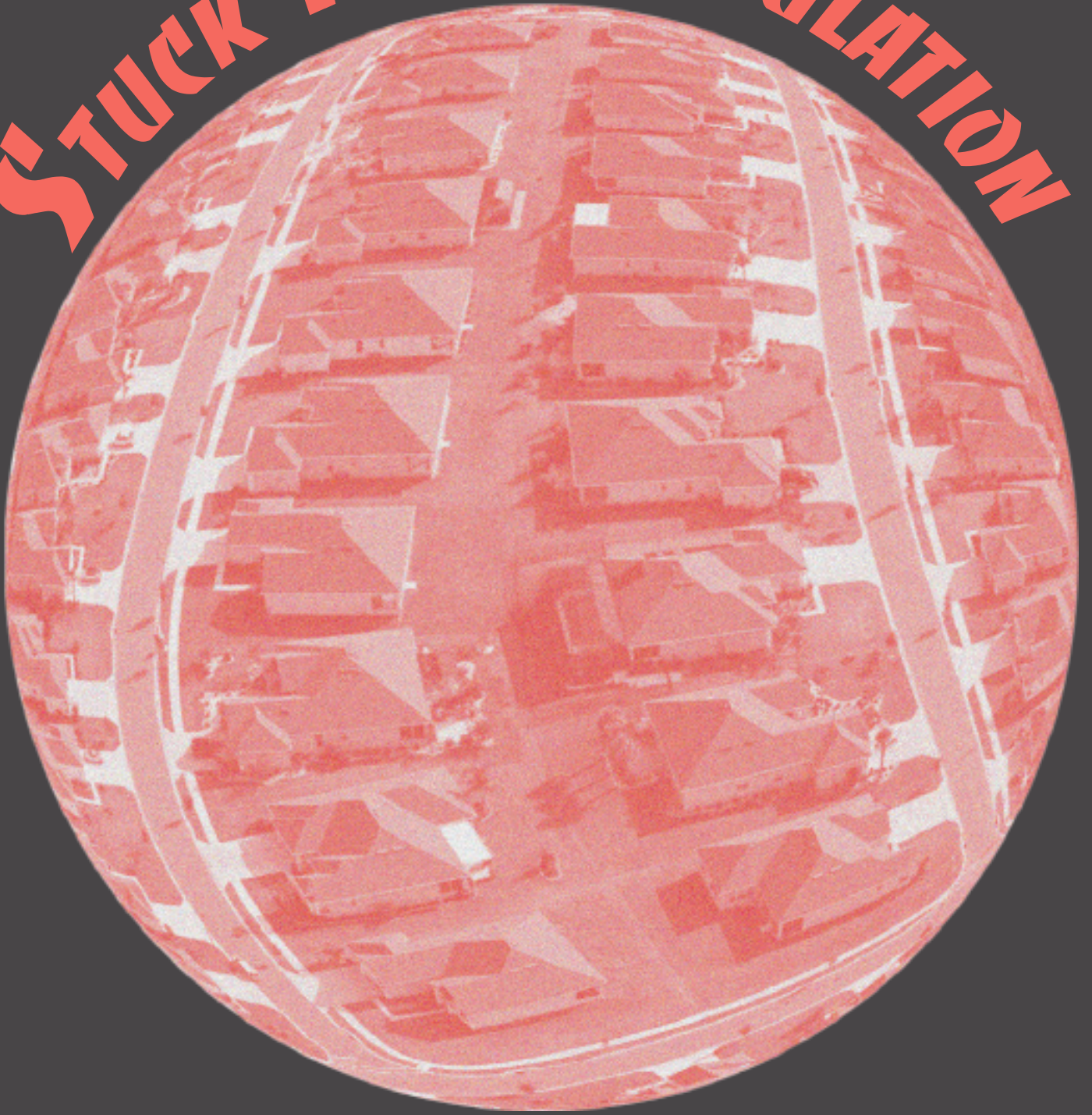
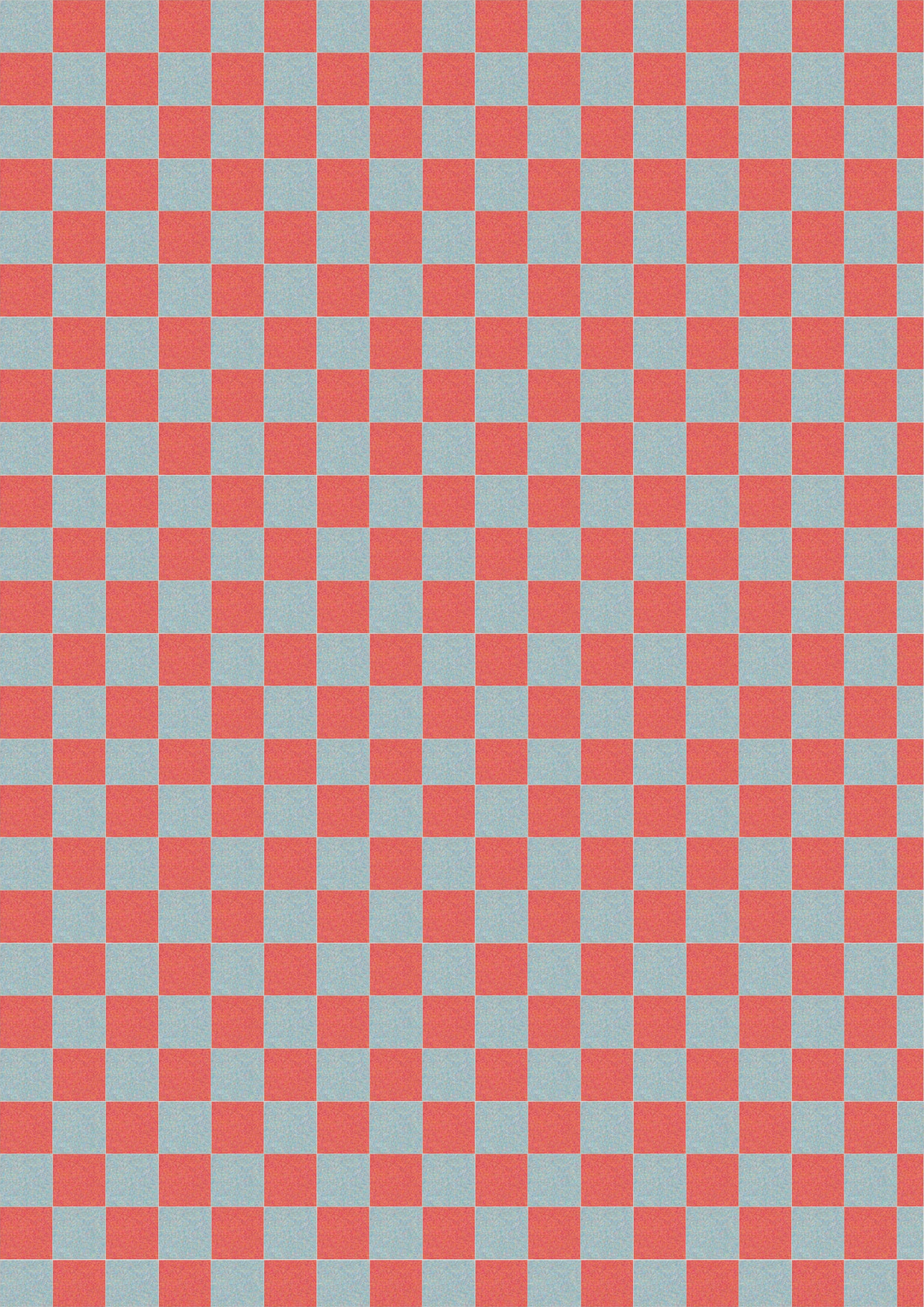
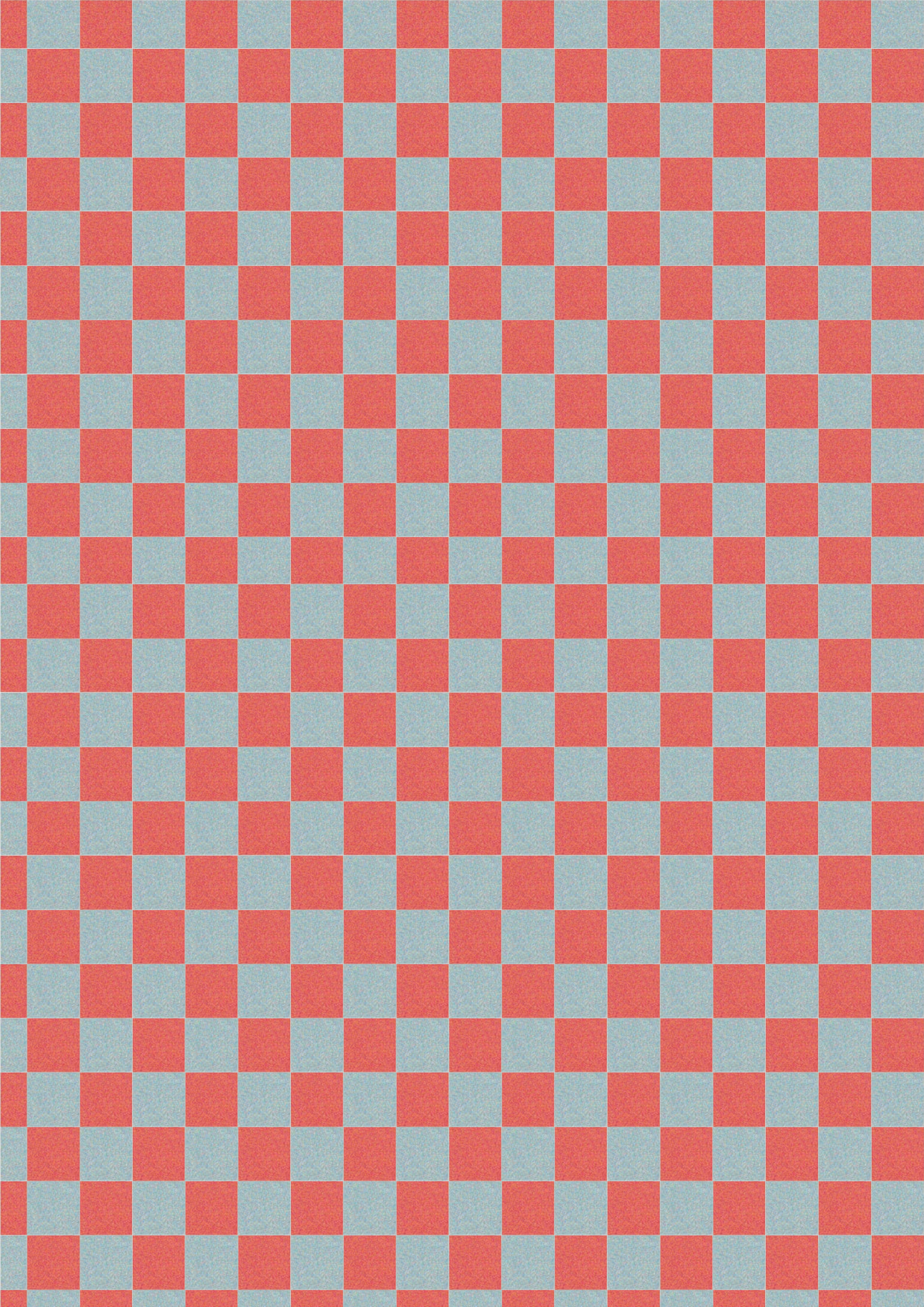


