

The concept of suburbia and modernity

Mette Mechlenborg, Ph.D. Fellow at Culture Studies

University of Southern Denmark for Centre for Housing and Welfare.

E-mail: mechlenborg@litcul.sdu.dk or mobile +45 – 61 30 96 34

Abstract: Suburbia is many things, but never neutral. It is a concept with a long history and close related to the rise of modernity. But as Rita Felski observes in her reflections on the concept of everyday life (1999- 2000), the same could be said about suburbia: Neither everyday life nor suburbia are rarely objects to a profound investigation and scrutinised as concepts: “Like any analytical term, it [a concept] organises the world according to certain assumptions and criteria” (2000: 15). This paper will focus on suburbia as a ‘travelling concept’ in modernity. Theoretically and methodically the project is placed in the field between housing research, cultural studies and aesthetic disciplines. It is embedded in the writings by Marshall Berman and in Mieke Bal’s theory on ‘travelling concepts’, developed for interdisciplinary studies. What I want to do is to devote the same attention to suburbia as a concept, as earlier has been devoted to the city: Artists of early modernity to various cultural sociologists, cultural historians and art critics have all approached the city as the primary scene for experiencing modernity, giving the suburb no or only a peripheral role in narratives on modernity. What kind of experiences is revealed, if we put the suburb and not the city central to our investigation of ideas and visions of modernity?

Suburbia in contemporary art and literature

At EXIT 2005, the annually presentation of the Royal Academy of Art’s new candidates, especially one of the artists, Eske Kath, draw attention to himself with his colourful, comic-like representations of Danish detached suburbia-houses in dramatic sceneries with explosions, hurricanes and fantastic firework challenging the conventional perception of the dull and monotone urban settlement. Not that he was to first to rediscover suburbia, but as a famous art critic put it, it seemed like a generation of artists were now confronting themselves with their upbringing in one of the half million detached houses, that were built between 1960 and 1979 and forever changed the Danish perception on home and house (Gade/Jalvin 2006).

The motivation for my project on suburbia is related to the revitalisation of suburbia in Danish art and literature. Within the last decade the traditional Danish suburb of detached houses and straight line hedges has become a new motif of essential investigation in disciplines, which normally haven't paid any or only little attention to suburbia. This is the case of the visual artists Eske Kath, Lars Bent Petersen, Ivan Andersen and Morten Schelde among others. As well as several Danish writers, beginning in the seventies with the legendary celebration of the work class suburb Vangede outside Copenhagen by the beat writer and performer Dan Turell a new generation of writers are making stories from and about the Danish suburbia with wit, irony and a new sensibility. Also within the theatre and music scene an interest in the magic and wonder of suburbia can be registered.

The motifs behind this aesthetic of suburbia are my primary interest. I am however reluctant to see this sensibility as a mere expression of a walk down memory lane, but sensing that something more profound is at stake. First of all, I am convinced that the aesthetic notion on suburbia is crossing the boundaries of art and connecting with the revitalisation of suburbia in urban planning, life style utopia and everyday life, placing suburbia in the midst of an interdisciplinary field of dynamic. Secondly many of these representations expresses a new kind of aesthetic as well as a new form of ambivalence compared to more classical representations on suburbia. They are so to speak challenging the conventional status of suburbia as an infant terrible in what the feminist sociologist Judy Giles names as "the paradigmatic narratives on modernity" (Parlour and Suburbs 2005).

Suburbia is inseparable from the concept of modernity. It originates from the new form of urban settlement created in eighteenth century by the privileged middleclass in London, who moved out of the city core and into a nowhere land between nature and the city (Fishman 1987). Now suburbia is one the most dominant type of settlement in most of the western modern world As such suburbia has become a very important and complex cognitive figure of modern time. As utopia the suburb is a metaphor for the good life, welfare and nature. As a dystopia suburbia reflects materialism, conformity and the culture of the petit bourgeois. Between these poles suburbia is a sticking point for a variety of feelings, visions and ideas. The ambivalence places suburbia in the field between nature and city, *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* (Ferdinand Tönnies), tradition and break of tradition and it is involved with issues on gender (Judy Giles); the rise of the middleclass (Robert Fishman,

Johs. Nørgaard Frandsen); welfare and popular culture (Roger Silverstone, Andreas Huyssen), everyday life and the mundane (Rita Felski) as well as on ideals of light, air and health (Claus Bech-Danielsen). All issues of the modern terminology, its construction and description. To approach suburbia is therefore to approach modernity. Depending on the perspective suburbia is seen as both an essential product of modernization and at the same time an escape from and a protest against it (Roger Silverstone). Focusing mainly on cultural representations my purpose is to look closer into this conflicting notion on suburbia, trying to reveal the dogmas and visions that lay behind, so it will be easier to understand the contemporary perception on the matter.

