

**ON AMERICAN SUBURBIA & PRUITT-IGOE:
TELEVISION AND THE POLITICS OF CARE
IN AMERICAN POSTWAR CITY / SOBRE LOS
SUBURBIOS ESTADOUNIDENSES Y PRUITT-IGOE:
LA TELEVISIÓN Y LA POLÍTICA DE CUIDADOS EN
LA CIUDAD ESTADOUNIDENSE DE POSGUERRA /
SOBRE OS SUBÚRBIOS DOS EUA E A PRUITT-IGOE:
A TELEVISÃO E A POLÍTICA DE CUIDADOS NA
CIDADE AMERICANA DO PÓS-GUERRA**

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at addressing the interplay between American Suburbia and Pruitt-Igoe-like projects through the lens of television representations while accessing their repercussions on city development regulations, gender and care. These concomitant urban models are two distinct examples of the American City, built from scratch at the height of Modernity and that concurs with the dissemination and banalization of television.

Family values, domestic stereotypes, gender roles and segregation will be considered, while simultaneously, tackling the role of television in the implementation of media rhetoric that underlies the way these massive housing projects were designed, understood, and consequently, inhabited.

The suburbanization movement in postwar America symbolized the pursuit of the American Dream, emphasizing nuclear families, homeownership, and the construct of the suburban housewife. Concurrently, the Pruitt-Igoe housing project in St. Louis, Missouri, emerged as a symbol of failed urban planning projects whose consequences were to be predominantly faced by

low-income., African-American residents. These contrasting narratives provide the backdrop for framing the politics of care and gender relations in a paradigm-shifting America.

While exploring housing policies, these two urban development models will be examined with a focus on the implementation of specific media narratives that shaped the social and cultural fabric of American postwar cities. At the same time, this discussion will be held from the vantage point of critical distance to review previous failures and understand that television can also be a common and legitimate platform to air counter-narratives that can build more balanced and inclusive urban models.

Keywords: American Suburbia, Pruitt-Igoe, Television, Gender, Care.

RESUMEN

El presente estudio pretende abordar la interacción entre el suburbio americano y el complejo Pruitt-Igoe a través de las representaciones televisivas, abordando simultáneamente sus repercusiones en la ciudad, concretamente en lo que respecta a las cuestiones de género y cuidado. Estos modelos urbanos son contemporáneos y ambos son ejemplos distintivos de la Ciudad Americana, construida desde cero en plena Modernidad coincidiendo con la difusión y banalización de la televisión.

Se examinarán los valores familiares, los estereotipos domésticos, los roles de género y la segregación, al tiempo que se abordará el papel de la televisión en la aplicación de la retórica mediática que subyace a la forma en que estos proyectos de vivienda a gran escala fueron concebidos, entendidos y, en consecuencia, habitados.

El movimiento de suburbanización en la América de posguerra simbolizó la búsqueda del sueño americano, destacando las familias nucleares, la propiedad de la vivienda y la construcción del ama de casa suburbana. Al mismo tiempo, el proyecto de viviendas Pruitt-Igoe de San Luis (Misuri) devino un fracaso con el tiempo del diseño urbano moderno, cuyas consecuencias sufrieron sobre todo los residentes afroamericanos en condiciones económicas muy desfavorecidas. Estos relatos contrapuestos sirven de telón de fondo para enmarcar la política de los cuidados y las relaciones de género en una América que cambia de paradigma.

Al explorar la política de vivienda, se examinarán estos dos modelos de desarrollo urbano centrándose en la aplicación de narrativas mediáticas específicas que han conformado el tejido social y cultural de las ciudades estadounidenses de posguerra. Simultáneamente, esta discusión se llevará a cabo desde un punto de vista de distancia crítica para revisar los fracasos anteriores y comprender que la televisión también puede ser una plataforma común y legítima para transmitir contra-narrativas que puedan construir modelos urbanos más equilibrados e inclusivos.

Palabras clave: American Suburbia, Pruitt-Igoe, Televisión, Género, Cuidado.

RESUMO

O presente estudo pretende abordar a interação entre o Subúrbio Americano e o complexo de Pruitt-Igoe através de representações televisivas, abordando, simultaneamente, as suas repercussões

na Cidade, nomeadamente no que respeita a questões de género e de cuidados. Estes modelos urbanos são contemporâneos e ambos são exemplos distintos da Cidade Americana, construída de raiz no auge da Modernidade coincidindo com a disseminação e banalização da televisão.

