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The Refeudalization of Housing in Texas: A Visual Approach[1]

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Although many ethnographers and urban sociologists have written extensively on the state of housing from below for more than 50 years, attempts to include more visual/arts-based methods to document further housing inequalities still tend to suffer from achieving wider academic acceptance. While some may argue that I am more or less just incorporating techniques found in the neighbouring field of anthropology, one important motivation for this unorthodox project is that I wanted to demonstrate that there are truly fruitful benefits in bringing visual/arts-based methods back into urban scholarship and mainstream sociology. During a 5-month period (June 2019-November 2019), I took more than 286 photographs from 30 sites of RV and mobile home trailer parks across North Texas/Dallas-Fort Worth Neighbourhoods. The sample/findings do indicate numerous fruitful applications with previous urban scholarship and social analysis of the structure of modern cities done by Geographer and Anthropologist David Harvey, German Sociologist Sighard Neckel, Sociologist Jerome Krase and Social Anthropologist Italo Pardo.
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Introduction

According to estimates from the Manufactured Housing Institute, some 22 million people in the United States live in mobile homes (MHI 2017) In addition, around 55% of those who live in mobile homes have an annual household income below $29,999 US dollars (MHI 2017). The distribution of mobile homes also varies regionally across the United States, with a much higher percentage of mobile homes existing in the South and Southwest regions (See figure 1 below). For example, in Dallas around 75,000 households live in mobile homes while the numbers are even higher in Houston, TX where nearly 104,000 households live in mobile homes (Bennet 2018). Neighbouring states to Texas like New Mexico and Louisiana also have high numbers of households that live in mobile homes. Estimates for those that also live in RV-type housing and other informal housing forms found throughout the United States remain unavailable.
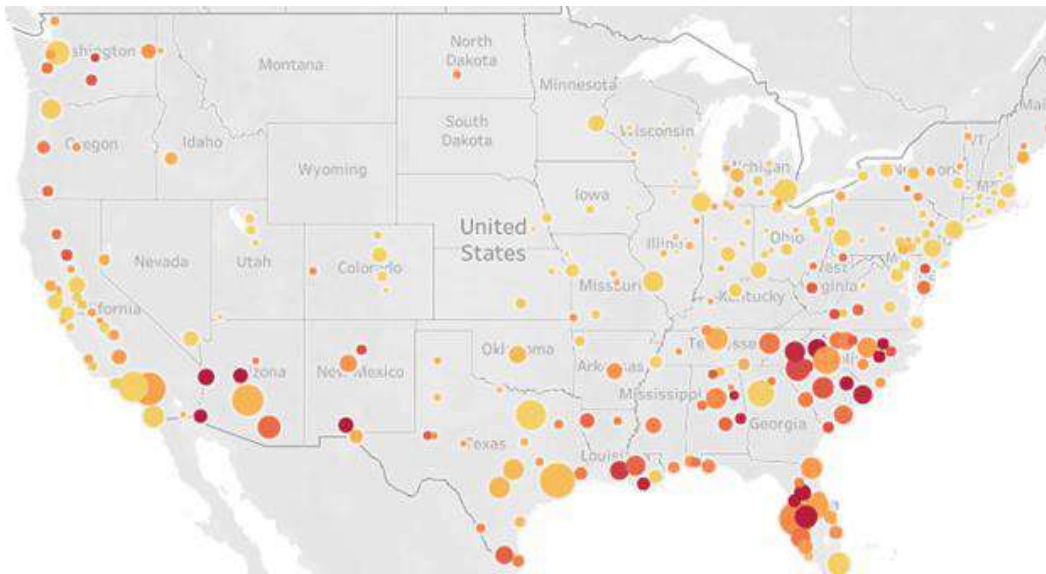

Figure 1. Map showing mobile homes distributed by Metro regions in the U.S. Source: Apartmentlist.com, 8 October 2019.

Although these maps and descriptive statistics do provide some preliminary estimates on the amount of people living in mobile homes across the United States, what appears to be missing is an important theoretical link between the glossy affluent-gated enclaves, a shrinking middle-class of homeowners, a growing working-class of renters and finally an emerging underclass of mobile-home and RV dwellers in the United States. In short, a break from the promises once associated with the America dream.