STUCK IN A SIMULATION







Stuck In A Simulation

Elizabeth Parkinson

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Introduction

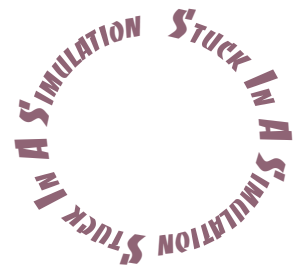


Fig 1

Take a walk outside your house and every other house is a carbon copy, everyone is a clone of each other and their lifestyles are duplicates of each other. This idea is suburban sprawl, also known as urban sprawl, which is the movement of people from urban settings to suburban settings. It is most notable in dwellings. It is recognized as single-family homes spreading into wild lands and converting agriculture and farms surrounding cities into residential areas.

After World War II, the veterans returning to the United States were in need of homes. To satisfy the demand Abraham Levitt, founder of Levitt & Sons, created the first mass-produced suburbs in the United States.

In this dissertation, we aim to uncover and learn more about why people move into one of these neighborhoods and live this so called “cookie cutter” perfect life. Is this the American dream? Is the dream of freedom, opportunity, and view of success, experienced by living in mass produced neighborhoods that are picture perfect? Ironically, there is a great sacrifice to freedom, as many of these mass development communities have homeowner’s associations (HOAs). An HOA is an organization made up of homeowners which creates rules and enforce them for the community. They can enforce a plethora of rules including specifying that only certain colours can be used for the facade of your house, what fences you are and are not allowed to install, and what decorative touches can be added to a home. Personal freedoms are sacrificed when a person or family decides to move into one of these developments. These developments lack creativity in the choices of architectural styles of the the houses and what floor plans and zoning they can have. “Life between building had been forgotten, pushed aside by cars, large-scale thinking, and overly rationalized, specialized processes.” (Gehl and Scarre, 2013 p.3)



Fig 2

Pop culture has also incorporated the suburbs into its genre with such movies as *The Truman Show*. The premise of this movie is that Truman lives in a picture perfect neighborhood of Seahaven Island. Every house has a perfect white picket fence, just like in the traditional American dream neighborhood. His everyday life is perfection because of the absence of any sort of discord. Essentially, everything is flawless in this world and there is an absence of public places where people can come together and share different aspects of themselves. An analysis of the use of public spaces shows that when interaction in these spaces is limited, people are kept divided. In Seahaven Island, there is a lack of these spaces in the development. What is it like to live in a space that is so similar to this fictitious suburban simulation and how does this affect people living there?

