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The Persuasive Image

George D. Grove

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THE PERSUASIVE IMAGE

The Anti-Suburbia Series IX

Graduate Thesis
Master of Fine Arts
School of Photographic Arts and Sciences
Rochester Institute of Technology

By George Dudley Grove

Spring 2004

The following members of my Thesis Board Committee accept this written thesis as the completion of a Master of Fine Arts Degree in Photography:

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Master of Fine Arts in Imaging Arts - Fine Art Photography
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DEDICATION:

I would like to thank my family, friends, and fellow graduate students for their support, ideas, and assistance in my work. I also would like to thank the participants in the project for living with my images for an extended period of time and filling out the surveys. For their direction and motivation, special thanks go to my thesis committee: Elaine O’Neil, Dan Larkin, and Alex Miokovic.
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The Persuasive Image

I. INTRODUCTION

The unfortunate suburban migration continues. These newly arrived suburbanites exchange their multidimensional urban city views for those of a carefully constructed and intensely controlled pastoral view. This view from their windows is one that symbolizes their ownership of the land and their freedom from dense urban living conditions. The open space and grass function as powerful reminders of why they live in suburbia. But what would occur if the suburbanites were to exchange their view of plastic Eden with images from the city? What if the view of their altered yards and obsessively manicured gardens were intentionally replaced with views of urban landscapes? What if an urban view were to be elevated and aestheticized until it was presented as a beautiful object to be coveted and desired? Several psychological theories, and in particular the Cognitive Dissonance Effect, suggest suburbanites could change their attitude about their living conditions in the suburbs with respect to the city.

The goal of this thesis is to provide an experience through which a change in the attitudes of suburbanites regarding living in an urban environment might occur. The thesis is more than just images, but is actually an attempt to explore, measure, and quantify the attitudinal change of two experimental populations when they are exposed to the same simulated city view (Figure 1). One group lived in the city of Rochester proper within a mile of the center of the city, while the other lived outside of the city, several miles away.

My Thesis Exhibition was part of the documentation of a performance that occurred in private residences in Rochester. Coinciding with the opening of the exhibition, each of the selected residences first completed a survey. Then they placed in front of one of their windows the identical image and frame that all of the other residences received. They lived with the image for an extended period of time, 8 weeks, at which point the objects were removed and the survey was re-administered to document any attitudinal change that may have occurred.
Figure 1.
In much of performance art from the 70's onward, the photograph was only a tool to document the performance or to disseminate the performance to an audience. This project utilizes the photograph in a very different manner, as the photograph IS the performance. Occurring over a limited duration, the audience is in daily and unavoidable contact with the image and is affected by its presence. Rather than using photography to document the performance, the documentation is through the attitudinal change registered in the pre- and post-performance surveys.

The images chosen for this exhibition were taken from apartments and residences of friends and acquaintances in Chicago, New York, and other cities. Their function is to impart a feeling of location and place, to imply that the viewer is living in the city. Initially I believed that the image content was relatively unimportant, as long as it conveyed "cityness." However, after photographing the rear of apartment buildings, I gradually enlarged the content to include facades that employed their architectural beauty as an additional aspect of the persuasion. Ultimately for the project I choose to use a single expansive view for all of the residences where the image encompassed both lower and higher density dwellings, containing both a neighborly feel while reminding the viewer that one is still in the city.

This thesis documented how photography can be utilized to change perceptions and viewpoints about the world around us. It is hoped this work can help lead people to the realization that the model for the suburban fabric is flawed, based on negligent and backward ideas about the home and living environment. Suburbia was created by investors, corporations, and people whose last concern or priority was the well being and happiness of the future inhabitants of the subdivision.
II. HISTORY OF SUBURBIA

Today, suburbia continues to grow at a tremendous pace, choking and devouring the landscape, as well as the lives of the families and individuals, who are trapped within an isolated and defined environment lacking vital and necessary aspects which meet our human needs as social animals. The isolation leads to feelings of loneliness and despair that are much deeper and more common in America than in other societies.¹

American’s relation to the land has undergone drastic change in the past several hundred years. The first English colonists believed wilderness was evil and savage because they were used to cultivation and control of their landscapes. Even the gardens and parks of the English were extremely formal and manicured to reflect this belief: the shrubs and bushes were tightly trimmed and sculpted and the grass was evenly cut in a domineering manner. The colonists brought many ideas of the landscape with them, many of these are still apparent in America today, although they have evolved and mutated over time. When the new country began to form a national identity, the landscape was one of the ideal metaphors. The incredible mountains, vast forests, gigantic freshwater lakes, and the unfathomable West all combined to reinforce the nation’s pride and sense of self. Sharp describes it as, “In sum, a topography of awesome dimensions and limitless natural bounty, singled out for divine blessing, has long been integral to the national consciousness.”² Throughout the nineteenth century the vastness and magnificence of the American landscape was extolled not only in literature and music, but also by numerous painters and photographers who were mesmerized by its beauty. Frederick Church and Thomas Cole are painters who showed this worship in images of New York State mountains and wildernesses (Figures 2 and 3). Coinciding with the westward expansion and occupation, a whole new generation of artists was enthralled. These included the famous topographic photographers of the government surveying missions of Timothy O’Sullivan, Carleton Watkins, William Henry Jackson, Andrew Russell, and John Hillers (Figure 4). They explored the virgin continent’s compelling beauty using large glass plate negatives which had to be prepared and developed on the spot. Art critic Andy Grundberg describes the work of these Western landscape photographers as “O’Sullivan organized these scenes into pictures of considerable

² Lewis Sharp, Visions of America: Landscape as a metaphor, p 10.
Figure 2.
Figure 3.
Frederick Edwin Church, *Home By the Lake*, 1852. Franklin Kelly, p. 48.
Figure 4.
force, and in a manner that radically extends our conception of what a landscape can be. Like Watkins, and to some extent Eadweard Muybridge and William Henry Jackson as well, O’Sullivan imbued his pictures of the American West with a profound skepticism about Man’s relation to Nature. Nature seems not so much dispassionate in his pictures as apassionate, remote from man’s wishes and intentions.”\(^3\) (Figure 5) These images helped fuel the frenzy for Manifest Destiny which deemed it was every American’s inalienable right, even destiny (especially those with power or money) to conquer and tame the new land in the name of America.

For inhabitants of newly industrialized cities, the dramatic natural scenes that were being produced effected them significantly. Sharp described the relationship as, “escapist images bordering on the sublime.”\(^4\) However, even as the public was incorporating these images into their psyche, the wilderness that was being depicted was rapidly undergoing a transformation. “Untamed nature was beginning to give way to small settlements and farms. The widespread leveling of forests, the ready availability of prairie land for homesteading, the sudden contraction of the continent, accelerated in 1869 by the advent of the transcontinental railroad, mining for gold and silver, were only a few of the causes of the disappearance.”\(^5\)

The images, however, continued to work their way into the consciousness and desires of everyone. Popular culture images were extremely persuasive in how the land and nature were ideally viewed and people wanted to capture a part of this vision around their homes. Instead of looking to the natural world as the way to design a yard, the naïve inhabitants looked back to their European roots.

While many historians have treated suburbia as a recent phenomenon, it actually has ancient roots, and has been present from the origins of the city itself. Only recently it is the incredible growth that has permitted the suburbs to dwarf the cities in population as well as area that makes this chapter unique. The ancient cities of Mesopotamia and Egypt often had a dense city core, but then had less dense ‘suburbs’ outside the city perimeter and beyond. The archeologist

\(^3\) Andy Grundberg, Crisis of the Real: Writings on Photography 1974-198, p. 58.
\(^4\) Sharp, p. 12.
Figure 5.
Leonard Woolley found evidence of buildings outside of Ur as far as four miles away from the urban center. There is an example of the natural interaction between and interdependence between the cities and the surrounding rural and agricultural lands for trade and resources. During later periods space limitations in the cities promoted growth at the peripheries such as when buildings and structures were erected that exceeded the space available, it was natural for them to look to the margins. So the location of the gymnasiaums in ancient Greece and the monasteries during medieval ages is similar to the way that the Super-Walmarts must now locate at the periphery of today’s communities due to their size requirements.

But space limitations are not the primary factor behind the growth of the modern suburbs. In ancient Rome the wealthy created country villas and estates for their social status as well as relaxation, pleasure, health benefits. Later peoples continued to follow this trend as the historian Lewis Mumford described the layout of Medieval cities as having “detailed evidence of little huts, cottages, and villas, with ample gardens, springing up outside the cities walls. By the sixteenth century the land so used served for more than summer residence and recreation. As early as the thirteenth century, indeed, Villani reported that the land for a circle of three miles around Florence was occupied by rich estates with costly mansions; and Venetian families were not behind in their villas on the Brenta.” But these estates were not for the common folk, and Mumford describes them as “From the beginning, the privileges and delights of suburbanism were reserved largely for the upper class; so that the suburb might almost be described as the collective urban form of the country house- the house in the park- as the suburban way of life is so largely a derivative of the relaxed, playful, goods-consuming aristocratic life that developed out of the rough, bellicose, strenuous existence of the feudal stronghold.”

