The Implicated City

Architecture and Race in Jeffrey Eugenides's *Middlesex* and *The Virgin Suicides*

by

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Abstract

This thesis explores how built spaces in Jeffrey Eugenides's novels are elemental in creating and reflecting hierarchies, memories, and identities. Specifically, I propose an analysis of these themes through an extension of Michael Rothberg's theory of implication as defined in his book *The Implicated Subject.* Rothberg focuses on time as a mediator of the ways groups and individuals perpetuate oppression while experiencing subjugation; I aim to introduce a spatial dimension to this concept. Specifically, I concentrate on how Eugenides's *Middlesex* and *The Virgin Suicides* suggest a mode of implication in Greater Detroit that centers built space as the mediator of race and identity. Implication, as defined by Rothberg, refers to a situation or category in which a person does not originate subjugative behavior or systems but participates in them. In both of Eugenides's novels, the primary conduit of racial identity and oppression is built space. This thesis looks to Detroit and its suburbs to analyze how architecture structures the novels' approaches to implication and historical memories of race in Southeast Michigan during the 1960s and 1970s.

Keywords: Urban studies, suburbs, race studies, American literature, architecture

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Author's Note on Language

Cal/Callie: The narrator of *Middlesex* is intersex, and is raised as a girl until the discovery of this condition during adolescence. Until then, the narrator goes by Callie, short for Calliope; later, Callie begins to go by Cal and lives as a man. The portion of *Middlesex* I will be focusing on takes place before the narrator learns about the intersex condition, when this character is living as a young girl. For clarity, I will refer to the narrator as Cal/lie, to acknowledge the complication of delineating the difference in gender identification between the narrator and the self being narrated. I will use the pronouns that Cal/lie used during the scene referenced. When Cal/lie is reflecting on the past as an adult, I will use "he." Debra Shostak's essay "'Theory Uncompromised by Practicality': Hybridity in Jeffrey Eugenides' Middlesex" is an excellent reference for analysis of intersexuality in the text, a topic which is not my primary focus.

Riots and uprising: Scholars have made various compelling arguments for the use of different terms for the events of July 1967 in Detroit, with "uprising," "rebellion," and "riot" being the most common. I will use both "uprising" and "riot" to describe different aspects of what occurred, since I believe terms capture unique and important characteristics of the events.

Black vs. black: I have made the decision to capitalize "Black" in this text when referring to African Americans. As journalist Lori L. Tharpes explained in a 2014 New York Times Opinion article, "When speaking of a culture, ethnicity or group of people, the name should be capitalized. Black with a capital B refers to people of the African diaspora. Lowercase black is

simply a color" (Tharpes). I defer to her expertise here, which aligns with the styles of Oxford and Webster dictionaries as well as the opinions of numerous other scholars. I have not chosen to capitalize "white." Historically, the capitalization of that word has been used by white supremacists and white nationalists, including the domestic terrorist Dylann Roof, to signal specific racist beliefs. I recognize the typographical inconsistency of capitalizing one and not the other. Ultimately, there is no perfect style that accounts for the ontological complexities of both words.

Introduction

In a 2006 interview, Jeffrey Eugenides was asked about his choice to set his novels in his home state of Michigan. “Was it Flannery O'Connor who said that all you need to know to be a writer you learn by the time you're fourteen? Somebody,” Eugenides said. He continued:

> I *have* gone away for a long time, but I've seen in my novels no reason to leave Detroit. Detroit is emblematic of so many American realities that seem important to me. It's the place of American ingenuity where lots of inventions came to be — obviously, the greatest one being the automobile, the most American thing. Its cultural production is very American, from Motown all the way through Madonna, Eminem, and The White Stripes. It's a place of great industrial might, but also great industrial decay, and of course extreme racial conflict that's basically destroyed the city. All these things were there, *are* there, in my hometown. It's a very rich place to set stories because you can get at all these things that seem to be central about America” (Powell’s Bookstore).

In the past twenty years, Eugenides has established himself as the most well-known author taking up the subject of Detroit. His books straddle multiple spheres as works of popular literature as well as subjects of critical analysis. Eugenides’s first novel, *The Virgin Suicides,* was published in 1993 and adapted into a film directed by Sofia Coppola seven years later. *Middlesex*, which was published in 2002 and chosen for Oprah’s Book Club in 2007, is one of the most widely-read books of fiction or nonfiction that mentions the Detroit uprising. It’s also likely the first or only material many readers encounter on the subject. On Goodreads, a social networking site for readers, *Middlesex* has over 500,000 ratings and over 22,000 reviews

(Goodreads). Eugenides's reach is wide, and his novels are among the most well-known recent works about Detroit.

As Eugenides explains, Greater Detroit is a microcosm of modern American issues and ironies. Thus, both *Middlesex* and *The Virgin Suicides* are ideal sites of analysis for questions of race, violence, and architecture that are central to both Detroit and the United States. As George Galster writes in *Driving Detroit: The Quest for Respect in the Motor City*, Detroit "is stunning in that it has represented to the world both the best and worst of what cities can be, all within the span of half a century. It is stunning in that it represents to itself a palette of internally inconsistent, prismatic symbols whose meanings depend on the class and race of the viewer" (Galster, 44). The juxtapositions wrought by Detroit's history make it an exemplary area of analysis. While its themes and struggles are shared by many American cities, the magnitude and intensity of the city's expression of "poverty and plenty, decay and splendor, ugliness and beauty, hate and love, despair and resilience" makes Detroit unique (Galster, 44). The long list of individuals with roots in Detroit shows the abundance and complication of the city: Ben Carson, Lucille Ball, Lizzo, Anna Sui, Francis Ford Coppola, Joyce Carol Oates, and Jimmy Hoffa all worked or lived in the city. The music, film, art, fashion, and politics of the United States all find provenance in Detroit, a city that reproduces so many of the country's joys and struggles in miniature.

As a Detroit author, Eugenides must take up certain themes that are, as he states, "central about America." *Middlesex* and *The Virgin Suicides*, his two novels set in Greater Detroit, are preoccupied with a set of questions that are relevant not only to Detroit and its population but to all American cities and residents. These questions interrogate the interconnected nature of race,

built space, and responsibility that have haunted and defined Detroit and the nation since their respective foundings. Eugenides's novels bring to light a specific set of theories about how race and the built environment interact. These theories rely on an understanding of the complexities inherent in assigning culpability regarding issues of racism and violence in America. In his book *The Implicated Subject*, historian and memory studies scholar Michael Rothberg lays out a theory of this complexity that centers around the idea of moving past the victim-perpetrator dichotomy. Rather, Rothberg advocates for a new understanding of how certain groups and individuals occupy a contested role in which they embody qualities of both the oppressors and the oppressed.

Rothberg writes that "Implicated subjects occupy positions aligned with power and privilege without being themselves direct agents of harm; they contribute to, inhabit, inherit, or benefit from regimes of domination but do not originate or control such regimes" (Rothberg, 1). This characterization of a particular role or status in American society and culture is deeply important to Eugenides's renderings of the connections and directionality between race and responsibility. Eugenides's characters are often implicated subjects, meaning their positions of privilege as white Americans are complicated by their lack of agency in that role. The ways in which his characters both do and do not benefit from their participation in the subjugation of other groups results in a moral cloudiness that permeates both *Middlesex* and *The Virgin Suicides*. The messy combination of personal action and participation in larger structures is essential to the novels. It is important to note that both Eugenides's novels and Rothberg's theory of the implicated subject do not recreate an uncomplicated focus on people with privilege. Rather, "the analytical lens of implication necessarily keeps in view differently situated subjects,

including victim and perpetrator" (Rothberg, 22). This lens can be observed throughout *Middlesex* and *The Virgin Suicides.*

Both novels craft a theory of race, space, and responsibility that relies on an understanding of the complications rendered by the theory of the implicated subject. As Rothberg writes,

> An implicated subject is neither a victim nor a perpetrator, but rather a participant in histories and social formations that generate the positions of victim and perpetrator, and yet in which most people do not occupy such clear-cut roles. Less 'actively' involved than perpetrators, implicated subjects do not fit the mold of the 'passive' bystander, either. Although indirect or belated, their actions and inactions help produce and reproduce the positions of victims and perpetrators. In other words, implicated subjects help propagate the legacies of historical violence and prop up the structures of inequality that mar the present; apparently direct forms of violence turn out to rely on indirection" (Rothberg, 1-2).

Rothberg's theory of implication focuses primarily on time as a mediator of the complex relationships individuals have to the systems they benefit from and are oppressed by. I aim to introduce a spatial dimension to this theory — namely, the implicated city. This new area of analysis will allow an extension of Rothberg's theory that captures the nuances of Detroit's unique position as a city where space is just as central as time to blame and responsibility. The spaces where metro Detroiters live and work— ranging in scale from the style and layout of homes to the construction of racially segregated neighborhoods and suburbs — define the limitations and possibilities of their occupations, social connections, material cultures,

ideologies, and thought processes. As historian Thomas Sugrue writes in *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, "In the postwar city, blackness and whiteness assumed a spatial definition" (Sugrue, 9). This "definition" included physical demarcations of racialized space that often went unseen and unacknowledged by white Detroiters while simultaneously forming one of the primary means by which Black Detroiters were oppressed. As Sugrue notes, "To the majority of untutored white observers, visible poverty, overcrowding, and deteriorating houses were signs of individual moral deficiencies, not manifestations of structural inequalities" (Sugrue, 9). These structural inequalities, which Rothberg analyzes through the lens of time, appear in *Middlesex* and *The Virgin Suicides* through the characters' interactions with built spaces in and around Detroit, including homes, a restaurant, and other buildings.

To clarify the connections between Rothberg's theory and my proposed use of implication in analyzing the novels, I will first give a short summary of how the theory interacts with the plots of *Middlesex* and *The Virgin Suicides*. In *Middlesex*, brother and sister (and later husband and wife) Desdemona and Lefty Stephanides immigrate to Detroit from Greece to escape the violence of the Greco-Turkish War of 1919-1922. Fifty-some years later, their son Milton, his wife (and cousin) Tessie, and their children Cal/lie and Chapter Eleven have become white-identifying citizens who move to Grosse Pointe following the 1967 riots. Their exodus is made possible through a cash insurance settlement from the destruction of the family's Detroit restaurant during the chaos of the riots. The Stephanideses are thus able to move into a suburb that would have otherwise denied them a loan for a house, and their experiences in this new built environment are characteristic of the intersection between implication and physical space in Greater Detroit.

In *The Virgin Suicides*, the deaths of five white teenage sisters during the 1970s sets the suburb of Grosse Pointe into turmoil. A group of boys (now grown men) narrate the story of the suicides, which they remained obsessed with as they grew up. The residents of Grosse Pointe understand the girls' suicides as both a symptom and a cause of the economic and racial unrest that swept Detroit, its suburbs, and the nation during the 1960s and 1970s. The girls personify the unease of the era by concretizing its contradictory values. They are at once sexy and virginal, kept enclosed in their home by their parents but still able to commit the ultimate social transgression: the destruction of their bodies, which becomes a symbolic defacement of the suburban ideals of fertility, whiteness, domestic tranquility, and sexual purity. The girls act as objects onto which the anxieties of the age are projected and enacted. Through this process, the Lisbon sisters' lives and deaths are conduits by which the other characters interface with the idea of the implicated subject. As the novel's narrators and other characters consider the question of why the girls killed themselves, they inadvertently interrogate the very nature of responsibility.

By suggesting that the sisters' deaths are connected to America's history of violence both at home and abroad, Eugenides creates a theory of responsibility that mirrors the one Rothberg elucidates in *The Implicated Subject*. Similarly, the placement of the Stephanides family (and especially Cal/lie, the story's intersex narrator) at the center of various conflicting identities — Greek immigrant, white, urban dweller, suburbanite — compels them to acts as subjects whose presence in various built environments creates and mediates their particular forms of implication. The theory of the implicated subject is predicated on the idea that blame and culpability are situated in a tangled web of individual and group participation in various levels of complex social structures — an idea that bears out in both *Middlesex* and *The Virgin Suicides* in different

ways. Additionally, it is important to note that "the implicated subject is not an ontological category and does not always or necessarily correspond to our stereotypical images of privilege" (Rothberg, 22). Rather, "it reveals the way power functions through complex and sometimes contradictory articulations" (Rothberg, 22). In *Middlesex* and *The Virgin Suicides*, implicated subjects are characters who don't necessarily conform to "stereotypical images of privilege." The situations that create their implication are often found in the spatial dimension of the "contradictory articulations" of power. In other words, the ways that non-stereotypically privileged subjects become implicated is intimately related to the mediating effects of built space.

In this thesis, I will center built space in Detroit and its suburbs as physical environments in which Rothberg's theory of the implicated subject intersects with Eugenides's construction of historical memory and inherited responsibility. Namely, I will lay out how violence, particularly racial violence, is suggested to exist in a framework of responsibility in which both no one and everyone can be blamed for the racial tension and violence in Detroit. This framework is concretized and generated in the built environment, since space creates physical and metaphorical lines of demarcation that police and engender modes of behavior and ways of thinking. In other words, built space in Detroit and its suburbs is an arbiter of implicated status and racial violence.

It is important to note that the urge to forget or escape a complicated legacy of privilege is an understandable one, since it often coincides with or originates in individuals' hopes to provide their family with the safest environment and best school system, both of which are found in Detroit's suburbs rather than the city. In other words, implicated subjects are not required (or

even likely) to operate on overt bias. Rather, they are presented with a specific set of decisions based on their racial and social positioning, and the orientation of these predetermined options gives a unique weight to their personal choices about where and how to live. The implicated city is not a theory interested in assigning blame, but instead serves as a lens for conceptualizing the nets of association and modes of thought and behavior that contribute to racial inequalities in the United States.

