

Vulnerable and Threatening: Edward Hopper's
Female Nudes

An honors thesis for the Department of Art History

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Introduction

A skeletal Edward Hopper sits on his knees, hands outstretched, silently begging his wife Josephine for food. Josephine, sitting in the clouds high above him, ignores her starving husband, and devotes her attention instead to the book in her hands. Such is the subject of Hopper's 1932 caricature titled *Meal Time*,¹ a work demonstrating Hopper's feelings of powerlessness with regard to the opposite sex. Edward Hopper has been named one of the twentieth-century's greatest Realist painters,² and yet what is most fascinating about his works is not their ability to capture America's essence, but rather their ability to capture the artist himself. This is exemplified by an informal series of female nudes in domestic interiors beginning in 1909,³ and continuing into the 1960s.⁴ The series attests to the complexities of Hopper the man, as illustrated by Hopper the artist.

In considering Edward Hopper's works, one inevitably pays careful attention to those paintings that critics and scholars have themselves considered most: *Nighthawks*, *Automat*, and *Office at Night*. Art historians have been fascinated with the theme of alienation and loneliness that pervades such works. They have, in fact, focused almost solely on the thematic rather than the theoretical.⁵ This is not to say that Marxist or feminist scholarship, for example, on Edward Hopper's works is completely nonexistent, but rather that it is dwarfed by the number of thematic analyses. His female nudes,

¹ Vivien Green Fryd, *Art and the Crisis of Marriage: Edward Hopper and Georgia O'Keeffe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 44, 45.

² Wieland Schmied and Edward Hopper, *Edward Hopper: Portraits of America* (Munich: Prestel, 1995), 7.

³ Carol Troyen et al., *Edward Hopper: [exhibition, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, May 6, 2007 - August 19, 2007, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, September 16, 2007 - January 21, 2008, The Art Institute of Chicago, February 16, 2008 - May 11, 2008]* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007), 177.

⁴ Mark Strand, *Hopper* (Hopewell, NJ: Ecco Press, 1994), 36.

⁵ Margaret Iversen, *Beyond Pleasure: Freud, Lacan, Barthes* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 21.

however, resist mere thematic examination. Psychoanalytic theory instead emerges as the appropriate lens through which to examine Hopper's female nudes. Freudian psychoanalysis is particularly useful as a theoretical perspective for Hopper's female nudes because it develops from a combination of formal, historical, and biographical analyses. Hopper's biography is so fraught with gender complexities that psychoanalysis becomes a necessary tool for examining his female nudes. This thesis does not attempt to untangle the intricacies of psychoanalytic theory as it is applied to visual images, but rather utilizes its basic principles in order to explore how Hopper's female nudes are connected to his anxieties about the female sex.

The works to be explored all have a number of formal similarities motivating the claim that Hopper used his art to express his unconscious desire to control the female. The composition is often tight and constraining, the perspective often forces the viewer into a voyeuristic position, and the woman is always the piece's sole figure. Hopper isolates his women in order to exert a greater control over them. With his early works, he endeavors to control the female generally. After his marriage, however, Hopper's desire to dominate focuses on his wife.

In yet another striking similarity among the works, the male's presence is always available symbolically. Though Hopper never includes a male figure next to his female nudes, the male is present elsewhere in the works: in the rumpled sheets or phallic bedposts, for example. Interesting too is the unsettling mood evoked by these formal elements, particularly the voyeuristic perspective. The women never appear entirely comfortable in their domestic confines. Hopper makes these formal choices repeatedly, demonstrating his constant desire to depict the female figure in a way that permits him

total power over her. Walter Wells argues just such a point: "...the sheer abundance of lone females in room staring out of windows in Hopper's pictures...would make it remiss not to question the impulses underlying those leitmotifs..."⁶ Wells locates precisely what draws the inquiring viewer to Hopper's female nudes, and warns against ignoring the complexities the works present. *Summer Interior* of 1909 is just such a work, and is typical of Hopper's female nudes: the female subject is compositionally locked in her environment, she is partially nude, and the male is present symbolically, both in the unmade bed behind the woman and in the phallic bedposts at the bed's end. *Summer Interior* is perhaps the archetypal work of the series, containing all of the formal qualities that demonstrate Hopper's anxieties.

