

THE FENESTRATION OF SUBURBIA
a thesis by Mitchell Stafiej

A melancholic social documentation of a cold Canadian suburb. Framed behind windows and surveilled from the street, the lives of suburbanites float in the black cinematic frame to form images that are simultaneously sorrowful, mundane, theatrical, and puzzling.

The Fenestration of Suburbia, and by extension the entire focus of my graduate studies, was always meant to be a simple yet effective idea. Throughout my life I've had a passion for walks through the suburbs in the winter. Every year when I return to visit my hometown for Christmas, I stroll through the winding roads of an individualist suburbia. The Christmas lights glow softly, diffused by the powdered snow that consumes each home. As I pass each house, some with their blinds and curtains wide open, people move freely within. You can almost see through the house and into the backyard, every piece of furniture and bland artwork is like an organ deep within the human body.

I would often stop in my tracks to observe the lives of these unknown suburban inhabitants for a moment and watch their mundane stories unfold in front of me. There was nothing nefarious, even though part of me desperately wanted to learn about their secrets, their drama, and their fears. Instead, I was confronted with an excruciating banality. People watched television, ate dinner, and paced around quietly. The pace was simply far slower than a constantly connected life. It made me reflect on the lives of humans in the 21st century and question whether this banality is exclusive to the suburbs. Are we expected to live grandiose and exhilarating lives and, if we don't, are we falling behind the rest of the world? We live in an era in which we are pressured to share the highlights of our lives and nothing else. On Instagram and Facebook, our self-worth can be shattered by a skewed perception of the lives of others. We are presented a false narrative. We do not see the boring and mundane moments of everyday life even though the majority of our lives are boring and mundane, as much as it may hurt to admit. Perhaps I was searching for solace in the knowledge that we do not constantly need to be moving forward. We can be content in inactivity. If this inactivity or banality is universal regardless of geography, why is this narrative of the boring historically attached to the suburbs? Why does this prejudice exist?

On the suburbs

For the purpose of this film and this thesis, we are referring to North American suburbs and, even more specifically, Canadian suburbs. Much like its U.S. counterpart the Canadian suburb is characterized by single family detached homes owned by a largely middle-class population. While the aesthetic is similar, the reasons for its existence and sustainability are much different. The suburb is a product of a rapidly rising and growing middle class and the availability of transport, transit, and jobs to support a lifestyle outside of metropolitan centres. Housing was more affordable and the commute to the city was supported by newly constructed freeways and adequate public transit. In Canada, cities are much higher in density and they have far less “urban sprawl.” Canadian suburbs are much closer in proximity to the city centres than U.S. suburbs, therefore the suburb in Canada becomes a much more diverse area rather than a product of what many researchers call “white-flight”, where an influx of poor black people move to urban centres and the middle-class white residents escape this by moving to the suburbs. (“Urban Sociology Theories”)

Sociologically, suburbs around the world vary greatly but aesthetically and tonally they operate in a similar fashion. “Community” is replaced by “individualism” accentuated by the trophy house, which effectively functions as an extension of the human body and mind, offering insight into the owners’ personalities, often just as boring and banal as their homes.

Culturally, sonically, and visually, there is a definite sense of banality... not much happens. The sounds are few and far between. The homes look exactly the same and for the most part are modern and don’t bear the marks of history yet. There is not much experience of art and culture other than the local cineplex or the family movie night provided by Netflix, unless one grows up in a family that commutes to a city centre. The art galleries are occupied by retirees’ paintings of a nearby lake or river or the cardinals and blue jays that eat from their bird feeders. Generally you cannot go to a concert or show without entering “the city.” In fact, Pointe-Claire, a suburb in Montreal’s West Island, (often called *Waste Island*) banned hip-hop shows at their local bars because it brought in the wrong crowd. Bars could have their liquor licenses revoked if they did not agree to ban the genre of music, traditionally dominated by black culture. (“Pointe Claire Bar Agrees to Ban Hip Hop”) Therefore even racially, the suburbs are far less diverse and this lack of diversity is enforced by the local government and councils. Furthermore, the suburb is often built and situated around a mini-business district, mall or strip mall, which becomes the epicentre of suburbia and the weekend excitement for many families. This urban sociological phenomenon is referred to as “Edge City.” Physically, it often rests on the edge of a busy metropolis. But thematically and tonally it exists on the edge of culture, excitement, and, as I would argue, reality.

