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Eliane de Larminat

Introduction

- 1 Public housing in the U.S., a program established by the 1937 Housing Act and redefined over time by the crucible of welfare, is profoundly stigmatized and stigmatizing both in person-based and place-based ways.¹ Publicly-owned housing for the poorest citizens has been conceptualized as providing habitation for the wrong kind of people in the wrong kind of place(s) – each side of the formula compounding the other. The stigma attached to those sections of the residential landscape is such that the redevelopment of public housing in the 1990s and 2000s has involved a process of complete reimagining: large numbers of public housing projects were torn down in several U.S. cities to be replaced with mixed-income housing, where the housing units of “market rate” residents and those of public housing residents are not readily distinguishable from the outside. Part of the explicit rationale has been to “remove the stigma” of living in publicly-funded housing.
- 2 In a deeply unequal and segregated city like Chicago, it has also been argued that the reimagining and dispersal of public housing has allowed poverty as a public problem and responsibility to become less visible—the presence of those massive buildings in the landscape was a reminder that all was not well in the city and the nation.² In this outsider’s view, there is a loss of self-knowledge for the city as a whole when high-rises with their smoke marks and boarded up windows disappear from view for other urban residents and suburban commuters driving on the city’s freeways or riding elevated trains.³ But when public housing projects were still standing in Chicago, they would

most often function as tangible “proof” that poor Blacks could not take care of their own places. Segregation and disinvestment as a collective failure, or the undeserving poor’s supposed social and cultural limits: such a bifurcation of what can be inscribed in space by public housing is an indicator of how much ideological matter goes into the visibility, the legibility, the “obviousness” of public housing projects’ “being there” in the cityscape—the cityscape being here conceived as something which is seen in material space, driven and walked through, but also imaginatively pieced together from media accounts about one’s own city. Especially since Chicago public housing turned into last-resort housing in the 1970s, inhabited almost exclusively by poor African American families, this residential form has been strongly associated with the socioeconomic construction of racial categories through segregation, and with dominant representations about welfare and illegal activities in a context where work has disappeared.⁴ Given the ways in which these urban phenomena usually get narrated and emblemized, public housing tends to be perceived as the inversion of the single-family home, itself conceived as the product and image of decent hard work.⁵ However, the efficacy of the landscape of public housing is that it is not just a space where ideas are projected, but that it also works as visible proof of those ideas. The visual dimension is indeed key; one supposedly just needs to look—as in “Look what they’ve done to their neighborhood.”⁶ And when the “physically appalling” is always paired with the “socially deviant,” the vision of the first comes to mean the second.⁷

- 3 One may ask how intractable this type of objectification is, and if and how, after decades of residential landscapes being read in terms of the stigmatizing effects of space—hardworking homeowners versus destructive minority households—, it can be undone for subjects identified by their residency in a housing project.⁸ When public housing *is* in such a state of disrepair that it can be said to be physically disfigured, as was undoubtedly the case in many high-rise housing projects in Chicago in the late 1980s and 1990s,⁹ what type of visual depiction of the spaces of public housing is possible that does not “automatically” objectify the residents and define them only through their disreputable environment? The example of public housing in Chicago provides a good case study because the conditions in public housing and the connotations of the program have been the subject of much public discourse, coming to a head in the 1990s. It has come down to questions of demolition, the very existence of publicly-owned housing for the poorest, and the value of the communities of poor Black families who lived in public housing projects.¹⁰ Because of the amount of social judgment involved in the diagnosing process, this public discussion also involved controversies over who had the authority to define urban problems, mobilizing notions of “perspective” and “viewpoint” and especially binary oppositions between the views of non-residents and residents, or outsiders and insiders. Meanwhile, the depth of the stigmatizing processes around public housing—stigmatizing processes that increasingly appeared to have very material consequences in terms of displacement of public housing residents to make way for gentrification—generated counter-images on the part of the residents themselves.
- 4 The production of resident-centered accounts in words and images, on stage and on the radio, in the media and in archives, has been prolific in Chicago.¹¹ The focus here will be on the years before demolition became an all-out strategy for the Chicago Housing Authority, when public housing was mostly a place to live, rather than a place to leave behind in redevelopment scenarios. Also, while the rhetoric of Chicago public housing residents’ counter-discourse has been studied especially through texts,¹² the focus of

this paper will be on photography and video, types of images that are documentary in a broad sense and in which space works to an important extent as a visual given—something one works with or around. To put it in simple terms, one can avoid the “bad angles of one’s home,” but what if the whole home is made of bad angles? And what if one wants, or needs, to publicize those bad angles? The analysis will bear here on the conflicting ways in which relationships between the residents and their living conditions have been made legible through images of the surfaces of the housing projects. It will focus first on the “outside close view,” when outsiders encounter and define public housing through its public surfaces—“through” being closer to “in” them, than “beyond” them. It will then move to images that are produced or coproduced by public housing residents and that aim at recoding the articulation between the living conditions as they are visible in space and the lives that are led in the projects. This paper will start by analyzing a magazine article, rather than a set of pictures, because it powerfully shows how visual and other limited perceptions can be elaborated into “visualizations”—and more specifically how the visible and the invisible can be articulated, with space working as a screen, both hiding what is going on beyond the surfaces that the eye can see, and lending itself to projection and fantasy. The analysis will then turn to pictures (photography and video); indeed, in a social context, pictures provide privileged material for the discussion of what is made visible and for the redirecting of representations—in this case, as they are inscribed in figure/ground readings.

Visualizing Public Housing: Space as a Stand-in for the Social

- 5 In 1988, an essay was published in the *Chicago Tribune* magazine, entitled “Moonlighting at the Green: A Cop’s-Eye View of Life in Chicago’s Most Notorious Housing Project,” and authored by policeman and aspiring writer Michael J. McInerney.¹³ The “notoriety” of Cabrini-Green among Chicago housing projects was grounded in its proximity to one of the most affluent neighborhoods in the city, the Gold Coast, and to the central business, political, and media district of the Loop. As the city’s Near North Side gentrified starting in the 1970s, Cabrini-Green appeared as a racially segregated enclave of poverty, visible from a distance but commonly avoided.¹⁴ The project’s moments of highest visibility were those when the line between Cabrini-Green and the rest of the city was crossed spectacularly. In 1971, the killing of two policemen by snipers who were shooting from one of the high-rises signaled the threat that the project represented for “the outside world.” In the spring of 1981, after gang conflict around the escalating drug trade had caused eleven gun deaths in only two months, the mayor of Chicago, Jane Byrne, decided to temporarily move out of her neighboring home in the Gold Coast and into a Cabrini-Green apartment, effectively putting the project in the spotlight for several weeks. As the 1980s unfolded, with the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) descending into further dysfunction¹⁵ and living conditions in its projects worsening, Cabrini-Green was especially covered through the lens of gun violence, with assorted figures of disorder—mostly trash piles in the fenced open galleries that characterize CHA high-rises, and gang graffiti in the lobbies and stairwells.¹⁶ “Moonlighting at the Green” was therefore based on the intensification of existing tropes about Cabrini-Green as a deviant and violent place.

