



The City Institute at York University (CITY)

Canadian Cities on the Edge: Reassessing the Canadian Suburb

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Occasional Paper Series
Volume 1, Issue 1
February 2008

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Abstract

Half a century of explosive suburban expansion has fundamentally changed the metropolitan dynamic in North American city-regions. In many cities the imagined suburban “bourgeois utopias” that evolved during the 19th Century, in material and discursive opposition to the maladies of the city, have given way to diverse forms of suburban and exurban development. New, complex and contradictory landscapes with diverse social, infrastructural and political-economic characteristics have appeared within pre-existing urbanisms and urban forms. This maelstrom of growth, with its associated fluid geographical restructuring, is being reflected in qualitatively different rhythms of everyday suburban life and has engendered stresses in the institutional and infrastructural cohesion of the metropolis – problematizing scalar governmental relations between city and suburbs, the theoretical and applied use of “urban” solutions to address “suburban” problems, and what constitutes “urbanity” itself.

Focusing on the Canadian context from a broad (yet by no means exclusive range of methodological and theoretical perspectives, it can be argued that, despite their ubiquitous presence, suburban society, space and politics have been unduly sidelined in various bodies of geographic literature. In response to this deficit, we think it is time to develop a research agenda for critically unpacking the complex social, institutional and infrastructural realities of contemporary suburban landscapes. In particular, we suggest future studies of “the suburbs” may benefit by engaging with the following: (1) the continuing predominance of an uncritical city-suburb dichotomy; (2) the presence of “in-between landscapes”, poorly acknowledged in both urban and suburban imaginaries; (3) the theoretical de-valorization of “forgotten” suburban spaces and lives within the contemporary metropolis; and (4) the dialectical interplay between (sub)urban society, space and politics. A re-conceptualisation of “the suburbs” requires a holistic understanding of the city’s varied landscapes, everyday realities, and contemporary political infrastructures, allowing us to grasp the fluidity and dynamism (and emerging contradictions) shaping present-day urban experiences in Canadian city-regions.

Introduction

Half-a-century of explosive suburban expansion has fundamentally transformed the metropolitan dynamic in North America. Sprawling city-regions now subsume historic central cities—rendering problematic many conventional and popularly-held understandings and representations of suburban space—suggesting the need to reconsider, reinvigorate and/or reinvent how suburbs are conceptualized, analyzed and represented in contemporary urban scholarship. In particular, we contend that conceptually “the suburbs” are widely (and uncritically) understood as (1) being relatively homogeneous in terms of social structure, built-form and political constituency; and (2) as playing a secondary, ancillary role in relation to the political, economic and cultural Mecca of the downtown urban core.

“Global cities” and urban governance literature is dominated by theoretical discourses that prioritize the role of city-regions’ downtowns, central business districts and political-economic institutions in the contemporary metropolitan dynamic, whilst the prevalent imaginary has presented suburban expansion as occurring autonomously from conditions within central city cores (Brenner, 2002). Whereas sustained suburban expansion since the end of World War II has produced, especially in the largest metropolitan regions, vast suburban regions that dwarf central cities in terms of population, employment and sheer physical size, recent urban scholarship has tended to emphasize “the city” and “urban life”—i.e. vibrancy and diversity, as well as tensions and conflicts in inner-city spaces. For example, urban scholars noted the increasing role of downtown and historic inner-city districts in the construction of “urban lifestyles” and the formation of “symbolic economies” in city-regions (Featherstone, 1991; Zukin, 1982, 1995, 1998) and have critically examined the contestation and displacement that accompany inner-city revalorization, gentrification and redevelopment (Blomley, 2003; D. Mitchell, 2003; Peck, 2005; Slater, 2006; N. Smith, 1996).

Despite the increasing predominance of suburban space in contemporary city-regions, suburban transformations (especially those occurring at the scale of everyday life) have received little focused attention. To be sure, new suburban forms such as “edge cities” or “technoburbs”—the sprawling mixed-use suburban zones on the urban periphery that are automobile dependent, highway oriented, computer network enabled, and relatively autonomous from older central cities—have been identified (see Fishman, 1987; Garreau, 1991). Fishman even goes as far as to explicitly argue that unlike the “traditional” suburbs that emerged in the 19th century Anglo-world (“bourgeois utopias”)¹ “this phenomenon...is not suburbanization, but a *new city*” (1987, p. 184). Still, old understandings and representations of suburbs predominate in urban discourses (both academic and popular). As Harris and Larkham (1999) suggest, this is in no small part because “suburbia” in the popular sense is mainly understood through representations and images centered more on myth than actual day-to-day realities. As Bourne (1996) observes, old city-suburb distinctions have disappeared and new ones have emerged. He

¹ Fishman describes “bourgeois utopias” as a low-density environment, defined by single family homes in a park-like setting. Domestic and nuclear family centered, suburbs had to be physically large and socially homogeneous enough to provide refuge from the discord of city life (poverty, noise and pollution, etc.). In particular bourgeois suburbia strictly separated work from home life, quite unlike the “premodern” city.

argues that scholarly and popular understandings of suburbs remain reliant upon “externally-imposed images, entrenched social meanings and inherited cultural baggage” and a “simplistic city-suburban dichotomy” that is “outdated and increasingly unsuited to the complex realities of contemporary metropolitan life and urban development” (Bourne, 1996, p. 163). As a corrective, he suggests that we “re-invent” both the content and terminology of our accepted understandings of suburbia.

Accordingly, this paper is driven by two broad aims: first, to provide a concise overview of recent literature on Canadian suburbs, and second, to tentatively tease out ways we might, as Bourne has suggested, reinvent or reconceptualize the suburbs in urban scholarship. In order to contextualize this project, we predominantly draw from the experience of the Toronto city-region to call attention to the presence of spaces that are neither “traditionally” urban, nor suburban, suggesting that Canadian suburban research could benefit by addressing the following: (1) the continuing predominance of an uncritical city-suburb dichotomy; (2) the presence of “in-between landscapes”, poorly acknowledged in both urban and suburban imaginaries; (3) the theoretical de-valorization of “forgotten” suburban spaces and lives within the contemporary metropolis; and (4) the dialectical interplay between (sub)urban society, space and politics.

Distinct or embedded literature?

The literature review conducted for this paper produced several important insights on scholarship about Canadian suburbia. First, there is a paucity of recent studies detailing contemporary “everyday life” in the suburbs. Second, scholarship that might be considered explicitly “suburban” in focus, as shall be discussed in the following, is a relatively small literature composed mostly of work on the historical development of—and living conditions in—early 20th Century Canadian suburbs. Third, there is a much larger body of literature that is metropolitan in focus (i.e. work on urban planning, urban politics, urban social geographies, critical urban geographies, etc.). Important insight into contemporary suburbia can be gleaned from this disparate body of research, but discussion of the suburbs tends to be embedded, implicit and highly fragmented and therefore difficult to summarize in a comprehensive and coherent manner.

It is, therefore, a considerable challenge to provide an exhaustive summary of literature that discusses or commented on Canadian suburbs. This is not intended to imply some sharp demarcation between what is “suburban”-focused and what is not. It is a recognition that with most Canadians now living in suburban areas (of some form or another), the suburbs form the essential backdrop for much of contemporary “urban” life and therefore are widely discussed—without necessarily being the focus of analysis or discussion itself. We wish to foreground this at the onset to highlight the degree to which any attempt to summarize scholarship on the suburbs is necessarily confronted by the challenge of identifying material that is scattered within work on other topics. It is inevitable that this review will have missed many contributions of this nature.

We present our review through the following conceptual groupings: (1) suburbanization and historical geographies of the suburbs; (2) the suburbs as political space; (3) suburban built environments and planning; (4) sustainable suburbs and suburban sustainability; and (5) metropolitan social geographies, before offering a critical appraisal of the literature. Of course, there are some papers that evade this kind of ordering; worth noting are papers

that call into question the validity of widely held popular and academic understandings of the suburbs, though these are not strictly limited to Canadian cities (see Bourne, 1996; Harris and Larkham, 1999; Harris and Lewis, 1998) and valuable summary sketches that outline past work and discuss key contemporary trends and issues (see Evenden and Walker, 1993; P. J. Smith, 2006). Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that groupings we have adopted in this review are somewhat arbitrary in themselves, and indeed, one of the issues we wish to emphasize are the multiple ways in which one particular prism of analysis may inform and enrich alternative perspectives through holistic and interdisciplinary research.

