

**“Location Is Everything”:
The Concept of Space in John Updike’s Rabbit Tetralogy and
Richard Ford’s Bascombe Trilogy**

Dissertation

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To Jörg and Max

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List of Titles and Their Abbreviations

John Updike:

Rabbit, Run: RR

Rabbit Redux: RRed

Rabbit Is Rich: RiR

Rabbit at Rest: RatR

Rabbit Remembered: RRem

Richard Ford:

The Sportswriter: SW

Independence Day: ID

The Lay of the Land: LoL

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1. Introduction

1.1. "Location Is Everything"¹

"Location is everything"—this hackneyed realty truism taken up by Richard Ford in *The Sportswriter* initiated my interest in approaching John Updike's Rabbit tetralogy and Richard Ford's Frank Bascombe trilogy from a spatial perspective. Location, and in a broader sense, the complex representation of space constitutes a key issue in both authors' multivolume fiction. This study takes a socio-spatial approach to their works and will show in what ways space serves as organizing principle.

John Updike and Richard Ford have unmistakably shaped the American literary canon. Updike (1932-2009) was born in West Reading, Pennsylvania. Ford (b. 1944) is a Southerner from Jackson, Mississippi. It is striking that their protagonists originally come from the same area as Updike and Ford. Updike's Rabbit was born and raised in Pennsylvania, Ford's main character Frank grew up in Mississippi. Thanks to their linguistic prowess and their inimitable style, both authors have become leading figures of the post-World War II era. A prolific writer of fiction and criticisms, Updike has been widely acknowledged as *the* American literary heavyweight.² Ford was more of a back row writer until he achieved his breakthrough with his highly acclaimed novel *The Sportswriter* in 1986.

From the large body of literature, I have selected their most widely known works for my analysis: Updike's Rabbit tetralogy (including the novella *Rabbit Remembered*) and Ford's Bascombe trilogy. Updike published the single volumes of his tetralogy, which comprises *Rabbit*, *Run*, *Rabbit Redux*, *Rabbit Is Rich*, and *Rabbit at Rest*, and the

¹ source: *The Sportswriter* 47

² Unfortunately, the German reception of the Rabbit tetralogy was falling short of expectations due to the bad quality of the translations. Updike's linguistic uniqueness got completely lost in the German edition.

novella *Rabbit Remembered* from 1960 through 2000³, whereas Ford launched *The Sportswriter* in 1986, *Independence Day* in 1995, and *The Lay of the Land* in 2006. The power in form and content of their narrative has secured *Rabbit, Run* and *The Sportswriter* their place among the hundred best novels since 1923 (cf. Lacayo n. pag.).

What unites both authors is the fact that they have been awarded a Pulitzer Prize, Updike for *Rabbit Is Rich* and *Rabbit at Rest*, and Ford for *Independence Day*. What unites them even more is that their novels are masculine examples of suburban fiction. The narrators are straight white middle class suburbanites. Hence, it is evident that the discursive world and the male rhetoric of their protagonists present a lopsided view of suburban space. Updike and Ford use the portrayal of space as a means to convey the changing attitude of their protagonists towards location down the years. Their main characters' depiction of the landscape, of the house and home and of suburban community life traces what has happened to their masculine idea(l) of location and to their sense of place in the postwar era. Rabbit Angstrom and Frank Bascombe meticulously map their suburban surroundings and virtually chart what they see. It is my contention that Updike and Ford use the description of their protagonists' spatial microcosm and macrocosm as a litmus test for social conditions. Moreover, the location of their fictional places is crucial. Rabbit lives in Pennsylvania, Frank in New Jersey. Besides, they both travel the country and mainly focus on the eastern United States. Hence, it is particularly striking that their fictional places are located at the edge of the continent, which implies that space serves as a symbol of imbalance.

In the tetralogy and the trilogy, Updike and Ford chronicle the lives of their white middle class protagonists. Both Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom and Frank Bascombe offer a glimpse through very wide-opened picture windows into their middling suburban

³ *Rabbit, Run* was published in 1960, *Rabbit Redux* in 1971, *Rabbit Is Rich* in 1981, *Rabbit at Rest* in 1990 and *Rabbit Remembered* in 2000.

existence. Updike's at times boorish main persona dissects American life and culture from 1959 until his death in 1989. In fact, Rabbit Angstrom epitomizes the average middle class American. He is a formerly successful high school basketball player who is now leading a life in the second row. His last name says it: he is constantly experiencing angst, and he suffers from disillusionment. In *Rabbit, Run*, set in 1959, he outlines his fundamental problem: "I once did something right. I played first-rate basketball. I really did. And after you're first-rate at something, no matter what, it kind of takes the kick out of being second-rate" (92). Rabbit earns his money selling kitchen gadgets. He deserts his family, indulges in an extramarital affair, loses his daughter Becky, and is always running away from his duties as a father and husband. Due to his shunning responsibility, he really is a milquetoast character. A decade later, in *Rabbit Redux*, he is working as a linotypist and eventually takes on a job as a car salesman in his father-in-law's business. His wife Janice betrays him with a Greek car salesman while Rabbit provides shelter for a young runaway girl and a deranged African American, who make him transgress fundamental moral rules. Together they explore the abysses of human existence. In the end, Rabbit and Janice manage to come to terms. In 1979, Rabbit is the head of his father-in-law's automobile agency selling Toyotas at the time of the energy crisis. Despite his wealth and good reputation, he is still discontent with his life and does not live up to societal expectations. Neither does his son, who is addicted to cocaine. Things just do not run as smoothly as expected behind the suburban picture windows. In *Rabbit at Rest*, the main persona is no longer running, but his physical condition has forced him to slow down. Rabbit is overweight, he spends most of the time in his condominium in Florida, occasionally plays golf and ultimately dies there. Down the years, no matter what he does, he cannot overcome his mediocrity and always marches to a different drummer. All along, he is witness of the respective time period, as he

constantly inserts historical and cultural events into his account, and this detailed testimony of the American lay of the land is continued ten years after his death in *Rabbit Remembered*.⁴

Richard Ford's protagonist Frank Bascombe is a pensive, solitary, and critical middle class suburbanite who is at least as disillusioned as Rabbit. He chronicles the period from 1983 to 2000, and so the temporal interface of both authors' plots comprises sixteen years. In every volume, Ford captures a different season of the year: *The Sportswriter* takes place around Easter, *Independence Day* on the Fourth of July, and *The Lay of the Land* is set around Thanksgiving. Concomitantly, Frank rings in a new stage in his life. Essentially, Frank provides an often self-mocking view of American life. In 1983, his life is a shambles, he is divorced, has lost his oldest son, and enjoys his life with his younger girlfriend Vicky, who will then let him down. Frank lives for the day earning his money as a sportswriter. In the two sequels to follow, he is working as a real estate agent and he is convinced that dwelling constitutes a basic need for every American. In *Independence Day*, set in 1988, he takes his disturbed son Paul on an extended weekend trip and has to face the challenges of his life as father and ex-husband. The last volume of the trilogy, which takes place at the turn of the millennium, portrays the main character suffering from prostate cancer. In the face of death, Frank takes stock. He goes through a range of disenchanting experiences with his ex-wife Ann, his second wife Sally, his children, and his clients while trying hard not to lose his optimism. In an interview with Donna Seaman, Ford revealed that he has been working on a sequel to his Bascombe trilogy in the form of "[a] book of stories" (Seaman n. pag.). In November 2014, this collection of four novellas about Bascombe will be published under the title *Let Me Be Frank with You* (cf. Charles n. pag.). From a purely formal point

⁴ *Rabbit Remembered* is set in 1999, but ends in January 2000.

of view, this collection of novellas is, of course, redolent of Updike's sequel to his tetralogy, *Licks of Love*, including the novella *Rabbit Remembered*.

The suburbs in connection with the cityscape make up the external context for Angstrom and Bascombe. Throughout four decades, Rabbit lives in fictitious Mt. Judge, Penn Villas, and Penn Park, all of which are suburbs of the city of Brewer. Ford's protagonist Frank outlines his life in Haddam and Sea-Clift. When reading their multivolume fiction, one becomes aware of the similarities between Updike's and Ford's main characters. They are both members of the middle class living in suburbia. To them, owning property represents the key element of their middle class self-fashioning. Certainly, Updike and Ford concoct different middle classes, since the notion of *middle class* is determined by cultural, sociological, and economic factors (cf. Peterson 53). In fact, the concept of middle class has been constantly changing. In their chapter "Postwar America: Suburban Apotheosis," Becky M. Nicolaides and Andrew Wiese argue that possessing a home and taking up residence in a specific place were pivotal to belonging to the middle class (cf. 258).⁵ In 1986, Barbara Ehrenreich explained that since World War II, the possession of a house has been one of many other necessary conditions for being considered part of the middle class. Equally important has been a good education for the offspring, holidays for the family, and a second automobile (cf. "Is the Middle Class Doomed?" n. pag.). As Updike's tetralogy covers a period of forty years, it is obvious that the middle class of the late eighties was different from the middle class in his earlier work. Throughout the years, society became more ethnically diverse due to the influx of African Americans and Hispanics. On top of this ethnic change, Ford's

⁵ In their study on Middletown, Robert S. and Helen Merrell Lynd quote from a local editorial article published in 1936, which negates class divide, saying that "while some became very rich and others very poor, the sovereign authority rested with a great middle class, whom we like to term the typical Americans. They were the people whose ideal of life was to own a home, and rear and educate a family in the fear of the Lord and in obedience to law" (*Middletown in Transition: A Study in Cultural Conflicts* 446). At that time, middle class status also depended on a religious and law-abiding life.

trilogy reveals the break-up of the nuclear family. In their novels, the ideal conception of a self-contented middle-class life in a pleasant suburban house gradually forms cracks. In addition to their middle class background, changing places is common to Rabbit and Frank. In every volume, they reside in a different place where they experience community life. Fundamentally, they both travel the country and put great emphasis on a verisimilar portrayal of their domestic microcosm and the effluvia of (sub)urban middle class life, and they both do this very eloquently and with an unerring eye. Despite these similarities concerning the social and local background of their characters, there is a key difference between them. Updike and Ford use different forms of focalization for their protagonists. Ford's first-person narrator creates the illusion of immediacy, which Updike's third-person narrator does not achieve.

I do not want to run the risk of simply classifying Ford's Frank Bascombe as the successor of Updike's Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom, which, as a matter of fact, numerous literary critics have done. Frank is more than the modern version of Updike's American Everyman, and such a claim would unequivocally curtail Ford's impressive qualities as a writer and his creative power. In a 1996 interview with Ulrich Greiner, Ford even reacted gruffly when asked about Updike.⁶ In 2011, however, he acknowledged Updike's lasting impact on his career as a writer: "I told him [Updike] that if he hadn't written those novels, I wouldn't have written mine. The fact that the *Rabbit* novels had such a large presence in American culture allowed me to think that such a thing could be done" (Walton n. pag.). In principle, Ford highly appreciated Updike's work and in an obituary

⁶ Greiner states: "Mein Hinweis auf Updike hatte Richard Ford so unwirsch gemacht, daß er zunächst vorgab, Updike nicht zu kennen" (204).

published in *The New Yorker*, he relates an encounter with Updike in which he mentions their mutual appreciation.⁷

1.2. Critical Reception

1.2.1. Updike

Updike has certainly been the most prolific and ebullient writer of the postwar era. Critic and essayist James Wood says about him that “[i]t seems to be easier for John Updike to stifle a yawn than to refrain from writing a book” (“Gossip in Gilt” 30). And Nicolaus Mills, a professor of American studies, even calls Updike “[a]n American Balzac” (n. pag.). In fact, Updike’s chronicling American middle class life by means of Rabbit Angstrom is evocative of Balzac’s *comédie humaine*. Altogether, Updike’s opus consists of twenty-six novels, one play, twelve short story collections, and eight poetry collections. Add to these a considerable amount of nonfiction, his equally renowned essays and his criticism. Usually, criticism has fluctuated between high esteem and acerbic comments. Still, most critics and reviewers are unanimous that the Rabbit tetralogy represents one of the greatest postwar novels due to the author’s expressive language, his unaccustomed style, and his acumen for creating convincing middle class characters. In his obituary, novelist Julian Barnes claims that “[a]ny future historian wanting to understand the texture, smell, feel and meaning of bluey-white-collar life in ordinary America between the 1950s and the 1990s will need little more than the Rabbit quartet” (n. pag.).

In his 2013 monograph *Becoming John Updike: Critical Reception, 1958-2010*, Laurence W. Mazzeno has undertaken the near impossible task of examining the

⁷ Ford states: “Later, lunch at Brown’s was not especially memorable. We talked, if I remember at all, about doctors, money, and real estate—things novelists talk about. Later still, we became friends” (“Remembering Updike” n. pag.).

abundance of criticism and reviews published on Updike and his oeuvre down the years.⁸ According to Mazzeno, Updike's work has thoroughly polarized critics and reviewers during his time. Most often, scholars have distilled the same recurring themes: his portrayal of sex, religion, and the individual. Notably the research done by Alice and Kenneth Hamilton focusing on the role of religion in his fiction has shaped the early reception of Updike's work (cf. Mazzeno 25). Particularly since the beginning of the 80s, Updike has left his stamp on the literary market. Most critics dealing with his work since then have applied rather conventional methods, "formalist analyses, character studies, examinations of technique" (Mazzeno 82), and still numerous were those who always put their critical lens on the same issue of sex and adultery (cf. 83). Concomitantly, new approaches within the framework of literary and cultural studies started to complement or even replace more traditional interpretations of Updike's work (cf. 87, 108). In the nineties, postmodern approaches added to more conventional literary criticism (cf. 127). Toward the end of the nineties, cultural studies, which considered Updike's fiction "fertile ground [...] for illustrating points about American literature and culture" (144), became more and more important. Since the turn of the millennium, interdisciplinary readings of the Rabbit novels have emerged, but traditional readings are still rather common (cf. 178-179).

It must be noted that, throughout his career as a writer, Updike had to face caustic criticism for his portrayal of women, which is why he occasionally undertook to write novels from the female perspective, i.e. *S.* or *The Witches of Eastwick*. In "Updike's Women," Anna Shapiro denounces his representation of women:

It was the way he depicted women. It was the way he described them—us.
[...] It was not like being stripped. It was like being splayed open on the

⁸ The latest addition to the plethora of criticism has been Bob Batchelor's *John Updike: A Critical Biography*, which was published in April 2013.

examining table under the glare of medical lamps while satirical remarks were made; it was being seen looming with comic grotesqueness through a telescope; it was the most unfriendly leering by someone saying, You see? You see? How could anyone love that? (Shapiro n. pag.)

This vivid illustration of Updike's almost vivisectionist portrayal of women can also be applied to the female characters in the Rabbit series. In addition, women are often portrayed as intellectually inferior. At least in the first two installments, Janice Angstrom figures as Rabbit's obtuse wife who is utterly incapable of juggling the daily household chores.

With regard to the setting and the social stratum he was interested in, Updike explains in "The Importance of Fiction:"

No soul or locale is too humble to be the site of entertaining and instructive fiction. Indeed, all other things being equal, the rich and glamorous are less fertile ground than the poor and plain, and the dusty corners of the world more interesting than its glittering, already sufficiently publicized centers.
(4)

As I will show, the locale has strongly influenced him and his fiction. However, the pertinence of the locale in the life of his main persona has not been dealt with comprehensively in critical studies on Updike yet. Instead, the sexually explicit scenes have often attracted the reviewers' attention more than their suburban background. Even in Mazzeno's 2013 outlook on future Updike studies, space as a core feature in his works is fully ignored.

1.2.2. Ford

By contrast, judged in purely mathematical terms, Ford's fiction to date comprises "only" about a fifth of Updike's complete works. Ford has published seven novels, four short

story collections, one screenplay, and has edited and/or contributed to several anthologies. Criticism on his fiction is still limited and, in comparison with Updike, it is less controversial. In 2008, Brian Duffy argued that “for such an important writer, there is relatively little scholarly work available on his novels and stories” (9). This situation has changed since then. Ford has almost exclusively been researched within a postmodern framework. Due to his provenance, he has long been studied in the context of Southern writing, and critics have argued that his style is evocative of Walker Percy and William Faulkner. Reviews, dissertations, and articles galore have been written since the end of the seventies, while book-length criticism on his work first appeared in 2000 when Elinor Ann Walker published her monograph and Huey Guagliardo edited a collection of essays. Besides, Guagliardo released a series of interviews with Ford in 2001. In *Morality, Identity and Narrative in the Fiction of Richard Ford*, Brian Duffy investigates the concatenation of the three aspects mentioned in the title of his study. Duffy puts his focus on the exploration of American culture and society in the trilogy. What is more, Ford’s literary work has been the object of gender studies approaches, dealing with the construction of masculinity (cf. Josep [sic] M. Armengol). Most notable, in the context of my study, is Martyn Bone’s 2005 monograph *The Postsouthern Sense of Place in Contemporary Fiction*. In essence, criticism on Ford’s trilogy has been less conventional than the reception of Updike’s tetralogy.

1.3. Updike, Ford, and Place(s)

The significance of place(s) in both authors’ lives unequivocally informs the concept of space in their fiction. Updike and Ford were both brought up in the United States and are aware of the meaning of rootedness and locatedness.

In “The Dogwood Tree: A Boyhood,” Updike explains: “My geography went like this: in the centre of the world lay our neighbourhood of Shillington” (*Assorted Prose* 63). His geographical roots have significantly influenced him, and his novels are highly autobiographical. The area around Shillington, where he grew up, literally shines through in his fiction. Charles Berryman claims: “The fact, however, that Updike uses the local setting of his own childhood for Angstrom’s home territory suggests that the fictional character is deeply rooted in the author’s vision of himself” (24). Similarly, Jeff H. Campbell is convinced that Updike exploits his “immediate personal experience as the matrix for his fictional world” (*Updike’s Novels* 98). Dilvo Ristoff posits that “what Updike cherishes most is to paint America, to recreate the scene into which he was born and into which every American is born” (*Updike’s America* xvii). In *John Updike’s “Rabbit at Rest”: Appropriating History*, Ristoff argues for a “scene-centered approach” (4). He supports the view that “[t]he scene is thus not only a *locus* for action but also the major *motive* for actions to occur” (15). Noting his upbringing in the Shillington-Reading area of Pennsylvania, Updike’s critics do not question the significance of his personal experience in his work. He himself foregrounds this fact in his autobiography *Self-Consciousness*, which focuses on the places where he grew up and the recollections linked with his past. Thanks to his environment, he manages to create “[t]he relentless domestic realism” (*Self-Consciousness* 156) of his oeuvre.⁹

For Ford, the (de-)construction of space in his fiction has always been a major concern. In his trilogy, he renegotiates the essence of place—especially the suburban locale—in the lives of his characters and for the development of the plot. Even though he was born in Jackson, Mississippi, he used to spend the summers of his childhood at his grandparents’ hotel in Little Rock, Arkansas. While Updike was rooted in small town

⁹ Updike had also included this area in his earlier novels *The Centaur* (1963) and *Of the Farm* (1965).

Pennsylvania, Ford moved frequently (cf. Walker, *Richard Ford* 2-4). At the age of seventeen, he left his hometown and henceforth lived in different towns both in Arkansas and Missouri (cf. 3). His restlessness impinges on his later life, making him move at least twenty times within two decades (cf. Ford, "An Urge for Going" 60). Essentially, Ford adopts a rather detached stance toward his hometown, arguing that Jackson has never played a decisive role in his life. Therefore, his most vivid childhood memories are not of familiar spots in Jackson, but of the roads that led out of there (cf. 61-62). Fundamentally, places have never determined the course of his life.

In their private lives, Updike's and Ford's idea of place could not have been more divergent. Still, what they both share is the aesthetic priority they give to painting their landscapes. On that score, Ford aspired to emulate Toulouse-Lautrec's "scene-painting" by creating an authentic background which allows his protagonists to lead convincing lives (cf. Duffy 324). In the same vein, Updike has always been a fervent admirer of Vermeer, which is why James Plath calls his way of writing "[v]erbal Vermeer" (Plath, "Verbal Vermeer" 207). V.S. Pritchett points out that "[...] Updike is a descendent, in writing, of the Dutch genre painters, to whom everything in a house, in nature, or in human posture had the gleam of usage on it without which a deeply domestic culture could not survive its own boredom" (202). When Updike painstakingly depicts the landscape, the rooms, and the paraphernalia of the house, he manages to make the nitty-gritty of everyday middle class life appear more riveting than real life. Notwithstanding the alleged realism of their fiction, the question arises as to what extent their novels generate a verisimilar image of the American landscape from the postwar era to the turn of the millennium. I will analyze Updike's and Ford's novels on the assumption that their representation of space transcribes the concept of space of the American middle class. Through their middle class lens, Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom and Frank Bascombe provide

razor-sharp pictures of suburban space in its different manifestations. They represent the fictional mouthpiece of the American middle class in the respective decade and provide their male view of the middle class's changing attitude towards suburban space and the essence of home. To support my argument that fiction conveys reliable information on the perception of space, I would like to quote geographer Marc Brosseau:

Although we admit that it may be difficult, or naive, to look for positive and reliable information in literature, we agree to assert that the novel—because it evokes the internalized experience of place so eloquently—enables us to develop or confirm theses on spatial identity, rootedness or sense of place [...]. (338)

Moreover, Updike's and Ford's fictions also offer interesting insights into architectural and aesthetic trends of the respective period.

1.4. Socio-Spatial Approach

First and foremost, space is the only constant straddling Updike's and Ford's multi-volume fiction. When reading the quartet and the trilogy, one cannot but see the landscapes and the houses and rooms the protagonists inhabit. Yet space is more than merely descriptive. It determines the plot as well as the characters' self-perception and their identity. Spatially speaking, Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom and Frank Bascombe perceive (sub)urban and domestic space and conceive a subjective, cognitive map of their surroundings. In addition, they describe the life within their suburban community.

This study moves from a portrayal of external space to the depiction of internal space. External space comprises urban and suburban areas as well as the analysis of community life against this backdrop. Internal space includes the domestic sphere, the representation of houses and single rooms. Hence, my analysis zooms in on the different

manifestations of space in both authors' fiction. In this context, it is worth pointing out that Rabbit and Frank portray places from two different angles. On the one hand, they travel great distances in their car thus providing a kinetic view of the landscape. On the other, they spend considerable time inside their houses or apartments taking a static perspective when describing their surroundings. So they care about being *rooted* and experiencing community life, but at least equally important for them is being *en route* and observing (sub)urban space from inside their car.

It is my contention that space serves as organizing principle in Updike's and Ford's multivolume fiction. The aim of this thesis is to derive from seven novels and the novella *Rabbit Remembered* how the protagonists perceive space and how they construe their sense of place. Examining Updike's and Ford's literature within the discourse of the male protagonists' white middle class world, I take a socio-spatial approach and intend to show that both authors renegotiate space and concoct a multilayered concept of space. In that connection, I will also analyze if Updike's and Ford's portrayal of space culminates in what Helmut Willke terms *atopia*—this term implies the gradual transition towards placelessness.¹⁰ Relying on the method of close reading, I will juxtapose selected passages of Updike's and Ford's novels and compare how Rabbit and Frank portray space.

1.5. State of Research: The Role of Space in Both Authors' Fictions

In the study of postmodern American literature, the analysis of space has gained prominence since the turn of the millennium with critics like Robert Beuka and

¹⁰ In his study *Atopia: Studien zur Atopischen Gesellschaft*, Willke argues as follows: "Ort, Raum und Entfernung werden zunehmend zu vernachlässigbaren Größen für wirtschaftliche Transaktionen. Der Begriff der Ortlosigkeit, *Atopie*, bezeichnet diesen Moment der Marktutopie, der in der Idee des Utopischen das *Nirgendwo* zum *Irgendwo* steigert. Utopie bezeichnet einen Ort, den es nicht gibt. *Atopie* bezeichnet die Irrelevanz des Ortes, die globale Ortlosigkeit" (13). Unlike Willke, I do not take account of globalization and the means of mass communication.

Catherine Jurca. However, up until now, research on Updike's idea of space in the Rabbit novels has been scarce.¹¹ Robert Beuka holds that *Rabbit Redux* exposes the suburb as an emasculating landscape, which is at the same time a hotbed of racial bias (cf. *SuburbiaNation* 132). The alienating character of suburbia is a key topic for him. I take issue with Beuka's approach, as the tetralogy must be approached in its entirety to fully catch the power of Updike's places. By contrast, Eva-Sabine Zehelein's 2003 dissertation "*Space as Symbol: John Updikes 'Country of Ideas' in den 'Rabbit-Romanen'*" focuses on all four Rabbit novels and seems promising from a spatial perspective. However, Zehelein adamantly rejects exploring the Rabbit novels (and *Rabbit Remembered*) within a discourse on space which applies a spatial terminology. She argues that it does not make any sense to examine topics like *space*, *place* and *nonplace* as the notion of *space* has become fragmented into so many parts that a debate on the issue is almost impossible due to the lack of a basis of argumentation. Instead, she studies the symbolic character of space in Updike's Rabbit narratives on three levels: as "Soziogramm," "Psychogramm" and "Mythogramm." The "Soziogramm" depicts how the tetralogy and the novella *Rabbit Remembered* trace the economic, socio-cultural and ethical changes in American life between 1959 and 2000 (cf. Zehelein 26, 61). The "Psychogramm" illustrates how Rabbit reacts towards his social environment. Finally, the "Mythogramm" alludes to the fact that Rabbit's death might imply the downfall of "the American experiment" (26-27). Her focus is on the deconstruction of the mythical notion that " 'the great ship America [is] going down with all her lights blazing' " (27). Zehelein elaborates on Updike's detailed descriptions of space and spatial change. However, a spatial reading that ignores the complexity of *space*, i.e. the interrelation of its geographical and

¹¹ Rachel Pagano argues that Updike portrays the underbelly of suburbia. She holds the view that the suburban municipalities depicted by the author lack a center, not only spatially, but also morally and spiritually (cf. 8). Even though her research focuses on *Couples*, the same can certainly be said about the quartet.

sociological connotations as well as its public and private character cannot fully grasp Updike's intricate conception of space.¹²

In more recent literary criticism, the changing role of place *and* the role of changing place have been discussed. In his 2011 monograph *The Global Remapping of American Literature*, Paul Giles includes a subchapter on the representation of geography in Updike's Rabbit novels (cf. 154). Under the influence of globalization and television, geographical borders are dissolving in *Rabbit Is Rich* (cf. 157-158). In *Rabbit at Rest*, Giles even observes "a fragmentation of national landscapes" (159) and concludes that geography gains substantially in importance throughout the tetralogy and *Rabbit Remembered* (cf. 160). His analysis only touches Updike's construction of space.

In comparison to Updike's tetralogy, Ford's trilogy has been researched more exhaustively within a spatial discourse. Matthew Guinn and Robert Durante analyze Ford's fiction from a postmodern realist perspective. Guinn explains that "for while his work adheres strictly to the code of verisimilitude, it does attempt to capture a world in which reality seems increasingly problematic" (*After Southern Modernism* xvii). He claims that Ford's style displays realistic features whereas his topics are explicitly postmodern (cf. xvii). Likewise, Durante, who discusses Ford's early work, but only the first part of the trilogy, asserts that the "narrative landscapes" do expose realist traits, but are postmodern in the sense that they often lack structure, direction and order (cf.

¹² Zehelein argues as follows: "Der kurrente Diskurs über *space* bzw. eine ‚Theorie des Raumes‘ liefert kein passendes und gewinnbringendes Theoriegerüst für die vorliegenden Anliegen. Er verführt vielmehr dazu, sich in die Reihe der LiteraturforscherInnen einzureihen, die der Versuchung nicht widerstehen können, ein abstraktes Konzept dem Text aufzuzwängen—der Debatte um ‚Wissenschaftlichkeit‘ sowie den *en vogue*-Wellen der Forschung gehorchend und Tribut zollend. [...]"

Ebenso wenig ist es sinnvoll, Begriffe wie ‚Szene‘ und ‚Milieu‘ im Spannungsverhältnis mit Raum und Ort—schlimmer noch: *space*, *place* und *nonplace*—aufzuwerfen^{46[sic]}, insbesondere in Anbetracht der Tatsache, dass ‚Raum‘ mittlerweile in eine Unmenge an zentrifugal auseinanderstrebenden Fragmenten zerfallen ist, sodass die diskursive Auseinandersetzung aufgrund der mangelnden gemeinsamen Grundlage beinahe unmöglich geworden ist [...]" (28-29).

49). I do not agree on this point, as Ford's landscapes in *The Sportswriter* are predictable or else his protagonist would not effusively laud their "readability" (SW 50). For Ford, places must above all be plausible, hence his insistence on detail.¹³

In the context of postmodern discourse, Martyn Bone and Tim Foster must also be mentioned as they examine Ford's oeuvre from a spatial perspective. Bone renegotiates the meaning of place against an increasingly capitalistic "postsouthern" background. He takes up a "historical-geographical materialist approach" (*The Postsouthern Sense of Place* vii) toward Ford's first two novels of the trilogy and holds that "[...] Frank Bascombe remains optimistic that one can achieve a 'sense of place'—however provisional—through the practice of everyday life *within* the capitalist spatial economy of postsouthern America" (134). By contrast, Tim Foster sees Frank surrounded by a "postsuburban" landscape in his 2012 dissertation *Escaping the Split-Level Trap: Postsuburban Narratives in Recent American Fiction* (cf. 78). In the context of *Independence Day*, Foster argues that "[...] Frank's status as a realtor gives him an understanding of space which allows him to reject abstractions in favour of a conviction that social relations are integral to its production" (117). Here Foster emphasizes the social constituent of space and I share his view.

Kathryn Knapp probes the role of the middle class suburbanite against his suburban backdrop. Knapp argues that postwar suburban literature basically portrays "a white male protagonist, who, having ostensibly 'arrived', finds himself in a living hell in which he is plagued by loneliness, anxiety, and despair" ("Life in the 'Hood" 3). In her dissertation *Nightmare on Elm Street: Nervous Laughter and Heart-Stopping Fear in Recent Suburban Novels and Films*, Knapp further dissects Frank's role within his municipality and refers to his dedicated comportment as "sentimental repossession"

¹³ During a reading on his latest novel *Canada*, Ford explained that places had to be plausible (cf. "Richard Ford/Christian Brückner").

(191) thereby alluding to Catherine Jurca's use of "sentimental dispossession" in her seminal monograph *White Diaspora: The Suburb and the Twentieth-Century American Novel* (cf. 9). According to Jurca, the male characters in literature from the 1890s to the 1960s are alienated and emotionally deprived and thus suffer from "sentimental dispossession" (cf. 11, 14). Jurca's study represents the interface between Updike and Ford, as she is the first to include both authors' representation of the domestic sphere. However, she only mentions Updike and Ford in the epilogue of her study calling them "heirs rather than inaugurators of a tradition [...]" (14).

To finish, I would like to draw the attention to the only study on both Updike's and Ford's novels, Krzysztof Kowalczyk-Twarowski's 2009 monograph *"This Isthmus of a Middle State": The Suburban Fiction of John Cheever, John Updike and Richard Ford*. Invoking the critical work of Lionel Trilling and John Gardner, Kowalczyk-Twarowski takes a socio-spatial approach toward suburbia, foregrounding the connection "between the middle class and materialism/consumerism [...]" (7). Kowalczyk-Twarowski provides a chronological analysis of the single novels while putting his focus on the analysis of "the suburban lifestyle and mentality" (7) in Cheever's, Updike's and Ford's literature.

No study so far has dealt with the multiple reifications of space nor has space been considered the organizing principle in Updike's and Ford's novels. Due to the scarcity of research on space in Updike's quartet and the near absence of studies on both Updike **and** Ford, this thesis therefore treads unbeaten paths.

1.6. Overview of Chapters

Chapter two of this study provides a survey of the issue of space and outlines the methodology of this thesis. The focus of this thesis being Updike's and Ford's concept of

space, I suggest a triadic reading of their fictions. Therefore this study is composed of three main sections. The third chapter investigates how the characters perceive and cognitively map (sub)urban space. In a next step, my study probes the representation of social space. In this context, I will analyze the state of community life and examine the structure of civic engagement. Since two of Updike's later narratives coincide with two of Ford's novels, it seems appropriate to consider their presentations of community life in the respective decades. Particularly in the context of social space, I will hark back to socio-cultural studies pertinent to a spatial understanding of the novels. The third pillar of my triadic reading of space focuses on the protagonists' private sphere and scrutinizes the representation of domestic space. In doing so, both the exterior and the interior of houses will be examined. By the same token, I will discuss the significant role of the realty business. The nexus between these three fields of investigation determines the protagonists' idea of home and their sense of place. The epilogue will provide a summary of the findings of this thesis and provide an outlook on possible new approaches towards post-9/11 suburban literature.

2. Space

2.1. The Pertinence of Space and Place

In American literature, certain areas have been associated with myths of place. Critic Robert Glen Deamer points out that “the American dream is [...] a cluster of myths which happen, mainly, to be myths of place” (1). He elaborates on “the Adamic myth of freedom and rebirth in a pristine natural world *beyond* the frontier [...]” (4), which is also known as the American Western myth (cf. 4). Moreover, he examines the New England myth of place (cf. 5) and the myth of the South (cf. 16). Deamer considers the myth of the West most significant, as it “most nearly accords with the American dream itself [...]” (16). His claim that the American dream implies myths of place is significant in this study.

In the nineteenth century, the fictional portrayal of the West could be subsumed under three headings: it was considered a garden, a wilderness, or an Eldorado. These diverging views required an appropriate response to the landscape: “the garden wanted cultivation, the wilderness taming, the place of treasure quick consumption” (Lutwack 144). Fundamentally, these ideas of the land mutually exclude and contradict each other (cf. 144).¹⁴ For authors, these diverging ways of land usage made it necessary to find a compromise in their fiction. For instance, Henry David Thoreau described “a middle landscape” between forest and town where agriculture was possible but where trees were growing rampant, reaching almost into the hut (cf. Lutwack 175).¹⁵ In the same vein, the suburbs of post-World War II fiction also represented “a middle landscape” according to Lutwack:

¹⁴ In *Rabbit, Run*, Mrs. Smith’s garden represents a perfect example of domesticated nature.

¹⁵ In *Walden*, Thoreau spends more than two years in Concord, at the shore of Walden Pond, and thus right between the town and the woods (cf. *Walden and Other Writings* 113). His writing will be of importance in the context of the Bascombe trilogy and Ford’s own conception of a sense of place.

The latest compromise has been the growth of suburbs, particularly since the end of World War II when many Americans have had the old feeling of making a new start in life. In this version of the American dream the ideal dwelling-place is located between the commercial, money-making place—city, industrial complex, retail markets—and the farm and forest. (177)

In this quotation, Lutwack, like Deamer, underlines the connection between the American dream and place. In essence, suburbia used to be conceived of as an ideally located place, close to nature. Of the three images of the New World, the concept that still suffuses American ideology and that is most pertinent to this study, is the conception of the landscape as a garden. This idea has influenced the perception of space in American Studies from the beginning.

2.1.1. The American Landscape as a Mythical Garden

To early European immigrants, America symbolized Eden and was tantamount to paradise (cf. Lutwack 149). For the first settlers, it represented a huge garden to be cultivated. However, by 1850, farmers could not subsist any more on farming alone. Hence, the farmers' initial pastoral ideal failed and resulted in improper measures. In the West, this failure led to agribusiness and technology; in the South, it entailed slavery. In real life, the conception of the American land as a huge garden ultimately had to be abandoned (cf. 151). Still this conception suffuses seminal monographs in the field of American studies.

The garden image has been an issue in American studies ever since Henry Nash Smith's 1950 dissertation *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*. In addition to Smith, his student Leo Marx and feminist critic Annette Kolodny have shaped studies on space. These critics examined canonical texts and argued that the core of the American self-image could be understood by reading these texts. Smith, to begin with,

came up with the concept of the American West as virgin land and investigated “the myth of the Garden of the World” (viii) prevalent in nineteenth-century America. Since the publication of his pathbreaking study, the American Adam¹⁶ has been literally placed in this virgin land. Smith examined the preconceived ideas with which Americans approached the West and analyzed fictional and historical texts from a male perspective. In 1964, Leo Marx published his highly acclaimed monograph *The Machine in the Garden*. Unlike Smith, it was his endeavor to elaborate on the changes Americans imposed on the putative garden. Primarily, Marx put his critical lens on nineteenth-century literature and argued that the most influential American writers were inspired by “the theme of withdrawal from society into an idealized landscape [...]” (10). However, this idealized countryside gradually succumbed to the negative aspects of progress. In 1844, Nathaniel Hawthorne described how the whistle of the locomotive disrupted the peacefulness of the scenery known as “Sleepy Hollow” (cf. 12-14). In this context, Marx states: “Most important is the sense of the machine as a sudden, shocking intruder upon a fantasy of idyllic satisfaction” (29). American authors often juxtaposed the pastoral elements of an intact landscape and the disruptive signs of progress (cf. 29). It is Marx’ aim to adumbrate that spatial change was caused by technology. To prove his point, he introduced the image of the machine which foiled the pastoral idyll.

Ten years later, in 1975, Annette Kolodny also examined space, but she did so from a feminist perspective. In *The Lay of the Land*¹⁷, Kolodny claimed that

Eden, Paradise, the Golden Age, and the idyllic garden, in short, all the backdrops for European literary pastoral, were subsumed in the image of an America promising material ease without labor or hardship [...] a

¹⁶ *The American Adam* is the title of R.W.B. Lewis’ eponymous book. Therein he elaborates on the American self-conception and investigates “the image of the American as Adam” (5).

¹⁷ Richard Ford was certainly familiar with Kolodny’s well-known study. However, it remains mere speculation if her work influenced his calling the third part of the trilogy *The Lay of the Land*.

resurrection of the lost state of innocence that the adult abandons when he joins the world of competitive self-assertion; and all this possible because, at the deepest psychological level, the move to America was experienced as the daily reality of what has become its single dominating metaphor: regression from the cares of adult life and a return to the primal warmth of womb or breast in a feminine landscape. (6)

Kolodny's analysis must be seen in the context of gender studies, as she puts her focus on female imagery in canonical American texts.

The seminal studies by Smith, Marx, and Kolodny have above all dealt with the representation of space in nineteenth-century literature and have shaped the perception of space in pre-World War II literature. Essentially, American studies as a discipline has dealt with space since its inception. In the context of the representation of (sub)urban space, it must be noted that there is in fact a clear connection between the image of the garden and post-World War II suburbia. Leonard Lutwack argues:

The post-World War II development of American suburbanism, with its emphasis on the separate plot of profusely planted ground, is a recent expression of the garden image. Suburbia combines the city, where the economic lifeblood is, with the countryside, where the pastoral setting is supposed to survive. (153)

In the novels to be discussed, the forces of capitalism intrude upon the suburban landscape like the machine intruded upon the garden almost a century before. And these forces similarly affect the landscape in postwar fiction. I therefore conclude that the whistle of the locomotive as the acoustic symbol of industrial progress has been superseded by spatial uniformity as the visual symbol of suburban sprawl. Spatial uniformity and as such the absence of difference clearly perverts the idea of progress.

2.1.2. Space in Twentieth-Century Literature

“Always spatialize!” (Friedman 130)¹⁸

In the following section, I outline how the fictional representation of the landscape was reshaped in the post-World War II era. In reality, the relation between Americans and their country has long lacked rootedness: “Displacement is the order of American history, starting with the migration from Europe, followed by the westward movement across the continent, and continuing with the flight from farms and towns to the cities [...]” (Lutwack 180). This accounts for the fact that the American literary hero used to be “the man in motion” with Leatherstocking, Ahab, and Huck Finn representing perfect examples of this ideal (cf. 181).¹⁹

In twentieth-century literature, “the trope of placelessness” (Smethurst 270) gained ground. At the beginning of the century, accustomed places, like the country house, were no longer in the focus of interest. So the portrayal “of fixed places in the lives of individuals [...]” (Lutwack 213) had receded into the background. The disappearance of these places unhinged the literary landscape. After World War II, writers were looking for alternatives to grapple with the decreasing power of place. Accordingly, their characters were thrown into motion (cf. Lutwack 226). Hence the main characters were again “in motion,” but this time mobility literally coalesced with automobility. Updike’s *Rabbit, Run* mirrors exactly this transition toward mobility with the protagonist spending a remarkable amount of time in his car and on the road. And

¹⁸ In *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter*, which was published in 1998, Susan Stanford Friedman modifies Fredric Jameson’s famous imperative “Always historicize!,” which appeared in the introduction to his influential monograph *The Political Unconscious* (cf. Friedman 130).

¹⁹ Yet these classical heroes allow a rather one-sided view of the landscape, which was also described from the female perspective, as in Longfellow’s epic poem *Evangeline* or, from a completely different ethnic and social point of view, in numerous slave narratives.

Ford's protagonist Frank Bascombe seems to have become one with his car in *Independence Day*.

Against this background, it might seem paradoxical that the second half of the twentieth century saw a shift inside the house and a foregrounding of the domestic surroundings. Consequently, during this time, there has been a change concerning the portrayal of the role of the male protagonist and the significance of domesticity. According to Barbara Ehrenreich, American icons like Huck Finn, Ishmael, and Natty Bumppo deprecated domestic life and preferred experiencing manifold adventures to assert their masculinity²⁰ (cf. "Realty Bites" 48, 50): "the guy genre wrestles with a single huge dilemma: the guy's responsibility to settle down into domesticity versus the lure of the unisex world of adventure. A cozy hearth versus a high-country campsite, the Little League versus the bullring, hunting whales versus selling real estate" (48). Ehrenreich claims that "real men" were used to leaving everything behind by using either a raft, a boat, or a vehicle. Under these circumstances, only a coward would simply be accommodated in a house or even sell houses. In novels by Cheever, Roth, and Updike, the protagonists abandon their dream of becoming great heroes. Henceforth, sex supersedes nautical challenges and men prove their strengths doing household chores: "Real men test their mettle on lawn maintenance and the intricacies of post-monogamous marriage" (50). Ehrenreich refers to this new type of postwar fiction as "the novel of settling" and adds that "American fiction, for the most part, has come indoors and closed the shades behind it" (50). I hold that this shift into the house simultaneously heralds the growing significance of property and real estate, which is

²⁰ As Ehrenreich alludes to Leslie A. Fiedler, I would like to quote the original lines she refers to. In *Love and Death in the American Novel*, Fiedler writes that starting with Rip Van Winkle "the typical male protagonist of our fiction has been a man on the run, harried into the forest and out to sea, down the river or into combat—anywhere to avoid 'civilization,' which is to say, the confrontation of a man and woman which leads to the fall to sex, marriage, and responsibility" (26).

why I will investigate the omnipresence of real estate in the third and fourth part of the Rabbit novels. Likewise, the significance of owning, renting, buying, and selling property is thrown into relief in Ford's trilogy. In essence, what Smethurst calls "the trope of placelessness" (270) implies a reappropriation of place and space. In Updike's and Ford's multivolume fiction, instead of losing significance, space is turned into the overarching issue.

2.2. Approaching a Fictional Spatial Terminology

Up until now, I have applied an array of terms designating spatiality: setting, scene, landscape, geography, location, locale, background, area, and place. Moreover, *topography*, *mapping*, and *cartography* often occur in literary studies focusing on the portrayal of postmodern landscapes. Given the range of possible ways to refer to the setting (with setting itself being a very extensible term) of a novel, it is a difficult endeavor to come up with a consistent spatial terminology. As a basic principle, *space* and *place* are intimately entwined and complementary. From an epistemological perspective, the subject of *space* and *place* straddles various fields, such as architecture, sociology, socio-cultural studies, sociolinguistics, and geography (and its undercurrents human geography and humanistic geography²¹), and, above all, literary criticism. Even though the focus of this thesis is on fiction, I will also include references to these various fields wherever it is appropriate and necessary to do so to elucidate both authors' concept of space.

²¹ In essence, human geography is "[a] major field of GEOGRAPHY that is centrally concerned with the ways in which PLACE, SPACE and ENVIRONMENT [sic] are both the condition and in part the consequence of human activities" ("Human Geography"). Moreover, humanistic geography implies "[a]n approach that seeks to put humans at the centre of GEOGRAPHY [sic]" ("Humanistic Geography").

In literary criticism, *space* has mostly been dealt with in connection with the parameter of *time*. In this context, M. M. Bakhtin played a leading role as he elaborated on the novelistic chronotope in the late 1930s:

In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope. (Bakhtin 84)

In postmodern literary criticism, there was a “spatial turn” (Smethurst 7)²² which entailed

a shift in sensibilities from a predominantly temporal and historical imagination that had informed, and in part constituted, modernity, to a more geographical and spatial imagination shaping many aspects of postmodernity, not least the means of both economic and cultural production in a world dominated by global capitalism. (10)

The “spatial turn” brought with it an increasing sensibility towards the issues of space and spatiality. Robert T. Tally Jr. remarks in this context that “[t]he spatial turn is thus a turn towards the world itself, towards an understanding of our lives as situated in a mobile array of social and spatial relations that, in one way or another, need to be mapped” (*Spatiality* 16-17). It is exactly this focus on social and spatial connections which will form the linchpin of my study.

As both Updike and Ford trace the development of the same characters down the years, their construction of space records spatial change against the background of an

²² This spatial turn is also referred to as “topographical turn” (Hallet and Neumann 19). Robert T. Tally Jr. explains that “it would be difficult, and misleading, to identify a particular date or moment when this occurred [...]” (*Spatiality* 11).

increasingly capitalist world. Novels can never be considered in isolation from the socio-cultural changes affecting both the society and the portrayal of space. Updike's *Rabbit Angstrom* and Ford's *Frank Bascombe* often compare the view of the contemporary landscape with the landscape of the past. In doing so, they oppose a synchronic view of the landscape to a diachronic view. This dichotomy informs their reading of space. Hence, the parameter of time is still significant, as different decades face different economic and socio-cultural challenges.

Fundamentally, the language addressing the role of space and place in fiction is of a rather protean nature. In the context of houses and rooms, Joseph A. Kestner undertook to create a spatial terminology at the end of the 1970s. He argues that "there seems to be what can be called a 'grammar' of locations throughout the history of the novel, such as the house, the window, the staircase, the prison, the room [...]" (70). The recurrence of these locations can be explained by the fact that they provide the setting for the people who inhabit them and, even more importantly, they provide the scene for actions to take place (cf. 70). In his 2004 monograph *Place and Space in Modern Fiction*, Wesley A. Kort, who exhaustively researched on place-space relations, has come up with the insight that

[t]he language of place in a narrative is often subordinate to the language of character, as when descriptions of a room or house serve to indicate a character's personality, tastes, or social standing. The language of space can be subordinate to plot, as when it provides places where events can occur. However, the language of space begins to dominate character and plot when it determines the characters that are likely to appear in certain locations or the kinds of events that occur. [...] Kinds of buildings, differing rooms of a house, open fields, and other locations can affect character and plot. (16)

I contend that in the novels to be analyzed the language of space unambiguously dominates character and plot.

In literary criticism, the overarching notion of *space* has often been given priority to *place*. In the first half of the twentieth century, Charles Olson distilled the fundamental role of space in his research on *Moby Dick*²³: “I take SPACE to be the central fact to man born in America, from Folsom cave to now. I spell it large because it comes large here. Large, and without mercy” (11).²⁴ The fundamental role of space was also examined, in more recent literary criticism, by Wolfgang Hallet and Birgit Neumann. According to them, spaces in literature are always experienced spaces, in which the spatial conditions, cultural meanings and individual modes of experience coalesce (cf. 11).²⁵ In *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, geographer Yi-Fu Tuan explains on that score:

“Space” is more abstract than “place.” What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value. [...] The ideas “space” and “place” require each other for definition. From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space, and vice versa. Furthermore, if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place. (6)

Space usually evokes the idea of expansion and vastness, while place implies a greater level of familiarity, definiteness, and specificity. The “pause in movement” put forward

²³ Olson is often quoted in spatial analyses, e.g. in Klaus Benesch’s article “Concepts of Space in American Culture: An Introduction” or in Michael Fuchs’ collection of essays in *Placing America: American Culture and Its Spaces*. Olson argues that space has a long tradition in America and this new awareness of space is finally gaining ground in literary studies.

²⁴ Folsom cave refers to a New Mexican quarry where a colored cowboy found a spearpoint made of flint towards the end of the 1920s. This spearpoint was lying close to the remains “of an extinct bison, pushing back to 10,000 years ago the date of human habitation of the continent” (Allen and Friedlander 381). Hence Folsom Cave influenced human chronology and, according to Olson, the prominence of the issue of space has not decreased since then.

²⁵ In “Raum und Bewegung in der Literatur: Zur Einführung,” Wolfgang Hallet and Birgit Neumann argue that the concept of space is difficult to grasp. In German literary studies, the space/place dialectic does not pose a problem, as the prevailing term “Raum” discharges critics from having to choose between the two. In the quotation above, I have translated the idea that “Räume in der Literatur, das sind menschlich erlebte Räume, in denen räumliche Gegebenheiten, kulturelle Bedeutungszuschreibungen und individuelle Erfahrungsweisen zusammenwirken” (11).

by Tuan makes possible this familiarity or attachment with a place. At bottom, space and place are dynamic, continually evolving concepts.

Literary criticism has also addressed the more specific study of place(s). Author and critic Eudora Welty, who, like Ford, lived in Jackson, Mississippi, and who was greatly admired by him, took pains to undergird the leading role of place in fiction. Before there was even the term *spatial turn*, she evinced the prominent role of place in her 1956 essay "Place in Fiction," in which she averred that reading a novel required an awareness of the interrelation of place and feelings (cf. 122). Even though such a statement must appear like a trite literary commonplace, what Welty acknowledged more than fifty years ago was the fact that place had long been undervalued:

Place is one of the lesser angels that watch over the racing hand of fiction [...] while others, like character, plot, symbolic meaning, and so on, are doing a good deal of wing-beating about her chair, and feeling, who in my eyes carries the crown, soars highest of them all and rightly relegates place into the shade. (116)

For this reason, she intended to buttress the role of place and do "a little petitioning" to strengthen its importance (cf. 116). Like Welty, literary historian Leonard Lutwack attached great importance to place deploring that it had not been dealt with exhaustively enough in literary criticism (cf. vii).

Beyond that, numerous geographic studies have focused on the core of place. Geographer J. Nicholas Entrikin elucidates its multidimensional character:

To understand place requires that we have access to both an objective and a subjective reality. From the decentered vantage point of the theoretical scientist, place becomes either location or a set of generic relations and thereby loses much of its significance for human action. From the centered viewpoint of the subject, place has meaning only in relation to an individual's

or a group's goals and concerns. Place is best viewed from points in between.
(5)²⁶

Entrikin differentiates between two complementary ways of perceiving place. By positing that “[p]lace is best viewed from points in between” (5), he emphasizes the interdependence between two different forms of reality and underlines both the local and the social constituent of place. This binary conception of place is shared by Richard Ford when reflecting on his writing process of *The Lay of the Land*. Yet instead of using *place*, he applies the term *landscape*: “I wonder if I’m writing a book which really does satisfy the definition of a book about how the American landscape lies, and, beyond that, how the American spiritual landscape lies” (Duffy 321). Here, Ford also distinguishes between an objective and a subjective reality. Fundamentally, both *place* and *landscape* comprise these complementary connotations.²⁷ The concept of landscape and its diverse manifestations will figure prominently in the third chapter of this dissertation.

The intangible character of the concepts of *space* and *place* being unequivocal, it is impossible to arrange the whole gamut of spatial notions at a fixed spot on a continuum. For this reason, Tim Foster opposes “a reductive distinction between ideas of space and place,” and instead suggests adhering to “particular ‘spatialities’ as the network of social interactions peculiar to any given space or place at any particular time [...]” (37). However, as I will make use of the notions of both *space* and *place*, especially in the context of Ford’s intricate terminology, I feel the urge to differentiate between them. Without unduly simplifying the issue, I therefore use *space* in a more generic sense than

²⁶ Entrikin argues from a geographical point of view, whereas Yi-Fu Tuan commits himself to humanistic geography.

²⁷ In this context, I would like to cite sociologist Sharon Zukin, who explains *landscape* as follows: “Not only does it denote the usual geographical meaning of ‘physical surroundings,’ but it also refers to an ensemble of material and social practices and their symbolic representation. In a narrow sense, *landscape* represents the architecture of social class, gender, and race relations imposed by powerful institutions. In a broader sense, however, it connotes the entire panorama that we see [...]” (16).

landscape and *place*. It will serve as the umbrella term for the categories relevant to this study, i.e. (sub)urban space, social space, and domestic space. Consequently, notions like *location*, *area*, *region*, *backdrop*, etc. are less abstract than the hypernym *space*. I agree with Foster's assumption that "place is not a bulwark against space but an integral part of the process by which space is produced [...]" (37). In my reading, *space* and *place* are interdependent with *place* being more definite than *space*. Still, it is absolutely impossible to provide a linguistically flawless narrative terminology of spatial lexemes as they simply do not possess only one fixed denotation. Instead, in line with the spaces and places I will portray in this study, these lexemes represent a spectrum of constantly evolving ideas and are subject to sociological, socio-cultural, architectural, and geographical change.

More specifically, I will also discuss whether the places, which are of significance for the characters, are suffused with a *genius loci*, a spirit of place. Concomitantly, I will address the meaning of *sense of place*. For this reason, both terms must be clearly delineated. It is worth mentioning that Ford himself contrives an elaborate idea of sense of place (and also of locatedness²⁸), which impacts his fiction. In human geography, both spirit of place and sense of place play an essential role. Geographer Edward Relph elucidates the core of both concepts:

Sometimes "sense of place" is used to refer to what might more accurately be called "spirit of place"—the unique environmental ambience and character of a landscape or place. I prefer to keep a distinction between sense of place and spirit of place, though clearly they are closely connected.

As I understand it, sense of place is the faculty by which we grasp spirit of place and that allows us to appreciate differences and similarities among places. Spirit of place exists primarily outside us (but is experienced through

²⁸ I will explain Ford's use of locatedness in the fifth chapter of this study.

memory and intention), while sense of place lies primarily inside us (but is aroused by the landscapes we encounter). (“A Pragmatic Sense of Place” 25)

I entirely share Relph’s categorization and will use his terminology in the following. Basically, I will examine how the main characters respond to physical space and if they develop a sense of place.

In this study, the manifestations of space in both authors’ multivolume fiction will be renegotiated. As I have pointed out, the notions *(sub)urban space*, *social space*, and *domestic space* constitute the core terminology pertinent to my reading of Updike’s and Ford’s novels. In the context of social space, I will investigate public places where the main characters often get together. In sociology, such gathering spots, which traditionally fulfill a socializing function, are called “third places”²⁹ (Oldenburg 20). This term completes my spatial nomenclature.

2.3. Methodology

Space can only be examined in connection with the socio-cultural circumstances of time. In this context, I invoke the landmark criticism *Theory of Literature* by René Wellek and Austin Warren. Therein, Wellek and Warren argue: “Much the most common approach to the relations of literature and society is the study of works of literature as social documents, as assumed pictures of social reality. Nor can it be doubted that some kind of social picture can be abstracted from literature” (102). In their seminal monograph, they also state that “[l]iterature occurs only in a social context, as part of a culture, in a milieu” (105). So the socio-cultural context is in constant flux. Their approach is of relevance in my analysis of Updike’s and Ford’s fiction, as Rabbit and Frank are always subject to the social and cultural concomitants of the respective decade and to the

²⁹ My use of “third place” should neither be confounded with Homi K. Bhabha’s use of “third space” nor with Edward Soja’s concept of “Thirdspace.”

corollary of an increasingly consumerist society. Updike explains on that regard: “But I think my overall theory, if I have one, is that the life of a piece of fictional prose comes from its relationship to reality, to truth, to what actually happens—and that a book without any reference to that is apt to be boring and not to really be alive” (Iwamoto 121).³⁰ In the same vein, Ford buttresses that being a writer in the United States includes exploiting what culture offers: “In fact, we’re always tugging at the coattails of American culture. We’re followers, not leaders. We’re always writing about things that have already occurred. In that aspect of the arts, we are always slightly retrospective” (Levasseur and Rabalais 90). According to him, fiction inevitably responds to cultural circumstances (cf. 90). Hence, both authors underline the connection between their fiction and real life. For this reason, I will also include sociological and spatial studies in this thesis. Even though Updike and Ford only focus on a relatively small part of the United States, their protagonists’ microcosm nevertheless mirrors the transformations affecting the United States since the post-World War II era.

Regarding the writing and reading of Updike’s and Ford’s landscapes, I draw on the critical work of Robert T. Tally Jr., who in his study *Spatiality* differentiates between “literary cartography” and “literary geography.” He defines “literary cartography” as follows: “The act of writing itself might be considered a form of mapping or a cartographic activity. Like the mapmaker, the writer must survey territory, determining which features of a given landscape to include, to emphasize, or to diminish [...]” (45). According to Tally Jr., a writer creates a “literary cartography” which will then be interpreted by the reader in terms of a “literary geography” implying “a form of reading that focuses attention on space and spatiality in the texts under consideration” (80).

³⁰ In his tetralogy, particular importance must be attached to historical events which infiltrate the plot. I will occasionally touch upon this issue in the context of space. Updike contends that his “fiction about the daily doings of ordinary people has more history in it than history books [...]” (Samuels 37).

Tally Jr. conceives of the two ideas as being complementary (cf. 80). Without unduly simplifying his theory, I would like to adapt his terminology to my study of (sub)urban space.³¹ I therefore argue that by drafting their characters' landscapes, Updike and Ford conceive a literary cartography. My analysis represents a literary geography gained through a spatial reading of their fiction.

³¹ Tally Jr.'s theory also includes, as a third strand, the field of *geocriticism* which is irrelevant to my analysis.

3. (Sub)Urban Space

3.1. Suburban Sprawl

To begin with, I outline the socio-cultural circumstances necessary to an understanding of the portrayal of (sub)urban space in Updike's and Ford's novels. In 2001, after the 9/11 attacks, Richard Ford reflected on the impact of this cataclysmic day in *The New York Times Opinion* section. As terrorism had come to the suburbs, which he considers "our Elysian fields spilling out beyond the horizon line," suburban life would never be the same any more ("The Worry Trap" n. pag.). For this reason, Ford reminisces about what the suburbs used to mean for the average American before 9/11:

Curbless streets, endless lawns, cul-de-sacs, two-car garages, picture windows and patios all signified the annihilation of worry. We accepted homogeneity, generational synchronism, an unreserved seat on the 5.48 and the mantra "It can't happen here," in trade for letting our guard down. The suburbs are nirvana for the urban neurosis, a crisp, peaceable frame of reference, the relevant vocabulary worked out by smiling realtors: "minutes from shopping," "a flower-lover's paradise," etc., etc. (n. pag.)

