EFFLORESCENCE WITHIN AN EPICYCLE:
A [RE]INTRODUCTION OF THE SHARED EXPERIENCE
INTO A MODERN [SUB]URBAN FABRIC
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This thesis is not a culmination of two semesters of work but a summary of the one thing I have been apart of my whole life... community. Through every different home, every new day at school or with every parting friend I have thought about what makes our lives so memorable. This thesis, in many ways, is my manifesto; it is my understanding of social principles and human interaction. This thesis is a summary of my life.

Family and friends, thank you for your support. I know how hard it was sometimes supporting me in this seemingly cruel environment that you knew little about. I am glad you finally got a glimpse of my world and were allowed to see the person I have become. Your love and encouragement have been the motivation that made this possible, thank you.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS:

INTRODUCING THE PROBLEM
OBSERVING THE OBVIOUS 4

AN EPICYCLE THEORY
REEVALUATING ADJACENCIES 8

BAND-AIDS AND BOMB SHELTERS
A SOLUTION TO AN EPIDEMIC 12

PORCHES AND CELL PHONES
RESTORING SOCIAL INTERACTION 22

BUTCH CASSIDY AND THE CUL-DE-SAC KID
PLACEMAKING THROUGH IMAGINATIVE IDEALS 26

DEATH TO THE MICROWAVE
EMBRACING CONTEXT THROUGH UNHURRIED LIVES 36

BIBLIOGRAPHY
ANNOTATIONS FROM OUR FOREFATHERS 44
INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM:
OBSERVING THE OBVIOUS

We as a civilization are constantly growing in terms of population. Every major city is continually expanding from its inner core. However, there has been little planning as to where they will grow. Populations are migrating to the outer rings of the city and disconnecting themselves from the atmosphere of inner city life. We as a society need to embrace the connection to the core of the city. Within the immediate future, this area we now see as suburbia will be forced to transform into a high-density urban context designed to accommodate a higher number of occupants in a smaller area of land. Suburbs need to become more urban if we are going to preserve the truly rural.\(^1\) We can prepare for this by designing a series of building typologies that create a high-density environment in anticipation of urban growth and in appreciation for the value of green space. This methodology would essentially involve the planning and design of numerous mixed-use spaces allowing residential, office, commercial, civic, and retail functions to reunite as a whole. It would focus on the importance of the community by encouraging shared spaces and attempting to bring back the pride found in creating an identity in one’s respective neighborhood instead of within the confines of individual homes.

However, before one can evaluate community one must comprehend that community is a fragile and precious phenomenon. It forms the foundation for our sense of identity and well-being; indeed it is critical to the survival of our societies.\(^2\) Community can most simply be defined as a series of shared experiences between people within the implied boundaries of a given location. Put more humanistically, community is the ability to do and experience activities with those around you. Community is human interaction. With the overabundance of sprawl in subdivisions throughout the nation the emphasis on the community has slowly begun to die. We have allowed the diversity of spaces and users that made the traditional small town so interesting to become displaced all over our landscape. With no regard to the effect it would have on the social fabric, we have abandoned the one thing that held us together for so long – community. Homes are located in residential subdivisions, factories are located in industrial districts, and offices find their home in office “parks” while retail and other commercial spaces are destined to live in a strip mall somewhere on the on the outskirts of the city under or near an interstate overpass.
In 1959 Louis Kahn proclaimed that, "Now is a time for discovery. It is a time, you might say, of realization. Our problems are all new, our spatial demands are new, and it is time, therefore, more concerned with trying to create better institutions from those that have already established." The underlying premise for this thesis revolves around the idea that suburban living has suffocated our social interaction and destroyed any chance of creating a successful community. This project will begin to understand why we chose to do this to ourselves and what can be done to prevent it from continuing. We need this opportunity to engage with those around us. We must allow ourselves the freedom to interact. The American home has gone from a welcoming façade anchored by the front porch, to a vast fortress of cookie-cutter vinyl-coated dwellings confronting passersby with an array of opaque garage doors and unused sidewalks. The identity we as a society relate to with our homes needs to be shifted to relate to our neighborhoods and our communities.

We are surrounded by people that see the ability to transfer public amenities into private activities as a sign of success. This has spawned the desire for home offices, home gyms, home entertainment centers, personal libraries, etc. People believe that the more dependent one becomes on shared things the lower quality of life that person will have. Along with this mindset brings

Figure 1.4: Sun City, Arizona.

Figure 1.5: Medford, Massachusetts.

Figure 1.6: Supply Demand Curve for Happiness.
Gate after gate, lock after lock, we think that these devices make us safer. When in actuality they destroy the ability of way-finding for both visitors and ambulatory services. In turn they disallow any circumstantial social interaction and a complete disconnection from the outside world. These methods are not only ineffective; they have the ability to become digressive.

the opportunity for gated communities. Segregating economic classes through physical barriers has taken the forefront in community design across the country. Such a suburban paradox has created a place absent of way-finding in the built environment and created a series of meandering roads that lose any sense of predictability. Yes, this system aids in privacy and is depicted by the media as a “safer” place to live in an “unsafe” America (even though murder in this country is down 20% while murder coverage on the news is up by over 600%\(^1\)), however; it also lends to the obvious problems of confusion for ambulatory and firefighting services. There must be more of an attempt to engage the community through viable streets and welcoming homes, not in winding roads and gated communities. This thesis proposes that the more shared experiences and the more social interaction one can receive, the richer the communal existence will become.