Suburbanization and historical geographies of Canadian suburbs

Harris (1996) provides a rich, comprehensive historical account of “unplanned” early 20th century suburbanization in Toronto. This important work documents the rise and eventual fall of self-built, blue-collar suburbs on the urban fringe. In contrast to the commonly held assumption that suburbs have always been middle-class, this work offers considerable empirical evidence that this view is far too simplistic. Harris provides no single explanation for working-class suburban development, but suggests multiple factors were at work, including the strong desire for homeownership, the availability of cheap land, the possibility of thrift and sweat equity as a substitute for capital, as well as factory decentralization, all played a role. His work doesn’t romanticize the unplanned suburbs, however. Harris is very clear that the cheap land available to the working-class on the urban periphery was so because it wasn’t serviced by municipal infrastructure (sanitation services, water or power, etc) and that this ultimately lead to the downfall of self-built suburbia.

Urban growth and development ultimately subsumed these settlements and made access to homeownership through thrift and self-reliance less possible—the less affluent were gradually priced out of the suburbs as they became more “conformist.” The eventual rise of corporate suburbia, the vast mass-produced tract housing of the post-World War II era,” is further addressed in *Creeping Conformity* (Harris, 2004). Here Harris argues that, for several reasons, Canada’s suburbs gradually came to reflect the much-maligned mass-suburbia of popular stereotype. New government policies (particularly CMHC² mortgage financing) and the introduction of comprehensive municipal zoning bylaws, as well as the costs associated with the extension of public infrastructure eventually tilted conditions in favour of large-scale developments and corporate builders. By the 1960s, gone was the messy diversity of land-uses and social classes that marked early 20th century Canadian suburbs. The post-World War II suburbs were “uniform,” “ubiquitous,” and “leading symbols of a new consumer lifestyle” (Harris, 2004, p. 164).

The importance of Harris’ historical work on suburbs cannot be understated. As he points out, *Crabgrass Frontier* (Jackson, 1985), widely considered the definitive account of American suburbanization, “assert[ed] that, as a simple matter of fact, most suburbs were occupied by the middle or upper classes” (Harris, 2003, p. 11). More recently, Beauregard (2006) interprets mass-suburbanization as a form of parasitic urbanization that relied on practices like redlining (the labeling of areas as unworthy of mortgage

² Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

financing or insurance) that directed investment away from central cities. Harris and Forrester (2003) examine the practice of redlining in Canada through a case study of mortgage lending patterns in Hamilton, 1935 to 1954. Their work suggests that redlining may have first been employed against peripheral areas that were unregulated and unserved by municipal infrastructure. Similarly, Harris (2003) complicates the assumption that homeownership necessarily produces more conservative politics. Instead, it is posited that suburban homeownership offered male workers some autonomy and degree of control in their personal lives and suggests historical (Canadian) evidence reveals suburban working-class politics to be highly contingent and dependent on the perception of threats to homeownership.³

Other scholars have also made important recent contributions to historical understandings of Canadian suburbia. In a review essay of *Creeping Conformity*, McCann (2006) suggests that the “diversity to conformity” model presented by Harris may need to be amended to better reflect regional diversity. McCann is quite complimentary of the work overall and does not dispute the wider premise that the suburbs in Canada were historically more than simply middle-class residential spaces. His concern, however, is to complicate Harris’ model with a better recognition of the role of provincial laws governing land development practices in promoting or delaying “conformity,” as well as the need to incorporate a stronger sensitivity to the distinctive suburban strategies employed by large regional land syndicates (notably the Hudson’s Bay company and the Canadian Pacific Railroad) in the pre-World War I era. Harris’s account, it is suggested, draws too heavily on his findings on British immigrant settlement in Toronto’s suburban periphery, underplaying suburban development dynamics from other regions of Canada.

McCann (1999) himself examines how the various interests, values and beliefs of suburban residents, land developers, builders, planners, financial organizations and governments have converged or diverged to change the “pluralistic” character of early Canadian suburbs to a more regulated, planned and middle-class (though not completely) urban space. Like Richard Harris, McCann also sees the forces shaping suburbia gradually shifting to squeeze out lower-income, working-class people, but his account highlights the role of land speculation and the build-out of streetcar suburbs. The development of an electric streetcar network, according to McCann, allowed the city to breakout of its “traditional” compactness and satisfy pent-up “suburban desires.” The resultant streetcar suburbs are a distinctive urban form that continues to be evident in many North American cities (see Hayden, 2003; Jackson, 1985).

Rather than producing a singular form of suburbia the streetcar suburbs differ from city to city depending on local public policy towards them and other utilities, as well as relationships between municipalities, streetcar companies and land developers. McCann (1999) also highlights that unlike later post-World War II suburbs, the streetcar suburbs were diverse, but only in a socially segregated patchwork style. He reveals that land developers built subdivisions with differing lot sizes in order to market different grades of property to the various social classes. Yet, as McCann (2006) notes, developer intentions were often subverted when wild land speculation gave way to periodic busts—

³ Given he is commenting on mostly historical political evidence it is unclear how this corresponds to the contemporary situation.

which resulted in lots reverting back to municipalities through tax-defaults. These “tax-lots” were then sold quite cheaply by municipalities without much concern for the social class of buyers in order to recover lost tax revenues. According to McCann, this “infilling” produced the mixing of social classes within subdivisions and led to more internal diversity in older middle-class suburbs than is generally acknowledged.

Lewis (2000; 2001) highlights the importance of industrial suburbanization in the 19th and early 20th century to the multi-nodal pattern of urban development in Montreal. In particular, his study emphasizes how industrial suburbanization in Montreal was dependent on the development of suburban working-class districts to provide needed labour. Lewis also foregrounds how local political and economic alliances created the physical, ideological and legal structures needed to make Montreal’s industrial and social spaces “malleable” enough for suburban growth and the rearrangement of the urban fabric. He suggests that each wave of economic decentralization involved new growth industries, new infrastructure needs and new labour requirements, rather than strictly the outward movement of existing firms and labour forces. Cyclical flows of investment into industry and the built-environment, therefore, created new industrial and social geographies without completely eliminating the existing ones.

Montreal’s working-class decentralization into peripheral, suburban areas was aided by a “suburban quilt of cheap housing” built by small contractors and speculative developers (Lewis, 2001). Lewis argues that the social composition and occupational structure of new residential districts were determined by the employment demands of their districts, with occupational specialization paralleled by ethnic segregation at the district, and sometimes neighbourhood level. As a result, the social geographies and multi-nodal metropolitan structure of Montreal reflects waves of suburban industrial development into the exurban fringe. The expanding city swallowed older industrial suburbs (and their associated social geographies) into the urban fabric, reordering them, but not entirely eliminating them—producing a fragmented social space, highly differentiated along class, occupational and ethnic lines.

The suburbs as political space

It is interesting to note in the above discussion, a tension between the American experience of suburbanization—both in terms of its physical structure and aesthetic, and cultural ideological significance—and an attempt to tease out the particularities, and assert the geographically contingent experiences within a distinctly Canadian context. For Beauregard (2006), the nature of America’s suburbanization in the “short American Century” has played a fundamental role in shaping the nation’s identity and perception of itself. Suburbanization is posited as a distinctly American phenomenon and with this, the experience south of the border casts a long shadow over the development and conceptualization of Canada’s own suburbanization and suburbanism. In the following section, we highlight the distinct political-institutional configurations and cultures found within Canadian society as a key factor that can significantly illuminate the uniqueness of the Canadian “suburban experience”. As Janet Abu-Lughod (1999) asserts in the American case, and is reflected in the critical intervention of McCann (2006), political boundaries, governmental infrastructures and urban territoriality are of fundamental

importance in shaping the spatial terrains, cultural patterns and political-economic relations of city-regions.

Placing suburbs within city-regions

The post-war growth of city-regions has extended and deepened the interconnection between cities' downtown cores and their suburban hinterlands as locations for the workers and services which facilitate the workings of the city (Kearns and Paddison, 2000; Swanstrom, 2001). The precise characteristics of such city-suburban interdependencies are complex, and contested within the literature. Brenner (2002), however, has noted an increased critical reappraisal of the notion that suburban expansion occurs autonomously from conditions within central city cores. Indeed, drawing from Savitch et al. (1993), he asserts that "suburban prosperity cannot be maintained under conditions in which central city economies are declining; concomitantly, central city economic growth is said to generate significant positive spillover effects for outlying suburbs" (Brenner, 2002, p. 14). However, it is significant to note the dominant, causal relationship being posited between the central city and suburban hinterlands.

