

This is an Accepted Manuscript of a book chapter published by Routledge/CRC Press in *Affective landscapes in literature, art and everyday life : memory, place and the senses* on 28/04/2015, available online: <https://www.routledge.com/Affective-Landscapes-in-Literature-Art-and-Everyday-Life-Memory-Place/Berberich-Campbell/p/book/9781472431790>

Martin Dines

A Child in the Suburbs

In Christine Berberich, Neil Campbell and Robert Hudson (eds), *Affective Landscapes in Literature, Art and Everyday Life* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015)

In his landmark study *The Child in the City*, Colin Ward acknowledges that, following demographic shifts in the twentieth century, 'the majority of urban children in Europe and North America are in fact suburban children' (1978, p.67). Despite this, just one chapter of Ward's book is devoted to the child in the suburb. A suburban childhood is the most common type of childhood in the West; partly for this reason it is seen to deserve only minimal attention, or otherwise evades scrutiny altogether. In the area of literary production, representing suburban childhood is certainly a minority pursuit. There has been a prolific outpouring of writing over the last century and a half in response to suburban development, particularly in the Anglophone West, but almost all of it is focalized through the perspective of adults (see Jurca, 2001; Beuka, 2004; Hapgood, 2005; O'Reilly, 2012). On the other hand, within the burgeoning field of children's geography, expressions of embarrassment about the apparent over-representation of suburban childhoods (and therefore the over-representation of the experience of growing up in white, stable and relatively affluent environments) are not uncommon. Inevitably, these childhood experiences are far more accessible to western researchers; David Sibley anguishes though that the treatment of street children in Brazilian and Columbian cities by death squads is 'a more pressing issue than mealtimes in Laburnum Crescent' (1995 p.137; see also Horton and Kraftl, 2006, p.262). Actually, geographers whose work focuses on children, as well as scholars of children's literature (e.g. Jones, 1997; Jones, 2002; Bavidge, 2005), often overlook suburban experience and representations due to their pre-occupation with the dichotomy between of urban and rural childhoods. If a long-standing association between childhood and nature renders children and urban environments incompatible (with far-reaching implications for the way children's access to urban space is regulated by adults), suburban childhood is left unacknowledged and unproblematised.

In this chapter I address this neglect by bringing to bear some of the observations of children's geography – many of which draw inspiration from Ward's formative work – on imaginative writing that focuses on suburban childhood. One of

the principal problematics of children's geography concerns the extent to which it is possible for an adult to imagine, or even understand, how a child experiences the world. These imaginative accounts – written by adults of course – put trust in children's capacity to generate their own narratives, stories which are responsive to the emergent spaces of suburbs and which imagine possible futures and future histories. In so doing these accounts resist nostalgia and an adult desire to claim or colonise childhood (see Probyn, 1996, pp.93-124; Jones, 2012), adopting instead a much more reflexive, and flexible, approach to memory and to an understanding of self. These stories accord rather with Owain Jones's reflection: 'Memories mobilise, a landscape within me comes alive, reforms, yet into something fresh. I change.' (2007, p.205) The emotional intensity that so frequently characterises narratives of suburban childhood does not simply correspond to attempts to render children's experience of space more authentically; it expresses a quickening, an enlivening sense of possibility, of new connections and relationalities. These stories encourage their readers to see their environment, and themselves, in new ways.

Stories of suburban childhood: remembered becomings

Ward suggests that 'one definition of the suburb might be that it is the child-rearing sector of the city' (p.66). The suburbs, this rationalisation implies, were made for children. Yet Ward goes on to show that, from the child's point of view, it is the suburbs which are *unmade* – unfinished, in development – which offer the most appealing habitats. New suburban developments 'provide a [...] child's bounty': basins, woods and ponds on the margins of housing estates are liable to be colonised by children for play spaces; the detritus of agriculture and building will likely be exploited in similar ways (p.70). These sylvan playscapes perhaps point to a residual romanticism, a presumption on Ward's part that children are essentially close to nature, and are thus more likely to flourish and remain true to themselves if left to roam free in 'wild' places. But Ward does not stress the 'naturalness' of these borderlands. Rather, the new suburb is 'is rich in experiences and adventures for the child' because it is 'a place that is *becoming*' (p.71, emphasis in original).¹ But as

