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Candidate Number 16598

‘THE WINDOW AND THE VOID’
IN THE WORK OF EDWARD HOPPER

Dissertation submitted for the Degree of B.A. Honours in History of Art

2011

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Introduction

'In that black or luminous square life lives, life dreams, life suffers.'
Charles Baudelaire, *Windows*, 1864

This study was born as the result of several initial observations. Firstly that, despite the vast amount of writing on Edward Hopper, few accounts have paid specific attention to his use of the window as a motif within his work. Several writers have noted its significance, yet subsequently failed to delve much deeper into its historical and symbolic connotations. Indeed, while Peter Wollen writes that within Hopper's rooms 'the window is the most important feature',[1] he moves on from this acknowledgement without further discussion; and while Joseph Ward believes that Hopper's windows 'almost always carry the dramatic current of his paintings',[2] his consequent observations can ultimately be seen as speculative. There has been little attempt to contextualise this motif beyond its most obvious art historical precedents. More importantly, I believe that the investigation into the wealth of symbolism attached to the window motif is the key to discovering new dimensions to Hopper's art.

Wallace Jackson correctly identified that Hopper 'has been rather too limitedly contextualized. We do not realize how deeply he has explored the act on which his art was premised.'[3] Furthermore, Gail Levin, in her biography of Hopper's life and work, paints a clear picture of how well read Edward was. Despite Hopper's statement – 'I have no influences really…every artist has a core of originality – a core of identity that is his own',[4] I would argue that his self-professed originality, rather than directly citing

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[1] P. Wollen, 'Two or Three Things I Know About Edward Hopper', in S. Wagstaff (ed.), *Edward Hopper*, exhibition catalogue, London: Tate Gallery, 2004, 69

[2] J. A. Ward, *American Silences: The Realism of James Agee, Walker Evans and Edward Hopper* (Louisiana, 1985), 182

[3] W. Jackson, 'To Look: The Scene of the Seen in Edward Hopper', *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vo.103, No.1 (Winter, 2004), 147-8

[4] B. O' Doherty, *American Masters: The Voice and the Myth in Modern Art* (New York, 1974), 9

'influences', rests upon a remarkable enthusiasm for art historical and literary tradition, which he used to further meaning within his deeply personal art. I feel this was achieved both consciously and subconsciously, for an artist's sensibility is shaped through his appreciation of the literature and painting that profoundly affects him, producing his own personal 'philosophy'.

The other element in my discussion will be the exploration of Hopper's 'void' motif, in symbolic relation to the window. What I aim to resist, however, is the temptation to pin down an ultimate function for the window motif, a motif with thousands of years' worth of symbolic tradition and meaning. It is this sheer wealth of symbolic potential that I believe drew Hopper to the motif, rather than a specific meaning he saw in it. He described how he chose subjects that he believed were 'the best mediums for a synthesis of my inner experience.'[5] It is therefore through the exploration of Hopper's use of window and void motifs that I aim to establish a better understanding of this 'inner experience', and of Hopper's art itself.

[5] G. Levin, *Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography, Updated and Expanded Edition* (New York, 2007), xiii

Chapter One
The Window and the Eye

I

It comes as little surprise that many readings of Hopper's work place the significance of his windows within the context of a sort of 'voyeurism'. It was hardly a novel concept for the painter to coerce the viewer into an uncomfortable involvement with the picture plane; French artists that Hopper admired were increasingly toying with the position of the viewer in relation to the picture space. Yet Hopper gave this concept a disturbing new life in the window spaces of his contemporary New York, where – akin to Paris – ideas of seeing and being seen appealed to critical interest in the increasingly detached urban psychology. Lloyd Goodrich's early readings of Hopper's urban works were charged with such ideas. 'They seem to epitomise the lonely lives of so many city dwellers,' he wrote, 'the solitude that can be experienced most intensely among millions.'[6] Although this reading has become something of a cliché, considered by Hopper himself to be largely inaccurate, it is a useful starting point for my discussion. For an important basis to the understanding of Hopper's art is to realise that almost exclusively, he makes no direct social commentary. While he mused on his painting of *Nighthawks* (1942, Chicago, Art Institute of Chicago) that 'unconsciously, probably, I was painting the loneliness of a large city',[7] he always maintained that great art was more a result of subconscious expression, what he called 'one's emotional reaction to life and the world', and 'the outward expression of an inner life in the artist.'[8] Toward the end of his career, on being asked what he was after, he responded 'I'm after ME.'[9]

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[6] L. Goodrich, *Edward Hopper* (New York, 1993), 104

[7] Edward hopper, quoted in K. Kuh, *The Artist's Voice: Talks with Seventeen Modern Artists* (New York, 1962), 134

[8] Levin, *Intimate Biography*, 438, 460

[9] G. Levin, *Edward Hopper: The Art and the Artist* (New York, 1980), 9

Thus while one could link Hopper's subconscious expression to urban psychology, as does Matthew Baigell, relating Hopper's art directly to a 'psychological depression and sexual frustration…part of conditions relating to the Machine',[10] I think it far more accurate to argue that Hopper discovered an expressive personal iconography in his contemporary New York. This iconography found its basis in the window motif, and in the motif's relation to the eye.

Hopper described how *Room In New York*, 1932 (figure 1), was 'suggested by glimpses of lighted interiors seen as I walked along city streets at night.'[11] This work situates the viewer before a window onto a lit interior, in which a couple sit apart, absorbed in separate reveries. Their faces are blurred and darkened, conveying a distance both between themselves and between us – the unnoticed spectator whose gaze becomes the artist's intruding 'glimpse', making us what Peter Wollen calls 'the Peeping Tom, the invisible night watchman.'[12] The deliberate cropping of the canvas further suggests a 'glimpse', serving to decentre the spectator, and in consequence his very importance. John Berger wrote how conventional ideas of linear perspective 'proposed to the spectator that he was the unique centre of the world.'[13] Hopper subverts this traditional perspective to emphasise the window's framing of our gaze, and the sense of intrusion, allowing a 'glimpse' of an unknown room, but no more.

Yet the concept of the 'voyeur' is still rather separate from the window's relation to the gaze. Walter Wells makes this distinction, explaining how 'strictly speaking, the voyeur peers furtively into someone's private moment to derive an erotic charge.'[14] There is little sense here of erotic perversion on the viewer's part, thus suggesting that the term

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[10] M. Baigell, *Artist and Identity in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge, 2001), 51

[11] Edward Hopper, quoted in 'Such a Life,' *Life*, Vol. 102 (August, 1935), 48, quoted in Levin, *Intimate Biography*, 241

[12] Wollen, 'Two or Three Things I Know About Edward Hopper', in Wagstaff (ed.), *Edward Hopper*, 71

[13] J. Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London, 1972), 17

[14] W. Wells, *Silent Theater: The Art of Edward Hopper* (New York, 2007), 78

1. *Room In New York*
1932
Oil on canvas, 74 x 91cm
Lincoln, University of Nebraska Art Galleries

'voyeur' has perhaps been too loosely used in analysing Hopper's works. Moreover, Freud, whose work Hopper read extensively, marked out 'voyeurism' as a clinical condition and erotic perversion, which leads Wells to conclude that Hopper's 'voyeurism' was 'mimetic, contrived and ultimately quite public.'[15]

I believe that Hopper only conveyed overtones of a 'voyeurism' at all in his earlier work, and agree with Wells that this was largely a contrived technique, controversially alluding to sexual perversity, as well as to discussions on urban psychology that were in vogue at the time. Fused with his powerful juxtapositions of darkness and glowing interiors, this combination created suggestive canvases that would guarantee critical attention. Yet I do not wish to diminish the significance of such works, for they lay the groundwork for the window motif becoming a highly charged symbolic device at the heart of Hopper's iconography.

Night Windows, 1928 (figure 2), for example, while depicting a 'voyeuristic' view of a woman bending over through her apartment window, is significant in the realisation that the viewer must be looking through his own window in order to see the window opposite. The canvas itself becomes the window that Hopper's voyeur 'spies' through, and in recognising this, we begin to see how the window becomes intrinsically joined to the 'gaze' itself. In turn, this 'canvas window' fixes our eye on a certain scenario, and so the window embodies the viewer's gaze. Jean Clair would later speculate that 'the gaze is the erection of the eye.'[16] Although he implies that the 'gaze' is solely an erotic activity, we can use these words to reinforce how the window here becomes the eye of the 'voyeur', the curtain blowing in the wind heightening the aura of symbolic eroticism. Hopper leaves no room for subtlety.

These ideas seem to have derived from the 1910 etching of the same name by Hopper's contemporary, John Sloan. Although Hopper denied any affiliation with the 'American Scene', within which Sloan was included, he had written an article on Sloan in 1927,

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[15] Ibid.

[16] J. Clair, 'La Point a' l'oeil', *Cahier du Musee National d'art Moderne,* No. 11 (Paris, 1983), quoted in M. Backer, 'Edward Hopper: An Artist in Pursuit of Desire', www.tfaoi.com/aa/6aa/6aa261.htm 29 March 2011

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2. *Night Windows*
1928
Oil on canvas, 73.7 x 86.4 cm
New York, The Museum of Modern Art

3. John Sloan
Night Windows
1910
Etching, 13.3 x 17.8 cm
Wilmington, Delaware Art Museum

praising his 'extensive chronicle of New York.'[17] His 1928 work must, then, pay homage to Sloan's *Night Windows*, 1910 (figure 3). The major difference, however, is that a boy on a rooftop takes the place of the 'voyeur', 'enjoying a masturbatory fantasy' as he gazes through a window at a naked woman.[18] We might imagine it is this figure's gaze that Hopper depicts in his *Night Windows*, yet it is equally likely, as Hirmer Verlag suspects, that Hopper recognised Sloan's positioning of the artist and viewer, at his own window, watching the boy watch the woman, 'dwellers in a mutual web of glances.'[19] Verlag remarks how the viewer thus 'might be subject to being watched themselves.'[20] It is with this observation that the window begins to embody both eye and gaze, whole buildings becoming sets of 'window-eyes' that watch and are watched. It seems that following these earlier paintings, Hopper started to paint interiors and subjects in direct relation to this 'gaze', rooted in an awareness of the symbolic implications of the window motif.

[17] Edward Hopper, 'John Sloan', 178, quoted in K. A. Marling, 'Early Sunday Morning', *Smithsonian Studies in American Art*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (Autumn, 1988), 36

[18] Wells, *Silent Theater*, 89

[19] H. Verlag, quoted in B. Haskell (ed.), *Modern Life: Edward Hopper and his Time*, exhibition catalogue, Hamburg: Bucerius Kunst Forum, 2009, 21

[20] Ibid.

