A Reconsideration of the Interpretation and Analysis Typically Applied to Edward Hopper’s Art During the 1940s

Ana-Ciara Evelini Ulamoleka

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A Reconsideration of the Interpretation and Analysis Typically Applied to Edward Hopper’s Art During the 1940s.

by

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A thesis submitted to the University of Plymouth in partial fulfilment for the degree of Master of Research (MRes) in Art History

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A Reconsideration of the Interpretation and Analysis Typically Applied to Edward Hopper’s Art During the 1940s.

Abstract

This study aims to reframe the consideration and appreciation of Edward Hopper’s art focusing on the 1940s. The thesis proposes that Hopper should be categorised as a Modernist. This notion was explored by selecting and critically evaluating literature and original paintings by Hopper. The literature utilised for this research included: materials covering the social, political and economic circumstances of post-depression America, Art Historical critique of Hopper’s work and life, and the philosophical theories which influenced Modernism at the time. These theories, in particular Existentialism and Feminist writing, are here applied to Hopper’s own work. The research provided evidence to support the initial proposal, and helped draw clear comparisons between Abstract Expressionism (Modernism) and Hopper’s work. The investigation opened up new lines of enquiry, predominantly the relevance of Existential and Modern Man theories to Hopper’s work. The argument follows a journey which began by analysing Edward Hopper in terms of the social context of the 1940s, through different mediums commonly identified as modern, (such as film noir), which are used as a comparison. Existentialism is applied as a way of looking at ‘the individual’ in three distinct areas: Hopper himself, the figures depicted in his paintings and the viewer of those paintings. Once these notions of the individuals and their relationships to Hopper and the Modern are clarified, the last segment addresses gender issues in relation to Hopper and Modernism. The final discourse investigates the relationship between Hopper’s work and gender theories, notably Feminist critiques of notions of masculinity and femininity, focusing on three distinct areas: Hopper’s own gender, the genders Hopper depicts and the gender of the viewer of Hopper’s work. The whole analysis is based on Jean-Paul Sartre’s description of the possibility of stepping outside of Bad Faith into existential authenticity and demonstrates how this is observable in Hopper’s work. This enables the thesis to argue the necessity and importance of Hopper’s recognition as a Modernist.
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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

At no time during the registration for the degree of Master of Research has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Faculty of Arts & Humanities.

I certify that the work in this thesis is wholly my own except where acknowledgement of other sources is clearly made.

In preparing this thesis, a programme of advanced study was undertaken, which included a postgraduate course on research in the arts & humanities and a subject-specific research module entitled Research Methods in Art History.

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Introduction

The central purpose of my thesis is a reconsideration of the interpretation and analysis typically applied to figurative art during the 1940s. The best known movement during the 1940s was Abstract Expressionism, which is often described as a reaction to World War II, and a visual embodiment of ‘the crisis of the individual’, an aspect of Modernism. It is this reaction that this thesis will question and analyse with regard to figuration. It could be argued that, in the present day, figuration is seen as the less rebellious, less exciting version of art produced during the 1940s. Due to the dominance of Cold War ideology in the post war era, and the damning association of figuration with Soviet aesthetic orthodoxy and Socialist Realism, figuration became marginalised and was seen as ‘kitsch’ and not sufficiently modern. By providing a study which applies theories used to analyse Abstract Expressionism to figuration, I hope to show how transferable the analysis is, and therefore ‘reframe’ the way figuration is seen, as a means of addressing the canon and its entrenched biases. This thesis will look specifically at the figurative art of Edward Hopper, examining why figuration took the form it did, why it was successful formally and critically, (and also in terms of museum exhibitions and market sales), but often marginalised as ‘kitsch’. In addition, the thesis examines why it would have evoked empathy and familiarity for American viewers. To answer these questions, this study combines a close formal analysis with social and historical contextualisation as a means of offering a more complex reading of figurative art than Clement Greenberg and the Formalists were previously able to provide. Existentialism and associated philosophical approaches will be used to develop this analysis, in particular, to examine contemporary notions of gender and sex. These concepts provide the foundations for the final argument that Hopper’s art can be seen as Modernist.
It is necessary first to define the essential terms used within this thesis before continuing with the main argument. The terms ‘Modernism’ and ‘Modernist’ are frequently used throughout this thesis. The term Modernism is defined as the movement in the arts which arose in the early part of the twentieth century, and which took several forms but was typically influenced by Freud’s work and notions of irrationalism and the unconscious mind, and rejected their traditional styles associated with the Victorian era, in particular its rationality, preferring instead a variety of experimental forms. The word ‘modern’ refers to what was modern during the decade of the 1940s unless otherwise stated, therefore a Modernist is someone who adheres to ideas of the ‘modern’ during the 1940s. Another term which needs to be clarified is Americanism. Throughout this thesis the term Americanism is used with regard to American painting, which it is argued conforms to the parameters of realism rather than ‘Modernism’. Figuration is also the movement and style with which Hopper is associated, so although this thesis argues that he is a Modernist it is not attempting to argue that he is not a figurative artist.

This thesis will begin with a social study of 1940s American art, putting Hopper’s work in its contemporary context. The 1940s were a pivotal and turbulent period in history, with the end of WWII marking a historical and physical split through the middle of the decade. In Reframing Abstract Expressionism, a key text used within this thesis, Michael Leja notes that ‘Some works of art are especially successful in addressing the pressing concerns of a community and having some impact upon them, or at least seeming to do so. The metaphors and discourses articulated or extended by such works situate them at the very heart of cultural preoccupations, where they collide and compete with other representations issuing from and inflecting predominant cultural
stresses\textsuperscript{1}. For Leja, this was in reference to Abstract Expressionism, which is, as previously mentioned, classed as a postwar reaction, with political and existential analyses often applied to such art. These analytic tools can be applied just as relevantly to figuration. I propose to look at the relationship between 1940s America and figuration followed by how existential philosophy affected this period. This will enable me to examine how Existentialism also affected the way Edward Hopper’s work was received during the 1940s, thereby providing evidence to support the modernity of figuration.

The twentieth century philosopher, Michel Foucault, commanded historians to ‘question those ready-made syntheses, those groupings that we normally accept before any examination...and instead of according them unqualified, spontaneous value we must accept, in the name of methodological rigour, that in the first instance, they concern only a population of dispersed events’\textsuperscript{2}. The thesis will aim to achieve this by reanalysing the perception of form and subject matter in relation to figurative art. Specific philosophical approaches will be used which will aid the reconsideration of figurative art. The 1940s is one of the most interesting decades of the twentieth century, when America became concerned with the economic, social and political stability of both itself and of the international spectrum. The Existentialist philosopher and writer, Jean-Paul Sartre, best summarises issues surrounding the individual during the transition between pre and post war America:

‘...during the period which was influenced by the first world war, just like the one that was influenced by the second world war, freedom was a phenomenon that was denied,

\textsuperscript{1} Leja, Michael, \textit{Reframing Abstract Expressionism: subjectivity and painting in the 1940s}, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993, p.2

almost hated. But I believe that today in left wing movements, among young people liberty plays a more important role; it opens up a new dimension of the world which is precisely that of a world inhabited by free men.' Sartre’s sentiment epitomises the centrality of the individual in Existentialist thought, which will be fundamental in demonstrating the Modernism of Hopper’s work.

Chapter One will discuss the cultural interaction in American during 1940s in relation to Edward Hopper’s paintings, analysing Hopper as a painter in both the pre- and postwar eras. When using critical concepts for an analysis of figurative art, it is important also to look at the artist’s understanding of these ideas and the issues fundamental to the decade, to gain a fuller, more nuanced understanding of figurative art. Edward Hopper, for example, was taught by Robert Henri that ‘The look of a wall or a window is a look into time and space,’ and he often uses windows in his paintings as a symbol of the expansive world beyond the cramped interior of his foregrounds. Often the solitary interior, and narratives of his paintings contrast to the wide world seen through his windows. Because ‘Hopper’s strength as a keen-eyed observer of humanity is particularly apparent in his depictions of the urban life of Paris and New York’, he is the best figurative artist to use for my art historical study, supporting the argument that figuration depicts modernity. Chapter One not only places Hopper in the social context of 1940s America, but also engages in a discourse which looks at other influences, (such as photography, film and European immigration), on the culture of the decade and the artist. The results of these discussions provide a supporting argument and guideline to look at Hopper’s reception. The chapter concludes with a comparison of Hopper’s

3 Charlesworth, Max, The Existentialists and Jean-Paul Sartre, New York: St Martin’s Press, 1975, p.103
exhibitions during the 1940s with the present day, noting the differing prices at which
the art was sold, and most importantly identifying the reception of his work during the
1940s in comparison to the present day. Not only will this analysis demonstrate the
importance of a modern day reconsideration of Hopper, but it will also explain how and
why this thesis calls for Hopper to be called a Modernist.

Existentialism was reborn during the 1930’s and 40’s with the work of writers such as
Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir and Albert Camus, who adopted the previous
philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard and added a modern twist. Due to the troubled social
context of the time, this philosophy became very applicable to American society and it
was often used as a way of explaining why art such as Abstract Expressionism came in
the form of it did. From the disillusionment of the collapse of ‘the American Dream’ to
the outbreak of world war, Existentialism’s stress on man’s sovereignty over his own
freedom would have been very applicable to American citizens. The art of the decade
(both figuration and Abstract Expressionism) deals with the trauma, dislocation and
turmoil in the aftermath of the crises wrought by the Depression and World War II, and
it is through Existentialism that the crisis of the individual is portrayed.

Chapter Two incorporates the Existentialist theories of Søren Kierkegaard, Freidrich
Nietzsche and Jean-Paul Sartre, to define and explain the isolation and solitude of the
life of a contemporary individual. Existentialism provides a way of understanding
Hopper’s work, whilst also providing a way of understanding the reception Hopper’s
work would have received due to the influence of this philosophy on American society
at the time. During this period, many Americans would have felt that their destiny was
beyond their own control, having lived through the depression and the overwhelming
experience of World War II. However, the main argument in this chapter is concerned
with the Existentialist claim that to be fully human, individuals should take their destiny
into their own hands. The notion of personal freedom would have been attractive to the Americans who felt so powerless. Nevertheless, the realisation of one’s autonomy carries with it a terrible burden of responsibility and loneliness. It is this which is so central in Hopper’s work, and it is also this which underpins the main argument, the claim that Hopper’s work is Modernist.

The final chapter is concerned with Modern Man and broadens into a wider analysis of gender. Theories of Modern Man began to develop as a way of understanding how the atrocities of war could take place. ‘World war, socialist revolution, political corruption, social conflict, economic depression... the development and use of nuclear weapon—each and all of these twentieth-century phenomena prompted meditation upon the makeup and situation of the human individual and what precisely within or outside him accounted for these tragedies’6. Anxiety grew, parallel with the idea of freedom and choice. Having been through the war it was necessary to create new kind of man. However, several versions of Modern Man arose, often in complete contrast to one another, such as the fascist and socialist versions. The Modern man that is most relevant to this thesis is drawn from the work of Charles Baudelaire, which is closely linked to the development of Existentialism. This version is most frequently employed in the analysis of Abstract Expressionism, but this chapter will argue that it may be applied instead to figuration. Leja discusses the role of the white, heterosexual middle-class male in Abstract Expressionism; this discourse will apply these ideas to figurative painting. In relation to the discussion of Modern Man, it is also important to address the role of the middle class, white female, or what Leja calls the ‘Modern Woman’.7 The chapter looks at a feminist discussion on sex and gender and the contemporary socially

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defined gender roles, applying this to the male and female figures in Hopper’s paintings. Recognising the difference between the status of male and female in figurative art is important for two reasons. Firstly, because the art world in the 1940’s was an aggressively male dominated playground (that is not to say, however, that there were no female artists, for example Georgia O’Keeffe, but in comparison to the number of males, there was a serious lack of recognition for women artists). Secondly, Hopper often uses lone women in his paintings to convey more intense versions of the existential emotions that he captures in his other works, for instance Morning in a City, 1944 (fig, 1). Hopper’s use of a nude woman makes the scene more intimate, and moves the viewer to the realm of voyeur. Using gender analysis and looking at the effect a male figure had in contrast to a female figure will demonstrate a deeper understanding of why Hopper’s painting is more than voyeurism. By comparing Hopper’s depiction of gender with the Existential analysis provided in Chapter Two, the main claim of this thesis will be that through such interpretations that rely on Modernist theories, Edward Hopper’s work can be categorised as Modernist. The last section of Chapter Three will draw Existentialist and Gender analyses together in relation to Film Noir, (a genre of film identified as Modernist), and demonstrate its link with Hopper’s work. This final drawing together of the key aspects of the thesis should, it is hoped, persuade future viewers of Hopper’s work that it is no longer to be classified as ‘mere’ American Realism, but belongs justifiably in the avant-garde of Modernism.
Chapter One

Upon embarking on a reframing or reconsideration of an artist and his work, it is
essential first to discuss the social and historical context of the time, so that a clear and
concise focal point may be defined. The following chapter is therefore concerned with
Edward Hopper as an artist during the 1940s. One must take into account the social and
cultural influences which may have affected Hopper and his work, influences from the
American society in which he was immersed as well as European influences reflected
through culture and art. This chapter is not only concerned with what influenced Hopper
but also how his work was received by the American art scene, art critics and the public,
and as a result how he was exhibited. Once this analysis is complete it will lay the
foundations for the following chapters.

