

**The Suburban Imaginary:
Ambivalence, Strangeness, and the Everyday in
Contemporary Representations of the Suburb**

by Ondine Park

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Department of Sociology
University of Alberta

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Abstract

This thesis is about the suburban imaginary. It is concerned with the way the suburb is imagined and what insights this imaginary might enable. It offers a definition of the suburban imaginary as being a culturally and historically located set of meanings, expectations, images, and ideas about the suburb that is dialectically shared and formed in the popular imagination, particularly through cultural mediation. The suburban imaginary is a social production. Moreover, like all "places", the suburb is a social spatialization—an on-going social production of space. As such, this thesis argues that while the suburb is in part defined and conditioned by its materiality and the way it is enlivened by those who dwell in, traverse through, or otherwise make use of it, it also always-already exceeds and is exceeded by this materiality, embodiment, and enactment. It also consists in such immaterialities as *the imaginary*. This imaginary can include repressive and conservative ways in which the suburb is imagined as delimited but also includes, or potentially includes, a radical and utopian imaginary—a possibility that the suburb can mean, can be, or can make be something wholly otherwise.

The suburb is dialectically produced through the reciprocal interaction of the material and lived elements with the suburban imaginary. This thesis explores the ways the suburban imaginary figures in diverse contemporary cultural mediations. It considers both a variety and a profusion

of creative works as cultural evocations of the suburban imaginary. Part One looks at popular culture. In surveying popular cultural representations, a persisting dominant operative imaginary of the suburb is legible. However, this dominant imaginary is rife with many deep ambivalences about whether it is good or bad; whether it can be understood as a spatialization of happiness and the site of the good life; and, whether it is ordinary or strange.

Part Two turns to gallery-exhibited visual works of art. Artworks about the suburb help to undo and offer a critique of the obviousness of the dominant suburban imaginary by exposing and playing with key assumptions. An oft-recurring trope legible in this art is that the suburb expresses a categorical, serial separation of spaces, which are imagined to be characterized by different functions, meanings and affective registers. One such defining separation is between interiority and exteriority. The suburban exterior figures as an anaesthetic site of insecurity, asociality, and unwelcome. Complementing this, the suburban interior figures as a guarded site for the creation and maintenance of the private individual, predicated on withdrawal and introversion. In illuminating these tropes, suburban artwork reveal the interior and exterior to be fictions that cannot be maintained. Instead, qualities of interiority and exteriority detach from the spatializations of the interior and the exterior. These disconnected qualities create paradoxical spatializations. Interiorities in exteriors; exteriorities in interiors.

Finally, Part Three considers minor forms of popular culture in the form of picture books for both children and for adults (graphic novels). Minor popular creative works can offer alternative ways of reading and imagining the suburb by presenting the suburb as a curious site. They are experimental about what the peculiarities of the suburban landscape or suburban identity makes

possible. In doing so, they imbue the suburban imaginary with promise and potency. In some of these works, the suburb promises that desires for the good, happy, well-placed life can be realized not as a deferred dream or ideological aspiration but as fully actualized, non-alienated everyday life. In other works, the suburb is imagined as replete with potential to be open to creative engagements and even radically liberatory intervention, subverting normative suburban imaginaries and thereby re-imagining the suburb as the spatializations of liberatory desire. By moving beyond the dominant suburban imaginary and recognizing the suburb as a place of possibility and unpredictability, these works re-enchant the suburb revealing its strangeness and mysterious potency and offer a meditation on how the suburb might be thought and lived otherwise.

Animated in particular by the contradictions, complexities, and paradoxes of the suburban imaginary, this thesis explores the problematics, possibilities, and promises that become imaginable and activated in the opening created by the pause of curious looking.

Preface¹

This thesis is an original work by Ondine Park.

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¹ Some formatting notes: This thesis is formatted in the "mixed" style as two of the chapters have been previously published, as noted. The text of these previously published chapters remain as published except citation styles have been adapted to make them consistent with the style of the thesis. Changes have been noted in the relevant chapters.

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Introduction

This dissertation is about the suburban imaginary. It is concerned with the ways in which the suburb is imagined and what those ways of imagining the suburb might mean.

Orientations

My childhood home was suburban, and many of my beloved relatives and friends live in suburbs—some in the newest, most barren, of suburbs. In approaching the study of the suburb, I sought a sufficiently nuanced understanding of the suburb to be able to account honestly for and honour their chosen homes without compromising a meaningful critical stance. The comfort, sense of home, and happiness that the suburbs actually brought to the people whom I knew and know were plain and emphatic—or, if not *actually* brought, then at least *imagined* to bring. Yet, from even before I had any inklings of researching the suburb, I felt there was something troubling about the newer suburbs that were being built in the outer reaches of Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto, Montréal, all around me. How could I, without insulting and demeaning my

many suburban loved ones as well as the many millions of people the world over who choose the suburb (and myself, who occasionally feels suburban nostalgia and perhaps suburban envy), consider these desires earnestly while also recognizing that there seems to be something awry?

I began my inquiry with these two images of the suburb: The cozy, dreamy one of my childhood, and a stomach-droppingly nightmarish one encountered as an adult. They play out in my imagination as forming a *telos*: In the beginning, there were trees, sky and clouds, there were friends and wild animals (squirrels, racoons, bears, cougars). There were the slightly scary walks to school (two blocks away) but jubilant runs home for lunch and after school; there was the canyon and the river and the shaky bridge and the waterfall; there was gathering food with my grandmother in the neighbourhood forests; there was blowing bubbles at the passing cars; there was peeking at the neighbours through the fences or peeking at the mountain through the trees. I grew up in the District of North Vancouver near the Lynn Canyon. In this imaginative, nostalgic remembering, my wood-and-window home was nestled in a residential foreground, my parents worked in their bookstore in the local mall in my mental mid-ground and out in that distant background, the city, Vancouver, was over there, over the bridge, over the water, far away, a place to go occasionally to do unusual things (like shopping).

Eventually, I moved away into the city and then to a town in England. When I returned to Canada, to Calgary, the suburb, it seemed, forced me to consider it in a new way. It had changed. It wasn't kind and nurturing anymore—a dwelling place away from the incomprehensible city. It was aggressive and monstrous and hideously ugly and endless. It had become incomprehensible. The suburb suddenly looked like a landscape of waste and refuse: A land where curving, looping rows of glistening new plastic houses lay like so many beds or so many graves or like those pods in the film *The Matrix* where humans live and die, utterly docile. Every time I saw a suburb (or, "new community", as they're called in Calgary), I could hear that moment of a movie's soundtrack that accompanies the panoramic pull-back shot and your stomach drops as you see the endless hordes of monsters coming over the horizon to attack the heroes.

Calgary is the near perfect suburban landscape of my adult imagination. It is like a drop of water reverberating in a puddle—or maybe a drop of oil in an oil spill. The drop bounces back in the middle of the puddle where downtown rises in high and densely crowded business and residential buildings. It ripples outwards in ever widening concentric circles in progressively newer suburban neighbourhoods. And, as the ripples ceaselessly continue to expand outwards,

their intensity dies down as the density of inhabitation declines in the approaching exurban developments. Eventually, the ripple is barely perceptible out where the acreages continue to pull and stretch at the corporate boundaries of the city. Finally, the ripples smooth out into the waving prairie grasslands. But, the force of the ripples—of the vibrations—is still there. Eventually, inevitably, the puddle will expand in order to give room to the ripples. The corporate limits of Calgary are in constant expansion.

Even as I knowingly hold off the un-nostalgizable memories of my past everyday life, I am still compelled to remember my own home suburb, at least for a time, as feeling like a perfect universe: just the right mix of nature and civilization, comfort and privacy and bustle. My home itself, extending out into the yards and sizable driveway, were a cocoon or fortress in which I could retreat to watch puzzling sitcoms and enjoy my grandma's loving cooking. Set in a forested mountain, in which wilderness seemed and occasionally was on our doorstep (did I just dream my Dad's heroic backyard encounter with a bear?), I imagined the setting of the many folktales I read as a child playing out just beyond the next mountain or somewhere not too far away. My nostalgic childhood imagination of suburban life was one informed by the suburb I once lived and walked and dreamed within, which comprised the place and experience of my everyday life. And now in my telling, I am accessing stylized, nostalgic memories of a good suburban life, a liveable suburb, a suburb with a promising future—one that meets an ideal of safe home, accessible nature, and useful city. My more recent imagination of the suburb is fleeting (mostly impressions derived from within a passing car), detached, cynical, and city-centric. It is an unsustainable, viral suburb with no history, which is both too present and too mediated for me.

Such a disjuncture between the good suburb and the bad suburb led me to ask after suburban imaginaries. How do we represent the suburb? Our place there? The suburb's place in a bigger picture (whatever that picture may be)? And, what does this mean? And, moreover, what are prevailing images of the suburb? I have already suggested a couple. There is the suburb that becomes a suburb by proximity to an urban centre. And, there is intentional suburban development. Either way, the suburb is often depicted as *the normal*. Either it is the taken-for-granted domestic space of normal life that provides a seemingly neutral background upon which things can be played out. Or, it is the problematized, hyper-normal and therefore highly suspicious and contentious space of life made strange. What is it about the suburb and the lives lived there that the suburb can be used as shorthand for normal? Is it the sheer number of people

living in the suburb (especially now) that makes it normal by default? Is it personal histories of childhoods spent in the suburb, writ large? Is it something about the suburb? Contrastingly, another kind of familiar and recognizable image of the suburb often comes in its representation in aerial photos. As if, to see the suburb, one must see all of it. As if, in seeing the homogeneity and order of the kind of suburb being depicted, one can understand the kind of homogeneity and order one can expect describes the lives lived in these spaces. How much is missing in trying to see it all? These super-human representations of the suburb tend to disrupt a sense of normalcy. They render the suburb as terrifying. They resemble cellular pictures of cancer—spreading, uncontrollably, taking over everything.² Or, as I suggested earlier, they are legible as strange, alien(ating), horrifying nurseries of humans ... or perhaps just labour—productive, reproductive and consumptive. In such a nightmarish vision, amalgamating alienating serial logic with the ongoing corporeal materiality of human life, they are exposed as breeding places—sites of bodily and social reproduction read as viral outbreak.

It is the goal of this dissertation to enable an ambivalence about the subject. Such an unsettled/unsettling orientation to the suburbs must recognize the visceral, affective intensity of such polarized positions towards an ossified image of the suburb of attraction and revulsion. But, this reorientation must also move beyond these polarizations and ossifications in order to be able to read the ambivalence as offering something intelligible, as offering an equivocation that can make a difference.

Contexts

Such an ambivalence is timely. At least half of the population of Canada³, England⁴, U.S.A. (Hayden 2004; Nicolaidis and Wiese 2006), and Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2013), respectively, lives in the suburbs. Globally, the population is rapidly moving towards suburbanization in various forms: peripheral, sprawling slums; affluent, gated neighbourhoods; and a multitude of other more and less familiar formations (Davis 2006; Keil 2013). Much of this

² Cartoonist Tom Kaczynski (2007) also sees and illustrates this resemblance.

³ Recent research suggests that the Canadian population is, in fact, two-thirds suburban (Gordon n.d., n.p.).

⁴ According to *The Future of Suburbs and Exurbs*, produced in 2004 by the Independent Transport Commission, England's population is a whopping 84% suburban (Local Futures Group 2007, 5).

suburbanization—both within the Canadian context and in the broader global context—is not sustainable environmentally, politically, or culturally in its current form (FCM 2006; Harvey 2000; Keil 2013; NRTEE 2003). Yet, despite the emergent urgency and range of suburbanization issues, the dominant suburban imaginary continues to reproduce the inadequate trope of "cookie-cutter suburbia".⁵ This discourse reductively and problematically imagines the suburb as predictable, homogeneous spaces populated by middle class, "white" families, self-excluded from the city and whose motivations for living in the suburb are uniform and straightforward. In contrast, the lived reality of Canadian suburbs reveals that suburban life is animated by ethnic and class diversity (FCM 2011; Fong and Gulia 2000; Fong and Wilkes 2003), circumscribed by cultural, political and gender issues (Harris 2004), and motivated by (often banal) everyday and intimate concerns and negotiations. This is compounded and exacerbated by a lack of an agreed-upon understanding of what the suburb is—even by those who must produce policies and action for suburban development and management. For example, Statistics Canada offers four different ways in which to differentiate central municipality from the suburbs: "four ways of categorizing them [i.e. the suburbs], based on four criteria for delineation: 1) administrative or political boundaries; 2) the boundaries of the city's centralcore, not to be confused with the urban core...; 3) distance from the city centre; and 4) neighbourhood density." As the author of the report notes, "each one has its strengths and weaknesses" (Turcotte 2008, 3). As I will argue, this problem of definition has to do with the suburban imaginary. That is, while there is a dominant suburban imaginary, there are also fundamental ambivalences at work within and upon this imaginary. If social science is to understand the experiences and contexts of an increasing swath of our population here in Canada and around the world, there is a need to understand persistent and taken-for-granted suburban imaginaries both for the continuing appeal and fundamental contradictions and problems of the suburb.

⁵ This was a recurring concern at *Imagining the Suburbs*, the third annual Cultures of the Suburbs International Research Network conference held at University of Exeter, June 19–21, 2014.

Re-Orientations

This work of exploring the imaginary operates in the gap between micro and macro sociological perspectives, applying a sociological imagination to popular cultural representations of the suburb. As I argue throughout this dissertation, the suburb is more than a particular, identifiable set of places, types of place, or configurations of built forms—that is, a specifiable material thing. It is also more than a way of living, or a particular way in which an identifiable group, stratum, or class of people live in and enliven a space. This work draws from and contributes to the intersection of rich theoretical perspectives that includes critical utopianism, critique of the everyday, cultural studies and critical geography. Taking up the insights of geographical social theorists such as Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, Rob Shields, Sharon Zukin, and many others, I take the perspective that like all "places", the suburb is *in part* defined and conditioned by, yet always-already exceeds and is exceeded by, its materiality and the way it is enlivened by those who dwell there or otherwise make use of it. It also consists in the abstract, ideal, virtual, affective, desired, storied, mythic, imagined. This includes the repressive, State, and capitalist ways in which the spatial imaginary of the suburb is represented (whether implicitly or explicitly) as delimited, a site at the service of State, capital, and hegemony. In addition to this conservative aspect of the imaginary, however, it also includes a radical imaginary.⁶ Thus, the suburb is a dialectic production of the interaction of the material and lived elements, the ways in which it is represented, and suburban imaginary (including, importantly, the potentiality to exceed this imaginary). I discuss this suburban imaginary below and throughout this project, and look at ways it is reflected upon, gestured towards, and made available for perception in cultural representations.

This is a project of cultural reading and critique of the socio-cultural trope of the suburb. It is a cultural and critical sociology. I am not providing either a conceptual framework or an ideal-type by which to understand the phenomenon of suburbs or suburbanization on a grounded level, such as the work done by historians, scholars of urban development, or geographers. This is a sociology in-between. It operates in the terrain between macro- and micro-sociology by offering a theoretically enriched sociological critique and cultural interpretation of the suburb but

⁶ See Castoriadis (1987) who discusses the notion of a radical imaginary as one that does not reproduce the existing institutions of society. Rather, it is "the capacity to make arise as an image something which does not exist and has never existed" (388, footnote 25).

neither delves into the detailed specificity of microsociologies or the broad theorizations of macrosociology. It tarries in the flickering between abstraction and concreteness in which most of us dwell most of the time. It takes seriously culture, broadly understood, as the primary mediator of all sociality. By taking this approach, what appears to be largely out of the remit of sociological investigation becomes accessible. Specifically, I take up the task of considering the suburban imaginary by looking at creative works—including comic strips, children's picture books, graphic novels, TV shows, animated movies, and visual art as cultural representations of the suburban imaginary. This imaginary informs how we come to expect or know the spatialization of the suburb prior to, in concert with, or despite our direct experience of it. As such, I approach the creative works as at once re-iterating and re-enforcing the "obviousness" of the suburban imaginary while also helping to accomplish the tasks of defamiliarizing the suburb and of re-directing perception so that the imaginary through which we perceive the suburb can be made more apparent, and thus open to inquiry and possibly alteration. In short, this dissertation suggests a new paradigm for thinking the suburb that pays active attention to the suburban imaginary. It does so by asking how cultural representations of the suburb, read through a sociological imagination, help to achieve this new orientation.

Chapter Descriptions

The suburban imaginary is a culturally and historically located set of meanings, expectations, images, and ideas about the suburb that is dialectically shared and formed in the popular imagination, particularly through various cultural media. How are we to recognize the suburban imaginary in its contemporary iteration? To illuminate the suburban imaginary, the following chapters proceed as an inquiry using *constellatory figures* in which many images are contingently, subjectively juxtaposed into interpretive constellations. In Chapter 1, I explore the theoretical and methodological concerns through which this dissertation proceeds. I make the argument there, and throughout this dissertation, that the suburban imaginary is made recognizable and familiar while also distinct and particular through the use and repetition of constellatory figures. These figures are represented in the following chapters through illustrative

visual artworks, lyrics of songs, and other media combined with theoretically-informed interpretive descriptions.

Part I. The dominant suburban imaginary and the multiple axes of suburban ambivalence: The suburb in popular culture

In Part I, I explore the ambivalences that animate and are animated by the suburban imaginary. I look to a number of popular cultural media for the way they imagine, represent, and critique the suburb. In particular, I consider songs, television shows, and cartoons—including comic strips, comic books, animated movies, and TV shows. I use these media towards two ends: First, to demonstrate a persisting dominant image of the suburb; second, to dissolve this dominant image and examine its underlying ambivalences to consider what the suburb is made to mean in its obscured multiplicity.

Despite the suburb's varied history and a great deal of nuanced suburban scholarship, the suburban imaginary changes very slowly and continues to be generic, simplistic, and easily recognizable. The dominant image of the suburb persists. Even personal experience—of which there are plenty, have been for centuries, and in increasing numbers—does not deter belief in the stereotype. As it turns out, personal experience does not provide a reliable understanding of the suburb as complex or ambivalent. Jon Teaford, a defender of the merits of the suburb, has found that ideas people have about "suburbia" often contradict their own experience of it (see also Corcoran 2010).

Comprising a majority of Americans, suburbia is not an undifferentiated enclave, a homogenized haven. It is a vivid mosaic composed of all the varied fragments of American life and society.

Any perceptive observer would already know this, but curiously *even those who spend their entire lives in the suburbs seem to believe some of the conventional stereotypes that clash with that reality around them....* Many suburbanites continue to view their turf as refuges, decrying the traffic, commerce, and influx of diverse people who seem to shatter this long-standing and beloved image. Suburbanites cling to a stereotypical suburban-ness long after the stereotypical community of single-family homes with happy families comprising two heterosexual parents and two amiable children has disappeared. ... *Metropolitan Americans in both the central city and suburbs*

clutch at dreams that are increasingly incompatible with reality (Teaford 2008, xiv-xv, emphases added).⁷

It is important to regard this still operative, still dominant imaginary as somehow lively and very powerful because it has material consequences. As Teaford (2008) notes,

these stereotypes influence the nation's public policy debates. Central city officials continue to exploit traditional conceptions of an essential hub surrounded by parasitical bedroom communities, claiming that their core jurisdictions require the bulk of public aid and concern (xiv).

This problem of experience highlights how important it is to consider the suburb as *imaginary* and, as I discuss below, as a *spatialization*—that is, the production of the suburb as a space that is contingently and dialectically defined, actualized and lived. The suburban imaginary, and the suburb as spatialization, are not individual productions but produced dialectically between individuals and collectively, mediated through popular culture. It is *shared*. This is precisely why it is important to consider the imaginary and not simply expect that people's experiences provide the truth of a situation. Such a shared collective imaginary finds representation and resonance in popular culture.

Beyond merely reflecting the dominant image, however, these media are also legible as both objects of critique and as sites of critique. Regarding the suburb as a complex cultural production and these media as complex expressions of this production enables a reading of the underlying and unresolved ambivalences animating the suburb.

In this first Part, then, I consider the ways in which the suburb is taken up in popular culture as an obvious thing, using various popular media as my primary illustrative and analytic material. While there is certainly a culturally dominant—and therefore taken-for-granted—image of the suburb, I contend that the idea of the suburb is animated by characterizations that compete with and contradict each other. This suburb, this seemingly "obvious thing," engenders ambivalences along a multiplicity of axes: ambivalence about what kind of place it is; whether it is a space of happiness, and if so, of what kind of happiness; and, if it is more than simply a place in which daily life occurs, but a space of "everyday life" where "everyday" is understood as a critical theoretical term. Part One interrogates these multiple axes of suburban ambivalence.

⁷ Cf. Cronin (2011) who found that visitors to Jasper National Park felt they had had the proper experience of the park only if their experience matched up to their pre-existing expectations based on promotional material and ideas circulating in the popular imagination.

First, in Chapter 2, I consider the ways in which the suburb is judged—what kind of a place it is, whether it is a good place or a bad place. In considering judgment, I argue that the problem of judgment hinges on problematic attempts to articulate a singular history or a singular definition of the suburb. While part of the difficulty of such attempts rests simply on a failure to recognize the multiple histories and multiplicity of types of things, places, people, styles, relations, etc. that might be described as suburban, the crux of the problem is the tendency to understand the suburb as a thing rather than as a process. Henri Lefebvre has identified this problem regarding the understanding of space. As I discuss further in the following chapter on theory and methods, for Lefebvre, space is an on-going dialectical process that includes not only particular spaces but also representations of it, and ways it is lived. Understanding the suburb as a spatialization, I suggest, helps to shift the problem of the judgment of the suburb away from a superficial, definitive accounting of the suburb as good or bad according to varying values. Instead, the problem is refocused on how to read the suburb as conveying a utopian longing and the complications in the actualization of such longings.

Next, in Chapter 3, I consider the question of happiness and the good life. Is the suburb the spatialization of happiness or an enablement of the good life? In what way can we understand this happiness? I briefly review understandings of happiness and illustrate ways in which the suburb is represented as a happy place, an unhappy place, and as deeply ambivalent in a number of cartoons (comics, books, and TV shows).

Finally, in Chapter 4, I consider whether the suburb is ordinary and if so, whether it might also be a site of everyday life in the sense suggested by critical theories of everyday life. This is an important intervention because some theorists of the everyday, like Maurice Blanchot in particular, explicitly rule out places like the suburb as supporting everyday life. It is my contention, however, that this now-dominant form of living must be understood as a site of the everyday in order to appreciate the meaning and implications of its ordinariness and its potentialities for otherwiseness.

While I do not address explicitly all of the axes of ambivalences in each of the subsequent chapters, these ambivalences form an important landscape in which this dissertation is set.

Part II. Critical perspectives: Paradoxes of suburban spatialization and gallery-exhibited art

Part II is concerned with the suburban imaginary and the ways it is represented in visual art. In the following chapters, I turn to gallery-exhibited, visual art that takes up the suburban theme in order to see in what ways the suburban imaginary is rendered imaginable. I look at art that is representational and that explicitly takes up the challenge of representing the suburb and the conditions of suburbanity.⁸ I take the work of representational art as enabling an attentive and attenuated looking-at and imagining-with, thereby rendering an imaginary imaginable. While suburbs are more than their material spatializations, for perhaps obvious reasons of representability and because the suburban imaginary is overwhelmingly a spatialized one, artists who have grappled with representing the suburb do so primarily with the suburb as a spatialization. As I will discuss in more details in these chapters, the suburb tends to be depicted (and also problematized) as *serial spatializations* in which the interior and exterior are mutually separate spaces, and also distinct *types* of spaces. That is, space is imagined to be divided serially into an interior and an exterior, which are discontinuous, mediated/separated by a boundary. These divided spaces are understood to be fundamentally different types or categories with each enacting, making possible, or precluding different, mutually exclusive meanings, orientations, attachments, behaviours, and more. Thus, while any number of different figures might be identified, two key sets of figures emerge as importantly marking the suburban imaginary. These are figures of exteriority and of interiority. Specifically, the interior is characterized by interiority and the exterior is marked by exteriority. These different qualities of serial spatialization, interiority and exteriority, are, in turn, imbued with dichotomous meanings. These different meanings are illustrated in the set of specific figures of interiority and exteriority that I present in Chapters 5 and 6, respectively, but which are, as I argue, ultimately paradoxical.

As I will discuss further, the interior historically emerged as a distinct concept that only consequently rendered a dichotomous exterior. However, descriptively, I start with the figures of

⁸ There are artists who approach the suburban landscape non-representationally. Surrealist artist Salvador Dalí, for example, seems to use "suburb" as a relational term, in the sense of its peripheral relation to the city, to signify a spatial metaphor for a surrealist conceptual break from the centrality and centrifugal force of European history in his painting "Suburbs of the Paranoiac-Critical City - Afternoon on the Outskirts of European History" (1936). From the outsider position of the suburb, then, the paranoiac-critical perspective can be employed to perceive the repetition of forms throughout the piece signaling unexpected, irrational relations amongst seemingly disparate and discontinuous elements.

exteriority since the effect of spatial serialization in the suburban imaginary is initially one of interiorization—a move that makes the exterior appear as if it is prior. First, then, in Chapter 5, I discuss anaesthetic figures of exteriority. I will show that the suburban exterior figures as anaesthetic when it is imagined as numbing the capacity for emotional, affective, or aesthetic response through either a deprivation or an excess of the sensible (that which can be sensed and thereby made sense of). This renders the suburban exterior as marked by absence and excess and as a non-place, and effectively detaches the quality of exteriority from the spatialization of the exterior potentially allowing exteriority to be a floating quality.

In Chapter 6, I discuss the figures of interiority, which are, in contrast to the figures of exteriority, taciturn: The suburban interior figures as offering a site for the creation and maintenance of the individual that is predicated on withdrawal and introversion. This renders the suburban interior as space marked by the individual and as (what I am calling) a "non-space"—that is, by a sense of spacelessness; and, detaches the quality of interiority from the spatialization of the "interior" and renders it intimate.

Such a categorical rendering of space ultimately produces the suburban imaginary as paradoxical. In addition to the detachment of the *qualities* of space from their respective spaces, the suburb figures as paradoxical spatializations when its serially divided spaces are imagined as properly being distinct yet are experienced to be uncannily hybrid. That is, as I discuss in Chapter 5, the spaces, their qualities, and their meanings are imagined as necessarily being categorically and mutually separate—they are divided by repulsive barriers and are otherwise imagined to be disconnected; and yet, as I discuss in Chapter 6, they are found to be irrepressibly mutually permeable: Exteriority is displaced and interiority expands.

Part III. Utopian re-imagining. Desire, promise and potency of the suburb: Representations from the margins of popular culture

In Part Three, I return to popular culture but focus in particular on a marginalized form: specifically, the picture book. In Chapter 7, I look at picture books for children and in Chapter 8, I look at picture books for adults—what is more typically described as graphic novels or comic books. Beyond reflecting and producing the dominant image, these marginalized popular cultural media offer alternative ways of reading and imagining the suburb. The specific works considered

in these chapters take up the suburb as something to be curious about. They are experimental about what the peculiarities of the suburban landscape or suburban identity makes possible. In doing so, they imbue the suburban imaginary with promise and potency. In some of these works, the suburb promises that desires for the good, happy, well-placed life can be realized not as a deferred dream or ideological aspiration but as fully actualized, non-alienated everyday life. In other works, the suburb is imagined as replete with potential to be open to creative engagements and even radically liberatory intervention, subverting normative suburban imaginaries and thereby re-imagining the suburb as the spatializations of liberatory desire.

In Chapter 7, I look at the suburban imaginary conveyed in two recent children's picture books, *On Meadowview Street* by Henry Cole (2007) and *The City Kid and the Suburb Kid*, written by Deb Pilutti and illustrated by Linda Bleck (2008). In analyzing how the suburb is represented in these books, I found that it is imagined as a place of promise. In particular, the suburb promises that desires for the good, happy, well-placed life can be realized. Through a reading of these books that take up the suburb as their direct theme rather than using it as a background setting, I argue that both these picture books and their respective representations of the suburb are open to creative engagements and potentially radically liberatory intervention, subverting normative suburban imaginaries and re-imagining the suburb as the spatializations of liberatory desire. These representations produce the suburb as at once familiar, uncanny, and full of potential. I present an analysis of children as agentic subjects who produce and mediate rather than simply react to proffered spaces of habitation. Ultimately, however, the suburb remains unreconstituted as a taken-for-granted place; and, the hegemonic ideal that asserts the desirability of a private, interiorized home in the suburb as a locale for individualized and developmental self-actualization, heteronormative family, and a categorically predetermined, pleasant relation with nature remains fundamentally undisturbed. The desires depicted as actualized in these books—i.e. of creating meadows, of feeling the security and comfort of home—re-confirm normative notions of the good life. These representations, then, cast the suburban experience as liminal: both full of potential and a process of naturalizing the place as it has become— a taken-for-granted idealized space of the good life. In reproducing routinized desire through ideologically constrained hopeful and nostalgic evocations of the good home and good family, these books reassert the standard imaginary of suburbia as the spatialization of hegemonic desire.

In Chapter 8, I interrogate the suburban imaginary as represented in graphic novels. I look at two recent collections of stories about life in the suburb: Kevin Huizenga's *Curses* (2006) is a series of loosely connected stories about Glenn Ganges, "a suburban everyman" (Arrant 2007, n.p.). Shaun Tan's *Tales from Outer Suburbia* (2008) is a series of unconnected surreal stories about suburbia. Both collections explore the uncanny, mystical, mysterious potency of suburban anonymity and alienation (of both the landscape and the people) and the hybridity of suburbia and everyday life. Like the children's books considered in the previous chapter, these books take suburbia as something to consider curiously and not merely as a taken-for-granted backdrop: They are experimental about what the peculiarity of suburban landscape or identity makes possible not as something to be judged *per se* but to be interested in, given that it is a condition and prominent feature of contemporary life. Interestingly, although fictional, the stories in both collections read as if autobiographical. Both Tan and Huizenga have indicated that these works were based to a certain degree on their own experiences of growing up or living in suburbs and, although not entirely autobiographical, they are not entirely not autobiographical, either. Asked about his storytelling direction for the book, Huizenga notes:

I've always been more attracted to telling stories that arose out of the contingencies of everyday life. ... I've always been a guy living in the suburbs, and that's all I know, so that's what I write about (Huizenga in Arrant 2007, n.p.).

More inclined towards the fantastic, Tan muses:

'Outer Suburbia' might refer both to a state of mind as well as a place: somewhere close and familiar but also on the edge of consciousness (and not unlike 'outer space'). Suburbia is often represented as a banal, quotidian, even boring place that escapes much notice. Yet I think it is also a fine substitute for the medieval forests of fairytale lore, a place of subconscious imaginings. I've always found the idea of suburban 'fantasy' very appealing, in my own work as well as those of other writers and artists, because of the contrast between the mundane and extraordinary, the effect of which can be amusing or unsettling, and potentially thought-provoking (Tan 2008a, n.p.).

Interrupting a mundane orientation to a taken-for-granted suburban imaginary in order to recognize it as a place of possibility and unpredictability, these stories re-enchant the suburb. Its ugliness and possibility come alive. In particular, suburban landscapes become places of mystery with a pervading sense of desperation in their unique uniformity and indistinctiveness in the stories "28th Street" (Huizenga 2006, 51–70) and "Our Expedition" (Tan 2008b, 84–91). The disquieting but familiar image emerges from a trope of roads, cars, signs, shops, houses, which is

looped and repeated, giving the quality of utter placelessness. Cleverly, this barely locatable landscape in which the sense of place is suspended or displaced becomes the necessary backdrop for a fantastic quest in both stories—the former inspired by an Italian folktale and the latter by an absurd supposition. These graphic novels take the *enigmatic* suburb as the space in which enchanted stories about suburbia unfold. In illustrating but also leaving unresolved the haunting, mysterious ambivalence of suburbia, highlighting its uncanniness, these story collections offer a meditation on how the suburb might be thought and recognised otherwise and, in that alternative recognition, re-cognize, re-perceive, and re-imagine what passes unnoticed in the first instance as familiar and ordinary. This is possible precisely because they allow us to see the ordinary suburb again, as a site of the everyday.

By moving beyond the dominant suburban imaginary and recognizing the suburb as a place of possibility and unpredictability, the works considered in Part 3 re-enchant the suburb revealing its strangeness and mysterious potency and offer a meditation on how the suburb might be thought and lived otherwise.

Before turning to the task of reading the suburban imaginary in and through cultural works, I first consider the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of this project in the next chapter.

Chapter 1.

Theories and Methodologies

In this chapter, I discuss the key theoretical interventions that run through the following chapters and that form the theoretical backdrop for them. In brief, as this dissertation is about the suburban imaginary, I review key articulations of the imaginary. As I am making the claim that the suburb must be understood as a social production of space that includes, is shaped by, and produces the suburban imaginary, I review the concept of spatialization before finishing the discussion of theories with a consideration of the everyday as the theoretical and lived context and conditions in which the suburban imaginary operates. After this theoretical working through, I then discuss how the imaginary, which is necessarily always-already social, is a way in which to invite the sociological imagination into considerations that do not immediately appear to fit sociological modes of analysis. I then describe the methodological considerations and approaches I have taken in addressing the work of creative cultural representations as a means by which to apprehend what has eluded observation about the suburb.

Theory

This dissertation approaches the suburb as complex and multiple. It recognizes that the suburb is fundamentally heterogeneous in its various specific physical manifestations, in the ways it is occupied, engaged with, and used, in the ways it is understood and conceptually mobilized by various groups in different contexts for different cultural, political, personal and imaginative purposes. And, it takes the approach that the various elements that constitute the suburb include people's everyday experiences as well as expectations and imaginaries, and also places and spaces—all of which on-goingly co-produce the suburb in relation to each other. Accordingly, the suburb is not a place that simply exists, always the same, always familiar. Rather, "suburban" is an ever-changing description variously overlaid onto diverse conditions, meanings, experiences, and representations. As such, I tend to use suburban terms—suburb, the suburbs, suburbia, suburban, suburbanites—relatively interchangeably, preferring the generic, least evocative term "the suburb."⁹

The imaginary

Despite this complexity and instability, with multiple elements in flux, the suburb remains somehow recognizable. It remains imaginable because of the suburban imaginary. I begin the discussion of the suburban imaginary with a brief overview and discussion of the broader concept of the imaginary. The imaginary can be understood in a few different ways, which are not necessarily consistent with each other. The most common and straightforward usage of the term is as an adjective, describing a thing or state that does not actually exist but is *merely imagined*. In this common usage, the imaginary describes what is made up and therefore unreal. In other words, the imaginary does not exist in the realm of the actualized, material world as a

⁹ In contrast, "suburbia" is perhaps the most evocative, connoting a generally negative judgment of a place inflected by particularly imagined cultural practices and values. It also tends to suggest a sense of remoteness (like the similar sounding "Siberia" as a barren, lost place) as well as past failure (like a mid-century utopia gone bad. "Utopia" is where the "-ia" of suburbia comes). As well, except where context-appropriate, I do not use the term "the suburbs" in the plural because in common parlance the term connotes the ill-defined but generally recognizable, concrete set of places opposed to and outside of the centre city. "The suburb" contrasts nicely to other equally complex place-images like "the city," "the country," "the wilderness," "the beach," "the home," etc.

real thing or state but only as a fiction or supposition. It is imagined and therefore "only" exists in the imagination, or as a projection of the imagination.

I take up *the imaginary* in a substantive, rather than descriptive mode (suburban imaginary rather than imaginary suburb): That is, I am using "the imaginary" as a noun rather than as an adjective to describe something else. To get at this distinction between the imaginary as substantive or descriptive, it is instructive to consider the difference between an "imaginary friend" (such as a child might have) and a "friend imaginary" (or, perhaps something like an imaginary of "the friend"). The former refers to a specific but non-materially existing friend invented by a particular child. The latter articulates a broader, socially significant and socially contingent category of imaginaries describing what qualities and conditions might be included in an understanding of the figure of "the friend" or of "friendness." It is this latter use of "imaginary" that I use. However, I also do not wish to dismiss the sense of the imagination at play in creating different modes of and orientations to what is "real", actual, existing. What both senses share is contingency. The imaginary friend does not and cannot exist independently of the child who imagines; similarly, the friend imaginary does not and cannot exist independently of the social and historical context in which it is enlivened. Importantly, in order for a child to have an imaginary friend, which can be identified as such, there needs to be a friend imaginary that includes the imaginary friend as a possible, recognizable expression of a version of friendship. I will build upon a discussion of the concept of the imaginary, in this substantive mode, to consider the notion of a specifically "suburban" imaginary.

A few imaginary vignettes with which to begin...

Vignette 1: Affect as a shadowy imaginary

The story "Distant Rain," from Shaun Tan's *Tales from Outer Suburbia* (Tan 2008b, 28–35) reveals what happens to the poems that people write but never show anyone else. What happens to those feelings and thoughts that are expressed in words but then get lost or put away as the scraps of paper on which they are written are secreted away or intentionally lost in the ordinary hiding places in the suburb? Over time, in a mysterious self-animating process, these scraps and fragments of forgotten poetry gravitate towards each other, slowly forming into semi-sentient

balls, hiding out in phone booths and other inconspicuous places, furtively roaming the suburban streets in search of other scraps. Eventually, these poems accumulate together into a ball of such size and emotional intensity that it levitates and hangs over the suburb from which it sprang—a rather ominous, looming presence haunting the suburb below with a weighty, affective secrecy. Eventually, with rain or wind, the suggestive ball composed only of bits of paper, dissolves or is blown apart, raining down as random disconnected scraps of poetry, giving arbitrary disjointed glimpses into inner lives, blanketing the landscape below (image 1.1).



1.0.1. A ball of poetry hangs ominously and forlornly over a suburb from which it emerged and upon which it will rain down. (Image by Shaun Tan. 2008. "Distant Rain," *Tales from Outer Suburbia*, 32–33.)

Vignette 2: The monstrous image of the whale

In the chapter "Of the Monstrous Pictures of Whales" in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, Ishmael the whaler and narrator ruminates on the tradition of whale imagery and its influence on subsequent depictions of whales. He considers long-held practices, evident across a variety of cultures, of depicting whales erroneously in images—with scales or helmets, for example. He notes that even in relatively recent, scientific depictions, whales have been pictured inaccurately.

In the vignettes and other embellishments of some ancient books you will at times meet with very curious touches at the whale.... Nor are the most conscientious compilations of

Natural History...free from the same heinousness of mistake where all manner of spouts, jets d'eau, hot springs and cold, Saratoga and Baden-Baden, come bubbling up from his unexhausted brain. ...[L]et us glance at those pictures of leviathan purporting to be sober, scientific delineations, by those who know.... In one of those plates the whales, like great rafts of logs, are represented lying among ice-isles, with white bears running over their living backs. In another plate, the prodigious blunder is made of representing the whale with perpendicular flukes (Melville 2008, n.p.).

Ishmael logically surmises, based on his experience as a whaler, the reasons for the disjuncture between the picture of the whale and its "true form." Ishmael notes that images made referencing actual whales are often based on broken, dead whales that have been hauled onto ships or land and deformed as a result of being dead and being out of water. Thus, when artists attempt a direct translation of such observations into images of live whales in the water, the result is monstrous. To depict live whales in their appropriate watery habitat was impossible because of the depths of their true environment, in which no one had yet observed them; and, it is additionally difficult both because they move very quickly and, as Ishmael notes, it is rare to see more than a small portion of a whale at any one time when it is near the water's surface. Finally, Ishmael explains, because of all these difficulties, and because most artists do not have direct experience of whales anyway, most artists base their images on past images and not on studies from nature. Thus, the problem of depicting the "true form" of whales is not surprising for Ishmael, even if the pictures themselves remain worthy of his derision. The whale imaginary, then, is one based, in part, on images of fictional and/or preposterously reanimated dead monsters writhing on the surface of the water rather than glimpses of lithe, deep-water inhabiting, live animals. As readers will know from the rest of the story, however, Ishmael is hardly a neutral observer of whales and his fixation on a particular whale, whom he psychologically characterizes as clever, evasive, and malevolent, suggests his own description of the whale may serve particular narrative ends besides "truth." He also fails to consider for what mythic or cultural reasons the whale may have been envisioned as monstrous.

Vignette 3: Imaginary woman

Just as the whale is imagined monstrously in both ancient and scientific pictorial depictions, woman, as represented in poetry, too seems to be a semi-mythical creature. The representation of woman—as poetic creation, as an image—bears a dissonant and potentially disorienting

relationship to women's own experience of being women. As Adrienne Rich found in becoming a poet, such a disjuncture between the image and daily experience puts women poets at odds both with being women and with being poets, requiring a further exercise of imagination to make sense of these incompatible identities. For Rich, the dissonance between image and experience of woman in poetry arises out of, and as a result of, a political problem: "the naming and image-making power" of a dominating masculinist culture:

I had been born a woman, and I was trying to think and act as if poetry—and the possibility of making poems—were a universal—a gender-neutral—realm. In the universe of the masculine paradigm, I naturally absorbed ideas about women, sexuality, power from the subjectivity of male poets.... The dissonance between these images and the daily events of my own life demanded a constant footwork of imagination, a kind of perpetual translation, and an unconscious fragmentation of identity: woman from poet. Every group that lives under the naming and image-making power of a dominant culture is at risk from its mental fragmentation and needs an art that can resist it (Rich 2001, 49).

I begin my discussion of the imaginary with these vignettes because they evocatively convey some rather tricky characteristics of the imaginary. Like the ball of poetry, the imaginary is a looming, overshadowing, imprecise but meaningful presence that hangs over social configurations with a sense of expectation—collective desire and dread. Being only a contingent and haphazard assemblage of fragmented images, partial knowledges, imprecise speculations, it falls apart upon probing. Yet, there is a durability of the imaginary despite this fragility and despite its vague imprecision. The unnamed power that animates and pulls it together (or causes it to self-animate and pull itself together) remains untraceable and mystified yet seems to persist even after any one particular assemblage falls apart. In the images of whales and poems about women, practices of representation defer to, and are imbued with, traditions of imaging, beliefs and idealizations based on imagining and ideology, which supersedes personal observations of the whale or experience of being woman. Like poeticized woman and the monstrous whale, the imaginary reflects and is inflected with notions about what is thought about or expected of that which is imagined at least as much as, if not more than, direct observations and actual experiences of that imagined thing. But, contra Ishmael's claim to be able to know and to be able to depict the "true form" of the whale—as if it is possible to apprehend such a thing or as if such a singular thing exists—Rich reminds us that the thing that is imagined is also shaped by its imagining. The dominant patriarchal culture that shapes woman as an image also shapes the

category of appropriate womanhood in that image and is, in turn, shaped by that image of woman.

The imaginary, then, describes what is or could be, but not what ought to be. Nevertheless, by its taken-for-granted status as *what is* or *could be*, it also effectively provides a base upon which to found a sense of how what will be *ought to be*. Furthermore, inasmuch as what is viewed through the lens of image and imagination, the imaginary through which we necessarily interpret our experience of what is, produces a fundamental incapacity to recognize what is apart from an expectation of what should be and, moreover, an inability to reconcile the experience of what is from the expectation of what should be. As Rich suggests, it is not the elimination of imagination that is needed, but a different kind of art, a different way of imagining that attends to the conditions of its imaginings and that lays bare the conditions of the existing imaginary.

The concept of the imaginary, although frequently evoked, is not often explicitly or fully theorized, in particular amongst English-language articulations. As Claudia Strauss (2006) notes, the concept tends to be used as if its meaning is obvious and often as a gloss for broadly similar ideas, such as "culture" in Anthropology. Practically, this means that the term gets treated as if its meaning is agreed upon and lucid but gets used inconsistently. A number of theorists and philosophers have worked through the notion of "the imaginary" or *l'imaginaire*; however, these different theorizations do not come to a singular agreement. I will briefly discuss some of the most influential of these.

Jean-Paul Sartre had important insights into the imaginary, dedicating an entire eponymously named book to the topic of *The Imaginary* (2004; originally published as *L'imaginaire*, 1940) and another to *The Imagination* (2012; originally published as *L'imagination*, 1936). Although Sartre's articulation of the imaginary as a substantive was important and informed Lacan's more widely-known use of the imaginary as a key concept, Sartre's contributions to the work on *l'imaginaire* outside of French scholarship is generally not well acknowledged.¹⁰ Sartre offers a lovely description of the operation of the imaginary in recounting his childhood. Surrounded by books but no other children and only a few adult

¹⁰ David Macey (1994) traces the first use of *l'imaginaire* as a noun to existentialist novelist André Gide, which was then given wider prominence by Sartre (xxi); Laurie E. Naranch (2002) claims that Lacan was the first to use the term as a substantive (64).

members of his family, Sartre became an avid reader, particularly of his grandfather's set of encyclopaedias. Sartre recalls his interpretation of the relationship of the world "beyond the walls" (i.e. the physically actualized, material world) to his understanding and image of it acquired through books:

Beyond the walls, one encountered rough sketches which more or less approximated the archetypes without achieving their perfection: the monkeys in the zoo were less monkey, the men in the Luxembourg Gardens were less man. In Platonic fashion, I went from knowledge to its subject. I found more reality in the idea than in the thing because it was given to me first and because it was given as a thing. It was in books that I encountered the universe: assimilated, classified, labeled, pondered, still formidable (Sartre 1964, 51).

The imaginary for Sartre contrasts to perception of the observable world. Whereas perception is based on the observation of objects using—and therefore limited by—the senses, the imaginary operates as a mix of impressions and knowledge about the imaged object presenting the object in its imagined totality. Sartre was interested in the way that what is imaginary is related to the image, which also lacks material substance but, nevertheless, exists. In other words, it is *irreal* ("*irréel*") in the sense that it is not *realized* but *could be real*.¹¹ Something that is irreal can also be real whereas something that is *unreal* can never be real—it is not real at all and therefore cannot or can never be real. In contrast "the object as imaged is an irreal. Without doubt it is present but, at the same time, it is out of reach" (Sartre 2004, 125). This imaged object is "quasi-sensible" (125). Through the act of imagining, as Sartre writes, "I always *perceive more and otherwise* than I *see*" (120, emphasis in original). Whereas perception makes an object available only from one point of view so that perception of an object is the observation of only one particular angle, the act of imagination "presentifies" a multiplicity of points of views of an imaged object. For Sartre, the act of imagination "is a magical act. It is an incantation destined to make the object of one's thought, the thing one desires, appear in such a way that one can take possession of it. ... From the outset my incantation strives to obtain these objects in their entirety, to reproduce their complete existence" (125). Thus, although imaged objects appear in the imagination as a totality, they are "feeble," passively waiting. Unlike real objects, imaged objects have no qualities outside of the imagining: "The feeble life that we

¹¹ As Jonathan Webber (2004) explains, "Sartre's '*irréel*' does not denote, as 'unreal' seems to, the class of objects that could exist but do not. Rather, an irreal object ... is an object as imaged by consciousness. This object may be real: the irreal Pierre may be the real Pierre as imaged. Conversely, unreal objects that are never imaged will never be irreal" (xxvii.) The irreal is, thus, a virtuality.

breathe into them comes from us, from our spontaneity. If we turn ourselves away from them, they are annihilated" (125). Nevertheless, the imaginary has a real effect in the "real" ("beyond the walls") world precisely because the imaginary is unreal.

Perhaps the most familiar use of the imaginary is that of Jacques Lacan. For Lacan, the Imaginary, the Real, and the Symbolic are the three orders of the structure of the psyche and its relation to the world. For Lacanian psychoanalysis, the Real is the world as such. Although we live in and engage within it and it is what we do, it remains outside of "experience" because experience is predicated on understanding or interpretation, which makes it partake of the Symbolic. The Symbolic refers to the realm of language and culture. We enter the Symbolic as subjects, constituted through our subjection to authority and through agency. The Imaginary is the pre-symbolic, infantile world of images and illusion before we become subjects. In particular, it is related to the mirror-stage in which the infant recognizes itself in the image reflected back in the mirror. The moment in which the child first recognizes itself in and identifies with the mirror image is also the moment in which the infant experiences a split between their imaginary self and their embodied experience (Lacan 1977, 2). The mirror presents an image of a controlled body that can be apprehended as a whole, coherent thing. However, the infant does not experience its own body as a controlled, coherent totality but rather as fragmented and subject to chaotic movements. As such, the mirror image, an exterior, diminutive form that seems to present a mirage of the infant's anticipated maturation of powers, with which the infant identifies becomes established as an image of the ideal self (an *Ideal-I*) towards which the subject will thereafter strive.

The fact is that the total form of the body by which the subject anticipates in a mirage the maturation of his power is given to him only as *Gestalt*, that is to say, in an exteriority in which this form is certainly more constituent than constituted, but in which it appears to him above all in a contrasting size (*un relief de stature*) that fixes it and in a symmetry that inverts it, in contrast with the turbulent movements that the subject feels are animating him (Lacan 1977, 2).

This image of the ideal self, then, is an illusion at odds with the ego. Thus:

The *mirror stage* is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation—and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic—and, lastly, to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development. Thus, to break out of the circle of the *Innenwelt* [interior;

one's inner world] into the *Umwelt* [exterior; the world outside of one] generates the inexhaustible quadrature of the ego's verifications (Lacan 1977, 3).

The mirror stage founds the Imaginary. For Lacan, images appear to bear a fullness of meaning that refers the one who beholds the image back to the mirror stage with its experience of wholeness. The mirror stage establishes a fundamental relationship of dependence of the ego (whose limits are understood spatially) upon the other—that is, on spatially external objects.¹²

Louis Althusser combines Lacanian and Marxist interpretive frameworks for understanding the imaginary and uses this understanding to propose a general theory of ideology (Althusser 1971). Althusser argues that individuals have an imaginary relationship to their "real conditions of existence" and that this imaginary relationship is represented by ideology (163).

Althusser observes that in his early thought, Marx conceived of ideology as

a pure illusion, a pure dream, i.e. as nothingness. All its reality is external to it. Ideology is thus thought as an imaginary construction whose status is exactly like the theoretical status of the dream among writers before Freud. ...For them, the dream was the imaginary, it was empty, null and arbitrarily 'stuck together' (*bricolé*), once the eyes had closed, from the residues of the only full and positive reality, the reality of the day. This is exactly the status of philosophy and ideology...in *The German Ideology*.

Ideology, then, is for Marx an imaginary assemblage (*bricolage*), a pure dream, empty and vain, constituted by the 'day's residues' from the only full and positive reality, that of the concrete history of concrete material individuals materially producing their existence (159–60).

In other words, early Marxist thought in relying on a strict materialist analysis saw ideology as being imaginary in the sense of an illusory falsity obscuring and overlaying true, hidden reality. Althusser draws a parallel between the Freudian work on dreams and his own work on generating a theory of ideology. In both cases, rather than dismiss dreams or ideology as being unimportant on the grounds of their immateriality, the structure of the real–imaginary–symbolic

¹² Over the course of his career, the relative importance of the imaginary in Lacan's thought shifted. Prior to the Rome Report of 1953, Lacan held up the Imaginary as the singular and proper object of psychoanalytic work. The mirror stage and the problem of recognition were of primary importance, both of which lay in the realm of the operation of the Imaginary. After the Rome Report, in the period covered by Lacan's writing collected in *Écrits*, the Symbolic came to prominence as being of primary importance. Eventually, it was the Real to which Lacan turned as the order to which psychoanalysis was to be focused and thought to be able to make its most important contribution (Sheridan 1977, 279–80). Given this shift in focus and understanding over the course of Lacan's intellectual career, it should be noted that the understanding and relative importance of the Imaginary, which I have represented briefly here, cannot adequately reflect the complexity of its use in psychoanalytic theorization. However, the version I have represented is the one that is generally adopted by the later theorists of the social imaginary whom I discuss below, including Althusser.

helps to make sense of how dreams and ideology operate. That is, rather than being a superfluous, meaningless residue of the truly (and only) real and important reality of material existence, the status of reality itself must be reconceived. He replaces the simplistic two-part structure in which the base is true reality and (super)structure is an illusory fiction overlaying and hiding that reality. Althusser uses the Lacanian tripartite model to argue that ideology is imaginary in the Lacanian sense in that it is of an order of reality, but distinct from the Real and Symbolic, and that its status as imaginary means that it does a kind of work. In the Lacanian model, (the experience of) reality is itself already within the realm of the symbolic and imaginary and, as such, the perception of one's experience of the material conditions of reality are always-already mediated by language and images. Dreams and ideology share in this structural condition. Althusser suggests that such an understanding of imaginary as meaning something other than simply "null" reveals the true role of ideology, which is the interpellation of subjects.

Interpellation is Althusser's (1971) theory of subject formation. For Althusser, the subject literally is called or hailed into being by ideology. The *subject* does not exist as such prior to this hailing but is constituted by the hail. That is to say, although the "concrete individual" pre-exists the interpellation, the individual only becomes a subject through their interpellation by ideology. In turn, however, that which does the hailing (i.e. ideology) is also constituted by the hail. Just as in the Lacanian mirror stage the infant's subjectivity is established at the same moment that it is fractured into an illusory wholeness and an experiential inadequacy, through interpellation, (bourgeois) ideology is constituted by the subject inasmuch as it constitutes the subject. In other words, interpellation is a "double constitution" of both ideology and of the subject:

the category of the subject is only constitutive of all ideology insofar as all ideology has the function (which defines it) of 'constituting' concrete individuals as subjects. In the interaction of this double constitution exists the functioning of all ideology, ideology being nothing but its functioning in the material forms of existence of that functioning (Althusser 1971, 171, emphasis in original).

It should be noted that despite the seemingly chronological formation of the subject by which I, following Althusser (174–75), narrate this constitution, in fact, we are all always-already subjects (176): the constitution happens "without any succession" (175). As subjects, we are always operating within ideology. As Althusser puts it concisely, "The existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing" (175). In being hailed as a subject and recognizing oneself as being hailed by that address, the individual is

thereby simultaneously constituted as already being its subject and therefore able to recognize the hail. Such a double constitution limits the concrete individual into the role of the concrete subject; i.e. one who always operates within the ideological category of subjectivity. Thus, through interpellation, individuals are simultaneously turned into and guaranteed as always-already being "concrete, individual, distinguishable and (naturally) irreplaceable subjects" (173). In this way, ideology constitutes "concrete individuals as concrete subjects" (173).

Cornelius Castoriadis¹³ was also strongly influenced by the Lacanian conceptualization of the imaginary. Like Althusser, Castoriadis was concerned with the *social* imaginary and emphasized the constitution—or, in his terms "institution"—of society through the operation of the social imaginary. Just as Althusser locates the formation of the subject and the ideology (i.e. the social formation) that calls into being the subject in the imaginary moment of interpellation, for Castoriadis, too, society itself is instituted in and through the imaginary.

The social imaginary is, primordially, the creation of significations and the creation of the images and figures that support these significations. The relation between a signification and its supports (images or figures) is the only precise sense that can be attached to the term 'symbolic'—and this is the sense in which we are using the term here (Castoriadis 1987, 238).

Castoriadis sought to move beyond Lacan's and Sartre's focus and emphasis on vision and illusion (Naranch 2002, 66; Castoriadis 1997, 182–3). In particular, Castoriadis found Lacan too fixated on the scopic, missing other objects—olfactory, tactile, auditory; and kinetic—that, he argues, are more important than visual objects. Concerned fundamentally with the social imaginary, Castoriadis argues that such a social imaginary is an institution of significations. Thus, for example, a "fundamental creation of the social imaginary, the gods or rules of behavior are neither visible nor even audible, but signifiable" (Castoriadis 1997, 182–83). Like Althusser, the fundamental importance of the social imaginary for Castoriadis is its capacity for and institution of social signification.

The social-historical institution is that in and through which the social imaginary manifests itself and brings itself into being. This institution is the institution of a magma of significations, imaginary social significations (Castoriadis 1987, 237–38).

¹³ Castoriadis's significant discussions on the imaginary have been influential in the French critical anthropological and sociological traditions. Among those prominent figures influenced by Castoriadis's articulation of the imaginary are Gilbert Durand, Henri Lefebvre, and Michel Maffesoli. Gilbert Durand co-founded and directed an extensive international network of institutions included in the *Centre de recherche sur l'imaginaire*.

The role of the imaginary in the shape and workings of society cannot be over emphasized in Castoriadis's thought. He once proclaimed that what distinguishes humans from other animals is not rationality, which animals have, but the imaginary capacity.¹⁴ It is the *social* imaginary, however, that enables society and which, in turn, makes possible the individual, or, to put it in Althusserian terms, the subject.

Imaginary: an unmotivated creation that exists only in and through the positing of images. Social: inconceivable as the work or the product of an individual or a host of individuals (the individual *is* a social institution), underivable from the psyche in itself as such (Castoriadis 1987, 247).

Concerned with the question of how to understand "the social", Castoriadis explains that the social is more than merely "coexistence" or as the "unity of a plurality." Moreover, it is not clearly articulated as "distinct and well-defined elements." Rather, Castoriadis (1987) describes the social as a "*magma of magmas*." Such a magma of magmas, which describes the social as well as the imaginary and the Unconscious is "not chaos but the mode of organization belonging to a nonensemblyable diversity" (182).

Echoing this political and especially social understanding of the social imaginary, a number of political theorists take up the social imaginary as a political concept, adapting Benedict Anderson's theory of the "imagined community," which is the result of collective imaginings of belonging to a nation-state (Adams 2004, 278). For Anderson (1983), the imagined (community) is very real in its effects but retains a sense of imaginariness—an exercise of a capacity to imagine an as-if real thing (and, ultimately, to treat that imagined thing as if it is real). This community is neither real nor unreal but only irreal as it is only through an exercise of imagination that such a community exists. Anderson argued that a sense of community at such a large, diffuse, macro social and political scale as the nation could only be imagined, not directly experienced. At such a scale, individuals could not meaningfully personally engage with a grounded sense of community. For example, no individual could ever meet the majority of other citizens. Influenced by Anderson's conceptualization of imagined community, which resonates with Castoriadis's notion of the social imaginary as an underlying but indistinct magma, Charles

¹⁴ This can be read as a rejection of Aristotle's (1962) claim that what distinguishes humans from animals is the work of the soul, which is to say the exercise of reason.

Taylor articulates the notion of the "modern social imaginary."¹⁵ The modern social imaginary, which he conceives as political, is different from the pre-modern imaginary most importantly because of the way in which moral order—"how we ought to live together in society" (Taylor 2004, 3)—is conceived. In the pre-modern social imaginary, Taylor notes two forms of moral order: One in which a people are understood to have been governed by a Law from time immemorial. The other is based on a cosmic hierarchy that sees its correspondence in social hierarchy. In both cases, "a moral order is more than just a set of norms; it also contains what we might call an 'ontic' component, identifying features of the world that make the norms realizable" (10). In contrast, Taylor argues, the modern social imaginary is premised on Natural Law.

Accordingly, society is comprised of individuals who are sociable and rational, collaborating peacefully for mutual benefit, most important of which is security. For Taylor (2004), the social imaginary is "the way our contemporaries imagine the societies they inhabit and sustain" (6). It is

the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations (23).

Taylor is interested in how ordinary people imagine their social context through images and stories. Just as Castoriadis articulates the "nonensemblistic diversity" of magmas exemplified by the social, the imaginary and the Unconscious, Taylor (along with the other Modern Social Imaginaries scholars) acknowledges the complexity of the social imaginary of any given time. Such an imaginary, Taylor argues, is shared by "the whole society", or at least by "large groups of people." It incorporates the ordinary understandings and expectations that comprise and enable social life:

It incorporates a sense of the normal expectations we have of each other, the kind of common understanding that enables us to carry out the collective practices that make up our social life. This incorporates some sense of how we all fit together in carrying out the common practice. Such understanding is both factual and normative; that is, we have a sense of how things usually go, but this is interwoven with an idea of how they ought to go, of what missteps would invalidate the practice (24).

¹⁵ In 2002, the journal *Public Culture* published a special issue on "New Imaginaries," edited by Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar and Benjamin Lee. This issue included Taylor's (2002) first articulation of the modern social imaginary. He included this article in his subsequent monograph *Modern Social Imaginaries* (2004). Also of note in that issue is Michael Warner's (2002) "Publics and Counterpublics" (later expanded into his 2005 monograph *Publics and Counterpublics*). Warner argues that the conceptualizations of "publics" are a modern social imaginary.

It is the social imaginary that makes common, which "is that common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy" (23). It connects the individual to the community and enmeshes the individual into the norms and expectations of the community. As Michel Maffesoli (1993), following Castoriadis makes clear, however, the social imaginary does not say what ought to be, merely going along with what is or what could be:

Wayward, a little improper and in the end idle, it does not spend its time saying what 'ought to be', but is content with what is or, which amounts to the same thing, with what could be (Maffesoli 1993, 3).

It is through the social imaginary, however, that one might come to recognize normative expectations and values.

Taking up the imaginary as social and political allows a shift of locating the social imaginary away from an internal process (Lacan and Sartre) to a collective one, and from an internalized set of cultural and social meanings (Althusser and Castoriadis) to considering the social effects of the social imaginary. Sharon Zukin et al. (1998) observing that the imaginary "is useful for demonstrating the social power exercised by cultural symbols on material forms" continue in the tradition of synthesizing symbolic and materialist analyses, following Castoriadis and Lefebvre, "who use the social imaginary to refer to a mythologized, but internalized, set of cultural meanings" (629). As Zukin et al. explain,

These meanings are held and communicated collectively.... While the set of meanings of the social imaginary is conceptualized in symbolic languages, these meanings are materialized and become real in all sorts of spatial and social practices, from urban design to housing policies. ... Like the concept of the unconscious that inspired it, the social imaginary is invisible, but it produces real effects (Zukin et al. 1998, 629).

Drawing on these traditions, I am taking up a notion of the imaginary to articulate an understanding of the constitution of "reality" as being always-already an enunciation embedded within the imaginary realm of language and ideology, and which is, therefore, social. This understanding of the imaginary connects the "individual" to the social and simultaneously recognizes that such an individual is constructed, instituted, and imagined by the social imaginary. This ties the social imaginary to individual imaginations. I also take up the imaginary as practical, common, atheoretical, implicit, amorphous, and changeable. The imaginary co-constitutes the imaged object (in the case of the present work, the suburb) and the conditions and structures of meaning by which it is imagined within a richly and deeply shared social context.

Suburban imaginary

I define suburban imaginary in the following way:

A suburban imaginary is a culturally and historically located set of meanings, expectations, images, and ideas about the suburb that is dialectically shared and formed in the popular imagination, particularly through cultural mediation. The suburban imaginary is a social production. That is, the suburban imaginary is something that we co-produce both personally and socially and in turn, it is also something that comes to us in various pre-constituted ways. Importantly, the suburban imaginary is always specific to a particular cultural and historical context. It changes over time and across different cultural settings precisely because it is a social production.

In this definition, I am adapting and expanding upon both Sharon Zukin et al's (1998) articulation of *urban imaginary* and Susan Ruddick's (1996) description of *social imaginary*. Zukin et al (1998) describe the urban imaginary as "a set of meanings about cities that arise in a specific historical time and cultural space" (629). Far from being static, the urban imaginary changes over time. They note, that it would be

simplicistic to relate these changes to material factors and subjective images alone. Instead, a discursive analysis of the urban imaginary assumes a coherence between social and spatial arrangements that is derived in and through cultural meanings attached to specific places and has a material effect on their growth and decline (629–30).

For Ruddick (1996), a social imaginary:

signals an image that exists within the popular imagination or unconscious: social, because the process which produces it is societal rather than individualized, and imaginary, rather than symbolic, because it indicates not a state of signification but a condition of possession—the distinction between the symbol and the object to which it refers becomes collapsed, confused, conflated. The imaginary, far from reflecting the object to which it seems to refer (be it a social, political, or other imaginary) is, in fact, produced by the discourse that surrounds it (12).

The suburban imaginary is social and changes over time dialectically affecting and affected by the changing spatialization of the suburb. Thus, the particular enunciation of this imaginary is contingent upon the specific historical time and cultural space of its enunciation. It is enunciated in a reciprocal interchange amongst the social imagination and individual imaginations, social discourses and everyday life. The suburban imaginary is shaped by expectations and assumptions

about it and, in turn, helps shape these. In other words, as the suburban imaginary is in part constituted by, but also in part constitutes, the spatialization of the suburb, and because spatialization is a social production of space, just as an imaginary is continually socially produced, the suburban imaginary is also an on-going social production. The suburban imaginary changes over time and, as such, what constitutes it as suburban in the social imaginary is not uniform over time and in different social and cultural contexts.¹⁶

Spatialization

If the suburb is an imaginary object, as we shall see, it is most prominently and dominantly imagined as a spatial object. Importantly, imagining the suburb as space, in which space is understood to be a kind of object, petrifies what is otherwise a process. In contrast, following Henri Lefebvre, I understand space as a production as *spatialization*—the (always emergent) process of spaces forming through routine, habit, and discourses. In these terms, space is an on-going production rather than an object—an endless becoming that is only partly constituted by the material world rather than a particular arrangement of the material world. As Lefebvre (1991b) conceives of spatialization, it is comprised of three interdependent elements: *practices of space* (or "spatial praxis"), *representations of space* (or, "discourses on space") and *discourses of space* (or, "spaces of representation") (33, 38–39).¹⁷ As Rob Shields (2013) explains, "*l'espace*," or the social production of space,

is all embracing, seeking what could be influenced by spatialisations in different historical epochs rather than simply defining and delimiting the spatialisation of one particular time or place. I suggest this is at root a social spatialisation, which includes (1) a set of spatial relations (i.e. space proper) between and on which core elements of the mode of production (and consumption) depend; (2) the arrangements of architecture and the landscape; (3) understandings and representations of that logic; and (4) cultural forms of social space that include the body and its gestures and comportment (22–23).

¹⁶ The suburban imaginary is, moreover, enunciated in complex relation to the urban imaginary. Due to limitations of space, this is an aspect of the suburban imaginary that future work will need to explore more fully.

¹⁷ This translation of Lefebvre's naming of the tri-part production of space comes from a combination of Shields' various interpretive translations (2013, 1999, 1991 and 1987)—David Harvey (2006) also uses *spaces of representation* to name the third concept. The original terms are *la pratique spatiale*, *les représentations de l'espace*, and *les espaces de représentation*. In the Nicholson-Smith translation, these terms are translated as *spatial practice*, *representations of space*, and *representational space* (Lefebvre 1991). My naming practice is based on the combination of terms I feel most clearly conveys the meanings of the original terms.

In daily practice, space and spatial order is taken as commonsense, something that is taken-for-granted. People engage with this perceived commonsense space but in doing so, produce it, "enacting spatial order in every action" (Shields 2013, 23). The limitations and possibilities perceived to be afforded by spaces themselves are, in fact, produced by the ways in which space *is practiced*. Thus, through every action, people also simultaneously challenge the construction of space and spatial order that they perceive. One of the ways in which people come to perceive space as predetermined in particular ways prior to and outside of their enactment of it is through discursive representations of space. These discourses are forwarded through "argument and refutation" and range in the various systems of narrating space in consistent, official ways—such as planning theories or cartographic conventions that actively operate on ideas of space as landscape that "can be rationally planned and subdivided" (Shields 2013, 23). Ordinary, informal, everyday and presumed-obvious ways of inhabiting spaces are framed by spaces of representations: Space itself is understood to be a discursive frame, making some things understandable as possible and, thus, other things as impossible. For Lefebvre, the work of radical artists challenges ordinary ways of apprehending and orienting within space and everyday life.¹⁸ Space is lived. People negotiate space as it is perceived and how it is represented to them. In this space, possibilities emerge of breaching the limiting conditions of space through art and shifting the imaginary. Taken together, these three modes are dialectical. As one changes, the others respond to this change. The capacity to perceive space in the peculiarity of a spatial praxis is informed by discourses that make that perception available through a mediating imaginary, which makes a space recognizable. This lived spatial praxis informs how it can be represented and, in turn, how the spaces can open up new imaginaries in response to existing ones.

¹⁸ Although now clichéd and not socially radical, an example of art creating such a perceptual shift of space is the trope of the roadrunner and coyote cartoon from Warner Brothers. In this cartoon series, the hungry but intelligent coyote attempts to capture the carefree roadrunner in order to eat him. The coyote, being much too slow-moving to catch the roadrunner on his own, uses various technological contrivances in order to increase his speed or to outwit the bird. Invariably, the coyote fails. One of the recurring reasons for his failure is that the roadrunner, for whatever reason, does not seem to be affected by gravity (either he is ignorant about gravity and is therefore unaffected by it, or he is so fast that he can escape its pull). As such, the traps set for him by the coyote often fail because the traps rely on the roadrunner being contained within the same spatial discourse. The coyote, though sometimes initially buoyant—for example, when he first runs off a cliff—inevitably, eventually falls to his demise. Such an example illustrates the dominant spatial imaginary (the material world acts inevitably upon bodies in particular, predictable ways, such as falling through space) while also subverting that imaginary (that it is possible to reject and escape from the "commonsense" knowledge about how the material world ought to operate upon one's body).

The Lefebvrian theorization of space as socially produced and differentially perceived is in significant contrast to the notion of "absolute space". David Harvey (2006; 1973) describes the three different ways in which space is understood. These understandings render space as *absolute*, *relative*, or *relational*. Understandings of space as absolute posit it as simply always-already existing as a material reality or as an emptiness in which things and people are contained; that is, space is taken to have an independent existence out there as a "thing"—specifically, as a container that is not dependent on the matter it contains (Harvey 2006, 271). In contrast, there are two ways in which space can be understood as being relative. One way, which Harvey more generically calls "the view of relative space" posits that space exists only in relation to and only as a result of the relationship between objects. That is, space does not exist as a separate entity but only as the relationship between objects. The third view of space, and the second relative view, understands it as "relational" space. This view regards space "in the manner of Leibniz, as being contained in objects in the sense that an object can be said to exist only insofar as it contains and represents within itself relationships to other objects" (Harvey 2006, 271, quoting Harvey 1973). This last view of space as a dialectical relationality is congruent with Lefebvre's understanding of spatialization—the production of space—as processual and social.

Both spatialization and the imaginary are dialectically socially produced. Moreover, spatializations and spatial imaginaries co-constitute each other. How and what space is expected or imagined to be, what its capacities and limitations are represented or imagined as being, what new possibilities can be imagined or unimagined or made imaginable by new practices, are reciprocally informed both by practice and by existing, emerging, and possible imaginaries.

The everyday: Conditions, perspective, method

Arjun Appadurai (1996) suggests that there is a new role for the imagination in social life, today: "The image, the imagined, the imaginary—these are all terms that direct us to something critical and new in global cultural processes: the imagination as a social practice" (21). He makes a compelling entreaty for attending to the imaginary and imagination in the contemporary modern, global context:

the imagination has become an organized field of social practices, a form of work (in the sense of both labor and culturally organized practice), and a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility. ... The imagination

is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order (31).

Imaginarities and spatializations arise in and out of everyday life. Within such a context as Appadurai describes, the everyday is a critical point at which the production of space, the social imaginary, and the suburban imaginary make contact and are enabled.

The everyday is also, importantly, a theoretical perspective that offers a critique. For French critical theorists of the everyday,¹⁹ everydayness is characterised by ambivalent tensions between stifling and anaestheticizing banality and unpredictable and potent possibility (Lefebvre 1987; Gardiner 2006 and 2004). The experience of everydayness as both trap and liberation corresponds to the duality of the everyday. Maurice Blanchot (1987), following Henri Lefebvre, describes the two sides to everyday life: On the one side is daily life as tedious, "painful and sordid (the amorphous, the stagnant)" (13). On the other, daily life is "inexhaustible, irrecusable, always unfinished" (13). It is this persistent incompleteness of the everyday—its multiplicity, its incapacity to be categorized, that it is "unqualifiable" (18)—which is rife with potential, offering the possibility of liberation: This is the critique that everyday life offers. This is because it "always escapes forms or structures (particularly those of political society: bureaucracy, the wheels of government, parties)" (13). Yet, these two aspects of the everyday always meet. This unfinishedness can be experienced as wearing, and its potentiality tends to remain concealed. This hidden, obscure element of everydayness (along with what obscures it) requires a particular kind of attention: To activate the hidden potential, release the aesthetic and affective intensities, and reveal latent utopian possibilities, everyday life must be defamiliarized, made strange and perceived anew. This is the role of the critique of the everyday, articulated by Henri Lefebvre (2010, 1991a, 1987). Such a critique must be able first to recognize everyday life for what it is and for the qualities that distinguish it—or rather, that make it indistinct. This means that everyday life (everydayness, the commonplace, the quotidian, the banal) must be taken up with interest rather than allowing its qualities (which make it thoroughly uninteresting—indeed, make it resist interest) to let it slip away. As Blanchot (1987) describes,

¹⁹ There are a number of other strains of philosophical and sociological theorization of the everyday, including such philosophers as Martin Heidegger, György Lukács, Agnes Heller, Jean-Paul Sartre, Philippe Ariès (Sheringham 2006); Jacques Derrida, Luce Irigaray, and others. They remain outside of the remit of this study.

the everyday escapes. This is its definition. We cannot help but miss it if we seek it through knowledge, for it belongs to a region where there is still nothing to know, just as it is prior to all relation insofar as it has always already been said, even while remaining unformulated, that is to say, not yet information. It is not the implicit ...; to be sure, it is always already there, but that it may be there does not guarantee its actualization. On the contrary, the everyday is always unrealized in its very actualization which no event, however important or however insignificant, can ever produce. Nothing happens; this is the everyday (15).

Everydayness contrasts to the momentous, to the eventful, or to the historical in being banal, routine, non-cumulative, meaningless, and trivial; however, the everyday must not thus mistakenly be taken to be trivial or meaningless.²⁰ That is, the everyday *is* meaningless in that it does not *mean* anything more than its own unfolding. Similarly, it is trivial in that it does not participate in the grand machinations of history. The everyday is neither part of a larger narrative nor does it constitute its own narratives, it does not partake of or contribute towards an identifiable greater accomplishment. Thus, it is "meaningless" and "trivial" in this sense of lacking a specific purpose, of being unaccounted and unaccountable, or of not participating in significance—it does not intentionally create meaning. It is, thus, unintelligible and incoherent. Practices, knowledges, products, and spaces of the everyday are effaced in their ordinary meaninglessness and triviality. As Alexandra Kogl (2007) notes, in "the abstract space of late capitalism, meaning appears to have been voided from our everyday spaces" (139). Because of this, it is routine for the everyday to go unnoticed in the first instance—in daily life, one does not note the mundane or ordinary at every moment. Rather, it is considered only upon an intentional second look, as Blanchot describes. Importantly, though, the everyday is not meaningless or trivial in the more colloquial sense of being futile or in vain, unworthy of further consideration. It is precisely its meaninglessness and triviality that compel the critic of everydayness to pay it attention. If its meaningless triviality makes it elude observation, critique is an intentional attentiveness to it.

²⁰ It is worth noting the parallel amongst the various effacements to which I attend in this dissertation: the dream before Freud, space before Lefebvre, the imaginary before Lacan, ideology before Althusser, the everyday before Lefebvre and Blanchot. Each of these—the dream, the imaginary, ideology, and the everyday—has been understood as the residue of what really matters: the dream as the residue of night versus the rational, productive activity of the day; space as the fixed, empty container filled with things and people as compared to humanly meaningful places; the imaginary as descriptive of what is illusory and false; ideology as a superficial fiction hiding the actuality of the material conditions of life; and the everyday as the boring, trifling nothing that fills the space between events and history.

In recognizing and attending to everydayness, critique seeks to perceive and reveal what is obscured by the qualities of everydayness (or lack of qualities). As Michel Maffesoli (1989) describes, the everyday as critique involves, above all, "placing social phenomena in a certain *perspective*, approaching them in a certain way" (v, emphasis in original). Namely, critique points out the mystification of daily life in its colonization by dominant ideologies that cover over the proliferating diversity inherent within everyday life. Thus, regarding everyday spaces, Alexandra Kogl argues that the appearance of the void of meaning "is a false impression": "Spaces, their builders, and their users all participate in producing and reproducing the power structures and systems of meaning that shape space and, through it, many of the conditions of everyday life, and are in turn worked upon by those spaces" (Kogl 2007, 139). It is this mystification of the political conditions that shape the everyday and the naturalization of a particular set of conditions and values within the everyday that make critique of and attending to the mundane important. However, this attentiveness is not easy.

Henri Lefebvre (2010) notes that the concerns of everyday life have always existed: "Undoubtedly people have always had to be fed, clothed, housed and have had to produce and then re-produce that which has been consumed" (38). But, *the everyday as such*, did not come to exist "until the advent of competitive capitalism and the expansion of the world" in the nineteenth century (38). That is, the mundane, banal, daily takes on particular characteristics in relation to the rationality of modern, industrial, capitalist life. Two peculiarly important and interconnected qualities of what makes the everyday potent while at the same time difficult to escape are its crushing repetitiveness and the commodification of almost every aspect of daily existence.

Benjamin fully understood, following Simmel, that the shocks and vicissitudes of modern urban life, combined with the commodification of virtually all facets of daily existence, tend to induce habitualized and highly stereotypical behavioural reactions to our environment that in many ways ultimately support the structures of domination, albeit not in all respects, or in wholly irreversible ways (Gardiner 2004, 246).

Repetition replaces cyclical variation with monotonous routine. And commodification replaces the variety and diversity of relating to, and making sense of the material and immaterial world with a singular logic that at once abstracts the material world and reifies the immaterial world and relationality. Together, these highly rationalized/rationalizing processes produce uniformity: "Rationality dominates, accompanied but not diversified by irrationality" (Lefebvre 1987, 7).

In modern life, the repetitive gestures tend to mask and to crush the cycles. The everyday imposes its monotony. It is the invariable constant of the variations it envelops. The days follow one after another and resemble one another, and yet—here lies the contradiction at the heart of everydayness—everything changes. But the change is programmed: obsolescence is planned. Production anticipates reproduction; production produces change in such a way as to superimpose the impression of speed onto that of monotony. Some people cry out again the acceleration of time, others cry out against stagnation. They're both right (Lefebvre 1987, 10).

Under the conditions of capitalist modernity, people are distracted and habitualized into repetitive gestures to the point that waking life is experienced as if a dream, in which one floats through not fully aware of what one is doing, the meaning of this doing, or where one is doing it (Kaplan and Ross 1987; Gardiner 2004). That the everyday is modern is the reason for the particular kind of ambivalences characterizing everyday life: Thus, on the one hand it is where we are most alienated yet also where we might be able to find liberation. For Lefebvre (2010), this is "one of the major paradoxes of history" (38). The paradox is that both the alienation of and liberation through everyday life has the same root, which is the ideological structure of everyday life. If alienation is a feeling of impotence in being able to affect the world, a persistent sense of meaninglessness and "of isolation from others, of estrangement from one's self" (Wander 2010, ix), then, for Lefebvre, liberation "ought to be the production of autonomous, thinking, feeling individuals able to experience their own desires and develop their own style" (Wander 2010, ix). Meaning must be something beyond mere consumerism.

As such, for critics of everyday life, techniques of estrangement are required to unsettle the dreamy, alienating routine of everydayness. However, to overcome the problem of the ordinariness of everydayness, critique cannot merely point to what is extraordinary in everyday life or simplistically re-orient to everyday life *as* extraordinary for the extraordinary is not excluded from everydayness. As Lefebvre explains, the familiar can abruptly transform into something unfamiliar, something new, creating an impression of strangeness. To produce this impression, all that is required is an unexpected juxtaposition of familiar, ordinary things or of something familiar and unfamiliar, or a disruption to familiar routine. But this experience of strangeness is not so upsetting as to produce anxiety or even expectation (Lefebvre 1991a, 118). For Lefebvre, creating the bizarre in this way

confuses thought and meaning without actually revealing the unknown to the mind or the senses, without producing any real enigmas or problems, without ever really being disturbing or worrying, such is the momentary experience of the bizarre. The bizarre is a

mild stimulant for the nerves and the mind—particularly recommended as risk-free for cases of nervous fatigue and mental impotence. It is both a stimulant and a tranquillizer. Its only use is as a spice for banality, a cosmetic for insignificance. It is a pseudo-renewal, obtained by artificially deforming things so that they become both reassuring and surprising (Lefebvre 1991a, 119).

Neither is ordinary strangeness sufficient to disrupt everydayness nor is alertness to it sufficiently critical *per se*. Moreover, beyond this artificial deformation of the familiar, the everyday has the power to transform and demote even the mysterious or truly unknown into what is merely "the weird and the bizarre" (Lefebvre 1991a, 118). Indeed, "The bizarre is a shoddy version of the mysterious from which the mystery has disappeared" (119). The mysterious is displaced and turned into "something *everyday*, at one and the same time familiar yet surprising" (119, emphasis in original).

