CONSTRUCTIONS OF HOME
INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES IN
ARCHITECTURE, LAW, AND LITERATURE

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AMS PRESS, INC.
New York
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**INTRODUCTION**

George had therefore to report to Lucy that the View was still there and that the Room must be there, too, but could not be found. She was glad of the news, although at that moment she was homeless.

The above quotation is taken from E. M. Forster’s "Appendix. A View without a Room" which he wrote for his novel A Room with a View (1908) in 1958. Forster here complicates the cultural concept of "home," which is traditionally associated with stability, for the individual as much as for social groups and for entire cultures. Its relevance in shaping the way people organize their lives and make their decisions in politics, community life, cultural practice, or in forming their general outlook is obvious. The British tradition epitomized by the much-quoted phrase "My Home is My Castle" comes to mind, or the culturally almost untranslatable idea of German Gemülichkeit, signifying the cozy comfort and protection frequently associated with home, as well as the German etymological antithesis of unheimlich, literally "un-homely," which has come to refer to an eerie feeling and the discomfort aroused by the uncanny.

The problem Forster identifies in the quotation and in the novel it refers to is suggested by the severing of the perspective of the "view" on the world from the safe basis of a home where the view is anchored as in an Archimedean point. The severing is symbolized by the loss of the eponymous room in the Pension Bertolini as well as by Lucy's homelessness after World War II, and it can be generalized as symptomatic of the twentieth-century approach to the concept of "home." Nineteenth-century Europe had very much reveled in the pleasures of domesticity and homelessness in the complex cultural spans of Victorianism or Biedermeier, with implications of colonialism, imperialism, the exclusion of large parts of the working classes from proper homes, and the oppressive gendering, as in Dickens's proverbial cricket on the hearth in his "Fairy Tale of
THE PLACE WE LOVE TO HATE:
THE CRITICS CONFRONT SUBURBIA, 1920–1960

John Archer

Over the past three centuries, since the very early 1700s, a new and distinct planning type, the suburb, has grown to maturity—first, in a piecemeal fashion in the Thames valley west of London, and then in the nineteenth century more broadly throughout England, the United States, and to a more modest extent, continental Europe. In the United States, where suburban growth has been most pervasive, expansion notably accelerated at two points in the twentieth century, first in the 1920s with rising automobile ownership, and then in the decades following World War II with the rise of mass production building techniques, easier terms for mortgage financing, and the expanding U.S. economy in general. By the turn of the twenty-first century more than half the American population had come to live in suburbia, with tens of millions more working and shopping there. The implications of this are profound for the future of America and—as suburbia becomes pervasive around the world—the planet, in respects ranging from class, race, and gender relations to aesthetics, lifestyle, culture, ecology, sustainability, and economic and social justice.¹

By its very ubiquity, the material and cultural apparatus of suburbia shapes much of who we are and what we do, physically, cognitively, ideologically, economically, socially, and politically. In America, it has become one of the chief paradigms according to which society, family,

¹ I am greatly indebted to Benjamin Wiggins and Holley Wlodarczyk for invaluable research assistance on this essay, and I am grateful for financial support from the Office of the Dean of the Graduate School of the University of Minnesota, the College of Liberal Arts, and the University of Minnesota McKnight Arts and Humanities Endowment.

selfhood, and daily life are constituted. Yet in rough measure proportional to its success over time, suburbia has also been a target of critique and condemnation. Acerbic critiques abound, even from suburbia's earliest days. As early as 1754 a popular British periodical published a "Letter on the Villas of Our Tradesmen" satirizing the unsophisticated, tasteless sort of "little country box" that people with new money were erecting along the roads of London. 2 By the 1920s, Sinclair Lewis's novel Babbitt (1922) could express with satirical disdain the growing concern over the devastating effect that standardized production processes had on suburban homes, their furnishings, and their residents. Beginning in the mid-1950s, the stream of condemnatory songs, films, and novels—most notably academic and journalistic publications—became a barrage, accelerating just at the time when moving to suburbia became a mainstream choice for America's middle classes. Acerbic tracts such as John Keats's Crackle in the Picture Window (1956) and John McPartland's No Down Payment (1957) were soon followed by a chorus of ridicule and loathing, such as Malvina Reynolds's "Little Boxes" (1963), The Monkees' "Pleasant Valley Sunday" (1966), Neal Peart's Subdivisions (1982), the film American Beauty, and Richard Yates's Revolutionary Road (1961). 4

The situation is paradoxical: just as an expanding economy, easy financing, and mass production techniques made suburbia possible for a far broader range of Americans than before, just as suburban single-family houses offered the opportunity to achieve the upwardly mobile American dream, suburbia became the terrain that critics uniformly loved to hate, and the object of such common critiques that bashing the suburbs became formulaic. A key to the paradox is to examine where the criticism came from—what were the interests of the cultural critics who thrived on these targets? Just as the debate, what brought suburbia into their sights, how the critics' antipathy toward suburbia became broadly accepted in popular culture, and how counterdiscourses from other perspectives played into the discussion. These are the questions that frame this essay, which begins

with an overview of the importance historically accorded to the single-family house (the staple of the suburban landscape) in American culture and ideological, then turns to some of the earliest concerted criticism leveled at suburban housing and suburbia, on the grounds of standardization and alienation, starting in the 1920s. Soon cultural critics associated with the Frankfurt School and New York Intellectuals brought the terms of much more intense debates—on mass society and commodified culture—to bear on suburbia. During the 1950s and early 1960s, however, the terms of the debate over suburbia shifted from political and social concerns to more narrowly aesthetic grounds. The effect of this was to simplify the discussion and ultimately frame it in negative stereotypes, at the same time thus rendering its conclusions much easier to digest and more amenable to the popular media, and ultimately establishing conventions for the assessment of suburbia that would persist for the next half century.

The Stakes: Suburbia and Selfhood

The history of suburbia is coeval with the history of the detached single-family middle-class house. Together, since their origins in the early eighteenth century, they have constituted a landscape in which persons of bourgeois (or middle-class) economic status could live in a manner consistent with the ideal of a private, individualized selfhood: a political and epistemological ideal that likewise arose during the early eighteenth century Enlightenment. Just as Enlightenment philosophers' understanding of autonomous selfhood was critical to the rise of democratic politics and capitalist economics, so the detached (and thus in some senses autonomous) dwelling afforded its bourgeois occupant the opportunity to shape a personal and social identity in self-defined terms. Or, put differently: unlike in feudal society, where a person's identity was largely defined and fixed from birth by prevailing social and political conditions, Enlightenment-capitalist society accorded to every person the obligation to define and realize an individual selfhood, an obligation for which, by the mid-nineteenth century, the detached bourgeois dwelling came to be seen as the perfect solution. 6

In pragmatic terms, the single-family detached dwelling became both an instrument and a sign of that autonomous selfhood (at very least for the husband/father who owned the house, less so for the rest of the family living there): building a house would afford its resident the opportunity to personally define how he would live and how he would represent himself to the rest of society. By the middle of the nineteenth century, this had become

basic advice for Americans, as recommended in an 1855 essay by the popular and influential Brooklyn preacher Henry Ward Beecher:

A house is the shape which a man's thoughts take when he imagines how he should like to live. Its interior is the measure of his social and domestic nature; its exterior, of his esthetic and artistic nature. It interprets, in material forms, his ideas of home, of friendship, and of comfort.7

The house, in other words, not only shaped the patterns and practices of daily life—themselves indicators of class and status—but also delineated openly, for all to appreciate, particulars of the inhabitant's social standing, taste, personality, and character. The size of the house, the style in which it was built, its plan, its furnishings, its landscaping, and the everyday routines it provided for (raising children, family togetherness, artistic and literary pursuits, entertaining friends, and so forth) all served as instruments for shaping and realizing the owner's identity. This ideal of delineating selfhood by means of a detached single-family house, and particularly a suburban detached house, isolated and framed in its own private landscape, is closely intertwined with other key strands of American mythology and ideology. These include the Jeffersonian agrarian ideal of the yeoman (or gentleman) farmer prospering in a pastoral landscape; the ideal of the private, entrepreneurial "self-made man," enunciated on the United States Senate floor in 1832 by Henry Clay, augmented by books such as John Frost's *Self Made Men of America* (1848) and Charles Seymour's *Self-Made Men* (1858); the bootstraps-to-riches stories of Horatio Alger that started in 1866 and continued through more than a hundred books over thirty years; Dale Carnegie's self-help evangelism in books such as *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (1936); and the ideal of the American dream, granting the opportunity for success to all who persevere, which originated in the 1930s and, not long after midcentury, became firmly wed to the idea of owning a "dream house" (itself an idea dating from the 1920s) in the suburbs.8

In addition, the efforts of self-made men and the homes they erected were collectively seen as contributory to the moral and political strength of the nation. As J. J. Thomas wrote in the *Illustrated Annual Register of Rural Affairs* in 1865: "A house is always a teacher; it may become an agent of civilization [...]. When [builders] works embody fitness, truth and dignified simplicity, these republican virtues will be firmly rooted in the nation."9 Six decades later, as Herbert Hoover praised "the tremendous post-war expansion of suburban areas with detached houses" as "one of the finest achievements of the present period of increasing national prosperity,"10 Calvin Coolidge tied that expansion to the nation's future political and ideological longevity: "No greater contribution could be made to assure the stability of the Nation, and the advancement of its ideals, than to make it a Nation of home-owning families."11 From many perspectives, suburbia and the suburban dwelling had become America's future: the dream house afforded its resident the twin opportunities of shaping a private selfhood and fulfilling the American dream, while suburbia itself, as the terrain where such individualist enterprises were realized, became instrumental to the nation's success. Still, as suburbia became increasingly integral and necessary to the production of private selfhood and individual identity, it also became a correspondingly conspicuous target for critics of American society which, as a culture beholden to industrial capitalism, mass production, and commodity consumption, threatened increasing erosion of identity and alienation of selfhood.