¹ Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts give a similar account of the opportunities afforded to children by England's 'edgelands', the largely unregulated, widely disregarded and continually changing landscapes of the urban fringe. A child's 'paradise', 'the edgelands provided a space of abandonment out of the watchful eye of the adult world, and also all of the terrain and materials a

well as encountering places that are temporarily without function, which exist in suspension, such as the 'bits of no-man's land which have ceased to be agricultural and have yet to become residential', Ward notes that, in the new suburb, 'the child is reminded of the poignancy of time and change.' He continues: 'Almost before his eyes the habitat alters. The houses completed six months before that of his parents are the old houses, those built since his family arrived are forever the new ones, roads are paved, trees felled and views altered before his own eyes.' (p.71) Thus children exploit the disorder of new suburban developments, claiming territories 'which fall outside the processes of adult control' (Cloke and Jones, 2005, p.320), while simultaneously witnessing the transformation of their environment by these very processes. The child both makes a home and sees it remade.

Ward is reflecting on mainly British contexts; indeed, some of his observations are drawn from his own childhood experiences. In his study of (predominantly American) children's 'special places', David Sobel is less upbeat about the opportunities suburban environments are supposed to afford children. Being often overly planned, suburbs typically lack the 'interstitial space', the 'undefined areas' where children might find suitable places to call their own (2001, pp.92-3) (I would suggest, however, that Sobel underestimates children's capacity to adopt, adapt and disorder adult-ordered space.) And then the purgatorial experience that characterises many a suburban adolescence is virtually legendary: precisely because suburbs are so geared towards raising children, one of the most common putdowns expressed by teenagers about their suburban neighbourhood is that there is, quite simply, nothing to do. A mindfulness of the diversity of suburban habitats and of the ways childhood experience them is profoundly shaped by many factors, not least age, gender and class, is indicated by this chapter's title: a singular 'suburb' rather than the generalising plural term; not *the* definitive child (who is inevitably presumed to be male), but one child among many.

But what concerns me here is not so much the geographical specificity of different suburbs, or the extent to which such environments provide child-friendly habitats, but rather Ward's invocation of the child's occupation of the suburb under construction. There is an intriguingly close correspondence between the 'unmade' suburban environment and an understanding of childhood as a state of becoming.

child's imagination needed to physically make its own world and reinforce a new sense of itself' (2011, p.39).

By 'becoming' I do not mean 'incomplete', in other words, that children are merely to be conceived of as adults in the making. Growing up, coming of age or going through phases may well be the principal temporal frameworks through which adults make sense of childhood, but they are not necessarily the ones employed foremost by children. Instead I am gesturing towards how children's attunement to newness – and strangeness – in their surroundings continually requires a reassessment of the world and their place within it. As Hilary Mantel puts it, 'children are struggling to get a fix on the world [...] Knowledge is revised from moment to moment, often from second to second [...] Every moment the world shifts, and you shift within it [as] childhood brings continual change, tiny crises every day.' (Cited in Jones, 2003, p.34) Mantel emphasises struggle and crisis; for sure, children frequently also face periods of calm, of stasis, for instance, while daydreaming, suffering boredom, or simply waiting. Moreover, the volatility and intensities of childhood experience are often situated within the orderly rhythms of home life and the school day. Indeed, as David Sibley observes, domestic environments and routines are structured by multiple spatial and temporal boundaries; for many children the transgression of these boundaries is associated with 'excitement, exhilaration or anxieties' (1995, p.122). Rather like the developing residential suburb, which facilitates considerable freedom even as it realises a plan, a child's 'becoming' is defined by fluidity and change but is inevitably shaped by strictures and regulation imposed by adults.