These complex interdependencies point to the intricate situatedness of the suburbs within the functional coherence of contemporary city-regions (see Brenner, 2004). If suburbia is no longer what it used to be, as Soja (2000, p.242) posits, then the same must be true for the urban core itself; the relationships and dialectical connectivity between the two suggests they be framed within the wider context of the city-region. The political and economic relationships between the urban core and suburban hinterlands are highly complex as the spatial scope of the urban process—problematized by dynamic patterns of growth and development—does not neatly align with the political geographies of contemporary urbanized regions. Administrative boundaries and the spatial configurations of political institutions play a significant role in shaping the growth and form of urban areas, and, through varying mechanisms of taxation and service provision, are influential in constructing political and socio-cultural identities of (sub)urban inhabitants. However, the conceptualizations of political constituencies within such demarcated boundaries concomitantly produce the problematic of the city-suburb dichotomy.

Within this context, the political arrangements of Canadian city-regions offer a provocative empirical and theoretical prism through which we may tease out the particularities of the Canadian experience. As sites of urban governance structures and spatial-territorial institutional formation, Canadian city-regions have adapted to changes in the functional scale of urban areas and broad-scale economic imperatives in distinct ways vis-à-vis the United States, particularly in relation to their higher degree of regional-governmental integration (Sancton, 2000, 2001, 2003; Bourne, 2003).

Theoretical and applied attempts to produce a political-institutional solution to this spatial mismatch have been at the forefront of debates in academic and public policies circles, particularly in regard to the resurgence of metropolitan governance infrastructures in North America (Brenner, 2002; Frisken and Norris, 2001; Jonas and Pincetl, 2006; MacLeod, 2001; Sancton, 2000; 2001). Debates surrounding metropolitan governance and regional political bodies are fundamentally concerned with mediating the political, economic and infrastructural relationships between urban cores and their surrounding

suburban municipalities, but studies in Canada and the United States have revealed several significant comparative differences in: (1) national political institutions (Bunting et al., 2002; MacLeod, 2001; Sancton, 2001); (2) regional / provincial cultures and political-economic concerns (Boudreau et al., 2007; Bourne, 1997; Jonas and Pincetl, 2006; Leibovitz, 2003); and (3) wider, yet localized ideological understanding of urban politics, citizenship and democracy (Boudreau, 2003a; Burns, 2000; Isin, 2000; Keil, 2000). Furthermore, whilst the concerns of downtowns have been explored in detail, the suburban experiences and socio-spatial structures of this relationship appear under-theorized (Imbroscio, 2006).

Attempts to tackle urban problems through scaling up governmental and governance authority to the regional level is not a new strategy (Friskien and Norris, 2001; Boudreau, 2003a; Jonas and Pincetl, 2006; MacLeod, 2001). Canadian cities have a long history of regional governance experiments. Whilst certain metropolitan governance schemes have been employed historically in the United States (Abu-Lughod, 1999; Brenner, 2002; Jonas and Pincetl, 2006), Sancton (2001) ponders why those advocating for the “new regionalism” in the United States have not sought guidance from Canadian metropolitanism.

The creation of the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto (Metro) in 1954 represented the political-institutional fix for the era of Keynesian-Fordist growth in Toronto and urban politics within the wider Canadian Fordist regime of accumulation, achieving a successful model for a two-tier urban governance infrastructure and a political solution to the city’s growth; Toronto became “The City that Worked” (Donald, 2002b; Williams, 1999). However, whereas Metro Toronto was largely successful in integrating the City of Toronto’s inner suburban municipalities, as the city grew beyond its territorial and political limits—particularly with the expansive growth of the “905” region—new political configurations were required and put into effect with the creation of the “megacity” of Toronto in 1998, as is discussed further in Donald (2002a), Peirce (1996), and Sancton (2000; 2003). With this, several scholars have argued that the resurgence of debates on metropolitan governance since the early 1990s largely reflect the ideological and pragmatic attempts to move beyond the flaws embedded in the metropolitan strategies and regimes implemented during the height of the Keynesian-Fordist accumulation regime, and as such, seek to produce institutional-political frameworks which conform more closely to the prevailing conditions in city-regions and the global economy (Lefevre, 1998; Blatter, 2006).

Canadian metropolitan political cultures and divisions

Regionalist discourses in the Canadian context have focused, for the main part, on differences between Canadian political systems and governance formations and those developed in the United States. A key disparity lies in the different political cultures prevalent in Canada and the United States, despite their widespread similarities as western democracies (Rothblatt, 1994). Whereas the American system is seen as an outgrowth of universalistic principles and competitive individualism, Canada represents the outgrowth of attempts to preserve linguistic and provincial cultures, rights and elitism, and as such, Canadian city-regions exhibit far higher levels of municipal integration and developed regional governance political infrastructures than do cities in

the United States (Blomley and Pratt, 2001; Frisken and Norris, 2001; Rothblatt, 1994; Sancton, 2000; 2001). Whilst Rothblatt (1994) points to a national distinction between American individualism and Canadian elitism, within the national contexts themselves, there are significant variations in the political cultures of place between states, provinces and regions. Thus Boudreau et al. observe “one might argue that the differences between Quebec and Ontario are *international* in nature due to the peculiar nature of the position of Quebec in the Canadian federal state architecture” (2007, p. 31).

Whereas Boudreau et al. (2006, 2007) explore these tensions in relation to metropolitan governance structures within the Canadian state, several studies engage debates surrounding “local democracy”, municipal amalgamation, city-suburban political identities and relations, and urban political cultures in an international comparative perspective; particularly in juxtaposing the cases of Toronto, Montreal and Los Angeles cases which “appear to be limited struggles over local jurisdiction and administration” but are, in actuality “struggles over the urban dimensions of a globalized world, at least in part” (Keil, 2000, p. 759).

Boudreau (2003b) offers a highly insightful analysis of the implications of varying political cultures and ideological constructions of “local democracy” as presented during the municipal amalgamation debates in Los Angeles, Toronto, and Montreal. Whilst Angelenos (reflecting the American experience; although not universally) chiefly focused upon limiting the scope and corruption of “big government” and “big capital” and preserving the rights of the individual, Torontonians appeared more concerned with democratic accountability than direct participatory access within urban governance structures whereas, (reflecting the diversity within national-state contexts; particularly Quebec’s relationship to federal Canada) Montreal’s context shifted attention to the inefficiency of government and attempts to mediate the complex cultural and linguistic terrains of the city (Boudreau, 2003b; Burns, 2000; Keil, 2000; Keil and Young, 2003; Nielson et al., 2002).

The Toronto experience

A series of recent articles by Walks (2004a; 2004b; 2005; 2006) have examined voting patterns, political attitudes and party preferences within Canadian cities, specifically seeking to identify and articulate city-suburban divides. These works, especially Walks (2006), seem to share with others an interest in revealing and explaining the political dynamic in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) that brought Mike Harris and the “common-sense revolution” to provincial power in the mid-1990s (Boudreau, 1999; Isin, 1998; Keil, 2002). Harris’s “common-sense revolution” clearly represents for Ontario an era of “roll-back” neoliberalism, where social welfare programs and institutions were actively dismantled (see Peck and Tickell, 2002). Keil (2002) goes further, concluding that governmental actions taken “against” Toronto represented the nearly simultaneous “roll-back” and “roll-out” of a neoliberal programme. He points out the “roll-out” phase of neoliberal reform included, among its many restructurings, the rescaling of Toronto’s local government by amalgamating the “old” city of Toronto with its adjacent inner suburban municipalities (East York; Etobicoke; North York; Scarborough; and York). He further asserts the underlying motivation for the creation of “megacity” Toronto was to suburbanize the governance and political control of the city of Toronto (noted for its innovative social programs and “progressive” politics).

Boudreau (1999) suggests the battle over “megacity” Toronto revealed a struggle between differing factions of the middle-class, specifically the affluent urban and suburban middle-classes. Opposition to amalgamation (and eventually other Harris government restructurings) focused around the movement Citizens for Local Democracy (C4LD); a non-partisan movement, well-organized and largely comprised of urban middle-class progressives, including most prominently: former reformist mayor John Sewell and urbanist Jane Jacobs. C4LD forwarded three arguments against municipal amalgamation: (1) a bigger city would dilute the power of downtown reformists against pro-growth suburbs; (2) the merger was illegitimate as it was not announced in the Tories’ election campaign; and (3) it favored, along with cuts in education and service funding, the creation of a neo-liberal local regime coinciding with the Province’s “common-sense revolution” (Boudreau, 2005; also see Isin, 2000; Nielson et al., 2002). Despite large-scale political mobilization against the (then) proposed amalgamation and other planned cuts to social programs the Harris government pushed, not only was the “megacity” created, but Mel Lastman, a suburban politician promising to maintain “basic” municipal services and no property tax increases, was elected mayor in its first election.

