

## THE PARADOXICAL LANDSCAPE OF THE AMERICAN SUBURBS

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The entire history of the American suburban landscape unrolls as if two currents, two genealogies, encountered one another and fused into a hybrid: from one side the "ordinary" or "vernacular" descended from the little colonial garden; from the other, the "aristocratic" tradition that Andrew Jackson Downing imported to the U.S.A. from the English theorists Uvedale Price, Humphry Repton, and John Claudius Loudon. Between 1870 and 1890 the barriers between these two tendencies rapidly began to disappear, leaving only the visually erased "imaginary line" around which played the scene of daily life and the spectacle of suburban pastoralism. Llewellyn Park, one of first "gated suburban community" in America, was developed in the 1850s on 750 acres in West Orange, New Jersey, some twelve miles from New York City. Its developer, Solomon Haskell (1815–1872), had set aside 50 acres of land to create the Ramble, a communal park, and had proscribed the use of fences to divide property.

### A Middle Landscape

Downing had in a way announced this "ordinary landscape" of America in an article on "Our Country Villages", in which he explained how to develop a "rural village – newly planned in the suburbs of a great city, and planned, too"<sup>1</sup>. He emphasized the importance for country villages of a "common lawn" area, which he associated with republicanism: in America, he claimed, the people provide areas for common physical comfort, whereas in Europe this is the concern of kings and princes. Adopting the models provided by the earliest wave of American colonization, Downing decreed the "indispensable desiderata" for the village to be: "first, a large open space, common, or park, situated in the middle of the village – not less than 20 acres [...] This should be well planted with groups of trees, and kept as a lawn. The expense of mowing it would be paid by the grass in some cases" or by the keeping of sheep. This park would be "the nucleus or *heart of the village*, and would give it an essentially rural character"<sup>2</sup>. According to Downing, the central spaces of these ideal villages should be transformed into public pleasure-grounds to ensure the "social and common enjoyment of them. Upon well-mown glades of lawn, and beneath the shade of the forest trees, would be formed rustic seats"<sup>3</sup>. What Downing proposes here is to import and recycle a number of the typical elements, or originals, of the English and northern European landscape: those types that the founder and director of the *Landscape*

1. Andrew Jackson Downing, "Our Country Villages", *Horticulturist*, 4:12, June 1850, pp. 536–541:540.

2. *Idem*, *ibidem*.

3. *Horticulturist*, *op. cit.*, pp. 540–541.



magazine, John Brinckerhoff Jackson, would subsequently describe as “proto-landscape”. These *Ur*-landscapes are formed by the ensemble of things that a people remembers and venerates over the passage of generations<sup>4</sup>.

In 1868, Frederick Law Olmsted used the same formulation of the “common lawn” to describe Shady Hill, the estate of Charles Eliot Norton in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Olmsted praised Shady Hill for possessing the “agreeable rural characteristics of a New England Village” and proposed to create there “a small public green or lawn suitable to be used as play ground by children of the Neighborhood”<sup>5</sup>. In 1868, he used the “Preliminary Report” on the creation of the suburb of Riverside, outside Chicago, to clarify the doctrine that he would so effectively put into practice there. Emphasizing that the suburb is a specifically domestic environment, he observed that

On the public side of all such dividing lines, the fact that the families dwelling within a suburb enjoy much in common, and all the more enjoy it because it is in common [...], should be everywhere manifest in the completeness, and choiceness, and beauty of the means they possess of coming together, and especially of recreating and enjoying them together on common ground, and under common shades.<sup>6</sup>

The image produced at Riverside by the sinuous line of the roads, the obligatory planting of trees, and the setback of houses from the street is that not of a common property but of a community of interests. Advising readers of his book on “the arts of suburban-home embellishment” to “adopt some design that will least conceal the lawn”, Frank J. Scott (fig. 1), another disciple of Downing, set out the almost paradoxical ideal of the transparent fence: “Our fences should be, to speak figuratively, *transparent*”<sup>7</sup>. As J. C. Beavers wrote, in an 1916 article about “The Lawn: Its Making and Its Care”: “the ordinary man who loves women, flowers, and Nature, wants a wife, and a home with grass, trees, and flowers around it. This class is interested in making the home grounds attractive”<sup>8</sup>. Downing, and then Olmsted, had prepared the foundation of the common ground, ready for the everyday life of ordinary men and women.