Hopper's repeated attention to particular formal details in his female nudes introduces the relevance of a psychoanalytic perspective. Hopper fetishizes the female sex by repeatedly and obsessively presenting the female form in a specific fashion. E. Ann Kaplan proposes that both fetishism and voyeurism are Freudian psychoanalytic ideas that aid in discussing what the female in art or film represents.⁷ It is precisely these two qualities prevalent in Hopper's female nudes that make it difficult, or at least undesirable, to avoid a psychoanalytic reading.

In order to reach a psychoanalytic reading, the thesis will first examine the time period in which Hopper was working. Deepening Hopper's sense of female oppression were the changes taking place around him in twentieth-century America: an historical approach to Hopper's works is necessary. The changes in America, specifically the

⁶ Walter Wells and Edward Hopper, *Silent Theater: the Art of Edward Hopper* (London: Phaidon Press, 2007), 59.

⁷ E. A. Kaplan, "Is the Gaze Male?," in *Powers of Desire: the Politics of Sexuality*, by Ann Barr Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 310.

uncertainty and confusion they created in men's minds, were happening at precisely the moment in which Hopper was working. Women began entering the workforce in greater numbers⁸, contraception heralded the idea of sexual enjoyment for the female sex⁹, and the divorce rate increased.¹⁰ America saw an increase in female autonomy. While crucial for a move toward equality between the sexes, these changes were unsettling to those used to Victorian traditions. Women's newfound claims to autonomy are defined as cultural sources for Hopper's anxiety regarding the female sex.

Broad historical preoccupations lead to more specific, biographical ones:

Hopper's life must be examined. Gerry Souter argues:

Contrary to the case of many famous artists, it is unnecessary, or even impossible, to ignore Hopper the man in studying his art. With Hopper, the whole fabric of his art seems to be completely interwoven with his personal character and manner of living."¹¹

Rather than weakening the art historian's understanding of Edward Hopper's art, the facts of his life enhance a reading of his pieces. Hopper grew up in a household dominated by his mother. The fiercely capable Elizabeth Hopper brought to the family those things expected from the patriarch: financial stability, social vivaciousness, and an authoritative disposition.¹² Edward's father Garret, the ostensible patriarch himself, demonstrated a decided lack of masculinity as defined by late nineteenth century society: unable to

⁸ Fryd, *Art and the Crisis*, 20.

⁹ Ann Barr Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson, eds., *Powers of Desire: the Politics of Sexuality* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 17.

¹⁰ Fryd, *Art and the Crisis*, 21.

¹¹ Gerry Souter, *Edward Hopper: Light and Dark* (New York, N. Y.: ParkstonePress International, 2007), 222.

¹² Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper: an Intimate Biography* (New York: Rizzoli, 2007), 15.

properly run a business, socially timid, and entirely dependent on his wife for support.¹³ Edward, from birth, witnessed his parents undermining their “proper” gender roles in order to take on those of the opposite sex. In doing so, the family upset normative middle class domestic roles.¹⁴ This is not to suggest that such undermining resulted in a serious psychological problem in young Edward, but rather that it did indeed create anxieties that would come to dominate his artistic decisions. Hopper would have been perplexed by the way in which his own household dared to conduct itself in a manner opposite to what mores of the time espoused. It is here that the roots of gender role confusion are located in Edward Hopper’s life. This confusion seeped into Hopper’s marriage with Josephine Nivison, a woman who exhibited many qualities similar to Hopper’s mother.¹⁵ Edward Hopper spent decades unconsciously attempting to restore the female to what patriarchal society dictated was her rightful place in the domestic interior by preoccupying himself in his paintings with representing female figures in a particularized fashion.

From a contemporary feminist perspective, the women in Hopper’s life demonstrated an admirable independence. From a young boy’s perspective, female autonomy was more complicated. The analysis of Hopper’s early biography does not blame Hopper’s mother and grandmother for overpowering Edward with their capableness. It instead defines that unusual capableness as an early source for his eventual anxieties regarding women.

