

**SPLITTING SPACE: DESTABILIZING THE SUBURBAN HOUSE IN POSTWAR ART
AND CONTEMPORARY HORROR FILM**

by

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Splitting Space: Destabilizing the Suburban House in Postwar Art and Contemporary Horror Film

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Abstract

This thesis explores the representation of the suburban house and the concept of suburbia as an extension of social normativity in America following World War II and into the contemporary period. I pursue this line of investigation by analyzing three works that question and disrupt this distinct space – Dan Graham’s *Homes for America* (1966-67), Gordon Matta-Clark’s *Splitting* (1974), and James Wan’s *Insidious* (2010). While seemingly disparate in terms of media and chronology, the following reveals the unique means through which each work exposes a shared disdain toward suburban development and its deep ties to normativity. By closely examining how each artist represents the space of the home and its subsequent undoing, a network of cultural production that seeks to destabilize the fraught idealism that has long been attributed to the suburbs is formed.

Drawing from spatial and temporal theory, I articulate how normativity is formed in the space of the suburbs through structured rhythms, movements, and gestures that become attributed to the heterosexual, white, middle- to upper-class family. My investigations of postwar art then create a methodology used in my following analysis of contemporary horror film. This methodology adopts from queer theory a process of estrangement, a deviation from the normative space of the suburbs that seeks to disrupt and challenge existing scripts within dominant social frameworks. As such, this thesis provides a new method through which postwar art and contemporary film may be analyzed, away from canonical or genre prescriptions, in addition to a justification for continued representational engagements with the suburban house in the contemporary period.

Lay Summary

This thesis considers several works of art and film that use the suburban house and the concept of the home as a site of representation. I explore how artists in the American postwar period hone into this space to comment on the collective problems that emerged during the moment of suburbanization, and how similar concerns have persisted into the present through horror film in 2010. Situating my thesis between these two periods, and using both art historical and filmic methodologies, my analysis focuses on the sociological valence of space and its representation in an attempt to establish a new mode of investigating contemporary horror film.

Preface

This dissertation is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Marcus Prasad.

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Dedication

To my late uncle, Lars Ekström, for taking me to the movies.

Introduction

In its deviation from a conception of physical objects and structures as absolute, an art historical analysis of space can provide unique insights into social formations and their proliferation. Inherently ephemeral and intangible, how can the qualities of a given space be refined into a useable field for academic inquiry? What are the practical components of space, and how are they derived? My thesis begins with a rumination on ontological questions of space in order to locate and harness the critical potential of a spatial inquiry. Space, as experienced in everyday life, is transient, in constant motion, and has a fleeting, ever-evolving presence. It is animate, and meanders through and among objects. Perhaps one of its more absolute characteristics is its partnership with objects and their co-determination, playing a role in how we understand them, delineating distances and relationships amongst other things. Space, however, is not homogeneous. Though it finds itself everywhere, at all times, it possesses an essential heterogeneity, articulating its own disparities that are contextually contingent. Key differences between diverse spaces are felt and known – indoor space is substantially different from outdoor space, for example, as private space is different from public – these are experienced characteristics that are universally recognized as unique. Space, as a whole, therefore fluctuates and mutates depending on the structure it is housed within, or on the objects and subjects it flows amongst. As such, conceiving a foundational structure of space must understand it as inherently malleable, able to mold and adapt its form to the contours of the more absolute structures it meanders by. With no solid form, it shifts and evolves *ad infinitum*, drawing into its dynamic process a range of interpretive possibilities.

This conceptual malleability is integral to what follows in this thesis, which aims to trace the shifting forms of engagement with the concept of normativity from the American postwar period to today through an exploration of space. Honing into representations and cultural products that grapple with the space of the home, I form a thread that connects two distinct periods that both confront the social and political concerns of American suburbanization. I will begin by examining two works that engage with and problematize the formation of postwar home space and structure. Dan Graham (b. 1942) and Gordon Matta-Clark (b. 1943), both working within the rise and demise of suburban sprawl, critique not only the physical components of the American house, but the tethered ideological space of the home and its inherent connection to social normativity. I examine *Homes for America* by Dan Graham and *Splitting* by Gordon Matta-Clark to explore the ways in which both construct and subvert ideals that had come to be attributed to postwar housing. Linking these two artists and their works through this perspective, a connective thread will be extended to encompass more contemporary reflections on home space through the medium of film. In an attempt to bridge these two moments to form a network of cultural production engaging with the problematic notion of the home in American culture, I ultimately suggest that the concerns pervading the postwar sphere have seen a resurgence in our contemporary moment, and that looking to the postwar period can greatly inform the persistent struggle with and against continued representations of the house in film.

I move forward my investigation of spatial analysis by bringing in the work of a contemporary filmmaker, whose engagement with the horror genre has been grounded in the lexicon of home space. In this thesis, I will analyze James Wan (b. 1977) as an artist, similar to Graham and Matta-Clark, that hones into the space of the home to problematize and complicate

its connection to the formation of normativity. Where Graham and Matta-Clark may be seen as artists proper, defining the representational terms of the suburban house and the cultural valence it would come to absorb, Wan represents and spatializes these same concerns in an ostensibly new way through the medium of film decades later. What I intend to garner from this analysis of film is not solely a comparison of shared traits with its postwar predecessors, but rather that these forms of cultural production, spanning decades, are linked by an engagement with and problematization of the suburban house as a representation of normativity through a destabilization of space. This engagement, I believe, persists to this day in an ever-evolving form, which is visualized clearly, yet with incredible nuance, through the logic of contemporary horror film.

I therefore trace the evolution of this home space from its inception in the postwar period as the realm of normativity to its use in contemporary horror film as that which becomes destabilized. I will begin by delineating the object of normativity, the suburban house, through Dan Graham's *Homes for America*, to articulate the formation of normative suburban space. In this 1966-1967 work that meticulously outlined each component of suburbia's standardizing impetus, Graham demonstrated the limited variations that the new nationalized housing aesthetic allowed. Acting as a prototype, Graham's work is used in this thesis to explore the relationship between structural standardization and the formation of social normativity around the white, middle- to upper-class family. Hosting this new nuclear social dynamic, the suburban house will be established as a kind of social model through *Homes for America*, as a first step toward my analysis.

I follow with a discussion of Gordon Matta-Clark's *Splitting*. Using the components of the house as normativity established from my analysis of Graham's work, Matta-Clark takes the

house and violently intervenes with a slicing action through its physical form – a notion that this thesis will refer to as the logic of the cut, articulating a calculated action that reappears in future representations. Cutting through the middle of a deserted New Jersey house, the home is stripped of its purpose in this work and left bare, no longer insulating inside space from the outside. Such an assault on the suburban house and its tethered spatial dynamic lays the foundation for my spatial investigation of contemporary horror film some decades later, where the cut is now realized through a split representation of home space.

I begin this final part of my inquiry by looking to James Wan’s 2010 work, *Insidious*. Here, I will argue that Matta-Clark’s cut, which resulted in a removal of the boundary between inside and outside space, is visible by a new conception in this film. Through a superimposition of ulterior, supernatural space onto the real space of the home, the film’s doubled spatial representation achieves similar aims as *Splitting*. It complicates and makes the at once familiar realm of the house into something unfamiliar, void of use, and irresolutely *unheimlich*.¹ What I intend to emphasize with my exploration of this film is that the logic of the cut in Matta-Clark’s work, bringing together inside and outside space, exists as a foundational framework with ever-changing means for filmic media to investigate the space of the home.

With my argument framed as such, I mobilize my exploration through an investigation of space as a means to intervene into the realm of contemporary horror film by a new light – one that positions the concerns of postwar suburbanization as a lens through which representations of contemporary home space may be looked through. My analysis is not merely comparative, but rather attempts to construct a methodology through postwar art that may be used to further expand upon the growing body of research in contemporary horror studies.

1. Freud, “The Uncanny.”

I note that much scholarship surrounding the work of Graham and Matta-Clark has continuously teased out the ways in which they confront the concept of the suburban home in America as it pertains to the postwar social context exclusively. I therefore intend to take these discussions and place them in relation to contemporary horror film, which I argue achieves a similar pessimism toward the concept of the home and its ingrained ideals. The site of this translation is specifically situated in the post-2010 era following the subprime mortgage crisis and subsequent international recession. I suggest that the widening gap between the American middle-class and homeownership as a result of this all-encompassing economic downturn between 2007 and 2010 creates the impetus for a renewed interest in contemporary representations of the home and home space. This comparison necessarily demonstrates that the inaccessibility of housing is not an entirely new concept emerging from a globalized economic crisis, but one that has been a primary concern since the inception of the notion of the home and suburbia as they are understood today. By looking to *Insidious* through the logic of the cut inaugurated by Matta-Clark's 1974 work, I argue that contemporary horror film aptly grapples with the core of a long-held and repressed anxiety regarding the home that has begun to emerge once again.

There has been much work that has situated films like *Insidious* in relation to a historic canon of horror cinema, linking them to well- and long-established codes of the genre. Though I will be following a similar impetus to a certain extent, I intend to have the force of my investigation focus on the ways in which these films represent space through the logic of the cut, a notion that, to my knowledge, has not yet been explored. As such, I do not wish for my analysis to be exhaustive, nor indicative of a set of rules that may be applied to all horror film. This thesis therefore highlights the productive potential of examining space and its

representation, as an ever-evolving force that provides a constantly shifting foundation upon which fruitful interpretation can take place.

As I set out to contribute a new perspective to the already existing and continuously growing research on filmic representations of the house and home, it is important to note that the body of work in filmic genre studies called the suburban gothic finds a deep resonance with my project. Where I articulate, in spatial terms primarily, how the cut from *Splitting* manifests in contemporary horror film in order to further innovate and problematize the representation of the home, the parallels with the suburban gothic are clear. This subgenre, a part of the wider gothic tradition in film and literature, dramatizes the myriad anxieties that emerge from the moment of suburbanization in postwar America. Its films normally feature suburban settings, preoccupations and protagonists, playing upon the lingering suspicion that ordinary-looking neighbourhoods and houses have something to hide, and that they are only one step away from a dramatic or terrifying explosion of conflict.² The notion of such horror beginning at the home is itself derived from a longer history of gothic literature, several titles of which address the concept of the haunted house story. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick notes that narratives within the gothic genre pertain to a selection of themes including the unspeakable and the dreadful.³ More specifically, the concept of the unspeakable was particularly gothic in the sense that it did not matter what the content of the thing that could not be said was, but rather that the revelation of the secret would be met with a violent fate.⁴ Several Anglo-American titles have grappled with this notion through narratives that center upon the space of the home – from Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* to Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, the house has functioned as a gothic element harbouring

2. Murphy, *The Suburban Gothic*, 9.

3. Sedgwick, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*, 5.

4. Sedgwick, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*, 22.

secrets, dread, and malignant unknown forces.⁵ This gothic notion is similarly integral to the suburban gothic subgenre of film, which embodies this form of criticality in its engagement with its chosen environment. The suburbs present an astute context for the anxious prospect of revealing secrets, as the façade of the suburban house is one that is built on a foundation of lies, paradoxes, and oppressions.

Robin Wood asserts that the gothic genre in film broadly consists of a three-pronged thematic core – normativity, figured by the dominance of heteropatriarchal capitalism, the other, figured by a threatening antagonistic force, and the relationship between the two.⁶ Harry M. Benshoff similarly interprets this interplay of normativity and the other as integrally linked to the notion of Sigmund Freud’s uncanny.⁷ In its destabilization of normativity, the antagonistic force sets in motion a questioning of the status quo, and in many cases with gothic literature, the nature of reality itself.⁸ This is made manifest in early gothic films like Tod Browning’s *Dracula* and James Whale’s *Frankenstein*, both from 1931, whose fantastical or unreal elements represent exaggerations of deviance that have been repressed by the pursuit of normativity. In the context of postwar America, the rampant promotion of suburbia as the foundation for the development of a collective normativity placed the suburban house and its representation in the crossfire of a similar gothic mode, consequently opening itself up to a disruptive and reformatory potential.

Reflecting the notion that a neighbourhood of identical houses, white picket fences, and well-manicured lawns is hiding a terrible secret, Bernice Murphy asserts that such a negative outlook on this space emerged from the rapid change in lifestyle that accompanied its development, forcing residents to break ties with old patterns of existence classifying everyday

5. Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, 15.

6. Wood, *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan*, 79.

7. Benshoff, *Monsters in the Closet*, 5.

8. Benshoff, *Monsters in the Closet*, 5.

experience during and before the war.⁹ Additionally, the mass exodus from the city to the suburbs, largely motivated by the influx of minority groups that were migrating closer to the urban center, formed the basis for the anxious lived reality of suburbia – it was emphatically *not* a space for all. Driven by a deep-seated fear of otherness, the motivations fuelling the nuclear, white, middle- to upper-class family and their newly deployed home space became troubled, allowing the repressed alterity to emerge through a wealth of family problems in the resulting sociological formation of normativity. This destabilization had far-reaching effects on the level of cultural production, and was responded to by a lurking anxiety waiting to be mined by the gothic mode. The shift allowed the source of fear emerging from the other, which was characteristic to the gothic tradition in film, to be repositioned however, to a place closer in proximity to oneself. Fear and danger were now thought to come from one's own family and home, rather than from external threats.¹⁰

Much scholarship on this subgenre has identified the home in the context of suburbia as the locus of fear – a result of suburbia's failed attempt to provide a utopian space of integration and harmonization. In this way, my analysis and critique of the development of home space in conjunction with social normativity fits within discussions of the subgenre. I will be positioning the suburban gothic and its critiques alongside my analysis of Matta-Clark's cut, as I believe both achieve similar ends by unique means. The reasons for this interaction are twofold. First, I cannot deny that the film I have chosen for this analysis possesses a connection to its postwar predecessors. I will be addressing this link in order to situate the film within the debates of its appropriate context. Second, I connect my analysis to the work of Matta-Clark to insinuate that what is taking place in this contemporary film is not solely a result of abiding by genre

9. Murphy, *The Suburban Gothic*, 2.

10. Murphy, *The Suburban Gothic*, 8.

convention. How the space of the home is represented has remained a pervasive question that has spanned multiple media forms, and has existed throughout several decades of production. This investigation is therefore an attempt to take a filmic exploration past an analysis of genre, providing another framework through which the nuanced operations of horror film and its relation to representing home space can be viewed and experienced.

My explorations of space in both the postwar and contemporary periods are greatly indebted to the work of Henri Lefebvre, primarily drawing from his 1974 work, *The Production of Space*.¹¹ Conceptualizing space as a productive and malleable site that sees the role of subjects as inherently formative, this analysis rejects the notion that social relations can be merely deposited onto a given space. As such, the objects I examine do not simply reflect the social relations in which they are culturally situated, they are rather active agents in the continued formation of a unique and heavily social spatial arrangement. Understanding space in this way is essential to a contention that undergirds this entire analysis – namely, that each work of art or film that I address acts as a kind of landmark amongst an ever-growing continuum of spatial inquiry and representation. The social relations attributed to home space therefore undergo a necessary reshaping and reformulation, which aims to suggest that the social sphere of normativity, too, is itself contingent and amenable to a range of determining forces.

As a supplement to my analysis of space, the notion of temporality is also essential to the objects I observe. I will address temporality in relation to the rhythms and movements of subjects that constitute a social space, that make one social space distinct from others.¹² The film I analyze takes part in representing temporal disjointedness or disruption, either formally, conceptually, or both, which I argue contributes to a deviation from the rhythms and movements

11. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

12. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*.

that are integral to suburban space. Drawing from the work of Elizabeth Freeman, these deviations will be shown to result in a kind of productivity that stems from alterity rather than from the realm of normativity, altering the landscape of normative social relations as a result.¹³

Here I will also integrate additional ideas from queer theory, suggesting that the dominance of ulterior space in my chosen film gestures toward a redefinition of civil order through a rupture in the foundational faith of futurity.¹⁴ I draw primarily from Lee Edelman and Sara Ahmed in order to substantiate my analysis of the cut as an estrangement strategy that alters the representation of normative suburban space. Both scholars position the queer subject as a disruptive force, either in their deviation from well-trodden, normative lines that direct spatial orientation,¹⁵ or as an impossibility of biological reproduction to constitute the continuation of the heterosexual family. Using temporality and the significance of queer atypicality in this way, or that which exists outside the binary of normative and ulterior, assists my analysis by providing another means to visualize the inherent contribution of varied forces toward an always evolving social space.