Recognizable social divisions like those briefly highlighted above are clear examples of the increasing social stratification of housing in the United States, once assumed to exist only in the periphery countries of the global-south like Brazil and India (Davis 2006). At the same time, such recognizable social divisions found increasingly in the arena of housing in the United States also give further evidence of social enclosure and social exclusion patterns. German Sociologist Neckel (2019: 1) refers to this process as 'the refeudalization of modern capitalism', basically translating into '[…] "neo-feudal" privilege for the upper classes while precarious social groups experience impoverishment and exclusion'.

In an effort to help conceptualize visually what Neckel may have meant by 'refeudalization' trends in modern capitalism, I use figure 2 below to illustrate two very different situations. On the left side is an RV which has been modified with a visible ac window unit attached for the likely purpose of more long-term living. On the right side is a single-wide trailer with a tiny stair-case and patio located in a typical trailer-park in North Texas.

Figure 2. Pictures of a modified RV-home with an attached ac window unit to the window (left) and a typical single-wide trailer in a trailer park in North Texas (right). Photos taken by the author.

The urban scholarship developed by David Harvey (2003, 2014) can in many ways be seen as complementary to the 'refeudalization' thesis by which Neckel (2019) offers theoretical trajectory patterns or future scenarios of modern capitalism. To go further, Harvey (2014) proposes a list of seventeen contradictions which in some fashion also involve contradictions in the organization of housing in capitalism. Specifically, this issue is brought up in the chapter titled 'Use Value and Exchange Value'. There, Harvey (2014: 21) talks about this tension between use value and exchange value, especially with regards to the fundamental housing problems in capitalism geared more towards exchange values. On this important point, Harvey states (2014: 21),

> 'Housing provision under capitalism has moved, we can conclude, from a situation in which the pursuit of use values dominated to one where exchange values moved to the fore [...] The provision of adequate housing use values (in the conventional consumption sense) for the mass of the population has increasingly been held hostage to these ever deepening exchange value considerations.'

Briefly evoking Neckel (2019) and Harvey (2014) as my initial introductory entry-points, the main purpose of this qualitative-arts-based project is to provide an account of what RV and mobile parks symbolize in modern capitalism. This may also intersect with other important topics and themes, including the unexplained rise of precarious and other informal housing forms in the United States.

As hopefully illustrated so far, a qualitative-arts-based project like this aims to not shy away from bigger questions about declining opportunity structures which once also defined the American Dream (homeownership) and the American middle-class. Some of these relate to broader, and often hidden, social divisions which RV and mobile home parks seem to reveal visually, specifically about the growing economic and social and political regional divides in American society in the 21st century. The three primary research questions I therefore will attempt to address are:

1. What can a visual-based study of RV and mobile home parks in North Texas reveal about larger economic inequalities/poverty and 're-feudalization' (Neckel 2019) trends that are happening in the US?
2. To what extend does Harvey's (2014) list of contradictions of capitalism fit with some of the visual representations of decay and the precarious housing character found in RV and mobile home parks in North Texas?
3. What can a visual-based study of RV and mobile home parks indicate about the direct consequences of state retrenchment and a declining affordable housing sector?

Literature Review

This section reviews research in what can be called early 'urban ethnography' that addresses issues related to poverty, the poor, social inequality, marginalization, and the city. Although I do start with some of what I characterize as 'Marx-inspired' literature from the mid- and late-19th century, there is really no designated order in which to start formally. Nevertheless, I aim to highlight carefully some of the ways previous thinkers (both academic and non-academic) have attempted to frame their research with regards to housing and inequality issues. It is also important to note that not all the works cited in this review are written exclusively by 'urban ethnographers' or social scientists. Some may have been simple cartoonists/amateur photographers, investigative journalists, or political activists.

One early limitation to this general literature review is that in the very beginning I had to delimit literature that would not aid in answering the research questions that are important to the project's aims and goals. This meant that the literature review ignored theories or works that might have looked at the social phenomenon of homelessness or even at the specific population impacted. Also, since I am looking at the housing refeudalization process, I am ignoring some dimensions related to refeudalization process regarding gated upper-class communities and up-scale mansions often linked with the upper social classes.[2] Also, with the exception of one or two books, the majority of the books reviewed below come from a global North perspective rather than a global South perspective, which should be seen as a limitation of the literature.