In this paper I intend to reconnect the rise of the modern suburbia to the classical modern narratives of the city by looking at different ways to cope with the experience of early modernity. My claim to approach suburbia as a concept is exemplified in three perspectives, which all represent works-in-process. These are: Suburbia as a concept in 1) Narratives on the city and modernity, especially as it has been reflected by what has been named the first modern hero – the French poet Charles Baudelaire's character, the flâneur, and secondly, by the businessman of Georg Simmel. In 2) As utopia: the flee from the city, I try to view the ideals behind suburbia as a third way of coping with experience of modernity and finally, 3) In the studies of everyday life, where I focus on the perception that everyday life is mainly something that goes on in the suburbs. By doing so I hope to reveal some of the dogmas behind suburbia as an important cognitive figure in our time, and put light on some of the dichotomies that are fundamental to our understanding of suburbia.

Theory and method: Suburbia as travelling concept

To see suburbia as a cognitive figure implicates several considerations on method and theory. As Rita Felski concludes on her analysis on the concept of 'every day life', (1999-2000), it is "rarely taken under the microscope and scrutinised as a concept". You may argue that the same could be said about suburbia. Like every day life suburbia is a term of common use and it is very easy to recognise with its attributes and accessories, but rarely object to analysis, even though like "any analytical term, it organises the world according to certain assumptions and criteria" (Felski:1999-2000: 15). Felski puts attention to the need for a more strict academic reflection in the common terms used within cultural studies. It is observations like these that have made me decide to look at suburbia as a concept. Theoretically and methodologically my project owe its structure to two major contributions: The American urbanist Marshall Berman for his definition on the experience of

modernity in *All that is Solid melts into air* (1982) and the Dutch cultural analyst Mieke Bal for her concept based method and her efforts to develop a method, that can deal with multiple theories, disciplines and objects (2002 and 2006).

Berman's idea of the experience of modernity

In *All that is solid melts into air* Marshall Berman comprehends modernity as a dialectic process of modernization on one side and modernism on the other (1982). Modernization represents the great discoveries in science, the industrialisation of products, capitalism and social processes due to these new inventions. Modernism on the other hand is ideas, visions, art and literature and is the mirror in which modernization is understood and interpreted. Berman's perspective is that the dialectic of modernization and modernism leave both of them essential to the understanding of the experience of modernity. To put it like this; our experience of modernity is a feeling mutually created by the social processes that form our daily life, and by the ideas, visions and explanations available for understanding these processes. His thesis is that modernization now rarely relates to modernism, and vice versa, which has resulted in a tragic gap between the way we understand and make meanings in our life on an abstract level and the way meaning is elaborated from the practices of the every day life. The experience of modernity has split so to speak, which makes it difficult to understand the late modern world. In our time, as he puts it "The idea of modernity, conceived in numerous fragmentary ways, loses much of its vividness and depth, and loses its capacity to organize and give meaning to people's lives." (1982: 17). A notion several thinkers have reflected on from Anthony Giddens, David Morley, John Tomlinson, and Richard Sennet.

In the matter of suburbia I do not intend to be able to close the gap, but I hope to contribute to the understanding of suburbia by doing the opposite of what is normal housing research practice: Instead of looking at social processes and life in the residence trying to conclude something in general from the specific, my purpose is to begin with the visions, ideas and interpretations on suburbia trying to make it say something new about the experience of suburbia.

Mieke Bal's idea of travelling concepts

Methodically Mieke Bal's Travelling Concept (2002) represents a model for working with concepts as generators of visions, ideas and meaning (cf. Berman). In here Bal introduces a concept based methodology within the interdisciplinary research of cultural studies that is able to compete with

“the exclusive methods of the separate disciplines” in humanities (2002:6-7). Her point is that concepts rather than methods should be the heuristic and methodological basis in the interdisciplinary research. She compares concepts with “theories in miniature” (2006:157), explaining that the concept should be looked at as a kind of epistemology that “serve[s] the purpose of organizing a set of phenomena, determine the relevant question to be asked about them, and determine the meaning of possible observations concerning them” (2006:158). In *Travelling Concepts* (2002) Bal says: “..concepts are flexible: each is part of a framework, a systematic set of distinctions, not oppositions, that can sometimes be bracketed or even ignored, but that can never be transgressed or contradicted without serious damage to the analysis at hand. (2002: 22-23). The comparison to theory is obvious, but with an important distinction: The ‘framework’ that hosts the given concept is not without ambiguity, but may contain several theories, visions and values as it ‘travels’ from one field of understanding to another. She says:

..concepts are not fixed. They travel – between disciplines, between individual scholars, between historical periods, and between geographically dispersed academic communities. Between disciplines, their meanings, reach and operational value, differ. These processes of differing need be assessed before, during and after each ‘trip’. (2002:24).

