Neighbouring as an occasioned activity : "Finding a lost cat"

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Abstract : *To illustrate the decline in a strong sense of community the characteristics of suburban living are often cited by social and cultural commentators. Spatially dispersed, lifeless during the daytime due to commuting, an excessive concern with keeping up appearances in terms of lawns, flowerbeds and property maintenance, moreover, suburbia, suffers perhaps worst of all, from weak social relations between residents. Such disparaging commentary on suburban neighbourhoods is frequently a premise for social scientists to define their version of "the good community", bemoan its absence or decline, and has little concern for the phenomena of daily life in suburbia. In its concern to advance one or another political agenda conventional social and cultural studies miss just how suburban residents organise their everyday lives at ground level. Drawing on the insights of ethnomethodology and other studies of social practice we offer some therapeutic descriptions of neighbouring. From our ethnographic fieldwork in a UK suburb we show, via the incident of the search for a lost cat, how everyday talk formulates places and is formulated by its location in the ongoing occasioned activities of neighbours. In contrast to studies that have depicted suburbia as a place where morals are minimised, we show how conduct amongst neighbours constantly displays specific and locally accomplished moral commitments. Building on our own and other ethnographic research we list some of the rules of good neighbouring and investigate how such rules are followed or otherwise oriented to during encounters between neighbours. We also make a start on the explication of the seen but un-noticed features of what neighbours know of one another as settled neighbours. In doing so we return to our initial topic of community and neighbouring to learn some of the good reasons for neighbours maintaining the social distances that they typically do.*

Introduction

Definitions of the good community, requirements for the good community, the loss of a sense of community and the new places we find community are the stock in trade of regional, urban and, of course, community studies[1]. It is a perennial research topic and an important one. Alongside research on community, a great deal of effort is devoted to developing good communities, investing in them, planning their spatial arrangement, drafting policy that will encourage them, selecting their housing types and to some extent attempting to select their inhabitants. Indeed this article arises out of a substantial research programme - "The Connected Community" - by the European Commission into new forms of information and communication technologies (ICTs) that could support local communities[2]. Worries over the placelessness of, particularly, the internet prompted a call for the development of technologies that would encourage proximate groups to strengthen their sense of community[3]. In "The Living Memory Project" this was translated into the ongoing design and specification of a system which would fit into the everyday lives of the residents of a suburban city neighbourhood (for more detail see (Laurier, Whyte, & Buckner, 2000)).

We will not be attempting to summarily document the multiple research activities of "The Living Memory Project" here since it was a three year long project involving around thirty different researchers (from software engineers to ergonomists). Instead we will be reporting results from the *ethnographic* strand of the project which gathered empirical material on everyday interactions in suburbia (Whyte, Laurier, & Buckner, 2000). These results are ones that were shaped by the requirements of system designers encountering, via ethnographers, the interests, needs, activities, affections and disaffections of 'the locals'. An interdisciplinary approach arising out of 'ethnomethodologically-informed ethnography' (Crabtree, Nichols, O'Brien, Rouncefield, & Twidale, 2000) was used by us as community researchers in sensitising the work of designers to the specifics of interactions in the ethnographic study area (see Part 2).

Within the suburban residential area ("Corstorphine") which our project delimited by postal district there were numerous 'communities of practice' (Wenger, 1998) rather than any unified entity which could be identified as *the* community. It was not that we expected to be able define or identify the 'local community' for more than our own practical purposes since in keeping with the praxiological approach which we advance later, it is the spatial and temporal arrangement of practices that lead to the forming of communities (Thrift 1999). Given that spatially proximate residence was bound to our project's definition of community members one of the most salient categories we selected to investigate was that of residents

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[1] We are not attempting to review or critique sociologists', geographers' or anthropologists' definitions of community here nor do we have space to review any other than the most pertinent studies (see part 2) however for the reader who wishes to investigate some of classics (past and more recent) a little further they might look into (Bryson & Thompson, 1972; Gans, 1962; Lynd & Lynd, 1929; Morris, 1988; Nancy, 1991; Rose et al., 1965; Seeley, Sim, & Loosley, 1963; Stacey, 1960; Suttles, 1968; Tonnies, 1995 (first published1887); Webber, 1964; Whyte, 1943; Wirth, 1933)

[2] http://www.i3net.org/

[3] http://cordis.lu/esprit/src/eyecall.htm

being *neighbours*. Or rather, once again given our social practice approach, we were interested in not solely what a neighbour is for another neighbour; but furthermore in describing how *neighbouring* as a socio-material practice occurs as 'relations in public' (Goffman 1963; Goffman 1971).

In accord with the guiding policies of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, the good constraint we imposed on our observations of suburbia and neighbours' relations, was to, as best we could, explicate the relevant observables for neighbours *as* neighbours and not for us as professional researchers and/or social theorists (Coulter 2001; Garfinkel & Sacks 1974; Sacks 1963; Schegloff 1999). In the material that follows, then, we will, firstly, introduce three of the ethnographic studies of suburbia and the elements of their work that we have drawn on in our own. In this first part we simultaneously introduce summaries from our generalisable conventional social science results which show similarities to the North American and Australian case studies. In our second part we provide a sample of our ethnographic empirical material, and through and by its close description and explication, we aim to show methods, cats, ways of talking, pointing and so on to be reflexively tied to the spatial organisation of suburbia. Building on descriptions made available by conversation analysis and ethnomethodology we show some 'seen but un-noticed' features of neighbouring by way of contrast, and as an alternate, to the 'usual suspects' which are ushered into view by many community studies, including our own. Just what community consists of we will not attempt to formulate here but we aim to at least show that neighbouring is something quite specific and cannot be mapped on to community without confusion arising.

Part 1 - Community and Suburbia : ethnographic studies

What came as something of a surprise when we embarked on our ethnographic study was how little recent work there had been of this kind on suburbs[4]. The most renowned urban ethnographies were of inner city neighbourhoods, such as, in the USA, W. F. Whyte's (Whyte 1943) "Street Corner Society" and in the UK Young and Wilmott's (1986) "Family and Kinship in East London". In the latter a sense of the community in its place is given when Phyllis Willmott accompanies a local resident, Mrs Landon, as she walks for half an hour down the street pointing out people she knows and stopping to chat to some of them. Supplementing Mrs Landon's stroll, Young and Willmott identify the places where residents of their London neighbourhood meet : the street, market, pub, work and the local library. Their study wanted "to find out what happens to family life when people move to an estate"[5] (pxxvii), to examine family life that had been rooted in the inner city and that was disrupted by the 'improvement' of the slums.[6]

Alongside the urban portraits there are numerous anthropologically-based studies of villages and other 'small communities' (i.e. (Vidich & Bensman 1958)). Indeed Erving Goffman's (1956) first major work "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life" came out of a study of a small settlement on a Scottish Island. Nevertheless there have been a handful of excellent studies of suburbia, though none of them very contemporary. In this section we will review them briefly whilst initiating our description of suburban community practices which shares many of the same conclusions, though it ultimately takes them in a different direction.

The first study, though only weakly ethnographic, was carried out by a US journalist and was a 'zeitgeist' book of its period. It is William H. Whyte's 'The Organisation Man'. A racey and lengthy 'state of society' report which skips through suburbia as the home location for Whyte's new iconic and symptomatic figure of post-war bureaucracy - 'the organisation man'. For all Whyte's diluting amalgamation of disparate and diverse activities into the one overarching condition - supplication to the organisation - he does not treat the residents of suburbia as dupes. He treats suburbanites as aware in their own ways of the social problems

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[4] Researchers in the field of cultural studies have produced intriguing essays on certain aspects of suburbia though seldom based on ethnographic work they are more typically exemplary readings of certain texts or the unearthing of often fascinating hidden histories, see (Dorst, 1989; Oliver, Davis, & Bentley, 1994; Revill, 1993; Silverstone, 1997; Webster, 2000). For a comprehensive history of the US suburban development, see (Jackson, 1985) chapter 15 of which focuses on 'loss of community'.

[5] Our study did not include 'social housing' and so its inhabitants were not resettled in our suburb *en-masse* from another area of the city, in this respect it was different from Young and Wilmott's (1986) study. In our area neighbours moved into their houses one after another, giving a constantly replenished mix of old and new neighbours which is typical of established surburban areas. New build suburban areas are once again distinct from Young and Wilmott's study as we will see later in Gans (1972) and Richard's (1990) studies, there all neighbours are *new* neighbours without previous acquaintance nor entitled to make claims about remembering the neighbourhood, how it's changed or what it's like on the basis of longer inhabitation.

