

The *Pleasantville* Effect: Nostalgia and the Visual Framing of (White) Suburbia

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Suburban films of the last fifteen years offer audiences spatial visions of nostalgically tinged suburbs, place individuals into the bosom of imperfect but loving and white families, and remake home and away, self and Other, on foundations of security and comfort. Functioning as “ethical” rhetoric, the films create suburban dwelling places that map the particular contours of suburbia. Representing and rejecting “impossible” sexualities and spaces, the films not only mark the boundaries of suburban space but also create the contours of “suburban subjectivities.”

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Few films in the last twenty years capture the contradictory visions of suburban life as carefully as does *Pleasantville* (1998). The film opens with images of a fictional 1950s television show, *Pleasantville*. The clips introduce the audience to the perfect nuclear family, the perfect house, and the perfect life, all photographed in crisp black and white. The film’s viewers are then jolted into the present. Images of a contemporary suburb constructed of look-alike beige stuccoed homes marching up the barren hills of California fill the screen. Students in the high schools are disengaged from their education, a disengagement fostered by teachers who drone apocalyptically about the future. The film’s magical conceit is this: siblings from the present dystopic suburb travel through their television set into the black and white (in nearly all senses of the phrase) perfection of *Pleasantville*. In sharply marking this contrast between the anxieties of the contemporary suburb and the imagined simplicity of the 1950s seen

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at the beginning of the film, *Pleasantville* engages its audience in a crucial contemporary question: what constitutes the good life in contemporary suburban living?

This question is important in the contemporary moment. For many, suburban life is the norm in the United States (Garreau 3–4; Hayden 3). Suburban developments are the dwelling places of postmodernity, the loci of everyday lives and practices (Garreau 3–4; Blakely and Snyder 3). It is within suburban landscapes that many US Americans stake their claim to the good life (Cohen 1052–1053; Fishman x; Kenyon 1). Suburbia is the space of the appearances and disappearances of the *ethos* of postmodernity. But what is this *ethos*? What are the claims to the good life made within the spatial imagination that constitutes suburbia? Answering these questions fully is complex and involves careful investigations of the wide variety of texts, practices, artifacts, and modes of living that constitute “suburbia.”¹ Recent cinematic representations of suburbia offer one compelling way into these questions, for in these representations we can get clues to the hopes and the discontents of suburbia.

In this essay I argue that *Pleasantville* and a constellation of recent suburban movies offer audiences spatial visions of nostalgically tinged suburbs that place individuals into the bosom of imperfect but loving and white families and remake home and away, self and Other, on foundations of security and comfort. Functioning as a rhetoric of *ethos*, the films create suburban dwelling places that map particular contours of suburbia. In the first section of the essay I will develop a conceptualization of an “ethical” spatiality—what I will call the *Pleasantville* effect—by exploring the intersections among space and spatial representations, and everyday suburban life. In the second section of the essay, I turn to a thematic reading of suburban films to trace the contours of a spatial imagination of suburbia. In the final section of the essay, I will return to the idea of the *Pleasantville* effect to reflect on the importance of images of suburbia for understanding everyday life in the contemporary moment and to reflect on the ways spatial visions engage us in ethical deliberations.

Everyday Life, Space, and *Ethos*

Animating this essay is a basic theoretical commitment: that as users and critics of everyday spaces, we need to explore the intersections among the varieties of texts we bring with us to particular spaces. Suburbia cannot be thought of exclusively in terms of its architecture, built environment, or aesthetic design.² Instead, suburbia is also suburbia as imaged and imagined across wide-ranging texts. As Victor Burgin argues about the city, “The city in our actual experience is *at the same time* an actually existing physical environment, and a city in a novel, a film, a photograph, a city seen on television, a city in a comic strip, a city in a pie chart, and so on” (28). Space as experienced is created through the intertextual resources we bring with us to material sites. We do not, Burgin suggests, live only in material, concrete, or geographically locatable space. Instead, our lives are bound together in hybrid spaces constructed out of the (sometimes overwhelming) welter of textual resources (29). Cinematic and other images do not simply intersect with or draw on spatial images, but films *urge* viewers to see and understand suburbs in particular ways. Put differently, living in

suburbia is not simply framed by filmic images, but rather the cinematic images are part and parcel of the ways in which we “*actually live and act*” in these spaces (Burgin 29). As rhetorical and cultural critics of space, we need to resist the temptation to separate image from space, image from experience. We never simply experience space or place in a vacuum. Our experiences are always conditioned by a host of previous experiences, including our immersion in media images. As Burgin writes, “This is to say representations cannot be simply tested against reality, *as reality is itself constituted through the agency of representations*” (238).

Our immersion in media images, in the “semiotic excess” of postmodernity, is a significant factor that undermines our sense of self as located in any particular, concretely knowable space (Collins 5, 31). Identity depends on an ability to locate oneself in time and space. But “the excess of information [in postmodernity] has forced an all-pervasive rethinking of spatial and temporal demarcations” (Collins 31). And yet, we are not simply cut adrift in a postmodern sea of excess. Instead, spatiality and identity draw on differently marked boundaries than they did in the past. Narratives and images of and about space serve as ways of mapping or making sense of new spatial relationships. Audiences engage spatial narratives and images as strategies for mapping and remapping their “location” in time and space (Burgin 194; Collins 41). These spatial images and narratives offer audiences “strategies for self-location” (Collins 41). Self-location—and by extension identity—is created out of the welter of images constituent of contemporary visual culture (Burgin 211, 226).

Arguing for the centrality of mediated spatial images is not an attempt, however, to empty space of its concrete importance. It is crucial to balance the agency of representation against the emplacement of ideology and subjectivity. Henri Lefebvre argues that “ideologies do not produce space: rather, they are in space, and of it. It is the forces of production and the relations of production that produce social space” (*Production* 210). Space, then, does not disappear behind the vale of mediatic representation. Instead, spaces become the nodes where images and imaginations come together. Spaces and images become constitutive of each other and of the possibilities of spatialized experience itself. Indeed the “spatial imagination” often organizes material spaces and the material relations enacted within these spaces (Grossberg, “Cultural Studies” 8). *Pleasantville* makes this very argument when an announcer’s voice commenting on the omnipresence of TV asserts, “TV Time, remember you’re soaking in it.” The spatial imagination, then, offers consequential images of space—images that can manage and organize spaces and actions within the context of conceptualizations of the good life.

Michael Hyde’s rich and historically informed conceptualization of *ethos* can guide an understanding of space and consequentiality:

Abiding by this . . . “primordial” meaning of [*ethos*], one can understand the phrase “the *ethos* of rhetoric” to refer to the way discourse is used to transform space and time into “dwelling places” (*ethos*; pl. *ethea*) where people can deliberate about and “know together” (*con-scientia*) some matter of interest. Such dwelling places define the grounds, abodes or habitats, where a person’s ethics and moral character take form and develop (xii).