Valores familiares, estereótipos domésticos, papéis de género e segregação serão considerados, abordando-se simultaneamente, o papel da televisão na implementação da retórica mediática subjacente à forma como estes projectos habitacionais de grande-escala foram concebidos, entendidos e, conseqüentemente, habitados.

O movimento de suburbanização da América do pós-guerra simbolizou a busca do Sonho Americano, evidenciando as famílias nucleares, as casas próprias e a construção da dona de casa suburbana. Simultaneamente, o projecto habitacional Pruitt-Igoe em St. Louis, Missouri, surgiu como símbolo de projecto urbano moderno falhado, com as conseqüências a serem predominantemente enfrentadas por residentes afro-americanos em condições económicas muito desfavorecidas. Estas narrativas contrastantes fornecem o pano de fundo para enquadrar a política de cuidados e as relações de género numa América em mudança de paradigma.

Ao explorar as políticas de habitação, estes dois modelos de desenvolvimento urbano serão examinados com o foco na implementação de narrativas mediáticas específicas que moldaram o tecido social e cultural das cidades americanas do pós-guerra. Ao mesmo tempo, esta discussão será realizada a partir de um ponto de vista de distância crítica para rever os fracassos anteriores e compreender que a televisão também pode ser uma plataforma comum e legítima para transmitir contra-narrativas que podem construir modelos urbanos mais equilibrados e inclusivos.

Palavras-chave: Subúrbio americano, Pruitt-Igoe, Televisão, Género, Cuidado.

1. INTRODUCTION

America's postwar period witnessed profound social and cultural transformations, particularly in relation to suburbanization and reshaping of the urban landscape. This article focuses on two paradigmatic cases of modern housing projects implemented in the post-war period in the United States, namely American Suburbia and Pruitt-Igoe. Both were widely broadcasted on television, although for very different reasons. Through television image and the contact that both urban projects had with media representations, we intend to approach not only the dynamics of care and gender to which both were exposed to, but also to access how television device has helped to implement narratives, policies and ways of inhabiting in these city models.

A significant aspect of this era was the happy portrayal of suburban middle-class life, driven by gender roles, family values and instigated by new logics of consumption. In addition, the rise and fall of the Pruitt-Igoe housing project in St. Louis, Missouri, became a symbol of the challenges faced by low-income urban communities during this period. Both constitute in different ways, examples of urban social segregation.

The spread of the American suburb and the implementation of Pruitt-Igoe are contemporary processes and both are new housing formulas framed in large-scale urban plans in post-war America. Although American Suburbia is a category rather than a concrete project and Pruitt-Igoe

complex a particular experiment, both were city models from the same period, with very definite goals and for very specific communities. The success of one model and the failure of the other are deeply rooted in issues of politics and care and on the basis of how these models were planned. Hence the relevance of analyzing the intersections between the American suburban ideal and the Pruitt-Igoe project is to approach the influence of the media in shaping public perception and policy decisions.

This exploration aims to understand the complex relationship between television and the logic of care and gender roles in American city during this period of transformation. By understanding the representations and discourses propagated through media culture, insights can be gained into the attitudes and social values that influenced post-war America, as well as the lasting impact of these dynamics on today's urban landscapes.

2. METHOD/DISCUSSION

Postwar culture balanced (...) contradictory ideals of privatization and community involvement through its fascination with the new electrical space. That television provided.
Lynn Spigel Lynn Spigel (2001, 33)

The post-war American city represents a change in the urban paradigm. Caused by the rise of the American middle class and mobility dynamics due to new automobile-based patterns, a new configuration of the American urban landscape was designed from the 40s and 50s onwards. These changes were accompanied by the rise of television, the first trivialized, private and purchasable screen.

American urbanism would start to feel the consequences of the migration of the principles and doctrines of the Bauhaus School materialized in a Modern Movement that dominated American architecture of that period, named *International Style*. The urban renewal of the city, worn out by the industrial model, was based on the total destruction of urban and devitalised areas, followed by the construction of massive plans with aspirations to the Modern city - new, efficient and ordered. The International Style was a breath of newness and optimism, as well as a boost for the financial, technological and urban boom that was to come. International Style's sobriety proliferated in the midst of American extravagance from the 1950s onwards. Paradoxically, the purist, functionalist, monolithic and orthogonal architecture of the Bauhaus School framed the progressive and pragmatic nature of American society at the time. Modern Spirit made the plea for the 'new', not only because destroying and building anew was more profitable, but also because the 'new' was always and intrinsically better than the 'old'. The 'new' also had the capacity to cleanse the past, building a more dignified present and sanitising possible futures. And this was the framework in which Pruitt Igoe was planned and built:

It was thought of as a solution. A cure for the disease. Pruitt Igoe would rise above the piloted slum. Leaving its residents out of poverty. They would prosper. The city would prosper. Everything would be different. (Freidrichs 2012, unpaginated)

Designed by Minoru Yamasaki in 1950, the Pruitt Igoe housing complex was created under the United States Housing Act of 1949, which made funds directly available to cities for slum clearance, urban redevelopment, and public housing (Bristol 1991, 163). It was built in the northern part of the city of St Louis, Missouri, to address the growing and deteriorating clandestine and unsanitary housing stock located on the industrial edge of the city and primarily occupied by very low-income African American families. The large-scale Modern project comprised 2870 flats spread over 33 buildings, each 11 storeys high, and was completed in 1955. Occupied by low-income families for over a decade, by the late 1960s Pruitt-Igoe was in deep decay and turned into a den of crime, violence, vandalism. Bristol refers that “*Few Architectural Images are more powerful than the Spectacle of the Pruitt-Igoe public housing project crashing to the ground.*” (Bristol 1991, 163)

The demolition of the Pruitt-Igoe complex has become iconic and almost unanimously, the symbol of the failure of modern architecture. The 15th of July 1972's implosion was filmed and widely televised. The images showed a once-grand housing complex being reduced to rubble in a matter of seconds. This broadcasting demolition may not only have celebrated the end of the Modern Movement but may, in fact, have instituted this end. Added to the impact on public opinion about this type of urban renewal and public housing is the discourse of the emerging post-modernity which conventionally marks the Modernist failure. These images confirmed and illustrated the dismantling of the desired modern idea of ‘unity’ - pragmatic, rational, scientific and moral: “Modern Architecture died in St. Louis, Missouri in July 15, 1972 at 3.32pm [...] when the infamous Pruit-Igoe scheme, or rather several of its slab blocks, were given the final ‘coup de grace’ by dynamite” (Jencks 1991, 23).

The reasons for the decline are, however, complex, diverse and debatable. Charles Jencks attributed the functionalist exhaustion of the Modern City to the orthodoxy of architecture and the imposing spirit of Modernist urbanism, where a Cartesian and unequivocal zoning between public vs. private would define a rationalist and binary vision designing what the city should ideally be, rather than what it actually was:

It consisted of elegant slab blocks fourteen storeys high with rational ‘streets in the air’ (which were safe from cars, but as it turned out, not safe from crime); ‘sun, space and greenery’, which Le Corbusier called the ‘three essential joys of urbanism’ (instead of conventional streets, gardens and semi-private space, which he banished). It had a separation of pedestrian and vehicular traffic, the provision of play space, and local amenities such as laundries, creches and gossip centers – all rational substitutes for traditional patterns. [...] Good form was to good content, or at least good conduct; the intelligent planning of abstracts space was to promote healthy behaviour. (Jencks 1991, 23-24)

Along with this clearance idea of urban renewal and aiming at healthy behaviour was a whole set of economic policies that supported the architectural and social project. Dismantling slums and building large housing complexes in their place was a formula that instigated business interests and building trades.

Clearance allowance was profitable for re-development. Construction met lucrative building contracts and jobs. And so, the law was written, and the slums were cleared,

the towers built and valuable land re-developed. All federal funding. But the enemies of public housing had their say as well: No federal funding for operation and maintenance. (Freidrichs 2012, unpaginated)

First residents' testimonies to move into the complex describe buildings that were always clean and constantly maintained, with a range of services and equipment (lifts, laundry, playgrounds and gardens).

The same system that planned the project wanted to guarantee its construction and a holistic operation based on strict social policies, thought out and anticipated by the welfare state to be followed strictly by the residents. The total disengagement of federal funds for the maintenance and care of the housing complex, after its construction, left the buildings dependent, basically, on the income of its tenants.

Promoters, managers, social workers and local authorities did not contemplate the real consequences of the project being totally dependent on the very low-income residents to make all essential repairs and keep the architectural, programmatic and structural complexity of the buildings and their equipment operational.

Considering that Pruitt-Igoe was a model of public housing like intended to be replicated, it is notable how economic policies impacted on its operation. Unlike American Suburbia, which was designed for the cis-white-middle-class, the public housing model that Pruitt-Igoe intended to implement was only profitable as a business of redevelopment and construction. The communities that would inhabit these complexes were not profitable. And this aspect has repercussions on the way both models were mediated and made visible on television.

