

# War and peace in the social geography of children

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## Introduction

It is a pleasure to be involved in this day's proceedings and to be on the fringes of the whole 'Children 5-16' Programme. My purpose in this paper is to say something indirectly about space and children, and more directly about research on the 'social geography' of children: it is to reflect upon the concerns (conceptual and substantive) of researchers proceeding from an academic disciplinary background within Geography and who are looking - from this background - at the worlds of children and childhood. This is not a disciplinary imperialism: rather, I am thinking about what geographers can offer to the broader, inter- or multi-disciplinary endeavour of researching children and childhood, and it is to say more about a perspective - a 'geographical perspective' - which I will argue can contribute valuably to all manner of studies on children and childhood (and which need not even be provided by 'geographers' per se).

I do feel a slight fraud, however, since there are a number of academic geographers here today who have far more knowledge and experience in this respect than I possess. I doubt whether much that I say will be new to them, although hopefully they might find something of interest in how I frame my reflections, and maybe too in the odd specific comment. For others in the audience, though, I would anticipate that my paper will cover quite new ground. I suspect, although I may be wrong, that the contribution of academic geographers - and more broadly of a 'geographical perspective' - is not all that familiar to specialists in research on children.

Although my own published writings on the geography of children are minimal, I did start giving lectures on this material some years ago - as part of an Honours Geography third-year undergraduate class on 'Social Geography', taught in Lampeter - and in what follows I will deliberately take snippets from these lectures, framing them a little more with an argument of sorts (a somewhat tentative one) which links into the slightly odd title of my paper ('War and peace in the social geography of children'). One implication of this approach is that my paper will reflect upon a slightly older literature of geographers and related scholars, and will not reference the most recent (and arguably most exciting) contributions of several geographical research teams (which include people in this room!). This is a fault which can perhaps be 'corrected' in discussion, but what I will say is that I feel there to be important and good things in some of the older literature that is being too quickly just referenced and then overlooked. Indeed, we maybe need to

pick a little more deeply into the historiography of work on the geography of children, given that there are some intriguing lessons and insights here that we could usefully build upon in the present growth of inquiries by geographers (and others) in this particular field. Without further ado, then, let me begin by saying something about the (as it were) encounter between geography (rather, geographers) and children (studies of children and childhood).

### **Bringing children into geography**

Let me begin by saying one or two things about what academic geographers have had to say about children. Well, the initial response here is not a lot. As in the case of women, but arguably even more acutely, children as a social grouping have been largely absent from the research and writing of academic geographers. Perhaps because they do not appear to do anything very significant - and certainly nothing with important material landscape effects (they do not lay-out fields, build towns, run factories, put up bridges) - they have been almost wholly invisible to the geographer's gaze. However, there are now a few indications of children beginning to interest geographers, and some of the earliest statements in this respect are to be found in an exhaustive essay published in 1981 by Frederick Hill and William Michelson entitled 'Towards a geography of urban children and youth'. Their paper began with this rather nice remark:

'What is argued here is that co-ordinated and explicit attention should be given children within the many realms of geography. Most generalisations espoused by geographers pertain to the adult world. Children come in different sizes and shapes and with differing capabilities, but it is theoretically, empirically and practically useful to consider the environments that concern children, quite apart from the assumptions made and conclusions drawn from adult behaviour and experience' (Hill and Michelson, 1981, p.194).

So the argument was heard for drawing out children and their geographies to be given explicit attention apart from what we might say about the adult world. And what Hill and Michelson also said, and which announced the key theme of the sheer 'otherness' of children in geography, is that:

'... many of the basic premises and ingredients of geographical studies which rest upon assumptions of the normative [usual, expected] behaviour of adults, are undercut by the existence of a cohort in the population whose relationship to the environment is fundamentally different to that of all others' (Hill and Michelson, 1981, p.195).

The 'otherness' of children and their geographies, the impossibility and inappropriateness of subsuming them within studies of the adult world, is itself made a justification for opening up a new field of geographical inquiry.

