

## Suburban Superiority: Hollywood's Depiction of the Central City

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During the last century, Americans left their cities for the suburbs in unprecedented numbers. At last count (Census 2000), more than 68% now reside in the suburbs, compared to 10% in the city, and 20% in rural areas. This shift in residential patterns corresponds to an increase in the number of films in which a suburban setting plays a significant role. Indeed, in the three movies presented here, Hollywood goes so far as to blatantly advocate that we leave our cities behind.

This paper examines and documents how Hollywood has presented its case for the superiority of the suburb through films such as *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House* (1948), *Please Don't Eat The Daisies* (1960), and *The Stepford Wives* (1975). Spanning almost three decades, these films compare urban and suburban lifestyles, make an argument for leaving the city, and present telling imagery of the promised suburban paradise. An in-depth analysis of the visual presentation of these two different environments is then used to reconstruct the changing perception of the American city over time.

### Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House (1948)

*Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House*<sup>1</sup> is probably the first feature film to recount the trials and tribulations of building a suburban home. The film's script is based on a book of the same title by Eric Hodgins, editor of *Fortune Magazine*. The author describes his own experience of buying an ancient, decrepit farmhouse in Connecticut, and subsequently having to tear it down and build it anew.

According to the film's narrator, the Blandings are "modern cliff dwellers," just like thousands of other New Yorkers. For fifteen years, Jim Blandings, his wife Muriel and their two daughters have lived in a cramped four-room apartment in Manhattan. One September morning, Muriel admits that she has asked an interior decorator for plans to improve on the apartment, and that these plans involve the demolition of one wall. Balking at the estimated cost of \$7,000 for a place they don't even own, Jim leaves for his office at an advertisement agency. Here he stumbles on an ad for a suburban home in Connecticut entitled "Trade city soot for sylvan charm."



Figure 1. Suburban Exodus 1900 - 2000

Jim, himself dissatisfied with the small apartment that forces him to constantly negotiate the use of closet space, the bathroom, its shower, sink and space in front of the mirror, makes an appointment with a real estate agent. After encountering the 'Old Hallek Place,' a run-down farmhouse somewhere in Connecticut, Jim and Muriel each create an idealized version of the place in their minds. More taken by their imagination than reality, they offer \$ 10,000 for the house and its 50-acre lot.

The proud owners soon discover that they have been taken to the cleaners. Instead of \$40, the price per acre charged to locals, they have paid \$200 per acre, and instead of the 50 acres originally stated, their lot measures only 35 acres, 'more or less.' To make matters worse, the old homestead is unsalvageable, and has to be torn down and constructed anew, at an estimated cost of \$15,000. Following multiple alterations to the original plans and disastrous setbacks during construction, the final tally reaches over \$40,000, nearly bankrupting the Blandings. The film concludes with a happy ending of sorts when the narrator, who has been critical of the endeavor throughout the movie, admits that "maybe there are some things you should buy with your heart. Maybe those are the things that really count."

*Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House* is one of the first anti-urban films to appear since *The City* (1939) was presented at the World's Fair in 1939. This documentary provided a highly unfavorable description of urban environments. It portrayed them as overcrowded, dirty and lawless, and decried

their lack of child-friendly environs. In a very clear message the film incited residents to abandon the city for the suburb.

The opening of *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House* borrows heavily from *The City*.<sup>2</sup> As the narrator speaks, the camera pans from the dark canyons between skyscrapers to congested streets with people and cars stuck in traffic. It then moves past an equally congested subway system ("a transportation system second to none in passenger comfort") to a crowded and hectic lunch counter. In spite of these shared scenes, however, the overall tone of each film is quite different.

By very selectively incorporating edited clips from *The City's* extensive urban footage,<sup>3</sup> many of the documentary's anti-urban arguments have been excluded. Pollution, social ills, the resulting lawlessness and the lack of child-friendly environments<sup>4</sup> are not a part of Mr. Blandings' Manhattan. Furthermore, *The City's* depiction of its inhabitants as mere cogs in the commercial machinery, devoid of individualism that sets them apart couldn't be more different from the highly personal portrait of Jim Blandings as "one of these bright young fellows you see around town. College graduate, advertising business, lovely wife, two fine kids, makes about \$ 15,000 a year."<sup>5</sup> This frothy, slightly ironic tone is sustained throughout our introduction to Mr. Blandings' urban environment, where, in contrast to the dark mood evoked in *The City*, it ends on a light note, with shots of one of the city's "delightful changes in climate," a street-scene featuring people navigating the snow- and ice-covered sidewalks after a blizzard.

