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NAOMI ELANA HAMER 20/04/2004
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Title of Thesis: MAPPING URBAN CHILDSCAPES: THE IMAGINARY GEOGRAPHIES OF CONTEMPORARY NORTH AMERICAN PICTURE BOOKS

Degree: MASTER OF ARTS IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE Year: 2004

Department of SCHOOL OF LIBRARY, ARCHIVAL, AND INFORMATION STUDIES (JOIN DEGREE WITH DEPT OF ENGLISH AND LANGUAGE AND LITERACY EDUCATION)

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, BC Canada
ABSTRACT

Recent cross-disciplinary research on childhood increasingly aims to question, dismantle, and analyze contemporary and historical constructions of childhood as it is mediated through social practices, cultural products, and literary and artistic representations. The representations of urban childhood in contemporary children’s literature often dynamically engage with the dominant discourses of North American childhood. The purpose of the study is to examine the spatial discourses of childhood as represented within the urban landscape of contemporary North American children’s picture books. Many historical and contemporary classics of children’s literature rely on an escape from the city in order for protagonists to experience an alternate fantasy or natural world; however, increasingly in modern children’s novels and picture books, the urban landscape itself has become central to the narrative. The urban child protagonists often create their own imaginative geographies in the core of the city where they live and play. These imaginary urban childscapes (Porteous 1990) produced by adults for and about children, elucidate the dynamic interactions and intersecting narratives of gender, class, race, and power in the lives of children and adolescents who inhabit urban spaces. The depiction of urban space in contemporary picture books often exemplifies a conflict between the confinement of children within their urban environments and yet their ability to find freedom as they map their way through spaces. These representations map the spatial and boundary-laden children’s geographies of the urban landscape; often charting and traversing the boundary lines between interior and exterior; safe and dangerous; public and private; home and play; fantasy and real spaces. Key questions guiding this study include: How may we define a children’s geography of the urban landscape? How are these geographies represented visually and textually in contemporary picture books? What do these representations reveal, elucidate, or critique about competing social discourses surrounding contemporary North American childhood?

In this thesis, I discuss and analyze three distinct contemporary urban picture books all situated or inspired by the real geographies of New York City: Madlenka (2000) by Peter Sis, Home in The Sky (1984) by Jeannie Baker, and Black Cat (1999) by Christopher Myers. This examination is informed theoretically by critical and post-modern geography (Soja 1989; De Certeau 1984); the geography of children and childhood space (Aitken 2001; Holloway and Valentine 2000); work related to the social discourses of childhood (Lesnik-Oberstein 1998); and urban studies discourses related to literary and artistic representations of space (Balshaw and Kennedy 2000; Villa 2000). I propose and utilize a multi-disciplinary methodology for the analysis of contemporary urban picture books that is framed by spatial metaphors and vocabulary (spaces, landscape, children’s geographies and mapping). The methodologies are further influenced by Michel Foucault’s theories of discourse, as reinterpreted by Gillian Rose for the analysis of visual images. Guided by key spatial themes derived from the geographic study of children, I analyze how urban childscapes are discursively mapped in contemporary urban picture books. The interrelated spatial discourses of childhood and urbanity are often embedded within these mappings. I examine how the spatial discourses of the child’s eye view in these picture books elucidate how we construct modern and post-modern childhood space within the urban context.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thesis committee:
Thanks to Theresa Rogers, Jane Flick, and Maureen Kendrick for their support, encouragement and interest in this research.

My honorary thesis committee:
Thanks to Judith Saltman, Brian Hornberg, Kirsten Andersen, Karen Sharkey, Kari Winters, Kieran Kealey, and everyone in the Master of Arts in Children’s Literature program for their enthusiasm and listening ears.

Thank you also to my friends, especially Samantha Semper, who probably learned more about children’s books than they ever intended to.

And to my family: this belongs to you as much as it does to me.
1. INTRODUCTION: CHILDHOOD AND THE CITY

There is a place where the sidewalk ends
And before the street begins,
And there the grass grows soft and white,
And there the sun burns crimson bright,
And there the moon-bird rests from his flight
To cool in the peppermint wind.

Let us leave this place where the smoke blows black
And the dark street winds and bends.
Past the pits where the asphalt flowers grow
We shall walk with a walk that is measured and slow,
And watch where the chalk-white arrows go
To the place where the sidewalk ends.

Yes we'll walk with a walk that is measured and slow,
And we'll go where the chalk-white arrows go,
For the children, they mark, and the children, they know
The place where the sidewalk ends.

- From Where the Sidewalk Ends (1974) by Shel Silverstein (64)

Shel Silverstein's poem begins with the description and thus, creation of a childhood fantasy place, "where the sidewalk ends and before the street begins." In a
classic storyteller’s tone, the narrator invites the reader to imagine this fantasyland, a liminal site: a space that exists betwixt and between, both inside and outside the city borderlines. He then urges “us” to leave the urban industrial landscape where “asphalt flowers grow” and “the smoke blows black.” “Let us leave this place,” he beckons, to go to another place, a secret place. The directions to this better place are marked in “chalk-white arrows” by our leaders: the urban children. Moreover, the children maintain a line to this fantasyland. They are the hope, the prophets, and the harbingers of this new place “We” cannot access the directions. We must follow the children’s markings. “The children, they mark, and the children, they know, the place where the sidewalk ends,” Silverstein’s verse whispers to us almost conspiratorially.

The city and the child are two highly discursive concepts in North American culture. They also tend to be spaces of shared and conflicted meanings, fantasies, hopes, dreams and concerns for the society at large. This is reflected in their representation in art and literature. In turn, these representations become rich sites to examine competing and interrelated discourses. Kenneth Hultqvist argues in his introduction to Governing the Child in the New Millenium (2001): “the historical forces and discourses that once produced the child and children are still with us and their presence is felt through the way we interrogate the present” (6). Karin Lesnik-Oberstein describes childhood as “an identity, a mediator and repository of ideas in Western Culture about consciousness and experience, mortality and values, property and privacy, but, perhaps most importantly, it has been assigned a crucial relationship to language itself” (6). Similarly, Kennedy discusses how literary and visual representations “map the fears and fantasies of urban
living" (12). Both the city and the child are socially and culturally constituted in images, representations, and constructs.

Childhood has a tricky relationship with the city in the history of representation, particularly in the dominant discourses of children's literature. The picture book texts I have chosen to explore in this thesis mark a transition from an earlier modernist and classic tradition of children's books that often represented an opposition between the natural and civilized world: rural versus urban life. I wish to observe how these earlier constructions of childhood spaces have changed or played out in these contemporary, often post-modern urban texts. When children's stories are transposed from pastoral or fantasy settings to the city, several questions move to the forefront. Where are the safe spaces? Where are the dangerous places? Where are the boundary lines drawn? Who creates these boundaries and who may cross them?

I am interested in how visual and textual representations in children's picture books construct images of modern and post-modern urban childhood. Both real and imagined childhood spaces often provide a conflicted stance between confinement to allotted spaces and movement between boundaries. The depiction of urban space in contemporary picture books often exemplifies that children are confined within their urban environments and yet, at the same time, they are able to find freedom as they map their way through spaces. From the child's eye view, the movement through the "in-between" geographies of the city may be central to the picture book texts.

This study is a multidisciplinary exploration of childhood and childhood space, especially as it is played out in the urban experience represented in picture books. As such, it is part of a broader proposal for the investigation of the spatial discourses of
childhood. Informed by the theoretical and philosophical work primarily in Henri Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space* (1991) and Edward Soja’s *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (1989), this discussion aims to move the analysis of “place” or setting in children’s literature into a theoretical realm that conceptualizes space as a dynamic element both in visual and textual representations. Certainly, children’s literature, a subject that may be viewed as intrinsically multidisciplinary, straddling literature, library studies, and education among other disciplines, lends itself to the use of space as a framework for the interdisciplinary study of these texts. The dynamics of space and place in picture books both visually and textually lend themselves to the application of geographic vocabulary and spatial metaphors.

In this examination, I use the concept of socially produced space as a tool to analyze how urban childscapes are mapped in contemporary urban picture books. I examine how the spatial discourses of childhood in these picture books elucidates how we construct modern and post-modern childhood space and imaginary experience within the urban context. In Chapter 2, an extensive literature review frames urban contemporary picture books in the context of: space and critical geography; work on the geographies of children and young people; children’s literature and landscapes of the mind; the spatial analysis of urban representations discourses surrounding the social discourses of childhood space; and a history of the emerging themes in North American urban picture books. In Chapter 3, I outline the research questions for the analysis, the theoretical method and frame (discourse analysis with a focus on visuality), and the parameters of the analysis. In Chapter 4, I introduce the spatial themes and discourses

Key questions guiding this study include:

- How may we define a children’s geography of the urban landscape?
- How are these geographies represented in contemporary picture books?
- What do these representations reveal, elucidate, or critique about the social discourses of urban childhood?
- What roles do the discourses surrounding childhood and urban spaces play in these picture books?
2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This multidisciplinary study is informed by a variety of theoretical frames. This literature review situates the analysis of urban contemporary picture books in the context of: a. space and critical geography; b. the geographies of children and young people c. spatial analysis of urban representation; d. children’s literature as a landscape of the mind e. the social discourses of childhood space; and f. emerging themes in North American urban picture books.

a. Space and critical geography

This study contextualizes contemporary urban picture books within the multi-disciplinary dialogue surrounding discourses of urban space and representation. Recent work on urban space and representation is heavily influenced by the use of “space” as “an increasingly irrepressible metaphor in contemporary cultural and critical theorizing” and this theoretical “metaphor” has also become “a point of convergence for the work emerging from the disciplinary meltdown of the humanities and, to a lesser extent, of the social sciences” (Kennedy 1). Many of these projects transform more traditional (often Cartesian) conceptions of space as a container, stage or backdrop in both real and representational contexts, into a dynamic concept. At the forefront of this cross-disciplinary theoretical work on urban space is an interest in the production and representation of space as a social product and that urban spaces may be viewed as discursive sites richly embedded with social and political ideologies.

Many of these spatial projects are framed by the work of key philosophical figures that have focused in distinct manners on the social construction of space. Gaston
Bachelard, Michel de Certeau, Henri Lefebvre, Edward Soja and Michel Foucault may be described as the central theorists involved in this field. In *Poetics of Space* (1964), Gaston Bachelard draws on the childhood experience of space as well as the memory of childhood space. He theorizes that these memories and experiences affect our perceptions of space and intimate places throughout our lives. Michel De Certeau, in a series of papers in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), conceptualizes spatial practices, often in the form of “spatial stories” in everyday life with an emphasis on practices and beliefs related to urban spaces. On broader spatial and social scales, Henri Lefebvre, particularly in *The Production of Space* (1991), focuses on the production of schematic and typological analyses of space. His work has strongly influenced a multitude of theoretical studies, primarily in the study of urban and human geographies. In *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (1989), Soja explores the function of space in its relationship with politics and ideology, particularly with its implications for understanding global capitalism. Michel Foucault’s extensive theoretical work focuses on the role of space in the construction of social power and knowledge. Moreover, Foucault’s conceptualization of discourse in *History of Sexuality* (1978) has become central to examinations of the relationship between social discourses and spatial practices in a variety of theoretical contexts.

The theoretical frameworks of Bachelard, de Certeau, Lefebvre, Soja and Foucault have paved the way for recent texts in critical and post-modern geography and a range of cross-disciplinary research rooted in the notion of space as a register for socio-cultural discourses. Although this examination is inspired and informed by these key figures outlined in this section, this study will more specifically utilize the theoretical
work by critical geographers and literary critics who apply these broader spatial theories to the representation of urban space and the real and represented geographies of children and young people.

b. The geographies of children and young people

Theoretical and practical research on the spatial discourses of childhood continues to be heavily informed by the field of geography, where children's geographies have been studied for the past thirty years. The 1970s proved to be a groundbreaking period for the production of cross-disciplinary work focused on urban children and childhood spaces. Colin Ward's *The Child in the City* (1978) stands as a cornerstone text for the examination of urban childhood that followed in several disciplines. Building on research from sociology, philosophy, geography and urban planning by Jane Jacobs (1961) among others, Ward discusses the social construction of an ideal landscape for childhood that traditionally maintained a pastoral or rural environment as an idyll. Moreover, he examines the role the urban environment as a site for home and play (Ward 5). Another influential text from this period, Roger Hart's *Children's Experience of Place* (1979) reports on a research study focused on a group of children's perceptions and mappings of their play spaces in rural Vermont. In a related text, Gould and White's *Mental Maps* (1974) aimed to explore how both adults and children perceive geographic space, linking cognitive psychology with studies in urban geography.

The Canadian community project “The Child in the City” based at the University of Toronto and headed by child psychiatrist Saul Levine, produced two volumes of multi-disciplinary research: *The Child in the City: today and tomorrow* (1979) and *The Child in
the City: changes and challenges (1979). These volumes include research from the
diverse fields of law, developmental psychology, urban planning, and sociology.
Similarly, an international congress in Montreal, Quebec in November 1979 produced a
volume of proceedings, Urban Life and the Child: Proceedings (1979), that reflects
similar interests on an international level (National Library of Quebec 1980). These
projects exemplify a move towards a social agenda related to the rights of children. In the
same vein, many researchers in the disciplines of architecture and urban planning have
addressed the social issues that underline creating spaces for children in the city. These
reports reference the decision-making process regarding playground construction and
Space for Children” and Ann-Marie Pollowy’s The Urban Nest (1977) exemplify these
practical intentions and applications.

The 1990s marked a return to an intensive interest in urban childhoods. Many
studies in social geography research have been rooted in social problems related to
children and adolescents in urban environments. The collective volume Growing Up in a
Changing Urban Landscape (1977), edited by Ronald Camastra, provides a collection of
recent case study research that explores the social realities of urban childhood.
Theoretical and reflective texts such Henry L. Lennard and Suzanne H. Crowhurst
Lennard’s The Forgotten Child: Cities for the Well-Being of Children (2000) similarly
exemplify work in urban planning, geography and architecture with a social agenda. This
text calls for a reconstruction of city space in order to create safe and healthy places for
children.
Building on the research of Roger Hart and Colin Ward, recent research has also aimed to understand children's perceptions of space within the urban environment in which they live, plan and learn. Among these, Sally Middlebrooks' *Getting to Know City Kids: Understanding their Thinking, Imagining and Socializing* (1998) brings the ideas of 'world-making' to the forefront for a group of children who live and attend school in East Harlem, New York City. She observes that children often create or claim play spaces that are “bounded, yet open to possibility” in order to create worlds. Comparatively, Amanda Dargan and Steven Zeitlin’s *City Play* (1990) charts a social history of the play space of urban children in New York City through photography and ethnographic observations. This volume exemplifies several of the recurring central themes in psychological, sociological and geographic research related to childhood spaces. These include: an exploration of “the block” as a play space including stoops, rooftops, apartments, vacant lots; defining private places, the role of gender, ethnicity and social class on play in the urban environment (Dargan and Zeitlin 39-43).

