



***The Suburbs*. By Eric Eidelstein.** New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017. 144 pp. ISBN 9781501336461.

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Eric Eidelstein's book *The Suburbs* is the result of three contributing factors: First, is the author's avid work as a film and television critic. Second, is his love of Montreal-based indie rock collective, Arcade Fire. Third, is his life-long connection to suburbia. Released in 2010, Arcade Fire's *The Suburbs* is an album that explores the carefree comforts and numbing conformity of growing up in the suburbs. Drawing on, among other things,

the films by Douglas Sirk and David Lynch, the author illustrates how the band's perceptions of suburban life are mirrored in audiovisual media. He includes academic references but avoids overloading the reader with theoretical content in this well-written and engaging text that is geared towards popular culture enthusiasts.

Eidelstein's work is organized into nine chapters, with an informal division of the book into two parts. The first part focuses on Arcade Fire and provides specifics and analyses of their albums prior to, and including their third release, *The Suburbs*. Chapter 1, "Who is Arcade Fire?," presents biographic material on the sextet, describing how they were catapulted into the mainstream with a 2011 Grammy win alongside nominees Lady Gaga, Katy Perry and Eminem. In chapter 2, "What are the suburbs?," the author draws on personal experience, as well as the work of cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard and urban historian Kenneth T. Jackson, to articulate the sociological space that is the suburbs. Chapter 3, "Where do you kids live?," consists of a track-by-track breakdown and analysis of the 16 songs on *The Suburbs*. In chapter 4 the author details *Scenes from the Suburbs*, a 30-minute short film created by the band in collaboration with director Spike Jonze and packaged along with the CD.



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The second part of the book consists of social commentary on suburbia and reflections on the expression of anxieties about modern life in films and television series since the 1950s. Chapter 5, “Why do I have these headaches?,” takes a concerted look into Douglas Sirk’s 1955 film, *All That Heaven Allows*. The author identifies how the movie and *The Suburbs* use melodrama to convey complex perspectives on suburban life. In chapter 6, “Why are there people like Frank?,” David Lynch’s dark realization of life in a small town is considered as seen in his 1986 movie, *Blue Velvet*. *The Suburbs* is described as mirroring aspects of desolation from the film, but also promoting a hopefulness amidst what can sometimes be a harsh, manic environment. Chapter 7, titled “Why are you so profoundly sad?,” focuses on two television period-dramas: AMC’s *Mad Men* and FX’s *The Americans*. Here, the author considers how the shows’ depictions of suburban life are reflected in Arcade Fire’s third album. Chapter 8, “Surely expulsion is not the answer?,” is a sort of catch-all portion in this part of the book. Eidelstein examines television shows *Black-ish*, *My So-Called Life* and *The Leftovers* along with films *Polyester*, *The Incredibles*, *Welcome to the Dollhouse*, and *Ordinary People* in connection to *The Suburbs* and Arcade Fire’s second album, *Neon Bible*. The ninth and final chapter references lyrics from the song, “The Suburbs,” in the chapter’s title “Should I move past the feeling?” Here, Eidelstein gives the reader a glimpse into his own life and adolescence through his recollections of the suburb in which he grew up.

Eidelstein’s use of intertext to illustrate how one piece of music or instance of visual media informs another is the thread that ties the book together. A strength of this book is the author’s accessible writing style which lends to the ease and enjoyment of the read. He lives up to the synopsis on the back cover of the book, and successfully deconstructs the music of Arcade Fire and the films and television shows that communicate various depictions of the cultural construct that is the suburbs. Yet, some of the arbitrary chapter titles distract from the otherwise logical organization of the book. *The Suburbs* is part of Bloomsbury’s 33 1/3 series, named after the speed of a vinyl LP. Each volume in the series of short books focuses on an individual album, and the artists covered range from Björk to Fugazi and from Merle Haggard to Celine Dion. Musicians, music lovers and music educators in the post-secondary field are likely to find *The Suburbs* of interest. It leaves the reader wondering how comparative studies of other creative works in connection to a diversity of sociological factors might be beneficial.