale or the desire to keep and maintain ones own piece of property and its relation to status. Six, the commodified icons; due to the rise of industrial production and replication of previous icons of status only available to upper class patrons, mass status is achievable given the style choices of a new home. Seven, the neighborhood watch; the perverse notion of voyeurism prevalent in suburban resident’s desires to keep track of the tasks of their neighbors and protection of the status of the collective. When combined these seven principles can be appropriated and simulated much in the same way that previous generations of advertisements have, in order to create new notions of what the current American suburban condition is.
“Collage is an interstitial state: neither flat nor round, neither identifiable nor chaotic. When objects snipped from magazines are reformed into an ephemera, a collage they transcend their former pictorial candor.”
Through the research presented in the previous eight sections and a visual analysis of home builder’s advertising and movie representations, hypotheses were made as to the seven omnipresent values seen in the mass media portrayals of suburban life and suburban houses. Each of these tropes are to be expanded upon in the three sections of this study in order to show the breadth of the depth of each virtue’s construction and evolution, and set up for the amplification operation on the suburban house. This process of amplification will foreground one of the seven virtues individually in a series of seven canonical houses. Once each of the seven houses have been articulated, Baudrillard’s Orders of Simulation and Theory of Sign Exchange Value have been significant cornerstones for the evolution of each of the vices in suburbia.

During the discourse analysis, a series of collages were created as a way to illustrate and analyze the information presented in the readings and media representations. These series of collages (one for each trope) are meant to be viewed as a graphic representation of the evolution the understanding of each vice, and in doing so must be viewed in a linear, chronological sequence. In previous work, I used collage as a form of sketching to understand complexity through juxtapositions and as a form of representation of spaces and architectural designs in a more finite way. The series of collages was undertaken on a set by set basis without any idea of the final “whole” in mind. In order to provide clarity into the particularities of each collage strand, the following paragraphs will be used as a metacognitive analysis to better illustrate each strands premises.

The first collage strand in this chronological procession, was an initial attempt at the “personification” of the vice onto the imagery of suburbia. Two parts, an actor (a person) and a stage (the house), were juxtaposed against each other...
to create a narrative of the one of the seven vices. The use of negative space is resultant of the erasure of the context of the pieces of imagery in order to heighten the presence of the vice and further the dialogue of the juxtaposition. The second college, a photo edit of a typical Levittown Cape Cod house which is an attempt to push the virtue into the realm of absurdity. Through the subtraction and addition of certain architectural elements, this collage represents the first attempt at the operation upon a suburban carcass. The third collage, uses the operation of erasure on a typical 1950s advertising portrayal of a “dream home” in which the absence is used to highlight the various virtues seen in the construction of the advertisement. When all seven erasure collages are combined, the whole of the image maybe seen, and when taken away the icon of the suburban house as presented by this advertisement has been deconstructed. The next collage in the series is an evolution of the first, in that it uses the same structure of two-part juxtaposition and erasure of context, but in this series a more contemporary photographic representation of suburban culture is used. The choice to use contemporary imagery is an attempt at creating collages which create a sense of the uncanny. This collages draw some inspiration from the work of David Lynch and Gregory Crewdson, in the sense that they seek to be ideal portrayals of the subject while masking their deeper meanings.

The next grouping in this series of collages appropriate various precedent projects from the realm of pedigreed architecture. For each suburban vice a precedent is chosen which represents an example of the amplification of the suburban virtues. As these precedents are not situated within the American suburban context, a process of abstraction must be executed in order to allow for experimentation with the appropriation of specific elements from the precedent projects. The first in this series of precedent analysis collages is an erasure collage seeking to strip down the precedent to the bare minimum of the attribute which is the focus of the analysis. This operation is also performed in order to simplify the precedent as every building is multifaceted, so in order to extract the essence of the precedent the complexity must be simplified. The next two collage series, are an attempt to take the simplified precedent imagery and appropriate its tropes into the suburban context. One collage will seek to place suburbia into the precedent and the other seeks to place the precedent into suburbia. These collages still maintain the simplicity of the previous collages in the series, only containing two to three parts and juxtaposed suburban imagery with imagery of the precedent. Following this attempt at assimilation of the precedent into the suburban context, the forth collage graphs a suburban icon, white vinyl siding, onto the erased carcass of the precedent. This collage aims at the creation of an absurd notion of the original precedent while also foregrounding the suburban material palette.