Adults, however, all too easily forget, or otherwise overlook, the exhilaration and anxieties of childhood. One reason for why adults have difficulty recalling childhood is because their whole way of experiencing the world has changed. Much of this has to do with being experienced. As Susan Greenfield explains, 'as we grow up and see the world increasingly in the light of previous experiences we develop a personalized inner world of private resources that increasingly act as a retaliatory buffer to the assault of the "booming, buzzing confusion" that previously poured into our brains unopposed' (2000, p.59). These 'personal resources' have become fundamental to the way we comprehend and interact with the world; it is thus virtually impossible to conceive of ourselves without them. The experiential gap between childhood and adulthood is, then, all but unbridgeable. For Ernest Schachtel, however, the tendency to forget one's childhood is largely cultural. What he calls 'childhood amnesia' is a repressive mechanism which demonstrates the extent to which our former experiences and personalities are incompatible with, and even

threaten, the society in which we live. Schachtel holds that we typically respond by substituting the 'the actual riches, spontaneity, freshness of childhood experience' (2001, p.320) with something much more manageable and comforting, an idealised vision of a happy childhood. Schachtel's theory offers a novel rationalisation of a persistent nostalgic impulse in Western thought: that which envisages childhood as a period of integrity and peace which is violated by the pressures of modern life. Schachtel seems to suggest that it is not so much that modernity corrupts childhood; rather, the exigencies of modern living require the production of a myth of a happy childhood which is far more manageable than lived experience.

The imagined landscapes which contain these mythical childhoods are usually either rural or domestic. Gaston Bachelard understands the essence of childhood, its poetic truth, to be accessible through the practice of imaginatively reconstructing the interior spaces of the home. The house is universally imagined as a protective shell: throughout adulthood, Bachelard contends, 'we comfort ourselves by reliving memories of protection' (1969, p.6), for 'life begins well, it begins enclosed, protected, all warm in the bosom of the house' (p.7). Childhood is thus presumed to be a period of eternal calm contentment free from the trials and threats of the outside world. Indeed, Bachelard's daydreams are almost always *static* fantasies: he describes, for instance, how we return to the 'land of Motionless Childhood' to 'live fixations, fixations of happiness' (pp.5-6). This insistence on motionlessness and fixity, the apparent denial of childhood's volatility, is reason enough to be skeptical of Bachelard's phenomenology of the home. Others have different reservations: Sibley (1995) for instance finds unhelpful the absence of any consideration of conflict; Rachel Bowlby complains that there is no place for the *unheimlich* in Bachelard's vision – the house is always an entirely benign, comforting environment (1995, p.77).

Yet some (e.g., Game, 2001), while acknowledging these limitations as well as others, find much that is useful in Bachelard's method. Chris Philo (2003) takes inspiration from Bachelard's 'poetics of reverie' and sees in it a means to negotiate the supposed unbridgeability between the perspectives of adults and children. The emergent field of children's geography is marked by an acute set of epistemological and ethical quandaries stemming from the fact that adult researchers are not children. Owain Jones suggests that academic investigation into the worlds of children risks being 'like an adult trying to crawl into a small, fragile "den" built and occupied on the small (to us) bodily scale of children' (Jones, 2003, p.33). In other

words, it is an intrusion that not only fails to comprehend the nuances of the child's world but threatens, with this adult presence, its destruction. Philo counters, however, by insisting that that all adults have themselves once been children – or at least have once been 'younger, bodily smaller, experientially deficient, and largely dependent upon, provided for and regulated by adults' (2003, p.10) – and that this fact allows for flashes of empathy. Adult reverie in particular produces 'fragments of connection', since it has much in common with the bored daydreaming of children; indeed, it enables the adult to experience a sense of child's perception of 'spaces [...] located away from the world of adults' (p.12). If handled carefully, reverie provides a less intrusive methodology for comprehending a child's sense of self-in-the-world than traditional qualitative methods such as interviews.

Following Philo, geographers and literary scholars alike have suggested that material about children's experiences of space written by adults has considerable potential for richness. For Paul Cloke and Owain Jones, the very fact that these narratives occupy an indeterminate borderland between abstract reconstructions of childhood and of lived experience helps to articulate the otherness of children, and points to the 'uncertain nature of children's presences in particular spaces' (2005, p.312). This uncertainty has much to do with the contradictory ways in which childhood is conceived by adults: in occupying environments free from the usual constraints on childhood, or in disordering adult-regulated spaces, children are often understood to have found a place to be 'themselves', yet such unchecked places are also seen as full of threats of harm – from the antisocial behaviour of other children to the risk of inappropriate interventions by adults. Jenny Bavidge (2006) makes a case for the place of children's literature in the understanding of children's geographies. While accepting entirely Philo's assertion that texts written about and for children are 'in no way [...] an unproblematic window on children's own imaginings (and imaginative geographies)' (Philo, p.22; cited by Bavidge, 2006, p.321), Bavidge insists that 'children's literature represents one of the most powerful manifestations of the ways in which the world is interpreted and explained to children' (p. 21). For sure, children's literature enacts a particular spatial politics. Bavidge (following Jones, 1997; Jones, 2002) identifies a persistent nostalgic pastoralism in children's literature; common even in stories set in cities is the presumption that children and urban life are incompatible. Thus children's literature tends to contribute to the marginalisation of children in discourse about the city.