The Project came increasingly to be inhabited by the poorest segment of the black population: primarily female heads of households dependent on public assistance. These demographic shifts and economic pressures resulted in chronic neglected of maintenance and mechanical breakdown. (Bristol 1991, 166)

The main cause of the buildings' demise was the lack of care for the buildings and the people who inhabited them. According to Berenice Fisher and Joan Tronto's definition of care: "On the most general level we suggest that caring be viewed as a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web." (Krasny 2019, p.33) In this framework, promoters, Welfare State and City Council did not provide adequate maintenance and security, and residents were often left to deal with these issues on their own. In Robert Fishman's words in the "Pruit-Igoe Myth" documentary, "In this very basic way, I think the public sector failed the people who were living in these buildings." (Freidrichs 2012, unpaginated)

Besides the constructive decay of the buildings, social policies ended up determining a highly segregated population from the racial, economic and gender point of view, which contributed to a hostile and irreparable experience. Rigid control and surveillance interventions with recourse to assiduous visits by inspectors and social workers have broken links and inter-dependence dynamics, economies of sharing and, at the limit, of belonging: "The residents did not feel that these spaces 'belonged' to them and so made no effort to maintain or police them." (Bristol 1991, 167)

In fact, there was a kind of mimicking of the residents themselves regarding the lack of responsibility of the entities and the State. Suddenly, those houses were under nobody's care. And the lack of care seems to be at the real origin of Pruitt-Igoe's decline. Women were often the primary caregivers due to the coercive absence of men. At the basis of these welfare formulas was the implicit punishment and guilt of these individuals for their own condition of poverty. Jacquelyn Williams, a former Pruitt-Igoe resident mentions that:

Before we move in to Pruitt-Igoe, the welfare department came to our home. They talked with my mother about moving in to the housing project, but the stipulation was that my father could not be with us. They would put us into the housing project only if he left the state. My mother and father discussed it and they decided that it was best for the twelve children. For the father to leave the home. (Freidrichs 2012, unpaginated)

The housing policies applied to the complex defined the resettlement of low-income population based on a forced segregation of gender and age, privileging the occupation of the fractions by single mothers and their children. According to Candace Borders, disadvantaged women/mothers and ADC (Aid to Dependent Children) recipients were forbidden to live with men or their husbands, allegedly because of their reproductive irresponsibility. "Policymakers assumed that if men were in the home, poor women on welfare would inevitably have more children and cost taxpayers more money. So, by 1959, women headed the majority of households in Pruitt-Igoe" (Borders 2017, unpaginated)

There were even officials from the welfare department responsible for making periodic visits to the homes of these women and their children and scrutinizing whether there were men in these homes. The policy of surveillance not only magnified the invisibility and isolation of these women - black, mothers, single and dependent on state subsidies - from the public domain, but also promoted their oppressive relationship with domestic life, enhancing a coercive incarceration and brutal stigmatization. "This form of state surveillance on the private lives of poor women defined the receipt of welfare as a waiver of privacy." (Borders 2017, unpaginated)

Family as an institution was instrumentalized. The abusive dismantling of nuclear families inhabiting the slums demonstrates that family values were not universal. According to Sophie Lewis, the family is the reason why you go to work, why you have to work and why you can go to work (Lewis 2022, 04). Being at the social base of the capitalist system, family structure constitutes, in essence, the privatized Care formula which makes society function as we know it. *Family* allows for the automatic allocation of roles that enable the "[...] economic assumption that behind every "breadwinner", there is a private someone (or someones) worth being exploited for, notably, with the man (or husband) being seen as the breadwinner and the woman (or wife) as the one who takes Care and responsibility for the housework and the lives of the "non-workers, including the ill, the elderly and the children". (Lewis 2022, 05)

But low-income families were not profitable. Therefore, on the assumption that they were unable to look after themselves and their children without state help, rather, than providing support and resources to help families stay together, a policy was implemented designed to break up families and remove children from their homes.

