Suburbia and the Arts

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Identical lawns, gossiping housewives and watching sit-coms: traditionally the suburb has been associated with mass culture, consumerism and the middle class, making it subject to an emphatically critical discourse in high culture – to the extent it has been accorded any attention at all. This perception may explain the absence of the fine arts in cultural studies' research on suburbia. But it also reveals profound dichotomies in the academic disciplines dealing with suburbia. As the alternative to the city, suburbia engenders research on oppositions like the fine arts vs. popular culture, masculinity vs. feminine culture, immaterial values vs. materialism, and, finally, experiences of modernity vs. more traditional ways of living. My project is theoretically placed in the field between housing research, cultural studies and aesthetic disciplines and is methodologically embedded in Mieke Bal's theory of 'travelling concepts' developed for interdisciplinary studies (2002). What I am trying to do is to (re)establish a dialogue between more traditional representations of suburbia and contemporary aesthetic investigations into life in the suburb. It is my hope that this dialogue will challenge the conventional understanding of suburbia in cultural studies as well as question the historical and contemporary canonisations of suburbia as a concept.

Introduction

At EXIT 2003, the annual exhibition of the Royal Academy of Art's new graduates, one of the artists in particular, Eske Kath, drew attention to himself with his colourful, comic-like representations of suburban Danish detached houses in dramatic sceneries with explosions, hurricanes and fantastic fireworks, challenging the conventional perception of the dull and monotonous urban settlement. Not that he is the first to rediscover suburbia within the arts, but as a famous art critic put it, it seems as if a generation of artists are now confronting themselves with their upbringing in one or other of the half million detached houses that were built in suburban areas between 1960 and 1979 and forever changed the Danish perceptions of home and housing (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 with its detached houses and its straight lines of hedges has become an exotic motif demanding investigation in aesthetic disciplines which have normally paid little or no attention to suburbia. I am however reluctant to see this sensibility as a mere expression of a walk down memory lane, and sense rather that something more profound is at stake. First of all, I am convinced that the aesthetic notion of suburbia is crossing the boundaries of art and connecting with the revitalisation of suburbia in urban planning, architecture and everyday life, placing suburbia in the midst of an interdisciplinary dynamic field. Secondly many of these representations express a new kind of sensibility as well as a new form of ambivalence compared to more classical representations of suburbia, which have tended to approach suburbia as an *enfant terrible* of the city, giving it at best only a peripheral role in what the feminist sociologist Judy Giles designates "the paradigmatic narratives on modernity" (Parlour and Suburbs 2005). Are the new representations of suburbia challenging the conventional status of the term crossing several fundamental dichotomies in the culture of canonised modernity? And if so, how and why?

Framing and Thesis

Despite suburbia's minor role in the canonical writing on modernity, suburbia cannot be separated from the rise of the modern world. As a modern urban settlement it was created in the eighteenth century by the privileged middle class in London, who moved out of the city core and into a nowhere-land between nature and the city (Fishman 1987). It is closely connected to the development of modern transport systems and the separation between work and leisure, private life and the public sphere in modernity. Now suburbia is one of the most dominant types of settlement in most of the western modern world, criticised by many, loved by even more. As such suburbia has become a very important and complex cognitive figure of modern times. As utopia the suburb is a metaphor for the good life, comfort and nature. As a dystopia suburbia reflects materialism, conformity and the culture of the *petit-bourgeois*. Between these poles suburbia is a fulcrum for a variety of feelings, visions and ideas concerning the ideal of an authentic modern life.

My project in this paper is to try to focus on suburbia as a "travelling concept" in modernity, as it is my conviction that the problems concerning suburbia can be seen as a matter of the relations between suburbia and the understanding of an 'authentic' (early) modern life. By taking this perspective I hope to reveal some of the dogmas and dichotomies that contaminate the concept of suburbia and to find a way to explain why suburbia has been stigmatised in the fine arts and writings. Something that will give us a chance to approach the contemporary interest in suburbia as a shift in concept. Secondly, what I will do in this paper is to (re)connect suburbia with its origin in modernity by approaching it as a way to cope with the new conditions in the early modern city – understood as a maelstrom of information and