The rhetorical art, seen from this perspective, is “architectural.” It creates spaces in which rhetors and audiences can “feel more *at home* with others and our surroundings” (xii). This architectural art is an everyday practice that relies on, as Michel de Certeau suggests, spatial stories. For de Certeau, spatial stories enunciate lines of connection and of boundaries (de Certeau 115–130).³ These stories locate individuals with regard to (and often in resistance to) larger structures, providing ways of imagining an everyday life that is aesthetically, polemically, and ethically rich (de Certeau & Giard 254–255). Suburban films are spatial stories in precisely this sense; they are stories about space that strive to create a “dwelling” in the world that responds in meaningful ways to the concerns of everyday life. These stories engage audiences in the most important of ethical questions: what might be the good life in suburbia?

In this sense, suburban films can create a suburbia effect, or what I will call, drawing on the popular 1998 film *Pleasantville* and following Blair and Michel, the *Pleasantville* effect. Blair and Michael coin the term “the Rushmore effect” to help explain the rhetorical and ethical force of “Mount Rushmore.” As they suggest in their magisterial reading of Mount Rushmore, the giant sculpture is more than just the images on the mountain, but is instead the accumulation of texts, histories, narratives, and public interpretations of and about Rushmore. The Rushmore effect is at least twofold. First, it pertains to the ways Americans imagine memorializing the nation—Rushmore in quite literal ways influences how Americans see their nation and themselves. This first effect seems to be an aesthetic or visual effect (254). But this aesthetic effect is also a political and ethical effect. Rushmore is more than “just” an image or even “just” a memorial; it is an advocate in the conversation about who and how we should be as a nation (183). “Mount Rushmore is important,” Blair and Michael write, “because it nominates for us a particular ‘consensual’ mirror of the American past and present. It marks out a particular image of the national *ethos*” (159). Thus, Rushmore is a material space, a cutting in stone, a collection of diverse and divergent discourses and silences, and a set of assertions about what it means to be American. Understanding the Rushmore effect becomes part of a larger project of uncovering the force of memorialization in the United States.

Spatial imagination is also important in creating other kinds of spaces as well. In particular, building and living in suburbia depend on the creation and enactment of a suburban imagination, of what Amy Kenyon calls suburban dreams (3).⁴ Attending to the *ethos* of suburban films is crucial because suburbia has become the decentered center of US life. Suburbs, in all their variety and in their shifting visual, cultural, political, and economic forms, are now central to everyday American life. Today, more Americans live in suburbs than in urban centers or rural countryside *combined* (Hayden 3). What is more, suburbs are not now (if they ever were) simply residential enclaves serving urban centers; they are also the center of consumption and work. While still connected to urban locations, suburbs are increasingly independent of the city center, becoming themselves new forms of cities (Cohen 1051–1052; Fishman 155; Hayden 3). In short, suburbs are now crucial contemporary landscapes. “Suburbia,” writes Delores Hayden, “is the site of promises, dreams, and fantasies. It is a landscape of the imagination where Americans situate ambitions for upward

mobility and economic security, ideals about freedom and private property, and longings for social harmony and social uplift” (3). Writing out of architectural history, Hayden nonetheless implicitly recognizes that investigation of suburbs and the suburban imagination is central to understanding Americans’ hopes for the building of the good life. The suburban imagination offers contours of the good life and directs concrete relations within suburbia.

What is more, these suburban imaginations offer individuals an *ethos* that directly engages deeply felt anxieties of postmodern suburban life. Postmodernity is, in part, a moment of profound fear. As Setha Low argues, contemporary suburban dwellers—in particular those searching out gated communities—are nearly obsessed with danger and safety, others and community. The suburbanites she interviewed deeply desire connections with neighbors and community. And yet, enacting this desire is curbed by deeply seated fears of others, crime, and poverty. American suburbanites are haunted by the “dilemma of how to protect themselves and their children from danger, crime, and unknown others while still perpetuating open, friendly neighborhoods and comfortable, safe homes” (Low 11). This specifically suburban difficulty intersects with larger spatial strains within postmodernity. As suggested above, radically shifting constructions and experiences of space mark postmodernity. Massive migrations, new transportation and communication technologies, and shifting (national, international, and transnational) economic and political relations all work together to shrink and expand space. On the one hand, the differences among spaces are diminished. As Pico Iyer argues, cities around the globe become more and more alike (18–20). Increasingly, Boulder looks like Berkeley, and Los Angeles can be found in Portland. What is more, geographic location is weakening as a factor in determining our interpersonal, communal, political, and economic relations (Giddens 17–18). In the contemporary moment, Anthony Giddens argues, “place becomes increasingly *phatasmagoric*, that is to say, locales are thoroughly redefined by and shaped in terms of social influences quite distant from them The ‘visible form’ of the locale conceals the distanced relation which determines its nature” (19). At the same time, however, our everyday spaces are increasingly atomized. We desire to become “located” in smaller and more tightly defined geographies (Low 9–10; Ellin 36). Further, the distinctions of class and race within postmodern America are more deeply etched into the built environment (Dear 72; Lipsitz 5–6; Low 21–22; Pulido 12). As space simultaneously expands and shrinks, it can no longer serve as a stabilizing experience or location for individual or collective identity (Collins 33–41). In short, within postmodernity, and in particular in the postmodern suburb, it is all too easy to “lose our place in time” (Burgin 190).⁵

In responding to these postmodern, suburban anxieties, individuals attempt to create private and public spaces that feel safe (Ellin 26; Low 16–17). This sense of safety can be created through a wide variety of performances, including locking doors and windows, hiring private security forces, living behind fences and gates, and limiting diversity within residential areas. Central to this creation of a sense of safety is the deployment of a spatial imaginary reminding residents that the space in which they live, work, shop, and play is, in fact, safe. The spatial imaginary of safety often draws

on nostalgically tinged memory and on the larger trend in creating memory spaces. A particular species of memory, nostalgia is marked by an often bittersweet emotion of longing for a lost, better, simpler, and securer past, and is a memory that is often deeply connected to comforting spaces—in particular “home.” (Wilson 21–23; Dickinson 13).⁶ As a direct response to the ease with which we “lose our place in time,” many postmodern spaces directly call on older, nostalgic forms as attempts to locate individuals within a cherished past and familiar place (Boyer 1; Dickinson 2; Huyssen 15; Sorkin 205; Zukin 233–241). Images and narratives of and about space are also often memory texts, offering audiences historically grounded images with which to map their spatialized everyday experiences.