Sprawl has frequently become the blame for allowing the built environment around us to transform into what it is today. Some even go as far as to say that sprawl is the reason for obesity, teen suicide\(^6\), violence in and outside our schools, lack of social skills with our nation’s youth and the fact we spend over three years of our life in the car.\(^7\) In hearing these arguments one finds it hard to refute them.\(^7\) With sprawl comes obvious architectural frustrations, but also a social propaganda that “this is just how things are.” It is unwise to underestimate the power of the consumer, which produced American suburbia in the first place.\(^8\) It has become a hypnotic element to many; subconsciously telling everyone that this is the way things are and the way they are going to continue to be – so accept it. Subdivisions have simply become that: a series of divisions within our society. The shared experience is almost completely gone and we must find a systematic solution to retrieve it.
sub-urb *n.* A residential community near a large city.

com-mu-ni-ty *n.*, *pl.* -ies (1) A group of people living in the same area under the same conditions. (2) A class or group having common interests and likes.

"People seem to think that if there's something that makes them unhappy in this country, all they have to do is stage a big march and everything will change. When will they learn?"  

George Carlin
AN EPICYCLE THEORY:  
REEVALUATING ADJACENCIES

In a nation where human functionality is almost directly correlated with a dependence upon a car, we find that we are also a nation made up of over 80 million people who are either too young, too old or too poor to drive. Where does that leave them? Suburbia has become a tangible metaphor for a prison. Through euphemisms such as "cul-de-sac kids" and "soccer moms" we can begin to understand what residential environments have truly become. Imprisoning its occupants to overly luxurious homes, awkward backyards and a neighborhood with empty sidewalks, one has to drive to function. This is the true failure of suburbia, a landscape in which automobile use is a prerequisite to social viability and the reason the average household currently generates thirteen car trips a day. Yet; replacing these cul-de-sacs and shopping malls with traditional urban design is not enough. There must be a practical and ideological appreciation for what these spaces need to be. Within the isolation of this zoning and disconnection between residential and commercial sectors there is no opportunity to engage the built environment as a pedestrian, only as a motorist. As a motorist you do not have the ability to understand your neighbor, you are no longer a citizen you are an extension to the car. In the book entitled "First City" Jonathan Franzen described this phenomenon:

“I’m a recreational walker, and in the past few years I’ve noticed something odd when I’ve hit the sidewalks of suburban Missouri and suburban Colorado: a not intangible percentage of men speeding by me in their cars and sport utility vehicles (it’s always men) feel moved to yell obscenities at me. It’s hard to know why they do this... My guess is that they yell at me simply because I’m a stranger, and from the perspective of their glassed-in vehicles I have no more human reality than the coach on their TV screens who has elected to go for fourth and short.”
This dissociation from the humanistic approach of the pedestrian leads us to evaluate a solution to such demise in society's sensitivities. One must begin to understand how we as a society can plan and prepare our suburbs to both embrace future growths from their patriarchal inner cities while simultaneously reintroducing the shared experience into everyday life.

Diagrammatically every suburb can be illustrated by a circle [representing the range of individual communities relative to a predetermined distance]. With some evaluation, these circles are transformed into epicycles, or smaller circles in which their center is dependent upon the center of a larger, more dominant circle. Rotating along the circumference of a primary sphere or epicenter [the inner city] these epicycles begin to move, grow and inevitably collide. Interactions begin to take place that allow for communities to become richer with variety and choices. This epicenter theory allows one to see foci as a series of walkable distances linked together by a series of transit systems that align as tangents to the given circles as opposed to dissecting them directly. These collector roads now no longer have the ability to impose upon a community as an encompassing wall but allow for the communities to function as separate entities bordered by transportation corridors. In this system, a correlation between different communities allows its respective occupants to identify with their community before they identify with their home. These epicycles become a number of perceived boundaries for various neighborhoods or communities throughout a city. A low-density atmosphere can not survive in such a context. We must cherish these epicycles, these communities. However, at the same time we must design them in such a way that they can function in an autonomous environment while obtaining a certain urban density and dynamic. Here they must begin to blossom and mature as an independent mechanism.

In many ways today's communities are similar to saddlebags. Each individual community is its own functional entity; however, it is completely disconnected from its counterparts. There is no direct correlation between neighboring modern communities, just like the contents of one saddlebag has no relationship to the contents in the other.