In *Middlesex,* the Stephanides's home on Middlesex Boulevard in Grosse Pointe acts as an intermediary between the family and their neighborhood. The house is the means by which they stake out their physical and social territory in the community, and its abrupt, often nonsensical modernist interior reflects the complex theoretical and material spaces that the family occupies in Grosse Pointe. Similarly, the Zebra Room (the Stephanides family's Detroit restaurant) is situated within various levels of racialized discourse. In *The Virgin Suicides*, racial anxiety and violence can be read in the blank spaces the novel carves out: absences and shadows that offer clarity on the implicated subject. Race materializes in *The Virgin Suicides* as an unembodied entity that feeds fear and misunderstanding in the residents of Grosse Pointe. This scarcity proves fertile ground for the development of Rothberg's theory. In the novel, the Lisbon girls' suicides call attention to specific ways that the isolated suburban environment both reflects and furnishes the materials for implication. As the narrators and the other characters search for an understanding of the girls' motivations for suicide, what slowly emerges from the chaos is not a single culprit but instead an encompassing theory of American life.

I will lay out my arguments in three sections. The first chapter is a short history of race and built space in Greater Detroit. The second chapter centers Detroit as an entity inside which

ideas of space, race, and violence can be observed through the lens of implication. In this chapter, the suburbs will appear as a counter-narrative to the events and concerns of Detroit and its citizens. The third chapter concentrates on the suburbs, with the city of Detroit emerging as an area of contrast through which the issues of suburban life can be more clearly viewed.

Chapter 1: The Implicated City

To understand why and how Detroit became a microcosm of American ironies, structures, and tendencies, an abbreviated history of the city as it relates to race, built space and violence is in order. Eugenides, who was born in Detroit and raised in Grosse Pointe, grew up in an area that had been struggling for years with racial tension, class strife, and economic turmoil. While the 2008 recession gave rise to particularly dire conditions, Detroit was always especially vulnerable to economic instability. As American studies scholar Scott Kurashige writes, "The Great Recession that began for most of the nation in 2008 has been a multigenerational calamity for southeast Michigan" (Kurashige, 2). This calamity is constituent to the larger social and economic ills that facilitated the current political regime. Kurashige writes that the same conditions which led to Donald Trump's election in 2016 can be viewed in relief in Detroit: "authoritarian rule by the super wealthy; a 'whitewash' against black political power; voter disenfranchisement; the gutting of workers' rights; and the pillaging of public goods and institutions" (Kurashige, 2). These circumstances, which inform the fictional Greater Detroit that Eugenides writes into existence in his novels, have roots in various aspects of the city's history, so I will first contextualize these power relations and social associations.

By the 1960s and 1970s, when the majority of *Middlesex* and *The Virgin Suicides* take place, the city was experiencing crippling racial mistrust, systematic racialized violence and inequality, economic turbulence, and mass exodus of the city's white citizens to nearby suburbs. These conditions had plagued the city in various forms since its founding in 1701 by French settlers. During its time as a fur trading post, many powerful Detroit families owned slaves. The

colonists also struggled with the presence of local Indigenous tribes, particularly during the French and Indian War of 1756-1763, establishing early on the city's uncomfortable dependency on racial subjugation and discrimination. Detroit was established through the exploitation of Black Americans and Indigenous peoples, creating a logic of causation in which economic prosperity and technological ingenuity were determined by white Detroiters' ability to oppress non-white residents. Those who faced these varied forms of inequity formed new avenues for cultural production and financial security, but the structurally mandated discrimination they faced in every corner of life made these efforts extraordinarily difficult.

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, settlers streamed into Michigan and other western and midwestern areas. Augustus Woodward's grand plan for the city, inspired by Pierre Charles L'Enfant's design for Washington, D.C., included wide avenues that jutted out from circular plazas. Grand Gilded Age mansions soon sprung up in neighborhoods such as Brush Park, Boston-Edison, Palmer Woods, and Indian Village. Luxurious movie theaters opened, as did a magnificent central library building, the Detroit Institute of Art, and world-class hotels and shopping districts. This development was buoyed by waves of immigrants from European countries as well as African American migrants from Southern states during the Great Migration. Greek immigrants — including the Stephanides clan, Eugenides's fictionalized protagonist family in *Middlesex* — began settling in Detroit's Greektown neighborhood in the early twentieth century, occupying a contested ethnic role between whiteness and Blackness.

As Sugrue notes, "Beginning in the 1920s — and certainly by the 1940s — class and race became more important than ethnicity as a guide to the city's residential

geography" (Sugrue, 22). Henry Ford's five dollar daily wage attracted people of all ethnicities and nationalities, but his employees were also closely monitored, examined, and groomed to adjust their personal lives and customs to accord with Ford's ideas about proper nutrition, behavior, sexual preferences, child rearing, and built spaces (Loizides). For example, a pamphlet from the Ford Sociological Department instructed that "Employees should live in clean, well conducted homes, in rooms that are well lighted and ventilated. Avoid congested parts of the city" (Meyer, 70). The company's ethos on living extended to the workers' children. Ford employees were told to find a home "where ample room, good wholesome surroundings, will enable the children to get the greatest benefit possible from play, under conditions that will tend to clean helpful ideas, rather than those likely to be formed in the streets and alleys of the city" (Meyer, 71). Here, the historic American set of concerns and tensions between built space, morality, race or national origin, and labor is thrown into contrast. This situation, which is not unique to Detroit, was exacerbated by a set of conditions that amplified the clashing interests of white business owners, Black migrants, and European immigrants. The city provided a large, spread-out plot of land on which the ensuing battles, both physical and metaphorical, would play out. During the early to mid twentieth century, the automobile industry — which was long dominated by Henry Ford, a man who made it his mission to exert control over the private lives of his employees — became a conduit through which contested ideas about the role of built space as a mediator of privacy and morality were tested, accepted, and rejected. This example illuminates Detroit's unique position at the epicenter of conflicts around race and American ideals.

Though the Ford Sociological Department ceased operation in 1920, the reign of the Big Three (Ford, General Motors, and Chrysler) continued to exert economic and social control over the citizens of Greater Detroit in subtler but equally pervasive ways. The swelling of Detroit's Black population during the Great Migration resulted in new modes of discrimination and engendered novel modalities of concern among white citizens. In Detroit's first census in 1820, only 5 percent of the population was Black, and by 1900 the figure had dropped to less than 2 percent (Galster, 99). However, from 1910 to 1920, the Black population in Detroit expanded from 5,741 to 40,838, a 614 percent increase, and by the 1920s, there were 120,066 Black residents of the city (Galster, 99). Among the people who migrated to the city during this period was Berry Gordy, Sr., founder of the Motown record label, and Elijah Poole, more famously known as Elijah Muhammad of the Nation of Islam. In 1923, William Young and his son set out for Detroit from Tuscaloosa, unaware that five-year-old Coleman would go on to be the city's first Black mayor and one of the most divisive political figures of his era (Galster, 100). The seeds of the city's legacy were already beginning to foment with the influx of Black Americans, who joined thousands of immigrants pouring into the city from Europe and the Middle East.

As Black laborers found work in Detroit's factories, discriminatory practices and segregation took hold in the city's built spaces. A 1920 report from the head of the Detroit Urban League, an organization founded in 1916 to provide services and support to Black residents, found that some companies segregated their facilities using physical barriers, such as a chain to split a factory cafeteria or divided bathrooms for Black and white employees (Galster, 100). Shut out of white neighborhoods, newly arrived Black migrants often found housing in an area on the east side of the city known as Black Bottom. As Galster writes, "the situation was so dire [in

Black Bottom] that some pool halls rented out their tables at night for those who had nowhere else to sleep" (101). Despite the hardship endured by many of its residents, Black Bottom soon became known for the quality of its nightlife and artistic production. Paradise Valley, the cultural district of Black Bottom, hosted musicians including Nat King Cole and Josephine Baker in the neighborhood's famous bars and lounges. Outside of Black Bottom, a new Black middle class began to emerge. Of the 65,000 Black Americans living in Detroit in 1924, most were laborers, but a directory published that year counted "8 policemen, 29 teachers, 15 pharmacists, 26 nurses, 24 lawyers, 24 dentists, and 35 doctors" (Galster, 101). These more well-off residents soon physically separated themselves from Black Bottom through the creation of new Black neighborhoods and venues for socializing. Founded in 1949, the Cotillion Club was one such space for middle-class Blacks who were banned from the equivalent clubs created by white Detroiters (Galster, 101).

While Detroit's racial history is often portrayed in terms specific to its white and Black populations, the city became home to people of many nationalities during the twentieth century. Maronite Christians from Lebanon and Syria arrived in the early 1900s (Galster, 102), and in the 1920s, Muslim Arabs from Jordan, Palestine, and Yemen found work at Ford's Highland Park factory. As white Detroiters fled to the suburbs in the 1960s and 1970s, a wave of Chaldean (Catholic Iraqi) immigrants took over the vacancies they left in their wake. In the 1920s, Mexican immigrants settled in multiple Detroit neighborhoods, including the area of southwest Detroit now known as Mexicantown. The 1990s saw an increase in the number of immigrants from Southeast and South Asia, with new residents hailing from countries such as China,

Pakistan, and Vietnam (Galster, 103-104). While it is important to acknowledge the diversity of Detroit's history of immigration and migration, the analysis of the city through a Black-white lens does have a basis in the area's population. As Galster writes, "Detroit's history is a particularly clear example of black-white relations in the United States, since the region's population has far fewer Hispanic and Asian residents than the country at large, and far more black people" (106).

I'd also like to call attention to the complication inherent in writing about race, economic status, and urban-rural living patterns. Not all white people experience the material and economic realities of suburban living or other forms of privilege; conversely, many Black Americans live in the suburbs and do not experience economic devastation due to systemic racism. My aim in this thesis is not to set up a white-suburban-wealthy or Black-urban-poor dichotomy, which would play into stereotypes and discount the experiences of many people. Rather, I use Greater Detroit as a test case to explore the demographic and economic realities of the United States — in which white people make up 68 percent of suburban residents and Black people are only 11 percent (Pew Research Center). In Detroit, Black people make up 80 percent of the population, and white people only 15 percent; on average, cities are 44 percent white and 17 percent Black (US News & World Report, Pew Research Center). Notably, Grosse Pointe is 94 percent white and only 2 percent Black (Census). Greater Detroit may be even more representative of national trends than these figures show, since a recent study found that the average Black American in metro Detroit lives in an area that is at least 81 percent Black, and similar statistics are found in other major cities such as Chicago and Philadelphia (Logan and

Stults, 8). Given these patterns of demography, it's clear that Greater Detroit reflects national patterns in the extreme.

The new understanding of race as a social category in the early- to mid-twentieth century contributed to the black-white dichotomy in Detroit. As American studies scholar and historian David Roediger writes in *Working Toward Whiteness,* scholars have long struggled to find language to describe the situation of recent immigrants from Europe in the early twentieth century. Labels include "not-yet-white," "situationally white," "not quite white," "off-white," "semiracialized," and "conditionally white" (Roediger, 13). Roediger, who prefers the term "inbetween peoples," notes that William Z. Ripley's authoritative 1898 study *The Races of Europe* named three discrete (and hierarchical) races in Europe: Teutonic, Alpine, and Mediterranean (Roediger, 14). In sum, the early twentieth century saw a general confusion and inconsistency among both individuals and larger organizing bodies (including census data collectors) about how to define and deny whiteness.

The capricious category of "white" was unstable in part due to disagreements about the biological basis of race and ethnicity. As Roediger writes, "these founding ambiguities spoke to how ethnicity tortuously emerged as a term registering uneven and unpredictable changes in how new immigrant communities and communities of color existed in a changing social structure" (25). Furthermore, the use of the word "ethnic" to distinguish between what William Peterson terms "nation-race" (i.e., ethnicity as culture) and "color-race" (i.e., race as genetic) did not emerge until the 1980s (Roediger, 32). Rather, "race was at once biological and cultural, inherited and acquired. Race identified, depending on context, both a category and a

consciousness" (Roediger, 35). This complex narrative of white racialization is key to understanding the contested and often implicated role that immigrants played in Detroit's history of race, built space, and violence.

As I have just detailed, Detroit exemplifies the way built space creates the role of the implicated subject as well as oppressed positions. From ribbon farms in the city's early years to redlining programs in the twentieth century, the physical characteristics of Detroit were always central to the ways people enforced racial categories and social roles. The foundational nature of built space in creating these individual relationships and collective actions gives shape to my idea of the implicated city. Namely, the role of the built environment in constructing and articulating the boundaries of social life and race relations in Detroit produces ideal conditions for defining the role of spatial reality for the implicated subject.

Chapter 2: Detroit

"Detroit is America's canary in the coal mine."

Scott Kurashige, *The Fifty-Year Rebellion*, 4

At about 4 a.m. on July 23, 1967, an unlicensed bar (known as a blind pig) was raided on Twelfth Street in Detroit, in the midst of a party for homecoming Vietnam veterans. The crowd began throwing glass bottles and setting fires while the police processed arrests of about 80 people. As the sun rose on a hot summer day, the looting, fighting, and fires spread, and by the end of July 23, the conflict had grown such that full-scale violence was engulfing the streets of the city. Units from the state police and National Guard descended on Detroit, and on the following day President Johnson deployed five thousand paratroopers after pleas for help from city and state officials. By July 28, forty-three civilians had died: 33 Black and 10 white. Two thousand people were injured and another 7,000 were arrested. It wasn't until the riots in Los Angeles in 1992, in which 52 people died, 2,383 were injured, and 16,291 were arrested, that these numbers ceased to be the highest in any American riot (Kenyon, 9).

Statistics about violence during the uprising paint a complicated picture about the identities of aggressors and victims of violence:

> (1) a white store owner was beaten by a black youth; (2) a white woman was shot in her car as it passed through a milling crowd of black civilians; (3) a white looter was shot by a white store owner; (4) a black youth was shot by a black private guard; (5) a black looter was shot by a white store owner; and (6) a black man was shot by an unprovoked white civilian" (Bergesen, 263).

