Picture Windows: Architecture of Privacy and Surveillance

Janelas panorâmicas: Arquitetura de privacidade e vigilância

Bärbel Harju

OpenEdition
Journals

BÄRBEL HARJU

PICTURE WINDOWS: ARCHITECTURE OF PRIVACY AND SURVEILLANCE[*]

Abstract: This essay, "Picture Windows: Architecture of Privacy and Surveillance," explores how privacy became a public concern within the context of U.S. suburbanization during the 1950s. Suburban spaces and architecture represent changed notions of privacy, publicity, property and selfhood that correspond to broader ideological and historical transformations. Techniques, functions, and forms of privacy in American suburbs are examined against the background of prevalent fears and sensibilities during the early phase of the Cold War, in order to analyze how privacy is imagined, staged, negotiated, instrumentalized and made visible in the cultural, social, and political context of suburbanization.

Keywords: architecture, postwar America, privacy crisis, suburbia, surveillance.

JANELAS PANORÂMICAS: ARQUITETURA DE PRIVACIDADE E VIGILÂNCIA

Resumo: O presente ensaio "Janelas panorâmicas: arquitetura de privacidade e vigilância" explora a forma como a privacidade se tornou uma preocupação pública no contexto da suburbanização norte-americana durante a década de 1950. Os espaços e a arquitetura suburbanos representam noções alteradas de privacidade, publicidade, propriedade e individualidade que correspondem a transformações ideológicas e históricas alargadas. Examinam-se técnicas, funções e formas de privacidade nos subúrbios norte-americanos no contexto dos receios e sensibilidades prevalecentes na fase inicial da Guerra Fria, procurando analisar de que modo a privacidade é imaginada, encenada, negociada, instrumentalizada e tornada visível no enquadramento cultural, social e político da suburbanização.

Palavras-chave: América do pós-guerra, arquitetura, crise de privacidade, subúrbios, vigilância.

---

[*] A version of this essay entitled "Privacy in Crisis" was published as part of the volume Cultures of Privacy (2015), edited by Karsten Fitz and Bärbel Harju.

John and Mary Drone, the fictional suburban couple featured in John Keats's The Crack in the Picture Window, are both epitome and caricature of the American Dream: moving into their newly built home, one of thousands of 'identical boxes' made possible by the G.I. Bill, they find themselves in

> a little box on a cold concrete slab containing two bedrooms, bath, and an eating space the size of a broom closet tucked between the living room and the tiny kitchen. A nine-by-twelve rug spread across the largest room wall to wall, and there was sheet of plate glass in the living room wall. That, the builder said, was the picture window. The picture it framed was of the box across the treeless street. (Keats, 1956: xv)

The Drones were soon to find out the picture window's role in holding up one of the tenets of life in suburbia: observing and being observed. The big windows popularized in postwar America turned homes into stages that not only allowed them to look out, but also invited neighbors to look in. Mutual surveillance and social control were indeed built into suburbia, as Keats astutely describes: "Through their [the Drones'] picture window, a vast and empty eye with bits of paper stuck in its corners, they could see their view – a house like theirs across a muddy street, its vacant picture eye staring into theirs" (ibidem: 21). Keats's biting critique of postwar suburbia crystallizes suburbanites' struggles with conformity, mutual surveillance, and a lack of privacy in the infamous picture window. Much like the confessional poetry of the time, Keats's satirical novel uncovers the ideological significance of the use of glass doors and windows in suburbia against the background of Cold War anxieties and a newly forged privacy crisis that pervaded postwar U.S. society.

Postwar America indeed witnessed a privacy crisis that rivals the current debate in portentous rhetoric and quasi-apocalyptic urgency.[1] Warnings of the death of privacy appeared in sociological studies, journalistic essays, as well as novels and autobiographies, legal and political texts (Nelson, 2002: xif.). For the first time in U.S. history, privacy forcefully entered the public consciousness as an endangered social value in need of protection. The narrative of the 'death of privacy' looms large in American imagination until today.

How did privacy in the 1950s gain the status of an endangered value on the verge of extinction? Which cultural, technological and political changes suddenly convinced

---

[1] A look at some book titles indicates that privacy as a declining value was widely regarded with a similar sense of alarm: The Eavesdroppers (1959), Privacy: The Right to Be Left Alone (1962), The Privacy Invaders (1964), The Naked Society (1964). For a more detailed discussion of this popular literature that emerged for the first time in the early 1950s, see Nelson, 2002: 9ff.

an alarmed public of the imminent end of privacy? While advances in technology, government surveillance, bureaucratization, and Cold War anxieties may well have sparked this crisis, Americans' fears about privacy gained particular momentum with regard to the suburban home and the domestic sphere. Postwar suburbia, with its single-family homes, cars, and TV sets, offered more privacy than ever to the average middle-class American, yet critics soon noted its downsides: vigorous neighborly surveillance, conformity and a lack of privacy. At the same time, private matters seeped into the public sphere as part of a confessional culture driven by voyeuristic, consumerist and therapeutic sensibilities. Suburbia's large picture windows allowed views of private living rooms – and illustrated the emphasis on self-observation and self-staging, which caused the blurring of boundaries between 'public' and 'private'. Critics feared that the increasing willingness to voluntarily reveal personal information could lead to indifference regarding the protection of privacy. Thus, privacy was considered doubly at risk: both attacks from the outside as well as disclosures from within had a destabilizing effect (Nelson, 2002: 11).

Nevertheless, the emphasis on privacy as a protected and central feature of a democratic society functioned as an important strategy to differentiate the United States from oppressive communist states. At the same time, however, numerous public discourses depicted privacy not only as a symbol of freedom, autonomy, and self-definition, but also framed it in terms of isolation, loneliness, control, and routine (Nelson, 2002: xiii).[2] Vigilant neighbors observed each other, deviant behavior and the retreat into the private sphere were considered suspicious. The conformity of the suburbs corresponded to the political need for stability, controllability and safety.

This essay explores how privacy became a public concern within the context of suburbanization and analyzes American anxieties about privacy during the 1950s. Postwar privacy anxieties can be tracked along two trajectories: the alleged decline of privacy caused by numerous transformations of private spaces through surveillance, technology, architecture and media; and the extrusion of private matters into the public by way of TV, gossip magazines and confessional culture. Suburban spaces and architecture represent changed notions of privacy, property and selfhood that

---

[2] Here, the often-neglected downside of the term "privacy" and its initially negative connotation as 'deprivation' and 'privation' become apparent. In The Human Condition, Hannah Arendt explains the term's change of meaning. Originally, to lead a completely private life meant deprivation and sacrifice: "to be deprived of the reality that comes from being seen and heard by others, [...] to be deprived of the possibility of achieving something more permanent than life itself. The privation of privacy lies in the absence of others" (Arendt, 1958: 58). Only in the course of the development of modern individualism did the term gain a predominantly positive meaning, as Arendt explains: "We no longer think primarily of deprivation when we use the word 'privacy,' and this is partly due to the enormous enrichment of the private sphere through modern individualism" (ibidem: 38).

correspond to broader ideological and historical transformations.[3] Techniques, functions, and forms of privacy in American suburbs are also examined against the background of prevalent fears and sensibilities during the early phase of the Cold War, in order to analyze how privacy is imagined, staged, negotiated and made visible in the cultural, social, and political context of suburbanization. The shifting boundaries between public and private do not testify to the disappearance of the private; on the contrary, the increasing significance of privacy illuminates its mutability as a public concept and testifies to its capacity of continuous reinvention and renegotiation rather than to its demise.