Hopper’s marriage only added to his anxieties regarding women. Hopper’s wife Jo was a strong woman whose independence only furthered his sense of inferiority. After his marriage, Hopper began to use his wife as his model. There is a way in which

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 23.

¹⁵ Brian O’Doherty, *American Masters: the Voice and the Myth*. (New York: Random House, 1973), 13.

Hopper's anxieties regarding women became specific to his wife. He artistically exerted control over the female figure because he could not exert it in his marriage. Though Hopper did convince Jo to abandon her career as a professional artist, Jo's strong personality still dominated the marriage. This biographical reality provides the basis for the psychoanalytic examination that the thesis takes.



Figure 1

Hopper's biography, combined with his works' formal qualities and the time in which they were created, introduces psychoanalysis as a desirable theoretical tool. Though scholars' use of psychoanalytic theory is often difficult to find on Hopper's works, it does exist. It would seem that scholars avoided a psychoanalytic approach because they were more interested in the repetition of various themes in Hopper's *oeuvre*. They focused their attention on the similarities among Hopper's pieces featuring architecture or Gloucester scenes rather than psychoanalytically examining such pieces. Yet in 1986, artist Victor Burgin examined Hopper's 1940 *Office at Night* (Fig. 1), boldly combining psychoanalytic, semiotic, Marxist, and feminist theory.¹⁶ The painting depicts a man and woman in a dimly lit office. The man sits behind a desk focusing on the papers in front of him. The woman, ostensibly his secretary, stands to his left before an open file cabinet. She wears a dress accentuating every curve of her voluptuous body, and looks in her boss's direction. Burgin sees the work as simultaneously raising tensions involved with the introduction of the erotic into the workplace and satisfying such tensions: "In a more recent (Lacanian) terminology, we could characterize Hopper's picture as a *mise-en-*

¹⁶ Victor Burgin, *Between* (Oxford [Oxfordshire: B. Blackwell, 1986), 182.

scene of the conflict of “Desire” and “Law.”¹⁷ Burgin then uses Freudian theory to suggest that the male, refusing to meet his female secretary’s gaze in a “Freudian disavowal of guilt,”¹⁸ upholds patriarchal values, stabilizing the erotic threat the female presents.

Burgin’s theoretical approach to one of Hopper’s most famous works implies that there is, in fact, a great deal to be found in the artist’s *oeuvre* using a psychoanalytic lens. A typical reading of *Office at Night* would ignore the painting’s Freudian implications, and focus instead on the apparent isolation between man and woman, as seen so often in Hopper’s works. Burgin’s combination of a theoretical approach that involves psychoanalysis reveals the gender complexities in the work that go beyond the conventions of an attractive female secretary waiting for her male boss’s command. Burgin’s analysis finds that it is perhaps the female figure who holds more power in the painting. The only way for the male figure to exert his authority is by refusing to move his gaze from his work. Burgin’s use of psychoanalysis demonstrates the usefulness of the theoretical approach on Hopper’s paintings, particularly when they involve a female figure.

Although Burgin’s analysis is not focused on a work featuring a lone female nude, his writing is also useful as a means of considering what the male signifies. Burgin sees the male in *Office at Night* as signifying the rational opposite to the female’s emotional.¹⁹ Hopper’s female nudes never include a male figure. The male presence can, however, be found through the process of semiotic deconstruction. Just as Burgin suggests that the

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 184.

¹⁹ John Howett, Jon Bird, and Edward Hopper, *Victor Burgin: Office at Night and Danaïdes/dames* (Charlotte: Knight Gallery/Spirit Square Center for the Arts, 1988), 11.

male in *Office at Night* stands in for something else, so too can an object in a painting signify the male. In some of the paintings to be explored, the male can be symbolically found in a phallic object. In others, he is seen in the unmade bed on which the female figure kneels. It is important to locate the male's symbolic presence within the paintings because it demonstrates the way in which Hopper objectifies the female. This objectification exemplifies his attempt to control the women in his art.