Ford brings realtors into play who use unduly positive language to lure their clients into the suburbs. Moreover, their realty jargon underpins the tantalizing prospects awaiting them there. Against the backdrop of this promising environment, suburbanites had obviously felt too safe and had thus abandoned their vigilance. Ford alludes to a utopian vision of suburbia, to the suburban myth. In his essay, he also mentions Sinclair Lewis' novel *It Can't Happen Here* in which Lewis superimposes the German experience of dictatorship onto the contemporary American political landscape and envisions the implications and consequences of such a dictatorship. The title suggests the

improbability of such a scenario. In contrast to Lewis' dystopia, the suburbs promised a utopian vision of an ideal world in the midst of a pristine setting.

In the following, I take a closer look at the historical landmarks pertinent to suburban sprawl. As the novels to be discussed focus on the time span from the end of the 1950s to the turn of the century, this period is crucial for an understanding of the suburban *modus operandi* and the bucolic ideals dominating the construction industry. The years between the Great Depression and the Second World War were marked by an enormous recession in the property market. However, since the beginning of the 1940s, partly as a consequence of rising birth rates, there had been an urgent need for houses, which plunged the United States into a crisis. 1945 marked a watershed, as the United States experienced an unprecedented expansion of its suburbs. This growth could be ascribed to three important aspects, i.e. a higher demand for houses after the war, governmental policies promoting the suburbs, and more efficient methods of building. When the government had recognized the extent of the crisis, it had started "a massive national construction program [...]" (Nicolaidis and Wiese 257) promoting the erection of one-family houses in the suburbs. In the process, governmental policies supported homeowners. First of all, the government increased the financial budget of the Federal Housing Administration to provide money for one-family houses. Secondly, it passed the GI Bill, which offered mortgages for ex-servicemen. As a consequence, from 1945 to 1965, more than twenty-six million houses were built, mostly in suburban areas. In order to facilitate the construction process, mass production of homes was launched to satisfy the booming housing market. In this context, Levittown in Long Island became the epitome of a suburban development and numerous similar developments were modeled after it. In a very short time, the landscape surrounding America's cities changed drastically. The monotonous views fueled the popular belief that suburban

communities were produced on a conveyor belt (cf. 257–258). At the same time, suburbia entailed far-reaching social consequences. As housing became affordable, more Americans could buy property. Therefore suburbanization together with the possession of a house played a decisive role in the reformation of the continuously growing American middle class. Concomitantly, social divisions dissolved while racial segregation persisted (cf. 258).³²

Suburban sprawl was inextricably entwined with the proliferation of the car. Hence car ownership became increasingly important. In the postwar era, the automobile industry exploded and the construction of highways boomed (cf. Kunstler 106). Robert Putnam, who did exhaustive research on the suburbs, stated referring to the era from the 1960s to the 1990s: “One inevitable consequence of how we have come to organize our lives spatially is that we spend measurably more of every day shuttling alone in metal boxes among the vertices of our private triangles” (*Bowling Alone* 212). For instance, Americans spent an increasing amount of time alone in their automobiles commuting to work (cf. 212). Architect Philip Bess refers to post-World War II suburban residential areas as “automobile suburbs” (144).³³

Believing in the tantalizing prospects suburbia seemingly had to offer, such as “greater space, larger homes” (Putnam, *Bowling Alone* 214), Americans were heading for the suburbs like lemmings to the sea. They were attracted by the myth of suburbia. At the beginning of the 1960s, Bennett Berger published his article “The Myth of Suburbia” (cf. Berger 312). Fundamentally, this myth perpetuated the image of suburbia as a conglomeration of homogeneous houses inhabited by homogeneous residents, who

³² For instance, Levitt and Sons, the eponymous builders of Levittown, excluded African Americans from becoming homeowners (cf. Beuka, *SuburbiaNation* 8-9).

³³ British historian Ruth Brandon explains that “[b]y 1970 there were 50 million small houses and over 100 million cars in the United States” (175). She also refers to the car as “an extension of home [...] a private cave of autonomous comforts” (3).

shared the same interests and the same way of life (cf. 313). According to Berger, suburbia implied both a local and a sociological layer of meaning. Spatially speaking, it designated the stretches of land outside the city. Sociologically speaking, suburbia also represented a state of mind or, as Berger put it, “a way of life” (312). Yet the myth of suburbia primarily considered white-collar suburbs and ignored less affluent, working class sections (cf. 315). Initially, the myth implied a rather positive view of suburbia. But after the suburbs had mushroomed in the decade following the 1950s, Americans were uncertain whether to consider suburbia as utopia or dystopia. On the one hand, realtors and people working in the construction and advertising industry naturally approved of the suburbs. On the other hand, intellectuals, moviemakers, and writers painted a harrowing image of the conformist, isolating, and materialistic world of the suburbs where women were denied emancipation. The initially idyllic vision of the perfect suburban community was gradually subverted in the fifties and sixties (cf. Nicolaidis and Wiese 291-292). Consonant with this demystification of the suburbs, “the white middle-class suburbanite emerged as a kind of victim, a casualty of mass society and corporate greed” (292).³⁴ The positive verbiage on the suburbs gradually disappeared. In 1969, historian and literary scholar Scott Donaldson published his study *The Suburban Myth*, which directly addresses the caustic criticism directed at suburbia. Donaldson analyzed the reasons behind the onslaught suburbia had to face at the end of the sixties, and he excavated the eighteenth-century myth of the Jeffersonian ideal as the main cause of vitriolic attacks against suburbia. Accordingly, the post-World War II suburbs were not a reincarnation “of the Jeffersonian ideal of the small community, made up of individualistic, selfsufficient yeomen who meet occasionally to solve their

³⁴ In this regard, Robert Beuka adds that suburbia “has come to reflect the phobias and insecurities of American culture” (*SuburbiaNation* 19). In fact, the tetralogy and the trilogy record the lives of increasingly discontent and alienated male characters.

mutual problems” (Donaldson 17).³⁵ This clash between the Jeffersonian ideal and post-World War II suburban reality accounted for more critical responses to the suburbs:

What is it, exactly, that the critics expected to discover, and found lacking, in the American suburb? Their expectations can be summed up as nothing less than the realization of the American ideal—a return to nature, a return to the small village, a return to selfreliant individualism. The American suburb, many social commentators came to believe, was the twentieth century place in which this eighteenth century ideal could and should come true. Reality stands little chance against such illusions. (22)³⁶

And critical voices did not die down. Thirty years after Donaldson, social critic James Howard Kunstler explained about postwar suburbs in *The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America’s Man-Made Landscape*:

The place where the dream house stood—a subdivision of many other identical dream houses—was neither the country nor the city. It was noplac[e]. [...] And yet like the city, the suburb afforded no escape from other people into nature; except for some totemic trees and shrubs, nature had been obliterated by the relentless blocks full of houses. (105)

Kunstler’s use of “noplac[e]” is redolent of Ford’s use of “Anyplace” when referring to the suburbs (cf. *SW* 100). Gradually, subdivisions and shopping malls completely changed the surface of the country (cf. Amato 220). Most important in the context of space is the fact that suburban sprawl caused the visual deterioration of the American landscape.

³⁵ According to *The Suburb Reader*, early suburbia was considered “a coveted, desirable place sought out by the wealthy and upwardly mobile as a place to live permanently, while still commuting to the city” (Nicolaides and Wiese 13).

³⁶ The phrase “selfreliant individualism” is evocative of Emerson’s essay “Self-Reliance,” on which I will elaborate later.

3.2. Suburbia in Updike's and Ford's Fiction

"I'm majoring in geography," Nelson admits, nervous by the door, tense to scuttle.

"Geography! That's something they teach in the third grade! I never heard of a grownup studying geography."

"Apparently it's a great specialty out there," Janice says.

"Whadde they do all day, color maps?"

(*Rabbit Is Rich* 109)

In *Rabbit, Run*, Updike describes the area surrounding his protagonist as "the un-grandest landscape in the world [...]" (110). And Ford declares in *The Sportswriter* that Frank Bascombe lives in "a plain, unprepossessing and unexpectant landscape [...]" (36). The telling prefix "un-" hints at a visceral problem endemic to the northeastern landscape. These negatively connoted adjectives convey the idea that Rabbit and Frank are in the wrong place and are surrounded by wasteland. The drab character of the northeastern locale, especially New Jersey and Pennsylvania, is emphasized right from the start of both authors' multivolume fiction. Updike's *Rabbit, Run* is set in 1959 and Ford's protagonist almost echoes his words in 1983. This means that the "un-attractive" view has not changed but, in fact, become even worse. Especially in the third volume of the Rabbit novels and in all the Bascombe novels, the portrayal of space must be seen in connection with the development of suburban areas, which, of course, takes its toll on the landscape. As a consequence, both protagonists are located in un-inviting, middling surroundings. Therefore I contend that the narrated landscapes represent antagonistic places.

In contrast to Updike's quartet, Ford's novels take place within a few days, which underscores the rapid destruction of landscape to erect new housing developments or food chains. More than Rabbit, Ford's I-narrator Bascombe manages to impart to the

reader the visual instantaneity of the rapidly growing suburban consumer landscape. Both authors' novels clearly expose the underbelly of suburbia. Down the years, their characters denigrate the negative spinoffs of suburban architecture and real estate, which is why it is not surprising that the realty business comes to the fore in their fictions. Even though their narrators empathize with the suburbs, their portrayal of space is harsh and unembellished. As Frank Bascombe relentlessly describes what he sees, Ford was categorized as a representative of "dirty realism" (O'Donnell 46). This is a term coined by Bill Buford to designate a group of writers emerging toward the end of the postmodern turn (1960-70s), who did not intend to gloss over the negative aspects "of American domesticity, regionalism, class, popular culture, and media" (47). It is my contention that not only Ford, but also Updike falls into this category as he gets down to the nitty-gritty of suburban life, using very explicit, and at times obscene language. From a spatial perspective, Updike's predominantly realistic portrayal of suburbia gains an additional layer of meaning in the Bascombe trilogy, as Ford's protagonist comments on the essence of space at the meta-level and realigns its denotation. Endeavoring to write verisimilar novels, both authors attach great importance to detail when describing suburbia. Their portrayal of suburban space must be seen in connection with the depiction of the cityscape.

It is worth noting that not all the suburbs mentioned in their fiction emerged after World War II. The architecture of the houses allows conclusions to be drawn about the time of construction. Updike's fictitious Pennsylvanian suburbs Mt. Judge, Penn Park, Penn Villas, and West Brewer can certainly be assigned to the twentieth century. By contrast, Ford's New Jersey suburbs were built prior to the postwar housing boom. According to his protagonist, the suburb of Haddam was founded in 1795 (cf. *SW* 45) whereas Sea-Clift emerged much later: "it had been founded in the twenties by upstart

Philadelphia real estate profiteers as a summer resort for middle-middle citizens from the City of Brotherly Love [...]” (*LoL* 361).

There is also a difference regarding the two authors’ portrayal of suburban houses. Essentially, Updike’s predominantly mass-produced postwar dwellings differ from Ford’s suburban places. The houses Rabbit describes are redolent of the suburban areas William Levitt erected in some states in the postwar era, including New Jersey and Pennsylvania. It must be noted that the house of Rabbit’s parents’-in-law, a “big stucco house” (*RiR* 32), stands out from these mostly identical suburban houses. Ford often depicts curlicued edifices, which strongly contrast with Updike’s predominantly basic buildings.

In the following subchapters, I examine the portrayal of the (sub)urban landscape in their multivolume fiction at local and regional level. In doing so, I extrapolate the literary geography conveyed through Updike’s and Ford’s texts. In this context, I also consider both authors’ idea of space, which they implemented in numerous essays, introductions, or, as in Updike’s case, in an autobiography.

3.3. The Role of Place in Updike’s Own Life

I have already pointed out that Updike’s excessive attachment to his geographical roots had enormously influenced his literary oeuvre. To comprehend his spatial connectedness, his autobiography *Self-Consciousness* must be considered.

The *genius loci* of Shillington where he grew up imbues his fiction with local color. In his autobiography, he explains at length his captivation with Shillington.³⁷ His

³⁷ In one of his last interviews with Charles McGrath in October 2008, Updike also underlines the significance of Shillington for him. He used to live there until the age of thirteen and explains that Shillington has been “mallized” in the meantime (cf. “John Updike: A Life in Letters” n. pag.).

portrayal of fictional Brewer and its suburbs is based on real, experienced geography.

Focusing on *Rabbit at Rest*, Joyce Carol Oates comments:

One comes to think that this background is the novel's soul, its human actors but puppets or shadows caught up in the vanity of their lusts. [...] The being that most illuminates the Rabbit quartet is not finally Harry Angstrom himself but the world through which he moves in his slow downward slide, meticulously recorded by one of our most gifted American realists. ("So Young!" 153)

For Oates, Updike is a realist, whereas I have categorized him a representative of "dirty realism" (even though he started writing before the postmodern era began) due to his explicit style.

In *Self-Consciousness*, Updike describes the gradual metamorphosis of Shillington. Snapshots of his Shillington past serve as blueprints for his novels and short stories. For example, he mentions "the view up the street, where the tall row houses of the Kegerises and the Kendalls and the Olingers and four or five others stood behind their retaining walls so loftily as to seem airborne" (*Self-Consciousness* 24). The "Olinger Stories" (cf. *The Early Stories* 3-125) were certainly named after his former neighbors. Furthermore, his memories shape the local grid of Rabbit's hometown Mt. Judge. On the evening of his precipitous flight, Rabbit walks down Wilbur Street to Potter Avenue, past *Kegerise* Street to the Sunshine Athletic Association, the home of his former coach Marty Tothoro (cf. *RR* 15-16). Besides, his mother used to purchase her son's clothes "at Croll & Keck" in Shillington (cf. *Self-Consciousness* 27), which inevitably evokes *Kroll's* in Brewer.

In Updike's conception of life, place serves as the foundation of his existence: "It was exciting for me to be in Shillington, as if my life, like the expanding universe, when projected backwards gained heat and intensity. If there was a meaning to existence, I

was closest to it here" (29).³⁸ Accordingly, an individual's sense of place can never be objective and unbiased. Updike explains his stance as follows:

Dasein. Nothing I have described here has importance except to me, and to those few thousands who thanks to chance also live or have lived in Shillington; they will see that I haven't described it very well, for I haven't described *their* town—only mine [...] a few scraps preserved by memory and used more than once [...] used up and wished away in the self-serving corruptions of fiction. Yet isn't it a miracle, the oddity of consciousness being placed in one body rather than another, in one place and not somewhere else [...]? (39-40)

In his view of the world, changing places always encompass a changing notion of the self (cf. 147, 233).

Updike's small-town life sometimes made him feel as hemmed in as Rabbit, and at such moments, reading literature encouraged him (cf. 113-114). Notwithstanding the key role of Shillington and Pennsylvania in his life and fiction, the novelist does not want to restrict his fiction to one area.³⁹ Instead, he asserts that his prime subject is "the whole mass of middling, hidden, troubled America [...]" (106).⁴⁰ Hence Rabbit's spatial microcosm paradigmatically represents the American macrocosm.

³⁸ *Existence* is evocative of the core values of French existentialism. Updike was familiar with the writings of the existentialists, especially with Sartre and Camus (cf. De Bellis, *The John Updike Encyclopedia* 180-181). Moreover, Updike's use of the term *Dasein* is redolent of Heidegger's existentialist use of the word. Updike had also been strongly influenced by Kierkegaard, Tillich, and Barth. Especially Heidegger's *Being and Time* had attracted his attention (cf. Boswell 7, 15).

³⁹ Even though Shillington, Pennsylvania, figures prominently, it must be stressed that Updike had also lived in other places. In 1945, he moved to Plowville, Pennsylvania. In 1950, he went to Harvard. Afterwards, he spent a year in England, then moved back to New York City. He has lived in different places in Massachusetts since 1957: in Ipswich, Georgetown and Beverly Farms (cf. De Bellis, *The John Updike Encyclopedia* 469-470).

⁴⁰ Updike explains: "[...] I, who seemed to myself full of things to say, who had all of Shillington to say, Shillington and Pennsylvania and the whole mass of middling, hidden, troubled America to say, and who had seen and heard things in my two childhood homes, as my parents' giant faces revolved and spoke, achieving utterance under some terrible pressure of American disappointment, that would take a lifetime to sort out, particularize, and extol with the proper dark beauty" (106).

In “A ‘Special Message’ for the Franklin Library’s First Edition Society Printing of *Rabbit at Rest* (1990)” (*Odd Jobs* 869-872), Updike elucidates his writing process and his stance toward places. Accordingly, Berks County in Pennsylvania became Diamond County in his novels with Brewer being modeled after Reading. In particular, Updike had closely studied the Floridian landscape before sending Rabbit there. Yet in this special foreword to *Rabbit at Rest*, he insists that the topography of Brewer was not meant to be a mimetic geographical reproduction of Reading:

When [...] I sat down to write my fable of an ex-basketball player gone off the rails, I drew haphazardly on the geography of my native turf, getting most of it rather wrong. To a child raised in Shillington, Reading was an ominous great city; its geography consisted of scattered eminences and glimpses, and in cooking up Brewer I twisted its orientation by ninety degrees, making what was east north, and jumbled real route numbers like 422 with unreal ones like 111. (871)

The places he portrays are subject to personal experience and experienced geography. Especially after his mother’s death, in 1989, he kept coming back to Pennsylvania. These visits showed him quite plainly the enormous power of “real places” in contrast to “the paper cities we make of them in fiction.”⁴¹ Coming back to the place where he spent his childhood so many years later made him see this area from a different angle. It was only then that he really comprehended his local roots. On that score, Updike acknowledged that fictitious emulations of places are always less powerful than “real places” (cf. 872).

⁴¹ In this context, I would like to quote from *Rabbit at Rest*: “And the Pennsylvania row houses take a simple square approach to shelter, not so different from those cities of aligned cereal boxes the teacher had you set up with cut-out doors and crayoned-on windows in first grade [...]” (167-168). Here they are again, the “paper cities” Updike mentions in this special edition of *Rabbit at Rest*. They symbolize the cookie-cutter houses which had become typical of suburbia.

3.4. Brewer and Its Suburbs in the Rabbit Tetralogy⁴²

Before putting my critical lens on the Rabbit quartet, I would like to turn my attention to Sinclair Lewis' novel *Babbitt* which was published in 1922. Not coincidentally Rabbit is often mentioned in the same breath as his near-namesake Babbitt, and there are indeed parallels between these two significant literary figures. Babbitt is a realtor who leads a ritualized, predictable middle class life in Floral Heights, a suburb of the city of Zenith. He is used to living up to social conventions and his whole existence is completely standardized. He lives in a mass-produced house, is married with three children, but nevertheless he is constantly dissatisfied and feels the urge to escape his conformist life. Babbitt perfectly represents the middle class suburbanite who cherishes nothing more than materialism. He takes his wife as much for granted as his kitchen gadgets. For this reason, he wants to rebel against his monotonous existence. Consequently, Babbitt leaves the path of virtue, indulges in an extramarital affair and enjoys his forays into an unconventional world. As his friends and business partners ostracize him because of his nonconformist behavior, Babbitt finally resumes his former middle class life.

One morning upon going to work, Lewis' protagonist muses about his neighborhood and is exalted:

They had laboured, these solid citizens. Twenty years before, the hill on which Floral Heights was spread, with its bright roofs and immaculate turf and amazing comfort, had been a wilderness of rank second-growth elms and oaks and maples. [...] It was brilliant to-day [sic]; the apple boughs were lit with fresh leaves like torches of green fire. (*Babbitt* 35)

At this moment, Babbitt experiences "some genius of authentic love for his neighbourhood, his city, his clan" (36). Updike's Rabbit would never have uttered such

⁴² As *Rabbit Remembered* only functions as a coda to the Rabbit novels, I do not use the term *pentalogy*.

an encomium on his neighborhood. By contrast, Ford's main character Bascombe speaks equally positively about his immediate surroundings, as I will show later, but Rabbit does not share such an extremely affirmative attitude at all and is essentially more critical of his environment.

From the outset of *Rabbit, Run*, the main character has to face a rapidly changing landscape. When writing about the suburban landscape, the transformation of Brewer, the "fifth largest city in Pennsylvania" (RR 7), is fundamental. The cityscape of Brewer serves as the scenic center of Updike's tetralogy and affects the portrayal of its adjoining suburbs. In an interview from 1983, Updike sketches out its key role: "[...] Brewer is basically the world I was born into, and for that reason seems to be nearer the human condition at large. It's a model for the small American industrial city which has known better days" (Orr 163).

The city is the place where Rabbit works: in 1959 as a salesman of the MagiPeeler, in 1969 as a linotypist and later as the owner of Springer Motors. Beyond that, Brewer is the place where Rabbit commits adultery with Ruth. The suburbs of West Brewer, Mt. Judge, Penn Park, Penn Villas, and Brewer Heights provide the setting for Rabbit's family life (and strife) and his leisure time activities. Updike often refers to Mt. Judge as a town, not as a suburb. In *Rabbit, Run*, at the end of the fifties, it was still considered a "suburb of the city of Brewer" (7), but in *Rabbit Is Rich*, he reminisces about "the days when Mt. Judge was a fashionable suburb" (210-211). Despite the changes it undergoes, I will classify Mt. Judge as part of suburbia in the following analysis. The blueprint of Brewer and its suburbs is well-wrought and in his Rabbit novels, Updike puts great emphasis on geographic precision and a verisimilar literary cartography.

From 1959 through 1989, Rabbit changes his suburban location several times and meticulously chronicles the changes affecting both his urban and suburban

environment. In *Rabbit Redux*, he owns a house in Penn Villas after having lived in Mt. Judge up to his mid-twenties. In *Rabbit Is Rich*, he moves back to Mt. Judge into his parents-in-law's house on Joseph Street before fulfilling his dream of owning a home in pretentious Penn Park in the last two sequels of the tetralogy. Besides, he retreats to Florida for some months in *Rabbit at Rest*, then returns to Pennsylvania and finally escapes again to Florida after his daughter-in-law revealed their tryst. Ultimately, Florida is the place where Rabbit will die.

3.4.1. Landscapes of Contrast

“The motions of Grace, the hardness of the heart;
external circumstances.

—Pascal, *Pensée* [sic] 507” (epigraph to *Rabbit, Run*)

At first sight, the “external circumstances” mentioned in this epigraph to *Rabbit, Run* refer to the historical background. The fifties represent an important period in American history. Economically, the United States thrived at that time, but they were also subject to “social and political conformity” (Ristoff, *Updike's America* 72).⁴³ However, it is my contention that these “circumstances” must above all be viewed from a spatial perspective. Particularly Rabbit's domestic surroundings initiate his flight and make him run.

Updike's portrayal of place(s) thrives from contrasts. The first and most obvious contrast is the spatial opposition between the suburb of Mt. Judge and the city of Brewer. Mt. Judge is located on the eastern and Brewer on the western side of the

⁴³ Fitting the context of place and home, Ristoff remarks that this decade implies “the spark which in the sixties will set the house of middle Americans on fire” (*Updike's America* 72). In fact, Rabbit's house will be set on fire in *Rabbit Redux*.

eponymous mountain. The mountain prevents town and city from merging and so Rabbit's flight begins downhill:

Though the town and the city meet along the highway that skirts the mountain on the south on the way to Philadelphia fifty miles away, they will never merge, for between them the mountain lifts a broad green spine, two miles long north to south [...]. (*RR* 17)

In order to intensify his cause, Updike puts a mountain between Rabbit's childhood abode and apartment in Mt. Judge and his lover's place on Summer Street in Brewer. The spatial barrier symbolizes the dissociation of his two lives: his new, putatively carefree life with Ruth happens in the city on one side of the mountain while his former life full of responsibilities and emotional shackles is in the suburb on the other side. It is no coincidence that Updike does not content himself with making Rabbit run to the neighboring suburb. By consistently separating Brewer and Mt. Judge, Updike reifies his protagonist's inner turmoil with the help of clear-cut geographical borders.

On the one hand, the city-suburb dualism underlines the difference between Rabbit's private and public life. On the other, it literally gives moral values a place. After fleeing his family home in Mt. Judge, he haphazardly ends up with Ruth, a prostitute, and spends some time in her apartment in Brewer. Like his suburban existence, which had let him down, his urban refuge turns out to be just another confining place in his life. Even twenty years later, he still associates Ruth with Brewer: "For him, she was city, those solid red brick rows of Brewer that take what comes" (*RiR* 55). From his male position, Rabbit equates the city with a woman, a prostitute at that, which corroborates the view of the city as a symbol of immorality. Similarly, his wife Janice moves in with her lover Charlie Stavros on Eisenhower Avenue in Brewer for some time in *Rabbit Redux* (cf. 74). Once again, Brewer is associated with adultery. The degrading metaphor

of the female body is taken up in the portrayal of the landscape. In American literature, places are often described in gendered terms. As I have pointed out, Annette Kolodny has exhaustively written on the perception of the landscape from a feminist perspective. At the turn from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, the shift toward a more industrialized landscape brought with it a dual imagery of the land:

Implicit in the metaphor of the land-as-woman was both the regressive pull of maternal containment *and* the seductive invitation to sexual assertion: if the Mother demands passivity, and threatens regression, the Virgin apparently invites sexual assertion and awaits impregnation. [...] At the opening of each new territory, in fact, the maternal and the sexual were invoked together [...]. (Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land* 67)

Kolodny argues that in the first part of the twentieth century, the linguistic representation of a feminine landscape was marked by “images of abuse” (147). However, she hopes that the land will no longer be portrayed as “*America the Raped* [sic]” (148).⁴⁴ Yet the increasing commercialization of the landscape in the second half of the 20th century thwarts her expectations. At the beginning of *Rabbit, Run*, when Rabbit is aimlessly heading South, he ponders: “He doesn’t want to go down along the water anyway; his image is of himself going right down the middle, right into the broad soft belly of the land, surprising the dawn cottonfields with his northern plates” (29). Rabbit, who is surrounded by the architectural signs of progress, uses an abusive metaphor. Both the city and the landscape are correlated to sexuality and thus contrast with the suburb of Mt. Judge, which serves as a space of prude domestic life.

There are more examples of Updike’s use of contrast to emphasize the antagonistic character of the landscape. On the evening of his precipitous flight, Rabbit’s

⁴⁴ Similarly, Leonard Lutwack explains with regard to the landscape of the first half of the twentieth century: “American writers who became disillusioned with America used the image of the degraded woman to express their disillusionment” (85).

local microcosm clashes with his macrocosm. The distance he covers and his single moves are meticulously mapped. When he decides to turn his back on his family, his unrest and anxiety obfuscate his perception. He perceives the vicinity of Mt. Judge both visually and tactilely through rose-colored glasses. His senses are overly acute at the moment of his escape:

He now and then touches with his hand the rough bark of a tree or the dry twigs of a hedge, to give himself the small answer of a texture. At the corner, where Wilbur Street meets Potter Avenue, a mailbox stands leaning in twilight on its concrete post. Tall two-petaled street sign, the cleat-gouged trunk of the telephone pole holding its insulators against the sky, fire hydrant like a golden bush: a grove. He used to love to climb the poles. (*RR* 15)

Rabbit enjoys feeling the natural elements of the landscape, such as the bark or the twigs. By contrast, the mailbox and the telephone poles (even though he loved to climb them) are unnatural objects, which do not originally belong there. In his distorted perception of this place, unobtrusive objects appear like a magical forest, as a layer of childhood memories suffuses his vision. His transfigured glance turns a shabby spot into a grove, and he is desperately trying to maintain the natural character of his purlieu. Thirty years later, Rabbit can still recollect this scenery in *Rabbit at Rest*: “Then they’re on 422 and a territory bred into their bones, streets they crossed and recrossed in all seasons as children, Central, Jackson, Joseph, the hydrants and mailboxes of the borough of Mt. Judge like buttons fastening down their lives, their real lives [...]” (227). Rabbit conceives of this place as the foundation of his whole existence and it permeates his whole life. The landscape of his microcosm has an elating effect on him. By contrast, when heading South, Rabbit points out the monotony and uniformity of the macrocosm surrounding him: “The land refuses to change. The more he drives the more the region resembles the country around Mt. Judge. The same scruff on the embankments, the same

weathered billboards for the same products you wondered anybody would ever want to buy" (RR 31). This landscape offers a repellent sight, but he portrays this visually unappealing macrocosm without ever using vacuous platitudes. Even though he seems lost in a net of highways, his describing his aimless driving and the spaciousness of the area never reaches the level of bathos.

Rabbit's portrayal of space is evocative of Fredric Jameson's thoughts on "spatial mutation" (Jameson 44). In essence, Jameson refers to the postmodern landscapes of late-capitalism where people usually experience a feeling of "lostness" and are often unable to relocate the same store in a huge mall. I would like to borrow Jameson's expression "spatial mutation" to refer to Rabbit's getting lost in a net of highways, as the landscape he is surrounded with "has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world" (Jameson 44). Rabbit's external world has started to be absorbed by the conditions of capitalism, which brought with it the homogenization of the landscape. Updike's protagonist opposes the natural, pristine landscape of his childhood and youth to an increasingly cultivated and spurious landscape, which is absolutely devoid of a *genius loci*. The perception of this depressing locale correlates with his melancholic state of mind.

As the plot unfolds, Rabbit keeps contrasting his microcosm and his macrocosm and his initial feeling of elation about Mt. Judge gradually subsides. After his daughter Rebecca's sudden death, Rabbit becomes doleful when taking a closer look at Mt. Judge as his feelings influence his perception of place. In his distress, he queries his existence and the reasons of his location:

[...] Why does anyone live here? Why was he set down here; why is this particular ordinary town for him the center and index of a universe that contains great prairies, mountains, deserts, forests, cities, seas? This childish mystery—the mystery of “any place,” prelude to the ultimate, “Why am I me?”—re-ignites panic in his heart. (RR 243)

Again, there is a longing for the soothing effect of unspoilt natural landscape. Rabbit ponders the meaning of living in one place rather than another, which he identifies as a “childish mystery” (243). Like a child, he keeps asking questions without knowing or even expecting an answer. These lines express Updike’s concept of the interrelation of place and *Dasein* he expounded in his autobiography. Rabbit’s choice of words and the notion “any place” will resonate in Ford’s portrayal of the suburban landscape. At this point in his life, Rabbit’s childish and uncritical infatuation with the Mt. Judge of his past has almost gone: “The details of the street [...] the tarry scarred trunks of the telephone poles—no longer speak to him” (243). Like the “external circumstances” of the American macrocosm he had to face when heading South, his suburban microcosm deceives him at this moment of utter sadness.

The novel ends with Rabbit’s zooming in on antipodal places. The very moment he decides to run again at the end of *Rabbit, Run*, his wavering between his two lives, i.e. either addressing “cultural expectation” or else “individual need” (Greiner, “No Place to Run” 16), is shifted to yet another level. When Ruth announces her pregnancy to Rabbit, she also tells him to either divorce Janice or forget her and their baby. Again, this conflict is too much for Rabbit and his first instinct is to get something to eat at the deli. Therefore, he leaves the apartment and zooms in on single blocks, with contrasting places serving as a means to reify his inner conflict:

The sense of outside space scoops at his chest. [...] Ruth and Janice both have parents: on this excuse he dissolves them both. Nelson remains: here is a

hardness he must carry with him. On this small fulcrum he tries to balance the rest, weighing opposites against each other: Janice and Ruth, Eccles and his mother, the right way and the good way, the way to the delicatessen [...] and the other way, down Summer Street to where the city ends. (*RR* 263)

He has to make a choice between the city—the place of debauchery and adultery—and “the good way,” which would imply joining his family. Escaping from social ties might lead him toward “the other way” and toward an unknown area. Behind the city’s end “a huge vacant field of cinders” (263) might await him. Shunning responsibility, he might be heading toward wasteland, but he starts running while his perception of place perpetuates and enlarges his fear.

In this first volume of the tetralogy, Updike’s opposing urban and suburban places and his clear-cut geographical grid fuel the development of the plot and serve as a litmus test for Rabbit’s emotional state. All along, his surroundings become increasingly antagonistic.

3.4.2. *Rabbit Redux*: Caught between *Locus Amoenus* and *Locus Terribilis*

In *Rabbit Redux*, Updike continues to portray the changing face of Brewer, but even more important is his adept spatial arrangement of the suburbs. At the end of the sixties, when *Rabbit Redux* was published, “[s]uburbia was imagined as either the happy realization of the American dream or a cesspool for every American neurosis and social pathology” (Nicolaides and Wiese 291). For its proponents, a house in the suburbs full of modern gadgets was highly desirable (cf. 291). Rabbit and Janice own a little house in Penn Villas, but Rabbit feels completely out of place there. The possession of property does not suffice to provide him with a feeling of locatedness, as the house is situated in the wrong place.

The spatial changes affecting the cityscape toward the end of the 1960s are drastic. Transport infrastructure alters Brewer. Whole building complexes have been pulled down to make room for parking areas (cf. *RRed* 3). For Brewer, the repercussions of the car boom are an increase in diners, drive-in shops, motels, and service stations (cf. 345). Beyond that, the relocation of the hosiery mills to the South contributes to the gradual decline of the city (cf. 169). Ultimately, the slow death of the city center cannot be prevented. Janice specifies that Brewer perishes “[o]nly in the middle” (344).⁴⁵ Figuratively, this dying city center alludes to the dissolution of the middle class. With social barriers becoming more permeable, the middle class grew in number.

Concurrent with the changes affecting Brewer, the suburbs lose their appeal. West Brewer is portrayed as “a gappy imitation of the city, the same domino-thin houses of brick painted red, but spaced here and there by the twirlers of a car lot, the pumps and blazoned overhang of a gas station, the lakelike depth of a supermarket parking lot crammed with shimmering fins” (12). Rabbit compares the huge amount of cars to the uncountable number of fish in a lake. Particularly the massive spread of the automobile altered the face of West Brewer. Likewise, the suburbs of Penn Park and Penn Villas are far from being charming spots in Rabbit’s view. The similarity of the names should not obscure the fact that Penn Park and Penn Villas belong to different boroughs and provide living space for different social strata. When referring to these two suburbs, Updike contrasts the *locus amoenus* with the *locus terribilis*. In Penn Villas, “a prairie sadness” (52) prevails which prevents its inhabitants from going outdoors.⁴⁶ On the other hand, the “half-timbered dream-houses” of Penn Park are traditionally reserved for successful doctors and insurance agents (cf. 12). Angstrom will become the owner of

⁴⁵ In real life, the booming car industry and extended motorways often created what Kenneth T. Jackson calls a “centerless city” (265).

⁴⁶ Generally, Updike’s geographical pattern is very precise. Irrespective of this fact, he obviously slips in this passage. He writes “Park Villas” (*RRed* 52) instead of “Penn Villas.”

a house in this wealthy suburb a decade later, in 1979 (cf. *RiR* 406). So far this area full of fancy stucco, impressive garages, and large drive-ups (cf. *RRed* 12) has been inaccessible for him and his family. His despair over his own shortcomings makes him loathe the whole area:

Rabbit pictures Penn Park, the timbered gables, the stucco, the weedless lawns plumped up like pillows. It was on a hill. He used to imagine it on the top of a hill, a hill he could never climb, because it wasn't a real hill like Mt. Judge. And he and Mom and Pop and Mim lived near the foot of this hill, in the dark next to the Bolgers [...]. (216)

The spatial opposition between Penn Park and Penn Villas is enlarged by the parameter of height implying a huge social gap. The imaginary hill turns Penn Park into an unattainable place for Rabbit, who is living at the (likewise imaginary) bottom on Vista Crescent in Penn Villas. In this context, Adam Jaworski and Crispin Thurlow, the editors of *Semiotic Landscapes*, explain: “We create our identities in part through the process of geographical imagining, the locating of self in space, claiming the ownership of specific places, or by being excluded from them, by sharing space and interacting with others, however subtly and fleetingly [...]” (7).⁴⁷ In essence, Rabbit suffers from being excluded from Penn Park. The fact that his parents' *Dasein* takes place in symbolic darkness implies their lower middle class status. Living literally *in the dark* for years affects his adulthood, and he will experience the same darkness in the house of his parents-in-law where he will move after his Penn Villas property burnt down. At this moment of his life, Penn Park is equated with the trope of the “city upon a hill” (Winthrop n. pag.). For Rabbit, it is tantamount to material prosperity and the realization of the American

⁴⁷ Jaworski and Thurlow are invoking the work of German sociologist Georg Simmel in this passage of their book.

dream, i.e. the possession of a house in the proper area. The location of the house determines his self-fashioning.

From a soteriological perspective, the metaphor of the “city upon a hill” implies the realization of Christlike salvation in this world.⁴⁸ The phrase is taken from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and has become a trope in literature. It is worth mentioning that in 1630, shortly before landing on the American shore, Governor John Winthrop delivered his famous speech “A Model of Christian Charity,” which includes the lines on the “city upon a hill” (Winthrop n. pag.).⁴⁹ Figuratively, the “city upon a hill” is fully exposed to light whereas Updike’s places are often deprived of light and, consequently, of the hope of attaining his dream during the time of his life. I will elaborate on the symbolic meaning of light in the context of the suburban home in chapter five. Not fortuitously does Penn Villas belong to the borough of Furnace Township (cf. *RRed* 12). So while Rabbit dreams of living in the “city upon a hill,” he is trapped in a furnace symbolizing hell. The telling name of the township foreshadows the fate of Rabbit’s house, which will be burnt down. Upon entering his suburb from Penn Park, both the houses and the surface of the street deteriorate. Immaculate roads are replaced by “potholed macadam” and the street changes its name: *Emberly Avenue* is superseded by *Emberly Drive* (cf. 13). As a furnace contains embers, the name *Emberly* intensifies the idea of Rabbit literally passing from paradise on earth to hell. This transition from *locus amoenus* to *locus terribilis* thus undergirds the key role of place in *Rabbit Redux*.

Besides, Penn Villas is portrayed as “nowhere” (248), which emphasizes the sameness of the suburban landscape. In the neighborhood, ranch houses with maple

⁴⁸ In the sixteenth and seventeenth century (in contrast to Antiquity and the Dark Ages) the idea that salvation could be reached in this life was enforced. Regarding this matter, Heike Brandt explains: “Hier besteht ein zentraler Unterschied zu antiken und mittelalterlichen Konzeptionen: An die Stelle einer reinen Jenseits-orientierung tritt die Hoffnung auf diesseitige Transformation” (82).

⁴⁹ I will hark back to Winthrop’s speech in the chapter on the core of community life.

saplings prevail (cf. 4). Here Updike chronicles an architectural trend of his time, as ranches were characteristic of the postwar era (cf. Rosenberg 65). Almost identical houses with identical TV aerials where even the sprinklers are spinning simultaneously (cf. *RRed* 174) entail a deadly suburban atmosphere. Beyond that, the behavior patterns of suburbanites have changed. When Rabbit was young, children could play outdoors and they knew that, from behind a window, an adult (most certainly a housewife) kept an eye on them. In Penn Villas, only “the shouts of unseen children” (52) can be heard, which vilifies the growing anonymity of suburban life.⁵⁰

Updike draws a clearly structured socio-spatial grid in *Rabbit Redux* and being placed depends on buying power. The upper middle class lives in gorgeous houses in pretentious, well-kept areas where even the street names sound better, while the lower middle class is confined to shabby suburbs.

3.4.3. Toward a Postindustrial Landscape

Rabbit Is Rich and *Rabbit at Rest* record the gradual but inevitable shift toward a landscape increasingly subject to the demands of a consumerist society, especially to the tertiary sector. The city of Brewer develops into a postindustrial city where the economy undergoes a transition “from a dependence on manufacturing to an emphasis on service employment” (“Post-Industrial City” 565). This is exactly what happens in *Rabbit Is Rich*, which is why I will refer to this kind of environment as “postindustrial landscape.” In *Rabbit Is Rich* and *Rabbit at Rest*, the tertiary sector involves a huge spread of the retail market (cf. *RiR* 53) and an immense surge of the restaurant industry. Similarly, the

⁵⁰ In this regard, Robert Beuka concludes that “[...] Updike’s description of Harry’s housing development underscores the collapse of the pastoral dream of the suburbs into an unsettling space of homogeneous facelessness [...]” (*SuburbiaNation* 119). Whereas in Rabbit’s boyhood home, impressive maples were rooted in the yard, there is only “a ‘spindly maple’ [...] ‘tethered to the earth’ [...]” (120) in his Penn Villas abode. So the size of the maple tree is a symbol of rootedness.

quaternary sector involving information technology, has started to spread and will drastically change the landscape in *Rabbit at Rest*. As a consequence, Rabbit has to face the “industrial decline of the birthplace [...]” (Zukin 29). The aesthetic appearance of the scenery is clearly subservient to the needs and requirements of a consumerist society.

In *Rabbit Is Rich*, the focus is on the expansion of the tertiary sector transforming the landscape and impacting both on the cityscape of Brewer and its surrounding suburbs. Rabbit points out that former vegetable fields have been replaced by shopping malls to satisfy the needs of consumers: “Usually on a Saturday Route 111 is buzzing with shoppers pillaging the malls hacked from the former fields of corn, rye, tomatoes, cabbages, and strawberries” (4). Updike critic Donald J. Greiner remarks in this context: “Farmland turns to shopping malls, overflowing garbage cans stink beside unsuccessful plywood restaurants, and people reel from a combination of less energy and higher prices” (*John Updike’s Novels* 84). Agriculturally used areas are transformed by degrees. In parallel, the “commercial stretch of greater Brewer” (*RiR* 16) has grown:

Fast-food huts in eye-catching shapes and retail outlets of everything from bridal outfits to plaster birdbaths have widened the aspect of this, the old Westertown Pike, with their parking lots, leaving the odd surviving house and its stump of a front lawn sticking out painfully. (16)

In the aftermath of rampant building projects, housing areas had to be leveled to the ground to make room for commercial zones. Residential estates were relegated to the suburbs. The single remaining house is a strange sight in the midst of a commercialized urban landscape. With the shopping malls being outsourced to the outer stretch of the city, the former center of Brewer is dying out while only the post office and banks are left. Being the head of Springer Motors after his father-in-law’s death, Rabbit himself fosters the creeping dilapidation of the city of Brewer, as he sells the epitome of what

had contributed to the destruction of formerly unspoilt areas: cars. So he literally is part of the “driving force” behind inner-city decay. Concurrent with this inner-city decay, Brewer becomes associated with crime (cf. 17). To remedy the situation, city planners planted woods in downtown Brewer to make it more attractive for people, but their endeavor failed completely (cf. 27, 77). As city planners had anticipated that half the trees would die, they had planted twice as many trees. However, “almost all of them thrived, so they have a kind of forest in the center of town, where a number of muggings have taken place and the winos and junkies sleep it off [...]” (27).

The second component of the tertiary sector, the restaurant industry, also enjoys rapid economic growth. Updike meticulously traces what has become of single venues. The Phoenix Bar where Rabbit used to have an after-work drink with his father in *Rabbit Redux* has become the Laid-Back (cf. 134). Johnny Frye’s Chophouse has been renamed twice and now is known as the Crêpe House (cf. 77). In renaming these eating places, Updike chronicles dominant eating habits and nutritional trends. Concurrently, the hippie movement has left its traces: health food shops have opened, little stores selling batik and macramé as well as restaurants specializing in macrobiotic food have metamorphosed the cityscape (cf. 290). At the same time, the United States have become more sexually outgoing. The movie theater, which was romantically called “old Baghdad,” now specializes in “adult movies” (214), and Rabbit supposes that one of the new stores on Weiser Street is “peddling smut” (189). At the end of the seventies and still behind closed doors, society has become a little more permissive with Rabbit, of course, leading the way. Almost simultaneously, Ford addresses the demystification of the landscape in *Independence Day* but, as I will show, his portrayal is even harsher.

Architecturally, the postindustrial landscape exposes a veneer of monotony, and Rabbit faces highways and the visual symbols of rising consumerism. His son Nelson

wryly comments on the futility of travelling: “ ‘the country’s the same now wherever you go. The same supermarkets, the same plastic shit for sale. There’s nothing to see’ ” (67). Regarding suburbia, *Rabbit Is Rich* gives greater prominence to spatial uniformity than *Rabbit Redux*. Updike disassembles the suburban myth with his protagonist representing the millions of Americans heading for the suburbs like lemmings to the sea. The novel unmaskes the suburbs as a monotonous parallel world. When he was a child, Rabbit and his family often went to the Jersey shore and even then he was struck by the similarity of what he saw:

Town after town numbingly demonstrated to him that his life was a paltry thing, roughly duplicated by the millions in settings where houses and porches and trees mocking those in Mt. Judge fed the illusions of other little boys that their souls were central and important and invisibly cherished.
(121)

His child’s view on the world and on his self-fashioning was founded on his perception of space. Rabbit was convinced that the soporific dreariness of the suburban landscape reduced his existence to “a paltry thing.” The homogeneity of the landscape seemed to level his singularity. Wanting to free himself from his spatial confines, his most ardent wish when growing older was to change places, “for his idea of destiny was to move away and marry a girl from another town” (121). He hoped that a different place would offer him a new opportunity in life. In his one-dimensional concept of space, uniformity encompassed malaise, whereas a different locale entailed new possibilities. Yet his later marriage with Janice did not annihilate the sameness of his numbing locale. Instead, moving to her place rather eroded his sense of identity, as he fully depended on her wealth, her prestige and her property.

Altogether, Rabbit exposes the postindustrial landscape of Brewer as unsightly and increasingly estranging. Even worse, he hates living in Mt. Judge. Rabbit feels “displaced” and would like to leave Mt. Judge, as the space surrounding him has become clearly antagonistic. For this reason, he is longing for peace and quiet in Penn Park. He has always had a craving to live there. In the meantime, thanks to his wife’s financial situation, he has reached upper middle class status and aspires to buy a house of his own in this suburb. At the end of *Rabbit Is Rich*, he finally moves to Penn Park, hoping to implement his idea of the (already crumbling) suburban myth.

Ten years later, in *Rabbit at Rest*, Brewer has finally undergone a complete metamorphosis. It has fully adapted to the requirements of both the tertiary and quaternary sector, specifically to information technology. In 1989, the city is characterized by technology and business. Against this background, Rabbit melancholically observes the cityscape and delves in memories:

Brewer was his boyhood city, the only city he knew. It still excites him to be among its plain flowerpot-colored blocks, its brick factories and row housing and great grim churches all mixed together, everything heavy and solid and built with an outmoded decorative zeal. The all but abandoned downtown, wide Weiser Street which he can remember lit up and as crowded as a fairgrounds in Christmas season, has become a patchwork of rubble and parking lots and a few new glass-skinned buildings, stabs at renewal mostly occupied by banks and government agencies, the stores refusing to come back in from the malls on Brewer’s outskirts. (*RatR* 166)

Once more, Rabbit opposes the Brewer of his childhood to the place it has become due to the corollary of the economy. His mental map is still suffused with “footprints of

vanished places” (Klinkenborg n. pag.).⁵¹ By opposing the past and the present of the same place and thus presenting a dyadic perspective of the same landscape, Rabbit undergirds the city’s spatial transformation. I have already mentioned Updike’s technique of juxtaposing a synchronic and a diachronic view of the landscape. Besides, his diction proves his skill to portray color, form, and surface texture (not for nothing was he a successful art critic). In fact, his protagonist often uses color and surface texture when limning the *genius loci* of places he feels attached to. He did the same on the evening when he first ran away and wanted to feel the twigs and the bark of the tree. His visual, tactile, and olfactory senses are overly acute, and he traces the changing face of Brewer focusing principally on color and form. Throughout the tetralogy and especially in *Rabbit at Rest*, he mentions the “flowerpot-colored blocks” (166) providing comfort. The color has become ingrained in his memory and clashes with the colorless “glass-skinned buildings” (166) erected in the former city center. Rabbit adamantly repudiates this transformation while clinging to a static past. In his memories, the chief department store of Brewer, *Kroll’s*, where he first encountered his later wife, constitutes an inseparable part of the city. The closing down of this store, to which he feels emotionally attached, unhinges his *Dasein*. It represents a devastating experience for Rabbit, because his philosophy of life at the end of the eighties does not diverge a great extent from the way he perceived the world in the fifties. Angstrom would love to keep up the fifties’ *status quo* and his self cannot come to terms with the new lay of the land. The postindustrial landscape is anathema to him as he imposes his immutable concept of space on an ever-progressing city. Due to his inability to counter change, his emotional landscape is saturated with doom. Rabbit uses the expression “sense of

⁵¹ In his article “Remembered Spaces,” which appeared in *The New York Times*, Verlyn Klinkenborg outlines his response to the closing down of a Korean market and argues that “footprints of vanished places” are ingrained in our mental maps (n. pag.).

doom” remarkably often in *Rabbit at Rest*. Ultimately, the negative spin-offs of the consumerist society engulf his childhood city while he keeps glorifying a place long gone:

Rabbit feels betrayed. He was reared in a world where war was not strange but change was: the world stood still so you could grow up in it. He knows when the bottom fell out. When they closed down Kroll’s, Kroll’s that had stood in the center of Brewer all those years, bigger than a church, older than the courthouse [...]. (419)

With *Kroll’s* gone, Brewer has forfeited its protective aura.⁵² Here, Updike uses the evanescent power of urban space to emphasize the inescapable disaster hovering over Rabbit’s life.

The postindustrial cityscape also encompasses the painting over of Rabbit’s emotional landmarks. After his sojourns in Florida, his eyes wander through Brewer on the lookout for familiar spots reminiscent of his childhood. The older he gets, the more these vestiges of his youth become an integral part of his existence. A simple “fire hydrant painted red, white, and blue for the Bicentennial in the Seventies has been given a fresh and garish coat of [...] orange [...]” (295), and this insignificant fact arouses his interest. Rabbit describes colors when portraying spatially fixed items accompanying him throughout his life. In the example given, the characteristic colors of the American flag and of American identity as such have been simply replaced by orange. In a figurative sense, this change of color entails a loss of identity. More significantly, this is the same fire hydrant he glorifies in *Rabbit, Run* when he runs away for the first time. He is still attached to unostentatious everyday objects, which gain importance having been there all his life. From a psychological angle, these familiar objects serve as emotional

⁵² Dilvo Ristoff argues that the end of *Kroll’s* was more than just the end of a business establishment. It also triggered the downfall of the city’s “commercial, legal, financial, religious [...]” organizations (cf. *John Updike’s “Rabbit at Rest”* 47).

support in a commercialized urban environment, which can no longer guarantee his rootedness. This process of uprooting is continued in *Rabbit Remembered*. Most of the locations portrayed in the tetralogy are reexamined in *Rabbit Remembered* even without the main character's physical presence. According to the success of the ongoing quaternary sector, Brewer has been subject to "yuppifying" and the IT sector has been spreading (cf. *RRem* 214). With the nineties drawing to a close, there is a remarkable trend back from the suburbs to the city. From an architectural point of view, the houses in Brewer still expose the same monotony: identical front porches, retaining walls and doors with fanlights (cf. 197). Still, the city's inner decay seems inexorable. In the meantime, the former movie theaters have been replaced by "just nothing" (208). Due to the growing importance of the IT sector, Springer Motors, the source of his wife's prosperity, was sold to a computer company but is completely dilapidated because of the failure of the company (cf. 348-349).

In contrast to the cityscape, the suburban landscape of Mt. Judge has mainly kept its spatial monotony. The houses "with their brick-pillared porches and dim front parlors don't change much [...]" (*RatR* 165). Yet there has been a drastic social shift. During the Fourth of July parade, Rabbit observes that Mt. Judge has been rejuvenated and become more open (cf. 336). He deplores that this suburb has left many traces in his memory whereas he has left hardly any traces there:

His life flowed along this shining asphalt, past these tilted lawns and brick-pillared porches, and left no trace. The town never knew him, the way he had imagined as a child it did, every pebble and milkbox and tulip bed eyelessly watching him pass; each house had been turned inward, into itself. (309)

His oxymoronic use of inanimate objects, which "eyelessly" watched him pass, emphasizes his rootedness and his complete identification with this town. The personi-

fictionation of dead objects symbolizes the power his hometown had over him; he felt watched and thought this place was taking care of him. Rabbit mourns “[...] Mt. Judge in the days of Depression and distant war [...]” (435). Back then, there were still cornfields, people could linger on their front porches, and chickens were pecking in their pens (cf. 435). An adult, he denounces the disappearance of the nurturing and caring character of Mt. Judge.

In sum, the three decades that have passed since *Rabbit, Run* have metamorphosed Brewer and deprived its suburbs of unique spots. Beyond that, community life has been strongly curtailed, which I will elaborate on in the next chapter. Both the suburban and the urban landscape have been transformed due to the expansion of the tertiary and quaternary sectors. Notwithstanding the fact that the architectural make-up reveals the prosperity of Brewer and of the country as such, the urban landscape has forfeited its singular character. To accentuate the change, Angstrom paints dyadic landscapes and compares the landscape of his youth with the *status quo* of his adulthood, which is why he is alienated and experiences his surroundings as profoundly uninviting and unappealing.

3.4.4. A Landscape of Decrepitude and Death

Specifically towards the end of the tetralogy, the representation of space reaches an almost pathological state. The city of Brewer is in an entropic state; its “structures speak of expended energy” (*RiR* 27). Ten years before, in *Rabbit Redux*, Rabbit had already referred to Brewer as a “stagnant city” (3). His elegiac diction and his use of metaphor buttress the impression of decay and decline hovering over the city: “These acres of dead railroad track and car shops and stockpiled wheels and empty boxcars stick in the heart of the city like a great rusting dagger” (*RiR* 28). The city center was literally killed

and to make matters worse, funeral parlors are ranking high among the new businesses launched in that area. The same fate has hit Mt. Judge. Rabbit uses death imagery when portraying what has become of the suburb of his youth: “The town falls away from this church like a wide flight of stairs shuffled together of roofs and walls, a kind of wreck wherein many Americans have died” (216). Here Mt. Judge is described as a coffin holding the dead bodies of numerous Americans.

This use of death imagery will become even more drastic and particularly apparent in the last volume of the tetralogy, which is set in 1989. When portraying Florida—where Angstrom retires at the beginning of the plot—the visual charge of his metaphorical vocabulary conveys the idea of transience and degradation. Florida’s construction sector is booming and Rabbit states wryly that they are “being developed to death” (*RatR* 25-26). Updike’s Floridian settings reinforce the homogeneity familiar from his portrayal of Pennsylvania. Not only the single-family homes surrounded by exotic plants, swimming pools, and garages look alike, but also the franchises, which sell food, alcohol, and gasoline, endlessly repeat themselves (cf. 25-26). Rabbit considers Florida a “mass-produced paradise where Janice’s money has taken him” (39). Accordingly, the alleged paradise has lost its sublime characteristics. The infrastructure of the sunshine state has been fully adapted to the needs and ailments of the elderly awaiting their death in Florida.

In 1984, Rabbit and Janice bought an apartment in Valhalla Village. In Scandinavian mythology, Valhalla is the antechamber of death for those who courageously died in combat. His condominium in Valhalla Village presages Rabbit’s impending end. Saturated with the spirit of uniformity, this place epitomizes the final dissolution of a suburban Eden and, at the same time, the endpoint of Rabbit’s life. From their balcony, they can hardly see the Gulf any more, “a dead-level edge to the world”

(37). Rabbit had to buy a telescope in order to catch a glimpse of the water. In the meantime, their view has been completely barred and Rabbit feels buried alive: “their view of the water has been built shut, skyscraper hotels arising along the shore, constructions the color of oatmeal or raspberry whip or else sheer glass like vertical distillations, cold and pure, of the Gulf’s blue-green” (38). The sand, the swamp, and the inlets have all disappeared, and the original stretch of land has been destroyed. “The past glimmers like a dream at the back of Harry’s mind [...]” (38) as the present view has become a nightmare for him. Thus Rabbit would love to restore the original landscape.

Valhalla Village is located in the quickly erected city of Deleon, which does not offer a more life-affirming alternative either. The name itself serves as a metaphor of death. Deleon was named after an explorer from Spain who was killed by a Seminole with a venomous arrow in 1521 (cf. 38). These negative connotations are worsened by the fact that the locals pronounce it “[...] *Deelyun* [...] as if they are offering to deal you in” (38). Updike portrays both Valhalla Village and Deleon as harbingers of death. These places spell doom and decrepitude. Valhalla Village represents the climax of Rabbit’s alienation and makes him long for the Brewer of his past. Updike’s description of landscape conveys the idea of omnipresent decay and thwarts the positive expectations usually associated with Florida.

As the plot unfolds, Rabbit and his granddaughter Judy go Sunfishing in Florida. During their boat tour, Rabbit suffers a heart attack and has to be taken to a hospital in Deleon. He is lying in hospital in “death’s favorite state” (146). Instead of having surgery in Deleon, he returns to Pennsylvania. This change of scenery between Florida and Pennsylvania increases the pivotal role of space and underlines Rabbit’s slow move towards his own death. Updike makes his protagonist muse about his feelings toward the different settings. Rabbit is glad to return to Pennsylvania, his sole refuge, as he

abhors the Floridian “villages that aren’t villages [...]” (168). On coming home, he drives through the city “freshening his memory and hurting himself with the pieces of his old self that cling to almost every corner of the Brewer area. The streets where he was a kid are still there, though the trolley cars no longer run” (164). Brewer seems to reawaken his spirits and he feels wistful upon entering his city. The quotation is evocative of Updike’s idea of *Dasein*. Rabbit’s self-fashioning is strongly determined by the cityscape of Brewer. As he is very sick, he has to undergo angioplasty in the hospital of Brewer. Recovering from heart surgery, he ruminates on his life and draws a comparison with a brick, the main element of construction:

Lying here thinking of all the bricks that have been piled up and knocked down and piled up again on the snug square streets that lift toward Mt. Judge, he tries to view his life as a brick of sorts, set in place with a slap in 1933 and hardening ever since, just one life in rows and walls and blocks of lives. There is a satisfaction in such an overview, a faint far-off communal thrill, but hard to sustain over against his original and continuing impression that Brewer and all the world beyond are just frills on himself, like the lace around a plump satin valentine, himself the heart of the universe [...]. (266-267)

He defines himself by means of place and places himself at the center with Brewer being a minor but lifelong appendage. Accordingly, his life no longer represents a brick in a row, but he feels more self-confident. Ironically, his heart, and as such his own *center*, is ailing and he is drifting toward death.