Though this thesis is in part structured diachronically, I derive from my analysis of *Splitting* a methodology for my following analysis of *Insidious*. The paradigm through which Matta-Clark viewed and expressed the structure of the suburban house is most fitting for my analysis of the film that follows because of its emphatic and violent gesture of the cut, a decisive action that is used as a framework upon which my investigation of film is built. The question therefore follows, what effect does Matta-Clark's paradigmatic cut have on the object of the house and its subsequent representation of home space in film? *Splitting* ostensibly destroys the physical structure of the house to emphasize its mere objecthood and status as a mediator

13. Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*.

14. Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*.

15. Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Objects, Orientations, Others*.

between inside and outside space. The physical fracture of the house resulting from this cut can be examined for its effects on the space of the home, which is now brought into confrontation with the forces of the exterior, changing and reconfiguring its previously untouched interiority.

Before proceeding further, it is important to distinguish my use of certain terms. Matta-Clark's cut is an inherently violent action, an intervention into an architectural structure by a linear and physical slicing effect, which renders the object emaciated. I therefore use the term "cut" to refer to this physical act, separating something that was once whole into two.¹⁶ This gesture is characteristic of Matta-Clark's practice, many works of which feature monumental building cuts or incisions in an effort to reconceptualize the status quo of architectural experience. The core operation of the cut therefore encompasses something of an estrangement strategy – an action that decisively transforms an experience from one that is familiar to one that is alienated. My use of the term will be underscored by this conceptual mechanism and applied to the suburban house through which the physical act takes place.

Some additional specification must also be made about my use of "postwar" and "contemporary." Since the term "postwar" can possess different meanings depending on location and the effect the war has had there, I situate my use of the term in the American socio-political context after the end of World War II in 1945. Generally, the "postwar period" ends in 1960, but I will be referring to both Graham's *Homes for America* and Matta-Clark's *Splitting* as postwar works because of their deep connection to the notion of suburbia, which itself began to develop in the period after 1945.¹⁷ Therefore, the term "postwar" in this thesis will refer to the approximate timeframe of 1945-1960 in America, and will encompass all production that references or critiques developments that came to fruition within this temporal span.

16. Lee, *Object to Be Destroyed: The Work of Gordon Matta-Clark*.

17. Beuka, *SuburbiaNation*, 3.

Further, my use of the term “contemporary” will naturally be positioned as a present-tense opposition to the “postwar.” I use “contemporary” in a looser sense, more so to delineate a period after around 2000 up until the present moment. Horror studies delineates specific movements within the canon of horror film, suggesting a move away from Hollywood productions that emphasized bodily gore for a teenage demographic in the late 1990s and early 2000s. A new audience was emerging that privileged what was known as “well-made horror,” celebrating novel and innovative approaches to narrative and formal composition.¹⁸ As such, this shift informs my use of the term “contemporary” with respect to Wan’s work, which was produced after this transition.

A final clarification should be made regarding my use of the terms “inside” and “outside.” As the force of my analysis stems primarily from the operative mechanism of Matta-Clark’s cut, my use of “inside” and “outside” will at first refer to the distinctions made between interior and exterior space, mediated by the physical structure of the architectural edifice. As my analysis progresses however, these terms will adopt more of a conceptual weight, incorporating notions of normativity and alterity – where the “inside” refers to the interior domestic space in which the cultivation of normativity takes place, and the “outside” refers to the space of alterity that hinges upon and threatens the interior order. The terms are therefore, for the most part, positioned as pairs of opposites in order to visualize the ways in which they interact and form new relationships with each other.

The following exploration, as outlined in brief previously, is organized in three sections. Beginning with Dan Graham’s *Homes for America* from 1966-67, I explore the social and historical context surrounding the postwar formation of suburbia and the prototype of the suburban house. This section creates the physical and ideological structures of the home that the

18. Hart, “Millennial Fears,” 334.

rest of this thesis uses in order to articulate the modes of its destruction and reformulation that follow.

The second section delineates the logic of the cut through *Splitting*, Gordon Matta-Clark's 1974 architectural work. Focusing on this intervention into the space of the home represented by the physical act of his incision, my analysis will foreground this term as a methodological principle that informs and permeates through to the realm of contemporary filmic production.

The final section of this thesis moves forward to 2010, centering in on James Wan's *Insidious*. I begin by situating filmic production within the realm of the suburban gothic subgenre, as well as by articulating the post-recession climate and its relationship to contemporary horror film. The logic of the cut in film will be positioned here as that which underlies a reinvigorated engagement with representations of the home resulting from the turmoil of the subprime mortgage crisis. This exploration will then relate *Insidious* closely to the work of Matta-Clark, exposing a more conceptual interpretation of his intervention. Specifically, this chapter will demonstrate the representational terms through which the inside and outside, or the normative and ulterior, encounter each other. Adhering to the notion that spatial analysis, like space itself, continuously evolves and takes different forms, my exploration of this film will present one of the many ways in which contemporary horror film has internalized the logic of spatial cut or fracture, expanding it toward a wide array of new analytic possibilities.

1966: *Homes for America*, Dan Graham

In its magazine-like composition, Dan Graham's *Homes for America* exposes America's housing sprawl as a space that privileges convention, sameness, and seriality. Begun in 1966 and completed in 1967, Graham documents through text and photographs the minute components of suburban tract housing across the United States and the seemingly disingenuous banalities they would come to embody. The detailed exploration ultimately confronts viewers with a question regarding the efficacy of standardized modes of mass production in the cultivation of family values, a healthy community, and a sense of peace and comfort that comes from the home.

“There is no organic unity connecting the land site and the home. Both are without roots – separate parts in a larger, predetermined, synthetic order.” – Dan Graham, *Homes for America*, 1966-67¹⁹

Cut out and pasted onto a white surface, this one passage of many makes up the end of a larger text concluding this work, a systematically collaged plane of images and words. Outlining the standardized logic of modular housing developments in America, this quote echoes the formal composition of the piece itself – a series of paragraphs and photographs organized concisely and diagrammatically. The images present multiple views of different houses, domestic interiors, and neighbourhoods, all of which are in separate geographical locations across the country, yet unified by their shared formal patterns. Positioned as comparisons to enunciate minute differences amongst different neighbourhoods, what ultimately prevails from this particular juxtaposition of photographs is a streamlined housing aesthetic that has been transferred and applied across developments nation-wide. Boxes of typed text further inform these photographs as captions, each exploring different aspects of the history of postwar American housing, from its floorplans to its stylistic flourishes.

19. Excerpt of text from a passage in *Homes for America*.

The viewer is asked to read the entirety of this piece from left to right, starting at the top right corner and finishing at the bottom left. This organized grid of visual information allows the eye to dance across the surface with a particular choreography, like an article in a magazine. “Homes for America” sits in bold face, welcoming the viewer into the following itemized and alphabetized list of suburban townships around the United States. The following is a detailed exegesis on the notion of suburbia, from the moment of its realization to the sociological effects of its final form.

Dan Graham’s *Homes for America* reads like a lifestyle magazine not only in form, but in content as well. His combination of photographs and text, both informing each other, evokes a documentary tone that aims to present a factual investigation into suburbia’s air-tight logic of production (Figure 1). Graham has in fact referred to his own work as a kind of photojournalism, in what Benjamin H. D. Buchloh asserts is an attempt to “construct functional models of recognition of actual history by [photographic] media.”²⁰ This approach, as Buchloh explains, ultimately claims to position itself closer to reality by presenting events and products of the everyday as they are rather than filtering them through the hand of the artist. Though the artist’s subjectivity is always present despite this intention, Graham’s photojournalistic method nonetheless provides viewers with factual information regarding the cultural moment. He is therefore concerned with the lived reality of history, using a documentary means of representation familiar to the magazine format to convey its experience.

While *Homes for America* currently hangs in the Museum of Modern Art in New York, it was originally conceived as a photo-essay, a version of which appeared in the December 1966 to January 1967 issue of *Arts Magazine*. His textual excerpts describe the process and result of housing developments with the intention to be unbiased, and are arranged around 35mm

20. Buchloh, “Moments of History in the Work of Dan Graham,” 4.

photographs of suburban tract housing units that he took during the two preceding years, visiting the sites listed at the top of the piece.²¹ Graham effectively distances his work from the status of an artwork, claiming in a letter written to Buchloh that “the fact that *Homes for America* was, in the end, only a magazine article, and made no claims for itself as “art,” is its most important aspect.”²² It therefore attempted to take its iconography not from a canon of art history, but rather the material of mass culture to justify and realize its claims. Such a distancing of this work from the concept of “art” removes an air of authority on behalf of the artist, instead positioning himself as merely a presenter of what is already readymade. In this way, the subject – suburban tract housing – adopts an authorship of its own through the organized texts and images, one that dictates an emerging social and cultural climate quickly dispersing amongst postwar America.

The formal structure of Graham’s work strictly adheres to an informational frame, using the seriality of repeated text boxes and images to convey a conceptual repetition present in everyday suburban tract housing. Such banality is exacerbated by the photographic medium in this context, working closely with the aims of his contemporaries including Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange, for example. Where the photographic lens often provided artists with an opportunity to hone into the specificities and unique differences between their represented subjects, Evans and Lange sought similarities, teasing out parallels between rural citizens and their shared sense of economic unease during the American Depression. Adhering to a documentary approach as well, their photographs of individuals and families during the 1930s constructed a collection of representations that expressed the widespread effects of this economic downturn. Dan Graham’s work negotiates something similar – the affective dimension of a quickly dispersing development project that would come to engulf a large swath of the American

21. Alberro, “Reductivism in Reverse,” 21.

22. Buchloh, “Moments of History in the Work of Dan Graham,” 4.

population. Mobilizing a familiar photographic aspiration toward objectivity as a means to document actual experience, Graham aims to capture the space of suburbia as it exists truthfully and presents it with a formal rigidity that mirrors the core values of the housing project itself – serial and continuous output. Buchloh further suggests that Graham pursued a reductivist approach, introduced by Frank Stella and grappled with throughout minimalism, which was an ultimate concern for the immediacy of perceptual experience.²³ By privileging the practice of perception, the photo-text layout of *Homes for America* is minimalist in the sense that it cuts through any content that may be frivolous or ambiguous. A reduction of the work’s visual information to its main components – descriptive and exhaustive texts with documentary photographs – allows it to simultaneously address, as Alberro notes, the social fabric of capitalist culture as well as the concerns of minimalist art.²⁴

Graham’s documentary approach toward representing the inception and growth of suburbia is of primary importance to this thesis. Given his attempts to deprioritize his own role as an artist and instead present a rather unbiased exegesis of information on housing, the claims made within *Homes for America* are substantiated and provide an entry point into the logistics of suburbia’s construction – both in material and ideological respects. The following chapter will touch upon several facets of this work, looking closely to its textual components and their relationship to its photographs in order to construct an accurate and factual image of suburbia. This image will then be located within the historical context of the postwar period, teasing out the paradoxes and hypocrisies that undergirded the suburban notion of the “American dream.” I will specifically elucidate, in this section, the logic of serialization and standardization that suburban space adhered to through *Homes for America*. As a unique postwar phenomenon,

23. Buchloh, “Moments of History in the Work of Dan Graham,” 15.

24. Alberro, “Reductivism in Reverse,” 32.

following an impetus of mass-production, this work reveals the collective internalization of a suburban ethos. The resulting paradigm through which America viewed itself was one that conflated suburbia with normativity, its environment transformed into an emblem of the new status quo.

1.1 The Advent of Suburbia

A list of townships found across several American states sits underneath the work's title, alphabetized and in bold type. Among the list are communities such as Belleplain, Fair Haven, and Garden City – perhaps most notable however is Levittown, a community in New York that marked the first success of suburban developments of this kind. This list of townships sprawling across the country links the viewer's experience of this work to actual suburban communities that were constructed in the postwar period, many of which still exist today. The following photographs and textual excerpts, positioned in this way, suggest an inextricable similarity shared amongst these towns. What Graham emphasizes here is the singular, intransigent, and therefore unchanged structure upon which each of these communities were built.

Alexander Alberro notes that *Homes for America* makes a parody of think pieces in magazines in order to reflect on the catastrophic nature of the city in the post-World War II period.²⁵ The advent of what Graham calls the “new city” was a result of a mass exodus of the middle- to upper-class from urban areas toward new suburban developments that were specifically distanced from the city. Accordingly, this work takes as its theme the administered spaces and architectural structures of this emergent community, one that privileged convention,

25. Alberro, “Reductivism in Reverse,” 22.

sameness, and a high degree of social sterility. These structures, as Alberro argues, were reflected formally as mere permutations of one and the same cell.²⁶

“Large-scale ‘tract’ housing ‘developments’ constitute the new city. They are located everywhere. They are not particularly bound to existing communities; they fail to develop either regional characteristics or separate identity.” – Dan Graham, *Homes for America*, 1966-67²⁷

Graham begins his first excerpt of text with this statement outlining the simultaneous ubiquity and liminality of suburban construction. It exists everywhere, all around the country, but is unbound, disconnected from any “source” that would endow it with a sense of geographic specificity or uniqueness. This passage is followed by two photographs of a suburban neighbourhood in Bayonne, New Jersey – a front view and a rear view. The striking nature of these images comes from their lack of differentiation, two completely different views of a street produces almost the same result. A row of identically constructed houses, each unit differing only in paint colour, recede into the picture plane, appearing constant and endless. With this section, Graham suggests that the outcome of such a systemic quantification of land and structure is a geometric and rigid environment. During the time span that *Homes for America* addresses, housing in the US was undergoing a significant shift. The township of Levittown is exemplary of this change, acting as the blueprint upon which subsequent suburbs around America were formed. The following will explore the history of Levittown, giving emphasis to the social conditions of the postwar environment that influenced its construction.

The popularized suburban plan that the townships listed in *Homes for America* employed were created by the best-known of all suburban developers, William J. Levitt. In 1941, Levitt began his career as a real-estate developer when his father’s company, Levitt & Sons, received a

26. Alberro, “Reductivism in Reverse,” 22.

27. Excerpt of text from a passage in *Homes for America*.

government contract to build war workers' housing in Norfolk, Virginia.²⁸ During the construction period of this project, Levitt was familiarized with the process of pouring concrete foundations quickly, as well as assembling structures from prefabricated parts. This equipped him with the fast-paced logic of construction that would become indispensable to mediating the housing crisis at the end of World War II. Many soldiers, upon their return from the war, no longer had homes to return to and did not have the financial capacity to invest in the current housing market. In 1946, as a response to this inaccessibility, Levitt & Sons built a housing development on 20 square miles of land near Hempstead, Long Island, later named Island Trees.²⁹ With the intention to provide accessible housing for veterans, development was under severe time constraints as masses of soldiers returned from abroad. This marked the beginning of a widespread availability of less expensive, mass-produced homes that required only small down payments with low interest rates.³⁰ Though targeted to veterans specifically, Levitt & Sons had inadvertently created a ripple effect. Millions of Americans, as a result, found that it was now cheaper to own a house than to rent one, signalling a major exodus of the American populace to the emergent space of suburbia – the beginning of a significant surge upward of class mobility

Island Trees, in its extremely rapid construction, was most notable for its production by a rigid formula. After bulldozing the land and removing all trees to provide a clearing, trucks dropped off building materials to the site at exactly 60-foot intervals. Each house was subsequently built on a concrete slab – the floors made from asphalt and the walls made from composition rock-board.³¹ Additionally, new power hand tools like saws, routers, and nailers increased worker productivity, to such a degree that one man could produce parts for ten houses

28. Miller, "Now Even the Pigs're Groovin'," 153.

29. Miller, "Now Even the Pigs're Groovin'," 153.

30. Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*, 122.

31. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 247.

in one day.³² At the level of the worker, disparities amongst individual housing units were ostensibly effaced due to the shifting logic of production toward constant and repetitive output. One worker was designated one task that would be done in the same way across tens of different houses. Levitt & Sons had equally divided their crews by the individual jobs they would fulfill – on one day, paint men would arrive on site, and the next, tile layers.³³ Such a regimented yet disjointed mode of production prioritized speed and efficiency, rather than individual quality and character. The pace at which new houses were going up was a result of a pressing demand for housing after the war however, and a lower cost of means meant that units could be sold at a lower price.

At its peak, more than thirty houses went up each day in Island Trees. Every aspect of this new community was fabricated and controlled by Levitt, from its mode of production to its decorative finishes. “We planned every foot of it – every store, filling station, schoolhouse, apartment, church, colour, tree, and shrub.”³⁴ Levitt’s “genius” was at this point attributed to the Fordist, assembly-line techniques he introduced to American housing construction. Shortly after it was finished, Island Trees was renamed to Levittown. It would then become the first of a series of Levittown-like housing plans that would proliferate across the eastern seaboard. Though not every township listed in *Homes for America* was attributed to Levitt per se, his streamlined mode of production acted as the ultimate framework for the development of future suburban spaces, as more regions began to experience a demand for housing away from the city. In providing a remedy to the housing crisis after World War II, Levitt assuaged returning veterans by creating an accessible, yet exclusive community for them. This however entailed a deliberate and explicit barring of black folk from the entire enterprise of suburbia. Most notably, Levitt wrote off his

32. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 247.

33. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 247.

34. Miller, “Now Even the Pigs’re Groovin’,” 153.

crucial role in the perpetuation of segregationist law as mere pragmatism: “We can solve a housing problem, or we can try to solve a racial problem. But we cannot combine the two.”³⁵ The following subsection explores the formation of suburbia as a segregated social space, leaving black communities out of the subsequent ideology of normativity tethered to the housing sprawl.

1.2 Segregated Social Space

A photograph in the center of the right side of *Homes for America* depicts several figures on a sidewalk of multiple identical houses, all engaged in different forms of domestic leisure or work. The handwritten caption reads “Two Family Units, Staten Island, N.Y.” Two separate families, seemingly unified by the fresh, harmonious space of the suburbs, embody the new activities of the postwar neighbourhood. A woman sweeps with a broom while two men tend to outdoor gardens, and a child in a bathing suit appears to be ready for a swim in a nearby pool. Perhaps most notable about this composition is the striking absence of people of colour. While suburbia was celebrated as a new social realm in which familial and communal ideals could be cultivated, it actively denied black folk the opportunity to integrate and share in its community.³⁶

After World War II, most middle- to upper-class white families had the financial mobility to distance themselves from the urban center of their respective cities, which entailed an inherent escape from communities considered to be deviant or other. Lizabeth Cohen notes that while

35. Miller, “Now Even the Pigs’re Groovin’,” 153.

36. This racist imperative exists in addition to the inequality between predominantly white men and women in suburban homes. Cohen notes that the father, who was generally the breadwinner of the family, was now subject to additional hours of commuting given the neighbourhood’s distance from the city. This left the mother of the family in charge of a house of unruly children, forming a wealth of emotional and psychological problems. Beuka further explains that the movement toward the suburbs in concert with the baby boom created an entrapping space for women of the postwar years, forcefully relocating them to isolated and child-centered environments. This resulted in a sense of dislocation and purposelessness, even as the culture at large was celebrating them as the central symbols in a new cult of domesticity.

extreme housing growth in new suburban areas accommodated the influx of veterans in the postwar period, they were distinctly geared toward white families, leaving 53 percent of married black veterans to double up housing with relatives, to live in trailers, or in small, rented rooms.³⁷ Emergency facilities such as the Veterans Affairs (VA) mortgage insurance program and the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) required vets to initially qualify at private banks and loan associations, which were known to discriminate against black folk in a multitude of ways. Not only was it difficult to gain approval from lending agencies and secure the lowest interest rates, but VA and FHA enacted and reinforced a hierarchy of neighbourhoods that “red-lined” areas where many black people lived. These areas were literally coloured red on government maps, marking them as poor investments.³⁸ As such, black families were relegated to these specifically delineated “red zones,” which were usually urban, old, and perceived as deteriorating simply by virtue of hosting predominantly minority residents.³⁹ These practices of red-lining formed barriers around the suburban neighbourhood and insulated white families from contact and interaction with members of the black community that hoped to buy within these areas.

Cohen further argues that the plight of African Americans in gaining access to public accommodations and spaces throughout the decades prior to this moment were jeopardized at the onset of this new lifestyle.⁴⁰ Under the guise of a more egalitarian society made up of homeowning, public accommodations moved out of the urban centers where black folk had gained a newfound accessibility, and into suburbia, where their presence was explicitly

37. Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*, 170.

38. Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*, 170.

39. Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*, 170.

40. Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*, 191.

discouraged.⁴¹ The formation of new housing plots included the construction of new malls, grocery stores, and parks, all confined within the social barriers it had erected. Suburbia's discrimination was not directed solely to black communities, however. Secured in its racism by the operations of the FHA, appraisers of the administration were known to give ratings on neighbourhoods from a top "A" grade to a failing "F."⁴² Cohen suggests that this evaluation system clearly considered newly built homes in the homogenous – meaning white and middle- to upper-class – booming suburbs to be better investments than others. "A" ratings were given to prime neighbourhoods in Newark's suburbs such as Millburn, Maplewood and Montclair, whereas "high-class Jewish" and "elite Protestant" areas were only given "Bs," because of their dangerous proximity to "hazardous" urban neighbourhoods.⁴³

The advent of suburbia after World War II equally ushered in a new conception of social normativity in conjunction with segregationist law as Americans found their footing in peacetime. Between 1948 and 1958, 11 million new suburban homes were established in America – 83 percent of all population growth during the 1950s took place in the suburbs.⁴⁴ Not only were citizens moving to these neighbourhoods in large masses, but many of them were starting families, welcoming the moment of the baby boom taking place shortly after the war.⁴⁵ As such, the quickly expanding populace of suburbia was highly indicative of and integral to a collective, national identity. Key to this development of American familial ideals was the notion of privacy, which was intricately intertwined in suburban housing plans. Dianne Harris notes that the 1950s privileged three primary ideals of house design – control, privacy, and an "American style" that would make postwar homes uniquely identifiable through modern interior décor and

41. Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*, 191.

42. Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*, 205.

43. Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*, 205.

44. Garvin, *American Cities*, 397.

45. Beuka, *SuburbiaNation*, 66.

organization.⁴⁶ These tenets were mutually reinforcing, guiding the process of constructing identity in terms of race, class and citizenship. The ownership of a private suburban house with carefully designed interior spaces provided security while simultaneously acting as a symbol of respectability through confirmed membership in the white, middle- to upper-class.⁴⁷ While this ideal was enacted through the notion of the suburbs as a gated community secluded from the busy, over-crowded city, it was also applied to the physical organization of space within individual housing units.

As a reaction to the modern architectural trend of the open plan, which presented the potential for friction amongst family members, clear distinctions between different rooms were implemented and carried through to future housing developments.⁴⁸ The noise from new television sets was offset by relegating it to a sectioned off living room, while various smells around the house from cooking were kept minimal by a walled kitchen.⁴⁹ These spaces were additionally sequestered from children's and parent's bedrooms for internal privacy during rest. Architect Robert Woods Kennedy suggests that the breakdown of privacy within the home was related to sociological and cultural changes occurring in the American sphere at the time.⁵⁰ He stresses that the need for distance between child spaces and parent spaces was increased as a result of growing sexual activity within the home.⁵¹ Responding to domestic needs and activities, the organization of interior space itself adapted to the new needs of the suburban enterprise, which ultimately articulated the base organization of normative housing architecture.

46. Harris, *Little White Houses*, 113.

47. Harris, *Little White Houses*, 114.

48. Harris, *Little White Houses*, 121.

49. Harris, *Little White Houses*, 122.

50. Kennedy, *The House and the Art of Its Design*, 152.

51. Kennedy, *The House and the Art of Its Design*, 153.

Beginning to divide home space in this way eventually introduced the logic of industrialization into the domestic sphere by shifting the symbolic heart of the house from the Victorian living room toward a Taylorist notion of the kitchen as a site of production and consumption.⁵² Ellen Lupton and J. Abbott Miller argue that postwar industrialization invited new standards for personal and domestic hygiene that emerged from scientifically-based health reforms, which fed into the culture of consumption by mapping out the human and architectural body as a site for an endless flow of products.⁵³ In this way, industry was retained as a metaphor for the domestic kitchen. Taylorism, a management technique that breaks down the production process into a series of smaller tasks, was the newly embedded logic of domestic production and consumption which was itself reflected in the design of the modern kitchen.⁵⁴ Plush fabrics, carved moldings, and intricate decorations characteristic of the Victorian era were now deemed dangerous breeding grounds for bacteria and dust, giving way to a new modernized aesthetic that favoured flush surfaces and rounded edges. The design of the kitchen consequently saw a gradual shift from free-standing appliances and storage units to boxy, built-in forms to enable an unbroken flow of kitchen activity.⁵⁵ Lupton and Miller assert that the kitchen had transformed into a modern factory controlled by a Taylorized housewife – the seamless coordination between sink, stove, countertops and cabinets as one horizontal plane contributed to a streamlined labour process that was akin to the general postwar tone of increased consumption.⁵⁶ This development consequently emboldened the role of women in the home as key directors of this new found industrial flow. Relegated to a reconfigured and modernized kitchen space, the wife and mother of the house was responsible for the maintenance of a never-ending cycle of production and

52. Lupton and Miller, *The Bathroom, the Kitchen, and the Aesthetics of Waste*, 8.

53. Lupton and Miller, *The Bathroom, the Kitchen, and the Aesthetics of Waste*, 9.

54. Lupton and Miller, *The Bathroom, the Kitchen, and the Aesthetics of Waste*, 3.

55. Lupton and Miller, *The Bathroom, the Kitchen, and the Aesthetics of Waste*, 3.

56. Lupton and Miller, *The Bathroom, the Kitchen, and the Aesthetics of Waste*, 41.

consumption for all members of the family. She was now the primary cog in the new workforce of the home, while the husband and father attended his own away from it.

With the creation of new private spaces and the heart of the house now existing in the industrialized kitchen, an additional layer of consumption was also brought forward – one that allowed members of the house to express autonomy and individuality through purchasing a new body of products for the home. Cohen’s primary argument in *A Consumer’s Republic* illuminates the idea that normalcy quickly became a lifestyle that citizen-consumers were able to purchase.⁵⁷ She explains that as the war ended, preparations began for a new battle, this time, on the homefront, of how postwar “normalcy” should be defined. The pursuit of a new, postwar family-centered life was attainable through purchasing a range of products that would come to encompass a sense of normalcy. That is not to say that these items were intrinsically “normal” per se, but that the importance given to the ability to purchase them became characteristic of this newfound normative existence. Acquiring these products, with time and constant reinforcement, therefore eventually contributed to a collective mode of suburban living understood as normativity.

At this point, the New Deal had expanded the state’s power to shape the economy by giving it the right to regulate prices, wages, and rents to assist citizens in forming a new home life.⁵⁸ A growing economy that centered on the mass consumption of new cars, suburban homes, and new products to fill them was argued to better protect the general good than the current governmental controls in place. Products were therefore advertised as essential components toward attaining the suburban ideal, revealing that to be a consumer was synonymous with being

57. Cohen, *A Consumer’s Republic*, 73.

58. Cohen, *A Consumer’s Republic*, 100.

a good American citizen.⁵⁹ Such an encouragement for purchasing goods would generate a more equitable standard of living for all derived from economic growth, which would ultimately fulfill the nation's commitment to equality and democracy.⁶⁰ The consequent transformation of the suburban house into the new target for consumerism emboldened its status as a primary tenet in the formation of postwar normativity.

As the economy shifted emphasis toward appealing to suburban communities and their new consumerist needs, those that had been excluded and red-lined faced a new layer of systemic oppression. Not only were minority communities quite physically and literally barred from integrating within these neighbourhoods, the new market of suburban goods and products were specifically not made for nor advertised to them. The effect of this deliberate exclusion was a proliferation of postwar normativity that served, expanded, and emboldened the existence of the white, middle- to upper-class. Suburbia was quickly becoming the standard mode of the ideal American experience after World War II, its site and social sphere used as a balm to soothe the ravages of the war years prior. The promotional short film *In the Suburbs* from 1957 made by Redbook Magazine for a campaign called "Easy Living" asserts that while moving to the suburbs improved the quality of life of many Americans, the markets that helped shape these communities over time exacerbated nation-wide inequality and class difference by establishing new kinds of hierarchies.⁶¹ Though the promise of a new and egalitarian social sphere was advertised, the video exposes the misguided notion that suburbia was seen as a *tabula rasa* upon which a utopia could be built. A transfer of already existing social structures from outside the suburbs took place instead, with magnified vitriol and discrimination against marginalized communities that attempted to enter the predominantly white sphere.

59. Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*, 101-102.

60. Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*, 101.

61. Redbook Magazine, "In the Suburbs (1957)."

The lived reality of the suburbs emphasized the divide between its disingenuous and cheap mode of production from the lofty aspirations of the social norm it intended to create. It slowly became clear that cheap and fast building practices were not amenable to achieving the luxurious lifestyle of its aims. The rigid and uniform method borne from current industrial practice in an attempt to create an architecture of normativity consequently produced a body of conventional and undistinguished social relations.

“Both architecture and craftsmanship as values are subverted by the dependence on simplified and easily duplicated techniques of fabrication and standardized modular plans. Contingencies such as mass production technology and land use economics make the final decisions, denying the architect his former ‘unique’ role.” – Dan Graham, *Homes for America*, 1966-67⁶²

In this excerpt, Graham once again brings attention to the frailty of suburbia, from its mode of production untethered to any previous mode of building construction to the exclusionary economy and social sphere it consequently fostered from within its walls. This brings forward a notion of the suburbs as detached from real spaces or in a state of flux, a site in which, as Alberro argues, social existence mutates under the always changing cultural conditions of modernity.⁶³ While housing construction had always taken place, the speed and scale at which it was growing in the postwar period began to assert that suburban tract housing was an architecture of normativity – one that clearly articulated a specific kind of social normativity due to its sheer and all-encompassing presence. The following will examine the liminal components tethered to the creation of an architecture of normativity that make the suburbs a fitting medium through which social formations can be observed.

1.3 Suburban Liminality

62. Excerpt of text from a passage in *Homes for America*.

63. Alberro, “Reductivism in Reverse,” 33.

As a new architecture of normativity was rapidly being imposed on a large percentage of the American population, its embedded logic of rapid construction launched many of its physical and ideological components into question. How did this completely new space provide for its residents? How would it be able to anticipate emerging and unforeseen needs? How can a singular base model account for differences in its users? Suburbia's façade of newness consequently glossed over these concerns, drawing Americans into its captivating promise of a better life even if the practical constituents of this idea were unclear. The construction of a space borne of such an idealistic perception consequently endowed it with a sense of liminality, a disconnectedness from the real plight of citizens that would become characteristic to the suburbs in the years following its inception. Robert Beuka argues that the general geographic location of suburbia exacerbates this quality, in its existence as a "borderland space" situated between the urban and the rural.⁶⁴ It rests between two definite spaces, the bustling city and the quiet farmland in closer proximity to the wilderness. Nestled between these realms, suburbia has no definite qualities of its own, defining itself only as a negation of two already existing spaces. Residents were consequently forced to acclimate to its newness with no frame of reference except the rampant, unfounded encouragement emanating from its widespread promotion.

This indeterminacy, as Alberro argues, is linked to Graham's work in its mobilization of a documentary imperative – "Just as the suburb is a liminal territory between the borders of city and country, *Homes for America* is neither strictly artwork nor article, neither minimalist nor pop art. The point is that everything previously thought of as fixed is in fact fluid, and always already a hybridization."⁶⁵ Mirrored by its formal approach, *Homes for America* consequently

64. Beuka, *SuburbiaNation*, 14.

65. Alberro, "Reductivism in Reverse," 34.

demonstrates this liminal quality of suburbia by highlighting its lack of uniqueness, existing in an indefinite, fluid state that is reflected in the social sphere tethered to it. The work's emphasis on what Graham calls the "new city" traces not only its trajectory of development, but also how it contains yet continuously shapes human existence, its interrelationships, and its dreams.⁶⁶

Ultimately, *Homes for America* identifies the instability of suburbia as a definite place, a dream realized by rapid and impermanent means. Simultaneously, the work begins to shed light on how this space's penchant for standardization and streamlined organizational procedures of mass production play a shaping role in the body of social relations that exist within it. Graham argues that the human relationships in suburbia are just as fabricated as the rows of houses that compose it.