PRIVACY CRISIS AND COLD WAR ANXIETIES

"The 1950s were a bad decade for personal privacy", Frederick S. Lane ascertains with regard to the early phase of the Cold War, which heavily influenced the origin and nature of the privacy crisis between the late 1940s and the mid-1960s (Lane, 2009: 122). After years of deprivation, Americans now longed to live the American Dream. At the same time, the rise of communism seemed to jeopardize this dream. The violation of citizens' privacy was deemed acceptable to locate dissidents and propagators of communist ideas: "Personal privacy was frequently the first casualty in the search for subversive 'Reds' in government, the military, and the arts" (ibidem: 122).[4] The FBI under J. Edgar Hoover earned particularly harsh criticism for its dubious methods: "the clandestine wiretapping, the mail checking, and surveillance; the gossip, the rumor, the damaging of truth and half-truth that repose in the secret dossiers of the FBI" (Cook, 1964: 395). Security concerns, distrust, and fear shaped the cultural and political climate of the nation. The retreat into the private sphere was considered suspicious; conformity and observability played a central role in establishing a sense of national security.

According to literary scholar Deborah Nelson, the Cold War not only generated the privacy crisis, but provided the complex relationship between public and private in the modern era with its own language, "and a narrative to the dilemma of privacy in modernity more generally" (Nelson, 2002: xii).[5] The influential metaphor of containment

---

[3] John Archer locates the emergence of a "culture of retirement" in the English middle class of the eighteenth century, which substantially influenced the ideological paradigm of suburbanization in the following centuries (Archer, 2005: xvi).

[4] According to Lane, it was particularly the development of credit cards and the traceability of citizens based on their social security numbers which additionally contributed to the erosion of consumers' privacy (Lane, 2009: 122ff.). Wiretapping – notably under FBI director J. Edgar Hoover – as well as the technological advances in the development of computers increasingly used by government agencies (Social Security Administration, Internal Revenue Service, Census Bureau) also contributed to fears of surveillance and the invasion of privacy (ibidem: 131f.).

[5] Nelson stresses "that in addition to contributing its own pressures on privacy, the cold war scripted a

– widely used in the context of containment policy – was constantly threatened to be subverted by the equally powerful metaphor of "the enemy within", as Nelson explains: "The impossible purity of the internal space meant the perpetual breakdown and failure of the containment project" (ibidem: xviii).[6] The expansion of surveillance and the encouragement of civil vigilance seemed justified to counter the dangers of an invasion from the outside as well as from the inside.[7] The figurative crossing of borders, the notion of a mutual penetration of the private and public spheres, and the instability of (cultural) spaces dominate the discourse during this "age of anxiety" (Schlesinger, 1949: 1). Anxieties regarding totalitarianism resulted from the widespread assumption that a core American value was at stake and in need of protection: the right to freedom and self-determination in the private sphere of the individual.

A critical engagement with modernity exposed the boundaries between private and public as "unstable in both mass democracies as well as totalitarian regimes" (Nelson, 2002: xii).[8] The notion that totalitarian governments are characterized particularly by their control and invasion of privacy was widely accepted in the 1950s. In Totalitarianism: Part Three of the Origins of Totalitarianism (1951), political theorist Hannah Arendt points to a twofold loss in totalitarian governments – the destruction of the world of public, political community and that of the private individual:

> Totalitarian governments, like all tyrannies, certainly could not exist without destroying the public realm of life, that is, without destroying, by isolating men, their political capacities. But totalitarian domination as a form of government is new in that it is not content with this isolation and destroys private life as well. It bases itself on loneliness, on the experience of not belonging to the world at all, which is among the most radical and desperate experiences of man. (Arendt, 1951: 173)

Totalitarian regimes rely on the destruction of both public and private spheres, eliminating personal and political freedom, thus exerting comprehensive control over all

---

topological crisis, a generalized anxiety about zones of sovereignty that was far more general and mobile" (Nelson, 2002: 3).

[6] Nelson focuses on two parallel developments in her analysis: privacy as the subject of constitutional law in three prominent cases, and the rise of confessional poetry in the 1960s.

[7] The historiography of the Cold War shows how flexibly these terms – "enemy within" and "silent threat" – were used: Communists, homosexuals, trade unionists or civil rights activists could all be regarded as subversive according to this terminology (Nelson, 2002: 11f.).

[8] The acknowledgment of a diversity of public spheres in modern societies softened the often rigid dichotomy between 'private' and 'public,' as cultural theorist Michael Warner demonstrates in his 2002 collection of essays, Publics and Counterpublics.

aspects of human life. When privacy is diminished, a state of constant surveillance extinguishes civil liberties, freedom and privacy are undermined.

Interestingly, in the early 1950s both Hannah Arendt's The Origins of Totalitarianism (1951) and George Orwell's 1984 (1948) gained popularity among readers and were widely circulated. Orwell's dystopia of a surveillance society, whose all-encompassing Thought Police pervaded even citizens' most private thoughts, fueled debates about the decline of privacy and the dangers of surveillance technologies. Historian Abbott Gleason links Arendt's and Orwell's books as key texts in the formation of the concept of totalitarianism in the American imagination. Gleason calls totalitarianism "the great mobilizing and unifying force of the cold war" and emphasizes the erosion and obliteration of the boundaries between private and public as the defining characteristic (Gleason, 1995: 3f.).

Many observers of American society in the postwar era subsequently focused on the protection of privacy, self-determination and individualism. Postwar public discourse followed Arendt's theories in that privacy was deemed of utmost importance for the preservation of freedom and democracy. The clear distinction between private and public took on a unique role in the comparison between communism and democracy: privacy – the inviolability of individual lifestyles and the vigilant protection of autonomy – was stylized as the most significant distinctive feature between the two regimes – and not, for instance, the promotion of a lively public discourse in a free democratic society (Nelson, 2002: xiii). This binary logic – "either privacy was stable and the United States would remain free, or privacy was dying and the nation was headed down the road to totalitarianism" – shaped discussions about privacy in the Cold War climate of the 1950s and generated a quasi-apocalyptic sense of urgency (ibidem: 9).