The one thing that is abundant in suburbia is ‘nature.’ There is more foliage, more animals, and more green space. But, again, it is on the edge of both a full urban environment, where nature is in the form of half-grown trees on a sidewalk and also on the edge of natural landscapes, where mountains, trees, and animals dominate. Perhaps the added nature in suburbia is tied to a sense of simplicity or a slow-moving lifestyle, where even the animals can live in peace, unaffected by the loud roaring sounds of the city.

On shooting

The experience of observing the lives of suburbanites from the street had to be translated to film. Uncertain about how to achieve this sensation, I knew at the very least that I was eager to shoot it on my own, something I had yet to do substantially in my career. I usually rely on the services of a cinematographer, but this time, partly for budgetary reasons and partly for educational reasons, it would be a solo-endeavour. I have noticed in my personal practice as a film director, at times, the inability to communicate certain visual ideas to team members. I believe the choice to act as cinematographer for *The Fenestration of Suburbia* has allowed me to communicate ideas more clearly and effectively.

I was influenced by documentary director/cinematographers and films like Gianfranco Rosi's *Fire at Sea*, Nikolaus Geyrhalter's *Homo Sapiens*, Chris Marker's *Junkopia*, and Laura Poitras' *Citizen Four*. These films maintain the visual mark of the director and are rather solitary and quiet productions that portray a profound intimacy with their characters or subjects. I wanted to follow in their footsteps and learn to create images as a documentary filmmaker on my own, as there will come a time when I do not have a cinematographer to turn to and will have to pick up the camera myself.

On inspiration (or lack thereof)

There may be links to films like *Rear Window* by Alfred Hitchcock, *The Conversation* by Francis Ford Coppola, *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* by Tomas Alfredson, or *We Live in Public* by Ondi Timoner. These links are purely coincidental as this film was never directly influenced by those productions. Tonally, the films are vastly different. In each of these films there is plot, conflict, and narrative. They involve surveillance, as do many fiction films, but they do not present the reality of the lives of the people that they surveil. Early in the post-production of *The Fenestration of Suburbia* I experimented with different aspects of the sound design and looked towards *The Conversation* for ideas and inspiration. There was a lot of radio static, interference, and active attempts to listen. Those ideas were quickly scrapped as I found them too explicit and became too much of a film about the “listener” or the “looker” and not the residents themselves. Instead of a film filled with implied listening devices, I recorded foley and did not answer the question: “how did I obtain these sounds?” They are just there. They just exist in the film without reason. Perhaps I used a recording device or perhaps it is all foley. What is important is a manufactured experience that can translate to audiences what the actual experience feels like. This extra layer prevents the film from being only about the walk through the suburbs, but it becomes about the lives of those who live there. We need to move into a false-reality to understand the true-reality of suburbia or, reality is not interesting enough to communicate experiences effectively to an audience. They need more. Filmmaker Werner Herzog calls this the “ecstatic truth”, where deeper meaning in cinema can only be extracted from a manufactured reality. (Herzog, 2017) This does not mean I need to write a fiction film. Instead, it means that we have to accept that reality is not entirely possible in documentary cinema. Each choice we make, whether it’s a cut or a camera placement, is a manipulation of reality from the perception of one point of view. These manipulations can exist on different levels and, in my film, they exist in the form of foley, scripted sequences, and cropping and frame-resizing. This is all in an effort to translate the truth or ‘reality’ of a feeling: the feeling of watching the lives of suburbanites.

On shooting 2

Technically, while each camera has its own nuances, my comfort level with the Sony FS5 came with relative ease. Framing and camera placement would prove to be a much more intuitive process that arose while shooting. There was no shot-list or plan to capture these images and this ‘feeling’ other than a re-creation of my suburban walks, only this time with a camera. The most profound imagery is that which I did not receive permission to shoot. The act of stopping, quickly setting up the camera, and picking a frame without real thought but instead pure intuition is what made the strongest images. When I picked the frame out of necessity I captured the most, in a sense, honest images for this film. This was likely because it was **my** vantage point, the camera operator. It was my line of sight into the house as I would see it on a walk. I was not approaching the house or attempting different setups to find the perfect angle. I captured a document as it was presented to me rather than “creating” or “influencing” the situations. This evokes the sensation of “searching” and “wandering.”. This is due to the honesty of the images or, the honesty in the creation of the images.