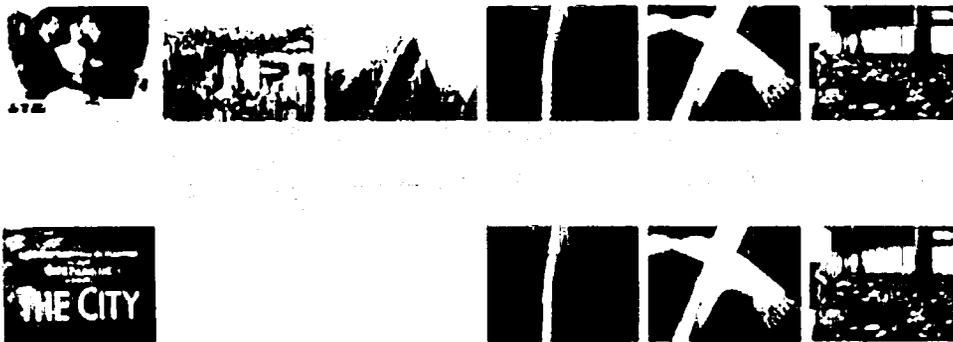


Figure 2. Film clips incorporated from *The City* (1939)



Figure 3. Featured locations in *The Blandings*

With the shortcomings of city living reduced to overcrowding, congestion and a fast-paced lifestyle, the film's real urban critique is centered on the residential problems of city life. Sharing their four-room apartment with two daughters, a maid and a canary, the Blandings awaken each morning to a hectic routine in an overcrowded space. For Jim, the day begins at 7:30 am with a search for clothes in overstuffed closets, followed by a fruitless attempt to get the single bathroom for himself. This is followed by breakfast in the small dining room that is barely able to accommodate the entire family. It can only be navigated by the constant moving of furniture or the birdcage. Chaos reigns, and until the girls leave for school, the apartment is buzzing with the same energy found in the gridlocked streets outside. Not surprisingly, it is the Blandings' desire for a more spacious habitat that ultimately triggers their yearning for a house outside the city proper.

"What the Blandings' wanted was simple enough: a two-story house in quiet, modern good taste; ... a good-sized living room, a dining room, and a kitchen on the first floor; four bedrooms and accompanying baths on the second; a roomy cellar, a good attic, plenty of closets, and a couple of nice porches. And that was all."<sup>6</sup>

From the onset, the film fosters the assumption that life in the suburb or the country will be no different than life in the city, just much more spacious. Jim's work will not be affected by the move, nor will be the running of the household, which remains the responsibility of the maid.<sup>7</sup> In addition,

because none of the typical urban amenities, such as varied forms of entertainment and a diverse range of retail stores and restaurants, appear to play a role in the daily life of the Blandings, the viewer is led to believe that their absence will not be noticed.

A few subtle twists, none of them present in either article or book, cast a shadow on their new-found paradise. After moving day, Jim discovers that from now on he will have to get up 2 1/2 hours earlier in order to catch the commuter train to the city. This will not only affect his marital life – "*you better save your strength, you have to get up at five*"<sup>8</sup> – but also means that he will no longer join his wife and daughters at the breakfast table, the site for animated family discussions. Instead, he will now commute for over an hour each way, spending much more time away from his family. The move thus reduces his presence as a member of the family.

Occasionally Jim has to spend the night in his office to finish his work. Upon his return from the city after one of those nights, Jim discovers his friend Bill wearing his robe after having spent the night alone with Muriel as a result of a storm. Jim becomes jealous, and questions his decision to move to the suburbs. "*I was once a happy man. I did have my sanity and a few dollars in the bank, two children who loved me and a wife I could trust.*"<sup>9</sup> Although his suspicions prove to be unfounded, the theme of marital betrayal has been introduced into the city / suburb equation. With later films such as *Please Don't Eat The Daisies* (1960), *The Graduate* (1967), *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), *The Ice Storm*

(1997), *Lawn Dogs* (1997) and *American Beauty* (1999), adultery becomes a common theme in the depiction of suburban life. Life there may thus look perfect, but not necessarily be perfect.