Sociologist Albert Bergesen also found that 69 percent of the total violence in the city during the uprising was committed by authority figures, including policemen, members of the National Guard, and federal troops. The remainder of violent incidents was about evenly split between accidental violent incidents and civilian violence (Bergesen, 267). These figures run counter to the widely accepted narrative that the uprising was caused by Black rioters, and that the violence was primarily committed by Black citizens. The numbers paint a more complicated picture of conflict, suggesting that the deaths were a result of entropic violence as well as frustration and anger by Blacks and whites (for both shared and different reasons) after years of classist and racist policies and attitudes in the city and its suburbs.

In "The Ruins of Detroit: Exploring the Urban Crisis in the Motor City," historian Kevin Boyle argues that new socio-historical analyses of 1967 find the cause of the uprising was not Black citizens but racist mismanagement of power by white-controlled institutions. Boyle writes that new scholarship has found traction in "insisting that the roots of Motown's continuing crisis must be traced not to the terrible events of 1967 but to white Detroiters and the institutions they controlled" (111). This narrative frame is useful when analyzing the role of violence in *Middlesex*, because it centers white Detroiters as a crucial agentic population whose ideas, beliefs, and responsibility must be analyzed for a complete understanding of the various permutations of racially-informed violence that exists in Detroit. Boyle's historical study informs my analysis of the Stephanides family and their crucial role as implicated subjects.

While the Stephanideses are initially received as non-white immigrants in Detroit because their Greek customs and beliefs differ from those of the Americanized white population of the city, the family is in many ways enculturated by the late 1960s. Their participation and

categorization in white American culture allows them to be a site of analysis for the ways white Detroiters perceived and partook in the uprising. However, it's important to note that the Stephanides's location at the intersection between whiteness and minority identity is one manifestation of the novel's preoccupation with liminality. Just as Cal/lie's designation as an intersex narrator is used as a means of exploring boundaried performances and experiences of gender, the Stephanides's Greek heritage provides them with inherited memories of out-group discrimination and cultural obfuscation while also allowing them to pass as white in some situations. Additionally, the family's bifurcated experience of the riots allows Eugenides to showcase the critical role of both public and private space in negotiations of race and violence during the events of those days. Cultural history scholar Amy Maria Kenyon writes about this phenomenon in her book *Dreaming Suburbia: Detroit and the Production of Postwar Space and Culture:* "On a very concrete level, the long, hot summer was about people as *users* of space; it was about bodies and experience. It was about houses and streets, who owned them, who controlled them, and who occupied them" (12).

While Milton runs off to safeguard the family restaurant, Cal/lie and her mother, grandparents, and brother have a specific experience of the uprising that is contingent on their location: hidden away in their attic, watching the violence on television. This is consistent with a first-person account by American studies scholar James Neuchterlein. "It was hot and the apartment had no air-conditioning, so we kept the windows open," he writes.

> Playing cards at the kitchen table, we could hear the sound of rifle fire. A major expressway separated us from the riot zone and we felt we had no great sense of danger, but the continuing — and increasing — background noise of gunfire, much like a war

> movie soundtrack, made for an unsettling, even surreal, experience. After midnight, we heard the rumbling of what we later learned were troop vehicles moving a long [sic] the expressway" (Neuchterlein, 1).

Neuchterlein's mention of a "major expressway" foreshadows the importance of highways as conduits of isolation that separate the suburbs from the city. Neuchterlein's narrative is structurally similar to the experiences of most of the Stephanides family, who, apart from Milton, "took a suitcase full of food up to the attic and stayed there for three days, watching the city burn on my grandparents' small black-and-white" (Eugenides, 239). The Stephanides's removal from the violence in this part of the plot reflects real experiences of white Detroiters, and it also reflects the middle-class, white-passing social situation of the family during the 1960s. Additionally, it underscores their role as implicated subjects operating inside specific built spaces such as the attic — spaces which confirm and make possible their implication. In the attic, the Stephanideses are isolated from the violence but able to observe it through the mediation of the television. The attic is not a passive physical medium, but an active one. The ramifications of experiencing the riots through the specific location and characteristics of this space goes on to inform later choices to leave Detroit. Furthermore, the isolation in the attic prefigures the family's later seclusion in Grosse Pointe, and it reflects a larger narrative theme in both *Middlesex* and *The Virgin Suicides*: that white families' effort to protect themselves from violence in cloistered suburban environment is futile, and that isolation creates dire situations for white people as well as the people they physically separate themselves from. This idea is predicated on an expansion of Rothberg's theory of the implicated subject into a consideration of

the built environment, and it also relies on Eugenides's theory of historical imagination and causation.

Rothberg's theory operates primarily through engaging with time as a mediator of the conditions that create the implicated subject. In addition to racial slavery, Rothberg "also addresses other situations where contemporary and historical problems of responsibility intersect" (Rothberg, introduction). These situations include the Holocaust, South African apartheid, liberation in Vietnam and Kurdistan, and the Israel/Palestine clash. In each of these areas of analysis, Rothberg focuses on the way time fractures and muddies the legacy of violence and inequality. For example, he writes about how the distancing effects of time complicate questions of reparations and restitution, since descendents of privileged individuals often benefit from their ancestors in indirect and intangible ways. Inherent to his analysis is a consideration of how historical memory influences questions of personal and collective responsibility — the effects, for example, of the memorializing of the 1967 riots as evidence of Black urban disorder rather than than a direct effect of white institutions' prejudice and violence. I will expand on this topic later in this chapter, though it's important to note here how historical memory forms the bridge between Rothberg's temporal axis and my spatial one. Space is an arbiter of history, setting and reflecting the conditions inside which it unfolds. Historical memory, then, relies on space to define the terms of remembrance and meaning-making.

Conventions of suburban interior design in Grosse Pointe, for example, or street-level urban planning and zoning in Detroit — these are not simply the backdrop of history but active participants in creating social roles, experiences, infatuations, and memories. Imagine houses, streets, restaurants, fences, and other manmade elements of the environment as structures on the

set of a play. Their characteristics form the terms with which every action and feeling is negotiated — who is visible and who is hidden; what textures and shapes invite fear, longing, or comfort. When the Stephanides family hides in the attic during the riots, the physical space they occupy defines the conditions of their experiences and forms the basis for their future memories of that week. The attic separates them from the violence in the city, and so they rely on the television to inform their understanding of what is happening outside. The television, though it is not an aspect of the architecture of the attic, is a crucial element of the built environment. As I established in Chapter 1, Detroit offers a particularly salient example of space as an axis of implication. This claim can be clearly observed in the Stephanides's experience and memory of the riots, which is sculpted from the mediating characteristics of their physical environment. While my focus foregrounds space rather than time, historical memory is an essential aspect of Eugenides's rendering of physical environments, since time is the medium through which space is experienced and remembered.

As Samuel Cohen argues in "The Novel in a Time of Terror: *Middlesex*, History, and Contemporary American Fiction," *Middlesex "*displays a particular historical imagination, as all historical novels do; it depends on a set of notions about the relationship between the past, present, and future, about cause and effect, and about the possibilities and problems that attempt to understand and represent the past entail" (Cohen, 371). This "set of notions" is essential to the way Eugenides constructs the racialization of violence. Eugenides's theory of the causalities and casualties of present and past violence can be observed at length in his rendering of the raid of the Twelfth Street bar. Namely, Eugenides's historical imagination is rooted in the experiences of people whose stories are excluded from mainstream narratives, with a focus on how those

individuals' lives intersect with larger social and economic forces and structures. This is especially clear in his highlighting of the experiences of prostitutes. He writes,"For instance, as the police arrive, there are girls lined along the street, girls in miniskirts, thigh-highs, and halter tops. (The sea wrack Milton hoses from the sidewalk every morning includes the dead jellyfish of prophylactics and the occasional hermit crab of a lost high heel)" (Eugenides, 236). Eugenides imagines the lives of the prostitutes who work the streets outside the Stephanides's restaurant, casting them as an integral part of the uprising as well as Milton's day-to-day life.

As Cohen writes, Eugenides is constantly at work in the creation of not just a single history but a set of histories, all of which overlap and inform each other. Eugenides's attention to the interior lives of figures whose lives go unrecorded in history books (prostitutes, for instance) is one way in which he probes the problem with singular and simplified tellings of history and the forces that cause and create them. In particular, his attention to the prostitutes calls attention to the ways race, gender, and sexual violence intersect with limited economic opportunities. Eugenides details the prostitutes' experiences as follows: "There are calls back and forth, the lifting of already minuscule skirts, and sometimes a flash of breast or an obscene gesture, the girls working it, laughing, high enough by 5 a.m. to be numb to the rawness between their legs and the residues of men no amount of perfume can get rid of." (Eugenides, 237). Eugenides connects the bodily experiences of these young women to the circumstances of the country they live in, suggesting that their desperation is tied inextricably to the limited opportunities for women in the United States in the 1960s, to the economic situation in Detroit, to Cold War mentalities about the contradictory fundamentality of privacy, and finally to the racial tensions that intersected with these and other cultural forces to produce the violence of the Detroit riots

and subsequent white flight. By constructing an imagined history of the Twelfth Street raid that begins with a description of the interior lives of young prostitutes, Eugenides emphasizes the importance of seemingly secondary individuals to historical events, based upon both human empathy and the inextricable web of historical cause and effect. Inherent to this configuration of history as a lattice of personal and collective interdependence is the theory of implication. This logic of history also figures into *The Virgin Suicides,* which I will discuss in Chapter 3.

Eugenides continues this rhetorical strategy of combining various individual viewpoints and social positions to national moods and events: "At the curb the girls recognize the cops because they have to do them for free. But something is different tonight, something is happening," Eugenides writes.

> "People stream out of other blind pigs and from houses and from street corners and you can feel it in the air, the way the air has somehow been keeping score, and how at this moment in July of 1967 the tally of abuses has reached a point so that the imperative flies out from Watts and Newark to Twelfth Street in Detroit, as one girl shouts, 'Get yo' hands offa him, motherfucking pigs!' . . . and then there are other shouts, and pushing, and a bottle just misses a policeman and shatters a squad car window behind . . . and back on Seminole my father is sleeping on a gun that has just become recommissioned, because the riots have begun" (Eugenides, 237).

Again, Eugenides takes care to connect the larger history of racial unrest in the 1960s, suggesting that the Watts riots of 1965 and the Newark riots that occurred a few weeks before the night in question were somehow deeply connected to that night on Twelfth Street — not just in the shared causes and effects of racial violence, but through something less definitive or academic: an

"imperative," a frustrated urgency, a call to violence felt in both the minds and bodies of those milling the streets, dancing in the blind pig, and sitting at home watching the fight unfold on television. By bringing the focus back to Milton, Eugenides again emphasizes the interconnectedness of the Stephanides family with real events that occurred not just in Detroit but across the country.

This interconnectedness — a sense of history that requires a perspective that is simultaneously broad and narrow — is the foundation for *Middlesex*, and it's especially important for analyzing the rest of Eugenides's scenes during the uprising. "So it was that the Detroit riots will always be connected in my mind with my first sight of aroused male genitalia. Even worse, they were my father's, and worst of all, he was reaching for a gun," explains Cal/lie (Eugenides, 238). Upon hearing the riots, Milton had "flipped gymnastically into the air and landed on his feet, completely unaware of both his nakedness and his dream-filled morning erection" (Eugenides, 238). This absurdist scene — a naked father with a gun and an erection — plays on the sense of the impossible that underwrites the emotional landscape of this chapter of the Stephanides's family history. Milton rushes out of the house "half-dressed, in shoes but no socks, in pants but no underpants" (Eugenides, 238). His comical appearance is juxtaposed by the seriousness of his mission, which is to secure the family business from the encroaching violence.

As Milton proceeds through the streets of the city, he recalls his memory of these places: "It was funny because these were his streets" (Eugenides, 239). This assumption of ownership over the public built environment is based on Milton's upbringing in the area.

> Milton had known them his whole life. Over there on Lincoln there used to be a fruit stand. Lefty used to stop there with Milton to buy cantaloupes, teaching Milton how to pick a sweet one by looking for tiny punctures left by bees . . . On the corner of Sterling and Commonwealth was the old Masonic temple, where one Saturday afternoon thirty-five years before, Milton had been runner-up in a spelling bee. A spelling bee! Two dozen kids in their best clothes concentrating as hard as they could to piece out 'prestidigitation' one letter at a time. That's what used to happen in this neighborhood. Spelling bees! Now ten-year-olds were running in the streets, carrying bricks. They were throwing bricks through store windows, laughing and jumping, thinking it was some kind of game, some kind of holiday" (Eugenides, 239).

Milton's familiarity with the area from his childhood provides source material for him to contextualize the violence. However, what Milton fails to acknowledge is that fact that his memories of spelling bees and fruit stands are not separate from the present violence but rather part of its history — facts of life which, like the experiences of the prostitutes watching policemen on Twelfth Street, seem tangential but are actually essential.

Milton's inability to perceive the interconnectedness between the private and public histories of Detroit is one manifestation of his refusal to acknowledge the relationship between white institutions (and those who benefit from them) and violence. Eugenides's emphasis on historical cause and effect, which Cal/lie is so obsessed with, is notably missing in Milton's thinking (which, given the logic of the book, is constructed by Cal/lie, a quasi-omniscient narrator who imagines this to be the shape of his father's interior life). Milton's shock that children are giddily throwing bricks as if the violence is "some kind of game, some kind of

holiday" provides a perspective that undermines accounts of the uprising as a rebellion or revolution. If some of the violence was done by children who did not understand the aims or causes of the purported rebellion, it's difficult to conceive of the events as having a united purpose accepted by all participants in the violence, as scholars such as Kurashige propose. Rather, Milton's account contributes to a more frustratingly nebulous historical memory, in which the violence was both random *and* purposeful, a result of a bad policing and a long history of racial prejudice in the city as well as the pull of childish joy — felt by children and adults, Blacks and whites — at the primal pleasure of destruction.

Cal/lie's recollection of her emotions during this time is also reflective of the multiple possible narratives about the uprising:

> Sure, buildings were burning, bodies were lying in the street, but the mood wasn't one of desperation. I'd never seen people so happy in my entire life. Men were playing instruments taken from a music store. Other men were handing whiskey bottles through a shattered window and passing them around. It looked more like a block party than it did like a riot" (Eugenides, 240).

