Spaces Imagined, Places Remembered

Spaces Imagined, Places Remembered:
Childhood in 1950s Australia

By

Carla Pascoe

**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

To my niece, Nina: thank you for coming into my life
and reminding me of the joy and spontaneity of childhood.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

LIST OF TABLES

PREFACE

At the bottom of a hill in the leafy Melbourne suburb of Glen Iris, a quiet suburban street makes a sudden turn to the left. Despite the otherwise neat, regular undulations of residential subdivisions, the street is forced here to swerve to avoid a creek and beyond it, a freeway, which run through the heart of the drowsy south eastern suburbs. This insignificant spot, where a road meets a creek meets a freeway, is the site of some of my most potent childhood memories.

To most adult eyes this would appear a fairly nondescript place. The creek is not much of a creek: it is contained by steep concrete banks to flow obediently along a narrow trough. Behind a high, grassy embankment the traffic of the freeway rushes by invisibly, the sound of cars a dull, unceasing susurration, broken occasionally by the trill of a bird. On both sides of the creek flourish a profusion of what suburban gardeners call "weeds": those disobedient, non-native plants which grow in the interstitial places between deliberate uses of the landscape. Beneath scraggly trees these plants swarm over the upper reaches of the bank, offering messy displays of floral colour in the springtime.

This place lacks the horticultural fervour and municipal regulation of a council garden. Absent too is the sense of untouched wilderness, native botanical purity and minimal human intervention that is valued by the government designation of national parks. Graffiti is scrawled upon the concrete above the gurgling water. Plastic bags and other human detritus are scragged around flowers and twigs, washed up in the last heavy rain. But for some reason this place held immense appeal to me in my middle years of childhood.

Sometimes I would come here to play with my brother or other friends from the neighbourhood. We sought danger, running up the steep concrete walls or leaping across the flowing waterway. We could climb trees or pick flowers without offending the sensibilities of adults. Without the watchful eyes of parents, teachers or other well-meaning grown-ups we could adventure in this wild place in any way our imaginations conceived. It was also a place of solitude: a gentle, quiet spot where I could sit beneath a tree amongst the long grass. Seeing yet unseen.

From my family home to the creek was about a ten minute walk. Along the way, one passed a large recreation reserve complete with play

equipment, sports field and tennis courts. Yet we regularly scorned this adult-designated play area for children in favour of the strange, unkempt, ugly-yet-beautiful place in the shadow of a freeway. And when I think back to childhood, my memories of the creek have a startling vividness by comparison to the countless hours spent on swings or slide.

Studies of children's geographies have tried to theorise the predilections of children. Many of the factors that appealed to me in my youthful play place are echoed in scholarly accounts: that children prefer natural environments that are overgrown, decrepit and offer a slight thrill of danger because they are not presented to them as safe, appropriate environments by adults. Yet when juvenile explorers grow up to be adults we generally create spaces for children that are very different from my little place at Gardiners Creek. The major task of this book is to explore these differing child and adult perspectives on the physical environment in post-war Australia.

In the 1950s the urban structures of the city of Melbourne were changing rapidly. The close of a brutal world war provided ideological circumstances in which Australians held high ideals to build better cities and invested their hopes in the new generation of children born after the war. A pre-existing housing shortage caused by war was exacerbated by the post-war demographic boom, resulting in an unprecedented demand for new infrastructure. The perceived needs of children were at the fore of the grandiose plans that urban planners and architects drew up for the suburbs, homes and schools being built around the city. But were these ideals realised in the physical environment constructed under enormous post-war pressures? And how did children experience the urban landscapes in which they grew up?

