

# The View from Above from Below: Novel, Suburb, Cosmos

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**T**HROUGH CONVERGENT TECHNOLOGIES OF CAMERA AND FLIGHT, THE VIEW FROM ABOVE directs the opening chapter of *The Australian Ugliness* (1960), Melbourne-based Robin Boyd's famous critique of urban and suburban aesthetic forms. By 1960, such aerial vision was nothing new, but the arrival in 1956 of the Boeing jet meant air-travel was about to eclipse the sea voyage, conquering what Australian historian Geoffrey Blainey famously termed 'the tyranny of distance', and ushering in the era of mass tourism. This development naturalised and popularised an aesthetics of panorama that also organises the representation of suburbia. Boyd re-stages the aerial view successively. The visitor's first approach to Australia is from the north. Moving from Darwin to Bourke, the visitor crosses over country 'burnt brown and patchy, like a tender sunburnt skin, with sections of darker brown and blood red and blisters of lighter ochre'; his camera-eye view takes in the 'red backland of Australia' which 'looks from the air satisfyingly like its own maps' (Boyd 18).

The arrival of Boyd's hypothetical visitor, as noted, is staged twice, in the second instance tracking the plane's approach 'from across the Pacific' over 1950s pre-Opera-House Sydney. From the long high view, urban Australia presents a vision of 'continuity, unity and the promise of comfort in the mushroom roofs and the bright background of tended green'. Momentarily, suburban sprawl figures the 'love of home', with 'great speckled carpets spread wide around every

commercial centre', becoming by night 'black velvet sprinkled wider with brilliant jewel lights than any other cities in the world' (40-1). Cities masquerade as harmonious parts of a continental whole even as the image of the 'carpet' evokes suburban domestication of the continent. From the orderly geometry on high, however, the visitor descends into chaos at ground level, into a *mise en abyme* of suburban featurism that proves at once fascinating and horrifying, with its 'battle of colours' and 'decorative iron skirmishes', its 'sandblasted koala bears' and 'yacht-race scenes' on windows, and 'black plastic silhouette cockatoos featured on the feature doors' (40-1).

Suburban panorama is generated by an 'aesthetic spectatorship' aligned with the cosmopolitanism vividly glossed by Bruce Robbins as the 'luxuriously free floating view from above' (Robbins and Cheah 2-4), or from what Heinrich Heine calls the 'kingdom of the air' (Beck 25). An implied cosmopolitanism directs not only the panoramic view but also the ground-level perspective. Professional duty requires Boyd's visitor to spiral into the midst of ordinary detail, where baroque explosions of kitsch disrupt modernist surfaces. Recoil rapidly switches to scopophilic desire as the gaze penetrates suburban interiors. The interior, however, proves depthless and resistant: it is only ever skin deep. Boyd's tropes of 'carpet' and 'desert skin' prefigure his book's preoccupation with veneers, with cloaking and camouflage as the twin strategies of featurism. Suburbia, nation and whiteness, the latter encoded in 'burnt desert skin', are satirically coupled few pages later when Boyd describes the interwar suburban housing palette of 'brown and cheese' as 'the cream Australia policy' (42). Boyd's modernist-inflected optics, in short, position suburbia as the organic built expression of an insular White Australia. At the same time, through its toggle between panoramic and ground level views (like the spatial dialectic described by Michel de Certeau 118), suburbia is constituted as a multivalent field, flexing both spatially and affectively between order and chaos, geometric panorama and sensory immersion, cultural critique and desiring attachment. Boyd's 1960s book speaks to a specific postwar moment in the critique of suburban sprawl, but also anticipates the ubiquitous, cinematic panorama of geometric suburban development that any Google image search of the word 'suburbia' displays today.

This mode of representing suburbia is not confined to visual fields and architectural writing. A similarly panoramic view is memorably deployed within George Johnston's 1964 novel *My Brother Jack*, published just four years after Boyd's book. Having clambered onto the roof of his house, Johnston's narrator and alter-ego David Meredith surveys his suburb from above:

... there was nothing all around me, as far as I could see, but a plain of dull red rooftops in their three forms of pitching and closer to hand the green squares and rectangles of lawns intersected by ribbons of

asphalt and cement, and I counted nine cars out in Beverley Grove being washed and polished. In the slums, I reflected, they had a fetish about keeping front door-knobs polished, but here in the 'good' respectable suburbs the fetish was applied to cars and to gardens, and there were fixed rituals about this, so that hedges were clipped and lawns trimmed and beds weeded, and the lobelia and the mignonette were tidy in their borders, and the people would see that these things were so no matter what desolation or anxiety or fear was in their hearts, or what spiritless endeavours or connubial treacheries were practiced behind the blind neat concealment of their thin red-brick walls. ... There was not one tree on the whole estate. (271-4)