The roots of C4LD’s apparent failure (and of “progressive” middle-class politics more broadly) lay in its inability to reach-out to other groups within the (to be) “megacity.” Isin (1998) suggests that opposition to the “megacity” revealed a great deal about new social cleavages developing in post-Fordist Toronto. The unfolding of the battle over the “megacity” merger could be re-read as the city’s urban middle-class, those working in public sector or professional jobs that had thus far evaded much of the impact of post-Fordist restructuring, versus suburban middle-class (presumably those in the more affluent areas of the inner suburbs and “905” region) private sector professionals whose lives were already ordered according to neoliberal rationalities (see Isin, 1998; Rose, 1999).

Lost in the mix were residents of less affluent inner suburban areas—the places where immigrants, refugees, the working poor and lower-middle class, those groups who have experienced the negative impacts of economic restructuring most directly, increasingly live. Isin (1998, p. 184) suggests Mel Lastman’s promise to freeze taxes appealed to these residents more because they were experiencing declining real-wages, than because they were “well-off suburbanites ‘who-liked their lawns,’ as the city elite would like to think of them.” Still, as Walks (2004a) reveals, overall city and suburban voters are diverging in terms of political attitudes and party preferences. Analyzing 1965, 1984 and 2000 Canadian federal election results, Walks’ study concludes that inner-cities have become more likely to vote for left-wing parties, whilst suburban areas increasingly support right-wing parties and exhibit attitudes consistent with a right-wing politics.

To probe this trend further, Walks (2006) examined in-depth the voting preferences and attitudes of voters in one electoral district (riding) in Toronto.⁴ The specific riding, Beaches-East York, was selected because of its diversity. According to Walks, Beaches-

⁴ The data analyzed came from a survey administered by the study author, involving face-to-face structured interviews (with a random cluster sample of 203 people living on twenty-five streets in the Beaches-East York electoral district).

East York can be split for analytical purposes into three generalized zones—inner-city Toronto, inner-city East York, and suburban East York—facilitating a city-suburban analysis without introducing comparability problems associated with comparing multiple ridings (i.e. the impact of individual candidates or locally specific political issues). Walks suggests his findings reveal “...a complex picture of the relationships among urban space, sociospatial processes, and political dispositions” (2006, p. 409). Among the findings highlighted by the author, the most interesting was the degree to which supporters of leftist politics self-selected into the inner-city zone of the riding and consciously sought to construct the inner-city as an “oppositional space”—a more environmentally and socially just place to live (Walks, 2006, p. 403). Respondents in the suburban portion of the riding with right-political views and voting preferences tended to voice an exclusionary discourse about immigrants and low-income housing being “out of place” in their suburban landscape, echoing the “neotraditionalism” revealed by some respondents from another study set in suburban Vancouver (see Dowling, 1998).

Finally, Cowen (2005) suggests that evidence of the suburbanization of Toronto’s urban governance can be seen in the post-amalgamation restructuring of public recreation. She notes that the city has dismantled the social right to public recreation in the wake of massive budget cuts and shifted towards a more selective and targeted understanding of service provision and accessibility. She argues that certain social programs have long been conceived as “residual” in Toronto’s older suburbs, even in the era dominated by the Keynesian welfare state. From the early post-war period right up to amalgamation, according to Cowen, the inner suburbs practiced a form of “suburban citizenship” that was dominated by strong normative understandings of suburban life. Principally, that residents would use the private spaces of the home or subdivision for recreation and leisure activities, except where specific activities required dedicated facilities for which user-fees would apply. Targeted programs were developed to provide “residual” access to less fortunate lower-income residents, leading Cowen to suggest that governance strategies, now identified as neoliberal, may in fact have their roots in long established practices of suburban governance.⁵

Suburban built environments and planning

Shifting political-planning processes in- and for- the suburbs

Often valuable discussion of the suburbs is simply embedded within broader studies. As the spatialities of political institutions in contemporary city-regions are theoretically and materially restructured, political and planning processes themselves are being reconfigured within these new state spaces, changing the ways in which suburban districts are conceived of and materially and discursively produced. Through case studies centered upon Toronto, Pierre Filion (1996; 1999) notes: (1) a transition in modes of planning connected with the shift from Fordist to post-Fordist production and consumption—particularly in relation to the development and growth of the postwar suburban form and suburban industrial parks; and (2) an associated shift from

⁵ For Cowen, targeted social policy in Toronto’s older suburbs became a means of dealing with non-normative or “problem” citizens, rather than a means of ensuring collective welfare or universal access to public services and goods.

technocratic top-down planning processes towards more participatory approaches connected to the influence of defensive citizen groups in challenging “modernist” planning and urban renewal (see also Kipfer and Keil, 2002; Rahder, 1999). His analysis however, points more towards a shift in political-planning discourse rather than any significant policy realignment. As such, Filion questions whether the shift from expert-driven technocratic modes of planning towards participatory projects produces greater levels of genuine democratic involvement. Instead, “postmodern”, “post-Fordist” planning merely serves as an empty symbolic political process which reflects the significance of stable, perpetuated societal trends such as the profit motive and capitalist property relations (Filion, 1999).

Sewell (1993) offers a critical perspective of Toronto’s broader “struggles” with modernist planning in the post-World War II era. This includes an overview of the city’s suburban development, including insightful discussion of important post-war suburban developments like Don Mills and Flemingdon Park. However, Sewell’s account ends in the 1980s and includes little discussion of the newer “905” suburbs. It is also strongly focused on “urban renewal” and modernist planning as it affected the inner-city. Sewell (1994) offers a brief examination of four suburban developments in the post-war era—one development for each decade (1950s to 1980s). In both works, Sewell is largely critical of the suburbs and advocates for a return to a denser, mixed-use kind of urban development, with strong emphasis on preservation of the historic urban-fabric (also see Fowler, 1992). However, whilst Sewell is critical of Toronto’s top-down modernist mode of planning, the collapse of this political-planning process in the GTA is argued to have altered both the ability to implement planning visions (significantly decreasing in the era of participatory planning), and reconfigured the nature of community resistance and protest movements. Filion’s (1999) analysis suggests that a move to participatory planning introduces a problematic transformation in the targets of protest movements that undermines the social sustainability and cohesion of [suburban] communities, particularly regarding the discursive construction of the social and ethnic status of newcomers as a reason to object to their presence.

Despite these reservations, feminist academics and activists have lauded the emancipatory benefits of the shift towards participatory modes of planning. Rahder (1999) argues that through participatory planning (with women at risk of abuse) the production of suburban space can be rethought, particularly in challenging the construction of “the suburbs” as private spaces, thus emphasizing the need to access and discover the needs of suburban communities with politically, socially, culturally and economically marginalized populations (Bushby, 1996; Rahder, 1999). The differences in perspective here, we suggest, may originate from the level at which suburban processes are being examined. Filion’s approach stresses the position of suburban development and participatory planning within a wider, capitalist economic framework, whilst the subsequent feminist interventions seek to understand the suburbs and their construction as a lived social and cultural space.

Suburban form and urbanization

The growth of Toronto, in terms of its position as a global city and its spatial extent and scale of the city-region’s urban process have increased the significance of the surrounding municipalities’ urban centres (Keil, 2000). Particularly, suburban mixed-use

centres—planned to act as distinct edge cities with integrated residential and business districts—have aimed to intensify suburban districts, and diversify land-use in the GTA (Filion, 2000; 2001; Filion et al., 2000). With this, metropolitan density-gradients and urban form have all received scholarly attention (Bunting, 2004; Bunting et al., 2002; Filion and Hammond, 2003; Filion et al., 2006; Filion et al., 2004), though with the exception of work on suburban office parks and mixed-use centres or “suburban” downtowns (Charney, 2005a, 2005b; Filion, 2001; Filion and Gad, 2006), this literature tends to have a metropolitan focus. An exception might be Filion et al. (2006) which, while metropolitan in scope, identifies the problem of “wasted density” (islands of high-density residential areas stranded in a sea of low-density single-family homes) as largely a suburban problem. Their findings highlight as particularly problematic, areas on the inner suburban periphery that despite being home to an increasing proportion of the city’s marginalized residents (see Murdie, 1994, 1996; Walks, 2001) are poorly served by public transit and other social services.

Critiquing the dominant view of Toronto—in the academy and professional planning circles—as the “city that works” in relation to other North American metropolises of similar size, Filion (2000) seeks to assert the significance of Toronto’s own sprawling suburban development whilst acknowledging the important role institutional arrangement and planning interventions have played in maintaining the health of both concentrated districts in the GTA, and the extension of dispersed suburban-type development. Despite attempts to bring elements of “urban” development into suburban downtowns in the GTA, these plans, Filion suggests, have failed to live up to expectations. Whilst success has been found in attracting development, investment and integrating activities in a moderately pedestrian friendly environment, characteristics of the suburban experience have shaped the production of these spaces, particularly in the continued dominance of automobile transportation (Filion, 2001, pp. 141-142). Specifically, these mixed-use suburban centres’ car orientation and relative inhospitality of the walking environment are blamed for the lack of realization of the benefits of concentrated, pedestrian based urban synergy (Filion et al., 2000).

