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Lights, camera, action!
Light, canvas, stillness.
A look at the intermedial relationship between cinema and Edward Hopper´s paintings

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LIGHTS/CAMERA/ACTION!

LIGHT/CANVAS/STILLNESS.

A LOOK AT THE INTERMEDIAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN

CINEMA AND EDWARD HOPPER´S PAINTINGS.

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INTRODUCTION

L'homme est le seul être qui s'intéresse aux images en tant que telles

Giorgio Agamben, *Image et Mémoire*

Cinema is one of my favourite artistic expressions since I was a child. I inherited this passion from my parents, who loved cinema and introduced me to it very early on. When cinema is intertwined with another art, painting in this case, I am in ecstasy as I also love painting. Again, I owe it to my parents who started taking me on museum tours in my early childhood.

Both indisputable means of artistic expression, cinema and painting possess the ability to represent reality. This similar property has caused a reciprocity of influences that has enriched both arts. However, their relationship goes beyond this simple property of representation of the real, and this is explained by the multiple scholars who have developed the theme of the film-painting duality. Since its inception, cinema has relied on pictorial art in the same way that painting was impregnated with the new artistic mentality that cinema brought with it.

From its beginnings, the cinematographic language saw pictorial representation as an important reference. In search of a plastic and aesthetic legitimation, cinema reproduced many paintings, often composing complete films inspired by the pictorial compositions of the great masters of painting.

In this context, we find the work of the American painter Edward Hopper, one of the painters who have most influenced modern cinema, to the point that many film frames, plans, and scenes are direct replicas of his images of unpopulated places, lonely women, luminous lighthouses on the coast, gas station pumps on unfrequented roads or misty bridges. On the other hand, many of his paintings are perfect frames or a full composition of a cinematographic shot, resembling the films he loved so much.

The purpose of this work is, on one hand, to analyse Hopper´s main paintings as well as the influences his work received from cinema, recognising and detecting them, and on the other hand, to analyse concrete films by directors that have been influenced by Hopper´s oeuvre, detecting the Hopperian themes and style in a variety of film genres

and the work of several directors. In other words, a reflection on the dialectic *aller-retour* that relates Hopper´s paintings with the cinema that he watched and cinema (his contemporary and later cinema, including European) with his paintings.

His inward-bent, thought-absorbed, and melancholic characters, his quiet lonely streets, his cafés, and cinemas inhabited by solitary characters have drawn the attention of many film directors throughout the 20th century to nowadays.

To write this work I resorted to several information sources. The works of Gail Levin, a specialist in Edward Hopper and his biographer, must be highlighted within the documental sources - *Edward Hopper: The Art and the Artist* (1980) and *Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography* (1995). Mark Strand, an art critic, and poet was also an aid of paramount importance. Strand began writing about Hopper in 1971, in an article titled "Crossing the Tracks to Hopper´s World". Later he wrote "Hopper: The Loneliness Factor" (1985) and a book, *Hopper* (1994), as the result of a lecture series.

Digital sources and virtual libraries such as the online resources of institutions such as Cinemateca Portuguesa, Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa, MoMA, Tate Modern, Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, the British Library, the British Film Institute, Oxford Academy, eLibraryUSA, and the Library of American Art, amongst others, were very helpful. Digital versions of magazines such as *Caimán Cuadernos de Cine*, *Cahiers du Cinéma,* or *The Guardian* were utilised as well.

Videos on Hopper´s life and works, and those featuring exhibitions and conferences related to his work, were also a precious help.

ABSTRACT

The following work analyses the relationship between painting and cinema, focusing on the figure of the American painter Edward Hopper and the influence that the artist both received from cinema and has had in cinema.

The first chapter discusses Intermediality and general aspects that link both arts, such as atmosphere, light, and shadow. I will stress that Hopper transposes to his paintings some of cinema´s atmospheres, characteristics, themes, and techniques, and film directors influenced by the painter transpose to their films some of Hopper´s painterly style, atmospheres, and themes.

The second chapter approaches Hopper´s life and overall oeuvre, as well as the main themes of his work. I will identify the influences suffered by his work and the importance of his marriage in the development of his craft. I will discuss his main themes: city, alienation, loneliness, silence, stillness, light, shadow, and windows.

The third chapter points out the influences operated by cinema on Hopper´s work. I will analyse the artist´s major paintings representing stage and cinema. I will explore how Hopper´s works developed a close relationship with film, on a reciprocal inspiration based on the depiction of the "American Way of Life". I will argue that not only did he choose to paint cinema halls throughout his career, but he also took inspiration and adopted techniques from cinema.

The last chapter identifies and analyses concrete examples of the painter´s influence on cinema. I will discuss how *film noir* brought to the big screen the "American nightmare." I will explain the paternity of the term *film noir*. I will explore the fact that cinema has also been influenced by Hopper's paintings. I will analyse films by Alfred Hitchcock, Michelangelo Antonioni, David Lynch, Wim Wenders, and Todd Haynes that manifestly display Hopper´s pictorial influence, as well as other directors and films.

KEYWORDS: Intermediality; Edward Hopper; cinema; *film noir*; ordinary life.

RESUMO

O trabalho que se segue analisa a relação entre a pintura e o cinema, focando-se na figura do pintor americano Edward Hopper e na influência que o artista recebeu do cinema e tem exercido no cinema até aos dias de hoje.

O primeiro capítulo aborda a Intermedialidade e aspectos gerais que ligam ambas as artes, como a atmosfera, a luz e a sombra. Edward Hopper transpõe para as suas pinturas algumas das atmosferas, características, temas e técnicas do cinema, e realizadores influenciados pelo pintor transpõem para os seus filmes alguns dos estilos, atmosferas e temas pictóricos de Hopper.

O segundo capítulo aborda a vida de Hopper bem como os principais temas da sua obra. Em 1923 Hopper casou-se com a também artista Josephine Verstille Nivison. Esta aliança é fundamental para entender o artista e a sua obra, já que Jo se tornou um elemento indispensável na execução da sua arte. Foi a única modelo feminina do marido e tornou-se a sua assistente de estúdio.

Embora fascinado pelos mestres flamengos, Hopper foi influenciado principalmente pela paleta dos Impressionistas. Outra grande influência na obra de Hopper foi o cinema. Ao trabalhar nas suas pinturas, Hopper deu forma às influências cinematográficas que recebeu desta recente invenção.

As suas pinturas exalam uma atmosfera de solidão urbana e possuem um carácter indescritível. A melancolia paira sobre a maioria das suas pinturas mais famosas, nas mulheres que pintou em quartos de hotel (*Hotel Room*), nos clientes de um “diner” (*Nighthawks*), ou na jovem mulher que bebe o seu café sozinha num restaurante automático (*Automat*).

Hopper transformou cenas normais da vida quotidiana em pinturas de beleza e construiu uma narrativa ambígua, intemporal e universal. Personagens absortas, muitas vezes mulheres, são observadas por um voyeur, e pelo espectador que contempla a pintura. As suas pinturas, uma mistura do comum e do estranho, são instantaneamente reconhecíveis. Hopper deu forma visual ao anonimato, ao isolamento, ao tédio, à solidão e estagnação da vida americana do século XX.

O artista encenou a vida quotidiana em restaurantes - *Chop Suey* (1929) e *Tables for Ladies* (1930), e em escritórios - *Conference at Night* (1949), *Office in a Small City*

(1953) e *New York Office* (1962). Tinha relutância em colocar as suas pinturas no contexto da época, mas algumas revelam várias mudanças sociais que ocorreram na sua época.

Hopper sempre preferiu pintar o vazio: as suas cidades estão desertas, os seus apartamentos têm pouca mobília, as suas paisagens são vastos espaços nos quais emergem, à distância, uma casa, um farol. A falta de acção, os espaços, e os silêncios constituem a acção nas pinturas de Hopper. Ele escolhe precisamente os momentos em que nada acontece, e nada é ouvido, para aumentar o mistério em torno das suas cenas. Este minimalismo desperta a imaginação do espectador, que é convidado a entrar nas pinturas e a decifrá-las.

Hopper era um mestre da luz. Os personagens das suas telas estão imóveis, sentados, deitados ou em pé sob um brilho branco. Estão como que estacionados na tela, à espera de serem "iluminados". A luz oferece a possibilidade de redenção, é um raio de esperança na dura realidade do dia-a-dia. A contribuição de Hopper para a pintura moderna é que ele tornou o tédio épico, sacralizando os momentos de desatenção banal da vida quotidiana, tendo "salvo" a realidade com a luz. Hopper entendeu que não necessitava de pintar assuntos solenes ou temas nobres; bastava-lhe uma passagem de nível, uma casa, um telhado, um bar, um quarto de hotel ou uma personagem absorta.

As pinturas de Hopper incluem frequentemente janelas, e os seus edifícios estão muitas vezes situados em ângulos que sugerem que os seus personagens estão posicionados tanto diante como atrás de janelas. A janela é como a abertura de um grande espaço obscuro, que lenta e firmemente separa a luz da escuridão. As suas janelas conferem-nos uma visão interna do seu mundo pessoal.

Cidade, alienação, solidão, silêncio, quietude, luz e sombra são temas recorrentes na sua obra. O retrato realista de Hopper de cenas urbanas comuns leva o espectador ao reconhecimento da estranheza em ambientes familiares.

O terceiro capítulo aponta as influências operadas pelo cinema sobre a obra de Hopper. O artista prestou inúmeras homenagens à sétima arte na sua obra. No entanto, nos seus quadros o ecrã ou o filme são dificilmente visíveis, em prol dos espectadores que estão absortos nos seus pensamentos, em momentos em que não há projecção (chegada, intervalo,) ou da arrumadora pensativa.

Há também que mencionar a questão da absorpção nas pinturas de Hopper. Os seus personagens estão geralmente absortos nos seus pensamentos, reflectindo sobre as suas vidas, e alheios ao facto de estarem a ser observados por um voyeur/pintor (Hopper), e pelo voyeur/espectador que contempla a pintura.

Os temas das pinturas de Hopper nem sempre provieram da observação directa da vida real; desde o início da sua carreira até à década de 1940, procederam predominantemente do cinema *noir*. Tal como nos seus filmes preferidos, as suas obras são sobre "a cidade", representando uma noção abstracta de espaço urbano em vez de uma cidade específica. O voyeurismo é outra característica do cinema que as pinturas de Hopper partilham.

Hopper não só escolheu pintar salas de cinema ao longo da sua carreira (*Two on the Aisle*, 1927; *Sheridan Theatre*, 1937; New *York Movie*, 1939; *First Row Orchestra*, 1951 e *Intermission*, 1963,) o que demonstra a importância destes lugares para ele, como também se baseou na cinematografia e em técnicas cinematográficas que se tornariam a marca registada do seu estilo.

Realizadores e cineastas da Europa Central destacaram-se no desenvolvimento do chamado cinema *noir*. Ao introduzir um novo conjunto de valores estéticos e culturais na indústria cinematográfica americana, estes cineastas desencadearam um processo de transformação do paradigma clássico de Hollywood. O cinema *noir* trouxe o "pesadelo americano" para o grande ecrã, retratando uma sociedade impulsionada pelo dinheiro e a alienação causada pela vida nos grandes centros urbanos da América.

O termo cinema *noir* foi inventado por dois críticos de cinema franceses para definir um conjunto de filmes cujo tema principal era a ocorrência de um crime. Após a libertação da França em 1944, os ecrãs franceses foram inundados com filmes de Hollywood, entre eles este novo tipo de filmes sobre crimes.

As cenas urbanas de Hopper estão imbuídas de desespero e tristeza ao ponto de inspirarem o cinema *noir*. As suas obras e o cinema *noir* partilham uma relação tão profunda que, ao conectarem-se entre si, criam uma visão de um país e do seu povo.

O último capítulo identifica e analisa exemplos concretos da influência do pintor no cinema. Se o pintor gostava do cinema, os cineastas apreciavam as pinturas de Hopper (e ainda o fazem). A atmosfera, por vezes ameaçadora e misteriosa, que Hopper criou

em algumas das suas obras através de formas, luz e ângulos incomuns, inspirou muitos cineastas a criar as suas atmosferas. A sua importância para o cinema é imensa: ajudou a ensinar ao novo meio que, numa narrativa, o momento de pausa, de reflexão, de devaneio, não é menos importante do que o da dança ou do combate, do movimento gracioso, violento ou desordenado. Hopper ajudou a integrar o momento da pintura no cinema.

Há tantas referências ao trabalho de Edward Hopper no cinema que me foi necessário destacar apenas as mais conhecidas. Falarei sobre o trabalho de diferentes cineastas, que têm uma relação directa e reconhecida com a obra de Hopper, começando por Alfred Hitchcock e Michelangelo Antonioni, passando por David Lynch e Wim Wenders, e terminando com Todd Haynes.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Intermedialidade; Edward Hopper; cinema; cinema *noir*; vida quotidiana.

CHAPTER I

A. INTERMEDIALITY

B. CINEMA

1. THE ATMOSPHERE IN CINEMA

2. LIGHT AND SHADOW

2.1. THE IMPORTANCE OF LIGHT(ING) IN THE SEVENTH ART

2.2. *CHIAROSCURO*

2.3. SHADOW AND *FILM NOIR*

A. INTERMEDIALITY

L´intermedialité, c´est “*in.*”

Joachim Paech

Since the title of this work includes the word “intermedial,” a previous elaboration on some considerations on this subject is required. My first step, then, must be devoted to some of the approaches adopted by scholars about Intermediality in a general sense, and, secondly, to Intermediality in cinema.

According to Inge van de Ven,[1] all media are intermedia since it resides in-between existing or traditional media and resists fixed aesthetic categories. The original interval enables the identity of media as we know them. This frame allows us to gain insight into the hybrid character of art forms: not only their intertwinement with each other, but also with daily life, science, philosophy, and social issues. In line with this argument, Walter Moser in "As relações entre as artes: por uma arqueologia da intermidialidade," considers that the relationship among the arts, by implication, always involves intermedial issues, even if they are not explicit, and considers that all art includes "mediality." (Moser, 2006:42)

A further dimension on this ongoing theoretical meditation is elaborated by Irina Rajewsky, one of the leading Intermediality researchers, when, in her essay “Border Talks: The Problematic Status of Media Borders in the Current Debate about Intermediality,” she argues that the debate about this subject is characterized by a variety of heterogeneous approaches and that many critical approaches make use of the concept, each with its premises, methodology, terminology, and delimitations. The specific objectives pursued by different disciplines in conducting intermedial research are also variable (media studies, literary, theatre and film studies, art history, musicology, philosophy, or sociology, for instance). This author states the following: (Rajewsky, 2010:51-52)

> Generally speaking, and according to common understanding, 'Intermediality' refers to relations between media, to medial interactions and interferences. Hence, 'Intermediality'

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1. Cf. an online article at https://www.diggitmagazine.com/timeline-item/what-intermediality

can be said to serve first and foremost as a flexible generic term 'that can be applied, in a broad sense, to any phenomenon involving more than one medium and thus to any phenomenon that - as indicated by the prefix inter - in some way takes place between media. Accordingly, the crossing of media borders has been defined as a founding category of Intermediality.[2]

In turn, Christina Ljungberg in "Intermedial Strategies in Multimedia Art," refers that the concept of "media" is used to refer to the classical mass media: newspapers, books, radio, popular music, film, and television. More recently, this concept was expanded, and it now covers writing or even speech in general, music, painting, photography, video, the Internet, and computer games. This author explains that Intermediality concerns the transgression of the borders between such media, for instance, between different sign systems and/or the iconic enactment of one medium within another. It also involves the sensorial modality of a specific medium, mainly the visual, oral, or tactile, and the semiotic register of sign functions. (Ljungberg, 2010:82)

According to Claus Clüver, in "lntermedialitv and lnterart Studies," once "´medium` instead of ´art` was accepted as the basic category for the interdisciplinary discourse, the interrelationship of the various media is conceived of as ´Intermediality.` This is how this research area now understands the object of its investigations, rather than as ´the interrelations of the ´arts`." (Clüver, sd:30)

Quoting Irina Rajewsky, Mário Avelar refers:

Intermediality affirms itself, thus, as a production process when different *media* interact to create a new form of artistic expression (Rajewsky, 2016:39). It is different, therefore, from multimediality – the co-presence of media that, however, do not merge, something that opera does - from the intermedia references – the *tableau vivant* – and from the nomadic phenomena of transmediality – the translation of a *media* into another as it happens with the so-called film adaptation of a novel (idem: 35-36). (Avelar, 2018:21)

In another article, "Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation: A Literary Perspective on Intermediality," Irina Rajewsky proposes three subcategories of Intermediality: medial transposition, media combination, and intermedial references. For

2. Irina O. Rajewsky. *Intermedialität*. 2002. pp. 11-15.

the first subcategory, the author gives the example of film adaptations or novelizations, where “the ´original` text, film, etc., is the ´source` of the newly formed media product, whose formation is based on a media-specific and obligatory intermedial transformation process.” The second one includes multimedia, mixed media, and intermedia. In this instance, Intermediality is the result of the combination of “at least two conventionally distinct media or medial forms of articulation.” Finally, the third subcategory includes references to a film in a literary text, the musicalization of literature, references in film to painting, in painting to photographs, etc. “Intermedial references are thus to be understood as meaning-constitutional strategies that contribute to the media product´s overall signification.” (Rajewsky, 2005:43-64) This author emphasizes that “Just as a literary text can evoke or imitate specific elements or structures of film, music, theatre, etc., so films, theatrical performances, or other media products can constitute themselves in various complex ways in relation to another medium.” (Rajewsky, 2005:57)

The example of cinema stresses the transformative quality of Intermediality that can be found in the varying interrelationships between two or more media forms, Rajewsky points out. In the case of cinema, “Intermediality acts as a model for the varied interrelationships between diachronic and synchronic media.” (Rajewsky, 2005:58)

Ágnes Pethő, another leading Intermediality researcher, mentions Jürgen E. Müller, who wrote one of the ground-breaking books on cinematic Intermediality, in her article “Intermediality in Film: A Historiography of Methodologies.” And she quotes (Pethő, 2010:48):

> The introduction of electricity and electronics made film into the intermedial threshold medium of modernism which meant the final stages of mechanizing and also the beginning of the electronic and the digital within media history. Therefore film is not hybrid or intermedial because it made its medial forerunners into its own contents (..), but because from the very beginning we find medial interactions and interferences on almost every level. Its technical conditions, its circumstances of presentation and its aesthetic structures are all marked by these interactions. (Müller, 1996:47) .

Pethö remarks that the notion that cinema is interconnected with other media and arts has been constantly addressed since the beginning of cinema history. Ricciotto Canudo in “Essai sur la musique comme réligion de l’avenir. Lettres aux «fidèles de musique»,” (Canudo, 1911) argued: “The new manifestation of art should really be more precisely a painting and a sculpture developing in time (…) in a most astonishing

apotheosis, the plastic art in motion will arise." Vachel Lindsay, in *Art of the Moving Picture* (1915), describes film as "sculpture in motion," "painting in motion," or "architecture in motion." (Pethö, 2010:50)

Sergei Eisenstein continued this inclination to describe the very essence of cinema by emphasising its similarities with other arts and media. His famous montage theory was based on the concept of film being "music to the eyes." In his essays (1942), he mentioned the techniques of Dickens´s or Zola´s novels in comparison to filmic narrative and the parallels between cinematic collage and El Greco´s paintings. (Pethö, 2010:51)

Ágnes Pethő addresses the heterogeneity of the discourse on Intermediality in "Approaches to Studying Intermediality in Contemporary Cinema" and reviews its major directions of thought, assessing their implications and productivity. This author has tentatively identified three major paradigms conceived around the ideas of a) media borders, b) in-betweenness, and c) connecting the real and the intermedial. (Pethö, 2018:166)

Regarding the "crossing of media borders," she states that it is one of the most persistent metaphors in the study of Intermediality. Pethő refers that Irina Rajewsky considers it as "a founding category," (2010, 52, cf. also 2002, 11–15) that Lars Elleström defines Intermediality as "a result of constructed media borders being trespassed," and contends that even though "there are no media borders given by nature […] we need borders to talk about Intermediality" (Elleström, 2010:27). The borders in question are admittedly constructed (historically, cognitively, and conventionally) and perceivable on different levels as differences that frame each medium coming into contact with another. Theoretical writings based on such "border-talks" are concerned with typologies of modalities and operations that can identify what happens to media (more precisely, to media forms or media characteristics) in an inter-media relationship. Broadly speaking, according to such typologies, in an intermedial border crossing media are fused, combined, and integrated to form a complex multimedia or hybrid entity; media (forms, characteristics, products) are represented, referenced by other media, or characteristics (which are either specific to one medium or not) are transposed, trans-mediated, trans-semioticised (Gaudreault and Marion, 2004), transformed or re-mediated. (Pethö, 2018:167)

The alternative to the paradigm based on the border metaphor can be seen in theoretical pursuits that shift the emphasis towards the idea of some kind of in-betweenness. Pethő refers to Bernd Herzogenrath who, quoting the Fluxus artist Dick Higgins who coined the term "intermedia" in 1966, observes that "intermedium" is not only the "uncharted land that lies between" in the sense that it comprises "the links (and cross-breeds) between various art forms" but also in the sense of connecting "various disciplines with which we talk about these media. (…) Intermedia(lity) thus can very literally be described as between the between." (Herzogenrath, 2012:2) (Pethő, 2018:168)

Pethő refers to Joachim Paech (2011:73), who explicitly applies the notion of in-betweenness to cinematic Intermediality, defining it "as a perceivable figure of media difference which disturbs the order of the discourse." (Pethő, 2018:169)

Pethő also refers that recent philosophers and film theorists like Alain Badiou, Jacques Rancière, Giorgio Agamben, and Raymond Bellour have brought new perspectives to thinking about Intermediality in cinema. They have explicitly written about cinema and offered new vantage points for interpreting its hybridity. They all implicitly point toward expanding the area to be considered in Intermediality studies beyond media. Alain Badiou interprets the designation of "the seventh art" not as indicative of the position of cinema among the arts, but of the way it is constituted: it is not simply another art added to the succession of previously existing ones, but the "plus-one" of the arts in the sense that "it operates on the other arts, using them as its starting point, in a movement that subtracts them from themselves." (Badiou 2013:89) Badiou writes: "all the arts flow through cinema. […] Cinema uses and magnifies them, giving them a distinctive emotional power. There's a power of revelation of the arts, a power of subjugation of the arts in cinema that truly makes it the seventh art." (Badiou 2013:7) (Pethő, 2018:170)

There is a similar gesture of extending and remapping the area where cinema (and thinking about cinema) operates on the principle of in-betweenness in Jacques Rancière's writings (2014). Only instead of Badiou's vision of binding together the divergent aspects of cinema, Rancière pulls them apart, by emphasizing the "gaps" or "intervals" of cinema. "The gaps of cinema are the results of cinema being other to itself – this internal heterogeneity producing extensions or relations with literature, politics, and other art forms. Gaps and extensions make cinema overflow itself." (Rancière 2014: 5) (Pethő, 2018:171)

Pethő further adds that Giorgio Agamben joins the rank of the contemporary philosophers who venture into these 'non-cinematic' fields by dislodging the image from the centre of discourse on cinema and replacing it with "gesture." Thus, for Agamben, cinema re-enacts the tale of the living statue: "the mythical rigidity of the image has been broken" as the cinematic world unfolds a "dream of a gesture." "Properly speaking, there are no images but only gestures" in cinema. (Agamben 2000: 55) Gesture itself is articulated in multiple ways as an agent of in-betweenness, between dance and image, language and pure spectacle, the body as an "exhibition of mediality," of "being-in-a-medium" (Agamben, 2000:57). This recovery of the non-cinematic and cinema's various relationships with the reality within thinking about cinematic hybridity in the writings of these theorists not only institutes a new kind of "border-talk," this time between art and non-art, the real and the intermedial but it is also marked by a strong emphasis on performativity (on what Intermediality does.) Unlike the metaphors of "media trespasses" of the first paradigm, which define what Intermediality is in the abstract, these relationships are considered here literally as action and interaction, as relations of power and conflict with the possibility of unearthing tensions that go beyond the realm of media. (Pethő, 2018:172)

Pethő comments that the disruptive way in which intermedial relations are enacted in cinema is most explicitly spelled out by Raymond Bellour in his two books on all kinds of combinations of photography, cinema, video, painting, literature, and digital media. His key concepts of "entre-images" or "images-in-between" unfold a vision of in-betweenness in which forms are "hollowed out from within" or "irrigated" by the new forces that surround them: fissures, interventions, intrusions, collusions, and corruptions. (Bellour, 2012:21) (Pethő, 2018:173)

Pethö argues that cinema can also be perceived as ekphrastic, not merely through the media differences of other embedded media forms, but on a more general level, when cinema explicitly attempts to rival another art form, or a style developed in another art form. Expressionist films, where there are characteristic painted settings, would be a good example of such an attempt to transform moving pictures into a sequence of moving paintings. (Pethő, 2018:213)

In her "Introduction to the second enlarged edition" of *Cinema and Intermediality - The Passion for the In-between*, Pethő explains that what prompted her to write the essays gathered in that book was a strong urge to investigate what the "inter" implied by

the idea of "Intermediality" stands for, and what it entails in cinema. This "inter" indicates that this kind of theorizing is focused on relationships, rather than structures, on something that "happens" in-between media rather than simply existing within a given signification, which has proved to be the key element of the term. Intermediality has brought into the limelight the complex exchanges of different media in the cinema, accentuating how film can incorporate forms of all other media and initiate combinations and dialogues between the different arts. Furthermore, it seems that Intermediality has the potential of becoming one of the major theoretical issues of contemporary thinking about cinema, precisely because it regards film as a medium of continuous change and interchange. (Pethő, 2020: xiii)

The chapter dedicated to Hitchcock - "Spellbound by Images: The Allure of Painting in the Cinema of Alfred Hitchcock" - offers a summary of important issues related to the use of paintings and painterly techniques in this director's movies and contributes to an intermedial interpretation of some of his major films displaying explicit relations with painting. Hitchcock's films constitute a unique link between the early cinema, the avant-garde affinity towards painting, and the conventions of classical storytelling. Some of his films can be interpreted as a self-reflection of cinema as a visual medium. (Pethő, 2020: xix) This is the case of *Rear Window*, which will be discussed ahead in chapter IV.

João Maria Mendes, in an article titled "Cinema e Intermedialidade", argues that the eye of the camera — what it frames, the way it moves or stays still, what it manages to capture from the constructed figuration, the way it relates to shapes, colours, light and shadow, the sound of beings and things in films — is the part of the cinematic device that most depends on the articulation between director and cinematographer or cameraman, and that is an heir from the *camera obscura* and all predecessors of the Lumières´s cinematograph. Thus understood, the cinematic device is historical, and it has varied depending on the technological evolution of the production and exhibition of films, their reception and cultural consumption, and the mutations caused by both things in the definition of the viewer's stance. That is why the concept of device is of interest to Intermediality. (Mendes, 2011:74-75)

Mendes mentions that in the early years of cinema many authors highlighted the inter-arts confluence in the new *medium*: as mentioned above, Canudo (1911) declared that cinema was painting and sculpture developing in time, and visual arts in motion;

Münsterberg (1916) referred to it as “photoplay” and Lindsay (1915) proposed a typology of these “photoplays”, which were “sculpture in motion”, “painting in motion” or “architecture in motion.” (Mendes, 2011:76-77)

Walter Moser in "As relações entre as artes: por uma arqueologia da intermidialidade" points out that painting, as a visual art, can be genealogically considered an ancestor of cinema, therefore it is not surprising that the reference to painting in films, as well as its inclusion, accompanies the entire history of cinema. Both media use the expression of visual language to compose their materiality, providing cinema with the practice of interactions with its predecessor. In fact, on its basic technical device, film is rigorously made of many fixed frames (pictures), whose sequence of twenty-four per second creates the illusion of movement (moving pictures). Cinema loves to interact and dialogue with its ancestor, painting, either in an intermedia mirror relationship, in the staging of a *paragon* not exempt from rivalry, or in a meta-critical reflection on its visual media. If therefore, painting is the ancestor of cinema, cinema's interest in painting can be interpreted as a return to painting, as an art/media that dwells on its past to interrogate and explore it in numerous ways. (Moser, 2006:54-55)

The constant transfers that occur in the arts are frequent, we could say inherent, in all disciplines. While it is true that this interdependence of the arts is necessary when structuring a correct historical-artistic discourse in cinema, painting is the material that has contributed most to the visual and aesthetic section in the History of Cinema. Cinema imitates painting as its natural precedent.

In the book *El Ojo Interminable: Cine y Pintura*, Jacques Aumont emphasizes that what prevails in this relationship is not that systematic copy of the works and concepts, but something deeper and transcendental in them. Painting was a fundamental basis in the development of cinema, and throughout history, important exchanges have been established between both disciplines. (Aumont, 1996:11-12) This author aims to demonstrate that the link between film and painting does not flow only in one direction. (Aumont, 1996:29-30)

Ortiz declares that there are concepts shared between both arts, such as lighting, colour, composition, scenography, etc. and these elements establish certain information from which ideas can be developed and transferred from one discipline to the other. (Ortiz, 1995:42-43)

All these arguments, considerations, proposals, and theories can be applied to the intermedial relationship between Edward Hopper´s paintings and cinema and vice versa, as it will be demonstrated in the following chapters, namely in chapters III and IV.

As the documentary *Edward Hopper*, *El Pintor del Silencio* points out, authors of the stature of Cecil B. DeMille [3] refer to renowned painters – Caravaggio, Rembrandt, and Goya – as the first cinematographic illuminators. Since painting was its predecessor, experiments with light in cinema began by imitating pictorial lighting (diagonals of light, Chinese shadows). Thus, the specific use of light by painters such as Hopper has directly influenced cinematographic lighting.

The Intermediality category in this relationship is intermedia medial transposition, following Rajewsky´s aforementioned proposition, since Edward Hopper transposes to his paintings some of cinema´s atmospheres, characteristics, themes, and techniques, and film directors influenced by the painter transpose to their films some of Hopper´s painterly style, atmospheres, and themes.

B. CINEMA

1. THE ATMOSPHERE IN CINEMA

The atmosphere is a concept often used in cinema to define a specific impression expressed during a film shot or sequence. It is a filmic figure, a particular form of expression, originated not only from the actors´ performance but also from certain cinema-specific principles. It often infects and involves the viewer, who will immerse himself in it during a film projection. It is something intangible and abstract; however, it can have a fundamental presence in the representative space of an image.

All films have an atmosphere because a film always expresses something that goes beyond mere representation, and that is perceived by the viewer, in the psychological and affective domain. (Gil, 2005:17) The perception of the atmosphere is both subjective and objective. It varies from individual to individual, but it contains objective elements. The

3. R. Birchard. *Cecil B. DeMille´s Hollywood*. 2004.

atmosphere is emotionally felt through individual experience. (Gil, 2005:21) The viewer perceives the atmosphere of a film, or a scene according to personal criteria. The atmosphere in cinema consists of two main categories: the spectator atmosphere, which develops between the viewer and the film, and the filmic atmosphere, which deals with the visual and sound elements of the film and the relationship between them. (Gil, 2005:23)

Inês Gil considers that atmosphere is everywhere, impalpable, hardly definable. However, art can express its presence or absence with means that are proper to it. Cinema, in particular, is interested in the notion of atmosphere because it has at its disposal a multitude of instruments for its representation and transmission to the viewer. (Gil, 2005:1) The filmic atmosphere is indissociable from its context. (Gil, 2005:9)

The atmosphere is not a simple "environment" that serves as a device for the filmic image. Neither is it a relationship established between objects or characters. As a full-length cinematic element, it has properties, and it is absolute. (Gil, 2005:38) It also contains its nature that develops according to dramatic events. (Gil, 2005:40)

As a filmic element, originating in one or several factors (or the relationship among these factors, such as lighting and the type of shot, for example), the filmic atmosphere expresses affections and arouses sensations that often pertain to the domain of the indescribable. (Gil, 2005:49)

During the projection of a film, the viewer experiences complex psychic processes that come into play, such as identification, distancing, the impression of reality or the "dream impression", constitutive elements of the spectatorial atmosphere. (Gil, 2005:67) To perceive the atmosphere of a film is to provoke an external excitement of our senses (sight and ear) that allows us to perceive representations of objects, situations projected on the screen, music, dialogues, and other sounds. (Gil, 2005:68)

The overall atmosphere of a movie is the atmosphere (or "the impression") that the viewer retains at the end. It is a general feeling that resides in your memory. The film atmosphere is always connected to the spectator atmosphere. (Gil, 2005:99)

To better define filmic atmosphere, Gil divides it into four sub-atmospheres fundamental to its elaboration and expression: visual atmosphere (linked to the image, it involves chromatic aesthetics, the types of scenarios, and the interplay of the actors),

sound atmosphere (related to the work of the soundtrack, from noises to silence, through voices and music), dramatic atmosphere, and plastic atmosphere. (Gil, 2005:100) In the analysis of the dramatic atmosphere, what is privileged is the performance of the actors, which is inseparable from the creation of the atmosphere in a film. The plastic atmosphere is expressed by the type of shot that is used, the role of framing, the out-of-field, and the chromatic treatment of the film image. (Gil, 2005:101)

Colour and the distribution of lighting (uniform or fragmented), whether it is daytime or nocturnal, are decisive variables for the formation of the filmic atmosphere, such as its properties (density, texture, chromatism, orientation, dynamism, etc.). (Gil, 2005:100) When it comes to a "warm atmosphere", we often associate it with a yellow or orange light. Bluish or greenish lighting evokes a cooler atmosphere that can be negative.[4] (Gil, 2005:140) Inês Gil states that "colour never makes the eye indifferent because it touches affections. It is known that red makes the sensations more vivid, and that blue cools the ´soul`. There are the so-called ´hot` and ´cold` colours." (Gil, 2005:7)

In is *Theory of Colours*, Goethe remarks:

> Just as yellow always implies light, it can be said that blue always involves darkness. That colour makes a singular, indescribable impression on the eye. It is, as colour, an energy, but it belongs to the negative side, and in its supreme purity it is, so to speak, a stimulating negation. Its effect is a mixture of excitement and serenity.[5]

The atmosphere is a specific impression that is expressed during a shot or a film sequence. The author also points out that the atmosphere is a film figure, which she defines as a particular form of expression that originates in cinema-specific principles, such as the temporality of the film image. Gil also establishes the difference between atmosphere and climate. According to her, the climate is more general, and we can talk about a climate of terror, for example. She states that atmosphere resembles a system of forces, sensitive or affective, resulting from an energetic field, which circulates in a context determined by a body or a precise situation. Being an energy system, it has diverse densities and an accentuated dynamism. (Gil, 2005:141-142)

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4. As is the case in *The American Friend* (1977, Wim Wenders), *Paris, Texas* (1984, Wim Wenders) and *Don´t Come Knocking* (2005, Wim Wenders), that will be discussed ahead in Chapter IV.
5. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. *Theory of Colours*.1810.

Nevertheless, what characterizes the atmosphere of a film is the movement of the images (and their content) and the time that is linked to that movement. (Gil:3) The movement of the cinematographic image is a good essential element in the expression of the filmic atmosphere. The movement allows images to maintain a rich and complex relationship with sound and create a particular atmosphere, most often abstract. To declare that movement is the nature of the filmic image necessarily implies thinking about its temporality. The meaning expressed by a shot, a sequence, or even the completeness of a film can create a specific atmosphere. However, there is an atmosphere specific to time, regardless of the diegetic time. Knowing that cinematographic techniques allow for easy temporal manipulation (through film editing, duration, accelerated or slow motion, flash-back, for example), it is easy to identify the expression of temporal atmosphere, which deals with time and its derivatives. The spatial atmosphere, which depends on everything that has to do with framing, camera movements, and consequent concepts (e.g., off-field) is also to be considered.

Other authors, such as Jacques Aumont and Hans Ulricht Gumbrecht, utilize the word *Stimmung* to analyse the atmosphere in cinema. *Stimmung*, a German word difficult to translate, refers to something that is expressed in English by “mood” (which refers to a state of mind that cannot be circumscribed with great precision) and “climate” (that relates to something objective that is around people and exerts a physical influence on them). (Gumbretch, 2014:12) In Jacques Aumont's description of that same word, he says that it refers to "a kind of invisible, auratic, ethereal irradiation", which when perceived in the foreground of a character "amplifies its resonance and vibrates with a unique, intense quality”. (Aumont, 1998:98)

The influence of the atmosphere created in cinema, according to Inês Gil, is partially constituted by the space in which the film is projected, which, depending on the situation, removes the viewer from his usual reality, in addition to the other components that allow the making of the film, such as "time, space, image, rhythm, representation of actors, framing, lighting, etc.". (Gil, 2016:2) Thus, the specific atmosphere of each film, even if not exclusively created by the film editing process, most often counts on its ability to articulate time and space.

However, according to this author, what characterizes the atmosphere of a film is the movement of the images (and their content) and the time that is linked to that movement. The movement of the cinematographic image is an essential element in the

expression of the filmic atmosphere. The movement allows images to maintain a rich and complex relationship with sound and create a particular atmosphere, most often abstract.

To conclude, what is relevant is the fact that cinema has its technical means of expression of space and time, which allow for a specific atmosphere production. The movement of the image remains the first factor in creating a filmic atmosphere. It is important is to recognize the atmosphere as a whole-body film element and, by making it intelligible, give it an analytical space in film theory.

2. LIGHT AND SHADOW

2.1. THE IMPORTANCE OF LIGHT(ING) IN THE SEVENTH ART

The history of light is part of the history of cinema because light is the essence of cinema. Without light, the Lumière brothers would not have created the cinematographer. Photography and cinema have sunlight lighting as their basic premise. For this reason, among others, American film studios moved from New York to Los Angeles in the 1920s, where light is lighter, blunter, and more golden, which allows for a frontal and uniform illumination of the characters.

Lighting serves to illuminate, create perspective, and improve the image. Lighting has obtained, with the improvement of technical means, enormous importance in the history of cinema, going from natural light to artificial light also, and participating in the film narrative itself. Subsequently, the technical development of lighting equipment allowed for greater control over light and its physical characteristics; therefore, the conceptual aspect of lighting as a narrative element increased, thus resulting in evolutions not only at the technical level but also in aesthetics. When we talk about the history of cinema, one must also talk about the history of lighting. Without it, there is neither projection nor an illuminated screen in the dark room. Lighting is the very essence of cinema.

While the technologies to improve lighting developed in Hollywood, filmmakers in Europe were inspired by the aesthetics of artistic movements, adapting to adversities (two World Wars, lack of resources, climate, politics) and seeking a more subliminal and philosophical substance for the lighting of their films, as occurred with German Expressionism, Italian Realism, and the Nouvelle Vague.