What is the essential to Bal’s concept based methodology is to look at concepts as concepts that performs. The purpose is to find out how a given concept acts and furthermore, to reveal any dogmatic use. She says: “While groping to define, provisionally and partly, what a particular concept mean, we gain insight into what it can do” (2002:11). To see suburbia as a kind of travelling concept in Bal’s terminology, is therefore to accept that suburbia doesn’t represent a neutral urban settlement, but must be grasped as a complex concept with a historical and idea based frame and clear, but conflicting distinctions. As a junction of ideals, dystopias and stereotypes suburbia represents an important theme in modern culture. By seeing suburbia as a travelling concept it is possible to 1) put attention to the dogmatic use of the term, 2) to focus on its travel between theories, disciplines and idea based fields and finally, 3) to involve artistic and cultural representation in ‘our groping to define what suburbia mean and do’.

What I will do in the following is to incite an investigation in the concept’s travel through different disciplines, historical periods and geographically dispersed academic communities related to

narratives on modernity. This is my framing of the concept of suburbia (cf. Bal). It is my conviction that this framing will reveal the 'luggage' that the concept of suburbia travels with through each field of understanding. Because my focus is on the concept of the privileged suburbia (from Fishman) that led up to the glory days of the Danish suburbs of detached houses in the sixties and seventies, all other kinds of suburbs (problem-suburbs, concrete and vertical suburbs or classical perception on suburbia, as something just outside the city) are being ignored. What I am interested in is the concept of the typical and popular middle class suburbia with its straight line hedges, detached houses and home centred lives: The most popular housing ideal in Denmark and in most of the Western world.

Draft for a travelling guide: Suburbia in three perspectives

My investigation in the travel of the suburban concept is yet very young and has just begun to move. So far I concentrate on three major trips. How is suburbia understood and used in: 1) Narratives on the city and modernity, 2) As utopia: the flee from the city and 3) In the studies of everyday life. My research on suburbia as a travelling concept as it is presented here concentrates on the early modern perceptions. So far this focus is established in order to reveal the complex origin of the concept and to try to connect one use of the concept with another in terms of modernity and how to deal with it. It is however my purpose to follow up the travel till today, but as my work is in process the following pages only represent starting points not conclusions and a complete research presentation.

1. The narrative on the city and modernity

The concept of modern suburbia has a long history and is closely related to the very idea of modernity. Suburbia, however, only plays a minor role in the writings on modernity. Despite its close connection to the rise of the city, to the development of modern transport system and despite of its unquestionable popularity from the very beginning, suburbia has remained remarkable invisible in the narrative of modernity (Fishman, Giles, Silverstone). If any attention is drawn to suburbia at all it is often being seen as a bad alternative to the city or even worse, as a symbol of the middleclass life, degeneration and conformity. Roger Silverstone puts it like this: "The suburban is seen, if at all at best, as a consequence, an excrescence, a cancerous fungus, leaching the energy of the city, dependent and inert and ultimately self-destructive" (1997: 4).

This negative notion on suburbia is still vivid and alive in many disciplines from architecture, art, philosophy and in high culture public discussions. And it is reflected in the perception of the term suburbia in daily life: A suburb is something one experiences from a car or a train. Something that flickers past you in the rush from A to B. A urban settlement with no or only few characteristics and almost no personality. This echoes in what the postmodernist Jean-François Lyotard in 1993 concludes about the suburb. He says: “the sentence of the suburbs is the regret to live in a place, which is no place, a non-place: nor from the outside, nor from the inside. [...] The suburb is the permanent embezzlement of the western spirit’s longing for community and the inhabitable space-time” (my translation 1993:2-3). Even though Lyotard’s notion on suburbia must be understood in its philosophical perspective; it describes the general perception on suburbia as something dissembled from the city and the development of the city life. Suburbia is neither city nor nature. It doesn’t contain the chaos, fluxus and adventures as the city, and is not beautiful, tranquil and contemplative as nature (see also Schau 1996). The exclusion of suburbia from the canon of the city has even more profound significance if we try to understand Lyotard’s characteristic on suburbia as a non-place. For being a non place, is to be nothing at all: The matter of suburbia is not even the matter of a victim or a fiend to the city, but the matter of nihilism. Suburbia has no significance. Suburbia is nothing philosophical speaking.