4. John B. Jackson, “Ghosts at the Door”, *Landscape*, vol. 1, n. 2, Autumn 1951, pp. 3–9:4.

5. “Memorandum accompanying drawing for C. E. Norton, Cambridge, Mass., Feb. 8th 1868”, *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, vol. VI, *The Years of Olmsted*, Vaux & Company, 1865–1874, David Schuyler, Jane Turner Censer [eds.], Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992, pp. 257–261:257.

6. “Preliminary Report upon the Proposed Suburban Village at Riverside, Near Chicago, by Olmsted, Vaux, & Co., Landscape Architects”, *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, vol. VI, *op. cit.*, pp. 273–290:288.

7. Frank Jesup Scott, *The Art of Beautifying Suburban Home Grounds*, New York, D. Appleton, 1870, pp. 77–88.

8. J. C. Beavers, “The Lawn: Its Making and Its Care”, *The Countryside Magazine and Suburban Life*, 22:3, March 1916, pp. 153–155:142.



## The Moral Law of Transparency

The first half of the twentieth century was marked by a continual oscillation between the most extreme convictions for or against fences in the suburbs. Generalizing greatly, it is possible to see in this debate two opposing camps: on the one hand a pronounced taste for the opening and transparency of front lawn and the street side of the house; on the other the aspiration to seclusion that converges on the back yard and the rear of the house. These are the places, respectively, of bourgeois and familial intimacy. Writing in 1907, Boston landscape architect Herbert Kellaway took this convention for granted: "There is a prevalent idea that there must be a front yard and a back yard to every estate"<sup>9</sup>. In his 1884 treatise *Ornamental Gardening for Americans*, Elias A. Long had earlier recommended a certain degree of visibility and publicity for reasons of civic order and social emulation: "Where a beautiful garden fronts on a public highway, it is as commendable to the owner to allow passers on the street to get glimpses of the interior, as it is to have thought of the effect of a fine house upon a neighborhood"<sup>10</sup>. Another author, writing in the magazine *Suburban Life*, observed in 1907 that

Hedges form pretty dividing lines between the homes and, until very recently, a fence was an unknown quantity; but of late there seems to be a disposition to enclose the grounds with some kind of fence, more or less ornamental, which, no doubt, gives a certain degree of privacy which cannot be attained in any other way. It is to be regretted in many ways that the day of the fence seems to [be] approaching.<sup>11</sup>

The author regretted this victory – provisional as it may have been – of hedges and barriers around the private space of the back yard. The tendency toward enclosure appeared again in a May 1946 formulation from *Better Homes and Gardens*: "Yours – from lot line to lot line. That's the idea. To make it so, your property needs definitely marked boundaries"<sup>12</sup>.

### Public and Private

In a 1903 essay in *House Beautiful*, Vernon Parrington designated Americans "the most public-spirited people in the world". Criticizing the transparency of rural houses, he remarked: "Even in making a home we plan to meet the approval of our

9. Herbert J. Kellaway, *How to Lay out Suburban Home Grounds*, New York, John Wiley and Sons, 1907, p. 16.

10. Elias A. Long, *Ornamental Gardening for Americans. A Treatise on Beautifying Homes, Rural Districts, Towns and Cemeteries*, New York, Orange Judd Company, 1884, p. 192.

11. F. E. M. Cole, "Chicago's Most Unique Suburb", *Suburban Life* 5:5, November 1907, pp. 282–285:284.

12. David Philips Dean, "Same Lot–More Living", *Better Homes and Gardens*, May 1946, pp. 38–39:38.



neighbors and of the strangers in the street. To this we sacrifice our own comfort and the privacy that is essential of a home"<sup>13</sup>. Despite these opinions expressed by the cultivated classes, and the Anglophiles, of America, the opening of the yard on the street side inexorably gained ground. This preference expressed itself overtly in a 1930 book by Leonidas Ramsey, *Landscaping the Home Grounds*:

A man's home may be his castle, but his front lawn belongs to the public. At least, this is the case in the great majority of American Homes. The universal practice of establishing building lines and setting the house back from the street has created the typical American front yard. Custom has prescribed the leaving of the front yard open, providing a view of the house and the grounds.<sup>14</sup>

Ramsey justified this tradition by linking it to a civic duty of contributing to the aesthetic of the surrounding landscape. "The home owner should always keep in mind that it is his duty to do everything in his power to make his street more attractive", he continued. "Unless each home owner plans his lot [...] as a part of the whole block or street, the street cannot present a harmonious aspect, no matter how well laid out or how important a part it plays in the city plan"<sup>15</sup>.

