



**Journal
of the Short Story in English**
Les Cahiers de la nouvelle

65 | Autumn 2015
Special Issue: Grace Paley

Knowing and Inventing New York: The Neighborhood in Grace Paley's Fiction

Nathalie Cochoy



Electronic version

URL: <http://jsse.revues.org/1647>
ISSN: 1969-6108

Publisher

Presses universitaires d'Angers

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 September 2015
Number of pages: 85-96
ISBN: 978-2-7535-5056-8
ISSN: 0294-04442

Electronic reference

Nathalie Cochoy, « Knowing and Inventing New York: The Neighborhood in Grace Paley's Fiction », *Journal of the Short Story in English* [Online], 65 | Autumn 2015, Online since 01 September 2017, connection on 14 October 2017. URL : <http://jsse.revues.org/1647>

This text was automatically generated on 14 October 2017.

© All rights reserved

Knowing and Inventing New York: The Neighborhood in Grace Paley's Fiction

Nathalie Cochoy

That woman lives across the street. She's my
knowledge and my invention.
I'm sorry for her. I'm not going to leave her there
in that house crying.
(Actually neither would Life, which unlike me has
no pity).

Grace Paley ("A Conversation with My Father,"
Changes 167)

- 1 In "A Conversation with My Father," Grace Paley exposes the principles of her art in which imitation and invention, realism and fantasy are closely intertwined. Quite significantly, in her foreword to the collection *Enormous Changes at the Last Minute*, she asserts that "[e]veryone in this book is *imagined into life* except the father" (my emphasis). Far from merely emphasizing the authenticity of the father figure in the collection,¹ she thus indirectly claims and recalls that fiction is not so much an imitation of life as a performative means of *giving* life. Indeed, in Paley's short stories, the metatextual comments on the art of writing do not alienate fiction from reality but on the contrary contribute to a revelation of the way in which words relate to the world—or even *inhabit* the world.
- 2 Although the backdrop of Paley's fiction is undoubtedly New York, the city as a whole remains invisible in her stories. For Paley's New York is actually the *neighborhood*, barely recognizable as the Bronx, Greenwich Village, Port Authority or Coney Island. As a microcosm, the neighborhood is not so much a place as a *common place*, ceaselessly recreated by a community of mothers and children who meet, move and mingle and above all "converse" with one another in various intermediary places (stoops or

staircases, parks or piers, subways or sidewalks...). As a writer, as a mother, as a citizen, Paley thus intimates that her “knowledge” and her “invention” of her neighbors, in their daily existence (*Changes* 166),² are means of approaching the truth about urban life and of revealing the value of the trite and the transient in the community.

- 3 In Paley's short stories, a sense of place paradoxically emerges from an interplay of voices “talking *senselessly*”—“voices from *who knows where*” (*Changes* 162, my emphasis). Indeed, Paley's narrators recreate the experience of city life by elaborating on a network of echoes, embedded stories, recurrent anecdotes and vibrant ellipses. In this respect, they seem to redefine the art of storytelling. In his well-known essay, “The Storyteller,” Walter Benjamin bemoans the disappearance of the art of storytelling as a means of conveying practical knowledge, common sense and morality. He claims that in the aftermath of the atrocities of World War I, the novel lost its capacity to transmit practical knowledge to the community—“as if something that seemed inalienable to us, the securest among our possessions, were taken from us: the ability to exchange experiences” (83). According to Benjamin, only the narrator has the necessary authority for an intuitive “grasping” of the ungraspable meaning of life and for the transmission of this experience. Commenting on Benjamin's essay, Giorgio Agamben remarks that this impoverishment of experience actually characterizes everyday life in our contemporary societies:

Today, however, we know that the destruction of experience no longer necessitates a catastrophe, and that humdrum daily life in any city will suffice. For modern man's average day contains virtually nothing that can be translated into experience. Neither reading the newspaper, with its abundance of news that is irretrievably remote from his life, nor sitting for minutes on end at the wheel of his car in a traffic jam. Neither the journey through the nether world of the subway, nor the demonstration that suddenly blocks the street [...] nor those eternal moments of dumb promiscuity among strangers in lifts and buses. Modern man makes his way home in the evening wearied by a jumble of events, but however entertaining or tedious, unusual or commonplace, harrowing or pleasurable they are, none of them will have become experience. (13)

