44. Eaton, "Trends in Kitchen Design," 23.

45. Cromley, "Transforming the Food Axis," 19.

46. "Food Network Drew Record Viewership in 2012," news release, Scripps Networks Interactive, December 12, 2012, http://scrippsnetworksinteractive.com; data compiled by Nielsen Media Research.

47. A measure of the stature of Lagasse, Flay, and Batali is their appearance in an episode of *Iron Chef America* filmed at the Obama White House in late 2009. See "White House to Host 'Iron Chef' Food Fight," *San Jose Mercury News,* November 5, 2009, 2(A).

48. Quoted in Amanda Hesser, "Under the Toque; 'Here's Emeril!' Where's the Chef?," *New York Times,* November 4, 1998, 1(F).

49. Quoted in ibid.

50. Rebecca Swenson, "Domestic Divo? Televised Treatments of Masculinity, Femininity and Food," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 26, no. 1 (March 2009): 46.

51. Ibid., 41, 44, 45.

52. Elizabeth Nathanson, "As Easy as Pie: Cooking Shows, Domestic Efficiency, and Postfeminist Temporality," *Television & New Media* 10, no. 4 (July 2009): 315, 321–22.

53. Sparke, *As Long as It's Pink,* 177.

AFTERWORD

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Suburban studies is an exciting field, still in development. With more than half the population of the United States now living in suburbs, scholars have finally acknowledged the importance of suburbia, not just as a problem but as a dominant fact of American life. Suburbanization can no longer be considered merely "sub" to a centrally defined "urban"; rather, it is an actual form of urbanization, with its own dynamics, that over the course of the twentieth century expanded to dominate the American landscape. But, as the editors of this volume point out, clearly defining what *suburban* means is difficult. Today many millions of people are living suburban lives, but analyzing and communicating the nature and meaning of these lives remains a challenge for scholars.

One reason for this difficulty is the surprising multiplicity and diversity of suburban environments, institutions, and experiences. Like some of the best books about suburbs, such as *Holy Land, My Blue Heaven,* and *Second Suburb,*[1] this collection emphasizes this growing complexity by replacing generalizations with local specificity. Focused and empirical, the twenty-one essays in this book make an important contribution to the growing corpus of writing about suburbs that, through detail and particularity, challenges stereotypes. Collectively, this approach demonstrates the enormous disparities among various suburbs. These disparities include such obvious features as size, location, demographics, history, and physical form. Suburbs can be rich or poor, near or far from the city, enormous or tiny. Fremont, for example, covers ninety square miles, while Pagedale, like most of St. Louis's Normandy suburbs, occupies just over one square mile. If some suburbs remain exclusively white, others, like Pasadena and Ardmore, have significant minority populations, still others are almost completely African American, and yet others are increasingly populated by Asian and Hispanic immigrants. Beginning in the 1960s, housing typologies such as garden apartments and townhouses, and then high-rise

rental apartments and condominiums, offered important alternatives to the single-family house. Today, as families and finances continue to change, illegal garage apartments and rented in-law units add invisible density to suburban single-family neighborhoods.[2]

All of these factors and more have shaped equally divergent ways of life in suburbs. The stories defy many popular and scholarly depictions. Perhaps more important, they often contradict each other, undermining the easy generalities so prevalent in discussions of suburban life. If, for instance, gay men and African Americans organized to defend their rights in the suburbs of Detroit and Philadelphia, and if the Junior League in Pasadena began to welcome minority women, then other, more conservative factions from New York suburbs joined forces to defeat the state's proposed Equal Rights Amendment. Even within racially homogeneous suburbs, residents defined race and space in conflicting ways. In the all-black suburb of Pagedale, residents who equate "suburban life" with middle-class respectability have tried to control behavior they associate with urban ghettos. *Second Suburb* describes how Levittown's white residents, when faced with the first African American family to move into the neighborhood, took violently opposed stands.

Charting the complexity, contradictions, and even paradoxes contained within suburbs, these accounts suggest that *difference* may actually be the defining characteristic of suburbia, rather than the sameness consistently attributed to it. In fact, currently, in an inversion of conventional wisdom, cities are becoming more homogeneous while suburbs grow more diverse. In widely varying circumstances, suburban people of different races, classes, religions, genders, and sexual orientations, acting according to a broad range of politics and values, live highly divergent lives.