Most recently, research in critical and “post-modern geography” aims to conceptualize the experiences of urban space and make sense of collective metaphoric imaginings, mythologies, perceptions and social constructions of childhood and the urban landscape. A volume edited by social geographers Sarah L. Holloway and Gill Valentine, *Children’s Geographies: Playing, living, learning* (2000), illustrates the diversity of recent work done in this field and includes articles that investigate the social reality of children. Much of this research refigures theoretical constructions of space and childhood. Stuart Aitken’s *Geographies of young people: the morally contested spaces of identity* (2001) addresses the contested spaces of play, work and school for children and
young adults in contemporary urban centres. Aitken's text employs geographic spatial vocabulary to discuss the societal constructions and perceptions of childhood and adolescence and how these constructions play out in the spatiality of the city. Working within a critical framework informed by feminist and psychoanalytic theories, Aitken traces the changing scientific and societal notions of what it is to be a young person and argues that there is a need to re-examine how we view childhood spaces, children’s bodies, and child development.

Iain Borden also alludes to the contested spaces of young people in his architectural work on the relationship between the city architecture and the urban (and suburban) youth culture of skateboarding. Borden contributes as an editor and writer to a collaborative volume, The Unknown City: Contesting Architecture and Social Space (2001, that attempts to understand the “familiar and the strange” spaces of the urban landscape. He has extensively theorized the activation and appropriation of everyday architecture of the city through skateboarding. He sees the act of skateboarding as a critique of the built urban environment through performance and a way to reconstitute the banal ‘quotidian’ space of the city with new meanings.

Borden, Holloway and Aitken, among other critical geographers all mark an interest in the ‘contested spaces’ of the urban environment and the changing meanings taken from and carried to these spaces by specific communities and individuals. How may these spatial discourses of the lived spaces and geographies of urban young people be applied to the imaginary spaces and geographies found within urban children’s literature?
c. Spatial analysis of urban representation

Increasingly, literary critics have worked to understand how theoretical frameworks connected to the production and practices of urban space may be applied to the analyses of representational space, particularly in literary and artistic texts. Maria Balshaw and Liam Kennedy's collection of essays in *Urban Space and Representation* (2000) illustrates the range of interdisciplinary studies that examine urban spaces in literary and artistic texts. In the introduction to this volume, Balshaw and Kennedy observe that current academic projects have begun to position the city as "a site of spatial formations produced across diverse discursive regimes and everyday practices" (2).

Many recent analyses employ the language of geography and space in distinct manners to analyze the imaginary representations of urban spaces. In this vein, Elizabeth A. Wheeler, in *Uncontained: Urban Fiction in Postwar America* (2001), uses spatial metaphors in her examination of post World War II American fiction. She identifies "two geographies" that characterize the uncontained city of postwar fiction: "a diaspora sense of place and a philosophy of camping out" (16). She identifies spatial metaphors of containment that reveal the discourses of segregation and repressed trauma, in order to read how the postwar generation "reclaims history and reads the past onto the present landscape" (16). Comparatively, in *City Codes: Reading the Modern Urban Novel* (1996), Hana Wirth-Nesher describes "modern urban life as a ‘landscape of partial visibilities and manifold possibilities’" (9). She sees readers as viewers of framed literary cityscapes and uses the term "verbal cartography" to describe how writers plot cities through language. In her literary analysis, she dismantles this verbal cartography in order
to investigate “where we are situated in the metropolis to see what we see” in terms of public and private spaces (Wirth-Nesher 3).

Postmodern research in a range of academic disciplines grapples with the existence of repression, surveillance and exclusion in contemporary urban spaces. In Race and Urban Space in Contemporary American Culture (2000), Liam Kennedy defines “urbanity” as “the phenomenon of collectivity which emerges from the close proximity of strangers, the freedoms of access and movement in public spaces-positing these as the very essence of urban life and the necessary conditions of democratic citizenship (3). He notes that the classic discourse of urbanity was to idealize urban life and the everyday encounters. However, he identifies recent urban texts as inhabiting a period of “postmodern urbanism and the crisis of urbanity” in contemporary American adult literature. (Kennedy 6).

Changes in the spatial, cultural and political form of the city consequently have affected perceptions and representations of the city (Kennedy 3). Kennedy asserts that “race may function to frame ways of seeing and reading the city...[although] not necessarily an explicit or transparent practice” (2). Moreover, he sees cities and urban spaces as key sites of memory for ethnic or racial groups (Kennedy 11-12). Raul Homero Villa’s highly politicized Barrio-Logos: Space and Place in Urban Chicano Literature and Culture (2000) his literary and cultural analysis of literature and other cultural texts are informed by a theoretical examination of the physical regulation, social control and ideological control of space. These forces have placed Chicanos, according to Villa, within the “material and symbolic geography of dominance drawn by the invisible hand of urbanizing mostly Anglo-controlled capital” (3-4).
Many of these spatial themes identified by Kennedy, Robinson, Villa, Wheeler, and Wirth-Nesher in their distinct literary analyses are at play in contemporary urban children's picture books. Moreover, the application of spatial themes to literary representations may be used similarly in this examination, in order to elucidate discourses related to the constructions of childhood in contemporary urban picture books.

d. Children's literature as a landscape of the mind

_I don't know whether you have ever seen a map of a person's mind. Doctors sometimes draw maps of other parts of you, and your own map can become intensely interesting, but catch them trying to draw a map of a child's mind, which is not only confused, but keeps going round all the time. There are zigzag lines on it, just like your temperature on a card, and there are probably roads in the island; for the Neverland is always more or less an island, with astonishing splashes of colour here and there, and coral reefs and rakish-looking craft in the offing, and savages and lonely lairs, and gnomes who are mostly tailors, and caves through which a river runs, and princes with six elder brothers, and a hut fast going to decay, and one very small old lady with a hooked nose. It would be an easy map if that were all; but there is also first day at school, religion, fathers, the round pond, needlework, murders, hangings, verbs that take the dative, chocolate-pudding day, getting into braces, say ninety-nine, threepence for pulling out your tooth yourself, and so on; and either these are part of the island or they are another map showing through, and it is all rather confusing, especially as nothing will stand still._

- From _Peter Pan_ by J.M. Barrie (11-12)
Initiated by the humanistic and imaginative geography movement in the 1970s, vocabulary including the concepts of mapping, cartography, landscape, space, place and even geography itself has been redefined and refigured for metaphoric and conceptual use in multi-disciplinary analysis. These metaphoric examinations of literary and artistic texts have investigated what have been deemed “imaginary geographies” (McDonogh 1993), “landscapes of the mind” (Porteous 1990) or a “city of the mind” (Caws 1991).

Margaret Atwood has written in her critical text Survival that “literature is not only a mirror; it is also a map, a geography of the mind” (18-19). Similarly, in “The Sense of ‘Before-Us’: Landscape and the Making of Mindscapes in Recent Australian Children’s Books” Rosemary Ross Johnston, explores how geographical space is culturally encoded, if not a cultural construct. She asserts that “European forests and woods have become densely populated by the fairytale adventure…and are perceived as more than geographical features; they become part of the landscape of the mind” (Johnston 30).

Often the worlds of children’s literature may be read as maps of childhood or the map of a child’s mind, such as Barrie’s children’s book fantasy world Neverland cited earlier in this section. However, these are not maps of the mind of a child as perceived and created by children, but rather maps of childhood constructed by adults. As Karin-Lesnik-Oberstein explains, the “ideas and art [created for and about children produces] a narrative of adults” (13). Children’s literature is geared towards and written for an implied reader whose desires, likes, dislikes and moral belief systems are not vocalized by the young reader. Adult critics, writers, teachers, distributors and producers make decisions as to what they feel will appeal to young readers, what will be morally good for
young readers, and what young readers “can handle” in terms of violence and other controversial problems. These picture books may be viewed as maps or mappings; attempts to recreate a child’s-eye-view; to retrieve the feeling, the thoughts, and the experience of childhood through narrative. Adult writers of children’s literature often create childhood spaces in literature that reflect a nostalgia and idealization of the imagined worlds of childhood, an attempt to bridge the gap between adult and child subjectivities (Honeyman 121). How do these children’s books map landscapes of the mind? What discourses of childhood do these mappings reveal?

e. The social discourses of childhood space

Urban space plays a conflicted role within the long history of classic children’s literature in the Western world. Susan E. Honeyman observes in her article “Childhood Bound: In Gardens, Maps, and Pictures”, that often in literature childhood landscapes are “defined in contrast to and as an escape from civilized adult spaces” (118). Moreover, these spaces “draw from and continue the pastoral tradition of modernity, which idealizes and romanticizes the wild (ironically) for those weary of civilized constraints” (Honeyman 118). Modernist and classic children’s books often represented an idealized vision of a childhood rural or pastoral place and creates a metaphoric opposition between the natural and civilized world; rural versus urban life. Moreover, the dominant discourses of Western childhood tend to define childhood space or childhood landscapes in terms of a marked separation from the urban environment. How do children’s books that explore and represent urban space negotiate this intrinsic conflict? What meanings may be derived from these negotiations?
Phillipe Aries' *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (1962) is often viewed as a turning point for work on the study of childhood as a social construction. Aries questioned the assumption that childhood was a natural and evolutionary subject; rather, he asserted that it was the product of the civilizing processes of Western society, related to the onset of industrialization. Aries argued that childhood and the modern conception of the child emerged within the bourgeoisie society where the division of public and private space spatially separated the child from the world of adults. Although there have been many critiques of Aries' work from both his supporters and opponents, and his work has triggered a range of work on the history, geography, sociology and psychology of childhood. Aries' social constructivist view of childhood, particularly in terms of the construction of childhood as spatially separate from adulthood, plays out extensively in children's literature, particularly in picture books aimed towards young children. Moreover, the notion of 'childhood spaces', and the genre of 'children's literature' itself, are categories intimately linked with modern conceptions of childhood and its associated practices and spaces.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau was a central figure in the modern construction of childhood. Hultqvist calls attention to Rousseau’s key idea that “the child had a vulnerable mind that needed to be protected from the influence of – as he saw it – a depraved adult world....To be free, then, would be to act in accordance with nature: the site of freedom and the great master of the order of things” (Hultqvist 3). Not unlike Wordsworthian Romantic innocence, in this framework, children were not yet tainted by society (often epitomized by the city). Moreover, their young vulnerable minds were closely linked with the nature and the natural order of the world. The child seemed
natural in relation to a society that was socially constructed. Rousseau’s educational process greatly inspired G. Stanley Hall and his collaborators who inaugurated the child study movement in the United States. This movement in turn initiated new educational practices and institutions for the rearing and education of children among them followers of Maria Montessori, Arnold Gessel and Jean Piaget. It is important to note that many of the discourses related to education and literacy are closely linked with the various agenda behind the production of children’s literature.

In Children’s Geographies: Playing, Living, and Learning (2000), Holloway and Valentine define contemporary Western concept of “Childhood” as understood to be:

a time of socialization where children learn what it is to be fully human adult beings. On the other hand, as less-than adults, children in the West are assumed to have the right to a childhood of innocence and freedom from responsibilities of the adult world. Thus, responsible adults have a duty to protect children from dangerous knowledges and people, and in normal circumstances children are not expected to contribute economically to their household or the care of others” (2).

Recent work related to the study of childhood across and within a number of disciplines (Holloway and Valentine’s volume included) has increasingly aimed to question, dismantle, and analyze this contemporary concept of ‘childhood’ outlined above. These projects also focus on the deconstruction of the concept of childhood as it is in constructed within institutions, practices, cultural products, literary and artistic representations. This study is positioned within this theoretical movement. Valerie Walkerdine calls for the “need to rethink concepts of what childhood means in postmodernity and childhood’s relation to a concept of space that can no longer be
contained within traditional developmental discourses” (15). In her article, Walkerdine investigates how anxiety about child protection in urban spaces and cyberspace, reveals underlying adult issues of desire, memory and fantasy related to childhood. In many ways, the representations of childhood in children’s literature, reveal similar issues of desire, memory and fantasy, many linked to modernist conceptions. She describes the departure from modern to postmodern in children’s real and imagined lives and experiences:

Traditionally, within the discourses of modernity, it has been developmental theory that has been marshaled to tell the truth about a naturally developing child within a natural environment. That environment was meant to protect children from the dangers understood as inherent in an industrialized urban landscape. Now in a context of a postindustrial and postmodern landscape there is no longer taken to be any safe haven, no environment safe for natural development.” (Walkerdine 16)

How are these changes reflected and negotiated in contemporary children’s literature, particularly picture books for young readers? Several spatial issues arise in modern adaptations of children’s fairytales particularly those transposed into an urban setting. Where are the woods? Where is grandmother’s house? Where are the spaces of safety and danger? Within the urban landscape, the boundary lines of childhood become blurred. Adventure often happens in the gaps of the city, where boundary lines become distorted. How are these geographies and spaces mapped in the urban landscape? How may they be analyzed?
f. Emerging themes in urban children’s books

Distinct experiences of urban spaces in major European and North American cities have inspired works of literature, film, and art, as well as, musical compositions and television programs for both children and adults. Diverse images of “the city” in art and literature offer a range of literal and metaphoric implications: the city as metaphor for modernization; the Old World European city as a romantic or nostalgic setting; the futuristic city as cautionary comment on technology; the city as centre of consumer and corporate culture; the city as a symbol of anonymous and empty (post) modern life; the city as an emblem of the disrupted relationship between humans and nature; the city as a site for criminalization, drug use, prostitution, gang violence and poverty; the city as a site for collective and racialized memories and histories; and the city as a space for the (re)construction of new scripts for both individuals and communities. In the context of this artistic, literary, and theoretical commentary over the last century, the image of the city has also become an integral and dynamic element in children’s literature.

All of the focal texts for the analysis are based in the imaginary urban landscape of New York City. Leonard S. Marcus explains in his introduction to Storied City: A Children’s Book Walking Tour Guide to New York City (2003), “as a city of superlatives where people have long come to follow their dreams, New York was bound to lodge itself in the world’s imagination and to become a favourite setting for literature” (Introduction v). As Marcus illustrates in his guide, New York City has become the impetus for many books from those for preschoolers to those for teens, and books from a variety of genres, including historical fiction and non-fiction based in and about the city. Samuel Wood, a local printer, published the first book about the city New York Cries in
1808. This book is “an introduction to the city street merchants, complete with the peddlers’ catchy sales jingles, or cries, and a miscellany of topical information” (Marcus 7). Since then, there have been numerous and diverse imaginary New York Cities in picture books. For example “Ten ways to see New York City” as listed by Marcus in his guide include: Alphabetically, Alphabet City by Stephen T. Johnson (1995); architecturally, The Inside-Outside Books of New York City by Roxie Munro (1985, 2001); as a gorilla, The Escape of Marvin the Ape by Carolyn and Mark Buehner (1992); botanically, Wild Green Things in the City: A Book Of Weeds by Anne Ophelia Dowden (1972); by cab, The Adventures of Taxi Dog by Debra and Sal Barracca illustrated by Mark Buehner; historically, A Short and Remarkable History of New York City by Jane Mushabac and Angela Wigan with art for the Museum of the City of New York (1999); ornithologically Urban Roosts: Where Birds Nest in the City by Barbara Bash (1990); and, poetically Sky Scrape/City Scape selected by Jane Yolen illustrated by Ken Condon (1996) (as listed in Marcus 131).