What, though, of the suburbs? It can hardly be said that children are out of place. But if many accounts of rural childhood depict a timeless, lost idyll – that is, a place sequestered from the modern world, or indeed distant from the travails of adulthood – those of suburban childhood often show the environment to be in flux. Both child and habitat are in process. In presenting suburban childhoods in this manner, these imaginative reconstructions seek also to connect, though not necessarily equate, these experiences and environments with other processes, broader currents – to events taking place in the wider world, or with their parents' interactions with the emergent environment. Thus these stories of suburban childhood are less concerned to stress the separateness of the worlds of children, their *otherness*, than they are to emphasize children's mutually transformative engagements with a world that is in large part conceived and managed by adults.

'A kind of remembering that is everywhere': Pam Conrad's *Our House*

Pam Conrad's 1995 short story collection for children, *Our House*, is an account of one of the United States' most famous post-war suburbs, Levittown, NY. Its six stories are each narrated by a different children growing up in its prefabricated environs in consecutive decades following its construction in the late 1940s. Conrad presents each of her child narrators recording significant experiences, an act which always corresponds to the creation and habitation of new spaces as Levittown matures. In the first story, 'Boy Fossil', the young narrator TeeWee Taylor recounts playing in his new home's attic. It is a space his family hopes to transform: the recently installed full staircase is described by his mother as her 'stairway to the stars' (2005, p.13), which prefigures it as a place of imagination and possibility. Conrad here would seem to be inscribing a Bachelardian vision of the home as a structure which fosters revivifying modes of daydreaming. Indeed, Bachelard remarks on how in the oneiric house – the 'house of dream memory' (1969, p.15) – the attenuated space of the attic fulfils the daydreamer's requirements for intimacy. The very verticality of the oneiric house also provides for the stowage of memories: says Bachelard, 'memories are motionless, and the more securely they are fixed in space, the sounder they are' (p.9). Thus Bachelard's observations have the potential dignify the Levittown home. Contemporary critics of the post-war American suburbs such as Riesman (1950) and Mumford (1961) bridled at what they saw as their relentlessly social – and conformist – nature; Lynn Spigel has since characterised

the suburban home as 'a place for looking' (2001, p.2), with the picture window, open-planned interiors and the television generating increasingly visual and correspondingly less private spaces. Through Bachelard, the suburban home may be appreciated as still having the capacity to foster intimacy; further, despite its inauspicious mass-produced fabrication, it can be seen as an environment which nurtures the imagination and enables memory making.

While she shares a concern about the relationships between domestic spaces and memory, Conrad's project is, however, quite the reverse of Bachelard's. At a very basic level, the act which TeeWee is memorializing is not his ascent to the intimate space of the attic – and Bachelard claims we always remember climbing the attic stairs, but never coming down them (p.26) – rather, it is a movement from lofty solitude back into society. TeeWee erupts through the ceiling into the middle of a party held by his parents (his fall is cushioned by a large tomato cake prepared by his mother). Repeatedly, while Conrad is interested in personal memories and narratives, the experience of domestic space in which they are enmeshed is always shared with others. By contrast, Bachelard seeks to '*desocialize* our important memories' (p.9, Bachelard's emphasis) in order to reify a shared, ancestral domestic imaginary. Even though he goes on to claim that 'it is better to live in a state of impermanence than in one of finality' (p.64), for Bachelard, the oneiric house, mined from childhood experience, is always already complete, ever comforting, and universal in its structure and extent. For Conrad the suburban home, located within a nexus of social relations, is an on-going project; it is precisely its *development* which prompts the creation of memory-texts. TeeWee memorialises his fall in another extension of the family's domestic territory: a cement patio. By inscribing his name next to his footprints in the wet cement (an act which recalls his earlier soft landing), TeeWee produces the first of many texts by Levittown children which act as mnemonics for particular experiences of suburban space. As the earliest, TeeWee's is appropriately primitive: a 'boy fossil', subsequently, the children's texts become more sophisticated and indeed literate as Levittown matures as an environment.