[6] A lovely historical account of gossiping in inner city working class areas and what happens when the groups of people are moved to new estates, similar to Young and Willmott, is (Tebbutt, 1995), at a more general level there is Clapson's (Clapson, 1998) history of suburbs and new towns, of which chapter 4 'Settling in' has remarks on getting to know neighbours in new towns and new suburbs..

of their way of life and brings out an aspect of neighbouring which we will return to later in our empirical material and conclusion - that it is a *moral activity*. In discussing with his suburbanites how the manner in which their street patterns were arranged affected their relations with their neighbours this comes out clearly:

> "Now this may be conformity but it is not unwitting conformity. The people know all about it. When I first started interviewing on this particular aspect of suburbia, I was at first hesitant ; it is not very flattering to imply to somebody that they do what they do because of the environment rather than their own free will. I soon found out, however, that they not only knew quite well what I was interested in but were ready to talk about it. Give a suburban housewife a map of the area, and she is likely to show herself a very shrewd social analyst. After a few remarks about what a bunch of cows we all are, she will cheerfully explain how funny it is she doesn't pal around with the Clarks anymore because she is using the new supermarket now and doesn't stop by Eleanor Clark's for coffee like she used to.
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> I believe this awareness is the significant phenomenon. … They know full well why they do as they do, and they think about it often. Behind this neighbourliness they feel a sort of *moral imperative* (our emphasis), and yet they see the conflicts also." P305. (Whyte 1960 (orig.1957)).

For the moment we will leave the moral aspect of neighbourliness hanging while we turn to two more nuanced accounts of suburbia. Both studies we will reiterate in some detail since our study shared most of their early conclusions. The first is provided in Gans' (1972) "The Levittowners", a book perhaps less popular with the Anglo-American general public than Whyte's but nevertheless a well received sequel to his earlier study (Gans 1962) - "The Urban Villagers" - of an inner-city Italian American neighbourhood. In the "The Levittowners" Gans, a resident of the suburban neighbourhood he studied, provides more detail than most on the practices of neighbouring.[7] He resided in Levittown, carrying out a long-term participant-observation study during the years when the houses were newly built and being occupied for the first time. This early settlement period provided special circumstances which allowed neighbours to circumnavigate the fact that:

> "…most people need an excuse to meet each other. The intrepid and extrovert few can go up and introduce themselves, but for most people such a frontal assault, with its tacit admission of loneliness and the possibility of being rejected, is impossible." ((Gans 1972), p46)

Gans then adds that 'since everyone was dying of curiousity' (p46) methods were used for 'breaking the isolation' (p46). People went out on their front lawns either to play with their children or do some gardening for what he describes as the 'covert' purpose of meeting their neighbours. They also walked up and down the street with their children to exchange greetings with the other new arrivals. He describes the small talk that was indulged in by the new arrivals to make available to one another the *salient facts* about themselves and their neighbours such as their jobs, religion, racial attitudes and level of education and so on. For instance with Gans own neighbour during their first conversation each made it clear that they

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[7] There is a lovely moment in Gans books where one of his neighbours, aware that Gans is doing a study of the suburb jokes to him about Whyte's earlier book - "you're not going to do 'an organisation man' on us are you?". Such joking also should alert us to the fact suburbanites today are just as likely to have read popular books on social phenomena such as postmodernism or deconstruction alongside watching documentaries and extended news reports in the media.

did not share the same ideas about race or religion: "Disagreements would surely come up about race and religion, and if we were to be good neighbours, these subjects should not be discussed" p47.

There is a sequentiality in the events that may (or may not) build bonds between neighbours that Gans alerts us to. What happens after these *first* meetings, with their established topics of jobs, religion and so on, and, dependent on what occurred in the first meeting, invitations would (or would not) follow to visit one another's houses for coffee or perhaps a house party, card games or home sales (i.e. "Tupperware" sort of occasions -see (Clarke 1997)). In our 2 year field study of Corstorphine we found a similar pattern of *newly arrived* neighbours being invited, after some on-the-street greetings and conversations during which some initial assessments are made by both parties. New neighbours were then, in the particular street we studied in detail, invited by *established* neighbours for early evening cocktail parties. What was important about these early evening events was that they allowed for 'a low pressure' introduction of new neighbours which was welcoming without being intrusive. A get-together where neighbours could still easily *get out* if they did not get on, where subjects that could be discussed were divided from the ones that should not be discussed. For Levittown and for Corstorphine, it is not just cocktail parties of course; charity events, neighbourhood meetings and seasonal parties (i.e. 4th of July, Guy Fawkes, Halloween) were all *follow-ons* from initial encounters with neighbours. Though as Gans learnt "… as a rule, large gatherings needed another rationale so as to leave enough social distance between potentially incompatible people." What Gans is providing, and what our fieldwork lead us to share, is a first formulation of neighbouring:

> 1. *Bringing new residents together whilst allowing them to mark social distances, shared interests conversational mentionables and unmentionables.* New neighbours in suburbia can expect to be invited to introductory parties or offer them themselves. There should be no assumption on either side that these will lead to immediate or deep friendships and may be as much about setting boundaries of acceptable behaviours (i.e. subtle warnings about religious practices, allowing dogs to stray, painting houses unacceptable colours, having loud parties etc. (see also below))

In Levittown familiar 'get-together's of the American suburbs were quickly instituted - bridge clubs and coffee-klatsches. Similar kinds of gatherings were common in Corstorphine particularly 'coffee-mornings', which were often remarkably regular on a weekly or fortnightly basis and with up to a dozen neighbours, predominantly women, attending on and off. Sometimes these informal associations persisted for more than two decades. Gans pays attention to the less obviously communal facets of suburbia, such as rules over the appearance of front lawns:

> "… the front lawn would be cared for conscientiously, but the backyard was of less importance. Those who deviated from this norm - either by neglecting their lawn or working on it too industriously- were brought into line through wisecracks. When I, in a burst of compulsive concern, worked very hard on my lawn at the start, one of my neighbours laughed and said he would have to move out if I was going to have "that fancy a lawn."

Picking up on Whyte's opening quote, Gans's episode described above and our project informants remarks, a second formulation we would offer of neighbouring is:

> 2. *Maintain your property in a similar state to those of your other neighbours.* Non-conformism in terms of excessive displays of individual and/or quirky taste, wealth or allowing property to fall into disrepair will lead to comments or worse from other neighbours. 'Keeping up with the Jones's' as this ethos of neighbouring is usually called, carries the sense of a mild or sometimes comical competitiveness, yet it is also about not falling too far behind nor indeed ever 'racing ahead of the Jones'.

During our fieldwork, especially in the summertime we were often welcomed in the front garden and would pay compliments on whatever flowers were blooming, or, noted that weeding or pruning had been done. Unlike Gans in Levittown we did not actually purchase a property in Corstorphine, our claim to being local[8] was based on our research project's ties through various activities to this particular neighbourhood, living in the same city and moreover that our university buildings were located in the district and were one of its resources (for employment, sports facilities, nightclasses, taxation, meeting rooms).[9] Our role as social researchers was much more overt than Gans' identity had been in Levittown yet we were also clear about the fact that we wished to make ourselves part of the local scene to the greatest extent possible and that we wanted to participate in community activities like everyone else from the area. For example we assisted in organising annual fayres, we walked and shopped regularly on the main street, visited the local shopping mall, became regulars at a local pub and a café, used the public library, assisted at the local primary schools, attended Burn's suppers organised by a local charity, ran a local newsletter, made acquaintances with people on the basis of their residence in the neighbourhood and more.[10]

On that basis we were settled into the neighbourhood as residents without residence (or rather with our workplace as our local address). As part of our introduction as new members-in-kind of the neighbourhood we were invited by 'compatible people' for drinks in the back garden on sunny evenings and at a later stage in two cases for elaborate meals inside neighbour's houses.[11] In the study-site street where we did our most in-depth work the intensifying of our relationships there happened gradually through visiting two households on numerous occasions[12]. On our first visits we administered a questionnaire, later we visited for longer

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[8] Note, our claim was to be 'locals' of a kind and not 'neighbours' of these neighbours.