It is into this context of postmodern suburban anxiety that the films under investigation here have their effects, effects that are precisely *ethical*. The films strive to create communal dwelling places, boundaries, and domains that are, in Hyde’s language, “stimulating and aesthetically, psychologically, socially, and perhaps theologically instructive” (xii). Indeed, these films teach us much about the values desired of and encoded in everyday suburban life. Understanding the *Pleasantville* effect becomes crucial to thinking about the *ethos* of suburbia. The films mark the contours of the good life within suburbia, pointing to the (im)possibilities that “border” ideal suburban living as the films struggle with seeming contradictions within (white) suburbia. In the films, suburbia is imagined as a bland landscape, devoid of deeply felt emotions or passionately committed relationships. Yet suburbia, in part because of this blandness, is also imagined as a place of safety, a home that offers security and acceptance. The struggle becomes one of offering passionate commitments and emotionally engaging relationships while maintaining the safety of familiarity and the security of a risk-free environment. Often, like suburban spaces themselves, the films negotiate these contradictions through appeals to memory. As we will see, *Pleasantville* and a wide range of other suburban films draw on deeply held and often nostalgic memories. By appealing to (and, at times, rejecting) these nostalgic memories, the films choose safety and security, offering images of white heterosexuality leavened with a just a bit of danger and risk offered by “aberrant” sexuality and the authenticity of “other” racial and ethnic identities. If successful, audiences incorporate the films into their memories and their spatial imaginations. The films become resources for managing and organizing in the world, for mapping suburbia, and offer images useful for strategies of self-location. In this sense, the films may mark the contours and limits of the good life within suburbia, teaching viewers both what suburbia looks like (an aesthetic effect) and the right actions that make possible ideal suburban living (an ethical effect). In short, investigating suburban films as *ethos* can generate an understanding of the visual and rhetorical resources brought to bear on suburban living *and* will begin to mark the possibilities and limits of the suburban good life.

The *Pleasantville* Effect

Since the spatial imagination is created out of complex weavings of intertextual relations, we can turn to texts about suburbs to begin to guide us in our understanding

of built space. At the end of the twentieth century, Douglas Muzzio and Thomas Halper argue, suburbs became a “cinematic fixation” (544). This welter of suburban films indicates the ways suburbia became a crucial issue for many audiences. At the same time, the number of films suggests the importance of tracing the intersections and diversions among the film. For the purposes of my argument, I am taking *Pleasantville* as prototypical of the films that take suburbia as their theme. Focused as it is on the differences between present suburbia and nostalgically held TV memories of 1950s suburbs, *Pleasantville* takes up visual and ethical concerns about contemporary suburbia as its central concern. And yet *Pleasantville* does not fully develop a suburban, spatial analysis by itself. Instead a constellation of other films develops and makes more complex the issues raised by *Pleasantville*. I will draw on readings of other related films to more carefully limn the boundaries of cinematic suburbia. I turn attention in particular to *American Beauty* (2000), *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), *Far From Heaven* (2002), and *The Truman Show* (1998), all of which explored visual and relational life in the suburbs and, like *Pleasantville*, engaged images of suburbia through the lenses of memory. Just as important, each of these films draws on memory to imagine the good life in suburbia. In *American Beauty*, Lester returns to nostalgic memories of his high school years to reimagine a better suburbia. *Edward Scissorhands* is told as a long and nostalgic flashback and is set sometime in the 1970s. *Far From Heaven* is set in the 1950s and is a nostalgic homage to the melodramatic films from that period that refrains from a nostalgic rendering of the suburbs of the era. *The Truman Show* uses New Urbanist architecture and city planning as its visual framework. New Urbanism is a memory-tinged mode of design.⁷ Finally, nearly all of these suburban films appear to be, in some way, critical of suburban life. At the same time, they are emphatically *not* rejections of suburbia but rather revised visions of suburbia that offer the safety and homogeneity of the suburbs made more meaningful through nostalgic invocations of the past and more tantalizing with just the slightest hint of racialized or sexualized danger, or both. Careful investigation of these films will begin to indicate the contours of the *Pleasantville* effect, an effect indicated by *Pleasantville* itself but reinforced and made more complex by the constellation of films that take suburbia as their problem and text.

Suburban Aesthetics

The magical conceit that forms the basis of *Pleasantville* is one reason the film is a compelling text to help us rethink the *ethos* of the suburban imagination. The film is framed as a comparison-and-contrast argument about suburbia. Images of present suburban life are sharply contrasted with the suburbia of the past. One way to begin thinking about these contrasts is with the suburban aesthetics offered by the film. While the images of the contemporary suburb are in color, the colors are washed out and beige: the California hills are the sandy colors of the desert, the houses are in earth tones, the schoolyard is paved and unrelieved by green grass. Compare this vision to that of the first images of *Pleasantville*. The film’s color is black and white, and yet the images seem sharper, more focused, somehow more appealing. Just as

important, the images are those of the idealized, archetypal suburban aesthetic: The streets are well maintained, and the cars drive by slowly. Large trees provide shade and visual interest. The houses are well kept and fronted by steps and porches. Neighbors connect over the fences and homeowners devote time to yard work. Perhaps most important, each house is surrounded by well-kept yards behind white picket fences.

Offered in this film is an aesthetic of suburbia that is reinforced by other suburban films. Indeed, suburban films draw on and emphasize a range of visual components of suburbs. Fundamental to the suburb, of course, is the single-family detached house—in *Pleasantville* both the contemporary and 1950s suburb emphasize the house with a yard. These houses are nearly always placed along clean, well-maintained, quiet, tree-lined streets (Jenkins 5; Girling & Helphand 21). In *American Beauty*, for example, the film opens with a panoramic shot from above of the trees that serve as a canopy to the street on which the Burnhams live. Viewers will see Lester Burnham and the film's other characters walk, run, garden, and drive on these apparently peaceful streets. Nearly all the films examined here open with exterior shots that focus attention on the streets, landscaping, and the houses themselves. In the opening of *The Truman Show*, audiences get a close-up of the brick street when Truman Burbank gets out of his car to investigate a light that fell out of the sky into the road. The first vision of the *Edward Scissorhands* suburb focuses on pastel ranch-style houses as an Avon lady drives her 1970s-era Dodge Duster along the gently winding streets.