- 4 In Paley's stories, the narrators fail to translate the departure of their husbands, the vagrancy of their children, the disappearance of their relatives or friends into some morally enlightening experience for the community. Thus, conceding that her vocabulary is “absolutely useless for an active moral life” (*Changes* 85), Faith Darwin, Paley's fictional alter ego, avoids passing judgment on her neighbors' existences. However, the writer's renunciation of the “authority” of the narrative voice does not mean she relinquishes all hope of converting rituals, misfortunes and losses into an experience that may serve the community at large. On the contrary, when interlacing various stories or memories in her narratives, Paley reveals her “craftsman's relationship” to her material—“[o]ne can [...] ask oneself whether the relationship of the storyteller to his material, human life, is not in itself a craftsman's relationship, whether it is not his very task to fashion the raw material of experience [...] in a solid, useful and unique way” (Benjamin 107). Indeed, Paley's interrelated stories succeed in translating the everyday lives of her characters into the “tongue of [her] undying carnal love” (*Changes* 77).
- 5 We will thus see how the author invents a new way of “mapping” her neighborhood, based not so much on lines, names or landmarks as on customs, constraints or blanks. We will then evoke the paradoxical role that daily events play in the reinvention of the past. Finally, we will consider the manner in which the author illuminates the “unseen in the seen”—the “invisible” inhabitants of the neighborhood as well as the *poetic* value of the

prosaic. Indeed, as Faith asserts when she catches a “sniff of the man-wide world” in the park (*Changes* 77), the neighborhood still allows one to “accidentally take sweetness into one’s lungs” (*Changes* 79).

Mapping Daily Life

- 6 According to the historian and anthropologist Christian Jacob, a map is both a “rational construction,” ruled by the scientific demands of geometry, symmetry and knowledge, and “a privileged space of projection for the viewer’s desires, aspirations and affective and cultural memories” (2). In her stories, Grace Paley sketches out her own map of New York: though she refers to landmarks of the city—Central Park, where mothers and children “row on [the] lousy lake” (*Changes* 60), the Theater District, where Vlashkin, an actor of the Yiddish theater, becomes “the Valentino of Second Avenue” (*Disturbances* 10), Coney Island, where Faith visits her parents at the *Children of Judea* residence for the elderly, or the Bronx, Brooklyn, Broadway and Brighton Beach—these sites and toponyms remain abstract, undefined entities. On the contrary, the park, the library, the Methodist church, and above all, the street—with its benches, its grocers’, its butchers’, its delicatessen shops (where sandwiches strangely bear the customers’ names)³ and its chorus of voices concur to delineate a new map of the neighborhood. Indeed, Paley relies on daily rituals in order to reveal the urban setting of her stories and record its ethnic, racial or social alterations. Everyday life becomes a means of shaping an uncertain world, of creating familiar forms that allow men and women to transcend the misery of their condition (Bégout 313). For everyday life is not ordinary—it contains the lineaments of the extraordinary.
- 7 In “Faith in the Tree,” the narrator renounces two forms of representation of the city: a distant, omniscient, panoramic view and a chaotic, fragmentary, labyrinthine perception. “Both in and out of the game and watching and wondering at it”—to recall a famous poem by Walt Whitman (“Song of Myself” 32)—Faith is sitting on the branch of a sycamore from which she has a wide yet limited view of the park while she is able to catch glimpses of the people around and snatches of their conversation. Faith resorts to irony when she evokes God’s all encompassing vision of the Park, and of New York:
- He sees South into Brooklyn how Prospect Park lies in its sand-rooted trees among Japanese gardens and police, and beyond us north to dangerous Central Park. Far north, the deer-eyed eland and kudu survive, grazing the open pits of the Bronx zoo. (*Changes* 78)
- 8 This panoptic position merely leads to the discovery of a world of constraints and limitations—the imprisonment of trees, citizens and animals. On the contrary, Faith’s more down-to-earth perception casts light on a community of individuals craving for life and liberation. If the pool is dry, the sonorous phrase evoking it (“the thick snout of the fountain spout” [*Changes* 78]) heralds an alternative way of describing Washington Square, far from Henry James’s aesthetic descriptions of “lilies floating.” Unnamed in the story, Washington Square appears as an expanse of land where rumors circulate as naturally as children run and grow—“[a]mong the trees, in the arms of statues, toes in the grass” (*Changes* 77). The park is bustling with life and bristling with promises of renewal. But the interwoven stories that make up the community do not isolate its members from the rest of the world. Indeed, Paley conveniently resorts to a metaphor⁴ in order to associate Faith’s fond memories of her strolls with her son Richard on the riverside or

across bridges with the coming and going of mothers in the park. If she used to observe barges, tugboats, merchant ships or the *United States* on the Hudson River, she also sees mothers evolving like boats in and out of the area:

I can easily see Mrs Junius Finn, my up-the-block neighbor and evening stoop companion, a broad barge, like a lady, moving slow—a couple of redheaded cabooses dragged by clothesline at her stern; on her fat upper deck, Wiltwyck, a pale three-year-old roaring captain with smoky eyes, shoves his wet thumb into the wind. “Hurry! Hurry!” he howls. Mrs Finn goes puff puffing toward the opinionated playground, that sandy harbor.

Along the same channel, but near enough now to spatter with spite, tilting delicately like a boy’s sailboat, Lynn Ballard floats past my unconcern to drop light anchor, a large mauve handbag, over the green bench slats. (*Changes* 78-79)

- 9 Beyond the narrator’s tender irony, recalling how the often abandoned mothers have no choice but to travel (or dream of traveling) in the park while fathers, with their “sly out-of-town-husband-in-New-York look” (*Later* 86) remain abroad, Paley undermines the essential function of daily rituals in the creation of an American citizen’s consciousness. Indeed, when she took her son for strolls on the riverside, Faith wanted him to “see the interesting world” (*Changes* 83). However, at the end of the story, when he copies an anti-Vietnam War slogan in the park, it is her son that makes her “[think] more and more and every day about the world” (*Changes* 100). The *United States* is not merely a cruise ship sailing away from the harbor—it is an everyday life concern of the community.

- 10 The park could be considered as a synecdoche for the neighborhood. In an interview, Paley resorts to the metaphor of a train in order to evoke her fiction:

What I am against is thinking about plot. And it is not the way I write. I just sort of build up a train, and all of a sudden, I look at it, and it’s a track. I didn’t look for the track to put the train on. And plot does not move the story along. People pull you to the next event. Life pulls you. (Interview Hulley 33-34)

- 11 If stories can evolve in many unexpected directions, the recurrence of metaphorical or literal references to trains, boats or cars constantly reminds us of the foreign origins of the inhabitants of the neighborhood. However, some hints at Irish accents or culture (Mrs Raftery), African-American idioms or Puerto-Rican and Chinese customs also underline the multiethnic, multiracial nature of the city. Once again, the author relies on daily rituals in order to suggest the religious or racial identities of the inhabitants. Indeed, if Mrs Vlashkin’s Yiddish is sometimes “perfect, each word cut like a special jewel” (*Disturbances* 15), or if “the butcher pull[s] down black window shades to keep the colored lights [of a decorated Christmas tree] from shining on his chickens” (*Disturbances* 60), very little is said about the families’ experience of displacement, immigration or exile. Stories of starvation and humiliation are poignantly embedded in other stories, as if painful memories needed to be controlled by the reassuring rituals of everyday life so as not to become devastating—for it is “a terrible thing to grow up in the shadow of another person’s sorrow” (*Changes* 171). In “The Immigrant Story,” Jack resorts to some terse, minimal vocabulary to evoke his father’s meeting with his mother at the harbor and his sense of horror as he realizes that his children have died of starvation in the home country: “[m]y father met my mother at the boat. He looked at her face, her hands. There was no baby in her arms, no children dragging at her skirt” (*Changes* 175). Faith also remains very discreet about her own origins, merely recalling the ironic family anecdote according to which her grandfather, “scoring the salty sea,” skated for miles on the Baltic Sea with a frozen herring in his pocket (*Changes* 30-31). Mentioned twice in the stories, this trivial, reported story seems essential to Faith’s self-definition.