Documenting the State of Housing

The earliest attempts to document the state of 'housing from below' can be found in late-19th century works, like Friedrich Engels' *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1962 [1892]). Although no known visual methods were used by Engels in his study of working-class communities in Manchester, England, around the 1840s, he did provide some detailed urban ethnographic descriptions of the negative impact that industrialization had on working-class people, and of the precarious state of housing in which many were forced to live and toil, often in the immediate vicinity of polluting factories. Similar arguments and concerns

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[2] Notably, studies focusing on the housing lifestyles of the secretive upper classes, for example in affluent enclaves like Aspen, Colorado, have also seen a recent increase in scholarly interest and readership (Elias 2008).

over the state of housing among the working classes can be found in political pamphlets written later by Engels (1872) to highlight 'The Housing Question'. There, Engels uses a more aggressive political rhetoric and more or less shifts the political blame towards both the petit bourgeois and the bourgeois for being unable to solve or address 'The Housing Question'.

Nearly at the same time, across the other side of the Atlantic Jacob Riis published his famous *How the other half lives* (1997 [1890])*.* Like Engels' important portrait of the state of working-class housing in cities like Manchester, Riis studied tenement slums, the majority of which were home to working-class immigrant groups and were located in the Lower-east side, New York. Yet, compared to Engels' work, Riis's can be considered in many ways as the first study to make fruitful use of modern photographic visual methods in order to document the horrible living conditions of the tenement city dwellers in New York city in the 1890s. A similar fruitful style of visual-cartoon documentation of German working-class city culture would be produced almost thirty years later by the German cartoonist and artist Heinrich Zille, who made a fruitful art-career out of drawing images of working-class neighbourhoods in Berlin, Germany, in the 1920s, during the Weimar period (Artnet 2019).

During the 1930s, the photographic work by Dorothea Lange essentially picked up where previous photographers like Riis left off with the study of tenements in New York city. In her book, Spirn (2008) details some of the visual projects Lange did in her own lifetime. Spirn provides commentary and background research to a variety of pictures produced by Lange. Many depicted the state of insecure housing found among white and black sharecroppers during the early 1930s, as well as among farm workers in California, who also lived in makeshift camps throughout the state. On page 164, for example, Spirn shows photographs of insecure housing among workers, who in the late 1930s, in search of work and shelter, often migrated from other states like Texas and Oklahoma to reach pear and apple farms located in Washington state. Such images produced by Lange in the 1930s would find their way in 1940s movies like Ford's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940).

Bourdieu's (Bourdieu et al. 2014) photographic work produced during his time living and working in Algeria from1957 to 1960 has striking similarities with some of the themes found in Dorothea Lange's work. In France-occupied Algeria, Bourdieu obtained a job as a clerk for the French military (Bourdieu et al. 2014: viii). In his free time, he took photographs of the slum-like housing in which many Algerians lived. Some of his photographs also highlighted the kind of manual and agricultural work Algerians did. Bourdieu focuses on a variety of themes in his photographs, including housing, unemployment and poverty. On pages 151 through 170, for example, the reader is introduced to pictures highlighting the state of poverty and the street-based vendor economy, which included both adult and child laborers that thrived in Algeria at the time (Bourdieu et al. 2014: 154).

In the late 1970s, it is perhaps the amateur work of Danish photographer Holdt (1985) that takes over where Bourdieu (Bourdieu et al. 2014) left off in Algeria. While hitch-hiking across the United States during the late 1970s, Holdt (1985) produced hundreds of unedited raw pictures, carefully documenting impoverished inner-city ghettos/projects like those in Harlem and the South Bronx, New York. Several pictures of affluent upper-class individuals

are also included in some of his pictures. Holdt also visited numerous shanty-towns in the deep South, some near tobacco farms, highlighting the serious housing insecurity and poverty among many minorities. Gunkel (2010) claimed that Holdt travelled more than 100,000 miles across 48 states and lived temporarily with more than 381 families while he was engaged in his photography project. After he returned to Denmark with a suitcase of pictures, *American Pictures* (1985) was published and became an instant success; his photographs had been widely distributed across many university campuses during the 1970 Anti-Vietnam war movements. Themes and topics shown throughout the book instantly remind one of other previous Marx-inspired works. Holdt did not censor any material or pictures in his works — so occasional nudity and drug addicts administering drugs are also shown in numerous pictures.