When a collector road is introduced to the community as a dissecting insertion it begins to collect unwanted sprawl around its boundaries. With Lawrence being no exception to this observation, the collector road begins to draw unwanted development like a magnet. When this vehicular corridor is moved to the outer limits of the community the heart of the area can be better developed disallowing sprawl to anchor itself within the neighborhood.
"Always design a thing by considering it in its next larger context – a chair in a room, a room in a house, a house in an environment, an environment in a city plan."^{15}

Eliel Saarinen
The term efflorescence is described in Webster's dictionary as "a state of flowering," but more appropriately "a gradual process of unfolding and developing." This concept will begin to describe the importance and application of this project. While these epicycles begin to blossom into these unique, intimate neighborhoods, the energy is constantly directed towards the community, reevaluating how we see ourselves as a whole. There must be a reassessment of our priorities, the old suburban dream is increasingly out of sync with today's culture and can no longer go unattended. We must once again allow this suburban environment to become a medium through which the American Dream can mature in hopes we can in turn regain our social interaction. In *The Next American Metropolis* Peter Calthorpe defined the American Dream as an evolving image with the American Metropolis as its ever-changing reflection. The two feed one another in a complex, interactive cycle. At one point the dream moves us to a new vision of the city and community; at another the reflection of the city transforms that dream with harsh realities or alluring opportunities. We are at the point of transformation once again and the two, city and dream, are changing each other.16 We must understand this change and plan for its maturation. Through this reassessment of adjacencies and established social guidelines the thesis begins to ask how these issues can be applied to this epicycle theory in a more architectonic reality. We must realize a solution in order to visualize an answer to the problem.

Like a flower in bloom, these neighborhoods and communities begin to unfold and reveal their inner beauty. These flowers, these delicate wonders — are our families, our friends, our homes.

Figure 2.5: Flower in Bloom.

Figure 2.6: Epicycle Theory at different scales.
BAND-AIDS AND BOMB SHELTERS:
A SOLUTION TO AN EPIDEMIC

What was once a thriving place, a wonderful place, now lies dead -- suffocated by the stench of profit. Ambushed by the efficiency of their work, we found ourselves raped of our comforts, our familiarities. We thought these band-aids would save us, we naively assumed that these parameters would protect us. We were wrong. Had we only taken some form of initiative, understood the importance of preparation against such a tragedy, maybe then would we have saved ourselves. But we didn't; we still haven't. We are so concerned with what comes next we seldom take the time to see if what just came was successful. Subsequently, we are now bound only by our own failure. Failure to understand that we control what is around us. We are the creators, the developers, the producers; but rarely is it addressed. With the explosion of big box retail, fast food chains and warning gas stations we have become lost in the metaphorical shingles. If we would only organize ourselves and construct some sort of bomb shelter we would be impervious to the destruction that has so frequently destroyed our society. Covering a wound does not prevent it; it only attempts to hide it. A band-aid tries to correct a problem, a mistake. It serves as a universal eraser of our problems and our pain. We must step away from this reliance on repairing and begin to implement the idea of preparing. If we prepare for future possibilities, we can begin to manipulate the outcome to promote a more appreciable result. Tragedy occurs through oblivion, success spawns from awareness of the world around us. We must begin to understand that not only can we begin to guard ourselves from these catastrophes we can begin to influence their outcome. Our society can no longer be content with placing miscellaneous band-aids over all of our problems. There must become a time where we understand the importance of the bomb shelter. We must appreciate its competence and remember its purpose before we are caught off guard again.

02.09.04
Inside this realm of sprawling landscapes is the question of how can we remedy the disintegration of social interaction. There are two underlying solutions that initiate responses to the problem. Any solution can be defined as either one of two distinctions: a "band-aid" or a "bomb shelter." In a band-aid one can find a solution that attempts to fix existing conditions through numerous possibilities such as adaptive reuse or urban infill projects. In a band-aid the priorities lie in an emphasis upon contextual relations and site functionality. It must understand its surroundings and begin to allow adjoining elements to relate to one another. Its responsibilities revolve around an attempt to create a seamless environment that conveys social vitality. On the other hand, the expectations are concentrated elsewhere when confronted with a bomb shelter. In a bomb shelter the solution is saturated in an effort of preparation. Organizing a context that will generate a socially successful environment, the bomb shelter is a solution that attempts to understand the problem in hopes that it may prevent it from ever occurring. The bomb shelter tries to eliminate the need for band-aids through the exploration of social needs and comprehension of functional occupant situations. This thesis is an attempt to create a working bomb shelter that will showcase the possibilities of what suburbia can become and possibly what it should be.

Directly east of the heart of Indianapolis, Indiana (located on the east side of Interstate 465) is the suburban township of Lawrence. Directly south of 56th street is a substantial residential subdivision named Winding Ridge. On the site are approximately 800 residential lots and an eighteen-hole golf course. Although a number of builders/developers have conglomerated to create this typical suburban landscape, the entire complex reads exactly as many other subdivisions across the country do. The majority of this effort will focus on an attempt to redesign it with a focus upon a sense of community and neighborhood while understanding the importance of preparing for urban growth. Allowing for accessible green spaces, safer ambulatory lanes and eventually more readable urban vocabularies the space will become more of a cohesive unit as opposed to a jumble of cul-de-sacs and meandering roads.

Out of the 38,915 citizens of Lawrence, IN ninety-eight percent commute. That is approximately 38,136 individuals depend upon their car for employment. However, this is not seemingly as disturbing as the fact that out of this ninety-eight percent the average commute time is slightly over twenty-four minutes. Virtually all of Lawrence spends an hour out of each work day in the car.