Cal/lie's characterization of the emotions and motivations of the participants in the riots is removed in a physical sense, since she is watching the events unfold on on television. Her misapprehension here is a disavowal of implication and a reflection of her own spatial distancing. By interpreting the mood of the riots as completely joyful, Cal/lie removes her own and her family's involvement in the various types of racial discrimination that led to the arrests in the blind pig and subsquent violence. Additionally, seven-year-old Cal/lie's understanding of race was shaped by her parents, and as an adult, Cal/lie reflects on the prevalent ideas about

Blackness in his Detroit neighborhood. As sociologist Donald Warren writes in "Suburban Isolation and Race Tension: The Detroit Case," neighborhoods are important centers of socialization that help form individuals' ideas about race. "The climate of opinion in a community affects what people think and do. The isolation of the white suburb from the city to which it is a satellite affects the perceptions of its residents," Warren writes.

> Whatever an individual might think or do if he were a resident of a central city, or even of another suburb, the milieu of his own community has a powerful effect on him, regardless of his background, education, or point of view. His action reflects his community climate—whether it be voting, joining groups, or buying guns" (Warren, 324).

While Warren's study is about the people living in suburban areas, the socialization he describes is relevant to the Stephanides family. While the Stephanides's experience the uprising as a white-passing immigrant family in a Detroit neighborhood, they are effectively isolated from the experiences of Black people. However, they are not isolated from the experience of race and racism. If sides were to be taken (which they were), the Stephanides family and their neighbors would choose to identify with whites and disavow the actions of Black Detroiters. In an immigrant family, the decision (or ability) to identify as white has serious ideological and practical implications.

As an immigrant family, the Stephanides's racial liminality is a form of implication. When Cal/lie's grandparents, Lefty and Desdemona, arrive in Detroit, their Greek heritage means they are not considered white or Black. Since they cannot claim whiteness and its privileges but are not grouped with Black people, they find themselves occupying a new and unstable racial

category. Their ethnicity puts them on a threshold, where they experience the privileges of not being Black but are restricted from the privileges of being white. Though Lefty and Desdemona's children and grandchildren experience increasing advantages as they assimilate into white culture, they are never fully recognized as white. Their position as subjects who both benefit from whiteness while also suffering from the racial and ethnic prejudice inherent to white institutions forms the basis of their implication. This implication can be primarily observed through a spatial lens, because it is space that structures which privileges they are granted and how they experience these advantages. Their exodus from Detroit, for example, is made possible by the burning of their restaurant during the riots. In Grosse Pointe, their ethnicity would have prevented them from getting a loan — a loan which is unnecessary because of the cash settlement they get from the restaurant's destruction. This combination of complicity, advantage, subjugation, and discrimination stems from their racial status and is expressed in the ways the family interacts with built space in Detroit and Grosse Pointe. Their shifting racial categorization reflects the complicated history of whiteness as a category of identification and ethnicity.

As Roediger writes in *Working Toward Whiteness*, "in the first quarter of the twentieth century, there was broad agreement that eastern and southern Europeans were white, though arguments raged about the relative merits of various white 'races,' such as southern Italians, Greeks, and Poles" (50). In other words, "the state of 'conclusive' whiteness was approached gradually and messily" (Roediger, 50). Importantly, this process took place within a specific framework of ideas about race and its mutability. "Soap, a haircut, money, or new diet could make the greaser less slick. Learning a language could do the same," writes Roediger (52). The idea that race could be changed through material or cultural realities is key to contextualizing the

Eugenides family's own transition to whiteness and their perspective on the relationship between white culture and African Americans.

To Warren's point about the impact of group ideas on individuals' perspectives, Milton's experiences in the Zebra Room during the uprising reflect the interpersonal effects of his community's (and thus his) views on race. Milton stays in the Zebra Room to keep watch over the restaurant, even as snipers line the streets. Eugenides chooses to illustrate the scene inside the restaurant first through a description of the strangely calm interior.

> The only light inside the diner came from the red glow of the jukebox. It stood to one side of the front door, a Disco-Matic made of chrome, plastic, and colored glass. There was a small window through which you could watch the robotic changing of records. Through a circulatory system along the jukebox's edges trails of dark blue bubbles rose. Bubbles representing the effervescence of American life, of our postwar optimism, of our fizzy, imperial, carbonated drinks. Bubbles full of the hot air of American democracy, boiling up from the stacked vinyl platters inside" (Eugenides, 244).

Here, Cal/lie's narration again connects intimate details of the Stephanides's lives to larger domestic forces and events. Cal/lie explicitly says that the bubbles in the jukebox are representative of "the effervescence of American life," "postwar optimism," and "imperial" consumption. This optimism circulates around the edges, forming a protective cloak around the deep inequalities in social and economic opportunity. As he waits in the Zebra Room, keeping watch, Milton turns off the jukebox "so that he could hear if anyone was trying to break in" (Eugenides, 244). The symbolism of this action is underscored when Cal/lie explicitly

declares that the jukebox is a symbol of frivolity, an object for entertainment that embodies the conspicuous consumption and confidence of the postwar era. Milton's decision to turn the jukebox off is reflective of the way the uprising damages his optimism. The powering off of the jukebox is the symbolic culmination of Milton's earlier shock that the same streets in which he remembers a peaceful childhood are now overrun with violence. Turning off the jukebox is a solidification of Milton's perspective, but it's also a choice he makes to protect himself. The possible joy of shared music is something that Milton must preclude, since the sound of the jukebox could cost him his life if it distracted him from intruders. However, the person who enters the Zebra Room is not a stranger, but a man named Morrison who works across the street.

Morrison is one of the few Black characters in *Middlesex*, and the only one who appears during the riots. The interaction between Milton and Morrison is in many ways stereotypical, feeding directly into ideas about the ways Black people and white people act and communicate with each other. As Jack L. Daniel writes in "The Facilitation of White-Black Communication," insincerity, whether perceived or real, is one of the greatest barriers to communication between Black people and white people. Daniel's open-ended interviews with members of Black communities in Pittsburgh during the 1960s found that Black people cited various types of insincerity on the part of white people as the most common barrier to goodwill:

> One of the greatest mistakes a white speaker can make when he communicates with a Black person is to gently stroke him with pleasant sounds of approval and understanding . . . Why should a Black person believe that a given white speaker is sincerely interested in helping Black people when his performance records indicate otherwise?" (Daniel, 140).

Daniel's assessment of communication issues between Blacks and whites can be observed in the conversation between Milton and Morrison. Milton greets Morrison by asking, "Can I help you?" (Eugenides, 245), which Cal/lie described as "what white people say in a situation like this" (Eugenides, 245). "What you doing here, man? You crazy? Ain't safe for no white people down here," Morrison says (Eugenides, 245). This is met by Milton's explanation that he must protect his property, to which Morrison responds, "You life ain't you property?" (Eugenides, 245). Morrison arrives to buy a cigarette from Milton, and after he sells Morrison a pack of Parliaments, Milton loses his temper: "The riots, his frayed nerves, the smell of fire in the air, and the audacity of this man Morrison dodging sniper fire for a pack of cigarettes all became too much for Milton" (Eugenides, 246). Milton calls after Morrison, asking, "What's the matter with you people?" Morrison answers him by declaring that "the matter with us is you" (Eugenides, 246). Here, Milton uses what Daniel identified as a key communication mistake by saying "you people" (Daniel, 137). Milton's language enforces the ideological and moral divisions he believes exist between white and Black people. Morrison's response directs responsibility back at Milton, in an attempt to expose to Milton his position as an implicated subject. Morrison suggests that Milton is in some ways responsible for the plight of African American in Detroit — not because Milton is personally involved in redlining, predatory loans, or discriminatory hiring practices, but because he benefits from these systematic forms of racism.

The breakdown in communication between Milton and Morrison is memorialized in the family's collective memory. "How many times did I hear this growing up?" recalls Cal/lie of Morrison's parting words.

> As the years went on, Milton used it as a shield against any opinions to the contrary, and finally it grew into a kind of mantra, the explanation for why the world was going to hell, applicable not only to African Americans but to feminists and homosexuals; and then of course he liked to use it on us, when we were late for dinner or wore clothes Tessie didn't approve of" (Eugenides, 246).

Ironically, Milton's wide-ranging application of Morrison's response reveals his misunderstanding of social relations, suggesting he finds it absurd that those with power (white people; men; heterosexual individuals; parents) could possibly have anything to do with the frustrations and rebellions of those in marginalized or disempowered positions. Additionally, his application of the phrase in these contexts reifies Milton's internal monologue during the riots about the changes in built space in the Detroit neighborhood where he grew up. Just as he found it impossible to understand that the circumstances which created his happy childhood memories were the same ones that caused the riots, his use of the phrase reveals the extent to which he separates the personal from the political or the public. When Morrison told Milton the problem with the rioters was people like him (i.e., white people), Milton pushed back against the idea that his actions and identity were part of a larger system that could cause widespread unrest. Milton's broad use of the phrase with his children over domestic disagreements as well as in response to groups he finds issue with suggests a fundamental disavowal of the idea that private and public life are connected in meaningful ways. Instead, serious cultural issues are dismissed with the same catchphrase used during trivial family disagreements. While the interaction from which the phrase originates is a generative source of information about Milton's character and personal ideology, Morrison's individuality remains frustratingly obtuse.

White writers (like all writers) are, of course, allowed to write characters with identities they do not hold. In a 2016 article in the Los Angeles Times, writer Viet Thanh Nguyen wrote, "It is possible to write about others not like oneself, if one understands that this is not simply an act of culture and free speech, but one that is enmeshed in a complicated, painful history of ownership and division that needs to be addressed responsibly" (Nguyen). Did Eugenides write Morrison's character responsibly? Morrison, who is brutally murdered just moments after his conversation with Milton, stands in for the many Black people who were killed or injured by snipers. While some Black civilians were killed by snipers, the deaths that occurred during the uprising happened in a variety of ways, in a situation of chaotic violence.

In historical fiction, the type of consolidation that Eugenides engages in is necessary, and his choice to collapse the story of Black participation in the uprising into one of senseless tragedy is a practical one, even if it does not comprehensively address the multitude of ways that both Black and white Detroiters were negatively and fatally impacted by the violence and destruction. By focusing on white experiences, however, Eugenides redirects the focus of the uprising back to Detroit's white citizens in a way that is uniquely productive by making clear the logic of the Stephanides family's views on race. This logic is described explicitly by Cal/lie: "We were ready to accept the Negroes. We weren't prejudiced against them. We wanted to include them in our society *if they would only act normal!*" (Eugenides, 240). The suggestion, of course, is that whiteness is the "normal" human condition, and Black people represent an aberration in this normalcy. This view is racist in the sense that it categorizes Blackness as inferior because it represents or enacts strangeness and exoticism. Cal/lie's neighbors and family believe that Black people can and should assimilate into white society through the replication of white behavior.

The riots challenge the community's belief that Black people are capable (and desirous) of assimilation. In other words, they think that Black people can behave well (like white people), but this belief is called into question when they see Black people setting fires and engaging in violence and looting:

> "In their support for Johnson's Great Society, in their applause after *To Sir With Love,* our neighbors and relatives made clear their well-intentioned belief that the Negroes were fully capable of being just like white people—but then what was this? What were those young men doing carrying a sofa down the street?" (Eugenides, 240).

Cal/lie's white Detroit community does not see the violence of white law enforcement officials and the participation of white civilians in violence and looting as signs that white people are, on the whole, opposed to peace, respect for private property, and the law. This reveals another aspect of Cal/lie's community's view of race: that all Black people are defined by the "worst" (as defined by whites) behavior of any Black person, while white people's poor behavior is seen as an aberration. The community considers itself progressive because it accepts the possibility that Black people are capable of overcoming their supposed base nature. This view of race informs the community's reactions to the uprising. To explain her socialization on race, Cal/lie recalls the film *To Sir, With Love* (1967), in which Sidney Poitier plays an engineer turned school teacher who wins over his rowdy British charges. Tessie's comment on the film succinctly reflects the community's prevailing view of African Americans: "You see, they can talk perfectly normal if they want" (Eugenides, 240). The family's ideas are directly disrupted by the uprising: "Would Sidney Poitier ever take a sofa or a large kitchen appliance from a store without paying? Would he dance like that in front of a burning building?" (Eugenides, 240). This exposes the

fundamental incongruity that the uprising presents for the Stephanides family and their ideological compatriots.

Black actors have always played important roles in shaping white views on race. Beginning with 1915's *Birth of a Nation,* representations of Blackness in films made by white writers, directors, and producers have reflected fantasies of Black behavior and culture. Ed Guerrero, a scholar of cinema and Africana studies, described this as the "Hollywood strategy of masking broad social and historical conditions by reducing them to the responsibility of the individual" (Guerrero, 19). As sociologist Matthew Hughey writes in his essay "Cinethetic Racism: White Redemption and Black Stereotypes in 'Magical Negro' Films," the manifestation of this strategy during the 1950s and 1960s were embodied in a certain kind of character who gestured at dominant white fictions about Blackness. "This trend headlined the 'ebony saint' character, dominated by Sidney Poitier, who championed the cause of assimilation through the repeated portrayal of a friendly, desexualized Black man that was little more than a nonthreatening confidant to virginal white women," Hughey writes (545). Poitier, who was the first Black man to win an Academy Award, often played the same kind of characters: "In all his films he was articulate, well dressed, and above all, non-threatening to the white majority," writes scholar Novotny Lawrence (Lawrence, 17). Hughey continues to explain that "As a riposte to this image, 'blaxploitation' films marketed a more ambivalent 'bad-ass' image of African American confrontations with white racism" (Hughey, 545). Morrison's behavior, like that of the Black rioters whose un-Sidney-Poitier-like behavior confounds the Stephanides's imagination of Black assimilation, aligns more neatly with the representations of Blackness in the blaxploitation films of the 1970s. As Lawrence explains, "Blaxploitation films feature a black

hero or heroine who is both socially and politically conscious" (Lawrence, 18). Morrison, like the prototypical hero of a blaxploitation film, has a stated political and social awareness of Black life. His conversation with Milton reflects this; in particular, his blunt statement that "the problem with us is you" suggests Morrison's willingness to speak directly about racism and call out the role of white people's racism in the riots. However, Morrison also differs from a blaxploitation hero in important ways. While blaxploitation films featured multiple Black characters, Morrison's role in the novel is closer to that of a Sidney Poitier-esque figure in that he is one of the only Black characters in the text, and the only one in this scene. Lawrence explains that in blaxploitation films, "the black hero or heroine does not emerge as a token character," but in *Middlesex*, Morrison functions as exactly the opposite of this: He *is* a token character, one who upholds Milton's notions about Black misbehavior and race relations. Additionally, the white characters in blaxploitation films are often the villains and are ultimately justly punished by the Black hero or heroine. However, Morrison is killed just moments after his encounter with Milton, in a reversal of the blaxploitation structure that reflects *Middlesex's* rejection of the wrongdoing-justice and justice-violence continuum often portrayed in blaxploitation films.