Literary recreations of major cities reflect and play with collective associations related to the distinct identity of a city. While Maira Kalman through post-modern chaotic style artistically captures the essence of New York City in her picture books such as Next Stop Grand Central Station (1999), Ludwig Bemelman’s Madeline (1939) uses Impressionistic, watercolor illustrations to reflect an idealized, romantic and nostalgic image of Paris that is heavily infused with collective fantasies and associations. In distinct manners, many contemporary picture books and children’s novels create fantastical realms that seem to evolve from the randomness, chaos, and excess of urban life. Many texts reference the distinct identity of (and specified places in) New York
City. However, although these primary texts depict the urban landscape of contemporary New York City, many of these picture books also address the social drama and post-modern spatial issues of North American urban life and contemporary childhood space that may apply to a number of cities.

The picture books in my analysis may be contextualized within several central trends and themes that have emerged in American urban children’s literature. Claudia Mills observes that “American children’s books – in the tradition of American literature more generally – have both celebrated and castigated the city” (211). She compares Ruth Sawyer’s Roller Skates (1936) and Virginia Lee Burton’s The Little House (1942) to compare this opposition. Set in New York City during the 1890s, Roller Skates depicts the story of a ten year old protagonist during her year living in the city: “Lucinda roller skates all over Manhattan, making friends with people from all walks of life and blossoming into a vibrant, loving and loved child” (Hendrickson 43). In contrast, Burton’s classic picture book reads as a harsh critique of urbanity. The little house watches as the city builds up around her and the story ends in resolution only when the house is physically moved back to the country. Mills also explores two other early urban children’s books (both novels) The Saturdays by Elizabeth Enright (1941) and Betsy and Tacy Go Downtown by Maud Hart Lovelace (1943). For Mills, these two stories “offer a more qualified and ultimately ambivalent view of the city....[Moreover,] the celebration of the city is qualified by a simultaneous and competing celebration of the virtues of rural or small-town America” (211). She argues that “these texts therefore reflect attitudes toward the city that run deep in both American culture and American literature” (Mills 211-212).
In an examination of urban poetry for children, David Russell observes another related trend in current urban poetry for children. One trend represents dark depictions of city life and a "sense of displacement, sense of victimization." For many urban children's poets the city is represented as "impersonal, demeaning, the root of sorrow, the foundation of despair" (Russell 35). Much of the poetry Russell investigates exemplifies a social mission characteristic of American children's literature in the 1960s and 1970s. Russell remarks that "the great lesson of urban life" is that in "in the absence of the soothing sights and sounds of nature, we must look to each other for comfort and reassurance" (42).

In both historical and contemporary contexts for children's literature (but also other literary and artistic representations), the city is frequently a site for dislocation and alienation. Often these issues are explored in terms of the immigrant experience, or in terms of growing up in distinct socio-economic realities. City life is often juxtaposed with a previous experience outside the city or in the protagonist's original home country. These books focus on the anonymity of the large metropolis while showing the child protagonists attempts to build communities and homes within the dysfunction and dislocation. The social realism of Stevie by John Steptoe for example exemplifies that "the strongest theme in both... is that of loving and being loved in a context outside of one's immediate family" (Henrickson 48). Spaces of belonging and the definition of home become points of conflict in the urban environment in these texts.

Russell also observes that in contrast to dark, critical urban poetry, many poems for children set in the urban landscape are marked by an "adherence to a pastoral, idyll that looms behind so much of children' literature" (Russell 32). Langston Hughes' poem
for young readers “city” illustrates this pastoral influence. Hughes writes, “In the morning the city/ Spreads its wings/ Making a song/ In stone that sings/ In the evening the city / Goes to bed / Hanging lights/ About its head” (Hughes, cited in Russell 32).

Hughes’ city is infused with pastoral imagery, as well as a tone and rhyme pattern that is reminiscent of classic children’s nursery rhymes. Russell argues that “Hughes’s rather Wordsworthian attitude toward the city gives the urban landscape an almost pastoral flavour. The city comes to life like a great bird rising from its nest; the city noises are songs” (33).

Related to this pastoral influence, modern children’s novels and picture books increasingly take on innately magical and fantastical qualities or becomes the site for a (quasi)-fantastical realm. Magic realism’, a literary genre strongly associated with contemporary Latin American writers, “interweaves, in an ever-shifting pattern, a sharply etched realism in representing ordinary events and descriptive details together with fantastic and dreamlike elements” (Abrams 135). Comparatively, “enchanted realism” is genre of children’s literature that “gradually penetrates the imagination, blending fantasy and reality through a distortion of time and space”(Egoff 99). Sheila Egoff cites Lucy Boston’s The Children of the Green Knowe (1954), Philippa Pearce’s Tom’s Midnight Garden (1958) and Natalie Babbitt’s Tuck Everlasting (1975) as examples of the subtle fantasy of enchanted realism. Unlike purely fantastical texts where entirely distinct worlds are entered such as Narnia (Lewis), Wonderland (Carroll) or Neverland (Barrie), in these texts, the real human world becomes “enchanted” within a confined place or space, usually connected to the pastoral tradition, such as an ancient house, a small village or a garden. Within these spheres the lines between fantasy and reality become
blurred. In many children’s texts that are set in the city, urban spaces become the enchanted spaces. Examples of these places in children’s literature are numerous. In Felice Holman’s *Slake’s Limbo*, the New York subway and the Commodore Hotel become central images; in Kay Thompson’s *Eloise*, the Plaza Hotel becomes its own imaginative sphere for its young protagonist; in E.L. Konigsberg’s *The Mixed-Up-Files of Basil E. Frankweiler*, the Metropolitan Museum in New York becomes the site for exploration.

Many urban children’s texts, picture books especially, tend to be more straightforward, colourful, idealistic celebrations. The glorification of the aesthetic becomes central to the urban landscape as the multiple stimuli, and multi-sensory experiences of urban spaces are explored. The books tend to read like catalogues of aesthetic experiences. A celebration of the classic discourse surrounding urbanity comes into play here. According to Kennedy:

*In the formulation of the classic tradition of American urban studies [from the Chicago School onwards] urbanity is the phenomenon of collectivity which emerges from the close proximity of strangers and face-to-face relations in public urban space. It valorizes the multifarious forms of social interaction and interdependence of the city-- the erotic and aesthetic variety of street life, the close encounters with strangers, the freedoms of access and movement in public spaces -- positing these as the very essence of urban life and the necessary conditions of democratic citizenship* (3).

This modernist discourse of urbanity turns the urban critique of anonymous, alienating urban life on its head. Rather than viewing the city as a site of alienation,
where *no one* belongs, these texts celebrate the antithetical fact: *everyone* belongs in the chaos of the city. This idea is central to Maira Kalman’s *Next Stop Grand Central* (1999) whose New York City consists of a series of strange, chaotic, quirky and random characters perpetually in a state of bustle. In this picture book, Grand Central Station becomes an emblem for the city as a whole. *Next Stop* explains, “while you are sitting there, there is a place in New York City that is the busiest, fastest, biggest place there is” where “every day 500,000 people walk, run, dash, rush-criss-crossing on and off trains. It is such a madhouse, people say IT’S LIKE GRAND CENTRAL IN HERE!” (Kalman). The characters in *Grand Central* are caricatures whose identities are revealed through a few random details and traits. Character introductions in Kalman’s picture book include: “The woman with the blue pancake hat is going to Chinatown to buy Poo Nik Tea”; “The Oblensky twins are going to their tap dancing class in Carnegie Hall.” Rather than an emphasis on the identity-less anonymity that characterizes many urban representations, Kalman’s picture book illustrates the individuality and diversity that exists amidst the rush hour crowd. However, at the same time, despite the unique qualities allotted to these characters, the urban individuals in Kalman’s text remain transitory and do not evolve beyond two-dimensional figures.

In the enormity of the city, the child protagonists often find themselves in a playground full of caricature-like characters that are often adults. Related to the construction of childhood as a spatially separate sphere, in early works of enchanted realism, “childhood is seen as a state separate from adulthood and the adventures the children encounter are a product of their own devising, their own serious play and imaginings” (Egoff 100). However, while the adventures of city children continue to be a
product of their own imaginative play and schemes, the modern urban child protagonists seem far more connected with the adult world than their predecessors. Mary Beaty remarks, “Metropolitan kids float above the [Maurice Sendak’s] Night Kitchen, deprived of milk cows and turtles and tree houses and fishing holes. They swim in an ocean of adults, sometimes remarkably alone” (1). Louise Fitzhugh’s novel Harriet the Spy exemplifies this dual perspective; the young central characters are both heavily involved in, yet outside observers of the adult world of the city. Within the realm of Upper East Side Manhattan, Harriet lives out a quasi-fantasy as a “spy” and takes notes on her friends, and classmates as well as several adults. She spies on various adult characters that are constructed as a series of satiric caricatures.

Both Kay Thompson’s Eloise (A book for precocious grown ups) and Fitzhugh’s Harriet the Spy stand as models for the life of the New York Upper East side child living in an adult sphere with minimal parental involvement. Eloise as the quintessential New York self-defined “city child” protagonist is spunky, talkative, imaginative, precocious, curious, mischievous and vastly self-absorbed. Like Harriet, Eloise is a keen participant in and observer of the adult world in the hotel where she lives. The Plaza becomes its own playful and imaginative world for Eloise where the busboys, musicians, maids and nanny reveal random stories and information about urban life. Compared to the adult characters in Harriet, the adult characters in Eloise seem more playful, even parodic. Comparable to Kalman’s character descriptions in Grand Central, Eloise’s descriptions of characters seem to capture, without direct critique, the random, eccentric individuals and transitory relationships that exist within the realm of the Plaza.
The urban representations in Ezra Jack Keats’s early picture books, *The Snowy Day* (1962) and *Whistle for Willie* (1964) have inspired the content and style of many contemporary picture books that focus on the everyday life of children in urban settings. Keats’s illustrations are textured with paint and mixed media collage, pieces of newspapers among other torn items add to expressionistic painted backgrounds. Keats’s *Apt. 3* (1971) also takes place on a rainy day in the city and draws attention to the multisensory experiences of city life, specifically in the enclosed world of an apartment building. The story begins with the rain that “beat[s] against the windows, softening the sounds of the city” (Keats). Sam hears the sad sound of a harmonica from somewhere in his building and with his brother Ben goes to find its source. As the brothers explore their building, the reader is introduced to the details of sound and smell that may be found behind each apartment door. The overall atmosphere of both the text and illustrations integrates mundane details with the mysterious almost fantastical discovery of the man with the harmonica. The theme of this picture book is the celebration of the everyday discoveries and adventures in urban childhood.

The multicultural and immigrant experiences of urban life are also common themes in contemporary urban picture books. *Chinatown* by William Low (1997), *Peppe the Lamplighter* (1993) by Elisa Bartone and illustrated by Ted Lewin, and *What Zeesie Saw on Delancey Street* by Elsa Okon Rael, illustrated by Marjorie Priceman (1996), all capture immigrant experiences in New York City during a range of historical time periods. Eleanor Schick’s *City in the Summer* (1969) depicts a simple story of New York City in the summer where “there was no place to go to get away. No place but the roof, with the water tanks and the chimneys and the laundry, and the old man’s flock of
pigeons.” The illustrations of the street and the beach are full of children and parents from a range of ethnicities. The storefronts (precursors to those in Sis’s Madlenka also exemplify the multicultural nature of many neighbourhoods in a large city: Tony’s Pizzeria, Sam Katz’s kosher meats and Tom Lee’s laundry.

Taro Yashima’s picture book Umbrella (1958) also represents a culturally infused New York City in its story about a young Japanese-American girl who uses her umbrella and walks down the street by herself for the first time. The protagonist of Umbrella is introduced in terms of her cultural background as well as her birthplace in New York: “Momo is the name of a little girl who was born in New York. The word Momo means ‘the peach’ in Japan where her father and mother used to live”. Moreover, Japanese characters in painted calligraphy and their meanings such as, “Spring” and “Rain,” are drawn sporadically on the top left hand corner of several pages of text. This inclusion creates an interesting juxtaposition with the city scenes on the facing illustrated pages.

Picture books often capture the green spaces and parks of the city. Charles R. Smith Jr. captures basketball on street courts around the city in Rimshots: Basketball Pix, Rolls, and Rhythms (1999), Bein’ with You This Way, written by W. Nickola-Lisa. And illustrated by Michael Bryant (1994), takes place in Washington Square Park, and The Park Book by Charlotte Zolotow, illustrated by H.A. Rey, chronicles a day in the life of the park. The Gardener (1997) by Sarah Stewart, illustrated by David Small, depicts a Depression era story about a resourceful farm girl’s visit to the big city and captures tenement life in the Lower East Side. This story has shades of the country mouse and city mouse dialectic as well as the immigrant experience. Urban animals (whether anthropomorphic human stand-ins or realistic urban dwellers) are frequent characters in
urban picture books. The Two Reds by William Lipkind, illustrated by Nicolas Mordvinoff (1950) follows Red the boy and Red the cat who both live in the East Village. In Amos Vogel’s How Little Lori Visited Times Square Maurice Sendak (1963) a young boy gets sidetracked and is helped by a New York turtle.


Several recent picture books involve a celebration of specific areas in the city. Harlem, for example, has become the site for a variety of stories including The Block (1995), based on a poem by Langston Hughes and illustrated by Romare Bearden. The illustrations were originally a six panel multi-media collage. Similarly, Uptown (2000) by Brian Collier is a collage tribute to Harlem. The picture book Harlem (2000) by Walter Dean Myers with collage and paint illustrations by his son Christopher Myers. This picture book in poetry and visual images pays homage to Harlem’s significance in African-American history.
The three focal texts of this analysis, Peter Sis' *Madlenka* (2000), Jeannie Baker's *Home in the Sky* (1984), and Christopher Myers’ *Black Cat* (1999), exemplify many of the emerging themes and discourses outlined in this section. In their contemporary representations of New York City, these three focal texts are often informed by earlier and classic representations in urban picture books.

**g. Application of the literature review**

In the analysis, I examine how the spatial discourses of childhood in these picture books elucidate the construction of modern and post-modern childhood space within the urban context. This picture book analysis is informed by: work on space and critical geography; the geographies of children and young people; the spatial analysis of urban representation; children's literature and imaginative geography; the social discourses of childhood and childhood space; and the emerging themes in North American urban picture books. The theoretical frames set up in this literature review act to contextualize my analysis within multi-disciplinary approaches and discourses.
3. THEORETICAL FRAME AND METHOD FOR ANALYSIS

a. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to examine the spatial discourses of childhood as represented within the urban landscape of contemporary North American children’s picture books. This examination utilizes a multi-leveled framework that applies the broader discourse of urban studies and the multi-disciplinary research on childhood and children’s geographies to the analysis of children’s literature. As outlined in the literature review, this examination is informed theoretically by critical and post-modern geography; the geography of children and young people; work related to the social discourses of childhood; and by urban studies discourses related to literary and artistic representations of space. The literature review also situates the analysis of urban contemporary picture books in the context of the emerging themes historically in North American urban picture books.