Edward Hopper, (1882-1967), was an American scene painter whose artistic career
spanned five decades from 1910 through to his death in the 1960s. His art was
associated with an array of artistic movements, but most notably American Realism and
Figuration. Prior to his successful career, Edward Hopper studied at the Chase School,
New York, alongside the (future) artist Guy Pène du Bois. There, he progressed from
illustration into the world of painting. Whilst in attendance at the Chase School, Hopper
began studying under Robert Henri, a teacher whose influence was still apparent
through Hopper's paintings decades later. In Edward Hopper an intimate biography,
Gail Levin notes that Guy Pène du Bois described ‘Henri’s class... [as]... the seat of the
sedition among the young. Chase... preached art for art’s sake; Henri, art for life’s sake.
The difference was monumental.’9 Henri’s artistic direction influenced the subject

9du Bois, Guy Pène, ‘Artists say the silliest things’ in Levin, Gail, Edward Hopper: An Intimate
matter that Hopper chose to paint throughout his career, but it is especially noticeable within the 1940s. During this decade, artists such as Jackson Pollock began painting abstract and expressionist canvases devoid of recognisable forms, yet Hopper continued to paint cityscapes, landscapes and most importantly, people. The Abstract Expressionists painted an underlying response to life, whereas Hopper continued to answer Henri’s call and painted life itself. During the 1940s, the art world attributed the rapid change in American art throughout the previous decade as a response to the era of depression. An article in the January edition of the Magazine of Art stressed a growing ‘change in the development of contemporary painting.’ In practice, the 1940s stands out as one of the most chaotic and troublesome decades of the early twentieth century, not only as it was the decade, in which America emerged from the depression, but also, it was one that saw her engage with the World War. A discussion regarding the 1940s is not to be embarked upon before acknowledging the rippling effects that World War II had on the decade.

America became fully involved with World War II after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbour in December 1941. However, it was a close ally of Great Britain from the very beginning of the war in 1939. Although America did not participate in the War effort until 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt began to initiate a plan to mobilize the American economy and industry in preparation for the potential involvement of war. France’s surrender to the Nazi army in 1940 ‘provided the shock that convinced an increasing number of Americans to support an acceleration of the defence program.’ From that point forth, America invested her efforts into FDR’s mobilization plan. ‘Mobilization brought the return of prosperity and with it the hope and confidence in the

American way that had all but disappeared during the Great Depression.\textsuperscript{11} America was able to increase her affluence whilst uniting her citizens by promoting social morale and unity, a contrast to the social crisis of the earlier depression. The United States escaped the intense destruction caused by constant bombing seen across Europe, so Americans were able to relax in the knowledge that the front line of the war had not reached the home front, until 1941 (Pearl Harbour). ‘Complete victory in 1945, accompanied as it was by productivity and prosperity, appeared a vindication of these values and virtues, and to herald indeed the dawn of ‘the American Century.’\textsuperscript{12} Thus, America emerged as the super power that it is still known as to the present day.

However, despite this apparent rise in the status of America itself, the individuals in its population may well have been more anxious and insecure.

As previously mentioned, the end of the war in 1945 marked a pinnacle moment in world history, a moment which has created a split in the decade for art historical studies. Richard Meyer notes in his Article \textit{Mind the Gap} (2004) that 1945 defines a change in art movements. Artists who conformed to the style of the early 40s were associated with Americanism and those whose art conformed to post-war trends were associated with Modernism. Meyer argues that there was a line ‘that separated pre- and post- World War II American art and, relatedly though not identically, academic realism from innovative modernism.’\textsuperscript{13} Hopper’s work is currently categorised as ‘pre- war’ American art or ‘Americanism’ but, and this is the central argument of this thesis, his work displays a vast amount of content which reveals the social movement of the 1940s as it became what is now known as ‘Modernism’, to the extent that he records and

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{11} Winkler, Allan, M., \textit{Home Front U.S.A: America During World War II}, Illinois: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1986, p.28
  \item \textsuperscript{12} Folly, Martin, \textit{The United States and World War II: The Awakening Giant}, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002, p.135
  \item \textsuperscript{13} Meyer, Richard, \textit{Mind The Gap: Americanists, Modernists, and the Boundaries of Twentieth-Century Art}, American Art, Vol.18, No.3, Fall 2004, p.1
\end{itemize}
mirrors all things as if they were both visually and emotionally modern. Meyer suggests that ‘Rather than locking artists into stylistic, chronological, or medium-based categories, we need to pursue interpretive dialogues that cut across those categories’\(^\text{14}\).

For the people of the time, the artists and Hopper, the split that we identify now was a milestone in the decade in which they lived. So before one may continue to look at Edward Hopper's work during the 40s it is important to look at the American culture of the 1940s and how the end of the war also marked the beginning of a new era in America which embedded itself in all aspects of American culture.

‘The first half of the 1940s is as deeply enshrined in the contemporary American imagination as the second half is entirely forgotten... One might also explain this amnesia through the speculation that late-1940s Americans themselves were in great need of a sleep and a forgetting of the traumatising immediate past.’\(^\text{15}\) Although Abstract Expressionism emerged as a popular art movement after the war, American literature and its culture remained in a consistent state until the 1950s, when the likes of the ‘beat-generation’ formed a literary avant-garde. Painting was not the only form of art which responded to the fluctuating culture of the 1940’s, photography enabled photographers to capture the true life of Americans, as seen in the work of Walker Evans (1903-1975) who documented the unglamorous truth of life in the United States throughout the 1930’s and 40’s. Evans depicted life affected by the depression as well as war; life did not stop, it continued on a day to day basis. As with photography, Hollywood adopted a cinematic depiction of reality during the 40s with the emergence of Film Noir. Film Noir is often compared to Abstract Expressionism in that ‘both repress some anxieties, but give visual form to others; both produce compensatory


structures; neither has much optimism to offer in line of imaginary resolutions or illusions of social harmony.’\textsuperscript{16} It is possible to compare \textit{Film Noir} to the figurative work of Hopper in a similar fashion, alongside a comparison with photography, but before this can happen, it is important to state Hopper’s position throughout the decade.

Hopper painted throughout the war and acknowledged the unique position that an artist acquired through the war ‘We are evidently eye witnesses 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.’\textsuperscript{17} The anxiety that Hopper identifies will be explored further in the following chapter in relation to existentialism, but his acknowledgement of the use of painting to dissociate oneself from the worldwide crisis is prominent within his paintings. Hopper’s wife Jo states in a diary extract from December 7, 1941 ‘Ed refused to take any interest in our likely prospect of being bombed- and we live right under glass sky-lights... For the black-out we have no shade over the sky-lights... but Ed can’t be bothered. He’s doing a new canvas and simply can’t be interrupted!’\textsuperscript{18} The canvas in question was what would become one of Edward Hopper’s most popular works, \textit{Nighthawks}, 1942 (fig. 2). \textit{Nighthawks} depicts a contemporary\textsuperscript{19} scene at night, three figures sit at a bar, a lonesome man with his back towards the viewer and a male and female sitting next to each other, both engaged in a contemplative passive stare; a fourth


\textsuperscript{19} Contemporary for the 1940s
figure stands behind the bar, seemingly serving the duo. With respect to the earlier bombing of Pearl Harbour in 1941, the narrative seems very calm, as people get on with normal nocturnal activities. However, the emotion it evokes implies the overarching anxiety of society; the street in the background is dark and desolate, illuminated by the light from the panoramic windows of the bar. There are no other lights on, and the half-closed blinds in the windows give a sense of loneliness, as if no one else inhabits this space except the four figures in the foreground. The foreground symbolises the day to day life and routine in blissful ignorance, in contrast to the dark and empty background which symbolises the impending doom moving towards the United States. It is also interesting to note that Mrs Hopper mentions how they were unable to cover the skylights in their home in the event of a black-out and it appears the window in Nighthawks provides the only light on what appears to be a blacked-out street, as if asking to be noticed. Hopper excelled in depicting the need to continue on with normality in a state of crisis throughout his paintings of the 40s.

By the end of the war in 1945, the Abstract Expressionists’ popularity became evermore prominent in the art sector, but Edward Hopper refused to conform to these new styles. In response to criticisms of his 1948 exhibition at the Rehn Gallery from critics who claimed Hopper’s work was explanatory rather than expressive, Hopper asserted ‘Abstract art is a very incomplete means of conveying great emotions, and all great art has expressed great emotion.’ Hopper continued to paint the reality of life, as can be seen in his Seven AM, 1948 (fig. 3). Painted three years after the end of WWII and six years after Nighthawks, Seven AM evokes a similar reality to the isolation of life seen in Hopper’s great 1942 masterpiece. Although the composition is brighter, the lack of figures in the painting suggests a more sinister narrative. The emergence of the ‘Atom

Bomb’ at the end of the war sparked a global fear of the possibility of the complete
annihilation of the human race. It was now possible to eliminate whole towns in a
matter of minutes, increasing social anxiety. As previously mentioned, during the latter
part of the 1940s cultural developments seemed to be ‘sleeping’. At seven am most
people would just be waking from their sleep, but still safely tucked away at home,
perhaps suggesting a parallel between the painting’s narrative and the ‘awakening’ of
culture and society at the end of the decade. By depicting similar issues identified with
Abstract Expressionism in the form and style of Figuration, Hopper is able to capture
modern culture within the boundaries of his own accepted medium.

Hopper not only captures modern culture in his paintings but also the influence of
modern technology, notably photography. Clement Greenberg, (the champion of
Abstract Expressionist analysis), wrote that ‘A special category of art should be devised
for the kind of thing Hopper does. He is not a painter in the full sense; his means are
second-hand, shabby and impersonal. But his rudimentary sense of composition is
sufficient for a message that conveys an insight into the present nature of American life
for which there is no parallel in our literature, though that insight itself is literary.
Hopper’s painting is essentially photography, and it is literary in the way that the best
photography is. Like Walker Evans’s... art, it triumphs over inadequacies of the physical
medium; and the main difference between them is that while Evans’s and Weegee’s
subjects do not give them time enough to calculate focus and exposure, Hopper simply
happens to be a bad painter. But if he were a better painter, he would, most likely, not
be so superior an artist.’21 Aside from the criticism of Hopper’s technique, Greenberg
highlights a key point regarding Hopper’s work, that being its truthful almost

Collected Criticism, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988, p.118
photographic depiction of life. It also provides an interesting insight into the criticisms Hopper’s art faced during the post war era. Walker Evans’ *House, Lyme*, 1940 (fig. 4) is almost identical to Hopper’s *Solitude*, 1944 (fig. 5) depicting the isolation of life within the American countryside. They are not only visually similar, but also in narrative, linking both works almost intrinsically. It is not just with photography that Hopper is intrinsically linked, but also with *Film Noir*.

*Film Noir* emerged as one of Hollywood’s newest genres during the 1940s. One ‘can easily identify classic film noir by the constant opposition of light and shadow, its oblique camera angles, and its disruptive compositional balance of frames and scenes, the way characters are placed in awkward and unconventional positions within a shot, for example.’

It is argued that both *Film Noir* and Figuration display ‘analogous high-cultural and low-cultural graphic representations of Modern Man discourse’. This argument will be continued in Chapter Three, however, the aesthetic relationship between Hopper’s paintings and *Film Noir* will be discussed here. The opposition of light and dark is a key storytelling feature within *Film Noir*, and is also attributed to Edward Hopper, but on the other hand Hopper’s work in the 40s adopts a lot of cinematic tendencies. ‘His world... has no reality: his people are mannequins, his cityscapes Chirico stage-sets notable for savage top-lighting and threatening shadows. Light is Hopper’s chief weapon- the America he shows us is immensely familiar, but it is the never-never America of Warner Brothers movies, and is lit and angled to the same merciless effect.’

By revisiting *Nighthawks* one may observe stage-like props, the background buildings visible from the light shining through the bar. Just like a

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movie director, Hopper has chosen what the light reveals, and just like a *Film Noir* movie, the light reveals the emptiness in the shadows. The relationship between Edward Hopper and *Film Noir* is symbiotically reliant on American culture.

Another significant cultural depiction in Hopper’s work is the change in architecture. Upon reading an article in the April, 1940 edition of the Magazine of Art entitled *Two Architects’ Credos: “Traditional vs Modern”* a striking resemblance between the development of architectural style in the 1940s and Hopper’s paintings became apparent. The debate between a traditional architect who asserts ‘Architecture is an art and not a science... it must serve practical needs and at the same time create an emotion.’\(^2^5\), and a modern engineer who claims ‘Building serves three purposes, to meet the social and economic needs of living, to delight the scenes, and last but not least to symbolize all that men aspire to hold and to command.’\(^2^6\). This mirrors the contrast between figuration and Abstract Expressionism, but, it goes further than that. It acts as evidence towards the case of Hopper’s modernity as Hopper identifies with both schools of architectural thought, as seen in his *Rooms for Tourists*, 1945 (fig. 6) and *Approaching a City*, 1946 (fig.7). *Rooms for Tourists* conveys a traditional style of American building, abiding by the rules of symmetry, proportion and colour. Whereas, *Approaching a City* revolves around the unsymmetrical ‘modern’ high rise buildings in the background, as the train tracks in the foreground take the viewer towards them. The buildings display the increased demand for social housing in the city, whilst acting as a symbol of the approaching modernity of the latter part of the decade. This contributes to the argument that, ‘In Hopper’s art, realism was combined with strong subjective emotion. His portraiture of actualities was always true and accurate; but it would have

been sterile without the emotion which it was charged. This emotion was concentrated
not on humanity but on its environment, on the structures and objects that man has built,
and on nature with its signs of man’s activities.\textsuperscript{27} Throughout his paintings, Hopper
identifies with both traditional and modern architecture, and therefore on structures and
objects built by man and society, and for that reason his paintings become a reflection
of modern changes within the American culture. Influences from American culture are
not the only ones seen through Hopper’s work, European culture also had a major effect
on the art world.