[9] And of course one of its nuisances since the university was expanding causing traffic congestion, its students would cause noise in the streets at night and its researchers frequently called at the door asking residents whether they were willing to become involved in such and such a study.

[10] For more details on our participation see : http://lime.qmced.ac.uk/metharch/, especially *'A Grand Day In' life at home with seniors.*

[11] For us, as researchers, making acquaintances with our locals was organised in a similar manner to that of any neighbours attempting to make acquaintances, so we were just as liable to being avoided as 'not the kind of people I'd get on with' as anybody else and having our interests (technology research being key given our research project) assessed for their compatibility with various other residents. Indeed following such a procedure was entirely appropriate to our ambitions. To use a census-like approach to meet all residents without exception was thereby to miss learning-through-using the 'natural' ways in which newcomers got to know other local residents.

[12] A strategy of selecting one street initially to investigate domestic uses of technology and form of acquaintanceship, was one that we emulated from Daniel Miller's (Miller, 1998) study of shopping and social

interviews, then helping with internet access, e-mail & web-page design from home and finally we visited regularly as a 'social call'. Echoing Gans's remarks about the shift from first meetings for neighbours to the growth of bonds based on shared interests, once we had established acquaintanceships with two key households we were then offered introductions to a wider network of neighbours who might be interested in, or interesting for, our research[13]. This lead us to codify a further rule of neighbouring:

> 3. *Wherever it is acceptable pass your neighbours on to other neighbours or acquaintances, especially if they are seeking help.* Amongst neighbours there was a level of mutual awareness of what each did for a job and also their major hobbies. If new resident Mr X was looking for a tennis partner then Ms Y would pass him onto Mr Z who she knew was a keen tennis player also.

In the 1960s there were frequent dismissals of the suburbs not just by popular commentators like (Whyte 1960 (orig.1957)) but also by social analysts. They were criticised for being pervasively homogenous, socially hyperactive, conformist and transient. These were depictions which Gans did the Levittown study to counteract, and ones which are still common today (e.g. (Baumgartner, 1988)). Indeed they are common sense, *as is the opposite view,* one which Gans puts forward:

> "The major reason for the upswing is indeed homogeneity, but an equally appropriate term might be "compatibility." Propinquity may initiate social contact but it does not determine friendship. Many relationships are indeed transient, but this is no reflection on their intensity. Finally conformity prevails, although less as malicious or passive copying than sharing of useful ideals. In short, many of the *phenomena* identified by critics occur in the Levittown but their alleged *consequences* do not follow." ((Gans 1972) p154)

The most recent studies of suburban life have come out of Australia (Bryson & Thompson, 1972; Ferber, Healy, & McAuliffe, 1994; Johnson, 1994), perhaps the best of which is (Richards, 1990) and hers is the second study we are turning to. Like Gans she picks up on the maligned homogeneity of the suburb though in her case with the intention of upholding it.[14] Following the categorisations of the social sciences she looks at how class, racism and patriarchal structures are manifest in the suburb she studied. However from a feminist standpoint whilst launching a critique against the previously mentioned aspects of suburban life, on neighbouring specifically she makes a strong plea to reassess its importance arguing that it has been downplayed in studies of community because of its association with women :

> "Perhaps the clearest result of the failure to examine a range of social and ideological contexts is the assumption that neighbouring offers default relationships for those - and only those - unable to do better." (Richards, 1990) p182

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relations. It was during the fieldwork that we became aware that it was offering us rich material on relations between neighbours.

[13] This process of being passed along from informant to informant on the basis of the ethnographer's stated interests is often remarked upon in anthropology. See for instance Rabinow's (Rabinow, 1977) highly readable story of the hidden work behind anthropological monographs in "Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco" which later sparked off the writing-worlds textual school of anthropology.

[14] For a fascinating recent study of suburbia in a multi-ethnic area see (Baumann, 1996).

Whilst we would certainly agree that what neighbouring actually consists of has been overlooked it is not only due to its strong link with the working, caring and neighbourly lives of women, a theme which we will expand on in Part 2. Richards continues:

> "It denigrates daytime relations between women as silly, time-filling trivia… The assumption that neighbouring is a residual relationship has also helped confirm the myth that neighbouring is irrelevant to men." (Richards, 1990) P182

Clearly not all studies, and particularly ethnographic studies are quite so denigrating toward daytime relations between women (and men). Since Gans's study of Levittown, as we have noted above, pays considerable attention to daytime neighbouring as it is done by women, men and equally as significantly by children. Without doubt though Richards has dug into the relations of neighbouring in greater detail than Gans attempted to do. From her fieldwork she builds up a typology of neighbours and their associated activities (see Table 1)

Table 1. 6 types of neighbours based on (Richards, 1990)[15]

Type 1 - **Family Lifers**	Visit each other's houses to "share equipment, tell jokes, local news and 'very personal things', and expect to stay friends should one family move.' (p203) Also they are related through child related activities : playgroup, baby-sitting group, kindergarten.
Type 2 - **The Local Jokers**	They are 'telling jokes with same-age local friends, but not intruding on 'very personal things'. (p205-207) They are often not in, but do watch each other's houses, lend equipment, and are the most likely of any type to have friends and 'a lot', even a hobby in common.'
Type 3 - **Good Neighbours**	'… lend equipment and mix socially as couples with one or two others and, being near watch each other's houses.' (p207) What they do is not apparently all that different yet they are somehow more isolated than the other groups as they are without family or friends nearby so they are forced to turn to their neighbours.
Type 4 - **Functional Friends**	'…define good neighbours in terms of not intruding.' (p209)
Type 5 - **The Triers**	'seeing contacts frequently, swapping local news, sharing child-minding'… 'they are joiners (p211)
Type 6 - **The Distance Keepers**	'epitiomize the popularly depicted evils of suburbia.' '… they do little else for each other but watch each other's houses. Even though they live near to those they know best, hardly any lend equipment and most only 'exchange greetings' rather than talking.' (p212.)

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[15] (Richards, 1990) assembled her 'six very different styles of local relationship' through a procedure she refers to as 'cluster analysis' (p202).

From her typologies Richards claims that 'community' is *infrequently* associated with neighbourhood relations, as is 'friendship'. She describes her 6 'ideal types' (table 1) in much greater detail as part of the analysis which leads toward her idealising them. In the next section we will critique this kind of analyst's 'typology' approach but for the moment will simply observe that Richard's types are general and generalisable ones that one could easily imagine one of her (and one of Corstorphine's) suburbanites producing.

Richard's work begins to complicate what we might understand by neighbouring as a social scientist's 'concept' or 'theory' or 'ideal type' when she starts listing some of th*e actual activities* neighbours did for one another as good neighbours (pp220-240). Once again the list of activities here is one that we also found in our ethnographic work, but rather than put our exhaustive list from Corstorphine forward as 'original' (as in 'new') results we will use Richard's concise and 'original' list (as in, the one that was the origin from which ours began)[16]:

> *Having one another around for barbecues[17]*
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> *Bringing in the neighbour's washing for them when it starts raining.*
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> *Bringing rubbish bins in to avoid them being blown away.*
>
> *Picking up the mail for you.*
>
> *Helping with heavy garden jobs such as erecting a shed.*
>
> *Lending electricity/hot water during an emergency (i.e. utilities failure).*
>
> *Looking after kids*
>
> *Feeding pets and/or watering plants whilst neighbour is away*
>
> *Top of the list of neighbouring activities was -* **housewatching**

What tends to be less examined in work on 'community' is neighbours finding each other to be nuisances, what could be called *bad* neighbours. Richards produced an equally specific list from her suburbanites:

> *Disputes over broken fences/walls*

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[16] The "Living Memory Project's" longer list can be found at: http://lime.qmced.ac.uk/metharch/ and in: (Whyte, Barr, & Buckner, 1999).

[17] This is the one exception in the list - and was not a common neighbouring activity in our climatically intemperate study area, though there would be barbecues in the brief summer. Evening cocktails were a more regular feature but also one that was slightly more selective.