I employ a multi-disciplinary methodology for the analysis of contemporary urban picture books that is framed by spatial metaphors and vocabulary (spaces, landscape, children’s geographies and mapping). The methodologies are further influenced by Michel Foucault’s theories of discourse, as reinterpreted by Gillian Rose for the analysis of visual images. I specifically use the concept of socially produced space as a tool to analyze how urban childscapes are discursively mapped in contemporary urban picture books.
b. Research questions

Due to the nature of the research and analysis proposed, the research question consists of two parts:

• *How do contemporary North American picture books construct and map urban childscapes (spatial geographies of childhood within the urban landscape) through text, visual images and paratextual elements, particularly in terms of urban imaginary representations of New York City post-1980?*

• *How do these representations reveal, reflect and/or critique the socio-cultural discourses related to real and imagined childhood space and experience within the urban landscape?*

The first question is primarily descriptive in terms of defining a children’s spatial geography of the urban landscape represented in the picture books. The second question is analytical in nature, drawing on a multi-disciplinary framework to examine how these spatial representations are constituted by a number of socio-cultural discourses.

c. Theoretical frame and method for analysis

I mobilize a Foucauldian *discourse analysis* that draws on elements of a more conventional compositional analysis (for visual images/illustration) and close textual analysis (for text). The theoretical framework outlined above heavily informs this analysis. The examination is particularly influenced by the central theoretical notion that space is socially constructed and embedded with social, political and cultural ideologies. I utilize a critical visual and textual methodology for analyzing picture books to focus on
the interconnected discourses around urban landscapes, childhood, urban childhood space and the conventions of children's picture books. I wish to offer a compositional and close textual analysis of the stylistic features to examine how these features (line, tone, colour, voice, imagery etc.) construct, reflect, and critique social constructions of urban childhood spaces. These close readings inform an analysis of discourses related to the representations of childhood spaces and the urban landscape. In my analysis, intertextuality, as outlined below, will be integral to contextualizing each text visually and textually within a framework of overlapping discourses and histories.

(1) Discourse Analysis

In my analysis, I will examine the representation of “space” and the consequential spatial metaphors in order to elucidate discourses of modern and post-modern urban childhood. Michel Foucault’s influential work, particularly in History of Sexuality (1978) informs this discourse analysis as reinterpreted by Gillian Rose in Visual Methodologies (2001) Rose explains that discourse “refers to groups of statements which structure the way a thing is thought, and the way we act on the basis of that thinking….discourse is a particular knowledge about the world which shapes how the world is understood and how things are done in it” (Rose 136). According to this understanding of discourse, ‘art’ becomes “not certain kinds of visual images but the knowledges, institutions, subjects and practices which work to define certain images as art and others as not” (Rose 136).

Rose distinguishes between Foucault’s two methodological emphases. She defines “discourse analysis I” in terms of its focus on “the notion of discourse as
articulated through various kinds of visual images and verbal texts than it does to the
practices entailed by specific discourses”, while “discourse analysis II” tends to pay more
attention to the practice of institutions than it does to the visual images and verbal
texts... [and] tends to be more explicitly concerned with issues of power, regimes of truth,
institutions and technologies” (Rose 140). My examination and analysis of picture books
may be classified under “discourse analysis I” as I will primarily focus on discourses
articulated through visual images and verbal texts. However, elements of “discourse
analysis II”, in terms of power, institutions, and technologies, will implicitly inform and
underline many elements of the analysis. As in most analyses, the construction of the
social world through images reflects specific understandings and knowledge(s) that are
informed by broader institutions. Often the discourse dynamics involved in visual
images and verbal texts microcosmically represent the dynamics of power and knowledge
that exist between discourses on a larger scale. As Tonkiss argues “the discourse analyst
seeks to open up statements to challenge, interrogate taken-for-granted meanings, and
disturb easy claims to objectivity in the texts they are reading” (cited in Rose 160).

The focus of discourse analysis I is the social modality at the site of the image
itself, the social production and effects of discourses: the “more socially constituted
forms of discursive power, looking at the social construction of difference and authority”
(Rose 141). My emphasis will be on the social modality of picture books. However, I am
also interested in how compositional and technological aspects inform and are informed
by social issues and practices related to the images and text. Discourse analysis implies a
concern “with the discursive production of some kind of authoritative account – and
perhaps too about how that account was or is contested – and with the social practices
both in which that production is embedded and which it itself produces" (Rose 142). The picture books I examine represent both dominant and resistant discourses surrounding urban childhood in North America.

(2) *Visuality*

Theoretical works related to the conceptualization of urban space often illustrate the operations of power at play in terms of visuality in urban spaces: “space is hierarchical-zoned, segregated, gated-and encodes both freedoms and restrictions- of mobility, of access of vision- in the city” (Kennedy 11). These boundary lines determine what access we have to read, understand meanings, and frame the urban landscape. Since an understanding of the visuality is integrally related to defining a child’s eye view or children’s geography of the urban landscape, I utilize Gillian Rose’s definition of visuality in *Visual Methodologies* (2001). Rose distinguishes between *vision* and *visuality* in the interpretation of visual images. While *vision* is “what the human eye is physiologically capable of seeing”, *visuality* “refers to the way in which vision is constructed in various ways: how we see, how we are able, allowed, or made to see...the ways in which both what is seen and how it is seen are culturally constructed” (Rose 6). Moreover, visuality is as much about what a viewer is able to see, as it is about what has been omitted, absent, or beyond our sight lines. The connection between space and visuality is a significant to the representation of urban childscapes.

This study also takes into account the social effects of images--particularly those constructed by adults for children--keeping in mind the multitude of possibilities for playful and sophisticated resistant readings on the part of adults and children engaging
with these texts. Although the focus of my discourse analysis is the construction of visual images, I am aware of the role of audience for picture books. Are these individuals referenced, implicitly addressed in the texts themselves? Visuality may be constructed through both the visual images and textual elements of a picture book. Certainly, many picture books (particularly those with poetic style) tend to be as visually (or sensory) focused in their word choices.

The significance of visual images in picture books also leads to the concept of a visual culture. Visual culture implies more than the artifacts themselves; it implies all the institutions, practices, and performances related to viewing/seeing visual images. In examining picture books, I am interested in how the stylistic and compositional elements of the children's picture book text are embedded in ideologies, concepts, implicit ways of seeing and social constructions, rather than what these mean in terms of artistic or literary merit. Moreover, I am interested in how these elements may be contextualized in a variety of ways in a series of interrelated discourses. Descriptive qualities of compositional analysis will be used as a springboard for a more extensive discourse analysis with an emphasis on the spatial organization and perspective as central compositional elements in picture book representations.

(3) Intertextuality

Literary critic Wirth-Nesher observes that the "[c]ity text is a palimpsest...of the history of its representation in art, religion, politics – in any number of cultural discourses" (11). Within this frame, the urban picture book may be seen as a multi-layered site for the histories and discourses of classic and contemporary texts to coincide
to create new meanings. The concept of intertextuality, first coined by Julie Kristeva, refers to "the ways in which written and visual texts were interrelated but also to the text of one's own life, as a collection of various overlapping experiences" (Sipe 256). Moreover, in an examination of visual culture, intertextuality "refers to the way that the meanings of any one discursive image or text depend not only on that one text or image, but also on the meanings carried by other images and texts" (Rose 136). Intertextuality is an integral element in this analysis in order to elucidate the historical and contemporary discourses at play in these picture book texts. Many contemporary, post-modern picture books exemplify this type of resistant discourse. In what ways are these picture books articulating dominant hegemonic discourses about social relations and in what manner are some of these picture books posing a resistant discourse that critiques or responds to other often dominant discourses? Many of these resistant texts respond to other texts in order to articulate their critique.

As previously stated, this analysis is heavily informed by the central theoretical notion that space is socially constructed and embedded with social, political, and cultural ideologies. This theoretical frame may be applied to the representation of the urban landscape in children's picture books. I utilize a critical visual and textual methodology for analyzing picture books to focus on the interconnected discourses around urban landscapes, childhood, urban childhood space and the conventions of children's picture books. Due to the nature of picture books as related to visual culture, visuality is linked closely with spatial discourses in this analysis. Intertextuality will also be integral to contextualizing each text visually and textually within a framework of overlapping discourses and histories.
d. Selection of picture books

This examination will involve the close textual and visual analysis of three focal picture book texts. The primary selected texts for analysis are:

Madlenka (2000) written and illustrated by Peter Sis (2000);

My choices of picture book texts are informed by Perry Nodelman (1988) and by Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott’s theoretical discussion on the unique relationship between pictures and word in children’s picture books rather than illustrated story books (2001). I have chosen texts where the text and illustration are equally important in terms of meaning and narrative. In these texts, the visual and textual representation may be read collaboratively or may each stand alone as a distinct narrative (Nikolajeva 6). Moreover, these picture books involve visual representations that may function as powerful spatial foci for the reader in terms of the relationship between space and vision in the urban landscape as well as children’s geographies. I have chosen picture books where the representation of urban spaces becomes intrinsic to the construction of meaning and narrative rather than merely a backdrop or a stage for the story. I have also aimed to choose texts that show unique or specifically child’s eye view perspectives of the city, providing rich texts for a discussion of childhood space and children’s geographies.

I have chosen contemporary picture books from the most recent period of children’s literature, post-1980. I feel that these books, often post-modern in style,
narrative and illustration lend themselves to a layered, multi-disciplinary spatial analysis framed by post-modern geography theory. In distinct manners, the selected picture books incorporate the post-modern elements of: collage (both visual and textual); use of paratextual elements to create new meanings; shifts in point of view; and the fragmentation of visual or textual narration. These stylistic elements play distinct roles in the construction of a contemporary urban landscape. Moreover, the picture books texts I have chosen for this analysis mark a transition from an earlier modernist and classic tradition of children’s books that often represented an opposition between rural and urban life. I wish to observe how these oppositions and constructions of childhood landscapes have changed or played out in these contemporary urban texts. As explained in the literature review, all of the selected texts are based in the imaginary urban landscape of New York City in order to focus the scope of the examination as well as to allow the analysis to compare shared localized meanings.

4. THE ANALYSIS OF PICTURE BOOKS

a. Introduction to the analysis: The urban picture book as theater and battleground

The streets of the poor quarters of great cities are, above all, a theater and a battleground
In response to Helen Levitt’s photography and films of children’s street play in East Harlem, New York City in the 1930s and 1940s, Ellen Handy remarked, “a great city such as New York is a continuing theatrical presentation in which adults and children, inhabitants and visitors, are woven together in complex relationships as performers and audience, a performance in which viewers are urged to enter as fellow actors” (207). Comparatively, Uri Shulevitz, a well known American children’s picture book author/illustrator, writes that “a picture book becomes naturally a dramatic experience: direct, immediate, vivid, moving... the kinship between picture books and theatre or film, the silent film in particular, becomes evident” (240). Picture books are more than a map of child space; rather, they are a landscape of the imagination, an adult and societal imaginary construction of childhood spaces and experiences in the city. The landscape frames the picture book space in the same way that a dramatic performance is framed by the conventions theatre, or a game is framed by a board, rules, and limitations.

In many ways, the theatrical elements of both the city street and the picture book meet in the space of the contemporary urban picture book. The space of the urban picture book becomes “a theater and a battleground” for the spatial dynamics of the urban landscape and childhood to be mapped out (Handy 207). The effect is twofold. The genre conventions of picture books and children’s literature (closely linked to social constructions of childhood and childhood space) easily allow for the fantasies of urbanity to be drawn onto the imaginary urban landscape. Moreover, children and the city have long been connected to the potential for the future of the society, and both concepts...
function as perpetually changing hypotheses for the future. These future-oriented discourses often underline the writing and production of children’s literature, particularly picture books directed at younger readers.

(1) Defining urban childscape

The term *urban childscape* is used in this analysis as a way to examine the spatial geographies of childhood within the urban landscape. In *Landscapes of the Mind: Worlds of Sense and Metaphor* (1990), J. Douglas Porteous reworks the term *landscape* to explore landscapes of metaphor in literature and art. Porteous attempts to push the concept of landscape past the solely visual to the non-visual sensory modes of: “smellscapes” and “soundscapes” and the conceptual landscapes of “deathscape, bodyscape, homescape and childscape” (Porteous 1990). In this picture book analysis, the concept of childscape incorporates the spatial dynamics of the picture book itself in the construction and framing of a specific landscape. The childscapes of picture books may include multi-sensory modes and auditory elements in conjunction with visual characteristics. These landscapes are multi-faceted, diverse and layered, and often emphasize sensory or tactile aspects of the urban landscape in ways that adult literature may not.

Building on this notion of the childscape, this analysis understands landscape as including the elements of the picture book text as a whole: the visual, textual and paratextual elements. My definition of paratextual elements includes: the title page, covers and endpapers (Nickolaeva 72-73). The focal books for analysis are all artistic representations of urban space that call attention to themselves as a representations through the visual, textual, and paratextual elements. In addition, these elements may
"reflect the characteristics of the modern world by including the verbal cacophony (oral and visual) of today's life" (Nickolaeva 74). Often in the bound imaginary landscapes of picture books, the stylistic elements of illustration and text, collage, auditory, and visual representations all take part in the construction of a child's-eye view of the urban landscape. What are the childscapes of urban picture books? What discourses do they reveal? How do these representations reveal, reflect and/or critique the socio-cultural discourses related to real and imagined childhood space and experience within the urban landscape?

(2) Spatial themes and discourses for analysis

I specifically use the concept of socially produced space as a tool to analyze how urban childscapes are discursively mapped in contemporary urban picture books. In these texts, childhood space tends to exemplify several distinct spatial themes rooted in the social constructions of childhood (and dominant discourses surrounding Western childhood) in general. These key spatial themes include: containment or bound space; space laden with boundary or demarcation lines; liminal spaces or elements (in-between sites of a transitory nature); dynamic relationships between interior and exterior spaces, between safe and dangerous spaces, public and private spaces; fantasy/enchanted spaces and real spaces; home and play spaces. These spatial themes guide this analysis of urban childscapes represented in contemporary picture books.

Informed by the broader theoretical frames outlined in the literature review, I arrived at these key spatial categories to guide the analysis, by drawing on spatial ideologies and imagery defined and explored in the critical geography of children and
childhood. The spatial studies in Holloway and Valentine’s volume *Children’s Geographies and the New Social Studies of Childhood* exemplify what has been defined as the “new social studies of childhood”. Among the aims of this field of study:

“geographical work on children, highlight[s] the difference that place makes, the importance of the different sites of everyday life and the spatial imagery in ideologies of childhood” (Holloway and Valentine 1). Moreover, spatial discourses “elucidate the links between childhood as a discursive construction and a variety of spatial discourses, including those focusing on the home, the city street, the rural idyll and national identity” (Holloway and Valentine 15). This analysis may be situated in relation to this field of work in its application of these spatial categories to the field of children’s literature and the representation of childhood in picture book texts.

Feminist multi-disciplinary work, including literature and geography explores the relationships between women, bodies and space (Higonnet 1994). While women are often conceptualized as confined within space in the domestic interior space of the home, children provide a shifting position between confinement to a specific space and creative movement within boundaries. These texts often exemplify a child’s geography of the urban landscape mapped out through the everyday experience of liminal sites: a tour through the “in between” spaces of the city. My definition of liminality stems from Victor W. Turner’s theoretical text “Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*” and on James Clifford’s article “Traveling Cultures”. The word “liminal” comes from the Latin word *limen* that means *threshold* and the liminal state may be seen as the period of ambiguity as an individual crosses a metaphorical threshold. Turner defines “liminality” as “betwixt or between...in a period of transition between states”
Moreover, the liminal state may be seen as the period of ambiguity where individuals "are neither one thing nor another; or may be both; or neither here nor there; or may even be nowhere" (Turner 236). Building on this concept of liminality, theorist James Clifford discusses the liminal qualities of places "of transit, not of residence" such as the "hotel, a station, airport terminal, hospital and so on: somewhere you pass through, where the encounters are fleeting, arbitrary" (Clifford 96). Many of these texts provide maps for places of residence, transit and play in the city.