“Developers usually build large groups of individual homes sharing similar floor plans and whose overall grouping possesses a discrete flow plan. Regional shopping centers and industrial parks are sometimes integrated as well into the general scheme. Each development is sectioned into blocked-out areas containing a series of identical or sequentially related types of houses all of which have uniform or staggered set-backs and land plots.” – Dan Graham, *Homes for America*, 1966-67⁶⁷

In the composition of organized text and photographs, Graham pinpoints the drive toward standardization that suburbia internalized and reflects it at various levels in *Homes for America*. Not only did individual houses share identical blueprints, but the entire neighbourhood itself was informed by a rigid structure that incited a particular choreography from its residents. The eye moves sequentially across this work from photograph to caption just as the suburban citizen would move from grocery store to house, from the park to the backyard, or from the kitchen to the living room. What is garnered from engaging with this work is consequently a sense of unease, a residual tension that emanates from the clean and repetitive forms of the never-ending suburban neighbourhood and the undifferentiated social behaviours it cultivated. How was the

66. Alberro, “Reductivism in Reverse,” 34.

67. Excerpt of text from a passage in *Homes for America*.

new American family, now free from the ravages of the war, able to realize the utopic striving of an individualized life of security and comfort, when it was being packaged and delivered in the same way to everyone? Graham confronts viewers with a back-end view of how American idealism is made manifest, exposing the disingenuous nature of its alleged care for individual families and their futures. By revealing the paradox inherent to an assembly-line mode of production in the cultivation of a sense of “homeliness,” *Homes for America* factually exacerbates the divide between a collective dream and its lived reality – a justifiably jarring experience at both collective and individual levels by its revelation of a growing dark side beneath a convincing promise of a better life.

Given its widespread popularity and the growing desire to live in the suburbs at this time, the image of suburbia ostensibly became the icon of postwar social normativity that many aspired to. Geared specifically toward the white folk and their desire for upward class mobility, suburbia presented an ideal social space in which the emergent nuclear family could thrive and foster a community of like-minded people. The deliberate exclusions of this space and the mass-produced nature of its development, as I have thus far illustrated, resulted in an anxious lived reality however – residents were unsure of how to navigate their new lives on a *tabula rasa*, placed at an unreachable distance from the dream that was advertised to them. As years went on, the ideal notions of suburbia began to deteriorate. Its paradoxes and hypocrisies became more apparent as families struggled to reconcile their individual identities with those of their collective suburban neighbourhood, any claims to fostering normativity were effectively weakened. The following chapter examines a work that gathers all of these anxieties and concerns and expresses them through one violent act. Gordon Matta-Clark’s *Splitting* from 1974 accordingly signals a decisive shift in the conception of the home and the suburbs as a bearer of social normativity.

1974: *Splitting*, Gordon Matta-Clark

In 1974, Gordon Matta-Clark enacted a physically violent intervention into the structure of a New Jersey house, exposing its interior to the exterior, conceptually letting the outside and inside confront. This structural disruption raised a multitude of concerns, rippling outward to destabilize categorizations of space and architecture as entities that are absolute. He called this work *Splitting* – a moment in time that has been crystallized by the act of the cut, the rest of the work succumbing to its own ephemerality. The house has since been demolished and now exists only through documentary photographs and video footage. These ephemera serve to demonstrate the striking nature of the work’s incision – a solid line that breaks up the walls between individual rooms in the house, offering new perspectives and viewpoints onto the original structure and organization of home space (Figure 2). Windows, staircases, floors and ceilings are now fractured, an access point to the outside is forged without a door or passageway. The bisection leaves most of the structural components physically intact aside from the cut that runs through them, allowing the existence of the house to hover just past the limit of its intended purpose. The cut therefore stands as a condensation of the work’s radical intervention, the decisive moment at which it is launched in suspension between purposeful architecture and de-purposed art object.

While the approach to this work seems rather straightforward, Matta-Clark’s intervention into the structure of a suburban house is an act that has received critical attention through many angles. Stephen Walker argues that “undoing” or “de-purposing” a building, in the way Matta-Clark does here, is a significant approach for advancing architectural thought.⁶⁸ By stripping the house of its purpose, essentially transforming it into a non-useful object, the artist problematizes

68. Walker, *Gordon Matta-Clark*, 31.

the notion of architecture as static at any given moment. Simultaneously, his cutting action reveals a multitude of new perspectives onto the seemingly stoic structure of the house, offering viewers invigorated sight lines that the edifice had not previously provided. Walker further suggests that this kind of query into the nature of surface and framework was characteristic of Matta-Clark's architectural work at this time – he wanted to disrupt the widespread acceptance of material as a limit.⁶⁹ The result of such a disruptive ethos in the creation of *Splitting* is the mobilization of a viewpoint that expands upon the one-dimensional, narrowed, and exclusive ideology that the suburban house had come to represent in the postwar period. By slicing through the structure of the home, Matta-Clark leverages his critique of the suburban enterprise, destroying the emblem of social normativity and reconfiguring it for future use.

Pamela M. Lee asserts that Matta-Clark's work engages in “a politics of things approaching their social exhaustion and the potential of their reclamation.”⁷⁰ The frail physicality of the house used in *Splitting* is therefore entirely deliberate. At once highlighting the immanent physical obsolescence of things in an increasingly consumption-oriented economy, while simultaneously pointing to their deeply engrained collective perception even after their use value has expired. Matta-Clark reclaims this home space through the physical structure of the house, one that is still potent with homely associations, and reorients our perception to reveal something new. *Splitting* accordingly remobilizes the decrepit and abandoned New Jersey house to present a malleable semiotic potential, in an effort to substantiate a different perspective through which the suburban house and its cultural legacy can be understood. At the point of this work's inception in the seventies, a multitude of artists had also honed into the space of suburbia as a site to express

69. Walker, *Gordon Matta-Clark*, 32.

70. Lee, *Object to Be Destroyed*, xvi.

critique.⁷¹ Matta-Clark's work stands apart from that of his contemporaries however, in its arguably more productive stance. Though similar critiques against the suburbs are clearly leveraged in *Splitting*, Matta-Clark presents, as Lee describes, a "potential of [its] reclamation."⁷² The following will build from the notion of the suburban house as a space of normativity to demonstrate how Matta-Clark's intervention in *Splitting* perpetuates a disdain toward the housing enterprise, simultaneously exposing its impermanence and disposability. I will then explore how a re-inscription of home space is made possible by his introduction of the outside to the inside, and the consequences toward the formation of normativity that may possess. Finally, and perhaps most essential to the next section of this thesis, is a description of the cut in *Splitting* as a methodology for the following analysis of contemporary horror film. In its synthesis of inside and outside space, Matta-Clark's cut brings together two ostensibly disconnected spaces, allowing one to enter and influence the production of the other.

2.1 Disposable, Ephemeral, Liminal

Matta-Clark's dealers, Holly and Horace Solomon, owned a house at 322 Humphrey Street in Englewood, New Jersey – a decrepit neighbourhood which had been slated for demolition a few months later in 1974. The Solomons allowed Matta-Clark to use the abandoned house as a site for *Splitting*, knowing that his resulting work would have an expiration date. He proceeded to clear the house of debris left by its former occupants and placed everything in the basement, out of sight, which, according to Lee, denied the work any anthropomorphic

71. Some of these artists include the likes of Norman Rockwell, Bill Owens, James Wines, as well as Dan Graham amongst others. Their work has tapped into the imminent "social exhaustion" of suburbia to expose its meticulously concealed fraught components, condemning its existence and ultimate perpetuation.

72. Lee, *Object to Be Destroyed*, xvi.

associations.⁷³ He then took a chainsaw and cut two parallel, vertical lines through the middle of the building with the help of Manfred Hecht. They set down one of the halves onto a slightly lowered foundation, creating a wedge-shaped intrusion that bisected the house.⁷⁴

In an account by American artist Susan Rothenberg, colleague of Matta-Clark, she states that *Splitting* was a “superpower cut,” one that ultimately destroyed the whole concept of a house while simultaneously providing “an exposé of what a building was.”⁷⁵ She identifies a split between the object of the house as a boring physical structure that carries with it something entirely more meaningful – the concept of safety and the presence of “something sacred about a shelter.”⁷⁶ Similarly, Rothenberg identifies a departure that *Splitting* takes from the minimalist program by its presentation of psychological and formal volume. Where minimalist artists such as Robert Morris made you walk around the edges of a room, consequently forcing viewers out of participation, Matta-Clark’s work was all-encompassing and subsuming, inviting a macabre re-encounter with a deeply personal sense of space.⁷⁷

Matta-Clark’s interventions and consequent exposés have been placed under the umbrella of *anarchitecture*, an approach that inserts literal and metaphoric voids into built structures to ridicule the idea of inherent function.⁷⁸ The term *anarchitecture*, resembling “anarchy” as well as suggesting an antithetical relationship to architecture, is argued by Maroš Krivý to ultimately reveal an architectural process that is hidden when the structure itself is understood as a mere functional object.⁷⁹ In this way, Matta-Clark used the abandoned New Jersey house to reveal the hidden process that has formed and shaped the normative suburban home. During his time at

73. Lee, *Object to Be Destroyed*, 7.

74. Lee, *Object to Be Destroyed*, 7.

75. Stiles and Selz, *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art*, 557.

76. Stiles and Selz, *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art*, 558.

77. Stiles and Selz, *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art*, 558.

78. Krivý, “Industrial Architecture and Negativity,” 827.

79. Krivý, “Industrial Architecture and Negativity,” 828.

Cornell University from 1962 to 1968, Matta-Clark worked with Robert Smithson, Eva Hesse, Robert Morris, Carl Andre, and Richard Serra among others, all of whom were formulating a theory and practice of art, in their own ways, that revealed the process of its making.⁸⁰ Using material that was considered lowly by traditional hierarchies of media, including rubber, foam, rags, and asphalt, Lee argues that these artists adopted a “disintegrative” aesthetic that would greatly influence the materialist and physical nature of Matta-Clark’s later architectural work.⁸¹ As such, he intended his work to be purely physical, and “not about making associations with anything outside of it.”⁸² He nevertheless recognized that people would make such associations and readings, and Lee suggests that much of the weight of his physical intervention lies in the symbolism it inevitably adheres to. Matta-Clark essentially reveals that the meaning of the house has always been accepted at face value – the stable, unsplit form signals its security, while the split form begins to unravel its previously uncontested nature.⁸³

Centering the architectural cut is not unlike his work prior to *Splitting*, much of which forcefully shifted phenomenological awareness as it relates to built structures and solid physical forms. Lee attributes Matta-Clark’s penchant for destruction to his close relationship with Smithson, who had been concerned with process art and its connection to entropy. Falling under the dictum of The Second Law of Thermodynamics, entropy is described as a dissipating force within the universe, driving the physical world from a system of order to maximal disorder.⁸⁴ The absolute form under entropy must negotiate a progressive disintegration and deterioration. While arguably distanced from the concerns of minimalism given the large scale of his later work, Matta-Clark’s emphatic preoccupation with material in states of decay confirms an

80. Lee, *Object to be Destroyed*, 39.

81. Lee, *Object to be Destroyed*, 39.

82. Lee, *Object to be Destroyed*, 21.

83. Lee, *Object to be Destroyed*, 21.

84. Lee, *Object to be Destroyed*, 39.

ostensibly minimalist preoccupation. This contestation is made most clearly evident by his 1969 work, *Photo Fry*, setting a foundation upon which his investigations in entropy could be realized by his later architectural interventions (Figure 3).

Contained in a small box, a burnt and almost entirely illegible Polaroid image of a Christmas tree sits in the top half with gold leaf sprinkled randomly around. In the bottom half, a hand-written card reads “A Gold Leafed Photo-Fried Xmass Tree & Best Lated Wishes,” signed with the artists first name. Lee argues that this text fails to adequately explain the above image, instead emboldening the artist’s intervention as an indicator of meaning for the work.⁸⁵ Having literally cooked the image in hot oil during a 1969 exhibition called *Documentations* at the John Gibson Gallery, Matta-Clark was clearly concerned with the disintegration of material and the processes that it bears. Existing as mere detritus of form, memory, and document of a destructive gesture, Smithson’s preoccupation with entropy is made evident in the artist’s early work.

Five years later, at a larger architectural scale, Matta-Clark would explore entropy as it pertains to a deteriorating suburban house. By exposing the house’s insides, deliberately displaying the underlying structure of its architecture, *Splitting* reconfigures the insular space of the home that had been constituted by the notion of suburbia in the postwar years. Matta-Clark grapples with and attacks this normative space decades after the inception of the suburbs in 1945, using a de-purposed, empty house first as proof of its impermanence, its failed promise, and second, to reformulate a conception of the home by its inherent disposability. Given the nature of the suburbs in this work and its status as abandoned, void of use, and lacking purpose, it exists now, in the seventies, as a site to be repurposed, presenting an opportunity for the notion of suburbia to once again be thrown into flux.

85. Lee, *Object to be Destroyed*, 42.

The specificity of Matta-Clark's chosen site is important to note, given his decision to pursue his violent act on a New Jersey house that was already slated for demolition. In disrepair, decrepit and crumbling even before the artist's intervention, the abandoned suburban space had already revealed its temporariness and impermanence on its own. What Matta-Clark's cut exacerbates however, is the resilience of the house as an emblem and ultimate perpetuation of normativity – that even in its final hours as a physical structure, the suburban house has become a collectively known and accepted form speaking to a moment in America that centralized the white nuclear family. The cut, and the consequent potency of the work as a whole, exposes these engrained associations that had perhaps been repressed since the peak years of suburbanization a decade prior. Matta-Clark therefore demonstrates how lasting the cultural memory of suburbanization has always been despite its current physical disrepair.

Splitting ultimately plays upon what has been established in the previous chapter – that suburban space, from its inception, has always maintained a sense of liminality in its failure to provide a permanent and universal means of security. Beuka argues that the suburban subdivision lacks its own self-contained sense of place identity and instead opens to a landscape composed of similar grids, lacking in individuality.⁸⁶ The suburb is therefore neither urban nor rural, its uniformity and internalized rigidification contributes to its inherent sense of placelessness.⁸⁷ Created from a *tabula rasa*, suburban rules of existence were written from an absence, lacking a sense of history and foundation to ground it. Matta-Clark accordingly takes the corpse of the suburbs not only to punctuate its failure to provide a better life for all, but also to reposition it as a site that can still be reconfigured – showing how the representation of the house can signal an evolving notion of normativity. Though the previous associations drawn

86. Beuka, *SuburbiaNation*, 20.

87. Beuka, *SuburbiaNation*, 20.

between the house and normativity in the moment of suburbanization are proven to be fraught, the house now exists as a site of contestation as a result of this tension. More specifically, Matta-Clark suggests that the house is a battleground for a multitude of forces to grapple with each other through a shifting spatial composition.

Peter Fend argues that the *anarchitect* sets up a game of space, one in which space is arranged in new configurations by new individual users.⁸⁸ As such, Matta-Clark reconfigures the conception of the house by intervening into the dynamics of space. Where suburban space was prescribed and administered as absolute, the intervention in *Splitting* signals a departure from that supposedly definite model, signifying that space in this context is amenable to a variety of forces and movements that can significantly alter it.

The critique of suburbia therefore takes place through a reframing of space, expanding from the physical intrusion made to the structure of the house. While this opens up an array of interpretive possibilities, welcoming influence from any and all spatial forces, the following analysis will hone into Matta-Clark's negotiation of inside and outside space through his implemented cut. The inside, representative of the space of insularity and suburban normativity, is effectively challenged by the forces of the outside in this work – a connection made possible by the artist's intrusion into the physical structure of the house. I therefore examine how a synthesis of these unique spaces possesses significant implications for the notion of suburban normativity, both in its formation and ultimate perpetuation.