In the remaining stories, Levittown is shown to be by no means detached from wider historical currents: the effects of war, de facto segregation and environmental degradation are felt by the later child narrators – but always in ways that alter the parameters of their environment and daily routines, and prompt the creation of

narrative. For instance, in 'The Longest Summer on Record', a teachers' strike ruptures Levittown's daily and annual rhythms, fostering new rituals and recording methods – storytelling and a diary. The clearing of polluted drainage sumps creates new play spaces and, as we find in the story 'Writer's Notebook', new narrative possibilities and scope for imagining racial harmony. In the book's final story, 'The Second Bad Thing', the young Katie narrates the events surrounding the death of her younger brother who is killed in a road accident whilst cycling in Levittown. Her story is really about her quest to produce and locate an appropriate memorial. Once again, it is the Levittown house that provides. As her father prepares the foundations for an extension to accommodate Katie's widowed grandfather, TeeWee's 'fossilized' imprint is revealed. Katie leaves her brother's boot prints and name next to those of the unknown child. This is a private, enacted memorialisation (for both sets of prints will be covered over with flooring). Yet, Conrad's *Our House* encourages the view that such private acts have public consequences, that the suburb holds such memories palimpsestically. Katie concludes: 'Maybe that's what neighborhoods are all about. Always changing and growing and sometimes getting worse, but underneath it all, there are invisible footprints pressed into the sidewalks and gardens and wet cement, footprints of all the kids who have ever played there. A kind of remembering that is everywhere.' (pp.114-15)

So, what is felt to be in evidence is not so much traces of past lives, but textual traces of memorialising acts, acts of remembering which are embedded in the suburban landscape. Thus, Conrad's collection rejects suburban literature's traditional insistence on dispossession (see Jurca, 2001), and demonstrates instead the ways narrative can performatively create home attachments. Indeed, in the epilogue, the (child) reader is asked to 'keep in mind that you are making memories' (p.121). The use of the present continuous here is suggestive of the way memories, ever in a dynamic relationship with current experience and emotions, are inevitably and continually remade. As Owain Jones puts it, 'memory is not just a retrieval of the past from the past, it is always a fresh, new creation where memories are retrieved into the conscious realm and something new is created in that context' (Jones, 2003, p.27). The instruction to produce narrative mnemonics, however, invites a confidence in the future fixity of memories of place. With its trust in the capacity of storytelling to safeguard against forgetting, coupled with the presumption of transience (the succession of child narrators suggests that none will experience

maturity in Levittown), the appeal ‘keep in mind that you are making memories’ comes across as a modified, rather peculiar form of nostalgia. One might indeed describe it as ‘pre-emptive nostalgia’, that is, the anticipation of the future production of the present as remembered past.

But in spite of its frankly odd construction, arguably Conrad’s nostalgia is fairly conventional after all. *Our House* determinedly counters the complaint that the suburbs cannot produce homeliness. This move, though, is perhaps indicative of another, frequently articulated variation of nostalgia: less a longing for home that has been lost than for a home one has never had, but for which nevertheless the loss is still felt. Thus the book’s insistence on the necessity of generating feelings of home through narrative thus might seem compensatory. Svetlana Boym (2001) considers how nostalgia may also take the form of a longing for a lost time as much as a place. The period of time in question is of course typically childhood, a constant realm untouched by the conflicts of history and the march of progress. It is the basis for secure, comforting visions, *à la* Bachelard. But, once again, Conrad seems keen to show childhood experiences of suburban space to be connected to and not divorced from historical time; the stories produced by the child narrators respond to and even critically reflect on events taking place in the wider world. Arguably, Conrad’s is a species of what Boym identifies as ‘reflective nostalgia’. Unlike the ‘restorative’ forms that typically lie at the centre of nationalist discourse, ‘reflective nostalgia does not follow a single plot but explores different time zones; it loves details, not symbols. At best, reflective nostalgia can present an ethical and creative challenge, not merely a pretext for midnight melancholias’ (2001, p.xviii). These comments well describe the fragmented narration of *Our House*, which breaks apart the conventional bi- or tripartite generational narrative of post-war American suburbs – the veteran settlers, then baby boomers, then generation x’ers – and which invites a more nuanced narrative of the post-war nation. And the text’s preoccupation with children’s attentiveness to detail – and its rejection of panoptic accounts of that were so prevalent in the post-war period² – is perhaps an encouragement to its readers to