More recently (and more programmatically), Sarah James has asked 'Is there a 'place' for children in geography?', and she suggests that - following Jacquie Tivers's (1978) call for geographers to consider 'how the other half lives' (ie. women) - the time is

now ripe 'to consider how the other third or quarter - the children - live'. She hence encourages 'a child and geography perspective within all streams of geography', proposing that whatever human-geographical topic is under investigation - whether the economy, housing, recreation, health, etc. - we must ask ourselves if there are any implications for children which should be brought into the picture. She is not wanting to create a nice little academic 'ghetto' of geographers studying children, and instead is insisting that all human geographers should be alert to the children and childhood dimension of their research. And she is also urging geographers to 'view reality through the eyes of both children and adults', although David Sibley - in a brief response (Sibley, 1991) - cautioned us on the methodological difficulties of adults ever being able to recover looking at the world as a child.

*'The geography of children and children's geographies'*

There are various ways in which geographers such as James have divided up the different issues and approaches tackled or taken by geographers interested in children, but at this point I want to repeat a simple twofold distinction introduced in 1984 by Roger Hart. The title of Hart's paper, 'The geography of children and children's geographies', neatly captures this distinction:

'First, there is a growing body of literature on the environmental behaviour of children, particularly concerned with spatial activity and use of the landscape. Much of this research has been conducted by planners, but it is nonetheless geographic. Second, there is an expanding literature on the development of children's knowledge of the geographic environment, most of it being focused on children's understanding of the spatial location of phenomena in the landscape. Although geographers have played a key role in igniting this research direction, the fire is being fed mainly within development psychology' (Hart, 1984, pp.99-100).

The second set of studies focuses very much on how children experience, perceive and represent their surrounding environment or landscape, taking seriously internal realms of cognition, interpretation and meaning, and it thereby turns towards questions about agency (about children's creative insights into and responses to what is around them); while the first set of studies focuses much more upon what children actually do in the environment or landscape, their patterns of spatial activity as social agents acting in an external world of other peoples, groups and power relations, and it thereby turns towards questions about structure (structural determinations of action, ones external to and beyond the control of children themselves). This is a simple but useful distinction, and I want to suggest - oversimplifying, but perhaps not too much - that it can be seen traced out in subsequent work by geographers: with one line of inquiry pursuing the second avenue ('children's geographies') and in so doing binding their efforts very closely into those of environmental psychology; and with another line of inquiry pursuing the first avenue ('geography of children') and in so doing conducting studies which (I would argue) are closer to the spirit of conventional social geography than to that of environmental psychology. And this distinction, complete with the gloss that I have just given it, is

central to my paper: it is in effect the framework for it, for what now follows.

### **Children's geographies, environmental psychology and beyond the mental map**

Now, in the lectures that I used to give in Lampeter, I introduced students to the possibility of taking seriously 'children geographies' as follows:

#### *Snippet 1: the 'otherness' of children's spatial imaginings*

But let me begin with children themselves, and with an immediate attempt to emphasise the real 'otherness' of children's involvement with the spaces of the world. I start by looking at Bill Watterson's U.S. cartoon *Calvin and Hobbes*: the toy stuffed tiger is Hobbes, and Calvin is most perplexed when people insist that Hobbes is not real; of course Hobbes is real; he talks, fights, eats cookies. Okay, here is a deeply serious cartoon about being three hundred feet tall and treading on cars (see **Fig.2**). Reality, along with a sense of space (of size, dimensions, near, far, etc.) and a sense of place (of where he is, what named place), is actually very flexible for Calvin; and the sandpit quickly becomes a whole landscape to be terrorised by the 'mighty giant' who is over three hundred feet high. Of course, the grown-ups do not have such a flexible view of reality, space and place, and Calvin does experience a certain amount of difficulty in explaining to his mother that a three hundred foot 'mighty giant' has just stamped all over his toy cars.

For Calvin, though, his experience of spatial relationships really is a very rich and diverse one: from being several hundred times bigger than his sandpit he can in moments become much smaller than a processed pea, as in other cartoons where we encounter Calvin the 'human insect' confronting a giant pea or finding a novel way to do his homework. At the same time, when presented with everyday objects such as a coat hanger, Calvin's understandings of what these things are - and of his relationship to these things - is often some way removed from what his parents would prefer them to be.

These lovely cartoons actually do make a serious point: that for children reality, space and place do not have the same 'stability' as they do for (most?) grown-ups, and as such the sandpit and even the dinner table can take on a whole set of meanings and uses that few grown-ups have much insight into. These spaces and places (and objects within them) possess a much greater 'plasticity' in the child's imagination than in the grown-up's, and what is more their own spatial relationship with the things around them is much less fixed: they often conceive of themselves to be bigger or smaller than the things around them than they actually are, nearer or further away, suddenly transported to the city, the jungle, another planet.