These differences are further complicated by the continuous changes that suburbs have undergone over the past century. If the original impulse for incorporation and regulation in Riverside, Tuxedo Park, and other nineteenth-century "bourgeois utopias" was to avoid the uncontrollable changes that were continually remaking American cities, it has become clear that this early strategy has been successful only in a very small minority of elite suburbs. And even there, success has been limited. An intact physical fabric can mask significant social and cultural transformation. In San Marino, Los Angeles's richest suburb, wealthy white residents are currently being replaced by wealthy Asians. This population shift has produced so much social tension that the city felt the need to establish an "Ethnic Harmony Commission."[3] Change can also be partial. My own hometown of Bethesda, Maryland, has seen its downtown develop from a sleepy crossroads into a high-rise corporate center while most of the area's leafy residential streets have remained untouched. Although some residents bemoan the changes, others are thrilled to have subway stops and high-end restaurants, shops, and services at their doorsteps.

Even canonical postwar housing tracts, often characterized as the epitome of mass-produced monotony, demonstrate disparate patterns of change and stability. A quick look at real estate ads for houses in Levittown, New York, reveals this suburb's extensive culture of home remodeling. Since 1949 continuous additions and modifications have rendered the original Cape Cods and ranch houses almost completely unrecognizable. In contrast, most of the facades in Lakewood, California—a suburb of the same vintage as Levittown—remain remarkably unaltered, and a surprising number of Lakewood's original residents and their children continue to live there, perhaps accounting for the town's new motto, adopted in 2004: "Times change, values don't."[4] But of course values do change, and social change is often particularly visible in suburbs. In the 1980s Detroit's suburban gays needed to band together to fight police abuse and discrimination; in contrast, since 2000 same-sex couples have been a common and accepted sight in the suburbs of large cities. Popular culture reflects these new values, as in the gay wedding between two of the main characters recently featured in the popular suburban sitcom *Modern Family.*

Voices, Habitation, and Imaginaries

What does this mean for suburban scholarship? In the face of overwhelming complexity and constant change, it is tempting to generalize or attempt to identify patterns or models. But I would argue for a move in the opposite direction, toward accumulating even more detail through ever more fine-grained accounts of specific cases and local stories. This book takes an important step in that direction, enriching our understanding of suburbia by accumulating rather than distilling knowledge. At the same time, much remains to be discovered. How can we zoom in for close-ups that capture the everyday experiences of suburban life? How can we understand how such experiences add up over of the course of a day, a week, a year, or a lifetime? How can we identify the multiple ways in which suburbanites attain, conceptualize, and exercise agency in the course of living their lives? How can we decipher the mixed and often contradictory motives underlying people's actions? How do these individual choices and decisions shape both the conceptual and physical dimensions of suburbia? The only way to answer these questions is to get even closer to the suburban lives we study. We do not need to abandon our scholarly methods in order to incorporate more suburban voices and experiences and attitudes into our scholarship. Toward that end, I want to highlight three very different but equally promising topics of research that could offer suburban studies richer and more detailed narratives of individual and collective lives.

The first is the individual voice. Incorporating first-person narratives such as those found in ethnographies, oral histories, memoirs, and interviews can significantly expand the explanatory power of suburban research. Books such as *My Blue*

Heaven and *Second Suburb,* by combining historical scholarship with memoirs, interviews, and oral histories, add depth and texture to our understanding of suburban life. Residents' accounts of not only important moments, like the decision to buy a house, but also everyday occurrences provide illuminating glimpses into ordinary yet meaningful lives. Multiple accounts of the same event, told through personal recollections, complement historical documentation, but the contrasts between different individuals' perspectives and memories raise important questions about what close-up and faraway perspectives can contribute to historical interpretation. Juxtaposing these competing accounts and multiple voices reveals significant gaps between what scholars assume and what suburbanites perceive and experience. Recognizing these differences—which can undermine our expectations—can serve as a useful correction and thus open up new avenues for further investigation.