Meanwhile, it is important to consider the photographic work by Richards et al. (1987) because in many ways it has much in common with some of the aforementioned Marxian-inspired work going as far back perhaps to Engels. In an effort to document visually US poverty trends during the 1980s, Richards and his colleagues produced portraits of individuals who were poor or on the margins of American society. They included, for example, pictures of people sleeping in their cars and vans, of former military veterans and also portraits of drug addicts. Pictures of retail workers in supermarkets working the late shifts were also included in the book. The photographic work of Baudrillard and Turner (2010 [1986]) in their book *America* (1986) is postmodern in that pictures were taken while driving a car on American highways. The pictures ranged from deserts to skyscrapers, to abandoned cars. There is no real theme that can be linked to any previous Marx-inspired literature. Rather, Baudrillard and Turner seem to use peculiar places like deserts and highways as a metaphor for describing the rise of social chaos in modern society, which often directly links with issues related to urban ethnography.

Thus, whether through its early uses by Robert Ezra Park (1952) and other key members of the Chicago school of sociology, urban ethnography continues to make significant contributions to the study of cities and housing. Among other important urban ethnographic works, Pardo's (1992) housing study conducted in Naples, Italy, embodies in many ways this desire to understand the city as dwelling from a totally different point of view. Pardo's classic urban ethnographic study reveals a kind of individual managing struggle which does not seem to fit into a traditional structural analysis. Although, there are here existence struggles similar to those found in any city, the inhabitants are also forced to engage with and be part of city life, which intuitively goes against some of the early heavy structural thinking found in early texts on urban life (Pardo 1992: 276). In our understanding of city-life, Pardo encourages us to look at action and agency, rather than merely obsessing about structure. He states,

> 'There is, in other words, an incomparable advantage in coming to terms with the moral and spiritual complexity of people's lives in its multifaceted relation to practical aspects such as work, transaction, choice, risk, investment, capital, property, education, entrepreneurship and contacts — in brief, individuals' management of existence as the pursuit of fulfilment.' (Pardo 1996: 187).

Another fruitful grounded approach to studying urban spaces can also be found in the works by the sociologist Jerome Krase (2012, Krase and DeSena 2015), who has made a very successful academic career taking thousands of pictures of urban spaces in locations like Brooklyn, New York, as well as numerous European cities. In a way, Krase's fruitful use of visual methods provides another lens to see urban spaces and the consequences of social change. Whether through the use of traditional participant observation found in anthropology and sociology or through their combination with visual techniques (street photography), the ethnographic study of social change in cities continues to be a powerful method for the purpose of understanding the state of housing and the city in the 21st century.

Methods and Data Collection

Throughout this project, my qualitative approach (also called 'urban ethnography') allowed me to study RV and mobile home trailer parks across North Texas/ Dallas-Fort Worth Neighbourhoods. I used overwhelmingly visual methods (Krase 2012, Krase and DeSena 2015, Caldararo 2017). My primary rationale for choosing this research method was tied to my ultimate research goal; specifically, I wanted to be able to differentiate among various forms of RV and mobile home housing from the standpoint of understanding the nature of social closures and what I characterize as 'housing from below'. Since previous works have focused extensively on homelessness and homeless encampments (Caldararo 2017), I decided that I would exclude this specific issue from my study. Later I realized that limiting the aim of this study (excluding homeless encampments) would further assist me in the process of coding my visual data and establishing themes and connections to the research questions and the academic literature, while avoiding to shift accidently towards a study of homelessness.

Then I had to make important decisions on the initial site selection techniques and on the parks and mobile-RV communities and other housing sites which I would visit. Given the limitations on time and funding, I decided to focus my study on the North Texas/Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex partly because I also live, work, and regularly commute through many of these communities. I selected the sites through what can be described as a snow-ball sampling technique which drew on basic web-based tools like Google Maps and Google Earth to locate the nearest RV and mobile home trailer parks. Locating mobile home trailer parks via Google maps was often as simple by entering searches for 'mobile home trailer parks Fort Worth Tx'. The Google Earth tool was also very useful because it allowed me to become acquainted with the roads and with the limitations in accessing the sites with my vehicle. To help with documentation, I invested in two digital cameras, which would ensure the production of high-quality images at the 16 mega-pixel range — an investment both costly and necessary.