Lighting is a primordial aspect in the constitution of psychological effects in cinema, it can unify a scene or highlight meanings, focusing attention on what is important and leaving in the shade what is an accessory. Lighting is utilised to enhance images and scenes, as well as to support the film´s atmosphere, as stated by film director Federico Fellini:

> In cinema, light is ideology, feeling, colour, tone, depth, atmosphere, history. It works miracles, it adds, erases, reduces, enriches, underlines, alludes, makes the fantastic believable, the dream acceptable and, on the other hand, it can suggest transparencies, vibrations, provoke a mirage in the grayest everyday reality. With a reflector and two pieces of cellophane, an opaque, inexpressive face becomes intelligent, mysterious, fascinating. The most elementary and coarse scenography can, with light, reveal unexpected perspectives and make history live in a hesitant, unsettling climate; moving a reflector and lighting another one in backlight, makes the feeling of anguish disappear, and everything becomes serene and cozy. With lighting the film is written, the style is expressed.[6]

2.2. *CHIAROSCURO*

Chiaroscuro is a painting technique developed in the Renaissance period characterised by a stark contrast between lights and shadows. As opposed to harmony, there is variation. And the main element of variation is contrast: it is responsible for avoiding excessive harmony in the composition; it combines, in the same area, elements with opposite characteristics; it is also capable of highlighting certain areas of the image, making them dominant in composition.

This technique of highlighting contrast through the variation between the light and dark areas of the canvas was first introduced when some Renaissance artists began to use light and shadow in their paintings to create a greater naturalism and to propose a perspective on the environment portrayed. It was Leonardo da Vinci who rationalized this creative use of light and shadow, both in theory and in practice, but perhaps it was Caravaggio who best disseminated the *chiaroscuro* technique, proposing its

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6. Federico Fellini. *Fazer um Filme*. 1980. p. 182.

reinterpretation in the Baroque period**.** One of the most famous lighting effects of the Seventh Art was created about four hundred years ago by the Dutch painter Rembrandt Van Rijn. Among the most striking features of this artist´s work is the strong marking of the expression lines of the faces, the dramatic *chiaroscuro* inherited from Caravaggio, and the triangular light stamped under the eyes of the characters in his portraits. The latter is today one of the most used tricks in cinema, often utilised to lead the viewer to believe that he is watching an emotional moment for the character.

Cinema made lavish use of everything that came before it. When it acquired sound in 1930, it requested the service of writers; with the success of colour, it regimented painters; it resorted to musicians and architects. Each one contributed with his vision, with his form of expression. Therefore, it is not strange that cinema would also be influenced by pictorial techniques explored centuries before the seventh art was even conceivable.

In painting, the game of lights and shadows allows human eyes to identify the perspective of objects. As in painting, photography and cinema had to develop lighting styles capable of giving a depth notion and conveying subliminal messages or sensations for a specific purpose. However, lighting does not only provide light and shadow; it adds perspective and improves image quality, and it also creates dramaticism.

But without colours, and at a time when cinema was still silent, one of the schools that represented the visual forms based on the effects of electric light was German Expressionism. To a large degree, this expressionism stages motifs of romantic literature with adapted and innovative lighting effects and an elaborate lighting technique, while the narrative is very reminiscent of theatrical staging, exaggeration, and dramaticism. The use of the cone of light and the mobile spotlight, cutting space and contrasting the protagonist with lighting, in complete darkness, creating strong areas of shadows - all this was also the result of an economic restrain due to the lack of resources for complex scenarios. German Expressionism had as characteristics the exaggerated interpretation, the mood of madness and nightmare, heavy makeup, monstrous creatures and tormented souls, scenarios with twisted perspectives, light-dark lighting, and painted shadows. This game of light and shadow, besides structuring the scene and delimiting the volumes of the image, was utilised to create atmospheres of great symbolic power, including by deforming the appearance of objects and scenery. This dense atmosphere structures the

film and its futuristic theme allows a stylization of the lighting produced by the photographic resources of the time that exceeded the simple positioning of reflectors. German filmmakers pursued the effect of *chiaroscuro* so tenaciously in the composition of the image that they often painted the scenarios with beams of light and shadow and also utilised this feature in the makeup of the characters, which almost deformed their faces.

And after German Expressionism came Ingmar Bergman, showing us that photography is a language, and that lighting can be the exclusive factor in the interpretation and relationship we create with the film characters: “Cinema is not a craft. It is an art. Cinema is not a team effort. The director is alone in front of a blank page. For Bergman to be alone is to ask questions; to shoot is to find the answers.”[7]

All film schools have a great representation of the intimate relationship of lighting with the narrative concept of cinema. Contemporary filmmakers such as Wes Anderson, Darren Aronofsky, Terrence Malick, and Lars Von Trier, among others, are representative of this paramount relationship.

2.3. SHADOW AND *FILM NOIR*

Without light, there is no image. Through the game light/shadow, light plays in cinema, photography, and architecture, but before that, in the visual arts, a role of a generator of atmospheres and modulator of emotions.

The shadow dimensions of an object depend on two factors: the size of the light source and the distance between it and the object. Light and shadow punctuate the whole of daily life, determining the way human being feels and sees the world. Light is fundamental in the perception of images, colours, volumes, textures, contours, etc. As for shadow, the alternation between light and darkness, day, and night, generates feelings such as fear, dread, uncertainty, joy, hope, birth, and death in the social imagination.

The primordial meaning of light is intrinsically associated with sunlight for the generation and maintenance of life. Without light, life is not possible. Shadow erases

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7. Jean-Luc Godard. "Bergmanorama." in *Cahiers du cinéma*. July 1958.

objects, volumes, contours, colours. Man ceases to have control over nature, which escapes him; therefore, there is anguish, fear of the unknown, of mysterious dangers, of hidden beings that lurk in the dark. “Light shares its character with darkness. Light and shadow are inseparable. Light shares with shadow the merits of our knowledge of shapes and spaces." (Faria, 2003:8)

One cannot exclude or fail to highlight the role of shadow in the perception of things. It assigns shape and life to the object being lit. On one hand, it is to shadow that light owes all its essentiality and, on the other hand, the quality of the light determines the quality of the shadow. Inês Gil considers that the universe of shadow can also be a universe of seduction, a universe that comforts. And light can be what terrifies, laying everything naked, not allowing for any kind of refuge. (Gil, 2005:95) On the other hand, "Shadow as a counterpart to light is the gradation between illuminated surfaces and shadow surfaces that provides information about the three-dimensionality of a body." (Faria, 2003:9)

The term film noir was first given to Hollywood films - namely, *The Maltese Falcon* (John Huston, 1941), *Laura* (Otto Preminger, 1944), *Double Indemnity* (Billy Wilder, 1944), *Murder My Sweet* (Edward Dmytryk, 1944), amongst others - by French critics Nino Frank[8] and Jean-Pierre Chartier[9], and it was unknown at the time of their production. Film noir already enunciates in its name its aesthetic proposal. In addition to the dark image, we find in its themes a somber tone and a pessimistic perspective in its approach.

Its lighting was very characteristic in three points: there was a light source to establish the darkness (shadows), another for the lighting (contrast with the darkness), and another to create a gradient of gray, regulated to create the atmosphere of the scene. Often, the characters were bathed in long linear shadows, projected from prison bars, stairs, or shutters on the windows.

Historically shot in black and white, *film noir* has its roots in the cinematography

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8. Frank Nino. “Un nouveau genre policier: l’aventure criminelle”. 1946. pp. 8-9, 14.

9. Jean-Pierre Chartier. “Les Américains aussi font des films noirs”. 1946. pp. 67-70.

characteristic of German Expressionism. The *noir* reflects the climate that was established in American society at the time, it portrays its time in a world of light and shadow dominated by disillusionment and uncertainty. The scenes are mostly nocturnal, often in wet streets, with the use and abuse of shadow in the characterization of psychological aspects and to accentuate some aspects of the narrative.[10] The *film noir* theme will be further developed in chapter IV.

In sum, this chapter aims to highlight light as a source of existence and sensations that make man live. Lighting prints a more expressive dramatic action in the film when photographic aesthetics are suited to cinematic narrative. It is thus an element that awakes feelings and emotions in moviegoers. Natural and artificial light is utilised by filmmakers to produce dramatic effects and the mood of a film. Different lighting approaches help achieve predetermined goals. Cheerful, colourful lighting often brings with it happiness in films, while dark colours prefigure tenebrous happenings.

There are films without actors, without music, without sound, without scenery. But there are no films without light. Light in cinema is a language of its own.

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10. Luís Urbano. *Arquitectura e cinema: da Câmara Escura a Celebration 34747*. 1998.

All quotes from works in other languages have been translated by me.

CHAPTER II

EDWARD HOPPER

1. A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY
2. INFLUENCES
3. PAINTINGS
4. CITY, ALIENATION, AND LONELINESS
5. SILENCE AND STILLNESS
6. LIGHT AND SHADOW
7. WINDOWS

Like a long-legged fly upon the stream
His mind moves upon silence.
W. B. Yeats, "Long-legged fly" in *Last Poems* (1940)

Reginald Marsh

Hopper at his Easel

Undated

EDWARD HOPPER

1. A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

If we could say it with words, there would be no reason to paint.

Edward Hopper

Amongst the many works devoted to Edward Hopper, Gail Levin's publications are to be distinguished, as this art historian is the artist's main biographer. In *Edward Hopper: An Intimate biography* (1998), a 777-page book, she recounts the life and work of Hopper in detail, based on abundant archives, extracts from articles and letters he wrote, as well as interviews he granted. In addition, there are the journals of his wife Josephine (Jo) Nivison, the main source of information on the life and conception of Hopper's works. These archives are accessible indirectly via Levin's biography.

Edward Hopper was born in 1882 in Nyack, a small village in New York State, into a Baptist grocery family, from whom he inherited its austerity. He attended a school for illustrators and then the New York School of Art in the period from 1900 to 1906. There he had several teachers, amongst them the artist Robert Henri, who left an everlasting imprint on Hopper´s training and became a vital role model to him on personal terms. Henri also made his students aware that ordinary everyday life constituted an almost endless reservoir of unexplored subject matter. He advised his students to imbue a modern spirit in their work: "It isn't the subject that counts but what you feel about it," and "Forget about art and paint pictures of what interests you in life."[11] Some of his students became members of “The Eight”, also known as the Ashcan School of American Art. Under his teacher´s influence, Hopper spent a year in Paris.

According to Clara Ferreira Alves, the east coast and its Protestant and Puritan tradition are the matrices of Hopper’s existential posture, who led a demure life away from the crowd. His landscapes are the ones of his childhood in small-town America: Victorian-style houses, boats and lighthouses, and roads without automobiles. An America before the post-war economic expansion, rock and roll, highways, fast food, and

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11. https://www.worldhistory.biz/modern-history/80770-ashcan-school.html

the brutal acceleration imposed by modernity. When he began his studies at the New York School of Art in 1900, American painting copied the previous European tradition. It would have been considered a minor reverie without cultural resonance to take as the object of art a petrol pump or a detached house on the hill, a balcony of a hotel foyer, an office, or a lighted window in a building seen from the L-train. (Alves, 2017:20-21)

On his return from Paris in 1910, Hopper had to earn a living while struggling for recognition. He thus put his talent as a draftsman at the service of advertising agencies for which he staged the objects and scenery of American ordinary life. He worked for several magazines, celebrating the world of the office (*The Magazine of Business*), leisure (*Hotel Management*), the countryside (*Farmer´s Wife* or *Country Gentleman*), and boat repair (*Dry Dock Dial*). It is appropriate to say that, although the artist loathed these activities, they allowed him to acquire a privileged view of ordinary life, which he used in his paintings.

In 1913, the first edition of the famous Armory Show in New York, a show proposed by painters (the above-mentioned group known as "The Eight") rebelling against a certain American academism, discovered the European avant-gardes. There Hopper exhibited his painting titled *Sailing* (1911) and influenced by this exhibition he became more attentive to formalism in the construction of his images. This may have been the origin of the geometric care with which, in his works, he dealt with architecture and light effects.

Edward Hopper
Sailing (1911)
Carnegie Museum of Art

Although the artist privileged oil painting, the technique of etching to which he turned from 1915 on encouraged him in this way, as it imposed a greater rigour on him

in his artistic projects. *American Landscape* (1920) builds the transition between a society that lives at the speed of the railroad and one that moves with the slowness of oxen, in the layering of the three horizontal bands, characteristic of Hopper´s taste for panoramic views.

Edward Hopper

American Landscape (1920)

Butler Institute of American Art

At the age of thirty-seven, in 1920, Hopper held his first one-person exhibition at the Whitney Studio Club, where sixteen of his paintings were shown. It was a symbolic milestone in the artist´s career, even though this exhibition sold no paintings. The Frank K. M. Rehn Gallery in New York was the venue of his second one-person exhibition; every painting was sold this time. In 1930, *House by the Railroad* was the first work to be acquired by the recently founded Museum of Modern Art (MoMA, inaugurated in 1929). In 1933, Hopper was the subject of a retrospective exhibition of his work held at the same museum. In 1952, the artist represented the United States at the Venice Biennale.

In 1923 Hopper married the also artist Josephine Verstille Nivison, a fellow student in Robert Henri's class. This alliance is fundamental to understanding the artist and his work. Jo, as he called her, would become an indispensable element of his art. She became her husband´s only female model. She created characters for his paintings and transformed herself into lonely, idle, waiting women. She posed as a woman in a train compartment, in the office at night, at a New York movie, in the sun. These are women who, even in company, always live in isolation, looking hopelessly at the ground, reading a book, or contemplating an empty landscape through the window. She became his studio

assistant, encouraged him to work more in watercolour painting, and kept detailed records of his works, exhibitions, and sales in her journals.

Nevertheless, one cannot assume that they lived in marital bliss. According to Sarah McColl in her article titled "Jo Hopper, Woman in the Sun," "their fights were vicious, as Jo recorded in her diaries. She would scratch him and bite him to the bone. He would slap her, bang her head against a shelf, colour her with bruises. On their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary, she told him they deserved a medal for distinguished combat, and he complied with a coat of arms made from a rolling pin and ladle." (McColl, 2018)

Jo recounts in her diaries that her husband was dominated by three impulses: art, sex, and the desire to drive a car. Art was his main means of expression; he was not very conversational, and with his work he managed to break his isolation. Driving was an obsession for him, and he began to travel farther for inspiration. Sex was an urgency that always baffled Jo, who felt neglected by her husband's erotic habits. She soon realized that sex for Hopper was a solitary pleasure for which she was a mere instrument. Hopper was a loner who painted solitude. But he also frequently faced periods of depression and suffered for extended periods of invincible inertia; he would sit for days in a row in front of his easel plunged into hopeless misery, unable to raise a hand to break the spell.

"Sometimes talking with Eddie is just like dropping a stone in a well except that it doesn't thump when it hits bottom," his wife once said. (Tackara, 2018) Many of his works depict troubled romantic relationships. Elizabeth Thompson Colleary, mentioned by Sarah Cascone in her article titled "How Jo Nivison Hopper, long known as wife and model of Edward Hopper, is being rediscovered as an artistic force in her own right," states that "Jo and Ed had opposite personalities and temperaments, but they shared many common interests such as French literature and culture, and a love for the theatre and film. They were also avid readers and spent many hours together attending art exhibitions and socializing with fellow artists, patrons, and dealers. So yes, they scrapped, but in Jo's writings there is abundant evidence of their love and affection, and devotion to one another." (Colleary, 2022)

Edward Hopper

Jo Painting (1936)

Josephine Nivison Hopper, as painted by Edward Hopper,
and with the artist

This painting of Jo is very interesting, as it only depicts her face and part of her upper body and, furthermore, in profile. Most of Hopper´s paintings include scenery and a setup and here there is none of that. It is as if the artist wanted to stress Jo´s relevance, by excluding additional elements from the painting, and at the same time did not wish to show his wife´s full body and face when depicting her real self, while he evidenced no problem in doing so when she posed as a model for his female subjects.

Starting in the summer of 1923, the artist made numerous visits to Gloucester, Massachusetts, a small seaside town where he fell in love with the architecture, especially the neo-Victorian residences, with their picturesque forms and porches, the original and haunting decor of American life. The landscape, especially Maine near Cape Cod, also caught his eye. With its seaside luminosity, wooden houses, tall grass, rocks, and space open to every wind from the coast, it inspired many of his works. He then adopted a straightforward chromatic scale, combining flat colours and the white light of the ocean coast. Hopper drew his first grammar of space and emptiness from the original landscape of America and the transparency of the air. The couple led a life away from urban confusion and spent almost every summer from 1930 through the 1950s in Cape Cod, Massachusetts, particularly in the town of Truro, where they built their own house.

Hopper left a few self-portraits. In the canvas from 1904 below, the young man is not yet 25 years old: three-quarter bust, long face, powerful jaws, and full lips. It is an unadorned portrait on a black background. In the second painting (1925–1930), produced in the mature phase of his career, Hopper wears a suit and tie as the antithesis of the

stereotypical bohemian artist. He is in a moment of transition, as suggested by his hat. Hopper captured himself in a contemplative moment.

Edward Hopper
Self-Portrait (1904)
Whitney Museum of American Art

Edward Hopper
Self-Portrait (1925–1930)
Whitney Museum of American Art

Hopper was not a very productive artist, as he sometimes lacked inspiration and only produced about two paintings a year. Nevertheless, his work is housed in several prominent institutional collections, including the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art, both in New York; the National Gallery of Art, in Washington, DC; the Museum of Fine Arts, in Boston; and the Art Institute of Chicago.

Although some may claim that his work expresses an anti-urban feeling, Hopper was a city dweller, he loved New York City, and that was the place he elected to live and work in. The artist died in 1967 in the same Washington Square studio in Greenwich Village, New York City, where he had settled 50 years earlier.

Gail Levin remarks that "Having staked everything on the concept of individual autonomy... he rejected offers of patronage."[12] Hopper was thus able to define his own parameters and vision as an artist. His oeuvre displays the uniqueness of his vision, making his paintings as significant today as when he created them. His art speaks not to one country or to one time, but to all who struggle with the difficulties of civilization as they occur in daily life.

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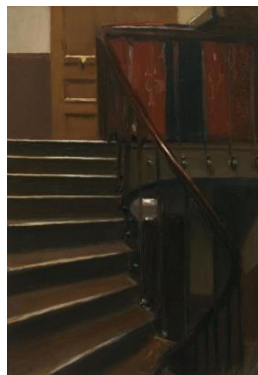
12. Gail Levin. *Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography*. 1998.

2. INFLUENCES

The only real influence I've ever had was myself.

Edward Hopper

Edward Hopper´s initial stay in Paris lasted from October 1906 to August 1907, in an apartment on rue de Lille. It was in France that he perfected his training, although he conducted his studies in the city`s museums and streets rather than in an academic institution. Far from America and the puritanical austerity of his family, Hopper discovered a refined and sensual world in the Paris of the Belle Époque. He was mesmerized, and delighted, everything enchanted him. He painted his apartment, its inner courtyard, and its waxed wooden staircases.

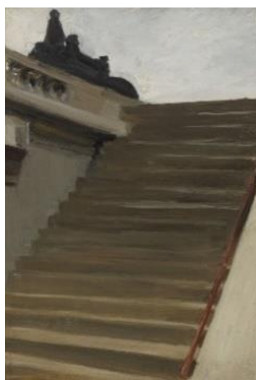


Edward Hopper

Stairway at 48 rue de Lille, Paris (1906)

Whitney Museum of Modern Art

It was only a few steps from the Seine. From his long walks on the quays of the river, he brought back views, like that of a majestic stone staircase leading down to the quay. In these first works, one gets a glimpse of his passion for architecture which will occupy his future canvases with innumerable houses, buildings, lighthouses, and housing blocks. He soon began exploring light and shadow on architectural forms as compositional devices. This would later become one of his hallmarks.



Edward Hopper
Steps in Paris (1906)
Whitney Museum of Modern Art

He filled his eyes with universal masterpieces at the Louvre. Watteau´s *Gilles* (Pierrot) showed Hopper a vision of life where everything is a spectacle, as was to be found in several of his paintings, including his last one, *Two Comedians* (1965). From Rembrandt he learned the lesson of light and he did not stop sculpting it throughout his life. He also discovered Vermeer, whom he considered a painter of spiritual illumination and an incomparable master of the intimate interior. Nevertheless, while fascinated by the Flemish masters, Hopper was mostly influenced by the palette of Impressionists, namely Manet, Monet, Cézanne, Degas, and Van Gogh. Their use of light is directly reflected in his oeuvre, as his palette lit up and he began to paint with light and quick strokes. The artist preferred the colours and the harmony of France to the chaos of New York. Hopper began to appreciate heavy dark forms, and contrast colours such as reds and greens. He rarely painted grey. Towards the end of his life, he could say "I think I'm still an Impressionist." (Hopper, late 1950s)[13]

While in Paris, the artist discovered its unique light, different from anything he had ever known. He also appreciated the poetry of Charles Baudelaire, whose work he continued to read and recite throughout his life. Swiss philosopher Alain de Botton notes that “there was a shared interest in solitude, in city life, in modernity, in the solace of the night, in the places of travel.” (de Botton, 2002:55) He returned to Paris twice, in 1909 and 1910, for brief stays.

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13. In an interview in the late 1950s, mentioned in Katherine Kuh’s *My Love Affair With Modern Art*. 2006.

Another major influence in Hopper´s work was cinema. Although this subject will be addressed with more length in chapter III, it must also be mentioned in this chapter. While working on some of his paintings, Edward Hopper gave shape to the cinematographic influences he received from this recent invention. It is widely known that the artist used to seek refuge in the cinema when inspiration was lacking. At the same time, it was as if he prefigured the way so many moviemakers looked at his paintings later, before giving a film shape to what they had visually received.

These roundtrips consist of reciprocal influences between different means of expression and are authentic time travels. Harold Bloom defended that the wish to create great art is the wish to be somewhere else, in a unique time and place, in an originality that must be combined with inheritance and the anxiety of influence.[14] This is valid both for Edward Hopper, a painter of the cinema age, and all the moviemakers that have sought and found in his paintings an opportunity to be affected by the spell of the inspiration, shapes, forms, and light of his canvases.

3. PAINTINGS

I'm after me.

Edward Hopper

> When I was a child what I saw of the world beyond my immediate neighborhood I saw from the backseat of my parents´ car. It was a world glimpsed in passing. It was still. It had its own life and did not know or care that I happened by at a particular time. Like the world of Hopper´s paintings, it did not return my gaze. (Strand, 2001:3)

These words are Mark Strand´s, a poet and artist, also an art critic, who devoted some of his writings to Edward Hopper. Strand began writing about Hopper in 1971, in an article titled "Crossing the Tracks to Hopper´s World."[15] He then wrote "Hopper: The Loneliness Factor"[16] and a book, *Hopper* (1994), as the result of a lecture series. This author writes in "Hopper: The Loneliness Factor:"

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14. Harold Bloom. *The Anxiety of Influence – A Theory of Poetry*. 1967.
15. Cited in *Poets on Painters*. 1988.
16. Cited in *Writer's on Artists*. 1988.

> It is often remarked that many of Edward Hopper's paintings engender feelings of loneliness. It is also assumed that such feelings are in response to narrative elements in the paintings, but in fact they are in response to certain repeated structural motifs. We often feel left behind, even abandoned, while something else in the painting, usually a road or tracks, continues. We feel caught in a wake that offers no possibility of catching up to whatever has departed. Likewise, if we have the impulse to linger, allowing ourselves to be taken into the painting's reduced ambiance, we are resisted by a force within the painting that closes us out. It is this being left behind or left out that gives rise to our experience of alienation. (Strand, 1985)

The following lines from Strand's *Story of our Lives* resonate with his reflection on Hopper's painting: "We are reading the story of our lives which takes place in a room. The room looks out on a street. There is no one there, no sound of anything." (Strand, 1973) The first stanza of his poem "Keeping Things Whole" reads as follows: "In a field / I am the absence / of field. / This is / always the case. / Wherever I am / I am what is missing." (Strand, 1980) This stanza sets the tone and presents the themes which continue to dominate his later work, also reflecting the author´s pondering on the transience and estrangement of Hopper´s work.

In the essay "On Edward Hopper", originally written by Strand for *The New York Review of Books* as a review of the exhibition of Edward Hopper's drawings at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 2013, the critic notes:

> (….) content being, of course, what the artist brings to his subject, that quality that makes it unmistakably his, so when we look at the painting of a building or an office or a gas station, we say it's a Hopper. We don't say it's a gas station. By the time the gas station appears on canvas in its final form it has ceased being just a gas station. It has become Hopperized. It possesses something it never had before Hopper saw it as a possible subject for his painting. (Strand, 2013)

Hopper was a lonely, shy, introverted man who found escape from his inner prison through painting. His works exude an atmosphere of solitude and possess an elusive character. However, he rarely represented the typical melancholic pose, that is, someone with his hand resting on his cheek. Melancholy floats in most of his most famous paintings, such as in the women he painted in hotel rooms (*Hotel Room*), in people having their drink at a bar (*Nighthawks*), or the young woman who drinks her coffee alone in an automatic restaurant (*Automat*). His figures stare blankly or dreamily into space. "Again

and again, words like ´loneliness` or ´alienation` are used to describe the emotional character of his paintings." (Strand, 2013)

The means of transportation interested him as much as the American movement and life. He turned ordinary daily life scenes into paintings of beauty. Hopper builds a rich, ambiguous, timeless, and universal narrative. Through doors, windows, shop windows, and porches, Hopper frames his somber and perfectly lit characters in his scenes. Characters who see what the beholders of the painting can only imagine. Characters in absorption, often women, are observed by a voyeur, and the beholder who contemplates the painting. His paintings, a mixture of the ordinary and the uncanny, are instantly recognizable.

Hopper´s locations are often empty of human activity, and they imply the transitory nature of contemporary life. In *Hopper* (1994), Strands mentions "the importance for him of roads and tracks, of passageways and temporary stopping places, or to put it generally, of travel." (Strand, 2001:3) At deserted gas stations, railroad tracks, and bridges, the idea of travel is fraught with loneliness and mystery. His people are rarely represented in the comfort of their own homes; instead, they are depicted in temporary shelters such as movie theatres, hotel rooms, or restaurants. The hotel, the road, and the automobile are prominent themes in Hopper's oeuvre.

In Alain de Botton´s opinion, in the ignored, often despised landscapes, Hopper found poetry: the poetry of motels, the poetry of small restaurants by the roadside. His paintings, as well as the resonance of their titles, reveal a reiterated interest in five different kinds of temporary stopping places (de Botton, 2002:56-57):

1. Hotels

Hotel Room (1931)

Hotel Lobby (1943)

Rooms for Tourists (1945)

Hotel by a Railroad (1952)

Hotel Window (1956)

Western Motel (1957)

2. Roads and gas stations

Maine Road (1914)

Gas (1940)

Route 6, Eastham (1941)

Solitude (1944)

Four Lane Road (1956)

3. Automats and Cafeterias

Automat (1927)

Sunlight in a Cafeteria (1958)

4. Railroad track views

House by the Railroad (1925)

***Railroad Sunset* (1929)**

New York, New Haven and Hartford (1931)

On the Way to Boston (1936)

Approaching a City (1946)

Road and Trees (1962)

5. Scenes on trains and moving vehicles

***Night on the El Train* (1918)**

Evening on an elevated railway (1920)

***The Locomotive* (1923)**

Locomotive (1925)

Compartment C, Car 293 (1938)

Dawn in Pennsylvania (1942)

Chair Car (1965)

The titles in bold are my addition, as they were not included in de Botton´s list.

Hopper's America is not disturbed by the sound of an always-on television, nor by the spectacle of the human variety. It is a static America, which goes from the beginning to the middle of the 20th century, with main streets, deserted gas stations, weekends in Cape Cod, roadside motels, houses on the edge of the train line, quiet mornings, and placid nights. It is a white, comfortable America, inhabited by characters who breathe the dry air of dismay. (Alves, 2018:17–19)

Following Black Friday in 1929, and the Great Depression, many American artists turned to themes of social criticism. “The American Way of Life,” either idealized or in its not-so-sensational aspects, reflected in the lives of ordinary people, the poor and the unprotected, as well as the Black minority, became an art theme. From the first significant attempts at the emancipation of American artists from the European tradition –

represented by the aforementioned Ashcan School at the turn of the century – this development led to Precisionism and Regionalism, and finally culminated in the work of Edward Hopper. The Ashcan School, formed by John Sloan, George Bellows, and others, first tried to introduce the theme of the metropolis into the young history of American art.

After learning to master colour and light in Paris, Hopper returned to his country to apply his skills in the American panorama, painting the countryside, but above all the solitude of the great city. His works are of incomparable stature in American art. Anne Gambling, in her book *Anything but Still Lives: The Worlds of Edward Hopper – a Collection of Painterly Prose* (2006), argues that Hopper gave visual form to the anonymity, isolation, boredom, loneliness, and stagnation of 20th century American life. This was something new in art: he reflected the sense of human hopelessness that began during the Great Depression and continued as an overarching *leitmotiv* until his death. But Hopper remained immune from the cultural statements influenced by his paintings. "I don´t think I ever tried to paint the American scene," he said in a 1956 interview. "I´m trying to paint myself." (Gambling, 2006:1)

Gambling adds that Hopper refused to be pigeonholed and that his motivation was informed by a quote from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe that he always carried around: "The beginning and the end of all literary activity is the reproduction of the world that surrounds me by means of the world that is in me, all things being grasped, related, re-created, moulded and reconstructed in a personal form and an original manner." (Cited in Wagstaff, 2004)

Hopper´s works confront viewers with the interior life of ordinary people through his ability to convey such authenticity of vision. "My aim in painting has always been the most exact transcription possible of my most intimate impressions of nature,"[17] declared the artist in 1933. Such was his interpretation of Goethe´s quote.

Hopper´s earlier works, in the period leading up to and including America´s involvement in World War II, focused on women as the main figure. He presented the

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17. Edward Hopper wrote "Notes on Painting" in 1933 for his first retrospective exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art. The statement was preserved in a 1959 interview with John Morse. https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-edward-hopper-11844

worlds they inhabited during that era. (Gambling, 2006:8) Their hats, down to their eyes, flood their faces with shadows and endow them with mystery. They contribute to hiding their gaze, which is never offered directly to the interlocutor or the viewer. The elusive appears linked to femininity. Often shown in profile, these women show and hide their bodies, even if they are naked.

Quoting Carl Ruhrberg, in Edward Hopper's work American realist painting reached a level before World War II that places it alongside the best European productions of the 1920s. (Ruhrberg, 2005:201) It is no exaggeration to say that Hopper's work was the pictorial equivalent of the most important American literature of this period, from John Dos Passos to Theodore Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, and William Faulkner. When Hopper evokes the isolation of the inhabitants of large cities in bars, restaurants, trains, and even in the theatre or cinema, at railway stations, gas stations, in their humble gardens, in the cottages or the suburbs, he does so through a masterful execution, a great mastery of the effects of light and shadow and a great colourist quality, that originate from a deep study of French painting. The themes of isolation, loneliness, and lack of goals in life, sometimes softened through an evocation of the little joys of life, are distilled into memorable pictorial signs. The mastery of his craft allowed Hopper to simplify the compositions and discard the superfluous details. His works convey compassion and empathy for the fate of ordinary people living in a mass society. (Ruhrberg, 2005:201-203)

Strand remarks:

> The invitation to construct a narrative for each painting is also part of the experience of looking at Hopper. And this, inasmuch as it demands an involvement in particular paintings, indicates a resistance to having the viewer move on. These two imperatives – the one that urges us to continue and the other that compels us to stay – create a tension that is constant in Hopper´s work. (Strand, 2001:3)

He also remarks about Hopper´s paintings that “the more theatrical or staged they are, the more they urge us to construct a narrative of what came before.” And of what comes after that moment caught in a glimpse, frozen in time, I would add. “Our time with the painting must include – if we are self-aware – what the painting reveals about the nature of continuousness.” (Strand, 2001:26)

In her article titled “Understanding Edward Hopper´s Lonely Vision of America, beyond ‘Nighthawks´,” Tess Thackara argues that “the ambiguous, narrative richness of Hopper’s paintings, combined with their subtle, anxious energy, has given them a timeless quality, even as they are inexorably associated with mid-century America.” “It is Hopper’s spareness,” writes art historian Deborah Lyons, “along with his progressive tendency to clear out detail and incident, which allows us to project the details of our own lives into his painted world.” (Thackara, 2018) And she adds, “Perhaps it is this mastery of mood and atmosphere—the combination of human figures with the ineffable psychological force achieved through line, color, and light—that allowed Hopper to succeed as a figurative painter even as Abstract Expressionism ascended in New York.” (Thackara, 2018)

The cinematographic treatment of the scenes and the personal use of light are two differentiating features of his geometric painting and the reason why anyone who contemplates Hopper's work can enjoy it and feel identified, regardless of their artistic training and sensitivity.

4. CITY, ALIENATION, AND LONELINESS

Great art is the expression of an inner life of the artist and this inner life will be translated by his personal vision of the world.

Edward Hopper

Hopper is a painter of metaphysical cities. A city is made of life, hustle and bustle, chaotic traffic and traffic lights, crowds, people shouting and running late, wind and rain, waste containers, dirty snow, car horns, etc. None of these city characteristics are present in his paintings. Instead, there is a quietness and cleanliness that unsettle the viewer. Human figures and architecture look lifeless. Hopper´s paintings often convey an atmosphere of eerie and ominous disquiet.

As a painter, Hopper was not always literal. He never painted skyscrapers or the Brooklyn Bridge, for example. It is as if they did not exist to him. Somehow, he created a personal, fantasy metropolis, choosing what to portray and what to leave out of his canvases. What makes Hopper America´s iconic painter are the modern subjects he was one of the first to fix on canvas. Hopper staged ordinary life in fashionable restaurants -

Chop Suey (1929) and *Tables for Ladies* (1930), - and offices - *Conference at Night* (1949), *Office in a Small City* (1953), and *New York Office* (1962) -, thus foreshadowing the future of the middle classes in the 20th century.

Let us discuss some of these modern subjects in his paintings. The fact that the key characters in *Chop Suey* are two women having a meal alone at a restaurant is an indicator of the fundamental changes that were taking place in American society.

Edward Hopper
Chop Suey (1929)
Private Collection

In *Tables for Ladies*, a waitress and a cashier carry out their work as a couple sits at a table in a well-lit restaurant. They hold jobs newly available to women working outside the home. The painting's title refers to a recent social innovation in which dining establishments began advertising "tables for ladies" to welcome their new female customers, who, if seen dining alone or with other women in restaurants and bars previously, were assumed to be prostitutes in search of business. Now they would be treated with respect. Hopper was reluctant to place his paintings in the context of the era, but these two paintings reveal several layers of social changes that occurred at that time.

Edward Hopper
Tables for Ladies (1930)
The Metropolitan Museum

The way Hopper captured the light (artificial, in this instance) in *Conference at Night* is impressive, flowing in through the window. Hopper often walked along Broadway at night, as mentioned earlier. He also used to ride the night train in New York City, thus catching fleeting glimpses of the apartment buildings and businesses lit up with artificial lights from the streets.

Edward Hopper
Conference at Night (1949)
Wichita Art Museum

With his work, the elements of the culture of the road and mobility, characteristics of the American identity, such as the service station, the metro, or railway attained recognition as aesthetic objects. A whole new topography of urban life, with its diners like the famous *Nighthawks* (1942), or *Automat*, (1927), its apartments - *Room in New York* (1932) -, and its cinemas - *New York Movie* (1939) -, invades his canvas. Inspired by Baudelaire, Hopper thus became the painter of modern life, but he did not succumb to its fascination. He watched America from afar as if to keep it at bay: bars are seen from the outside, offices are depicted from the street behind a window, and gas stations are observed from afar. Neither does he praise nor criticize modern life. Hopper´s gaze is based on the desire to depict reality as objectively as possible. However, the views from the outside gradually penetrate the interiors, and the intimacy of the various places is depicted in a voyeuristic way.

Hopper´s depiction of city life has contributed to the production of the discourse of anti-urbanism in American culture. In his article titled "Anti-urbanism" (2009), the geographer Tom Slater explores the intertextual influences behind Hopper´s so-called anti-urban sentiments and puts forward three main arguments to justify his interpretation:

the intellectual filiation of the painter, the conjunctural historical context of realization of his works and, lastly, the very content of the paintings. (Slater, 2009)

The foundations of Hopper´s hostility towards the city would first be found in the artist's intellectual affinities and readings. Hopper admired three authors in particular: the thinkers Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, and the writer Henry James. Of Emerson, Hopper is quoted as having said "I admire Emerson greatly. I read him quite a lot. I read him over and over again." (Levin, 2007:276) These three authors condemned the city in their writings.

Emerson and Thoreau are the two leading figures of transcendentalism, a current of thought that considers nature the very symbol of the spiritual life of the individual and the social group. For these authors, being in harmony with God is synonymous with living close to nature. Thoreau is famous for his solitary experience of living in the woods, recounted in *Walden* (1845). According to Thoreau, man needs to be in contact with nature to recharge his batteries in the face of urban ills (Nash, 2001:90). Slater sees the characters represented by Hopper as "out of place, detached from the city both socially and spatially," as the pictorial expression of transcendental philosophy. (Slater, 2002)

According to his biographer, Gail Levin, Hopper appreciated Henry James's *The American Scene* (1907), in which the writer echoed the painter's amazement, on his return from Europe, in the face of the architectural upheavals of New York City. Henry James describes New York as "terrible" and "horrible" and denounces its ugliness (quoted by Levin, 2007:279). "The appearance of skyscrapers in New York's cityscape was seen by James and then Hopper as representative of encroaching unwelcome modernity." (Slater, 2002:41)

Hopper was born in the late 19th century, and he painted his main works in the first half of the 20th century. The urban context and reality he encountered were those of the industrial revolution, modernity, and the unprecedented urban growth they induced. A city in a continuous change where entire neighbourhoods disappeared under the excavators. "Hopper was dismayed by the crushing of Washington Square." (Levin quoted by Slater, 2002) Hopper would always keep the nostalgia of the small town of his childhood. The city of Hopper is also that of the economic crisis of 1929 with the ensuing poverty, precariousness, suicides, and queues of unemployed people in search of work

who invade the streets. Hopper's lonely and sad figures were an expression of this dramatic situation, although he never referred to it directly.

Slater bases his demonstration on the very content of Hopper's works, on what the artist wanted to show or suggest in the urban scenes represented in his paintings. The analysis is based on the idea that many clues – details, shapes, colours, framing, the choice of landscapes, characters, and objects – display the interests and values of the artist. Four works by the painter are specifically cited to demonstrate the anti-urban character of his work: *Night Shadows* (1921), *Sunday* (1926), *Nighthawks* (1942), and *Approaching a City* (1946) - "four examples of the American city as a place of isolation, fear and loss." (Slater, 2002)

In *Night Shadows*, a lonely man walks down a street lit by a blatant light that contrasts with the darkness of the adjacent street. The atmosphere is disturbing. A threat seems to hang over this man. This etching multiplies the obliques and diagonals, introducing a perceptual vertigo, and it is perhaps a metaphor for the feeling of loss in the modern city.