In Alberti’s seminal work The Ten Books of Architecture, he discusses these country estates saying that “there is a vast deal of satisfaction in a convenient retreat near the town, where a man is at liberty to do just what he pleases . . . I would have the front and whole body of the house

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5 Sharp, p.15.
6 Leonard Wooley. Excavations at Ur: A Record of Twelve Years’ Work.
7 Lewis Mumford. The City in History: its Origins, its Transformations, and its Prospects, p. 484.
8 Mumford, p. 484.
perfectly well lighted, and that it be open to receive a great deal of light and sun, and a sufficient quantity of wholesome air.”

“Though the retreat from the city held manifest advantage for health and family life, it was equally an attempt to achieve liberation from the sometimes dreary conventions and compulsions of an urban society: an effort, given the necessary financial means, to have life on one’s own terms, even if it meant having it alone: the anarchism of the well filled purse, the heresy of the private individual’s seeking to take over within the limits of a private family the functions of a whole community.”

“To be your own uniqur self; to build your unique house, mid a unique landscape: to live in this Domain of Arnheim a self-centered life, in which private fantasy and caprice would have license to express themselves openly, in short, to withdraw like a monk and live like a prince- this was the purpose of the original creators of the suburb. They proposed in effect o create an asylum, in which they could, as individuals, overcome the chronic defects of civilization while still commanding at will the privileges and benefits of urban society. This utopia proved to be, up to a point, a realizable one: so enchanting that those who contrived it failed to see the fatal penalty attached to it- the penalty of popularity, the fatal inundation of a mass movement whose very numbers would wipe out the goods each individual sought for his own domestic circle, and, worse, replace them with a life that was not even a cheap counterfeit, but rather the grim antithesis.”

With the growth of the industrial revolution and the exponential increase in the grime, soot, and smog of the cities, the health benefits of the rural life became more apparent and desirable. As road networks became more efficient, the cities began another stage of growth that was ravenous in its appetite for land. The upper classes were the first to leave the cities, echoing a trend from the 18th and 19th centuries when they had rural estates within a day’s journey of the urban area. With the advent of the railroad and mass transit, these areas and beyond were now available to a far broader population. With the vastly decreased travel times, it was possible to commute to

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10 Mumford, p. 485.
work each day and the surrounding lands became feasible to the middle class. Roger Silverstone, the editor of *Visions of Suburbia*, illustrates the change that the railroad had on suburban England with “Bromley is a case in point. Half a day’s horse ride from London and once a manor of the bishops of Rochester, it was suburbanized, unexceptionally . . . with its population quadrupling in the last forty years of the nineteenth century, following the arrival in 1858 of the railway, which brought the centre of the growing town to around twenty minutes from Cannon Street in the City of London. Bromley . . . like so many towns and villages of the time and equivalent distance from London, quickly succumbed to more speculative, unplanned development.”

In America this rapid expansion was also assisted by Theodore Roosevelt and his New Deal that “after 1932 encouraged the thirty-year mortgage that made home ownership feasible to many working-class families even though few could avail themselves of it until after the Second World War. Roosevelt supported highway construction that laid the foundation of modern suburban sprawl. In 1939, Roosevelt signed legislation that offered tax deductions on mortgage interest, thus providing a major subsidy to suburbanization. From 1934-1953 the American suburban population rose by 75 percent (compared to only 25% for the country as a whole).”

As their new living environment became more common, it began to be represented in popular culture in “memorable postwar american films, *Miracle on 34th Street, Mr. Blanding Builds his Dream Home*, and even *It’s a Wonderful Life* provided a visual image of the popular dream of a suburban home.” Now part of the “American Dream” was to own a home with a yard that surrounded it, no matter how tiny and inefficient it was. With the end of WWII signaling national recovery, the GI Bill with the Veterans Administration and FHA mortgage insurance programs, and the advent of Levittown, NJ, even the lower middle class could afford a section of this grassy dream.

It is interesting to note that the first Levittown included aspects of community in its design, but these aspects were de-emphasized in the later two Levittowns. Sociologist Herbert Gans, who studied the Levittown inhabitants, described the initial version as a “. . . smaller version of the

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11 Mumford, p. 486.
13 Silverstone, p. 119.
14 Silverstone, p. 121.
expensive suburban ones the Levitt firm had built previously, but included an array of home appliances and were located around Village Greens that consisted of neighborhood shops, an playground and a swimming pool.”15 The firm was initially operated by Abraham Levitt and his two sons William and Alfred. Alfred was trained in architecture and was a strong proponent for community centered building, which can be seen from some of his other projects. Together with the executives, they were “divided into two relatively stable factions, the self-styled “idealists” who wanted to build what they considered the best possible community, and the “realists”, concentrated mainly in the comptroller’s office, who were concerned with economy and sometimes questioned innovations that might increase costs or affect sales.”16 Unfortunately, when Alfred left the firm, his brother William was left in control, so much of the push towards creating community disappeared. Gans describes William’s viewpoints as “unlike his father, he had no desire to involve the firm in the life of the community or to uplift the cultural level and civic performance of the residents.”17 He felt that “most of the buyers were moving to Levittown only because of the house and had little interest in the wider community.”18 Outside competition from shopping centers also eroded the ability of the Levittown to support its own shops and attractions, with the result being that the later Levittowns included less of them, and the result was they were much less community oriented.

With the now affordable suburbs growing rapidly (20% growth between 1950 and 1956 alone!), they were filled mostly by the middle-class inhabitants of the urban cities. This resulted in what Paul Grogan characterizes as a multi-wave assault on the urban fabric. The first of these:

“is middle-class flight. Where the aging infrastructure of old cities and the newer, lower-cost amenities of the suburbs propel the middle classes farther and farther toward the suburban horizon. A middle-class consumer taste for detached houses, larger lots, and (at least among whites) homogenous racial and ethnic environments accelerates the flight. The move to the suburbs was almost self-generating. As larger numbers of affluent citizens moved out, jobs followed. In turn, this attracted more families, more roads, and more industries. ...High quality municipal services, and especially well-funded public schools that offered racial

16 Gans, p. 7.
17 Gans, p. 6.
18 Gans, p. 12.
homogeneity and harmony, attracted still more residents, which in turn made select suburbs even wealthier and more attractive. As early as the 1950’s, suburban real-estate advertisements were harping on the themes of race, crime, drugs, congestion, and filth.”

“Since World War II auto-centric policies have eroded the nations public transportation agencies, now receiving one government dollar for every seven handed to the car.”

“With the federal government financing 90 percent of the interstate system, the nation took to the highways, and the moving vans headed to the hills.”

Thus the dream did not take into account the interactions between inhabitants, as the design centered on each family unit and their own desires. The neighborhood was designed to efficiently divide up a parcel of land into yards with easy access for a vehicle, hence the name “subdivision.” The pedestrian was usually ignored or even discouraged, and it is common to find subdivisions being constructed today without sidewalks, thereby discouraging interaction among the inhabitants. Interaction is limited to seeing one’s neighbors drive past to and from work. This takes to an unnatural extreme what George Simmel describes as “one of the large developmental tendencies of social life . . . a small circle firmly closed against neighboring circles.”

“It appears that the planning axiom is to make it as convenient as possible for cars. The arrangement of homes, schools, libraries, businesses, and shopping is intentionally organized so that none of it is accessible in suburbia without automobiles. It is very car-friendly, but not at all people-friendly. The preeminent value upheld by planning by most American communities is that whatever allows more cars to travel greater distances faster is good planning. The clogged highways, the neighborhoods without sidewalks, the acres of black asphalt baking in the summer sun, the periodic poisonous air, the enormous land consumption and destruction, and the inability to walk anywhere that matters are not good for people living or unborn, and these things make communities a place nearly impossible to develop.”

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20 Jane Holtz Kay, Asphalt Nation: How the Automobile Took Over America and How We Can Take It Back, p. 44.  
21 Kay, p. 21.  
Currently, the trend of suburbanization continues, but some are starting to question the relationship. They wonder why so much of their property is covered with grass, and are even questioning if a yard is integral to modern-day satisfaction, or if it detracts from their quality of life. They see the abandonment and decay of the old cities in favor of building anew at the outskirts, and recognize the waste and come to the conclusion that:

“The biggest environmental debacle is not contaminated industrial sites, poor air quality, wetlands destruction, or radioactive waste; rather it is the prodigal waste of existing infrastructure combined with the simultaneous investment in new infrastructure on the fringes of a region... we abandon an existing investment and then replicate the whole thing somewhere else. Yet all of those abandoned or underutilized streets, sewer pipes, water lines, utilities, side walks, business blocks, and industrial facilities, schools, houses, and neighborhoods represent an extraordinary investment in both renewable and non-renewable resources, the energy to make them, and the tremendous human labor required to build them. How can we claim to be environmentally responsible and behave in such a profligate manner?”

Eventually this scenario is to be repeated in reverse in the suburbs. The aging infrastructure in the suburbs will begin to be a drain on the community as a result of the sprawling design. I estimate that there will be much higher infrastructure repair and maintenance costs per unit dwelling, perhaps by a factor of one-hundred. Thus, as these suburbs age past their tenth decade, the unbearable tax burden will hopefully encourage the inhabitants to relocate in the urban centers rather than moving further out to a newer suburb.