If suburbia is close to nothing, then the city is everything. Whether approached through art, sociology, history or even within economical theories, the city – not the suburb – has been the centre of the paradigm of (early) modernity.

The archetype modern man: the flâneur

The French poet and critic Charles Baudelaire is mythologized as one of the first to describe the experience of the modern world. Begun in 1859 with the essay “The painter of Modern Life” Baudelaire cast his legendary hero, who curses the hours he must spend indoors, when he could be out recording “the landscape of the great city” (1859/2001:1-18). The creation of the flâneur is closely related to the rise of the city, especially as he is described in his strolls around the city streets in Paris Sleen (1869), where he is being intrigued and absorbed by the new world, “the modern”. For the flâneur the urban scene is the scene of art and existence. The flâneur is, as Baudelaire describes him: “this lonely figure equipped with a creative imagination, always on his move in the big desert of people” (my translation 1853/2001: 03). With his sensitive imagination

the flâneur collects and keeps files on his observations in order to understand the ‘beauty of his time’. A beauty Baudelaire himself defines as “the temporary, the transient and the not-needed” (my translation 1853/2001: 34). On a higher level what the flâneur experiences on his strolls is not only the rise of the big city, but the rise of modernity. The ambivalence of the new is reflected in most of Baudelaire’s writing, although it is evident and never forgotten, but praised, that the old world is about to collapse. This dynamics transition taken place in the streets of Paris is represented in Baudelaire’s ambivalent relation to home as a symbol of tradition and regression and what is about to be left behind. The streets of Paris are inhabited not with individuals, but with the mass, an impersonal ‘desert of people’. And to the mass the city is equivalent to the home of the bourgeois, replacing the attributes of the home with attributes of the city. To the mass the “news stands [are] its libraries, post boxes its bronze statues, benches its bedroom furnishing. [..] Among these [counterparts to the home] the passage [was] the salon. Here more than elsewhere the street revealed itself as the furnished outdoor interior of the mass.” (my translation, 1995:13). Somewhere else the replacement of attributes reveals a far more profound ambivalent feeling: “To be not-at-home, but yet at home everywhere; to be in the centre of the world and yet hidden from the world, these are some of the minor pleasures given to these independent, not-participating souls” (my translation 2001: 27), he concludes about the masses of the city.

As several researchers have noticed this celebration of the city as a symbol of movement, temporarity and surface rather than anchor, tradition and roots, resulted in a new kind of mentality. A mentality, though understood differently, most researchers agree define the very experience of (early) modernity. In “The invisible flâneuse” (1985) Janet Woelff compares the flâneur’s distanced approach to his city with George Simmel’s famous writings on ‘blasé’ in “Die Grosstädte und das Geistesleben” (1903); a mechanism of defence developed by modern [business] man in order to protect himself to the bombardment of stimuli and information thrown at him in the new city. Simmel defines this psychological mechanism as a group sociological development from ‘gemeinschaft’ to ‘gesellschaft’ (Ferdinand Tönnies), from the life of the little town to the urban life of the metropolis, a transition closely related to the rise of capitalism and industrialisation. Others point out that the flâneur can not be compared with the businessman of Simmel, but must be understood as a more sensitive character engaged in the fluxus and movements, but not capable of protecting himself against it. Marshall Berman describes the correlation between the city and the modern conscious as almost symbiotic. With the flâneur the

man and the city become one. In an interpretation of Baudelaire's writings, it becomes obviously how the city, the sensibility of the flâneur and the ability to create is related:

The man in the modern street, thrown into this maelstrom, is driven back on his own resources –often on resources he never knew he had - and forced to stretch them desperately in order to survive. [...] He must become adept at [...] sudden, abrupt, jagged twists and shifts – and not only with his legs and his body, but with his mind and sensibility as well. (1988:159).