2.2 Inside/Outside

88. Fend, "New Architecture from Matta-Clark," 49.

The inside and the outside, interior and exterior space, and the ways in which they become intertwined make up the underlying conceptual framework of Matta-Clark's *Splitting*. Lee argues that much of Matta-Clark's architectural work emphasized the "non-monolithic nature of his cuttings."⁸⁹ She attributes a notion of flexibility to the seemingly stable and stoic ontology of architecture, one that is realized through his violent act of the cut. This now present ambiguity between stability and instability, as Lee suggests, was a function of his braiding of positive and negative space.⁹⁰ In a similar way, Stephen Walker asserts that this interplay between the positive and the negative speaks to a conceptual interplay between architecture as static object and as a dynamic, contingent process.⁹¹ These binaries, manifested simply as the interaction between inside and outside, are what activates this new conception of architecture, one that is active and constantly generative.

Both scholars elucidate such a binary to examine the ways in which Matta-Clark's work is bound up with its own destruction and self-effacement, expanding the understanding of architecture as in proximity to art object. While my analysis corresponds to this in a way, I would like to mobilize this binary more so to touch upon the sociological concerns of *Splitting's* duality. I intend to do so by specifically examining the destabilization of inside space by outside space through the act of the cut – how positive and negative space, structured and unstructured space, ulterior and normative space, fall into each other, to ultimately challenge the postwar conception of the suburban house as one of insularity, privacy, and a realm in which normativity can thrive.

I do so by envisioning both interior and exterior space as constitutive of their own social formations respectively. To elucidate the social constitution of the inside, that which dictates

89. Lee, *Object to Be Destroyed*, 7.

90. Lee, *Object to Be Destroyed*, 28.

91. Walker, *Gordon Matta-Clark*, 39.

suburban normativity, I mobilize Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the *habitus*. Bourdieu asserts that the *habitus* is a system of durable and transposable dispositions produced by structures that constitute a particular type of environment.⁹² It is seen as a principle of generation and a structuring of practices or representations which can become objectively regulated.⁹³ Bourdieu makes note of two primary tenets constituting the *habitus* – first, it is a continuous action, and second, its continuity becomes a rule that is to be enforced. This model can be transposed onto the social relations that are created and enforced by the notion of suburbia. The regimented roles of mother as domestic caregiver and father as career-oriented breadwinner compose the normative nuclear family – a notion that is the direct target of critique in Matta-Clark's work. In his intervention into the house, he directly attacks the physical structure that enforces these roles through the prescribed spaces of the kitchen, the living room, and the dining room, for example – all of which are intended for specific family activities and rituals. The suburban house as a repeated prototype across millions of units, in this sense, becomes the visual manifestation of the operations of this kind of *habitus*, a governing principle that articulates normative social relations by their constant repetition. It is a structure that privileges the social practices, embodiments, and movements of the nuclear, white, middle- to upper-class family. The dynamics of the suburban social arrangement therefore perpetuate and reinforce the form of the *habitus*, all of which fall under the standardized architecture of the suburban house.

Splitting confronts this notion of the *habitus* and its relation to the formation of normativity by the act of the cut, violently assaulting this structured space with the force of the outside. This recalls a second notion of Bourdieu's *habitus* – that it is itself a product of

92. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 72.

93. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 72.

historical practices and is constantly subject to reproduction and transformation.⁹⁴ While the *habitus* dictates a set of rules to be followed in the social composition of a space, it is inherently flexible and amenable to forces that may shift its generative logic. A disruption in the continuity of producing a normative social framework therefore suggests that ulterior forces or social relations can interfere and ultimately have an impact on the governing structure. These kinds of ulterior influences reside in the territory of the outside in the context of *Splitting* and the critique it positions against the notion of suburbia. The operative mechanism of spatial reclamation in this work is lodged in the relationship between the inside and the outside, spaces that stand in for social normativity and an alterity that threatens it.

The idea of spaces of alterity hinging upon a normative mode of sociality can be further expanded upon by turning to the notion of temporality. Elizabeth Freeman argues that time itself is integral to the composition of a given socius.⁹⁵ Inaugurating a concept called *chrononormativity* derived from Bourdieu's *habitus*, Freeman outlines how the body is bound into socially meaningful configurations through temporal regulations.⁹⁶ *Chrononormativity* can be further understood as a technique by which institutional forces are experienced as somatic facts – things like schedules, calendars, and time zones constitute hidden rhythms of temporal experience that seem natural to those that they privilege.⁹⁷ Mobilizing the concept of *chrononormativity* can begin to account for the temporal aspect inherent to constructing and perpetuating the *habitus* in its operative reproduction of normative social structures.

Freeman further suggests that there are a variety of experiences that counter or exist outside dominant, normative temporality, including mourning, maternal love, domestic bliss,

94. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 72.

95. Freeman, *Time Binds*, 3.

96. Freeman, *Time Binds*, 3.

97. Freeman, *Time Binds*, 3.

romance, and even bachelorhood, all of which entail sensations that move according to their own beat.⁹⁸ She asserts that emotional, domestic, and biological tempos are, though culturally constructed, somewhat less amenable to the speeding up and micro-management that increasingly characterizes industrialization.⁹⁹ Distinguishing different types of temporalities is important for this analysis, as it identifies additional components that have formative roles in the unique rhythms of each social configuration. Where Freeman differentiates between emotional and industrial temporalities for example, I posit the model against the respective temporalities of the interior and the exterior, as spaces that adhere to and exist amongst differing experiences of time. To clarify, the temporality of interior space would refer to the rhythms of the everyday that characterize suburban experience – a teleological conception of time structured by a normative routine. By contrast, the temporality of exterior space is antithetical to this, warping and estranging such a chronology in comparison. An analysis of temporality as such encourages an understanding of social formations as distinct, formed by unique spaces and the temporalities they adhere to. The analysis of the *habitus* adds nuance to this conception however, ultimately asserting that each social formation is amenable to an array of shaping forces. This epistemological framework is key to my exploration of how *Splitting* makes manifest the relationship between inside and outside.

The purpose of this prism through which inside and outside is understood aims to demonstrate how *Splitting* complicates the distinct formation of the *habitus* and the temporality of the suburban house. These concepts have been elucidated to form the social base that the inside and outside adhere to respectively. As two distinct spaces embodying their own *habitus* and temporality, Matta-Clark's work puts these competing forces in confrontation with each

98. Freeman, *Time Binds*, 5.

99. Freeman, *Time Binds*, 7.

other – the interior space of suburban normativity is faced with the exterior space of alterity and the unknown. This is the work’s primary operation. I argue that *Splitting* illustrates the logic that the inside is disrupted and ultimately transformable by the outside, further implying that the social relations and temporalities constituting suburban normativity are transformable by alterity. Matta-Clark reveals the malleability of the suburban enterprise through his architectural intervention of the cut, welcoming a range of sociological concerns that gesture toward the future of the house and its shifting emblematic nature.

The work’s direct attack on the formation and subsequent future of normativity as such illuminates an inherent discussion of queer theory that also undergirds my entire analysis. As a space that encompasses the heterosexual couple and nuclear family, the suburban house is specifically normative in its privileging of biological reproduction as a means toward perpetual futurity. Lee Edelman examines the invocation of the “Child” as an emblem of futurity in politics, endowing the heterosexual couple with absolute value and consequently positioning the queer subject as outside the dominant social structure.¹⁰⁰ As such, queerness exists as a block to the realization of futurity for its inability to produce a child. Edelman further explains that the Child embodies the telos of the social order and has come to hold the trust of the dominant order.¹⁰¹ In this way, anything that threatens the nuclear, heterosexual family and the centralization of the Child, is a direct assault on the future of America and its longevity.

A similar notion is expanded upon by Sara Ahmed in her exploration of lines of orientation and their relationship to bodies and space. In a way similar to Bourdieu’s *habitus*, she argues that lines that direct our motion and action throughout space are “both created and being followed and are followed by being created,” they depend on the repetition of norms and

100. Edelman, *No Future*, 3.

101. Edelman, *No Future*, 11.

conventions.¹⁰² These lines followed as such directly shape how a subject moves through time and space, and those that are followed more frequently become what might be understood as more normative. The queer subject is oriented differently from these normative lines however by virtue of exclusion. Ahmed suggests that queers deviate from the “straight line” in their immediate opposition to the heterosexual couple and the biological reproduction of the family.¹⁰³ Homosexual desire therefore becomes a form of deviance insofar as it challenges the family line and its longevity.¹⁰⁴

The queer subject’s positionality in the formation of a political doctrine that hinges upon the heterosexual couple, the line of the family, and its reproducibility is directly related to the critical efforts of Matta-Clark’s work on the suburban house and the normativity it has come to represent. Attacking the physical structure of the house equally destroys its semiotic valence as an emblem of the nuclear family, a space in which biological reproduction occurs and is fostered. The violence of the cut is therefore akin to the queer subject and their relation to the politics of reproduction – as Edelman argues, “queerness can never define an identity; it can only disturb one.”¹⁰⁵ As such, the cut never fully rids the house of its initial semiotic valence, it rather estranges the one that is normative, the one that has been engrained as absolute. The efficacy of queerness as an estrangement strategy against the dominant social structure of the heterosexual family is a notion that undergirds *Splitting*, as well as the destabilizing aims of horror film examined in the next chapter. The kinship between Matta-Clark and *Insidious*, brought to light by queer theory, aims to suggest that the cut may be viewed as a gothic operation by its exposure of something familiar now made strange.

102. Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 16.

103. Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 74.

104. Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 74.

105. Edelman, *No Future*, 17.

2.3 Cut as Methodology

The cut, for the purposes of this thesis, is envisioned as the clear moment at which the realms of the inside and the outside meet and negotiate with each other. Rather than merely relieving the architectural structure of its purpose, I would like to frame the cut as an act that brings the inside and outside together— one that possesses insightful perspectives on the formation of normativity and the estranging force that threatens it. The effect of this confrontation uniquely problematizes the space created by the suburban house in *Splitting*. Not only is the insularity of suburban normativity threatened by the force of the outside, it is revealed that this force has a shaping role in the foundational structure of what the inside represents. Inside and outside space influence and reproduce themselves from each other, which ultimately insists upon the necessarily shifting dynamic of social normativity.

A critical stance similar to the cut operates in Graham's *Homes for America*, which is registered as a decisively less violent pessimism toward the serialization of suburban developments. In his exploration of the standardized processes that had come to inundate housing construction after the war, Graham similarly exposes a frailty to the supposed genuineness of suburbia as a nation-wide project. Such a revelation is expanded upon in Matta-Clark's *Splitting*, which widened the distance between the hopeful promise of a better suburban life and its decrepit physical reality. The cut in his work specifically reorients our perception of the home and the way it has been treated as a representation of normativity. It is important to note in addition that this notion of the cut inevitably builds from its definition and application in Dada collage. As a violent gesture that intervenes through a once whole image to place it alongside other fragments, invariably shifting its meaning, the cut as it pertains to this thesis is

mobilized in a way that builds from this idea. Cutting through the surface of the house places it in a new realm of discourse, peeled from its associations to normativity and utopianism and held up for critique.

I rely on the work of Matta-Clark to develop a methodology that can be applied to works of contemporary horror film engaging with similar spatial concerns. This is an attempt to supplement readings of these films that merely position them within a canon of horror film, consequently narrowing critical attention toward their loyalty to or deviation from their prescribed genre. The cut from *Splitting* will therefore be used as a prism through which a split spatial representation becomes revealed, as it pertains to the representation of the suburban house in film. Like the interaction of inside and outside in Matta-Clark's work, the cut explores how these two spaces are expressed through filmic representations of normative, suburban space that ultimately become threatened by ulterior, supernatural space.

The cut is an operation that engages a variety of theoretical concerns, intervening into the formation of the *habitus*, disrupting normative temporality, as well as positioning itself close to the queer subject in relation to the dominant social structure. Though this overview demonstrates the inherently destabilizing effects of these theories on the objects of analysis, I position the cut as that which offers a reframing of what has been deemed normative. The following section of this thesis therefore uses this methodological toolkit to not only innovate the analysis of contemporary horror film as it currently stands, but to suggest that the push for the abolition of dominant structures is necessary and ongoing. With this inherently art historical and spatial investigation, I intend to intervene into scholarship surrounding these films to offer a new lens through which the social concerns they bring to the fore can be engaged with critically. I will begin by outlining the suburban gothic subgenre, as a means to ease my transition from postwar

production to contemporary, as well as to trace the history of horror films that situate themselves within the realm of suburbia. I will then contextualize my methodology of the cut as it pertains to film, and the new sociological and temporal concerns this medium presents. Finally, I introduce my last objects of analysis as a case study viewed through the methodology of the cut – James Wan’s *Insidious* from 2010. My investigation will position the previously outlined concerns against the surface of the film and what it contains, diving into the unique ways it represents suburban space and the immanent threats to it.

2010: *Insidious*, James Wan

The contentions surrounding the representation of the house and suburban space have continued to span multiple decades and across various media. Its deeply entwined connection to the formation of a cultural status quo has been engrained in the collective subconscious – owning a house and building a family remain at the core of the human experience despite the exclusions and discriminations that have come to characterize its realization. Though less overt in its promotion today, the anxieties underlying the façade of suburbia have succeeded in their present manifestation as an irresolute site of contestation. This ongoing topic has provided a fruitful foundation upon which many artists have attempted to pin down its ever evolving yet always sinister status.

In 1975, Martha Rosler's video work *Semiotics of the Kitchen* parodied early cooking television shows that were considered popular women's entertainment. Speaking directly to a camera set in a suburban kitchen, Rosler introduces her audience to different kitchen utensils and equipment in alphabetical order with increasing disturbance and urgency, until dispensing the tools entirely to use her body directly (Figure 4). *Semiotics of the Kitchen* tackles the rigid and oppressive nature of women's domestic roles that the suburban enterprise had encouraged. In 1986, David Lynch released *Blue Velvet*, a film that similarly exposed the repressed darker underside to idealized, small American towns through the visual language of noir cinema (Figure 5). Working against the popularity of television series during Ronald Reagan's presidency that promoted a restoration of nuclear family values, Lynch's work pushed against the grain, and received critical backlash accordingly.¹⁰⁶ Starting in 1998, Gregory Crewdson embarked on his

106. Morton, "1980s Cinema and the Disturbing Side of Suburbia."

years-long ongoing photographic series titled *Twilight*. Elaborately staged sets frame suburban neighbourhoods and houses with a sense of alienation, disturbance, and decay. These photographs use harsh lights and shadows to endow its seemingly plastic and artificial suburban subjects with an air of suspicion and unease, as if the secrets of the suburban realm are in the midst of bubbling through its surface (Figures 6 and 7). These few examples, all of which grapple with the notion of suburbia in some way even decades after its inception, return to a similar qualm that the home is not, and has never been a beacon of comfort and security – it is rather a site of dysfunction, alienation, and a source of corruption. In an attempt to reveal this darker underside, all of these works mobilize something of an estrangement strategy privy to the cut in *Splitting*. By intervening into the façade of pleasantry and peace that suburbia had constructed, Rosler, Lynch, and Crewdson amongst others mobilize representational strategies that evoke unease within these spaces.

As many artists through the latter half of the twentieth century continued to chip away at the enduring paradoxical nature of the suburbs, a variety of media were mobilized to articulate their widespread concerns. Attacking the concept of suburbia from the various approaches of photography, video art, architecture, and cinema, this wide field of investigation has contributed to suburbia's existence as a deeply engrained anxiety that has yet to be quelled. The suburbs continue to haunt many forms of cultural production as a testament to its encompassing and strengthened grasp around collective American identity. Narrative cinema is one avenue of investigation that has consistently used suburbia as an environment framing an array of shifting concerns. Specifically, the suburban gothic subgenre has closely traced the trajectory of suburban space and incorporated it into its filmic representation as the generative locus of fear.¹⁰⁷

107. Some landmark films of this genre in the postwar period include Roman Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), William Peter Blatty's *The Exorcist* (1973), Brian De Palma's *Carrie* (1976), Stuart Rosenberg's *The*

The main object of this chapter's analysis, James Wan's *Insidious* from 2010, fits comfortably as a contemporary extension of this subgenre for its deliberate foregrounding of suburban space in its narrative, guiding the demise of its nuclear family through a novel mode of representing the house. With a budget of \$1.5 million, *Insidious* has grossed \$97 million worldwide since its 2010 release.¹⁰⁸ Receiving mixed reviews, aggregator Rotten Tomatoes notes that its critics' consensus has categorized the film as "a very scary and very fun haunted house thrill ride."¹⁰⁹ The family-centered narrative has been revered for its revitalization of many considered classic tropes from the haunted house story which had been adopted into the suburban gothic subgenre, now brought into a contemporary context. Specifically, John Anderson of the Wall Street Journal explains that although the film brings forward a poignant repertoire of terrifying antagonists, its innovative cultivation of fear comes from "what *might* jump out of the closet... Movie goers are far more convinced, instinctively, that what we don't know will most assuredly hurt us."¹¹⁰ Wan effectively heightens suspense by subverting the long established conventions of expectation that the past decades of horror film have engrained in viewers.