‘American art presents a special problem in that its history, until rather recently, is in
direct line with and almost always has been a reflection of past centuries of European
art\textsuperscript{28}. The 1940s marked a pinnacle decade not only for America’s global status but
also for its artistic power. ‘The second world war marked the end of European world
leadership. It also marked the end of Paris’s artistic leadership.’\textsuperscript{29} For the first time in
Western History a non-European country adopted the role of artistic leader, previously
associated with the likes of Paris, Rome and Florence. Modernism first emerged on the
American scene through the 1913 Armory Show, which acted as a ‘revolt against the
academic idealism of established art... [the Armory Show of 1913]... introduced
international modernism to the American public.’\textsuperscript{30} It was not only the beginning of
Modernism that the Armory Show produced, but it was also a platform for exhibiting
the work of painters such as Edward Hopper. During the show Hopper ‘was represented
by oil, \textit{Sailing}, which was sold for $250- his first sale of a painting’\textsuperscript{31}. It wasn’t until the
late Thirties and early Forties that the idea of Modernism really began to show within

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{27} Goodrich, Lloyd, \textit{Edward Hopper: Selections from the Hopper Bequest to the Whitney Museum of
\textsuperscript{28} \textit{American Printmakers: 1900-1989: Edward Hopper to Jasper Johns}, Chicago: RS Johnson Fin Art,
1989, p.5
\end{footnotesize}
American Art. During this time many artists, poets and intellectuals fled to America to escape the fascist regime sweeping across Europe; and with their arrival the idea of modernism in art, philosophy, politics and sociology was reenergised. A study in the European influences on politics and sociology would require a completely separate thesis, and for this reason will be omitted from the discussion. However, European philosophical influences will be discussed further in Chapter Two. The influence of European art on American art during the 1940s is apparent in the work of the Abstract Expressionists who are often likened to Cubists, Surrealists and German Expressionists. However, it also filtered into figuration which depicted the raw truth of American culture, and influences can even be seen in the work of Edward Hopper, who claimed ‘it took me ten years to get over Europe’32. Hopper’s exposure to European styles may be attributed to two key moments in his life: firstly from Robert Henri who ‘frequently quoted from French authors such as Zola, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Guy de Maupassant, not that he wanted his students to impose a European aesthetic on their work.’33 - rather, to inspire the depiction of reality. Secondly, Hopper would have been exposed to European art and culture in 1906 upon his first visit to Paris, during which he developed a brief interest in photography34. A comparison may be drawn between the work of Hopper and the Impressionists, in that both strove to depict truth and reality. However, they differ in aesthetic composition as the Impressionists attempted to capture the instantaneity of life, the transient and fleeting and the movement of light, whereas Hopper’s compositions can be seen as more photographic, capturing the essence of life. It may be argued that Hopper drew inspiration not only from French literature and culture but also from the narrative of figures within Impressionist painting. Guy Pène du

Bois, Edward Hopper’s contemporary, wrote an article entitled ‘Edward Hopper’ in which he begins with the idea of ‘the dandy’, or what was often identified in Impressionist painting as the ‘Flâneur’, and remarked that Paris was ‘taking over’ an overt suggestion of the influence European art had on Hopper. ‘The Flâneur, though grounded in everyday life, is an analytic, a narrative device, an attitude towards knowledge and its social context. It is an image of movement through the social space of modernity.’

Impressionists depicted the Flâneur as a response to Charles Baudelaire’s call to paint modernity. The Flâneur was a middle class male in the middle of the fast growing modernity who, instead of engaging with it, took a step back and watched. This position is similar to the figures in *Nighthawks* who are sitting at a bar watching life go by as the world outside waits for its ultimate demise. To expand on this further one may look at Hopper’s *Morning in a City*, 1946 (fig. 1) in a comparison with Gustave Caillebotte’s *Young Man at His Window*, 1875 (fig. 8). Caillebotte’s *Young Man at His Window* is a typical nineteenth century Parisian narrative, depicting a young bourgeois male (Flâneur) standing at his window looking out at society, adopting a voyeuristic stance. This scene is almost mirrored in Hopper’s *Morning in a City*, but with two major alterations. Firstly the voyeur at the window is now a female nude, and secondly, the viewer could now also be seen as the voyeur. Hopper adopted ideas from European art, yet made it his own, thus making it ‘American’; further to this, du Bois notes ‘His hatred of the purely decorative is notorious. And yet he will... not belie existing fact. His work in this sense is in no way subjective. He is an interpreter and not an inventor or forms.’

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37 A further analysis of gender will be provided in chapter three.
influences, but it is more than that, it is an evolution. By merging together different mediums and styles, Hopper was able to create a truly unique picture of the real America of the 1940s.

Cultural influences play a major role in this analysis of Edward Hopper’s art, however, the American society and economic hierarchy of the 1940’s was just as important and influential. Hopper paints the real America with real people, but who were these people? Clement Greenberg asserts that there is an ‘absence of a stable, leisured... self-confident, intellectual class in this country, prepared to rally to each other’s help against the attrition of journalism, fashion, publicity, and kitsch.’39 In a country which prided itself on classlessness, the figures depicted in Hopper’s work are clearly not from the same class as those photographed by Walker Evans (fig. 9) in the 1930s. Class was typically identified by the sort of job a person had, but with the emergence of sociological developments thorough out the era, those who identified with Karl Marx often saw class as a reflection of one’s relationship to the means of production. Regardless of which school of thought one may wish to adopt, Hopper’s work shows the existence of a rapidly up and coming ‘middle class’ in American society, a class which would revel in commodities, fashion, journalism and the ‘kitsch’ which Greenberg disdainfully dismisses. This class was identified by many intellectuals at the time and Guy Pène du Bois recognised that ‘there existed and was growing in New York City an upper middle class in basic accord with its Parisian Counterpart.’40. In Hotel Lobby, 1943 (fig. 10) Hopper paints a scene which almost embodies a Baudelaireian picture of the bourgeoisie in its depiction of the new bourgeois-like American class. ‘Every old master has had his own modernity; the great majority of fine

40 Du Bois, Guy Pene, Art and the Decline of the Bourgeoisie, Magazine of Art, October, 1944, p.218
portraits that have come down to us from former generations are clothed in the costume of their own period. They are perfectly harmonious, because everything— from costume and coiffure down to gesture, glance and smile... everything, I say, combines to form a completely viable whole. 41 The figures in the painting are sitting at leisure in the lobby of a hotel, (that which may be constituted as a luxury), dressed in the latest fashion. The male has a detached gaze on his face, symbolic of the isolation and anxiety seen within the decade. It would be fair to assume, therefore, that although Hopper paints the reality of America, which would have been applicable to the majority of Americans, he does tend to focus on a depiction of a certain class, the middle class. Returning to Greenberg, he asserts ‘There exists in this country no self-assured, self-intelligible class of connoisseurs and amateurs of art with defined and independent tastes. Collectors, critics, and simple enthusiasts depend on slogans, worded and un-worded, that cull from everything except their own experience.’42 Popular art became art for art’s sake, but there was a time when Hopper was thought of as a Modernist, although later judgements saw him as less modern. However, this thesis will reverse that change.

During the 1940s, Edward Hopper’s paintings were frequently exhibited and his work sold modestly, however, his journey to ‘accomplished painter’ was not always straightforward. At the very beginning of his career, once he had returned from Paris, Hopper ‘found that his kind of realism was too unromantic for the academic juries of the big exhibitions through which alone a young artist could show his work in those days. After repeated rejections he gave up submitting; and from about 1915 to 1920 he

painted less, although he never stopped entirely.'\textsuperscript{43} Hopper's big break came in 1920 when the Whitney Studio Club (the predecessor of the prestigious Whitney Museum of American Art) held a one-man exhibition of his work. After the success of his one-man show in 1920, Hopper's work was annually exhibited in the Whitney Studio Club and as Gail Levin says ‘after the Whitney opened its doors in 1931, Hopper’s oils and watercolours were included in practically every annual exhibition throughout his life.'\textsuperscript{44} Hopper’s relationship with the Whitney spanned nearly the entirety of his career: from 1918, when he became a member of the Whitney Studio club, through to the posthumous bequest\textsuperscript{45} of the entire collection of his work. During his lifetime, the Whitney continued to exhibit and support the figurative artist, and ‘in 1950 the Whitney Museum held a full scale retrospective exhibition of Hopper’s works’\textsuperscript{46}, fourteen years later another exhibition was held ‘which filled the entire building on 54\textsuperscript{th} street’\textsuperscript{47}. It was not just the Whitney in which Hopper’s work was exhibited but also the Museum of Modern Art, where he had numerous exhibitions, and in 1933 the MOMA held a one-man show in Hopper’s name. By the 1940s, Edward Hopper was able to exhibit his work comfortably, but he produced work at a slower pace, ‘no more than two to four oils per year.’\textsuperscript{48}. In 1940, Hopper entered \textit{Gas} (fig.11) into the Annual Exhibition of Contemporary American Art; that same year, he decided that he would never paint as a request from someone else. ‘Having staked everything on the concept of individual

\begin{itemize}
  \item Donated by his wife Jo.
\end{itemize}
autonomy... he rejected offers of patronage\textsuperscript{49}. In doing this, Hopper was able to define his own parameters as an artist, but limited himself in terms of buyers. In 1941, the Frank K.M Rehn gallery held an exhibition entitled ‘Early Paintings by Edward Hopper: 1907-1914’. The exhibition resulted from the artist’s slow production of work, but ultimately provided a visual insight into Hopper’s Parisian influence, as the critic Jewell wrote ‘For at least a decade and a half, Hopper’s style has seemed to epitomize the sort of plastic speech that, with augmenting assurance, is termed “American”. Indeed, suddenly confronted with evidence, it may require some effort to adjust one’s self to the fact that Paris has its place in the retrospective pattern of so American a painter’s growth’\textsuperscript{50}. Hopper continued to steadily exhibit his work throughout the decade. In 1945, his 1943 painting Hotel Lobby ‘won the Logan Institute Medal and a five-hundred-dollar prize in the annual Exhibition of the Chicago Art institute.’\textsuperscript{51} Although still popular as a painter, Hopper’s progress was remarkably slow during the 1940s and it wasn’t until 1948 that the Rehn Gallery held another exhibition of Hopper’s work. In an interview regarding the exhibition, Hopper asserted ‘I’d rather be painting all the time, but I don’t have the impulse. Of course I do dozens of sketches for oils... if I do one that interests me, I go on and make a painting, but that happens only two or three times a year’\textsuperscript{52}. Hopper’s disassociation from painting may be seen as a reflection of the dislocated society; it must have been hard to derive inspiration from the surrounding loneliness and anxiety. Nevertheless, Hopper was able to accumulate a reasonable number of exhibitions during the 40s, which received vast amounts of attention and


attracted a large section of the American public, even though he was not able to turn out very many paintings across the decade.

Although Hopper was an important painter and his work was well exhibited, his sales only amounted to surprisingly low figures. ‘In the 1930s, he was getting between $1500 and $3000 for an oil painting’ and in 1940 the total sale of his work only amounted to $3866. As the decade progressed, the overall annual total of his sales declined, and in 1945 it was only valued at $2,020. Although this would have been attributed to the lack of paintings Hopper produced, the value that they were sold for was not considerable. In contrast, paintings by Edward Hopper go for millions of dollars at auctions in the present day. It is reported that in 2012 Sotheby’s sold his Bridle Path, 1939, (fig.12) for $10,386,500, over 2000 times more than the price Hopper was receiving for his annual total sale of works in 1940. In 2013 Christies sold Hopper’s depiction of ‘modern American life’ East Wind over Weehawken, 1934, (fig.13) for $40million. It is evident in current day sales that Hopper’s work is still relevant, but it is also interesting to note that, though it is identified as a depiction of the ‘modern’, the painter himself is still not considered a ‘Modernist’. It could even also be argued that his work is something of a commodity in the modern day, considering the numerous prints and reproductions of Nighthawks that are readily available, drawing even more similarity between Hopper’s work and that of the Modernist Abstract Expressionists, whose art is often regarded as a ‘commodity in the struggle for American dominance.’

It is also interesting to draw a parallel between the current status of Hopper’s work and an article in the 1939 ‘Art News’ entitled ‘Artists Unappreciated, Opposed &

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55 http://galleristny.com/2012/05/edward-hopper-tops-sothebys-35-m-american-art-sale/
56 http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-25257335
Unrewarded in their Day: Fascinating Exhibit’, which discusses an exhibition at the Toledo Museum of Art. The exhibition discusses late-nineteenth century artists, such as Millet, whose work did not sell well during his lifetime but is ‘the most highly prized today’\textsuperscript{58}. Written over 60 years ago, its arguments are still applicable to a modern day appreciation of Hopper’s art, especially in regards to the difference in value. Similarly, Guy Pène du Bois interestingly points out in his 1944 article \textit{Art and the Decline of the Bourgeoisie} ‘The New York banker was driven, after many mournful experiences, to the conclusion that the only good painter is a perfectly accredited dead one.’\textsuperscript{59} This potentially explains why Hopper’s art is sold for such substantially higher prices in the present day. In addition it gives an insight into the life of a painter during the 1940s. There must have been a sense of disillusionment for Hopper, knowing that there was a general agreement, so often acknowledged in the art journals of the 1940s, that an artist’s work only displayed its true value once the artist had died. With this in mind, Hopper’s decision to stay true to his style and technique, rather than conforming to the avant-garde Abstract Expressionist movement, was not only radical move but also a foresightful and clever one. If his work only became valuable after he had died, and its value and worth were measured on its ability to create a retrospective view of America at the time, then rather than conforming to the emotive and expressive up and coming styles it was far more beneficial to paint America as it truly was thus creating a picture of the true anxiety within America. It is fair to say that though this is rather a speculative point, it does identify a cause for the crisis of the individual which is to be explored in the next chapter.