If we think back to our own childhoods we can surely all remember - however hazily - examples of where certain spaces, places and objects held an entirely different meaning for us than they did for our parents or other adults: think of that pile of boxes and crates on the edge of the building site which was our 'camp' or 'den'; that old cart in the field 'out the back' which was a stage coach or a tank; those different coloured bricks in the school wall that were the controls of a space-craft; or, more simply, the cardboard box that was a hat, a hoop, a vehicle or a football.

I do not have to labour the point (although it is fun to do so), for the important thing to notice is this strange 'otherness' of how children view their spaces and places, the objects in these spaces and places, the reality around them.

In my Lampeter lectures, I moved from this gentle start to say a little more about that strand of inquiry - into 'children's geographies' - which did indeed lead a few geographers with a growing interest in children towards the endeavours of environmental psychology.

#### *Snippet 2: towards and beyond environmental psychology*

I want briefly to examine research concerned to probe into the 'otherness'

of the child's 'inner world': to probe here for clues regarding the processes known as spatial cognition or (maybe a little more generally) as the environmental cognition and environmental learning of children: the way in which children, as they grow up, develop their substantive knowledge of local environments and - more abstractly - refine their powers of spatial cognition (their ability to recognise patterns, shape, dimensions; their ability to represent these for themselves). I do not want to say too much about this field of concern: it can become quite complex and technical, parading Piaget's structural models of how 'different kinds of cognitive thought process' (including 'the child's conception of space') evolve through 'successive stages' as the child develops, or debating at length the pros and cons of different ways of measuring environmental cognition and learning.

A growth in this field of concern can be traced to the work of such influential characters as Kevin Lynch and Kenneth Boulding (whose work clearly influenced that of many so-called 'behavioural geographers'), and this field of concern relating to children came to feature in the work of numerous geographers inspired by the classic 1974 text of Peter Gould and Rodney White entitled *Mental Maps*. Gould and White were interested in the geographical knowledge that you and me carry in our heads (in our minds / brains), and they worked with a variety of people - mainly children and students - to get a handle on how these 'mental geographies' or 'mental maps' are formed and function.

And some geographers have indeed followed this cue - this interest in mental maps - and those that have pursued this interest have tended to focus their attention on children, and in so doing to key into the literature on environmental cognition and environmental learning, much of which has indeed been produced by environmental psychologists (see, for instance, Gold and Goodey, 1989). A good early review of the state of the art by a geographer is to be found in Denise Piché's 1981 paper, which has the intriguing title of 'The spontaneous geography of the urban child', and consider too the work of Hugh Matthews, a geographer who has conducted a number of studies into the environmental cognition of young children (leading to the publication in 1992 of his excellent book *Making Sense of Place: Children's Understanding of large-Scale Environments*).

And consider Matthews's 1984 paper which inquires into the cognition that children have of both their 'journey to school' and their 'home area', generating rather attractive maps such as these (see **Fig.3**), and identifying three different grades of mapping ability: children moving from a tendency to use pictorial information through to using a plan format, with a parallel increase in the amount of verbal information displayed. Matthews also notes the move from portraying buildings as 'lying down' (portraying these as they would be seen from the street) to portraying these 'from above' (effectively transforming environmental information into an aerial view). Other points to notice are the increasingly accurate scaling of maps, and also - and significantly - the simple increase in the spatial extent of the territory considered by the child as 'home': as a child grows, he or she has more and more encounters further and further afield - if he or she is fortunate - and so builds up a more extensive 'local knowledge'. Perhaps surprisingly, there is no straightforward relationship between age and the sophistication of maps produced: some six-year olds could produce Grade III maps (with a 'rotation' of house fronts into aerial views), whereas some eleven-year olds were still producing pictorial and untransformed diagrams. Nonetheless, as a general rule, those children aged eight or under tended to produce pictorial responses, whilst those aged ten or over tended to produce plan responses. In addition, Matthews seeks to identify different 'map styles' as employed by the children, and found that children of all ages have the ability to draw in point and line styles, but that it was only older children (of seven and more particularly nine and over) who employed area styles. I could say more about Matthews's work: about how some of his findings contradict existing orthodoxies in environmental psychology; or about, perhaps more importantly, the influence that he finds gender to have on children's environmental cognition (with differences in the 'home ranges' of boys and girls linking into the relative richness or poverty of their environmental experience: see esp. Matthews, 1987).