Chapter 1

The Dark Truth Of Levittown

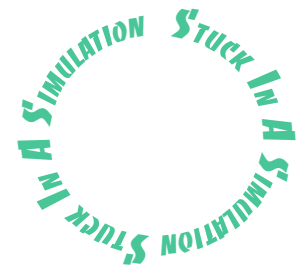


Fig 3

The first town Levitt & Sons created lies on Long Island in New York state just 27 miles (43.5km) outside of Manhattan. The Levitt family would end up building 17,447 free standing homes which at the time was the largest undertaking by a single developer. The Levitt family built four communities called Levittown including the one in New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Puerto Rico.

While his father was building Levittown, New York, William Levitt made plans to make another town similar to the New York town and create it just outside of Philadelphia, PA and Trenton, NJ. Levittown, Pennsylvania was the second community built and the town that will be focused on in this dissertation. It lies only 22 miles (35.4km) north of center city Philadelphia. This second effort was almost as large as the first one with 17,311 single family homes constructed over approximately 8 square miles.

The original Levittown in New York only offered two different floor plans the Cape Cod and the Ranch. Levittown, PA offered six different varieties of homes, all of them being single family. The different home types were called the Colonial, the Country Clubber, the Jubilee, the Levittowner, the Pennsylvanian and the Rancher. The reason for the limited number of house styles was that materials could be ordered in large quantities and portions of the houses could be mass-produced on site. The Levitt's had created a new way of constructing homes. This revolutionary method of construction involved dividing the construction process into twenty-seven steps. The construction workers would perform each step for each house one after another. When building these houses, they essentially created an assembly line system. Instead of building one house at a time, at their peak they were building 36 houses a day. "We are not builders...we are manufactures."(Marshall, 2015)



Fig 4



Fig 5

To keep with the utopian feeling Levittown had a list of rules you had to follow when it came to the up keep of the outside of your house. Essentially like an early version of a H.O.A., these rules included “No fences around the yards. Grass had to be maintained and trimmed. Clothes could not be hung to dry in the backyard on weekdays. Only white people could live there.” (Lokting, 2019). Another rule was that each house was to come equipped with modern appliances and television sets. The Levitt’s wanted to appeal to the white nuclear family.

It is no coincidence that the Philadelphia suburbs are predominantly white in the forties, fifties and sixties and still are to this day. They were built that way. “Early suburb developers like William Levitt instituted explicitly racist policies.”, (Loewen, J.W., 2005 p.282) This created a term called redlining which originates back to the U.S. Government which in the 1930s when they created the New Deal homeownership programme and a part of it was the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC). These new government insured mortgages were to help homeowners in the wake of the Depression. The government mapped out the neighborhoods by colour. Different colours correlate with what value the government assigned to the land and which houses were worthy of the new homeownership programme. “The results of these policies is that from 1934 through 1968, a whopping 98% of housing loans were given to white families.”(Fresh Air,

Announcing *The 1956 Jubilee* Price \$11,600

The Country Clubber
BY LEVITT

PRICE \$18,990 - \$108 MONTHLY

The Levittowner
PRICE: \$10,990 \$67 A MONTH

NO CASH REQUIRED FROM VETERANS



NO. 1



NO. 2



REAR VIEW OF ALL HOUSES

The Rancher
 A NEW HOUSE IN LEVITTOWN
 •
 SPECIAL INTRODUCTORY PRICE—
\$8,990
\$57 A MONTH!
 No cash required from veterans!



NO. 3



NO. 4





Fig 7

These new policies became exclusionary for many Americans. This exclusionary practice coined a new term called redlining. Redlining received its name from the red ink used to split the neighborhoods. Green neighborhoods in the U.S. were deemed to be deserving and red neighborhoods were least deserving. They used terms like hazardous or dangerous to describe these red neighborhoods which were lived in by predominately black residents. The green neighborhoods were predominately white residents. By doing this they made it almost nearly impossible for black families to move into these new suburban neighborhoods. "Those were the neighborhoods where African Americans and other minorities lived, and redlining systematically prevented them from getting home loans"(Bouie, 2014) One of the major areas where redlining happened was in Philadelphia and specifically North Philadelphia which is a historically a neighborhood where African-Americans and other people of color live. This has created a multiple decades long problem where these families cannot get out of these unsafe neighborhoods. "Cities that were appraised by the home owner's local corporation are more racially segregated today than cities that were not appraised" "(Faber, 2021)

The residents of these neighborhoods are still affected to this day due to redlining. They have inadequate resources, lower quality housing and fewer job opportunities than from neighborhoods only a few miles away. There have been legal actions to attempt to address the situation the Supreme Court Case "Shelley vs. Kramer (1948) was the milestone civil right ruling, in which the the Supreme Court said that covenants could not be enforced by the state to evict black buyers of "restricted homes." Later after that "The Fair Housing Act is a federal law enacted in 1968 that prohibits discrimination in the purchase, sale, rental, or financing of housing—private or public—based on race, skin color, sex, nationality, or religion." (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2000) Unfortunately it was too late there is decades worth of damage to families that are still affected. These policies have fenced people into existing neighborhoods as well as preventing integration in places like Levittown. "We're 50 years past the Fair Housing Act, but these inequities have really persisted to the present day." (Pradelli, Mettendorf and Rosenfeld, 2021)



Fig 8

“Levittown homes must not be used or occupied by any person other than members of the Caucasian race.”(Lambert, 1997) William Levitt was knowingly building sundown towns and Levitt & Sons built the most of these type of towns out of any other firm. “A sundown town is any organized jurisdiction that for decades kept African Americans or other groups from living in it and was thus “all-white” on purpose.”(Loewen, 2005 p.4) Levittown is an almost exclusively white neighborhood. This has negatively impacted its residents social development. There is a lack of human connection with others, limited ability to interact with a variety of different perspectives, reduced creativity and many other negative effects. According to the 2010 U.S. census Levittown, PA is still predominately white with 89% of residents counted as caucasians. “Cities that were appraised by the home owner’s local corporation are more racially segregated today that than cities that were not appraised.” (Faber, 2021)

Levittown and mass produced neighborhoods have many other drawbacks as well. These include a lack of walkability, a lack of multi zoning buildings and a lack of environmental friendliness.

**“We are not
builders...we are
manufactures.”**



Fig 9

Chapter 2

Pop Culture In Suburbs



Fig 10

The perfectly composed suburbs are frequently depicted in pop culture such as movies, television shows and music. They are often portrayed as the ideal place marketed to nuclear families for their ideal place to grow a family. In pop culture they illustrate the suburbs as a utopia where things are always far better than what they actually are. They often depict the American dream as picturesque communities where families live in spacious homes with well-manicured lawns and white picket fences. Suburbanites also enjoy lower crime rates, better schools and a sense of community.



Fig 11

Vivarium

The movie *Vivarium* is a science fiction thriller and means “place of life” in Latin which centers around two main characters Gemma and Tom who have been looking for a home. Very early on in the movie they stumble across a real estate agent with photographs of model homes lining the walls. Waiting inside is a clean-cut man, Martin, patiently waiting for someone to come in. Martin convinces the young couple to take a tour of Yonder which Martin describes as “Yonder is a wonderful development. Both tranquil and practical, it has all you need and all you’d want. And as for the prices, it’s no wonder these houses are getting snapped up.” (Vivarium, 2020)

When they first drive through Yonder, it is picture perfect. All of the homes are in pristine condition with nothing out of line. All of the trees are perfectly trimmed. Even the sky is perfect with the most perfectly shaped clouds. Martin tours them around the house which was fully furnished. Each room was devoid of distinguishing features. The house was so bland that the only art was images of each room depicting itself. This scene signifies how the suburbs suppress unique individuality and creative expression. Following the tour, Martin leaves unexpectedly without Gemma and Tom. The couple then tries to leave, they get lost and start aimlessly driving throughout the neighborhood. They continue they get more confused and unsure what street to go down as they all look the same. There are no interesting and unique places in suburbs that people can gather in. These would help make it unique and make people able to tell apart different streets. The couple ended up getting stuck and having to live this lifeless life and end up dying after a sad life.