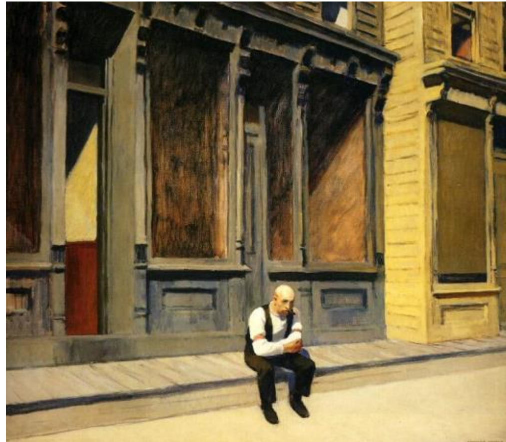
Edward Hopper

Night Shadows (1921)

Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia

In *Sunday*, a lonely man smokes, sitting on the curb in front of a store; the street is deserted, and the store seems empty. Like many of Hopper's characters, he seems lost in thought. Although the canvas was painted in 1926, it could already be seen as the herald of depression: being on the street would be a sign of alienation and exclusion. This city

is devoid of optimism: more "depressing than liberating, lamented rather than celebrated," and "city people appear emotionally weak and lost in their melancholy." (Slater, 2009:163) The city where a man loses his bearings and withers away.



Edward Hopper

Sunday (1926)

Private Collection

Translated according to some authors as "night owls," "night birds," or even "night prowlers," (Levin, 1985) *Nighthawks* is the most famous and iconic work of the artist. In a street corner diner, three customers and a waiter inhabit the brightly lit interior revealed by large bay windows. The customers are leaning on a circular bar and facing the waiter. All customers, even the one with his back turned to the street, appear lost in their weariness and private concerns. Inside the diner the light is raw and the characters blatant, contrasting with the darkness of the street, deserted and sinister. This staging is associated with the *film noir* genre, of which city and drama are the main components. Many commentators of this painting perceive an impression of imminent violence: "at a time of theft and aggression, it would not be surprising to see a character brandishing a revolver to demand that he be given the contents of the cash drawer." (Levin, 1985: 70) Hopper´s biographer sees the influence of Hemingway's short story *The Killers* (1927) in this painting: “But that short story has the sense of something about to happen, and it never does. In a sense, Hopper's paintings are just like that.”[18] The title itself is disturbing: in New York slang, “hawk” refers to a man who behaves like a raptor. Through this famous canvas, the city appears as a dangerous place, a landmark of lonely characters.

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18. https://faculty.baruch.cuny.edu/glevin/Gail%20Levin%20Interviewednew.htm

Sarah Kelly Oehler, in an article titled "Nighthawks as hope: a curator muses on Edward Hopper and crisis," remarks that the painting was Hopper's response to the bombing of Pearl Harbour on December 7, 1941, and the subsequent entrance of the United States into World War II. The characters´ disconnect and alienation would then stand for the way Americans felt during that period. Gail Levin also comments on this situation:

> We are evidently eyewitnesses to one of those great shiftings of power that have occurred periodically in Europe, as long as there has been a Europe, and there is not much to be done about it, except to suffer the anxiety of those on the sidelines, and try not to be shifted ourselves... Painting seems to be a good enough refuge from all this if one can get one's dispersed mind together long enough to concentrate on it.[19]

Hopper enjoyed walking the city, but his walks took place in a city darkened by crisis, both literally and figuratively. The brightly lit diner may be seen as a beacon of light against the darkness of wartime. Oehler sustains that "he included four figures, not just a lone figure as in many of his other paintings." Jo was the model for the redheaded woman, and himself the model for the man with his back to the viewer. (Oehler, 2020)

As fluorescent lights had just come into use in the early 1940s, Hopper became aware of the several expressive possibilities of light playing on shapes. The artist admitted that in *Nighthawks* "unconsciously, probably, I was painting the loneliness of a large city."[20]

Regarding this painting, Strand remarks:

> It is as if the light were a cleansing agent, for nowhere are there signs of urban filth. The city, as in most Hoppers, asserts itself formally rather than realistically. The dominant feature of the scene is the long window through which we see the diner. It covers two-thirds of the canvas, forming the geometrical shape of an isosceles trapezoid (…). Looking at *Nighthawks*, we are suspended between contradictory imperatives – one, governed by the trapezoid, that urges us forward, and the other, governed by the image of a light place in a dark city, that urges us to stay. Here, as in other Hopper paintings, where

19. Gail Levin. *Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography*. 1998.
20. https://www.edwardhopper.net/nighthawks.jsp

streets and roads play an important part, no cars are shown. (Strand, 2001:5) [21]

Edward Hopper

Nighthawks (1942)

The Art Institute of Chicago

There is a multitude of parodies, cartoons, and photoshopped images of *Nighthawks* that endeavour to give voice and narrative to Hopper´s most well-known painting. The most famous parody features James Dean, Humphrey Bogart, Marilyn Monroe, and Elvis Presley in the roles of patrons and attendant.

Gottfried Helnwein

Boulevard of Broken Dreams (Nighthawks)

1984

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21. This geometrical figure, the trapezoid, appears in other Hopper paintings, such as *Dawn in Pennsylvania*, *Seven A.M.*, *House by the Railroad,* and *Hotel Window*. Triangles are also used, as is the case in *Ground Swell* and *Cape Cod Evening*, just to name a few. Mark Strands notes "the repeated use of certain geometrical figures that bear directly on what the viewer´s response is likely to be." (Strand, 2001:3) Jeffrey Scott Childs also refers to the importance of geometrical figures in Hopper´s works in his article "Reasons for Moving: Mark Strand on the Art of Edward Hopper:" "Whereas the trapezoid is associated with movement and duration, the triangle creates a pictorial (and momentary) stability, regardless of how fragile or evanescent." (Childs, 2005:137)

But there are many others, in all forms, shapes, and sizes. I have chosen a couple of representative humorous ones.

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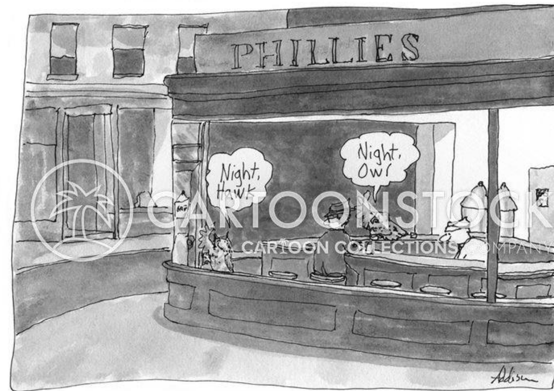


Mark Addison Kershaw

"Night, Owl!"

Undated

Untitled

Unknown author

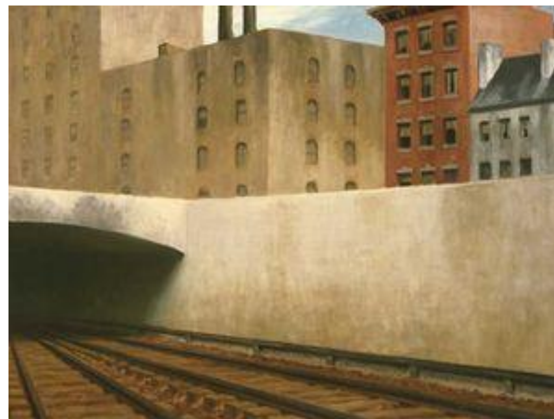
Undated

In *Approaching a City* (1946), the rails enter a tunnel as they approach a city. The walls surrounding the railway tracks only reveal a few portions of buildings. No

characters are visible; urban life looks frozen. Nevertheless, there are invisible lives behind the numerous tenement windows. Hopper commented on this painting in the following way:

> I've always been interested in approaching a big city by train; and I can't exactly describe the sensations. But they're entirely human and perhaps have nothing to do with aesthetics. There is a certain fear and anxiety, and a great visual interest in the things that one sees coming into the city. (Levin quoted by Slater, 2002:141)

Slater retains the expression of fear and anxiety emphasized by the painter. This is caused by the darkness of the tunnel; entering the city is nerve-wracking, and there is no visible light at the end of the tunnel. The scene is imbued with urban animosity.



Edward Hopper

Approaching a City (1946)

The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC

Santos Zunzunegui remarks that this painting is revealing of the cinema´s influence in Hopper´s paintings. In his particular version of the city of New York, so often taken as a model for his works, the background of many of his paintings seems to be built in a way similar to that of the great Hollywood studios in their golden age, that is, building an urban environment that was and was not, at the same time, that of a certain grand city. *Approaching a City* perfectly illustrates this approach. (Zunzunegui, 2012:16)

The representation of often dark, deserted urban spaces, the harsh lights, the sadness, and the loneliness of the characters undoubtedly offer arguments to support the interpretation that the painter's work was anti-urban. Hopper gave a plastic expression to a negative vision of the city inherited from transcendentalism, contemporary to industrial growth and the economic crisis.

On the other hand, one could say that Hopper is neither for nor against the city. First, it is important to remember that Hopper offers no reading keys to his way of conceiving the city in his work. This shy and introverted artist gave very few interviews, made very few comments about his work, and revealed virtually nothing about his depiction of the city. All his life he preferred to express himself through his works: "He preferred to speak through visual images." (Levin, 2007:282) The few reported comments about the city are ambiguous.

The very extensive notebooks that his wife Jo devotes to his paintings do not shed much light on his urban imagination, but rather on Hopper's pictorial techniques and the intimate and social life of the couple. However, the universe that Hopper invented leaves a lot of room for the imagination of the creative viewer and a wide margin of interpretation. His paintings are not explicit enough to leave no room for a reading other than that desired by the artist. Hopper´s works are presented with a neutrality that invites contradictory readings. They differ, Slater also notes, from those of the members of the Ashcan School, who described themselves as painters of urban reality and, more particularly, of the poor neighbourhoods of New York, with their garbage cans (ashcan), their bistros, their factories, and their boxing matches. It was a deliberate attitude in order to show the raw reality and the harshness of urban life.

Hopper's paintings can lend themselves to all kinds of readings as his universe is marked by ambivalence. Let us take *Sunday* as an example again. According to Slater, another interpretation of this scene is possible: the title, the paratext, suggests rest and leisure rather than despair. The atmosphere is calm and warm. The character sitting in front of a shop may have finished his day. He smokes, quietly, sitting outside, imagining what he will do in the evening. This game of double interpretation is often possible with other paintings by Hopper. In *Approaching a City*, the tunnel is dark, but we know it leads to the hectic city hidden behind the high walls that frame the rails. There is anxiety, fear, and excitement when someone finally arrives at his destination. Hopper captures the moment before the arrival, the moment when everything is still possible.

To understand the artist's universe, it is worth remembering that Hopper appreciated the banality of ordinary life. "No atmosphere was banal enough not to be interpreted" he said, commenting on a painting by his colleague Charles Burchfield, who loved representations of the American suburbs. (Kranzfelder, 2006:136) This statement could be applied to his own oeuvre.

Nevertheless, according to Slater, the demonstration would not be complete if one did not look at Hopper's rural scenes. The artist painted just as much of the countryside as the city. As mentioned above, Hopper and his wife divided their time between Greenwich Village and the small village of South Truro on Cape Cod. Slater's description of urban scenes can be transposed word for word by replacing the word “city” with “country:” "Country people appear emotionally weak and lost in their melancholic thoughts, detached from the world around them in a near-catatonic state."

In *Cape Cod Evening* (1939), a couple and a dog take the air in front of a house that overlooks a thick yellow lawn. The house adjoins a very dense forest. The characters are submerged in their boredom and there is a total lack of communication between them. As in urban scenes (e.g., *A Room in New York*), the couple does not interact, and each one appears lost in his/her thoughts. The man seems to demand the dog's attention, but the dog does not look in his direction. In a commentary on this painting, Hopper notes that "even the dog is elsewhere." (quoted by Levin, 1985:60) This painting, like many others, depicts the sadness of Hopper´s characters, wherever they are.

Edward Hopper

Cape Cod Evening (1939)

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC

About this painting, the artist also remarked:

> It is no transcription of a place but pieced together from sketches and mental impressions of things in the vicinity…The dry, blowing grass can be seen from my studio window in the late summer or autumn. In the woman I attempted to get the broad, strong-jawed face and blond hair of a Finnish type of which there are many on the Cape. The man is a dark-

haired Yankee. The dog is listening to something, probably a whippoorwill or some evening sound.[22]

The title of this painting was originally to have been *Whippoorwill*, after the nocturnal bird by the same name.

City or country, there is a similarity in situations. In Hopper, unlike in Emerson or Thoreau, we do not find an opposition between bad cities and good countryside. Like the doorless houses of *Two Puritans* demonstrate, rural vibes can be chilling.

Edward Hopper

Two Puritans (1945)

Private Collection

The mansion depicted in *House by the Railroad* (1925), set in a rural environment, is so unpleasant that it inspired Alfred Hitchcock to design *Psycho*'s house. This subject will be expanded in chapter IV.

A key element of Thoreau's anti-urban discourse is the idealization of nature. However, Hopper's nature does not possess this quality. Forests are dense and dark, and we do not know how to get in. We are far from a soothing forest where modern man, confronted with the fury of cities, would go to recharge his batteries. Rather, it is the inextricable and ominous forest of fairy tales.

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22. https://www.wikiart.org/en/edward-hopper/cape-cod-evening

Mark Strand refers to the trees/woods in Hopper´s oeuvre several times. In his article “Crossing the Tracks to Hopper´s World” he remarks: “Hopper´s trees are strangely opaque; we never enter the woods in his work, nor does light.” (Strand, 1971:342) Commenting on *Seven A.M.*, he states, “the massed trees, which form the dark, tangled, impenetrable presence of nature. (…) we are more doubtful about the woods than we are about the city streets.” (Strand, 2001:10) In *Second Story Sunlight* there “is a group of trees that seems, because of its upward slant, to be growing on a hillside. Dark and forbidding, it appears, nevertheless, to manifest as much order as it does wildness (…).” (Strand, 2001:12) In the pages devoted to *Gas* and *Four Lane Road*, Strand comments:

> Usually when woods appear in a Hopper they are across a road or behind a house and do not reveal much of themselves. (…) With the exception of the tamarack, Hopper´s trees are generic. (…) And yet his woods have a peculiar and forceful identity. Compared to the woods that precede them in American painting, they are somber and uninviting. (…) For Hopper, the wilderness is nature´s dark side, heavy and brooding. In *Gas* the shadowy woods seem poised, ready to absorb the viewer as well as whoever happens to be traveling down the road between them and the gas station.” In *Four Lane Road* “the woods, meanwhile, appear uncharacteristically harmless in their background role. (Strand, 2001:13-15)

In *Cape Cod Evening* “the woods (…) dissolve into a foreboding darkness. (..) The house gives way to the woods (…).” (Strand, 2001:25) In *Stairway*, “a small, eerie picture, we look down some stairs through an open door to a dark, impenetrable massing of trees or hills directly outside.” (Strand, 2001:39)

Gas is a strong image of the condition of alienation. The human figure is deliberately calibrated according to the size of the inanimate objects and almost forced to measure with them on an equal footing. In Hopper, the houses are settled on lawns or grass as if nature came to dispute supremacy with man. There is on these canvases a conflict in which civilization seems to be diluted in larger forces, be they that of the interior or exterior landscape. Later, the phenomenon would be analysed with a magnifying glass and theorized. Alienation was the name given to it.

Hopper does not seek to make beautiful or desirable the cityscapes, landscapes, or seascapes he paints, but to transcribe what he feels at their sight: "My aim in painting has always been the most exact transcription possible of my most intimate impression of nature. I have tried to present my sensations in what is the most congenial and impressive

form to me." (quoted by Gussow, 1997:132) Even if Hopper makes the city one of his main settings, it does not imply that he has anything to say about the city. It is just a medium from which he invents his compositions, the *leitmotiv*. The city, in Hopper´s paintings, portrays the face of a particular America, nitid and mysterious at the same time.

When Hopper was questioned about this work, in an interview with his friend Brian O'Doherty, "What are you after?" the artist responded, "I'm after me." (Quoted by Kaplan, 2012) That is also what the characters of the scenes composed by the painter seem to say to the beholder. In the city, as in the countryside, the introspective quest is the same, and the discontent identical. The environment, whether urban or rural, has little influence. On the contrary, the characters make the landscapes in which they are located sad and hostile.

Hopper "viewed art as a reflection on his own psyche." (Levin, 2007:277) His characters seem to be in full introspection, less turned to the real world than to their own psyche. Under an apparent realism, behind these painted figures hide the symbols of the inner torments of the artist: loneliness, the passage of time, and death. Slater concludes that Hopper's universe is far too ambivalent to have been intended as a vehicle for an ideology. He is an introverted painter for whom painting is the means of expression of a tormented intimate universe. The city, as well as the countryside, are only the backdrop, the *leitmotiv*. He was a profound connoisseur of the isolation, alienation, and loneliness embedded in modern industrialized America.

Let us now look at other paintings whose setting is the city and where Hopper´s favourite themes are developed.

Early Sunday Morning (1930) portrays a deserted morning on a Manhattan street. Two-story houses, red-brick façades, a maple leaf yellowed by autumn, shops with shutters down, a barber´s pole with the recognizable stripes. The sky is blue, cloudless, and clean. The sun illuminates the sidewalk, interrupting the advance of the shadow. It is the quiet of the morning of a New York Sunday. There is no one to be seen. An urban glimpse, inhabited not by masses but by loneliness. Time is imprisoned and, at the same time, abolished until it becomes static.

Edward Hopper

Early Sunday Morning (1930)

Whitney Museum of American Art

The couple portrayed in *Room in New York (*1932) is a study on indifference and the rupture of conjugality. "Another of those scenes that you might come across during a walk in the city or see from your apartment." (Strand, 2010:56) This painting is almost the prefiguration of Hitchcock's film *Rear Window* (1934). One cannot look at this mundane scene without feeling anxiety and even dread. Painted as if glimpsed from another window, the scene takes place at night. A couple sitting in a living room: him, intently reading the newspaper; she, touching the piano keys with one finger, not intently. It is a scene saturated with silence and solitude, the worst of solitudes, the one that presumes company. The viewer´s eyes dwell above all on the tall door without a knob that separates the two characters, "(…) the door, which is shut not on either one but on both together." (Strand, 2001:57) There is also a round pedestal table between the couple. The distance between them seems unbridgeable.

Edward Hopper

Room in New York (1932)

Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery ad Sculpture Garden

In *Western Motel* (1957), a woman turns her back to the landscape and stares at the viewer-voyeur who peeks inside the frame. She is the only one of Hopper´s people who does so. She poses stiffly as if someone is about to take her photo. Strand comments, "It is particularly witty that the painter and the viewer should combine forces to play the role of photographer." (Strand, 2001:49)

Edward Hopper

Western Motel (1957)

Yale University Art Gallery

In *Hotel Room (*1931) a woman reads what appears to be a book, her suit and her shoes taken off, the luggage undone on the floor, like someone who has just arrived, and there is no one to greet her as she expected. She looks contained, nonetheless. Disappointment would be another fitting title for this painting. The titles of the paintings, their paratext, are a part of the narrative of desolation and loneliness.

Edward Hopper

Hotel Room (1931)

Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza

Clara Ferreira Alves wonders what all these women see, whose eyes, dark spots in the pallor of the flesh, we never get to see. Their skin is white, stained with grey, or yellowed like pages in an old book. (Alves, 2018:19)

Similar atmospheres return in other Hopperian exercises, which propose hieratic silhouettes arranged in neutral places: rooms with rough furniture and huge windows, which give on buildings with other windows. Sharp, yet enigmatic scenes which evoke a precise era. Figures fixed in usual gestures or absorbed in daily occupations and, nevertheless, inaccessible. Like frames of films of which we do not know the plot. Citing Gil, "there is a constant nostalgia, the intrinsic loneliness of man in a world that he does not dominate or seek to dominate. There is almost an autism, like a break with time (...)." (Gil, 2005:154)

Mark Strand remarks that "In Hopper´s paintings there is a lot of waiting going on. Hopper´s people seem to have nothing to do. They are like characters whose parts have deserted them and now, trapped in the space of their waiting, must keep themselves company, with no clear place to be, no future." (Strand, 2001:27) The scenes of solitude are not definitive in their sad balance: there is a keen sense of waiting, the certainty that something must happen or that someone must arrive, even if you do not know what or who. Hopper is the master who knows how to fix the unstable instant as a desire for a form of salvation.

The world of Hopper´s characters is a world without a future and, worst of all, it does not include children. Apparently, Hopper never painted the portrait of a child. Why is it so? Because Jo and he were childless and considered their paintings their children? I was not able to find an answer to this odd situation.

Nevertheless, children are featured in two drawings of his. There is no date on the tiny, but lovely, *Little Boy Looking at the Sea*, a drawing in ink made by Hopper on the reverse of a report card he received when he was nine-year-old. The little boy, facing the sea with his hands clasped behind his back and his feet in the wet sand, seems both younger and older than nine. From his size, he appears to be a toddler, but his posture is pensive, and he does not seem to be in a playful mood.

Edward Hopper
Little Boy Looking at the Sea (undated)
Arthayer R. Sanborn Hopper Collection Trust

Boy and Moon (1906-1907) was drawn during the little-known two-decade illustration career of the realist master. A very private individual, Hopper left no written considerations on his career as an illustrator, even though he believed that a mature development was linked to the work of the formative years.

Edward Hopper
Boy and Moon (1906-1907)
Whitney Museum of American Art

In both drawings the children turn their backs on the viewer, as if to conceal their faces, their emotions, their inwardness.

5. SILENCE AND STILLNESS

I guess I’m not very human. All I really want to do is paint light on the side of a house.

Edward Hopper

Perhaps due to his puritanical upbringing, Hopper always preferred to paint emptiness. His cities are deserted. His apartments are furnished to a minimum. His landscapes are vast spaces from which emerge, but in the distance, a house, a lighthouse. The lack of action, the spaces, the silences, that is, what is left unpainted, constitute the action in Hopper´s paintings, filled with inscrutability. Hopper precisely chooses those moments when nothing is happening, and nothing is heard to heighten the mystery surrounding his scenes.

Some of his work is haunted by couples who do not look at each other, are indifferent, and almost oblivious of each other´s presence. Hopper had a severe problem of deafness, revealed to one of his dealers much later. This health condition may have influenced his work, for his paintings are silent, and dominated by isolated, prostate, mute characters. “The word seems to have withdrawn from the world without hope. Every voice is shut in a silence that is not reassuring, but rather ominous. This cancellation of all sounds is obtained through images that fix the details with exactness.” (Grillet, 2018:158)

Quoting David Anfam, “Hopper´s many blank walls, vacant windows, and dramatic façades eventually ´speak’ *in lieu* of their mute inhabitants… they enunciate an ultra-materialist America era in which things – invented, mass-produced by assembly line, consumed, bought, sold, and discarded – gained the edge over people.” (Gambling, 2006:6) Such is the case of *House by the Railroad*: although railroad tracks are typically associated with the noise, speed, and rapid change of modern life, the scene is curiously still and silent.

Mark Strand stresses that “The silence that accompanies our viewing seems to increase. It is unsettling. We want to move on. And something is urging us to, even as something else compels us to stay. It weighs on us like solitude.” (Strand, 2001:66)

The instants captured in his paintings exist in both time and space, as well as beyond temporal and spatial dimensions. Those snap-frozen moments consist of a split

second when time and place stand still, a moment of contemplation before movement and narrative recommence. What the viewer sees in Hopper´s art is stillness, the anonymous capturing of an existential moment. Within the frame there is a tension, an energy to explore what is beyond; it arises from the faces he gives models, inscrutable, devoid of expression. This minimalism arouses the viewer´s imagination, he is invited to enter the painting and read the work or to scratch the surface of the canvas with a chisel to reveal what lies hidden.

In Hopper´s paintings people are frozen between a "before" and an "after" that one ignores and can only imagine. They stare at the void, wrapped by some secret unknown to the viewer. Loneliness is petrified, it is an eternal still image. Stillness is impenetrable, no one moves. Regarding this matter, while commenting on *Early Sunday Morning* Mark Strand remarks "Here, as in other Hoppers, the city is idealized. The people are asleep. There is no traffic. A dreamy collaboration of stillness and quiet makes it seem that some magical moment is being extended (…)." (Strand, 2001:19) Discussing *Hotel Window* (1956), Strand notes that Hopper commented on the question of loneliness in this painting in an interview with William Johnson in 1956: "Lonely? Yes, I guess it´s lonelier that I planned it, really." (Strand, 2001:51)

Lessing preconized that plastic arts, having space as their domain, are reduced to the instant, literally to a frozen image.[23] Hopper revisits this notion as the frozen moment, the instantaneous that his paintings portray, comes from a story that is no longer that of life, but rather that of the film of life. There is a sort of laconism and monotony that are related to the melancholy or the wait for an event that will not take place. Perhaps one can conclude from this that Hopper´s paintings reflect the artist´s inner quest. His true subject would then be "thought" illustrated by the series of introspective figures with absent gazes found in his paintings.

Even though Hopper´s paintings are impregnated with some sort of diffuse narrativity, there is no narration in them. There cannot be any because there is no duration either, time has been suspended from the painting. The motifs Hopper presents may be transitory, like brief flashes, moments frozen in time. But they stick to the viewer´s retina and last in one´s memory like a melancholic ballad.

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23. Ephraim Gotthold Lessing. *Laocoön - An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*. 1766.

As summed up by Strand, Hopper´s work transmits "an oddness, a disturbing quiet, a sense of being in a room with a man who insists on being with us, but always with his back turned." (Strand, 1971:343)

6. LIGHT AND SHADOW

There is a sort of elation about sunlight on the upper part of a house.

Edward Hopper

As mentioned earlier, Hopper preferred the works of the Impressionists, particularly those by Claude Monet, Edouard Manet, Edgar Degas, and Vincent Van Gogh whose use of light and colour had a lasting influence on his art. Hopper was a master of light. To him, light was an immaterial material, capable of sculpting and creating spaces. He stripped the elements in his compositions down to their essential geometries and treated light as a palpable presence. The subjects of Hopper´s canvases are immobile, sitting, lying, or standing in white brilliance. They are thus parked on the canvas, waiting to be "illuminated." They all have a complex relationship with light, be it the electric light of the bulb that envelops them or the cosmic light of the sun that burns them with a strangely cold glow, as in *Sea Watchers* (1952).

Edward Hopper
Sea Watchers (1952)
Private Collection

Light can be daytime or nocturnal, and the two enclose people in empty rooms, empty houses, empty halls, or simply, as in *Sun in an Empty Room*, empty walls. (Alves, 2018:17) According to Strand, "Hopper´s use of light is almost always descriptive of

time. (…) Hopper´s ability to use space convincingly as a metaphor for time is extraordinary. (…) Night and day in their more local manifestations as shadows and light are so arranged that they dramatize and give extra significance to buildings or parts of buildings we would otherwise take for granted.” (Strand,1971:341-342)

The joyful lighting of his early illustration works gives way to the sharp and cruel light of the depressed and cool universe of his later paintings. *Office at Night* (1940) recycles, under an ambiguous light, the same office universe as that of the *Magazine of Business*, with its stereotypes: functional furniture, a secretary in a tight dress, and the boss. Oddly enough, there is no paper in the typewriter.

Edward Hopper

Office at Night (1940)

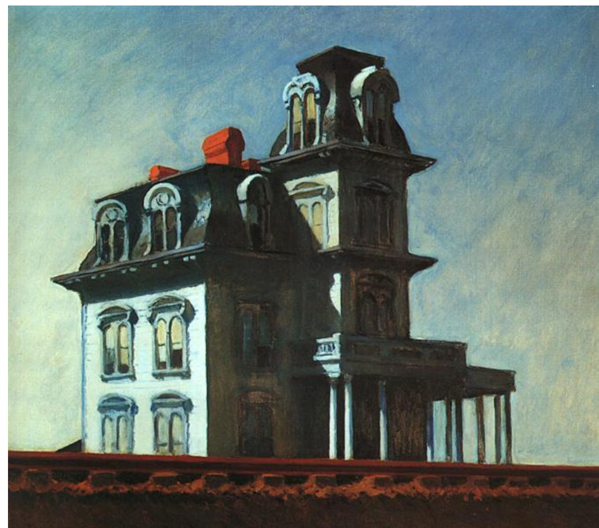
Walk Art Center

Among the greatest luminists of the 20th century, Hopper proposes a bold use of lighting. Recreating the effects of neon in painting, he uses natural and artificial flashes: sharp and crystalline, concentrated, and exact, flanked by sudden and prolonged blinds. His bars are nocturnal even in the blaze of electric lamps. His houses are gloomy even in the blinding afternoon light. And his motels´ façades are always hit by the sun. His is a dramatic light: dilated and oblique, it immobilizes the interior of a bar, a house overlooking the ocean, and a gas station. It is like the look felt in a farewell, the flash of a reminiscence, the remoteness of a regret. It is not applied to forms. It does not pursue movement, it is fixed, timeless, it can be modulated in many ways. It enhances the colours or turns them off. It becomes tenuous, it finds shadows. It falls on roads. Sometimes it

cuts the city nights. Other times it penetrates deserted rooms or rooms inhabited by solitary figures.

Light enters in a Brooklyn apartment, in the lobby of a hotel or motel, in the office of a provincial town, in a cinema, in a theatre, in an all-night café, and in a room overlooking the sea. Desolate void lives flow in it. Moments of a simple visual story, with evident references to the idea that places mirror states of mind: an existential discomfort that people are not always aware of. Notwithstanding, Alves stresses, the oppression caused by the interior scenes is not continued in the washed light of certain seaside landscapes or the houses flooded by the morning light. (Alves, 2018:22-23)

House by the Railroad (1925) is different. An enduring sign of progress, the railroad was the trigger for industrial change. It enlarged existing cities and created new ones on the frontier. It also provided Americans with unprecedented mobility, allowing them to explore other regions of the country. In this painting, the railroad track takes on the colour of earth, as it has come to take the place of the stream, valley, or farmland that once formed the background of American culture. The house would eventually thicken contemporary iconography and we see it quoted in Hitchcock's and Malick's cinema: it inspired *Psycho*'s and *Days of Heaven´s* houses. This subject will be addressed in more detail in chapter IV.



Edward Hopper

*House by the Railroad (*1925)

Museum of Modern Art (MoMA)

In *Gas* (1940) and *Seven A.M. (*1948) light bows to the green mass of the trees, whose indistinct thickness contrasts with the dryness of the straight lines of the

compositions. The gas station represents a beacon light, comfort, and safety before the road advances into the forest. Electric light floods the parking area as if it was daylight. It is a balmy contrast to the shadow of the forest ahead.

Edward Hopper

*Gas (*1940)

Museum of Modern Art (MoMA)

Edward Hopper

*Seven A.M. (*1948)

Whitney Museum of American Art

Mark Strand also reflects on light and shade in Hopper´s works. Pondering on *Pennsylvania Coal Town* (1947), he argues:

> It is a space that forms a corridor of light. (…) It has the feel of transcendence, as if some revelation were at hand, as if some transforming evidence were encoded in the light. (…) It is like an annunciation. The air is stricken with purity. And we are involved in a vision whose source is beyond us, and whose effect is difficult to embrace. After all, we view the scene from the shade. (Strand, 2001:29)

This painting captures a time and a place that convey silence, stillness, and solitude, themes prevalent in Hopper´s paintings. Here, as in other paintings of his, light plays a role of paramount importance. The sunlight shines directly on the man and one side of the house, in contrast to the rest of the painting, which is shown in shadow.

Edward Hopper

*Pennsylvania Coal Town (*1947)

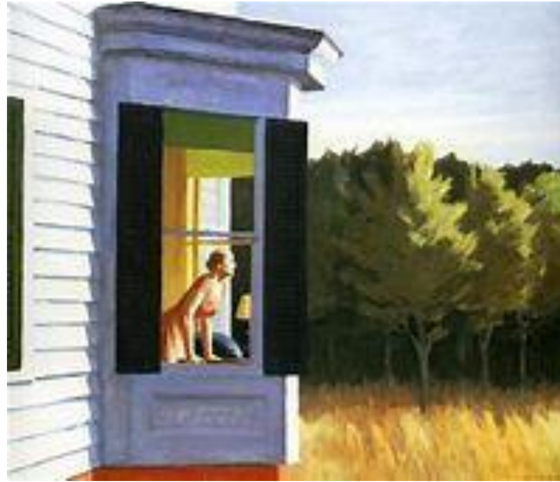
Butler Institute of American Art

Strand also remarks:

> Hopper´s light is peculiar, that it does not seem to fill the air. Instead, it seems to adhere to walls and objects, almost as if it comes from them, emanating from their carefully conceived and distributed tones. (…) In Hopper´s paintings, light is not applied to shape; rather, his paintings are built from the shapes that light assumes. His light, especially his interior light, can be convincing without ever being fluid. (…) One of the reasons Hopper´s light is so wedded to objects is that his paintings were, by his own admission, put together from notes and memory. (…) His paintings are careful and scrupulously considered rather than improvisational, and their light has a memorial rather than a celebratory character. Hopper´s attempts to fix it, to give it a life that would resist dissolution, may account for the geometrical severity of its shapes. (…) Hopper´s light, despite the titles of his paintings, is atemporal. (Strand, 2001:32-33)

Women facing the light inspired many of Hopper's paintings, as described below. Mark Strand considers that "*Cape Cod Morning* and *Morning Sun* are two paintings in which this feature of Hopper´s light is quickly discernible." Strand refers to his notion that Hopper´s light has some annunciatory, otherworldly power, exclusive to those who are lucky enough to be bathed by it. The woman in *Cape Cod Morning* (1950) stands tense, leaning from a window and staring expectantly toward the source of light, the Sun, almost as if she is offering herself to someone or something. In Strand´s words, "The

object of her attention, like the source of the light, is beyond the picture. We can witness only its effects, how the woman´s pose manifests her attraction to it.” (Strand, 2001:34-35)



Edward Hopper

*Cape Cod Morning (*1950)

Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery

Morning Sun (1952) portrays another woman, sitting on a bed, welcoming the “visitation” of light, like the lover of this luminous god who is hiding. “She, too, is a recipient of the sun´s warmth. She, too, seems fixed on something beyond the painting´s realm. (…) she seems sculpted by light.” (Strand, 2001:35-36) These women´s attitude is almost religious, it is as if they were sunlight worshipers.

Edward Hopper

*Morning Sun (*1952)

Columbus Museum of Art

As for *A Woman in the Sun* (1961), the situation is somewhat different. “Though she receives the light, she does so with less apparent eagerness. (…) The light coats the front of her. And the parts of her it does not touch fall abruptly into shadows. (…) Her

past, like the back of her body, is left in shadow." (Strand, 2001:36-37) The setting, voyeuristic and almost cinematic, leads the viewer to imagine a narrative, like in so many other paintings by the artist.

Edward Hopper

*A Woman in the Sun (*1961)

Whitney Museum of Modern Art

In *City Sunlight* (1954) another woman, seated and in her underwear, leans and stares into the light that comes in through the window. However, she is not expectant like the woman in *Cape Cod Morning*. She is just leaning toward the sunlight.

Edward Hopper

*City Sunlight (*1954)

Whitney Museum of Modern Art

In *The Barber Shop* (1931) the clock on the wall indicates 1.03 PM, while the sun is pouring down from an unseen window into a basement parlour in New York. The barber is tending to the only customer and the manicurist is reading a magazine at her neat table, with its shiny glass top. She becomes the focus of our attention, surrounded as she is by sunlight and its reflections, which frame the woman as the central character. She

is removed, reflecting the isolation of the modern age. The barber and the customer are marginalised in the painting by the light and shade of the banister and the background shadow.

Edward Hopper

*The Barber Shop (*1931)

Private Collection

People, in Hopper´s canvases, seem to have lost their taste for life. A deep melancholy weighs on the individuals. Perhaps all this prostate, defeated humanity that haunts Hopper´s work like a ghost, will, in the end, see the light and be saved by it. Light offers the possibility of redemption, a ray of hope in the harsh reality of everyday life. That might be the case of the harsh fluorescent light in *Nighthawks*, a beacon of hope amidst the darkness of the night, a metaphor for salvation if we consider that it was painted during World War II. Hope, salvation, and redemption take on the connotation of light. Hopper's contribution to modern painting is that he made boredom epic, sacralizing the moments of banal inattention of everyday life, having "saved" reality with light. Hopper understood that he did not need solemn subjects or noble themes to ponder on the spiritual aspect of visible nature. All it took was a level crossing, a house, a roof, a bar, and a hotel room.

The paintings *Rooms by the Sea* and *Sun in an Empty Room* are also filled with light. However, the former is less austere than the latter, even though it feels staggering to have the sea right outside the door. What could be a threatening image becomes less so because “the light seems to be pointing, telling us which way to look.” (Strand, 2001:63) And that way is inwards, toward the partially hidden second room, where there is furniture and a sense of domestic life. Nevertheless, the painting stands as a metaphor for solitude and silence, which are not necessarily bad things.

Edward Hopper

*Rooms by the Sea (*1951)

Yale University Art Gallery

In *Sun in an Empty Room* (1963), a space without anything or anyone in it is penetrated by the grace of light, the principle of spirituality. Strand argues:

> Nothing is calming about the light. It comes in a window and falls twice in the same room – on a wall close to the window and on a slightly recessed wall. (…) The light strikes two places at once, and we feel its terminal character instead of anything that hints of continuation. (…) a finality against which two tomblike parallelograms of light stand upright. Done in 1963, it is Hopper´s last great painting, a vision of the world without us; not merely a place that excludes us, but a place emptied of us. The light, now a faded yellow against sepia-toned walls, seems to be enacting the last stages of its transience, its own stark narrative coming to a close. (Strand, 2001:65)

Edward Hopper

*Sun in an Empty Room (*1963)

Private Collection

This painting inspired a Canadian music band, The Weakerthans, to write a song. The lyrics are an interpretation of what might have occurred within those walls.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8se66vS90Z8

Sun in an Empty Room

Now that the furniture's returning to its Goodwill home
With dishes in last week's papers, rumours and elections, crosswords, an unending war
That blacken our fingers, smear their prints on every door pulled shut
Now that the last month's rent is scheming with the damage deposit

Take this moment to decide (Sun in an empty room)
If we meant it, if we tried (Sun in an empty room)
Or felt around for far too much (Sun in an empty room)
From things that accidentally touch (Sun in an empty room)

Hands that we nearly hold with pennies for the GST
The shoulders we lean our shoulders into on the subway, mutter an apology
The shins that we kick beneath the table, that reflexive cry
The faces we meet, one awkward beat too long, and terrify

Know that the things we need to say (Sun in an empty room)
Have been said already anyway (Sun in an empty room)
By parallelograms of light (Sun in an empty room)
On walls that we repainted white (Sun in an empty room)

Sun in an empty room

Take eight minutes and divide (Sun in an empty room)
By ninety million lonely miles (Sun in an empty room)
And watch the shadow cross the floor (Sun in an empty room)
We don't live here anymore (Sun in an empty room)

Writers: John K. Samson, Stephen Allan Carroll, Greg Scott Smith, Jason Tait

7. WINDOWS

Windows play a very important role in Edward Hopper´s work. As this feature of his work has been heavily imported and adapted by film directors, I deem it worthwhile to be discussed both in this chapter and chapter IV.