I started producing visual data in June 2019 and formally concluded the project in late-November 2019. In total, I visited 30 sites, taking 286 photographs of RV and mobile home trailer park housing and other kinds of low-income housing in the DFW metroplex area. Initially, I visited the sites by commuting there with my vehicle. As I reached the end of the project, I realised I had used up almost two full 16GB memory cards. Also, since I wanted to have HD quality photographs, all pictures were taken at the 16 million pixels range.

The ideal time frame for taking pictures would usually be during the weekday or weekends from 10am to 4pm. Of course, I was careful to take photographs that would not violate any established academic research ethics or state and local laws. Hence, I established a few research guidelines in which I would not take photographs, including of people's homes, without people's permission. Moreover, prior to taking any photographs, I went to great lengths to contact individuals and park managers in order to ask their permission. Both during the initial process of producing visual data and during the subsequent coding process, I made it a priority that no biographical data would be shared and that any visible identifying markers would be immediately deleted. In the photographs that I have included in this article, I have edited or totally removed license plate letters and numbers. Also, I have respected 'no trespassing signs' or 'stay out signs', avoiding to take pictures or entering the premises. Inevitably, this reduced both the number of pictures that I could take and the sample of restricted-access sites.

Coding and Analysis

The coding process started as soon as I downloaded the 286 photographs from my two digital cameras and divided them based on themes into different sub-folders. In an effort to help me remember important documenting details about every photograph, I dated each photograph, typed in the physical location/address and wrote down any important field-note comments using the Excel program from MS Office. During the early stages of the coding process, I felt it was useful to colour-code entries to indicate whether the housing unit or type under investigation represented what I characterized as 'soft' differentiation (green), 'medium' forms of differentiation (orange) or more 'extreme' or high forms of visible decay and some representations of poverty (red). This colour coding would later also help me to distinguish between different types of 'housing from below' and create an index of what I defined as Type 1, Type 2, Type 3 or Type 4 housing. Besides using MS Excel to organize and colour-code each specific photograph, I also used Google Earth to take snap-shots of the physical locations where photographs came from and placed them both into the matching folders and my excel spreadsheet. It was at this point that any remaining biographical or identifying markers were removed from the photographs. Although I undertook an inductive approach in this project, the coding process was initially inspired by a careful review of the work of Harvey (2014) and Neckel (2019), which provided me with theoretical themes like 'disparities of income and wealth' and problems of 'social reproduction', as well as the concept of 're-feudalization' (henceforth, the inverted commas are intended). Subsequently, in an attempt to operationalize my visual data, I analysed every single photograph looking for ways in which it might fit with the Marx-inspired and non-Marx-inspired theories developed by Harvey (2014), Neckel (2019), Krase (2012, Krase and DeSena 2015) and Pardo (1992, 1996). At a later stage, this also helped me to contextualize further and build theoretical themes from visual patterns taken from the photographs, which I specifically defend in detail in the following section.

Findings

To assist in the dissemination of my findings of the phenomena of 'housing from below' in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex, I used the index that I had constructed during the coding process and sub-divided photographs into four types of housing. Type 1, for example, can be more formal RV- and trailer-park housing, which may demonstrate some basic differentiation or 'differential inclusion'. This is articulated in both Figure 3 and Figure 4. Meanwhile, Type 2 housing bears more informal elements, or even some visual evidence of extreme precarity or poverty and of building decay and precarious structuring or modification of RVs for the purpose of more permanent housing. This is reflected in Figures 5 through 9. Type 3 housing represents the state of some public housing which is increasingly facing cuts by the federal government agencies (via HUD at the federal level) and failure to provide adequate affordable housing options for individuals below the poverty-line. Finally, Type 4 housing takes the form of low-income-oriented, for-profit hotels which tend to operate throughout many poor or low-income neighbourhoods in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex area and seem to have become the norm.

Influenced by my initial index, what follows in the next section is an attempt to start a basic mechanism for theorizing about housing differentiation types. It should not be seen as much different from the theoretical attempts made by many sociologists to conceptualise social stratification and establish dividing lines between relative and absolute forms of poverty. The construction of the index was, in part, influenced initially by the technique used by Gans (1974) to make theoretically-based differentiations between what he called 'high culture' and 'popular culture'. While my four different types do not have specific labels like those devised by Gans, they do generally follow a similar technique of high/medium/low housing distinctions.