Fig 12



Fig 13

The Stepford Wives

The Stepford Wives takes place in a fictional town of Stepford, Connecticut a suburb of New York City where protagonist Joanna moves from Manhattan with her husband and kids. In this 1975 movie the neighborhood is something of the Levitts dream with every family being the perfect white nuclear family.

As Joanna slowly starts to settle into her new home she meets another new wife of the community Bobbi. The two of them start to try to make new friends and they notice something strange about the wives. All of the wives are starting to lose interest in their hobbies and personal matters. They develop the need to become the most perfect housewife. They become brainwashed into being the “perfect” woman and living in their “perfect” world of Stepford. The ideal images of living in these perfect houses with manicured lawns, perfectly decorated interiors has wormed its way into the culture of what success looks like in the United States.

The film suggests that as a society this is the way we view the suburban environment. The pressure to conform to traditional gender roles and societal norms. In the movie the wives lose all of their individuality of their own from the way they dress to personal activities they used to enjoy they no longer have any aspirations. The movie critiques how people living in the manicured suburban lifestyle do so at the expense of individuality and personal freedoms.



Fig 14



Fig 15

The Truman Show

The Truman Show is another movie set in a picture perfect neighborhood of Seahaven. The creator of *The Truman Show* Christof said "Seahaven is the way the world should be." (*The Truman Show*, 1998) This seaside suburban town is what Christof has tried to make perfect he also said "While the world he inhabits is in, some respects, counterfeit, there's nothing fake about Truman himself." (*The Truman Show*, 1998) The counterfeit parts of his life is this made up picture perfect town they had created for the show. The town they had created integrates automobile and pedestrian traffic.

As the film progresses we see more into Seahaven it is not a car centric town but this is due to the artificially made town. In scenes when we see Truman on his way to work, the majority of people are walking there are also many bike riders. The few cars we see are going at slow speeds. It's a lively town with many people and different areas where people can come together and meet. Outside of Trumans work place there is a gigantic green park which seems to be in the middle of town and can be easily accessible to everyone.

"It is important to assemble people and events. However, too many and too large outdoor spaces are typically not provided for new residential area. The processes that encourage city life never have a chance to get started." (Gehl, 2010 p.71)

The Truman Show was shot in a real town in South Walton, Florida. Peter Weir the director found the charming town and ended up choosing this development for the set because it "looked fake." The idea of this town being already the picture perfect suburb where real families already live in.

Ultimately, *The Truman Show*, shows how people accept the mundane realities of their lives. The perfect house with the perfect facade with the perfect family and the perfect job all becomes boring. The real challenge becomes how to break free from the reality of no differences and no challenges. It is the same in communities with HOA's. How does a home owner show their individuality when all the houses look the same and no changes can be made. Ultimately, people conform or move out these communities into less structured neighborhoods or back into cities.



Fig 16



Fig 17

“We accept the reality of the world with which we’re presented. It’s as simple as that.” The Truman Show





Fig 18

Chapter 3

Jan Gehl & Urban Planning



Fig 19

Jan Gehl has dedicated his life to enhancing the spaces and to improving the urban environment for more favorable living conditions. Gehl focuses on the design for people and this philosophy goes back all the way to how people were living in the past from 500 AD to 1500 AD. In this time, there were no planned designs, people simply started constructing more structures when needed. This organic way of designing is very different from new transformed methods of creating plans. Modern pre-planned neighborhoods allocate quite little room to grow physically and little room for people to grow and develop socially. Human environmental needs change continuously and their spaces must be able to accommodate these changes.

Gehl emphasizes the premise that cities need to be built for people first then for cars. Walking and being a part of a community through the spaces in between homes is a critical part of the human experience. Opportunity for social interactions that can occur in major cities are not always found in suburban neighborhoods. This creates a major societal problem. To build strong communities, we need to create livable spaces where we can interact with each other, have social support systems in place and there is a true sense of belonging and collective action. Gehl believes that designing cities a certain way encourages people to gather, socialize, and interact. We can create neighborhoods and communities that are vibrant, dynamic and connected.

	Quality of the physical environment	
	Poor	Good
Necessary activities	●	●
Optional activities	●	●●●●●●●●
"Resultant" activities (Social activities)	●	●

Fig 20

“Good architecture ensures good interaction between public space and public life. But while architects and urban planners have been dealing with space, the other side of the coin, life, has often been forgotten. “Perhaps this is because it is considerably easier to work with and communicate about form and space, while life is ephemeral and therefore difficult to describe.” (Gehl and Scarre, 2013 p.2) As humans we engage with the outdoors in three different ways that are described as follows:

- Necessary activities- are more or less mandatory and can include: going to school/ work/home and waiting for the bus/green light. Because of this, the activity is very little affected by the quality of the space.
- Optional activities- are, unlike necessary activities, only carried out when wanted. These can consist of: going out for food, stroll and people-watching. Because of their non-mandatory nature, the spatial surrounding need to be optimal (inviting) in order for them to occur.
- Social Activities- is depended on the presence of other people are therefore only occur when people are moving around in the same space at the same time. These activities includes: people-watching, conversation or people-listening. Because of the need of other people, it is necessary that there is a good amount of both necessary and optional activities, in other words, good environmental condition in the space (good quality).”(Gehl, 2011 p.9,11)



Fig 21

“Think big but always remember to make the places where people are to be, small.” Jan Gehl

As seen above outdoor spaces play a crucial role and there are several different ways we interact with the outdoors. If these new suburban areas are not created with the three outdoor spaces, then what Gehl suggests is that humans will not be actualized. “To focus attention on who, what, where and other basic questions can provide general knowledge about behavior in public space and special knowledge of specific issue in practice. Studying these key questions can provide documentation and understanding of a given pattern of activity or concrete knowledge about who goes where or not in a given place. This these elementary questions can be used in practice as well as for more basic research purposes.” (Gehl and Scarre, 2013 p.11)

In designing spaces, there is a need for people to interact and live within these outdoor spaces. These spaces are just as important as our indoor spaces. The outdoors is where you can have interesting interactions with individuals. These activities Gehl describes as follows, “An ordinary day on an ordinary street. Pedestrians pass on the sidewalks, children play near front doors, people sit on benches and steps, the postman makes his sound with the mail, two passerby greet on the sidewalk, two mechanics rear a car, groups engages in conversation.” (Gehl, 2011 p.9) The mass produced suburbs are not created for any of these types of interactions, and this gap is realized as a lack of community in these areas.