**Industrialization, Standardization, Alienation**

In the nineteenth century the notion that building and furnishing a house could afford its resident the opportunity to articulate an individual selfhood and identity necessarily relied on the premise that the house could be tailored precisely to a given individual's character and interests. Realistically this may have been a matter more of theory than of practice, as the individualization of house plans and exteriors was not only limited to those who could afford to build their own houses and do so in a personalized fashion, but also limited by the stylistic conventions to which housing widely conformed. Still, the role played by richly furnished parlors and other interior spaces in shaping the "social demeanor" of those who lived there—a highly affordable practice that could produce distinctive interiors—sustained the larger notion that houses could help shape and represent their residents' identity.12 The rise of industrial production techniques for houses and their furnishings at first promised even greater opportunity: more sizes, types, and styles could be made available to more people at less cost. Techniques for the prefabrication of entire houses, as well as the standardization of parts and furnishings, were already in place at the beginning of the century. Between 1908 and 1940, for example, Sears, Roebuck and Company manufactured and shipped 447 different models of homes as ready-to-assemble kits. Even Gustav Stickley, the principal proponent of the early twentieth-century "Craftsman" (nominally hand-crafted) style of furniture design, wrestled with the need to industrialize his furniture production in

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order to make it affordable. But mechanization was a two-edged sword: for at the same time that it made more variety available to a greater part of the population, it also meant that a given artifact or design, because it was a factory-produced commodity, could no longer be considered authentically suited to any given individual — and thus a challenge to the proposition that the self-made man, having at last secured a dwelling all his own, could ever truly make it an authentic instrument of selfhood.

In the novel *Babbitt* (1922) Sinclair Lewis vividly captured the disappointing shift in what a homeowner might expect with such a house, epitomized in the description of George Babbitt’s bedroom:

> It was a masterpiece among bedrooms, right out of Cheerful Modern Houses for Medium Incomes. Only it had nothing to do with the Babbitts, or anyone else [...]. In fact there was but one thing wrong with the Babbitt house: It was not a home. (14–15)

Three years later, in 1925, Caroline Bartlett Crane expressed despair over the “mass production” of houses, producing “long rows of homes just alike” that potentially could make their residents “go crazy.” Three years after that, Christine Frederick protested the broader shift that industrialized production had occasioned toward standardization, assailing it as the ruination of suburbia. Her essay “Is Suburban Living a Delusion?” (1928) was in many respects a harbinger of the acerbic critiques that subsequent generations would level at suburban uniformity and loss of selfhood. She decried the loss of individuality that standardization affected:

> The sad truth is that the suburb standardizes those things which a true individual doesn’t want standardized, and leaves unstandardized those things he most desires standardized [...]. Standardization in the suburbs is not applied, as it should be, to the comfort of living, but to the flattening out of personal individuality.

Portentous as the concerns raised by Lewis, Crane, and Frederick may have been of attitudes toward suburbia that would prevail broadly in future decades, theirs were not yet the prevailing positions, and they certainly did not speak for the steadily growing numbers who were moving to suburbia. Nevertheless their concerns did tie into broader apprehensions, over the present and future prospects of Western industrial-capitalist society, that had been raised in sociological and political discourse over the previous several decades. Key to this debate was the pioneering analysis laid out in 1887 by the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies regarding the breakdown of community that he saw occurring under the conditions of modern industrial production. He differentiated *Gemeinschaft*, a comparatively traditional, long-standing form of community based on shared values, familial ties, and customs of mutual dependence, from *Gesellschaft*, a form of community that individuals in a privatized, competitive society construct explicitly to facilitate mutual cooperation in the pursuit of self-interest. While *Gemeinschaften* had been typical of a feudal order where everyone’s place was fixed in a complex, often hierarchical social fabric, *Gesellschaften* were a product of modern capitalist society, in which people were cast as individuals, and handed the responsibility of forging their own identities and relationships around common interests. As Tönnies noted, interpersonal ties in *Gesellschaften* ordinarily would be much weaker, and more impersonal, than in *Gemeinschaften*, since they would be formed artificially around specific interests, rather than constantly generated, through custom and tradition, across multiple interests amongst the population at large. The rise of *Gesellschaften* thus bespoke growing social fragmentation, and alienation of individuals from the common interests of other citizens, under modern forms of industrial capitalism.

While Tönnies was not immediately concerned with the rise of suburbia, the discourse on suburban society has often been cast in much the same terms as those in which he analyzed the formation of community. As early as 1838 John Claudius Loudon, the popular English author of garden and architectural manuals, prefigured Tönnies’s description of *Gesellschaft* when he advised prospective suburbanites to choose a neighborhood in which the other residents were of a comparable social and economic class — in effect to seek to form a *Gesellschaft* — where “the houses and inhabitants are all, or chiefly, of the same description and class as the house we intend to inhabit, and as ourselves.” A century and a half later, the *Gesellschaft* is still echoed in the ubiquitous Common Interest Development (CID) suburban planning paradigm that registers explicitly the incorporation of artificially narrow criteria as a benchmark of community formation. And gated communities, of course, take that privatization of common interest one step further, purposefully refining the bounds of the *Gesellschaft* by sequestering it entirely from the public arena.

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13 On the history of prefabricated houses, and on Sears kits in particular, see Barry Bergdoll and Peter Christensen, *Home Delivery: Fabricating the Modern Dwelling* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2008). Gustav Stickley’s influential journal *The Craftsman*, to which he contributed many articles and designs, appeared beginning in 1901.


16 Christine Frederick, “Is Suburban Living a Delusion?” *Outlook* 148.8 (1928), 290–291.

17 See for example Herbert Hoover’s 1927 assertion, quoted below, that the expansion of suburbia was one of the “finest achievements” of the present day.

18 Ferdinand Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* [1887], 2nd ed. revised and expanded (Berlin: K. Curtius, 1912). One example of *Gesellschaft* would be the labor union, formed for the purpose of advancing the employees’ mutual self-interest against owners and management.

Mass Culture: Frankfurt School and New York Intellectuals

Concerns such as Tönnies’s over rising economic and social alienation, augmented during the 1920s by the social criticism of Max Weber and Georg Lukács’s analysis of commodity fetishism, laid foundations for inquiries during the 1930s and 1940s focused on the rise of mass society and the corresponding production of mass culture – inquiries that in due course would necessarily extend to a critique of much of suburbia. American critics had paid increasingly close attention to the rise of mass (or, as focus and terminology shifted back and forth, popular) culture and society since the late 1890s. In 1938 Louis Wirth, a principal figure in the Chicago school of American sociology, looked to the growth of mass society with grave apprehension. He projected a worrisome scenario for the future course of the industrial city, in which, among other consequences, culture would be flattened and individuality would be suppressed:

Services of the public utilities, of the recreational, cultural institutions must be adjusted to mass requirements. Similarly, the cultural institutions, such as the schools, the movies, the radio, and the newspapers, by virtue of their mass clientele, must necessarily operate as leveling influences [...]. If the individual would participate at all in the social, political, and economic life of the city, he must subordinate some of his individuality to the demands of the larger community and in that measure immerse himself in mass movements.

And to this erosion of culture and individuality, Wirth tied the insidious ascendency of commodity culture over traditional human relations: “the pecuniary nexus which implies the purchasability of services and things has displaced personal relations as the basis of association.”

A year later sociologist Herbert Blumer, a product of the Chicago school, contributed a chapter to a textbook edited by Robert E. Park (a principal figure in the Chicago school) that assessed the state of mass society in highly pessimistic terms. Delineating an apparently post-Gesellschaft stage of societal evolution, Blumer viewed the mass as an aggregation of “detached and alienated individuals,” a group that was “devoid of the features of a society or community.” As all these individuals were ordinarily “separated from one another and unknown to one another,” Blumer argued that the mass typically behaved “in terms of each individual’s seeking to answer his own needs,” rather than in terms of community interest. Nor did Blumer hesitate to lay much of the blame for this alienation and isolation directly at the feet of commodity culture: in that everyone’s “individual activities are primarily in the form of selections – such as the selection of a new dentifrice,” and given the power of “Mass Advertising” to influence everyone’s individual selection, the mass would perform as a consummate consumer public.

By the late 1930s American sociologists had clearly acknowledged the rise of mass society as a significant problem, and began to examine its spread in connection with related social and political concerns. But over the next decade and a half it would not be Chicago sociologists who pursued the study of mass society most intensively in connection with such matters as individuality, alienation, community, commodity culture, conformity, taste, and morality; two other schools of social critics instead took the lead.

One was the Frankfurt School of critical theorists, originally established at the Institut für Sozialforschung, founded in Frankfurt in 1923, and then brought under the leadership of Max Horkheimer in 1931, and whose members, fleeing the rise of Nazism, arrived in the United States in 1934. Prominent figures within the group, in addition to Horkheimer, included Theodor Adorno, Erich Fromm, Leo Löwenthal, and Herbert Marcuse. The other influential camp was the group of writers and critics known as the New York Intellectuals, many of whom were educated at City College in New York, and whose early work began to appear in Partisan Review during the 1930s. Members included Clement Greenberg, Irving Howe, Daniel Bell, Nathan Glazer, and, of particular interest here, Dwight Macdonald.