Although hardly typical of the postwar experience in America – featuring an upper-class New Yorker and his family -- the topic resonated with the general public and, according to Kenneth T. Jackson, made the book the “perhaps most widely read of the many postwar novels that explored the world of rising executives and long-distance transfers.”<sup>10</sup> By making the book into a movie, Hollywood did not just run behind the emerging trend of suburban migration, but actively promoted it as well. Over seventy “Blandings Dream Houses” were constructed in cities across the country, financed by an admission fee of 25 cents, and raffled off with the profits going to charitable institutions. Not surprisingly, thousands wrote to the studio asking for “dream house” building plans following the film’s release.<sup>11</sup> These houses were a sensational form of real-life advertising for *Mr. Blandings*. Additional corporate tie-ins with building supply companies such as Aetna Steel and Sherwin Williams Paint amounted to \$ 3.5 million in free print advertisement for the film. General Electric hopped on board by contributing the latest model washing machine, stove and refrigerator for inclusion in the movie set.<sup>12</sup> All over America people dreamed of living the life of the Blandings family.

*Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House* lives on as an icon depicting the trials of

homeownership, and continues to be available in print and on film. The author, on the other hand, did not experience this level of success. In real life Eric Hodgins ran out of money, and had to sell his New Milford house in 1945.<sup>13</sup> His second book on homeownership and country life, *Blandings Way*, did not fare well. It described the Blandings’ continuing struggle with the building’s upkeep and their failure to establish roots in their new community, and concluded with the family’s return to a Manhattan rental apartment. Their failure to sustain a suburban lifestyle, however, did not appeal to the general public. The book saw only its original 1950 edition, and, lacking popular interest, was never made into a movie. America didn’t want to know about the failure of the suburban dream.

#### **Please Don’t Eat the Daisies (1960)**

On first glance, *Please Don’t Eat the Daisies* appears to be nothing more than a colored remake of *Mr. Blandings* a decade later. Again, the film’s script is based on a book depicting the author’s own experience of suburban life.<sup>14</sup> Apart from their difference in size – the Mackay household consists of four children, a maid and a dog – both families are remarkably similar; the husbands are successful middleclass wordsmiths, each married to stunning women who stay at home. In both cases, the move to the suburb appears to be motivated solely by the lack of space to be had in a Manhattan apartment. Furthermore, just like the Blandings, the Mackays find themselves an old house in the country, far away from the city and badly in need of repairs.



Figure 4. Featured locations in *Daisies*

*Please Don't Eat the Daisies* draws a larger, more positive picture of the urban environment than *Mr. Blandings*. Even as it establishes its premise that the Mackays' apartment is too small for a family with four boys, it ends the opening sequence with Kate (and the viewer) admiring the illuminated cityscape as she escapes in a cab from her chaotic apartment. The plot of *Daisies* also shows her husband enjoying a variety of the city's cultural events and forms of entertainment, urban amenities largely ignored by both *The City* and *Mr. Blandings*.

As a newly minted drama critic, Larry Mackay is fully immersed in the city's nightlife, with its parties, theater productions, restaurants and blues clubs. Although the couple had previously agreed to look for a house in the country, Larry's new career now demands that he spend many evenings in the city. It also prevents him from attending any of the scheduled meetings with the real estate agent. Their inadvertent failure to renew the lease on their Manhattan apartment, however, forces the issue and drives a wedge between the couple. While Kate continues to favor relocation to the suburbs, Larry balks at such a move, preferring to find a bigger apartment in the city. He exclaims: "I like living in the city now! I like being part of the theater. I like being wanted and accepted by the people who count, by important people..."<sup>15</sup>

It comes as no surprise that he is less than taken with their purchase of a huge, somewhat dilapidated mansion that is much in need of cleaning and repairs. Located about 70 miles from where he wants to be, he remarks dryly: "I am about to start a long life as a commuter."<sup>16</sup> Bothered by the noise of home improvement and the constant interruptions by workmen, which prevent him from concentrating on his work, Larry welcomes Kate's suggestion of temporarily moving to a hotel in the city in order to finish his book manuscript.