Whether modernity is something man must surrender to (the flâneur) or overcome intellectually (the businessman) the rise of the city forced the modern man to deal with a new kind of movement, environment and world. But in doing so, this also, paradoxically, enforced new modes of freedom. When the flâneur is characterized as the first modern hero, it is because of his heroic position to modernity of the city. Compared to the businessman, who is coping with the city in an intellectual way as he overcomes it with his superior ratio, the flâneur inquests the modern world with his whole body and soul without any agony or complaint. As a consequence hereof the flâneur embodies an anti-home-ideology: His insistent dedication to the urban life reveals a perception on home as if not the antipode, then the symbol of all the things that modern man must leave behind him in order to throw himself in the arms of the new world. As Keth Tester puts it, the flâneur is a modern hero who “only feels existential at home, when he is not physically at home.” (1992:2).

This fundamental mobility and freedom opens up a great wealth of new experiences for the modern man of the city, and it might explain why the city has been the main symbol of the modern up through the nineteenth century's art and culture. From the impressionists to the futurists, painters and writers have used the city as a generator of motifs that could express the aspects of the new age: The train, the cafés, the streets and boulevards, the electricity as well as anonymity, fluxus and freedom. This notion of the modern left no room for the fixed place symbolized with the home or the alike. To dedicate one self to the adventures of the city was to leave the safety, but claustrophobic home. And that was what Baudelaire did with his flâneur, what Knut Hamson did later on with his character in *Hunger* (1890) and what a number of artists has done since then. Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1955) for instance is one long goodbye to home, stability and order. With this stigma home and the like became synonyms, as Christopher Reed puts it, with tradition, family, the regression, the silence and closure (1996).

Some concluding remarks

The link between the city and the modern experience has been the main theme in classical analysis of the transformation of *gemeinschaft* to *gesellschaft* by Ferdinand Tönnies to writings on modernity, among these Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno/Horkheimer, Richard Sennet, Marshall Berman among others. You may claim that the superiority of the city have been so powerful that the process of the modernization most of all has been equivalent to the process of making the whole society work as a city. The urbanisation is, as Michael Foucault puts it, a tool of power. As he claims urbanism constitutes the basis of society's development of a micro social empowering, and was established in spatial and material disciplining of human behaviour in the city (Foucault 1986:240). As the Danish researcher on suburbia John Pløger concludes on this notion, this has been the foundation of the basis ideas of society, as the design and planning of the city represented society's hegemonies ideas and values (Pløger 2003:9).

My thesis is that this stigmatic role that suburbia has been subordinated to in most writings on modernity and urbanisation, 'travels' with it into other disciplines, not only in art and culture, but in academics disciplines as in ideals on suburbia as well as study of every day life. Suburbia as something in opposition to the city, mobility and the public life give resonances in others fields of study. Suburbia is often described and defined with virtues and activities remarkable antithetical to the virtues and activities of them of the city.

2. Suburbia as utopia

If Baudelaire's *flâneur* and Simmel's businessman represent to ways of coping with modernity in the city, then the modern suburbia could be understood as a third, not accepted alternative.

Normally two major ideals are said to give rise to the modern suburb. One who claim that suburbia was closely related to the visions behind the garden cities especially as it was described in writings by Ebenezer Howard in Britain around 1900 and one who with Robert Fishman as a key note speaker claims that suburbia is not a product of a genius architect or urban planner, but a "collective creation of the Anglo-American middle class" (see Bourguios *Utopias* 1987:x). In opposition to the garden city which symbolizes the perfect and controlled harmony between nature and the city, Fishman argues that suburbia first of all is designed to express a complex balance between freedom and comfort in the shape of middle class ideals on community, private property and family life.

However conflicting the two explanations are, both of them express the complex matter of suburbia understood as a concept. My thesis is that in both cases the concept of suburbia is part of a framework connected to the description of the city and of modernity. Both ideals deal with how to cope with the new conditions in the city as a maelstrom of information and stimuli. Meaning that the rise of suburbia could and ought to be seen as a third way to react to the over stimulation of the nerve system. An alternative that didn't forced the citizen to either adopt himself to the new modes and movement of the city with its excitements and loneliness as Baudelaire did or forced him develop a psychological defence mechanism making you blasé to your city, city life and its inhabitants. This notion is one I will very much like to pursue and develop in my work.