In the third section of *Rabbit at Rest*, Rabbit sleeps with his daughter-in-law Pru after his return from hospital. Pru tells Janice and Nelson about her and Rabbit’s tryst. In an agitated mood, Janice calls Rabbit, who is in their house in Penn Park, and takes him to task. Rabbit confesses his infidelity, but Janice insists that she will never forgive him. Instead of facing Janice and Nelson to offer an apology, Rabbit dodges responsibility,

packs his suitcases and escapes again to Florida. However, he thinks of his wife and wants her to forgive him, but he is incapable of confronting her (cf. 392-396). He is heading towards Valhalla Village, the place of his self-imposed exile. On his way there, he makes a stop-over in Brunswick, Georgia, relieved to spend the night at a quiet motel: "Lost in the net of thread-lines on the map, he sleeps as in his mother's womb, another temporary haven" (415). The spatial conditions estranging him, he is glad to finally find some sleep. Driving further South, he observes a "landscape outside the car windows" which "gets more and more honkytonk—*Flea World, Active Adult Living* [...]" (417). Rabbit's diction devalues the landscape, which has become even more repulsive and sexualized at that. When he finally arrives in Florida, he pejoratively calls the state "the Florida thing" (421). Back in Florida, he takes to going for a walk in the colored section of Deleon, which reminds him of Mt. Judge. There he finally feels at ease as this area evokes recollections of his past: "he would tingle with the excitement of simply being himself, at this point of time and space, with worlds to know and forever to live, Harold C. Angstrom, called Hassy in those lost days never to be relived" (436). Ironically, the only place in Florida not associated with death, the section where he will enjoy playing basketball with African American kids, will prove to be the place where he will die.

I hope to have shown that the portrayal of space and the juxtaposition of dyadic landscapes dominate character and plot in Updike's tetralogy. In his childhood, Rabbit used to perceive his local and regional environment very intuitively and affirmatively. The older he gets, the more critical he becomes of the local and regional landscape. He starts to question his roots and feels more and more estranged. All along, the landscape mirrors his state of mind. So the pivotal role of place in the tetralogy is unequivocal. For this reason, it is difficult to understand critic Pat C. Hoy. He argues in his essay "Early

Updike: Wandering in the Fields of the Lord” with regard to Updike’s early work: “As place recedes into the background, as it often does in Updike’s fiction, his vision comes into the foreground, and we see instead of place the dramatic action of the scene itself” (215). I would like to refute Hoy’s assumption that place plays a minor role in Updike’s early oeuvre. On the contrary, his early short story collections also contain detailed descriptions of landscape. For example, in “Packed Dirt, Churchgoing, a Dying Cat, a Traded Car,” the protagonist, David Kern, explains how “[w]e in America have from the beginning been cleaving and baring the earth, attacking, reforming the immensity of nature we were given” (*The Early Stories* 103). Likewise, in the short story “Home,” Robert, the main character, is emotionally seized by the landscape:

Coming home filled him with strength, a thicker liquid. But each time less full; he sensed this. Both he and the land were altering. The container was narrowing; the thing contained was becoming diluted. [...] he silently willed the car forward, as if the heart of his homeland might give out before he reached it. (*The Early Stories* 218)

Still, it is true that place becomes increasingly important in the tetralogy and in *Rabbit Remembered*, as Rabbit observes the change of the suburbs and the cityscape down the years.

3.5. Richard Ford’s Idea of Place

3.5.1. The Influence of Thoreau and Emerson

Richard Ford’s concept of place and his idea of sense of place have been determined by the writings of Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson. In an interview with Elinor Ann Walker (cf. “An Interview with Richard Ford”) and in two essays, “S.O.P.” and “Country Matters: Living in Plain Form,” Ford illustrates to what extent the two

transcendentalists have inspired him and informed his train of thought as well as his concept of place.⁵³ Ford states in the interview with Elinor Ann Walker that Emerson has been a source of inspiration for him (“An Interview with Richard Ford” 146).⁵⁴ As Ford explicitly mentions excerpts of Thoreau’s *Walden* and Emerson’s *Self-Reliance* in his criticism, I begin with a brief overview of the ideas on place conveyed in the texts of the two transcendentalists.

In *Walden*, Thoreau extols the beauty of the nature surrounding him. He spent two years close to Walden Pond to experience the simple life in the midst of nature. This is the “middle landscape” I referred to in my chapter on space; it is located between town and forest and nature is literally creeping up to his hut. The chapter “Sounds” serves as a reference point for Ford. In this chapter, Thoreau pleads for seeing and hearing one’s surroundings. He considers this acoustic experience to be more rewarding than reading books. Thoreau states:

BUT WHILE [sic] we are confined to books, though the most select and classic, and read only particular written languages, which are themselves but dialects and provincial, we are in danger of forgetting the language which all things and events speak without metaphor, which alone is copious and standard. [...] What is a course of history, or philosophy, or poetry, no matter how well selected, or the best society, or the most admirable routine of life, compared with the discipline of looking always at what is to be seen? Will you be a reader, a student merely, or a seer? Read your fate, see what is before you, and walk on into futurity. (197)

⁵³ Transcendentalism had its heyday between 1830 and the Civil War, and Emerson and Thoreau were among its most influential literary representatives. It put “feeling over reason, individual expression over the restraints of law and custom” (“The Age of Romanticism” 605).

⁵⁴ Ford explains: “At least from my particular philosophical Emersonian view (see, I think that’s who my great influence is: Emerson), the kinds of rapport you have with others are totally supported by some kind of wholeness of self” (146).

In this excerpt, Thoreau argues that all things can be heard through some form of inherent language, which means they make sense through their mere existence. He alludes to the sounds he hears every day, which are either natural or produced by machines. He is enthralled by the birds' chirping, "the bleating of calves and sheep" (205), the chant of the whippoorwills, the hooting of owls, and the sounds evoked by bullfrogs (cf. 205-209). At the same time, he observes that "[t]he whistle of the locomotive penetrates my woods summer and winter, sounding like the scream of a hawk sailing over some farmer's yard [...]" (200-201). Here Thoreau exploits the trope of the machine in the garden.⁵⁵ From his log cabin, he enjoys listening to railroad cars and hears the bells striking in the nearby villages (cf. 200, 206). He emphasizes his heightened awareness of these sounds from his retreat. Never before has he perceived these sounds more intensely. Although Ford only harks back to "Sounds," I also include "Solitude," the chapter following "Sounds." In that chapter, Thoreau analyzes his perception of nature:

The indescribable innocence and beneficence of Nature,—of sun and wind and rain, of summer and winter,—such health, such cheer, they afford forever! and such sympathy have they ever with our race, that all Nature would be affected [...] if any man should ever for a just cause grieve. Shall I not have intelligence with the earth? Am I not partly leaves and vegetable mould myself? (218)

For Thoreau, there existed a binary relationship between man and nature. Also referring to this excerpt from "Solitude," Edward S. Casey argues in *Getting Back Into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*:

⁵⁵ I have mentioned before that American authors often juxtaposed the elements of progress and the portrayal of a pastoral landscape.

Sympathy in nature is bivalent action and reaction between the human and the wild. On one hand, natural phenomena have sympathy *for us*, to the point of seeming to reflect our emotional states back to us in “moods” of the season or the weather. On the other hand, we have sympathy *for nature* in turn, since we have intelligence with (i.e., literally “read within”) the earth itself. (245)

So Thoreau literally reads his environment and is read by it (cf. 246). In the introduction to this study, I have explained that my analysis of space draws on the field of human geography where “the metaphor of landscape as text and spectacle [...] has a well-established position” (Jaworski and Thurlow 5). Thoreau’s perception of nature as text must be transferred to Ford’s main character, who likewise reads the landscape and comments on it applying a spatial vocabulary. Yet Ford’s Frank Bascombe is far from experiencing an interrelation between the individual and nature, or, in a broader sense, between the individual and space.

Ford also cites from Emerson’s *Self-Reliance* to express his stance on place. Toward the end of his essay, Emerson provides four concluding paragraphs on the significance of relying on the self, one of which deals with the role of travelling. In this context, Emerson elaborates on the core of places. It is his firm conviction that travelling can only be justified “for the purposes of art, of study, and benevolence [...]” (37). Travelling for mere amusement must be avoided. For this reason, Emerson argues that “[i]n manly hours we feel that duty is our place. The soul is not traveller; the wise man stays at home [...]” (36). What Emerson means is that duty should prevent humans from travelling far away. To his mind “[t]ravelling is a fool’s paradise. Our first journeys discover to us the indifference of places” (37). Hence, Emerson objects to travelling for mere amusement and argues that for journeys to make sense, one would have to stay longer in a place and study its diversity.

Ford includes the reflections of these two transcendentalists when presenting his own concept of place. He begins his brief essay “S.O.P,” the acronym for sense of place, with a reference to Thoreau’s *Walden*:

Thoreau thought that places spoke, that they expressed themselves in a language “which all things and events speak without metaphor, which is copious and standard.” [...]

But I would say against Thoreau that places—mountains, street corners, skylines, riverbanks—do not speak, have no essences which can be “captured,” heard. They are intransigent, mute, specific, and that is enough. (64)

Here Ford quotes Thoreau out of context and elaborates on his own sense of place by contradicting him. He blurs the meaning of Thoreau’s ideas on places and does not examine the actual sounds Thoreau referred to in *Walden*. Paradoxically, Ford takes Thoreau’s words literally and claims that places cannot speak, but are “mute” and “intransigent” (64). He deduces that the core of a place cannot be heard and is not tangible. Therefore, language often imbues places with characteristics they do not have. Ford argues that the sense of place people have is highly individual and depends on their own perception and imagination (cf. 64). Five years after the publication of “S.O.P,” in the 1997 interview with Elinor Ann Walker, he explains his adaption of Thoreau’s words more firmly. He stresses that he is fully aware of exploiting a figure of speech to draft his concept of sense of place:

[...] Thoreau talks about the forest in terms of animate behavior. My view—not that it’s original with me, God knows,—is that those things are not animate, that they never speak. Okay, I know it’s a figure of speech. But in talking about sense of place, or locatedness, or the importance of place, or how we feel about it, that figure of speech gets made perplexingly literal sometimes, and in that transaction personally responsible for how one feels,

and what's important about place gets shed or lost. ("An Interview with Richard Ford" 142)

Then Ford concludes that a sense of place is always an expression of one's feelings towards a place (cf. 142). So his sense of place rather comprises an inner geography, which varies from one individual to another.

This recognition coalesces with his reading of Emerson. When looking at Ford's conclusions in his essay "Country Matters: Living in Plain Form," it becomes clear that his idea of place surpasses the literal meaning of the word and that he devises an elaborate and complex construct of place:

Place [...] is wherever we do good work. It is wherever we can gain dominion over our subject (whether we find it there or not) and make it convincing. Or, in Miss Welty's words again, a good place is where we can "give the writing its objectivity."

Thought of abstractly, place almost detaches from geography and merges with Emerson's notion of *duty*. (84)

As was the case with Thoreau's "Sounds," Ford's reading of Emerson is of a rather unconventional, idiosyncratic nature. He culls from both transcendentalists' body of thought to contrive his multilayered and well thought-out idea of place. It becomes apparent that for Ford himself, place has already developed into a mindset. According to him, place has become a duty, which means that every individual must actively shape his or her own sense of place. His literary cartography even undermines the assumption that having a sense of place necessarily requires the presence of a fixed geographic entity. Unlike Relph, whose theory on sense of place I have outlined earlier, Ford deliberately excludes the fact that a sense of place "is aroused by the landscapes we encounter" (Relph, "A Pragmatic Sense of Place" 25).

3.5.2. Ford's Southern Provenance

Ford's unconventional concept of place becomes even more complex, because he is a Southerner. Notwithstanding his Southern provenance, he does not want to be identified as a Southern writer. "Personally, I think there is no such thing as Southern writing or Southern literature or Southern ethos, and I'm frankly sick of the whole subject," he states in an article for the August 1986 edition of *Harper's*, in which several authors express their view on "A Stubborn Sense of Place" (42). In his article, Ford vehemently opposes a rigid categorization of literature (cf. 42). Instead, he "considers himself more of an American writer and not so much a 'southern' one" (Walker, *Richard Ford* 2).⁵⁶

Ford's open and adamant denial of being a Southern writer certainly accounts for his deliberately inserting stereotypes associated with Southern and Northern places in the first two parts of his trilogy. Like Ford, his protagonist Frank grew up in Mississippi, and Frank insists that his parents had "no irregular point of view, no particular sense of their *place* [sic] in history's continuum, just two people afloat on the world and expectant like most others in time [...]" (SW 21). Due to his origin, Ford's main character enjoys making broad-brush statements about Southerners. His remarks are above all an ironic stab directed at the South and its denizens. In *The Sportswriter*, Frank warps regional characteristics when he happens to meet his internist Fincher Barksdale at Newark Airport. Apart from their initials, Frank and Fincher do not share much. Frank abhors meeting Fincher and has difficulty suffering his impudence: "He is the perfect southerner-in-exile, a slew-footed mainstreet change jingler in awful clothes—a breed known only *outside* the south" (SW 66). Obviously, Fincher's abhorrent appearance goes

⁵⁶ Usually Southern writers, who stand in the tradition of Agrarianism, feel strongly attached to the South and its history. Ford was born in the South, but has been restlessly moving all his life. Elinor Ann Walker asserts that "for southern writers, place is always and under every circumstance important; the land in and of itself embodies a tragic history of slavery, occupation, and defeat [...]" (*Richard Ford* 13).

unnoticed in the South and only takes shape once he leaves his accustomed Southern sphere. At university, Fincher had got to know his future wife, who did not want to live in the South any more “and craved the suburbs as if they were the Athens of Pericles [...]” (66). So they moved North, which other “renegades” did, too (cf. 66). By alluding to Pericles, Frank hyperbolically distorts the pungent desire of Fincher’s wife to move northwards and leave their unattractive surroundings as soon as possible. Later, Frank is concerned that his ex-wife might be interested in more than only dating Fincher which is why he warns her against him: “He’s down in Memphis starting an air-conditioned mink ranch at this very moment. That’s the kind of guy he is” (318-319). Frank pokes fun at Fincher and criticizes his brash and complacent behavior. Ford seemingly enjoys creating these stereotyped characters and exploits clichés in order to refute them. By overdrawing Fincher’s ostentatious southernness, Ford expresses his criticism of any form of spatial categorization or pigeonholing.

Beyond that, Bascombe contrasts geographic patterns at the meta-level and opposes spatial terms. In so doing, he ironically drives home the point that only Southern places are considered true places. After his return from France, where he escapes at the end of *The Sportswriter*, Frank draws an analogy between Haddam, the suburb where he lives now, and the Mississippi Gulf Coast, where he grew up and which he refers to as “a true *place*” (ID 93). By contrast, he considers Haddam to have “a simple *setting*” (93). Even though his choice of words devalues the meaning of *setting*, it was exactly the simplicity and unobtrusiveness of this locale, which he appreciated and which made him stay there. The allegedly “true *place*” didn’t invite him to stay. Even though Bascombe spent his youth in Mississippi, he does not feel connected to the South any more. For this reason, he enjoys directing numerous stabs at Southern behavior patterns.

Essentially, Ford's main character pokes fun at Southern fads and whims, and he implicitly hints at the alleged particularity of Southern places. By inserting these ironic remarks on regional diversity, Ford manages to create an ironic distance to the area where he grew up. It is my firm conviction that he also includes these passages to implicitly address those critics who like to pigeonhole him as a Southern writer despite his adamant denial.

3.6. The Suburban Landscape in the Bascombe Trilogy

Ford's trilogy abounds with suburban settings and his particular concept of place permeates his fictional places. In an interview, he explains: "I wanted to write about a certain stratum of life that I knew, which was life in the suburbs" (Bonetti 29). On a regional level, Ford presents the northeastern United States and, on a local level, he portrays Haddam and Sea-Clift, which are both located in the state of New Jersey. Ford outlines his main focus as follows: " 'Primary to my understanding to what's going on in American life [...] is that there's a general sense that there's a wild world outside our perimeters. And the suburb is one response to it [...]' " (Shea 129-130).

His protagonist Frank lives in Haddam, a suburb of New York, for the greater part of the trilogy. It is notable that, like Washington Irving, Bascombe calls New York *Gotham*. Whereas Updike's suburbs are closely connected with the changing shape of the cityscape, such an immediate correlation is absent from Ford's trilogy. While Gotham does not become the local backbone of *The Sportswriter* and *Independence Day*, it nevertheless constitutes the metropolitan backdrop.⁵⁷ Ford's literary focus is on suburbia and on his protagonist's notion of place in general. Unlike Updike's suburbs, which mostly consist of residential areas, Ford's settings mainly include suburban small

⁵⁷ In *The Lay of the Land*, Frank lives in Sea-Clift and Gotham is relegated to the background.

towns with a distinctive infrastructure. Ford wanted to write positively about the suburbs and in an interview for the *California Literary Review*, he explains his approach:

whether you live in the suburbs or don't, we're always around where the suburbs are. [...] And it would be, at least—as a provisional way, not as a final judgment about the suburbs, but as a provisional way—see [sic] if I couldn't generate a vocabulary of affirmation for what was traditionally and conventionally thought of as not affirmable. (Cross n. pag.).

In an interview with Tim Adams, he denies any common characteristics with his protagonist. His own suburban experience has not left him with any positive memories (cf. Adams 20). Via his protagonist, Ford is able to explore suburban life in an unimpeded manner:

Using him [Frank Bascombe], I think I did dream up some interesting (interesting to me, anyway) formulations about the suburbs. One was that by embracing the suburbs and all their metastatic commercialism and inert housing patterns and traffic nightmares—as Frank claims to do—one is, in essence, demonstrating a willingness to take credit for what we've created. We're all responsible, after all. [...] Saying, as Frank does, that you like the suburbs is just a step in the direction of making things be better. (20)

By taking responsibility for the suburban *status quo*, Frank can cope with his environment without excoriating what he sees. His optimistic stance certainly conflicts with the pessimistic portrayal of what he observes. Initially, Ford's aim was to write "an homage to New Jersey" (Shea 126), and this might be the reason why his protagonist convincingly states that he is "willing to say yes to as much as I can: yes to my town, my neighborhood, my neighbor, yes to his car, her lawn and hedge and rain gutters. Let things be the best they can be" (*SW* 49). In this context, Emerson's influence on Richard Ford's novels becomes obvious again. In his parlor lecture "The Preacher," which he had

written for divinity students, Emerson argues: “Speak the affirmative; emphasize your choice by utter ignoring of all that you reject; seeing that opinions are temporary, but convictions uniform and eternal [...]” (n. pag.). Hence, Ford’s main character Frank responds to the suburbs in an Emersonian vein.

3.6.1. The Semiotic Landscape of *The Sportswriter* and *The Lay of the Land*

Updike’s Rabbit paints what he sees, the flowerpot red and even “ox-blood” red colors of Brewer (cf. *RRed* 33), roofs that are covered with white tiles or “pink condos like Spanish castles or Chinese pagodas” (*RatR* 25). He conceives colorful suburban landscapes, which are a symbolic still-life of an increasingly capitalistic era. Likewise, Ford’s main character focuses on the portrayal of a postindustrial landscape, but his approach is multilayered as Bascombe explicitly analyzes and comments on the landscapes he delineates. At the meta-level, he reads his suburban and urban surroundings. For this reason, I refer to his landscapes as *semiotic landscapes*. A semiotic landscape means “in the most general sense, any (public) space with visible inscription made through deliberate human intervention and meaning making” (Jaworski and Thurlow 2).

It is above all the “visible inscription made through deliberate human intervention” which figures prominently for Frank. When describing New Jersey, Bascombe lauds “the suave and caressing literalness of the New Jersey coastal shelf” (*SW* 49). At first glance, the term *literalness* does not make much sense in connection with space. So the actual meaning of literalness in this context exceeds its basic meaning, its denotation. As mentioned earlier, human geography interprets landscape as text, and against this background the notion *literalness* is apposite. For Frank, literalness implies a

praise of the simplicity and straight-forwardness of the state as such.⁵⁸ He reads the landscape without any difficulty. To his mind, the New Jersey landscape does not have a symbolic layer of meaning; it is easy to understand, and this is exactly what makes it so attractive for him. Consequently, there seems to be no need for him to investigate what he sees. Apart from its literalness, Frank is fascinated by the readability of the New Jersey landscape, which evidently derives from its predictability: “An American would be crazy to reject such a place, since it is the most diverting and readable of landscapes, and the language is always American” (SW 50). For Frank, a landscape in which he feels at ease must be foreseeable and readable. He presents New Jersey as a state deprived of unique spots, as the landscape has been standardized due to the repercussions of global capitalism. Yet he believes that it is exactly this exchangeability of areas Americans are enthused about. This idea is evocative of Ford’s article “An Urge for Going,” in which he remarks that the ideal citizen of the United States should be able to feel at home anywhere in the country (cf. 63). For this reason, his protagonist turns the state of New Jersey into “Anyplace” (SW 100). Frank takes the view that locatedness should not depend on one state. Part of the interchangeability of New Jersey derives from the stenciled surfaces both inside and outside the state:

Much of what I pass, of course, looks precisely like everyplace else *in* the state [...]. The effect of driving south and east is to make you feel you’re going south and west and that you’re lost, or sometimes that you’re headed nowhere. [...] Suddenly it is a high pale sky and a feeling like Florida, but a mile farther on, it is the Mississippi Delta [...]. (SW 235)

⁵⁸ Later in the novel, Frank elaborates on the meaning of the terms *literalist* and *factualist*. His way of explaining the meaning of *literalist* helps to elucidate his use of the notion *literalness*: “A literalist is a man who will enjoy an afternoon watching people while stranded in an airport in Chicago, while a factualist can’t stop wondering why his plane was late out of Salt Lake, and gauging whether they’ll still serve dinner or just a snack” (SW 128). So, in contrast to a *factualist*, a *literalist* can simply be overwhelmed by a certain moment without constantly analyzing why a situation is the way it is.

It is worth noting that Frank almost sounds like Rabbit when he is heading South at the beginning of *Rabbit, Run*. Yet Rabbit observes the numbing spatial homogeneousness at the end of the fifties and since then the landscape has certainly become even more readable.

The predictability of the semiotic landscape is further enhanced in *The Lay of the Land*, which focuses on the days preceding Thanksgiving and the holiday itself. Yet the Thanksgiving festivities in 2000 have hardly anything in common with the Thanksgiving celebrated by the early settlers. As shopping malls are ubiquitous in Frank's portrayal of landscape, it seems natural that Americans even go shopping on a national holiday while special sales fuel their buying power (cf. *LoL* 22). The malls are open around the clock and Bascombe observes: "Traffic actually moves more slowly, as if everyone we passed this morning is still out here, wandering parking lot to parking lot, ready to buy if they just knew what, yet are finally wearing down, but have no impulse to go home" (*LoL* 284). Apparently, the shopping mall has become their second home.

The title *The Lay of the Land* suggests a spatial reading, as the suburban lay of the land reaches its nadir in this novel. The forces of capitalism have completely devoured the natural landscape and transformed the suburbs on the northeast coast. Identical conglomerations of malls and restaurants swamp the landscape. Bascombe conceptualizes his own spatial terminology to be able to verbalize his visual perception. When portraying the landscape, he does not simply depict its color and shape. Instead, he lauds the advantages of this predictable landscape. Frank seemingly enjoys the foreseeable topography surrounding him and on driving home along the shore, he exults:

It's the *moment d'or* which the Shore facilitates perfectly, offering exposure to the commercial-ethnic-residential zeitgeist of a complex republic [...].

“Culture comfort,” I call this brand of specialized well-being. And along with its sister solace, “cultural literacy”—knowing by inner gyroscope where the next McDonald’s or Borders [...] is going to show up on the horizon—these together I consider a cornerstone of the small life lived acceptably. (*LoL* 430)

This is the “meaning making” part I quoted when defining the semiotic landscape, as the combination of “culture comfort” and “cultural literacy” ostensibly exerts a soothing effect on Frank. Yet Bascombe perverts the meaning of culture, and his portrayal of identical chains repeating themselves distorts the positive connotations associated with this word. It is noticeable that Frank has a tendency to combine lexical fields, which usually do not share any semantic properties, in this case *place* and *literacy*. He did the same in *The Sportswriter*, where he lauded the literalness and readability of the countryside (cf. *SW* 49-50). So Ford’s main character avails himself of the same semantic field. In *The Lay of the Land*, however, the readability of a mostly unspectacular setting rather exposes the cultural illiteracy of the reader. In essence, fast-food chains and bookshop chains have eliminated the particularities of the countryside. On the one hand, the recurrence of look-alike places depreciates the countryside, on the other it turns the landscape into foreseeable cartographic units, their predictability giving comfort. By the same token, Frank observes the scenery from within his car on his way to his favorite bar: “The Manasquan River winds past somewhere off to the left. But little is discernible or of interest. It is actually hard to tell what the natural landscape looks like here” (*LoL* 434-435). To remain in Frank’s semantic field, I therefore conclude that the landscape ends up being “over-written,” which enhances its literalness and readability.

3.6.2. The Intertextual Landscape of *The Sportswriter* and *Independence Day*

I contend that Frank's portrayal of landscape is intertextual, as it alludes to a series of well-known literary texts. Intertextuality is, as Graham Allen puts it, "underdetermined in meaning and overdetermined in figuration" (2). Depending on the respective approach, it can be of a rather malleable and even contradictory nature. To better come to terms with this concept, I invoke the critical work of French theorist Gérard Genette. Not a postmodernist, but a structuralist, Genette defines intertextuality as the first of his altogether five subcategories of transtextuality. It is striking that intertextuality does not provide the generic term of his theory. Instead, Genette argues that transtextuality must be considered the hypernym with intertextuality ranging as the first of five different relationships: intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, hypertextuality, and architextuality (cf. Genette 1-5). I will elaborate on the subcategory of intertextuality, which is compelling for an understanding of the first two volumes of the trilogy. Genette defines intertextuality "as a relationship of copresence between two texts or among several texts: that is to say, eidetically and typically as the actual presence of one text within another" (1-2). First and foremost, Ford includes fictional texts as basis of reference. But it is also my contention that in addition to literary texts, he includes a social study in his intertextual reading of landscape.

Frank's conceiving of landscape in an intertextual manner informs his portrayal of Haddam where he lives in *The Sportswriter* and *Independence Day*. Charles McGrath, a contributing writer for *The New York Times*, explains that Ford's Haddam is an artificial combination of Hopewell, Princeton, and Pennington (cf. McGrath, "A New Jersey State of

Mind" n. pag.).⁵⁹ In *The Sportswriter*, Frank Bascombe outlines the beginnings of Haddam:

Settled in 1795 by a wool merchant from Long Island named Wallace Haddam, the town is a largely wooded community of twelve thousand souls set in the low and roly hills of the New Jersey central section, east of the Delaware. It is on the train line midway between New York and Philadelphia, and for that reason it's not so easy to say what we're a suburb of—commuters go both ways. (SW 45)

The name of the fictitious town of Haddam bears similarities with Wallace Stevens' poem "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird." "Wallace Haddam," the name of the town's founder, suggests the association of Haddam with the line "O Thin Men of Haddam" in the seventh stanza of Stevens' poem. Stevens spent most of his life in Connecticut, and the eleventh stanza of his poem opens with "He rode over Connecticut" (Stevens 93-94). This phrase is evocative of Frank passing Connecticut, where his ex-wife and her second husband live, to pick up his son in *Independence Day*.

Beyond that, Frank's portrayal of Haddam uses a symbol which is redolent of Updike's *Rabbit, Run*. Bascombe, who buttresses the literalness and readability of New Jersey, now applies this concept to his hometown Haddam and compares its clearly arranged pattern to a fire hydrant: "Haddam in fact is as straightforward and plumb-literal as a fire hydrant, which more than anything else makes it the pleasant place it is" (SW 100). This accentuation of a simple fire hydrant is reminiscent of Rabbit, who compares a mailbox, a fire hydrant, and a telephone pole to a grove, in a sense of pastoral longing when heading South in *Rabbit, Run*. So both authors recur to similarly

⁵⁹ Similarly, Sea-Clift, where he will live in *The Lay of the Land*, combines Seaside Park, Seaside Heights, and Ortley Beach (cf. McGrath, "A New Jersey State of Mind" n. pag.). To increase the verisimilitude of his places, Ford hyphenated the name. He explained that the hyphen in *Sea-Clift* represented a problem for editors as place names usually do not take a hyphen. His riposte was that "this was a town invented by land developers, and they would definitely want the hyphen" ("A New Jersey State of Mind" n. pag.).

insignificant, unobtrusive objects as basis of comparison. Even though Frank wants a place to be “straightforward” and devoid of intricacies, there is more to his idea of place than this simple equation. Matthew Guinn, one of the critics focusing on Ford’s idea of place, argues: “For the postmodern individual such as Frank, a new conception of place is in order: a sense of place as literal, straightforward, and knowable—with no mystery to complicate things beyond the tangible, no character beyond the commercial. In short, a postregional landscape” (“Into the Suburbs” 202). According to Guinn, Frank appreciates the loss of regional particularities characteristic of the landscape. However, I think that this position is refuted at the end of *The Sportswriter*. Ford’s protagonist sometimes drives to a suburban train station at night to watch people come and go. In those moments, he arrives at the conclusion that “there is mystery everywhere, even in a vulgar, urine-scented, suburban depot such as this” (*SW* 335). Despite their readability, places have not yet forfeited their mystery according to Frank.

Most striking is Ford’s allusion to Southern writer Walker Percy. Ford has personally known Percy, and *The Sportswriter* was often compared with Percy’s novel *The Moviegoer* (cf. Guagliardo, “A Conversation with Richard Ford” 181). Ford’s main character Frank, a writer by profession in the first part of the trilogy, refers to his article “Why I Live Where I Live” published in a magazine in which he elaborates on the importance of finding “a place to work that is in most ways ‘neutral’ ” (*SW* 37). Ford himself has published a similar article: “An Urge for Going: Why I Don’t Live Where I Used to Live.” His lines bear similarities with Walker Percy’s essay “Why I Live Where I Live,” which opens his monograph *Signposts in a Strange Land* (cf. Percy 3). I hold that Thoreau’s chapter in *Walden*—“Where I Lived, and What I Lived for” (cf. Thoreau 174-

188)—serves as a matrix for both Ford and Percy.⁶⁰ In the respective chapter, Walker Percy expounds that he enjoys living in Covington: “The reason is not that it is a pleasant place but rather that it is a pleasant nonplace” (Percy 3). Percy argues that a writer needs to get away from his roots, although he should not move too far away. Bascombe’s extensive analysis of Haddam recalls Walker Percy’s words. The latter gets excited about the enjoyable character of Covington:

The pleasantest things about Covington are its nearness to New Orleans—which is very much of a place, drenched in its identity, its history, and its rather self-conscious exotica—and its own attractive lack of identity, lack of placeness, even lack of history. Nothing has ever happened here, no great triumphs or tragedies. (Percy 6)

Percy’s “nonplace” Covington can be put on a level with fictitious Haddam, and his New Orleans equals Ford’s Gotham. The notion “nonplace” is tantamount to Ford’s “Anyplace” in *The Sportswriter* (cf. 100). The following excerpt from *The Sportswriter* is appropriate to juxtapose Ford’s and Percy’s wording:

We all need our simple, unambiguous, even factitious townscapes like mine. Places without challenge or double-ranked complexity. Give me a little Anyplace, a grinning, toe-tapping Terre Haute or wide-eyed Bismarck, with stable property values, regular garbage pick-up, good drainage, ample parking, located not far from a major airport, and I’ll beat the birds up singing every morning. (SW 100)

Bascombe is dreaming of a suburb with a working infrastructure where nothing is out of the ordinary. According to him, life in such a locale guarantees happiness and well-being. In case of life becoming too confining, the nearby airport might serve as a means of escape. Fundamentally, Bascombe intrinsically perverts the idea of suburbia: what

⁶⁰ I will elaborate on Thoreau’s ideas on the meaning of a house in chapter 5.

appears to be *the* perfect setting turns out to be “Anyplace.” Yet at that moment in his life, such a place is exactly what Frank longs for.

In the same vein, *Independence Day* is dominated by Frank’s conspicuous intertextual references. To begin with, I would like to delineate the different nature of this novel. Even though I have argued that the trilogy follows the tradition of “the novel of settling,” Ford sends his protagonist on an extended weekend trip in *Independence Day*. Frank is on the road, not in a Kerouacian sense, but he spends the Fourth of July weekend mainly crossing the northeastern part of the United States. He sets out from his New Jersey domicile and does not leave the state when heading toward his girlfriend Sally’s place in South Mantoloking. After a short stopover in Connecticut to pick up his son, the two Bascombes continue their trip to Massachusetts, the state of New York, and back to New Jersey. All along, Frank indirectly portrays Vermont in the context of the Markham subplot. Frank is an excellent observer of space, presenting the landscape as if seen through a magnifying glass. En route, he describes the adverse effects of commercialization: numerous construction sites and billboards galore.

When passing through Connecticut on the way to pick up his son, Bascombe describes two small towns as enclaves of the rich. He has a tendency to contrast socially segregated places. Along the way, he becomes aware of the stately character of Ridgefield and Deep River, both of which can actually be traced on a map. The infrastructure of the “hamlet” (*ID* 196) of Ridgefield and its architecture signalize that it is an exclusive retreat for its well-heeled residents. The Central Business District offers its exigent clientele, who loathes tourists, exquisite goods. With its verdant lawns, its “deep-pocketed mansion district of mixed architectural character [...],” and numerous safety provisions, Ridgefield is, in fact, the wealthier version of Haddam (cf. 196). Although the restaurants with French names promise some upscale ambiance, Frank

calls this hamlet “a piss-poor place to live” (197). Even more obviously, Deep River, the “burg” (229) where Ann has moved with their kids, is marked by social segregation: “down by the river there’s the usual enclave of self-contented, pseudo-reclusive richies who’ve erected humongous houses on bracken and basswood chases bordering the water, their backs resolutely turned to how the other half lives” (229). Affluent sections are strictly separated from less well-off neighborhoods and those who live by the river look down on the poorer neighborhoods (ironically, they have to look up, in fact). From an intertextual perspective, the expression “how the other half lives” alludes to the eponymous study Jacob A. Riis conducted almost a century before Ford published his novel. According to Genette, allusion refers to “an enunciation whose full meaning presupposes the perception of a relationship between it and another text [...]” (2). The allusion to Riis is cogent to comprehend Frank’s perception of this place. In his study, Riis analyzes the squalid living conditions of the poor in New York providing photographic proof of their tenements. Of course, “the other half” mentioned by Frank is better off than almost a hundred years before, but the expression serves as a symbol for the less well-off community of Deep River and the gaping social difference between them and the upper middle class. The rich living close by the river ignore the less affluent. Furthermore, this passage is evocative of Rabbit when he is thinking about the residents of Penn Park: “It was on a hill. He used to imagine it on the top of a hill, a hill he could never climb, because it wasn’t a real hill like Mt. Judge” (*RRed* 216). In both cases, local segregation supports the idea of social distance. Beyond that, Frank accuses the supercilious attitude of the social climbers and rich retirees, who buy their food in exclusive stores and who are only interested in fancy cocktails and barbecues (cf. *ID* 229-230). The perception of this landscape strongly affects Frank’s emotions. Despite his declared intention to keep his affirmative stance, such enclaves make him suffer

physically: “My brain, in the time it’s taken me to clear town and wind down into these sylvan purlieus of the rich, has begun to exhibit an unpleasant tightness behind my temples. My neck’s stiff, and there’s a feeling of tissue expansion in my upper thorax [...]” (230). Hence, this place palpably impacts on his emotional state of mind.

It is worth adding that Frank also construes an intertextual landscape by comparing the contemporary landscape he sees to the portrayal of the exact same area in Cooper’s *The Leatherstocking Tales*. It should not be overlooked that Frank and his son visit an area steeped in American literature. The two Bascombes are heading towards the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York. Cooperstown is a small town, which, at first sight, appears to be the ideal of a suburban Eden. In Ford’s novel, this locale is fraught with symbolism. Located South of Lake Otsego, Cooperstown was named after James Fenimore Cooper’s father, William Cooper. In *A Journey through Literary America*, Thomas R. Hummel traces significant places in American literature and explains with regard to Ford’s novel: “The area, once only reached by the Hudson or by Indian trails through the wilderness, is the birthplace of American literature of place [...]” (273). Ford’s cross-references to Cooper and *The Leatherstocking Tales* are numerous. Cooper’s fictional character Natty Bumppo explored the area around Lake Otsego almost two hundred years before Ford’s fictional characters Frank and Paul get there. Referring to Cooper, Hummel remarks: “The landscape that Cooper introduced in the early Leatherstocking novels was one of staggering natural beauty” (7). Back then, Cooper caught the sublime spirit of the region in his novels, while Thomas Cole implemented it in his famous paintings (cf. 14). It is worth noting that romantic authors, like Cooper, apotheosized landscape. In the *Anthology of American Literature*, the age of romanticism is defined as the time when “writers celebrated America’s meadows, groves, and streams, its endless prairies, dense forests, and vast oceans. The wilderness

came to function almost as a dramatic character that illustrated moral law" ("The Age of Romanticism" 606-607). Cooper's protagonist Natty is enchanted by the beauty of nature and like Natty, Frank Bascombe experiences the grandeur of the Catskill mountains: "Spiriting on across the Hudson and past Albany [...] the blue Catskills rising abruptly into view to the south, hazy and softly solid, with smoky mares' tails running across the range" (*ID* 285). Yet Ford's diction is less picturesque than Cooper's.⁶¹ The area Frank is passing with his son almost appears like a reminiscence of a long gone pastoral ideal:

we have now entered the CENTRAL LEATHERSTOCKING AREA, and just beyond, as if on cue, the great corrugated glacial trough widens out for miles to the southwest as the highway climbs, and the butt ends of the Catskills cast swart afternoon shadows onto lower hills dotted by pocket quarries, tiny hamlets and pristine farmsteads with wind machines whirring to undetectable winds.
(286)

In parentheses, Frank comments that "[i]t's the perfect landscape for a not very good novel [...]" (286). The triple ambiguity of this comment is obvious: it implicates a side blow on Cooper's novels, it refers to Frank's own novel *Blue Autumn* (which he mentions more than once), and, of course, it is a self-referential comment on Ford's *Independence Day*. At the meta-level, Ford comments on his own writing and this remark must be considered as metatextual. According to Genette's concept, metatextuality denotes "the relationship most often labeled 'commentary' " (Genette 4). The fact that Frank considers this area the perfect space for a mediocre novel debunks the irony behind his remark.

⁶¹ See the following passage of *The Pioneers* where Leatherstocking explains the beauty of the Catskills to the young hunter Oliver Edwards: "You know the Catskills, lad; for you must have seen them on your left as you followed the river up from York, looking as blue as a piece of clear sky, and holding the clouds on their tops, as the smoke curls over the head of an Indian chief at the council fire" (294).

Having preserved their natural beauty, the Catskill mountains contrast with the landscape that has been spoilt by roads and highways. The transition between almost unspoilt nature and commodified territory is harsh. In this context, the intertextual character of the landscape comes again to the fore as Frank refers back to Emerson's *Self-Reliance* to come to terms with the immensity of space surrounding him. He adapts a central passage from Emerson's essay to his perception of landscape and argues that geography offers "a natural corroboration to Emerson's view that power resides in moments of transition, in 'shooting the gulf, in darting to an aim.' [...] 'Life only avails, not having lived' " (ID 286). To fully comprehend Bascombe's perception of landscape, one must have an understanding of Emerson's train of thought. Emerson underlined the importance of living in the present and of mobilizing one's power to follow an aim in life. Accordingly, stasis and entropy must be avoided.⁶² By referring to Emerson, he tries to give the increasing commodification of landscape a positive twist.

There are more examples of intertextual relations. Frank refers to Natty Bumppo more than once. Talking about the general proximity of places in northeastern states, he explains that in three hours one can travel to the spot "where old Natty drew first blood" (ID 288). On top of that, Frank discovers his second-rate collection of short stories on the same bookshelf as Cooper's novels at the *Deerslayer Inn* where he and Paul will spend the night (cf. 321). So there is a double interleaving of perspective: Frank mentions his own novel in connection with a literary classic and all this within the context of Ford's *Independence Day*. Notwithstanding Frank's positive portrayal of the area, his account of Cooperstown desecrates the sublime character the region emanated in *The Leatherstocking Tales*. Cooperstown is depicted as "a replica (of a legitimate

⁶² Referring to this passage by Emerson, Harold Bloom remarks that Emerson's central statement on power is essentially American: "Nothing is more American, whether catastrophic or amiable, than that Emersonian formula concerning power [...]" ("The Sage of Concord" n. pag.).

place),” and as such it lacks authenticity. At first glance, it seems to be “an ideal place to live, worship, thrive, raise a family, grow old, get sick and die” (293). However, this backdrop only feigns Arcadian elements. In truth, its fake character adds to the increasingly charmless landscape Bascombe has been observing since *The Sportswriter*. Ironically, Frank misses some really authentic features, like litter and crime. To him, this place is too clean and too factitious. To old Natty, this replica town and the suburban areas pictured by Frank would have appeared like a *terra incognita*. Even though the Catskill mountains still remain an impressive sight, the portrayal of Cooperstown perverts the magic of the area.

As is well-known, the Catskills have also provided the setting in Washington Irving’s “Rip Van Winkle” and “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.” It is certainly no coincidence that the Markhams, Frank’s more than strenuous clients to whom I will come back later, are staying at the *Sleepy Hollow*. After touring the area in search of a house, they always return to their motel: “it’s a good strategy to set the Markhams adrift as I just did, let them wheeze around in their clunker Nova, brooding about all the houses in all the neighborhoods they’ve sneered at, then crawl back for a nap in the Sleepy Hollow [...]” (ID 89). In a figurative sense, their crawling back to the *Sleepy Hollow* underlines the central role of this stretch of land both in *Independence Day* and in American literature in general. Yet the landscape described by Ford does not have much in common with the landscape portrayed by Cooper and Irving any more. By using intertextual references, Ford’s protagonist unveils what has become of the area, which Cooper’s Natty had experienced as natural landscape more than two hundred years before.

When talking about places steeped in American literary history, Concord, Massachusetts, must be mentioned, too. Concord represented the local center in the lives

of Emerson and Thoreau and therefore it was considered the center of transcendentalism. In fact, Bascombe twice mentions Concord in *The Sportswriter* (cf. 197-198). However, based on Frank's indications of directions and the distances he covers, the city he mentions can only be Concord, New Hampshire. It is difficult not to suspect any purpose in Ford's referring to Concord, as he explicitly refers to Emerson and Thoreau in his elaborations of the meaning of place.

I hope to have shown that Ford's portrayal of place can only be fully grasped if the different layers of intertextuality are taken into account. Especially the references to Walker Percy and James Fenimore Cooper are of interest from a spatial perspective. Ford, who never wanted to be categorized as a Southern writer, deliberately alludes to Walker Percy, who must be considered the epitome of Southern writing. Like Faulkner, Percy represents Southern literature and used to write about the history and culture of the South. In a way, Percy was the mouthpiece of the South. The similarities between Frank's fictional essay and Percy's essay illustrate Ford's constant preoccupation and confrontation with his Southern provenance. Likewise, the references to James Fenimore Cooper are crucial. In Cooper's literature, the vastness of the American continent served as a setting for the very first time. So his *Leatherstocking Tales* are landmarks in the history of American literature on place. In summary, Ford drafts an intertextual landscape by referring to key writers of American literature, most notably Wallace Stevens, Walker Percy, and James Fenimore Cooper. Moreover, he alludes to fictional hero Natty Bumppo and to the stretch of land most significant in American literature, the area around Lake Otsego where the exploration of the West began.

3.6.3. The Degradation of the Suburban Dreamscape

Like Updike, whose Floridian suburbs convey the idea of decrepitude and decay, Ford depicts an increasingly antagonistic landscape. Like Rabbit in *Rabbit at Rest*, Frank Bascombe contracts a severe disease in the last part of the trilogy. Bascombe suffers from prostate cancer, which impacts his perception of the landscape. Notwithstanding his insistence on writing positively about New Jersey, the suburban facade has started to crumble. In *Independence Day*, crime severely affects Pheasant Meadow, a residential area in New Jersey, which has already served as a setting in the first part of the trilogy. In *The Sportswriter*, it was the home of Frank's former girlfriend Vicky Arcenault. In *Independence Day*, real estate agent Clair Devane is murdered there and her death symbolizes the inexorable decay of the whole housing estate. Pheasant Meadow, which was only erected some years before, has "already gone visibly to seed" (*ID* 141). Housing estates are no longer built to survive more than one generation and Bascombe explains that "it seems so plainly the native architecture of lost promise and early death [...]" (*ID* 141). The ambiguity of this quotation encapsulates the development of the suburbs in the trilogy. On the one hand, "early death" alludes to the numerous murders committed in the suburbs. In *The Lay of the Land*, a student runs amok and kills his teacher (cf. 1-2). Besides, a desperate client shoots a homeowner in the aftermath of usurious real estate practices (cf. *LoL* 126-127). On the other hand, "early death" hints at the ephemeral character of suburban housing estates. Five years after its erection, Pheasant Meadow is dilapidated. Houses are quickly erected, and non-arable farmland is about to be turned into "behemoth-size dwellings in promiscuous architectural permutations [...]" (*LoL* 56) to meet the demands of the market. In essence, Ford describes a tissue paper suburban world whose architecture does not strive for permanence. Paradoxically, Bascombe himself is going through the "Permanent Period" of his life in *The Lay of the Land*.

Like Rabbit, Frank emphasizes the dyadic character of the landscape when opposing the present *status quo* to the past. Frank reminisces about “[t]he old lay of the land” (*LoL* 61) when he used to enjoy driving around in the area with his former wife Ann. Back then, the bucolic elements of the landscape had not been destroyed yet and Frank immersed himself in the “then-untouched countryside [...] and the river towns, stopping at a country store [...] buying a set of andirons or a wicker chair [...]. It was long before this became a wealth belt” (50-51). Bascombe’s cloying sentimentalities belong to a bygone era when the pastoral mode still constituted part of the perception of suburbia. Frank indulges in nostalgia for a countryside which has disappeared, and, at the same time, his profession as a realtor requires him to consider place in strictly economic terms.

The suburban architecture described by Frank is anything but sustainable. As quickly as they are erected, buildings are turned into rubble. In Asbury Park, which has virtually become a multi-racial suburban nightmare, a ramshackle hotel is torn down and billboards read “LUXURY CONDO COMMUNITY COMING!” (cf. *LoL* 444). Construction sites mutilate the suburban landscape. When Frank, who is used to categorizing the different stages of his life, reaches the “Next Level” of his existence at the end of *The Lay of the Land*, this shift metaphorically implies the hope for a “Next Level” regarding the landscape and the political situation of the country. In fall 2000, when the story is set, the United States were going through the Gore versus Bush presidential election, which turned out to be a complete disaster. So the title of the novel is ambiguous and space unequivocally assumes a symbolic role.

Ford puts special focus on a detailed presentation of the changes affecting Haddam, which acquires more and more antagonistic traits. In *The Sportswriter*, it is portrayed as a residential suburb run by Republicans and Italian policemen whose

common belief is that “*location is everything* [sic]” (SW 47). Firstly, it is symptomatic that Haddam does not have a real center. There is no main street and this fundamental lack is counterbalanced by the omnipresence of religion with the Theological Institute and the Seminarians playing a pivotal role. Frank still enjoys his life in Haddam because of its good infrastructure: “All in all it is not an interesting town to live in. But that’s the way we like it” (SW 47). Ennui and daily routine plus a touch of spirituality turn Haddam into an unimpressive, all-American place. Its manifest lack of a center highlights its replaceability. As the plot unfolds, Frank becomes aware of the fact that after all “location isn’t actually everything [...]” (213). Location does not protect him against the vicissitudes of everyday life. When driving back to Haddam after his disastrous Easter weekend at the Arcenaults’ and the news of Walter Lockett’s death, Frank is in a state of despair and longs for some positive influence of the New Jersey backdrop on his psyche. However, he comes to realize that “there is no consoling landscape [...]” (292). The New Jersey landscape does not possess the power to dispel or reduce his negative thoughts. More specifically, Haddam lets him down. His mood increasingly shapes his perception of suburban space: “And I see again it can be a sad town, a silent, nothing-happening, keep-to-yourself Sunday town [...]” (307). Frank denies the positive effect of Haddam on his feelings. After inspecting the apartment of his deceased clubmate Walter, he muses about where to go in his desperate mood. At this moment of distress, he feels “left alone [...] a man with no place to go in particular [...]” (331). He suddenly becomes aware of his physical and psychological deficiencies. I will refer to this state of deprivation as “emotional homelessness.” Spatially located, he nevertheless feels “dis-located.” The uninviting character of Walter’s neighborhood intensifies his sense of lostness. His suburban environment cannot alleviate his alienation. After all, Frank comes to realize that Haddam is a pleasant suburb as long as everything is literally in its place. But

Walter's death interrupts the suburban peacefulness. Haddam "is not a good place for death. Death's a preposterous intruder. A breach. A building that won't fit with the others" (332). When a tragedy occurs, it abandons its residents. Hence, putting one's hopes onto the comforting influence of a location is a fallacy, but Frank's self-imposed optimism enables him to tackle the situation. While Haddam recedes into the background in *Independence Day*, it is foregrounded again in *The Lay of the Land*, where it is described as "a kind of love-it/hate-it paragon of suburban amplitude gone beyond self-congratulation to the point of entropy" (68). So Haddam is turned into an increasingly repellent place.

In *The Lay of the Land*, the degradation of the suburban dreamscape continues. Frank emphasizes how the landscape has changed on the threshold to a new millennium. The portrayal of landscape must be seen against the background of the real estate bubble affecting the United States. Frank's choice of words becomes increasingly negative. He presents the economy as "a malign force," which "was holding property hostage [...]" (*LoL* 123). Nevertheless, the immaculate reputation of Haddam attracts numerous homebuyers who are willing to pay outrageous prices. Consequently, realtors sense their chance to make a big haul. Realty prices skyrocket, but the incredible price increase does not prevent potential buyers from investing in condemned buildings. Here Ford hyperbolically distorts the negative spin-offs of the realty market. Selling "a rotting, ruined beaverboard shack that had once been the Basque gardener's storage shed for toxic herbicides, caustic drain openers, banned termite and Asian beetle eradicators [...]" (122) for a huge amount of money goes against the grain for Frank and is incompatible with his code of ethics. Frank could have been elated about such a rise in value, but the "real estate heresy" (123) violates his sublime principles and finally makes him quit Haddam for Sea-Clift. He assumes that the destructive power of the economy works

everywhere (cf. 123). Ultimately, space succumbs to the forces of supply and demand, with the landscape being gradually decomposed into tradable units.

What is more, Haddam has lost its unique infrastructure. Frank rhapsodizes about the past when Haddam still “had the ambling, impersonal, middling pleasantness of an old commercial traveler in no real hurry to get anywhere. All of which has gone” (*LoL* 111). Haddam has forfeited its atmosphere of comfort. Cozy eating places have disappeared and the choices are either to spend much money in exclusive restaurants or to stand in line at health food shops. Besides, bars have lost their singular character. *The Johnny Appleseed Bar*, which used to be one of Frank’s favorite hangouts after divorcing Ann in 1983, has become “a fair replica of a Revolutionary War roadhouse tavern” (249-250). Frank assumes that such “bars are probably a chain [...]. Another one just like this one may exist in Dayton” (263). Cookie-cutter bars and restaurants spring up like mushrooms and convey anything but a positive image of suburban life. In the construction sector, huge houses called McMansions are popular with higher earners (cf. 627). They are anathema to Frank, but epitomize American real(i)ty. Updike chronicles a similar trend in *Rabbit Remembered*. In the coda to the Rabbit tetralogy, prosperity is translated into the construction of large houses (cf. *RRem* 196). Under the influence of the real estate market, Haddam undergoes a complete change. In principle, it “stopped being a quiet and happy suburb, stopped being subordinate to any other place and became a *place to itself* [sic], only without having a fixed municipal substance. It became a town of others, for others. You could say it lacked a soul [...].” (*LoL* 129). At this moment, the spatial and spiritual emptiness of Haddam has reached its nadir, which impinges on the residents’ stance toward suburban housing. When Bascombe entered the real estate business, he did not take the danger of uniformity seriously:

But by 1992, even homogeneity had gotten homogenized. Something had hardened in Haddam, so that having a decent house on a safe street, with like-minded neighbors and can't-miss equity growth—a home as a natural extension of what was wanted from life [...] all that now seemed to piss people off, instead of making them ecstatic [...]. (130)

The idea of homogeneity and of everybody owning a house, which initially constituted part of the suburban myth, is completely perverted and reduced to absurdity. Ford's diction outlines the nightmarish character of owning property in suburbia at the beginning of the nineties. The preponderance of gingerbread-style houses proves that Haddam "had become the emperor's new suburb [...]" (130). It has completely forfeited the positive characteristics associated with a suburb and has become a perversion of intelligent architecture. Here, the allusion to Andersen's fairy tale *The Emperor's New Clothes* is apposite. Suburbanites should believe that their property represents the pinnacle of happiness. At first, they do not recognize this fallacy, but they finally realize that their place in the suburbs is a sham and does not guarantee a contented life. Due to the uniformity of residential areas and the indifference of its inhabitants, Bascombe argues that Haddam has become "a place where maybe someone might set a bomb off just to attract its attention" (130). Ironically, someone really drops a bomb in front of the cafeteria at the local hospital where Frank usually has lunch.⁶³

Eventually, Haddam finds itself bereft of "its crucial sense of East," which makes Frank move "to the very edge" (130). He leaves Haddam out of desperation, and hopes that Sea-Clift, a suburb on the very eastern edge of the continent, might provide a more substantial locale. Sea-Clift is located "just off the continent's edge" (7) on a small spit in

⁶³ In the course of investigation, the police even get in touch with Frank, as he had stopped in front of the crime scene to have lunch shortly after the bomb had exploded. A man he knew and who had occasionally worked for him some years before, had been killed, and Frank was wrongly suspected of having been involved in the crime (cf. 374).

the ocean. His geographical rootedness can be seen as a metaphor for the present stage in his life, and the analogy of his suffering from cancer is suitable. Like the spit of land, which appears like a short appendage to the continent, his whole existence dangles on a string. Bascombe's location visualizes his current state of health. This use of space as a harbinger of death is redolent of *Rabbit at Rest*.

Yet the portrayal of Sea-Clift in *The Lay of the Land* will also reveal its progressively antagonistic character. It is hardly distinguishable from other places on the beach. The different beach townlettes are more like "one long, good place-by-an-ocean [...]" (395) than several independent suburbs. Bascombe's narrative focus is on Timbuktu Street and its cookie-cutter houses in absolutely identical streets, which had been erected "en masse" (602-603). Once more, predictability is what owners cherish most. The Haddam mantra that "*gasping increase* [sic] was the sacred article of faith [...]" (595) has not engulfed Sea-Clift yet. However, Sea-Clift cannot escape the malicious corollary of the market either⁶⁴: the Dollars for Doers Strike Council intends to boost Sea-Clift tourism, as stagnation is tantamount to economic death (cf. 595). Once more, Ford's wording is perfectly aligned and does not miss its target: money is all that matters and why not demolish some summer chalets in order to turn the newly acquired space into a parking lot or a lucrative shopping mall (cf. 403)? Bascombe sardonically remarks that one day rapacity will not even refrain from draining Barnegat Bay in order to erect profitable businesses there (cf. 596). By degrees, naturally grown structures will be eliminated, and Sea-Clift might have to meet the same fate as Haddam. Ford's

⁶⁴ Martyn Bone argues that " '[c]ents of place' may well have been substituted for 'sense of place.'" Bone refers back to Stephen Smith who coined the expression "cents of place" (cf. *The Postsouthern Sense of Place* 51).

hyperbolic diction exposes the suburbs as unpleasant and exchangeable places.⁶⁵ Toward the end of the trilogy, Frank's view of public space becomes more and more negative and pessimistic.

Not only does Frank's portrayal of space deteriorate. In the same manner, the presentation of the middle class becomes more and more negative. As place is gradually turned into "Anyplace," the middle class is literally turned into "Anyclass" in Ford's trilogy. What Bascombe calls "cultural literacy" is accompanied by social conformity: "Everybody reads the same studies, takes the same newspapers, exhibits the same fears, conceives the same obsessive, impractical solutions" (*LoL* 228). In *The Lay of the Land*, Ford criticizes the increasing homogenization of space and of society. According to sociological studies, the majority of Americans consider themselves middle class. Yet "[s]tatistically, the middle class is always the same—the 60 percent of families in the middle range of the income-distribution scale" (Peterson 53-54). Disregarding the economic, cultural, and sociological criteria, which are essential to come up with a scientifically sound definition of the middle class, the characters portrayed in Ford's spatialized fictions certainly represent the broad spectrum denoted as middle class. According to Harvard economist Larry Lindsey, "the numerical boundaries of the middle class cannot be defined, since it is essentially a state of mind" (53). In Ford's trilogy, the middle class state of mind suffers from increasing alienation and estrangement. Metaphorically, the view through the suburban picture windows reveals a monotonous

⁶⁵ Notwithstanding Ford's endeavor to write realistic novels, he also enjoys making broad-brush statements on the landscape and abstains from analyzing regional diversity. In this regard, I would like to mention the 2010 NeMLA conference, which was held in Montréal. I was part of a group of four scholars presenting papers on "The Changing Shape of the Suburb in Recent Fiction and Film." Discussing literature by Philip Roth, Michael Chabon, Alicia Erian, Jonathan Franzen, and Richard Ford, the members of this panel concluded that, viewed in a broader context, there is, in fact, a real kaleidoscope of suburban places. Instead of one fixed specification of suburbia, a plethora of socially and ethnically different settings provide the background for suburban plots.

and repellent landscape. And like the space surrounding them, suburbanites are becoming more and more similar and even display homogenous behavior patterns.

