THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

O’NEIL FORD CENTENNIAL CHAIR IN ARCHITECTURE
SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE
BATTLE HALL, ROOM 117
AUSTIN, TEXAS 78712-0222

T 512.232.9312
F 512.471.7033
E wilfried.wang@utexas.edu

ADVANCED URBAN DESIGN, ARC 696
ADVANCED ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN, ARC 696/ARC 560R

DESIGN AS CRITICISM:
REPLACING SUBURBIA
LITTLE BOXES
Malvina Reynolds (1900-1978): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2_2lGkEU4Xs

Little boxes on the hillside,
Little boxes made of ticky tacky
Little boxes on the hillside,
Little boxes all the same,
There’s a pink one and a green one
And a blue one and a yellow one
And they’re all made out of ticky tacky
And they all look just the same.

And they all play on the golf course
And drink their martinis dry
And they all have pretty children
And the children go to school,
And the children go to summer camp
And then to the university
Where they are put in boxes
And they come out all the same.

And the people in the houses
All went to the university
Where they were put in boxes
And they came out all the same
And there’s doctors and lawyers
And business executives
And they’re all made out of ticky tacky
And they all look just the same.

And the boys go into business
And marry and raise a family
In boxes made of ticky tacky
And they all look just the same,
There’s a pink one and a green one
And a blue one and a yellow one
And they’re all made out of ticky tacky
And they all look just the same.
THE TASK

The limited time of less than a decade in which conventional unsustainable patterns of behavior need to change, including those that determine settlement developments, requires radical strategies for the replacement of suburbia, not gradual retrofitting steps. These strategies will be conceived in consideration of expected patterns of climate change and forecast global population growth.

Students opting for this studio will choose the site for which they would like to propose replacement strategies: they can opt for the place where they grew up or they can choose a city in Texas. Besides researching a series of preparatory topics, each student will be mapping the growth of their chosen city over the past century in intervals of ten years. Based on the rate of growth of the past decades, students will interpolate the growth of their chosen city for the next three decades. In contrast to this expected growth pattern, students will propose their alternatives. These alternatives will cover an area of 16 square miles: either 4 x 4 miles square or 2 x 8 miles long. Topics to be addressed in these strategies include hydrology, sealed/unsealed surface ratio, density, landscape architecture, natural and passive shading, local food production, live/work building typologies, modes of mobility, and public space design.
THE CONTEXT

Much of suburban life style, of suburban culture, is unsustainable. The dispersal of functions and social groups across a large territory puts a daily burden on people’s mobility. The lower the density of a settlement structure, of occupation and construction, the farther the distances between these, the more difficult the establishment of an effective collective transport system. In this context, the personal car has become the preferred mode of transport. Added to the dispersal of functions and social groups, many suburban neighborhoods are laid out along dendritic road systems (tree branch layouts) that prevent through traffic. In the pursuit of maximizing privacy and thereby bringing about social segregation, suburban culture has also maximized mobility times.

The autonomization of modes of life determines the growth of suburban culture. The privacy of the nuclear family has been one ideal of modern civilization. The seemingly stable image of a four-person household – that effectively only lasts for a couple of decades – has given rise to a building typology of a single-family home whose inflexibility and spatial excess is rarely examined in critical terms. From underused dining and living rooms to the inevitable once-in-a-year occupation of the children’s bedrooms at Thanksgiving, many single-family houses are expressions of inefficient use. At best, they are private museums, gathering the memorabilia of emigrated or departed family members. The single-family house enables each family to lead an
autonomous life-style. Sufficiently spaced apart, each family, and in turn in the home’s interiors, each family member can create noise, use artificial light, potter around in the garden, cook odorous food, keep any number of pets and cars without necessarily disturbing the neighbors. The single-family house is the guarantor of the pursuit of individual, autonomous happiness and thus an indispensable element of the constitution of the USA. Outside the USA too, young families dream of leading a life surrounded by “nature”, in which children can supposedly grow up in safe and harmless circumstances – free of urban plight and morally questionable temptations (a notion of insulation that is now undermined by the Internet). The extent of this suburban landscape conception of “nature” is realized in the so-called English landscape design tradition, in other words, an unproductive, picturesque landscape that is to be viewed and understood as being natural in the hope that the seductive power of the image dispels any lingering knowledge of it being entirely artificial. Few things are grown in the suburbs: principally grass that is ritualistically mowed – nowadays – by an automower. Suburban domestic life is the epitome of conspicuous “residing”, a wide-spread
version of "conspicuous consumption" that Thorstein Veblen analyzed over a century ago as the characteristics of the then upper class' deliberately wasteful life style. In this sense, the single-family house has become an important motor of limitless consumption. By necessity, each household requires a basic set of items from kitchen utensils to smart security systems, from sofas to SUVs, from barbecue grills to swimming pools; but then the contemporary suburban life style industry produces many unnecessary things, things that are "nice-to-have", things that the neighbors just bought, and, of course, there can never, ever be enough closet space.