II

The actual word "window" derives from "vindagua", an Old Norse word, combining the words 'vindr', meaning 'wind', and 'auga', meaning 'eye', for the eye was exposed to the wind, and the window was perceived as a similar opening in the body of a building.[21] It is enlightening that the word itself has always been linked to the eye, and thus indirectly to the process of vision itself, and it is perhaps no coincidence then that several art historians have described Hopper's windows as representative 'eyes'.

In *Early Sunday Morning*, 1930 (figure 4), Hopper places the viewer in direct confrontation with a set of 'window-eyes'; three central windows sinisterly constructed through the black and white rectangles of drawn curtains and window frames. In facing the canvas head-on, the viewer must adopt the uncomfortable role of the 'watcher', yet he is also 'watched,' aware of the windows opposite that echo his gaze, despite neither his presence nor the presence of his 'watchers' ever materialising upon the canvas. It is in this painting above all that writers on Hopper seem to explore this idea. Karal Ann Marling notes the 'ten tall windows set like eyes beneath the lowering brow of the cornice,'[22] while Robert Hughes describes them as 'staring windows.'[23]

It is through Hopper's interior scenes, however, that I wish to begin a richer exploration of these ideas. Within these interior spaces, his subjects were almost exclusively female, using his wife Jo to model for him. Hopper binds his subjects to this interior realm, and to the window motif, which comes to signify some sort of threshold, a point of connection with the exterior realm, while also a divide through which one is distanced and kept secure from the world outside.

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[21] A. Friedberg, *The Virtual Window: From Alberti to Microsoft* (Massachusetts, 2006), 103

[22] K. A. Marling, 'Early Sunday Morning', *Smithsonian Studies in American Art*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (Autumn, 1988), 23

[23] R. Hughes, *American Visions: The Epic History of Art in America* (New York, 1997), 422

4. *Early Sunday Morning*
1930
Oil on canvas, 89.4 x 153 cm
New York, Whitney Museum of American Art

Yet the security that the window maintains as this essential barrier is threatened by its very transparency. A station through which one can spy on others, it is also a space of vulnerability, undermining the physically and psychologically protective strength of an opaque wall. Barry Schwartz has described how 'the wall annihilates the outside…men withdraw from others…to create a world over which they reign with more complete authority.'[24] The window threatens this interior world; a weak point in the wall that spoils its privacy. It is a vital point of visual connection with the outside realm, yet also sinister, exposing private domestic space.

Morning In A City, 1944 (figure 5), represents these conflicting positive-negative properties of the window space. A naked woman stands before her window, the light streaming in across her exposed body amid the darkness of her interior realm. Rolf Renner has written how 'the relative gloom makes it cavernous, sealed off from the outside world,'[25] yet the front of her body seems to absorb the intrusive light, emphasising her sudden visibility and drawing her into the line of sight of the outside world. Her expression is uneasy, her hand tensely clutching a white cloth, though she is seemingly oblivious to the 'window-eyes' that gaze across at her from the apartment opposite. These 'window-eyes' are dark, impenetrable; forming what Ward calls 'some grotesque, eye-dominated head…a surrealistic illusion.'[26] There is something almost sadistic in the peering eyes of this building, so clearly framed by the woman's window, this leering gaze essentially forcing her back into the darkness. Yet she is eternally trapped in this moment of exposure, and in the allusion of the morning light to the vision of her 'watchers'.

The relation of the female to the window space was of course a well-known motif, both in art and literature. It is surprising, then, given Hopper's breadth of literary interest, that there has been little connection to works he knew that develop these themes. Levin has

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[24] B. Schwartz, 'The Social Psychology of Privacy', in J. Helmer & N. A. Eddington, *Urbanman: The Psychology of Urban Survival* (New York, 1973), 134

[25] R. G. Renner, *Edward Hopper 1882-1967: Transformation of the Real* (Hamburg, 1990), 56

[26] Ward, *American Silences,* 188

5. *Morning In A City*
1944
Oil on canvas, 112.5 x 152 cm
Massachusetts, Williams College Museum of Art

6. *Eleven A.M.*
1926
Oil on canvas, 71.4 x 91.8 cm
Washington D.C., Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden

written, for example, how one work 'commonly translated and read in Hopper's youth'[27] was Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. One can deduce that Hopper had read and admired this book from the fact that he and Jo, while in Hyannis in 1949, went straight to see the movie adaptation upon its release.[28] In this novel, Emma Bovary's relationship with the window represents a longing exacerbated by her confinement, both in terms of her gender – being controlled by the men in her life – and in her dreams of grander prospects, of escaping her narrow provincial life. Lines such as 'seated in her armchair by the window, she watched the villagers go by along the pavement',[29] call to mind Hopper's woman in an armchair, watching out of her window in *Eleven A.M,* 1926 (figure 6), while Emma's desire to 'escape' is ironically only achieved through suicide, during which she cries, 'Open the window…I feel choked!'[30], symbolic of her release from a life of confinement.

The most important influence from this era, however, was the work of the Impressionists, which Hopper saw during his trips to Paris in 1906 and 1909. One artist exploring similar ideas was Gustave Caillebotte (1848-1894), whose influence on Hopper requires further examination. Levin records Hopper seeing the Caillebotte collection at the Luxembourg Palace during his stay in Paris from 1906-7, and she goes on briefly to speculate about Caillebotte's influence on both his brushstroke and treatment of perspective.[31] Yet it seems Caillebotte provided a deeper thematic influence on Hopper's art than has been recognised.

Caillebotte worked with the window motif within the context of Parisian spectacle following Baron Haussman's visual transformation of Paris, and the uneasy division of domestic and public space within a city in which identity revolved around the 'gaze'. *Young Man at His Window*, 1875 (figure 7), depicts a man looking out onto a city street.

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[27] Levin, *Intimate Biography*, 15, 16

[28] Ibid, 416

[29] Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, 110

[30] Ibid, 327

[31] Levin, *Intimate Biography*, 66, 89

7. Gustave Caillebotte
Young Man at his Window
1875
Oil on canvas, 117 x 82 cm
Private Collection

8. Gustave Caillebotte
Interior, Woman at the Window
1880
Oil on canvas, 116 x 89cm
Private Collection

The many windows around him, while not so much abstract 'window-eyes', convey the same idea of Verlag's 'web of glances', for in looking out, he becomes exposed to the gaze of others. In *Interior, Woman at the Window*, 1880 (figure 8), Caillebotte depicts a similar idea, yet the window evokes confinement within a claustrophobic domestic space. In both works, he paints these figures from behind, so that the luminous light beyond the window casts a contrasting glow against the dark forms of their confined bodies. Michael Fried has argued that through this technique, Caillebotte fuses the Impressionist interest in the depiction of city streets with the 'not obviously Impressionist motif, the figure seen from the rear.'[32] He further suggests that this fusion involves what Kirk Varnedoe called 'a psychological or emotive dimension that would seem to have more to do with the heritage of Romanticism, and most especially German Romanticism.'[33]

This reference to Romanticism points almost explicitly to the work of Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840). In observing Friedrich's *Woman at the Window*, 1822 (figure 9), the connection with Caillebotte seems clear, yet a direct connection between Hopper and Friedrich is less easy to identify. While Levin records no trace of Hopper encountering Friedrich's work, Wells briefly refers in a footnote to 'one highly possible point of influence,' this being Hopper's visit to Berlin in July 1907, following the 1906 *Jahrhundertausstellung*, which displayed forty Friedrich works that 'aimed at rejuvenating and energizing the status of 19th-century German art.'[34]

I believe a less obvious connection could have brought Hopper into contact with Friedrich's art. Hopper was an avid reader of Goethe, 'a writer whose ideas shaped his aesthetics,'[35] often reciting his *Wanderer's Nightsong*, which he later declared 'an intense admiration of mine for a long time.'[36] The 1787 portrait of Goethe by Wilhelm Tischbein,

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[32] M. Fried, 'Caillebotte's Impressionism', *Representations*, No.66 (Spring, 1999), 2

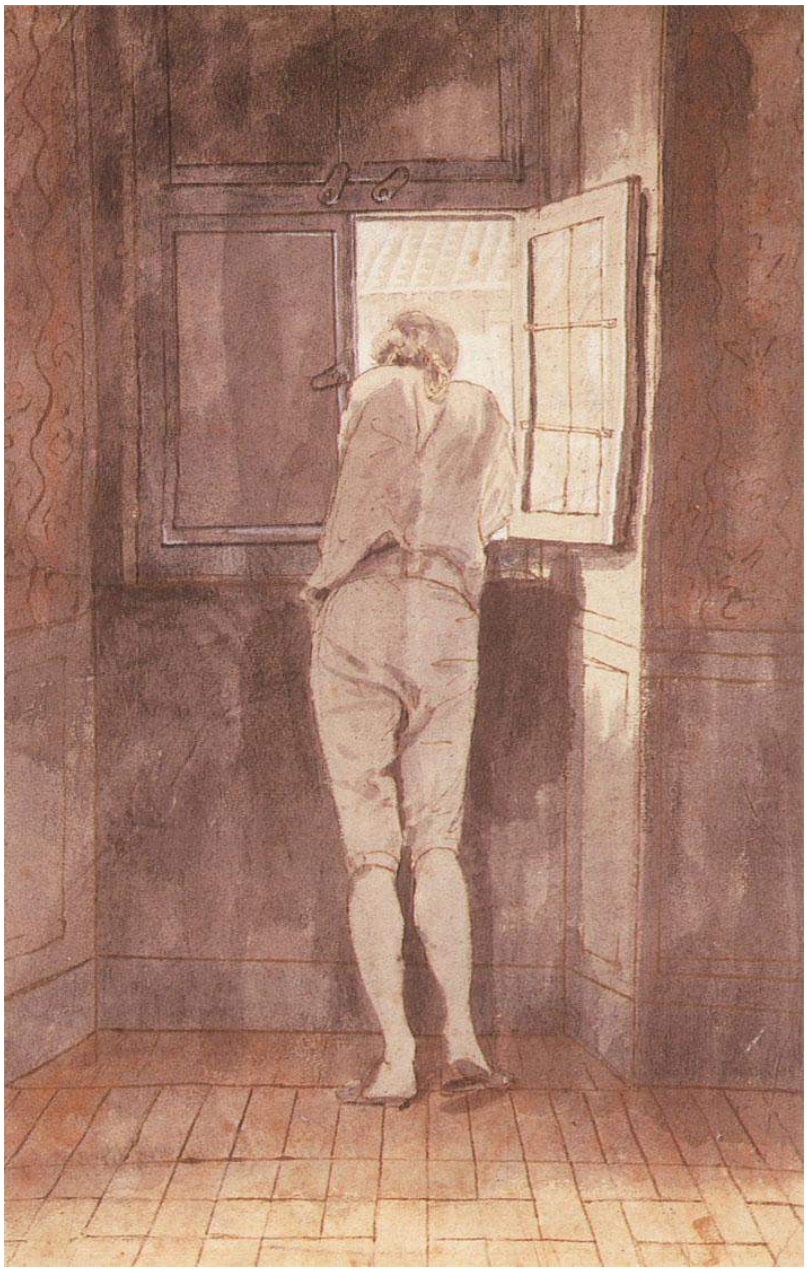
[33] J. K.T. Varnedoe et al., *Gustave Caillebotte: A Retrospective Exhibition* (Houston, 1976), 89, quoted in Fried, 'Caillebotte's Impressionism', 4