For children, natural environments are often the most appealing because they offer intense sensory experiences that have a profound emotive impact. As humans age, our logical mind develops more fully and we start to prioritise the rational use value of the physical environment over these less quantifiable attributes. Though the child resides within the adult and the adult within the child, we shall see that often the types of spaces which adults have designed for children have been very different to those that children sought for themselves.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Although creating a book often feels like a very solitary journey, scores of people helped to make this project possible. I'd like to thank Museum Victoria and the University of Melbourne for sponsoring my PhD, providing me with intellectual and practical support. In particular, the Australian Children's Folklore Collection Reference Committee at Museum Victoria created the original PhD scholarship that I was awarded. A less tangible but highly significant contribution came from my department – the Australian Centre – at the University of Melbourne. It was liberating to study in a genuinely interdisciplinary environment where cross-fertilisation requires no justification, and it gave me the courage to borrow liberally outside the strict boundaries of history. The Australian Centre also provided me with a precociously talented group of postgraduate colleagues who met regularly together to critique each other's work and offer consolations on the trials of writing a PhD. My fellow curators at Museum Victoria provided friendship and inspiration, as well as a motivation to step away from my desk occasionally for coffee.

My research couldn't have been successful without the patient assistance of staff at the University of Melbourne Library, the Public Records Office of Victoria, the State Library of Victoria and the University of Melbourne Archives. Thanks are also due to the many academics and curators who generously offered their thoughts, across Australia and North America. My oral history participants deserve a special mention for sharing their life stories, which gave me privileged access to the intimate worlds of their remembered 1950s childhoods. The people who perhaps gave most selflessly and crucially of their mental energies are my proofreaders at various stages: Kate Darian-Smith, Richard Gillespie, John Murphy, Robert Pascoe and Stephen Pascoe. Oscar Sainsbury miraculously transformed my rough sketches into the stunning maps that appear in the appendices. And for our regular meetings which never failed to renew my confidence, I'd like to thank my principal supervisor, Kate Darian-Smith.

There are a lot of car wrecks littering the desert highway to PhD completion. To all those family and friends who forgave my distracted state and waited patiently for me to return to normality: thank you. Special appreciation is due to Robert Pascoe, Susan Pascoe, Stephen Pascoe,

Virginie Rey, Andre Lobanov and Benjamin Jones. And to CN: thank you for helping me find *my* place.

ABBREVIATIONS

AHB:	*Australian Home Beautiful*
BNPS:	Balwyn North Primary School
CBD:	Central Business District
CIR:	Country Infant Room
EG:	*Victorian Education Gazette and Teacher's Aid*
HCV:	Housing Commission of Victoria
LTC:	Light Timber Construction
MMBW:	Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works
MMPS:	Melbourne Metropolitan Planning Scheme (1954)
PROV:	Public Records Office Victoria
RSPS:	Rathdowne Street Primary School
SHS:	Small Homes Service (Victoria).

CHAPTER ONE

SCHOOLYARD OBSERVATIONS OF DOROTHY HOWARD

In 1954 a diminutive, determined woman undertook the lengthy journey from the United States of America to the other side of the world. Her name was Dorothy Howard and she spent ten months traversing the wide continent of Australia on a Fulbright research grant sponsored by the University of Melbourne. Through visits to dozens of schools and letters received from scores of pupils and teachers, Howard meticulously documented the rich playground culture that thrived amongst Australian children (see Fig. 1-1). Fascinated by the verbal play traditions which children inherit, adapt and transmit amongst themselves, she compiled a detailed collection of the games, songs, rhymes, jokes, slang, taunts and superstitions that she observed in Australian schoolyards.[1]

Despite the perception of Australian adults in the 1950s that traditional games were dwindling, Howard found evidence of a flourishing play culture. She observed considerable innovation, including significant regional variation. Howard detailed a variety of local alterations, citing examples of how "children's play was influenced by history; climate; economy; topography; flora; fauna; by association with their Aboriginal inhabitants; and, most of all, by children's inventiveness".[2] But what most drew my interest were her descriptions of the influence of the physical characteristics of different spaces upon children's games. For example, she wrote that in Australia in 1955,

> changes in marble gameways were taking place there. Older informants and old memoirs indicated that in the days before bitumen-covered streets and footpaths and carefully kept lawns and parks, hole games were the favorites. Surface games played on chalked or scratched diagrams predominated in the 1950s.[3]

Fig. 1-1: Dorothy Howard notes the rules of marbles at a school in Perth, 1955 (Australian Children's Folklore Collection, Museum Victoria, MN013361).