Summoning Patrick White's manifesto of 1958 in which a 'great Australian emptiness' spreads 'in all directions' ('Prodigal Son' 37), David Meredith's rooftop view is the culmination of his rising discontent and constitutes the novel's turning point. His worldly ambitions now appear false and inconsequential, and his life a veritable cul-de-sac. His role as the golden boy journalist at the *Morning Post* has required submission to what he now recognises as a merely bourgeois milieu. His wife's tasteful domestic décor is no more than kitsch and his neighbours belong to the mindless herd. David is primed for this negative epiphany by his earlier visit to his colleague Gavin Turley's home. The cultured Turley is a Toorak-dwelling, cultivated and authentically literary figure. David's exposure to Turley's superior aesthetic in turn makes visible the crass vulgarity of his own suburban milieu. This iconic moment mobilises anti-suburban rhetoric as the signifier of a cultured, cosmopolitan view, and—in *My Brother Jack*—this henceforth propels Meredith away from parochial Melbourne and out of Australia. The optical shift, attributed to Boyd above and present in *My Brother Jack* (indeed across the Meredith trilogy as a whole), activates tensions between distant, panoramic prospects and ground-level action and narration. And yet this makes Johnston's representation of suburbia far more layered and ambiguous than usually acknowledged. In what follows, I consider how shifting views of Australian literary suburbia depend upon and mobilise various versions of cosmopolitan identity. My subsequent return to, and re-reading of, *My Brother Jack*, asking how it connects with suburban terrain, proceeds by way of comparison with a series of novels of suburbia by Johnston's successor, Melbourne-based author Steven Carroll.

As Andrew McCann argues (vii-x), suburbia is a field of signifiers rather than stable, pre-existing terrain, a point that arguably applies just as well to other semiotic fields like the bush, desert or beach. But by the 1950s and 1960s, the emergence of anti-suburban panoramics in the writings of White, Boyd, Johnston and others converged significantly with a broader cultural rhetoric circulating not only within Australia but also transnationally. In Australia, the critique

leveled by anti-suburban intellectuals seemed to herald the subsequent cultural turn from Menzies-era Cold War conservatism towards Whitlamism—when the Labor Government led by Gough Whitlam (1972-1975) dismantled the discursive template, at least, of 'White Australia'. Postwar anti-suburban discourse—pro modernist but anti suburban modernity—had been instrumental, therefore, in advancing and articulating a new national narrative based on cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism and, arguably, postcolonialism. Beyond the 1980s, however, and ironically, with the postmodern spatial turn, these earlier critics of suburbia were in turn subjected to criticism by a new generation of scholars and intellectuals—figures like Hugh Stretton and Tim Rowse—who deemed 1960s-style anti-suburbanism to be the self-serving rhetoric of an elite professional class oblivious to the aspirations and lives of ordinary people. This class of urban dwellers, it was now alleged, had sought to distinguish itself as cosmopolitan from parochial suburban others, repurposing older discourses of the 'uncultured herd and us' (see Nichols and Schoen).

Lefebvrian and Foucauldian turns to spatiality (and Edward Soja's theorisation of postmodern urban geography) have supported more recent multi-disciplinary scholarly work on suburbs, on their histories, structures, forms and representation. Rejecting elitist (often implicitly modernist) anti-suburban paradigms, scholars have sought to map the complex cultural diversity of suburbs in phenomenal, ethnographic and historical terms. Re-appraisal of the cultures of suburbs is well advanced in the disciplines of urban studies, history and cultural studies. In Australia these include, to take just a few key examples, Graeme Davison's historiography of suburban ideologies, Amanda Wise's analyses of interethnic exchange in Sydney's inner west, and Fiona Allon's work on local suburban cultures, communities and real estate. At the same time, a new suburban chic is abroad in the arts, in photography, television, film and poetry, and via social media. Suburban chic coincides with suburban transformation and renewal. In this global, digital era, a post-suburban sensibility expresses itself through an inner-urban aesthetic, a café culture ethos that pervades suburbia, even as the suburbs themselves sprawl ever outwards or are subject to renewal and densification.

Despite these developments, an elitist anti-suburbanism persists, even flourishes, and is frequently directed, as Christy Collis, Simon Freebody and Terry Flew have observed, against newer suburbs on the outer urban edge. Clive Hamilton and Richard Denniss's *Affluenza* (2005) and Elizabeth Farrelly's *Blubberland* (2008) exemplify more recent critique of aspirational cultures of overconsumption, so often symbolised by, or geographically aligned with, outer-suburbia and its so-called 'McMansions'. While such works canvas important problems in contemporary urban and social planning, residual traces of that earlier view from above arguably reappear. The persistence of such a view is also