However, I want to move on here to consider the question of children's environmental cognition as tackled in some detail in the third chapter of a book that has greatly inspired me in my own thinking: namely, Colin Ward's excellent 1978

text entitled *The Child in the City*. Ward might be characterised as an 'anarchist architect', someone opposed to the 'establishment's' imposition of ordered spatial-architectural forms on the people, and it is telling that he edited a series of essays by Prince Peter Kropotkin, the turn-of-the-century Russian 'anarchist geographer'. He discusses various environmental cognition studies in his 1978 book, but I particularly like his account of Jeff Bishop's work on maps drawn by children aged nine to sixteen in the East Coast English port of Harwich. And I like his account here because it connects back very directly to my earlier remarks about the sheer 'otherness' or difference of the child's experience and use of space and place. This is what Ward writes:

'... the most significant thing to come out of Jeff Bishop's work in Harwich was the comparison of the children's maps with those of adults. In the middle of the part there is a lighthouse which featured as a significant landmark in all the maps drawn by adults. But none of the Harwich children showed the lighthouse on their maps, though many showed the public lavatory which stands at its base. Things which were important to them included kiosks, hoardings and other bits of unconsidered clutter in the street. One item that frequently recurred in their maps (and was totally ignored in those of adults) was a telephone connection box - a large metal object on the footpath with a fluted base. Obviously, as a feature for hiding behind or climbing on, this kind of obstruction has a value for children in their use of the street. What planners call 'non-conforming uses', or places which the adult eye just does not see, have importance in the children's maps too. There was, for example, the council refuse depot, noted by many of the children as the place where they wash down the dustmen's lorries' (Ward, 1978, pp.27-28).

The environmental cognition studies do have an intrinsic interest, then, but in many ways what I find more intriguing - as a social geographer - are those moments, as Ward so clearly indicates in this quote, when the children's 'mental maps' reveal something unexpected (to us as adults, at least) about the spaces, places, environments in which they live and play: when these maps bring to light some space, place or object that obviously has a meaning and a use for children that largely escapes the attention of grown-ups; when they reveal something about children's social geographies, particularly as different from yet intimately bound up with - and maybe conflicting with - the knowledge, expectancies, activities and so on of adults.

Now, both in my original lectures and in this paper, such remarks begin to reveal my own 'hand' - my own particular stance on geography's encounter with children - since I lean towards favouring that work which adopts a more explicitly social-geographical lens on children and childhood: roughly, what Hart meant by the 'geography of children' (of children as social agents in a social world). The way in which I am indeed framing my reflections here on the geography, particularly the social geography, of children should hopefully be becoming clearer.

### **Geography of children, social geography and beyond 'activity spaces'**

In my lectures - as will be the case here - I hence turn to the issue of the 'geography of children', and I do so as follows:

#### *Snippet 3: 'formal geographies' and 'informal geographies'*

Much of the previously-mentioned research that Hill and Michelson report - research conducted under the auspices of a project called the 'Toronto Whole City Catalogue' - looks at children's more formal geography: at where they live and at the distribution of, and their utilisation of, 'all the facilities, services, land uses, spaces, places, activities and programmes relevant to children and teenagers throughout Metropolitan Toronto' (the latter phrasing is lifted directly from the paper). This survey obviously touches upon children's use of more 'informal' facilities, services and so on (ie. ones not provided by adults), but for the most part attention is paid to facilities such as swimming pools and libraries which are clearly provided, run and managed by adults.

But what of children's informal geography: their use of spaces, places and objects that is not sanctioned by - and may lie wholly outside the ken of - the city's adult population. Hill and Michelson are clearly aware of (and sympathetic towards) this more informal geography:

'A (significant) aspect of the urban environment, highlighted by the special situation of children and youth, is its degree of formality. Some places and parts of territories, in addition to parkways, are consciously provided by formal authorities. These frequently reflect planning activity and the expenditure of public money. Researchers have found, to public chagrin, that young people often use other places and sometimes even ignore those which are formally provided' (Hill and Michelson, 1981, p.201).