stimuli. This means that the rise of suburbia could be and ought to be seen as another, uncanonised way of dealing with the over stimulation of the nervous system caused by the new modern city, designated "Neurasthenia" by the American doctor George Beard in his famous book *A Practical Treatise on Nervous Exhaustion* from 1869. Focusing on this new, modern, nervous disorder, I will approach suburbia as one strategy out of three involving attitudes and solutions in relation to the new condition of modernity: An alternative strategy that didn't 1) force the citizen to adapt himself to the new modes and movement of the city with its excitements and loneliness in the manner the French poet and critic Charles Baudelaire's *flâneur* or 2) force him to develop a psychological defence mechanism making him blasé towards his city, city life and its inhabitants (cf. Georg Simmel). Every strategy is theoretically embedded in canonised texts and given expression by a canonised spokesperson. They are:

1. Strategy: To surrender. Result: ambivalence and art (artist and critic Charles Baudelaire).
2. Strategy: To overcome. Result: the blasé attitude and capitalism (sociologist Georg Simmel).
3. Strategy: The separation. Result: suburbia (doctor and writer Frode Sadolin).

My hope is to gather arguments for the mayor thesis in my Ph.D.-project, asserting that one of the reasons why suburbia has a bad reputation in the fine arts and canonical writings on modernity is that suburbia, in contrast to the city, has been constructed as an urban scene not able to generate any aesthetics at all. Until now suburbia has been artless. Finally I must strongly stress that my paper for this workshop is an expression of a work-in-progress, and the following pages are therefore not to be mistaken for a wrapped up investigation in the matter. They are evidence of evolving ideas.

Theory and Method: Suburbia as Travelling Concept

To see suburbia as a cognitive figure implicates several considerations with regard to method and theory. As Rita Felski concludes on her analysis of 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 of suburbia. Like every day life suburbia is a term in common use and very easy to recognise with its attributes and accessories, but rarely subjected to analysis, even though like "any analytical term, it organises the world according to certain assumptions and criteria" (Felski 1999-2000: 15). Felski draws 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. My project is therefore embedded in the writings of the Dutch cultural analyst Mieke Bal and especially in her concept-based method and her efforts to develop a method that can deal with multiple theories, disciplines and objects (2002 and 2006). Her point, as it is described and practised in *Travelling Concepts in Humanities* (2002), is that concepts rather than methods should be the heuristic and methodological basis in 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[s] the relevant question to be asked about them, and determine[s] the meaning of possible observations concerning them" as she puts it with reference to the idea of concepts according to Isabelle Stenger (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 (discipline, period or through time) of understanding to another. What is essential to Bal's concept -based methodology is to look at concepts as concepts that perform. The purpose is not to discover the meaning of the concept but 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 means, 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 1) to draw attention to the dogmatic use of the term, 2) to focus on its travelling between theories, disciplines and idea based fields and finally, 3) to involve an artistic and cultural representation in 'our groping to define what suburbia mean and do'.

The Canonical Narratives on Modernity

Despite its unquestionable popularity from the very beginning, suburbia has remained remarkably invisible in the narrative of modernity (Fishman, Giles, Silverstone). If any attention is drawn to suburbia, it is often seen as a bad alternative to the city or even worse, as a symbol of middle-class life, degeneration and conformity. Roger Silverstone describes the classical perspective on suburbia 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).

The city, on the other hand, has been central to our understanding of modernity. Whether approached through art, literature, sociology, history or even within economic theories, the city – not the suburb – has been the centre of the paradigm of (early) modernity. The French poet and critic Charles Baudelaire is mythologized as one of the first to describe the experience of the modern world. 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 Spleen* (1869), where he is being intrigued and absorbed by the new world, "the modern". Baudelaire introduces his hero in 1859 with the essay "The painter of Modern Life, a man" 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 *flâneur* is, as Baudelaire describes him: "this lonely figure equipped with a creative imagination, always on the move in the big desert of people" (my translation 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 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.