² Among the most widely disseminated were aerial photographs – such as those of Lakewood, California by William Garnett (see Waldie, 2013) – which documented the new suburbs’ emergence. These emphasized the mass-production processes involved; the uniformity and sterility of suburban life was implied by the absence of any obvious human habitation. By contrast Brian Selznick’s illustrations for the 10th anniversary edition of *Our House* typically feature the book’s child protagonists framed by and emphatically engaged with their immediate environment. Indeed, one of the book’s

leave off tired metanarratives about the suburbs and register instead the different textures any the many enchantments of these environments.

A lavish foretelling of possibility: Joanne Jacobson's suburban childhood

Hunger Artist: A Suburban Childhood (2007), Joanne Jacobson's account of growing up in Evanston, Illinois, one of Chicago's North Shore suburbs, is a narrative attuned to the sensuality of connectedness and transformation. Throughout the text the entire sensorium bristles in response to all manner of shifts – to movement and change, both epic and intimate, both predictable and startling. The memoir's emphasis on motion and discovery no doubt in part purposefully reflects the new-found social and physical mobility enjoyed by many in post-war America. The young Joanne and her family are certainly free-wheeling. One whole chapter, 'Motel', is dedicated to their numerous long-distance car journeys. 'My mother and father were ready for motion' (p.38), Jacobson declares, and the exhilaration of their release, the promise of new networks of mobility, is readily evoked: 'they sailed up concrete ramps onto the roads that unwound across the Illinois state line' (ibid.). Yet this trail-blazing is framed by rituals and recognizable rhythms: the journeys always begin from the same gas-station, where 'the aroma of motion felt close' (p.37). Indeed, the experience of newness – their overnight stays in motels, for instance – becomes a ritualized delight. Thus Jacobson articulates how the sense of promise and excitement of the post-war suburbs structured even everyday rhythms.

The suburbs' becoming was for sure something which was overlooked by contemporary critics (Riesman, 1950; Mumford, 1961; Jacobs, 1961) who hastily judged these places to be complete, fully realized habitats whose comforts and security cosseted those who dwelt there. Far from articulating an atmosphere of self-satisfaction, Jacobson communicates how a sense of boundless possibility puts everyday life under a degree of tension. She declares, 'we were alert in the realm of the ordinary, ready to be transformed' (p.28). Moreover, the memoir's 'lavish foretelling of possibility' (p.16) is tempered by subsequent moments of danger and periods of pain and anxiety. For instance, the eleven-year-old Joanne is attacked and dragged into an alley one night on her return from school; in her teenage years her habitual over-eating leads to her 'exile from the land of proud bodies, bodies that

stories, 'Night Photograph', concludes with a child leaving off her ambitions to take a bird's-eye-view shot of her home.

lilt though space in bright, form-fitting cloth' (p.71); one whole chapter dwells on car accidents and breakdowns (pp.91-6); and the book's final section mainly recounts her parents' break up. But these counterpoints seem less an attempt to reveal the 'dark side' of suburban America (a 'reveal' which is something of a comforting cliché) than they are an evocation of the becoming of everyday life. Jacobson indicates repeatedly how that strained alertness to volatility in 'the realm of the ordinary' just manages – or just fails – to buffer all manner of shocks and intensities. There is again and again an anxious, surging feeling about how this world of possibility may, at a turn, become one of chaos. For instance, after witnessing flesh-eating during a dissection class: 'for just one terrible moment I had stumbled near to the trembling body of order, and I saw that the world was as small as we were, that it could come apart at our touch' (p.85). Or, when observing road kill: 'violence presses itself on us; and we are inexplicably, inevitable, of it' (p.87). These surging intensities recall anthropologist Kathleen Stewart's work which explores the affective qualities of everyday life. The kind of story that interests Stewart, she declares, 'track the pulses of things as they cross each other, come together, fragment, and recombine in some new surge. It tries to cull attention to the affects that arise in the course of the perfectly ordinary life as the promise, or threat, that something is happening – something capable of impact.' (2005, p.1041) Notably, toward the end of her book *Ordinary Affects*, Stewart recounts walking down a suburban street; she asserts that 'the unfinished quality of the ordinary is not so much a deficiency as a resource, like a fog of immanent forces still moving even though so much has already happened and there seems to be plenty that's set in stone' (2007, p.127).