necessarily conditioned by the post 1970s return to the city by the wealthier fraction of an educated and progressive, globally-connected middle class. This is not just an Australian phenomenon but transnational, heralded by urban activists like New York's Jane Jacobs (whose public planning impact could arguably be likened to that of Robin Boyd in Australia). Jacobs and her peers, wittingly or not, initiated the trend towards the recoding, gentrification and revaluation of urban space for progressive community and also, in consequence, as prized real estate (Gopnik). So even though suburbia-at-a-distance may be chic—prompting pastoral nostalgia (see Aiden Davison) or the fascinating spectacle of difference—actual suburbs in the present are all too often ignored and de-valued. The real-world picture of urbanisation is immensely complex, of course, and impossible to capture neatly here. But it is notable that in Australia's expanding seaboard cities, areas that in the postwar decades defined the suburban frontier now constitute an ageing middle zone undergoing massive redevelopment and densification. Outer suburbs meanwhile tend to be more ethnically diverse than those inner city suburban precincts famed for their (erstwhile) 'ethnic' character. Urban and suburban spaces, subject to demographic flux and cyclical creative destruction, exist in dynamic interrelation. These urban dynamics are reshaping suburban environments in terms that outpace (rendering outmoded) earlier representations of suburbia even as the salience of such representation increases.

How are representations of suburbia considered in the discipline of literary studies? In the US and UK, renewed attention to fictions of suburbia is focusing attention on, among many other things, their significance for critical regionalism (Wilhite) and their performance of white anxieties about race and masculinity (see Kutcha; and Jurca). But apart from a burst of scholarly interest in the 1990s and some sporadic recent work, there has been negligible attention in Australia to suburbs as zones of literary significance. In 'Gerrymander' (1990), Robin Gerster's influential preliminary mapping of Australian fictions of suburbia, the view from David Meredith's roof is adduced as a signal example. Looking across an array of postwar novels by such writers as Johnston, Patrick White, David Malouf and many others, Gerster argued that an inner-city imagination had produced a snobbish cultural gerrymander against suburbia, one hostile towards and ignorant of the worlds, lives and perspectives of most Australians. Gerster's intervention was an important reference point for subsequent scholarly commentary on suburbia in Australian literature. Andrew McCann's 1998 work offered a more nuanced view of Patrick White's anti-suburban rhetoric as directed against an oppressive modernity and its hegemonic consumerism rather than merely an elitist spurning of ordinary suburbanites. Recent feminist analysis promises to broker some fresh perspectives (e.g., Burns) but critical focus overall has been trained on the question of whether Australian writers are for or against suburbia.

Why, beyond this brief 1990s flurry, has there been so little sustained interest in literary suburbia among Australian scholars? Do the proximity and ubiquity of suburbs make them harder to see than more distant and exotic subjects? Is neglect a function of the post-1970s urban-centrism of educated elites, gerrymandering literary critical scholarship as much as, or more than, actual fictional works under scrutiny? It is also true that nationally focused, area-studies approaches to Australian literary culture that conditioned pro-or-anti-suburban paradigms in the 1990s are now being eclipsed by transnational literary approaches. These and other factors may explain why Nathanael O'Reilly's *Exploring Suburbia* (2012) is the only monograph to date on Australian novels of suburbia. Even O'Reilly's book adheres to the terms set by Gerster in 1990. Nominating Johnston's *My Brother Jack* as foundational to the anti-suburban tradition in postwar Australian fiction, O'Reilly maintains that 'Australian writers who seek to write realistic fiction about their nation severely limit their choice of subject matter if they choose to disparage the suburbs and their inhabitants, or ignore them altogether' (O'Reilly 299).

Building on the recognition Gerster and O'Reilly, among others, accord to suburbia as a significant strand in Australian fiction, we can now shift the coordinates of debate beyond pro- and anti-suburban binaries. O'Reilly's statement, above, usefully mobilises a key distinction between the pejorative signifier 'suburbia' and the word 'suburbs'. The plural term points towards heterogeneity, difference and multiplicity but also, paradoxically, to the locally specific. For O'Reilly, writers have been overly concerned with *suburbia*, understood as a target of scorn, but blind to real suburbs. If we follow this lead and attend to the traces of 'suburbs' in novels, a far more capacious fictional terrain unfolds. Suburbs are everywhere in Australian fiction. The word 'suburbs' both extends the range of applicable texts and suggests new coordinates for re-reading and re-thinking even those novels that are most demonstrably anti-suburban, including *My Brother Jack*. Insofar as 'suburbs' are imagined instead of, or as well as, 'suburbia', the field of representations is established much earlier than the 1960s and spans a wider diversity of writers, genres and preoccupations. While novels dealing with *suburbia* may refract or resist cosmopolitan elitism, if we limit the focus to their pro- or anti-suburbanism we are at risk of reproducing yet another 'view from above'. Delimiting these novels according to whether they are for or against suburbia is to reduce the complexity of their storyworlds and their modes of narration, and to restrict their manifold textual possibilities.