\textsuperscript{58} ‘Artists Unappreciated, Opposed & Unrewarded in their Day: Fascinating Exhibit Theme in Toledo’, \textit{Art News}, Vol. XXXVIII, No.9, Dec 2, 1939 p.17
\textsuperscript{59} Du Bois, Guy Pène, \textit{Art and the Decline of the Bourgeoisie}, Magazine of Art, October, 1944, p.218
The present chapter has skimmed through the decade of the 1940s and the life of Edward Hopper, and in doing so, has laid the foundations for the arguments which are presented in the succeeding chapters. Modernist influences such as *Film Noir* and photography are recurring themes in the remainder of this thesis, and lend themselves well to the discussions of Existentialism and Gender. Although this chapter has summarised Hopper’s depiction of class, questions still remain as to his depiction of Gender, and hence masculinity. The similarities between Hopper’s work and what makes Abstract Expressionism ‘Modernist’ are also looked at in terms of Existentialism and Gender. This is furthered with a discussion on what makes Hopper’s work a ‘complete’ depiction of great emotion, in contrast to the ‘incomplete’ emotions conveyed by the Abstract Expressionists. The anxiety and solitude of 1940s American society has already been identified in this chapter, however a further analysis with the use of Existentialism will explore the way Hopper not only captured these atmospheric emotions, but also painted through his own experience of them. Finally, the discussion regarding his reception also leads on to the next section, as it is the beginning of an analysis concerned with the underlying influence of the existential present within both the society and Hopper’s work. Consequently, the following chapters of this thesis will continue to build on the argument that Edward Hopper is, in his own right, a Modernist.
Chapter Two

Upon deciding which philosophical angle to take for an analysis of Edward Hopper’s work, I found that Existentialism provided the voice that I needed, a voice which not only shed light upon the importance of an individual, but which helped convey the alienation that the individual would feel within society. Existentialism brings a unique enlightenment to the notion of the individual portrayed in Hopper’s work as the philosophy places the individual as an independent self aside from society, a self that is guided by his/her own freedom of thought and experience. However, the idea that the individual was in charge of their own destiny was one which the American people of the 1940s would have longed for, as they lived through an uncertain period. The previous chapter discussed the social and historical effects of the 1940s on Edward Hopper’s work; this chapter will take all of that into consideration and apply it to the individual. Before carrying on with this discussion I will first clarify the terms I will be using. When discussing the ‘individual’ I will be focusing on three separate entities: Edward Hopper as an ‘individual’, the ‘individual’ painted within Hopper’s narratives, and lastly the ‘individual’ as a viewer of Hopper’s work. Through analysing all three aspects of ‘the individual’, the study should underpin the argument that Edward Hopper is just as much a Modernist as the Abstract Expressionists. By depicting the Existentialist themes of modernism, Hopper’s work is able to embody the isolation which Americans of the 1940s felt, using a less chaotic and more immediate medium than the Abstract Expressionists. He thus provides paintings which would have been more salient for the 1940s viewer than has previously been appreciated. For this analysis, I have chosen to begin with Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche as a way of laying the foundations for a comparison of Edward Hopper’s paintings with the writings of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. The four existentialist philosophers which I have
chosen: Søren Kierkegaard, Freidrich Nietzsche, Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, all placed importance on the individual, but adopt varying approaches to define the life that the individual should lead. ‘Man is free, says Sartre, and he must accept his freedom and live it out, even though his life is a “useless passion”. Man’s existence is “absurd”, says Camus, but he must accept his situation...’\textsuperscript{60}. Both begin with the individual, but develop it in different directions. Although these philosophers’ theories may sometimes diverge from one another, they are important in capturing the raw feeling of isolation and helplessness in the work of Edward Hopper, an aspect which is key in the work of all four philosophers.

Søren Kierkegaard (1813-185) is often considered to be the founder of Existential philosophy, a philosophy which began ‘as a voice, raised in protest against the absurdity of Pure Thought, a logic which is not the logic of thinking but the immanent movements of being’\textsuperscript{61}. Kierkegaard rests his moral philosophy on the notion of a transcendent being and ‘great emphasis is placed upon fate and its two sides, fortune and misfortune. This means that when you find yourself or your life “out of control” all you can do is wait. You must let ‘fate’ take its course’\textsuperscript{62}. For Sartre this would in fact be Bad Faith. Kierkegaard goes on to lay the foundation of existentialism through his discussion of the ultimately subjective way in which the individual makes sense of the world and develops a moral code.

The concept that life is out of a person’s hands would have been prevalent throughout the 1940s, due to the backlash of the depression and the outbreak of World War II. For American society it was almost as if one had to just wait in isolation for fate to take its

\textsuperscript{60} Charlesworth, Max, The Existentialists and Jean-Paul Sartre, New York: St Martin’s Press, 1975, p.71
\textsuperscript{61} Blackham, H.J, Six Existentialist Thinkers, London: Lowe & Brydone, 1972, p.2
course. This notion can be seen in Hopper’s Solitude (fig. 5) which depicts a desolate scene, perhaps an allegory of the a monotonous period of waiting which America was experiencing, waiting either for the war to end, or for complete destruction, only time would tell. ‘The wayside house in Solitude by a road which disappears to the horizon, seems an alien intrusion in the landscape, thanks to the strong colours and position. There is no track from the house to the road: indeed, the house appears to have opted deliberately for seclusion among the trees.’63 The house is a symbol of isolation and seclusion, but it is not only that which strikes a chord between Hopper and Kierkegaard, it is also the fact that the house seems to be waiting, for someone to walk by and rediscover it, just like the individual waiting for ‘fate’ to rediscover them and let them continue on with their journey in life. Solitude is not the only painting by Hopper which visually captures this aspect of Kierkegaard’s philosophy. Pennsylvania Coal Town, 1947, (fig. 14) is another narrative which resonates with philosophy. Søren Kierkegaard once wrote: ‘Like a solitary fir tree egotistically separate and pointed upward I stand, casting no shadow, and only the wood-dove builds its nest in my branches.’64 This sentiment creates a striking image of solitude and isolation within society. The image this evokes is one similarly evoked in Edward Hooper’s work, especially in Pennsylvania Coal Town. A figure raking the lawn acts as the focal point of the painting, he is surrounded by suburban houses, and is completely alone. It is not the narrative which pin points the solitude of the painting, rather it is the atmosphere which is created through the man’s gaze. His back is turned away from the job at hand as he gazes past the houses in the early morning light. Alone at the break of dawn, carrying out mundane tasks is the hour when one may take on a contemplative view on life and existence, and when one may feel most alone, just like Kierkegaard’s fir tree. However, 

64 Blackham, H.J, Six Existentialist Thinkers, London: Lowe & Brydone, 1972, p.1
Kierkegaard’s individual loses his/her autonomy and agency and becomes what he calls a ‘ghost’ among society, a role which one could imagine the figure in Hopper’s painting adopting when his time of contemplation and isolation is over.

Freidrich Nietzsche’s (1844-1900) philosophy was in contrast to Kierkegaard’s. ‘Kierkegaard precipitated himself into the irrevocable either-or of his final unforgivable attack on the church, Nietzsche into his Dionysian nihilism, his euphoria and eventual madness’ 65, but, both philosophers shared a likeness with their divergence from their present day cultures. Freidrich Nietzsche embodied Existential thought by ‘taking the problems of his philosophy from the conflict of the age instead of from the disputes of the schools’ 66. The discussion of Hopper’s Existentialism in this thesis reflects Nietzsche’s refusal to work within ‘the disputes of the schools’, as it rejects the parameters of the debate which categorises Hopper as a realist as opposed to a Modernist. Therefore an Existential viewpoint will be produced which like Nietzsche moves away from the common division of artistic schools, and into the realm of social and economic conflict. The individual in Hopper’s painting can be viewed through the lens of Existentialism in a way which allows one to regard Hopper as a Modernist. Before engaging with his theories further, I would like to discuss Nietzsche’s comparison of Wagner and Bizet, and how his argument shed light onto the division between Hopper and the Abstract Expressionists. In his book The Case of Wagner Nietzsche asserts ‘every time I heard Carmen I seemed to myself more of a philosopher, a better philosopher, than I generally consider myself... May I say that the tone of Bizet’s orchestra is almost one I can still endure? That other orchestral tone which is now the fashion, Wagner’s, brutal, artificial and “innocent” at the same time- thus it

65 Blackham, H.J, Six Existentialist Thinkers, London: Lowe & Brydone, 1972, p.23
66 Blackham, H.J, Six Existentialist Thinkers, London: Lowe & Brydone, 1972, p.36
speaks all at once to the three senses of the modern soul- how harmful for me the 
Wagnerian orchestral tone!67

It would be crude to say that the comparison between the composers is exactly how this 
thesis compares Hopper’s art to that of the Abstract Expressionists. However, there is a 
distorted reflection of this argument throughout this thesis. For instance: with regard to 
Wagner, Nietzsche goes on to say ‘This music is evil, subtly fatalistic: at the same time 
it remains popular- its subtlety belongs to a race, not to an individual.’68 Similarly this 
thesis argues that Abstract Expressionism gained in popularity, but it belonged more to 
society than the individual and it is in fact Figuration which belongs to the idea of the 
individual. It is through Edward Hopper’s painting, that the viewer is treated as 
intelligent and it is this art which can truly belong to and illustrate the problem of the 
individual. One may look at Jackson Pollock’s The Moon Woman, 1942 (fig. 15) in 
comparison to Hoppers, Summertime, 1943 (fig. 16) to see a visual demonstration of 
Nietzsche’s statement. In The Moon Woman, Pollock experiments with line and form, 
in relation to a figure. ‘The figure, consequently, while it structures the pictorial field, is 
the spontaneous, casual product of an automatic, wandering line’69. The painting could 
be argued to be brutal and artificial and is a showcase of Pollock’s genius, aimed at the 
popularity of the masses rather than a contemplation of the individual. On the other 
hand, Hopper’s Summertime has a calmer composition as the figure of a woman stands 
on the steps of a building ‘behind her, the open front door is in darkness. Into the 
geometry of the architecture Hopper has introduced life by showing curtains blowing


1967, p.157

69 Leja, Michael, Reframing Abstract Expressionism: subjectivity and painting in the 1940s, New Haven 
and London: Yale University Press, 1993, p288
back from an open window (with the room beyond it again in darkness).\footnote{Renner, Rolf G, \textit{Hopper}, Germany: Taschen, 2000, p.52} In an era which was struck by terror and devastation, Pollock’s work was revered and was held in the highest esteem as a depiction of the individual. Nietzsche called for the individual to live life to the fullest (as he asserted that there was no afterlife and no god). This Pollock does by expressing his individuality in his painting. Hopper on the other hand appeals to the individual, making his work for the individual by looking at the way in which they exist in a world which attempts to define them, and impose itself upon them. Yet, his characters seem to be poised on the possibility of agency. The figure in the foreground could be argued to represent life and the possibility of choice, in contrast to the darkness seen within the building in the background, which could be a symbol of nothingness, the inevitability of human existence. The figure observes the light and sunny foreground, before the shadows of the background engulf her. Hopper’s paintings belong to the individual because he paints a narrative which not only resembles life but which also acts as an allegory of the meaninglessness of life, yet allows the possibility of freedom and autonomy. It is through the Existential traits that Hopper depicts in his narratives, in the people and the places that he paints, that Hopper truly becomes a Modernist.

In summary, both Nietzsche and Kierkegaard ‘oppose themselves to the culture of the day’\footnote{Blackham, H.J, \textit{Six Existentialist Thinkers}, London: Lowe & Brydone, 1972, p.23} but of far greater importance was the fact that both philosophers identified the subjectivity of existence which means an individual is just that: an isolated individual. And Hopper paints just that: the isolated individual. However, it is Jean-Paul Sartre’s Existentialist philosophy which truly exposes the idea of the isolation of the individual so commonly depicted in Hopper’s work. Sartre developed the theories of Kierkegaard.
and Nietzsche, but rather than attributing life and morality to a transcendental being (like Kierkegaard does) Sartre asserts that ‘man is alone in the world without any pre-existing moral or religious systems to support and guide him. On the one hand he is forced to a realization of his solitariness, of the futility and absurdity of existence: on the other he has the freedom to define himself, to reinvent himself with every action’\textsuperscript{72}. Sartre’s philosophy would have been disseminated to an American audience affected by migration of European intellectuals and artists, as previously mentioned. The notion of individuals being free to define themselves and chose how to act, would have been an idealised aspiration for the people of the American society of the time.