- 6 The focus of the analysis here will look at the text of the piece more than at its photographs (by *Tribune* photojournalist Val Mazzenga), which mostly show the policeman in various parts of the project and fixate especially—and classically—on graffiti and broken windows, always in the public areas of the project. McInerney, a policeman working at Cabrini-Green once or twice a month, has chosen a second-person point of view to describe a supposedly typical day around Cabrini-Green.¹⁷ His account of his own experience is framed by the evocation of past crimes (shootings and a gang rape) that have affected fellow non-residents—bus drivers, a woman walking by, the policemen killed in 1971. What violence is described is primarily directed at outsiders, which reinforces the us/them perspective. In between these opening and closing accounts of violent crimes, “Moonlighting at the Green” explores a few recurrent motifs: the idea that the relegation of residents produces “frozen rage,” animalization (in phrases like “a ‘jungle,’ a place where wild animals roam and devour weaker organisms” or “the gang vermin who slink around the Green”¹⁸), a portrayal of policemen as prey. The senses of touch and smell receive pride of place in an explicit effort to make readers “feel” the project: the author holds onto a dirty wall, feels a cockroach come up his leg, is assaulted by the stench of urine in the elevator, of garbage in the stairwell, and even of the residents themselves (“and if there’s an odor about them, it’s pure body stench and stale beer”¹⁹)—a multisensory descriptive strategy culminating in a bizarre, “everyday” version of the assault on policemen, when McInerney reports being urinated on by an unidentified resident in a stairwell.
- 7 This grotesque climax, which prepares the purple passage when McInerney goes through the gun battle of 1971 as if it was continuous with his beat in 1988, is also particularly interesting on account of how it articulates the hidden, the seen, and the projected. When the policeman runs up the stairs to locate his aggressor, he simply notes, “You see nothing.”²⁰ This is a condensed formulation of the theme of opacity and invisibility running through a text that sets a hyper-visible policeman (a figure that becomes a target for the “frozen rage” of the residents) against invisible threats in dark corners and behind windows (from where snipers might be shooting, as in 1971). The sentence “You see nothing” is striking also because the whole text is driven by the author’s capacity to turn opacity into images: lurking presences are located in dark corners, and the impenetrable faces are a veil, a mask, the form taken by relegation. Invisible threats or ungraspable aggressors trigger exercises in imagination, as when McInerney, who cannot see through windows (just like in the large photograph that opens the article and that shows the policeman facing a building made opaque by the reflection of the sun in its many windows), “see[s him]self being felled by a bullet, falling out there on the blacktop”—or when the volatilization of his aggressor leads to a comparison between elusive residents and the “clay people” who merge into cave walls in the 1936 science fiction serial *Flash Gordon*.²¹
- 8 One of the four readers’ responses to this article that were published by the *Chicago Tribune* states, “It was so well-written that I went every step of the way with him—and visualized all the horrors of living there.”²² The use of the verb “visualize” begs for attention. Indeed, at the end of the article, the cop-writer has seen little—a few residents, only one apartment, no illegal activity, no trace of the man who humiliates him—but through his writing he has projected many images and through them other sensations. Most importantly, he has managed, like the clay people, to merge the residents and the walls of the project—especially when the well-established motif of the

stench of garbage and urine is picked up in the author's reference to the residents' "body stench"—so that the inscrutable social world of Cabrini-Green can supposedly be deciphered in its surfaces. The visual, in "visualized," is both vision as the dominant sense standing in for other forms of embodied experience, and vision as understanding, comprehension, observation turned into knowledge, a "full picture" as opposed to assaulting perceptions.

- 9 The *Chicago Tribune* reader's use of the verb "visualize" can productively be referred to Nicholas Mirzoeff's definition of "visuality" as "a medium for the transmission and dissemination of authority, and the means for the mediation of those subjects to that authority."²³ As a vulnerable policeman on unfamiliar and opaque ground, McNerney experiences the project's architecture mostly as an obstacle to vision. Drawing on a Foucauldian theorization of oversight, communications scholar Matthew Murray has defined Cabrini-Green as an inverted panopticon, where those inside the buildings and on their fenced galleries are hidden from view and can watch over anyone approaching;²⁴ visuality as an instrument and deployment of authority does not work there. But the policeman turns his vulnerability in the order of vision into a strength, when he mediates his experience to fellow outsiders and produces an exterior knowledge of life in Cabrini-Green for those who do not live there and can therefore supposedly identify with the outsidership of the "you" in the text. Arguably, it is the very fact that visuality is impeded in the landscape of public housing that fuels a dynamic visualization of the project as a foreboding place where anything can be projected in the dark. What is visible stands for what is out of sight, and the tangible provides a basis for the imagined.
- 10 It might seem only natural that a policeman should focus on the public areas where he is walking his beat, and yet it is striking that the sole visual cue given about the one apartment in which McNerney steps is the fact that interior walls are made of the same brick as exterior walls; "What you see outside is what they have inside."²⁵ There is nothing more to be seen by entering the apartments, it is all in the public areas, *you have seen it all*. The strength of this type of "visualization" is that it contradicts nothing in the dominant media's view; rather, it elaborates on elements that can be reencountered by the general public in a mediated form—since the fenced galleries, the dark stairwells, and the doorways marked by graffiti are often glimpsed on television, photographed in the press or simply evoked at the outset of articles about public housing. Meanwhile, as pointed out by the *Chicago Reader*, an alternative magazine, in a critique about McNerney's text (in itself an indicator of the strong response to the piece), "a lot of people around the projects object to 'Moonlighting at the Green.'"²⁶ While McNerney's text is deeply exploitative (and indeed he hopes to leverage his knowledge of the seediest aspects of the city into a weekly column as an additional source of income²⁷), it displays only a particularly extreme way of capitalizing on the exploitable surfaces of decayed projects, and of reducing the social world of public housing to the façade it presents to those who come close but are not invited inside the homes of residents.
- 11 Before moving to images in which residents object to the way they are treated (symbolically in the media or materially in their housing conditions), this paper will focus on a second view from up close, produced a decade later by another policeman—this quintessential figure of the outsider who gets a close view of public housing and enjoys both authority and an authorized point of view. Scott Fortino is a different kind

of character, and his visualization of Cabrini-Green is far from McNerney's sensationalism, but his 1998 photographs of doors offers an occasion for refining the problem of looking at the decayed surfaces of public housing from the outside.