If we provisionally uncouple novels from their (obvious) ideologies of suburbia, other questions arise. First, how do novels map and reconfigure the raw material of real suburbs? Can we read novels, against the grain of their evident anti-

suburbanism, for their evocation through time of suburban places and communities? Considered nationwide and across a century, novels summon a myriad of suburbs, albeit fictively transformed or disguised places that are, nonetheless, capable of conjuring memory, or of catching place in the 'aspic' of narrative time (see Carroll, 'Blue Suburban Skies'). Could these fictions represent an imaginative archive of suburbs lost, forgotten, or irrevocably transformed? Could they form a fictive map through which to glimpse historic processes of urban transformation as these condition suburbs, regions, hinterlands and cities? What if we read novels, regardless of whether they happen to be for or against 'suburbia', as maps of suburban place and time? And what happens to our understanding of both novels and suburbs if we trace textual coordinates and conjunctions into the world that sourced them, and then turn back again, rereading their fictional topographies?

This latter question leads to another: in what sense, and with what effects, might suburbs themselves occasion and shape novelistic projects? This is more elusive, but we might consider novelistic treatments of suburban locality as conditional upon or even integral to transnational reinventions of literary form. The suburb affords an inherently unstable chronotope as a space-time figure capable of refracting successive phases of modernisation. Suburbs are both the built manifestation of more abstracted forms of global capitalism and localised vehicles for the gritty, resistant and sensory phenomena of everyday life. The suburb doubles as the site of primal experience, of individual memory, and at the same time it belongs to that series of abstracted, social and cultural forms, those gridded spatialities and subjectivities, that have taken shape under various phases of capitalism. In other words, literary scholars, in their local contexts and elsewhere, could seek to investigate how writers have contributed to the 'morphology of the novel' (Mead 13) by examining the suburb as a key scene for negotiating transnational forms that enact local-global dynamics, exercising the simultaneities of here and there, now and then.

Suburbs are primary sites of vernacular modernity imbricated in globalisation. Ulrich Beck's model of 'cosmopolitanisation' offers a way of thinking the local-global dynamic not only with respect to suburbs themselves but also to novels about suburbs. Beck's 'cosmopolitanisation' is not about reinforcing but rather resisting the nation-state's tendency to confine identity within fixed, hierarchical territorial boundaries—a model cognate with the critical 'cosmopolitics' advocated by Robbins and Cheah (8). Cosmopolitics or cosmopolitanisation reconceive cosmopolitanism as critical method, encouraging attention to interconnectedness and the fluidity of social space. The shift to 'cosmopolitanisation' emphasises process, generating a 'frame of reference for empirical exploration of globalization from within, globalization internalized' (Beck 25-6). These models envisage a dialogic imagination able to presuppose,

among other things, the ‘imagined presence of geographically distant others and worlds’ (Beck 31). Subverting elitist cosmopolitanism by envisaging avenues for subaltern resistance to the totalising frames of the nation-state, these models seem more than a little conducive for literary works given that the latter—as McCann’s reframing of Patrick White’s suburbia insists—often express resistance to (rather than mere collusion with) hegemonic interests. This is what emerges from the work of Rebecca Walkowitz in her book *Cosmopolitan Style* (2006), which considers how the literary styles of both the early twentieth century modernists and late twentieth century postmodernists enable politically progressive negotiations of ‘cosmopolitanism’. In this light, reading the fictions of suburbia requires openness to the workings of the dialogic imagination, to narrative experimentation with modernist simultaneities, to the flexing of the view from both above and within the suburban house, from above and within the suburb, and with attention to locations, near and far, that may be juxtaposed with or threaded into these spaces.

The flexing of perspectives that so often characterises novels of suburbia is in one sense expressive of, and correlative with, modernity’s local-global dialectic. This dialectic is coupled with another, albeit one structural to fictional narrative *per se*, but with specific purchase in novels of suburbia: that is, the dialectic of the real and the imagined, the play across the unbridgeable gulf between cosmos and heterocosmos. Suburbs, needless to say, exist in three-dimensional space as built physical things, whereas novels only conjure mental images of ‘other’ fictional worlds. Even so, there is a close relationship between suburbs and novels, since both have functioned, historically, as vectors for colonial, and capitalist, modernity. Their obvious ontological divide notwithstanding, novels and suburbs are serial forms (printed book, generic pattern, prefabricated design, gridded system) that travel through, and help create, global space. Both are vehicles for transnational modernity even as, and because, they take root in and adapt themselves to local conditions. In novels, as the work of Susan Stanford Friedman suggests, geographically diverse, localised coordinates are implicated in and shape travelling forms of modernism. In their different domains, novels and suburbs are each concerned with the partitioning of social space, with movement between interiors and exteriors, privacy and publicity, mobility and rootedness. Might we, then, rethink literary works about suburbia—via the dialogic imagination—as inherently linked to a critical cosmopolitanism, being on the one hand shaped by global modernity and on the other hand offering resistance to that modernity?