22 Wirth, “Urbanism as a Way of Life,” 17.
Looking back on the course of the mass society debate as it had unfolded since the early 1940s, Daniel Bell in 1956 briefly recapitulated the principal lines of argument that Frankfurt and New York critics had advanced to date:

The revolutions in transport and communications have brought men into closer contact with each other and bound them in new ways; the division of labor has made them more interdependent; tremors in one part of society affect all others. Despite this greater interdependence, however, individuals have grown more estranged from one another. The old primary group ties of family and local community have been shattered; ancient parochial faiths are questioned; few unifying values have taken their place. Most important, the critical standards of an educated elite no longer shape opinion or taste. As a result, mores and morals are in constant flux, relations between individuals are tangential or compartmentalized rather than organic. At the same time greater mobility, spatial and social, intensifies concern over status. Instead of a fixed or known status symbolized by dress or title, each person assumes a multiplicity of roles and constantly has to prove himself in a succession of new situations. Because of all this, the individual loses a coherent sense of self.25

Although the larger purpose of Bell's essay was to challenge such an analysis of mass society, his précis highlighted several concerns that not only were central to the mass culture critics, but which became equally important to these and other critics in debate over suburbia: these included isolation, loss of community, declining morality, deteriorating taste, anxiety over status, pressure to conform to a particular role or roles, and loss of identity.

When Bell referred, in his précis, to the erosion of "old primary group ties" in favor of "tangential or compartmentalized" relations, he implicitly acknowledged that Tönnies's distinction between Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft continued to anchor the thinking of many, if not most, of the mass culture critics. Tönnies's argument clearly underpinned the approach of Dwight Macdonald, the earliest and foremost of the New York critics who would address mass and popular culture in relation to their social and political context. Already in a 1944 essay titled "A Theory of Popular Culture," Macdonald, in respectable Tönniesian fashion, differentiated folk art, which "grew from below, [...] a spontaneous autochthonous expression, shaped by the people themselves, [...] to satisfy their own needs," from popular culture, which was "imposed from above, [...] manufactured by technicians hired by the ruling class."26 In an expanded version of the essay published nine years later, titled "A Theory of Mass Culture" (1953), Macdonald elaborated the distinction. He characterized "a folk or people," on the one hand, as "a community, i.e. a group of individuals linked to each other by common interests, work, traditions, values, and sentiments; something like a family, each of whose members has a special place and function." Against this Gemeinschaft-like formulation he contrasted "the masses" in terms that both echoed Gesellschaft and portrayed (in a manner not unlike Wirth) the ensuing social and cultural disintegration:

A large quantity of people unable to express themselves as human beings because they are related to one another neither as individuals nor as members of communities—indeed they are not related to each other at all but only to something distant, abstract, non-human: a football game or bargain sale in the case of a crowd, a system of industrial production, a party or a State, in the case of the masses. The mass man is a solitary atom, uniform with and undifferentiated from thousands and millions of other atoms who go to make up "the lonely crowd," as David Riesman well calls American society.27

For Macdonald and other critics of mass culture, one of the key arguments lay in the fact that the commodification of cultural products had rendered them "standardised,"28 which in turn resulted in a society of passive, prefabricated consumption that is "imposed from above. It is fabricated by technicians hired by businessmen; its audiences are passive consumers, their participation limited to the choice between buying and not buying."29 Ultimately the "homogenised" nature of mass culture "destroys all values."30

Irvine Howe made much the same point in his 1948 essay, "Notes on Mass Culture," in which he cited at length Theodor Adorno's 1941 seminal discussion of standardization and its consequences in popular music. Bolstered by Adorno's critique, Howe's assessment of mass culture was as


pessimistic as Macdonald's, charging that it “reinforces [...] passivity and boredom,” and leads to “the depersonalization of the individual.” Here again are terms that would become central to the critique of suburbia: a product imposed in accord with mass fabrication techniques, on hapless, passive consumers, who were constrained to choose aesthetically debased merchandise from a manufactured menu.

Compared to Sinclair Lewis's discussion of standardized “Cheerful Modern Houses for Medium Incomes” that afforded no one a “home,” or Christine Frederick’s comparable complaint that the standardization of suburbia only served to flatten out personal individuality, Macdonald and Howe had escalated the critique of standardization significantly. Indeed in their eyes, the products of mass culture contributed to an even more insidious effect. As Howe explained, with respect to movies: they provided predictable, familiar, entertaining experiences that would help their viewers “acquiesce” to their situation in life — that is, to keep them from protesting the unjust conditions under which they lived and worked — and by closing off the opportunity to experience anything new or challenging, to “remain at peace with ourselves by helping us to suppress ourselves.”

For Macdonald, Howe, and Adorno, as well as other members of the Frankfurt School and New York Intellectuals, suburbia itself did not become a prominent object of critique; indeed during the period they were writing, the cultural impact of music, film, television, and many other popular media was considerably greater than that of suburbia, and thus a more opportune target for their attention. But Macdonald and Adorno, at least, made clear that suburbia, as a product of mass culture, certainly fit the critical paradigm that they were laying out. The very first paragraph of Macdonald’s 1944 essay on popular culture offered a list of examples of “Popular Culture,” including instances of literature, music, art, and architecture; the latter, he said, “from Victorian gothic to suburban Tudor.” In the revised version of this essay published in 1953, the same examples appear again, but now as specimens of “Mass Culture.” In the final, much extended version published in 1960, the examples of mass culture are updated; in architecture, the line now extends from Victorian Gothic to “ranch-house moderne.” While there is little mention of architecture and none of suburbia elsewhere in Macdonald’s essays, it nevertheless would have been easy for his readers to make the connection between these instances of suburbia and his appraisal of mass culture as prefabricated, standardized, and homogenized.

In remarks on 1940s wartime housing in Los Angeles, Adorno, writing jointly with Max Horkheimer in Dialectic of Enlightenment, made it clear that standardized housing was no less pernicious. Referring to tracts of “new bungalows on the outskirts” of the city, the authors characterized such houses as “inviting their users to throw them away after short use like tin cans.” Again, readers would recognize that suburban housing, as a disposable commodity standardized for mass production, amounted to little more than an apparatus of a commodity culture that ultimately abetted the debilitation of society. As Thomas Wheatland has written, it was Adorno’s conviction that “mass culture and commodity fetishism [...] promoted a pervasive conformity that stripped the masses of their individuality and subjectivity.” Inferences regarding Adorno’s attitude toward suburban housing were plain for the reader to see.

Selfhood and Identity: Erich Fromm

By the 1920s, critics such as Sinclair Lewis and Christine Frederick had begun to identify the challenges that industrialization and commodification posed to the role that houses might play in the articulation of selfhood and identity. During the 1930s and 1940s, the mass culture critics amplified these concerns in their wider indictment of standardization, de-personalization, and conformity in mass society. Among these critics, one Frankfurt School figure more than any other, Erich Fromm, maintained a persistent engagement with questions of selfhood and identity in modern society. In a series of best-selling books published during the 1940s and 1950s, Fromm brought these and broader questions concerning society,

32 Lewis, Babbitt, 14.
33 Howe, "Notes on Mass Culture," 121. Howe, like Macdonald, echoed charges by Adorno and other Frankfurt School critics that the formulaic standardization of cultural products provided consumers with relaxation and escape as a means of restoring them to a level of productivity suitable for the next day's work, while simultaneously sustaining a familiar complacency with their current position in society.
38 Horkheimer and Adorno, Dialectic of Enlightenment," 94. In light of Horkheimer's earlier remarks on the nature of individuality, it is hardly surprising that mass-produced housing would come in for such scorn: "Individuality, the true factor in artistic creation and judgment, consists in idiosyncrasies and quirks, but in the power to withstand the plastic surgery of the prevailing economic system which carves all men to one pattern." Max Horkheimer, "Art and Mass Culture," Studies in Philosophy and Social Science 9 (1941): 290.
39 Wheatland, The Frankfurt School in Exile, 175.
40 Fromm was a prominent member of the Institute for Social Research during its early years at Columbia University; however, Horkheimer formally severed Fromm's relationship with the Institute in 1939. See Wheatland, The Frankfurt School in Exile, 82-84, 223-225.
politics, and human nature before a much broader swath of the American public, and much more effectively, than any other Frankfurt School member or the New York Intellectuals.

In *Escape from Freedom* (1941), his first major work in English, Fromm focused on the heightened isolation and alienation that ensued from the rise of personal economic and political autonomy since the Middle Ages. In Fromm’s view, that autonomy was accompanied by serious existential consequences: “growing individualism means growing isolation, insecurity, and thereby growing doubt concerning one’s own role in the universe, the meaning of one’s life, and with all that a growing feeling of one’s own powerlessness and insignificance as an individual.”41 Worse, within this existential abyss, the terms in which human beings could relate to each other deteriorated to the level of objects and commodities:

Man does not only sell commodities, he sells himself and feels himself to be a commodity. The manual laborer sells his physical energy; the businessman, the physician, the clerical employee, sells their “personality” [...]. As with any other commodity it is the market which decides the value of these human qualities [...]. Thus the self-confidence, the “feeling of self,” is merely an indication of what others think of the person [...].

In the same way we regard our personal qualities and the result of our efforts as commodities that can be sold for money, prestige, and power.42

In *Man for Himself* (1947) Fromm examined further challenges posed to selfhood and identity by the inexorable rise of a market economy based on commodity consumption. Identifying a predominant personality type of the day as someone of the “marketing orientation,” he described this as an individual who “find[s] the conviction of identity not in reference to himself and his powers but in the opinion of others about him” – a “situation that makes him utterly dependent on the way others look at him” and requires that he “be free, free of all individuality.” In the end, “man, living in a market economy, feels himself to be a commodity.”43

In sum, at the hands of advertising and other marketing strategies, identity itself had become commodity. Fromm addressed the consequences of this shift in personality orientation in *The Sane Society* (1955; discussed at greater length below). Significantly a central chapter of the book, concerning “characterological changes” in twentieth-century society, focuses intensively on the population of postwar American suburbia. Consistent with his earlier interest in isolation, insecurity, and loss of identity, Fromm was concerned that Americans were trading away their individuality, their free will, and their moral compass, with suburbanites being the chief representatives of this trend. In his attention to problems of selfhood in a capitalist, consumer economy, Fromm (in a manner that complemented the work of the mass culture critics) thus set the stage for American critics who would look more closely at the new and, in many respects, unfamiliar territory of postwar suburbia as a mass-produced commodity-landscape.