- 12 In 1998, Scott Fortino was both a policeman at Cabrini-Green and a graduate student in photography who was resuming studies interrupted in the early 1980s. As part of his degree at the University of Illinois in Chicago (UIC), he set out to photograph all 48 apartment doors in one building. The images were produced with a cumbersome view camera and a consistent viewpoint, with each door or pair of doors photographed in the same frontal way. The series was shot in color, which reveals subtle variations; no two doors are alike. Some signs of disorder are visible, especially gang graffiti in several images, but the doors mostly show traces of heavy use; each one is marked by time. In late 1998, Cabrini-Green was in limbo. The process of demolition had been underway for redevelopment since 1996 but was stalled because of legal action by groups of residents; yet the probable fate of all these buildings (the last high-rise came down in 2011) lent an archival dimension to Fortino's project—even though the building was still inhabited when he photographed it.
- 13 Should one see in the images a democracy of vision, respect for the lives that are led there and even a form of care? Or on the contrary fodder for a voyeuristic gaze, an aesthete's version of slumming? This type of question animated the UIC faculty discussion of the project, as recounted in an article by the *Chicago Tribune's* cultural critic Julia Keller in the arts and lifestyle section of the newspaper in January 1999.²⁸ As stressed by historian of Chicago public housing D. Bradford Hunt, the cover of the article, which displays the newspaper's own visual take on the series, weighs towards a touristic gaze, with twelve photographs of doors forming a grid “in a play on tourist posters of colorful Irish and English doorways, offering a voyeuristic tour for readers [...]”²⁹ The photographer's position, as quoted in the article, is that it is possible to “see through [...] the things you associate with public housing” by paying attention to the way the light falls on the buildings, in other words, to the visual presence of the architectural objects and surfaces as a physical fact, as a matter of form and color.³⁰
- 14 The paradoxical dimension of this outlook, and an important part of why these images might have deserved a full-page reproduction in the *Chicago Tribune*, will be more apparent if these photographs shot in the circulation areas of the projects are related to a shocking crime against a nine-year-old girl that took place in a Cabrini-Green high-rise in 1997, and that became yet another public symbol of “what was wrong with Cabrini-Green”—less than five years after the fatal shooting of seven-year-old Dantrell Davis in the fall of 1992. Dantrell Davis was far from an isolated child victim of gun violence in Chicago, but because he was killed by a gang sniper shooting from a high-rise as he was holding his mother's hand on his way to school across the street, his death had sent shockwaves in the city. The 1997 rape and choking of a nine-year-old girl (known as “Girl X” to protect her identity) thus took place in a sequence of highly mediatized tragedies involving children in Chicago public housing. And while violence was already strongly associated with high rise buildings, some key specifics of this 1997 crime, as it was recounted in the media, made it seem as if a real-life event was pushing the rhetorical vision of crime seeping from the walls to the limit. The young resident was literally treated like vermin by being poisoned with roach spray, and gang graffiti was written on her body to mislead the police, as though they had slid on her from the walls. Against the backdrop of such criminogenic potential for the halls and staircases

of public housing, as they featured in the media, the fact of seeing the democratic transfiguring power of light and complex psychological associations in “the doors of Cabrini,” and the careful detailing of ordinary surfaces without privileging the most sensational ones (typically the doors bearing graffiti), can indeed be seen as a form of reclamation; beauty is found in an unlikely place, to paraphrase the *Chicago Tribune*. But interestingly, and probably because of the academic context of this work, the journalist relates this instance of a close look at Cabrini-Green by a non-resident—therefore vulnerable to charges of voyeurism—to broader ethical issues in documentary photography when it focuses on the poor, and specifically to issues of power and asymmetry. Julia Keller points out that “the photographer exerts power over the subjects,” that “race adds another complication,” and that “while we have Fortino’s view of the Cabrini doors, we do not—because of a variety of factors—have the Cabrini residents’ view of Fortino’s door or their own doors.”³¹

- 15 The journalist’s quick overview of recent photographic theory leads her to seek the opinion of tenant representative Carol Steel, an unsurprising move after several years of conflict over redevelopment plans at Cabrini-Green with claims by residents that they should be consulted more thoroughly in the process, and a reminder of the fact that the question of the outsider/insider point of view was then emerging as a significant issue where the optical-aesthetic and the political are entwined. Carol Steele is presented as a “Cabrini spokeswoman;” she also co-founded the Chicago-based Coalition to Protect Public Housing in 1996. She had not seen the photographs and was not hostile to the project in the interview, but her reaction is a broader objection to the fact that the apartments themselves are never shown: “The media is always taking pictures of the outsides of the buildings [...] They don’t go inside. People don’t realize that [Cabrini-Green residents] take care of their places too. They live just like everybody else.”³² This position is a leitmotiv for Steele, who declared in another context in 1999 that, “public housing is just like any other apartment or housing. Home is where your heart is.”³³ Her reaction to this instance of close-looking at the décor of Cabrini-Green is a reminder of the fact that Fortino’s project fits into a broader context of images of the decayed exterior surfaces of public housing as a stand-in for communities, images that cumulatively work to stigmatize residents. As a matter of fact, a few years later, as Steele was still fighting common ideas about the domestic spaces of Cabrini-Green in order to resist demolition and displacement, she circulated a poster with photographs of well-appointed interiors.³⁴ She was then appropriating the use of the photographic image of housing as proof of the social worth of the residents, but shifting the perspective to space that is both off limits to the outsider and outside of the interest of the photographer looking for a “rich” material surface of poverty. Steele opened the door to normal domesticity, in reaction to pictures that locate the projects in a distinct materiality, the image of way of life of the other as defined at the intersection of class, race, and gender.
- 16 The *Chicago Tribune* journalist further stresses how Fortino’s images show “only his point of view” by recounting how residents who were going in and out of their apartments appeared to be uninterested in the photographer’s activity.³⁵ It is in fact striking that Fortino photographs doors that are all closed, with no one looking back from the inside. In contrast, one may think here of Mikhael Subotzky and Patrick Waterhouse’s photographic project on Ponte City, the massive apartment building in Johannesburg where they have photographed all the front doors, all the windows, and all the TV screens.³⁶ Those wooden doors are often sculpted and freshly painted, even