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, electricity, as well as anonymity, fluxus and modes of freedom and adventure. This might explain why the city has been the main symbol of the modern up through the nineteenth century's art and culture. The link between the city and the modern

experience has also been the main theme in classical analysis of the transformation of *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* from Ferdinard Tonnies to writers on modernity, among them Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno/Horkheimer, Richard Sennet, Marshall Berman. In *Not at Home. The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture* (1996) Christopher Reed claims that the artists and architects as well as the promoters of the avant-garde, among them Adolf Loos, Le Corbusier and, as already mentioned, Baudelaire and Benjamin and Clement Greenberg, are to be blamed for the somehow one-sided definition of the 'authentic' modern life as they "assert their accomplishment through contrast with domesticity" (1996: 7). One may claim that the superiority of the city has been so powerful that the process of modernization most of all has been equivalent to the process of making the whole society work as a city. Urbanisation is, as Michael Foucault puts it, a tool of power. Since the eighteenth century, he claims, urbanism has been the foundation of society's pursuit of a micro-social empowerment – an empowerment which was established in the spatial and material disciplining of human behaviour in the city (Foucault 1986:240). As the Danish researcher on suburbia Jon Pløger concludes on this notion, this has generated the basic ideas of society, as the design and planning of the city represented society's hegemonic ideas and values (2003:9).

The Inherited Modern Dichotomies

This stigmatic role that suburbia has been subordinated to in most writings on modernity and urbanisation, 'travels' (cf. Mieke Bal) with it into other disciplines, genres and medias. Suburbia as something in opposition to the city gives resonances in other fields of study and is closely related to every day life's dichotomies as well as high culture's dogmas. Without going into details and explanations the most fundamental dichotomies between the city and suburbia are these:

CITY	vs.	SUBURBIA
Public space		Private space
Mobility		Stability
Adventure		Everyday life
Masculinity		Femininity
Fine arts and culture	Popular culture	
Modernity		(Semi-)tradition

Though exaggerated this account of the dogmas behind our understanding of suburbia reveals profound academic conflicts in research on suburbia. Suburbia, the housewife, everyday life and popular culture etc. have each been subjected to one kind of research, namely gender-, design- and cultural studies as well as studies in every day life. The city with its related attributes and high culture representations have on the other hand been objects for aesthetic disciplines, philosophy, theories in urbanisation and globalisation, disciplines which traditionally do not grant suburbia any or only little importance. As Judy Giles points out in her study on suburbia, every day life and women:

> 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).

Methodologically, culturally and academically it is obvious why the aesthetisisation of the Danish 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. In making them an

object of fine art our approach to the matter is from the beginning on the right court, so to speak. As a unique example of conventional high culture dealing, not with the experience of life in the city, but with the *enfant terrible* of the city, the suburb, we have a strong entry point to the matter that due to its nature is already part of the privileged narrative on modernity, as well as of the related academic disciplines. Secondly, the aesthetic of suburbia that is now emerging in art and literature might give suburbia what it lost with its separation from the city: It is giving it the status of an artistic motif and further – a cultural recognition.

How to Reconnect Suburbia with Its Origin

What I intend to do on the following pages is to reconnect suburbia with its modern origin by introducing a three-strategy analysis of the mental disorder "neurasthenia" as a symbol of the experience of modernity in the city. My focal point is the relationship between the rise of the modern city, modernity, and the existence of various descriptions of new mental disorders that sprang out from these new conditions. My intention is to accept rather than dismiss the myth about the city as a privileged scene for experiencing early modernity, but then try to nuance the way this experience is handled within different aspects of modern self-understandings.

Neurasthenia and the Rise of the City

In Denmark the rise of the modern suburbs began with the outbreak of cholera in 1853, which resulted in a flight 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 possible in the city. Later, when Copenhagen changed into a metropolis and the city wall fell, the flight to more quiet areas outside the chaotic city was still closely related to a the infected air, even though the reasons were explained not only by the physical conditions of the city but also by the more mental challenges connected to 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 city. The texts deal with different illnesses that arose in relation to the escalating market which became the starting signal for 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 a result of studies of patients in New York, was published in translation in France in 1895 (Robinson 1996: 100) and formed the basis for a common diagnosis of many mental 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 nervous 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 gentlemen from the bourgeoisie, the disease soon became a symbol of mental superiority and considered a natural and socially accepted consequence of the new power in the market place (Drinka 1984: 208). In the Danish version of the new disease, it found its spokesperson in the famous doctor Knud Pontoppidan, who 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 course of 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).