The magazine The American Scholar provided a broad platform for debates on privacy in 1958, when it launched a series entitled "The Invasion of Privacy". In the first article, Richard H. Rovere portrays privacy as a value that was especially – but not only – jeopardized by new technologies and processes of bureaucratization:

> But then came the camera, the telephone, the graduate income tax, and later the tape recorder, the behavioral scientist, television [...], the professional social worker, "togetherness" and a host of other developments that are destructive of privacy as a right and as a condition. (Rovere, 1958)

Privacy was under attack – not necessarily by foreign governments or the threat of communism – but from within: the domestic "invasion of privacy" (ibidem: 413), fueled

by new technologies, by the U.S. government that was supposed to protect its citizens' privacy. Rovere's description reverberates common fears of the 1950s. Similarly, in his book The Naked Society, journalist Vance Packard blamed technology and "the mounting surveillance" (Packard, 1964: 1) for establishing a new regime of social and governmental control that diminished Americans' privacy by tracking, constantly observing and examining them. Television, the system of social security numbers, computer databases, and enhanced monitoring devices caused public discomfort with regard to potential privacy violations at home. His analysis of the postwar period bleakly states that "[privacy] is becoming harder and harder to attain, surveillance more and more pervasive" (ibidem: 5).

Rovere extends his critique beyond government surveillance and vividly describes the interdependency that resulted from social changes and threatened to undermine individual autonomy:

> We were willed a social order dedicated to the sovereignty of the individual but, again thanks mainly to technology, dependent for its functioning largely on the interdependence of lives. My behavior affects my neighbor in a hundred ways undreamed of a century ago. My home is joined to his by pipes and cables, by tax and insurance rates. [...] I may build a high fence, bolt the doors, draw the blinds and insist that my time to myself is mine alone, but his devices for intrusion are limitless. My privacy can be invaded by a ringing telephone as well as by a tapped one. It can be invaded by an insistent community that seeks to shame me into getting up off my haunches to do something for the P.T.A. or town improvement or the American Civil Liberties Union [...]. My "right to be let alone" is a right I may cherish and from time to time invoke, but it is not a right favored by the conditions of the life I lead and am, by and large, pleased to be leading. (Rovere, 1958)

Remarkably, Rovere not only includes bureaucracy and technology, but also mentions the societal imperative of "togetherness" which, according to him, manifests itself in the form of social control and intrusive neighbors.

In a second contribution to the series "The Reshaping of Privacy" August Heckscher explores the extent to which the perceived boundaries between public and private spheres are subject to social change, describing the decline of privacy as "one of the more depressing features of the time" (Heckscher, 1958: 11).[9] While

---

[9] Heckscher explains that "the prevailing readiness to follow catchwords and fads, to blend as

acknowledging the 1950s "inquisitorial spirit" manifest in numerous privacy violations by the Congress, he highlights the era's general tendency to devalue substance and introspection: "The widely deplored trend to conformity [...] is the result of a common disregard for the secluded and inward qualities that at other times have been judged the heart of life" (ibidem: 11).

Influenced by Hannah Arendt's thoughts on the public and the private realm in The Human Condition (1958), he states: "[W]hat is disturbing today is not merely the decline of privacy; it is equally the decline of a public sphere" (Heckscher, 1958: 14; see Sennett, 1977: 3ff.). Heckscher does not solely lament the invasion of the private sphere, but observes a decline of public and private life, which he describes as a corruption of both spheres. Previously clear boundaries were blurred, especially in suburbia. The cult of the private home, consumerism, conformity and confessional culture led to the rise of a so-called "social sphere", which compromises the private and public spheres (Heckscher, 1958: 20).[10] The result, according to Heckscher, is not a decrease but an expansion of the private, which is characterized by a certain ambivalence:

> Actually there seems today to be a retreat into privacy, and at the same time a disposition to flaunt areas of life hitherto hidden in the public light. The privacy lacks substance and depth, while the publicly performed portions of our life lack the edge of excellence, risk, and high responsibility [...]. What has happened to privacy, therefore, may be said to be less an invasion than a corruption. (Heckscher, 1958: 19f.)

While surveillance, bureaucratization, and technological innovations certainly provided the breeding ground for privacy anxieties, many debates emerging during the 1950s focused their attention on suburbanization – and the alleged change in social values it brought about.

---

inconspicuously as possible with the group, can only be taken as proof that the domain of the private has been disconcertingly reduced" (Heckscher, 1958: 12).

[10] In The Human Condition, Arendt elaborates her views in a chapter entitled "The Rise of the Social": "The emergence of society – the rise of housekeeping, its activities, problems, and organizational devices – from the shadowy interior of the household into the light of the public sphere, has not only blurred the old borderline between private and political, it has also changed almost beyond recognition the meaning of the two terms and their significance for the life of the individual and the citizen" (Arendt, 1958: 38). The confusion of the private and public realm, according to Arendt, relates to the conformism required in the social realm, since "society expects from each of its members a certain kind of behavior, imposing innumerable and various rules, all of which tend to 'normalize' its members, to make them behave, to exclude spontaneous action or outstanding achievement" (ibidem: 40).

"PRIVATE HAVEN IN A HEARTLESS WORLD": THE AMERICAN DREAM HOME

The mass migration from the cities into more rural areas played an integral role in the transformation of the (imagined) boundary between 'private' and 'public' in various ways. Having escaped urban hardships, suburbanites ascribed high importance to the home: the nuclear family – not the community and neighborhood – became the focus of attention. Social interaction on sidewalks became less frequent due to the car as the preferred – and sometimes only – mode of transportation. Jackson notes that the retreat into private enclaves prevented the formation of lively public spaces: "Residential neighborhoods have become a mass of small, private islands; with the backyard functioning as a wholesome, family-oriented, and reclusive place. There are few places as desolate and lonely as a suburban street on a hot afternoon" (Jackson, 1985: 279f.).

When the Second World War came to an end, Americans breathed a collective sigh of relief: "Normal family life could resume" (ibidem: 231). Along with the demand for residential building, birth and marriage rates soared. The housing boom of the postwar period led to a massive wave of migration from the cities. Mass produced single-family homes offered the opportunity to live the American dream, and "a new stake in the ideology of privacy and property rights" (Spigel, 1992b: 100) – especially to young members of the white middle class. The Federal Housing Administration and inexpensive mortgage loans for veterans made suburban homes from companies such as Levitt and Sons affordable. Urban historian Dolores Hayden illustrates the ramifications of these subsidies of the postwar era in Building Suburbia, particularly with regard to so-called "sitcom suburbs":[11] "In the vast new suburbs built in the late 1940s and 1950s, definitions of public and private were reshaped, as loans guaranteed by the federal government poured into private real estate development firms" (Hayden, 2003: 129).[12]

In an attempt to make sense of the ideology that accompanied the suburbanization, historians frequently point to a general feeling of isolationism, "both at the level of cold war xenophobia and in terms of domestic everyday experience," as media scholar Lynn Spigel explains (1992b: 100). Thus, the private home functioned as a safe haven that offered protection against the insecurities and ambiguities of public life. The retreat into privacy simultaneously ushered in a return to the "Victorian cult of

---

[11] In Building Suburbia, Dolores Hayden identifies three suburbs as model "sitcom suburbs": Levittown, NY, Lakewood, CA, and Park Forest, IL. The families living in these model homes resembled each other in age, ethnicity and income, and their lifestyle was popularized and performed on popular sitcoms of the 1950s and 1960s, such as Leave it to Beaver, Ozzie and Harriet, and Father Knows Best (Hayden, 2003: 128).