The encounter between Morrison and Milton is also significant to the text's construction of the events of the riots because it's the only time a Black character appears. Additionally, the discussion is important because the riots themselves are understood to reflect larger socio-political conflicts, and thus the interaction does as well. Cal/lie describes the uprising as inextricably tied to the national political climate. Eugenides does not specify whether Cal/lie understands the local-national interplay as a child, or if the realization comes later, at a time between the end of the uprising and the writing of the narrative. Regardless, Eugenides's

inclusion of a relationship between local politics and large-scale partisan maneuvering is notable. It is described as follows:

> For three days we watched the politicians hesitate and argue: the Republican governor, George Romney, asking President Johnson to send in federal troops; and Johnson, a Democrat, saying he had an 'inability' to do such a thing. (There was an election coming up in the fall. The worse the riots got, the worse Romney was going to do. And so before he sent in the paratroopers, President Johnson sent in Cyrus Vance to assess the situation. In the meantime the inexperienced National Guard was shooting up the town)" (Eugenides, 241).

Later, Cal/lie narrates the aftermath of President Johnson's decision to send in federal troops: "General John L. Throckmorton set up the headquarters of the 101st Airborne at Southeastern High, where my parents had gone to school" (Eugenides, 242). This summary of the political arena in 1967 performs three specific types of rhetorical work: it first announces a rendition of national political history as relating to the uprising, and it then suggests a relationship between the actions taken by President Johnson to harm Governor Romney's reputation and the extensive violence and destruction that occurred during the uprising. Finally, it allows for the possibility of involvement by the Stephanides family in the events of the uprising, and thus the possibility that they are as important to the story of the riots as historical figures such as Lyndon B. Johnson. This set of causal relationships allows a connection to be made that illuminates the inextricability of national and state politics while also building on Eugenides's theory of history, in which individual decisions, whether carefully considered or impulsive, can drastically influence the course of future events.

Cal/lie's account of the riots also references a theme present in *The Virgin Suicides:* the notion that war has returned to the United States, in the sense of physical violence and destruction as well as the lingering presence of previous wars fought by American soldiers in foreign countries:

> "To live in America, until recently, meant to be far from war. Wars happened in Southeastern Asian jungles. They happened in Middle Eastern deserts. They happened, as the old song has it, *over there.* But then why, peeking out the dormer window, did I see, on the morning after our second night in the attic, a tank rolling by our front lawn?" (Eugenides, 242)

Eugenides's temporal dropped pin of "until recently" can logically be assigned to the events of September 11, 2001, which occurred just a year before the publication of *Middlesex.* Eugenides argues that the newly disturbed sense of security is both new and not so new: it happened on a national scale on September 11, but also in a smaller way during the Detroit uprising and even before that, as the long shadows of past wars disrupted the peacetime memories and experiences of white Americans. The war that came home was a racial war, one that was being fought abroad against Vietnamese people as well as against African Americans in cities across the country. Notably, the memories of domestic peace remembered by white Americans might have been experienced differently for Americans who were (and continue to be) systematically and individually targeted by police and civilians. In fact, that peace for white Americans often came at the cost of marginalized groups' rights and freedoms. For example, the prosperity remembered by Milton as he observes the riots was not a time of simple peacefulness for Black Americans in

Detroit. Rather, they faced poor working conditions and housing discrimination after the Great Migration, culminating in the 1943 Detroit riot. White flight — attempts on the part of white Americans to escape the urban violence of the 1960s and 1970s by moving to the suburbs — was a result of this national landscape, and it resulted in expanded physical divisions between white and Black people that continues today. Furthermore, Eugenides's construction of white flight shows the uninhabitability — in both urban and suburban areas — created by white isolation, a theme I will engage with further in my analysis of implication in *The Virgin Suicides* in Chapter 3.

Cal/lie's experience of domestic warfare is primarily facilitated by her decision to follow a tank to reach Milton at the restaurant:

> After two blocks, I caught sight of the tank: it had stopped at a red light. The soldiers inside were busy looking at maps, trying to find the best route to the riots. They didn't notice the little girl in the aviator's cap stealing up on a banana bike. It was still dark out. The birds were beginning to sing. Summer smells of lawn and mulch filled the air, and suddenly I lost my nerve. The closer I got to the tank, the bigger it looked. I was frightened and wanted to run back home. But the light changed and the tank lurched forward. Standing up on my pedals, I sped after it" (Eugenides, 243).

Cal/lie's decision to continue on her journey is made by the changing of a traffic light; if she'd had more time to think, she might have turned back. This mixture of resolve and randomness is confronted time and time again, in both *The Virgin Suicides* and *Middlesex.*

Additionally, the manner in which Eugenides incorporates the uprising into the plot of *Middlesex* suggests a specific construction of the relationship between Detroit and its suburbs. When the Zebra Room burns down during the riots, the Stephanides family collects enough insurance money for them to purchase a house in the affluent suburb of Grosse Pointe, a series of events that form an intimate allegory for white flight. The cash from the insurance settlement allows them to bypass the Grosse Pointe point system, in which real estate agents ranked prospective home buyers based on ethnicity and other measures such as how "swarthy" the couple was (options included "very," "medium," "slightly," or "not at all"). The information was passed along to loan agencies, and if a family's points disqualified them, their loan application would be denied (Georgakas, 203). Eugenides's choice to use the riots to facilitate the move from Detroit to Grosse Pointe is revealing in the context of Eugenides's approach to historical cause and effect. Specifically, the uprising is the impetus for the Stephanides's ultimate assimilation into white American consumer and suburban culture. "Shameful as it is to say, the riots were the best thing that ever happened to us. Overnight we went from being a family desperately trying to stay in the middle class to one with hopes of sneaking into the upper, or at least the upper-middle," Cal/lie explains (Eugenides, 252). Here, the theory of the implicated subject sheds light on the Stephanides's complex position in relation to the victim-perpetrator model. As a reminder of Rothberg's theory, he writes, of this dichotomy that "An implicated subject is neither a victim nor a perpetrator, but rather a participant in histories and social formations that generate the positions of victim and perpetrator, and yet in which most people do not occupy such clear-cut roles" (Rothberg, 1). As second-generation Americans who have assimilated into white culture, they directly benefit from the racial violence that led to the riots, and their use of those benefits

to move out of the city fuels that same racial turmoil. However, as they do so they are discriminated against due to their Greek ethnic background. Eugenides's choice to use the uprising to give the Stephanideses socioeconomic mobility does not inherently erase the experiences of those whose lives and livelihoods were not enhanced by the violence. Rather, Eugenides's decision implicates the suburbs in narratives about why the riots happened. Specifically, the circumstances of the Stephanides family's move allows Eugenides to discuss suburbanites and their expectations for behavior and norms. In *The Virgin Suicides*, Eugenides is similarly invested in describing the uprising and racial strife from the perspective of the suburbs.

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In *The Virgin Suicides*, the city of Detroit and the 1967 uprising are referenced only as shadows of the novel's central narrative. Late in the book, the riots appear when the neighbors give their best guesses as to why the Lisbon sisters killed themselves: "It had to do with . . . the thievery at City Hall, or the race riots, or the 801 fires set around the city on Devil's night. The Lisbon girls became a symbol of what was wrong with the country, the pain it inflicted on even its most innocent citizens" (Eugenides, 226). The suggestion that the girls' suicides are in some way caused by the general unrest of the 1967 Detroit uprising is complicated by later descriptions of the impact the girls' suicides have on race relations in Grosse Pointe and economic activity in the area. The suicides, which are possibly both caused by and cause racial unrest, have a duality which is suggestive of not only the potential power of teenage girls in American culture but also of the contested space occupied by female teenage bodies. The girls' choices about what to do with their bodies are understood to have effects on their own lives but

also on the well-being or illness of their community and country; they represent and create the presence or absence of fertility, decay, pleasure, and violence.

Chapter 3: The Suburbs

"Suburbia is the irresistible spatial arrangement in a culture of avoidance."

Amy Maria Kenyon, *Dreaming Suburbia,* 11

The culture of avoidance of which Kenyon writes is central to conceptualizing the role of the suburbs in my theory of the implicated city. As I wrote in Chapter 1, Detroit and its suburbs offer an especially striking example of how implicated positions are fabricated in and enacted through the built environment. As Rothberg writes, "implicated subjects help propagate the legacies of historical violence and prop up the structures of inequality that mar the present; apparently direct forms of violence turn out to rely on indirection" (Rothberg, 2). The suburbs offer a generative location for this indirection, since the "culture of avoidance" often appears in part as a physical and ideological refusal of implication. As I explored in Chapter 2, the Stephanides's physical isolation in their attic in Detroit prefigures their experience in the suburbs, in which their spatial position reflects and creates their identification with whiteness while underscoring their isolation from Blackness (and their inability to isolate from racism). In Grosse Pointe, the Stephanideses are more concretely separated from Black Detroiters, but the implicated role that forms their ideological connection to race is solidified and altered. Similarly, the characters in *The Virgin Suicides* are also implicated subjects in relation to their roles in white suburban culture. Given the centrality of space as an axis of implication, the impossibility of fulfilling the desire for a culture of avoidance is what makes the suburbs such a fruitful area of analysis. In this chapter, I'll foreground the suburbs (specifically Grosse Pointe) and explore how

suburbia functions in relation to urban space regarding race, identity, privacy, and the urge for isolation as a means of denying implication. While the previous chapter centered built space in Detroit as an arbiter of historical memory and racial identity for implicated subjects, this chapter assesses the role of suburban architecture and its relationship to implication. Specifically, I examine how the desire to deny implication through physical separation in the suburbs has a range of effects, both for people living in urban areas as well as for suburbanites themselves.

The relationship between Detroit and its suburbs has always been a contested one, and the strife between these areas is explored in both *Middlesex* and *The Virgin Suicides*. The books address the topics in vastly different ways and with different themes in mind. Their representation of Detroit and its suburbs — as well as their portrayal of the suburbs as a distinct entity — contributes to the historical memory of these places and to contemporary understandings of how Greater Detroit functions, economically and socially, as both two separate entities and one living organism. In *Dreaming Suburbia: Detroit and the Production of Postwar Space and Culture*, Kenyon describes the surge of misinformation that coursed through Detroit and its suburbs following the 1967 riot:

> The police were training white suburbanites, preparing to incite a riot, and then launch an armed invasion of ghetto areas. Black activists were mining the expressways and planning to shoot white suburbanites as they drove to their downtown offices. Or, by rolling down gas drums, they would set fire to the expressways. Concentration camps in secret sites across the United States were being readied for a massive displacement and incarceration of black inner-city populations. Or the ghetto itself might be cordoned off

> into a concentration camp. Black mobile killer squads would roam suburbia, kidnapping and murdering a white boy from each Detroit suburb. Black maids were organizing to poison white households in the wealthier suburbs" (Kenyon, 10).

The rumor mill shows the extent of the divide between the suburbs and the city, a relationship I will explore in depth in this chapter. This separation is not just racial and social, but also physical. The architecture and built spaces of Detroit and its suburbs are the physical spaces in which and onto which the region's anxieties and modes of violence play out, and they form the structural basis for the experiences of implication subjects. These physical demarcations appear both geographically and on a more intimate house-by-house level. Before we can understand the intricacies of either individual houses or large-scale landscape features, an understanding of the suburbs as an American entity is required.

Bernadette Hanlon's study "A Typology of Inner-Ring Suburbs: Class, Race, and Ethnicity in U.S. Suburbia" found that the "old and wealthy are some of the earliest suburbs that developed as enclaves for upper-income classes, and these types of old suburbs have managed to retain a high-income status over many, many decades. . . These suburbs were elite with extremely low poverty rates and tremendously high housing values" (Hanlon, 238). Grosse Pointe — which is Eugenides's hometown as well as the enclave chosen by the Stephanides family and the setting for *The Virgin Suicides* — fits Hanlon's criteria for an old, wealthy suburb. Like other high-income suburbs, Grosse Pointe's homes usually fit specific architectural criteria that reflect the residents' desire to differentiate their community from other types of suburbs. Scarsdale, New York, for example, established three "style setter" housing types: Southern with white columns, colonial, and English with turrets. The suburb's planners and residents did not

want all the houses to look alike, as in Levittown-type post-war suburbs (Hanlon, 239). This example reflects the power of architectural cues to signal differences between classes and communities, revealing divisions within suburban culture. While suburbia is often imagined and derided as architecturally homogeneous, the type of suburban setting in *The Virgin Suicides* and *Middlesex* is pointedly dissimilar in regard to domestic architecture. The homes in both novels suggest a counterintuitive culture of individuation that is not antithetical to sameness but instead reinforces it. The prevailing suburban domestic culture is defined by a mutual desire for exclusivity, privacy, and originality within a set of social parameters that signify wealth and etiquette.