A local-global dialectic, a dialogic imagination and a vital interest in the relation between suburban space-time and narrative form all characterise Steven Carroll’s fiction. In his cycle of six planned volumes (five are published to date) Carroll remembers and fictively renders the northern Melbourne suburb of



Glenroy in both its change and continuity across time. Carroll's suburbia novels are powerfully elegiac in their summoning of lost suburban place. *The Time We Have Taken* (2007), the Miles Franklin Literary Award winning third novel, is set in 1970, the year the Beatles broke up, as Australian Labor Party leader Gough Whitlam's political star is rising—yielding a confluence of energizing generational change and bitter-sweet nostalgia typical of this novel. Carroll's central character and implied alter-ego, Michael, is a self-confessed 'nostalgic type' (32), 'habitually fatalistic' (37). In this third novel, we meet him on the cusp of adulthood, just graduated from university and now a teacher of high school English. In ironic counterpoint with the omniscient third person narrator, Michael obsessively anticipates both the demise of his relationship with his sweetheart, Madeleine, and the end of an era. We are told of novels Michael is reading that complement and frame the ordinary suburban world even as he moves away from these origins (and simultaneously returns to them). Reading his way through George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, and fiction by Somerset Maugham, Michael happens at last upon *My Brother Jack*. Johnston's novel is, for Michael, an 'event', allowing him to see 'for the first time in his reading life the world from which he comes' (201). At the same time, as the narrative informs us:

He does not know that the writer, this George Johnston he has only just heard of, is a dying man living his last days in Sydney and who saw his death foretold in X-rays the previous month while Michael bared his unfashionable jealousy for Madeleine to see. Two people cross a tram and enter a picture theatre; a dying man, skin on a stick, refuses to enter a hospital because he wants to die among friends; the book he wrote a few years before is thrust into Michael's hand from an unlikely source; and already the dying man lives on. (201)

This passage typifies Carroll's incantatory prose, aligning with his narrative method throughout of insistently threading together otherwise distant times and places. That Johnston died in 1970 exemplifies the way Carroll's fiction continually maps itself onto the scaffold of real historical place and time. Together with its modernist flexing of space-time simultaneities, the novel folds fictional and real worlds into intricate metafictional patterns.

Carroll is by no means uncritical of his precursor, George Johnston, of the latter's seemingly scornful dismissal of ordinary suburbanites. He clearly recognises the limitations imposed by the postwar anti-suburban rhetoric of which *My Brother Jack* is such a famous example. Even so, Carroll cites Johnston's novel as crucially significant in animating and enlivening Melbourne's suburban terrain. Carroll's fictional character Michael, likewise, gravitates to Johnston's novel because it so vividly conjures the everyday world of his familiar experience. Like *My Brother Jack*, Carroll's Glenroy novels both map and transmute the coordinates of their

suburbs in and across time (see Rooney). It is in fact via their critical yet affective engagement with Johnston's fiction, and with the tradition that it represents, that Carroll's novels work to remediate Australian literary suburbia in what is currently, arguably, the present post-suburban moment.

Carroll is not just writing about suburbia: he is rereading it, challenging the homogenising panorama from above by inhabiting views from below and from within the narrow suburban plot that his characters traverse or to which they repeatedly return by bicycle, car or train, or in their minds. But it is precisely because of tensions between the views that are above, beyond and within the suburban 'rectangle no more than a mile long and a half mile wide' (Carroll, *Time*, 289) that Carroll's fiction aligns with Beck's cosmopolitanisation. The still life of the fictional suburb is transected by commodities and people, flows and desires, all emanating from elsewhere. There is Rita's dress that is too good for the street, the hum of radios and the vision of television, the spectacle of flash young men with their hi-fi record players, the danger and banality of trains and cars, the global provenance of visiting cricketing heroes and new immigrants who settle, not always easily, in the suburb. Carroll's third person prose weaves across the interior subdivisions of this landscape, pairing global and local, past and future. The ceaseless prospection and retrospection of his characters yield layered simultaneities, crossing spatial elsewheres with temporalities beyond. If the suburb is a zone of perpetual transformation, a slow-motion catastrophe of inexorable progress, the fictional body constituted by the Glenroy series, with its modernist sense of time, yields a monumental stasis that works as a counterweight to the flux it otherwise conjures.