“Most people look upon our highway system as a good thing, taking pride in its width, length, appearance, and efficiency. I also assume that most people are unaware of the consequences the system has had on the development of suburbia, on the reduction and deterioration of other forms of public transportation, and on the acceleration of the decay of and disorganization in the central city. That is to say, most people who take pride in our modern highway system cannot see a relationship between it and their complaints about the absence of a psychological sense of community.”

24 Archibald, p. 4.
The biggest loss from the growth of suburbia is the loss of community. Freud describes how human needs are ignored in society as, "we justly find fault with the present state of our civilization for so inadequately fulfilling our demands for a plan of life that shall make us happy."\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{26} Sigmund Freud, \textit{Civilization and its Discontents}, p. 211.
III. COMMUNITY

What is the definition of community? Sarason defines it as “the sense that one belongs in and is meaningfully a part of a larger collectivity, and that there is a network of and structure to the relationships that diminishes rather than increases the feelings of loneliness.”\(^27\) He goes on to include in his sense of a community, “a readily available, mutually supportive network of relationships upon which one could depend, and as a result of which, one did not experience sustained feelings of loneliness that impel one to actions or to adopting a style of living masking anxiety and setting the stage for later and more destructive anguish.”\(^28\)

“We need to feel needed. We yearn to be part of a larger network of relationships that would give greater expression to our needs for intimacy, diversity, usefulness, and belonging.”\(^29\) It is this need for belonging that has caused there to be such a “powerful affiliative drive drawing men and woman into religious congregations, fraternal lodges, ethnic organizations, sports clubs, reform groups, mutual-improvement juntas, professional societies, civic associations, and communal living ventures.”\(^30\) It just takes a look at “the divorce rate, the declining force of institutionalized religion, high-rise living quarters, changing neighborhoods, and a fantastic rate of moving. It is no wonder that the absence of a stabilizing sense of community has been pinpointed as one of the most frequent and significant features of our society.”\(^31\)

Unfortunately, today’s suburban communities are not formed by the accumulated knowledge of psychologists, sociologists, urban planners, economists, and the inhabitants, as it should be, but by the developers who are motivated by short term profit. They do not care about the inhabitants long term happiness after the house is sold.\(^32\) B.F. Skinner, the pioneering psychologist who made some of the first breakthroughs into human behavior and psychology, also called for “a changed relationship between psychology and society, between theory and action, and between science and social responsibility.”\(^33\) He wanted to alter society by having its members attain a psychological sense of

\(^{27}\) Sarason, p. 41.
\(^{28}\) Sarason. p. 1.
\(^{29}\) Sarason, p. 3.
\(^{30}\) Donald Pitzer, America’s Communal Utopias, p. 11.
\(^{31}\) Sarason, p. 154.
\(^{32}\) Gans, p. 7.
\(^{33}\) B. F. Skinner, Walden Two, p. xvi.
community. According to Skinner, this is possible by giving the welfare of the community precedence over that of the individual.

What makes a good community? Key elements of a strong community are the sense of belonging and the security that results from knowing and interacting with your neighbors. Neighbors which make up the modern equivalent of the historic tribe. Throughout mankind’s history people have sought the support and interaction of communities. The Fellowship for Intentional Community describes the common thread of intentional communities as “idealism- each one was founded on a vision of living in a better way, usually in response to something perceived as lacking or missing in the broader culture. Most communities aspire to provide a supportive environment for the development of members’ awareness, abilities, and spiritual growth. Most seek to create a life that will satisfy the basic human cravings: security, family, relationship, fellowship, mutual cooperation, creativity and self-expression, a sense of place, and ultimately a sense of belonging.”

Historically these communities have gravitated towards certain sizes and designs. An example is the Yonomamo peoples of Brazil. The Yonomamo live in a large circular compound that is open in the center where they perform their daily living and rituals. When the tribe grows over a certain size, usually around 200 adults, there is an increase in disagreements and social tension that eventually results in the tribe splitting into two groups. This splitting into two smaller groups resolves the conflicts that were caused by the group being larger than the optimal size for the group.

The Shakers are the most successful and longstanding group in the U.S. They were the most thoroughly organized and have existed for more than 225 years. Arriving in America in 1774, “the Shakers by the 1830’s had attracted some 4,000 members to more than sixty community units called ‘families’ in nearly twenty different agricultural settlements from Maine to Indiana.” The Shakers had an agrarian based society that believed in group oriented living, working, eating, singing, dancing, and spirituality. They promoted the virtues of faith, hope, honesty, innocence, humility, pacifism, patience, thankfulness, and

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34 The Fellowship for Intentional Community, *Communities Directory: A Guide to Intentional Communities and Cooperative*, p. 16.
35 Pitzer, p. 7.
charity. Physical labor was encouraged as well as industry, and they developed a unique style of architecture, furniture, literature, and philosophy. Once again as the size of their communities grew, they would split up to form more intimate and functional groups. These groups averaged 250 people, but they were subdivided into smaller groups of 50 that worked together, coming together for special events and self-governance. Other intentional communities and societies in America have also found this size to be optimal, as the Oneida New York Perfectionists with 238 people in their community, the Amana Society in Iowa with seven villages with about 207 people in each, and the Bethel Community in Missouri which totaled 200 members.

A modern example of this optimal size of a society is the growth of a business. Business models of communication have noted that as a business grows over a certain size there is a breakdown in the transmission of oral communication between all the individuals in the group. After this size point, once again around 200 members, there are individuals who are accidentally not included in the communication chain, and they begin to feel isolated, ignored, and uninvolved with the group. To compensate, a new multi-tiered information system must be implemented in order to retain the functioning and connectedness of the business.

This proven historic sense of community applies equally to urban and suburban areas. Urban cities are divided into smaller neighborhoods or into dwelling configurations like apartment buildings where people can interact. In these higher density buildings, the inhabitants have regular and repeated contact with one another at several of the shared common spaces. These include the front stoop, the lobby, the mail room, the elevator, and the hallways. In each of these spaces the neighbors have frequent interactions such that their neighbors become familiar and lose the oppressive qualities inherent in strangers. These provide the structure for the ‘tribe’ that encourages and allows people to live happier and more effective lives. As de Toqueville observed, “democracy depends upon the free association of strangers to get anything done.” Urban areas are far more conducive to interaction of this nature, as contrasted to the lack of daily contact which occurs in the suburbs. Coming and going at 30 miles per hour (48.3 kph) the inhabitants only see their so-called community form a car window. These are

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36 Gerald and Patricia Gutek, *Visiting Utopian Communities: A Guide to the Shakers, Moravians, and Others*, p. 31-81.
38 Nordhoff, p 25, 262, and 324.
automobile communities, often times devoid of sidewalks or pedestrian areas, thus leading to little or no sense of community or connection with one’s neighbors. The only view of the neighborhood that the occupants of the vehicle ever see is a blur, where a brief fleeting instant of eye contact and a casual nod are supposed to replace an actual conversation or connection.

Based on these historical precedents, I have come up with a design that I believe could function in our urban centers, providing contemporary conveniences while providing the members with identity and belonging which I claim is vital to our collective happiness. I would structure a community in our cities with four autonomous groups of 200 composed of around 50 families that would live in close proximity to each other. Each group would live in a building that housed all 200 or perhaps four contiguous buildings that would have 50 in each. The first few floors would be dedicated to social activities, such as meeting areas, lounges, a theatre, café, grocery store, daycare, and a school. The four groups would interact with each other through sports events, plays, dances, meetings, etc. This structure would give each of the 50 families in each group several layers of belonging and recognition of others. At the center would be the direct family unit that each person belonged too, then being one family of 50 in the building or living unit with all of them readily familiar, and finally being one group of four, and interacting with them through school, activities, etc, but never seeing them enough so that all are known. There would always be members one had not meet yet, and thus the community would seem dynamic and effervescent, never getting old or boring. This type of community could provide for the health of its members as well as the health of our cities, repopulating them with concerned, active, and happy citizens.

Urban infill is a crucial aspect of undermining the suburban cancer. Orion Kriegman, founder of an urban ecovillage in Boston, describes this as “Badly designed, impoverished cities hold the potential to be transformed into forested gardens of vibrant multi-cultural neighborhoods . . . with high-density, comfortable living in large buildings concentrated within several blocks, laced with bike paths, roof gardens, terraced cafes, with asphalt and parking lots torn up to plant orchards, create parks, and surface long-buried streams. Such density would create enormous efficiencies in the delivery of services and use of energy, as well as free up potential land currently paved over by sprawl.”

Cordivae, cofounder of an ecovillage in Denver, states that “Re-use, retrofitting, and rehabilitating existing buildings and using salvaged and found materials, is likely to be more important than natural building methods, due to the resources available in cities and their more conservative zoning regulations.”

In summary, throughout time cultures have sought to foster a sense of community in the places they lived. Only in recent times as suburbia has expanded, has our living environment neglected to include this important element in designing our neighborhoods.