The family's function is to replace welfare and to guarantee debtors. Masquerading as a choice, creation, and desire of individuals, the family is method for cheaply arranging the reproduction of the nation's labor power and securing debt repayments. (Lewis 2022, 07)

It is therefore confirmed that this segregation is convenient both for the most privileged part of the system but also to the underprivileged populations that are supposedly situated at the bottom of this "hierarchy". In Elke Krasny's words, "The politics of gender and of race have defined the history of care". (Krasny 2019, 34)

By placing these women at the service of the system, a form of incarceration of caregivers is fostered, which simultaneously punishes them for it (for being caregivers). By isolating them in reproductive and caregiving labor removing them from the public sphere, as well as their own precarity, systemic poverty is perpetuated. Placing this model at the antipodes of what Davina Cooper called the *Caring State*:

[T]he caring state is not vertical, top-down, disciplinary or coercive one (...). A caring state necessarily works in the vein of social justice rather than criminal justice, learning the lessons of abolitionism feminism to build supportive communities rather than privatized systems of incarceration. (...) collectively resourced public services produce greater satisfaction than profit-seeking (...). They significantly reduce inequality and secure broader solidarity and support, whatever the tensions they might also generate. (The Care Collective 2020, 64-65)

In this context, it is relevant to mention the role of the politics of representation in the implementation of effective rights, conditions and realities, as well as the logic of Care (or the lack of them) for the communities living in these new housing complexes. The emergence of television, simultaneous with the massive urban and housing development that the American postwar period has witnessed, has been central to this America that was being designed. Both influenced and propagated each other. Lynn Spiegel states that the American standardization of the suburbs, coupled with television, fosters and enforces social practices and cultural fantasies of the emerging suburban class:

Television and suburbs are both engineered spaces, designed and planned by people who are engaged in giving material reality to wider cultural belief systems. In addition, media and suburbs are sites where meanings are produced and created; they are spaces (whether material or electronic) in which people make sense of their social relationship to each other, their communities, their nation, and the world at large. (Spiegel 2001, 15)

Television changed a whole set of *domestic dynamics* by conveying an imaginary of "family", and placing these family ideals at the center of the television stage, while, and at the same time, making the family its most significant spectator. Television constitutes therefore the first trivialized, private and purchasable screen, just like the suburban house. Consumers became indispensable actors in this dynamic, which allows us to understand which roles were pre-determined and disseminated through this stage of domesticity.

For the white middle-class nuclear family, the emphasis on family values and gender roles was portrayed through advertising or television series, for example, in a way that Beatriz Colomina called “aggressively happy” (Colomina 2006, 12). These representations reflected, above all, the cultural norms and expectations of its time, whilst not necessarily representing the diversity and complexity of American families and gender roles during the 1950s. The performative exaggeration and the over-expressive interpretation of family and domestic dynamics demonstrate a certain self-consciousness of the tutorial responsibility that these shows had for their target audience.

[E]arly sitcoms typically depicted the family as a theatre troupe rather than as a “real” family. These situation comedies often reflected back on their own theatricality, self-consciously suggesting that family life itself was nothing but a middle-class social convention in which people acted out certain roles for each other. Situation comedies served in part to express anxieties about middle-class family life even as they worked to reinforce that lifestyle by their obsessive representation of it. (Spigel 1992, 10)

Television representations intersected with the politics of care in the postwar American city, showing how caregiving roles were depicted within suburban households, highlighting the gendered expectations and power dynamics that shaped these portrayals. The instrumentalization of the television device aimed, above all, to stabilize an America in transformation which was essential to confirm American Suburbia as a successful project:

The 1950's was a decade that invested an enormous amount of cultural capital in the ability to form a family and live out a set of highly structured gender and generational roles. (...) the new suburban family ideal was a consensus ideology, promising practical benefits like security and stability to people who had witnessed the shocks and social dislocations of the previous two decades.(...) In many popular sources, television was depicted as a panacea for the broken homes and hearts of wartime life; not only was it shown to restore faith in family togetherness, but as the most sought-after appliance for sale in postwar America, it also renewed faith in the splendors of consumer capitalism. (Spigel 1992, 02-03)

Television and domestic dynamics of suburban America have been together since the beginning of both. Capital, industrial, geopolitical and territorial prosperity plunged the United States of America into ascendant abundance, success and power that outlined the entire American 20th century. Public housing buildings, America's modernist version of the German and Dutch Siedlungen, expanded in height, while lots of identical villas sprawled on the peripheries. Modernist blocks were confined to the cities, while the house in the post-war suburb became the ex-libris of the middle-class American Dream:

[T]hey were called public housing projects. But somehow the workers [...] managed to avoid public housing. [...] [And] headed out instead to the suburbs. They ended up in places like Islip, Long Island and the San Fernando Valley of Los Angeles, and they bought houses with pitched roofs and shingles and clapboard siding, with no structure expressed

if there was any way around it, with gaslight-style front-porch lamps and mailboxes set up on lengths of stiffened chain that seemed to defy gravity. (Wolfe 1981, 53-54)

Through a “modern”, comfortable, house-with-garden and large-garage-for-one-large-car lifestyle the suburb represents a bittersweet reconstruction of domesticity. On one hand this emphasizes the fulfillment of ambitions and its ostentation, on the other hand gives a new impetus and meaning to consumer culture and masses. In addition to this search for belonging, identity and meaning, the average American middle-class individual faced the possibility of becoming an owner.