[34] Wells, *Silent Theatre*, 245

[35] Levin, *Intimate Biography*, 30

[36] Ibid, 487

9. Caspar David Friedrich
Woman at the Window
1882
Oil on canvas, 44 x 37 cm
Berlin, Nationalgalerie



10. Wilhelm Tischbein
Goethe at the Window of his Lodgings in Rome
1787
Watercolour and chalk on pencil
Frankfurt am Main, The Goethe Museum

Goethe at the Window of his Lodgings in Rome (figure 10), a picture reproduced in many copies of Goethe's writings, is thus one that Hopper would have seen. Pre-dating Friedrich's *Woman at the Window*, the composition is virtually identical, the subject seen from behind in a darkened interior as he gazes out of the window, one shutter open. Given the personal connections between Friedrich and Goethe, [37] it would not be unreasonable to suggest that Friedrich based his composition on Tischbein's drawing. If Hopper knew one of these pictures, it may have drawn him to the other.

Friedrich's *Woman at the Window* draws close comparison with Hopper's *Cape Cod Morning*, 1950 (figure 11). Aside from the woman's proximity to the window, the shutters on either side frame her form, as they do in Friedrich's work. Hofmann observed that this section is 'closed by wooden shutters, forming a triptych,' leading him to suggest how 'it is also conceivable that (Friedrich) associated the window and its shutters with a small folding altarpiece.'[38] Given Friedrich's faith and interest in religious symbolism, this idea seems to carry a lot of weight. Thus we could observe how this triptych becomes subverted in *Cape Cod Morning*, its effective 'predella' panel below the window blank and faded, the woman's exposure to the morning light reminiscent of an annunciation scene, yet one surrounded by burned grass and a dark patch of woodland – 'her hopes are already bracketed in bands of mourning', says Wells.[39] Juxtaposing Hopper's own secularism with the religious overtones transmitted through the beauty of nature, this woman becomes representative of a sort of existential crisis – a yearning, perhaps for salvation, perhaps 'troubled by a desire to escape' from her 'narrow existence.'[40] Either way, this annunciatory light will fulfil neither wish, as the woman's, grim, desperate expression evokes in its futility.

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[37] See Hoffman, *Caspar David Friedrich*, 20-28

[38] Ibid, 110, 112

[39] Wells, *Silent Theater*, 106

[40] L. Eitner, 'The Open Window and the Storm-Tossed Boat: An Essay in the Iconography of Romanticism', *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (December, 1955), 286

11. *Cape Cod Morning*
1950
Oil on canvas, 86.7 x 102.3 cm
Washington D.C., Smithsonian American Art Museum

Friedrich's other well-known window painting, *View from the Artist's Studio (right hand window),* 1805-6 (figure 12), includes a segment of a mirror beside the window, in which we see the artist's eyes reflected. Gottlieb writes how 'nothing is known about the meaning of the two studio-window pictures,' though she suggests that this mirror could reflect 'the painter's eyes filled with the divine Light.'[41] Yet there seems to be something more specific in the connection of the window to the eye here, far beyond ideas concerning the 'gaze'.

This brings me to consider the famous phrase 'the eye is the window of the soul'. Carla Gottlieb has traced the earliest use of these words to a passage by the skeptic philosopher Sextus Empiricus (A.D. 175-200), who cites Herakleitos (500 B.C.) as his source. In this passage, Sextus equates the window with the senses, with the window closed as he sleeps and open when he is awake:

> When the window is open, the individual mind looks out from it to meet with the divine reason of the universe…but on waking it stretches out again through the passages of sense, as it were through windows, and…is invested with the power of reason.[42]

The window thus becomes the vehicle by which 'the individual's reason reaches for cosmic reason.'[43] This iconic metaphor, perhaps then explored by Friedrich, had been revived during the Italian Renaissance, the period that Hopper had once said perhaps appealed to him most.[44] Margaret Iversen has further written a paper linking Hopper's 'melancholic' art to that of Albrecht Dürer's. It is therefore reasonable to assume that Hopper was familiar with a series of works by Dürer in which windows were painted in the pupils of his subjects' eyes, including *Portrait of Philip Melanchthon,* 1526 (figure 13). Gottlieb describes how Dürer was likely inspired by Leonardo Da Vinci, who wrote how 'the eye, which is called the window of the soul, is the principal means by which the

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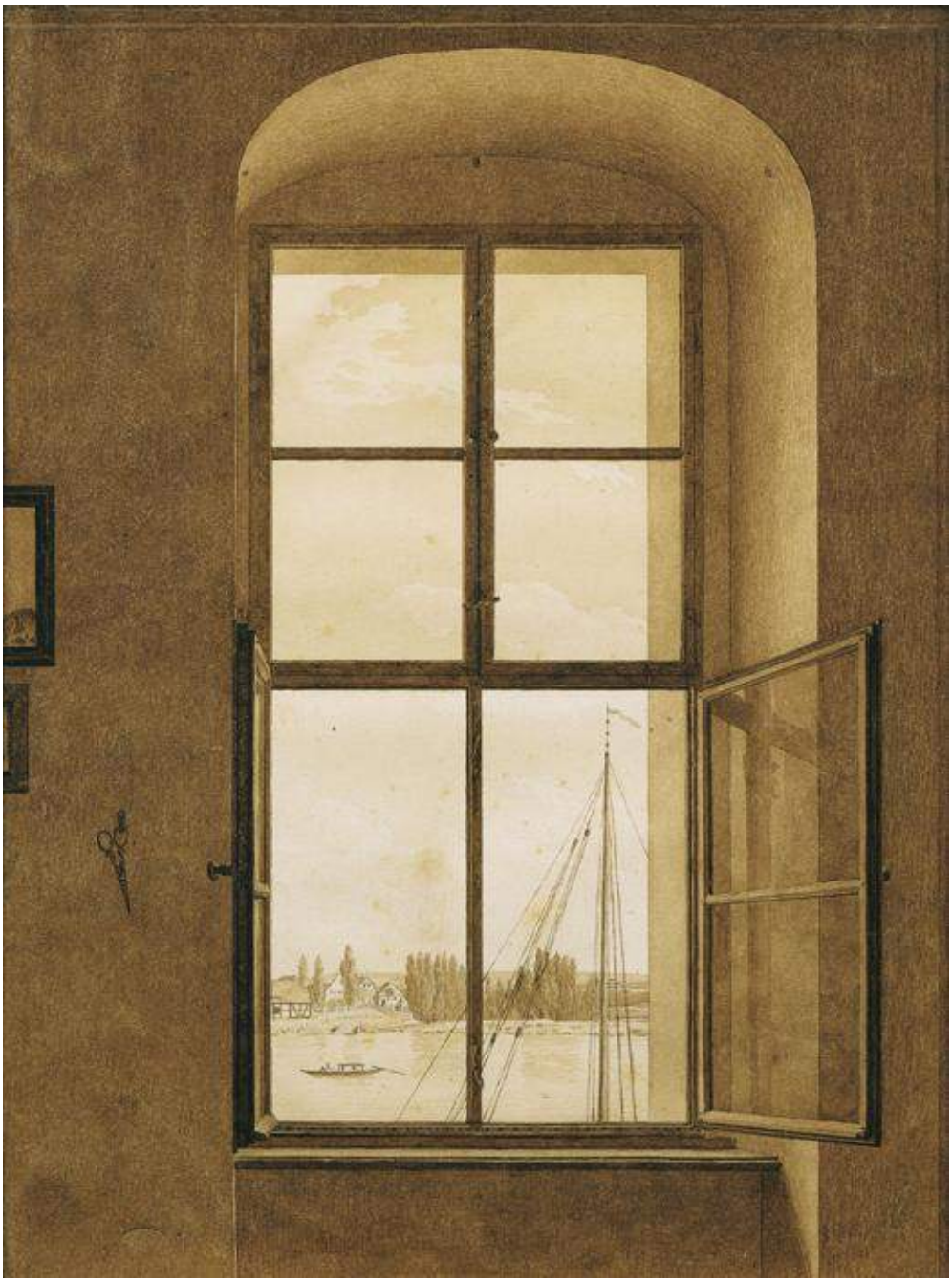
[41] C. Gottlieb, *The Window in Art: From the Window of God to the Vanity of Man: A Survey of Window Symbolism in Western Art* (New York, 1981), 296

[42] S. Empiricus, *Against the Logicians* 1.30, quoted in Gottlieb, *Window in Art*, 49

[43] Gottlieb, *Window in Art*, 49

[44] Levin, *Intimate Biography*, 566



12. Caspar David Friedrich
View from the Artist's Studio (Right hand Window)
1805-06
Graphite and sepia on paper, 31.2 x 23.7 cm
Vienna, Österreichische Galerie Belvedere

13. Albrecht Dürer
Portrait of Philip Melanchthon
1526
Engraving
Boston, Museum of Fine Arts

central sense may most completely and abundantly appreciate the infinite works of nature.'[45] Beneath this portrait, Dürer included a Latin inscription, meaning 'Dürer could paint the features of the living Philip, but the learned hand could not paint his mind.'[46] He therefore paints the window to suggest the 'presence' of the intangible 'mind', the eye, as the window to Philip's soul, being the closest he can come to a physical depiction of the 'mind' in pictorial representation.