[12] See Jackson, 1985: 190ff.

domesticity that was predicated upon the clear division between public and private spheres" (ibidem: 100). In his seminal study on suburbia, The Crabgrass Frontier, urban historian Kenneth T. Jackson notes that young families in pursuit of happiness – meaning "good schools, private space, and personal safety" – were not disappointed in places such as Levittown. Historian Barbara M. Kelly emphasizes that the home and the community supported only one ideal: "togetherness. There was simply no place else to go" (Kelly, 1993: 71). Heckscher also criticizes the absence of a lively public sphere: "In suburbia there are no streets [,] it provides no public arena – no square, no market place, no political responsibility" (Heckscher, 1958: 14).

Jackson argues in The Crabgrass Frontier that "the single-family tract house – post World War II style – whatever its aesthetic failings, offered growing families a private haven in a heartless world" (Jackson, 1985: 244). The longing for privacy fueled Americans' flight to the suburbs and retreat into domestic life. Historian Elaine Tyler May argues in Homeward Bound that "amid a world of uncertainties brought about by World War II and its aftermath, the home seemed to offer a secure private nest removed from the dangers of the outside world. [...] The self-contained home held out the promise of security in an insecure world. It also offered a vision of abundance and fulfillment" (May, 1988: 1).[13] While city life implied a confrontation with Cold War anxieties and the uncertainties of the postwar period, a suburban home seemed to promise a respite, a private refuge that enabled its inhabitants to shut public life out (Spigel, 1992b: 100). Hannah Arendt stresses this suburban ideal: "[T]he four walls of one's private property offer the only reliable hiding place from the common public world, not only from everything that goes on in it but also from its very publicity" (Arendt, 1958: 71). Clearly, in the American imagination, suburbia oscillates between a utopian living environment, the American dream come true; and dystopian visions of an environment characterized by conformity, consumption and control. Postwar suburbanization is characterized by the idealization of privacy as the only space that allowed unrestricted self-development, and the merging of the American dream with the withdrawal from the public sphere of the cities into suburban dream houses. The American Dream materialized with a private home, while interior design magazines like American Builder and House Beautiful framed private property as significant markers of individuality and upward mobility, the "instrument of choice for fulfilling the individual

---

[13] May adopts the political idea of "containment" prevalent at the time in order to highlight how the term applies to the home: "Within its walls, potentially dangerous social forces of the new age might be tamed, so they could contribute to the secure and fulfilling life to which post-war women and men aspired. [...] More than merely a metaphor for the cold war on the homefront, containment aptly describes the way in which public policy, personal behavior, and even political values were focused on the home" (May, 1988: 16).

American dream" (Archer, 2005: 284f). Thus, the retreat into private life was supported by a powerful trope in U.S. cultural history, since "the single-family houses on separate plots reinforced the American myth of rugged individualism", as Barbara Kelly states (Kelly, 1993: 63).

Of course, the merging of the American Dream with the idea of a single-family home is imbued with ideology. Moving to the suburbs, it was implied, meant the achievement of the dream and the participation in the "democratic way of life" (Nicolaides, 2006: 258). Underlying the glorification of suburban home ownership was a larger system of political ideology, as cultural theorist John Archer purports. Assuming a strong correlation between the ideology of a society and its material culture, Archer examined suburban homes and their "ever more inward-turning privatism" (Archer, 2005: 299) to find that in the early twentieth century

> the trope of the American dream [...] became synonymous with the notion of the dream house – partly as a deliberate consequence of government policy, partly as a consequence of ways in which consumerist practices afforded new opportunities for dwellings to engage the ideological imperatives of selfhood. (ibidem: xvif.)

The equation of the American dream with ownership of a dream house ascribed a cultural function – self-fulfillment – to the home, while the notion of an explicitly American dream served to exemplify the superiority of the capitalist, democratic system. Archer underlines how the trope of the American dream (house) enables the connection of private individuals' aspirations with ideological and political ideas:

> The notion of a "dream" introduces a different rhetorical and ideological dimension. To cast personal aspirations as one's American dream implies an ongoing articulation of this nationalistic vision of self-fulfillment. One's dream world in this respect is not really sacrosanct; even here the nature and function of the private individual are very much constructs of the larger political-ideological system. […] [T]he "American dream" has become a rhetorical formula that defines how individuals are expected to contribute to that system: the political and economic prosperity of the nation is advanced by harnessing on a mass scale an individualized imperative for private self-fulfillment.[14] (Archer, 2005: 292)

---

[14] With Bourdieu, Archer argues that "the house [is] both a cognitive apparatus by which social relations were directly embodied in its residents and a practical instrument by which the maintenance of that system was continuously prompted and performed. [...] A given habitus thus is linked inextricably to the

Archer's insights demonstrate that the pursuit of suburban privacy during the 1950s requires to be examined against the background of its instrumentalization by an ideological system and its agenda. The longing for private property bolstered fundamental American values – which was crucial to quench Cold War anxieties regarding socialism and communism – and boosted the U.S. economy. Archer underlines the strong correlation between private property and the American Dream inherent to this ideology of "possessive individualism" (ibidem: 293). With private property underlining the twin values of democracy and capitalism, suburbia figures prominently in the ideological tug of war between the United States and the Soviet Union and came to serve as an "exemplification of the superiority of capitalism and the American democratic political system" (ibidem: 292). The framing of suburban dwellings as the antithesis to communist housing was omnipresent, the suburban home "became a symbolic bunker" (Nelson, 2002: 81) for white middle-class families. Quite paradoxically, life in the suburbs was often shaped by conflicting values: social control, homogeneity, and a lack of individual agency were rampant, as I will proceed to demonstrate.

PRIVACY AND TOGETHERNESS

"There was an odd sense of connection and disconnection in this new suburbia," Spigel observes with regard to suburbanization (Spigel, 1992b: 101). Postwar suburbs are characterized not only by a retreat into the private but also, simultaneously and paradoxically, by participation in community life, involvement in clubs, PTAs (Parent Teacher Associations), and social organizations. While suburbanites subscribed to the ideal of communal life, many historians stress that the idea of the home as a sanctuary continued to exist on an ideological level. Spigel criticizes this reading because "[i]t reifies the very ideology of privacy that it attempts to explain – in other words, it begins by assuming that the home was indeed a retreat and that people understood their domestic lives and social lives to be clear cut and distinct entities" (ibidem: 101). According to Spigel, it is far more likely that private and public were not perceived as distinct entities: "The ideology of privacy was not experienced simply as a retreat from the public sphere; it also gave people a sense of belonging to the community. By purchasing their detached suburban homes, the young couples of the middle class were given a new, and flattering, definition of themselves" (ibidem: 101). Young middle-class couples redefined themselves by purchasing a single-family house and became

---

characteristics of a particular spatial apparatus" (Archer, 2005: 11).

part of one of the many suburban neighborhoods, or "private islands", as Jackson described them (1985: 280). Advertisements and magazines stylized them as cultural representatives of the American dream. The proliferation of community organizations in the suburbs indicates that suburban residents did not bolt the doors of their uniform houses, but "[i]nstead, they secured a position of meaning in the public sphere through their newfound social identities as private land owner" (Spigel 1992b: 101). Participation became the currency that enabled the acquisition of something scarce in the suburbs: distinction and social status. Harry Henderson points this out in a 1953 article in *Harper's Magazine*: "Since no one can acquire prestige through an imposing house, or inherited position, activity – the participation in community or group affairs – becomes the basis of prestige" (Henderson, 1953a: 26).[15] This 'rugged American collectivism'[16] refers to some of suburbia's most fundamental tensions and can be explained along two axes – the desired participation in community life and simultaneous adherence to the ideal of the retreat into the private.