though the presence of metal railings connotes insecurity. Not only are they generally in much better shape than Cabrini-Green's, these doors also appear as openings; when residents answer the doorbell, the door picture becomes a portrait of the resident posing on the threshold of his or her apartment—a sort of “doorstep portrait” in which the human subject composes him or herself. According to Didier Aubert, the visual trope of the “doorstep portrait” is a ritual form in which the “mainstream tradition of documentary” (part of liberal reform discourse) negotiates the issue of intrusion in the lives of the poor; performance, in the form of the pose adopted on one's threshold in front of the photographer-outsider, serves to code the relationship between photographer and subject as a transaction, thereby explicitly ensuring that the documentary move is “ethical.”³⁷ Fortino is clearly not setting his work in this mainstream documentary tradition, but the absence of negotiation and human interaction in images that are quintessentially “going to the homes of the poorest” explains the discomfort felt by some of the UIC faculty. This close and careful look at the materiality of Cabrini-Green does beg the question of what residents might want to show of their lives in public housing.

- 17 Faced with an objection like Steele's, calling for a radical counter-image strategy towards a de-specifying of the public housing environment, and keeping in mind the UIC faculty reactions to “the objectification of poverty,”³⁸ the question yet remains of the conditions under which the public exposure of a physical living environment such as distressed public housing might work in a non-stigmatizing way. In order to test the idea that pictures showing a resident's point of view can avoid social objectification, even in cases when decayed space is represented, the rest of this paper will analyze several instances of resident-produced or -coproduced images meant for public circulation outside the projects. Beyond the human-centered frame of the political iconography of the portrait as a space where the visibility of the subaltern can be rehabilitated, those images, when they give a significant part to the physical environment, give opportunity for a productive rerouting of the supposed legibility of social-spatial mechanisms—and especially for a redistribution of attention allowing viewers to identify other destructive processes than those wrought by tenants.

“Behind those Red and White Dingy Walls Are a Loving, Intelligent People.” The View from Home

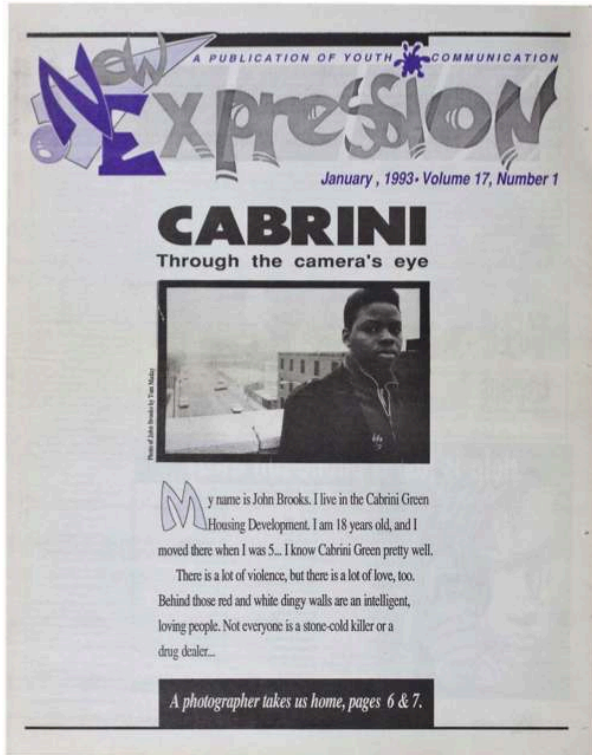


Fig.1: *New Expression*, January 1993, 17, no. 1, cover. Columbia College Chicago, http://digitalcommons.colum.edu/ycc_newexpressions/130



Fig.2: John Brooks, “Welcome to My World,” *New Expression*, January 1993, 17, no. 1, 8-9. Columbia College Chicago, https://digitalcommons.colum.edu/ycc_newexpressions/130/

18 The title of this section is a quotation from the cover of the January 1993 issue of the Chicago teen magazine *New Expression*, which featured the images and words of

eighteen-year-old photographer John Brooks who depicts his building as well as friends and family in Cabrini-Green.³⁹ At the time, the project was the focus of extreme media attention after the shooting of seven-year-old Dantrell Davis—an event that would prove a turning point in the history of Chicago public housing. As the *Chicago Reader* put it in 2012 with twenty years' hindsight, it was “the shot that brought the projects down.”⁴⁰ More immediately, the shock of the tragedy and the dark light that the media shone on Cabrini-Green on this occasion triggered protests such as Brooks': “Not everyone is a stone-cold killer or a drug dealer...”⁴¹ The negative light was such that the *Chicago Tribune* also published an illustrated article about one multigenerational family's day in Cabrini-Green shortly after the shooting—with women walking children to day-care and a teen-age boy pressing his trousers before leaving for high school, far from the school drop-out stereotype—under a title that was reminiscent of Brooks' protest but one that still kept the deviants in view: “Amid Gangs and Violence, It's Still Home for Thousands.”⁴² The text by Brooks goes in fact much further than the *Chicago Tribune* article, as it voices an “insiders' perspective” on the interruption of shootings after the police crackdown in late November: the police are described as the disrupters of project life, and the calm as the result of a gang truce after Dantrell Davis's death.⁴³