This idea leads us to consider how an artist might go about actually attempting to represent this internal space of the 'mind', or indeed, the 'soul'. The implications of the window motif naturally suggest the construction of a 'room'. In an article on Hopper's interiors, John Hollander mentions that 'light playing inside a room is an ancient and firmly grounded metaphor for thoughts in a human head,' going back to a description of Aeneas' anxious thoughts in Vergil's Aeneid.[47] Furthermore, Hollander crucially observes how 'Hopper's dwelling chambers get to be more and more like representations of the minds of the figures we perceive within them.'[48] While I would agree that these chambers could be seen as representations of the mind, I feel that the figures within these rooms are not so much 'subjects' as 'vehicles', representations of Hopper's own interior state. Hopper once said in an interview that 'the figure was very rarely the main emphasis,' and that he used it largely 'to augment the "emotional reaction of the moment".'[49]

I feel that these rooms are therefore Hopper's expression of his own 'inner experience', not that of anybody else's, and hence wish to argue that Hopper's interiors represent this inner space of the 'soul', his window motif being the 'eye' that connects this inner space

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[45] L. Da Vinci, tr. J. P. Richter, *The Notebooks of Leonardo Da Vinci, Volume 1*, (1883, New York: Dover, 1970), 446

[46] Gottlieb, *Window in Art*, 166

[47] J. Hollander, 'Hopper and the Figure of Room', *Art Journal*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (Summer, 1981), 139

[48] Ibid.

[49] Edward Hopper, Unpublished Interview by Malcolm Preston, 1951, Truro, Massachusetts, quoted in Levin, *Intimate Biography*, 417

to external reality. Tellingly, when Lloyd Goodrich recalled asking Hopper where the subject of a work was situated, 'he would say "Nowhere" or "In here," tapping his forehead.[50]

[50] Goodrich, *Edward Hopper*, 132

Chapter Two
'The Virtual Window'

Hopper's windows should be looked at, then, as symbolic 'eyes', through which lie the internal spaces of the 'soul', apertures in the walls of his isolated chambers that divide interior and exterior space while also providing a point of connection and interrelation between them. I wish to now look at the relationship of these ideas to the concept of the 'canvas window'.

It was Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472) who first suggested the idea of the canvas itself being a 'window', with his famous words, in his 1435 treatise *Della Pittura*:

> …On the surface on which I am going to paint, I draw a rectangle of whatever size I want, which I regard as an open window through which the subject to be painted is seen.[51]

This statement has since been largely taken out of its original context, as several writers have argued, for Alberti was not treating the canvas as a literal painted 'window'. Instead, he treats the drawn 'rectangle' as this metaphorical 'window', which itself stands for a frame, rather than the canvas itself as a window-like extension between real and fictive space. Anne Friedberg observes this misreading, proposing that 'Alberti may have meant to use the window metaphor as an instructional device and not as a philosophical paradigm…yet, as a metaphoric figure, it performs a coy slippage.'[52] It is clear that Alberti was using the idea of the 'open window' as a perspectival device, defining a fixed relationship between the viewer and the carefully constructed pictorial composition within the rectangle. Yet what is important is that that the very misreading of this device became part of Alberti's unintentional legacy, the '"window" idea…a trope, and a signal of the essentially fictive poetics of painting.'[53]

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[51] L. B. Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. C. Grayson, (Penguin Books: London, 1972), 54

[52] Friedberg, *Virtual Window*, 12

[53] J. Masheck, 'Alberti's "Window"': Art-Historiographic Notes on an Antimodernist Misprision', *Art Journal*, Vol. 50, No.1 (Spring, 1991), 35

Such ideas of constructing linear perspective were vital for artists working during the fifteenth century, the key to invoking believable pictorial space. However, in the design of Renaissance architecture, this relation of centric vision to the construction of perspective was derived not solely from Alberti, but from the artists whose own perspectival experiments provided the foundation for Alberti's optic theories, namely Giotto di Bondone (c.1255-c.1319) and Duccio di Buoninsegna (1266/7-1337). For example, in *Temptation of Christ on the Temple* (from *Maesta*, 1308-11) (figure 14), Duccio paints the temple building with an impressive display of geometric and optical theory, his perspectival construction implying receding space. Martin Kemp has proposed that paintings like this had influenced the architect Filippo Brunelleschi (1377-1446) in his own groundbreaking display of 'Renaissance' perspective within his drawings of the Florentine Baptistery (figure 15).[54]

In this context, it is worth examining Hopper's own construction of pictorial perspective in relation to the 'canvas window'. I believe that his compositions were strongly influenced by these Renaissance constructions, especially in the divisions of interior and exterior space using strong geometrical shapes that we see throughout the work of artists such as Piero Della Francesca (1415-1492) and Filippino Lippi (1475-1504).[55]

We might compare their box-like constructions to any number of Hopper's spaces, such as his *Office in a Small City*, 1953 (figure 16). Yet Hopper's use of geometrical shapes to construct space places a new level of dependency on the motif of the rectangular window, and the window's subsequent projection of planes of light. Furthermore, Hopper subverts Renaissance notions of linear perspective, pushing vanishing points to areas of the picture that do not adhere to centric perspectival construction. The fixed position of the viewer before the canvas, and thus the position of the artist himself, is made ambiguous. Jean Gillies explains that 'since the observer's position is directly in front of the drawing, the vanishing point should be in the centre of it; only in that case can the scene be "in

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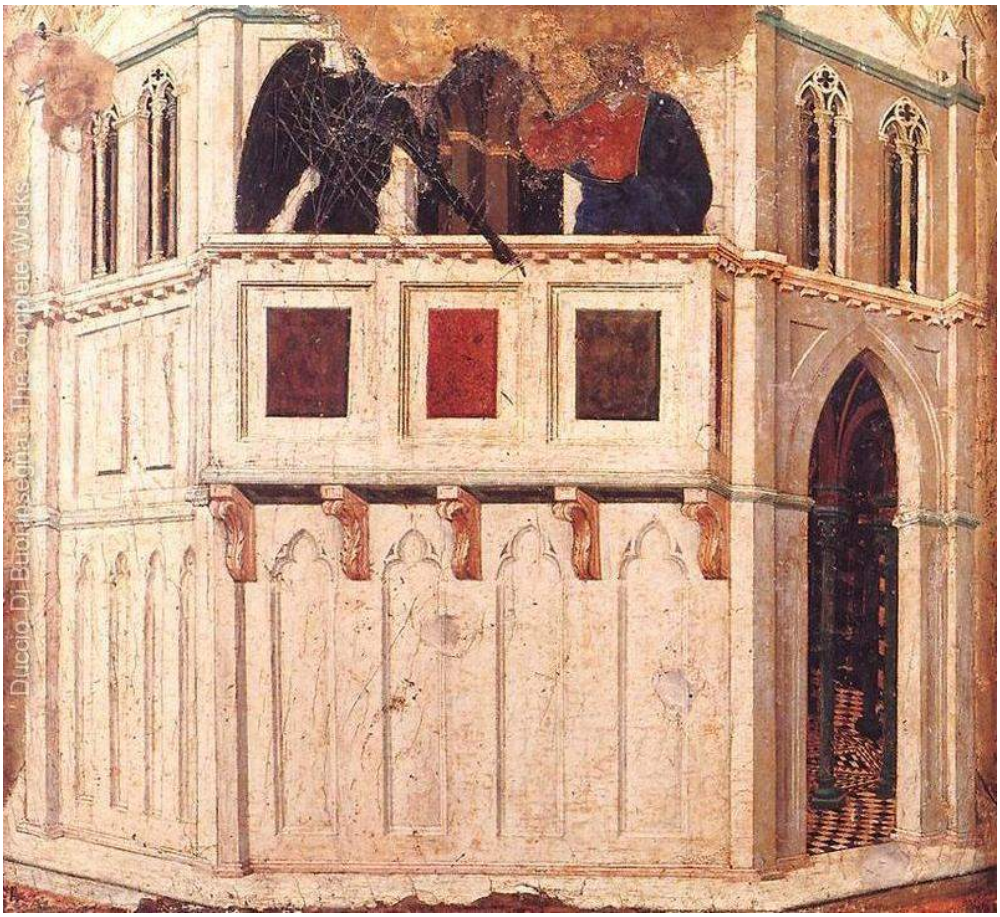
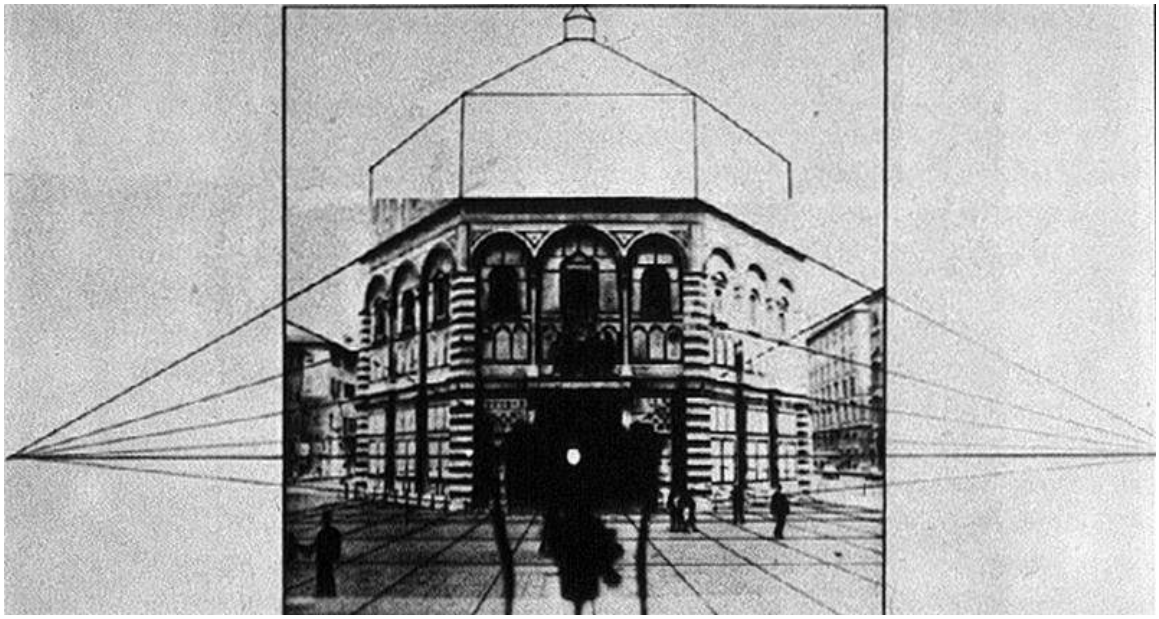
[54] T. Puttfarken, *The Discovery of Pictorial Composition: Theories of Visual Order in Painting 1400-1800*, (London, 2000), 73-4

[55] For example, Piero Della Francesca's *Flagellation of Christ* (1455-60, Urbino, Galleria Nazionale delle Marche).