Dogs that were out of control

Decaying cars on the street

Loud parties at anti-social hours

Snooping on one another (as the negative of housewatching)

From interviews with residents of an affluent New York suburb Baumgarten (1988) gathered remarkable narratives of grievances, annoyances and often quite bizarre behaviour. In one anecdote, a family told of how they avoided confronting their neighbour and questioned his sanity. Amongst other provocations, he threw stones at their window to catch their attention before dancing naked on his lawn and defecated outdoors in full view of his neighbour's children. He poses an interesting case for our third and important formulation of neighbouring is:

> 4. *Watch the neighbours and the neighbourhood.* Much like properly maintaining property without either being a 'show off' or an 'eyesore' this rule of thumb is balanced between being reasonably aware of what neighbours are doing - 'knowing your neighbours' and being a 'nosey neighbour'. It is a *mutual* and *reflexive* watchfulness in the sense that residents are aware that certain aspects of what they do can be seen by their neighbours. Also watchfulness may be unevenly distributed with the housebound elderly being expected to be more watchful and sometimes resented for being so, and children, pets and other possessions as appropriate items to watch (see section 3)).

We have summarised three rules so far, and would suggest that there are probably more that could be formulated. There is a fifth rule for neighbouring which stands out though and was a commonplace point of heated discussion amongst the neighbours in Corstorphine, and in our interviews and conversations with them :

> 5. *Do not intrude on your neighbours.* Living in proximity to one another means that neighbours have the possibility of calling around too frequently, of commenting more than they should on each other's lives as they see and hear them happening over the fence, through the wall or hedge, or, out in the street.[18] Even neighbours who were friends had to be careful to avoid seeing too much of another and most neighbours, as you would expect, were just neighbours.

Richards re-iterates this attribution with a well-turned phrase at the close of her analysis of what neighbours do for one another as neighbours:

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[18] Many of Corstorphine's suburban homes are terraced or semi-detached thus neighbours share a wall and there is the possibility of 'low level' overhearing where shouting, children crying, crockery breaking, powertools, dogs barking or loud music are audible whilst talk, stirring coffee spoons, cats purring etc. are not. Loud noises and how they should be responded to are clearly not all of a kind (e.g. loud music versus a smoke alarm). That they will be audible is recognised by neighbours where they may apologise in advance before drilling into shared walls and restrict their drilling hours. Drilling before 8am or after midnight may lead to justified complaints.

"The strongest message is that neighbour relations are normally not close. Those who have close relations find them elsewhere, those who know their near neighbours best know them very little. In each of the different types (see Table 1) a good neighbour is at a distance, 'not one that pops in every five seconds', in Grace's words, not 'on your doorstep all the time', in Keith's." p215.

The five rules that we have formulated here are ones that settled members of Australian, European and American suburbs can be expected to know in common as suburbanites. How they deal with these general rules in practice is quite a different matter.[19] Our gradual progression in this part of our article has been from the generalities and easy equation of neighbourliness and community via the two exemplary ethnographies by Gans and by Richards to the specifics of what neighbouring actually consists of as it is indicated in the lists that we have compiled from Richards. Why the specific details of neighbouring are worth turning to learn about how the social, political and moral order works in practice is a question we will address in the next section as we turn toward language and social practice in neighbouring. Paralleling our shift toward the actualities of neighbouring we have also remarked very briefly that the residents *acting as neighbours* have rules to follow.

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[19] How such rules are *acquired* and the related gaffs, disagreements, misunderstandings etc. made along the way is a topic worthy of as much investigation as is currently turned toward the acquisition of languages or various expert or workplace skills.

Lost Cats : the moral accountability of being a neighbour and the visibility arrangements of a neighbourhood

As we set out in Part 2, in common with Gans and Richards our finding was that one of the key guides in good neighbouring for suburban residents was not to intrude on your neighbours. Relatedly we can see that for contemporary city dwellers the general warning issued at childhood is : *don't talk to strangers*, and for sociologists and urban geographers the avoidance of contact with strangers, creating the 'lonely crowd' is taken to be the typifying and alienating experience of modern urban life. Furthermore, its explanation is sought in general abstract relations such as 'fear of the Other', 'the commodification of public spaces', 'moral minimalism' or a little more concretely in the design of pavements. Yet all of this relies on retaining the type 'stranger' as if it were used as ubiquitously and reductively in ordinary interactions as it is by social theorists. The massively apparent fact is that people in cities do talk to one another as 'customers and shopkeepers', 'passengers and cabdrivers', 'members of a bus queue', 'regulars at cafes and bars', 'tourists and locals', 'beggars and bypassers', 'Celtic fans', 'smokers looking for a light', 'fellow-owners of Weimaraners[20]' and, of course, in this case, as neighbours. However each kind of talk-in-interaction has its particular further expectations, rights, limitations and obligations as to what people can say and do for (and to) one another according to their contingently assigned social category (i.e. customer, passenger in a taxi, neighbour, Weimaraner owner).

For neighbours, then, we should not start with their problem as having to break through the fact that they are 'strangers' to one another, or even that suburbia renders them straightforwardly anonymous. Nor should we assume that neighbours are dying to form close and caring bonds with another and are simply kept apart by badly planned street layouts, lack of public fora and impenetrable leylandi or laurel hedges and that given the right arrangement they will do so. We know already from the accounts of good neighbouring gathered by Gans, Richards and ourselves that there are rules which provide organisational features to neighbouring. Our interest is with an occasion in hand which demonstrably does provide justification for one neighbour talking to one or more of their neighbours. Further our concern is with just how the approaching is done by one neighbour and how other neighbours allow themselves to be approached. To foreshadow some of what we will relate in this section : when a certain kind of event occurs in a neighbourhood, it may be a leaky waterpipe flooding the street, or a person accidentally dropping their groceries, a pet being run over or lost, or new neighbours moving into their house, there is what we might call a potential integrative event. [21] It is available because it happens in a publicly witness-able way in this

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[20] A Weimaraner is a relatively rare breed of hound with a distinctive smooth coat. Conversations between owners as they bump into one another in streets or parks revolve around where the dog came from, how old it is, what kind of personality it has. All of this can be done without owners directly saying anything about themselves, their age, their personality, etc. though such conversations display aspects of their personality at the same time.

[21] The observations we are building here are from (Sacks, 1992b)p194, where he investigates the relation between public tragedies such as the Kennedy shootings, or more recently the death of Princess Diana, as tickets for conversation between unacquainted people in cities, and further their particular relation to the absence of a

particular neighbourhood and therefore with relevance to the residents there, at that time (and for various other acquaintances besides).
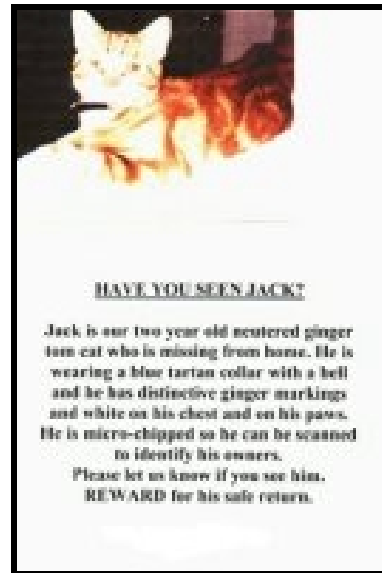

HAVE YOU SEEN JACK?

Jack is our two year old neutered ginger tom cat who is missing from home. He is wearing a blue tartan collar with a bell and he has distinctive ginger markings and white on his chest and on his paws. He is micro-chipped so he can be scanned to identify his owners. Please let us know if you see him. REWARD for his safe return.

Figure 1. Missing Cat notice found attached to lamp-post in Corstorphine.[22]

From the outset of our research project we were in pursuit of "lost cats" and means by which they were sometimes found again. A pursuit that for researchers studying suburban life and community might seem a little strange[23]. Why "lost cats" should be a focus for our investigations was because during the start-up of the "Living Memory" research it was agreed by the multidisciplinary team that it was a good instance of the kind of everyday problem in a neighbourhood that a high technology distributed system should be able to assist in solving. A Living Memory system, as a form of networked electronic database with public and private interfaces and software agents, would record lost items of various kinds. It could be consulted by residents who had found lost items and its 'agents' would attempt to match-make the losers' and finders' items. We will not concern readers any further with the technical aspects of the system[24] and simply once again note that our ethnographic task was to report on how cats that got lost in suburbia were actually searched for and sometimes found.[25] As we have hinted already searching for a lost cat was an *occasion* for neighbouring through which many of the activities neighbours expectably do for another were displayed along with the moral expectations incumbent on a person as a neighbour[26]. There were many stories about losing

greeting sequence at the outset of a conversation between two people. Where greetings between people have been taken to be an almost unavoidable feature of initiating conversations.