Not unlike many Midwestern suburban cities a large majority of Lawrence, IN is Caucasian. With seventy-six percent white, over fifteen percent are black and the remaining nine percent is accumulated by a series of ethnic backgrounds. In response, Lawrence is similar to many American cities throughout our nation; it is structured by a majority of white people that would rather live in their car for an hour a day than work in their home town. While "white flight" meets the common commuter we must try to find a solution to this reality and begin to implement an answer.
The Winding Ridge site plan consists of numerous awkwardly designated lots and an eighteen hole golf course. Neither of which promote a communal experience.
The average home throughout this entire scheme is a typical modern layout, street facing facade housing, an opaque garage door while the rest of the home is hidden behind it. Although the layout of such a structure may seem appropriate to some, one can argue that not only is it inappropriate, it is inhumane. To increase the dysfunctional nature of this one has to begin to imagine the layout of the overall development. Here it is not surprising to find forty-foot wide homes spaced ten feet apart. Lot after lot, home after home, one can begin to see the privacy suburban dwellers admittedly seek is ironically non-existent. The site is labeled "a golf course community" by both its advertisements and masonry signs located at every entrance. Yet, one argument is that the golf course is one of the many things that are dividing this settlement in the first place. Dissecting every separate neighborhood in this "community" the golf course becomes a "Winding Wall" instead of a glorious amenity used as a primary selling point. Nevertheless, the golf course becomes a major source for identification for the homes here no matter how successful. Overall, the Winding Ridge development is a perfect example of suburban residential sprawl. With rows and rows of identical rooftops and repetitious street-facing garage doors, the complex will become the site for a bomb shelter allowing one to wonder what could have happened with the constraints of this site and what should begin to happen here and on a national scale.

"If there is to be a New Urbanism it will not be based on the twin fantasies of order and omnipotence; it will be the staging of uncertainty, it will no longer be concerned with the arrangement of more or less permanent objects but with the irrigation of territories with potential."17

REM KOOLHAAS
Engulfed in this ideology is a series of design guidelines concerning the functionality and juxtaposition of form within the development. Broad based community ownership results from encouraging involvement and capturing values from its native occupants; therefore the overall project must share certain common values. Six fundamental rules were predetermined for the organization of this project:

**[1] A Community Center:** Allowing the epicycle theory to exist on more than one level, it will be superimposed over the site plan emphasizing the importance of a grounded inner core that allows things to radiate outwardly. This center will serve as the epicenter for the community and a datum point for its occupants. Mimicking the purity in the organic hierarchy of the microscopic tissues of cell-structure, the community must read as one living organism. The center, therefore, is the nucleus. Everything is governed and dependant upon this core, the epicenter.

**[2] A Fifteen Minute Walk:** An average human can walk one mile in fifteen minutes. Allowing for a more relaxed stride the entire site was broke down by a three quarter mile = fifteen-minute walk system. The site is roughly one and a half miles wide and three quarters of a mile deep in order to allow a pedestrian to walk the entire site. Therefore; from the epicenter nothing is located further away than a fifteen minute walk.

**[3] A Street Network:** Through the evolution of suburbia, curved roads have become understood as superior street patterns. This argument holds little merit when one evaluates cities such as Philadelphia or San Francisco. Realizing this, the entire site is based on a three hundred foot orthogonal grid that is systematically being dissected by two circular linear parks [also serving as two nine-hole golf courses] creating a fused network. In this system the opportunity for predictability complements the possibility of a series of anomalies. This must read as a circulation pattern that will accommodate cars as well as transit and will reinforce walkable places rather than isolated zones.
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"The edge of a city projects probe phenomenological dimensions in the formation of new urban spaces, in order to transform the tangled waste at all fringes of our modern cities and build new urban sectors with programmatic spatial and architecture richness."\textsuperscript{24}

Steven Holl

[4] Mixed-Use Typologies: The site is largely made up of mixed use buildings allowing retail and commercial functions to control the street level while residential components occupy the levels above.\textsuperscript{6} This not only allows for a richer mix of functions and utilities; it governs the site through the possibility of a twenty-four hour neighborhood. At all times someone is occupying the buildings and serving as the "eyes on the street."\textsuperscript{26}

[5] Layers of Density and Scale: The site consists of three major levels of density and scale starting from the core [epicenter] and radiating outwardly.\textsuperscript{27} Going from high to low density the site becomes a three dimensional interpretation of the epicycle theory functioning as a community.

[6] Consolidation of Green Space: Currently in suburban realities left over residual space dictates resident's backyards.\textsuperscript{28} However; if these spaces were united and used more efficiently the possibilities of community parks and gardens are endless. The site makes a strong effort to showcase as much usable greenspace as possible through neighborhood nodes and linear parks.

Figure 3.10: Eyes on the Street

Figure 3.11: Density/Scales.

Figure 3.12: Consolidation.
Urban design and architecture in general, must be fulfilled with designs of use. It must simultaneously be rooted in time and site while allowing the opportunity for it to transcend them as well. With this in mind this redevelopment needs to function as more than a residential identity it must read as an identity for the occupant of the community, neighborhood, building and individual unit scale. The site tries to incorporate the methodology of identity through its configuration and structure while allowing for opportunities for unique functions to occur. This site is the facilitator for the next scale and the framework for the context as a whole. This site is preparing for social interaction, physical interpretation and inevitable growth. This site is the bomb shelter.