With this passage Ramsey announced what from then on would become not only the rule of architectural composition in the American suburb but also its unwritten moral law: the inhabitant must maintain his lawn as a community place. In 1937, for example, in a work on *Planning the Home Grounds*, this quasi-law governing the landscape in its smallest details appeared as a need for conformity – not only formal, but social as well. In fact, the chapter titled "Lawns and their Care" began with this assertion: "The semi-public area, no matter what your personal preference may be, will of necessity conform largely to the planting style of the homes which surround you"<sup>16</sup>. An upkeep manual in 1950s California described the front lawn as a pair of arms opened toward the visitor, the better to welcome him: "Where zoning laws [...] exist, there is usually a required setback from the street to the building line. This leaves a strip of grass that [...] is the welcome mat to any visitor and goes far toward giving him his first impression of the place"<sup>17</sup>. The landscape of the suburb is also the place of micro-tactics inscribed on the ground: "To divide one lawn from another (and to avoid offending a neighbor's sensibilities), some use rough-hewn stones as a 'natural' boundary"<sup>18</sup>. In the 1950s and

13. V. L. Parrington, "On the Lack of Privacy in American Village Homes", *House Beautiful*, 13:2, January 1903, pp. 109–112:109.

14. Leonidas W. Ramsey, *Landscaping the Home Grounds*, New York, MacMillan Company, 1930, p. 54.

15. *Idem*, pp. 55–57.

16. Cecile Hulse Matschat, *Planning the Home Grounds*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1937, p. 60.

17. Frederick Frye Rockwell, Ester C. Grayson, *The Complete Book of Lawns [...]*, Garden City, New York, American Garden Guild, 1956, p. 28.

18. P. J. McKenna, Anna B. McKenna, *Small Home Landscaping*, New York, Sterling Publishing Co, Inc., 1953, p. 49.



the 1960s, the editors of *Sunset* magazine abounded with practical advice: "a lawn has a spiteful way of exposing the lax gardener to his neighbors by turning brown, sprouting weeds, or looking generally shaggy and woebegone"<sup>19</sup>.

### Tactics of Beautification

In 1911, under the title "Every Lawn A Theatre", Katherine C. Budd wrote an article proposing: "An open-air theatre is possible for the poor man as well as the rich, [...] even in the heart of a crowded city. But especially should everyone who has a lawn regard it as a theatre"<sup>20</sup>. At the time of the first world war, many American cities and towns organized beautification and clean-up campaigns following the example of the writer George Washington Cable, who practiced civic reform in Northampton, Massachusetts, beginning in 1887<sup>21</sup>. In the city of Salisbury, North Carolina, in 1913, the membership card of the Civic League of Colored Women attested to a contract made by its possessor: "I, [name], as a member of the above organization, promise to improve the sanitary condition of the home in which I live [...]. By planting flowers and grasses, and keeping the weeds cut down"<sup>22</sup>. In its September 1916 issue, the urbanist journal *American City* undertook a precise analysis of the sanitary conditions caused by fences:

The usual wooden fence around a back yard hides from view the lower part of the house as well as the surrounding grounds. Because of this, the artistry expressed in a home garden or lawn [...] does not add as much as it might to the beauty of the general landscape. The type of fence thus detracts from the beauty of the city. Moreover, such a fence may actually hide serious insanitary conditions. Heaps of garbage or a large amount of litter may be secreted against the lower part of the fence [...]. If a transparent fence is used, it serves a double purpose of displaying the beauty achieved in home designing, and at the same time revealing any hideous or insanitary aspects of other open spaces. Yards thus bounded are not closed cages, but attractive playgrounds.<sup>23</sup>

The transparency of lawn enclosures guaranteed visual control in a permanent and continuous manner.