The activities mentioned above are for all members of the community no matter what age, gender or race. These highly structured suburbs discourage walking and cycling because these neighborhoods are designed and produced for cars first then human use. The neighborhoods are less active and less healthy mentally and physically. “How does it affect us as people when our physical landscape changes? When a social corridor, a neighborhood corner or occasional meeting place disappears?” (The Human Scale, 2013) “When outdoor areas are of poor quality, only strictly necessary activities occur.” (Gehl, 2011 pp.11)

Life



Space



Buildings



Fig 22

These spaces need to be more focused on the people living there and not be so car centric. There are unmet needs for sidewalks and trails and gathering spots for interaction. The activities which should be viewed as necessary are activities which are essential activities people need to perform which should include working and shopping, etc.

Gehl's approach to urban planning is to create walkability, open spaces to gather, and to create facades of buildings which do not inhibit these activities. The analysis of Gehl's ideas have yielded equivocal results. There seems to be a relationship between walkability and interactions, but it is premised on the fact that there are places such as store fronts and cafes to entice these relationships. There appears to be a lack of studies that analyze the effects of walkability in the suburbs with a more vibrant and active community. The studies that have been conducted were in a virtual reality scenario in the city of Singapore so environmental factors could be more easily be controlled. However, the suburbs like Levittown are a far cry from the neighborhoods of Singapore. The studies which would be most relevant need to take place in places like Levittown. The social activity and how people interact would need to be measured against how often people are outside in their yards and how often this precipitates interaction. "Venice has a remarkably high level of activity although the population had been reduced dramatically. The explanation is that all traffic is on foot, everyone walks slowly and there are many spontaneous stays." (Gehl, 2010 p.17)



Fig 23

We need to interact and live within these outdoor spaces and they are just as important as our indoor spaces. The outdoors is where you have interesting interactions with individuals. These activities Gehl describes as “An ordinary day on an ordinary street. Pedestrians pass on the sidewalks, children play near front doors, people sit on benches and steps, the postman makes his sound with the mail, two passersby greet on the sidewalk, two mechanics rear a car, groups engage in conversation.” (Gehl, 2011 p.9) These mass produced suburbs aren’t created for any of these interactions and this results in a lack of community in these areas. These activities are for all members of the community no matter what age, gender or race. These suburbs also discourage walking and cycling because these neighborhoods are promoted for car use. These neighborhoods are less healthy.

Figure 24,25:

The following graphics are two different takes on suburban planning. The first one is the actual planning of Carriages at Ventry Edgmont Preserve located in Newtown Square, PA and the one following is a re-imagined plan. The new plan takes in consideration of what Jan Gehl believes makes good design and how humans actually interact with their spaces. The re-imagined design thinks of humans first and not cars unlike the counter partner. The main focus on the design is the open space in the middle where people can meet and connect with each other or where planned events for the communities can be held. The community is a lot more accesible and walkable due to to the grid organization which has no cul-de-sac like roads. The townhomes and single family home are not split up which brings more people close together.



Carriages at
VENTRY
◇ EDMONT PRESERVE ◇

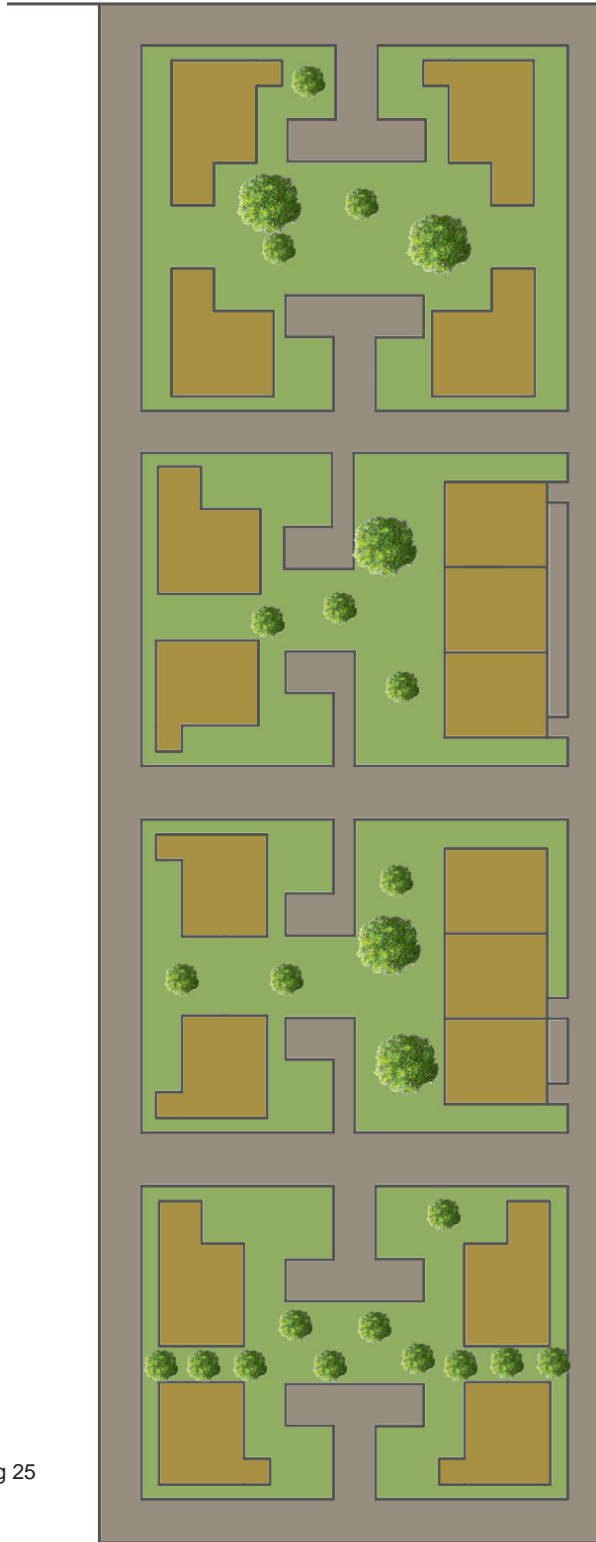
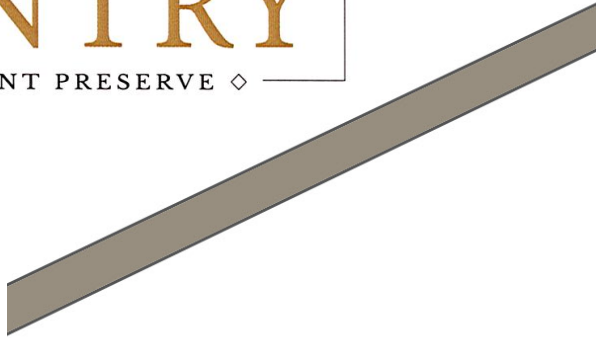


Fig 25



Chapter 4

McMansions



Fig 26

“McMansion is a slang term that describes a large, often opulent or ostentatious, mass-produced house... McMansion is a play on McDonald’s fast-food restaurants but is also associated with a generic, cookie-cutter, suburban aesthetic for home design.” (Kagan, 2021)

The origin of McMansions was in California in the 1980’s and they hit a peak in the 2008 subprime mortgage crisis that created the housing bubble and financial crisis. Middle class families were getting tired of the Levittown style homes and wanted something lavish but in a middle class price. McMansions became the ultimate symbol of living beyond one’s means. Looming over too-small lots, these cookie-cutter houses are often decked out with ersatz details, like chandeliers and foam-filled columns. The housing boom of the mid-2000’s was when these homes sky rocketed in popularity as families were being approved for high risk loans so they could afford these gaudy homes. What makes a house a McMansion is the inexpensive low quality materials.