In the Grosse Pointes — the City of Grosse Pointe, Grosse Pointe Park, Grosse Pointe Farm, Grosse Pointe Woods, and Grosse Pointe Shores — houses range in style from Tudor Revival to Georgian to Cotswald to Colonial. Many of the houses in the Grosse Pointes were designed by well-known architects, including Albert Kahn, Marcus Burrowes, Wallace Frost, Hugh T. Keyes, and Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue (Grosse Pointe Historical Society). As scholars of architecture and built space have noted, domestic structures dictate and organize how life is lived. These spaces reflect the acknowledged and unspoken ideals of those who reside in them. Literature scholar Nicole Seymour, in her essay "*Middlesex* and the Biopolitics of Modernist Architecture," argues that architecture is "a matter of bio politics, in the Foucauldian sense of administering, optimizing, and regulating human life" (1). The study of architecture through a biopolitical lens allows for an understanding of how built space structures the types of regulation and modes of experience that create implicated subjects. The biopolitics of the built environment and its influence on implication are complicated by the type of architecture in question.

In *Middlesex*, the Stephanides family moves into one of the only Modernist homes in Grosse Pointe — and modernist homes, as Seymour writes, "often work against the exploitative effects of automation and sexology" (1). Seymour argues that "the house represents the family's 'successful' Americanization as much as anything else" (2). Specifically, the house is a site where Eugenides allows his characters to explore biopolitics, identity, and modernity. The automation and technology built into the house on Middlesex Boulevard recalls earlier scenes in which Cal reflects on automation. The exploitation of human bodies through the controlling influence of the Ford Company is a form of biopolitics that Cal suggests robbed humans of their very humanness. In reference to Lefty's work in a Ford Company factory, Cal states,

> Historical fact: people stopped being human in 1913. That was the year Henry Ford put his cars on rollers and made his workers adopt the speed of the assembly line. At first, workers rebelled. They quit in droves, unable to accustom their bodies to the new pace of the age. Since then, however, the adaptation has been passed down: we've all inherited it to some degree, so that we plug right into joysticks and remotes, to repetitive motions of a hundred kinds" (Eugenides, 95).

By moving the Stephanides family's experience of modernity from automation to the modernization of private living, Eugenides sets up a tension between types of modernity and suggests a complicated relationship between functionality, efficiency, and autonomy. In both the Ford factory and their suburban home, built space orders their experiences and structures how their bodies interact with the environment to produce belief systems, behaviors, and identities. In the factory, the assembly line is the key aspect of the physical environment that compels workers to contribute to capitalism and its subjugative (and temporarily economically empowering)

possibilities; in the suburbs, remote controls, joysticks, and other apparatus of repetition offer similar opportunities for people to define themselves in relationship to others. Watching television and clicking through channels, for example, is an interface with the physical environment that shapes one's ideological orientation toward justice, politics, and racial identity, given the powerful effects of TV programming. Similarly, owning and driving cars (or participating in the production of them) creates a spatially-informed experience that defines the physical and emotional parameters of one's positionality. This function of the built environment is key to my analysis of the way Eugenides renders architecture as a both a plot device and a tool for depicting the materiality of identity formation.

As Seymour aptly describes, the house on Middlesex Boulevard "contradicts Eugenides's own plotting work. *Middlesex* relies heavily on foreshadowing, dramatic irony, and notions of fate: nods, perhaps, to the Greek tragedies that form part of the family's cultural heritage. . . But if the novel's architecture, as it were, is thus relentlessly teleological, the house is not" (Seymour, 2). This claim is borne out in the way Cal/lie describes the house in accordance with the fictional architect's logic:

> Hudson Clark hadn't believed in doors. The concept of the door, of this thing that swung one way or the other, was outmoded. So on Middlesex we didn't have doors. . . The concept of stairs in the traditional sense was also something the world no longer needed. Stairs represented a teleological view of the universe, of one thing leading to another, whereas now everyone knew that one thing didn't lead to another but often nowhere at all. So neither did our stairs" (Eugenides, 258).

Cal/lie conflates Hudson Clark's ideas about purposes and causes with a theory of life that "everyone knew" — everyone, it seems, except for Cal/lie and Eugenides himself. Eugenides's interest in incorporating metafictional qualities into *Middlesex* is most overt here. Clearly, "everyone" does not include Eugenides himself, who wrote the novel in a manner that suggests everything does indeed lead to something.

In *Middlesex,* events and outcomes are predicated on inherited modes of decision-making as well as the repetition of patterns of coincidence. Cal/lie's parents' simultaneous conception, for example, occurs on the night when both sets of grandparents see a play about the Minoatur, a bull-human monster. Years later, the children who were conceived that night themselves have a baby with an intersex condition — a form of hybridism which leads to a curious adolescent Cal/lie to look up her pathology in a dictionary and read "See synonyms at monster" (Eugenides, 430). Cal/lie, in accordance with his parents' and grandparents' world of reiterated, teleological motifs, narrates the novel with a methodology defined by his exploration of the function of repetition rather than the cause of it. His descriptions of family history all conform to an anterior logic, in the sense that every decision seems fated, and the explanation of these repeated phenomena (incestuous love, a death onstage) are less important than the role of these repetitions in the lives of members of the family. Furthermore, this approach informs the evolving role of implication for the three generations of the Stephanides family. When Lefty and Desdemona escape from civil war Greece, for instance, their journey to America results in their descendents' later escape from violence in Detroit and move to Grosse Pointe. In Greece, though, their decision to leave is not an overtly implicated one. In Greater Detroit, however, implication cannot be escaped, especially not through an exodus to the suburbs. Cal/lie is less interested in

the historical collection of causes for these facts. Rather, he is preoccupied with the purposes and effects of these patterns, which shift slightly but crucially upon repetition, just the way an ill-copied gene might. Given the centrality of teleology to the narrative, how do we contend with the anti-teleological biopolitics of Stephanides's house on Middlesex Boulevard?

Seymour argues that "the house in *Middlesex* indexes sensitive issues of sex, gender, and family. Its open floor plan, the lack of closets (!), and play with inside/outside, privacy/exposure speak to our protagonist's humiliating medical exams and public scrutiny, but also to his self-acceptance and coming out to love interest Julie Kikuchi" (Seymour, 2). I find this analysis too simplistic in its comparison between the house's exposed interior and the physical exposures that accompany Cal/lie's evolving gender identity. While this line of inquiry is valuable, it centers on the argument that the house's open floor plan symbolizes the vulnerability and medicalization of Cal/lie's body as an intersex individual. This is certainly one possible interpretation of the house's biopolitical symbolism, but by focusing on it, Seymour fails to account for the fact that the official discovery of Cal/lie's intersexuality occurs not in the house on Middlesex Boulevard but in a hospital in Petoskey, Michigan. Seymour argues that "Middlesex—as status, as street, as structure, and as story—points us to the role of the built environment in the unique articulation of *intersex* identity and embodiment" (Seymour, 3). I argue that the house's importance in the text cannot be simplified or universalized into a symbol of intersex identity. Instead, the house functions as a site of all sorts of negotiations around autonomy, Americanization, modernization, and experiences of suburban parenting and adolescence. Specifically, the house is a *site,* located on a real street in a real suburb. This localization is not just coincidence or convenience; instead, it determines a specific tether to dynamics and histories present in the suburbs of Detroit and in

the city itself. Among the negotiations specific to the house and informed by its location is the Stephanides family's struggle to broker the changing role of privacy in American life during the Cold War. This struggle can also be observed in *The Virgin Suicides,* which I will explore later in this chapter. First, I will examine the way architectural features of the house on Middlesex function as arbiters and organizers of familial relations, privacy, modernity, race, and implicated status.

One of the defining features of the house on Middlesex is the large front windows, whose size and distinctiveness initially prompt discomfort in Tessie. "'And how am I supposed to find curtains for those windows? They don't make curtains that big. Everyone can see right in!'" Tessie says to Milton as the family explores the house for the first time. "'Think of it this way. We can see right out,'" Milton responds (Eugenides, 259). The windows serve a dual purpose, as Tessie and Milton's exchange illuminates. They make it possible for neighbors to see into the home and thus observe the family's publicized, Americanized private life, and in doing so they facilitate the family's displays of proper behavior, allowing the Stephanideses to prove to their neighbors their suitability for suburban life. However, the windows also disallow privacy. In her book *Pursuing Privacy in Cold War America*, American literature scholar Deborah Nelson writes that the Cold War introduced and sanctified the idea that "In the interests of preserving the space of privacy, privacy would have to be penetrated" (Nelson, Introduction xiii). The windows of the Stephanides's house make this irony visible as a physical structure; the family's suburban privacy is compromised by the very modernity that makes that privacy possible. Eugenides's overt use of symbolism here can perhaps be attributed in part to the era in which *Middlesex* was written. Nelson writes that the close of the twentieth century brought with it new and intensified

concerns about privacy: “The wave of apprehension about the vulnerability of privacy at the end of the twentieth century has generated a massive investigation into the changing boundaries of public and private domains that has become a central preoccupation, not to say obsession, in American political, aesthetic, and intellectual life” (Nelson, Introduction xi-xii). *Middlesex*, which was published in 2002, finds its footing in using built space to symbolize the anxieties and predilections of the world Eugenides was writing in — a world infatuated with finding our lost privacy, or proving we’d never had any to begin with. Thus, the Stephanideses become implicated subjects through their participation in white suburban culture — an experience that denies them privacy while forcing them to reiterate the conditions of their subjugation through continuous semi-public enactments of assimilation. Notably, Lefty and Desdmeona live in a guest house behind the main home, thus hiding them from the neighborhood and allowing their children and grandchildren to engage with Anglo-centric suburban aesthetics.

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Built space in *The Virgin Suicides* is also reflective of a system of symbolism in the novel. In this case, the Lisbon girls and their home are representative of the city of Detroit itself. What is wrong with the Lisbon girls is wrong with their house; what is wrong with the house is wrong with Detroit and also wrong with the country. Eugenides writes, “The Lisbon girls became a symbol of what was wrong with the country, the pain it inflicted on even its most innocent citizens, and in order to make things better a parents’ group donated a bench in the girls’ memory to our school” (226). As evidenced in the donated bench, white concern for white pain is the enduring legacy of the Lisbon girls’ suicide. While the girls are recognized as symbols of the way national crises play out on the bodies of vulnerable individuals, the adults of Grosse Pointe

respond with a physical emblem of care rather than attempts to make right the larger things that were "wrong with the country." The girls are thus a symbol of Detroit and also of the way the nation responded (and continues to respond) to Detroit's economic and social catastrophes. Its jobless and homeless population, its burned-out neighborhoods, its history of police brutality, its decades of class- and race-based discrimination: These are not problems unique to Detroit. What is wrong with Detroit is wrong with the country, emphatically so. Even as Americans understand this, Detroit's predicament is localized rather than extrapolated. Similarly, the Lisbon girls' suicides are recognized as symbolic of larger systemic circumstances, but their community's response is focused on denying their own role as implicated subjects rather than acknowledging it. The girls are not only symbolic of the violence enacted on non-white communities by white people in America, but they also reflect a situation in which white Americans are alerted to their role in enacting and perpetuating these modes of violence and actively deny their own implication. This symbolism is further clarified through the comparison between Cecilia's suicide and the suicides of men in Detroit: "Back in the summer, the city newspapers had neglected to report on Cecilia's suicide because of its sheer prosaicness. Owing to extensive layoffs, hardly a day passed without some despairing soul sinking beneath the tide of the recession, men found in garages with cars running, or twisted in the shower, still wearing work clothes" (Eugenides, 89). These mens' means of suicide are the same as the ones that other Lisbon sisters use, underscoring the girls' role as symbols of Detroit's issues embedded in Grosse Pointe.

Descriptions of Detroit from the perspective of the suburbs are one way to understand how Eugenides and his characters understand the relationship between the city and the suburbs.

In *The Virgin Suicides,* Detroit is referenced only obliquely. “Occasionally we heard gunshots coming from the ghetto, but our fathers insisted it was only cars backfiring,” the narrators explain of their understanding of the violence in Detroit (Eugenides, 32). A cemetery worker’s strike in Detroit is one of the few situations in which specific events in the city figure directly into the novel’s plot. Because of the strike, the cemeteries that Mr. Lisbon visits to find a suitable one for Cecilia (the first of his daughters to die) are all poorly maintained. There is only one cemetery in Grosse Pointe: “a drowsy field” which, “with its leaning headstones, its red gravel in the shape of a horseshoe, and its many trees nourished by well-fed carcasses . . . had filled up long ago in the time of the last deaths.” (Eugenides, 33). These alternative cemeteries are located in various Detroit neighborhoods: “On the West Side they visited a quiet cemetery in the Palestinian section, but Mr. Lisbon didn’t like the foreign sound of the muezzin calling the people to prayer, and had heard that the neighbors still ritual slaughtered goats in their bathtubs” (Eugenides, 34). Mr. Lisbon’s sense of alienation Detroit enclave, combined with the rumors about the practices of the neighborhood’s residents, makes this cemetery unattractive to him. His dismissal of it hints at the ideological separation that divides the suburbs from the city. Notably, one of Mr. Lisbon’s issues with the cemetery is a rumor about the private life of the Palestinians who live near the cemetery. The rumored ritual slaughter of goats in bathtubs disturbs Mr. Lisbon, a detail which is darkly ironic since Cecilia first (unsuccessfully) tried to commit suicide by slitting her wrists in the bath. The parallel violence illuminates the irony of Mr. Lisbon’s assumption of moralized divisions between the suburbs and the city: Detroit is where immigrants kill animals in bathtubs; the suburbs are where teenagers kill themselves in bathtubs. However, this gruesome analog does not seem to occur to Mr. Lisbon. The next

cemetery Mr. Lisbon visits, which is in Poletown, "reminded him of photographs of Hiroshima" (Eugenides, 34). The funeral director explains to the narrators that "GM bought out like twenty-five thousand Polacks to built this huge automotive plant. They knocked down twenty-four city blocks, then ran out of money. So the place was all rubble and weeds. It was desolate, sure, but only if you were looking out the back fence" (Eugenides, 34). Here, Eugenides weaves together the story of Detroit's economic growth and a period of decline with the circumstances of Cecilia's burial, thus implicating her in the larger history of Detroit. This implication is emphasized when she is buried at a cemetery between two freeways (Eugenides, 34). Freeways, which were the means by which white Detroiters left the city, were made possible by demolishing historic and culturally significant Black neighborhoods such as Black Bottom. Cecilia's burial between two freeways is evidence of the complexity of her death's symbolism. Namely, her burial location occupies the interstices of Black and white neighborhoods, showing how her death fits into the larger history of racism and racialized violence as it relates to white flight, implicated status, and the destruction of built spaces occupied by African Americans. Her life and death in the suburbs calls attention to the way her primarily-white community does not originate racial prejudice or benefit from it in an uncomplicated way but is still key to the experiences of Black Americans.