Howard reflected further that, "To moralize in favor of one kind of marble game in preference to another would be silly indeed. But to examine environmental factors which determine for children the kinds of games they play is neither silly nor moral".[4]

Such allusions to the spatiality of children's games prompted questions of my own about how certain physical environments might have affected children's play – and their broader lives – in 1950s Australia. There were hints, too, of another important question for understanding the play cultures of children in the past. Howard noticed that Australian adults were trying to turn autonomous, self-governed children's games into organised sports and to transform unkempt scraps of overgrown land into sports fields.

Playways in Australia are changing as play space becomes more and more congested and disappears in city areas, and as open paddocks for unsupervised play become well-groomed playing fields for organized athletic activities and professional sports aimed at Olympic championships.[5]

This comment gestures strongly towards a discrepancy between adult objectives and juvenile preferences. Even the best-intentioned adult attempts to create play spaces for children could ultimately inhibit the very outdoor recreation that parents, educators and officials sought to encourage. Howard's observations imply that in order to understand the effects of space upon children's lives, one must also analyse the ideas about environments for children that governed the actions of adults.

The fastidious research notes of Dorothy Howard constitute a rare attempt by an adult to understand the world of children from their own perspective. Howard was an eyewitness to children's play and space at a time when few adults paid much attention to such things.[6] This scholarly aspiration has inspired the intentions of this book: to explore not only the types of spaces which adults created for children in the 1950s but also to investigate how children themselves experienced these spaces. We cannot replicate Howard's privileged firsthand observations because half a century has lapsed since these post-war children played their games. But we can follow some of the threads which are suggested by Howard's findings. What were the adult aspirations for the physical environments of post-war children? What practical circumstances shaped the spaces? What were the remembered experiences of children in these places? In this book these three key questions concerning ideal, real and remembered environments are pursued across the sites of the neighbourhood, home and school in two suburbs of Melbourne in the 1950s: Carlton and North Balwyn. Carlton was a largely working-class area of significant ethnic diversity, comprised of nineteenth-century buildings and streets on the northern edge of the central business district. By contrast, North Balwyn was a sought-after new suburb for the aspirational middle classes on the eastern fringe of the metropolis (see Fig. 1-2). But the spatial problematics that these two distinct neighbourhoods faced were broadly symptomatic of all post-war Australian cities, rather than distinctively Melburnian.

At the intersection between two fields of history long neglected, this book simultaneously engages with histories of children and histories of space. In pursuit of my project to historicise children's spatiality I have adopted a multidisciplinary approach, drawing upon insights from studies of children's playlore, histories of the child, social histories of 1950s Australia, oral history, children's geography, architectural and urban planning discourses, and philosophical accounts of space and place.

A child's-eye view of the world

Research into children's playlore – like that of Howard – offers an important contribution to studies of children in that it genuinely engages with children's own culture rather than solely adult views of juvenile life. An interest in children's playlore was relatively slow to develop because of what Brian Sutton-Smith terms "the triviality barrier": adults rarely take seriously the whimsical play traditions of children.[7] Early investigations into children's play such as Lady Alice Gomme's *Traditional Games of England, Scotland and Ireland* (1894-98) or Norman Douglas' *London Street Games* (1916) were motivated by the assumption that traditional games were disappearing.[8] Yet in their detailed studies of English children in each of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s decades, pioneers Iona and Peter Opie demonstrated the dynamism and tenacity of children's play traditions.[9] In the United States, Mary and Herbert Knapp researched children's unsupervised play at roughly the same time, claiming that children's play functioned to instil a sense of collectivism, release the tension created by school discipline, parody popular culture and lessen childhood fears.[10] The writings of both the Opies and the Knapps typify the approach of many early folklorists in describing childhood as a cooperative, tolerant, liberated and creative state that is slowly corrupted by the learning of adult traits. Despite this adult temptation to sentimentalise childhood, other research has stressed that playlore commonly encompasses vulgar, sexist or racist elements.[11] Studies of children's playlore in Australia have a relatively brief lineage, dating only from Howard's research in the mid 1950s. Australian researchers such as Heather Russell, June Factor, Peter Lindsay and Denise Palmer have paid particular attention to the effects of spaces upon play, and their findings inform sections of this study.[12]