- 19 *New Expression* (1977-2008) was a teen magazine produced by high-school journalists that aimed at giving a voice to minority urban youth through access to mass media.⁴⁴ It was therefore well positioned to mediate what a young resident had to say and show. A year later, in May 1994, when the editors of the same magazine sent young photographers to the Robert Taylor Homes, a massive housing project on the South Side of Chicago that was then the site of “gang wars,” and the young residents they met with objected to the exclusive focus of the media on gun violence, the resulting cover page showed four photographic portraits of smiling youths, with their school achievements specified and this title: “Why Are the Cameras Only Here When Someone Dies? We are ambitious. We are hardworking. And we all live in the Robert Taylor Homes.”⁴⁵ But the fact that the mayor of Chicago Richard M. Daley invited these same youths to stand by him during his state of the city address⁴⁶ shows that such a claim for respectability could also quite seamlessly be politically coopted. John Brooks' focus on the broader social and material landscape of the project reacted to dominant media accounts in a more complex way.
- 20 Indeed, in contrast with the tightly framed portraits of the May 1994 issue resembling high school yearbook portraits, Brooks' 1993 photo-essay shows spaces as much as figures (see Fig.2)—with close-shot portraits, individual figures in identifiable environments (a young boy by a window, a woman coming out of the building under a “metal detector” sign, a young boy coming down a staircase), and “pure” architectural shots (with the signature grid pattern of the Cabrini-Green high-rises, seen in a dramatic low-angle shot in the top left corner and through the gallery fencing that identifies high-rise project architecture in Chicago in the top right corner). Across the whole spread, the contrast between a smiling face and a melancholy look, in the two close-shot portraits, and the variations in scale and angle, have an almost cinematographic quality. The bottom photograph echoes the Dantrell Davis tragedy: it shows women doing a CPR demonstration on a baby mannequin, an image of a community in action, reacting to threats with care and knowledge. But the photographs interact with media representations and with preexisting visualizations in

a more diffuse way, by injecting emotional complexity and intimacy in the well-known architectural texture of Cabrini-Green—the “dingy walls” that frame the spread.

- 21 One could say that Brooks is addressing a public outside the project through the medium of a magazine with Chicago-wide circulation, but also through the medium of the known spaces of the project. Rather than taking the readers to unexpected spaces such as the well-appointed apartments that Steele would see as the right thing to photograph, he provides unexpected views of the stereotypical spaces of the projects—through startling angles, as in the low-angle shot up a recess of the building, and through unguarded, intimate portraits. In the process, a point of view emerges—that of a young photographer who experiments with the medium and who experiences the housing project as a close-knit community. His vision of “home” is thus addressed to the public in a dual sense: a public who might appreciate the photographs as photographs, and a public who might develop new affects regarding public housing as a place that gets misrepresented. The portrait on the cover, which shows the young photographer against a non-project cityscape, suggests that public housing residents are not confined—and should not be symbolically reduced—to their buildings; arguably, this detachment from the project landscape is achieved because Brooks can claim a point of view *on* Cabrini-Green. Both in the visual composition and in the viewing subject position thus claimed, the distribution of bodies and spaces, bodies in spaces, complexifies the figure/ground assumptions about residents-in-their-projects.

“This Is the Clear Picture of CHA – The Living Conditions of CHA.” Redirecting the Stigma of Space

- 22 In his documentation of living in Cabrini-Green, a photographer like Brooks does not train his camera on public housing’s dinginess *per se*, and his authorial position is detached from immediate action. And yet, given the state of advanced deterioration that characterized Chicago projects in the 1990s, residents had incentives to publicize their living conditions. Sociologist Sudhir A. Venkatesh witnessed a community group enlisting gang members to make a survey of needed apartment repairs in the Robert Taylor Homes in 1993 and trying, unsuccessfully, to attract the attention of the local press at a forum held at the project with photographs and other exhibits.⁴⁷ This article’s final focus will be on visual productions that provided similar documentation and successfully garnered attention outside the CHA, while taking steps to deactivate the stigmatizing potential of decay—in other words, to shift the stigma away from the residents while focusing public attention on space. The 1991 video press release and the early blog started in 2001 that will be considered here can be described in varying degrees as “coproductions” between residents and professionals, a fact that has to be related to a widespread interest for the voices of public housing starting in the early 1990s, but should also be interpreted as another symptom of the reputational perilousness of the spectacle of poor housing.
- 23 The first example creates a powerful twist in the articulation of decayed public housing spaces and their residents, more specifically regarding the way in which the responsibility for the state-of-the-building is conceived. At the end of the 1980s, the Henry Horner Homes were in a state of dilapidation graphically described by Alex Kotlowitz in his book *There Are No Children Here*.⁴⁸ Both the apartments and the common areas had been heavily vandalized and run down as maintenance was deferred during

the decade. The West Side of Chicago, where the project was located, was still experiencing the devastating social consequences of the disappearance of tens of thousands of industrial jobs starting in the late 1960s and the lasting effects of the 1968 riots. The arrival of crack cocaine compounded these problems. In 1991, the vacancy rate at Horner had reached an average of 50%, which was in itself a major source of physical and social degradation. With the support of the Legal Aid Foundation, the Henry Horner Mothers Guild—an organization of women who had been running programs for children as well as calling for better upkeep by the CHA and the city since the mid-1980s—decided to sue the CHA for “de facto demolition,” using an emerging legal theory regarding the obligations of public housing authorities and the meaning of decay.⁴⁹ This led to several years of legal action, which eventually gave Horner residents unmatched rights and protection during the redevelopment of their project after a mixed-income model was adopted in 1995.⁵⁰ Beyond its legal and material results, the significance of the lawsuit lies in the fact that residents took the initiative to change the terms by which their living spaces and they were assessed; they argued successfully in court that material conditions in the projects were an indictment of the CHA, rather than of residents—who would commonly be held by the larger public to be collectively responsible for the state of their buildings because of a supposed tolerance for vandalism or a form of apathy.

24 By studying legal affidavits in particular, anthropologist Catherine Fennell has shown how “decay narratives,” or ways of documenting and narrating the “many harms of living [t]here,” were used in an innovative legal context to establish a new form of sympathy—with the condition of the buildings coming to be seen (and felt) as affecting potentially anyone.⁵¹ Equally innovative was the media strategy developed with the Henry Horner Mothers Guild by the newly created Chicago Video Project. This non-profit structure, which meant to provide social change organizations with the same public relation tools as major companies, produced a video press release through which the Henry Horner Mothers Guild publicized its legal move against the CHA.⁵² The four-minute video was sent to newspapers and television stations, which used elements of it on the evening news, including ABC, CBS and Oprah Winfrey.⁵³

25 The video exposes the conditions by taking the viewers on a tour of the buildings. An establishing shot showing the exterior of a high-rise with many boarded-up windows is followed by interior shots of lobbies with asbestos hanging from the ceiling, ill-lit or unlit halls, and stairwells covered in layer upon layer of graffiti, as well as views of the barren grounds as seen from a fenced gallery. All these shots of decayed public areas show mothers and children. The second part of the video, which presents the legal move by the Guild, includes photographs of heavily degraded spaces with broken walls, stagnant pools of water in the halls, crumbling ceilings—pictures which one assumes are part of the legal file. These photographs are without human figures. At various moments in the video, women of the Guild are shown in close shots as they are discussing the past and present state of the project, or interacting with children in clean and well-lit community or domestic spaces.