14. Duccio di Buoninsegna
Temptation of Christ on the Temple
1308-11
Gold and tempera on panel, 48 x 50cm
Siena, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo



15. Filippo Brunelleschi; S. Y. Edgerton
Reconstruction of Brunelleschi's First Perspective Picture
C.1424-5 (reconstruction 1975)
S. Y. Edgerton, *The Renaissance Rediscovery of Linear Perspective*, fig. X-3, 146

focus".'[56] Both Gillies and Philip J. Lawson have studied the effects of this ambiguity in Hopper's *Gas*, 1940 (figure 17), with its vanishing point at the end of the road on the right, while the observer stands in the centre, not adhering to his centric position within the proposed visual field. Lawson describes how the artist 'asks us to imagine ourselves standing in the centre of a street, staring straight down its length, and yet seeing clearly *what we are not looking at.*'[57] The viewer is therefore 'asked to be in two places at one time.'[58] Gillies further explains that if 'the viewer cannot orient himself to the painting in terms of space or time…the result is the perceptual experience of "timelessness".'[59]

This observation is crucial in establishing how Hopper conveyed the fundamental and intentional 'unreality' of his pictorial spaces. With an awareness of Hopper's pictorial construction of "timeless", fictive space, his relationship with the 'canvas window' acquires a new level of self-consciousness that can be further related to the painted windows within his fictive spaces. For there is a strong division between the space within the canvas and the space outside it, which I believe can be associated with the idea of Hopper's spaces representing his 'inner experience'. Indeed, his interiors become separated both from Hopper's fictive exterior 'reality' by their painted windows, and from our reality by the 'canvas window' itself. The canvas could thus be looked upon as another window through which lie the subjective spaces of Hopper's inner 'reality' – his mind, and hence the effective 'eye' to the artist's soul.

In this sense, the fictive picture planes of Hopper's painted spaces represent the result of a sort of transference, from the artist's mind to the canvas space, which itself becomes physically representative of the mental space from whence it came. The 'canvas window' is thus a vehicle that essentially facilitates a means of *escape* for the intangible creative 'mind', beyond the confines of the physical body, the window becoming symbolically

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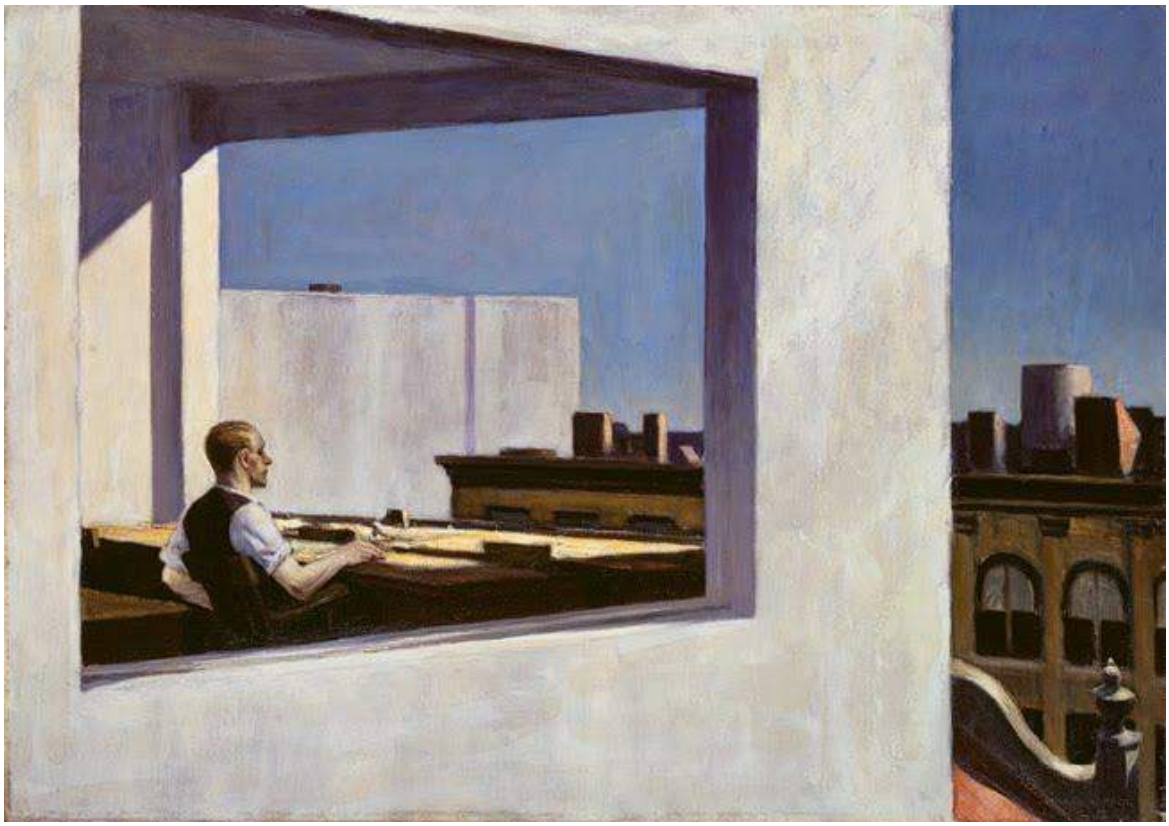
[56] J. Gillies, 'The Timeless Space of Edward Hopper', *Art Journal*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (Summer, 1972), 406

[57] P. J. Lawson, *Practical Perspective Drawing* (New York, 1943), 177

[58] Gillies, 'The Timeless Space of Edward Hopper', 406

[59] Ibid.



16. *Office in a Small City*
1953
Oil on canvas, 71.7 x 101.6 cm
New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art

17. *Gas*
1940
Oil on canvas, 66.7 x 102.2 cm
New York, The Museum of Modern Art

representative of a complex mind-body dualism; a philosophical conflict that I believe Hopper consistently attempts to address through his art.

This mind-body conflict finds poetic illustration within the space of the 'virtual window' in *New York Movie*, 1939 (figure 18). I use the term 'virtual window' here as proposed by Friedberg, who uses it in reference to the movie screen, the modern 'canvas' – describing how 'a beam of light forms a "virtual window" upon the wall.'[60] Hopper's keen interest in film has been well documented, yet this work evokes more intricate ideas than the artist's enthusiasm for cinema. In this picture space, we see a glimpse of the black and white movie screen, showing what Renner has suggested is 'an Alpine landscape',[61] before which the darkened outlines of figures observe this 'virtual window'. An enormous column functioning as a *repoussoir,* on the right of which stands an isolated usherette, divides the receding dark space of this area, emphasising the separation of mental states between this solitary figure and the audience, who represent contrasting fantasies of 'escape'.

Indeed, the cinema screen, like Alberti's picture plane, provides a window into fictive space, an experience of effective escapism. David Anfam describes how films 'immobilise the audience in their seats, arrest real time in the course of virtual reality…enclose us in a dark chamber and turn life into a single luminous whole.'[62] This overbearing darkness of the auditorium is integral to the experience of 'escape', a room which itself is windowless. Everyone faces toward the 'virtual window', the projected light echoing the singular motion of the audience's centric vision, effective optic rays that follow and 'become' the eye of the camera. Wolfgang Schivelbusch describes how the intensity of the darkness 'heightens individual perceptions,' so that 'every lighted image is experienced as the light at the end of the tunnel…and as a liberation from the dark.'[63]

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[60] Friedberg, *Virtual Window*, 123

[61] Renner, *Edward Hopper 1882-1967*, 45

[62] D. Anfam, 'Rothko's Hopper: A Strange Wholeness' in S. Wagstaff (ed.), *Edward Hopper*, 46

[63] W. Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night: The Industrialisation of Light in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley, 1988), quoted in Friedberg, *Virtual Window,* 152

18. *New York Movie*
1939
Oil on canvas, 81.9 x 101.9 cm
New York, The Museum of Modern Art

These words evoke the experience of a sort of salvation, yet the experience upon this virtual plane is entirely 'unreal', a brief escape into a fictional scenario separate from one's own reality. Nevertheless, the psychological experience of one's mind transcending the physical body compels Friedberg to address the question of '"Where are we"…when we watch a film?' concluding that we must be 'in a subjective elsewhere, in a virtual space.'[64] The truth is that we are effectively in two places at once, our mind locked within this virtual space, our body rooted to the seat, an experience that Friedberg calls 'a phenomenological tangle – twin paradoxes of mobility and immobility…and of materiality and immateriality.'[65] One can hence conclude that the experience of the 'virtual window' is essentially an 'out of body' experience.

The 'virtual window', like the 'canvas window', is thus a crossable threshold, by which the mind transcends the body. The real power of *New York Movie*, however, lies in the usherette and her contrasting space. Absorbed in her own thought, Wells has made the clear connection between 'her own illusions and those on the screen.' [66] It is ironic, given her job to light the darkness of the auditorium and facilitate the mental escape of others, that she herself remains earthbound. Furthermore, her 'escape' up the stairs beside her cannot be achieved until the movie has ended. Her physical and mental isolation from the people in the theatre is therefore accentuated, her mind comparatively 'trapped' in her body, the glow of the electric light leading upward from her head as if in expression of her thoughts of freedom, only to be cut short by the ceiling, akin to the ceiling of her own skull.

But the key to the real tragedy of her introspection lies in the recognition of her hand gesture, softly touching her cheek, the symbolic gesture of 'melancholy', a depressive condition encapsulated by Albrecht Dürer in his engraving *Melencolia I*, 1514 (figure 19). In further connection to this tradition, Rudolf Arnheim describes how 'the melancholic was given a black face, because it was assumed that a darkening of the blood

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[64] Friedberg, *Virtual Window*, 178

[65] Ibid, 150

[66] Wells, *Silent Theater*, 224

19. Albrecht Dürer
Melencolia I
Engraving, 31 x 26 cm
New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art

– …"melancholy" means literally "black bile" – was responsible for a depressed state of mind'.[67] Erwin Panofsky, in his well-known reading of Dürer's engraving, also describes the 'earthlike' melancholic complexion, relating it to Dürer's figure, whose face, he writes, is 'overcast by a deep shadow.'[68] Hopper's usherette is too cast in a 'deep shadow', altogether confirming her melancholic condition. Panofsky further describes how the melancholic is 'reduced to despair by an awareness of insurmountable barriers which separate her from a higher realm of thought.'[69] These 'insurmountable barriers' here present themselves in the confining form of the woman's own body, in her grounding within a reality that she cannot transcend. Her melancholic introspection stands in marked contrast to the fictive escape offered by the 'virtual window' beside her.