Since Douglas and Gomme, generations of folklorists have feared the demise of children's play rituals due to factors such as the disappearance of open spaces,[13] adult interference and supervision,[14] television,[15] colonisation by organised sports and physical education,[16] and the commodification of childhood. But such fears overlook the fact that children are engaged social actors, not passive subjects of adult behaviour.[17] As Factor points out, children's playlore has always been characterised by both conservation and creativity, ever managing to reinvent tradition in the face of threats. It has remained resilient in the face of changing social contexts. Indeed Factor argues that children have always played, across all cultures and time periods.[18] Yet the danger of overly emphasising the consistency of children's play is that it can obfuscate the fact that the

context in which children live and play changes throughout time, as do understandings of the child. Studies of children's playlore tend to focus upon linguistic elements that demonstrate change and continuity over time, whereas I am more interested in situating particular trends in children's play within their historical context. What was it about Australia in the mid-1950s that would have made Howard's findings different if she had visited ten years before or after?

Childhood as a socio-historical construct

Beyond studies of children's playlore, scholarly interest in children has been late to develop. A critical historiography of children and childhood has emerged only relatively recently, perhaps because histories of children and play have previously been considered rather frivolous.[19] But like any social group, children deserve to have their stories told, and in recent decades historians have tried to rectify the silences in the historiography of childhood. To ignore the past of a group that has generally constituted about thirty per cent of the population is to leave gaping holes in the historical record.[20]

Since the 1962 English publication of Philippe Ariès' *Centuries of Childhood* historians have recognised that understandings of childhood are not based purely on biology but are socio-historically constructed.[21] In this oft-cited work, Ariès traced the emergence of a sentimental concept of childhood through objects and spaces created especially for children.[22] Nevertheless, historians have often been more concerned with adult conceptions of children than with children themselves. Many scholars fail to differentiate between histories of *children*, which deal with the actual practices of real children in the past, and histories of *childhood*, which focus upon ideas about children, which may or may not prove realistic. Scholars such as Lloyd deMause and Lawrence Stone have been criticised for overly ambitious psycho-historical projects that confuse ideologies of childhood with actual behaviour.[23] A more productive way of conceptualising the histories of childhood and children is through the interdisciplinary framework developed by Emily Cahan and others. They propose a typology of four conditions influencing the social practices of children: physical environment; social environment; "imperial" practices of adults; and "native" practices of the child's social group.[24] Whilst children's folklore might be considered part of the native practices of children, children's historiography has generally focused upon the imperial practices of adults. This book will explore both, but through the prism of the physical environments that children inhabited. I heed here the

call of sociologists Allison James and Alan Prout to address both the ways in which children are active and creative agents moving purposively within the world, as well as the ways in which children's lives are structured by adult institutions and discourses.[25]

Few Australian historical accounts have focused upon childhood or children. Although Penelope Hetherington, Shurlee Swain, and Robert van Krieken are important exceptions, their research has been more interested in the relationship between children and welfare institutions or the state and prioritises the nineteenth century.[26] Jan Kociumbas constructed the first comprehensive history of Australian children from pre-colonisation to the present day.[27] Though her work filled a yawning gap in Australian historiography, the book has been criticised for viewing children only as victims of adult attempts to control them.[28] Rarely have Australian historians combined an interest in histories of children and histories of space. An exception is Simon Sleight, who has studied the "territories of youth" in colonial Melbourne, making the point that "Youth as a category of *historical* analysis has not… been adequately 'spatialised'."[29]