The site became the main focus of the project early on in the process. Trying to understand how to create a context for some to live and mature within itself became something that was not only difficult but subjective. The focus shifted on the overall structure of the site and how the golf course [depicted by the red circles above] would cut and stitch the site. Governing the adjacencies of the site, this course will create the identity of the community and illustrate the possibilities of such a development.

low-density housing
multi-family housing
commercial mixed-use
retail mixed-use
restaurant mixed-use
greenspace
water
thesis
Figure 3.19: pedestrian paths and walking times

Figure 3.20: density scales and nodal points
PORCHES AND CELL PHONES: RESTORING SOCIAL INTERACTION

Silhouetted by the flickering street lights I walk down the empty street as the rain slowly falls down to the cold asphalt surface under my feet. Every day I cherished that walk, my walk. My schedule was frenzied, my days intense, or so it seemed for a fourteen year old boy. But for those few moments as I meandered across those short blocks before my house I was at peace. Usually humming to myself I would wave "good evening" to my neighbors as I passed by their homes. While "Lean On Me" ran through my head every porch I passed housed someone not willing to let me by without a "hello". For years these seemingly meaningless voyages were my relaxation, my solitude. A journey through porches, a voyage through neighbors; I strolled along those nights oblivious to a world outside my own. As the years have gone by, the porch-dwellers have passed; replaced by others, strangers, who have abandoned these values. The walk now seems cold, distant from those detailed memories kept vivid in my mind. The streets are empty, the porches bare. Now the march along that street is lit by the flickering of televisions through a series of bay windows; their attention spans humbly getting their fix as channel after channel is surfed. The only hello's I hear are those of people angrily trying to talk to each other on their cell phones, frustrated with their phone service, as well as their lives. Without anyone knowing "How was your day?" was secretly exchanged for "Can you hear me now?" The age of the multi-tasker brought forth the death of the patience conversationalist. The cell phone has become an excuse for many; held close to their face it serves as a shield protecting them from engaging in any physical dialogue with those around them. Our society has bartered our porches to Verizon Wireless with promises of limitless communication. Nevertheless, instead of breaking these physical boundaries it trained us to regurgitate thoughts into a small plastic receiver pressed to our ear erasing our ability to talk to humans. We need to understand the importance of that interaction; we need to appreciate its presence. Those nightly walks are gone, extinct along with the warmth embracing those memories. I still walk along at night humming to myself in hopes that someone will say "hello", but eventually it becomes a venture through a sea of empty porches. As a child it was one of my most cherished activities, as an adult it has become one of my most frustrating. I miss those conversations, I long for those nightly talks. I wish we wouldn't have traded our porches for our cell phones.

02.05.04
Focusing in on the retail core of the site allows for almost all of the building typologies and scales to be addressed. Distributed in a series of wedges the retail core reads as several neighborhoods that have shared as well as isolated personalities. Each wedge has its own core-reading as a pedestrian node, its own parking garage allowing for above ground and below ground parking; and its own pedestrian corridor. Reverting back to the epicycle theory, each wedge has a public corridor running tangent to its boundaries while a more private corridor dissected it internally. This allows for a series of activities to occur that range from public events to more personal activities. This segregation of scale showcases to the occupant the range of the interaction throughout the site. Along with this idea of physical interaction through built adjacencies is the presence of a third dimension. Above the street-level spaces are floor plates that extend into the pedestrian corridor serving as the retail canopy as well as the buffer between the street and the retail unit itself. This extension allows the units to interact on all dimensions and relays a design density that designates gestures that serve multiple functions. Within this density is the re-introduction and reinterpretation of the modern porch.

This window box is aligned in such a way that it will allow maximum solar penetration in the winter and minimal during summer months.
Some place in the timeline of residential America it became acceptable to move the garage to the street facing façade of a home, replacing the dominate porch. Homes fronted by a porch say “people live here” where houses fronted by garages say “cars live here.” However, the porch has lost a great deal of its functionality due to the introduction of mechanical systems and air conditioning into today’s home. Before such advances the porch was an escape from the heat of the smoldering kitchen and a retreat from the warmth of the home. Due to this extinct functionality the porch needs to be somewhat redefined. It still must read as a medium for visual interaction but is no longer confined by the constraints of a relatively small attachment to the front of a home. This visually interact porch begins to define the project at this scale and allows the occupant to understand the context in which they live.

With the differentiation of form and juxtaposition between the ground floor and the above levels, a relationship between neighboring units allows for a series of possibilities in urban gardens, both street level and rooftop. These become urban porches as well as community greenspaces allowing the occupants to share the “porch” as well as presenting them as a smaller-scaled community to be seen be any adjoining neighbors. Beyond this they serve as shading devices for the levels below. Each overhang is aligned in such a way that allows maximum daylight to penetrate in the winter and minimum light in the summer months. Each function redefines the porch and allows it to take on a new identity in today’s built environment. It encourages people to put down their cell phones and communicate with those standing next to them, reconnecting social relationships and reestablishing the communicative citizen.