3.7. Rethinking the Pastoral Mode

Despite the inexorable spatial transformation, both authors include pastoral spots disrupting the monotony and antagonism, which have become symptomatic of the landscape. As I have pointed out, there has been a connection between the suburban myth and the Jeffersonian ideal of pastoralism. According to cultural geographers James S. Duncan and David R. Lambert “[p]astoralism began as a literary movement and school of landscape architecture in England in the eighteenth century and rapidly spread to America. Thomas Jefferson was perhaps its most important popularizer in the United States” (266). Leo Marx explains that originally, the pastoral mode implied an Arcadian ideal:

Beginning in Jefferson’s time, the cardinal image of American aspirations was a rural landscape, a well-ordered green garden magnified to continental size. Although it probably shows a farmhouse or a neat white village, the scene usually is dominated by natural objects: in the foreground a pasture, a twisting brook with cattle grazing nearby [...]. This is the countryside of the old Republic, a chaste, uncomplicated land of rural virtue. (Marx 141)

I have mentioned earlier that part of the onslaught on suburbia was caused by a comparison between the suburban status quo and the idyllic version of unspoilt landscape. However, the description of the farmer’s life has not ranked high in American literature notwithstanding the fundamentally positive image of the garden in the American ideology (cf. Lutwack 153). In the nineteenth century, “[t]he anti-pastoral note in American literature is a more dominant strain than the pastoral” (154). And the first half of the twentieth century was clearly marked by “anti-pastoralism” (156). I argue

that in the second half of the twentieth century, certainly due to a widespread criticism of suburban life, Updike and Ford intentionally insert this pastoral ideal in their novels. However, they do not base their argument on the eighteenth century Jeffersonian ideal. Instead, they realign their pastoral settings, and their realignment of the pastoral mode correlates with the rise of the car. In the post-World-War II era, the car turned out to be the new “machine in the garden,” which is why the pastoral elements in Updike’s and Ford’s chronicles must be seen against this background. In the following paragraphs, I will look at select excerpts from *Rabbit Is Rich* (set in 1979), *The Sportswriter* (set in 1983), and *Independence Day* (set in 1988) in order to show how both authors adapt their pastoral settings to the challenges of the postindustrial landscape. Both protagonists mainly experience the opposite of an idealized countryside and their descriptions of landscapes subvert the pastoral mode.

It is of interest that Updike had originally considered calling the third part of the tetralogy *Rural Rabbit* (cf. De Bellis, *The John Updike Encyclopedia* 325). His changing the title proves that he shifted his focus on Rabbit’s social ascent. In *Rabbit Is Rich*, Rabbit is the head of Springer Motors at the time of the oil crisis and his financial means determine the plot. The pastoral scene par excellence is Rabbit’s trip to his former lover Ruth’s place in Galilee. Knowing that Ruth was pregnant when they split up, he visits her farm to find out more about Ruth’s and his illegitimate daughter. With its “corn stubble of the fields” (*RiR* 396) and the duck pond along the route, the landscape clearly exhibits elements of the pastoral. The positive expectations are soon thwarted as the farm itself is in a bad state and looks “like a woman’s farm, in need of help” (98). Here, Rabbit insinuates that, without male support, a woman cannot run a farm. He observes the area “behind the barn, where the woods are encroaching upon what had once been a cleared space, sumac and cedar in the lead [...]” (98-99). Instead of a “cleared” landscape, Rabbit

meets wilderness. Moreover, he observes a rotting school bus, the only remaining testament to the bus company Ruth's deceased husband had owned. The rotting bus is literally being devoured by wilderness and destroys the last vestiges of a once beautiful "garden." Here, Updike seems to approach the destruction of nature by the car in a contrapuntal way, as the powers of nature decompose the remnants of the rotting bus. In the midst of this rampant green of a garden, "Harry stands in what once had been an orchard, where even now lopsided apple and pear trees send up sprays of new shoots from their gutted trunks" (99). Admittedly, the rotting bus in the backyard and an orchard growing rampant rather convey the idea of omnipresent decay. Even though the farm represents a unique spot in the woods, its portrayal distorts the pastoral ideal.

Ford's main character also reveals that pastoral spots can only be reached by car. In *The Sportswriter*, Bascombe explicitly refers to the rural character of New Jersey: "Perfect little bucolic America set in the New Jersey reservoir district, an hour's commute from Gotham" (*SW* 183). However, the commoditization of landscape dissolves the remnants of a bucolic countryside. Surrounded by an increasingly antagonistic landscape, Frank transfers his pastoral longing onto his domestic surroundings. He dreams of relaxing in a cozy chair, of dozing off while reading the newspaper, and of listening to the birds' twittering: "It is for such dewy interludes that our suburbs were built. [...] At times I can long so for that simple measure of day and place—when, say, I'm alone in misty Spokane or chilly Boston—that an unreasonable tear nearly comes to my eye. It is a pastoral kind of longing, of course, but we can all have it" (305). At the beginning of the 1980s, Frank simply blanks out the visual deficiencies of suburbia. He muses about what the suburbs could be like and glorifies a pseudo-reality. In *Independence Day*, his intangible longing materializes. Frank is cruising around in his car when he suddenly falls asleep and runs into *Bemish's Birch Beer Depot* (cf. *ID* 129). This

sudden sight breaks the monotony of the suburban landscape and arouses nostalgic feelings in Frank: “Everybody over forty (unless they were born in the Bronx) has pristine and uncomplicated memories of such places [...]” (129). This spot is located in a “suburban-semi-rural location—a few old farms nearby, with small but prospering vegetable patches, the odd nursery *cum* cider mill, some decades-old hippie pottery operations and one or two mediocre, mostly treeless golf courses” (132). As was the case in *Rabbit Is Rich*, the pastoral setting includes a farm, while the orchard is replaced with vegetable patches—so the key elements of the postwar pastoral landscape are there. Frank used to adore the readability of the landscape and its “cultural literacy.” This relic from the fifties, however, contrasts with the predictable fast food chains mushrooming everywhere, which makes it the appealing spot it is. *Bemish’s Birch Beer Depot* simulates originality and tradition, whereas the fast food chains convey the idea of exchangeability. Driven by feelings of nostalgia and his conscience after running into this place with his car, Bascombe becomes co-owner and renames it *Franks*.

The Jeffersonian pastoral mode essentially conveys the idea of harmony with nature. In the postwar literature by Updike and Ford, this harmony with nature has been completely thwarted. In the midst of developing landscape, which becomes increasingly inimical for Rabbit and Frank, there are still putatively pastoral spots positively impacting their emotional landscape. However, Updike and Ford both portray what has become of the pastoral mode against the background of a postindustrial landscape. The basic elements of the pastoral mode—like the farmhouse and the pasture—are still there, but the surroundings—an overgrown garden in *Rabbit Is Rich* and the highway in *Independence Day*—clearly pervert the idea of pastoralism.

3.8. Summary

Updike's and Ford's literary cartography exhibits and criticizes the increasing homogeneity of the landscape. Essentially, both the trilogy and the tetralogy generate a hostile literary cartography. Rabbit and Frank show the decay of grown inner city structures and the increase of faceless suburban areas. At the same time, Frank's intertextual references, especially the cross-reference to Natty Bumppo, underline the significance of this stretch of land in American literature. Still, the main characters are primarily surrounded by unsightly space, which ultimately loses its distinctive features.

Back in 1959, Rabbit "had read, that from shore to shore all America was the same" (RR 31). In the same vein, Frank reveals in 1983 that "I have read that with enough time American civilization will make the midwest of any place, New York included" (SW 111). From the outset, they both underline the fact that they have read about the growing homogeneousness of America to give greater authenticity to their statement. Local peculiarities have been eradicated, and the boundaries between single states are blurred. It is striking that they make these statements in the first part of their multivolume fiction, which indicates that this spatial sameness worsens down the years. In fact, the juxtaposition of the final part of Updike's tetralogy and Ford's trilogy corroborates the worsening of spatial conditions. Both *Rabbit at Rest* and *The Lay of the Land* reveal that the increasingly negative visual perception of the landscape is echoed by the negative outcome of the plot. The protagonists contract a severe disease in the last volume of the tetralogy and the trilogy. So the main characters *and* their suburban environment are literally in a pathological condition. Like the disease eating itself through their bodies, the places where they live are fraught with destructive symptoms. Essentially, getting stuck in the suburban rut indicates morbidity.

All along, the protagonists cope differently with spatial change. While Frank is trying hard to keep his affirmative attitude, Rabbit feels increasingly doomed and lost. Like his surroundings, Frank changes and goes through a different period of life in every part of the trilogy. Frank's ironic and detached distance helps him to accept spatial change. By contrast, Rabbit maintains an immutable and unyielding idea of his surroundings. The space surrounding him changes down the years, but he doesn't, and this conflict constitutes part of his malaise.

4. Renegotiating Social Space

Space is the order of coexisting things, or the order of existence for things which are simultaneous.

G. W. Leibniz, *Initium Rerum Mathematicarum Metaphysica* (Jammer 80)

4.1. What Is Social Space?

Space and specifically the strand of social space must be considered a multidimensional construct. In my understanding of space, social space includes the fields of geography and sociology and therefore constitutes an interstitial form of space. I base my conception of social space on the research done by feminist geographer Doreen Massey. According to Massey, there exists a connection between geography and the social sciences, and her research encouraged “the social sciences to take on board the complexity of space and place within their formulations” (Callard 299). It was her intent to conceptualize space and place, as the formulation of a concept of space and place determines one’s perception of the social world (cf. Callard 299). In her essay “A Place Called Home?,” Massey elaborates on her idea of social space:

Social relations always have a spatial form and spatial content. They exist, necessarily, both *in* space (i.e. in a locational relation to other social phenomena) and *across* space. And it is the vast complexity of the interlocking and articulating nets of social relations which is social space. Given that conception of space, a ‘place’ is formed out of the particular set of social relations which interact at a particular location. (12)

Like Massey, sociologist Pierre Bourdieu conceives of social space as a space of relations.⁶⁶ According to Bourdieu, social space designates a group of people who share the same or a different social, economic, and cultural background. To his mind, social space must be considered an abstraction and serves as a metaphor to conceptualize society or segments of society in terms of space (cf. Löw 181).⁶⁷ In the following, I will apply a combination of Massey's and Bourdieu's train of thought. Social space implies the social relations interacting at the "particular location" of both protagonists' suburban environment. It must be considered a theoretical construct which makes possible to conceive of suburbia within the framework of space.

Finally, Paul Smethurst's *The Postmodern Chronotype*, in which he explains his stance on social space, has influenced the triadic structure of this thesis. Smethurst, who did exhaustive research on space and place—inter alia in the field of fiction—argues that "social space spans the dichotomy between 'public' and 'private' space evident in the modern functional division of space, and in cultural and aesthetic responses to this" (44). I adapt his categorization to my concept of space: instead of public space, I have investigated the portrayal of (sub)urban space. In this thesis, social space represents the interface between (sub)urban space and private, domestic space. By analogy, this chapter is sandwiched between the preceding chapter on landscape and the next

⁶⁶ Beyond that, Henri Lefebvre fuelled the spatial discourse with his monograph *The Production of Space*. According to Lefebvre, the social production of space consists of three different levels which mutually influence each other: 1. spatial practice which includes a "society's material organisation of space;" 2. representations of space referring to the concepts of space responsible for the production of space; 3. representational spaces which incorporate the mental maps determining our experience of physical space (cf. Smethurst 48-49).

⁶⁷ In her monograph *Raumsoziologie*, Löw resumes Bourdieu's at times inconsistent train of thought. I have summarized Löw's synopsis of Bourdieu's fundamental ideas: "Sozialer Raum ist für Bourdieu eine relationale (An)Ordnung von Menschen und Menschengruppen im permanenten Verteilungskampf, das heißt auch in permanenter Bewegung. Ein sozialer Raum ist also ein Raum der Beziehungen. Er bezeichnet eine (An)Ordnung von Personengruppen auf der Basis gleicher bzw. unterschiedlicher Verfügungsmöglichkeiten über ökonomisches, soziales und kulturelles Kapital, welches sich in einem ähnlichen oder verschiedenen Habitus zeigt. Der soziale Raum ist eine Abstraktion. Mit dem Begriff des sozialen Raums ist es nur metaphorisch möglich, die Gesellschaft oder gesellschaftliche Teilbereiche als Raum zu konzeptualisieren" (181).

chapter on the portrayal of the main characters' immediate surroundings. In my reading, social space encompasses the places where the protagonists meet and analyzes how they interact. In a broader sense, social space entails public places. In a more narrow sense, social space includes the home⁶⁸ and the neighborhood. It is my contention that social space and community life are mutually dependent.

4.2. Individualism

When negotiating the core of social space, the role of the individual in a community is significant. As stated before, Richard Ford culls from the intellectual heritage of Ralph Waldo Emerson. For this reason, it is necessary to reconsider nineteenth-century transcendentalism with its focus on individualism. Ford conscientiously inserts excerpts from Emerson's essay *Self-Reliance* in his trilogy. In his essay, Emerson defined the role of the individual and propagated self-reliance. He appealed to every American: "Accept the place the divine providence has found for you, the society of your contemporaries, the connection of events" (7). Toward the end of his essay, he concluded that "[d]iscontent is the want of self-reliance: it is infirmity of will" (34). Ford includes exactly these lines in *Independence Day*. When heading toward the Basketball Hall of Fame in Springfield, Massachusetts, with his son Paul, Bascombe's adaptation of Emerson reads:

I should, of course, seize this inert moment of arrival to introduce old Emerson, the optimistic fatalist, to the trip's agenda, haul *Self-Reliance* out of the back seat, where Phyllis had it last. In particular I might try out the astute "Discontent is the want of self-reliance; it is infirmity of will." Or else something on the order of accepting the place providence has found for you,

⁶⁸ In the context of social space, the home serves as a meeting place. In the next chapter on domestic space, the focus will be on the portrayal of single rooms and the furnishings.

the society of your contemporaries, the connection of events. Each seems to me immensely serviceable if, however, they aren't contradictory. (*ID* 264)

Like Ford, Updike was familiar with Emerson's train of thought and even though he does not explicitly quote him in the Rabbit novels, he refers to the same passage on accepting the place allotted by providence in his speech on "Emersonianism" (cf. *Odd Jobs* 158).

In his essay, Emerson argued that self-reliance strongly contrasted with an increasingly conformist society:

[...] Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members. Society is a joint-stock company, in which the members agree, for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater. The virtue in most request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion. [...]

Whoso would be a man, must be a nonconformist. (9-10)

Some passages later, he expressed his hope that the words "conformity and consistency" be abolished (cf. 18).⁶⁹ The word *conformity* is particularly striking in the context of a study on postwar suburban fiction. Scott Donaldson, whose monograph *The Suburban Myth* I have mentioned before, analyzes the criticism suburbia had to face at the end of the sixties. He argues that the most frequently heard objection to suburbia was "that standardized dwellings produce standardized people" (Donaldson 9).⁷⁰ The genuine

⁶⁹ What Emerson postulated in his essays, Walt Whitman did in his poetry. In this context, I would like to draw attention to a letter Whitman wrote to Emerson. In 1855, Emerson had sent a letter to Whitman speaking positively of *Leaves of Grass*. Whitman, who was only at the beginning of his career at the time, published Emerson's letter in the second edition of *Leaves of Grass* (cf. 731-741). Therein, Whitman defines individuality: "Of course, we shall have a national character, an identity. [...] Such character, strong, limber, just, open-mouthed, American-blooded, full of pride, full of ease, of passionate friendliness, is to stand compact upon that vast basis of the supremacy of Individuality [sic]—that new moral American continent without which, I see, the physical continent remained incomplete, may-be a carcass, a bloat [...]" (740-741). Besides, Whitman's lines on (in-)consistency in *Song of Myself* are famous:

"Do I contradict myself?
Very well then I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)" (88)

⁷⁰ Donaldson implies that Emerson would have accepted conformity "in minor matters, among which he would certainly have included similar house facades and uniform situation of plumbing facilities" (9-10).

problem behind this frustration with suburban standardization is that Americans have always shunned the idea of conformity. In 1960, sociologist Daniel Bell outlines the American stance on conformity as follows:

The curious fact, perhaps, is that no one in the United States defends conformity. Everyone is against it, and probably everyone always was. Thirty-five years ago, you could easily rattle any middle-class American by charging him with being a "Babbitt." Today you can do so by accusing him of conformity. (35)

This background must be taken into consideration when analyzing the concept of social space in Updike's and Ford's novels. At the end of the fifties, and thus coinciding with the publication of Bell's study, Updike's *Rabbit* distinguishes himself through his rampant nonconformism. Instead of accepting societal tasks and bonds, he takes to his heels. In the same manner, Ford's main character Bascombe displays nonconformist behavioral patterns at the beginning of the eighties. In line with Emerson's train of thought, both protagonists deviate from the normative ethos within an increasingly conformist society.

In the same vein, Emerson's essay *Friendship*, in which he further analyzed the human condition, is of relevance for Ford. In this essay, Emerson declares: "In strictness, the soul does not respect men as it respects itself. In strict science all persons underlie the same condition of an infinite remoteness" (*Emerson's Essays on Manners* 107). Ford refers to this essay in an interview in which he explains that occasionally his protagonist longs for a merely physical relationship "to narrow that space Emerson calls the infinite remoteness that separates people" (Majeski 120). More generally, I argue that this "infinite remoteness" between people informs the portrayal of social space in postwar suburban fiction. So the question arises as to what extent Emerson's ideas on the self-

reliance of the individual and the distance among individuals take a negative turn in Updike's and Ford's spatialized fictions.

In connection with individualism, French historian Alexis de Tocqueville must be mentioned, too. Between 1835 and 1840, De Tocqueville had published his influential work *Democracy in America*, in which he analyzed the advantages and disadvantages democracy had brought to the United States. Ford explicitly alludes to De Tocqueville. There is a De Tocqueville Academy in Haddam, which provides the setting for an encounter between Frank and Ann. His ex-wife will start working there in the admissions office (cf. *LoL* 41). In *Independence Day*, Sally puts De Tocqueville's masterpiece out for Frank to read. Yet Frank only grudgingly thumbs through it: "[...] *Democracy in America*, a book I defy anyone to read who is not on some form of life support [...]" (153). Updike does not directly mention De Tocqueville in his quartet, but according to Ethan Fishman, the Rabbit novels must be read as a fictional representation of *Democracy in America*:⁷¹

Obviously, Tocqueville has much to offer readers of Updike. His work illuminates the trilogy's themes, articulates its conflicts, even explains its sensationalist style. What, however, can Updike offer students of American politics? Updike, as poet, represents through the character of Rabbit the essence of democratic principles and experiences. His work is an exploration of the American soul. (Fishman 98)

What was De Tocqueville's achievement? Essentially, he had identified three core features of a working democracy: equality, materialism, and individualism (cf. Fishman 81). So, like Emerson, De Tocqueville discussed the role of the individual in society. In *Democracy in America*, he defined individualism as follows:

⁷¹ Fishman had published his article "What Makes Rabbit Run? Updike's Hero as Tocqueville's American Democrat" in 1985 and thus before the publication of *Rabbit at Rest*.

Individualism is a reflective and tranquil sentiment that disposes each citizen to cut himself off from the mass of his fellow men and withdraw into the circle of family and friends, so that, having created a little society for his own use, he gladly leaves the larger society to take care of itself. (585)

De Tocqueville envisioned the downside of individualism in democratic nations, i.e. social isolation and a retreat into the private sphere:

Each of them [an innumerable host of men], withdrawn into himself, is virtually a stranger to the fate of all the others. For him, his children and personal friends comprise the entire human race. As for the remainder of his fellow citizens, he lives alongside them but does not see them. He touches them but does not feel them. He exists only in himself and for himself, and if he still has a family, he no longer has a country. (818)⁷²

Disregarding the prominent role of the family, these lines could just as easily pass as a synopsis of the portrayal of suburban life in the novels discussed here.⁷³ In their 1996 study *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*⁷⁴, Bellah et al. investigate what has become of Alexis de Tocqueville's ideals in post-World War II American society:

What would probably perplex and disturb Tocqueville most today is the fact that the family is no longer an integral part of a larger moral ecology tying the individual to community, church, and nation. The family is the core of the private sphere, whose aim is not to link individuals to the public world but to

⁷² According to Bellah et al., De Tocqueville was aware of the fact that this manifestation of individualism was irreconcilable with conformism: "Tocqueville was quick to point out one of the central ambiguities in the new individualism—that it was strangely compatible with conformism" (147).

⁷³ Referring to De Tocqueville, architect Philip Bess holds that "the most popular and pervasive physical expression of contemporary individualist culture is the post-WWII American suburb, which manifests the ideal of a freestanding house in the natural landscape" (143).

⁷⁴ In *Democracy in America*, De Tocqueville explains his idea of *mores*. Therein he uses the notion *habits of the heart* which has become the source for the title of Bellah's eponymous study on civic commitment in America: "By *mores* I mean here what the Ancients meant by the term: I apply it not only to *mores* in the strict sense, what one might call habits of the heart, but also to the various notions that men possess, to the diverse opinions that are current among them, and to the whole range of ideas that shape habits of mind" (331).

avoid it as far as possible. [...] Thus the tendency of our individualism to dispose “each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of his fellows and withdraw into the circle of family and friends,” that so worried Tocqueville, indeed seems to be coming true. (111-112)

So the mere idea of individual retreat does not imply danger. If individualism leads, however, to disengaging from society or mistrust of society, it becomes dangerous, according to De Tocqueville (cf. Bellah et al. 112).

Essentially, both Emerson's and De Tocqueville's intellectual legacy represents a cornerstone of America's cultural heritage unequivocally affecting the reception of Updike's and Ford's fiction. Unlike Emerson, De Tocqueville outlined the downside of an individualism gone awry. In Updike's and Ford's novels, the main characters are increasingly subject to the negative corollary of their exaggerated individualism and egocentrism. At times, their egocentrism culminates in narcissism. Individualism and nonconformism are connoted positively as long as they do not thwart community life. Rabbit and Frank are both nonconformist in that they challenge the conventions of suburban middle class community life. Interestingly, it is not their withdrawal into the circle of family and friends which threatens and ultimately perverts the working of community life. Instead, it is their shunning family ties and social obligations, and their endeavor to be alone sometimes which foils community life. To understand both authors' portrayal of the state of social space, it is therefore essential to consider that the main characters expose an exaggerated form of individualism, which is at times pathologic. As individualism and community life are inextricably entwined, I briefly outline the development of suburban community life in the next subchapter.

4.3. The Changing Face of Community

First and foremost, *community* must be distinguished from *society*. At the end of the nineteenth century, the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies elaborated on the meaning of both notions. In his monograph *Community and Society*, he postulated that *Gemeinschaft* refers to “[a]ll intimate, private, and exclusive living together [...]” whereas *Gesellschaft* depicts “public life” (33). Fifty years after the first volume, he published an updated article including a passage on the “Capitalistic, Middle-Class, or Bourgeois Society (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*) [sic]” (258). Therein he argued that the basic values of a community might be thwarted due to a change in the way of living together. Tönnies claimed that if the cooperation between people were obstructed by individualism, a “‘capitalistic society’ ” (258) would emerge. It is exactly this power of capitalism on the community which is of prime importance in Updike’s and Ford’s fiction. Tönnies’ claim of one essential component of community being shared place is crucial: “The *Gemeinschaft* by blood, denoting unity of being, is developed and differentiated into *Gemeinschaft of locality* [emphasis added], which is based on a common habitat” (42). Here he underlines what I have referred to as interdependence between social space and community life.

Historically, the idea of community dates back to the seventeenth century when the Puritans crossed the Atlantic aboard the Winthrop Fleet. In 1630, on the *Arbella* and en route to Massachusetts, Governor John Winthrop delivered his lay sermon “A Model of Christian Charity” (cf. Winthrop n. pag.).⁷⁵ Therein, Winthrop presents the Puritan ideal of community: “We must delight in each other; make others’ conditions our own; rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work, as members of the same body”

⁷⁵ I have already referred to this speech when analyzing the role of place in *Rabbit Redux*.

(Winthrop n. pag.). A life according to religious and ethical rules forms the linchpin of the Puritan ideal, and Puritan colonies can be considered “the first of many efforts to create utopian communities in America” (Bellah et al. 29). This utopian understanding still suffuses the American conception of community (cf. 29).

In my methodology subchapter, I have explained that both the tetralogy and the trilogy must be considered socio-cultural documents. Both Updike and Ford closely observe social reality. Not only do they painstakingly outline the main characters’ spatial backdrop, but at least equally important is their portrayal of the characters’ moral landscape. Regarding his Bascombe novels, Ford explained in an interview: “It was part and parcel of each novel’s big-ness: that each one take on some salient bits of our time and culture and politics, and render them vivid and vividly considered, and perhaps try to say something fresh” (Holland n. pag.). Likewise, Updike made it his priority to record a verisimilar picture of American middle class life. On that score, V.S. Pritchett posits: “Updike has the extraordinary gift of making the paraphernalia of, say, the Sears, Roebuck catalogue sound like a chant from the Book of Psalms turned into vaudeville” (202). Even though their novels follow the conventions of realism, they are not mimetic. Updike and Ford do not draft some form of societal facsimile, but they insist that incorporating the zeitgeist of the American middle class constitutes part of their work. Their spatialized fictions chronicle the state of community life and social space from the postwar era to the turn of the millennium. The community portrayed in the discursive world of their privileged white middle class protagonists is clearly the opposite of the ideal of community life John Winthrop called on three centuries before.

As their novels are social documents of the respective time period, I give a brief survey of how community life was portrayed in recent analyses of American suburbs. Studies on the state of community life in the United States unambiguously paint a

harrowing picture and corroborate the fact that community life has been dwindling. In his 1985 monograph *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*, Kenneth T. Jackson notices a decreasing interest in the lives of one's neighbors (cf. 272):

The real shift, however, is the way in which our lives are now centered inside the house, rather than on the neighborhood or the community. With increased use of automobiles, the life of the sidewalk and the front yard has largely disappeared, and the social intercourse that used to be the main characteristic of urban life has vanished. Residential neighborhoods have become a mass of small, private islands; with the back yard functioning as a wholesome, family-oriented, and reclusive place. There are few places as desolate and lonely as a suburban street on a hot afternoon. (279-280)

In addition, the world of modern entertainment furthered the disintegration of community life (cf. 278-279). It is interesting to note that not Rabbit, but the TV set is constantly running in *Rabbit Redux*. What is more, the omnipresence of cars and television is apodictic in both authors' novels. The car becomes a second home for Rabbit, who even sleeps there after his failed trip South (cf. *RR* 36-37).⁷⁶ Like Updike's protagonist, Ford's main character spends much time in his car and on the road. Fitting the context, Frank drives a Suburban (cf. *LoL* 58). Furthermore, the invention of air-conditioning enabled people to stay inside their homes. Going for a walk became a thing of the past and henceforth domesticity dominated suburban life (cf. Jackson 281). That life was relegated inside the house is explicitly mentioned in *Rabbit at Rest* when Rabbit laments that porches are not used anymore (cf. 435).

In the year 2000, Robert D. Putnam analyzes the reasons for the declining social commitment characteristic of the postwar era in his study *Bowling Alone: The Collapse*

⁷⁶ Angstrom's father-in-law is a car dealer and every car Rabbit drives is described at length. That the car is getting more important throughout the tetralogy becomes obvious by Rabbit's choice of words: in *Rabbit, Run*, his vehicle is referred to as just a "car." Later, the car types are precisely mentioned: in *Rabbit Redux* it is a Ford Falcon, in *Rabbit Is Rich* a Toyota Corona, and in *Rabbit at Rest* a Toyota Celica.

and Revival of American Community. Community-based organizations began to disappear toward the end of the twentieth century (cf. 16). Active participation in their respective municipalities was predominantly a middle and upper class phenomenon (cf. 18). In essence, a “sense of civic malaise” was widespread on the threshold to the millennium (cf. 25):

For the first two-thirds of the twentieth century a powerful tide bore Americans into ever deeper engagement in the life of their communities, but a few decades ago—silently, without warning—that tide reversed and we were overtaken by a treacherous rip current. Without at first noticing, we have been pulled apart from one another and from our communities over the last third of the century. (27)

In the same manner, architects like Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk criticized the alienating character of the suburbs in their 1992 article “The Second Coming of the American Small Town.” They argue that “[t]he structure of the suburb tends to confine people to their houses and cars; it discourages strolling, walking, mingling with neighbors. The suburb is the last word in privatization, perhaps even its lethal consummation, and it spells the end of authentic civic life” (21). It is worth noting that the most recent study on the waning sense of community, Dick Meyer’s *Why We Hate Us: American Discontent in the New Millennium*, even uses Ford’s fiction paradigmatically to showcase the ailments of the time.⁷⁷

In the following, I will examine the picture which the Rabbit tetralogy and the Bascombe trilogy give of community life and social space. To do so, I will first dissect the construction of social space in public places, i.e. third places and heterotopian places.

⁷⁷ Moreover, Michael A. Peters explains that the principles of “the neoliberal Right” in the 1990s entailed, *inter alia*, social imbalances: “many communities had become split and endangered by the rise of racism, crime, unemployment, and social exclusion” (22). It would be beyond the scope of this study to present a detailed definition of the tenets of neoliberalism. Suffice it to mention that the rights of the individual were enforced (cf. 21).

Second, I will focus on the manifestation of social space in the neighborhood areas where Rabbit Angstrom and Frank Bascombe live. Third, this thesis scrutinizes whether the portrayal of national holidays in Updike's and Ford's fictions fosters or impedes community life.

4.4. Public Places: Third Places and Heterotopian Places

In the context of social space, public places play an eminently important role. In the novels to be analyzed, these public places fall into two categories: third places and heterotopian places.

According to Ray Oldenburg, third places are "informal gathering places" (xvii). He explains that the home must be considered as the "first place," and the workplace as the "second place" (cf. xvii). Oldenburg outlines the character of third places as follows:

Third places exist on neutral ground and serve to level their guests to a condition of social equality. Within these places, conversation is the primary activity and the major vehicle for the display and appreciation of human personality and individuality. Third places are taken for granted and most have a low profile. [...] Though a radically different kind of setting from the home, the third place is remarkably similar to a good home in the psychological comfort and support that it extends. (42)

The third places pertinent to this study are civic organizations, like the (country) club, and the bar.

In contrast to the busy public places of the bar and the country club, the cemetery rather provides an inert setting, which explains why it represents a different kind of place. Due to the different character of this place, I draw on the critical work by French philosopher Michel Foucault, who categorized cemeteries as heterotopian places or "other places" (Foucault 17). In his pathbreaking essay "Of Other Spaces," Foucault

coined and defined the term “heterotopia” (17).⁷⁸ He analyzes how the heterotopia of the cemetery has changed down the centuries. During the nineteenth century, cemeteries, which used to be associated with disease, were relocated to the periphery of the city then representing “the ‘other city’ ” (19). Foucault outlines why cemeteries play a key role in everyday life:

Heterotopias are most often linked to slices of time—which is to say that they open onto what might be called, for the sake of symmetry, heterochronisms.^{21[sic]} The heterotopia begins to function fully when people find themselves in a sort of absolute break with their traditional time; one can see that the cemetery is indeed a highly heterotopian place since the cemetery begins with this strange heterochronism, that, for the individual, is the loss of life, and with this quasi-eternity in which he incessantly dissolves and fades away. (20)

In Updike’s and Ford’s novels, both protagonists lose a child which is why they meet at the cemetery. I will examine if the cemetery as a place of otherness is conducive to or detrimental to further the social connectedness between the main personae.

4.4.1. The Club

In *Democracy in America*, De Tocqueville observed the propensity of Americans to join associations: “Americans of all ages, all conditions, and all minds are constantly joining together in groups” (595). He also underlined their penchant to found uncommon associations. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the first country clubs were established and they came to be the social hub of suburban life. A characteristic feature of these clubs was that “they openly practiced class, ethnic, and racial exclusion”

⁷⁸ Foucault pleads for describing heterotopian places within a field he suggests calling heterotopology intending to avoid the word *science*. This field “would have as its object, in a given society, the study, analysis, description, and ‘reading’ [...] of these different spaces, of these other places, as a sort of simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live” (17).

(Jackson 98). In some municipalities, club membership was necessary to settle down in a suburban area. Golf was the favorite sport in a country club and the most popular leisure time activity among the aristocracy (cf. 98-99). Putnam outlines that social associations can be categorized as “community based, church based, and work based” (*Bowling Alone* 49). In the novels discussed here, there are exclusively community-based organizations. Sociologist Bennett Berger explains in this regard: “Clubs, associations, and organizations allegedly exist for almost every conceivable hobby, interest, or preoccupation” (Nicolaidis and Wiese 313). The clubs in Updike’s and Ford’s novels correspond exactly to this criterion. How else could the existence of the *Divorced Men’s Club* in Ford’s *The Sportswriter* be justified?

4.4.1.1. The Flying Eagle

Rabbit Is Rich—and his success is the admission ticket into *The Flying Eagle Tee and Racquet Club*. Beyond that, Rabbit also becomes a member of the Rotary Club. I will focus on the *Flying Eagle* club, as it represents the main suburban venue. In this context, I would like to draw attention to the fact that the eagle is of course *the* symbol of America, constituting the core of the Great Seal of the United States. The club thus represents what has become an all-American tradition. It is not only a meeting place to do sports, like golf and tennis. In addition, the members simply enjoy more mundane leisure time activities, like sunbathing. Essentially, golf is the favorite leisure time activity in Updike’s tetralogy. Two decades earlier, in *Rabbit, Run*, Eccles and Rabbit also played golf. In *Rabbit Is Rich*, Rabbit plays in a foursome with his exclusively male clique, consisting of Buddy Ingelfinger, his archrival Ronnie Harrison, and Webb Murkett.

The club provides the setting for social encounters and it is a key element of middle class status. Rabbit’s father-in-law Fred Springer had long striven for

membership in the *Brewer Country Club* south of Brewer, but had been persistently denied acceptance. Only doctors and Jewish people were entitled to become members. Just as in other works of American fiction, Updike exploits the stereotype of the “money-obsessed” Jew who is only interested in social ascent (cf. Harap 9, 438). Likewise, the walled-off *Tulpehocken Club* ten miles north of Brewer only admitted members of the upper class. Owners of mills and their legal advisers constituted the small circle of elected members. Rabbit does not fail to underline that the lower class, including the peasantry, could spend their leisure time on “several nine-hole public courses tucked around in the farmland” (*RiR* 53).

In contrast to his father, Rabbit has climbed the social ladder and seeks access to *The Flying Eagle Tee and Racquet Club*, which differs both geographically as well as socially from more traditional clubs and their kudos. First of all, it is located on Mt. Pemaquid, which is the exact opposite of Mt. Judge. The portrayal of Mt. Pemaquid is redolent of the history of the American landscape, which initially was perceived as wilderness. Moreover, the Indian name alludes to the Native American population. Mt. Pemaquid “remained if not quite a wilderness a strange and forbidding place, where resort hotels failed and burned down and only hikers and lovers and escaping criminals ventured” (53). This area is virtually *terra deserta*, an uninviting environment where Rabbit enjoys spending his free time amongst his friends. Apart from its unappealing character, the country club differs from old-established clubs in that it aims at unpretentious arrivistes. Rabbit is a parvenu, who now seeks to consolidate and develop his new position:

But there was a class of the young middle-aged that had arisen in the retail businesses and service industries and software end of the new technology and that did not expect liveried barmen and secluded cardrooms, that did not

mind the pre-fab clubhouse and sweep-it-yourself tennis courts of the Flying Eagle; to them the polyester wall-to-wall carpeting of the locker rooms seemed a luxury, and a Coke machine in a cement corridor a friendly sight.
(53)

Henceforth, this less luxurious club will constitute the fulcrum of Rabbit's social life. On returning from a holiday in the Poconos, the first thing Rabbit wants to do is go to the *Flying Eagle* "and see if the gang has missed him" (143). For some time, the club offers the social space he has long missed in his life. Both in *Rabbit, Run* and *Rabbit Redux*, he had lacked this social entanglement.

At the club, the Angstroms regularly meet the Harrisons, the Murketts, and Buddy Inglefinger with his various girlfriends (eventually, Buddy will be dropped). In essence, the club serves social goals, and the coterie of "friends" is united by their pride at being in this club. They all soon start to exhibit class conceit as they disrespect "the moronic Fosnachts" (256). A decade earlier, Rabbit, who had not yet garnered his riches, did not flinch from befriending the Fosnachts and even had an affair with Peggy Fosnacht. Back then, he was lower middle class himself and did not object to her social standing. Due to his social ascent, he has become vain and condescending. During a meeting at the Murketts' house, Rabbit is relieved after the Fosnachts have left: "He feels melancholy and mellow, now that the invasion from the pathetic world beyond the Flying Eagle has been repelled" (270). Rabbit no longer belongs to this world, which he considers pathetic. Hence, he would like to forget that he had ever been friends with the Fosnachts.

Despite their weekly meetings and pretended friendship, the male members of the club enjoy holding cockfights. Since their youth, Rabbit and Ronnie Harrison have been archrivals in sports. To make matters worse, their mutual dislike is projected onto their sex life. During their trip to the Caribbean, where they practice some kind of chaotic

wife-swapping, it is Ronnie who gets to spend a night with Cindy Murkett and not Rabbit who has a crush on her. Regular meetings at the club underpin their continuing rivalry, as Ronnie does his utmost to provoke Rabbit. In the same vein, competition influences the relationship between Rabbit and Webb Murkett. Angstrom is jealous of Webb and begrudges him his beautiful wife. When invited to the Murketts' house, Rabbit infringes on their privacy, as he enters their bedroom. He cannot refrain from opening the drawer of their bedside table where he finds intimate Polaroid pictures. Without the slightest scruple, he intrudes upon the Murketts' private space and transgresses the fundamentals of decent behavior, because he is interested in their love life. This all culminates in spouse swapping during their trip to the Caribbean in the course of which Rabbit ends up with Thelma Harrison, who initiates him to anal intercourse. Updike's novels and short stories have often challenged (and still challenge) the putative prudery of the American middle class. His inexorable sexual realism does not leave out any detail of the protagonists' erotic adventures. From a socio-spatial perspective, it is worth noting that the main characters have to go to the Caribbean to abandon themselves to sexual excess and to live out their hedonism. A distant place seemingly absolves the three couples from responsibility for committing adultery. The prudish suburban society they leave behind for some time does not offer the appropriate setting for extramarital affairs. Contrary to expectations, Rabbit and Thelma continue their affair once they are back in their suburban microcosm with all its constraints. However, they have to meet secretly and often, Thelma "opened the garage for him and closed the door electronically from within the kitchen, to hide the evidence" (*RatR* 174). Double moral standards dominate Updike's tetralogy and illegitimate affairs must be concealed. The portrayal of these couples' behavior in the club and in private allows Updike to portray declining

moral values.⁷⁹ Thus, his Rabbit novels catch and hyperbolically distort the changing zeitgeist.

On the whole, club membership constitutes an essential feature of community life. In *Rabbit Is Rich*, regular encounters are gradually superseded by debauched behavior, as Updike wanted to trace sexual liberation. Ultimately, these couples' moral transgressions impinge on their pseudo-friendship. A decade later, in *Rabbit at Rest*, Rabbit spends most of his time in Florida. For this reason, the *Flying Eagle* plays a subordinate role and Rabbit deplors that playing golf is "no fun with the old gang gone" (*RatR* 360). Yet the old gang does not get as rich as Rabbit and they cannot afford an apartment in Florida. Instead, they remain middle class and are excluded from the amenities of an upper middle class existence. Finally, Rabbit's original circle of friends slowly dissolves and the former club mates only meet haphazardly at Thelma Murkett's funeral. The club no longer fulfills the requirements of a third place. Communication has been superseded by estrangement. In the end, the annihilation of their community of friends underscores the deterioration of social bonds.

4.4.1.2. Social Life in the Bascombe Trilogy

The core feature of a third place—communication—undergoes a serious change in the trilogy. Whereas club membership involves communication but mainly implies competition in Updike's tetralogy, it is of a completely different nature in Ford's *The Sportswriter*. Due to modified social circumstances, the sports club has served its time.

The increasing dissolution of traditional family structures brings in its wake a new social

⁷⁹ I would like to briefly discuss the author's personal stance on the role of sex, which he elaborated on in an interview: "About sex in general, by all means let's have it in fiction, as detailed as needs be, but real, real in its social and psychological connections. Let's take coitus out of the closet and off the altar and put it on the continuum of human behavior. [...] In the microcosm of the individual consciousness, sexual events are huge but not all eclipsing; let's try to give them their size" (Samuels 34-35). Similarly, he explains in *More Matter* that in 1969 the middle class started to welcome promiscuousness (cf. 818).

outcast: the divorced man. As birds of a feather flock together, Ford creates an uncommon forum for this group: the *Divorced Men's Club*. To make matters worse, the club consists of only five men (cf. *SW* 75). Ford satirizes the tendency to create associations with awkward names and, at the same time, he records the declining involvement of its members. Sociologist Robert Putnam, whom I have mentioned before, illustrates in a study that “only mailing list membership has continued to expand, with the creation of an entirely new species of ‘tertiary’ association whose members never actually meet” (*Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival* 63). Essentially, “active involvement in face-to-face organizations has plummeted [...]” (63). In *The Sportswriter*, this very lack of commitment is foregrounded. Ford only mentions clubs for male members whereas clubs for women are completely missing in his Bascombe novels.

In the first part of the trilogy, Frank's psyche is scarred following the death of his son and his divorce. He is going through what he calls “dreaminess,” a “state of suspended recognition, and a response to too much useless and complicated factuality” (*SW* 39). This psychological aberration vindicates the restrictedness of his interpersonal relationships. Frank rejects close friendships and abhors getting deeply involved with women after his divorce. By his count, he sleeps with eighteen women and professes his (nonexistent) feelings for them without considering the consequences of his verbal concessions. He does not care about his words and enjoys the moments of his sexual encounters without making any commitments (cf. 124-125).

It might be expected that regular meetings with other suburbanites are conducive to creating social connectedness. Yet Frank's joining the *Divorced Men's Club* is not spurred by his wish to find real friends. The members do not know each other well and have difficulty communicating unless they drink alcohol (cf. 76). What unites them is the fact that they are engulfed by their common “lost-ness” (77). Mentally unstable, Frank

becomes infatuated with catalogs, which seemingly satisfy his needs after losing his son: “we were the kind of people for whom catalog-buying was better than going out into the world [...] or even going out into the shady business streets of Haddam to find what we needed” (191). Frank retreats into a catalog world where glossy prints of self-contented Americans replace sound family structures providing comfort and predictability. He drifts into a parallel universe and his excessive purchasing behavior prevents him from introspection and from facing his inner void. The arrival of the UPS delivery service satisfies him. Fitting the spatial context, I contend that Frank’s compulsive consumerism is tantamount to “dis-placement” behavior. In behaviorism, a person who cannot decide between two instincts switches to a third. This reaction bears no relation to the actual situation. Regarding *The Sportswriter*, this means that Frank orders from catalogs instead of accepting the death of his son or dealing with his emotional lack. His shopping spree is a compensation for the impairment of family life, and his growing solipsism must be interpreted as narcissistic personality disorder (NPD). This is what Stanley Goff calls one of the widespread features of suburban existence. In his 2007 essay “Middle Class Angst: the Politics of Lemmings: Part I,” Goff lists the symptoms of this common suburban disease, of which I will only quote a few:

General guidelines for NPD are (1) grandiose sense of self-importance [...] (4) obsessive need for attention and admiration [...] (6) instrumental attitude toward human relations (using others, or taking advantage of them), (7) low index of felt-empathy (feigned empathy is in the repertoire of manipulation), (8) feels excessive envy and suspects envy of others for him/herself, and (9) displays of arrogance... there are a few others. Psychiatry says that any five of these suggests NPD. [...]

Another aspect of NPD, that is also intrinsic to American Suburbia's worldview, is a hair-trigger perception of victimization. (n. pag.)⁸⁰

Frank certainly exhibits more than one of these symptoms. His severe egocentrism and "instrumental attitude toward human relations" are especially traceable in his behavior toward women and club mates. Frank cannot show compassion; he has no compunction hurting other people's feelings and is only bent on his own advantage. Basically, he is emotionally deprived, and his distanced attitude partly stems from his suburban life. Bascombe's disillusioned stance discloses a deep-rooted problem of suburbia. In "The Buddha of Suburbia," an interview for the online forum *nerve*, Ford argues that in contemporary America "we're mostly looking out for ourselves and pretending we are looking out for someone else. In other words, we're narcissistic" (Rubin n. pag.). Ford claims that Frank knows exactly that narcissism constitutes one of the dangers of interpersonal relationships (cf. Rubin n. pag.). In almost the same manner, Rabbit's son Nelson diagnoses his father as "narcissistically impaired" in *Rabbit Remembered* (cf. 248). He adds that what annoys him "is seeing that his father had been trying as far as his narcissism allowed to step out of his selfish head and help his son, trying to shelter him from one of those disasters that most decisions entail" (253). Nelson admits that his father at least tried to help him despite his self-centeredness and excessive individualism. So Updike and Ford both denounce the increasing narcissistic egocentrism, which has become endemic of suburban community life.

The "low index of felt-empathy," which is typical of NPD according to Goff, becomes evident when Walter Lockett, one of the members of the *Divorced Men's Club*,

⁸⁰ Goff's sinister diagnosis of suburban life is in line with Christopher Lasch's monograph *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*, which was published in 1991. Lasch declares that narcissists are usually afflicted with "a feeling of inauthenticity and inner emptiness." The social circumstances also imply that people are willing to move frequently if necessary (cf. 239). This attitude certainly accounts for the omnipresence of realty agencies in the United States.

enters Frank's life. Bascombe's excessive egocentrism affects his relationship with Walter. Whereas Frank has fully internalized the unwritten rule of club membership, which is to always avoid the disclosure of personal problems, Walter transgresses this rule. When Frank agrees to have a drink with him, Walter confesses what he considers a moral slip-up. He chooses Frank to be his confidant and tells him about his homosexual one-night stand, which keeps haunting him (cf. *SW* 89-90). Frank does not like his role as familiar friend, because friendship does not exist in his post-divorce life where "[a]cquaintanceship usually suffices [...]" (211). However, Walter considers Frank his only true friend. Discontent with his own life, Walter decides to commit suicide and leaves a suicide note for Frank. Due to his reclusive stance, Bascombe cannot understand why his clubmate has killed himself. Frank has adapted his concept of happiness to the laws of consumerism. In his way of seeing the world, Walter could also have perused catalogs while awaiting the arrival of the UPS truck. For him, the frantic shopping frenzy seems to be a panacea for emotional deficiencies. In essence, unfettered market forces lead to the increasing brutalization of society. From a socio-spatial perspective, the portrayal of consumerism conveyed in this novel negatively impacts both the landscape and social relations. Accordingly, Frank epitomizes the narcissistic suburbanite, who feels "dis-placed" and who deliberately "dis-places" sorrowful feelings. The *Divorced Men's Club* underscores this idea of growing isolation, which is indicative of the insidious annihilation of the suburban myth with its ideal-world-image.

In *Independence Day*, Frank is again an active member of a club, this time of the *Red Man Club*, an anglers' resort. Frank's recreational activity is redolent of Robert Putnam's influential study *Bowling Alone*, as he does not enjoy bowling but "fishing alone" (110) three times a week. Once more, Frank eschews the presence of others and secludes himself from society. By degrees, alienation supersedes the high ideals of mutual

support and civic engagement. On that score, Frank explains to Carter Knott, one of his former acquaintances of the *Divorced Men's Club*, whom he meets again in *Independence Day*:

It is our unspoken rule never to exchange dinner invitations or to meet for drinks or lunch, since neither of us would have the least interest in what the other was up to and would both get bored and depressed and end up ruining our relationship. And yet in the way known best to suburbanites, he is my *compañero*. (443)

Their give-and-take does not exceed the ninety-second time limit for small talk.⁸¹ In sociolinguistics, these empty verbal exchanges constitute the phatic function of language.⁸² Linguist and social scientist Philip Riley explains in this respect:

Phatic communion can be defined as communication which is interactive but which is not intended to transfer information, either by seeking or conveying it. Instead, phatic communion has a social function, which is to establish or maintain contact, to show that the communicative channel is open, that it is functioning well and that the speaker is willing to use it. (126)

Ludmila Urbanová has analyzed the role of phatic communion in fiction and holds that it furthers “detachment” (36).⁸³ Talking without saying much and meeting without making friends—Ford continues to offer a sinister outlook on community life in *Independence Day*.

⁸¹ When talking to Carter Knott, Frank finishes their give-and-take as follows: “Carter’s and my ninety seconds are up” (*ID* 446).

⁸² Roman Jakobson introduced the expression *phatic function*, but the term *phatic communion* goes back to Bronislaw Malinowski (cf. Riley 125).

⁸³ Urbanová argues: “Phatic communion in my interpretation is defined as ‘a ritualistic conversational behaviour’ which ‘releases the tension at the beginning and at the end of the encounter and bridges the social gap’ (Urbanová 2002:90). The role of the phatic communion has been analysed mainly with regard to **the degree of authenticity** [author’s emphasis] (i.e. verisimilitude) in fictional discourse.

In fictional discourse, however, the phatic communion can be frequently utilized by the author rather as a means of **defamiliarization** [author’s emphasis] to achieve such intricacies of meaning as irony, mockery, detachment, humour etc.” (36).

This social disconnectedness is equally evident in *The Lay of the Land* where Frank provides moral support for people who have problems but no friends to talk to. In their distress, these isolated suburbanites might call up a crisis line and a “tolerant and feeling human not of their acquaintance” would visit them shortly after the call (cf. *LoL* 132). Frank is working there as a “Sponsor.” His voluntary activity feigns social commitment, but he openly admits that “[...] Sponsoring is not about connectedness anyway” (140). “Sponsees” have a one-hour time limit to talk about their woes or else the conversation might lose its impartial character (cf. 135). The conditions of being a “Sponsor” thwart any form of social commitment.⁸⁴ Frank’s portrayal of the lack of interpersonal relationships—his lay of the land at the beginning of the new millennium—is alarming. Meeting in a club and committing oneself to the common good are no longer of a social character. By contrast, individualism has been prioritized.

4.4.2. The Bar

4.4.2.1. *Rabbit Redux*: Segregated Local Venues

Fundamentally, the bar as a third place promotes conversation. In *Rabbit Redux*, which is set in 1969 and in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement, the conversation-making part seemingly works as long as the races do not mingle.

After work, Rabbit and his father usually have a “before-bus drink” (151) at the Phoenix Bar in Brewer. At this local bar they both watch the landing of Apollo 11 on July 20, 1969. Usually, when they meet there, father and son talk about private issues and about their wives and their woes. Earl must take care of his sick wife whose “talk is

⁸⁴ Recent analyses trace the rapid decline of community life. Dick Meyer quotes a survey stating that in 2004 the number of Americans having no or just one confidant had doubled since the middle of the eighties. He therefore concludes, alluding to Putnam, that “[i]t’s not just bowling alone, it’s living alone” (25-26).

getting wild” (5) whereas Harry’s wife Janice is hardly ever at home. Earl and his son mutually support each other, and Rabbit tries to give his father comfort (cf. 5-7). Their after-work ritual endows them with power and allows them to better tackle their domestic situation. Occasionally, Rabbit meets Stavros there; the special irony is that Janice has an affair with him and has even moved into Stavros’ apartment. Fundamentally, Rabbit and his father meet in this bar and, if we take the name of the bar literally, their encounters enable them to rise like phoenixes from the ashes and prepare them to endure their daily lives better. Here, the bar serves as an appropriate third place and family ties are doing their bit to promote social relations.

Yet meeting family members is different from getting together with acquaintances of a different skin color, especially at the end of the 1960s. With race chasm dominating the plot of *Rabbit Redux*, Updike also includes *Jimbo’s Friendly Lounge*—an African American bar. Rabbit’s colleague at work, Buchanan, had invited him to this bar where Rabbit is introduced to Babe and his later housemate Skeeter. Upon entering this place, Rabbit feels exposed and threatened and he “hangs like a balloon waiting for a dart [...]” (98). He is intimidated by the immediate proximity of African Americans he usually derides. Initially, he does not feel at ease there, which is why this place is anything but a *friendly lounge* in his perception. He hates Babe constantly playing with the hairs on his hand (cf. 110). The moment when Jill, the white under age runaway, enters the bar, “he feels more in charge” (108) even though they are still outnumbered by African Americans. Rabbit, who has never held back his racist stance, virtually beards the lion in his den. He considers himself “among panthers” (101) and feels surrounded by dangerous black animals waiting to devour him any second. After smoking a joint with Skeeter and Babe, Rabbit relaxes a bit and can bear the situation better. Yet for their communication to succeed, he constantly takes a defensive position and bravely suffers

the side blows bestowed on him by the colored community. Being at this place is a strenuous experience for Rabbit. He is aware that he is the outsider who has to put back if he wants to make their meeting a success. The drugs certainly contribute to the positive outcome of the evening. In essence, the encounter at the bar evinces that biracial encounters are difficult and require restraint from both sides. Even though this meeting is a strenuous experience for Rabbit, *Jimbo's Friendly Lounge* nevertheless provides a communicative environment. Communication does not completely fail, but it is inhibited. In *Rabbit Is Rich* and *Rabbit at Rest*, the bar recedes into the background and is superseded by the country club.

4.4.2.2. Ford's Trilogy: The Lost Spirit of Johnny Appleseed

In Ford's trilogy, the bar figures more prominently. In particular, the author traces the fate of two bars which both undergo a complete change down the years. Although *prima facie*, the bar seems to feature the core elements of a third place, it has long begun to forfeit its socializing power. In *The Sportswriter*, after divorcing Ann, Frank enjoys his periodical meetings with the other members of the *Divorced Men's Club* at the *August Inn*. When reminiscing about this place almost two decades later, he regretfully admits that he had his "fullest sensation of belonging in Haddam on those nights, circa 1983" (*LoL* 251). Despite his difficult personal situation, he had experienced a sense "of belonging" there. Yet Frank's conception "of belonging" had always excluded close social ties, and he used to be satisfied with superficial encounters doing small talk. In *The Lay of the Land*, this venue has been turned into *The Johnny Appleseed Bar*. It was named after John Chapman, a hero of American folklore, who travelled the country at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This icon of American folklore was a man who like no other epitomized the core of community. Howard Means, who undertook to disclose

the myth about Appleseed in his monograph *Johnny Appleseed: The Man, the Myth, the American Story*, writes about John that he “was a genuine American hero who was all about love—of his fellow citizens, of all God’s creatures, of all creation” (241). This was all the more remarkable as the time when he lived was marked by the repercussions of the Civil War and the period after Reconstruction (cf. 240-241). It was the *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* which started to spread the myth of Johnny Appleseed thus turning him into a national hero (cf. 239). In the edition of November 1871, *Harper’s* journalist and Unitarian Minister W. D. Haley (1828-1890) had published his article “Johnny Appleseed: A Pioneer Hero,” in which he emphatically chronicled Chapman’s life.⁸⁵ The opening of Haley’s article is remarkable as it harked back to the spatial myth of the exploration of the West and certainly evoked a feeling of nostalgia in its readers in 1871. Haley stated: “The ‘far West’ is rapidly becoming only a traditional designation: railroads have destroyed the romance of frontier life, or have surrounded it with so many appliances of civilization that the pioneer character is rapidly becoming mythical” (830). Against this backdrop, Haley turned the figure of Chapman into “the emblem of this paradise lost [...]” (Means 242).

According to Haley, John Chapman, who was only later known as Johnny Appleseed, put all his effort into travelling down the Ohio River: “With two canoes lashed together he was transporting a load of apple seeds to the Western frontier, for the purpose of creating orchards on the farthest verge of white settlements” (Haley 830). Barefoot and sporting a tin vessel on his head⁸⁶ and a coffee sack on his emaciated body, he certainly offered a strange sight to everybody he met on his mission. His adamant will to plant apple trees in the most remote places earned him the reputation of

⁸⁵ According to Howard Means, Haley’s account contains some mistakes, one of which is Haley’s calling Chapman *Jonathan* instead of *John* (cf. Means 244).

⁸⁶ To protect himself against the sun, the tin vessel was later replaced by “a hat of pasteboard with an immense peak in front [...]” (832).

a pioneer. Ford's naming the bar after this hero of American folklore is significant in two respects: first, when planting his seeds in the most distant places, Chapman could still face cleared landscape and virgin soil. His chronicler Haley explained on that score:

[...] Johnny would shoulder his bag of apple seeds, and with bare feet penetrate to some remote spot that combined picturesqueness and fertility of soil [...]. The sites chosen by him are, many of them, well known, and are such as an artist or a poet would select—open places on the loamy lands that border the creeks—rich, secluded spots, hemmed in by giant trees, picturesque now, but fifty years ago, with their wild surroundings and the primal silence, they must have been tenfold more so. (831)

Despite the railroads, the landscape John was surrounded by contrasts so much with the commercialized landscape portrayed by Frank that the name of the bar evokes a feeling of nostalgia for a bygone time. Second, Chapman used to be an extremely pious and sociable man, who enjoyed reading out loud from his few books, among which the New Testament, to the families who had offered him shelter, mostly “uncultivated hearers” (834). He was eager to bond with the people he met, to socialize with them and spend an evening together around the open fire. For this reason, he must also be considered a pioneer regarding the creation of social space. Hence the name of the bar, which insinuates a resumption of the positive social spirit spread by Chapman, is absolutely misleading. Almost two hundred years after he planted his apple seeds, not much has been left of Chapman's open-mindedness and his pioneer spirit. In *The Lay of the Land*, *The Johnny Appleseed Bar* reveals itself to be completely at antipodes with the community building character associated with this iconic legend. Ford's naming the bar after this positive figure of American folklore must be considered dramatic irony, as the bar no longer represents the values and convictions propagated by Chapman. Instead, *The Johnny Appleseed Bar* will provide the setting for a violent fistfight between Frank

and Bob Butts. Even though socializing had never been Bascombe's first intention and even though the mere presence of others was usually enough for him, he vehemently shuns open antagonism and aggressive behavior: "It was also better when this was a homey town and a bar I used to dream sweet dreams in. Both also gone. Kaput" (*LoL* 261). So Bascombe experiences some form of nostalgia for the past of this place, when it was still called the *August Inn*. This is particularly noteworthy, as Frank usually has a tendency to ignore the past. After all, he deplores the fact that this bar no longer serves as a meeting ground for him and his divorced fellows in misery.