The reason McMansions look so out of place and are eye sores is that they do not follow fundamental architect principles. In very simple terminology homes are primarily built of two factors, masses and voids. A mass refers to the main and biggest part of the building which can also be divided into primary mass and secondary mass. The primary mass is the main part of the building and should be easily recognizable as the main part and never be mistaken or compete with the secondary mass. Voids are the openings of buildings such as windows and doors. Voids should be placed carefully within the masses to help create rhythm throughout the building. McMansions violate these rules as they tend to create a too many masses, some up to six or seven masses that all compete for primary mass. There is no clear distinction to what the main part of the building is. With the many masses they also create many voids and then have a poor balance of windows.

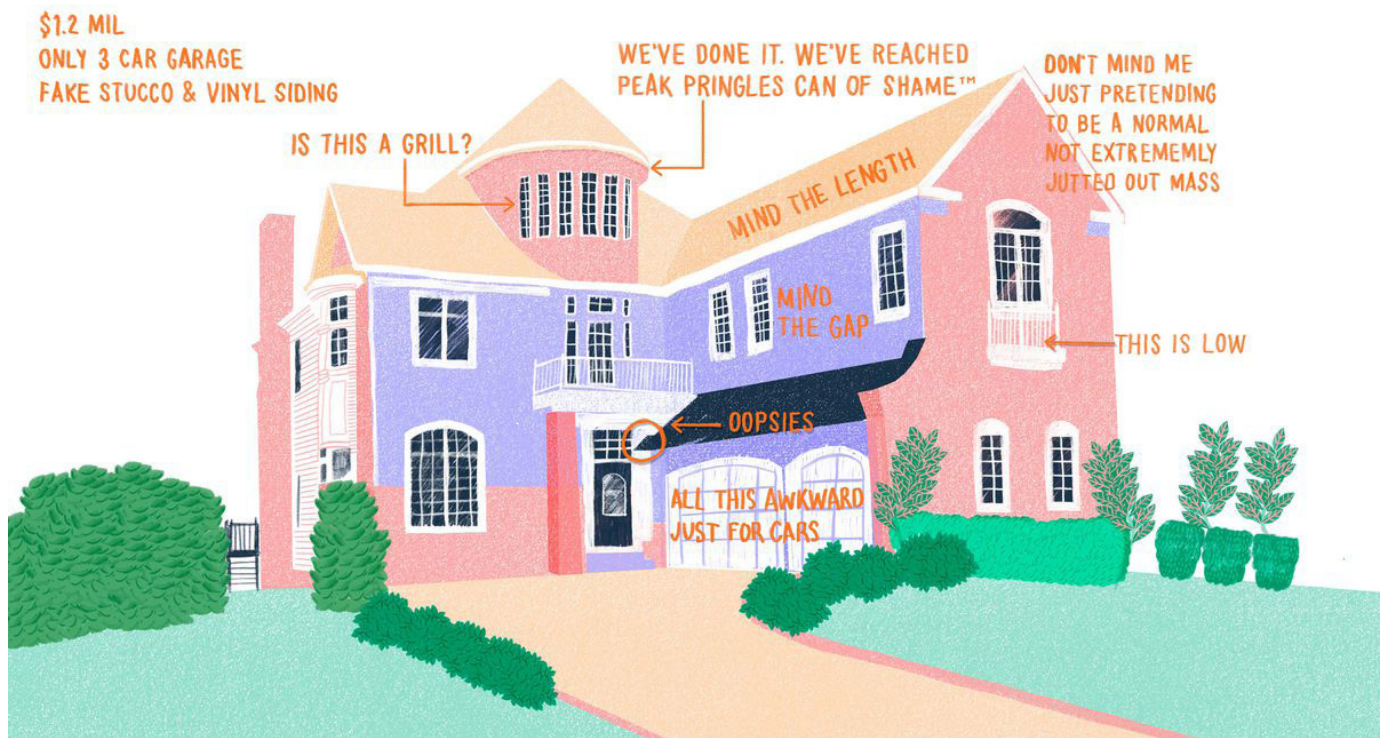


Fig 27

There are a few key differences in McMansions and regular mansions. A main factor is the workmanship of the home and if the craftsmanship is produced not only for aesthetics but real life elements making it functional, durable, and long-lasting. The other main part is the McMansions lack of architectural integrity. Mansions will have one consistent style throughout the house while McMansions will have a haphazard mix of styles or low quality emulations of other previous style homes.

In the year of 2022, the average number of children under 18 in a U.S. household was 1.94. An average three bedroom house would be plenty for the average family. In average sized homes each room has a purpose and is designed for the needs of the tenant. This contrasts the massive square footage of McMansions where they average 3,000 square feet plus. They are no longer designing for the families that will reside in these homes but designing excessive spaces that will never or hardly ever be used.

Beyond appearance, there are other reasons why these homes are bad architecture. Due to their immense size they produce a disproportionately large amount of carbon dioxide emissions for a single family home. Many of these buildings do not use sustainable or durable materials. The result is cheap houses that are not solid and do not last long. These houses cannot be passed down from generation to generation like homes were in the past. To make them cheap the builders skimp on details and use faux detailing like fake chimney stacks or shutters. The oversized homes waste money and resources with higher maintenance and utility costs. These homes are oversized for the plot of land on which they are placed. These developments replace space where farms and wildlife once were, which changes the character of the surrounding neighborhoods. The pricing of these new developments keeps them just out of reach to lower middle income families. Ironically, many of these families were also non-white families. The same old story repeats with the same groups of people getting priced out of neighborhoods.