“The arrangement of space is a principle determinant of the kinds of potential relationships that can exist within that space. The cheapest short-term solution, like development of the least expensive real-estate on the periphery, may be the most expensive option for our children and their children. If we decry the isolation of the individual in our world, if we wonder what happened to communities of place, and if we are aghast at the single-minded pursuit of self-interest that is so often a hallmark of our times, we do not need to look for deep-seated common angst. All we need to do is to examine the way we have arranged our spaces in our neighborhoods and around our places of business. As if by intent we have made relationships between people difficult.”

B.F. Skinner states that the choice is clear: “either we do nothing and allow a miserable and probably catastrophic future to overtake us, or we use our knowledge about human behavior to create a social environment in which we shall live productive and creative lives and do so without jeopardizing the chances that those who follow us will be able to do the same.”

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41 Archibald, p. 5.
42 Skinner, p. xvi.
IV. INFLUENCES

Propaganda and the Anti-Suburbanists

The use of photographs as propaganda or as a method of intentionally exerting influence is extensive. From the very beginning with the Portrait of the Artist as a Drowned Man by Hippolyte Bayard, produced in 1840 one year after photography’s unveiling to the public, photography has been used to intentionally attempt to change the viewer’s beliefs and opinions (Figure 6).

Jacob Riis’s was one of the earliest advocates of social change through photography through his documentation of the abysmal living conditions of immigrants that were reproduced in newspapers in 1888 and eventually in a book How the Other Half Lives (Figures 7 and 8). Andy Grundberg describes his crusade as "Using a frantic hyperbole nowadays reserved for tabloid newspapers, Riis sought to mobilize sentiment against slum life in New York City, where in 1877 a population of one million was housed in some 37,000 tenements."43 His goal, Riis stated, was to make a collection of views for lantern slides to show "as no mere description could, the misery and vice that he had noticed in his ten years of experience ... and suggest the direction in which good might be done."44 Another social advocate utilizing photography was Lewis Hine with his Child Labor images that showed young Americans hurt and disabled from industry’s exacting labor (Figures 9 and 10). Hine’s images and descriptions, as well as his tireless lecturing, were critical to the implementation of child labor laws in the early part of the century. Grundberg describes Hine’s work as "his pictures of child labor, of which there are hundreds, are well known as exemplars of the power of photography- because of them, we are told, Congress passed legislation outlawing child labor."45 The United States government was aware of these successes and in the 1930’s believed that the strategy could work again to convince the populace to support the agenda of social reforms.

Documentary photography was found to be a powerful and valuable force for the government administration that supported it, as well as for the individuals who created it. The government supported the use of documentary photography during the 1930’s to gain support for new Deal programs and other relief measures for needy groups of people where photography was used to illustrate the relief proposals

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43 Grundberg, p. 54.
44 Jacob Riis, How the Other Half Lives, p.23.
45 Grundberg, p. 62.
Figure 6.
Figure 7.
Figure 8.
Figure 9,
No future and low wages "Junk"

SHALL INDUSTRY BE ALLOWED TO PUT THIS COST ON SOCIETY?

Figure 10.
because of its powerful verisimilitude (Figures 11, 12, 13, and 14). In one of their first uses of documentary photography, accompanying the memorandum to the director of the division of Rural Rehabilitation in the Emergency Relief Administration of California in April 1935 regarding the “Migration of Draught Refugees to California,” Paul Taylor describes the use of photography in that “the parties [are] photographed as accurately as field investigation methods permit. No variations have been made beyond those necessary to provide intelligible context or condensed presentation. The photographic documentation of this report is authentic.”46 The key word here is authentic. Photography critic Abigail Solomon-Godeau further relates that “the prevalent belief that photographic documentation constituted an unassailable and objective truth was largely unchallenged throughout the century.”47 Because of the continuing misconception that photographs could not lie they continued to be used extensively by the Resettlement Administration and later by the Farm Security Administration to further their own political ends.

The FSA photographers were “vitally concerned with the fate of the migrant farm families and sharecroppers they photographed and were seeking to bring about action on their behalf. They were well aware of the political potential of their craft in helping to do this.”48 Solomon-Godeau describes how they were also aware of the potential to manipulate the subject matter, “when subjects smiled into the camera, they were stage-managed into more somber poses; sharecroppers who wore their best clothes to be photographed were told to change into their ragged everyday wear, persuaded not to wash begrimed hands and faces for the camera.”49 Dorthea Lange later said that “everything is propaganda for what you believe in, actually, isn’t it?”50

In the 1970’s photographers began to train their lenses on our living conditions and they documented the rapidly proliferating suburbs. These artists included Robert Adams, Joe Deal, Bill Owens, and later Richard Misrach. Jonathan Green, critic, professor, and author of American Photography: A Critical History illustrates this new approach as:

48 Levin, p. 31.
49 Solomon-Godeau, p. 179.
50 Levin, p. 31.
Figure 11.
Figure 12.
Figure 13.
Figure 14.
The early photographers of the land stood with the civilized world behind them and looked out toward the wilderness. In the later half of the seventies the new breed of photographers reversed this orientation. They stood in the open land and pointed their cameras back towards the approaching civilization. Rather than explorers pushing into the unknown, these photographers were observers documenting the conflict taking place between man and nature on the new American frontier. They photographed that point in the landscape where the Old West was unceasingly and irreversibly dissolving into contemporary, homogenized America.”

The work by these photographers was in response to the 19th century photographers, whose photographs “were tacit protests against the contemporary production of images that depicted a traditionally sublime landscape; such photographs were considered anachronistic, naïve, and indefensible.” Green describes the whole of the work as “the dominant theme of this new American Frontier was the phenomenon of change that occurs with the transformation of the wilderness, rural territory, and open land into urban environment. The dominant presence in this photography, however, was not the present but the past . . . From this perspective it describes the land as it has been tamed, conquered, broken, and developed by the advancing line of settlements. The frontier that is photographed is the intersection of reality, myth, technology and wilderness, rural independence and industrial dependence.”

“In the work of Lewis Baltz and Robert Adams, art, nature, and industrial form become inextricably tangled. Both photograph the meeting point of land and settlement in such a way that the landscape and the buildings assume qualities traditionally associated with the other. In reality, both the land and the architecture are usually banal, sterile, bleak, and scruffy . . . The landscape takes on attributes of industrial regularity, urban brutality, and artificiality.”

“Though these photographers presented their work as formal statement and careful documentation and though they were deeply aware of the difference between undefiled terrain and developed land, their hallmark was not irony. Neither are their photographs emotionally neutral: these are photographs about taking, exploiting, and raping the land. At the same time they are also about the visual potentials of a damaged landscape. Uncomfortable before the traditionally magnificent views, these photographers self-consciously avoided the overly dramatic; they were unwilling and unable to make the grand gestures of Muybridge, Weston,

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52 Green, p. 166.
53 Green, p. 164.
54 Green, p. 167-168.
and Ansel Adams. Equally uncomfortable before the spiritual ennui of the contemporary landscape, they sought out the sublime aspect of the ordinary. Photography provided a means for creating visual beauty out of the material that in reality offered little hope for spiritual redemption. Instead of presenting the distressing suburban world that Peter Blake recorded in 1973 in God's Own Junkyard, these photographers took a view closer to that advanced by Robert Venturi in 1972 in Learning from Las Vegas. They recognized the beautiful in the disdained and endowed the vulgar and the ordinary with a new pastoralism. In the end, then, the landscape and suburb are both glorified and disparaged in their work. The photography is torn between being true to their world - which is the basis for documentation - and being true to the medium- which is the basis of art. The essential hallmark of the photography of the new American landscape is ambivalence.”

Adams is perhaps the most recognized of the Topographics group, as he is a skilled writer as well as photographer. He photographed in Denver, Colorado during the 1970’s, capturing the incredible growth that the city underwent during that time period. He shows the advancing suburban landscape and its detritus, form litter on a doomed grassy plane to the doomed lives of the inhabitants in this empty landscape (Figure 15). Adams refers to destruction with, “The suburban West is, from a moral perspective, depressing evidence that we have misused our freedom.” He shows the population isolated, alone, and miserable. Images of lone diners amid countless empty chairs highlight the solitude that is modern day Denver and the New West (Figure 16).

In Adams’s book What We Bought, he laments the destruction of the West in his eloquent images and words. In the preface, he describes the encroachment of the city “as the metropolitan area’s population increased, large tracts of hastily conceived commercial and residential buildings were added, weakening the social fabric. Who were one’s neighbors?” He documents these sprawling tracts of houses and their inevitable purposelessness, furious over our neglect and lack of control. He speaks a sorrowful testament of our shortsightedness with, “In a few years the area’s ruin would be testament to a bargain we had tried to strike. The pictures record what we purchased, what we paid, and what we could not

55 Green, p. 167.
56 Green, p. 168.
57 Robert Adams, What we bought, Preface.
Figure 15.
Figure 16.
buy. They document a separation from ourselves, and in turn from the natural world that we professed to love.”