The house and street serve as one element in the visual vocabulary of the suburbs, one that is directly tied to a second element: filmic suburbs separate residential space from commercial and civic space, creating a distinctly different visual sense from mixed-use urban scenes. This separation encourages and is represented through individual transportation from home to school, work, or shopping. The automobile seems nearly as important as the houses in defining suburban space in general and particular characters' place within the space.⁸ Viewers are drawn, early on, into the movie town of Pleasantville through the immaculate convertibles of the 1950s. Lester Burnham demonstrates his rebellion against the straitjacket life he has been leading by trading in his Toyota Camry for a 1970 Pontiac Firebird. In *Edward Scissorhands*, all the men in their Fords, Chevys, and Dodges drive home in the evening and out to work in the morning at the exact same time.⁹

More central yet to the visual vocabulary of the suburb are the well-kept lawns. Bordered by white picket fences, the lawns are green, the flowers are perfect, and the shrubs and trees are tall and healthy. What is more, the movies consistently show that these immaculate yards take work. Audiences see Bud's neighbors in Pleasantville watering and mowing their lawns.¹⁰ Truman Burbank—the unwitting “star” of his own television show—works in his front yard in plaid shorts. Edward Scissorhands uses his scissorhands to dress up his adoptive family's and the neighbors' yards with animal topiaries fashioned out of the ubiquitous shrubs. Edward's acceptance into the neighborhood, in spite of his physical oddities, is initially fostered by his ability to artfully trim the neighborhood's shrubs. *American Beauty* introduces Carolyn Burnham—unfulfilled real estate agent, mother, and wife of the narrator—as she is

pruning one of her perfect red roses. While the Burnham's lawn is perfect (so perfect that it prompts a neighbor to ask for advice on growing roses), the new next-door neighbor's yard is composed of a dying lawn and unpruned shrubs, and it is *not* bordered by a white picket fence.¹¹ This provides the visual clue that the new neighbors themselves may be morally corrupt—and, in fact, the son is a drug dealer, the mother is agoraphobic and obsessive about cleanliness, and the father is at once sexually attracted to Lester and homophobic, abusive and, in the end, a murderer. Yards, it becomes clear, are more than pleasurable visual additions to a house; they are modes by which moral and civic worth can be expressed and measured (Hayden 17, 26–35). Indeed, as Cynthia Girling and Kenneth Helphand argue, “Even in the seemingly prosaic suburban yard/garden, Edenic characteristics are present: peacefulness, innocence, and idealized nature, a place where the world is both useful and good to look at” (23). In each of the films, yards indicate the moral worth of the neighborhoods. Further, they consistently reinforce gendered norms, as lawns and lawn care have consistently been marked as masculine (Jenkins 118–121).¹² These yards, drawing on gendered and class norms, offer visions of safety and stability. Even as a critique of suburbs is leveled, this visual landscape of Edenic yards, well-painted houses, and the white picket fence remains undisturbed and unquestioned.

Finally, filmic visions of the suburbs are marked by the presence of whiteness and the nearly complete absence of nonwhite faces and non-Anglo American cultures (Muzzio & Halper 547). In *The Truman Show*, Truman Burbank first appears on the steps of his house, where he is greeting his neighbors, including the handsome African-American family, a family that appears only as neighbors to be greeted in the morning. But, as is the case with the rest of the films, this couple does not become a significant portion of the narrative. In *American Beauty* the only African Americans we see are men playing basketball. The suburbs of *Edward Scissorhands* and *Pleasantville* appear to be exclusively white. This is not to say that films ignore diversity. The conceit of *Pleasantville* is that the black and white residents of Pleasantville become “colored” as they have strong, emotional experiences that allow them to become “fully human” or true to themselves. *Edward Scissorhands* explores the desire for—and ultimate rejection of—difference. Thus, even as race is expelled from these visions of suburbs, race (along with desiring and performing sex) serves as one mode of providing “real experiences” within a setting that is visually figured as safe but boring.¹³

Nostalgia and the Hope for/Fear of Danger

This visual framing of suburbs articulates with the installation of suburban nostalgia. Most broadly, the films install nostalgia for a past that was more authentic and safer than the present. However, as will become clear, these two modes of nostalgia are often at odds with each other. Authenticity through nostalgia is a central theme of *American Beauty*. As the film opens, Lester Burnham, in voice-over, describes himself as sedated, and, “in a sense, dead already.” The movie is the story of Burnham's reawakening. Lester's first moment of happiness comes when he shares a joint with

a neighbor who becomes both Lester's dealer and Lester's daughter's boyfriend. As they get high, Lester describes high school summers flipping burgers, smoking marijuana, and having sex. It was, he says, the best time of his life. Thus begins his (nostalgic) awakening. With this newfound understanding of himself, Lester takes a job at a burger joint, settles into a pot habit, begins working out in the garage, and buys a red Pontiac Firebird, the car he has "always wanted. And now I have it. I rule." And, of course, he seduces and is seduced by Angela, his daughter's best friend from high school, an all- "American beauty." At the final moment, Lester chooses not to have sex with Angela; nonetheless, their attraction to each other completes Lester's high-school fantasy of drugs, rock and roll, a fast car, and sex. The blandness of present suburban life—the color tones of the movie run from white to *écru*, with the exception, of course, of Angela's red, red lips and the red rose petals that cover her naked body in Lester's masturbatory fantasies—is countered with a fantasy of a better suburbia. In this better suburb, middle-aged men get stoned, get laid, and work out in their garages with Pink Floyd playing in the background.¹⁴ In Lester's fantasy he risks little while nostalgia installs an older, better, sexier, and profoundly patriarchal, white, and heterosexual space.

Lester's sedation and subsequent waking rely on nostalgia. However, the theme of sedation or loss of authentic self runs in opposing directions. In *Pleasantville* the present is fraught with overwhelming danger that leads, as Lawrence Grossberg argues in a different context, to both angst and boredom (*We Gotta Get Out of This Place* 208–210). As Setha Low argues, highly controlled suburbs are responses to the anxieties produced within globalization. Yet these new, often gated, communities foster the anxiety to which they are responses (16–22). It is in this context that visions of past (and better) suburbs make sense. This relation between the profound anxieties within contemporary society and the safety of warmly remembered suburbia is perfectly encoded near the beginning in *Pleasantville*. Cutting between images from the TV show and David's present life, *Pleasantville* sets up the dialectic between an anxiety-ridden and profoundly boring present and a safe, secure past. The film's viewers first see a TV promotional for a Nickelodeon-style cable-channel *Pleasantville* marathon. The following scene takes the audience into the high-school classrooms where teachers drone to bored students about how difficult the present is and the future will be—incomes are going down, global temperatures are going up, the teachers warn. These utopic and dystopic visions coalesce as David watches the *Pleasantville* intro (dad comes home from work, where he is met by his beautiful homemaker wife and two chirpy, perfect teenagers) while trying to ignore his mother's argument with her ex-husband over weekend parental duties. The contrast is clear: Pleasantville is good, safe, warm, and loving; Presentville is fractured, unsafe, and scary.