In engaging with the GTA’s edge cities, Filion notes a dualism in the urban form of the metropolitan area; one which introduces significant cleavages between the City of Toronto and its surrounding municipalities. This dualism is based on: (1) governmental formations: with the outer suburbs antagonistic towards any form of metropolitan governance; (2) transportation (dis)connections, in part caused by the abandonment of regional transportation policies in the wake of the 1989-93 recession; and (3) the nature of the urban structure, with a concentrated urban core with dispersed suburban districts — leading to the description of Toronto as “Vienna surrounded by Phoenix” (Juri Pill, c.f. Filion, 2000, p. 166).

For Filion, Toronto therefore presents an excellent study site to examine the costs and benefits of concentration and dispersion in urban structures. Whilst sprawling suburban development has become self-propelling and self-financing and offers less congestion, critically thinking about development in the suburbs paints a complicated picture in balancing the health and accessibility of concentrated modes of *suburbanization*, the environmental costs of sprawl and transportation infrastructures, and the maintenance of affordable housing (Filion, 2000, pp. 181, 184). In taking the role and nature of suburban

edge-cities as the object of study, Filion (in single and joint authored papers) has shifted the analytical lens from a focus on the Downtown urban core. However, this approach still prioritizes understanding how the “urban” works in a suburban context, lauding the benefits of concentrated urban development in suburban districts that in all likelihood support differing conceptions and priorities for life in the suburbs. As such, the “suburban” is still, to a great degree, understood through the lens of the “urban” and the ideological and material priorities of those in the urban core.

Sustainable suburbs, suburban sustainability

Sustainability has come to replace social cohesion (e.g. Coleman and Cross, 1995; Coleman, 1984; Kearns and Forrest, 2000; Newman, 1972) as a dominant discourse in the production and theorization of contemporary urban spaces in both the downtown and suburbs. Sustainability however, is a topic with broad connotations and applies across the spectrum of social and environmental frameworks including social equality across racial (Bauder and Sharpe, 2002; Ley and Smith, 2000; Skaburskis, 1996), gendered (Bushby, 1996; Rahder, 1999; Skaburskis, 1997), immigration / migrant (Anisef and Lanphier, 2003; Bauder and Sharpe, 2002; Buzzelli, 2001), and class divides (Michalski, 2003; Walks, 2001), as well as ecological notions of sustainability (particularly significant in light of contemporary debates surrounding global warming and climate change) regarding both environmental degradation (De Soussa, 2002; Prudham, 2004) and environmental politics (Bekkering and McCallum, 1999; Gilbert and Phillips, 2003). Within the Canadian context, and particularly in regard to Toronto’s emergence and development as a global city, green urban spaces and environmental concerns have emerged at the forefront of public policy and academic analysis of the city and urbanized development (Desfor and Keil, 1999). The following highlights two differing approaches to sustainability in (primarily) Toronto’s suburbs.

Brownfield vs. greenfield redevelopment

Within the Canadian context the wider trends in urban development have focused upon greenfield development rather than brownfield sites and urban renewal. Whilst brownfield development is increasingly on the North American agenda—particularly with the search for more sustainable forms of urbanism—Canadian governmental support for such development at all levels has been minimal compared to the United States, despite the purported social, environmental and economic advantages of such (De Soussa, 2002, p. 251). Retractions of governmental subsidies for private developers and spending in general, and the lack of significance placed on Canada’s brownfield problem are posited as key factors in this disparity. Filion (1999) notes that despite the growth of environmental concerns, the significant pressure coming from this lobbying group did not stimulate major structural transformation in urban land use as this would clash with the capitalist imperatives of developers, consumers and suburban municipalities; “Rather, responses to environmental demands relied mostly on technological solutions... [such as sewage treatment facilities]... that leave intact present urban development patterns and their underlying interest base” (Filion, 1999, p. 440).

As nearly all Canadian urban centres were exhibiting growth in the share of housing starts relative to their peripheral municipalities at the begin of the 21st Century, De Soussa suggests that there is a need to invest in improving the visibility and perception of

brownfield sites as spaces for redevelopment in Canada's urban cores; specifically within the GTA and City of Toronto. With this, he asserts the importance of discourses surrounding sustainability and environmental sensitivity in any potentially successful brownfield developments, as well as the economic viability and social functioning of inner city redevelopment (De Soussa, 2002, p. 272). Both Filion and De Soussa emphasize the importance of challenging the discursive construction of sustainable development in the urban core and suburban municipalities, but Filion's further assertion of the importance of the underlying political-economic imperatives supporting current patterns of (sub)urban development, points to: (1) a reason for the lack of significant change in relation to these issues; and (2) a potential avenue to contest this problematic stasis.

Urban density: "New Urbanism" as a remedy for sprawl

Skaburskis (2006) suggests a shift in perceptions of housing and suburban development in Toronto, particularly in the role "density" should play in urban design. Skaburskis is critical of supply-side arguments promoting new urbanist projects as a sustainable antidote to sprawl by suggesting that it is demand-side pressures which forge cities' morphologies, whilst furthermore positing "the development [of new urbanist communities] may also increase sprawl by inducing households to leave their high-rise apartments earlier by the availability of lower-priced townhouses in new urbanist developments" (Skaburskis, 2006, p. 233). As with De Soussa (2002), the stress is placed upon sustainability in suburban development and density in fostering "community"—counteracting the alienation of modern suburbs and apartment blocks, thus achieving a sustainable mode of (sub)urbanism. This perspective is somewhat complimented by an implicit recognition of the role of government programmes in combating sprawl in the GTA.

Furthermore, as Skaburskis grounds his arguments theoretically in neoclassical economics, he attests high density new urbanist designs should be most successful as infill projects on vacant land trapped by earlier discontinuous growth (2006, p. 235). Suburban new urbanist developments are therefore argued to serve suburban markets as a stepping stone for urban households relocating to the suburbs, with the possibility of homeownership acting as a major draw. For Skaburskis, "new urbanism's greatest contribution toward increasing suburban densities can be made by capturing the market for single family detached houses on smaller lots" and as such, suburban housing of this nature is not viewed as affecting the downtown condo market (2006, p. 246). This assertion appears to compliment the argument Skaburskis (1997) forwarded previously regarding gender and housing demand in Canadian cities. What Skaburskis's argument does signify is the importance of a particular lifestyle which draws urban inhabitants into the outskirts of city-regions, lending credence to the assertion by Lehrer and Milgrom (1996) that new urbanism is really a repackaging of sprawl.

Whilst New Urbanism, as it appears in Skaburskis's argument, appears a remedy for the sprawling low-density of the stereotyped North American suburb, Bushby (1996, p. 28) notes that such approaches also challenge the problems posed by too great a density as can be found in, for example, Toronto's older, modernist inner suburbs, which foster "child unfriendly high rise dwellings set in barren, frequently unsafe, expanses of land,

favoring access... by car [and] without adequate services". The challenge of density in meeting community needs in the suburbs therefore reflects the diversity of experiences in city-regions complex suburbias, as well as issues of environmental degradation and social alienation. However, the diversity of these suburbanizations and suburbanisms are rarely, if at all, tackled in the same studies which leads to an unsatisfactory conceptualization of what constitutes cities' suburbs, spatially and socially.

Metropolitan social geographies

Research on "urban" problems like housing need/homelessness, poverty and neighbourhood disadvantage increasingly identify the suburbs, specifically older, inner suburbs, as "problem" or "at-risk" areas. The United Way's *Poverty by Postal Code* (2004), found that poverty increased dramatically between 1981 and 2001 in Greater Toronto. Most dramatic, however, was the widening of neighbourhood poverty in the inner suburbs. In 1981 deep neighbourhood poverty was largely contained in the inner-city. Yet, by 2001 neighbourhood poverty, according to the report, was an inner suburban story. This is consistent with Walks (2001), which suggests socio-spatial polarization is increasing in Toronto, with the inner suburbs now disproportionately home to those most negatively impacted by post-Fordist restructuring.

While the inner-city remains home to a sizable proportion of the city's marginalized urban poor, the suburban apartment boom of the 1960s produced a large stock of now low-rent apartment blocks scattered across the older, mature suburbs in Canada's largest metropolitan regions (especially Toronto). These inner suburban low-rent apartments are often highly localized within large tracts of mostly single-family homes creating micro-geographies of acute housing need and poverty in otherwise comfortably housed areas (Bunting et al., 2004; Fiedler et al., 2006). Complicating things is evidence of housing need and poverty that is thinly distributed across areas where residents are generally well-housed—a phenomena that may be explained by the growing role of basement suites as a form of low-rent housing in suburban areas, though this is somewhat speculative (Fiedler et al., 2006).

