

Safety Not Guaranteed

ASHLEY BIGHAM

University of Michigan

Architecture is inseparable from defense. From its most primitive and revered “origins,” architecture was rehearsed in environments of conflict. As an alternative to the term defense architecture, a category which typically refers to forms and types (fortresses, citadels, bastions, urban walls), this project proposes the idea of an architecture of defense. An architecture of defense sees all of architecture as a reaction to some measure of paranoia and studies the built environment to recognize measures and methods used to subdue these fears. *Safety Not Guaranteed* explores the architecture of paranoia through a series of design manipulations. Its setting is the network of suburbia and everyday domestic scenes—those most commonly associated with spaces of privacy, safety, and security—and where fortification occurs on the scale of the front door, the home, the cul-de-sac, the neighborhood.

This project uses the American suburb both as a typology for study and as a testing ground upon which to project future architectural possibilities. American suburbs straddle a unique space in the discipline of architecture. While many Americans see these enclaves as the default or even ideal way of living, suburbs or gated communities are often ignored

by architects. The ubiquitous nature of the spaces leaves little room for imagination or provocation. It is for this very reason that this project sought to tackle the American suburb as a site, to mine the generic typologies of suburbia to its advantage. In addition to observing the defensive stances of individual houses, gates and circular cul-de-sacs, suburbs offer specific examples of contemporary fortification. Residents in suburbs clearly mark their territory with fences, often battling with neighbors over inches. Front porches have been replaced with backyard decks which offer increased privacy and a socially accepted method of interacting with (or avoiding) neighbors. Large gated communities host a network of distributed centers—club houses, golf courses or swimming pools—and clearly defined but physically weak periphery boundaries, such as gate houses, fences and security checkpoints.

Since its development in the 1820s, the American suburb has been embedded with social aspirations about the nuclear family, gender norms, religion, inclusiveness and maybe most importantly, exclusiveness. As of the year 2000, more Americans live in suburbs than in either central cities or rural areas combined. American suburbs have slowly

developed into enclaves defined by gates, fences, berms, and other forms of defensive origin. In most cases, gated communities provide only the illusion of protection. Public space has been replaced by the shopping mall, a type which feels public but precludes many by its location removed from the urban centers, inaccessible by public transportation or in areas where vehicular traffic makes walking or cycling dangerous, or at the very least, unpleasant. Suburban enclaves are spreading throughout the world as cities co-opt forms of American suburbanization in response to local socio-economic shifts and perceived or real physical threats.

The three models in this exhibition project possible pasts, presents and futures in order to understand through subtle distortions how paranoia shapes our world. Rather than offering a single solution to the problem, it offers a new lens through which suburban fortification can be understood and “hacked” by designers. The project offers a glimpse into the world of military tactics deployed in the most typical environs.



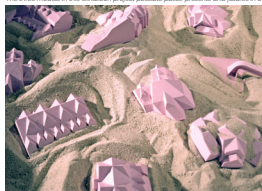
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Sand table model allows participants to design their own form of suburbanism.

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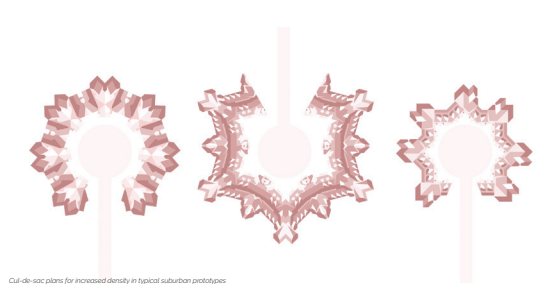
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Vertical panorama drawing of fortified suburbanism

SAFETY × NOT ● GUARANTEED



Cul-de-sac plans for increased density in typical suburban prototypes