Alongside the exposure of dilapidation, the rehabilitative aims of the video are obvious. The mothers and children are well-dressed, the women are interviewed in front of a bookcase which lends them credibility, on two occasions a woman is presented interacting with a singular child—which goes against stereotypes of numerous children left to their own devices in “underclass” families; the clean domestic spaces bearing the marks of care (with a potted plant in one shot) stand in sharp contrast to the disastrous

public areas. The extent of the need for such rehabilitation is highlighted by a sentence in the voice-over that accompanies the shot of a mother and her daughter in a clean kitchen: “The women of the Henry Horner Mothers Guild teach their children individual responsibility and the difference between right and wrong.”⁵⁴ These women have to be recast, away from the welfare mother stereotype. The emphasis on the organized tenants’ respectability is indeed necessary to prepare the final shift of blame from the residents to the public landlord, with the last words of the voice-over, this time coming from a resident: “This—the whole... That’s your clear picture. This is a clear picture here. This is the clear picture of CHA—the living conditions of CHA. So let everyone know.”⁵⁵

- 26 The heavy-handed “respectable” theme, with its conservative ring (“individual responsibility”, “the difference between right and wrong”), must be read against the fact that images of housing dilapidation always risk being read as the destructive tenants’ fault.⁵⁶ The pairing of visual documentation of an appalling physical environment and figures of articulate women taking care of their children and of the parts of their home that they can control appears as a radical—and necessarily formulaic given the format—rerouting of social-spatial connotations. This will be clearer if we venture outside public housing and consider an often-cited chapter of *Picturing Us*, the collection of essays about African Americans in photography that Deborah Willis edited in 1996.
- 27 The photograph chosen by art historian Paul A. Rogers for his essay, entitled “Hard Core Poverty,” was taken in 1966 in Harlem by photojournalist John Launois. It shows an African American mother standing with her five children in the corner of a room with darkened and crumbling walls, a falling ceiling and dangling electrical cords. Navigating between the human group and the domestic background of the scene, Rogers reads a “corporeal/architectural equation” in the figure/ground relationships of the image, with a continuum in color and texture between the bodies, their clothing, and the space around them. Space is “mapped onto” the bodies, but Rogers sees all possible meaning for this environment as firmly located in the vision of a dysfunctional “black family matrix” at the center of the photograph.⁵⁷ The forthrightness of Rogers’ denunciation of a stigmatizing reading grounded in race and gender might be traced back to the fact that this photograph opened the section about the 1960s in the catalogue of “Harlem on My Mind,” the controversial exhibition held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1969.⁵⁸ But other uses of the same image in the early 1970s suggest under what conditions the photograph, as a paradigmatic social-spatial image of the poorly-housed Black poor, can be read differently.
- 28 In 1970, in *An Illustrated History of Black Americans* written by John Hope Franklin and edited (especially for the images) by “the editors of Time Life,” the section on the present situation of African Americans is introduced by a cropped version of Launois’ photograph.⁵⁹ The caption is appreciative (the mother “stands protectively with her children”), but, especially as the environment of the room has been partially cropped out, the visual focus is on a group under pressure. Such a scene could have been traced by the contemporary viewer to the notion of a supposedly dysfunctional matriarchal black family structure, a few years after the publication of the Moynihan Report. Another occurrence of this image is in a collection of textbooks conceived by the Chicago-based Law in American Society Foundation, which aimed at developing a better knowledge of how the law works among Chicago high school students.

Documentary photographs are used to lead students to think about common situations in terms of legal principles. In the *Landlord and Tenant* volume, in the section on “Responsibilities of the parties,” the uncropped photograph by Launois is accompanied by this caption: “Does the apartment meet the implied conditions of being fit to live in? Why? What is the definition of ‘implied condition’? If you were a legislator, would you write a new law redefining ‘implied condition’ and making it more specific? If so, how?”⁶⁰ The viewer is here invited to evaluate the space in terms of whether it is “fit for the habitation of human beings,” and to reflect on what tenants are owed. The room is assessed in reference to the human figures that live there, and those figures are presented as generic “inhabitants”—or at least, this is what the students of the image must be working toward.

- 29 There were limits to this specific exercise, if only for the fact that the Law in American Society series was mostly meant for inner-city high school students, and was therefore presumably not going to recode representations of poor Black tenants’ plight across a wide social and racial divide. Also, the fact that the meaning of a photograph is determined by context and captioning is already well established; but what these different uses of the same image show is how the meaning of the spectacle of “the poor in their inadequate housing”—a foundational scene of American documentary photography since Jacob Riis—can be redefined by actively changing the direction of judgment in the binary system body/space, through the circulation of the assessment of the physical situation in and out of the image. Here, the mother’s concern, as expressed by her gaze, can activate the viewer’s concern—both a technically- and politically-oriented one, or in other words, law-based and rights-based.⁶¹ It is as if the mother’s look out of the photograph was encoding another question after “[Is it] fit to live in”: “What would this mother say?” Precisely, in the Henry Horner Mothers Guild’s video press release, the public is invited to hear poor black mothers’ own assessment of the living conditions of their children. The staging of women who show viewers around their place, in the images filmed in the hallways, who present additional forms of evidence that they have gathered, with the photographs of specific code violations, and who adopt an authoritative stance to comment on the situation, in the images shot in front of the bookcase, invites the viewers to follow the mothers’ gaze, to look with them, rather than to lump them into the “distressed situation.”
- 30 In order to undo established figure/ground readings and to deconstruct the assimilation of the tenants with their visible living conditions, the mediation of the tenants’ point of view through a legal framework was key in the case of the Guild, but so was the fact that the video stages the use of documentation methods. The persuasiveness of the documentation move by which the residents publicize the texture of their building was stressed by a TV reporter asked about the impact of the video press release: “It was clear to me that if they were willing to go to that length to document the problems there, that the problems were serious. I was impressed with their willingness to take matters into their own hands and to creatively document what they experienced everyday.”⁶²
- 31 This paper’s final example of the mediation of a resident’s documentation of her housing was published in an early blog developed by community activist and journalist Jamie Kalven, photographer Patricia Evans, and technologist David Eads between 2001 and 2007. Entitled “The View from the Ground,” this online publication aimed at reporting conditions in the Stateway Gardens housing project (located on the South