There is no one history of the child but a multiplicity of histories of children, even within this single book. Certain inflections of religious, ethnic and gender identity have been explored here, but other children shaped this research by their absence. Whilst the children studied represent a heterogeneous group of different sexes, classes, religions and ethnic backgrounds, Aboriginal children are conspicuously lacking. Primarily this is because I did not encounter any indigenous Australians who had grown up in my case study areas and they were not mentioned in the planning, architectural, or educational texts that I analysed. But their silent presence hovers around the fringes of my study. Indeed, throughout post-colonisation Australian history, white ideologies of ideal childhoods have often been framed in dichotomy with Aboriginal childhoods.[30] Country childhoods are also not explicitly analysed herein and it is important to remember that the experiences of rural children are often markedly different to those of city children.[31] Insofar as romanticisation of the rural idyll forms the implicit backdrop to concerns about children growing up in the city,[32] country childhoods are a constant, shadowy backdrop to this study.

Changing definitions of the child

Definitions of when childhood begins and ends have changed throughout time and within cultural contexts. Within these pages, childhood is defined as encompassing the primary school years – roughly six to twelve years of

age. Any younger and a child is still an infant or toddler; any older and the child begins to slip into adolescence, a concept just emerging in post-war Australian popular culture.[33] A different concept of the child predominated in the 1950s compared to that which is assumed at the start of the twenty-first century. These post-war years saw the gradual ebbing of old ideas about the competency of children and a growing view of children as peculiarly vulnerable. Although a number of historians argue that middle-class, western children begin to be viewed as vulnerable and innocent from the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries,[34] evidence from 1950s Australia suggests that alongside this, the traditional assumption still lingered that children could handle the responsibilities of adulthood.[35]

Older notions of the competency of children persisted particularly in working-class urban areas and in rural areas. Growing up in post-war Carlton, an underprivileged inner-city locality of Melbourne, large numbers of children worked. Livio Belia had paid employment from the age of about eleven and he juxtaposes this unromantic work with the carefree play associated with post-war childhoods.

> My first job was at University Café. Washing dishes on Saturday and Sunday… The rest of them would kick a paper footy and I'd be there washing dishes, come home with crumpled hands.[36]

Not only were some post-war children deemed capable of "adult" occupations, they were also allowed to handle quite dangerous weapons and materials. Bill Boyd was raised in Maryborough in rural Victoria, where as a child he would often hunt rabbits with his pet ferrets, possessing a fearsome-looking hunting knife for that purpose.[37] Similarly, the *Education Gazette* recommended to post-war Victorian teachers that they ensured that their (presumably rural) pupils who used fire-arms understood how to handle them safely, in a manner which suggests there was nothing unusual about children being allowed to fire guns.[38] Yet we can also see in the 1950s the kind of shift that Viviana Zelizer charts as occurring a little earlier in the United States: from understanding children as productive workers to seeing them as economically worthless but emotionally priceless.[39] We shall see that the 1950s were a time when children began to be viewed as particularly precious, as the hopes of an entirely new era were invested in them.

The social world of children in 1950s Australia

In popular imagination today, the children born after World War II are envisaged to have grown up in a period of prosperity and stability. Often,

these attributes are characterised pejoratively or nostalgically. Doug
Beattie remembers the 1950s as a decade frozen in time.

> I always reckoned the 'fifties were just a unique period of time that were
> never repeated. Once 1960 came, it was just an explosion of everything.
> Changed the whole scene. The 'fifties, there was no change. You felt you
> were in a time warp and it was always going to be like that. The price of a
> meat pie always stayed the same. It was always tuppence on the tram down
> to East Kew and thruppence down to Kew picture theatre. It was always
> tuppence for an ice block. No prices ever changed for years, and you
> thought, "Well, this is the way it is".[40]

This sense of living through halcyon days in which the wheel of time
stopped moving also imbues popular histories of the period.[41]

Although the work of Australian historians such as John Murphy and
Nicholas Brown has complicated this neat characterisation,[42] it is
nonetheless true that the post-war years saw the building of an affluence in
Australia which came in sharp contrast to the preceding decades of
deprivation. Children of the 1950s were raised by parents who had
suffered through the austerity and fear of the Great Depression and World
War II. Post-war parents yearned to provide secure, comfortable
childhoods for their offspring.