The exaltation of domestic life in a privatized family idyll, paradoxically but understandably, meant that privacy was not necessarily available in the spatial structure of suburban homes, since "although privatized as households, the houses provided little or no internal privacy for the family members" (Kelly, 1993: 69). Spending time with family epitomized the ideal of the nuclear family. The lack of doors and walls, the impossibility of a retreat from family togetherness, was further perpetuated by the thinness of walls (Whyte, 1956: 352). Privacy in suburbia was gendered, since "for women, especially, the single-family suburban house implies isolation, lacking physical and social context", as Hayden notes (2003: 7). In The Feminine Mystique (1963), Betty Friedan points out that the spatial and social structure of the suburbs negatively affected the privacy of women who spent most of their time there, especially with front kitchens exposing women to being surveilled:

> There are no true walls or doors; the woman in the beautiful electronic kitchen is never separated from her children. She need never feel alone for a minute, need never be by herself. She can forget her own identity in these noisy open-plan houses. [...] A man, of course, leaves the house for most of the day. But the feminine mystique forbids the woman this. (Friedan, 1963: 245f.)

---

[15] In a second article, "The Mass-Produced Suburbs, Part II" Henderson explains that "one becomes a [...] personage of some importance and influence, only in one way: by working hard in organizations, accepting responsibility, and speaking up in meetings" (Henderson, 1953b: 86).

[16] The expression "rugged American collectivism" refers to the term 'rugged individualism,' in other words, the idea of the individual's self-responsibility and independence from the government. See Henderson 1953b.

The female sphere, overshadowed by the dominant image of the wife as a happy homemaker, in fact negatively impacted many female surburbanites' well-being.[17] Thus, the alleged private haven in fact diminished privacy for its inhabitants, as Nelson concludes: "[T]he suburban home, while marketed as a source of privacy and upheld in cold war political rhetoric as the acme of American democratic self-governance, was in fact defined by surveillance, especially though not exclusively for women" (Nelson, 2002: 87).

The myriad of critics who commented on suburbia in the 1950s and early 1960s often framed 'togetherness', the imperative to participate in communal life, as a loss of privacy. In his 1956 study The Organization Man, sociologist William H. Whyte notes with regard to Park Forest, Illinois, that a sense of belonging was considered the individual's ultimate need (Whyte, 1956: 7).[18] This need is captured in the expression "Keep up with the Joneses", popularized by Harry Henderson in his article "Rugged American Collectivism" (Henderson, 1953b: 80). Striving for conformity, neighbors constantly had to keep up with each other by purchasing the latest kitchen appliances, consumer goods, by participating in the expected leisure activities and by engaging in neighborly small talk. Babysitting, organizing dinner parties, community activities: participation was obligatory. Whyte seconds this observation and describes Park Forest as a "hotbed of Participation", in which the interaction between residents by far exceeded neighborly friendship (Whyte, 1956: 287). Privacy had become a secret pleasure to be enjoyed only with remorse. The positive effects of these close communities include high social cohesion, mutual assistance and exchange. However, Whyte asserts, the group could quickly turn into a tyrant: withdrawal, retreat, isolation, and unavailability prompted mistrust and suspicion among neighbors (ibidem: 361). The commitment to the community required continual renewal, the imperative of social interaction commanded self-disclosure and permanent exchange with the group. The stigma of deviance and antisocial behavior had to be avoided, the retreat needed to be camouflaged. As Whyte noted, "[p]rivacy has become clandestine. Not in solitary and selfish contemplation but in doing things with other people does one fulfill oneself" (ibidem: 319). Privacy was not given, but required the individual's active appropriation:

---

[17] Simultaneously lacking the avenues for public engagement and actual privacy in the home, many women, as Friedan critically noted, suffered from the boredom, monotonous and lonely lives suburbia imposed on them, and caused in part by the houses' open-plan design (Friedan, 1963: 246f.). Similarly, scholars have noted the lack of privacy that suburban life might have entailed for men and children, too. Cf. Kelly, 1993: 70; cf. Jackson, 1985: 243.

[18] The developers advertised the suburb with the following slogan in 1952: "You belong in Park Forest! The moment you come to our town you know: You're welcome. You're part of a big group. You can live in a friendly small town instead of a big lonely city" (Whyte, 1956: 284).

"To gain privacy, one has to do something" (ibidem: 352). Neighborly vigilance proved to be constitutive of the creation of privacy. Cultural techniques of vigilance that required individuals to draw demarcation lines between themselves and the group led to the development and proliferation of the idea of privacy as a value worthy of protection. Paradoxically, then, privacy could be achieved only in the company of others.[19]

POLICING THE COMMUNITY: VIGILANCE AND SOCIAL CONTROL

Despite the omnipresent rhetoric of 'rugged individualism' conformity and consensus prevailed in suburban places like Levittown. The return to traditional values, the private home as a refuge, and the focus on domesticity and family, however, were not open to all Americans: suburban residents were similar in age, lifestyle, income, and skin color (Kelly, 1993: 59). There was a broad consensus that the working population should not be too individualistic. At the same time, it was necessary to prevent the development of the collective solidarity among workers found in socialist societies. In Expanding the American Dream, Kelly emphasizes that "[s]ocial nonconformity was tantamount to political subversion; in 1947, to be a nonconformist was to take sides against 'us'" (ibidem: 20). The American need for safety during the postwar period led to generalized suspicions of collective efforts, while the desire for stability stimulated distrust towards otherness (ibidem: 60). Deviance became a catchword that fueled fears and encouraged neighborly vigilance.

The houses in places like Levittown corresponded to the ambivalent needs of the postwar period in a particular way: single-family homes conformed to the myth of 'rugged individualism' and satisfied the longing for private domesticity. At first glance, the 6000 houses built between 1947 and 1948 looked completely identical; planners, however, included minimal variations of design elements.[20] Designs that were too individualistic were frowned upon, and a majority of residents complied with the parameters of the suburbs' planners. As Kelly underlines, the mass-produced homes served the economic necessity of standardized production on the one hand, while satisfying the politically motivated need for conformity and control on the other: "In a world threatened by political subversion and atomic annihilation, nonconformity was interpreted as a danger signal" (ibidem: 63).