Side in what was among the poorest census tracts in the U.S. at the time) and to enrich the public conversation on the ongoing demolition of public housing, including by reminding the public of the fact that during this years-long process, projects were still homes to many families. In its (White) creators' words, it was an example of "human rights monitoring" and "a vehicle for documenting conditions of life in abandoned communities."⁶³ This media, produced onsite and in cooperation with residents, was directly linked to political activism and organizing. Indeed, "The View From the Ground" would serve to publicize police misconduct and to press for public inquiry into aspects of CHA management, with investigative work led by Jamie Kalven.⁶⁴ While notable journalistic and legal skill went into these projects, it is significant that several of the first blog posts in 2001 relayed specific complaints by residents, with the inclusion of formalized "data" that they had produced themselves, alongside one or two photographs by Patricia Evans—in a creative use of the new multimedia blog format. In "A Letter to Terry Peterson," a resident's letter to the head of the CHA is presented partly through the reproduction of her handwriting, with her logbook of the elevator not working day after day.⁶⁵ In "April's Kitchen," a woman whose kitchen had been devastated by a fire and who was contesting the way the CHA had handled the case can be heard telling her story in a short audio track.⁶⁶ And in "Coco's Door," in which Catherine Means/Coco reports how her door was broken and her belongings turned upside down and damaged by the police searching for drugs in her absence (in an example of widespread exploitative policing techniques that "The View from the Ground" would serve to denounce), photographs taken by Coco with a disposable camera document the havoc, along with a Patricia Evans photograph of the woman and her two daughters by the flimsily patched plywood door.⁶⁷

32 A counter-cop's-eye view, with the photographs by Coco standing against the photographs *not taken by the police officers* whom she called after coming home and who botched the inquiry;⁶⁸ scenes of the violation of "normal" domesticity, with broken toys and trinkets by the overturned couch and TV; a fragile door that bears the scars of "law and order" lashing out at the residents rather than the contrary; and a mother who stands protectively with her children, composed and dignified in contrast to the chaos: all the threads that have been followed in this article are interwoven in the combined illustrations of this blog post. With the portrait of Coco and her children, Patricia Evans does not so much portray victims restored in their dignity by a "respectful" photographic process as she introduces to the public (that is, mediates) a subject who looks back at the outside world after having looked in at the form momentarily taken by her fragile status as a citizen—and who refutes, in her own images as well as in her facial expression and body language, a police narrative according to which nothing has happened ("Don't worry about it [...] You can clean up your house now"). When "The View from the Ground" publicizes Coco's images, Patricia Evans's artful photography gives way to the residents' homemade visual discourse, and the documentary photographer can be said to "stand by" her subject, looking *with her* at her living conditions as much as she is looking *at her*.

33 Conclusion Among the second-class citizens of Chicago in the 1980s and 1990s, public housing residents can be said to have been relegated to their housing in symbolic as well as in material terms. The images and visualizations that have been discussed here exemplify the vulnerability of public housing residents to the stigmatizing effect of the spectacle of their dilapidated housing, because of the way in which that space has been coded, but also because of its rich texture, of what can be termed the photogenic

character of poor housing. In the order of representation, and in the cityscape as it is mediated by images and descriptions, such groups experience in a particularly acute way what Stuart Hall has termed “the confinement of meaning to the rich surface of things” by the documenter in a position of knowledge.⁶⁹ Rather than reversing the stigma of space, what residents do when they circulate their own images of their homes as marked environments is to shift the stigma away from their bodies—and possibly to shift it toward the failings of the legal, institutional, political system that allows the space to stand as it is, as housing.

34 However minor these interventions in the mediated cityscape might be in front of dominant discourses and ever-repeated messages, and however vulnerable to stigmatization a place-based public identity like that of public housing residents might be, it remains that by circulating documentary pictures of their living conditions, public housing residents appear as agents who can *also* look at their housing, gaining the position of subjects in front of an object—and thus resist objectification. At the same time, and although public housing residents can of course be photographic authors (like John Brooks), the role of professional image makers in the Horner video and in “The View from the Ground” must be taken seriously and be referred to the sensible and sensitive material of decayed public housing. It points to what could be described as a third point between the aesthetic-political capacities described by Jacques Rancière as “the ability to see and the talent to speak”⁷⁰—namely, the capacity to show or make seen, even in already overdetermined visual surfaces. If these images offer some clues as to how visual productions might work through social divides while working with space, it is largely because their dual structure—space and figures, environment shots and portraits, inhabitants vividly showing space and professional image-makers representing subjects—unpacks and undoes some powerful equations. They point to the difficult and important work of deconstructing the visualizations of “the poor through their housing” as well as of the seminal scene of “the poor in their poor housing,” itself as old as photography as an agent of social exploration.

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NOTES

1. Lawrence J. Vale, *Reclaiming Public Housing: A Half Century of Struggle in Three Public Neighborhoods* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 13-16; Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (Englewoods Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1963).
2. See for instance Alex Kotlowitz, "Foreword: Vital Neighborhoods," in Audrey Petty, *High Rise Stories: Voices from Chicago Public Housing* (San Francisco: Voice of Witness/McSweeney, 2013), 13. The replacement of housing projects with mixed-income developments has meant a great loss of public housing units, replaced by "vouchers" to be used in the private market, with former public housing residents often moving to other segregated and sometimes even poorer neighborhoods.
3. See the National Public Housing Museum, an institution in progress conceived after the Tenement Museum in New York, and which will eventually be located in a building from the New Deal era of public housing in Chicago.
4. William Julius Wilson, *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor* (New York: Knopf, 1996).
5. Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1983); Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Wilson, *When Work Disappears*.
6. For such basic formulations of the idea that the decayed landscape is proof of deep cultural flaws as recollected both by former residents and former non-residents, see Catherine Fennell,

Last Project Standing: Civics and Sympathy in Post-Welfare Chicago (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 72, 76, 96.

7. Those paired expressions are borrowed from Larry Bennett and Adolph L. Reed Jr., “The New Face of Urban Renewal: The Near North Redevelopment Initiative and the Cabrini-Green Neighborhood,” in *Without Justice for All*, ed. Adolph L. Reed Jr. (Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 1999), 195.

8. On ways of reading deserving and undeserving landscapes in racialized urban geography since World War II, see David Freund, *Colored Property: State Policy and White Racial Politics in Suburban America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

9. On social and physical conditions in several public housing projects in the 1990s, with testimonies from residents among other types of data, and on the failure of the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) to halt the decline, see Susan J. Popkin et al., *The Hidden War: Crime and the Tragedy of Public Housing in Chicago* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2000). On public housing projects as “disfigured landscapes,” see Vale, *Reclaiming Public Housing*, 13.