Politically, the 1950s are closely associated with Robert Menzies,
Australia's longest serving prime minister. Menzies was elected in 1949
and led the Liberal Party leadership of the country until 1966. Renowned
for its conservatism, this era in Australian politics was characterised by
widespread support for policies that increased economic wealth. There was
heavy spending on national development projects, housing, health and
education because social justice was seen as necessary to prevent
dangerously radical political views (such as communism) that accompanied
economic depression.[43] During the long economic boom unemployment
hovered at around one per cent for thirty years following World War II.
Household incomes rose by more than one per cent each year during the
1950s, climbing to over four per cent in the 1960s and early 1970s.[44] It is,
however, important to bear in mind Murphy's point that the ten years
following World War II were marked by economic instability and political
uncertainty, and it was only after the mid-1950s that a greater stability
ensued.[45]

But by the close of the decade Australia was indeed a more consumerist
society, as increasing mass production brought goods within the price
range of the ordinary person. This phenomenon was linked with
Americanisation as Australian industry imitated the United States:

modernising industrial practises and embracing the promises of modernity.[46] From the late 1950s, Australian shopping moved out from city centres and increasingly took place within suburban drive-in shopping malls. Peter Spearritt explains that shopping malls became "the main meeting places for suburban Australia" and formed "a link between the two great icons of suburban living – the house and the car".[47] Indeed, the car was a central feature of post-war life in Australia. Car ownership rose dramatically: only one Melburnian in eleven owned a car in 1945, but by 1968 one in three could make this claim.[48] Post-war urban expansion and car use were intimately linked as Graeme Davison has demonstrated, with the new freeways and suburbs of 1950s Melbourne clearly developed upon an assumption of widespread car ownership.[49]

The private dream of many Australians to provide a comfortable suburban home for their family was supported by government policy and rhetoric which emphasised home ownership and conservative family values. Home ownership figures soared, as owner occupation rose from around 50 per cent in the 1920s-1940s, to over 60 per cent during the period 1947-54, peaking at around 71 per cent by 1961.[50] Suburbanisation has been a major characteristic of Australian post-war history, encouraged by mass immigration, industrialisation, home-ownership and favourable government policies. Like other Australian cities, Melbourne experienced a changing distribution of residents as its highest growth rates moved to the outer suburbs, which kept pushing steadily outwards.[51] Much of the impetus for the post-war housing boom came from the increased numbers of migrants beginning a new life in Australia. From 1947 to 1961, 1.3 million people immigrated to Australia – many from non-British backgrounds – leading to a profound cultural diversification that was experienced immediately by children in school playgrounds.

The other major cause of the rapid growth of Australian cities was the rising birth rate. With an increased number of people marrying and having children at a younger age, fertility increased from 2,970 babies per 1,000 women in 1948 to 3,584 per 1,000 in 1961.[52] Kate Darian-Smith points out;

> The status of children as crucial components of national development was unprecedented. The cornerstone of post-war society was the nuclear family, and the responsibilities of marriage and parenting were integral to the official rhetoric and individual understandings of citizenship.[53]

During the 1950s, the value of the family was promoted heavily through both government policy and popular culture. The modern nuclear family consisting of husband, wife and children came to seem normal and

"traditional", despite its relatively recent manifestation.[54] Within this monolithic definition of the normal family was an expectation that feminine and masculine gender roles were clearly differentiated as complementary opposites. In particular, the social economy of the ideal family assumed that the man was the breadwinner and the woman was the housewife and mother.[55] These gender roles were not new,[56] but arguably the naturalness of male and female traits and roles was especially enshrined during the 1950s. Gender demarcations were communicated to post-war children through sex-segregated clothing and toys.