Once more the city is shown at its most stimulating. Larry enjoys quiet suppers in his hotel room, frequents restaurants and blues clubs, and gets his work done without interruptions. In short, he spends the weekday as a bachelor – a status further emphasized by his frequent encounters with Deborah Vaughn, who attempts to seduce him – while Kate works hard to make the suburban residence their home.

The depiction of the city as an exciting and invigorating environment clearly sets *Please Don't Eat the Daisies* apart from the two previous films. The choice between urban and suburban is no longer clear cut, but has become gender and role specific. Kate's desire for a house in the country is primarily driven by her concerns for the well-being of her children. "Oh, listen to the kids out there, they are having a ball,"<sup>17</sup> she responds when Larry complains about his commute. The move to the country has opened a new world to her. The house and its needs for repairs and decorating cement her role as a homemaker by providing a serious challenge; required parental participation in the local school furthers her involvement with children and their upbringing; and the invitation to participate in a benefits play produced by the local drama society gives her a creative outlet and fosters her acceptance in the local community. Altogether, the move to the suburb has elevated Kate from being a mere appendix to her husband to becoming an independent operator in a variety of roles.

Larry, on the other hand, suffers greatly from the move. His professional life remains his sole focus, and it is still centered in the city. Because he is neither interested in the local community nor in his children's schooling, the suburb has nothing to offer him. Instead, he has to spend several hours a day commuting. This further diminishes his participation in family life, which he might not mind, but the children do. Indeed, he finds himself reduced to a mere 'breadwinner,' a position not helped by his temporary move back into a city hotel. Although he continues to enjoy the city's nightlife, his family's absence diminishes his pleasure, and his life as a weekday-bachelor remains unfulfilled.

Although the film concludes with a happy ending – Larry forsakes his weekday bachelor existence and moves back to the family – no true solution has been achieved. In fact, it seems as if *Daisies* might harbor a subtle critique of the suburbs behind its generally positive portrayal. From Larry's point of view, they don't offer many of the amenities that he is used to having in the city, such as interesting cultural activities as well as a variety of restaurants and nightclubs. For him, the move to the suburbs is not a solution, but a compromise.



Figure 5. Featured locations in *Stepford Wives*

In both *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House* and *Please Don't Eat The Daisies* the suburb is portrayed in glowing terms. At the same time, however, each film shows that a move from the city can cause difficulties to arise. In *Mr. Blandings* these difficulties are minimal. They become slightly more pronounced in *Daisies*. Only in *The Stepford Wives* do they take an extreme form, ultimately leading to the death of the mother/wife.

### The Stepford Wives (1975)

*The Stepford Wives* departs from the introductory pattern set up in the previous two films. At the beginning, the Eberhart family has already made its decision to leave the city and move to the suburbs. The film opens as Joanna Eberhart, mother of two and aspiring photographer, forlornly looks around the apartment one last time before leaving the city and moving to Stepford. We don't see how her family has coped with life in the city, nor are we privy to the couple's decision-making process concerning their move. Gradually, though, the film reveals their reasons for leaving. The first hint comes in the second sequence, where Joanna and her children observe a man carrying a nude female mannequin across the street. As the children recount the event to their father, Walter remarks "Well, that's why we are moving to Stepford,"<sup>18</sup> thus implying that the suburb will be a safer, less strange place. The next hint comes as they follow barren motorways through industrial landscapes on their way to their new home. Upon their arrival in Stepford, they find a town in which the winding streets are lined with trees in full

bloom; horses graze on green meadows; and all of the houses have good neighbor fences and curbside mailboxes. The visual contrast to the city has made it very clear that Stepford is the better place to live.