- 12 In Paley's fiction, memories vibrate and reverberate in daily scenes or conversations. In the neighborhood, windows are open and partitions are porous. Secrets inevitably become rumors—when mothers “air” the children in the park (*Changes* 196), when a couple watches another through a hole in the back of the kitchen closet (*Changes* 4), when a mother expects the visit of her son and “s[ings] out loud in a girlish brogue that only came to tongue for grand occasions” (*Disturbances* 87). Staircases, windows, streets are vibrant with conversations, even though they may lead to nothing but misunderstanding (“What are you talking about?” [*Changes* 197]) or utter disbelief (“Blah blah [...]. Blah to you” [*Changes* 85]). Paley often insists on her listening to others before writing: “[w]hatever I say comes from what I hear. It comes from the speech of my city. But that has to go through my American Jewish ear” (Interview Hulley 19). In her stories rumors contribute to the construction of identities and relationships: Richard “is known far and wide for his *nosy ear*” (*Later* 206, my emphasis), Faith and her mother unravel wool while weaving stories “[heard] from the neighborhood” (*Changes* 39), elderly people (*Later* 43) or “bossy youth[s] in need of repair” (*Disturbances* 149) sit and talk on stoops, addressing friends or kids as spectators. In Paley's stories, “everyone knows” (*Later* 42) about the affairs, accidents, illnesses, departures or deaths of others. The narratives themselves become conversations with the reader: “This is common knowledge and well known or I'd never say it” (*Changes* 17). Replete with marks of spoken language, the narrative discourse is even brought at times to mere stammering or sound: “So many boys were out bumming, on the tramp, tramp, tramp” (*Disturbances* 152); “I didn't like to worry worry worry him.” (*Changes* 18). Voices and noises resonate from one window to another, from one sentence to another:

There is a certain place where dumb-waiters boom, doors slam, dishes crash; every window is a mother's mouth bidding the street to shut up, go skate somewhere else, come home. My voice is the loudest.

In that place the whole street groans: Be quiet! Be quiet! But steals from the happy chorus of my inside self not a tittle or a jot. (*Disturbances* 55)

- 13 As traces of endurance and existence, the rituals of everyday life allow the characters to overcome the hardships and tragic turns of fate. When they meet again in front of the library, the ex-husband and the ex-wife of “Wants” merely wonder if what caused their divorce was not the fact that they “never invited the Bertrams to dinner” (*Changes* 4). For in the neighborhood, daily customs and conversations are means of relieving the pains of the past.

Retracing One's Steps

- 14 Paley's characters know about the importance of the past in the shaping of everyday life: “[i]n this simple way the lifelong past is invented, which, as we know, thickens the present and gives all kinds of advice to the future” (*Later* 121). However, since nostalgia is constantly questioned in an ever renewed city, the present also becomes necessary to the re-“invention” of the past.
- 15 Paley's characters live in the present, “which is happening now” (*Changes* 25). And when they inadvertently revisit the past, their reminiscences turn into unexpected encounters with otherness. In “The Long-Distance Runner,” Faith takes the “*Independent* subway” (my emphasis) and leaves her children on their own to go for a run in the neighborhood she used to live in as a child, Brighton Beach—“This was my territory,” she asserts in

“Dreamer in a Dead Language” (*Later* 135). Faith’s running reveals her intuition that all static representations of beautiful scenery in an ever-decaying city are bound to be deceptive. She indeed chooses to harmonize the pace of her steps with the constant metamorphosis of her surroundings:

I wanted to stop and admire the long beach. I wanted to stop in order to think admiringly about New York. There aren’t so many rotting cities so tan and sandy and speckled with citizens at their salty edges. But I had already spent a lot of life lying down or standing and staring. I had decided to run. (*Changes* 181)

- 16 Faith soon discovers that her former neighborhood is now inhabited by African-Americans. After befriending a group of young people, she suddenly feels threatened by them and seeks refuge in her former apartment, now occupied by Mrs Luddy and her children. At first welcomed as a stranger in her former home, Faith becomes a member of the family for three weeks. Entering the past (“It’s me! [...] Mama! Mama! Let me in!” [*Changes* 187]) is a means of becoming acquainted with the present. Faith nevertheless discovers how sad, sordid and devastated her former neighborhood has become:

The tenement in which Jack my old and present friend had come to gloomy manhood had been destroyed, first by fire, then by demolition (which is a swinging ball of steel that cracks bedrooms and kitchens). Because of this work, we could see several blocks wide and a block and a half long. Crazy Eddy’s house still stood, famous 1510 gutted, with black window frames, no glass, open laths. The stubbornness of the supporting beams! Some persons or families still lived on the lowest floors. In the lots between, a couple of old sofas lay on their fat faces, their springs sticking up into the air. Just as in wartime a half-dozen ailanthus trees had already found their first quarter inch of earth and begun a living attack on the dead yards. At night, I knew animals roamed the place, squalling and howling, furious New York dogs and street cats and mighty rats. You would think you were in Bear Mountain Park, the terror of venturing forth. (*Changes* 190)

- 17 Memories frame and shape a scene that is so ruined, scarred and empty that it seems indescribable. They soon give way to imagination and metaphors of war or wilderness. The boundaries between the inside and the outside seem to vanish as pieces of furniture are exposed in vacant lots. Anthropomorphic details (sofas lying “on their fat faces”) highlight the pathos of the scene. However, this outer scene of desolation adumbrates the absence of emotion Faith discovers when, summoned by Mrs Luddy to resume her role and responsibilities as a mother, she returns to her own apartment. If she hid under the children’s bed at Mrs Luddy’s, Faith also finds her son vacuum cleaning “under his bed” upon coming back home. He violently shakes her out of her need for protection: “What are you talking about? said Richard. Cut the baby talk” (*Changes* 198). Indeed, when visiting her parents’ former flat, Faith has not merely gone on a pilgrimage and regressed to childhood, she has also learnt that meeting otherness, in the present, is a means of coming to terms with the erasure of the past and the uncertainty of the future.
- 18 In “The Long-Distance Runner,” memory amounts to a *re-creation* of past events: “I felt a strong obligation as though remembering was in charge of the *existence* of the past” (*Changes* 186). In “The Expensive Moment,” it is the outer viewpoint of a Chinese visitor that casts a new light on the daily rituals of the neighborhood, and on the memories associated with each of its places. When guiding the Chinese woman through the streets of her neighborhood, Faith rediscovers the wonders of everyday life and the extraordinary beauty of the most ordinary, even sordid, areas of the city. She also sheds light on the community’s force of endurance in the midst of despair:

They walked around the block a couple of times to get the feel of a neighborhood. They stopped for strudel at Art Foods. It was half past two and just in time to see the children fly out of the school around the corner. The littlest ones banged against the legs of teachers and mothers. Here and there a father rested his length against somebody's illegally parked car. They stopped to buy a couple of apples. This is my Chinese friend from China, Faith said to Eddie the butcher, who was smoking a cigar, spitting and smiling at the sunlight of an afternoon break. So many peaches, so many oranges, the woman said admiringly to Eddie.

They walked west to the Hudson River. It's called the North River but it's really our Lordly Hudson. This is a good river, but very quiet, said the Chinese woman as they stepped onto the beautiful, green, rusting, slightly crumpled, totally unused pier and looked at New Jersey. They returned along a street of small houses and Faith pointed up to the second-floor apartment where she and Jack had first made love. [...] She showed her the church basement where she and Ruth and Ann and Louise and their group of mostly women and some men had made leaflets, offered sanctuary to draft resisters. They would probably do so soon again. [...] They walked east and south to neighborhoods where our city, in fields of garbage and broken brick, stands desolate, her windows burnt and blind. Here, Faith said, the people suffer and struggle, their children turn round and round in one place, growing first in beauty, then in rage. (*Later* 193-94)

- 19 Faith's walk with a stranger in the neighborhood is not merely a guided tour. The paratactic accumulation of fragments of vision or sensations amounts to an *experience* of the city—the women get “the feel of a neighborhood.” The use of generic names or functions (“teachers and mothers,” “a father,” “Eddie the butcher”...) gives way to terms of endearment (“our Lordly Hudson,” “our city,” “her windows”...). Likewise, the alliterative evocation of desolate areas (“broken brick,” “burnt and blind”) is interwoven with fleeting references to the “beauty” of some particular elements or inhabitants. Indeed, Paley's stories also celebrate the wonders of everyday life in the neighborhood.