Once the series of illustrative collages reach a point of sufficient completion that various ideas could be extracted and later applied, a new collage typology was created, the stage set. This collage methodology plays off notions of the suburban home as a stage set for living as portrayed by various outlets in the mass media culture. In order to represent the collages as more spatial representations a Cartesian grid was underlaid and the various pieces of the collage were shown in relationship to the grid as if it were the ground plan in the collage. Composing this collage out of at least four parts allows for the creation of not just one actor and setting, but a more multilevel reading of the piece’s relationship to one another and the introduction of additional actors into the collage. The next step is to translate this stage-set collage into a physical model; becoming a preliminary schematic design for the amplification of each suburban virtue into sin. The collaged addition, onto the carcass of a wooden gable-formed block, is based on the imagery created in the prior collages and is created using printed yardstick images from the same digital library as the collages. The models are meant to be multisided, something that the 2D collages cannot be, but the two-sided nature of the paper allows for a front and back reading if the model elicits that kind of reading.

Once rendered in three dimensions, the limitations of the collage inquiry can be seen in the in ability to fully translate itself into an architectural space?
this case a suburban home. In order to explore and test the various aspects of notions of house as image, house as commodity, and house as propaganda, a more standard architectural procedure is needed to represent each sin. By using the traditional architectural means of representation (plans, sections, perspectives, and physical models) the amplification of each vice into their architectural manifestations will become much more palatable to the general architectural observation. It is also interesting to note that many prospective homeowners only encounter the “paper” architecture of their future homes in the plan and perspective rendering medium, along with the model home. Given the historical evolution of the suburbs and the argument laid out in the theory section of the paper, it seems that the operational carcass must be conceived within the same context contemporary suburban house. This house must fall into the average home size typical of America today, roughly 2,600 to 3,000 square feet in plan area and have a typical program associated with the contemporary single family home. Drawing from Peter Eisenman’s House Series, John Hedjuk’s Masques, and Pezo Von Ellrichshausen critical practice; this study seeks to situate itself within an ongoing architectural discourse of the single family house.

The rigor of the process of collage inquiry leads to the discovery and distillation of the seven canonical tropes seen most prevalent in the mass media representations of the American suburban home. While this method of inquiry is beneficial to the development of the argument for the creation of a suburban visual language it also creates a simulated framework for operation. Moreover, the idea of image, commodity, and propaganda closely parallels the Baudrilladian theory of simulation with its three orders.

To first begin to understand the correlation between the thesis and the concepts brought forth by Baudrillard, one must understand who he was as a theorist and the breath and context of his work. Born in France in 1929, Baudrillard was began his career in sociology after a quick stint as a German high school instructor. Over the course of his career he evolved to be called a philosopher, cultural theorist, political commentator, photographer, pataphysical artist, along with being a known as a sociologist. Baudrillard is best known through as one of the most read writers on the subject of the postmodern condition due to the popularity and in most cases the polemic of his writings. Of his texts some of his most famous, and perhaps the ones most relevant to this thesis are, Symbolic Exchange and Death (1976), Simulacra and Simulation (1981), Fatal Strategies (1983), and America (1986).

Baudrillard’s theories revolve around mass media studies and the application of poststructuralist thinking, which Baudrillard uses to combat the overarching presence of systemic construction within the postmodern age. His notion of the code and the orders of simulation are especially relevant to the construction of the American postmodern suburb, as seen in the previous sections of this document. To begin one must first be introduced to Baudrillard’s theory of Symbolic Exchange in which he edited Marxist’s exchange theory to go beyond simply the functional and economic value of an object, and add the symbolic value of the object to its exchange value.

The functional or use value of an object is closely tied to the commodification of goods, as an object’s use value is correlated in traditional economic theory to its exchange value or economic value. An object is not limited to being valued in this singular way but also achieves valuation based on its symbolic value to the owner. An example of this would be a wedding ring, or to pick a more applicable example to this thesis a home. The sign value of a suburban home can be seen as being closely tried to development of the home as a form of simulacrum. A house not only represents its self in the present but simulates all previous houses in the form of a collective memory. The final part of the valuation of an object according to Baudrillard is the sign exchange value, or the value given to the object by the signs it is associated with in culture. Within the suburban context this concept of sign exchange value is rampant throughout and can be closely associated with the seven tropes distilled within this thesis. An example of the sign exchange value of a house might be having columns frame a small entry portico at the ceremonial front
door of the house. In most instances this addition to the house is no longer functional as it once was but acts as a sign of wealth and class which the owner of the house can then use to elevate their own status. All together these three valuation strategies work to define an exchange value of a system of objects, in this case suburban housing, which has moved past simple use-exchange value in postmodern society and into a value system based on the role of symbolic values and a sign value.