Mansion



Fig 28

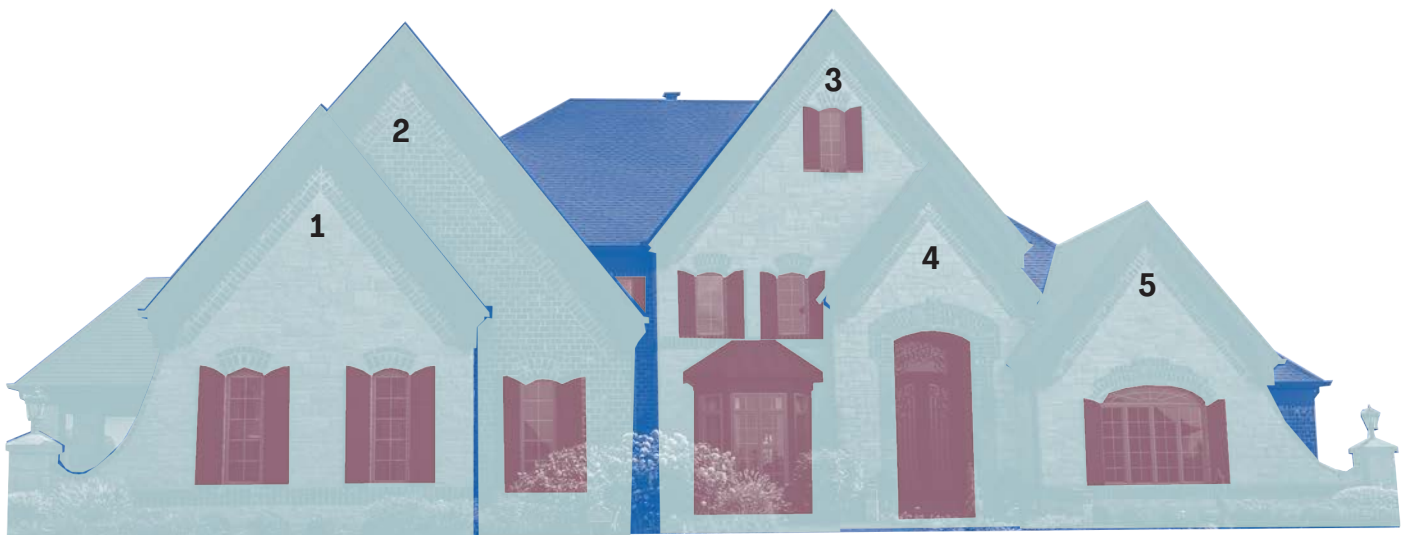


- 1 Primary Mass
- 1 Secondary Mass
- Even Amount of Voids

McMansion



Fig 29



- 1 Primary Mass
- 5 Secondary Mass
- Uneven Amount of Voids

Chapter 5

Benefits of Multi-Zoning



Fig 30

Two sites were visited while writing this dissertation. Both sites are located outside of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. These two developments were both recently created and both still have homes available for new residents to come live in. These site visits included driving around the communities and a tour inside the new home models which are decorated as ready to live in. They are similar to the Levittown of yesteryear in that there are only a few different designs to choose from and there is a definite feel to the developments and the target customer who would buy in these homogenous neighborhoods. The main differences are the sizes of the houses and the cost of the houses which go to over one million dollars. In addition to single family homes, both developments offer town homes which come in clusters of three to four connected houses.

Franklin Station, located 17 miles west of center city Philadelphia, is the Toll brothers newest development. The development is located directly adjacent to U.S. Route 1, a major motorway. Only accessible by car, one drives and turns off the motorway and up the hill to the new development. The land was previously occupied by The Franklin Mint, a coin factory and museum. As we drove around the community it was quite eerie. It was trash collection day and everyone had the same trash can, and they were perfectly aligned down each street. This is unlike other cities or towns where the residents have different trash cans or just put out the trash in bags, and not all are in a row in a certain spot on the curb. It was very quiet there with no one outside or walking around the community.



Fig 31

Touring the site inside a few of the available properties was an intriguing experience. All of the finishings (lights, closet finishings, etc.) were builders grade. They put them in just for people to get rid of them and put in better quality finishings. The yards were perfectly manicured with pre planned plants and trees. Residents are not allowed to plant or grow any new trees or even plant a vegetable garden. There was very rigid HOA which prohibited certain decorations for the outside of the houses.

Franklin Station has a strong marketing campaign for their development emphasizing how picture perfect the community is. Their packet depicts images of people enjoying time in downtown Media, a nearby city, which is only accessible by car and which is an 8 minute car ride down route 1 only if there is no traffic. The alternative would be an almost two hour walk along major motorways or a 40 minute bus route. The advertising does not accurately represent the everyday life within the development as there are no restaurants, shops or schools etc. in the development. They do have a small club house that can be rented out for gatherings and a small pool that can be joined by the residents.

The Toll brothers follow very similar foot steps to the Levitt family. None of them have an education background of design or architecture yet still decided to start in the business. The Toll brothers was the fifth biggest home builder in the U.S. in 2020.

Ventry at Edgemont was the second site visit taken. Similar to Franklin Station it is an isolated community set aside from the rest of the township it is located in. This development offers much more personalization than Franklin Station, but it still felt very eerie. This community features cheaply made homes at a very costly prices. As shown in the photo they have put decorative details on them including faux shutters that would not cover the whole window. Three different facades are used on these homes. In this development, there were no shops or cafes for people to walk to after work or on the weekends. By offering none of these amenities it becomes a very car intensive community. This deprives teens and children of freedom, leaving them dependent on their parents for automobile transportation. In a development surrounded by motorways there is no way for children to go out and venture on their own. There are no walks home from school or trips to the corner store to get a fun snack on the weekend. They become extremely dependent on their parents or guardians to drive them to entertainment. Ventry at Edgemont also offered a club house and pool, but they were undersized for the population of the development. It is assumed that most residents will join swim clubs and country clubs in the surrounding area for their entertainment.



Fig 32

When building in mass production manner, there becomes a limit of how many different styles and floor plans of homes can be constructed. Doing this creates a lack of variation in home design and there were no unique architectural features. This contributes to an overall lack of good design within these spaces. All of these homes have a cookie cutter layout that only a select few people who were employed by the Levitt's thought was the ideal spatial arrangement for people. This is detrimental, as people live their lives so differently and interact with spaces distinctly. But when every house as far as you can see has one of six different floor plans and exterior facade, this creates a specific model of how people should live their life.