To sum up, one might also say that my attempt in the section below is to develop a kind of relative housing poverty definition which I also label as 'Differential Inclusion', rather than a more absolute or extreme housing poverty definition.

Housing Differentiation or 'Differential Inclusion'?

What I will label 'soft' housing differentiation is often visible in mobile homes and RV parks, like other kinds of informal housing, as they provide visual accounts of such increasing differentiation in some parts of the United States. The 30 test sites that I visited in Texas had some level of housing differentiation with regard to formality, informality, semi-informality, decay and/or precarious character. I use the word 'soft' rather than 'hard' or 'harsher' forms of housing differentiation metaphorically, when compared to the far more peculiar term 'refeudalization' coined by Neckel (2019), who suggests the existence of a neo-feudalism in modern society marking the social relations between aristocrats and peasantry. Both housing differentiation and forms of 'differential inclusion' are visible at this basic socio-economic level. I also want to acknowledge that the expression 'differential inclusion' is originally credited to Mezzadra and Nelson (2013), who coined it in their effort to move away from simplified *either/or* debates of inclusion or exclusion in the field of migration and border research. Theoretically, I employ this expression to signify that a kind of 'differential

inclusion' exists in the field of housing in the United States which does not always fit into inclusive or strictly exclusive patterns, or in absolute vs relative forms of housing poverty.

For Harvey (2014: 182), capitalism starts to interfere with the 'social reproduction' function which previously meant the maintenance of social structures and the '[…] social reproduction of the labour force […]'. In short, he suggests that when social reproduction is interfered with it also carries real consequences for the social, cultural, as well as physical re-production of a social class (that is, ex working-class). Paradoxically, then, for Harvey there might be noticeable differences between the kind of housing that exists for the lower classes, the middle classes, and the upper classes in the US, but this does not necessarily have to interfere in the social-reproduction of class. I have decided to call 'differential inclusion' the basic level of housing shown in Figure 3, in view of the fact that it does not yet threaten the social reproduction of class.

Below are visual examples of what I call Type 1 housing.

Figure 3. The three pictures above indicate more of what I characterize as 'differential inclusion' or type 1 housing. The picture top left shows a detached 5th wheel RV trailer which is being used as a semi-permanent rather than short-term housing. The picture top right shows a colourful single-wide mini-trailer house with a satellite tv-dish placed on concrete blocks. It was located in a Trailer-park beside other single-wide trailers with worse conditions. The bottom picture shows a RV located inside a RV-park which also has some basic outside furniture (bench) and other visible external appliances. A grey-cloth cover has been attached to the front-windows probably to help ensure privacy and keep out unpleasant sun-lighting. Photographs taken by the author.

Figure 4. A single RV-trailer and small vehicle in a typical RV-park. Although some mild structural adjustments seem to have been done to the RV- trailer (attachment of a window unit), it still can be described as a type 1 form of housing RV-home and typical RV- trailer in a trailer park in North Texas. Photo taken by the author.

Housing from Below

The application of the concepts developed by Harvey (2014) and Neckel (2019) has helped me to theorize the critical link between housing poverty and other significant social and economic inequalities being reproduced within the United States. Thus, especially when examining the economic and impoverished state of type 2 housing (Neckel 2019), I use the expression 'housing from below' to refer to the radical transition away from 'differential inclusion' in housing conditions towards a shift to social closure forms of 'differential exclusion' and refeudalization. Let me briefly recall that for Neckel (2019: 1), refeudalization basically means, '[…] "neo-feudal" privilege for the upper classes while precarious social groups experience impoverishment and exclusion'. For example, according to some statistics provided by the National Low-Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC 2019), in Texas there is a shortage of 594,631 rental homes for people identified as low-income renters (NLIHC 2019). This echoes what Neckel may have meant by increasing forms of exclusions which lower-income people frequently face in modern capitalism, as opposed to upper-class people.