---

[19] Spigel disagrees with the idea that the ideology of suburbanization presents only a return to Victorian ideals. Rather, the seemingly contradictory simultaneity of participation in the community and domestic privacy was inherent to this ideology: "[T]he ideal was that one could be alone in one's home, but still be attached to the community" (Spigel, 1992b: 211).
[20] Kelly notes "subtle differences in color and window arrangements, along with staggered setbacks" (Kelly, 1993: 63).

Many observers of the suburban social fabric took note of the suburban residents' neighborly vigilance and control. The refusal to conform to the group might lead to social isolation and the accusation of anti-social behavior, while the effects of social control created self-censorship and sentiment very much in opposition to core American values, as Packard criticizes with regard to postwar U.S. society more broadly:

> [T]he person who finds himself being watched, electronically or otherwise, tends unwittingly to be careful in what he does or says. This breeds not only sameness but a watchfulness completely untypical of the exuberant, free-wheeling American so commonly accepted as typical of this land in earlier decades. (Packard, 1964: 11)

Reminiscent of exactly those characteristics heavily criticized with regard to the Soviet Union – collectivism and quasi-totalitarian surveillance –, suburban conformity was subject to "the omnipresent eye of the community", as Dobriner puts it (1963: 9). Accordingly, diffident or introverted residents were deemed suspicious. In Levittown, for instance, neighbors' reservations towards alternative lifestyles are ubiquitous in letters of complaint to local newspapers, which almost always used anti-communist labels such as "Russkie", "commie" or "comrade" to describe non-conformists (Kelly, 1993: 62). Criticism of the suburb's builders, Levitt and Sons, was particularly frowned upon, although they presented residents with paternalistic, controlling and authoritarian rules and regulations (Kelly, 1993: 62). William J. Levitt ruled with an iron hand, hoping to instill into the residents his own idea of proper manners and middle-class respectability: "In no way did Levitt encourage Levittowners to engage in civic-minded activities; he preferred to run Levittown himself" (Baxandall and Ewen, 2000: 144). Restrictions concerned, among other things, the height of fences and hedges, lawn care as well as housekeeping.[21] Many restrictions point to a new notion of privacy, since, for example, "Levitt apparently viewed the public use of outdoor wash-lines as a marginally unacceptable practice. The wash-line was an urban icon; laundry in the suburbs was a private matter" (Kelly, 1993: 68). Allusions to urban tenement neighborhoods were avoided at all costs: William Levitt, a staunch anti-communist, feared any association with urban public housing, and, by implication, with communism. Levitt and Sons'

---

[21] According to Jackson, "[t]he Levitts forbade fences [...] and permitted outdoor clothes drying only on specially designed, collapsible racks. They even supervised lawn-cutting for the first few years – doing the jobs themselves if necessary and sending the laggard families the bill" (Jackson, 1985: 236).

modus operandi clearly resembled "efforts […] to police the community" (ibidem: 62).[22] Their efforts to dictate and control Levittowners' private lives are reminiscent of Orwell's Big Brother and reinforced anxieties about totalitarian surveillance and the loss of privacy.

Attempts to reveal the autocratic and anti-democratic nature of the strict requirements were unsuccessful. A councilman who spoke out against Levitt's restrictions against doing laundry on weekends and holidays was attacked in numerous letters to a local newspaper editor (Kelly, 1993: 62). Due to the nimbus that surrounded William J. Levitt, many residents of Levittown sided with him. According to Kelly, the entrepreneur widely received admiration because "Mr. Levitt solved the housing shortage, he provided a good house, the area did not become a slum, and any criticism of Mr. Levitt or his ways is therefore tantamount to an attack on the American way of life" (ibidem: 63). Although a strict regulation of the height of fences and details concerning housekeeping could be considered an invasion of privacy, the residents of Levittown not only seemed to willingly accept the infringement on privacy but also regarded any criticism as un-American. Levitt routinely employed anti-communist rhetoric in order to silence noncompliant residents, describing them as "communist dupes" in pamphlets that were distributed among Levittowners (Baxandall and Ewen, 2000: 145). Levitt, an outspoken anti-communist, sympathized with Senator Joseph McCarthy, who described apartment buildings and public housing as breeding grounds of communism (Hayden, 2003: 131). Levitt readily agreed with this plea for private single-family homes: "No man who owns his own house and lot can be a communist" (apud Jackson, 1985: 231). The political instrumentalization of suburbanization cannot be overestimated. The emphasis on privacy – and private property – as a valuable asset and central distinguishing feature between the U.S. and communist regimes, and the simultaneous relinquishment of personal privacy in an effort to uphold conformity and security, is striking – and points to the ambivalent and often contradictory status of privacy in postwar America.

LIFE IN THE GOLDFISH BOWL: ARCHITECTURE OF VISIBILITY

Suburban architecture of the 1940s and 1950s illustrates the complex negotiations between private and public space and, according to Lynn Spigel, "mediated the twin goals of separation from and integration into the outside world" (Spigel, 2001: 32).

---

[22] The uncompromising stance and insidious methods employed by the Levitts in order to reach their goals are illustrated in an incident that occurred only one year after the founding of Levittown, when, after rents were increased for the first time, a resident's complaint was printed in a local newspaper. In response, Levitt bought the newspaper and even proceeded to fake communist leaflets in order to denounce dissenters (Baxandall and Ewen, 2000: 145).

Touted as "architecture that will encourage the development of individualism", modern single-family homes and their private yards were seen as bulwarks against communism (Hayden, 2003: 17). Interior design magazines and architectural journals declared the California ranch-style houses as the new ideal: smooth transitions between rooms and functionalist design principles created openness and continuous space.[23] The influence of modernist European architecture of the 1920s and 1930s and its spatial aesthetics reached suburbia in a watered-down, mass-produced version of this architectural ideal, namely in the form of Levittowns (Spigel, 1992b: 104). Even fences or hedges that usually enclose or demarcate private property had to yield to this ideal. The Levittown Tribune, the local newspaper founded by real estate entrepreneur Abraham Levitt, reported that "[a]ll fences, whether fabricated or growing, are prohibited" (Restrictions Affecting Houses & Sample Contract, 1948: 2). Heckscher noticed the limits of a real retreat in his contribution to the American Scholar and stated: "Americans […] live in the open" (Heckscher, 1958: 12), which fosters vigilance, a state of permanent mutual surveillance and interest in other peoples' lives. William S. Dobriner coined the term "visibility principle" to describe the prevalent concept of mutual observability enabled by suburbia's spatial structure, and "operating within the flat, horizontalized, and relatively simple institutions of the suburbs" (Dobriner, 1963: 49).

Spigel notices that the frequently praised "illusion of spaciousness" (1992b: 101) led to a merging of interior and exterior spaces:

> Beyond the "form follows function" aesthetic, however, this emphasis on continuous space suggested a profound preoccupation with space itself. The rambling domestic interiors appeared not so much as private sanctuaries that excluded the outside world, but rather as infinite expanses that incorporated the world. (Spigel, 1992a: 6f.)