In the suburban imaginary, there are at least three forms of suppression of strangeness operating. That is, there are three ways in which the everydayness of the suburb is reasserted: First, the ordinary becomes strange upon taking notice of it. Such attention may turn to "critique" if one notices that regardless of the imposition of dominant ideological systems of meaning and control, its meaning is never finalized, that life always escapes capture by administrative procedures, and that the everyday is a site of endlessly creative doing, making-do, and making be. However, second, the ordinary is easily rendered strange by juxtaposing unexpected elements together. This form of "making strange" is for Lefebvre (1987) and Blanchot (1987) a way of colonizing and trivializing strangeness, reducing the extraordinary into a mildly surprising expression of the ordinary. Finally, such a frivolous vision of suburban strangeness can depoliticize the critique of suburban everydayness. The truly extraordinary gets blended back into the ideological image of the ordinary normalcy of the suburb. The refusal to recognize the exceptionally strange as an imaginable possibility presents the imaginary as more reliable than and a replacement for experience. Such a foreclosure of experience is an experience of alienation and mystification. The affirmation of the nothingness of everyday life is deeply ideological because it renders as commonsense, matter-of-fact, and common practice workaday alienation and dissatisfaction and interprets as outside of politics and of the social the possibilities and pleasures of the quotidian and of any spatialization or situation of the quotidian, as in the suburb. In this view, everyday life and its site of realization are wasted or trivial remainders of real life (life that counts) and real places (authentic places), which operate always outside of the

everyday, which is to say almost always and almost everywhere. Both everyday life and the suburb as the site of the everyday, then, are remaindered always outside of life.

From the critical perspective, in order to recognize the everyday, it is important not to take the everyday to be particular qualities such as being boring or bizarre. It is not specific content (Maffesoli 1989, v). "Everydayness is not a property or aggregate" of the many things that are "commonly identified with the *quotidien*" (Sheringham 2006, 360). Rather, it is a *concept* concerning the conditions of modern, industrial, capitalist life (Lefebvre 2010). Lefebvre (2010) explains that the everyday is a philosophical concept that cannot be appropriately understood outside of its philosophical context—not even within the context of everyday life itself. Instead, "it designates for and by philosophy the nonphilosophical" (13). Indeed, Lefebvre argues, as a philosophical concept, *the everyday* does not belong to everyday life and it does not reflect everyday life. Rather, the everyday expresses the "possible transfiguration [of everyday life] in philosophical terms"; yet, "it is not the product of pure philosophy but comes of philosophical thought directed towards the non-philosophical, and its major achievement is in this self-surpassing" (Lefebvre 2010, 13). The everyday as critique, then, is a specialized, philosophical—or sociological—orientation, responsive to the conditions of the making of this particular form of modern, capitalist life.

What is most potent in the critique of everyday life is the sense in which the everyday is a dialectical enfolding and not simply an ideological entrapment, neither is it a space of absolute freedom. That is, through a critical perspective—either through what might be termed everyday life critique *or*, I would suggest equally validly, sociological imagination—one can recognize and reveal the ways in which obviousness and invisibility are ideologically imbued within the conditions of the everyday. At the same time, such a perspective or imagination also recognizes ways in which the particular engagements or refusals, participations or non-participations, tactics and re-purposing occur in the dialectic exchange between the individual and the larger context. This does not mean that the everyday social world is filled with on-going utopian unfoldings. However, it also does not mean that the everyday social world is one in which individuals are utterly trapped. Finally, it recognizes the way in which the everyday and the social are dialectically produced. Thus, every context must eventually change, which is neither ultimately liberatory nor entrapping, but is resolutely anti-conservative.

Methodology

Sociological imagination

The imaginary is always-already social. As Tara Milbrandt (2007) succinctly summarizes, the imaginary is, "in essence, a social imagination, a set of interwoven meanings (and representations) whose *enunciation* is constitutive and open-ended." It is "in an implicit and perpetual dialogue interweaving past, present and imagined futures of a society" (2). As such, it is always shared and made meaningful in being shared. It bridges the gap between the way in which "society" is imagined and operates and the way in which "the individual" is imagined and socialized. The imaginary is dialectically produced and is never stable. As Candace Vogler (2002) explains, "imaginaries are complex systems of presumption—patterns of forgetfulness and attentiveness—that enter subjective experience as the expectation that things will make sense generally (i.e., in terms not wholly idiosyncratic)" (625).

The imaginary is an important, if relatively under-utilized concept for sociology (Adams 2004, 279), despite C. Wright Mills's famous invocation of the sociological imagination, widely touted as the hallmark of Sociology in introductory textbooks.²¹ For Mills (2000),

The sociological imagination enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals. It enables him to take into account how individuals, in the welter of their daily experience, often become falsely conscious of their social positions (5).

Mills invites the Sociological thinker to activate the capacity to *imagine* the relationship between the individual and the social, the biographical and the historical. In other words, the Sociologist, through an act of imagination, must fill-in the black-box relationship between the micro and macro orders of Sociological analysis. The "sociological imagination is the mental ability to *establish intelligible relations among history, social structure and personal biography*" (Solis-Gadea 2005, 114, emphasis added).

²¹ That is, it is relatively rare in the English-language traditions of Sociology. The concept of *l'imaginaire* is more commonly employed in French-language Sociology. A couple of exceptions in English was the publication of a special issue on the social imaginary in the journal *Current Sociology* in 1993 and, as mentioned above, on the new imaginaries in *Public Culture* in 2002. In her review of the consideration of imagination in the sociological literature, Jaqueline Adams (2004) has found that "sociology as a whole gives almost no consideration to the imagination, except for the 'sociological imagination'" (280).

But, what is the precise relationship between experience and larger social and historical forces? This in-between, mediating level is the work of the imaginary, which bridges, illuminates, and produces the three fictions of the imminent phenomenal experiences and agency of an "individual," the structuring forces of "society," and the meaning-making context of "history". The imaginary makes available for analysis, interpretation, and as an explanatory mechanism, an order of the social that is experiential but not psychological or phenomenal and an order of the abstract that is not ideal or theoretical. The imaginary is both imminent and transcendent, the commingling of agency and structure. That is, it articulates the mode of society that is most consequent and explanatory of the social and collective, of sociality and relationality, but least available for study through scientific tools of measurement or theoretical formulation. It is through the imaginary that theories, ideas and images become internalized by individuals and by which, in turn, individual experiences become social discourses. The imaginary is, then, a sociologically useful tool that names the operation between the micro and the macro. However, imagining by itself is not sufficient to be sociological imagining. Inasmuch as any imaginary is taken as commonsense, dominant, or taken-for-granted, it is mythic, according to the description of myth forwarded by Roland Barthes (1972). Barthes describes mythology as replacing history with nature so that the present and the way things are understood to be, appear to be inevitable and natural. Hegemonic ideology is mythic. Inasmuch as the dominant imaginary presents a singular image as *the* imaginary, such a mythical mystification occurs through the imaginary. One way in which the imaginary is peculiarly mystified is that it does not represent and explain "reality" as such (or at least as it is experienced or perceived). Instead, it is a contingent idea of what is assumed to be assumed, re-introducing a sense of a collective unconscious—a mythic re-enchantment. It is the work of the sociological imagination to undo this mystification, but not through a naïve doing away with images or imaginaries. Following Blumer, Howard Becker argued that empirical, social scientific research could only be done based on the images that pre-exist the study. Yet, this underlying image is rarely acknowledged:

One can see the empirical world only through some scheme or image of it. The *entire act* of scientific study is oriented and shaped by the underlying picture of the empirical world that is used. ... In view of this fundamental and pervasive effect wielded on the entire act of scientific inquiry by the initiating picture of the empirical world, it is ridiculous to ignore this picture (Becker 1998, 10, quoting Blumer 1969, 24–25).

For both Blumer and Becker, it is not a matter of getting rid of images and certainly not of ignoring them. Both were concerned that much empirical social scientific research is based upon what they considered "bad" imagery—partly bad because it remained unacknowledged. Becker argued that it was important to replace the bad imagery with "good" images upon which to base research and that this could be, at least partly, achieved by going out into the "real" world and acquiring images based on lived experience.

Imagery enters our heads as the residue of our everyday experience; so, to get better imagery in there, we have to do something about the character of our ordinary lives (Becker 1998, 15).

The present project seeks to clarify the "images in our heads" with which we are already operating (Parts I and II) and to propose "better imagery" (Part III) by considering how to engage in a project of re-imagining and attending to the imaginary. The imaginary is not inherently liberatory. For example, in the spatialization of the suburbs, it is the ideologically dominant imaginary that is, above all, expressed in the representation of the suburb (i.e. the conceived space of the suburb). But, because it is dialectical, incorporating popular culture and lived experience, and because there are multiple imaginaries, some are more constraining, some are more liberating. They may facilitate the deepening of hegemony (perhaps even false consciousness) or let loose the radical potentiality of everyday life. As such, it is not enough to look at the practices of people in everyday life and its material expression and concretization, as has typically been the "take-away" methodological message for everyday life researchers. If the everyday is mystified and imbued with ideology and is otherwise only one element in the dialectic production and expression of the imaginary and of spatialization, then we need to consider the other elements of these processes.

So now I see the humble events of everyday life as having two sides: a little, individual, chance event—and at the same time an infinitely complex social event, richer than the many 'essences' it contains within itself. The social phenomenon may be defined as the unity of these two sides. It remains for us to explain why the infinite complexity of these events is hidden, and to discover why—and this too is part of their reality—they appear to be so humble. Is it truly a question of the superstructures? Is it the superstructures alone that matter? No: it is a question of superstructures only in so far as they are created at each instant of everyday life and social practice—in so far as they are constantly coming down to penetrate these realms from above. And also only in so far as the superstructures are linked to society as a whole, to social practice as a whole, although everyday practice is dispersed, fragmented—be it in terms of an individual or a specific and determined social activity: in them the whole is represented by the part, and vice versa. It is therefore not

only a question of the superstructures. In truth it is a question of sociology, in other words of a science which studies an aspect or sector of social relations (Lefebvre 1991a, 57).

Cut from the suburb / cut by the suburb

It is almost a cliché now, but a pleasing one: When talking about places and spaces—particularly urban ones—it is not uncommon to deploy the metaphor of travel, of movement, of kinaesthetics. Walter Benjamin (1999), Michel de Certeau (1984) and Georg Simmel (1997) walked through cities and told us what they experienced and how these moving experiences helped them think about us and about what they were doing—that is, cities. In Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, Marco Polo wanders the city to come to know it and comes to unknow it and comes to unknow his self. In other contexts, Zygmunt Bauman (1998) talks about tourists and Deleuze and Guattari (1987) talk about nomads. But, what about those who are imagined to be intentionally and determinedly settled? Sedentary? Cocooned? Who, when they do move, do not travel, wander, explore, search, navigate but, rather, "commute"? Who do not bustle and struggle in crowded places but who are imagined to exist as if asleep—perhaps watching television—in familial isolation and apathetic detachment in pods of domesticity?

I am interested in what is an appropriately suburban methodology. Benjamin attempts a fragmentary reading of the poetics of the phantasmagoric city, through a method of studious distraction, juxtaposing the incongruent in a riot of aphoristic notes collecting glancing observations (Taussig 1991, Chisholm 2001). Kathleen Stewart (2007), writing about the slow flows, endless accretions of things and stories that are endlessly interrupted, and the vigilant noting of happenings in the hills and "hollers" of West Virginia, writes in a way that absorbs and mimics the poetics of the everyday life she observes. Both Stewart's and Benjamin's writings seek to partake in that which is observed and recorded. Taussig (1991), describing Benjamin's method, notes

This I take to be Benjamin's contribution, profound and simple, novel yet familiar, to the analysis of the everyday, and unlike the readings we have come to know of everyday life, it has the strange and interesting property of being cut, so to speak, from the same cloth of that which it raises to self-awareness (152, emphasis added).

If, as I take it, my goal for my writing is to be "cut from the same cloth" of the suburb itself, what ought to be the texture and shape of the cut, so to speak, of my writing? How shall my writing cut the suburb? How shall my writing be cut from or by the suburb?

Perhaps my analysis of the suburb must have the property of to-ing and fro-ing, of the back and forth as in the commute, the endless repetition of lawn mowing or house cleaning. Perhaps it must partake of constant deferral, dreaming of future nostalgia with trepidation, obliterating the real experience of daily life. Perhaps it ought to be characterized by a passive refusal to story or be storied, always just a receding setting for a perfectly normal, unexceptional life. It could, perhaps, be one disposed to disposal, focused on constant acquisition, eternally shocked by newness, dulled by the disappointing fading of newness, ever compelled to discard. But, it all depends on the version of the suburb that I wish to write. The object I discover as the suburb will be the one I create through its description and the method by which I seek to find it. This is the problem with reading the suburb as if this taken-for-granted thing is an obvious, manifest, stable, concrete thing awaiting perception or an idea, a representation, or an abstraction. As Henri Bergson (1991) suggests,

realism and idealism both go too far.... [I]t is a mistake to reduce matter to the perception which we have of it, a mistake also to make of it a thing able to produce in us perceptions, but in itself of another nature than they. Matter, in our view, is an aggregate of "images." And by "image" we mean a certain existence which is more than that which the idealist calls a *representation*, but less than that which the realist calls a *thing*—an existence placed halfway between the "thing" and the "representation" (9).

I rather move to a different order of reality and its object of analysis: the order in between: the order of the imaginary.

Looking for the suburban imaginary

Thomas Muzzio and Douglas Halper (2002) suggest that representations of the suburb can be classified into two types: suburban-set and suburban-focused. Suburban-set representations are stories that are set in a suburban location but wherein the setting is not crucial to the story and could equally be set in any other place without fundamentally affecting the story. Suburban-focused stories are those that are necessarily set in a suburban context; the story, in some way, has to do integrally with that context. Although Muzzio and Halper were referring specifically to

movies made in the U.S.A., this categorisation is broadly useful for descriptively characterizing suburban representations in general and is a key point of distinction for the media I analyze in the following chapters. In Part I, in order to read for the dominant imaginary, I consider both suburb-focused and suburb-set works across a large swath of popular culture. In Parts II and III, I analyze only suburban-focused works in order to get a better sense of the specific critique of, and promise imagined to be offered by, the suburb. Although I do use this distinction to a limited degree, a too strong distinction between these two orientations to the representations of the suburb suggests that stories that are merely suburban-set can be neutral about their use of the suburb and what the suburban representation does. I would suggest, instead, that no representation of the suburb is neutral. They are always doing some kind of work to support, subvert or undo hegemonic suburban imaginaries. In this dissertation I interrogate what work is being done or undone by representations of the suburb. While some representations present the suburb as taken for granted and thereby *produce* its normalcy, its desirability, comfort and familiarity for easy consumption, others challenge this normalcy, desirability, familiarity or taken-for-grantedness by introducing or being alert to dysfunction or strangeness. These representations may potentially disrupt or even subvert hegemonic meanings. Often, however, the dysfunction merely highlights what is desirable about the suburb—precisely its everydayness, its spatialization of everyday life—by throwing it into relief vis-à-vis dysfunction or strangeness. The contradictory effect may be the re-enforcement and stabilization of hegemonic ideals. In the end, both categories may take the suburb (that is, what the suburb is made to represent) to be not only taken-for-granted but inevitable—the space and place of inescapable everyday life, a good life founded on the nothingness of the everyday.

The figure as an analytical tool

In this dissertation, I look at images of the suburb in popular culture, gallery exhibited visual art, and socially and culturally marginal (although still "popular") media, and identify themes preoccupying the suburban imaginary. I identify these as "figures". I am not using the figure in the sense of the technical captioning of individual images as stand-alone "figures". Rather, I present images (whether included or implied) *read together with* my discussions provoked by them to describe a much more interpretive set of "figures". That is, the figures are not the images

as such, but are, rather, what is described by and gestured towards in the constellation of images and text. These are constellatory figures. Figures, as I use them in the following chapters, then, are assemblages in which many cultural representations—mediations, examples, illustrative pieces, images, lyrics, movies, etc.—together with my writings about them, are contingently and subjectively juxtaposed into constellations to illuminate the suburban imaginary. Such constellations are meaning-making readings that seek to illuminate both the dominant operative imaginary as well as alternative social and political possibilities obscured by those dominant ideologies and social values. And this is made visible by this work of assembling figures. So, while the creative works on their own primarily represent the suburban imaginary through material and spatial imagery, read as figures, they are also more readily legible for social, political, and moral values.

Figures are meaningful and recognizable tropes that act simultaneously as *generic social categories* (or concepts, images, or types) and also as *particular instantiations* or exemplifications (see Castoriadis 1987); they are, moreover, instructive or illuminative of the social ground and processes by which they are brought into relief. "The figure is both itself—a living and historical entity—and a sign of something outside of, and larger than, itself" (Hovind 2012, 259).²² As such, figures traverse across the thresholds of modalities of existence, thus operating like other syncretic phenomena, which is to say that they are "undecidable, hovering on the boundary between categories" of modes of existence (Shields 2013, xii).²³ As generic categories, figures are an iteration of *the abstract*—something that is ideal and possible and thus not real or actual (Shields 2013, xii). However, the specificity and praxis of particular (realized and actualized) figures remove them from the purely and singularly abstract, symbolic, ideal, or even virtual orders. The figure is illuminative inasmuch as the figure is (a) both a product of and produces the conditions from which it emerges, (b) signals the political conditions and social

²² Here, Hovind is discussing Auerbach's interpretation of the figure in relation to the representation of reality in Western literature, tied to the Christian history of salvation:

in Auerbach's analysis "realism" is not a category of literature that straightforwardly represents a reality outside of itself, but rather a series of figural relationships whose ultimate end-point lies quite far afield from any simply existent reality and which constantly defers the critic's unmediated access to the history that is ostensibly his object (Hovind 2012, 260).

²³ Shields (2013) offers a tetralogical table that offers a summary of four "modalities of existence" (xii). He is emphatic in describing this "four-part ontology" as providing "the stations of a continuously changing reality" (xii). The four stations, then, are *the virtual* (that which is both real and ideal), *the concrete or material* (that which is both real and actual), *the abstract* (that which is both possible and ideal), and *the probable* (that which is both possible and actual).

values peculiar to the historical and cultural context in which this figure comes to be meaningful, and (c) gestures towards the intervention of the one who (or the situation that) ascribes the figure this status and its capacity to figure. The figure is a contingent, constellatory bringing into relief out of a social ground which itself becomes interpretable only by the very process of distinguishing between figure and ground. In this way, I am conjuring a notion of a constellatory figure as Walter Benjamin (1999) summons his many figures of urban modernity—perhaps best known amongst these, the figure of the flâneur; or as Avery Gordon (2008) meditates on the figure of the ghost (to which I return briefly, in a moment); or, as Georg Simmel (1971) or Zygmunt Bauman (1991) evoke the stranger as a figure that helps to define relations of sociality and, simultaneously, questions the very nature of community (an idea to which I return in Part III).

Figuring method

Figures are social. While they are more easily and typically understood as types of people (as in the stranger or the flâneur), figures can also be understood as ideas and concepts (as, to some extent, ghosts are).²⁴ Cornelius Castoriadis offers such conceptual figures including *magmas*, *instituted society*, *radical imaginary*, and other ideas that are particular to his thought. His figures also include "revised and reworked philosophical and psychoanalytic ideas and concepts" such as *the social-historical*, *psychical monad*, *praxis*, *alienation*, *the symbolic*, and more. For Castoriadis, these are "figures for *enabling one to think* (or to rethink, beyond inherited thought) psyche and society, history and revolution" (Anonymous 2005, xlvii). For Castoriadis, figures help to identify what is *thinkable*. Figures are illustrative of and emerges out of the social imaginary:

to think is precisely to shake up the perceptual institution of the world and of society, and the imaginary social significations born by this institution. What is akin to perception in this case, is that when we consider thought which is *already achieved*, we confront the schema of background/figure, and the necessity of such a schema. The perceptual institution instates once and for all what is background and what *can ever be* figure, just

²⁴ The figures in *The Arcades Project* are generally understood to be the human figures (the flâneur, the collector, the prostitute, the gambler, the hashish eater—all nineteenth century "types"); in addition to these, however, the subject of each of Benjamin's "Convolutes" can be understood as figures (the arcades, fashion, boredom, panorama, the automaton, etc.).

as it instates the manner, the mode of being of their relationship, their distinctness and their solidarity (Castoriadis 1984, xxv).

Yet, figures can also be created by original thought/thinking in a "creative tearing apart" of the relation between background and figure, in a moment in which "things take up another configuration in an unknown landscape" (xxv) as compared to the "stable landscape" of the everyday world (ix). Castoriadis likens *thinking* to forsaking the pleasure of taking for granted the everyday world as it appears to us and instead entering into the Labyrinth (ix)—or rather, "more exactly, it is to make be and appear a Labyrinth" (x). To think is to get lost in galleries and, finding oneself in a cul-de-sac, the opening of which closes off upon entry, to tread in circles. It is not a forward, progressive, linear motion, but a spinning requiring a treading and re-treading over familiar, and seemingly unyielding ground until this turning rounds somehow creates openings in the walls, "cracks which offer passage" (Castoriadis 1984, x). And in this finding/making passage, one finds/makes one way through thinking.

In this manner of treading and retreading, and attempting to rend figures from ground both as a mode of recognition and creation, I viewed and reviewed, considered and reconsidered, interpreted and reinterpreted the many artworks that both appear and remain implied throughout this thesis. The suburban imaginary is not just an image or series of images. Identifying an imaginary is not, therefore, simply a matter of directly observing things as they are or depictions of these things. Rather, it is one of reading images for how they make the imaginary, and what of it, they make legible. Artworks are not straightforward or obvious reflections of either the imaginary or of "reality," even when presented in a highly realist, objectivist mode (although this case is often made of the photos of the New Topographic photographers, below).

"Landscapes" are the symbolic environments created by human acts of conferring meaning to nature and the environment, of giving the environment definition and form from a particular angle of vision and through a special filter of values and beliefs. Every landscape is a symbolic environment. These landscapes reflect our self-definitions that are grounded in culture. ... Thus, when events or technological innovations challenge the meanings of these landscapes, it is our conceptions of ourselves that change through a process of negotiating new symbols and meanings. ... [T]here are no natural meanings inherent in the world that is there (Greider and Garkovich 1996, 1, 2)

To rend legible figures from these metaphorical and literal landscapes presented by artworks, I look at a number of examples in order to identify the general contours of figures. It was by looking at a number of examples a number of times that I tread open fissures and cracks in

articulating the repetition of themes and tropes drawn upon, and recognizing the cultural production beyond individual artistic visions as one that taps into and represents the suburban imaginary.

The labyrinthine *The Arcades Project* (*Das Passagen-Werk* in the original German), through which Benjamin's figures of nineteenth-century modernity flit in and out, is filled with endless quoted passages (such as snippets from newspapers, philosophical works, poetry, prose, scientific works, advertisements, etc.) that, decontextualized, act as discontinuous objects seemingly only in irreducible proximity with each other and Benjamin's occasional notations. The structure of the *Arcades Projects* mimics the endless passages of the arcades (covered-over streets) in which commodities disconnected from social relations seem only to interpellate shoppers in relation to other commodities: "the commodity proliferates along the margins and enters into fantastic combinations, like the tissue in tumors.—The flâneur sabotages the traffic. Moreover, he is not buyer. He is merchandise" (Benjamin 1999, 42 [A3a,7]). The *passagen-werk* then, is a work *about* the passages of the Arcades—the strange indoor/outdoor hallways/covered streets that created weather-proof shopping malls. But, the *passagen-werk* is, as well, a work *constructed of* passages of quoted texts. It is, moreover, the work that is *done by* both the reader of the text and the shopper of the arcades to make their ways through their respective passages. At the same time, "*passagen-werk*" suggests *passage-work* or *arcades-work*, in a sense paralleling *dream-work*. That is, *The Arcades Project* describes the processes by which the vacuous content and alienating conditions of consumer capitalism are altered in everyday urban life in order to conceal its estranging and impoverishing quality. It is work in much the same way as Freud's psychoanalytic dream-work is the process by which the manifest content of dreams are distorted in order to disguise from the dreamer their latent meaning, consisting of desires and wishes. Benjamin describes the mystifying qualities of everyday life within the conditions of nineteenth century commodity capitalism: the constant and frequent onrush of sensations is such that the capacity for conscious, rational processing of such experience is overwhelmed. For Benjamin, collective consciousness *problematically* responded by falling into a hallucinatory sleep by which the world appears as a dreamworld (Buck-Morss 1995, 6; Pile 2005). Benjamin saw in the nineteenth century arcades an illuminating²⁵ example of this onrush of sensations and

²⁵ The arcades were illuminating in the conventional sense that they help bring to light in an exemplary, microcosmic fashion the conditions and underlying (macrocosmic) social context of nineteenth century

the compensatory hallucinatory stupor and boredom invoked. Benjamin (1999) describes the arcades as

structures in which we relive, as in a dream, the life of our parents and grandparents, as the embryo in the womb relives the life of animals. Existence in these spaces flows then without accent, like the events in dreams (106 [D2a,1]).

Benjamin's purpose in attending to the dreaminess invoked by nineteenth century commodity capitalism was political: "His goal was not to represent the dream, but to dispel it" (Buck-Morss 1995, 6). By the time he was investigating the arcades, they were already outmoded—the decaying innovation of a previous era. In this decay, Benjamin saw the possibility of using precisely what had been enthralling in the previous era to break its spell in his contemporary era: "the out-of-date ruins of the recent past appear as residues of a dreamworld" (Buck-Morss 1995, 4):

Having lost their dream-power over the collective, they [the outmoded wish-symbols of the nineteenth century] had acquired a historical power to "awaken" it, which meant recognizing "precisely this dream as a dream. It is in this moment that the historian takes upon himself the task of dream interpretation" (V, 580). Benjamin's purpose in the *Passagen-Werk* was political. His goal was not to represent the dream, but to dispel it (Buck-Morss 1995, 6).

I dwell on the passages of Benjamin's arcades because they also evoke Castoriadis's labyrinth. For Castoriadis, (to make be and) to enter in and wander with interest within the labyrinth is to lose ordinary orientation to being in the world and thus enable a critical capacity, making the everyday world strange—to break the hallucinatory hold of the phantasmagoria and dispel the dream.

Style as method: Constellations

As I noted earlier, in the following chapters I present figures as constellations. I identify recurring tropes and motifs and put them together as figures, which is both based on and allows for the work of sociological analysis and interpretation. This work of making constellations draws on both the work of the author in constructing *The Arcades Project* and the work of its reader.

modernity. Additionally, Benjamin saw them (as he saw nineteenth century modernity more generally) as a world dominated by phantasmagorias—images projected from an illuminating lamp.

The Arcades Project presents an important example of constellational writing. Benjamin gets at "figures" by presenting constellations—subjective juxtapositions of a number of disparate observations recorded as writing ranging from notes to mini-essays, images, and quotations. The connections between these different elements or "stars" in his constellations remain, for the most part, implied, and as such, the work retains the processuality of meaning-making—admittedly, possibly because it remains an unfinished work. Adorno also wrote in constellations (see, for example, *Minima Moralia*). For Adorno, like Benjamin, a constellation signified "a juxtaposed rather than integrated cluster of changing elements that resist reduction to a common denominator, essential core, or generative first principle" (Jay 1984, 14–15). *The Arcades Project* is an extreme example of retaining and drawing attention to constellations in that Benjamin typically does not narrate the lines of connection.

Interpretation of the unintentional through the juxtaposition of elements isolated by analysis and the illumination of reality by the power of such interpretation; that is the program of every genuine materialist knowledge (Buck-Morss 1977, 93. Quoting Adorno, "Die Aktualität der Philosophie").

The work of the author in this case is seen in having isolated and collected these particular pieces, putting them in juxtaposition to each other. In turn, this provokes the reader into actively exercising their mimetic faculty: Like a conjuring of sympathetic magic, the reader must actively discover and create secret links—and become linked—through the act of interpreting the various elements presented, thereby suturing together the fragments into lively meaning; without this intervention, the elements remain disconnected and lifeless.²⁶

As Buck-Morss indicates, the aim of constellatory readings is to illuminate some "reality." Thus, at the same time that constellations are processual and interpretive, they are not wholly subjective. The figures described by the constellations are not random and the interpretation of their meaning is not left entirely to the reader's capricious, dehistoricized personal opinions. In *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin attends to figures that he interprets as illustrative of particular and peculiar characteristics of the nineteenth-century, urban, capitalist

²⁶ I was prompted to include the reader into the constellation through the doing of reading by Roger Caillois's interpretation of mimesis. As Taussig (1992) describes, Caillois

suggests that mimesis is a matter of 'being tempted by space,' a drama in which *the self is but a self-diminishing point amid others, losing its boundedness*. Caillois tries to describe this drama in its most extreme form where the mimicking self, tempted by space, spaces out: ..."The individual breaks the boundary of his skin and occupies the other side of his senses. He tries to look at himself from any point whatever in space. He feels himself becoming space' (34, emphasis added).

modernity that he sought to interrogate. And, moreover, bringing these figures into relief out of the social, cultural, and historic (back)ground in which they are embedded allows Benjamin to work through an alternative historical perspective that seeks the fissures and cracks in the smooth ideological narration of history:

the Benjaminian critic must first blast out historical phenomena from the fictive continuum that has been fabricated by the victors. But after this dramatic event, which can be characterised as apocalyptically messianic and even nihilistic, ... Benjamin's materialist historian seeks out the newly liberated fragment from the rubble of history, using it to construct a dialectical image. ... Benjamin implies that there is a "historical index" that guides the materialist, that after the obscuring effects of false consciousness have been swept away by the destructive critical act, the truth content of historical phenomena will be revealed. The truth is the recognition that the present has been intended by the past, that previous missed possibilities may be redeemed in the now (Blencowe 2010, 107–108)

Methodologically, then, Benjamin's work with his material and his structure of representation mimics what he is writing about (Taussig 1991; Chisholm 2001), as well as the political end towards which he works. In this dissertation, inspired by his and other constellatory readings of figures, I too have attempted to render a similar such structural and methodological mimicry: The images and text sprawl much like the suburb; the tracking of figures speeds down broad corridors and slows down into the endless turnings and getting-lost in cul-de-sacs that seem to close in upon entry—treading and retreading ground looking for/making a way out. The superabundance of images with which I work, I seek to put into illuminative juxtapositions as figures to parallel and acknowledge the suburb as juxtaposition of a superabundance of things, desires, people, times, spaces, and processes. Moreover, spatializations are social figures inasmuch as the representation of spatial configurations is the representation of the social production of space.

The image of the suburb pervades the everyday world and becomes almost invisible in its ubiquity. Yet in re-imagining, re-enchanting, and requiring a re-focusing of gaze upon the too bland suburban image, children's books, graphic novels, other popular media, and suburban visual art that I have looked at in this research suggest an unsuspected depth, possibility and ardent, if not quite consistent, hope that goes beyond superficial notions of living a good life defined in individualist, materialist, asocial, anti-political terms. This dissertation interrogates what insights can be gathered about the contemporary everyday world by reflecting upon these

cultural workings-upon and considerations of the suburb. To do so, I consider the work of imaging the suburb by identifying figures of the suburban imaginary. The ideological determinations and utopian possibilities submerged within the suburban imaginary become more easily legible in the work of suburban art. Art can help do the work of defamiliarizing and re-focusing, required of a critical everyday life perspective:

After we see an object several times, we begin to recognize it. The object is in front of us and we know about it, but we do not see it—hence, we cannot say anything significant about it. Art removes objects from the automatism of perception (Shklovsky 1988, 17).

Avowedly constellatory, figures are meaning-making readings that can illuminate alternative social and political possibilities obscured by dominant ideologies and social values. While the images primarily represent the suburban imaginary through material and spatial imagery, read as figures, they are also legible for social and moral values. These figures give a glimpse of something perhaps familiar, perhaps uncanny, or perhaps even revelatory.

In the following chapters, I take a closer consideration of the suburban imaginary as characterized by ambivalences (Part I); as constituted by a complex of spatial imaginaries (Part II); and, as framed as if a general promise for a better good life (Part III).

Part I.
**The Dominant Suburban Imaginary and the Multiple Axes of
Suburban Ambivalence: The Suburb in Popular Culture**

Chapter 2.

Judgment: Suburb as Good Place or Disappointment?

In this chapter, I consider the ways in which the suburb is judged—what kind of a place it is, whether it is a good place or a bad place. I will argue that such judgments about the suburb are legible as conveying a utopian longing, which is complicated in such judgment and in the actualization of such longing in the suburb as concretized object.

For many, the suburb is a good place for a happy, "ordinary" life marked in particular by comfort and plenty, peacefulness and security, privacy and individual freedom, family, and home ownership. It is a happy place, a dream come true. As suburban apologist Paul Barker (2009) enthuses,

Suburbia, along with its exurban cousin, has become the greatest zone of growth—in living, in working and in creative vigour. ...We should welcome this as a thriving example of individual choice. ...The freedoms of suburbia are a fine, humane creation, to be cherished; not an aberration, to be destroyed (225).

This enthusiasm is not, of course, universally shared. The suburb—as a material actualization and as an imaginary—is both a deeply contested terrain with support and adoption, and critique

and opposition expressed in a wide variety of complementary and contradictory ways. Defenders of the suburb have often suggested that judgments on the relative merits or faults of the suburb divide along cultural and class lines: that elitist city-dwelling academics and cultural producers (architects, designers, planners, artists, writers) disparage the suburb while "ordinary" people enjoy or aspire to it (Archer 2008 and 2011; Barker 2009; Berger 1960; Bruegmann 2006; Donaldson 1969; Harris 2005; Harris and Larkham 1999; Martinson 2000; Teaford 2008). One might, then, ask: "Why is it that writers and academics hate suburbs, but almost everyone else seems to like them?" (Harris 2005, A23).

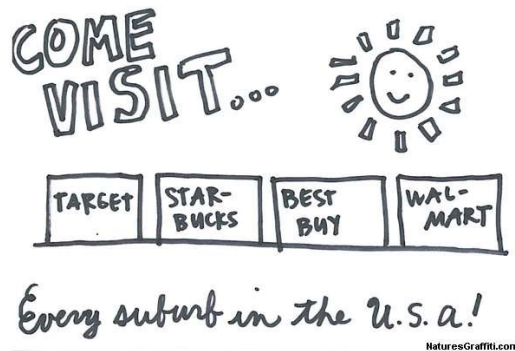
To this over-stated conundrum of why intellectuals hate what "almost everyone else" likes, one defender suggests: "To the intelligentsia, the suburbs were and always have been the place where nothing happens, or nothing good" (Mount 2009, n.p.). According to this general line of argument, contrary to elitist disparagement, the suburb is a highly desirable and good place as evidenced by the number of people who live in them. By virtue of a sort of moral democratism or vulgar utilitarianism, these defenders account the suburb as being good, interpreting the *quantity* of suburbanisation and suburbanites as a vivid demonstration of preference, irrefutable evidence of freely chosen dwelling, and this choice to be a sufficient moral justification. Moreover, the popular circulation of a discourse of "the dream" of home ownership and of a better future for children is seen as a valid cultural rationale for the continued existence and expansion of suburbanism. This is bolstered by an apparent dispelling of "the suburban myth" of homogeneity, in which it is shown that over time even the most homogeneous of developments are adapted with local flair and personality and, moreover, that cultural acceptance, even nostalgia, for suburban neighbourhoods and neighbourhood types increase as time passes (Bogart 2006; Archer 2008; O'Neill 2002). The critical backlash against suburbs and especially of the suburb as a lifestyle and cultural landscape is, then, interpreted as an elitist incapacity to recognize or value the preferences and culture of ordinary people. Barker (2009) derides this as a snobbish penchant: "The motto often seems to be: Find out what those people are doing, and tell them to stop it. Especially if they are enjoying it [*sic*]. Yet, a generation later, nostalgia always sets in. What was despised becomes 'heritage'" (131). This accusation receives some support in the contemporary flourishing of design fetishization of the once-derided mid-century modern homes and furnishings showcased in such magazines as *Atomic Ranch* and *Dwell* (see, for example, the Dec 2007/Jan 2008 issue dedicated to "Suburbs with Attitude:

Prefab, Renovations, Additions & More").²⁷ However, this anti-elitist counter-critique is not entirely convincing if for no other reason than that many of the aforementioned defenders are themselves intellectuals while many anti-sprawl/anti-suburban proponents are "ordinary" people—in the limited sense that they are neither academics nor institutional elites such as designers, architects, or planners (see Figure 3, below). Furthermore, if one considers the cultural, political, and economic limitations on choices of dwelling styles and places, and also considers the irresistible hegemony of the private property ownership ideal, then one is hard pressed to understand the mere fact of living in, moving to, or adapting to the residential suburb to be entirely a question of freedom or choice. Similarly, as neither workers nor consumers, in general, "choose" the design of the place in which they work, one cannot in good faith understand the presence of workers or consumers in a commercial or industrial suburb to be an endorsement of its design.

Figure 1: The Suburb as Generic and Alienating Environment

The ostensibly populist perspective that the suburb is the chosen and beloved environment of ordinary people emphasizes, rather than undoes, the critique that the suburb is alienating. It celebrates the "making do" of ordinary people within circumstances not of their own making and finds in the ordinary landscape of the suburb (as, often, opposed to the monolithic, vilified landscape of the city), a vitality and a will to humanize an appropriated environment. Such a celebration of supposed folk culture assumes that "ordinary" people thrive under conditions of alienation and, with enough time, will make a befitting, meaningful place of their chosen environment, no matter how mass-produced, generically serviced, or absurd, as imagined in the comics in images 2.1 and 2.2.

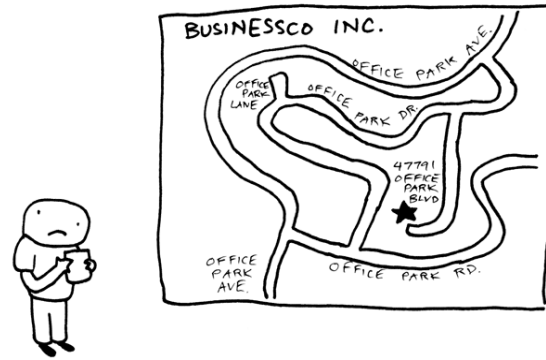
²⁷ Thanks to Petra Hroch for alerting me to this issue of *Dwell* and to Rob Shields for telling me about *Atomic Ranch*.



2.0.1. "Come visit... Every suburb in the U.S.A.!" The suburb represented as big box shopping outlets, characterized by homogeneity and multi-national corporate domination. (Comic by *Nature's Graffiti*, n.d.)²⁸

Both images 2.1 and 2.2, rendered in crudely minimalist, clean-line hand-drawing suggest a naïve, child-like, depiction of the suburb. Image 2.1, with its smiling sun, block-lettering and unrefined cursive writing evokes children's drawings and resembles the naïveté and happy optimism one might expect in such drawings. The slogan "Come visit..." is additionally reminiscent of the cheerful greetings of a postcard. But, this naïveté and cheerfulness of the form are undone by the cynical, pessimistic content. Four multinational chain stores are represented as a chain of four squares, one after the other on a straight line. In the image, they are indistinguishable except by the label of the store-name, suggesting that there is no distinction in the experience of these shopping sites and, perhaps, only a negligible difference in the specific goods or services provided by the stores. Not only is there uniformity among the stores, the written text suggests that such a configuration marks the uniformity of the suburban landscape across the entire U.S.A. As such, the invitation to "come visit," which on a postcard would be followed by the name of a specific, unique place for a (supposedly) distinct cultural experience, instead becomes an invitation to recognize the generic quality of the suburban landscape everywhere, entirely nullifying the possibility of visiting any unique place.

²⁸ Image retrieved from <http://naturesgraffiti.com>, February 27, 2009.



2.0.2. The name of every street on this map of the Businessco Inc. office park is a variation of "Office Park". (Comic by Drew. 2010. "Office Park off of Office Park," *Toothpaste for Dinner*, September 12.)²⁹

Just as much as the generic place to which the viewer is invited in image 2.1 might be anywhere and is everywhere, the street names shown in the map in image 2.2 are just as disorienting and meaningless in their homogeneity, suggesting that any specific place is indistinguishable from any other place and that the planners (and perhaps also the users and occupants of such places) lack imagination and commonsense. Each of the roads on the map is named some version of "Office Park" with the only differentiation coming in the naming of the street type—"road," "street," "avenue," "drive," etc. The character's unhappy facial expression suggests the absurd uselessness of these street names, which ought to be the orienting devices but which, instead, offer only further disorientation. This is not an uncommon naming convention in new suburban communities.³⁰ The joke is, then, that in being both too generic and too homogenous, all attempts at locating and specifying the landscape are rendered meaningless, useless, and disorienting. The figure with map in hand appears doomed to remain lost and confused.

Sociologist C. Wright Mills famously identified the *sociological imagination* as the capacity to recognize personal troubles as being inextricably entwined within larger social issues. For Mills (2000), the "sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society. That is its task and its promise" (6). As such, to be

²⁹ Image retrieved from <http://www.toothpastefordinner.com/>, December 10, 2010.

³⁰ I first became aware of this naming convention in Calgary, AB, where many of the newer suburban developments differentiate different streets not through street *names* but by the *naming of street types*. E.g. in Calgary's southeastern suburban development of Chaparral, road names include Chaparral Drive, Chaparral Way, Chaparral Place, Chaparral Common, Chaparral Park, Chaparral Circle, Chaparral Manor, Chaparral Grove, etc.

unable to understand one's situation as being bound up in larger social "issues" leaves one struggling with personal troubles that remain misrecognized and, for the most part, unsolvable. The expectation that individuals can make a fulsome human life in any environment and under any circumstances (Figure 1) is a refusal of the sociological imagination. Moreover, to understand the suburb as the secluded site of individual and familial life-making offers the decidedly *unsociologically* imagined solution to the traps of contemporary life through further withdrawal, greater isolation, and enforced individualization. By this token, it embodies a hope-killing dream of escape: In the face of large-scale issues *and* individual problems that seem inevitable and insurmountable, the suburb offers a pragmatic, if troublingly individualist (and individualizing) solution (as we will see in Figures 2 and 3; see also Chapter 6 discussion of retreat into interiority). It parcels out pieces of nature-like spaces for individual consumption, ruining the larger social and natural environment in the process (Figures 2 and 3; see also Chapters 5 and 7). It is envisioned as a good place inasmuch as it offers endlessly expandable and expendable storage space for more consumer commodities and more people, simultaneously offering escape from urban troubles and the problem of sociality (Figures 3 and 4; see also Chapter 5).

Figure 2: Suburb as (Cause of) Catastrophe

For many social and environmental justice-oriented urban designers, and activists, the suburb represents an unsustainable and failed site of the good life marked, for example, by segregation and exclusion, intolerance and conformity, secrecy and greedy self-interest, or minimally, by a visual uniformity that is thought to imply a more fundamental homogeneity and an imaginative deadness (Low 2003; Knox 2005; Kunstler 1993; Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Speck 2000; Putnam 2000; Mumford 1961; Whyte 1956). From this perspective, the suburb is a nightmare, a dystopia, a disappointment. Accordingly, the suburb understood in these terms—along with hyper-consumption and logic of separation that are its hallmark (Fishman 1987 and see Part II, below)—is at the heart of many global catastrophes including the recent and ongoing global financial crises, climate change and despoliation of the natural world, and the deepening immiseration of the worlds' poor and oppressed (see below, including the sample of rap lyrics;

and Diken 2004). All such injustices, it is thought, are necessary preconditions to make "the suburban lifestyle" possible (Dagger 2003; Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Speck 2000; *End of Suburbia* 2004; Thompson 2006). It is not only critics of the suburb who have this view, however. One defender and suburbanite goes so far as to suggest that the despoliation of nature brought about by the sprawl of new suburban development ought to be hailed as a supremely humane and optimistic achievement. Thus, he suggests that

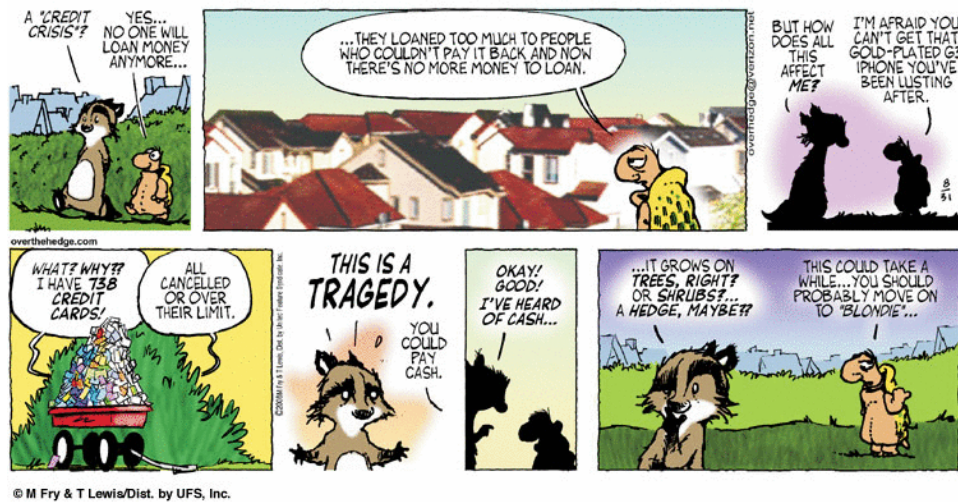
rather than decry urban sprawl, we might just want to celebrate it. Sure, new suburban development is all-too-often accompanied by growing pains, but those can be remedied. And anyway, what is really important is that new homes are about new families, new dreams, and the hope that the sacrifices of today—in paying down mortgages and raising up children—will lead to a brighter future.

In that light, every new home that is built, every new street that is carved out of forest, every new neighbourhood that asserts itself on the countryside, is a celebration of our humanity. And that is good. Let the sprawl go on! (O'Neill 2002, 8)

For this champion of the suburb, the material actualization of environmental destruction and degradation through sprawl are significantly less consequential than idealizations in the form of unspecified "new dreams," of "hope," of good living deferred to future reckoning, and of "humanity" understood as human domination.

The comic strip *Over the Hedge* and the "White Middle Class Suburban Man" sub-series of the comic strip *The City* offer social commentary on the single-minded self-interest and greedy consumerism, which they judge as being the indisputable motivators for suburbanization and the clear causes of social, economic and environmental disasters, which, for these social commentators, are the effects. These can be read as morality tales warning of the consequences of unsociological imagining. The comics in images 2.3 and 2.4 present caricatures as a critique of the kind of short-sighted and self-interested consumerism that brought about the ruinous social effects represented in image 2.3 and the environmental calamity of the mass expansion of the suburban homeownership ideal depicted in 2.4 and metaphorically and metonymically represented in image 2.5. Image 2.3 is a strip from the syndicated comic strip series *Over the Hedge*, about suburban life from the perspective of woodland animals whose habitat is encroached upon by the suburban expansion of human dwellings. In this strip, looking across a sea of suburban roof tops, Verne, the turtle, explains the credit crisis, to the racoon RJ who has completely bought into the consumer lifestyle:

OVER THE HEDGE
BY MICHAEL FRY & T LEWIS



2.0.3. Verne, the turtle, explains the U.S.A. mortgage crisis to the consumerist raccoon RJ. (Comic by Michael Fry and T Lewis. 2008. *Over the Hedge*, August 31.)³¹

RJ: A 'credit crisis'?

Verne: Yes... no one will loan money anymore... They loaned too much to people who couldn't pay it back and now there's no more money to loan.

RJ: But how does this affect me?

Verne: I'm afraid you can't get that gold-plated G3 iPhone you've been lusting after.

RJ: What? Why?? I have 738 credit cards!

Verne: All cancelled or over their limit.

RJ: This is a tragedy.

Verne: You could pay cash.

RJ: Okay! Good! I've heard of cash... ...It grows on trees, right? Or shrubs?... A hedge, maybe??

Verne [to reader]: This could take a while.... You should probably move on to "Blondie"...

Here, RJ stands in for and speak on behalf of the blithe consumerism the cartoonists represent as essentially characterizing suburban life. In contrast to the animals' vigorous dialogue and reflexivity, when humans appear in the strip, they are usually entirely and voraciously engrossed

³¹ Image retrieved from <http://www.nytt.no/dailystrips/dailystrips-2008.08.31.html>, April 6, 2009. For this and all subsequent comics in this chapter, text is transcribed left to right, top to bottom (or represented in a manner that attempts to be faithful to the individual comic's layout) with punctuation and emphasis approximated as closely as possible. Text of comic is reproduced in accompanying footnotes except when complete text is to be found in the accompanying caption or in-text.

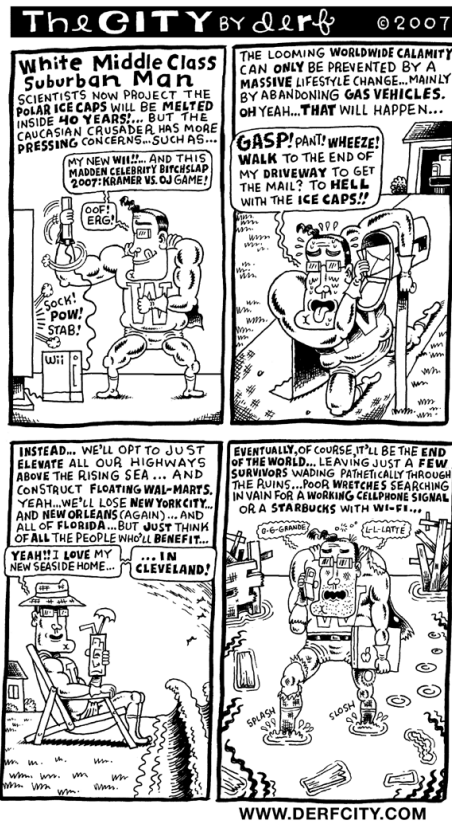
in their consumption—of food, goods, television—and oblivious both to being observed by the woodland animals and to the longer term effects of their excessive consumption, to which the animals in general, particularly Verne are much more acutely attuned. Yet, while Verne provides a voice of reason critical of consumerism, RJ revels in all aspects of suburban consumerism parodied by the strip, in particular regarding (passive) entertainment, (dependence on) technological gadgetry, (the gratuitous) accumulation of possessions, and (over-)eating: RJ prefers eating junk-food from the trashcans over foraging for food in the forest. He spends much of his time watching TV, playing videogames, or using one of his technological gadgets. And, he surrounds himself with stockpiles of assorted consumer goods, whether he uses them or not.

Just as RJ embodies the supposed desire and ignorance of a consumer culture that refuses to acknowledge or understand its own catastrophic effects, the figure of the white, middle class, heteronormative man, and the interests of this privileged group, are hyperbolically represented by the superhero figure White Middle Class Suburban Man (image 2.4),³² also described as the "caucasian crusader." Although this character is here, and in other instalments of the series, presented as an impotent buffoon, prone to extreme short-sightedness and irrationality, he nevertheless maintains his imperious, highly individualist superhero persona, unable to imagine collective-thinking, generosity, or an alternative lifestyle. In this strip, facing the catastrophic effects of climate change, Suburban Man refuses to change his ways even minimally:

The looming worldwide calamity can only be prevented by a massive lifestyle change... mainly by abandoning gas vehicles. Oh yeah... *that* will happen...
Suburban Man: Gasp! Pant! Wheeze! Walk to the end of my driveway to get the mail? To hell with the ice caps!!

Throughout his appearances in the strip, it is clear that his absurd reasoning and extreme fearfulness are not meant to be singular in their extremity but, rather, illustrative and representative, if exaggerated. Suburban Man is a mascot for maintaining privilege at any cost. He appears to speak in frank terms the usually unspoken or veiled individualist logic that Derf, the cartoonist, diagnoses as collectively having created the kind of calamitous disasters Suburban Man finds himself individually working through. In this case climate change, but in other instances, extreme suburbanization, economic recession and job loss, and other large-scale social and economic crises.

³² Henceforth shortened to "Suburban Man."



2.0.4. A commentary on the effects of global warming and the short-sighted opportunism of the privileged "White Middle Class Suburban Man" is here satirically represented as an impotent superhero. (Comic by Derf. 2007. *The City*, January 10.)³³

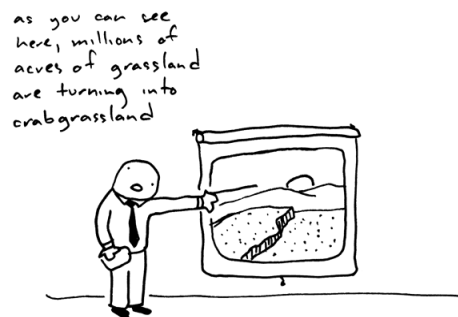
Regardless of how catastrophic the effects of global warming, Suburban Man continues to profit through short-sighted opportunism (his home in Cleveland is now beach front property as the

³³ Image retrieved from <http://www.gocomics.com/thecity>, November 19, 2010. Text reads:
 White Middle Class Suburban Man. Scientists now project the polar ice caps will be melted inside 40 years!... But the caucasian crusader has more pressing concerns... such as...
 Man: My new Wii!... And this *Madden Celebrity Bitchslap 2007: Kramer vs. OJ* game! Oof! Erg!
 The looming worldwide calamity can only be prevented by a massive lifestyle change... mainly by abandoning gas vehicles. Oh yeah... *that* will happen...
 Man: Gasp! Pant! Wheeze! Walk to the end of my driveway to get the mail? To hell with the ice caps!!
 Instead... we'll opt to just elevate all our highways above the rising sea... and construct floating Wal-Marts. Yeah... we'll lose New York City... and New Orleans (again)... and all of Florida... But just think of all the people who'll benefit...
 Man: Yeah!!! I love my new seaside home... ...in Cleveland!
 Eventually, of course, it'll just be the end of the world... Leaving just a few survivors wading pathetically through the ruins... Poor wretches searching in vain for a working cellphone signal or a Starbucks with wi-fi....
 Man: G-g-grande l-l-latté

eastern seaboard is now entirely underwater). He only recognizes the downside of cataclysmic global warming once it impedes his capacity to consume as usual:

Eventually, of course, it'll just be the end of the world... Leaving just a few survivors wading pathetically through the ruins... Poor wretches searching in vain for a working cellphone signal or a Starbucks with wi-fi....
Suburban Man: G-g-grande l-l-latté

Image 2.5 also presents a critique of the environmental transformation and degradation brought about by suburban growth. A man points to an image of landscape and indicates, "As you can see here, millions of acres of grassland are turning into crabgrassland." Crabgrass is a common synecdoche for the suburb.³⁴ In other words, wilderness environments are being replaced by suburban developments: grasslands are being replaced with grass lawns. The implied joke is that suburban development replaces already-existing nature with a newer, worse version.



2.0.5. "As you can see here, millions of acres of grassland are turning into crabgrassland." (Comic by Drew. 2009. "Eco Disaster," *Toothpaste for Dinner*, January 29.)

Figure 3: The Suburb and its Discontent: Suburban Malaise

While criticism of the suburb can and often does appear to be elitist denigration, much of it also comes from suburbanites themselves who feel frustrated by the conditions of suburban life.

Canadian indie-rock band Arcade Fire created an album, *The Suburbs*, on the theme of the experience of growing up in a suburb. The theme of being an insider, growing up or living in the

³⁴ See, for example, the classic pessimistic academic work on the suburb, Kenneth T. Jackson's *Crabgrass Frontiers*. The idea that the suburb also colonizes wild space, thus constituting the "frontier" is also common. Image retrieved from <http://www.toothpastefordinner.com/>, June 27, 2010.

suburb, is taken up in a wide variety of rock, pop, alternative, and punk music. As in many of these songs, Ben Folds, in "Rockin' the Suburbs," articulates the only-partially repressed anger of suburbanites who wanted and expected more from suburban life. Although his suburbanites sit at the peak of social privileges, they find themselves in a shallow, vapid world, pettily obsessed with such trivialities as lawn maintenance (visually satirized in image 2.6). There are two versions of "Rockin' the Suburbs." The 2001 version satirizes privileged suburban malaise. In this earlier version, Ben Folds, a white, alternative rock musician, sings from the first person perspective about an angst-driven, mediocre white, male rock musician who complains about and simultaneously capitalizes on his suburban lassitude, characterized by unearned privilege and a lack of true creativity or talent, which nevertheless does not impede his success:

Ya'll don't know what it's like
Being male, middle class and white
It gets me real pissed off and it makes me wanna say
Fuck (Folds 2001)

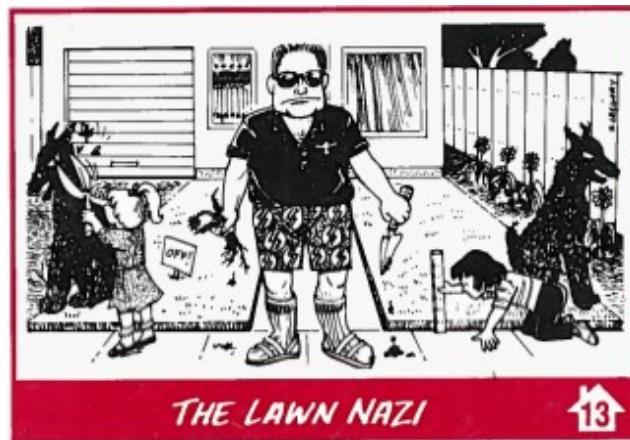
In 2006, Folds reworked the song for the soundtrack of *Over the Hedge*, an animated, feature film for a "family audience" about the intrusion of human development into wild nature and its intrusion back into the suburb, based on the comic strip (e.g. images 2.3, 3.13–3.15). This version downplays the satirization of the "white man's burden" of the original and focuses much more strongly on the dreary conditions of living in "the suburbs":

We're rocking the suburbs
Around the block just one more time
We're rocking the suburbs
Cause I can't tell which house is mine
We're rocking the suburbs
We part the shades and face the facts
They got better looking fescue³⁵
Right across the cul-de-sac (Folds 2006).

This version features a spoken-word solo by William Shatner who also voiced one of the animal characters in the film. The solo is comprised of one side of a conversation between a man, Bill, and his neighbour. Bill, about to leave for his anger management course, confronts his neighbour for not properly taking care of his newspapers (which have been piling up on the driveway), lawn (which is getting a little longer than neighbourhood regulations), and dog (whom Bill has

³⁵ Fescue is one of the common types of grass used to create lawn.

video-recorded strewing garbage around the neighbourhood). The confrontation escalates until Bill warns the neighbour that he may exercise his black-belt-level karate on the dog.³⁶ A similar parody of suburban discontent is at play in the comic in image 2.6. This comic is the thirteenth in a series of twenty-four art trading cards, *Mondo Suburbia*. Entitled "The Lawn Nazi," a white man stands in the centre of the image in front of his house and lawn. In the centre of the image stands a stocky, barrel-chested man. He looks like a caricature of a military man with his buzz-cut hair, strong jaw, and dark sunglasses. Wearing knee-high socks and sandals, he nevertheless appears tense and rigid. In one hand, he holds a trowel dripping soil and in the other a bunch of weeds, also dripping soil, apparently freshly pulled. The garish shorts he wears appear to be patterned with an encircled "SS" (i.e. Nazi) symbol while his black shirt (another Nazi reference) seems to bear a white cross. Behind him, two small, white children tend to landscaping. One child measures the height of the meticulously flat, rectangular lawn with a ruler while the other child trims one of two hedges, shaped like vicious dogs (perhaps another reference to the Nazis and their use of dogs). On the lawn is a sign that reads OFF! This man and his absurdly fascistically militant lawn perfectionism suggest the degree to which property maintenance and rigid conformist orderliness is imagined to matter in the suburban landscape.



2.0.6. "The Lawn Nazi." (Art card by Robert Gregory. 1990. *Mondo Suburbia!* trading cards, #13.)

This angry, resentful perspective of disaffected white, middle class suburban inhabitants (young men in particular) is much more explicitly articulated in punk rock. Punk emerged as a

³⁶ Lyrics, including Shatner's solo, is available at <http://www.lyricattack.com/soundtracks/o/overthehedgelyrics/rockinthesuburbslyrics.html>

response to and from within the post-industrial suburbs of the U.K. and U.S.A. (Moore 2004). Many punk rockers railed against the suburb as both the product and reproducers of what they identified as the dominant cultural values of mass consumerism, corporatism and individualist competition, and as the wasteland incubator of white, middle class, consumerist monoculture, boredom, vapidness, and fearfulness towards difference.³⁷ As Sociologist Ryan Moore (2004) describes, "many of these punk rock bands have personified the boredom and purposelessness of suburban youth socialized to be spectators and consumers, and the spastic flow of their music and musical careers dramatizes that fragmentation of experience" (307). Such personification is also evident in the use of first-person perspective in lyrics in songs like Dead Kennedys' (1982) "Terminal Preppie," in which the singer proclaims in fast-paced, insistent, unmelodic harsh staccato:

I go to college
That makes me so cool
I live in a dorm
And show off by the pool
I join the right clubs
Just to build an impression
I block out thinking
It won't get me ahead
My ambition in life
Is to look good on paper
All I want is a slot
In some big corporation
...
Some day I'll have power
Some day I'll have boats
A tract in some suburb
With Thanksgivings to host.

The rushed pace of the song, like a flow of noise punctuated by a circus-reminiscent kazoo, reflects the thoughtless, circus-like manic rush of the narrating preppie to acquire the expected experiences to propel him to the suburban good life—the terminus of the preppie's college life. Here, acquiring a suburban home is one item on an imagined, standard checklist of achievements that mark and sustain hegemonic privilege. In this and other punk songs of suburban critique, a

³⁷ For examples of songs that explicitly and directly critique the suburb, see ¡All-Time Quarterback!, ¡All-Time Quarterback!, Black Flag, *Damaged*; Dead Kennedys, *Plastic Surgery Disasters* and *Mutiny on the Bay*; Descendents, *Milo Goes to College*; Iggy Pop, *Zombie Birdhouse*; Screeching Weasel, *Boogadaboogadaboogada!*. See also Green Day, *American Idiot* (2004); Arcade Fire, *The Suburbs* (2010).

good life is the implied but unrealized promise of living according to such narrow, conformist rules of success. This notion of conformity and critique of the forfeiture of originality and individual-expression is more explicitly articulated in the Descendants' (1982) "Suburban Home", again in first-person narration. With its lyrical and musical repetition, occasional dips into a nostalgic, 1950s-reminiscent tune, this song leaves no doubt that it regards wanting a suburban home as equivalent and parallel to a desire to be utterly absorbed into a dehumanizing system of dominant desire:

I wanna be stereotyped.
I wanna be classified.
I wanna be masochistic.
I wanna be a statistic.
I wanna be a clone.
I wanna suburban home, suburban home, suburban home, suburban home,
suburban home.

One who desires a suburban life, in other words, desires no longer to desire, never to be an agentic, self-expressing individual with divergent, potentially revolutionary, needs and interests. The suburb, then, is a key element in a promised but unrealized and limited good life. For these punks, instead of a good life in a good place, the normative life course set through the suburb offers a bad place to live a not-fully human, non-expressive, alienated life of conformity, isolation, fearfulness, and, most importantly, of endless consumption.

From the insider perspective of these bored and angry, white, punk and rock men who act as cultural observers of their fellow suburban beneficiaries, the suburb is populated by a mass of cultural dupes and apolitical, atomized but not individuated interior-dwellers. In *Civilization and its Discontent*, Freud describes the paradox that civilization, intended to support and maintain happiness produces discontent in the individual by suppressing the individual's desires for the sake of the community. These artists of the suburb represent the suburb too as paradoxically producing discontent in creating a particular kind of configuration of life in which the collective good is sought through the conglomeration of individual, consumer goods, thereby suppressing true collectivity and community in favour of individual conformity.

Figure 4: Suburb as Culturally Central. Marginalized from the Peripheries

Criticism of the suburb also comes from, and on behalf of, oppressed and marginalised people who interpret the suburb to be the excluding landscape of privilege and the heart of cultural imperialism rather than of cultural impotence.³⁸ For example, even on the tundra of the Canadian Arctic, the stereotypical North American suburb is reproduced as houses surrounded by grassy lawn by the bureaucrats who move from southern Canada to administer the north. Despite the environmental difficulty and cultural foreignness of cultivating lawn in these conditions, native studies scholar Peter Kulchyski notes these "occupants of monster homes busily put time and energy in reproducing neat little square tracts of empty land, lawns: covering over the—to them—unsightly rock and cutting down the scrub pines to replace them with imperialist grass" (Kulchyski 2005, 73). Critique of the suburb as spatial metonym of cultural imperialism is found especially explicitly in North American rap. Many rappers dichotomously observe "the suburbs" as protected enclave spatialization of wealthy white privilege in contrast to their own home neighbourhoods as ghettoized spatialization of poor black oppression. This spatialized view of racial cultural imperialism is expressed broadly geographically—from members of the germinal gangsta rap group N.W.A. (Niggaz With Attitude) from Compton in southern California to rap mogul Jay-Z who came from Marcy, an inner-city public housing project in New York City. Addressing his fellow Marcy dwellers about his success in the music industry, bringing mainstream attention and sympathy to the struggles of the black impoverished population who deal drugs in order to survive, Jay-Z (1999) declares

I made it so, you could say Marcy and it was all good
I ain't crossover I brought the suburbs to the hood
Made 'em relate to your struggle, told 'em 'bout your hustle
Went on MTV with do-rags, I made them love you
You know normally them people wouldn't be fuckin' witchu
Til I made 'em understand why you do what you do.

³⁸ For more on the imperialist, racialized cultural meanings imbued into space, see Davis 2006; Lipsitz 2007 and 1995; Razack 2002; and Wacquant 2007. While Buffam (2011) shows that such spatial imaginaries strongly operate in the Canadian city of Edmonton, Walks and Bourne (2006) found no *actualized* settlement pattern reflecting ("US-style") "ghettoization" in Canadian cities. That is, in Canada, the presence of concentrated racialized populations alone does not directly or consistently correlate to concentration of poverty.

Ice Cube (1990), one of the original members of N.W.A., also contrasts the privileged white suburb to black impoverished space. Ice Cube's "AmeriKKKa's Most Wanted" implies that the white middle class's orientation to, fear of, and ignorance towards racial and class difference is the key behind the differential spatialization of the white suburb vis-à-vis all urban spaces beyond.:

It's time to take a trip to the suburbs
Let 'em see a nigga invasion
Point blank for the caucasian
Cock the hammer then crack that ol' smile
Take me to your house, pal.
Got to the house, my pockets got fat, see
Crack the safe, got the money and the jewelry.

The story continues three weeks later, when the narrator sees himself on TV as a wanted man. Intending to flee his home, he finds himself surrounded by "the feds," (federal law enforcement agents).

I got hassled and gaffled in the back seat
I think back when I was robbin' my own kind
The police didn't pay it no mind
But when I start robbin' the white folks
Now I'm in the pen...

Key to the socio-spatial differentiation for Ice Cube is that while (affluent) whites in the suburbs expect an absence of crime and State mediation of risk, blacks in poor areas can have no such expectation. From this view, the State is at the service of maintaining white supremacist privilege.

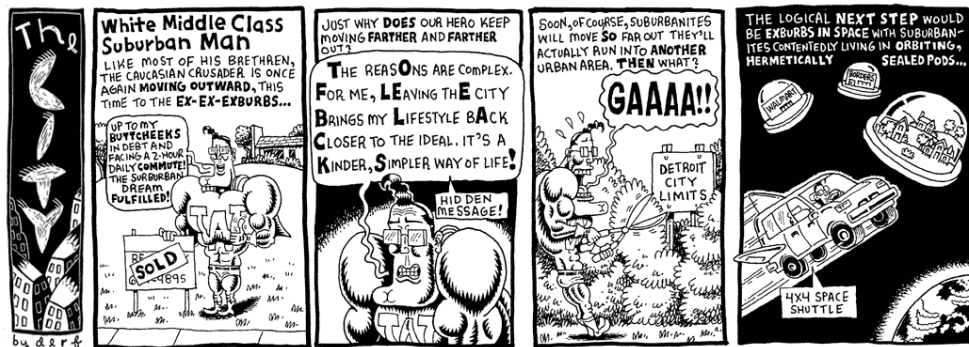
This perspective from the margins articulates a curious paradox of the North American suburban imaginary. While imagined (and often concretely manifest) as a peripheral space, at the margins of cities, where nothing happens, the suburb is, nevertheless, culturally (socially and politically) central. Those who are excluded from this spatially marginal cultural centre are thus paradoxically marginalized from and by the peripheries. Such a view of the suburb as both the spatialization and reproducer of unearned privilege amongst people oblivious or indifferent to the struggles and oppressions of marginalized people (sometimes more explicitly identified as the cause and perpetrator of these) is reiterated in rap, hip hop, and the resistance music of oppressed and marginalized black and indigenous people both in North America and around the world (Mitchell 2001).

In the comic in image 2.7, White Middle Class Suburban Man proposes the extent to which U.S. American white, middle class families will go in order to exclude themselves from urban life:

Like most of his brethren, the caucasian crusader is once again moving outward, this time to the ex-ex-exburbs...

Suburban Man: Up to my buttcheeks in debt and facing a 2-hour daily commute! The suburban dream fulfilled!

Suburban Man explains why he is willing to move to suburbs that are so far removed from the city centre that he will need to endure long commutes and greater debt. Overtly, he states that "The reasons are complex. For me, leaving the city brings my lifestyle back closer to the ideal. It's a kinder, simpler way of life!" However, his statement contains a "hidden" message. The hidden message, written in bold letters interspersed within the overt message, reads "TO FLEE BLACKS!"



2.0.7. The extent to which "White Middle Class Suburban Man," will go in order to self-exclude from urban life, and in particular, avoid blacks—colonizing space. (Comic by Derf. *The City*, n.d.)³⁹

³⁹ Image retrieved from <http://www.derfcity.com/cityarchive/wmcsman/wmcsman4.html>, November 19, 2010. Text reads:

White Middle Class Suburban Man. Like most of his brethren, the caucasian crusader is once again moving outward, this time to the ex-ex-exburbs...
 Man: Up to my buttcheeks in debt and facing a 2-hour daily commute! The suburban dream fulfilled!
 Just why *does* our hero keep moving *farther* and *farther* out?
 Man: The reasons are complex. For me, leaving the city brings my lifestyle back closer to the ideal. It's a kinder, simpler way of life!
 Hidden message! [The semi-hidden message reads: "to flee blacks!"]
 Soon, of course, suburbanites will move *so* far out they'll actually run into *another* urban area. Then what?
 Man: Gaaa!!
 The logical *next step* would be *exurbs in space* with suburbanites contentedly living in *orbiting hermetically sealed pods*...

Running out of space to suburbanize around his city's peripheries due to the simultaneous outward expansion of neighbouring cities, Suburban Man goes so far as to colonize space. But he is not the only one. The last panel shows him driving his SUV, configured as a rocket, driving through the "ex-ex-exburbs" in which "hermetically sealed pods" containing private residential homes orbit around the Earth, creating a planetary suburb. It is clear that as excessive as the "caucasian crusader" is presented, the many other neighbours already orbiting the Earth in these pods must also share his desire to capitalize on the freedoms and rights associated with suburban homeownership—to live "a kinder, simpler way of life"—but flee the citizenly responsibilities of participating in the social life and woes of the city centre, categorically identified with its black population.

This is perhaps where detractors and defenders of the suburb differ most fundamentally: Where defenders see the suburbs as lively, viable, adaptive places, and especially as sites rife with potentiality for future good living, detractors see adaptation of and to mass-produced suburbs to be rather palliative for a social and physical landscape that is doomed and damning, and particularly in the present-time of everyday living.

Figure 5: "The" Suburb

This problem of judgment—that is, of ambivalence arising when trying to make definitive judgments about the suburb—is one that emerges precisely as a result of trying to narrate a definitive history of *the* suburb as if it is a singular entity, and moreover, of attempting to create a single, universal definition of this "thing". The suburb is far more complex.

Interestingly, although there is an increasing quantity of suburban scholarship that specifically problematizes both of the practices of narrowly defining the suburb and of articulating a precise singular history,⁴⁰ the drive to narrate a suburban cosmology seems irresistible. The first question still typically asked in suburban studies continues to be "what is the suburb?" with the implied answer requiring some kind of historiography tracing the suburb's

⁴⁰ See, for example, McManus and Ethington 2007; Nicolaidis and Wiese 2006; *Harvard Law Review* 2003; Wunsch 1995; Bourne 1996.

origins.⁴¹ As there is no consensus on what constitutes the suburb, there can be no consensus on the history or origins of the suburb. Although most often taken to be the official history of "the suburb," the history of the emergence of a particular spatial form of development and settlement (e.g. subdivided, low density, single-family residential development) is only one of many ways of narrating the history of the suburb—only some of which are primarily physical. It can also be traced as the expression of, to name but a few we encounter in this chapter: a peculiar interpretive relationship to the city and/or to "nature"; a particular orientation to culture, to the social and/or to the political; spatialized class-, race-, gender-, generational-, familial-, and/or temporal-ideologies; and others. Terms relating to the suburb—including *suburbia* or *the suburbs* as well as the description *suburban*—apply to a proliferation of possible referents. Given this complexity, how might we proceed in defining the suburb? Contemporary critical suburban scholars note that defining the suburb is a difficult and contentious activity, if for no other reason than that the description has been applied to so many different kinds of built forms, let alone styles of life, motivations, and even individual experiences and expectations. In recognition of this complexity, many contemporary scholars suggest that it may not make sense to speak of "the suburbs" at all. In a recent article entitled "Do the Suburbs Exist?", Vaughan et al. (2009) note that the question posed in the title "is intended to draw attention to the epistemological fragility of the term 'suburb'" (475). That is, while they acknowledge that suburbs do exist in the material world, they are concerned that "[b]eyond the most perfunctory level of definition, it is far from clear as to what this term actually means or indeed, whether it can be thought to possess meaning at all" (475). They aptly recommend a greater recognition of the complexity of the suburb. In addition, they suggest that future scholarship should include both increased specificity in discussions and studies of the suburbs as to what particular kind of suburb is being studied and a more intentional and explicit engagement with the *built form* of the suburbs. But, as this recommendation itself suggests, the built form of the suburb is multiple.

Some historians and urban scholars suggest the proper origin of the contemporary suburb—that is, suburbs as we know them today—is firmly fixed in the mid-twentieth century,

⁴¹ For discussions about the proliferating suburban literature, including critique and cultural depictions as well as comments about this proliferation, see Sies 2001; Nicolaidis and Wiese 2006; Vaughan et al. 2009. See Dines and Vermeulen (2013) for a discussion of critical suburban studies, which they term "New Suburban History" (1).

post Second World War United States (Kunstler 1993, Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Speck 2000)⁴². For them, this is the era in which the "modern," mass consumer, automobile-dominated suburb arose, distinct from any prior form of suburbanization (Lang, LeFurgy, and Nelson 2006). A version of this also tends to be the popularly understood history of the suburb (e.g. O'Grady 2005; Leinberger 2008).

Suburban scholars like Robert Fishman (1987) and Dolores Hayden (2003) argue that the history of the contemporary suburb actually properly began earlier—sometime in the late 18th to mid 19th centuries as an effect of the Industrial Revolution in England. This is a view supported by such observers from the time as Friedrich Engels (1987, originally published 1845) who described the emerging layout of British cities and towns of the early-mid nineteenth century, reacting to industrialization. He found that the cities and their surrounding area were not only socially segregated into classes, but that the class divisions were spatially organized. Thus, in Manchester

by unconscious tacit agreement, as well as with outspoken conscious determination, the working people's quarters are sharply separated from the sections of the city reserved for the middle class; or, if this does not succeed, they are concealed with the cloak of charity. Manchester contains, at its heart, a rather extended commercial district, perhaps half a mile long and about as broad, and consisting almost wholly of offices and warehouses. Nearly the whole district is abandoned by dwellers, and is lonely and deserted at night.... With the exception of this commercial district, all Manchester proper ... are all unmixed working people's quarters, stretching like a girdle, averaging a mile and a half in breadth, around the commercial district. Outside, beyond this girdle, lives the upper and middle bourgeoisie, the middle bourgeoisie in regularly laid out streets in the vicinity of the working quarters...; the upper bourgeoisie in remoter villas with gardens...in free, wholesome country air, in fine, comfortable homes, passed once every half or quarter hour by omnibuses going into the city. And the finest part of the arrangements is this, that the members of this money aristocracy can take the shortest road through the middle of all the labouring districts to their places of business, without ever seeing that they are in the midst of the grimy misery that lurks to the right and the left (Engels 1987, 85–86).

The first such middle class suburbs skirted around London during this era as a solution for wealthy businessmen to maintain close ties to the work of the city while escaping its noxious

⁴² Suburban historian Dolores Hayden (2003)—who does not subscribe to the mid-twentieth century model of suburban history—describes this version of suburban development as "sitcom suburbs," referring to the growing cultural importance of the TV within the suburb in this era as well as the frequent depiction of the era's suburbs in these shows. Others have addressed the cultural significance of popular media, particularly television, in this era—including the physical television set as a window to the outside world. See Spigel 2001; Marling 1994; Taylor 1989.

effects (Fishman 1987; Archer 1988). Helping to create the ideological conditions for this development were changes in the understanding of nature (Berlin 1999; Harris and Larkham 1999, 4), of the family (Miller 1995; Stone 1977), and of gender relations (Archer 1988; Hayden 2003). Both nature and the family were coming to be seen as a retreat from the harsh, alienating circumstances of contemporary urban life, which was focused on business and industry, and as a respite for the over-taxed soul of the middle class, male breadwinner (Fishman 1987). Moreover, in order for such spatial separation of men's work and leisure time, women and men's work and domestic roles first had to be differentiated (Archer 1988).

According to this version of the suburb's history, the modern suburb began to emerge around the 1800s (first in England and then in the U.S.A.). The middle classes began building houses at a remove from the city in order to maximize the physically and "morally" healthful benefits of private domestic dwelling amidst (cultivated) nature and away from the hustle and pollution of the city. Yet, this commutable distance still allowed businessmen to stay engaged with city commerce (while wives stayed home to nurture morally and physically healthy children) (Fishman 1987). This physical and social development was conceptually allowed by emerging post-Enlightenment Romantic ideas about the beneficence of contact with nature; ideology of the individual (Archer 1988); the need for moral, physical and spiritual health and sanitation (Fishman 1987, 18–38); and, the supremacy of the romantic family and domesticity (Hayden 2003, 4–9).⁴³

Some scholars trace suburban origins even farther back, however. Anthony King (1984) argues that the origins of distinctly suburban architecture and a suburban orientation to the home emerged from the British colonisation of India and the importation and adaptation of the bungalow-style house to England and its subsequent exportation throughout the colonies. Meanwhile, John Archer (2005) argues that suburban architecture finds its origins in 1600s Italy when the house began to be understood as a reflection of the homeowner's identity rather than the execution of architectural typologies. For Archer, the contemporary residential suburb is the large-scale articulation of the ideal of the home as the culmination of the strong aspirational ideologies of private property and individual selfhood—ideologies that Archer traces to seventeenth-century England and political philosopher John Locke in particular.

⁴³ See also Archer 1988; Nicolaides and Wiese 2006.

Many urban and suburban scholars argue that if we are to understand the suburb to be peripheral settlement around a city, then it has existed at least as long as there have been cities or settlements (e.g. Archer 1997; Bourne 1996; Harris and Larkham 1999; Mattingly 1997; Mumford 1961; Nicolaides and Wiese 2006). The suburb accompanied a more central settlement of dwelling and commerce as a spatially peripheral site for noxious industry and for the dwelling of those who engaged in such activity as well as those who were too poor to be able to afford urban taxes, facilities, or protection (Harris and Larkham 1999, 3–4). In general, it was considered both spatially and morally sub-urban (i.e. subordinate to the city) (Bourne 1996). As early as the fourteenth century, Geoffrey Chaucer (1999) mentions such a notion of the sub-urb in *Canterbury Tales*:

Where do you dwell, if you may tell it me?
Within the suburbs of a town, said he,
Lurking in corners and in alleys blind,
Wherein these thieves and robbers, every kind,
Have all their privy fearful residence,
As those who dare not show men their presence
So do we live, if I'm to tell the truth (chapter 48, lines 103–109).

It is likely that such a negative view of the suburb as a dangerous, dirty place in which were to be found "the underclasses and outcasts who could not afford the privilege and safety of living within the city itself" probably goes back as far as the term's Latin origins (McManus and Ethington 2007, 320). Its negative assessment changed only in the nineteenth century when the aristocratic ideal of living in the country transformed into the middle class ideal of suburban living (McManus and Ethington 2007). Although the trend of moving into the suburb as a desirable choice for dwelling began approximately in the mid-nineteenth century, its ideological preconditions developed over an even longer period of time. But, it was the shift in ideological status of the suburb, along with accommodating policy and infrastructural expansion towards mass-production in the early to mid-twentieth century that ultimately saw the explosion of this ideal as a mass consumable.