In Bill Owens’ book *Suburbia*, his portraits of a town’s inhabitants were collected together to create a derogatory representation of suburbia. He places his own views onto his subjects through the selective use of quotes from the subjects, using short, fragmentary phrases and sentences to advance his own agenda, as the complete dialogue that was recorded would not portray the subjects in such a poor light (Figure 17). Contrary to what he says in the introduction, Owens is not attempting to express the lives and reality of the people, but instead his own reality and how he believes that suburbia has affected it. The introductory images show the destructiveness of the suburban growth process that few of the interviewed individuals seem to acknowledge (Figure 18). Another theme presented in the book is the general lack of satisfaction with their lives and lifestyles, and the ways they try to fill the void (Figure 19). One of the more interesting aspects is that because they are so deeply habituated with the ideas of suburban living, they never realize that it is the cause of their misery. One man, late middle-aged and balding, reflects on his life as “my hobby is drinking.” He is pictured sitting at a miniature bar in his house with a multitude of assorted liquor bottles surrounding him (Figure 20). Rampant materialism is another manifestation of the unattainable salve that Owens represents. Owens also wants to express the isolation and loneliness that a suburban lifestyle enforces. The separation of everyone in the community by walls and fences, and each family’s retreat into the hidden back yard, maintains a fragmented and unhappy society. One of the images without text simply shows an empty living room with two chairs facing a television (Figure 21). The image is cold and barren and illustrates the lack of connection except through T.V. In another image, one couple insisted that it was a source of “freedom” that “no one knows what you really do,” but actually this feeling of complete anonymity is at the root of their problems.

Joe Deal photographs “the outskirts of Albuquerque, Deal records the intersection of the social and the natural world. The land has not yet solidified into urban center or suburb. It lies uneasily between past and present, still harboring contrasting rural and urban values. It simultaneously embodies the American dream of country living and the nightmare of developer exploitation . . . Streets and utility poles

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58 Adams, Preface.
Figure 17. Bill Owens. *We’re really happy. Our kids are healthy, we eat good food, and we have a really nice home*, 1973. Gelatin Silver Print. Bill Owens, p. 53.
Bill Owens. *I bought the lawn in six-foot rolls. It's easy to handle. I prepare the ground and my wife and son helped roll out the grass. In one day you have a front yard, 1973.* Gelatin Silver Print. Bill Owens, p. 11.
Figure 19.
Bill Owens. *Our house is built with the living room in the back, so in the evenings we sit out front of the garage and watch the traffic go by*, 1973. Gelatin Silver Print. Bill Owens, p. 115.
Figure 21.
suddenly appear, incongruously, on empty land. In each single photograph the full transition from open land to suburb happens right before our eyes. ”61

Richard Misrach, while not part of the New Topographics group, is a contemporary photographer who portrays the West, the landscape, and its inhabitants and the destruction that accompanies their presence. His photographs show complex issues of historical, political, social, and aesthetic concerns. Much of his work deals with issues of beauty and aesthetics, in that the images of ravaged lands are difficult to reconcile with the concept of beauty (Figure 22). Misrach describes it as “aestheticizing horror”, influenced by Walter Benjamin and Susan Sontag, making it not only more palatable, but attractive.62 Since the 80’s he has photographed the American deserts and man’s influence on them (Figure 23). He shows a world that is not a wilderness, untouched by mankind, but rather a land that has been “converted for economic gain and in the process stained and trampled, franchised and fenced, burned, flooded, grazed, mined, exploited, and laid waste.”63 (Figure 24)

These topographic artists each examine the American landscape and its inhabitants, but in different manners. Adams focuses on the suburban buildings and their failures. Owens photographs the people who live in one Californian suburb, using their own words as testimony of their unhappiness. Deal’s images are aloof and distant with the seemingly deserted neighborhoods echoing their lack of life and vitality. Misrach sees the beauty in the desert and the waste that mankind creates with thoughtless disregard. These four artists are examples of the Anti-Suburbia work that has influenced my philosophies and photography in my desire to try and subvert the suburbs and eventually play a role in their destruction.

The Harrisons

The 60’s were a time when many artists were changing their approach to art. It was a time when there was a growth of a “counterculture loathing of commercialism and a reluctance to create salable art-as-object to be showcased in the gallery-collector’s home-museum context.”64 As a result, there was an

60 Owens, p. 42.
61 Green, p. 173.
63 Misrach, p. 22.
64 Irving Sandler, Art of the Postmodern Era, p. 62.
Figure 22.
Figure 23.
Figure 24.
increase in the use of earth art, installation art, performance art, and body art. "This was a period when artistic opinion about the environment was dominated by artists such as Michael Heizer, whose Double Negative (1969) involved the displacement of 240,000 tons of earth in the Nevada desert; Walter De Maria, who set 400 steel poles in straight lines over a square mile of the New Mexico desert to draw lightning to his Lightning Field (1977); and Robert Smithson, whose Spiral Jetty (1970) was a giant coil of rock stretching from the shore into Utah's Great Salt Lake. Created to move art out of the gallery into the real world and to defy the turning of art into a commodity, projects like these also had a less savory side in their tendency to usurp the earth as just another kind of raw material available for artistic transformation and exploitation."  

The 60's were also a time of counterculture revolution and the rise of ideals of environmentalism and ecological respect, and while some of these artists were concerned with the environment and the impact of their work, the majority of artists' pieces were destructive and unconcerned with the ecosystems they were situated in. The double negative essentially dumped 240,000 tons of earth onto the plants and animals of the surrounding terrain, as well as creating a 'tailings pile' equivalent to those created by the mining companies which are the source of pollutants for centuries to come. Some of the artists realized the negative aspects of their work, but for many it was late in their careers.  

"Towards the end of Smithson's life, his thinking became more positive. He began to think of ecology and the social role that earthworks might play in the rehabilitation of the environment. As he wrote: 'Across the country there are many mining areas, disused quarries, and polluted lakes and rivers. One practical solution for the utilization of such devastated places would be land and water re-cycling in terms of 'Earth Art.' The artist would mediate between ecologists and industrialists. Smithson proposed both to prettify strip mines, sludge heaps, and other devastated sites and to reveal the ravages of humankind's pollution. He executed one land reclamation project, Broken Circle/Spiral Hill (1971), in an abandoned quarry in the Netherlands. A year later he was tragically killed before he could further realize his land reclamation art."  

Helen and Newton Harrison are a California couple who have been involved in creating environmental art that cooperates with the environment, and look to nature with the intention of preservation. They shared a teaching position at the University of California in San Diego from 1969 to 1993, and it was in

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66 Sandler, p. 61.
the early 70's that they began to form their unique approach to environmental issuers and concerns. Their work had a large influence on the structure of this thesis as well as it's presentation in the thesis exhibition.

Their approach stems from taking an "issue with conventional thinking that the expansion of urban boundaries ultimately breed disaster for both the land and its human inhabitants. Instead they advocate various forms of restoration and reclamation to bring human needs back into synchronism with natural processes."67 The presentation of their work was quite unique for their time as "Over the years the Harrisons have developed a unique ecopolitics, couched in the form of an ecopoetry. Combining text with photographs, drawings, and maps, the Harrisons employ the language of storytelling to present the results of their investigations into a particular problem or a specific ecosystem. Each work is presented as a poetic dialogue woven together from diverse voices, including those of planners, ecologists, botanists, foresters, the artists themselves, and even the rivers and waterways whose histories and futures are under consideration. Borrowing promiscuously from other disciplines, the voices use metaphor, irony, and analogy to suggest new ecological strategies and approaches."68 (Figures 25 and 26)

The Harrisons were working on a project with the Sava river in Yugoslavia, which had been damaged by industrial farming practices that leached toxic fertilizers into the soil and water, and the environmental burdens of the recently arrived industry along the river, consisting of a paper mill, a coal mine, an atomic energy plant, and a fertilizer factory (Figure 27).

"As with all the Harrisons' projects, their work on the Sava comprised two parts. The first involved the actual conversations with the planners, scientists, and ordinary people they encountered in their investigations and the reverberations these conversations set in motion. The second part of the project consisted of the visual record that the Harrisons produced in the form of an installation of maps, texts, and photographs. ...the work wraps around the gallery walls. Viewers follow the course of the river visually as they read the texts in which the Harrisons meditate upon the specific problems and solutions at various junctures. Perhaps more than any other narrative by the Harrisons, this project captures the conversational nature of their work. Sections of the text are written as dialogues between the artists and various individuals whom they encountered in their investigations. We hear from a Botanist about the dangerous effects that modern flood-

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67 Heartney, p. 145.
68 Heartney, p. 144.
An aerial view of Pasadena's Devil's Gate Dam circa 1986 reveals the drained debris basin and rubble pile the Harrisons encountered when invited to develop a watershed restoration plan for the area.

Figure 25.
The architectural model for the Harrisons' Devil's Gate project was an important element in the presentation of their ideas to local government and ecological groups.

Figure 26.
Helen and Newton Harrison, *Atempause für den Save Fluss* (Breathing Space for the Sava River), 1989. The Harrisons' plan for the Sava River included a proposal to create a nature preserve for migrating waterfowl in an area currently containing large fish ponds.

Noting that runoff from the chemical fertilizers employed in the farms that line the Sava River jeopardizes the watershed, the Harrisons proposed the replacement of current practices by organic farming.