[22] The original includes a telephone number which has been removed here for anonymisation purposes.

[23] Many readers may be aware of the growing number of social studies which recognise the importance of animals in all aspects of the organisation of society and have begun to study the histories and geographies of the relations between humans and animals, e.g. (Philo, 1995; Philo & Wilbert, 2000).

[24] For more detail on the technical aspects of the project see (Mamdani, Pitt, & Stathis, 1999)

[25] We carried out comparable ethnographic research on brief encounters of a romantic nature where one of the parties attempted to "find" the other through writing a small ad in a magazine (Laurier & Whyte, 2001).

[26] Two of the original project applicants had been very impressed by the film 'When the Cat's Away' by ?? wherein a girl on losing her cat starts a picaresque journey that involves her meeting all her neighbours and

and finding cats that we heard doing our fieldwork and we came across a couple of cases as they happened[27]. In this part of our article we will shift through a selection of the events surrounding "Jack" (see figure 1) as they were sequentially organised and use them to explicate how neighbours treat one another as neighbours with moral obligations toward one another and expectations of 'knowing the neighbourhood'.

We have organised them in a series of vignettes and it should be noted by readers that the vignettes draw on the insights and events from several lost cat episodes.[28]

Vignette 1 - Tuesday Evening

After failing to appear for 48 hours, Jack the tomcat's owners, Christine and Peter Winning became worried. His movements in and out of their house were fairly regular, and though he sometimes did not come in all day or all night, he was seldom gone for as long as 24 hours. The same evening while Peter was out clipping their straggling clematis hedge Mrs Munro their next-door neighbour walked by and stopped to say hello. After their greetings were finished, Peter asked "You don't remember when you last saw our cat by any chance do you?" Mrs Munro said she wasn't sure but she'd ask her husband.

Neighbours are not all of exactly the same kind and that they are not is, of course, an issue picked up by Whyte (1963), Gans (1972) and Richards (1990) in their studies of suburbia However the typifying we would like bring out is the one in use by members in the course of their actions and not one that might serve the construction of typifications for the purposes of social scientists' generalisations. In this case it is Peter asking his *next-door neighbour*, Mrs Munro when she had last seen his cat. From the beginning of their interactions Peter and Mrs Munro's mutual orientation has been toward this status. Three days after Peter moved in Mrs Munro introduced herself across the hedge in the back garden as 'Mrs Munro, your next-door neighbour.' And Christine and Peter introduced themselves as 'Christine and Peter'.[29] They are next-door neighbours of a certain kind since like most of the semi-detached residences on 'Chapel Street', they share an interior wall, allowing them to hear one another to a limited

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learning about their lives. Part of its charm, as with road movies, is in passing through highly diverse scenes and characters which don't have to be connected by plot or character development.

[27] The fieldwork story we are sketching out merges the details of the 'participant' loss of one of the ethnographer's cats with a number of 'observer' project interviews on losing and finding cats with Corstorphine residents. In using the anonymised and amalgamated story of a missing cat we perhaps render our research findings susceptible to being disparaged as trivial, akin to the kind of stories found in small circulation town newspaper. It is not a story of protest, rampant conformism, money-grabbing landlords, dubious real estate deals or indeed the demolition of homes for an airport. Yet that is because it is an *ordinary* event that happens all over the place to many neighbours and is what everyday neighbourhood life consists of and most certainly *is* news to the residents concerned. A second form of disparagement may come from using fieldwork stories, rather than say interview transcripts, as 'data', however we hope that readers are sufficiently familiar with ethnographic fieldwork accounts as to find this acceptable and normal practice. If not, please consult : (Geertz, 1988; Law, 1994; Orr, 1996; Wolf, 1992).

[28] Vignettes, aside from serving as a textual device for writing up ethnographies, have proved a useful genre for swapping results between ICT designers and planners, who themselves often produce 'scenarios' to consult with partners before going on to produce mock-ups, prototypes or finished objects.

[29] The use of surnames alongside first names established some predicates to each party straightaway.

extent inside adjacent rooms in each of their houses. Their front doors are closer to one another than that of their fully detached neighbours, as a result they often find themselves greeting one another while entering or leaving their houses.[30] Time spent by both parties in their *front* gardens, where Peter is pruning his hedge in the vignette, further increases the chances of their making small talk with one another (of the kind remarked upon by Gans (see above)). By facing onto the street not only does a front garden show, without possibility of hiding, to other neighbours, the levels of its maintenance, it also provides a spot where a home owner can legitimately watch and/or greet passers by in the street and vice versa. Peter and Christine, whilst in their front garden, intermittently see Mrs Munro when she is coincidentally pruning her roses, and more often, as she comes and goes with her shopping, her grandchildren and to and from church on Sunday. In fact without intending to, Peter & Christine and Mrs Munro will meet one another usually two or three times a week. What we have then in this aspect of their spatial arrangement is a device that regularly places neighbours in a situation where they ought to at least do a greeting, yet do not necessarily have any topic of talk in their interaction beyond that since they do not meet one another with a 'reason for calling' (see below). Most of the time then they use the kinds of topics that do not build any specific sort of relations between the conversants, in other words, items that anyone could talk about, almost any time, such as 'the weather'. Every once in a while they deliver items that specify their relation to one another as neighbours, such as, in this case, Jack's absence, an event which Mrs Munro has expectably something to offer on.

It is worth perhaps further emphasizing the specific form of un-intentional and regular encounter that being next-door neighbours provides: to *avoid* bumping into Mrs Munro would require *intention* on their part, and moreover elaborate planning such as ducking behind their hedge if they saw her coming, listening through their wall to check she wasn't leaving her house at the same time as they were, parking their car on another street so that they could sneak up their house unseen etc. All of which would, apart from bearing closer resemblance to a staged farce than reality, be detected after a week or two by the other neighbour as an irregularity, posing the question in not so many words of: 'it's odd that I haven't seen my neighbours at all this week, are they on holiday or something?' Or even ' I could have sworn I saw them ducking behind the hedge the other day.' In their particular meetings there is still a level of awareness and concern normal appearances whereby if they start bumping into each other very frequently it becomes a matter for comment too and Christine has confessed to sometimes waiting until Mrs Munro's grandchildren have been dropped off before leaving the house in the morning.

Spatial organisation is still more deeply involved in the actions, language and sense of their lives as neighbours than offering them the opportunity to make small talk or the challenge of evading one another. For example, Mrs Munro spends a great deal of time in the summer tending her roses whilst also attending to the movements of the street. People who walk off the street, up the Winning's path and ring their doorbell are seen by their sequenced actions

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[30] Residents of our suburb spend surprisingly large amounts of time in their front doorways at the same times welcoming or bidding goodbye to guests and friends (and pets). These times are to do with the regular rhythms of the suburb - people leaving for work in the morning, children going to school, then both coming home again afterwards, guests arriving for dinner at relatively similar times, dog walking before and after work, and after dinner etc.

by Mrs Munro to be *callers*. We might note here that such a categorisation's criteria will not fulfilled if the candidate callers do not actually go to the door and knock or ring. Indeed Mrs Mrs Munro would justifiably become suspicious wondering whether non-knockers were burglars, door-to-door sales people or lost. In doing what they do, from the moment they walk up the garden path, these 'strangers' are seen as 'callers at the Winnings'. They display their actions as such and Mrs Munro sees them as such. It is thus no mystery to either party what Mrs Munro means when she responds to their action by saying quite loudly to these 'callers' : "I saw them go out earlier in their car". (Though a mystery could be made of it by a researcher who parted the audible component of 'language' from its situated use during this event.) Tending her roses Mrs Munro can in turn be appropriately categorised by the 'callers' as the Winning's next-door neighbour, more so when she offers her information. As a next-door neighbour she is entitled to monitor any callers' movements (rule: good neighbours watch over their neighbours property, particularly when they are out) and provide a formulation of their actions when she calls out "I saw them..."