Much has 'already happened' in Evanston; indeed, it is not a post-war suburb in the mould of the mass-produced Levittowns, or Park Forest, Illinois and Lakewood, California: it incorporated in the late nineteenth century, during which time the settlement underwent its most rapid expansion. Nevertheless, Jacobson dwells on Evanston's becoming through, for instance, her childhood explorations of housing lots under development, imagining the families who would take up residence to be 'capable of anything' (p.20). Perhaps this seems rather an adult observation. But then, Jacobson insists on children's capacity for conceiving of their environment through the eyes of others – through their dogs, for instance, which facilitates various playful transgressions: 'Kid and dog, inside and outside, we passed back and forth until nowhere was out of bounds.' (p.35) Repeatedly the memoir outlines homologies

between adult potentialities and childhood experiences of unfolding suburban space. For instance, if her parents are 'intoxicated' by the promise of their garden's fecund soil, the young Joanne is drawn to the newly laid tar on local streets. Hers is, as ever, a more intimate and sensuous encounter: she recalls bending to 'touch the jet black paste, still sticky and aromatic' (p.16). Indeed the forming landscape indicates a deeper connectivity, the drying tar revealing 'the earth's deep oozing essence to me just over our curb' (ibid.). And then, Jacobson marks the initial occupation of the Evanston house by her choice of vehicle – a red tractor with pedals – as though it designates a kind of apprenticeship: 'my mother and my father were already on the path of transformation, and I wanted to be with them, in motion, pitching in' (p.16). Later, she says of her dreams of multi-speed bicycles, 'with instruments such as these – vehicles of transformation – I could sail into the universe' (p. 26), prefiguring her later journeys with her parents. Thus many of the early sequences in the book evoke simultaneously the promise of connection and transformation: a connectedness between self, family, habitat and the wider world, each in motion. The unformed landscape is a spur to imagine oneself and others anew.

My discussion of narratives of suburban childhood has, admittedly, been limited to just two literary genres and one national context. Certainly, children's experiences of emergent suburban landscapes elsewhere have been depicted, using different methods. Consider for instance the scene in Lynne Ramsey's 1999 film *Ratcatcher*, in which the young boy-protagonist discovers a half-built housing estate on Glasgow's rural fringe. We witness his bouts of wonder and disaffection during his explorations but are not privy to his reflections during moments of repose; the film's final dreamlike scene, however, suggests his imagining his family's arrival and occupation of a new home. Or take Georg Klein's 2010 novel *Roman unserer Kindheit*, ('Novel of our Childhood'), set in a new suburban housing estate in 1960s West Germany. According to Caroline Merkel (2013, pp.44-6), the bright new suburb parallels the promise of the new forward-looking Republic (narration is provided by an unborn child). Yet the novel indicates also how habitation may produce other stories: much is made of a group of children's exploration of the under-used margins of their habitat, and how they reimagine these places anew through their own collective fabulations. Thus, again, an emphasis on connection and transformation: what these texts have in common is their presentation of children engaging with and reimagining their environment – as well as the implications of such change for

themselves and for others. Of course, a significant difference between Conrad's book of children's stories and the others is that it addresses, and has been marketed to, a different audience. Yet this fact does not prevent it from sharing a presumption – with Klein's novel, for instance – that children can and should provide their own narrative accounts of their habitats. And, despite their different settings and readerships, all of these narratives demonstrate Ward's observations of how residential suburbs are both made *for* and *by* children. Finally, stories of suburban childhood remind us that, even though often heavily prescribed, this realm of the ordinary, being also incomplete, at times volatile, is also a place of possibility, and a source of new stories.

Bibliography

Bachelard, G., 1969. *The poetics of space*. Trans. M. Jolas. Boston, MA: Beacon.

Bavidge, J., 2006. Stories in space: the geographies of children's literature. *Children's Geographies*, 4(3), 319-30.