Saving Lives

- 20 In “Debts,” Faith underlines her wish to tell the stories “of [her] own family and the families of [her] friends” “as simply as possible, in order, you might say, to save a few lives” (*Changes* 10). Indeed, Paley's stories relate tragic events that, far from being heroic and rare, constitute the daily life of the community. Mothers die, husbands disappear and children are kidnapped, abandoned or introduced to drugs: “What about this city? [...] the whole thing is hopeless. Top to bottom, the streets, those kids, dumped, plain dumped” (*Later* 122). However, the writer's responsibility is not simply to relate this misery but to contribute to the *making* of the neighborhood by showing how love still unites and saves the community and makes beauty shimmer in the midst of chaos:

We must, I said, continue pointing out simple and worthwhile sights such as [...] our own beloved city crowded with day and night workers, shoppers, walkers, the subway trains, which many people fear but they are so handsomely lined with pink to dark brown faces, golden tans and yellows scattered amongst them. It's very important to emphasize what is good or beautiful so as not to have a gloomy face when you meet some youngster who has begun to guess. (*Later* 204)

- 21 As Paule Lévy asserts, Paley's credo is that the “artist must rehabilitate the ordinary and give visibility to the poor and the weak” (117). Now, this rehabilitation of the “invisible” often takes the form of streaks of vision or snatches of conversation that suddenly illuminate the narrative and the neighborhood. For instance, “a simple sunset happening

outside [a] hospital window” seems to redeem in its lonely yet universal splendor the fall it adumbrates: “It was a red ball—all alone, without its evening streaking clouds—a red ball falling hopelessly west, just missing the Hudson River, Jersey City, Chicago, the Great Plains, the Golden Gate—falling, falling” (*Changes* 121). On the street, the characters find fragments of beauty that help them face the hardships of life. When in “Living,” Faith hears that her friend Ellen is dying, she runs down to the corner “for a quick sip among living creatures” (*Changes* 59). In “Love,” the narrator also finds inspiration in “the old earth of Vesey Street” where she notices how love “glides to solid invented figures from true remembered wraiths.” Shreds of memory and imagination blend in her evocation of the local bookstore or of the “kale in the grocer’s bin, crumbles of ice shining the dark leaves” (*Later* 6). More than mere samples, the fragments of vision, memory or imagination or the “stubs of conversation” (*Later* 83) that suddenly brighten the street reveal the metamorphic power of the neighborhood. Scenes of solitude, despair and decay can unexpectedly be endowed with a wonderful shimmer. In “Distance,” for example, the street is suddenly transformed by the arrival of the ice-cream truck: “I like the street anyway, and the hot night when the ice-cream truck brings all the dirty kids and the big nifty boys with their hunting-around eyes” (*Changes* 26).

- 22 The writer’s role and responsibility is to reveal the value of the trivial yet valuable rituals that *make* the neighborhood. Sometimes, this making only consists in *naming* “invisible” characters in order to save them from total disappearance. Because she knows that names “can take thickness and strength and fall back into the world with their weight” (*Later* 79), Paley gives the name of an African-American boy accidentally crushed by a subway train to her story, “Samuel.” The narrator never comments on the risky game of the boys who are “jumping and jiggling” on the platform. She merely reports the men’s boastful memories and the women’s indifference and fear of “embarrassment” as they watch the show from the inside of the car. The dramatic force of the story comes precisely from the detached perspective, from the mechanical precision of the description and from the neutral, journalistic tone of the evocation of the boy’s death and of his mother’s reaction. Samuel not only loses his life but also his identity as he is merely remembered as a son who can never be replaced: “never again will a boy exactly like Samuel be known” (*Changes* 106). If life erases the traces of the poor boys of the neighborhood, it is the writer’s duty to “save” them from oblivion.
- 23 Ceaselessly endeavoring to “show how mysterious ordinary life is” (Interview Hulley 35), Grace Paley thus attempts to make her characters escape the “[g]rayness” (*Changes* 172) of their lives and fleetingly enter a field of light and color. As the sounds, rhythms and inventiveness of her words suggest, writing then amounts to reinventing the world that she knows and revealing its extraordinary value. In “A Subject of Childhood,” the sun suddenly emerges from “among the water towers of downtown office buildings and suddenly [shines] white and bright on [Faith]” (*Disturbances* 145). In “The Pale Pink Roast,” Peter enters a field of sputtering greenness: “Pale green greeted him, grubby buds for nut trees” (*Disturbances* 43). And in “The Long-Distance Runner,” Faith challenges a group of young African-Americans with a blooming bunch of yellow flower names (*Changes* 183). New York, in Paley’s fiction, is the *neighborhood*—a place that she knows, loves, invents and, gracefully, illuminates.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Agamben, Giorgio. *Infancy and History: The Destruction of Experience*. 1978. Trans. Liz Heron. New York: Verso, 1993. Print.
- Bégout, Bruce. *La Découverte du Quotidien*. Paris: Alia, 2005. Print.
- Benjamin, Walter. "The Storyteller." 1955. *Illuminations*. London: Fontana Press, 1992. 83-107. Print.
- Jacob, Christian. *L'empire des cartes*. Paris: Albin Michel, 1992. Print. Trans.
- Tom, Conley. *The Sovereign Map: Theoretical Approaches in Cartography throughout History*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006. Print.
- Lévy, Paule. *Figures de l'artiste: Identité et Ecriture dans la littérature juive américaine de la deuxième moitié du vingtième siècle*. Bordeaux: Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 2006. Print.
- Paley, Grace. *Enormous Changes at the Last Minute*. 1960-1974. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990. Print.
- . Interview with Kathleen Hulley. "Interview with Grace Paley." *Grace Paley*. Ed. Kathleen Hulley. Spec. issue of *Delta* 14 (1982): 19-40. Print.
- . *Later The Same Day*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985. Print.
- . *The Little Disturbances of Man*. 1970. London: Virago Press, 1980. Print.
- Whitman, Walt. *Leaves of Grass*. Philadelphia: Rees Welsh and Co, 1882. Print.