Furthermore - and this is crucial - Hill and Michelson provide a brief comment on this divergence of formal and informal geographies:

'Children's perception ... reflects interests which diverge from those of adults. Keller (1979), for example, points to the common perception of adventure playgrounds by children as exciting locations, while adults view them as eyesores. What ... may seem to an adult to be a safe, pleasant enclosure, for a child may be a boring lifeless space' (Hill and Michelson, 1981, p.197).

The adventure playground is particularly interesting in this respect: in a sense it is a formal provision, but it is one that seeks to imitate the more 'natural' and chaotic arrangements of informal playgrounds created by children for children, and as such it is disapproved of by many adults. As Jack Lambert, a founder of many adventure playgrounds, notes:

'The adventure playground is free space, space where children can do things they are normally prevented from doing. There is a whole world of difference between this and the 'familiar, dull, unimaginatively equipped, asphalted, flat square or rectangles' provided by most local authorities [as play areas]. As T.H. Sorensen, the Danish architect whose idea it first was, described the dream in 1931, 'a junk playground in which children could create and shape, dream and imagine a reality'" (Lambert and Pearson, 1974, p.14).

Many formal spaces and places (such as the 'asphalt rectangle' play areas) are indeed viewed as lifeless and boring by many urban children, but - if they are not lucky enough to have access to an at least semi-formal adventure playground - what are the more informal spaces and places that such children can colonise? Well, the answer is obviously a whole range of nooks, crannies and otherwise 'redundant spaces' that are squeezed into the built fabric of the city, an answer tellingly illustrated by photographs from Ward's book: the first set showing the use of 'waste places', the patch of derelict land, the back alley, the car park, the walkway in a block of flats; and the second set showing life on the 'street corner', and taken from a chapter that Ward compellingly entitles 'Colonising small spaces'. This is the face of the city that "we" (adults, grown-ups) do not often see, or perhaps do not let ourselves see: it is the face of grubby nooks and crannies; of those 'small spaces' where so many 'small people' find things to do away from the normal authority of parents and other adults.

And it is these 'small spaces' that Ward concentrates upon in his book, seeking to describe them in detail and to understand something of the meanings that they hold for their users. Consider this passage, for instance, where he tells of how an education specialist in Cardiff ended up being invited by a group of ten-year olds to their 'unofficial play-spaces' in a derelict area of town:

'There was an almost mischievous glee among the children as they took him into the scary area of town, through alleys, ginnels and tunnels, into the district which had no longer an official existence. The council had here spent one-and-a-half day's labour by three men in bricking up the doors and windows of each of the abandoned houses, but they still sustained a population, the inebriates, the junkies and some bewildered homeless people, who along with the bloated dead domestic animals provided the setting for the use the children made of these abandoned streets. It was here and here alone that they were able to use the environment. Here and here alone they were able to indulge their appetite for either building or destroying. Their human encounters in this sector of the city were those which the educator would have most wished to spare them. But just because the adult users of this no-man's-land were unofficial inhabitants too, they were not a threat to the children's determined use of the area as a place of eerie encounters, forbidden games and the acting out of destructive passions' (Ward, 1978, p.41).

Ward clearly sees much to praise in this vigorous use of an informal location by the children of Cardiff, but we ought to bear in mind his anarchistic streak: his love for those moments when 'establishment' mores and niceties are stamped all over. Even so, I have

no doubt that here he is touching upon something of great importance: the whole business of taking seriously the real needs, desires, hopes and dreams of children, which may well require the city to provide them with messy, grubby, 'skew-wiff' places and spaces, rather than with the sanitised, 'squeaky-clean' and geometric places and spaces so beloved of urban planners.

A note of caution must be sounded, though, given that Ward does perhaps underplay the physical danger that children face when playing in such informal locations, and maybe - for children, if not for adults - 1997 is a rather more violent and perverted year to be living in than 1978 (when Ward's book was published). This is a matter that needs great care and thought, and links clearly into recent works by geographers such as John McKendrick and Gill Valentine (members of two of the ESRC Programme teams: see esp. Valentine, 1997), and I have also heard the geographer Susan Smith examining what she describes as a 'seamless web of insecurity in a risky environment' encompassing the children of the Corkerhill community in Glasgow (Smith, 1991). These comments from Smith occurred at a Lampeter seminar, and provoked heated debate about the difficult balance to be struck between risk avoidance and children's full social development in relation to the range of unsupervised environmental encounters made available to children.