[67] R. Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye* (California, 1974), 326

[68] Erwin Panofsky, *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer*, (Princeton, 1955), 163

[69] Ibid, 168

Chapter Three

The Window and the Void

I

The concept of 'escape', inextricably bound to the window motif, will now be examined in connection with the motif of the 'void'. Centered on the juxtaposition of unfathomable darkness with blinding light, the void motif revolves around a sense of profound duality, both in a physical and metaphysical sense. Moreover, it provides a binary counterpart to the window itself.

As in the auditorium of *New York Movie*, Hopper places his melancholic subjects within a binding proximity to absolute darkness, suggestive in its allusion to 'unbecoming'. Furthermore, the nature of the 'melancholic' is, according to Iversen, one 'haunted by death.'[70] Arnheim further explains how 'when darkness is so deep that it provides a foil of black nothingness, the beholder receives the compelling impression of things emerging from a state of non-being and likely to return to it…life as a process of appearing and disappearing.'[71] This preoccupation with the prospect of disappearance manifests itself in Hopper's voids, one that Iversen believes is Hopper's figuration of the Freudian death drive, opposing the pleasure-seeking drive that seeks to bind and unite in its motivation to destroy.[72] These impulses provide a complicated interplay, the prospect of 'undoing', and death itself threatening the material existence of his subjects, emphasising their ultimate transience.

In *Automat*, 1927 (figure 20), lies Hopper's largest void, an enormous black window, a darkness that reflects nothing of the scene in front of it except for the row of lights upon the ceiling, receding into some impenetrable distance. Nochlin describes this 'blackened

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[70] M. Iversen, 'Hopper's Melancholic Gaze', in S. Wagstaff (ed.), *Edward Hopper*, 58

[71] Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception*, 327

[72] M. Iversen, 'In the Blind Field: Hopper and the Uncanny', *Art History*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (September 1998), 417

20. *Automat*
1927
Oil on canvas, 71.4 x 91.4 cm
Des Moines, Des Moines Art Centre

glass'[73] as if the blackness were a property of the glass itself – and in this sense, the window has literally become a void. The presence of the lights above the pensive woman, which Wells sees as cartoonist 'thought bubbles',[74] is particularly mysterious given the lack of any other reflection upon this black screen, leading us to believe, as Mark Strand has suggested, that the woman herself is an illusion, and that the room is an effective 'limbo' space.[75] These lights then, may be providing a subsequent direction beyond this 'waiting room', caught in a state somewhere between reality and 'unreality'. I would suggest, given their receding direction, that these lights are akin to the sunlight in Hopper's daylight interior spaces, functioning to connect interior with exterior. Yet the 'escape' that may be provided through this exterior space is a morbid escape, from life itself, and thus this looming black window takes on the role of a symbolic 'memento mori'.

Moreover, the presence of the fruit in a glass bowl before the window, which has been largely interpreted in reference to the sensual and erotic, seems to refer directly to a vein of window symbolism concerned with 'vanities', in direct correlation with these ideas on mortality. For example, in Ambrosius Bosschaert's *Bouquet of Flowers*, 1620 (figure 21), depicting a flower vase upon a windowsill, Gottlieb explains how the window is a 'symbol of the senses', in juxtaposition with the roses, which symbolise 'the passing of beauty', dew the 'brevity of life' and glass the 'frailty of fortune.'[76] I believe that the juxtaposition of the fruit in its glass bowl against the window-void here is a similar meditation on transience and the passing of time.

There is, however, one other detail reflected in this window-void, a faint circular green light, situated to the left of the bowl of fruit (figure 22). It is my belief that this light is a pictorial illustration of F. Scott Fitzgerald's 'green light' from *The Great Gatsby*, which

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[73] L. Nochlin, 'Edward Hopper and the Imagery of Alienation', *Art Journal*, Vol. 41, No.2 (Summer, 1981), 137

[74] Wells, *Silent Theater*, 37

[75] Mark Strand, *Hopper* (New York, 2007), 43

[76] Gottlieb, *Window in Art*, 270

21. Ambrosius Bosschaert
Bouquet of Flowers
1620
Oil on canvas, 23 x 17cm
Paris, Musée de Louvre

22. *Automat*, detail
1927
Oil on canvas, 71.4 x 91.4 cm
Des Moines, Des Moines Art Centre

was published in 1926, one year before the painting of *Automat*. Hopper being the 'voracious reader' that he was,[77] would not have let this landmark novel escape his attention. Moreover, his art has often been linked with Fitzgerald's thematic explorations of American alienation.

This 'green light' is symbolic of the ideal, lying across the water, a light that Jay Gatsby would fixate upon each night in the darkness. While in reality it was the light at the end of Daisy Buchanan's dock, it came to embody the suggestion of her invisible presence, the symbolic illusion of the woman that so infatuated him. By the end of the novel, the notion of the 'green light' becomes a more general symbol of man's dreams and illusions themselves:

> Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter – tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms further…And one fine morning – So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.[78]

Hopper's inclusion of this green light upon the window-void then, seems to me to be a direct response to this text, symbolising the separation of this woman's reality from her dreams, those intangible ideals that one must chase to preserve the illusion of their own progress. Perhaps this is why the woman is represented as an 'illusion' with no reflection, becoming the pictorial embodiment of her own illusory thought, so that again, Hopper's *Automat* depicts a literal space of the 'mind'. The contrasting 'reality' that is the looming prospect of death in the window-void then, becomes intertwined with the tantalising green light – the light of an unreachable dream.

Automat bears a striking relationship to Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, 1882 (figure 23), which also examines concepts of reflection and illusion. The flowers upon the bar, similar to Hopper's fruit, convey a sense of transience and mortality, while Iversen has also noted the similarity between the mirror and the window-void in *Automat*,

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[77] Guy Pène du Bois, November 30 1918, quoted in Levin, *Intimate Biography*, 124

[78] F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (1926; London: Penguin Books, 1990), 172-3

23. Edouard Manet
A Bar at the Folies-Bergère
1882
Oil on canvas, 96 x 130 cm
London, Courtauld Institute of Art

though solely in reference to 'melancholy'.[79] Manet's mirror is notoriously contradictory, reflecting a false image of the painted reality we see, inviting the notion that either this painted 'reality' is an illusion, or its representation in the mirror is. Whatever the case, Manet brings into question his subject's thought in relation to the artist's constructed 'reality'. Hopper seems to be examining these same ideas. In referring to a host of influences, his window-void becomes an empty mirror, its only reflections being that of the receding lights and the distant green light, illusory beacons that the eye follows toward a foreboding distance.

Hotel Room, 1931 (figure 24), leads the eye down the length of the room toward the vanishing point – a similar black 'window-void', via a receding perspective reminiscent of Degas' *Interior*, 1868-9 (figure 25). In the latter, the eye travels past the female subject toward a blurred mirror that provides a similar illusion of 'escape' from the claustrophobic interior. Moreover, both of these female subjects, absorbed in troubled thought, their heads in deep shadow, and the posture of Degas' subject described by Susan Sidlauskas as 'a variation on the Romantic melancholia pose',[80] embody the theme of the 'melancholic' subject in relation to the illusion of 'escape'. Pamela Koob has noted how Jo's wedding gift to Hopper was Paul Jamot's monograph on Degas, 'a volume that offered a wealth of reproductions',[81] pointing to an admiration for his work that scholars have previously recognised within Hopper's pictorial and perspectival devices.

Hotel Room seems to enjoy a direct association with the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson in his 1841 essay *Self Reliance*, a favourite of Hopper's from which he frequently quoted. One line states that 'travelling is a fool's paradise…I pack my trunk…embark on the sea and at last wake up…and there beside me is the stern fact, the

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[79] See M. Iversen, Hopper's Melancholic Gaze', in S. Wagstaff (ed.), *Edward Hopper*, 57

[80] S. Sidlauskas, 'Resisting Narrative: The problem of Edgar Degas's Interior', *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 75, No. 4 (December, 1993), 688

[81] P. N. Koob, 'States of Being: Edward Hopper and Symbolist Aesthetics', *American Art*, Vol. 18, No.3 (Fall, 2004), 67

24. *Hotel Room*
1931
Oil on canvas, 152.4 x 165.7 cm
Madrid, Thyssen-Bornemisza

25. Edgar Degas
Interior (The Rape)
C.1868-9
Oil on canvas, 81.28 x 114.3cm
Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art

sad self, unrelenting, identical, that I fled from.'[82] This idea of vainly trying to 'escape' oneself is embodied in this dislocated woman in her hotel room, melancholic, in mental and physical limbo. Her failure to 'escape herself' is epitomised in the motif of the window-void.

It seems likely that both *Automat* and *Hotel Room* were directly referencing these mirror-based works by Manet and Degas, Hopper referring to a European tradition that he seemed to have admired more than he often let on. Uncharacteristically, in 1962 Hopper revealed 'I think I'm still an Impressionist.'[83] In exploring these French ideas, his window-voids become empty mirrors that deny both the viewer's eye, as well as the subject, the 'escape' they seek, playing on ideas of illusion and reflection to emphasise his melancholic meditations on mortality.