19. Sunset Editorial Staff, *How to Install and Care for Your Lawn*, Menlo Park, CA, Lane Book Co., 1955, p. 4.

20. Katherine C. Budd, "Every Lawn A Theatre", *The World's Work*, vol. 22, n. 6, October 1911, 14927-39:14927.

21. On G. W. Cable, see David P. Handlin, *The American Home, Architecture and Society, 1815-1915*, Boston, Little Brown, 1979, pp. 189 ff.; and Thomas J. Schlereth, *Victorian America. Transformations of Everyday Life, 1876-1915*, New York, Harper Perennial, 1991, p. 138.

22. "Clean-Up Campaign", *American City*, 9:4, October 1913, p. 333.

23. "A Contrast in Back Yards", *American City*, vol. 15, n. 3, September 1916, pp. 343-345:344-345.



## Home Beautiful

The period abounded in lawn and garden contests like that held in Norfolk, Virginia, in 1918, described in a report that seems intent on inciting enthusiasm for garden management: "Who would not rejoice to have such a lawn as this?"<sup>24</sup>. Pamphlets on lawn organization were distributed to suburban real-estate agents, as in Kansas City, Missouri, in 1924: "The community spirit will reflect itself in the architectural design of every home, in the garden side as well as the street side of the lawn, in the interior arrangement; hangings, paintings, and furniture of the owners, and in the mental attitude and spiritual attitude of the residents themselves"<sup>25</sup>. Thus was the movement for the "City Beautiful" translated into the "Home Beautiful" contest, as in Hutchinson, Kansas, in 1927, when yards were evaluated according to a precise scale: "The points on which the lawns are judged, are: planted grass lawns, 40 per cent; shrubs, 20 per cent; tea roses and perennials, 20 per cent; general arrangement, 20 per cent"<sup>26</sup>. From then on, the competitive aspect of garden culture became an intrinsic part of the suburban way of life, as a 1951 *House Beautiful* article proverbially headlined: "Is Your Lawn getting You Down? We know just how you feel. The grass is always greener in your neighbor's yard"<sup>27</sup>.

## Overcommitment in Gardening

This array of regulations and instructions upholds what sociologist William Dobriner called the "visibility principle" in his noted thesis on "The Psychology of the Suburbs". A defining mark of suburbia, the visibility principle describes a visual openness that permits residents "to observe each other's behavior and general life style far more easily than the central city dweller"<sup>28</sup>. In a further exploration of the implications of this pervasive visibility, the *Sunset* editorial staff in 1964 announced, and enunciated, the singularity of the lawn, as if the owner-gardener affirmed his individuality in the culture of the lawn: "no two lawns are alike [...]. You can see why your lawn has to be different in some degree from your neighbor's

24. Clemmer Johnston, "Permanent Lawns for Norfolk", *American City*, vol. 19, n. 2, August 1918, pp. 115-116:116.

25. J. C. Nichols, "Suburban Subdivisions with Community Features: Suggestions for Realtors and Community Organizations, as Exemplified in the Country Club District of Kansas City, Mo.", *American City*, 31:4, October 1924, pp. 335-338:338.

26. E.G. Drennen, "Influence of Home Beautiful Contests and Systematic Tree Planting in Hutchinson", *American City*, vol. 37, n. 5, November 1927, p. 633.

27. "Is Your Lawn getting You Down?", *House Beautiful*, 93:3, March 1951, pp 120, 194-197:194.

28. William Mann Dobriner, *Class in Suburbia*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice-Hall, 1963, p. 9; see also "the visibility principle may be the major force behind the suburban informal relationships rather than a psychological predisposition", *idem*, pp. 62-63.





lawn or from a lawn in the next town or the next state"<sup>29</sup>. This explanation manifests all the premises of what pop sociology had already described as "Overcommitment in Gardening". The 1958 study done by Rolf Meyersohn and Robin Jackson, "Gardening in Suburbia", gave the following interpretation: "In general, the overcommitted gardener showed little balance. He worked very hard, but he didn't enjoy it. He overestimated the community's expectations"<sup>30</sup>. Perhaps it was instead sociology that underestimated the power of subjectification to the imperatives of community.