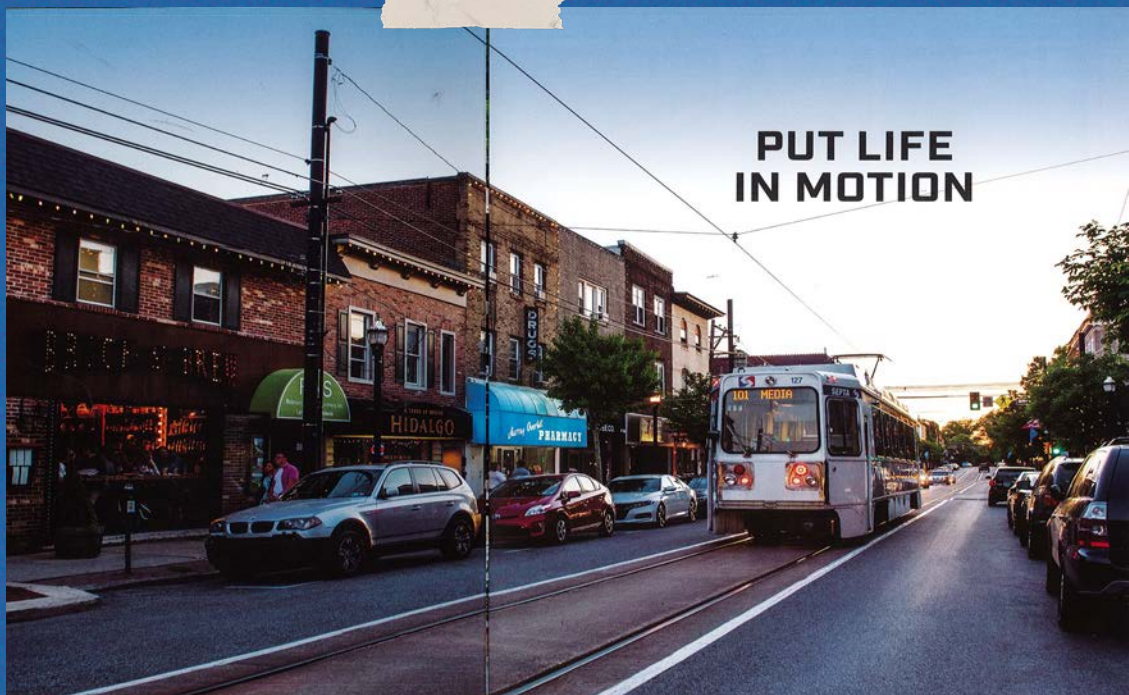
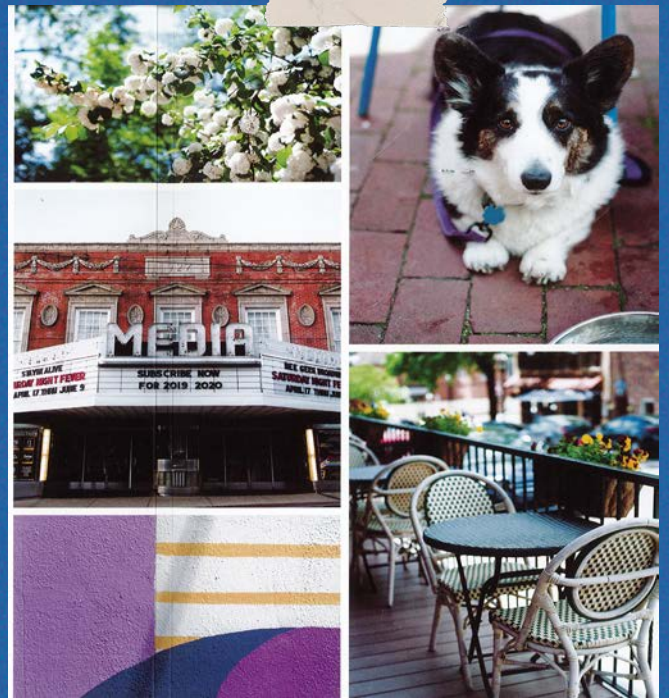
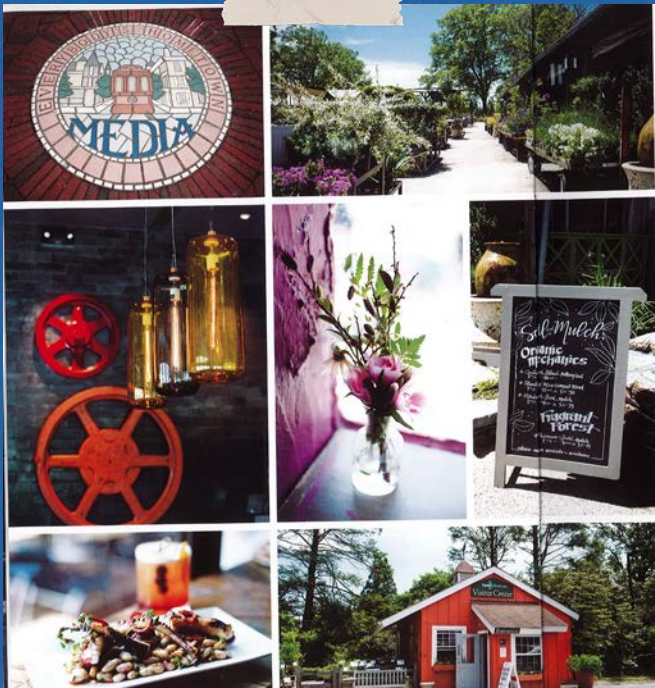
When these neighborhoods are created, they are designed using single use zoning. Zoning separates land and buildings for multi use spaces including residential, commercial, or industrial. Within these single use zoning communities there becomes a lack of walkable accessibility to everyday necessities and services. People in these communities become reliant on cars which has multiple negative effects. When zones have diverse uses it can help the occupants and surrounding neighbors with various aspects of their lives including health, mood and productivity. "Most of these studies noted that certain neighborhood types with design feature such as connected sidewalks, architectural variety, etc. manifested positive correlation with walking and biking." (Kashef, 2011)



Fig 33

There is change already happening with single-family zoning. For instance, the state of California recently signed legislation which eliminated single-family zones while other cities and states are following California's lead. Needing to be car dependent has negative effects on people of all ages from children to the elderly. With children, there is an insufficiency of independence and of what children can do alone. When they live in these neighborhoods there are no venues like town centers or parks within walking distance. They become stuck or dependent on a parent/guardian or older sibling to drive them places. For adults there become lengthy commutes. "People with lengthy car commutes suffer from disproportionate levels of stress, pain, obesity, and are even forty percent likelier to get a divorce." (Lowrey, 2011) Before the Covid-19 Pandemic when majority of Americans were still regularly committing to work the U.S. census reported that the average American commute was 27.6 minutes each way.

Many of these neighborhoods have and are on cul-de-sacs and are single use zoning buildings which makes them a lot less accessible and walkable. "Actually, when it comes to traffic, cul-de-sacs are unsafe. Did you know that traffic fatalities are 270% more likely on cul-de-sacs than on grid streets?" (Becher, 2012) This makes it so children are forced to be contained on their street and play with neighbors and not able to explore their surroundings. "In a dense grid system you can walk from place-to-place. But the complex maze-like design of cul-de-sac neighborhoods positions just about every destination farther away, making walking practically impossible." (Snyder, 2011) They are not able to walk to the corner store to buy a treat, like many of their parents did growing up. Single use zoning has stymied not only architectural growth, but also emotional growth of the families who live there.



Ventry Edgmont



Fig 35



Fig 36

Figure: 35,36

Townhomes in Ventry Edgmont in which this community is only residential and has no mixed use zoning. To improve the design and the lives of the people in this development one could simply turn one of the homes into mixed zoning, where they have their shop on the bottom floor and live on the top. This makes it very easily accesible to everyone in the community no matter their age.

Conclusion



Fig 37

In conclusion, the analysis of this essay rests upon the assumptions that the suburbs changed when Levittown, New York was imagining and built. Before the Levitts, there were suburbs that existed, but each house had its own unique style and feel. There were not cookie cutter subdivisions of homes. It is true that after World War II there was a real need for affordable housing, but the limitations of use and design that the Levitts placed on their homes was not beneficial to the overall cultural development of the nation. In addition, adding the “whites only” clause into their contracts only further increased the racial divide that is still prevalent in the housing market today. The Levitt family flipped the way Americans looked to the suburbs and in their relationship with planned communities and cultural sameness. What was gained is the so called efficiency of building homes faster and easier. As the awareness of the drawbacks to planned communities grows, HOA’s and the lack of diversity becomes evident to a new generation of homeowners.

The depiction of such areas in pop culture is usually in an unflattering light. What starts out as a utopia turns into a very unpleasant place to live. What Levittown offered in the forties and fifties are not the conveniences that many are looking for today. They lack public transportation, places to gather and express individualism. These factors are definitely slowing the development of new subdivisions similar to Levittown. The uniqueness of design, cultural diversity and the ability to commute easily are back in vogue. The Levittowns of the country will not go away but their popularity surely has.



Fig 38

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