Carroll's literary project is double stranded: it presents the suburb as the site of abstract forces of progress, colonisation and globalisation but also, simultaneously, as the locus of memory and desire. It is a generative literary scene in which the inheritance of modernism is renegotiated and renewed for contemporary readers in what could be described as a positive reclamation of high modernism's other, of that more ambivalent category of the middlebrow. Carroll's negotiation of literary modernism for a broad contemporary readership is at its most explicit, however, in the cycle of novels he is currently writing, in tandem with his Glenroy novels, based on T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* (1944). Two of four novels envisaged have thus far been published, with a third currently in train:<sup>1</sup> *The Lost Life* (2009) engages with Eliot's 'Burnt Norton' and *A World of Other People* (2013) with his 'Little Gidding'. Both create speculative biographical scenes that might be imagined as an originating source or backstory for each of Eliot's poems. *A World of Other People*—set just as the London Blitz comes to an end—tells the story of an ill-fated love affair between a young English woman

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<sup>1</sup> Personal communication with Steven Carroll: 15 November 2016.

named Iris and an Australian pilot named Jim. In both novels, a fictional version of Eliot appears as a stern, unspeaking but pivotal character around whom Carroll's other characters circle, as though around a monument. Of course Eliot is a monument of high modernism, and so represents, in Carroll's fiction, modernism's famed hierarchy of cultural values. Even so, and as we will see, Carroll's invocation of Eliot in this context is not only a critique, but yokes high modernism and suburban modernity together in terms that suggest their structural interconnection, their joint remaking and renovation of traditional forms.

Similarly monumental figures (also, like Eliot, objects of narrative curiosity) recur in Carroll's fictional universe. In the Glenroy cycle, the factory owner Webster, West Indian cricket celebrities, and the historical mountain of Whitlam enter into the ordinary suburban world as signifiers of exotic otherness, of progress or History. In *A World of Other People*, Carroll's third person narrative is chiefly focalised through Iris, a fictive version of the young Iris Murdoch. Because Carroll does not give Iris her family name, her resemblance to Murdoch remains coded rather than explicit in the text, and this is in contrast to the more obviously labeled, classified and distanced Mr Eliot. Iris and her friends see Eliot as a large ocean liner: cold, impersonal and remote. Fire-watching on the roof of the Faber and Faber building, in company with the famous man, Iris witnesses the momentary slippage of Eliot's public mask when a single plane in flames passes close overhead. Eliot becomes visibly animated as he sees the dove, painted on the side of the plane's flaming cockpit, 'ascending or descending' (41). Unaware of his connection with this scene, one redolent of mystical epiphany and violent trauma, Iris subsequently encounters the plane's young pilot—an Australian, Jim, from Essendon—the sole survivor of the crash that follows. Severed by trauma from 'the world of other people', Jim dreams of visiting his parents asleep in their suburban home. Through Jim's dreams, Carroll's novel loops the tranquility of suburban Essendon into blitz-torn London. At the novel's climax, Eliot's public reading of 'Little Gidding', with its dove in flames ascending or descending, cruelly unlocks Jim's repressed memory. An alienating vision of self is unleashed as Jim sees that his private trauma has now been appropriated as a piece of arcana for Eliot's high modernist art.

Eliot's poetic appropriation of the pilot's trauma functions in the novel as an inverted mirror of Carroll's own fictional capture and recoding, across time and space, of Eliot's high modernist poetics for his own vernacular-modernist prose. This amplifies ironies already built in to the figure of Eliot himself as an Anglophile American who journeys to the metropolitan centre of English letters to reinvent himself, in the process suppressing his provincial origins. Drawn to yet critical of Eliot, Carroll's novel ultimately places itself on Iris's side. Iris finally

imagines Eliot sitting in his Faber and Faber office, enjoying the aerial view, the panorama of the ordinary:

Perched at his desk. The bespectacled eyes forever seeking, the eagle's beak of a nose sniffing out, the quarry of the 'real thing', of the anointed, the chosen few of a new generation of poets from below ... he's up there, Eliot, where he will always be ... Above it all ... utterly above it all. Which is all the more reason, she declares, looking up, for these communications from below. (276)

Carroll's co-option of Iris Murdoch—whose philosophically engaged yet highly readable novels for an educated postwar readership met with significant commercial success—refracts something of his own project. Another figure in the story, Iris's betrothed Frank, adds to the novel's reflexive, metafictional scenario. Frank is a fictional compound of the Thompson brothers. Frank and nineteen-year-old Iris Murdoch were young lovers before Frank died a hero in the Great War, while his brother, the historian E. P. Thompson, went on to write *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963). *A World of Other People* inscribes itself into this history of challenge to high modernism's self-generated myth of elevation over mass culture. With its readerly accessibility, Carroll's novel—not unlike the short story that his character Iris writes and delivers to Eliot—communicates from below. It also looks back in time, and from its implied position 'down under', in contemporary suburban Australia. Taking advantage, perhaps, of Australia's invisibility in world literary space, Carroll's own poetics of time and space ironically mirror or double the poetics of high modernism. Circling the great modernist poet with skepticism, Carroll's novel separates Eliot's hierarchy of values from his poetic energies, diverting these into the everyday, middlebrow forms of the contemporary novel. Carroll's negotiation of a middlebrow modernism through which the (Australian) suburb and the (English) metropole are dialogically co-constituted informs both his novel cycles, the Eliot cycle and the suburban cycle, weaving their separate strands together. Late in *The Time We Have Taken*, Carroll's narrative directly invokes Eliot's 'East Coker', from the latter's *Four Quartets*: 'The suburb ... lies still and silent, like houses gone under the sea' (229).