(4) Discursive mapping

Each of these three picture book representations exemplifies a distinct discursive mapping of an urban childscape. Interrelated spatial discourses of childhood and urbanity are embedded within these mappings. Moreover, the type and act of mapping itself is informed by overriding discourses and conventions related to the production of children’s literature, and picture books themselves. I use the concept of the picture book as a specific type of discursive map to guide the analysis of interrelated spatial themes (outlined above) and discourses at play in the representations.

In Sis’s Madlenka, the format of the picture book becomes spatially a game board of a city block. The picture book utilizes the overriding discourse related to a fantasy game board to map the urban childscape. The visual narrative becomes a game played with and between interior and exterior spaces. In Baker’s Home in the Sky, the picture book takes on the spatial conventions of a miniature toy theatre set where a parable of urbanity plays out in a miniature urban childscape often viewed from above or at a distance. In Myers’s Black Cat, the picture book moves forward spatially through the
childscape in a post-modern street game between visual and verbal texts. Not quite hide and seek, not quite follow the leader, with the echo of double-dutch skipping rhymes, *Black Cat* is a question and answer game played on the boundary-laden urban childscape that may be characterized more as a battleground than a theatre. Thus, the analyses both define and dismantle the spatial construction of the urban childscapes in the picture books at hand; however, these analyses also elucidate how the overriding discursive mappings of the picture book representations inform the spatial discourses at play. How do these contemporary North American picture books construct and map urban childscapes through text, visual images and paratextual elements? Moreover, how do these representations reveal, reflect and/or critique the socio-cultural discourses related to real and imagined childhood space and experience within the urban landscape?
b. Peter Sis’s *Madlenka*: The city block as fantasy game board

Peter Sis’s *Madlenka* (2000) narrates the story of a young girl who goes on a short adventure around one city block in New York City. Madlenka’s journey hinges upon entry into different multicultural shops around the block, where Madlenka enters different fantasy-infused worlds. The urban childscape in *Madlenka* is represented through a primarily visual narrative that may be read as a celebration of childhood imagination, cultural mythologies and pluralistic urban life. Most of the story in this picture book is told through several layers of visual texts (often a series of distinct spatial maps), with the verbal texts merely functioning as simple signposts to move the narrative from visual adventure to visual adventure. At each page turn, the reader is engaged in a pop-up- book type experience as paper cut openings on several pages allow images from later pages to peek through.

On Madlenka’s journey around one block, each store or shop includes its own subjective multicultural exploration into a new place for both the protagonist and reader. Each page of this picture book may be viewed as a new blueprint for the city block and reveals a multi-layered journey to another country or continent. For example, Madlenka first encounters the bakery and Mr. Gaston, the French Baker. With a turn of the page, the figure of the protagonist from the page before may be seen through a window (a cut-out segment in the paper). However, she is now surrounded by a two-page spread of a fantastical, dream-like depiction of France; Parisian landmarks sit on top of cakes that float on an aesthetic, deep blue background. This visual effect repeats several times as Madlenka’s adventure continues to Mr. Singh’s shop (India), an Italian ice-cream truck (Italy), and other journeys to Latin America, Germany, Africa and Asia. The book
concludes when Madlenka is asked where she has been and she responds: "Well... I went around the world." In this picture book, the contained space of one city block acts as an entry portal, a liminal sphere where Madlenka may go on a fantastical, multicultural adventure.

(1) Crossing the threshold: between exterior and interior spaces

In both the visual and written texts, Madlenka immediately situates the story in the geography of the city, while simultaneously creating fantastical imaginary space for the narrative to unfold. The first line of text reads, "In the universe, on a planet, on a continent, in a country, in a city, on a block, in a house, in a window, in the rain, a little girl named Madlenka finds out her tooth wiggles." This fairytale-like beginning line of the verbal text simultaneously focuses the story to a specific city place and creates a timeless, almost magical universality. However, even before, the reader has encountered the verbal text, the visual narrative of the story has already begun in the endpages, title pages and book cover and jacket, pulling the space of the story into the specificity of an urban setting and a fantasy-laden childscape simultaneously. The endpages of the text reveal two views of what might be earth, with a small dot indicating where the adventure of the book may begin. The first view of earth is quite small, as if we are flying in from outer space. The facing page displays a closer, more detailed view of water and continents that begins to spatially situate the story in a particular place. Notably, the earth represented is not a realistically accurate depiction of earth, but rather an artistic rendering of a "planet"; the continents are meshed together and the scale of water to land masses is exaggerated and distorted. The story is localized further on the title and facing
page. A close look at the title page reveals several miniature, distinct views of the one city block and facing the title page is blueprint map of a city (implicitly New York City).

The cover of *Madlenka* reveals the central themes of the text before the reader has opened the picture book. While the dust jacket depicts the inverted tunnel view of the protagonist's city block, a cutout square in the jacket reveals the image of blonde and smiling Madlenka underneath, as she is depicted on the actual cover of the book. If the dust jacket is removed, the reader observes Madlenka, complete in yellow rubber boots and yellow umbrella, flying over a fantasyland, an amorphous continent with elements of distinct places sticking out from a green area in the centre. Images include: the leaning tower of Pisa, the Eiffel tower, an elephant and a volcano in the distance. Even from the cover, the picture book introduces itself as a text focused on the concept of real and imaginary geographies; the interactions between interior and exterior spaces. The cover is at once the physical map of the one city block and the fantasyland that exists within the bounds of this contained space. Similar to the map of Peter Pan’s Neverland, this map is both of Madlenka’s fantasyland and a map of the protagonist’s mind in many respects. This multi-layered depiction of city block on the cover initially alludes to the blurring of real and fantasy, interior and exterior boundary lines that are integral to the construction of a childscape in this picture book.

While the map of Madlenka’s urban childscape may be easily compared to fantasylands of children’s books past, the means by which Madlenka reaches the fantasy sphere is distinct. The Neverland of Barrie’s *Peter Pan* may be reached by an all night flight, over and away from London with the right leader and the secret -- *second-star-to-the-right-and-straight-on-till-morning* -- directions. Similarly, the secret-holding, urban
children of Silverstein’s poem, lead their readers by foot to a place away from the city, “where the sidewalk ends.” Comparatively, rather than moving outside, up or away from the urban landscape, Madlenka’s secret world is found by moving inwards, within the urban space of the city block. The urban childscape depicted in this picture book is certainly a fantasy, separated from the reality of urban experience; yet, it is inspired by and embedded within the urban space itself.

(2) The city block becomes spatial game

Although it seems merely to be an aerial view at first, the first view of Madlenka’s city block is actually an inverted view. The block has been flipped inside out. The outsides of the shops are displayed inside the block and the treetops of the courtyard peer over the top. The effect is similar to that of reading a two-way optical illusion. It seems as though the reader is looking down a tunnel and looking up from the bottom of a hole simultaneously. The next view on the facing page shows Madlenka with her umbrella, standing at the bottom of the image, looking up at the city block that spins like a wheel. With her announcement of her “tooth is l-o-o-o-se”, the lettering of the text wiggles like her tooth itself. The adventure is truly initiated and intensified by the spinning lights around the wheel of a city block. The lights added along the edge of the image give the sense of a ferris wheel or a roulette wheel, signaling the possible beginning of a game. The spinning image also moves the story into a distinct realm with references to “down the rabbit hole” as in Carroll’s Alice in Wonderland or being spun inside a tornado as in the film interpretation of Baum’s Wizard of Oz as Dorothy is taken to Oz.
When the page is turned, the next image is a two-dimensional representation of Madlenka's block. At this point, the spinning stops and the box collapses into a game board. The game may begin on square one of a two-dimensional game board of the city block. The bakery is Madlenka's first stop (square one) on the block. This act of spinning and then falling flat into a (often two-dimensionally mapped) fantasyland relates to the characteristic spatial conventions of the entry into a classic children's literature fantasyland or a child's fantasy game.

Not unlike Dorothy's Kansas home, swept up into the middle of the tornado, the city block has been dislocated from the surrounding elements of the urban landscape. The city block is isolated, and separated from traffic of cars and people running through to other areas. The city block has been detached, spun around and dropped flat onto a blank background, to be examined and adventured through from various perspectives. Comparable to many children's fantasies, Madlenka at this point becomes a spatial game of a liminal nature and boundaries become blurred in the movement from outside to inside and vice versa. Within the containment of one city block, the boundaries between external and internal landscapes become fluid. The external landscape becomes internalized while the internal landscapes of Madlenka's imaginings diffuse into and inform the external landscape. The urban childscape of this picture book inhabits the space between external and internal landscapes.

Often in order to read the verbal and visual texts, the reader needs to physically turn the book around, inspiring an imaginative game and beginning the spinning on the following page that leads Madlenka and the reader into a fantasy space. The hands-on, pop-up book nature of the text, beginning with the cover and continuing through the
entire text, stylistically enables movement through boundary lines. These stylistic elements of the text that require the physical engagement of the reader also relate to the connection between the spatial dynamics of picture books and the spatial nature of childhood games and childhood play in general.

Sis’s picture books, Madlenka and its sequel Madlenka’s Dog are sophisticated, challenging, detailed and graphic in symbolism, content and design. The details of his images require the reader to engage with both images and text; to search for intertextual and cultural clues hidden often in his backdrops, borders and paratextual elements (as illustrated in his cover and endpages in Madlenka). The written and visual texts in Sis’ most recent works such as Tibet through the Red Box (1998) may be perceived along a continuum of meaning rather than as separate entities. Don Latham cites Lawrence R. Sipe’s definition of “synergy” to describe the effect of this relationship between visual and textual elements in Sis’ work. He explains that the result is “the total effect depends not only on the union of the text and illustrations but also on the perceived interactions or transactions between these parts” (Latham 189). The stylistic elements of the text add to the relationship between picture book and games. His style is intensely microcosmic in detail, and at times there is an overwhelming amount of information and detail hidden in the illustrations. For example, one two-page spread in Madlenka in the representation of Mrs. Grimm’s imaginative German world, there is a similarity here between Martin Handford’s Where’s Waldo (1987) and the experience of searching for Madlenka amidst the overlapping fairytale images. Moreover, Sis’s attention to detail extends to the paratextual elements of each work, notably including the cover art, endpapers, dust
jacket, titles, liner notes etc., and these details highlight the post-modern tendencies in his work.

This play with conventions in these picture books strengthens the connections with discourses surrounding the play spaces of children in two ways. Firstly, in the representation of the picture book as a child play space itself, and secondly in the representation of Madlenka’s play space as contained and bound. The representation of Madlenka’s journey also conforms to the conventions of board games, dramatic pretend games and interactive street games such as hopscotch and ‘town’. The representation of play space in Madlenka alludes to the rules and limitations by which the game may be played in the way space is marked to allot the spatial boundaries of the game. This allusion to childhood games has implications for not only the practical experience of reading the picture book as a game; but also reflects the discourse of childhood spaces as sites for bound play and implies that confined space is defined as a safe place for play.

(3) Mapping the urban childscape: What is a child’s eye view?

In The Practice of Everyday Life (1984), Michel de Certeau claims that “every story is a travel story - a spatial practice” (115). I am particularly interested in how the concept of “spatial stories” plays out in the children’s geographies in urban picture books, particularly Madlenka. De Certeau sees space as “a practiced place” (117). Building on this concept, de Certeau theorizes that “the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into space by walkers. In the same way the act of reading is the space produced by the practice of a particular place: i.e. a written text” (117). He further defines the distinctions between narrative “tours” and narrative “maps” (de Certeau 118-
de Certeau describes these narrative “maps” as geographical descriptions, for example the map narrative, “the girls’ room is next to the kitchen” (119). In comparison, narrative “tours” are experiential guides. For example a tour narrative may be: “you turn right and come into the living room” (119). What spatial stories are being told about the urban landscape in Sis’s Madlenka?

At the core of Madlenka is an underlying visual narrative that plays with the representation of space, particularly in terms of maps. This picture book is innately about children’s geographies. Sis’s picture book presents three distinct views of the city block to its reader and in doing so creates three interrelated maps and representations of childhood space in the urban landscape. These become blueprints for the game that Madlenka will play as she goes around the city block. Madlenka’s itinerary around the block is plotted on two-dimensional maps, while her experiences within the stores, shops and courtyard are distinctly spatial stories, drawn out like individual theatre sets and representing the internal imagination. These one or two page spreads of different worlds are rich colour spreads, surrealist or mythic in their colour, detail and spatial depth. These contrast the two-dimensional coloured maps of the city block that are self-conscious representations of a journey. Madlenka directly alludes to the external and internal imaginings of experience as they relate to the city. The different perspectives of the block presented throughout the text elucidate several understandings related to children’s experience of space and play.

The two-dimensional itinerary maps exemplify an aerial view of the block and a linear flow of associations to place (for example, listing characters from Grimm’s fairytales or elements of the rainforest). In comparison, the visual journeys through the
shops illustrate imaginings that are more spatial than temporal; that are lateral rather than linear. While all the maps are heavily visual, the two-dimensional maps seem to play into discourse around the multi-sensory concept of child experience. These representations also allude to the classic discourse of urbanity that celebrates the multiple realms of experience one may have moving through urban spaces. Many sections draw on multi-sensory associations including olfactory and auditory descriptors of place. Each map of the block draws on different sets of knowledge we collect to create a sense of place, be they random smells, sounds, visual images and associations.

The voice of the adventure seems to be an omniscient storytelling voice, while the text (written distinctly) on the two dimensional maps of Madlenka’s itinerary seems to be a child’s voice. For example, one two-dimensional map describes Eduardo’s store as "feel[ing] like a rainforest", and uses a textual and pictorial list that includes “forest, rain, butterflies.” These textual and visual mappings represent a visceral world that is infused with associations and multi-sensory experience. The worlds of each store maintain Sis’s characteristic style of pen and ink and printmaking; however, each adventure is informed by the iconic or characteristic style of culture and place as, for example, the block colours and circles of Tibet and East Asia (extensively explored in his other text Tibet Through the Red Box) and the stylized of images of south Asian painting. Sis’s focus is the literary and artistic symbols and associations of the cultures and countries rather than the real-life experiences of these places. The worlds of Sis are often complete with secret images, faces, haunting trees and buildings. In Madlenka’s play with Cleo in the courtyard, the trees seem to hide the images of animals. In Sis’s The Three Golden Keys (1994), secret faces seem to haunt buildings in Sis’s childhood city of
Prague, ghosts from the past of the historical city and from his own childhood that haunt his revisit to the city in this picture book.