In Sartre’s novel \textit{Nausea}, the protagonist, Antoine Roquentin, reflects that ‘every existing thing is born for no reason, carries on living through weakness, and dies by accident’\textsuperscript{73}. This sentiment would have reflected the way that many people felt throughout the 1940s and is evoked in the narrative of Hopper’s paintings. Sartre’s statement suggests life’s meaninglessness and he asserted ‘It is through the existence of ...emptiness, separating a person from the world of things about him, that the possibility arises of thinking or acting as one chooses.’\textsuperscript{74} Hopper depicts the meaninglessness and emptiness of life in his paintings \textit{Dawn in Pennsylvania}, 1942 (Fig. 17) and \textit{El Palacio}, 1946, (fig. 18). In \textit{Dawn in Pennsylvania} Hopper paints a desolate scene: light shines upon an empty platform in the foreground, beside which there is a railway track and the end carriage of a cargo train can be seen. In the background there are industrial buildings which share no light from their windows. Behind the buildings on the left there is a rising light, perhaps signifying the dawn, but if that is the case the light shining upon the platform is artificial. The light in the background is almost

\textsuperscript{74} Warnock, M, Existentialist Ethics, London: Macmillan and Company Limited, 1967, p.21
apocalyptic, perhaps a symbol of the growing war in the western world. The artificial light shining on the empty platform makes the empty platform a focal point and highlights the lack of figures within the painting. This may be seen as an analogy for the artificial importance humanity bestows upon itself and yet it is the incoherence of individuality that therefore emphasizes the inherent meaninglessness of life. Perhaps Hopper is finally registering the earlier atrocities of Pearl Harbour, which as mentioned in Chapter One, he chose to close his eyes to when painting Nighthawks. Therefore, Hopper has painted an emptiness which depicts the separation of the individual and his surroundings by choosing not to paint figures. El Palacio has a much brighter composition, perhaps as it was painted after the end of World War II, however, it still embodies a desolate feeling and portrays emptiness. The buildings in the painting emit no light from their windows and no figures can be seen. The whole narrative is similar to that of a ghost town, the only suggestion of life is in the defined ‘Ford’ and ‘Palacio’ signs which create a focal point for the painting. Renner argues ‘Hopper is reconstructing an uncomplicated and unprejudiced pleasure in the signs of Civilisation... In making these signs his subject, Hopper was adopting a technique that partially took him beyond Modernism.’ By creating an atmosphere of emptiness and desolation without human figures Hopper embodies Sartre’s notion of the emptiness of life whilst also demonstrating his Modernist leanings by moving beyond the Abstract Expressionists and rediscovering ‘what lay on the surface’ of a painting. ‘The signs mean nothing beyond themselves’ just like life means nothing beyond itself. Both ‘pictures show that, even when human figures ...[are]... absent, or present as mere

75 Renner, Rolf. G, Hopper, Germany: Taschen, 2000, p.28
76 Renner, Rolf. G, Hopper, Germany: Taschen, 2000, p.28
77 Renner, Rolf. G, Hopper, Germany: Taschen, 2000, p.28
ciphers, Hopper was using his views of houses and cities to suggest the forces that
govern modern life.\textsuperscript{78} The sovereign force of the individual over what they see and do.

In \textit{Nausea} Roquentin describes the way in which he suddenly overcomes the reality of
being an individual ‘I didn’t even suffer, I felt empty. Then time started flowing again
and the emptiness grew larger’.\textsuperscript{79} Hopper tackles the Existential feeling of emptiness
through his paintings of desolate urban landscapes, however, he also does it by
paintings with figures. Hopper’s figures are famous for the sense of loneliness and
isolation that they create, and the similar feeling that they evoke in the viewer. It is
important to note that Sartre asserts that ‘the desires and wishes of others, their interests
and their liberty, constitute a limit to the morally desirable exercise of our own freedom
to satisfy our desires’.\textsuperscript{80} Therefore, although an individual may be isolated they cannot
exercise complete freedom due to social constrictions. This notion is evoked through
Hopper’s figures, which creates an atmosphere of solitariness whilst engaging in
mundane tasks in the company of other people, an example of which can be seen in
\textit{Summer Evening}, 1947 (fig.19). A young couple are painted next to one other on the
porch of a house. The light on the porch illuminates the scene, a contrast to the
complete darkness in the background. The male figure is leaning on his right side
looking towards the female figure, who is leaning backwards staring at the ground in
front of her. Neither of the figures seems to be happy, in fact, they reflect Hopper’s
trademark depiction of separateness and isolation, not only that but they demonstrate the
notion of emptiness that an individual may feel because of social constrictions. ‘The
two people are lit as if they were on a stage, almost defenceless and yet with a manifest

\textsuperscript{78} Renner, Rolf. G, \textit{Hopper}, Germany: Taschen, 2000., p.41
self-confidence.'81 The defencelessness of the couple can be seen through the empty and isolated atmosphere of the painting, yet the self-confidence seen within the couple can be argued to be from the sense of agency which the female displays. The colours which Hopper uses, and the overall composition of the painting suggests ‘a symbolic element in Hopper’s art. It is not that specific meanings can be attached to identifiable symbols in ...[his]... paintings; but Hopper’s evocative method allusively implies narrative contexts and experiential frameworks.’82 The detachment displayed on the female figure’s face, combined with her almost hollow looking eyes ‘allusively implies’ the emptiness of an individual, although it may be at this point that she becomes aware of the freedom which Sartre previously asserted was possible. A discussion of the theories of Existentialism in association with Hopper’s work cannot be held without mentioning the way in which Hopper captures the sense of alienation through his depiction of light.

Edward Hopper is equally famous for the manipulation of light in his work as he is for the isolation of individuals and scenes that he paints. Indeed the two are functionally linked. In the December 1948 issue of the Magazine of Art, Parker Tyler asserts ‘A phenomenon such as ‘inner light’ is inconceivable in Hopper’s work. It might be said that he illuminates the earthly dark by accenting its resolutely opaque surface; thus light is an apparent means by which an object or person isolates itself both from other objects and persons and even from the universe- that is, from a sense of unity with all other things’83. The depiction of light in Hopper’s work is used as a tool by which he conveys the emotions of the figures that he paints; their loneliness, emptiness and ultimately, their isolation. The manipulation of light in this way can be seen in Hopper’s Morning

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82 Renner, Rolf. G, Hopper, Germany: Taschen, 2000, p.76
in a City. The female figure stands at her window as the morning light begins to illuminate her room, but it is not just the light which creates the atmosphere of the painting, it is also the contrast formed by the shadows and darkness. The shadows fill the foreground and the background, surrounding the figure, yet she stands in the centre of the painting bathed in light. However, it is not a refreshing light; rather, it highlights the anxiety and loneliness of the figure. Tyler notes that ‘The light on the body of the girl in Hopper’s painting... is cut off from the white of the bed linen and the brilliant light of the exterior visible through the window.’\textsuperscript{84} The figure is thereby alienated not only by the narrative of the painting, but also by the light which surrounds her. She is not in the shadows, nor is she illuminated in the same way as the room, she is isolated from her own surroundings in a similar way to the individuals which Sartre identifies.

As well as natural light, Hopper also uses artificial light to alienate his figures. In Office at Night, 1940 (fig.20) artificial light is used to demonstrate the figures’ alienation. The painting ‘shows light as a wedge pressing people back into their own private darkness, under the merciless glare from overhead... the girl clerk’s figure is united with the filing cabinet she stands by, while her boss is united with desk.’\textsuperscript{85} Whilst both figures become fused to the objects near them, another form of light shines through the window, highlighting the separation between the two figures. As it is night time, one can only assume that the light coming in through the window is from a street lamp or another office opposite. Nevertheless, its subtle existence alienates the figures from the office space around them, whilst also alienating them from each other. But, as with the female figure in Summer Evening, the female figure in Office at Night has a contemplative and bored look on her face, but with it comes the sense that she has the freedom to do as she

\textsuperscript{84} Tyler, Parker, ‘Edward Hopper: Alienation by Light’, Magazine of Art, Vol. 41, No.8, Dec, 1948, p.292
\textsuperscript{85} Tyler, Parker, ‘Edward Hopper: Alienation by Light’, Magazine of Art, Vol. 41, No.8, Dec, 1948, p.292
pleases; she realises the possibility of her own freedom, but due to her social status, she is choosing not to exploit it\(^{86}\) (i.e. in Sartre's term Bad Faith). Hopper uses light to alienate his figures from their surroundings as a way of indicating the alienation of the figures themselves. But it is not only in paintings which include figures that Hopper does this, it can also be seen in the desolation of buildings and landscapes.

As previously mentioned there are two forms of light in *Dawn in Pennsylvania*, one rising in the west, in the background of the painting, and one shining on the foreground from the east. The light in this painting illuminates the emptiness of the platform providing the sense of desolation. In contrast to this, in *Approaching a City*, Hopper uses shadow rather than light to demonstrate isolation. The painting is set in broad day light and the very small amount of blue sky that can be seen above one of the buildings suggests that it is a sunny day. The darkness of the tunnel and the dark windows give the painting its sense of desolation. The painting suggests that by approaching the city, the viewer is also approaching darkness and with that isolation. This idea is exaggerated by the dark windows on the city buildings, perhaps suggesting that once in the city, there is no light, no individuality, only emptiness and isolation. Yet another example of Hopper’s use of light to convey isolation can be seen in *Seven AM*. Similar to *Dawn in Pennsylvania*, in *Seven AM* Hopper uses light to illuminate the empty scene, whilst also creating shadows and darkness which suggest isolation. The dark forest in the background suggests seclusion but it also has a sinister feel. Not only that, but it may be argued that the darkness of the forest in contrast to the light at that hour of the morning, sunrise, could suggest that even though the War is over, (it was painted in 1948), death and the terrors of the war are still close by, ready to creep up and engulf humanity again.

\(^{86}\) It should be noted that the following chapter provides a more detailed discussion of the female figures ‘social status’.
at any given moment, a sentiment which is strengthened by the lighter shadows within the shop. Ultimately, the omission of figures from this painting is what gives Hopper the chance to manipulate light in such a way that he is still able to demonstrate the emptiness, isolation and seclusion that an individual may feel. As well as light Hopper uses space to aid his demonstration of Existential isolation and angst; it is another key element in the composition of these paintings.

In his book *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre suggests that the individual exists only in the present because the point in Existentialism is not to be defined either by the past or the future, but in that the idea of the emptiness in the ‘now’ is prevalent. When discussing the basis of Existentialism, he asserts that ‘we are dealing with a morality of freedom. So long as there is no contradiction between that morality and our philosophy, nothing more is required.’\(^{87}\) Hopper’s art can be argued to capture the moment in which the individual realises their own freedom, whilst existing in a society where strict rules and social expectations are place on a person. By revisiting *Pennsylvania Coal Town*, the idea of the individual existing in that present moment can be seen. There is nothing physically stopping the male figure from dropping his rake and walking away; in the precise moment that Hopper captures, the individual has a choice, the freedom to do as he pleases and exercise his autonomy or to continue living a mundane and dependent existence. It is not only the figure in the painting that realises this, but also the viewer. The viewer can empathise with this notion with regard to both the figure in the painting and for themselves. Therefore the narrative, composition and atmosphere of the painting almost transcends the canvas. Renner argues that ‘Hopper provided his own commentaries on the processes by which things are metamorphosed in imagination’\(^ {88}\).

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In his paintings, Hopper metamorphosises his own imagination but also that of the figures he paints and of the viewer. Hopper’s work could be argued to be an embodiment of Jean-Paul Sartre’s idea that it is only in the present moment that the individual is able to recognise the possibility of their freedom and live the life of a true individual, (in Sartre’s terms, create their own being-for-itself). Hopper shows, through the figures he paints, that moment when they suddenly realise their own agency. Although the use of light is a key element in Hopper’s depiction of this, his manipulation of space is just as important.

Quite literally, Hopper uses space to demonstrate separation and desolation, but as well as the notion of emptiness, ‘space’ is also used as a way of depicting the ‘crisis of an individual’. For instance, by studying *Dawn in Pennsylvania* again, it is clear to see that space is what makes up the majority of the foreground, aided by the light which draws the viewer’s focus towards the empty space, but it is also just the space itself which elicits the painting’s narrative. In *Nighthawks* there is a stark and clear contrast between light and dark but there is also a purposeful manipulation of space. Tyler comments that Hopper uses ‘the mathematical definition of light, dividing the world without fuss into clear, uncomplicated areas.’ The light sets the parameters for the viewer’s focal point but the space is what fortifies the essence of isolation. If the painting was cut off at the window, the scene would still embody a sense of isolation through the depiction of the figures. However, the male figure who is sitting alone at the bar, radiating isolation, becomes the focal part of the painting because of the illuminated empty space behind him. It is almost as if the empty street is a reflection of the male figure’s emotions. Whilst the scene at the bar is still the focal point of the painting, it is the mathematical

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dimensions of empty space and light which give the painting such a powerful underlining of those figures’ isolation.

