

## The Return of Organisation Man: Commuter Narratives and Suburban Critique

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### ABSTRACT

This article considers the significance of suburban commuter imagery in a selection of screen visions of mid-century modernity. A number of examples, including *Mad Men*, and the screen adaptations of *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit* (1956) and *Revolutionary Road* (2008), will be shown to echo key themes, symbols and scenes in their depictions of suburbia and the cultural impact of the corporation. Taken together, these narratives indicate the resilience of the "Organization Man" (Whyte 1956) as a figure marking the tension between individualism and conformity. It is this tension that the archetypal businessman's uniform continues to symbolise in popular culture, even if, as this paper will argue, it is no longer the most fitting expression available.

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arrived and commandeered it. Lorde found a smaller studio available farther uptown, and though the move was inconvenient, she saw the humor in being inadvertently evicted by Bono — it was just one more marker of how strange her life has been since she became famous, four The Return of Organisation Man: Mad Men, commuter narratives and suburban critique more. by Melissa Gregg. More Info: This is an updated version of the paper previously posted following peer review. Forthcoming in Cultural Studies Review, special issue 'On Mad Men', Pru Black and Melissa Hardie (eds), 2012. Research Interests: Cultural Studies, Organizational Theory, Television Studies, Organizational Culture, Suburban Studies, and 5 moreCultural Theory, Computer Networks, Gender, Masculinities, Mad Men. In charting Mad Men's place in the history of commuter narratives, the following discussion recalls previous visions of mid-century modernity, including the film adaptation of Wilson's novel and the more recent production of Revolutionary Road, based on the Richard Yates book of the same name.<sup>4</sup> Among the many cultural references evident in Mad Men (which this special issue amply. Sharing key themes, symbols and scenes, suburban commuter narratives illustrate the pressures, ideals and compromises of modern masculinity in a similar way to the western genre of an earlier era.<sup>5</sup> Fresh from the trauma of battle following World War II, they are stories that illustrate what had been at stake for so many in the wartime effort to secure the American Dream.