The picture window, a central design element of the suburbs, was usually located at the rear wall of the living room facing the backyard and "made the seasons into an ever-changing wall decoration" (Clark, 1989: 178).[24] While the idea of incorporating the natural surroundings into the living room remained intact, reality didn't necessarily live up to this idea, as Whyte dryly notices: "the picture in the picture window […] is what is going on inside – or, what is going on inside other people's picture windows" (Whyte,

---

[23] Some of the most common books on architecture and interior furnishing were: Ford and Creighton, The American House Today (1951); Sunset Magazine, Sunset Homes for Western Living (1946); Kennedy, The House and the Art of Its Design (1953); May, Western Ranch Houses (1958).
[24] Starting in 1948, the picture window was a regular feature in the "Ranch" model, the successor of the "Cape Cod" in Levittown (Kelly, 1993: 77).

1956: 352). The facilitation of mutual surveillance in suburbia is sometimes referred to as the "goldfish bowl effect" (Spigel, 1992b: 128). The removal of the visual separation of indoors and outdoors is emblematic of the ambiguous relationship between public and private suburban spaces.[25] Picture windows integrated the outside world into the home and transformed private living rooms into stages – and residents into actors. Rather than open the residents' view on the surrounding nature, picture windows provided insights into the neighbors' homes – through their picture window. Kelly concludes that "[t]he picture window, therefore, became the interior of the house, which gradually became more and more like a stage – or in 1949, a television – setting" (Kelly, 1993: 84).

Although interior design magazines idealized oversized windows, they also offered advice on how to shield views from the outside by using curtains, blinds, and shrubs (Spigel, 1992b: 117). Lowering the blinds, however, was ambiguous, since the seclusion from the community and the desire for privacy elicited feelings of guilt as well as suspicion. As Whyte noted with regard to Park Forest, "to shut oneself off from others like this is regarded as either a childish prank or, more likely, an indication of some inner neurosis. The individual, not the group, has erred" (Whyte, 1956: 352).[26] The wish for privacy was equated with mental illness. The imperative of permanent observation of the self and of others prevailed, since "suburban visibility is not limited to surveillance and social mapping, but also includes the pressure to occupy and embody a rigorously homogenous ideal image, which is continually mirrored back and policed by neighbors" (Joselit, 2009: 155). The disciplining power of voyeurism is obvious and far-reaching. Heckscher, too, interpreted the picture window as a symbol of the blurring of boundaries between private and public in The American Scholar:

> The picture window, serving in the typical housing development more as a means for having others look in than for letting the owner look out, stands as a perfect symbol of the confusion of realms, a confusion that spreads [...] to the society as a whole. (Heckscher, 1958: 15)

Heckscher underlines that surveillance technologies were not responsible for the invasion of the private; rather, changing social values had resulted in a distortion of the

---

[25] In Make Room for TV, Spigel demonstrates that TV "given its ability to bring 'another world' into the home" perfectly harmonized with the aesthetics of suburban architecture (Spigel, 1992b: 102f.).

[26] One of many positive readings of this kind of community formation can be found in W.D. Wetherell's nostalgically transfigured The Man Who Loved Levittown: "[W]e used to talk about [...] how there were no hedges [...] in the old days, no fences, no locked doors. Everyone's home was your home; we all walked back and forth like it was one big yard" (Wetherell, 1985: 14).

private. The picture window is emblematic of this development, which implicates an increased inclination towards self-presentation and exposure of formerly private matters: "Vacancy or conformity at the core, combined with the display before others of what should be an inner privacy, is a situation more menacing, and certainly more difficult to cure, than a deliberate attack upon one's personal citadel" (ibidem: 15). Whyte's argumentation regarding the growth of confessional culture supports Heckscher's claims:

> Less is sacred. "It's wonderful", says one young wife. "You find yourself discussing all your personal problems with your neighbors – things that back in South Dakota we would have kept to ourselves". As time goes on, this capacity for self-revelation grows; and on the most intimate details of family life, court people become amazingly frank with one another. No one, they point out, ever need face a problem alone. (Whyte, 1956: 390)

Voluntary confessions testify to the fact that insights into spatial as well as emotional interiors were not only tolerated, but also desired. The window served as a metaphor for a society that oscillates between privacy and transparency. As a (permeable and transparent) border, which allowed insights and views of the interior and the exterior, the window epitomized the suburban sentiment of one's self-positioning in the public sphere – on one's own and yet in relation to, and visible for, the world. The boundaries between public and private spaces increasingly blurred and became the subject of complex social and cultural debates.

The television, 'a window onto the world', gained the status of a central gathering place and refuge – and proved to be a focal point of privacy anxieties and ambivalent sensibilities. The television boom[27] symbolized the privatization of entertainment: the home developed into a self-sufficient entertainment center (Jackson, 1985: 278).[28] News, shows, and movies brought the world into suburban residents' living rooms. Public places such as the movie theater or sports stadiums were substituted by the privacy of the domestic TV program. The theatricalization of the home was accompanied by an inversion of "the relationship between public/spectacle and private/spectator", as Spigel notes: the isolated viewers at home imagined themselves

---

[27] While in 1950 only 9% of American homes owned a TV, the number had climbed to 65% by 1956 (Meyrowitz, 2002: 164).
[28] Jackson points out that due to television and other technological achievements, such as the telephone, the record player, and air-conditioning, the home hardly needed to be left: "[T]he private dwelling offers a range of comforts and possibilities, and with the expansion of telephone service, easy and quick communication with outsiders. Air-conditioning in particular has coincided with a general withdrawal into self-pursuit and privatism" (Jackson, 1985: 280f.).

to be part of a larger, invisible audience (Spigel, 1992b: 116). Although television was advertised as a medium for the entire family, reporters like Harry Hershfield were concerned: "Overnight our homes have taken over the burdens carried by outdoor strolling minstrels, park gatherings and stadiums. Previously, every man's home was supposedly his castle. The lord of the manor decided what and who should enter its sacred precincts" (Hershfield, 1952: 105; Spigel, 1992b: 117). According to Hershfield, the "line of demarcation in privacies and social standings" had been damaged beyond repair by the rise of television (Hershfield, 1952: 105), an observation seconded by Nelson, who purports that the "mere witnessing of public life from the living room would abrade the clear distinction between public and private life" (Nelson, 2002: 167). While picture windows enabled suburbanites to observe neighbors, the television set offered a glimpse into the fictitious lives of their sitcom neighbors – an idealized version of family life in suburbia. Often set in an all too familiar scenery, the suburban tract house, popular shows like "The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet" or "Leave it to Beaver" provided ample opportunity for identification with characters and lifestyles. Despite the "claustrophobic aspect of the sitcom's setting, the […] programs did provide a privileged opening onto a public sphere" (Spigel, 1992b: 105). The hyperrealism of sitcoms provided suburban viewers with privatized entertainment and, simultaneously, allowed them to experience the feeling of being part of an extended community – of both television neighbors and other viewers.