Insidious follows father and husband Josh, and stay-at-home mom Renai Lambert (Patrick Wilson and Rose Byrne), who have just moved into a new house. When one of their sons, Dalton (Ty Simpkins), encounters an unknown supernatural spirit while exploring their attic, he falls into an inexplicable coma-like state, unable to wake up for months. Doctors struggle to figure out what condition he suffers from, as his vital processes are stable, but he remains entirely unconscious. He is able to be cared for at home after some time, but at this

Amityville Horror (1979), John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978), Tobe Hooper's *Poltergeist* (1984), Wes Craven's *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1987), Tom Holland's *Child's Play* (1988), Mary Lambert's *Pet Sematary* (1989), and Tommy Lee Wallace's *It* (1990) amongst others.

108. Box Office Mojo, "Insidious," <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/release/r13428550145/>.

109. Rotten Tomatoes, "Insidious," <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/insidious>.

110. Anderson, "'Insidious': Scary Eye-ful of the Unknown."

point, further supernatural occurrences start to take place in the Lambert's house – doors opening by themselves, voices stirring in dark corners, and apparitions of unknown individuals making themselves present in increasingly violent and terrifying ways. Upon hiring a supernatural investigator, Elise (Lin Shaye), who is revealed to have had a long history with Josh's family, Dalton is discovered to be trapped in “the further,” a supernatural realm containing a mass of spirits and demons existing in a dimension that is spatially and temporally superimposed onto the real space and time of the Lambert house.

Wan's particular visual approach to this film pays careful attention to obscuring the space of the home, making its architecture unfamiliar, uncomfortable, and dark for the Lambert family, as well as his audience. Throughout the length of the film, the setting of the house is placed in an increasingly close confrontation with its opposing spatial articulation in “the further.” The pace and comfort of the domestic, familial space is forcibly made foreign by the dangerous closeness of this ulterior dimension, a territory completely unknown to the family, all the while possessing the same visual attributes now rendered unfamiliar (Figures 8 and 9).

Insidious markedly represents the threat of alterity on the space of the home through “the further,” a realm that is expressed as a shift in visual tone that brings viewers into a new, more terrifying version of the home. Once characters enter this realm, they are thrust into architectural spaces that are structurally the same as those they would encounter in reality, but rendered colder, darker, and as if they are hiding something terrible. For example, the climax of the film presents a scene in which Josh is hypnotized by Elise in order to enter “the further” to save Dalton who is trapped there. He is sat in a chair in the living room of his suburban house while following the guiding words of Elise. Suddenly he is thrown into “the further,” which is revealed to be the same living room setting now made terrifying and strange, a looming mist enveloping

any sensation of comfort the room had held previously (Figures 10 to 12). The space is ostensibly made entirely unfamiliar, signalling the existence of two spaces – the real and the supernatural, or the normative and the ulterior – intertwined and existing within a singular architectural edifice. Though one is accessed through the characters’ states of heightened suggestibility, affirming that this space is not necessarily real, the conditions of their representation appear to suggest that this duality is integral to the once singular space of the home.

This logic that continuously and persistently transforms the home into a site of unease and terror aligns itself with the aims of the suburban gothic subgenre, as mentioned in brief previously. Though primarily pertaining to films from the twentieth century, the following exploration of the suburban gothic subgenre will situate *Insidious* with its precedents in horror film, with the intention to address a larger question that still remains – why has this film, in its engagement with seemingly postwar suburban concerns, re-emerged in the sphere of cultural production? What conditions have allowed *Insidious* to become popular and critically acclaimed in 2010? I will attempt to answer this question by first exploring the suburban gothic subgenre and its alleged decrease in popularity at the turn of the millennium. I will then suggest that such a return to suburban gothic narratives mirrors the subprime mortgage crisis beginning in 2007, in which a swath of the American population experienced the promise of homeownership being pulled away from them once again. Finally, through in-depth scene analyses of *Insidious*, I will explore the nuanced filmic and representational mechanisms used to alienate and destabilize the representation of the house. Its complex engagement with spaces of normativity and alterity ultimately suggests a necessary move away from the status quo of suburbia as normativity, exposing the continued failure to provide accessible homeownership to all.

3.1 The Unhomely House / Progression of the Suburban Gothic

The suburban gothic includes films of the wider horror genre that are distinctly set in the space of suburbia, conflating its concerns with those of the constructed neighbourhood. Though generally considered “B-movies” whose themes were widely viewed as more bodily and physical rather than intellectual, William Peter Blatty’s *The Exorcist* from 1973 was the first film of this subgenre to be nominated for Best Picture at the Academy Awards, accordingly raising the status of the canon to critical acclaim.¹¹¹ The narrative follows a family living in suburban Georgetown, in Washington D.C. and the demonic possession of their daughter, Regan (Figure 13). Five years later, John Carpenter’s *Halloween* was released, following the tyrannical and murderous raid of Michael Myers on the fictional suburban town of Haddonfield, Illinois (Figure 14). The 1980s presented a solidification of the suburban lexicon with films like Steven Spielberg’s *Poltergeist* from 1982 and Wes Craven’s *A Nightmare on Elm Street* in 1984. The supernatural terror in *Poltergeist* emerges from the realization that the Freeling family’s new neighbourhood in Orange County, California was built on the original site for a cemetery that had been relocated (figure 15). *A Nightmare on Elm Street* similarly grapples with a spectral enemy, a disfigured man with a bladed glove named Freddy that haunts the protagonist from the comfort of her home (Figure 16). By conflating fear of the othered or supernatural antagonist with the newly constructed environment of the suburbs, these films operatively suggest that suburbia is the ultimate source of menace and chaos. Narratively and formally, the space of the home is distanced from its conception as a realm of safety in these films – the bright, inviting, and warm interior is replaced by shadowy corners and canted hallways that hide spectral or murderous antagonists.

111. Susman, “The Exorcist.”

The decade of the 90s presented a lull for the suburban gothic subgenre and its success however, a gap that would affect the trajectory of the broader horror genre in general. Adam Charles Hart argues that the decade began with the Oscar-winning success of Jonathan Demme's *Silence of the Lambs* in 1991, but was followed by a string of unsuccessful remakes such as Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* from 1992 and Kenneth Branagh's *Frankenstein* in 1994.¹¹² As the decade came to a close, two innovate frontrunners would come to steer the future of mainstream horror film – Hideo Nakata's *Ring* from 1998 and Eduardo Sánchez's *The Blair Witch Project* from 1999. These films ostensibly strayed away from insincere remakes of older horror films as well as the suburban lexicon that had proven to be successful in the 70s and 80s. *Ring* in particular signalled the beginning of an expanded Hollywood industry toward an international scope whose implementation of extreme bodily horror from Japanese and South Korean filmmakers would become heavily influential (Figures 17 and 18).¹¹³

The widespread market success of these two films signalled a proliferation of films influenced by Asian horror cinema, as well as of independent horror films at the turn of the millennium.¹¹⁴ Charles Derry argues that because of this fragmentation and dispersal into other sources, horror movies in the new millennium have not had a definitive testament to the issues of their time.¹¹⁵ Positioned in this way, horror in the 2000s did not respond closely to widescale shifts in cultural development as it had with the advent of suburbanization half a century prior. Derry posits that this is also a primary effect of 9/11 and its impact to cultural production.¹¹⁶ As the millennium opened with this tragedy, he suggests that the problem with horror film following

112. Hart, "Millennial Fears," 329.

113. Hart, "Millennial Fears," 330.

114. Hart, "Millennial Fears," 332.

115. Derry, *Dark Dreams 2.0*, 110.

116. Derry, *Dark Dreams 2.0*, 345.

that event lies in the fact that film directors and producers were unable to trump the terror of real life events.¹¹⁷

While I do agree with the debilitating effects of 9/11 on cultural production, I suggest that the suburban gothic subgenre and the horror genre more broadly were able to revive themselves as a result of the subprime mortgage crisis which had begun in 2007 – the effects of which would not have come into full fruition when Derry was writing his book. It was in this period that Americans were reacquainted with a sense of severe insecurity regarding homeownership resulting from extreme economic inflation and the subsequent market crash. Robert M. Hardaway notes that from 1940 to 2007, housing prices in America had risen incredibly to create the greatest asset bubble in the history of the world due to a variety of factors, most of which insulated financial institutions and protected the emerging billionaire class.¹¹⁸ From the onset of the postwar housing enterprise, wealthy homeowners were given tax subsidies allowing them to create and foster massive amounts of money while poorer citizens were forced to take out loans. Simultaneously, lenders were enjoying a constant flow of reliable and risk-free mortgage income from those that required financial help.¹¹⁹ Wall Street financial institutions earned billions as a result by first buying then securitizing mortgage loans, and hedge funds then made fortunes for their investors by using these securitized mortgages as leveraged collateral.¹²⁰ Perhaps most perniciously, politicians rode to power on the crest of this growing bubble and were celebrated for their advocacy on expanding homeownership, aware that the divide between lower classes and the top third of American income earners was steadily increasing.¹²¹

117. Derry, *Dark Dreams 2.0*, 345.

118. Hardaway, *The Great American Housing Bubble*, xvii.

119. Hardaway, *The Great American Housing Bubble*, xvii.

120. Hardaway, *The Great American Housing Bubble*, xvii.

121. Hardaway, *The Great American Housing Bubble*, xvii.

Notably, ever since the Great Depression until 2006, housing prices did not rise in an amount commensurate with the national inflation rate, but rather at one significantly higher than reported in the official Consumer Price Index.¹²² This incongruent growth was exacerbated by the 1983 decision from the US Bureau of Labour Statistics to delete housing prices from the Consumer Price Index entirely, creating the impression that the real total inflation rate was 15% lower than it actually was. Consequently, the federal reserve was left with a perceived opening to lower interest rates without undue risk of inflation.¹²³

With the deceitful exclusion of information from the index, home values had eventually declined to a point where homeowners owed more money to loaning institutions than what their house was worth by 2006. These same institutions therefore filed for foreclosure in the subprime market, which had reached over half a trillion dollars and accounted for more than a quarter of all home mortgages, leaving thousands of families with no means of paying their housing bills.¹²⁴ With an economic collapse immanent, US policy makers began to implement strategies such as handing out \$8,000 checks to poorer homebuyers in order to stimulate demand – meanwhile wealthier homeowners were still receiving hundreds of thousands of dollars from tax benefits, ultimately continuing the growth of the housing bubble.

The disingenuity of such aid efforts finally culminated in a full-scale crash in late 2008, first in the US with the bankruptcy of American Home Mortgage, then rippling to the rest of the world. The quarter-trillion loss in subprime loans had eventually resulted in a cumulative national loss of \$4.7 trillion, and a loss of over \$26 trillion in stock market capitalization

122. Hardaway, *The Great American Housing Bubble*, 19.

123. Hardaway, *The Great American Housing Bubble*, 21, 172.

124. Hardaway, *The Great American Housing Bubble*, xix

internationally.¹²⁵ Hardaway ultimately argues that this net loss revealed for the first time that the American housing bubble was “the critical bottom card in a world-wide house of cards.”¹²⁶

The devastating loss from the slow burning housing crisis reignited an awareness in the frailty of homeownership in America. With the higher echelons of income earners protected by executives at financial institutions, lower level earners experienced a widening gap between their own economic situations and the security of the housing market, which eventually left millions of families homeless. Revealing the dense and complex corporate structures in place, the collapse of the housing bubble exposed a fundamental miscalculation – a presumption that expanding the housing market to communities with previously barred access would ease the problem of income inequality. In response to a need for housing for lower income populations, most of which consisted of ethnic minorities that were written out of the postwar suburban space at its inception in the 1940s, subprime loans were created to provide access to the novelty of American housing. This increased access, provided by loans with less stringent and exclusionary application terms, granted the means through which property could be had – a temporary and limited solution that would soon rebound into an economic situation more dire than before the emergence of subprime loans.

The implementation of market- and profit-based initiatives through a loan structure as such attempted to assuage the deeply rooted history of income inequality, but was soon revealed to be more detrimental than helpful in the aftermath of the crash. Kathleen Engel and Patricia McCoy assert that subprime lending, which had been lauded as the tool to increase homeownership, was now ultimately responsible for its decline.¹²⁷ In 2004, homeownership had peaked at 69 percent, and by 2008, the rate had dropped to 67.9 percent. Among African

125. Hardaway, *The Great American Housing Bubble*, 24

126. Hardaway, *The Great American Housing Bubble*, 25.

127. Engel and McCoy, *The Subprime Virus*, 121.

Americans, the decline was even more dramatic, with a drop from 49.1 percent to 47.4 percent.¹²⁸ These statistics reveal the instability of the marketized homeownership structure when it is extended to low-income earners, and consequently demonstrates the unviability of its claims to universal access. Under the guise of increased inclusivity, the burst of the housing bubble exposed the nuanced hierarchization of economic exclusivity that spawned from the more overt segregationist tactics employed in the postwar development of suburbia.

In this way, the affective dimension of America's housing situation continues to be wrought with anxiety and instability. The massive failure of subprime lending proved that the discriminatory actions of the postwar past in the development of nation-wide housing laid the foundation for a complex, dense, and globalized economy of covert segregation. With millions of Americans left out of the dream of homeownership, what would become of the utopic aspirations of suburbia? The American house continues to expose itself as pure myth by virtue of its continued inaccessibility, the security and comfort it has become associated with is made possible only through membership in the higher rankings of financial wealth. With the 2008 market crash positioned as the crux of this revelation, a refreshed outpouring of uncertainty has swelled the collective perception of homeownership.

I therefore suggest that the popularity and general critical acclaim given to *Insidious* is partly due to the contentious discourse surrounding American housing that it steeply itself in. A film representing the home as a site unable to provide comfort, safety, and security for the nuclear family, Wan inherently exposes an ugly truth that everyday Americans had recently been faced with. Coupled with the familiarity of the suburban gothic subgenre, *Insidious* acts as the nexus between a necessary genre reconfiguration and a recent socio-economic crisis that had yet to be fully explored in the realm of representation. I do not intend to suggest that the housing

128. Engel and McCoy, *The Subprime Virus*, 121.

crisis is of primary concern to this film, but rather that the span of its effect was felt widely and collectively to such a degree that it pervaded into the film's mode of representation as subtext. In Wan's exploration of the Graham family home as a double, there is a distinct merging of the familiar and unfamiliar within the space of the American home and its representation. This conflation, as I suggest, speaks to a long-held anxiety surrounding the safety and comfort that has come to constitute the suburban house and who is allowed access to it. Harking to a filmic past of suburban gothic representational and narrative tropes, *Insidious* does not simply recycle conventions, but reignites their semiotic charge in order to more aptly address the current socio-economic climate.

3.2 Scene Analyses

A closer look to foundational scenes in *Insidious* demonstrates this reinvigorated contestation with representations of the space of the home in light of the growing anxiety surrounding homeownership that had re-emerged in the American sphere. Using the visual cues and general filmic lexicon of the suburban gothic, these scenes are doubly effective for their harkening to a past canon of suburban horror film now recontextualized to prod at the recent collective trauma of the housing crisis.