In time, Walter brings up the themes of the previous two films when he mentions that it's good to have more space, and that it's a perfect place for the kids. In spite of his comment about the children, however, their well-being only plays an indirect role in the movie. While the daily activities of the Mackay boys are featured prominently throughout *Daisies*,<sup>19</sup> Kim and Amy Eberhart have limited screen time (less than 7%). And, unlike the Blandings girls, whose precocious comments provide a humorous reality check to their parents' preoccupation with home construction,<sup>20</sup> the Eberhart children, when on screen, are mostly relegated to the background. They are shown tagging along in the move to Stepford, shopping with their parents at the local supermarket, sitting next to mammy on the family couch, or playing at a distance in the yard. Only a few times do they actively contribute to the story: when they cry out for Joanna because they can't sleep, when they have friends over, play in the yard, crowd around the kitchen table, and when, at the end of the movie, they confront their quarreling parents.

Although they seemingly play a secondary role, the children are indispensable when it comes to the film's storyline. As the subjects of Joanna's gaze they replace the city in her photographs, thereby indicating a shift in her source of stimulation from urban grittiness to

child's-play. They are also the reason for Walter's reluctance to leave Stepford, and ultimately, they serve as the instrument of Joanna's destruction. After she has decided to flee, her desperate search for the children not only delays her departure, but takes her to the Victorian villa of the Men's Association where she will be killed.

The filmic treatment of the children also helps unmask the gender roles in suburbia. Contrary to the growing "domestication of the American Male" asserted by Life magazine in the 50's,<sup>21</sup> Walter spends little time with his girls. Although he occasionally does household chores - we see him helping with the dishes or the shopping - he is at a loss when asked to take care of them on his own. He is in many ways similar to the self-involved Larry Mackay, who is unwilling to spend more time than necessary with his sons,<sup>22</sup> and rather enjoys his life as a bachelor during the week, at least to a certain degree. Walter displays a similar level of selfishness when he brags about transforming an unfinished space into a playroom - for himself.<sup>23</sup>

Indeed, Walter benefits from the move to the suburb while Joanna does not. Instead, it deprives her of an environment teeming with the gritty and exciting images that infuse her work as a photographer, and cuts her off from her friends, cultural events and professional opportunities. An emancipated woman of the 70's, she has no desire to follow in Kate Mackay's footsteps and eagerly throw herself into the role of homemaker to the exclusion of everything else.

*The Stepford Wives* thus marks a distinct departure from previous accounts of suburban housewives. More attuned with Betty Friedan's assertion that mass relocation to the suburbs positioned women within a "comfortable concentration camp,"<sup>24</sup> the film features women who **do not** 'adjust' as housewives, and who **did not** grow up wanting to be 'just a housewife.' Once they are isolated in a suburban landscape, disconnected from social relationships outside of the family and home, and separated from employment opportunities,<sup>25</sup> the women of Stepford lose their distinguishing characteristics.

Newcomers, who have moved from the city, are portrayed as independent individuals with numerous interests, who are somewhat

politically active, and who, despite marriage and children, frown on servitude. Their homes - just like the city - are messy and unorganized, but full of activity.<sup>26</sup> In short, their lives and homes reflect the vitality of the urban environments they have just left. Once replaced by a -- somewhat improved<sup>27</sup>-- mechanical replica, however, the female suburban residents lose their distinctive, independent personalities. They conform to the ideal that their husbands expect of them, through language (a reduced vocabulary that no longer supports criticism), a common appearance (form-revealing clothes on top of enlarged breasts), and singular interests (baking, cleaning, raising children). Indeed, in their ruffled aprons, dresses, and padded uplift bras, the women of Stepford have become commodities of their husbands, stylistically interchangeable just like the decorated boxes they now live in.<sup>28</sup>

This commoditization of the family goes hand in hand with tight control over the entire suburb. Diz Corba, president of the men's association and a former employee of Disney World, has sought to rein in the residents of Stepford by adapting the strategies of a theme park, where the details of the landscape and those who inhabit it are tightly controlled. Police officers and their cars are omnipresent, but, rather than preventing the violation of personal property or guaranteeing the well-being of the residents, they "reinforce the sense of suburban Stepford as a closely monitored, regulatory environment."<sup>29</sup>

At a time when suburbs are becoming the dominant landscape of the country, the *Stepford Wives* supports the notion that personal independence and freedom of choice can only be obtained in an urban context. Whereas the Blandings exchange city life for a more spacious version in the country, and the Mackays have to compromise between the needs of the family and those of the individual, the women who move to Stepford encounter the complete erosion of personal autonomy, the erasure of identity and the loss of individual agency in their new environment.<sup>30</sup> What has been the motive behind the rural exodus since the middle ages, and has led to the establishment and growth of numerous cities around the globe, is now no longer available to Joanna Eberhart: the right to choose one's fate.