Anxieties regarding a possible intrusion from the outside via the television appeared during the 1950s in several contexts. Particularly during the early days of television, owners of the latest and largest TV sets literally had to relinquish privacy due to visits by curious neighbors. A Californian suburban housewife complains in 1953: "Sometimes I get tired of the house being used as a semiprivate theater. I have almost turned the set off when some people visit us" (apud Spigel, 1992b: 127). Moreover, the TV set itself frequently figured as a device of surveillance in Americans' imagination: numerous newspaper articles, novels, films and TV series address the fear that the television might allow a two-way vision (Spigel, 1992b: 118). The figure of Big Brother in Orwell's 1984, who observed unsuspecting residents in their homes via the TV monitor, especially inspired fears of surveillance and became part of Americans' collective consciousness. The menacing aspects of television can be traced back to its ability to connect the interior and the exterior world (ibidem: 117). Merging the privacy of the home with the outside world and catapulting viewers from their living rooms into public life, TV thus further blurred the fragile boundaries between 'private' and 'public' in suburbia.

Conclusion: "There Isn't Much Privacy"

The discussion of television as a window on the world that possibly allowed insights into the domestic living room bespeaks the obsessive preoccupation with privacy during the 1950s (Spigel, 1992b: 117). The rhetorical figure of the window as a boundary between interior and exterior – private and public – illustrates processes of cultural and social transformation during this early stage of the Cold War. The increasing visibility of privacy as a vanishing social value in need of protection can be traced back to a number of sources, but nowhere is the ambivalent status of privacy as evident as in suburbia. In suburbs like Levittown, the American dream was associated with a retreat into the private sphere – and entrapped residents in a system of mutual surveillance, conformity and control. The political instrumentalization of the imperative of individual self-realization is evident: homogeneity and stability in the Cold War climate served to establish a national sense of security. The creeping totalitarianism of social conformity did not go unnoticed. Journalists and social critics sometimes lamented the invasion of the private in suburbia as emphatically as sociologists who, like Whyte, bluntly stated: "Fact one, of course, is that there isn't much privacy" (Whyte, 1956: 389). At the same time, privacy expanded, not only as a result of an increasingly confessional culture, which led cultural critics to fear for the inviolability of the public sphere. The shifting boundaries between public and private by no means suggest an erosion of privacy; much rather, privacy becomes more visible in public discourse than ever before. The rising importance of privacy is fueled by the dominant narrative of privacy as a vanishing value. Warnings of privacy's disappearance, which range from nostalgic to alarmed, are omnipresent in postwar America – and still are, in today's privacy debate. A historicization of the ambivalent status of privacy in American culture complicates the linear narrative of its demise and exposes the strict dichotomy between 'public' and 'private' as an illusion. Although new technologies, the rise of confessional culture and electronic mass media contribute to increased (self-)observation, history portrays privacy as a concept capable of continuous reinvention and renegotiation.

Edited by Sofia Silva

Bärbel Harju

Amerika-Institut, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München
Schellingstraße 3, VG, 80799 Germany
Contact: baerbel.harju@lmu.de

Picture Windows: Architecture of Privacy and Surveillance

REFERENCES

Archer, John (2005), Architecture and Suburbia. From English Villa to American Dream House, 1690-2000. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Arendt, Hannah (1951), Totalitarianism. Part Three of the Origins of Totalitarianism. New York: Harcourt Brace.

Arendt, Hannah (1958), The Human Condition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Baxandall, Rosalyn; Ewen, Elizabeth (2000), Picture Windows. How the Suburbs Happened. New York: Basic Books.

Clark, Clifford E. (1989), "Ranch-House Suburbia: Ideals and Realities", in Lary May (ed.), Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of the Cold War. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 171-190.

Cook, Fred J. (1964), The FBI Nobody Knows. New York: Pyramid Books.

Dobriner, William M. (1963), Class in Suburbia. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Fitz, Karsten; Harju, Bärbel (eds.) (2015), Cultures of Privacy. Heidelberg: Winter.

Ford, Katherine Morrow; Creighton, Thomas H. (1951), The American House Today. New York: Reinhold.

Friedan, Betty (1963), The Feminine Mystique. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.

Gleason, Abbott (1995), Totalitarianism. The Inner History of the Cold War. New York: Oxford University Press.

Hayden, Dolores (2003), Building Suburbia. Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820-2000. New York: Vintage Books.

Heckscher, August (1958), "The Invasion of Privacy (2): The Reshaping of Privacy", The American Scholar, 28.1, 11-20.

Henderson, Harry (1953a), "The Mass-Produced Suburbs, Part I: How People Live in America's Newest Towns", *Harper's Magazine*, 25-32.

Henderson, Harry (1953b), "The Mass-Produced Suburbs, Part II: Rugged American Collectivism", Harper's Magazine, 80-86.

Hershfield, Harry (1952), "Humorist's Warm Slant On That New Robot – TV", Variety, January 2, p. 105.

Jackson, Kenneth T. (1985), Crabgrass Frontier. The Suburbanization of the United States. New York: Oxford University Press.

Joselit, David (2009), "Citizen Cursor", in Beth Hinderliter; Vered Maimon; Jaleh Mansoor; Seth McCormick (eds.), Communities of Sense. Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 153-170.

Keats, John (1956), The Crack in the Picture Window. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.

Kelly, Barbara M. (1993), Expanding the American Dream. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Kennedy, Robert Woods (1953), The House and the Art of Its Design. Huntington, NY: Robert E. Krieger.

Lane, Frederick S. (2009), American Privacy. The 400-Year History of Our Most Contested Right. Boston, MA: Beacon.

May, Cliff (1958), Western Ranch Houses. Menlo Park, CA: Lane Book Co.

May, Elaine Tyler (1988), Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era. New York: Basic Books.

Meyrowitz, Joshua (2002), "Post-Privacy America", in Ralph Weiß; Jo Groeb (eds.), Privatheit im öffentlichen Raum. Medienhandeln zwischen Individualisierung und Entgrenzung. Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 153-204.

Nelson, Deborah (2002), Pursuing Privacy in Cold War America. New York: Columbia University Press.

Nicolaides, Becky M.; Wiese, Andre (eds.) (2006), The Suburb Reader. New York: Routledge.

Packard, Vance (1964), The Naked Society. New York: McKay.

"Restrictions Affecting Houses & Sample Contract" (1948), Levittown Tribune, June 24, p. 2.

Rovere, Richard H. (1958), "The Invasion of Privacy (1): Technology and the Claims of Community", The American Scholar, 4, Fall. Accessed on 20.04.2017, at https://theamericanscholar.org/the-invasion-of-privacy/#.VVYW6UuXJSU.

Schlesinger, Arthur M. (1949), The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Sennett, Richard (1977), The Fall of Public Man. New York: Knopf.

Spigel, Lynn (1992a), "Installing the Television Set: Popular Discourses on Television and Domestic Space, 1948-1955", in Lynn Spigel; Denise Mann (eds.), Private Screenings: Television and the Female Consumer. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 3-8.

Spigel, Lynn (1992b), Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Spigel, Lynn (2001), Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Sunset Magazines (1946), Sunset Homes for Western Living. San Francisco: Lane Publishing Co.

Warner, Michael (2002), Publics and Counterpublics. New York: Zone Books.

Wetherell, W.D. (1985), The Man Who Loved Levittown. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Whyte, William H. (1956), The Organization Man. New York: Simon & Schuster.