The exodus of the middle class towards the outer city limits represented a conquest based on mobility, powered by the automobile and motorways, and based on the expansionist idea of unlimited territory - the ever-surpassable and transposable frontier - where, supposedly, is located the Promised Land. Moving in to the suburbs was the closest representation of what the Declaration of Independence proposed when it enacted the “Right to Freedom and the pursuit of Happiness” as an inalienable right of the American citizen.

Postwar architecture was not simply the bright architecture that came after the darkness of the war. It was aggressively happy architecture that came out of the war, a war that anyway was ongoing as the cold war. The new form of domesticity turned out to be a powerful weapon. Expertly designed images of domesticity bliss were launched to the entire world as part of a careful orchestrated propaganda campaign. (Colomina, 2006, 12)

The American Suburbia, symbolized an ideal situated in a supposed balance between mobility and home ownership, public and private, privacy and neighbourhood. Thus, a kind of “post-city” (or what is after the limits of the city) was established that concentrated in itself, potentially, the best of these two dimensions, and, therefore, the realization of the promise to live in the “America” project. According to Lynn Spigel, the ideology that separates the spheres that define public and private life by dividing them into public and private are rooted essentially in gendered terms. This division of spheres operates as a means of social control and power, constituting the “*socially and politically motivated way of organizing social space, rather than a response to universal human needs.*” (Spigel 2001, 05).

In this context, American Suburbia functions as a formula to establish and romanticize the division of spheres, namely and succinctly, between reproductive and productive work. This division potentiates visibilities and invisibilities that are at the genesis of capitalist hegemony, where women were expropriated of the value of their labor power by stipulating them the domestic space and the reproductive labor. By distancing the domestic realm from the corporate world, a chain of care performed by women/wives in the privacy of the home is guaranteed, enabling men to work more, and to produce more in the public and corporate sphere. This dynamic was only possible thanks to a “carefully orchestrated propaganda campaign” to construct a set of “aggressively happy” stereotypes based on “gender architecture”:

One can describe suburban houses as filled with gender stereotypes, since houses provide settings for women and girls to be effective social status achievers, desirable

sex objects, and skillful domestic servants, and for men and boys to be executive breadwinners, successful home handymen, and adept car mechanics. There is also a larger meaning to the architecture of gender – entire metropolitan regions have been arranged to separate suburbs of private single-family houses from public urban spaces. (Hayden 2002, 34)

Dolores Hayden adds that “Americans continue to build millions of dream homes in neighbourhoods that uphold Victorian stereotypes of the home as ‘woman’s place’ and the city as ‘man’s world’.” (Hayden 2002, 288) In fact, the differences between these two realities are evident both in the geographical space as in the space of representation. Namely, considering the scale - and distance - between this domesticity of American suburban housing created to be invisible - and host reproductive labor - and the city that was created to be visible – like skyscrapers and corporate work. Rather than representations, architecture functions as the most basic and symbolic element of these discrepancies, sheltering and delineating inequalities. And images were complicit in creating these architectures and disproportions.

In a deeply capitalist system, television representations reflect the best models to be implemented (through advertising, television series, soap operas and films) or being erased (either by the lack of representation or by less positive broadcasting images). Television imagery was a key tool for the propagation of an “aggressively happy” America Suburbia, as well as for the failure of Pruitt-Igoe, reflecting also the social, political and care discrepancies between these two city models.

In the case of Pruitt-Igoe, television played a different role. The television image that proliferated was that of its implosion, as the ultimate solution to solve the project’s failure, simultaneously highlighting its extreme urban decay and irreparable social dysfunction. The broadcasting of the complex’s total demolition was the culmination of various kinds of media coverage, including reports and news items documenting poverty, crime and vandalism, reinforcing negative stereotypes and affecting the stigmatization of the residents. And if television narratives reflect and complement the urban, cultural, social and family principles to be implemented in the dominant middle class of that period -- “(...) for the White middle class, these mass-produced suburban developments became the ideal “terminals” for a new traffic in the media culture.” (Spigel 2001, 02) --, also the widespread images of the Pruitt –Igoe complex were based on policies of discrediting public housing -- “Clearly there were a number of powerful social and economic factors at play in the rise and fall of Pruitt Igoe.” (Bristol 1991, 166).