This connection between the city, a fundamental new experience and the rise of modernity is essential for our understanding of the discussion of the fundamental dichotomies

within the studies of suburbia as a cognitive figure as it established the background for the urbanised version of the modern break-through.

Three Strategies on How to Cope With Modernity

For Baudelaire as for several artists, writers and commentator of the early modern, these new codes of the city were approached with ambivalence. As the American Marshall Berman describes this early modern experience, the new world was experienced as a two-headed monster:

> To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of our self and the world – and on the other hand threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are (1982: 15).

This ambivalence between adventure and a feeling of being lost is reflected in most of Baudelaire's writing, for example in the already quoted fragment from "The painter of modern life", the *flâneur* is: "this lonely figure equipped with a creative imagination" always collecting and filing his observations. (my translation /2001: 34), implying the ambivalence in words like "lonely" and "desert of people". The modern world is though exiting, but it leaves little or no room for permanent relationships, deep experiences and a feeling of being rooted. On the other hand the *flâneur* himself praises the freedom that follows this new condition, because it gives him the possibility to withdrawn himself from the midst of things in order to observe the new, and most importantly to create art out of his observations. As several researchers have noticed this celebration of the city as a symbol of movement, the temporary and surface rather than anchor, tradition and roots, resulted in a new kind of mentality. A mentality that, though understood differently, most researchers agree defines 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 defence mechanism developed by modern [business] man in order to protect himself from the bombardment of stimuli and information thrown at him in the new city. This description of the city and its consequences for the human psyche is similar to that of George Beard concerning neurasthenia. 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.

First Strategy: The Surrender and the Ambivalence

Others point out that the *flâneur* cannot 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 them. Marshall Berman describes the correlation between the city and the modern consciousness as almost symbiotic. With the *flâneur* the man and the city become one. In an interpretation of Baudelaire's writings, is become obvious 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).

Another way of understanding the *flâneur* is to take a closer look at his description of the masses. For the *flâneur* the masses are the inhabitants of the new world. To them the city is equivalent to the home of the bourgeois, replacing the attributes of the home with attributes of the city. To the masses 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 masses." (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, theses 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. When the *flâneur* is characterized as the first modern hero, it is because of this heroic position in relation to modernity of the city. Compared to the businessman the *flâneur* explores the modern world with his whole body and soul making the confrontation into an ongoing piece of art. As a consequence of this the *flâneur* embodies an anti-home ideology: His persistent dedication to the urban life reveals a perception of 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 into the arms of the new world. As Keith Tester puts it, the *flâneur* is a modern hero who "only feels existential at home, when he is not physically at home." (1992:2).

Another very important factor in the different ways to cope with modernity is the *flâneur*'s need of the city in order to be inspired and to be able to create. For the *flâneur* the urban environment is the scene of art and existence. The *flaneur* is creative because there is something to observe. This close relation between the city, the sensitive mind and art as a work-in-progress, is a theme in much modern writings and has to do with the status of the city as a privileged place in which to broaden one's imagination and sensibility (see for instance Sylvian Brien's analysis of the term "illumination" in writings on August Stringberg/Charles Baudelaire etc). This aesthetic of the city, which the *flâneur* and a lot of artists after him have praised, is another, creative way to describe "the complicated and potentialized Existence" in the city making the "overburdened nervous system" a generator of art and poetry (Pontoppidan).

Second Strategy: Simmel's businessman: The Overcoming by Ratio

For the businessman the city was not a scene for art but a scene for capitalism and a vital and necessary aspect of the new world. Even though this mechanism of defence, the blasé attitude, towards the maelstrom of information and stimuli in the city resulted in a distance similar to the distance of the *flâneur*, they are essentially different. The blasé attitude is not a psychological distance built on the eagerness to create, but a distance developed by the strong rationalism of the businessman: it is a shield, not a generator, a way to be able to gain from the inhumane scene of capitalism. Therefore the businessman is coping with the city with his intellect, not with his sensibility in the manner of the *flâneur*. The reference to the act of the sublime according to the philosopher Immanuel Kant is obvious, if we approach Simmel's blasé attitude as a way of coping with what cannot be understood, but it also reveals what is at stake for the businessman as the blasé attitude always depends on a previously or potential collapse of the senses – a collapse, which, as has already been mentioned, was an acceptable, even a status-giving symbol of the importance of the businessman as the break down was connected to the prestigious trading market of incipient capitalism. Therefore the blasé attitude as a strategy is closely related to the definition of the *maladie de Beard* as it often provoked or could provoke nervous breakdowns.