Anthony King (2004) narrates a tidy summary of the suburban history, importantly highlighting its etymological history:

The term 'suburb', as well as the phenomenon it represents, has been around at least since the fourteenth century. However, the massive expansion of suburbs in modern Western cities was principally a nineteenth- and early twentieth-century occurrence. ...The notion that the suburb generates a particular style of life has, however, been especially asserted

from the late nineteenth century, a time (1895) when the word 'suburbia' is first identified by the Oxford English Dictionary (98–9).

As King's description makes clear, it is the particular understanding of the term that suggests its history. Ultimately, the origins of the suburb is not so much a question of historical precision as one of categorical or even ontological definition. To tell the story of the suburb means making up the suburb as we go.

In addition to this multiplicity of expressions of the material landscape and built form of the suburb, there is the added complexity of the social and cultural forms ("suburbia" and "suburbanisms"), as well as of the various suburban representations:

All of us carry images in our heads that encapsulate ideas about "the suburbs." Say the word, and we may see ... the towns where we live, or came of age, or those to which we aspire. Just as likely, our images may spring from mass media: from *Father Knows Best* and *The Brady Bunch* to *South Park*, *The Boondocks*, and *American Beauty* (Nicolaidis and Wiese 2006, 7).

The suburb is, then, "a geographical, an architectural and a social space, ... an idea and ideology, ... form and content of texts and images and ... product of a multitude of social and cultural practices" (Silverstone 1997, ix). Thus, the multiplicity of material landscapes and built forms ("the suburbs"), and the social and cultural forms and characteristics ("suburbia" and "suburbanisms") contribute to a larger complex of the suburb as combinations of fictions, realities, ideas, and materialisations. As contemporary critical suburban scholars are advocating, suburbs are more than a specific sort of spatial configuration or relation, more than particular lifestyles.⁴⁴ They are not simply an ideal or myth like the "American dream." They are more than their representations. They are not a particular kind of people, activity, or morality. Like all places, suburbs are an ever-changing combinations of these.

Suburban spatializations change over time and occupy different relative positions within urban landscapes. The ways it is occupied, inhabited and used are various, reflecting the many different reasons, intentions, desires, purposes and needs of those who inhabit, cross through, use or do not use suburban spaces. Thus, the spatial idea of the suburb is understood and

⁴⁴ Dines and Vermeulen (2013) refer to these scholars as engaging in the "New Suburban History." These scholars include John Archer, Mark Clapson, Becky Nicolaidis, Andrew Wiese, Roger Silverstone, as well as the Cultures of the Suburbs International Research Network (based in Exeter University, U.K.), the Centre for Suburban Studies (based in Kingston University, U.K.), and the National Center for Suburban Studies at Hofstra University (U.S.A.).

conceptually mobilised in different contexts for different cultural, political, personal and imaginative purposes. The ways that the suburb is heterogeneous as a space in turn creates and is created by the people who constitute the suburb. There is, then, a "soft" side to the "hard" spatial infrastructure that defines what we identify as the suburb and these interpenetrate and interrelate to each other.

Yet, for all this variety and difficulty in pinning down what is specifically suburban, there are some characteristics that seem particularly prone to reiteration in dominant cultural representations of suburbs. Amongst these tropes that have come to form a common understanding of the suburb are "a low-density, residential environment on the outskirts of larger cities, occupied primarily by families of similar class and race, with plenty of trees and grass" (Nicolaides and Wiese 2006, 7). In their introduction to *The Suburb Reader*, editors Becky Nicolaides and Andrew Wiese (2006) cite Kenneth T. Jackson's one-sentence description of the American suburb as paradigmatic of what they term the "common sense" definition: "affluent and middle-class Americans live in suburban areas that are far from their places of work, in homes that they own, and in the center of yards that by urban standards elsewhere are enormous" (7, quoting Jackson). They make explicit the assumption that remains implicit in Jackson's description "that suburbs are likely to be white communities. For most of their history, suburbs have been associated, by scholars and ordinary citizens alike, with the white middle class" (Nicolaides and Wiese 2006, 7; see also Barraclough 2011; Fogelson 2005; Jurca 2001; Tongson 2011). And, as we have already seen, this image of the suburb as a space of whiteness, heteronormativity, and class privilege is echoed by those who are thereby unhappily excluded as well as by those who are unhappily included.

For North Americans, thinking of the suburb as a social spatialization in opposition to that of the imagined inner-city "hood" or "ghetto" has acquired a taken-for-granted commonsense. But, in France and Brazil, as contrasting illustrative cases, it is precisely what we can recognize as suburban, peripheral development (i.e. the *banlieues* of France and the *favelas* of Brazil) that are intersecting class- and race-based spaces of exclusion (Wacquant 2007). Just as black U.S. American anti-hegemonic rap and hip hop emerged from ghettos and inner city enclaves, railing against white suburban culture, it is out of the suburbs from which local French and Brazilian anti-oppressive and politically critical rap and music emerge (Meltzer and Shepherd 2006; Mitchell 2001), portrayed cinematically in such films as *La Haine* and *Favela*

Rising. Even within the U.S.A., however, amongst the most famous "ghettoes" and "hoods" from which rap emerged are suburbs: the City of Compton and South Central Los Angeles⁴⁵—both suburbs of L.A. Given their notorious gang reputations, it is perhaps surprising that from the 1960s to the 1980s, Compton had been a piece of the "American Dream" of suburban home ownership for middle-class blacks (Sides 2004). However, economic decline caused by deindustrialization in the region and white flight lead to a marginalization and impoverishment of middle class blacks and, eventually, the rise of gangs amongst the poor, alienated youth (Sides 2004). It was in the 1980s, especially with the release of N.W.A.'s *Straight Outta Compton*, that "Compton" became a metonym for disastrously poor, violent ghettoes for blacks (Sides 2004). But both Compton and South Central (the human geography of which can be seen in the 1991 film *Boyz n the Hood*) remain in their built form, nevertheless, suburbs of relatively attractive, low density, single-family housing.

South Central has never merely existed; it has been invented and imagined, erased and resurrected through an intersection of competing names, narratives, images, and geographic spaces, some real and some merely represented (Bennett 2010, 217).

The demographic of these neighbourhoods continue to change and the pull of affordable private home ownership attract immigrants to the area (Sims 2003; see also Ramón and Hunt 2010).

If we understand the suburb physically to be sites of low-density residential housing and/or peripheral in physical or imaginative geographic terms to a more central urban hub, then, no matter the specific characteristics of the occupying population, Compton and South Central are suburbs. If the suburb is, instead, defined as the space in which privilege is segregated and enclosed, then Compton cannot be considered to be a suburb while a wealthy enclave, even in the heart of downtown, like a luxury condominium building, could count as suburban. If instead of being defined as a spatialization, however, the suburb is rather defined as a *characterization* of a style of living based on a particular set of "suburban" values (as in Fishman 1987 and Archer 1988), then, for example, a middle class nuclear family could also be considered suburban no matter where they live, if they insist on sustaining that set of values. A literal example of such mobile suburbanism is *Glenn Martin, DDS*.⁴⁶ This U.S. American stop-motion TV show for adults is about a dentist who takes his nuclear family (wife, son, daughter, and pet dog) on the

⁴⁵ South Central is the former name of an area comprised of a number of neighbourhoods in and near the City of Los Angeles. It was renamed "South Los Angeles" in 2003 (Sims 2003, n.p.).

⁴⁶ This show, created by Alex Berger, Michael Eisner, and Eric Fogel, ran over two seasons from 2010–2011

road in a mobile home after he accidentally burns down their suburban home. The episodes tend to revolve around the various family members for the most part attempting to maintain or returning to stereotypical suburban tropes in values, behaviour, spatial and social division of labour, and social and familial roles despite being nomadic in a generic sense.

While the suburb as mobile may seem paradoxical since it is so often associated with such stability as to be boring and such care and maintenance of property as to be parodied as fanatical (as in image 2.6), for those who view the suburb as primarily defined by bourgeois values (Fishman 1987, Fogelson 2005, *Harvard Law Review* 2004; Baumgartner 1989; Barraclough 2011), suburbanism is highly mobile.

Suburbs are also inextricably tied to the archetype of the suburban homeowner, who ... is perceived to possess a long-term stake in the community where his property lies. The irony of suburban stability, however, lies in the fact that the suburb is also bound to the concept of physical and socioeconomic mobility. Suburbs were essentially constructed for those who were able to move, marketed to those who were willing to do so, and defined by the hypermobile who were eager to escape the city before anyone else. With mobility ingrained into the very idea of the suburb, it is not surprising that the suburb continues to slip and sprawl along the metropolitan landscape (*Harvard Law Review* 2004, 2006–07).

While this is a highly particular kind of history of the suburb generalized to all kinds of suburbs, it concisely gets at the apparent paradox of suburban mobility, and a reorientation to more abstract concerns. Thus, for urban and suburban historians attuned to changes in the *meaning* of places over time, the suburb moves with changing economic and political conditions. Describing this process in Montréal through the first half of the twentieth century, suburban historian Robert Lewis (2002) notes that each "new growth cycle deposited new suburban areas and, in the process, transformed the meaning of what was central and what was suburb" (131; see also Nicolaides 2006). Such a process can result in urban sprawl (Davis 2006; Kiefer 2005). This mobility of the suburb as form and meaning is lampooned in image 2.7 in which "White Middle Class Suburban Man" must colonize space in order to maintain his isolation. The joke is also seen in the *Futurama* episode "The Route of All Evil".

"The Route of All Evil" is an episode of *Futurama*, an adult cartoon⁴⁷, set a thousand years in the future, in which contemporary social, cultural, environmental and political problems are magnified and generalized. In the episode, two boys from Earth deliver newspapers to earn money. Their paper route includes the suburban-like neighbourhood of Maple Craters, which

⁴⁷ Created by *The Simpsons* creator Matt Groening, *Futurama* aired 1999–2003, 2008–2013.

circles around an unspecified planet. In this suburb (or exurb—perhaps "ex-planet"?) each single-family detached house occupies its own asteroid (see image 2.8 and 2.9 for still-frames from this episode). Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's (1970) little prince also resides in this neighbourhood. There is a social commentary legible in this cultural reference. In Saint-Exupéry's book, the little prince's home asteroid is very isolated and extremely far away from Earth. It appears as a tiny dot in the night sky. Yet here, presumably after one thousand years of suburban expansion, his distant home is now engulfed within an interplanetary suburb whose newspapers are delivered daily by boys from Earth in their child-sized space-ship.



2.0.8. On their interplanetary paper route, Dwight (left, in rocket wagon) and Cubert pass *le petit prince* in the "suburban" neighbourhood of Maple Craters. (Still frame from "Route of all Evil," an episode of *Futurama*.)⁴⁸



2.0.9. Dwight and Cubert making their way through Maple Craters. (Still frame from "Route of all Evil," an episode of *Futurama*.)⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Image retrieved from <http://www.ugo.com/tv/every-sci-fi-reference-in-futurama>, September 19, 2013.

⁴⁹ Image retrieved from http://www.hwdyk.com/q/images/futurama_s03e12_09.jpg, September 19, 2013.

McManus and Ethington (2007) observe that suburban critique has tended to focus on the new developments and edges of the suburb (and as we have seen, this observation applies also to suburban satire such as in images 2.7, 2.8 and 2.9) rather than adequately addressing older suburbs. The most disparaged type of suburb tends to be the newest edge of development; however, the long history (or, *histories*) of the suburb means that there are many layers of built suburbs. Suburbs can also be acquired by cities: Not all suburbs are built as such but might be cities, towns or villages that become annexed as suburbs either officially or *de facto* by proximity and use. (This is something that Engels (1987) observed already in the towns surrounding industrializing British cities of the 1800s.) The proliferation of "megacity" slum sprawl can be understood to be suburban as can the proliferation of wealthy gated communities (see Diken 2004; Davis 2006). The specific physical manifestations of the suburb are multiple and heterogeneous. As Sies (2001) notes, "suburbs come in a diverse range of densities, planning forms, land use mixes, and relationships to nearby urbanized areas and ... they may boast a confusing array of dwelling types and costs" (316).⁵⁰ Recognizing the rich history of both the suburb and suburban scholarship, McManus and Ethington (2007), drawing on Harris and Larkham (1999), propose a set of seven "key definitional variables" by which suburbs might be identified:

Peripheral location (at least initially, the suburb is located at the edge of the urban core); *Relationship to urban core* (functional dependence, sometimes with political independence); *Relationship to the countryside* (particularly in the nineteenth century, suburbanization was linked to the Romantic/Picturesque Movement and aspirations of country living); *Density* (relative to the urban core); *Housing type* (most commonly single-family dwellings with gardens); *Social (class, race, ethnic) segregation*; *Transportation* (commuting relationship to core); *Cultural formations* (utopian ideal 'middle landscape' and private romantic paradise versus dystopian nature-devouring 'sprawl', vacuous aesthetic wasteland, anti-intellectual, intolerant, etc.) (McManus and Ethington 2007, 321, emphasis in original).

This list of suburban variables comprehensively identifies the key categories by which suburbanity is recognizable. Being only a list of categories of characteristics, rather than specific

⁵⁰ Roger Keil and the Global Suburbanisms project (a Major Collaborative Research Initiative funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada) seek to address this complexity to a certain degree by distinguishing between the spatial and social processes related to the suburban form. Thus, for their project, *suburbanization* is the physical reproduction of suburban forms while *suburbanism* refers to the "qualitatively distinct 'suburban ways of life,'" which is premised on the observation that "Unique land-use patterns of suburbs, relative to the central city engender differing social and cultural norms of suburban life" (Ekers, Hamel, and Keil 2012, 307). See also Walks 2013.

characteristics (like Jackson's description, earlier), sustains the multiplicity of the suburb.

Suburban Value

Much of the definitional problem comes from understanding the suburb too strictly as places or a kind of place or as only one lifestyle or one demographic—particularly white and (loosely understood) "middle class." But, as with any other kind of social place, the suburb is an on-going dialectical spatial *production*, better described as *spatialization*—an on-going process. And, like other spatializations, the on-going production of the suburb is obscure, or effaced, and its status as a seemingly obvious category of place is taken-for-granted. This is because, as Rob Shields (1991) explains, in our inheritance of Enlightenment thinking, Western perspectives treat space as a *concrete abstraction* rather than as a dialectical process (1991, 50; see also Stanek 2008):

the modern Western understanding of 'space' is itself a materially produced form, a *concrete abstraction*—in the same sense as Marx's understanding of the commodity. Space is neither a substance nor a 'reality' but only becomes fetishised as such. ...[S]ocial space as a *form* is a '*concrete abstraction*' of its contents and its production by a *society*.... But, the spatial is also a condensation of the social relations of its production (Shields 1991, 51).

The suburb is, then, a space enacted through social and individual life, conditioned by sensory perception of material and relational characteristics and contingencies. That is, the suburb is, at least in partial measure, the way space is perceived in a particular, suburban way. It is, however, also comprised of the representations of the suburb. It is imbued with ideas, idealizations, myths, and visions about what kind of place it is, can be, should be, and must be (in particular, from the perspective of hegemony). It is as a spatial imaginary, with this understanding of space as a production, that the suburb can be understood. The suburb is a spatialization that is produced by a dialectic of perceived space (how suburbs are materialized), conceived space (how suburbs are represented in particular ways) and lived space (how suburbs are spaces that can be imagined otherwise and represented as such). The "absolute spaces" of the suburb are only one element of a larger, spatial imaginary. It is a spatial imaginary because space is reified (i.e. made to be as if it were a thing) only in the imagination. Because space is always dialectically produced,

particular spaces, like the suburb, must also be understood as imaginary—only a "thing" while being imagined as such during a moment of imagining the dialectic at rest.

Attending to the suburb as material, lived, and imagined, and attentive to the problems of judgment that arise out of focusing too much on the separation and over-emphasis on any one of these, I suggest it is not so much a disagreement over what marks the suburb but rather over how the suburb marks: a rift between the interpretations of the *meaning* of the suburb. Defenders and detractors disagree on whether the suburb is dystopian or utopian but they do not generally disagree on whether the suburb is a site of normalcy on the edges of the city, even if they do not agree on how to judge this normalcy. They do not tend to disagree that the suburb reaches ever outward, even if there is disagreement on whether this constitutes "sprawl," or whether sprawl must always be understood as "bad" (Bogart 2006).

The disagreement is one of interpretation of the *value* of the suburb. As such, it is important to consider that there is more to judgments of the suburb—both affirming and critical—than meets the eye, notwithstanding the usual palliative and reactionary defences of the suburb. Of course, there is certainly a great deal of negative judgment about suburbs—indeed Kathleen Stewart (2010) notes that the "air is full of sneering stereotypes" (50). This affectively-laden "sneering" scoffs at "clichés of conformity and isolation" (50). For Stewart, such self-righteous derision misses what's "really" going on, taking the clichés for truth:

There's also something more basic about how the dream world is desirable precisely because it only goes so far. And something about how that dream wants to be sutured to the moment when things snap together. It's like flexing one's watching and waiting muscles, keeping them limber. And it's just as attuned to the possibility that things will fall apart, the elements dissipating or recombining into something else. Not exactly "passive," it's hypervigilant and always building itself up to the intensity where action can become reaction (50).⁵¹

Taking a cue from Stewart's watchful, subtle appreciation for what is derided, I would like to suggest that even the sneering and derision might be considered with an interested attentiveness. In addition to "sneering" being an affective orientation to the suburb, then, perhaps it might also serve as a mask for a vulnerability and longing. What too-quick judgments (of the suburb as bad

⁵¹ Stewart's comments are specifically about gated communities; however, her observations are generally applicable to the broader category of suburbs since gated communities can be understood as suburban subset.

place or, even, good place) might be covering over is that the question of judgment is fundamentally a problem of happiness and the good life. How, if at all, can the suburb, the site of so many ordinary lives, also be the site of a good life? It is to this problem that I turn in the next chapter.

Chapter 3.

Happiness and the Good Life: The Suburb as Spatialization of Happiness?

Can the suburb be understood to be a spatialization of happiness? In considering the question of the suburb and happiness, I am not interrogating whether the suburb is or is not happy or does or does not allow for happiness. Rather, in what ways is it imagined to promise, fulfil, or disappoint ideals of happiness and the good life? How is it represented as doing so? And, what constitutes these ideals? Although happiness and the good life are not precisely synonymous and the differences between these are important, for the purposes of this chapter, I attend to what they have in common, in providing a language of positive affect, hopeful promise, and actualized experience of flourishing.

The ideal of happiness is a key recurring but deeply problematic trope in the suburban imaginary. Happiness appears as if it is easily recognisable and uncontested and that it is unquestionably desirable. But, although happiness seems to be universal and self-evidently good, such an appeal to universality is troubling: To take happiness as universal obscures that it is

ideologically imbued. And, placing happiness as definitive of the suburban imaginary masks the vast amount of preparatory work that is done to make the suburb appear to be the site of happiness realised. As we know from personal experience, statistics, news stories and cultural representations, the suburb is, at best, a deeply ambivalent affective landscape, not one singularly marked or lived as "happy"—and often one that is unhappy or prevents happiness. Moreover, as I have argued in the previous chapter, the judgment about the meaning and value of the suburb remain contested. Nevertheless, the suburb as a spatialization of happiness continues to be a powerful and persistent trope of the suburban imaginary. In this chapter, I will look to cartoons for representations of suburban happiness. However, before turning to these examples of the suburban imaginary, I first consider the question of happiness itself. In trying to define the "happiness" of the suburb and consider whether the suburb is capable of fostering the good life, it would be useful to ask what is happiness? How are we to understand the good life?

"Happy"? Eudaimonia and Hedonism as Versions of Happiness

There are a host of philosophers, psychologists, economists, cultural scholars, artists, comedians, writers, self-help gurus, etc. in the business of happiness.⁵² The academic fields generally most explicitly concerned with the question of happiness are philosophy and psychology. Regarding the status of happiness in philosophy, Ahmed (2010) muses: "the history of philosophy could be described as a history of happiness. Happiness could even be described as the only philosophical teleology that has not been called into question within philosophy" (15). For Ahmed, philosophy is, beyond the formal body of philosophical texts, also a "'happiness archive': a set of ideas, thoughts, narratives, images, impressions about what is happiness" (15). In psychology, recently and most directly, the subfield of positive psychology has emerged specifically addressing the question of happiness. Building especially on the work of Ed Diener (see Diener 2009), positive

⁵² For summaries of this happiness industry, see Ahmed 2010; Kingwell 1998; and McGill 1967. A few examples include documentaries on the topic (e.g. *How to Be Happy* and *Happy*); Gretchen Rubin's popular blog and bestselling book *The Happiness Project*; Eric Weiner's *The Geography of Bliss*; interest in Bhutan's Gross Happiness Index; the OECD's "The Better Life Index," which measures happiness across the globe; the U.S.A. government-funded "World Values Survey" of global happiness—a longitudinal study that tracks global levels of happiness and where the happiest country on Earth is; *Psychology Today*'s website's dedicated section on happiness, etc.

psychology is dedicated to the problem of how to achieve well-being. It is the basis of much of the massive contemporary popular literature on how to be happy or happier and how to measure it.

The most influential philosophical articulation of the problem of how to define happiness (that is, the good life) is Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle posited happiness as the ultimate "good"—i.e. an end, or goal of human striving, which is not itself a means to another end. Since Aristotle and still typically, happiness is described along a spectrum ranging between enjoyment or pleasure and *eudaimonia*. For Aristotle (1962), there are three kinds of lives: the common life, the political life and the contemplative life (8). Aristotle notes that it can only be expected that people derive their understanding of what counts as happiness from the kind of life they lead. Happiness from the perspective of the "common run of people and the most vulgar" is a life of enjoyment: that is, material satisfaction and physical enjoyment (8). For the man who engages in political life (that is, men who are "[c]ultivated and active"), happiness is honour—although, in order to attempt to understand this good as an ultimate good (14), Aristotle takes this notion of honour to its further logical end as "excellence" (8; 22). In contrast to these other (lesser) forms of happiness is that form as defined by the man who lives a life of contemplation: *Eudaimonia*, "the good life," which is true happiness. Etymologically, the term *eudaimonia* is derived from (*eu*) good + (*daimon*) spirit (or force), reflecting that a good life depends in large part on good circumstances or good fortune beyond the individual's control. (Similarly in English, the *hap-*, meaning "chance", in *happy* acknowledges that happiness is at least in part circumstantial and a matter of fortune.) *Eudaimonia* is, then, contentment and satisfaction derived from a sober reflection upon one's well-lived, virtuous life, in which accomplishments reflect a contribution to greater (political, i.e. social) purpose, as well as good luck and a capacity to have made the most of that good luck.

While the primary focus of the *Nicomachean Ethics* is not obviously politics, nevertheless, for Aristotle (1962), a good life is only possible within the context of political and social life:

No one would choose to have all good things all by himself, for man is a social and political being and his natural condition is to live with others. Consequently, even a happy man needs society. ...[A] happy man needs friends (264).

Indeed, in defining happiness as the life in pursuit of the highest good, which is the "activity of the soul in conformity with virtue" (22), Aristotle begins his discussion by defining politics as the greater good.

the end of politics is the good for man. For even if the good is the same for the individual and the state, the good of the state clearly is the greater and more perfect thing to attain and to safeguard. The attainment of the good for one man alone is, to be sure, a source of satisfaction; yet to secure it for a nation and for states is nobler and more divine. In short, these are the aims of our investigation, which is in a sense an investigation of social and political matters (4–5).

In Aristotle's political and circumstantial understanding of *eudaimonia*, true happiness is only available to those who live within political circumstances, who have the capacity to engage with those politics, and who productively use their capacities to engage meaningfully in those politics. By this definition, most people (e.g. all women, children, and slaves) in Aristotle's historical context were precluded from even the possibility of being "happy" based on their circumstantial birth into the social order. Additionally, even if not precluded, a man could be excluded if he "lacks the wherewithal" or due to changes in fortune. Thus, a man who does not have a good birth, good children, or beauty "cannot be classified as altogether happy" (21). One whose children or friends are "worthless, or one who has lost good children and friends through death" is even unhappier (22). As such, to take Aristotle's *eudaimonia* seriously means to acknowledge that most people are categorically and permanently excluded from any possibility of true happiness (and from society) while many more become excluded through the vagaries of fortune.

Contemporary considerations of happiness, such as positive psychology, tend broadly to follow Aristotle's classical analysis of the notion. Thus, typically, they hold that true happiness and a truly good life can only come when one shifts one's goals from superficial pleasures to *eudaimonia*. Contemporary commentators of happiness use *hedonism* to refer to superficial material, physical and psychological pleasure while *eudaimonia* is well-being, which is a sense of contentment based on such things as the accomplishment of worthwhile goals, giving and sharing of oneself with others, and a capacity to overcome adversities (not the absence of adversities, which would be more hedonistic) (see Ryan and Deci 2001).⁵³ Unlike Aristotle's

⁵³ Psychologists Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci (2001) provide an overview of the psychological literature on well-being. They use "happiness" to describe hedonic conceptions of happiness and "well-being" to describe eudaimonic conceptions of happiness. That is, for them, happiness is not an ultimate good, but wholly equated with shallow pleasure.

resolutely social (albeit individually experienced) conceptualization of happiness, contemporary popular commentators interpret happiness as individual emotional or psychological achievements. Even aspects of *eudaimonia* that for Aristotle is based on luck (e.g. being born into and being sustained within the "right" social category) is a better or worse expression of agency for contemporary commentators.⁵⁴ Thus, bad circumstances must simply be reinterpreted or altered by the individual through a shift in attitude and effort. Nevertheless, importantly, in explaining or puzzling with the subject, this focus on happiness ultimately demonstrates how uncertain it is.

Ahmed differs from the vast majority of contemporary happiness-thinkers in doubting happiness itself as a desirable accomplishment. In doing so, she applies an important critical and sociological consideration to the "*happenstantial*" or "*daimonic*" conditions of happiness highlighted and taken as a matter of course by Aristotle and under-appreciated by contemporary proponents of *eudaimonia*. If this aspect of luck in happiness is socially defined and assigned, and if happiness must thus by definition exclude, she questions whether happiness or the desire for it is indeed universal: do we really all want to be happy? And, do we want to be happy in the same way?⁵⁵ What does it mean to *want* to be happy? Rather than resolving the problem of happiness by redefining what happiness should mean (i.e. *eudaimonia* rather than hedonism) or how one ought to live in order to align oneself with these definitions, Ahmed considers the work that happiness and the promise of happiness do. She does this by investigating "unhappy" subjects, those subjects who are thought to be trenchantly unhappy or to *cause* unhappiness: feminists, queers, and migrants. Along the same lines, Theodor Adorno also questioned happiness. For Adorno,

the idea of happiness can serve as a foil for the criticism of existing society and at the limit as an ideal to which existing society should live up (Finlayson 2009, 16).

Both Adorno and Ahmed recognize in happiness the work of ideology. The apparent universality of happiness is the subterfuge of ideological normativity. As such, the normativity of happiness

⁵⁴ Ryan and Deci (2001) interpret *daimon* as meaning one's own spirit: thus, "well-being [i.e. *eudaimonia*] consists of fulfilling or realizing one's daimon or true nature" (143).

⁵⁵ Aristotle's (1962) differentiation between the superficial forms of happiness—of worldly achievements such as wealth and fame or of physical enjoyment—and the deep and meaningful happiness of a good life is itself also a problematization of a universal conception of happiness. That is, he disambiguates the categories of happiness in order to show that the common-sense (i.e. common) understandings of happiness are flawed and imprecise.

must be problematized. Ahmed finds in this normativity that happiness is the cause of unhappiness. For Adorno, this problem of happiness, of living a good life, is one that cannot be happily resolved. For him,

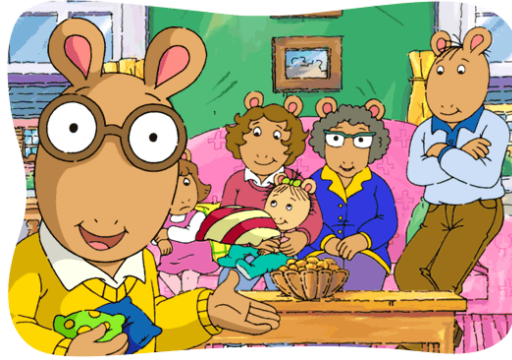
there is no right living in a false world and that currently we cannot so much as reliably form a positive conception of a good life or a good society (Finlayson 2009, 16).

I take up Ahmed's and Adorno's suspicions about happiness as my own guide to ambivalence on the question of suburban happiness.

Spatialization of Happiness

Figure 1: Happy suburban home

Where happiness is the dominant affective register in representations of the suburb, it is often the heteronormative nuclear family that acts as both the proper recipient and guarantor of happiness (Ahmed 2010). Obvious examples of this can be seen in sitcoms and children's shows on television where the circular, episodic rhythm of the medium returns the viewer and the represented world to a presumed normal state of happiness after a tribulation that presents a threat to the family's happiness. This role of televisual family happiness can be traced to the 1950s when TV "sold, through the episodic series, an image of desirable family life with consumption casually woven into the fabric of its stories" (Hayden 2003, 149, quoting Taylor 1989, 20). The family continues to be presented as largely unproblematically desirable and a source of happiness, reassurance, and love in such children's TV shows as *Arthur* (image 3.1), *Caillou* (image 3.2), *Clifford the Big Red Dog*, *Rolie Polie Olie* (image 3.3), and more.



3.0.1. Arthur and his family. (Image by Marc Brown.)⁵⁶



3.0.2. Caillou and his family. (Image copyright Cookie Jar Entertainment.)⁵⁷

Thus, for example, in *Rolie Polie Olie*, Olie is a robot boy who lives with his nuclear family (mother, father, and baby sister, plus their pet dog Spot) in a suburban neighbourhood on a robot planet comprised entirely of manufactured machines. Everything seems to be alive with (and through) happiness. Given that everyone and everything is a robot in this world, it is perhaps going too far to say that they are "alive" with happiness. Rather, perhaps they might more accurately be described as demonstrating a machinic semblance of aliveness. However, this is a show for young children and it is not at all clear that the robots are not genuinely alive, at least in the sense of having independent, innate organic sentience. Moreover, it is precisely the sense that everything is happy that gives each thing its liveliness. Almost every object that both comprises and is contained in Olie's world has expressive eyes that convey some level of sentience. Each thing and person continually bounces about in a general state of exuberance. Each thing in Olie's world actively works to facilitate the happiness of the family.

⁵⁶ Image retrieved from <http://pbskids.org/arthur/health/>, February 26, 2014.

⁵⁷ Image retrieved from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caillou>, June 7, 2014.



3.0.3. Rolie Polie Olie and his family. (Image copyright Cookie Jar Entertainment.)⁵⁸

If the happy family is at the centre of normativity (Ahmed 2010) and is spatially set in the happy family home, centred in, or rather distributed through, the suburbs, then the suburb can be understood to be a site of "happiness," a spatialization of happiness, or a space that makes happy.

But, what of those suburbanites for whom the family home does not provide a sufficient buffer of happiness, or for whom the family itself is the cause of unhappiness? We might ask, along with Ahmed (2010), "What happens when domestic bliss does not create bliss?" (76). Muddling the happy family image, there is also a common trope in popular culture, of discord as being normal in the suburban setting. Dysfunction amongst putatively "proper" suburbanites—white, middle class, able-bodied, heteronormatively reproductive families—acts as the driving force of narrative in each episode of many suburban family sitcoms including such popular adult cartoons like *The Simpsons*, *Family Guy*, and *South Park*. In these satirical shows, the happy family and the happy suburban community in which they are ensconced are both the source of and solution to the unhappiness of individuals. Fathers, mothers, children, and neighbours who attempt to fulfil their expected roles, respectively, as bread-winning patriarch, nurturing caretaker, embodiment of hopeful futurity, and supportive community, episodically fail in these endeavours. The unhappy individuals habitually find happiness in the acceptance of such failure. For example, a recurring theme in *The Simpsons* is a test of Homer and Marge Simpson's marriage. In particular, episodes take the perspective that it is unclear why (or unconvincing that)

⁵⁸ Image retrieved from <http://90sbabiesonly.com/rolie-polie-olie/>, June 7, 2014.

Marge continues not only to tolerate Homer but to love and support him. While Marge is competent, generous, and compassionate, Homer is a boorish, selfish simpleton. In the episode "Secrets of a Happy Marriage" (1994),⁵⁹ Homer gets a job as an adult education teacher where he maintains the interest of his students by sharing intimate secrets about Marge. When she finds out, she asks him not to share personal information with his class again, to which he reluctantly agrees. However, with little regard, he again shares even more personal information with his class. When she discovers this, Marge kicks him out of the family home. Echoing the standard line of dysfunctional families, she explains to her children, Bart and Lisa, that although she and Homer are going through a difficult time, both parents still love them. At this point in the episode, eight-year old Lisa confides to Bart that every time she worries about their parents, she adds to her ball of string in the attic. The viewers see the ball is so massive that it rolls onto and crushes the pet cat, suggesting that marital discord is frequent and that Lisa often worries for her parents' well-being. Homer takes up residence in Bart's treehouse in the backyard and descends into squalor and madness. Lisa advises Homer to try to remember the reason they stay together, which, she suggests, is the one thing that he gives Marge that no one else can. Eventually, Homer has an epiphany and begs Marge to take him back (see image 3.4):



3.0.4. Homer begs Marge to take him back after descending into filth and madness after a day of separation. (Still frame from "Secrets of a Happy Marriage," an episode of *The Simpsons*.)⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Thanks to Emily Snyder for reminding me of this episode.

⁶⁰ Image retrieved from http://simpsons.wikia.com/wiki/File:Secrets_of_a_Successful_Marriage_115.JPG, June 7, 2014.

Homer: I know now what I can offer you that no one else can—complete and utter dependence!!

Marge: Homer, that's not a good thing.

Homer: Are you kidding? It's a wondrous, marvelous thing. Marge, I need you more than anyone else on this entire planet could possibly ever need you! I need you to take care of me, to put up with me, and most of all I need you to love me, 'cause I love you.

Marge: But how do I know I can trust you?

Homer: Marge, look at me! We've been separated for a day, and I'm as dirty as a Frenchman. In another few hours I'll be dead! I can't afford to lose your trust again.

Marge: I must admit, you certainly do make a gal feel needed (*The Simpsons* 1994).

Marge takes him back, the marital problem is resolved without Homer making any real change, except his realization that he is utterly dependent upon Marge, and the family is restored back to its unhappy happiness. It is now explicit that the thing that keeps the happy marriage together is precisely what makes it an unhappy relationship: not only must Marge care for and love Homer simply because he wants and needs her to, but his promise of confidentiality is predicated on her maintaining his survival. The happiness promised by the family and the suburb is not precisely a happy happiness. The suburb can be, even for these normative, ordinary families, an unhappily happy place, or a happily unhappy place.

Figure 2: Happy suburban nature

For some suburbanites, the suburb enables happiness and the good life when it fosters a sense of wonder and an appreciation of the beauty of a nurturing nature, illustrated in a few comics that have a very loving, affirming relationship to the suburb (see image 3.5). Most comic strips that feature the suburb tend either to skewer it, as in the examples in Chapter 2,⁶¹ or simply treat it as an unexceptional backdrop— such as comic strips focusing on the domestic sphere like *Dennis the Menace*, *Family Circus*, *Fox Trot*, *For Better or For Worse*, *Garfield*, *Marmaduke*. However, some alternative comics—*King-Cat*, *American Elf*, and Kevin Huizenga's various Glenn Ganges comics⁶²—feature affectionate, often complex, portrayals of the suburb in the form of beautiful, often reverential illustrations of suburban landscapes and descriptions of experiences,

⁶¹ See also *Boondocks*, which I address below.

⁶² I discuss Huizenga's work further in Part 3.

characterized in particular by quietude and meditative solitude (see images 3.5–3.7). In facilitating moments of grateful reflection, such a suburban life also facilitates an Aristotelian process of contemplating one's life as a good life. Thus, these suburbs can be understood to be happy ones. Both *King-Cat* and *American Elf* are autobiographical comics and both have achieved a sort of cult status among alternative artsy comics aficionados. *King-Cat* is an on-going paper-based, diary-style mini-comics by John Porcellino, which he has been self-publishing since 1989.⁶³ *American Elf* is also a diary-style comic, self-published daily on the web from 1998–2012 by James Kochalka.⁶⁴ These comics display an awed and detail-attuned orientation to nature in the suburb and the nature afforded by suburban proximity to a wild (or seemingly wild) nature. In using the term 'wild', I am drawing on William Cronon's (1995) concept of *wildness* that, for Cronon, describes the defining characteristic of nature. (The cognate term *wilderness* refers to a particular spatialization of nature). For Cronon what makes nature "natural" is wildness, which can be found even in the rogue weed growing through a crack in the pavement:

The chief merit of wildness as a locus of value and meaning...is that, unlike wilderness, it "can be found anywhere: in the seemingly tame fields and woodlots of Massachusetts, in the cracks of a Manhattan sidewalk, even in the cells of our own body." Whereas wilderness is a particular kind of place (one that exhibits no signs of human intervention), wildness is an attribute of living organisms that may turn up anywhere; a blue jay or a daisy in a Manhattan park, he contends, is no less wild than its counterpart in the Rocky Mountains (Marx 2008, 20, citing Cronon 1995).

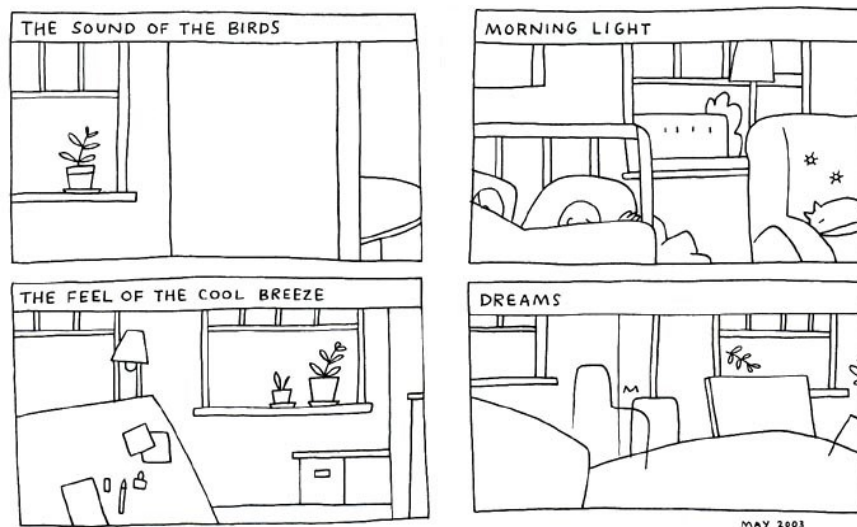
King-Cat and American Elf⁶⁵—both straight, white, U.S. American men living largely uneventful lives in suburbs—often ruminate upon the deep joy they gain in appreciating the small pleasures afforded by their suburban environments, particularly natural and wild elements.

⁶³ A collection of these were published in 2010 by Drawn & Quarterly.

⁶⁴ From time to time, these comics were compiled in books published by Top Shelf Comix. Poignant examples of the underground popularity of *American Elf* comes from after the comic's fourteen-year daily run ended. When the strip ended, dozens of artistic tributes to the strip were produced by fans and sent into Kochalka, who posted them on Tumblr. Even nine months afterwards, tributes continued to appear. The few times Kochalka has posted an American Elf comic after the end of the official run, there has been a surge of interest. For example, on February 21, 2014, Kochalka posted a strip about the death of his cat. By May 2nd, there were 1464 notes (likes, reblogs and comments) to this post and a tribute strip. See posts tagged "American Elf Tribute" at Kochalka's Tumblr at <http://kochalka.tumblr.com/tagged/american-elf-tribute>.

⁶⁵ I use the comic strip names when referring to characters in the strip and the cartoonists' names when referring to them as cartoonists. Even though King-Cat and American Elf are autobiographical, Porcellino and Kochalka nevertheless draw themselves into the comics as characters.

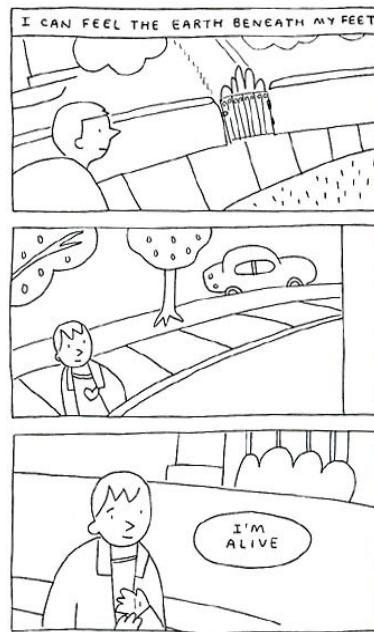
Drawn in minimalist clean line, images 3.5–3.8 present few flourishes or additional pictorial content beyond what is needed to outline the pleasing elements of the suburban environment and delighted, attentive ways in which to experience it. Such pared-down style parallels the presumed simplicity of such enjoyment and works to focus attention on the ways in which one might actively seek to discover beauty and happiness in the suburb. A practicing Buddhist, Porcellino also brings a Japanese Zen aesthetic influence to his work (see Porcellino 2010).



3.0.5. "The sound of the birds. Morning light. The feel of the cool breeze. Dreams"—King-Cat observes the suburb as supporting a beautiful life. (Comic by John Porcellino. 2010. "Page from King Cat #62," *King-Cat Comics* website. Retrieved from <http://king-cat.net/catalog.html>, 10 September 2010.)

Image 3.5 can be read as a Zen poem, mindfully reflecting upon the pleasure of the material and temporal world: "The sound of the birds / Morning light / The feel of the cool breeze." It also hints at the fleeting ephemerality of such a world: The last panel, "Dreams," might suggest both, more straightforwardly, that dreaming is also a pleasure of life in the suburb, and, more obliquely, that life and all of its sources of sensory pleasures—sound ("the sound of the birds"), light ("morning light"), and feeling ("the feel of the cool breeze") are but dreams, leaving the nature of everyday experience in question. In both this and image 3.6, the flattened, two-dimensionality of the unembellished even-flowing black-lines on white background and, especially, the skewed and disintegrating perspective of some of the panels (e.g. the third and fourth panel of image 3.5 and the first panel of 3.6) work to make figure and ground inseparable,

embedding King-Cat's individual sensory experience as part of the scene. The individual is an inextricable part of the suburban landscape described primarily through its natural elements. This basis of interpreting the experience of suburban life shifts from a social, analytical perspective (as we saw in the songs and comic strips, above), to a deeply intimate and nature-focused one. In such a shift, King-Cat in meditating upon his experience of the suburb simultaneously makes his experience of it a tranquil, beautiful, or happy one.



3.0.6. "I can feel the earth beneath my feet... 'I'm alive'" —King-Cat walking through his suburban neighbourhood. (Excerpt of comic by John Porcellino. 2001. "Introduction to the Night Sky," *King-Cat Comics* #59. Collected in *Map of My Heart: The Best of King-Cat Comics & Stories, 1996–2002*, 199–230. Montreal: Drawn & Quarterly. 205)

Similarly, many of the strips in *American Elf* are reflections upon an actively observed moment of happiness, often involving the natural aspects of the suburban landscape. In both images 3.7 and 3.8, *American Elf* pauses to enjoy what otherwise might at best be fleeting pleasures or, more likely, things so common as to be passed without noticed. In image 3.7, he stands outside (possibly in his backyard, indicated by the top of a fence and a branch of a tree) facing the sun. He happily soaks up the sun for the top two panels and in the third bottom panel of size equal to the top two, describes himself as "rubbing and pressing my tongue against the smooth new acrylic filling on my broken tooth." In this illustrated moment, this small, strange pleasure is of

equal sensual value as the sun, each pleasure taking up equal visual space in the comic. Enjoying both is presented as acts of marking the last day of summer.



3.0.7. "'Sunshine!' Rubbing and pressing my tongue against the smooth new acrylic filling on my broken tooth. Last full day of summer."—American Elf enjoys a moment of summer in his suburban neighbourhood. (Comic by James Kochalka. 2009. "Smooth Sunshine," *American Elf*, September 21.)⁶⁶

Equally odd and charmingly narcissistic, is his "fluffing" of the grass after a period of long rain in image 3.8. Again, like in 3.7, the relative size of the panels suggest that the grand acts of nature—a rainstorm that lasts for days, the sun finally coming out—are equal to his own eccentric intervention into nature, manually reviving the soggy grass.



3.0.8. "It's been raining hard for days...but the sun came out for an hour this afternoon. I fluffed up the new baby grass that had been squashed and flattened by the rain. Fluff fluff. May 18, 2006."—American Elf's eccentric relationship with nature. (Comic by James Kochalka. 2006. "Grass Fluffer," *American Elf*, May 18.)⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Image retrieved from www.americanelf.com, April 18, 2013.

⁶⁷ Image retrieved from <http://www.americanelf.com>, April 29, 2013.

King-Cat and American Elf's romantic orientation to a restorative nature is matched by the more popular syndicated daily comic strip *Calvin and Hobbes* by Bill Watterson. These illustrated suburban dwellers' easy access to and at times accidental encounter with nature (usually in the form of animals or mini ecologies—such as forests, meadows, scrubs, marshes) are presented as a source of deep meaning, spiritual enrichment, and pleasure. *Calvin and Hobbes*⁶⁸ is a syndicated comic strip that ran from 1985–1995 about a wildly imaginative and creative school-aged boy Calvin and his friend Hobbes, a tiger, with whom he shares his home-life. Hobbes's status as toy, imaginary friend, or living creature is never fully resolved. While Hobbes always presents as an inert stuffed toy in front of other people, when he and Calvin are alone, he appears as a fully sentient, automobile, thoughtful companion who is physically and intellectually independent of Calvin and lives a life somewhat separate from Calvin's (especially when, for example, Calvin is away at school).⁶⁹ The strip often places nature and consumer culture in opposition, embodying the ambivalence of this opposition in Calvin's fluctuating orientation to these. Calvin occasionally seeks solace in the predictable banality and feeling of security he sees as being offered by his consumerist suburban life, particularly watching TV. Such a search for refuge in familiarity and superficiality is often brought on by a sense, as in image 3.9, of being overwhelmed in the face of nature's awesomeness and of being confronted by existential crisis as a result:

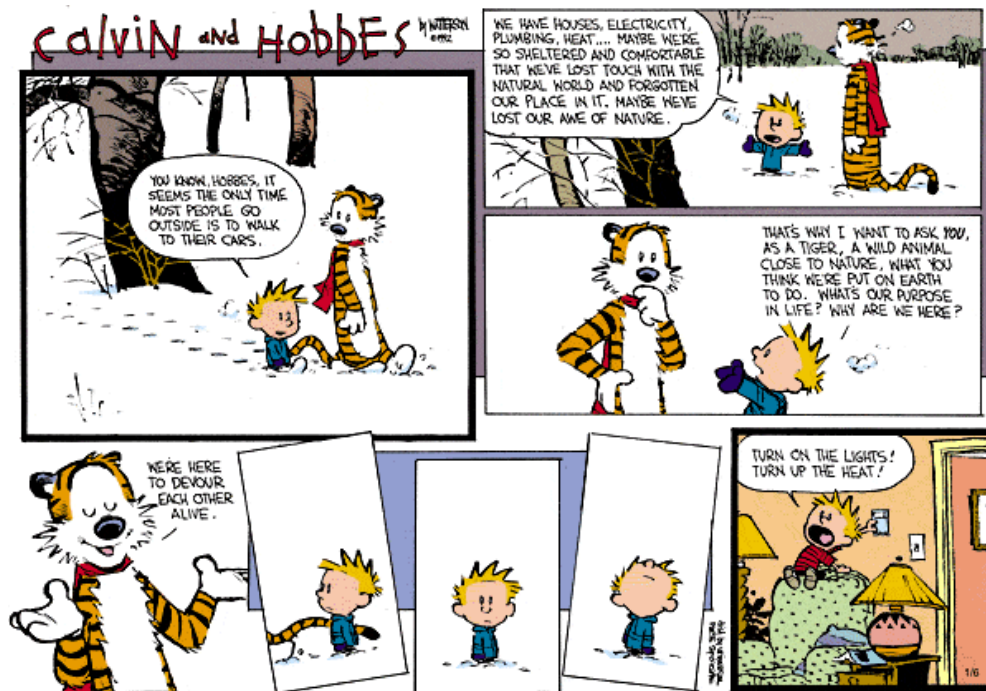
Calvin: You know, Hobbes, it seems the only time most people go outside is to walk to their cars. We have houses, electricity, plumbing, heat ... Maybe we're so sheltered and comfortable that we've lost touch with the natural world and forgotten our place in it. Maybe we've lost our awe of nature. That's why I want to ask you, as a tiger, a wild animal close to nature, what you think we're put on earth to do. What's our purpose in life? Why are we here?

Hobbes: We're here to devour each other alive.

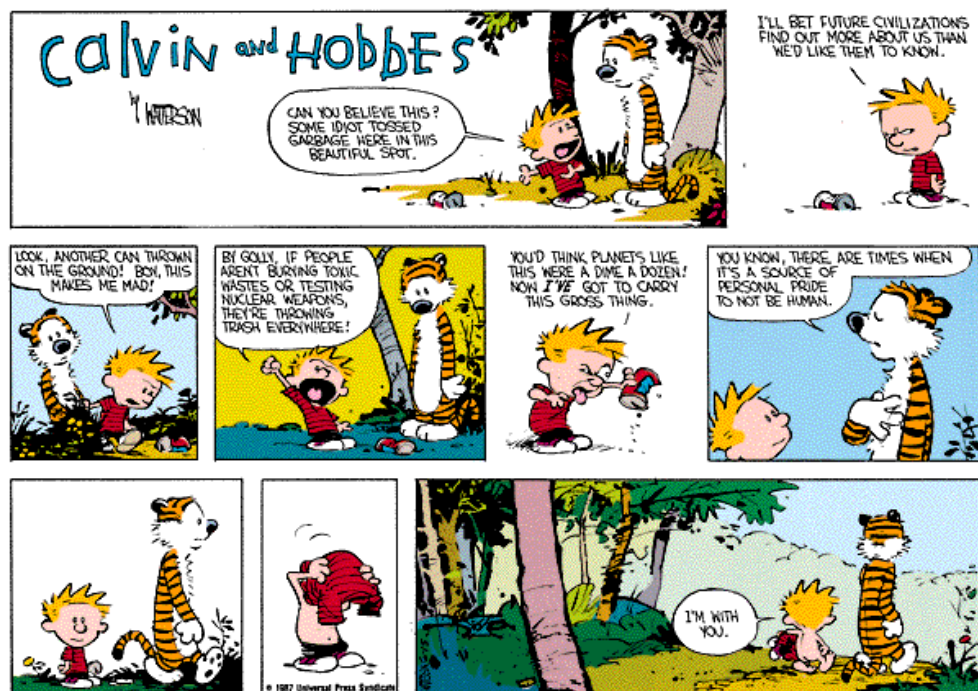
Calvin: Turn on the lights! Turn up the heat!

⁶⁸ Occasionally strips are compiled into books published by Andrews McMeel Publishing.

⁶⁹ There are a number of recurring gags in the strip and one of these is that Hobbes will sneak-attack Calvin when he returns home from school. These attacks always catch Calvin by surprise who is genuinely angry with his friend.



3.0.9. Hobbes explains the purpose of life is to be devoured. Calvin retreats into the mediated shelter of the home interior. (Comic by Bill Watterson. 1991. *Calvin and Hobbes*, January 6.)⁷⁰



3.0.10. Disgusted with humans polluting the natural environment, Calvin decides not to be human (Comic by Bill Watterson. 1987. *Calvin and Hobbes*, July 19.)⁷¹

⁷⁰ Image retrieved from <http://www.gocomics.com/calvinandhobbes>, June 1, 2014.

⁷¹ Image retrieved from <http://www.gocomics.com/calvinandhobbes>, April 29, 2014. Text reads:

However, more often, Calvin revels in nature—enjoying its beauty and the freedom he experiences within it. Ordinarily this involves playing with Hobbes in the expansive woods behind his house. A recurring such motif involves Calvin and Hobbes perilously hurtling down a hill through the forest either on a red wagon or a wooden sled, discussing philosophical questions. While Calvin's play typically involves dispensing with social conventions, occasionally, as in image 3.10, he goes so far as to eschew membership in human society entirely, opting instead to be a non-human in nature.

In these suburban dwellers' appreciation of nature, there is an inconsistent erasure of the value of suburban development and proximity to nature. *King-Cat*, *American Elf*, and *Calvin and Hobbes* showcase and affirm the suburban lifestyle not only as a pleasant, good way to live but even seem to go so far as to make the suburban lifestyle a compelling and important place for human flourishing. They affirm the romantic suburban ideal (the founding ideal of Fishman's (1987) "bourgeois utopias") of a fully human individual being nurtured at the bosom of nature at a sufficient distance from the city's civilization to be able to observe and be critical of it and also learn lessons for improving one's self; while at the same time, it is not so distant as to be uncivilized, uncultivated and insensitive. Yet, these comics are also, for the most part, highly critical of further suburban sprawl that impinges upon the as-yet undeveloped natural environment that surrounds them. All of them wish to halt and maintain the edge between suburban encroachment and nature precisely at the point or limit where they themselves reside, without acknowledging that their own happy-making relationship to nature is based on previous (presumably unhappy) encroachments. *King-Cat* (image 3.11) and especially Calvin (image 3.12) react with disgust on behalf of nature when they happen upon the unmistakable signs of encroaching suburban development in their meanders through wilderness local to their own suburban homes. In image 3.11, *King-Cat*, on a drive with his parents, stops at a wilderness area and takes a walk. He comes across a farmhouse, which he describes as "the last one to withstand

Calvin: Can you believe this? Some idiot tossed garbage here in this beautiful spot. I'll bet future civilizations find out more about us than we'd like them to know. Look, another can thrown on the ground! Boy, this makes me mad! By golly. If people aren't burning toxic wastes or testing nuclear weapons, they're throwing trash everywhere! You'd think planets like this were a dime a dozen! Now, *I've* got to carry this gross thing.

Hobbes: You know, there are times when it's a source of personal pride to not be human.

Calvin: I'm with you.

the suburbs' *relentless chokehold*" (emphasis added) but discovers that it is for sale, zoned for commercial development. Although the character does not react to this discovery in any overtly negative way, the cartoonist is clearly outraged: In addition to describing suburban development as a "relentless chokehold," he has drawn the "for sale" sign listing the real estate company selling the property as "Greedy Pig Real Estate." Continuing his walk, King-Cat encounters an animal he describes as a "root hog." After initially being frightened by it, he enjoys watching the animal in its environment and declares that if he had the money, he would buy the farm, leave it as it is, and give it to the root hog.

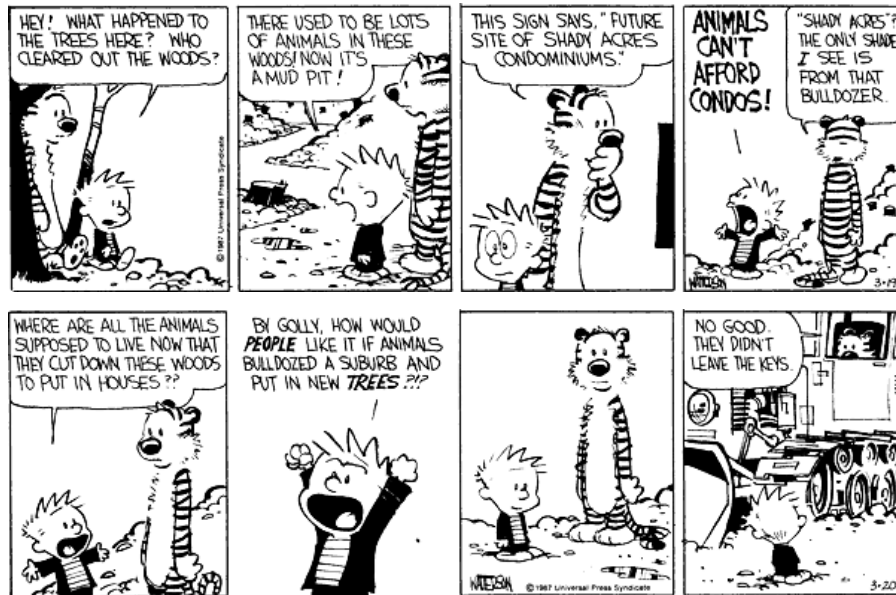


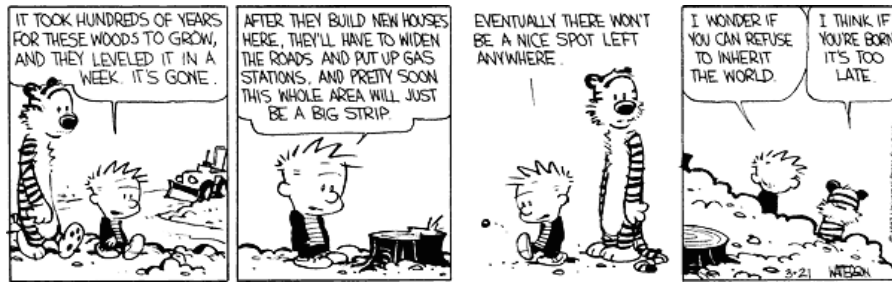
3.0.11. King-Cat on a walk, discovers a farmhouse on the edge of encroaching suburban development. (Excerpt of comic by John A. Porcellino. 1996. "I Saw Where the Root Hog Lives, Part Two," *King-Cat Comics* #51. Collected in *Map of My Heart: The Best of King-Cat Comics & Stories, 1996-2002*, 9-38. Montreal: Drawn & Quarterly. Excerpted from 31, 33.)⁷²

In image 3.12, Calvin and Hobbes stumble upon a newly clear-cut area in the woods. A sign indicates that the clearing is "the future site of Shady Acres Condominiums." Calvin, outraged that the clearing had previously been a wooded area in which many animals lived, angrily yells

⁷² Text reads: Then there was the old farm...the last one to withstand the suburb's relentless chokehold. Now a "for sale" sign stood in front—the old farm was zoned commercial. I walked toward the weedy lot, when... If I was a millionaire—I'd buy this old farm and keep it just the way it is... ..and give it to you.

"*animals can't afford condos!*" (emphasis in original). He wonders where the animals will now live and vengefully considers giving other humans a taste of their own medicine by displacing them from their homes and replacing them with trees. Calvin realizes that the development will bring an influx of further development of infrastructure and amenities and frets that "eventually there won't be a nice spot left anywhere." Calvin tends to be brash, temperamental and self-serving, articulating the most draconian ethics of living while also being a dreamer who invents both scenarios and machinery to try to bring about a better life; Hobbes, in contrast, is typically level-headed, rational, and lives in the moment. Hobbes is an astute observer of human foibles and, in particular of Calvin's, often questioning the logical outcome of Calvin's ideas and schemes. Both Calvin and Hobbes share a love of nature. As a tragi-comic closing gag, Calvin wonders "if you can refuse to inherit the world" to which Hobbes replies sardonically "I think if you're born it's too late." As Calvin is a small child wandering alone with his stuffed toy, the woods must be within walking distance of his own suburban home. As such, Hobbes's last remark could also be read as pointing out the hypocrisy of Calvin's outrage and any similar self-excluding critiques: Calvin continues to benefit from an earlier such clearing of woods that made way for his own home. The animals and trees on whose behalf he speaks, seem more like aspects of the scenery, the "nice spot," which he wishes to continue to use undisturbed.





3.0.12. Calvin outraged on behalf of nature at the encroachment of suburban development into the forest. (Comics by Bill Watterson. 1987. *Calvin and Hobbes*, March 19–21.)⁷³

Towards a similar end, Duncan and Duncan (2001) found the landscapes surrounding the elite suburbs of Bedford, New York, were aestheticized as being wild nature, or natural nature, in order to prevent any further development. In these communities, informal and formal discourses, including local land-use policies, aesthetically interpret the landscape as if the current appearance of the lands are the most natural and wild. They thereby obliterate the historical development of the lands and the contemporary maintenance of them in order to preserve vast tracts of land as undevelopable to the benefit of the current, wealthy inhabitants. They literally naturalize the exclusion of further development, which would have brought in lower income dwellings and families—including the workers who must commute in to work in those suburbs. Here, I mean "naturalize the exclusion" to mean both to exclude through the manipulation of the idea of nature and also to make the operation of ideology invisible. Thus, for both the suburbs of the Duncan and Duncan study as well as of the comics, the version of nature upon which these suburbs are predicated as spatializations of happiness (for some) is also the basis of aesthetic and ethical judgment by which the exclusion of others is predicated.

⁷³ Image retrieved from <http://www.gocomics.com/calvinandhobbes>, March 25, 2010. Text reads:

Calvin (boy): Hey! What happened to the trees here? Who cleared out the woods? There used to be lots of animals in these woods! Now it's a mud pit!

Hobbes (tiger): This sign says, "Future site of Shady Acres Condominiums."

Calvin: *Animals can't afford condos!*

Hobbes: "Shady Acres"? The only shade I see is from that bulldozer.

Calvin: Where are all the animals supposed to live now that they cut down these woods to put in houses?? By golly how would *people* like it if animals bulldozed a suburb and put in new *trees*???

Hobbes: No good. They didn't leave the keys.

Calvin: It took hundreds of years for these woods to grow, and they leveled it in a week. It's gone. After they build new houses here, they'll have to widen the roads and put up gas stations, and pretty soon this whole area will just be a big strip. Eventually there won't be a nice spot left anywhere. I wonder if you can refuse to inherit the world.

Hobbes: I think if you're born, it's too late.

Figure 3: Suburban aliens

Each of these U.S. American suburban dwellers—King-Cat, American Elf, and Calvin—is portrayed as a white, able-bodied, straight man (or boy, in the case of Calvin). As such, each is normate. Nevertheless, each can still be considered queer, at odds with normativity in that each is an *affect alien*, in Sara Ahmed's (2010) terms. Affect aliens are those who are alienated by their non-normative affective responses and desires—"those who do not desire in the right way" (Ahmed 2010, 240). Their critical or uncomfortable response to a given situation does not fit within the normative range of correct affective reactions, rendering them situationally unexpected, unusual, or inappropriate. They are marked by "feeling at odds with the world, or feeling that the world is odd" (Ahmed 2010, 168).⁷⁴ King-Cat feels joy and burdened by his extreme sensitivity to details and self-obsession. For example, in a journal entry, he writes:

"TODAY INSTEAD OF KILLING MYSELF, I CAME TO JOHNSON'S MOUND. Cars quiet in the distance, gentle, birds, sun and sky. Climbing the big hill, can't write, I feel lost. Somehow I lost my connection with myself, who I am. Now, sitting on the edge of the pavilion, throat dry, bugs sniffing my ankles, look—miles, Illinois, my home. The earth under my feet, old stones, green leaves, frozen sky. I don't know." November 24, 2000 1:38 PM (Porcellino 2009, 346, emphasis in original).

Although not typically as dark, American Elf, too, often rues and celebrates his sense that he feels too intensely, that his affective orientation to the world is not typical. His behaviour is also eccentric and vacillates between artistic child-likeness and narcissistic childishness. In his strip, he represents others as viewing him with curiosity, distrust, as well as admiration. Finally, Calvin is read by other characters as being weird or even dangerous in his odd response to the world around him. For these comic strip characters, the suburb and its attendant nature offer a release from such burdens of sociality into a welcome solitude. For them, the suburb is a site of relative peace, proximity to beloved and gentle nature, and a place in which their highly sensitive personalities, creativity, and non-achieving lifestyle orientation can be fostered and nurtured. It is a retreat from the vexations and difficulties of ordinary daily life, including the necessary

⁷⁴ Ahmed's exemplary affect aliens are feminists, immigrants, and queers—or, to be more specific, "feminist killjoys", "unhappy queers", and "melancholic migrants". Such figures as feminists are alien and alienated when instead of laughing at a misogynist joke along with the rest of the group, they feel uncomfortable, embarrassed, angry, and set apart. They alienate, in turn, when they refuse to laugh and point out the fundamental violence of the joke. They are then dubbed "killjoys."

encounters with other people, and (especially for Calvin) encounters with social institutions (such as school). (See image 3.16.)

Struggling with the difficulties of being affect aliens, King-Cat and American Elf appear as figures who seem unable to imagine sociologically. For them, the ordinary difficulties of social life and their alienation appear as if they are due only to their own individual mental disturbances. As such, for these figures, their struggle with discontent remains a question of how, as self-actualizing individuals, to cope better in the given world. It is not a matter of how the world as everyday might be otherwise. In contrast, Calvin is able to recognize power structures, institutions and social expectations as limitations to his agency and causes of his unhappiness. Yet, while Calvin sees the world as odd, the world sees him as odd: other characters see him as relentlessly naughty and inappropriate and therefore the cause of his own suffering. Nevertheless, for each of these characters, the suburb, and particularly suburban nature, is a happy withdrawal from everyday life, and a site of individual freedom and nurturance. Suburban nature acts as a guarantor and anchoring site of human happiness and a good life for these affect aliens who seem like they ought to fit in to the larger social world but do not. As such, for these figures of affective alienation, nature is a source of happiness but their happiness depends on a particular version of a happy nature. Nature is, then, a "happy object" (Ahmed 2010) but one that, under this burden of providing for human happiness, is sacrificed.

Spatialization of Unhappiness

Figure 4: Unhappy suburban nature

Nature talks back to the suburb in the form of anthropomorphic animals in the syndicated daily comic strip and animated film *Over the Hedge*.⁷⁵ Like the comic strip, the film is about suburban life from the perspective of woodland animals who are forced to encounter the human world as a direct effect of invasive suburban development. Their perspective as the losers of constant urban development offers a critical commentary on mass consumer society. The animals spend their

⁷⁵ This syndicated daily comic strip by Michael Fry and T. Lewis has been ongoing since 1995. See Chapter 2 for additional discussion of *Over the Hedge*.

time making cynical observations about the humans who appear as strange hyper-consumers. Thus, in an early sub-series of strips entitled "Over the Hedge Field Guide to 'Burb Watching," RJ, the racoon, and Verne, the turtle, observe from a distance the behaviour of suburbanites. Watching through binoculars and reading a guidebook entitled *Common Suburbanites of North America*, RJ and Verne take up the role of human-watchers—i.e. those who watch humans in the vein of bird-watchers—who curiously glimpse into the lives of humans in their suburban habitat, observing suburbanites as predictable types with known habits. In image 3.13, for example, the pair observes "the debt-headed thrasher," which turns out to be (what is heteronormatively legible as) a man in bed with his wife who thrashes about in bed unable to obtain a restful sleep as he is plagued by worries about debt.



3.0.13. In a series of strips, RJ and Verne observe the habits of suburbanites in the style of bird-watchers observing the habits of birds. (Comic by Michael Fry and T Lewis. 2001. *Over the Hedge*, August 30.)⁷⁶

Despite their ruthless ridicule of suburbanites, the animals, particularly the charismatic RJ, also adopt many of their practices (such as eating junk food, watching copious amounts of TV, and acquiring a vast stockpile of consumer goods for no apparent reason, as in image 3.14. See also image 2.3 in Chapter 2). In adopting the "suburban" lifestyle, which the comic strip and movie lampoons, the animals appear absurd, reduplicating the critique of over consumption and destruction of nature.

⁷⁶ Image retrieved from <http://assets.amuniversal.com/5778f6e00c410131251d001dd8b71c47>, April 28, 2014. Text reads:

Over the Hedge Field Guide to 'Burb Watching. [Cover of book:] *Common Suburbanites of North America*.

The Debt-Headed Thrasher...

Widespread suburban species ... Deep in the red...Gives off an oppressive, mournful call...

Man in bed: *Overlimit?* Try this one... *Overlimit?* Try this one...



3.0.14. RJ as a hyper-consumer. His desire for more "stuff" parallels that of the suburbanites whom he and his other animal friends observe and lampoon. (Comic by Michael Fry and T Lewis. 2014. *Over the Hedge*, April 18.)⁷⁷

This dramatic irony is particularly forceful in the character of RJ. A wise-cracking, superficial, self-serving individualist, RJ presents himself as detached and worldly-wise, both a student of and superior to the suburbanites whom he observes and mocks, yet whom, all the while, he emulates to the furthest degree. In the film, it is precisely disagreement over the consequences of taking up the suburban lifestyle that forms the pivotal plot tension. A collective of assorted species of woodland animals live in what is essentially a friend-based commune in the woods. The newcomer RJ convinces the group of the goodness of easy living brought by access to things and especially food in the suburb that, like RJ, has newly arrived in their woods. In contrast, Verne, the group's leader, suspicious of change and constantly worried for the group's on-going survival and well-being, warns the group of the unknown perils of giving up their traditions and time-tested routines. In the film, the animals eventually come to a resolution between preserving their earlier self-sufficiency and enjoying the pleasures of consuming the bounty of the suburb; but in the comic strip, the tension persists between the critique of the suburban lifestyle and the desire to embrace it fully.

Whereas the earlier examples of comic strips in this chapter portray suburban nature as nurturing and fulfilling, in *Over the Hedge*, the suburb's intimate relationship to nature is clearly not a site of fulfilling happiness but one that directly causes unhappiness (especially for the animals, but also for the consuming humans) and creates unhappy places. Thus, in image 3.15,

⁷⁷ Image retrieved from <http://overthehedgeblog.files.wordpress.com/2014/04/oh140418.gif>, April 29, 2014. Text reads:

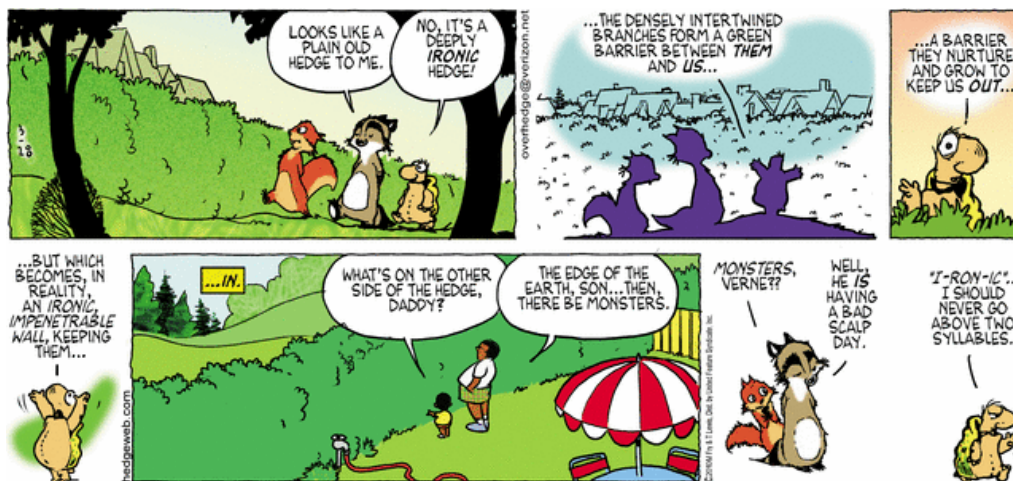
Verne: What happened to all your stuff?

RJ: I gave it all away.

Verne: Wow. I'm impressed you want to simplify your life.

RJ: Who said anything about *simplifying*? I just need to make room for more stuff.

Verne, strolling alongside a seemingly endless hedge with RJ and their friend Hammy the squirrel, explains that the hedge, planted by the suburbanites to keep them and the rest of wild nature out of the suburb acts, instead and ironically, as a mechanism to keep suburbanites in the suburb—an unintentional prison of their own making. Beyond the hedge, a throng of rooftops are visible receding into the horizon. The penultimate panel presents the perspective of the humans on the other side of the hedge. A boy stands with his father in their backyard looking at the hedge and asks what is on the other side. Beyond the hedge, a throng of trees is visible, receding into the horizon. His father answers "The edge of the earth, son...then, there be monsters." For the suburbanite, the world ends at the edge of the property line and whatever exists beyond this is unknown and fearsome. The phrase "there be monsters" recalls the maps of early European explorers which marked undiscovered and unknown parts of the world with this phrase (or pictures of monsters, like the image of the monstrous whale evoked in Chapter 1). These monstrously unknown places eventually were explored and colonized. This comic seems subtly to be suggesting that the fearsome unknown nature that lies beyond the perimeters of the hedge will also be subdued eventually; that, rather than humans opening the hedge and facing the unknown and wild, instead the human-side of the hedge will expand pushing the hedge ever deeper into a nature that remains unknown.



3.0.15. Interpreting the edge of the suburb from the perspective of the wildlife who are encroached upon. (Comic by Michael Fry and T Lewis. 2010. *Over the Hedge*, March 28.)⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Image retrieved from <http://overthehedgeblog.wordpress.com>, March 28, 2010. Text reads:

RJ: Looks like a plain old hedge to me.

In the earlier comics featuring affect aliens, nature is a pleasant, generous but passive site in which to retreat for human self-recreation: Nature is the undifferentiated, nourishing source of happiness for humans (specifically, in those comics, for men). Turning this on its head, in *Over the Hedge*, nature is specific, agentic, and individuated. Here, nature is taken out of abstraction and is no longer romanticized as a single, unified, coherent landscape. Instead, the animals, recognize and attempt to respond rationally—and, in the movie, collectively—to the on-going threat presented by the suburb in order to adapt to and mitigate the damage to their society and culture. In contrast, humans are abstracted and generalized. Humans appear as voracious, irrational consumers who mindlessly seek escape into consumption of mass entertainment, mass housing, and mass-produced goods and food. Instead of the romantic, heroic, world-perceiving and world-creating human individual whom we see in the earlier-discussed comics, suburbanites are presented as an indistinguishable and accused mass of petty, grotesque, and fearful creatures who act out of (self-destructive) habit, seem incapable of reason, do not understand when they encroach into pre-existing animal territories, and certainly cannot see the larger-scale consequences of their actions.

Figure 5: Unhappy suburban home

Of course, the human experience of the suburb is anything but uniform. The happiness promised by the suburb is denied not only to the other of nature but to human others within the suburb. Where, for some affect aliens, consolation is found in withdrawing into the small pleasures of the suburb and particularly its offer of a suburban version of nature, for others, the suburb offers no such reprieve. The graphic novel for juvenile readers *American Born Chinese*⁷⁹ and the comic

Verne: No, it's a deeply *ironic* hedge! ...The densely intertwined branches form a green barrier between *them* and *us*... ...A barrier they nurture and grow to keep us *out*... ...But which becomes, in reality, an *ironic, impenetrable wall*, keeping them... ...IN.

Son: What's on the other side of the hedge, Daddy?

Dad: The edge of the earth, son.. Then there be monsters.

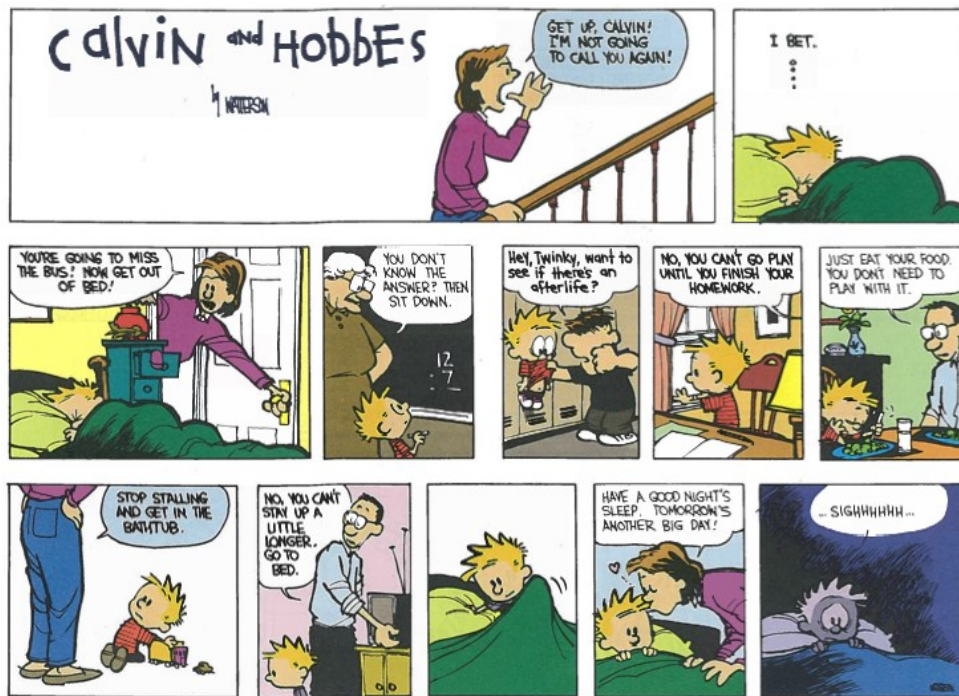
Hammy (squirrel): *Monsters*, Verne??

RJ: Well, he *is* having a bad scalp day.

Verne: "*I-ron-ic*"... I should never go above two syllables.

⁷⁹ This 2006 graphic novel is highly acclaimed. Amongst the many honours it has received are the 2007 Eisner Award for best new graphic album, the 2007 Michael L. Printz Award. It was also a 2006 National Book Awards finalist.

strip and adult animated TV show *Boondocks*⁸⁰ present struggles and unhappiness as basic elements of the suburb as a site of growing up for characters who have no chance of fitting in. And, even for Calvin, who finds respite in suburban nature and a retreat into his imagination, the rest of suburban life, including his home life, friendships in the neighbourhood, and school, present relentless challenges (as in image 3.16). Calvin copes with the challenges of his unhappy suburban life by a persistent refusal to participate in expected norms or with appropriate behaviours through playful exercises of his imagination. His general disappointment is with a structuring society characterized as a rules-bound, constraining and unimaginative adult world that constrains his agency and imagination and produces him as a misfit and trouble-maker.



3.0.16. Calvin's day full of discontent—in every moment, his agency is restricted and his desires are over-ruled. (Comic by Bill Watterson. 1995. From *The Calvin and Hobbes Tenth Anniversary Book*, 84.).⁸¹

⁸⁰ A controversial syndicated daily comic strip that ran from 1996 to 2006 as well as the animated TV show for adults based on this strip, both created by Aaron McGruder.

⁸¹ Text reads:

Mom: Get up, Calvin! I'm not going to call you again!

Calvin: I bet.

Mom: You're going to miss the bus! Now get out of bed!

Mrs. Wormwood (school teacher): You don't know the answer? Then sit down.

Moe (bully): Hey, Twinky, want to see if there's an afterlife?

(Unseen parent): No, you can't go play until you finish your homework.

Dad: Just eat your food. You don't need to play with it.

More radical and politicized than Calvin, Huey Freeman, the main character of *Boondocks*, is a ten-year old black radical leftist revolutionary who is critical of the white supremacist capitalist society he sees as characterizing the world around him. (See images 3.17 and 3.18.) The backstory of *Boondocks* is that Huey moved with his now-retired grandfather (Robert Freeman or "granddad") and younger brother (Riley) from the inner city of Chicago to the exclusive suburb of Woodcrest. For Huey, the suburb is the site of obvious white privilege and class- and race-segregated wealth that enables the uncivil obliviousness towards racism (and, to a lesser degree, classism) its inhabitants demonstrate. Like a contemporary *Pilgrim's Progress*, Huey—a lone knowing, faithful, and vigilant pilgrim—traverses through a landscape of temptation. These temptations are the apolitical and materialist promises of plenty, comfort, and the semblance of equality and peace (limited to within the local suburban sphere). The suburbanites demonstrate an incapacity or refusal to recognize systemic racism and its structural and intimate complexities while often (sometimes viciously but more typically blithely) reproducing it. This is characteristic not only of the white residents but also of other black characters. A few black characters and a couple of exceptional white characters form the central cast of characters. In addition to Huey, the black characters include Riley, Granddad, Thomas Dubois and his (mixed-race) daughter Jazmine, and neighbourhood character Uncle Ruckus. The white characters include Sara, who is Thomas Dubois's wife, the extremely wealthy real estate developer Ed Wuncler, Sr. (whose family founded Woodcrest), and his grandson Ed Wuncler, III, who is a spoiled young man who dabbles in robbery and other criminal activity. The other white neighbours are generally indistinct background characters (usually characterized by a lack of independent thought—much like the human suburbanites in *Over the Hedge*).

Each of the black characters represents orientations to blackness that are problematic from Huey's (and the audience's) perspective. Thus, for example, although Riley rejects the values and behaviours of the dominant middle class white social order, this refusal is based on his adopting (or imitating) a hardcore gangster persona without recognizing either the historical or socio-cultural context of oppression in which an extravagant performance of black masculinity is rooted or in its manufacture and reproduction by the culture industry.

Mom: Stop stalling and get in the bathtub.

Dad: No, you can't stay up a little longer. Go to bed.

Mom: Have a good night's sleep. Tomorrow's another big day!

Calvin: ...Sighhhhhh...