According to Ray Oldenburg, alongside its conversational function, "the third place is often more homelike than home" (Oldenburg 39). In addition, third places are usually segregated by gender: "Homes are private settings; third places are public. Homes are mostly characterized by heterosocial relations; third places most often host people of the same sex" (39). This criterion applies to the *Manasquan*, the second most important venue in Haddam. Occasionally, after a sailing trip, Frank and his male clique were meeting there:

the Manasquan was the Divorced Men's special venue for demonstrating residual rudimentary social, communicative and empathy skills (we actually weren't very good at any of these things and not good at fishing, either), and we all fled to it the instant we stepped off our boat [...]. (*LoL* 483)

The *Manasquan* offered Frank a second home. He "felt right at home reading a newspaper or watching TV [...]" (*SW* 86), which is why the bar fully meets the requirements of a third place. Almost two decades later, when stranded in the area after his car window was broken and waiting for it to be fixed, Frank enters the bar again. In the meantime, this place has been renamed *Old Squatters*. Had it once been a meeting ground for middle-aged male loners, it has now become a place reserved for women and

serves as local venue for lesbian couples. Pursuing a bigoted machismo point of view, Frank portrays the bar as follows:

the atmospheric old Manasquan has become a watering hole for late-middle-passage dykes and possibly I might be happier elsewhere, but I don't have to leave if I don't want to. [...] I couldn't care less whose orientation's bending its big elbow beside mine. In fact, I feel a strong Darwinian rightness about what was once a hard-nuts old men's hidey-hole transitioning into a safe house for tolerant, wry, full-figured, thick-armed goddesses in deep mufti (one's wearing a Yankees cap, another a pair of bulgy housepainter's dungarees over a Vassar sweatshirt). My own daughter used to be one of their number, I could tell them—but possibly won't. (*LoL* 491)

Frank's unabashed attitude feigns acceptance. In fact, this scene is evocative of Rabbit's dogmatic pigeonholing his female neighbors in *Rabbit Is Rich*.⁸⁷ And Frank's male view must also be seen against the background of a heteronormative⁸⁸ society. His putatively liberal stance and his ironic reference to Darwin including the implied survival of the fittest reveal his conservative attitude. Notwithstanding his ostentatious open-mindedness, he can hardly conceal his uneasiness at being at this place. The only man, he has to suffer derogatory, scathing commentaries by the extremely self-assertive female guests. Only the bartender, whom Frank nicknames Termite as these letters are tattooed onto her neck, seems willing to talk to Frank. New incoming female guests give Frank an evil eye and exclude him from their community and their conversation. Although Frank literally is the odd man out, he still adheres to his fundamentally

⁸⁷ I will refer to this scene in more detail in the respective subchapter.

⁸⁸ William Leap defines *heteronormativity* in the following way: "By *heteronormativity*, I mean the principles of order and control that position heterosexuality as the cornerstone of the American sex / gender system and obligate the personal construction of sexuality and gender in terms of heterosexual norms. Heteronormativity assumes, for example, that there are two sexes and therefore two genders" (98).

affirmative stance, but he knows that his is a very idiosyncratic way of judging his situation:

It is a fine and fortunate feeling to be beached here—stranger and welcomed onlooker. I could've easily gotten mired into nowhere-no-time, with only the night's dark cave in front of me. But I'm not. I'm found, though I'm not sure anyone but me would see it like that. (*LoL* 504)

Frank is fully aware of his distorted perception. Neither is he a “welcomed onlooker” nor does he feel “fine and fortunate” being there. He sugarcoats their encounter wanting to maintain his conception of this place as a meeting ground filled with positive memories. The truth is that dislike and suspicion are in the air, which is why the *Old Squatters* eventually fails to serve as social space for a heterosocial encounter. Only the female bartender is constantly trying to socialize with him; she even submits him an immoral offer he declines. Eventually this third place, which used to be the epitome of male comradery some twenty years before, ends up letting Frank down.

Concomitant with the change of name, both bars where Frank used to experience some form of connectedness have forfeited the characteristics of a third place. They neither provide a homey atmosphere, nor does Frank meet sympathetic peers of the same sex. Instead he is beaten up by Bob Butts or surrounded by women who alienate him. For Frank, the idea of the bar as a third place furthering community life has become completely eroded.

4.4.3. The Cemetery in Updike's *Rabbit, Run* and Ford's Trilogy

The location of the cemetery assumes great importance in Updike's *Rabbit, Run* and Ford's fiction. In *Rabbit, Run*, “the cemetery is high on the mountains, between the town and the forest” (251-252). Hence, it conforms to the nineteenth-century heterotopian

ideal described by Foucault (cf. 19). The dead are located outside the confines of Mt. Judge, and the congregation of mourners has to drive there by car after meeting at the funeral parlor. Again, Updike's places thrive on contrast. Here, the idea of the relocated cemetery is enforced by the difference in altitude. And it is striking that Rabbit, who is usually surrounded by darkness, faces sunlight in a place where the dead are buried: "The cemetery is beautiful at four o'clock. Its nurtured green nap slopes down somewhat parallel to the rays of the sun" (251). Yet this allegedly peaceful place does not foster peaceful mourning. After attending the funeral service of Rabbit's and Janice's daughter Rebecca June, who drowned when her drunken mother was bathing her, the Angstrom/Springer family gathers around the grave to bury her. The cemetery is supposed to provide social space for the family members to mourn together. Yet Rabbit cannot endure their shared dolefulness. He feels guilty for his baby's death, but is adamantly trying to put the blame on his wife. Janice was alone at home and had drunk too much alcohol before she decided to bathe their daughter. At the same time, Rabbit was roaming the streets of Brewer and had spent the night in a hotel, which, in his distorted perception, fully exempts him from any responsibility toward his daughter's demise.⁸⁹ During the funeral, Rabbit feels as if he is in the center of everybody's attention. To his mind, the funeral congregation is blaming him for the tremendous suffering inflicted on the Angstrom/Springer family. The moment the coffin is lowered into the earth, Rabbit disrupts the silence hovering over the ceremony and says to Janice: "Don't look at *me* [...] I didn't kill her" (253). His outbreak of emotions makes him the focus of attention and elicits his remark: "You all keep acting as if *I* did it. I wasn't anywhere near. *She's* the one" (253). Rabbit had tried hard to be part of this

⁸⁹ When Janice had returned from hospital with the baby, she refused her husband's sexual advances. As a consequence, Rabbit went to Brewer hoping to meet Ruth. As Ruth was not home, he decided to spend the night in a hotel.

congregation of mourners; and he had tried to believe in the possibility that the community of his family and friends could alleviate his sorrow, but he was mistaken. After his emotional eruption, everybody, notably his mother, is aghast, and Rabbit feels blinded by “[a] suffocating sense of injustice [...]” (253). As the title of the novel suggests, he again takes to his heels and runs, turning his back on a grieving community who has, in his way of seeing the world, let him down. Thus, the idea of the cemetery as a social space providing comfort and mutual support is subverted. Instead, Rabbit’s egotism prevails making him follow his instincts. At this very moment, he ranks his individual needs over his family and community life.

Like Rabbit, Frank has lost a child—his son Ralph died of Reye’s syndrome at the age of nine. In contrast to *Rabbit, Run*, the cemetery is located right behind Frank’s house on Hoving Road. Hence, in Ford’s trilogy the heterotopian place has been shifted back right into the center of the city. Mourning is supposed to take place in the midst of everyday life. In *The Sportswriter*, Frank and Ann, whom he only refers to as X, meet at 5 o’clock before dawn the day of Ralph’s birthday on Good Friday morning. Initially, Frank had hoped that this early hour would bestow on him and his ex-wife some moment of togetherness: “These pre-dawn meetings were my idea, and in the abstract they seem like a good way for two people like us to share a remaining intimacy” (9). However, Frank is incapable of really creating a moment of common mourning, and X does not do anything to maintain the sublime spirit of the place. Instead, she takes out her sandwich box and nonchalantly starts to peel an egg. Even worse, Frank realizes that they “actually have little to say” (10). They exchange some small talk, discuss trivialities, and when they become aware of the silence threatening their encounter, Frank suggests reading a poem out loud. The year before, he had brought along “To An Athlete Dying Young” by A.E. Housman. Not having reread it before and only remembering its contents from his

times in college, Frank's choice of poetry had turned out to be a complete disaster. Similarly, this year's encounter gradually develops into a farce and desecrates what is left of a peaceful Good Friday atmosphere. When X has finally finished nibbling her egg, she simply throws it into the gravestones behind her. The sublime spirit of the place gains a layer of ludicrousness; it is in fact a bathetic moment. Then Frank begins to read out a poem by Theodore Roethke. Hardly has he finished the first line when he is interrupted by X informing him that she does not like the poem. Frank has chosen this poem against his better judgment. So his intention to solemnly celebrate Ralph's birthday with the mother of his deceased son fails two years in a row. During their intimate meeting to commemorate their son, they completely fail to create and maintain a sense of community. Neither in Updike's novel nor in Ford's trilogy does the cemetery as a heterotopian place, which usually provides the background for mourners to meet and share their grief, support community life. The cemetery as a heterotopian place does not unite the mourners in order to assuage their grief. According to Foucault, a heterotopian place only functions if people are aware of the different character of such a place and are willing to "find themselves in a sort of absolute break with their traditional time [...]" (Foucault 20). However, the characters in the analyzed novels do not respect this break. Their focus is not on handling the loss of a child, but has shifted to the private level of their strained partnership: Rabbit bears a grudge against Janice, and Frank is unable to maintain a communication with his ex-wife.

Unlike Rabbit, Frank also muses about where he himself could imagine his final resting place, and he changes his mind on that regard over the years. The option of himself being buried in Haddam cemetery increasingly loses its validity for Frank. In *Independence Day*, he even rigidly opposes the mere idea of finding eternal peace next to his son and behind his former dwelling:

since early this very morning, in a mood of transition and progress and to take command of final things, I decided (in bed with the atlas) on a burial plot as far from here as is not totally ridiculous. Cut Off, Louisiana, is my first choice; Esperance, New York, was too close. Someplace [...] where anyone who comes to visit will do so just because he or she means to [...]. (ID 439)

The names of the places where he considers being buried are telling and his reasoning undergirds his disentanglement from his hometown. His antipathy towards Haddam cemetery constantly grows, and in *The Lay of the Land* he refers to it as a place he intends “to avoid” despite his son’s being buried there (cf. 66). He gradually detaches himself from his origins and thus thwarts the forming of a sense of community. For him, it even becomes unimaginable to be united with his son after death. Frank exhibits a very selfish and increasingly egotistic behavior pattern. He makes his decision without asking his closest of kin. Not even after his death would he want his tombstone to provide a place to mourn for his family members. Instead, he plans to retreat to a far away spot to prevent regular posthumous family gatherings at his grave.

Some years later, when suffering from cancer, Frank is of a different opinion concerning his last place of rest. He considers Ocean Vista Cemetery in Sea-Cliff as a possible place to be buried and muses about his interest in purchasing the cemetery:

For a time—two winters ago—I proposed buying the ground myself and turning it into a vernal park as a gesture of civic giving, while retaining development rights should the moment ever come. I even considered not deconsecrating it and having myself buried there—a kingdom of one. [...] In my case, I thought it would’ve saved my children the trouble of knowing what in the hell to do with “me” [...]. (LoL 657)

Frank’s feigned civic involvement would only satisfy his self-interested endeavor. However, the Dollars For Doers Council assumes “disguised dreams of empire” (657)

behind his presumptuous proposition and declines it, as his uncommon plans would jeopardize the interests of his community and rather subserve his egocentrism. In essence, Frank either wants to be buried far away or he wants to rest in peace alone on a spacious graveyard. Hence, even after his death he shuns community and cannot bear being surrounded by other souls, even if they are dead, too.

In Updike's and Ford's novels, the cemetery as a place of otherness serves as a symbol of alienation and isolation, and lays bare the increasing self-centeredness of the protagonists. It does not provide the setting for common grieving or mutual support. In Frank's case, it reveals that this conscious isolation even goes beyond the grave.

4.5. Neighborhood

Both authors trace the production of social space in residential areas. It can be noted that the neighborhoods are either multiethnic sections or, by contrast, exclusively white enclaves.

4.5.1. Racial Bias on Vista Crescent in *Rabbit Redux*

“Trouble with your line,” Rabbit tells him [Skeeter], “it’s pure self-pity. [...] You talk as if the whole purpose of this country since the start has been to frustrate Negroes. Hell, you’re just ten per cent. The fact is most people don’t give a damn *what* you do.”

(Rabbit Redux 204)

Superior “whites” and inferior “blacks” dominate the storyline of *Rabbit Redux*. Vista Crescent in Penn Villas represents a hotbed of dissension between African American and white suburbanites. In 1969, neighborhood seemingly fails to further interpersonal relations and does not seem to promote the peaceful coexistence of different races.

To understand why neighborhood does not further social space and a working community life, the socio-cultural conditions must be considered. In postwar suburbia, race strongly determined community life, as the suburbs promoted racial segregation. A mixed racial makeup of the neighborhood was detrimental to the value of real estate. As a consequence, predominantly white enclaves came into being (cf. Nicolaidis and Wiese 321). Regarding this matter, Rabbit tritely remarks that African Americans “can’t put their money into real estate like whites [...]” (*RRed* 100). In the forties and fifties, real estate agents, house builders and authorities united in their fight to keep the suburbs white with the effect of “a regime of land use control and racial exclusion deployed on an unprecedented scale” (Nicolaidis and Wiese 322). If these measures did not work, white people used force: “house bombings, arson, death threats, physical assaults, and mob demonstrations became an ugly commonplace in postwar suburbia” (322). In most cases, African Americans were the target of violent acts (cf. 322). The arson committed in *Rabbit Redux* is evocative of such behavior. Nevertheless, violence did not keep African Americans from moving to the suburbs. At the beginning of the 1960s, 2.5 million African Americans had come to live there, accounting for approximately 5 per cent of the population of suburbia. Outside Southern regions, African Americans had to fight to find a home, as had other minority groups. They were often ostracized and had to join communities where mainly minorities were accommodated. Segregation at both a private and public level was normal: “For whites and nonwhites alike, race became naturalized by the separate and often unequal spaces that they occupied” (322). Different ethnic communities settled in different areas.

In *Rabbit Redux*, Updike exploits this antagonism between neighbors and writes against the prevailing narrow-mindedness in mainly white suburban enclaves. In addition to the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War threw the United States into

turmoil. Another important aspect to be considered was the Hippie subculture. Within this macrocosm, Angstrom houses Jill, a white upper middle class runaway, and Skeeter, a black Vietnam veteran. He places his protagonist in a white enclave with Skeeter as the bad apple in the midst of a putatively beautiful orchard.⁹⁰ Jill and Skeeter become his surrogate family after the breakdown of his marriage, the death of his daughter Becky, and the loss of his job. *Ipsa facto*, Rabbit's house on 26 Vista Crescent symbolizes the United States as a nation. Rabbit is exposed to his unusual cohabitants and their devastating influence on himself and on his son Nelson. Moreover, the TV set broadcasts news about the moon landing right into Rabbit's living room. His house must be considered an epicenter where the different socio-cultural and historical threads coalesce. In 1978, Updike explained in an interview with Charlie Reilly why race relations were so important to him:

Those small cities—and not simply the ones in Pennsylvania but in many places in the country—are almost like self-contained ghettos. Surely they've enjoyed rather tame and uncomplicated race-relations. The relations tend to operate entirely to the benefit of the white power-elite, and the blacks do tend to be rather docile. (134)

Political correctness was unheard of at the end of the sixties which is why Updike's protagonist unabashedly uses the terms "Black(s)" and "Negro(es)."

In their suburban Vista Crescent microcosm, Rabbit and Skeeter exemplify the clash between the races. Updike's hyperbolic portrayal of interracial tensions shows the irreconcilability of African Americans and Whites within the same community and even

⁹⁰ According to Dilvo Ristoff in his study *Updike's America: The Presence of Contemporary American History in John Updike's Rabbit Trilogy*, Updike chooses Skeeter to incarnate "the black resistance against racial and social discrimination [...]" (93). I absolutely agree with Ristoff, who claims that "Skeeter's militant anti-establishment attitudes are also essentially a disbelief in the possibility of justice for blacks in a system that is eminently racist, and which, despite legal conquests by blacks, does not allow for the application of anti-segregationist laws" (94).

within the same house. Rabbit's adamant, bigoted racism was passed on to him by his father Earl Angstrom. Together, they serve as the mouthpiece of their generation. Their unrelenting, racist stance bears witness to the prejudice white Americans have toward people of a different skin color. Communicating with African Americans is difficult for Rabbit and "[t]alking to Negroes makes him feel itchy, up behind the eyeballs [...]" (*RRed* 88). Besides, the omnipresence of colored people on the bus is anathema to him (cf. 10).

Updike chooses this housing situation in order to expose and condemn suburban racism. Initially, Rabbit doggedly defends his racist stance. Like his neighbors in this narrow-minded enclave, Rabbit hates African Americans and openly voices his opinion. He is convinced that Skeeter is the embodiment of evil (cf. 181) and his aversion culminates in the statement that "[h]e is poison, he is murder, he is black" (185). By offering shelter to a colored person, Rabbit transgresses the unwritten law of how to be a decent neighbor. When he explains to his father Earl that he does not even know his neighbors, his father warns him: "That black boy shows his face outside, you'll get to know them [...]" (207). Similarly, Rabbit ignores his son's naive remark: "Tommy Frankhauser said we had a nigger living with us and said his father said it was ruining the neighborhood and we'd better watch out" (222). Skeeter's presence offends the neighborhood, and Rabbit is fully aware of this fact. He is intent on provoking his conservative neighbors and curious to deal with Skeeter's otherness and his excessive behavior. In his neighbors' opinion, providing shelter for a black person is fatal enough, but moral misdemeanor is even worse. Rabbit's *ménage à trois* with Jill and Skeeter is frowned upon by his fellow residents, and their promiscuity exacerbates interracial tensions. The tacit suburban *modus operandi* is to keep their enclave white and, at least apparently, morally irreproachable. When curious teenagers spy through the huge picture window of Angstrom's house, they tell their parents about it. All along, the

portrayal of space mirrors Rabbit's emotional state. After detecting a face in front of the window, he is unable to leave the house and to follow the intruder: "he feels that there is no space for him to step into, that the vista before him is a flat, stiff, cold photograph" (260). The repulsive force of the locality makes Rabbit feel like an outcast within his own community. At this moment, he incarnates the opposite of the American Adam. In his 1955 monograph *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century*, R.W.B. Lewis describes the prototypical American Adam:

The new habits to be engendered on the new American scene were suggested by the image of a radically new personality, the hero of the new adventure: an individual emancipated from history, happily bereft of ancestry, untouched and undefiled by the usual inheritances of family and race; an individual standing alone, self-reliant and self-propelling, ready to confront whatever awaited him with the aid of his own unique and inherent resources.

(5)

Unlike the American Adam, Rabbit is not his own master. He lacks power and stamina. In *Rabbit Redux*, he is neither "self-reliant" (here is Emerson again) nor "ready to confront whatever awaited him." On the contrary, he is lethargic and torpid in the face of his surroundings. His loss of initiative stems from the antagonistic character of his suburban environment. He does not fit in there, and his neighbors virtually live on a different planet. The conflation of spatial homogeneity and mental conformism predisposes this part of Penn Villas to disaster and mayhem. The growing need for the purifying effect of a catharsis is looming large, and it seems as if Rabbit's tainted place must be razed to the ground to become virtuous soil again. Eventually, the destruction of his house has an expurgatory effect on both Rabbit and his biased neighborhood.

Apart from the setting as such, the behavior patterns of the neighbors turn Penn Villas into an unattractive locality foiling social space. Even though they adamantly deny

it, Rabbit's fellow suburbanites strive for a monoracial neighborhood. Mahlon Showalter and Eddie Brumbach, the spokesmen of the white Vista Crescent community, are unpleasant characters. Showalter works in a computer company, Brumbach is a brawny blue-collar worker. Notwithstanding the fact that Brumbach and Skeeter are both Vietnam veterans, their shared war experience loses its validity when living side by side in a suburb. "This is a decent white neighborhood [...]" (*RRed* 250), Brumbach explains. The lewd behavior of Rabbit's housemates is grist to the community's conservative mills. Showalter pretends to prize decency above racism. Any time, they would "welcome a self-respecting black family [...]" (250-251). They put forward philanthropic reasons to expel Skeeter from their community of "reasonable good people" (251). Brumbach issues the ultimatum to expel Skeeter, as mixed-race coupling even within the domestic space of the house poisons their enclave. When Rabbit suggests that instead Jill leave, Brumbach remains irreconcilable. Showalter is adamant about the fact that "it's the circumstances of what's going on, not the color of anybody's skin" (252). Their exchange of arguments shows Updike's skill to debunk suburban racism.

The pseudo-liberalism of the neighborhood culminates in arson. Updike himself had experienced a similar scenario in his own childhood. In *More Matter: Essays and Criticism*, he states: "But it was in Berks County, as my parents reported to me, that a house occupied by a biracial couple—the black man had attended my high school—mysteriously went up in flames" (818). Drawing upon his memories, Updike has Rabbit's house go up in flames. Skeeter sees two white figures disappear before he manages to leave the inferno in which Jill dies (cf. *RRed* 290). Indeed, neighborhood as one essential component of community life and social space fails completely. Yet Updike does not explicitly make the white residents of this suburban enclave responsible for the crime. Without a doubt, arson in combination with a homicide is worse than the minor

delinquent acts which are primarily attributed to African Americans. Throughout *Rabbit Redux*, colored people are stigmatized and associated with delinquency: Skeeter is sued for possessing marijuana (cf. 188); a widow is robbed and raped and three young African Americans are assumed to be the delinquents (cf. 131). This is why Earl Angstrom states matter-of-factly that “they have to rob and kill, the ones that can’t be pimps and prizefighters” (142). He cuts to the chase of the matter and his words are a vitriolic attack on African Americans: “They’re the garbage of the world, Harry. American Negroes are the lowest of the low” (142).

Although it is obvious that the perpetrators of the arson live in the neighborhood, the burning down of Rabbit’s house is never prosecuted. Updike debunks the police’s lack of stamina when inquiring about the instigator(s) of this arson attack. Yet public authorities are above all intent on protecting the transgressors from punishment. Whereas crime in connection with African Americans usually makes the headline, the newspaper article the day after the fire reads “Arson Suspected in Penn Villas Blaze” (295). The bigotry dominating this enclave allows the culprits to burn down the house without taking any responsibility. Here, Updike unmasks the double standards prevailing in the suburbs and displays the mendacity and hypocrisy of white middle class suburbanites.

In addition to the racial bias of its inhabitants, Vista Crescent is both visually and olfactorily repellent. From a visual perspective, all the houses look alike, and, after the arson, the rubble of Rabbit’s house contrasts perfectly with his neighbors’ immaculate cookie-cutter houses: “black coal in a row of candies” (340). From an olfactory perspective, “the earth of Penn Villas has a sweetish stink” (263). Thus Updike creates a suburban environment with synesthetic properties to emphasize the prominence of the background.

Throughout *Rabbit Redux*, the “Gemeinschaft of locality” (Tönnies 42) entails the growing alienation of its inhabitants instead of providing mutual municipal support. Brought to his knees, Rabbit is temporarily compelled to succumb to the suburban ethos, which stipulates conformist behavior. His lack of connectedness with his surroundings forces him to renounce his agency and culminates in his reverting back to a childlike state. He moves in with his parents again, stays in his old room, and takes to eating the food he loved when he was young (cf. *RRed* 327). Even worse, he wears “his high school athletic jacket” (340) when meeting Janice in front of the ruins of their former house. Essentially, *Rabbit Redux* foregrounds the collapse of multiracial coexistence and the erosion of Rabbit’s self-confidence.

4.5.2. Rabbit’s “White” Neighbors: A Cross Section of Society

The portrayal of neighborhood in the Rabbit novels mirrors the make-up of an increasingly multicultural and liberal society. Rabbit’s relationship to his neighbors is never marked by friendliness. Down the years, he has Methodist, homosexual, and Jewish neighbors. It seems as if Updike made his protagonist face a new challenging neighborhood every decade.

Since his childhood, Rabbit has experienced his neighborhood negatively. Growing up in a duplex house on Jackson Road in the forties and fifties, he was aware of the endless quarrelling between his parents and the cantankerous old Methodist couple next door. The piece of lawn between their houses caused an altercation, as “the old man refused to cut the strip of grass between his house and the Angstroms’ ” (*RR* 19). Throughout the summer, Mrs. Angstrom didn’t allow her husband and her son to mow the other half of the lawn. Finally, authorities had to intervene. One Saturday, when Mrs. Angstrom was not home, Mr. Angstrom cut the weeds with the sickle, then Rabbit

mowed the lawn, and so they settled the affair. Mr. Angstrom even lied to his wife and told her that the old Methodist had given in. So instead of mutual tolerance, the neighborhood is characterized by fierce disputes.

As I have shown in *Rabbit Redux*, neighbors do not refrain from behaving belligerently or from committing a crime. They rally against Rabbit, but apart from that, they only congregate to push through their municipal goals. Neighborhood is presented as a conglomeration of isolated families: “These his neighbors, they come with their furniture in vans and leave with the vans. They get together to sign futile petitions for better sewers and quicker fire protection but otherwise do not connect” (*RRed* 65-66). Their suburban ethos prevents them from bonding on a more personal level.

In *Rabbit Is Rich*, set in 1979, Updike places Rabbit again in an unconventional neighborhood and endows him with a rather liberal attitude. This time, Updike locates lesbian women in Angstrom’s immediate surroundings. Rabbit comments on his suburban neighborhood from his male-dominated, heteronormative perspective. He is outspokenly heterosexual, and he labels and stigmatizes people who do not conform to his compartmentalized thinking. Despite his pigeonhole thinking in sexual matters, Rabbit pretends not to take umbrage. It is noteworthy that he avoids referring to the women in his neighborhood as *lesbians*, but his disparaging diction reveals his “silent” opposition:

A crew of butch women has moved in a few houses down and they’re always out in steel-toed boots and overalls with ladders and hammers fixing things, they can do it all, from rain gutters to cellar doors: terrific. He sometimes waves to them when he jogs by in twilight but they don’t have much to say to him, a creature of another species. (*RiR* 40)

By overdrawing his portrayal and exploiting fixed behavior patterns, Rabbit exposes his homophobic stance. He considers himself the odd man out and derides these women's manual skills. The real problem is that Rabbit feels emasculated, because he fails in two traditionally male domains. First, in contrast to these women, he has never been a talented craftsman and used to be "a cop-out as a householder" (*RRem* 213). Second, after his "career" as a salesman of kitchen gadgets, he could never lead a self-sufficient life being the breadwinner of the family. Instead, he was economically dependent on his wife and her family's wealth. This all plays an underlying role in his perception of his female neighbors. It must be noted that, against all odds, Updike's female characters become more and more independent throughout the years. From the start, Janice has been portrayed as a completely incompetent woman who does not "fulfill" the traditional role pattern between men and women. She neglects the household, she is a terrible cook, and Rabbit even complains about her inability to keep the fridge filled. Only toward the end of the seventies, in *Rabbit Is Rich*, does Janice, the "modern housewife" (*RR* 12), start to emancipate herself when she begins to work as a real estate agent. Her husband does not support her quest for self-dependence, and in fact "[h]e preferred her incompetent" (*RatR* 275). It is worth mentioning that Janice can live a life without Rabbit, whereas he cannot exist without her, which intimidates him. In the same manner, the self-assured women in his neighborhood do not need male support to carry out maintenance work. Even without identifying the women as homosexuals, Rabbit's putatively gullible description of the women's technical skills indicates their sexual orientation. In their presence, he feels estranged and literally out of place despite his apparent composure. Beyond that, he is forty-six years old, has been married to Janice for more than twenty years and enjoys his extramarital affairs. His outgoing heterosexuality and exaggerated masculinity clashes with the idea of having homosexual

women in his neighborhood. Ten years before, Rabbit had provoked his neighbors by taking in Skeeter and leading a promiscuous life. He finally succumbed to his hostile neighborhood, which ostracized him. In *Rabbit Is Rich*, despite sharing the same suburban place, the residents are not part of a community either and stereotyped thinking prevails. In a suburban society characterized by heteronormative thought patterns the coexistence of homo- and heterosexual couples still thwarts unencumbered neighborhood life.

In the last volume of the tetralogy, Updike's main character spends much time in Florida where his immediate neighbors are Jewish. Updike again exploits fixed patterns when portraying Jews as well-heeled, self-reliant retirees owning an apartment in the sunshine state. His main character regularly plays golf with his next-door neighbor, Joe Gold, but their encounters are restricted to sports. Apart from playing golf and exchanging small talk, Rabbit and Joe do not meet on a private basis. Fundamentally, the Golds enjoy living a secluded life: "He and his wife, Beu, Beu for Beulah, are very quiet condo neighbors next door; you wonder what they do all the time in there, that never makes any noise"⁹¹ (*RatR* 53). Similarly, Rabbit does not foster any form of more-than-formal relationship with Mrs. Zabritski, a bizarre Jewish woman also living on the same floor. According to the Golds, she survived a concentration camp, which might account for her eccentricity (cf. 424). Rabbit describes her as an extravagant person with strange looks and always tries to give her a wide berth. Neighbors unanimously shun close ties and Rabbit obviously enjoys this seclusion. Essentially, the Southern sphere presents a more positive view of neighborhood life than Brewer and its suburbs. Throughout the

⁹¹ The choice of the name Beulah recalls an instance from *Self-Consciousness*. As a child, Updike used to call Mrs. Stephens from the luncheonette "Gert" instead of " 'Boo' (for Beulah)" (5).

tetralogy, suburban neighborhood fails to provide a working community life. Mutual support and real neighborliness are absent from the Rabbit novels.

4.5.3. Mixed-Race Community Life in the Bascombe Trilogy

Race relations are a primary concern for Richard Ford, who was born in Mississippi. His being a Southerner accounts for the high importance he attributes to race, especially in *Independence Day*. Ford had left Jackson, Mississippi, in 1962 at the age of eighteen and the deterioration of racial relations had partly contributed to his leaving the state (cf. Diggs 16). Ford explains in this context:

I was quite aware at the time that race relations were reaching a bad pass, and that I—although not particularly a visionary—wasn't always on the side of my race, if my race had a side. That's hindsight, though. I guess it just felt at the time, 1962, like a good time for me to get out of Mississippi. (Diggs 16)

This experience marked him for life and it is his endeavor to endorse racial issues in his Bascombe trilogy. In an interview with Imre Salusinszky and Stephen Mills, Ford claims that particularly his novel *Independence Day* is basically about race. He deeply regrets that the United States are obviously still incapable of overtly talking about race relations, and he deplores the fact that even in *The New York Times Book Review*⁹² this fundamental subject was ignored:

It's just a function of how absolutely impossible in American culture it is for whites to talk about race. [...] I come equipped, by virtue of being a Southerner, with all of this vast racial experience, a lot of it just negative and bad, and I want to have a public conversation about it, because I can. Nobody wants to. [...] too many people have too much invested, in America, in races

⁹² In this interview, Ford refers to Charles Johnson's review " 'Independence Day,' by Richard Ford," which appeared in *The New York Times* on June 18, 1995.

not being reconciled. There's too much of society built on this rickety structure that separates the races. (Salusinszky and Mills 172)

Ford wants to spark a discussion about prevailing racial tensions. He explicitly criticizes his fellow countrymen's inaptitude to openly face this issue. His adamant stance accounts for his provocative and often sarcastic portrayal of race relations. As Ford's novels focus on the last seventeen years preceding the millennium, the background is clearly a different one than in *Rabbit Redux*. While Updike recorded the time during the Civil Rights Movement, Ford traces the repercussions of this historic watershed.

In his trilogy, Ford chronicles landmark social changes in American life towards the end of the twentieth century. According to *The Suburb Reader*, which I have referred to earlier, the number of Americans living in suburbia increased from 37 to 50 per cent in the last three decades of the twentieth century. As a result, far-reaching transformations took place. The racial and social composition of the suburbs changed: single-parent families, homosexuals, "empty-nesters," and an increasing number of minorities moved there. The stereotypical 1950s model of an all-white suburban family with a breadwinning father and "a stay-at-home mom" was superseded by a more modern image. At the cusp of the new millennium, the suburbs were again a perfect reflection of the American nation. Strikingly, the African American population more than tripled in the last three decades of the twentieth century (cf. Nicolaides and Wiese 409). Immigrants often formed enclaves, which entailed social problems (cf. 410). It would be beyond the scope of this study to trace the exact ethnic composition of the suburbs. Suffice it to conclude that from the 1970s onwards, the United States have been subject to increasing suburbanization and diversification (cf. 411). This spread of multiethnic suburban communities and the ensuing tensions between white middle class Americans and African Americans are foregrounded by Ford. Therefore, his protagonist

investigates mixed-race communities and their quality as social spaces, where people live together in the same neighborhood, and where they even share the same house.

Ford exploits the general stereotypes associated with African Americans in order to refute them. His main character is anything but politically correct and his language is very explicit. Frank Bascombe does not even refrain from using the “N word” to refer to African Americans. In this regard, he resembles Rabbit, who also unapologetically uses derogatory words to talk about people with a different racial background. Ford creates a main character whose comments must be seen within the discourse of his white, middle class privileged point of view. Frank’s comments and observations are at times coming close to persiflage. His statements on racial relations are either ostensibly naïve or incredibly sarcastic, the border between these two forms of comment being blurred.

Ford’s unabashed protagonist faces numerous situations in which race chasm is thrown into relief. Bascombe provides a double perspective on the construction of social space across color bars. First, he depicts the microcosm of his Haddam house, where he rents a room to Bosobolo from Gabon. Second, he traces his experiences with colored people within the macrocosm of the predominantly colored section of Wallace Hill, where he rents a house to a biracial family.⁹³ The racial clash in both Bascombe’s private place as well as the public sphere of Wallace Hill reveals insurmountable differences between the races. The impression arises that in Frank’s suburban neighborhoods people of different skin color cluster and that one race is always in the majority. In his immediate surroundings on Hoving Road, Frank’s housemate Bosobolo represents a minority within a mainly white community. Conversely, Frank feels as if he is ploughing

⁹³ In the third chapter of this study, I have focused on suburban monotony. Wallace Hill also consists of mostly identical houses and Frank observes “the street of white, green, blue and pink frame houses with green and red roofs and neat little cemetery-plot yards [...]” (*ID* 119). This fact hints at the exchangeability of the whole area and Frank concludes that this “could be a neighborhood in the Mississippi Delta [...]” (119). His trite comment implies that lower-income suburban places are devoid of local peculiarities.

a lonely furrow whenever he drives to the colored section of Wallace Hill, where he owns two houses, to collect the rent. At the end of *Independence Day*, Frank rents one of his houses to the Markhams, who will then form a white minority among the African American majority. So the ethnic composition of the different sections of Haddam always reflects a clear majority-minority ratio.

Furthermore, location is indicative of social status, and there is an ethnic difference regarding the property situation. In Frank's case, property ownership is reserved for the white middle class suburbanite. His tenants are African-Americans (or, in the McLeods' case, a mixed-race family). The issue of ownership necessarily impacts on community life. In addition, the size of the house assumes a significant role. Frank lives in a large Tudor house in Haddam. By contrast, his two houses in Wallace Hill are smaller and so the size of the place implies a lower social status of its inhabitants. Yet African Americans are also portrayed as owners. In *The Sportswriter*, Ford's protagonist makes derogatory remarks about Wallace Hill: "Even the servant classes, who are mostly Negroes, seem fulfilled in their summery, keyboard-awning side streets down Wallace Hill behind the hospital, where they own their own homes" (47). Predominantly blue-collar workers have settled there. Wallace Hill used to be an "established black neighborhood" where "[r]eliable, relatively prosperous middle-aged and older Negro families have lived [...] for decades in small, close-set homes [...]" (ID 24). The values of their houses are still a bit lower than in white residential areas. Apparently, colored suburbanites are confined to this segregated place: "It's America like it used to be, only blacker" (24). The neighborhood has kept and consolidated its monoracial composition. On that score, Frank identifies the spatial restrictions African Americans have to face: "there aren't that many places for a well-heeled black American to go that's better than where he or she already is" (25). This statement illustrates that, according to Frank,

African Americans still have limited opportunities when taking up residence. With property prices gaining value, Bascombe predicts that many inhabitants will sell their houses at a profit. Ford's protagonist hints at the coming gentrification boom demonstrated in *The Lay of the Land*. He assumes that African Americans will then "move away to Arizona or down South, where their ancestors were once property themselves, and the whole area will be gentrified by incoming whites and rich blacks [...]" (*ID* 25). With his subtle remark, Bascombe again connects race with space. As Frank usually insists on his liberal stance, an ostensibly naïve comment like this conveys his deeply rooted prejudice. During the gentrification boom, Frank sells his two houses on Clio Street (cf. *LoL* 90). After all, the formerly "stable Negro population" ends up being "gentrified to smithereens" (*LoL* 212). Ultimately, economic forces do not only affect the suburban landscape, but also determine the ethnic structure of residential areas. The persistence of these spatial restrictions impacts the quality of social space in these neighborhoods.

More importantly, interpersonal relations in Ford's mixed-race neighborhoods are not conducive to promote community life, and his characters are outspokenly biased. In contrast to Updike's Skeeter, Bosobolo's presence does not infuriate the neighborhood any more in Ford's novel *The Sportswriter*, which is set in 1983. Multiracial coexistence seems to work at first sight. Frank and his housemate customarily have a coffee together in the morning and as both are Presbyterians, they enjoy their noncommittal chats (cf. *SW* 27). Yet African Americans always carry a stigma. When Walter Lockett, Frank's divorced middle-class "friend," visits him, he assumes that Bosobolo is the butler (cf. 231). Such a rash association illustrates the prejudice held by white middle class suburbanites. Besides, the stigma pertains to the sexual performance of colored people. Bascombe himself pigeonholes Bosobolo and draws upon stereotypes. He sees in

Bosobolo “a bony African with an austere face, almost certainly the kind to have a long aboriginal penis” (229). His bias culminates in his drab conclusion that his housemate could actually be worse off: “He could still be running around in the jungle, dressed in a palm tutu” (308). Notwithstanding the fact that Frank and Bosobolo share the same house, they do not become friends. Their give-and-take is usually restricted to some short verbal exchanges. Even worse, Frank’s relationship with the McLeods, his Wallace Hill tenants, is simply non-existent. They are portrayed as a violent and unfriendly family. A “former black militant” (*ID* 28), Larry McLeod epitomizes the tough guy who does not refrain from applying violence. Frank’s attempts to communicate with the McLeods mostly fail, but he stoically and unflinchingly returns to claim the rent ignoring their refusal to pay or even to open the door. He neither threatens to sue them, nor does he ever lose his temper. In spite of his self-imposed liberalism, he is apprehensive: “The McLeods are also, I’m afraid, the kind of family who could someday go paranoid and barricade themselves in their (my) house, issue confused manifestos, fire shots at the police and eventually torch everything, killing all within” (122). By the same token, Bascombe’s use of pronouns reflects racial segregation. When meeting Mr. Tanks, an African American, on his trip to pick up his son Paul, Tanks asks him: “You got any niggers down there in your part of New Jersey?” (209). Whereupon Frank nonchalantly replies: “Plenty of ’em [...]” (209). A second later, he regrets his answer, but his use of deictic pronouns and his derogatory vocabulary to designate colored people exemplify the prevalence of race chasm.

Beyond that, dating across color bars is either scorned or doomed to failure. When Bosobolo dates a much younger white woman, Frank constantly derides their relationship. Frank himself has a relationship with Clair Devane, his African American colleague at the real estate office. After their break-up, Frank claims that “[r]ace, of

course, was not our official fatal defect" (*ID* 212). Instead, Clair decides to date an African American lawyer and they soon become "a nice, viable, single-race item in town" (215-216). Hence, community life can only be realized within the same ethnic group.

Fundamentally, the inhabited space of Haddam and Wallace Hill is extremely segregational. Neighborhood across color bars and shared community life are absent from the trilogy. Ford's novels, which display the discursive world of his white middle class protagonist, run the whole gamut of irreconcilable differences between the races. Metaphorically, he pours the horn of plenty filled with prejudice over his main characters to express his sustained criticism on racial discrimination. Even though the trilogy covers successive periods, the persistent ethnic tensions prevent placid coexistence while white supremacy subliminally permeates suburban life. The only feature the different ethnic groups share is space in the broader sense of the word, and white middle class residents maintain their hegemonic understanding of race relations. All along, it is Ford's endeavor to openly confront racism in order to overcome hegemonic attitudes.

4.5.4. Frank's Monoracial Vicinity

Ford's trilogy also traces the decreasing solidarity within monoracial neighborhoods. In "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital," Robert Putnam states that the number of Americans practicing neighborliness diminished by 11 percent and fell to 61 percent between 1974 and 1993 (cf. 73). The Bascombe novels point in the same direction and provide a bleak outlook on community life despite his protagonist's affirmative stance. Bascombe's presentation of neighborhood illustrates that the suburbs have become a center of growing alienation. Moreover, Frank observes a

recurring feeling of angst among his fellow suburbanites, who are evidently all subject to “the same fears” (*LoL* 228).

In the early eighties, New Jersey promises a “bustling suburban-with-good-neighbor-industry mix of life [...]” (*SW* 50). However, Ford’s main character experiences the opposite. At the beginning of *The Sportswriter*, Frank and his immediate neighbors, the Deffeyes, maintain a perfunctory relationship. More than once, Delia Deffeye politely invites Frank over, but he knows that her glib invitations are not meant sincerely. After some superficial verbal exchanges, their conversation usually ends abruptly (cf. 209).

From a chronological point of view, the cocooning of people living in the same neighborhood increases throughout the trilogy. In *The Sportswriter*, which is set in 1983, Ford’s protagonist muses: “It is a dreamy, average, vertiginous evening in the suburbs— not too much on excitement, only the lives of isolated individuals in the harmonious secrecy of a somber age” (320). Life in the suburbs seems to have become even more isolating in the 1988 sequel *Independence Day* where Bascombe asserts that “[n]o one knows his neighbors in the suburbs anyway” (75). Meanwhile, Frank has moved into his ex-wife’s house and when driving through his former neighborhood, he ruminates on the fate of this area. Neighbors do not support each other anymore: “The daughter of a famous Soviet dissident poet [...] seeking only privacy and pleasant, unthreatening surroundings, but who found instead diffidence, condescension and cold shoulders, has now departed for home, where she is rumored to be in an institution” (440-441). The growing repudiation among neighbors reaches its nadir twelve years later. In *The Lay of the Land*, Frank mentions “insider mutter-mutter conversations passed across hedges between like-minded neighbors who barely know one another and wouldn’t otherwise speak” (46). The reclusiveness of human beings in anonymous neighborhoods exacerbates Frank’s solitude, which surely is a symbol of the process of dehumanization

in society. In her study on suburbia, sociologist M. P. Baumgartner explains that when facing conflict, for example within the neighborhood, suburbanites practice avoidance. They shun any direct confrontation with people whose conduct they consider inappropriate. As a consequence, “[i]t is even possible to speak of the suburb as a culture of avoidance” (11). What she terms *a culture of avoidance* reaches its pinnacle in Ford’s presentation of the Feensters, Bascombe’s next-door neighbors in *The Lay of the Land*. Ford portrays Nick and Drilla Feenster as upper middle class parvenus and fills their house with all the gadgets of modern life and architecture. The Feensters’ house resembles a stronghold with manifold security devices parodying the predilection of Americans to apply numerous alarm systems and warning signs. Bascombe ridicules their upscale lifestyle, their non-authentic clothing, and their morbid angst of being robbed. Their enormous wealth and extravagant behavior turn them into social misfits. Not surprisingly, their attempt to rename the street and to guard the entrance provokes their neighbors’ opposition. The fence around their house is the visual symbol of their self-inflicted isolation. Frank’s relationship with his other neighbors is superficial, but not inimical. Notwithstanding his disposition to keep others at a distance, his next-door neighbors’ demeanor alienates him. He rejects too close a relationship between neighbors, but admits that he “would still enjoy [...] a frank but cordial six-sentence exchange of political views as the paper’s collected at dawn or a noncommittal deck-to-deck wave as the sun turns the sea to sequined fires, filling the heart with the assurance that we’re not experiencing life’s wonders *entirely solo*” (*LoL* 308). Intentional ignorance and subtly provocative behavior are characteristic of the Feensters. In her study of the suburbs, M. P. Baumgartner also claims that suburbanites take to “moral minimalism” (10), which she defines as “what is *not* done when tensions arise” (11). In fact, Frank and the Feensters practice “moral minimalism” as they do not talk to each other when in

conflict. Instead, Bascombe calls the police when Nick shoots clay pigeons that almost crash into his bedroom window (cf. *LoL* 308-309). *The Lay of the Land* culminates in a crescendo of violence inflicted on the Feensters. All their security devices cannot prevent them from becoming victims of an armed robbery. Despite their uneasy relationship, Frank intervenes and risks his life. This might be the affirmative attitude of his protagonist, which Ford alludes to in numerous interviews. Still, the ideal-world image of the suburbs is broken in *The Lay of the Land*. White neighbors do not guarantee community life either.

4.6. Social Gatherings

In their multivolume fiction, Updike and Ford include America's two most important holidays, the Fourth of July and Thanksgiving. *Rabbit at Rest* (set in 1989) and *Independence Day* (set in 1988) focus on the Fourth of July, while *Rabbit Remembered* (mainly set in 1999) and *The Lay of the Land* (set in 2000) include Thanksgiving scenes.

4.6.1. The Fourth of July

National holidays usually provide social space for encounters with family members and/or other residents. Both authors refer to the obligatory parade, which gains symbolic meaning as it serves as a metaphor for community life toward the end of the eighties.

4.6.1.1. Surrounded by "Human Melt"⁹⁴

On July 4th, Rabbit agrees to march as Uncle Sam for his granddaughter's sake. Although he has meanwhile moved to Penn Park, he is still deeply rooted in the area where

⁹⁴ Source: *Rabbit at Rest* 336

numerous residents remember him as a basketball hero. With his unbuttoned trousers, a hat that does not fit properly and a goatee that almost falls off, Rabbit epitomizes a laughing stock instead of a stately Uncle Sam. He is still acknowledged and respected by the Mt. Judge community. Updike has embedded his own experience in this scene:

I was invited to be in a parade in a town I lived in, as one of its celebrated citizens. Anyway, I walked [in the parade], and the sense of the aloneness of being in a parade when you're sort of the only float, it was just amazing. It took so much courage to take those steps on that wide empty street—the itch to run and hide, and the kind of toppling feeling you get when you're in a parade like that—so I just grafted that onto poor Harry, and made him into Uncle Sam. (Bragg 227)

Updike continues with an encomium on America and its people. Yet in *Rabbit at Rest*, his main character perceives the crowd differently. Angstrom contrasts the community he knew in his youth with the people lining the street in 1989. Again, the setting is inextricably linked with Rabbit's memories. When living in Mt. Judge, he often took part in the parade and he can still recall the streets he passed: “as a child he used to participate in parades, in the crowd of town kids riding bicycles [...] through blocks of brick semi-detached houses up on their terraced lawns behind the retaining walls, then downhill past Kegerise Alley as they used to call it, Kegerise Street it is now, with its small former hosiery factories [...]” (*RatR* 333). Even though the street names and shops have been replaced for the most part, the locale and the people joining the parade when he was young are burnt into his memory. But in 1989, the community life he experienced as a teenager does not exist anymore. Rabbit is astonished by the physical appearance of people, who dress more revealingly than he is used to. Men who are past their prime wear clothes that do not befit them anymore. Beyond that, the crowd has rejuvenated and become more ethnically diverse (cf. 335-336). In the midst of the

cheering crowd, Rabbit experiences utter alienation: “A spirit of indulgence, a conspiring to be amused, surrounds and upholds his parade as he leads it down the stunning emptiness at the center of the familiar slanting streets” (335). He desperately watches out for a familiar face among the spectators, but does not recognize anyone. Completely distraught, he identifies the bystanders as “human melt” (336) and decries the exchangeability of the members of his former community. Ford’s main character almost echoes his words when he states that “we’re just like the other schmo [...] all of us popped out from the same unthinkable mold” (*ID* 57). Basically, the community Rabbit used to live in has developed into an estranging and undifferentiated mass. The familiar locale, which used to serve as an emotional crutch, cannot fulfill this significant task anymore. In the midst of a crowd, Rabbit no longer feels connected to anyone. Here, Updike portrays late-1980s suburbia as annihilating community life.

4.6.1.2. Community and Contingency in *Independence Day*

Ford even names the second volume of his trilogy after the holiday. *Independence Day* is particularly noteworthy, as Frank Bascombe elaborates on his increasingly disenchanting idea of community at the meta-level. With the parade being only mentioned in a very short paragraph at the end of the novel, this subchapter focuses instead on the deconstruction of Bascombe’s complex notion of community, which is essential to fully grasp the portrayal of the parade.

Bascombe chooses the days preceding the Fourth of July to go on a trip to the Baseball and Basketball Hall of Fame with his recalcitrant son. The trip must be seen as a rite of passage, as *Independence Day* exhibits the same characteristics as a story of initiation with the father supporting his son’s identification process. Inevitably, their excursion ends in a disaster with Paul being hit in the eye by a baseball in a batting cage.

Frank's ex-wife flies in immediately with an ophthalmologist. Ultimately, this holiday weekend, which should essentially have fostered solidarity, exacerbates the already strained family ties. After all, Frank's relationship with his son improves, and Paul even considers moving in with his Dad (cf. 400).

Only in *Independence Day* does the protagonist discuss his uncommon and intricate concept of community life. As a basic principle, Frank categorizes the different phases of his life. In *Independence Day*, he is going through the "Existence Period," constantly pontificating about the meaning of *community*. Bascombe dissects the core of *community*, which he has never done before. It should be noted that his idea of community is intimately entwined with space and that local connectedness plays a pivotal role for Frank. Fundamentally, it is part of his character to avoid close connections. Nonetheless, he would like to become part of the more anonymous Haddam community. He considers realty to be the best opportunity for noncommittal civic engagement. Therefore he invests in bricks and mortar and buys two houses in Wallace Hill. By acquiring property, he does not need to commit himself more than necessary:

And I thought that if I could buy both houses at a bargain, I could then rent them to whoever wanted to live there [...] people I could assure a comfortable existence in the face of housing costs going sky-high and until such time as they could move into a perpetual-care facility or buy a starter home of their own. All of which would bestow on me the satisfaction of reinvesting in my community, providing affordable housing options, maintaining a neighborhood integrity I admired, while covering my financial backside and establishing a greater sense of connectedness, something I'd lacked since before Ann moved to Deep River two years before. (*ID* 27)

Needless to say, Frank also has a pecuniary interest in the two houses. He analyzes his investment in strictly economic terms and considers himself the benefactor of his

community. For both Frank and his community, this deal is a win-win situation. As a matter of fact, Bascombe refrains from supporting his community through face-to-face action and opts for an economic deal instead. During the “Existence Period” of his life, signing a contract is easier for him than accepting close relationships. In doing so, he can reestablish the feeling of connectedness he had lost since the departure of his family to Connecticut.

Frank’s belief in the power of a community is shaken to the core after his real estate experience with the Markham family to whom he unsuccessfully shows more than forty houses. The Markhams’ realty odyssey reveals the bitter truth that a community values a person “in the only way communities ever recognize anything: financially [...]” (ID 51-52).⁹⁵ To this effect, Brian Duffy holds that the Markham subplot clearly shows “the hegemony of the market and the subservience of the personal to economic laws” (66). I agree with him on that score, as social bonding has clearly been replaced by financial power. Henceforth the financial strength of suburbanites will determine their degree of solidarity with a suburban community. To stay with Leo Marx’ metaphor of *The Machine in the Garden*, what we encounter here is the final demystification of the suburban garden in the wake of destructive mercantile forces.

Ontologically, the dichotomy between *being* and *seeming* determines Bascombe’s idea of community. He often theorizes about these opposing ideas. Frank’s initial conviction to equate *be* with *seem* fades when he realizes that *being* cannot be put on a level with *seeming* (cf. ID 244). This insight correlates with his growing disillusionment concerning communities. To illustrate Bascombe’s point of view on community, Ford introduces his stepbrother Irv Ornstein as *deus ex machina*. Working in the flight simulator business, Ornstein literally symbolizes the *seeming* part. Ford chooses this

⁹⁵ The Markhams’ real estate experience is discussed in detail in chapter 5.

constellation of characters to visualize the antagonism between two theoretical constructs. While Frank explains his disenchanting view on community life, Ornstein intransigently underscores his sanguine stance. The stepbrothers' opinions complement and contradict each other.

Frank's idea of community is interlaced with the concept of contingency. Ford's own view on contingency, which he elaborated on in an interview with Bonnie Lyons, is helpful in understanding this concept. Outlining the incalculability of his writing process, he explained that a character might develop into a completely different direction than initially intended by him: "Now *that's* something about life that interests me. That's incalculability, if on a small scale: how we cope with contingency in ourselves but try still to accept responsibility for our acts" (Lyons 48). The notion *contingency* is particularly crucial within a socio-spatial discourse. In this context, I draw on the research done by German sociologist Markus Schroer who, against the background of globalization, argues that originally space functioned as a means to cope with contingency. The current discontent derives from the fact that spatial relations have become flexible, fragile, and contingent. For this reason, space can no longer serve as an antidote against the frenzy of speed which has become characteristic of a globalized society.⁹⁶ This function of space as a means to cope with contingency is pertinent to my reading of Frank's concept of community. Bascombe analyzes the shortcomings of community life in relation with his idea of contingency. It is notable that both his concept of community and the period of life he goes through are characterized by contingency. Right at the beginning of *Independence Day*, Frank mentions this fact to the reader. At the age of forty-four, he is a bachelor and thinks that his life is "full of

⁹⁶ In his monograph, Schroer argues: "Die einstmalige Selbstverständlichkeit räumlicher Bezüge machte den Raum zu einer Art Kontingenzbewältiger. Die derzeitige Unruhe rührt genau daher, dass räumliche Bezüge nun selbst flexibel, kontingent und fragil geworden sind und damit nicht mehr länger als Antidot gegen den Rausch der Geschwindigkeit taugen, der die gegenwärtige Gesellschaft erfasst hat" (12-13).

contingencies and incongruities none of us escapes and which do little harm in an existence that otherwise goes unnoticed" (7). In a next step, Frank transfers this idea onto communities:

"I don't really think communities are continuous, Irv," I say. "I think of them—and I've got a lot of proof—as isolated, contingent groups trying to improve on an illusion of permanence, which they fully accept as an illusion. [...] Buying power is the instrumentality. But continuity, if I understand it at all, doesn't really have much to do with it." (386)

At the end of the eighties, a community offers contingency instead of continuity. Concomitantly, sharing suburban space no longer guarantees permanence. It must be noted that the issue of permanence has long been anathema to Frank (which is why this aspect of community life should suit him). To avoid permanence, he had kept changing places after his divorce, and in 1988, he did not want to be buried in the cemetery behind his former house next to his son (cf. 439).

When driving through Haddam at the end of *Independence Day*, he elaborates on his view of community and ponders the impact of the familiar streets and places on his life. He comes to the conclusion that it is incredibly difficult to lead life the way it was planned back in the 1960s due to a fundamental change of social circumstances:

We want to *feel* our community as a fixed, continuous entity [...] as being anchored into the rock of permanence; but we know it's not, that in fact beneath the surface (or rankly all over the surface) it's anything but. We and it are anchored only to contingency like a bottle on a wave, seeking a quiet eddy. The very effort of maintenance can pull you under. (439)

With *contingency* Frank means the uncertainties and incalculabilities of human experience. According to him and his increasingly disillusioned stance, a community does not ensure the predictability of the intricacies of everyday life. Shared suburban

space can no longer serve as a means of coming to terms with contingency. Frank thus questions the effective functioning of his community and communities in general.

More drastically, community life crumbles at the most intimate level of the family. While his stepbrother Irv apotheosizes the past and revels in shared memories of bygone times in Skokie, Illinois, Frank completely renounces this time and decides to ignore their shared past. Irv shows him an old laminated photograph of their family, but Frank does not feel in the least connected with this part of his life: "I look again reluctantly at this little pinch-hole window to my long-gone past, feel a quickening torque of heart pain [...]. I'm a man who wouldn't recognize his own mother" (391-392). It is particularly noteworthy that curtailing the impact of the past was one of the tenets postulated by Emerson, which is why I would like to hark back to *Self-Reliance*:

Is the acorn better than the oak which is its fulness and completion? Is the parent better than the child into whom he has cast his ripened being? Whence then this worship of the past? [...] Time and space are but physiological colors which the eye makes, but the soul is light: where it is, is day; where it was, is night; and history is an impertinence and an injury if it be any thing more than a cheerful apologue or parable of my being and becoming. (24)

Emerson's ideas must of course be seen against the background of transcendentalism. The crucial role of the past is also of importance in relation with narcissism and, as I have pointed out, Frank clearly shows narcissistic features. In 1991 and thus within a more recent sociological framework, Christopher Lasch analyzed the role of the past in *The Culture of Narcissism*:

The narcissist has no interest in the future because, in part, he has so little interest in the past. He finds it difficult to internalize happy associations or to create a store of loving memories with which to face the latter part of his life,

which under the best of conditions always brings sadness and pain. In a narcissistic society—a society that gives increasing prominence and encouragement to narcissistic traits—the cultural devaluation of the past reflects not only the poverty of the prevailing ideologies, which have lost their grip on reality and abandoned the attempt to master it, but the poverty of the narcissist’s inner life. (xvi-xvii)

In his afterword, Lasch explains that the family is not responsible for transmitting cultural values anymore, which likewise eliminates the role of the past (cf. 239). In contrast to Rabbit, who never manages to extricate himself from his past, Frank willfully relinquishes his past for the greater part of the trilogy and thus obstructs family relationships.⁹⁷ Moreover, he refrains from actively participating in community life and does not maintain private contacts.

His disinterest in social space and his uncommon idea of community contrast with the short portrayal of the Independence Day parade, with which the novel ends. When joining the parade, Frank for the first time physically senses the presence of his community. He immerses himself in the crowd and feels “the push, pull, the weave and sway of others” (*ID* 451). However, the glimmer of hope for a revival of social connectedness is immediately quenched in *The Lay of the Land* where Frank is still a loner, who at times even shows misanthropic traits.

Overall, the holiday weekend is not conducive to lifting Frank’s spirits, if anything it fuels his growing dissatisfaction. Bascombe is not interested in maintaining social ties. Ford, who is married to a city planner, is certainly well aware of the deplorable changes affecting community life. The suburbs have long lost their postwar splendor, which explains why suburbia is occasionally depicted as *disturbia* in recent sociological studies

⁹⁷ The past will again be of importance in the context of Bascombe’s search for home, which I will examine in the next chapter.

and literary criticism.⁹⁸ At the meta-level, the title *Independence Day* implies becoming independent from traditional concepts of community promoting a propitious social environment.

4.6.2. Thanksgiving

A holiday usually provides social space for families to get together. In his reference work on Thanksgiving, James W. Baker argues that this historically portentous day has become a secular holiday toward the end of the twentieth century:

The holiday has steadily become more broadly humanistic, so that the primary observation is not commemoration or contemplation but family reunion and dinner, to which the custom of watching parades or football games is often added. (213)

Philip Roth says about Thanksgiving that “[i]t is the American pastoral par excellence and it lasts twenty-four hours” (402). In more recent literature, i.e. T.C. Boyle’s *Tortilla Curtain*, Thanksgiving has become a repeatedly recurring leitmotif, which is above all associated with trouble. The masculine examples of postwar suburban fiction discussed in this study desanctify “the American pastoral par excellence” and show that community is crumbling at its very core: the family. To prove my point, I will juxtapose the Thanksgiving scenes of *Rabbit Remembered* and *The Lay of the Land*.