## Put In Context

On a superficial level, Hollywood's depiction of the suburb appears to have remained unchanged. In each of these three films, the studios peddle the advantages of the spacious suburban home, surrounded by extensive grounds, and containing multiple bathrooms. In addition, they each advocate suburbia as a refuge, where certain family values as well as social and racial homogeneity are the norm. It seems that the suburbs aren't really meant to be for everyone as *The City* had once proclaimed. Indeed, Hollywood's focus on white, upper middle class professionals with above average incomes and educations prompted Bosley Crowther, the New York Times film critic, to remark that

"if the much-talked about housing problem could be as happily resolved for all as it is for those fortunate people who watch "Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House" on the Astor's screen, then one of our major dilemmas in the domestic area would be a national boon."<sup>31</sup>

The on-screen quest for more living space was subsequently shared by millions of Americans, who, just like the families depicted in the movies, did everything to exchange an apartment in the city for a house in the suburbs. Between 1948 (Blandings) and 1975 (Stepford), the percentage of people residing in the suburbs almost doubled. Moreover, the average size of the American home increased by two thirds, while the number of people per household declined.<sup>32</sup> As the suburban migration grew - from 20% in 1948 (Blandings) to 40% in 1975 (Stepford) - the amount of screen time depicting the city declined drastically. The portrayal of urban life that accounted for over half of the footage in *Mr. Blandings* and *Daisies* has almost vanished in *The Stepford Wives*. Only a small fraction of the film features the city, its activity, noise, vistas and people. Later productions completely reduce the urban environment to an abstract concept, and either totally ignore the city or reduce it to a symbolic stand-in such as a generic office high rise or a Los Angeles limousine.<sup>33</sup> By this time, it appears as if Hollywood no longer needs to compare the city and suburb in order to convince us that suburbia reigns unchallenged.

## Notes

1. The story was first published as an article entitled "Mr. Blandings Builds His Castle " in *Fortune Magazine*, vol. 33, nr. 4, pp 138 -189, April 1946. Later that year, Hodgins expanded the article into a book and changed the title to *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House*. Originally published by Simon and Schuster, New York in 1946, the story continues to find an audience. It was reworked in 1949 as a radio series starring Carry Grant and his future wife Betsy Drake, who also wrote some of the scripts. 1986 saw its reincarnation as "The Money Pit," starring Tom Hanks. The book was republished by Academy Chicago Publishers, Chicago, IL in 1987, with a new edition by Simon and Schuster in December 2004. Currently, Columbia Pictures is producing yet another remake of the comedy starring Ice Cube as Mr. Blandings.

2. *The City* [1939]. Produced by American Documentary Films and directed by Ralph Steiner and Willard Van Dyke. 44 min. Pyramid Media, 1999, c1939. Videocassette. Its makers were not credited for the use of their footage.

3. Of the approximately 588 seconds of urban footage in *The City* only 80 seconds were used.

4. *The City*, 1;14-1:30.

5. *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House*. Produced by Norman Panama and Melvin Frank and directed by H. C. Potter. 94 min. Warner Home Video, 2004, c1948. Videocassette. (2:50 - 3:29). Jim's yearly income was to be \$25,000, but was reduced to \$15,000 in order to make him a member of the middle class. Nevertheless, even his adjusted salary was about five times the national average of 1948. See Jurca, C. "Hollywood, the Dream House Factory." *Cinema Journal* 37, No. 4, Summer 1998.

6. Hodgins, E. "Mr. Blandings Builds His Castle." *Fortune* 38 (4), p. 140. Questioned by the architect about the necessity of a private bathroom for each of the daughters, at a cost of \$1,300, Mrs. Blandings replied: "I refuse to endanger the health of my children in a house with less than four bathrooms." *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House* (41:07 - 41:11).