On sound

The film was shot over 4 nights throughout the winter of 2017 and 2018. I did not record sound while gathering images, instead, I treated the sound recording like a separate production. I returned to the suburbs at the end of the winter to gather sounds of the environment to answer the question “what do the suburbs sound like?” Not in a basic sonic sense but in a phenomenological sense. What do the homes have to say? What do the trees have to say? What do the street lights have to say? What are their voices in this film? The film also contains extensive foley work to give life to the people I filmed. Without foley the homes are empty — the film becomes about the exterior and not the interior. Added to this, with foley, the documentary moves away from reality and into hyperreality with sounds that could not have been recorded. This hyperreality makes the viewed images more real.

Sound becomes a far more enveloping process than the image-making. It situates audiences in the ‘world of the film’ and forces them to buy into the images. Much of my background in sound stems from an interest in noise music, where low quality sonic textures can overwhelm listeners. I often want my films to be as loud as possible and completely shake and shatter audiences. Then why is *The Fenestration of Suburbia* so quiet? Think of the space the film occupies: fluffy snow, empty streets, and frigid air. There is no need to overwhelm listeners. There is no need for noise. The contradiction would not spark a discourse, instead, it would alienate audiences from a true suburban experience. The fact of the matter is that the suburbs are not loud save for the occasional airline jet or train that passes. Noise is an unwanted polluter. If a boisterous family barbecue goes into the night past 11PM, they can surely expect a visit from the police called by a disturbed neighbour. The result of this fear of noise is a sterile environment — one that lives not fully in nature and not fully in city-life. It is an in-between state where distant industrial sounds blend with the wind and animals that inhabit suburbia.

These sounds (or lack thereof) are comforting to me, but they could be profoundly boring for an extended period of time. The sounds that I want to explore and want to uncover are those that are unheard in suburbia. I want to know about the lives of the inhabitants, so much so that I invent sonic narratives of their interiors.

The opportunity and my passion and desire for lo-fi noise could be explored in other ways with this film. A live-score or sound installation, with the film as the backdrop, could infuse louder and more intense sound textures. It could create much more experiential and ephemeral portrait of suburbia, to reflect my changing views of that world.

On voyeurism

Some say that this film is “voyeuristic,” and that would be an inaccurate description. By definition voyeurism is sexual in nature. If my intention was to capture a couple having sex, a woman changing, or a man pleasuring himself, then I would certainly attribute the term voyeurism to this film. I would also have fictionalized the scenes, as I have no intention of capturing such an act. The term voyeurism is used much too liberally in film. Is it because there is a term lacking to describe the act of looking at someone who does not know they are being looked at?

Or is it simply, looking? Observing at a distance =/= voyeur. That would make a photographer who watches and waits for a lion to pass in the desert a voyeur. That would make the U.K. government, with their endless CCTV cameras, voyeurs. That would make a teenager playing a prank on their friends, filming with an iPhone, a voyeur. We are missing a word to describe what is accomplished in my film.

Surveillance is a possible term, and the closest I’ve come to describing this film, but it carries the weight of *security* with it. I suppose I am scrutinizing the existence of the inhabitants of suburbia. I am interpreting the data I receive from the small bit of information they choose to share with the outside world — their open windows. I interpret the data, rearrange it, and extrapolate meaning from it. I create my own narrative with this data and surveillance.

On solitude

A solitary walk through the suburbs is meant to be just that: solitary. This film necessitates the lone camera operator and filmmaker. It is meant to emulate the walks that I nostalgically connect with. It is not supposed to be a group of friends watching the lives of others, just small fleeting glimpses... a momentary open window.

On public/private life

The moment a person leaves their home, they act. They wear a mask. They are not themselves. In public, even as one walks down the street, they make subtle changes to their behaviour for any number of reasons. And now, in a digital world where we are constantly connected to social media, we must be ready at any time to pose for a photo or video to share with followers online.

People hide their true-selves from the outside world because they are frightened of vulnerability. In a capitalist society, there is only one acceptable direction and that is “up.” Whether it’s “up” financially, in power, social status, or popularity, capitalism makes it very clear that there is only one way to go. To be vulnerable would mean to take a step back on a capitalist totem pole; therefore, people hide all vulnerability and save it for their private lives where they can wallow in the comfort of the weakness without consequence. They won’t disrupt their image. All of the stress and trials of their public life, in which they tensely play the lead role in their life’s play, is for the pursuit of happiness in their private life: the perfect home, family, and financial stability.

There can be overlap and there often is, since the capitalist state is flawed and broken. The public stress penetrates the private life and wreaks havoc on those that inhabit it. The family falls apart, debt rises, and resentment breeds.