But *Pleasantville* is more deeply instructive than this simple dialectic suggests. The movie demonstrates that, while the safety of the 1950s suburban past may be a desirable escape as a TV show, it is *not* acceptable for "real life." David and his sister's transportation back to Pleasantville profoundly changes the town's people, transformations signified by residents who begin to change from black and white to color (a contemporary version of Technicolor). The film seems to suggest that having

sex is the key to becoming “colored.” Yet, as Jennifer points out midway through the movie, she is having more sex than anyone, but nonetheless she remains a study in gray tones. It becomes apparent that the residents remain black and white as long as they repress their true emotions. They take on color as they take the risk of powerful, personal emotions. The 1950s show—as a TV show—is a powerful counter to the difficulties of the present in proffering safety, security, and certainty in response to the contemporary trauma. However, this safety, when taken alone, is just as stultifying to the spirit as is the fragmentation and fear of the present.

Pleasantville, far from arguing against nostalgia (as some critics have suggested [Muzzio & Halper 549–550]), argues *for* nostalgia, but a nostalgia that is leavened with a hint of danger or risk; for it is risk, the movie suggests, that leads to full human emotions. As it becomes clear to David’s Pleasantville girlfriend that there is life beyond Pleasantville’s borders, she asks him, “What’s it like out there?” “It’s louder,” David responds, “scariest I guess, and it’s a lot more dangerous.” “Sounds fantastic,” she replies. This dialectic between “a lot more dangerous” and “sounds fantastic” is precisely what is at stake in these movies. The movies critique the numbing effects of the safety of suburbia, and yet, while the danger “sounds fantastic” from inside Pleasantville, it is, at its best, a danger always contained within safe, larger boundaries that remain unquestioned. For the film’s audiences, the danger is all the more fantastic because the danger is frightening but has been objectified; thus the fear is at once experienced and yet contained.

The danger and risk that fosters authentic experience is nearly always coded in complex intersections between race and sex. The film offers racial difference as a key to authentic emotionality and passionate relationships, but offers this difference within the safety of whiteness. The awakening of the residents of *Pleasantville* is signified most obviously by their gaining color, and for many, experiencing sexual passion is the key to becoming “colored.” This coloring of Pleasantville’s the residents becomes obviously racialized as the black and white residents strive to ostracize the newly colored folks, raising signs against “coloreds” and making rules against “colored” behavior and music. The film remembers the 1950s struggle over racial equality, and yet black citizens are completely absent from this suburb, and those liberated from Pleasantville’s strictures are all white.

But “coloreds” coming alive is racialized in more subtle ways: the music of the “coloreds” is that of nascent rock and roll and jazz. As characters become “colored,” the film consistently shifts from “white” to “black” music.¹⁵ Perhaps the most telling of these shifts comes near the end of the film’s second act. David, having been named a hero for knowing about and putting out a fire in a tree, arrives for work at the soda fountain. The soda shop is filled with teenagers who demand an explanation for how David knows about fire (an unknown to Pleasantville residents—including the firefighters). David’s explanation—and the growing realization among the town’s residents that there is a world outside of Pleasantville—is set to Dave Brubeck’s “Take Five.” As Krin Gabbard points out, Brubeck’s music—especially “Take Five”—was popular in the 1950s and introduced bebop to a broadening (whiter) audience. The teenagers at the soda fountain press David with more questions, including ones

about the books they are just beginning to read from the library. One boy asks David about how *Huckleberry Finn* ends. As David begins to tell the story of Huck and Jim (and as the words magically appear on the page), the music shifts from Brubeck to Miles Davis's "So What" (97–99). The shift to Davis's "So What," writes Gabbard, serves as a "signifier of profound transformation As black music, the Miles Davis recording carries with it an aura of the forbidden and the transgressive that *Pleasantville* needs as it moves the narratives of the civil rights movement to a small town devoid of African American faces" (98).

Finally, these shifting musical and skin tones are reinforced in *Pleasantville* through visual art that is inspired by the music and the awakening of emotions. This art, produced by the formerly repressed owner of the soda shop, is somewhere between modernist and pop art. Most provocatively it is painted, like graffiti, on the side of a commercial building. With its offering of David's telling of Huck's and Jim's story as the realization of individual freedom, a soundtrack that associates black music with passion and feeling, and its presentation of urban, modernist graffiti as honest and authentic visual expression, *Pleasantville* uses racialized and sexualized differences to assert authentic emotionality and connectedness. But these racialized possibilities always remain screened as the characters become colorized versions of whiteness.¹⁶

The connections among modernist art, jazz, race, and sex are made most explicit in *Far From Heaven*. Produced as homage to 1950s melodrama and drawing on a nearly complete range of suburban visual vocabulary, the movie explores the repressions of the 1950s. The story revolves around the "perfect" suburban couple, Cathy and Frank Whitaker, and their black gardener, Raymond Deagan. Cathy is a perfect wife and mother. However, she leads an unfulfilled life (unfulfilled in part because Frank does not desire sex with Cathy) and begins a relationship with Raymond. She meets him in her garden, then at the opening of a modern art show at the Hartford art museum. This second meeting cements Cathy and Raymond's relationship. Raymond is intelligent, caring, kind, and a good father—many characteristics that Frank no longer possesses, if he ever did. Finally, after Frank hits her out of his own sexual frustration, Cathy goes with Raymond to a restaurant in "black" Hartford. They have drinks and dance to a jazz combo. Of course the relationship is doomed. When the town begins to talk about Cathy and Frank's relationship (they are seen together at the restaurant), Cathy is ostracized, Raymond is run out of town (by both the whites and the blacks, he indicates), and Cathy is left alone with her son, daughter, and black maid.

Raymond is the voice of reason both about race and about how to live life. She desires to come see him in Baltimore. Raymond decides that her coming will not work. "I'm not sure that would be a wise idea I've learned my lesson about mixing in other worlds. I've seen the sparks fly, all kinds." With tears in her eyes, she turns to go. Raymond touches her shoulder; she grabs his hand but keeps her back turned. Raymond blesses their parting: "Have a proud life, a splendid life. Will you do that?" She nods, he kisses her hand, and she leaves. The sparks Raymond has seen fly are the powerfully positive sparks of romantic and sexual attraction.

But this illicit attraction caused even greater sparks—the sparks of racial conflict—that are far more dangerous and uncontrollable than Raymond is willing to risk. The moment expresses in fairly precise form what Thomas DiPiero calls the hysteria of whiteness (148–150).¹⁷ Cathy, rejected by her husband (who, it turns out, is homosexual) and searching for an identity, a self that feels real and right, turns to Raymond. But he, wiser than she in the ways of race, reaffirms the irreconcilability of their differences. He re-collects, for her, her whiteness, resuturing her into the white space of suburbia, even as he moves to the not-white space of the city.