The photographs shown in this article reflect this problem of social-exclusion in terms of available and affordable housing for low-income renters. I will also attempt to demonstrate that at least some of the visual material shown in figure 5 through 9 can be fitted under the umbrella of quasi-refeudalization housing patterns through precarious or impoverished RV- and trailer-park housing. The latter differs from the kind of Type 1 housing shown in some visual examples given earlier. In support of the thesis of a refeudalization taking place in lower-class housing, I offer significant details on the structure and precarious visual character of this kind of 'housing from below' and on its observable character of impoverishment and social marginalization; in other words, some of the photographs that I took in this project show global-south near qualities (Davis 2006).

Figure 5. A single-wide trailer in a trailer park in North Texas. Its condition can be described as impoverished and shows clear signs of structural aging and numerous external modifications, including an attached ac window unit. The wood panelling seems to have been re-painted and added to the original structure. It is fair to say it is representative of what I call Type 2 housing. Photo taken by the author.

Figure 6. The two pictures above are similar to figure 5. On the left is a much older model RV-trailer which has modifications made to the windows in order to fit the ac window unit; an antenna is attached on the roof. On the right is an aging single-wide trailer; the modifications include an additional deck, an attached roof with blue plastic covering, a small garden, an American flag, a wooden fence and a wooden staircase. It also can be characterized as typical type 2 housing. Photos taken by the author.

Figure 7. The picture on the left shows a RV-trailer and older Ford-pickup truck; minor additions seem to have been made near the door area including a wooden scaffolding. On the right is an aging single wide-trailer that shows signs of structural modification; for example, the wood panelling near the window seem to have be re-fitted for the purpose of attaching an ac window unit in the rear of the trailer. Both pictures seem to fit into type 2 housing. Photos taken by the author.

Figure 8. An aging and slowly decaying single-wide trailer. Some of the wooden panelling near the bottom seem to be slightly unbalanced. A wooden stair-case seems to have been added. Paint does not seem to be the original. Numerous appliances are visible near the doorway, including two BBQ grills. The trailer seems to fit into what I characterize as type 2 housing. Photo taken by the author.

Figure 9. The picture on the left shows an impoverished and aging single-wide trailer. Visible modifications have been done to the windows, including the attachment of external window units. The exterior also seems to have been recently painted with a different kind of grey. The picture on the right is an aging 5th wheel trailer which seems to be no longer fit to being moved or used for travelling purposes. A small wooden staircase structure has been built to ease access to the back doorway. Both can be fitted into what I call type 2 housing. Photos taken by the author.

Public Housing for All or a State Retrenchment?

The next set of pictures is an attempt to demonstrate how state retrenchment, or the systematic underfunding of public and affordable housing programmes, has produced a number of unintended fatal consequences for the current state of public housing in the United States. Although several social theorists have written extensively on this topic of retrenchment, I will mostly rely on both Pierson (2012) and Harvey (2014), who frequently tie the politics of state retrenchment to the neo-liberalism brought about by neo-conservative austerity waves, from Ronald Reagan to Margaret Thatcher. For example, Pierson (2012: 17) defines retrenchment as, '…policy changes that either cut social expenditure, restructure welfare state programs to conform more closely to the residual welfare state model, or alter the political environment in ways that enhance the probability of such outcomes in the future.'

Harvey (2014: 190) would possibly agree with this definition of retrenchment, although for him neo-liberalism is also about attempts by the state, '[…] to externalize as much as possible the costs of social reproduction on the populace at large […]'. The definitions of state retrenchment provided here by both Pierson (2012) and Harvey (2014) are important in so far as they can also be visually observed on the ground. Statistically, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (2019), the actual number of available public housing units has been reduced by around 250,000 since prior decades. This statistic needs to be taken into account when one looks at the current state of public housing in the United States. So, although I could only visit two North Texas public housing sites, I did notice a kind of retrenchment at least in one of the locations in Fort Worth, Texas. Some of this process appears to be reflected in figures 10 through 11 below.

Figure 10. A semi- occupied public housing unit in Ft. Worth TX. Although there is evidence that some of the units are currently housed, it seems many are not being used. When I entered the location with my vehicle, I was instantly struck with the lack of human presence and social activity in this public housing community. The physical condition of the units also seems to be aged and lacking some essential maintenance. I have categorised this as type 3 housing; it should also be considered as an example 'housing from below'. Photo taken by author.