Baudrillard goes further to theorize on the evolution of symbolic exchange and sign valuations with his text Simulacra and Simulation (1981). In the book he categories the evolution of a sign based system of values over the courses of four epochs of exchange systems. The first era is that of symbolic exchange, in which access to signs are limited by status and rank and the meaning of those signs is not challenged due to their fixed accessibility. This era is associated with pre-renaissance, feudal society of Europe. The second era, or the ‘First Order of Simulation,’ is dominated by what Baudrillard calls counterfeits or false images. This era, 15th to 18th centuries, reflects the growing bourgeois class and greater competition and access to the signs controlled by the ruling class in the previous era. In this era, the sign has been freed to refer without any obligation but to produce meanings of status, wealth, prestige, and now take over all aspects of social life. The third era, or the ‘Second Order of Simulation,’ is domination by the serial production of signs and is closely associated with the Industrial Revolution of the 19th century. In this era signs mask the absence of a basic reality through their reproduction of the original signs without a concern for the origin. The fourth and final era, the ‘Third Order of Simulation,’ is the current era we live in according to Baudrillard’s theory. Signs no longer bear any relation to any reality whatsoever and have become pure simulacra of the original. The difference between the true and false realities have been collapsed. The real has now been replaced by the Hyperreal, a more real version of reality than reality itself. 37

The relation of suburbia to Baudrillard’s eras of simulation is outlined in the previous sections of this document as it is engrained in the development and evolution of the suburban condition. At this point it may be best to summarize the context established previously in a way that fits into the framework established by Baudrillard. To do this, Baudrillard’s timeline of eras may need to be altered in order to more readily fit in to the evolution of suburbia. The symbolic order of suburbia (pre-17th century) is dominated by the assistance of suburban palaces of royalty, the most popular example being the Palace of Versailles which constructed an artificial suburban retreat from 16th century Paris using terraforming techniques seen in the suburban developments of today. The ‘First Order of Simulation’ of suburbia (17th-18th Century) is constructed by the proliferation of the bourgeois country house and the notions of a Romantic return to nature from the city. The access to these mansions increased from the previous era as they are no longer required to be held by blood royalty, just the ruling merchant class. The era lasted up until the foundations of the first street car suburbs and the building of the larger Victorian style homes seen in certain neighborhoods of cities around the country. The transition into the ‘Second Order of Simulation’ of suburbia, is defined by the creation and mass sale of the catalog home by companies such as Sears Roebuck and the Aladdin company. This era lasted from the late 18th century to the end of WWII, and is seen in the commoditization of the home into a system of parts which could be ordered from a catalog and constructed at any site. Similar techniques can be seen today but with a subtle difference that is hard to perceive without deep thought, this makes the transition into the ‘Third Order of Simulation’ of suburbia. The Third Order began with the foundation of Levittown and has continued to the present condition. It manifests itself with the hyper-replication of the suburban tropes established in the previous eras to produce a super real version of suburbia, the most real yet. The creation of new homes in contemporary suburbia only masks their identities non-authentic suburban conditions with simulacra of signs to not reveal that they no longer behave in a manner in which they were traditional constructed. The transition into the ‘Third Order of Simulation’ accounts for the feelings of isolation and alienation which are prevalent in the contemporary
suburb, as well as account for popular notion of suburbia being “dead”. Suburbia is dead in this sense because it has become a simulation of itself and created a hyperreal version of what we think is the authentic suburban condition to mask the reality that it no longer conforms to its original prescribed notions.

This is where this document and accompanying production come into play as agents of demonstration of the existence of the Third Order within the American suburb, and is tasked with the attempted implosion of this false reality. Using the methods described throughout this section, an attempt will be made to distill and amplify the building blocks of the American suburban condition into seven canonical houses and associated representations. The distillation will prove the existence and prevalence of these representational tropes, signs if you will, in order to clarify for the reader and the author to nuances of each. The amplification will attempt to provide the viewer of this work with a realization of the perceived evolution of each of the tropes within the context of the construction of a house, taken to an almost absurd conclusion. Through these methods seven tropes will be further interrogated into what Baudrillard would refer to as an implosion. By attempting to implose the system of tropes within the Third Order of Simulation in suburbia, a musing of a solution to the problem will be posited. It is the attempt of this thesis to lay the groundwork for a new order of ontologically designed suburbs created around the fatal theory presented in the closing section of this document.