Beuka, R., 2004. *SuburbiaNation: reading suburban landscape in twentieth-century American fiction and film*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bowlby, R., 1995. Domestication. In: D. Elam and R. Wiegman (eds), *Feminism beside itself*. London: Routledge, pp. 71-92.

Boym, S., 2001. *The future of nostalgia*. New York: Basic.

Cloke, P. and O. Jones, 2005. 'Unclaimed territory': childhood and disordered space(s). *Social and Cultural Geography*, 6(3), 311-333.

Conrad, P., 2005. *Our House*. Tenth anniversary ed. New York: Scholastic.

Farley, P. and M. Symmons Roberts, 2011. *Edgelands: journeys into England's true wilderness*. London: Jonathan Cape.

Game, A., 2001. Belonging: experience in sacred time and space. In: N. Thrift and J. May (eds), *Timespace: geographies of temporalities*. London: Routledge, pp.226-39.

Greenfield, S., 2000. *The private life of the brain*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Hapgood, L., 2005. *Margins of desire: the suburbs in fiction and culture, 1880-1925*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Horton, J. and P. Kraftl, 2006. Not just growing up, but *going on*: materials, spacings, bodies, situations. *Children's Geographies*, 4(3), 259-76.

Jacobs, J., 1961. *The death and life of great American cities*. New York: Random House.

Jacobson, J., 2007. *Hunger artist: a suburban childhood*. Huron, OH: Bottom Dog.

Jurca, C., 2001. *White diaspora: the suburb and the twentieth-century American novel*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Jones, O., 1997. Little figures, big figures: country childhood stories. In: P. Cloke and J. Little (eds) *Contested countryside cultures: otherness, marginalisation and rurality*, London: Routledge, pp.158-79.

Jones, O., 2002. Naturally not! childhood, the urban and romanticism. *Human Ecology Review*, 9(2), 17-30.

Jones, O., 2003. 'Endlessly revisited and forever gone': on memory, reverie and emotional imagination. *Children's Geographies*, 1(1), 24-31.

Jones, O., 2007. An ecology of emotion, memory and landscape. In: J. Davidson, M. Smith and L. Bondi (eds), *Emotional geographies*. Farnham: Ashgate, pp.205-18.

Jones, O., 2012. Black rain and fireflies: the otherness of childhood as a non-colonising ideology. *Geography*, 97(3), 141-6.

Merkel, C., Entering no-go areas: suburbs in contemporary German literature. In M. Dines and T. Vermeulen, eds. *New suburban stories*. London: Bloomsbury, pp.41-50.

Mumford, L., 1961. *The city in history: its origins, its transformations, and its prospects*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World.

O'Reilly, N., 2012. *Exploring suburbia: the suburbs in the contemporary Australian novel*. Amherst, NY: Teneo.

Philo, C., 2003. 'To go back up the side hill': memories, imaginations and reveries of childhood, *Children's Geographies*, 1(1), 7-23.

Probyn, E., 1996. *Outside belongings: disciplines, nations and the place of sex*. New York: Routledge.

Riesman, D., 1950. *The lonely crowd: a study of the changing American character*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Schachtel, E., 2001. *Metamorphosis: on the conflict of human development and the development of creativity*. New ed. London: Routledge.

Sibley, D., 1995. Families and domestic routines: constructing the boundaries of childhood. In: S. Pile and N. Thrift (eds), *Mapping the subject: geographies of cultural transformation*. London: Routledge, pp. 123–137.

Spigel, L., 2001. *Welcome to the dreamhouse: popular media and the postwar suburbs*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Sobel, D., 2001. *Children's special places: exploring the role of forts, dens, and bush houses in middle childhood*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press.

Stewart, K., 2005. Cultural poesis: the generativity of emergent things. In: N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln (eds), *Handbook of qualitative research*, 3rd Edition. New York: Sage. pp. 1027-42.

Stewart, K., 2007. *Ordinary affects*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Waldie, D. J., 2013. Beautiful and terrible: aeriality and the image of suburbia. The Design Observer Group [online]. Available at: <http://places.designobserver.com/feature/beautiful-and-terrible-william-garnetts-lakewood/37655/> [Accessed 06 January 2014].

Ward, C., 1978. *The child in the city*. London: The Architectural Press.