While the space of normalcy is visually framed as warmer, more inviting and more comfortable than the space of alterity in *Insidious*, there are several other filmic mechanisms that help enunciate their differences and inform the nuances of their increasingly intertwined relationship. First, the Lambert house in its normal state is presented as welcoming and inviting – in an opening scene that introduces the audience to Renai, the sequence begins with a slow

panning shot of the outside of the house on a sunny day (Figure 19). Cutting to a shot from inside the house, the camera dollies forward into the living room, showing the richness of the dark wooden floors and pillars, the warm red and orange details from a shelf of books complement the colours of decorative vases and lamps spread throughout the room. The frame then tightens around Renai, softly lit by a yellow light as she plays piano and sings along (Figures 20 and 21). The sound of her music fills the house with a pleasant tone as the camera slowly backs away from her to reveal a baby monitor that suddenly erupts in cries, breaking Renai away from the keys. Positioned at the beginning of the film as such, this sequence is one of few instances that create a sense of ease and pleasure within the normative state of the Lambert house.

This perspective is at odds with the house's second manifestation as it exists in "the further." Returning to the sequence mentioned previously in which Josh is sent into "the further" through Elise's guidance, we are confronted with this same house now made terrifying. Beginning with a goodbye kiss shared between Josh and Renai, marking a symbolic departure from the normative social configuration of the nuclear family, Josh is seated in a chair across from Elise, the room lit warmly by the fireplace and surrounding lamps. Elise sets a metronome in motion so that when its consistent ticking becomes obscured or slowed, he knows he has left the real world and has entered "the further." The camera cuts back and forth between the ticking metronome and Josh's face as he relaxes with his eyes closed, Elise's voice leading him into a state of hypnosis. The frame tightens around his eyes as they open in disbelief – he stands up dismissively, claiming that such hypnosis could never work on him (Figures 22 to 25). The surrounding living room looks suspiciously different however, the camera follows him as he rises, revealing that the lights have turned off and a blueish tinge has seeped into the space (Figure 26). He turns around to see his own body asleep in the chair, everyone in the room

except Elise no longer present. The camera slowly zooms into his second self in shock as he glares at his own body from outside of it, coolly lit by a blue light and accompanied by a cacophonous arrangement of strings. Elise then vanishes and Josh stares slowly at the space around him – his own house that has now become filled with shadows, fog, and darkness.

Both of these spaces are presented as ostensibly different but within the same architectural edifice of the house. Positioned at different ends of the narrative, this spatial bifurcation is made increasingly clear as the film progresses – the Lambert house slowly transforms from its initial normative state of comfort into the site at which the ulterior space of “the further” manifests, revealing a number of demons and spirits close by. As the space of the home becomes progressively split, a few integral scenes in the middle of the narrative demonstrate how the space of alterity begins to tear through the space of normalcy. Narratively and stylistically, we encounter persistent threats to the originally perceived safety of the suburban home by spectral apparitions that assault and challenge Renai.

In a scene following Josh and Renai’s decision to move houses after increasingly violent supernatural activity in their old home, Renai familiarizes herself with the new space, which is coincidentally another suburban house in a different neighbourhood. This sequence marks the moment when Renai realizes that supernatural forces have attached themselves to her family. Of particular emphasis in this scene is the way in which the supernatural begins to manifest itself within suburban space, exacerbated by a darkening visual tone and disorienting camera movements.

Renai enters the scene and places a record on a turntable that plays a calm piano piece as she tends to different chores. She walks down a hallway and the camera steadily follows her from behind at eye-level, transforming the hallway into an elongated, cramped, tunnel-like space.

This initial visual distortion is the first hint toward an imminent supernatural occurrence, Renai enters a spatial realm that disrupts the normative representation of the home. As she walks into her son Foster's bedroom, she passes a grandfather clock, cleaning up the mess he had left on his bed. The space suddenly adopts a grey tone, as if a cloud has started blocking the sun, adding further suspicion and obscurity to why the camera is following Renai in this way. Picking up disheveled piles of clothes and walking through to the laundry room connected to the bedroom, the camera remains adhered to Renai's movements, revealing in the left side of the frame a figure of a boy facing the wall. Renai doesn't notice the figure as she continues through to the kitchen to take out the trash – the camera continuing to trace her as if she is guiding viewers through a now uncertain space. Once she leaves the house, the camera stays inside, framing her through the windows she's left open, the curtains billowing in the wind. Suddenly, the record scratches – the peaceful piano melody is interrupted by an unsettling rendition of "Tiptoe Through the Tulips," a song by Tiny Tim from 1968, his high falsettos rendered as hysterical shrills. Through the window Renai sees the same boy from the laundry room dancing near the turntable, rendered in greyscale, his face turned away. She runs past another window to see that he has suddenly vanished (Figures 27 to 29).

As she storms inside to sort out the confusion, the record scratches again and leaves the room silent. She stands in anticipation, looking around frantically, when the door to the kitchen suddenly closes on its own – directing our attention to the left side of the frame. The boy suddenly runs through the living room from the right side of the frame behind Renai without being seen. He stops at the end of the elongated hallway, making eye contact with her by the grandfather clock, and runs into her sons' bedroom as if he is playing a game. Creeping toward it slowly and silently with the clock ticking in the background, the camera adopts a shaky point-of-

view shot as Renai inches down the hallway. She then enters the bedroom to find no trace of the mysterious child, closing the door behind her in relief. The camera pans left and right to show the room in its entirety, void of any visible supernatural entity, when Foster's rocking horse suddenly starts swaying on its own. She grabs it to stop its motion, our attention once again directed toward the right side of the frame, when the bedroom door swings open by itself at the left. She hears the boy laughing in the bedroom across the hall, where coma-induced Dalton rests in a hospital bed. Now concerned for the safety of her comatose son, she sees a pair of feet peeking out from the room's wardrobe. A consistent beeping is heard from Dalton's heart monitor as Renai approaches the wardrobe with her son's hockey stick, ready to attack this apparition she is unsure of. She moves back the fabric obscuring the pair of feet, the camera shakily cutting back and forth between her and the curtain. While our attention is fixed at the bottom half of the frame, the mysterious, spectral child bursts out from the top half of the wardrobe consisting the upper part of the frame. His face is grey and old, but he laughs in her face like a young boy, his clothes reminiscent of a Victorian child as he runs out of the room. Renai is left in fear, tears rolling down her face – though her family has moved houses, they have not escaped the wrath of this supernatural force (Figures 30 to 33).

This scene is pivotal to the film's plot, and simultaneously works to distinguish the ways in which its filmic language weaves together the space of normativity and the space of alterity. Where Renai represents the suburban enterprise of normal, everyday existence, the ghostly child emblemizes the realm of evil and alterity that complicates it, turning the home into a space of fear. Her initial movements throughout the multiple rooms of the house followed closely by the camera create a sense of harmonious flow, the domestic activities seamlessly integrated and unified until the boy's presence disturbs it, her movements becoming agitated and frantic. While

the audience is guided through the home space by the camera following Renai's actions, instructing us to pay attention to the areas of the frame she is focused on, the supernatural force deliberately circumvents her routine by forcefully and jarringly redirecting our attention at unexpected moments. It is at this point in the film that Renai realizes the evil spirits that had been haunting her family in her house have now latched onto them as a unit. Regardless of the house they may be living in, the supernatural realm will express itself through and amongst the architecture of the suburban house.

This sequence also reveals the logic of spatial representation in this film – namely, how the supernatural begins to threaten the suburban realm of comfort and stability. The camera follows Renai as she completes domestic tasks like tidying up, laundry, and taking out the trash – contributing to a rhythm of activity that constitutes an everyday suburban existence, a sense of normalcy that can easily be overlooked as a minute insignificance.¹²⁹ This scene is particular in that it immediately disrupts that rhythm by a supernatural intervention tearing through the fabric of the suburban experience. The spectre of the supernatural child interrupts her movements and forces her to realize the existence of a realm that could threaten her entire suburban world.

While the premise of these suburban rhythms disrupted by an incomprehensible force of alterity is primary, the more nuanced constituents of this effect must be parsed out. The film has up to this point established these two spaces as opposites in order to demonstrate their now collapsing distance, one progressively breaking through the other to change it fundamentally. This is achieved by a direct gesture toward the notion of temporality as previously established by Elizabeth Freeman. A distinct attention toward constructing a feeling of suburban temporality is present – time, in the space of the home, is represented as passing in a certain way. The scene

¹²⁹ Recall Bourdieu's notion of the *habitus* as a system of durable yet transposable dispositions produced by structures constituting a particular type of environment. This structuring of practices constitutes a particular type of environment. In this scene, Renai's domestic tasks constitute the environment of the suburban house.

opens with Renai playing a vinyl record, a piano based score with an optimistic beat that guides her through her following domestic tasks. This specific rhythm is reinforced by two encounters with the grandfather clock at the end of the hall, the second of which emboldens the sound of its consistent ticking. Finally, the notion of a suburban beat or rhythm is once more punctuated by the steady beeping of Dalton's monitor, right before Renai's climactic encounter with the supernatural child spectre.

Freeman's notion of *chrononormativity* outlines how the body is bound into socially meaningful configurations through temporal regulations.¹³⁰ These time-based mechanisms – a score, the passing of seconds, and the beat of a monitor – are represented in this scene to accompany the camera's meandering through suburban space as Renai engages in everyday, household activities. The socially meaningful configurations created here are those that reinforce suburban normalcy, represented in this scene by a mother caring for her children and the house. Freeman further suggests that the fragmentation of time or breaks within the consistency of a given temporality can expose how time itself binds a socius.¹³¹ This scene carefully positions the ghostly child as that which disrupts suburban temporality, breaking through its façade of security to incite fear and unease. The result of this supernatural intervention inherently exposes the temporality that constitutes normativity, and simultaneously positions the supernatural as that which threatens its integrity.

In addition to the child's role as a disruptor of normative temporality, it might also be seen as a rather didactic representation of Edelman's framing of the "Child" as that which substantiates a dominantly heterosexual telos of social order.¹³² This scene markedly includes the presence of two children, both of which are not alive. Dalton is in a comatose state, unresponsive

130. Freeman, *Time Binds*, 3.

131. Freeman, *Time Binds*, 3.

132. Edelman, *No Future*, 11.

in his bedroom while the ghostly child defies physics in the game he plays with Renai. It is in this way that the emblem of the Child is not fully present, or is represented as something fragmented, damaged, or ephemeral despite the existence of the nuclear, heterosexual couple. At this point in the film, the Graham family continues to plunge further into deterioration as Dalton's medical health sees no improvement while supernatural occurrences around the house increase. Such a gesture that emphasizes the frail presence of children points toward something aberrant or atypical, a queer positionality that counters the invocation of the Child in an attempt to challenge or disrupt the normativity that has been formed around it.

It is in this way that the methodology of the cut becomes apparent in this film. Recalling Matta-Clark's intervention into the structure of the home by physical means, a similar intervention makes itself present in the narrative of *Insidious*. Although less decisive, the cut is realized as an intrusion that is spectral, disorienting, and ultimately threatening toward the foundation of suburban normativity. An unknown entity enters the space of the home and changes it radically, no longer providing the comforting and nurturing environment that the home was meant to sustain. In this way, a mechanism privy to the cut introduces something of the outside to the inside, an unreal space of supernatural beings is superimposed onto the real space of the home. The home is accordingly positioned as the site in which this combination of forces takes place – a space where the notions of interiority and exteriority confront and grapple with each other.

Insidious asserts that the result of this confrontation is the demise of the Lambert family. The conclusion of the film ends rather tragically, as Josh returns from “the further” not as himself, but as a body possessed by a spirit that had been haunting him since childhood. In this way, the film offers a direct effect of the methodological cut – that the encounter between

normativity and alterity results in a marriage of the two forces that drastically changes the composition of the nuclear family, and therefore the suburban social space it perpetuates.

Insidious effectively sets in motion a questioning of the formation and perpetuation of suburban space, estranging the social relations it contains and creates as a result.

3.3 Filmic Mobilization of the Cut

The logic of the cut and its application to the medium of film must be elucidated by its difference in operation within the architectural structure in Matta-Clark's work. Where *Splitting* intervened into the physical edifice of a house, the cut in film, as it pertains to this thesis, operates at the level of spatial representation. The distinct manner in which the space of the home is represented in contemporary horror film creates a link to the concerns that Matta-Clark was engaging with, primarily through an intervention into a space to change its fundamental structure – an act that has been understood as a cut. Wan frames the space created by the structure of the house as the intersection where normative and ulterior space, natural and supernatural space, inside and outside space cross. I ultimately suggest that there is an imperative present in this film that forces these spaces to confront – similar to Matta-Clark's cut that brings the inside and the outside together – allowing their respective realms to meet and collide with one another.

The cut, distilled into a singular moment, is rather expanded in its field of implications for filmic analysis. To begin, this logic may be applied to the surface of the film, referring to a film strip that is itself split amongst thousands of motionless, still images, merely producing an

illusion of motion and the passage of time.¹³³ A film is produced by an amalgamation of cuts by this understanding, the film strip acts as a fragmented foundation of representation that becomes sutured together by a continuous motion. While this thought gestures toward an ontology of film as inherently constructed, amenable to multiple convincing tricks and editing techniques, my focus aims to situate the cut in relation to the creation of filmic space at the level of representation.

An analysis of space – one that is indebted to a Lefebvrian notion of space and its inherent productivity – is extremely suited to the medium of film. René Clair asserts: “If there is an aesthetics of the cinema ... it can be summarized in one word: ‘movement.’¹³⁴ As such, movement is integral to the ethos of film as a continuous stream of still images, an organized collection of thousands of cuts, as well as a record of objects and subjects that move within the frame. Mary Ann Doane additionally asserts that the synchronization of sound and moving image unique to film creates a special relationship between the body and the space it is represented in – “the phantasmic visual space which the film constructs is supplemented by techniques designed to spatialize the voice, to localize it, give it depth, and thus lend to the characters the consistency of the real.”¹³⁵ The medium of film, in its manifold proximities to the representation of reality through the marriage of image and sound, is therefore apt in tracing the formative process of spatial compositions, following their evolution and revealing active social relations in practice. Simultaneously, bringing attention to the role of movement in the constitution of space amplifies the destabilizing effect of Matta-Clark’s cut. As an act that disrupts the wholeness of the space of the home, one constituted by normative movements, the

133. Belton, *American Cinema / American Culture*, 6.

134. Kracauer, “Basic Concepts,” 149.

135. Doane, “The Voice in the Cinema,” 375.

cut reframes not only the physical structure of the house but the way in which it creates and perpetuates normative space.

Understanding filmic representations as documents of movement within space in this way, the conventions of the horror genre that are meant to incite fear and anxiety inherently problematize the representation of normative spaces and the social relations they contain. These films effectively challenge norms by simply placing these movements and spaces in relation to sources of fear, letting the work of association take viewers to disturbing conclusions. As Chris Dumas puts it, “horror films break down doors that are chained shut, disclose secrets that were thought permanently forgotten, open up containers that are meant to keep their contents forever hidden.”¹³⁶ This statement belies a primary impetus of the horror film – it complicates the notion that what is normal should stay normal. Fear is therefore generated by transforming that which is understood as conventional or quotidian into something unknown or strange, and this transformation is consequently registered as a threat to what was once normal.

Integrally linked to the concerns of horror film is the work of Sigmund Freud in the field of psychoanalysis. Several components of Freud’s theorizations can be used to analyze horror film both at the level of style and narrative content. For the concerns of this thesis which centers on the space of the home as one of normativity, the uncanny is the most prevalent operation that should be elucidated upon. The uncanny is defined by Freud as the “class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar.”¹³⁷ Deriving from the German *unheimlich*, it stands in opposition to *heimlich*, meaning “familiar,” “native,” or “belonging to the home.”¹³⁸ Freud adds that *heimlich* belongs to two sets of ideas – one including the familiar,

136. Dumas, “Horror and Psychoanalysis,” 21-22.

137. Freud, “The Uncanny,” 219-220.

138. Freud, “The Uncanny,” 220.

and another that addresses what is concealed and kept out of sight.¹³⁹ This notion of the uncanny finds resonance with Dumas' analysis of the horror genre – namely that the uncanny encompasses “everything that ought to have remained hidden and secret [which] has become visible.”¹⁴⁰ A dualistic operation is therefore integral to the uncanny and its existence in horror film. It hovers between the poles of familiarity and unfamiliarity, normativity and alterity, easily switching back and forth between the two.