**The New Middle Class: Mills, Riesman, and Whyte**

During the 1940s Frankfurt School and New York critics made intensive inquiries into the consequences of mass society and commodity culture for identity, community, and modern society in general. These inquiries were broad in scope: they encompassed Enlightenment ideology, the rise of industrial capitalism, commodity production, many forms of popular media, and much in between. Their resulting critiques of popular culture and mass production set the terms in which much of the future discussion of suburbia would proceed. Still, except for Fromm, their investigations did not include suburbia itself as a primary target. In the early 1950s, however, a small number of American sociologists began to focus more deliberately on suburbia, its residents, and their culture. And while the Americans would have been aware of the mass culture critics’ work – Riesman, for example, referred to Adorno and Löwenthal in a 1950 essay he published on “Listening to Popular Music,” and openly acknowledged the influence that his teacher and analyst Erich Fromm had on his work44 – their concerns focused more closely on the transformations under way in postwar American middle class society.

In 1951 C. Wright Mills published *White Collar: The American Middle Classes*, in which he chronicled the rise of a “new middle class” comprised of managers, salaried professionals, salespeople, and office workers – white-collar workers who, he argued, were finding themselves trapped in a bureaucratic machine that “increasingly sets the conditions of intellectual life and controls the major market for its products.” He identified suburbia, where white-collar workers increasingly chose to live, as a correspondingly pathetic register of the pernicious effects of a mass consumer society. He all but pitied those who lived in “little stucco boxes,” in “suburban slums,” beholden to “a mass society that has shaped him and seeks to manipulate him to its alien ends,” in which identity is, at least in part, a function of the selfhood and commodity of the day.

43 Erich Fromm, *Man for Himself* (London: Routledge, 1974): 73, 78, 136. Fromm pessimistically described this type as “rooted in the experience of oneself as a commodity and of one’s value as exchange value,” living a life concerned not with happiness but rather with “becoming salable” (Man for Himself, 68, 70).
“personality market.” Arguing along lines similar to Adorno and Macdonald, Mills indicted suburbia as emblematic of the depersonalization and commodification of the individual in modern capitalist society.

David Riesman’s book *The Lonely Crowd (1951)*, an academic bestseller, explored the postwar rise of much the same new middle class that Mills did, focusing on the different ways in which personal character develops and functions in relation to its larger social context. The centerpiece of the book is Riesman’s delineation of three “character types”: tradition-, inner-, and other-directed. People of the third, or other-directed, type exhibited a tendency to orient their identity in the direction of popular opinion and mass media. While this “sensitivity to the actions and wishes of others” could be a mark of healthy, gregarious individuals, an excessive “need for approval and direction from others” could just as easily result in personally and socially debilitating conformity. As Riesman put it, the common characteristic of other-directed people:

[...]

Like Fromm’s marketing orientation personality type – on which, Riesman acknowledged, the other-directed type was based – this type was most prevalent within the new middle class, among whom Riesman included white-collar bureaucrats and salaried employees. But unlike Mills, Riesman did not extend his critique of this type, or of white-collar workers, to their homes in suburbia. Nor did Riesman identify other-directedness as intrinsically cause for alarm. Indeed he indicated that any given individual ordinarily had characteristics of all three personality types. The principal ground for concern was balance: no one type should unduly predominate. And unlike many who followed him, Riesman did not condemn suburbia or its residents as pathologically other-directed, or conformist, or beholden to mass media. Still, his readers would have recognized these other-directed white-collar workers as the new *suburban* middle class: Mills had clearly connected them to suburbia, Herbert J. Gans (in work known to Riesman) had been studying their socialization in Park Forest, Illinois, since 1949, and William H. Whyte would shortly begin to document the residents of Park Forest more broadly for a series of articles that appeared in 1953 in *Fortune* and later would be incorporated into *The Organization Man (1956)*.

47. Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*, 22, 21. The words “is that” through “mass media” are italicized in the original.

For Riesman’s audience, the equivalence between the other-directed, conformist personality and suburbia was all too easy to draw.

Shifting his focus to the decline in privacy in American life, in settings ranging from the larger public social arena to the workplace and the home, Riesman did touch briefly on the relation between the spatial configuration of the suburban house and the behavior of its residents, especially those of the other-directed type. “The typical other-directed child,” he wrote, grows up “in close urban quarters, or in a suburb.” And “as the size and living space of the family diminish, home is no longer an area of solid privacy.” Riesman’s criticism was not directed exclusively at suburbia; nor did he extend the implications of his argument to consider the possibility that closer quarters, and thus increased levels of personal contact, might induce other-directed people to conform. But the inference was nevertheless obvious: that suburban housing could exacerbate conformity among those who were most likely to live there – a proposition that future researchers such as Whyte (1953) and Fromm (1955) were quick to pursue.

When Riesman returned to the topic of suburbia later in the decade, in an essay titled “The Suburban Diaslocation” (1957; revised in 1958 as “The Suburban Sadness”), he expressed misgivings over suburban literature, such as John P. Marquand’s novel *Point of No Return* (1949), that made too facile a connection between uniform suburban housing and conformity; Riesman reminded his readers that “actually, uniformity and conformity are quite different matters.” He was also reluctant to press the general critique of suburbia too far. In a section of the essay called “The Aimless Quality of Suburban Life,” he commented briefly on the rise of a certain “aimlessness, a pervasive low-keyed unpleasure,” but he ceded further discussion to others: to understand “what is missing in suburbia,” he directed the reader to Erich Fromm’s recently published *Sane Society* (1955) as well as to Percival and Paul Goodman’s *Communitas* (1947).

Still, Riesman had not abandoned interest in the relation between behavior and the built environment; indeed one section of the 1957 essay, under the subhead “Suburban Styles of Life and Thought,” is devoted to the consequences of new kinds of suburban floor plans and furnishings. He noted for example that popular amenities such as patios and recreation rooms were shrinking the scale at which people commonly socialized, from the neighborhood to the household: “the home itself, rather than the neighborhood, becomes the chief gathering place for the family – either in the ‘family room’ with its games, its TV, its informality, or outdoors around
were becoming established. Thirty-five miles south of Chicago the newly rising suburb of Park Forest, already the site of Herbert Gans’s field research,54 offered a perfect laboratory for Whyte’s own research, culminating in four articles published in *Fortune* in 1953, then revised and expanded as the final nine chapters of *The Organization Man* in 1956. Focusing on some of the first portions of Park Forest to be completed, consisting of attached houses grouped around common courtyards, Whyte analyzed the ways in which residents engaged and affiliated with each other, how these connections were mediated by the physical fabric of the courtyards, individual dwellings, and the larger development, and in turn how all of this contributed to the shaping of selfhood and identity, as well as broader relations of status, gender, and class.

Like Riesman, Whyte was inclined to play down concerns over conformity, although his field research allowed him to discuss the question in more depth than Riesman. At Park Forest, he wrote, the situation is “not a simple case of conformity. Within these suburbs there is a great deal of diversity.” Nor was there any “discernible class structure,” due to the residents’ “unwillingness to concede class differences,”55 as well as to the wide range of community activities in which they took part, the multiple allegiances that they forging, the abundance of outlets for civic and social participation, and even the varied tenor and quality of neighborhood interaction from one courtyard to the next. All of which would have tended to muddle class and status boundaries. “While many people get together according to common interests – interest in world politics, for example, or in gardening – these are only part-time associations and they are so fluid that they carry few overtones of social status.”56

Despite the mass-produced, prefabricated nature of this “package community,” Whyte found little evidence of widespread alienation. To the contrary, Park Forest appeared to have distinguished itself as an incubator for skills in building community. Tracking ex-Park Foresters to new locations, he found that many were “shocked” at the lack of community when they moved back into “a traditional town,” although “the effect of the shock is more often to stir than inhibit them […] I learned at Park Forest how to take the initiative, go for the typical explanation […]” Thus, in their new locations, Park Foresters had become “more active, more a part of the community, than most of their contemporaries.”57