### Psychological Landscapes

As early as 1917 (fig. 2), a gardening guide described the democratic ideal of the suburban landscape as something fatally monotonous: "The democratic idea and feeling against planting of hedges and the lining off of one's property makes for a deadly uniformity"<sup>31</sup>. Frank A. Waugh, the famous landscape architect, had developed a framework for thinking about the monotony of the landscape in a 1910 chapter called, "On the Beauty of Landscape Psychologically Considered"<sup>32</sup>. Waugh based his theory on the psychology of Ethel Puffer, who postulated that "all impressions of the world without are experienced in the body in the form of nerve or muscle tensions" and that physical and mental experiences are shaped by "various forms and masses, with lights and shadows, and, perhaps, with many different colors"<sup>33</sup>. When these disparate tensions "balance one another", Puffer proposed, they produce "a state of nervous and muscular equilibrium or rest. And it is precisely this state of equilibrium in a highly excited muscular and nervous system that gives the organic effect of beauty". Waugh applied this notion of "aesthetic repose" to the study of landscape: "The beholder of a beautiful landscape also experiences, in a most marked degree, the favorable stimulation – the muscular and nervous tensions – which accompany the enjoyment of any effective work of art". Less various, they are nonetheless of the same kind, and often "make up in intensity what they lack in variety"<sup>34</sup>. Before a sunset, a rainbow,

29. Joseph F. Williamson and the Sunset Editorial Staff, *Lawns and Ground Covers*, Menlo Park, CA, Lane Books, 1964, p. 7.

30. Rolf Meyersohn, Robin Jackson, "Gardening in Suburbia". In: William Mann Dobrinier [ed.], *The Suburban Community*, New York, Putnam, 1958, pp. 271–286:283.

31. *Garden Guide. The Amateur Gardener's Handbook. How to Plan, Plant and Maintain the Home Grounds, the Suburban Garden, the City Lot*, J. Harrison Dick [eds.], New York, A. T. De La Mare Co., 1917, p. 13.

32. Frank A. Waugh, *The Landscape Beautiful: A Study of the Utility of the Natural Landscape, Its Relation to Human Life and Happiness, With the Application of these Principles in Landscape Gardening, and in Art in General*, New York, Orange Judd Company, 1910, pp. 269–295.

33. Ethel D. Puffer, *The Psychology of Beauty*, Boston & New York, Houghton, Mifflin, & CO., 1905, pp. 277–278.

34. Frank A. Waugh, *The Landscape Beautiful*, *op. cit.*, pp. 289–290.



or a sunlit prairie, for instance: "We must not forget that color is one of the chief materials for producing aesthetic enjoyment". Natural elements produce "that 'exaltation with repose' – that excitation of tensions brought into equilibrium – which we have learned to think is characteristic of the feeling of beauty"<sup>35</sup>. While psychology remained the dominant theory within American culture during this period, other authors warned of the limitations of the genre of psycho-physiological explanation.

### Green Melancholy

In his 1964 *Gardens and People*, for instance, the American landscape architect Fletcher Steele called for a return to an associative interpretation of color: "The eye pays no attention to laboratory statistics of vibration but accepts colors only in relation to other colors, whether they be near or remote in the field of vision"<sup>36</sup>. Even if "[The landscape gardener] announced that green is restful [...] green soothes because of what it brings to mind; it is not restful in itself"<sup>37</sup>. This kind of observation is still made by contemporary environmental psychology in the U.S.A.: "Green" is shorthand. It stands for 'nature'<sup>38</sup>. This is from Rachel Kaplan's essay "The Green Experience", which repeats this axiom tautologically: "the preference for a variety of things 'green'"<sup>39</sup>. To be sure of being understood, she adds: "There are [...] many green places that provide the setting for involving and gratifying activities"<sup>40</sup>. This monomania for verdant colors also appears in the press: "Americans are lawnholics. True, some, of us just say no to grass. But then we have to paint the asphalt green or swear devotion to the *idea* of sward"<sup>41</sup>. This is confirmed by as reputable a botanist as John Greenlee: "The lawn is a state of mind. It's cartoon nature, Disney nature. It has to be the right color. No one wants to look at grass that isn't green"<sup>42</sup>.