Hopper´s paintings often include the architectural element of windows, and his buildings are often situated at angles to suggest that his subjects are both in front and behind windows. Hopper is a window genius. Light can go through windows and glass, ubiquitous in Hopper's frames, a symbol of a wall that can always be transposable. The window is like the opening of a large obscure space, such as a room, which slowly and firmly separates the light from the darkness.

The composition of three windows is also frequently utilised, as it allows for a dramatic setting of illuminated interior against the dark night. Windows are used by painters to help emphasise the narrative structure of the image. Hopper, however, uses windows to challenge the viewer's perception of the world, to provoke his curiosity, and to function as a lens into the world of others.

Frequently, his subjects are near windows, looking out of windows, standing in front of windows, behind windows, and the viewer is peering through windows.

> This is what those who walk in the evening in a quiet neighborhood of New York, in the residential streets of Chelsea or the Upper West Side, and watch from the sidewalk in the shade, through the illuminated windows of dining rooms or libraries or small offices, fragmentary scenes of the lives of strangers, people reading the newspaper next to a lit lamp, sat on a red and wide armchair. Then the window frame becomes the exact frame of the painting. (Molina, 2004:49-50)

Hopper´s windows, and doors to some extent, are the major medium through which light enters his paintings and illuminates his characters and spaces. Let us look at some of his most striking windows. First and foremost, the window in *Nighthawks*, probably Hopper´s best-known window. Strand remarks “The dominant feature of the scene is the long window through which we see the diner. It covers two-thirds of the canvas, forming the geometrical shape of an isosceles trapezoid (…).” (Strand, 2001:5) In this instance, Hopper uses the window to showcase an interior scene and it serves as a barrier between those inside and the viewer outside.

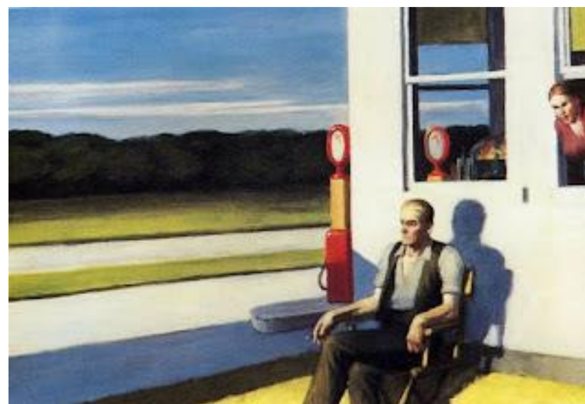
Second Story Sunlight (1960) features two identical houses, each with two windows on the second floor and one on the third. They are bathed by sunlight, while a side window is in the shade; nevertheless, the room interior is lit by the light that comes in from the front windows.

Edward Hopper

Second Story Sunlight (1960)

Whitney Museum of American Art

In *Four Lane Road* (1956), a woman leans from one of the three featured windows to tell the gas station´s proprietor (her husband?) something that falls on deaf ears, as he looks oblivious. It introduces a dramatic narrative dimension in the painting.



Edward Hopper

Four Lane Road (1956)

Private Collection

In *Hotel by the Railroad* (1952) an elderly couple is settled in a room. There is no communication between them, or with the viewer. The woman reads a book, while the man stands in front of a large window, through which sunlight comes in and illuminates

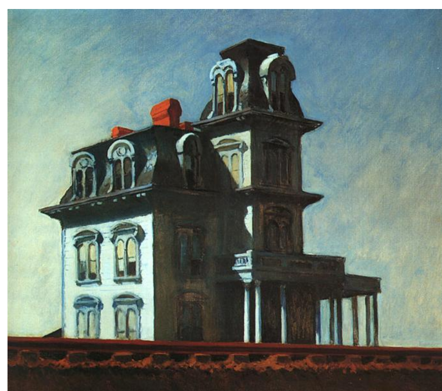
them and the room. The window shows a closed and partially shaded window in an adjoining room in the same building, also basking in the light. The man maintains a shielding distance from the window as he looks out at the street. He is far back removed to prevent being seen from below or from other hotel windows as if to protect his privacy.

Edward Hopper

Hotel by a Railroad (1952)

Private Collection

And then there are the famous windows of *House by the Railroad.* The turret has a periscope thrust with a 360° view. The few uncovered windows have partially pulled shades. They are lower to the left and rise on the right, giving the unsettling impression of a sidelong glance in the viewer's direction. The tall, hooded windows appear tightly closed, as if they have become obsolete or hide some dark secret. The house conveys a visible threat in the closed windows, in the dark corners that speak the language of mystery. Part of the house is sunk in darkness. The house may be now vacant; a railroad track runs so close to it that a passing train would have rattled its windows.



Edward Hopper

*House by the Railroad (*1925)

Museum of Modern Art (MoMA)

In *Early Sunday Morning* all is quiet behind the shaded or open windows in the two-story brick building, there is no evidence of actual movement. In *Pennsylvania Coal Town*, the interior of the house can be seen through a large front window. There seems to be a lamp by the window, and a picture on the wall. In this painting the character appears to be alone, there is no sign of life around him. The house does not look inviting or welcoming, with most of the curtains closed as if to keep out the rest of the world.

In *Cape Code Morning,* it is from a bay window that a woman leans toward the light. The woman in *Morning Sun* is sitting up in bed and contemplates the city through a large open window. And *A Woman in the Sun* enjoys the sun and a breeze that come in through an open window. In *Chair Car* (1965), the floor is flanked by windows that allow the light to get in, but there is nothing outside the windows that suggests motion or a landscape. The windows function as compartments, defining the space: each person has a seat and a private screening of life as it goes by. Windows and seats organize people, so they do not have to interact. All we see outside the windows is sunlight flowing in; combined with the green and yellow colours inside the car, it creates an atmosphere of dread and suffocation.

Edward Hopper

Chair Car (1965)

Private Collection

The woman in *Compartment C, Car 1938* seems to be reading her book, but she may occasionally shift her gaze between the carriage, the book, and the sunset view that is seen through the window. The green atmosphere inside the car is not pleasant, although less harsh than the one in the previous painting.

Edward Hopper

Compartment C, Car 293 (1938)

Private Collection

In *Office in a Small City* (1953) a man sitting at a desk in front of a large window stares at the rooftops of the buildings across the street. There is another large window to his right and there is no reflection on both glasses, exactly as it occurs in other of Hopper´s works.

Edward Hopper

Office in a Small City (1953)

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

In *New York Office* (1962) a woman stands in front of a large office window reading a document. The façade of the building, the window, the woman, and part of a wall in the office are bathed by sunlight, while the rest of the office is in the shadow. On the side street, there is a building with half-shaded windows. The sun is high, the place is public, therefore the viewer does not need to hide in the dark to watch. The window is a

viewing screen, directing the eye. It contains others while excluding the viewer, thereby removing once again any chance of human interaction.

Edward Hopper
New York Office (1962)
The Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts

In *Room in Brooklyn* (1932) a woman sits in a corner room, her back to us, in front of a half-shaded window, sided by two other windows. She stares down at the buildings across the street, which also feature several windows.

Edward Hopper
Room in Brooklyn (1932)
The Museum of Fine Arts

Sunlight in a Cafeteria (1958) features a man and a woman seated at separate tables in a sunny cafeteria on a quiet side street. The two cafeteria guests are strangers. They are apparently the only customers, and there seems to be no one to wait on them. The viewer is inside looking out. Bright daylight pours through the large window. She

sits in full sunlight, he in semi-shadow. The shyness between man and woman will not be overcome unless one of them takes the initiative to break the ice.

Edward Hopper

Sunlight in a Cafeteria (1958)

The Museum of Fine Arts

As for *Automat* (1927), a woman sits alone with her back turned to a plate glass window that "reflects only the twin receding rows of ceiling lights and nothing else of the automat interior. It allows nothing of the street, or whatever is outside, to be seen." (Strand, 2001:43) Again, the isolation, the feeling of alienation and loneliness.

Edward Hopper

Automat (1927)

Des Moines Art Center

In *Western Motel* (1957) a woman sits near the end of a bed in front of a large window with unpulled curtains and through which she is bathed by sunlight. Through the motel window, we can see the front of a car and some hills.

Edward Hopper

Western Motel (1957)

Yale University Art Gallery

In *Hotel Window* (1956) an elderly woman sits before a large picture window in a hotel lobby. The window shows very little of a dark city street, other than a partially illuminated large pillar and the face of a building across the street.

Edward Hopper

Hotel Window (1956)

Private Collection

In *Hotel Room* (1931), as noted earlier, the window reveals nothing but the darkness of the night, a black square, in accordance with the woman´s mood. The window is a mirror of the viewer, taking the same voyeuristic stance at the opposite end of the room. In this sense, it becomes an eye looking in upon a woman reading on her bed. In another sense, it provides her with an emotional escape outward from that confined space. Through the window she can play both roles: the spied upon and the voyeur.

In *City Sunlight* (1954), as mentioned earlier, another woman, seated and in her underwear, leans and stares into the light that comes in through the window. "The

windows behind her lead to the windows of another building whose interior is black. Windows over parts of windows, each with a yellow-green shade and one with a curtain gathered at one side, create a rhythm of overlapping planes." (Strand, 2001:55)

In *Room in New York* (1932), as previously discussed, the scene is painted as if seen through a large open window with a darkened frame. It takes place at night since the interior is lit by artificial light.

As for *Excursion into Philosophy* (1959), the light comes in from a large open curtainless window.

Edward Hopper

Excursion into Philosophy (1959)

Private Collection

The theme in *Summer in the City* (1949) mirrors *Excursion into Philosophy*. The light also comes in from two open curtainless windows, and from another one in the adjoining room; in both paintings, the harsh light surrounding the couples suggests imprisonment in their dramas.

Edward Hopper

Summer in the City (1949)

Private Collection

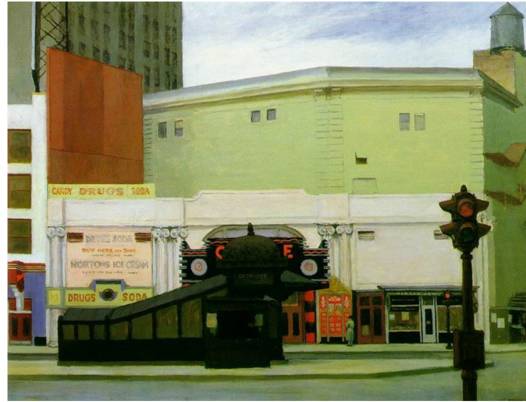
As discussed earlier, in *Sun in an Empty Room* (1963), a barren space, without anything or anyone in it, is penetrated by the light that comes from a curtainless window and falls twice in the same room.

In *Eleven A.M.* (1926) a solitary woman, with her hands clasped together, sits in profile in a blue armchair, staring out through a large open window illuminated by daylight. She is naked and wears a pair of flat shoes. Her nakedness and face are hidden by her hair to provide her with dignity. She appears to be waiting for someone or seeing someone leaving. This figure dominates the scene, partly because of the strong contrast of the paleness of her skin with the other colours in the painting: the blue of the chair, the deep red of the lamp, and the green of the curtains in the background. The colours help to give the painting a dramatic dimension and a melancholic feel.

Edward Hopper
Eleven A.M. (1926)
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden

According to Wendy Lopez, in her academic work *Windows as Expressive Elements in the Art of Edward Hopper and Fairfield Porter* (1990), Hopper makes three distinct uses of windows. Each usage depends on the position that the viewer is compelled to take about the painting at hand. The first category is the "window-as-eye", where the painting often is a portrait of a house or other building. The structure is rarely on the same plan as the viewer, as it may rise above or sit below eye level. The placement seems calculated to increase the viewer's anxiety. The building itself almost assumes an entity, human or animal-like, and the window becomes a telling feature. In *The Circle Theatre*, as remarked by Mark Strand, “The paired windows, the paired vents, the marquee bull´s eyes, and the streetlights seem to be looking, too – sometimes at us. This is both unsettling

and amusing; that is, we are being stared down by the very picture we are looking at.” (Strand, 2001:21) I share Strand´s impression, I too feel I am being stared down by these buildings.



Edward Hopper

The Circle Theatre (1936)

Private Collection

The turbulent sky, the yellow light, and the dramatic black shadows create a sense of impending storm in the painting *Captain Upton's House*. The windows mirror the sky, reflecting that sense of foreboding, and refusing to reveal their depths. They look out but deny entry. They act as a barrier to the viewer.

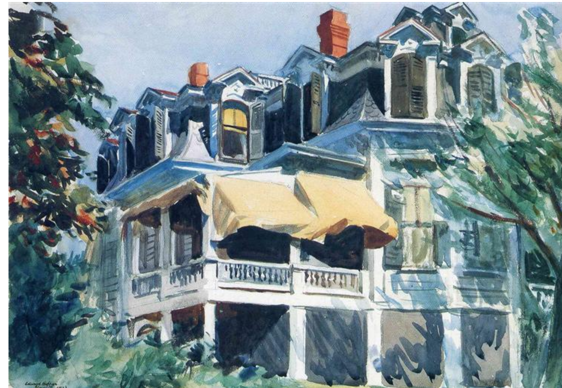
Edward Hopper

Captain Upton´s House (1927)

The Art Institute of Chicago

The canvas porch awnings in the house with *The Mansard Roof* look like a skirt caught in the breeze and the elevation of the house creates a dramatic effect. One window

catches the viewer´s eye due to its yellow shade: it seems to look down on us, expressing a scolding through its yellow eye.



Edward Hopper

The Mansard Rooftop (1923)

Brooklyn Museum

Haskell's House is a magnificent mansion, superior in position and decoration. There are physical and psychological barriers to gaining access to it. There is a steep, narrow, and imposed climb; and a throng of window-eyes, elegant, and proud, close themselves to anyone who approaches.

Edward Hopper

Haskell´s House (1924)

National Gallery of Art

Adam's House depicts a simple and unpretentious house. Its façade is bathed by the late-afternoon sun, creating long shadows. Structural elements, such as the white picket fence, the stoop, windows toward the street, and the short walk-up, could easily

read as "All-American Hominess." This house is a self-conscious narrow house on a narrow lot, with carefully marked boundaries. Windows are located only street side, reinforcing its emotionally restrained content. There can be no visual interaction with neighbouring houses. Window shades are drawn to prevent the intrusion of nature and any involvement in life on the outside. This house is in self-containment and turns its eyes inward.

Edward Hopper
Adam´s House (1928)
Wichita Art Museum

Two public buildings in this "window-as-eye" category are depicted in *New York Pavements* and *Custom House*. In the former painting, the scale provided by the nun in the foreground and the angle enhance the sense of size. The yellow half-pulled window shades in an overall grey composition becomes the focal point. The windows are low and bordered with large stones, with a tough, scale pattern.

Edward Hopper
New York Pavements (1924)
Chrysler Museum of Art

Custom House takes on the character of its function - a good government building. The shaded windows appear as condescending eyes that peer out, offering no internal information. In both these works the building maintains a measured distance from the viewer. Hopper's positioning of the viewer is never dominant, but often subordinate and subtly threatened. Also used are the devices of awnings, shades, and curtains, and deliberately elongated windows to produce an anthropomorphic and psychologically rich result. Thus, windows become veiled glances or hostile stares. As symbols of a psychological state, buildings with "eyes" assume character qualities and engage the viewer to imagine the actual individuals behind these windows, protected in their enclosed darkness.

Edward Hopper
Custom House (sd)
Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art

This leads to a second category, "the individual behind the window", as proposed by Lopez. Here the viewer enters the interiors, public and private, or shares outdoor spaces. We watch the scene at an emotional distance and encounter the individual behind the window, whose presence we have sensed all along. That sense of people enclosed, keeping to their private little worlds, is confirmed. The window is their eye on the world, behind which they can safely hide. In *Hotel by a Railroad,* previously mentioned, we see such a couple in their room. The man may be described as the secretive presence behind the window as mentioned in the previous category. *Summer Evening* adds a new twist to the window's role. The viewer is positioned in the dark. A young couple is spotlighted as if onstage, contained within the boundaries of the porch and its light. Their behaviour is also contained, as they place as much possible distance between themselves and their two *chaperons*: the very felt presence of Mom and Pop is represented by the window and the

door. The gaps in the curtains and the open window establish a visual link with the woman's pose and attire, which simultaneously conceal and reveal.

Edward Hopper

Summer Evening (1947)

Private Collection

In *Cape Cod Evening*, previously discussed, the husband sits with his back to the door, and the wife leans against the window. Their dog may venture into the fields, but people remain intrinsically anchored to architectural structures such as windows, doors, and porches, both physically and psychologically. This is very typical of Hopper, as evidenced again in *Four Lane Road*, previously mentioned, and in *Sunlight on Brownstone*.

Edward Hopper

Sunlight on Brownstone (1956)

Wichita Art Museum

Lopez states that the third category, “viewer-voyeur,” occurs when Hopper uses the windows to showcase an interior scene. It serves as a barrier between those inside and the viewer outside who can never participate, only watch. The viewer's position as voyeur is enhanced by contrasts: he may be shrouded in the darkness outside, while the diner´s customers drink coffee inside under harsh fluorescent lighting, as in *Nighthawks*. In *Rooms for Tourists*, individual rooms light up. Hopper manages to make the viewer feel like a prowler in the night as we stare, positioned in the dark, out of exposure.

Edward Hopper
Rooms for Tourists (1945)
Yale University Art Gallery

If it is daytime, and the viewer is in the light, the interiors may be darkened to silhouette the figure behind the window, as is the case in *New York Office*.

Some of Hopper's windows are representative of a human feature, the eye, in the face of a building. They are protective and suspicious. Others serve as a transparent wall between those inside and out. Shutters and shades provide secrecy and closure. Windows are the voyeuristic eyeglasses through which the viewer stares. They are also a barrier to nature. When light is allowed access to human spaces, it has shallow penetration, regulated by narrow openings under man's control, as in *Rooms by the Sea*. They carry a psychological dimension as they represent loneliness and separateness. Many of Hopper´s windows are in public buildings or in the transient settings of hotel rooms. Even houses do not feel like havens; they represent the uncomfortable combination of rooms and individuals with little to share. Accordingly, the viewer-voyeur is also assigned an alienated stance.

Hopper was able to create unique and different languages through his windows. And beyond those specific expressions, his windows grant us an internal view of his personal world.

To conclude, we have seen that Hopper's paintings are imbued with psychological connotations. Light and shadow, architecture, and people play off one another to create a sense of loneliness and alienation. The dark tonalities reinforce this tension.

Hopper interprets the American society of his time through his paintings. His themes of urban or country life, alienation, and loneliness, empty cityscapes and countryside, the stark light of Cape Cod, silent hills, neo-Victorian houses, and estranged couples, have been indelibly imprinted on Americans' collective sense of themselves and their country. Nevertheless, it is through his pensive, silent, solitary characters that the complexity of his work stands out. Hopper's imagery continues to have an impact on contemporary culture and the artist holds a place in the American mind.

Although some critics saw Hopper's oeuvre as an expression of American identity – the so-called "American scene", according to Henry James's [24] expression ⁻ he always rejected painters who caricatured the country through "typical" images. He declared that he never wanted to paint an "American scene," just as the French never wanted to paint a "French scene." However, Hopper picked up the grim vein of puritanism that recognized the desolation of human existence, which had so deeply marked American culture. He remained faithful throughout his life to a conception of art as a truthful record of perceptions. He stubbornly followed his path, bearing witness to the special character of America in the first half of the 20th century.

He intuited that the greatest mystery is not present in what is mysterious, but in ordinary reality, in what is far from mystery. His paintings point to the heart of our being in the world. The meaning of his paintings is not psychological or sociological. Nevertheless, it touches the fundamental strings of human life: its permanent incubation state; the stress of people´s expectations; the unstable balance between melancholy and desire, loneliness and waiting for someone; the need for some form of "salvation" and "grace;" the gaze beyond the window, directed to a possible "annunciation."

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24. Henry James. *The American Scene*. 1907.

The present chapter has skimmed through the life and works of Edward Hopper, and in doing so, has laid the foundations for the arguments which are presented in the succeeding chapters. City, alienation, loneliness, silence, stillness, light and shadow are recurring themes in the remainder of this work. Hopper´s realistic portrayal of ordinary urban scenes leads the beholder to the recognition of strangeness in familiar surroundings.

His figurative painting, because bathed in this climate of "disturbing strangeness," poses questions and makes us ponder on many subject matters. But his work also intersects and establishes a dialogue with another great visual art of the 20th century: cinema.

All quotes from works in other languages have been translated by me.

CHAPTER III

EDWARD HOPPER AND THE CINEMA

1. CINEMA AND STAGE PAINTINGS
2. CINEMATOGRAPHIC IMAGES
3. AMERICAN REALISM

EDWARD HOPPER AND THE CINEMA

1. CINEMA AND STAGE PAINTINGS

> *Great art is the outward expression of an inner life in the artist, and this inner life will result in his personal vision of the world… The inner life of a human being is a vast and varied realm.*
>
> Edward Hopper

As discussed previously, on his first trip to Paris Hopper was impressed by the work of European painters and absorbed many characteristics of their masterpieces. Among these were included the female figures of Edgar Degas's *In a Café* (1875–76) and Edouard Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergères* (1882). His works from the 1920s onwards clearly grasp Degas's compositional strategies: severe cropping, extreme diagonals, and unusual visual perspectives. In Amsterdam, Rembrandt's *The Night Watch* (1642) impressed him with its powerful lighting and operatic tension. These influences, coupled with his life-long interest in stage and cinema sets, surfaced in Hopper's oeuvre.

Since Giotto's time, one of the most crucial functions of painting, if not the most important, has been telling stories. Cinema is a way of telling stories through images and that interested Hopper because it was imbued in the popular culture of his time. That is why Hopper and cinema constitute a perfect communion and his work connects so easily with narrative and cinematographic aesthetics.

A contemporary of the invention of cinema, the artist made numerous tributes to the seventh art in his work. Nevertheless, we hardly see the screen and the film itself, but rather the spectators who are absorbed in their thoughts, in moments when there is no projection (arrival, intermission) or the pensive usherette. Hopper was infatuated with cinema, and he used to go on a cinema binge when he lacked inspiration. In his own words, "When I don't feel in the mood for painting, I go to the movies for a week or

more."[25] He and his wife frequently visited the movies from their apartment in Greenwich Village, where they lived for 40 years. Thanks to the indications provided in the *Edward Hopper* catalogue (under Sheena Wagstaff´s direction, Tate Modern, London, 2004), we have an idea of Hopper´s eclectic tastes in cinema. He enjoyed watching gangster movies, *film noir*, and European movies.

The attraction of the stage was manifold for the artist as it combined elements of artifice and performance with those of anonymity and voyeurism, which were the central themes of Hopper's art. Hopper loved the theatre and the cinema, and they became subjects for his paintings, each form influencing his compositions. Everything was prepared for the show: cabarets, theatre, cinema, and life itself, behind the windows, in the bar, the office, the bedroom, the apartment.

In several instances, his painting draws its subject matter from the stage and the screen. Hopper portrayed the isolation of moviegoers, who turn in on themselves as they wait for the curtain to go up or the lights to go down.

Hopper's major paintings representing stage and cinema will be analysed below.

1. *Solitary Figure in a Theatre*

Edward Hopper
Solitary Figure in a Theatre (c. 1902)
Whitney Museum of American Art

25. As quoted by Gerald Matt in *Western Motel. Edward Hopper and Contemporary Art*. 2008.

Solitary Figure in a Theatre, one of his earliest known paintings, announces and introduces his fascination with the stage and its related melancholy and solitary mood. It depicts a single spectator, apparently a woman, seated in an empty theatre hall, holding a white paper (perhaps a programme), and an empty stage. It is imposing, and powerful, in white, black, and grey.

I came across the poem below by Linda Pastan, former Poet Laureate of Maryland, which I consider a perfectly accurate and beautiful, albeit sad, description of this painting about alienation and loneliness.

EDWARD HOPPER, UNTITLED

An empty theatre: seats
shrouded in white
like rows of headstones;
the curtain about to rise
(or has it fallen?)
on a scene
of transcendental
silence.

And the audience?
A solitary figure sheathed
in black, a woman
in a hat perhaps
(more abstract
shape than woman)
sitting alone
in the cavernous dark.

This is quintessential Hopper –
cliché of loneliness
transformed by brushstroke
into something part paint,
part desperation.

"Oil on board," the label says,
as if even a tree
had to be sacrificed.

Linda Pastan, "Edward Hopper, Untitled" in *The New Yorker*, September 12, 2011
https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/09/12/edward-hopper-untitled

The first stanza of this poem deals with death. The poet begins by comparing the empty theatre to a cemetery: "seats shrouded in white/ like rows of headstones." Even the question "(or has it fallen?)" may refer to the final curtain of life. The whole atmosphere is "a scene of transcendental silence," so peculiar to graveyards.

The second stanza continues in the same mood. Focusing now on the audience, the poet describes the only figure in the painting as "A solitary figure sheathed in black, / a woman in a hat perhaps." This description suggests someone in mourning, a widow perhaps, visiting a cemetery. But "(more abstract shape than woman)" sounds like an almost ghostly figure, while "sitting alone in the cavernous dark" describes a frightening atmosphere and space, not an inviting entertainment venue.

Finally, the third stanza mentions Hopper, his universe, and his ability to transform with his brush the "cliché of loneliness/ (…) into something part paint, / part desperation." Loneliness and desperation are two themes dear to Hopper and frequent in his oeuvre, as discussed in chapter II. The poem closes by returning to the initial theme, death. The poet refers to the materials the painting is made of: « "Oil on board, the label says", / as if even a tree/ had to be sacrificed. » The death of a tree was necessary for the painting to be made. The whole poem has dark, lonely tones, like the painting it refers to.

In "The Empty Stage in Edward Hopper's Early Sunday Morning, Girlie Show, and Two Comedians," Philip Smith argues that "an empty stage at the start of the performance is an invitation for the audience to examine the objects before them and anticipate the action to follow. An empty stage at the end of a performance is an invitation for the audience to reflect upon what they have just seen." That seems to be exactly the "activity" Hopper´s characters are absorbed in, in *Solitary Figure in a Theatre, Two on the Aisle*, *First Row Orchestra*, and *Intermission*, that will be discussed below.

2. *Soir Bleu*

Edward Hopper
Soir Bleu (1914)
Whitney Museum of American Art

Hopper's interest in clowns, or Pierrot characters, began while he was studying in Paris and came across Watteau´s work. In *Soir Bleu*, a stage-like composition, the curtain rises to reveal a Parisian café terrace on a summer evening. Small groups of individuals are seated at three bistro tables. On the right, an elegantly dressed bourgeois couple looks surprised by the arrival of a little-too-flashy woman; this constitutes a moment of transition, of passage, in the narrative of the painting. To their left, an odd trio: three male figures occupy the central table, including a Pierrot, the famous white clown of the *commedia dell'arte*. His face is floured, two vertical red lines split his eyes, and a cigarette escapes from his red-tinted lips, unlit, unsmoked. He bears some resemblance to Hopper in build and appearance; this is a moment of disjunction, caused by the unusual presence of a clown in a café. He sits in front of a soldier in uniform and a man with a red beard who holds a cigarette in his mouth, perhaps a painter. This character is portrayed in profile and a white wooden pole hides him slightly. On the left, a character with a thin mustache sits with his back on them; the cap he wears signals him as a sailor. Finally, standing at the back, a woman (a prostitute?), wearing a green dress with a plunging neckline, dominates the terrace from her height. She is wearing heavy-duty makeup, almost like a mask.

In addition to the Parisian bistro furniture, a white wooden balustrade adorns the "backstage." Three different layers of blue paint are superimposed, bringing out the contrasting colours - the white, red, and black that mainly colour the scene. The moving blue of the flows of the Seine is distinguished between two balusters. Above the balustrade, a strip of midnight blue landscape is cut out under a clear blue summer sky,

giving a certain depth to the scene. The lighting of the terrace is provided by some colourful lanterns whose soft and diffuse light is reflected on the glasses and the golden metal of the tables. Under the effect of a draft, they oscillate softly.

This work seems to be a theatrical staging in which Hopper shows a panorama of Parisian society, in memory of the three stays of his youth. Under the guise of caricatured characters, Hopper brings together the different social categories he had the chance to encounter. But the painting does not pretend to be a genre scene, a study of morals, or a slice of life. It is a symbolic view of society, a microcosm: the bourgeoisie, the army, the artistic world, and prostitution. It is also a kind of allegory, under the guise of an observed scene, where two characters occupy the major place: the prostitute, and the clown; the former, because she is standing, very visible, and staring; the latter, because he is voluminous, and placed at the centre of the painting. Each one plays her/his part; they do not play together.

This painting is also a tribute to French painting, and more particularly to the Impressionist painters whose works Hopper had discovered in Paris. *Soir Bleu* reminds us of the famous coffee scenes painted by Édouard Manet and Edgar Degas. The pole that cuts off the view, and the painter's ear, as if to recall Van Gogh's severed ear, recalls the point of view that Degas adopts in his *Femmes à la terrasse d'un café le soir*.

Edgar Degas
Femmes à la terrasse d'un café le soir (1877)
Musée d'Orsay

The attraction *Soir Bleu* holds on the viewer is due to the singular atmosphere that emerges from the painted scene. There is a strength in the oppositions that govern its composition: the total and heavy silence that fills the terrace of the bistro, usually a place

of conviviality so dear to Parisian life; the distance amongst the characters, reunited yet absent from the world around them, absorbed as they are in their inner lives, engaged in their thoughts. Widespread incommunicability: the time is not for a party, but for melancholy. Thus, *Soir Bleu* may be understood as the evening of the blues. Hopper transcribed to this painting the feeling of loneliness, melancholy, and isolation he felt while in Paris. He painted a society that was no longer united and in which he did not find his place. The title may have been borrowed from Arthur Rimbaud's short poem “Sensation” (1870), whose first verse – Par les soirs bleus d'été, j’irai dans les sentiers – fully suggests the feeling of the blues of *Soir Bleu*.

The character of Pierrot, who catches the eye with his brilliant whiteness, illuminated figure, and central location, seems to be particularly representative of the decay perceived by Hopper. Far from the naïve and buffoon character of *commedia dell'arte*, the gloomy figure of the clown appears detached and displays a look of overwhelming loneliness, despite being surrounded by people. Paraphrasing Emanuela Morganti in “Soir Bleu. Le solitudini di Edward Hopper,” his emotional condition is that of a man, not that of the circus character he plays. This is not the old cliché about the sad clown. He is the character Verlaine described in the first quatrain of the sonnet dedicated to him:

Ce n’est plus le rêveur lunaire du vieil air
Qui riait aux jeux dans les dessus de porte;
Sa gaîté, comme sa chandelle, hélas! est morte,
Et son spectre aujourd’hui nous hante, mince et clair.

Paul Verlaine, "Pierrot" in *Jadis et Naguère*, 1881

Indeed, Hopper portrayed Pierrot in the manner of a melancholic specter, a hollow figure of the blues of the modern world. The only non-realistic element in a realistic setting, he seems to intervene as an allegory of the death of the cheerfulness of the ancient world. There is a blood-red scarp that vertically bars his eyes. His face is a death mask, he is a tragic, funeral clown. No wonder the painter’s character, concealed in part by the pole and his beret, looks at Pierrot: he represents Hopper who, looking at the white clown, looks at melancholy. His loneliness anticipates those that will follow in Hopper's artistic production, the infinite catalogue of American loneliness, made of people and places. The

works of Edward Hopper are thus linked to each other, and each one to the thread of absence, expectation, and want.

3. *Two on the Aisle*

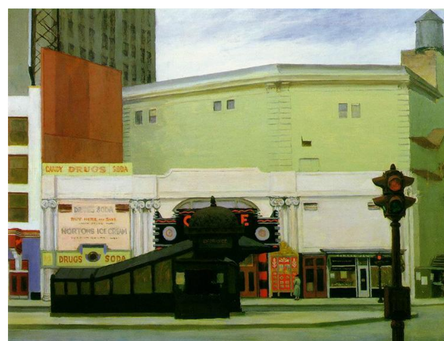
Edward Hopper

*Two on the Aisle (*1927)

Toledo Museum of Art

Hopper's first major painting of a theatre scene was *Two on the Aisle*. It seems to be a simple composition, portraying three figures in an otherwise empty theatre. This painting reminds us that when we go to the cinema or theatre we are surrounded by people, perhaps even by friends and family, but we are alone with our emotions and experience as audience members. Hopper did not paint a world without people, he painted isolated people who are absorbed in themselves.

4. *The Circle Theatre*



Edward Hopper

The Circle Theatre (1936)

Private Collection

The Circle Theatre, in turn, features a theatre building from the outside. The painting displays filmic and melancholic elements, by framing a single isolated human figure, small and lost, within an empty, albeit visually busy, urban landscape. This figure is almost completely swallowed up by the colour contrasts of the surrounding architecture. The shopfronts are dimly lit to create a sense of inertia and stillness. Hopper creates a dreadful atmosphere that is emphasised by the greenish, cold light. Both Hopper's choice of colours and compositional structure highlight the tensions between man and the cityscape, thus creating a sense of overbearing solitude.

Strand points out that this painting “is different from other Hoppers. The many shapes it contains, presented in surprising detail, are crowded together, and the space they share is unusually shallow. This is the only Hopper that has the look of a collage.” (Strand, 2001:20) He further remarks that there “is a concrete island holding a subway entrance” which is:

> a part of a series of overlappings and occlusions. The subway entrance and the small booth in front of it seem, along with the theatre marquee, gathered into one predominantly dark shape. And yet, just as obviously, the entrance is separate from the marquee. It partially blocks it, so that all we see of CIRCLE is C and E, an alphabetic homonym for see. It is possible that Hopper is humorously reminding the viewer of what he must do. (Strand, 2001:21)

By inserting the Horton’s Ice Cream brand, which no longer existed when the painting was created, Hopper addressed the film industry as one of the most important American entertainment industries, implicitly alluding to the major problems caused by the increased economic competition caused by the Great Depression. These problems caused inhumane conditions and social upheaval.

5. *The Sheridan Theatre*

Edward Hopper

The Sheridan Theatre (1937)

Newark Museum

This is yet another instance when Hopper elected to paint an empty movie theatre and convey its ambiance. Movie theatres themselves were becoming vibrant movie palaces that featured luxurious settings. The Sheridan Theatre, which seated 2,000 guests, was one of those and it was close to where Hopper lived. The luxury is conveyed by the vibrant colours and the lights that accentuate them. The glow of the yellow and golden lights transmits a sense of tranquillity and warmth, as opposed to the menacing colours of *The Circle Theatre*. The painting portrays three subjects: a solitary woman figure leans up against the railing in a large lobby; an usherette engages in a conversation with a man in a corner, thus conveying the social aspect of movie-going. Another striking element is the atmosphere of isolation and solitude created by the distance between the woman standing on the right and the people on the left. As if that was not enough, no one else is seen.

5. *New York Movie*

Edward Hopper

New York Movie (1939)

Museum of Modern Art

In 1939, Edward Hopper completed a masterpiece that directly approached cinema, and that is considered the greatest painting of a cinema interior. I will therefore discuss it in more depth than other stage or cinema-related paintings. Unlike *The Sheridan Theatre*, where the usherette is a secondary character, in *New York Movie* the usherette is the main character. Hopper drew his young wife Jo, who modelled for most of his paintings, in various poses standing under a lamp in the hall of their apartment.

The light captures the beautiful pensive figure of a young woman. Melancholy hovers in many of his most famous paintings, but Hopper rarely represented the typical melancholic pose. However, in *New York Movie* the usherette rests her chin on her hand, revealing the apathy of someone who lives her life in black and white and recalling the characteristic *gestus melancholicus*. She is in a complete state of absorption, oblivious to her surroundings. It is the portrait of an era in which cinema, the rutilant Hollywood dream machine, is still an enigmatic and inexplicable rite, and the audience lives the thrill of letting themselves be embraced by the darkness of the room, which allows escape, freedom, and transgression. *New York Movie* invites the viewer to reflect on the traditional similarity, as old as cinema itself, between the situation of the spectator in the cinema room and that of the dreamer.

Hopper deconstructs the glamorous image of the usherette's job through her melancholic countenance. The daily routine of the usherettes was hard, with long working

hours and low pay. They were not allowed to watch the movie during business hours. Therefore, she waits for the curtain to fall, daydreaming and pondering on her own life, and problems. The painting also alludes to the fact that, behind the idea of cinema as a place of dream and fantasy, a commercial organization is economically active in the entertainment industry. According to Mike McKiernan, in an article titled "Edward Hopper, New York Movie 1939," the screen shows an image of the snowy Himalayan peaks of Frank Capra's film *Lost Horizon* (1937).

In the penumbra of the room, where heads are outlined, there is a contrast among the screen, from where a grey light flows, the red of the ceiling, the velvet curtain, and the lamp in the corridor. The static figure counterpoints the screen with its incessantly flickering images and illusions. Her stance points out the gap between fantasy land and the real world. She has been compared to the bored-looking waitress in Edouard Manet´s *Le Bar aux Folies-Bergères*. Like Manet, Hopper depicts the illusory theatre world as attractive, glamorous, and yet, hollow.

Edouard Manet
Le Bar aux Folies-Bergères (1882)
Musée d'Orsay

Mark Strand argues that this painting "has something of *Automat*`s somberness – the row of lights, the thoughtful woman (…)." (Strand, 2001:44) He also notes that the two sides of the painting, separated by a vertical, are remarkably different. "The moviegoers look at the screen in front of them, the usherette, taken up with her thoughts, looks within." Strand further states "The usherette´s preference for privacy over the silver screen, her inwardness, wins our sympathy." Because, he explains, "the way we stand before a painting may resemble more the usherette´s stance. (…) we are looking both *at* and *in*, moving between the two as we shift our attention from one side of the canvas to the other." (Strand, 2001:45) That is exactly how Hopper wants the viewer to act. Also,

the visual experience is dynamic: from the vision of a vision (moviegoers, screen) to a direct vision (external viewer, usherette).

Strand´s subtle analysis sheds light on the complexity of Hopper´s art, his mastering of composition and colour, his capacity to engage the viewer´s attention in an exploration of the painting and a reflection on it (both optical and *cosa mentale*), his capacity to give the viewer (a little like Vermeer) the feeling that *New York Movie* hides an allegory, but that it will remain forever enigmatic.

6. *Girlie Show*

Edward Hopper

Girlie Show (1941)

Private Collection

Girlie Show portrays public sexual entertainment and voyeurism through the eroticism of the female figure, a burlesque stripper entering the stage, on display for a male audience. She is red-headed and wears nothing but G-string and high-heeled blue shoes; a blue garment she has taken off is waving behind her. The main curtain, dark and folded, is down and constitutes a backdrop for the scene. The dancer is lit by a spotlight which makes her body bright and casts the rest of the scene in somber tones.