4.6.2.1. “The Thanksgiving Blow-Up”⁹⁹

Updike presents a family reunion, which satirizes the sublime spirit of Thanksgiving. A decade after Rabbit’s death, his illegitimate daughter Annabelle joins this annual social

⁹⁸ See Bernice M. Murphy’s introduction “Welcome to Disturbia” in her 2009 study *The Suburban Gothic in American Popular Culture* (1).

⁹⁹ Source: *Rabbit Remembered* 330

encounter for the first time. The setting is the house of his parents-in-law where he had never felt at ease. Essentially, the locale reinforces the negative denouement of the scene. Moreover, the constellation of characters illustrates the ultimate break-up of the Angstrom family. Updike has already hinted at the dissolution of the traditional family pattern in *Rabbit Is Rich* where his protagonist observes: "Everywhere, it seems to Harry, families are breaking up and different pieces coming together like survivors in one great big lifeboat, while he and Janice keep sitting over there in Ma Springer's shadow, behind the times" (199-200). His statement foreshadows the final disruption of their nuclear family. Back then, Harry felt he was swimming against the current; he thought he had missed his opportunity to divorce when it was part of the zeitgeist to do so.

In *Rabbit Remembered*, the Springer house, which Rabbit used to loathe, is clearly inimical to further sociability. On Thanksgiving, the Angstrom-Harrison patchwork family is gathered around the history-laden mahogany table in the dining room (cf. 283). There is Janice with her son Nelson and her second husband Ronnie with his three sons, one daughter-in-law, and three grandchildren. Then there is pudgy Annabelle who could not be more out of place in the literal sense of the word. Rabbit's archrival Ronnie has replaced him at the Springer table. Mr. and Mrs. Dietrich complete the jovial circle of thirteen people. Eva-Sabine Zehelein argues that the number of guests and their position around the table are redolent of Leonardo da Vinci's famous picture *The Last Supper*.¹⁰⁰ From a spatial perspective, Annabelle's aside on rooms underscores the significance of

¹⁰⁰ Zehelein argues: "Zu diesem Erntedank-Essen versammeln sich die Restmitglieder der ‚Patchwork‘-Familien Angstrom und Harrison, sowie ein befreundetes Ehepaar im Haus der Angstroms. Sie sitzen, an Leonardo da Vincis Bild *Abendmahl*¹³ [sic] erinnernd, mit 13 Personen um den Esszimmertisch, an einem Tag, der für die Jahreszeit zu warm gewesen ist [...]."

Wollte man die Analogie zum Letzten Abendmahl ausschöpfen, so stellte sich die Frage der Identifizierung der Jesus-Figur, die schwerlich zu beantworten scheint. Harry ist seit zehn Jahren tot und fungiert als omnipräsente Reminiszenz. Man mag ihn als Gott-Figur betrachten" (256).

feeling at ease at a place: “how much easier, Annabelle thinks, it is to stay in rooms you know as well as your own body, having a warm meal and an evening of television, where it’s all so comfortably one-way” (*RRem* 288).

Once more, the past overshadows the scene. Janice, who accidentally drowned their daughter Becky when she was drunk, is sitting at the same table as Annabelle. The latter is the illegitimate daughter of Rabbit and his former lover Ruth, who was also Ronnie’s mistress many years before. On top of that, Rabbit had an affair with Ronnie’s deceased wife Thelma. These entanglements entail trouble. Rabbit’s mannerism of always defending the President in power contributes to the impending chaos, as Annabelle’s vindication of Clinton and his philandering ignites the store of emotion that has lain hidden since before the death of Rabbit. Discussing infidelity at a dinner table where both hosts had extramarital affairs culminates in the outbreak of aggressions. Ronnie’s shattering indictment that Annabelle is the daughter of “a hooer and a bum” (300) leads to the final breakdown of family ties. The Springer house Rabbit had always resented serves as the perfect setting for this brawl. The memory of Rabbit still haunts the room and destroys what is left of a peaceful family Thanksgiving tradition.

Furthermore, the fact that Janice abhors Thanksgiving is conducive to the negative outcome of the holiday. Being a mediocre cook, she struggles every year to serve the iconic elements of a good Thanksgiving dinner: “The turkey was dry and the gravy a little thick and cold but the stuffing, mashed potatoes, and cranberry sauce all came out of a box and were excellent [...]. Janice’s bearing breathes relief that she will not have to do this for another year” (291-292). Even at Christmas, family bliss has gone out of the window and family tensions have only eased a bit. Nelson still refers to that special day in November as “the Thanksgiving blow-up” (330). Accordingly, Thanksgiving is no longer a holiday that the family members are looking forward to with anticipation or

that they have fond memories of. On the contrary, it has metamorphosed into a necessary evil. Social bonding with family members and friends has become a compulsory exercise. After all, *Rabbit Remembered* leaves the reader with the sobering realization that the nuclear family as one of the cornerstones of community life does not work anymore.

4.6.2.2. “I’d Gladly Forget Thanksgiving”¹⁰¹

Ford’s *The Lay of the Land* does not offer a more promising view of Thanksgiving. Bascombe has invited his son with his girlfriend to meet at his Sea-Cliff mansion. So his house will serve as social space for a family encounter. Ford deliberately chooses a holiday for the plot as it often provides “a very good little proscenium for a human drama [...]” (Majeski 123). In *The Lay of the Land*, Americans spend the days around Thanksgiving at the mall, swallowed up by the forces of consumerism (cf. *LoL* 22). An anti-Thanksgiving movement seems to form, and Frank makes no secret of his profound aversion: “I’d gladly forget Thanksgiving (like any other American)” (576). Yet, he grudgingly accepts the obligatory holiday rituals. Like Janice, he objects to preparing the iconic food symbols himself and orders a huge dinner from the *Eat No Evil* catering service instead. In a figurative sense, the solely organic health food contrasts with the unhealthy spirit suffusing the holiday.

Frank’s idea of Thanksgiving reads as follows: “Thanksgiving, in my playbook, is an indoor event acted out between kitchen and table, table and TV, TV and couch (and later bed)” (658). On that day “law-abiding citizens should be inside stuffing their faces and arguing [...]” (660). To Bascombe, even the annual proclamation delivered by the President is replete with “platitudes and horseshit” (697). So the holiday Baker used to

¹⁰¹ Source: *The Lay of the Land* 576

call “a middle-class imperative” (212) in his eponymous monograph is completely demystified.

Despite his stubborn refusal to give thanks and express his gratitude, Frank does not dare abjure his family responsibilities. Nevertheless, due to his solipsistic stance, he suffers physically and would like to spend the day avoiding an encounter with his children:

The Eat No Evil people will be here soon. All this brings with itself a sinking sensation. I don't feel thankful for anything. What I'd like to do is get in bed with my book of Great Speeches, read the Gettysburg Address out loud to no one and invite Jill and Paul to go find dinner at a Holiday Inn. (*LoL* 664)

Bascombe would like to immerse himself in reading a speech which focuses on equality and resumes the fundamental tenets of democracy. Lincoln's speech represents a historic milestone and gains symbolic meaning in this context. Against the background of the Civil War, Lincoln wanted to dedicate the Gettysburg cemetery after the death of thousands of soldiers. He delivered the address on 19 November 1863, shortly before Thanksgiving (cf. Wills 263). When Frank refers to the Gettysburg address, the focus is once more on the northeastern part of the country. In his speech, Lincoln postulates his wish that henceforth the government should be “of the people, by the people, and for the people [...]” (261). Lincoln's ideals are particularly significant because Bascombe's portrayal of community life questions their implementation in postwar suburbia. As Frank intends to read the speech out loud to himself, he perverts the idea of community and emphasizes even more his self-imposed isolation and his egocentrism. Above all, the community pictured by Ford's main character is devoid of reciprocal support “by the people, and for the people.”

Instead of looking forward to spending some time with his family, Frank would prefer to meet Bernice Podmanicky, a casual acquaintance. To make matters worse, he even considers inviting her over to his house to avoid being alone with his closest relatives. Facing the next of kin scares him, whereas meeting a stranger would be noncommittal. The presence of Bernice “could bring out the unforeseeable best in everybody and cause Thanksgiving to blossom into the extended-family, come-one-come-all good fellowship the Pilgrims might (for a millisecond) have thought they were ringing in by inviting the baffled, mostly starved Indians to their table” (*LoL* 646). To use the terminology of sociologist M. P. Baumgartner, Bascombe practices avoidance at both private and professional level. Instead of staying at home, he undertakes to sell a house to the Bagosh family, but the deal does not go through and Frank concludes that a holiday might not be the best occasion to sell property (cf. 624). So Frank fails as a family man and in his job as a realtor. Worse still, he must finally acknowledge that his private life is in shambles. On Thanksgiving morning, he quarrels with Paul. On top of that, his second wife Sally departs to join her putatively dead but then resurrected ex-husband Wally. So his relationship with both his wife and his son is strained. Besides, Frank learns that his daughter Clarissa is in police custody after stealing her boyfriend’s car. With the stolen car she ran into a merge-lane arrow thereby hitting a highway worker. On leaving his house to drive to Absecon, where his daughter has been arrested, Frank witnesses that his neighbors are held at gunpoint. After all, Thanksgiving culminates in an outbreak of violence. His next-door neighbors are killed and Frank is severely injured. Eventually, the positive spirit of Thanksgiving is completely thwarted and the suburbs have become the center of sheer pandemonium. Like Updike, Ford annihilates the community-building character of this holiday.

To sum up, both Updike and Ford expose the increasing meaninglessness of Thanksgiving. Alienated family members meet and grudgingly agree to spend some hours together. In the course of their reunion, pent-up aggressions lead to altercations and an early end of the supposedly happy encounter. At root, recent suburban literature showcases family conflicts and dysfunctional families. The original idea of the holiday has completely disappeared and the day, which used to be reserved for “saccharine sentiment” (Baker 207), ends in total chaos.

4.7. Conclusion

Updike’s and Ford’s suburbia no longer fuels social space and community life. Towards the end of the twentieth century, community life is deprived of social cohesion. Good neighborly relations have been superseded by estrangement. Suburban life is marked by a withdrawal into the private sphere and by persistent tensions between ethnicities and even in monoracial enclaves.

At the beginning of this chapter, I have alluded to Emerson’s idea of self-reliance and I would like to end this chapter with a comment by Updike on the occasion of Emerson’s bicentennial anniversary in 2003. In his article “Big Dead White Male: Ralph Waldo Emerson Turns Two Hundred,” Updike assesses Emerson’s theories. He concludes his speech as follows:

A country imposed on a wilderness needs strong selves. Whether American self-assertiveness fits into today’s cramped and touchy world can be debated. But Emerson, with a cobbled-together mythology, in melodious accents that sincerely feigned the old Christian reassurances, sought to instill confidence and courage in his democratic audience, and it is for this, rather than for his mellowed powers of observation and wit, that he is honored, if honored more than read. (n. pag.)

Yet the “confidence and courage,” which Emerson valued so much, are no longer an inherent part of the communities depicted by Updike and Ford.

On a spatial level, Updike presents the suburban community of Mt. Judge as a palimpsest, certain parts of which are effaced and rewritten throughout the decades. In the process, the local foundation remains the same. Even though the street names change, Rabbit still recalls the familiar places of his youth. On a social level, Rabbit can neither connect with his neighbors nor with the new generation of Mt. Judge residents. Updike emphasizes the beginning decline of solidarity within the circle of family and friends and, on a wider level, within the neighborhood.

The essence of community life is further eroded in Ford’s trilogy. His protagonist’s concept of community is more multilayered. Unlike Rabbit, Frank is no longer interested in maintaining social bonds with his closest of kin, nor is he in the least interested in joining the community life of the places he lives in. For this reason, Ford’s portrayal of the increasing alienation among family members and the growing dissolution of neighborhood life is harsher and gloomier than in Updike’s fiction. He discloses the creeping disintegration of community life and his linguistic deconstruction of the core of community corroborates his conception of a deteriorating lay of the land. Eventually, the social space of suburbia no longer allows for a working community life. Bascombe’s growing solipsism mirrors the degenerate state of social space and unequivocally perverts what Emerson and De Tocqueville had in mind when writing about self-reliance and individualism.

5. Domestic Space

When we speak of man and space, it sounds as though man stood on one side, space on the other. Yet space is not something that faces man. It is neither an external object nor an inner experience. It is not that there are men, and over and above them *space*; for when I say “a man,” and in saying this word think of a being who exists in a human manner—that is, who dwells—then by the name “man” I already name the stay within the fourfold among things. [...]

Man’s relation to locations, and through locations to spaces, inheres in his dwelling. (Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* 154-155)¹⁰²

For Rabbit and Frank dwelling assumes a pivotal role which is why the third pillar of this thesis comprises the analysis of domestic space. The main emphasis will be on the portrayal of the house and the question of what makes a house a home. In 1984, Leonard Lutwack asserted that “the house is no longer a significant place in the writing of our time” (37). Contrary to Lutwack, I claim that the house represents an issue at stake in Updike’s and Ford’s fiction and that it is fraught with symbolism. The description of both the exterior and the interior of a house reveals more about the main characters than any

¹⁰² In the German original, Heidegger wrote: “Ist die Rede von Mensch und Raum, dann hört sich dies an, als stünde der Mensch auf der einen und der Raum auf der anderen Seite. Doch der Raum ist kein Gegenüber für den Menschen. Er ist weder ein äußerer Gegenstand noch ein inneres Erlebnis. Es gibt nicht die Menschen und außerdem *Raum*; denn sage ich „ein Mensch“ und denke ich mit diesem Wort denjenigen, der menschlicher Weise ist, das heißt wohnt, dann nenne ich mit dem Namen „ein Mensch“ bereits den Aufenthalt im Geviert bei den Dingen. [...]

Der Bezug des Menschen zu Orten und durch Orte zu Räumen beruht im Wohnen” (Heidegger, *Bauen, Wohnen, Denken* 28-29). By “Geviert” or “fourfold” Heidegger means the unity and interrelatedness of human existence with earth, sky, mortals, and divinities. Every human being is born into such a fourfold structure (cf. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* 147).

form of direct characterization. Houses provide the center of everyday life for the main characters and they are the linchpin of the real estate business.

The phrase “Home Sweet Home” has long constituted the core idea suffusing the American dream and, by analogy, the suburban myth. These commonly known words are deeply rooted in the American consciousness. It was John Howard Payne who composed the song *Home Sweet Home* in 1880, and I argue that it spearheads the list of cultural assets:

Mid pleasures and palaces though we may roam,
 Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home.
 A charm from the skies seems to hallow us there,
 Which, seek through the world, is ne'er met with elsewhere.
 Home! home! sweet, sweet home!
 There's no place like home!
 There's no place like home! (n. pag.)

Most Americans are familiar with Payne's song not only since the young Judy Garland desperately tapped her heels repeating “[t]here's no place like home” in the 1939 movie *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*.¹⁰³ Without doubt, the home represents the epitome of American self-fashioning. In literature, it has served as a trope ever since novelists decided to focus on the domestic landscape instead of sending their protagonists on adventurous trips across the country or to the high seas. Sinclair Lewis included Payne's popular lines in *Babbitt* and has one of the real estate salesmen rephrase this song to come up with a suitable advertisement for their company (cf. 45). Lewis' use of Payne's famous lines is particularly noteworthy, as it mirrors the pertinence of home ownership for the middle class. Subsequently, Updike and Ford have rediscovered the domestic environment as the ideal location for their plot. By implication, the home impinges on

¹⁰³ Frank L. Baum first published his novel *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* in 1900.

the emotional state of their main characters. In the next subchapter, I outline why there has been a shift in the choice of setting to the house in postwar suburban literature.

5.1. The “Generation of the Lost Dream”¹⁰⁴

Novelists have exploited the suburban myth with its focus on the house, as it obviously conveys best the prevailing ideals of middle class American culture in the postwar era. However, both Harry Angstrom and Frank Bascombe feel increasingly estranged and dissatisfied. The question arises why Updike and Ford challenge the ideal concept of suburbanites living complacently in their own (or in rented) homes surrounded by convenient kitchen gadgets.

In *American Dream, American Nightmare: Fiction since 1960*, Kathryn Hume asserts that the clash between an idealized America and the real America has always been of interest in American fiction (cf. 4). Her study focuses on literature from the sixties to the nineties (cf. 8). She argues that from the end of the 1930s until the 1950s, the government was seldom if ever criticized (cf. 5). The positive course of the wartime economy had reduced economic discontent during the Second World War. For this reason, these years were characterized by a “consensus culture” and a cooperation “of business, government, and labor [...]” (5). Either tensions did not arise or if they did, they were subdued. Since the 1960s however, the social circumstances have been subject to change. Qualms “about governmental, racial, and personal morality [...]” were responsible for a growing discontent with the system (cf. 5). Moreover, there was a change in politics. Against this background, literary taste started to adapt to the new situation. Hume declares:

¹⁰⁴ Source: Hume 8

the traditional literary themes and structures have lost appeal in part because so many Americans have lost faith in America's future, in America's righteousness, and in the power, meaning, and integrity of the individual. [...] The central solidity and rightness of what had once been America is gone. (5-6)

Up until the 1960s, the white American middle class was convinced that most of the wrongdoings of the past, for instance corrupt machinations or racial and social oppression, could be rectified. Middle class Americans were positive about what Hume calls "their own basic goodness" (6). In the nineties, the composition of society had changed, and the middle class was marked by racial and ethnic diversity. Even though these middle class Americans owned a home, they constantly worried about joblessness, riots, and physical assaults. A cumulative unease with the political situation led to frustration across social classes (cf. 6).¹⁰⁵ This fundamental dissatisfaction is echoed in literature and Hume pigeonholes the authors of the era between the 1960s and the 1990s as the "Generation of the Lost Dream" (8).

In the same manner, Updike's and Ford's main characters experience unease, estrangement and dissatisfaction. Yet their discontent primarily stems from their middling surroundings. Before looking into the portrayal of the characters' domestic space and the suburban house, I consider it essential to elaborate on the significant expansion of the realty business, which was embedded into their novels by both authors.

¹⁰⁵ President Carter's 1979 malaise speech is telling in this context. His speech denounced the lack of confidence engulfing America: "The erosion of our confidence in the future is threatening to destroy the social and the political fabric of America" (Mattson 210). In addition, he claims that "[f]or the first time in the history of our country a majority of our people believe that the next five years will be worse than the past five years" (211).

5.2. Real Estate

The realty business has long constituted an integral part of American life. At the beginning of the 1920s, the “Own-Your-Own-Home” campaign encouraged homeownership and wanted to establish it as one of the constituents of middle class status (cf. Hornstein 120). In 1934, the National Housing Act propagated the idea that “the free-standing, owner-occupied, single-family home in the suburbs became, if not the reality, at least the aspiration of every (truly) American family” (119). After the Second World War, people preferred owning to renting (cf. 154-155). The growing interest in owning property unequivocally accounts for the immense success of the real estate profession in postwar literature.

As houses became commoditized, the realty business experienced a veritable boom. In Sinclair Lewis’ *Babbitt*, which must be considered the matrix for the *Rabbit* novels as I have already pointed out, the profession of the realtor determined the plot. Updike explicitly mentions Lewis’ novel in the epigraph to *Rabbit Is Rich* where he quotes “George Babbitt, of the Ideal Citizen” (n. pag.). The realty business is dealt with comprehensively in *Rabbit at Rest* and *Rabbit Remembered* where Updike turns Janice into a real estate agent. Similarly, Ford’s protagonist is working in the real estate business in *Independence Day* and in *The Lay of the Land*. Indeed, the ubiquity of realty gives reason to assume a deeper sense behind Ford’s endeavor to make Frank a realtor. However, rather pragmatic considerations influenced Ford’s writing process. In order to be able to work in the realty business, his protagonist did not need to go back to university, which made it quite easy for Ford to have a plausible explanation for Frank turning from sportswriter to realtor (cf. Salusinszky 167). In the second and third sequel of his trilogy, Ford chronicles the omnipresence and proliferation of real estate agencies all over the United States, and the plot primarily revolves around houses.

5.2.1. Updike's *Working Girl*

As indicated before, it was Updike's intention to chronicle American middle class life. His protagonist has a one-dimensional point of view and portrays women, most notably his wife Janice, from his male perspective.

Concerning the image of women in the years following the Second World War, I invoke the research done by Betty Friedan to show Updike's take on his female characters. In her seminal study *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan criticized the fact that numerous institutions, women magazines and even colleges, spread a distorted image of the happy suburban housewife who found complete fulfillment in her family and her home (cf. Friedan 10-11). To this effect, Friedan explains:

In the fifteen years after World War II, this mystique of feminine fulfillment became the cherished and self-perpetuating core of contemporary American culture. Millions of women lived their lives in the image of those pretty pictures of the American suburban housewife, kissing their husbands goodbye in front of the picture window, depositing their stationwagonsful of children at school, and smiling as they ran the new electric waxer over the spotless kitchen floor. (Friedan 12)

Friedan outlines how dissatisfied numerous women were, she underscores that they felt trapped and could not tap their potential as they were restricted to their roles as housewives and mothers (cf. 18).

Updike often had to face caustic criticism for his biased and misogynist portrayal of female characters. Even though his description of Janice seems to comply with Friedan's attack on the biased image of the happy suburban housewife, because Janice is dissatisfied with her life, Updike's harsh portrayal implies a highly denunciatory image of the suburban housewife. Janice Angstrom is lethargic and very unhappy in her role as a young housewife and mother in the suburb of Mt. Judge. Often, her or Rabbit's parents

have to take care of their son Nelson. She doesn't at all find fulfillment at home, she is a horrible cook and hates cleaning the apartment in *Rabbit, Run*. Rabbit depicts her as clumsy, and "a mess" (RR 11). She drinks alcohol even though she is pregnant with their second child (cf. 11). When seeing her in her desperate condition, Rabbit hauls at her that "[o]ther women *like* being pregnant" (12). They quarrel, Janice behaves in a very subordinate manner, and when she tells him that she only tried to relax a bit during the afternoon, Rabbit loses his nerves:

"You're supposed to look tired. You're a modern housewife." [...]

It gripes him that she didn't see his crack about being a housewife, based on the "image" the MagiPeel people tried to have their salesmen sell to, as ironical and at bottom pitying and fond. (12-13)

Updike exploits the stereotypical image of the supposedly happy suburban housewife, who was considered to find fulfillment doing household chores surrounded by numerous kitchen gadgets. In *Rabbit, Run*, Janice has adopted her subordinate role in a patriarchal world. However, she does not correspond at all to the stereotypical image of the happy suburban housewife and mother perpetuated in magazines and advertisements according to Friedan. On the contrary, she is a complete failure as a housewife and mother, according to her husband. She is good for nothing. Updike's portrayal of his female protagonist towards the end of the fifties is all the more misogynist, as he portrays Janice as a completely incompetent character. Down the years, Janice manages to extricate herself from male repression. She gradually gains confidence working in her father's business doing the bookkeeping.

In *Rabbit at Rest*, Updike includes the 1988 movie *Working Girl* featuring Melanie Griffith and Sigourney Weaver. This film precipitates Janice's metamorphosis from a

dissatisfied and incompetent housewife to a self-confident working woman. Still, Harry maligns her making derogatory remarks about her and her professional drive:

Now she's got the idea she wants to be a working girl. She's signed up at the Penn State annex over on Pine Street for those courses you have to take to get a real-estate broker's license. At Mt. Judge High I don't think she ever got over a C, even in home ec. (*RatR* 181)

Watching her preparing for class, he "hates to see her struggling so hard not to be dumb" (298). His impudence and superiority once again expose the patriarchal character of their marriage. Rabbit does not take his wife's aspirations seriously and derides the profession *per se*.

By turning Janice into a female realtor, Updike considers a new trend in the real estate business. Since the end of the 1940s, women have been progressing in this field. During the sixties and seventies, the realty business represented an interesting alternative for women, who had so far been mostly restricted to hearth and home (cf. Hornstein 185). From the second half of the sixties into the seventies, feminism experienced a resurgence. Because of this re-energized movement, it became easier for women to advance into the male-dominated territory of real estate. With the realty business offering flexible working time, women could combine their job with their role as wives and mothers. The increasing number of women in this profession brought with it the creation of a female figurehead. According to Jeffrey M. Hornstein, a writing realtor named Mary Shern invented "Suzy Soldsine" who "got into real estate to increase her personal spending power and add some fulfillment to her boring personal life" (186). In this way, the balance between career and domesticity should be promoted as the basic right of every married woman (cf. 185-186). The fact that by 1960 more than a quarter of all realtors were women illustrates the success of the profession (cf. 196). By

supporting Janice's metamorphosis into a working woman in 1989 and in the 1999 coda *Rabbit Remembered*, Updike responds to social change. Not surprisingly, Janice stresses the fact that women make up the majority in her new class (cf. *RatR* 283). It is worth noting that female realtors played a central role in politics, as they advocated free enterprise economy and thus helped pave the way for conservative politicians, such as Ronald Reagan and Barry Goldwater (cf. Hornstein 196).

Updike was conscious about the shift affecting the realty business which is why he made Janice pursue a career of her own. And she manages to assert herself in a still male-dominated domain. After her son Nelson's embezzlement of 200,000 dollars, Janice is eager to sell their property on Franklin Drive to pay credits back. This would be her "entrée" (*RatR* 389) as a realtor. But Rabbit feels rooted to their house and suffers enormously from his wife's blind ambition. Janice deliberately ignores her husband's emotional entanglement with their house and does not accept his entrenchment in Franklin Drive. For her, it is merely a house whereas Rabbit undergirds his rootedness to this place. After his death, she immediately sells the house (cf. *RRem* 260). By contrast, she does not even consider selling her own family's property, neither the Springer house nor the lot where Springer Motors used to be located. Especially the lot is imbued with her childhood memories and therefore sacrosanct. When talking about her father's heritage, she reminisces about her first impressions:

The lot is our number-one asset. [...] I remember when he [her father] bought it after the war, it had been a country gas station, with a cornfield next to it, that had closed during the war when there were no cars, and he took Mother and me down to look at it [...]. Springer Motors won't sell out as long as I'm alive and well, Harry. (*RatR* 388)

Janice's behavior corroborates the importance of memories linked with a place. On the other hand, the house she bought with Rabbit is, for her, not endowed with the same emotional value. However, financial reasons finally force her to change her mind. A decade later, in *Rabbit Remembered*, the Springer lot is completely dilapidated because Janice had to sell her inheritance "to a computer-components company that never took off [...]" (348-349). As for her job, she finally epitomizes the successful working woman she aspired to be ten years before. "Local real estate is lively [...]" (318) in Brewer and she has metamorphosed into a busy realtor. The realty business has allowed her to step out of her shadowy existence in order to tap her full potential. Her profession constitutes an essential part of her middle class self-image and allows her to reinvent herself as a woman. Updike underlines the positive character of the real estate business for the self-realization of women. Against all expectations, Janice is portrayed as an increasingly ruthless and greedy person, who is only interested in succeeding in her job. Hence, the general coarsening of the business has already started to take shape and is symptomatic of Ford's novels.

5.2.2. "Someone Should Draw the Line Somewhere"¹⁰⁶

"You just need to remember the three most important words in the 'relaty budnus,' Frank, and you'll do fine in this shop,' he said, jiggering his heavy brows up and down mock seriously. 'Locution, locution, locution.' "

(Shax Murphy to Frank; *Independence Day* 113)

Shax Murphy, one of the experienced brokers working for the Lauren-Schwindell Group where Frank launches his real estate career, gives him this sardonic piece of advice about the business. And Rolly Mounger, another colleague, informs Frank that "[t]his is

¹⁰⁶ Source: *The Lay of the Land* 61

realty. *Reality's* something else [...]" (ID 115). The name of the company, because of the word *Schwindell*, suggests that this business involves fraudulent behavior and unfair business practices. Frank himself adopts a rather holistic approach towards real estate:

Sometimes a new vista, a new house number, a new place of employ, a new set of streets to navigate and master are all you need to simplify life and take a new lease out on it. Real estate might seem to be all about moving and picking up stakes and disruption and three-moves-equals-a-death, but it's really about arriving and destinations, and all the prospects that await you or might await you in some place you never thought about. (LoL 501)

According to Frank, realtors offer their clients new, enriching perspectives on life by supporting them to find a suitable place to live. Frank is convinced of his beneficial influence. However, at the turn of the millennium, trading houses alone does not suffice anymore to do a good job. Frank considers himself "confessor, therapist, business adviser and risk assessor to the variety of citizen pilgrims who cross my threshold most days" (722). Emphasizing the psychological deficiencies in an alienating suburban society, Bascombe delineates the manifold requirements he has to meet in his job.

In comparison to his colleagues, Frank is not a greedy representative of his professional group. He adamantly rejects the increasing destruction of landscape to create new residential areas: "Flattening pretty cornfields for seven-figure mega-mansions isn't, after all, really *helping* people in the way that assisting them to find a modest home they want—and that's already there—helps them" (292). Frank deeply deplores the eradication of cornfields in order to erect huge houses and clings to the maxim that "[s]omeone should draw the line somewhere" (61). Fundamentally, *The Lay of the Land* denounces the morbid growth of the real estate bubble. As a realtor, he knows best the negative spin-offs of his business. He decries the rise in delinquency in the wake of usurious realty practices. Recognizing the incompatibility of his work ethic

with the destructive forces of the economy, Frank feels the urge to quit the Lauren-Schwindell Group and move to Sea-Clift where he works as a self-employed realtor as of 1992 (cf. 72). In order to set himself apart from the commercial practices of his former employer, he names his own office *Realty-Wise*. Instead of pursuing fraudulent business practices, he intends to be honest with his clients and, in a broader sense, his corporate philosophy promises a more responsible use of development areas and developed sites.

At the beginning of *The Lay of the Land*, Ford's protagonist declares that commerce constitutes the basis of the suburban ethos: "Unbridled commerce isn't generally pretty, but it's always forward-thinking. [...] it feels good that at least commerce keeps me interested like a scientist" (23). By degrees, he realizes that excessive commerce is not about satisfying fundamental needs anymore. Bascombe compares the laws of the real estate business with commercialism and deduces that realtors, like shopping malls, are obliged to satisfy their clients' needs. Ultimately, the real estate market succumbs to the laws of the economy. As a consequence, it is not guided by the principles of fair business practices anymore. This disillusioning recognition is completely at odds with Frank's attitude to work. In the truest sense of the word, he cannot live up to his name anymore due to the lack of frankness in his job. Instead, he feels like "a house flogger" (599). In his case, "a house flogger" whose at times quixotic attitude even prevents him from advertising his business on the internet. He could earn more money by promoting his business online, but flinches from doing so. Whereas Frank still has a sense of moral limits, Janice Angstrom has no qualms about the business and even sells their own house after Rabbit's demise. Still, the Bascombe trilogy chronicles the increasing brutalization of the whole business which is all about making money. The realty business is determined by avarice and unfair competition and this situation is generally accepted, as

everybody wants to own property. Eventually, reality surpasses Ford's fictitious realty world. In 2007, the real estate bubble burst leading to a worldwide financial crisis.

5.3. House and Home

In this subchapter, I investigate how both authors picture the domestic microcosm of their characters. When analyzing the protagonists' private space, it is incumbent to qualify the terms *house* and *home*. I would like to again invoke Sinclair Lewis' *Babbitt*, as Lewis provides a suitable explanation to counter linguistic ambiguities. His protagonist, the paragon of American middle class life, adamantly rejects life in a house with a surplus of gadgets: "It had the best of taste, the best of inexpensive rugs, a simple and laudable architecture, and the latest conveniences" (24). Though every single room fits the latest standard, his house has one decisive drawback: "In fact there was but one thing wrong with the Babbitt house: It was not a home" (24). Consequently, Babbitt, the "Solid Citizen" (18), vehemently revolts against the amenities of his domestic sphere.

In his study *Home: A Short History of an Idea*, architectural historian Witold Rybczynski defines *home* as a combination of house and household. Mere ownership refers to a house, but if attachment is added, a house becomes a home: "'Home' brought together the meanings of house and of household, of dwelling and of refuge, of ownership and of affection. 'Home' meant the house, but also everything that was in it and around it, as well as the people, and the sense of satisfaction and contentment that all these conveyed" (62).

According to James Howard Kunstler's 1994 study *The Geography of Nowhere*, the real estate business took advantage of this particular difference between house and home. From his point of view, twentieth-century Americans were less interested in

establishing efficient communities than in possessing a place they could consider their home. Realtors exploited the dichotomy between house and home to further their cause:

Here was a neat little semantic trick introduced by realtors as they became professionalized: The prospective buyer was encouraged to think of his purchase as a *home*, with all the powerful associations the word dredges up from the psyche's nether regions; the seller was encouraged to think of it as a *house*, just a thing made of wood where the family happened to sleep and eat, nothing to be attached to. It was most emphatically not *home*. Home was where one was born and raised, a place in time called the past, gone forever. (Kunstler 165)

So the word *home* elicits a specific psychological response.

In his tetralogy, Updike uses both terms without however providing a precise explanation of their meaning. For instance, he inserts the semantic difference between house and home in *Rabbit, Run*. Updike's protagonist explains that "[h]is parents' home is in a two-family brick house on the corner [...]" (RR 18). Home is the place where he grew up, it is filled with the recollections of his youth. In contrast, Janice only refers to material possession when she daydreams that "[s]he would be a woman with a house on her own" (214). Her property warrants her middle class existence. The importance of the setting becomes evident when Rabbit even takes account of the domestic background of the girl he wants to have sex with. He dreams of "a little Catholic from a shabby house [...]" (118), which would have excluded his choosing Janice, who lives in an impressive stucco house.

Ford goes one step further. His protagonist virtually dissects the meaning of home. For this reason, Ford's deliberations relating to house and home are more comprehensive. While the house features as an omnipresent motif in Updike's tetralogy, Ford turns it into an even more salient issue. It becomes the gist of his trilogy

determining plot and setting. Therefore, manifold shapes of houses are portrayed with the realty business forming the linchpin of the plot in *Independence Day* and in *The Lay of the Land*. Ford's real estate vocabulary is perforce richer than Updike's, as he needs to express his thoughts in more detail.

In Updike's tetralogy, the quest for an adequate home is essential for Rabbit. On that score, it is incumbent to consider the historical background. Commenting on the fifties, Updike explains that "[t]he intention was to create little nuclear households of happy children, and humming appliances, and a collie dog in a station wagon" (Gross 22). According to Dennis Farney, who wrote an article on Updike in *The Wall Street Journal*, basic American values crumbled during those years with core institutions from the government to churches losing ground. As indicated before, postwar America involved the end of the extended family. The increase in divorce rates entailed the break-up of traditional family patterns. Consequently, Americans were on a spiritual quest and dreamed of finding a safe haven in their homes (cf. Farney A1, A8). Dennis Farney explains that at best, a house provided a home:

More fundamentally, Mr. Updike senses a spiritual emptiness at the core of American life. "Our condition is basically one of anxiety, of lostness," he thinks. Life is a search for "a sense of having found home." [...]

Americans once searched for "home" together, through family and religious faith. Today, they are more likely to search alone, particularly through sexual exploration. (A8)

The spiritual quest went hand in hand with a search for home and, at least as important, an outgoing permissiveness. Spatially speaking, a home might compensate for the spiritual void characteristic of the postwar years.

This search for home is continued in Ford's trilogy. Unlike Rabbit, Frank Bascombe's priority is not so much on finding an appropriate place for himself. Instead,

it is his job to single out a perfect house for his clients in *Independence Day* and *The Lay of the Land*. Literary scholar Harold K. Bush Jr. states that finding a suitable home in the landscape of the twenty-first century has become a strenuous enterprise. According to Bush Jr., Richard Ford mirrors this trend by describing the fate of “dysfunctional homebuyers” (465). The paradox lies in the fact that Ford’s protagonist finds houses for others while it remains uncertain to what extent he manages to find a home himself (cf. 465-466). Ford’s trilogy focuses specifically on the house, but there is an additional layer of what Martyn Bone calls “the capitalist fetishization of place” (*The Postsouthern Sense of Place* 129). Frank Bascombe dissects what becomes of the home if domestic space is increasingly subjugated to economic interests.

By implication, the portrayal of domestic space represents a cogent topic in both authors’ novels. Over many years, their protagonists keep searching for home. It must be noted that neither Rabbit nor Frank have ever built a house themselves, they only rent or buy places. This aspect deserves mentioning as building usually ties a person even closer to a place. Moreover, Rabbit and Frank have similar life experiences, as they both lose a child in the first place they live with their respective families. This might be a reason why they never consider their first dwelling a home.

Fundamentally, Updike and Ford present a plethora of house types and multifaceted interiors in their multivolume fiction. They exhaustively depict the minutiae of single rooms. No detail is left out when they describe the changes in the shapes of the houses, the arrangements of the furniture or even the bathroom carpeting (cf. *RiR* 272-273). It is particularly striking that the suburban houses drafted by Updike and Ford often include a place reserved for the male characters.

5.4. The Male Retreat

Whenever the male characters feel the need to spend some time behind closed doors, they seek refuge in a room of their own. This tradition goes back to the Victorian Age. In *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England*, John Tosh explains that women had been gradually emancipating themselves from male supremacy at the time. Accordingly, the “spatial dynamics within the home” (182) changed: “By the 1880s, however, the role of the study or den as an escape from femininity was emphasized much more” (182). This place inside the house was often referred to as “growlery” (182). The significance of the male retreat in Victorian England is reflected in literature, for example in fiction by Charles Dickens. In the novel *Bleak House*, Mr. Jarndyce, the guardian of Esther Summerson, shows her his “growlery.” It is the room he uses most often:

[...] I was passing through the passages on my return with my basket of keys on my arm, when Mr Jarndyce called me into a small room next his bed-chamber, which I found to be in part a little library of books and papers, and in part quite a little museum of his boots and shoes, and hat-boxes. ‘Sit down, my dear,’ said Mr Jarndyce. ‘This, you must know, is the Growlery. When I am out of humour, I come and growl here.’ (82)

Apart from this place inside the house, the Victorian male used to retreat into the “coach-house” or the “stable yard” (Tosh 182). Likewise, installing a preserve for the husband and father became common in American families:

Privacy for the Victorian family was still associated with short periods of time alone, in a special place in the house: a window seat, a cubbyhole under the stairs, a man's library, or “growlery.” Within the home, there was always somewhere to retreat from the intensity of family life. (Wright 112)

Updike and Ford both resume this Victorian tradition. I argue that three different locations serve as male retreat: the den, the basement, and the studio. If located outside the house, the retreat is connected with the main building.

In his seminal study *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard holds that “every corner in a house, every angle in a room, every inch of secluded space in which we like to hide, or withdraw into ourselves, is a symbol of solitude for the imagination; that is to say, it is the germ of a room, or of a house” (136). Bachelard deplores that a retreat often has negative connotations and he therefore provides examples from literature to show the positive effect of a special corner inside the house (cf. 136-138). Following Bachelard, I assert that Updike and Ford present male preserves which can be considered “a symbol of solitude for the imagination.” Even so, these shelters convey an invariably positive image. First, I will focus on the places inside the house, i.e. Rabbit’s den in *Rabbit Is Rich* and Wade Arcenault’s basement in *The Sportswriter*.

For Rabbit, the den represents the pivot of his new house. It is a room he has always longed for (cf. *RiR* 410). This place bears fabulous traits and is cut off from the rest of the house. With its green and orange fitted carpeting and its fireplace, the den exudes coziness. There are “little high windows whose sashes crank open and shut and are composed of leaded lozenge-panes such as you see in books of fairy tales” (411). In this environment, Rabbit can give full vent to his feelings and daydreams. Spatially speaking, his den is situated on a lower level than the living room which is why he has to step down to get there. Whenever he has to face the home truths—and the word *home* must be taken literally in this context—of his *Dasein* in this first house where he feels at ease, the den serves as a place of evasion. Rabbit is eager to retreat into his parallel universe where a moderated form of pseudo-reality is awaiting him. Above all, the den provides an escape from his daily routine and from his family. There, Rabbit can indulge

in his imagination, it is “a room where people would have trouble getting at him” (410-411). In his parallel universe, he resolves to start reading books and to enlarge his knowledge of history instead of perusing newspapers and magazines. Thus, the den is associated with a more demanding intellectual preoccupation in a fairytale-like surrounding. Moreover, the different spatial level of the den bears new possibilities: “this small difference in plane hints to him of many reforms and consolidations now possible in his life, like new shoots on a tree cropped back” (411). This detail about the difference in space is evocative of the Murketts’ “sunken living room” (72) Rabbit used to dream of.

Gaston Bachelard explains in this context that like animals looking for shelter human beings follow their primitive instincts when looking for nests in their homes: “Thus, well-being takes us back to the primitiveness of the refuge. Physically, the creature endowed with a sense of refuge, huddles up to itself, takes to cover, hides away, lies snug, concealed” (91). In Rabbit’s case, the analogy with the animal world is apposite. A decade later, in *Rabbit at Rest*, he still enjoys his den and almost feels like a rabbit in his hole: “[...] Rabbit feels safe as in a burrow, where the hungry forces at loose in the world would never think to find him” (*RatR* 384). His den provides shelter against the severe hardships afflicting American society. Those negative forces are manifold at the end of the eighties: there is the end of the cold war, the Lockerbie plane crash, the spread of AIDS, the national debt and consequently, the growing influence of Japan on the American economy. Against this background, the male retreat has a positive effect on Rabbit’s emotional landscape. It is his haven and a place suffused with a *genius loci*.

Likewise, Wade Arcenault, a toll-taker and, moreover, father of Frank’s former girlfriend Vicky, must step down into his private retreat. Whereas Rabbit’s den can be considered typically middle class, Wade’s basement conforms to a lower middle class

refuge instead. In *House Thinking: A Room-by-Room Look at How We Live*, Winifred Gallagher includes a scientific study asserting that the basement serves as the most favorite male retreat. The study cited by Gallagher also reveals the exhilarating recognition that women prefer to retreat into the bathroom (cf. 202-203). Strikingly, Wade's basement offers a different sensory experience as light, temperature and smell change upon entering it. Frank explains that the intense chemical smell is characteristic of "suburban basements" (SW 258).

In his retreat, Wade strives for the satisfaction that comes along with DIY. Gallagher's research underlines the positive side effect of the DIY business, which she refers to as "the inner rewards of hands-on work [...]" (197). In his basement, Wade can give free rein to his love for restoring cars. However, there is no possibility to ever exit the Chrysler from the cellar and he knows from the start that his efforts are absolutely in vain. Due to the narrowness of the basement, he can only move the car one foot in each direction. Nevertheless, he abandons himself to his task, fully aware of the futility of his endeavor. In contrast to the imponderabilities of life he encounters upstairs in the real world, his basement is a place devoid of problems. Wade is proud of his DIY job, which he considers an enriching experience, as "it's every bit of it completely knowable [...]" (SW 269). Arcenault's retreat is reserved for "man-talk-below-decks business" (270) and it is obviously a no-trespassing ground for women. There, Wade and Frank are among themselves and talk about the vicissitudes of life. Neither his wife Lynette nor his daughter Vicky dare access this place. Wade jokingly calls his refuge his "devil's dungeon" (258), because it represents a world apart. Like Updike's Rabbit, he retreats into a parallel universe where life is stripped to its essentials. In the following passage, Wade's description of the soothing power of his preserve is redolent of Mr. Jarndyce's "growlery" in Dickens' *Bleak House*:

‘There are a lot of things went into an old car like this, if you get my meaning.’
 [...] ‘Little touches I can’t put into words. I’ll come down here at four in the morning sometimes and tinker till daylight. And I have it to look forward to when I drive home. And I’ll tell you this, son. Any day I come up upstairs, I’m happy as a lark, and my devils are in their dungeon.’ (SW 268-269)

In the same way, Ann’s second husband Charley O’Dell profits from his world apart, which is located outside his house. The retreat is a boathouse and includes his studio. It is erected on pilings above a pond. As the main building is situated on a knoll, Charley can only reach his boathouse via a catwalk. Like Rabbit and Wade, he has to walk down to get there. The catwalk connecting the studio with the main building is evocative of an umbilical cord. Money does not matter to the successful upper middle class architect. Therefore, he has built “a proper old New England seaman’s chapel” (ID 249) to exhibit all the paraphernalia of his wealth. His retreat seems like a miniaturized version of the “whalemen’s chapel” in Melville’s *Moby-Dick or The Whale* (cf. 73). The studio is both office and recreation center. Charley has relocated his hideaway to an exterior place, and so his house and his retreat are spatially separated. The physical distance to his house underpins the fact that he has created a completely secluded room for himself.

Overall, the male retreats discussed here follow a social ranking order. Situated literally lowest is Wade’s subterranean basement, which figuratively represents a lower middle class retreat. Rabbit’s den, which is aboveground but nevertheless subjacent to the other rooms, serves as a typical middle class refuge. Charley’s luxurious chapel-cum-studio on stilts constitutes the retreat of a member of the upper middle class. It is the visual symbol of his wealth. Hence, the physical position of the male retreat mirrors the social position of the respective character. Furthermore, it is noticeable that the retreats share two salient characteristics. Firstly, from a spatial perspective, the male characters

always have to either step or walk down to their private places. Their retreat is like a cocoon offering a refuge from the chores and preoccupations of everyday life. Secondly, these places provide absolute solitude and endow their owners with invigorating power. Sheltered in their favorite corners inside or outside the house, the male characters indulge in activities to their own liking and immerse themselves in a world apart: Rabbit intends to read books there, Wade restores an old car and Charley draws architectural plans. In essence, the *dramatis personae* discussed here use their retreats for self-absorption: Rabbit considers new options in his life, Wade leaves his negative feelings behind and Charley spends some time brainstorming. As mentioned before, Bachelard explains that immersion into the self is often connoted negatively in literature: “a corner that is ‘lived in’ tends to reject and restrain, even to hide, life. [...] In one’s corner one does not talk to oneself. When we recall the hours we have spent in our corners, we remember above all silence, the silence of our thoughts” (136-137). In the cases studied here, the retreat definitely represents an affirmative place. Whether the male characters are busy practicing introspection, doing manual work or drafting blueprints—the retreat has a cathartic and stimulating effect upon them. It certainly constitutes the spatial center of their lives and, in Rabbit’s case, it is the very room which makes his house a home. The male retreat is the only room in the house suffused with a *genius loci*, and it protects the male characters against the vicissitudes of everyday life. It is an exceptional place and stands out whereas none of the other rooms radiates such a positive sense of well-being.

In the following subchapters, I will compare how Updike and Ford represent the protagonists’ house(s) and their conception of home.

5.5. The Suburban Home in Updike's Rabbit Novels

In an interview, Updike disclosed that “[s]omething quite intricate and fierce occurs in homes, and it seems to me without doubt worthwhile to examine what it is” (Howard 11). For this reason, I will elaborate on the momentousness of the home in the four Angstrom novels and the coda *Rabbit Remembered*. Rabbit's detailed description of domestic space determines his concept of home and his sense of place.

5.5.1. From Shadow to Light

Rabbit runs, but he returns. Then he runs again. His ostensibly inconsistent behavior throws his home into sharp relief. Growing up in a duplex house on Jackson Road in the thirties and forties, Rabbit was always surrounded by semi-darkness. His life seemed to be ill-fated, because his parents' house used to be in the shadows: “*The Bolgers' windows getting all that light and here we sit wedged in [italics in the original]*” (RR 18). Updike puts this statement in italics to underline what Rabbit thought about his parents' home as a child. A similar gloominess surrounds him in his first apartment on Wilbur Street. At the age of twenty-six, he is living in a dingy apartment with Janice and Nelson. Updike's diction underscores the repellent character of the clusters of houses:

The frame homes climb the hill like a single staircase. The space of six feet or so that each double house rises above its neighbor contains two wan windows, wide-spaced like the eyes of an animal, and is covered with composition shingling varying in color from bruise to dung. The fronts are scabby clapboards, once white. There are a dozen three-story homes, and each has two doors. The seventh door is his. (8)

The sordid character of this place is almost palpable. What is worse, the pavement of the street ends one block away from Rabbit's apartment (cf. 189). From the outside, his dwelling symbolizes the acme of suburban malaise. The interior corroborates the

impression of his literally living in the shadows, as the sun never reaches the vestibule (cf. 8). Hence, the whole place exudes a dismal atmosphere. Throughout *Rabbit, Run*, the bleak semidarkness of his protagonist's domestic environment is foregrounded. Such a depressing locale inevitably affects Rabbit's state of mind. He is fully aware of the uninviting character of his apartment and a wife who "[j]ust yesterday [...] stopped being pretty" (8). For this reason, he prefers playing basketball with some kids on the street to going home. Even a basketball playground appeals more to him than his apartment, which he does not emotionally connect with. Thirty years later, Rabbit refers to the locale of his youth as "a kind of slum" and is enthralled by the fact that stylish apartments have superseded it (cf. *RatR* 296). Times have changed and the fronts of the condominiums bear witness to this. However, back in 1959, his dull suburban home exacerbated his discontent and his depressed mood.

In the 1969 sequel *Rabbit Redux*, his first house on Vista Crescent in Penn Villas does not disseminate a pleasant atmosphere either. Hardly any light reaches the interior of the kitchen: "The window above the sink is black and as opaque as the orange that paints the asylum windows" (*RRed* 22). To Rabbit, the whole interior of his domestic surroundings appears like a varnished surface:

Rabbit turns from the window and everywhere in his own house sees a slippery disposable gloss. It glints back at him from the synthetic fabric of the living-room sofa and chair, the synthetic artiness of a lamp Janice bought that has a piece of driftwood weighted and wired as its base, the unnatural-looking natural wood of the shelves [...] it glints back at him from the steel sink, the kitchen linoleum with its whorls as of madness, oil in water, things don't mix. (22)

Updike's use of "asylum windows" and "madness" gives this room an almost uncanny quality, and as a reader, one can virtually feel that Rabbit is about to go crazy in these

surroundings. Transparent windows shedding light on the interior are absent from the first two parts of the tetralogy. This lack of light visualizes Rabbit's personal situation. Given that he is no longer the famous basketball star he used to be, he leads a life in the shadows. At this point in his life, his whole existence is wrapped in semidarkness. The prevailing opacity of his dwellings mirrors his growing languor and apathy. In such a dreary environment, he cannot feel at home and he develops a lackadaisical attitude.

The negative portrayal of Rabbit's domestic surroundings reaches its climax in *Rabbit Is Rich*. In the meantime, he has moved in with his mother-in-law on Joseph Street. On every occasion, Updike's main character emphasizes the unbearable gloominess of the house. Even a decade later, in *Rabbit at Rest*, the memories of the Springer house are still deeply ingrained in his subconscious mind. He remembers the enormous copper beech to the left of the house, which was finally cut. The shadows cast by this tree used to increase the oppressive darkness inside their bedroom. Because of the huge tree, "the sun never shone in [...]" (*RatR* 227) and so the natural source of light was blocked. Moreover, Rabbit recalls "the picture windows with the drawn curtains [...]" (452), which aggravated the prevailing semidarkness. Updike, reminding his readership so many times of the insufficient light conditions in the rooms, throws the depressing character of the locale into relief. The gloomy atmosphere of the Springer's dining room is emphasized again in *Rabbit Remembered*. As indicated before, Janice lives in her parents' home with her second husband Ronnie at the turn of the century. In order to prevent the fading of the Oriental rug and to shield the mahogany table against the sunlight, the dining room is mostly protected against light (cf. *RRem* 177). Hence, both the tetralogy and *Rabbit Remembered* bear witness to the dimness of Rabbit's (former) dwellings.

This absence of light, which persists throughout the decades, mirrors Rabbit's personal circumstances. Always in the shadows, he has managed to become the head of Springer Motors, but is actually only tolerated in that position as Janice's husband. Since the end of his career in sports, Rabbit has been leading a life in the back row. He owns neither the Springer house nor Springer Motors, which leaves him with a feeling of emasculation. Above all, the gloomy rooms are deprived of a *genius loci*. It cannot be denied that Updike chooses these shadowy settings to illustrate Rabbit's growing estrangement within his suburban environment. The perpetual lack of light reminds Rabbit of his parental home. For this reason, he only pursues one goal after having suffered from light deprivation for years: "He'd like a house some day with lots of light, splashing in across smart square surfaces. Why bury yourself alive?" (*RiR* 228). Accordingly, his plans to buy a place of his own take shape. In his house on Franklin Drive the lighting conditions are finally different. Rabbit has always dreamt of light-flooded rooms and yearned for an explosion of light. Looking at his property from the outside, he admires "his house with its lit windows [...]" (*RatR* 173). Finally, he is surrounded by light rooms and has managed to overcome the dim places of his past. Throughout the tetralogy, the variations of light and shade within his domestic surroundings have mirrored Rabbit's increasingly disillusioned frame of mind.

In *Rabbit at Rest*, Updike sends his protagonist to the Sunshine state. Beyond doubt, Florida represents the epitome of light. Once more and certainly not coincidentally, the author uses a house metaphor to literally drive home his point. On entering his apartment in Valhalla Village, Rabbit expounds: "You live life here as if your condo is just home base, a sort of air-conditioned anteroom to the sunny mansion of all outdoors. Stay inside, you might start to mildew" (*RatR* 27). Hence, the condominium is considered part of the big Floridian mansion, which is flooded by light and heat. The

second sentence of the quotation foreshadows Rabbit's impending death. Altogether, Rabbit's journey from shadow to light culminates in the midst of the ultimate source of light and eventually entails his doom. He dies in the "sunny mansion" of Florida, and death comes upon him when he does what he likes best: play basketball. His life circle is complete now.

5.5.2. The Role of Furniture

Updike's playing with light proves his predilection for opposites, as there are either half-dark or light rooms. Similarly, there are either cluttered or sparsely furnished rooms. The furnishings serve as a key element in the tetralogy and in *Rabbit Remembered*. In Rabbit's first apartment on Wilbur Street, the shabby furniture stands out. It strongly influences his psychological state. If the interior of his apartment had been more appealing, Rabbit might have been able to endure his life better. But the run-down, darkish furniture increases his constant feeling of unease. The absence of color implicates the absence of joy and pleasure in his life at the end of the fifties. Himself an orderly person, Rabbit cannot bear the overflowing ashtray, the rumpled carpet, Nelson's scattered toys and the dirt under the radiators: "the continual crisscrossing mess—clings to his back like a tightening net" (*RR* 14). His domestic environment strangles him and he loathes the interior of this place. In addition to his boring job as a salesman of household gadgets, the harrowing atmosphere of his putative home exacerbates his alienation. Within this depressing locale, his pregnant wife seems like an add-on to the furniture. Always watching television and drinking alcohol, she has merged with the armchair. Before leaving his narrow and suffocating place behind, Rabbit has a final look at everything: "he surveys the apartment once more, and the furniture, carpeting, wallpaper all seem darkly glazed with the murk filming his own

face [...] he is glad to get out" (86). Eventually, his domestic chaos precipitates his flight. The rebarbative setting illustrates his utter discontent. Yet instead of tidying up his apartment to perform an act of inner catharsis, Rabbit simply renounces his capacity to act. He literally lives up to his name and takes to his heels.

A decade later, the repellent interior is characteristic of the first house of his own. Angstrom abhors the alien character of his microcosm and again gets the impression that everything is covered with a murky veil. The armchair, the sofa, and the lamp consisting of a piece of driftwood underscore the fact that these pieces of furniture do not belong there. It is "furniture Rabbit has lived among but has never known, made of substances he cannot name, that has aged as in a department store window, worn out without once conforming to his body" (*RRed* 62). The conglomerate of interior furnishings aggravates his repugnance toward the setting as such. Rabbit explains that he and Janice "never really picked out the furniture, it just kind of happened" (121). Consequently, his domestic surroundings augment his melancholy.

In *Rabbit Is Rich*, it is his mother-in-law's furniture which impinges on his life. The crammed rooms had already made a lasting impression on him when he dated Janice at the end of the fifties. Rabbit reminisces about his feelings when he first saw the house: "big rooms full of the latest and best goods [...]. Everything looked new and smelled so clean, and in the side room off the living room a long wrought-iron table held a host of tropical plants, a jungle of their own that seemed the height of luxury" (*RiR* 245). Ten years later, after Nelson and his family moved in, the house appears to him as "pathetically furnished" (*RatR* 230). Two pieces of furniture are mentioned throughout the tetralogy: Bessie Springer's Barcalounger and a heavy glass egg with a teardrop, which Angstrom often dreams of smashing into his wife's skull. This pale-green glass egg is also mentioned in *Rabbit Remembered* where the top of the Zenith television is loaded

with Bessie's knickknacks (cf. 190, 303). Zenith is a brand name, but in this context, it is again evocative of Sinclair Lewis' *Babbitt* who used to live in Floral Heights, a suburb of the fictitious city of Zenith. Regarding the composition of the interior, Updike deliberately arranges the different pieces of furniture in the rooms. Over the years, he maintains the ground plan of the Springer house and the pieces of furniture keep their position in the respective rooms.

What is more, Updike contrasts the crammed rooms of the Springer house with the sparsely furnished rooms of Rabbit's own property on Franklin Drive. Whereas Bessie's pretentious abode was crammed, dark and full of bric-à-brac, Rabbit's house is only austere furnished. Simplicity and frugality are his new credo. Rabbit certainly takes a step toward minimalism by purchasing the house on Franklin Drive. The described simplicity reminds of Thoreau's description of his hut at Walden Pond. Thoreau aimed at a life in accordance with nature and intended to return to simplicity. In *Walden*, he explained: "Furniture! Thank God, I can sit and I can stand without the aid of a furniture warehouse. [...] Indeed, the more you have of such things the poorer you are" (162). In fact, he had made part of the furniture himself and felt at ease with some few essentials. Like Thoreau, Rabbit hardly possesses any furniture. Apart from a mahogany table and some boxes with kitchenware, he and Janice do not own much (cf. *RiR* 392, 410). Even though he used to dislike Bessie Springer's stuffed rooms, he now misses her furniture: "Harry has no habits yet in this house; without habits and Ma Springer's old furniture to cushion him, his life stretches emptily on all sides, and it seems that moving in any direction he's bound to take a fall" (413). Against all odds, Bessie's knickknacks had provided Rabbit with a feeling of safety and belonging. After years of being spatially limited, he finally feels "[l]ost in space" (419) in his house on Franklin Drive. He is not used to living in almost empty rooms, and starts to ponder what it might cost him to

furnish the house. He felt “dis-placed” when he still had to live in the Springer house and now misses what he once rejected.