Figure 4.4: Connection of Scales.

The ability to create a variety of scales throughout a certain parameter is only half of the challenge of this thesis. The majority of the concern is how one can weave these different levels of scale together to read as one cohesive component. How does the city relate to the suburb? The suburb to the neighborhood? The neighborhood to the home? The home to the occupant? All of these questions try to understand how these things begin to read as one. We must connect these elements in hope of a more unified social fabric.
community=shared ex
BUTCH CASSIDY AND THE CUL-DE-SAC KID: PLACEMAKING THROUGH IMAGINATIVE IDEALS

There I stood in the middle of the road as SUV's drifted by like tumbleweeds. Roaming along the open land I daydreamed to ignore the heat. I was an outlaw, a rebel without a clue. As the cold steel of my Smith & Wesson six-shooter laid against my hip I tasted the dust in the air while I walked along the prairie in search for the next saloon. I had been riding for days now and more than anything I needed a warm bath and a stiff drink. I was lost in my imaginary world. It was the only way I knew how to cope with such mundane surroundings. Identical duplex after duplex played as the background to my cowboy adventures as a child. Scurrying through the vinyl coded boxes and malnourished trees the neglected sidewalk became my Oregon Trail. Accompanied by my brother I ventured through this wilderness protecting the innocent and apprehending anyone riding a black horse; an occupation I deemed indispensable for this average suburban wasteland. This is how I spent those deceitful afternoons. Nevertheless, it may have been my only option in order to keep my borderline sanity in that stale neighborhood. All the while the world around me so obviously continued through the constant noise of the hammers and nail guns coming from the growing developments. As new construction continuously plagued my life I turned to the old west for comfort. In many ways it was the only choice I had at the time. However, as I grew up my teenage mind wasn't able to manifest such an environment into something as remotely entertaining. Those years of shooting moving cars and saving distressed damsels were becoming awkward and monotonous. The context was to painfully real. I could no longer ignore its existence around me, no matter how desperately I tried. Ironically, the majority of that brief period of my life fell within the capabilities of my most imaginative childhood. Without the ability to visualize different locations, different faces, different time periods, I wonder how I would have survived. In those moments envisioning new adventures I drifted away to a world that made more sense, a world that involved more depth and charisma than that cold palette of nothingness. As I began my next expedition my brother would continually proclaim himself Butch Cassidy as he eagerly begged to accompany me. Upon my approval we would lead a posse across a series of driveways to a fortress of garage doors in hopes of capturing the malevolent Billy the Kid. It was only a matter of time before he would be captured and the people of my subdivision would be safe. Or was I the one who was captured? Then again, who could capture the Cul-de-Sac Kid?

Figure 5.1: Cowboy.

02.11.04
This thesis is an attempt to understand the paradigm of suburban constraints and question them, challenge them and fundamentally obliterate them. This project, in many ways, is reevaluating suburbia through more imaginative eyes in hopes one can find not only a better solution but, more importantly, a more pleasurable one. Any fantasy of urbandity that wants to be built should be a fantasy of desirability. Cowed by the anathema heaped on the disgraced project of planning, the most arresting images of the city born of the last twenty-five years have been dystopian. This is a tragedy for urbandity. [This] project's purpose is to invent happier forms.32

The challenge is to identify with what these urban-like environments can become and discover the necessary ingredients to create them. People need an identifiable spatial district to belong to separate from that of their home. They need a neighborhood that relays characteristics that define their region.33 The retail core of the site is analytically divided into a series of wedges, or neighborhoods, that then come together to form a larger whole. Along the outside of the wedge is the public corridor, along the inside lies an opportunity to more intimately converse with the occupants and allows for a more communal experience. This wedge serves as the distinction in sub-communities and the social network that unites them.
In section this methodology again becomes evident. The structures bordering the street are between 6-8 stories tall, the second tier between 3-5 and the last ranging from 1-3. This decline in scale showcases the ability of the site to address the street in an urban setting while respecting the opposite side as a more intimate approach to nature and its context [including the golf course]. The wedge has gone from urban to sub-urban to rural in a relatively small distance and tries to convey the opportunity of weaving all of these elements into a cultural center as something that deserves further investigation.

Within this cultural center however, one cannot forget that this is not strictly zoned for commercial and retail use. These are people’s homes, and by forgetting that a home can quickly become nothing more than a house. There are a series of questions that need to be answered to understand these spaces from the point of view of the occupant as opposed to the visitor. How can someone express their identity through their unit? How does an occupant enter the core? ... the wedge?... the building? Where do they park?... etc.

To realize these answers exploring a particular building becomes crucial. Dissected, the wedge becomes a series of buildings that address the street on the first level and then begin to open up to the surrounding context along the upper floors. With this guideline the taller buildings open up to the wedge, the middle tier of structures open to their neighbors and the rural buildings open to the golf course allowing it to integrate itself into their backyards. All of these openings begin to mature into urban gardens and shared courtyards that only the occupants access.
Economic segregation at its finest. Is this what we as a society see as superior living? Has separating families of different incomes become an approach we collectively decided was the answer? This, and so many other things, have become the downfall in our communities. We are too concerned with classifications and reputations, we have abandoned the one quality that made this nation so endearing -- variety.