7. *First Row Orchestra*

Edward Hopper

*First Row Orchestra (*1951)

Hirshhorn Modern Art Museum

The environment is similar to that of another painting, *Two on the Aisle*. People are waiting for a performance to begin, and the primary figure, an elegant lady in a fur-coat, seems to be oblivious to the world's stimuli as she reads the programme. The painting depicts five, eventually six, people seated in the first two rows of an elegant theatre. The blue velvet curtain is down, it is either pre-performance or intermission.

8. *Intermission*

Edward Hopper

*Intermission (*1963)

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

Intermission is one of Hopper´s largest paintings. He idealised it while he was watching a movie and Jo arranged for him to work on the painting in a vacant theatre.

However, *Intermission* was completed at his home and studio in New York City. This painting resonates with *Solitary Figure in a Theatre*, as the subject matter is the same. It portrays a lonely woman in a theatre, seated in the first row of a side aisle, in an apparently empty movie theatre, waiting for others to return from intermission. This work evokes another type of intermission: an instant between events that allows the woman depicted to be alone with her ponderings, as she stares into the distance with a vacant look, in complete absorption.

9. *Two Comedians*

Edward Hopper

*Two Comedians (*1965)

Private collection

Hopper was eighty-three when he painted *Two Comedians*. It was intended as a personal statement, a dramatic farewell painting. He died less than two years later, and Jo the following year. *Two Comedians* represents two figures caught in the moment before their final bow and retreat to the darkness of an ominous stage. A spotlight is centred on the figures. Jo later confirmed it represented the two of them. Hopper presents himself and his wife as isolated Pierrots, cropping the image to remove the audience completely. The tall male, Hopper (he was an imposing 2 m tall figure), takes the hand of the petite female comedian, in opposition to his non-communicative couples in *Room in New York* and *Cape Cod Evening*. Husband and wife point tenderly to one another, delicately recognising the considerable role Jo played both in Hopper's life and his art. Jo described *Two Comedians* as "a dark stage and two small figures out of a pantomime."

(https://www.edwardhopper.net/two-comedians.jsp) The stage looks massive and sturdy, compared to the frailty of the human figures. The gloomy and empty stage behind them infuses the scene with the sense of mystery and narrative interruption that is so characteristic of Hopper´s art.

Hopper's first-known and very last paintings, *Solitary Figure in a Theatre* (1902), and *Two Comedians* (1965) are strikingly dark and lonely theatre paintings, void of any glitter or glamour. A piece of trivia: *Two Comedians* was, at some point, owned by Frank Sinatra.

Having reached this point, I deem it necessary to mention the issue of absorption in Hopper´s paintings, although I have referred to it in passing while discussing some paintings. Hopper´s characters usually see something the viewers of the paintings can only imagine. These characters are absorbed in their thoughts, pondering on their lives, and oblivious to the fact that they are being observed by a voyeur/painter, Hopper, and the voyeur/viewer contemplating the painting.

The question of absorption is dealt with by the art critic Michael Fried in his book *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (1980). He addresses the perennial tension in painting between form and content, sophistication, and sincerity. Fried stresses a sort of denial of the beholder with the phenomenon of absorption and the drift of the "serious" subject towards theatricality. The author uses Diderot and other eighteen-century art critics' writings to understand how the beholder of paintings is positioned. He resorts to an abundance of paintings and citations of art criticism to show how painted characters ignore the beholder, first by being absorbed in quiet activities, and later in self-abandonment.

> At the heart of my argument, underlying both the pursuit of absorption and the renewal of interest in the sister doctrines is the demand that the artist brings about a paradoxical relationship between painting and beholder - specifically, that he finds a way to neutralize or negate the beholder's presence, to establish the fiction that no one is standing before the canvas. (The paradox is that only if this is done can the beholder be stopped and held precisely there.) (Fried, 1980:108)

2. CINEMATOGRAPHIC IMAGES

We are no other than a moving row
Of Magic Shadow-shapes that come and go
Round with the Sun-illumined Lantern held
In Midnight by the Master of the Show.
Omar Khayyám, *The Rubaiyat* (1120)

As it has been discussed, Edward Hopper's interest in film and cinema influenced his work and his paintings display a cinematic quality. He is considered the painter with a cinematic eye, as his work revolves around the creation of atmosphere, environments, and the presence (or lack thereof) of the human figure. There is an evident relationship between the plasticity of the cinematographic image and the pictorial universe of Hopper.

By inventing cinema, man has not only invented a technique but another way of being in the world. Hopper, as a painter, is a witness of this novelty, of this modification of our existence; he represents the man of the time of cinema, this "seventh art" that is one of the characteristics of modern man. He painted the time of the *homo cinematographicus*.

Hopper's imagery is based on simple elements and circumstantial details, taken from places such as South Truro, Cape Cod, or from road trips through Maine, Canada, Mexico, or the West Coast; they make his work a painted road movie. It is as if an imaginary camera caught a certain moment, a detail, a character who, moreover, rarely looks directly at the lens, and when that occurs, he does it vaguely, conveying the feeling that there is a fourth wall. The reality is, therefore, mediated by a vision — that of the artist and, consequently, our own — that alludes to a state of mind, an untold story, a latent tension, a longing for what has never been experienced, or mere contemplation and discovery. Hopper conveys the emotional fundament caused by the off field in painting, that is, the cinematography of the painting. His works, as in a film, only show a part of reality, suggesting that something is hidden in the universe, always in the process of happening, in pure contemplation, in words that are not spoken, in the tension before the explosion.

Katarina Mirkovic, in an article titled "Hopper/Modern Life´s Solitude," argues that "by portraying figures in a slightly blurred manner, juxtaposing them against stark

geometric forms, and illuminating them in a specific way, the artist achieved an emblematic, mysterious, and rather cinematic atmosphere, so it is no wonder that the majority of his paintings are perceived as noir film snapshots in colour."

Hopper´s works developed a close relationship with film, in a relationship of reciprocal inspiration based on an intense visual closeness, focused on similar objects and the depiction of the "American Way of Life." The subjects of Hopper's paintings did not always come from direct observation of real life; from the beginning of his career until the 1940s, they came predominantly from *film noir*. Like the films he preferred, his works are about "the city," depicting an abstract notion of urban space rather than any specific city. Voyeurism is another common characteristic of moviegoing and urban life that Hopper´s paintings share. *Nighthawks* is, in many ways, emblematic of Edward Hopper's noirish, cinematic style, characterized by its voyeuristic perspectives, dramatic interaction of light and shadow, and emotionally isolated figures that inhabit anonymous urban spaces: roadside diners, gas stations, and hotels.

Hopper behaves like a movie director, who places the characters in a certain set; decides where to place the camera and calculates its movement; arranges the light and measures its intensity. His gaze is controlled and measured, and it displays an almost respectful distance. He shoots actors indoors looking outside, seldom staring at the camera: they seem to be waiting for something that will make sense out of their lives. Through skillful zoom, Hopper focuses on a situation only. There is no connection of sequences, nor evocation of actions accomplished or to be accomplished. The story is about to be told, but then it is immobilized. The scene is filled with an impenetrable, almost threatening, stillness. Each painting is like an isolated frame.

Space is one of the several elements that characterise Edward Hopper's painting style. Instead of exploring the depth of a given space, Hopper often contradicts the deep focus because he leads the viewer´s eye to a specific figure or situation. Examples of this are *Automat* and *New York Movie*; in these works, the eye first meets the human subject, that is, the nostalgic woman, and only then it is led to the surrounding space. The way Hopper captures and frames space, often decentralising it, is another important aspect of his style, as it is related to framing choices made by film directors.

Another element is light. Hopper blends the principles of *chiaroscuro* with *film noir´*s lighting, since he separates light from shadow, and highlights human figures,

forms, and textures. *Automat* is a perfect example of Hopper's suggestive use of light, and it perfectly conjures his cinematic sense of narrative. From *film noir* Hopper acquired a taste for the rational layout, and the fixed icon, enhanced by geometric architectural forms. Among the greatest luminists of the 20th century, Hopper proposed a bold use of lighting. Recreating in painting the effects of neon, he used natural and artificial flashes: sharp and crystalline, concentrated, and exact, flanked by unpredicted and prolonged shadows. Projected on small stages, light beams highlight instant details of the Hopperian daily epic, between lyricism and disorientation. It is a dramatic light; it can modulate itself in many ways; enhance the colours or turn them off. Sometimes it cuts the darkness of the nights of the metropolis; other times it penetrates deserted rooms or those inhabited by solitary figures. Hopper's realistic details represent both a psychological and subjective reality. The treatment of light is a resource that the artist utilises to create those environments of solitude; therefore, the symbolism of the figures in his paintings often lies in the way light illuminates them.

In an article titled "Edward Hopper and the cinematographic image", Marcos Kurtinaitis states that what is cinematographic in Hopper´s works is the use of framing, since there are obvious similarities with film plans in the limitation of perspective applied to the scenes he portrayed. His frameworks always insinuate the continuity of a space beyond the canvas, a common technique in film. More than just framing, his paintings also have cinematic scenography, an art director, and a set designer. The importance of the setting of his paintings is so great that, often, the scenario is the subject itself, and the human figure becomes superfluous. An empty street or hotel room is simultaneously scenery and character, constantly evoking an absent humankind. Sceneries like the one portrayed on *Early Sunday Morning* are empty places. The scenery acts as another character, even in a painting in which the human figure is present.

There is also the issue of narrative. When we talk about cinema, we always think about narrative cinema. Hopper´s works always refer to a narrative situation, even if it is an implicit one. Having been an illustrator of book covers, a task that requires condensing into one drawing the narrative of an entire work, he was aware of the possibilities of synthesizing in a single image a complex narrative content. If this occurs, it is because Hopper manages, as cinema does, to invest in elements of visual composition of narrative value.

In cinema, in terms of purely visual construction (excluding sound and dialogues), editing is the narrative element *par excellence*. Since a painter does not have at his disposal a succession of plans with different frameworks, he resorts to other composition features to narrate and draw attention to certain details of a scene: a peculiar kind of internal editing, in which our eyes, passing from one point to another of the painting, operate the delimitation of the plans, as camera and editor do. Hopper places the entirety of a scene on each canvas but manages to highlight details by applying colour and light effects, drawing attention to a particular element. He rejects being faithful to reality as it presents itself; it does not bother him to subvert laws of physics to ensure that a beam of light plots an impossible trajectory to guide our gaze and highlight a certain element of the composition, as it occurs with the clown smoking a cigarette in *Soir Bleu*. If cinema owes much of its narrative to the possibilities of editing, the great narrator in painting is light. Film photography owes much to all the light research undertaken by painting.

When we refer to the affinity between painting and cinema in Hopper, the expression "cinematographic image" is imposed to the extent that this characteristic visible in his paintings is linked to an image of archetypal cinema. While admiring one of his paintings, we do not think of any scene from a specific film (perhaps only in the case of scenes that purposely emulate one of his paintings), but in a certain combination of elements – theme, scenery, light, framing – that reminds us of the type of image that we consider proper to cinema. The cinema under discussion is, of course, the American.

Edward Hopper was a typical American who was born in Nyack, in New York State, and lived and died in New York City. His subject matters were always intricately linked to the American experience and the "American way of life." There is no doubt that he helped to cement a certain image of America in the collective unconscious. Both American classical cinema and Hopper´s paintings are based on the reproduction of life in the United States. Hopper painted throughout the 1930s, 40s, 50s, and 60s; that was exactly the period when American cinema gained world hegemony as a representation of modern life. The relationship between his works and cinema, therefore, is related to the cementing of an iconic image of America. What we recognize in his paintings is that universe that American cinema has accustomed us to.

He painted the America of cinema, and the cinema has been nourished by Hopper's painting. To the point that we question, when re-watching American *film noirs*, whether this or that image, that shot, that sequence is some kind of quote from Hopper,

or if Hopper has integrated it into his work, or if it is America as it is, with its white wooden houses, the streets of New York, the gas stations, the motels, and so forth. Many films have quoted famous Hopper paintings to place the action of a sequence in them; sometimes the filmmaker was so closely inspired by the painter´s universe that it looks like a citation. Hopper borrows from cinema its framings, light, and atmosphere; cinema takes back from Hopper what the painter received from it and stages it.

The involuntary film Hopper directed in his oeuvre portrays the face of a desolate, puritanical, perverse America. Hopper shares with the cinematographic image, above all, the ability to insinuate psychologically complex content in a realistic figuration of the world, to offer us the mystery of our inner worlds under the appearance of the most familiar images of the outside world.

3. AMERICAN REALISM

Edward Hopper is considered the realist painter of twentieth-century America *par excellence*. He witnessed the evolution and growth of cinema, lived the two World Wars and the Great Depression, and coexisted with the post-war period. He thus became a faithful representant of the reality of his time: an indefinite society that had suffered the loss of its values. (Cerrato, 2010:24)

Although his fame is supported by the notion that he captured the reality of that society, Hopper never agreed with the statement that his paintings are a reliable representation of the American scene of his time; rather, he always claimed that the creative process is a conjunction of reality and imagination. In 1953, Hopper submitted a statement to *Reality*, an art publication, where he wrote: "Great art is the outward expression of an inner life in the artist, and this inner life will result in his personal vision of the world."[26] One of the characteristics that facilitate the recognition and identification of a real Hopperesque painting is the implicit incorporation of the viewer´s gaze. Hopper's paintings, especially those that include human figures, are susceptible to multiple readings of their narrative essence. His use of different pictorial media, such as his representation of light, encourages the viewer to try to interpret the story that is shown;

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26. https://artincontext.org/edward-hopper/

as Erika Bornay affirms, it is the viewer's sensibility that leads him to suspect that there is a beginning and an end to the story depicted; deciphering these limits, however, requires a more complex subjective process. (Bornay, 2009:68)

Hopper believed in the objective value of vision. His paintings are always born out of reality: an open window, a mysterious house, a lighthouse, a road; the squalor of everyday life; the sadness of Sundays; the non-places - diners, hotel and motel rooms. The American painter is often appointed, for chronological purposes, as a representative of the third and final phase of Modernism, marked by a return to figurative and realism. This classification is particularly important because it links his work directly to cinema, given the representative nature, or realistic vocation, of this art. The moviegoer hopes to find in a film the world as it presents itself to his perception, and images, and sounds that reproduce the way we are accustomed to experiencing reality. However, the realism of cinema is essentially plastic; it has an affinity with the eagerness of man to reproduce with his technique the world as it is, which dates to the Renaissance. It is an imitation of Realism.

On the other hand, painting always presents degrees of realism, which, from the point of view of plasticity, are linked only to simulations of reality. In this sense, Hopper's compositions are considered realistic because they escape from abstractionism and distortion and seek to portray real-world elements on canvas in a way that simulates the way we perceive them.

The other point regarding the meaning of the term “realistic” in art concerns the fact that a work thus considered refers to a specific historical period. Realism is a category always linked to a specific context; in Hopper's case, that of Modernism. His first paintings are legitimate representatives of Impressionism, indicating that he was, at that time, in line with the general tendency of the visual arts to reproduce, not exactly the reality of the world, but the reality of perception. However, during the truly typical period of his production, which begins in the late 1910s, his art took a turn toward Realism, as well as Modernism as a whole. This movement also occurs in cinema. Not by chance, Neorealism is considered the initial landmark of modern cinema. Indeed, cinema was immediately elevated to the condition of popular entertainment and was thus dominated by the imposition of realistic conventions of plasticity.

Despite the temporal discrepancy between Impressionism in painting and cinema, related to the later technological development of the cinematographic environment, we can find parallels between them, particularly in the theme of daily life, the treatment of light, or the framing mode. The dynamic aspect of space allowed access to, and evoking of, the psychological and emotional conditions of the characters.

The splitting moment of classical cinema from modern is postulated only in the mid-1940s, with the emergence of Neorealism. However, what happens already in the 1920s and in the consolidation of traditional narrative cinema is the adoption of a realism that puts itself at the service of fantasy, which is only plastic, as pointed out earlier, an imitation of the perceived reality. In traditional cinema, although realistic in appearance, gender conventions overlap with any claim to make it a vehicle of literal representation of the everyday human experience of reality. Thus, as in other arts, Realism once again imposed itself at the end of Modernism as a reaction to the excess of fantasy. The terminology Neorealism, utilized since 1945, designates cinema that captures the authenticity of the human experience, in terms of psychological and social reality.

In fact, in terms of appearance, Hopper´s work can be considered realistic in that it faithfully reproduces the shapes, colours, and proportions of the real world. His painting is marked by an awareness of the cinematic and photographic representation of the real world. The modernist Realism of the American painter is a late and "transformed" Realism. In his writings, he constantly expressed his position that art is always the real world filtered by the subjectivity of the artist, and this is clear in his paintings. "He agreed, not far from Zola, that art is fact seen through a personality." (O'Doherty: 1982, 9) The "real" world we see in his paintings is not the one that our eyes capture, but the one that only the artist's eyes could capture represented according to his own language, his own obsessions, and his own code.

His paintings always represent familiar figures, objects, and places. However, if they were limited to reproducing the world as we know it, it would be absurd to attribute to them the enigmatic aura that affects us so deeply.

To wrap up this subject, let us focus on a specific painting, *Rooms for Tourists*. It represents a house that serves as a hotel, illuminated from within, in the middle of a dark night. At first, it seems to be a realistic representation. However, there is a ghostly quality in the light that illuminates the house and produces a supernatural effect: it radiates

through the two floors of the property as if it were coming from a sole source of central and internal light. Were it exclusively realistic and devoid of psychological intentions, this painting would never evoke such a range of sensations, from curiosity and fear to a sense of mystery. It is a representation of the artist's inner world, not of the outside world. Not by chance, Hopper´s painting is remarkably close to the psychological cinema of Michelangelo Antonioni, as will be discussed in chapter IV.

Edward Hopper
Rooms for Tourists (1945)
Private Collection

The artist's own psychology and emotional states influenced his paintings, as it has been observed earlier. Cinematic images are loaded with symbolism and hidden psychological meanings. In cinema, the mystery is even more fascinating and real because it is hidden beneath the apparent neutrality of a representation of the world as it is, just as in Hopper's paintings.

It could be said that Hopper's paintings often illustrate an absent text or take its place. Perhaps it is the absence of this implicit text that has led so many writers and filmmakers to be inspired by some of Hopper´s paintings; they have felt, and feel to this day, the urge to make those eminently silent paintings "speak". But this silence is tension, drama.

An American painter; a painter of America. But what is this America of which he would be the painter? For those who see Hopper as a realist painter, which he is only in appearance, his America would be *the* America. It is an image, a representation of an inner America, by which a man, a painter, expressed himself. The America of Hopper's paintings is at the junction of an inner, mental world, and reality. Hopper´s America is

the America of (metaphysical) cities, streets, bars, shops, bridges, railways, and trains; that of a rural America; that of suburbs and small towns, white houses on the side of the road, on the edge of a meadow or a forest. It is an America of melancholy, of a certain disgrace, an America of nostalgia.

He followed his individual path and expression, regardless of the artistic and social trends that dictated the norm in his time. His American realism fell out of approval in the decades of 1940 and 1950; however, in recent times he has been considered one of the major realist painters of the 20th century.

As the analysis of Hopper’s works moves forward, the strong relationship the artist developed with cinema becomes clear. Not only did he choose to paint cinema halls throughout his career (*Two on the Aisle*, 1927; *The Sheridan Theatre*, 1937; *New York Movie*, 1939; *First Row Orchestra*, 1951; *Intermission*, 1963), which demonstrates how important these places were to him, he also borrowed from cinema inspiration and techniques that would become the trademark of his style.

Thanks to Jo, who willingly served as his model, Hopper functioned like a director who had a favourite actress whom he gave several roles to play. His shots and framings are those of a chief operator playing the expert with light. In short, behind each canvas there is a film, waiting to turn its viewers into spectators of a narrative.

By painting isolated, uncommunicative human figures in urban settings, Hopper helped to crystalize the theme of loneliness in large cities as central to the whole western culture. This Hopperesque theme is undoubtedly one that identifies the influence of the painter in cinema. He helped to form the image of typical American life environments as non-places, as spaces of incommunicability. His paintings influenced both photography and cinema, both pop art and postmodern architecture, and their fascination with emptiness.

Being a dissent means standing apart, separate, and different. Hopper was a dissident concerning American Realism as well as all the avant-gardes, abstraction, cubism, and surrealism, of which he is contemporary. His life is a lesson in loneliness.

All quotes from works in other languages have been translated by me.

CHAPTER IV

THE CINEMA AND EDWARD HOPPER

1. THEMES AND PERSPECTIVES
2. *FILM NOIR*
3. DIRECTORS AND FILMS INSPIRED BY HOPPER
   3.1. ALFRED HITCHCOCK
   3.2. MICHELANGELO ANTONIONI
   3.3. DAVID LYNCH
   3.4. WIM WENDERS
   3.5. TODD HAYNES
   3.6. OTHER DIRECTORS AND FILMS

THE CINEMA AND EDWARD HOPPER

1. THEMES AND PERSPECTIVES

After World War I, the United States lived through the so-called “Roaring 20s,” a decade of prosperity, of great social and political advances. However, the stock market crash of 1929 led to the Great Depression, an era that marked a new course in society as social inequalities were accentuated, which produced widespread disenchantment among Americans.

Later, with the end of World War II, the United States regained its economic level prior to the great crisis. It took advantage of the dire situation of European countries to establish its economic system and its way of life, known as "the American way of life.” A lifestyle conducted by the values of wealth, ostentation, success, initiative, and individual responsibility. However, this economic opulence did not reduce social inequalities, it aggravated them instead. Criminality, racism, gangsters, alcoholism, and conflicts with other countries became a constant.

Most of Hopper´s works focused on showing the modern lifestyle of the American middle class. The modernism that began in the United States at the beginning of the 20th century, industrialization, urbanism, communication media, and mass consumption transformed the lifestyle Americans had had until then. Appearance, job success, and well-being began to be part of their life, and Hopper was aware of the negative effect those standards, strongly marked by the economic system and social regularization, entailed.

Film noir showed the other face of American society, where gangsters, detectives, social problems, and alienation from modern life were the protagonists. Hopper dealt with these themes in many of his works, creating somber atmospheres through unusual shapes, light, and angles. He also portrayed ordinary life themes that at the time were unusual, if not unique, in the history of art, namely gas stations, hotel lobbies, restaurants, and offices.

There are also themes related to the coastal landscape of his childhood and that he continued to frequent in his adulthood. On the one hand, nautical and sailing themes are recurrent in his paintings. On the other hand, his frequent trips to the coast of New

England provided him with an assortment of locations and architectures that the artist used as inspiration. The lighthouses, for example, gave him the possibility to combine his love for the sea and architecture. In the village of Gloucester, Massachusetts, he also found a picturesque architectural setting that fascinated him and allowed him to begin to explore the effects of light.

Hopper used the urban landscape as inspiration for his works, with New York City as the main protagonist. The cities and their buildings provided the artist with the possibility of capturing these themes in his paintings, using both the structures and the life that existed in their interior, the type of scenes that he observed through windows, in restaurants, offices, and apartment buildings. Cityscapes are generally solitary, devoid of human figures or activity; but when figures appear, they are portrayed insignificantly as compared to the massive architectural presence, as in *Manhattan Bridge Loop*.

Edward Hopper

Manhattan Bridge Loop (1928)

Addison Gallery of American Art of the Phillips Academy

Within the urban theme, Hopper found more sources of inspiration, such as restaurants, where the artist managed to capture a wide variety of moods through composition, light, and the figures he represented: *Automat* (1927), and *Chop Suey* (1929), for instance.

As discussed in chapter III, cinemas and theatres are a recurring theme in Hopper's paintings, influenced by Edgar Degas, and *New York Movie* (1939) or *Two Comedians* (1965) are an example of this situation. His frequent attendance at these places had two direct effects on his painting: by including them as a theme in his work and by developing

compositions that were often influenced by scenography, stage lighting, and cinematic devices. Hopper saw theatre as a metaphor for life and himself as a sort of stage director.

As previously mentioned, Hopper added to his catalogue a rather unusual theme in art: the representation of offices, another example of the artist's observations of city life. The most illustrative example would be *Office at Night* (1940).

Edward Hopper

Office at Night (1940)

Walker Art Center

Hopper depicted specific moments of the day in his work that allowed him to express different moods through the variation of the effects of light. Finally, the theme of the representation of the human figure. It is a representation unknown to the protagonists, making the viewer a voyeur. Hopper was also interested in the emotional interaction between couples or, rather, the lack thereof. *Room in New York* (1932) and *Cape Cod Evening* (1939), already addressed in chapter II, are two of the most representative examples of this situation. The main characteristic of Hopper's works in which there is a human presence is the loneliness of the character (or characters, even if they are represented accompanied). One of the dominant themes of the painter's works is the alienation of the people he depicted, the estrangement from society and thus night-time acquires significant importance within this set of elements the painter explored.

Hopper was considered both a voyeur and a "flâneur," close to a voyeuristic art *par excellence*: cinema. He observed the world without it realizing that it was being observed, but he also walked around, wandered about, and observed people and cities wherever he went. His findings influenced a series of film directors who made these themes a constant in their works. The representation he achieved in his paintings

approached the experiences of cinema and theatre because, in these arts, the public becomes a voyeur, that is, someone who lures in the dark observing the lives of others being played, without their knowledge.

2. *FILM NOIR*

> *I believe that the great painters with their intellect as master have attempted to force this unwilling medium of paint and canvas into a record of their emotions.*
>
> Edward Hopper

The rise of the Nazi regime in Germany was the origin of the largest-ever exodus of professionals from the European film industry. Among the thousands of refugees who went to Hollywood, there was a group of Central European directors and cinematographers who had been developing their careers in the German film industry.

Between the mid-1930s and early 1940s, filmmakers such as William Dieterle, Fritz Lang, Mac Ophuls, Curtis Bernhartd, Robert Siodmak, Otto Preminger, Billy Wilder, and cinematographers such as Rudolph Maté, Franz Planer, Ernest Laszlo, and John Alton went to the United States. and enriched the world's largest film industry with their talent.

Among the hundreds of films they made in Hollywood, Central European directors and cinematographers stood out in the development of the so-called *film noir*, a cycle whose boundaries Paul Schrader delimited between *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) and *Touch of Evil* (1958). (Silver and Ursini, 1996:53-61) By introducing a set of aesthetic and cultural values, characteristic of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Weimar Republic, in the Hollywood film industry, Central European filmmakers triggered a process of transformation of the classical Hollywood paradigm.

Film noir brought to the big screen the "American nightmare," portraying a society driven by money, where greed, violence, crime, and the psychological and emotional problems of the protagonists constituted the inevitable reflection of the traumas of war and the alienation caused by life in the great urban centres of America. This pessimistic view of society translates into the protagonist’s moral ambiguity and cynicism.

It was also necessary to adopt a visual style capable of expressing the pessimism and amorality that characterizes this narrative universe. The *noir* style is characterised by the stylized treatment of the scenarios, sometimes revealing a *horror vacui*, and by the dramatic and symbolic importance that objects assume in their *mise-en-scène*. Among these stood out the mirrors, portraits, and stairs that referred to the Expressionist heritage.

Adapted or inspired by the literary universe of authors such as Raymond Chandler, Dashiel Hammet, and James M. Cain, creators of a style of police fiction known as hard-boiled, *film noir* also served as a launching pad for a whole generation of actors from the 1940s, whose image would forever be associated with this type of film. On the faces of Robert Mitchum, Alan Ladd, Veronica Lake, Richard Conte, Burt Lancaster, Dana Andrews, and Gene Tierney, just to name a few, *film noir* found the ideal expression of the anti-hero, insecure and plagued by existential neuroses and anxieties.

No one can doubt the paternity of the term *film noir*. It was invented by French film critics to define a set of films whose main theme was the occurrence of a crime. After the liberation of France in 1944, the ban on the import of American films imposed by the German invaders was raised. French screens were flooded with Hollywood films, among them this new type of tough crime movie. The five movies that successively charmed the Parisian audiences were *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), *Double Indemnity* (1944), *Murder, My Sweet* (1944), *Laura* (1944), and *The Lost Weekend* (1945.)

I will now proceed to summarise an essay titled "L´invention française du film noir," by Jean-Pierre Esquenazi (2013), where the author reflects on the French origin of the genre, or more precisely the French origin of the critical act that brought together several American films under the label *film noir*. It all started with the articles by Nino Frank[27] and Jean-Pierre Chartier[28] published respectively in August and November 1946, where the expression *film noir* appears. Esquenazi argues that this seems to be a paradox: an American film genre would have been identified by French critics twenty-five years before the Americans became aware of its existence.

27. Nino Frank. "Un nouveau genre policier: l'aventure criminelle" in *L'Écran français,* no 61, August 1946. pp. 8-9, 14.
28. Jean-Pierre Chartier. "Les Américains aussi font des films noirs" in *La Revue du cinéma,* no 2, November 1946. pp. 67-70.

Nino Frank's "A New Police Genre: The Criminal Adventure" was published in issue 61 of *L'écran français* on August 28, 1946. The article begins by celebrating the quality of these films, which proves that "American cinema is more prodigious than ever."[29] Esquenazi then says that Frank insists on the narrative innovation he detects in these films: the classic formula of the policeman, who was content to look for the culprit among a list of suspects, is abandoned. "[These films] are to the detective film what the novels of Dashiell Hammett are to those of Van Dine or Ellery Queen [...] and the detective is not a machine but the protagonist."[30] The emphasis is therefore clearly on the disruptive effect that these films produced: their focus is on "the imprint of life, the lived experience."[31] To conclude, Esquenazi remarks that Frank notes the introduction of the system of subjective narration that gives each of these films a personal, lived tone. This narrative form gives primacy to the scenario. Esquenazi notes that Frank does not dwell on the expression *film noir*. In the title, he chooses the term "criminal adventure" to qualify the genre he hopes to have identified.

This is also the case of Jean-Pierre Chartier in his article published three months after Frank's, even if he uses the term in its title "The Americans also make films noir,"[32] and which appeared in *La Revue du cinéma* directed by Jean George Auriol. Its anti-Hollywood ideology is clear, and its director misses few opportunities to scratch the American production. It is therefore not surprising to find in Chartier's article a quite different tone from that which animates Nino Frank's: it is the moral darkness common to *Double Indemnity, Murder My Sweet,* and *The Lost Weekend* that he wants to note and blame. Esquenazi states that the villainousness of the characters affects the critic, who writes for example about the character of Claire Trevor in *Murder My Sweet:* "It is the most naturally in the world that she offers her favours to the detective in exchange for her complicity in a new assassination."[33] The succession of depravities contained in these films leads the author to conclude that "the acts of all these people seem conditioned by

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29. *Ibid*em. p. 8.
30. *Ibidem.* p. 9.
31. *Idem*
32. Cf. *op. cit*.
33. Jean-Pierre Chartier. "Les Américains aussi font des films noirs" in *La Revue du cinéma,* no 2, Novembre 1946. p. 68.

a haunting fatality of crime."[34] Esquenazi remarks that Chartier, like Frank, notes the first-person narration, justifying the visual effects that the critic associates "with the research of pure cinema [of the 1920s]."[35] Concluding, Chartier comes to the comparison between two *film noir* modalities that the title of the article implies. If the atmosphere of these American films is as dark as that of the films of French realism of the late 1930s, in the first we only find "Insatiable Messalinas, brutal or senile husbands, [...], inveterate drunkards," while *Le Quai des brumes* or *L'hôtel du Nord* had "accents of rebellion, a fleeting glimpse of hope for a better world," and their characters "aroused pity."[36] The American *film noir* is ultimately unforgivable, it only contains "monsters, criminals whose evil nothing can excuse."[37] Esquenazi highlights that Chartier´s point of view is influenced by the ethical concern of the Church of the time: Catholic and anti-fascist, he wants to signal the psychological degradation of these films.

Esquenazi stresses that it is true the expression *film noir* does not have the same meaning for each of the two authors: for Chartier, it only serves as a convenient gateway to justify his comparison; as for Frank, he describes the subgenre of crime films that he thinks he has identified. In addition, they are far from considering the magnitude of their "discovery." All the major critical themes around *film noir*, be it the relationship between male and female, the expressionism of the image, and the link of gender with the contemporary context, are foreign to them.

Before inferring that the use of the expression *film noir* by Frank and Chartier was ultimately only anecdotal, Esquenazi warns, it is necessary to consider an important event to which André Bazin was linked. The latter was one of the organizers of the Objectif 49 film club, which brought together many intellectuals interested in cinema, such as Jean Cocteau, and it was a privileged place for reflection on cinema.[38] Bazin persuaded them to participate in the organization of Objectif 49. The result was an event that met with enormous success and took place in the Pagoda Hall at the end of 1948: the *Film Noir*

34. *Ibidem,* p. 69.
35. *Ibidem,* p. 70.
36. *Idem.*
37. Cf. op. cit.
38. Jean-Pierre Chartier." Les Américains aussi font des films noirs" in *La Revue du cinéma,* no 2, Novembre 1946. p. 68.

Festival represented "the first time since the twenties that a group of cinephiles had sought to provoke a Parisian event by screening films."[39]

Esquenazi concludes that the current discourse around *film noir* makes the articles by Nino Frank and Jean-Pierre Chartier performative acts: they took a particular set of films from limbo by giving them a name. The expression *film noir*, which we have seen is not central in either text, has become not only a genre name but also a reference like "fantasy film," "science fiction film" or "melodrama." They "invented" the *film noir* category, the first to distinguish these films from ordinary crime films, the second to signal their moral decay by opposing them to French *film noir*. This taxonomic invention would become the explicit source of the American critique of the genre from the 1970s. *Film noir* is a common term now, but it was not commonly used in the U.S. until that decade. Experts classify as *noir* more than three hundred titles produced between 1940 and 1958.

As mentioned above, it was not just Hopper who took inspiration from cinema. Cinema itself (directors, cinematographers, scriptwriters, actors, and producers) developed a close relationship with Hopper's paintings. He depicted situations that appealed to cinema: there were stories wanting to be told, lonely and detached people whose causes were waiting to be noticed, and places that were screaming to be filmed. This mutual attraction made of Hopper's paintings symbols of America and its way of life. They still cast a spell and influence over contemporary filmmakers.

Hopper's signature brand of *noir* stems from the anthropomorphic qualities of his paintings: the solitary midnight diners, the enduring lighthouses, and the timid street corners. Hopper's urban scenes are imbued with despair and sadness to the point that they inspired *film noir*. His works and *film noir* share a deep relationship in such a way that by connecting with one another they create a vision of a country and its people.

Film noir's golden age occurred between the 1930s and 1940s, which was also one of Hopper´s most productive periods, spanning from the end of the 1930s to the beginning of the 1950s. Hopper's work in the 1940s adopted a lot of cinematic tendencies.

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39. *Ibidem.* p. 69.

During this period, Hopper painted his most famous work, *Nighthawks* (1942), which was inspired by Ernest Hemingway's *The Killers*. The characters depicted in *Nighthawks* bear great resemblance to the detectives and *femmes fatales* that starred in so many *noir* films. It is undeniable the use of light both Hopper´s paintings and film share – contrasting light and shadow in order to infer a certain mood or darker tone; the meticulous set design – each object and area acquires different degrees of importance; similar framing – decentralised; the highlight of textures and haunting expressions – either highlighting steam or leaving a portion of a person's face in the shadow, which is one of the golden rules of *film noir*; and similar locations depicted by both paintings and film genre – diners, empty streets often depicted at night, offices.

As in many of Hopper's paintings, *film noir* is anchored in windows and mirrors, not so much to reveal as to darken and distort. The genre itself thrives on confusion, and the skillful use of windows and mirrors intensifies that sense of disorientation. In *Nighthawks*, Hopper paints a disorienting window in an analogous way, one that does not show any reflection, it defies expectations, it seems almost transparent. The ambiguity and confinement mood, of restlessness and uncertainty, proper to *noir*, fittingly describes *Nighthawks*.

The resemblance to the bar in *Nighthawks* (1942) in *The Killers* (1946)

In *film noir* – which applied the experiments of German Expressionism to detective stories – it is common to follow anti-heroic figures, men who for many reasons follow a different current than everybody else's. The protagonist is the antihero who represents suffering, loneliness, alienation, and existential emptiness. It is from his point of view that confessional narrations and camera movements occur. The plots had a strong urban component and showed the city as an oppressive place, dangerous and capable of corrupting good men. Night and rainy scenes reinforced this idea. Social problems were recurring themes: stories were filled with crimes, police investigations, marginalized

figures, alcohol, and cigarettes. Favourite settings showed the urban and dirty environment of the metropolis, whose streets were the stage of all dangers and where unscrupulous characters were revealed under corrupt authorities, where atmosphere and tension, cruelty, and eroticism were unleashed.

Wearing impeccable dark suits and fedoras, Hollywood gangsters looked fascinating and tough. *Nighthawks*' male patrons are reminiscent of the tough guys played by James Cagney and Edward G. Robinson in *The Public Enemy* and *Golden Underworld*. Similarly, Hollywood's idea of the gangster girl corresponded to the funny, scruffy women played by Joan Blondell and Jean Harlow: women who dyed their hair and wore tight, brash suits, just like the red-haired lady in *Nighthawks*. The image of the leading actress was in complete rupture with the former passive image of women in classic Hollywood cinema.

The *noir* characters expressed their disgust with the institutions, derived from an aversion to restrictive rules and the expectations placed on them by the police, the army, and other military authorities. Often, they seemed existentially lost, damaged by things out of their control. The protagonists often had dubious, cynical, and even cruel goals. Men were at odds with their friends and family; the hero did not always save and sometimes he was even violent; the alleged victim was not so helpless; the love interest could be the villain of the plot. They were the famous *femmes fatales*, who used their sensuality to manipulate men, as Rita Hayworth does in *Gilda* (1946), or black widows who trapped men. In this genre, women were often blamed instead of fate or were the cause of males' disastrous fate.

Another feature of *film noir* was the three-point lighting: there was a light source to establish darkness (shadows), another for light (contrast with darkness), and another one to create a gradient of gray, regulated to create the atmosphere of the scene. Often, the characters were bathed in long linear shadows, projected from prison bars, stairs, or window venetians. *Film noir* featured unbalanced lighting that emphasized strong contrasts and extreme camera angles that favoured a disorienting staging.