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52 David Riesman, “The Suburban Dislocation,” 140.
53 Riesman’s responsibility for shifting the discourse on suburbia in suburbia’s disfavor is commonly overstated. See for example this *Wikipedia* entry: “Riesman argues that the character of post World War II American society impels individuals to ‘other-directedness’; the prominent example being modern suburbia, where individuals seek their neighbors’ approval and fear being outcast from their community.” David Riesman, *Wikipedia*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=David_Riesman&oldid=290135751> (accessed June 19, 2009). In 1959 Riesman ironically speculated that “I myself have contributed” to the widespread stereotype of suburbia as “mass-produced houses with picture windows and handicraft-style lawns,” and as a terrain “of social anxiety and conformity, of transience and overorganization.” David Riesman, “Flight and Search in the New Suburbs,” (1959) in *Abundance for What? and Other Essays* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964): 258. Careful attention to Riesman, however, shows that his estimate of his culpability may be overstated, particularly with respect to *The Lonely Crowd*. Indeed suburbia is barely more than a tangential topic in *The Lonely Crowd*: a search for “suburb” and its derivatives (such as “suburban” or “suburbanization”) yields but a single hit, viz. <http://books.google.com/books?id=EPlS-CxMYCA&printsec=frontcover&dq=intitle:lonely+intitle:crowd+inauthor:riesman&lr=&as_drb=0&as_vis=0&as_schb=0&as_rtt=0&as_max=0&as_max_s.lists=all&num=100&as_brr=0> (accessed June 19, 2009). Most are used in a neutral or incidental fashion, e.g. indicating that three different character types all may be found living “in the same housing project or suburb” (248). Riesman’s 1957 essay “The Suburban Dislocation” may bear more responsibility, as may overzealous commentators who appear to have read his work selectively.
54 Gans, “Park Forest.” Gans’s work is discussed in more detail below.
56 Whyte, “The Outgoing Life,” 87. Not incidentally, although Whyte nowhere referred to Tönnies, the webs of informal, informal, ad hoc, and ad hoc relationships that he delineated at Park Forest made for an exemplary instance of a *Gesellschaft*, indeed much more successfully functioning community than the depersonalized and fragmented sort of *Gesellschaft* that Tönnies and his successors might have led one to expect.
57 Whyte, “The Future, c/o Park Forest,” 186. For clarity, consistency, and brevity, my references to Whyte’s discussion of Park Forest are drawn entirely from the 1953 *Fortune* articles, and no comparison is made with Whyte’s revised and reorganized discussion in *The Organization Man*. 
For Whyte, the prefabricated nature and architectural uniformity of tract house suburbs were not in and of themselves cause for harsh judgment. The new way of life in “package communities” such as Park Forest, Whyte wrote, was “not a synthetic way of life ‘sold’ by mass producers of suburbs.” Rather, he found it a positive expression of “younger people’s needs and wants,” that is to say, a perfectly acceptable realization of changing social circumstances and economic needs. “A good many observers,” he wrote, “have fastened their eyes on the physical homogeneity of the new suburbia and seen it as the avenue to [Orrwell’s] 1984. But,” he said, “this physical homogeneity is not the real issue.” Uniformity emphatically did not engender conformity. That there are rows and rows of houses, Whyte wrote, is:

[Dictated by economic necessity and it is intellectually irresponsible to bemoan them without facing up to the lack of a reasonable alternative. Rows and rows of identical houses are not in themselves a force for conformity — any more than, say, rows of identical Park Avenue apartments or rows of city houses built at the turn of the century, or, for that matter, some of the identical brick fronts of eighteenth-century America.]

Indeed, while Park Forest’s builders had intentionally varied the façades of individual houses, Whyte noted that residents largely rejected the opportunity for further differentiation. As he put it, “one might assume that in putting up aluminum awnings, making alterations, repainting and the like, residents would try hard to enlarge the differences.” In other words, one might expect residents to embrace an opportunity for a certain degree of personal individuation, or perhaps to help overcome the perception of conformity. But Whyte found differently: “This is not always so; in some areas residents have apparently agreed to unify the block with a common design and color scheme for garages and such. In such blocks an otherwise minor variation [consequently] becomes blatant deviance.”

Just as many would misread Riesman’s delineation of the “other-directed” character type as typical and thus symptomatic of suburbia’s decline, so could Whyte’s use here of the term “deviance” be expected to feed later critics’ interest in the pathology of suburbia. In fact Whyte was after something entirely different, namely the residents’ commitment to community. For although residents eagerly pursued a diverse range of interests and tastes, he also observed that the prevailing ethic (and aesthetic) was not so much a matter of keeping up with the Joneses, as an inclination “to keep down with them,” that is, to maintain community in spatial and aesthetic as well as social terms. Those few, who did seek some degree of distinction, as in the case of a garage, whose owner had mounted a gargoyle on top, thus breaking the bonds of community that Whyte found otherwise so persistent, were the exceptions that proved the rule.

Riesman already had expressed concern, as would Fromm two years hence, over declining privacy in American housing. At Park Forest, Whyte bluntly noted that “there isn’t much.” Nor was this surprising, at least when compared to the nominal ideal of small-town America. “In most small towns there is at least enough space to soften the shock of intimate contact, and besides, there is usually some redoubt to which the individual can withdraw.” Not so at Park Forest: “people don’t bother to knock and they come and go furiously,” while “the thin walls transmit the knowledge that the court, the group, is omnipresent.” The courtyard around which the town houses were grouped was the anchor of community, particularly for the women left at home during the weekday. Yet along with community came exposure: as Whyte noted (in a passage that Fromm later chose to quote), “from the eye of the court there is no escape.” Like it or not, Whyte observed, “one is made outgoing.”

This sometimes involuntary degree of exposure and intimacy could easily lead to private tensions and public spats or feuds, but according to Whyte it also bred a new mode of socialization: a qualified form of privacy defined by small groups of friends. “Privacy has become clandestine,” he wrote, but not in the sense of individual isolation. Rather, he found:

In doing things with other people does one fulfill oneself [...]. Even watching television together — for which purpose, incidentally, several groups have been organized — helps make one more of a real person. The important thing, to borrow a phrase, is the togetherness.”

Selfhood, in other words, was not necessarily a matter of “solitary and selfish contemplation,” but had evolved such that here it also could be a personally fulfilling activity commonly occurring in the company of others.

Where Whyte differed from most contemporary critics of suburbia (as well as critics of mass culture), and where he added a substantial new dimension to the discourse on suburbia, was his ethnographic analysis of the manner in which the material environment — neighborhood plan, housing orientation and design, interior plan and furnishings — functioned in the production of community, friendship, and personal identity. Tracing friendships among neighbors across the courtyard and down the block, as a social analyst Whyte wrestled with the problem of environmental

64 Whyte, “The Outgoing Life,” 158.
65 Whyte, “The Outgoing Life,” 156.
66 Whyte, “The Outgoing Life,” 158.
67 Whyte, “The Outgoing Life,” 158.
determinism: “the architects happened on a basic design that has proved to be highly functional in shaping people’s lives.” He observed:

People’s friendships, even their most intimate ones, seem predetermined; less on individual personality do friendships depend than on such seemingly inconsequential matters as the placement of a sidewalk, the view out of a picture window, the height of a fence, or the width of a street.69

He traced how variably configured courtyards or differently oriented detached houses made a difference in how people associated with each other:

In designing the 105 rental courts the architects staggered the buildings in different fashion in each court; similarly, no two superblocks are laid out exactly alike. By comparing these differences in design with any differences in social activity among areas, one can discover a cause-and-effect relationship.70

By then identifying specific factors in the physical environment that helped to shape the residents’ lives and social relationships, such as the location of a given home in relation to others, the placement of driveways and stoops, and the location and quality of children’s play areas, Whyte was able to conclude that “what really counts is the effect of the physical layout.”71

Yet despite this apparent inclination toward a determinist analysis, Whyte was loath to deny residents’ agency. “People are not yet such pawns of their environment, of course, that physical, objective factors are all that determine their social lives.” Whyte made it clear that people also associated with each other on the basis of age, preference for alcohol, whether they played bridge or pinochle, and many other possible shared interests. And beyond friendships formed along such lines of common interest, many residents also sought out people of different backgrounds, orientations, and values, making “an active effort [...] to meet one another halfway.”72 Ultimately, for Whyte, friendship and group membership were a balance of environmental factors, social circumstances, personal history, and what he called “denominator-seeking,” a coming together to find “common values.” Thus at the end of his concluding essay, Whyte found himself posing the question, “Should friendship be designed?” and wondering whether it would “theoretically be possible to design an optimum ‘happy block.’” These were questions that, in one form or another, planners and designers have been confronting ever since: how can design be harnessed to produce a successful social community? Whyte had his doubts about the wisdom of pursuing such a goal. The more a particular design enabled a given set of residents to get along, he reasoned, the more any outsiders or newcomers would be unable to “make the grade,” and the existing group would fail to include the less worrisome, the more cohesive the group, the less opportunity for difference and diversity to take hold.73 In either case, the community would be disposed to stagnate. Still, such speculative considerations aside, the greater findings of Whyte’s study remain: he showed that Park Forest, despite its outwardly uniform and homogeneous appearance, sustained a robust capacity to foster community along multiple (some might even say diverse) lines and on many scales.

Conformity as Pathology: Fromm and Whyte

In addressing the problem of conformity, both Riesman and Whyte raised substantial concerns, but neither framed conformity as a major problem, either for society in general or for suburbia in particular. Erich Fromm offered a very different perspective, however, in his third best-seller, *The Sane Society* (1955), which treated a number of social behaviors, including conformity, as serious social pathologies.74 As evidence for much of his discussion of conformity, Fromm drew heavily (if selectively) on Whyte’s Park Forest articles—reaching, in the process, far more disquieting conclusions than Whyte.