Lodged in the DNA of the single-family house is a spatial generosity that invites the purchase of the latest fads. Single-family houses are the world's greatest accumulators, depositories, or in fact, temporary waste sites.

In terms of the construction quality, most single-family houses consist of poor quality building materials that are stretched to their maximum visual and spatial effect. Subsequent to the occupation by their new owners, they become the vehicle for personal embellishments that are deemed to increase the value of the property: Italian marble for the bathrooms, German kitchens, solid oak floors, etc. Over the last half century, single-family houses, like many owner-occupied properties, have become vehicles of financial speculation. The virtual increase in property values gave both borrowers and lenders scope to enlarge their respective debt or credit. Bundled subprime mortgages of differing creditworthiness, otherwise referred to as "mortgage backed securities" combining highly "toxic" and normal risks, were sold to naïve
and greedy speculators in search of easy profits. A chain reaction of defaults led to the 2008 financial scandal with the collapse of Lehman Brothers setting off the steepest global economic decline since the Wall Street Crash of 1929. One decade after one of the worst global economic slumps that in part had its origins in the financing of suburban developments, there have neither been significant changes in the financial nor in the development sector. The apparent bucolic suburban landscape continues to sedate onlookers.

Late 20th century settlement patterns, of which suburban layouts are a part, also dispel and hide modes of production. Not only are factories often anonymous boxes set behind some notional vegetation, they shroud their content. This applies equally to animal and vegetable production facilities: battery chicken, pork, fish, milk, hydroponic cultures, peppers and tomatoes, etc. are indoor products. Some living organisms never see natural light before they are "processed". Such automated, autonomous, highly controlled and "reliable" methods guarantee calculable standards and prices. Production processes are hidden behind the abstracted factory walls, which in turn are set behind notional vegetation, which in turn pretend to be natural; this dissemblance mirrors the contemporary line of production at whose end is a well presented, packaged product of which the consumer is unsure as to its contents.

Advertising agencies then use nature as a backdrop for such artificially compounded objects, whether they be free-range chicken or cross-country SUVs.

Given these abstracted production processes, it has become easy to "outsource" them to ever lower paying regions of the world, which in turn has led to the concentration of both
wholesalers and distributors. Together with Internet retailing, these powers of market concentration have undermined both the viability of traditional small retailers as well as shopping mall developers/owners. Low energy costs have enabled the cheap transport of mass products across the globe. In sum, retailing today consists of compounded products of dubious contents packaged and marketed with allusion to nature sold via an image on a web site or in a large box in suburbia surrounded by a sea of asphalt. All this is unsustainable; dying shopping malls are merely a symptom of the end of the economic logic of this model.
DESIGN AS CRITICISM: REPLACING SUBURBIA

The initial research of the semester will reveal that the bulk of the world’s suburbs has been built since the Second World War. However, the models for suburban developments have a much longer history, reaching back to the anti-urbanist visions of Antiquity, revived by the migrating Venetian nobility who had their villas designed by Palladio in the Veneto, widely realized through the English anti-industrialist garden cities and countless modernist interpretations of the free-standing single-family houses. The dream of life in the countryside is an ancient one, that is deeply rooted in the imagination of civilization. It is time that people holding to this dream are confronted with the reality of suburban culture and that sustainable alternatives are developed in its stead. Designing such alternatives is a comprehensive task that should address all central aspects of suburbia’s failings. The alternative visions should also be accompanied by an approach to territorial management (regional landscape planning), property development, community and mobility infrastructure, and a view of what production of food
and objects of daily life will look like in the future. One current powerful alternative to suburbia is under way in Austin’s West Campus neighborhood. Here, changes in zoning has permitted the replacement of low-density single-family houses by high-rise apartment buildings. While there is much to be critical of the urban design and architecture, the changes brought to this area have been radical and substantive. While the West Campus area has a specific set of users, suburbia in general has a diverse and normal population mix, for which the proposed alternative design strategies need to provide viable answers.