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Gender is central to *The Virgin Suicides'* conceptualization of the relationship between built space and violence. The Lisbon sisters' bodily experience of womanhood and of self-inflicted violence are tied explicitly to their home. When a local boy named Peter is invited to the Lisbon house for dinner by Mr. Lisbon, he excitedly reports back to his friends about his

discovery of “bedrooms filled with crumpled panties” and “a crucifix draped with a brassiere” (Eugenides, 7). The invocation of religion and domestic space as tainted or defiled with the girls’ underwear reveals a suburban tension about the role of young women’s sexuality in private spaces. Though female sexuality is, of course, policed in public ways, private life offers a unique location for the expression of expectations for young women. Namely, these messy private spaces, which run counter to public respectability (crumpled panties, a bra hung over a cross), allow for the disruption of public norms about behavior that speak to the interrelation of gender and violence. When Peter finds “one Tampax, spotted, still fresh from the insides of one of the Lisbon girl,” he tells his friends that “it wasn’t gross but a beautiful thing, you had to see it, like a modern painting or something” (Eugenides, 8). Peter marvels that “Lux Lisbon was bleeding between the legs that very instant, while the fish flies made the sky filthy and the street lamps came on” (Eugenides, 8). Here, Peter creates a relationship between Lux’s period, the functioning of public spaces in Grosse Pointe, and the natural world. The image of blood is indicative of Lux’s capacity for both reproduction and violence. Later, when Lux begins inviting boys and men onto the roof of her house for sex, she employes a method of contraception that involved “shaking up Coke bottle and hosing down her insides” (Eugenides, 144). A few later, she fakes stomach pain so that she’ll be taken to the hospital, where she asks for a pregnancy test, which comes back negative. Despite using scientifically unsound methods of birth control, Lux does not become pregnant, underscoring her usurping of suburban social conventions about sex and fertility. While casual sex is prohibited, casual sex without the consequence of pregnancy is even more taboo, since it proves the implausibility of isolating sex as a means of reproduction. Additionally, Lux’s trysts seem to cross the geographic and symbolic

lines of race and class which the suburbs require be strictly enforced: “We received reports of her erotic adventures from the most unlikely sources, kids from working-class neighborhoods with feathered haircuts who swore they’d gone to the roof themselves with Lux” (Eugenides, 142). The fish flies that the narrators mention earlier as swarming during Lux’s period are symbols of the Lisbon girls’ complicated symbolic relationship to sex, death, and fertility.

Fish flies, also known as mayflies, spend most of their lives as larvae in water. They emerge, mate, and die within a few days. In Grosse Pointe, like other suburbs along Lake St. Clair, fish fly season runs from early June to late July. During this period, the air swarms with millions of insects mating and dying. These flies are primarily noticed by humans during the time in their life cycle when they are having sex or dramatically dying in crunchy glazes on every surface imaginable. They thus offer a complex analog to the Lisbon girls, whose visibility in the novels is predicated on their sexuality and suicides. The boys remember their preoccupation with cleaning up the dead fish flies the summer after Cecilia’s death: “No one ever understood what got into us that year, or why we hated so intensely the crust of dead bugs over our lives. Suddenly, however, we couldn't bear the fish flies carpeting our swimming pools, filling our mailboxes, blotting out stars on our flags” (Eugenides, 53). Here, the boys’ obsession with disposing of the fish flies, which infest elements of the built environment specific to suburban life such as swimming pools, represent their discomfort with the relationship between fecundity and death symbolized by these insects. Eventually, the boys are instructed by their fathers to clean off the Lisbon house, and one boy remarks, “What smells like fish, is fun to eat, but isn’t fish?” (Eugenides, 54). This reference to female genitalia underscores the symbolic role

that the fish flies and the Lisbon girls occupy for the boys: something intriguing and unknowable, immediate yet mysterious, and colored by the boys' perspective as adolescents. Sexuality and built space as mediators of violence are essential to the circumstances by which a neighborhood boy, Paul Baldino, discovers Cecilia during her first suicide attempt.

After declaring to his friends that he will watch the girls showering, he sneaks into their house by crawling through the sewer system. After emerging into the Lisbon home and wandering around, he "found Cecilia, naked, her wrists oozing blood" in the bathroom. After the paramedics take her to the hospital, Paul's description of the scene to his friends is focused on the mechanics and logistics of the act. The boys wonder why the razor she used to cut her wrists was in the toilet, which "led to the question as to whether Cecilia has cut her wrists while already in the bath water, or while standing on the bath mat, which was bloodstained" (Eugenides, 13). These questions reveal the importance of the contours of the bathroom to the very act of suicide, as the boys parse the possible difference in meaning between a suicide attempt that takes place sitting on the toilet or standing on a bathmat or lying in a bathtub. Ultimately, the space of the bathroom prior to Paul's arrival becomes a space of unknowability, in which all scenarios are equally possible. This initial obfuscation inside a domestic space foreshadows the larger questions that haunt the neighborhood boys, all of which relate to the complex relationship between built space and gender, violence, sexuality, implication, and death. The boys' role as detectives of the girls' implicated status is evident as they record the attitudes of Grosse Pointe residents regarding Cecilia's death.

The adult neighbors' reactions to Cecilia's suicide attempts underscores her position as a body onto which the anxieties, desires, and expectations about the protective and aesthetic role of

suburban built space are projected. “She just wanted out of that house,” one woman says (Eugenides, 15), and another quips, “She just wanted out of that decorating scheme” (Eugenides, 15). These jokes reveal the women’s assumptions about the primacy of domestic space in shaping a person’s experience of the world (and their potential desire to leave it). Echoing this belief, the psychologist suggests to Mr. and Mrs. Lisbon after Cecilia’s death that they “relax their rules” (Eugenides, 19). The boys note that “From that time on, the Lisbon house began to change,” employing a synecdoche in which “the Lisbon house” represents the girls and their parents, the house itself, and the rules that govern the space. This complex association of people and space is notable since it reflects the extent to which a house is (and is perceived to be) a reflection and expression of a person or family’s social position and belief system. The changes to “the Lisbon house” include a new invitation to Butch, the man who cuts the Lisbon’s grass, to come inside for a glass of water: “Sweaty, shirtless, and tattooed, he walked right into the kitchen where the Lisbon girls lived and breathed, but we never asked him what he saw because we were afraid of his muscles and his poverty” (Eugenides, 20). The change also allows for the neighborhood boys’ first collective entrance to the Lisbon residence: a chaperoned party.

Following Cecilia’s exit from the festivities, the boys recall hearing a “moist thud” like “the sound of a watermelon breaking open,” and when the partygoers run outside, they see

> Mr. Lisbon holding Cecilia, one hand under her neck and the other under her knees. He was trying to lift her off the spike that had punctured her left breast, traveled through her inexplicable heart, separated two vertebrae without shattering either, and come out her back, ripping the dress and finding air again. The spike had gone through so fast there was no blood on it” (Eugenides, 28).

This scene reinforces the relationship between domesticity and violence, removing the bloody spectacle from the previous suicide attempt and locating the death on the fence rather than inside the house. The bloodless elegance of the scene, in which "Cecilia merely seemed balanced on the pole like a gymnast," underscores the whole scene as a manifestation of the liminality of female adolescents (Eugenides, 28). She wears a 1920s wedding dress, with "sequins on the bust she didn't fill out" and a hem that is cut off with "a jagged stroke so that it ended above Cecilia's chafed knees" (Eugenides, 24). The cut-off wedding dress (which the narrators note was trimmed by either Cecilia herself or the owner of the thrift store where she bought it) is a symbol of Cecilia's own stunted growth. Whether it was by a private impetus or imposed on her by outside forces, her death in the too-big wedding dress is a gory inversion of the suburban idealization of marriage as the most important day in a woman's life. The wedding dress, which is a cultural symbol of state-sanctioned reproduction, instead marks Cecilia's premature death.

Immediately after the paramedics carry her body away, the boys ascend to the roof of one of their homes "to watch what would happen next" (Eugenides, 31). What they focus on from this vantage point is not the repercussions of Cecilia's death, but instead Detroit: "The abrupt demarcation where the trees ended and the city began. The sun was falling in the haze of distant factories, and in the adjoining slums the scatter of glass picked up the raw glow of the smoggy sunset" (Eugenides, 31). As the boys sit on the roof, the narrator dictates the view of Detroit:

> crouching on the tarred shingles, resting chins in hands, we made out, faintly, an indecipherable backward-playing tape of city life, cries and shouts, the barking of a chained dog, car horns, the voices of girls calling out numbers in an obscure tenacious game—sounds of the impoverished city we never visited, all mixed and muted, without

sense, carried on a wind from that place. Then, darkness. Car lights moving in the distance. Up close, yellow house lights coming on, revealing families around televisions. One by one, we all went home" (Eugenides, 32).

Here, Cecilia's suicide is implicitly tied to the activities of Detroit and its citizens through the scope of the boys' viewpoint, which is emotionally steeped in Cecilia's death and physically present to the cityscape. A parallel is established here between Cecilia's suicide and the description of Detroit, which is "indecipherable" and "obscure." The city, which the boys do not visit, is distant in its visual obscurity yet immediate in the snatches of indeterminate sound that filter to their position on the roof. Similarly, Cecilia's death occupies a liminal territory in its immediacy and unknowability. In this scene, built space is the mediator that structures the boys' understanding of the relationship between the city and the suburbs. The height of the house and the angle of the roof create the physical circumstances in which they hear the noises of the city, and thus suburban built space is central to rendering their imagination of Detroit in terms that deny the rich visual culture of the city.

The image of the "yellow house lights, revealing families around televisions" suggests the dual role of a suburban home. The home acts as an organizing force that is assumed to reflect a family's interior life, values, and position in the community, and it also isolates both families and individuals from the larger community. This twin purpose is reflected in the neighborhood's response to Cecilia's suicide by impalation on the fence. The fathers of the street gather to tear out the fence: "They struggled with the fence, bent over like Marines hoisting the flag on Iwo Jima. It was the greatest show of common effort we could remember in our neighborhood, all those lawyers, doctors, and mortgage bankers locked arm in arm in the trench, with our mothers

bringing out orange Kool-Aid, and for a moment our century was noble again" (Eugenides, 50-51). The comparison to Iwo Jima makes clear the national implications of Cecilia's use of the fence in her suicide, casting the fathers as courageous and defiant defenders of the American way of life. The fence, which is a symbol of private life, prosperity, and freedom, becomes a foreboding and violent object. The elevation of the scene through its comparison to Iwo Jima works in a number of ways. First, since the soldiers at Iwo Jima were putting something in rather than tearing something out, the invocation of the scene is an inverted reenactment in which an iconic image of American victory becomes one of destruction. Additionally, the scale of the project and the fathers' inability to effectively uproot the fence suggest the men's pettiness and incompetence in comparison to the soldiers who raised the flag on Iwo Jima. When the hired hauler arrives, he "pressed a button to make his giant winch revolve, and with a deep earth sound, the murdering fence came loose" (Eugenides, 51). The description of the fence as "murdering" places the agency for the suicide on the fence rather than on Cecilia, suggesting that the isolating effects of suburban built space is responsible for her death. The boys also speculate that the house is the means by which some suicidal virus infects the Lisbon girls:

> In the bathtub cooking in the broth of her own blood, Cecilia had released an airborne virus which the other girls, even in coming to save her, had contracted. No one cared how Cecilia had caught the virus in the first place. Transmission became explanation. The other girls, safe in their own rooms, had smelled something strange, sniffed the air, but ignored it. Black tendrils of smoke had crept under the doors, rising up behind their studious backs to form the evil shapes smoke or shadow take on in cartoon: a black-hatted assassin brandishing a dagger; an anvil about to drop" (Eugenides, 153).

The centrality of the house in this imagining of an "airborne virus" reflects its importance as an arbiter of social health. Similarly, the physical effects of this contagion are visible in descriptions of its impacts on "household objects," which " lost meaning. A bedside clock became a hunk of molded plastic, telling something called time, in a world marking its passage for some reason" (Eugenides, 153). The dual role of the suburban home as a private space and an indicator of a family's adherence to the ideals of its community is expanded on in an instance of a letter written to the editor of Detroit's largest newspaper, whose publisher lives in Grosse Pointe. Three months after Cecilia's suicide, the letter, signed with the pseudonym "Mrs. I Dew Hopewell," asks the schools to do something about teenagers' anxiety. The boys suspect the letter-writer lives on their street, since "the rest of the town had forgotten all about Cecilia's suicide, whereas the growing disrepair of the Lisbon house constantly reminded us of the trouble within" (Eugenides, 90). Here, "within" has a double meaning: within the house, but also within Grosse Pointe. Many years later, the woman who wrote the letter confesses, saying, "You can't just stand by and let your neighborhood go down the toilet" (Eugenides, 90). Soon, news article and TV spots appear, warning residents of the threat of teenage suicide, and the issue becomes tied to local economic success and anxieties about the racial makeup of Grosse Pointe:

> Many men said afterward that the board members of the local Chamber of Commerce, Mr. Babson, Mr. Laurie, Mr. Peterson, and Mr. Hocksteder, had shown great prescience in predicting the negative publicity the suicide scare would bring to our town, as well as the subsequent fall in commercial activity. While the suicides lasted, and for some time after, the Chamber of Commerce worried less about the influx of black shoppers and more about the outflux of whites. Brave blacks had been slipping in for years, though they

were usually women, who blended in with our maids. The city downtown had deteriorated to such a degree that most blacks had no other place to go" (Eugenides, 95). This sequence of events ironizes the process by which violence impacts housing value. After the 1967 riots, white Detroiters feared that what they perceived as Black violence would drive down the value of their homes, so they moved to the suburbs. Here, the specter of Black violence is located in the bodies of five white teenagers, since the Lisbon girls' suicides are what the Chamber of Commerce worries will cause an "outflux of white." Meanwhile, Black shoppers begin to enter Grosse Pointe in larger numbers. This creates a situation in which the Lisbon girls become implicated subjects who reveal the mechanisms of implication. The things the Lisbon parents (and other Grosse Pointe residents) did to keep violence out of their home(s) and suburb are the same things that invite violence into the community. The Lisbon house is a microcosm for the fallout of the abandonment of Detroit, showing how white flight refuses implication and in doing so creates situations which are unlivable for both Black and white people. The Lisbon sisters' suicides momentarily seem capable of forcing Grosse Pointe to reckon with its implicated position, since the Chamber of Commerce is more worried about white people leaving than Black people entering. However, the modifier "for some time after" suggests that the city eventually resumed its singular concern about Black people moving to Grosse Pointe.