While again overlapping the epicycle theory over the floor plans of the building the overall makeup of the structure becomes another appreciation for interaction between a series of different scales. On the street level you have two segregated sectors of retail units, diagrammatically serving as two separate communities. Running tangent to the service [back] side of these units is a service hallway accessed by a garage door. This service alley becomes the collector road and the functional highway to stock and serve the retail tenants. The above levels carry through with the same philosophies.

In typical apartment design it is common to encounter a double loaded hallway with apartments on either side. With this arrangement that corridor is the street. The hallway has been brought to the outside of the building and reads as an elevated sidewalk creating visual interaction with those circulating through the building and along the street. This allows for the balconies to be moved to the courtyard side of the building allowing more intimate visual interaction between the occupants themselves. It also designates a more dominate feeling of ownership for the courtyard and a more personal connection to the shared space. All of the residential units are based off of a twenty-five foot grid. However; throughout the site is an opportunity to expand upon this structural grid. This flexibility becomes the springboard to the reintroduction of mixed economic classes into suburbia. American history has always been plagued with different types of segregation -- by race, by class, by how recently one has immigrated -- but for the first time we are now experiencing ruthless segregation by minute gradations of income. These buildings, this project, must allow for variations of race, income, and age to live within the same neighborhood; but more importantly in the same building. Therefore, each structure houses a series of apartment types that would reflect different occupant backgrounds. Connecting these forms is a series of transition spaces, communal spaces. Coded in louvered panels that visual separate their functions from a passerby on the street, these communal spaces are sub-shared spaces that function the same as the courtyard only on the floor to floor basis. Each transition space is shared by the occupants of that floor, allowing a third scale of neighborhood community to exist and interconnect the social network of the site. These tertiary communal spaces not only reinforce the idea of the epicycle theory as a system to integrate communities, it begins to showcase the importance of the shared experience in the built environment.
Along the second level of the core is another vocabulary of alignment. Each unit begins to direct attention to a neighboring object. Be it the wedge, the golf course or the adjacent sky garden; these orientations begin to connect the spaces into one underlining whole. As you can see on the diagram on the right, each of these enclosure unite the occupants and remind them that their community does not stop at their building but extends far past the walls that make their home.

Another detail that spawned a series of investigations was how to address the ideology of different level of scale throughout the project. This diagram showcase the reinvented porch that allows for visual interaction but also shows the passersby the separate neighborhoods through the site. In this the porch becomes part of the shared experience and allows for "sub-porches" [balconies] to overlook this porch connecting the unit back to the communal areas.
Figure 5.10: Street Level Plan

1. lobby
2. retail units
3. service corridor
4. storage
[5] single unit apartment
[6] double wide apartment
[7] courtyard
[8] communal space
[9] transition space

Figure 5.11: Second Level Plan
With the majority of the residential structure being created by a series of vierendeel trusses, the layout of the units becomes extremely flexible. The units have the possibility of becoming 1, 2, 3... units wide as well as beginning to penetrate the floor plates creating multi-level apartments.

Figure 5.12: Unit Floorplans.
Figure 5.13: Pedestrian Node Perspective.

Figure 5.14: Street Perspective.
DEATH TO THE MICROWAVE:
EMBRACING CONTEXT THROUGH UNHURRIED LIVES

As a child I used to sit on my grandfather's worn wooden picnic table while my blue Velcro shoes dangled six inches from the shaded grass. There he and I would sit and eat Mother Nature's candy, ripe watermelon. Without any thought of chores still left to do we would sit and respond to each other's contagious laughter as we competed as to who could spit the slippery black seeds the furthest into the summer lawn. This game, among my favorite as a six-year-old boy, was one of the many ways we would pass the time on those slow Saturday afternoons. However, the taste of the watermelon was never a primary concern. It is not even something I remember. The enjoyment came from the game, the seeds, and the satisfaction of taming the fruit with your tongue and firing them out of your mouth like a cannonball. The pleasure of the experience lay in the eloquent fact that those two slices of watermelon could become an afternoon event someone could remember for the rest of their life.

Nevertheless, we as a society have become preoccupied. Eating watermelon apparently had taken too much time out of our lives and therefore had to evolve. As we are so busy, it is obvious to everyone that there is an obvious shortage of time and abundance for better things to do came seedless watermelon, H2O melon vol. 2.0, more sophisticated, more reasonable, and theoretically compatible with Windows XP. As a society we are consistently in a hurry to go nowhere. We have time to pump gas into our SUV's every 37 miles but we no longer have the time to eat seeded watermelon with our children. We abandoned the homemade meal accompanied by a glass of milk for TV dinners and a reliance on the microwave: a machine invented to dramatically decrease the length of cooking time and successfully destroy all intimacy that the sacrifice of a homemade dinner so consistently presented.

There are few things in this world that are necessities: shelter, family, love, food/water. Yet there are so many more things we allow to replace old approaches without a thought as to what we as a society will miss in their absence. All due to the excitement we blindly share to their scientific evolution. Answering machines, seedless watermelons, drive through food services, cell phones, tanning beds, microwaves along with so many other "technological advances" have forced us to speed up our lives and forbid us the allowance to stop and appreciate forgotten things. I miss the way that picnic table made me feel that afternoon. I miss life being slow. I wish the watermelon's seeds would return. I wish the microwave would die.