John B. Jackson, too, noted that "[A]ll front yards in America are much the same"<sup>43</sup>. Later, he associated the monochromatic color of the lawn with monotony: "thousands and thousands of families find themselves living not in the midst of nature but in a green desert [...]. Some day a city council will discover it costs more to mow acres of monotonous lawn than to plant trees and gardens and preserve a little tame

35. *Idem*, pp. 292–293.

36. Fletcher Steele, *Gardens and People*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1964, p. 27.

37. *Idem*, *ibidem*.

38. Rachel Kaplan, "The Green Experience". In: Stephen Kaplan, Rachel Kaplan [eds.], *Humanscape: Environment for People*, Ann Arbor, Ulrich's Books, Inc., 1982, pp. 186–193:186.

39. *Idem*, p. 189.

40. *Idem*, p. 192.

41. Richard Wolkomir, "Take the Sword to the Sward", *Smithsonian*, vol. 21, n. 2, May 1990, p. 166.

42. Wade Graham, "The Grassman: Can John Greenlee Do Away with the Lawn?", *New Yorker*, 19 August 1996, pp 34–37:37.

43. John B. Jackson, "Ghosts at the Door", *Landscape*, vol. 1, n. 2, Autumn 1951, pp. 3–9:3.





wilderness near where people live"<sup>44</sup>. In this prelude to the awakening of ecological lawn sensibilities in the 1980s, the surrounding nature suddenly began to express sentiments and experience sensations. A gardening guide spoke, essentially, of humors: "plants are living things – which grow, develop and display the moods of Nature and her successive variations throughout the entire year"<sup>45</sup>.

This sentiment was described by many analysts of the new suburbs after the second world war. The American novelist John Keats, in his 1957 book *The Crack in the Picture Window*, recounted in this way the mood of a young mother recently emigrated to this new "wilderness": "the neutral lawn failed to give relief, for like everything else about Rolling Hills, it was steeped in stifling monotony"<sup>46</sup>. The principal activity of young women consisted in inviting one another for regular "lawn-dating"<sup>47</sup>. In what were commonly called "bedroom neighborhoods", the discouraged heroine only "stared absently out her picture window and saw lawns full of young mothers and babies"<sup>48</sup>. Trapped in what some had nicknamed the "burbdoms", these residents, according to Keats, "are prey to drift and abyssal boredom"<sup>49</sup>. Apart from the anagram, there have always been curious relations between boredom and the bedroom. There is of course the famous analysis of "the amount of boredom in Levittown" published by sociologist Herbert Gans in 1967. Gans related that while "40 per cent (about a third of the women and more than half of the men) are never bored and only a few women are constantly so", many residents found that the new suburbs brought their own species of boredom: "For about a quarter of the total sample of city women, and about 10 per cent of men, Levittown meant new boredom [...], social isolation being the major source and the role change from worker to mother the second"<sup>50</sup>.

### Therapeutic Gardens and Gated Towns

Interestingly, this uniformity simultaneously provided the basis for both a critique of the lawn and the promise of a relief from boredom. Gans, who had lived the experience of this new frontier himself, related that "As one person put it, 'You start trimming the lawn or pull one weed, and then you go on to do the job right because you want it to look right, and the time goes. There's less time to be bored'"<sup>51</sup>. An article in *Lawn Care* in 1960 explained that the lawn, which created the visual condi-

44. J. B. Jackson, "Green Deserts", *Landscape*, vol. 3, n. 1, Summer 1953, pp. 3-4:4.

45. P. J. McKenna, Anna B. McKenna, *Small Home Landscaping*, New York, Sterling Publishing, Co., 1953, p. 3.

46. John Keats, *The Crack in the Picture Window*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1957, p. 57.

47. John Keats, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

48. *Idem*, p. 169:157.

49. *Idem*, p. 193.

50. Herbert J. Gans, *The Levittowners: Ways of Life and Politics in a New Suburban Community*, New York, Random House, 1967, pp. 228, 258.