As the boys, now grown men, try to come to terms with the Lisbon sisters' suicides, built space is what they remember of the girls' lives and deaths. Eugenides writes, "What lingered after them was not life, which always overcomes natural death, but the most trivial list of mundane facts: a clock ticking on a wall, a room dim at noon" (242). The localization of built

space as an enduring system for the creation of meaning and historical memory is emphasized in the way the boys remember the experience of the neighborhood they shared with the girls:

> As the houses passed, they had something to say about the families in each one, which meant that they had been looking out at us as intensely as we had been looking in. . . Like us, the girls had distinct memories tied to various bushes, trees, and garage roofs. They recalled the race riots, when the tanks had appeared at the end of our block and National Guardsmen had parachuted into our backyards. They were, after all, our neighbors" (Eugenides, 119).

As the boys try to reckon with the meaning and cause of the Lisbon girls' suicides, the girls' shared experience of the 1967 riots suggests a commonality that is, at some point, interrupted. By the close of the novel, the girls have become unknowable to the men. It is built space that creates and propagates this unknowability. Ultimately, the narrators decide, "the Lisbon girls pointed to a simple reasoned refusal to accept the world as it was handed down to them, so full of flaws" (Eugenides, 239).

"The world as it was handed down to them" is one populated with implicated subjects and thus dotted with implicated cities. The suburbs are not separate from these implicated cities but rather essential facets of them, central to the city's status because they structure the fallout of what happens when people are physically separated from the economic and social realities of racial inequality. Of course, few people with economic mobility are willing to reside in a city with high rates of unemployment, violence, and vacancy, especially when they are not personally responsible for creating those conditions and thus do not feel it is their duty to ameliorate them. As Rothberg notes, diffusion of personal responsibility over time and space results in an

obscuring of the very conditions that collective action can render material — namely, the continuation of governmental, capitalistic, and interpersonal relations and rules that disadvantage Black Americans and stagnate their means of economic success.

As I noted in Chapter 1, it is not the case that all Black Americans live in urban areas or that all white people live in suburbs. Of course, the national picture is far more complicated than this. Furthermore, it's obviously not true that all Black people live in poverty or that all white people are economically advantaged. I don't wish to simplify the demographics and economic realities of urban and suburban living, but rather to provide the context and theoretical basis for the social relationships that create patterns of population and privilege. As Rothberg writes, "Forms of violence and inequality premised on racial hierarchy take shape in small-scale encounters and large-scale structures; they are also instantiated repetitively in the present yet burdened with active historical resonances (Rothberg, introduction). These "small-scale encounters and large-scale structures" appear in Greater Detroit as the built space and ensuing behaviors that define *Middlesex* and *The Virgin Suicides*. These factors turn both novels into extended meditations on the role of the built environment in creating experiences, behaviors, and anxieties.

Conclusion

"Architecture is a social act and the material theater of human activity."

Spiro Kostof, *A History of Architecture: Settings and Rituals*

In the second half of the nineteenth century, cities and towns across the United States began constructing large, palatial buildings. They were funded by state governments, and many of them were built with the finest materials available. One such building, located in Buffalo, New York, has an exterior of Medina Sandstone, the same type used for the Brooklyn Bridge and the facing at Buckingham Palace. The floor tiles were imported from Europe, and an underground subway was used to carry people from one end of the building to the other. In other towns, these large buildings were situated on plots of land which included baseball diamonds, dance halls, golf courses, and hundreds of acres of gardens and fields. These places were, as the writer Sandy Allen describes, "symbols of civic and social achievement" (99% Invisible). They were also homes and treatment centers for the mentally ill.

Dr. Thomas Kirkbride was a Philadelphia doctor whose detailed book *On the Construction, Organization and General Arrangements of Hospitals for the Insane, with Some Remarks on Insanity and Its Treatment* sparked the construction of hundreds of 'Kirkbrides.' He thought that insanity, as it was then called, was a curable disease, but only within a specific environment. He made it his mission to use built space as a treatment for mental illnesses, since he believed that the physical places where people live have profound impacts on the way they perceive the world. From windows to heating systems to the arrangement of pavilions, Kirkbride

was convinced that fine-tuning individual elements of architecture and interior design was essential to creating livable conditions for those with mental illnesses (99% Invisible). The success of these treatment centers was limited, as they soon faced underfunding and overcrowding. Over a century later, some have been transformed into luxury apartment buildings or multi-use shopping centers, while many others stand abandoned and in disrepair. Though Kirkbride's ambitious project did not bear out due to the financial realities of American healthcare, his philosophy about the centrality of built space endures. He believed that architecture was central in creating the context of a person's life — a force so ideologically muscular that it could alter the way a person interacted with the world. In other words, Kirkbride thought that what a person believed to be true was dependent on the structures in which they spent their life. This is also the premise that drives my project of imagining *Middlesex* and *The Virgin Suicides* through the lens of built space. For space to be a valuable framing tool for issues of race and violence, the constructed places in which people live must be accorded a degree of primacy as arbiters of emotion and ideology. As the Kirkbride asylums exemplify, built space does have the capacity to be this powerful, particularly when it comes to defining the terms of reality.

In *Middlesex* and *The Virgin Suicides,* built space is the means through which characters experience and define their role within larger communities. It is inside of built spaces that their roles as implicated subjects are defined, and thus it is the physical environment that creates the specific modes of behavior and thought that configure their interactions with others. In one concluding scene in *Middlesex*, this is especially clear. Upon returning to the city when Milton

dies, Cal/lie and his brother Chapter Eleven drive through Detroit. “Grow up in Detroit and you understand the way of all things,” writes Eugenides.

> Early on, you are put on close relations with entropy. As we rose out of the highway trough, we could see the condemned houses, many burned, as well as the stark beauty of all the vacant lots, gray and frozen. Once-elegant apartment buildings stood next to scrapyards, and where there had been furriers and movie palaces there were now blood banks and methadone clinics and Mother Waddles Perpetual Mission” (Eugenides, 517).

Their drive takes them back past their old house in Indian Village, and then to Grosse Pointe. “My body was reacting to the sight of home,” Cal/lie says when he and Chapter Eleven approach the house on Middlesex Boulevard. “It was a canine feeling, full of eager love, and dumb to tragedy” (Eugenides, 519). Cal/lie’s childhood memories are structured in two places: Detroit and Grosse Pointe. This duality reflects his intersex experience with “not the monovision of one sex but the stereoscope of both” (Eugenides, 303). In other words, living in both Detroit and Grosse Pointe allows the Stephanideses a stereoscopic vision that is uniquely implicated. Near the close of the novel, Tessie looks for her own childhood home on Detroit’s East Side on the way back from Milton’s funeral: “But she couldn’t find it. Bushes had grown up all around, the yards were littered, and the decrepit houses now all looked the same to her” (Eugenides, 529). The impossibility of returning to this house is created by the very circumstances that led her to leave Detroit. The perceived and real dangers of the city, which were produced by structural inequalities she did not personally create, were exacerbated by her and Milton’s decision to move. Decades later, the effects of these inequities also prevent her from going home to Detroit. This scene illuminates the liminality that is suggested by the very fact of the implicated subject:

an individual whose choices exist within a set of parameters, and whose parameters are created by real spaces. The choices an implicated subject makes are predicated on the available options, and this set of possibilities is determined by specific aspects of the built environment which condition and qualify a person to choose this rather than that.

In the book's final scene, Cal/lie stands in the doorway on Middlesex, participating in the traditional Greek funeral custom of guarding a house to prevent a spirit from entering. He thinks about the past, and the histories and choices which have led him there: "The wind swept over the crusted snow into my Byzantine face, which was the face of my grandfather and of the American girl I had once been. I stood in the door for an hour, maybe two" (Eugenides, 529). His Byzantine face, the girl he used to be: these are fragments wrought by a life of implication, in which binary choices (to be a man or a woman, to be white or a Greek immigrant) are impossible. Instead, implication forges a philosophy of multiplicity rather than severance.

A similar logic of spatially-informed loss and liminality is at work in *The Virgin Suicides*, which also closes on a scene where the built environment takes center stage. The boys, now men, reflect on their project of searching for the Lisbon girls. The collection of memorabilia that structures the book — diary entries, doctor's reports, photographs, interviews — leads them to the treehouse where they spent time as adolescents, a space which in turn directs them back to the Lisbon house, that mysterious entity in which the girls lived and died:

> It doesn't matter in the end how old they had been, or that they were girls, but only that we loved them, and that they hadn't heard us calling, still do not hear us, up here in the treehouse, with our thinning hair and soft bellies, calling them out of those rooms where

they went to be alone for all time, alone in suicide, which is deeper than death, and where we will never find the pieces to put them back together" (Eugenides, 243).

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Right now it's March in Michigan, and the air still blows cold on the streets that prompted Eugenides to write his novels. I know, because I'm here. I grew up in Philadelphia, but my mom has lived in Grosse Pointe Park for the past two years, just a couple of blocks from Detroit and about fifteen miles from where she grew up, in Dearborn. Before I moved to Michigan, Detroit was a place that existed in photographs rather than reality: my grandmother as teenager in her prom dress, her face aglow from the light of a window in the apartment above the bar her father owned, or as a little girl, stoically recovering from chickenpox in a chair on the front lawn. The house she grew up in, on a street near what became Edsel Ford Freeway, is probably gone in the same way Tessie's house on Hurlbut is: hidden by weeds, changed beyond recognition, or lost through demolition. Like the Eugenideses and the Stephanideses, my grandparents moved to a suburb of Detroit. My great-great-grandmother raised twelve children in the city, and none of her descendants live there. What remains in those empty spaces whose fullness implication has disappeared? I think it's memory, which is always located in places you can't return to.

But I tried, anyway, to find the physical places that formed Eugenides's memories as he captured them in his novels. I walked to William Kessler's modernist house in Grosse Pointe Park, the one I'm sure inspired some of the details for the Stephanides's home in *Middlesex.* It's located on Cadieux Road, not Middlesex Boulevard (though that is a real street, where Eugenides grew up). Some details match the novel — the giant windows; the eccentric designer — but

trying to overlay the Stephanides's house onto this one feels like retracing the plot of a half-remembered dream. On the way home, I looked for a house that could be the Lisbon's. This seemed even more futile, because what I was looking for was based on emotion rather than physical description. Which house looks like the kind where five teenage girls would kill themselves? Inside, people were doing dishes and watching television, unaware that I was subjecting their homes to private tests of domestic morality. I thought that walking through the real streets that became the fictional spaces of the novels might open the books up to me in a new way. I hoped I'd be able to see beyond their construction and locate some larger truth or unreliability I'd been missing before: It really is like he says, or it isn't. Instead, what I felt was a jarring disconnect between this place and the setting of the books. I realized I'd been projecting their plots onto a territory of the past that was far removed from any actual location, as if the stories had taken place in my own memory. And they had, in a way — the memory of my imagination. Understanding Detroit's suburbs as spaces that attempt to deny implication means acknowledging how these places lead to obfuscation, displacing experience onto remembrance by creating situations so unlivable that memory becomes a necessity rather than a luxury. The houses and streets of Greater Detroit, their unknowableness and their familiarity — these are what haunt the protagonists of *Middlesex* and *The Virgin Suicides*. The thrust of their grief is anchored in the way built space structures both life and recollection: how the memory of vanished places returns them to us in incomplete, garbled shards, when what we really want is anything whole.

Postscript

As of March 27, 2020, the world is experiencing a pandemic of coronavirus (COVID-19), a highly contagious respiratory disease that has caused unprecedented social and economic upheaval. The nature of coronavirus transmission means that many people are experiencing social isolation on a novel scale, with more than 50 percent of the population of the United States ordered to stay at home as of this week (CNN). This reorganization of collective life has created a radical new awareness of the interconnectedness of our social experiences and economic security. It's no longer possible to assume that staying healthy or financially stable is a result of one's own behaviors. Instead, it's become obvious over the past few weeks that health and livelihood are clearly tied to the behaviors and beliefs of our neighbors, family members, friends, and coworkers. This was always the case, of course, but the reality of this situation was never as clear as it is now.

The pandemic brings to light another kind of implication, one based not on racial identity but on beliefs about individual responsibility for collective wellbeing. Of course, the crises wrought by the outbreak have a disproportionate impact on those with limited access to economic resources and quality healthcare, including people of color. But Americans with various kinds of privilege are also getting sick, dying, and being laid off. In other words, we are all implicated subjects, accountable to each other. Recognizing this means acknowledging the complicated ways our histories, hopes, and experiences intersect to create a reality in which we often fail to recognize that our systems of government, education, employment, and cultural

production are fundamentally flawed. These systems don't work for all Americans, which means they don't work for any of us.

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