Figure 11. The three pictures above are examples of public housing in Ft. Worth TX. The top two pictures are examples of boarded up units which seem to be no longer occupied or in use. The bottom picture shows an occupied building where a number of residents currently live. These three pictures are reflections of what I have called type 3 housing subsidized by the state (Federal Public Housing Programme). It is important to note that these pictures may not be representative of the state of public housing across the North Texas region or the broader United States. More fieldwork may be needed to get a better picture of what I have called type 3 housing. Photos taken by author.

Figure 12. Pictures of Low-income Hotels in Mesquite, Texas. Low-income or Extended-Stay hotels are what I characterize as Type 4 housing. As shown by the hotel signage, hotels frequently advertise long-term deals or so-called 'Weekly rates', which seem to target people who lack formal housing. Although these two pictures were taken in a sub-orb located in East Dallas, similar low-income hotels use this kind of advertising strategy across the entire Dallas-Forth Worth Metroplex region. Photos taken by the author.

Discussion and Conclusion

This ambitious qualitative arts-based project has tried to provide critical visual illumination to what can be characterized as 'housing from below' throughout the Dallas-ForthWorth Metroplex region. Briefly, the three important research questions which were initially posed in this project were: 1) What can a visual-based study of RV and mobile home parks in North Texas reveal about larger economic inequalities, poverty and re-feudalization (Neckel 2019) trends happening in the US?; 2) To what extend does Harvey's (2014) list of contradictions of capitalism fit with the visual evidence of decay and the precarious housing found in RV and mobile home parks in North Texas?; 3) What can a visual-based study of RV and mobile home parks tell us about the direct consequences of welfare state retrenchment and a declining affordable housing sector?

I believe I have done my best to answer the first important research question, by demonstrating through the use of the sample of some 286 pictures and descriptive statistics that economic inequalities are highly visible in the social stratification of housing, or in what I have classified as Type 1, Type 2, Type 3, and Type 4 housing. The soft kind of differentiation was characterized by the forms of 'differential inclusion' that I have shown. Regarding the extent to which poverty is reflected in the character of housing, I have discussed 'housing from below', which is shifting towards 'differential exclusion', rather than merely a 'differential inclusion', and towards what Neckel (2019) has called re-feudalization trends in modern capitalism.

I have provided details to the precarious nature of such housing as visible in several photographs (Figure 4 through Figure 9). In addition to the initial list of 17 contradictions of capitalism discussed by Harvey (2014), three contradictions were also consistent with some of the evidence found in the photographs that I have shown. This includes both what Harvey called the contradictions and tension between so-called 'use-values' and 'exchange-values' and the ways in which this tension plays out throughout the oversupply of luxury housing and lack of affordable housing. The exchange value character initially theorized by Harvey was also reflected in the for-profit hotel industry entering into overt and covert marketing strategies (as observed in the photographs in Figure 12) to provide extended stay and weekly-pay arrangements, as well as transitional and informal housing. The second contradiction which Harvey also brought out regarding the problem of 'disparities of income and wealth' was observable in almost all the pictures. The third contraction known as the problem of 'social reproduction' was, at least theoretically, a fruitful bone of contention during the evaluation of precarious and decayed RV and mobile home-based housing. One might argue here that Neckel's (2019) concept of re-feudalization also warns in many ways of the polarization between the haves and have nots and re-address the basic question whether 'social-reproduction' of all social classes, including basic housing access, is being hindered by the internal problems of modern capitalism (use-value versus exchange-value).

In attempting to answer my third research question, I found that the photographs of public housing in North Texas (Figure 11) appear to be consistent with Pierson's argument (2012) that a social policy has favoured state retrenchment against the widening and

revitalization of providing public housing. There is some interesting consistency between what appears in the pictures that I have offered and what Pierson has theorized.

On a final note, as I have also argued at the beginning of this article, I feel there are fruitful reasons in bringing visual arts-based methods back into urban scholarship and mainstream sociology. I hope that this article demonstrates the value of visual techniques in the study of the state of housing in the United States. Yet, not one single research method should be taken as the sole monopoly or representation of truth. Visual documentation and other ethnographic evidence may help bring about much needed social change. I hope to inspire fellow public sociologists to engage in research that helps to illuminate the impoverished state of housing in numerous communities in Texas and elsewhere in the spirit of opening avenues for public discussion.

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