In fact, there was political opposition and various interests in demonstrating its social, economic and ideological failure: in addition to the political and economic subordination of public housing to postwar urban redevelopment programs, there was the fact that new ideological values were emerging in the architectural environment and that it was a convenient scapegoat for instituting counterculture and imposing a new order. By placing the onus of problems on modernist architecture, it was possible for postmodern voices to proclaim themselves as a new paradigm that promised to resolve the state of affairs under other principles and with other methods. These architectures thus materialized in an arena where ideologies were disputed, forgetting in the end, above all, who actually lived there:

By placing the responsibility for the failure of public housing on designers, the myth shifts attention from the institutional or structural sources of public housing problems. Simultaneously it legitimates the architecture profession by implying that deeply embedded social problems are caused, and therefore solved by architectural design. (Bristol 1991, 163)

And, in this sense, the Pruitt-Igoe failure was achieved not only by the massive dissemination of the screened images of its implosion but also enhanced by the absence of a televised counter-narrative, which was also a determining factor in confirming this failure. The extreme visibility of the implosion of Pruitt Igoe contrasted with the extreme invisibility of its residents - of their testimonies and their version of history - and the extraordinary invisibility to which they were exposed. Among the multiple restrictions to which they were subjected by welfare policies, one of them was the banning of televisions in the houses of the complex. Jacquelyn Williams tells that:

When we first moved in to the project we couldn't have a television. And my mother gathers a litter so that we could have TV. I was always interested in the family programs, programs with fathers... "My little Margie", where the father was so involved with his daughter... When I looked at those sitcoms, I just felt like this is the way white people live, because, black people, from my experience, did not live that way. And I never questioned, I never wonder why... I just figured: It is how it is. (Freidrichs 2012, unpaginated)

Considering that a broadcasted image is also demonstrative for what it does not show, the exclusion of the residents of Pruitt-Igoe from the reach of the television screen, - or poorly represented either as actors or as spectators -- may illustrate the significance that this segment of the population had for American society. By exposing only certain social-cultural roles and conventions, television fulfilled its mission of showing the modern ideal of reality, constructing fictional dynamics, instigating family values and gender roles, further fostering the patriarchal, capitalist and pyramidal framework that was at the base of the full functioning of post-war urbanism. Consummated by policies of privilege and segregation, banning access to the television device was yet another of the many tools to isolate the Pruitt-Igoe residents from the broader community. The television screen had become a kind of last public space where everyone could meet at prime time. More than a deprivation, it was a gesture of erasure, taking into account that not having access to the spheres of representation is an attestation of a sense of *non-belonging*:

Considering that invisibilities become fragilities by isolating, excluding, erasing and omitting people and their relevance from social, political and geographical maps, then, non-representativeness not only translates into vulnerability but also potentiates a non-full participation in the exercise of inhabiting, and even, in the exercise of *existing*. (Sol, 2023, 17)

In this sende, it is relevant to mention how the broadcasted images and the reality exposed in the documentary "the Pruitt-Igoe Myth", manage to be a tool that exposes, precisely, this counter-narrative, giving voice to the residents - who were not contemplated in the previous

representations, channelling all problems to crime and vandalism. Meaning, this broadcasted narrative constitutes a repair device, giving back to this community the possibility of exposing its version of history and making it visible.

With politics of representation based on the predominantly white, cis-gender, middle-class family and targeted exclusively at this segment, class distances widened. In this way, the underprivileged were further removed from this more-or-less public sphere, enhanced by television, to which they did not belong, to which they should not have access, and, in the extreme, about which they should not have even an opinion, nor formulate a critical spirit. And I quote again -- “I just felt like this is the way white people live, because, black people, from my experience, did not live that way. And I never questioned, I never wonder why... I just figured: It is how it is.” (Freidrichs 2012, unpaginated)

In this context, considering the metaphors of land and property, we highlight how media representations define territories and determine “fences” in social and urban fields. Just as sexism comes with the definition of boundaries and the privatization of land, also the modernist division of spheres between the city and the domestic, has been established with media guidelines. Confirming that, whatever the paradigm in sight (from the most underprivileged to the most privileged), urbanism is by default planned taking into account a logic of segregation and free labor, predominantly female. This configuration thus guarantees and makes possible the functioning and perpetuation of the hegemonic dynamics of capitalism, with urbanism and the mass media both serving this system, complementing, strengthening and fulfilling each other.