**DESIGN AS CRITICISM**

To design is to think. To design is to consciously reflect. To design is to choose from a range of options. To design is to place in one’s imagination the proposed solution into the larger global context: would this design be appropriate and suitable in other contexts? How would a design change the patterns of lives of its users, change energy flows and emissions and thereby contribute in another way to a sustainable life style?

To design is to decide which is the right space and dimension, the appropriate profile and form, the suitable material, the desired color and surface quality, and so forth, in relation to other prevailing conditions.
To design is to be both critical of one's own decisions as well as of the immediate physical as well as the general socio-cultural context that is affected by one's design. To design is to develop one's own critical faculties, one's own approach to the socio-cultural conditions, one's own sensibilities for proportions, spaces, forms, materials, color, light, atmospheres.

The luxury of design is that any idea and each proposal can occur in one’s mind, on paper or in the computer prior to being realized. Each act of design is an act of free choice, an act of liberation of the existing circumstances while at the same time responding to this reality.

To design is to bring another reality into being, to project an alternative world, to change the world.

To design is to criticize in order to improve a given condition.

Architecture addresses all the senses and it involves all the facets of material reality. Architects should possess the skill to bring these facets of material reality into a certain balance or harmony. Every architect can define this balance in a specific, even personal way. The challenge in this balancing act is to define the role that each part plays within the whole, the relative importance that each element has within the overall design, the degree of distinction or discretion that each figure possesses against each ground.

The purpose of the studio is to demonstrate the integrative power of architectural design. There is no other discipline in either the realm of the arts or in the realm of engineering that is able to bring all the material and abstract elements into a harmonious synthesis. Ultimately, architects decide on the atmospheres that are to be embodied by their designs and with them the existential aspirations that the atmospheres should communicate to the users and visitors of their designed environments.
STRUCTURE OF SEMESTER

Design as criticism will only succeed if it can integrate the diverse challenges to society in comprehensible visions. In preparation for the development of concepts for alternative strategies to suburban culture, there will be presentations on key topics of change:

1. Production and retail
   What, how and where are things being produced?
   From food to clothes and other objects of daily use

2. Live/Work
   How are we going to live and how will this relate spatially to the future of work?

3. Mobility
   How are we going to move from one place to another?
   Self-driving vehicles? Collective transport systems?

4. Urban and building typologies
   How specific or adaptable should future typologies be?

Reflecting on these key topics, students will begin to develop concepts for the replacement of suburbia. Reference will be made to the previous six studios on the future of Berlin to outline the depth and breadth of considerations and design development. Sustainability topics such as hydrology, urban heat island effects, sealed/unsealed surface ratios, density, regenerative energy production, space syntax, social equity, etc. will of course also be part of the design considerations.

To demonstrate the integrative power of design, there will be two foci throughout the semester: urban design and architecture. Students from CRP and Landscape Architecture are welcome. Depending on the disciplinary mix of the studio, there could be interdisciplinary design teams.

The focus of the first part of the semester will be on the development of a concept, translated into urban design and architecture. The focus of the second part of the semester will be on the communication of the concept through both a narrative and a set of graphic and three-
dimensional representations. Students should bear in mind the need to explain their approach to the public by contrasting the current situation with their future vision. There will be no restrictions on the extent of each intervention; students will state the reasons for their proposed subtractions, corrections, alterations, transformations, adaptations, additions, superimpositions, and so on; only the students’ own critical faculties, sensibilities and sensitivities will determine what replaces suburbia over the next ten years.
BIBLIOGRAPHY AND WEBSITES

1 General


4 Ellen Dunham-Jones: TED Talk: https://www.ted.com/talks/ellen_dunham_jones_retrofitting_suburbia

5 June Williamson: http://buildabetterburb.org/11-urban-design-tactics-for-suburban-retrofitting/


7 René Boer, Michiel van Iersel and Mark Minkjan, ed.: 2ha, No. 11, Dublin 2015: https://failedarchitecture.com/did-suburbia-fail/