The dialectic between danger and safety gets recoded throughout these movies. Edward Scissorhands, after his initial success in integrating into suburban life, is chased out of town, back up the hill to the castle, where he lives alone. Near the end of movie, while the suburbanites are chasing Edward, Peg—the suburban mom, Avon lady, and Edward’s surrogate mother—says to her daughter Kim:

You know, when I brought Edward down here to live with us, I didn’t think things through, and I didn’t think about what could happen to him, or to us, or to the neighborhood. And now I think that maybe, it might be best if he goes back up there, because at least there he’s safe, and we just go back to normal.

Formally, this functions in the exact same way as the ending of the relationship between Cathy and Raymond in *Far From Heaven*. The risky “Other” is expelled from the suburb. The white suburb is too dangerous for the Other, and, at the same time, the Other is far too disturbing to the suburb. For the rest of her life, the white woman left behind longs for this “real experience.” Indeed, *Edward Scissorhands* begins and ends with Kim, the daughter who fell in love with Edward, telling Edward’s story to her grandchild. As with Cathy, Kim gave up this chance of love, this moment of authenticity, because the risks of difference were too profound.

Finally, as Truman stands on the liminal edge between his created world and the “real” world, Christof, the creator of the television show, and Truman engage in a conversation about safety and truth. Christof says, “I am the creator of a show that gives hope and joy to millions.”

T: Then who am I?

C: You are the star.

T: Was nothing real?

C: You were real; that’s what made you so good to watch . . . There’s no more truth out there than the worlds I created for you . . . but in my world you have nothing to fear.

As in *Pleasantville*’s black-and-white TV suburb, Truman’s TV home is safe and comfortable. This safety is at once desirable and, at the same time, terrifyingly boring.

The Truman Show is the one film discussed here that does not return its characters to the comforts of home. Truman finally escapes his hermetically sealed life. His escape is shown on live television. The film cuts between Truman finding the door out, hesitating, and finally deciding to leave, and the television show’s audiences: security guards, bar patrons and workers, and a female former character on the show who had began to awaken Truman’s wonder about an outside world (conflating,

again, sexuality and honest emotionality). The theater audience identifies with the television audience, which identifies with Truman as he escapes the simulacra of his world. The film's audience is asked to respond as does the television's audience—by cheering Truman on, but staying at home. *The Truman Show's* critique of simulacra is itself proffered through simulacra. And this, I want to suggest, is precisely the nub of the *Pleasantville* effect. As the theater audience cheers the audience cheering for Truman's "escape" from his plastic world, the film's audience can experience, in some small way, and at some significant distance, their own escape. And in seeing Truman's individual triumph over simulacra, the audience's audience can begin to imagine (without being called on to enact) an escape from their own plasticized, televised world. What these films offer along with a critique of suburbia is a mediated experience of authenticity and memory that can assuage the conflicts surrounding life in the suburbs. In experiencing the risky sexual and racial relations within the films, audiences can partially overcome their own torpor. If the audiences accept the narrative arc of most of these films, then they can risk authentic emotions, they can cross boundaries of diversity, but as with *American Beauty's* Lester and *Pleasantville's* David, they return to the safety of their carefully controlled and designed suburbs and into the bosom of their imperfect but beautiful families.

"Perverse" Spaces¹⁸

There is one final difference that runs through many of these films and has remained just below the surface of my text: the difference of homosexuality. *American Beauty* and *Far From Heaven* depend on homosexuality to generate the narrative tensions within the films. *American Beauty* begins and ends with images of (male) homosexuality. The only seemingly well-adjusted family on the Burnham's block is the gay couple that lives next to the Burnhams. The movie famously ends with Col. Frank Fits shooting Lester in the back of the head just as Lester has returned to the heart of his family. Frank shoots Lester after fantasizing that his son is having an affair with Lester and after kissing Lester. Viewers are invited to understand Frank as a repressed homosexual. This repression is portrayed as the psychic center of a dysfunctional family and of Frank's violent abuse of his son, abuse that becomes most troubling after Frank believes he sees his son performing fellatio on Lester. Within these scenes, the garage—the prototypical masculine space, located adjacent to but not embedded in the domestic space of the home—becomes the site of deeply disturbing "perversity."

In *Far From Heaven*, Cathy desires a blissful normalcy with her husband, Frank, but he is unable to fulfill her needs. He is emotionally and physically distant and clearly on his way to alcoholism. Viewers learn over the course of the movie that Frank is a closeted homosexual. Again, the repression of this "perverse" sexuality is read as the roots of Frank's inability to carry on a positive family life. And, as in *American Beauty*, this homosexuality is nearly always placed outside of the domestic sphere of the suburban house. In *Far From Heaven*, Frank's office, urban bars, a Miami Beach hotel room, and an urban flat contain the homosexuality that

undermined the heterosexual suburban utopia of Cathy and Frank's "perfect family." Just as the black man is banished to the city spaces of Baltimore, Frank's homosexuality is lived outside of the heterosexist space of suburbia. In the end, Cathy is left alone in her vast and echoing suburban home, abandoned by her (gay) husband, her (black) lover, and by her (heterosexist and homophobic) friends.

These images of real and fantasized homosexuality depend on a larger epistemological, visual, and geographical imagination of homosexuality as, quite materially, "marginalized" (Chauncey, *Gay New York* 26; Ingram, Bouthillette, & Retter, 27–29). Intriguingly, of course, the image of the "closet" is a crucial mode of (spatially) thinking about the "marginalization" of homosexuality. The closet as metaphor and space directly raises the image of domesticity, an image crucial to the suburban imagination, just as the closet serves as a foundational epistemology within the Western imagination (Sedgwick 1, 10, 65, 67; see also Edelman 152). This epistemology of closeted sexuality intersects with deeply spatialized struggles over sexuality.¹⁹ George Chauncey, for example, details the shifting sexual landscapes of New York City through the twentieth century. The visibility of homosexuality in public spaces and in particular neighborhoods shifted over the century and across space. These shifts were not linear or progressive. In New York, homosexuality was more visible and accepted before World War I, was forced underground between the wars, and in the post-World War II years became again more visible (*Gay New York* 331–354). Part of this new visibility came through the struggle for gay rights, which is partly a struggle over the performance of sexuality in space, of creating what Ingram, Bouthillette, and Retter, call "queerscapes" (27). No matter the particular contours of these changing "borders, by policing of the gay subculture the dominant culture sought above all to police its own boundaries" (*Gay New York* 25). These boundaries involve conceptualizations of the public and private and the urban and suburban (Chauncey, "Privacy" 224, 259; Saunders 12–13). These films, in imaging homosexuality at the margins and heterosexuality at the center of suburban domestic space and in figuring homosexuality as disturbing to the normalcy and safety of the heterosexual suburban family, enact in narrative form these very boundaries.