In the original lectures - as here - these borrowings from Ward serve to indicate my ideas about a genuinely social geography of children: one indeed alert to children as creative beings 'making' their own 'social space' in the wider social world, and in the process often coming into an ambiguous, even conflictual relationships with adults. Now, I would suggest that it is only recently that such a genuinely social geography of children has surfaced and become at all a part of the discipline's research agenda, notwithstanding a longer pedigree of work leaning towards environmental psychology. In my lectures - as now - I seek to check this narrative, however, and in so doing to reference one amazing instance of a rather older geographical engagement with the fractured, conflictual geographies of children and adults.

*Snippet 4: 'advocacy geography', children and machines*

This relates to the oft-mentioned but virtually never examined work of the so-called 'advocacy geographers' of the late-1960s / early-1970s, who established what they termed 'geographical expeditions' to the hearts of run-down North American cities. The objective was for the academics concerned to turn their backs on the formal academic agenda - then dominated by the abstractions, models, statistical wizardry and mathematical manipulations of geography as 'spatial science' - and instead to ask the poor, vulnerable, disadvantaged, commonly black residents of 'ghetto' neighbourhoods to set the agenda: to specify what was wanted of the geographers, what they might contribute to improving the well-being of the city's poorest, least powerful people and places. The exercise was hence one where the geographers were supposed to put their professional skills and abilities, as professional 'advocates', at the disposal of these marginalised inner-city communities. These geographers - the best-known of whom was William Bunge, working in Detroit - duly ended up studying all manner of processes affecting the places concerned: all manner of 'ghetto' or slum formation processes.

Yet one angle which emerged most distinctively was that of the plight of inner-city children. In response to the concerns of local people who approached them, Bunge *et al* ended up researching the numerous threats to inner-city children posed by poverty, disease, attacks, accidents, and the like, and hence produced some remarkable maps (see **Fig.4**). In one marvellous observation on the achievements of the Detroit expedition, Bunge writes as follows:

'The emphasis has been on unhappy regions, with special attention to geographic injury to children: location of traffic 'accidents', doctorless regions, toyless regions, rat-bite regions, fly-covered babies regions, high-infant mortality regions, inferior schools regions. Prolonged contact with the misery of children develops in us an extreme interest in a better world' (Bunge, 1973, p.67).



No comfortable geography this, then, but a deeply unsettling social geography of children: an approach fully aware of the wider contexts, problems, hazards of children's 'small' social lives in and amongst the worlds of adults. And this then became a key conceptual and substantive focus for Bunge, as can be seen from his almost wholly neglected 1975 paper on 'The point of reproduction': a paper looking explicitly at the political-economic geographies of reproduction, turning the lens from the battles of class around the workplace to the struggles of gender and age around the homeplace (and residential neighbourhood). Here Bunge devotes several pages to the enormous hardships of working-class children associated with their dangerous neighbourhood environments, and in the process he fosters a vision in which such children become the purpose and symbol of the social 'revolution': in which children become the pivot of, in his admittedly odd terms, 'secular (working-class) churches' where a political-moral imperative to 'save the children' should be forthcoming:

'Exploitation is geographically located at the point of production, the [capitalist] threat generates out of the factory, but the object of this deadly aggression lies at the point of reproduction in mostly working-class neighbourhoods where the vast bulk of our species children reside. To save the children and therefore the human race, both the sources of the threat and the ultimate victims of the threat, the children, must be given attention' (Bunge, 1975, p.74).

To be sure, there are some very curious aspects to Bunge's writing about the geography of children at this time: notably his obsession with the countless acts of hostility perpetrated on children by the machines of the adult world, particularly by the automobile, which led him to advocate a strict spatial separation of children from machines (except under carefully controlled conditions); and more bizarrely his search for a 'utopia' on earth in the shape of a colony on the beaches of Guadeloupe where inner-city black children from the US could be taken to start a new life (see **Fig.5**, which shows his ideal design for such a colony, and note here the strict separating of children and machines). But maybe we have too quickly passed over Bunge's claims, referencing the odd paper but no more, without reflecting further on what is signposted here in the sense of a social geography of children full of attentiveness to matters of inequality, injustice, conflict, power, class, gender and ethnicity.