The third way: The flee from the city

In Denmark the rise of the modern suburbs began with the breakout of cholera in 1853, which resulted in a flee from the overpopulated and infectious capital (Zerlang: 2001). In the camp outside the city walls the first humble suburbs and the Doctors union's villas were built as an alternative to the bad housing possibility in the city. Later when Copenhagen changed into a metropolis and the city wall fell, the flee to more quite areas outside the chaotic city was still close related to a the bad climate, even though the reasons were not physical conditions of the city but also the more mental challenges connected to the life in an urban world. These symptoms were the same in all big cities in Europe and America. This is confirmed by medical texts from the second half of the 19th century, describing a direct connection between the new conditions of modernity and the function of regression within this modernity. The texts deal with different illnesses that arose in relation to the escalating trade market that became the starting signal of the capitalisation of the Western countries. One of the most important of these was George Beard's *A Practical Treatise on Nervous Exhaustion* from 1869. The book that was build over studies of patients in New York, was published in translation in France in 1895 (Robinson: 1996) and set the grounds for a common diagnosis of many nerve diseases prevalent at that time. In the book *Neurasthenia, or the 'maladie de Beard'* as it was soon named, is explained as an overstraining of the nerve system when exposed to the intense stimulation of the urban world. Because the majority of patients suffering from the disease were "mental workers", well educated males from the bourgeoisie, the disease soon became a symbol of mental superiority and considered a natural and socially accepted consequence of the new powers in the market place – capitalism (Drinka, 1984:208). In the Danish version of the new disease, the famous doctor Knud Pontoppidan became head of the new department of mental- and

nerve diseases in the city hospital in 1875. He was convinced that the metropolis and especially the heavy traffic in the streets was the main cause to this new mental disorder. In an article in 1887 he writes: " .. our Capital has just now become a big city, where the complicated and potentialized Existence is an expression of an overburdened Nerve system" (Quoted in Zerlang: 125). Later another Danish doctor Frode Sadolin takes up this international perspective on the city in *Nerve-Helse* (trans. *Nerve-Health*, 1908). As well as his predecessor he is making the life of the city with its gas lights, horn on cars, noisy trains, and questionable newspapers, and "where you live up in the air in rented apartments" responsible for "the nervousness of our time" (my translation 1908: 66) . The notion echoes the description of the city made by both Baudelaire and Simmel, but is here made from a very different perspective and with a very different interpretation. The new conditions of the city made by the rise of modernity are not something that man should accept, but must fight against. The city is seen as a generator of mental diseases and a symbol of a modernity not suited for the (healthy) human beings.

The cures against the 'maladie de Beard' were many and different, most of them suggesting the busy and overburdened tradesman to withdraw to a quiet oasis of rest and convalescence when he returned home after a hard day's work. As the art historian Joyce Henry Robinsons explains in her article "Honey I'm Home" – a whole series of handbooks and popular articles concerning interior design and furnishing (later this became the task of magazines and periodicals) grew out of this new market culture advising the housewife how best to create an interior satisfying to her husband. Among others Robinson refers to Jacob von Falke's *Art in the House* 1879:

.. the husband's occupations necessitate his absence from the house, and call him away from it. During the day his mind is absorbed in many good and useful ways, in making and acquiring money for instance, and even after the hours of business have passed, they occupy his thoughts. When he returns home tired with work and need of recreation, he longs for quiet enjoyment, and takes pleasure in the home which his wife has made comfortable and attractive. (Robinson 1996:102).

The best alternative to the over intense city was however a rural life. As the Danish physician Frode Sadolin argues in his reflections on the new nerve disease, the moving in to the rural villas of the bourgeois and the allotment sheds of the working class was in both cases a health matter of "brain

hygienic” (1908:55), because, as he puts it, “the consistency of housing is one of the reasons why the rural population is the marrow of the people” (1908: 66). In a prediction on the future his scenarios are more close to what happened than he could imagine:

The cities as settlements have shown not to be suitable, though they looked attractive and contain the merits of the cities: The water works, electricity, telephone and easy communication will by and by be something the country side has as well. People move out of the big cities into the villas and allotment sheds. The big city will end up with a core containing of only business, administration and entertainment residentials, with electric track ways running like waves in all directions through a landscape of villa towns. (my translation, 1908:64)

Two years before this scenery; the suburb had become an official urban settlement and was put into statistic, when Gentofte and Frederiksberg was listed as suburbs of Copenhagen in 1906 (Zerlang: 2000, Lind: 1996). In J.P. Trap’s Danish canon from 1911 the number of Danish suburbs had raised to 26 (ditto). And between 1960 and 1979 the amount exploded when up to half a million detached houses were built in order to host one and a half million of the Danish population (four and a half million). In 2003 the Danish business magazine *Mandag Morgen* published a research saying that 67% of every Dane wished to live in a private owned detached house with a garden, if they had a choice.