Figure 2 : Suburban semi-detached house, showing the 'next-door' neighbour arrangement with close parallel paths to front doors

We could put this more strongly: a neighourhood is not simply compromised of the 'locals' and then 'outsiders', neighbours generally use much more fine-grained typifications (i.e. other home-owners who live on the same street, neighbour's children, callers, refuse collectors, dog-walkers etc).[31] Peter and Mrs Munro have special obligations and awareness of one

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[31] Despite the assertions of numerous (but not all) critical theorists that everyday language is burdened with ideologically unsound dualisms such as insider/outsider, local/incomer etc. typifying people in the neighbourhood on such 'all or nothing' types is seldom intrinsic to typifying people as variously neighbours, friends of neighbours, door-to-door sales reps, postal workers, district nurses, car thieves etc. (see Rod Watson's

another as *next-door* neighbours (see Figure 2). Not only does Mrs Munro watch over their property and they hers but in the vignette we are suggesting that Mrs Munro will be the *first person* the Winnings *turn to* having lost their cat. For other problems they might turn to someone else, like their home computer breaking down or Peter losing his job. Losing a cat is though an occasion for turning *first* to your next door neighbour (unless they hate cats[32].) Another way of putting this is that it is only certain problems that sensibly and morally predicate assistance from a neighbour and do so primarily by their obligations as a neighbour. A friend might calm your anxiety or offer consolation over the loss of your cat but you would not ask them where and when they saw it last (unless they also happened to be your neighbour). Equally whilst Mrs Munro does offer a degree of consolation to Peter, she does this as a neighbour displaying friendliness and not as a friend from next door. The criteria by which we can judge a neighbour to be a good neighbour are not those which we would apply to a friend being a good friend. It makes sense to say of good neighbour that they are 'friendly' and of a bad that they are 'unfriendly'. Whilst it is confusing to say of a good friend that they are 'friendly' nor even that they are 'neighbourly'. In passing we might note that Christine and Peter may well spend more time on a minute-by-minute basis in conversation with their good neighbour Mrs Munro than they do with many of their good friends. Monitoring relations with neighbours and friends is done by different criteria. The actual encounters in which relations are made manifest require a skilful management and we have noted already they are in various ways, neither determined by nor cut loose from but are definitely implicated in the on-the-ground spatial arrangements of neighbourhoods.

Vignette 2 - Wednesday Evening

After another day of Jack failing to arrive at the door or on a windowsill, the Winnings started calling at the doors of the neighbours they knew as acquaintances, which was all of their immediate front door neighbours. Kim the GP's wife, from one house over, with a different view on to the backgardens suggested that they call at a house that backed diagonally on to the Winnings. From her upstairs study she had seen Jack sitting on its conservatory doorstep, sleeping on the inside of the windowsill a couple of times and being ushered out by the old woman that lived there.

In this second vignette we rejoin the search for Jack as the Winnings widen their net to include the next level of neighbours. In following their search we are finding the distinctions they make between their neighbours. This next level is neighbours they have also at one or another time introduced themselves to by attending either a cocktail party, or through talking to them in the street or, of particular relevance with Kim, through cat-related activities. Kim like Mrs Munro is a person connected to them by Jack. Kim has from when the Winnings first moved in, brought their cat back to them from her house. It is not a surprise that Jack is often found at Kim's since she is a cat-lover who has greeted and petted Jack from the

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(Watson, 1993) delightful analysis of being accosted by gypsies in Nice and his position as 'stranger' *and* 'member').

[32] Though that might be an ever better reason for investigating *first* what they have to say about your missing cat.

beginning, has fed him frequently and confessed to keeping cans of tuna fish in the cupboard for him. On this basis they have asked her a few times to feed and look after Jack while they have been away on holiday (a neighbouring activity noted by Richards (1990) in her studies in Australia). Other neighbours ignore him and still others who positively dislike cats have thrown jugs of water at him to discourage him from coming to their doors and windows.

A further thing we learn from just these first two vignettes is that each neighbour observes Jack's life from a slightly different perspective in terms of timings and the visibility arrangements of the neighbourhood. There is no overview of Jack's movements nor any other residents, and seeing is distributed unevenly amongst the residents[33]. Partly who can see various goings on is inequitous because of the architecture of the neighbourhood - so that Kim has a good view of Jack's visits when the Winnings do not - but also according to the time spent watching. Yet seeing is further organised according to *what* it is that neighbours watch out of their windows, where some neighbours may not be interested in cats at all. Even for the non-feline inclined part of the visual attraction of cats is that they can be stared at without fear of accusations of snooping or spying. They thus *provide proper objects for idle attention* when neighbours look out into one another's back gardens. As a result neighbours may be able to provide a great deal more detail on the life of one another's pets than on the human residents, even if they claim little love of cats or dogs.

Vignette 3 - Thursday

When Peter Winning called at the door of the old woman's house he immediately introduced himself as firstly her neighbour "Peter " whilst also pointing to his back garden ("I live just there") and then quickly adding that he was the owner of a ginger tomcat who, he was pretty sure, visited this house. In response the woman introduced herself as Moira: "yes your cat comes around quite a lot. I call him Tom the tom."
      Peter asked if she'd seen him recently to which she replied that she hadn't seen him for a couple of days. After this Moira apologised for inviting the Winning's cat into her house but Peter reassured her that they didn't mind. Adding that it was in a cat's nature to be 'disloyal' and that he liked the fact that they made friends with the neighbours. Moira went on to add further justification to her having Tom to visit saying that she was a cat lover and had had many in the past but was too old herself now to take a on a kitten.

Conversation analysts and ethnomethodologists have devoted a great deal of attention to the sequential orderliness of telephone talk. A notable feature of phone conversations is that a caller has, with very few exceptions, a *reason for calling* which they will work up to in various ways and which the person called justifiably expects to come up at some point (Sacks, 1992a). Calling at people's doors historically preceded calling at their house via the phone and it is unsurprising that neighbours who receive a knock at the door from another neighbour also have the expectancy that their neighbour has a reason for calling more especially if they were neighbours previously unacquainted as Peter and Moira are. Before Peter formulates his reason for calling he has to make his identity as a neighbour available to Moira in the first place.

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[33] On the uneven distribution of seeing in airports see (Goodwin, 1997).

Just how he locates himself and how he uses "what any competent neighbour should know" of other neighbours is something we will try and explicate here. Giving his first name - Peter - is not an insignificant matter but it is his formulation of their common membership - "I'm your neighbour" that is identification which has the most significant consequences for Moira's obligations toward him. It's not a phrase that he would have to use were he pruning his hedge, nor is it an identification Moira has to use either since answering the door is contextualisation enough.

When ethnomethodologists criticise many other treatments of language it is often over their attempts to remedy the *indexical* nature of language when it needs none and to do so is to risk making nonsense of what is said or written or otherwise enunciated. Moira's location is clear to both parties because they are on her doorstep. Think what sense it would make for her to say "I'm your neighbour", though she could say "I'm *not* your neighbour" to introduce an explanation as to why she was answering the door of the Winning's neighbour's house. We can see in her non-production of a correction to her being seen as the person that lives in the house whose door she is answering an assignment of her membership of the community of neighbours and that it is a moral matter if she is hiding the fact that she is not actually a neighbour. Caught being in someone else's house is the sort of happening that requires some sort of comment to control the inferencing that can follow by legitimate neighbourhood residents.

What Peter does after making available their common membership as neighbours is still more interesting - he points toward the back of his home which adjoins Moira's. It may or may not be the case that Moira has seen Peter at his windows (though it is quite a distance for being able to see facial features) or gardening or eating or drinking outdoors in the summer. At this point Moira has not made her neighbourly perspective clear in terms of whether she has seen Peter or Christine, it may be that is because Peter has not given her the opportunity to do so. What he is building on without waiting for a risky statement from Moira as to *just how much* of their lives she watches over is the accepted fact that neighbours watch one another's property (and make comparisons between it and theirs). He is locating himself as a resident of *that* property *there*, with its tidy garden sharing a high boundary wall with Moira's (which is why he has never seen her in her garden since he is also downslope). This locating will be important for the reason for calling that follows and is already giving Moira warning of the pertinent facts.