7. It is never made clear whether the maid has moved with the family or now commutes from the city.

8. *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House* (1:09:30).

9. *Ibid*, (1:26:02 - 1:31:57).

10. Jackson, Kenneth T. *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985. p. 281.
11. Svanevik, M. and Burgett, S. "Matters Historical." *Burlingame Daily News*, October 4, 2004.
12. Jurca, C. "Hollywood, the Dream House Factory." *Cinema Journal* 37, No. 4, Summer 1998, p. 29.
13. Maeder, J. "'Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House': Jim and Muriel Blandings." *Daily News*, September 14, 2002.
14. Jean Kerr's book *Please Don't Eat the Daisies* has sold millions of copies since its original publication in 1957. It became a film in 1960 starring David Niven and Doris Day, and a television series in 1965.
15. *Please Don't Eat the Daisies*. Produced by Joe Pasternak and directed by Charles Walter. 112 min. Warner Home Video, 2004, c1960. Videocassette. (0:49:00 - 0:50:56).
16. Ibid, (0:56:46).
17. Ibid, (0:56:46).
18. *The Stepford Wives*. Produced by Edgar J. Scherick and directed by Bryan Forbes. 115 min. Paramount Pictures, 2004, c1975. (2: 41- 2:49).
19. About 26% (1,745 sec.) of the screen time in *Please Don't Eat the Daisies* is devoted to showcasing the four children, with the majority of the time being spent actively rather than providing mere background for the parents' interaction.
20. Joan and Betsy Blandings are mostly featured as active participants in the family life: at the breakfast/dinner table, moving in, cleaning up, or playing in the yard. Because children are not allowed on a construction site, they contribute only a total of 11% (600 sec.) of the movie.
21. "The New American Domesticated Male: A Boon to the Household and a Boom for Industry," *Life* 36 (Jan. 4, 1954): 42-45; "The Weekend Woe of a Father Named Joe: He Gives the Wife Time Off and Bravely Takes Charge," *Life* 41 (July 16, 1956): 85-89; and "Outdoor Cooking: Barbecue Boom Smokes Up U.S.," *Life* 35 (July 20, 1953): 49.
22. Larry: In my opinion, elementary school and the main purpose of it is to keep the children out of the parents' hair ... . And I don't have the faintest intention to giving up that freedom. *Please Don't Eat the Daisies* (1:10:26 - 1:10:46).
23. Walter: I thought I'd make it into a den/playroom. Maybe I put the pool table right over there. I thought I'd go to town, you know, really spoil myself. Claude: It'd be great for the kids. Walter: Who's talking about the kids. This is a play room, they won't be allowed in. *Stepford Wives* (29:03-29:25).
24. Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: Dell, 1964. P. 294. Friedan, in her recent memoir *Life So Far* (New York, 2000 ), retracted this analogy.
25. Beuka, Robert. *SuburbiaNation*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. p. 151ff.
26. Joanna: Everything in her [Bobby's] house looked like a TV commercial. Walter: Well, good! She had to clean it sooner or later; it looked like a goddam pigsty! When are things gonna start sparkling around here, that's what I like to know? *Stepford Wives* (1:24:06 - 1:24:21).
27. The replicas are frozen in time, free of wrinkles and other imperfections, and sport enlarged chests. At the same time their vocabulary is reduced to make potentially critical remarks a thing of the past.
28. Silver, Anna Krugovoy. "The Cyborg Mystique." *Women's Studies Quarterly*, Spring 2002; 30,1/2. p.73.
29. Beuka, p. 181
30. Ibid, p.183ff.
31. Crowther, Bosley. review, *New York Times*, March 26, 1948, 26.
32. According to the US Census Bureau and the National Association of Home Builders, US houses have been increasing 500 square feet every 20 years, while the average family size has shrunk from 3.4 in 1950 to 2.6 in 2000.
33. In Burt Kennedy's *Suburban Commando* (1992) the city's sole function is that of a workplace. The regular appearance of an office tower indicates daily work rituals and the passage of time. Richard Linklater's *SubUrbia* (1996) reduces the city even further to the promise of a better life, symbolized by Pony's white LA limousine.