**Figure 27.**
control methods were having on the native stork and sea eagle population. They present concerns of a young ornithologist who was also working with the concept of reedbed purification systems. They talk with a landscape architect engaged in mapping the current floodplains in Europe against the vastly more extensive ones that originally existed there.”69

“Although the Harrisons work with specific sites and particular problems, they also take a long view, using these situations as case studies with which to explore the larger economic, philosophic, and cultural assumptions behind environmental policy. Implicit in each project is a critique of conventional thinking about environmental problems.”70 “In the end, although the Harrisons point with pride to those situations in which their ideas have been implemented in some form or another, this process of raising questions and challenging assumptions is more central to their work than are any concrete results. Ultimately they are artists, not scientists or administrators, yet this distinction remains one of the most misunderstood aspects of their work.”71

“Critics within the art world frequently object to their work, claiming that it belongs more properly to the realm of science than art. What sort of formal criteria, they ask, can be brought to bear on work whose subject matter involves issues such as groundwater purification and wetlands restoration, with presentations relying heavily on maps, and aerial photographs and drawings that have clearly been selected for their informational rather than aesthetic value? Granted, the Harrisons’ ideas about reforestation, floodplain restoration, and habitat generation are useful, but by what stretch can they also be termed “artistic”? Although it is true that the Harrisons’ work does not resemble art in any traditional sense, it employs a multilevel, metaphorical kind of thinking that differs sharply from the more linear and instrumental approach of conventional science and technology. This can be seen not only in the language employed in the Harrisons’ written texts but also in the ease with which the artists are able to shift paradigms, moving between the notion, for example, of nature as the figure as well as the ground of human activity reversing the perception of flooding as a problem to its being regarded as the potential solution to the creation of a viable local ecology.”72

“As Children of the Conceptual art movement of the 1970’s, the Harrisons have well understood Conceptualism’s lesson that the meaning of an artwork is to be found not in the object itself but in the physical and conceptual frame that surrounds it. In its more orthodox commodifying form, Conceptual art involves a critique of the institutions of the art world. It questions commodifying art, the separation of art from life, and the barriers set up between art and audience by museums and galleries. In an analogous way, the

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69 Heartney, p. 156.  
70 Heartney, p. 159.  
71 Heartney, p. 160.  
72 Heartney, p. 160-161.
Harrisons remove the frame from the environment, critiquing the institutions that have been set up to manage land use and natural resources. As landscape artists of a new kind, they propose that nature is best comprehended not as a collection of landscape features to be memorialized in paint but as a set of interrelationships among the forces of biology, climate, and technology.”

Like myself, they also believe that that one can make a difference in the world, “Likening their process to the flow of a river, they talk about ‘conversational drift’ and suggest that their ultimate goal is to ‘change the conversation.’” This figure of speech captures their sense that change on a large scale happens only when the underlying metaphors that shape public belief are subtly altered and internalized.”

Thus by raising your arguments in discussion with others, there is often a subtle long-term change in their attitudes as a result. And there is a possibility that one’s espoused ideals will be repeated by those who have heard them, and could spread and take a life of their own, traveling through the population like an outbreak of influenza or measles.

More recently, “Postmodernism has made it clear that they [artists] must position themselves in relationship to their own identities, the social issues that surround them, and the world in which they live.” Some critics, such as Douglas Crimp from October are overly pessimistic about the ability of activist art to affect change. He states that “One has the sense that the kind of interventionist work that you and a few other artists make can hardly make a dent in the monolithic monster that the . . . world has become.” Lucy Lippard responds to this defeatist attitude by saying that art “may not be the best didactic tool available, but it can be a powerful partner to the didactic statement, speaking its own language (and, incidentally, sneaking subversively into interstices where didacticism and rhetoric can’t pass) . . . Artists alone can’t change the world. Neither can anyone else, alone.”

Hans Haacke states that if “art cannot change the world,” it can help to change “the consciousness and drives of the men and women who would change the world.” Haacke also believes in the power to effect change inherent in the cultured upper class, and he describes it as “People who visit art galleries,

73 Heartney, p. 161.
74 Heartney, p. 148.
77 Lucy Lippard, Trojan Horses: Activist Art and Power, p. 344.
78 Becker, p. 126.
museums, and so forth obviously come from a different culture. The same is true for those who learn about what’s in the galleries through mediation of the press. A good number of them are, in fact, working in the consciousness industry, where opinions are made and promoted. That is the arena where my art and ideas could perhaps be of use.”

Performance Art

In much of performance art from the 70’s onward, the photograph was used as a tool to document the performance or increase the audience. As Lippard states “the ability to produce visions is impotent unless it’s connected to a means of communication and distributed.” Some artists, such as Laurie Anderson, were initially opposed to utilizing photography to document their performances, but she then changed her mind, at first “ I thought that since my performances were about memory, the best way to record them was in other people’s memories.” She subsequently realized that ‘other people don’t remember them very well.”

Initially, there was argument about the status of the photograph, “was it simply a nonart record of an artistic event or an artwork in its own right, to be marketed as such?” Postminimalists whose sympathies were countercultural believed that the documentation of a work was not art and thus not salable. They had turned to these mediums because they did not want to create art commodities with the belief that their refusal to produce salable objects would actually subvert the art market. These negative attitudes about the commodification of art seem to have originated at a time when the avant-garde was heavily influenced by Marxist theory, which was anti-capitalist. Thus the ideals of capitalistic society, if applied to this work, would have been contradictory. However, much of today’s activist art is not so narrowly focused, and encompasses a far broader range of designs and intentions. For much of this contemporary work, the advocacy of social agendas is not necessarily at odds with marketing and selling the crafts of one’s production.

“In the end, the documentation was accorded the status of art object. Indeed, much of the impermanent postminimal art seemed to have been made because of the documentation that it yielded: It was made to

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80 Lippard. p. 347.
81 Amelia Jones, Body Art/Performing the Subject, p. 32.
be photographed. As Nancy Foote wrote: ‘It’s ironic that an art whose generating impulse was the urge
to break away from the collectible object might through an obsession with the extent and quality of its
documentation have come full circle.’ Consequently photography assumed a new importance in avant-
garde art.”82

“Seemingly acting as a ‘supplement’ to the ‘actual’ body of the artist in performance, the
photograph of the body art event or performance could, in fact, be said to expose the
body itself as supplementary, as both the visible proof of the self and its endless referral.
Mendieta’s later Silueta pieces, which document the body only through the marks it has
left on the landscape, explicitly enacts this doubled lack indicated by the photograph.
The photograph, like the body itself, is a supplement to the inescapable lack that founds
subjectivity (the existence of the body in the social, vis-à-vis other subjects). The
supplement, argues Jacques Derrida, is a ‘terrifying menace’ in its indication of absence
and lack but also ‘the first and surest protection...against that very menace. This is why
it cannot be given up.’ The sequence of supplements initiated by the body art project-the
body ’itself,’ the spoken narrative, video, and other visuals within the piece, the video,
film, photograph, and text documenting it for posterity- announces the necessity of ‘an
infinite chain, ineluctably multiplying the supplementary mediations that produce the
sense of the very thing they defer: the mirage of the thing itself, of immediate presence,
or ordinary perception. Imediacy is derived.... The play of substitution fills and marks
a determined lack.’ Derrida notes that ‘the indefinite process of supplementarity has
always already infiltrated presence, always already infiltrated presence, always already inscribed there the space of repetition and the splitting of the self.”83

“While, predictably, many have relied on the photograph, in particular, as “proof” of the fact that a
particular action took place, of the meaningfulness of the subject-in-performance, or as a marketable
object to be raised to the formalist height of an “art” photograph, in fact such a reliance is founded on
ideological belief systems similar to those underlying the investment in the “presence” of the body in
performance.”84

Most of this work reinforces my concept that the photograph is seldom the performer. Rarely is the
image exerting the force in the piece. Almost always it is not seen until after the performance is over,
when the film is then developed and printed. So the photographs are viewed after the performance, in a
permanent record of what occurred. However, Yves Klein’s “Leap!” comes close to being an actual
performance (Figure 28). There were two photographs taken, one of Klein jumping off of a wall onto a

82 Sandler, p. 24.
83 Jones, p. 34.
cushion. The second photo is the exact same image without the cushion or the jumper. Later, the two images are put together so that a relatively seamless image is the result with someone jumping out into the street with nothing to break their fall. Playing on the “a photo cannot lie”, the photograph pretends to be documenting a performance which “is a supplement of a supplement: a seemingly rigorous visual, indexical marker of a body’s having ‘been there’ before the camera/audience (‘in the photograph”),’ Roland Barthes writes, “something has posed in front of the tiny hole and has remained there forever . . . In photography, the presence of the thing (at a certain past moment) is never metaphoric.”85 The impact of the performance does not exist until the two photographs are combined in the darkroom. But still, the result is documenting an imaginary performance.