In this sense, television representations help us to think about and situate, historically and geographically, social and urban problems. Taking into account what has changed and what can still change, the broadcasted image allows us to potentially reverse invisibilities, confirming that the screen, being a device increasingly inseparable from our habitat and way of life, is a common territory that allows us to rewrite, review and repair versions of history, creating counter-narratives in a more critical and careful urban framing.



Fig. 1. Pruitt-Igoe Model, Screenshot from “The Pruitt-Igoe Myth”, Chad Friedrichs, 2012.



Fig. 2 Levittown Pennsylvania, Screenshot from television advertisement, c.1957.



Fig. 3. Pruitt-Igoe's implosion in 1972, Screenshot from "The Pruitt-Igoe Myth", Chad Friedrichs, 2012.



Fig. 4. Screenshot from "Leave it to Beaver" TV show, 1957-61.



Fig. 5. Demonstration by Pruitt-Igoe's residents, Screenshot from "The Pruitt-Igoe Myth", Chad Friedrichs, 2012.



Fig. 6. Screenshot from "Father Knows Best" TV show, 1954-60.

3. CONCLUSION

The American suburbia and the Pruitt-Igoe housing complex, are two contemporary housing paradigms that were addressed here, through the television representations to which both were exposed to. Alongside an exploration of the politics of care, repercussions of architecture on its representations and vice versa were problematized, gauging the impact of audiovisual culture on issues of equality and inequality in the post-war American urban landscape.

The rise of suburbia in postwar America was driven by various factors, including the desire for homeownership, the promise of a better quality of life, and the pursuit of the American Dream. However, this idealized vision of suburban living often concealed the underlying social, gender and racial inequalities that characterized these communities.

Puitt-Igoe ultimately illustrated the failure of public housing initiatives by highlighting the systemic neglect and marginalization faced by low-income African American communities. However, the real causes of Pruitt-Igoe's decline were much more related to political and social issues than with the architecture itself. Relocation policies, based on gender and class segregation, housing primarily female heads of households dependent on public assistance, fostering family separation. The lack of support and resources for care of disadvantaged residents was at the root of the failure. Added to this are the various political, economic, social and ideological interests in demonstrating the failure of social housing in the context of urban regeneration programmes.

In the same way, the domestic ideal of American Suburbia hid, behind an apparent and staged happiness, the anxieties, frustrations and prejudices of a rising middle class. Indeed, the diffusion of this 'American dream' in the form of the garden villa was more related to the norms and expectations intrinsic to the success of this housing formula, than to authentic happiness.

The full functioning of America Suburbia and its fitting into the system depended on the institution of family values and gender roles that ensured the dynamics of care within the family context. For the father - the breadwinner - to produce more and better, it was necessary for the mother - the wife - to guarantee reproductive and domestic work. And media narratives were essential for the implementation of this idea. Television representations disseminated the portrayal of suburban life as a utopian ideal, emphasizing the nuclear family, consumer culture and the gendered division of labor. Simultaneously, they portrayed the Pruitt-Igoe project as a dystopian environment beset by social and economic problems, often associated with racialized poverty and crime. And just as these representations enabled the dissemination of roles and stereotypes, the broadcasted images have the same power to make visible what is invisible, summoning to themselves the maps of representativity of Western culture. In this sense, the screen reveals itself to be that undeniable place where it is possible to detect and combat invisibilities, and to frame counter-narratives that allow us to problematize the issues of care, housing and segregation in our urban landscapes from another perspective.

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SHORT CV

Luísa Sol. PhD in architecture and researcher. Worked as an architect at Aires Mateus&Associados. Her PhD, “The Image of the City and its Space-Represented in music videos of the Eighties: North American Interferences in the Western Architectural Culture”, was awarded by Lisbon School of Architecture, Universidade de Lisboa and at the FCSH-UNL. Currently, she is a full Post-doctoral researcher at the University of Lisbon (CIAUD) where she coordinates and develops the research project “Architectures of the Screen: Television and Emerging Urbanity(ies) in Portugal – From Postmodernity to Contemporaneity.”

Focused on the immense public space inaugurated by the television screen, she works on topics related to gender, feminism, Care, housing rights, and the various inequalities defined by the consumer economies of the landscapes built by global capitalism.

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