NOTES

1. Paley here uses the definite article "the," instead of the possessive adjective "my" in the title of the story, thus emphasizing the unknown quality of the known, rather than a generic figure.
2. In "The Long-Distance Runner," Faith recalls that, just like the father in "A Conversation with my Father," Mrs Raftery "got liked by [her], loved, invented and endured" (*Changes* 180). The passive form, as well as the crescendo in the list of verbs, shows how invention is spurred by knowledge and affection. When admitting her failings, the narrator also indirectly underlines the process of creation: Mrs Luddy first appears as "[a] slim woman whose age I couldn't invent" (188).
3. "With my coffee, I ordered a sandwich named after a neighbor who lives a few blocks away. (All sandwiches are so honored.) I do like the one I asked for—Mary Anne Brewer—but I must say I really prefer Selena and Max Retelof, though it's more expensive. The shrimp is not chopped quite so fine, egg is added, a little sweet red pepper. Selena and Max were just divorced, but their sandwich will probably go on for another few years" (*Later the Same Day* 200).
4. Etymologically the term metaphor (meta/pherein) means to carry over, transport from one place to another.

ABSTRACTS

Si les nouvelles de Grace Paley se déroulent à New York, la ville demeure néanmoins invisible dans les récits. New York, dans l'œuvre de Paley, est avant tout le quartier, lieu commun bruisant de conversations et de rumeurs. Dans leur évocation du voisinage, les narrateurs et les personnages de Paley réinventent la valeur de la vie ordinaire. Loin de toute autorité morale, ils recréent une expérience de la communauté. Ainsi, une nouvelle cartographie se met en place – celle de la rue, des parcs et des bancs publics. Une nouvelle temporalité, fondée sur la récurrence des rites quotidiens, rassemble aussi les voisins dans une même volonté de surmonter les souffrances de l'exil. La mémoire qui s'infiltré dans les conversations à la fois banales et intimes ne donne alors lieu à aucune lamentation nostalgique, mais exprime au contraire la nécessité d'une ouverture aux autres. Au cœur des descriptions, les moments poétiques qui naissent du prosaïque révèlent la manière dont la fiction dépeint moins le quartier qu'elle ne l'habite.

AUTHORS

NATHALIE COCHOY

A former student of the "Ecole Normale Supérieure de Fontenay-Saint Cloud," Nathalie Cochoy is Professor of American Literature at the University Toulouse-Jean Jaurès. She is the author of *Ralph Ellison, La Musique de l'Invisible* (Belin, 1998), and of *Passante à New York* (PU Bordeaux, 2010). She co-directed *The Art of the City* (Anglophonia/Caliban, 2009) and directed *City Instants* (erea, 2010). She also wrote numerous articles on the representation of urban and natural spaces in American literature. She is the editor-in-chief of *Transatlantica* for literature and the arts.