The obvious problem such an approach poses is that by forsaking too many comparisons or too much contextualisation, the analyses might be seen to have little validity beyond their individual application. I have, however, intended these analyses less as claims about the trend they represent, than as examples of how close textual analysis and theoretical reasoning might help us gain a more thorough understanding of our experience of certain trends within suburban fiction as well as of fictional suburbs. As I have suggested on numerous occasions throughout this introduction, I feel that studies of suburban fiction have thus far devoted too little attention to close textual analysis of individual poetic and aesthetic qualities. By taking the time to analyse each film and each television programme in detail, by devoting an entire chapter to one or at the most three texts, I hope to make a start on redressing this critical imbalance.

In the first chapter, I examine how *Pleasantville* presents the nature of the suburban fictional world. Each film or television programme postulates its own fictional world, which in turn delineates the possibilities for, and limitations of, the plot. The fictional world of *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (Jackson, 2001), for instance, allows for very different plot developments than the fictional world of *Sense and Sensibility* (Lee, 1995). In the former, plots may come to include wizards, elves and hobbits, resurrections and afterlives, whereas no such creations can ever populate the story world of Jane Austen. In this chapter I look at what kind of world the cinematic suburb might be: what are its natural laws, what is its internal logic, what can and cannot happen there? Looking at the relationships between genre and style, temporality and worldhood, I argue that Pleasantville, the film's eponymous suburb, is characterised by an intrinsic ontological instability that renders narrative by definition unpredictable, contradictory and essentially open-ended.

Chapters 2 and 3 are concerned with the suburban mise-en-scène. In the second chapter I examine how Todd Solondz's 1998 controversial ensemble film *Happiness* uses editing, composition and tone to create a particular spatiality – which I will call, following Peter Sloterdijk, foam – as well as a particular sense of place. Suburbs are often criticised for lacking a sense of place. In this chapter I argue that in *Happiness* placelessness functions precisely as a distinct and unmistakable sense of place. In the first section I look at the ways in which editing is used to maintain narrative coherence and visual consistency while simultaneously creating a sense of geographical dislocation, discontinuity and isolation. In the second section I analyse two scenes in terms of their composition. I show that these scenes are composed visually, as well as in terms of the plot, in such a way so as to create a space that is at once communal and isolated,

transitory and permanent. Finally, in the third section I discuss how the film negotiates stylistic register and diegesis in order to create a particular tone, or feeling, that the film associates directly with its environment.

The third chapter looks at two animated sitcoms – *The Simpsons* and *King of the Hill*. In popular culture as much as in criticism, the suburb is often perceived as a sort of flatland. For many people, the suburb literally lacks dimensions: it is culturally bland, socially conformist, emotionally shallow, or architecturally homogenous. Taking my cue from the philosopher David Kolb, I take issue with these assumptions. By looking at the ways in which two explicitly two-dimensional programmes negotiate the generic properties of the sitcom with the medium-specific qualities of animation, such as flatness and elasticity, I examine how they problematise the correlation between flatness, superficiality and simplicity, and open our eyes to another figuration of complexity.

In the public mind, there is a correlation between women and suburbs. 'Women and suburbs,' Susan Saegert notes, are thought 'to share domesticity, repose, closeness to nature, lack of seriousness, mindlessness and safety.'[54] Sociologist Barry Schwartz has even suggested that suburbs are an essentially feminine environment.[55] In the fourth chapter, drawing on close textual analysis of camera movement, plot and performance, I present a reading of the gendering of space and the social construction of womanhood in the popular dramedy *Desperate Housewives*. Often praised as a prime example of a liberated postfeminist culture, I argue that, on the contrary, *Desperate Housewives* naturalises the suburb as a female retreat, restricts and manipulates the movements of its female protagonists (and explicitly condemns those who are mobile), and stimulates an inhibited performativity and self-consciousness.

In the fifth and final chapter I look at the ways in which three teen suburban noirs – *Brick*, *Alpha Dog* and *Chumscrubber* – engage with the suburban environment. Drawing on the work of Marc Augé and Michel de Certeau as well as close textual analysis, I argue that these films, each in its own way, present the suburb not as a static, depthless non-place, but on the contrary as a space that can be experienced, extended and appropriated – in short, as a lived space.

