

“FEAR THY NEIGHBOR”: PARANOIA AND SUBURBAN VICTIMHOOD IN MARK PELLINGTON’S *ARLINGTON ROAD*

Steffen Wöll
Leipzig University

Abstract: *This paper investigates the cinematic rendition of the undermining and deconstruction of a coherent suburban identity and subsequent dissolution of the Middle American reality principle in Mark Pellington’s Arlington Road (1999). Taking into consideration cultural theory as well as Lacanian psychoanalysis, it argues that the movie depicts the suburban habitat as a breeding ground for non-conformist, anti-social elements, and domestic terrorists who exploit its underlying psychosocial affinities to objective truth, paranoia, and conspiracy theories. An examination of characters, key scenes, and dramaturgical techniques shows that Arlington Road visualizes how social conventions of life in the suburbs are affected by and have contributed to the dissolution of a coherent Middle American identity that rests upon empirical objectivity, categorical exclusiveness, binary oppositions, and a communally shared reality principle.*