Suburban Dreams, "Perverse" Spaces, and the *Ethos* of *Pleasantville*

Thus, these spatial stories formulate spatialized boundaries between city and suburb, black and white, homosexual and heterosexual, bad and good. While passionate, authentic emotions lie in the first of the binary, the films return us, always, to the second term. The *ethos* of these films create spatialized imaginations in which safety, comfort, normalcy, are structured within the white heterosexist spaces of suburbia. More, however, the films point to the edges, the apparently unsayables, of contemporary life. Crossing over into this dangerous territory, these films seek to create the human subject in the suburb through the imagining of the sublimity (and thus the unsayability) of same-sex, cross-racial, cross-generational, and even cross-species (in *Edward Scissorhands*) sex. The audiences of the films, addressed at a distance, are witness to a failure of discourse and to an imaging of the possible and the impossible.

In fact, as with *The Truman Show*, the films nearly always place the audience at a distance from the impossibilities the films proffer. *American Beauty*'s Lester is already dead, as we know from the opening sequence. *Edward Scissorhands* is told as a long and nostalgic flashback. *Far From Heaven* is set in an idealized past. *Pleasantville* is set in this same past but is even more removed, as this past is mediated both by the film and the film's television show. In each case, audiences are invited to experience a mass-mediated form of perverse sublimity. But even this "apostrophic address" of the mass media is not enough to insulate the viewers from the risky borders proffered by the films. And so, the films nearly always add yet another layer of distance—whether of time or of simulacra—between the audience and the perverse honesty within the narrative arcs. Thus these films represent something like the sublime aesthetics of which Nathan Stormer has been writing. "Sublime aesthetics," Stormer writes, "enact a strange variant of one of the oldest commonplaces, the possible and the impossible. Ultimately, through the apostrophic play of possibility and impossibility, the spectator is reconfigured into the rhetorical topography of humanism" (234). Or, in more everyday terms, in viewing the impossibilities of crossing over from the banality of suburbia into the sublime "authenticity" of "Otherness," viewers are reconfigured into the rhetorical topography of the suburbs. If the audiences accept the narrative arc of most of these films, then they can risk authentic emotions, they can cross boundaries of diversity, but as with *American Beauty*'s Lester, *Pleasantville*'s David, *Far From Heaven*'s Cathy, or *Edward Scissorhand*'s Kim, they always return to the safety of their carefully controlled and designed suburbs and into the bosom of their imperfect but beautiful families.

In this suburban movement between the impossible and the possible, these films construct very particular spatial imaginations of suburban space as white, heterosexual, and patriarchal—a *Pleasantville* effect. This ethical appeal creates seemingly safe "dwelling places" within a deeply fragmented world, a world of fear and longing. But just as crucially, these films help construct a "suburban subject," whose boundaries and borders are marked by the profoundly threatening impossibilities of "perverse" sex. In the economy of these films, it is this risky sexuality that inspires authentic emotional responses. Through desiring an other that, as we have seen, is ultimately rejected, the white suburbanite finally takes on a fully embodied suburban subjectivity. As is so often the case, the suburban subject creates and depends on a passionately desired and expelled other (DiPiero 99).

Tied together in these movies (as in suburbia itself), then, are profoundly difficult contradictions, the most fundamental of which is that between the risks of deeply felt "true" emotions and human attachments on the one hand, and the safety and security of living a normal and socially accepted life on the other. In these films, this passionate desire is filtered through nostalgic longing, a longing that returns the narratives back to center. These nearly unbridgeable differences, as disturbing as they can be, are, in the end, rejected in favor of the nostalgically limned suburb. In most cases, the return to normalcy is celebrated because of the lessons learned in the trip to the wild side. David, the hero of *Pleasantville*, returns to his suburban home of the 1990s better able to cope with this familiar world because of the lessons learned from

the 1950s. The teenager has grown and is able to comfort his divorced mother. “There is no right house, no right car,” he tells her, and that, he suggests, is the way it ought to be.²⁰ Lester, just before he is shot, returns to the bosom of his family, realizing that as difficult as his life has been, it has been good. In his final voice-over, after the audience sees him shot, Lester says, “I can’t feel anything but gratitude for every single moment of my stupid little life.” In short, the films offer audiences escapes from the boredom of suburban life but return the audience to that very same suburb, the same relationships. The journey through the risk of racialized difference and sexualized passion returns the characters back home—wiser, perhaps, and chastened, but home nonetheless.

More broadly, however, these films offer a suburban *ethos*—a dwelling place in which the suburban good life is imagined. These films’ architectural rhetoric, however, is not purely metaphorical. Instead the films offer images of dwelling places—houses, yards, streets, and towns that at once draw on and offer the potential of creating the houses, yards, streets, and towns audiences desire. With suburbia becoming the decentered center of everyday life in the United States, understanding this imagination becomes central to understanding much about many peoples’ everyday lives and desires.

I have focused on several films central to construction of a suburban imagination, tracing the contours of that imagination. By exploring these films as modes of engaging audiences in issues of spatiality, imagination, and *ethos*, I have begun to investigate the multitude of ways audiences come to experience their everyday lives. What is at stake here is not a reading of particular films but rather an increasingly complex understanding of the ways texts, spaces, materialities, and audiences intersect. Exploring the suburban imagination within *Pleasantville* and the constellation of films that surround it begins to alert us to the (im)possibilities of making a good life within suburbia and, as such, within the postmodern “landscape” more broadly. However, since space and images, place and ideas are inseparable, investigation of spatial images is central to the larger project of understanding the rhetorics of space. By bringing together a concern over *ethos*, spatial rhetoric, suburban films, and the suburban imagination, we can begin to understand that a rhetoric of *ethos* not only creates dwelling places in which we can talk and think about the good life, but also creates dwelling places in which we—as fully embodied, material, and concrete subjects—actually *dwell*.

Within this conceptualization, media texts are not necessarily distinct from other forms of texts or textuality but rather are seen as part of the “landscape” of everyday life, where landscape is figured as a contingent intersection of images, performances, materialities, and temporalities. Subjects, constantly striving to make meaning of their lives, struggling to find comforting and passionate “self-locations,” and hoping to find their “place in time,” can and do turn to spatial narratives and images. Cultural, communication, and rhetorical critics can do the same, turning to media texts not only in hopes of “decoding” their meaning or uncovering their ideology but, perhaps even more importantly, to begin to think the boundaries and possibilities of spatial imaginations. Thinking the boundaries and possibilities of spatial imaginations engages us in

an exploration of the deeply embedded everydayness of everyday life, and draws us into conversations about the fundamental (and banal) questions of what we should say, what we should do, where we should live, and whom we should be when we live there (Lefebvre, “Everyday” 11).