Furthermore, both in my lectures and here, this brief recalling of Bunge's claims feeds into some final comments which take up this vision of a social geography of children that centralises the contestation of 'social space' by children and adults. And so, the final snippet below is one which turns its gaze most explicitly on to the most obvious axis of unequal power relations in children's lives: namely, that running between themselves and adults. Here we are talking about a social division of great moment, even if it is impossible to decide precisely where the line is being drawn between child and adult, or between child, youth and adult), and it is one which often entails spatial separations of various kinds boasting various implications (as I will explain presently).

*Snippet 5: 'an outright war between adults and children'*

Thinking first of the social division, it is important to return to Ward's arguments about the child in the city, since here he situates his exploration in the context of what Paul Thomson terms a 'war' between adults and children much akin to the war between the sexes and the classes:

'Children [Thompson] declares, 'like other social under-groups, have long protested against their position by resistance, sometimes open and hidden, in a war with adults which parallels and echoes the wars between the classes and the sexes' (Ward, 1978, p.96).

It is not necessary to go all the way with this statement, though, in order to agree that there are certain 'frontlines' - certain territorial front-lines indeed - where children's play (in the face of extreme boredom for instance) becomes irritating and even dangerous to adults in the vicinity. The most obvious of these 'front-lines' are the corridors, stairs and lifts of large tower blocks, and in this respect Ward writes as follows (drawing in part on information derived from a group of girls aged eight to eleven from

Lambeth, London):

'Some residents have developed a bitter hostility towards the young, elderly people live in fear, and in one London housing estate the boys have actually found a way of travelling on the roof of the lift car, both imperilling their own lives and terrorising the occupants of the lift below their feet. There are several other adaptations to the new urban environment of ancient pranks. One trick is to collect all the doormats from outside a row of front doors along the access balcony of a block of flats and to pile them outside one particular door, or to exchange a worn mat for a new one, waiting to see what the inhabitants will do about it. Another is to tie a length of cotton round a milk bottle and suspend it over the access balcony from someone's door knocker. Yet another brief and sensational delight is to buy and assemble a plastic model aeroplane, fill it with cotton wool and paraffin, ignite it and launch it from high up in a block of flats' (Ward, 1978, pp.101-102).

Moving from these still relatively trivial skirmishes on the 'front-line', Ward discusses in more detail the extreme vandalism and physical intimidation associated with older youths in certain tower blocks and on certain estates, and I guess that I do not have to labour this point in further detail (the 'moral panic' currently surrounding the threats that many children themselves pose to the safety of others in public space is in full swing today, more so probably than when Ward was writing in 1978: see esp. Valentine, 1996).

In spatial terms, it is obvious that the 'front-line' skirmishes involved here do amount to a fierce contestation of space - the 'land-use conflict' between adults and children about which Ward writes at length - and it entails children infringing in what is considered to be an inappropriate fashion on 'adult space'. As James explains:

'... a 'child's space is the playground, classroom or garden, while 'adult space' is at work, shopping or in the pub. This division of space is not totally rigid, of course, but it is sufficiently marked that certain activities and spaces come to symbolise childhood, others adulthood' (James, 1990, p.282).

Tensions arise when these separations are transgressed by a presence - in terms of level or purpose - that is unusual (of children in 'adult space' and also perhaps of adults in 'children's space'), and tensions also arise (as just explained) where the two spaces touch (giving 'front-lines' and 'no-persons' lands').

It remains now to elaborate such claims, however, with just a few more remarks that offer a preliminary account of why this friction or 'war' has come to exist between adults and children. Moreover, such an account also starts to deal with the peculiar power that adults possess in defining 'childhood': in specifying what it is that a child should be and do, and where. Let me turn once more Ward, given that the explanation (for this friction, this war, the acts of child vandalism) that he himself returns to repeatedly is one that concerns not just the boredom of much childhood existence in the contemporary West, but - and more importantly - it is one that emphasises the lack of a meaningful economic and social role for children in modern society. Historically in the West, as the research of Philippe Ariès has shown, children were often not so 'cut off' from the economic and social hub of society: often they worked and often they partook of everyday social life. There is hence the claim that 'childhood' was effectively invented round about the beginning of the seventeenth century, in that the state of being dependent upon one's parents - of being, hypothetically at least, molly-coddled in the family bosom until the middle to late-teens - is not something 'natural', but rather something 'discovered' or 'socially constructed'.