For Fromm, conformity was a key behavior that enabled the rule of authority in modern capitalist society: “Authority in the middle of the twentieth century,” he wrote, is no longer “overt authority, but anonymous, invisible, alienated authority.” And “the mechanism through which the anonymous authority operates is conformity.” To live under such authority meant internalizing a set of behavioral imperatives: the individual thinks, “I ought to do what everybody does, hence, I must conform [ ... ]; I must not ask whether I am right or wrong, but whether I am adjusted.” And to illustrate the pathology of being “adjusted,” Fromm explicitly turned to the example of Park Forest.75

Five years earlier Riesman had devoted several pages of *The Lonely Crowd* to a discussion of “adjustment” as a manner in which Americans established a successful fit with contemporary culture, and there is little doubt that Fromm knew Riesman’s work well. For Riesman, the “adjusted” could be found throughout all three of his three character types: they are the typical tradition-directed, inner-directed, or other-directed people—those who respond in their character structure to the demands of their

One year after The Sane Society was published, Whyte's work on Park Forest reappeared as part of The Organization Man (1956). In his revised and updated text, Whyte took Fromm to task for his one-sided reading of the original Park Forest essays in Fortune, charging that Fromm had failed to recognize that conformity was a two-way street: that one might conform to the practice of a given group not only due to pressure or fear, but also in pursuit of beneficial aspects of community, or "brotherhood." For Whyte, "the group is a tyrant; so also it is a friend, and it is both at once. The two qualities cannot easily be separated, for what gives the group its power over the man is the same cohesion that gives it its warmth." As Whyte saw it, Fromm had chosen a case study of suburbia to illustrate his "diagnosis of man's desperate efforts to escape the burdens of freedom in group conformity of suburbia." True enough, Whyte wrote. "Park Foresters illustrate conformity; [but] they also illustrate very much the same kind of small group activity Fromm advocates," and indeed in the fourth of his articles on Park Forest Whyte had delineated at length just such mechanisms of small-group formation. Fromm, Whyte insisted, "has damned an effect and praised a cause." In short, Fromm had not been mistaken in recognizing the relationship between the physical fabric of suburbia and its residents' social and psychological identities. What he had done wrong was to make a facile equation between tightly spaced, open-plan, uniform housing and a pathological disposition among residents toward conformity.

Misreadings and mistaken understandings notwithstanding, Fromm had extended the mass-culture critics' examination of selfhood, in the context of modern market society and commodity culture, to suburbia. In a book overtly addressing the "pathological problems of our time," he cast words like 'neurotic,' but sometimes by cruel sanctions" (159). But Whyte had only used the word to indicate the presence of neurosis: "She's just too busy to get neurotic" (157). In another instance, Fromm quoted Whyte on the subject of privacy: "Indeed, privacy has become clandestine" (158). Fromm concluded that what this "really means," is that life in suburbia had become a matter of "giving up oneself, becoming part and parcel of the herd, and liking it" (159). Again quoting Whyte: "Just as doors inside houses - which are sometimes said to have marked the birth of the middle class - are disappearing, so are the barriers against neighbors. The picture in the picture window, for example, is what is going on inside - or, what is going on inside other people's picture windows" (157/158). For Fromm, this was evidence of the pressure to conform; the next paragraph contained his assertion that "virtue is to be adjusted and to be like the rest" (158). In the original context of the Fortune essay, however, Whyte's words formed part of a longer discussion of neighborhood. Immediately preceding the text quoted by Fromm, Whyte wrote, "people become amazingly frank with each other. No one, they point out, ever need face a problem alone. In the battle against loneliness even the architecture becomes functional" (156). While it probably exaggerates Whyte's position to claim that he found suburban housing served therapeutic ends, by the same token he certainly had not read it in the way that Fromm indicated, as pathology.

78 Fromm, The Sane Society, 154.
79 Fromm, The Sane Society, 155.
80 Fromm, The Sane Society, 157. As discussed above, Riesman had also expressed concerns over the erosion of privacy in The Lonely Crowd, and would explore the problem further in connection with suburban dwellings in "The Suburban Dislocation."
81 Fromm, The Sane Society, 158.
82 Fromm, The Sane Society, 159.
84 Fromm, The Sane Society, 102.
Park Forest and its residents as poster children for the loss of individuality and identity that ensued from the permeation of suburbia in particular, and capitalist society in general, by conformity. Previous mass-culture critics had already identified the physical fabric of suburbia as one example of the poverty of mass culture, and had explored the social and existential consequences of other mass media. Fromm's contribution was to bring these two strands of critique together in suburbia, connecting its physical pathology with the mental and social pathology of its residents.

Aesthetizing the Critique in the 1950s and early 1960s

By the mid-1950s, the discourse on suburbia had brought together several key strands from critical discussions of mass culture, selfhood, community, and society, and from American sociologists' early explorations of privacy, conformity, and community in suburbia. Chief among these strands were four critiques: of the role of dwellings in the production of selfhood and identity; of the manner in which Gesellschaften give rise to personal alienation and social fragmentation; of the role of product standardization and mass production techniques in displacing individuality; and of the threats posed by mass culture and commodity consumption to selfhood and the entire fabric of society. By the 1950s a number of critics, building on their interest in these critiques and related concerns, had also identified suburbia as a bellwether site for assessing the current state of, and future prospects for, American society, particularly with regard to questions of privacy, conformity, identity, community, morality, status, and taste. As with the major figures discussed above, many found suburbia to be a target easily (if not necessarily justifiably) harnessed to prove their point, while a minority of others approached suburbia as a terrain that opened up new questions and opportunities for new modes of investigation.

Still, some of the broader concerns that had animated 1940s and 1950s critics, particularly the shortcomings of industrial-capitalist society, failed to endure in the critique of suburbia as it evolved during the 1950s and 1960s. Rather, as with the course of much political debate in this period, the terms of the discussion frequently shifted into the realm of aesthetics. In Tönnies's work, as in that of the Frankfurt School critics and the New York Intellectuals, the economic and political structure of society under industrial capitalism had been a paramount concern; the central focus of Erich Fromm's Sane Society was the alienation produced by the rise of industrial capitalist society, and similar concerns with the broader economic and political context informed the early work of C. Wright Mills, David Riesman, and William H. Whyte. But as Barry D. Riccio and Jackson Lears have shown, however, the 1950s witnessed a widespread subsumption of political debate into discourses on aesthetics and taste. In many instances politically charged questions of class, gender, and economics continued just under the surface in discussions of aesthetics. But it was patently safer to address aesthetics than politics, and aesthetics was a much more palatable topic for the American popular media.  

A fitting harbinger of this shift was an essay titled “Build and Be Damned” published in the December 1950 issue of The Atlantic. Contributed by no less a figure than public works mogul Robert Moses, whose bridges and parkways would inexorably contribute to the suburbanization of metropolitan New York, the essay was a scathing indictment of modern suburbia. Peppering his text with references to “monotonous new communities” and “clusters of little pastel houses,” Moses decried the “horrons being perpetrated by uncontrolled boom building” that would result “in the slums of tomorrow.” He made it clear that much of the problem stemmed from declining standards of taste. Unlike the elite owners of grand Long Island estates at the turn of the twentieth century, or even the builders of prewar suburbs, which “have worn well physically and aesthetically [...] due to high individual and group standards,” the developers of postwar suburbia had “ruthlessly leveled and ripped up nature, eradicating the natural beauty of the landscape – destructive practices which in many cases amount to sheer vandalism.” Moses advocated some mechanism “of control, in the public interest”; the standards he envisioned were epitomized by private developers who still “preserve topography and planting, stake out lots large enough for privacy and for the exercise of ingenuity in landscaping, place restrictions on permitted types of houses, provide adequate infrastructure, and who ‘welcome high zoning standards.’” Moses evidently was not against suburbanization per se; what he deplored was the declining (or vanishing) taste with which they were laid out and landscaped.

85 During the 1950s, according to Riccio, “it appeared that politics had become aesthetized.” It seemed “that questions of taste came to matter more than questions of power for many cultural critics.” Barry D. Riccio, “Popular Culture and High Culture: Dwight Macdonald, His Critics, and the Ideal of Cultural Hierarchy in Modern America.” Journal of American Culture 16.4 (1993): 14.

86 Nor would the preference of popular media for matters of aesthetics over politics be surprising to the mass culture critics. From their perspective, the political function of popular media was to provide its consumers with respite from labor without acknowledging the economic and political conditions of their situation. As Robert Warshow wrote in 1947, “the chief function of mass culture is to relieve one of the necessity of experiencing one’s life directly.” The consequent “experience of an alienation from reality [...] is the characteristic experience of our age.” Robert Warshow, “The Legacy of the 30’s,” Commentary 4.6 (1947): 540, 541.

87 Robert Moses, “Build and Be Damned,” Atlantic 186.6 (1950): 40-42, 40f.

88 Moses, “Build and Be Damned,” 40-42. Moses's essay in part echoed City Beautiful reformers from earlier in the century, such as Charles Mulford Robinson, who advocated more deliberate attention to the role of architectural aesthetics in advancing civic ideals and effecting moral improvement. “Suburban Aesthetics Is Not an Oxymoron,” in Worlds Away: New Suburban Landscapes, ed. Andrew Blauvelt (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2008): 129-146, 133.
The Critics Confront Suburbia, 1920–1960

The same year that Moses's essay appeared, Charles Mergendahl situated his novel *It's Only Temporary* in the fictional suburban tract development of "Camptown, Westchester County," whose residents put up with its shoddy materials and aesthetic monotony because "it's only temporary" — they all hoped to be moving on soon. The repetitive sameness of Camptown's 4,276 houses was overbearing: "Outside they varied slightly, as there were seven distinct models. Inside they were precisely alike." Readers clearly got the message that this aesthetic wasteland exacted a toll on those who lived there, a toll whose cause lay in the development's repetitive uniformity, rather than in any social or economic reasons for the residents' having to accept "temporary" residence in hastily and shoddily built housing in the first place. 89

Mergendahl's take on uniformity, like countless send-ups of "little boxes" before and since, may have appealed to audiences for satirical fiction, but in doing so contributed more to shaping public opinion on aesthetics and taste than it did to advancing the understanding of suburbia and its residents, let alone understanding the broader social and economic context. Indeed as Harry Henderson made clear in his 1953 *Harper's Magazine* essay on "Mass Produced Suburbs," residents of homogeneous tracts actually *liked* the overall sameness (presumably for much the same reasons documented by Whyte the same year); and, while it was relatively difficult to individualize the standardized exteriors, residents could be quite assiduous in differentiating their interiors from each other (thus putting the lie to the popular stereotype that Mergendahl and others perpetuated, that interiors were "precisely alike").