[82] R. W. Emerson, 'Self Reliance' (1841), *Selected Essays*, (London: Penguin Books, 1982), 198

[83] Levin, *Intimate Biography*, 89

II

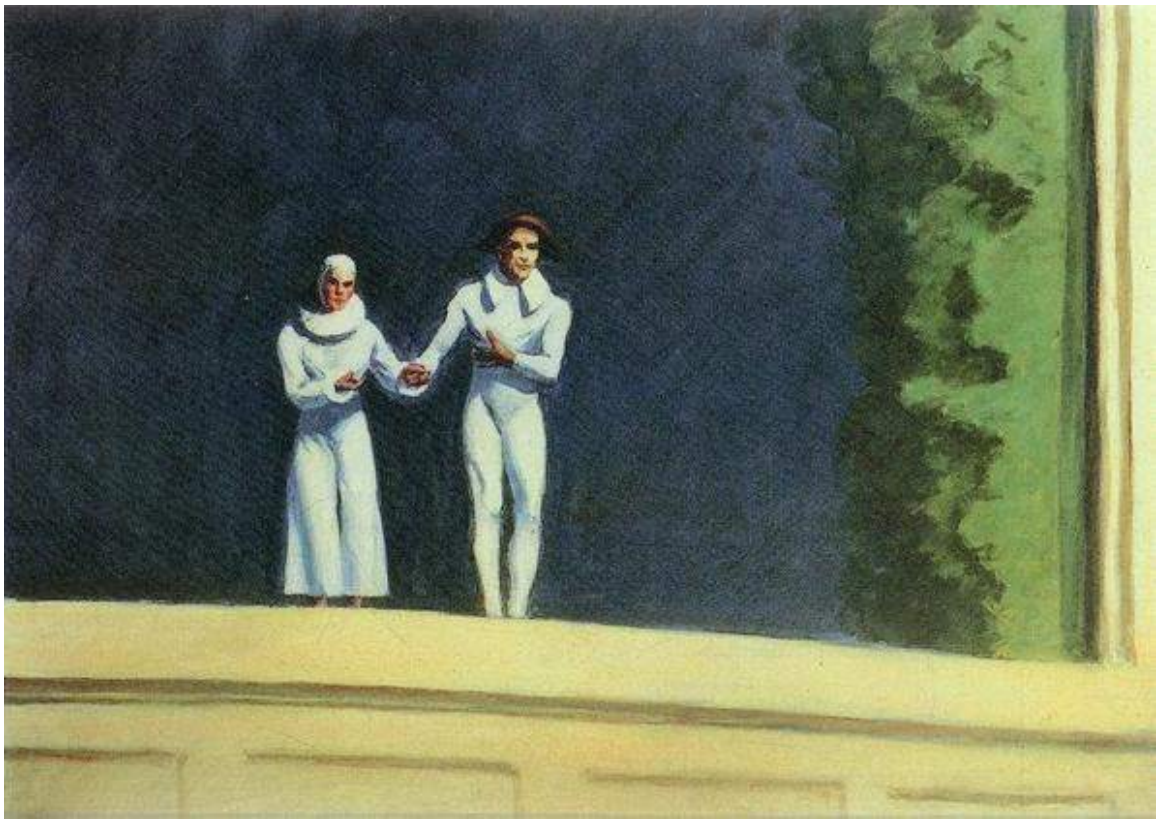
Hopper's black voids are not always present as windows. More often than not, they appear in the darkness of the natural world, a foreboding gloom separating man from the unknown. Nature's relation to departure and death in Hopper's work is bound to a sense of freedom that he perceived in its harmony, removed from the confining realms of man, evoking metaphysical qualities in its sublime beauty that artists like Friedrich had explored before him. The motif of this void in nature appeared early on, in works such as *House at Dusk*, 1935 (figure 26), contrasting the confining life of city dwellers in their small interiors against the overbearing darkness of nature behind it, an expansive void waiting at the top of a flight of steps. It would remain consistently present until his final painting, *Two Comedians*, 1966 (figure 27), which sees Hopper and Jo taking a final bow on the stage of life before they disappear into the void behind them, framed in natural foliage and greenery. It is within this spiritual and metaphysical context, which again owes much to Emerson, that I wish to study a final series of works that juxtapose this void in nature with the window motif.

Excursion into Philosophy, 1959 (figure 28), depicts a post-coital scenario, a pensive man sitting upon the bed, on which a semi-naked woman lies beside him, turned away toward the wall. The male subject fixates upon a rectangle of bright light on the floor, which streams in from the window on the right, through which lies a view split into three sections: blue sky, green grass and a void of darkness beneath.

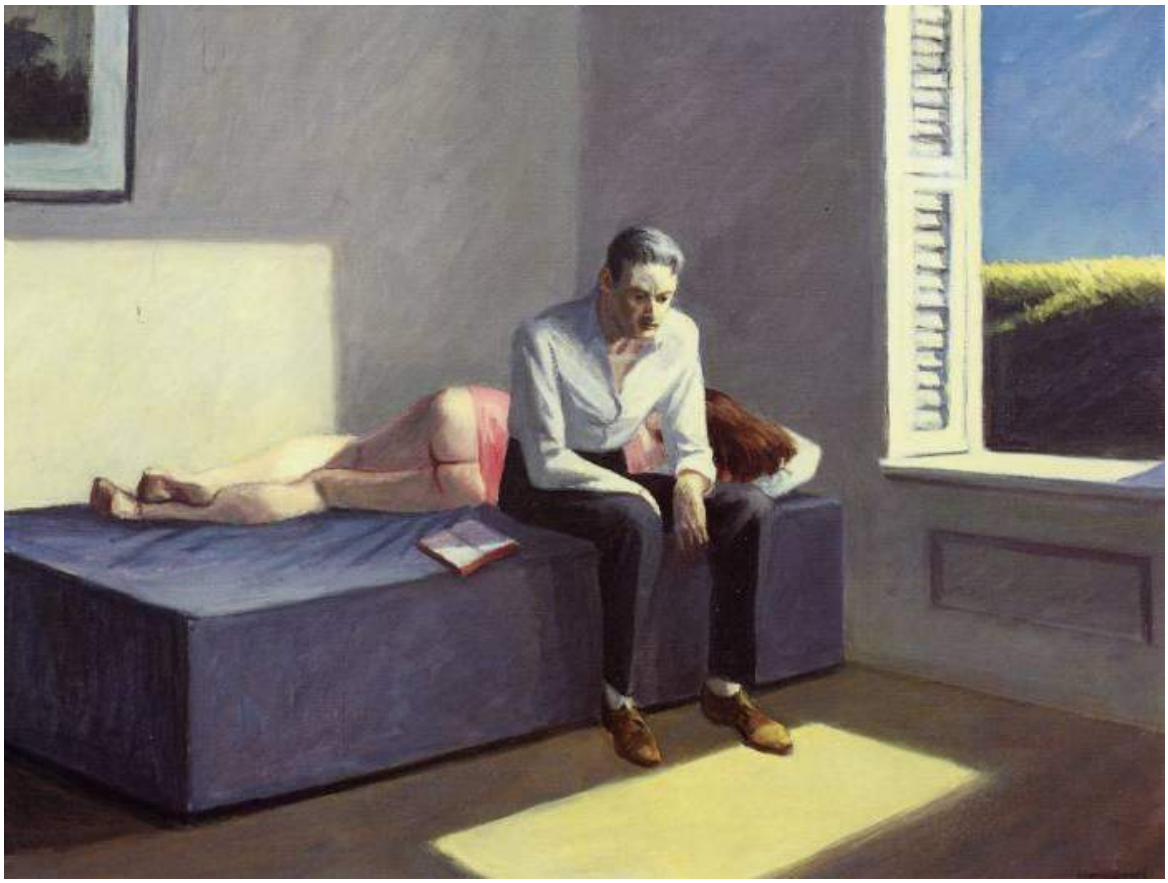
In 1956, Jo noted how Edward 'gazes at book of Rembrandt reproductions',[84] an observation that has led both Levin and Iversen to link this work to Rembrandt's *Saint Paul in Prison* (1627, Stuttgart, Staatsgalerie), though I believe the work bears a stronger connection to Rembrandt's *Philosopher in Mediation*, 1632 (figure 29). The latter depicts a philosopher as he gazes meditatively at the sunlit floor of his interior, juxtaposing the bright light of the window on his left with the pitch-black void at the top of a set of stairs on his right. The symbolic contrast of this blinding light and ultimate darkness calls to

[84] Jo Hopper diary entry for February 10, 1956, quoted in Levin, *Intimate Biography*, 496

26. *House at Dusk*
1935
Oil on canvas, 92.1 x 127 cm
Richmond, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts



27. *Two Comedians*
1966
Oil on canvas, 74.9 x 104.1 cm
Barbara Sinatra



28. *Excursion Into Philosophy*
1959
Oil on canvas, 76.2 x 101.6 cm
Private Collection

mind the words of Wallace Stevens in 1930: 'the exceeding brightness of this early sun/ makes me conceive how dark I have become.'[85] Indeed, Hopper's subject appears to be experiencing a crisis of this sort, facilitated by his contemplation of light. Hopper himself had remarked how 'all animals become sad after sex,'[86] though this post-coital 'sadness' here merges with philosophical thought.

One might consider Hopper's *A Woman in the Sun,* 1961 (figure 30), in relation to this work. Painted two years later, the female subject is experiencing a similar crisis, this time standing within the elongated rectangle of light. John Taggart has written an extensive discussion on this work, which considers Kierkegaard's philosophy on 'melancholy' in relation to the experience of 'crisis':

> "There is a melancholy which in the case of poets, artists thinkers, is a crisis, and on the part of women may be an erotic crisis". Let us put this questionable distinction under erasure and yet keep its principal identification: melancholy = crisis.[87]

Taggart explains that 'crisis' occurs when 'all the possibilities are reduced to a single choice…between faith or sin,' and that this woman, having chosen negatively, is 'waiting or expecting the annihilation of soul/self…she is in melancholy…she mourns for her pre-crisis, pre-conscious self.'[88] This sense of it being 'too late' is reinforced by the symbolic hills through the visible window, which Wells explains have a history in American writing of representing 'memento mori', symbolising 'the melancholy of age, of loss, of the approaching end.'[89] Hopper explained in an interview that 'at fifty you don't think of the end much, but at eighty you think about it a lot.'[90] I believe that *Excursion into*

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[85] W. Stevens, 'The Sun This March' (1930), *The Collected Poems* (New York, 1961), 133, 11. 1-2, quoted in Wells, *Silent Theater*, 28

[86] Jo Hopper diary entry for 6 December 1949, quoted in Levin, *Intimate Biography*, 419