It is on this background that I am convinced that the rise of the Danish suburbia as well as any other suburb can not be understood solely in its own term, but most always be defined in relation to its rejected other: the big city. The suburban utopia is in its nature ambivalent, as it on one hand represents the perfect balance between city and nature, on the other hand a nightmare image of the metropolis. As Fishman describes it in his writings on the early British suburbs: “In the eighteenth century creators of suburbia bequeathed to their successors their positive ideal of a family life in union with nature, but they also passed on their deepest fears of living in an inhumane and immoral metropolis” (1987: 27). Further more the rise of modern suburbia can be approached as a way modern man cope with modernity in the city. In relation to surrender of the flâneur and the overcoming of the business man, the suburban man deals with the modern experience by a process of separation. Suburbia as many researchers have observed have to do with separation of work and

leisure (Gary Gross/Silverstone), public and private life (Walter Benjamin, Krishan Kumar), progression and regression (Christopher Reed), creating and sleeping so to speak. As it is understood in relation to the nerve exhaustion of the early modern, suburbia represents an oasis close to nature where modern man can relax and come to his senses after a hard day's work in the city (Silverstone).

Some concluding remarks

If there is any truth in seeing the rise of the modern suburb as a way to cope with the modes of the modern city (not only as a scene of overpopulation and bad condition, but as mental room) then we need to consider modernity not only as something that grew out of the city but is closely related to the new urban settlements outside the city, even though the relation is antithetical. This means that we need to reconsider the definition on modernity as something defined not only by the life in the city, but as something defined by the life in the city as well as the life in the suburb. This involves a redefinition of modernity as something characterized with hegemony, movements, progression, anonymity, surface, adventure and chaos. My next perspective on the concept of suburbia deprives therefore from the study of everyday life. Something that suburbia is said to be a primer carrier of.

3. Suburbia and the concept of everyday life

The relation between suburbia and the study of every day life is my focus in this perspective on suburbia as a travelling concept. My working thesis here is yet quite vague, but I am very interested in finding out why Rita Felski and Judy Giles claim, that suburbia has always been a preferred scene for investigation on every day life (Felski 1999-2000, Giles 2004). As if the routines of the daily life and its habits are more evident and manifested here than elsewhere? By doing so I hope to go deeper into the dogmas and dichotomies of the concept.

The authentically everyday life

Like suburbia everyday life seems to be uneven to fit the classical definition on modernity. In Felski's investigation on *The Invention of Everyday life*, Felski observes, that scholars have an tendency not only to oppose everyday life to critical reflections and speculations, but to "the historical possibility of modernity" (1999-2000: 17 and 19). The reason is, she argues, that everyday life is understood as something fixed to a singular place (home), as something to do with repetition rather than progression and that everyday life is connected to the female or private space,

rather than to the masculine and public space of the city. Maybe because, as Felski observes, everyday life is being emerged as an field of authentic experience, a kind of pre-modern, traditional relationship to world and nature (1999-2000: 16). A strong myth that echoes the writings of Heidegger and Levinas and underlay the perception in the majority of the increasingly interest in home, every day life and the ordinary in art, television and politic. As a symbol of the authentic and pre-modernity home and its alike is something to pull against the overwhelming and omnipresent globalisation (Kumar, Winther, Mechlenborg). Felski concludes:

The vocabulary of modernity is a vocabulary of anti-home. It celebrates mobility, movement, exile, boundary crossing. It speaks enthusiastically about movement into the work, but is silent about the return home. (1999-2000: 23).

She echoes Henri Lefebvre's notion in *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (1984), when she argues that everyday life must be understood as a modern phenomenon emerged in the nineteenth century. Not to mistake that everyday life didn't exist before that, but in the nineteen century everyday life got increasingly important as it became a subject to major criticism in art and literature. Lefebvre himself sees the negative interest in everyday life as a result of the impact of capitalism and industrialisation on the daily life of the people in the modern and overpopulated city. Due to the new conditions the monotone and repetitive aspects of human life suddenly became visual and subject to attention. This made everyday life, as Lefebvre puts it, a material by-product of capitalism and a sign of social degradation. On this background Felski singles out three reasons for this negative notion on everyday life: First of all intellectuals in nineteen century began to comprehend everyday life as synonym with the 'natural attitude' rather than 'theoretical attitude', meaning everyday life was approached as a taken-for-granted perception rather than the distanced and observing perception registered by the scientist of the modern (1999-2000.17). Secondly, everyday life got distinguished from the aesthetic. Art is seen as something remote from the practice of the routines and rituals of the mundane. As it is a foregone presumption that in everyday life objects are transparent, in art they are subject to attention and contemplation.