Just as Carroll's swerve away from Eliot also inscribes his return to Eliot's legacy, so also his suburbia cycle swerves away from as it returns to George Johnston's *My Brother Jack*, the inherently ambiguous founding text of Australian literary suburbia. In the wake of Carroll's fiction, we can now return to *My Brother Jack* to ask what else might be at work in its fictive map of suburbia. Borrowing from Boyd's tropes of surface and skin but recasting them in terms suggested by Vilashini Cooppan, we can attempt to 'skin the map' of Australian literary suburbia (Cooppan 8). Instead of simply occupying the position of the

cartographer looking down from on high, Cooppan suggests placing oneself within the map and becoming alert to its ambiguities, flows and conjunctions, to the work of memory, to shifting scales and angles of view, to emotions and affect—to the full sensorium (8). How might we skin the map of literary suburbia within *My Brother Jack*? What of the narrative's folds, reversals and qualifications, its shifting perspectives, its multiple frames, and its sensory memories? Can we glimpse Johnston's suburbs from below or within rather than just from above?

When Johnston returned to Australia from the Greek island of Hydra, where he, Charmian Clift and their children had lived according to cosmopolitan and bohemian ideals for nearly ten years, he spoke about writing *My Brother Jack* from that distance in time and space:

I was homesick for my native land. As a way of trying to overcome the long dragging hours of confinement in a sickbed, I set myself the task of trying to remember a street in Melbourne I used to walk along in the early nineteen twenties, when I was a ten-year-old schoolboy. Although I had no distractions, it did not come easy. However, I persisted, and gradually—I thought at the time miraculously—the street assembled itself in my mind, bit by bit, shop by shop, house by house, the most minute detail, people and things I had not thought about for forty years. (Johnston, in Kinnane, 216)

To recall the Elsternwick of his childhood, Johnston conjures the embodied memory of street-level movement. He is in fact describing a trick of memory retrieval that he owed in the first place to Charmian Clift (Wheatley 430-4) but one that is also compatible with the ancient art of mnemonics used by literary modernists like Marcel Proust and Virginia Woolf. What he delivers here is less a view from above than memory's processual re-inhabitation of three-dimensional space. Intriguingly, Steven Carroll attributes the inception of his own first Glenroy novel to a dream in which he walks with his parents along their street at twilight (Carroll, 'Blue Suburban Skies'). This becomes the spine for Carroll's plot, and for what ballasts the narrative tension between linear progress and simultaneity in the first novel, *The Art of the Engine Driver*, a pattern amplified across the series. Johnston's recollection of Elsternwick supplies *My Brother Jack* with Meredith's dreary inner-suburban, interwar childhood home of *Avonlea*, the character of which recalls Boyd's interwar 'cream Australia'. Yet later in the narrative this childhood suburb is re-evaluated by Meredith, and privileged over the new, hygienically modernist and bourgeois suburbia of Beverley Grove that he sees from his rooftop. As Robin Gerster points out, this modulation between older and newer suburbia is one of the key, recurring tropes of anti-suburban

discourse in which the benign organic suburb of the past is valued over the soulless modern suburb of the present (568-9).

This always-already shifting terrain could prompt a further question: how might readers themselves imagine Beverley Grove, confronted with Meredith's description? In what terms might readers picture his suburban panorama? How might reader-generated internal images of suburban terrain compare with the actual suburban terrain upon which Johnston drew for his novel? Would it be literal-minded to skin the fictional map by paying a visit to the suburb on which the fictional Beverley Grove was based? Beverley Grove is a fictional version of East Brighton where George Johnston lived, in the 1940s, with his first wife Elsie Taylor. The Australian Electoral Roll confirms that Johnston did indeed reside at 7 Mackie Grove, East Brighton during these years. A visit to this location via Google Maps shows that Mackie Grove is now a heritage-listed street within the 'Cheeseman Avenue Precinct'. Mackie Grove is a quiet street, very leafy, and lined by lovely interwar modernist bungalows, evidently all built at the same time, showing uniformity in materials, style and presentation, but each featuring its own distinctive architectural variations:

The Cheeseman Avenue Precinct is notable for its remarkably intact inter-War residential aesthetic. Comprising almost entirely standard single plan, single-storey brick villas, the consistency of scale, setbacks and materials creates cohesive and homogeneous streetscapes with a high level of architectural integrity, enhanced by mature front gardens and intact front fences. (Bayside City Council)