The next year Russell Lynes included a chapter titled "Suburbia in Excelsis" in his popular book *The Tastemakers* (1954), in which he took a more generous (if still apolitical) position on the aesthetics of tract suburbs. Citing Henderson's essay, the often iconoclastic Lynes offered a fairly positive assessment of "mass-produced communities," describing them as "in effect, single-class communities where there is no living on the wrong side of the tracks." Clearly uninterested in the sort of distinction that Moses had drawn between elite and mass standards of taste, Lynes observed that in suburbia there was a growing "unity of taste" between "the relatively poor and the relatively well-to-do," exemplified in the proliferation across America of "the ubiquitous ranch house," which "has become the standard new suburban dwelling." 90


92 Peter Blake, *God's Own Junkyard* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964): 17, figs. 104–107. Blake credited the passage concerning "anonymous boxes" to Frank Lloyd Wright. A fuller excerpt of Wright's text, originally published in 1954, is found in Frank Lloyd Wright: *Writings and Buildings*, eds. Edgar Kaufmann and Ben Raeburn (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1960): 292–296. Blake indicated that the aesthetic criteria he employed here — monotony, ugliness, anonymity, repetitiveness — were also meant to be exemplary of commodity production and consumption: "the developers who built [suburbia] are, fundamentally, no different from manufacturers of any other mass-produced product; they standardize the product, package it, arrange for rapid distribution and easy financing, and sell it off as fast as they can" (17).
Examples abound in popular culture and mainstream criticism, perhaps most famously in Malvina Reynolds’s 1963 song “Little Boxes,” which describes the insipid “Little boxes made of ticky-tacky” that “all look just the same,” whose residents are likewise “all made out of ticky-tacky | And they all look just the same.”93 They all do the same things, have the same tastes, and even have children who go to the university and “come out all the same.” Reynolds’s presumption that any trace of individuality must have vanished, and that the aesthetic uniformity of suburban tract developments (in this case, Daly City, California, on which her song was based) was responsible, is similar to Lewis Mumford’s eagerness two years earlier, in The City in History (1961), to accept the exterior uniformity of suburban tracts at face (aesthetic) value, and to summarily write off the residents’ lives as necessarily empty and meaningless:

A multitude of uniform, unidentifiable houses, lined up inflexibly, at uniform distances, on uniform roads, in a treeless communal waste, inhabited by people of the same class, the same income, the same age group, witnessing the same television performances, eating the same tasteless prefabricated foods, from the same freezers, conforming in every outward and inward respect to a common mold, manufactured in the central metropolis.94

Three years later New York Times architecture critic Ada Louise Huxtable inveighed against suburbia on similar grounds as “regimented hordes of split-levels lined up for miles in close, unlovely rows.”95 All these critiques clearly ignored the findings of researchers such as Whyte who, instead of limiting the discussion to aesthetics, had examined the actual patterns of socialization and daily life that residents pursued. Indeed, Whyte found that when asked about their own community, residents had a very different perception of where they lived. “Those pictures are absolutely disgraceful,’ one resident recently said of some published pictures of her area. The way they angled them, it makes it look as though this was a development.”96 This resident, although apparently unwilling to concede that communities of the same quality as hers might well be found everywhere else in suburbia, at least knew for certain that the pejorative assessment implied by an unflattering photograph certainly did not apply to hers.

In many cases aesthetic critiques of suburbia continued to take social and psychological concerns into consideration, which in turn reengaged some critics with questions of environmental and aesthetic determination – whether, for example, regimented uniform housing produced a homogeneous population of conformists – questions that Whyte had tried to balance so delicately in his observations on Park Forest. Fromm, who was much less hesitant about this question than Whyte, may well have set the tone for ensuing discussion, offering no doubt in The Sane Society that tightly spaced, open-plan, uniform housing effected a pathological disposition among residents toward conformity. But while these sorts of determinist arguments might not have stood up to empirical (or even logical) scrutiny, the facile correspondence between homogeneity and conformity (or between uniformity and boredom, alienation, or loss of individuality) remained too simple and too obvious for critics in the popular media to ignore. John Keats’s polemic-cum-novel The Crack in the Picture Window (1956) pointed to “identical boxes spreading like gangrene” across the landscape that not only would lead to the “destruction of individuality” and the spread of “social and mental illness in our home towns,” but even would dangerously undermine the family, turning the father into “a woman-bossed, inadequate, money-terrified neuter.”97 The next year John McPartland’s novel No Down Payment (1957), made into a film of the same name starring Joanne Woodward and Tony Randall, offered a sensationalized and disturbing portrait of the neighborhood, family, and personal dysfunctions (such as jealousy, lust, and domestic violence) that living in a standardized, closely built tract development both produced and exacerbated.98

By the early 1960s suburbia had become a terrain of choice for pulp-fiction depictions of the degeneracy and depravity that suburbia – itself portrayed as a cheap, flimsy, tasteless landscape – ostensibly fostered. As the front cover of Dean McCoy’s 1961 novel The Development trumpets, this is “A biting novel which strips bare the flimsy facade of decency concealing the unbridled sensual desires of America’s sprawling Suburbia.”99 Three years later McCoy published The Love Pool, which on its rear cover posed the lurid question, “What’s behind the willingness of otherwise decent couples to be unfaithful? Can they be taught to realize the terrible price they are paying for wall-to-wall carpeting – and for neighbor-to-neighbor love-making?”100 Nor is it without considerable irony that popular music, a


96 Whyte, The Outgoing Life, 86-87. See also A. C. Spector’s popular book The Exurbanites (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1955), in which he disparaged the spread of house types in bad taste, such as “Flat-lot Split Level, and Noxious Ranch House” (27). In an essay titled “Trouble in the Suburbs,” Saturday Evening Post 228.12 (September 17, 1955), Hal Burton freely employed terms such as “cooky cutters,” “slums of the future,” and “deadly sameness” (113, 117). A generation later, see the writings of James Howard Kunstler (discussed below).


98 John McPartland, No Down Payment (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957); No Down Payment, dir. Martin Ritt (Jerry Wald Productions, 1957). Malvina Reynolds’s “Little Boxes” is perhaps the most well known (even infamous) statement of correspondence between environmental uniformity and uniform identity.


100 Dean McCoy, The Love Pool (New York: Universal Publishing and Distributing Corporation, 1964): back cover. Even communities laid out according to well-
medium that Adorno identified as exemplary of the decline of mass culture, became the vehicle for the most mordant and relentless critique of suburbia for the rest of the century, often trading on glib correlations between the repetitive homogeneity of suburbia and the residents' identity and psychology. Indeed from the late 1950s to the late 1990s, it is impossible to find popular music lyrics that portray suburbia in a positive light, while the catalog is full of songs such as “Pleasant Valley Sunday” (Monkees, 1966), "Subdivision" (Neal Peart, 1982, and its accompanying video), or "Suburban Home" (Descendents, 1982) that paint suburbia in the same abject terms of prefabricated homogeneity, conformity, alienation, and loss of identity.  

Finally, just below the surface in many of the above critiques, not least those judging suburbia based on standards of aesthetics and taste, lies an implicit class prejudice. Moses, for example, cast nostalgic glances at the natural scenery that had been conserved in the era of "big estate owners," while neither Blake nor Reynolds could understand what Henderson, Whyte, and later Herbert Gans saw: that the landscape of mass-produced suburbia (perhaps because it was mass-produced and thus affordable for the lower and middle classes) suited the aspirations and needs of those who lived there, personally, aesthetically, socially, and economically. Few, if any, critics granted the serious possibility that a new and very different sort of aesthetics might have evolved as the “new middle class” pioneered the new material and social landscape of postwar suburbia.

**Countercurrents, 1950–1960**

By the early 1960s, the common opinion of suburbia, whether anchored in the critique of mass society and commodity culture, or oriented toward standards of aesthetics and taste, and whether coming from academic and literary discourse or from the popular media, was on balance highly negative. Still, during the 1950s, significant countercurrents did emerge, largely in the work of American and Canadian sociologists. Even before William H. Whyte undertook his onsite research at Park Forest, sociologist

intentioned, and presumably well considered, master plans were not immune to this critical approach. The 1979 film *Over the Edge*, directed by Jonathan Kaplan, portrays how the design of one such community forced its youth into drugs, alcohol, vandalism, gang behavior, and other deviant behaviors.


101 The critique of suburbia in popular music is discussed further in Archer, *Architecture and Suburbia*, 320–325.


Herbert J. Gans was at work there interviewing its Jewish residents and studying the progressive formation of "a young, awkward, but unmistakable Jewish community." His research, completed in 1949, formed the basis of his 1950 master's degree from the University of Chicago, followed by an essay published in the April 1951 issue of *Commentary*, in which he documented the interests, concerns, commonalities, and differences that Jewish residents shared and negotiated in the process of building a new suburban religious community. In the *Commentary* essay Gans did not reference current debates over mass culture or suburbia, but his research nevertheless made it clear that many of those critics' presumptions were wrong: residents of suburbia were not alienated, they were not oppressed by pressures to conform, and they were hardly in the throes of moral corruption.