The third reason, why everyday life has been excluded in modernity correlates according to Felski with the fact that everyday life is lacking of distinction and differentiation and is therefore opposed to the heroic life of the specific, the extraordinary, the new, the battle (1999-2000:17). A distinction,

Felski notes, that is related to the fact that women were understood as being almost identical with everyday life. Femininity, modernity and suburbia are exactly what are being investigated in Judy Giles *The Parlour and the suburb* (2004). In her work Giles challenges the stereotypes of the everyday life by a reevaluation of women's roles in the rise of the British suburbs in the first half of the nineteenth century. Like other feminists in cultural studies she is questioning the view that everyday life in the rise of modern time slides into a ranking of persons: Those who were able to escape the realm of monotony and emptiness of everyday life (men) and those who culturally, economically and socially were stocked in the routines of everyday life in the suburbs (women). She says: "The deadening routines of the home are set in opposition to the progressive march of science and industry which is thereby (misleading) constructed as masculine" (2004: 32). She points to the fact that the connection between everyday life, suburbia and women must be approached as a construction of boundaries, and that the connection must not be separated with issues on modernity and class.

This attempt to confine women to the private space of suburban domesticity which enacts a refusal to see woman as agent of modernity requires a constant shoring up the boundaries between spaces of masculinity (the city) and femininity (the suburb). From this perspective we can read the constant and insistent denigration of suburbia in terms of attempts to exclude certain groups, notable women and working class, from the narrative that constitutes our understandings of modern times. (2004: 39).

Giles is here affirming what has already been mentioned, that narratives on modernity can be approached as a process of separation (Benjamin, Kumar, Morley). Suburbia as a complex concept plays an important role in this separation as has been linked with privacy, everyday life, women's space and tradition leaving the opposite to be the city, the public space, the spectacular, masculinity and modernity. A separation process that also involves the academic writings and representations in so far high art is opposed to popular culture, or as Giles implies in the following quotation, in so far classical academic disciplines are opposed to studies of every day life:

The significance of vacuum cleaners, semi-detached houses, and the decline of domestic service has been largely ignored, except by those fields of study frequently dismissed as less

serious and academically respectable, for example cultural studies and design and technology. (2004:23).

Giles's observation reveals a major problematic methodological aspect of research done on everyday life and of suburbia. If there is any truth in this pessimistic quotation, and I am about to believe so, it shows that the studies that tries to overcome the constructed oppositional thinking, in reality are validating it, as their academic status do not possess the authority to do so. This means that the concept of everyday life, like the concept of suburbia is not only a cultural, but an academic problematic field of interest waiting to be solved.

Some concluding remarks

To see suburbia as a concept within the study of everyday life implies a discussion of the very understanding on the term. It is also evident that the connection between suburbia and everyday life cannot be separated from the discourses on modernity, gender and class. As well as it implicates a question on the status of the studies which do research on everyday life.

The suburban gap: can we close it?

What I hope to show and to elaborate on in my work is that the research on suburbia as a concept reveals different understandings on the matters that can not be separated from our understanding of modernity, as the dichotomies revealed are close related to the very definition of the experience of modernity. Maybe the question has to be put differently: Maybe our problem with suburbia does not have to do with suburbia but with the way we normally define modernity?

Methodologically, culturally and academically it is obvious why an investigation on the contemporary interest in the detached suburbs of the sixties and seventies is highly interesting as it give us an opportunity to study the understanding of suburbia in a new context. As an object of aesthetical investigation our approach on the matter is from the beginning on the right court, so to speak. As a unique example of high art dealing, not with the experience of the life in the city, but with the infant terrible of the city, the suburb, we have a strong entry point to the matter that due to its nature as high art is already part of the privileged narrative on modernity, as well as of academia and high culture. Secondly, the aesthetic of suburbia that is now happening in art and

literature might give suburbia what it lost with its separation from the city: It is giving it a status of an artistic motif and further –a cultural recognition.

Not that I think this extraordinary approach to suburbia will alter fundamentally our perception on suburbia and close the tough gap in (post)modern life (Berman). But by questioning the negative perception of suburbia in fine art and writings on modernity with the same weapons that are withholding this classical perception, I hope to contribute to a more complex, nuanced understanding on the matter and throw light on the gap between the social processes and concrete daily life in suburbia, and the ideas, visions and explanations available for understanding suburbia

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