Studies examining immigration settlement patterns have noted the growing tendency for affluent new immigrants to by-pass the inner-city and settle directly in the newer suburbs, while noting that less affluent newcomers are struggling in Canada's bifurcated urban labour market and increasingly access housing via lower-cost apartments found predominantly in inner suburban neighbourhoods (see Hiebert, 2000). Others have pointed out that immigrants may employ alternate household structures, such as doubling-up or living in multi-generational families, as adaptive strategies to access housing—including homeownership (Murdie and Teixeira, 2003). This is sometimes reflected in income data, where average individual incomes in certain areas are well below the Canadian norm, whilst household incomes appear much healthier (Ley, 1999).

When examining the settlement patterns of certain visible minority groups, for example South-Asian and Chinese Canadians, a clear trend towards suburban residency has been noted (Hiebert, 2000). This may be partly explained by higher incidences of multi-generational and/or extended family living arrangements that make larger suburban homes the desired form of accommodation. For less affluent immigrants it may also be a reflection of the availability of low-rent apartment blocks in the older, inner suburban

areas. A number of studies analyzing the relationship of either spatially concentrated poverty or neighbourhood disadvantage and immigrant settlement patterns have highlighted noticeable overlap in the inner suburban areas of Canada's largest cities (Ley and Smith, 2000; H. A. Smith, 2004). Despite providing important insights into changing social geographies of suburbs these studies do not, for the most part, focus specifically on the suburbs—they happen to make noteworthy mention of the suburbs in their research results.

There are a number of exceptions that discuss the now wide-scale suburbanization of Chinese immigrants in both Toronto and Vancouver. These studies tend to address the impact of Chinese suburban settlement since the mid-1980s, either in terms of the emergence of suburban “Asian theme malls” (Preston and Lo, 2000), the changing geographies of “ethnic” business and commercial activity (Wang, 1999) or the response/reaction by long-time residents to the ensuing neighbourhood change (K. Mitchell, 1993, 1997; Ray et al., 1997). Collectively, these studies provide a partial window into the changing landscape—physical and social—of contemporary suburbs in Canada and highlight the local impact of national immigration policy. In particular, they reveal ongoing tensions between official multiculturalism (the ideology and policy) and the actual “everyday” reality in many Canadian communities.

For example, Ray, Halseth and Johnson (1997) explore the “changing ‘face’ of the suburbs” through in-depth examination of recent Chinese immigrant settlement in Richmond (a Vancouver suburb). Their work highlights the divide between actual Chinese settlement geographies and the social construction of these geographies by long-time residents. The rapid development of a sizable Chinese population prompted many long-time residents to react with hostility. Long-time residents expressed fear and concern that separate enclaves were forming, that traditional neighborhood values were being eroded and that the visual landscape and architecture of the city was being transformed into something they didn't feel comfortable with. The authors point out this was despite the reality that the Chinese moving into Richmond were largely family-oriented, middle-class homeowners who lived in single-family detached dwellings. From a socioeconomic perspective they weren't particularly different from long-time residents. Nor does statistical evidence, from property and census data, support the popular assertion that new Chinese residents were settling in concentrated “ghettos,” but instead suggests a more even geographic distribution.

This is a fear frequently identified by scholars, not just in Ray, Halseth and Johnson (1997), but also in work on the early 1990s “monster-home” controversy in the upper-class Shaughnessy area of Vancouver (K. Mitchell, 1993, 1997) and in contested development of “Asian-theme malls” in the Toronto suburb, Richmond Hill (Preston and Lo, 2000). Curiously, all three accounts document the reception of affluent Hong-Kong Chinese immigrants in what are perceived to be affluent or desirable areas. Less was found that addresses the tensions associated with contemporary neighbourhood change involving immigrant settlement in less affluent or desirable suburban areas.

Dowling (1998) explores the role of “neotraditionalism” in suburban exclusion. Her study examines two (quite different) recent residential subdivision developments⁶ in Surrey (a mostly lower-middle class or working class suburban city about 40 minutes east of Vancouver by automobile or SkyTrain⁷). Similar to Ray, Halseth and Johnson (1997), Dowling reveals that “neotraditional” understandings of home and neighbourhood were invoked by “white” residents as reasons they moved into these developments. For example, residents of the more affluent development (Glenwood) revealed a preference for perceived class and familial homogeneity. House size, material used and strict controls governing architecture and landscaping—not to mention the physical barrier offered by the highway to the south—offered control and symbolic separation from the “heterogeneous”, lower-income neighbourhoods that dominant the popular image of Surrey. Similarly, residents of the more modest development (Berkshire) referred to a desire to avoid “monster homes” or suggested that Newton, an area to the southwest of the development, had a poor reputation. In both cases, Dowling notes that further probing revealed that in the local “socio-spatial vocabulary” the residents were articulating a desire to avoid perceived “others” – non-traditional families (lone-parent families or those on “welfare”) or Indo-Canadians (an increasingly prominent ethnic group in the Newton area of Surrey, associated with “monster homes”).

Connectivity in the suburbs

The feared loss of connectivity, community and public space associated with suburban sprawl have generated creative, new forms of connectivity in the suburbs. Notions of “community” have been considerably rearticulated in the shift from an industrial to post-industrial society, particularly with the emergence of new technologies (e.g. the internet) and modes of urbanism (facilitated by improved transportation and communication) so that many people have more ties throughout and beyond their metropolitan areas than within their local neighbourhood (Hampton and Wellman, 2003). Whilst technology has been associated with alienation and the loss of traditional community practices (see Wellman, 1999), Hampton and Wellman (2003) argue that internet networking may provide new forms of connectivity and interaction within individualized, atomistic suburban communities. With this, technological developments serve as mechanisms to combat the perceived placelessness and loneliness of the suburbs (see Caulfield, 1994). What is arguably emerging can be seen as a postmodern form of virtual community as a symptom of the suburban experience—one which is devoid of a material basis itself, but may offer the potential for more interactions and community building within virtual “wired suburbs”—particularly in negotiating the complex spatialities and temporalities of non-standardized workweeks, times of employment and leisure, and non-traditional life patterns which reduce the predictability of neighbourly interactions.

⁶ It should be recognized that these two developments represent very different suburban landscapes. Glenwood is located north of the Trans-Canada Highway and is relatively exclusive and expensive (larger “executive” homes), while Berkshire is in Fleetwood (more lower-middle class area) and was developed as entry-level housing (smaller “starter” homes).

⁷ The SkyTrain is an elevated rapid transit system (subway). It’s main (Expo) line runs east from the city core diagonally through the city of Vancouver, Burnaby, New Westminster and terminates in North Surrey (Surrey City Centre).

Hampton and Wellman offer an interesting perspective on how we might begin to conceptualize the suburban (and exurban) everyday experience. The development of technological infrastructures—“wiring” neighbourhood [suburban] communities—alongside more traditional physical, planned infrastructures, they attest, will lead people living in these communities to interact with their neighbours to a greater extent than those living in communities without such forms of connectivity; “This is not unlike New Urbanism and neo-traditional planning advocates who argue that the neighbourhood common spaces, front porches, and other design factors encourage surveillance, community participation and a sense of territoriality” (Hampton and Wellman, 2003, p. 286). However, whilst such technological infrastructures may combat the atomization of suburban life, or at least provide a form of neighbourhood building which brings local communities together, such suburbanism is not unproblematic as feminist critiques have suggested that men are more satisfied with the suburban lifestyle than women (Bushby, 1996) and class-based critiques assert that the educational needs and cost of home computing raise important questions about the equity of “wired suburbs”.

Gendered perspectives on the suburbs

Feminist geographers have argued that “suburban studies” have largely failed to consider the suburbs as “women’s spaces” or critically examine the gendered nature of the discourse on suburbanization (Strong-Boag et al., 1999). Conventional accounts have focused on the suburbs as a male paradise, a haven from the hustle and bustle of the city and a separation of work life from family life. The suburbs, it is suggested, were closely implicated in the Victorian defense of the ideal middle-class family through the spatial separation of “private” homes and “public” cities. Accordingly, the inner-city came to represent locales of the deviant, the poor, the recent immigrant and racially marginalized and in particular a place of female sin. As Strong-Boag and her coauthors note, in early 20th Century Toronto the inner-city was a place that “respectable” society was expected to avoid, though interestingly the inner-city was typically understood as specific places (in Toronto the Ward, an immigrant ghetto), rather than the whole central-core.