This text and adjoining study is the resultant of a rigorous interrogation of the contemporary American suburban condition as manifested in the areas surrounding Cincinnati. It is not only an investigation into this realm of pseudo-architecture, but an investigation of the underlying self of the American consumer. The American home as being manipulated into an image, a commodity, and a simulacrum in the propaganda of its moral messages. Its reality has been stretched to the point in which the livelihood of its dream, the American Dream, has been called into question. It is the goal of this thesis to articulate the depth of meaning behind each of these areas of representation, and form a new treatise on the contemporary suburban condition. Given the complex nature of such a topic as the American suburb, its development must be deconstructed into a more intelligible form. In order to best understand the nature of the American suburb, this document argues one must look at the suburban home through three lens of focus.
"The more you look at the same exact thing, the more the meaning goes away and the better and emptier you feel."

- Andy Warhol, 1975
The evolution of suburbia did not occur within a short period following World War II as many Americans would like to believe, but has been the resultant of class distinctions, marketing strategies, and above all the ontological changes from pre-modern to modern to post-modern society. This evolution can be segmented into four epochs of suburban ontology which tie directly into the three lens presented within this thesis. The first epoch of suburbia, or suburbium in this era, was defined by the ruling landed gentry and the sprawling country estates of the nobility. Class was established by the size and ornate nature of the houses. These homes were more rural in nature as the suburbs of feudal Europe were the lawless areas lying directly outside the walls of the cities. The second epoch of suburbia, known to this thesis as the First Order of Suburbia, is commonly associated with the bourgeoisie Victorian suburbs. The scale of these houses shrunk from their noble forebears, while early capitalist economies allowed for an greater access to the signifiers of wealth. The decorative nature of this homes as well as the ornate nature of their plans, was used in much the same ways as fashion to signify the social stature of the owner. The image projected by the home is of the utmost importance.

In the third epoch, the Second Order of Suburbia, the commoditization of the home is prevalent as advancements in industrialized methods gave access to the American Dream to more individuals. The signifiers replicated in the previous order are now produced with ease, devaluing their production value while trying to maintain their sign exchange value. The advent of the catalog homes in the early 1900s divorced the means of production from the location of consumption, defining this era of suburban and paving the way for the advancement of Postwar America. The fourth epoch of suburbia, is the suburbia in which most of us can associate memories with. Huge swaths of
track housing defined only by minimal articulations in form and appearance where ornament have been flatten to a state of appliqué style. This is the Third Order of Suburbia, an era in which the propaganda qualities of the American Dream have been used to simulate a reality in which the vast sprawl of suburbia is a truly authentic form of living. The home has now been turned into a simulacra of sorts. One which offers its occupants feel good feelings of nostalgia and simplicity to counter the complexity of the current ontological age.

The arrival of the Third Order of Suburbia gives rise to the birth of a mass suburbia, the version of suburbia that has come to represent the American domestic condition for the last 80 years. The rise of mass suburbia in American is defined by the mass simulation of the American Dream which draws its lineage from the pioneering spirit of Manifest Destiny and the individualism of a Democratic Capitalist society in the face of the growing Communist Totalitarianism regimes of the 19th century world. In a society of mass suburbia the three orders of suburbia become intertwined making it harder to distinguish from one another as their characteristics are exponentially added to create a new reality of the suburb. This rendition of suburbia is created by the mass replication and representation of seven defining tropes carried throughout media portrayals of the suburban ideal. These representations then become physically manifested in the architecture of the homes as they becomes linked to architectural indicators which use their sign values to add to the symbolic exchange value of the house, thus completely commodifying the house. In a sense, this perpetuum mobile also had a substantial impact on the architecture of the house as an entire generation of buildings emerged whose character, scale and program were not determined by new answers to contemporary questions, but by the manner in which they were financed. This constantly moving machine is still today running the development of suburbia and has only become stronger with age as the agents of its code, the tropes themselves, have come to define aspects of the American Dream tied to the single family home.

Historically the American Dream has come to be known as the desire to better ones status from that given to them at birth, affording them a good career to support a family and buy a home. The American Dream came into popularity around the same time in which the United States government decided to marry capitalism with democracy to dictate the future of the state. With this marriage the Dream needed to be sold to the masses in order to further the new found politics of the era and fight against the less than desirable politics coming out of the socialist regimes in Europe. Through mass marketing strategies the American suburban home was depicted and sold to the general public as a utopian ideal of what the authentic citizen consumer should desire. The evolution of this depiction furthered both the development of the seven tropes and also cemented the power of the third order of suburbia. Now advertisements of the home can render a new suburban dwelling more desirable than ever and feed off the powerful nostalgia for a authentic suburban life.