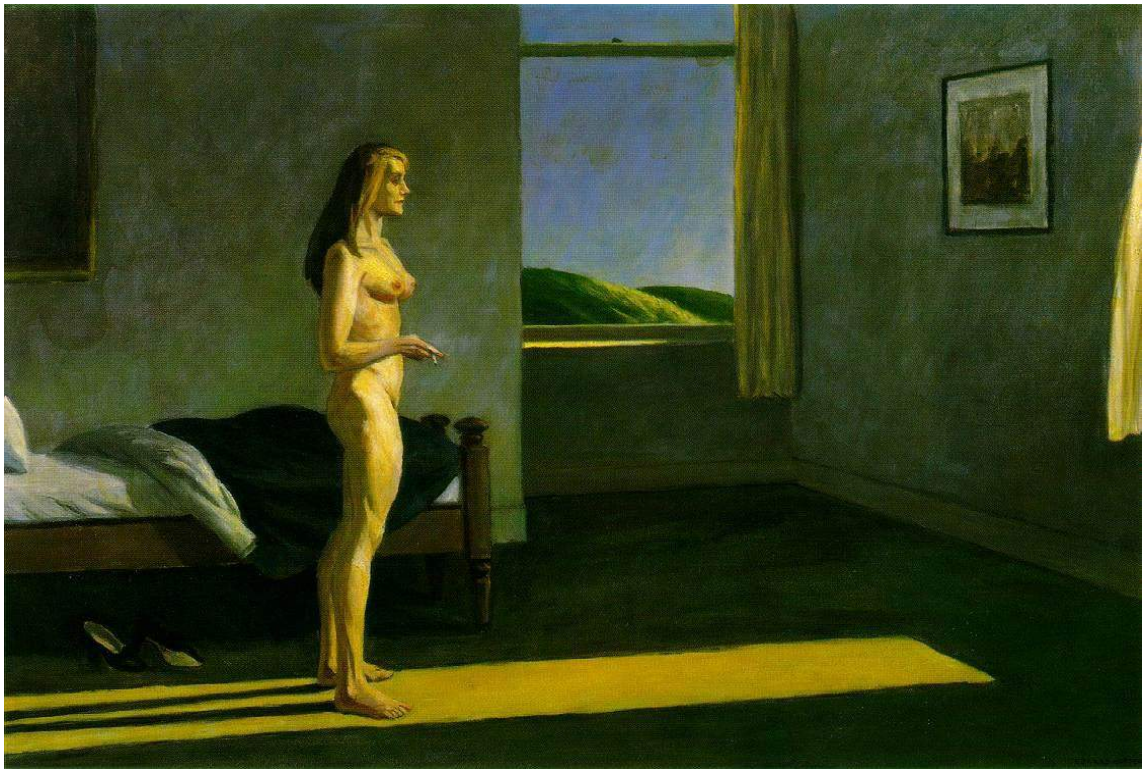
[87] S. Kierkegaard, 'Stages On Life's Way' (1845), quoted in J. Taggart, *Remaining in Light: Ant Meditations on a Painting by Edward Hopper* (Albany, 1993), 11

[88] Taggart, *Remaining in Light,* 12

[89] Wells, *Silent Theater,* 97

[90] O' Doherty, *American Masters,* 11

29. Rembrandt van Rijn
Saint Paul in Prison
1627
Oil on wood, 72.8 x 60.2 cm
Stuttgart, Staatsgalerie



30. *A Woman in the Sun*
1961
Oil on canvas, 101.9 x 155.6cm
New York, Whitney Museum of American Art

Philosophy revolves around this idea of 'crisis' in association with approaching death, represented in the void just outside the window, yet within a complex work that brings Hopper's pictorial iconography full-circle.

Jo Hopper's first description of this work noted the 'book of Plato on couch, resorted to on morning after episode with young woman.'[91] She wrote shortly after that 'the open book is Plato, reread too late.'[92] Scholars have interpreted this reference to Plato in several different ways. Wagstaff, for example, has referred to the allegory of Plato's cave in her interpretation, while Levin discusses 'Platonic love' in relation to the duality of the specific and the ideal. Both interpretations are viable, though I feel that the title of the work holds the key to the Platonic ideas that this man is contemplating.

Emerson had already spoken of the 'true philosopher' in his 1836 essay *Nature,* and in his 1842 essay *The Transcendentalist* spoke of the 'idealist' or 'transcendentalist' as the opposite to the 'materialist', stating how 'mind is the only reality', and how the 'idealist' 'believes in the perpetual openness of the human mind to new influx of light.'[93] This is essentially the mind of the 'true philosopher', and it seems that the man's 'excursion into philosophy' here is an excursion into the mindset of the philosopher, acquired through his reading of Plato.

I believe, therefore, that the passage that Hopper directly refers to is the conversation between Socrates and Simmias in Plato's *Phaedo,* as follows:

> Do we believe that there is such a thing as death?
> Certainly, said Simmias.
> Is it anything else than the separation of the soul from the body?
> …No, that is what it is, he said.
> Consider then…do you think it is the part of a philosopher to be concerned with…the pleasure of sex?
> Not at all.
> What of the other pleasures concerned with the service of the body?

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[91] Jo Hopper diary entry for summer 1959, quoted in Levin, *Intimate Biography,* 523

[92] Edward Hopper Record Book III, 39, quoted in Levin, *Intimate Biography*, 525

[93] Emerson, 'The Transcendentalist' (1842), *Selected Essays*, 242-3

> …I think the true philosopher despises them.
> Do you not think…such a man's concern is not with the body, but that, as far as he can, he turns away from the body towards the soul?
> I do.
> …A man who finds no pleasure in such things and has no part in them is thought by the majority not to deserve to live and to be close to death.
> What you say is certainly true.
> Then what about the actual acquiring of knowledge? Is the body an obstacle when one associates with it in the search for knowledge… do men find any truth in sight or hearing, or are not even the poets forever telling us that we do not see or hear anything accurately…and is it then that the soul of the philosopher most disdains the body, flees from it and seeks to be by itself?
> It appears so.[94]

With this passage in mind, it appears that the man on the bed is experiencing a literal 'excursion into philosophy' 'too late'. He takes on the soul of the philosopher, which should not be concerned with bodily pleasures – represented in the woman behind him. In turning away from the body to the soul, he is 'close to death', foreshadowed in the void outside the window. In embodying the mind of the 'true philosopher', he wishes to move away from the corporeal world, his distrust of the primal senses emphasising the sense of 'unreality' that separates his mind from the physical world. Yet this realisation arrives too late. Having indulged in bodily pleasures, he has only just 'seen the light', as it were – his contemplation of the light on the floor being the focal point of this melancholic 'crisis'.

The actual separation of the soul from the body is prophesised in the void outside the window as one that will not happen in life, but in death. Gottlieb has written how 'folklore considers the window as the means through which the soul escapes.'[95] Thus, Hopper's interior space is again representative of the 'soul', more specifically of the soul's philosophical conflict with potential separation from the body, the resulting acknowledgement of Hopper's own proximity to death.

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[94] Plato, 'Phaedo', *Complete Works*, ed. J. M. Cooper, (Indianopolis, 1997), 56, 64c-65d

[95] Gottlieb, *Window in Art*, 313

This interior, representing Hopper's 'inner experience', the window being the eye to this space of the soul, and the walls as the frame of the physical body, may draw us to the words of the ancient Roman philosopher Lucretius (ca. 99 BC – ca. 55 BC), who wrote explicitly of the body as frame, and of the soul's departure:

> Often the soul, now tottering from some cause
> Craves to go out, and from the frame entire
> Loosened to be; the countenance becomes
> Flaccid, as if the supreme hour were there
>
> …Fears it, perhaps, to stay,
> Pent in a crumbled body? Or lest its house,
> Outworn by venerable length of days,
> May topple down upon it? [96]

Lucretius' 'supreme hour' conforms to the morbid connotations of Hopper's void beyond the 'frame', while his likening of the aged body to an old house further corresponds with Hopper's interior spaces of the 'soul'. The likelihood of Hopper's direct appreciation of Lucretius' text can be traced through his passion for the writing of George Santayana, whose 1935 novel *The Last Puritan* he 'was so eager to read that he immediately seized upon the book when he first spotted it in the Truro library in July 1936.'[97] It so happened that Santayana greatly admired Lucretius, writing his *Three Philosophical Poets: Lucretius, Dante, and Goethe* in 1910. Hopper's passion for Santayana's writing would have undoubtedly led him to this text.

In his final interior of this kind, *Sun In An Empty Room*, 1963 (figure 31), Hopper painted a room that practically shares the composition of *Excursion into Philosophy*. Yet the room is now empty, save for that blinding light, which filters in and casts what Strand calls 'two tomblike parallelograms of light' against the dark wall.[98] Outside the window,

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[96] Titus Lucretius Carus, *Lucretius: On The Nature of Things*, trans. W. E. Leonard, (50 B.C; (Forgotten Books, 2007), 102-8

[97] Levin, *Intimate Biography*, 275

[98] Strand, *Hopper*, 65

the void looms closer than ever, the greenery of the natural world sat above it, almost entirely concealing the sky.

Andre Pijet has written that this light 'symbolises the spiritual liberation of consciousness coming with the moment of death' and the window 'represents the passage from the material state to the spiritual one',[99] while Levin seems to see Edward and Jo as the planes of light, 'purified of flesh and made geometry…polarized and united, emanating from the same vital light.'[100] The consensus is evidently one of finality, a sort of spiritual assumption achieved through this light, the pictorial illustration of the soul's final 'escape' across the window threshold and beyond the confines of the physical body, into the void. Hopper, in coming to terms with his mortality, attempts to resolve the metaphysical 'crisis' that *Excursion Into Philosophy* illustrated, bringing his pictorial iconography full circle. The result is a work that evokes an inner peace, the counterbalance of darkness and light, the separation of soul from body, and the reconciliation of dualities that so consistently haunted Hopper's art.

[99] A. Pijet, 'Hopper's Concept of Self Representation', http://pijet.com/2009/06/15/hoppers-concept-of-self-representation/, 3 March 2011

[100] Levin, *Intimate Biography*, 562

31. *Sun in an Empty Room*
1963
Oil on canvas, 73.7 x 101.6 cm
Private Collection

Conclusion

Brian O' Doherty was on the right track when he wrote that all of Hopper's art 'is a kind of self-portrait'.[101] His painted spaces not only represent the 'vast and varied realm' of his 'inner life', they also question the nature of art, and of life and death in their relationships to 'reality' and 'unreality'. As discussed, Hopper's creative exploration of these themes found its perfect symbolic expression in his ever-present window and void motifs. These 'openings' become points of transference between different literal and metaphysical realms, yet also emphasise persistent ideas of separation and alienation. Moreover, their symbolism is never fixed, consistently referencing an iconographic tradition that offers an array of interpretative possibilities.

Through my discussion of these ideas, I hope to have both enriched the understanding of several of Hopper's major works, and perhaps more importantly, to have widened the scope of the ongoing investigation into the potential influences on his art. This study demonstrates how Hopper's extensive passion for art and literature played a major role in the creation of this pictorial iconography. The fundamental symbols of the window and the void, encompassing a range of dualities including mind – body, interior – exterior, entrapment – escape, dark – light, reality – illusion, yield a wealth of potential meaning. Through their examination, I hope to have painted a richer picture of Edward Hopper as both man and artist.

[101] O' Doherty, *American Masters*, 9

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