Questions and Answers

Finally, there are two questions which I have thus far assumed but neither explicitly asked nor straightforwardly answered. These questions are: what do I understand by the suburban narrative? And what do I understand by the fictional suburb? The reason I have not yet attempted

to come to terms with these questions is that they are the two questions this book is concerned with, and it would seem disingenuous to suggest I have an answer already, especially since part of my argument is that the suburb produced by the suburban narrative is less a consistent and coherent iconographic structure than a complex and oscillating 'structure of feeling'. Let me, however, at the outset give two working definitions. By the suburban narrative I understand, as I hope has become clear by now, narratives that are not merely set in, but also structured around and by, the suburb. By the suburb I simply mean, for now, cinematic and televisual settings that have been described as suburb by those involved in making the film or the television programme, by those involved in distributing and marketing the film or the television programme, and by those reviewing them. For indeed, what interest me is what it is in the rendering of these places that denotes them as suburbs in terms of space, in terms of mise-en-scène, in terms of cultural geography, and, as I discuss in the next chapter, worldhood.

Notes

1. D. Muzzio and T. Halper, 'Pleasantville? The Suburb and Its Representation in American Movies', *Urban Affairs Review* 37: 4 (March 2002), p. 544.
2. Compare R. Beuka, 'Imagining the Postwar Small Town: Gender and the Politics of Landscape in *It's a Wonderful Life*', in: *Journal of Film and Video* 51: 3–4 (Fall 1999), pp. 36–47; R. Beuka, '"Just One Word . . . Plastics": Suburban Malaise, Masculinity, and Oedipal Drive in *The Graduate*', *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 28: 1 (Spring 2000), pp. 13–21; R. Beuka, *SuburbiaNation: Reading Suburban Landscape in Twentieth-Century American Fiction and Film* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); P. C. Dolce, 'Suburbia: A Sense of Place on the Silver Screen', in D. Rubey (ed.), *Redefining Suburban Studies: Searching for New Paradigms* (Hempstead: Hofstra University Press, 2009), pp. 159–66; L. Felperlin, 'Close to the Edge', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 7, n. 10 (October 1997), pp. 14–18; T. Gournelos, 'Othering the Self: Dissonant Visual Culture and Quotidian Trauma in United States Suburbia', *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 9: 4 (2009), pp. 1–24; S. Huston, 'Filming Postbourgeois Suburbia: *Office Space* and the New American Suburb', *The Journal of Popular Culture* 42: 3 (2009), pp. 497–514; C. Jurca, *White Diaspora: The Suburb and the Twentieth-Century American Novel* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001); K. Knapp, 'Life in the 'Hood: Postwar Suburban Literature and Films', *Literature Compass* 6: 4 (July 2009), pp. 810–23; D. Muzzio and T. Halper, 'Pleasantville?', pp. 543–74; R. Porton, 'Suburban Dreams, Suburban Nightmares', *Cineaste*, vol. 20, n. 1 (1993), pp. 12–15; S. Solomon, 'Images of Suburban Life in American Films', in

R. Panetta (ed.), *Westchester: The American Suburb* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), pp. 411–41.

3. K. M. Kruse and T. J. Sugrue, 'Introduction: The New Suburban History', in K. M. Kruse and T. J. Sugrue (eds), *The New Suburban History* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005), p. 1.

4. C. Jurca, *White Diaspora*, p. 4.

5. A. Britton, 'Blissing Out: The Politics of Reaganite Entertainment', in B. K. Grant (ed.), *Britton on Film: The Complete Film Criticism of Andrew Britton* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2009), p. 145.

6. R. Beuka, *SuburbiaNation*, p. 4.

7. F. Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel 1800–1900* (London: Verso, 2007), p. 70.

8. R. Beuka, *SuburbiaNation*, p. 15.

9. S. Huston, 'Filming Postbourgeois Suburbia: *Office Space* and the New American Suburb', in: *The Journal of Popular Culture* 42:3 (2009), pp. 497–514.

10. B. Wiggins, 'Re-placing Black Suburbia: Culture Industry Geographies of South Central Los Angeles', unpublished conference paper, presented at the conference *The Diverse Suburb: History, Politics, and Prospects* (Hempstead, 22–4 October 2009).

11. R. Beuka, *SuburbiaNation*, p.15.

12. S. Žižek, 'Looking Awry', *October*, vol. 50 (Autumn 1989), pp. 30–55.

13. Similar attempts have legitimised the study of media – such as television's 'qualitative' turn, cinema's inscription into artistic discourses, photography's alleged problematisation of representative discourses and the novel's turn to a 'descriptive realism' – and genres – from the soap opera to daytime television, melodrama to the blockbuster, the snapshot to the novella etc. – in the past.

14. See G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London and New York: Continuum, 2004): 256–341; and G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), pp. 16–27.

15. I will come to explain what I mean by each of these terms – 'smart' and 'quirky', postmodern and postfeminist – throughout the book.