10. Larry Bennett, Janet L. Smith and Patricia A. Wright eds, *Where Are Poor People to Live?: Transforming Public Housing Communities* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2006).

11. To cite only a few examples: the 1991 award-winning radio documentary *Ghetto Life 101* coproduced by David Isay, LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman, turned into a bestselling book (*Our America*) in 1997; the *Residents Journal* created by Ethan Michaeli in 1996 and the We The People Media foundation; an oral history project published in 2001 under the title *Cabrini-Green in Words and Pictures*; Beauty Turner’s “Ghetto Bus Tours” in the South Side in 2007; the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation-funded video documentation (2005-2010) of the Plan for Transformation through a resident perspective, with 250 hours of video now housed in the Chicago Public Library’s Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature.

12. See for instance David Fleming, *City of Rhetoric: Revitalizing the Public Sphere in Metropolitan America* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008); Deirdre Pfeiffer, “Displacement Through Discourse: Implementing and Contesting Public Housing Redevelopment in Cabrini Green,” *Urban Anthropology* 35, no. 1 (January 2006): 39-74; Bennett, “The New Face of Urban Renewal,” 196.

13. Michael J. McInerney and Val Mazzenga, “Moonlighting at the Green: A Cop’s-Eye View of Life in Chicago’s Most Notorious Housing Project,” *The Chicago Tribune Magazine*, July 10, 1988, 14-25.

14. Ed Marciniak, *Reclaiming the Inner City: Chicago’s Near North Revitalization Confronts Cabrini-Green* (Washington, D.C.: National Center for Urban Ethnic Affairs, 1986).

15. The CHA, which had lost a lot of revenue through the impoverishment of its tenant base, was plagued by mismanagement and deferred maintenance, and had no less than five executive directors in the 1980s, entered HUD’s “troubled” housing authority list in 1979 and stayed there until 1997. D. Bradford Hunt writes that the CHA had become a slumlord by the early 1980s. D. Bradford Hunt, *Blueprint for Disaster: The Unraveling of Chicago Public Housing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 259.

16. The analysis of the photographs published in the *Chicago Tribune* during the 1980s reveals a predilection for these motifs. On the history of Cabrini-Green, see Lawrence J. Vale, *Purging the Poorest: Public Housing and the Design Politics of Twice-Cleared Communities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

17. The second-person point of view connects the article with the opening of a series on the Robert Taylor Homes in the *Chicago Daily News* in 1965, which signaled a change of tone in media coverage of the high-rise housing projects with a move from the theme of slum-clearance to that of ghetto-building. M. W. Newman, “Chicago’s \$70 Million Ghetto,” *Chicago Daily News*, April 10, 1965, 1, 4, 28.

18. McInerney, “Moonlighting at the Green,” 15, 23.

19. *Ibid.*, 24.
20. *Ibid.*, 22.
21. *Ibid.*, 19, 22.
22. "Cabrini Cop," J26.
23. Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), xv.
24. Matthew Murray, "Correction at Cabrini-Green: A Sociospatial Exercise of Power," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 13, no. 3 (1995): 316-318.
25. McInerney, "Moonlighting at the Green," 22.
26. Michael Milner, "Cop and Writer; Manhandling the Sun-Times," *Chicago Reader*, August 11, 1988, 4.
27. *Ibid.*
28. Julie Keller, "Threshold: A Quality of Light Opens the Door to Seeing Beauty in an Unlikely Place," *Chicago Tribune*, "Tempo" section, January 7, 1999, 1 and 4.
29. Hunt, *Blueprint for Disaster*, 287.
30. Keller, "Threshold," 4.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*
33. Jewish Council on Urban Affairs, "Public Housing: Voices Rising Above the Bulldozers," *Community Views: Voices from Chicago's Neighborhoods* (Chicago: 1999), quoted in Fleming, *City of Rhetoric*, 154.
34. Pfeiffer, "Displacement Through Discourse," 57.
35. Keller, "Threshold," 4.
36. Ivan Vladislavic ed, *Ponte City: Mikhael Subotzky - Patrick Waterhouse* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2014).
37. Didier Aubert, "The Doorstep Portrait: Intrusion and Performance in Mainstream American Documentary Photography," *Visual Studies* 24, no. 1 (April 2009): 3-18.
38. Keller, "Threshold," 4.
39. John Brooks, "Welcome to My World," *New Expression* 17, no. 1 (January 1993): 1, 8-9.
40. Mick Dumke, "The shot that brought the projects down, part one of five," *Chicago Reader*, October 12, 2012. <https://www.chicagoreader.com/Bleader/archives/2012/10/12/the-shot-that-brought-the-projects-down-part-one-of-five> <accessed on August 14, 2020>
41. Brooks, "Welcome to My World," 1.
42. Teresa Wiltz and Jerry Thomas, "Amid Gangs and Violence, It's Still Home for Thousands," *Chicago Tribune*, October 18, 1993, 1, 12.
43. On the opposition between this account among Cabrini-Green residents and the version held by the media, City Hall, and the police, and according to which the strict lockdown and intensive policing were responsible for the end of violence, see Ben Austen, *High-Risers: Cabrini-Green and the Fate of American Public Housing* (New York: Harper, 2018), chap. 11 and 12, Kindle.
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54. Chicago Video Project, "A Presentation of the Henry Horner Mothers Guild," 2:27-2:35.
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ABSTRACTS

This article focuses on the visual workings of space as stigma in the place-based visibility of public housing residents in Chicago in the 1990s. By analyzing the production and discussion of images by outsiders and insiders in various media (the local press, a video press-release, an early blog), it considers the decayed surfaces of housing projects as both fact and representation – in other words, as exploitable visible material. By contrasting mechanisms for looking *at* residents through space, and mechanisms for looking *at* the same space *with* residents, it aims at a clearer understanding of the subject/object and figure/ground equations that determine deeply ingrained readings of “the poor in their housing.”

INDEX

Keywords: public housing, Chicago, stigma, photography, figure/ground

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Eliane de Larminat holds a PhD (2019) in anglophone literature and culture from Université Paris Diderot (now Université de Paris). Her research stands at the intersection of visual studies and urban studies, and her dissertation focused on the part played by photographic images in the history of public housing in Chicago in the 20th century.