Chris Burden originally used photography to solely document his pieces, but he later realized that photography was far more complex when it was presented to a viewer (Figure 29). He stated that he “previously maintained that the photographs of my performance work were merely a documentation and not the work, in actuality, I now see that the photographs were an integral part of the work, having been carefully chosen and condensed to a single emblematic image.”86 However, he also believed “that the still photograph is now understood by society to be merely a symbol of an event and not the actual event itself,” versus their interpretation of film as being the actual event.87 “By being symbolic, my still photographs allow the viewer’s imagination to make the performance a mythical and bigger-than-life event.”88

For Andy Goldsworthy, whose images include “Hazel Stick Throws” where he throws the sticks into the air while documenting it with a camera, photographs take on a much larger function where he actually believes that the photograph is a crucial aspect of his performances (Figure 30). He states that his “art is visual evidence which runs through my life as a whole and gives me a broader, more distant view of what I am doing.”89 The documentation is so critical that he loses connection with these performances

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84 Jones, p. 36.
85 Jones, p. 36.
Figure 28.
Figure 29.
Figure 30.
that were not documented. He said on these instances where the performance is not documented by film, that the work "feels dislocated-like a half-forgotten memory."90

Rosiland Krauss recognized the philosophical reciprocity of photography and performance in her 1977 essay "Notes on the Index," in which she situates the two as different kinds of indexicality. As indexes, both labor to "substitute the registration of sheer physical presence for the more highly articulated language of aesthetic conventions."91 As Amelia Jones describes it, "the body art event needs the photograph to confirm its having happened; the photograph needs the body art event as an ontological "anchor" of its indexicality."92

This thesis project utilizes the photograph in a very different manner, as the photograph IS the performance. The image is an indexical marker of "being there" subtlety trying to convince the viewer that they are actually in the city. Occurring over an extended time, the audience is living with the images in their house and are in daily and unavoidable contact with the image. Over the length of time that the image is in their house, the viewers have an interaction with it, even if it is on a subconscious level. Thus the performance occurs only when the viewer interacts with the images, requiring their presence for the performance to proceed. In this process, the audience is an active participant with the images versus a passive viewer, constantly interacting with the image and being influenced by it. Rather than using photography to document the performance, the documentation is accomplished by the surveys that measure the attitudinal changes of the participants through pre- and post-performance surveys.

The Cognitive Dissonance Effect

The Cognitive Dissonance Effect was first thought up in the 60s as a theory that examined people's beliefs and actions and explained their responses when the beliefs and actions were in conflict with each other. It was noticed that people try to be consistent in their thoughts, beliefs, and actions together, but if there was an inconsistency an attempt was made to restore harmony by realigning living and beliefs. Festinger notes that "The presence of dissonance gives rise to pressures to reduce or eliminate the

90 Goldsworthy, July 10, 1980.
91 Jones, p. 37.
92 Jones, p. 37.
dissonance. The strength of the pressures to reduce the dissonance is a function of the magnitude of the dissonance.93

The basic theory is as follows: “1: The existence of dissonance, being psychologically uncomfortable, will motivate the person to try to reduce the dissonance and achieve consonance. 2: When dissonance is present, in addition to trying to reduce it, the person will likely avoid situations and information which would likely increase the dissonance.”94

An example of this effect is shown by the interaction of beliefs and actions. For example, if there is a conflict between a memory of a belief and an action, the memory is far more malleable. If a person holds a belief that they hate cigarettes and would never partake in them, but then begins accepting cigarettes when in the company of friends, there is a clear conflict between what they are doing and their belief system. It is impossible to resolve the conflict because the individual is holding a cigarette, but memories and beliefs are not as rigid. It is possible for the person to forget that they ever held such negative and condescending attitudes about smoking.

In another interesting example of the cognitive dissonance effect, simple body self-movements can influence our attitudes. The study involved a recorded message about a hypothetical tuition raise at a college.95 Several of the attendees of the college listened to the message while moving their head either in the nodding/yes or shaking/no repeatedly during the recording. A third group of students was the control and moved parts of the body that were not the head, such as an arm or leg. After they had listened to the message while moving a part of their body, they were asked questions about their attitudes towards the tuition raise. Students that were nodding were more likely to be in support of it, while those who had been shaking their head were opposed to it. The control group tended to have a more neutral viewpoint. Both groups when probed about the reasons for their attitude of support, would even corroborate their stance with confabulated or circumstantial arguments, much of which was of a questionable nature. The generally accepted interpretation of this study is that certain body movements such as nodding or shaking one’s head hold deep cultural connotations associated with agreement and disagreement. The control group was moving a part of the body that was not associated with a strong

93 Leon Festinger, A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance, p. 16.
deeply engrained cultural meaning, so it had no influence on their interpretation of the recording. But those students who were nodding or shaking their heads biased their interpretation of the recording so that it was in agreement with their body movement. Thus it seems that the actions of the body can influence the mind in subtle ways. This experiment can be generalized to other actions that the mind would interpret as a subtle change in its views and its memories, based on the its interpretation of the action.

A third example is from the Southwestern Bell Headquarters in my hometown of St. Louis. Every six months the artwork in every office is exchanged for new work, and the employees in whose office the work goes do not have a say in the matter. Without fail, during the first month there is bitter complaining about how much the employees hate the new work and how they want the old work back. And yet at the end of the six months when the art is exchanged once again, the same employees who initially hated the art hanging in their office, complain again about how they hate the new art and want the old back again. This could be explained by the theory that with unfamiliarity art is difficult to appreciate until the person has lived with it for a while. But it can also be explained by the cognitive dissonance theory in that if someone puts something in your personal office that you do not like, and yet it is still there day after day, there is dissonance. Since they do not have the option of removing the art, after a time it is easier to change one's opinion of the art than to remove the dissonance. This scenario is actually very closely related to my thesis project.

95 Festinger, p. 35.
V. THESIS SUMMARY

After studying the work of philosophers and artists such as Marcuse, Haacke, and Lipard as well as the theories of Freud, Skinner, and Sarason, it is clear that photography can be used to change the individual’s perceptions and viewpoints of the world. Specifically, in this project, I believe that I can lead people to the realization that the current preference in America for suburban over urban living is flawed. History and experience support this again and again, from the earliest Indian tribes to our current business structures, indicating the need for interactions and relatedness in small groups – interactions to which the automobile and the subdivision deny access. Our social health and mental well being necessitates an environment with closer, shared contact provided by defined neighborhoods, shared facilities like the front stoop, hallways and community centers, and common experiences. I see photography as one way to reverse this trend to the suburbs and to encourage inhabitants to relocate to the urban center.

Unlike the performance art of the 1970’s onward, when photography was a documentary tool or used to disseminate the performance to a larger audience, this project utilizes the photograph in a very different manner. A single photograph is placed in a private home to show the city as a desirable place to live and enable the viewer to feel that he/she is participating in the urban space. By placing the image over their own window views, the image gains priority over the view, subtly conveying to the viewer the idea that they are coveting the urban view over their own. Thus this project takes the photograph further because the photograph is the performance.
VI. EXPERIMENT

Hypothesis

The hypothesis of the experiment is that if someone lives for an extended period of time with an image that superimposes an urban view over their suburban views, then his or her viewpoint about urban life should be made more positive. If the participants are living in an urban area, then superimposing an urban view over their similar urban view should have little effect on their viewpoints about urban life. Thus there should be a greater change in attitude if they are living in the suburbs than if they are already living in an urban area.

Methods

One of the first issues I faced was deciding what sort of image I should use. “Marcuse contends that what is deeply satisfying and aesthetic is political and art with political aspirations should utilize the subversive power of beauty when appropriate.” However, Becker contends that “work considered by political activists and critics to be the most “subversive” is often filled with unpleasure, deliberately negating the Beautiful and reflecting the unhappiness one would want to change.”

“William Blake believed that his poetry had to be difficult to read, that it was in the act of struggling to understand the text that transformations of consciousness actually occurred.” “According to Marcuse, the strength of art lies in its Otherness, its incapacity for ready assimilation. If art comes too close to reality, if it strives too hard to be comprehensible, accessible across all boundaries, it then runs the risk of becoming mundane. And if this occurs, its function as negation to the existing world is abandoned. To be effective, art must exert its capacity for estrangement.” This also corresponds with the cognitive dissonance theory, that the greater the dissonance or estrangement, the greater the viewpoint change.

After considering this issue of image, I chose images that were neither remarkably interesting or artistic, but rather their mundaneness implied that the viewer was living in the city. The images were takes from windows in the homes and apartments of friends and acquaintances in large urban areas including

96 Becker, p. 123.
97 Becker, p. 124.
98 Becker, p. 127.
99 Becker, p. 119.
Chicago, St. Louis, and New York. Initially, I expressly chose photographic sites that showed views that were ordinary: a back yard, the side of a plain building, a non-descript building across the street. Their function was to impart a universal sense of "citiness" to the viewer, rather than describe a particular subject matter or desirable location. After photographing the rear of apartments I found that they did not strike a chord of interest or resonate appeal. In response, I gradually enlarged the content of the photo to include images of building features, facades, architectural points of interest, including both lower and higher density dwellings and urban landscapes. Ultimately six of these images were selected for the Anti-Suburbia Series IX and displayed in the exhibition. One image was selected to be reproduced for the experiment as it had what several individuals believed was an "urban feel" yet was aesthetic and not too industrial.