In the last volume of the tetralogy, the portrayal of furniture gains an additional layer of meaning. Updike’s focus is on three settings: the Springer house, Rabbit’s meanwhile furnished property on Franklin Drive and the condominium in Florida. Ma Springer’s Barcalounger still exists. In 1989, it is old (cf. *RatR* 289) and contrasts with the more modern furniture Nelson and his wife Pru bought at Schaechner’s. Even after Bessie’s death, her house and her furniture, which constituted the foundation of her existence, still impinge on Janice’s emotional landscape. Furthermore, feelings also affect the perception of place. For instance, the furniture of Rabbit’s den on Franklin Drive, where he usually enjoys his seclusion, aggravates his psychological distress. When he gets a call from one of Nelson’s drug dealers, his fear distorts the perception of his retreat. At that moment, Rabbit projects his anxiety onto the furniture thereby reifying his fear:

The familiar room, the den with its frost-faced TV and two silvery-pink wing chairs and bookshelves holding a smattering mostly of history books and on the upper shelves some china knickknacks [...] that used to be in Ma Springer’s breakfront, all this respectable furniture changes quality, becomes murky and fluid and useless, at the insertion of this menacing plaintive voice into his ear [...]. (208)

After the abrupt end of the call, his surroundings seem to liquefy and change their state of aggregation. Rabbit thinks “that the walls of his solid little limestone house are as thin as diet crackers, that the wall-to-wall carpet under his feet is soaked with water, that a pipe has burst and there is no plumber to call” (208). Updike exploits the setting to amplify Rabbit’s inner turmoil. In the same manner, the portrayal of the condominium in Florida underpins his suffering. Throughout *Rabbit at Rest*, Updike stresses Rabbit’s

poor health and his doom, which is why Angstrom persistently experiences angst. Moreover, Rabbit escapes to Florida after having slept with his daughter-in-law. He is desperate and, as is his habit, shuns direct confrontation with Janice. Therefore he retreats to their Floridian apartment. Again, his emotional landscape modifies his perception: “The whole apartment [...] seems to Rabbit a tight structure carefully hammered together to hold a brimming amount of fear” (423). This all climaxes in the final personification of place:

The rooms and furniture of the condo in these days he’s been living here alone have taken on the tension and menace of a living person who is choosing to remain motionless. At night he can feel the rooms breathe and think. They are thinking about him. The blank TV, the blond sofa [...] the aqua kitchen cabinets that seemed too intense once they were painted [...] all have a certain power, the ability to outlast him. (449)

Inanimate objects are suffused with life and in addition, the color of the kitchen elicits negative associations. Being underwater has been a nightmare for Rabbit ever since his Sunfish tour with his granddaughter Judy. Hence, the bluish color of the kitchen furniture increases his panic.

Updike utilizes the presence (and the absence) of furniture to intensify Rabbit’s psychological condition. Initially, Rabbit felt at ease among the furniture of his den. But toward the end of his life, his health suffers and he exhibits signs of decrepitude. Furthermore, he has betrayed both his wife and his son. The worse his emotional condition becomes, the more negatively he perceives his domestic surroundings.

5.5.3. "Take Me Home"¹⁰⁷

In Rabbit's life, only two places deserve to be called a *home*: his parents' house on Jackson Road and his property on Franklin Drive. For him, his parental home was sacrosanct until his adulthood with the power of this past home impacting on his whole life. His parents used to like their middling abode, even though Mrs. Angstrom imagines what Rabbit's future wife Janice might have thought about her when entering their place for the first time: "All she meant was, What [sic] was I doing living in such a run-down half-house when she came from a great big stucco barn on Joseph Street with the kitchen full of gadgets [...]" (RR 137). The Springers' impressive house is the opposite of the Angstroms' ordinary dwelling. For Rabbit, his parents' place provides shelter and refuge, whereas the apartment he inhabits with his little family in 1959 lacks the very characteristics of a safe haven. As a kid, Rabbit enjoyed his sheltered existence and the odors of his childhood home fostered feelings of rootedness (cf. RRed 304). This synesthetic effect is intimately entwined with Jackson Road. Nonetheless, as an adult, he often associates his parents' house with the smell of his mother's medicine combined with "fleshly staleness" (323). His positive childhood associations are then superseded by a sensation of infirmity and decay.

Regarding the key role of place, Gaston Bachelard holds that "[t]he house we were born in is more than an embodiment of home, it is also an embodiment of dreams" (15). In fact, the *genius loci* of the places of Rabbit's past still pervades his subconscious mind almost forty years later:

His dreams are delicious, like forbidden candy—intensely colored overpopulated rearrangements of old situations stored in his brain cells, rooms like the little living room at 26 Vista Crescent, with the fireplace they

¹⁰⁷ Source: *Rabbit at Rest* 294

never used and the lamp with the driftwood base, or the old kitchen at 303 Jackson, with the wooden ice box and the gas stove with its nipples of blue flame and the porcelain table with the worn spots, skewed and new and crowded with people [...]. Harry wakes from these dreams reluctantly, as if their miniaturized visions are a substance essential to his nutrition [...]. (*RatR* 429-430)

In his dreams, he construes a utopian ideal of a perfect home, which explains his reluctance to face reality. In principle, his first apartment on Wilbur Street has never represented a home for him. Thirty years later, Updike's protagonist grudgingly recalls his former life there: "the view across the asphalted rooftops to the peaked houses and parked cars lower down just seemed an enlargement of their discontent, their defeat, a sense of defeat the years have brought back to him, after what seemed for a while to be triumphs" (*RatR* 296-297). And in *Rabbit Redux*, Rabbit despises his house on Vista Crescent in Penn Villas even more vehemently than the apartment on Wilbur Street. It is sandwiched between similar cookie-cutter houses, but the name of the street is misleading: "the view from any window is as into a fragmented mirror, of houses like this, telephone wires and television aerials showing where the glass cracked" (*RRed* 13). Updike's metaphor of the cracked glass is reminiscent of John Keats' *The Crack in the Picture Window* in which Keats analyzed the erosion of the suburban myth.¹⁰⁸

Beyond that, the depiction of the characters' state of mind depends on the historic circumstances. Whereas the Eisenhower years had been relatively calm, the Hippie

¹⁰⁸ Beyond that, these lines are evocative of Malvina Reynolds' song "Little Boxes," in which she caricatures the numbing monotony of suburban housing estates. The first stanza runs as follows:

"Little boxes on the hillside,
 Little boxes made of ticky tacky,
 Little boxes on the hillside,
 Little boxes all the same.
 There's a green one and a pink one
 And a blue one and a yellow one,
 And they're all made out of ticky tacky,
 And they all look just the same." (Nicolaides and Wiese 294)

culture and the Civil Rights Movement of the sixties encompassed upheaval. In *Rabbit Redux*, Jill and Skeeter embody these cataclysmic forces. Their provocative behavior literally sets Rabbit's world on fire and leaves him in a state of lethargy. Again, domestic space has an enormous impact on Rabbit's feelings. While the United States are in a state of turmoil, Rabbit is incapable of acting within the microcosm of his own house. He has gradually abandoned his agency as a responsible adult person. Rabbit soon learns that owning a place does not necessarily imply happiness despite governmental programs to foster home ownership. On the contrary, he feels "dis-located" and powerless. The portrayal of his house intensifies his discontent. Against the background of the moon landing, he perceives his domicile as "a strange dry place, dry and cold and empty spinning in the void of Penn Villas like a cast-off space capsule. He doesn't want to go there but he must. He must" (*RRed* 113). This attitude toward his home environment explains his relief following the arson. The destruction of his house involves the annihilation of his adult status. Even though only debris is left of his property, Rabbit does not bemoan the loss of his house. Instead, he voluntarily moves in with his parents where he is finally on *terra firma*: "It has been his salvation, to be home again" (304). He is no longer—and in fact he has never been—the self-reliant head of the Angstrom family. The rubble on Vista Crescent is a symbol of his life and, in a broader sense, of the imbalance of his country. As indicated before, the soil beneath the building rubble is penetrated by sewer smell. Figuratively, this offensive smell sums up the ailments of suburbia.

With regard to place, the meaning of *Redux* is unequivocal: Rabbit is led back to the protective cocoon of his childhood home, which has a strong emotive draw for him and influences his whole life. However, Rabbit makes one serious mistake, which he only

realizes years later. He was used to glorifying his childhood at his parents' place. Only at the end of *Rabbit Redux* does he realize this fallacy:

There was a time [...] when this homely street [...] its sidewalk blocks tugged up and down by maple roots, its retaining walls of sandstone and railings of painted iron and two-family brickfront houses [...] excited Rabbit with the magic of his own existence. These mundane surfaces had given witness to his life; this cup had held his blood; here the universe had centered [...]. No more. Jackson Road seems an ordinary street anywhere. Millions of such American streets hold millions of lives, and let them sift through, and neither notice nor mourn, and fall into decay, and do not even mourn their own passing but instead grimace at the wrecking ball with the same gaunt facades that have outweathered all their winters. (324)

The sobering realization that houses, and especially his parents' house, are transient and exchangeable leaves him with a feeling of forlornness. For this reason, Rabbit continues his persistent search for a home in *Rabbit Is Rich*. Notwithstanding the country's energy crisis, he enjoys his social ascent. From an economic perspective, he has reached upper middle class status, but still suffers from his inappropriate living conditions. "Every couple we know owns their own house [...]" (*RiR* 348) he laments. Rabbit does not come to terms with living in his parents-in-law's great big stucco barn. He cannot connect with this place and imparts to Janice that he has "been trying to get out of this fucking depressing house for years [...]" (36). There is a constant feeling of emasculation as he does not own the Springer house: "His house, yet not his. [...] He lives here like a boarder, a rummy old boarder in his undershirt, too fuddled to move. Even Ruth has her space" (140).

Years later, we learn that he vehemently objected to investing time and money into the Springer house. In *Rabbit Remembered*, Ronnie Harrison speaks ill of Rabbit and criticizes his poor qualities as a householder (cf. *RRem* 213). From a psychological point

of view, not owning a place robs a man of the basis of his existence. Given that his closest friends are house owners, Rabbit is in a tight spot. He dreams of a house in Penn Park, with a stone facade and a big living room where they can finally receive guests. Janice and Rabbit would like to live in a house full of fancy kitchen gadgets in the midst of notable lawyers and dermatologists. Merely communicating about their future place turns them on and culminates in their having sex (cf. *RiR* 319, 322-323). Eventually, they buy a mock-Tudor house behind two bigger pretentious houses in Penn Park (cf. 409). Updike places his protagonist on a dead end road. From a spatial point of view, Rabbit is literally trapped at the end of the street, an impasse at that. The fork cutting off of Franklin Drive does not even have a name and therefore their new address is 14 ½ Franklin Drive. Rabbit considers calling the fork Angstrom Way. Webb Murkett proposes calling it Angstrom Alley, but the derogatory term *alley* reminds Rabbit too much of the alleys of his Mt. Judge past (cf. 411). He belongs to the upper middle class now, and being located in an alley would not befit his social status anymore.

A decade later still, in *Rabbit at Rest*, his whole mindset is determined by ownership: “Janice is over there at her mother’s old place a fair amount, but not me. She owns it, I don’t” (*RatR* 183). Thus, for him, property represents the primary criterion of middle class status and his whole *Dasein* depends on it. On the basis of Greenblatt’s *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, I therefore deduce that the possession of a place constitutes the core of Rabbit’s self-fashioning. On that score, I would like to draw on research by geographers Duncan and Lambert: “Place-based identity is a type of identity that Americans are relatively comfortable with, as it doesn’t appear to contradict the deeply embedded American cultural value of a classless society” (270). In Rabbit’s case, the attractive limestone house with its fishpond represents the home he has always longed for. It provides him with the shelter he has been missing throughout his life. Thanks to

his den, he experiences rootedness for the first time. After a stay at the hospital, when Janice wants to take him to the Springer house, Rabbit exclaims: “Why can’t I go to my own fucking house? I was looking forward to it. I lived in that damn barn of your mother’s for ten years and that was enough. [...] Take me home” (*RatR* 294). Janice, on the contrary, is tied to her parents’ house and will never have the same connection toward their common property. After marrying Ronnie, they both live in the Springer house, and Janice feels the urge to set things straight:

This is my house, he [Ronnie] had said, but it was not, it was her house, the house she had been raised in, the house her mother’s pride had cleaned and polished and her father’s money had maintained. They were surrounded by Koerner and Springer things; the Angstroms and the Harrisons had contributed hardly a stick of furniture, they were nobodies in the county, they would leave nothing behind but their headstones. (*RRem* 304)

Once more, this statement undergirds the concept of place-based identity, as social status heavily relies on property. Accordingly, this reading implies that Janice married two “nobodies” and that her property provides the foundation for her status as “somebody” in this suburban neighborhood. Her self-fashioning involves her house. For this reason, she does not intend to sell it, at least not at that moment in her life. By contrast, she never connects in the same way with the house on Franklin Drive. The possession of this place enables Rabbit to finally step out of his wife’s shadow. It is striking that Rabbit uses the word *place* to refer to the locale and the word *home* to allude to the feelings associated with it: “I love this place. [...] It’s the only place I’ve ever lived where I felt at home, at least since Jackson Road. This place has class. It’s us” (*RatR* 387-388). 14 ½ Franklin Drive is the only place that does not leave him with a feeling of “emotional homelessness.”

To conclude, light and furniture constitute an essential cornerstone of the power of a place. The personification of furniture and the synesthetic perception of domestic space enhance this effect. Beyond that, both the past *and* the present of a place determine whether Rabbit conceives of a house as a home. Throughout the decades, Updike's protagonist exhibits negative feelings ranging from fear to distress to what he calls a "sense of doom" (*RatR* 8). Most of Rabbit's gloomy suburban dwellings engender his psychological confinement. In the end, not even his home on Franklin Drive can fully dispel his general unease. Basically, space serves as a litmus test for Rabbit's fear-laden emotional landscape, as there is a striking correlation between his domestic environment and his state of mind.

5.6. "Home Truths"

5.6.1. Richard Ford's Concept of Home and "Locatedness"

Ford's perpetual restlessness determines his conception of home. In "An Urge for Going: Why I Don't Live Where I Used to Live," he explains that *home* does not refer to a specific location, but to the emotions transferred onto such a fixed location:

Home—real home—the important place that holds you, always meant that: affection, love. [...]

Construed differently, as *turf*, home just seems a provisional claim, a designation you make upon a place, not one it makes on you. A certain set of buildings, a glimpsed, smudged window-view across a schoolyard, a musty aroma sniffed behind a garage when you were a child, all of which come crowding in upon your latter-day senses—those are pungent things and vivid, even consoling. But to me they are also inert and nostalgic and unlikely to connect you to the real, to that essence art can sometimes achieve, which is permanence. (62)

Ford further explains his idea of home in “Accommodations” where he indulges in reminiscences about the time spent at his grandfather’s hotel when he was a child. He comes to the conclusion that “[h]ome is finally a variable concept” (43).¹⁰⁹ His childhood memories partly explain why Ford usually refrains from associating home with one single locale. In a 2007 interview for *Granta*, he illustrates that his idea of home includes more than one location on the map and is connected with multiple locations instead. From the experience of having lived in many different places in different states for a certain amount of time, he deduces that “the essence of home for me is quite variable” (Adams 19). It is Ford’s firm conviction that the average American citizen should be capable of feeling at home anywhere in the country and not only in one particular spot. For this reason, he recommends changing places (cf. “An Urge for Going” 63).¹¹⁰ Interestingly, Ford himself had the experience of owning property. Yet even the mere idea of spatial permanence is anathema to him (cf. 65).¹¹¹ His aversion to permanence has certainly affected his portrayal of community life in *Independence Day*.

Ford is fully aware of the fact that his restlessness counteracts the traditional American ethic of settling down: “*Transient* is a word of reproach; *impermanence* bears a taint [...]” (64). Comparing himself with the average American, Ford realizes that for him moving has the same effect which settling has for his compatriots: it generates a feeling of safety and control of the self. This recognition leads him to renegotiate his idea of locatedness, which comprises “some quality within us” (68). As is often the case with Ford, the meaning of certain terms exceeds their mere denotations. Therefore it is essential to elaborate on his idea of locatedness in order to comprehend the pivotal role

¹⁰⁹ In this context, he also reminisces about Markham Street where the hotel was located. The name of the street might have been his literary inspiration for the Markham subplot.

¹¹⁰ Numerous passages of “An Urge for Going: Why I Don’t Live Where I Used to Live” and “I Must Be Going: In Praise of Moving and Moving and Moving...” are identical.

¹¹¹ His rejection of permanence made him empty a can of white paint in the living room of the first house he ever owned in order “to desanctify” (“An Urge for Going” 65) it and to fight perpetualness.

of the suburban home in the trilogy. Elinor Ann Walker conceives of Ford's concept of locatedness as a "more metaphysical configuration" (*Richard Ford* 205). In an interview with Walker, he underlines the emotional constituent of this term: "My sense of locatedness is actually just a matter of where I work, and the contact I keep with the people I love. That's as much location as I feel is absolutely essential" ("An Interview with Richard Ford" 133).¹¹² Fundamentally, geography recedes into the background:

But, anyway, I think one's sense of locatedness represents the claim you make on place, rather than the claim it supposedly makes on you. [...] Therefore, my view is that anything you feel about a place, anything that you think about place at all, you have authored and ascribed to some piece of geography. Everything that defines locatedness is then something that you yourself generate. ("An Interview with Richard Ford" 142)

As was the case with his idea of home, Ford's concept of locatedness challenges and ultimately denies the inherent power of a place. Instead, an individual ascribes meaning to a place. In essence, Ford's view on home and locatedness is highly personal and unorthodox. With such background knowledge of the author's unconventional approach, his protagonist's musings about the significance of domestic space become more tangible. I would like to point out that Frank Bascombe mainly applies the term *place* in connection with suburban houses and residential areas.

¹¹² Ford also incorporates his concept of locatedness in the short story "Quality Time." His protagonist Jena has an affair with Wales, a journalist. When Jena thinks about what her husband might miss in their marriage, she explains: "But *he'd* [sic] wanted something more, something he couldn't quite describe but could feel vividly the lack of. A sense of locatedness was absent—his words—something she should somehow contribute to" (*A Multitude of Sins* 26).

5.6.2. The Home in the Bascombe Trilogy: Abiding the Abode?

5.6.2.1. Architectural Styles

Authenticity is a prime concern for Ford. Before writing about the New Jersey area, he had closely studied the architecture and anatomy typical of New Jersey houses. Helen Schwartz' book *The New Jersey House* has helped Ford depict the houses with as much verisimilitude as possible.¹¹³ Her illustrated book contains numerous pictures of the shapes of the houses incorporated by Ford. In the afterword to *The Lay of the Land*, he explicitly thanks Schwartz for her research on New Jersey architecture.

This subchapter traces the architectural styles taken up by Ford. As mentioned previously, Updike also inserts architectural trends characteristic of the respective decade. He includes the ranch house in *Rabbit Redux* (cf. 4)¹¹⁴ and the split-level house in *Rabbit at Rest* (cf. 174). Likewise, the ranch house occurs in Ford's trilogy when Bascombe alludes to the houses on Timbuktu Street in *The Lay of the Land* (cf. 602). Apart from that, Ford selects rather pompous architectural styles, all of which are discussed in Schwartz's book: Greek Revival, Queen Anne, and Tudor Style. Chronologically, the romantic houses of the Greek Revival period range first. From 1836 to 1850, Greek Revival was the prevailing architectural style (cf. Schwartz 55). Frank's ex-wife Ann lives in a "Greek Revival town house of a style and 1920s vintage typical of the succinct, nice-but-not-finicky central Jersey architectural temper [...]" (*ID* 106-107). It is interesting to note that Ann's house is ascribed to the 1920s. Schwartz explains the particularities of this architectural line: "Endless combinations of pediments, cornices,

¹¹³ Schwartz is former president of the *New Jersey Society of Architectural Historians* (cf. back cover of Schwartz' book).

¹¹⁴ In *In Our Times: America since World War II*, Emily and Norman Rosenberg explain that the ranch house was glorified as the perfect home for a consumption-oriented family in the fifties (cf. 65). The kitchen was considered the meeting place for the whole family (cf. 66). Indeed, the kitchen represents a highly frequented room throughout the tetralogy, but even more important is the living room.

and columns surrounded doors and windows and topped walls, determining the character of the American house for nearly two decades” (55). The second most frequent style Ford incorporates is the Queen Ann house, which was characteristic of high Victorian architecture (cf. 130). Numerous add-ons, like towers, gables, and dormers were supposed to embellish the facades. The Queen Ann houses typical of New Jersey were smaller but “built with the same structural exuberance of the grander versions, using a variety of materials and ornament” (130). In *Independence Day*, Bascombe’s girlfriend and later wife Sally lives in a huge Queen Ann house close to the sea (cf. 147). The third house type Ford includes is the Tudor house, which was a widespread architectural style at the beginning of the 20th century (cf. McAlester 358). Tudor style is a subcategory of Eclecticism, which resorts to both classical and modern architecture as its source of inspiration (cf. 319). Right at the beginning of *The Sportswriter*, Frank explains that his house was built in Tudor style. Hence, these houses have a history of their own and diverge from the mass-produced houses characteristic of the second half of the 20th century. These buildings thwart the impression of exchangeability and follow a very specific architectural style instead. However, Frank also provides examples of uniform housing estates.

5.6.2.2. “Illusion Will Never Be Your Adversary Here”¹¹⁵

At the beginning of the 1980s, Ford’s *The Sportswriter* documents the sprawl of housing areas which are akin to theme parks. Pheasant Run, where Frank’s girlfriend Vicky Arcenault bought an apartment, is presented as “a theme-organized housing development [...]” (50). Her father Wade Arcenault and his second wife live “in the same sort of place down in Barnegat Pines [...]” in an area called Sherri-Lyn Woods (cf. 50-51,

¹¹⁵ Source: *The Sportswriter* 50

239). The residential communities of Pheasant Run and Sherry Lyn Woods (with a y and without the hyphen) can be traced on the New Jersey map. So Ford's cartography of New Jersey might allude to real locations.¹¹⁶

The suburban house of Wade and his second wife exceeds the factitious character of Vicky's place, as it is located on an artificial peninsula. This place is deprived of established structures, because it does not have a past. It is exactly this loss of connectedness to the past which characterizes Ford's portrayal of suburban space. His protagonist describes this newly erected location as follows:

This snaky peninsula is the work of some enterprising developer who's carted it in with trucks and reclaimed it from a swamp. And it has not been a bad idea. You could just as easily be in Hyannis Port if you closed your eyes, which for a moment I do. (252)

Here, Ford hyperbolically distorts the lack of authenticity by contrasting it with the exclusive housing estates of Hyannis Port, where President Kennedy used to own a house. A further issue is that this building site is redolent of Updike's Mt. Pemaquid in *Rabbit Is Rich*. However, there is one crucial difference. Sherri-Lyn Woods had to be banked up and was man-made whereas Mt. Pemaquid used to be a virgin area before the country club was constructed. It must be mentioned that none of Wade's neighbors in this unusual suburban place is indigenous to the area. According to Wade, former residents would not even recognize Sherri-Lyn Woods anymore (cf. 258). These newly erected suburban settings distinguish themselves by their inauthentic aura. Neither the housing estates nor the inhabitants are entrenched in this landscape. Still Wade thinks that the area is "our little Garden of Eden down here [...] which is why I don't mind

¹¹⁶ In "A New Jersey State of Mind" (McGrath n. pag.), a 2006 article in *The New York Times*, Ford recounts how he travelled New Jersey to catch the spirit of the state in his writing.

driving fifty miles to work" (257). Ford records the fact that suburbanites often create a bucolic world apart while shutting reality out.

In Vicky's residential district, euphonious street names painted on spurious slates connote a pastoral idyll. The houses are not the English country-style houses that the melodious street names, like Hedgerow Place, suggest. They evoke a utopian ideal of the suburban myth by simulating Edenic conditions. The explicit reference to the American painter Andrew Wyeth intensifies the impression of an idyllic place (cf. 50). It is significant that Updike also alludes to this artist in *Rabbit Is Rich* when describing the "reproductions of Wyeth watercolors" (262) in the Murketts' living room. Among other things, Wyeth was known for his propensity to catch the scenic American landscape.¹¹⁷ Matthew Guinn's study on Ford in *After Southern Modernism: Fiction of the Contemporary South* categorizes the housing estates of Pheasant Run as "faux-pastoral," because the Anglophile names point toward a tradition which has never existed in this part of New Jersey (cf. 121). Of course, the same can be said about Sherri-Lyn Woods in Southern New Jersey. Here, "woods" is misleading and denotes an inexistent reality. So Ford caricatures the fake character of this housing estate which looks like any place in California (cf. *SW* 239). The *dramatis personae* buy into a utopian vision of the suburban myth, and the places they acquire are more akin to Potemkin-style villages than to real homes. Essentially, what they purchase is an empty wrapping. The attractive facades are a sham, but residents are nevertheless content to get their piece of the suburban pie. To use Bascombe's words when describing New Jersey: "Illusion will never be your adversary here" (50). What Ford writes about suburban housing estates chronicles the American endeavor to acquire a seemingly nostalgic pseudo-place. In his 1994 study,

¹¹⁷ In *The Art of Andrew Wyeth*, Wanda M. Corn explains that Wyeth was "hailed as the 'people's painter,' the hero-artist of agrarian America. His images of the countryside and its folk are said to be plainspeaking, appealing to everyone's love for picturesque America [...]" (93).

James Howard Kunstler accentuates this inability of Americans to differentiate between truth and real(i)ty:

This habit of resorting to signs and symbols to create the illusion of charm in our everyday surroundings is symptomatic of a growing American character disorder: the belief that it is possible to get something for nothing. [...] The culture of advertising—which bombarded Americans daily, hourly—eroded our capacity to distinguish between the truths and the lies. [...] You could name a housing development Forest Knoll Acres even if there was no forest and no knoll, and the customers would line up with their checkbooks open. [...] In fact, they preferred fantasy. They preferred lies. And the biggest lie of all was that the place they lived was *home* [sic]. (169)

In *The Sportswriter*, the fake character of the exterior is intensified by the portrayal of the interior. For example, Vicky's overly neat apartment and her kitschy furnishings make her place look like an exhibition room. Her spick and span dwelling appears sterile. As her condominium was furnished within a day at the *Miracle Furniture Mile*, it lacks character and patina: "pastel poof-drapes, sunburst mirror, bright area rugs with abstract designs, loveseat with a horse-and-buggy print, a maple mini-dining room suite, a China-black enamel coffee table, all brown appliances and a whopper Sony" (SW 54). In contrast to the exuberant and unique furniture Updike's Rabbit is surrounded with, the trite character of Vicky's run-of-the-mill interior creates an even more negative effect than the monotony of the facades. Rabbit used to inhabit authentic houses, whereas Vicky lives in a completely designed place. Whenever Frank visits her, everything is in its proper place and perfectly arranged. Her apartment always looks the same, from both the outside and the inside. In Updike's tetralogy, the furniture still has a key role. Bessie Springer's Barcalounger¹¹⁸ and her nostalgic knickknacks recur

¹¹⁸ There are two different spellings of the word. Updike writes "Barcalounger," whereas Ford splits the word.

throughout the decades and have become inseparably linked with the house. Rabbit's untidy domicile in *Rabbit, Run* even fuels the development of the plot. By contrast, Vicky's interior is above all vacuous and emblematically emphasizes the shallowness of the modern middle class generation. Her model condominium contrasts with Frank's middle class home, which—like the Springer house—holds “the general residue of mid-life eclecticism [...]” (54). It is overstuffed with the “artifacts of a prior life and goals (many unmet), yet evidence that does not announce a life's real quality any more eloquently than a new Barca Lounger or a Kitchen Magician [...]” (54). Again, there is an implicit reference to Updike's protagonist. The Barca Lounger is redolent of Rabbit's domestic sphere and the Kitchen Magician alludes to his former profession.

To counteract the numbing uniformity and the illusionary character¹¹⁹ of suburban housing complexes, Ford affixes a tawdry Jesus figure to the front of the Arcenaults' house in Sherri-Lyn Woods showing “Jesus in his suburban agony” (239). Jesus' suffering symbolically displays the suburban malaise which has started to encroach upon this artificial peninsula. The figure decries the excrescences of suburban development and denounces the (non-existent) architecture of mass-erected, stenciled edifices. The mass-production of houses in these planned communities has created architecturally impressive but utterly insignificant facades.

5.6.2.3. Placing the Markhams: Is Location Really Everything?

Numerous characters in the Bascombe trilogy are constantly on the move. Frank and Ann move from a rented house into the first house of their own. After their divorce, Frank relocates into Ann's house in Haddam and then to Sea-Clift. Frank's ex-wife later joins her second husband Charley O'Dell. Moreover, Bascombe's clients are perpetually

¹¹⁹ In German architecture, this inauthentic type of construction is called *Kulissenarchitektur*. See also *Kulissenarchitektur und Illusionsarchitektur* by Karlheinz Stoklas.

looking for a new place to settle. The latest trend includes putting houses on wheels to shift them “like Monopoly pieces” (*LoL* 605). However, only when describing the Markhams’ endless odyssey to find a suitable place does Ford’s protagonist run the whole gamut of what realty is all about.

In *Independence Day*, Ford expounds his protagonist’s endeavors to literally *place* the Markhams. Bascombe’s realty experience with the Markhams is first and foremost an investigation of the impact of domestic space on life: “Buying a house will, after all, partly determine what they’ll be worrying about but don’t yet know, what consoling window views they’ll be taking (or not), where they’ll have bitter arguments and make love [...] where they might die or get sick and wish they were dead, where they’ll return after funerals or after they’re divorced, like I did” (*ID* 43). Finality is conveyed in these lines, and the wrong choice of a house might therefore affect the whole course of life. In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard posits that “all really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home” (5). When Bascombe ponders the power of a place, he doubts whether the places he shows his clients can ever become a home for them. Placing the Markhams enables him to scrutinize and reconsider his own concept of place and especially of home. Yet the Markham case develops into a difficult endeavor. Above all, Ford’s protagonist adds a layer of meaning to the Markhams’ search for home when he analyzes their “pioneer anxiety” (*ID* 58). Bascombe assumes that “the Markhams feel like pioneers, reclaiming the suburbs from people (like me) who’ve taken them for granted for years and given them their bad name.” Still their “pioneer conservatism” (58) might prevent them from trespassing too far into the suburbs, to a place which might be too clean and too safe, which Frank describes as “the suburban experiential ante raised to dizzier and dizzier heights” (58). If their “pioneer anxiety” persisted, no place might ever be considered a home and within a short period of time, they would feel the urge to

move again. Frank extrapolates that finding a suitable place is all about giving up “pioneer anxiety.” His maxim is to steer a middle course between conformity and—in accordance with Emerson and De Tocqueville—individualism. He has to convince the Markhams that they do perforce conform to their suburban neighbors, but that they are also individuals. The postwar suburban pioneer spirit of the twentieth century is of course a reappropriation of the pioneer spirit, which is, for example, characteristic of Cooper’s novels. In this regard, it is of interest that Bascombe uses the term *pioneer anxiety* to designate the reason why potential homebuyers might not settle down. Thus, the Markhams have to abandon their “pioneer anxiety” to find a place at all.

Initially, the Markhams sold their Vermont house to settle in New Jersey and they are desperately looking for a New Jersey version of their Vermont house in a safe and drug-free neighborhood with a good school for their daughter. From the outset, they have a clear concept of their future home: “A house with hardwood floors, crown moldings, a small carved mantel, plain banisters, mullioned windows, perhaps a window seat” (39). Ideally, it is located in the midst of farmland and close to a pond. In this context Ford, like Updike, also refers to the maple tree as a symbol congenial to suburban rootedness. Unfortunately, the Markhams ignore the fact that their stereotypical idea of a dream home and their suburban ethos do not correspond to reality. The prices for realty in New Jersey are not what they are accustomed to in the Vermont market. In essence, the Markhams’ discontent derives from their comparing every house they see with the property they owned in Vermont. The omnipresent power of their former home in Vermont makes it impossible for them to buy a house in New Jersey. After showing them forty-five houses in New Jersey, Frank comes to the conclusion that this family has failed to face the fundamental truth about the realty business, which is “that people never find or buy the house they say they want” (41). As

a consequence, they should accept an affordable property even if it does not fully meet their expectations. Therefore, *Independence Day* must also be interpreted as the need to become independent from a utopian ideal of a house in order to finally settle down.

In this connection, Ford carries the topic of the house to extremes. By introducing the character of Joe Markham, he manages to deconstruct the essence of *house*. Buying a house in New Jersey would tie the Markham family to a place for a long time and the mere idea of being *placed* terrifies Joe. He declares “that the reason we haven’t bought a house in four months is that I don’t *want* to goddamned buy one. And the reason for that is I don’t want to get trapped in some shitty life I’ll never get out of except by dying” (52). The finality of being a house owner in a delineated space scares him. His fear of settling down in the wrong place thwarts any cooperation with Frank. So the pursuit of finding the right property ends in a deadlock. Whenever a decision is to be taken, Joe hesitates. On their way to the forty-sixth object, the Houlihan house, Frank mentions that the place they are about to see is located in the Haddam area which elicits Joe’s elusive and incomprehensible riposte: “ ‘I don’t want to live in an area. [...] The Boston area, the tristate area, the New York area. Nobody ever said the Vermont area, or the Aliquippa area [...]. They just said the places’ ” (59). Any far-fetched excuse serves him to avoid a decision. Joe’s tergiversations convey his pronounced fear of settling down. According to Bascombe, the Markhams have to stop looking around and expecting places to offer them a perfect home. Instead, they must practice introspection and acknowledge their own responsibility toward a place:

It’s perfectly evident that the Markhams haven’t looked in life’s mirror in a while [...]. Vermont’s spiritual mandate, after all, is that you don’t look at *yourself*, but spend years gazing at everything *else* as penetratingly as possible in the conviction that everything out there more or less stands for you, and everything’s pretty damn great because you are. (Emerson has some

different opinions about this.) Only, with home buying as your goal, there's no real getting around a certain self-viewing. (89)

The Markham experience evokes Frank's economically motivated concept of place. As a real estate agent aware of the influence of the market at the end of the 1980s, he supports the hypothesis that his clients should above all get what they pay for. For this reason, Joe's wife Phyllis eventually concludes that "maybe no one gets the house they want" (76). Phyllis' conclusion leads to one of Frank's fundamental statements on place. According to him, owners must imbue a place with meaning, as a place itself does not possess any power. The Markhams end up renting a house in Wallace Hill which would have been impossible at the beginning of their quest. By getting personally involved in this African American section of Haddam, they can become part of their new community and give up their false ideals. Essentially, the Markham subplot proves how much the northeastern region and the country as a whole are subject to the influence of a consumer society. Due to that, both realtors and clients have to adapt their idea of home and locatedness to the laws of the market.

What is more, Frank renegotiates his concept of place in *Independence Day*. Places increasingly lose their power due to the homogenization of the suburban neighborhood. According to Frank, suburbanites should stop consecrating places:

It is another useful theme and exercise of the Existence Period, and a patent lesson of the realty profession, to cease sanctifying places—houses, beaches, hometowns, a street corner where you once kissed a girl, a parade ground where you marched in line [...]. We may feel they *ought* to, *should* confer something—sanction, again—because of events that transpired there once; light a warming fire to animate us when we're well nigh inanimate and sunk. But they don't. Places never cooperate by revering you back when you need it. In fact, they almost always let you down [...]. Place means nothing. (*ID* 151-152)

Ultimately, Frank completely annihilates the meaning of place. Not even the memories linked with places are of significance any more, and so the past is completely negated. The allusion to the “parade ground where you marched in line” is evocative of Rabbit recalling the Independence Day parade of his youth. In contrast to Ford, Updike underpins the pivotal role of the past and the powerful spirit of the streets of Mt. Judge. In a recent interview, Ford admitted that he had in fact violated his own principles: “My rule is—and it’s stated quite explicitly in *Independence Day*—‘place means nothing.’ But in the pursuit of trying to make these books interesting, I end up getting interested in the places themselves” (Hinzen n. pag.). At the same time, Ford’s personal stance on locatedness clearly permeates Bascombe’s portrayal of place in *Independence Day*. Indeed, a couple like the Markhams might never experience locatedness. To achieve locatedness, residents have to acknowledge their responsibility towards the place they live. The Markhams have not internalized this simple equation, which is why they have unsuccessfully tried to buy a house. In essence, Ford’s interpretation of the core of space is carefully weighed. His trilogy throws into relief that although suburbia provides a location to settle down, living there does not automatically entail a feeling of locatedness.

5.6.2.4. “What Is Home Then, You Might Wonder?”¹²⁰

In English, *home* “connotes a physical ‘place’ but also has the more abstract sense of a ‘state of being’ [...]” (Rybczynski 62).¹²¹ This distinction is a prerequisite to fully grasp Frank’s comprehensive idea on place.

¹²⁰ Source: *The Lay of the Land* 15

¹²¹ Witold Rybczynski writes in his monograph *Home: A Short History of an Idea*: “This wonderful word, ‘home,’ which connotes a physical ‘place’ but also has the more abstract sense of a ‘state of being,’ has no equivalent in the Latin or Slavic European languages. German, Danish, Swedish, Icelandic, Dutch, and English all have similar sounding words for ‘home,’ all derived from the Old Norse ‘heima’ ” (62).

I have explained earlier that Ford has culled from Thoreau's *Walden*. The chapter "Sounds" in *Walden* influenced Ford's own concept of a sense of place. Moreover, the chapter "Where I Lived, and What I Lived for," in which Thoreau expounded his feelings on the importance of a house, serves as a matrix for Ford's article "An Urge for Going: Why I Don't Live Where I Used to Live."¹²² In this chapter, Thoreau explains:

AT A [sic] certain season of our life we are accustomed to consider every spot as the possible site of a house. I have thus surveyed the country on every side within a dozen miles of where I live. [...] This experience entitled me to be regarded as a sort of real-estate broker by my friends. Wherever I sat, there I might live, and the landscape radiated from me accordingly. What is a house but a *sedes*, a seat?—better if a country seat. (174)

About a hundred and fifty years later, Ford's protagonist could have uttered the same words stripping the meaning of *house* down to its essentials. Thoreau advocated a life in accordance with nature. He rigorously curtailed the power of place and pleaded for more flexibility regarding the geographical location of the house. In "Economy," the first chapter of *Walden*, Thoreau deplored the fact that the majority of his contemporaries had never really dealt with the importance of a house; he opined that "[m]ost men appear never to have considered what a house is, and are actually though needlessly poor all their lives because they think that they must have such a one as their neighbors have" (138). Within a postwar suburban discourse and in line with the suburban myth, the irony of these lines is that suburbanites in fact often had almost the same cookie-cutter house as their neighbors. In his trilogy, Ford traces the repercussions of suburban sprawl. The world of his protagonist consists of nothing but houses and real estate and the mantra controlling the suburbs is: *habito—ergo sum*. Frank Bascombe's portrayal of

¹²² Moreover, I have mentioned earlier that Ford's article also alludes to the first chapter of Walker Percy's *Signposts in a Strange Land* which carries the title "Why I Live Where I Live" (3).

sprawling McMansions and mushrooming housing estates evokes a feeling of nostalgia for the simple and frugal life in a log cabin described in *Walden*.

I have shown in the previous subchapter that Ford deconstructs the core of place; in the same manner, he investigates the essence of house and home. His protagonist never feels connected to his parents' house and thus never experiences what it means to have a childhood home. Bascombe's parents were from Iowa and later settled in Biloxi, Mississippi. After his father's early death, his mother sent him to the Gulf Pines military school when he was fourteen. So he had to leave his "home" behind at an early age. As a boy, Frank referred to Gulf Pines as "Lonesome Pines" and only saw his mother during holidays. After her second marriage, his mother decided to move to Skokie, Illinois. Later, Frank enrolled at Michigan University and continued to visit his mother in Illinois (cf. *SW* 21-25). What he remembers of Skokie is "that strangely suburban ranch-style house with plastic slipcovers on the furniture and twenty-five clocks on the walls, in a Jewish neighborhood and in a town where I had no attachments" (25). Ever since he was a child, rootedness and locatedness have been alien to him. Frank has been deprived of a home in the double sense of the word: he has neither experienced home as a physical place nor as a state of being. This fundamental deficiency encroaches upon his whole life.

Whereas both the New Jersey landscape and the quickly erected suburban housing estates often create the impression of interchangeability, Frank's Tudor house on Hoving Road foils this uniformity. As has been noted, a time of revival set in at the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century. American developers were, for example, influenced by the architecture of Tudor manors (cf. Schwartz 139). For this reason, Frank's house differs from more modern housing estates. In principle, his dwelling in the Haddam community with hardly any crime offers everything the average middle class American dreams of. However, owning property in a drug-free residential suburban

housing enclave does not *per se* make a house a home. Unlike Rabbit, Frank never experiences connectedness with a place of his own. In *Independence Day*, Frank's domestic situation even develops into an in-depth investigation of the difference between house and home. After selling his property on Hoving Road, he buys his ex-wife's place to break the power a house can have over its owners. Paradoxically, it will keep him attached to Ann. Yet he claims that her house prevents him from becoming too closely connected to his own domicile: "Houses can have this almost authorial power over us, seeming to ruin or make perfect our lives just by persisting in one place longer than we can. (In either case it's a power worth defeating)" (*ID* 106). Nevertheless, he agrees that Ann's house "felt like home, in other words; and if not my home, at least my kids' home, *someone's* home" (107). Nevertheless, Frank refrains from calling it *his* home. According to his suburban way of thinking, houses should not have power over their inhabitants. Concerning family life, he thinks that "[o]ne house is as good as another [...]" (108). At this point, Bascombe explicitly addresses the commutability of houses, which in fact represents one of the core features of his general idea of place. In 1992, he moves to Sea-Clift (cf. *LoL* 72) where he inhabits a virtual dream of a house in an exclusive neighborhood. Only five houses flank the road after a hurricane has destroyed the fifteen mansions originally situated there (cf. 306-307). His new place symbolizes the acme of upper middle class prodigality and exposes all the excesses of modern architecture (cf. 666).

In *Independence Day*, Frank scrutinizes the living conditions of Ann and her second husband in relation with his own domestic space in Haddam. Charley O'Dell's impressive property is called *The Knoll*,¹²³ which reflects its inauthentic character. For Bascombe, Charley's "glorious erection" (*ID* 236) is more appearance than substance. Frank

¹²³ Here, Ford chronicles the American predilection for charming place names. As I have pointed out, Kunstler provides scientific proof for this trend in *The Geography of Nowhere*.

consciously employs the word *erection* to emphasize its mainly sexual connotation. It is evident that O'Dell considers his house the integral component of his masculinity and his *raison d'être*. The monumental domicile and the fact that Charley married Ann make Frank feel emasculated. Therefore, he takes great pains to lambast the unappealing character of the interior of the house. When waiting for his son on the immense porch, he observes the modern furniture of the "malaise-filled 'family room' " (244). What he sees is "a vacant vista, the acme of opulent American dreariness [...]" (246). Accordingly, Bascombe questions Charley's obsolete sense of home, stating that

my own mind bends with unexpected admiration toward meisterbuilder O'Dell's big blue house on the knoll; and to what a great, if impersonal, true-to-your-dreams *home* it is—a place any modern family of whatever configuration or marital riggery ought to feel lamebrained not to make a reasonably good go of life in. A type of "go" I could never quite catch the trick of, even in the most halcyon days, when we all were a tidy family in our own substantial house in Haddam. [...] It always seemed to me enough just to know that someone loved you and would go on loving you forever [...] and that the *mise-en-scène* for love was only that and not a character in the play itself. (283-284)

In line with the tenets of the suburban myth, O'Dell considers the possession of a vast place the foundation of (upper) middle class status. Besides, there was implicit acceptance of his father's moral slip-ups as long as the family could live in a house befitting their social status. The picturesque facade of their house stirred false impressions of an idyllic world, and the physical foundation sufficed to turn a blind eye to immoral behavior. Indeed, Charley ranks property above all else whereas Frank challenges the fact that the mere possession of a house can compensate for moral imbalances. In his opinion, place only ever exclusively serves as a backdrop. Charley, in contrast, firmly believes that a good life depends on "strict physical moorings" (284).

Life's vicissitudes cannot harm him as long as the foundations are stable: "A roof over your head to prove you have a head. Why else be an architect?" (284). Charley's philosophy of life depends on the power of place and, as an architect, he communicates his outlook on life to his clients.

Frank's constant musings on the essence of house and home undergird the fact that place has long started to lose its power. His ethos is founded on the interchangeability of houses and the conviction that, as Thoreau put it, a house is only a *sedes*.¹²⁴ Frank's reading of place reaches its climax at the end of *Independence Day* when he ruminates on the sale of his former property on Hoving Road, which was turned into the Chaim Yankowicz Ecumenical Center. Observing his former residence from inside his car, he becomes aware of his emotional disentanglement. Even though he has spent several years there, nostalgia never crosses his mind:

Indeed, it's worth asking again: is there any cause to think a place—any place—within its plaster and joists, its trees and plantings, in its putative essence *ever* shelters some spirit ghost of us as proof of its significance and ours?

No! Not one bit! Only other humans do that, and then only under special circumstances, which is a lesson of the Existence Period worth holding onto. We just have to be smart enough to quit asking places for what they can't provide, and begin to invent other options [...] as gestures of our God-required but not God-assured independence. (*ID* 442)

Hence, *Independence Day* contains an additional layer of meaning: to become independent from a fixed notion of the essence of place, which is why Bascombe reassesses his idea of home. As a consequence, home "de-substantiates" into an economically determined concept, which culminates in Frank's drab remark: "home's

¹²⁴ The title of Ford's novel is *Independence Day*. It is particularly striking that Thoreau had moved into his hut at Walden Pond on July 4, 1845 (cf. Thoreau, *Walden* 111).

where you pay the mortgage [...]" (449). Frank continues theorizing about home in *The Lay of the Land*. Being in poor health and struggling with cancer, he delves into even more intricate reflections:

What is home then, you might wonder? The place you first see daylight, or the place you choose for yourself? Or is it the someplace you just can't keep from going back to, though the air there's grown less breathable, the future's over, where they really don't want you back, and where you once left on a breeze without a rearward glance? Home? Home's a musable concept if you're born to one place, as I was [...] educated to another [...] come full stop in a third—then spend years finding suitable "homes" for others. Home may only be where you've memorized the grid pattern, where you can pay with a check, where someone you've already met takes your blood pressure, palpates your liver [...] measures the angstroms gone off your molars bit by bit—in other words, where your primary caregivers await, their pale gloves already pulled on and snugged. (*LoL* 15-16)

It is noteworthy that the passage on "angstroms" is evocative of Rabbit Angstrom. Updike's main character would certainly have answered the question about the essence of home differently. For Rabbit, home designates the place he owns and where he feels at ease. Bascombe, on the contrary, never really answers the fundamental questions he raises about home and deliberately refrains from resorting to platitudes. It is striking that he now includes memories in his thinking process, but he never associates home with "strict physical moorings" as Charley does. Instead, he mentions the infrastructure of a city, in his case Haddam. Frank is intent on keeping affiliated with Haddam, because he is convinced that a former place of residence will always constitute a vital part of a person's life (cf. 14). So far, he has not been able to find a real home within his microcosm as the houses of his past were all destroyed, except for Ann's house. His former property was sold to the Korean Fresh Lighters, who tore it down in the middle

of the night. Shortly afterwards, a rich man from Kentucky had a huge mansion called “Not Furlong” (67) constructed on the former Bascombe lot. The telling name derides the ephemeral character of this new construction. In addition, the house of Frank’s mother was eventually replaced by a Sears parking lot (cf. 710). The destruction of the dwellings of his youth and adulthood culminates in Frank’s utter detachment from his past and in absolute spatial deracination. So the significance of a past place, which constitutes one essential element of the concept of home, is completely annihilated. In this study, I can only focus on the Bascombe trilogy, but in the meantime, Ford has finished working on a sequel to the trilogy (cf. John Williams n. pag., Charles n. pag.). At a reading with James Salter in New York, Richard Ford enthralled his audience by presenting excerpts from this unpublished sequel (cf. Salter n. pag.).¹²⁵ He revealed that in this sequel to the trilogy, Frank’s house in Sea-Clift, which he had sold to move back to Haddam, has been devastated by Hurricane Sandy (cf. Liu n. pag.). After his mother’s house and his property on Hoving Road, which was bulldozed, his Sea-Clift mansion is the third house of his past which is completely leveled to the ground. Symbolically, Ford’s protagonist thus loses the last remaining point of anchorage in his life.

This complete loss of connectedness to a specific house has become common practice in Ford’s suburbia. Failing to sell property to his client Clare Suddruth, Ford’s protagonist tritely states: “Houses like theirs change hands every four to six years and are built for turnover. Not many people feel they were born to live in a house forever” (*LoL* 427). On the one hand, Ford’s characters are interested in settling down and owning property. On the other, Frank and his fellow suburbanites give in to their “pioneer anxiety” (*ID* 58) and move to a different place after a certain amount of time. Being rooted in one particular house and one particular area has obviously become an

¹²⁵ I have mentioned in the introduction that Ford’s collection of four novellas will be released in November 2014 (cf. Charles n. pag.).

obsolete conception of life.¹²⁶ Here, Rybczynski's definition of home as both a physical setting and a state of being must be reconsidered. If a house loses its inherent power, home is reduced to a state of being, which in itself is a theoretical concept. For this reason, Frank considers home "a musable concept," as it implies moving and changing places (cf. *LoL* 15-16).¹²⁷ Bascombe's words convey Ford's own perception of the mutability of home, which he underlines so often in his autobiographical essays.

Not without an ulterior motive does Ford introduce the character of Mike Mahoney alias Lobsang Dhargey in the paragraph following his considerations on home (16). Born in Tibet, Mahoney has his own idea of home. After settling in the United States, he denies his roots and his language. He gives up his name and fully immerses himself in American culture. Ford introduces this exotic character to demonstrate Bascombe's metaphysical conception of home. Mike deliberately dissociates himself from his origins. By introducing Mahoney, Ford's *The Lay of the Land* also broaches the issue of Asian American minorities and migration.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Strangely enough, Frank, who suffers from prostate cancer, experiences a feeling of home when he has to relieve himself in the entryway of a Haddam bookshop (cf. *LoL* 273). At that moment, he refers to Haddam as "the town I used to call home [...]" (274). Still, Frank knows that he has never really enjoyed his suburban existence: "My life in Haddam always lacked the true resident's naïve, relief-seeking socked-in-ed-ness that makes everyday existence feel like a warm bath you relax into and never want to leave" (120-121).

¹²⁷ Bascombe's idea of home is evocative of bell hooks' lines on home (Doreen Massey also referred to hooks in her essay "A Place Called Home?"). hooks, a feminist and literary critic, conceives of home as follows: "At times, home is nowhere. At times, one knows only extreme estrangement and alienation. Then home is no longer just one place. It is locations. Home is that place which enables and promotes varied and everchanging perspectives, a place where one discovers new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference" (148). Of course, hooks' idea of home must be seen against the background of her African American origin. Here, I have transferred her postcolonial concept to my socio-spatial reading.

¹²⁸ In "Model Minorities and the Minority Model—the Neoliberal Novel," Walter Benn Michaels criticizes the fact that Asian Americans are often regarded as the " 'model minority' " (1018). Michaels explains in the 2011 edition of *The Cambridge History of the American Novel* that identity is becoming more and more important: "Questions about what it means to be yellow or what it means to be American are questions about who we are rather than about how much (or little) we own, and while such questions have always played a significant role in American literature, they have [...] come to play an absolutely central role both in the literature and the literary criticism of the last thirty years" (1017). Ford's *The Lay of the Land* denounces the fact that people have to abandon their identity to meld with the majority. In his novel, becoming American implies a loss of identity.

In connection with domestic space, the role of the furniture is again emphasized in *The Lay of the Land*. A decade ago, Frank had left most of his furniture in his Tudor house on Hoving Road when moving to Ann's furnished place. Except for some books and the pieces of furniture he felt attached to, Bascombe did not care for the interior of his former house (cf. *ID* 108). After moving to Sea-Clift, these few items of furniture are shut away in the basement, which Frank refers to as "a rumpus room" (*LoL* 577). Down there, Frank feels as if he is in a "chilly mausoleum of old Haddam furniture [...]" (577). This comparison implies that he obviously buries his furniture there. Upstairs, the interior of the rooms does not provide positive counterbalance to the basement. Bascombe gradually develops an abhorrence for the furnishing, which rather resembles the decor of a motel. Given that the furniture appears "bland and too familiar, but also strange and unpossessed [...]," he experiences feelings of estrangement within his own place and wonders if his time in Sea-Clift is coming to a close (cf. 682). Basically, the interior furnishings of Frank's Sea-Clift house never make it a home. The place he lives in remains a transitory setting. Unlike Rabbit, Frank gradually dissociates himself both from the house and its furnishings.

Due to the fact that the physical foundations of his past were bulldozed and that he does not really connect to his Sea-Clift mansion, Frank develops an intangible and idealized conception of home. Therefore, it is my claim that only the buildings he envisions during his daydreams allow him to experience a feeling of home at all. When his client Suddruth receives a phone call, Frank profits from these few free minutes to daydream about a place where he would feel at ease:

This freed moment, however, strands me out of context and releases me to the good sensations we all wish were awaiting us "behind" every moment: That—despite my moment of syncope, my failed house-showing, my

crumbling Thanksgiving plans, my condition [...] there is still a broad fertile plain where we can see across to a white farmhouse with willows and a pond the sky traffics over, where the sun is in its soft morning quadrant and there is peace upon the land. I suddenly can feel this. (*LoL* 424-425)

Such a fictive *lie* of the land contradicts reality. The simplicity of his daydream house strongly contrasts with the pompous character of the realty objects he sells, owns or inhabits. This ideal perception of a house complies with the pastoral Jeffersonian myth of unspoilt landscape prevalent in the eighteenth century. As I have pointed out, Ford defines his own sense of place by harking back to Thoreau's *Walden*. Here, the very simplicity of the farmhouse Frank is dreaming of is in line with the philosophy propagated in Thoreau's chapter "Economy." Within his nineteenth-century transcendentalist discourse, Thoreau uttered his conviction that a dwelling should above all distinguish itself by its unpretentious character.¹²⁹ In essence, Frank Bascombe envisions a nostalgic place resembling a Wyeth watercolor. He projects his longing onto a place which only takes shape in his imagination, whereas real life will never conform to this Edenic ideal. In that regard, Frank epitomizes a new type of late-twentieth-century middle class American, who has seemingly abandoned his roots and who does not feel connected to one particular place. In their essay "Landscape, Aesthetics, and Power," cultural geographers James S. Duncan and David R. Lambert elaborate on what has happened to the ideal of eighteenth-century "pastoral romanticism" in postwar suburbia (264). They explain that the loss of connectedness to a home encompasses the revaluation of idealized places:

¹²⁹ Thoreau opined: "The most interesting dwellings in this country, as the painter knows, are the most unpretending, humble log huts and cottages of the poor commonly; it is the life of the inhabitants whose shells they are, and not any peculiarity in their surfaces merely, which makes them *picturesque*; and equally interesting will be the citizen's suburban box, when his life shall be as simple and as agreeable to the imagination, and there is as little straining after effect in the style of his dwelling" (*Walden* 147-148). In this excerpt, Thoreau refers to an ideal conception of suburbia prevalent in the eighteenth and nineteenth century.

Much has been made of the geographical mobility of late-twentieth-century Americans and their consequent lack of attachment to a long-term home place [...]. But perhaps identities based on long-term geographical rootedness have, if not been replaced, then at least been supplemented by a different form of attachment, attachment to idealized places or landscape models. (268)

This complies exactly with Frank's idea of home. Moreover, his reading of the pivotal role of house and home is related to his emotional state. Throughout the trilogy, his emotional landscape continuously evolves. In *The Sportswriter*, Frank suffers from "dreaminess" and the ensuing incapacity to connect with others. In *Independence Day*, he lives through the "Existence Period" after his post-divorce trauma. His callous and numbed behavior shows that he has become incapable of having a real relationship. Only after his son's terrible accident, due to which he almost lost his sight, does he begin to abandon his noncommittal stance and learn to accept his emotions. All along, his perception of place and community adds to his alienation. In *The Lay of the Land*, Frank goes through the "Permanent Period," which would have seemed impossible in *Independence Day* where permanence was anathema to him. As was the case in *The Sportswriter* and *Independence Day*, he categorizes the respective stage of his life to prevent himself from too much self-analysis. During these successive phases of his life, Frank perceives the suburban landscape differently. He traces the increasing dreariness of the locale and deplores that even the reassuring effect of the countryside has been annihilated by degrees. In the last part of the trilogy, not even Haddam, where he had to some extent felt at home, can put an end to his forlornness. Alienated by the prospect that "Haddam might be *it*" (*LoL* 77), he moves. The positive feelings he used to associate with Haddam have switched completely: "The town felt different to me—as a place. A place where, after all, I'd dwelled [...] whose streets I'd driven, taxes paid, elections

headed [...]. All these engraved acts of residence I'd dutifully committed, with staying-on as my theme. Only I didn't like it anymore" (127-128). Frank is willing to quit his personal comfort zone ignoring the fact that he will only switch to another comfort zone, which is a little more elitist and architecturally refined. Eventually, his Sea-Clift mansion will equally deceive him. In this context, Baumgartner's "culture of avoidance" comes again into play. In principle, Bascombe persistently avoids his suburban environment. Ultimately, he comes to realize that the "Permanent Period," in which he used to practice avoidance, equals self-deception. His continual "pseudo-acceptance" (564) implies despair. For this reason, Frank finally abandons his belief in the "Permanent Period" and renounces his self-deceptive attitude (cf. 564-565). Following the traditional pattern, Bascombe heralds a new chapter in his life, the "Next Level." Henceforth, he wants to accept himself and the blows of fate awaiting him. At that moment in his life, he has undergone cancer treatment and is sitting in a plane waiting to go down. Acceptance becomes his new credo and he projects this cognition onto his domestic surroundings: "Here is necessity. Here is the extra beat—to live, to live, to live it out. [...] A bump, a roar, a heavy thrust forward into life again, and we resume our human scale upon the land" (726). Accepting the New Jersey landscape and his location as spatial foundation for his life might eventually put an end to his disillusionment. But there the novel ends. The question if the "Next Level" will really bring about the hoped-for panacea to cure suburban ailments remains unanswered. At the end of *The Lay of the Land*, the image of the suburbs as a barren wasteland prevails.