A final analysis of Edward Hopper’s *Gas* (fig. 11) will provide a summary of how Hopper’s use of light, space, narrative and overall compositional structure embodies the Existential themes of emptiness, isolation, desolation, alienation and ultimately the possibility of freedom that the Existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre (and his predecessors Søren Kierkegaard and Freidrich Nietzsche) proposed. Renner notes that ‘the petrol station in *Gas* is like an outpost marking the frontier of Civilisation as it takes its stand against nature. Both the colour contrasts and the compositional structure serve to emphasize this tension’


The scene evokes the feeling of man versus nature and marks the point where the two meet. Light and space are used to demonstrate the divide, the empty road acts as a physical divide between the foreground and the background whilst light and shadow contribute to the narrative. As the road continues past the petrol station, it merges into the darkness of the forest, although the darkening blue sky suggests there is still natural light. The light from the sign and the station itself illuminate important aspects of the painting and create shadows of their own. The light which shines on the ‘Mobilgas’ sign prefigures the importance of signs which Hopper stresses in his later paintings, where signs symbolise the existence of humanity, but also the isolation and meaninglessness of life: the sign will exists even when the figure in the painting does not. It is also notable that the light which shines through the door of the petrol station runs parallel to the male figure, lighting up the empty space around him rather than the figure itself. This circular contrast of light and dark points the viewer’s focus finally towards the man. Standing in the shadows of the artificial light emitted by the petrol station, he is placed at the gas pump, the view of his hands obstructed by the
pump. One would assume that he is checking the pump, but he could also be leaning
against it, in a moment of contemplation. Perhaps he is shielding himself from the
artificial light as he realises his own loneliness. The narrative of this painting is a
powerful demonstration of the isolation of the individual. The petrol station is secluded;
one would imagine it is the only building along that road amid the forest for miles. As
there is no car or motor vehicle in the painting, it is safe to assume that the figure is
working there alone, in the secluded patrol station. Hopper has painted the figure at the
exact moment in which the man may have realised his own individuality, his freedom.
He is alone, the scene is empty, he has the choice to seize his own autonomy, yet one
can speculate that he chooses to carry on with his tasks, he carries on existing in
isolation, performing mundane chores to abide by social expectations. But this moment
will forever be on his mind, just like Antoine Roquentin’s realisation of freedom (in
Nausea), and this powerful moment for an individual is what Hopper captures.

Through this analysis it is clear that Hopper depicts modern scenes (although it is not
the modernity of cosmopolitan Manhattan) and modern emotions (loneliness, emptiness,
angst and isolation) in a modern manner, making his work arguably Modernist. And it is
this aspect of his work which makes his paintings so emotive even in the present day.
One cannot look at a Hopper painting without feeling as if one is experiencing the scene
at first hand, as if one is actually there. That is the magic of Hopper’s paintings; they not
only document the decade of the 1940’s, the society and the atmosphere of the time,
they manage to transcend the canvas on which they are painted and therefore speak to
the individual across time, the viewer of the 1940s and of the present day.

There is a link between Hopper and Existentialism which can also be related to Film
Noir, especially with regard to Hopper’s manipulation of light. ‘French existentialist
philosophy was contemporaneous with classic film noir and shares some of its themes, if not its outlook and tone. While most critics agree that there wasn’t a direct influence of the Existentialists on the films, those philosophical themes are clearly present in the movies, like moral ambiguity, reason versus passion in human decision making and action, the meaning of life, and pessimism.\textsuperscript{91} The term \textit{Film Noir} was created by French critics in 1946 as a way of describing ‘the dim lighting and dark mood’\textsuperscript{92} which films from the United States began using. A common situation seen within \textit{Film Noir} is the struggle the protagonist goes through trying to assert his own morality. In \textit{Detour}, 1945, directed by Edgar G. Ulmer ‘a largely innocent and likeable character is brought to ruin by a string of circumstances quite beyond his control. At the end of the film, as he gets into the police car that will take him away, his voice, which has narrated the story, sums up the moral: “one day fate or some mysterious force can put the finger on you or me for no good reason at all.” ’\textsuperscript{93} Although existential choice is possible, the individual still has to take responsibility for the consequences of the choice.

This appears to be analogous to Kierkegaard’s notion that an individual must just wait for fate to take its course, which as mentioned, is an aspect of Hopper’s work. It is not only the idea of the individual controlled by fate and society, trying to express freedom that Hopper and the \textit{Film Noir} genre share, but most notably the use of light. In most \textit{Film Noir} movies of the 1940s ‘the Claustrophobic settings are awash in deep shadows, the streets are rain swept, it always seems to be night, and the atmosphere is charged and angst ridden.’\textsuperscript{94} This can be seen in Orson Welles’ \textit{The Stranger}, 1946. This setting

\textsuperscript{91} Conrad, Mark. T, (ed.), \textit{The Philosophy of Film Noir}, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2006, p.2
\textsuperscript{94} Conrad, Mark. T, (ed.), \textit{The Philosophy of Film Noir}, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2006, p.1
is one seen in many of Hopper’s paintings, for instance: Conference at Night, 1949 (fig, 21). Three figures seem to be deep in discussion, shadows engulf the room which is lit by light shining through the window, presumably from an office opposite. Although a male figure is sitting on a table in a relaxed way, leaning back on his left hand, the serious facial expression of the female figure suggests that it is a charged and serious conversation. In a 2004 article in ‘The Guardian’ Philip French notes that Hopper took inspiration from Film Noir much in the same way as it took inspiration from him. “When I don't feel in the mood for painting,'...[Hopper]...said, 'I go to the movies for a week or more. I go on a regular movie binge.' The cinema returned the compliment by turning to him for stylistic inspiration, and film noir became his great love and the area of his chief influence. He created a world of loneliness, isolation and quiet anguish that we call Hopperesque.”

Hopper’s symbiotic relationship with Film Noir assists this thesis’ argument that Hopper is as much a Modernist as he is an Americanist. It is through the notion that Hopper was inspired by, and inspirational for, modern phenomena such as Film Noir, that his Modernist traits are seen. Edward Hopper’s work is still an inspiration for cinematographers and directors, most famously, his work was an important influence for Alfred Hitchcock, who based the house in his 1960 Psycho, on Edward Hopper’s House by the Railroad, 1925 (see fig.22).

Edward Hopper’s paintings during the 1940s convey a unique and influential style in which his use of space, light, shadows, individual narratives, contrasting colour palettes and overall composition embodies Existential theories proposed by Søren Kierkegaard, Freidrich Nietzsche and Jean-Paul Sartre. The situation which the individuals in his paintings convey could be argued to reflect the character of Mersault in Albert Camus’ novel The Outsider, in that as in The Outsider, Hopper’s individuals’ freedom is

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usurped from them, but unlike Mersault, whose freedom is taken because he acts way outside of society’s expectations, they have not utilised their freedom to the extent that they behave in the way society expects them.

In summary, by using Existentialism as a way of understanding and analysing Edward Hopper’s paintings, his Modernist tendencies become apparent. ‘The artist paints a genre of social relations along with a genre of chiaroscurist relations, and his conceptions of density and balance might be praised by a physicist... And if his version of the human is laconic, grim, ironical- only obliquely warm and magnetic- we should not be able to ignore the fact that his people... have an undeniable health and animal tenacity; even an elusive energy, a veiled heat.’96 Although Hopper’s paintings are said to embody isolation, they go beyond that: they show the individual in a moment of self-realisation, Hopper’s own realisation of freedom, and they inspire the viewer to think about their own agency and freedom. Therefore, Existentialism and Edward Hopper go hand in hand when discussing the individual. However, to further this discussion the next Chapter will look at the relationship between notions of the Modern Man and Edward Hopper’s painting. Focusing on gender, the discussion will present the final case study in this thesis, arguing that Edward Hopper deserves to be recognised as a Modernist.

Chapter Three

The previous chapter explored the ‘crisis of the individual’ depicted in Edward Hopper’s paintings through the scope of Existentialism. This chapter will examine the individual in terms of Gender. Before the analysis can begin, certain terms used within this chapter need to be clarified. In *Gender and Art*, (1999), Gill Perry states that Gender is defined ‘as the cultural construction of femininity and masculinity, as opposed to the biological sex (male or female) which we are born with’\(^\text{97}\). For the purpose of this thesis, both definitions of gender and sex will be used to define the parameters of a ‘Modern Man’. The social and historical context and the philosophical anxieties this individual would have identified with have been discussed, and from that, the individual will now be analysed in terms of Gender, (through theories of Masculinity and Femininity), and sex, (through notions of male and female). At the beginning of this thesis the question posed was ‘who is the individual?’ with regard to the figures in Hopper’s paintings, the viewers of the paintings and Hopper himself. This chapter will assess whether the artist’s sex (as a male) influences the understanding of his work; how that may then affect the representation of Gender within his work and lastly how concepts of Gender affect the reception of these works. The result will demonstrate how the depiction and relationship of the ‘Modern Man’ and ‘Modern Woman’ within Edward Hopper’s paintings of the 1940s convey an essence of Modernism, thus providing the final parameters in the argument for Hopper’s recognition as a Modernist. Lastly, it should be remembered that the origins of the term ‘Modern Man’ are seated in an era where the word ‘Man’ was thought to encompass both males and females.

\(^{97}\) Perry, Gill, *Gender and Art*, Yale: Open University Press, 1999, p.8
Theories of the ‘Modern Man’ were developed through the fin-de-siècle of the nineteenth century and asked ‘What is man? What meaning has his life? What is his origin, his condition, his destiny? To what extent is he a creature of forces beyond his knowledge and control, the plaything of nature and the sport of gods? To what extent is he a creator... who refashions the world to which nature has bound him?’98 (Note the sexism inherent in this statement – i.e. How ‘man’ is used to represent both man and woman, indicative of the time it was written). The French structuralist, Michel Foucault, wrote intensely regarding issues of power and gender, and with reference to the emerging Modern Man he deconstructs the terms as follows: ‘modern serves to connect him to the phenomenon of modernity and distinguish him from earlier incarnations, although the comparison most common in literature is with primitive man; man indicates that gender will likely play some role in the character of this modern subject’99. The questions put forth by the Modern Man theorists and Foucault’s definitions, emphasise the key features that will be identified in this chapter: the modern and the man. When defining masculinity, two major themes appear to play a significant role: psychoanalytic and sex role theory and feminist theory. To begin with one must first discuss what Jung sees as the relationship of the primitive to the unconscious (or as Leja asserts ‘the two principle categories of “others” opposed to reason and common sense.’100) with regard to psychoanalytic and sex role theories. During the 1940s, the image of the self came under severe attack, as men literally tore each other apart on the battlefield. People began to question how such barbaric and primitive behaviour was possible during a ‘civilized’ age. The writings of Carl Jung provided a way of...
understanding how humans could inflict such atrocities on one another, whilst remaining comfortably modern. By combining Jungian theories of the unconscious, and the post-war anthropological writings of Claude Lévi-Strauss on the primitive, one may attempt to understand the ‘Modern Man discourse and the dominant, middle-class ideology it forms and reforms’ and therefore, begin to negotiate the way modern masculinity was evoked by the paintings of Edward Hopper.

Feminist theory helps to define Masculinity, although it does not create a clear way of defining the difference between the two. It clarifies the gender differences in society’s expectations of masculine and feminine roles but, at the same time, insists that male and female identities are a continuum and not Derridaian, binary oppositional constructs. By acknowledging the Feminist criticism of Hopper’s work, such as the charge of voyeurism which ‘became Hopper’s preferred perspective on women’, it is possible to analyse Hopper’s work in a way that engages with a Modern Man discourse. Thus, by using these arguments, I will endeavour to demonstrate that Figuration was ‘a form of modernist visual representation that could accommodate and enrich developing models of the human individual, models that attributed new importance to irrational others within human beings.’ Furthermore, Modern Man theories are often used in relation to Film Noir, which, as mentioned in the preceding chapter, is closely linked to Existentialism. A final analysis of Edward Hopper’s work, using the notion of Modern Man and ideas from Film Noir will thereby suggest that Edward Hopper displays modernist traits in his authorship, representation and reception.

It is possible to argue that ideas of the Modern Man began in the late nineteenth century, developed from European ideas of masculinity and moulded throughout the epic periods of war. The theory of Modern Man looks at the constructs of man through modernity, and, in the type closest to Existentialism, it identifies the bourgeois ideology typically associated with France during the late nineteenth century. In Chapter One, the bourgeois figure, ‘the Flâneur’, was briefly discussed, with regard to direct European influences on Edward Hopper’s work. Further to that discussion, the concept of the Flâneur also has importance when looking at Modern Man theories. Bourgeois life was one of excess and hedonism, or so painters such as Henri Toulouse-Lautrec (see Fig 23.) seemed to envision, with paintings depicting absinthe, luxury and seductive females. But behind this façade the bourgeois male obeyed a strict code of honour: ‘...the formation of a modern culture of honor was not a simple matter of a newly rich middle class imitating its social superiors... they were deeply influenced by the historic struggles of a vigorous urban elite to establish its independent claims to precedence; they reflected the bourgeois preoccupation with moral discipline, inner values, and with the control of reproduction and sex.’\(^{104}\) As with all other aspects of European context discussed in this thesis, this bourgeois culture migrated over to the United States, thus influencing the American bourgeoisie. Many artists and writers travelled between Europe and the United States, producing much of the work which can be identified with Modern Man. This demonstrates the extent to which Modernism and notions of Modern Man are an international development. However, the Modern Man discourse’s identification of the Flaneur was abandoned to investigate why man often rejected his code of honor and morality and ‘was better able to explain the new dimensions of violence, human cruelty,

and malevolence witnessed... throughout the decade. Serge Guilbaut asserts ‘when the political and cultural crisis erupted in Europe in 1940, it became clear that the traditional role of Europe would be passed on to the United States’. Guilbaut suggests that although Modernism was not yet recognised in the United States ‘it now it slipped in through the back door, as it were, and established itself in the national consciousness.’ Society consciously adopted themes of modernity and a comparison can be made between Hopper’s work and the Euro-American standards of a middle-class. This link is seen by returning to Hotel Lobby. The male figure standing in the painting represents bourgeois modernity (as discussed in Chapter one); however, he is also an embodiment of the bourgeois codes of honor, as he stands beside his wife in a chivalrous manner, but as his wife looks towards him, he stares away into the distance. It is interesting to note that he does not look towards the younger female on the right of the painting, whose legs are uncovered, and outstretched, giving her a subtle sense of seduction. The male figure displays a sense of control through detachment as he engages with neither female in the painting; on the other hand, the detachment runs counter to the suggestion that ‘the individual man retreated to familiar spaces of desire and empowerment. Wartime experiences led to an increased yearning amongst the male sex for domesticity’. The male does not appear to yearn for his partner, rather, his detachment extracts him from their relationship and into a contemplative realm. Modernism and the Modern Man discourse examined the atrocities of the 1940s and

prior decades, looking for answers in the nature of man and his psyche rather than the conscious front of domesticity.