Before we move on to the search for Jack let us consider briefly the neighbourly awareness that Peter's pointing is part of. It is the mutual awareness residents have of their suburban street and block that they regard house-by-house, garden-by-garden, every day accumulating an ongoing sense of which houses and gardens are well-kept, showy, gnome owners or not, for sale or uninhabited. These are the observable aspects of their neighbours, the neighbours themselves are by comparison seldom observed *in situ*.[34] In fact two neighbours could know a great deal about one another despite never having seen one another's faces (what car they drive, how often they entertain, whether they play a musical instrument, whether they have

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[34] An aspect of suburbs which titles and opens Richard's ethnography - most of the time there appears to be 'nobody home' even when the lights are on (since they are security lights as often as not).

children, what time they normally go to bed at etc.)[35] In this case Moira is more likely to know that the ginger tom belongs to the house behind her than that Peter does. As Peter points he is not putting "a name to a face" he is putting a face and a name to a familiar and well-known property. In this way he is orienting to the mutuality of perspectives that "unacquainted" neighbours should have and no more.[36]

Having prepared the way for his inquiry Peter then learns a little more about Jack's travels without as yet finding out where he is now. As Peter and Christine had already assumed Jack has more acquaintances among the neighbours than they do. We can also note here that even Jack does not act simply on propinquity; his visiting is a mutual arrangement. Moira, like Kim, befriended him and as a retired elderly cat-lover currently cat-less she was nearly always there to let him indoors[37] and have a ready stock of the food and other comforts that would bring him back again.

Vignette 4 - Thursday Later

Mrs Munro knocked at the Winning's door. 'Have you found Jack yet?' Christine said that she and Peter hadn't. Mrs Munro continued 'Alec says the last time he saw Jack was around the front of the house on Monday waiting to be let in.' Christine thanked her saying that Jack had been in the house that night but that was the last time they had seen him. They then had a lengthy conversation about what they might do next. They had already phoned the cat homes and the refuse collection company (who keep a record of dead animals they find). They would try a notice in the shop windows, the vets and the supermarket.

In this vignette we would like to draw attention to the fact that *reason for calling* applies as equally to next-door neighbours as any other. Mrs Munro's reason is to pass on, her watchful husband Alec's, report as requested a day earlier by Peter. By calling at doors and meeting in their street, the conversational topic can be strung out over several days and different locations, which is one way that talk mundanely extends itself and that neighbours have an integrative event which justifies more than a neighbourly greeting without having to venture into inquiries that are too personal. By having a legitimate reason for calling Mrs Munro is also working with the good neighbouring rules: not to always be on her neighbour's doorstep, she is there as a response to their request for help. The request for help is a time bound entity and there will come a future point when the search for Jack peters outs and Mrs Munro will and can no longer raise the topic as her reason for being on their doorstep. Mrs Munro has also consistently used 'the doorstep' for purposes beyond updates on Jack's status - she stays on it and refuses to budge until a conversation is over and signals a conversation is over when she does budge. When they first moved in the Winnings often asked her to come inside their house but she would decline their offers by various means. Through her *repeated* declining the Winnings learnt how and where it was going to be between themselves and Mrs Munro. By staying on the doorstep Mrs Munro controls the kind of encounter they have - she stops it

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[35] Police stake-outs exploit this very visibility arrangement of the neighbourhood though usually with uninterrupted observation and much better spying equipment than average neighbours turn upon one another.
[36] Unacquainted in one respect though well acquainted with each other's properties.
[37] Just how cats negotiate their way in and out of houses would be a fascinating study in itself. Some starts have been made, though in a somewhat ironic mode in Ashmore (1993).

leading to offers of cups of tea and biscuits (in that she is not just 'being polite' but has made it practically inconvenient for Christine to pour her a cup of tea). There is a shared sense also of the appropriate time conversations on the doorstep can run on for in this suburban street (which is, as it happens, surprisingly long). By keeping her footing at the threshold Mrs Munro skilfully manages several aspects of the conversations - in so doing she is giving the 'language' a 'context'. Not only is she doing that kind of social work she is also, without having to take time out to explicitly formulate 'what is going on and could go on in this encounter', is by her locating of the talk making it the kind of conversation that neighbours can have at their front door. In this way she artfully manages the maintenance of appropriate distance between herself and her next-door neighbours. And as we hinted earlier, as she backs off the doorstep, even when she is still speaking, she is showing on her part a preparation to finish all that she to say on this occasion. Seeing her backing off, her conversant can forestall the end of the conversation by adding 'another thing' which they want to speak about before coming to a mutually agreed upon end of the 'what the call at the door' was about.

The doorstep is not an equally shared conversational space, like say a table in a café, since it is clearly one person's doorstep and the other is caller. The relation of the conversants to the doorway controls what can be done there in terms of finishing the conversation, since the person who is standing in their doorway cannot easily 'back off' to start closing the conversation. With an unwanted door-to-door sales person they could perhaps start closing the door on them to indicate they were closing the conversation too but with their neighbour they have to use different and fairly complex, explicit techniques to draw the conversation to a close. We might note here that the neighbour that calls upon a neighbour therefore is also expected to be the one who first draws the conversation to a close.

Vignette 5 - Saturday

At the weekend with some extra time, Christine and Peter put together a 'missing cat' notice on their PC. Scanning a photograph and composing the text (see figure 1). Not only did they post it in the newspaper shop, vet's and supermarket, they also laminated it in plastic and attached copies to streetlight poles on the corners of the three parallel streets to theirs and the noticeboard at the edge of the local park.

Having called on the observational assistance most of their immediate neighbours the Winnings spread their net wider and thinner. Even in their adoration of their cat the Winnings retain a practical reasoned attitude to how many doors along the street they can call before they have "gone far enough" in their door-to-door search for Jack. Their search as it unfolds as a 'first-time' experience for them is shaped by Jack's movements since beyond three doors in either direction it turns out that although the neighbours say they have seen the ginger tom at Number 5 it has never visited them nor even crossed their garden. For what is after all a time-consuming search for a working couple this serves as sufficient reason to switch to other methods of searching. It is at this point, five days after Jack's disappearance, that the Winnings draft the missing cat notice in figure 1.

Although "interpreting the text" might be the exemplary discursive analysis to do, we are once again going to look at how the text is used procedurally in its setting rather than isolated lying on the desk of an academic researcher. Looking *closely* and *rereading* the missing cat notice is the last thing residents of the neighbourhood are likely to do in the course of their everyday activities. [38] The Winnings are attuned to the everyday habits of their residents and are aware that the first thing they have to do is to choose "relevantly and appropriately" the place to put their notice (Evergeti, 2000). Public space is not a big featureless container as many social theories often posit it to be but is instead massively and minutely organised. The Winnings are, just as any other competent member of a neighbourhood would be, aware of just which places missing cat notices have been and should be displayed to be found and to be seen as actual legitimate missing cat notices. Places like vets, corners shops, etc. in the neighbourhood (and not city wide by dint of cat's travel patterns as well as private resource limitations on bill-postering) and also lamp-posts (see Figure 3), railings and even bus stops. These are places known in common as publicly relevant zones (Evergeti, 2000) and are thus proper objects/surfaces for residents and other to stop and stare at. They are also sought out by locals as sources of local information about planning applications, community events, clubs, voluntary organisations, night-classes etc.

Figure 3 – Laminated 'street' notice attached to lamp-post at Junction between 2 of the busiest streets, near to where cat was lost.

Vignette 6 - Monday

A neighbour from across the opposite side of the street posted a note through their door saying that the new neighbours behind him had found a cat which they handed over to the cat rescue centre (who it later turns out failed to match it to the Winning's telephone description

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[38] Even for someone who has found a cat, it may only take a quick glance at the notice to match their found cat to the missing one since there are very few missing cat notices in the average neighbourhood and they are temporally attuned: you find a cat and four days later you see a new missing cat notice go up. The text description is not irrelevant but the timing along with the photo are probably enough in themselves.

for reasons that remain mysterious to ourselves and the Winnings). During some smalltalk with his neighbours whilst he was unloading his car and they were taking their baby out in its pushchair they told him about finding a stray tomcat. 'It seemed like a stray' they told us later 'because it was so desperate to get in the house. It was hungry and thin. It had no collar. And some of its hair was missing.'

Our story about the Winning's search for their missing moggy has a happy ending with Jack being 'found'. There is an irony in his 'finding' since, by the incongruity procedures of the new neighbours, Jack was 'found' to be a stray. His recent attack of berry bugs[39], losing his collar that day and his lean looks[40] were taken as evidence of his *not* being a neighbour's pet and thus that he was lost and/or a stray. At this point Jack was removed from the neighbourhood entirely to the care of the cat shelter which is in another suburb of the city.