Taking the selected image, I created a 20”x24” image on Duratrans material, a translucent photographic paper, so that the images could be backlit. I then collected a group of six identical window frames taken out of an urban house undergoing renovations. These frames were 22”x26” in size with six panes of glass in each. The frames were in poor condition, so they were stripped of their old peeling paint so that they revealed the natural beauty of their wood. The identical Duratrans images were attached to the back of each of the frames, so that they appeared to be an actual window with an urban view outside.

Second, I had to resolve where a display of my work would have the greatest effect on elevating the viewers' opinion of cities. The creation of an activist piece is primarily about awareness and change. Lucy Lippard puts the goal of activist art into her own words as one that "leads us not into the valley of thoughtlessness but to the moving of mountains."\textsuperscript{100} In order to accomplish an alteration of the trajectory of society, the artist has many different approaches available, each which must be examined. Lippard describes this as the artist must "take into consideration . . . how it will reach its context and why."\textsuperscript{101} Generally the artist has limited choices about where to exhibit work. With activist art to effectively get the message across so that change will occur adds another dimension to the selection of venue. Irving Sandler echoes this concern by asking "If political art is to be effective, where should it be exhibited? In elitist private galleries and museums or in the real world, installed in public places, for

\textsuperscript{100} Lippard, p. 341.
\textsuperscript{101} Lippard, p. 343.
example, as murals or billboards?" In the end I decided on placing the images in private homes in the Rochester area to intensify the duration of exposure to the images. Most other venues would only have a few moments of contact with the viewer, rather than an extended period of interaction. The images were located in the living room or family room where the individuals spent most of their leisure time, and placed in front one of the windows in that room that had a view. Over a pre-determined period of eight weeks the home’s occupants would have daily and unavoidable contact with the image, during which it would exert a subtle but relentless dissonant force. Thus the decision to place the images into private residences was calculated to have the greatest effect on changing the viewers opinions. The photograph was presented as a beautiful object to be coveted and desired.

After I decided that I wanted to have the performance occur in the participants’ houses, I then had to decide which houses. Six individuals were selected to participate in the research project, three were living in the city of Rochester, New York, on the same street about a mile from the center of the city. They were selected by walking up to every third house on the street and asking the occupants of they would consent to participating in the experiment. The other three residences were chosen in a similar manner, although they were living outside the city and several miles away in the same subdivision.

The six individuals were given a 112 question survey documenting their ideas and concerns with living in a city versus the suburbs before the image was given to them. The same survey was readministered again at the end of eight weeks to determine if there had been an attitudinal shift as a result of living with the objects. I scored the questions on a scale of 1-10. Both surveys were examined, and each individual’s questions from the 1st survey were correlated with the 2nd to see if they had changed, and if so how much.

Results
The results were encouraging, with a +1.22 correlation between the before and after surveys for the suburb group, and a +1.08 correlation for the city group. A correlation of 1.00 would indicate no change, while a 2.00 would mean it was double, so these results indicate that there is some change.

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102 Sandler, p. 382.
Conclusion

The experiment showed that the participants did have a change in their viewpoint over the eight week duration of living with the images. The time period was arbitrary, and it is possible that a time greater than eight weeks would have been more persuasive. It is also possible that more images in each residence would have amplified the effect. Perhaps different images could have been screened in a methodical and accurate manner, to find one image that may have been more influential.

Experimentally there were some issues as this was not a randomized, controlled, double-blind study. There also was no control group of comparable individuals in similar homes who did not live with the images. The small number of participants is also problematic as an experimental group of six is statistically too small to get a valid result, and I should have used photography's strength of almost unlimited reproducibility to print hundred of images to place in homes. Although I cannot statistically prove my results, the initial test results would lead me to want to replicate this experiment on a larger scale.
VII. CONCLUSION

In order to contribute to the bettering of society, I have been exploring ways in which photography can help me to achieve that goal. Often one does not know where to begin or how to effect the most change. Robert Adams described his grappling with this issue as, “I was left at the end of the day with a sense of the certainty of evil, of the ambiguity of what photography could do with it, and of the fact of my own limited skills.”

Photography has a long history of being used in an attempt to objectively document injustices, evils, and issues that need attention. It has also been utilized as an intentional propaganda tool, attempting to bias the viewer with graphic images of the horrors of war, the plight of the destitute, or the need for social change. Most of this propaganda was based on an appeal to our emotions of fear, compassion, honor, and goodness. Very little of this was scientifically based, and it did not try to quantify the reactions and then improve upon them. With this thesis, I was trying to incorporate scientific methods and psychological principals with the use of photography as a tool for social change. The photos I produced were anti-suburbia propaganda that utilized the cognitive dissonance effect to alter the viewpoint of the viewers towards urban living with the goal of changing the attitudes of suburbanites regarding living in an urban environment. It is this combination of the arts with the sciences that I think makes this project interesting, and opens up a large area for further exploration.

My thesis was more than just images, but was actually an attempt to explore, measure, and quantify the attitudinal change of two experimental populations. Even though the study should have had more participants, the placement of the images did have an effect, which makes it a success. It reinforces artists’ belief that their work has an effect on the lives of its viewers. That their photographs can continue to exert their influence for as long as the images exist, often outliving the author of the images. Thus there is a kind of permanence or immortality through the creation of art. As Andrew Mellon replied when asked about his collection of art that forms the core of the National Gallery in Washington, “Every man wants to connect his life with something he thinks eternal.”

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103 Robert Adams, Beauty in Photography, p. 66.  
104 Carol Duncan, Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums, p. 83.
VIII. APPENDICES

Thesis Survey
Name:
Address:
Years at Present Home:

For the following pairs of questions, please jot the appropriate number in the space to the right of each question.

Scale:
Urban 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Rural
Very Satisfied 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Very Unsatisfied

How would you characterize the neighborhood where you live? ________
How satisfied are you with the quality of life there? ________

How would you characterize the last neighborhood where you lived? ________
How satisfied were you with the quality of life there? ________

What type of neighborhood would you like to reside in next? ________
How satisfied do you think you will be with the quality of life there? ________

How would you characterize the “optimal” or “perfect” neighborhood? ________
How satisfied do you think you will be with the quality of life there? ________

What percent of your residences have been in a city? ________%

How many years have you lived in an urban environment? ________ years
How many years have you lived in a suburban environment? ________ years

Please pick a number from the scale to show how well each word or phrase below describes Cities and jot it in the space to the right of each item.

Scale:
Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Perfectly

Fun ________ Exciting ________ Safe ________
Beautiful ________ Convenient ________ Successful ________
Exhausting ________ Woody ________ Secure ________
Enjoyable _______ Ugly _______ Satisfying _______
Risky _______ Important _______ Grey _______
Repugnant _____ Interesting _____ Aesthetic _____
Efficient _______ Changing _______ Inconvenient _____
Open _______ Green _______ Difficult _______
Magnificent ______ Desirable ______ Distracting _____
Intimidating ______ Alluring ______ Charming _____
Exotic ______ Boring ______ Dangerous _____
Routine _______ Pleasant _______ Restful _____
Failure _______ Energizing _____ Quiet _____

Nice place to raise children _______
Nice place to visit _______
Nice place to live _______
Nice place to work _______
Enough parks and open spaces _______
Parks within walking distance _______
Restaurants within walking distance _______
Entertainment is nearby _______
You know your neighbors _______
Housing is conveniently located _______

In your own words, describe the Urban environment:

How do you see the Urban environment changing over the next 10 years?
Please pick a number from the scale to show how well each word or phrase below describes the Suburbs and jot it in the space to the right of each item.

Scale:
Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Perfectly

Fun _______ Exciting _______ Safe _______
Beautiful _______ Convenient _______ Successful _______
Exhausting _______ Woody _______ Secure _______
Enjoyable _______ Ugly _______ Satisfying _______
Risky _______ Important _______ Grey _______
Repugnant _______ Interesting _______ Aesthetic _____
Efficient _______ Changing _______ Inconvenient _____
Open _______ Green _______ Difficult _____
Magnificent ______ Desirable _____ Distracting _____
Intimidating ______ Alluring _____ Charming _____
Exotic ______ Boring _____ Dangerous _____
Routine _______ Pleasant _____ Restful _____
In your own words, describe the Suburban environment:

How do you see the Suburbs changing over the next 10 years?


SLIDE LIST

1  Window Frame with Thesis Image
2  Thesis Exhibition, Installation View
3  Thesis Exhibition, Installation View
4  Thesis Exhibition, Installation View
5  Thesis Exhibition, Installation View
6  Thesis Exhibition, Installation View
7  Thesis Exhibition, Installation View
8  Thesis Exhibition, Installation View
9  Thesis Exhibition, Installation View
10 Thesis Exhibition, Installation View
11 Thesis Exhibition, Installation View
12 Thesis Exhibition, Installation View
13 Thesis Exhibition, Installation View
14 Thesis Exhibition, Installation View
15 Completed Thesis Survey
16 Completed Thesis Survey
17 Completed Thesis Survey
18 Participant’s House, City
19 Participant’s House, City
20 Thesis Image Installation in Participant’s House, City