3.0.17. Riley proclaims threats and tries to assert his gangster credentials to his new suburban neighbourhood but the street-tough effects are lost in the vast surrounding natural environment. (Comic by Aaron McGruder. 1999. *Boondocks*, April 22.)⁸²

Thus, in image 3.17, Riley shouts threats and his gangster credentials to his new suburban neighbourhood. He claims identity as a criminal and asserts his ownership over the whole place threatening to shoot any who attempt to stop him. But, the street-tough effects are lost when it becomes clear, in the third panel, that he is proclaiming these threats from the top of a grassy, wooded hilltop. Huey points out that the effect is diminished by his choice of place, suggesting that Riley is simply imitating a version of rebellion that he does not live or understand, learned from listening to music which also presents false rebellion. Riley, interested only in acting out a stereotypical version of what he considers legitimate black masculinity (primarily characterized by criminality) is unable to see that such a performance in its limited, self-serving, reactionary politics reproduces racist (and misogynistic and homophobic) oppression as he is unable to think about social liberation. Throughout the comic strip and TV series, Riley remains intentionally politically apathetic and instead embroils himself in the manufactured problems of daily life and particularly of constantly trying to enact criminality and thus gain street cred even though, as in image 3.17, there is usually no one who can provide this recognition.

⁸² Image retrieved from <http://www.gocomics.com/boondocks>, June 9, 2013. Text reads:

Riley: The whole place is mine for the taking! *All mine!* The criminal mastermind 'Riley Escobar' is here to run things!!! Chief mafioso thug kingpin 'Riley Escob' is now in charge! I'm packin' heart. I hate cops. I don't fear jail! *What!!!* Hold on to your jewels 'cause Riley is takin' your loot—*believe dat!* 'Playa hatas *get away* or my lead will spray...'

Huey: You know, it might help if you *didn't* shout your nefarious plans from a hilltop.

Riley: You and I are *obviously* not listening to the same rap music.

Huey: True. I'm allergic to studio gangsters.



3.0.18. Huey asks Granddad, a former civil-rights activist, for politically utopian schooling. (Comic by Aaron McGruder. 1999. *Boondocks*, April 22.)⁸³

In contrast to Riley's apolitical semblance of rebellion, Huey's grandfather, Robert Freeman, ("Granddad" for Huey and Riley,) had been involved with the resolutely political and social rebellion of the civil rights movements in the 1960s. However, for Granddad, collective political struggle is now in the past. In image 3.18, Huey asks Granddad to home-school him so that Granddad can teach him "how to overthrow an imperialist capitalist regime and replace it with a socialist system which recognizes and protects the collective good against personal avarice." Huey expects his grandfather to be able to give him this education knowing that Robert was once a radical. In exasperation, Robert minimizes his former radicalism by suggesting he only wore the clothes of rebellion in a now long-gone time. Robert's experience of the conditions of race and racism is fundamentally different than Huey's. Having lived through the historic shift from overt and legal segregation and inequality, during his youth, to formal equality, Robert seems to interpret both history and his own life as one of progress. He is content to engage with what he sees as the minor negotiations of interpersonal expressions of a largely superficial racism. For example, in the first episode of the TV series, he tells his grandsons that since he's moved them into this beautiful house in this neighbourhood, he wants them to act like "they have some class." Riley asks Huey what "class" means. Huey replies, "It means don't act like niggas."

⁸³ Image retrieved from <http://www.gocomics.com/boondocks>, June 9, 2013. Text reads:
 Huey: See, Granddad—I *need* home schooling. There's so much that I want to learn that no American school will ever teach me.
 Granddad: Like what?
 Huey: Like how to overthrow an imperialist capitalist regime and replace it with a socialist system which recognizes and protects the collective good against personal avarice.
 Granddad: And *I'm* supposed to teach you that?
 Huey: Hey, I *know* you were a radical—I've seen pictures.
 Granddad: (Sigh) You own *one* dashiki thirty years ago and nobody lets you forget it.

Granddad immediately points out that interaction as an example of not acting like they have class. Instead, he explains, he's moved them to the affluent white suburb "to expand their horizon" and learn about the suburban white man—the "new" white man:

Granddad: There's a new white man out here. He's refined! For example, did you know that the *new* white man loves gourmet cheese?

Huey: Wait, I'm sorry...did you say cheese?

Granddad: Yup! Cheese. You give the meanest white man a piece of cheese and he turn into Mister Rogers.

Huey: Granddad, that doesn't make sense.

Granddad: Don't you talk back to me, boy!

Huey: Granddad, you can't tame the white supremacist power structure with cheese!

Granddad: Oh yes I can.

Huey: No you can't!

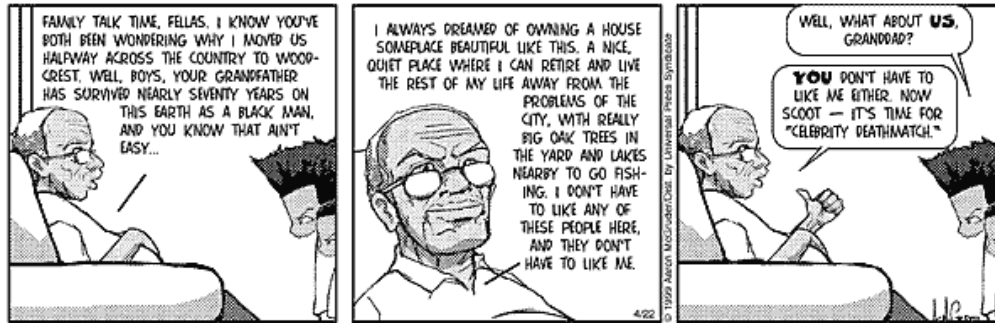
Granddad: Yes, I can!

Huey: No, you cannot!

For Granddad, dealing with racism is merely a clever navigation or avoidance of interpersonal relations: The large scale social and political issues being left behind in history, what is left is a matter of reaping individual reward. In both the comic strip and TV show, Robert spends his time attempting to pursue an individualist version of the good life that consists in seeking a young wife to share his large home in a quiet, affluent suburban neighbourhood, in which he wishes to be left alone, as he declares in image 3.19:

Granddad: Well, boys, your grandfather has survived nearly seventy years on this earth as a black man and you know that ain't easy... I always dreamed of owning a house someplace beautiful like this. A nice, quiet place where I can retire and lie the rest of my life away from the problems of the city.... I don't have to like any of these people here, and they don't have to like me.

Robert narrates his arrival in the suburb as the personal reward for a hard-lived life and the hard-won realization of a lifelong dream. But, it becomes clear in the final panel, that what Robert really desires is to be left alone by both his neighbours and his grandsons so he can watch vapid TV—a shallow sentiment that resonates with the imagined desires and aspirations of the suburbanite suggested also by *Over the Hedge*. Moreover, he abjures any responsibility for any social troubles his grandsons will face: He has lived a long life surviving as a black man but he passes on no promise of an easier or happier life to his grandsons.



3.0.19. Granddad explains to Huey and Riley that they moved to a white, affluent suburb so that he could seek peace and home ownership. (Comic by Aaron McGruder. 1999. *Boondocks*, April 22.)⁸⁴

Similar to Granddad, Huey's neighbours, the young, mixed-race couple Thomas and Sara Dubois— despite being involved in and actively identifying with the fight for civil rights (both are members of the NAACP, for example)—live as if the most egregious issues of racism have been dealt with, leaving only issues of political correctness to address. Their family seems to represent the superficial fulfilment of the promises of the civil rights movement, having achieved socially-recognizable success and racial harmony. Thomas in particular is unable to recognize on-going structural and systemic racism and his own implication, as a prosecutor, in perpetuating the effects of such racism. Moreover, their mixed-race daughter is unable to recognize that she is black. (For example, she is often troubled by her curly hair wondering why it is not straight and smooth like her white mother's and becoming distressed when Huey points out that she has an afro, which she refuses to accept).

Whereas the other black characters seek different modes and degrees of equality, agency, and liberation, even if problematically, Uncle Ruckus, who does various service jobs around the suburb, is a virulently racist, grotesque caricature of black self-hatred (and mouthpiece for the most overt forms of white supremacist racism). Although the darkest-skinned of all the main cast of characters, he claims to be white, explaining away his blackness by saying he has a medical

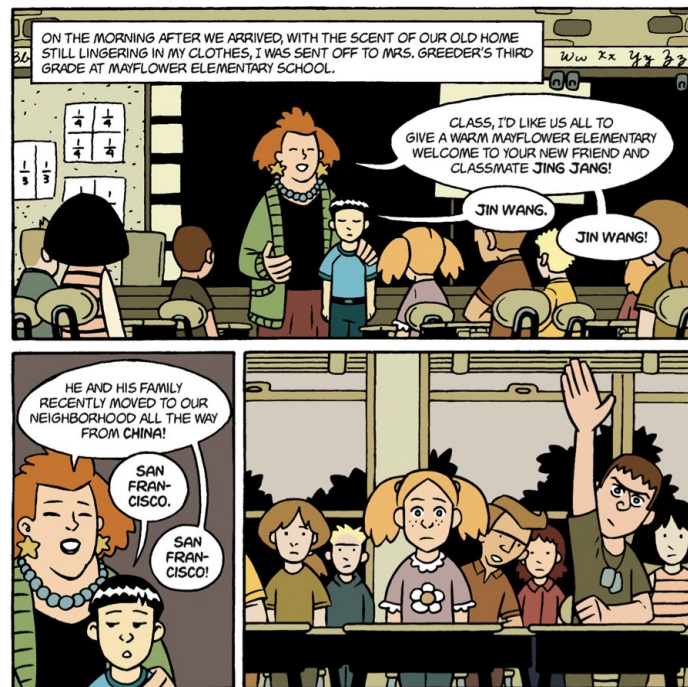
⁸⁴ Image retrieved from <http://www.gocomics.com/boondocks>, June 9, 2013. Text reads:
 Granddad: Family talk time, fellas. I know you've both been wondering why I moved us halfway across the country to Woodcrest. Well, boys, your grandfather has survived nearly seventy years on this earth as a black man and you know that ain't easy... I always dreamed of owning a house someplace beautiful like this. A nice, quiet place where I can retire and lie the rest of my life away from the problems of the city, with really big oak trees in the yard and lakes nearby to go fishing. I don't have to like any of these people here, and they don't have to like me.
 Huey: Well, what about *us*, Granddad?
 Granddad: *You* don't have to like me either. Now scoot—it's time for "Celebrity Deathmatch."

condition that darkens his skin. He subscribes to and actively promotes white supremacy and believes that the rightful place of black people in the U.S.A. is in gratefully serving white people. Ironically, it is in his obsequious and aggrandized attempts to serve white supremacy that helps mark the degree and ubiquity of racism that permeates suburban life.

Unlike Huey, the other black characters employ adaptive strategies to make their own lives happier or more fulfilling that do not fundamentally undermine or question structural and systemic inequality. Uncle Ruckus embraces structural inequality. Jazmine Dubois tries to forefend considerations of race afforded by claiming whiteness, Thomas Dubois pursues success and presents himself as blandly safe. Granddad adopts and wishes to enjoy a "suburban" lifestyle and orientation (see image 3.19). Even Riley's version of rebellion relies on the structures remaining in place in order for his actions to be read as rebellious. All of these adaptive strategies (even Uncle Ruckus's racism) would appear to be easier and more rewarding than Huey's ongoing struggle to recognize, name, and resist both micro- and macro-political forces of inequality. Huey alone can see and name the structures of oppression that both underlie and support the veneer of commodified pleasures that dupe and lure all the other characters. Moreover, he recognizes these as problems (unlike Uncle Ruckus who, arguably also sees the structures of oppression but works in support of them). Huey uses both his highly developed intellect and his mastery of martial arts in his struggle. And, Huey does struggle. And, in his struggle, he makes those other black characters with adaptive strategies uncomfortable and unhappy (see 3.17 and 3.18). He also makes white people and the white power structure unhappy; but at times, his radicalism is perceived by wealthy white people, whose privilege is unassailable, as amusing. In the first episode of the series, Granddad takes Huey and Riley to a garden party thrown by Ed Wuncler, Sr. The guests are primarily rich white people. Huey attempts to shock and offend the guests by telling them controversial things like "Ronald Reagan was the Devil" or that 9/11 was a government conspiracy. Rather than being shocked, the guests clap, delighted by what they consider his adorable precociousness. When Granddad angrily confronts Huey about ruining the party for him, Huey exclaims "Ruin the party? They love me. These people aren't worried about us. They're not worried about anything. They're rich. No matter what happens, these people will just keep applauding."

In contrast to Calvin's grim resignation and Huey's righteous anger, Jin, the main character of *American Born Chinese*, a Chinese-American boy, tries desperately to fit into the

dominant white racist and populist culture of the suburban school life in which he sadly finds himself. Just as Huey moves to the suburbs as a young boy having grown up in a neighbourhood in which he felt more at home, Jin also moves with his parents to a predominantly white suburb as a young child after having grown up immersed in the diasporic Chinese cultural community of San Francisco's chinatown. In his new suburban school, he finds it difficult to fit in or be accepted by his primarily white classmates and encounters various forms of racism, including from his teacher (see image 3.20).



3.0.20. Jin's experience of racism at his new school begins with his teacher introducing him to his class. (Image by Gene Luen Yang. 2006. *American Born Chinese*, 30).⁸⁵

Reluctantly, he finds community and friendship with the two other Asian/Asian-American students, although he continues to wish to be accepted by the white kids. Throughout his

⁸⁵ Text reads: On the morning after we arrived, with the scent of our old home still lingering in my clothes, I was sent off to Mrs. Greeder's third grade at Mayflower Elementary School.

Mrs. Greeder: Class, I'd like us all to give a warm Mayflower Elementary welcome to your new friend and classmate Jing Jang!

Jin: Jin Wang

Mrs. Greeder: Jin Wang! He and his family recently moved to our neighborhood all the way from China!

Jin: San Francisco

Mrs. Greeder: San Francisco!

schooling, he endures mistreatment and ostracism from these white kids; yet, Jin is particularly devastated and humiliated when a popular and generally friendly white boy approaches him as a teenager and asks him not to continue to date a white girl, for whom Jin has a crush. Jin is so agitated by this event that somehow he magically finds himself transformed into a white boy, to his relief and delight. (See image 3.21 for the moment of this transformation.) The book weaves mythical, everyday and cartoon-like storylines. The now-white Jin finds himself plagued by his cousin "Chin-Kee," an inexplicable and over-the-top caricature of various racist and anti-Chinese tropes. Chin-Kee embodies the yellow peril. He is exceptionally good at all academic subjects, mobilizing the "positive" model-minority stereotype. He is also, however, a cloying, toadying coward; secretly, he is a lascivious sexual predator and an unscrupulous trickster with dubious morality. Eventually, Chin-Kee is revealed to be a disguise taken on by the legendary Monkey King from Chinese mythology. The Monkey King as Chin-Kee was sent to help Jin come both to recognize and see the racism in which he has been struggling and, moreover, to realize how deeply he has internalized this racism and how his pernicious self-hatred has caused him to harm both himself and his friends. The book ends with Jin trying to learn how to stop punishing himself and his friends for being not white.



3.0.21. "Now what would you like to become?" *American Born Chinese* protagonist Jin's transformation into a white boy. (Image by Gene Luen Yang. 2006. *American Born Chinese*, 194.)

Is the suburb a happy place into which some simply do not fit? Or is the happiness it offers somehow not happy? It is apparent that the suburb is deeply ambivalent in its spatialization of happiness. These figures, Calvin, Huey, and Jin, stand out, estranged, angry or

embarrassed, as unhappy figures in the suburb represented as a happy place for all others except for these Others. In turn, their experiences rearticulate the suburb as a spatialization of happiness undone by their incapacity or unwillingness to partake appropriately. As Ahmed (2010) notes, if

happiness creates its own horizon, as a horizon of likes, then it is possible to be surrounded by likes that are not your own, and by promises that haunt you in their emptiness. Not only do such objects not cause happiness but they may remind you of your failure to be made happy; they embody a feeling of disappointment. ...Feminist archives are full of scenes of domesticity in which domestic objects, happy objects, become alien, even menacing (76–77).

As we have seen, the suburb turns out to be a place where meaning cannot be finally settled because of profoundly divergent desires and wishes—for home, nature, and happiness—as well as different experiences and anxieties—despair and unbelonging; ennui and too much belongingness. Even the promised happiness and the hope for the sort of good life it offers are ambivalent. As Ahmed (2007/2008) observes,

ordinary attachments to the very idea of the good life are also sites of ambivalence, involving the confusion rather than separation of good and bad feelings: 'Reading happiness becomes a matter of reading the grammar of this ambivalence.' (4)

This ambivalence becomes provisionally, though unsatisfactorily, resolved in an implied future vision: The unhappy child will grow up to be a happy adult. It is hoped that the child's present bad feelings (e.g. Calvin's obstreperousness, Jin's awkwardness, Huey's recalcitrance) will be outgrown and properly socialized into a future good life. Whether they want it or not, in the adult good life to which these characters are propelled, everyone fits in, knows what to do, and is fully accepted, even if, in daily life, they remain affect aliens like King-Cat or American Elf.

Happy Is the Suburb!

The suburb is for many a sign and an experience of belonging—the achievement of the American, Canadian, middle class, or settler's dream. Perhaps this is a dream of becoming-ordinary in which one unbecomes peculiar. The suburb as a common dream is a dream of becoming in-common: one is no longer marked by a categorically generic particularity (e.g. race, class, migrant-status) but becomes instead unmarked by one's choice of dwelling and re-marked as an agentially self-actualized individual. Rather than being an immigrant, or working class, or

racialised, one can instead simply be suburban and by being suburban be like the imagined "everyone else" of the dominant settler society.⁸⁶ Otherness is shunted outside for other Others to inhabit. However, as we saw earlier (in Chapter 2), for critical interpreters of the material and cultural landscape, the suburb is both a maker and a mark of a failing society: one that proliferates inequalities and provisional, inadequate spatial solutions to abiding social divisions. Even the hope for inclusion in an imagined to be already-existing happy community raises questions about the conservative political implications of such apolitical desires for happiness to be based upon becoming part of the dominant group that maintains structures of unequal power and exclusion.

Yet the desire for the suburb to be a happy place, no matter how limited and imposing the notion of happiness, betrays a secret wish that the suburb could exist realized in the way it is stereotyped to be: that there is indeed a somewhere on the urban peripheries where people are living an actualized good life, against all probability and reason. Where, despite any sort of depletion of resources, at least in the present moment, community is spatialized, and no one (perhaps because they all conform, perhaps because they all simply belong) is outside of the remit of this utopia. The degree to which the utopian vision is ultimately liberatory—the kind of good life enabled—however, depends on whether the suburb is imagined as a site for a series of singular, individual achievements or can be re-imagined with the conditions by which all might flourish. Beyond the argument about whether the suburb is an unhappy or happy place, then, simultaneously and contradictorily, the suburb can be read as expressing a hopeful desire for a radical transformation of the very conditions of life, not simply a temporary or spatial escape from them. In this utopian vision, a good life—not simply a materially plentiful life but a meaningfully enriched and fulfilling *good* life—is imagined as being both possible and within quite easy, realistic reach, thanks to and within the suburb.

In being imagined as a space (whether figurative or material) in which happiness will be (or at least ought to be) realised, the suburb imposes a particular normative vision of happiness. Located—as it always is—in a particular type of place and in a particular lifestyle (even if the particularity of these particularities are not always the same from situation to situation), this

⁸⁶ There is a significant sub-field in the suburban literature on the suburb as sites of ethnic enclaves and communities in North America. See for example, Cheng 2010; Fong 1994; Harris 1992; Jones-Correa 2006; Lake 1981; Lieberman 1962; Ray, Halseth and Johnson 1997; Wiese 2004.

happiness-demand demands much of those whom it interpellates⁸⁷: It becomes a stifling injunction that one *must be* happy. For a suburban happiness-demand to interpellate happy suburban subjects is to call into being—and thereby exclude all other possible ways of being—the happy subject of the concrete individual. This, then, must be (since it is constituted as) an always-already happy subject. What does this mean for the suburb? Perhaps in its spatialization, this happiness-demand, even more than a *demand* (to which some sort of a response, including refusal, might still be made) arises as an *imposition*: if one is in the suburb, or is suburban, then one *is* already happy. That is, rather than an offer of happiness or even demand to be happy, it is an assertion that one *is* happy so that no other way of being is imaginable or possible—that unhappiness is impossible.⁸⁸

If such a correspondence—that being suburban means being happy—is bestowed upon that which is suburban (e.g. landscape, person, lifestyle, image) what does it do and mean that no alternative response is (rendered) possible? Donna Haraway (following Derrida) contrasts responsiveness and responsibility to mere reactivity or reaction. As Haraway (and Derrida), argue, "Reaction is for and toward the unfree; response is for and toward the open" (Haraway 2008, 78). That is, whereas reaction is delimited, a calculation, a "fixed calculus proper to machines," response and "responsibility is never calculable. There is no formula for response" (77). When the possibility for response and responsibility is obliterated, what possibility remains for the suburban? Here is where suburbs perhaps receive short-shrift: they can be judged to be good or bad but in being imagined as endowed with inhering qualities, they are then imaginatively produced as lacking a capacity for response, and so can be interpreted but not fundamentally altered or co-produced. Such an endowment (i.e. that the suburb is a happy place and that, therefore, there is no recognisable possibility but to be happy) is the premise and the problem of a mostly unarticulated and often contradictory utopian vision with which the suburban imaginary is imbued. This utopianism is contradictory because it is both hopeful and hope-killing at the same time, a cause of happiness and misery, both a promise and threat of happiness. And, it is effective inasmuch as the suburb is a dialectical spatialization.

⁸⁷ Interpellation is the process by which an individual is hailed by the State as a subject. See Chapter 1 for a discussion of interpellation.

⁸⁸ In Althusserian terms, happiness is an "obviousness" of the suburb inasmuch as it is ideologically necessary and, therefore, (as-if) natural. (Althusser 1971, 45–46)

Chapter 4.

Everydayness: The Suburb as Ordinary and Strange

Whether the suburb is hopeful or hope-killing, the happiness envisioned as enabled by the suburb is, ultimately, one that is ordinary: The suburb offers the happiness of and within everyday life. Imagined as ordinary, banal, even boring, the suburb is, figuratively and materially, the ground upon which daily life unfolds. More than this, it is also the site in which profound, perhaps aggressive, normalcy is imagined both to reside and to arise, as we saw in the discussion on happiness (in Chapter 3). Perhaps by that token of normalcy, it is also the site of strangeness and absurdity as well as ordinary extraordinariness. In this chapter, I consider the suburb as the extraordinary and ordinary figures of the everyday.

Figure 1: The Strange Suburb

Familiar strangers

A number of television shows, including cable dramas and network sitcoms, play on the ambivalence of suburbs as ordinary and strange. In the early seasons of the drama series *Mad Men*, the dysfunction of mid-twentieth century American men, women, children, and families living in the affluent suburbs of New York City appear both as the norm and as differentially hidden and exposed secrets. Madison Avenue ad executive Don Draper, the main character of *Mad Men*, commutes back and forth between Manhattan—where he seduces clients with nostalgically patriarchal pitches and seduces women with his hegemonic masculinity—and his pastoral suburban home, where he performs a script of domestic bliss. More sinisterly, but following a similar logic, the opening credit sequence of *The Sopranos* shows mafia boss Tony Soprano driving home from the dirty, gritty city, in which he conducts his illicit business. Like Don Draper and the countless other commuting businessmen with whom he shares the rush hour at the end of his day, Tony Soprano leaves behind the bustle and actual and metaphorical dirtiness of the city and of his business, finishing his drive in the sanctuary of his tree-lined suburban family home. Both Don and Tony retreat behind the façade of suburban normalcy both to hide and to justify their ruthless urban dealings. Similarly retreating behind the screen of suburban normalcy and respectability, Dexter Morgan, a serial killer and police blood-spatter forensics expert, tries to learn how to be—or at least pass as—a happily married, suburban father of three in season four of the TV series *Dexter*. Newly married and suburbanized, Dexter struggles to find a balance between the demands of his job and learning how to be a husband and father despite his general lack of empathy and emotions. More importantly, he seeks to balance the semblance of a normal person living a normal life while still satisfying his blood-lust, which he achieves through secrecy, lies, and subterfuge.

In contrast to these men who live and struggle to maintain double lives seemingly split geographically between urban sordidness and (the performance of) suburban wholesomeness, TV's suburban women and girls contend with the split between attending to strange turmoil and maintaining an outward appearance of normalcy *within* the suburban home and community context. Thus, in the first season of *Weeds*, newly widowed mother of two Nancy Botwin takes up dealing marijuana within her quiet suburban community in order to maintain the family's

wealthy suburban lifestyle: she enters into a criminal double-life at home in order to maintain the duplicity of a seeming happy suburban home life and community. Similarly, in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Buffy, a seemingly ordinary teenage girl who lives in the seemingly ordinary city of Sunnydale, spends her time trying to keep her suburban high school and community (and the world at large) safe by (and ignorant of her) slaying vampires and other evil creatures that emerge from the portal to demonic dimensions, located beneath her high school's library. Perhaps because his masculinity is always in question and his virility is at stake due to his illness with cancer, Walter White of *Breaking Bad* also tries to maintain a semblance of ordinariness within his own suburban domestic—and especially familial—context. Walter struggles throughout the series to manage and conceal his escalating involvement in increasingly dangerous and high level criminal activity, requiring ever more effort to keep hidden.

In addition to dramas like these, secret identities hidden in the suburb also form the theme for half-hour TV sitcoms such as the adult cartoon *American Dad*, in which an extraterrestrial alien lives with a CIA agent and his family in their suburban home and *3rd Rock from the Sun*, in which an entire crew of extraterrestrial explorers secretly live as a human family in a suburb in order to collect anthropological data. In the 1960s, *Bewitched* depicted a witch living as a suburban housewife, married to a mortal, and trying to minimize her use of magic; while in *I Dream of Jeannie*, a woman genie lives as the house-slave (and, later, wife) of the NASA astronaut who discovered her bottle. All of these shows play on the anxiety of the ambivalent familiarity/strangeness of neighbours: people who, by dint of accidental propinquity and daily superficial encounters seem familiar but who remain, in many cases, fundamentally strangers. These familiar strangers though overtly friendly neighbours might also secretly be (as they are in these shows) duplicitous womanizer, cruel Mafioso, remorseless serial killers, treacherous drug dealers, vampire slayers, aliens, witches, or genies.

Ordinary horror and misrecognized absurdity

The ambivalence of the simultaneously held ordinariness/strangeness of the suburb also plays out routinely in the daily parade of startling or horrifying news stories that reveal with shock and induce moral outrage what nevertheless continues to be espoused as unimaginable deviant and criminal happenings in suburbs. The revelation of home invasions, domestic violence, sexual

abuse, grow ops, kiddie porn rings, school shootings, mall shootings, cyber-bully-induced suicides, gang violence, kidnappings, murder, and so on in the otherwise mystifying ordinariness of the suburb momentarily undo feelings of domestic comfort whilst reinscribing the perceived necessity of such havens of safety.⁸⁹

Ambivalence about the suburb's ordinariness is on display, too, in countless movies wherein a predictable, almost boring suburban everyday life acts as a backdrop or cover for an unfolding of weird events. As Christopher Hoover (1989) suggests,

Horror films offer a scarred but revealing topography of the great American dreamland: suburbia. They bring to the surface submerged sexuality or fears, expose the real horrors of violent crime and the tensions in American society. These films collide the real and unreal, domestic and exotic, natural and supernatural, the sane and the insane. It is within these tears and ruptures that horror finds the space to critique (11).

Hoover goes on to discuss the suburban horror films *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957), *Dawn of the Dead* (1979), *Poltergeist* (1982), and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), which, together, he argues

present a typology of the horror film's various responses to suburbia. All four films can be interpreted as allegories of certain mechanisms of socialization (gender roles, consumerism, corporate power, repressed sexuality and violence) in suburban America over the last thirty years. Provocative horror films suggest that horror is not a timeless condition of the human psyche but rather a response to these specific social and technological constructions (Hoover 1989, 11).

Horror films re-present and respond to the social and technological changes and machinations in a carnivalesque fashion, turning these values topsy-turvy, and undoing the ordinary placid image of the suburb.

But, it is not only the horrifying that makes the suburb extraordinary in the face of its work-a-day ordinariness. Many films, particularly animated ones, set suburbs as the site of the absurd ensconced in pleasant routine: Largely inexplicable, often humorous, outrageous, or surreal happenings, although fully in plain sight in some cases, remain invisible or, rather, unrecognizable through a veneer of expected normalcy—that is, by the dominant suburban imaginary. Thus, the capers of toys that come to life in the various *Toy Story* movies (1995, 1999, 2010) remain undetected by adult humans no matter how near or how flamboyant the toys'

⁸⁹ See Brottman (2009) for a discussion of some horrifying events in American suburbs in late twentieth century that led to a reconfiguration of American attitudes to the suburb.

adventures—even when these adventures occur within full view of the adult human-populated public realm. The *Toy Story* toys' true liveliness remain unsuspected and unseen by adults in large part because the toys themselves work actively to maintain the illusion of their passivity. Image 4.1 is a still frame from a scene in which two toys, Buzz Lightyear and Woody, try to catch up to their owner, Andy, who is moving. Although the toys normally play inanimate when in public, they chase Andy's vehicle down the road, in plain sight in their lively mode.



4.0.1. A lively Buzz Lightyear and Woody trying desperately to reunite with their owner Andy, speed down a street. (Still frame from *Toy Story*.)⁹⁰

In other animated films, clearly astonishing characters dwell and unambiguously extraordinary events unfold in plain sight in the ordinary suburbs. Yet, even these remain largely unnoticed or misrecognized by the adult human population until they become so ostentatiously conspicuous as to be impossible to ignore. Thus, in *The Incredibles*, the superhero married couple of Mr. Incredible and Elastic Girl settle down, raise a family, and live an anonymous life in the suburbs after legislation is passed requiring superheroes refrain from ever using their super-powers because of the excessive tax burden caused by cleaning up after battles. While there are clear indications that this is not an ordinary family such as Mr. Incredible's hulking physique (see image 4.2), his son's improbable speed, and his daughter's propensity to become invisible, none of the neighbours—except for a small boy—seems to sense this strangeness. Eventually, the family breaches the anonymity when they are compelled to battle a super-villain

⁹⁰ Image retrieved from http://www.imdb.com/media/rm4079782144/tt0114709?ref_=ttmi_mi_all_sf_22, June 8, 2014.

beginning in the heart of downtown and moving, eventually, to their suburban home, making it impossible for others to ignore the superpowers being unleashed in the ordinary setting.



4.0.2. Mr. Incredible on his daily commute, barely fitting in his car. (Still frame from *The Incredibles*.)⁹¹

Finally, in the animated film *Over the Hedge*, a new subdivision is built next to a forest in which a group of woodland animals live, spending most of their time foraging and stockpiling food for their winter hibernation.⁹² Initially, when in the presence of humans, the animals try to act in a way that they believe will be read as "natural" by the humans, as they have been taught by the newcomer to the group, RJ—a racoon who has anthropological knowledge of the suburbanites. Many of these ways of seeming natural are humorous precisely because they are so contrived, seemingly unnatural, and unconvincing. However, by the end of the film, such pretences are entirely dropped and it becomes indisputably obvious to the humans that the animals are intelligent, organized, and can communicate with each other through a shared language. In particular, the animals are caught in the act of emptying out all the contents of a suburbanite's kitchen and subsequently coordinating to escape capture. Nevertheless, earlier and throughout the film, there are overt clues that the animals act collectively with rational purpose, yet these clues are consistently missed by the humans—even by the children. Expecting toys, humans, and animals not to be able to act respectively in such an active, super, or rational manner, the suburban neighbours never see them doing so even amidst obvious displays.

⁹¹ Image retrieved from http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0317705/mediaindex?ref_=tt_pv_mi_sm, June 8, 2014.

⁹² See Chapter 3 for additional discussion of this film.

Where these films play upon expectations of ordinariness and polite neighbourly disregard as covers for extraordinariness, in the animated film *Despicable Me* (2010), the rank odiousness of the super-villain Gru and his presence in his suburban neighbourhood are overtly marked. He drives an extravagantly polluting and large vehicle, has an extremely poorly maintained yard and house, and utters thinly-veiled threats of death to his neighbour's dog. Perhaps most obviously, he unabashedly flash-freezes other customers in the local coffee shop using his freeze-ray gun. Yet, neither he nor his diabolical actions register as anything more than inconsiderate or unpleasant—an upping of the ante of unpleasantness to be expected in such suburban neighbourhoods in which civility and toleration seem to be tightly strained. Thus, as we see in one scene, his absurdly huge, fume-spewing vehicle is only a bigger, more obnoxious version of an SUV, which he passes on the road, itself depicted as an absurdly large, fume-spewing, obnoxious vehicle that has just rudely passed a smaller vehicle. (See image 4.3 for sequential still frames of this scene.)



4.0.3. A large, aggressive SUV passes a small car on a suburban street only to be overtaken by Gru's even larger and more aggressive utility vehicle. (Still frames from *Despicable Me*, 2010.)⁹³

Gru's veiled threat to his neighbour's dog is only a verbal escalation of the passive-aggressive tone initially taken by the neighbour and the physical crossing of boundaries by his dog.⁹⁴ Not even the pyramid of Giza, stolen by Gru's nemesis Vector and barely hidden in Vector's backyard, in another suburban neighbourhood, seems to garner any worrying attention. The implausible attempt at hiding the massive structure under a large tarp painted to look like the sky seems to be sufficient disguise. Image 4.4 shows a still frame of the aftermath of both Gru and the suburban street having been pummelled with a barrage of missiles and explosives by Vector's zealous home-security system. Despite the catastrophe, none of the other neighbours seem to have noticed this. In their inattentiveness to such overt signs of menace and threat, folding truly diabolical plots and figures into the petty violence of routine social interaction and toleration of

⁹³ Images (top to bottom) retrieved June 3, 2014 from: <http://tinyurl.com/m56kptv>, <http://tinyurl.com/khl4kcc>, and <http://tinyurl.com/lvo38f4>

⁹⁴ See also William Shatner's portrayal of a raging neighbour in the song "Rockin' the Suburbs" (Chapter 2, Figure 3).

neighbours, the mostly-invisible suburban neighbours of Gru and Vector remain oblivious to the imminent and horrendous peril, which constantly threatens to (and occasionally actually) besiege them.



4.0.4. A smouldering crater is left in the otherwise quiet suburban street after Gru, attempting to enter Vector's compound, has been hit by a number of missiles. Despite the wreckage, none of the neighbours check on the commotion. (Still frame from *Despicable Me* 2010.)⁹⁵

The examples of strangeness in these films help to illustrate the political nature of quotidian neighbourly disregard. By wilfully ignoring their own on-going lived experiences of extraordinariness, these suburbanites collude to re-enforce the image of the suburb as safe, predictable, ordinary, and boring. The suburban imaginary as ideological trope not only trumps the haptic, sensorial, affective, experiential and material conditions of everyday life in these suburbs, but re-interprets these conditions and replaces them with images. It is, in other words, a locus of normative socialization, a political site of ideological repetition.

Figure 2: The Everyday Suburb

Such ordinary–extraordinariness is not, of course, the whole story. Indeed, in the above examples, the strange is identifiable precisely because it is exceptional; there continues to be a normal suburb that forms the quotidian backdrop of ordinary life. Rather than being an

⁹⁵ Image retrieved from <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1323594/>, September 24, 2011.

exceptional space, or a space of endlessly emerging eventfulness, the suburb in these films is precisely the space of everyday life—both everyday in the sense of unremarkable daily life, but also everyday in the sense used by critical theorists of the everyday emphasizing ambivalence and critique.⁹⁶ As an increasingly common, even ubiquitous form of daily experience (from living to working to pursuing leisure), there is no doubt that the suburb affects a widespread, mainstream and huge number of people and constitutes an ordinary place for many.⁹⁷ However, whether wonderful or pathetic for its banality, judged to be good or bad, happy or unhappy, it is worth re-considering the suburb also for its taken-for-granted ordinariness. Jokes and observations about the ordinary tragedies and joys of everyday suburban life have been chronicled daily in mainstream, serialized comic strips, printed in newspapers, over a long period of time. Until recently, comics depicted the suburbs as the background for normalcy and mundane buffoonery—quaint endearments and foibles of home life. For example, suburban comics⁹⁸ such as *Arlo & Janis*, *Blondie*, *Cul de Sac*, *For Better or For Worse*,⁹⁹ *Foxtrot*, *Frazz*, and *Nancy* set the suburb as the ordinary backdrop against which ordinary domestic life unfolds while strips like *Dennis the Menace*, *Family Circus*, *Garfield*, *Marmaduke*, and *Peanuts*, use the quirkiness of children and animals to make the familiarity of everyday suburban life seem strange for humorous effect.¹⁰⁰ However, as I discussed above, comic strips have also, more recently, depicted the suburb as the site and cause of depleted everyday life, recounting the on-going tragedies of sprawl and overconsumption (e.g. *Over the Hedge*) and classist and racist privilege (e.g. *Boondocks*, *The City*). Precisely the paradox Henri Lefebvre (1987), Maurice Blanchot (1987), and other critics of the quotidian observe in everydayness is reflected in

⁹⁶ For a further elaboration on the critique of everyday life, see Chapter 1.

⁹⁷ It is now a standard line in suburban literature that the world's population is now majority urban (UN 2010) with a good deal of that urban population dwelling and/or working in peripheral and otherwise suburban spaces (Stern and Marsh 1997). Moreover, the population of the suburbs *exceeds* the combined population of rural and urban communities in both Canada (Gordon n.d.) and the U.S.A. (Hayden 2003) and it is where "most people reside" in the U.K. (Huq 2013b, n.p.).

⁹⁸ The location of some comics cannot be confirmed as they are deliberately left ambiguous. It is possible that some of these are set in small towns that appear suburban-like. But it is precisely in that lack of distinction between suburban landscapes and suburban-like settings that the ubiquity of suburban-ness is illustrated.

⁹⁹ *For Better or For Worse* is a Canadian comic strip about a suburban family.

¹⁰⁰ Whether this intended effect of humour is successful is a matter of debate. This notion of making the familiar strange comes from Peter Berger (1963) and is a fundamental operation of *sociological consciousness*.

To ask sociological questions, then, presupposes that one is interested in looking some distance beyond the commonly accepted or officially defined goals of human actions. It presupposes a certain awareness that human events have different levels of meaning, some of which are hidden from the consciousness of everyday life (Berger 1963, 29).

suburban comics: That is, on the one hand, daily life is dreary, entirely colonized by the alienating conditions of modern, urban, capitalist life. And, on the other hand, the daily continuously escapes hold—it allows no finitude, conclusiveness, or consistent narrative.

Critique of everyday life

Charlie Brown and the Peanuts gang offer reminders of the happy, nice things about suburban life—particularly nostalgia-producing moments—by paying special heed to the "special occasions" of the calendar such as the start of the school year, holidays, summer games, the changing of the seasons, etc.¹⁰¹ In these suburban comic strips, the renewing cyclical rhythms of everyday life seem to be preserved and treasured against the crushing monotony imposed by capitalist modernity as Henri Lefebvre (1987) describes it: Modernity, with its endless routine and repetition, flattens out the cycles in its linear logic (9). Charlie Brown's daily concerns tend to be whether his baseball team might ever win a game; or, if he should trust that his friend Lucy will reliably hold the football for him as he runs to kick it; or, how to keep his kites away from the kite-eating tree; or, how to catch the attention of the little red-haired girl. Yet, in the seemingly carefree, nostalgic childhood suburban world of Charlie Brown and friends, not all is well. Famously, Charlie Brown is relentlessly denigrated by his friends, family, and pet dog Snoopy. Image 4.5 is one of the first syndicated *Peanuts* strips. In it, Charlie Brown's friends Shermy and Patty sit on a curb. As Charlie Brown passes by, Shermy extols his friend as "good ol' Charlie Brown" until the final panel, when Charlie Brown has finally gone and Shermy declares his hatred of his friend.

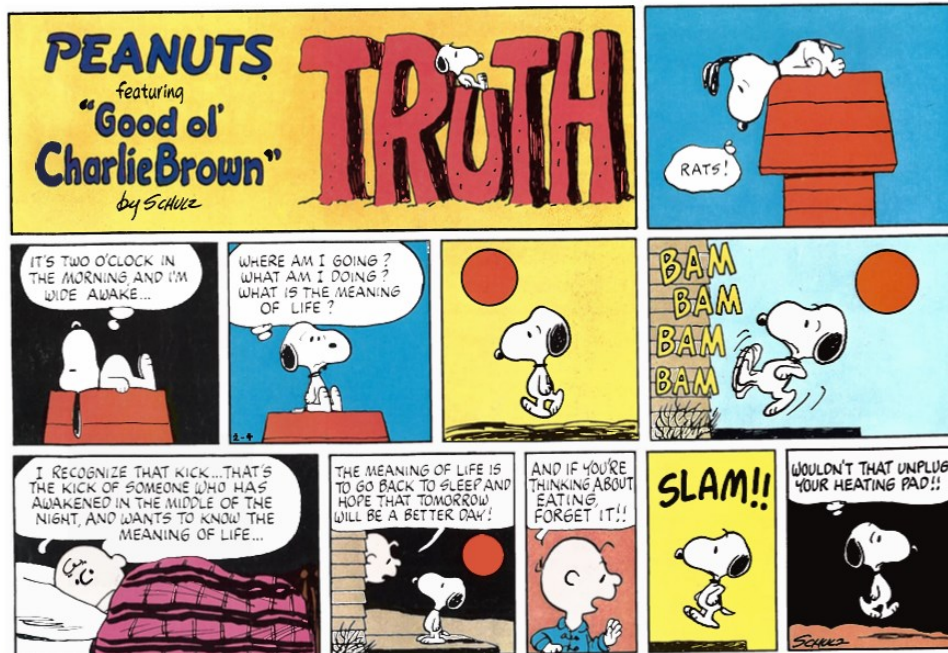
¹⁰¹ There are a number of animated Charlie Brown movies. Each of these marks a particular holiday. The act of marking seasonal holidays, the use of light-hearted jazz scores, the unaffected voicing by children, as well as the resolution of each movie's narrative into a moral lesson and a happy ending give these movies a highly nostalgic quality. In contrast, the comic strips that continued through time rather than being contained within the remit of a holiday, rarely were resolved (and especially not by happy endings or moral lessons), and, having relatively minimal dialogue and no narration, relied on a great deal of readerly interpretation.



4.0.5. "Well! Here comes ol' Charlie Brown! Good ol' Charlie Brown... ..Yes, sir! Good ol' Charlie Brown... How I hate him!" The first *Peanuts* strip. Even Charlie Brown's friend Sherry hates him. (Comic by Charles M. Schulz. 1950. *Peanuts*. October 2.)¹⁰²

Charlie Brown is also besieged with existential and moral philosophical problems. He lays awake at nights contemplating the meaning and purpose of his life and is attuned to existential crisis in others. In image 4.6, Charlie Brown's pet dog Snoopy, lays on top of his doghouse in the suburban backyard, unable to sleep. As he finds himself contemplating questions about the meaning of life, he gets up, eventually walking over to Charlie Brown's house and kicking at the door. Charlie Brown, in bed inside the house, hears the kicking and says to himself, "I recognize that kick... That's the kick of someone who has awakened in the middle of the night, and wants to know the meaning of life..." Charlie Brown explains that "the meaning of life is to go back to sleep and hope that tomorrow will be a better day!" and sends Snoopy away, back out into the darkness of the night.

¹⁰² Image retrieved from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peanuts>, August 27, 2013.



4.0.6. Snoopy plagued with existential angst, unable to sleep, turns to Charlie Brown for comfort who recognizes the sound of such angst. (Comic by Charles M. Schulz. 1975. "Truth," *Peanuts Jubilee*, plate 132.)¹⁰³

While *Peanuts* tackles grand philosophical problems of existence and meaning, even Charlie Brown's concerns that seem inconsequential in their triviality or inevitability become concerns of some importance when given attentive consideration. For example, one of the running gags of the strip was Lucy's football trick (see images 4.7–4.9). In one strip a year, in early autumn, Lucy would offer to hold the football in place so that Charlie Brown could complete a running punt. Charlie Brown would express doubt. Lucy would offer a logical or emotional appeal. And, Charlie Brown would be convinced. As he would run towards the ball, his scepticism and doubt would typically give way to joyful belief, imagining that he would kick the ball an extraordinary distance. Inevitably, Lucy would pull away the ball at the last moment, leaving Charlie Brown going for the kick only to fly through the air and land on his back. Typically, the strip ended with Lucy chastising him for having believed her in the first place by

¹⁰³ Text reads:

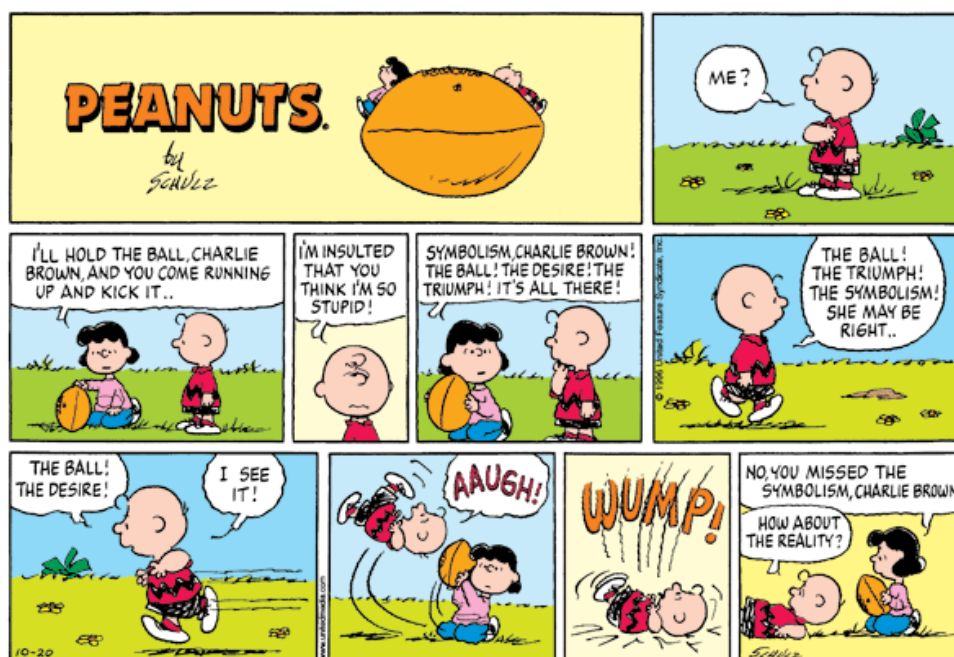
Snoopy (dog): Rats! It's two o'clock in the morning and I'm wide awake... Where am I going? What am I doing? What is the meaning of life?

Charlie Brown: I recognize that kick... That's the kick of someone who has awakened in the middle of the night, and wants to know the meaning of life...

[to Snoopy]: The meaning of life is to go back to sleep and hope that tomorrow will be a better day! And if you're thinking about eating, forget it!!

Snoopy: Wouldn't that unplug your heating pad!!

unveiling the flaw in his accepting the shabby logic or emotional plea that she had offered. What makes the gag work each time is that Charlie Brown always comes around to believing and hoping despite what always turns out to be the utter inevitability and often cruelty of Lucy's last-minute betrayal. Despite the routinization of disappointment, Charlie Brown always in the course of his run towards the ball comes to believe in a different, triumphant outcome. What would have to be a very short duration in which Charlie Brown runs inexorably towards the ball, is nevertheless fulsome enough for him to change entirely his thoughts about, affective orientation to, and the material conditions of his world. But, what for Charlie Brown strengthens into the certainty that this is a world in which, at the end of his run, there will be a ball to kick, dissolves into a world in which he kicks nothing and falls through the empty air with a "wump" onto the ground.



4.0.7. A typical version of the "football gag" in which Lucy tricks Charlie Brown into trusting that she will hold the football for him to kick, yanking it away at the last moment. (Comic by Charles M. Schulz. 1996. *Peanuts*.)¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Image retrieved from <http://tinyurl.com/85fx69h>, July 31, 2013. Text reads:

Charlie Brown: Me?

Lucy: I'll hold the ball, Charlie Brown, and you come running up and kick it...

Charlie Brown: I'm insulted that you think I'm so stupid!

Lucy: Symbolism, Charlie Brown! The ball! The desire! The triumph! It's all there!

Legible as a form of critique of the everyday, the strip extends the experience of and gaze upon this short moment so that the gag of Charlie Brown's inevitable, routine disappointment and Lucy's inevitable, routine betrayal can be seen anew, can be de-habituated so that Charlie Brown's pattern of gullibility can be seen for the radically hopeful gesture that it is. No matter how many disappointments, humiliations, and betrayals he endures, no matter how much and how often he should know otherwise, for Charlie Brown, there is always potential for an utterly different outcome. Charlie Brown can imagine a breach of dreary routine that opens the horizon of a glorious new utopia. In his striving to kick the football physically in the present, material world, he attempts to realize such an ideal. And it is this utopian longing that Lucy exploits repeatedly (see image 4.8).¹⁰⁵



4.0.8. Lucy confirms the endless repetition of this pattern of trust and betrayal, hope and disappointment. (Comic by Charles M. Schulz. 1981. *Peanuts*.)¹⁰⁶

Charlie Brown: The ball! The triumph! The symbolism! She may be right. The ball! The desire! I see it! Aaugh!

Lucy: No, you missed the symbolism, Charlie Brown

Charlie Brown: How about the reality?

¹⁰⁵ The gag, as the strip in general, also highlights the ordinary irrationality and obtuseness of everyday sociality and identity. Were Lucy, with her intentional and cruel pranks and put-downs, and Charlie Brown "friends"? What, besides habit and geography, motivated the many kids of the Peanuts "gang" to spend their time with each other?

¹⁰⁶ Image retrieved from <http://tinyurl.com/85fx69h>, July 31, 2013. Text reads:

Ultimately, the failure of Charlie Brown's utopianism is precisely the failure Henri Lefebvre (1987, 11) identifies in attempts to actualize a break with the ordinary through festivals or other escapes from everydayness. The mistake is in attempting to surpass the ordinary (as in Charlie Brown's case,) as an individual exercise, without changing any of the material or structural conditions of everyday life itself. Lucy, with her alternating ruthless and pragmatic cynicism epitomizes the aggressive or *laissez-faire* affirmation of hegemony and its attendant mystification of everyday life and possibilities for the ordinary to be otherwise.



4.0.9. "It's just so sad...eventually everything in life just becomes routine.." In a pattern so familiar as not to require further dialogue, Lucy's trick ends with her sobering recognition that rather than renewing playfulness, this repetition has lead to joyless routinization. (Comic by Charles M. Schulz. 1988. *Peanuts*.)¹⁰⁷

Charlie Brown's is a childhood burdened by the intensities, nothingness, frustrations, routine terrors, and dull time passing of everyday life. And in this way, Charlie Brown's childhood and the suburb of his inhabitation are "ordinary," in the sense used by critics of everyday life.¹⁰⁸ That is, the spaces in which he and his "gang" dwell and traverse enable both

Lucy: Over here! I'm over here!

Charlie Brown: I can't believe it... Not again! Does she really think I'm such a fool? Not again! Am I dumb enough to think she's going to let me kick that football? I can't believe it! Not again! Am I really going to try it? Not again! I can't believe I'm trying it! Is it really happening again? Aaugh!

Lucy: Again, Charlie Brown...and again, and again and again

¹⁰⁷ Image retrieved from <http://tinyurl.com/85fx69h>, July 31, 2013.

¹⁰⁸ See Chapter 1 for a discussion of everyday life theory.

tedium and inspiration. At once, they provide the material conditions that promote and re-enforce resignation to a life outside of their control and adoption of the meanings provided by that life. And, simultaneously, these spaces make room for philosophical ruminations on the otherwise possibilities and supporting play and imaginings that actualize such difference. Charlie Brown's experience of the complexity and crushing repetition of the everyday, the sense that it is both mundane and awesome presents a sly critique of everyday life. The suburb acts, then, as a site of the ordinary and the banal-extraordinary. The ordinary and that which bears the appearance and minor surprise of the extraordinary, what I am here calling the banal-extraordinary, serve as further affirmation of the inevitability of the everydayness of the everyday. However, the suburb can also be the site of the truly extraordinary. As I have shown, and as Lefebvre asserts, there is no reason why the ordinary cannot also reveal the extraordinary: "Why wouldn't the concept of everydayness reveal the extraordinary in the ordinary?" (Lefebvre 1987, 9)

Obscurity of Everydayness and the Utopian Suburb

There are two ways in which the everydayness of the suburb is obscured and for which critique, aided by illustrative devices, as I have used throughout this chapter, is necessary for apprehension. On one hand, the extraordinariness of the everyday is hidden by its habituating tendency. The event-like structure of the cinema seems to offer an appropriate instrument of extraordinariness with which to consider the everyday suburb as a site harbouring ideologically occluded exceptional happenings. The interplay between the ideological imaginary of the suburb as site of utter ordinary normalcy and the wilful naïveté with which such an imaginary is affirmed despite events contradicting such an imaginary is paralleled, more particularly, by animated motion pictures (both films and TV shows), which require an extraordinary collusion between the film and audience. In animated motion pictures, what ought to be still and lifeless, moves and seems to live. The mechanism by which this miraculous illusion is achieved necessarily remains invisible to the viewer in order to achieve this effect; at the same time, the viewer actively ignores that such mechanisms are in operation in order to enjoy the effect of liveliness as naturalistic. Judith Halberstam (2011) notes that while the effect of motion picture cinema is intended to make invisible the suturing together of a series of still images to create the

seamless illusion of motion, matching the audience's expectation that the motion encountered in everyday life will be represented on the screen, stop-motion animation in particular introduces a certain uncanniness in this illusion. This form of animation creates the illusion of motion through the painstaking mechanical re-positioning of inanimate objects shot frame-by-frame. The actual movement (of the human hands that reposition the inanimate objects between shots) remains invisible and in its place, simulated movement is produced through the mechanism of film. Thus, it "conveys life where we expect stillness, and stillness where we expect liveliness" (Halberstam 2011, 178). Moreover, with respect to animated cinema more generally, Halberstam (2011) argues that what is conveyed is neither merely an image nor "image masquerading as reality"; rather, it must "always be the image of ideologically committed thought. It is also the image of change and transformation itself" (181).

By contrast, the routine, episodic structure of the funny pages and television shows seems to offer an appropriate canvas of ordinariness upon which such daily spectacles and accusations might be drawn out. This is the other way in which the everyday is obscured: the ordinariness of everydayness also hides the strangeness of the everyday. The suburb is a cultural text. Inasmuch as it is a means by which cultural values and meanings are broadly transmitted, the suburb is, moreover, a mass medium.¹⁰⁹ Here, then, the popular, mass medium of the newspaper and comic book¹¹⁰ (now increasingly the web) coincides with the mass medium of the ordinary suburb. These comic strips are premised on the ordinariness of the suburb but simultaneously render it as notable: As such, they have the capacity to disrupt one's normal paradigm of making sense of the world and, thus, offer a glimpse into an alternate world of potentiality that is simultaneously all around but hidden from ordinary view. The comics and TV shows represent suburbs as a habitual, habituated, habituating place that is occupied by the uneventful, the insignificant, and the ephemeral, which recede back into the quotidian, unremarkable except as marked by the comics and TV shows themselves. Yet, in this marking, these popular media become remarkable.

Returning to the earlier discussion, whether it is a good or bad place, the suburb is nevertheless imagined to be a space that can enable the good life. If the suburb is to enable such a life, then, at least according to the Aristotelian conception, it must be a political site: a place in

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Beatriz Colomina (1996) who argues that architecture is a mass medium.

¹¹⁰ Gabilliet (2010) notes that comic books could have been considered a mass medium in the early- to mid-twentieth century but by the new millennium, it no longer had the vast readership, relegating the medium to a marginal cultural status.

which political and social contestation might occur. It is precisely that the suburb is a site of everydayness—that sphere of life that seems deceptively to be the least political—in which its political quality can be discovered. In particular, the suburb, just as everyday life

is political in that it takes place within the context of human-made conditions that are shaped by collective normative judgments...[and] cries out for critique and perhaps transformation, not despite but because it so easily comes to seem apolitical (Kogl 2009, 516)

It is, then, the sense that the suburb seems so apolitical—that is, so ordinary and everyday—that illuminates what is most hidden and to which I have returned again and again throughout this chapter, which is that the suburb is utopian.

The suburb, as ordinary, is by many envisioned as imperfect, rapacious, and nullifying; and, because of this, it is imagined as a site of everydayness that is both a "bad" place and an ordinary cause of unhappiness. The suburb as everyday is also, however, a spatial and cultural expression of an earnest desire and daily attempts to live a good life or for the hope that such a life is possible—a life in pursuit of that ultimate goal of enacting human virtue. How might it be possible to refrain from turning that desire into a voracious colonizing drive that drives away spirits and strangeness? How might alienation from this desire be averted, disallowing its reification into a commodity, as a superficial form of happiness, that is sold back to be consumed or a landscape to be fully mapped?

This is, at least partially, a problem of imagining. The irresolution of the ambivalences that constitute the everyday spatialization of the suburb renders it concretely as the mass housing of a mass society, depoliticized encampment, a state of the abandonment of collective, public space—the actualization of a hopekilling desire of individual escape. Simultaneously, however, it is an imperfect but working expression of hopeful utopian desire for radical liberation from the constraining, deadened conditions of everyday life in this contemporary context. In the face of ambivalence, the suburb remains utopian. This utopianism fluctuates between privatopianism that augments divisiveness and a retreat into a dream world and radical utopianism that breaks through the encumbrances of everyday life into a liberatory lived world. In the suburb, this confused utopia is achieved. For Baudrillard (1988), "The US is utopia achieved" (77) in the here time and now place; as a result, it is in crisis, "confronted with the problem of its duration and

permanence" (77) and living in the paradox of a realized utopia.¹¹¹ It is precisely in its materialization and stabilization that the utopia of the suburb ultimately fails: That is, it is precisely that it is thought to be a *realized* utopia rather than sustained as a process or orientation (Harvey 2000, Gardiner 2006) that makes it, paradoxically, dystopian (Harvey 2000): the suburb as place rather than as spatialization. To prevent the reification of utopian desires in the suburb, in other words, the suburb too must not be reified, but tended to as material, lived, and imagined.

¹¹¹ Baudrillard (1988) suggests that, in contrast to this American crisis, Europeans are confronted with a crisis "of historical ideals facing up to the impossibility of their realization" (77). Europeans "shall remain nostalgic utopians, agonizing over our ideals, but baulking, ultimately, at their realization, professing that everything is possible, but never that everything has been achieved. Yet that is what America asserts" (78–79). That is, for Baudrillard, America asserts that utopia ("revolution, progress, freedom") has been achieved. As such, Americans "live in paradox (for a realized utopia is a paradoxical idea)" (79).

**Part II. Critical Perspectives.
Paradoxes of Suburban Spatialization
and Gallery-exhibited Art**

Chapter 5.

Anaesthetic Figures of Exteriority

Suburban themes make for a fecund and prolific arena in which artists grapple with questions of what the suburb is, what it promises and provides, what its effects and their larger implications are, and what its affects and their intimate implications are. There is an impressive number of pieces, range of interpretative perspectives, and variety of media involved. They include painting, drawing, collage, video, sculpture, installation, land art, multimedia, web-based interactive pieces, and photography (including documentary, photojournalist, and staged; landscape, portraiture, etc.). In touring a large number and variety of suburban artworks, I have found that the approaches taken to the suburb are particularly attentive to suburban spatialization. The distinction between interiors and exteriors figure especially prominently as well as the relationship between these two spatial modes and their related interpretative–experiential imaginary orientations of interiority and exteriority. In this chapter, I consider the suburban exterior as it is represented in visual artworks. (Then, in Chapter 6, I consider the suburban interior.)

Many works of art represent the suburban exterior as uninviting, or dislocated non-places.¹¹² Suburban exteriority figures as anaesthetic. Here, I am using anaesthetic in two complementary, though seemingly opposed ways. In these works, the suburb is imaged as numbing the capacity for emotional, affective, and aesthetic response to it through a *deprivation* or an *excess* of the sensible—of that which can be sensed and made sense of. First, the suburban exteriors depicted defy, for the most part, aesthetic considerations, seemingly preventing affective response or producing only a flattened, insufficient one. The suburban exterior is depicted in many works of art as ugly or pragmatic rather than beautiful. This is the most obvious way in which the suburb, particularly suburban exteriors, are represented as anaesthetic: The suburban landscapes, buildings, and infrastructure are depicted as characterized by a *lack* of aesthetic consideration—whether visual, somatic, or visceral. This is signaled in particular by a sense that the overriding ethic guiding the environmental design is a concern for ease of manufacturing, orderliness of transportation, and utilitarian efficiency over any socio-cultural consideration or concern with beauty, experience, or feeling. In this way, these sites can be described as ugly.¹¹³ Second, however, the suburb is often imagined as inducing *anaesthesia*, an incapacity to sense, by *overwhelming* the senses. The buildings and other structures such as electric lines, roadways, parking lots, single-purpose designated areas, etc. are so massive, numerous, repetitive, uniform, persistent or ubiquitous as to confound any capacity for intelligibility or sensibility. As a result, the effect (and affect) of these exteriors is an overwhelming of the senses—a landscape in which a capacity to respond to the sensorial environment is numbed, flattened, or made dull through overexposure. Rendering the senses numb, these landscapes are nonsensical but remain intelligible: That is, they convey a sensual phenomenon that can only be understood intellectually not sensually.

¹¹² There are, of course, many artists who approach suburbs as capable of being rendered as pretty, pleasant, longingly nostalgic, or even scenic or beautiful. In particular, there are a host of Australian painters (for example, Howard Arkley, Helen Cantrell, Emma J. Williams) and French Impressionists and Post-Impressionists who have rendered beautiful suburban landscapes (for example, Claude Monet, Vincent van Gogh, Henri Seurat, Henri Rousseau). Nevertheless, their work is not without an embedded critique of the spatial division of classes and the uneven distribution to the wealthy of aesthetically beautiful dwelling places.

¹¹³ I am reticent in my use of the notion of "ugliness" to describe the suburban landscape, particularly as if the description can be universally agreed upon, because such assessments are bound up with moral judgments which are, at least in part, founded on classed, raced, and cultural expressions and judgments. My use of "ugly" to describe the suburb is limited, as I describe above, to the domination of a machinic logic in the creation of human environments over the concerns of everyday live encounters of these environments and over the concerns of nonhuman nature. I acknowledge that there is an implicit moral judgment in this definition, which, for reasons of space, I cannot consider in greater depth, here.

I have identified nearly two-dozen suburb-themed art exhibitions in North American galleries that exhibited in the decade span between 2002 and 2012. Adding the artists whose work have been featured in these exhibits to a list of artists working on themes of the suburb who have not shown in these explicitly suburban-themed exhibitions, I have identified well over three hundred different artists as having been active in North America in the last decade working on suburban themes. The exhibits and artists are listed in Appendix A. To come up with this list, I began with overtly suburb-themed exhibits. Initially, this included looking at catalogues. Amongst these were, first, *World's Away: New Suburban Landscapes* (at the Walker Art Center in 2008), an extensive catalogue that I initially came across because of a number of the scholarly essays it included. In addition to this was *Burb: Zones of Living* (Manifest Gallery in 2010) and *Cul-de-Sac: Art from a Suburban Nation* (at the Radford University Art Museum in 2006)¹¹⁴ which are slim but beautiful catalogues. I also looked at catalogues acquired through interlibrary loan: *I Love the Burbs* (at the Katonah Museum of Art in 2006), *The Burbs: The Influence of Suburban Iconography on Pictorial Art* (at DFN Gallery in 2003), and *Suburbia: An Exhibition Examining the Nature of Suburbia and Its Effects on the Contemporary Psyche* (at Art Gallery of Peel in 2002). And, I looked at the websites for exhibits that did not produce physical catalogues:...*After the Suburbs* (at Kiang Gallery in 2011), *Faraway Nearby: Addressing Suburbia* (at Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art in 2010)¹¹⁵, *Global Suburbia: Meditations on the World of the 'Burbs* (at Abington Art Center and Sculpture Park in 2008)¹¹⁶ and *Suburbia* (at Platform Gallery in 2011). Looking through these exhibition catalogues and on-line ephemera associated with the exhibits, through library searches, as well as through other on-line sources such as gallery websites and virtual galleries, and artists' websites, I was able to identify additional artists, artworks and exhibits that are identifiable as suburban—that is, "suburb-themed". One of the most fruitful methods for identifying relevant artists and artwork was to sift through the CVs of artists who had exhibited in identified suburb-themed shows and look for other shows in which they had exhibited. In many cases, artists were exhibiting in multiple suburb-themed exhibits. Searching out these other exhibits in turn lead to discovering additional

¹¹⁴ Thanks to Kim Cochrane, the Registrar/Assistant for the Radford University Art Museum for generously sending me the catalogue.

¹¹⁵ Thanks to Stevie Greco, administrative assistant at the Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art for kindly sending me the didactic wall text from the exhibition, including a list of works in the show.

¹¹⁶ Thanks to Heather Rutledge of the Abington Art Center for kindly sending me the gallery essay by the exhibit curator Sue Spaid.

artists. Finally, I also included artists whose names and/or works I had, through other means, come across as being described as suburban, such as in the suburban scholarly literature, through art reviews, word of mouth, and internet and library searches.¹¹⁷ Most of the art I have looked at, I viewed on a computer screen or as reproduced in a book. I did, however, also see some works in person. I was able to look at the photographic works of Brian Ulrich in his exhibit *Copia* at the Cleveland Museum of Art, which I visited in September 2011; the paintings of Jennifer McAuley in her exhibit *Landscapes of Suburbia* at Place des Arts (Coquitlam, BC) in September 2011; and, the diverse artworks in *Spaces of the City*, an exhibit at the National Gallery of Art (Ottawa, ON) in August 2011 as well as in *Mapping a Prairie City: Lethbridge and its Suburbs*, an exhibit at the Southern Alberta Art Gallery (Lethbridge, AB) in September 2011.¹¹⁸ These latter exhibits included the work of a number of different artists, working with a variety of media but all addressed the subject of urban and suburban spaces.¹¹⁹ However, for the way I engaged with these artworks, seeing them "in person" was less important than being able to access a wide scope and variety since I am not doing a technical critique of the individual art pieces.

I conducted such an extensive search for suburban art in order to be able to survey as wide a scope of the landscape of suburban art as possible and get a sense of the suburban imaginary preoccupying art. Having reviewed the artwork of dozens of artists, I narrowed down the number of works to consider more systematically those listed in Appendix A. These works have been specifically and explicitly characterized as "suburban" by gallery curators, art critics, or the artists themselves. It is artwork by artists on this list that I used to look for the broad themes and recurring figures identified and discussed in this (and the following) chapter.

¹¹⁷ In creating my list, I did not include non-North American artists except those few who have exhibited in North American galleries. This is for two reasons. The number of artists exhibiting in North America addressing the question of the suburb is already huge and unwieldy for a descriptive project. To add the works of the large range of international artists would be both quantitatively and qualitatively challenging. For example, in Australia alone, a sizable catalogue (McAuliffe 1996) chronicles that country's many significant artists of the suburb. While large numbers can be cut down to be made manageable and insightful according to narrowing criteria, the more important reason not to include artists and artwork from outside of the North American context is that, although the suburb and suburbanization are global phenomena, the suburban imaginary to which the suburb is both a response and for which it is an impetus has different histories, social contexts, and interpretations in different locales.

¹¹⁸ Thanks to the University of Alberta's Department of Sociology Research Travel Funds for supporting this research.

¹¹⁹ Although the details of the exhibit *Spaces of the City* are included in Appendix A, they do not include a list of artists whose work appeared in the exhibition because I do not have a reliable complete list; however, pieces by Susan Dobson, some of whose work I discuss below, were amongst the works exhibited.

In the first section of my discussion of exteriors, I consider the suburban exterior through the ways in which it is represented by artists as anaesthetic. Thus, as we shall see, for example, industrial suburbs depicted in their grandiose, inhuman scale exceed the viewer's capacity to make sense of these landscapes, rendering these disturbing images into aesthetic abstractions. These sites are pragmatic serial orderings of space for machinic efficiency, in particular for the efficient movement of resources and goods through a globally ordered system of consumption. The suburb is depicted as a space uninviting to people and in which we would not wish to dwell except out of necessity; as such, the suburb in this imaginary becomes illegible as a place of dwelling or, only legible as a non-place.

Figure 1: Absence and Excess

The persistence of transiency

One way in which the suburban exterior figures as anaesthetic is in being characterized by absence and excess. One element of this absence and excess is in a persistence of transience, documented both intentionally and unintentionally by the New Topographic photographic movement. This movement, which began in the 1960s, turned landscape art on its head by taking as the explicit and sole subject of landscape photography the relationship between nature and human-made places, especially those banal sprawling and dilapidated places characteristic of industrialization, including burgeoning residential subdivisions and industrial suburbs. The photographers of this movement aimed for finely-detailed, photorealist, dispassionate but carefully framed documentary photos of human-made, ordinary places that were proliferating across the U.S.A. landscape. Emerging from the American documentary landscape tradition and more generally from the long history of landscape art, the New Topographic photographers' documentation of the human-made landscape, and particularly their detached, observational perspective, was a significant departure and re-definition of the genre, which had previously been attuned wholly to the "natural" world—or perhaps more accurately, to the depiction of certain elements of the physical world, for the most part as if it were free from human intervention. This influential turn in landscape photography significantly culminated in the 1975 exhibit *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape*. This important exhibition

included such photographers of the suburb-as-landscape as Robert Adams, Frank Gohlke, and Lewis Baltz—as well as others who did not work on representing the suburb.¹²⁰ Artists who have turned their attention to the suburb as a landscape have been influenced by the New Topographic movement if not directly and explicitly, then indirectly by its resolute turn to the obviously human-made world as landscape.¹²¹

Lewis Baltz, a central figure in the New Topographics movement, was interested in capturing the rapidly changing human-made landscape and looked with interest at ugly sites, such as industrial parks, which were in the midst of being built, that obviously demonstrated this process of change, often replacing previously undeveloped land. Many of Baltz's images, such as the dirt pile at the corner of the warehouse in *South Corner, Riccar America, 3184 Pullman, Costa Mesa* (image 5.0.1), are surprising simply for having been taken of such unsightly sites: The neglectable ordinariness of these sites makes them odd subjects to be composed into an object of intentional gazing. They are even more surprising, however, for also being remarkably beautiful, displaying technical virtuosity and pleasing composition, making what are otherwise boring, ugly, or peculiar photographic subjects interesting, beautiful, and meaningful photographic objects. Images such as *New Industrial Parks #23* (image 5.0.2) stand as beautiful and poignant testament to the relative ephemerality of these eyesores. What was yesterday a pile of dirt or slabs of concrete might today be a garden or finished warehouses, and perhaps tomorrow will be replaced by yet something else altogether. These are, then, landscapes of change caught in a fleeting moment of transition. In some cases, as in *Foundation Construction, Many Warehouses, 2891 Kelvin, Irvine* (image 5.0.3), the transition is construction and development, where the outcome might be planned but neither figuratively nor literally is yet fully concretized. Here, the vista of possibilities remain open, though only in the moment offered by the photograph to contemplate other futures. In other images (see images 5.0.1 and 5.0.2), the landscape is made but in a state of repair or renewal. Like Benjamin's (1999) arcades, the fragmentation of the image of a

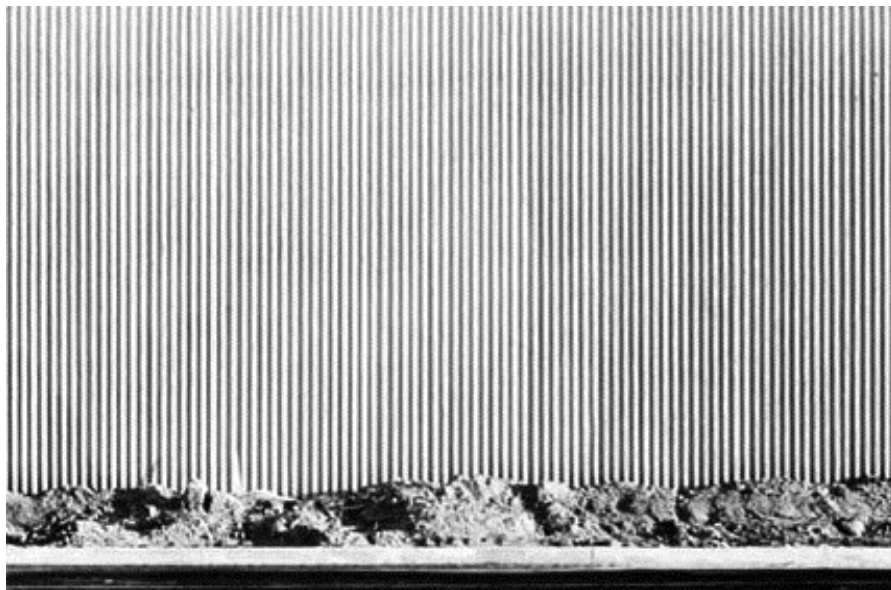
¹²⁰ The exhibit was put together again in 2009, curated by Britt Salvesen of the Center for Creative Photography in Tucson, Arizona, and Alison Nordström of the George Eastman House International Museum of Photography & Film in Rochester, New York. It was on exhibit at the George Eastman House June 13–October 4, 2009 and then on tour in eight venues across the U.S.A. and Europe until January 2012. As with the original, the featured artists were: Robert Adams, Lewis Baltz, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Joe Deal, Frank Gohlke, Nicholas Nixon, John Schott, Stephen Shore, and Henry Wessel, Jr.

¹²¹ The landscape tradition in art more traditionally represents the "natural" world or ancient ruins as the proper object of landscape. However, it is clear that landscape paintings typically represent human places, reifying and aestheticizing what should otherwise appear as labour (see Berger 1972; Rose 1993).

whole landscape caused by this transition and abrupt visibility of the phantasmagoric overlay leaves exposed the landscape's change as one towards ruin.



5.0.1. Lewis Baltz, *South Corner, Riccar America, 3184 Pullman, Costa Mesa, 1974*. Gelatin silver print.¹²²



5.0.2. Lewis Baltz, *New Industrial Parks #23, 1974*. Gelatin silver print.¹²³

¹²² Except where noted, all images by Lewis Baltz retrieved from George Eastman House Still Photograph Archive, http://www.geh.org/ar/strip87/htmlsrc2/baltz_sld00001.html

¹²³ Image retrieved from Museum of Contemporary Photography website, <http://www.mocp.org/detail.php?type=related&kv=6860&t=people>



5.0.3. Lewis Baltz, *Foundation Construction, Many Warehouses, 2891 Kelvin, Irvine, 1974*. Gelatin silver print.

Like the other New Topographic photographers, Baltz took photographs in a documentary mode, purportedly reserving judgment in favour of observation. Yet, the documentation of such sites that were becoming increasingly common—and, thereby, in process of becoming ordinary—becomes legible as political in the protracted gaze invited by the photograph upon such becoming-ordinary landscapes marked so fundamentally by mutability and transience:

The New Topographics exhibition in 1975 was not just the moment when the apparently banal became accepted as a legitimate photographic subject, but when a certain strand of theoretically driven photography began to permeate the wider contemporary art world. Looking back, one can see how these images of the "man-altered landscape" carried a political message and reflected, unconsciously or otherwise, the growing unease about how the natural landscape was being eroded by industrial development and the spread of cities. (O'Hagan 2011: n.p.)

Yet, for the limited temporal continuance of any one structure, pile of dirt, or construction site, the similarity between these beautifully photographed transitional sites of possibility and more recent considerations of suburban commercial and industrial buildings—such as Kasumovic's *Silhouettes* (image 5.0.6), Susan Dobson's *Home Depot* (image 5.0.34), Brouws's *No. 13 New Kmart* (image 5.0.44), Muldrow's *Sprawlmart, OH* (image 5.0.45), Craig Lloyd's *Cruiser* (image 5.0.50), etc.—speaks to the *persistence* of temporary ugly sites (both of specific ones, but more importantly of these types of sites) and to the perhaps unforeseen endurance of ephemeral unsightliness.

Ugly features as ubiquitous and monstrous

Attending to another persisting ugly element of the contemporary suburban landscape, Canadian photographer Mark Kasumovic explores the presence of electric power lines and their seemingly out-of-place ubiquity in peripheral settings, within developed suburbs (e.g. image 5.0.4) and in open spaces (e.g. image 5.0.5). The images in Kasumovic's series *I Can Hear You Humming* tend to read as rather pleasant documentary depictions of everyday life. Despite the blandness of the environments, the suburbs are nevertheless depicted on bright sunny days with, at times, joyfully blue skies, and vibrant green grass.



5.0.4. Mark Kasumovic, *Suburbs #1 - Toronto, ON*, 2009. C-print.¹²⁴

Despite the quaint prettiness of such ordinary landscapes, the series also inspires awe for the grandeur of the arrays supporting the powerlines that dwarf the suburban homes. The repetition, scale and close proximity of these arrays and lines to homes and people also provide for an unsettling, almost surreal, sense of their monstrousness, particularly when taking into consideration their visual invasiveness over, and extremely close juxtaposition to, inhabited spaces. Such a sense of sensual disturbance is redoubled when one considers also the aural pervasiveness suggested by the title of the series, as well as the knowledge that they are literally full of power and that they are utterly necessary.

¹²⁴ All images by Mark Kasumovic retrieved from artist's website, http://www.kasumovic.net/new/galleries/01_hum/



5.0.5. Mark Kasumovic, *Suburbs - Hamilton, ON*, 2009. C-print.

It becomes apparent, for example, that the arrays casting shadows onto the Concord stripmall in *Silhouettes* (image 5.0.6) are also delivering the only source of light and air in the massive, windowless, built structure. These lines and arrays spatially and practically dominate the suburban environment (see *Suburbs - Hamilton, ON*, image 5.0.5). The ugliness of the suburban landscape is, then, in part an effect of insistent repetition of elements of ugliness, and, in addition, of the appallingly large scale of its repetition.



5.0.6. Mark Kasumovic, *Silhouettes - Concord, ON*, 2009. C-print.

Monotonous repetition and hackneyed seriality

This repetition producing a hackneyed aesthetic of seriality and an attendant sense of suburban monotony emerges in a number of the paintings of Edward Ruscha—a multimedia artist and an important figure in the Pop Art and Conceptual Art movements. In the late mid-1980s, Ruscha created images in acrylic on canvas that resemble hazy black and white night photographs or x-ray images, which play with darkness in light and create a sense of vague dreaminess and surreality. In one series, which he called *Silhouettes* or *Nocturnes* (Richards 2008, 85), this play of darkness and light suggests the uniform silhouettes of houses at twilight. The houses appear like the shadow of a house-shaped paper doll-chain: identical, uniformly distributed (see *You and Your Neighbors*, image 5.0.7). These images employ "archetypes, created by morphing images from memories of childhood books and magazines into an ideal shape" (Richards 2008, 85).

Mary Richards (2008), describing *Name, Address, Phone* (image 5.0.8), notes:

Its composition here evokes the camera angles, high-definition shadows and imagery of film noir, creating the impression of surveillance, as if the viewer is lurking in the bushes in the foreground (85).

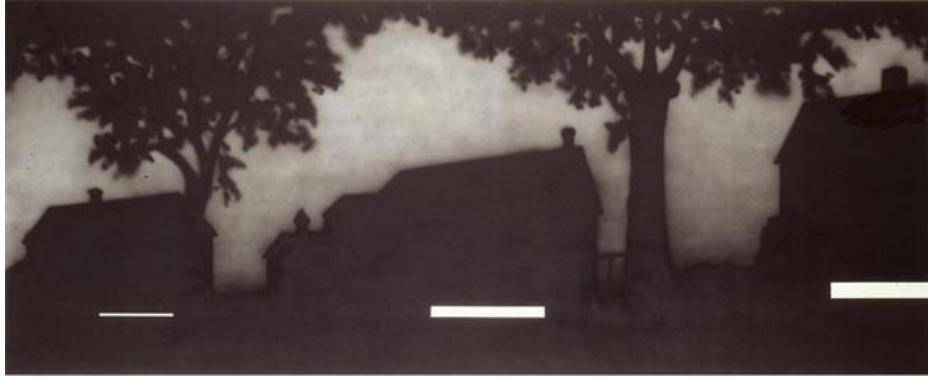
White rectangular spaces starkly cut the images: they appear as blank spaces to be filled in with text—captioning, demographic information, or geographic specification.



5.0.7. Edward Ruscha, *You and Your Neighbors*, 1987. Acrylic on canvas.¹²⁵

These blanks imply that with an incomplete label, the houses (and perhaps the lives inside) remain indistinguishable from each other or easily recede into the murky shadows of massified life, in which the everyday converts into statistics (see *Averages*, image 5.0.9).