As a comparatively small and isolated nation, Australia had long emulated the cultural trends of its more powerful "mother country", England. In the 1950s, Australian children still sang "God Save the Queen" and paid homage to the British flag.[57] During her visit, Howard observed that, "Many Australians [transmit] their nostalgia for the homeland even to the third and fourth and fifth generations... The word 'Home', I learned, meant the British Isles".[58] The enormous sentiment felt towards England was clearly demonstrated during the Queen's visit in 1954. Of immense significance in popular culture, at least 6 to 7 million people, or 75 per cent of the population, saw the royal couple at least once.[59] Yet culturally, Australia increasingly looked towards the USA rather than England. Following the closer military cooperation of the two Pacific nations during World War II, Australians began to desire the affluence, consumerism and modernity associated with America. Simultaneously, significant sections of the population were suspicious of various forms of "trashy" American popular culture that began infiltrating the Australian landscape, such as comic books and rock 'n' roll music.[60]

Raising the post-war child

Greater attention began to be focused on the appropriate raising and education of the child in the 1950s. The popularisation of psychology in these years led to an emphasis upon the responsibility of parents to raise "normal" children. Early years of personal development were emphasised as crucial, particularly the nature of family life in the home environment.[61] As we shall see in Chapters 4 and 5, this emphasis upon the domestic nurturance of children had material as well as emotional inflections, so that certain types of houses were seen as more suited to the creation of happy families and well-developed children.

Parental advice was characterised by a new permissiveness in contrast to the strict regulation recommended in the early twentieth century. Childrearing specialists like the influential American, Dr Benjamin Spock,

encouraged parents to enjoy raising children and follow natural urges rather than worry about discipline.[62] His influence can be clearly discerned in the writings of Australian childrearing experts such as Dr Phyllis Cilento[63] and appears to have permeated parental practices by the mid-1950s. One sociological study of Sydney families in 1954 and 1955 found that,

> While there were more traditional and more experimental methods of rearing children, all of the parents felt that they were in a new era in this regard. There were four main elements in the new approach to children: a belief that one had to be equipped with knowledge in order to deal with children effectively, and not simply repeat the methods used by one's parents; a belief that one should be affectionate and companionable towards one's children, and not the remote authorities that parents had been in previous generations; a desire to produce a self-regulating rather than obedient child; and an aim to ensure full development of the child's capacities rather than prepare him to be devoted to duty.[64]

But post-war children lived in split worlds, with the intimate space of the home a more permissive environment than the institutional space of the school. Post-war teachers still tended to take a traditional approach of control and punishment to the education of children.[65]

These children were at the centre of adult discourse in a way that no previous generation of children had experienced. Without the distractions of war or depression, children of the 1950s grew up in conditions of relative prosperity as the embodiment of the nation's future. The perpetuation of belief in environmental determinism, which we shall see had structured discourses about the city from the late nineteenth century, shaped the conviction that optimal child development required particular types of physical environments. Thus adult aspirations in the 1950s resulted in flourishing spatial discourses around the child.

Environmental cognition in children

To better understand the ways in which post-war adults tried to translate spatial ideals into concrete form and the manner in which children responded to these spaces, I have drawn upon the plethora of studies relating to children's geographies that have emerged in recent decades.[66] Many scholars of children's geography contend that the ability to play in a manner that interacts with a challenging physical environment is crucial to child development.[67] Robin Moore terms this *terra ludens*: "the special quality of children's relations with living environments and the particular

knowledge and developmental support that can be acquired through playful interaction with natural materials and phenomena".[68] This process is reciprocal: as the child is influenced by the physical environment, s/he also influences and adapts that environment.[69] The developmental significance of the physical environment can best be appreciated in the middle years of childhood "between the strivings of animal infancy and the storms of adolescence" when children have the most opportunities and ambitions to independently explore new places within reach.[70] Children have particularly vivid sensory experiences according to Colin Ward, who draws upon Piaget to explain that the child's conception of space slowly expands with age and with increased interactions with the world around them.[71] Moore (with many others) asserts that play, particularly in natural environments, leads to the acquisition of "manual dexterity and sensori-psycho-motor, social-emotive, perceptive, imaginative, affective, cognitive and verbal skills".[72] Describing the potency of outdoor places for children, Moore and Donald Young note that "there is an apparent contradiction here between the overwhelming affective presence of the outdoors in children's minds and emotions, compared to its more modest actual use".[73]

By contrast to other scholars, however, Yi-Fu Tuan warns us to be sceptical of claims that children have a sympathetic bond with nature and that more stimulating playthings are found in the natural environment. Our understandings of childhood and nature are based upon deeply entrenched cultural beliefs, which make it easy to forget that children always live in some contact with and require stimulation from the man-made world.[74] Raymond Williams writes that our cultural nostalgia for the innocence of children and their assumed empathy with nature can be traced back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As rural landscapes were replaced by industrial cities, the western world began to view childhood and nature as "refuges from the pressures of industrialization and urbanization".[75] Such assumptions framed the emergence of urban planning, as Chapter 2 demonstrates.