9 Nathan Lewis, "Letting go of Suburbia", 20 Jul 2016: https://www.strongtowns.org/journal/2016/7/18/suburbia-retrofit

10 Kristoffer Ruud Røgeberg: Densifying Suburbia, AHO, Oslo, 2017: https://brage.bibsys.no/xmlui/handle/11250/2487195


15 Robert Kunzig: "To build the city of the future, we must get out of our cars", National Geographic, 27 Mar 2019:https://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2019/04/to-build-cities-of-the-future-stop-driving-cars/


II History of Suburbia

https://books.google.de/books/about/Los_Angeles.html?id=qXMwCbPE5mkC&redir_esc=y


3 William S. Saunders, ed., *Sprawl and Suburbia*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2005


6 Paul Mees, *Transport for Suburbia: Beyond the Automobile Age*, Earthscan, London-Sterling VA: 2010https://books.google.de/books?id=D3K0FMVhcsC&pg=PA15&lpg=PA15&q=Replacing+suburbia&source=bl&ots=g-ge9oMTFq&sig=ACfU3U1khYulu-y16m8shl3-Z4NVL8tVyw&hl=de&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiw-uT4tnhAhWGVXAKHZxTA7Y4ChDoATAMegQI8hAB#v=onepage&q=Replacing%20suburbia&f=false


7 Brian Henk, *Suburbia: Strategy Primer*, 24 Jan 2014:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3grXOpbmdb0


10 Adam Ruins Everything, season 1, episode 43, The Disturbing History of Suburbia, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ETR9qrVS17g


III Urban Design Strategies
1 The Functionalist City: Charta of Athens:
   1.1 Le Corbusier: *The Radiant City: Elements of a Doctrine of Urbanism to be used as the Basis of Our Machine-Age Civilization*, London 1933/1967.
2 Stadtlandschaft: Landscape Urbanism
   2.3 Dean Almy: *Center 14: On Landscape Urbanism*, Austin 2007
3 The Architecture of the City: Critical Reconstruction
   3.1 Aldo Rossi: *The Architecture of the City*, New York 1982
4 New Urbanism
   4.1 Leon Krier: *Architecture Choice or Fate*, London 1998
5 Alternative Approaches
   5.1 Camillo Sitte: *City Planning according to Artistic Principles*, (1889) Engl. transl. by Geoge R. Collins and Christiane Crasemann Collins, 1986
   5.2 Josef Frank’s Accidentism in urban design, see: Christopher Long: *Josef Frank: Life and Work*, Chicago 2002, pp. 221-231.
6 Austin
   6.1 Mark Walters, City of Austin Planning and Zoning Department, *Overview of the University Neighborhood Overlay (OUN)*, 18 Dec 2018:
   http://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=311899

IV Sustainable Urban Design
1 Compact City/Interstitial densification/Urban Densification
3 Freiburg: http://www.freiburg.de/pb/,Len/623421.html
4 Berlin: http://www.stadtentwicklung.berlin.de/planen/foren_initiativen/nachhaltige_stadtentwicklung/ (German only)
5 Aurora Fernández Per, Javier Mozas, Javier Arpa: *This is Hybrid: An analysis of mixed-use buildings*, Barcelona 2014.

V Mobility
1 Autonomous cars: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autonomous_car
2 Autonomous cars NPR: http://nprberlin.de/post/pulling-out-car-ownership#stream/0
3 Car sharing: http://www.spiegel.de/international/zeitgeist/car-sharing-increasingly-popular-in-german-cities-a-913891.html
SEMESTER SCHEDULE

30 Aug  Introduction, the challenge of sustainability, research topics
02 Sep  Presentation: the future of production and retail
04 Sep  Presentation: the future of live/work, pin-up of concepts

16 Sep  Pin-up research and concepts
18 Sep  Presentation: the future of mobility
20 Sep  Presentation: urban and building typologies
23 Sep  Desk crits
25 Sep  Pin-up typologies and desk crits

07 Oct  Pin-up concepts and typologies
09 Oct  Desk crits
11 Oct  Desk crits
14 Oct  Desk crits
16 Oct  Desk crits
18 Oct  Mid-term review