In Beaconsfield, Quebec, the suburb where I filmed much of *The Fenestration of Suburbia*, there was a string of murder-suicides that rattled the generally quiet town. Over the course of 10 years, four murder suicides took place within a .5km radius. This area was nicknamed: *The Bermuda Triangle of Beaconsfield*. (“Beaconsfield Is Jinxed”) Each murder had a specific aspect in common, a depressed father killed his family and then himself. Did the pressure of the public suburban life, at the cost of the private life, lead to these horrific crimes? A desperate need for the perfect image, exacerbated by suburban and capitalist pressures of a nuclear family, could cause the degradation of a suburban family’s mental health even to this extreme extent. There are films that explore this very theme, with families that turn against each other. *Crazy Family* by Sogo Ishii is a film about a family that attempts to escape “city sickness” by moving to the suburbs. Only the family grows more ill in the suburbs, turn on each other, and try to kill one another. It is not necessarily a new thought but something real and dark that happens in the depths of suburbia as seen in Beaconsfield.

On the fundamental right to privacy

What is the legality of my film? The Quebec Criminal Code has strict personal privacy laws whereby capturing images of people in their homes may be a violation of personal privacy, even though they may have their blinds open. What does the camera add to the legality of an act that would be legal without its presence? If I am walking along a suburban street and stop to observe into a house for a moment, that is legal. But insert a camera into the narrative and I become a criminal.

What power does the camera have? As a documentary filmmaker, I often feel protected by the camera. It gives me access to places that I normally would not. It has allowed me to meet people that I would never have met otherwise. But in this instance, it makes people nervous... scared.

Let us examine Youtube videos of road rage: A man exits the vehicle and angrily approaches a driver that cut him off. The driver pulls out his phone to record; the phone is a form of protection. The angry man yells and tries to grab the phone. He doesn't want to be filmed. He does not want to be seen in a vulnerable state. Is it **vulnerability** that makes my production so problematic for people? I am capturing them in their most vulnerable moments, unaware of an onlooker or a camera. This is when people are truly themselves. There is no acting or subtle changes to their character as often happens with the presence of a camera or in public. Though banal, it is deeply intimate to watch someone cook that doesn't know they are being watched. If someone is striving for honesty in cinema or documentary, this is as close as one can get.

While filming one evening in Beaconsfield, there was an instance at a family friend's house where I had permission to capture their images through their windows; the police were called by concerned neighbours. The officer approached me and mentioned that there had been numerous calls about a "man filming into peoples' homes." Since I had permission, things were cleared up very quickly. I asked the officer what would happen if I did not have permission and he confirmed that it's *highly illegal*. I did not film again after this, even though I would call the officer's integrity and knowledge of the law into question as police officers are notoriously ignorant of laws they are supposed to enforce.

There are countless cases and videos on Youtube where a police officer attempts to enforce a non-existent law or completely misinterprets the law. This is often the case when a camera is present to record their activities, which is legal and within the rights of citizens in all of North America. In many cases the pride and ego of a police officer is more important than the law, amplified by the presence of the camera. It becomes

a weapon. It becomes a defense against police injustice. Though I did not film after I was approached by police, I would not take the police's interpretation of the law at face value, as the police consistently manipulates the law to their own benefit. Therefore we must observe real-life case studies of similar events that have taken place.

The legality of this varies from province to province and from country to country. In the United States, Arne Svenson, a photographer, was sued for taking photographs of his neighbours through the open windows of their condo. The exhibit and the photos were gorgeous, artful, and painterly. The neighbours that sued Svenson ultimately lost in court and the case was dismissed by the judge. Svenson's act was protected under the 1st amendment, even though the judge had reservations over her own ruling. She stated: "Needless to say, as illustrated by the troubling facts here, in these times of heightened threats to privacy posed by new and ever more invasive technologies, we call upon the Legislature to revisit this important issue." (Walker, 2015)

In a similar case, photographer Philip-Lorca diCorcia presented portraits of everyday people in his exhibition titled *Heads*. The MoMA describes his method like this, "He affixed a powerful strobe light to scaffolding and used a radio signal to activate the strobe, releasing the shutter of his camera in time with its flash. In doing so, he captured unwitting pedestrians in a burst of light from more than 20 feet away. Since diCorcia worked in broad daylight, his subjects did not notice the strobe's flash. The person caught within its light is highlighted in great detail, while the surrounding crowd recedes into the background." (MoMA) diCorcia was sued by one of the subjects but, again, the judge ruled that he was protected under the 1st amendment. In regards to this case, the MoMA continues, "Free speech advocates argue that street photography is an established form of artistic expression and that the freedom to photograph in public is protected under the first amendment to the United States Constitution." (MoMA)