¹²⁵ Except where noted, all images by Edward Ruscha retrieved from <http://www.edruscha.com/>



5.0.8. Edward Ruscha, *Name, Address, Phone*, 1986. Acrylic on canvas.

The non-specificity of the houses suggested by their uniformity is reinforced by the absence of written text in the white spaces: The houses form a background to an image that has no foreground, or, they illustrate a caption that is missing. These images are also reminiscent of the establishing or credit shots of 1930s black and white Hollywood films noirs with their fuzzy, almost shadow-puppet-like fuzzy edges and dramatic angles giving a palpable sense of expectation. (If familiar with the genre, one can almost hear dramatic music play, looking at *You and Your Neighbors*, image 5.0.7). The profundity of the scope of the alienated landscape becomes more apparent and more abstracted in Ruscha's many works in his *City Lights* series (see images 5.0.10 and 5.0.11), which look like the familiar grids of street lights of early- to mid-century suburbs with their straight streets intersecting at right-angles, seen as if from an aerial perspective at night. *Plots* (image 5.0.12) offers a key to understanding the many images in this vein as being inspired by the sprawling suburban landscape of Los Angeles and Miami.¹²⁶



5.0.9. Edward Ruscha, *Averages*, 1987. Acrylic on canvas.

¹²⁶ Richards (2008) notes that Ruscha was travelling by plane frequently between these two cities during this period and that "the bird's-eye view from the passenger seat" inspired the series (83).

The other images in the series feature words or phrases overlaid onto the apparent landscape such as *Fiber-Optic Suburbs* (image 5.0.10) or *I Tried to Forget To Remember* (image 5.0.11). Each of these images have titles bearing the words that are etched onto the surface of the canvas.

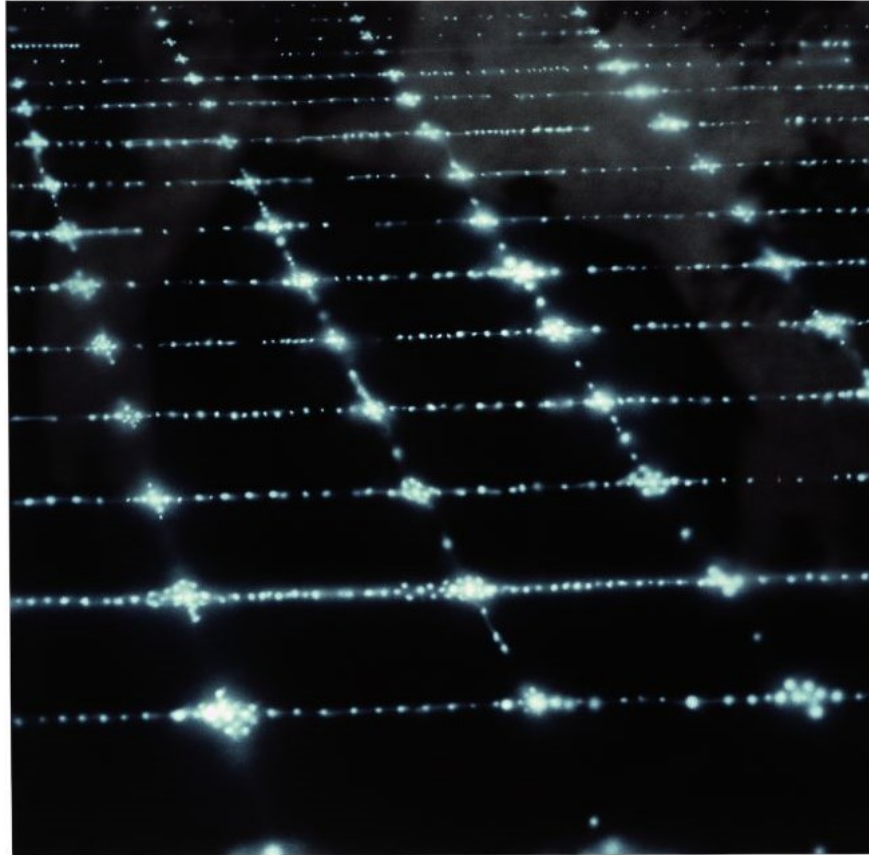


5.0.10. Edward Ruscha, *Fiber-Optic Suburbs*, 1986. Acrylic on paper.



5.0.11. Edward Ruscha, *I Tried To Forget To Remember*, 1986. Oil on canvas.

In *Plots*, in the place of words is the just barely visible silhouette of the type of "archetypal" house also seen in the *Silhouettes* series, casting a signifying shadow over the canvas. Also unlike the other images in the series, this image is also legible inversely: While in the other images in the series, the words are clearly overlaid on top of an underlying scene, in *Plots*, the image of the individual house can also be read as both overlaid on top of and covered over by the bright, over-exposed light-points forming the image of the gridded suburban landscape. Thus, the image of home appears as if either and both a clearing in a haze of clouds hovering over the vast uniform suburbs or/and a substrate upon which it is built. The film noir-style home—an individually isolated site redolent with the promise of a narrative—haunts the cold, generic, infinite landscape of geometrically-organized blocks of housing below or/and is haunted by it. The silhouette appears in the style of a subliminal message hidden in and by the image. This shadow of an ideal home-image remains detached, over-shadowing or over-shadowed without altering the otherwise disconnected scene that spreads out beneath or above it. In Ruscha's work, the banal, spreading (sub)urban landscape redolent with strange potency and unspecified possibility remain trapped in dream-like shadows and endless, meaningless, hallucinatory repetition.



5.0.12. Edward Ruscha, *Plots*, 1986. Oil on canvas.

In addition to his painted works, Ruscha also self-published a number of books containing photographic series. Noted for his "detached photographic gaze," (Giblett and Tolonen 2012, 157) also detectable in his paintings, Ruscha detached his gaze and artistic intervention even further for *Thirtyfour Parking Lots in Los Angeles* (see image 5.0.13), a series of black and white aerial photos of empty parking lots in Los Angeles. Ruscha conceptualized and designed the series, but the photos themselves were taken by aerial photographer Art Alanis. The images demonstrate both the scale and anaesthetic quality of individual suburban projects¹²⁷ and, taken collectively, gives a sense of the mind-boggling repetitiveness of this built form as well as the mega-scale of such an anaesthetic, car-focused/inhuman vision of building and planning. Ruscha was particularly interested in capturing the parking lots when they were empty because he interpreted them as displaying a kind of ongoing ersatz artistic production in which the dripping engine oil, over time, leaves a trace of movement (1967, back cover). What is most impressive

¹²⁷ Of course, parking lots are not exclusively suburban sites. But the open-air, surface lots featured in this series contribute to sprawl, de-densification, and cater to and encourage automobility.

about this series is the utter size and number of the parking lots, empty, devoid of life and local place-character, ugly, singular uses of space, often butted up against residential neighbourhoods (e.g. *May Company, 6150 Laurel Canyon, North Hollywood*, image 5.0.14).



5.0.13. Thumbnail montage of Edward Ruscha's *Parking Lots*, 1967/99. Gelatin silver prints.¹²⁸

Associated with the Conceptual and Pop Art movements, Ruscha has lately been retrospectively placed within the New Topographic movement for his photographic series work. In the catalogue for the original exhibit, the curator William Jenkins explicitly contrasts the New Topographic photographers' approach to photography to Ruscha's approach, citing the distinction between the two approaches "is fundamental to photography" (Jenkins 1975, 5). According to Jenkins this "essential and significant difference" between the works created by the New Topographic photographers and Ruscha "is found in an understanding of the difference between what a picture is *of* and what it is *about*. Ruscha's pictures of gasoline stations are not about gasoline

¹²⁸ Image retrieved from Patrick Painter Gallery website, http://editions.patrickpainter.com/artists/Ruscha_Ed/parkinglots.html

stations but about a set of aesthetic issues" (Jenkins 1975, 5, emphasis in original). Jenkins sums up the importance of this distinction by quoting the New Topographic photographer John Schott's description of Ruscha's photos "[T]hey are not statements about the world through art, they are statements about art through the world" (Jenkins 1975, 5 citing Schott). For Jenkins, the New Topographic photographers, in contrast, make photographs that are "primarily *about* that which is in front of the lens" (Jenkins 1975, 5, emphasis in original). And this is what makes the works of the New Topographic photographers *documentary*. Despite this specific and fundamental distinction, the recently revised New Topographics Movement exhibit (2009–2012)¹²⁹ included photographic work by Ruscha in recognition of his influence in the "detached gaze" shared by the New Topographic photographers (Giblett and Tolonen 2012, 157).



5.0.14. Edward Ruscha, *May Company, 6150 Laurel Canyon, North Hollywood, 1967*. Gelatin silver print.¹³⁰

More recently, Travis Shaffer, inspired by the photographic series of both Ruscha and (other) New Topographic photographers has also explored the banal suburban landscape through a number of different series. Following Ruscha's groundbreaking photo series, with its detached gaze and re-orientation to the work of the photographer, Shaffer has created series of his own, including *Fortyone Walmart Supercenters* (e.g. image 5.0.15) and *Eleven Mega Churches* (e.g. image 5.0.16).

¹²⁹ See Appendix A for further details about this exhibit.

¹³⁰ Image retrieved from Tate gallery website, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/ruscha-may-company-6150-laurel-canyon-north-hollywood-al00250>



5.0.15. Travis Shaffer, *Untitled* [Phoenix] from the series *Fortyone Walmart Supercenters*, 2008. Appropriated satellite imagery.¹³¹

These series adapt the theme and concept of Ruscha's series but they also illustrate how much larger and more expansive the suburban scale is half a century later. Just as Ruscha commissioned another artist to take the actual photographs of his parking lots series, Shaffer appropriates satellite imagery for his series (Shaffer n.d., n.p.).



5.0.16. Travis Shaffer, *Untitled* from the series *Eleven Mega Churches*, 2009. Google maps screen-capture.

¹³¹ Except where noted, all images by Travis Shaffer retrieved from artist's website, <http://www.travisshaffer.com>

It seems likely that in order to be able to capture in one frame the entire parking structures of the Walmart supercentres or of the mega churches, and to include some perspective on the immediately surrounding areas, like in Ruscha's images, a great distance is required—perhaps as only afforded by satellites.

Immensity of scale

Along these lines, Michael Light and Edward Burtynsky illustrate the stupendously grand scale of repetition in suburban locations around the world. In their respective large-scale, aerial photographic works, each artist calls attention to the spectacular ugliness and colossal non-human-scale geographies of these places. In their works, suburban residential divisions (e.g. images 5.0.17 and 5.0.18) and retail, commercial, and industrial sites (e.g. images 5.0.19, 5.0.20, and 5.0.21) sprawl, receding endlessly into distant horizons.



5.0.17. Michael Light, *"Dominguez Hills Village," a 581-Unit Guarded Carson Community Built by "K. Hovnanian(R) Homes TM"*, 2006. Pigment print.¹³²

¹³² All images by Michael Light retrieved from artist's website, <http://www.michaellight.net/>



5.0.18. Edward Burtynsky, *Suburbs #1, North Las Vegas, Nevada, USA, 2007*. Digital c-print.¹³³

Yet, what is aesthetically displeasing, even horrifying, at the everyday, street-level scale becomes aesthetically interesting, perhaps sublime if not beautiful, in the remote perspective from which Light and Burtynsky photograph. From this meta-perspective, both artists consider the global scale of human development, drawing direct links in their works between consumption of all kinds of resources including space, time, fuel, and labour in the extraction, transport, and refinement of natural resources (e.g. as seen in image 5.0.21); in the production, storage, distribution, and disposal of commodities (e.g. as seen in images 5.0.19 and 5.0.20); and in the expansion and continued support of human dwelling (e.g. as seen in images 5.0.17 and 5.0.18).

¹³³ All images by Edward Burtynsky retrieved from artist's website, <http://www.edwardburtynsky.com/>



5.0.19. Edward Burtynsky, *VW Lot #1, Houston, Texas, USA*, 2004. C-print.



5.0.20. Michael Light, *Compton and Carson Industrial Parks Looking Southwest, Built By Rancho San Pedro Heirs, CA*, 2006. Pigment print.

And, both Light and Burtynsky demonstrate what is legible as an increasing homogenization and serial logic overtaking huge tracts of the physical world, and by extension, of the material conditions of sociality and cultures. By showing the vast scale, insistent repetition, and ubiquity of these processes, the images invite speculation about what might be the immaterial effects of serial homogenization of the material conditions in which everyday life unfolds.



5.0.21. Michael Light, *L.A. River and Railroad Yards Looking South, 4th, 6th and 7th Street Bridges in Distance, CA*, 2004. Pigment print.

All of these artists—the New Topographic photographers, Kasumovic, Ruscha, Burtynsky, and Light—take seriously the suburban landscape as a "landscape" and depict the suburb as characterized by a disconnection between the actual physical composition and appearance of the place, from its expected use and experience. In their works, the anaesthetic quality of the suburban landscape is demonstrated by the endurance of ephemeral ugliness and the visibility of unsightliness, as well as by unrelenting uniformity, seriality, and repetition, and by the scale of suburbanization. Their works image the visual and physical elements of the suburb as being ugly and repeated in a quantity and scale that are immense, hinting, in the more contemporary images, at a global-scale repetition of the imaginaries that define suburban space. As such, this suburban landscape is anaesthetic in the sense that it so overwhelms the senses and one's capacity to make

an aesthetic judgment, that one is left incapable of responding to the landscape. By disaggregating conceived and perceived space, these works arrest the dialectic movement to lived space and disrupt resolution in lived space, in which space becomes of necessity livable. As such, these are landscapes that are anaesthetic, with a rift between actual conditions and expected experience—like anaesthetic drugs that separate the actual conditions of medical surgery from the expected (non)experience of it. In being visually ignored and disregarded spaces or affectively overwhelming sites, these are, at the same time, expected to be the place of dwelling and conditions of living.

Figure 2: Non-Place

Although expected sites of dwelling, in many suburban artworks the exterior is often imagined as uninviting and excluding, both physically and socially. The effacement of ethical relationality and aesthetic sensibilities of these places is represented through absence. Many artists work with processes of erasure, occlusion, and making invisible, thereby paradoxically rendering visible the suburb's imagined lack of locatedness—the qualities of being local and specific. Missing the fixity and sensibility of a particularity of place, the suburb that these artists make visible and erase is rendered legible as a non-place, as I discuss below. Meanwhile, some artists mark the erasure and disregard of ugliness in the ordinary suburban landscape precisely through a deliberate process of eliminating this landscape. In their works, the nowhere of the suburban non-place is omnipresent. This is taken to a further extreme in the work of still other artists in which the suburban landscape is entirely abstracted into imaginary non-places.

Non-places are located, dimensional spaces in which social meaning has been prevented from accreting or from which social meaning has been evacuated. Anthropologist Marc Augé is most famous for articulating the concept of the non-place. For Augé, the definition of non-place is predicated on an opposition between (anthropological) place and space: "If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place" (Augé 1995, 77–78). Place, in these terms, names a system of relationality in which individuals, spatial localities, and a meaningful passage of teleological time are all interconnected, giving the

individual a sense of occupying meaningful coordinates (Buchanan 1999, 394). "Space, as it was once understood, circumscribes an area of intelligibility, it defines a world in which certain things make a certain kind of sense" (Buchanan 1999, 394). For Augé, non-places are produced by supermodernity, which is a contemporary iteration of modernity. Under conditions of supermodernity, solitary individuals feel a need to fill in meaning in a world that is overlaid by a superabundance of meaning systems:

non-places...induce a sense of disassociation (the feeling that one no longer knows where one's coordinates are) only marginally compensated for by nostalgia.... there is now such an overwhelming number of signifying universes that we no longer know which way to turn. ... So we retreat. (Buchanan 1999, 394)

The non-place is socially abstract because it is a spatial location that lacks social dimension. As we will see, many artists imagine the suburban exterior as such a non-place marked by its simultaneous excess and dearth of shared social meaning.

Nowhere now here

Meg Aubrey, working in oil on canvas, paints only some, though highly realist, elements of the suburban landscape, creating a discomfotingly implied surface over which women seem to wander as if across incomplete set pieces for the good life (see *Tuesday morning*, image 5.0.22).



5.0.22. Meg Aubrey, *Tuesday Morning*, n.d. Oil on canvas.¹³⁴

¹³⁴ All images by Meg Aubrey retrieved from artist's website, <http://megaubrey.com/>

Ordinary spaces like parking lots (*Thursday Afternoon*, image 5.0.23) disappear as if being so taken-for-granted as to defy representation or so ugly as to be intentionally occluded from experience.



5.0.23. Meg Aubrey, *Thursday Afternoon*, n.d. Oil on canvas.

The shopper in *Baggage* (image 5.0.24) as Aubrey's other suburban figures, seems as a result of this erasure to be stranded with nowhere to proceed and yet also nowhere to settle. The place itself is unsettling.



5.0.24. Meg Aubrey, *Baggage*, n.d. Oil on canvas.

Isolated and floating in an incomplete, insular, and disorienting emptiness, Aubrey's figures appear naïvely lost and affectless or, like the woman brooding in a lawn chair in *Waiting* (image 5.0.25), angrily detached from a larger world. Seemingly trapped by the superficiality of their stereotypical lives, they read as deeply alienated.



5.0.25. Meg Aubrey, *Waiting*, n.d. Oil on canvas.

In *Soccer Mom Line Up* (image 5.0.26), five of those familiar figures stand in close proximity to one another, but there appears to be no social contact between any of them. Rather, each seems withdrawn into an internalized asocial space of boredom, eternal waiting, and muted affect paralleled by the limbo-like space surrounding them. Aubrey's leisuring suburban women are socially defined primarily by their status as wealthy wives and mothers; yet, like all the other defining and relational elements of their lives, both the partners and the children remain unseen but deeply implicated.



5.0.26. Meg Aubrey, *Soccer Mom Line Up*, n.d. Oil on canvas.

Occasionally, unsightly things meant to be out of sight become momentarily, peculiarly in sight, disorientatingly orienting in their visibility. The electric box in *Hidden* (image 5.0.27) is unsightly in the sense that it is ugly, inconsistent with the dominant "natural" aesthetic. Importantly, it is out of place in its very placing of the community: Its semi-visible presence

reveals a larger electrical and social grid to which this ideal, seemingly isolated community is still attached.



5.0.27. Meg Aubrey, *Hidden*, n.d. Oil on canvas.

In *Lawn Care* (image 5.0.28), the labour involved in the perfect grooming of lawns and shrubbery that makes the women's leisure possible, are easily ignored, though not quite invisible. Yet, despite the impeccable manicure of the spaces and of the women themselves—both displaying obvious material privilege—these women are disconnected socially and from their environment, and seem inaccessibly interiorized.



5.0.28. Meg Aubrey, *Lawn Care*, n.d. Oil on canvas.

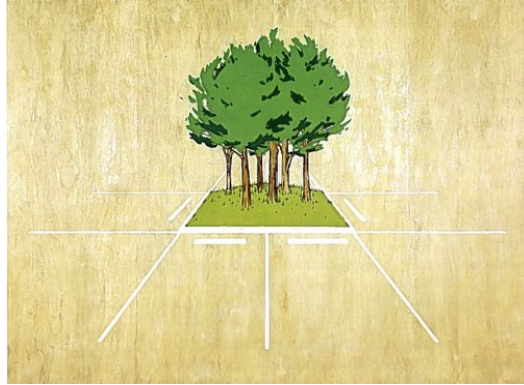
Aubrey's partial scenes give an impression of a dissatisfying partial lifeworld: The places in which these disjunct lives unfold, inhabited by disconnected people and where the things, people, and relations, that are imagined to provide the landscape of meaning disappear in lieu of lawns,

labourers, and ornamental pillars, which actually define and punctuate the space. *Cull de Sac* [sic] (image 5.0.29), expresses this most explicitly and most catastrophically, as a woman stands with her back to the viewer in the middle of the road. Her body, tense with legs bracing and arms pulled into her body, conveys shock and loss as if she is facing a cul-de-sac in which the houses have suddenly disappeared. An end of the road which is an endless void, Aubrey's suburb is a nowhere, a non-place in which individuals are isolated but unable to decipher or decide the meaning of the location in which they find themselves.



5.0.29. Meg Aubrey, *Cull de Sac* [sic], n.d. Oil on canvas.

Chris Ballantyne's suburban works are also characterized by spare rendering of only select elements of the suburban landscape, sometimes represented absurdly or impossibly. Ballantyne's ambivalent landscapes tend to appear muted with an emerging line of flight. This can appear either as a serene scene in which a potential calamity erupts into view or a quietly desperate scene from which a hint of vitality manifests. Ballantyne's works convey an unnerving ambivalence in their environmental critique, focusing on the relation between suburban built forms and the larger natural environment. Two images are illustrative. In *Untitled (Berm)* (image 5.0.30), an island refuge for a stand of trees is encircled by a parking lot so abstracted as to disappear into the strong wood-grain of the painting's birch panel surface. If a parking lot is a nowhere, then the trees have found, and make this a somewhere. But, it can also be read as the last remaining vestige of nature engulfed in a sea of relentless paving over, in which case the stand of trees act as a failing berm of wildness against a flood of development—possibly to succumb inevitably and become the wood panel on which such scenes might be painted.



5.0.30. Chris Ballantyne, *Untitled (Berm)*, 2004. Acrylic on birch panel.¹³⁵

In *Untitled (Fence and Trail)* (image 5.0.31), a suburban neighbourhood is comprised of white, abstracted houses, that are indistinguishable from one another in both the sense that they all look the same and in the sense that they appear to be merging into one another and are thus not separate, distinct structures. These indistinct houses seemingly corralled together into an impossible closeness, fade into nothingness like an Escherian optical illusion in which figure and ground turn into one another. A fence separates the overcrowded houses from a natural area in which a trail approximately follows the line of the fence.



5.0.31. Chris Ballantyne, *Untitled (Fence and Trail)*, 2008. Acrylic on paper.

The image can be interpreted hopefully as a push back, in which overdevelopment can be

¹³⁵ Except where noted, all images by Chris Ballantyne retrieved from artist's website, <http://www.chrisballantyne.com/>

reigned in and room made for wild spaces to flourish. However, it can perhaps more easily be read pessimistically, suggesting that generic, bland, inefficient human development cannot be forestalled for long from overtaking green spaces, which it consumes and blankets with the blankness of non-placeness. Primal wild spaces in which individual human meanings do not adhere but social meaning does, are replaced by contemporary non-places in which individual meanings cannot accrete into social meanings.

Subtraction through addition and abstraction

While Aubrey and Ballantyne limit how much of the subject they represent, Jaclyn Shoub and Susan Dobson, working with paint on photographs, *subtract* from the suburban landscape through an accretion of paint. Discussing her process for creating images like *Untitled (bridge and tower)* (image 5.0.32) and *Untitled landscape with plane and building* (image 5.0.33), Shoub notes: "These start with the large and complex environment, urban or rural, and remove everything but a thin line of meaning" (On Site 2010, n.p.).



5.0.32. Jaclyn Shoub, *Untitled (bridge and tower)*, 2005. Oil and toner on mylar mounted on masonite.¹³⁶

What is left is an edited, minimalist and abstracted landscape. The effect is like the selective, inattentive gaze with which a passenger might peer vaguely out through the window of a moving

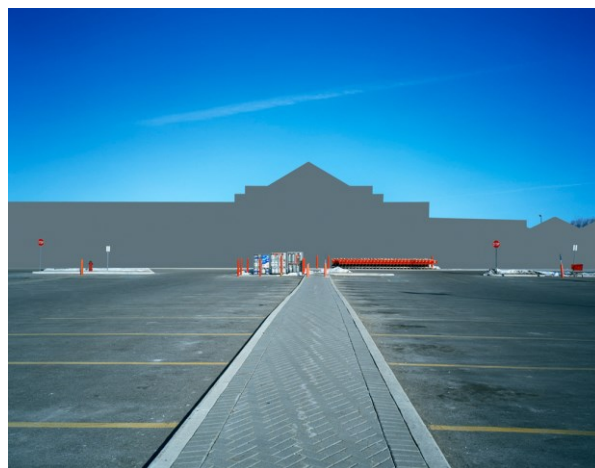
¹³⁶ All images by Jaclyn Shoub retrieved from artist's website, <http://www.jaclynshoub.com/>

vehicle. These works convey the feeling of an unattended landscape rolling by, an absent-minded sense of how the road might curve ahead, the happenstantial passing glimpse of a few prominent buildings or other landmarks, and a dim awareness of the general mood of the weather.



5.0.33. Jaclyn Shoub, *Untitled landscape with plane and building*, 2006. Oil and toner on mylar mounted on masonite.

Using a similar process in her series *Retail*, Susan Dobson vividly creates an absent-presence by painting a block of grey to precisely blot out a building. Dobson takes photos of big box stores then visually erases the store by digitally colouring over it in grey, rendering it a grey block. Interestingly, the identity of the store can sometimes still be read through the shape of the block of grey left behind, such as in *Home Depot* (image 5.0.34).



5.0.34. Susan Dobson, *Home Depot*, 2008. Premium digital inkjet.¹³⁷

¹³⁷ All images by Susan Dobson retrieved from artist's website, <http://www.susandobson.com/>

These works that differentially represent and suppress what is physically present in the actual suburban landscape reflect an affective orientation to what is so banal as to escape notice or so anaesthetizing that everyday experience blocks careful observation. The blank spots more precisely render our affective orientation to—or disorientation by—these overpowering, generic presences.

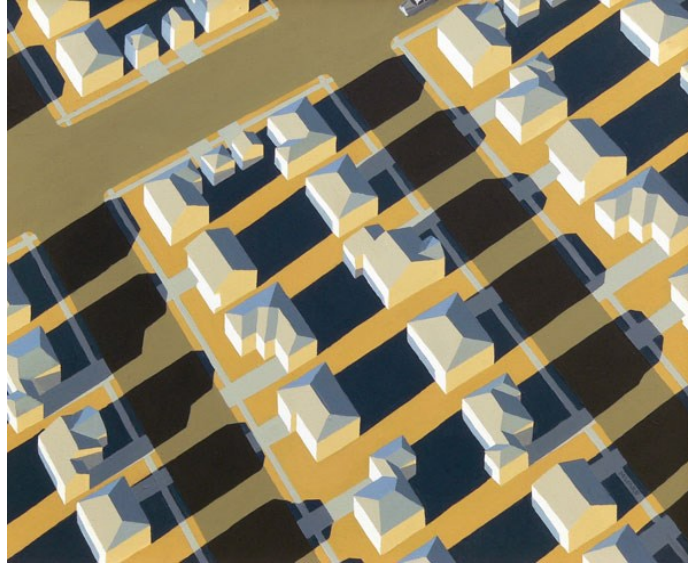
Painters like Toni Silber-Delerville and Michael Ward, and mixed-media artist Steven Millar take the aerial perspective to approach the suburb, a perspective that is more typically photographed in a documentary style. Both Silber-Delerville and Ward use the expressiveness of lighting and shadows and abstraction to highlight interpretive elements and patterns to respond to the aesthetic problem they encounter, posed by the suburb, of uniformity, repetition, and incomprehensible scale. Silber-Delerville manages to retain an element of human activity and even a certain degree of hominess in many of the images in her *Aerial* series (such as *Paterson, NJ*, image 5.0.35). Thus, even in the face of abstraction and aerial distancing, she renders these as still imaginable as specific meaningful home places.



5.0.35. Toni Silber-Delerville, *Paterson, NJ*, n.d. Acrylic on canvas.¹³⁸

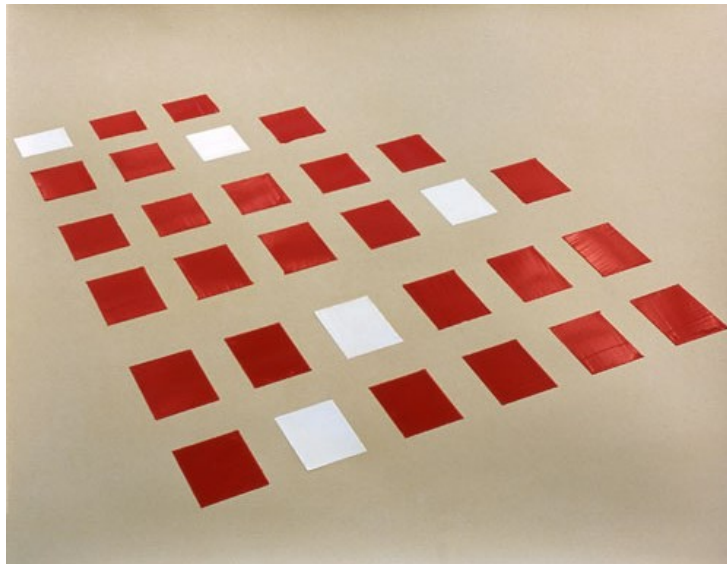
However, in other pieces, which read as more critical, as well as in Ward's *God's Grid* (image 5.0.36) the houses are abstracted to the point of looking like pieces in the board game Monopoly.

¹³⁸ All images by Toni Silber-Delerville retrieved from artist's website, <http://www.tonisart.com>



5.0.36. Michael Ward, *God's Grid*, 2004. Acrylic on canvas.¹³⁹

Steven Millar also abstracts this human-made landscape in his painting, but delivers an even more pointed critique by abstracting the landscape to a series of flat planes (e.g. *White Flight*, image 5.0.37) or coloured blocks representing individual houses, as in his installation piece *Dogwood Hollow, Levittown, PA* (image 5.0.38).



5.0.37. Steven Millar, *White Flight*, 2005¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ All images by Michael Ward retrieved from artist's website, <http://www.tmichaelward.com/michaelwardartist.htm>

¹⁴⁰ All images by Steven Millar retrieved from artist's website, <http://sdmillar.com/>



5.0.38. Steven Millar, *Dogwood Hollow, Levittown, PA*, 2007. Plywood, Formica, steel, vinyl tubing.

Similarly, Ross Racine, playing especially on the geometrical, regular designs of subdivisions, which become apparent from the aerial perspective, creates entirely fictional though realist images of subdivisions. Drawing freehand directly on a computer, Racine notes that his work contains no photographs or scanned material (Racine n.d., n.p.) yet works like *Elmwood and Oaklawn* (image 5.0.39) strongly evokes images like William Garnett's *Foundations and Slabs, Lakewood, California* (image 5.0.40) or of other, more recent, satellite images of suburbs.

Similarly, *West Concentric Estates* (image 5.0.41) is almost identical to the actually existing Sun City, Arizona, photographed by Jim Wark for Dolores Hayden's *A Field Guide to Sprawl* to illustrate the concept of a "zoomurb" (image 5.0.42).¹⁴¹ The key difference between the two images in each of the pairings I have presented, besides that between representing an actually existing material place and an entirely fictional rendering, is that there is something "flawed" in the design of Racine's subdivisions: These could not be translated into livable material places. For example, *West Concentric Estates* is literally comprised of concentric circles of roadways: The roads are disconnected. There is no way in or out (for a car). Thus, not only are these images not photos, they are also not models. Racine introduces these design flaws in order to examine "the relation between design and actual lived experience, the works subvert the apparent

¹⁴¹ "A place growing even faster than a boomburb, zoomurb is a Charlottesville, Virginia, newspaper's coinage for a sprawling area. Sun City, Arizona, fits the bill" (Hayden 2006, 118).

rationality of urban design, exposing conflicts that lurk beneath the surface" (Racine n.d., n.p.).



5.0.39. Ross Racine, *Elmwood and Oaklawn*, 2009. Digital drawing.¹⁴²



5.0.41. Ross Racine, *West Concentric Estates*, 2011. Digital drawing.



5.0.40. William Garnett, *Foundation and Slabs*, Lakewood, California, 1950. Gelatin silver print.¹⁴³



5.0.42. Jim Wark, *Zoomburg*, 2004. Colour photograph.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² All images by Ross Racine retrieved from artist's website, <http://www.rossracine.com/>

¹⁴³ Image retrieved from The Getty museum website, <http://www.getty.edu/pacificstandardtime/explore-the-era/worksofart/foundation-and-slabs-lakewood-california/>

¹⁴⁴ In Hayden 2006. Image retrieved from *Wired New York* website, <http://wirednewyork.com/forum/showthread.php?t=4864>

Abstracted from their place in many people's everyday lives by the literal absence of people—or, in the case of Aubrey's images, by the presence of people but an absence of place—these artistic works compellingly portray these suburban exterior sites as spaces devoid of cohesive social and cultural meaning. It is in this way that they are non-places.

Figure 3: Repulsive Barriers

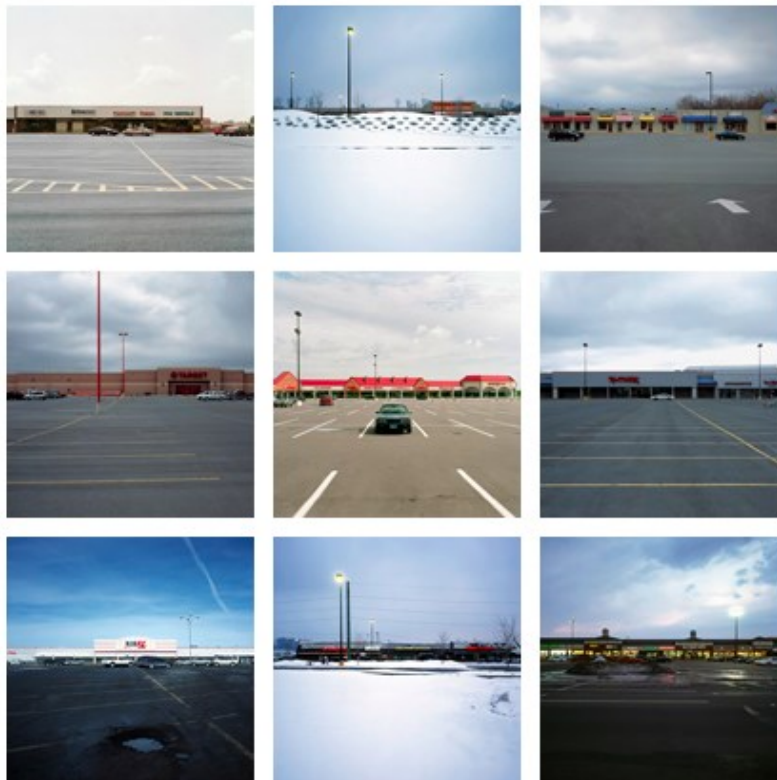
Getting onto the ground level to view the sprawling, ugly, repetitive, uninviting structures and spaces of the suburb from the human-perspective, so to speak, does not help to humanize these spaces for many artists. In fact, considering suburban exteriors from this street-level perspective makes more obvious the connection between the (an)aesthetics of these sites and their refusal of social relationality. The aesthetic critique quickly become more overtly an ethical one. The suburban exterior is represented as excluding: Building façades present with no entrance, no invitation to enter. Structures are impervious or bear ominous, forbidding openings that guard and fortify what must be precious, though largely unseen interiors. As such, they reinforce boundaries both physical and, ultimately, social. The suburb figures as riven by repulsive barriers: exteriors are disconnected from interiors, separated by impenetrable boundaries that render both spaces inescapable. Exteriors and interiors refuse relationality divided by an incapacity to transition or by an excess of transition.

The inescapable exterior

Jeff Brouws has photographed that most neighbourly of malls, the mini-mall,¹⁴⁵ in what now looks very much like a vernacular of stripmall landscapes: the bottom half of the image features a large expanse of (usually nearly) empty parking lot. The sky takes up the top half. At the horizon, vertically centred, forming a thin line pressed between the two large, oppressive volumes, lays the nearly featureless strip of mall (see the mosaic of pieces from his *American Typologies - Strip Malls* series, see image 5.0.43). In this sense, the stripmall landscape is aesthetically very like prairie landscapes, emphasizing its horizontal expansiveness through a

¹⁴⁵ Brouws includes both mini-malls (small neighbourhood malls) as well as other types of larger-scale malls and strip-style box-stores.

horizontally-oriented verticality. Like so much suburban art, while there is evidence of the human fundamentally imbued into the landscape itself, there are no people. Brouws depicts these sites as empty or abandoned landscapes, conveying the desolate and flat affect of non-places. Variations of this desolate, unpopulated stripmall vernacular is seen in the work of a number of other artists (including Kasumovic's *Silhouettes*, image 5.0.6; Susan Dobson's *Home Depot* (image 5.0.34) Muldrow's *Sprawlmart, OH*, image 5.0.45; Craig Lloyd's *Cruiser*, image 5.0.50; etc.).



5.0.43. Thumbnail mosaic of Jeff Brouws's *Strip Malls* from *American Typologies*. Archival pigment print.¹⁴⁶

In the artistic treatments of suburban commercial and industrial buildings, the sense that there is no correlation between interior and exterior figures strongly. This is not only an artistic convention. These large commercial structures like shopping malls and big box stores have very few entrances, funnelling in consumers and workers but making it difficult for them to leave or steal, while industrial buildings accommodate machinic efficiency and are not at the human scale. The disconnection between interior and exterior is also an effect of the sprawling scale of

¹⁴⁶ Image retrieved from Robert Mann Gallery website,
http://www.robertmann.com/exhibitions/2003/brouws/grid_02.html

these buildings. Suburban retail, commercial and industrial buildings are both huge and also appear from the ground-level as very long. This is because while they have very large footprints, they are typically only one floor. They have, for the most part, long windowless walls.¹⁴⁷ As a result of this scale, the relatively puny doors are almost invisible from the distance needed to see an entire face of the structure in one view. In Brouws's *Strip Mall No. 13 New Kmart* (image 5.0.44), despite being photographed from a great distance, the entire structure is still not visible and the building's entrance looks like an afterthought, awkwardly attached to the side.



5.0.44. Jeff Brouws, *Strip Mall No 13 (abandoned Kmart), Brookings, South Dakota, 2003*. Archival pigment print.¹⁴⁸

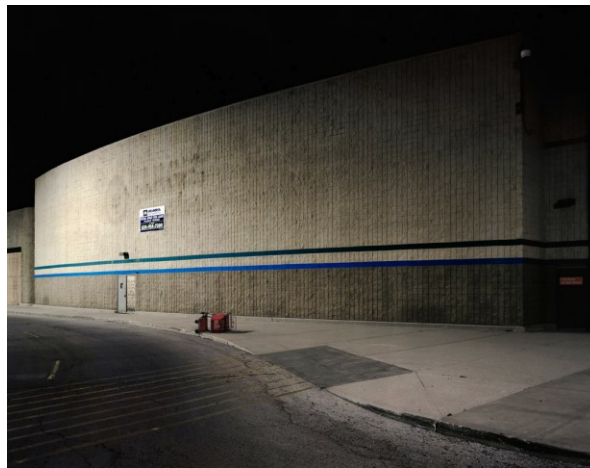
Michelle Muldrow's *Sprawlmart, Ohio* (image 5.0.45) and Brian Ulrich's *Target* (image 5.0.46) also do not depict the entire building: Not only is no door visible, but in their uniform and forbidding featurelessness, it seems implausible that had even more of these buildings' surfaces been depicted, that any door could have fit anywhere. In Muldrow's *Blight Consumption, Bedford Heights, OH* (image 5.0.47) and Ulrich's *Kids R Us* (image 5.0.48), the entrances are dark and forbidding yet the intense light emerging from Ulrich's *Pep Boys 3* (image 5.0.49) does not make the building any less forbidding or any more appealing to enter; while in Kasumovic's *Silhouettes* (image 5.0.6), the scale of the building and the shadows of the towers make a mockery of the one, nearly invisible door.

¹⁴⁷ Although, there are occasionally windows in the roof, as can be seen in some of Michelle Muldrow's images, whose works I discuss below

¹⁴⁸ Image from Brouws 2006, plate 91.



5.0.45. Michelle Muldrow, *Sprawlmart, Ohio*, 2005–08. Acrylic on canvas.¹⁴⁹



5.0.46. Brian Ulrich, *Target*, 2008. Colour photograph.¹⁵⁰



5.0.47. Michelle Muldrow, *Blight Consumption, Bedford Heights, OH*, 2008–10. Gouache on paper.

¹⁴⁹ All images by Michelle Muldrow retrieved from artist's website, <http://mmuldrow.com/>

¹⁵⁰ Except where noted, all images by Brian Ulrich retrieved from artist's website, <http://notifbutwhen.com/>



5.0.48. Brian Ulrich, *Kids R Us*, 2008. Colour photograph.



5.0.49. Brian Ulrich, *Pep Boys 3*, 2009. Colour photograph.

Craig Lloyd's warehouse or big box store, aptly named *Cruiser* (image 5.0.50), sits like its namesake, a nearly invisible war machine lying in wait in the distance. It is menacing in appearing entirely closed off. This sense of lurking menace is reiterated in its strange juxtaposition but non-relationality to the tranquil fields before it. It is a pastoral idyll interrupted along its horizon-line by a semi-covert alien presence.



5.0.50. Craig Lloyd, *Cruiser*, 2009. Oil on canvas.¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ Image from *Manifest Gallery* 2010, n.p.

In a similar dreamy, quiet aesthetic, Chris Ballantyne's *Warehouse (Entrance)* (image 5.0.51) depicts an enormous, windowless warehouse, surrounded by an unending, featureless parking lot. The door is the only human-scale and welcoming element in the entire monotonous exterior of the warehouse. This small element of playfulness and comfort, a houseplant, tikki mask, and awning, gives this corner of the warehouse and parking lot a homeliness and human texture; but, ultimately, it is engulfed in the unvarying expanse of these two surfaces, both of which appear so enormous and monotonous as almost to merge into the same blankness and fade away. And, like the other windowless buildings, one might wonder to what vast, entirely synthetic, human-made interior world the doorway gives entry as it provides exit from just such an exterior world.



5.0.51. Chris Ballantyne, *Warehouse (Entrance)*, 2012. Acrylic on paper.

The impenetrable interior

In these works of industrial and commercial suburban art, the alienation of inside from outside is not invented, simply aesthetically highlighted. The mutual exclusion of suburban interior and exterior spaces is also marked in representations of the residential suburb. Here, home interiors are guarded, hidden, or otherwise inaccessible. Peter Drake's *Bulwark* (image 5.0.52) shows a frontal, street-level look at a suburban Cape Cod-style home flanked by its two brightly-coloured neighbouring houses. The property features immaculate lawn and precisely trimmed shrubbery. The house is also almost entirely hidden behind an immaculately groomed, monolithic hedge.

Bulwark's pleasant, picture book-like style is at humorous odds with the obdurate impenetrability of the front hedge hiding the front façade of the house and whatever else may be happening inside.



5.0.52. Peter Drake, *Bulwark*, 2005. Acrylic on canvas.¹⁵²

Glenn Priestley's *The Suburbs* (image 5.0.53), Gillian Willans's *The Neighbourhood 2* (image 5.0.54), and Michael Ward's *Beware of Dog* (image 5.0.55) show the other edifices used to maintain the boundaries of suburban properties and keep houses safely guarded from intrusion: fences and closed gates, guard dogs, warning signs, and ornamental shrubbery.



5.0.53. Glenn Priestley, *The Suburbs*, 1984. Oil on board.¹⁵³

¹⁵² All images by Peter Drake retrieved from artist's website, <http://www.peterdrakeartist.com/>



5.0.54. Gillian Willans, *The Neighbourhood 2*, 2009. Mixed media on paper.¹⁵⁴



5.0.55. Michael Ward, *Beware of Dog*, 2005. Acrylic on canvas.

Or, as in Priestley's *The Suburbs* (image 5.0.53) and Travis Shaffer's typological study of *Residential Facades (after Becher's Industrial Facades)* (image 5.0.56)¹⁵⁵, houses themselves—like the commercial buildings discussed above—can present impenetrable façades with a puzzling absence of physical entry and exit points, effectively cutting off interiors from exteriors, and making each inaccessible to the other.

¹⁵³ Image retrieved from The Centre for Contemporary Canadian Art (CCCA) database, <http://tinyurl.com/n5wx356>

¹⁵⁴ Image retrieved from artist's website, <http://www.gillianwillans.com/index.html>

¹⁵⁵ Bernd and Hilla Becher were photographers in the New Topographic movement who are best known for their typological studies of, especially, industrial buildings.

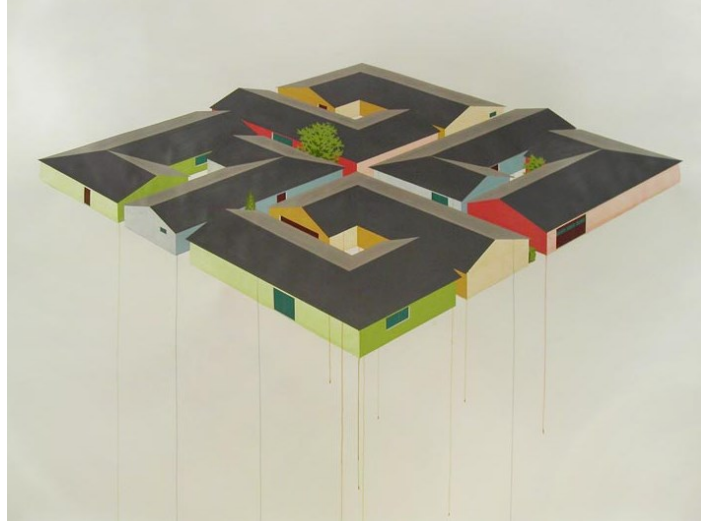


5.0.56. Travis Shaffer, *Residential Facades (after Bernd and Hilla Becher)* [installation view]. Silver gelatin prints.¹⁵⁶

Boundaries as bonds or barriers

The unyielding impenetrability of suburban interiorities and their shutting out of exteriorities are not limited to physical exclusion. The representation of suburban exteriors as being uninviting and rebuffing, with structures which have impervious envelopes that bar entry, is a commonly used device signalling social boundaries and limitations. Chris Ballantyne represents the social boundaries graphically as physical boundaries. For example, *Untitled, Neighborhood (Tight-Knit)* (image 5.0.57) provocatively illustrates the social relations of a suburban neighbourhood as if directly manifest in the material environment. The social connections amongst the neighbours appear to be so strong as to have turned the houses in towards each other. Each house folds in to another house, creating a tight, nearly impenetrable block. The insular community, floating in a blank field, is isolated from any external context or larger relationality, densely closing in on itself.

¹⁵⁶ Image retrieved from artist's Flickr, <https://flic.kr/p/7yywbA>



5.0.57. Chris Ballantyne, *Untitled, Neighborhood (Tight-Knit)*, 2008. Acrylic on paper.

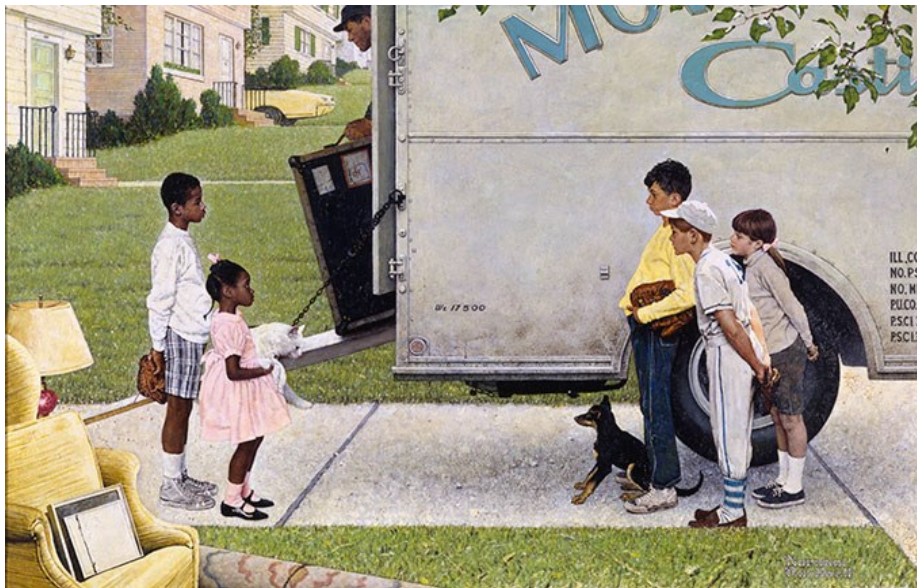
Not only is this community guarded and secured against what may intrude from outside, the community itself is inescapable: the outside is a blank nowhere. The dripping, bleeding paint suggests perhaps not all is well within the community.

A number of artists have taken up the question of the social exclusion of the imagined suburb more directly. Many of them interrogate the understanding of the middle class residential suburb as a space of whiteness¹⁵⁷ by considering the presence of racialized inhabitants in these places. Although, of course, alterity could be investigated through other differences, in U.S. American art in particular, attentiveness to the problematized relationship of blacks with the suburb has been an area of productive artistic intervention. Norman Rockwell, best known and commercially successful for his saccharine nostalgic portrayals of white American families and family traditions, explored the theme of social (non)integration and exclusion in his 1967 piece *New Kids in the Neighborhood (Negro in the Suburbs)* (image 5.0.58). The painting accompanied a *Look* magazine article about middle class black families moving into white suburbs in Chicago.¹⁵⁸ In this image, two black children stand next to a moving truck, which is being unloaded. The children's family is moving into the neighbourhood. On the lawn are pieces of their matching yellow living room furniture, which also match the yellow houses and car on the block. The boy holds a baseball mitt behind his back and the girl, wearing a pink dress with

¹⁵⁷ Bonnett (2002) describes a persistent tendency in the U.S.A. to cast the imagined white rural and suburban America as the "authentic national home" in contrast to the "dark" multiracial spaces of the city (362).

¹⁵⁸ The actual location of this scene is West Street in Lenox, Massachusetts (NRM 2013, n.p.).

matching pink bow and socks, carries a white cat. Facing these shy new kids is a group of three white children, two boys who carry baseball mitts (echoing the black boy's hidden mitt), and a girl in casual clothes but whose hair is tied in pink ribbons (matching the ribbon of the black girl). The white kids have a black puppy with them, which looks with interest at the cat. This moment of encounter is ambivalent. The title, *New Kids in the Neighborhood (Negro in the Suburbs)*, suggests that this is the first black family in what we can historically assume is an otherwise all white neighbourhood. Although there are clear similarities and parallels between the two groups of children, it is unclear what the outcome of this encounter will be as it is marked with uncertainty, reticence, and expectation. The larger social question of how the family's entry into the community will be received is even more undecidable.



5.0.58. Norman Rockwell, *New Kids in the Neighborhood (Negro in the Suburbs)*, 1967. Oil on canvas.¹⁵⁹

Although the black family is obviously middle-class in a way that is entirely consistent with the rest of the community (with their interior furnishings even matching the exterior colour scheme of the neighbourhood), the furtive figure spying out the window of the house (with the yellow car parked in the driveway), and the closed curtains and doors on the remaining houses on the block, on a gently sloping hill and not even a peek of sky, gives the sense that this is the beginning of an uphill, insidious struggle for inclusion with no clear end in sight.

¹⁵⁹ Image retrieved from Brooklyn Museum website
http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/witness_civil_rights/new_kids.php

Half a century later, Peter Drake's *Daniel* (image 5.0.59) features a more overtly fraught but even less legible inter-racial relationship between children. Two white girls (who look like sisters and are dressed in similar clothes) laugh and smile mischievously at each other in the foreground while a black boy stands meekly with eyes closed, arms pressed to his sides, awkwardly occupying the mid-ground, a yellow ranch-style home surrounded by trees and bushes in the background.



5.0.59. Peter Drake, *Daniel*, 2004. Acrylic on canvas.

While it is uncertain what the relationship amongst the children is, it is clear that Daniel does not feel included, comfortable, or welcome, while the girls appear secure and strangely (somehow sinisterly) gleeful.

Zoë Charlton and Rick Delaney explored this question of suburban social exclusion in *There Goes the Neighborhood* (see image 5.0.60). This installation piece included a lawn of real grass surrounded by a miniature white picket fence, identical small pink homes, and store-bought garden gnomes. The houses are clustered into rings, with the rings of houses spaced apart from each other. In this miniature suburban world, the gnomes, who are set to appear to be tending the lawn or grouped together as if chatting, stand as figures disproportionately larger than the houses. Thus, although the gnomes are very small, they are so large in comparison to the houses that they would not be able to enter the houses whose lawns they tend. The gnomes, which the artists hand-painted, are also oddly jarring in being the "wrong" colour: Where garden gnomes are usually white (or rather, pink), these gnomes are different shades of brown, ranging from a

light brown to black. And, although each is cute and jocular, there seem to be too many of them: They significantly outnumber the houses. The gnomes' disproportionate size and number in relation to the houses suggest that they are unwelcome and potentially threatening in this miniature suburban landscape. Their colouring, especially in contrast to their expected pink hue and the actual pink hue of the houses, and the defensive ring formation of the house clusters, as well as the white picket fence around the perimeter, all suggest the uneasy relationship between racialized labourers and the white suburban (and especially gated) communities they tend by day but from which they are meant to be excluded.



5.0.60. Zoë Charlton and Rick Delaney, snapshots of *There Goes the Neighborhood*, 2004. Multi media.¹⁶⁰

Charlton returns to the theme of exclusion, visibility, and suburban inhabitation in her series *Saint of the Suburbs* (image 5.0.61). Houses are again pink in these paintings, set in blank, white backgrounds, suggesting both that these suburbs are spaces of whiteness and simultaneously predominantly women's spaces. In the namesake image of the series, the "saint" of this suburb is a corpulent, black woman with an afro encircling her head like a glowing halo. She is dressed in white boots and shirt but is otherwise naked. She lies with her legs in the air, her bottom occupying the place in the circle of houses where a house (presumably her house) should sit. A large, conspicuous, vulnerable and flagrantly sexualized presence, Charlton's saints explore the vulnerability and jarring visibility brought to blackness and racialization in the context of the

¹⁶⁰ Image retrieved from *Black Medusa* artists' website, <http://blackmedusa.org/neighborhood02.html#>

white suburb. At the same time, the saints make visible the over-embeddedness of women in the interiority of the domestic suburb as we will see below in the work of Laurie Simmons.



5.0.61. Zoë Charlton, *Saint of the Suburbs*, 2007. Mixed media.¹⁶¹

Figure 4: The Displaced Exterior

During the curious time that is night, some artists help make the suburban landscape become recognizable as a surprising and strangely interesting, if lonely, place. Henry Wessel and David Hilliard simply present the curiousness of the suburban exterior through their night-time observations. But, night also makes clearer the threat of the exterior derived from the suburb's dislocation into a generalized non-place. Art of the night-time suburb, as in the works of Robert Adams, Todd Hido, Lori Nix, and Leonard Koscianski, present a creepy, dangerous, and unsettling quality of the exterior.

Exteriority as distance and difference

In Henry Wessel's *Night Walk* series (images 5.0.62 and 5.0.63), the sense that the photographer is a mildly curious but detached night-time flâneur pervades the observational but aloof vision of other people's (for the most part) cozy homes.

¹⁶¹ Image retrieved from artist's website, <http://www.zoecharlton.com/index.html>



5.0.62. Henry Wessel, *Night Walk No. 22*, 1995. Gelatin silver print.¹⁶²

The glow of the lights on the porch or in the front window casts the otherwise dark houses as inviting—if not literally to enter, then to enter imaginatively into the intriguing other world contained within the lighted box of the house.



5.0.63. Henry Wessel, *Night Walk No. 28, Los Angeles*, 1995. Gelatin silver print.¹⁶³

Similarly, in David Hilliard's triptych photo *Dad* (image 5.0.64), not much is happening out of doors at night, but the peek into the warmly-lit suburban interior, conveys a sense that all is well in the glowing interior of suburban home life. These glimpses into an otherwise inaccessible interior give a pleasant, though mundane, sense that the suburban home interior is a cozy site of small-scale, domestic things: "Why does the glance into an unknown window always find a

¹⁶² Image retrieved from Galerie Thomas Zander website, http://www.galeriezander.com/en/artist/henry_wessel/series/night_walk

¹⁶³ Image retrieved from *Art Blart* weblog, <http://artblart.com/2013/01/06/>

family at a meal, or else a solitary man, seated at a table under a hanging lamp, occupied with some niggling thing? (Benjamin 1999, 218 [I3,3]).



5.0.64. David Hilliard, *Dad*, 1998. C-print.¹⁶⁴

However, the curious place of the suburban nightscape easily becomes one that is creepy, unsettling, even dangerous, however, by night-time considerations that attend to the very strangeness of lurking about at night and of photographing other people's homes.¹⁶⁵ Even Wessel's photos, when contemplated for a longer period, start to make one wonder, perhaps sordidly, about precisely what sorts of dramas might be unfolding indoors. Robert Adam's *Summer Nights, Walking* (1976–82) series offers many images in which considerations of homes at night, with its deep shadows and either too glaring (as in image 5.0.65) or barely glinting light (as in image 5.0.66), gives a deeply unsettling feeling of being an intrusive presence. Looking inside, from a dark outdoors in images like *Berthoud, Colorado* (image 5.0.67) and *Longmont, Colorado* (image 5.0.68) turns the viewer into a stalking voyeur. Such suspicious, surveillant considerations foreground the sense of riskiness and distrust already culturally imbued in characteristics of night, including its darkness, quiet, and in the assumption that, in the residential suburb, at least, it is a time of rest and familial closeness.

¹⁶⁴ Image retrieved from artnet Auction website, <http://www.artnet.com/auctions/artists/david-hilliard/dad>

¹⁶⁵ The figure of the flâneur is such an ambivalent figure. More famously one of Baudelaire's exemplary figures of the modern metropolis, the flâneur is the man who is found amidst the tumult of the city but refuses its logic. Sauntering and meandering, supported by his independent wealth, he observes but does not participate.



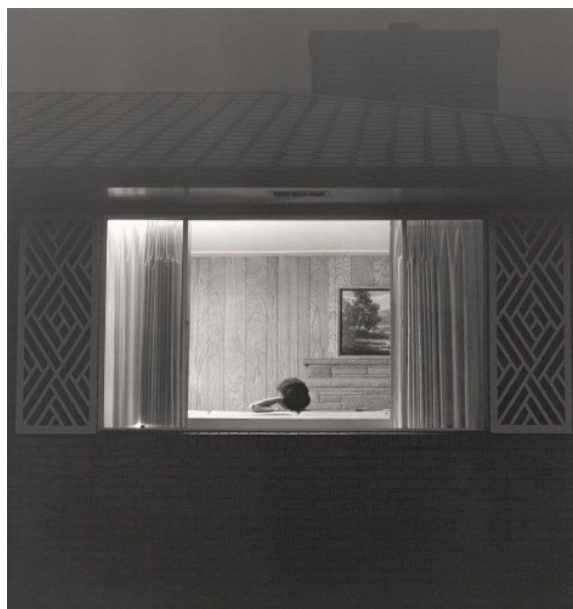
5.0.65. Robert Adams, *Longmont, Colorado*, 1976. Gelatin silver print.¹⁶⁶



5.0.67. Robert Adams, *Berthoud, Colorado*, 1976. Gelatin silver print.¹⁶⁷



5.0.66. Robert Adams, *Longmont, Colorado*, 1980. Gelatin silver print.



5.0.68. Robert Adams, *Longmont Colorado*, 1976–82.. Gelatin silver print.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Images 5.0.65 and 5.0.66 retrieved from Yale University Art Gallery website, <http://media.artgallery.yale.edu/adams/landing.php>

¹⁶⁷ Image retrieved from *American Suburb X* website, <http://www.americansuburbx.com/wp-content/gallery/robert-adams-summer-nights-walking/adams-from-summer-nights-walking10-1976-82.jpg>

¹⁶⁸ Image retrieved from *Blouin Art Info* weblog, <http://blogs.artinfo.com/modernartnotes/2012/08/the-modern-art-notes-podcast-robert-adams/>

More recently, Todd Hido also photographed suburban neighbourhoods and homes at night for his *Home at Night* series. Hido used only the ambient light available. The voyeuristic quality of these images, produced in part by the long exposure time required to create these photos, helps to emphasize the interiority of suburbs. For all the camera's long looking, nothing is happening outside, giving greater affective intensity to what can be imagined to be happening inside. Although, unlike Hilliard's *Dad* (image 5.0.64) and Adams's *Longmont, Colorado* (image 5.0.68), no interior happening can be seen directly, if something is happening somewhere, it must be inside because, except for the lurking photography, there is no happening happening outside. In Hido's *2133* (image 5.0.69), the only source of light is the blue glow of the walls and it is apparent that TV is being watched in two separate rooms. But, in images like *1975a* (image 5.0.70), the viewer is left to wonder what is happening in those lit rooms behind closed curtains and blinds.



5.0.69. Todd Hido, *2133*, 1999. C-print.¹⁶⁹



5.0.70. Todd Hido, *1975a*, 1999. C-print.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ Image retrieved from Michael Berger Gallery website, <http://www.michaelbergergallery.com/Artwork-Detail.cfm?ArtistsID=451&NewID=1882>

¹⁷⁰ Image retrieved from *Foto for Fake* weblog, <http://fotoforfake.wordpress.com/2013/03/06/necropolis-viaggio-nei-vuoti-ostili-di-todd-hido/>

Or, in *2312a* (image 5.0.71), an unlit house observed from directly in front, sitting in the light and shadows of a nearby street light seems perplexingly sinister.



5.0.71. Todd Hido, *2312a*, 1999. C-print.¹⁷¹

In Lori Nix's *Circleville* (image 5.0.72) and much of Leonard Koscianski's work, what is sinister about the residential suburb at night seems to be nature lurking, perhaps waiting, ominously outside. Here, night is the time of frightening wildness and its place is just out the front door. Mixed media artist Lori Nix both creates and photographs her miniature dioramas, which often depict disasters and danger with a sense of dark humour (Nix, nd).¹⁷² *Circleville* conveys a feeling of ominous danger and impending doom. The closed community, with houses crowded tightly to one another, the overshadowing, the power-lines and arrays situated very close to the houses, and the large number of black birds perched on the rooftops all contribute to a sense of things being tense, too tight, and too close. Adding to the tension, the neon sky

¹⁷¹ Image retrieved from *Aborn Magazine*,
http://www.abornmagazine.com/issue_6/interview_hido/interview_hido.html

¹⁷² "In my own work, I create photographs that depict our failing future and the demise of humanity.... I am interested in depicting danger and disaster, but I temper this with a touch of humor." (from <http://www.lorinix.net/about.html>)

conveys a foreboding transition between day and night or the possibility of some other extreme source of light. In these undecidable conditions, the houses appear hunkered down on the verge of something dreadful about to happen, waiting for the doomed night inevitably to fall; or, having emerged from a ghastly night, the houses seem to await morning when they will be released, at last, from whatever terror may have befallen them. The terrible thing might be natural—perhaps the birds themselves or perhaps a forest fire in the distance casting the neon glow in the sky, from which the birds have fled. It might be supernatural. Or, perhaps it is social: For example, is the sky-glow coming from the beginning of a nuclear holocaust? Is it fire from a riot? Does the pervading sense of dread come, instead, from a too close community? Whatever the source of anxiety, the suburban exterior appears as a frightening, unsafe space. Yet, a withdrawal into the interior would not appear to have the capacity to provide comfort or a convincing safe retreat from the external calamity because it might be the dreams or nightmares produced in the night-time interiors that have given rise to the disastrous exteriority.



5.0.72. Lori Nix, *Circleville*, 2000, from the series *Some Other Place*. Colour photograph.¹⁷³

¹⁷³ Image retrieved from artist's website, <http://www.lorinix.net/>

Chapter 5

This is a possibility allegorically considered in Koscianski's *Suburban Life* (image 5.0.73) and *Dusk* (image 5.0.74), where large white dogs prowl an otherwise impeccably neat, quiet suburban neighbourhood at night. Seemingly unnoticed by the distracted adult human figures seen through windows, these dogs present a feral threat to the domestic scene.



5.0.73. Leonard Koscianski, *Suburban Life*, 2012. Oil on panel.¹⁷⁴

These roaming dogs read as the exteriorization and exclusion of wildness, agency, and unpredictability in the certainty and tidy order of the protected suburban interior.



5.0.74. Leonard Koscianski, *Dusk*, 2004. Oil on canvas.

¹⁷⁴ All images by Leonard Koscianski retrieved from artist's website, <http://lkart.com/>

In voyeuristic night-time images of interiors viewed from dark exteriors, nothing can be observed to be happening outside, the sense that something might be happening inside is strongly implied. This sense is emphasized in the long-exposure required to capture photographic images in the dark, in Lori Nix's painstaking hand-crafting of the scenes she photographs, and in the deliberate process of creation of Koscianski's night paintings that re-enforce the sense of witness and purposefulness suggesting there might be something important in these artists' very act of making images of houses at night. In particular, a sense of suburban exteriority comes into focus.

Anaesthetic, the suburban exterior is imag(in)ed as being ugly, numbingly large scale and hypnotically repetitive. Its visual specificity is reduced and delimited, even erased or made hallucinatory through abstraction. The landscape becomes abstracted as does the sense of the suburb as a place. In extirpating the very material conditions of the environment in which everyday and everynight life is grounded, representations of suburban space accrete an abstract, estranged quality. In a number of images, among perhaps the most iconic style of suburban imagery, artists, especially photographers, show the repetitiveness and immense scale of suburban typologies and landscapes, suggesting the machinic, automobile, or economic, not social or cultural, rationale of these built forms. Images like William Garnett's *Foundations and Slabs, Lakewood, California* (image 5.0.40) show in one image the baffling, terrifying scale of repetition. Like the work of many other artists who have explored this aerial perspective, the sheer scope of the suburban project is rendered as an aesthetic abstraction that is otherwise incomprehensible. The nonsense—that is, the incapacity to sense and make sense—of suburban development becomes evident in its unwavering serial rationality. This aesthetic character (or non-character) of the suburb and what can be seen as a negatively-defined sociality easily render this place a non-place. In this way, the suburban landscape is depicted as paradigmatic non-place. Many artists show these non-place exteriors as being inescapable: Suburban commercial, retail and industrial buildings are depicted with no point of entry, no capacity to be entered while the suburban home is equally impenetrable, with its own physical edifices of exclusion. This exclusion is extended to entire communities through less physical but equally visible forms of social exclusion. While the social implications of such architectural boundary-maintenance can be inferred, some artists illustrate more explicitly the impenetrability of social boundaries in suburban communities. The aesthetic, material conditions of the suburban exterior as being

uninviting, then, are revealed to be related to social forms of exclusion and refusals of ethical relationality. In short, these are imagined as unethical places: ones that forego relationality and preclude social responsibility. Such a sense of social irresponsibility becomes magnified in the suburban everynight. The suburban exterior at night can be read as a representational device that makes manifest the imaginary construction of exteriority as an uncanny, disorienting, and menacing quality. The quality of exteriority becomes unmoored from the exterior space. "Exteriority" is conveyed both as an effect and as an affect. As uninviting, anaesthetic non-places, these exteriors give rise to a mounting affective sense that suburban exteriority is characterized, in particular, by pervading creepiness and ominousness. Artworks exploring suburbs at night amplify this sense that the outside is an eerie, unsettling, or dangerous territory: Exteriority is marked by unspecified risk and unfocused fear. Beside nightwalkers and unseen but seeing night stalkers, the outside also threatens with uncontained wildness, whether the wildness of nature, someone else's wildness, or one's own unfathomable wildness and unpredictability.

Chapter 6.

Figures of Interiority

In this chapter, I consider the figures of suburban interiority. The suburban interior is imagined as a spatialization of the individual and the site of retreat for the private individual, as I discussed in Chapter 4. More than this, and in contrast to the exterior—which, in the previous chapter, I argued is a spatialization of an anaesthetic non-place—the interior also figures as a *non-space*—a novel concept I am proposing that describes the affective, emotional, and psychic intensity of the enclosure of the interior. As I did in the previous chapter regarding exteriority, I will also be arguing that interiority is a quality that is separable from the spatialization of the suburban interior. This separability has important paradoxical consequences, which I will discuss at the end of the chapter.

If the suburban exterior gives rise and makes legible undesirable qualities of exteriority, the suburban interior shuns and offers protection against exteriority. In the previous chapter, the suburban exterior figures as anaesthetic, uninviting, and a non-place. In contrast, the suburban interior figures as a space of, and ineluctably marked by and for, the private individual and

family and their things. Thus, where the exterior is uninviting and excluding, the interior is embracing and cozy. Where the suburban exterior is anaesthetic—ugly and too large and repetitive in scale—making the human seem irrelevant in an all-too-human-made environment, the interior is particular, selected, and reflects personality in a befittingly-human environment; it is entirely suited to the individual and the family. Where the exterior is a non-place, the interior is home. Of course, not all suburban interiors are home in the sense of being residential. Yet, the suburban interior, whether in the residential interior or within the sites of shopping, leisure, traveling, or working, is nevertheless represented as a site of dwelling and lingering, of individual choice and self-production, of a self-made and self-making material and psychic world.

The Emergence of Interiority and Exteriority

Walter Benjamin, recounting changes to technologies of perception and life in Paris in the nineteenth century, noted that the "interior" historically emerges in this period of modern industrial urbanization as living-space, separate from the place and sphere of work. This interior was a retreat for the private citizen from both business and social life. In his private interior, the citizen became a collector of consumable culture, *appearing as if* partaking in the world by surrounding himself with the de-contextualized material cultural artefacts of a world from which he was separate:

The private citizen who in the counting-house took reality into account, required of the interior that it should maintain him in his illusions. This necessity was all the more pressing since he had no intention of adding social preoccupations to his business ones. In the creation of his private environment he suppressed them both. From this sprang the phantasmagorias of the interior. This represented the universe for the private citizen. In it he assembled the distant in space and in time. His drawing-room was a box in the world-theatre (Benjamin 1969, 169).¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁵ In a longer but earlier version, Benjamin describes the historical emergence of the private individual and the interior:

Under Louis Philippe, the private individual makes his entrance on the stage of history. ... For the private individual, the place of dwelling is for the first time opposed to the place of work. The former constitutes itself as the interior. Its complement is the office. The private individual, who in the office has to deal with reality, needs the domestic interior to sustain him in his illusions. This necessity is all the more pressing since he has no intention of allowing his commercial considerations to impinge on

For Benjamin, the domestic interior is the site of the *phantasmagoria of the interior*. The phantasmagoria is "a serial procession of hauntings ordinarily hidden from sight" (Pile 2005, 8). The phantasmagoria was a late 18th, early 19th century image projection performance in which the images were projected from hidden lanterns. Benjamin (1999) understood the "new forms of behavior and the new economically and technologically based creations that we owe to the nineteenth century" (such as the arcades, world exhibitions, the experience of the flâneur and the interior) (14)—in short modernity itself (Pile 2005, 20)—to be manifest as phantasmagoria. What, for Benjamin, is important about phantasmagoria is that they have a dream-like or hallucinatory quality, being a projection of a procession of images that simulate, and therefore offer the spectacle of, movement. Simultaneously, the means of the production of the phantasmagoria is hidden. Because the source of the images were invisible to the audience, the transition between images "created a dream-like and ghost-like visual effect" (Pile 2005, 19). As such, the effect of both aspects of the phantasmagoria—both the appearance of the spectacle and the concealment of the social processes that produce it—is one of alienation.

In the interior, the private individual was able to mark out and affirm his¹⁷⁶ individual existence (Benjamin 1999, 14). The interior offered coziness, comfort, and a space of individuality. Benjamin describes this orientation to dwelling as an "addiction" particular to the nineteenth century, which

conceived the residence as a receptacle for the person, and it enacted him with all his appurtenances so deeply in the dwelling's interior that one might be reminded of the

social ones. In the formation of his private environment, both are kept out. From this arise the phantasmagorias of the interior—which, for the private man, represents the universe. In the interior, he brings together the far away and the long ago. His living room is a box in the theater of the world (Benjamin 1999 [Exposé of 1935], 8–9).

¹⁷⁶ It is important to note that I use the masculine pronoun explicitly and intentionally in the following discussion of the interior. As Henri Lefebvre (1987) has noted—a problem with which many artists featured in this chapter work—not everyone is affected in the same way by the "generalized passivity" imposed by everyday life. It is

distributed unequally. It weights more heavily on women, who are sentenced to everyday life, on the working class, on employees who are not technocrats, on youth—in short on the majority of people—yet never in the same way, at the same time, never all at once (Lefebvre 1987, 10).

This means, also, that the highly dichotomized experience of public and private life, the spatial segregation of the spheres of work and leisure, the great anonymity of alienated everyday life on the streets contrasting to the highly individualized passivity of everyday life in the interior, which I discuss below, describes only, at best, a small, bourgeois, masculine population—and even then, only imaginarily or for heuristic purposes. For others, the experience is more complex: The borders and spatial delineations of the different forms of alienation are less clear-cut. However, attending to this strongly binarized model is important in reading and making sense of the suburban imaginary.

inside of a compass case, where the instrument with all its accessories lies embedded in deep, usually violet folds of velvet (Benjamin 1999, 220). Like the velvet folds of the compass case, the interior reflected and ensconced the individual perfectly. The inhabitant's imprint was so precise, Benjamin asserts, that the interior (that is the domestic interior and all the things contained therein) could be read accurately, in the inhabitant's absence, as clues to piece together his personality (Benjamin 1999, 20).

The interior as phantasmagoria of the bourgeois dwelling place distinguishes itself from and yet is enabled by the "phantasmagorias of the market". In contrast to the interior in which the private individual may mark out and affirm his individual existence, in the places of work and particularly in the streets, "people appear only as types" (Benjamin 1999, 14). The withdrawal and retreat of the citizen into the phantasmagoric world of the private interior was the spatialization of a concomitant political and social withdrawal of the citizen—the "demonstrable flagging of the social imagination" (Benjamin 1969, 167). Individuals no longer imagined their efficacy through their action as social citizens but rather through having children. That is, the citizen re-imagined his capacity to impact the future through private familial means rather than public, political ones (Benjamin 1969, 167). In creating this private interior, this phantasmagoria, the nineteenth century citizen had created a space safely outside of the realm of public life. In it, the private individual suppresses concern not only for his business interests but also his social function (Benjamin 1999, 19).

To live in these interiors was to have woven a dense fabric about oneself, to have secluded oneself within a spider's web, in whose toils world events hang loosely suspended like so many insect bodies sucked dry. From this cavern, one does not like to stir (Benjamin 1999, 216 [I2,6]).

This is why for Maurice Blanchot, the interior cannot be the space of the everyday—that is, it is not the space of political possibility. For Blanchot, the everyday—the conditions of possibly being otherwise grounded in the nearly unbearable tedium, routine and nothingness of daily life—is in the city streets:

We need these admirable deserts that are the world's cities for the experience of the everyday to begin to overtake us. The everyday is not at home in our dwelling-places, it is not in offices or churches, any more than in libraries or museums. It is in the street—if it is anywhere (Blanchot 1987, 17).

The everyday understood in these political geographic terms is not to be found in the coziness of the interior of home:

Man, well protected within the four walls of his familial existence, lets the world come to him without peril, certain of being in no way changed by what he sees and hears.

"Depoliticization" is linked to this movement. And the man of government who fears the street—because the man in the street is always on the verge of becoming political man—is delighted to be no more than an entrepreneur of spectacle, skilled at putting the citizen in us to sleep, the better to keep awake, in the half-light of a half-sleep, only the tireless voyeur of images (Blanchot 1987, 15).

Thus, safely able to consume the spectacle of the world without being affected by it, the individual safely ensconced in his homely interiority is also safely unthreatening. Viewing the world as spectacle for entertainment, he does not experience himself as part of that world and, in particular, as one who can affect that world or effect any collective world.

Hannah Arendt similarly describes the domestic interior of this modern individual as an escape from public, political life into the petty, albeit pleasurable concerns with "small things":

Modern enchantment with "small things" . . . has found its classical presentation in the *petit bonheur* of the French people. Since the decay of their once great and glorious public realm, the French have become masters in the art of being happy among "small things," within the space of their own four walls, between chest and bed, table and chair, dog and cat and flowerpot, extending to these things a care and tenderness which, in a world where rapid industrialization constantly kills off the things of yesterday to produce today's objects, may even appear to be the world's last, purely humane corner (Arendt 1958, 52).

For Arendt, such an orientation to little things historically emerges as a symptom of the alienation the individual experiences from the larger historical, political forces as well as the pace and constancy of change under conditions of modernity. Arendt acknowledges why immersion into such a comfortable domestic sphere is eminently humane and desirable. Here, as we also see in Lefebvre's and Blanchot's critique of the everyday, everyday life is comforting and annihilating. Interiority is the sphere of intimacy, privacy, comfort, and withdrawal. Interiority offers a disengagement. Unlike in public life, in the interior, Arendt's *petit bonheur*, Blanchot's man in his four walls, or Benjamin's private individual presumably does not *actively feel* a sense of alienation and anonymity but one of fulfilled individuation and an actualized (if small sense of the) good life. One is not "an anyone" (that is, anonymous) as in Blanchot's man in the street, but a particular, distinct someone—one who is located and locatable in his particular place.

However, for Arendt, such a re-orientation of the conditions of happiness to such a small domain forfeits "the grand, fully human happiness of the public realm" (Kogl 2009, 520). In contrast to the possible grandeur of the public realm, the private realm is enchanting and characterized by

charm—a quality imparted upon it by its capacity to "harbor the irrelevant" (Arendt 1958, 52). Because the public realm is unable to harbour the irrelevant, it can never be charming. Thus, although the private realm expands within mass society so that, as Arendt describes, an entire population might be enchanted by its charm, the private is not by this enlarging made public but causes the public realm to recede (52). Accordingly, modern, mass society is lived not only within the privacy of the domestic interior, but also in the extended realms of privacy supplanting the public, common realm.

For Arendt, to live a private life is to not live a "truly human life" (58) or even within "reality" because it is an entirely subjective life, lacking the confirmation of or permanence achieved by and enabled within sociality. The private man is one who, from the perspective of others, does not exist:

To live an entirely private life means above all to be deprived of things essential to a truly human life: to be deprived of the reality that comes from being seen and heard by others, to be deprived of an "objective" relationship with them that comes from being related to and separated from them through the intermediary of a common world of things, to be deprived of the possibility of achieving something more permanent than life itself. The privation of privacy lies in the absence of others; as far as they are concerned, private man does not appear, and therefore it is as though he did not exist. Whatever he does remains without significance and consequence to others, and what matters to him is without interest to other people (Arendt 1958, 58).

The status of such a private individual, understood in these terms, should be alarming. The individual who is private in this way—the one who remains within interiors retreating from the world, the one who is unrecognized or unrecognizable by others, the one who cannot or will not participate in public social life—is, in Anthropological terms, the one who is socially dead. The interiorized, private individual as socially dead can be understood as the conjunction of two ghastly figures, the corpse and the ghost, which cannot combine to make a truly lively person. The private individual is a corpse inasmuch as he is one who is physically present yet socially absent.¹⁷⁷ The interior can then be read as the tomb or casket of such a corpse. In such a view, the

¹⁷⁷ Victor Turner (1998), summarizing the liminal status of an individual (an "initiant") undergoing ritual transition from one social position to another through a rite of passage, discusses the prevalence of two-fold symbolism of the liminal person as one who is invisible because "they are no longer classified and not yet classified," both at the same time (6).

The subject of passage ritual is, in the liminal period, structurally, if not physically, 'invisible.' As members of society, most of us see only what we expect to see, and what we expect to see is what we are conditioned to see when we have learned the definitions and classifications of our culture (6).

residential suburb, serialized site of interiorities, can be read figurally as a graveyard. However, the corpse is inert while the socially dead private individual is not. The private individual is, then, also a ghost inasmuch as he is one who does not, cannot, ought not, or must not exist, yet does: a presence that cannot be explained because his existence does not fit into recognizable meaning systems. Importantly, while private individuals are asocial or antisocial, ghosts are social figures:

ghosts appear when the trouble they represent and symptomize is no longer being contained or repressed or blocked from view. ... The whole essence, if you can use that word, of a ghost is that it has a real presence and demands its due, your attention. Haunting and the appearance of specters or ghosts is one way ... we are notified that what's been concealed is very much alive and present, interfering precisely with those always incomplete forms of containment and repression ceaselessly directed toward us (Gordon 2008, xvi).

Being such social figures, ghosts are instructive. They direct attention to what is in the process of being made to pass out of perceptibility, markedness, or questionability. While the private individual is socially dead, in the form of a ghost the individual is resurrected as a troublesome social figure.

The effect of creating an interior as a cozy space of private life into which the ghostly individual is ensconced and retreats behind his four walls from political and business life is to create an exterior—what is kept out by the four walls. As Gaston Bachelard (1964), meditating on the figure of the childhood home notes,

it must be noted that the two terms "outside" and "inside" pose problems of metaphysical anthropology that are not symmetrical. To make inside concrete and outside vast is the first task, the first problem, it would seem, of an anthropology of the imagination. But between concrete and vast, the opposition is not a true one. At the slightest touch, asymmetry appears. And it is always like that: inside and outside do not receive in the same way the qualifying epithets that are the measure of our adherence. Nor can one live the qualifying epithets attached to inside and outside in the same way. Everything, even size, is a human value (215).