In his introduction to the collection of anthropological papers in *The Cultural Meaning of Urban Space* (1993), Gary McDonogh remarks that "in cities people force the spaces around them to take on meaning. No space is permitted to be neutral or homogenous (McDonogh xiii). When Madlenka adventures first to Mr. Gaston the French baker, we are introduced to three distinct ways to experience this segment of the city block 1) the aerial view of the block, a two dimensional map that has been marked with Madlenka's subjective experience and the front of the shop. When the page is turned and Madlenka is transported inside the bakery, the world is the imaginary experience of Paris and France. Perhaps these are stories that Mr. Gaston tells, perhaps these are collective imaginings about Paris, and perhaps these are Madlenka's imaginings. These visual narratives are about storytelling but rather than tell the reader through verbal text what Madlenka discovers, experiences, or imagines, the visual images leave this discovery for the readers to experience themselves through examination of the visual images. Each Parisian landmark in Gaston's bakery is positioned on top of a swirling cake and these swirling cakes seem to be flying above the ceiling of the bakery, the walls dissipating into the page.

(4) Home space as fantasy space

Madlenka's home is depicted in grays and as two-dimensional. The parents at the end of the story are depicted as empty silhouettes frozen in tableau. Home seems empty, merely a window where we see Madlenka sitting alone in the beginning of the story. The
courtyard is related to home (as is the block) but there is freedom to imagine. It is only when she goes downstairs for her adventure around the block that the images become infused with colour (much as the images do in the film The Wizard of Oz when Dorothy exits her house after the tornado and finds herself in Oz). Ironically, however, Madlenka never truly leaves her own back yard, her neighbourhood block and the courtyard in the middle, to go on her imaginative adventures. In fact, the containment of the Madlenka story seems to inspire the imaginative play implied. Home in Madlenka is inverted, bringing the outside adventure inside and vice versa. The aerial view of the apartment block appears almost like a toy model or stage. The effect is that the city block is friendly, unpopulated from the street and safe for a young girl to traipse around by herself. The simple ideal of the external world implies the safety of a small town Main Street rather than the actual connecting blocks of Spring and Mulberry Streets in SoHo, New York City that inspired the story (Marcus 23). Dargan and Zeitlan distinguishes between “the block” that “connotes an enclosed space, delimited by street corners…familiarity, relative safety ” and “the street” that “connects with the outside world…an image of the harsh side of urban life” (47). Madlenka builds on the glorification of the block as an enclosed safe space for play. Moreover, Madlenka’s adventures visually positioned in the centre of the city block where she can safely play. As a fantasy of interior space safety heavily underlines both verbal and visual text in this picture book.

In Kay Thompson’s Eloise, the Plaza Hotel becomes its own enclosed fantasy realm where six-year-old Eloise may play freely in a decadent world primarily inhabited by adults, and yet seem relatively safe from harm. Thompson’s literary construction of
the Plaza is carefully removed from the realities of potential danger and dangerous adults in a real-life hotel in New York City. Eloise’s imaginary adventures such as those with her dolls (depicted in the illustrations as red/pink line sketches to dramatize their imaginary status) are described in the same tone as her real-life adventures in the hotel. This flow of narrative effectively recreates the worldview of a six year old, where there are often fluid lines between reality and make-believe. Hilary Knight’s illustrations in Eloise are unusual as they allude to the discrepancy between the fantasy world of the child protagonist and reality of her play in the hotel. Like Eloise, many of these urban-based texts, including Madlenka, depict flexible and fluid boundaries between fantasy and reality, inviting the reader to enter a more fantastical realm of the city.

Madlenka is a quintessential female storybook urban protagonist in the vein of Eloise, Harriet the Spy, Madeline, Lucinda in Roller Skates, and others such as Momo and her umbrella (like Madlenka herself) in Yashima’s early picture book. Also similar to Thompson’s Eloise, Madlenka is a participant-observer. Although Madlenka seems to be directly involved in the adventures in each imaginary journey she is often depicted as outside the scene, observing the stories on display with curiosity. In a few instances she is actively involved in the magical land. She is inserted into the Grimm’s fairytale world, and she is also depicted within the green of the courtyard in her adventure. Primarily, Madlenka is a collector in the city who collects stories and imaginary experiences of place. The adventures in this text are interior, inside the stores on a literal level, but inside Madlenka’s imagination. We never see more than a stylistic façade of the external aspects of each store and blueprint or model toy mappings of the block from distinct perspectives. Although all the adventures are rooted and contained by these city blocks, a
central discourse in Madlenka is the construction of the city as a site embedded with shared and subjective narratives.

(5) The contained block: the fantasy of urbanity and the fantasy of childhood

Madlenka depicts a dynamic world of exterior and interior landscapes that emerge from one contained city block in New York City. In City Play, a socio-historical archive of urban childhoods in New York City over the last century, Dargan and Zeitlan explain that “the block is the basic unit of urban geography: it defines community” (43). Furthermore, as one of their informants explained about growing up in New York, “it was a matter of just one or two blocks that was your land in a neighbourhood, and you did not know anything about the people beyond that one or two blocks. New York is [composed of] little towns – every block is a small town” (Dargan/Zeitlin 43). Although these experiences seem timeless, a fairytale of the city block, part of the fantasy is informed by the nostalgia for modernist discourses of city life. Rooted in Madlenka is the modernist discourse of the city block as a small town in the midst of the big city.

Madlenka is a fairytale about urbanity, a myth of New York city life that paints a city block as a celebration of pluralistic society. Madlenka, in the words of Leonard Marcus is a “fantasy-laden picture-book tribute to melting-pot New York” (23). This is indeed a celebration of multiculturalism in the city; however, even more so, this story is a celebration of diverse stories and multiple narratives from different cultures that meet in one city block through one girls’ imagination. Each adventure through the page incorporates not the real-life experiences of that country but rather the fantasies, myths and collective folk or fairy tales of that culture including references to children’s
literature. For example, when Madlenka enters the imaginative realm of Germany, hidden in the green background are the images of Hansel and Gretel, Slovenly Peter and many other Grimm fairytale creatures and characters. When she explores France through Gaston’s bakery, images from Ludwig Bemelmans’s Madeleine and Antoine de Saint Exupery’s Le Petit Prince are hidden in the blue background around the floating cakes. In the sequel to Madlenka, Madlenka’s Dog the memories of each character are alluded to directly as each lift of the flap allows the reader to look inside each character to view that character’s childhood memory of a dog or pet in their childhood. In this myth of urbanity, all the distinct characters and cultures are connected through their shared memories. Madlenka is both a drama about the external and internal worlds of childhood and a fantasy of urban multicultural life.

c. Baker’s Home in the Sky: the city as miniature toy theatre set

Jeannie Baker’s Home in the Sky (1984) follows the story of Light, a homing pigeon who lives on top of an abandoned building in New York City. One morning, Light flies away from his flock and consequently comes up against a series of obstacles alone in the urban environment. He is finally rescued by a young boy and then instinctively finds his way home to Mike, his owner. The verbal narrative in Madlenka is secondary to the dominating and complex spatial play of the visual narrative. In comparison, the verbal text in Home in the Sky follows a traditional, almost parable-esque, linear story that moves spatially from home, through obstacles around the city, and then concludes with a return to home. However, although the visual images closely follow and supplement the verbal narrative, they may stand alone as works of art to be examined for detailed visual
narratives. Baker created what she calls “collage constructions” for the illustrations. This visual narrative consists of detailed urban scenes created from a variety of materials from scraps of fabric, leaves, clay and real hair. The effect is that of a detailed miniature model of urban scenes or a changing toy theatre set that changes cinematically from view to view as the story moves through urban spaces. Light’s movements are shown image by image as though they are frozen, like photographs or film stills, as the reader follows the action, play-by-play.

Baker spent ten months researching in New York City in order to produce her original “collage constructions” depicting Central Park, streets, subway, buildings and roofs. The original “collage constructions” as they are called in the book, were exhibited in the Dromkeen Museum of Children’s Literature and Roslyn Oxley Gallery in Australia and Forum Gallery in New York City. The artist “collected grasses, leaves, pigeon feathers, and other materials that might be useful….Tree trunks were modeled from clay, fabric was chosen and cut for clothes, and the characters have real hair.” Jenny Bourne Taylor alludes to E. Nesbit’s Wings and the Child: On the Building of Magic Cities (1913) in which Nesbit “analyzed the building of ‘magic cities’ out of the pieces of the everyday world” (Taylor 1). Moreover, “the child’s world is doubly miniaturized in this process of playing with model worlds” (Taylor 1). The overall effect of the collage constructions is that of the city as a miniature theatre set, a miniature world, a toy model world or puppet show or theatre set. Although the textured collage implies a sense of the photographic realism, it also draws attention to itself as a representation, a landscape that is framed and constructed to create a city in a picture book.
(1) *City picture book as parable of urban spaces*

Played out on Baker's miniature city set, the verbal text of *Home in the Sky* may be read as a conventional parable about urban life. A parable may be defined as a type of allegory in that it narrates "one coherent set of circumstances which signify a second order of correlated meanings"; however, a parable is specifically "a very short narrative about human beings presented so as to stress the tacit analogy, or parallel, with a general thesis or lesson that the narrator is trying to bring home to his audience (Abrams 6). Central to this narrative is the strong historical connection between parables (as well as fables and other allegorical tales) and the teaching of morals and lessons, particularly rooted in the Christian tradition. The act of "teaching a lesson" or illustrating a moral message is a central discourse underlying many works written for children. The simplicity of the narrative and symbolism lends itself to picture books, texts traditionally aimed at the youngest of children. Moreover, these stories are often read to children and parables were traditionally tales read or told out loud to listeners.

In these children's books, the child reader is posited as an observer/learner in these texts. The narration of these texts moves towards a succinct conclusion and teaching a lesson to its readers. In *Home in the Sky* both the tone of the verbal text and visual text imply this lesson-teaching intention. What is the lesson about urbanity illustrated in this picture book parable? Distinct from the celebratory fantasy of contained urban childhood space in *Madlenka*, *Home in the Sky* represents a spatial lesson about the boundaries of urban space and childhood space. Even as boundary lines blur, Madlenka is protected from the real outside urban world. The containment of childhood
is glorified in Sis’s picture book where contained space is represented as the site for childhood imaginative play, exploration, and experience. In contrast, moral geographies and boundaries of childhood space in a broader urban landscape are central to the parable of Light, the pigeon.

In the same way that the first line of Madlenka constructs a fairytale fantasy space for the story, the tone of Home in the Sky incorporates a detached third-person that narrates a simple, parable-esque story. Light the pigeon is introduced as the only white pigeon in a flock of gray pigeons. This colour symbolism continues through the text. While Madlenka was a liminal narrative between inside and outside, Home in the Sky is a narrative that moves between light and dark, high and low, close and far. Madlenka spatially pulls the viewer inside and outside of the text and the imaginary landscapes. Comparatively, Home in the Sky distances his readers/viewers as they observe the movement between (often spatial) categories. The whiteness and lightness of Light may imply his goodness, uniqueness, and lightness (of soul? of spirit?) despite his contained home in a coop atop an abandoned building. Moreover, as he is the only white pigeon, perhaps he may also be read as the purest and lightest of the flock. From the first view of this building, the reader is aware that Light is lower in the socio-economic strata. Nevertheless, he has a home, although makeshift: the roof has been claimed by “Mike” from abandonment and possible eviction to house his pigeons. The text does not reveal that Mike (who is represented as a middle-aged African-American man) lives in the abandoned building as well (although his dog keeps watch). Even when there are the dark moments of the verbal narrative, the visual images remain light, distanced and unemotional. Examples of this include when Light becomes lost inside a subway car, as
well as when Light is pecked by other pigeons who want his food. The colours of the visual images are not expressive of emotion, as in Christopher Myers's *Black Cat*, but rather stand as symbols alone. There is a sense of optimism and idealism throughout the story both in written and visual texts; there are only hints of the darkness of urban life hidden in the visual images.

**(2) Zoom in and Zoom out: Spatial movement between verbal and visual text**

The first line of *Home in the Sky* could take place in any setting “Every day at sunrise and sunset, the pigeons burst into the sky.” This visual image situates the story on top of a cathedral. It is not until the second page that Light’s home is introduced both visually and textually “on the roof of an abandoned building.” The story has moved visually and spatially from the highest point in the city to somewhere lower. The reader has a view of the entire building from the litter on the sidewalk, to the buildings in the background. The third image is the view from the roof, where the pigeons sit. The ritual everyday of urban life opens this narrative: “One morning, before feeding time, Mike flies his pigeons as usual.” This description of ritual the pigeon that dares to break away from his urban rituals and allotted spaces in the urban landscape.

Visual illustrations are at first simple and sparse and then on the next page vivid and detailed, as the visual narrative moves from plot elements and events to setting and then back to an event. The two-page and one-page detailed spreads of city experience tell a spatial story of the city that is assembled alongside the verbal text but may exist separate from the textual narrative. For example, where the text reads, “It starts to rain. His wings become heavy,” Light is pictured against a gray background the rain falling
heavily on his wings. The image is detached from a specific setting and could be anywhere. However, the next illustration is extremely urban and specific in its setting. While the verbal text gives a vague sense of place, "He flies through an open doorway. The doors close behind him. He is in a train," the visual text reveals more details of the narrative. The view from inside the train is represented visually and reveals many details of inside and outside the subway train including: graffiti and the edges of advertisements fade into the darkness of the train walls; the "125th St" sign; and a bubble gum wrapper among other litter on the ground. The backdrop of the visual image shows a wall of windows from the side of a building, clothes hanging on clothesline. Moreover, Light himself is the only sign of natural world. Light's white exterior greatly contrasts the levels of gray and brown in the background, inside the train, outside the train, and in the far backdrop.

The next image depicts the inside of a subway train. While the text reads "A boy picks him up, holding him firmly so he will feel safe, and gently strokes his feathers," the visual narrative has a multitude of layers inside the subway train. The visual image, a collage depiction of the inside of one subway train, reveals several narratives. This interior visual image of the subway reveals multiple texts of urban life including the distinct characters riding the train. Several details in this two-page spread, such as a news headline alludes to "Reagan" on the cover of one passenger's newspaper, situates the story in 1980s. Other visual details allude to modern and postmodern urban life with references to discourses of containment characteristic of urban experiences. Particularly, many advertisements on the train imply forms of escape or fantasies removed from everyday life. Advertisement texts within the visual narrative include: "Fly away on delta
to the beach;" "cellulite eliminator;" "catch the train to the plane;" and "Need guaranteed help? Sister Teresa, can look deep into your life in just one hour." The lack of concern for and attention to the pigeon by all the adults on the train alludes to the harshness and lack of human compassion within the urban space. Only the boy leans towards him to help him. While the text reads "the boy walks home cuddling Light to his chest," another two-page visual spread shows the subway station (possibly also an image of 125th street station) and an image of urban childhood space: weedy urban green space under a bridge, children on a curb and young girls playing double-dutch skipping games.