5.7. Conclusion

For both protagonists, the past plays a decisive role in the construction of home. Inhabited space can only ever serve as home if memories are connected with it. Rabbit's

suburban places are suffused with positive and negative feelings, at best with feelings of rootedness. The furniture he is surrounded with lasts for generations. Throughout the tetralogy, Updike inserts flashbacks in which Rabbit reminisces about the dwellings of his past. The representation of the places of his past and how they inform his idea of home is evocative of Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire*.¹³⁰ In the tetralogy, these *lieux de mémoire*—"places of memory"—can be either a mere idea (and sometimes only take shape in Rabbit's dreams) or refer to a geographically fixed entity. These places are emotionally charged and determine Rabbit's character and his place-based identity. Accordingly, the memories of certain places of his past turn these places into "places of memory." In the introduction to this study, I have invoked Relph's definition of "sense of place" and "spirit of place" with spirit of place being "experienced through memory and intention" ("A Pragmatic Sense of Place" 25). Hence, the spirit of the places of Rabbit's past informs his distinctive sense of place, and more specifically his clearly structured concept of home.

Bascombe, on the other hand, never experiences what it means to feel connected to a house. He does not attach great importance to indulging in memories of the places of his past which is why "places of memory" do not exist in his ideology. Only in his job do houses play a prominent role. If there are moments of longing for bygone times, these moments refer to the landscape itself, but not to a specific building where he spent an important part of his life. Until the end of *The Lay of the Land*, he intentionally dissociates places from time. Due to this low esteem for the houses of his past and the absence of a spirit of place, Frank can only develop a weak sense of place and, accordingly, a weak sense of home.

¹³⁰ According to Nora, *lieux de mémoire* are places which, because of their symbolic character, forged the identity of the French nation (cf. *Erinnerungsorte Frankreichs* 9-10).

In Updike's tetralogy, home both as a place and a state of mind remains a viable concept at any moment. Even though, as I have shown in the preceding chapters, the suburban landscape becomes increasingly unattractive, and even though social space and community life start to collapse, Rabbit still finds a place where he really feels at home. By contrast, Ford's protagonist consistently rejects accepting an area or a house as his home. By truncating the significance of geographical rootedness, Frank ultimately abandons his territorial identity. In his point of view, home finally metamorphoses into an experiential concept.

6. Epilogue

I hope to have shown that both authors' literary cartography reveals a changing notion of place and home from the end of the fifties to the turn of the millennium. In the introduction to this study, I have quoted geographer Marc Brosseau, who argues that "the novel—because it evokes the internalized experience of place so eloquently—enables us to develop or confirm theses on spatial identity, rootedness or sense of place" (338). It is part of Updike's and Ford's social criticism to denounce the conflation of social and local uniformity. Their portrayal of space reveals the drastic changes affecting the American notion of home and sense of place. Through the decades, both Rabbit and Frank have to adapt their sense of place to an increasingly antagonistic suburban environment. While Updike's protagonist keeps his clear-cut sense of place, Ford's main character no longer feels connected to any particular location. The masculine middle class discourse of their novels lays bare that there has been a clear shift from a territorialized to an almost diasporic conception of sense of place and home.

In the era after World War II, Rabbit's initial idea of location and locatedness was determined by the suburban myth and the ideal image of owning property in suburbia. Thirty years later, Ford's protagonist gradually refutes this assumption. Towards the end of the century, the American middle class male develops a disenchanted and at times almost transcendental sense of place. Essentially, the generic concept of home and sense of place has given way to a more versatile attitude towards location and locatedness. The suburban locale and social relations are more and more estranging. Concomitantly, social community life deteriorates which exposes the middle class suburbanite as increasingly alienated by the suburban locale. All along, the racial politics of Updike's and Ford's white characters reveal the suburbs as utterly segregational

places. Both authors' literary cartography mostly complies with the results of sociological and geographic analyses, which corresponds to their endeavor to write verisimilar chronicles of suburban life from their protagonists' male point of view.

The juxtaposition of (sub)urban space, social space, and domestic space has shown Updike's and Ford's diverging approach. Both authors trace the gradual collapse of the meaning of space in the life of their middle class characters. In Rabbit's and Frank's life, the concept of the suburban myth clashes with the eighteenth-century Jeffersonian myth of pristine landscape. Rabbit denounces the disappearance of accustomed places, and Frank regrets that he can no longer experience the unspoilt landscape Natty Bumppo faced. The ideal state of suburbia has never existed for them (nor has it for Americans in general). Suburban architecture plus the effects of the economy have been taking their toll on the American scene and cause local and regional boundaries to disappear or at least become fragile and blurred.

In his tetralogy, Updike renegotiates the portrayal of the (sub)urban landscape. His protagonist Rabbit always conceives of himself qua space. Down the years, the (sub)urban space mapped by Updike is more and more tainted by the topological consequences of suburban sprawl. Specifically the core of social space is gradually hollowed out, which clashes with Rabbit's unchanging ethos. Social relations and community life are successively eroded, the country club has served its time, while family gatherings entail turmoil and the release of pent-up aggressions. Ultimately, both the landscape and Rabbit are subject to decrepitude and decline, while he still clings to a location and a place he considers his home. Essentially, owning property serves as the bedrock of his self-fashioning. For Rabbit, being located always involves geographic moorings and accounts for his feeling rooted. Even though, in his perception, the suburban landscape ultimately consists of nothing more than homogenized patterns of

houses endlessly repeating themselves, even though community and family life are curtailed, and even though Rabbit has to suffer domestic surroundings he at times resists, his idea of *Dasein* is still intimately entwined with space and informs his sense of place. In Rabbit's case, the triad of space literally fuses in his person. Diamond County, Brewer, and Mt. Judge represent the foundation for his existence. Notwithstanding spatial changes, location is still everything for Rabbit and he conceives of home as having an almost totemic significance. Harking back to Eudora Welty and her essay on place in fiction, I therefore deduce that place pertains to Rabbit's feelings the way his feelings pertain to place. The individual and his surroundings, be they geographical or social, are in a perpetual process of interaction. Rabbit's geographic rootedness fosters his identification process which undergirds his monolithic sense of place. Home for Rabbit is associated with one place and his overarching concept of space is always territorialized.

In Ford's novels, the concept of space consistently sets the agenda. His trilogy realigns the triadic concept of space. Basically, the forces of consumerism have subjugated the landscape, and Frank observes the drastic changes of the locale. Like Updike's places, Ford's locations are subject to decrepitude and decline. Yet in addition to their denotative and connotative meaning, places are also framed at the meta-level and thus gain an additional layer of meaning. I hope to have shown that Ford drafts a semiotic landscape and, more importantly, that the (sub)urban landscape is conceived by means of intertextual elements. His references to key writers of American literature and to significant stretches of land underline the pertinence of space in his novels. His protagonist Frank is constantly moving through this landscape, either in his car or from one house to another. As a consequence, he never feels located which is why his identity is in a perpetual state of flux. In the course of the trilogy, he gradually deconstructs his

sense of place, and ends up completely stripping place of its meaning. Ultimately, he considers place nothing more than a theoretical construct, an abstraction. Hence the triadic manifestation of space is gradually subverted: (sub)urban space is conceived of as “Anyplace,” social space is renegotiated and replaced by “anti-social” space with inefficient “Sponsors” and cocooning neighbors, while domestic space is even reduced to the formula that “[p]lace means nothing” (*ID* 152). In Ford’s suburbia, these three constituents of space are no longer charged with meaning. Especially Bascombe’s portrayal of the development of social space reveals the “anti-social” and antagonistic character of this fundamental pillar of space. At heart, Ford’s trilogy presents a main persona who repudiates the validity of place and, by analogy, of home. To refer back to Welty, feelings still pertain to place, but place no longer pertains to feelings. The mutual dependence, which determined Updike’s concept of space and place, is transformed into a unidirectional ideologeme in Ford’s novels. Ultimately, Ford’s main character experiences a feeling of deterritorialization.¹³¹ Despite the detailed and comprehensive descriptions of landscape, place itself gradually loses its geographic reference. The conception of an inner territory finally outweighs the presence of the geographic territory. Eventually, the trilogy heralds a new kind of suburban real(i)ty with Ford recording the growing “de-substantiation” of space. By truncating the geographic constituent of home and place in general, Bascombe is deprived of the possibility to experience locatedness. The trite realty commonplace that “location is everything” is reversed. Even in his job as a realtor, location is no longer everything and has stopped serving as the fulcrum of locatedness. Bascombe has long gained a less profit-oriented and more holistic attitude. Finally, his sense of place illustrates that local rootedness has become insignificant.

¹³¹ The term *deterritorialization* was coined by Gilles Deleuze (cf. 47-48). I use it here to mean a lack of rootedness to the area.

In both authors' novels, the implicit assumption that spatial and socio-spatial relations provide a means to cope with contingency is gradually dissolved. Space can no longer fulfill this task and places have forfeited their power of serving as a means to better come to grips with contingency. While in the Rabbit novels space was predictable and served as an antidote for Rabbit's strenuous life, the growing "de-substantiation" of space in the Bascombe trilogy ultimately renders the concept of space fragile and unpredictable. From Updike to Ford, there is a shift towards an atopian society in which the three constituents of space gradually collapse.

On the basis of this study, it would therefore be challenging to investigate how the concept of space is framed in postwar fiction written from a feminist or ethnic perspective. It would be tempting to investigate to what extent such a spatial analysis would differ from the male-dominated middle class rhetoric. Moreover, Ford's and Updike's post-9/11 fiction lends itself to an analysis. The concept of space prevailing in their later fiction could be contrasted with their earlier fiction.

In a broader sense, it would be of particular interest to undertake a spatial investigation of post-9/11 literature in general. On 9/11, Americans' perception of their home country was shattered, which irrevocably changed their sense of place. In her essay "Wounded New York," literary critic Judith Greenberg, who especially dealt with the effects of trauma, argues that "September 11 blew apart not just our sense of home but our psychological unity as well" (24). And she raises the question whether "the attacks [will] cause us to widen our conceptions of home [...]" (34). Essentially, September 11 has strongly affected the literary canon, as authors felt the necessity to write about the horrors of that day in their fiction. In *After the Fall: American Literature since 9/11*, Richard Gray states: "On September 11, 2001, as the media did not fail to point out over and over again, America came under attack. It was—at least, according to

the national sense of things—invaded. The homeland was no longer secure and, to that extent, no longer home” (5). Updike had included the cataclysmic events of this day in his later novel *The Terrorist*. Even though Ford’s *The Lay of the Land* was published in 2006 and thus after 9/11, the story is set before the attacks. Ford himself had not felt the urge to tackle 9/11 explicitly.¹³² Yet he had published his article “The Worry Trap,” which I have already referred to in my third chapter, on November 1, 2001. Therein, he also summarizes the repercussions of 9/11 for the United States: “What seemed good and free about the suburbs and about ourselves looks more like mere defenselessness now, our uniformity with fellow mortgage holders more like facelessness—more like those still unearthed victims at ground zero” (“The Worry Trap” n. pag.). So the United States have become vulnerable, and in the face of trauma and disorientation, there has been a constant threat from outside, also focused at American space and the perception of home and the homeland.¹³³ In post-9/11 literature, the subliminal fear affecting the whole country has unequivocally impacted the portrayal of space and the American concept of home. Based on my dissertation, it would therefore be challenging to probe how more recent, post-9/11 suburban fiction has implemented this new awareness of space and especially how it presents the concepts of home and of sense of place. I hope that my literary geography of Updike’s and Ford’s spatialized fictions opens up new avenues to inquire into the prominent and increasingly important role of space in American literature.

¹³² In an interview for *Granta*, Tim Adams asked Ford why he believed that so many novelists directly addressed 9/11. Ford replied: “They were moved by those events. It’s not very complicated. In the case of DeLillo and Updike, they’re both supremely accomplished writers who’re unusually confident of their abilities to make a subject their own. The fact that I wouldn’t do it, didn’t do it, probably just means I’m not their equal on either front. Otherwise I’d have surely done it. Right?” (Adams 14).

¹³³ In her latest article “Richard Ford’s Frank Bascombe Trilogy and the Post-9/11 Suburban Novel,” Kathryn Knapp holds that the cataclysmic effects of 9/11 have obliterated the illusion of suburbia as a safe middle class haven. As in pre-9/11 novels, the protagonists of this new type of suburban literature still suffer from existential fear, but since the attacks they also have to face a perilous and unpredictable environment (cf. 501-502).

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Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Die Dissertation „ ‚Location Is Everything‘: The Concept of Space in John Updike’s Rabbit Tetralogy and Richard Ford’s Bascombe Trilogy“ analysiert die komplexe Darstellung des suburbanen Raumes in der Rabbit Tetralogie (einschließlich der Novelle *Rabbit Remembered*) und der Frank Bascombe Trilogie unter Zuhilfenahme von Raumtheorien. In meiner Dissertation werde ich darlegen, dass das Geflecht aus Handlung, sozialen Beziehungen zwischen den Charakteren sowie deren Auffassung von Heimat und Verortet-Sein Teil eines übergreifenden Raumkonzepts beider Autoren ist.

1. Kapitel: Einleitung

Updike, das literarische Schwergewicht, und Ford, der erst 1986 mit dem ersten Band seiner Trilogie den Durchbruch schaffte, sind zweifelsohne unverzichtbarer Bestandteil des literarischen Kanons. Beide sind Pulitzerpreisträger und überzeugen durch ihre sprachliche Prägnanz und ihren unverwechselbaren Stil. Vielmehr jedoch eint beide Autoren die Tatsache, dass ihre Romane eine männliche Perspektive suburbanen Lebens bieten. Beide Autoren beschreiben und analysieren die Orte aus der Sicht ihrer weißen, männlichen Mittelschichtprotagonisten, das heißt die diskursive Welt ihrer Erzähler bietet einen sehr einseitigen, voreingenommenen Blickwinkel. Rabbit und Frank beschreiben sehr detailliert ihre Wahrnehmung der sie umgebenden Landschaft, der Häuser und des Gemeinschaftslebens und dabei legen sie sehr dezidiert dar, wie sich ihr maskulin geprägtes Ideal vom Leben in den Vororten über die Jahre hinweg verändert. Beide Protagonisten kartieren nahezu, was sie sehen und beobachten. Die Darstellung des räumlichen Mikro- und Makrokosmos ihrer Protagonisten nutzen Updike und Ford

auch als Vehikel, um Missstände im Gemeinschaftsleben offenzulegen und um ihre Sozialkritik zu äußern. Darüber hinaus ist die geografische Lage der Schauplätze bezeichnend. Rabbit lebt in Pennsylvania, Frank in New Jersey. Hinzu kommt, dass beide Charaktere viel reisen, wobei der Fokus immer auf dem Osten der Vereinigten Staaten liegt. Es ist besonders auffällig, dass der fiktionale Handlungsfokus oft am Rande des Kontinents liegt, was wiederum bedeutet, dass der Raum Symbolkraft besitzt und auf eine räumliche respektive soziale Schieflage verweist.

Was die Kritiken anbelangt, so fielen sie in Updikes Fall häufig sehr kontrovers aus, Ford hingegen polarisiert weniger. Updikes *Everyman Rabbit Angst* bewegt sich von 1959-1989 durch die amerikanische Mittelschicht, Fords Protagonist Frank Bascombe konzentriert sich auf die Jahre 1983-2000. Updikes Tetralogie umfasst die Romane *Rabbit, Run, Rabbit Redux, Rabbit Is Rich* und *Rabbit at Rest*. Hinzu kommt die zehn Jahre danach veröffentlichte Erzählung *Rabbit Remembered*, die selbst nach Rabbits Tod noch einmal das Leben seiner Familie und die fortwährende Veränderung seiner früheren Umgebung beleuchtet. Fords Trilogie beinhaltet die Romane *The Sportswriter, Independence Day* und *The Lay of the Land*. Eine Fortsetzung der Trilogie mit vier neuen Geschichten über Frank Bascombe wird voraussichtlich im November 2014 unter dem Titel *Let Me Be Frank with You* veröffentlicht werden (cf. Charles n. pag.).

In Updikes Romanen lag das Hauptaugenmerk der Kritiker oft auf den immer wiederkehrenden Themen Sex, Ehebruch, Glaube und Religion. Das Gros der Literaturkritik beschäftigte sich mit konventionellen Lesarten, die jedoch zum Teil ersetzt bzw. ergänzt wurden durch postmoderne Kritik und neuerdings auch durch interdisziplinäre Ansätze, der Kulturwissenschaften sei Dank. Ford wurde von jeher im Kontext postmoderner Theorien gelesen. Ihren Protagonisten gemein ist der Blick durch

die bereits getrüben Panoramafenster der Vorortbewohner sowie ihre Fähigkeit, das Gesehene in Sprache zu fassen und nachgerade zu kartieren.

Im Anschluss an eine kurze Einordnung und zusammenfassende Darstellung der Handlung der zu untersuchenden Romane beschäftige ich mich mit der Bedeutung der Verortung im Leben von Updike und Ford. Mit Orten verknüpfte Kindheitserinnerungen beeinflussen beide Autoren nachhaltig. Während sich Updike stets seiner Wurzeln bewusst ist und diese stringent und bedingungslos in seine Literatur einfließen lässt, schafft der aus dem Süden stammende Ford ebenso deutlich eine klare Distanz zu den Orten, in denen er einmal gelebt hat. Orte sind für ihn durchaus wichtig, allerdings widerstrebt es ihm als *Southern writer* kategorisiert zu werden. Grundsätzlich sieht er sich mehr als den ewig Unsteten, den es nicht an einem Ort hält. Updikes und Fords persönliche Auffassung von Orten und Verortung könnte also unterschiedlicher nicht sein und daher stellt sich die Frage, wie beide Autoren diese Thematik in ihre Romane integrieren.

Der Titel „Location Is Everything“—ein Zitat aus Fords *The Sportswriter*—bringt auf den Punkt, worum es in meiner Dissertation geht: die Darstellung des Raumes in seiner ganzen Komplexität, denn Raum ist in Updikes und Fords Werk mehr als eine rein deskriptive Komponente. Meine Analyse bewegt sich vom äußeren Raum der (sub)urbanen Umgebung zum inneren Raum des häuslichen Bereichs. Ich untersuche, wie die Protagonisten den sie umgebenden Raum wahrnehmen und ihren *sense of place* definieren. Ich vertrete dabei einen sozial-räumlichen Ansatz, das heißt, ich analysiere sowohl die soziale als auch die räumliche Umgebung der Charaktere. In diesem Zusammenhang werde ich auch erörtern, ob die Darstellung des Raumes in Atopie

kulminiert.¹ Als Methode für die literarische Herangehensweise habe ich *close reading* gewählt.

Im Anschluss an eine kurze Forschungsübersicht erläutere ich den dreigliedrigen Aufbau meiner Arbeit bestehend aus den Säulen *(sub)urban space*, *social space* und *domestic space*. Die Verquickung dieser drei räumlichen Kategorien determiniert, wie die Protagonisten *house* und *home* wahrnehmen und wie sie ihren eigenen *sense of place* definieren.

2. Kapitel: Raum

In der amerikanischen Literatur sind insbesondere der Westen, der Süden und Neuengland Regionen, die mit Mythen behaftet sind (cf. Deamer 4, 5, 16). Dabei stellt vor allem die weite Landschaft des Westens einen Mythos dar, der, sehr vereinfacht ausgedrückt, mit dem amerikanischen Traum korreliert. Im 19. Jahrhundert wurde der Westen der Vereinigten Staaten zumeist als Garten, Wildnis oder Eldorado dargestellt. Zu dieser Zeit erkundeten Romanhelden wie Lederstrumpf, Kapitän Ahab und Huckleberry Finn die schier endlosen Weiten des Landes. Es war vor allem die Metapher des Gartens, die die Amerikanistik von Anbeginn prägte. Wegbereitend dafür war Henry Nash Smiths 1950 erschienene Dissertation *Virgin Land*, in der er die Erkundung der Neuen Welt im Zusammenhang mit dem Mythos des Gartens analysierte. Sein Schüler Leo Marx untersuchte dann 1964, wie die Industrialisierung diese Landschaft veränderte. Dampflok, Zug, und Auto ermöglichten fortan schnelle Ortswechsel. Die sich permanent weiterentwickelnde Technologie tat das Ihrige, um die literarische Darstellung der Landschaft sprichwörtlich aus den Angeln zu heben. 1975 dann vertrat die feministische Literaturkritikerin Annette Kolodny die These, den „Garten“ als

¹ Helmut Willke hat den Begriff *Atopie* geprägt, der „die Irrelevanz des Ortes, die globale Ortlosigkeit“ bezeichnet (cf. 13).

grundsätzlich feminin zu interpretieren. Die Metapher des Gartens prägte auch die Wahrnehmung der Vororte in der Literaturkritik. Die Vororte bildeten sozusagen die moderne Variante des edenischen Gartens—Vorortidylle umgeben von viel Grün fernab der Städte.

Insgesamt überwiegen in der Literatur der Zeit nach dem 2. Weltkrieg immer gleichförmiger werdende Ortsbeschreibungen, was Paul Smethurst als „placelessness“ bezeichnet (cf. 183). Auffallend ist zudem, dass die Literatur der zweiten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts gekennzeichnet ist von einem Rückzug ins Private. Barbara Ehrenreich erklärt in diesem Zusammenhang, dass die Unwägbarkeiten unbekannter Territorien eingetauscht wurden gegen den „heimischen Herd“ und bezeichnet diesen neuen Romantypus als „the novel of settling“ (50). Updikes und Fords Protagonisten sind einerseits viel unterwegs, präsentieren andererseits aber auch sehr dezidiert eine statische Sicht der sie umgebenden Landschaft und des häuslichen Mikrokosmos.

Im Folgenden setze ich mich kritisch mit der komplexen Thematik einer Terminologie des Raumes in der Literatur auseinander. Beschäftigt man sich mit dem weiten Gebiet der Raumanalyse, wird sehr schnell deutlich, dass es ein enorm großes Spektrum an Lexemen gibt, die den Raum denotieren, wie beispielsweise *space*, *place*, *location*, *landscape*, *locale*, *setting*, *scene*, *mapping*. In engem Zusammenhang damit stehen die Begriffe *spirit of place* und *genius loci*, die den Geist eines Ortes beschreiben, sowie das Konzept eines *sense of place*, welches die dem Individuum eigene individuelle Wahrnehmung eines Ortes bezeichnet. Laut Edward Relph ist *spirit of place* demnach ein extrinsisches Konzept, wohingegen *sense of place* von einem Individuum ausgeht und somit intrinsisch motiviert ist (cf. 25).

Der Raum trat überhaupt erst nach dem sogenannten *spatial turn* in den Fokus der Literaturkritik und bestimmt die Postmoderne seit den sechziger Jahren. Obwohl der

Raum also keineswegs ein innovatives Feld der Literaturkritik repräsentiert, mangelt es dennoch an einer linguistisch unstrittigen Raumterminologie. *Space* ist nach Meinung des Geographen Yi-Fu Tuan abstrakt, wohingegen *place* ein größeres Maß an Vertrautheit und Bestimmtheit vermittelt. Gemeinhin sind *space* und *place* als komplementäre Konzepte zu sehen. Ich verwende *beide* Begriffe und nicht—wie von Tim Foster vorgeschlagen—den weiter gefassten Terminus *spatiality*, da insbesondere Ford auf die Bedeutung von *place* rekurriert und diese begriffliche Dichotomie demnach aufrechterhalten werden muss. Prinzipiell fungiert *space* in meiner Analyse als Hypernym, als allumfassender Begriff.²

Bei dem Versuch *space* und *place* näher zu bestimmen, nehme ich Bezug auf wegweisende literaturkritische, geographische, soziolinguistische und soziologische Studien zu diesem Thema. Im Allgemeinen sind räumliche Begriffe permanentem Wandel unterworfen und mit anderen wissenschaftlichen Fachgebieten eng verwoben. So wurden auch *space* und *place* von Geographen (und Humangeographen), Soziologen, Soziolinguisten und Literaturkritikern zum Teil sehr kontrovers diskutiert.

Was die Methodik anbelangt, so greife ich auf einen Meilenstein der Literaturkritik zurück, nämlich *Theory of Literature* von René Wellek und Austin Warren. Demnach gewährt Literatur immer auch einen Einblick in den kulturellen Kontext und die sozialen Rahmenbedingungen der jeweiligen Epoche (cf. 102). Was die Raumtheorie anbelangt, so stützt sich meine Argumentation auf Robert T. Tally Juniors Studie *Spatiality*. Laut Tally Jr. erschaffen Autoren durch ihre Darstellung von Räumen und Orten eine *literary cartography*, die dann vom Leser als *literary geography* rezipiert wird. Tally Jr. definiert *literary geography* als „a form of reading that focuses attention on space and spatiality in

² Auf Grund der vielschichtigen Bedeutung von *space* und *place* ist es ein ebenso schwieriges Unterfangen diese Begriffe ins Deutsche zu übertragen. *Space* lässt sich am besten mit *Raum* übersetzen, wobei *Raum* selbst wiederum ein sehr dehnbarer Begriff ist. *Place* werde ich mit *Ort* übersetzen.

the texts under consideration“ (80). Meine Dissertation stellt demnach eine *literary geography* dar, da sie die Bedeutung von *space* und *spatiality* im Werk beider Autoren analysiert.

3. Kapitel: Der (Sub)urbane Raum

Suburbane Zersiedelung

Dieses Kapitel beginnt mit einem Überblick über die rasante Ausbreitung der Vororte in der Nachkriegszeit. In diesem Kontext ist erwähnenswert, dass *suburbia* selbst, wie bereits die mit dem amerikanischen Traum assoziierten *myths of place*, einen Mythos darstellt. Zu Beginn der sechziger Jahre veröffentlichte der Soziologe Bennett Berger seine Abhandlung „The Myth of Suburbia“ (cf. Berger 312). Darin geht es primär um den Mythos der Vorstadt als Konglomerat homogener Häuserreihen, die von mindestens ebenso gleichförmigen Bewohnern besiedelt wurden, die noch dazu die gleichen Interessen hatten und den gleichen Lebensstil pflegten. Der ursprünglich positiv besetzte Begriff *suburbia* geriet jedoch nach und nach immer mehr in die Kritik. 1969 erschien das Werk *The Suburban Myth* des Historikers Scott Donaldson, worin er sich mit der harschen Kritik an den Vororten befasste. Als Hauptursache heftiger Angriffe sah er den Kontrast zwischen dem im 18. Jahrhundert weit verbreiteten, auf Thomas Jefferson zurückgehenden pastoralen Ideal der frühen Vororte als Inbegriff kleiner, naturverbundener Gemeinden, und der bitteren Realität der Vororte in der Nachkriegszeit:

Der amerikanische Vorort war, laut Überzeugung vieler Sozialexperten, der Ort, an dem im 20. Jahrhundert dieses Ideal des 18. Jahrhunderts wahr

werden konnte und sollte. Die Realität hat kaum eine Chance gegenüber solchen Illusionen. (Donaldson 22)³

Die Kritik an *suburbia* nahm immer mehr zu und Fords Gebrauch des Begriffes *Anyplace* ist bezeichnend in diesem Zusammenhang.

Die Vororte in der Literatur von Updike und Ford

Das erste Element meines triadischen Raumkonzepts ist der (sub)urbane Raum. Die Darstellung der Vororte ist dabei untrennbar verbunden mit dem urbanen Raum, bei Updike noch mehr als bei Ford.

Entgegen dem Mythos von *suburbia* als Inbegriff des amerikanischen Traumes, wählen Updike und Ford für ihre Protagonisten unspektakuläre, geradezu drittklassige Schauplätze. Sowohl Rabbit Angstrom als auch Frank Bascombe bedienen sich zur Beschreibung der sie umgebenden Landschaft negativ konnotierter Adjektive. Gerade diese bewusste Ignoranz des suburbanen Mythos mit seiner utopischen Vorstellung vom Eigenheim inmitten ursprünglicher Landschaft macht die Besonderheit der Romane beider Autoren aus. Ich behaupte daher, dass beide Autoren ihre Charaktere an antagonistischen Orten „ver-orten“.

Updike dokumentiert das Leben in den *suburbs* und hat dabei immer den *genius loci* seiner Heimat Pennsylvania vor Augen. In seiner Autobiographie *Self-Consciousness* wird der Einfluss des Örtchens Shillington auf sein literarisches Schaffen und seine Selbstidentifikation mehr als deutlich. Die Verortung eines Menschen trägt seiner Meinung nach dazu bei, das eigene Ich zu definieren. Meine Dissertation zeigt, dass die Darstellung des Raumes bei Updike keinesfalls ein zufälliges Nebenprodukt ist, sondern

³ Dieses Zitat lautet im englischen Original wie folgt: „The American suburb, many social commentators came to believe, was the twentieth century place in which this eighteenth century ideal could and should come true. Reality stands little chance against such illusions“ (Donaldson 22).

dass der Autor seine Topographie ganz bewusst wählt und mit großer Präzision die Stadt Brewer und ihre Vororte beschreibt. Sowohl in *Rabbit, Run* als auch in *Rabbit Redux* zeichnet Updike gegensätzliche Landschaften. In *Rabbit, Run* steht der Vorort als Inbegriff von Engstirnigkeit und festgefahrenen Moralvorstellungen, wohingegen die Stadt gleichzusetzen ist mit Ehebruch, Hedonismus und Sittenverfall. Während Updike in *Rabbit, Run* noch eine sehr eindimensionale und überschaubare Kartographie präsentiert, wird die Bedeutung des Raumes in den folgenden Rabbit-Romanen komplexer. Auch in *Rabbit Redux* kontrastiert Updike Orte, in diesem Fall Vororte. Rabbits Wohnort Penn Villas, gleichsam ein *locus terribilis*, steht in krassem Gegensatz zu Penn Park, dem *locus amoenus*. Zudem repräsentiert Penn Park die Trope von der *City upon a Hill* und versinnbildlicht demnach den verheißungsvollen, jedoch im Diesseits nahezu unerreichbaren paradiesischen Ort. In seinem 1981 erschienen Roman *Rabbit Is Rich* tritt der antagonistische Charakter der Stadt und der Vororte noch deutlicher hervor. Updike entwirft das Bild einer postindustriellen Landschaft, die durch die Präponderanz des tertiären Sektors nachhaltig verändert wurde. Zudem liegt in *Rabbit Is Rich* und *Rabbit at Rest* der Fokus auf der Darstellung einer sukzessive verfallenden und dem Tode geweihten Landschaft. Die Todesmetaphorik durchzieht vor allem den letzten Teil der Tetralogie.

Auch Ford beschreibt die fast unerträgliche Gleichförmigkeit des (sub)urbanen Raumes, aber sein Hauptaugenmerk liegt auf den Vororten und Kleinstädten. New York als Metropole spielt eine eher sekundäre Rolle. Ford betont, dass sein Protagonist trotz des visuell abschreckenden Charakters der Umgebung einen grundsätzlich affirmativen Ansatz vertritt. Es fällt schwer, seiner Hauptfigur diesen *affirmative stance* abzunehmen, denn das, was man in seiner Trilogie über die Vororte erfährt, ist alles andere als einladend und positiv. Im Gegensatz zu Rabbit Angstrom kommentiert Frank auf der

Metaebene, wie er die ihn umgebende Landschaft wahrnimmt. Ich behaupte, dass Ford in *The Sportswriter* und in *The Lay of the Land* eine semiotische Landschaft entwirft. Grundsätzlich bezeichnet eine solche Landschaft einen Raum, der durch bewusste menschliche Intervention und die Absicht, Bedeutung herzustellen, beeinträchtigt wurde (cf. Jaworski and Thurlow 2). So lobt Frank in *The Sportswriter* die Lesbarkeit (cf. SW 50) und „literalness“ (SW 49) der Umgebung, das heißt er begreift den suburbanen Raum als Text. Gleichwohl betrachtet er es aber auch als Vorteil, dass der ihn umgebende Raum durch die Konsumgesellschaft nachhaltig verändert und sozusagen kommodifiziert wurde. Die Nordostküste der USA scheint aus sich endlos wiederholenden, uniformen Einheiten gleicher Fast-Food-Ketten zusammengesetzt zu sein, was Frank als „culture comfort“ und „cultural literacy“ interpretiert (cf. LoL 430). Die Landschaft wird zunehmend vorhersehbarer, aber gerade diese Berechenbarkeit und Austauschbarkeit haben für Frank auch etwas Beruhigendes. Die Konsumgesellschaft hat die Landschaft sozusagen neu „beschrieben“ und die ursprüngliche Landschaft nachgerade „überschrieben“, was in einer klar vorhersehbaren Topographie kulminiert.

Des Weiteren vertrete ich die These, dass Ford in *The Sportswriter* und in *Independence Day* eine intertextuelle Landschaft erschafft. Als Beispiel sei genannt, dass Frank in seiner Funktion als Sportreporter einen Artikel mit dem Titel „Why I Live Where I Live“ veröffentlicht. Im wahren Leben hat Ford einen ähnlich klingenden Essay—„An Urge for Going: Why I Don't Live Where I Used to Live“—publiziert, der wiederum stark an Walker Percy's „Why I Live Where I Live“ erinnert. Diesen Schriften liegen als Matrix Thoreaus Ausführungen „Where I Lived, and What I Lived for“ in *Walden and Other Writings* zugrunde. Zudem bewegt sich Frank topographisch betrachtet genau in dem Gebiet, das etwa zweihundert Jahre zuvor von James Fenimore

Coopers Natty Bumppo erkundet wurde. Diese intertextuellen Bezüge unterstreichen die Veränderungen, die der Raum erfahren hat und münden in der bitteren Erkenntnis, dass die Landschaft zunehmend zu einem „Irgendwo“ verwandelt wird. Ähnlich wie Updike, skizziert auch Ford vor allem im zweiten und dritten Teil seiner Trilogie den zunehmenden Verfall der suburbanen Traumwelt. Frank ist umgeben vom sprichwörtlichen Niemandsland und einer Architektur, die für Vergänglichkeit steht und unterschwellig den Niedergang des amerikanischen Traums symbolisiert. Im gleichen Maße wie sich die Besonderheiten der amerikanischen Landschaft durch die Suburbanisierung auflösen, explodiert die dort ansässige Mittelschicht. *Place* wird zu *Anyplace* und die Mittelschicht demnach zur *Anyclass*, der im Prinzip schon fast jeder angehört. Mehr noch als bei Updike wird die Raumthematik bei Ford zu einem omnipräsenten und zudem selbstreferentiellen Leitmotiv. Insbesondere die Querverweise auf Percy und Cooper sind bezeichnend. Ford, der nie als *Southern writer* kategorisiert werden wollte, spielt bewusst an auf Percy, den Inbegriff eines Schriftstellers aus den Südstaaten. Und das von Cooper in den *Leatherstocking Tales* beschriebene Gebiet war Ausgangspunkt der Erforschung des Westens und begründete sozusagen die kritische Auseinandersetzung mit der Analyse fiktionaler Räume.

Trotz der oft desillusionierenden visuellen Realität gibt es in den Romanen beider Autoren dennoch Orte, die ihre Ursprünglichkeit scheinbar bewahrt haben und die Idee der Pastorale wieder aufgreifen respektive neu auslegen.

4. Kapitel: Eine Neuinterpretation des Sozialen Raumes

Die zweite Säule meines dreigliedrigen Raumkonzeptes beschäftigt sich mit sozialem Raum. Die feministische Geografin Doreen Massey definiert sozialen Raum folgendermaßen:

Soziale Beziehungen haben immer eine räumliche Form und einen räumlichen Inhalt. Sie existieren, zwangsläufig sowohl *im* Raum (...) als auch *über* den Raum *hinaus*. Und es ist genau die überwältigende Komplexität dieser verzahnten und miteinander in Verbindung stehenden Netzwerke sozialer Beziehungen, die den sozialen Raum konstituiert. Diese Auffassung von Raum vorausgesetzt, wird ein Ort gebildet aus der besonderen Beschaffenheit sozialer Beziehungen, die an einer besonderen „location“ interagieren (Massey 12).⁴

Sozialer Raum ist demnach ein theoretisches Konstrukt, eine Abstraktion. In meiner Analyse sind sozialer Raum und Gemeinschaftsleben untrennbar verwoben.

Zu Beginn dieses Kapitels erläutere ich die Bedeutung des Lebens in der Gemeinschaft, wie es sich im amerikanischen Gedankengut von jeher manifestiert und in zeitgenössischen Studien abgebildet wird. Gegen Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts zeichnen soziologische Untersuchungen ein primär düsteres Bild von *community life*. Insbesondere verweisen möchte an dieser Stelle auf die Rolle des Individualismus als eine der Grundfesten des amerikanischen Ethos. Der Begriff Individualismus evoziert Unabhängigkeit und *self-reliance*, die von Ralph Waldo Emerson in seinem gleichnamigen Werk dezidiert beschrieben wurde. Ford rekurriert in seiner Trilogie explizit auf die Schriften von Ralph Waldo Emerson und Alexis de Tocqueville, die sich beide intensiv mit der Rolle des Einzelnen in der Gesellschaft befasst haben. Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts stellt Emerson Eigenständigkeit als Störfaktor einer von Konformismus geprägten Gesellschaft dar. Sein Zeitgenosse De Tocqueville argumentiert, dass übertriebener Individualismus zu einem für die Gesellschaft ungesunden Rückzug ins

⁴ Ich habe Masseys Zitat ins Deutsche übertragen. Im englischen Original lautet dieses Zitat wie folgt: „Social relations always have a spatial form and spatial content. They exist, necessarily, both *in* space (i.e. in a locational relation to other social phenomena) and *across* space. And it is the vast complexity of the interlocking and articulating nets of social relations which is social space. Given that conception of space, a ‘place’ is formed out of the particular set of social relations which interact at a particular location.“

Private und somit zu sozialer Entfremdung führen kann. Demnach sind weder Eigenständigkeit noch Individualismus vereinbar mit einer tendenziell konformistischen Gesellschaft. Genau diesem Aspekt kommt im Werk beider Autoren eine besondere Bedeutung zu. Weder Rabbit noch Frank entsprechen dem Prototyp des angepassten amerikanischen Durchschnittsbürgers. Updikes vermeintlicher *Everyman* führt alles andere als ein geregeltes Mittelschichtleben und auch Frank ist eher ein Außenseiter, der—passend dazu—am Rande des Kontinents lebt. Die Rolle des Einzelnen in der suburbanen Gesellschaft determiniert, wie sich sozialer Raum manifestiert.

Meine Untersuchung des sozialen Raumes konzentriert sich auf drei Aspekte. Zuerst erörtere ich die Darstellung von *third places* und heterotopen Räumen. Des Weiteren analysiere ich nachbarschaftliche Beziehungen und abschließend gesellschaftliches Miteinander am Unabhängigkeitstag und an *Thanksgiving*.

***Third Places* und Heterotope Orte**

Nach Meinung des Soziologen Ray Oldenburg sind *third places* Treffpunkte, die sich durch eine gewisse Ungezwungenheit und Formlosigkeit auszeichnen. Dabei kommt der Kommunikation eine besondere Rolle zu (cf. xvii, 42). In Updikes und Fords Romanen stellen sowohl der (Country-)Club als auch die Bar sogenannte *third places* dar. Meine Analyse wird zeigen, dass die zentrale Rolle der Kommunikation sukzessive in den Hintergrund tritt.

In *Rabbit Is Rich* wird der Protagonist, kaum zu Reichtum gelangt, Mitglied eines Vereins, der weder Tradition noch Exklusivität vorweisen kann. Es ist ein Club für junge Aufsteiger, die sich gern von ihresgleichen umgeben sehen. Rabbit zelebriert die wöchentlichen Treffen mit seinesgleichen. Doch die vermeintliche Gemeinschaft wird

schnell ersetzt durch Rivalität und Eifersüchteleien und im Laufe der Jahre lösen sich die sozialen Bande der Clubmitglieder sprichwörtlich auf.

Bei Ford haben Vereine kaum noch Mitglieder und so exotische Namen wie „Club der geschiedenen Männer“. Gemeinsame Treffen zeichnen sich durch oberflächliche Gespräche und Pseudo-Interesse am Leben des Anderen aus. Frank skizziert die zunehmende emotionale Verrohung der suburbanen Gesellschaft, die soziologischen Studien zufolge an einer narzisstischen Persönlichkeitsstörung leidet.⁵ Genau dies ist typisch für Bascombes Darstellung des Vorstadtlebens. Egozentrismus und gegenseitiges Desinteresse ersetzen gemeinschaftliche Strukturen. Somit wird der ursprüngliche Sinn einer Clubmitgliedschaft zunehmend *ad absurdum* geführt.

Ebenso finden Treffen in Bars zwar noch statt, aber soziales Miteinander ergibt sich vor allem gegen Ende der neunziger Jahre nicht mehr. In Updikes 1971 erschienenem Roman *Rabbit Redux* funktioniert die Bar vor dem Hintergrund der Bürgerrechtsbewegung als Treffpunkt nur problemlos, solange sich Weiße und Farbige in unterschiedlichen Bars treffen. Fords Protagonist Frank hat in den achtziger Jahren zwar regelmäßig Kontakt zu seinen ebenfalls geschiedenen Leidensgenossen, doch verkümmern solche Treffen in der Bar immer mehr zu „sprach-losem“ Nebeneinander und einem Sich-Suhlen in dem Gefühl kollektiver Verlorenheit.

Auch die Darstellung heterotoper Orte unterstreicht den Verfall sozialer Beziehungen. Nach Foucault sind heterotope Orte „other places“ (17), wie beispielsweise der Friedhof. In Updikes und Fords Romanen fungiert nicht einmal mehr der Friedhof als sozialer, der gemeinsamen Trauerarbeit gewidmeter Raum, sondern symbolisiert stattdessen die zunehmende Entfremdung und Isolation der Trauernden.

⁵ Stanley Goff benutzt den Ausdruck „narcissistic personality disorder“ (n. pag.), um dieses typische Phänomen suburbaner Existenz zu verbalisieren.

Nachbarschaft

Beide Autoren beschreiben einerseits Nachbarschaft zwischen Weißen und Afroamerikanern, wobei Ford zudem das Verhältnis zwischen Mieter und Vermieter thematisiert. Andererseits wird aber auch nachbarschaftliches Leben in monoethnischen Enklaven erörtert.

Nachbarschaft in Updikes Tetralogie

In *Rabbit Redux* beherbergt Rabbit in seinem apfelgrünen Vororthäuschen die jugendliche Ausreißerin Jill, und Skeeter, einen militanten Schwarzen. Während es innerhalb des häuslichen Mikrokosmos zu Spannungen und sexuellen Ausschweifungen kommt, stößt die Präsenz Skeeters in der weißen Vorortenklave auf immer stärkere Ablehnung. Die vermeintlich liberale suburbane Nachbarschaft duldet Skeeter nicht, stellt Rabbit ein Ultimatum und lässt schlussendlich das apfelgrüne Häuschen in Flammen aufgehen. Tragischerweise stirbt Jill in dem Feuer. Updike dokumentiert mit ungeheurer Wortgewalt die Scheinheiligkeit und Bigotterie der Vorstädter. Dabei kommt dem Schauplatz eine tragende Rolle zu, denn Rabbit empfindet seine Umgebung als abstoßend und sich selbst als Außenseiter. Ein gemeinsam bewohnter Lebensraum sollte laut Ferdinand Tönnies eine „Gemeinschaft of locality“ (42) ermöglichen und als sozialer Raum fungieren, doch in *Rabbit Redux* gibt es kein nachbarschaftliches Miteinander zwischen Weißen und Afroamerikanern, was unter anderem der historischen Situation der sechziger Jahre geschuldet ist.

Auch die in der Rabbit-Tetralogie dargestellten monoethnischen Wohngebiete sind alles andere als der Inbegriff guter Nachbarschaft. Updike umgibt seinen Protagonisten mit Nachbarn, die eine zunehmend multikulturelle Gesellschaftsstruktur widerspiegeln. Im Laufe der Jahre sieht sich Rabbit mit methodistischen, homosexuellen und jüdischen

Nachbarn konfrontiert. Schon als Kind erlebt er den Streit seiner Eltern mit dem Methodistenehepaar nebenan. Überdies ziehen Ende der siebziger Jahre lesbische Frauen in seiner Nachbarschaft ein. Rabbits scheinbar liberale Haltung kann jedoch nicht darüber hinwegtäuschen, dass er im Grunde genommen seine Männlichkeit infrage gestellt sieht. Ferner erlebt er 1989 in Florida, dass seine jüdischen Nachbarn sich bevorzugt in ihre eigenen vier Wände zurückziehen und isolieren.

Nachbarschaft in Fords Trilogie

Ford dokumentiert die Ära nach der Bürgerrechtsbewegung, doch die Rassenproblematik scheint nicht abzuebben. Erneut kommt der Nachbarschaft als Basis eines sozialen Raums eine tragende Rolle zu. Es fällt auf, dass Ford eine Bevölkerungsstruktur zeichnet, deren ethnische Zusammensetzung immer ein klares Mehrheits- oder Minderheitsverhältnis darstellt. Vor diesem Hintergrund sind Wohnungen immer auch ein Indikator für sozialen Status. Weiße bewohnen größere Häuser als ihre dunkelhäutigen Mitbürger. Frank ist Hausbesitzer, Bosobolo aus Gabon sein Mieter. Frank und Bosobolo wohnen im gleichen Haus, sind aber nicht befreundet. Des Weiteren unterhält Frank geradezu feindliche Beziehungen mit seinen *mixed-race* Mietern, die ihm äußerst offensiv und aggressiv entgegen treten. Neben örtlicher Segregation gibt es zahlreiche Beispiele für Ressentiments zwischen den unterschiedlichen Bevölkerungsgruppen, was das Zustandekommen sozialer Beziehungen vereitelt. Frank greift immer wieder auf hegemoniale Denkweisen bezüglich unterschiedlicher ethnischer Herkunft und Hautfarbe zurück. Dadurch, dass der aus dem Süden stammende Ford die Rassenproblematik und vor allem die Bigotterie der Vorstädter derart überzeichnet, will er natürlich eine Diskussion zu diesem Thema entfachen.

Zudem beschreibt Fords Protagonist ein ähnliches, der Gemeinschaft abträgliches Bild nachbarschaftlicher Beziehungen in monoethnischen Wohnvierteln wie Updike. Bereits in *The Sportswriter* erlebt Frank die zunehmende Isolation seiner Nachbarn, die nicht ernst gemeinte Einladungen aussprechen und mit ihm oberflächlichen Small Talk betreiben. In *Independence Day* kennen sich Nachbarn nicht einmal mehr und in *The Lay of the Land* bedauert Frank, dass selbst ein kurzer Gruß oder ein unverbindliches einander Zuwinken nicht mehr erwünscht sind.

Gesellschaftliches Miteinander

Es ist bemerkenswert, dass die beiden wichtigsten amerikanischen Feiertage, *Independence Day* und *Thanksgiving*, in den Romanen beider Autoren vorkommen und dass diese Werke noch dazu in etwa zur gleichen Zeit spielen.

In *Rabbit at Rest* (1989) pervertiert Updikes Darstellung der Parade des 4. Juli den Sinn des Unabhängigkeitstages. Verkleidet als Uncle Sam hat Rabbit eigentlich eine tragende Rolle, wirkt aber wie eine Witzfigur. Die Route der Parade kennt er seit seiner Jugend. Der Schauplatz hat sich kaum verändert, aber Rabbit nimmt um sich herum nur noch eine gesichtslose Menschenmenge wahr. Niemand erscheint ihm vertraut, die Menge am Straßenrand scheint austauschbar und fremd. Im Vergleich dazu thematisiert Fords Protagonist in *Independence Day* (1988) weniger die eigentliche Parade als vielmehr die Bedeutung von *community*. Diskussionen mit seinem plötzlich auftauchenden Stiefbruder Irv als *deus ex machina* entlarven Franks desillusionierende Auffassung von Gemeinschaft. Der gemeinsam bewohnte Raum als konstante Komponente bietet normalerweise die Möglichkeit, die Unwägbarkeiten des Alltags besser abzuwägen. Frank ist jedoch davon überzeugt, dass der gemeinsam bewohnte

Raum seiner *community* nicht mehr als „Kontingenzbewältiger“ (Schroer 13) fungieren kann.

Gleichsam erscheint auch *Thanksgiving* in negativem Licht. In *Rabbit Remembered* (1999-Anfang 2000) endet das erste *Thanksgiving* Essen, an dem Rabbits uneheliche Tochter Annabelle teilnimmt, mit einem heftigen Familienstreit und es scheint, als schwebe Rabbits Geist immer noch wie ein Damoklesschwert über dem von ihm verhassten Mahagonitisch im Wohnzimmer des Hauses seiner Schwiegereltern. In Fords *The Lay of the Land* (2000) würde Frank den Feiertag am liebsten vergessen oder mit Menschen feiern, die er nur vom Sehen kennt. Sowohl bei Updike als auch bei Ford gibt es statt geselligen Miteinanders familiäre Konflikte.

Demnach trägt die gemeinsame Verortung nicht mehr dazu bei, als Fundament sozialen Raum zu fördern. Soziale Bindungen lösen sich sukzessive auf bzw. waren nie wirklich vorhanden. Infolgedessen skizzieren die Romane den Verfall des sozialen Raums und des Gemeinschaftslebens.

5. Kapitel: Privater Raum

Die dritte Säule meines Raumkonzepts basiert auf der detaillierten Darstellung der häuslichen Umgebung der Charaktere und analysiert die Einstellung der Personen zu ihrer unmittelbaren Umgebung. Das Haus, einzelne Räume und auch das Mobiliar rücken dabei in den Vordergrund. In diesem Kapitel verdeutliche ich, dass die äußere Gestalt eines Hauses und die Einrichtung mehr über die Charaktere aussagen als jedwede Form direkter Charakterisierung.

In *American Dream, American Nightmare: Fiction since 1960* argumentiert Kathryn Hume, dass zwischen 1930 und 1950 Kritik an der Regierung nahezu nicht existierte und es eine Art Konsenskultur gab. Doch mit Beginn der sechziger Jahre setzte eine

zunehmende Unzufriedenheit mit der Regierung ein, was sich natürlich auch in der Literatur niederschlug (cf. 5). Vor diesem Hintergrund nimmt der Besitz eines Hauses einen immer größeren Stellenwert ein. Jedoch ist ein Haus nicht *per se* ein Heim. Der Besitz eines Eigenheims entpuppte sich als erklärtes Ziel der Mittelschicht, weshalb Häuser in den Romanen beider Autoren eine bedeutsame Rolle innehaben.

Der Männliche Rückzugsort

Augenscheinlich gibt es innerhalb oder außerhalb der dargestellten Häuser immer einen Ort, der als Rückzugsmöglichkeit dient, allerdings nur für die männlichen Charaktere. Bereits in der Literatur der viktorianischen Zeit taucht beispielsweise im Werk des englischen Schriftstellers Charles Dickens ein solcher, dem männlichen Protagonisten vorbehaltener Rückzugsort auf, der oftmals als *growlery* bezeichnet wurde. Auf Updikes und Fords Werk bezogen, stellen diese deutlich abgegrenzten Orte für die *dramatis personae* eine Art Parallelwelt dar, die ihnen Raum bietet zur Selbstreflexion. Diese Räume sind immer erfüllt mit einem *genius loci* und daher positiv konnotiert. So zieht sich Wade Arcenault gern in den Keller zurück, um an einem alten Chrysler herumzutüfteln. Rabbit verbringt gerne Zeit in seinem Kämmerchen, um dort zu lesen und nachzudenken, und Charley O'Dell, der reiche Architekt und Ehemann seiner Exfrau, verweilt bevorzugt in seinem auf Stelzen errichteten Bootshaus. Sie alle erleben den geradezu kathartischen Effekt, den dieser besondere Raum auf ihre Psyche ausübt.

Die Darstellung des Zuhauses in den Rabbit-Romanen

In seiner Tetralogie kontrastiert Updike dunkle Räume mit hellen, beleuchteten Räumen. Licht und Schatten sind untrennbar mit der Darstellung der Häuser verbunden. Updike lässt seinen Protagonisten bewusst im Halbdunkel aufwachsen und leben, um

dessen Unzufriedenheit hervorzuheben. Erst das Haus, das er in *Rabbit Is Rich* erwirbt, durchbricht das Halbdunkel und lässt ihn aufleben. Sein Lebenszyklus endet tragischerweise im lichtdurchfluteten Florida.

Darüber hinaus legt Updikes Hauptfigur großen Wert auf eine umfassende Bestandsaufnahme der Wohnungseinrichtung. Erneut stellt Updike Räume einander gegenüber. Überladene Räume, in denen sich Rabbit nie wohlfühlt, kontrastieren mit dem spärlich möblierten Eigenheim, das allein er als *home* wahrnimmt. Grundsätzlich beeinflussen ihn das Mobiliar und die Positionierung bestimmter Möbelstücke im Raum nachhaltig. Gleichzeitig beeinträchtigt aber auch seine emotionale Verfassung die Wahrnehmung des ihn umgebenden Ortes.

In diesem Kapitel untersuche ich insbesondere Rabbits Wohnsituation im Laufe der vier Jahrzehnte und lege dar, wann Rabbit ein Haus als „Zuhause“ interpretiert. Oft vergleicht Rabbit seinen häuslichen Mikrokosmos, den er als Erwachsener bewohnt, mit dem vergangener Zeiten und diese Nostalgie bestimmt sein Gefühl von Verortet-Sein. In erster Linie definiert er sich über den Besitz eines Eigenheims, der allein seine Daseinsberechtigung ausmacht.

„Home Truths“—Bittere Wahrheiten in Fords Trilogie

Auch Ford thematisiert die Bedeutung von *home* und hinterfragt auf der Metaebene den Sinn von Verortung und Heimat. Seinem Verständnis von *home* zufolge gibt es nicht nur eine örtlich auszumachende Heimat. Heimat ist überall und nirgendwo und diese Überzeugung überträgt sich auf seine Trilogie.

Sein Protagonist beschreibt die rasante Verbreitung von Wohnsiedlungen, die Themenparks ähneln und den Eindruck potemkinscher Dörfer erwecken. Hier ist wahrlich „the emperor’s new suburb“ (*LoL* 130) entstanden und die Anspielung auf

Andersens Märchen passt. Des Weiteren analysiere ich die Immobilienodyssee, die Frank mit der Familie Markham durchlebt, und die mit der Erkenntnis endet, dass Heimat immer dort ist, wo man gerade seine Hypothek abbezahlt. Im Anschluss illustriere ich Franks Auffassung von Heim und Heimat. Im Gegensatz zu Rabbit verbindet Frank *home* nicht mehr mit einem festen Punkt auf der Landkarte. In der Folge entlarvt er *home* als theoretisches Konstrukt: „home’s a musable concept [...]“ (LoL 16).

Meine detaillierte Analyse begründet, dass Rabbit’s *sense of place* und seine Idee von Heimat stark mit Nostalgie und den Erfahrungen aus der Vergangenheit verwoben sind. Im Gegensatz dazu trennt Frank Orte von der Koordinate Zeit. Die Vergangenheit verliert ihre Gültigkeit und so entwickelt Frank nur einen schwach ausgeprägten *sense of place* und ein ebenso schwach ausgeprägtes Heimatgefühl.

6. Kapitel: Epilog

Ich hoffe gezeigt zu haben, dass die sich über die Jahre verändernde literarische Kartographie beider Autoren eine sich verändernde Konzeption des Raumes und des Heimatbegriffes widerspiegelt. Der männlich determinierte Diskurs der Protagonisten legt dabei einen klaren Übergang offen von einer stark örtlich bestimmten zu einer nahezu diasporischen Auffassung von *sense of place* und *home*.

„Is location still everything?“ Diese Frage stellt sich durchaus und ist in Rabbits Fall eindeutig zu bejahen. Rabbit misst geographischem Raum (sowohl (sub)urban als auch häuslich) und sozialem Raum grundsätzlich eine große Bedeutung bei und definiert sich darüber, das heißt die drei Säulen meines Raumkonzeptes verschmelzen sozusagen in seiner Person. Folglich erlangt „Heimat“ für ihn eine geradezu totemische Bedeutung.

Sein Raumkonzept ist immer geographisch verankert, denn auch der soziale Raum ist untrennbar verwoben mit den Beziehungen, die er in den Vororten aufbaut. Auf Eudora Weltys Aufsatz „Place in Fiction“ zurückgreifend, lässt sich sagen, dass in Updikes Tetralogie ein stetes Wechselspiel zwischen Orten und der Gefühlslandschaft des Protagonisten besteht.

Für Bascombe hingegen gilt: „location is no longer everything“. Das triadische Raumkonzept wird in sein Gegenteil verkehrt. *(Sub)urban space* entwickelt sich schleichend zu *Anyplace*, sozialer Raum verwandelt sich zu einem der sozialen Gemeinschaft abträglichen Raum und *domestic space* wird bedeutungslos: „Place means nothing“ (*ID* 152). Weltys binäre Formel gilt bei Ford nicht mehr, da Orte ihre Bedeutung verlieren. Frank Bascombe gelingt es nicht, die Frage „What is home then [...]?“ (*LoL* 15) zu beantworten. Für ihn ist Heimat nicht mehr geographisch konnotiert. Aus diesem Grund negiert er die Existenz territorialer Identität. Auf der Metaebene beschreibt Ford die zunehmende Entkonkretisierung des (Vor-)Ortes. Die Vereinigten Staaten sind mithin zu einer atopischen Gesellschaft geworden.

Meine Dissertation leistet einen Beitrag zum Thema *spatiality* in der Literaturkritik, indem sie die Romane von Updike und Ford unter Zuhilfenahme von Raumtheorien analysiert und sich eines triadischen Raumkonzepts bedient. Es wäre daher von Interesse, neben der männlich determinierten Sicht auch raumtheoretische Analysen aus feministischer oder ethnischer Perspektive durchzuführen. Darüber hinaus bietet es sich an, eine raumtheoretische Analyse von zeitgenössischer post-9/11 Literatur vorzunehmen. Seit diesem einschneidenden Tag im Jahr 2001 hat sich insbesondere das Verständnis von Verortung und Heimat vieler Amerikaner stark verändert, was dazu führte, dass in dieser Literatur die Darstellung von Raum und die durch Trauma und Ängste evozierte veränderte Raumwahrnehmung noch stärker in den

Vordergrund gerückt wurden. Ich hoffe, dass diese Dissertation und ihr dreigliedriger Aufbau neue Wege aufgezeigt hat, suburbane Literatur raumtheoretisch zu analysieren und die Komponente Raum aufzuwerten.