Bachelard illuminates the asymmetrical relationship between the interior and exterior. Where the interior is a limited space imbued with the known, small-scale and endearing things and other

As one who is no longer classified, the initiand is imagined according to symbols of, and treated like a corpse (6). As one who is yet to be classified, the initiand is also imagined in images of, and treated as an embryo or newborn (7). Such liminal personas are, Turner explains, often hidden because "they have physical but not social 'reality,' hence they have to be hidden, since it is a paradox, a scandal to see what ought not to be there!" (8)

concretions of everyday life, the exterior is, in contrast, vast, limitless and unknowable. As Bachelard describes, space has been pushed out of the interior in order to enable thought: "it really was admirable, this power to make *space withdraw*, to put space, all space, outside, in order that meditating being might be free to think" (Bachelard 1964, 231). However, such a conceptual framing—the opposition, even if asymmetrical, of inside and outside—does not imply that the exterior is public. The individual's initial movement into privacy is neither a spatial one nor is it one that pre-exists the movement (moving from an already existing public exterior into a newly created interior); rather, it is an imaginary one that simultaneously creates the two terms between which the imaginary movement occurs. Thus, the individual retreats from an imagined or potential public, a socially-constituted realm of possibility which is instituted in the collective imaginary. The private individual simultaneously withdraws into and is created by an interior that is spatially defined. Thus, the individual moves from a conceptual imaginary into a conceptual spatialization. In this movement, by the very definition of an interior spatialization, space is serialized, producing the exterior dialectically as a necessary, excluded, oppositional spatialization. Such a serial spatialization is not equivalent to public social space and does not in turn become public social space.

Figure 1: The Individual and Material Evidence of Dwelling

John Archer (2005) notes that it was only in the eighteenth century in Britain that the home began to be designed to reflect personal criteria of the owner. Prior to this, since the Renaissance, architects designed houses

according to the principle of "decorum," which required that design and decoration of a building suit an owner's *position* within certain established social hierarchies such as rank, status, wealth, and ancestry (Archer 2005, 2).

However, beginning in the 1700s, as Archer describes, the design of homes was increasingly influenced by Enlightenment conceptions of selfhood, property, and privacy, and especially John Locke's philosophical articulations of the ideal of the individual as a rational, agentic actor separate from society able most fully to self-actualize through private property. As a result, the privately owned home, especially the interior, became a site of selfhood. That is, it began to be

understood as an integral element of full self-expression—the home reflected the owner in design and through the accumulation of things in a way that nothing else could. And, moreover, the home was also increasingly a fundamental component of self-fulfillment—without privately owned property, one could not truly fulfill the conditions of achieving selfhood. It was in the suburban interior, separated from the tumult of the city, where the elite individual could restore and create himself and his home could reflect this. Over time, with the generalization of the suburb across classes, this ideal of the suburban interior as the site of individual self-actualization and self-expression, also became generalized. The imperative of suburban homeownership was also an imperative of self-expression and self-actualization within the suburban interior.

Many of the debates that have grown up surrounding suburbia are rooted in a broader, long-standing contest within American society. On the one hand is an idealistic vision, inherited from the Enlightenment, of life as centered on opportunities for self-realization. Fulfillment as an individual is tied to the pursuit of private aspirations, defined and set autonomously. Against this is an advanced-capitalist vision of self as rendered upwardly mobile through opportunities available in an economy of commodity accumulation and consumption. Here society at large is recognized as instrumental to formation of the self, but only insofar as it is an apparatus of commodity production and distribution. In principle such a commodity culture values each individual self highly. The problem is that actual dimensions of choice are limited to those that are marketed. Notions such as "self" and "happiness" thus are prone to disappear into categories of consumer products. In the end, the marketplace becomes arbiter of "self" (Archer 2009, 22).

Many artists who depict the suburban interior vividly catalogue the material edifices of suburban interior life and demonstrate ways in which generic built spaces bear the peculiar imprint of their inhabitants. In the suburban interior, the figure of the individual can be read as an individual or, more typically, as a couple or family. In attending to the individuation of the suburban interior by dwelling individuals, artists interrogate the marks and marking of the suburban individuals on the mass-produced, generic interiors characteristic of suburban interiors.

In his documentary photographic series *Suburbia*,¹⁷⁸ Bill Owens photographed his

¹⁷⁸ Some photos from the series were selected and published as a book in 1973. The selection of images was reworked for the second edition in 1999. Daniel Rubey (2004) argues that there is a shift from the photos as "sociological" documentation in the first edition to the photos as art in the second edition. In the first edition, the collection of images is thematically occupied with issues of community and sociality, the encroachment upon rural and wild land, and the cycle of life. In the second edition, Rubey finds there is a greater sense of critique, observation of ironic and dissonant situations, and a critical disengagement and distance. It was with

neighbours (from 1968–1972) in the new suburban neighbourhood to which he and his family had recently moved. In these photos, couples and families pose with and within their houses along with their things or lack of things. Owens also photographed the things in the houses without their owners as well as taking broader neighbourhood shots. Most photos are captioned with a quote from the subject(s) of the photo.¹⁷⁹ The images convey the central role that the new material conditions, the plethora of consumer possessions, and the personal arrangement of these things play in helping to create these houses as either comfortable homes that enable the full expression of the homeowners' tastes, values and desires, or discomfoting domiciles in which this desire of self-expression and self-fulfillment have yet to be (or will never be) realized or where the need to maintain outward signs of well-being are taxing. Photos like the two featuring a couple in the same room first empty and then, a year later, furnished convey a sense of progress and well-being through the material actualization of a vision of self-expression. (See these side-by-side in image 6.0.1).



6.0.1. Bill Owens, "We lived in our house for a year without any living room furniture. We wanted to furnish the room with things we loved, not early attic or leftovers. Now we have everything but the pictures and the lamps," 1973. Gelatin silver print.¹⁸⁰

this second edition that Owens' work became widely regarded as art. For this chapter, while I have looked at images for the second edition, I consider primarily the images from the first edition.

¹⁷⁹ In the published book, the captioned quotes are not explicitly ascribed to the specific speaker, but based on content, the speaker can usually be surmised. When there is a man in the image, the captions are quotes from the man. When there is only a woman or woman with children, the quote is sometimes from the woman although sometimes from an unseen husband. In images of only young children, the quote is usually from a parent.

¹⁸⁰ Except where noted, all images by Bill Owens retrieved from Greg Kucera Gallery website, <http://www.gregkucera.com/owens.htm>

Interestingly, while the couple stand large and as a clear focal point in the first image, in the second image, the perspective has shifted—the camera has pulled back, making the couple appear recessed, standing in amongst the things that now fill the room. Although they are technically still at the centre of the image, the man and woman no longer seem to be the focal point but are just two amongst the many things to look at in the image: Now the objects speak for the couple as much as they themselves do. Similarly, the image of the living room decorated for Christmas and featuring Ronald Reagan on the television (image 6.0.2) conveys a sense of material abundance and the importance of things. On the left edge of the photo, part of a decorated Christmas tree is visible and a profusion of wrapped gifts is neatly arranged below and around it, trailing off in front of the TV set. The television set is prominently featured both in the living room itself (the nativity scene is arranged on top of it) and centred in the frame of the image. The curtains are closed but the TV is on. Everything about the image seems to be saying something about the unseen inhabitants of this home.



6.0.2. Bill Owens, *Untitled* from the series *Suburbia*, 1973. Gelatin silver print.

The marks and markings of the interior by the inhabiting individual(s) might be as ephemeral as the things with which the interiors are filled, but they can also include the changing of the very structure of the home or its interior. In the mid-twentieth century post-war era, suburban development in the U.S.A. was stepped up as a mass-produced commodity in order to

provide housing for returning soldiers, to boost the economy, and to diffuse the population away from urban centres in order to reduce the risk of nuclear bombings amidst the threat of the Cold War suddenly turning hot. In being developed rapidly and on a mass scale, North American suburban developments of the mid-century, like the one Owens documented, became (in)famous for being homogenous tract developments. Amongst the best-known of the mid-century suburbs were the various Levittown developments (in Long Island, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey), which were very large-scale planned communities built by Levitt & Sons. Despite their initial homogeneity, photographer Barbara Gallucci, through her photographic series *Ranch '50 (The Levittown Interiors)* catalogues the ways in which the identical home interiors in the Long Island Levittown became individuated over time. Specifically, as part of the design of the identical, mass-produced ranch-style houses of Levittown, Long Island, a television set had been embedded into the wall of a staircase (as shown in *TV Wall*, image 6.0.3).



6.0.3. Barbara Gallucci, *TV Wall*, 2003. C-print.¹⁸¹

As Gallucci explains, eventually the television company stopped manufacturing that model. As the television sets inevitably stopped working, each of the homeowners of that style of home had to deal with the same problem of what to do with the hole in the wall that was left after the TV was removed (Gallucci 1996–2006, n.p.). Gallucci's series shows the ways in which different

¹⁸¹ All images by Barbara Gallucci retrieved from artist's website, <http://barbaragallucci.com/photography-2002-2004/photography>

home owners addressed the problem and the ways in which the identically built homes accreted individuality over time both decoratively and structurally. For example, *Bob and Jess* seem to have preserved (or possibly installed) mid-twentieth century design elements, including wood-paneling on the walls and mid-century furniture, giving a nostalgic sense of kitsch (image 6.0.4). In contrast, *Jim and Vera's* room (image 6.0.5) appears austere and artless in its late-twentieth century-looking stark pragmatism.



6.0.4. Barbara Gallucci, *Bob and Jess*, 2003. C-print.



6.0.5. Barbara Gallucci, *Jim and Vera*, 2003. C-print.

Josephine and John's room (image 6.0.6) is nearly unrecognizable as the same space in the degree of transformation it has undergone.



6.0.6. Barbara Gallucci, *Josephine and John*, 2003. C-print.

The images (all taken in 2003) appear almost as snapshots, recording the design era and homeowners' tastes in the particular moment of time in which the re-structuring of the room was undertaken. The titles of the photos, named after the homeowners, suggest the degree to which the individuals claimed and individualized the spaces to their own tastes, budgets, and needs. These structural and decorative re-makings and markings by the dwelling individuals of their suburban interior are clearly intentional. In showing the homeowners' different solutions to the same problem, Gallucci's series conveys a sense of the preferences and values re-shaping an otherwise homogenous setting.

To a certain extent, the structural re-designs catalogued in Gallucci's series intend to create an impression or a preferred reading of both the home interior and the homeowners. But there is also an unintended impression imprinted upon the interior. As Walter Benjamin observed, it was the legibility of the interior as betraying the dwelling individuals that made possible the detective novel, which emerged in the nineteenth century, in tandem with the emergence of the interior. The interior bore clues that the detective could read.

The interior is not just the universe of the private individual; it is also his *étui*. ... It is as if he had made it a point of honor not to allow the traces of his everyday objects and accessories to get lost. ... The traces of its inhabitant are molded into the interior. Here is the origin of the detective story, which inquires into these traces and follows these tracks. ... The criminals in early detective fiction are neither gentlemen nor apaches, but simple private citizens of the middle class (Benjamin 1999 [Exposé of 1939], 20).¹⁸²

Susan Dobson's photographic series *Open House* explores this theme of the conveyance of biographical information in these "traces" of the inhabitants. The rooms strongly and peculiarly bear the imprints of their inhabitants. Although these interiors are not filled with the velvety and

¹⁸² In an earlier version, Benjamin writes:

The interior is not just the universe but also the *étui* of the private individual. To dwell means to leave traces. In the interior, these are accentuated. ... the traces of the inhabitant are imprinted in the interior. Enter the detective story, which pursues these traces. ... The criminals in early detective novels are neither gentlemen nor apaches, but private citizens of the middle class. (Benjamin 1999 [Exposé of 1935], 9)

The full version of this quote:

The interior is not just the universe of the private individual; it is also his *étui*. Ever since the time of Louis Philippe, the bourgeois has shown a tendency to compensate for the absence of any trace of private life in the big city. He tries to do this within the four walls of his apartment. It is as if he had made it a point of honor not to allow the traces of his everyday objects and accessories to get lost. Indefatigably, he takes the impression of a host of objects ... The traces of its inhabitant are molded into the interior. Here is the origin of the detective story, which inquires into these traces and follows these tracks. ... The criminals in early detective fiction are neither gentlemen nor apaches, but simple private citizens of the middle class (Benjamin 1999 [Exposé of 1939], 20).

plush surfaces that literally molded and took the physical impressions of those nineteenth century inhabiting counterparts Benjamin describes, the particularity of the objects and decoration of the suburban home interiors photographed by Dobson create as distinctive an impression of their inhabitants. Many of the rooms are highly idiosyncratic: Walls painted in murals or rooms decorated thematically unabashedly declare the personal interests, experiences, and likes of the inhabitants. Thus, a children's bedroom decorated in a "princess" style (image 6.0.7), a formal living room filled with books and wooden and leather furniture (image 6.0.8), or a kitchen covered in children's art (image 6.0.9) each seems to convey the inhabitants' most significant preoccupations and most cherished values. The bedroom, with its pink walls and whimsically painted murals and decorated with romantic linens and furniture clearly aims to achieve a "fairytale princess" effect.



6.0.7. Susan Dobson, *Untitled* from the series *Open House*, 2002/03. Lightjet print.¹⁸³

The living room with its richly coloured walls, wooden furniture, and leather reading chairs, and the plethora of arranged flowers and leather-bound and coffee-table books, and the dark alcohol in crystal decanter forcefully present a display of "culturedness". These scenes intentionally and boldly proclaim the fantasies, longings, and beliefs held dear by their respective inhabitants.

¹⁸³ All images by Susan Dobson retrieved from artist's website, <http://www.susandobson.com/OpenHouse.html>



6.0.8. Susan Dobson, *Untitled* from the series *Open House*, 2002/03. Lightjet print.

The image of the kitchen (image 6.0.9), too, suggests, seemingly less intentionally but no less strikingly, a particular kind of devotion. Fairly large, white, and otherwise non-descript, the bland environment of the kitchen is layered with a profusion of children's art—drawings, paintings, paper crafts—tacked onto almost every visible surface. Many clues, including children's boots, pink bag and umbrella at the door and the stuffed animal on the counter next to the stove, suggest that at least one school-aged girl lives in this home with at least one caretaker who celebrates (or feels compelled to post) the child's art.



6.0.9. Susan Dobson, *Untitled* from the series *Open House*, 2002/03. Lightjet print.

The photo seems to have been taken right in the middle of an adult preparing snacks and a child making art. The kitchen table is crowded with art supplies including a felt-marker left uncapped on an open book of blank paper. A container of potato chips and box of crackers both lay toppled over next to an empty bowl. Beside these, cut fruit and a knife rest on a cutting board. Both unused and wadded napkins lay on the counter. At the sink, there is more food and a knife resting atop another chopping board. And, next to the stove, a block of unwrapped cheese sits next to a grater and a kitchen towel left crumpled on the counter.

These photos intimate at intimacy: They seem to offer a (potentially intrusive) glimpse at deeply personal and personalized spaces. However, Dobson staged these interiors with the help of the actual inhabitants (Dobson n.d., n.p.). *Open House* is, then, an invited tour of home interiors on display. Their staged quality is immediately apparent in those images that present tidy spaces but only gradually becomes apparent in those spaces that appear to be amidst ordinary use. In the image of the kitchen, the utter abundance and almost manic display of personal and personalized embellishments seems playfully but insistently to suggest not only that there is a child in this home, but that perhaps she is the focal point of the home and of family life. With a longer viewing, a sense of aggression begins to emerge: there seems to be too much children's art. The overwhelming indirect presence of the child becomes excessive and strangely intrusive. The image suggests the degree to which a home, styled and individualized by the choices of the adult homeowners, is overwritten by their children, less intentionally but more directly individuating the domestic interior. The intentionally displayed home scene, then, also displays unintentional glimpses into domestic life and into the accidentally revealed desires, necessities, and expressions of the inhabiting individuals.

Continuing with this theme, the possessions displayed within the suburban homes in Sheila Pree Bright's photographic *Suburbia* series also subtly hint at the inhabitants in both intentional and unintentional ways. Presented carefully in tidy vignettes, the images are reminiscent of aspirational home and lifestyle magazines. Although there are people visible either directly or obliquely in a number of the photos, it is more significantly the objects that cumulatively present an indirect portrait of the homeowners. Political magazines, each cover featuring Barack Obama, carefully displayed on a coffee table (e.g. in image 6.0.10), toys left at the stairs (e.g. in image 6.0.11), elegant furnishings and architectural details, and framed photos (e.g. in image 6.0.12)

collectively suggest that the inhabitants of this suburban home are likely politically informed Democrats, a young family, upper middle class, and black.



6.0.10. Sheila Pree Bright, *Untitled 40* from the series *Suburbia*, 2009. C-print.¹⁸⁴

Bright's series considers the invisibility of black middle class suburbanites (Bright n.d., n.p.)—that is, that black people in the U.S.A. are rarely imagined or imaged to be middle class suburbanites and simultaneously that middle class suburbanites are rarely imagined or imaged to be black (Richmond 2007, n.p.). Bright's series presents at once an image of the normalcy and ordinariness of actual black suburban homeownership and, at the same time, suggests the degree to which the self that is expressed and fulfilled through suburban dwelling—especially of middle class and wealthy suburbs—is expected to be white. The imagined individual retreating into a self-created, self-creating interior is a particular kind of self. This concern is showcased in how much visual information must be presented before the inhabitants become legible as black. The interior, otherwise readily legible for determining such things as class, wealth, and family status of its inhabitants must present a preponderance of details in order for the viewer to be able to expect the inhabitants to be other than white. These images can be read as both a critique of a generalized racist assumption while also a subtle celebration of black middle class achievement.

¹⁸⁴ Image retrieved from *Review Magazine's Legacy* website, http://www.ereview.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/SheilaPreeBright_Untitled-e1272056216438.jpg



6.0.11. Sheila Pree Bright, *Untitled 8* from the series *Suburbia*, 2005. C-print.¹⁸⁵

The photos present comfort and refined, class-appropriate taste. However, it is notable that in seeking to expand the suburban imaginary to include black families, little else about the suburban imaginary is challenged. It is because of the ease with which other aspects of the inhabitants can be interpreted as "appropriate" in reading the interiors that the racial expectations can be isolated and challenged. These images suggest a reinscription and affirmation of a dominant suburban imaginary in presenting an interior that is an otherwise straightforward translation of the individual inhabitants.

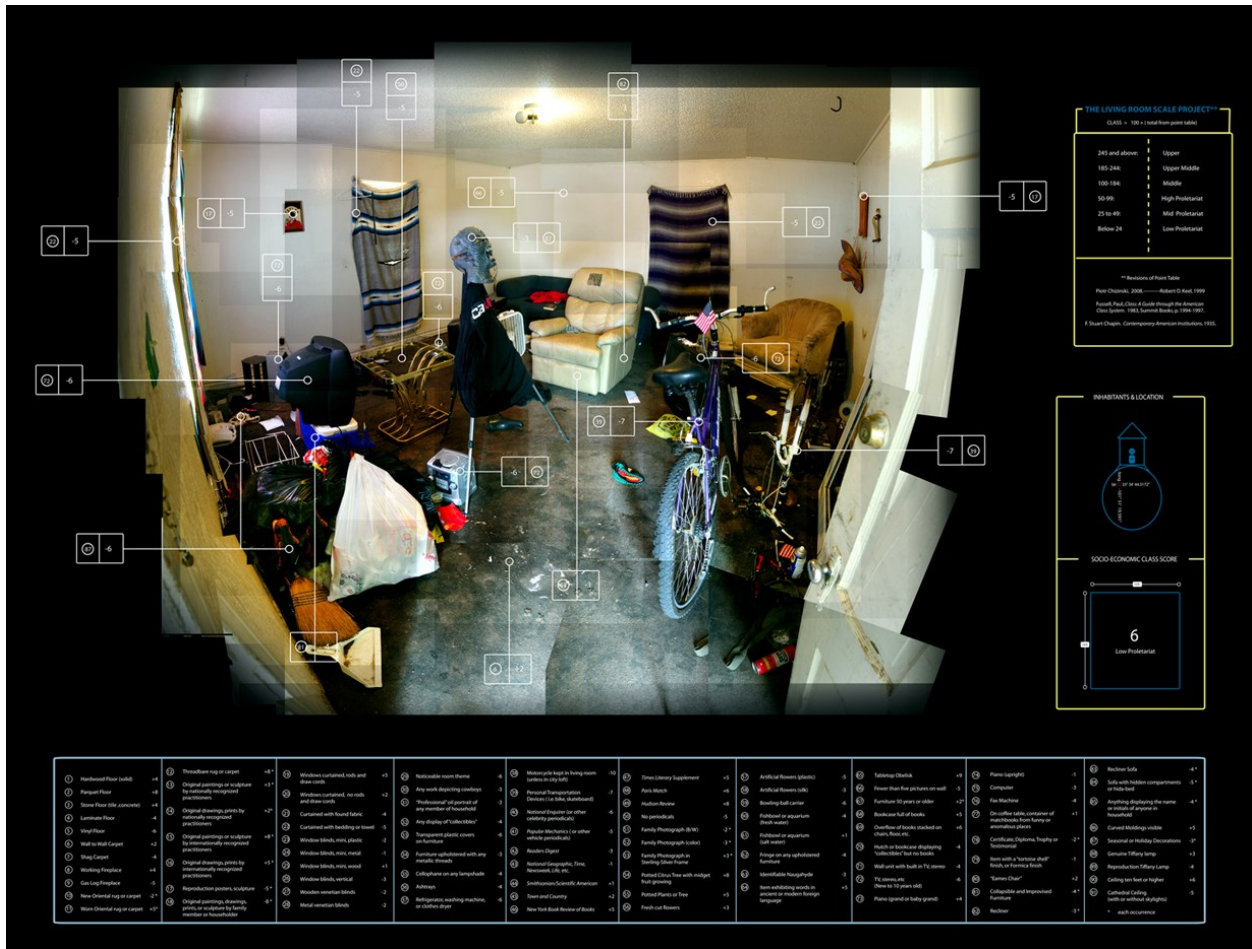


6.0.12. Sheila Pree Bright, *Untitled 3* from the series *Suburbia*, 2004. C-print.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ Image retrieved from *En Foco* website,
http://www.enfoco.org/index.php/photographers/photographer/pree_bright_sheila/

¹⁸⁶ Image retrieved from *Creative Loafing Atlanta* website,
<http://clatl.com/freshloaf/archives/2011/09/08/3947473-5-things-today-15-x-15-fashions-night-out>

Where Dobson's staged images appear as if snapshots of a home amidst the messiness of daily life, and Bright's images appear like high fashion magazine images of a home intentionally polished for envious gazing, Piotr Chizinski offers a much more explicit analytic interpretation of interiors with his *Living Room Scale Project*. In a self-described mix of photographic collage and quantitative sociology, Chizinski explicitly decodes the signs embedded in living rooms for both their intended and unintended effect of conveying class status (e.g. see images 6.0.14 and image 6.0.13).



6.0.13. Piotr Chizinski, *Ward of State*, 2008. Lightjet print.¹⁸⁷

Each image is a quasi-scientific socioeconomic class analysis of a living room, showing how the possessions on display and the structure of the interior space reflect social class. Using a detailed

¹⁸⁷ Image retrieved from Cornell AAP's Flickr, <https://flic.kr/p/8LAQ2B>. Chizinski offers a tutorial demonstration explaining the structure of the images on YouTube, http://youtu.be/wsQzDl1_IUU.

metric of his own creation, Chizinski diagrammatically identifies how certain objects can be translated into and added up to a quantitative class rating. Each piece in the series is comprised of a collage of photographic images of a living room written over with clusters of numbers. Each cluster includes two numbers. One number, enclosed in a circle, indicates the category of analysis. Along the bottom of the image is a legend that lists all of these circled numbers and their corresponding categories. The other number in each cluster is a score for that category. The total score is given in a box on the right hand side and indicates the class ranking. Thus, for example, the living room of someone identified as a "philanthropist" (*Philanthropist*, image 6.0.14) displays many objects that receive positive ratings, adding up to a high score, which translates to or reveals a higher socioeconomic class status. Amongst the high-scoring objects, Chizinski awards eight points per "original painting or sculpture by nationally recognized practitioners." With fifteen separate such objects in the room, the philanthropist scores one hundred-twenty points in art alone with the room receiving a score of 367 overall, placing the philanthropist in the "upper" class.



6.0.14. Piotr Chizinski, *Philanthropist*, 2008. Lightjet print.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁸ Image retrieved from Richland College Galleries website, <http://www.rlc8.dcccd.edu/gallery/?p=278>.

In contrast, the living room of someone identified as a "ward of the State" (*Ward of the State*, image 6.0.13) displays many objects that receive negative ratings including "curtained with bedding or towel" (-5 each). Chizinski calculates this living room as having a total score of six, placing the ward of State in the "low proletariat" class. Although the metric that Chizinski uses is subjective, only aesthetically scientific, it nevertheless helps make explicit the bases of interpretation for reading other interiors.¹⁸⁹

These artists' works play on the expectation that the material accumulation and display of both incidental everyday detritus of living and the intentional transformation of spaces will convey meaningful personal information about the inhabitants and their ways of life. Owens's images of progress, prosperity and happiness through self-actualization in and through the suburban interior seem to confirm that for many of Owens's neighbours, the suburban interior provided a well-suited space and place for self-expression and self-actualization in the form of a happy family home. As one family, standing in their tidy kitchen, describes, "We're really happy. Our kids are healthy, we eat good food and we have a really nice home" (image 6.0.15).



6.0.15. Bill Owens, "We're really happy. Our kids are healthy, we eat good food and we have a really nice home," 1973. Gelatin silver print.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁹ Thus, for example, one can reconsider why Dobson's living room, though seemingly presenting a consistent image of "high class" still does not read as the room of a cultural elite. While Chizinski's measures include a high positive score for "Threadbare rug or carpet", a rug that is new, like the one pictured, would receive a low negative score. Each of the many colour family photos displayed on the bookshelves would also receive a -3 each. And, the absence of any periodicals also adds a score of -5.

¹⁹⁰ Jeffrey Kastner has noted that this image abounds with subtle dissonance, which Daniel Rubey argues is present in many of Owens' photographs and moves these seemingly documentary images into the realm of

Similarly, Gallucci's images of self-expression through the re-configuration and personalization of the manufactured suburban home interior illustrate the strong inter-relationship of the interior and the individual. Chizinski's and Dobson's works also suggest the degree to which the interior reflects the inhabitants in intentional and unintentional ways. Bright's images complicate this relationship of individuals and their legibility in interiors suggesting ways in which the viewer's expectations cause a failed reading of the inhabitants' imprint on the interior. And, in other images by Owens, this seemingly straightforward relationship between the individual and self-actualization in the interior is also challenged.

Owens documented ways in which the expression of the individual through the interior is strained and complicated both by a paucity and an excess of things. In *Suburbia* (1973), there are two images of non-white families. One shows a black mother who identifies the various activities available to her children (such as Little League), which she likes. But, she also laments the lack of "Black cultural identity." The other image is a photo of a Chinese-American family sitting around the dining table, about to eat dinner (image 6.0.16).



6.0.16. Bill Owens, "Because we live in the suburbs we don't eat too much Chinese food. It's not available in the supermarkets so on Saturday we eat hot dogs," 1973. Gelatin silver print.

art. Taking a closer look at the image, Kastner spotted several of the family's twenty-three cats in the photo, which are not immediately obvious. This same closer looking also reveals the powerplant visible through the back windows "its marching towers buzzing across the horizon" (Rubey 2009, quoting Kastner 2000). Image retrieved from MOMA website, http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=51462.

The captioned quote notes that the family does not tend to eat Chinese food often due to the lack of its availability in the suburban supermarkets. These two non-white families are evidently limited in their capacities for self-expression and self-actualization even within the interiors of their own homes. Individuals and families are unable to access desired things or to express fully or actualize their desired selves. In another image (6.0.17), a young, white girl sits in her bedroom surrounded by a mess of things. Accompanying the image is the exasperated caption (which we can assume is a quote from a parent): "I wanted Christina to learn some responsibility for cleaning her room, but it didn't work." Christina's things seem neither to express nor to help accomplish a self-fulfilled individual, revealing instead a fraught parent-child relationship that is contested over the proper place, value, and meaning of things. Yet, even in these portraits of unintended and not-quite chosen relationships to things, of the making do within material and cultural limitations, of the uncooperative ways children and things occupy their interior spaces, the interior conveys the inhabiting selves, even if not as fully intentionally self-expressive individuals. These photos also help to reveal the degree to which the other photos depicting the personalization of interiors—seemingly examples of full self-expression and self-actualization—are also contingent and operate within a limited set of possibilities.



6.0.17. Bill Owens, "I wanted Christina to learn some responsibility for cleaning her room, but it didn't work," 1973. Gelatin silver print.

If the interior, which includes all of the things contained within the interior, can be read as providing material evidence of the dwelling individual, it also helps to define and produce the dwelling individual. It is the result of, hosts, and produces both the individual and the need for endless aesthetic and consumer decisions. Such decisions imbue and extend the individual self into the material and psychic making of the interior. But as reading these works show, if the self is traceable in the material presentation of the interior, then such a self is reducible (at least visually) to the mere making of these aesthetic and consumer decisions. Individuality is produced by these decisions as well as by the requirement to decide. For Gaston Bachelard (1964), the house does even more than reflect, represent or embody the character of its residents. It plays an active role in inscribing the activity of dwelling into the self (Archer 2005, 3). He argues, "over and beyond our memories, the house we were born in is physically inscribed in us. It is a group of organic habits" (Bachelard 1964, 14). This inscription passionately marks the inhabitant as the diagram of dwelling within the particularity of a specific house:

We are the diagram of the functions of inhabiting that particular house, and all the other houses are but variations on a fundamental theme. The word habit is too worn a word to express this passionate liaison of our bodies, which do not forget, with an unforgettable house (Bachelard 1964, 14, 15).

In these ways, then, the interior creates the individual as much as the individual creates the interior. The interior is a place that locates the self. Of course, not all suburban interiors are domestic. Yet, if the interior is the site of self-making and self-expressing, and this self is understood to be produced primarily through consumer and aesthetic decisions, then it is not difficult to extend the understanding of the interior to those other suburban sites that enable and support such a project as well including retail sites, storage sites, sites of manufacture and production, and so forth. As a result of changes to notions of the self brought about by the Enlightenment, and particularly by the theories of John Locke, privately-held land, i.e. property

became crucial to the categorical differentiation of personal identity from society at large. ...that imperative to categorical differentiation also led to an incipient suburban imperative ... in gross terms such a categorical differentiation of identity could be accomplished most obviously by establishing one's residence, that is, one's site for establishing one's personal and private identity, in a locale that was both literally and rhetorically *contrapositional* to that most social and urbane of places, the city. The answer was the suburb. In other words, the city came to be identified as the social or public domain against which personal identity necessarily was defined (Archer 2005, 27).

These artworks illustrate and open for analysis the ways in which the interior enfolds and

represent the individual, even in their absence. Thus, whether a documentation of the relation of homeownership to accumulation of putatively meaningful consumer goods reflective of the self, a subtle representation of black middle class achievement, or an exercise in making explicit the class-suffusion of material self-presentation, these works demonstrate the domestic interior as a self-made, self-making insular space.

Figure 2: Non-Space

In *Architecture for a Comfort Class* (2008), Sara Ross collages the suburb into a place constructed entirely of the domestic interior as a self-made space. Literally pieced together out of the signifiers of an imagined perfect suburban life predicated on the ideals of comfort, luxury, and leisure, Ross's pieces present an assemblage of designer couches, cushions, chairs, and mattresses piled into plush floating islands from which single-family dwelling houses can sometimes be seen peaking out (see, for example, image 6.0.18). In each collage, only a couple or a dog populate the, by contrast, huge and otherwise depopulated, decontextualized spaces. The landscape of comfort and luxury sits in a blank, white field—it is an architecture that is geographically isolated, and in that isolation dislocated.



6.0.18. Sarah Ross, *Untitled* from *Architecture for a Comfort Class*, 2008. Collage on paper.¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹ Image retrieved from artist's website, <http://insecurspaces.net/comfortClass.html>

A playful making literal of elitist interior design tropes, the series of collages offers a critique of the reorientation of the imagined ordinary domestic landscape to one shaped exclusively by such opulent tastes and, by extension, exclusion. These re-imagined, desired landscapes of exclusion overtly signal a wish to be disconnected from larger social and cultural concerns and Ross's landscapes are similarly ungrounded, appearing to be floating in a nowhere space marked only by the objects intended to signal individuation. The collages also turn the landscape inside-out, making explicit that the role of the residential suburb is fundamentally about interiors and interiority and is thus a landscape intrinsically shaped by and at the service of that fundamental principle. It can also be read allegorically, presenting the interior as a non-space.

Non-space, I propose, is a dis-location of "interiority." They are places that are disconnected from locations but retain the quality of being "placed." Where a non-*place* is a locational space in which social meaning has been prevented from accreting or from which social meaning has been evacuated, I am suggesting that non-space can be understood as a site that is rife and laden with social meaning (i.e. it is a "place"), but lacks the qualities of geographic dimension—space is contracted and, ultimately abstracted. Thus, whereas non-place is socially abstract being a spatial location that lacks social dimension, non-space is spatially abstract being a social location that lacks spatial dimension. Non-space cannot be understood except through experiential and affective means: non-spaces do (or can) occupy space but it is the affective and psychic experience that renders them spaceless. As in Ross's collages, the non-space of the interior is a dis-located landscape where the self makes the interior a place and the place makes the self an interior.

Enticing and entrapping

The interior as a self-made, self-making environment—that is, an environment that is made by the self and that makes the self—in figuring as able to reflect one's preferences and to help produce a self, is expected to be controlled, safe, and private enough to be able to do so. As we have seen in the previous chapter, exteriors and interiors are imaginatively constituted as bearing only a serial relation to each other interrupted and intermediated by a boundary. Where the exterior make its appearance as an uninviting space, in Chapter 5, seemingly inescapable in its oppressive social meaninglessness, the interior is a mostly unseen sanctum impenetrable and

closely guarded against such an exterior. In the present chapter, the interior makes its appearance as a space that potentially is both enticing but also entrapping. If the exterior must be abandoned as a lost, inhuman wasteland, figuring in Chapter 5 as an uninviting, anaesthetic non-place, then all there is left is the interior. Yet, in both domestic and commercial settings, an excessive fulfillment of the expected guarantees of safety, insularity, and privacy easily turn into a sense of inescapability, secrecy, suffocation, suppression, perversion, and angst—making the interior an intense "place" retreating from an encircling non-place: Under conditions in which the non-place proliferates, the individual is left responsible for meaning-making. As such, the interior incorporates those who are accounted in the meaning-making but shuns those who are not.

Both painter Michelle Muldrow (images 5.0.47 and 6.0.19) and photographer Brian Ulrich (image 5.0.48 and 6.0.20) depict dilapidated suburban exteriors that announce the exterior as risky and to be abandoned.



6.0.19. Michelle Muldrow, *Dead Mall NE Ohio*, 2008–10. Gouache on paper.¹⁹²

Both also attend to interiors. Muldrow's series *Cathedrals of Desire* and Ulrich's series *Copia* each explores the consuming interior of big box stores.¹⁹³ Muldrow takes up the space of the big

¹⁹² Except where noted, all images by Michelle Muldrow retrieved from artist's website, <http://mmuldrow.com/>

¹⁹³ Although big boxes are originally and still primarily suburban retail forms, there are exceptions. In both Vancouver and Toronto, there are very large Home Depots right in the heart of highly dense, multiuse, city centre neighbourhoods. Judith De Jong (2013) argues that there has been a "'flattening' of the American metropolis" in which elements of the suburban landscape are increasingly seen in central cities and vice versa.

box interior itself as her subject and approaches this subject as a landscape. In the series statement, Muldrow (n.d.) asserts: "This new body of work incorporates the landscape painting tradition with awe-inducing elements of cathedrals to evoke a contemporary sublime. My paintings of big box stores are intended to elicit fear and awe at the vast American consumer landscape" (n.p.). To depict an interior as a *landscape* is an unusual, genre-defying orientation to the representation of the interior and one that is made possible by the massive, but especially horizontally immense, space that turns commercial interiors into expansive landscapes.



6.0.20. Brian Ulrich, *Northridge Mall*, 2009. Colour photograph.¹⁹⁴

Ulrich meditates upon the shopping experience and the effects of vast commercial interior spaces on shoppers through candid, intimate portraiture of the shopping subject, and he also photographs what could be considered portraits of large format retail spaces themselves.

Despite being a familiar element of the suburban landscape, there is no universal definition of what counts as a big box store. The term began to be used commonly in the second half of the 1980s but the phenomenon had begun as early as the late 1950s with Toys R Us (Sampson 2008, 17). In general, however, the term describes a type of large format retail store in a single storey

Included in this flattening, she notes the presence of big box retailers in inner cities (3) and describes some examples, including Home Depot in Manhattan (129–30) and Target in downtown Chicago (130–31).

¹⁹⁴ Image retrieved from The Great Leap Sideways gallery website, http://www.thegreatleapsideways.com/?ha_exhibit=is-this-place-great-or-what-an-essay-on-brian-ulrichs-copia

building with a very large square footage. (There is disagreement about the minimum floor space required to start counting as a big box). In *A Field Guide to Sprawl*, Dolores Hayden describes the "big box" as

a gigantic, windowless structure, usually of cheap, concrete block construction, typically sited next to an arterial or near a freeway interchange with high traffic volume. The big box, favored by retail chains, discount buyer clubs, and department stores, requires 75,000 to 250,000 square feet of space on one level and easy access by trucks and automobiles (Hayden and Wark 2006, 24).

Very large parking lots surround the building. These large format stores

are lacking in community character, landscaping, and pedestrian amenities ... [and] are several times the size of a traditional store in the same category (Guppy 2000, 2).

In the works of both Muldrow and Ulrich, the vast interior consumption spaces themselves seem to be all-encompassing: there appears to be no outside, no elsewhere, no other place than unfathomable interior. Even the horizon line, the contour of the limits of the Earth meeting the infinity of space, has been brought inside, imaginable just beyond the seemingly eternally receding line of checkout counters in *Granger, Indiana, 2003* (image 6.0.21) and *Altar in Orange* (image 6.0.22).



6.0.21. Brian Ulrich, *Granger, In*, 2003. Colour photograph.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁵ Except where noted, all images by Brian Ulrich retrieved from <http://notifbutwhen.com/copia/retail/>



6.0.22. Michelle Muldrow, *Altar in Orange*, n.d. Acrylic and pastel on canvas.¹⁹⁶

And, beyond the horizon, the twinkling lights in the broad expanse of the twilight firmament, too, are contained indoors as suggested in a number of Muldrow's works, including *Reconfiguration* (image 6.0.23). The images play with the baffling, seemingly endless inner volume of these buildings. This is interior at the scale of the outdoors, creating a conflation between exterior and interior and affirming a sense that there is no outside.



6.0.23. Michelle Muldrow, *Reconfiguration*, n.d. Casein on clay panel.

¹⁹⁶ Images 6.0.22, 6.0.23, 6.0.25, 6.0.29, and 6.0.30 are from the series *Cathedrals of Desire*, which spans 2010–present.

In the suburban commercial interiors depicted by Ulrich and Muldrow, one might suspect that not only is there no outside, there is no need or could be no conceivable wish to leave, since it seems that every material thing and service that one could possibly need are here. Instead, everything has been brought into the interior: Nature appears in the form of commodified animals (in *Schaumburg, Illinois, 2004*, image 6.0.24) and plants (in *Garden of Delights*, image 6.0.25).



6.0.24. Brian Ulrich, *Schaumburg, Illinois, 2004*. Colour photograph.



6.0.25. Michelle Muldrow, *Garden of Delight*, n.d. Casein on clay panel.

The urban experience of pedestrians walking through neighbourhoods, window shopping, and aimlessly meandering through the city is mimicked in the endless walking of shoppers through "blocks" or aisle (each finished with a U.S.A. flag in *Garden of Delight*, image 6.0.25) or the slow pushing of carts while languorously gazing at the wares in Costco refrigerated aisle (of *Chicago, Illinois, 2003*, image 6.0.26).



6.0.26. Brian Ulrich, *Chicago, IL*, 2003. Colour photograph.

Meanwhile, what awaits outside is far less certain. In Ulrich's *Black River Falls, WI, 2006*, the outside world can be seen through a gas station window. This is one of the few images in either *Copia* or *Cathedrals of Desire* in which a window or door is visible (image 6.0.27). But this window, darkly framed and affixed with a prominent Homeland Security sticker meant to indicate the day's threat level for terrorist attack, appears like a screen, which re-frames the exterior as a frightening picture that carries a warning label about an unspecified but persistent threat outside-goers face. Meanwhile, the "window" in Ulrich's Disney Store (image 6.0.28) is no window at all but a screen: a picture of a fairy-tale simulacral world. The Disney Store's simulated window allows the "outside" to become a projection of fantasy from the consumer interior. This simulacral outside presents a contained, narratively-preknown, and happier world than the actual exterior world, which is recorded as images of decay and non-placeness glimpsed through Ulrich's gas station window and in other representations of the suburban landscape.



6.0.27. Brian Ulrich, *Black River Falls, WI*, 2006. Colour photograph.

Fantasy and reality become reversed in these screen images and the screen depicting Cinderella's castle becomes a window while the window showing the actual material and social world becomes a protective screen.



6.0.28. Brian Ulrich, *Cleveland, OH*, 2003. Colour photograph.

Aside from these images, both series more typically represent the interior spaces of consumption without exits, entrances, or windows. They convey a ubiquity of interiority by an absence of evidence of an outside world. If the exterior world is unsafe to traverse and not even accessible as a possibility, the interior, even with its abundance of things and space, becomes an inescapable trap. Muldrow conveys a sense of inescapability, even of being ensnared in a number of paintings of store aisles. These images, like *Eternal Spring* (image 6.0.29) and *Contemplating Prospect* (image 6.0.30), present a view down a long straight aisle, shelves on both sides packed full of goods.



6.0.29. Michelle Muldrow, *Eternal Spring*, n.d. Casein on clay panel.¹⁹⁷

The lines converging in the middle draw the eye towards a horizon, which terminates in a dead-end of yet more shelves with more things. There is no window or door. Even the promise of other aisles is curtailed by the wall of shelves capping the aisle. *Eternal Spring* is claustrophobic in its gaudy, too cheerful colours, low aisles crowded with indiscernible goods and a pronounced floor rising in its blankness to usher the viewer to the dead-end. *Contemplating Prospect*, with gleaming floor and bright lights, dauntingly towering shelves packed full all the way to the

¹⁹⁷ Image retrieved from Jen Bekman gallery website, <http://archive.jenbekman.com/shows/cathedrals-desire/artwork/25/>

soaring ceilings, is even more irresistible in its ushering headlong towards an abrupt termination. The aisle, though wide, the ceiling, though lofty, and the space, though vast, close in to a claustrophobic dead-end, where the grid of horizontal and vertical lines converge on a bright, blank rectangle in the middle of the canvas.



6.0.30. Michelle Muldrow, *Contemplating Prospect*, n.d. Casein and graphite on clay panel.

These interiors are spaces into which consumers enter in order to consume—in part in order to acquire materials with which to construct the project of selfhood and self-expression in the domestic interior. In turn, in these interiors, they are themselves consumed. In each of Brian Ulrich's *Smithhaven, New York, 2003* (image 6.0.31) and *Indianapolis, IN, 2004* (image 6.0.32), a figure sits in the centre of the photo, withdrawn from an encompassing retail interior. In both cases, they appear oblivious to their surroundings, which betray no sense that there is an outside, a beyond. In *Smithhaven*, the boy sits dejected in a massage chair in what looks to be a department store. The boy's body slumps passively as if in defeated resignation.



6.0.31. Brian Ulrich, *Smithhaven, New York*, 2003. Colour photograph.¹⁹⁸

In contrast, the man in *Indianapolis* sits seemingly enraptured on a home theatre couch, ears covered with headphones. He sits at ease, his arms and body stretched over the surface of the chair.



6.0.32. Brian Ulrich, *Indianapolis, IN*, 2004. Colour photograph.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁸ Image from Ulrich 2006, 19.

In these images, the boy, bored or tired, eyes glazed and unfocused, seems unable to imagine an escape from the tedium of the shop, withdrawing into a stupor, while the man, attentive to something perceptible only to himself, seems to have found a way to escape within, mesmerized into a different kind of passivity. Both seem stuck or fixed inside an inescapable, although potentially vast interior. There is no window. There is no door. Their respective psychic withdrawal into a further interiority appears to be the only avenue of escape from the physically immediate, omnipresent, inescapable consuming interior space.

Intense spaces

With no escape, interiors are intense. Lori Larusso's *Spaces*²⁰⁰ is a series of paintings depicting (mostly) domestic spaces, especially interiors. The spaces are represented minimalistically and graphically as abstracted, precise, single-colour flat surfaces, juxtaposed against each other, just barely giving form to a room. The spaces seem over-exposed with insinuating shadows providing only very shallow relief to the oppressive surfaces. Rooms are perplexingly barren, with shelves, counters, and tables often strikingly empty. An ominous, sinister feeling pervades these bright paintings. Some unspoken and unspeakable depth seems to hold these spaces in silent thrall. These spaces, though demonstrating inhabitation, feature no people except in a couple of images in which the people can only be seen obliquely or partially. In *Miscommunication* (image 6.0.33), a man's pant leg and shoe are just visible on the left edge of the painting. He seems to be sitting with his legs crossed. A woman's leg is just visible on the right edge of the painting. She appears to be standing. Between them, an expanse that suggests a vast distance contained within the small living room comprised of suggestions and cool confection-coloured surfaces. A bubble gum pink sofa with ruffled dust-skirt, pale yellow wall, white floor, and a frivolously ornate but empty red shelf in the corner stand pushed to the edges of the living room's space. Although the space is legible as a carpeted, plush room, the surfaces look hard, cold, and misplaced. The sofa, with cushions askew, recedes against the wall in incorrect perspective: the front edge of the sofa

¹⁹⁹ Image from Ulrich 2006, 27.

²⁰⁰ Paintings in this series come from 2004 to an unspecified end date, possibly 2013. I wrote the initial description of these images in January 2013, viewing the artist's website frequently throughout that process. In April 2014, as I edit this chapter, I see the artist's webpage no longer includes the *Spaces* series in Larusso's portfolio of work, which now includes the two series *Shapes* and *It's Not My Birthday. That's Not My Cake*, which continues Larusso's interest in the "middle American" domestic interior (Larusso 2013, n.p.).

seems to meet the corner of the wall and the floor, although it should be the back edge that does so, making it look as if the sofa is pushed back into the wall—as if it is trying to get out of the way and out of the nothing space between the man's sitting leg and the woman's standing leg and whatever miscommunication, referenced in the title, separates them..



6.0.33. Lori Larusso, *Miscommunication*, 2007. Acrylic on panel.²⁰¹

Within the desolate domestic interiors of *Spaces*, trivial concerns are laden with too much meaning and are taken too seriously: Seemingly insignificant, everyday problems presented in the images are interpreted in their titles as catastrophes. A plate of charred waffles, half off the canvas, in an otherwise too bright yellow kitchen is extravagantly entitled *Inferno* (image 6.0.34)—raising what might otherwise be a simple cooking accident into a Dantean tribulation. The flat surfaces of an array of cabinetry are unbroken by hardware. The kitchen appears more as an idea of a kitchen, an "artist's rendition" of a kitchen than one that could be usable. It appears harshly lit, with stark shadows the only break in the flat, mostly featureless, awkwardly juxtaposed surfaces. The plate of burnt heart-shaped waffles sits on the counter at an angle at odds with the plane of the surface of the counter, making it appear to be sliding off. Whatever was the inferno of the title has left burnt hearts sliding off a discordantly angled interior surface. Coupled with the evocative title, the image has a tense affective charge—a sense that the depthless smooth surfaces of the space resist and reject the difficult emotional depths that are only hinted at while at the same time awkwardly accommodating them. The implied domestic melodrama remains palpable but hidden below unyielding façades.

²⁰¹ All images by Lori Larusso retrieved from artist's website, <http://www.lorilarusso.com>



6.0.34. Lori Larusso, *Inferno*, 2005. Acrylic on canvas.

Similarly, in *Ruined* (image 6.0.35), a watermelon lays smashed on the ground of a patio. Again, the space—the patio, appearing like a closed interior space—is composed of clean, abstracted surfaces. Two elements break this semblance: The odd shadows on the grey surface in the top right half of the image and the splattered watermelon. The view of the deep red flesh of the broken fruit is jarring in showing a violently opened interiority, exposing what would otherwise be a hidden, protected depth beneath another smooth surface. Read allegorically, the ruin referenced in the title, might not be of the watermelon or of the patio but of the home attached to it and the interior life of its inhabitants; in which case, it is not the watermelon that is broken, but the human relations that precipitated the watermelon's demise.



6.0.35. Lori Larusso, *Ruined*, 2008. Acrylic on canvas or panel.

As a series, *Spaces* offers a critique of a consumer lifestyle that occupies and makes possible suburban domestic interior life, condemning it as vacant and meaningless while simultaneously melancholic, haunted by uncompromising and impossible visions of perfection, hidden behind by the claustrophobic veneer of comfort.²⁰² *Spaces* tell a larger tale, which narrates the superficiality and damage of a system of consumption and over-consumption, about the American dream in ruins, and about a veneer of domestic perfection covering over dysfunction, uncertainty, and a sense of internal threat.

Container of distress and dysfunction

If exteriors are abandoned, interiors are inescapable, and the conditions associated with interiors are more intimate, the dysfunction characteristic of such enclosures are likewise intimate. A sense of foreboding if not outright danger of the interior is a theme explored in a number of artists' work. Both Eric Fischl and Gregory Crewdson present undecidable yet disturbing visions of unspoken and hidden social and familial dysfunctions. In Fischl's *Master Bedroom* (image 6.0.36), a girl sits on a large bed, the covers partially pulled open.



6.0.36. Eric Fischl, *Master Bedroom*, 1983. Oil on canvas.²⁰³

²⁰² In another image, empty plates sit stacked next to a white frosted cake, garishly decorated with mini American flags, perched on the edge of a counter, over an empty garbage can. Entitled "Imminent Danger," and painted in 2007, this seems to be a metaphor for the (white) American dream, of safe, individually owned interiorities supported by insupportable mortgage and banking system, on the brink of ruin.

²⁰³ All images by Eric Fischl retrieved from Wikiart Visual Art Encyclopedia website, <http://www.wikiart.org/en/eric-fischl>

There are no pillows and on the headboard a telephone and side table hang. On the table is an ashtray on which a partially-smoked cigarette rests. The girl is naked except for her underwear and the curlers in her hair. Hugging a large dog around its neck with a tight grip, she looks towards the right of the image with an uncertain look on her face. She sits on her feet with knees opening towards the same direction as her gaze. While both she and the bed sheets are over exposed, illuminated in bright light, the black dog recedes into the shadow.



6.0.37. Gregory Crewdson, *Untitled* from the series *Dream House*, 2002. Digital C-print.²⁰⁴

Similarly exposed, or over-exposed, in Crewdson's living room image (image 6.0.37), a blonde young woman (actress Gwyneth Paltrow) stands in profile in a living room dressed only in bra and underwear. Shoulders hunched and head hung low, she stands looking ashamed before another woman who sits fully clothed on the couch. This seated woman, hands folded into her lap and body turned away, looks back at the standing woman with a look of steely anger on her face. The living room has a low, white ceiling and grass-like green carpeting. The wood-panel wall on the left meets in a corner with a wall of curtain on the right, which is open just behind the standing woman to expose a glass door through which the night outside can be seen. The corner cuts the image in half. On the right half, in which the woman stands, the living room is neatly and symmetrically organized with a vase of fresh flowers resting on a side table between two

²⁰⁴ All images by Gregory Crewdson from Crewdson 2007.

plush, velvet armchairs. On the left, the room is in disarray. In front of the couch lies a coffee table on which rest an arrangement of drooping flowers, a box of tissues, open prescription bottles, and other small things. Pillows, blankets, clothes, and shoes lay in disarray on the ground, couch, and armchair. The sad reflection of the young woman can be seen framed in the mirror behind the couch just to the right of the seated woman's head while to the left, on the wood-panel wall behind her is cast a square of harsh white light, like that of a car's headlights, coming in through the glass door. The stark shadow of the seated woman cuts the square of light. It is not at all clear what has happened to cause the mess or what is happening in the photo between the two women but the scene is affectively charged with shame and anger. Both this and *Master Bedroom* feel like a tense moment before the moment that plunges the vulnerable, semi-clothed young women into tumult. It is not simply that the young women are unclothed that makes these scenes of coming danger. The combination of deep shadows and over-exposed lighting, as well as their postures—the utterly submissive posture of the standing woman in Crewdson's living room image and the semi-recoiled but tightly gripping posture of the girl in Fischl's *Master Bedroom*—suggesting a narrative that is not quite legible render a strong but undecidable affective charge to the scenes we are witnessing. The banality of the rooms disconcertingly suggests a familiarity of these undecidable, disturbing scenes.

Figure 3: The Dislocated Interior

The quality of the interior understood as inescapable, intense, and dysfunctional, as described above, can be de-coupled from the particular spatialization of the interior. Such a quality, *interiority*, on its own does not directly link to the domestic suburban interior but harbours all of its qualities. This happens as a result of the contraction of space within the interior into the non-space of interiority. Withdrawal becomes a withdrawal into one's psychological interior. Indeed, if interiority is about the individualization of interior spaces and interiority is such intense non-space, then interiority becomes dislocatable from the interior. Interiority becomes separable as characteristics, relationships, or associations of particular types of individuals with interiority; a psychological attribute or process; and, as an accumulation of personal things themselves—the material edifices of the individualized interior.

Woman in/as domestic interior

Some figures are inseparable from the suburban interior, in particular middle class housewives, but women more generally. If the home is to be the site of individual fulfillment and conveys the male homeowner's selfhood, then, as Beverly Gordon (1996) notes, it is also to be the expression of the female home-maker's soul while her body, in turn, is to be the reflection of the house:

Although the associations and identification of woman and house had existed since the seventeenth century, in the nineteenth century they were seen as part of the natural order in an elaborated ideology of separate spheres. This held men and women as inherently different, each with their proper area of influence. It was considered appropriate that women be in the home and be concerned with appearance, for they were by nature domestic beings ("homebodies"). The embellished ideology was particularly tenacious, furthermore, because it was laden with deep, pious moral precepts. ... [Women's] concern with dress and home decoration became a kind of "holy mission"; this was not a frivolous matter but a crucial issue for the proper rearing of future generations. Outward appearance of house and body mattered because it reflected a deeper self or inner character. ... C. E. Sagent claimed in an 1884 advice book that "the outward [home] is but the expression" of the inward home, the soul. The house/body conflation can be seen as a full-blown extension of the naturalization of these nineteenth-century ideologies. The house was seen to reflect the same qualities as the woman, and since both the body and home mirrored the deeper self, they were both meant to be looked at (285).

Gordon argues that this conflation between woman and the home effectively broke down in the late twentieth century after a particularly strong expression in the post-World War II period. In the work of artists, this attachment of domesticity to woman as an association of an earlier historical era is referenced in nostalgic, kitschy and retro aesthetics. However, as the images below attest, it is apparent that the association has not dissolved.

In her *Interiors* series (1978–79), multimedia artist Laurie Simmons uses found woman-dolls and other miniature found items to construct dollhouse-like domestic interiors, which she then photographed. With very close focus, the photos immerse the viewer into the miniature diorama. These dolls, live in a tiny, self-enclosed, constructed world. They stand or sit stiffly in a literally superficial environment surrounded by things—often disproportionately large compared to the dolls, as in the food and cooking items in *Blonde/Red Dress/Kitchen* (image 6.0.38). Simmons photographed the dolls seemingly engaged in typical menial domestic tasks such as cleaning the bathroom in *New Bathroom/Woman Standing/Sunlight* (image 6.0.39) or cooking in *Blonde/Red Dress/Kitchen*. The photos convey a claustrophobic and isolating world in which the dolls seem trapped in interiors with no windows or doors.



6.0.38. Laurie Simmons, *Blonde/Red Dress/Kitchen*, 1978. Silver dye bleach print.²⁰⁵

Diminutive in size with a kitschy retro look and photographed in bright, cheerful colour and light, these little women also seem trapped in someone else's too nostalgic memories.



6.0.39. Laurie Simmons, *New Bathroom/Woman Standing/Sunlight*, 1979. Silver dye bleach print.

It is only in black and white images, like *Untitled (lying on the floor)* (image 6.0.40), in which the woman is freed from the compelling, exuberant gaiety of colour, where she finally seems to have become overwhelmed, paralyzed, perhaps, by "the problem that has no name"—the stifling entrapment of middle class women in the comfort and convenience of a suburban life that offers no fulfillment (Friedan 1963).

²⁰⁵ Except where noted, all images by Laurie Simmons from artist's website, <http://www.lauriesimmons.net/>



6.0.40. Laurie Simmons, *Untitled (lying on kitchen floor)* from the series *Early Black & White*, 1976. Gelatin silver print.

Similarly, it is with a sterile vision of perfection as illustrated in Laurisso's work coupled with the constraints of women's domestic roles, explored by Simmons, that appears to have left the woman in Peter Drake's *Out of Place* (6.0.41) in a state of desperation. She stands in a perfectly appointed, perfectly tidy living room. The scone, picture frames, lamps and table surfaces gleam. She herself is perfectly coiffed and neatly dressed.



6.0.41. Peter Drake, *Out of Place*, 2004. Acrylic on canvas.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁶ Image retrieved from artist's website, <http://www.peterdrakeartist.com/>

Yet, standing in the middle of this perfection, her pained facial expression and tense bodily posture show she is in the middle of an emotional breakdown. While she looks as though her inner turmoil is about to pour forth, she seems rooted to her spot unable to escape the space, yet emotionally out of place, as suggested by the title

In the series *Color Coordinated Interiors* (see images 6.0.42 and 6.0.43), Simmons more directly takes up the theme of women being conflated with their domestic surroundings. The small plastic women-dolls are posed in front of rear screen projected images of monochrome interiors. The figures and the dominant colour of the interiors are the same.



6.0.42. Laurie Simmons, *Yellow Living Room*, 1982. C-print.



6.0.43. Laurie Simmons, *Coral Living Room with Lillies*, 1983. C-print.

It is unclear whether the "women" and interiors are so closely coordinated because the interiors have been decorated to suit the taste of the women and therefore reflect their tastes, or if it is because the women are imagined simply to be a part of the household, indistinguishable from domestic interiority itself. Thinking back upon her work, Simmons notes:

I would say I was thinking about disappearing and obscurity—the possibility of being subsumed by a place, a location, a role and certainly about fading into and finally vanishing in the background—blending in as an ultimately desirable state. (Simmons and Welling 2007, n.p.)

Simmons again takes up the theme of women being conflated with their homes in the short series *Underneath* (1998). In these photos, a comfortable living room or an entire suburban home is revealed under the lifted skirt and between the splayed legs of a (white) woman whose head is just out of frame. In those images featuring the entire house (as in image 6.0.44), the woman is wearing what can be read as a wedding gown with its cream skirt, white tulle overskirt, and a gold lace bodice with pearl buttons. While she recedes into darkness, the house is illuminated with a bright light glowing through the back of her skirt, and her legs and lifted skirt are reflected in a distorted mirror on the ground. It suggests that the bride (i.e. the woman in white) is giving birth (the glow of the birth canal, the afterbirth suggested by the mirror) to a family home complete with lawn and trees.



6.0.44. Laurie Simmons, *Untitled* from the series *Room Underneath*, 1998. Duraflex print.

In *Room Underneath (Red)* (image 6.0.45), the woman wears a pink skirt edged with a darker pink smocking and white lace trim, and black ballerina shoes. She is vaguely reminiscent of Alice from Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. She sits on a white rug, her elbows just visible,

resting on her raised knees, feet wide apart. Beneath the front edge of her raised skirt, a cozy-looking living room tableau in miniature is displayed. An easy chair and matching love seat, separated by a side table, are grouped around a braided rug. A picture in an ornate gold frame is affixed to the "wall" of the woman's crotch. Whereas the suburban family home seems to be eschewing forth from the bride's body, this intimate living room seems to be the private, hidden domain guarded and kept semi-secretly by the pink-garbed woman. Where Simmons's miniature women-figures seem trapped both by their own plasticity (inanimacy and, less obviously, by their material pliability) in superficial and claustrophobic domestic interiors, in *Room Underneath*, live women are obliged to remain in place in order to create the interior space for plastic domestic interiors to be ensconced within. The conflation between domestic interiority and womanhood is complete. Now, she is not trapped within the shelter, she is trapped in having to be the shelter.



6.045. Laurie Simmons, *Untitled (red)* from the series *Room Underneath*, 1998. Duraflex print.

In these works of women in and as suburban home, domestic women are so thoroughly incorporated by the suburban interior and so thoroughly incorporate the interior that neither can women escape interiority nor can interiority be fully separated from femininity. Woman as bearer of domestic interiority, then, represents a general conceptual mobility of interiority, enabling it to break free from the space of the interior; but women understood in these terms are unable to escape from such an attachment.

Things of/as interior

The excesses of interiority as a project partially defined by a commitment to expressing individuality and creating personal physical and psychological spaces through a process of accumulation of consumer goods finds ever newer spaces to spill out into and take over. Liz Kuball's *In Store* project reveals the places that are colonized by this excess. This project documents the growth of the use of storage facilities. The expansion of the storage facilities demonstrate a next order of suburbanization in which the things that are used to create the suburban interior are subject to a second peripheralization in being sent to these off-site extensions of home. The intimate network of personal possessions extend out from mantles, cupboards, closets, basements and attics, and garage and storage sheds, out to the mobile storage units at the end of the driveway (as in *PODS #2*, image 6.0.46), to the large, storage facility building down the street or even all the way out to the—perhaps aptly-named—self-storage complexes in various far flung suburban locations, such as in the middle of the freeway (e.g. *BA Self Storage*, image 6.0.47).



6.0.46. Liz Kuball, *PODS #2*, 2007. Colour photograph.²⁰⁷

These facilities indeed temporarily and permanently warehouse iterations and excesses of the self-making project.

²⁰⁷ All images by Liz Kuball retrieved from artist's website, <http://www.lizkuball.com/instore>.



6.0.47. Liz Kuball, *BA Self Storage*, 2008. Colour photograph.

Kuball documents the intentional storage of excessive interiority in non-interior places. But, images of the suburban interior represent the interior as uncomfortably ambivalent and undecidable as to whether it can be understood as safe and protective or inescapable and isolating, cozy and comforting or stifling and suppressing, familiar and private or secretive and shaming. If exit from the interior, especially into a blighted or placeless exterior is not a solution, as Chapter 5 suggests—and perhaps not even possible for some subjects (women as interiority and personal possessions as interiority)—then suburban subjects have found a solution consistent with the logic of suburban spatialization, of creating new, serial spaces, particularly interiors. They recede into a deep introversion, withdraw from presence, abandoning the physical exterior as well as the physical interior into a psychological interiority. Suburban shopping sites like big box stores or warehouses, crowded by an excess of goods, prove to be so sensorially overwhelming that they force the shopper to retreat psychologically into an asocial torpor. Likewise, domestic interiors are so crowded by an intensity of intimacy that they force the dweller to retreat psychologically into a further interiority.

Interiority as altered presence

As I suggested earlier, photographer Brian Ulrich portrays people in suburban shopping sites absorbed in and by consumption. In the "candid portraits" of his *Retail* series, Ulrich explores shopping as an everyday activity as well as its implications upon human subjectivity. In order to

capture the candid portraits, Ulrich, holding a hand-held camera at waist-level, would stand in one spot in a store for long enough that, at least according to him, he became part of the background and—being thus invisible though in plain sight—was able to take photos of people engrossed in shopping rather than posed or self-conscious.²⁰⁸ Occupying a common space, engaging in a common activity, the people shopping in Ulrich's photos are essentially alone. Not only are they alone, they are withdrawn into an asocial mode. Some of Ulrich's subjects show the familiar facial and bodily expression of a person withdrawn into a secret interior, driven there by the boredom and fatigue that sets in after a tedious, perhaps captive, shopping excursion—like the sitting boy (image 6.0.31) and the sitting man (image 6.0.32) in the earlier discussion. Other shoppers seem to stand alone enclosed in a stupefying abundance of things that seem actively, individually, and ceaselessly to interpellate them as consumers in shopping centres, grocery stores, big boxes, and warehouse clubs. Some shoppers appear stupefied (or anaesthetized) by the excessive, overwhelming interior landscape. For example, the woman on a cell phone at the grocery store in *Chicago, IL, 2003* (image 6.0.48) seems to occupy a different kind of presence. She stands with a cell phone to her ear, facing a wall packed full of refrigerated groceries, her back to a nearly empty cart. It is unclear whether she is listening to someone on the phone, waiting, or not paying attention. It is also unclear whether she is looking with intense, focused attention at an item of food or if her gaze is turned inward. In front of her is too much, an excessive abundance. The packaged food seems almost to be pushing themselves towards her, leaping towards her. She stands at the mid-point of the image trapped in a space and moment between intensity and void—before her, the excess of the shelves, behind her, the emptiness of her cart and of the store. She seems, likewise, stuck between the social isolation of being alone in a (semi-)public space, and a private sphere of intimacy created by someone talking directly into her ear. Her purse and phone act as important mediators that negotiate her fragile occupation of a public-private affective spatialization. That is, while grocery stores are not truly public spaces, she can experience it *as if* it were public because she holds the money (purse) needed to access the space *as if* it were an open space in which all are welcome. Similarly, while the grocery store is private property and interior space, it is not a private, intimate space; yet, the cell phone creates a simulation of such an intimate space. This shopper, then, withdrawn from the exterior,

²⁰⁸ This surreptitiousness is not uncommon in photographers of the suburb who appear to want to sneak up on the suburb to catch it unawares (e.g. see Genocchio 2007).

withdrawn from a public realm is also doubly withdrawn by withdrawing from the immediacy of her material context into a present absence, a psychic introversion or attentional orientation to an other-where.



6.0.48. Brian Ulrich, *Chicago, IL, 2003*. Colour photograph.

Other shoppers are transfixed by the object they have found, carried into an imaginative interiority by the unseen desired thing before them. Take for example the image of a man looking at a fishing rod in what appears to be a big box outdoor gear store (*Gurnee, IL, 2003*, image 6.0.49). This man stands alone transfixed as he contemplates the rod. There is an ethereal glow, originating somewhere in front of and below him that softly illuminates his face. It is as if the light is coming directly from the fishing rods. The commodities are glowing as they are coming to life in the hands and, especially, under the gaze of this consumer. The other people in the photo are not engaging with any of the objects for sale, they are not illuminated, and their gazes are not so intensely focused. This man, however, is transported. A woman and child whom we can heteronormatively read as his wife and daughter look towards the fishing rods, too. But they seem not to see what apparition has taken the man. They look on as unseeing spectators. But it is as if he, in a moment of mystical communion, is communicating entirely through an interiorized conversation.



6.0.49. Brian Ulrich, *Gurnee, IL*, 2003. Colour photograph.

Similarly, the boy in the toyshop (*Gurnee, IL*, 2005, image 6.0.50) seems also to be transfixed by the objects in front of him. It is not clear if he is actually looking at the objects. Rather, the boy seems to be looking past the plastic toy soldiers at something just outside the frame; or, like the women in the grocery store, he is caught in a moment of gazing inwards. He looks absent but not in the bored way of some of Ulrich's other subjects and not in the overwhelmed way of others. Rather, he seems as though absent in his presence but alternatively present: zombie-like. In this, he enacts an affective semi-presence like the man gazing upon fishing rods. Each looks as if he is being "activated," taken out of ordinary consciousness and wilfulness by the objects at hand (the rod, the toys) and made susceptible to control and command. The young boy, then, although towering over these small, fragile toys, looks as though it is he who is the vulnerable plaything, receiving marching orders from these little commandos. The shadows around his eyes cast by the harsh overexposed, overhead store lighting makes him look tired—strangely so for such a young person—adding to this effect of unexpected fragility. The modelling landscape grass on which the toys are doing battle in the foreground is repeated in the display behind the boy. It looks as though he is—and indeed, he is—part of the diorama. He stands as a giant in a canyon and the puny toys look like they are protecting themselves against this massive, oafish menace. He has a small stain on his t-shirt, as if he has drooled a bit, adding to a sense that he is not quite in control

of himself. A smaller boy is turned away from the scene towards an adult man, a sliver of whom is just in frame. No one appears to be aware of what transfiguration has befallen this boy. He is a lost Gulliver captive to plastic Lilliputians (see Swift 2010). The boy's face and lips are flushed, his finger rests on the edge of the display, pointing in a way that suggests he is unaware of this bodily posture. He seems completely unaware of his embodiment. He is transported within a consumer fantasy. But where is he? Here is an utterly reified relationship between fetishized objects in which the human and social dimensions are caught recessing, in a moment of the process of disappearance.



6.0.50. Brian Ulrich, *Gurnee, IL*, 2005. Colour photograph.²⁰⁹

Interiority as double withdrawal

Introversion into a deeper interiority is also evident in Angela Strassheim's *McDonald's* (image 6.0.51). In this image, there is a multiplicity of interiorizations. Six people—legible as a father, mother, two sons, and two daughters—sit gathered around a long table inside a McDonald's restaurant. Dark outside, the inside of the restaurant is bright and highly visible. Visually contained within the centre-panel of a triptych-like framing by the restaurant windows, the figures are enclosed within the restaurant, by the framing of the photo, and then again by the

²⁰⁹ Image from Ulrich 2006, 16.

framing of the window. In addition to these enclosures, the individuals are also socially enclosed: The individuals close in as a family together to share a meal, thereby erecting a symbolic boundary, which produces their gathering-space as an interior. The group withdraws from the (semi)public interior–exterior space of the restaurant into the extended interiority of their familial circle, excluding possible others from entry. Yet, even within this interiority, the groups has withdrawn into an even deeper interiority: The family members hold hands, bow their heads, and close their eyes, and appear to be saying grace before dinner. They have withdrawn from the secular, commercial restaurant space into a spiritual space of prayer. That is, all of them except for the girl on the right hand side of the image whose eyes are open and who looks up and away from her family. While most of the family has withdrawn into a collective, shared interiority of prayer and shared belief, the girl has traversed to a different, secret, individual interiority. Thus, like Ulrich's many shoppers, though the family appears to be occupying the same space, the five inhabit different interiorities from the girl, each excluding and isolating the other.



6.0.51. Angela Strassheim, *Untitled (McDonald's)*, 2004. C-print.²¹⁰

Even within the interior of the home, individuals can be observed in such a further withdrawal into a psychic interiority. Such interiorization within the domestic interior can be observed as moments of introspection, or as sustained distraction, as in the figures encountered

²¹⁰ Image retrieved from Marvelli Gallery website, <http://www.marvelligallery.com/LBCatalogue25.html>

in Chapter 5—in David Hilliard's *Dad* (image 5.0.64), Leonard Koscianski's *Suburban Life* (image 5.0.73), Robert Adams' *Longmont, Colorado* (image 5.0.73) or, presumably, the invisible figures in Todd Hido's *2133* (image 5.0.69). These figures, also visible (or implied in Hido's case) through the framing of windows, are absorbed into an interiority created by reading or watching TV—a dislocation of their presence, in which their physical presence and their psychic presence are disambiguated just as the interior and interiority are disjoined. The figure in Robert Adams's *Colorado Springs* (image 6.0.52) appears strangely forlorn, caught in a moment of non-presence but not a non-presence created through distraction. Though she appears visible through the window, her double-framing in the picture window and then again in the back window echoes her own double interiorization. Like the voyeuristic night-time photos discussed in Chapter 5, the nothing happening outside suggests something might be happening inside. However, this sense that something is "happening" inside is undone by the view into the interior. Whatever might be happening, it is uneventful. Since no happening is observable inside, if anything is happening it must be in a further interiority. Like Ulrich's and Strassheim's withdrawn figures, the observable figure in Adams's image appears intense, tense, and withdrawn.



6.0.52. Robert Adams, *Colorado Springs, Colorado*, 1968. Gelatin silver print.²¹¹

The suburban interior appears as spaces of waiting or of doing nothing. It figures as

²¹¹ Image retrieved from Yale University Art Gallery website,
<http://media.artgallery.yale.edu/adams/photographs/102043.jpg>

claustrophobic non-space of non-events, storage space for furniture and things and people. The portrayal of people in suburban settings is relatively uncommon. Yet, in many of these artworks representing suburban interiors, the people portrayed appear to have withdrawn into a deep, secret interiority. Each of these withdrawn figures' respective interiorities is even more introverted than their mere placement within a spatial interior. These figures appear as physical presences characterized by a common attentional absence. In Ulrich's, Strassheim's as well as Aubrey's and Crewdson's figures, there is a distinctive disengagement with the material and social conditions at hand, a deep introversion, and an affectively muted non-presence, which seems in its withdrawal to open up an interior space. That is, by withdrawing their attentiveness and presence, these figures open up a gap, creating an impossible interior space in which to dwell. Like Simmel's (1997) imagined metropolitan dweller who develops blasé, social reserve, and a high degree of individuation, the suburban dweller if present at all in representations of the suburban imaginary, is often one who occupies the exterior world affectively flat, bored, or overwhelmed into an anaesthetic withdrawal. Across the images, it appears that what these interiorized subjects share in common is this absence and a muted, minor affect. The other suburban dweller is the one who is expelled, repulsed, or abjected—like Drake's, Fischl's, Simmons's, Rockwell's, and Charlton's figures. They stand outside of themselves or outside of the extended selves of their homes, in some cases in the impossible blank space of exteriority. Interiority, then, becomes a way of remaining in the unbearable world—bored or affectless, ensconced and withdrawn.

Figure 4: Unruly Permeability

This deep introversion, the withdrawal into an individualized and abstracted interiority, seems to be a response to the hyper-publicity brought about by the actual permeability of boundaries between inside and outside, private and public, where the limits or borders between these two supposed serial spaces are not experientially demarcated by the spatial segregation they are imagined to be. This unruly and irrepressible permeability is thus paradoxical. It is figured in the breaching of bounds through porous barriers, in the display of the private interior as spectacle and in the colonization of exteriors by suburban interiority.

Breaching bounds

In Brian Tolle's *Cheaper by the Dozen* and Laurie Simmons's *Walking House (Color)* and *Lying Objects (house)*, a generic, mass-produced suburban home is represented with protruding legs. In each of the pieces, the human legs physically extend beyond the limits of the house suggesting the breaching of moral and social boundaries meant to contain interiors within and exile exteriors to outdoors. Tolle's piece, *Cheaper by the Dozen* (image 6.0.53), comes from his larger series *Levittown*, which is comprised of a number of installation pieces. Each is a diorama in which a New York Levittown-style house is situated with a variety of found objects. In each case, the house is draped, hung, or stuffed in order to give it internal structure, which it lacks on its own, being a sheath of silicon. Tolle made each house using the same mould and thus, like the original Levittown homes, all the houses are nearly identical (CRG Gallery 2009, n.p.). The differentiation between the houses is in the different colouring and situation of each house in its own individual scene. This situating also makes each house mean something slightly different in each case.



6.0.53. Brian Tolle, *Cheaper by the Dozen*, 2008. Dolls, Astro turf, plywood, and platinum silicon rubber.²¹²

For example, in *Father Knows Best* (image 6.0.54) the house is "sitting" in the easy chair. The house is the father, the father is the house. Perhaps this illustrates the common phrase of

²¹² All images by Brian Tolle retrieved from artist's website, <http://www.briantollestudio.com/works/levittown/index.htm>

patriarchal possession symbolized by the house, stereotypically uttered by fathers at their unruly teenagers, "not while you're under my roof."



6.0.54. Brian Tolle, *Father Knows Best*, 2009. Salesman sample recliner, braided rug, plywood, platinum silicon rubber.



6.0.55. Brian Tolle, *I Stand Here Ironing*, 2008. Ironing board cabinet and iron, and platinum silicon rubber.

In contrast, in *I Stand Here Ironing* (image 6.0.55) the role of the housewife is expressed as the drudgery of ironing the house, draped on an ironing board. In this case, the house stands in not for the wife, but her labour in cleaning and maintaining the house. *Cheaper by the Dozen* is a reference to either a 1950 or a 2003 movie by the same name that features a family with a dozen children. This is the only tableau in which the house acts seemingly as a house. It appears to be held up on a patch of grass by a number of (white) children, whose pale legs emerge from under it. The suburban house is teeming with children. It is at once given shape and upheld by them while also threatening to collapse upon them or suffocate them. The children seem to be conferring with each other, like in a team huddle, under the shroud of the house. At any moment they may throw off the house, simply carry it away with them, or tear it apart. For Tolle's children the house is both a protective, if temporary, casing and a threatening, confining envelope. Their growing pains are not contained within the confines of that sheath.

Laurie Simmons also has pieces featuring houses sprouting human legs. *Waking & Lying Objects* is a series comprised of photographs of objects with women's legs, which Simmons

made out of found objects. The series was inspired by advertising from the mid-twentieth century in which objects danced about on women's legs (Simmons 2007) and speaks to the sex appeal of commodities. It also explores the gendering of this consumerist desire to possess as also the ways in which women are conceived as desired objects. The series has other objects with women's legs including handguns, globes, hourglasses, pastries, etc. Simmons printed all the photos so the images were human scale; but, fittingly, the suburban house is the largest subject of these desirable, feminized commodities. As discussed earlier, Simmons has an on-going concern with women's limited available social roles and particularly their ambivalent and often imprisoned relationship to the commodified, domestic sphere. Propped up on very long, thin, white legs, the *Walking House* (image 6.0.56) appears unsteady in its mincing gait and is perhaps unable to proceed very far before becoming a house lying down, with legs open—a "lying object" (*Lying Objects (house)*, image 6.0.57).



6.0.56. Laurie Simmons, *Walking House*, 1989. Gelatin silver print.²¹³

²¹³ Image retrieved from MOMA website, http://www.moma.org/collection/artist.php?artist_id=7015

This house as woman/woman as house is a lying object in that it is an object that lays down and can be "laid" (a colloquialism for sexually penetrated), and it is also an object that is not really an object, an object that lies. Recalling Simmons's other works on women, identity, and the domestic sphere, these pieces make both kitschily and poignantly literal the notion of the housewife or homemaker, a woman who is overtaken by her home work or whose domestic identity is written on her body. That she lacks a face, the most individually identifiable part of a body, suggests that she is literally a model of home-making, reduced to and objectified as that labour.



6.0.57. Laurie Simmons, *Lying Objects (house)*, 1992. Offset photograph.²¹⁴

The extension of legs from Tolle's and Simmons's houses disrupts the containment of domestic affairs within the confines of the home. Strange, organic, extrusions, these legs defy the invisibility of domestic life relegated to the interior. Again, the quality of interiority becomes legible as being not contained within the home interior but as a quality adhering to woman as domestic or as domestic labour and domestic relationality as mobile. If interiority attaches to woman, then it goes with her wherever she goes, whether or not she chooses it.

²¹⁴ Image from Drake and Nickle 2013, 10.

Porous barriers, broken bonds

The margins and boundaries between inside and outside are not impenetrable. Both Peter Drake's *Annunciation* (image 6.0.58) and Crewdson's untitled image from the *Dream House* series (images 6.0.59) convey the ambivalence and anxiety related to the inevitably porous division between inside and outside, interior and exterior, and interiority and exteriority. In *Annunciation*, a man in a casual suit stands in the bushes outside of a house, looking at and touching a wall, which divides the image in half, vertically. On the other side of the wall, a small dog points alertly in the direction of the man, and a woman, dressed in a pink dress, bends down affectionately towards the dog. Like many of Drake's other works, the colours make the image seem initially like a pleasant scene. But the man's inexplicable nocturnal survey of the outside wall, standing in the bushes, and the emaciated dog's rigid, vigilant stance, tail tucked between its legs, convey an uncanny, uneasy tone. The door open, just behind the man does not clarify the ambiguity of the situation.



6.0.58. Peter Drake, *Annunciation*, 2003. Acrylic on canvas.

Similarly disturbing and undecidable is Crewdson's image of a man standing outside, staring through the sliding glass door of a living room at a woman laying on a couch watching TV and a girl laying asleep on the floor. As in Drake's image, it is uncertain whether we can or should interpret the outside man as a menace or as a protector, or the inside woman and girl as potential

victims or comfortably at home. While Drake's man can easily enter through the open door, the porosity of Crewdson's wall is in the availability of the interior to the gaze of the exterior.