For the businessman the cures for these breakdowns were many and different, most of them suggesting the busy and overburdened tradesman 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" (1996) – a whole series of handbooks and popular articles concerning interior design and furnishing (later this became the task of women's magazines) grew out of this new market culture advising the housewife how best to create an interior satisfying for 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 point is that the businessman in contrast to the *flaneur* doesn't feel at home in the city/the modern world. The split between his rationality (work) and his body and soul (his private self) is illustrated in his need for an oasis, a constructed other, within the city where he can recover himself and feel truly at home.

The Third Way: Separation and the Rise of Modern Suburbia

Suburbia, as many researchers have observed, has to do with the separation of work and leisure (Gary Gross/Silvertone), of public and private life (Walter Benjamin, Krishan Kumar), of progression and regression (Christopher Reed), of creating and sleeping so to speak. As a strategy one may say that in comparison to the surrender of the *flâneur* and the overcoming of the business man, suburban man goes all the way in separating his life into two parts. Therefore the problems of Simmel's businessman may be seen as the initial phase of this separation as the need for an oasis for the modern man was the idea that started the separation process that led to the fundamental split in culture, everyday and academia.

Simultaneously with the publication of Simmel a Danish doctor Frode Sadolin developed his perspective on the city and its problems in *Nerve-Helse* (trans. Nerve- Health, 1908). Like his predecessor he makes the life of the city with its gas lights, car-horns and noisy trains 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 created by the rise of modernity are not something that man should accept, but must fight against. The city is seen as generating mental diseases and as a symbol of a modernity not suited for the (healthy) human being.

The best alternative to the over-intense city is, he claims, a rural life. As the Danish physician argues in his reflections on the new mental disease, the movement to the rural villas of the bourgeois and the allotment sheds of the working class was in both cases healthy for "brain hygiene" (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 of the future his scenarios are more close to what actually happened after his death:

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

The scenario began in London in the mid-eighteenth century, when the privileged middle class took some of the city core with them out into the beautiful countryside outside the city (Fishman 1987). In Denmark the suburb became an official urban settlement and was put into the statistics when Gentofte and Frederiksberg were listed as suburbs of Copenhagen in 1906 (Zerlang: 2000, Lind: 1996). 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 all). In 2003 the Danish business magazine *Mandag Morgen* published a survey saying that 67% of Danes wished to live in a the suburb in a privately owned detached house with a garden, if they had a choice.

Concluding Remarks

It is against this background that I am convinced that the rise of Danish suburbia as well as any other suburb cannot be understood solely on its own terms, but must always be defined in relation to its rejected other: the big city and its over-stimulation of the nervous system as a symbol of the new modes of living that gave rise to modernity. 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 it is a nightmare image of the metropolis. As Fishman puts it in his comments 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).

But it also illustrates what suburbia is lacking: From the Baudelaire point of view the most essential part is aesthetisation. Suburbia separated sleeping from creating, homemaking from the public activity, making suburbia unable to produce or generate beauty. In this narrative suburbia is not the scene of art, there is nothing to observe or to categorize and it doesn't appeal to the creative imagination of the sensitive observer. It is a public oasis away from the authentic home of the masses, a constructed urban scene lacking information and stimuli.

From the Simmel point of view the problem with suburbia is that it became inhabited not with weary businessmen of the higher, well-educated middle class, but with the lower middle classes who invaded the exotic suburbs during the 19th century, making it too much of a success. What should have remained an exotic oasis in nature became a major urban expansion destroying the very nature it tried to be close to. As Fishman puts it: "If anything suburbia has succeeded too well. It has become what even the greatest advocates of suburban growth never desired – a new form of city" (1987: xi).

My point is that the three strategies can serve as analytical devices connecting contemporary interest in late modern suburbia with the history of the concept. The three strategies also serve as a privileged way of gaining insight into the forces that separated suburbia from the city and split our understanding of the matter into fundamental dichotomies, among them popular culture versus the fine arts. Dichotomies that are now in the process of collapsing into something else.

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