‘The (white, heterosexual, middle-class, male) individual was posited in this discourse as the subject of reflection upon modernity and its problems.’\textsuperscript{109} Before carrying on with an analysis of the relationship of the Modern man with the primitive and the unconscious, it is important to note that the realm of the Modern man is not concerned with any man, but a white, heterosexual one. In a separate thesis the role of queer theory and homosexuality might be addressed, as well as depictions of different races. Hopper wrote an article regarding the depiction of race in the 1941 August – September issue of Magazine of Art stating ‘the main thing is the natural development of a personality; racial character takes care of itself to a great extent, if there is honesty behind it. The danger, of course, is in trying to superimpose a culture that is not truly congenial to it.’\textsuperscript{110} For Hopper, painting the true Modern American in situ consisted of depicting the white heterosexual man. In the modern day this may seem slightly ignorant, however it is important to remember that the American society remained segregated until the mid-1960’s and did not begin to accept homosexuality openly until the 1980s. When returning to ideas of primitive man, for this thesis one must first look to the writings of Claude Lévi-Strauss, whose structuralist anthropology explored the parameters of the savage mind. Lévi-Strauss’ introduction to theories of the primitive man, demonstrates remarkable similarities between what is identified as ‘primitive’ and that which is identified as ‘modern’. ‘Every civilization tends to overestimate the objective orientation of its thought and this tendency is never absent. When we make the mistake of thinking that the Savage is governed solely by organic and economic needs, we


\textsuperscript{110}Hopper, Edward, ‘If Artists took the Offensive’, \textit{Magazine of Art}, Vol.34, No.7, September 1941, Magazine of Art, p.381
forget that he levels the same reproach at us, and that to him his own desires for knowledge seems more balanced than ours.¹¹¹ These theories are often applied to Expressionism, due to the primitive composition and narratives that it uses. But Lévi-Strauss’ claim also sheds light onto the beginnings of the Modern Man discourse which becomes more relevant to Figuration and Edward Hopper as this argument is furthered. The idea of a ‘primitive man’ shares the same characteristics as that of the existential individual and furthermore, it lays the foundation for ideas of the Modern Man to be built on. Leja suggests that ‘For the Modern Man writers, terror was one corollary of primitive man’s irrationality; he was afraid because he didn’t understand the lawfulness of nature. There were, of course, also entirely rational bases for his terror...they were, however, often portrayed as magnified by ignorance’¹¹². As mentioned earlier, an obvious parallel can be made between primitivism and Abstract Expressionism. However, it is in the sentiment of ‘terror magnified by ignorance’ that the primitive is observed within Edward Hopper’s paintings. The scene in Nighthawks has already been discussed in the first chapter, but by revisiting the analysis of the overarching anxiety seen within the painting, the concept of the primitive man becomes relevant. ‘Modern Art, with its basically critical stance, underwent a type of regression in search for something with a greater spiritual value, honesty and meaning’¹¹³. The Abstract Expressionists achieved this notion in a very literal form, Edward Hopper, however, adopts this trait in a more subtle way. The narrative of Nighthawks is one of honesty, rather than being a portrait of a false, idealised narrative, (so frequently seen in the academies of the late nineteenth century). Instead it emits a sense of harsh realism. As previously mentioned, the background portrays a desolate and dark scene, symbolic of

the political and social context of the time. The focal point, the figures at the bar, embody the idea of ignorance in the face of anxiety. Rather than displaying the typically primitive ‘fight or flight’ reaction they remain ignorant to the turmoil around them, paralyzed into generic monotony by the growing collective terror of society. Not only in Hopper’s paintings is the essence of primitivism seen but also through him as a painter. S.J. Newton identifies the primitive instinct of a painter ‘It has been stressed that under Modern Art various analyses of creative processes were undertaken...individual artists who have the necessary receptivity to instinctively apprehend these developments, are then stimulated to reproduce the significance of this art in their own way.’\(^{114}\) Edward Hopper does this in a contrasting way to that of the Abstract Expressionists. Rather than depicting anxiety through an instinctive form of painting, he depicts it through narrative, displaying primitive traits in his painting (and some would argue, in himself). If therefore, the primitive man and the civilized man are not as inherently different as one initially assumed, then ‘a reconstruction of the bourgeois notion of human nature... [is]... required’\(^{115}\). To understand this relationship one must turn to psychoanalytic theories, most notably that of Carl Jung. Jung seems to be in agreement with Lévi-Strauss and asserts ‘... it is not only the primitive man whose psychic processes are archaic. The civilized man of today shows... archaic processes as well, and not merely in the form of sporadic “throw-backs” from the level of modern social life. On the contrary, every civilised human being, whatever his conscious development, is still an archaic man at the deeper levels of his psyche.’\(^{116}\) As ‘modern’ as those of the 1940s believed themselves to be, they were constantly displaying primitive tendencies, the


only difference being ‘the man whom we can with justice call ‘modern’ is solitary’. 

Thus, the relationship between the Modern Man and Existentialism was born, in that Existentialism sees only individuals, creating their own humanity through making choices – a terrifying responsibility for Modern Man.

The Modern Man discourse is used by Leja for an analysis of Abstract Expressionist painting in relation to ‘the nature, mind, and behaviour of “modern man”’. Leja asserts that Abstract Expressionism ‘was a part of a process of reconfiguring human (to be precise white heterosexual male) subjectivity’. To demonstrate the truth of this statement, Leja traces the concept, followed by the evolution of Modern Man theories, ending with its application to the Abstract Expressionists. As with Modernism, the Modern Man theory began emerging in American society in the early twentieth century, but it did not fully blossom until the 1940s. As discussed previously, the concept of the Modern Man was heavily influenced by ideas of the primitive man and his unconscious. Leja claims that ‘this interest in man’s primitive nature and instincts was inseparable from the concern with the unconscious.’ Whilst Leja is concerned with the Abstract Expressionists his discourse is transferable to Edward Hopper. Leja’s idea of the Modern Man was one that ‘opposed the human individual to culture, society, and community, aggressively asserting the priority of the individuality over collectivity.’

Edward Hopper’s work embodies ideas of the individual through Existentialism, but it does more than that, it opposes the cultural expectations of the era. America prided itself

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119 Leja, Michael, Reframing Abstract Expressionism: subjectivity and painting in the 1940s, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993, p.8
120 Leja, Michael, Reframing Abstract Expressionism: subjectivity and painting in the 1940s, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993, p253
on its ‘deep-rooted optimism’\textsuperscript{121}, and the honest depictions of reality that Hopper
produced, for instance in the desolate modernity in \textit{Approaching a City}, combine this
façade with an inherent undertone of pessimism. The reality of the 1940s was not as
glamorous or united as America wished to portray, and it is through Hopper’s paintings
that this feeling is represented. By looking into the unconscious motives of the painter,
Leja puts together ideas of Modern man and Abstract Expressionism. However, Jungian
thought does more than just open the door to the painter’s psyche, it establishes the
interlinked relationship between masculinity and femininity. Susan Hogan’s \textit{Gender
issues in Art Therapy} interestingly notes that ‘Jungian psychology has... encouraged
men to value their ‘feminine’ side (anima) and women their ‘masculine’ side
(animus)’\textsuperscript{122}. Although this attribute is more apparent in the present day, it is still
applicable to the 1940s. Therefore, when discussing the Modern Man it is essential to
involve the intrinsic relationship between Masculinity and Femininity. As much as
‘Femininity can be seen as a mask, a masquerade performed by mimicking what being a
woman is meant to be about’\textsuperscript{123}, so too can Masculinity. So, by using Feminist ideas as
tools to analyse Edward Hopper’s painting one can produce an understanding of what it
was to be masculine, and therefore a Modern Man.

Feminist theory was securely acknowledged during the second half of the twentieth
century, but throughout the first half of the century many writers began to identify
feminist themes. Most relevant to this thesis is the work of the female Existentialist
Simone de Beauvoir. de Beauvoir’s \textit{The Second Sex} is a key text combining Feminism
and Existentialism. The text was first published in 1949 and it was not until 1953 that it
reached audiences in Britain and the United States. Although dissemination of this text

\textsuperscript{123} Rose, Gillian, \textit{Visual Methodologies}; London: SAGE publications, 2005, p.117
occurred after the period that this thesis discusses, de Beauvoir’s theories and critiques divulge an interesting perspective on Hopper’s work. de Beauvoir discusses the position of woman in society and the role she adopts in regards to the male psyche. She states that ‘the term ‘female’ is derogatory not because it emphasizes woman’s animality, but because it imprisons her in her sex; and if this sex seems to man to be contemptible and inimical even in harmless dumb animals, it is evidently because of the uneasy hostility stirred up in him by woman.'\textsuperscript{124} The oppression of women in society is directly linked by such writers to the way in which she has the power to intimidate men. In America during the 1940s, women gained independence through ideas of modernity, however, de Beauvoir notes ‘ A single woman in America... is a socially incomplete being even if she makes her own living; if she is to attain the whole dignity of a person and gain her full rights, she must wear a wedding ring.'\textsuperscript{125} This analysis of woman is apparent in both the life and painting of Edward Hopper.

Edward Hopper’s exposure to feminism would have come with the influences of Existentialism but also from his home. Before her marriage to Edward Hopper his wife, Jo, previously known by her maiden name Josephine Verstille Nivision, was acquainted with many active feminists in New York. She adopted feminist theory in relation to her status as an artist, and then in her view towards her marriage. ‘Long-standing biases that women should serve their husbands’ needs and pleasures gave way to talk of satisfaction for women in marriage. These new attitudes made sense to Jo, who in marrying Edward had done so for neither of the traditional reasons: to escape parental authority or find economic security. She had already attained the former and Edward


offered no promise of the latter when they met." Jo and Edward maintained an intensely co-dependent relationship and as Jo adopted the role of wife, friend, manager and critic, Edward ‘reached a point where he was painting only one single woman: his own wife’. Hopper’s paintings are renowned for the voyeuristic ways in which he depicts women, but as most of his paintings of women by the 40s were based on a model of his wife, the question remains: to what extent did Hopper’s primitive unconscious inspire the oversexualised depictions of his wife? As a male living in a modern America, Hopper must have already been consciously battling feelings of anxiety. However, despite his symbiotic relationship with his wife, the sense of isolation is also apparent within his work. Consciously, Edward Hopper was a modern man living under the ‘bourgeois code of honor’ that was previously mentioned. His painting Jo in Wyoming, 1946 (see Fig.24), depicts the moral, domestic life that Hopper and his wife led, taking vacations to the American countryside and combining the simplicity of life and American landscape. However, it is in his depictions of modernity in the city, or rather female nudes in the city, that Hopper’s unconscious view of the female form, and thus his wife, emerges, for instance, Girlie Show, 1941 (see Fig.25). The painting depicts ‘the theme of voyeurism in the most direct form. Here the painting has indeed become a stage, and the striptease takes place expressly for the viewer, challenging him or her to consider the reactions elicited by the performance.’ The female is on display to the audience as an object of desire. She does not look for the emotional or financial support of a husband, and therefore is not a symbol of submissive femininity. However, she is valued due to the desire that she causes men to feel, an unconscious need for masculine control is emitted through the painting. The female figure stands with

confidence and strength, perhaps a metaphor for Jo’s position as a strong female.

Nevertheless she is nothing without the audience (both in the painting and of the painting), and if the men were not there to view and admire her, her purpose would be lost. This is perhaps an unconscious allegory of Hopper’s view of his relationship with a strong, and sometimes overbearing, wife, defining his primitive need for her to rely on him. Linda Nochlin states in her 1981 article *Edward Hopper and the Imagery of Alienation* that in *Girlie Show* ‘Hopper has invented a figure that brilliantly unites the intensity of his middle-aged desires with his sense of middle-aged desperation. The erotic impulse, released from the constrictions of protective formula, here functions as a potent strategy of risk in the invention of an image of alienation that is daring and moving at the same time.’

129 Nochlin argues that the canvas does not only depict Hopper’s unconscious desire and view of the female form, but also his own experience of alienation and vulnerability, and claiming that Hopper viewed the role of a burlesque dancer on par with that of an artist like himself.

Through Hopper’s paintings ‘the male eye treats the female body as a screen onto which to project unconscious desires... [but]... also demonstrates that the male eye sees in ways that have been coded by social and gender norms.’