(3) Flying over the urban landscape: The city as totalizing text

*I had a boat, and the boat had wings;
And I did dream that we went a flying
Over the heads of queens and kings,
Over the souls of dead and dying,
Up among the stars and the great white rings,
And where the Moon on her back is lying.*

-Anon (cited in Hughes-Hallett 208)

The image of flying is an extremely common motif in children’s literature, particularly in poetry, and in street rhyme, as exemplified in the anonymous traditional rhyme above. The perspective of *Home in the Sky* relates visually and spatially to this fantasy of flying. The text visually is often the bird’s eye view, above a representation of the city that miniaturizes it, like a toy model. The stylistic manner in which the book is constructed of scraps and fabric shreds adds to this vision of the city as model. The
perspective has a specific relationship with containment that is distinct from Sis’s representation of containment in Madlenka. While Madlenka in a sense celebrates the contained world of childhood, Home in the Sky plays into the opposite fantasy: the transcendence of boundaries, from a bird’s eye view. Michel de Certeau describes seeing the city from the top of the World Trade Center and “the pleasure of ‘seeing the whole,’ of looking down on, totalizing the most immoderate of human texts” [92]. In urban picture books, the visual text of the city is often represented as a fabric, something tangible or conquerable. The collage constructions of Baker may be compared to the quilt work of Ringgold’s flying fantasy Tar Beach (1991) or the textiled edges of the buildings seen from the sky in Dorros’s Abuela (1991). From the aerial view, there is a sense of empowerment and ownership over the city; it is like a toy model of a city, a fantasy world, and a map seen from above as in Madlenka.

Issues of power, access and mobility underline these bird’s eye view adventures. Flying often is a metaphor for freedom, particularly with reference to mythology of slavery and the Underground Railroad. In these flying picture books, flying becomes spatial freedom of vision and access for children, often spatially oppressed and contained within urban landscapes (and in general). In his work on the geographies of young people, Aitken describes the “spatial oppression of children... ultimate victims of the political, social and economic forces that contrive the geography of the built environment” (Aitken 12). From the bird’s eye view, the viewer can plot his or her itinerary, write stories about the characters positioned inside, and have access to all they can see.
Marcus in *A Storied City* describes the world’s largest three-dimensional scale model of New York City at The Queens Museum of Art (New York):

In children’s picture books about New York, far and away the most commonly expressed fantasy is that of a magical flight over a city, which, when viewed from ground level, can so easily overwhelm. To spend time gazing down at the Panorama from the elevated viewing platform is to experience a nearly comparable thrill (123).

Like the Peter Pan ride at Disneyland, this visual view plays upon this fantasy for both adults and children, as the reader (or participant in the ride) may fly like Peter and the Darling children over the city of London to Neverland. The image of the Darling children flying over London to Neverland has certainly become part of the North American cultural collective unconscious.

The floating night adventure of a young boy captured by Maurice Sendak in *In the Night Kitchen* (1970) may be viewed as an early example of this trend of urban flight in picture books. The most recent New York City based books that explore this narrative both visually and textually are *Tar Beach* (1991) by Faith Ringgold, *The Night Flight* by Joanne Ryder illustrated by Amy Schwartz by and *Abuela* (1991) by Arthur Dorros, illustrated by Elisa Kleven. In a related narrative, *Sector 7* (1999) by David Wiesner (1999) the protagonist is transported to a factory (modeled on Grand Central Station and Penn Station) in the sky where clouds are made. In addition, the wordless picture book *You Can’t Take a Balloon into the Metropolitan Museum* (1998) by Jacqueline Preiss Weitzman and illustrated by Robin Preiss Glasser follows a little girl as she tours the Met. The visual narrative on the one hand follows a little girl as she tours the Met, while
the balloon she checks in floats around New York City. This balloon flight is reminiscent of the classic adventure balloon through 1950s Paris in Le Ballon Rouge (The Red Balloon), a short film whose stills were made into a children's picture book.

While Madlenka exemplifies localized meanings within the city block that may in turn provide entrances into imaginary worlds, Home in the Sky posits the city as a world to explore and own itself. The readers of this story are positioned outside the story in terms of visuality. Although Light is central to the narrative, the readers are not presented with the urban landscape from his point of view specifically. The view of Central Park, for example, is not quite a bird's eye view. The view is above the park, at a level that the viewer may see more than they would a bird's eye view, the reader has access to the entire scene including Light who may be found near the top of the two page visual spread. The effect is that of a sweep of urban experience: a woman brushing her hair on the grass, a family having a picnic, a man pushing a baby carriage; and someone walking their dog. At once the reader may feel the freedom of Light flying high above the crowds, trees and buildings, while they also may investigate the details presented in the two-page collage.

(4) Containment and the paradox of home

In Jeannie Baker's Home in The Sky the medium of collage itself stands on its own to tell a visual story distinct from the text. Comparable to Sis's and Myers's picture book texts, the end pages of Home in the Sky initiate the story visually before the narrative has begun verbally. The endpages depict a group of pigeons in boxes drawing an immediate paradox between the title of the book, but also alluding to apartment
buildings, a standard in urban life, where people are crammed on top of each other in boxes. This paratextual element immediately establishes the discourse of containment in the urban environment as a focal spatial theme.

*Home in the Sky* is a visual narrative about the inside and outsides of city space. Notably, the entire story is set visually outside, on rooftops, in parks, inside subway cars, but we are often taken outside and inside these urban spaces, even as the reader is located as an observer outside of the space for the majority of the picture book. We are taken “inside” the space of Central Park in the same way we are taken inside the subway car. The fantasy of *Home in the Sky* is the flight and freedom from home, but the message is that you can go but you must return. Although Light may indulge in the fantasy to fly away and beyond the boundary lines, he will never belong anywhere but on Mike’s rooftop. The texture of Mike seems to signify home: “That evening, as Mike is feeding his pigeons, Light lands on his shoulder and nestles against his face”. Home for Light, the pigeon, seems to be the specified space of the roof and the pigeon’s ritualistic relationship with Mike.

In *Home in the Sky* the distinctions between danger and safety are replaced by the familiar and the “unfamiliar” parts of the city. The conclusion of the story has Light return to the familiar where he belongs after his brief excursion into the unfamiliar parts of the city. The second discourse in *Home in the Sky* is the connection that is made between the young boy and the pigeon; as well as the connection between Mike and the boy mediated by Light, the pigeon. Although, Light has returned home, he has made a connection with another city dweller that was kind enough to help him. Like Madlenka, *Home in the Sky* is framed and contained. The child protagonist, Madlenka, physically
never leaves the block and her adventures do not trespass into the greater urban landscape. Rather, Madlenka’s adventures are extensive but spatially interior. Comparatively, Light, the pigeon, explores the broader urban landscape and breaks from his every day routine; however, he returns home where he belongs at the end of the story. Moreover, although the boundaries the city are the focus of this story, the narrative begins and ends with a return to home and containment in a specific spatial area within the urban landscape. The spatial lesson about urban life at the core of this picture book is certainly ‘do not stray far from home.’

In Home in the Sky, the urban geography is mapped in terms of interior spaces and boundary lines. Even when Light is represented as outdoors in Central Park, he is inside Central Park. Moreover, when Light flies high above unfamiliar buildings, there is only a narrow slip of blue that is framed and contained visually by the surrounding buildings. The story concludes with the textual description of the boy “on his roof the next morning, [he] eyes a flock of pigeons flying in sweeping curves across the sky. He is sure he sees a white pigeon among them.” The concluding tone of the story implies that Light has found his home among the flock of pigeons on Mike’s roof. This is a cautionary but idyllic myth of about urbanity. This picture book exemplifies a narrative about the spatial containment in the familiar and home spaces of the urban landscape. Despite the textual and visual adventure of trespassing or foregoing boundary lines, at the conclusion of the picture book, the pigeon is inevitably spatially rooted to a particular location within the urban landscape. Classic children’s books often end with the return to home, containment, or the familiar for a sense of comfort. The conclusion of Home in the Sky continues this tradition.
d. Myers’s Black Cat: The urban picture book as post-modern street game

Christopher Myers’s Black Cat follows a black cat through the in-between sites of the urban landscape of New York City. In this sophisticated picture book, collage art, primarily rooted in photographs taken in Harlem and Brooklyn, is paired with rhythmic poetry reminiscent of a street game, to create a dynamic and subversive urban childscape. While Madlenka utilizes the conventions of picture book space itself to create a fantasy game board of the city, Home in the Sky utilizes the picture book space to represent a spatial parable utilizing the conventions of a miniature world. Distinctly, Black Cat utilizes the conventions of picture book space to call the spatial boundaries of urban life into question. Black Cat’s critique of the modernist discourse of urbanity is twofold. Both the verbal text and the visual text in content and style exemplify a post-modern discourse on urbanism and specifically childhood in the city.

The visual narrative in Black Cat is in many ways a response to the visual narrative in Home in the Sky. Home in the Sky opens at a high point of perspective in the city from the top of a cathedral where “every day, at sunrise and sunset, the pigeons burst into the sky.” In contrast, the opening image of Black Cat is the mirror reflection perspective: the view from the dark gutter. Black Cat represents the view from the inside of the city. In contrast to the “totalizing” view of the city from the bird eye view of Home in the Sky, Black Cat represents the experience of the “walkers” within the text of the city (de Certeau 1984). While the bird’s eye view provides access to an empowering perspective of the city, the cat’s eye view of the urban landscape elucidates another type of access-- the access you may gain by creeping between and through spaces. Much like
small children, cats have access to certain information because they are small. Moreover, while an examination of Baker’s Home in the Sky may reveal the discourses of urban containment and boundary-laden space that are embedded in the texts of the picture book, similar urban discourses are self-consciously addressed in the visual and verbal narratives of Black Cat. The visual and verbal texts of Black Cat call attention to the boundary lines of urban space, and in doing so, the picture book narrative becomes an act of (re)claiming urban space.

(1) Street game between visual and verbal texts

Black Cat exemplifies the most complex relationship between visual and verbal texts of the three focal picture books. In Madlenka, the verbal text is merely a touchstone to initiate and guide the visual narrative of the story. Comparatively, the text of Home in the Sky heavily leads the movement of the story from visual image to visual image. In Black Cat, the visual and verbal texts may stand on their own, although they also complexly call each other into question and play with and against each other in a dynamic dialogue. The voice of the poem calls out to the black cat depicted in the visual images. In turn, the visual image of the cat responds through its spatial movement across the urban landscape.

The voice of Madlenka is a third person narration, detached from the story. However, the pervasive visual images and supplementary text within the two-dimensional maps of Madlenka invite the engagement of the reader/listener to physically and visually experience each interior journey. Madlenka is a book to play with, as much as it is a book to read and be read. Similarly, Black Cat also demands spatial engagement.
The poem that runs through the text is the voice of the idealized and mythic urban children of the past, known for their street rhymes and street games. Myers dedicates the book “to all children of the city, like me”, and thus includes himself in the collective ‘we’ that constitutes the voice of the poem in this picture book. This collective voice questions the cat in rhyme, and the cat responds through its representation in the visual images. Comparable to Madlenka, the conventions of a child’s game is implied here; however, the game in Black Cat is primarily a post-modern game that the writer plays within his textual and visual representations, and welcomes the reader to join. Rather than the implicit engagement of the reader of Madlenka, Black Cat is a game of hide and seek played between the chorus of narrators and the visual images of the black cat, slipping around and through urban boundary lines.

Often the visual images in Black Cat are distinct from and sometimes a critique of the meaning implied by the verbal poem. The language of the poem will often describe people or things that are not physically apparent in the visual images. For example, while the text reads “in the wake of Sunday night families spilling from blue neon churches”, the visual image presents the cat observing an empty street. Another example is the segment of the picture book that takes place on the subway. The rhyming text in burnt yellow reads: “do you nod hello to the people you meet/over yellow subway seats?” However, the cat is represented as jumping onto yellow subway seats in an empty subway car.

The Black Cat subway image is distinct from the subway in Home in the Sky. The moment of intimacy between the boy and Light, the pigeon on a crowded subway car in Home in the Sky represents an urban discourse of the close interactions and crowded
spaces of urban transit. In contrast, the subway car and the city in general throughout the visual narrative of *Black Cat* are devoid of people; the city of this picture book is the summer amusement park at night when everyone has gone home for the winter. In *The Cultural Meaning of Urban Space* (1993), Gary McDonough defines a "geography of emptiness" to describe the spaces in the city whose meanings may be changed by context, for example how certain sites become dangerous at night. Similarly, Iain Borden (2001) explores how skateboarders in real city spaces change the meanings of the everyday architecture in the city. *Black Cat* plays with these contested, shifting and changing meanings throughout the urban landscape.

(2) *Urban childscape as liminal collage*

*Black Cat* utilizes a multi-media technique that combines photography, paint, and collage. Photography of urban experience is often rooted in the artistic discourse that perceives photography as a way to capture the essence of the city or the raw realism of the urban moment. In *Black Cat*, the blurring of photographs and the application of paint or collage onto the photographs complicates this notion of raw realism in urban photographs. The visual images in *Black Cat* are represented as real moments that have been distorted and blurred with surreal or hyperreal effects. Both the font of the verbal text and the vivid and pervasive colours of the typeface imply an urban playful aesthetic. Certainly, both the visual and verbal texts of *Black Cat* play into the multi-sensory aspect of urban life. The figure of the cat moves through distinct realms of multi-sensory experience: visual, auditory, sensation, and smell.
In Baker’s *Home in the Sky*, the collage constructions capture the diversity and immensity of the collections of people, things and experiences within urban space in the representation of a distanced miniature world. Baker’s spatial representation of the urban landscape may be compared to the hectic, and overwhelmingly detailed urban scenes in Maira Kalman’s New York-based picture books. In comparison, Myers’s collage art is more closely related to the everyday collage depictions of urban childhood depicted in Ezra Jack Keats’s urban picture books such as *Whistle for Willie*. Myers, like Keats, also captures the in-between sites of the city where children may play. However, distinct from Keats’s playful snapshots of urban life, Myers’s representation creates a vivid, almost hyperreal experience of the urban landscape for the reader/viewer. For example the visual text that accompanies: “listening to brick music falling from project windows” illustrates the photographic image of housing projects painted excessively and roughly with red as if they were on fire. The photograph of the housing projects is heavily outlined and covered in red paint in an expressionistic, almost surreal manner.

The image of the black cat painted onto photographs of city scenes posits the black cat as an artistic visual representation that may comment on the reality of urban life. The black cat is a painted onto the photographs. The painted image of the black cat includes a textiled design of barely visible flowers and other stylistic designs that are figured onto the cat. Myers’s black cat-protagonist is a mythical figure/symbol that moves through the gaps of the urban landscape. He is part of the urban imaginary, drawn onto the urban spaces and unwinding spatial narratives as he moves through the space of the city and the picture book.
When the verbal poem describes the cat "hearing the quiet language of invisible trains," the two-page spread exemplifies the climax of imaginary urban space. The effect is that of an imaginary mythical cat trespassing through artistic representations of city spaces, listening to invisible trains. The inset image depicts the cat rushing to capture what seems to be a subway rat. The backdrop is almost realistic, and the photograph has been painted on but maintains much of its original image, including advertisements on the wall. The overall effect is of a moment that has been sketched onto the backdrop of the city. The implication of this visual image is that this event might happen within this space.

(3) Hide and Sneak: A spatial tour of the in-between sites

The poem of Black Cat is driven forward by active verbs in the text and visual action in the visual narrative. Each line implies an action, some kind of movement through the urban landscape. The coloured type tends to contrast or match a colour in the visual image. The print is playfully displayed in lower case letters. The lower case rhyme implies street credibility and the vernacular, a resistant discourse of language. The reprise: "black cat, black cat, cousin to the concrete/creeping down our city streets/where do you live, where will we meet?" is reminiscent of a street rhyme that might be recited during a child’s game such as double-dutch skipping. The alliteration of the c sound adds to this street rhyme tone. Moreover, the line "creeping down “our” city streets further stresses the cat’s outsider status; that the city is “ours” not his.