The disturbing atmosphere was reinforced with visual tricks, such as unusual framing; often, they were inclined (the so-called "Dutch angle"). In the more open scenes, the composition of the elements was asymmetrical (an inheritance of German Expressionism). The close-ups were tightly closed, intense, and misaligned. Inês Gil

remarks that the concrete atmosphere is linked to macro perceptions (created by fog or light) and the abstract atmosphere is invisible but perceived by the viewer. For example, in an Expressionist film, the atmosphere is represented by the contrast of light that cuts the representation into two worlds: what is manifest and what is hidden. (Gil: 2005, 27)

3. DIRECTORS AND FILMS INSPIRED BY HOPPER

> *Imitation is congenital to man from childhood, who differs from other animals precisely because he is the most inclined to imitate, and through imitation he seeks the first knowledge; from imitation everyone gets pleasure.*
>
> Aristotle, *Poetics*

> *An art can learn from another the way in which it uses its means so that, in turn, it may use its own in the same fashion.*
>
> Wassily Kandinsky

Hopper was an inveterate movie-goer, as discussed in the previous chapter. During his more inactive periods, when inspiration lacked, going to the movies was one of the few things Hopper was willing to indulge in, as he was considered as stingy. The artist once admitted that he "could have painted more if he had not loved movies so much."[40] On the other hand, his interest in cinema unintentionally led the way to cinema directors being influenced by his work. Hopper's work often reflected cinema and *film noir* was an obvious inspiration choice.

If the painter liked cinema, filmmakers appreciated Hopper´s paintings (and still do). As quoted by Gambling, art historian Gail Levin states that it is no coincidence that his paintings have inspired filmmakers: "Themes of urban alienation or existential loneliness are classic expressions of ´Hopper *film noir*,` the stage-feel of his paintings, with their stark use of light and shadow, oft-repeated in films and photographs throughout the last century." (Gambling, 2006:12)

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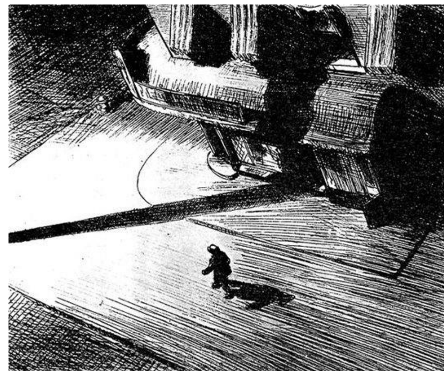
40. Judith A. Barter. "Nighthawks: Transcending Reality." in Carol Troyen. *Edward Hopper*. 2007.

Film noir showed the other face of American society, where gangsters, detectives, social problems, and alienation from modern life were the main themes. The atmosphere, sometimes menacing and mysterious, that Hopper created in some of his works through unusual shapes, light, and angles, inspired many filmmakers to create their atmospheres. In the etching *Night Shadows* (1921), Hopper charged the scene with drama through a chopped shot of a man walking down an empty street at night and the play of light and shadow. This engraving was used as a reference in *Strangers in a Train* (1951) by Alfred Hitchcock, among other films.

In his article "From Nighthawks to the Shadows of Film Noir*,"* Phillip French writes "German Expressionism impinged on Hopper early on, during his sojourn in Paris. His 1921 etching *Night Shadows* looks like a storyboard sketch for a high-angle shot in a Fritz Lang movie."[41]



Edward Hopper
Night Shadows (1921)
Philadelphia Museum of Art

French notes that "voyeurism has been an unavoidable condition of urban living and movie going, and Hopper's pictures spy on people in uncurtained rooms. They are epiphanic moments in someone else's life, stills from a movie we can't quite remember." [42]

Edward Hopper's work is like a deposed seed in contemporary culture that has produced fruits of every genre. It has influenced painters such as David Hockey and Mark Rothko, filmmakers such as Alfred Hitchcock, Wim Wenders, David Lynch, Todd Haynes, and Sam Mendes to name a few; sculptors and photographers; numerous poets

41. Phillip French. "From Nighthawks to the Shadow of Film" in *The Guardian*, 25th April 2004.
42. *Idem*

and narrators such as Paul Auster and Raymond Carver, and the novelist Annie Proulx; John Squire, a former guitarist with Stone Roses, and also a painter, has an album, *Marshall's House*, with 11 tracks all named after Hopper´s paintings.

Hitchcock was inspired by the painting *House by the Railroad* to give atmosphere to the thriller *Psycho*, and by *Night Windows* for the film *Rear Window*; Wenders was deeply inspired by Hopper in making films such as *The American Friend* and *Paris, Texas*. It would be impossible for such directors to create these films would they not have known the work of Hopper.

Gambling refers to director Sam Mendes stating in a 2002 interview that "compositionally, Hopper constantly ensures that your imaginary eye is guided off the frame of the picture. You begin to imagine what´s on either side of the frame. In other words, what´s important is what is off camera." (Gambling, 2006:5)

Gambling also cites filmmaker Wim Wenders´s view that Hopper´s paintings could be expanded into imaginary sequences as the viewer imagines a before and an after to each still scene: "Hopper´s tableaux thus contain a temporal dimension which, in each viewer´s mind, could be vitalised and set in motion," a technique which Hopper described in 1939 as follows: "Carrying the main horizontal lines of the design with little interruption to the edges of the picture is to make one conscious of the spaces and elements beyond the limits of the scene itself." (Gambling, 2006:5)

Hopper´s scenes also enable the viewer to focus more on the characters (or actors) within their stage-like setting. Jo´s journal confirms this intention: "Figures stand out in space, not fastened to background." (Gambling, 2006:7) "Most of Hopper´s characters are so immersed in thought that they seem completely unaware of their surroundings. They are posed in dramatic scenes of distraction, absorbed in private thought and sober musing." (Gambling, 2006:8) From Rembrandt, Hopper learned the art of conveying internalised thoughts by focusing on the dichotomy of lighting and shadows. Like Vermeer, he painted women alone, abstracted in reveries, and seemingly part of their habitats, even when that habitat was temporary. His paintings suggest rather than conveys, and his characteristic restraint compels us to rifle through the oppressive ambiguity for unspoken truths or hidden secrets, which explains why countless artists, filmmakers, and writers have been riffing on Hopper's work for years.

It has been repeatedly stated that Edward Hopper was a cinematic painter influenced by the cinema of his time and that this relationship has been reciprocal. In her *Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography*, Gail Levin states "Among the artists whose development paralleled that of the cinema, none felt more intimately the impact of the new medium at successive stages, and none has inspired such fascination in cinematographers as Edward Hopper." (Levin,1998) He is one of the painters who have had the most influence on the seventh art, namely on cinematographers and directors from different decades, from Hitchcock to Todd Haynes. Cinematographic art is the discipline that manages to give movement to image, something that painting always strived to achieve.

Hopper has been extensively studied through monographs and exhibitions dedicated to his work, from the first time he exhibited in a group exhibition in 1908 to the most recent ones. Poet Mark Strand makes a personal approach to a selection of his paintings, which represent the scenarios of his own childhood.[43] Rolf G. Renner[44] takes a tour of Hopper's life and work, as well as Silvia Borghesi's[45] monograph for the Arts Books collection dedicated to the artist, which contextualizes Hopper's work in relation to art and the history in which it takes place, as well as analysing some of the painter's works. Gail Levin, Hopper's biographer, introduced the catalogue of the exhibition held at the Juan March Foundation in 1989.[46]

In the eighties, there was a reference to the relationship between *film noir* and Hopper in an article by Erika L. Doss.[47] In Spain, Juan de Pablos Pons has also studied Hopper's relationship with cinema.[48]

The special booklet published by the magazine *Caimán Cuadernos de Cine* (June 2012), on the occasion of the great exhibition dedicated by the Thyssen- Bornemisza Museum to Edward Hopper, is of special interest. This issue brings together a set of

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43. Mark Strand. "Hopper: The Loneliness Factor" in *Writers on Artists*.

44. Rolf G. Renner. *Edward Hopper: 1882-1967, transformaciones de lo real*.

45. Silvia Borghesi. *Hopper: realidad y poesía del mito americano*.

46. Jordi Teixidor. Edward Hopper: [exposición]13 octubre de 1989- 4 enero de 1990.

47. Erika L. Doss. "Edward Hopper, Nighthawks, and Film Noir."

48. Juan de Pablos Pons. "El cine y la pintura: una relación pedagógica. Una aproximación a Víctor Erice y Edward Hopper." 2006.twe

written texts and it was the first publication published in Spain dedicated to studying the links between Hopper's pictorial work and the cinematographic universe.

There are also some remarkably interesting documentaries about Hopper. I would like to highlight two of them: *Hopper's Silence* (Brian O'Doherty, 1981) and *Edward Hopper. El Pintor del Silencio* (Carlos Rodríguez, 2005). The latter, broadcasted by Canal+, was shot in England, the United States, and Spain, and involved in the film, among others, Gail Levin, Hopper´s official biographer; Ed Lachman, cinematographer of *Far from Heaven* (2002) and its director Todd Haynes; Eduardo Serra, cinematographer of *Girl With a Pearl Earring*, by Peter Webber (2003); the critic Francisco Calvo Serraller and the painters Antonio López and Ángel Mateo Charris. Directed by Carlos Rodríguez, the documentary mixes the images of Hopper's paintings with Hopperian film genres and the places he portrayed in his paintings.

Most of the films that have been related to Hopper's style appeared from 1940 on when his artistic production and fame were booming. According to the director and writer José Luis Borau "in a sense, Hopper has been an excellent storyboard artist."[49] He was aware that cinema is the art of the appearance of reality, and he did not hesitate to take elements of reality to create his own fiction, transforming the external into his intimate gaze.

Hopper eliminated the superfluous in his works, achieving abstraction through light, form, and colour. To de Pablo Pons, "Hopper represents the consubstantial alienation of modern life, the impersonal coexistence of large cities, and the loneliness experienced while you are surrounded by people. Underworlds of psychological violence and suffering under the guise of a perfectly normal daily life, but that coexist with superstition and fear, because the difference between good and evil, in everyday life, is not easy to discern."[50] This is the reason why Hopper's paintings inspire cinema, as they resemble frames from a story taken in *medias res*: for instance, the frozen moments of *Hotel Room* (1931), *Room in New York* (1932), or *Night Office* (1940).

His paintings expose the reverse of the American dream, the America of the Great Depression, the loss of horizons, and the idea of loneliness; the desperate feeling that

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49. *Edward Hopper, el pintor del silencio*. (Carlos Rodriguez, 2005) min. 44.
50. *Op. cit.*, pp. 103-114.

everything has been lost is expressed by his characters. Hopper was also aware that American life had changed after World War II and his paintings reflected the loss of a way of life. Likewise, poet Federico García Lorca expressed in his poem "La Aurora" the uneasiness caused by the alienated city he encountered in 1929. We can imagine that the impact life in New York City had on Hopper, coming from a small town, was the same that Lorca suffered coming from his native Granada.

The poem below is included in the book *Poeta en Nueva York*, written by Federico García Lorca during his stay in the United States between 1929 and 1930. It is one of Lorca´s best-known poems and it conveys a pessimistic view of the modern city. The main theme of these verses is the arrival of dawn in the industrial city of New York, and the author makes judgments about humanity as opposed to nature.

LA AURORA

La aurora de Nueva York tiene
cuatro columnas de cieno
y un huracán de negras palomas
que chapotean las aguas podridas.
La aurora de Nueva York gime
por las inmensas escaleras
buscando entre las aristas
nardos de angustia dibujada.
La aurora llega y nadie la recibe en su boca
porque allí no hay mañana ni esperanza posible:
A veces las monedas en enjambres furiosos
taladran y devoran abandonados niños.
Los primeros que salen comprenden con sus huesos
que no habrá paraíso ni amores deshojados:
saben que van al cieno de números y leyes,
a los juegos sin arte, a sudores sin fruto.
La luz es sepultada por cadenas y ruidos
en impúdico reto de ciencia sin raíces.
Por los barrios hay gentes que vacilan insomnes

como recién salidas de un naufragio de sangre.

Federico García Lorca, "La Aurora" in *Poeta en Nueva York* [51]

The poem suggests that dawn, a natural phenomenon, has a specific character in New York City. Nature has been truncated by the hand of man and the dawn that the Spanish author describes is bathed in the shadow of the city lights. People live in a dehumanized way in a city that presents all the evils of the *polis*: darkness, stale waters, noise, etc. The thematic distribution of the poem is thus divided: the first ten lines are dedicated to the description of the American city, and the last ten to the people who inhabit it. This poem has the character of a painting, a static view of events. In that sense it resembles Hopper´s paintings.

The poem is a critique of the separation of man from nature, a warning about the dark side of the industrial world. The American metropolis is the place where that unbalance is more striking. Lorca utilises his observations to transform them into hard and powerful images that express his personal views on the city, in particular, and on the state of civilization, in general. The result is as frightening as impressive. Like some of Hopper´s works.

Returning to Hopper and his influence on cinema, it lies in the fact that he produced paintings based on reality that were at the same time an expression of an individual and intimate world. This influence can be seen in cinema through visual concepts, the treatment of light, framing, or psychological atmospheres. Wim Wenders stated the following in an interview (El País, 19/08/2005): "That Hopperian image is consciously sought. I love in that painter the absence of details; that going to the bare minimum. There are places in the United States where you put a camera and you get a painting by Hopper."

Hopper captured in his works the same isolation of film noir and crime films such as *Marty* (1955), *The Savage Eye* (1960), *Scarface* (1932), or *The Big Combo* (1955). Among others, this type of film, as it has been noted, attracted Hopper as a spectator. The *film noir* of the forties and fifties represented the detective world, alienation, isolation,

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51. Federico García Lorca. *Poeta en Nueva York*. 1929-1930.

and fear of cold war-era society. Hopper conformed to *film noir* cinematic formulas, such as the particular use of light and shadow or extreme camera angles. We also see that disturbing *film* noir atmosphere propitiated by all the above. The fixation on windows is typical of *film noir* and it is also a recurring element in Hopper. Mirrors express a state of confusion, as exemplified by the ones featured in *The Lady of Shanghai* (1947), by Orson Welles. However, I cannot recall any mirror in Hopper´s oeuvre; even his windows do not show any reflection.

There was a relationship between *film noir* and realism. In contrast to the previous decade, the relationship between films and the society that made them possible and consumed them was evident at that time. In this respect, *film noir* was more than just the filming of stories starring detectives, policemen, and thieves: it was rather a positioning in front of reality. In the same way, *film noir* characters were typified by the existential anguish caused by social instability.

Thanks to the indications given in the Edward Hopper catalogue directed by curator Sheena Wagstaff (Tate Modern, London, 2004), we have an idea of Hopper's rather eclectic tastes in cinema. He watched gangster films (*Golden Underworld*, *Scarface The Terror of the Underworld*), many *film noir* (*Story of a Detective*, *The Lady of Shanghai*, *The Lady of the Lake*, among others), and at least one Hitchcock film (*Chained*, 1946). Wagstaff also disclosed that Hopper enjoyed European films (*Les Enfants du Paradis*, by Carné; *Mon Oncle*, by Tati) and that he considered *All About Eve* (1950), by Mankiewicz, the best thing that Hollywood had ever produced.

Cinema made finally possible what had been the illusion of so many painters, from Tintoretto to Sargent: the perfect illusion of movement. Nevertheless, Hopper´s works go against that kinetic tendency. They underline the long-sustained immobility; the meditative, often melancholic, pose; the burden of threat contained in an architecture that seems immemorial, frozen. Notwithstanding, his importance for cinema is immense: he helped to teach the new medium that, in a story, the moment of pause, of reflection, of reverie, is no less important than that of dance or combat, of graceful, violent, or disorderly movement. Hopper helped to integrate into cinema the moment of the painting. Maev Kennedy, in an online article titled “Only the lonely,” states that Sheena Wagstaff hints that it is the element of storytelling in Hopper´s oeuvre that seduces people who have worked in film or theatre, including Sinatra, whom she described as "the consummate showman". (https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2004/may/15/arts.artsnews)

According to Annelisa Stephan, in an online article titled “Listening to Edward Hopper´s Silence,” the artist was a taciturn introspect, speaking little about his work, giving few interviews, and keeping to a small circle closely monitored by Jo, his protective wife. (https://blogs.getty.edu/iris/listening-to-edward-hoppers-silence/) When the Academy of Arts and Letters awarded Hopper its gold medal for painting, he gave a one-word speech: “Thanks.” Upon his death in 1967, eight people went to his funeral, including artist and author Brian O’Doherty, a long-time friend of the painter.

Stephan proceeds to elaborate on a documentary that O’Doherty had the idea of making about the artist. He had no desire to violate Hopper’s silence, but rather to welcome it. The 1981 documentary *Hopper’s Silence* is a meditative visual essay that explores the superb quiet and stillness that characterize the human figures, rooms, and streets in Hopper’s paintings, as well as the artist himself. O’Doherty recently discussed *Hopper’s Silence* and revealed its odd origins in 1961. As expected, if Hopper had secrets, he was not keen on giving them away in an interview. Below is an excerpt from that interview:

> **O’Doherty:** “Are your paintings reflective of the isolation of modern life?”
> **Hopper:** “It may be true. It may not be true.”
> **O’Doherty:** “What do you think of your teacher, Robert Henri?”
> **Hopper:** “I think he was moderately good.”
> **O’Doherty:** “What draws you to the dark landscapes you paint?”
> **Hopper:** “I suppose it’s just me.”

As it is clear from this excerpt[52], Hopper did not have an obvious theoretical discourse nor tried to impose any ideas. He knew that he faithfully represented in his paintings what he meant but he left space for interaction with the viewer. Reserve and suggestion are the cornerstones of his art, achieved thanks to a work of purification that rejects adornment or useless artifices. As a result, it is his poetic work that generates a wealth of connections that can emerge in the viewer's mind.

“His silence was half process, half paralysis,” O’Doherty stated after the screening. “He was mysterious even to himself. And he plumbed the sense of mystery he

52. Brian O´Doherty. Interview with Edward Hopper. 1961. https://vimeo.com/120697871 (accessed on 20/07/2022)

found in himself." This mystery is why an artist once regarded as an "American scene painter" continues to call to us, silently. O´Doherty adds "Whenever I would question him, he would always say 'It's about me, it's about me.'... I think his art appears so objective but is very much a self-portrait. And it was a self-portrait with a quest. He was continually turning his eye inward as he paints outward, trying to find out who he is."[53]

His paintings also find a parallel in cinema in the works of non-American filmmakers that have a slower and contemplative narrative time. In this sense, it seems undeniable that there are no more Hopperian filmmakers than the Italian Michelangelo Antonioni and the German Wim Wenders. Given that Wenders is a direct and declared disciple of both Antonioni and Hopper, perhaps there is an authentic artistic lineage, in which Wenders' cinema is a direct descendant of Antonioni's cinema, which in turn has roots in Hopper's painting. Wenders' cinema can even be reduced to an exercise of permanent rereading of the pivotal points of Antonioni's work: the obsession with the desert and the road, the lack of communication and loneliness of urban life, the frameworks, and the contemplative rhythm. This simple enumeration of the characteristics shared by the two filmmakers also attests to their affinity with the painter's universe.

In the documentary *Der Bap film*, which records the backstage of a tour of the German band Bap, Wenders intentionally and faithfully reproduces Hopperian lights and frames, including literal staging of some paintings, such as *New York Movie*, played in a theatre where the band performs. This attests to the affiliation and would suffice to legitimize the rapprochement between his work and that of the painter, as well as Wenders' fascination with American culture and iconography (notice the profusion of cowboys and typically American scenarios in his films, namely in *Paris, Texas,* and *The American Friend*).

There are so many references to the work of Edward Hopper in cinema that I have elected to highlight the better-known ones. I will talk about the work of different filmmakers, who have a direct and recognised relationship with Hopper´s oeuvre, starting with Alfred Hitchcock and Michelangelo Antonioni, moving on to David Lynch and Wim

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53. Brian O´Doherty´s interview in Jean-Pierre Devillers´s documentary *Edward Hopper and the Blank Canvas*. 2012.

Wenders, and ending with Todd Haynes.

In this group are reunited the films that, regardless of their genre, display not only an explicit and defining influence from Hopper´s oeuvre but also a literal one, that must be generally interpreted as an homage to the painter, and a transposition of painting´s bidimensional to cinema´s multidimensional characteristics. In the words of Lars Elleström:[54]

> Paintings and photographs actually have only two dimensions, width and height, but often, by means of resemblance of certain visual qualities in the perceived world they give the illusion of a third, depth, which creates a virtual space in the mind of the beholder. The interface of a movie, correspondingly, has three dimensions: width, height and (fixed sequential) time, but usually an illusion of depth is created. (Elleström, 2010:20)

3.1. ALFRED HITCHCOCK

> *You call this man 'Hitch,' we call him 'Monsieur Hitchcock.' You respect him because he films love scenes like crime scenes. We respect him because he films crime scenes as if they were love scenes.*
>
> François Truffaut

Alfred Hitchcock is often called the "Master of Suspense." He is best known for his iconic films in the suspense genre that instil anxiety and fear in their viewers. Several comparisons between Hitchcock and Hopper must be mentioned in this discussion. To Hitchcock, Hopper's particular gaze was an inspiration from which an infinite number of narratives could arise. According to Carol Troyen in her work *Edward Hopper* (2007), "Hitchcock did more to condition our perception of Hopper than anyone else."

In the United States, the director would shoot some of his most known classics and deepen the relationship between the style of his cinematography and Edward Hopper´s oeuvre. He used different elements of the American painter´s work in his filmography, often purely aesthetic aspects, such as Hopper´s representation of small Gothic towns that he understood as the identifying image of the country.

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54. Lars Elleström. "The Modalities of Media: A Model for Understanding Intermedial Relations." 2010. p. 20.

3.1.1. SHADOW OF A DOUBT (1943)

Still from *Shadow of a Doubt*

Shadow of a Doubt was unquestionably influenced by the works of Edward Hopper. Not only the locations are similar to some of those painted by Hopper, such as the *Hodgkin's House* (1928) or *Room for Tourists* (1945), but there is also the use of windows, doors, staircases, and trains. The situation of the characters within a scene resonates with other works by Hopper, like *Summertime* (1943). The first shots of the film are reminiscent of *Street Scene, Gloucester* (1934).

Edward Hopper
Street Scene, Gloucester (1934)
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Edward Hopper
Small Town Station (1918–1920)
Whitney Museum of American Art

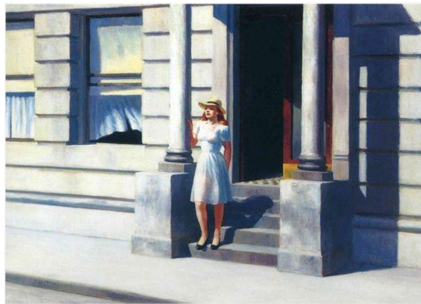
Stills from *Shadow of a Doubt*

A young woman is delighted when her favourite uncle comes to visit the family in their quiet town, Santa Rosa, in California. She then begins to suspect that he is the

"Merry Widow" killer hunted by the authorities, as they seek her help to investigate him. In *Shadow of a Doubt,* Hitchcock uses Hopper´s aesthetics to show an American town that seems ideal on the surface but is pervaded with a climate of crime and suspicion after Uncle Charlie´s arrival.

Below are some stills that immediately remit us to Hopper´s locations, themes, and style. I find the one that mentions "Tables for Ladies" particularly interesting, as it is in perfect syntony with Hopper. This subject was discussed in chapter II.

Stills from *Shadow of a Doubt*



Edward Hopper
Summertime (1943)
Delaware Art Museum

Still from *Shadow of a Doubt*

Room for Tourists' house architecture is similar to the one portrayed in *Shadow of a Doubt*. Since the painting is two years younger than the film, the painter was likely inspired by the film to conceive it.

The house in the film is a character itself. Like in a Hopper painting, the film´s plot is often told by the windows themselves. Lights are switched on and off, disclosing story details.

Edward Hopper
Hodgkin's House (1928)
Private Collector

Edward Hopper
*Rooms for Tourists (*1945)
Whitney Museum of American Art

Still from *Shadow of a Doubt*

3.1.2. *REAR WINDOW* (1954)

Still from *Rear Window*

Hopper's influence can be found throughout Hitchcock's oeuvre, though more specifically in *Rear Window*, where there are several references to the painter who often depicted people seen through windows going about their lives. The plot revolves around Jeff Jefferies (James Stewart), a wheelchair-confined photojournalist who observes from his window, through his telephoto lens, his neighbours in their apartments: a dancer, a lonely woman whom he calls "Miss Lonely Hearts," a pianist, a sculptor, and some couples, including the one married couple he should not have spied on. Isolated in his Greenwich Village courtyard apartment, the protagonist suspects one of his neighbours has murdered his wife, despite the scepticism of his girlfriend.

He observes his neighbours in a limited way because he only knows what happens in those apartments when his neighbours are visible through their windows, leaving out of the field the diegetic development of their lives. Most importantly, there is a dominant sense of social isolation despite the dense urban surroundings. In

Rear Window, all apartments generate suspense, and there is a tense atmosphere just like in Hopper's paintings. This film and Hopper's work also share the themes of isolation and incommunicability.

Stills from *Rear Window*

Also, formal elements were equally important for both authors: the unusual points of view, the frames, the compositional strategies, and, above all, the voyeur look, the pleasure of looking without being seen. Hopper turned the viewer into a voyeur through perspective, lighting, framing, and the point of view from which he showed the scene. Through the windows, or sharing the same space as the subject, anyone who contemplates a painting of his involuntarily becomes a voyeur of that instant in the life of the character, who is not aware of that presence. The same happens in the work of Hitchcock, who uses this motif to create a story in *Rear Window*, where the director makes a reflection on the artificiality of cinema.

The English director exposes the existence and actions of the voyeur. However, this time not only the viewers represent the voyeur, but the film plot also develops from the voyeur´s viewpoint. To Hitchcock we are all Peeping Toms and, when watching films, we reaffirm this position. In a conversation with Hitchcock about the film in question, François Truffaut said: "We are all voyeurs, even if it is only when we watch an intimate film. In addition, James Stewart at his window finds himself in the situation of a viewer watching a film."[55] Likewise, the inclusion of the window, both in cinema and in Hopper's paintings, participates in the idea of constructing reality: it is the gaze that creates reality.

It is a film that makes explicit the voyeuristic mechanisms that govern cinema because we all participate in the contemplation of somebody else´s life without asking for permission, and without the person being aware of our existence. To Hitchcock, we are all voyeurs, as he admitted to Truffaut in the historic conversation between the two

55. François Truffaut. *Le cinéma selon Hitchcock*. 1966.

masters: "Yes, the man was a voyeur, but aren´t we all? (...) I am sure that nine out of ten people if they become aware of a woman undressing on the other side of the courtyard before going to bed, or of a man who is simply tidying up his room, will not be able to stop and will look."[56]

Rear Window is an exemplary case of metalanguage, of cinema within cinema and Hitchcock is the genius whose "madness" is to take his passion for cinema to the last consequences. Jeff, the photographer, is a metaphor for Hitchcock himself. Stories occur behind the windows opened in front of the protagonist, some of them representing facets of human loneliness. The scenes show the dramas of the inhabitants of the big cities reduced to the condition of fish trapped in their aquariums with glass windows. Jeff, as well as the viewer, identifies with each story, with each one of those lonely beings, even with the puppy. In Jeff's case, it is not enough to observe, to have a passive position; he must intervene, and change the course of events.

Loneliness and melancholy sprout in Hitchcock's work in the characters portrayed, in ordinary everyday stories, in the exterior and interior scenarios. The painting-cinema relationship in Hitchcock is remarkable, but when Hopper is summoned, this aesthetic dialogue becomes intense. In *Rear Window* some scenes represent the "in movement" materialization of many paintings by the American artist. Hopper was the one who best painted the drama of the loneliness of modern man and his moments of melancholy in the city. In *Rear Window* we observe the loneliness of the plastic artist, the musician, the dancer, and even the murderer. The night in *Rear Window* belongs to the lonely, the insomniacs, and the voyeurs. Small stories are also told through the windows: closed curtains tell us that the honeymoon couple is making love; closed windows hide a crime. Open windows are indiscreet characters.[57]

This relationship painting-cinema can be observed in two representations of moments when women are vulnerable to the voyeur gaze. In *Night Windows*, a woman is glimpsed from the back leaning forward and wearing pink lingerie; in *Rear Window,* Jeff observes "Miss Torso" in a similar posture and attire. Both scenes catch solitary,

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56. *Idem*

57. Irene M. Pérez Méndez. "Miradas desde el umbral: el voyeurismo en la obra de Edward Hopper y Alfred Hitchcock."

partially naked women within the intimacy of their homes, and both carry a sense of intrusion and voyeurism.

Edward Hopper

*Night Windows (*1928)

The Museum of Modern Art

Night Windows semi-erotic tone resonates in *Rear Window,* and it strikingly captures the experience of living in a big city like New York, where people become oblivious of the enormous world around them as they go about their daily lives. *Rear Window*'s “Miss Torso” seems to have been inspired by *Night Windows* right down to the pink underwear.

Stills from *Rear Window*

There are other similar moments between Hopper's paintings and *Rear Window*. Both the woman in *Automat,* having a coffee by herself, and “Miss Lonely Hearts,” having a lonely dinner at home, are melancholic, pensive characters. In *Hotel Room*, a woman sits in a bed holding a piece of paper, her face is shadowed; a similar image is shown in the film through a slit in a window of the building in front of Jeff´s. *Room in New York* portrays a couple, each one minding their own business: he reads the newspaper, and she looks melancholic, immersed in her thoughts while playing with the piano. There is a similar scene in *Rear Window* when the artist is next to a woman in his apartment, apparently ignoring her. These comparative images are shown below.

Some of Hopper´s paintings and similar stills from *Rear Window*

Hopper possesses, like Hitchcock, the voyeur´s gaze that captures private moments, as well as mysterious, solitary, and intimate situations. Hopper's paintings respect a certain distance, necessary so as not to disturb the women depicted in their moments of intimacy or melancholy. Another parallelism, probably unintentional, is that Jeff, in his enthusiasm to imagine and rebuild the lives of the people he spies on, attributes fictitious names to them, curiously something that Hopper and his wife also did with the characters in his paintings.

The windows that Hopper opens in his paintings are indeed those of *Rear Window*, with their ordinary events amplified to the point of the absurd, to the suspense, to the obsession. In *Rear Window* each window opens to a film within the film, and the window frames are simultaneous screens.

Hitchcock learned to draw his films shot by shot: "To me, a film must be planned on paper... I never look with the camera; I only think of a blank screen that needs to be

filled like one paints a canvas."[58].

3.1.2. VERTIGO (1958)

In *Vertigo*, Hitchcock seems to have borrowed from Hopper the highly saturated and contrasting colours, the interior scenes in urban buildings, and the characters who silently walk alone through diverse city locations, such as a cemetery or a museum. However, as a voyeur, the protagonist needs to get involved in what he sees (or is led to believe he sees) until he adds a story to it, just like the viewers of Hopper´s oeuvre. We feel the need to invent a story behind the image to complete it. This is exactly what the protagonist of *Vertigo* does, disturbingly and morbidly. Voyeurism is an essential character in *Vertigo*, and it defines Hitchcock's fetishistic, obsessive, capricious, and misogynistic personality. It is related to the main character´s lurid and sick obsession with the mysterious woman. Voyeurism is the *leitmotiv* in this film.

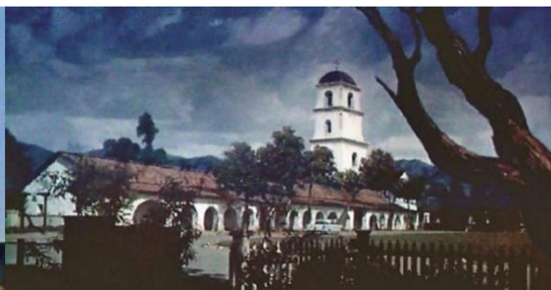
The relationship between the two artists is also expressed in the way landscapes are depicted. In *Vertigo*, the use of landscape is related to the uncertainty about what is going to happen, to the tension created by the actions of the protagonist, the still instant. There are many isolated, dark, and lonely places. The symbology of the representation of the landscape, therefore, responds to the same purpose in both authors. The influences are present in various situations, among them the following: the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, under which Madeleine appears to have committed suicide, is shot at an angle reminiscent of Hopper´s *Queensborough Bridge*; the bell tower where Scottie, the protagonist, suffers vertigo and the fatal accident occurs reminds us of the painting *The Lighthouse at Two Lights*.

58. Quoted by Charles Thomas Samuels in *Encountering Directors*. 1972. p.234.

Edward Hopper Still from *Vertigo*

Queensborough Bridge (1913)

Whitney Museum of Modern Art



Edward Hopper Still from *Vertigo*

The Lighthouse at Two Lights (1929)

Metropolitan Museum of Art

There are several other films by Hitchcock that dialogue with the American painter, an aesthetic dialogue of deep structural connections and meaning. Both artists had very analogous ways of creating images and situations. In *Compartment C, Car 293* (1938), a woman reads alone in her car on a train; in *The 39 Steps* (1935), Pamela (Madeleine Carrol) is aboard a train in the same posture and place as the character in Hopper's painting. The framing, lighting, composition, and attitude of the characters convey the same feeling of loneliness. Hopper's *Office at Night* (1940) depicts a woman working at night in an office, while her boss reads at his desk; in *Marnie* (1964), there is a scene where the office and the atmosphere are similarly portrayed. *Night Shadows* (1921) depicts a man walking alone at night in a lonely street; in *39 Steps* there is a street scene that looks very much like this painting. *Queensborough Bridge* (1913) depicts the new Manhattan-Queens Bridge; in *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943), a bridge connecting Jersey City to Newark is filmed at an angle like the one portrayed by Hopper. Hopper's buildings and architecture were a constant source of inspiration for Hitchcock.

Edward Hopper

*Compartment C, Car 293 (*1938)

Whitney Museum of American Art

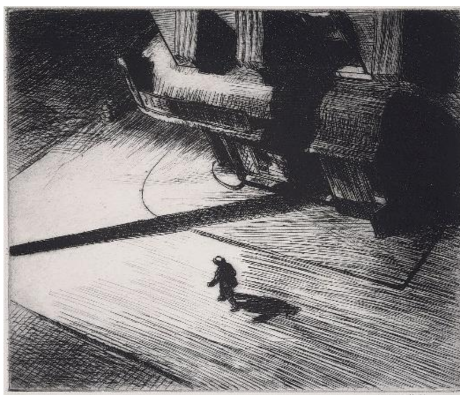
Still from *The 39 Steps*

Edward Hopper

Office at Night (1940)

Walker Art Center

Still from *Marnie*



Edward Hopper

*Night Shadows (*1921)

Philadelphia Museum of Art

Still from *The 39 Steps*

Still from *Shadow of a Doubt*

As the images above demonstrate, there are many similarities in the way Hitchcock and Hopper create their scenes. It is not just about the composition or the lighting; the mood they convey is often the same.

3.1.3. PSYCHO (1960)

Psycho is a sinister suspense film, with many references to Hopperian poetics throughout, as the following lines will demonstrate. Hitchcock frequently used windows in his films as a starting device to begin a scene, symbolic of entering the lives of its characters. In the opening sequence of *Psycho*, the camera shows a wide view of the city, which strongly resembles Hopper`s painting *The City* (1927), before peering through the window of the hotel room where Marion Crane and her lover are having an afternoon encounter.

Edward Hopper

The City (1927)

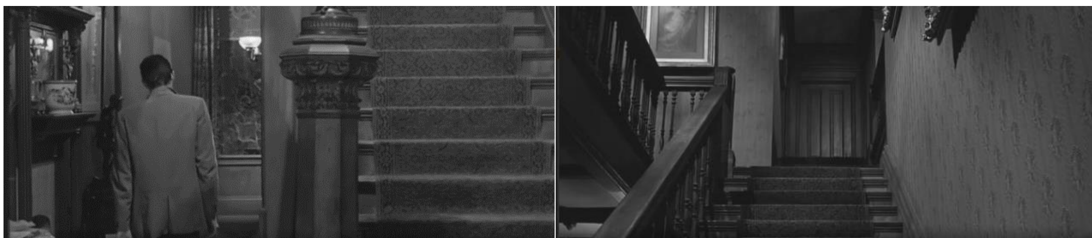
Private Collection

Stills from *Psycho*

Hitchcock reveals himself as a master of suspense and intrigue once again in *Psycho*, a film that determined a before and an after in the thriller genre. The home of Norman Bates was directly modelled after Hopper's *House by the Railroad*, as previously discussed; however, it was quite warped in relation to the original premise. The prominence given to the Bates motel is a ghostly and haunting version of Hopper´s painting, as Hitchcock transforms the isolated gothic mansion into a house of horrors. It is no longer a house, it has become the receptacle of the horror, of the repetition of the days of solitude, of that remaining on the threshold to protect oneself from the world while continuing to observe it. The house acquires demonic proportions, assumes its condition of hell, and Hitchcock shows us not only the interior of that labyrinth but also the ghosts that inhabit it.

When Hitchcock films the house, he does it in such a way (shape, lighting, shot angle, inscription in the editing, duration of the shot, music, etc.) that it becomes loaded with countless fictional possibilities.

House by the Railroad and Still from *Psycho*



Stills from *Psycho*

The house set of the film is still at Universal Studios in Hollywood (I was lucky to visit the studios many years ago and had the opportunity to see it).

The gigantic mansion, isolated and proud, also inspired, although with another symbolic tone, the Benedict family´s house in *Giant* (George Stevens, 1956) and the farmer´s house in *Days of Heaven* (Terrence Malick, 1978). *Giant* is a rural drama that bears witness to the history lived by American wild nature, besieged by the capitalist civilization, before which it surrenders both in terms of urbanization and as a source of resources that fatten the system (in this case, oil). *Days of Heaven* will be discussed further ahead in this chapter.

Stills from *Giant*

The voyeurism of *Rear Window* is also present in *Psycho*. Norman Bates bridges the distance between painting and viewer, between voyeur and observed, in details such as pulling the shower curtain hastily or peeking through holes in the walls of the motel to observe his next victim. As Bates says, he does not have many guests at his motel since they redirected the highway. In his isolation, his madness grew, and he thus became the murderer we all know.

Still from *Psycho*

Hitchcock exaggerates the angles through which he photographs the plans and appeals to urban scenes, specifically streets, roads, and offices. Finally, the utilization of

black and white photography instead of colour photography aids to reinforce the relationships with the classic *noir* and heightens the emotions that the viewer should experience during viewing.

Hitchcock and Hopper shared common themes: voyeurism, loneliness, and isolation. Art-loving Hitchcock and film-loving Hopper had the mastery to tell a story within a single, still frame. Both aimed at getting and conveying a sense of melancholic, poignant longing in their crafts, which was their mutual interest and goal. Hopper did it through paint; Hitchcock through film.

Hopper was, still is, an inspiration to all inventive artists and will always be regarded as an example of true art. Hitchcock was a master filmmaker with the creativity to not only produce his own original masterpieces but also to imitate others' great works of art. Obviously, Hitchcock was not the only one to be aware of Hopper's cinematic qualities, as it will be discussed in the following pages.

3.2. MICHELANGELO ANTONIONI

> *To me making a film is to live. We know that underneath the revealed image there is another one, more faithful to reality, and underneath this other one another, and again under this last one, until we get the true image of that reality, absolute, mysterious, that no one will ever see. Or perhaps until the breakdown of any image, of any reality. Abstract cinema would therefore have its own raison d'être.*
>
> Michelangelo Antonioni [59]

Hopper's influence also goes beyond the United States. Such is the case of Michelangelo Antonioni (the great poetic film director of alienation), who works on the relationship between emptiness and space in several of his films in an infinite waiting embodied by suspended characters. When it comes to the relationship between Hopper's paintings and film, Italian filmmaker Michelangelo Antonioni is one of the names to take into great consideration. Filmmaker and painter shared common themes even before Antonioni went to America.