6.0.59. Gregory Crewdson, *Untitled* from the series *Dream House*, 2002. Digital C-print.

In Crewdson's and the many other images of interiors exposed through undraped windows or of doors left ajar at night, the sense that neither the inside nor the outside feels safe sums up the problem and paradox of the construction of suburban spatial division. In attempting to maintain strict boundaries and separate functions, neither imaginary space reads as safe, or rather both alienated spaces read as risky because of the fundamental but ineffective division.

Medium of/in the private interior

The interior cannot contain interiority. It also cannot keep out exteriority. Peeking in through the doors and windows of video artist Ron Lambert's houses, it becomes apparent that these are not the only portals making the boundaries between interior and exterior porous. Lambert's digital video *Home Movies* (see image 6.0.60 for stills), features images of houses that were for sale in his local neighbourhood of Nashville. In the windows and doors, old films can be seen and heard. Initially, viewed as still images, the houses seem to be the container of memories and meanings as well as the articulation of the inhabitants' hopes. Like Bachelard's (1964) childhood house, the

house as object seems to be triggering deeply intimate resonances of remembered time. But, it soon becomes clear that these home movies are not preserved intimate memories. The movies are bits of mid-twentieth century public domain film footage intended for classrooms. They are the shared, collective memories of an era transmitted through media.



6.0.60. Ron Lambert, stills from *Home Movies*, 2009. Digital video,²¹⁵

It is not only windows and doors, then, that make the boundary between interiors and exteriors permeable. Media such as films and television are also important portals through which the suburban interior is exposed to external forces. This is particularly true of TV and the family living room. In Adams's *Longmont Colorado* (image 5.0.68), Hido's *2133* (image 5.0.69), and Koscianski's *Suburban Life* (image 5.0.73), one can see or infer that someone is at home watching TV.²¹⁶ In other images, the television set is a key piece of furniture in the house, especially in living rooms. Of course Barbara Gallucci's *Ranch '50* series was inspired by the prominent and permanent TV wall that formed part of the house (images 6.0.3, 6.0.4, 6.0.5, and 6.0.6). But, other photographers take the TV seriously too. In Diane Arbus's *Xmas Tree in a living room in Levittown, Long Island, 1968* (image 6.0.61), a TV set sits in one corner and an over-sized Christmas tree is crammed in the other corner, surrounded by a bounty of gifts. But all of the many gifts and the Christmas tree itself are pushed into the corner, out of the line of sight

²¹⁵ Screen-grabs of video at Culture Hall website, <http://culturehall.com/artwork.html?page=16795>

²¹⁶ According to Koscianski's own description of the image, it is the glow of the TV set that illuminates the room.

between the couch and the TV. The couch appears to be facing a window, but where the dark TV screen can be fully viewed in the photo, the window is only hinted at. Similarly, in Bill Owens's untitled image of the Christmas-decorated living room (image 6.0.2), the TV is on and visible while the window is curtained and its view thus obscured. In another of Owens's untitled images a living room is empty except a TV in a corner and two folding chairs arranged to face it (image 6.0.62). The window is visible but, like the rest of the room, is bare, with no curtains or covers; yet all that is visible is a shadow on a wall or fence. In these homes, the TVs provide a more important view out than the windows.



6.0.61. Diane Arbus, *Xmas Tree in a living room in Levittown, Long Island*, 1963. Gelatin silver print.²¹⁷



6.0.62. Bill Owens, *Untitled* from the series *Suburbia*, 1973. Gelatin silver print.

²¹⁷ Image retrieved from *trouvaillesdujour* weblog, <http://trouvaillesdujour.blogspot.ca/2011/09/diane-arbus-exhibition-at-jeu-de-paume.html>.

When turned on, the television appears almost supernaturally to be a zombifying force. For example, in Gregory Crewdson's untitled work from his *Dreamhouse* series (image 6.0.59) in which the man outside peers into a living through the large window, the woman and child who are inside lay as if having succumb to the TV. Although its screen cannot be seen, the two lay in its glow which washes over them and is so strong that it makes a lighted lamp cast a shadow. Crewdson's untitled piece from his early works (image 6.0.63) shows the TV having a similar, although less dramatic effect.



6.0.63. Gregory Crewdson, *Untitled* from his early work, 1986–88. C-print.

In the photo, what is legible as a family—a boy, his brother, their mom and what we can guess is their dad (only his arm is visible)—all lay on a small bed appearing to watch TV. Their gazes are directed towards an unseen source of light, their quiet attentiveness to it suggests it is a television whose glow illuminates, in particular, the boy. Although the family is balanced on a small, intimate space, they are not paying attention to or interacting with each other: Each is individually absorbed with and by the TV. It stupefies and interpellates each viewer individually, making each inattentive to anything happening immediately around them. Whether or not television or any other medium is so sinister and controlling, it is clear that media are an important external presence in the suburban interior.

Suburban interiority inscribed onto the double exteriority of nonhuman nature

It is not only suburban interiors that are penetrated by exteriority through an interiorization of a displaced exteriority. Interiority dislocated from interiors also expands outwards, colonizing the exterior: Exteriors are taken over by the interior and qualities of interiority. In Jennifer McAuley's *Bullrushes* (image 6.0.64), behind a close study of bullrushes, an almost imperceptible, sky-coloured warehouse or big box peers out, while in the diptych *Twilight Bullrushes* (image 6.0.65), a crowded suburban residential neighbourhood is visible behind another stand of bullrushes. In both cases, the human habitat lurks almost invisibly between the bullrushes and the sky, appearing nearly like another element in the seemingly natural world apparently being depicted.



6.0.64. Jennifer McAuley, *Bullrushes*, n.d. Oil on panel.²¹⁸

²¹⁸ All images by Jennifer McAuley retrieved from artist's website, <http://www.jennifermcauley.com/>



6.0.65. Jennifer McAuley, *Twilight Bullrushes*, n.d. Oil on panel.

The critique becomes most overt in her trio of *Dream Home* paintings (images 6.0.67, 6.0.66, and 6.0.68). Each of these three paintings feature placid natural landscapes—a forest clearing, a lake, and a meadow—overlaid by the line drawing of an architectural floorplan. These seemingly pristine spaces are marked as future sites of dream homes. In fact, however, the landscape site for *Dream Home 2* (image 6.0.66) appears, upon closer inspection, not to be so pristine as it initially appears.



6.0.66. Jennifer McAuley, *Dream Home 2*, n.d. Oil on panel.



6.0.67. Jennifer McAuley, *Dream Home 1*, n.d. Oil on panel. 6.0.68. Jennifer McAuley, *Dream Home 3*, n.d. Oil on panel.

Like the abstracted, receding forms of the houses in *Twilight Bullrushes*, the lake appears already to have been highly developed with the regular triangular peaks of abstracted houses forming what looked like nature: What seemed like a thickly forested lake comes into focus as a highly developed subdivision. Although quite a literal symbolization, this work shows the way in which interior suburban spaces and desires implied by representing such an interiority are etched onto both the suburban landscape but even onto not-yet suburban spaces potentially subduing all spaces with a fantasy of suburban interiority.

In a similar vein as McAuley's *Dream Home* images, but even more literally, Matthew Moore etches the image of suburban homes and neighbourhoods into not-yet suburban places in a series of large-scale earthworks (site specific art pieces that use nature as an integral part of the work of art). Moore is the last of four generations to farm his family's land outside of Phoenix, Arizona. On his website, he notes, "Within five years, my home (this land) will transform into suburbia" (Moore n.d., n.p.). In *Rotations: Single Family Residence* (see image 6.0.69), Moore physically cut into a field of barley an enlarged line-drawing floorplan of a single family residence home. Using a hoe, string and stakes, Moore hand cleared 5500 lateral feet to create the eight feet-wide lines of the "drawing", which can only be seen as a "floorplan" from an aerial perspective. For the project, Moore rented land close to his family's farm since his grandfather was in the process of negotiating suburban zoning for their own land. In the next iteration, *Rotations: Moore Estates* (see image 6.0.70), Moore planted the image of an entire planned subdivision into his family's farmlands. In this piece, Moore precisely recreates at one-third scale

the lot map for the 253-home subdivision planned for this site. The "houses" are sorghum and the "roads" are wheat. In this case, the interiority of suburban domestic spaces figuratively then literally takes over and consumes this land.



6.0.69. Matthew Moore, photograph of *Rotations: Single Family Residence*, 2004. Barley, 20 acres field. C-print.²¹⁹

²¹⁹ All images for Matthew Moore's work retrieved from artist's website, <http://urbanplough.com/work/>



6.0.70. Matthew Moore, photograph of *Rotations: Moore Estates*, 2005–2006. Sorghum and wheat, 35 acres field. C-print.

If McAuley's paintings show the relation of the conditions of suburban interiority to the consumption of land by symbolically overlaying the plan for an interior onto a landscape and Moore "draws" the plan of interiority into the fields it will eventually consume, then Michael Light's corpus of aerial photos of suburbs (for which he both pilots and photographs) shows the next step in this progression from conceptual plan to physical actualization. Light photographs, in particular, two types of places: strip mines and suburban development, especially suburban development in what could be understood as extreme and remote locations (like in the deserts of Arizona and California, or on the top of mountains). Light focuses on the dramatic changes these places create and require of the natural environment. In images like *Unbuilt "Ascaya" Development Looking Southeast; \$250 Million In Mountaintop Removal and Terracing, Henderson, NV*, 2012 (image 6.0.71), land has been cleared to make room for future suburban neighbourhoods and the house sites have been directly carved onto the sides of hills and mountains. Sometimes these plans do not get further than the clearing and carving of land. Light organizes his photos in books, which focus on a single place. The particular ordering of images imply a narrative. Typically, his books begin with images of the nonhuman natural environment unaffected by development and then proceed to show, through the aerial perspective, the immense scope and scale of the alteration of that environment.



6.0.71. Michael Light, *Unbuilt "Ascaya" Development Looking Southeast; \$250 Million in Mountaintop Removal and Terracing, Henderson, NV, 2012*. Pigment print.²²⁰

In his project *Lake Las Vegas, 2010–2012*, he explicitly draws the connection between strip mines and suburbs both in terms of their similar aerial aesthetics (in particular in the clearing and development stages of suburban development, see for example *Future Homesites of "The Falls" at Lake Las Vegas, Henderson, Nevada, 2011*, image 6.0.72) and in the invisible relationship between resource use and such projects.

²²⁰ All images by Michael Light retrieved from artist's website, <http://www.michaellight.net/>



6.0.72. Michael Light, *Future Homesites of "The Falls" at Lake Las Vegas, Henderson, Nevada*, 2011. Pigment print.

Thus, both the extractive industries and suburban dwelling require the use of vast amounts of the natural environment, converted into natural resources, not least of which is land but also, significantly, water. Moreover, suburban development also requires the industrial-scale extraction of stripmines. Light's images show the building up of suburbs has the consequences of the stripping down of the earth. As Light comments, this relationship was something that he had

long suspected abstractly: that the extraction industries and the habitation industries are two sides of the same coin. Seeing entire mountains graded into building pads for gated luxury homes and 'purpose-built communities,' only to be left to slowly revert to sagebrush in bankruptcy, was the most naked and skeletal revelation of the speculative habitation machine I'd yet seen (quoted in Rothman 2012, n.p.).

Exteriors taken over by qualities of interiority

While McAuley, Moore, and Light present exteriors as evidencing the eventful and cataclysmic process of being overtaken and inscribed with the promise of future interiors, other artists present exteriors in the everyday/everynight, mundane but no less consequential process of being taken over by qualities of interiority including domesticity and secrecy. In Diane Arbus's photo *A Family on Their Lawn One Sunday in Westchester, N.Y.* (image 6.0.73), a woman and man lie on

reclining deck chairs in their massive backyard sunning themselves while a young boy plays alone, bent over a wading pool behind them. The couple's body language suggests that they might hate each other and can barely stand being in proximity of each other. The neglected boy is turned away from both the viewer and the adults in their lawn chaises.



6.0.73. Diane Arbus, *A Family on Their Lawn One Sunday in Westchester, N.Y., 1968*. Gelatin silver print.²²¹

In Eric Fischl's painting *Sleepwalker* (image 6.0.74),²²² it is as if the boy in Arbus's image has returned to the pool at night as an adolescent. Sleepwalking naked, the boy stands in a wading pool in what reads as a backyard. Standing tensely with knees slightly bent and his body slightly turned away from the viewer, the boy appears to be masturbating or urinating in front of two empty lawn chairs.

²²¹ Image retrieved from Christie's art auction website, <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/photographs/diane-arbus-a-family-on-their-lawn-5051876-details.aspx>

²²² Thanks to Heidi Bickis for initially telling me about Eric Fischl.



6.0.74. Eric Fischl, *Sleepwalker*, 1979. Oil on canvas.

Meanwhile, in multimedia artist Amy Bennett's *Losing It* (image 6.0.75) from her series *Neighbors*,²²³ a man sits, with legs stretched straight in front of him and arms tightly crossed, at the bottom of his empty swimming pool at night. A dark shadow flooded by an outdoor light, he pays no attention to his dog, at the edge of the pool bending down towards him. While in *Sleeping Separately* (image 6.0.76) from the same series, a woman lies sleeping on the lawn-covered hill of a backyard facing all the way down the street

²²³ For this series, according to her website, Bennett painted the scenes based on miniature models that she first constructed (Bennett 2012, About).



6.0.75. Amy Bennett, *Losing It*, n.d. Oil on panel.²²⁴



6.0.76. Amy Bennett, *Sleeping Separately*, n.d. Oil on panel.

²²⁴ All images by Amy Bennett retrieved from artist's website, <http://www.amybennett.com/neighbors.html>

Brandon A. Dalmer's diorama encased within a cloche features a man standing in the bushes facing an outside wall of a house while on the other side of the house, a woman manhandles a child, seemingly trying to control the squirming figure (see images 6.0.77 and 6.0.78). It is unclear what the man is doing in the bushes or what the nature of the struggle between the woman and the child is, if these two scenarios are related, and if so how. But, like the other images, this miniature domestic scene feels at once like a shockingly public exposure of private turmoil—a domestic disturbance—and reads as an episode in a longer, more complicated, suffocatingly irresolvable, persisting familial crisis.



6.0.77. Brandon A. Dalmer, image of *Untitled - Domestic Scene (with man in bushes)*, 2009. Diorama on metal base (under glass).²²⁵



6.0.78. Brandon A. Dalmer, detail views of *Untitled - Domestic Scene (with man in bushes)*, 2009. Diorama on metal base (under glass).

²²⁵ All images of Brandon A. Dalmer's work retrieved from artist's Tumblr, <http://brandon-dalmer.tumblr.com/tagged/miniatures>

For the most part, this expansion of interiority is kept within the limits of the extended interiority of the backyard. But, as in Fischl's *Best Western study* (image 6.0.79), as the domestic sphere is taken on the road, so too is this sphere of interiority, as with the suspiciously lone boy playing his violent little game of knocking down toy "Indian" figures (as in "cowboys and indians") with oranges in the nighttime courtyard of a Best Western motel.



6.0.79. Eric Fischl, *Best Western study*, 1983. Oil on canvas.

In a number of works—Diane Arbus's iconic *A Family on their Lawn One Sunday in Westchester, N.Y.*, Eric Fischl's *Sleepwalker* and *Best Western study*, Amy Bennett's *Neighbors* series, and Brandon A. Dalmer's *Untitled, Domestic Scene (with man in bushes)*—it appears that the dysfunction, strife and sense of dis-ease and ennui meant to be contained within the space of the domestic interior breaches the edges of the interior–exterior boundary. With such a mobile quality of interiority, it is unclear what the suburban interior's limits of expansion are, presenting a paradoxical situation in which the non-space of interiority may overlap the non-place of exteriority.

Today, despite ample historical and contemporary evidence to the contrary (see, for example, Garreau 1991, Harris and Larkham 1999, Harris and Lewis 2001, and Hayden 2003), the suburb continues to be imagined in artistic works as the extension and fullest expression of a logic of separation of spheres of life, with an attendant retreat into an interiorized domestic non-space in which one may escape from the demands of the incommensurate world of work and productivity. The residential suburb extends the home interior to the backyard with its carpet-like lawn and outdoor living room patio set, the cul-de-sac with its assumed guarantee of safety for children's games, and the neighbourhood as an extended safety zone. The interiority of the home is extended through the car into a personal bubble of interiority making commuter routes, with their long strings of consecutively arranged interiority bubbles, a literalization of serial logic. The extended interiorities of the suburban neighbourhood or of the car on the commuter highway or the work places dominating business and industrial suburbs cannot, for Benjamin, Blanchot, or Arendt constitute the sites of the everyday, which is redolent with political potentiality. If interiority is expanding, is there any place for everydayness and its political potency?

In the final two chapters, I turn to the question of what possibilities are enabled within the suburban imaginary.

**Part III. Utopian Re-Imagining.
Desire, Promise and Potency of the Suburb: Representations
from the Margins of Popular Culture**

Chapter 7.²²⁶

Illustrating Desires: The Idea and the Promise of the Suburb in Two Children's Books²²⁷

I. Introduction

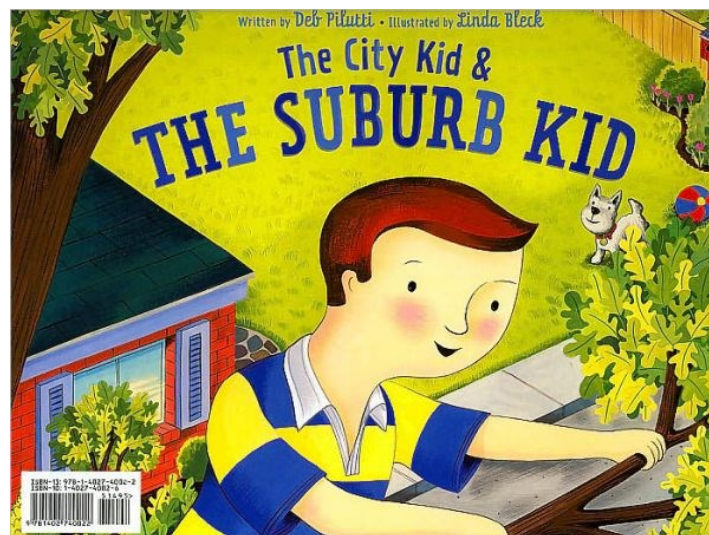
In this chapter, I consider the idea and the promise of the suburbs.²²⁸ I do this by looking at how they are imagined in two children's picture books about young kids newly encountering the

²²⁶ A version of this chapter has been published. Davidson, Tonya K., Ondine Park, and Rob Shields, ed. 2011. *Ecologies of Affect: Placing Nostalgia, Desire, Hope*, 169–93. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press. The images appearing in this chapter were not included in the publication. Please see Coda for the images that were published with this chapter.

²²⁷ Sincere thanks to Rob Shields, Olga Pak, and Alissa Overend for feedback on earlier versions, and especially to Heidi Bickis, Tonya Davidson, and Barret Weber for ongoing feedback. Any faults, of course, remain m own. This chapter builds on research supported in part by a Queen Elizabeth II Scholarship granted by the Government of Alberta.

²²⁸ In this chapter, I use the terms *suburb*, *the suburbs*, *suburbia*, and *the suburban* more or less interchangeably, recognizing that these designations have distinct implications. Common usage is not so rigorously delineated as in academic use, and the elisions between the different terms allow for a useful flexibility in considering the multiplexity of the suburban. Here, I am adapting the notion of the multiplex suburb from Amin and Graham's (1997) discussion of the multiplex city.

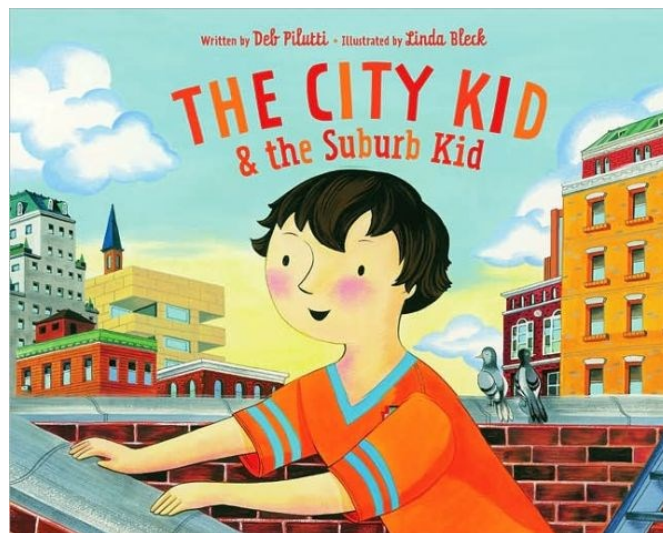
suburban landscape. *The City Kid and the Suburb Kid* (2008, written by Deb Pilutti and illustrated by Linda Bleck) and *On Meadowview Street* (2007, written and illustrated by Henry Cole) are as much about suburbs as they are set in them. Each, in its own way, mobilizes familiar cultural imaginaries, representing the suburb as a recognizable, taken-for-granted place while enabling the reader to consider suburbia anew as the young characters explore the possibilities it offers. I take up these highly acclaimed picture books (Chicago Public Library 2009; Mattson 2007; Whalin 2007) as illustrative of broader, shared imaginaries of the idea of the suburb and its promise to provide a much-desired good life.



7.0.1. Deb Pilutti and Linda Bleck's *The City Kid & The Suburb Kid*, cover for the suburb story

As tools for enculturation and as demonstrations of cultural assumptions, these children's books gesture vigorously toward dominant, normative cultural meanings, values, and ideals. In particular, they affirm the "dominant and effective" (Williams 2005a) notion that the suburban place is a landscape that promises and provides for the good life, which is, above all, for young children. These books show suburbia as seeming to offer itself up ever to be rediscovered, waiting to reveal the surprising wonders of a pleasant nature, and as an alternative, self-contained whole world in contrast to the other world of the city. *The City Kid and the Suburb Kid* considers the suburb in direct comparison to the city, celebrating the different possibilities of everyday life afforded by the suburb versus the city. In this semi-nostalgic portrayal of the suburban good life, with its imperative to enjoy (Žižek 2006), suburbia appears as a vibrant, nurturing, inspiring, and

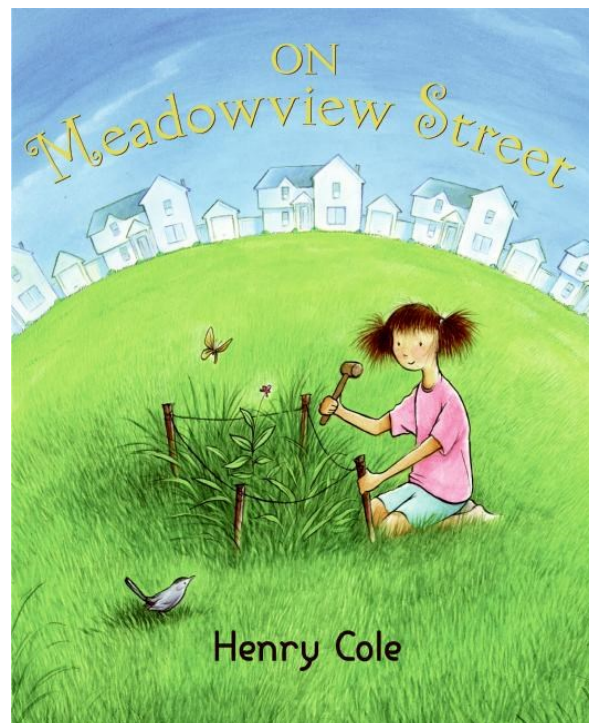
abundantly natural place. In contrast, in *On Meadowview Street*, the suburb appears (at least initially) as a bland, alienating, conformist, and artificial space in the gently persuasive depiction of an individual actualizing the suburban promise through transformative intervention. With an ethical enjoiner to act, it demonstrates a rehabilitation of the relationship between suburbia and nature and considers the suburb primarily in this relation to nature. Although the images of suburbia presented by the two books differ, both are common suburban tropes, and, ultimately, their superficial divergence gives way to a similar desire for what the suburb can offer and what it might mean. In this wish image, suburbia appears as a nurturing environment that is an extension of the private, interiorized home, encompassing a benevolent nature and supported by family life. The suburb in this image is a conceptual and material space to express and actualize one's supposed most interior and desired self.



7.0.2. Deb Pilutti and Linda Bleck's *The City Kid & The Suburb Kid*, cover for the city story

On Meadowview Street and *The City Kid and the Suburb Kid* do challenge the normative suburban imaginaries somewhat. As picture books for and about young children encountering suburbia, these books juxtapose multiple liminalities (that of the picture book as medium, the child as audience and story character, and the suburb as subject, as I discuss further in the conclusion). They bear the potential to open up subversive "liminoid" gaps in the meaning and interpretation of the shared cultural imaginaries of the suburban good life. Yet despite this potent conjunction of liminalities, ultimately, the limits of the familiar, dominant imaginary are

reinscribed, and the hegemonic tropes are reaffirmed and naturalized. My purpose is not, of course, to point an accusing finger at these particular children's books for failing to offer a more profound and radical critique of suburbia in their attempt to show children the suburban good life. It is rather to point precisely at these ideals and values, tropes and imaginaries, that are so deeply entrenched, ideological, and "normal" as to be invisible and, if made visible, seemingly intractable.



7.0.3. Henry Cole's *On Meadowview Street*, cover

II. Representing Suburbia

There is a vast multiplicity of expressions of the suburban. Indeed, the suburb might be seen to act as "an open text—an endlessly interpretable landscape" (Knox 2005, 33). As a result, what "suburban" might mean specifically, or to what it should refer, seems ever contingent and undecidable. This leads many contemporary critical suburban scholars to contend that it is no longer a relevant category, especially when set in a binary against the city (Harris 2004; Nicolaides and Wiese 2006, 8). Despite this, however, there is an ongoing production of

suburban images and representations that continue to have cultural resonance, as in the two books at hand. I suggest the "open text" of the suburb is closed when the "central system of practices, meanings and values, which we can properly call dominant and effective," is recognized (Williams 2005a, 38). This system is

a whole body of practices and expectations; our assignments of energy, our ordinary understanding of the nature of man [*sic*] and of his world. It is a set of meanings and values which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming. It thus constitutes a sense of reality for most people in the society (Williams 2005a, 38).

It is my contention that such a dominant and effective idea of suburbia operates in any representation of suburbia in which it is recognizable as such. This dominant and effective idea, then, can be gleaned from our two representative books.

Suburbs, like "the city" or other such places, "are not only the subject of representation but are 'objects' in representations" (Shields 1996, 228). Representations, then, make the suburb

available for analysis and replay. Their strange effect is that, like the snow falling in a souvenir snow-bubble, representations blanket the city [and also the suburb], changing the way it appears to us. In Marxist terms, reality is obscured by ideology, which furthermore affects how we see ourselves and understand our actions.... In everyday life, we fashion and receive countless representations. Of course we all realize that a totally accurate representation—a perfect copy—is impossible. We are happy to settle for a good likeness (Shields 1996, 228).

This ideologically interpreted good likeness is perhaps closer to any so-called reality of the suburb than any ostensibly "real" suburb: an actually existing suburb looks "like" a suburb only inasmuch as the suburb that it looks like is an idea—specifically, an ideal-type: a conceptual construct (*Gedankenbild*) to which an approximation might be made but which can never be realized (Weber 2006, 264).²²⁹ Representations of suburbia, then, "achieve the appearance of reality to the extent that they conform to our preexisting conceptions of the suburb, which ... is a social image,²³⁰ a state of mind" (Muzzio and Halper 2002, 547–48)—an ideal-type. Inasmuch as any representation or any actually existing suburb more or less closely approaches this ideal-type, it is a good likeness.

The ideal-type "is neither historical reality nor even the 'true' reality.... It has the significance of a purely ideal limiting concept with which the real situation or action is compared

²²⁹ See also De Certeau (1984) on the city as a concept, rather than an actually existing reality, and Amin and Graham (1997) on the ordinary city.

²³⁰ See Cambre (2011) for more on "the image".

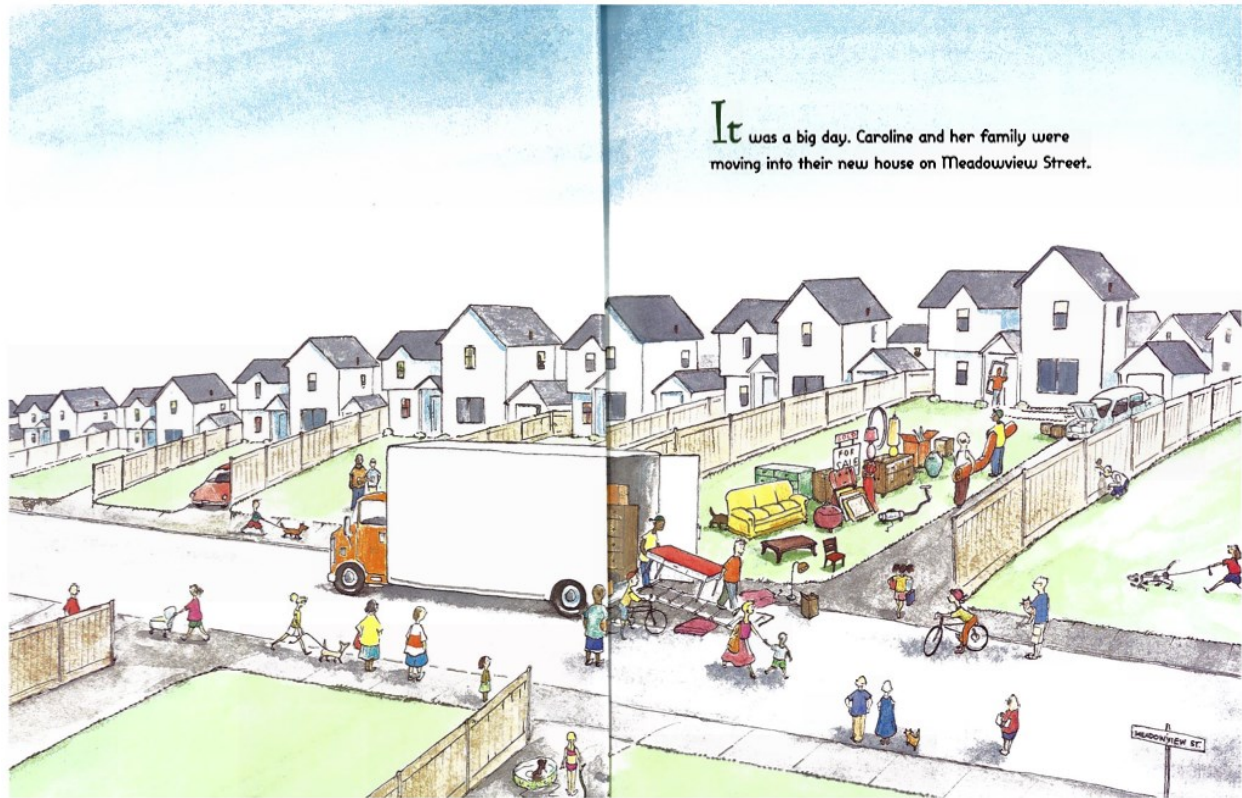
and surveyed for the explication of certain of its significant components" (Weber 2006, 266). This always contingent, but seemingly fixed, conceptual construct is one that is built up through, for example, an accretion of social, cultural, and personal experiences, images provided by cultural encounters (mass media, hearsay, art, these children's books, etc.) and by ideological and personal expectations. Subject to change and reinterpretation, past and imaginable future encounters are used to evaluate and make meaning of the ideal-types while they are simultaneously re-evaluated and reinterpreted. There is, then, a web of reciprocal relations among the representations of the suburb, the built forms of the suburb, and the idea of the suburb. Works about suburbia, such as *The City Kid and the Suburb Kid* and *On Meadowview Street*, illustrate our already existing presumptions and expectations of suburbia, and in turn render suburbia as a particular thing, orientation, or image. These, then, are applied to subsequent encounters with suburbia, illustrating what a suburb ought to be or how it shall be recognized.

III. The Suburban Place in Picture Books

On Meadowview Street and *The City Kid and the Suburb Kid* are two examples of picture books that take suburbia as the focus of the story (and not simply a background setting). Rather than depicting everyday life, these stories take as their problem exceptional, liminal engagements with the suburbs— how children are to make sense of, make home in, and find a good life in the suburban place with which they are newly presented. They demonstrate the possibilities and promises offered by suburbia. In *On Meadowview Street*, the young Caroline and her parents move to the distinctly misnamed Meadowview Street. Far from having a meadow view or being meadow-like, the neighbourhood consists of rows of repetitive, nearly identical houses on flat plots of lawn, fenced into cubicles. (One might be reminded of the tragic joke that suburbs are named after what they destroy and replace.²³¹ See image 7.4.) Eventually, Caroline transforms her lawn, with the help of her parents, into a lush, variegated garden, attracting many living creatures. The neighbours soon follow suit, resulting in a transformed neighbourhood teeming with diverse flora and fauna. In *The City Kid and the Suburb Kid*, city kid Jack spends a week

²³¹ See King (2004) for a discussion of the work that is done by the names of suburbs.

visiting his suburban cousin Adam. The two boys enjoy the fun and cozy offerings of this verdant suburban neighbourhood. Adam also spends a week visiting Jack in his bustling city neighbourhood. Initially excited to visit his cousin's place, which he idealizes, each boy eventually decides his favourite place is home.



It was a big day. Caroline and her family were moving into their new house on Meadowview Street.

7.0.4. Caroline's family moving into their cubicle-like home on the distinctly misnamed Meadowview Street. (Image by Henry Cole. 2007. *On Meadowview Street*, n.p.)

These two books are among only a handful of North American, English-language children's books explicitly about (and not simply set in) the suburbs.²³² This is surprising given

²³² A search of the electronic catalogues of the U.S. Library of Congress produces only twenty-one books for children and juveniles with any variation of the word *suburb* tagged as a subject heading. Four of these, including *On Meadowview Street* and *The City Kid and the Suburb Kid*, are fictional books for younger children (eight years and under). All four are picture books, published within the last few years (Robey and MacDougall 2006, and Ziefert and Cohen 2004). There is, in fact, a much larger number of children's books, both contemporary and older, set in suburbs (the popular Arthur series by Marc Brown, the mid-twentieth century Dick and Jane series, and so forth), but, because the suburban setting in these stories is taken for granted as an ordinary, unremarkable place, it is not explicitly tagged in the keywords. As a result, such books remain unnumbered. Regardless of how many suburban-set books there may be, there is a notable dearth of

that in the English-speaking world, and especially in North America, suburbia is deeply culturally entrenched and nearly ubiquitous. In the United States, the suburban population equalled the combined populations of rural and urban dwellers by 2000 (Nicolaidis and Wiese 2006, 1), and Canada had become a "suburban nation" by the 1960s, according to Richard Harris (2004). With this being the case, stories placing the suburb at the fore provide an opportunity for children to see themselves reflected in stories that make sense of their familiar setting and the everyday lived landscape shared by ever-growing numbers of children in North America. Moreover, the status of the suburban landscape continues to be contentious in the North American imaginary.²³³ Despite strong dominant images and normative tropes, there is, nevertheless, an ideological battle over the interpretation of the desirability and affective meaning of suburbia, oscillating between such extremes as seeing suburbia as the embodiment and pinnacle of the "American dream" and viewing it as a "nowhere" threatening to make a vast wasteland of North America (if not also the rest of the world) and devastating sociality and community (e.g., Thompson 2006; Kunstler 1993). As such, one might expect to see some of this working out in stories about suburbia. In view of the limited number of such books and the contestation over what suburbia *should* mean, it is perhaps not entirely surprising that the few picture books about the suburbs imagine exceptional, *liminal* engagements with the suburbs rather than everyday life.

The liminal is an indeterminate time and space "neither here nor there," but rather "betwixt and between" (Turner 1969, 95), in which the ordinary, day-to-day social norms and order, space and time are suspended, allowing antisocial expression not tolerable in the everyday workings of society.²³⁴ Although the term *liminal* tends to be used generically to mean simply a time or space out of the ordinary and un beholden to it, there is an important distinction between the *liminal* and a second term: the *liminoid*. Liminoid times and spaces are similar moments of freedom from the ordinary constraints of society (examples include theatre, children's play, and sports). Whereas the liminal is a characteristic confined and restrained by the structure of ritual, the liminoid

children's books that put the focus on suburbia itself. See Muzzio and Halper (2002) on the difference between suburban-set and suburban-centred narratives (specifically movies).

²³³ See Pak (2011), for more on the "imaginary."

²³⁴ According to Arnold van Gennep (1960), this ambiguous status is associated with the middle stage of the three-part rite of passage ritual in which individuals or communities shift from one significant social category to another through the stages of separation, transition, and reincorporation. These rites may be linear (as in an individual's rite of passage to a new social status) or cyclical in nature (in which a community phases through different stages of seasonal change, for example).

carries a potential for radical liberation. The liminal is a moment that ultimately serves to conserve and renew the existing social order, reasserting and strengthening its totality, and absorbing those who have transitioned back into community. The liminoid, unconstrained by a ritual order, offers a potentially revolutionary break with social rules and responsibilities, and may induce a lasting innovative (anti-conservative) change in society (Turner 1987, 1982, and 1969; Shields 1991, and in Davidson, Park, and Shields 2011).

The qualities of liminality and possibility are characteristic of picture books as a genre, holding open the possibility of subversive, even revolutionary critique of everyday life.²³⁵ Not exclusively a children's medium (e.g., Huizenga 2006; Kandinsky 1981; Masereel 1972, 1988; Tan 2008b), picture books have "the power to provide insight into the 'changing terms of our world'" (Johnston and Mangat 2003, 203, quoting Birkerts). What is important about picture books, whoever the audience, is that one must read between and across co-present texts. The visual text of images is more than merely illustrative of or supplementary to the lexical text (if there are any words present at all). These texts do different work. They are read independently or interdependently; "their relationship is contrapuntal" (Shulevitz 1996, 240). They can complement or complete one another, each helping to provide a fuller sense of the story (*ibid.*), but they may also be at odds with each other, opening up "liminal spaces" (Johnston and Mangat 2003, 203) of incommensurability and illegibility—or of possibility. In addition to the words and images, there are often additional significant *paratextual* elements to consider, such as the physical construction of the book or performative interactions with the book. Untypical of other written genres, picture books, particularly ones intended for young children, can be multimedia performances when they are read to (or along with) children. The visual, aural, haptic, and even oral capacities of the child as reader-audience might all be engaged as the child looks at the images, listens to the words, feels the book and the presence of co-readers, and joins in the performance (or the undoing of the performance, such as by interrupting or losing attention).

Reading picture books is a process of active meaning-making intratextually within and across media, and intertextually across social, cultural, and experiential texts (cf. Crawford and Hade 2000). This reading across and between texts disturbs and subverts the usually "relatively stable interpersonal system" between writers and readers rendering visible the interstices

²³⁵ See Hroch (2011), on puppetry. Puppetry's similar "minor art" form status affords it the freedom to critique radically.

between text and reader (Lewis 1996, 268), between performer and audience, and between texts. In such readings, the reader-audience is dramaturgically immersed into an alternative inchoate world where limits and boundaries push into and out of the texts, enveloping the reader in an "interstitial" (Lewis 1996, 260) world of potentiality. This immersion is sanctioned, even enforced, by the person in authority who performs the reading, possibly by the conditions through which the book was acquired, and perhaps by the very givenness of the book itself. With all of these overlapping modes of interpretation, children may, and often do, interpret picture books in multiple, highly idiosyncratic, and seemingly inconsistent ways, particularly when they encounter something that is unfamiliar or out of their experience (Crawford and Hade 2000).

However, for all this liminoid possibility, picture books often render complexities (such as, in our two books, the idea of the suburb, the city, family, community, or nature) into a thing that is knowable and to-be-taken-for-granted by visually and lexically codifying and contextualizing "explanations of items foreign to the viewer ... in order to expediate the meaning-making process" (Trifonas 2002, 191). In this way, potentially radical, creative, liminoid readings that this medium makes possible are ideologically subdued and recaptured. In particular, by illustrating what is presupposed to be easily recognizable as suburban, *The City Kid and the Suburb Kid* and *On Meadowview Street* key into and reify dominant cultural imaginaries of the suburban ideal-type, presenting a good likeness that is (meant to be) obvious and that children either already recognize as a "normal" place or presumably should learn in order to get to know their everyday world. Both books show the suburbs as consisting of relatively large single-family detached houses on large, private plots of land, covered in lawn, and surrounded by mostly self-contained neighbours with similar residential arrangements, all situated within an exclusively residential neighbourhood (see images 7.4 and 7.5). Both books also highlight an imminent relationship to a benign (rather than malevolent) nature. They assert (by taking as given) the primacy of the Romantic family unit (i.e., a heteronormative, nuclear family in which emotional relations are primary), demonstrate the apolitical interiority of the private home dwelling, and hint at the dependence of these suburbs on automobile transportation. As "a place apart, the suburb offers a space of freedom, imagination, escape and fantasy" (King 2004, 106) that is at the same time, far removed from the incursions of other people, "culture," and a sense of liveliness. For the most part, then, the subversive potential of these books is absorbed by their stronger normative pedagogical aims into a reaffirmation of the dominant and effective suburban

imaginary.



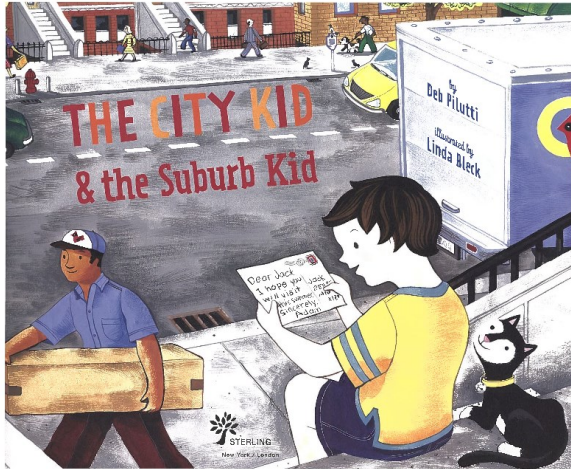
7.0.5. Adam looks at his suburban neighbourhood from the highest vantage point. (Image by Linda Bleck. 2008. *The City Kid & The Suburb Kid*, n.p.)

IV. The Suburban–Urban Dichotomy in Three Variations in The City Kid and the Suburb Kid

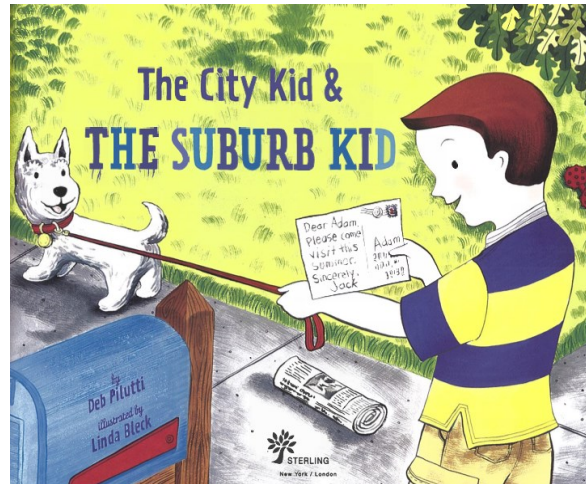
The City Kid and the Suburb Kid is a vibrantly illustrated, simply told, two-part story in the form of a "flip-over" book: the reader reads one story and at the end of it physically flips the book over to read the other story. One side is the story of the city kid Jack visiting his suburban cousin Adam for a week. The other side is the story of Adam visiting Jack in the city for a week. Each story begins with the boy reading an invitation from his cousin to visit. The invited boy is full of hope as he looks forward to leaving behind his everyday routines and annoyances (in particular, the tiresomeness of domestic suburban life for Adam, and the invasiveness of crowded city life for Jack) to join his cousin in what he imagines to be "the perfect life" in an ideal place. This hopeful anticipation is reversed toward the end of the stories, with the visiting boy nostalgically thinking about home and the familiar things he originally couldn't wait to leave behind. The two stories follow an arc of shifting desires: anticipation of leaving home, enjoyment of the new

place, longing for home, and a happy return.²³⁶ Both stories end with each boy concluding that his cousin had a nice life, but that home is his favourite place. The last image is the boy writing a postcard inviting his cousin to visit, leading into the other story. The stories thus form a continuous loop. (See images 7.6–7.9).

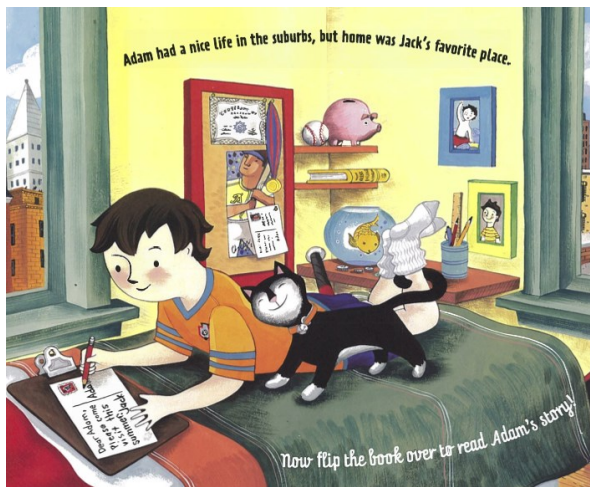
²³⁶ Compare this to Hui's (2011) discussion of the role of the *virtual* home in actually making, leaving, and returning home.



7.0.6. Jack receives an invitation to visit Adam's suburban home. (Image by Linda Bleck. 2008. *The City Kid & The Suburb Kid*, n.p.)



7.0.8. Adam receives an invitation to visit Jack's city home. (Image by Linda Bleck. 2008. *The City Kid & The Suburb Kid*, n.p.)



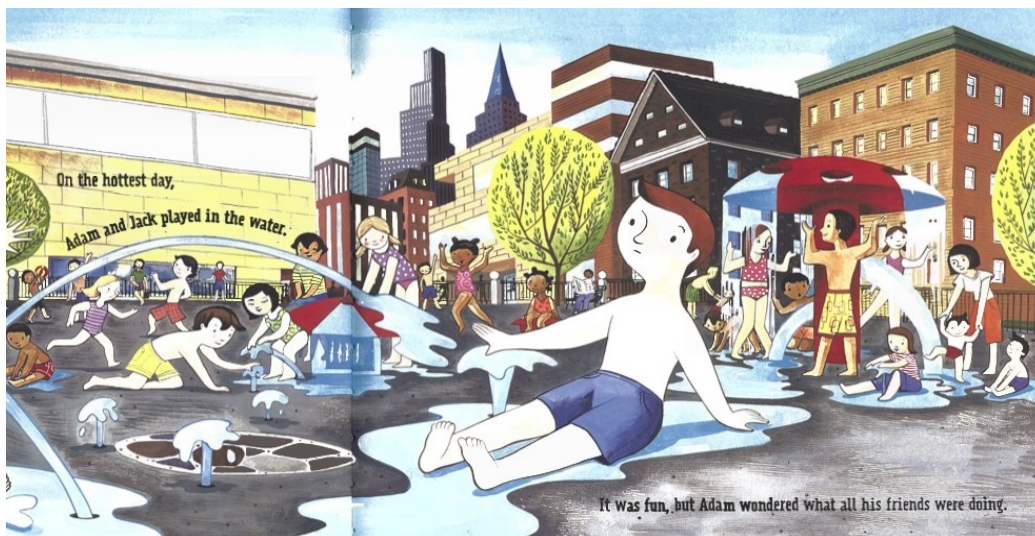
7.0.7. Jack returns to his city home. (Image by Linda Bleck. 2008. *The City Kid & The Suburb Kid*, n.p.)



7.0.9. Adam returns to his suburban home. (Image by Linda Bleck. 2008. *The City Kid & The Suburb Kid*, n.p.)

Aside from the two moments of anticipation (of leaving and returning home), author Deb Pilutti's lexical narrative of how the cousins spend their time in the two places is paralleled almost verbatim in each story. The particularities of place are marked almost exclusively by illustrator Linda Bleck's pictures, which tell the story of the differences in the boys' experiences. For example, when, on each visit, they "took a ride downtown and explored the shops" (n.p.), in the suburb they are shown eating ice cream in the outside courtyard of a mall complex, whereas in the city they eat ice cream in an open downtown square amid buildings, traffic, and a throng of

people feeding pigeons, playing basketball, taking in the sights, and more. The words graphically curling across each of the pictures suggest that in the suburb Adam's mom drove the two to the mall, while in the city Jake's mom and baby brother accompanied their ride on the subway or bus. On another day, when the boys "played in the water," in the city they can be seen playing in a public water park with many other children of various races, surrounded by tall buildings (see image 7.10); in the suburb they play in Adam's grassy backyard, surrounded by trees, fences, and neighbouring houses, supervised by his older sister (see image 7.11). This book pushes the possibilities offered by the multitextual picture book genre and plays on the tension in the gap between the sameness of the words and the difference of the images. The reader is required to interpret multiple simultaneous and consecutive texts: the words, the pictures and *sequences* of pictures, the relationship between the words and pictures, and the performance of reading these books. The reader then must make (or unmake) sense of all of these elements together. It is amid all this work of reading the many overlapping, competing, and separate elements that the book's three representations of the relationship between the city and the suburb can be seen to emerge. One version imagines that the suburbs and the city are fundamentally the same, differing only in minor specificities. Another shows the suburb and city to be complementary extensions of each other. The third variation shows the city and suburb to be diametrically opposed.



7.0.10. In the city, Adam and Jack play in the water in a public water park. (Image by Linda Bleck. 2008. *The City Kid & The Suburb Kid*, n.p.)



7.0.11. In the suburb, Jack and Adam play in the water in Adam's backyard. (Image by Linda Bleck. 2008. *The City Kid & The Suburb Kid*, n.p.)

In the first variation of the suburb–city relationship, just as each lexical story is the extension of the other, and both stories are contained in the same book, the city and suburb can also be understood to be extensions of each other—each a different iteration of the urban (as compared, perhaps, to the unmentioned rural or wild). As Richard Harris (2004) notes, "Their very name, 'sub-urbs,' implies that they exist, function, and should be seen primarily in relation to the city." They function "primarily as adjuncts to the city.... The character of suburbs then is fundamentally urban" (48–49). Among the similarities are the types of fun and play opportunities available: going to a park, the movies, shopping, etc. The overall effect of this reading of the story suggests that fundamentally, people, whether urban or suburban, have similar desires and experiences, that the particularities of their dwellings are not sufficiently significant to suggest different modes of being, and that differences between the city and suburb are only superficial—indeed, they are barely worth noting.

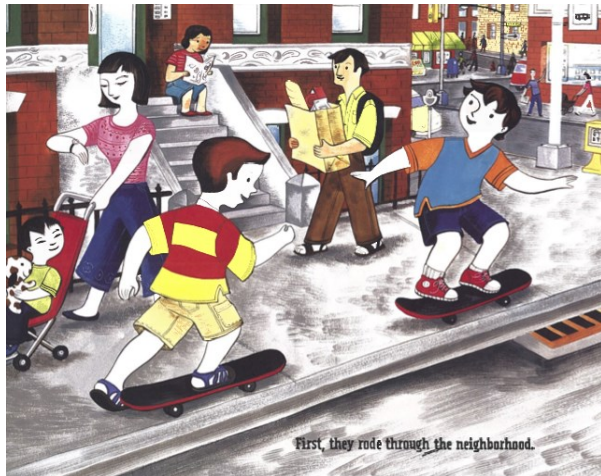
These differences *are* noted, however, in the important opening and closing pages that act both to frame and to marginalize these considerations. These few words that differ between the two stories (although still structurally parallel) bear significant assumptions about the city and suburb. For example, in looking forward to his impending vacation, Jack anticipates, "No more honking horns!" while Adam thinks, "No more lawns to mow!" Jack is eager to leaving behind hot waits for noisy subways, while Adam is glad not to have to wait for his mother to drive him

everywhere. Jack thinks about his cousin's "huge yard with a big oak tree," while Adam thinks about the tall buildings surrounding his cousin's apartment. These differences, while otherwise unidentified in the central portion of the lexical story, are reiterated to fuller effect in the visual story and underscore a second vision of the relationship between the city and suburb, suggesting that the suburb and city are defined in their contrasting, perhaps complementary, relation to each other—each offers what the other cannot. The visual story depicts a stereotyped difference between the two places: the city is marked by diversity of activities and a background of culture (architectural buildings, people reading books and newspapers, ads for the zoo; see image 7.10), the suburb is marked by nuclear family togetherness (Miller 1995) and neighbours, and a background of "nature"²³⁷ (a pleasant, almost cute nature marked by trees, shrubs, flowers, and seemingly friendly little animals; see image 7.11).²³⁸ The city is a bustling mix of work, shopping, and leisure; the suburb is a place of recreation and home. The city features an elision between inside and outside, private and public, with many social and physical interdependencies and hybridities (e.g., eating restaurant food at home, watching a movie at an outdoor theatre in a park that is nestled among towering buildings), and many public places but little private space (Jack has to share his apartment bedroom with his baby brother). See image 7.12. The suburb, by contrast, features relatively rigid demarcations between inside and outside, private and public (e.g., watching a movie in a movie theatre, going shopping at a mall rather than in a mixed-use neighbourhood, eating homemade food in the backyard), with vast domestic private places but little public space, and characterized by familiarity and an apparent independence from others beyond the immediate family, at least in the context of the neighbourhood. See image 7.13. Whereas in the city there is an intensity of relations among strangers of various socio-economic positions mixing in a contracted space (cf. Simmel 1997), in this nearly ideal-typical suburb, there is an intensity of middle-class familial relations (Archer 1983; Fishman 1987; Miller 1995) and an expansiveness of space in which to do a narrower range of activities.²³⁹

²³⁷ To be clear, the word *nature* is never used in either this book or *On Meadowview Street*.

²³⁸ Buffam (2011) finds a more extreme version of this urban–suburban dichotomy mobilized in his study.

²³⁹ It is worth noting that both this and the suburban neighbourhood in *On Meadowview Street* do not reproduce the racial homogeneity that significantly prevails in other versions of the dominant image of suburbia. In addition, the main characters' racialization seem indeterminate in both books, but especially so in the case of Caroline.



7.0.12. Jack shows Adam his bustling, densely populated, mixed use city neighbourhood. (Image by Linda Bleck. 2008. *The City Kid & The Suburb Kid*, n.p.)



7.0.13. Adam shows Jack his quiet, spacious, residential suburban neighbourhood. (Image by Linda Bleck. 2008. *The City Kid & The Suburb Kid*, n.p.)

The material construction of the book (that is, that one must physically flip the book upside down between stories) suggests, most extremely, that the suburb and the city are oppositional and incommensurate with each other. In this reading, the suburb is the obverse or inverse of the city: they are worlds apart. One must literally turn the city on its head to reach or have a proper perspective of the suburbs, and vice versa. Like Alice, who famously visits a topsy-turvy, mirror-image world in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass*, Adam and Jack visit worlds turned upside down, where what is said and what is seen do not align, creating an uneasy breach in meaning. Jack's experience of the suburb and Adam's experience of the city unfold like a classic tale of voyage: the protagonist adventurously discovers the place of the story and finds it to be uncanny in its strange familiarity but ultimately alienating otherness. Initially marvelling at the newness, the protagonist (and reader), through the course of the adventure, becomes familiar with the surroundings, but always fundamentally remains a stranger who eventually leaves the place. Both Jack and Adam have an experience of the strange familiarity but abiding and unassimilable otherness of that fantasy ("perfect") world of his cousin.

The suburban good life offered in this book *becomes meaningful* only when juxtaposed to the good life of the city through the cousins' experiences of each other's place. Whereas Adam starts off understanding his life in the suburbs to be unhappily dominated by his responsibility to contribute to maintaining private property, by tolerance of and dependence on his family, and by boredom, he later is able to appreciate these as providing for a distinctly suburban good life: one

marked by safety, recreation, and privacy. The comparison between the city experience and the suburban experience reiterates the dichotomization of *urban* experience into these two manifestations, with each offering a different fulfillment of the desire for a good life. Because they form a symbiotic binary, however, the suburb and the city are rendered mutually defining by their mutual exclusion: "In dualisms like urban-rural or public-private, each term is dependent on the other for its distinctness and definition.... In this system of meaning, the definition of terms and concepts ultimately is circular" (Shields 1996, 232). And we see this circularity rendered literally and haptically as, at the end of each story, the reader is enjoined to flip the book over and read the next story (see image 7.14). Again and again, Adam and Jack are constantly leaving and entering that uneasy place. They never cease desiring, hopefully and nostalgically. They never feel satisfied at home, never come to feel at home in the new environment, and never return home for good. Jack's and Adam's desires for the perfect place wax and wane endlessly. Yet, in the face of all this unsatisfied desire, hope, and nostalgia, and despite the uncanniness across the two sides of the stories, neither the city nor the suburb is disrupted. Each is left to be exactly as it was: "perfect" and flawed in its own way. For all the tension between the words and pictures and the need for the reader to make active interpretations, Jack and Adam never get to fulfill their desires or resolve their misgivings in a final way.



7.0.14. The middle of the physical book shows two worlds separated, opposed, and inverted. Each story ends and enjoins the reader to flip the book over. (Images by Linda Bleck. 2008. *The City Kid & The Suburb Kid*, n.p.)

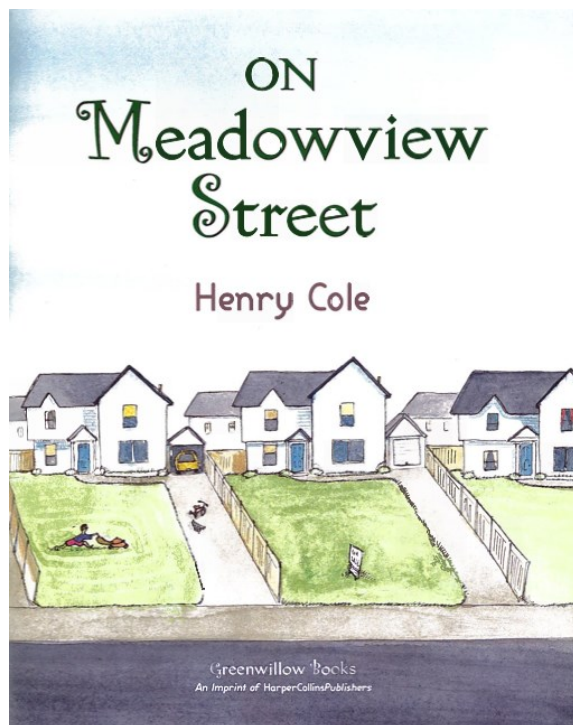
It is not insignificant that Jack is in the suburbs exceptionally: he is there for a short-term visit with no expectation that he will stay and fit into an ordinary rhythm of life. While the place of suburbia is presented as normal and quotidian, both Jack's and Adam's experience of it is liminal: their everyday concerns (such as Jack having to share his room with his brother or Adam having to mow the lawn) are suspended in deference to constant enjoyment; their usual social identities of brother or son are disrupted and recast as special guest and generous host. And, although the suburb Jack comes to discover is a world that is a known, preexisting place in which enactment of desire unfolds, through the liminoid processes of play and discovery, the suburb is detached from its broader contexts and reshaped as a liminal space in which the extraordinary is possible. Ultimately, each boy emerges from his visit with a new sense of his social identity and a strengthened desire for his own community: whereas before the visit, each boy may not have seen himself as a suburb kid or city kid, by the end, each boy has an affirmed sense of his identity and of what place counts as home.

For Jack and Adam, the already burgeoning suburban conditions of home, nurturing nature, and close family life are simply waiting to be discovered and mobilized through playful engagement. *The City Kid and the Suburb Kid*, by opening up spaces between texts, holds open possibilities for imagining new orientations and new understandings of the suburb. But, ultimately, these texts, by playing on (and playing up) normative variations of the urban–suburban dichotomy, render these pre-scribed imaginaries as the only possibilities to be enjoyed. For Caroline, on the other hand, the latent potential of the suburban promise is recognized and actualized only through her transformative intervention, guided by her desire for a home in beautiful nature. Whereas Jack and Adam inherit existing worlds into which they must fit, Caroline acts to create a world of her own making and her own desiring.

V. The Nature of Suburbia: On Meadowview Street

On Meadowview Street opens with an image of an austere row of three identical detached houses, fronted by flat, rectangular lawns and prominent driveways (see image 7.15). These configurations are separated by tall fences. Like figures in a paper doll chain, each house-lawn-driveway-fence configuration is identical to the next, with only minor passing differences: the

lawn of the middle house sports a realtor's "For Sale" sign, and another features an adult pushing (or chasing) a lawn mower in seemingly frantic labour. The uniformity, blandness, and consistent rectilinearity of the features and layout of the built environment suggest an unimaginative, artificial, and alienating suburban landscape. Perhaps it is one that might be familiar to the reader. Caroline and her parents arrive (from where or why, we don't know), and as their moving truck is unloaded, curious, if rather undifferentiated, neighbours look on as they walk by with dogs and children, or simply watch at a distance (see image 7.4).



7.0.15. The rectilinear Meadowview Street. (Image by Henry Cole. 2007. *On Meadowview Street*, n.p.)

Soon after unpacking, Caroline sets about "to explore the new street to see if there *was* a meadow on Meadowview Street" (n.p., emphasis in original). Before she gets very far, she notices a small flower in the yard and convinces her dad, who was about to cut the grass, to mow around it. She sets up stakes and string to form a "small wildflower preserve." As she notices more and more flowers, Caroline claims more and more of the lawn for her preserve. Eventually, the preserve of flowers and tall grass encompasses a large portion of the yard and her father sells off the lawnmower. With her parents, Caroline plants trees, creates ponds, and installs homemade birdhouses. In time, the yard becomes "a home to many things" as insects, birds, and

other creatures move in, and children come over to picnic. One by one, the neighbours follow Caroline's lead, re-landscaping their lawns and selling their mowers. By the end of the story, and answering the initial curiosity with the same words, "there really *was* a meadow on Meadowview Street" (emphasis in original) and, finally, "a home for everyone." Under these last words, Caroline stands with watering jug and trowel in hand, watching birds gathered around a birdhouse (see image 7.16). Here, "everyone" appears to refer to the birds, the transformed garden, and Caroline herself. Caroline has created a home for herself. The final image of the book parallels the first image: the three houses in a row. Now, instead of the bland, rectilinear house-lawn-driveway-fence configurations, there are birds flying over the lush, verdant gardens replete with trees, flowers, animals, and ponds that front and visually link together these same houses. Caroline is no longer seen in in this last image; one might guess that, having finished her heroic labour in making this place home, she has finally gone inside to dwell.



7.0.16. "... a home for everyone." (Image by Henry Cole. 2007. *On Meadowview Street*, n.p.)

In this book, the suburb as a context for a relationship to nature and a place for home is primary. It is problematized inasmuch as the suburb in which Caroline initially arrives seems merely to simulate nature and home (and a home in nature), displaying isolated elements of natureness or homeness, or hinting at abstract ideas rather than realizing them. The fundamental

questions of whether a home in nature or a home in suburbia is desirable or good remain unasked; indeed these are taken for granted as desirable. This image of suburbia as a home in nature (which, of course, we also see in *The City Kid and the Suburb Kid*) echoes early and still dominant ideals of the modern suburb as a marriage of city and nature, town and country. In the nineteenth century,

the ideal of suburbia as a place of quiet, beauty, wealth, and Arcadian [i.e., pastoral] delights became a powerful and influential new paradigm. It represented the spatial expression of a new value system that emerged out of broad changes in society, economy, religion, and culture. Rooted deeply in the history of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—across national boundaries—the elite suburb came to express a new bourgeois conception of the world (Nicolaides and Wiese 2006, 14. See also Archer 1983; Howard 1965; Loudon 2006).

This suburban ideal is based on Romantic ideas of nature. With its origins in eighteenth century Europe, Romanticism was both a backlash to and an outgrowth of Enlightenment rationalist philosophy (Berlin 1999). In this view, nature is interpreted to be "a realm of general perfection both morally above and ontologically prior to the corruptions and vices of human society" (Archer 2005, 158) particularly concentrated in the cities. Appearing in the nineteenth century in the United States and redefining "nature as benign and virtuous—rather than dangerous or threatening," the Romantics "emphasized the value of nature as a vehicle for human perfection and a source of contact with the divine" (Nicolaides and Wiese 2006, 14). Guiding the exercise toward human perfection is "the indomitable will," one of the central elements of Romanticism (Berlin 1999). That is,

you create your own vision of the universe, exactly as artists create works of art—and before the artist has created a work of art, it does not exist, it is not anywhere.... The heart of the entire process is invention, creation, making, out of literally nothing, or out of any materials that may be to hand. The most central aspect of this view is that your universe is as you choose to make it, to some degree at any rate (Berlin 1999, 119).

In this view, "the universe is a process of perpetual forward self-thrusting, perpetual self-creation" (ibid.). If one is able to recognize that the creative force of the universe is also in oneself, then the universe, that is, the natural world, appears *friendly* and one will "at last be free" (Berlin 1999, 120). Much in this way, it is through Caroline's labour that the potential for the ideals of a home in nature and a self agentically produced through the placing of home are finally actualized. Like the Romantics' redefined relationship to nature, the revised promise of the suburban good life that *On Meadowview Street* offers is one that embraces a benign, co-creative

nature. This promise replaces the one with which Caroline's family is initially confronted, a place that struggles against an unruly nature that must constantly be confronted and overwhelmed. Caroline shows that instead of taming nature, suburbanites can foster it, repurposing existing suburban spaces into ones that might sustain the flourishing of an abundance of life.



7.0.17. Nature restoring itself after destructive human intervention is halted. (Image by Henry Cole. 2007. *On Meadowview Street*, n.p.)

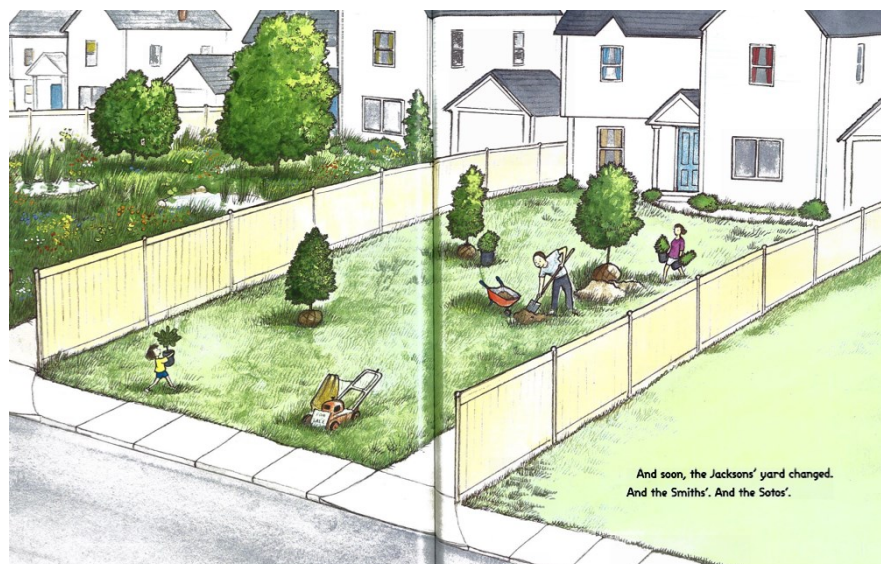
The book's implicit critique of the alienated conditions of suburban living and the failure of mass-produced built environments to fulfill the promise of and desire for suburbia is an important one. More vociferous detractors of suburbia argue that it is a failure aesthetically and ethically: that it is uninspiring, unimaginative, and inauthentic, harbouring conformity, complacency, and isolation—it "actively erodes the interactive social foundations of everyday life" (Thompson 2006, 35). They decry the failure in imagination that reproduce such a suburbia, and which exploits the signs of a good life in a good place but ultimately does not deliver upon it (e.g., Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Speck 2003; Knox 2005; Kunstler 1993; Thompson 2006). *On*

Meadowview Street illustrates an ecological, and thus more holistic, orientation to understanding a system of nature, showing that the suburban yard might be transformed from a monocultural lawn into a place hosting a diversity of flora and fauna. It offers what seems to be a *return* to a more natural nature—it seems when the lawn stops being mowed that the always-already present wild nature can self-actualize without the destructive interference of constant human activity (see image 7.17). The book shows the wasteland version of suburbia—or "soulless suburbia and its faux-bucolic trappings" (Mattson 2007, 70)—then challenges the image, showing that care and effort, and expression of desire, can create a vital and sustaining place. In this way, the story quietly and gently offers solutions to a few major critiques of suburbia: by showing the transformation of possibility (*Meadow-view*) to actuality (a supposedly more natural nature), the story seems to suggest that suburbia need not be an artificial, barren, and utilitarian agglomeration of tract housing that destroys and wastes natural spaces for singular human use. Caroline's heroic efforts, supported by her parents and reaffirmed by her neighbours' efforts, suggest that the promise of the good life lying dormant in the suburban landscape can be vitalized with some agentic intervention. In the end, however, it does not fundamentally challenge the dominant promise or desire of an isolated and privately owned, single-family home. It goes only so far as to offer a way of abiding in these conditions alongside a less-reified version of an idea of nature.²⁴⁰

This narrative of recovering the real promise of the suburbs accepts an ideal of the suburban good life that relies on premises of a separate domestic space—the home as an expression and extension of one's self (Archer 2005; Bachelard 1964; Benjamin 1999; Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981), and privately owned property as a necessary sanctuary for the middle-class, heteronormative family (Fishman 1987); suburbia as a marriage of city and nature; and nature as an aestheticized ethical experience (Duncan and Duncan 2001; see also Olmstead 1968). Thus, rather than overturning those ideals, the story reproduces a fetishization of nature and romanticizes a narrative of mastery and perfection. It is the story of a single, heroic, self-actualizing and world-actualizing individual actively changing the environmental place and (perhaps) the social culture of her new community. Through her perfection of place and expression of will, she actualizes herself and places herself. In Caroline's

²⁴⁰ On the "idea" of nature, see Williams (2005b). Duncan and Duncan (2001) show the hidden work that the idea of wild nature is made to do to protect socio-economic privilege and exclusion.

relentless effort to create a meadow in her backyard, the story reaffirms the promise that home can indeed be a reflection and extension of the interiorized self, and that making home is an act of agentic self-actualization. That the neighbourhood is made a meadow entirely through actions on discrete household properties by individual families, rather than, for example, through a coordinated community effort, further suggests that home should be seen not only as a reflection of self, but also as an expression of private, bounded, *family* life (see image 7.18). The neighbourhood is united aesthetically in nature-like beauty, rather than ethically in community. When it comes to their own family, however, Caroline's parents' quiet and active support reinforces the ideal of the heteronormative family as a nurturing, emotional unit, grounded in the guarantee of nature itself (Fishman 1987). This nature they create is an aesthetic and ethical nature: one that extends caring, by being "home," to other living creatures.



7.0.18. Neighbourhood transformation, one private plot at a time. (Image by Henry Cole. 2007. *On Meadowview Street*, n.p.)

Despite *On Meadowview Street*'s apparent critique against it, the ideal-type suburb of its opening pages, characterized by uniformity and conformity, is not ultimately challenged. By the end of the book, the uniformity of the houses is again re-established, if revised aesthetically and with the possibility that the street might be more environmentally sustainable. Although Caroline expresses her own desires in her labouring, when the neighbours follow suit, they seem merely to imitate Caroline's aesthetic example. Whereas she processually responds to the affordances of

the garden with no apparent master plan except to rescue and fulfill the meadowness of her suburban space,²⁴¹ the neighbours reproduce her final outcome (see image 7.19). The book illustrates a movement toward a different sort of sameness despite its apparent attempt to show fulfillment of one's desires through the enactment of one's capacity.



7.0.19. From last page of the story, showing the transformed Meadowview Street as more beautiful and more "natural" in its new uniformity. (Image by Henry Cole. 2007. *On Meadowview Street*, n.p.)

VI. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have looked at the idea and the promise of the suburbs as illustrated in two recent picture books about the suburban landscape. Both of these books respond to a shared desire for a pleasant, mutually generous, and mutually nurturing relationship with nature, a place that supports the protective and loving sphere of family togetherness, a place for kids to be kids unassaulted by the woes of urban life,²⁴² and all of these combining to make home. In their respective articulations, they affirm that suburbia is desirable and a good life is supported by it. In *The City Kid and the Suburb Kid*, the good life of suburbia is simply waiting to be appreciated

²⁴¹ See Tiessen (2011) on affordances and capacities.

²⁴² See Buffam (2011) for a discussion of the ideal of innocent childhood.

(acknowledging that this version of the good life does not appeal to everyone, as eventually "the city kid" discovers). In *On Meadowview Street*, the good life and good home lying in potential in the suburbs must be actualized through active intervention.

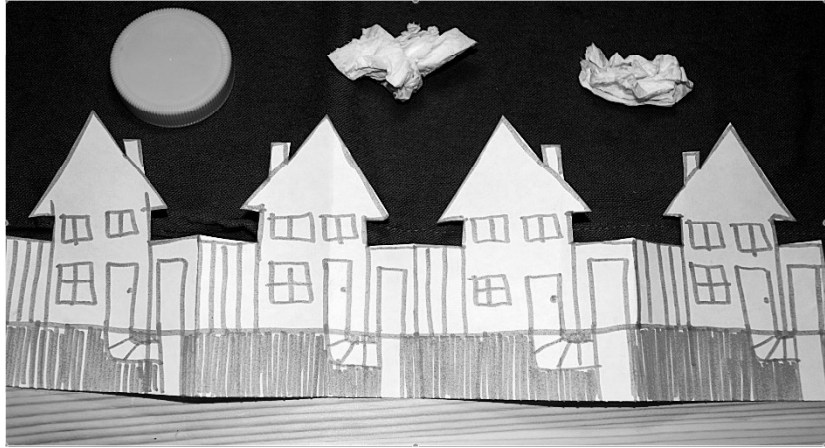
In these books, the liminality and marginality of the child, the picture book genre, and suburbia come together to a potentially radical conjunction. Young children, both the intended audience and the represented suburbanites of these particular picture books, are liminal, occupying a marginal, at times invisible, social status in a world dominated by adults. Typically seen to be in a process of becoming, they are understood to be full of a future-oriented potential to be, but are ever not-yet. Yet, while socially marginal, they are, simultaneously and paradoxically, also culturally central (if fetishized) in justifications of suburbia. The picture book is also liminal as a marginal literary genre in which ambivalences within and between the multiple co-present texts can proliferate irreconcilable readings, opening up fecund gaps of meaning. This exceptionally flexible and "unconventional" medium "frequently possess[es] a playful and subversive quality" and may be (and quite often is) used for challenging, ridiculing, and subverting dominant, normative perspectives (Lewis 1996, 260). The suburb, too, is liminal, in no small part because it continues to be at least partially disavowed, contested, and misrecognized in its multiplexity, while also being the primary imagined space of home and the family. Spatially peripheral and culturally marginal (that is, rarely understood to be the site of "culture"), the suburbs form the expansive perimeters of the city and of the urban imaginary. Suburbia is also interstitial: imagined to be not quite urban and not quite rural, suburbs always seem, moreover, to be in the process of development yet remaining perpetually incomplete. This proliferation of liminalities holds open the possibility of transforming these containable *liminal* eruptions into a radical *liminoid* break, which might surpass merely reappropriating the promise of suburbia to radically recast the desire for a good life in a revelatory and liberating imaginary.

Both books do challenge some conventions, with Caroline creating a renewed vision of nature in suburbia, and Jack and Adam venturing through multiple overlapping and at times incongruent relationships between the suburb and the city. But in the end, for all their possibilities, their liminoid potential subsides into a bounded liminal eruption. Thus, the story of *The City Kid and the Suburb Kid* unfolds as an endless transition: with Jack and Adam coming and going, visiting but never staying. And Caroline, too, is seen only in transition as she moves to her new suburban place on Meadowview Street, and then works to transform it into a home.

Once she has successfully made the place her home, she is no longer visible to the reader. The books become tools for re-enforcing and displaying hegemonic ethical, aesthetic, and practical bases for judgments, illustrating recognizable and reiterated cultural imaginaries. The imaginaries reify the suburb as a familiar place that fulfills normative desires for an ideologically appropriate home in a safe place imbued with nature and family. It is a place that fulfills the desire for a limited and present-oriented conception of a good, happy, and well-placed life in which to raise young children. With both books, the idea of suburbia and the desire for the suburban good life are explored but remain fundamentally unchallenged.

Chapter 7 Coda

In the published version, the following captioned images accompanied this chapter as a paratextual gallery. The interspersed of these not-directly related images throughout the chapter was not explained but appeared as an implicitly complementary/supplementary/dissonant but separate text. In this way, like the books discussed in the chapter, the chapter itself acted as a "picture book" in which images and text invite the reader into an active meaning-making process, reading between and across the two types of texts.



Coda 7.0.1. Suburbia as a paper doll chain: a suburban ideal-type? (Photo credit: O.Park)



Coda 7.0.2. Suburbia glimpsed through the back window of a moving vehicle. A child's-eye view of the suburbs? (Photo credit: O.Park)



Coda 7.0.3. Ubiquitous suburbanization? (Photo credit: O.Park)



Coda 7.0.4. Rectilinear suburbia. (Photo credit: O.Park)



Coda 7.0.5. "Cookie cutter" suburb. (Photo credit: O.Park)



Coda 7.0.6. Suburban encroachment on green field. Suburbia versus "nature"? (Photo credit: O.Park)



Coda 7.0.7. Reformed suburbia? (Photo credit: O.Park)



Coda 7.0.8. Suburban home in nature? (Photo credit: O.Park)

Chapter 8.²⁴³

Ambivalence and Strangeness in the Everyday Utopianism of Suburbia²⁴⁴

Suburbia is a site of deep cultural ambivalences. Comprised of both physical places that we have come to recognize as "the suburbs," as well as imaginaries represented in, for example, pop cultural depictions, *suburbia* is a complex of fictions, realities, ideas, and materialisations. It is a ground upon which ordinary, daily life is enacted and rooted. It is, at the same time, a strange depth inhabited by mysterious and barely imaginable creatures, in which absurd, fantastic,

²⁴³ A version of this chapter has been published. Park, Ondine. 2011. *Public* 43: 110–24. There are more images included within this chapter than in the published version. Additionally, the images appear in a different layout than in the publication.

²⁴⁴ Sincerest thanks to Kevin Huizenga and Shaun Tan for generously allowing me to include images from their respective works in the published version. Thanks also to Barret Weber, Rob Shields, Matthew Unger, Heidi Bickis, and the editors and reviewers of the special issue in which this article was originally published, who provided insightful feedback on various earlier versions. An early draft of this paper was work-shopped at Theory Building, the University of Alberta's 3rd Annual Space and Culture Research Group Theory Retreat. Thanks to participants of the retreat for their engaged discussion especially Val Napoleon, Bryan Sluggett, and Tonya Davidson.

wondrous, monstrous things happen, following an improbable, perhaps unrecognizable, logic. At once ordinary and strange, suburbia is also a promise of utopia. But this promise fluctuates, unreconciled, between an aspiration that is emancipatory and shared—one that provides for the good life universally—and a concretization that is (itself paradoxically) both individual and totalizing—one that provides for a comfortably insulated life for some, excluding all others in its rationalizing logic. I suggest the image of suburbia revolves around multiple such axes of cultural ambivalences and I explore these by looking at creative works that take suburbia as a commonplace site with extraordinary depth.