Quebec, on the other hand, has some of the most strict privacy laws in North America. Article 36 of the Quebec civil code states:

"36. The following acts, in particular, may be considered as invasions of the privacy of a person:

- (1) entering or taking anything in his dwelling;
- (2) intentionally intercepting or using his private communications;
- (3) appropriating or using his image or voice while he is in private premises;
- (4) keeping his private life under observation by any means;

- (5) using his name, image, likeness or voice for a purpose other than the legitimate information of the public;
- (6) using his correspondence, manuscripts or other personal documents.” (Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms)

This civil code and the fundamental right to privacy must be balanced with Quebec’s fundamental human right of expression which includes art works such as *The Fenestration of Suburbia*. There is precedent of these two rights coming to a head in a legal case: *Aubry v. Editions Vice-Versa*. The lawsuit states that the defendant, Pascale Claude Aubry had her photo taken without permission. This photo was then printed and published in a magazine titled *Vice Versa*. Aubry sued the photographer and the magazine for \$10,000. What followed was a case that pitted both personal privacy rights and freedom of expression against each other.

“The Supreme Court of Canada ruled the right to one’s image is an aspect of privacy. The purpose of the protection of privacy is to “guarantee a sphere of individual autonomy for all decisions relating to ‘choices that are of a fundamentally private or inherently personal nature’” (Aubry, para. 52).” (Hoang, 2009) Thereby, the precedent was set. This would become the new standard for cases that involve someone’s image and their right to that image when permission was not obtained in Quebec. IP Osgoode, an intellectual property law school, argues that these instances need to be open to interpretation and exception. Furthermore, IP Osgoode states that the Supreme Court of Canada did not adopt the U.S. model to rule in cases like this, which may have been a good tool to use. They write, “The SCC declined to adopt the American approach of determining whether the information in the expression is socially useful, saying “[a] photograph of a single person can be ‘socially useful’ because it serves to illustrate a theme. That does not make its publication acceptable...if it infringes the right to privacy” (Aubry, para. 61). In the U.S., demonstrated by *Nussenzweig v. DiCoccia*, freedom of expression will prevail so long as the information is not purely commercial.” (Hoang, 2009) The case they reference is the case referenced earlier in this thesis.

Added to the Aubry case, in 2003 Maxime Rheaume sued The Gazette in Quebec for publishing a photo of him as he exited a hotel. Rheaume won as the court found that his right to personal privacy, and a right to his image, was violated. In this case specifically, Rheaume needed to prove that the publication of the image caused him prejudice and harm. Rheaume argued that he experienced speculation about his character as to *why he was leaving a hotel in the middle of the day?* Things could be speculated about his character. Was he cheating on his spouse? Was he going to leave his job? (*Rh  ame c. Groupe Montr  al Gazette Inc.*)

As far as this civil code is concerned, much of my film can be interpreted as illegal as $\frac{3}{4}$ of it was shot without the permission of the subjects. It is debatable whether some, if not all, of the subjects in my film can or cannot be identified. They are either too far from the camera or their faces are not seen. There is a risk in the publication of this film but a risk that is weighed against the importance and impact of the film's ability to offer insight into the world of the suburbs. This film will not be sold and will not turn a profit / make money. This film was made entirely for cultural and artistic purposes.

On politics

I would have originally said that my film is not inherently political, but clearly there is a major discourse to be had about personal privacy. Furthermore, I also want to offer a critique on the governments that spy on their own citizens. I think this critique is part of the film, though it lies more in the subtext. I partly chose the form for this film because I wanted to become the government. I wanted an answer to the argument by those who support government surveillance, “I have nothing to hide.” Our online data, a window into our lives, is gathered and sold to companies that can target ads, influence voters, and manipulate minds with that data. People accept it. Either they feel like they have nothing to hide or, the enemy is too great to fight so they succumb.

The statement and question is: If you don’t like or are scared of what I’m doing, which is ostensibly harmless, how could you accept what governments do?

Perhaps in a future film, I should use the same formal aesthetic, turn the camera on high-ranked government officials, and capture their mundane suburban lives so that they can hypocritically condemn the breach of their privacy. Or maybe I can capture the life of Mark Zuckerberg, Sundar Pichai, and Tim Cook through their open windows without their knowledge. Those that sell our data for profit should be watched and they should feel what it’s like to be surveilled. I want them to be scared of surveillance, not perpetrate it... in the same way that I am scared.