Many images affiliate the black cat with the youth of the city. The actions of "leaving paw prints and chalk flowers on concrete sidewalks “, and the description of the
black cat "throwing shadows and tags on graffiti-covered walls," allude to products of urban child and youth play. The visual images that are juxtaposed with this text depict the black cat observing the sidewalk and the wall where we assume a child or an artist has been marking and critiquing urban space, marking and claiming the blank walls and sidewalks of the city. Although the black cat seems to only observe these images in the visual narration, the verbal text posits the cat as creator of urban representations such as "tags" and "chalk flowers." The black cat is affiliated with the oppressed groups and individuals in the city that resist their oppression through critique and response to space.

Home in Black Cat is truly liminal, as home is everywhere and nowhere simultaneously. The refrain, "black cat, black cat, we want to know/ where's your home, where do you go?" is repeated throughout the picture book. Moreover, the chorus of voices asks: "where do you live, where will we meet?" and the cat responds to these queries through the verbal and visual description of his wanderings. Many of these images are located spatially "between," near the gutter. We are just above the cat's eye view, watching him yet close to his eye range, "sauntering like rainwater down storm drains/ between cadillac tires and the curb/ sipping water from fire hydrants/ dancing to the banging beats of passing jeeps." The cat moves through the gutter "between cadillac tires and the curb" (my emphasis). The verbal text, in its physical display on the page also has a visual nature (illustrated in the citation below) that implies the black cat's movement under and around boundary lines cutting up space:

Ducking under the red circling of sirens cutting through the night
He ducks under the consequences of violence.
As illustrated in this example, in *Black Cat*, even auditory sounds mark boundary lines such as the sirens “cutting through the night” that mark spaces as safe or dangerous. In the image that accompanies the “red circling of sirens,” the police car is positioned in the foreground, although blurred by the blue and white paint that has been painted onto the photograph. The focus of this image becomes the black cat as he flies quickly across the street (and thus the image), between the events of a crime scene. However, the cat predominately is represented as the observer in the visual images, often with his back to the viewer, demanding that we see what he sees.

(4) *Black cat as bender and mender of boundary lines*

Liminality is intrinsic to the spatial movement of this picture book in visual and verbal texts. The cat is depicted as “leaping onto ledges of bricked-in windows” — he is in perpetual action moving from edge to edge where action has occurred. Many urban spaces represented in this picture book are the left over spaces of the urban landscape such as: bricked in windows, back alleys, empty bottles on a ledge, and empty basketball courts. With the textual description of the black cat’s “eyes like the green of empty glass bottles”, the cat himself also become left over, a shell, a bottle that has been used. Once again the black cat exists within and around liminal geographies: the geography of nowhere and the geography of emptiness (McDonough). Interestingly, both the worlds of *Madlenka* and *Black Cat* are quite vacant of crowds, but with distinct effects. In *Madlenka* the empty streets of the city block de-emphasize the “urban” to allow for the safety of a young child’s adventure, displacing the realities of urban life for fantasies. In
Black Cat the opposite effect is produced by the image of empty urban space, and the vacant spaces where the cat trespasses seem eerie and potentially dangerous.

The book seems to take a turn, at “mending city blocks cut by fences” as the cat’s role moves from observer to “mender” of boundaries, as if in his movement between and along boundary lines, he changes them, merges areas back together through movement between city blocks. The visual image that is juxtaposed with the text, “playing chain link games”, represents the cat walking along a chain link fence, as if the mending the separation between the areas on either side of the fence. A series of images in Black Cat are around a fenced in basketball court, characteristic of New York City in particular among other American cities, whose basketball and playground areas, especially in the inner city are extensively fenced in and off. In these images we, the viewers (and the narrators) are outside the fence looking in at the cat as he pounces on hopscotch markings (yet another, like the chalk flowers and graffiti, a territory marking space for children-different from the fences marked off for them). We, the viewers, are positioned by the visual image to observe through the chain link fence as the cat crossing basketball courts and no-netted hoops. The hoops have been de-netted from use, and the cat even crosses the boundary lines of the basketball court itself marked in yellow. With the textual and visual image of the cat “slam-dunking yourself [the black cat] through a thin orange halo,” the cat has crossed a series of boundary lines, climaxing with his transcendence through the circle of the basketball hoop.

The following textual line describes the black cat “watching children screaming playground cages”, in this image, the cat walks along the fence of the playground observing the children inside blurred with white and red paint. In this image, although the
cat is affiliated with the children, the cat is not the child who is closed into playground cages. There is no one to cage him and he can slip through these boundary-marking fences. The voice of the poem seems outside the playground cages as well, as if the chorus of mythical urban children of the street observes these confinements for contemporary play.

Contemporary urban picture books such as Way Home (1994) by Libby Hawthorn and Smoky Night by Eve Bunting (1994) may be compared to Myers's Black Cat. These two picture books tackle social problems in the inner city with realistic characters and issues: homelessness and race at the forefront. Both of these two books focus on the experience of young boys living in the city, who must grapple with distinct forms of homelessness. In Way Home, many themes may be compared to Myers's Black Cat. In Way Home, a young homeless boy (who we do not find out is homeless until the very end of the book) find a stray cat and leads it to a "safe home." This picture book narrates the often dangerous inner city struggles of the boy daily life with visual representations of back alleys, fences, dark corners, prostitutes, and monstrous dogs. Home in this picture book is in an abandoned building where he has decorated with pictures. While, the visual imagery of the city is comparable to Black Cat, the underlying implications are distinct. The underlying message of Way Home is that home is not everywhere. In comparison, Black Cat critiques the boundary lines of the city and celebrates the black cat's ability to find home everywhere. With a similar tone Smoky Night, sets out to tell a story set in the context of the Los Angeles riots. A young boy and his cat lose their home in a fire during the riot. The issue at the heart of this book is socio-economic marginalization as the characters witness the riot. While, Smoky Night
emphasizes the strength of urban communities in the face of hardship and socio-economic disparities, *Black Cat* emphasizes the strength of the individual to find his place in the urban environment, and to filter through boundary lines and obstacles.

*Black Cat* is an adventure observed from the exterior. The central character is not the child locked behind the bars of the playground, or the homeless child of *Smoky Night* or *Way Home* searching for belonging in the urban environment. Rather, the black cat is but an outsider figure that creeps through the boundary lines of the city. The liminal spaces of *Black Cat* are not moving between interior and exterior but rather in-between. Myers’ text is a critical visual tour of the boundary lines and the act of de-territorialization through urban spaces. In a sense, the modern discourse of urbanity still filters through in terms of the cat’s freedom of movement through urban spaces. Thus, despite its critique of urban boundary lines, *Black Cat* continues to be a celebration of urbanity. However, this is a celebration of the underbelly of the city. Moreover, this is a glorification of the marginalized; the outsiders who belong nowhere so must make everywhere home. The final message to the reader is that ‘everywhere [you] roam’ may be claimed as a home in the city. Thus, *Black Cat* is a story about claiming space and space being taken away, about crossing boundary lines. Moreover, Myers’s picture book exemplifies a post-modern critique of the classic discourses of urbanity in its illustration of how “public space [has] become increasingly privatized, commodified and militarized” (Kennedy 3). This picture book constructs urban space as a battleground and a theater where the dynamics of space and childhood play out a broader struggle to redefine the boundary and territory lines of the contemporary North American urban landscape.
5. CONCLUSION: BUILDING ON URBAN CHILDSCAPES

a. Conclusions

In this thesis, I have used the concept of socially produced space as a tool to analyze how urban childscares are mapped in contemporary urban picture books. I have examined how representations of space from the child’s eye view in these picture books elucidate how we construct modern and post-modern childhood space and imaginary experience within the urban context. Madlenka, Home in the Sky, and Black Cat all represent the spatial drama of boundaries and boundary crossing in the urban landscape and childhood space. All three texts exemplify tours of the liminal geography of the city in the literal and metaphorical urban landscape. Spatial movement is central to the narrative of the three books. The urban landscape is a site for spatial stories that are told as characters move between, around and through confined spaces and boundary lines. The urban childscares in these stories are sites of transit; the adventure, for the child reader, lies in collecting and connecting narratives from and through space. Often these picture books represent a liminal drama of insides and outsides; of crossing, playing within, and dodging between boundary lines. From these spaces, specific kinds of visuality, access, mobility and observation are implied. These are related to engagement and adventures within these boundary lines as well as the reaction to these boundaries through acts of trespassing, resistance or claims for new space.

In distinct manners, the classic discourses of childhood space (outlined in the literature review) tend to underline or define the urban landscapes of urban picture books. These three picture books elucidate discourses surrounding childhood in the use of the spatial conventions of the picture book themselves. In Sis’s Madlenka the format of the
picture book becomes spatially a game board of a city block. In Baker's *Home in the Sky*, the picture book takes on the spatial conventions of a miniature toy theatre set where a parable of urbanity plays out in a miniature urban childscape often viewed from above or at a distance. In Myers's *Black Cat*, the picture book moves forward spatially through the childscape in a post-modern street game between visual and verbal texts.

I have chosen contemporary picture books from the most recent period of children's literature, post-1980. These books, often post-modern in style, narrative, and illustration, lend themselves to and are enriched by a layered, multi-disciplinary spatial analysis framed by post-modern geography theory. Moreover, the picture books texts I have chosen for this analysis mark a transition from an earlier modernist and classic tradition of children's books that often represented an opposition between rural versus urban life. These early constructions and discourses surrounding the childhood and childhood space are still at play in contemporary picture books. The adherence to (although often playful engagement with) the classic discourses surrounding childhood space and urbanity continues in many contemporary texts, including elements of *Madlenka* and *Home in the Sky*. Often these discourses are rooted in nostalgia for an idyllic or classic vision of childhood and classic modernistic visions of urban life. *Black Cat* begins to call into question many of these conventions of the picture book itself, and in addition offers a post-modern critique of contemporary urban spaces for children and individuals in general.

In distinct manners, *Madlenka* and *Home in the Sky* reject the social reality of the city and (post) modern urban childhoods, in order to create nostalgic fantasies of childhood and city experiences. These picture books are idealizations, celebrations and
glorifications of childhood imagination and experience. While Madlenka is a pure 
celebration of multiculturalism and urbanity, it is also a glorification of contained 
childhood space. In comparison, Home in the Sky presents an urban twist on a classic 
children’s theme. This picture book narrates a cautionary tale that warns not to stray too 
far from home. Only Myers’s Black Cat pushes the genre of the picture book into the 
realm of social critique. Black Cat utilizes the conventions of picture book space to call 
the spatial boundaries of urban life into question. Black Cat’s critique of the modernist 
discourse of urbanity is twofold. Both the verbal text and the visual text in content and 
style represent a post-modern discourse on urbanism and specifically childhood in the 
city.

b. Implications and applications

This study may have implications and further applications in two distinct but 
interrelated areas. On the one hand, this examination may add to the broader cross-
disciplinary project related to the social discourses of childhood and children within 
representation as well as real, lived spaces. Conversely, there is the potential to expand 
this analysis into a study of the playful and possibly resistant readings of these picture 
books by real child readers.

(1) Picture books and the social construction of childhood

In The Disappearance of Childhood (1982) Neil Postman notes major shifts that 
occurred first with the invention of the printing press and the consequent changes that 
arose in society with regards to literacy, related to what he defines as “the invention or
discovery of childhood.” He goes on to explain how electric communication, particularly the increasing significance and access to television and its effects through a variety of ways, initiated the “disappearance of childhood.”

What has happened since Postman posited the “disappearance of childhood”? Do the urban picture books from this analysis represent a response to this phenomenon? These books seem to reject the reality of the city and (post) modern urban childhoods, in order to create fantasy-infused, nostalgic representations of childhood and city experiences. These picture books are idealizations, celebrations and glorifications of childhood imagination and experience. They are also often celebrations of urbanity. Urbanity in these contexts is characterized by the positive elements driving urban life. The city and the child seem to hold similar shared meanings in our imaginations in their connections to both the future and potential for society. Children’s literature becomes a political act, a political decision for the future. Often these representations are rooted in nostalgia for earlier conceptions of childhood.

How may these picture books be contextualized within a potentially more extensive investigation of urban child culture, practices and texts? I am interested in applying the spatial frames surrounding urban experience and childhood in these picture books to various media: urban novels for children; urban fiction for young adults; graphic novels and comics in urban settings; popular films for and about children set in the urban landscape; interactive video games situated in urban environments and related to urban spatial practices (such as skateboarding, car theft, and other situated crime); and the acts of skateboarding, graffiti art and other urban practices of children and young adults.
(2) Real readers responding to urban picture books

One fundamental text in reader-response theory is Louise Rosenblatt’s *Literature as Exploration*, first published in 1938. Central to Rosenblatt’s argument is her description of a reader’s response to literature as a “lived through experience.” This view of reading involves the “creation of a dynamic, alternative reality—one that requires the active participation of, even, performance of, the reader” (Rogers 140). Rosenblatt coined the term “the poem” to “refer to the whole category of aesthetic transactions between readers and texts” (Rosenblatt 12). Rosenblatt sees the transactions between reader and text as “an event in time” where “under the magnetism of the ordered symbols of the text, he [the reader] marshals his resources and crystallizes out from the stuff of memory, thought, and feeling a new order, a new experience (Rosenblatt 12). Many works of literature, particularly children’s literature, lend themselves to both aesthetic response and dramatic experiences. Picture books are more than a “map” of child space; they are a landscape of the imagination, an adult/societal imaginary construction of childhood spaces and experiences in the city. The term “landscape” may be viewed as a framing device, framing the picture book space as a map of a fantasy world—accessible, bound, conquerable.

This analysis of literary texts for young readers involves an awareness of the active process of a young reader. I have chosen these texts also because of their potential for practical classroom and library use and the opportunities they provide to connect subjects across the curriculum such as geography, history and literature, through activities in the classroom for younger readers (elementary school age) and more
sophisticated picture book readers (secondary school and beyond). Moreover, I have chosen these texts with the intention that this literary analysis may be expanded into a study to involve the spatial experiences of urban child readers in classrooms and as individuals.

The two main goals of recent spatial work related to childhood spaces are firstly, to call the social constructions of childhood into question, and secondly, to position children as active social actors in their own lives, experiences, and spaces. The next step for this examination would be to connect the childscapes of children’s literature with the childscapes both real and imagined of real children. A central question remains to be explored: How do these real spatial experiences with texts and in real spaces, compare, respond to, and critique the spatial constructions in the texts themselves?

This thesis is significant in forwarding the critical study of children’s literature, as well as the cross-disciplinary research on contemporary childhood. Critical international theory has only recently focused on the social, cultural and political implications of children’s literature. The shifting identities and contested spaces of the urban landscape are rich sites to explore contemporary social issues surrounding twenty-first century childhood and urban life in general at a variety of critical levels. The critical study of children’s literature may be practically applied through the innovative use of these texts in language and literacy education. Moreover, this analysis may be expanded into a study of the playful and possibly resistant readings of these picture books by child readers. The focal picture books for the analysis may be used to inspire language arts activities such as poetry, art and drama as well as, integrated units that incorporate subjects across the
curriculum. This research would be of interest to academics, teachers, teacher-educators, librarians, parents, publishers, and those who work with children and adolescents.
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**Focal Picture Books in Analysis**