What the new neighbours made apparent in their error is just what the settled neighbours come to know and they did not *yet* know. Through repeated observations of their street, its houses, gardens, hedges and pathways they learn which pets belong to which properties, which children to which parents and even which vehicles belong to which houses (should they be broken or bumped into or damaged by the aforementioned children). Moreover it was by once again via the fine distinction of *new* neighbour rather than *settled* neighbour that their (mistaken) actions were morally assessed by their next-door neighbour, the Winnings and Mrs Munro (who is known for passing on her assessments of neighbours up and down the street). By their categorisation they were seen to be genuinely mistaken rather than as potentially involved in an attempt to remove an intrusive cat from the neighbourhood. It is just such events as complaints over pets and in some cases calls to have loud dogs removed, or indeed neighbours killing one another's pets that are matters for moral conflict between neighbours as alluded to by studies other than ours.

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[39] A common mite that arrives at the end of each summer in suburban gardens causing allergic reactions in some cats and concomitant damage to their coats.
[40] the Winnings informed us that he was fit while the other neighbourhood cats are fat, an assessment that our observations of several sagging feline bellies would support.

Conclusion: the moral order of the community of neighbours

What we have also tried to do in this article is to follow on from two of the few detailed studies of suburbia (Gans (1972) in the USA and Richards (1990) in Australia) by taking their analysis further down to "ground level". We do not treat suburban life as some general problem community that needs remedying nor as essentially ill-conceived and neither did Gans nor Richards both of whom sought to reprieve suburbia from such critiques. Our concerns have not been to defend suburbia at all, suburbanites are more than capable of doing so, we have instead been describing somewhat briefly what it is that suburban neighbours do actually say and do through looking at a specific event - the search for a lost cat. In concluding we wish to turn to one of the recent critiques of suburban life in the USA to clarify in what ways, whilst making an excellent political argument it risks obscuring the grounds of the moral judgements of suburbanites[41].

> People in the suburbs live in a world of characterised by nonviolence and nonconfrontation in which civility prevails and disturbances of the peace are uncommon. In this sense, suburbia is a model of the social order. The order is not born, however, of conditions widely perceived to generate social harmony. It does not arise from intimacy and connectedness, but rather from some of the very things more often presumed to bring about conflict and violence - transiency, fragmentation, isolation, atomization, and indifference among people. The suburbs lack social cohesion but they are free of strife. They are, so to speak, disorganized and orderly at the same time. (Baumgartner, 1988) p134

> In suburbia … among friends and neighbours assistance is restricted to casual actions that entail few costs. Its primary form is the small favour – picking up someone else's child after school, loaning someone a cooking ingredient or borrowing detergent, shovelling someone's snow in winter, or watering someone's house plants while its occupants are away. True sacrifices, however, are rare, particularly outside the household. (p133)

> These patterns provide a glimpse at another side of the culture of moral minimalism. People with little occasion for enmity are also unlikely to develop strong friendships. If it make no sense to confront offenders, it correspondingly makes no sense to shower anyone with kindness. Moderation thus prevails in both positive and negative behavior alike. In this sense, weak social ties breed a general indifference and coldness, and a lack of conflict is accompanied by a lack of caring. (p134)

In Baumgartner's argument about the cooling off of relations between neighbours in suburbia she echoes Elias's (Elias, 1978 (1939)) comments on the civilising process, Sennett's (Sennett, 1994) on the decline of public life in its complexity and intimacy, and ultimately the

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[41] One of the popular books of the 90s describing the decline of community in the USA in predominantly statistical terms was {Putman, 2000 #664} and it posited the decline of 'social capital' as its cause. Our article does not join an argument about whether community is 'really' in decline or not, though many have argued with Putman over his choice of statistics, our interest is in what Putman's frozen statistics miss, which is community in practice and moreover what is missed when community is used as a gloss over a diversity of activities that remain to be described and may have their own socio-logics (such as neighbouring).

turn of the century comments of Tonnies (Tonnies, 1995 (first published1887)) on the shift in social relations that occurred as communities shifted from living in small towns and villages to cities. With the welcome growth of civility in the suburbs where residents avoid violence and confrontation comes a corresponding unwelcome decline of 'intimacy and connectedness.' We can make some brief comments here that it makes sense to say of someone of something being 'civil' that whilst they are guided by politeness and etiquette, this thereby transforms their conduct from spontaneous or genuine shows of feeling, be they hot, cold or icey to this more measured conduct.

What Baumgartner adds to these general comments on the rise of contemporary civil society and what she builds on to the term civil as a conceptual element in her argument is that the results are that 'moral minimalism dominates the suburbs' (p127). The researcher of suburb's search for aspects of a civilising process already risks losing much of what neighbours do for one another by allowing the civilising process to be a grand historical context that provides the limits on the development and forms of all communities whilst missing what those communities consist of. Baumgartner's search for what brings about 'the cultural of moral minimalism' tends toward invidious comparison whereby neighbours' actions, which although moralised through and through, come to be treated as lacking moral authority or exercise by comparison with, on several occasions, anthropologists' accounts of tribal disputes and how they are settled by those present. A lack of physical aggression or public airing of disputes in favour of simple avoidance or delegations to third parties such as the police or law courts is then equated with 'moral minimalism'[42]. However there is confusion here between 'spectacles' of morality-in-action[43] such as shouting matches or fist fights, 'true sacrifices' (whatever they may be) between neighbours and the multiple arrays of quite ordinary morally accountable and morally formulative action that goes on (that we have displayed to some extent in our cat story). 'Small favours' are the lesser party to 'true sacrifices' but what happens if we label one neighbour's efforts for another a 'big favour' and under what conditions might expect a 'neighbour' to sacrifice themselves for us as their neighbour? We can envisage 'big favours' and we can also anticipate conditions where one neighbour might 'sacrifice' themselves for another but they are *exceptional* circumstances[44]. Think of the sense it makes to say, 'she sacrificed her career for her neighbour' in contrast to 'she sacrificed her career for husband'. Yet the exceptional case can be : 'she sacrificed her life saving her neighbour from their burning building.' Moreover the diversity of moral dilemmas that do face communities of (of even middle class New Yorker suburban) neighbours are shown in Baumgartner's collected anecdotes of neighbouring complaints and disputes. Of greater import perhaps than the use of the heirarchical contrast between true sacrifices and small favours is the disjunction between the moral authority and exercise that can legitimately be attributed to and used by a 'tribal member' in a village society observed in

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[42] It's intriguing unspoken element of both Baumgartner's interviews with suburbanites and her worries over the lack of physical contact between neighbours in disputes that neighbours may well have another form of physical contact. They may have sexually intimate relations occurring between them. The cross-cutting moral categories and codes in such a situation are then between being lovers, having an affair and being good neighbours. Out of precisely such conflicts which are the staple plots and subjects of modern suburban novels, soaps and films, we could expect and do see in their fictional depictions, divergent moralities, agreement and disagreement, and perhaps even neighbours coming to blows.

[43] Spectacles of moral conflict and production of official history are described in (Lynch, 1996).

[44] On the importance of exceptions and how they are tied to moral categories, see (Jayyusi, 1984) chapter 7.

an anthropological study. Should a 'tribal member' in that setting settle a disagreement or make a complaint with an axe in the neck of the wrong-doer then that may be in those specific circumstances an appropriate, locally accepted and morally tenable method of getting justice to be done. Suburban neighbours in Scotland or elsewhere in Western nation states should not be assessed by the same criterion and to do so, as Ryle (Ryle, 1949) often observed, is a category error.

Rights and obligations are reflexively tied to the settings, its members and through their reflexive and accountable organisation. Attributions of blame, assessments of character, senses of responsibility are specified by the category of person / institution / thing that is taken to be acting and accountable for their actions. While in many community studies there is an assumption of the common good which has been in decline, when the good is taken in its usage as: good friend, good plumber, good cat, good lover, good party and, of course, good neighbour, then we can see that our criteria of how we shall assess good (or bad) in each case changes and remains to be settled on each and every occasion (Jayyusi, 1984). What we can also grasp is that our moral assessment sensibly varies according to who we find someone to be on any particular occasion, where the 'same person' may be your neighbour fixing their car on Saturday and the priest giving a sermon on Sunday. Our morals are organised as part and parcel of the ordinary and diverse organisation of often disjunctive settings and their agents. A good neighbour in suburbia should thus be judged and understood according to the criteria given an used by an actual community of suburban neighbours and not the *a priori* morals or transcendental ethics of a philosopher nor the idealised or dystopian versions of community imposed by a social theorist.

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