51. Herbert Gans, *op. cit.*, p. 229.



tion of monochromatic monotony, could also supply a remedy for this ill humor: "Caring for a lawn is heaven-sent for any woman who wants a better figure"<sup>52</sup>. In 1974 the lawn could still be seen as the basis for a healthy life capable of dissipating the memory of the green melancholy: "once established, [the lawn's] nurture and upkeep can be a therapeutic diversion in the form of wholesome exercise; the profit is pride of accomplishment for better living"<sup>53</sup>. As the rock star Pony states upon visiting his hometown of Burnley in Eric Bogosian's play *subUrbia*: "The smell of freshly cut grass [...] great! I could see into the picture windows of the houses. Families watching TV, eating dinner, guys drinking beer. It's the suburbs! They don't call it 'The American Dream' for nothing"<sup>54</sup>.

By the post-war period, the American lawn had become the formal setting that presented the home as a proscenium, a theatrical space where the performance of family life could take place, through lawn parties, with barbecues sizzling around swimming pools. This routine was then replicated by family "sitcoms" (situation comedies) on television and movie screens<sup>55</sup>. While Erwin Goffman had offered a classical sociological survey of these theatrical stagings in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), it was going to be the popular culture of cinema that would pronounce its own social critique of suburbia, from *The Stepford Wives* (directed by Brian Forbes, 1975) to *The Truman Show* (directed by Peter Weir, 1998), starring Jim Carrey, a satire of media and "new" urbanism, which was actually shot in the town of Seaside, Florida, designed by the "new" planners Andres Duany and Elisabeth Plater-Zyberk during the 1980s.

Equally, during the 1990s, the planned town of Celebration, near Orlando in Florida, was built by the Disney Company and designed by the New York architects Robert A. M. Stern and Jacquelin Robertson, paying close attention to every minutiae of the master plan<sup>56</sup>. The artifices of design, including retro-colonial columns in plastic and carefully planted front lawns, were intended to evoke neighborly sentiment. As in the nearby Disney World theme parks, control is a central theme of Celebration, where some of the restraints echoes those imposed by Olmsted at Riverside (Ill.), regulating every detail, down to the ratio of grass, trees and shrubs on each property lot. In the U.S., since 1975, the gated communities are the latest real-estate innovation

52. "Kick Off Your Shoes, Girls!", *Lawn Care*, 33:2, Late Spring 1960, p. 3.

53. Lloyd E. Partain, "Grass for Protection, Safety, Beauty, and Recreation". In: Howard Bennett Sprague and American Forage and Grassland Council, *Grasslands of the United States: Their Economic and Ecologic Importance; a Symposium of the American Forage and Grassland Council*, 1st ed., Ames, Iowa State University Press, 1974, p. 212.

54. Eric Bogosian, *subUrbia*, New York, Theatre Communications Group, 1995, p. 62; the film *subUrbia* was directed by Richard Linklater, Castle Rock Entertainment, 1996.

55. Lynn Spiegel, "From Theatre to Space Ship. Metaphors of Suburban Domesticity in Postwar America". In: Roger Silverstone [ed.], *Visions of Suburbia*, London, Routledge, 1997, p. 222.

56. Andrew Ross, *The Celebration Chronicles. Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Property Value in Disney's New Town*, New York, Ballantine Books, 1999; Douglas Frantz, Catherine Collins, *Celebration, U.S.A. Living in Disney's Brave New Town*, New York, Henry Holt & Company, 1999.



in the suburbanization trend toward ever more secluded and controlled environments. Guardhouses, physical barriers, electronic surveillance devices and hired security forces, are the custodians of a threatened privacy<sup>57</sup>. However, at Celebration, the image-conscious Disney, inspired by a display of good public relation, did not build another gated community; yet, in its insularity and exclusiveness, this "new" town is paradoxically a walled community without a wall.

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57. Evan McKenzie, *Privatopia. Homeowner Associations and the Rise of Residential Private Government*, New Haven (CT), Yale University Press, 1994; Edward J. Blakely, Mary Gail Snyder, *Fortress America. Gated Communities in the United States*, Washington (DC), Brookings Institution Press/Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 1999.