Women were a vehicle through which Hopper channeled his own moods. The cinema of the second half of the 20th century was fertile ground for this kind of

59. Giorgio Tinazzi. *Michelangelo Antonioni*. 2013. p. 7.

character in film. An exemplary version of this is the way women were portrayed in several of Antonioni´s films, played by his life partner and muse (between 1960 and 1970), Monica Vitti.

If Hopper's influence on Wim Wenders is self-evidence, the same cannot be said of Antonioni. And contrary to his German disciple, the Italian never sought to make any reference in his films to the work of the American painter. Still, the affinity between their works is undeniable: many isolated plans of Antonioni's films look like Hopper's paintings and numerous paintings by Hopper seem extracted from the filmmaker's works. Hopper and Antonioni express in their crafts a corresponding worldview. Loneliness, especially that experienced in large cities, exercised the same fascination in both. In their works, people are anonymous and the relationship between them is circumstantial. Both were sensitive to the lack of communication between the middle-class couple, which is portrayed both in paintings such as *Summer Evening*, *Hotel by a Railroad,* and *Cape Cod Evening*, as well as in films such as *La Notte*, *L´Eclisse,* and *L´Avventura*. It is as if Antonioni turned into a film those stories about lack of communication hinted at by the American painter. The two of them share the same pessimistic view of contemporary urban life and its immense boredom. Both are attracted by locations considered "no places," spaces without history and without identity. Both are equally obsessed with travel, and the urge to move, with characters seeking an escape from civilization, such as those in the *L´Avventura*.

From a formal perspective, linked to visual composition, the affinities between these two artists are equally disconcerting. Both share the same ideal of formal economy, sobriety, and austerity. There is asepsis and a certain icy tone in Hopper's paintings that find a parallel in the way Antonioni composed his plans. Similarly, the framing rules applied by both respect an organic, articulated, and graphic composition of figures and backgrounds. Everything that has been said about the presence or absence of the human figure in Hopper's paintings can be transposed to the analysis of an Antonioni film, and in no other is this more evident than in *L´Eclisse*. Its final ten minutes – which are among the most original in the history of cinema – are filled with a succession of static takes of the locations that were the setting of the characters' love encounters. However, in this final assembly, all those spaces are revisited at a time when they are completely empty. As in paintings, those empty places constantly evoke the human presence that is not there.

It is, therefore, in the treatment of space that we find the greatest similarities between their compositions. In both, space is invested with an intrinsic psychological value, and it is also an expression of the interior of the characters. The vast empty locations of some of Antonioni's films are an expression of the sentimental emptiness and meaning experienced by its characters.

The attention to the image, to framing, and their possible unifying relationship has been a theme constantly investigated by Antonioni's cinema, clearly identifiable throughout his production. There is always an intangible link between the different shots of his films, as well as a unifying force that renders unique the space of the image, even if it is broken in its constituent elements: the void. It is the technique that involves following the main character, especially from behind, through all the events that happen to her/him in the film. Reality through the gaze of Michelangelo Antonioni makes the absence, the empty space, and the missing character a real conditioning agent of the whole story; it manages to make the intangible "visible."

His biggest success was the so-called Alienation Trilogy, composed by *L'Avventura* (1960), *La Notte* (1961), and *L'Eclisse* (1962), that renders an uncomfortable pondering on modernity and its boredoms, namely social estrangement, as evoked by their many lonely figures, often portrayed in isolated, Hopper-like circumstances. Many critics add *Deserto Rosso* (1964) to this trilogy, thus making it a tetralogy. Because these are films with virtually no narrative plot and no resolution, with wandering dialogues or open endings, they could be easily taken as extended and moving versions of Hopper's images.

3.2.1. *L'AVVENTURA* (1960)

L'Avventura concerns the mysterious disappearance of a young woman, Anna, during a boat trip in the Mediterranean, off the coast of Sicily, and the search taken up by her cynical lover and her best friend (the great Monica Vitti, in her first role). During the search, they develop a relationship. Considered Antonioni's masterpiece, this film is a stunningly shot tale of modern boredom and spiritual loneliness.

Below are some visual echoes that strongly resonate with Hopper´s influence.

Stills from *L'Avventura*

3.2.2. *LA NOTTE* (1961)

The plot revolves around a single day and night in the life of a married couple who confront their alienation from each other and the emptiness of the bourgeois circles in which they move.

Below are stills that display the strong influence received from Hopper, namely settings and framings involving stairs and windows.

Stills from *La Notte*

3.2.3. *L`ECLISSE* (1962)

A young woman, Vittoria, on the rebound from a failed relationship, meets a confident young stockbroker, but their love affair is doomed because of the man's greedy nature.

Below are stills that display the strong influence received from Hopper, namely settings and framings involving windows.

Stills from L´Eclisse

If we look at a particular shot of *L´ Eclisse,* we will recognise a reference to Hopper's *Soir Bleu*. In this work, the painter inserted a column that frames and reorganizes the space in the canvas, as discussed in chapter III. The insertion of a visual obstacle between the viewer and the protagonists changes the perception of the former,

who becomes aware of his external position in the narrative. The same happens in Antonioni's framing: the reorganization of the image that frames the protagonists excludes the viewer from the action.

Still from *L´Eclisse*

The final sequence of *L´Eclisse*, emptied of its characters who have gone in opposite directions, submerges us in a pictorial environment worthy of the best Hopper paintings.

Still from *L´Eclisse*

Quoting Lucia Cardone in *Sguardi differenti – Studi di cinema in onore di Lorenzo Cuccu, Il Soggetto Imprevisto e la "tetralogia dei sentimenti" di Michelangelo Antonioni*, the centrality of the female characters, in the three films under consideration, who are guiding characters to whom the narrator has attributed his point of view, is an evident fact that is first disclosed by their exceptional ability to perceive phenomena, to feel the world, to represent its crisis. The protagonists, observed in their external behaviours, in the enigma of actions that appear incongruous and unmotivated, bring to the screen the traces of female existences irreconcilable with the patriarchal scene. (Cardone, 2014)

Cardone argues that Anna, in *L´Avventura*, can only disappear, transposing her unexpected subjectivity into the definitive, absolute sign of absence: she disappears from the world in order not to disappoint herself. As for Vittoria, in *L´Eclisse*, she cannot find her place in a world that does not mean anything to her, regulated as it is by money and its dark power, pervaded by ungenuine relationships, which squander the joy of the

encounter. Her nomadism comes from this mismatch, her quest takes on the traits of inexhaustible questioning. Her enigmatic walks on the sunny and dusty roads of Eur offer the camera a precise cast for the unfolding of the final sequence, where the gaze, retracing her steps, lingering on the objects that she, first, looked at and touched, finally frees itself. The fifty-eight shots that close *L´Eclisse*, with their magnificent geometry, detached from the presence of the character guide, mark the definitive liberation from the dictates of the *récit* in favour of an autonomous vision exercise. Sort of film in the film, this powerful closure binds together the scattered and suspended fragments of a sunny landscape, inhabited by rare and guarded human presences, dotted by the lines of a bare, essential architecture; it is a pure observing exercise, a reflection on gaze itself. (Cardone, 2014)

A morbid language, internally tense and complex, allows Antonioni to deepen the theme of ambiguity (sentimental, moral, cultural) that is at the centre of his best work: the Alienation Trilogy. These are films that represent the career of a director. His filmography remains a milestone in the history of cinema, and one of the most significant signs of modernity.

3.3. DAVID LYNCH

It´s a strange world.
"Sandy" in *Blue Velvet*

Still from *Twin Peaks*

It is not possible to speak of David Lynch without mentioning his close link with painting. And it all lies in a statement made by himself:

> Looking at what I had done, I heard a noise. Like a breath of wind. And it all came at once. I imagined a world in which painting would be in perpetual motion. I was very excited and started making animated films that were nothing more or less than moving frames.[60]

David Lynch's filmography stands out for its fascination with mystery and strong contrasts. There are always secrets and hidden elements waiting to be investigated and deciphered. Throughout his films, comfortable, daily situations are shattered by elements that make the viewer uncomfortable: the baby in *Eraserhead*, the ear in *Blue Velvet*, Laura Palmer´s corpse in *Twin Peaks*, and the videotapes in *Lost Highway*.

Hopper's repertoire has been an aesthetic inspiration throughout the career of David Lynch, whose films influenced by the painter's work will be mentioned in this section. Hopper, whose figures are conceived as if they were characters in a film, is one of the painters whose work has influenced David Lynch the most. Both artists share the same background image, that of the "small American town" that is shown at the beginning of *Blue Velvet*, in *Twin Peaks*, or in *The Straight Story*. It brings forward the power of stereotypes in the viewer's imagination. There is also a feeling of instability, that something unexpected and disastrous is going to break the stillness, which appears both in Hopper´s oeuvre and in David Lynch´s films.

Lynch's work is possibly the best example of the influence of painting on film. From Hopper, he takes the poetics related to the concept of solitude and monotony. Lynch´s cinematic characters display banality, introspection, and isolation, characteristic themes of the Hopperian universe. Like Hopper, Lynch´s films create a narrative in which there is the monotony of the average American immersed in his daily life. The state of nostalgia was the American feeling during and after the two World Wars, as discussed previously. Thus, the director plays with a dual concept: through scenarios and images that represent the idealization of a perfect life, with beautiful lighting, reminiscent of Hopper's paintings, Lynch reconstructs the stereotypes and icons of the "American way of life" just to destroy them next by introducing the small daily miseries.

Painter and filmmaker coincide in elements deeper than the mere translation of painting to film frames. For this reason, in 2004, on the occasion of the exhibition that

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60. Zoran Samardzija. "DavidLynch.com: Auteurship in the Age of the Internet and Digital Cinema". 2013.

Tate Modern in London hosted on the artist of silence, film director Todd Haynes held a film cycle in which he included David Lynch. In his statements for the documentary filmed in the wake of Hopper's exhibition at Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum in 2012, Haynes gives us the keys to understanding the relationship between the two artists:

> I felt that there was a kind of sensibility that directly connected Hopper and Lynch, and that has to do with a strange sense of isolation, something creepy that happens in the middle of a very normal scene. This can be seen in all the details of Hopper's paintings, the grotesque, the surreal, the nightmare sleeping in the corners of the frame. Sometimes it is found in those eyeballs, which look like bullets, of the women he paints. They always have dark eyes; they have no sight. There is something scary about them. Somehow, they overthrow the exhibitionist mechanism that the voyeur seeks, and I think all that is in Hopper and arguably also in Lynch and his films.[61]

Lynch works with collaborators who maintain a privileged relationship with the painter's work. Jack Fish, in charge of the sets of *The Straight Story* (1999) and *Mulholland Drive* (2011), worked in the seventies in two of Terrence Malick´s films, *Badlands* (1973) and *Days of Heaven* (1978), where Hopper's pictorial heritage is evident. Patricia Norris, production designer of the pilot chapter of *Twin Peaks* (1990), the film *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* (1992), *Lost Highway* (1997), and *The Straight Story* (1999), conceived with Wim Wenders the set of the scene that recreates *Nighthawks* in *The End of Violence* (1997).

Jean Foubert, a specialist in American cinema, gave a lecture[62] under the scope of the symposium "Hopper. Cinema and Modern Life" organised in 2012 by the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, whose theme was the relationship between Hopper and David Lynch, in which he highlighted some scenes from the director's filmography that are reminiscent of the painter's works.

To Foubert, Hopper is primarily an American artist of hyperreality. He is more concerned with representing an American way than with the representation of America

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61. *Edward Hopper, the Painter of Silence*. Canal+España, Morgancrea (for the Edward Hopper exhibition, Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum). 2012.

62. *Hopper and David Lynch*. Lecture by Jean Foubert, a specialist in American cinema, within the Symposium "Hopper. Cinema and Modern Life," organised in June 2012 by the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum.

itself. The same goes for Lynch, an American filmmaker of hyperreality who shows in his films a set of clichés of the American cultural scene and landscapes: small cities, motels, and restaurants.

Foubert highlights one of the painter's constants: voyeurism, an illicit look that is introduced into a space of private life to steal and capture on a canvas a moment of intimacy. Foubert makes a parallel between this recurrent theme in Hopper with a fundamental scene in *Blue Velvet*, where the protagonist Jeffrey, while hiding in a closet, experiences the pleasure of the voyeur watching Dorothy Vallens get undressed.

Voyeurism is, thus, another characteristic that unites painter and director. Hopper's characters are represented from the point of view of the voyeur (artist and viewer). In that same line, we find some scenes in Lynch's films in which the role of the voyeur and the game he initiates are essential.

One last element unites Hopper and Lynch above all the previous ones: the emptying of time. Both in the paintings of the former and in the films of the latter, we find that feeling that suggests that something is going to happen, or the nostalgia of what has already happened, in that space plagued by an excess of reality. The non-event is the theme of the work, in a paralysed time that Hopper resolves through motionless framing. His scenes disturb us precisely because they make us believe that they anticipate the nightmare, the danger. For his part, Lynch plays with the viewer, who awaits the mysterious event in tension, with fear, by using motionless frames and the silence that accompanies them. It is often the close-up that triggers the chaos that precedes those motionless scenes, starting the action.

Speaking of Hopper, Lynch made the following statements: "Edward Hopper is another guy I love, but more for the cinema than for the painting. You dream immediately when you see his works."[63]

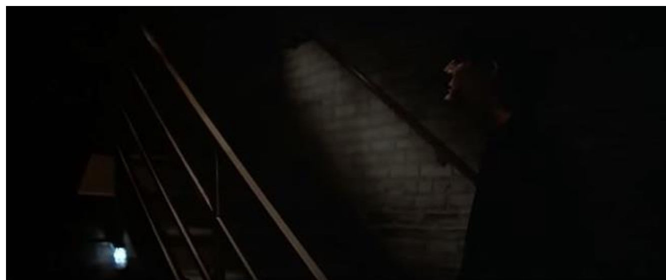
63. David Lynch. *Lynch on Lynch*. 2005. p. 17.

3.3.1. *BLUE VELVET* (1986)

Still from *Blue Velvet*

Hopper´s voyeuristic characteristic has inspired several film directors, including David Lynch. The character Jeffrey Beaumont in Lynch's *Blue Velvet*, very much like Jeff Jeffries in Hitchcock's *Rear Window*, becomes involved in a mystery through voyeurism, in a singular adventure that drags him to the most extravagant places in the city and in his own unconscious.

Blue *Velvet* is a fitting example of the Hopperian influence on cinema. Its *noir* look can be traced back to Edward Hopper's paintings, as it utilizes shadowy, occasionally dark cinematography. A pallet of dark colours dominates the film's atmosphere, thus illustrating the mysteries hidden within the apparently calm suburban American way of life.



Stills from *Blue Velvet*

Blue Velvet owes much to 1950s *film noir*, as it explores such conventions as the *femme fatale* (Dorothy Vallens), a villain (Frank Booth), and the dubious moral stance of the hero (Jeffrey Beaumont). The film introduces several trademark elements of

Lynch's work, the most significant one being the uncovering of a dark secret in an idealized small town. Red curtains, specifically in Dorothy's apartment, have since become a Lynch symbol. *Blue Velvet* has been compared to *Psycho* (1960) due to its bleak portrayal of evil and mental illness. The starting point of both films is curiosity, which draws the protagonists into a secret underworld of crime.

The concept of "American nostalgia," which is present in the formal and content aspects of Edward Hopper's paintings, is reinterpreted in *Blue Velvet* through two procedures: through similar compositions between the paintings and the frames, and the novel resources provided by audiovisual technology, which favour and promote these aspects of composition. The formal aspects and the audiovisual resources are related by composing similar frames and the narrative of a similar story, that of "American nostalgia." However, the frames and stories are enhanced in the film, since it uses resources such as camera movement, internal movement, and editing.

This concept goes hand in hand with monotony, the experience of day-to-day life without major change or radicalization. The link between everyday life and monotony is due to repetition and lack of emotion. The characters portrayed in the paintings of Edward Hopper and in *Blue Velvet* are human beings who develop usual activities, without major changes in their lives. This state of monotony developed by an overwhelming routine leads to boredom and a lack of motivation. The strong longing for a more stimulating life generates a feeling of melancholy or nostalgia for a better past or for the illusion of more excitement in daily life.

There is a contrast between order and chaos, or between what is revealed on the surface and what hides beneath it. In addition, it should be taken into consideration that the views of Lumberton (the American town where the story takes place) have, in several shots, great similarities with the spaces and cities created in Hopper's paintings.

There are several formal aspects seen in the paintings and in the film, such as lines, colours, lighting, shadows, and flat composition, which describe a similar scenario. However, beyond the physical aspect, these resources narrate a similar story: the opposition of formal aspects reveals a vision full of contradictions in the life of Americans of the 20th century, which trigger a melancholic, lonely, and nostalgic feeling.

In addition, the idea that there is something that both authors hide from us or do not let us see is very recurrent. They propose that although there is a daily, normal world,

there are things we do not understand and that it is necessary to hide them because the protagonists themselves do not know what they are. Through the gloom, the contrast of lines, the absent people, the faces, and the hidden actions and intentions, we realize that there is something Hopper and Lynch do not wish to tell us.

The plot deals with the exploration of unknown territory and the inner adventure, which reflect levels of normality and monstrosity. Dorothy Vallens' character personifies everything that hides beneath the surface in Lumberton. She also represents loneliness because she is away from her family (her husband and son have been abducted), and lives alone in an apartment; when she sings, she does it alone; and she has no one to protect her. Despite the presence of Jeffrey, who wants to help her, he does not end up with her, but with Sandy. In the scene where Dorothy is singing in a bar, her loneliness is evident since she is apart from her musicians and alone on stage. It is not only loneliness but also dehumanization. She is stripped of her human character by singing “Blue Velvet" every night, a song that is linked to the dress she wears every time Frank abuses her. Dorothy is a character alienated from the world she lives in.

Still from *Blue Velvet*

We have already discussed that, in more than one situation, Hopper shows us in his paintings that there are solo characters who seem to be accompanied by absent people. You feel the presence of people through windows, and lights that are on; however, we do not have the opportunity to see them. Thus, his characters are always alone, perhaps waiting for those absent to return, longing for the past. In Lynch's chaos, it is very evident that his characters are alone. He has absorbed the characteristics of Hopper's figures and enhanced them by taking them to a level of dementia and debauchery.

An Hopperian echo is shown in one of the film's fundamental scenes, where the frame is remarkably similar to the painting *Summer Interior* (1909). A half-naked woman, sitting on the floor, next to a bed, broken, and discouraged, is spied on in a moment of noticeable discouragement and intimacy. There is intense drama in the silence of both the bedroom (painting) and Dorothy´s apartment (film). The woman´s face is hidden from

the view of the voyeur, in either case, as both scenes are constructed from the viewpoint of the prying eye, be it that of the person who looks at the painting, the viewer of the film, or that of Jeffrey (hidden in the closet).

Edward Hopper
Summer Interior (1909)
Whitney Museum of American Art

Still from *Blue Velvet*

The title of the painting is neutral and deceiving. It indicates a genre, a season, an atmosphere, a light; it says nothing about the subject. Light pours into the room from an unseen window. The painting is a subtle colour party: the brown of the bed and furniture, the beige of the wall, the white of the sheets and the woman´s flesh and shirt, the yellow of the blanket, and the red of the three stripes. This painting summons a range of emotions in the viewer, while we realize the tragic nature of the woman´s situation. A possible reading is that her body was used by a man in a hurry (she is half-dressed), who then left just as hastily. She sits on a sheet from her bed and seems to look away in shame. An arm is between her legs, and her bare front bottom is exposed. The viewer is powerless and passive, he cannot do anything to ease her pain; he is the prying Peeping Tom in a moment of a lonely woman's intimate life. As discussed in chapter II, perhaps light can be the redeeming agent again. This is one of the most tragic and intimate of Hopper´s paintings.

As for Dorothy´s apartment, colours are sombre and darker: dark brown furniture, violet couch, and dark red cushions. The woman wears black lingerie, contrasting with her white flesh. She is on her knees, crouched, taken down by her heartache and grief. Roger Ebert, one of the film´s critics, praised Isabella Rossellini for her convincing and courageous performance. However, he did not like how her character was depicted in the film, and even accused David Lynch of misogyny: "degraded, slapped around, humiliated and undressed in front of the camera. And when you ask an actress to endure those experiences, you should keep your side of the bargain by putting her in an important

film."[64] On the personal side, during the film´s production, Lynch and Rossellini fell in love and started a relationship.

3.3.2. *THE STRAIGHT STORY* (1999)

One of Lynch´s most literal films in the use of Hopperian poetics is *The Straight Story*. It becomes evident in his rendering of the American landscape, through which Lynch simply passes the glance of the camera (the lawnmower of the film), without judging what he observes but also without avoiding leaving traces of solitude, something that is consubstantial to a country as vast as the protagonist, full of increasingly remote stories of pilgrims, explorers, and pathfinders.

In *The Straight Story*, David Lynch approaches the theme of the road as a personal quest that leads the protagonist to solve a personal problem. Although this is Lynch´s simplest film, it still has a deep meaning. His less "Lynchian" film (without dream worlds or disturbed minds) is a hypnotic road movie that goes from Iowa to Wisconsin, allowing the viewer to enjoy the calm of the wheat fields and the serenity of a landscape typical of Edward Hopper´s paintings. The protagonist, Alvin Straight, a 73-year-old, decides to take a trip on his lawnmower to talk to his brother whom he has been estranged from for more than 10 years. Along the way, he meets several characters who will make him reflect on his life.

As in Hopper's paintings, Lynch proposes moments that are part of a reality that flows continuously and in which time plays a fundamental role. In addition, Lynch creates an abstraction of reality through the landscapes and characters that inhabit them. The old man leaves on a journey to explore the universe of everyday life and its surroundings, something that in Hopper's painting is reflected in the representation of his distant figures in their ponderings.

However, the director's undisputed mark is visible in the presence of certain sinister elements. When Alvin's character is introduced, he is seen lying on the ground, possibly the victim of a fall caused by his health condition. Along the way, mishaps endanger his life. This intuition of the sinister and the dark is perceived not only in

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64. Roger Ebert. "Blue Velvet". *Chicago Sun-Times*. September 19, 1986.

the images, but also in the sounds that Alvin hears as he recalls his war exploits. This constant play between light and darkness, the familiar and the unknown, is also evident in Hopper's pictorial work. The realistic light that Hopper and Lynch recreate in their scenes contrasts with the dark psyche of the characters and takes us back to the America of everyday life, the ambivalent, the apparent peace that hides many secrets. Thus, Alvin Straight travels through a Lynchian landscape, as the viewer does when viewing a painting by Edward Hopper.

Edward Hopper

High Road (1931)

Whitney Museum of American Art

Still from *The Straight Story*

3.3.3. *MULHOLLAND DRIVE* (2001)

Still from *Mulholland Drive*

After a violent car accident on the winding Mulholland Drive, a woman becomes amnesiac. She and a starry-eyed Hollywood wannabe seek clues and answers across Los Angeles in a sinister adventure that takes them beyond dreams and reality. All of David Lynch's cinema has sinister tones. These characteristics are evident in the three initial scenes of *Mullholand Drive*: the first scene resembles a dance contest, whose winner is the protagonist, accompanied by a couple who appear to be her parents. Then a red pillow is shown, indicating a dream state. To present the film's credits, the director introduces a dark road in the city of Los Angeles and a car that takes someone to Mullholand Drive. Lynch presents a series of clues and objects for the viewer to try to unravel the underlying plot of the film. If the viewer is attentive, he will notice that this is the beginning of a sinister journey proposed by Lynch. Thus, the audience enters an unknown, strange, and indecipherable universe, because the clues left by the director lack meaning, they contain a symbolic void. This rupture of the symbolic conventions of the film industry also serves the director as a vehicle to denounce the parameters imposed by Hollywood, as it makes a metacritique of the deceptions, hidden interests, and mafias existing in the industry.

Lynch had already used the road symbolism as a metaphor for the unconscious in *Lost Highway* (1997), his previous film. In *Mulholland Drive* the same resource is used, but in another dimension. This film became the icon of Lynch´s cinema because through it we can see how the director´s cinema works, breaking free from the conventions of the institutional acting method. That acting method is the conventional code of cinematic language that settles in the public´s imagination, that is, the linear narrative through which Hollywood cinema tells its stories.

Lynch resorts to the Hopperian influence once again in *Mulholland Drive*. The saturated colours, the closed spaces (diners, offices, rooms, a theatre), a certain type of light, very bright (typical of a hot city like Los Angeles) and the lonely cityscapes are close to Hopper´s art as Lynch, like the painter, presents scenes to which he does not provide a coherent explanation or solution. *Mulholland Drive* breathes Hopper´s universe through all its pores, as shown by the images below (building façade, theatre, and the apartment of one of the protagonists), where the dark, somber colours predominate, on one hand, and the loneliness of a remorseful woman is depicted, on the other hand.

Stills from *Mulholland Drive*

3.4. WIM WENDERS

My filmmaking from the beginning had a huge documentary aspect. Looking back now, I think I made most of my fiction films (...) as if they had been documentaries, and then I made my documentaries as if they had been fiction.

Wim Wenders

"All the paintings of Edward Hopper could be taken from one long movie about America, each one the beginning of a new scene," declares Wim Wenders in his book *The Pixels of Paul Cézanne: And Reflections on Other Artists* (2015). "Each picture digs deep into the American dream and investigates that very American dilemma of appearance versus reality." A chapter is devoted to Hopper, and this is how it begins:

> A fat and heavy volume. That was my main reference for everything related to Edward Hopper. The book contained reproductions of his main paintings and it had already undergone several changes, but what had suffered the most was the shooting of *The American Friend* (1977), since at the time Robby Müller and I were so enthralled by Hopper that we carried those reproductions around and took them as models for several framings. We even tore out several pages and hung them on hotel and production office walls.[65]

This influence is most evident in Wenders´s American urban landscapes. To the

65. Wim Wenders. *The Pixels of Paul Cézanne: And Reflections on Other Artists.* 2015.

director, Hopper´s paintings could be the beginning of a new chapter in a film about America.[66]

Landscapes are probably the most critical component of his films. He has even declared that "they (the landscapes) could be the leading actors and human beings would be the extras."[67] Cities are a usual location in Wenders´s films, starting with the ones that are closer to him, the German cities, like the Hamburg of *The American Friend* (1977) or the Berlin of *The Sky Over Berlin* (1987). The cityscapes in which his films are immersed often remind us of the ones Hopper painted.

Something that particularly strikes us in Hopper is the off-field, which we do not see, the suspension of time and narrative, that is, the cinematography of his painting. On the other hand, in some of Wim Wenders' most interesting films, we find a kind of suspension of breath and time in images. This suspension does not, of course, turn the film into a painting, nor is that what is intended. However, it makes the film evoke the plasticity of a painting, as has already been stated. The plasticity of the cinematographic image and its interesting relationship with painting, the use of the plastic universe of a painter in the image of a film is a relationship that Wenders handles with mastery.

Wenders is a great admirer of Hopper´s work and he loves him to the point of explicitly quoting his paintings in his films. This relationship is displayed in his famous reconstruction of *Nighthawks* in *The End of Violence* (1997), which is used as the movie set of a scene in a Hollywood thriller. He noted:

> I studied Hopper's paintings with the cameraman and the cinematographer. We found out that when he paints people in the rooms and you see the outside, or when from the outside we look inside the room in his paintings, the impressive thing is that you never see the glass. The outside and the inside have no separation.[68]

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66. *Ibidem*. p. 47.

67. Donata Wenders and Wim Wenders. *Como si fuera la última vez*. 2009. p. 127.

68. Wim Wenders. "Dialogo" (con C. Truppi). *Nei luoghi dell'anima con Wim Wenders*. 2007. p. 122.

Still from *The End of Violence*

In an interview in 2012,[69] Wenders stated that the eerie qualities of the artist's work "prompt us to think about what is going to happen next. I never knew paintings could have this quality. Usually... paintings often show a moment in time, so they suggest a story. But with Hopper, when you look at the same painting ten minutes later, you'd swear something happened." And he added, "To give everything a permanent form, to put things in their place... to overcome the emptiness, the anxiety, and the dread by capturing them on a white surface. That's what his work shares with the cinema. It lets Hopper, the storyteller, with a canvas on his easel, stand along the great painters of the silver screen." The German director further explained why Hopper's work was so influential to filmmakers like himself: "Hopper's paintings came into being when American narrative cinema was in its heyday, and you can interpret them with those movies in mind. All of them portray locations, all the scenes of the crime...The paintings either show the calm before the storm or the deserted scene after a dramatic encounter."

Other films by Wim Wenders that were influenced by the painter's works are *The American Friend* (1977), *Hammet* (1982), *Paris, Texas* (1984), *Don't Come Knocking* (2006), and *Two or Three Things I Know About Edward Hopper* (2020), which will be discussed below.

3.4.1. *THE AMERICAN FRIEND* (1977)

It is undeniable that Wenders´s films are deeply influenced by Hopper´s paintings. It all started with *The American Friend*, whose images are impregnated with the Hopperian style. As mentioned above, the director himself declared that Robby Müller and he were so inspired by Hopper that they carried around a book containing all of his paintings. However, they did not imitate him, they captured his atmospheres regarding

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69. Interview with Wenders in *Devillers, Edward Hopper and the Blank Canvas.* 2012.

light. More than explicit references to specific canvas, they created a visual style (between realistic and artificial, that generates a certain strangeness) that systematically resounded with the painter´s universe. For that purpose, they used an intense chromatic range (from cold blue and neon green to fiery red).

The story is about Tom Ripley, a forged art dealer, who suggests that a picture framer he knows in Hamburg would be a good hitman for a job that must be done, but the appointed man is a reluctant assassin. The ensuing dramatic action takes us through Hamburg and the atmospheres feel as if taken from Hopper´s works.

The film deals with feelings and atmospheres that are present in Hopper´s pictorial poetics: loneliness and alienation, anguish and inwardness, wait and stillness. As in Hopper´s oeuvre, everything is due to the iconographic treatment of the urban landscape (and how the human figure fits in it), in both the representation of the interior and exterior spaces, windows and glass (or the lack thereof) playing an essential role as a link between the two types of space. A melancholic landscape halfway between nocturnal and brightness, inhabited by desolation and silence.

Below there are some stills from the film that resonate with Hopper´s paintings, atmospheres, colours, and settings.

Stills from *The American Friend*

3.4.2. *HAMMETT* (1982)

Still from *Hammet*

Wim Wenders had in *Hammett* his first all-American production, and he used this film to explore his relationship with Hopper’s works. It is an early bridge between Wenders and the painter, as the resemblance between some of Wenders’ shots and some of Hopper’s atmospheric early drawings, such as *Night Shadows* or *House Tops* (both 1921) is evident, particularly because of the influence film noir and its elements have over this film.

Edward Hopper
Night Shadows (1921)
Philadelphia Museum of Art

Edward Hopper
House Tops (1921)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art

In *Night Shadows*, a print from 1921, the artist provides a birds-eye perspective of a city street corner. He summons just a few elements: a storefront, a fire hydrant, and a solitary man about to cross the approaching shadow of a lamppost that lies across his path. Hopper made this setting look mysterious, and even menacing, by using dark tonalities and strong compositional devices. The viewer becomes a voyeur, watching the unaware pedestrian. *Night Shadows* is a predecessor of the *film noir* of the 1940s. *House Tops*, also a print from 1921, is a New York City scene that depicts a woman contemplating the city from an elevated (El) train, as a fellow passenger with parcels seems absorbed in thought. The atmosphere of these drawings is mirrored in some shots in *Hammet*.

The film is a fictional account of real-life detective story writer Dashiell Hammett, a prominent figure of the *noir* movement, and his involvement in the investigation of the mysterious disappearance of a Chinese cabaret actress in San Francisco. Wenders has a fascination with American culture and landscapes, and a particular look on *film noir*, which was also a source of inspiration for Hopper, as discussed earlier.

Below are some stills from the film that summon Hopper´s atmospheres, colours, and settings.

Stills from *Hammet*

3.4.3. *PARIS, TEXAS* (1984)

Still from *Paris, Texas*

Paris, Texas (1984) has two particularly important visual influences: photographer Walker Evans and Edward Hopper. From the latter, Wenders took the reverse image of the American dream, loneliness, and alienation.[70] Robby Müller´s magnificent cinematography completes the spell with saturated colours that pay homage

70. Pamela Biénzobas. "Paris, Texas de Wim Wenders. La reescritura del sueño americano." in *Revista de Cine Mabuse*, edición n. 96. http://www.mabuse.cl/articulo.php?id=86674

to the master painter.[71] Müller´s panoramic vistas are breath-taking, and the film is Wenders' most visually appealing portrayal of America.

There are road movie elements in *Paris, Texas*, even though the film is essentially a western (Wenders's favourite genre), according to Ryan Gilbey in an online article (https://www.theguardian.com/film/2022/jul/01/wim-wenders-when-paris-texas-won-cannes-it-was-terrible) in *The Guardian* (July 1st 2022.) Harry Dean Stanton's painfully isolated protagonist, Travis Henderson, is an aimless wanderer who has been absent for four years. When he comes out of the desert, he undertakes another journey to try to reconnect with society, himself, his life, his family, and his son especially. As the film progresses, it is revealed that Travis has a difficult and tragic past. He eventually tracks down his estranged wife, who works in a Peep Show, returns their child to her, and disappears back into the wild. This alienated and lonely character seems to have wandered straight out of a Hopper painting.

Stills from *Paris, Texas*

The road trip undertaken by Travis takes him to lonely gas stations, diners, motels, dusky rural towns, and vast, modern cityscapes. In the final scene of the film, when Hunter, Travis's son, goes back to his mother Jane´s arms, there is an urban darkness that is intensified by neon rays emanating from a streetlight. Amazing fluorescent greens fade into the black of night. Throughout the film, fluorescent lights and low-light sequences are used. *Paris, Texas* is brimming with Hopper-style Americana, and it serves as an ode to American culture, the country, the people, and its traditions.

Wim Wenders recently gave an interview on the subject of the restoration of some

71. Carlos González García. "Sobre la relación ente la pintura de Edward Hopper y el cine." in *Faena Aleph*. 2015. http://www-faena.com/aleph/es/articles/sobre-la-relacion-entre-la-pintura-de-edward-hopper-y-el-cine

of his films where he stated the following:[72]

> The challenge of *Paris, Texas* was to find that Kodachrome feel again. It all goes back to the light of the American west, the brightest, most primary-coloured skies on Earth. So Robby Müller, the DoP at the time, did amazing work to remain true to that light, contrasting it with some dawn or dusk light, and using fluorescents that had this kind of poisonous green/yellow touch to it… He loved that combination. (…) Part of the look of *Paris, Texas* was that Robby dared to keep this fluorescent light – with all its poisonous impact – in the shots. In the West, there's a lot of neon, and that neon set against the open skies is really mind-blowing. And it's hard to capture it on film. And hard to print it too. On the digital restoration, we wanted to get back to Robby's original colours.

Wenders´s fascination for the American dream, and for the dark side that lures within it, makes *Paris, Texas* a masterpiece. Below are some stills from the film that immediately evoke Hopper´s universe.

Stills from *Paris, Texas*

72.https://lwlies.com/interviews/wim-wenders-with-restoration-theres-a-danger-you-can-falsify-the-film/

3.4.4. *DON´T COME KNOCKING* (2005)

Still from *Don´t Come Knocking*

Wenders´s most faithful film to Hopper´s cinematic-pictorial characteristics is undoubtfully *Don't Come Knocking*. It is a dramatic genre film that represents the paramount stylization of the director´s homage to Hopper. Both the scene composition and the chromatic intensification are rendered in Hopper´s fashion, and the plot lacks the sombre tones that are evident in some of his other films.

The plot deals with the desertion of an aging cowboy movie star from a film set. His intention is to reconnect with his mother, whom he has not seen in thirty years, as he feels he is getting old. He then learns from her that he has a child he never knew about and sets off to find him or her.

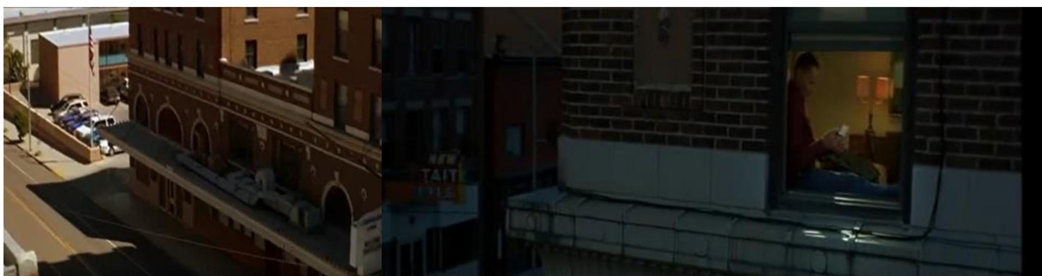
In a review titled "The gray cowboy movie,"[73] Roger Ebert argues that "these people move in intersecting orbits through Butte, Montana, a city that seems to have essentially no traffic, and no residents except for a few tavern extras and restaurant customers. (…) they all seem outlined against their own mental horizons, as archetypes who represent something." Ebert also notes: "His life (Howard Spence´s) seems to be lived outside his experience as if someone else made all those headlines in his mother's scrapbook. ´Nothing that happened back then happened`, he says, summing up his life with one line that puts its finger directly on the character's biggest problem."

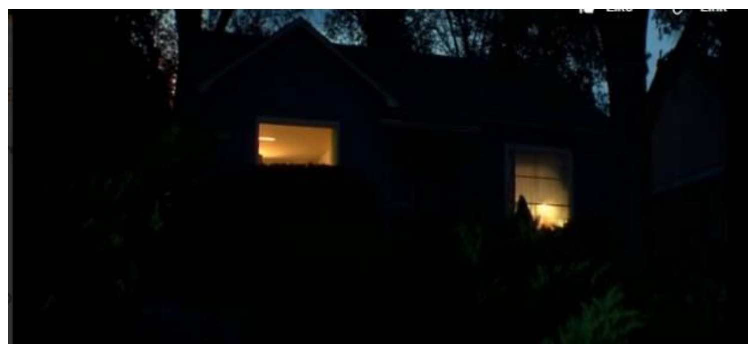
The cinematography by Franz Lustig produces wonderful images from beginning to end, but the best shot is the one of Howard Spence sitting in a lonely hotel room

73. https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/dont-come-knocking-2006

windowsill, overlooking a desolate city street (image above). When they framed this shot, Wenders, Lustig, and Shepard must have had Hopper in mind.

Below are some stills from the film that highlight the similarities with Hopper´s paintings.