The houses of Mackie Grove are very modest in size by comparison with contemporary housing stock and a long way from the images a contemporary reader might envisage if asked to conjure the suburbia of Johnston's fictional Beverley Grove. Mackie Grove in no way resembles my own teenaged imagining of the place on first encountering Johnston's book many decades ago. That internal reader's image refracted mid 1960s Sydney housing stock, consisting of three bedroom, blonde brick-and-tile kit homes of the postwar era that constituted what is now deemed the middle-ring of Sydney's suburbs. Ironically, this is that same middle-ring of three-bedroom brick homes mentioned earlier, that is now ageing, under demolition, making way for larger houses that take up most of the block, or rezoned for high-rise dwellings. By skinning the map, by returning the novel to a street-level encounter with 'real' suburban terrain, something appears that had been hidden in plain sight: and that is that Johnston's novel is not leveled at the 1950s postwar suburbia of Robin Boyd's time, but remembers the late 1930s model that he, or at least his reader, tends to project forwards. In short, the coordinates of ordinary suburban places, past and

present, could be mapped across Australian literature to yield a rich palimpsest created by the conjunction of novels with their suburbs.

At least two aspects of Johnston's *My Brother Jack* undermine its view from above: its act of narrative retrospection and the unreliability of its narrator. The view from above issues from David Meredith himself whose anxious discontent irradiates the narrative. This unreliability renders uncertain the novel's putative view of suburbia, decentering its ostensible anti-suburbanism—an anti-suburbanism that in part rebounds upon the narrator himself. Its retrospectivity, furthermore, summons a series of distant spaces and times. Johnston was writing about Melbourne from Hydra—at a time when the idyll of freedom and artistic community was already, according to Dalziell and Genoni, disintegrating. By now, moreover, the ideal village was becoming the focus of an international mass tourism flowing swiftly in the wake of its expatriate and bohemian *avant-garde*, a pattern that coheres entirely with histories of suburban development described by Lewis Mumford (559). From this 'long remove in time and space', however, Johnston's 'nostalgic looking back' is enabled by the fact, or fantasy, that, for the remembering writer, 'nothing of the present Australia [obtrudes] on the scene':

... one sees it perhaps a little bit out of true, out of perspective, but with ... almost a dreamlike clarity in a way, and it's terribly odd, the moment one sets oneself the exercise of examining this past time; in the beginning it is very very difficult indeed and then as you rather painfully evoke some early image it seems to breed the other early images and a most extraordinary chain of memories is in some curious way revived, sometimes quite frightening, and you find details seem to come up from some bottomless pond that one had for decades utterly forgotten—the names of people, their appearance, the clothes they wore, the streets, the little shops where one bought those long-vanished sweets, nullanullas and silver sammies and lamp posts and licorice sticks and so on, and all this comes up, and it comes up in a very fresh and strangely vivid way. (Johnston, Interview n.p.)

Johnston's writing of *My Brother Jack* in 1960s Hydra, remote from interwar Melbourne, yields the spectral doubling of time and place—and this is only further amplified through both divergence and repetition across the remaining volumes in the trilogy: *Clean Straw for Nothing* (1969) and *A Cartload of Clay* (1971). In Benedict Anderson's terms, the textual pairing of these disparately located provincial communities—the suburbs of Melbourne and the island of Hydra—is inherently spectral; Anderson describes this 'incurable double vision' as like looking through the wrong end of a telescope that puts distant things in comparison so that they are at once both close up and far away (Anderson 4). In the Meredith trilogy, village and suburb shift, reconfiguring distances and times,

forging mutual spaces of desire and nostalgia. The static enclosures of village or suburb, beheld from a distance, are broken by the movement, speed and change that condition them and that result from their serial nature, their globally interchangeable status. From this angle, and particularly when seen through the lens provided by Carroll's fiction, Johnston's trilogy is less the manifestation of a fixed cosmopolitan view than a refracted negotiation or mediation of the global and the local, since the one always inheres in the other. Across this combined fictive terrain, the dialogic imagination cosmopolitanises literary suburbia.

Cooppan's invitation to skin the map allows us to subvert the view from the kingdom of the air, to re-admit the sensory fullness yielded by the interaction of cosmos with heterocosmos, of novel with suburb, and reveals the ways in which global and local are already in a significant sense immanent to each other. As Robbins writes, 'If our supposed distances are really localities ... it is also true that there are distances *within* what we thought were merely localities' (Robbins 250). The dialogic imagining of global distances as already present in local proximities promises to open new dimensions within suburban worlds, whether those worlds are real or fictional. If so we can read the novel and the suburb together, dialogically, as always already cosmopolitanised, and cosmopolitical.

### **Acknowledgements**

I thank Robert Dixon, Monique Rooney and anonymous peer reviewers for their comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of this paper. An earlier version was presented as a keynote talk at the Australian Centre, University of Melbourne, for an early career conference, 'View from Above: Cosmopolitan Culture and its Critics', held on Monday 22 September 2014, and I thank conveners (Katie Hansord, Kate Noske and Jay Daniel Thompson) as well as those who attended for their comments and suggestions.

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