Historical perspectives also highlight how the design of suburbs and suburban housing have enacted (and reinforced) gendered divisions of labour. “Traditional” suburbia was underpinned by women’s unpaid domestic work. Over time, it is suggested, these “bourgeois utopias” have become harder to find as women increasingly enter the paid workforce in order to maintain middle-class life-styles in the face of rising costs and stagnant or declining real-wages (see also Rose and Villeneuve, 1998). Paradoxically, increased work outside the home by women has resulted in contradictions between the “...assumptions underpinning suburban communities and the reality of female residents’ lives” (Strong-Boag et al., 1999, p. 178). These contradictions include the increased isolation of stay-at home mothers and the difficulties experienced by working-mothers trying manage the multiple demands of family-life and wage labour. In concluding, Strong-Boag and her coauthors emphasize the active role of women in negotiating and constructing the suburban landscape and highlights the differing experiences of women in the suburbs, with some women finding the “burden of being ‘good’ wives and mothers worsened by a landscape that has regularly ignored them,” while “[o]thers have flourished, able to mobilize community and kin resources in ways they experience as rewarding” (1999, p. 179).

Dyck (1989) draws attention to the “invisible work” that home and neighbourhood performs in a suburban area of Vancouver. In particular, she highlights how a “supportive neighbourhood” and deep knowledge of neighbourhood space (the availability of informal or reciprocal child rearing and “safe spaces”) offers women trying to negotiate the demands of child-rearing and paid-work some semblance of control over their lives, despite considerable constraints. More recently, Pratt (2003) reveals a more troubling picture of the unmet child-care needs of suburban women and the equally problematic low-wage world inhabited by domestic workers providing informal childcare.

Markovich and Hendler (2006) provides a critical examination of a “new urbanist” development in suburban Toronto. Their study considers the similarities and differences between feminist and “new urbanist” critiques of modernist urban planning and conventional suburban development. Employing a survey of women living in the Cornell development in Markham, the authors probed reasons for living in a new urbanist community, transportation and mobility, community relations and neighbourhood diversity. The study found that “new urbanism” does address some of the key concerns raised in feminist planning critiques, but only partially in actual practice. Furthermore, the authors suggest that the participants did not place high value on many of the tenets held in regard by feminist planners or “new urbanists.” Instead, most respondents indicated the price, style and the physical character of the housing available at Cornell were the primary factors influencing the decision to live in the development.

Kern (2005) investigates the role of middle-class privilege in allowing some women to feel “in place” in the diverse urban environment of Toronto. Her study attempts to unsettle past representations of women as fearful and constrained in urban space. The findings presented are based on in-depth qualitative research (focus groups and semi-structured interviews) with a small group of women who grew-up in the suburbs and had chosen as young adults to live in the inner-city. The study offers a number of interesting insights into perceptions of safety and belonging in urban and suburban environments. Echoing the sentiments expressed by early middle-class gentrifiers in Caulfield (1994), Kern’s participants indicated that urban design, abundance of “populated” public spaces and sense of community made them feel safer—more at home—in the city. Participants contrasted this with images of bleak, unpopulated suburban landscapes and a sense that lack of pedestrian traffic made them feel isolated and vulnerable.

All participants in the study were young (mid-twenties), white, college or university educated middle-class women without children. Kern suggests in her conclusion that accumulated cultural capital (in the Bourdieusian sense) played an important role in enabling these women to construct a sense of belonging by offering them the ability to blend in physically and socially in urban space. But, she notes it also enables race and class privilege to act as a blind-spot to urban violence more broadly. Kern connects her participants’ sense of being “in place” in the city to the suggestion by Ruddick (1996) that in Toronto, spaces of whiteness or middle-classness are constructed through associating urban violence with “other” neighbourhoods like inner suburban Jane-Finch or inner-city Parkdale (see Kern, 2005, pp. 368-369). She concludes that small size of her study limits generalizing the results, but suggests that the findings create an opening for critical dialogue on the role of privilege in the “framework of interlocking systems of oppression” (Kern, 2005, p. 372).

Critical assessment and discussion: Moving beyond the city's "other"

Bourne (1996, pp. 165-166) correctly summarizes the dominant image of the suburbs in popular media and traditional textbooks as a "relatively recent invention and a simple add-on to the fabric of the city... widely characterized as socially homogeneous, predominantly of one social class and household type, relatively deficient in jobs, economically dependent on the central core, and as symbols of more-or-less closed societies." The reality of "actually existing" suburbs suggests something quite different and if the work of historical urban geographers is taken seriously, it appears in many ways they never were.

To conclude, therefore, we wish to discuss two interlocking challenges that future urban scholarship should address: (1) the pressing need to rewire widely-held academic and popular understandings of the suburbs to reflect, as Richard Harris (amongst others) has suggested, that "other" suburbs exist; and (2) the persistence of a city-suburb dichotomy, dominated by "city-centre-centrism", which prevails in much of the contemporary literature. This is not a call to re-centre "the suburbs" at the heart of a new urban theory, but rather a suggestion that we engage with the complex realities of the spatial and social structures which lie beyond the glittering towers of downtown, and their relational positioning within contemporary city-regions.

As illustrated above, both within the distinct literature engaging with the production of and experiences within- contemporary Canadian suburbs, and the literature in which suburban concerns are embedded within wider analytical perspectives and empirical foci, suburban space and society are complex, multifaceted objects of study, thus highlighting the inadequacies of simplistic or reductionist portraits of suburbia. To highlight these assertions, in the following we wish to call particular attention to the following issues (1) the continuing predominance of an uncritical city-suburb dichotomy; (2) the presence of "in-between landscapes", poorly acknowledged in both urban and suburban imaginaries; (3) the theoretical de-valorization of "forgotten" suburban spaces and lives within the contemporary metropolis; and (4) and the dialectical interplay between (sub)urban society, space and politics.

Evenden and Walker (1993) suggest, the suburbs are diversifying across a broad array of variables (i.e. social, economic and political) at the same time as they have come to be "where the people are", making them increasingly representative of the social geography of Canadian cities. Yet, as Bourne (1996), Harris and Larkham (1999) and others have suggested the terminology, definitions and content of our understandings of the suburbs have not kept up with the reality of contemporary cities. It may be that, as Keil and Ronneberger (1994, p. 139) suggest with regard to contemporary urbanization,

...it remains difficult not to relapse into the old concepts. The center-oriented discourse on urbanization, in fact, appears more solid than the walls of the urban quarters which are constantly being revamped by new waves of creative destruction. We particularly lack the terminology and the imagery to express fully what is going on in that no-man's land beyond the city limits: the city that we think we see is a city which, in reality does not exist anymore.

The key question then is whether the suburbs should continue to be viewed as subordinate to "downtown" or the central city in urban studies? Or, whether in fact the

contemporary city has been turned “inside-out” and is no longer characterized by a tidy zonal or core-periphery geography, but instead by a poly-nucleated urbanism? To better understand contemporary urbanization, Sieverts (2003) introduces the concept of “Zwischenstadt” (or “in-between city”) to reflect the overwhelming presence of urban spaces that are neither fully urban, nor suburban (or exurban) in contemporary city-regions. Important for the discussion here is Sieverts’s assertion that our view is obstructed by the “myth of the old city” and that “...the one-sided love for the historical city is the main reason for our repression of the challenge presented by unloved suburbia” (2003, p. 17). Whilst the historical city comprises a relatively small space in contemporary cities, its image continues to overpower our understandings of the reality outside it.

Along these lines, Evenden and Walker (1993, p. 251) asked whether current suburban trends, continued strong growth and increasing social and functional diversity, would eventually reduce the central-city to a “specialized neighbourhood” within the metropolitan region. This may well be reflected in the increasing role of downtown as a space of flexible accumulation through the production of symbolic capital and mobilization of the spectacle (Harvey, 1987). As Zukin (1998) notes, cultural strategies for the economic development the urban core (either downtown revitalization, or simply to enhance and ensure continued vitality) has taken the form of historic preservation, private sector redevelopment and the creation of “tourist zones.” It is also argued the new urban middle-class—the “creative class” as popularized by Florida (2002)—provides the “critical infrastructure⁸” needed for inner-city revalorization through its construction and consumption of culturally sensitive urban “lifestyles” (see also Featherstone, 1991).