Responding to Ernst Jentsch's discussion of uncanny themes found in E. T. A. Hoffman's “The Sandman,” Freud concludes that the themes are all concerned with the phenomenon of the double – in which there is “a doubling, dividing, and interchanging of the self.”¹⁴¹ The double is an integral component to uncanniness, dating back to an early mental stage which has since been surmounted.¹⁴² At this early moment, the first instance of what has been doubled appeared and felt friendlier, but now its re-emergence as a double has become a thing of terror. Having undergone the process of repression after the initial appearance, the re-emergence of this double produces an uncanny sensation precisely because it had been something familiar and old-established, which has now become alienated.¹⁴³ In this way, the logic of the double and its inherent destabilizing effect offers an aesthetic paradigm through which the dual representation of the house in *Insidious* can be viewed.

Both the normative state of the house and its ulterior version in “the further” exemplify Freud's double – the former existing as the friendlier aspect, prior to repression, while the latter is that which has become terrifying, re-emerging as a double that is now alienated and estranged. This is exacerbated by several filmic and representational techniques. At the onset of the film,

139. Freud, “The Uncanny,” 225.

140. Freud, “The Uncanny,” 222-223.

141. Freud, “The Uncanny,” 234.

142. Freud, “The Uncanny,” 236.

143. Freud, “The Uncanny,” 244.

we are introduced to the space of the house as comforting, warm, and inviting when we meet Renai through slow camera movements, soothing colours in the mise-en-scène, and a gentle score. Reaching the film's climax and end, we encounter its articulation in "the further," the same house rendered empty, dark, and cold shown through jarring camera movements, and tense, limited framing. A doubled logic of representation as such extends to the socio-economic climate that I argue the film addresses as well. In the American context rife with tension surrounding homeownership, the ideals of comfort and security attributed to the home can arguably exist as that which has returned as a source of anxiety – the normative space that the home used to collectively represent is now more akin to its uncanny double in "the further." The very real fears and anxieties that have seeped into the collective perception of American housing have found themselves represented on screen through the doubled representation of the house in this film.

The integral existence of the double in *Insidious* ultimately provides the means through which the methodological cut can be further understood. Where Matta-Clark used the logic of the cut to transform the suburban house from its prior conception as a space of insularity and safety into something unusable, now merely a de-purposed object, Wan's representation of the house can be seen to be doing something similar. In its progressive estrangement from the Lambert family, the logic of the cut slowly turns the normative space of the house into its darker double in "the further," a space that is now foreign and no longer serving the purpose that the house once did. The cut is therefore the process that exposes the doubled representation of the house, a mechanism that gradually destabilizes the notions of comfort, safety, and nurturing that had been attributed to the home, until reaching its ultimate point of terror and chaos.

While operating primarily through representational means, *Insidious* also mobilizes the methodology of the cut through its narrative focus on the house and the family it contains – a

nuclear social arrangement that is eventually dissolved by a supernatural threat. Evil specters in this film are not only represented as distinct “others,” alienated from the family and the space of normativity that is suburbia – they are more importantly harbingers of a completely ulterior space that exists simultaneously alongside and through the space of normativity. The cut therefore does not only reveal the doubled representation of the house where these two spaces exist within one physical structure, but also the progressive intertwining of these two spaces throughout the narrative, exposing the sutures and tears within the fabric of its initial, normative representation through which ulterior beings begin to creep in.

It is through this comingling of both spaces that a new space is born, another *tabula rasa* that the film gestures toward. While the story concludes with the ultimate obfuscation of the nuclear family, suggested by the final scene in which Josh returns from “the further” to the home as a demon in disguise, the clean slate that emerges from the shattered social structure becomes clear. Now that these two spaces have been intertwined, what comes after the destroyed nuclear family and the now altered space of normativity? This site of potential, reminiscent of Matta-Clark’s *Splitting* after the cut took place, has become a space to be reclaimed, a filmic iteration of that which has reached its representational exhaustion, ready for something new to take its place. *Insidious* therefore ultimately suggests a clean slate upon which a new normativity can be posited.

Conclusion

The cut, as I have thus far explored, can be used as a methodological tool to expand upon the manifold techniques used in horror film as an expression of disdain toward the continued volatility of American housing. While actively portraying this critical stance, this thesis has aimed to demonstrate the disruptive potential that the cut also elucidates – a split site upon which the normative components of suburban space can be newly reframed and re-perceived. In this way, the organization of this project has perhaps most obviously been organized chronologically, having begun in the sixties and ending in the 2010s. Simultaneously however, the structure can be seen as organized by works that express violence toward the representation of suburban space in increasing order of intensity. Starting with a general pessimism toward standardization in building practices with *Homes for America*, a heavier and more substantial attack was made on the house and its surrounding enterprise with *Splitting*, which finally culminated in a didactic representation of the failure of the suburban nuclear family in *Insidious*. This triad of works, composing a network of cultural production steeped in the suburban anxieties of the collective American psyche, offer a steadily growing sense of vitriol toward the phenomenon, and a clear call for something new to take its place.

As suburbia had quickly become associated with the formation of normativity after World War II, I have shown that its development was steadily problematized throughout the following decades of cultural production. Insisting upon a dismantling of normativity as such, the centralization of the white, heterosexual middle-class was however difficult to evade – these works could not posit a solid, alternative solution for the future. Graham's *Homes for America* was acclaimed for its revelation of an industrialized logic in a seemingly innocent development project, while Matta-Clark's *Splitting* had been celebrated for creating the potential to reclaim

the space of the suburban house entirely. Similarly, Wan's *Insidious* radically concludes with the demise of the heterosexual family at the hands of a supernatural force. These works are all arguably radical and subversive by their unique means, but fail to hint toward what comes next – the possibility is ostensibly left open. What is the new normativity? What is the new nuclear family? What is a future now that these representations have been and continue to be destabilized?

These questions recall once again the work of Edelman, at the same time revealing a queer impetus underlying the basis of my entire inquiry. Edelman argues that the queer subject dispossesses the social order on which it rests and disrupts the consistent reality of the social.¹⁴⁴ Queerness effectively brings attention to the fantasies that are structurally necessary in upholding the dominant order, including the invocation of the Child as a means to futurity, and exposes them as mere illusions.¹⁴⁵ This notion ultimately belies the destabilizing positionality that the queer subject possesses, one that is akin to the logic of the cut I have so far elucidated. In the destruction of space by a split representation, the cut is inherently queer by its revelation of the illusion of safety given to the nuclear family, and the suburban enterprise as a whole by extension.

In placing queerness, the cut, and/or ulterior space as outside of the illusion that is the normative structure, a potential for a radical deconstruction begins to emerge. Decentralizing the notion of normativity as it has been established with the suburban house is the first step to eliminating the pillars that have upheld the binary between normative and ulterior – as Edelman suggests, “queerness should and must redefine such notions as “civil order” through a rupturing

144. Edelman, *No Future*, 6.

145. Edelman, *No Future*, 6.

of our foundational faith in the reproduction of futurity.”¹⁴⁶ The suburban house, the nuclear family, and the myth of normativity must be broken down before we can begin formulating more inclusive structures.

It is in this way that the works I have discussed resist normative articulations and dissolve dominant structures as if possessing a queer imperative. Though what comes next is unclear, the script of the suburbs is effectively challenged by these three artists, amongst many others. The deep-seated notions of normativity have seen their initial attempt at dissolution within the suburban gothic subgenre, gaining in popularity throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. As part of my argument has shown however, the problem of the suburbs has never been reconciled, and instead has become more nuanced, more pernicious, and irresolutely complex. This growing, real-life claustrophobia can never be fully relieved – though horror protagonists are often able to escape their haunted house by the end of their narratives, they are unable to evade the wrath of the suburbs and its inherent connection to class hierarchization and oppression.

The importance of this notion lies in the continuing work that can be done in this field of research. While answers are not necessarily provided and perhaps never can be, the changing means in structuring its questions brings us closer to the complex critical moves these works are making. For example, further research may be pursued on the so-called “Conjuring Universe,” a network of films, most of which are directed by Wan, that have grown from *Insidious* and its three sequels. Including the two (soon to be three) installments of *The Conjuring* as well as the three installments of *Annabelle*, these films contribute to the haunted suburban house framework and engage with spatial representations that adhere to what I have so far outlined. Similarly, two highly acclaimed films from Ari Aster, *Hereditary* (2018) and *Midsommar* (2019), offer unique

146. Edelman, *No Future*, 17.

insights into the idea of the split representation of the house, heavily privileging the question of home space and architecture throughout their narratives and mise-en-scène. These films present yet another avenue of development for this realm of analysis and proof of an ongoing contestation with this site of representation.

It may also be of worth to return to other works of art grappling with postwar housing developments while adhering to this methodology. As explored throughout this thesis, the logic of the cut is not exclusive to contemporary horror film, as it finds its roots through works of art that engage with the space of the home and its destabilization. Using the cut to reappraise works such as Ken Lum's *Vancouver Especially* from 2015 for example can assist in illuminating some of the components of estrangement that the work deploys, as well as expand the scope of the critique against housing to an international scale. *Vancouver Especially* is a play on the "Vancouver Special" architectural style of homes that was popularized from 1965 to 1985, which sought to provide the suburbanized means through which immigrants to Canada could settle into their new lives.¹⁴⁷ Adhering to a production budget of \$45,000 – comparable to the value of the Vancouver Special in 1973 – the work was intended to demonstrate what kind of house \$45,000 could buy in Vancouver today. The result was so small however, that it would go unnoticed by most. Lum therefore increased its size by eight, the final scale existing as a 1:3 replica of its original size from the seventies.

The cut is perhaps less didactic in *Vancouver Especially* when compared to a work like *Splitting*. Without a decisive slice through the façade of a house, Lum enacts something of a cut through scaling down his representation of home space, making it into a space that is uncannily small, inaccessible, and unfamiliar in order to widen the gap between contemporary viewers and

147. 221A, "Vancouver Especially (A Vancouver Special Scaled to Its Property Value in 1973, Then Increased by 8 Fold)."

the postwar dream of owning a home. The cut is therefore realized through an ostensible manipulation of space, an estrangement in scale that turns the home into an object of simultaneous fascination and alienation. *Vancouver Especially* is another example that demonstrates a contemporary critical engagement with the postwar concept of suburbia – one that has expanded its reach from the American context and adapted to the cultural and physical geography of Western Canada.

In an effort to form a new and more complex perspective through which works negotiating with the space of the home may be viewed, this thesis has not claimed to encourage a revisionist stance in its retroactive application of a new methodology. Rather, I have pointed toward the possibility that a collection of works in the postwar and contemporary period, including those at an international scale, are contending with parallel concerns surrounding the home and normativity that have not and may never see resolution. It is in this way that a queer lens has provided unique insights into current artistic and filmic production, as well as the postwar works that are linked to them. This is not to say that artists in the sixties and seventies were aware of and consciously mobilizing queer ideas per se, but instead to suggest that the collective effort to destabilize spaces of normativity is akin to queer subjectivity. Positioning this triad of work as such and opening up the possibility for others, both new and old, to join the amalgam, assists in the development of a critical awareness and understanding of cultural products that effectively challenge normativity.

While the tensions surrounding the suburbs have evolved from their initial iteration, the effect they have had on the collective psyche has been long-lasting and has seen nothing close to reconciliation. It is difficult to imagine any conception of Western homeliness without some reference to the ideals perpetuated in the postwar period. Though the notion of normativity now

attempts to accommodate shifting meanings and definitions, slowly expanding its scope to include previously excluded minority groups, the underlying structure of suburban normativity and its ideals have remained relatively the same, which has contributed to a socio-economic complexity that continuously enforces and perpetuates the same exclusivity. This has bolstered the existence of suburbia as a pervasive and evocative setting, in which a variety of cultural production continues to subvert, challenge, and destabilize any rigidification of a normative model. The critical power of horror film, emboldened by the strides made in postwar art, reminds us to question anything that has been deemed normal, and to consider that a wealth of disruptive forces may be residing just beneath, behind, or above the façade, ready to intervene at any moment.

Figures

Figure 1. This image has been removed due to copyright restrictions. Dan Graham, *Homes for America*, 1966-67. <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/105513>.

Figure 2. This image has been removed due to copyright restrictions. Gordon Matta-Clark, *Splitting*, 1974. <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/114408>.

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Figure 9. This image has been removed due to copyright restrictions. *Insidious*, FilmDistrict, 2010. In this image, the front of the Lambert's suburban home is shown in "the further," lit by an unknown blue light with smoke billowing around it. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1591095/>.

Figure 10. This image has been removed due to copyright restrictions. *Insidious*, FilmDistrict, 2010. In this image, Josh (Patrick Wilson) stands up in his living room and stares at his unconscious body being spoken to by Elise (Lin Shaye). <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1591095/>.

Figure 11. This image has been removed due to copyright restrictions. *Insidious*, FilmDistrict, 2010. In this image, Josh (Patrick Wilson) navigates "the further" with a blue lantern. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1591095/>.

Figure 12. This image has been removed due to copyright restrictions. *Insidious*, FilmDistrict, 2010. In this image, Josh encounters a deceased family that lived in his home decades before him and his family while navigating "the further." <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1591095/>.

Figure 13. This image has been removed due to copyright restrictions. William Peter Blatty, *The Exorcist*, Warner Bros Pictures, 1973. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0070047/>.

Figure 14. This image has been removed due to copyright restrictions. John Carpenter, *Halloween*, Compass International Pictures, 1978. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0077651/>.

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Figure 19. This image has been removed due to copyright restrictions. *Insidious*, FilmDistrict, 2010. In this image, the outside of the Lambert's house is shown in daylight. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1591095/>.

Figure 20. This image has been removed due to copyright restrictions. *Insidious*, FilmDistrict, 2010. In this image, Renai (Rose Byrne) is playing piano in her house.

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Figure 21. This image has been removed due to copyright restrictions. *Insidious*, FilmDistrict, 2010. In this image, a closeup shot of Renai at her piano is shown with baby monitor in the foreground.

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Figure 22. This image has been removed due to copyright restrictions. *Insidious*, FilmDistrict, 2010. In this image, Josh and Renai kiss goodbye before he enters “the further.”

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Figure 23. This image has been removed due to copyright restrictions. *Insidious*, FilmDistrict, 2010. In this image, Josh is sitting in a living room chair awaiting his entrance into “the further.”

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Figure 24. This image has been removed due to copyright restrictions. *Insidious*, FilmDistrict, 2010. In this image, Elise starts a metronome. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1591095/>.

Figure 25. This image has been removed due to copyright restrictions. *Insidious*, FilmDistrict, 2010. In this image, Josh opens his eyes in disbelief. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1591095/>.

Figure 26. This image has been removed due to copyright restrictions. *Insidious*, FilmDistrict, 2010. In this image, Josh has just entered “the further.” <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1591095/>.

Figure 27. This image has been removed due to copyright restrictions. *Insidious*, FilmDistrict, 2010. In this image, Renai puts a record on a turntable and walks down a hallway in her new house. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1591095/>.

Figure 28. This image has been removed due to copyright restrictions. *Insidious*, FilmDistrict, 2010. In this image, Renai walks through the laundry room and passes by a spectral figure of a boy. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1591095/>.

Figure 29. This image has been removed due to copyright restrictions. *Insidious*, FilmDistrict, 2010. In this image, Renai notices the boy in the living room through an open window. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1591095/>.

Figure 30. This image has been removed due to copyright restrictions. *Insidious*, FilmDistrict, 2010. In this image, Renai notices the kitchen door closing by itself as the boy runs behind her through the living room. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1591095/>.

Figure 31. This image has been removed due to copyright restrictions. *Insidious*, FilmDistrict, 2010. In this image, Renai makes eye contact with the boy at the end of the hall by the grandfather clock. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1591095/>.

Figure 32. This image has been removed due to copyright restrictions. *Insidious*, FilmDistrict, 2010. In this image, Renai attempts to protect herself from the unknown entity with a hockey stick. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1591095/>.

Figure 33. This image has been removed due to copyright restrictions. *Insidious*, FilmDistrict, 2010. In this image, Renai is frightened by the boy's sudden appearance from the top of the wardrobe. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1591095/>.

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