The suburbia depicted in these advertisements of home builders is a hyperreal version of the suburbia that once was. Using the powers of the sign value of each of the tropes and an ability to control to message in a propaganda-like way, the rendering of suburbia moves beyond just a utopian image portrayal but now informs how we as Americans should perceive our builder homes as being the best version of a suburbia we want. When presented with this imagery we feel both a sense of desire to indulge in this idyllic lifestyle and the strange feeling of familiarity with the images in front of us. Perhaps we have seen this image before? This eerie feeling of the uncanny can be taken as evidence of the presence of the Third Order of Suburbia as the simulation has now taken over. We now occupy these non-places with a sense of alienation seen in the paintings of Hopper with the underlying tensions of the films of Lynch. This condition can be used to explain why most consider suburbia to be dead. It is dead just not in the way that most would attribute its murder to. The culprit in this homicide is the code of suburbia itself which allowed for a definition of reality to be pre-established. This coded reality is easily simulated.
to itself in its current definition.

The methodology put forth in this study is meant to both interrogate the code as defined by each of the seven tropes and look for solutions for its implosion. Using a form of collage inquiry, the tropes were illustrated in order to define their intricacies as well as pull from them a visual means by which to distill each of the seven tropes into their most pure modes. Once distilled the tropes could then become a series of canonical houses proposing a future neighborhood development in an overlooked area of Cincinnati. This development then becomes a theatre of the absurd with the houses becoming actors within a stage that is both the physical and intellectual context of the contemporary American suburb. This methodology does not seek to challenge the concepts or meanings of home but postulate on the articulation of house.

By choosing to closely align this thesis with the writings of Jean Baudrillard, an ally is made to help set a framework which guides the previous research and future musings of the project. Through the implementation of this methodology a fatal strategy for suburbia is developed which will become the conclusion to this thesis as it will provide an answer as to a possible next step for the suburban house.

This thesis can be seen as a pataphysical exploration resulting in a possible implosion of the pervasive nature of simulation seen in the American suburb that has come to define reality in this pseudo-architectural realm. Through collage and architectural explorations, a possible recoding of suburbia is placed in front of the viewer/reader of this work which seeks to raise question to the perpetuum mobile mentioned perviously. This recoding manifests itself in a familiar way, in the form of seven houses rendered as though they exist in our reality today and yet seem completely foreign to the contemporary suburban context. In this sense the seven houses become Lynchian counterparts to their homogenous cousins which set the stage for a new evolution. The Seven become agents of a fatal strategy which is meant to challenge the pervasiveness of the current code while providing a revolutionary
counter thinking of the American suburb. This fatal strategy attempts to implode the simulation of reality in suburbia and the meaning behind the signs we have chosen to define meaning in this reality. While valiant this attempt maybe, the code is all powerful and attempts at implosion may easily be absorbed back into it’s highly evolution formations. It is unclear at this point if the work within this thesis will have been a successful attempt at an implosion and perhaps it will never be known. However it is clear now that the initial assumptions put forth by this thesis surrounding the image of the house, the commodity of the house, and the propaganda or simulacra of the house, have proven to be more evident than initially suspected.

This thesis is not the end of this line of thinking but the jumping off point for a pataphysical future.

*The Seven are Us.*
FIG. 117

N.T.S.  GLUTTONY


Curb appeal can be defined as “the visual attractiveness of a house as seen from the street”. This is a term used within the realty industry to describe the aesthetics of the exterior of a home and is often correlated to the marketability of a home. “Curb Appeal.” Merriam-Webster. Accessed March 12, 2017. https://www.merriam-webster.com/.


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56 Colomina. Domesticity at War. 200.


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63 Colomina. Domesticity at War. 7.

64 Self and Bose. Real Estates: Life Without Debt. 43.

65 Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design by Kress and van Leeuwen is a book used in Communications coursework which offers a methodology by which mass media and marketing imagery may be critiqued.


67 Ibid. 129.

68 Ibid. 201.


72 Ibid. 14-15.


76 Baudrillardian refers to theories associated with the French post-modern thinker Jean Baudrillard.

77 Self and Bose. Real Estates: Life Without Debt. 55.


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XI.

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