04 Nov  Pin-up and desk crits
06 Nov  Desk crits
08 Nov  Desk crits
11 Nov  Pin-up typologies
13 Nov  Desk crits
15 Nov  Pin-up: hanging plan and final presentation outline

25 Nov  Pin-up and desk crits
27 Nov  Desk crits
29 Nov  Desk crits
02 Dec  Desk crits
04 Dec  Desk crits
12 Dec  Final Review
GRADING POLICY

There are four components to the grade:

1. Research and concept 20%
2. Interim Review 20%
3. Final Review 30%
4. Attendance, participation and team work 30%

Grade Descriptions

A/A-: excellent work
 Abe project surpasses expectations in terms of inventiveness, appropriateness, verbal and visual ability, conceptual rigor, craft, and personal development. Student pursues concepts and techniques above and beyond what is discussed in class.

B+/B/B-: good work
 A project is thorough, well researched, diligently pursued, and successfully executed. Student pursues ideas and suggestions presented in class and puts in effort to resolve required projects. Demonstrates potential for excellence.

C+/C/C-: required work
 A project meets the minimum requirements. Suggestions made in class are not pursued with dedication or rigor. (Note: C- does not meet the minimum grade to be counted toward the student’s degree.)

D+/D/D-: poor work
 Basic skills including graphic skills, model-making skills, verbal clarity or logic of presentation are not level-appropriate. Student does not demonstrate the required design skill and knowledge base.

F: unacceptable work
 Minimum objectives are not met. Performance is not acceptable. Note that this grade will be assigned with excessive unexcused absences.

X: excused incomplete
 A grade given only for legitimate reasons of illness or family emergency. Incomplete assignments are not a cause for assigning this grade. An incomplete is assigned after consultation with the Associate Deans’ offices. Incomplete coursework must be completed prior to the beginning of the following semester.

ALL GRADES ARE SUBJECT TO DEDUCTIONS FOR UNEXCUSED ABSENCES, LATE WORK AND LATE ARRIVALS.

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory. Participation is expected. Students with three (3) unexcused absences may be dropped from the course without further notice. The minimum penalty for more than three unexcused absences is a full letter drop in your final grade for the course. Please contact the instructor prior to class if you expect to be late or miss class.
Religious holy days sometimes conflict with class and examination schedules. If you miss an examination, work assignment, or other project due to the observance of a religious holy day you will be given an opportunity to complete the work missed within a reasonable time after the absence. You must notify each of your instructors as far in advance as possible prior to the classes scheduled on dates you will be absent to observe a religious holy day.

By UT Austin policy, students must notify the instructor of any pending absence for reasons of the observance of religious holidays at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If a student must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, the student will be given an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

**Disabilities**
Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 471-6259, [http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/](http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/). Students with disabilities requiring special accommodations need to obtain a letter documenting their disabilities from the Services for Students with Disabilities area of the Office of the Dean of Students (471-6259 voice or 471-4641 TTY for users who are deaf or hard of hearing). This letter should be presented to the instructor in each course at the beginning of the semester and accommodations needed should be discussed at that time. Five business days before an exam the student should remind the instructor of any testing accommodations that will be needed.

**Academic Dishonesty**
UT Honor Code (or statement of ethics) and an explanation or example of what constitutes plagiarism (Link to University Honor Code: [http://registrar.utexas.edu/catalogs/gi09-10/ch01/index.html](http://registrar.utexas.edu/catalogs/gi09-10/ch01/index.html))

**Evacuation in Cases of Emergency on Campus**

- Occupants of buildings on The University of Texas at Austin campus are required to evacuate buildings when a fire alarm is activated. Alarm activation or announcement requires exiting and assembling outside.
- Familiarize yourself with all exit doors of each classroom and building you may occupy. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when entering the building.
- Students requiring assistance in evacuation shall inform their instructor in writing during the first week of class.
- In the event of an evacuation, follow the instruction of faculty or class instructors.
• Do not re-enter a building unless given instructions by the following: Austin Fire Department, The University of Texas at Austin Police Department, or Fire Prevention Services office.
• Behavior Concerns Advice Line (BCAL): 512-232-5050
• Link to information regarding emergency evacuation routes and emergency procedures can be found at: www.utexas.edu/emergency