Whilst it is important to avoid romanticising an alleged intuitive connection between children and the natural world, geographers of childhood do offer a useful explication of the ways in which children develop through interaction with physical environments. We shall see in Chapter 3 how conceptual understandings of space become more complex and far-reaching as the child ages.[76] Such questions fascinated Howard. In her autobiography, written in the third-person, she attempted to describe

> a child's expanding, interior view of an exterior, sensed world related to
> invisible worlds of the mind created by her responses to language, spoken

and written. Each new day necessitated a reordering of her cosmos. Each new day, as she lived it, had to be incorporated into an unending tale.[77]

Likewise the perspectives that post-war children had on the spaces around them did not remain static throughout their childhood years, as each new experience complicated their mental framework of place.

Fig. 1-3: In this image from 1950s suburban Melbourne, girls break both clothing and toy gender stereotypes (photographer James Higgins Quirk, Jill Quirk Collection, Museum Victoria).

Children's interactions with physical environments are influenced by a range of variables besides age, including class and gender.[78] Several children's geographers claim that boys generally have more opportunities for interaction with their environment; that they are accorded more freedom which in turn leads to a wider scope of geographic familiarity and greater spatial competency.[79] Yet it is difficult to generalise: girls can also be active users of their local streetscape.[80] In this photo (Fig. 1-3) from the 1950s young girls break clothing and toy gender stereotypes with unselfconscious glee. As we shall see, many post-war girls were very adventurous: exploring dirty and dangerous inner-city lanes or fishing with brothers on the outskirts of the city. Boys are stereotypically associated with being outdoors, yet some post-war boys in my study relished indoor

activities such as model-making and reading. More determinative of environmental interaction were class differences. These were clearly evident in the possessions of children, which then affected what types of activities were available to them. For example, the delight of middle-class children in constructing model planes or cars was not echoed in stories from working-class children whose parents would have struggled to afford such toys. Socio-economic background also affected a child's likelihood of working and the types of recreational activities s/he engaged in. Participation in youth groups such as Scouts and Girl Guides or in organised sports such as tennis or cricket was common amongst children growing up in middle-class suburbs but rarely mentioned by former residents of working-class inner-city areas. In all likelihood other variables such as religion or ethnicity also affected the post-war child's spatial world, but my interview sample was not extensive enough to exhaustively explore such factors.

Sites of childhood

As organising themes for this book, I have identified three sites in which children spent most of their time: the neighbourhood, home, and school. An array of studies has been undertaken which have built up our understanding of children's geographies in their local streets. As the immediate context in which children move, the neighbourhood is a crucial site for understanding the world of children. It often largely constitutes their spatial and social boundaries. Though children once "owned" the streets, from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries social reformers in the western world tried to shepherd working-class children from public places into supervised playgrounds.[81] The street was reconceived as a site of danger by the child-saving movement. Twentieth-century studies across the western world have charted a gradual decrease in available urban play space and in children's unsupervised access to their neighbourhoods, due largely to heightened parental fears.[82]

House design in a given era generally reflects dominant ideals of family interaction, including concepts of childhood.[83] The home as a discrete domestic environment, has historically been associated with the private worlds of children and women, and is the first space with which a child becomes intimately familiar.[84] The uses made of particular home spaces have been variously interpreted as reflective of parental control or juvenile agency.[85] Childhood "has been increasingly domesticated over the course of the past two centuries", as children spend more time in the home and this is seen as the most appropriate place for them.[86]