Gans's research, like Whyte's, showed that the ways in which suburbanites went about the task of forming relationships and building community often involved adaptations to the physical and demographic circumstances of suburbia; residents increasingly preferred to participate in informal and decentered (though still structured) activities. As Gans and others noted, this more ad-hoc approach to social organizing was a process that, particularly when it came to political issues, called into question the status and leadership position that intellectuals had nominally been accorded in urban society. While this marginalization of intellectual leaders may have been reason for some critics to elevate their disdain for suburbia, and others to abandon suburbia, Gans suggested that intellectuals instead recognize the suburban landscape for what it was, a thriving new sort of community landscape, and that they contribute in suitable ways. Responding to a 1954 essay in *Commentary* portraying the intellectual as increasingly left out of, and irrelevant to, the new culture of suburbia, Gans urged that the author participate in that culture such as it had evolved, and tellingly argued that a bit of conformity actually might not hurt:

Let him "conform" to the many good things in Suburbia [...] Let him help to organize cooperative nursery schools and baby-sitting exchanges, Leagues of Women Voters, and P.T.A.'s. But in addition, could he not continue to experiment with new things, and stimulate deserved criticism of some of the old, be they "highbrow," "lowbrow" or "middlebrow"?  


104 Herbert J. Gans, "Individualism in the Suburbs," *Commentary* 18.1 (1954): 76. Four years later Gans took more direct aim at cultural critics who would discount and disparage products of the mass media. He argued that popular arts should be evaluated in terms of what they "mean to the audience who accept or reject them daily," i.e., in relation to their own lives and value systems. *Popular Culture and High Culture Critics,* *Dissent* 5.2 (1958): 185–187.
In other words, the community whose absence many intellectuals bemoaned was already there, in many forms, waiting for the intellectuals to join and lead.

Gans's continued interest in the processes of suburban community formation led to a follow-up study of the Jewish community in Park Forest that he published in 1957 and then, a decade later, The Levittowners (1967). This book, his best known work on suburbia, was a participatory ethnography of the New Jersey Levittown in which, unconventionally for research on suburbia, he moved into the community and lived among his subjects. The result was a much fuller picture than ever before of the complex networks of connections and associations by which residents really engaged in the very active process of community building.

In 1956 Daniel Bell, then by a labor editor at Fortune and soon to be professor of sociology at Columbia, published his spirited rejoinder in Commentary to the critics of mass culture and society. Against the complaint that "the United States is an 'atomized' society composed of lonely, isolated individuals," Bell countered that "Americans are a nation of joiners," citing statistics and concluding that in "no other country in the world, probably, is there such a high degree of voluntary communal activity, expressed sometimes in absurd rituals, yet often providing real satisfactions for real needs." Quoting the work of sociologist Morris Janowitz, Bell took to task those "who are preoccupied with the one-way trend toward 'Gemeinschaft' to 'Gesellschaft,'" maintaining that society was not in fact "as self-centered and barren" as they would have it. Bell likewise discounted the assertion "that the American mass society imposes an excessive conformity upon its members"; he countered that "it is hard to discern who is conforming to what [...] There is probably less conformity to an over-all mode of conduct today than at any time within the last half-century in America." Declaring that "change and innovation" were far more characteristic of American society than "social disorder and anomie," he concluded that "the theory of the mass society no longer serves as a description of Western society, but as an ideology of romantic protest against contemporary society.'"

While Bell's protest hardly effected a sea change in attitudes toward mass society, let alone suburbia - Macdonald's "Masscult and Midcult" had yet to appear (in 1960), and influence of the Frankfurt School in American intellectual circles actually increased during the 1960s - it nevertheless complemented the concerns that Gans had raised. In its pragmatic and favorable assessment of contemporary society it also complemented two larger, empirically researched sociological studies of individual suburbs that appeared during the latter half of the 1950s. One, the first full book-length study of a single suburb, appeared in 1956. Titled Crestwood Heights, it was a "study of the culture of suburban life" of a metropolitan Canadian suburb (that, as David Riesman noted in the introduction, was in many respects indistinguishable from American suburbs) authored by John R. Seeley, R. Alexander Sim, and Elizabeth W. Loosley. An ethnographically based study ("action research," as Riesman put it), the book offered by far the fullest empirical account to date of social interaction in suburban physical settings such as schools, the club, and especially the private household. The authors found that Crestwood's residents were dead with matters such as status, privacy, and gender roles, but always in relation to two overarching goals, doing what was best for their children, and pursuing the American dream of material abundance. In envisioning and realizing this dream, the researchers found, "each family or person builds a special version, a particular cultural pattern, like and yet unlike the neighbor's." In other words, neither the dream nor the ways in which Crestwood's residents pursued it, accorded with the critics' predictions of conformity and homogeneity; nor, in the end, did the authors find a landscape that fulfilled the critics' predictions of depersonalization, isolation, or alienation.

The other study of an individual suburb was completed two years later, as Bennett Berger's doctoral dissertation at Berkeley titled "Proletarian Suburb: A Study of a Working-Class Version of Suburbia," in which he followed the resettlement of Ford assembly line workers in a new suburb of San Jose. Published as a book in 1960 with the title Working Class Suburb, Berger's study challenged what he termed "the myth of suburbia," that is, its reputation as a place of overbearing homogeneity and conformity. Berger summed this up in the preface to a 1968 reprinting of his book, where he addressed the question of the understandable "connection between the physical character and the alleged cultural style of suburbia" - a connection that, he maintained, "has never been established." He speculated as to why this myth was so enduring:

Perhaps it is because we have been too well trained to believe that there is somehow a direct relationship between the physical structure of the esthetic shape of a residential environment and the sort of values and culture it can possibly engender - so that the esthetic monotony of suburbia could house nothing but a generation of dull, monotonous people, and its cheerful poverty of...


106 Daniel Bell, "The Theory of Mass Society," 80-83. For a parallel perspective on the mass culture critics, see Edward Shils, "Daydreams and Nightmares: Reflections on the Criticism of Mass Culture," Seminar Review 65.4 (1957): 587-608. Shils's essay was ostensibly a review of Rosenzweig and White's Mass Culture, a 561-page compendium of essays pro and con on the subject of mass culture. Shils used the opportunity to stake out his position on the subject, noting for example that the critics may at best have had a very limited knowledge of what they were talking about: "Few of the critics of the new culture of the lower classes have had first-hand contact with those classes." (592).

architectural design could breed nothing but a race of happy robots. 108

The results of Berger's research wholly undercut such presumptions: he
found that when moving to a new environment, people continued to
maintain many of the social preferences and political inclinations that they
brought with them; the environment did not transform them into different
social beings, and certainly not into alienated, tasteless conformists. "None
of this research can be expected to give much comfort to those who find it
convenient to believe that living in suburbs exercises some mysterious
power over its residents to transform them into replicas of Whyte's
[conformist, group-oriented] practitioners of 'The Outgoing Life.' " 109

David Riesman offered a perhaps fitting close to the decade in his
1959 essay "Flight and Search in the New Suburbs," in which he questioned
the reigning stereotype of suburbia (to which he admitted having
contributed) as "an image of mass-produced houses with picture windows
and handkerchief-sized lawns, of endless neighboring across the lawns, of
social anxiety and conformity, of transience and overorganization." 110
Admitting that the most commonly cited examples of suburbia, Park Forest


whom he had interviewed "harborred a view of their new suburban homes as a
paradise permanently gained." "Suburbia and the American Dream," The Public
Interest 2 (1966): 80-91, 81. Earlier, see the article by Thomas Ktsanes and
Leonard Reissman that challenged the presumption that suburbia was
homogeneous, middle-class, and conformist: "Suburbia - New Homes for Old
"The Structuring of Social Relationships Engendered by Suburban Residence,
American Sociological Review 21.4 (1956): 446-453, explored the nature of
suburban homogeneity in greater empirical depth, but overall broke little new
ground. Robert Wood's Suburbia: Its People and Their Politics (Boston: Houghton
Mifflin, 1958) was a self-described "different kind of book" on suburbia, that
"emphasizes suburban political ideology." Wood nevertheless anchored his
analysis in a bleak assessment of suburbia as uniform and homogeneous, where
community had been supplanted by conformity. The collection of essays selected
and edited by William Dobriner, The Suburban Community (New York: G. P.
Putnam's Sons, 1958), includes a number of essays composed specifically for
that volume as well as articles selected from recent literature in sociological
journals (Riesman's "Suburban Dislocation," revised here as "The Suburban
Sadness," is mentioned above). Consistent with then-current trends in American
sociology, the essays are largely demographic in orientation, with many
employing quantitative methodology. To varying degrees some of the essays do
intersect with concerns under consideration here, such as homogeneity and
community, but their empirical orientation tends to bypass larger questions
involving the interrelations of society, mass/popular culture, and the material
environment.

110 David Riesman, "Flight and Search in the New Suburbs," in Abundance for


112 Riesman, "Flight and Search in the New Suburbs," 168. Riesman's essay was
first delivered at Smith College in 1959, and subsequently published in minor
periodicals. In 1964 it appeared in a volume of Riesman's collected essays,
dedicated this volume to Erich Fromm (who at one time had been Riesman's
analyst and teacher).

113 James Howard Kunstler, Home from Nowhere (New York: Simon & Schuster,
caring about, and we shall run shrieking from it to a better world."\textsuperscript{114} Concurrent with Kunstler's critique, the New Urbanism movement (Congress for the New Urbanism, founded 1993; Charter of the New Urbanism, 1996) has evolved as the prevailing, favored paradigm for remediating the ills of suburbia. While the New Urbanist agenda incorporates many innovative and progressive strands that address emerging contemporary concerns, particularly in relation to economic and environmental sustainability, and although it is hardly a monolithic enterprise, the discourse of earlier decades still resonates in much of the New Urbanist discourse. Particularly in its reliance on design codes anchored in "traditional" national or regional aesthetic vocabularies, and in its deliberate attention to ways in which planning and design can affect the production of community, the voices of critics from the 1940s through the 1960s still echo strongly.

\textsuperscript{114} Kunstler, \textit{Home from Nowhere}, 294–295.