Using Toronto as a case study, Ruppert (2006) outlines the moral construction the “good city” and its deployment by business groups, planners and urban design professionals arguing for the redesign/redevelopment of Yonge-Dundas into a tourist and middle-class friendly landscape of consumption—centered around the creation of a public square and entertainment complex. Proponents of the redevelopment project constructed Yonge-Dundas as prime retail-space (conflated with public space) that was too important to be left to tacky, low-end retailers (and poor local-area residents). They instead highlighted its centrality to the downtown economy and the need to keep up with attractions offered (or being developed) by other cities to ensure that downtown offers a unique “experience” appealing to tourists or middle-class (read mostly suburban) consumers from elsewhere in the city. In this view downtown, and certain areas of the inner-city, have become both landscapes of consumption and a prized place to view vibrant, diverse street-life; people shop and consume the visual landscape, looking at each other without really interacting, becoming participants in what Sennett (1994) calls a purely “visual agora.”

As such, Yonge-Dundas Square and other downtown “cultural” projects, like the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts (the new opera house), the Royal Ontario

⁸ The “critical infrastructure” Zukin refers to is twofold: it includes the type of residents (class and occupation) reoccupying the inner-city neighbourhoods, especially the increased presence of people involved in the cultural industries (writers and artists, etc.); and the emergence or resurgence in cultural amenities like gourmet grocery stores and restaurants, art galleries, bistros, night-clubs, upscale cafes and boutique retailers, etc.

Museum's Daniel Libeskind-designed Crystal or the Art Gallery of Ontario's expansion and Frank Gehry-designed façade, not to mention Kensington Market, become central in attracting visitors and tourists. Downtown and its immediate environs become a "specialized" neighbourhood; not strictly, however, in the typical sense of containing a specialized service, but as the symbolic and discursive heart of the city, as well as home to the bulk of the city's symbolic economy as outlined by Zukin (1995). This, of course, increasingly fails to reflect the totality of the city as a metropolitan region, or the diverse ways it is experienced on an everyday level by most residents. This is most evident when dominant representations of the suburbs are contrasted with that of the city—understood as downtown and certain inner-city spaces. The city appears to be composed of textured, highly differentiated buildings and people, while "the suburbs" appear mostly through negation or "...as rhetorical foil for whichever desirable *urbs* they *subtend*" (Hartley, 1997, p. 209).

This shouldn't come as a surprise. As Hartley (1997) points out, for the "knowledge class" which includes academics and social/cultural commentators, suburbia has long been something to criticize and deride. The suburbs, suburbia, or "the suburban" are often evoked as a pejorative—as a stand-in for narrow and reactionary politics, for the banality of mass society and as the ultimate symbol of unsustainable mass consumerism (Hartley, 1997, pp. 184-185). The post-Second World War suburbs have come to represent poor planning (Sewell, 1993) and perhaps more importantly, "placeless" modernist landscapes (Relph, 1976; 1987). The "hardness" of postwar suburban built-form has, thus far, proven difficult to "soften"—at least visibly. Too often mass suburbia does reflect the concept of "placelessness" or "a weakening of the identity of places to the point where they not only look alike but feel alike and offer the same bland possibilities for experience" (Relph, 1976, p. 90). That there is truth in this critique of suburbia can't be denied (especially in the appearance of newly built suburbs), however, what is largely missing now are nuanced explorations of suburban diversity (both in terms of the built-environment and the social landscape and especially with regard to maturing suburban areas) and attempts to incorporate these more widely into urbanist accounts of city-regions.

Of course, what is highlighted here isn't exactly new. Other authors, both from within Canada and without, have made similar points in the past. For instance, in the introductory chapter of *Planned Sprawl* (1977), Gottdiener laments that critics persist in viewing suburbia as the city's bedroom—an appendage to the city, home to the urban middle-class, socially and physically homogeneous and largely dependent on the central-city. For him, this is the ghost of the Chicago School of Urban Sociology (i.e. the urban ecology model) continuing to haunt suburban analysis (also see Harris & Lewis, 1998). Gottdiener is clear that as suburbs age they develop internal differentiation and lose their "homogeneity and trouble-free existence". That is, over time the suburbs increasingly come to resemble the central city and its urban "problems", except their built form reflects the larger-scale afforded by private automobile travel.

Perhaps it is the vastness of post-war suburban form that has made perceptive accounts of contemporary suburbia so uncommon; it denies easy access. Hartley (1997, p. 187) points this out in response to a call for academics and cultural commentators to take a "bus-trip" to the suburbs, noting wryly "the interesting bits of suburbia are round the back or inside

the house[s], well out of sight of busloads of tourists, which is why such buses never go there.” Further to this, Frith (1997, pp. 275-276) highlights “pop imagery” of suburbia as

Suburban lives are lived behind closed doors. There’s no sense of excess here; no spill-over of cousins, aunts and uncles; no massing on street corners. These are single-class communities: people don’t know each other but they know what they’re like...Suburbia is a place where people live but don’t work; rest but don’t play (the real jobs, the real shops, the real pleasures, are elsewhere). Geographically, suburbia is, in effect, an empty sign, a series of dots on the map from which people travel—to the office, to the fleshpots, to the city. Suburban living is characterized by what it lacks – culture, variety, surprise – not by what it offers – safety, privacy, convenience.

The suburbs are lacking even the “visual agora” found in many city spaces, but Frith’s view of suburbia is still too narrow. It’s not clear that suburban living is any more characterized by safety, privacy and convenience than the inner-city is necessarily home to culture, variety and surprise. In order to revalorize such theoretically marginalized city spaces, urban studies need to view cities and urban development as a whole. If the concept of parasitic urbanization (Beauregard, 2006) or the see-saw of capital (N. Smith, 1984) once operated to produce serious decline or urban blight in certain inner-city areas, it is possible now that certain suburban spaces are experiencing the same (see Lucy & Phillips, 2000). In Toronto it seems evident that inner suburban areas like Jane-Finch, Rexdale-Jamestown, or Thorncliffe/Flemingdon Park share more in common with impoverished inner-city neighbourhoods like Regent Park, St. Jamestown or Moss Park than with stereotypical images of suburbia. Meanwhile, large segments of the newer “905” suburbs exhibit a stunning degree of ethnic and social diversity also generally absent from most conventional understandings of the suburbs.

If a closer examination of contemporary Canadian suburban space indicates a disconnect between the predominant imaginaries and realities of the metropolis, this will have distinct ramifications for both political practices engendered in negotiating diverse suburban spaces, and in integrating the political-economic realities between the urban core and its surrounding periphery within particular geographical contexts. The wake of the resistance to Metro Toronto’s amalgamation and the social cleavages revealed a more suburb-sensitive exploration of metropolitan political spaces in Canada would be productive. Collective action in “the city” has received detailed coverage in recent years, particularly with regard to the gentrification of inner-city neighbourhoods (see Blomley, 2003) or the restructuring/rescaling urban politics (see Isin, 1998; Boudreau, 1999; 2005). Particularly noteworthy is the self-selection of leftist progressives into certain inner-city neighbourhoods and their construction as “oppositional spaces” as described by Walks (2006). The self-conscious use of inner-city neighbourhood space as a marker of life-style and political distinctions (specifically as non-suburban or mass society oriented), begs the question: are the suburbs as conservative and reactionary as such inner-city perspectives indicate? More importantly, how prevalent is collective action in the suburbs that isn’t related to property-oriented concerns such as zoning/landuse or taxation policies or actions? Finally, given the social diversity of many suburban areas, what new sociopolitical movements might be present (or emerging) within the changing dynamic?

In order to reassess the Canadian suburb and suburban experience we suggest that the “forgotten spaces” of Canadian suburbia ought to be rediscovered through a

comprehensive, holistic research agenda, and these spaces and social structures be analyzed as a totality, and across interdisciplinary boundaries (Harvey, 1973). Following Harvey's (2006) insightful analysis, suburban space may be viewed as an amalgamation of physical form and material infrastructures, relative interconnections and flows between other nodes and places, and subjectively experienced and understood relationally. Neither of these perspectives is ontologically privileged, but each offers a particular prism through which we can understand the contemporary realities of Canadian suburbanization and suburbanism; each offering a distinct insight into the varying social, political, economic, cultural and ecological processes.

Dialectically constructing the contemporary Canadian "suburban process" through these prisms, providing an accurate portrait of urban periphery beyond simulacrum or ascribed Americanized theorizations, and placing them within wider structures and systems (whether this be within the city-as-political-economic-totality regarding the functional coherence of the urban process under neoliberal capitalism; globalizing networks of capital, people and ideas; ecological systems through which the urban and "natural" environments intersect; or in the dream-worlds and phenomenological experiences of [everyday] life in the metropolis) may allow us to begin to move beyond simplistic constructions of the city's "other", whilst unpacking both the complexities of suburban society and space, and the nuances of the lived experience in these environments. It may not be possible to adequately capture the dynamics of "everyday life" in contemporary suburbs, but more can be done to dispel overly narrow understandings of suburbia and replace them with a multiplicity of perspectives that better reflect present-day diversity of suburbs in Canadian cities.

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