The repository of suburban stories available to scholars is rapidly increasing, partly due to the rebirth of storytelling as a popular medium. Although programs such as *This American Life*—National Public Radio's most downloaded podcast—and live storytelling slams rarely promote themselves as specifically suburban, many of the stories told in these venues take place, not surprisingly, in suburbs. These curated forms of personal narrative are currently being supplemented by more broad-based forms of public history such as StoryCorps, an enormous oral history project that has now collected forty-five thousand interviews, stored at the Library of Congress. StoryCorps and similar initiatives offer scholars raw material as well as methods and opportunities to engage with residents to create meaningful public histories grounded in suburban places and experiences.

Habitation is another potent theme. Investigating both the ways in which people live in particular places and the houses in which they live can tell us far more than studying either one by itself. Studying the single-family house—probably the most investigated topic in suburban history—in terms of ongoing habitation as well as basic design reveals a complex and nuanced spatial order. Typically depicted and usually attacked as an exclusively private realm, the suburban house can also be understood as a highly malleable boundary between the residents and the larger world "outside." For example, Dianne Harris and Steve Waksman describe the house as a complex layering of spatial zones in which public and private mix according to the residents' interests in listening to and playing music. Most suburban houses were not designed with music in mind, of course, but the growing availability of consumer goods such as stereo systems, electric guitars, and amplifiers has effectively altered the nature of suburban spaces—and boundaries. Music, carefully selected according to individual tastes, breaches the walls of the house, bringing aspects of urban culture usually found in public venues into suburban environments, to be

listened to alone or shared with family and friends. Similarly, rock bands practicing in the basement or the garage transform these spaces into semipublic venues that attract friends, neighbors, and passersby.

Even the teenage bedroom, often imagined as a solitary refuge, may not be all that isolated. In some cases listening to and playing music is the first step toward more public and semipublic forms of performance in these supposedly private spaces. In recent years, for example, it has become common for teenagers to post pictures and videos of themselves in their rooms on YouTube and other social media sites—platforms that are accessible to millions of viewers. Or, to note another example, as more and more people telecommute or run businesses from their dining tables or garages, nearly every room in the house can potentially take on a public character. Similarly, as Ursula Lang demonstrates, the yard is not always a barrier. Minneapolis gardeners, proud of their handiwork, often welcome admiring neighbors or curious strangers into their yards.

The penetrability of these different private/public domestic zones shifts according to time, with maximum openness at particular moments, such as during garage band rehearsals, or on Halloween, when front yards and porches and doors become accessible to costumed trick-or-treaters. The maximum inversion of public and private occurs during the quintessential suburban event, the garage sale. For the duration of a day or even a weekend, the front or side yard transforms into a public space, open to all. Personal items and household goods that once resided in private places—in closets, drawers, attics—are placed on the lawn or driveway, where any passing stranger can examine them and even purchase them.

Habitation also reveals the ways in which housing production and consumption interact, an increasingly important theme in suburban studies. One key register of consumer agency is the ability of individuals to use mass-produced commodities to suit their own particular purposes. Several chapters in this book demonstrate the complexity of possible relationships among producers, designers, and consumers. In certain cases these roles can even be reversed; as Trecia Pottinger shows, Ardmore's African American residents organized to initiate and construct housing typologies appropriate for their social and spatial needs. As suburbs evolve over time, habitation marks change in both the public and private spheres. Martin Dines shows how Pam Conrad's children's stories document the accumulation of layers of experience, memory, and meaning in Levittown, New York. In an essay published in 1995, Annmarie Adams describes how large the gap can be between intention and actual use, detailing a single California family's experience in their modernist Eichler Home. Almost totally undermining the house's design concepts, the family kept the curtains drawn across the glass walls, arranged furniture to re-create conventional

room-like configurations, and used the garden atrium for storage.[5] By examining the house from both outside and inside, Adams reveals how widely divergent generalized intentions and specific habitation can be.