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APPENDIX

This film was not my first attempt at a thesis production — there were numerous failed ideas, tests, and films that simply did not work for many reasons. Some ideas may still be realized into films at some point in the future, but for now they are milestones in a 3-year search for meaning in my practice. A search for the perfect balance between form and politics. Audio-visual research culminating in *The Fenestration of Suburbia*.

These are the failed and incomplete productions:

Forever Alone in Your Suburban Home
October 2015

A slickly produced real estate open house video. As the camera moves deeper into the home the image and sound begin to degrade until they are unintelligible. As suburban life fades to be banal, boring, and unimportant — as does the image of the perfect and pristine suburban home.

I shot a test for this film but my motivation to create it waned. I thought it would be a bit too low effort of a production and inhuman for me to spend my time on. It is an interesting visual experiment in image degradation, but I need humanity in my productions.



WHITE POWDER AND VEGETABLES

October 2015



The audience joins a man high on cocaine on a dangerous ride through the woods on a powerful ATV. Features a heavy electronic noise soundtrack that mimics the effects of the stimulant.

Compiled from b-roll of my feature length documentary *The Devil's Trap*. The film was completed but was largely uninteresting, to me, and more of a test in sound design and noise.

Sister

December 2015

Two alien sisters disguised as humans wander the suburbs and search for the beacon of the spacecraft that will return them to their home planet.

The film is semi-completed but is far too boring for me to release. I would re-visit this project and add more conflict for the characters to overcome and put more emphasis on special effects.



Untitled Test

July 2016

A short fiction film shot entirely through the windows of a suburban home — a young woman walks home from the bus and discovers her parents dead in their bed. She frantically calls 9-1-1 and tries to hide from the killer who is still in her home.

I've always been interested in shooting a film through the windows of suburban homes. This was a quick test to see what it might look and feel like. This version of that film, and subsequently my thesis, was far too creepy. This was practically a horror film and it's not the way I'd want to make a horror film or a film about the suburbs. This was also my first attempt at sound mixing 5.1 audio — a skill I would later utilize in my sound work.

I would still like to make a fiction film partially shot through the windows of suburban homes. It would be an extension of my thesis but this time creating a complex narrative of suburban memories to play out in front of the camera. An attempt to make a seminal youth film about suburbia in the 21st century.



Disappearing Skies

June 2017



rather lackluster. Ultimately, the logistics of the film to produce on my own became too much of an obstacle. Not enough people with the perfect view of condos from their windows would let me enter their home with a camera. Logistically, I would need help to achieve what I wanted — and without money that's a difficult task.

As condos are erected in the landscapes of our cities, the blue sky begins to disappear. Our windows become portals into worlds of concrete. Soon, we will only see the sun, the clouds, and the moon in the reflection of stainless glass windows.

We see images of the vanishing skies from the interior of nearby homes and historic buildings and hear sounds of the lifelong residents' favorite memories of life in their home before the condo takeover.

This film was incredibly motivating and poignant. I shot the images myself and was still becoming accustomed to the Sony FS5. Some of the images were fantastic while others were

APPENDIX B

The Fenestration of Suburbia
Short Experimental Documentary
18 minutes, HD Video, 5.1 Surround

Artist Statement

I am not interested in information. I am interested in experience. I am not interested in narrative. I am interested in senses. I am not interested in story. I am interested in form. If we, as filmmakers, are to push documentary cinema forwards we need to abandon traditional methods and structures. Talking heads are effective for one thing, conveying linear information. It does not convey an **experience**. Experientiality in documentary cinema is what I search for. I work to place audiences in the experience they witness, not tell them about it.

At its core, *The Fenestration of Suburbia* is a nostalgic ode to the suburbs but, through its unique form, transforms into a discourse on personal privacy and government surveillance. I deliberately surveilled the lives of suburbanites by filming through their open windows from the street. This choice captures people in a way they are rarely seen: real. They don't know about the camera's presence and therefore act comfortably, as if no one was watching. But I was watching.

This may be frightening to some, and especially to those that I filmed. They should be scared. What I did is far less intrusive than how our governments spy on us. The glimpses I captured into the lives of these people pales in comparison to the information that we willingly allow corporations and governments to gather and sell. Our entire lives are tracked and monitored, but we don't do anything about it. We deserve the right to be able to close our blinds when we want to.