16. E. Dimendberg, *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); M. Dines, *Gay Suburban Narratives in American and British Culture: Homecoming Queens* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010).

17. L. Mumford, *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Progress* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), p. 553.

18. M. Clapson, *Suburban Century: Social Change and Urban Growth in England and the USA* (New York: Berg, 2003), pp. 5–6. See also L. Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950); and W. H. Whyte, *The Organization Man* (Philadephia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).

19. D. Muzzio and T. Halper, 'Pleasantville?', pp. 556–8.
20. S. Solomon, 'Images of Suburban Life', p. 429.
21. J. Archer, 'Suburbia and the American Dream House', in D. Rubey (ed.), *Redefining Suburban Studies: Searching for New Paradigms*, p. 18.
22. C. Jurca, *White Diaspora*, p. 161. My emphasis.
23. P. McGinley, 'Suburbia: Of thee I sing', *Harper's Magazine* (December 1949), pp. 78–82. McGinley added: 'I have yet to read a book in which the suburban life was pictured as the good life or the commuter as a sympathetic figure'.
24. C. Jurca, *White Diaspora*, p. 5.
25. Ibid. p. 15.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid. p. 48.
28. H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 53.
29. See G. Perez, *The Material Ghost: Films and their Medium* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); D. Thomas, *Reading Hollywood: Spaces and Meanings in American Film* (London: Wallflower Press, 2001); G.M. Wilson, *Narration in Light: Studies in Cinematic Point of View* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).
30. See E. Dimendberg, *Film Noir*; and L. Spigel, *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).
31. C. Brunsdon, *London in Cinema: The Cinematic City Since 1945* (London: BFI, 2007); P. J. Massood, *Black City Cinema: African American Urban Experiences in Film* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003); M. Shiel, *Italian Neorealism: Rebuilding the Cinematic City* (London: Wallflower Press, 2006).
32. M. Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', *Diacritics* 16: 1 (Spring 1987), p. 22.
33. H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 129.
34. E. Soja, *'Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989), p. 129.
35. H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 404.
36. Ibid. p. 11.
37. It is not unthinkable that Lefebvre's use of these terms is slightly ironic, since elsewhere in *The Production of Space*, as well as in his previous work *The Urban Revolution*, Lefebvre takes elaborate issue with linguistic ('semi-ology') and psychoanalytic theories of space. See H. Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), especially pp. 45–76.
38. Ibid. p. 64. My emphasis.
39. Ibid. pp. 11–12.
40. M. Lefebvre, 'Between Setting and Landscape in the Cinema', in M. Lefebvre (ed.), *Landscape and Film* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), p. 20.
41. Ibid. p. 22.

42. J.-L. Nancy, *The Ground of the Image* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), p. 58.

43. S. Chatman, *Antonioni, or, The Surface of the World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 125–31.

44. M. Lefebvre, 'Between Setting and Landscape', p. 29.

45. For critical discussions of the Bordwellian tradition of close textual analysis, see J. Gibbs, *'It Was Never All in the Script': Mise-en-scène and the Interpretation of Visual Style in British Film Journals, 1946–1978*, unpublished PhD thesis (1999), pp. 167–76; and D. Frampton, *Filmosophy* (London: Wallflower Press, 2006), pp. 103–15.

46. M. G. Cooper, 'Narrative Spaces', *Screen* 43: 2 (Summer 2002), p. 143. See also S. Heath, 'Narrative Space', *Screen* 17: 3 (1976), pp. 68–112.

47. J. Gibbs, *Mise-en-Scène: Film Style and Interpretation* (London: Wallflower Press, 2002), p. 5.

48. K. Shonfield, *Walls Have Feelings: Architecture, Film, and the City* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 160. Original emphasis.

49. M. G. Cooper, 'Narrative Spaces', p. 143. Original emphasis.

50. D. Rubey, 'Preface', in D. Rubey (ed.), *Redefining Suburban Studies*, p. xii.

51. A. Wiese, *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), p. 5.

52. R. Silverstone, 'Introduction', in R. Silverstone (ed.), *Visions of Suburbia* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 1–25; R. Silverstone, *Television and Everyday Life* (London and New York: 1994), pp. 55–72, 159–75; L. Spigel, *Welcome to the Dreamhouse*, pp. 2–59.

53. R. Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema*, 2nd edn (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 157–86.

54. S. Saegert, 'Masculine Cities and Feminine Suburbs: Polarized Ideas, Contradictory Realities', *Signs* 5: 3, Supplement (Spring 1980), p. S97.

55. Ibid.