Finally, suburban imaginaries can clarify the ways in which individual experiences coalesce into collective representations. Identifying the urban imaginaries of iconic cities has become a staple of urban scholarship over the past decades. Typically a city's imaginary is a highly selective mental construction composed of collectively shared representations of its space, history, and culture. A mixture of everyday experience, popular representations, political discourse, and historical memories, imaginaries are both material—acknowledging the specific conditions that shape the city—and fanciful, based on existing representations and the city's intangible "atmosphere." Their composite nature allows them to contain both "truth" (empirically verifiable facts) and fiction (invented stories) and to highlight certain places and qualities while disregarding others. Repeated and shared over time, these selective images—or "mental maps"—acquire a life of their own; they can be celebratory, as in descriptions of New York, or abject, as in the case of Detroit.

In contrast, most scholars have interpreted such collective mental constructs about suburbs negatively, often portraying them as mere ideology or "false consciousness." They assume that those who choose to live in suburbs do so because they have unwittingly bought into myths of nature, community, and homeownership. Popular culture has imposed other, equally reductive, constructs on suburban life, imagining it as conformist, alienating, and socially impoverished. Suburbs in general have often served as convenient stand-ins for larger social concerns, such as the role of women, consumerism, and, most recently, public health and environmental crisis.

Such generic concepts are far from the highly specific process of "memory work" that Paul J. P. Sandul identified in Orangevale, California. Orangevale's suburban imaginary, literally rooted in its agricultural past as a citrus colony, is made up of a multilayered set of physical and mental associations. In addition to the rural past, these include images of early settlement, small-town flavor, and community coherence, constructed and communicated through yearly events, local organizations, building preservation, and history books.

An architect friend, charged with designing a Metro rail station for a Los Angeles suburb, discovered that Chatsworth residents overwhelmingly favored what they called "the Western Ranch style." They saw themselves not as suburbanites but as the inheritors of a place where there had once been ranches, cows, and horses. The fact that several of these ranches were owned by movie studios and used as sets for westerns just added another layer of meaning to their suburban imaginary.

Such imaginaries, however far from the current "reality" of a place, serve important functions for residents. First, they construct and codify the specificity of

different suburbs. Their selective use of symbols, places, and activities incorporates change into easily accessible narratives of popular history, easily shared meanings that shape individual identities and add perspective and temporal depth to the daily lives of the inhabitants. Critics might see these imaginaries as limited, but the images they convey are often more than clichéd narratives such as those about New York or Paris, still circulating in spite of the fact that the majority of their populations now reside in their suburbs.

All of these stories underline the diversity of suburban realities and imaginaries. They demonstrate how confronting the human experiences of suburbia through careful observation, research, and analysis can expand and deepen our understanding of their multiple meanings. This greater awareness of suburban lives will inevitably challenge many accepted facts and interpretations. Moving in close, looking and listening attentively narrows the distance between scholar and subject. This can help correct the a priori assumptions and critiques that many scholars still bring to suburban topics. The closer one gets to the lives of suburban residents, the more difficult it is to believe that they are simply unwitting prisoners of larger economic and political imperatives, even if their agency, like everyone's, is bounded by constraints of all kinds. Focusing on lives and subjectivities can also address one of the lingering dilemmas of suburban studies: the continuing dependence on the urban "other." It is difficult to study suburbs without responding to the extensive literature on urban topics or reacting to the stated and implied attacks on suburbs contained in its city-centric perspectives. By investigating and understanding what is meaningful about suburban lives, suburban studies can move out of the shadow of the city and become as complex as its subject.

Notes

1. D. J. Waldie, *Holy Land: A Suburban Memoir* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995); Becky M. Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920–1965* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Dianne Harris, ed., *Second Suburb: Levittown, Pennsylvania* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010).

2. Vinit Mukhija, "Outlaw In-Laws: Informal Second Units and the Stealth Reinvention of Single-Family Housing," in *The Informal American City: Beyond Taco Trucks and Day Labor,* ed. Vinit Mukhija and Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2014), 39–59.

3. Merlin Chowkwanyun and Jordan Segall, "How an Exclusive Los Angeles Suburb Lost Its Whiteness," CityLab, August 27, 2012, http://www.citylab.com.

4. "About Lakewood—Established 1954," City of Lakewood, California, accessed December 22, 2014, http://www.lakewoodcity.org/about.

5. Annmarie Adams, "The Eichler Home: Intention and Experience in Postwar Suburbia," in *Gender, Class, and Shelter,* ed. Elizabeth Collins Cromley and Carter L. Hudgins (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995), 164–78.