I. Everyday Suburbia

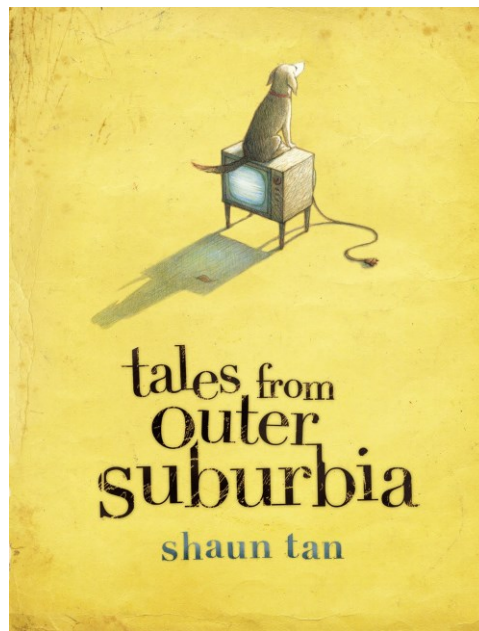
Any generic descriptions of suburbia might equally well be applied to *the everyday*. In particular, both the everyday and suburbia are taken to be common: They are "common" in the senses of shared, ordinary, and widespread, but this sense of commonness also leads to the sense of vulgar and without distinction. From this assumption of normalcy, ubiquity, and triteness derive the predilection to hold both everyday life and suburbia as precisely lacking quality; that is, lacking distinguishing features and lacking worth. If the everyday (as also suburbia) is that which is so common or repetitious as to fade unobserved into a monotonous background, then much of what happens in the everyday also escapes notice—it slips away without attention or recognition. As Maurice Blanchot puts it, "the everyday is what we never see for a first time, but only see again, having always already seen it by an illusion that is, as it happens, constitutive of the everyday" (Blanchot 1987, 14). This characteristic of self-effacement, in which we experience the everyday primarily as illusion, only seeing it when we pay attention to look a second time, gives the everyday over to abstraction: "This is a world that we are so inured to that we often inhabit it as if anaesthetized, in which we wander about distractedly whilst in a kind of 'dreamless sleep'" (Gardiner 2004, 229). In this state of inattentive abstraction, the appearance of things as they are is taken to be natural and acquire a certain sense of necessity (Gardiner 2004, 246; see also Benjamin 1969): The everyday is the register at which ideology acquires hegemony. But, it is also, for this same effacement, that which escapes control. If the everyday is what we fail to see or what we are unable to register, then anything—an event, a disaster, a catastrophe, a miracle—

can erupt in and emerge from the everyday at any moment, all of a sudden and unexpected precisely because the conditions of its possibility remain unrecognizable; or, having been there all along, it becomes expressed or noticed only extraordinarily. Blanchot suggests, "[t]here must be no doubt about the dangerous essence of the everyday, nor about this uneasiness that seizes us each time that, by an unforeseeable leap, we stand back from it and, facing it, we discover that precisely nothing faces us." Blanchot identifies this "secret destructive capacity" at play in the everyday as the power of dissolution, "the corrosive force of human anonymity, the infinite wearing away" (Blanchot 1987, 19).

But, while it may be the case that everyday life will, as a matter of routine and a necessary repetition, always have a sense of monotony or banality; it isn't an inherent quality of everyday life that it is alienating and meaningless. It is, rather, "the uncritical, thoughtless submersion in the everyday that marks it as a site" that appears to be apolitical (Kogl 2009, 521; see also Kogl 2008). Moreover, while it may be the case that we live in a world increasingly dominated by suburbanisation, planned environments, and tending towards uniformity,²⁴⁵ it is not a matter of course that we accept and give in to the colonization and rationalization of local and particular physical and social worlds by a universalizing economism, techno-bureaucratism, and risk calculism. Thus, a distinction must be drawn between the conditions of everyday life and suburbanisation within the context of late capitalism, which are increasingly limited, and their *meanings* and *possibilities*, which are multiple. The everyday remains "an inchoate and heterodox mix of fluid, multiple and symbolically-dense practices and ways of feeling and knowing" (Gardiner 2004, 230). It is marked by a tension between its enactment as an apolitical and deadening sphere of routinized daily life and as the fertile ground for creative action. This creative action may register as terrifying or liberating: chaotic or utopian. The more a particular limited normalcy is enforced and accepted, which turns on an opposition between what may be included and what must be excluded, the more possibilities and potentialities are rendered invisible and escape notice. This may, in turn, lead to greater fear of something (anything) happening without warning or being always already present but unnoticed until an event seems suddenly to unfold, such as we see in an orientation to risk and insecurity. In such an orientation, the greater the sense of terror when alternatives become manifest, the more horrific become the

²⁴⁵ Henri Lefebvre (1987) remarked, "Today we see a worldwide tendency to uniformity. Rationality dominates, accompanied but not diversified by irrationality" (7).

possibility of possibilities, and the more uncanny the ordinary becomes.²⁴⁶ When the everyday is understood in these terms of absolute impossibility and alienation, then the contexts and ramifications of life lived at the register of the everyday seem to be free-floating, un beholden to history or larger structures of power. It appears as if everyday life simply happens and as if choices made in this sphere are entirely individual. This has given rise to a proliferation of technologies and mechanisms that attempt (e.g., through consumption or enclosure) both to concretize and hoard such virtualities (e.g., happiness) and to fend them off (e.g., risk).²⁴⁷ However, while the everyday may, thus, become a site of fearfulness and terror, it also bears unnoticed utopian possibilities of liberatory revolution, of radical creativity, of delight and fulfilment.



8.0.1. Shaun Tan's *Tales from Outer Suburbia*, cover

Utopianism, for Henri Lefebvre and many critical theorists of the everyday, lies precisely in first *re-cognizing* everyday life. As Lefebvre muses, "Are not the surreal, the extraordinary, the surprising, even the magical, also part of the real? Why wouldn't the concept of everydayness reveal the extraordinary in the ordinary?" To begin to enact utopian possibilities, then, everyday

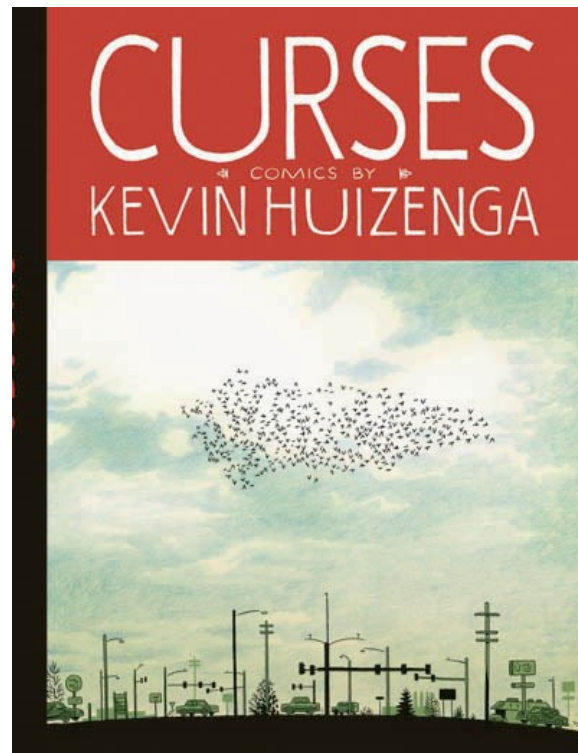
²⁴⁶ As Sigmund Freud (n.d.) explains, the uncanny (*unheimlich*—literally, the unhomely) is "a class of frightening things" that "proceeds from something familiar which has been repressed" (n.p.).

²⁴⁷ On the concept of virtuality, see Shields (2003); Davidson, Park, and Shields (2011).

life must be "rendered strange or unfamiliar, in order to grasp how it is mediated by a wide range of sociocultural, political and economic factors" (Lefebvre 1987, 9). Michael Gardiner (2006) explains that

the ordinary can become extraordinary not by eclipsing the everyday, or imagining we can leap beyond it arbitrarily to some "higher" level of cognition, knowledge or action, but by fully appropriating and activating the possibilities that lie hidden, and typically repressed, within it. Such an enriched experience can then be redirected back to daily life in order to transform it (3).

This transformation requires recognizing that the everyday is not inherently apolitical but tends to appear that way and, as such, must be repoliticized (Kogl 2009, 516).



8.0.2. Kevin Huizenga's *Curses*, cover

Suburbia—both wonderful and pathetic for its everyday banality—is, like the everyday itself, more than an obvious landscape of superficial ordinariness. It is also strange and uncanny: If one attends to the repressed, disavowed, and hidden, then uncomfortable, perhaps accidental, glimpses alight upon an alternate world that is simultaneously all around but hidden from ordinary view. We see this ambivalence of the simultaneously held ordinariness/ strangeness of

suburbia played out in countless horror movies or comedies, for example, wherein a predictable, almost boring suburban everyday life acts as a backdrop or cover for an unfolding of weird events.²⁴⁸ We see this also in the daily parade of startling or horrifying suburban news stories about home invasions, domestic violence and sexual abuse, and grow ops, that momentarily undo feelings of domestic comfort whilst reinscribing the perceived necessity of such havens of safety. For an evocative look at the ambivalent, haunting, even uncanny quality of the parallel experiences of everyday life (the banal and the strange), I turn to two recent graphic novels²⁴⁹ about life in suburbia: Kevin Huizenga's *Curses*, a series of loosely connected stories about "suburban everyman"²⁵⁰ Glenn Ganges, and Shaun Tan's *Tales from Outer Suburbia*, a series of unconnected stories, each exploring the particularities and peculiarities of suburbia.

II. Strange People

The strangeness of everyday life in suburbia acquires an uncanny quality under conditions of taken-for-granted alienation. In a number of stories, Tan and Huizenga explore a sense of unease that creeps in as figures, things and relations that, according to the unspoken rules of *public secrecy*,²⁵¹ ought not to have been acknowledged, become the object of attention in an otherwise homely, familiar suburban setting. In Tan's "Stick Figures," a narrator describes human-shaped figures made of broken tree branches and dirt-clod for heads who wander about suburbs—animate but seemingly proto-conscious. The narrator indicates that these figures "have always been here, since before anyone remembers, since before the bush was cleared and all the houses were built" (Tan 2008b, 65). The horror of these beings turns on two qualities: first, there is the

²⁴⁸ Movies as diverse as *Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984, dir. Wes Craven), *Blue Velvet* (1986, dir. David Lynch), *Happiness* (1998, dir. Todd Solondz), and *The Incredibles* (2004, dir. Brad Bird) set suburbs as the site of strange, often terrible, happenings, largely hidden from view under a veneer of ordinariness. TV shows also play on this ambivalence. See, for example, *Weeds* (season 1, 2005), *Dexter* (season 4, 2009), *I Dream of Jeannie* (1965–1970), *Bewitched* (1964–1972).

²⁴⁹ There is no standard definition of what comprises a graphic novel and no clear delineation between "comics" (the term Huizenga uses to describe his book) or picture books (the term Tan uses). I use the term to distinguish these books from serial daily comic strips. This broad genre of books that is primarily aimed at adults and emphasizes the equally important use of pictures and words.

²⁵⁰ This phrase comes from Arrant (2007).

²⁵¹ The public secret is that knowledge which everyone knows to not know: It is a collective disavowal. See Taussig (1999).

terrifying flickering between pure biological existence (*zoe*, life as such) and a sort of human-like quality (*bios*, a human life) that they embody. They form themselves out of materials at hand and are able to walk about; yet they submit, utterly passively, to destruction at the hands of local teenage boys.²⁵² In addition, and supplementing this ambiguous life status, their very existence appears daily to confront the suburban dwellers with a silent accusation.



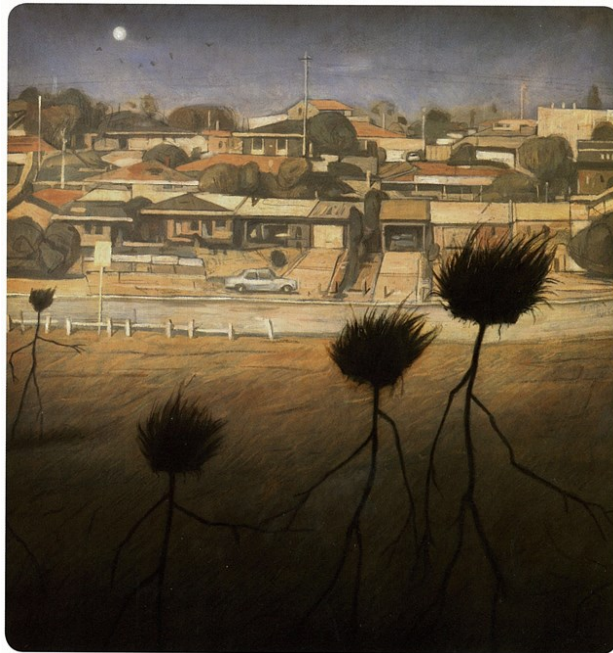
8.0.3. An uncanny stick figure sticking around in suburbia. (Image by Shaun Tan, 2008. "Stick Figures." In *Tales from Outer Suburbia*, 65.)

This accusation clearly does not come from the stick figures, who appear to lack words or gestures. It must, then, be a projection of the suburbanites themselves. The suburbanites wonder of these enigmatic figures, "Are they here for a reason?" As symbols come to life of a colonized nature, spirit, and/or colonized peoples (perhaps specifically the indigenous people of Australia) who have been reduced literally to stick figures, they are as spectres that haunt the suburb. They are uncanny. As Freud (1985) notes,

an uncanny effect is often and easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced, as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality, or when a symbol takes over the full functions of the thing it symbolizes, and so on (367).

²⁵² They are very much like *homo sacer* described by Agamben (1998).

The narrator notes, "It's impossible to know, but if you stop and stare at them for a long time," one begins to feel questions being returned: "It's as if they take all our questions and offer them straight back: Who are you? Why are you here? What do you want?" The suburban dwellers who perceive themselves to be the ones who belong find themselves terrifyingly reminded that they themselves are the unwelcome, dangerous strangers. From the perspective of those who dwelled before, then, the suburban home owners are the most dangerous kinds of strangers: Those who come today and stay tomorrow (Simmel 1971) and, moreover, claim the place, dis-place the foundations of the old socialities and political formations, and institute new ones.



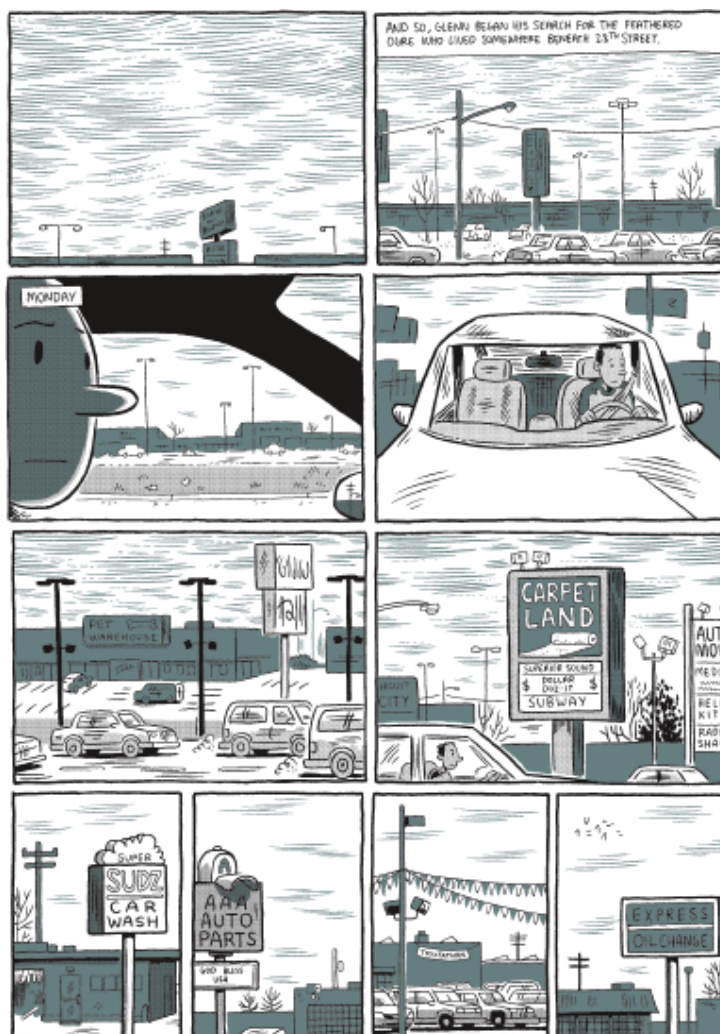
8.0.4. "It's as if they take all our questions and offer them straight back: Who are you? Why are you here? What do you want?" (Image by Shaun Tan. 2008. "Stick Figures." In *Tales from Outer Suburbia*, 69.)

In Huizenga's tale "28th Street" in *Curses*, Glenn Ganges and his wife Wendy desperately seek a remedy to their infertility. They unsuccessfully undergo an exhausting gamut of procedures starting with medical testing, through adoption procedures, to increasingly unconventional and bizarre medical, sexual and spiritual methods. Finally, his doctor concludes that Glenn is cursed and the only way to lift the curse is to pluck a feather from the ogre who is rumoured to lurk somewhere beneath 28th Street. Glenn accepts the challenge and goes through

a series of disorienting and dislocating procedures as he spends a week driving to and fro along this big box-store shopping corridor, trying to locate the ogre.

Over the course of the week, Glenn meets a series of strangers who provide him with guidance as well as items that, simultaneously, are banal and bear magical properties: A gas station attendant, who suffers from migraines, allows Glenn to douse himself with the gasoline, which gives visions; a waitress, who has sore elbows after twenty years of serving, bestows upon him an enchanted Styrofoam take-out container that produces whatever food one desires; and a bag boy at Eden's Mega Mart one-stop shop, offers him a plastic bag that, once donned, becomes a mask with protective qualities. These strangers, like the dreary–mysterious 28th Street on which they work, and the ordinary–extraordinary items they give to Glenn, are ambivalent. They are the people one might ordinarily meet in one's daily suburban routine and, as such, be so familiar as to elude particular notice. At the same time, they provide access to astounding material objects that bear mystical, otherworldly properties. This ambivalence—the simultaneity of opposing characteristics that remain unresolved—is reiterated with each encounter: Glenn pays for his gas purchase and asks after the ogre. Registering equal attentiveness and matter-of-factness to both matters, the attendant rings in the purchase, informs Glenn of the enchanted gas, then goes to get a form for Glenn to sign so that Glenn can spray himself with the gas. The seemingly ordinary act of purchasing gas is coupled with the extraordinary revelation of enchantment. The extraordinary revelation of enchantment is coupled with the bureaucratic task of signing a form. After he's done eating at the diner, the waitress asks if Glenn wants anything else. He asks for the bill and whether she knows anything about the ogre. She replies that she doesn't, but gives him the enchanted Styrofoam food container in case it might help, and notes it requires four "D" batteries. The seemingly ordinary exchange of food and service for money (but which is itself a kind of universalizing magic) (Benjamin 1996) becomes aligned with a magical gift economy as the waitress gives Glenn the enchanted container and requests reciprocity through healing. This magical gift is overlaid with the more mundane necessity that, like any gift, batteries are not included. Yet, this mundane necessity takes Glenn to Eden's Mega Mart, where he asks the clerk and the young man bagging his purchases if they know where to find the ogre. The man bagging the batteries answers that he does and relates a dream he has been having since he arrived from Sudan that makes it impossible for him to sleep. This dream is about the ogre and a devil and their terrible monthly feast. He warns Glenn that if the ogre or devil sees

him, they will eat him, gives him the enchanted plastic bag, and agrees to point out the devil when he comes into the shop. Again, the ordinary act of purchase is coupled with the extraordinary revelation of a prophetic dream, another magical gift, and another relationship forged out of mutual help and solidarity. With the aid of the strangers' gifts and insights, Glenn eventually succeeds in finding the ogre in the basement of the mega mart. He plucks a feather and returns home, relieving the strangers of their ailments along the way. He and his wife have a baby. This story aptly illustrates Lefebvre's insight that the everyday is interpenetrated by both the ordinary and extraordinary, and that by paying heed to the extraordinary within the ordinary, one can appropriate and activate its unseen possibilities.



8.0.5. "And so, Glenn began his search for the feathered ogre who lived somewhere beneath 28th Street." (Image by Kevin Huizenga. 2006. "28th Street." In *Curses*, 57.)

Like "Stick Figures," this story turns on the ambivalence of the figure of the stranger. The familiarity of their everyday routines and roles along with the nearness and intimacy of Glenn's engagement with them is juxtaposed with the frightening unknownness and unknowability that they ultimately represent. For Georg Simmel, the stranger is the one who is at once proximate and familiar, sharing certain qualities and habits, while remaining unknown and mysterious, sharing only the most universal of qualities and differing greatly on more specific matters. He suggests that the "strangeness" of strangers is not that they are so different as to be utterly incomprehensible and outside of the realm of understanding:

It is rather caused by the fact that similarity, harmony, and nearness are accompanied by the feeling that they are not really the unique property of this particular relationship: they are something more general, something which potentially prevails between the partners and an indeterminate number of others, and therefore gives the relation, which alone was realized, no inner and exclusive necessity (Simmel 1971, 3).

For Simmel, proximity is key. The stranger's familiarity and nearness are experienced as unsettling rather than assuring. Zygmunt Bauman, taking the political analysis of the stranger further, suggests that the stranger is the figure that is outside of the binary relation of friend and enemy. While the friend and enemy are mutually defined and knowable, constituted by a relation of sociality (responsibility and moral duty with respect to the friend, renunciation of responsibility and moral duty with respect to the enemy), the stranger is the one who occupies neither position and indeed threatens to undo not only the two positions but the underlying myth of the universality of the friend–enemy dichotomy (i.e., that these two relations encompass all possible relations) thus threatening the very foundation upon which all social and political life is founded. The stranger's allegiances can never be known for sure. Bauman (1991) notes that the stranger is an *undecidable*—one who resists and disorganizes binary oppositions yet never constitute a third term, remaining uncategorizable and unrepresentable (55).²⁵³ As such, the stranger, like the disavowed or unrecognized elements of the everyday, constitutes a potential threat or revelation.

The strangeness of the strangers encountered on 28th Street is less manifest than the overt alienness of Tan's stick figures, but one acquires a sense that they partake in a deeper strangeness than meets the eye in reading through *Curses*. A couple of the stranger-figures are reiterated in other stories in the collection. The bag boy at Eden's is a Sudanese émigré, tying this story to the

²⁵³ In this explanation, Bauman is invoking Derrida.

immediately preceding story, "Lost and Found"—a meditation on the subject of lost and missing children. As part of that story, Glenn reads a newspaper article aloud to Wendy about "the lost boys" of Sudan who were brutally displaced by civil war. After years of catastrophic turmoil and abjection, unable to make a normal life for themselves at home, some of these young men were relocated to Michigan under refugee status, and, Glenn's newspaper tells us, a few found jobs at Eden's. Yet, as the newspaper article continues, despite the cataclysmic devastation of the civil war in Sudan, it has remained "relatively unnoticed in the west." This stranger who appears as a bag boy, who turns out to have supernatural insight into ogres lurking in mega marts, turns out to have a deeply haunted past himself, which, given "the west's" disavowal of the larger historic events, is not a personal history that likely can be guessed or brought up in casual encounters. In a later story, "Not Sleeping Together," a waitress with sore elbows briefly appears, serving insomniac customers at a 24-hour diner. We gather obliquely, eventually, that the customers appear to include the undead. Although this specific waitress is almost certainly not the same one that appears in "28th Street," the recurrence of parallel characters living out different, astonishing stories highlights their abiding strangeness—that is, their unknownness (or, perhaps, their disavowed knownness). Under conditions of contemporary life in the vast networks of suburban and metropolitan communities, we are all such strangers in one way or another: we might live with neighbours with whom we share only postal codes and commuter routes, or have colleagues or friends with whom we share only a limited sphere of interest. Yet, with these ubiquitous strangers, we conspire in extraordinary acts of magic (e.g., capitalist exchange) and faith (e.g., sociality) in the daily interactions and engagements that constitute our everyday lives. This is the terrain of the public secret: These magical dealings with strangers are faithfully enacted, but this mutual reliance either remains unacknowledged or is actively disavowed (Taussig 1999). The conceit that suburban living is characterized by autonomy and independence is made a lie by this collective but repressed collusion.

III. Strange Place

Such lies and myths help constitute a place. Any place is composed of the many overlapping individual and collective, expressed and repressed, actual and virtual, physical and fabled,

official and lived, and experienced and promissory layers that multiply constitute it as a territorial, physical space, an imagined place, and a complex of social, cultural, and political relations (see Lefebvre 1991, de Certeau 1984). Suburban landscapes in "28th Street" and in Tan's "Our Expedition" are revealed to be places of mystery with a pervading sense of desperation in their characteristic uniformity and uncanny indistinctiveness. Cleverly, this barely locatable landscape in which the sense of place is suspended or *dis*-placed becomes the necessary backdrop for a fantastic quest in both stories. The monotony of the suburban landscape becomes a hypnotic opening into an alternate dimension.

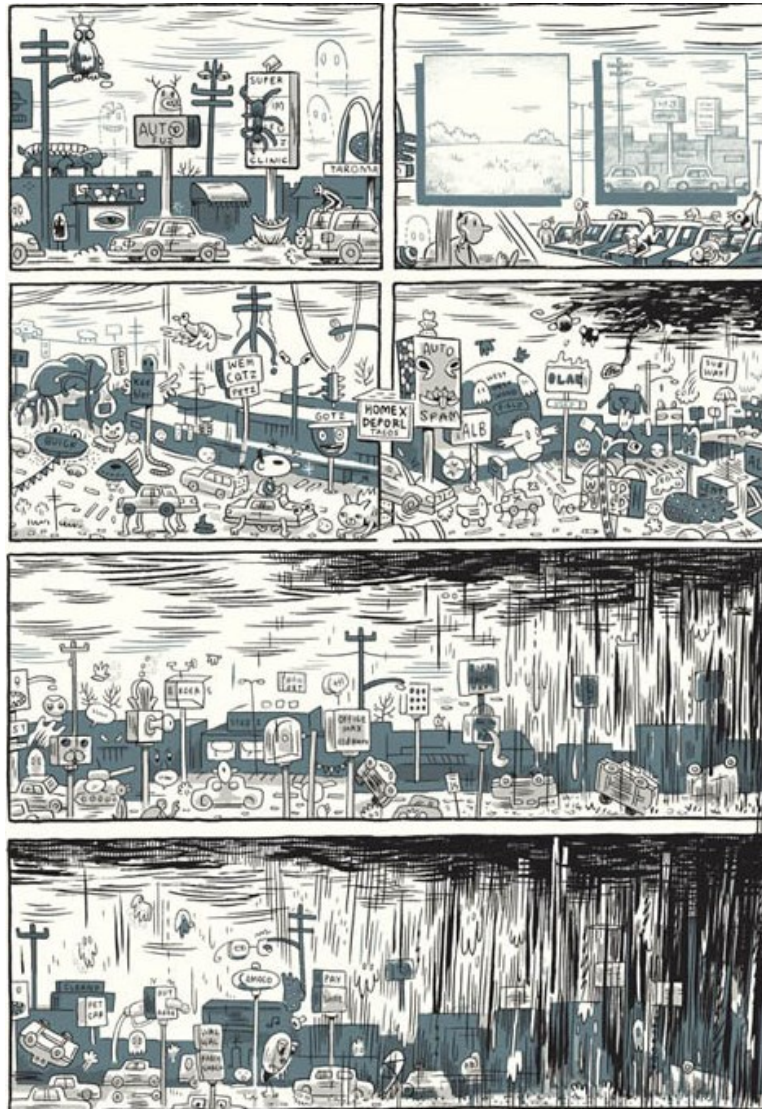


8.0.6. "Where there once was forest and farmland..." (Image by Kevin Huizenga. 2006. "28th Street." In *Curses*, 56.)

As Glenn initially sets out in search of the feathered ogre, narrative captions over illustrations of the mundane 28th Street indicate that formerly a small country road, it was now one of the slowest, most unpleasant stretches of road in Michigan. Where there once was forest and farmland now grew countless fast food franchises, car dealerships, strip malls, pet supply warehouses, "neighborhood" bar and grill chain restaurants, superstores, multiplexes, and parking lots (Huizenga 2006, 56).

Although so generic as to seem a meaningless non-place, this everyday landscape is not without

meaning. Its meaning, both too obvious to miss and for that reason too glaring to pay heed, is economic primacy. Given that many of the shops are multinational corporations, it is specifically about the primacy of globalized economism.



8.0.7. The secrets of 28th Street. (Image by Kevin Huizenga. 2006. "28th Street." In *Curses*, 61.)

This suburban commercial strip is not meant to be a space of politics, of mythologies, of poetics, of being a local place: it is a landscape of buying and selling, commuting and driving (see Kogl 2008). Yet, as we learn from Glenn's adventures, this commercial suburban landscape of 28th Street is as much what is visible as what is hidden, what is quotidian as what is fantastic, what is acknowledged as what is disavowed (see Pile 2005; Davidson, Park, and Shields 2011). 28th

Street is enchanted. It is haunted by a secret that lurks beneath its surface, which it tries to suppress. This secret is wildness and mystery—what was unique and special about this particular place, what has been paved over and forgotten. The fields and forests, and the mysteries that may have hidden within them, haunt 28th Street as much as the ogres and devils that disturb the dreams of refugees who seek a good life in this wearisome landscape. This estranged place is also bewitched by the magic of capitalist exchange, the necromancy of commodity fetishism, the enchantment of organic solidarity²⁵⁴ amongst mysterious strangers who walk amongst us semi-recognizable but alienated and displaced, and the daily exorcism and conjuration of meaning upon places.

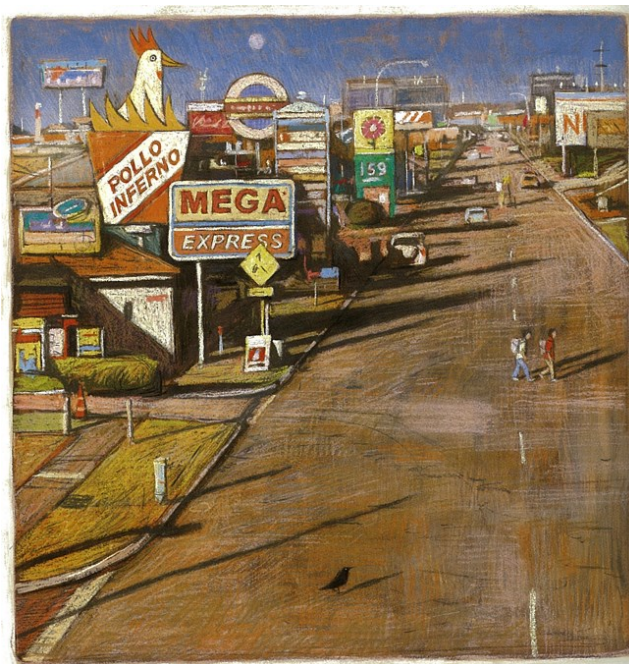


8.0.8. Suburbia as unknown places to be explored. (Image by Shaun Tan. 2008. "Our Expedition." In *Tales from Outer Suburbia*, 87.)

²⁵⁴ "Organic solidarity" is Durkheim's (1997) term for describing the mutual interdependency of individuals and institutions in a society where there is a high level of individuation and highly specialized, complex division of labour.

In Tan's "Our Expedition" in *Tales from Outer Suburbia*, two boys argue over why their father's map book suddenly stops at Map 268. The narrator reasons that the book must have lost some pages because the last page is full of streets right up to the edge. His older brother, however, believes that the directory is both complete and accurate as it is. In order to settle their disagreement, the brothers set off on a trek to find the place where the map ends. The narrator marvels: "It was exciting to be on a real expedition, like venturing into a desert or jungle wilderness, only much better sign-posted. How great it must have been long ago, before shops and freeways and fast-food outlets, when the world was still unknown" (Tan 2008b, 89).

Travelling through an increasingly monotonous and disconcertingly repetitive landscape as they trek further into the outer suburbs, they begin to notice something peculiar: "The farther we ventured, the more everything looked the same, as if each new street, park or shopping mall was simply another version of our own, made from the same giant assembly kit." The effect of this quest is to realize that suburbia, the ostensibly well sign-posted, well-mapped place, is still a world unknown. The sign posts encountered don't mark out directions to these voyageurs and the map doesn't provide orientation. Suburbia is rendered a foreign and strange land. In turn, it becomes a place that can be explored and discovered anew.



8.0.9. "It was exciting to be on a real expedition, like venturing into a desert or jungle wilderness, only much better sign-posted." (Image by Shaun Tan. 2008. "Our Expedition." In *Tales from Outer Suburbia*, 88.)

After a more tiring and protracted adventure than they had anticipated, the brothers' quest ends abruptly when, in the middle of the road where Map 268 ends, the suburb suddenly gives way to a sheer cliff, as if it were the end of the world. Theirs is the journey of one who goes forth in faith to face the edge of the known world and one who goes forth in doubt and, surprised, comes up against both the end of the world and the limits of his preconceptions.²⁵⁵ How can we read this edge/end of suburbia?



8.0.10. "How great it must have been...when the world was still unknown." (Image by Shaun Tan. 2008. "Our Expedition." In *Tales from Outer Suburbia*, 90–91.)

The literal (geospatial) edge of suburbs, where the suburb meets open space, can be a place of delight and play, especially for children.²⁵⁶ This hybridity of spaces—the apparent proximity of a homely space, which is tightly controlled and familiar, to a wild space, which is vague and inscrutable—is itself the very selling point of many suburbs despite the incessant obliteration of

²⁵⁵ Cf. Kierkegaard's (1985) knight of faith and knight of infinite resignation.

²⁵⁶ Tan (2008a), reflecting on his own childhood in a Perth suburb, reminisces fondly upon the thrilling mix between the "nice" suburb and the "creepy" wild areas just beyond.

that edge by constant development. However, if read as a contemporary environmental morality tale, this story confronts the problematic consequences of constant human expansion covering over the world and subsuming all the resources and land until the end of the earth's capacity is reached and its resources are exhausted. Perhaps this is the journey of the doubtful younger brother: Thinking there is still much more to the earth, he faces in confusion and disappointment what for him turned out to be an unforeseeable limit. But what then is the journey of the faithful older brother? His end of suburbia might be taken as the encounter with the end of *a* (life)world and the opening to a new world. The logic of the rationalisation of space and of radical functional division of places ceases here, on the edge, and gives way to an orientation to the meaning of place which retains its openness and multiplicity. Such an openness appears as a void but perhaps is merely strange. The "edge" of this suburban landscape may thus be read as the boundary, the limit that cannot be crossed except by a leap of faith, as where the known confronts the unknowable (Kierkegaard 1985). The question of the end of suburbia thus raises the question of suburbia as an end. How do we remain with our legs dangling over the edge, past the limit of this well mapped landscape of apparent certainty? How do we witness the ends of suburbia—providing for a good life—as alive with everyday utopianism rather than as the end of utopia? How shall we adopt a position of enacting everyday life in such a way as to see its strangeness but not succumb, once more, to alienation?

One way to begin may be to re-cognize the landscape of suburbia as ambivalently utopian. It is both a utopia achieved and a signal of unfulfilled utopian desire. It appears superficially, much too easily, as a secured, fully materialized, fully present utopia, of the type found so often in literature and urban planning and real estate ads. The perimeters of such utopias are well demarcated; the friends and enemies are clearly defined. These small utopias augment divisiveness in the lived world and offer a retreat into a hallucinatory world of individual well-being anxiously secured against an encroaching, threatening world. When utopia is taken to be fully actualized simply through spatial organisation and defining parameters of inclusion, it becomes, paradoxically, dystopian. Instead of obliterating everyday life and its proliferation of possibilities, a critical utopian vision must be "sensitized to the needs and desires expressed within daily existence" (Gardiner 2006, 102). Habitual and habituating, dynamic and liberating, the everyday is powerfully annihilating in its banality, yet potentially revolutionary in its possibility. Any utopia that does not attend to such things remains complicit "with hegemonic,

instrumental rationality seeking to erase difference and particularity in the service of the globalization of capital" (ibid.).

Suburbia, as a site and expression of the everyday, contains within it a multiplicity of possibilities that are liberatory, constraining, horrifying, and utopian. However, the image of suburbia pervades the everyday world and becomes almost invisible in its ubiquity. In reanimating the too bland suburban image, *Curses* and *Tales from Outer Suburbia* provide an estranged and uncanny sense of unease with which to begin to re-experience suburban alienation and gain a new apprehension. These stories bear witness to the repressed, the disavowed, and the secret that in their suppression maintain the everyday in its nullifying torpor yet persistently threaten to exceed and activate the unplumbed strangeness and utopianism of suburbia. The utopian possibility suburbia signals, yet is unable to provide for, is an emancipated everyday life world that surpasses fearfulness, conformity, alienation and annihilation, and opens onto a life lived with vitality, love, creativity, and satisfaction. Rapacious and imperfect as it certainly is, and faithfully put to the service of colonizing global capital, suburbia nevertheless signals a *desire* for the good life: a utopianism that is fulfilling and emancipating. Suburbia is a temporary and deeply flawed *means* to express utopian aspirations but it is not utopia's *end* (see Harvey 2000; Gardiner 2006). To stop on this traverse as if it is the end—as if one has arrived at utopia—is to mistake a mirage for an oasis, a dream for reality.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have considered the suburban imaginary. As I have noted throughout, this imaginary sets the conditions for how we know and come to expect the suburb along with or even in contrast to our own experience of suburbs. In turn, our accumulating individual and collective experiences of the suburb work towards re-configuring the suburban imaginary. This imaginary is what makes the suburb recognizable. To find this recognizable suburb, I have looked at popular cultural media, comics, picture books, graphic novels, and visual art whose cultural representations estranges the suburban imaginary, makes it curious and a curiosity, thereby making it legible. By making this imaginary curiously legible, I have shown that it is open to inquiry and alteration. Without attending to this imaginary—without taking seriously that the suburb is, at least in part, imaginary—any inquiry and alteration directed at the taken-for-granted "suburb," as if it simply describes a thing, process, lifestyle, or person, can ultimately only fail.

Review of Key Points

Part I

This dissertation has been premised on the observation that the suburb is a site of profound cultural ambivalences hidden within and despite the dominant suburban imaginary. Claims of what is "suburban," how it can be known, and how it ought to be valued, revolve around competing and often opposing judgments. It is, at once, the quotidian ground upon which ordinary, daily life is enacted and rooted—perhaps contentedly so, perhaps oppressively so. It is at the same time, I have shown, a strange depth inhabited by mysterious and barely imaginable creatures, in which absurd, fantastic, monstrous, even wondrous things happen. At once ordinary and strange, the suburb is also an expression of hope and utopian desire. The suburb simultaneously expresses a desire of liberation, a better world in general and, incompatibly, a dream of escape, a better life of one's own. Importantly, the suburb promises happiness. However, the promise of happiness is not straightforward and may even constitute a threat. That is, happiness might be both a hoped for and fulfilled promise of living in the world, while also, when defined too narrowly and categorically, an imposing goal for proving one's normalcy and normative success; and, in this latter understanding, one that is attested to, in particular, by material well-being. The promises that are actualised in the suburb remain largely unarticulated and often contradictory: A good place or a bad place, promising happiness or threatening it, ordinary or mysterious, the suburban imaginary revolves around such axes of multiple ambivalences.

Ambivalence and a multiplicity of competing interpretations are not unique to the suburb, of course. Nevertheless, the particularities of those ambivalences mark the suburb peculiarly and insistently. The question of judgment (what is the suburb? Is it good or bad?); the conundrum of happiness (does the suburb offer a promise or threat of happiness? Is it a site of the good life?); and the question of ordinariness (is it really ordinary? Can it be understood as a site of the everyday?) are questions marking the suburb and to which the suburb responds in particular, suburban ways.

In Part I, I took up these ambivalences as sites of interrogation, in particular by exploring many specific expressions of the suburban imaginary. While the suburb is complex—indeed, a complex of a plethora of different places, forms, ways of living, people, activities, ideals, values,

and images—and characterized by multiple axes of ambivalence, the suburb as myth, stereotype, or imaginary continues to be simple, recognizable, and easily generalizable. Yet, even within popular representations of the easily imagined, dominant image of the suburb, ruptures and reformulations, suppressed desires and hope can still be found.

These ambivalences, then, point out the on-going complex production of the suburban spatialization and suburban imaginary. I have argued that it is important constantly to recognize the suburb precisely as a spatialization and keep alive the utopianism reflected in its ambivalences—both the optimistic, happy interpretation as well as the ones that offer much needed critique. And, in this mode of staying attuned to process, we must also sustain a critique of everyday life, the condition of suburbanity. Such an orientation is important because it makes recognizable that the suburb is a (mostly) spatial solution to fundamentally social and political problems.

These multiple axes of ambivalences form the backdrop for my larger discussion of the suburban imaginary, consideration of the suburb as a site of the everyday, and analysis of cultural texts, in this dissertation.

Part II

In Part Two, I looked at visual artwork that has been exhibited in North American galleries in the decade span between 2002–2012 to interrogate how they illustrate the suburban imaginary. All of the artwork is on the theme of the suburb. I chose this timeframe to ensure that the artwork with which I am working is recognizable as having some kind of contemporary, timely engagement with the theme of the suburb. That is, the work of these artists can be understood as having something relevant to say about the suburb both in and of the contemporary moment. The chapters look at the way in which suburban art helps to undo the taken-for-grantedness of the suburban spatialization and explicitly re-present the suburban imaginary. Through a reading of individual images and across a constellation of a large number of images, I show that the suburb is imagined as a site of a complex of spatial imaginaries. This complex includes a separation between categories of spaces that are imagined to do different things, which are mutually exclusive: a defining division is between interior and exterior. A second element that is mobilized within this complex is a particular system of interpretations, meanings and affects that

characterize different spatializations. Here, suburban exteriors are characterized as peculiarly anaesthetic non-places in which a feeling of insecurity, dislocation, and a sense of being unwelcome pervade. These are the qualities of exteriority. Meanwhile, suburban interiors are taken to be private, closed off, and supposedly secure places for individuals against the danger of the exterior. But, the interior can easily become a site of dysfunction when these qualities of interiority become overbearing. Ultimately, the division between interior and exterior is a false one that cannot be maintained and as a result, suburban spaces that are imaginatively delimited to be one thing or the other—interior or exterior—are revealed to be neither. And this is the third, crucial consideration that defines the current dominant suburban imaginary: that, seemingly paradoxically, the suburb is characterized by simultaneous intensification of exteriorization and expansion of interiorization. Because the imaginary is so convincing and meaningful as to override the everyday experience and interpretation of this fluidity and instability of categorical divisions, these spaces are interpreted as risky hybrids. The only solution to such an ineffectual division of space is to recede into what is imagined as the deepest interiority, which is the interiority of the imagined individual: an introversion that lacks introspection. It is this withdrawal into the individual psyche that illuminates the asociality of the suburb.

Part III

In Part III, I considered narrative art—a broad but marginalized category of literature and art that includes graphic novels and comics as well as children's picture books and illustrated books. These fit in the category of minor art (Deleuze and Guattari 1986; see also Hroch 2011).

Children's books are marginal because of their audience: The child is socially marginal despite a massive social rhetorical machinery of the child's centrality and significance for society. The child is also strange: Not belonging in society proper, the child sees things from a queer perspective (Stockton 2009). Judith Halberstam (2011) argues that even mainstream animated films intended for children diverge from mainstream media intended for adults because of the peculiar strangeness of children. Media (including children's literature) aimed at a child audience must include an element of failure that is not read as failing, as children are constantly failing in their everyday experiences of the world in which they find their inexpert selves. Moreover, primary relationship configurations and allegiances are based not in heteronormative,

Conclusion

romantic coupling, or in hegemonic, reproductive and Oedipal family formations, which are insignificant and disempowering for children, but in friendships. Strangely present, but not quite mainstream, children's picture books attuned to the suburb consider the potentiality of the suburb and desire for a place that nurtures and sustains the individual and family and is also environmentally and socially sustainable. It is fantasy but also conveys an optimism for a fulfilling good life.

The graphic novels²⁵⁷ to which I turned in the final chapter offer an evocative look at the ambivalent, haunting, even uncanny quality of the parallel experiences of everyday life as banal and strange. Although well within the populist and mass-medium genre of comics, this ill-defined subgroup of sequential narrative art, which may encompass a vast range of narrative and art styles, is more marginal than mainstream comics and comic books. This is in part because generally—except for the most popular, renowned, or critically acclaimed—they must be purchased from specialty shops or directly from artists or publishers. With the decline in recent years of newspapers and the rise in web-comics, non-mainstream comics are becoming as easily available as weekly syndicated "newspaper" comic strips but lack the visibility and widespread appeal of the syndicated strips. This medium occupies an "alternative", marginal niche in literature and art that both skirts and partakes in popular culture. Artists, publishers, and fans of these media often locate themselves and these media in an outsider position relative to popular culture, which is oftentimes one of critical commentary, especially in the form of satire, fantasy, nostalgia, or absurdity (see Spiegelman 2008 and 2013).²⁵⁸ Perhaps in keeping with this jesterly

²⁵⁷ There is no standard definition on the graphic novel or clear delineation from comics on the one hand (as which Huizenga identifies his book) or picture books (as which Tan identifies his book) on the other. I am simply using the term to distinguish these books from serial daily comic strips.

²⁵⁸ However, at the Internationales Literaturfestival Berlin in September 2013, comic artists, graphic novelists, and their publishers produced "The Comic-Manifesto," which acknowledges the traditional (and on-going) division between (legitimate and state-supported) high culture and low culture and demands formal recognition of comics as a legitimate form of art, deserving the funding and policy support that high art receives:

No serious critic is in doubt today about the fact that the comic is an independent form of art that has earned its place on equal terms alongside literature, theatre, film or opera. It is a scandal that this fact does not already enjoy general consensus.

We therefore demand that the comic be afforded the same respect as literature and the visual arts and that it receive the corresponding funding. Like all other art forms, the comic depends on state and private support.

...

COMICS ARE ART. THIS IS A FACT THAT CULTURAL POLICYMAKERS NEED TO UNDERSTAND. (*The Comic-Manifesto* 2013, n.p. Emphases in original.)

role, these media, when focusing on the suburb, relay complex interpretations of and varying affective attachments to the suburbs. Reading like the narration of a nature show about the life and habits of a little-known, timid creature, the surreal stories collected together in *Tales from Outer Suburbia*, are written as if relaying known or true things about the suburb. Yet, it is a recounting of incidents that are absurd, uncanny or preposterous which nevertheless seem to convey an affective resonance. Similarly, invoking superstition, myth, religion, and folklore *Curses* evokes the surreal, uncanny experience of engaging with everyday life when it is dehabituated. Both contain stories redolent with a hopefulness or suspicion that the suburb could offer a world of other possibility—something inexplicable and enigmatic. Ambivalent and complex emotions and experiences explored here in short vignettes are impossible in the too happy, too easy suburb as-taken-for-granted backdrop of the gag comic.

Future Directions

All theses are limited by time and there is much further research that could be done. Amongst other projects, these include more sustained theoretical considerations of suburb as utopia, suburb and time and temporality, and a greater focus on affect. In particular, working with theories of utopia and heterotopias offers a way of bringing together literatures of critical everyday life theories with more explicit spatial considerations and the promise of the suburban imaginary. For limitations of time, I have been unable to pursue time and/of/in the suburb. The suburban imaginary, in addition to being a complex of spatial imaginaries, is also imagined and lived temporally. Although Lefebvre decried the loss of the cyclical patterns of time, replaced entirely by the linear time of modern, industrial urbanity, I believe it is possible and important to perceive in the suburb the rhythms and possibilities of everyday life as they flow in patterns of time: through the course of the day marked by comings and goings; cycling through the year, with its periodic returns to mythic-time in seasonal festivities; through the life course, in which the suburb acts as an incubator and restorative/storage space for the army of labour, both producers and consumers; and, through the course of a city's history with its shifting fashions and moral orientations towards dwelling, favouring particular social and material configurations of living at different times. I look forward to working with these ideas in postdoctoral research

along with a more in-depth consideration of affect and the suburban imaginary. In particular, I have conducted research in the archives of the District of North Vancouver, B.C., to consider the intersection of memory, place, and archival records as palimpsests patinated by affective orientations and remembrances. Attempting to incorporate and work through this preliminary research is well beyond the scope of this project, and out of step with its focus on cultural representations, but offers what I consider an enticing future project.

Contributions

In the early twentieth century, Russian formalist theorist Victor Shklovsky noted that the purpose of art is to help make available for renewed perception the world as it is experienced, rather than the world as it is expected: "The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known" (#15). A century later, this perspective was reiterated by comic artist Art Spiegelman (2008). This dissertation enunciates a re-focused approach to thinking the suburb by acknowledging it as a spatialization and attending to the suburban imaginary. It does so by asking how cultural representations of the suburb help to achieve this new orientation. In turn, these representations make the imaginary more readily available for analysis.

This dissertation—having looked at animated films and comic strips, children's books, graphic novels, visual art, as well as a range of popular cultural media with a Sociological Imagination—offers a unique contribution to the area of suburban scholarship. Much of the suburban literature, and especially the most cited works, looks at suburbs in their built form (for example, subdivisions), policies pertaining to them, demographic, environmental or health shifts within or including them.²⁵⁹ Thus, urban studies, geography, history, and sociological suburban scholarship tend to look at the use, policies, history, demography, or environmental and social effects of particular suburbs. On the other hand, scholarship that does look at representations approach them from the perspective of literary studies, film studies, or other specific cultural

²⁵⁹ This claim to "most cited" is based on a Web of Science search of the topic keyword and subject truncated keyword "suburb*". A more subjective look at some of the works that I would argue are key sources in the literature, based on my own engagement with the literature, still results in a very limited number of works focused on cultural representations of the suburbs. The edited collection *The Suburb Reader* includes many of these key, highly cited sources.

studies. These tend to look at the major art forms of novels and (to a lesser degree) movies about the suburb—large scale narrative fictional representations of suburban life (some examples include Beuka 2004; Hapgood 2005; Jurca 2011 and 2001; Muzzio and Halper 2002). There are exceedingly few studies which look at other creative and artistic representations of the suburb, especially from a sociological perspective.²⁶⁰ This is not, however, for a dearth of material. As I have shown throughout this dissertation, there is a rich plethora of such alternative, minor and popular creative engagements with the suburb and these works could fruitfully be explored further, well beyond this dissertation. Looking at minor, marginalized, and under-considered forms of cultural production rather than only the major ones is an acknowledgement of the suburb's mass appeal and taps into alternative imaginaries that animate what is too often considered a technology of massification.

Along with taking seriously these marginalized art forms, this dissertation makes a number of additional significant contributions to the literatures of (sub)urban studies, sociology, and cultural studies. First, it acknowledges that the suburb is a spatialization. In doing so, it identifies some of the key ambivalences characterizing the suburb and locates these in the suburb's complexity rather than attempting to close off or resolve these ambivalences by positing a singular history or definition of the suburb. Second, this dissertation takes the suburb as a site of everyday life, which means that the ambivalences inhering in it become available to be read as offering alternative possibilities for the future production of the suburb as spatialization. This dissertation also works towards articulating the suburban imaginary and recognizing both its culturally dominant expression while also paying attention to alternative images and envisioned possibilities. Attending, then, to spatialization, the suburban imaginary, ambivalences and everyday life opens up the suburb to otherwise hidden and un-perceived liberatory potencies and possibilities.

²⁶⁰ Emerging exceptions include Dines and Vermeulen (2013), Gill (2013), Huq (2013a); *Public* 43 (2011), Silverstone (1997), and Vermeulen (2014)—all of whom look at a variety of media, including minor forms of media. However, none of these take a sociological approach.

Appendix A: Suburb-Themed Art (2002–2012)

Suburb-Themed Art Exhibits

(in reverse chronological order)

Private Frontiers, Hosfelt Gallery, New York, NY, December 15, 2012–January 26, 2013. Works of Chris Ballantyne and Michael Light.

Landscapes of Suburbia, Leonore Peyton Salon, Place des Arts, Coquitlam, BC, September 8–October 8, 2011. Works of Jennifer McAuley.

Michelle Muldrow: Cathedrals of Desire, Jen Bekman Gallery, New York, NY, April 30–June 5, 2011. Works of Michelle Muldrow.

Suburbia Mexicana: Cause and Effect, Circuit Gallery Presented at Gallery 345, Scotiabank Contact Photography Festival, Toronto, ON, April 28–May 29, 2011. Works of Alejandro Cartagena.

Too Drunk To Fuck, Latitude 53, Edmonton, AB, January 14–February 12, 2011. Works of Brandon A. Dalmer.

Suburbia, Platform Gallery, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA, January 3–May 31, 2011.

Featured artists:

Gina Randazzo
Hannah Vainstein

Hans Gindlesberger
Jared Flores
Jean-Pierre Hébert
Joe Johnson
Jon Horvath
Jonathan Cecil
Juliane Eirich
Lori Larusso
Paula Winograd
Ron Lambert
Sarah Ross
Shane Tolbert
Tom Berenz
Travis Shaffer

...*After the Suburbs*, Kiang Gallery, New York, January 21–March 27, 2011. Curated by Karen Tauches.

Featured artists:

Alex Rogers
Amandine Drouet
James D. Griffioen
Kemp Mooney
Meg Aubrey
Michelle Levine
Nancy Van Devender
Nat Slaughter
Pandra Williams
Sarah Hobbs
Sheila Pree Bright
Sze Tsung Leong
Travis Schaeffer

Bill Owens: Suburbia, Brigham Young University Museum of Art, Provo, UT, April 30–December 2, 2010. Curated by Diane Turnbow. Works of Bill Owens.²⁶¹

Whitney Museum Biennial 2010, 2nd Floor Gallery, Whitney Museum, New York, NY,

²⁶¹ I have not listed all of the solo exhibitions featuring Bill Owens's work as there have been quite a few over the years and not all of them focus on his suburban-themed work. However, I have indicated a couple of the ones dedicated to his suburban work.

February 25–May 30, 2010. Curated by Francesco Bonami and Gary Carrion-Murayari.

Featured artists²⁶²:

Ari Marcopoulos
Aurel Schmidt
Dawn Clements
James Casebere
Jessica Jackson Hutchins
Josephine Meckseper
Julia Fish
Nina Berman
Robert Williams
Tam Tran

Faraway Nearby: Addressing Suburbia, Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, Johnson County Community College, Overland Park, KS, February 26–May 16, 2010.

Featured artists:

Amy Stein
Brian Tolle
Chris Ballantyne
Don Lambert
Greg Stimac
Matthew Moore
Michael Vahrenwald
Paho Mann
Sheila Pree Bright

Burb: Zones of Living, Manifest Creative Research Gallery and Drawing Center,

²⁶² According to curator Francesco Bonami, the art exhibited on the Museum's second floor "will be more suburban." Which, he explained, means "More related to 'American-ness'" (Fox 2010, n.p.). Because there is no explicit listing available for which pieces were considered to be "more suburban," I have gone through the list of 55 featured artists in the Biennial and made this sublist of "more suburban" artists based on the image and write up featured on the Whitney website (<http://whitney.org/Exhibitions/2010Biennial>. Last accessed November 26, 2013).

Cincinnati, OH, January 22–February 19, 2010. Curated by Tim Parsley.

Featured artists:

Andrew Dickson
Andrew Harrison
Art Werger
Barry Jacques (with David Smith)
Charles Kanwischer
Craig Lloyd
David Linneweh
Kevin Haas
Meg Aubrey
Nathan Sullivan
Piotr Chizinski
Ron Longsdorf
Ross Racine
Stefan Petranek
Travis Shaffer

New Suburbia, Photographs Do Not Bend Gallery, Dallas, TX, November 22, 2008–February 21, 2009. Works of Bill Owens.

The Leona Drive Project, Toronto, ON, October 22–31, 2009. Curated by Janine Marchessault and Michael Prokopow.

Featured artists:

An Te Liu
Angela Joosse
Anna Friz
Christine Davis
Claire Ironside & Angela Iarocci
Daniel Borins & Jennifer Marman
David Han
John Greyson
Lisa Steele & Kim Tomczak
Michael Graham
Michael Taglieri & Bojana Videkanic
Oliver Husain
Patricio Davila
Richard Fung
Robin Collyer
Ryan Livinston
Shana Macdonald
Steven Logan

Terence Dick
Thomas Blanchard

Memoirs from Suburbia, Evan Lurie Gallery, Carmel, IN, September 19–October 24, 2009.

Featured artists:

Drew Simpson
Michael Fitts
Peter Drake
Tom Haney

Levittown, CRG Gallery, New York, NY, February 5–March 21, 2009. Works of Brian Tolle.

Suburbia, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Cleveland, OH, September 12–December 28, 2008. Works of Sheila Pree Bright.

Global Suburbia: Meditations on the World of the 'Burbs, Abington Art Center and Sculpture Park, Jenkintown, PA, August 30–November 30, 2008. Curated by Sue Spaid.

Featured artists:

Amy Bennett
Barbara Gallucci
Center for Land Use Interpretation
Chris Ballantyne
David Schafer
Eva Struble
Fritz Haeg
Götz Diergarten
Hiro Sakaguchi
Lee Stoetzel
Mark Bennett
Mark Shetabi
Matthew Moore
Michael Barton Miller
Sarah McCoubrey
Thomas Wrede

Sprawl. Multiple venues in Jersey City, NJ (Jersey City Museum; Shore Institute of Contemporary Arts, Long Branch; Arts

Guild of Rahway, Rahway; Hunterdon Museum of Art, Clinton; Art Galleries at Ramapo College, Mahwah), March 20–August 24, 2008. Curated by Rocio Aranda Alvarado.

Featured artists:

Aileen Bassis
Ana-María Vág
Andrew Demirjian
Andrew Wilkinson
Ben Polsky
Brendan Carroll
Bryan Zanisnik
Bryony Romer
Dahlia Elsayed
Debbie Reichard
Deborah Pohl
Emily Helck
Gergory Maka
Hector Canonge
Jason Burch
Jason Seder
Jessica Demcsak
Jonathan Glick
Joseph Gerard Sabatino
Kimberly Witham
Leslie Sheryll
Lisa Dahl
María Mijares
Mauro Altamura
Megan Malloy
Michael Dal Cerro
Michelle Loughlin
Nyugen Smith
Owen Kanzler
Pat Brentano
Patrick Grenier
Paul Ching-Bor
Rebecca Feranec
Richard Pasquarelli
Robert Kogge
Roger Sayre
Roger Tucker
Susan Evans Grove
Tim Daly
Valeri Larko

Worlds Away: New Suburban Landscapes, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN, February 16–August 17, 2008. Curated by Andrew Blauvelt and Tracy Myers.

Featured artists (& designers):

Adam Cvijanovic
Andrew Bush
Angela Strassheim
Benjamin Edwards
Brian Ulrich
Catherine Opie
Center for Land Use Interpretation (CLU)
Chris Ballantyne
Chris Faust
Coen+Partners
Dan Graham
Edward Ruscha
Estudio Teddy Cruz
FAT (Fashion Architecture Taste)
Fioto+Warner
Greg Stimac
Gregory Crewdson
INABA
Interboro
Jessica Smith
John Lehr
Julia Christensen
Kim Beck
Larry Sultan
Lateral Architecture
Laura E. Migliorino
Lee Stoetzel
LTL Architects
Matthew Moore
Michael Vahrenwald
Paho Mann
Sarah McKenzie
SITE (Sculpture in the Environment)
Stefanie Nagorka

Saint of the Suburbs, University of North Texas Art Gallery, Denton, TX, October 15–November 17, 2007. Works of Zöe Charlton.

Photographing Suburbia: Crewdson, Owens and Weiner, Rochelle and Irwin A. Lowenfeld Exhibition Hall, Hofstra University Museum, September 24, 2007–January 28, 2008. Curated by Daniel R. Rubey.

Featured artists:

Bill Owens
Dan Weiner
Gregory Crewdson

Stalking Suburbia, Westport Arts Center, Westport, CT, September 13–October 25, 2007. Curated by Lauren Ryan.

Featured artists:

Alec Soth
Andrew Bush
Anthony Goicolea
Bill Owens
Brian Ulrich
Gail Peter Border
Julia Peirone
Miranda Lichtenstein
Peter Piller
Suellen Parker
Todd Hido

Bill Owens: Suburbia, Museum of Contemporary Art (Pacific Design Center), Los Angeles, CA, August 13–October 15, 2006. Works of Bill Owens.

Suburban Escape: The Art of California Sprawl, San Jose Museum of Art, San Jose, CA, September 23, 2006–March 4, 2007. Curated by Ann M. Wolfe.

Featured artists²⁶³:

²⁶³ This may not be the complete list of featured artists. The gallery's website does not list all the artists who were included in the exhibit, noting only that the exhibit was "featuring approximately 30 artists"

(<http://www.sjmusart.org/content/suburban-escape-art-california-sprawl>. Last accessed November 26, 2013). I have, therefore, pieced

Amir Zaki
Angela Buenning
Ansel Adams
Bill Owens
Camilo José Vergara
Darlene Campbell
David Hockney
Deborah Oropallo
Ed Ruscha
Fandra Chang
Jeff Brouws
Jeff Gillette
Joel Sternfeld
John Divola
John Register
Kota Ezawa
Larry Sultan
Laurie Brown
Lewis Baltz
Mark Campbell
Mary Snowden
Richard Meisinger, Jr.
Richard Misrach
Robert Adams
Robert Arneson
Robert Isaacs
Rudy Venderlans
Salomon Huerta
Stéphane Couturier
Todd Hido
William Garnett

Cul-de-Sac: Art from a Suburban Nation, Martin Gallery, Radford University Art Museum, Radford, VA, September 14–October 17, 2006. Curated by Preston Thayer.

Featured artists:

Armin Mühsam
Benjamin Edwards
Blue McRight
Geoffrey Aronson
Heather Deyling

together the list of artists based on the gallery's website and reviews of the exhibit.

Kota Ezawa
Lori Larusso
Mary Irwin Moore
Mike Mergen
Patrick King
Pete Baldes
Richard Garrison
Steve Millar
Terri Bright

I Heart the Burbs, Katonah Museum of Art,
Katonah, NY, January 15–April 9, 2006.
Curated by Ellen J. Keiter.

Featured artists:

Barbara Griffiths
Beaumont
Bill Owens
Chris Ballantyne
Chris Doyle
Dan Cohen
Daniel Dove
David Hilliard
David Hockney
David Levinthal
David Opdyke
Diane Arbus
Gail Biederman
Gregory Crewdson
Jason Falchok
Jayne Holsinger
John Bennett
Joel Sternfeld
Joshua Lutz
Lamar Peterson
Lane Twitchell
Larry Sultan
Lori Nix
Lee Stoetzel
Mark Bennett
Mary McCleary
Peter Drake
Robert Selwyn
Russell Biles
Sandy Skoglund
Sarah McKenzie
Stefan Kürten

Stephanie Diamond
Steven Millar
Sven Pahlsson
Tad Lauritzen Wright
Todd Hido

There Goes the Neighborhood, Creative
Alliance, Baltimore, MD, November 11–
December 17, 2004. Installation by Zöe
Charlton and Rick Delaney.

*The Burbs: The Influence of Suburban
Iconography on Pictorial Art*, DFN Gallery,
New York, NY, 2003. Curated by Peter
Drake and John Nickle.

Featured artists²⁶⁴:

Alfonse Borysewicz
Amy Bennett
Ben Aronson
Bob Knox
Bob Marty
Bob Yarber
Brady Dollarhide
Bryan LeBoeuf
Catherine Howe
Charles Burchfield
Cindy Sherman
Cornelia Foss
Dan Feldman
Dan Witz
David Hockney
David Humphrey
David Levinthal
David Mahler
David Sandlin
Edward Hopper
Eric Fischl
Fairfield Porter

²⁶⁴ This list may not be complete. I derived this list from a combination of the published catalogue for the exhibition, *The Burbs: The Influence of Suburban Iconography on Pictorial Art* (New York: Suburburama, 2003), and exhibit blurb quoted at http://www.inkydinkyworld.com/events/bob_events_current.html#1. (Last accessed November 26, 2013.)

Gregory Crane
Jana Duda
Joel Sokolov
John Bowman
John Moore
Jon Waldo
Josette Urso
Julie Heffernan
Julie Jacquette
Kerry Schuss
KK Kozik
Laurie Simmons
Lisa Krivacka
Lori Nix
Mark Mann
Mark Tansey
Martin Mull
Orly Cogan
Peter Drake
Peter Schroth
Rob Grunder
Robert Yarber
Stephen Lack
Susan Grossman
Thomas Woodruff
Todd Hido
Tom Birkner

Vincent Desiderio
Wade Schumann

Suburbia: An Exhibition Examining the Nature of Suburbia and Its Effects on the Contemporary Psyche, Art Gallery of Peel, Peel Heritage Complex, Region of Peel, ON, December 1, 2001–January 27, 2002.
Curated by David Somers.

Featured artists:

Angelica Inglis
Cameron Sharpe
David Urban
Doug Kirtin
Eric Fischl
Euan Macdonald
Gary Evans
Glenn Priestley
Jaclyn Shoub
Jim Reid
John Armstrong
Mathieu Gallois
Pary Bell
Per Kristiansen
Susan Clark
Susan Dobson

Art Exhibits That Significantly Featured Suburban Themes

(in reverse chronological order)

The Altered Landscape: Photographs of a Changing Environment, Nevada Museum of Art, Reno, NV, September 24, 2011–January 15, 2012. Curated by Ann M. Wolfe.

Featured artists:

Amir Zaki
Amy Stein
Andy Goldsworthy
Anne Noble

Ansel Adams
Avi Holtzman
Barbara Bosworth
Bernd and Hilla Becher
Catherine Opie
Catherine Wagner
Chris Jordan
Christian Houge
Darius Kuzmickas
David Maisel

Dawn-Starr Crowther
 Dean Burton
 Drex Brooks
 Edward Burtynsky
 Edward Ruscha
 Edward Weston
 Eirik Johnson
 Emmitt Gowin
 Eric Paddock
 Fandra Chang
 Frank Gohlke
 Geoffrey Fricker
 Greg Mac Gregor
 Henry Wessel
 J. Bennett Fitts
 James Turrell
 Jean de Pomereu
 Jeff Brouws
 Jim Sanborn
 Joan Myers
 Joe Deal
 John Divola
 John Pfahl
 Karin Apollonia Müller
 Kim Stringfellow
 Laurie Brown
 Lee Friedlander
 Len Jenschel
 Lewis Baltz
 Lisa M. Robinson
 Marilyn Bridges
 Mark Klett and Timothy O'Sullivan
 Mark Ruwedel
 Martin Stupich
 Maslen & Mehra
 Michael Light
 Michael Wolf
 Michelle Van Parys
 Mitch Epstein
 Olaf Otto Becker
 Olivo Barbieri
 Otabong Nkanga
 Patrick Nagatani
 Peter Bialobrzeski
 Peter de Lory
 Peter Goin

Pipo Nguyen-duy
 R.M. Zomorrodinia
 Reinhart Mlineritsch
 Richard Misrach
 Robert Adams
 Robert Dawson
 Robert Voit
 Roderik Henderson
 Rondal Partridge
 Sant Khalsa
 Shai Kremer
 Sharon Stewart
 Stéphane Couturier
 Stephen Jonassen
 Stuart Allen
 Subhankar Banerjee
 Ted Orland
 Terry Evans
 Terry Falke
 Timothy Hearsum
 Todd Hido
 Toshio Shibata
 Trevor Paglen
 Victoria Sambunaris
 Virginia Beahan and Laura McPhee
 Wanda Hammerbeck
 William Christenberry
 William Eggleston
 Wim Wenders
 Wolfgang Volz
 Yang Yongliang
Copia, Cleveland Museum of Art,
 Cleveland, OH, August 27, 2011–January
 16, 2012. Works of Brian Ulrich.

*Mapping a Prairie City: Lethbridge and its
 Suburbs*, Southern Alberta Art Gallery,
 Lethbridge, AB, June 24–September 11,
 2011. Curated by Don Gill and Ryan
 Doherty.

*Featured artists*²⁶⁵:

²⁶⁵ In addition to art, this exhibit also featured archival and nature displays as well as the following films: *The End of Suburbia* (dir. Gregory Green, 2004, 78 minutes), *The Real Dirt on Farmer*

Adrian Cooke
Amrita Deshpande
Antonio Aguirre
April Matisz
Brendan Matkin
Carol Thibert
Catherine Ross
Chai Duncan
Christina Cuthbertson
Dan Wong
Dana Inkster
David M. C. Miller
Don Goodes
Doug Scholes
Elizabeth Porter
Emily Luce
Field Notes Collective:
 Amy Dodic and Karen
 Beauchemin
 Dagmar Dahle and Hester
 Jiskoot
 Don Gill and Braum Barber
 Leanne Elias and Frank
 Larney
 Mary Kavanagh and Rose de
 Clerk-Floate
 Troy Nickel and Mark
 Goettel
Francine Desjardins
Frater Tham
Joan van Wijk
Joseph Anderson

John (dir. Taggart Siegel, 2007, 82 minutes), *The Unforeseen* (dir. Laura Dunn, 2007, 93 minutes), *A Walk Through H* (dir. Peter Greenaway, 1978, 41 minutes), *Of Time and the City* (dir. Terence Davies, 2008, 74 minutes), *London* (dir. Patrick Keiller, 1994, 82 minutes), *Robinson in Space* (dir. Patrick Keiller, 1997, 78 minutes), *Bunker Hill: A Tale of Urban Renewal* (dir. Greg Kimple, 2008, 23 minutes), *Last Day of Angels Flight* (dir. Robert Kirste, 2008, 2:31 minutes), *Which Playground for Your Child: Greenbelt or Clutter?* (dir. Joseph Horowitz, 2000, 15 minutes), *Bitter Harvest* (dir. Taggart Siegel, 2007, 8 minutes), *Jumpstarting the Future* (dir. Chris Paine, 2006, 15 minutes).

Karen Campbell
Kerri Reid
Leanne Elias
Len Komanac
Linda Many Guns
Luke Stebbins
Mary-Anne McTrowe
Michael Wagener
Nancy Anne McPhee
Neal McLeod
Nick Wade
Nicolas de Cosson
Peter White
Petra Malá Miller
Ruth Scheuing
Shanell Papp
Susan McEachern
Taras Polataiko
Yujing Ding

Spaces of the City, National Gallery of Art, Ottawa, June 15–September 5, 2011. Organized by the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography. List of featured artists not available.

Land Use Survey, Jen Bekman Gallery, New York, NY, July 1–August 14, 2010.

Featured artists:

Aili Schmeltz
Alec Soth
Alex MacLean
Andrew Scott Ross / Scott Lawrence
Beth Dow
Brad Moore
Bryan Schutmaat
Chris Ballantyne
Christoph Gielen
Dana Miller
David Maisel
Ian Baguskas
Joel Meyerowitz
Justin Newhall
Liz Kuball
Louisa McElwain
Matthew Moore

Michael Lundgren
Michelle Muldrow
Nick Lamia
Paho Mann
Ross Racine
Sarah McKenzie
Scott Lawrence
Todd Hido
Tyson Anthony Roberts
William Wegman

Suburbs vs. Cities, Altered Esthetics,
Minneapolis, MN, July 1–29, 2010.

Featured artists:

Awad Abdiwahed
Becky Lang
Cassie Pupovac
Christopher Cannon (chris crisis)
Christy Schwartz
Crisanta de Guzman
Daayh Mohamed
Damian Sheridan
David Crow
Emily Bulen
Hannah Frick
Happy Accidents
Jason Wasyk
Jeredt Runions
Jessica Turtle
Kate Johnson
Lance Ward
Laura E. Migliorino
Mary Davis
Matt Wells
Michael Wiechmann
Michelle Lee
Morgan Pease
Peter Groynom
Raha Siad
Toni Dachis
Tracie Thompson

Robert Adams: Summer Nights, Walking,
Matthew Marks Gallery, New York, NY,
February 6–April 17, 2010. Works of Robert
Adams.

The Promise of Real Estate, Camel Art
Space, Brooklyn, NY, January 8–24, 2010.
Curated by Carl Gunhouse and Christine
Rogers.

Featured artists:

Carl Gunhouse
Chris McGee
Christine Rogers
Lauren Portada
Rachel Boillot
Tom Marquet

I Can Hear You Humming, Toronto Image
Works, Toronto, ON, January 7–30, 2010.
Works of Mark Kasumovic.

Burzynsky: Oil, Corcoran Gallery of Art,
Washington, DC, October 3–December 13,
2009 and on tour through 2012. Works of
Edward Burzynsky.

*New Topographics: Photographs Of A Man-
Altered Landscape*, George Eastman House
International Museum of Photography &
Film, June 13–October 4, 2009 and on tour
in 8 venues in US and Europe until January
2012. Curated by Britt Salvesen, Center for
Creative Photography, Tucson and Alison
Nordström, George Eastman House,
Rochester.

Featured artists:

Bernd and Hilla Becher
Frank Gohlke
Henry Wessel, Jr.
Joe Deal
John Schott
Lewis Baltz
Nicholas Nixon
Robert Adams
Stephen Shore

Catherine Opie: American Photographer,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New
York, NY, September 26, 2008–January 7,

Appendix A

2009. Curated by Jennifer Blessing, with Nat Trotman. Works of Catherine Opie.

Aerialscapes, NY Studio Gallery, New York, NY, June 5–July 5, 2008. Works of Toni Silber-Deliverie.

Robert Selwyn: Houses and Newscasters, DFN Gallery, New York, NY, September 6–29, 2007. Works of Robert Selwyn.

Henry Wessel, Charles Cowles Gallery, New York, NY, January 11–February 17, 2007. Works of Henry Wessel.

American Standard: (Para)Normality and Everyday Life, Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York, NY, June 26–August 16, 2002. Curated by Gregory Crewdson.

Featured artists:

Bill Owens
Charles Ray

Cindy Sherman
Diane Arbus
Edward Hopper
Eric Fischl
Henry Wessel, Jr.
Hiroshi Sugimoto
Joel Shapiro
Joel Sternfeld
John Currin
Keith Edmier
Maureen Gallace
Robert Adams
Robert Bechtle
Robert Gober
Stephen Shore
Steven Spielberg
Tim Davis
Todd Haynes
Vija Celmins

Artists of Suburbia

(in alphabetical order by first name)

List derived from artists featured in "Suburb-themed exhibits" and known suburban artists. List does not include artists featured only in "Art exhibits that significantly featured suburban themes".

A

Adam Cvijanovic
Aileen Bassis
Alec Soth
Alejandro Cartagena
Alex Rogers
Alfonse Borysewicz
Amandine Drouet
Amir Zaki
Amy Bennett
Amy Casey

Amy Chan
Amy Stein
An Te Liu
Ana-María Vág
Andrew Bush
Andrew Demirjian
Andrew Dickson
Andrew Harrison
Andrew Moore
Andrew Wilkinson
Angela Buenning

Angela Joosse
Angela Strassheim
Angelica Inglis
Anna Friz
Ansel Adams
Anthony Goicolea
Ari Marcopoulos
Armin Mühsam
Art Werger

B

Barbara Gallucci
Barbara Griffiths
Barry Jacques (with David
Smith)
Beaumont
Ben Aronson
Ben Needham
Ben Polsky
Benjamin Edwards
Bill Owens
Blue McRight
Bob Knox
Bob Marty
Bob Snyder
Bob Yarber
Brady Dollarhide
Brandon A. Dalmer
Brendan Carroll
Brian Tolle
Brian Ulrich
Bryan LeBoeuf
Bryan Zanisnik
Bryony Romer

C

Cameron Sharpe
Camilo José Vergara
Carl Gunhouse
Carson Fox
Catherine Hoew
Catherine Opie
Charles Burchfield
Charles Kanwischer
Chip Lord
Chris Ballantyne
Chris Doyle
Chris Faust
Christine Davis
Cindy Sherman
Claire Ironside & Angela
Iarocci
Colin Blakely
Cornelia Foss
Craig Lloyd

D

Dahlia Elsayed
Dan Cohen
Dan Feldman
Dan Graham
Dan Weiner
Dan Witz
Daniel Borins & Jennifer
Marman
Daniel Dove
Darlene Campbell
David Han
David Hilliard
David Hockney
David Humphrey
David Levinthal
David Linneweh
David Mahler
David M. C. Miller
David Opdyke
David Sandlin
David Schafer
David Urban
Dawn Clements
Debbie Reichard
Deborah Oropallo
Deborah Pohl
Diane Arbus
Don Lambert
Doug Kirtin
Drew Simpson
Duane Hanson

E

Edward Burtynsky
Edward Hopper
Edward Ruscha
Emily Helck
Emma J. Williams
Eric Fischl
Euan Macdonald
Eva Struble
Eve Arnold

F

Fairfield Porter
Fandra Chang

Frank Gohlke
Fritz Haeg

G

Gail Biederman
Gail Peter Border
Gary Evans
Geoffrey Aronson
Gergory Maka
Gillian Willan
Gina Randazzo
Glenn Priestley
Götz Diergarten
Greg Stimac
Gregory Crane
Gregory Crewdson

H

Hannah Vainstein
Hans Gindlesberger
Heather Deyling
Hector Canonge
Helen Cantrell
Henry Wessel, Jr.
Hiro Sakaguchi

I

Ilene Segalove

J

Jaclyn Shoub
James Casebere
James D. Griffioen
Jana Duda
Jared Flores
Jason Brockert
Jason Burch
Jason Falchok
Jason Seder
Jayne Holsinger
Jean-Pierre Hébert
Jeff Brouws
Jeff Gillette
Jeff Koons
Jennifer McAuley

Appendix A

Jennifer Zackin and
Sanford Biggers
Jessica Demcsak
Jessica Jackson Hutchins
Jessica Smith
Jim Reid
Joe Deal
Joe Goode
Joe Johnson
Joel Sokolov
Joel Sternfeld
John Armstrong
John Bennett
John Bowman
John Divola
John Greyson
John Lehr
John Moore
John Register
Jon Horvath
Jon Waldo
Jonathan Cecil
Jonathan Glick
Joseph Gerard Sabatino
Josephine Meckseper
Josette Urso
Joshua Lutz
Judy Dater
Julia Christensen
Julia Fish
Julia Peirone
Juliane Eirich
Julie Heffernan
Julie Jacqueline

K

Kemp Mooney
Kerry Schuss
Kevin Haas
Kim Beck
Kimberly Witham
KK Kozik
Kota Ezawa

L

Lamar Peterson

Lane Twitchell
Larry Sultan
Lars Lerin
Laura E. Migliorino
Laurie Brown
Laurie Simmons
Lee Friedlander
Lee Stoetzel
Leonard Koscianski
Leslie Sheryll
Lewis Baltz
Lisa Dahl
Lisa Krivacka
Lisa Steele & Kim
Tomczak
Liz Kuball
Lori Larusso
Lori Nix
Louis Porter
Lydia Schouten

M

María Mijares
Marion Belanger
Mark Bennett
Mark Campbell
Mark Kasumovic
Mark Mann
Mark Shetabi
Mark Tansey
Martin Mull
Mary Irwin Moore
Mary McCleary
Mary Snowden
Mathieu Gallois
Matthew Moore
Mauro Altamura
Meg Aubrey
Megan Malloy
Melissa Doherty
Michael Barton Miller
Michael Dal Cerro
Michael Fitts
Michael Graham
Michael Taglieri & Bojana
Videkanic

Michael Vahrenwald
Michael Ward
Michelle Levine
Michelle Loughlin
Michelle Muldrow
Mike Glier
Mike Mergen
Mindy Faber
Miranda Lichtenstein

N

Nancy Van Devender
Nat Slaughter
Nathan Sullivan
Nina Berman
Nyugen Smith

O

Oliver Husain
Orly Cogan
Owen Kanzler

P

Paho Mann
Pandra Williams
Pary Bell
Pat Brentano
Patricio Davila
Patrick Grenier
Patrick King
Paul Ching-Bor
Paula Winograd
Per Kristiansen
Pete Baldes
Peter Drake
Peter Piller
Peter Schroth
Piotr Chizinski

R

Rebecca Feranec
René Price
Richard Artschwager
Richard Fung
Richard Garrison
Richard Meisinger, Jr.

Richard Misrach
Richard Pasquarelli
Robert Adams
Robert Arneson
Robert Bechtle
Robert Isaacs
Robert Kogge
Robert Selwyn
Robert Williams
Robin Collyer
Rodney Alan Greenblat
Roger Sayre
Roger Tucker
Ron Erickson
Ron Lambert
Ron Longsdorf
Ross Racine
Rudy Venderlans
Russell Biles
Ryan Livinston

S

Salomon Huerta
Sandy Skoglund
Sarah Hobbs
Sarah McCoubrey
Sarah McKenzie
Sarah Ross
Shana Macdonald
Shane Tolbert
Sheila Pree Bright
Stefan Kürten
Stefan Petranek

Stefanie Nagorka
Stéphane Couturier
Stephanie Diamond
Stephen Lack
Stephen Shore
Steven Logan
Steven Millar
Suellen Parker
Susan Clark
Susan Dobson
Susan Evans Grove
Susan Grossman
Sven Pålsson
Sze Tsung Leong

T

Tad Lauritzen Wright
Tam Tran
Terence Dick
Terri Bright
Thomas Blanchard
Thomas Woodruff
Thomas Wrede
Tim Daly
Todd Haynes
Todd Hido
Tom Berenz
Tom Birkner
Tom Haney
Toni Silber-Delriver
Travis Shaffer

V

Valeri Larko
Vincent Desiderio

W

Wade Schuman
William Eggleston
William Garnett

Z

Zöe Charlton

Design/Architecture

Center for Land Use
Interpretation
(CLU)
Coen+Partners
Estudio Teddy Cruz
FAT (Fashion Architecture
Taste)
Fioto+Warner
INABA
Interboro
Lateral Architecture
LTL Architects
SITE (Sculpture in the
Environment)
Olmsted, Vaux & Co.
Robert A.M. Stern
Architects
Robert Licata

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²⁶⁶ See Appendix A for detailed information about Exhibits. See List of Images for complete list of images. Sources of images are noted in captions and footnotes accompanying images.

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