Notes

- [1] The literature on suburbia is immense and written from a wide range of disciplines. See, for example, Cohen, Fishman, Girling and Helphand, Hayden, Kenyon, Low, Wiese.
- [2] Conversely, of course, suburbia should not be thought of exclusively in terms set out by mediated images of suburbia. A well-rounded understanding of suburban rhetoric will depend on explorations of the vast range of communicative texts in/of suburbia. This essay is one foray into the larger problematic.
- [3] For de Certeau “spatial stories” are not limited to verbal enactments of and about space. Instead, spatial stories include the “enunciation” of space through practices like walking, cooking, dwelling, shopping, and reading.
- [4] In the post-World War II years, Kenyon argues, we dreamed ourselves to be American, dreams that figured Americans as suburban and white. These dreams hid the social exclusions upon which suburbia was built, and yet these dreams find their concretization within suburbia itself (2).
- [5] Burgin goes on to write:

The fabric of self-identity—individual, ethnic, or national—is woven in time and space, history and geography, memory and place. In mediatic space-time, however, neither monument nor moment survives beyond the immediate, and there are no permanently stable points of orientation. It is not only the links between images that have been shattered. In this present fin-de-siecle, the aggressive history of the West has exploded nothing less than the image itself. (190–191)
- [6] Wilson writes, “Nostalgia is an emotion of longing for a past—admittedly, the longing may be for a past that did not necessarily exist” (36). Fred Davis writes that contemporary nostalgia is a response to the “deep cultural and spatial disruption of contemporary society [which] has begun to dislodge man’s [*sic*] deep psychological attachment to a specific house in a specific locality, in a specific region, which over the centuries had been fostered by the more settled and protracted arrangement of a primarily agricultural and small-town society” (6).
- [7] I am not arguing that these films are *primarily* memory texts; rather, the films use memory as one of their rhetorical modes. Some of the movies are more clearly centered on memory (*Pleasantville*, for example); in others the appeal to memory is more subtle (*The Truman Show*, for example).
- [8] Girling and Helphand argue that the automobile is central to making the visual and experiential landscape of the suburbs. “To the traditional interplay of city and country, dwelling and nature, has been added mobility and the street. The dialectic of culture-nature is now a triad of culture-nature-mobility” (34).
- [9] The clockwork coming and going of men in *Edward Scissorhands* is repeated in *Pleasantville*, though in the town of Pleasantville, most of the men seem to walk to work. The walking in 1950s Pleasantville (which is not repeated, except as a moment of “rebellion” in *American Beauty*) is another mark of *Pleasantville’s* nostalgia.
- [10] The importance of the yard and yard work is reinforced in other suburban movies. Notable for their variations on the theme are *My Blue Heaven*, where we know that Steve Martin—an East Coast mobster relocated to the suburbs of Southern California because he is in the

witness relocation program—is beginning his adjustment to suburban life when he mows his lawn, though he does so in one of his many suits. The narrative of *Far From Heaven* circulates around the relationship between an African-American gardener and a white homeowner. Here—in signifying that this is a wealthier suburb—the yard work is done by hired help, and the yards are bigger and more complex. Nonetheless, yards remain important to the image of the suburb.

- [11] After the single family home, the white picket fence is the single most prevalent sign of suburbia in these films.
- [12] Indeed, the gendering of the lawns and lawn work in the films absolutely reinforces Jenkins' argument. Women, to the extent they are figured as concerned about lawns are concerned with beauty over technique and control. Carolyn Burnham is the only woman seen working in the yard in these films and she is tending red roses (a motif in *American Beauty*). See, Jenkins 120–121.
- [13] As I will argue below, race “reappears” in the sound tracks and on the margins of many of these films. Krin Gabbard argues that race often “appears” in U.S. American films in these very ways. He calls these “appearances,” “Black magic” (6). These films' visual and narrative development of white space intersects with the development of white spaces in other contexts (see Jackson 39; Holloway 198; Nakayama and Krizek 291; Pulido 13; Shome 42).
- [14] The film is framed through Lester's voice-over as a story of a man who has lost his sense of identity. It is clear that the present has forsaken him and that the past offers amelioration—he has, to paraphrase Burgin, lost his place in time (190). The audience is invited, like Lester, to find their place in time in an idealized image of the past.
- [15] For example, Jennifer's first attempts to seduce Skip are set to Pat Boone's “Mr. Blue.” As the movie shifts to scenes of the town's teens following Jennifer and Skip's lead in their convertibles on Lover's Lane, the music shifts to the rhythm and blues influenced “Be-Bop-a-Lula.” The next scene shifts to the soda fountain as David comes to work. A teenager drops a coin in the jukebox and selects “Lawdy Miss Clawdy,” a song performed and written by black men. This shift from white pop to black rhythm and blues corresponds with the deepening shift in identities within the movie. As the young people become more aware of their own feelings and their passions, the music shifts from white to black, from suburb to urban (Gabbard 93–94). My reading of the use of black music in *Pleasantville* closely follows Krin Gabbard's argument in *Black Magic*. See pages 90–104.
- [16] It is important to note that only David leaves the new and improved Pleasantville. We are left to assume that colorized Pleasantville is, in some senses, ideal. Further, the knowledge that David gains from his time in Pleasantville provides him resources for living in the present. The nostalgic landscapes of Pleasantville, then, are pedagogical.
- [17] DiPiero writes that whiteness depends on a “maneuver of externalizing fragmentation or division onto an other while simultaneously demanding of that other knowledge of white masculinity” (20). In short whiteness demands that “others” reflect back whiteness's own identity (148–150). In this scene, Cathy seems unsure of her identity, her place in the world. Raymond, on the other hand, sees clearly, and his clear vision resets the boundaries of white and black.
- [18] With the phrase “perverse space,” I am pointing, more or less obliquely, to Elizabeth Grosz's *Space, Time, and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies*. Throughout the book, Grosz explores the intersections among masculinist epistemologies, built space, and “perverse” desire. “Perversity” ambiguously suggests dominant response to nonheterosexual sexualities and spaces while also suggesting the progressive potential of “perversity.” In “Women, *Chora*, Dwelling,” Grosz writes that Western philosophy and architecture expel all difference, shifting all that is “not male” to Other spaces that are then rejected, denied, hidden (122–124). “Perverse spaces” serve as the outside necessary to the making and maintenance of an inside. While I am trying to point to perversity as a mode of boundary making, I am not rendering a normative judgment about that “perversity.”

- [19] Several collections can serve as good introductions to the spatialization of sexuality, including Colomina; Ingram, Bouthillette, and Retter; and Bell and Valentine.
- [20] It is worth noting, as does Gabbard, that the film opens with contemporary problems defined as issues such as AIDS and ozone depletion. At the end of the film, the problem is David's mother's breakup with her boyfriend (Gabbard 103).

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