As an index of this historical development, Ariès points out how in the tenth century artists were unable to depict a child except as an adult on a smaller scale, and he then traces through subsequent developments in the artistic representation of children, noting in particular a seventeenth-century painting by Philippe de Champaigne showing the seven children of the Habert family. Here we see children represented, but the eldest boy (who is only ten years of age) - on the left of the picture - is 'already dressed like a little man, wrapped in his cloak; in appearance at least he belongs to the world of adults'. Some notion of 'childhood' does appear to be present (and represented) here, but not in the full-blown sense - stressing the child's dependency, and extending the span of dependency well into teenage years - which is typical of more recent centuries in the West.

What Ariès therefore signposts is what might be referred to as an historical geography not just of children, but of the whole package of ideas and practices constitutive of 'childhood': a package that has varied through time and continues to vary across space, and a package that has itself come into being (with the first glimmerings

of a concept called 'childhood') in particular periods and places. This dimension to what might be considered by geographers interested in children remains largely unexplored, although there are intriguing hints in the work of Fiona Smith (1995: see also Valentine, 1997, esp. pp.65-67), and I would suggest that this here a whole fertile terrain of concern awaiting sustained geographical research.

The story to be told is certainly complex, then, but in essence the argument is that the twentieth century has crystallised the notion of 'childhood', and in so doing has forced a large proportion of the population into a dependent and (it might be declared) ultimately pointless condition. "We" have in a sense 'made' children into children, and have in a sense trapped them into an 'otherness' (and into 'other' places and spaces) that is not the necessary order of things. If adults are indeed having a war waged on them by children, then - by the logic of this argument - they are merely reaping what they have sown, it being an inevitable consequence of their socio-spatially marginalising ('infantilising') of James's quarter to a third of human society.

### **War and peace in the social geography of children**

To bring things finally to a close, let me spell out the argument (of sorts) which has threaded through my paper today. I have in effect identified two rather different (if not wholly distinct) trajectories of geographical inquiry dealing with children and - less often - with childhood:

- (i) 'children's geographies' → link into environmental psychology → concentrating on the interior realms of spatial imaginings, spatial cognition, mental maps, and the like.
- (ii) 'geography of children' → towards a more obviously social geography → concentrating on the exterior realms of children as social agents claiming and contesting 'social space' in the wider social world, often bumping up against the power held over them by adults (a power of both definition and coercion).

Now, in my original lectures - and as a warning to undergraduate students thinking of projects or essays, and as a warning to myself about 'over-romanticising' the children angle - I insisted on highlighting 'the danger that geographical interest in children can too easily slip into being a cosy (pink and fluffy, uncontroversial) study of cute little children drawing pictures / playing in sandpits'. Instead, I emphasised the possibilities of a social geography of children more aware of just how conflictual, power-ridden, dangerous and demeaning the lives of children can be, particularly in terms of their 'hidden' war with adults over the designation and utilisation of 'social spaces' (notably ones outside: the street, the housing block, the park, the adventure playground). I thereby placed my own preference on the side of what I am calling 'war-time' studies of children - ones conducted in the shadow of the ongoing and arguably intensifying hostilities with adults - and in consequence I envisaged a relevant social geography here as one reporting from the (many and varied) territorial front-lines (ones which might now even include the virtual spatial front-lines of the 'internet'). I guess that ultimately it is studies of this sort that I find to be most rewarding and illuminating, and to hold more interest and promise than studies relevant to what might conversely be called the 'peace-time' situation, ones with the goal of tackling the minutiae of children's spatial imaginings and cognitions largely untroubled by the wider contexts - struggles and battles - of children's entry into and

passage through the 'social spaces' of the social world. I should immediately underline, however, that to say this is in no way meant to deny the value of work undertaken at the intersections of geography and environmental psychology on the subject of children's geographies: it is merely to make the case for extending and deepening work on the irreducibly social geographies of children and childhood in the terms examined in my paper.

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**Nb.** Here I simply list references directly referred to in my paper: the field of geographical research on children and childhood is now much more extensive than indicated here.

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