130 A demonstration of this can be seen in his *Morning in a city*, 1944 (see Fig. 1). The woman stands alone staring out of her window as the sun rises over the city. Her stare is one, so often seen in Hopper’s work, of contemplation. The single bed suggests she is not married, and she stands nude and alone. Although the female figure is nude, and the view voyeuristic, a feeling of vulnerability and isolation is prevalent in the painting causing us to feel empathy with the figure, rather than seeing her as a symbol of sexual desire. de Beauvoir’s notion that a modern woman is not regarded as complete until she is married is inherent in this

picture. The figure’s vulnerability comes from the sense that something is missing, from the painting and from her life. Furthermore as the surrounding room suggests that the figure is alone, the viewer can only assume what she is missing. What she needs to be fully integrated as a modern woman is a husband. One could claim that Hopper was misogynistic, judging by the voyeuristic views which he chose to adopt. However, by adapting Nochlin’s argument it may also be suggested that he sympathises with the role of the woman struggling to be Modern, as although his treatment of the female form is satisfying to the male eye, by identifying the woman’s isolated position in society he is giving femininity a platform of its own, whilst also identifying himself with her vulnerability and alienation. However, in contrast to this, Hopper depicts the subservient role of the female figure within male modernity. ‘There is a general agreement that gender is constituted within a particular set of power relations and hence reflects those power relations. That which is considered to be female and male reflects the subordinate-dominant relationship of female and male, and when we ‘do’ our gender appropriately, we act to maintain that relationship.’¹³¹ For instance, in *Office at Night*, 1940,(fig.20), a voluptuous female, presumably a secretary, as suggested by the empty desk and typewriter in the foreground, stands at a filing cabinet in opposition to the dominant male figure in the painting, who is at his desk. However, Radtke argues that ‘By nature, men not woman are ‘the weaker sex’. Men’s greater vulnerability, not female inferiority, is the natural fact.’¹³² Male dominance is a social construct which plagues the male unconscious with the desire to assert dominance, due to the fact that they are not naturally the more powerful sex. Women have the ability to bring life into the world which creates a natural superior role. Therefore through social constructs

males have formed their own role of dominance and superiority to give them agency and power. However, ‘men live in the terror of confronting the fraudulence of their self-definition and hate and fear woman as subversive agents who might expose the truth.’ Therefore, the male-female, dominant-subordinate relationship is established. It may be argued, that the vulnerability and nudity that Hopper chooses to depict in *Girlie Show* and *Morning in a City* is an unconscious reaction to the controlling nature of his wife. However, it may also be argued that the voyeuristic view of the women in his paintings that he is accused of holding may in fact be a truthful reflection of how society would look at female figures, and how society would expect to see them. Therefore, Hopper is not painting as an unconscious reaction to female control rather he is painting for an audience. Not only that, but Hopper paints both female figures with contemplative gazes on their face which give them life by depicting their possible feelings of boredom and monotony. By showing that the female figure is capable of feeling the same angst and loneliness as a male, she becomes more than subservient, she becomes an equal. However, the need for female dependence on a male was prevalent within the society of the 1940s ‘... a wife who keeps her husband at her side for hours because she is bored certainly bothers him and seems burdensome; but in the last analysis he can get along without her much more easily than she can without him; if he leaves her, she is the one whose life will be ruined.’ Within society, the extent of a woman’s freedom and individuality was dependent on her husband. Therefore, if Hopper were to depict a female figure on a par with a man, his work would not have been as welcomed by critics as it was, as her nudity characterises her as more of an object, whilst also highlighting female vulnerability. By using Existentialism to provide an insight to the hopelessness

of both males and females during the 1940s an argument can be made in favour of Hopper’s modernistic traits.

As previously mentioned, Hopper depicts ‘the individual’ as both male and female: furthermore he not only deals with their gender, he also identifies with their emotions and inner turmoil ‘Existential uncertainty, our human inability either to know or control our destiny, is deeply disturbing to our sense of mastery and efficacy. It illuminates the limits of our autonomy and reminds us that life, itself, is only marginally within our control.’ An Existential analysis will help to clarify the extent to which women remained defined by masculine constructions of femininity. If they (women) are living in Bad Faith and failing to achieve their true human agency, they have the choice to refuse such socially constructed versions of themselves, as Jo Hopper did. However, the question arises: can any man drawing a voluptuous nude ever escape contribution to the imprisonment of his subject into ‘Bad Faith’? And yet it is she (Jo) who accepts this role by posing for him, so it would appear that she too is in fact displaying Bad Faith.

Possibilities of avoiding Bad Faith and achieving Existential autonomy are in fact seen by some writers, such as the Marxist T. J. Clark, as false freedom, serving only the needs of capitalism. ‘[There] are aspects of experience that the culture wants represented now, wants to make use of, because capitalism at a certain stage of its development needs a more convincing account of the bodily, the sensual, the “free”, in order to extend - perhaps perfect - its colonization of everyday life’ Clark’s argument leaves no room for the possibility of an Existential choice, whereas Hopper can be read as using his paintings to convey the point where an individual has suddenly realised

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their own freedom; the complexity of the painting is drawn from this moment. The viewer can only speculate about the individual’s next move, be it continuing on with their monotonous routine, and conforming to Bad Faith, or embracing their freedom and realising authentic selfhood. Hopper depicts figures in a moment of contemplation who have the option of stepping outside of waiting, for fate or life. They could be on the verge of saying no and stepping out of their Bad Faith. *El Palacio* is a visual embodiment of this notion whilst also incorporating T. J. Clark’s idea that capitalism strips the individual of their right to freedom. As mentioned in the previous chapter, one of the only signs of civilisation in *El Palacio* comes from the ‘Ford’ sign. Henry Ford was the wealthiest businessman during the 30s and 40s, and his industrial empire was the first to use assembly lines. Fordism retracts from the notion of the individual by forcing people to lose sight of their individuality, workers become mere cogs in the production process. This leads to individuals having no control over their own fate. Ford was renowned for his ‘laissez fair’ attitude to economics and government policies, believing in minimal government intervention as a way of dealing with atrocities like the Depression. As workers lost sight of their individuality, unwittingly stepping into Bad Faith, they became figures in waiting, similar to Kierkegaard’s idea of a fir tree standing and waiting for fate. *El Palacio* pinpoints this idea. The desolate ghost town appears soulless, just like the assembly line. So the focal point of the painting, the Ford sign, acts as a deliberate reminder of how capitalism (and Fordism) destroys individuality, leaving nothing but desolation. It is interesting to note that, in his figureless paintings Hopper leaves the viewer with the senses of desolation and loneliness whereas, paintings which contain figures contain at least the possibility of opting for freedom within their gaze.
Hopper depicts the idea of Bad Faith not only through his depictions of males, but also females, the middle class (office workers) and the working class (garage hands and maintenance men). However, it cannot be said for sure that these figures walk away from accepting their role into the Existential negative (the choice to say no), which is the beauty of Hopper’s painting. He captures them in their moment of contemplation.

Hopper’s white middle class man shares his moment of Existential clarity with females and the working class. This can also be seen in depictions of the Modern Man seen in *Film Noir*. Many of the male and female figures in Hopper’s paintings share similarities with common characters seen in *Film Noir*. For instance, the male figures sitting at the bar in *Nighthawks* are dressed almost identically to the characters in *Blue Dahlia* (most notably the detective). The most striking part of *Film Noir* narratives is the fact that women are the cause of the protagonist’s sorrowful fate. *Film Noir* appealed to a mass audience by giving engrossing and immediate form to its fantasy of (masculine) innocence.137 As mentioned earlier, feminism argues that men are not dominant by nature rather they assert their dominance through social constructions, particularly of women. *Film Noir* embodies this with the idea that ‘guilt was frantically displaced from the protagonist onto the most readily available scapegoat - fate, woman, or the other within; the individual’s impotence was universalized and dignified.'138 In *Film Noir* women are often blamed instead of fate, or as the cause of male’s disastrous fate. This is where Hopper exceeds Modernism, he does not portray female figures as the fall of man rather he depicts them as individuals (on a par with males) who have the possibility to acquire their own freedom if they choose.

In conclusion, Hopper’s sophisticated treatment of both male and female figures lends itself to Modernism. Hopper not only paints his figures in accordance with the way an audience expects to see them, he also captures them mid thought, in a moment of contemplation which lends itself to the idea that the figures are experiencing a moment of Existential clarity. Leja asserts that ‘In the contemporary world philosophers and savants of a hundred kinds compete for the public ear and agree with each other about nothing except that we have fallen into confusion. Modern thought is a wilderness of contention and contradiction. It offers to the inquiring mind no belief to which all men can subscribe, no discipline to which they can all submit, such as some of the older cultures possessed. In such a situation every reflective man must be, in a measure, his own philosopher.’\(^{139}\) Hopper paints figures who are in fact their own philosophers, and does not discriminate against women or other classes when depicting the individual in a moment of clarity. On a final note, Hopper takes on the Feminist idea that an individual can chose ‘subjugation to a human ruler...[or]... [the assumption of] control over other individuals’\(^{140}\) as a way of reducing Existential Anxiety. He paints figures in mundane professions, who are in charge of other individuals or who are under the control of a higher individual. By acknowledging these social arrangements the individual ‘protect[s] the position of the entrenched power group, to wit, particularly the more powerful males.’\(^{141}\) The Modern Man, therefore, is the manifestation of these entrenched biases of gender roles. However, although Hopper paints his figures in the form of social expectation, by giving both male and female figures Existential clarity,


by capturing them in the moment of realisation, he encapsulates Modernism (alongside his Americanism), thus making his work inherently Modern.
Conclusion

This thesis set out to reconsider the interpretation and analysis typically applied to Edward Hopper’s art during the 1940s. The argument posed within this thesis was refined and directed at the Modernist tendencies of Edward Hopper, which thus prove his Modernity. By comparing the reception of Hopper’s art (described as ‘kitsch’ by some) with that of the Abstract Expressionists, a distinct difference was revealed between the two. This produced a dichotomy as Hopper’s work shares so many of the ‘attributes of Modernism’ with Abstract Expressionism. The thesis picked apart some of the ‘attributes of Modernism’ which are seen in Hopper’s work and closely analysed their relevance. The re-appraisal of Edward Hopper’s work found him to be essentially Modernist, illustrated by the body of Modern works of art produced during the period under investigation. On the surface, Hopper’s figurative art appears to be simply a narrative scene similar in form to Realism. At first glance it seems to be devoid of the deeper meanings normally attributed to Abstract Expressionism. However, the analysis in this thesis has provided evidence that shows in actual fact Hopper supersedes the Abstract Expressionists by embodying the atmosphere and emotions of the era in a more sympathetic and familiar way (for his viewers) than previously acknowledged. Renner asserts that Hopper’s realism ‘was never merely a reproduction of the visible, the given, the actual; he was not interested in mimetic representation as such. Rather image and imagination, and representation and aesthetic construction, were independent in his work. It is only the ludic interplay between images of the real and the viewer’s gaze decoding the real that finally establishes the reality of Edward Hopper’s art.’¹⁴² He not only captures the Existential atmosphere of the time, (isolation and desolation), but also portrays a person’s true individuality. The individuals that he depicts are in a moment of

self realisation, they no longer need to wait for fate to take its course; they can control their own freedom, and their own fate. Hopper himself identified the reasoning behind his realistic narratives “My aim in painting has always been the most exact transcription possible of my most intimate impressions of nature. If this end is unattainable, so, it can be said, is perfection in any other ideal of man’s activities.”

The unattainable ‘exact transcription’ in Hopper’s statement is in fact depicted in the symbols of loneliness, isolation and desolations seen in his paintings, which ‘refer beyond themselves to the life that once filled them and which may fill them again.’ This aspect of Hopper’s work is what would have made his paintings more salient and empathetic for the audience of the 1940s than Abstract Expressionism. By looking at Existentialism followed by gender the argument is further supported. Existentialism runs as an underlying theme throughout the thesis, assisting in the analysis of Hopper’s figures in particular the females. Applying notions of gender helped to deepen the notion that Hopper’s figures portray isolation and solitude. Feminist theorists often criticised Hopper for his voyeuristic depictions of women but the argument in this thesis offers a different interpretation suggesting that Hopper actually elevates the status of a woman, by identifying her freedom and individuality alongside male figures. In contrast Hopper identified himself with the lone vulnerable isolated figures. This modern approach to gender further supports the claim that Edward Hopper is a Modernist. Lastly the symbiotic relationship between Hopper and modern media such as film noir was identified. Philip 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’\textsuperscript{145}. Hopper was influenced by the movies of the 20s and 30s, and the movie industry reciprocated by incorporating Hopper’s imagery and style in subsequent films. During the making of his first noir movie (Force of Evil 1948) Abraham Polonski, a black-listed left wing writer, took the famous cinematographer George Burns to an exhibition of Hopper’s paintings and told him ‘that’s what I want this picture to look like’\textsuperscript{146}. Hopper’s symbiotic relationship with Film Noir (one of the most modern artistic medium of the time) further illustrates his contribution to Modernism, not least in ‘his way of rendering in colour those dark shadows that contrast between light and dark.’ This quid pro quo relationship is an essential component with regard to Hopper’s right to be called a modernist.

In conclusion, Edward Hopper’s work is a clear illustration of Modernism and therefore his work should deservedly be considered Modernist.

\textsuperscript{145} French, Phillip, \textit{From Nighthawks to the Shadow of Film}, 25\textsuperscript{th} April 2004, The Guardian, \url{http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2004/apr/25/art/print}

\textsuperscript{146} French, Phillip, \textit{From Nighthawks to the Shadow of Film}, 25\textsuperscript{th} April 2004, The Guardian, \url{http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2004/apr/25/art/print}
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