10.12.04
Figure 6.2: Middle Tier of Model.
Solutions are correct as long as the problem never evolves. Nevertheless, evolution is inevitable making solutions a fickle thing. One must realize that the true solution to this social disconnection is the separation of uses, the separation of functions, the separation of lives. We must reevaluate our priorities as a society and in turn collectively establish a new set of standards for the construct of our lives both physically and socially. This thesis was an exploration of the possibilities of our quality of living as a society. It was an investigation towards understanding how this suburban environment could have been developed. Simply it was a crusade to understand scale, as an observer and occupant; showcasing what this knowledge can lend to the planning of future communities.
Figure 6.8: Overall Wedge.
courtyard

variation

Figure 6.10: Northwest Corner.
Figure 6.11: Middle Tier of Model.
When this thesis was simply a series of notes etched on coffee-stained napkins, the question of "what is community" was something that never received an appropriate response. Is the word community a crutch? What terminology can justify the meaning and all it encompasses? The thesis was a search to understand how to redefine suburbia, more importantly it was a search to understand community to understand place-making. Charles Moore wrote once in 1962 that We have carefully developed techniques for describing what buildings look like, both in words and in two-dimensional monochromatic abstractions by celebrated architectural photographers. The talisman of these gentlemen have such value that, in curious annual rituals, they are examined by panels of experts who bestow awards on the buildings from which the most elegant abstractions have been made. Meanwhile, nobody - critic, architect, teacher or other theoretician of technician - has so far communicated any interest in the way these buildings work, the way they have taken possession of them. It would be hard to communicate such an interest; there is no technical language to do it. But the language, presumably, does not exist because there is the need for it has not yet been urgently enough felt. Over forty years have passed and I think the urgency is now felt. With every dead end cul-de-sac, in every road rage temper tantrum, in every tired voyage to a distant school by a burnt-out "soccer mom" in a crowded minivan I think the urgency is more than felt, it is irrefutable. This thesis responds to these urgencies as petitions to create a more suitable institution where social life can exist. It visualizes possibilities, both real and unreal, while attempting to push the limits of the contextual built environment. The word community is not a crutch; it becomes a catalyst for a sense of belonging. Community is simply a medium for humanism to thrive. Urbanity allows us the possibilities to reintroduce imagination into our lives, to once again embrace a fairy tale architecture, an architecture that is collectively imagined. We must salvage our public realm, reintroducing the shared experience through collectively fighting for social interaction. Suburbia was once a foundation for the American dream. Now it is the cause of American frustrations; however, it doesn't have to be. We must regain our lives, or neighborhoods, our communities. We must reintroduce the shared experience within our social fabric - we must allow ourselves a better life.
Bowling For Columbine. DVD. Dir. Michael Moore. A Dog Eat Dog Films Production, 2002. 120 min.
Franzen, Jonathan. First City. p91
Saarinen, Eliel. Time. 02 July 1956.
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Figure 1.1: Baltimore, Maryland. Photo by John Maclean.
Figure 1.2: Bloomingdale, Illinois. Photo by John Maclean.
Figure 1.3: Miami, Florida. Photo by John Maclean.
Figure 1.4: Sun City, Arizona. Photo by John Maclean.
Figure 1.5: Medford, Massachusetts. Photo by John Maclean.
Figure 1.7: Gated Community Entrance in Haines City, Florida. Found at www.forestisle.com/images/gate.jpg
Figure 1.8: Gated Community Entrance in New Orleans, Louisiana. Found at www.lakehenryestates.com/htm.jpg
Figure 2.1: Traffic Jam. Found at www.soundprint.org/whatif/traffic.htm
Figure 2.2: Saddlebags. Found at www.spaghettireplicas.com/images/bag.jpg
Figure 2.5: Flower in bloom. Found at www.pointgallery.com/images/flower.jpg
Figure 3.1: The Bombing of Nagasaki. Found at www.mattbua.com-coolpics-nagasaki.jpg
Figure 3.2: Commuter Chart. Information found at www.city-data.com/city/Lawrence-Indiana.html
Figure 3.3: Demographics Chart. Information found at www.city-data.com/city/Lawrence-Indiana.html
Figure 3.4: Typical Street Elevation. Found at www.harmonymagazine.com/community
Figure 3.5: Winding Ridge Site Plan. Found at www.harmonymagazine.com/community
Figure 3.6: Typical Floor Plan. Found at www.harmonymagazine.com/community
Figure 4.1: The American Porch. Found at www.thebathhouse.com/images/porch/lrg.jpg
Figure 5.1: Cowboy. Found at www.nlc/bncmailorder/h33/203/e.html.jpg
Figure 5.6: A sign at the entrance to a gated community. Koolhaas, Rem. Mutations. Barcelona: Actar Editorial, 2001. p569.
Figure 6.1: Microwave. Found at www.yentala.typepad.com/cyber_yenta/microwave.jpg

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Figure 6.13: Second Level Connection.


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Franzen, Jonathan. First City. p91