Stills from *Don´t Come Knocking*

In *Don't Come Knocking* Wenders is in a reflective mood, even more so than in *Paris, Texas*, even though they are both road movies. Spence is older and has more to regret than Travis, who seems to live in his own autistic world until he realizes his son must be reunited with his mother and snaps out of his numbness.

The film´s plastic/pictorial construction, framing, liveliness, colour saturation, and light treatment make it function as a painting. Its frames are filled with intense hues - fiery reds and yellows, and glowing blues or greens (the latter mostly when Spence is present in the scene). There is a direct inspiration, visible in such elements as interiors lit by lamps or streets illuminated by neon. This is a film that does not simply quote Hopper, it plastically recreates his visual imagery in another time, space, and context.

3.4.5. *TWO OR THREE THINGS I KNOW ABOUT EDWARD HOPPER* (2020)

The Beyeler Foundation in Switzerland devoted its main spring exhibition in 2020 to Edward Hopper. The high point of this exhibition was the screening of a short (15-minute) 3D immersive live-action film, *Two or Three Things I Know About Edward Hopper*, by Wim Wenders, who stated that Hopper´s paintings deeply impressed him when he first became acquainted with them in the 1970s. To shoot it, Wenders travelled around the United States searching for the spirit of Hopper. There is no dialogue; however, there is a musical background written by French composer Laurent Petitgand, who had worked with Wenders before, that perfectly matches the atmosphere of the film.

Wenders reconstructed a handful of main Hopper paintings with actors and weaved micro-narratives. The accomplishment of Wenders's project is to give a spark of life to the stories the viewer feels are hiding beneath the surface of Hopper's canvas. The

director offers abundant space to allow the viewer to create his own narrative out of these image fragments, keeping them open to narrative possibilities, like Hopper's paintings do.

Below are some illustrative stills from the film.

Stills from *Two or Three Things I Know About Edwar Hopper*

3.5. TODD HAYNES

Todd Haynes is one of the most important contemporary American filmmakers. Acclaimed for films like *Poison* (1991), *Safe* (1995), and *Far from Heaven* (2002), *Carol* (2015) is his best-known film. The visual and emotional isolation of his characters, the exuberant and static anguish of his scenarios, and his ability to explore the mysterious and paranormal nature of American life are strongly related to the work of Edward Hopper.

In *Safe*, Haynes shows that his style, influenced by Hopper, may be adapted to a more modern context. His protagonist feels harassed by loneliness and pessimistic thoughts, which manifest themselves especially in domestic interiors, as much during the day as at night. As we have already seen, in Hopper's work there is a huge reservoir of psychological anxieties, a series of stories repressed under a quiet surface. This sensation is present in *Safe*, and in the way the director uses the interior of the room: the mirrors, the architecture, and the decoration. We can trace the scenes directly back to Hopper's oeuvre.

Haynes also adopted Hopperian aesthetic principles to the Great Depression era in the miniseries *Mildred Pierce* (2011), whose five episodes he directed. Framed windows are abundant, through which pensive women pondering on solitude are seen, as well as diner atmospheres, and contrasting lighting.

Under the scope of the exhibition dedicated to Edward Hopper in 2004, the Tate Modern of London showcased a program of films selected by Todd Haynes that, in the opinion of the director, were influenced by the painter. Richard Dyer, Professor of Film Studies at the University of Warwick, joined the director at a symposium to discuss the issues raised in his filmography in relation to Hopper's work and influence.

Dyer claimed that somehow Hopper's works contain a great narrative load even though, in themselves, they do not tell anything, and that in Hollywood the narrative is of paramount importance. He asked Haynes if he sees narrative quality in Hopper's work. The director replied that it is precisely this inert subject that really made an impact on him.[74]

3.5.1 *FAR FROM HEAVEN* (2002)

Speaking about *Far from Heaven* and the influence that the painter had on this film, Haynes stated that the women in Hopper's paintings occupy a space confined to American values, where oppression ends up determining the values of these women. The plot develops in a world of loneliness, secrets, and dissatisfaction. The image of a typical American residential neighbourhood of the 1950s is reconstructed as the scenario for the everyday stories that are never totally disclosed. Like Hopper´s frozen moments, they pass before the audience´s eyes as images that everyone can glance at in the lives of their neighbours, through windows or balconies, in gardens or other public spaces.

74. Todd Haynes with Richard Dyer. *Double Indemnity: Todd Hayes/Edward Hopper*. London: Tate Modern. 2004. Conference held on the occasion of the exhibition "Edward Hopper", organized by Tate Modern between May 7 and September 5, 2004.

Stills from *Far From Heaven*

Hopper stated that he was looking for himself and painting his inner emotions; likewise, the characters of *Far from Heaven* dive into their feelings and experiences, searching for who they are and what they feel under the prototype appearances that the advertising or the Technicolor films of the time tried to impose on Americans as a way of life and, thus, the road to happiness.

At a more superficial level, Haynes recognised that Hopper's style is present within his films and explains that, when he begins to create one of them, he always makes a book of images that will show him what he wants in his film. Hopper's works will always be very present in these books, especially the paintings featuring lonely women, which inspired scenes from *Far from Heaven*. *New York Movie* is another painting that inspired Haynes for one of his scenes in the same film.

3.5.2 *CAROL* (2015)

Carol`s plot is about two women who fall in love in the United States in the 1950s. For its remarkable pictorial qualities and for the time in which these two women live, the film does not cease to remit us to the Hopperian universe. One of the clearest examples is the scene in which one of the protagonists is sitting on a bed with a suitcase next to it.

Still from *Carol*

There are other noticeable references throughout the length of the film. For example, the use of the colour green and how it bathes the different scenes of the film, as it does in some of Hopper's paintings. It is also very evident that the New York City we see in *Caro*l owes a lot to the urban landscapes of the artist's canvases, as well as the use of the windows and the voyeur point of view observed in different scenes of the film. It is also interesting to see how both artists try to capture the loneliness of their women characters.

In *Carol* Haynes re-works the clash between reality and appearance and the unhappiness or frustration that it may cause. The “American way of life” of the 1950s, represented by a well-furnished house, the latest model family car, a cosy neighbourhood, and a food-packed refrigerator, embodied by traditional “blessed” families with several offspring, may quite easily hide professional, emotional, and sexual dissatisfactions, as Hopper also suggests. There is also a quite literal aesthetic similarity, especially due to the use of light and shadow contrasts between the outside and inside.

Below are some stills from the film that highlight the similarities with Hopper´s paintings.

Stills from *Carol*

3.6. OTHER DIRECTORS AND FILMS

Having thus ended this tour of the directors that I have elected as the most representative ones out of those who have been influenced by Edward Hopper´s paintings, I will now briefly discuss other directors. Edward Hopper´s close relationship with cinema as a source of inspiration soon became mutual, as the film industry was also influenced by Hopper's paintings. A great range of films was, and continue to be, influenced by the painter's use of light (the contrast between light and shadow, highlighting forms, figures, and textures); by the settings of his paintings whether they were rural (houses along New England or lighthouses by the sea) or set in cities (skylines,

rooftops, middle-class apartments, diners, and bars); by his framing (decentralized); and specifically by the figures he painted, people, often lonely or estranged from society (the last customers of a bar, clerks working in night offices, couples enjoying their evening after supper, women waiting for someone, or the start of the next film.)

Below is a list of twenty-seven films, chronologically ordered, that illustrate the close relationship of cinema with Edward Hopper´s paintings, including the ones discussed under the director´s sub-chapters. There are certainly many other examples and valid categorizations, but I needed to draw the line somewhere and decided to elect these, which I deem more representative. These cinematic references function as leads for a possible future investigation in my academic path.

1. *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943, Alfred Hitchcock)

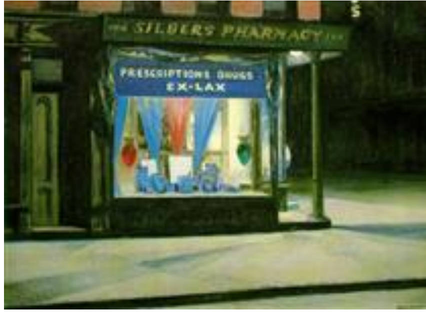
Discussed in Alfred Hitchcock´s sub-chapter

2. *Scarlet Street* (1945, Fritz Lang)

Still from *Scarlet Street*

The plot revolves around an unhappily married middle-aged man who falls in love with a young woman. However, she has a crooked fiancé who convinces her to rip her suitor off the fortune they mistakenly assume he possesses, leading to fatal events.

In many *films noir* like *Scarlet Street* is possible to recognize traces of Hopper´s influence. The use of light, the suggested voyeurism, themes such as loneliness, depression, and the shooting on locations, such as underground bars or typical New York flats, give today´s viewers a glimpse of 1940s America.



Edward Hopper

Drug Store (1927)

Museum of Fine Arts

Still from *Scarlet Street*

Stills from *Scarlet Street*

3. *The Killers* (1946, Robert Siodmak)

Still from *The Killers*

Legend has it that Edward Hopper was inspired to paint his *Nighthawks* (1942), after reading Ernest Hemingway's famous short story *The Killers* (1927). Then, in 1946, Robert Siodmak directed the film *The Killers* in a production for Universal, in a very stimulating filmic transposition. According to Zunzunegui, the operation is simple but remarkable: decomposing the outdoor and indoor space, using the ubiquity of the camera, and taking dramatic advantage of the depth of field, the film director mobilizes the means of cinema to create his personal vision. *Nighthawks* is less quoted than used as a background, as a visual stimulus in terms of atmosphere, but without renouncing its cinematographic dimension. (Zunzunegui, 2012:15) The connection between the painting and the film is truly undeniable.

Two hitmen murder a docile victim, and an insurance investigator sets out to find his past association with beautiful, and deadly Kitty Collins (a young Ava Gardner), and other shady characters. Not only does the place where the two hitmen meet resemble the bar in *Nighthawks*, but particularly the use of light, with its contrasts between shadow and light highlighting textures of objects, was inspired by Hopper's paintings. The film used

two of Hopper's typical locations for the boxer's accommodation and workplace: a dark hotel room and a desolate gas station, echoing *Gas* or *Four Lane Road*.

Flashbacks, such as those present in *The Killers*, were frequent in *film noir*, helping to portray characters haunted by what they did or to prove that the present is not quite what it seems to be. The stills below remit us to Hopper´s oeuvre: the bar, the stairs, the office, the gas station, the shops, and the rooftops.

Stills from *The Killers*

4. *Force of Evil* (1948, Abraham Polonsky)

Still from *Force of Evil*

An unscrupulous lawyer wants to help his older, sick brother and becomes a partner in the dangerous and murderous numbers racket with a client. *Force of Evi*l shares many of the characteristics mentioned before – the use of light, and the themes – but it is

different in the way that it portrays and shares Hopper´s pessimistic view of America. It gives us a complete feeling of Hopper's New York, showcasing the typical New York architecture, the Brooklyn Bridge, lighthouses, and the rocky coastal zone.

Abraham Polonsky´s directions to cinematographer George Barnes were quite explicit:[75]

> I tried to tell George what I was looking for, but I couldn't quite describe that to a cameraman, because I didn't know what to say. I went out and got a book of reproductions of Hopper's paintings. Third Avenue, cafeterias, all that black lighting, and those empty streets. Even when people are there, you don't see them; somehow the environments dominate the people.

These are Polonsky´s comments about Hopper's work, and it is with this style that he finally impregnates the film. He said he wanted the film to look like those paintings. And it does.

Below are some stills from the film that display the connection with Hopper´s aesthetics.

75. E. Sherman and M. Rubin *The Director's Event: Interviews with Five American Filmmakers.* 1970.

Stills from *The Force of Evil*

5. *The Naked City* (1948, Jules Dassin)

Still from *The Naked City*

The film´s plot follows a step-by-step murder investigation on the streets of New York and many encounters with seedy characters. *The Naked City* depicts New York City and its inhabitants as Hopper painted them: real-life concealed amid noirish lights.

"There are eight million stories in the Naked City," the film´s narrator says. That sums up one of the most important characteristics of Hopper's paintings: his gaze over people locked in themselves and their loneliness, making the viewer speculate about their identity and the stories they hide.

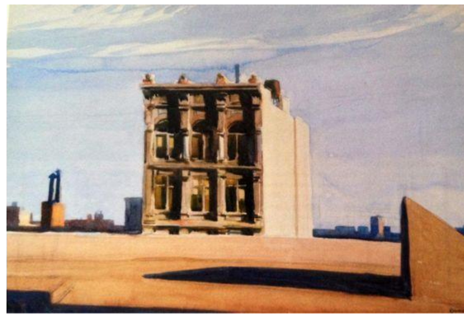
Stills from *The Naked City*

6. *The Window* (1949, Ted Tetzlaff)

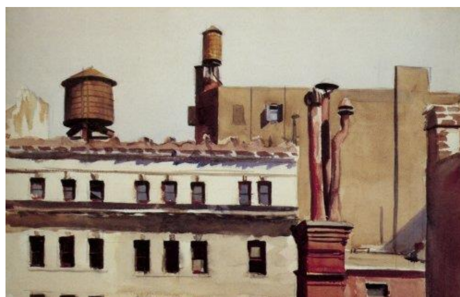
Still from *The Window*

Set in Manhattan, this film follows Tommy, a boy who, during a sweltering summer night, climbs into his neighbour's fire escape to sleep there, and ends up witnessing a murder; however, no one will believe him.

It is said that the sequence shot across New York's roofs and buildings under construction, where Tommy is chased by the murdering couple, was inspired by some of Hopper's paintings, such as *Skyline Near Washington Square* (1925), *Roofs of Washington Square* (1926), *Rooftops* (1926), *From Williamsburg Bridge* (1928), or *City Roofs* (1932).



Edward Hopper
Skyline near Washington Square (1925)
sl



Edward Hopper
Roofs of Washington Square (1926)
Carnegie Museum of Art

Edward Hopper
Rooftops (1926)
Whitney Museum of American Art

Edward Hopper
From Williamsburg Bridge (1928)
Metropolitan Museum of Art

Edward Hopper
City Roofs (1932)
Private Collection

Below are some stills from the film that attest to the influences received from Hopper´s paintings and style.

Stills from *The Window*

7. *Rear Window* (1954, Alfred Hitchcock)

Discussed in Alfred Hitchcock´s sub-chapter

8. *Vertigo* (1960, Alfred Hitchcock)

Discussed in Alfred Hitchcock´s sub-chapter

9. *Psycho* (1960, Alfred Hitchcock)

Discussed in Alfred Hitchcock´s sub-chapter

10. The alienation trilogy - *L'Avventura*, *La Notte* and *L'Eclisse* (1960 – 1962, Michelangelo Antonioni)

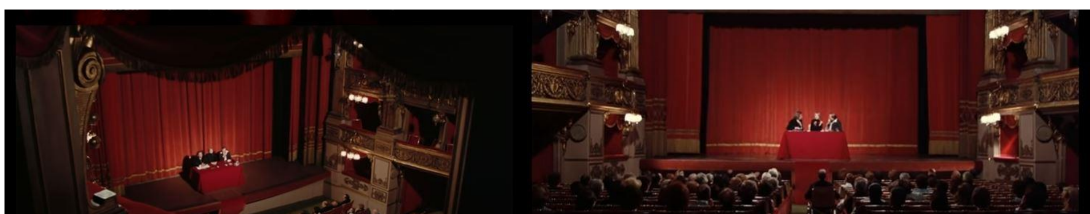
Discussed in Michelangelo Antonioni´s sub-chapter

11. *Profondo Rosso* (1975, Dario Argento)

Still from *Profondo Rosso*

Another cinematic tribute to Hopper is *Profondo Rosso (1975)* by Italian director Dario Argento. A jazz pianist and a journalist are pulled into an intricate web of mystery after the former witnesses the brutal murder of a psychic. The framing and scenes directly borrowed from Hopper reveal the aesthetic stakes of such pictorial interference.

This film is influenced by Hopper's paintings on many levels. Firstly, the set design, in which a vast array of colours can be seen, red in predominance. Secondly, a more direct reference to *Nighthawks*: Hopper´s bar becomes the "Blue Bar" in an Italian imaginary city. Dario Argento made it a key place in the film. The characters in this bar hardly move or interact with each other, as if suspended in time. This is another key reference to Hopper's style because, in various scenes of the film, several extras appear in the background, alone and simply standing without moving, lazily smoking a cigarette, waiting for someone, or simply window shopping. These figures remind us of the lonely characters of some of Hopper´s works.



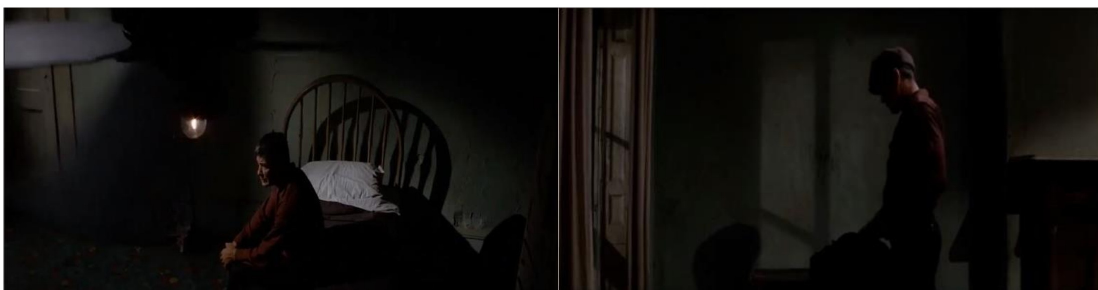
Stills from *Profondo Rosso*

12. *Hard Times* (1975, Walter Hill)

Still from *Hard Times*

Combining different film genres, ranging from drama to crime and sports, *Hard Times*, set during the Great Depression in New Orleans, serves as a symbol of how great Hopper's influence on film is. It follows the adventures of a drifter turned illegal prize fighter.

Director Walter Hill took inspiration from the mood of Hopper's paintings, their use of light, and their places. The film owes the pictorial image, as the director convokes the painting of Hopper for its composition, according to Mário Avelar. (Avelar, 2018:130)[76]



76. Mário Avelar. *Poesia e Artes Visuais – Confessionalismo e Écfrase*. p. 130.

Stills from *Hard Times*

13. ***The American Friend*** **(1977, Wim Wenders)**

Discussed in Wim Wenders´s sub-chapter

14. ***Days of Heaven*** **(1978, Terrence Malick)**

Still from *Days of Heaven*

Another film inspired by the painting *House by the Railroad* is Terrence Malick's *Days of Heaven*. Solitary, the house looks unreal as if its owner wants to inflict civilization at all costs on the great Texan latifundia. Alongside the resemblance of the house to the one painted by Hopper, the painter´s influence is also visible in the use of light and framing, which highlight the isolation of that place and those people secluded from contact with society, living within the vastness of the surrounding sea of wheat fields.

Terrence Malick´s rural dramas can be interpreted as readings associated with Hopper´s paintings. The representation of the landscape in *Days of Heaven*, massive and unadulterated, is like that portrayed by Hopper in his rural paintings. The characters are also typically Hopperian, with their silences and their way of infiltrating the film just by posing and contemplating, waiting for events that never occur. The plot revolves around a hot-blooded farm worker who convinces the woman he loves to marry their rich but dying boss so that they can inherit his fortune.

Below are some stills that transport us to Hopper´s universe.

Edward Hopper

Railroad Train (1908)

Addison Gallery of American Art

Stills from *Days of Heaven*

15. *Hammett* (1982, Wim Wenders)

Discussed in Wim Wenders´s sub-chapter

16. *Paris, Texas* (1984, Wim Wenders)

Discussed in Wim Wenders´s sub-chapter

17. *Blue Velvet* (1986, David Lynch)

Discussed in David Lynch´s sub-chapter

18. *True Stories* (1986, David Byrne)

Still from *True Stories*

A particularly Hopperian film in its visual construction is *True Stories*, directed in 1986 by David Byrne. The film is a metropolitan road movie that portrays urban life as empty of meaning, pointing to the unpredicted that is hidden under the everyday dullness, the escape away from the routine, and the metropolis. The director takes an ironic appropriation of all Hopperian iconography, with its cities empty of both "real" places and "real" inhabitants.

The small but growing fictional town of Virgil, Texas is filled with strange characters who converge on a local parade and talent show. The viewers are taken on a guided tour by an unidentified cowboy who introduces us to the town’s businesses, activities, and people. It serves as a cynical portrait of the technological growth Texas experienced since the late 1970s, the consumerism that came with it, and the recklessness that changed some of the core of Texan society during that period.

True Stories is a funny, witty, and ironic piece, and an exercise of observation of people and places interacting together much like what Hopper did in his paintings.

Below are some stills that resonate with Hopper´s influence.

Stills from *True Stories*

19. *The Straight Story* (1999, David Lynch)

Discussed in David Lynch´s sub-chapter

20. *Mulholland Drive* (2001, David Lynch)

Discussed in David Lynch´s sub-chapter

21. *Road to Perdition* (2002, Sam Mendes)

Still from *Road to Perdition*

Set during the Great Depression, *Road to Perdition* revolves around the underworld of gangsters. In 1930s Illinois a mob enforcer's son witnesses a murder, forcing him and his father to hit the road down a path of redemption and revenge.

Throughout the film, there are several references to Hopper's works, from shooting locations (diners, middle-class apartments, empty streets) to the way lighting works around the characters, hiding part of their bodies and sometimes their facial expressions.

Below are some stills where Hopper´s influence is evident.

Stills from *Road to Perdition*

22. *Far From Heaven* (2002, Todd Haynes)

Discussed in Todd Haynes´s sub-chapter

23. *Don´t Come Knocking* (2005, Wim Wenders)

Discussed in Wim Wenders´s sub-chapter

24. ***Le Havre*** **(2011, Aki Kaurismäki)**

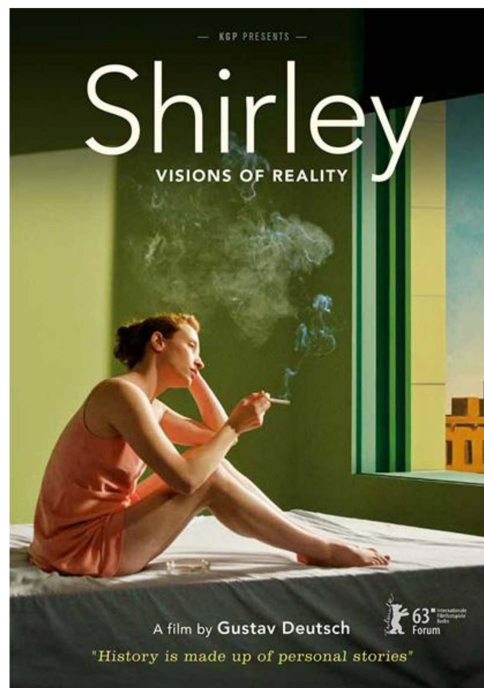
Still from *Le Havre*

In Finnish director Aki Kaurismäki's *Le Havre*, a more contemporary film, the relationship between film and Hopper´s paintings is also visible. Kaurismäki´s films are often marked by a prevailing melancholy, present either in the character's actions or in the locations where the action takes place. It is also evident the noteworthy precision the director places in the set and shot design, particularly due to the placement of objects, and the use of textures and colours, much like a painting by Hopper.

An African boy arrives on a cargo ship in the port city of Le Havre, and an elderly shoe shiner has compassion for the child and welcomes him into his home illegally. *Le Havre* is one of Aki Kaurismäki's most remarkable accomplishments.

Stills from *Le Havre*

25. ***Shirley: Visions of Reality*** **(Gustav Deutsch, 2013)**



Poster of *Shirley: Visions of Reality*

In *Shirley: Visions of Reality*, Austrian director Gustav Deutsch conducts a meticulous three-dimensional reconstruction of thirteen of Hopper´s paintings, turned into thirteen overwhelmingly beautiful sequences, based on the characters and the sets. Here it is the reality that imitates art. It is a unique and interesting example of the relationship between Hopper and cinema. The atmosphere of Edward Hopper's paintings, frozen in time, and its multiple narrative and cinematographic possibilities are exploited in the film, which fictionalizes the life of the protagonist of some of his paintings (precisely the Shirley of the title), a woman who does not accept the reality of the *Mad Men* era in which she has to live and who clings firmly to her convictions. *Shirley: Visions of Reality* covers the life and professional experiences of its protagonist, a fictional New York stage actress, in a period that coincides with key events in American history such as the Great Depression or McCarthyism. In short, thirteen paintings by Edward Hopper come to life in the most faithful and revealing way possible, to tell us the story of a woman who lives a reality that she does not accept.

Deutsch connects the paintings with the film, inspired by Hopper's feminine characters (only one of the original paintings lacks human figures, *Sun in an Empty Room*), which leads the viewer through the wars of the United States and its social history from 1931 to 1965. The frames/scenes are in chronological order, always on the same day, August 28 (there is one exception, that of the painting without characters). The radio broadcasts information about what is happening in the world (the Depression, Hitler, Stalingrad, Elia Kazan, Martin Luther King, etc.), and Shirley's reflections in off tell us about her life and her political associations. In some scenes, Shirley is accompanied by her silent partner Steve (there is not a line of dialogue throughout the film), as in the recreation of works such as *Room in New York* or *Excursion into Philosophy*. Later, the same man plays her boss in *Office at Night*.

Several of Hopper´s motifs appear throughout the film: incredible colours, strong diagonals, bright lights, and large windows that open to a bigger world outside the boundaries of the protagonist's own life. The visual composition of the film is dazzling, and the static framing is hardly interrupted by small camera movements. It does justice to Hopper's artistic legacy and pays an original tribute to the American painter, through perfect theatrical poses by the cast of actors and the leading actress. There is respect for the textures, the cold lighting full of contrasts and *chiaroscuros*, the chromatic richness, and a minimalism that corresponds perfectly to the original frames, recreating the

diagonals, and the objects that populate the rooms. Above all, the film brings to life the alienated, anguished, and lonely characters of Hopper´s paintings.[77]

Shirley: Visions of Reality accurately copies some of Hopper´s paintings frames, distances, colours, objects, costumes, stances, and light to the extent that to ensure that the frames looked exactly the same through the camera lens as they do on canvas, optical distortions had to be made on the set, using, for example, three meters wide beds or very narrow seats. On the other hand, it adds stories to those canvases that, in painting, can only be imagined or presupposed. This narrative opts for a melancholic reading, that of a woman oppressed by society, who would like to break the ties and conventions of her life to perform functions and roles forbidden in her time. The film is a conscious dialogue between cinema and painting, recognizing both the influences that Hopper received from the seventh art and those that he offered to the cinematographic environment. However, Deutsch took that purpose further by adding movement and three-dimensionality to it, in addition to storytelling, which inevitably alters the possible original meanings.

77.https://www.elantepenultimomohicano.com/2014/08/shirley-visiones-de-una-realidad-critica.html

Stills from *Shirley: Visions of Reality*

As Deutsch's film shows us, one of the great virtues of Hopper's paintings is that they seem to take on a life of their own. A faithful reflection of American society since 1920, and perhaps also of today's society, while watching Hopper's paintings we can imagine we are in a movie theatre enjoying a great film.

26. *Carol* (Todd Haynes, 2015)

Discussed in Todd Haynes´s sub-chapter

27. *Two or Three Things I Know About Edward Hopper* (Wim Wenders, 2020)

Discussed in Wim Wenders´s sub-chapter

We have discussed how many filmmakers have taken up the characteristics, framing and atmospheres of Hopper´s painting. They have drawn from Hopper's paintings his characters, urban settings, streets, shops, and offices observed from the window; just like a filmmaker who is inspired by another filmmaker, copies him, and pays tribute to him.

In Juan de Pablos Pons´s opinion, the importance of Hopper does not lie in his break with aesthetic norms or the search for new pictorial techniques, but in that he showed that the images we create start unequivocally from the reality of the things that surround us and, nevertheless, are an expression of a personal and intimate world, that is why his contribution is so important for the creators of images.[78] It is precisely this ability to express a state of mind through the treatment of light and space, together with the realism to which he always clung, that has made Hopper an inescapable reference for cinema. His paintings, realistic and timeless, can be associated to works as disparate as

78. Juan de Pablos Pons. "El cine y la pintura: una relación pedagógica. Una aproximación a Víctor Erice y Edward Hopper." 2006. p. 16.

those of Alfred Hitchcock, David Lynch, or Wim Wenders.

Hopper offered his viewers strongly coloured cinematic drama at a time when drama was almost exclusively portrayed in black and white in cinema. Colour was deemed inappropriate for drama. Yet that is exactly what Hopper offers us: intense drama expressed in intense colour.

In conclusion, it is always interesting to trace the relationship between different arts but, in this case, the interest doubles because Hopper's art and *film noir* share a profound relationship in a way that by interrelating with one another they produce a vision over a country and its people. When looking at *noir* pieces such as those mentioned before, one comes across the slums, the regular people, and the fictionalized real life that by contradicting other studio system products (which provided audiences with an escape from reality to enchanted and luxurious worlds), becomes in a certain extent a document of American existence, and, thus, a piece of American History itself.

Although Hopper's successes waned with Abstract Expressionism in the post-war period, his work has remained influential to modern filmmakers, writers, and photographers, particularly for its distinctly cinematic, brooding, and emotionally resonant *mise en scène.*

All quotes from works in other languages have been translated by me.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In general, it can be said that a nation's art is greatest when it most reflects the character of its people.

Edward Hopper

The context of the United States in the 20th century and the biography and painterly style of Edward Hopper have been studied throughout this work - his personality, his concerns about the society of his time, his training, his travels, his relationship with his wife, his tastes in cinema, and his standing as an artist.

The success of his work, both at the time and today, lies in a social trait that is still very present: the alienation of the individual. The feeling of incomprehension, of non-relevance to a place, the loneliness or disappointment that is often seen in life. An aspect that Hopper had very much in mind and that he wanted to represent repeatedly.

In "Nighthawks: Transcending Reality," [79] Judith Barter remarks that Hopper's real subject was "mood." I tend to agree with her: his paintings convey, above all, a mood, and an atmosphere, through his characters or settings. That mood expresses all the emotions that have been discussed: alienation, disenchantment, loneliness, silence, and solitude.

To recapitulate, chapter I opened the theoretical path for the subsequent intermedial reflection, namely the atmosphere in cinema, and the importance of light(ing) in cinema. As we have shown, cinema has its technical means of expression of space and time, which allow for a specific atmosphere production. The movement of the image remains the first factor in creating a filmic atmosphere. Thus, this chapter stressed the importance of light as a source of existence and sensations that make man live. Lighting prints a more expressive dramatic action in the film when photographic aesthetics are suited to cinematic narrative. It is thus an element that awakes feelings and emotions in moviegoers. Natural and artificial light are utilised by filmmakers to produce dramatic effects and the mood of a film. Different lighting approaches help achieve predetermined goals.

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79. https://baudrillardstudies.ubishops.ca/baudrillards-artist-edward-hopper/

Chapter II dealt with Edward Hopper´s biography and how he regarded contemporary American society through his paintings. His themes of urban or country life, alienation, and loneliness, empty cityscapes and countryside, the stark light of Cape Cod, silent hills, neo-Victorian houses, and estranged couples, have been indelibly imprinted on Americans' collective sense of themselves and their country. Nevertheless, it is through his pensive, silent, solitary characters that the complexity of his work stands out. Hopper's imagery continues to have an impact on contemporary culture and the artist holds a place in the American mind.

Although some critics saw Hopper's oeuvre as an expression of American identity – the so-called "American scene" – it became clear that he always rejected painters who caricatured the country through "typical" images. On the other hand, Hopper picked up the grim vein of puritanism that recognized the desolation of human existence, which had so deeply marked American culture. He remained faithful throughout his life to a conception of art as a truthful record of perceptions.

He understood that the greatest mystery is not present in what is mysterious, but in ordinary daily life. The meaning of his paintings touches the fundamental strings of human life: its permanent incubation state; the stress of people´s expectations; the unstable balance between melancholy and desire, loneliness, and longing; the need for some form of "salvation" and "grace;" the gaze beyond the window, directed to a possible "annunciation."

Hopper´s realistic portrayal of ordinary urban scenes leads the beholder to the recognition of strangeness in familiar surroundings. His figurative painting, because bathed in a climate of "disturbing strangeness", poses questions and makes us ponder on many subject matters. His work also intersects and enters into dialogue with another great visual art of the 20th century: cinema.

Chapter III analysed the strong relationship the artist developed with cinema. As we have shown, not only did he choose to paint cinema halls throughout his career, but he also drew from cinema inspiration and techniques that would become the trademark of his style. The abundant citation of images, frames, fragments of films and his paintings allowed us to clearly identify the dialogue between images - painting and cinema – that we discussed in detail in the following chapter. As we have seen his shots and framings

somehow remind us of those of a chief operator playing the expert with light. In short, behind each canvas there is a film, waiting to turn its viewers into spectators of a narrative.

Being a dissent means standing apart, separate, and different. Hopper was a dissident concerning American realism as well as all the avant-gardes, abstraction, cubism, and surrealism, of which he is a contemporary. His life is a lesson in loneliness.

Lastly, chapter IV developed Hopper´s influence on cinema. His work has remained influential to modern filmmakers, writers, and photographers, particularly for its distinctly cinematic, brooding, and emotionally resonant *mise en scène*. Filmmakers have drawn from Hopper's paintings his psychological atmospheres, characters, urban settings, streets, shops, and offices observed from the window.

It is his ability to express a state of mind through the treatment of light and space, together with the realism to which he always clung, that has made Hopper an inescapable reference for cinema. His paintings, realistic and timeless, can be associated with works as disparate as those of Alfred Hitchcock, Michelangelo Antonioni, David Lynch, Wim Wenders, and Todd Haynes, just to name a few of the better-known directors.

Hopper's art and *film noir* share a profound relationship in such a way that by interrelating with one another they produce a vision of a country and its people. When looking at *noir* pieces such as those mentioned in this work, one comes across the slums, the regular people, and the fictionalized real life that becomes to a certain extent a document of American existence, and, thus, a piece of Americana. Just like Hopper´s paintings.

We have seen how an American painter from a small town has manifestly influenced cinema throughout the decades and how he has left a trail of vestiges that can be followed until today and are still recovered in cinema. We have discussed the admiration that Hopper felt for the films of his time and the reciprocal one that his contemporary film directors felt for his work, as well as today´s masters of cinema. His painting has become universal, not only through his work but also through the multitude of reinterpretations and transpositions it has endured in several media, mostly in cinema.

There is in Hopper a discourse that speaks of the inner world of mankind, and this trait is what makes his work stand the test of time. All this from a painter with no other pretensions than to represent himself through his works. In the end, he unintentionally

showed us the harsh consequences of capitalism, the reality of the American dream locked in a cold restaurant or a sordid hotel room. His spaces are psychological portraits of a certain American way of conceiving existence, with its self-absorbed and melancholic characters, its desolate and silent streets, and its cafes and cinemas inhabited by solitary individuals who seem to ponder on the vicissitudes of modern man.

We have also discussed how Edward Hopper, his pictorial style, and his themes have influenced the cinematographic language of several generations. Voyeurism, the feeling of loneliness of the individuals, and the way of portraying women are three of the painter´s work themes that have been most influential to different film directors. Hopper´s way of representing an era, an urban landscape, or a lonely country road is also an inspiration source for directors and their technical staff, who are keen to recreate that recognizable Hopperian universe. We have seen that cinema has resorted to painting to punctually recreate a famous painting and took a series of elements from it, such as lighting, photography, and focus.

Edward Hopper was never interested in monumental urban spaces. His art was based on the everyday aspects of the contemporary United States, in city, town, and country. His was an intimate viewpoint, concerned with the immediate surroundings of everyday life. Perhaps this makes his art appear more emotional, for his compositions are, for the most part, intimate close-up portraits. Therefore, he was not just an objective realist as some people tend to think: his art was filled with strong, personal emotion. This is due to his strong attachment to our everyday world, to ordinary life, and to inwardness. His characters do not breathe; they sigh resigned in solitude, or in the company of others with whom there is no communication. Instead of representing the world exactly as it is perceived, Hopper freezes a feeling or a state of mind. He deals with inwardness and the quest for the ordinary, the two dimensions that stand at the core of contemporary culture, according to the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor. (Taylor, 1989)

Hopper´s realist creations in oil, watercolor, and etchings granted him a degree of celebrity throughout America´s interwar years, from the 1920s to 1940s. His creative efforts discovered elements of the American scene that appear to be silent remnants left behind, or events about to happen. In a sense, his work is his autobiography. His work needed no manifesto and belonged to no school.

Hopper the taciturn explains nothing to us, he does not give anything away; he does not judge, and he does not seek to convince. He sketches a setting and a story; freedom is offered to everyone to interpret it. He presents the viewer with invitations and suggestions. And, Gambling remarks, we are drawn to wondering, and wondering leads us into the realms of our imagination where narratives develop beyond those "frozen moments." (Gambling, 2006:5)

His paintings, reproduced *ad infinitum*, have circulated the world, and belong to the world´s virtual museum. They are at the same time clear and mysterious; clear enough for the message to get through, but mysterious enough to leave the viewer wondering. Hopper´s paintings present issues, concerns, life questions, and relationships that transcend cultural and historical constraints and they still speak to contemporary art lovers.

The secret of his posthumous success largely resides in the tendency the viewers have of projecting their desires, frustrations, and yearnings on the mute and unexplicit painting scenes. He continues to be a source of inspiration for other artists, whether painters, photographers, or film directors to this day.

His vision of American society was melancholic and disenchanted. Depression, lack of ambition, boredom, loneliness, isolation, everything came through his brushes and went straight to his canvases. He was relentless in his observation of the automaton behaviours of the men and women around him. There are human dramas, albeit unspecified and unspecifiable, implicit in the figures that appear in the windows or at the doors of sun-illuminated houses. Hopper is synonymous with stillness, spareness, loneliness, disillusionment, and despair.

Only in great art do we find this essential solitude, which universalizes it and makes collective the singular experience of fear of the echo of our voice and the lack of an interlocutor. Hopper absorbed the manifestations of his time and he managed to illustrate America without falling into the excessive rhetoric of American realism of the 1930s. His figurative painting is not a statement about the state of the world, nor a dreamlike composition. In this sense, Hopper's painting is pioneering. By the end of his life, in 1967, Hopper had become an emblematic figure of American art.

On a personal level, the making of this work has been a gratifying and pleasant activity, as well as a source of great learning for all the knowledge acquired. The union

of two of my favourite artistic disciplines has given me the possibility to analyse in more depth the connections between painting and cinema, exemplifying them with the paintings of Edward Hopper, one of the most important names in American painting of the 20th century, and great works of film directors. Despite having applied all my efforts and energy in its making, the topics have been treated in a somewhat superficial way, laying the groundwork for a broader and deeper investigation in the future.

As a final note, I should mention that the cataloguing of images should be understood as a preliminary reflection, as something preparatory for future work, because, as I have tried to demonstrate, this is a dialogue that I have nevertheless only touched on.

I trust the result will show how much effort I put into this work as well as how much gratification I derived from its elaboration.

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