Laura Mulvey's seminal "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" explores, from a feminist and psychoanalytic perspective, the way in which the female form is eroticized cinematically as the object of the male gaze.²⁰ A number of scholars have pointed to the cinematic quality of Hopper's works²¹, suggesting that there is a basis for reading the women in Hopper's pieces as Mulvey reads the women in cinema. Ivo Kranzfelder suggests that, "Hopper painted as if in an attempt to capture an individual frame of a film strip. He divided perception into distinct phases...".²² Kranzfelder focuses on Hopper's tendency to paint as though producing cinematic stills, or moments in time. Margaret Iversen similarly demonstrates the ease with which one can view Hopper's work in cinematic terms by devoting a great deal of attention to comparing Hopper's work with Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*.²³ Such preoccupations and comparisons demonstrate the validity with which one can apply cinematic theory to Hopper's works.

Mulvey locates the first of the three male gazes as that of the person behind the camera, assumed to be male.²⁴ Hopper's undeniable masculinity immediately genders his

²⁰ Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Visual and Other Pleasures*, by Laura Mulvey (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 19.

²¹ Brian O'Doherty, "Hopper's Look," in *Edward Hopper*, by Edward Hopper, Sheena Wagstaff, and David Anfam (London: Tate Pub., 2004), 90.

²² Ivo Kranzfelder and Edward Hopper, *Edward Hopper, 1882-1967: Vision of Reality* (Köln: B. Taschen, 1995), 89.

²³ Iversen, *Beyond*, 21.

²⁴ Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure," 20.

gaze. The second gaze is that of the man involved in the cinematic narrative itself. The hero uses his gaze to objectify his female counterpart.²⁵ The paintings being examined in this particular study depict women alone. The second gaze, therefore, is located symbolically through the process of semiotic deconstruction in other parts of the painting. Objects signifying the male presence are located in each of the paintings to be studied, demonstrating the way in which Hopper inserts the male presence in his works without actually painting or etching a male form. Finally, the third gaze is that of the male viewer, who takes on the gazes of the male cameraman (painter) and male within the work (present symbolically).²⁶ This last gaze can of course apply to male viewers of Hopper's works²⁷, who were perhaps extensions of Hopper himself: threatened by women's newfound independence.

Victor Burgin is not the only writer to examine Hopper's works psychoanalytically, nor is Laura Mulvey the only art historian to consider the way in which the female form is aesthetically objectified. Psychologists Stephen B. Safran and Monty L. Kary acknowledge the influence of women on Hopper's art in their piece "Edward Hopper: The Artistic Expression of the Unconscious Wish for Reunion with the Mother." They are, in fact, preoccupied with Hopper's consistent depiction of lone females within interiors. The two suggest that Hopper, "used his art as a projection of his internalized object-world-the wish for reunion with the mother. The abstract symbolism in his art expresses the primitive desire."²⁸ Safran and Kary see the ubiquitous house of

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Schmied, *Edward Hopper*, 74.

²⁸ Stephen B. Safran and Monty L. Kary, "Edward Hopper: The Artistic Expression of the Unconscious Wish for Reunion with the Mother," *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 13 (1986): 308.

Hopper's paintings in Freudian terms, as representing the womb.²⁹ What is most relevant about Safran and Kary's analysis is that they use psychoanalytic symbolism in order to study Hopper's works. So too does this thesis endeavor to find Freudian symbols within Hopper's female nudes in order to prove the way in which he objectifies his female figures.

Applying psychoanalytic theory to Hopper's works is therefore not without precedent. Its application to a specific collection of his female nudes, however, demands further exploration. Hopper used his art to do what he could not in reality, sublimating his repressed fantasy of exerting control over the female³⁰ in all of the paintings to be explored. Having watched his mother overpower his father, only to experience the same thing in his own marriage, Hopper could only impose his dominance on the opposite sex artistically. As Safran and Kary psychoanalytically examined Hopper's works, so too does this thesis locate within Hopper's paintings symbols that suggest his desire to access a power in art that he could not attain in reality.

Discussing women in basic psychoanalytic terms is useful when considering the female figure in any aesthetic representation. In examining the ways in which the female is objectified in film, Mulvey finds that the reason for such objectification has a great deal to do with the male's desire to destroy the threat the female poses. This threat is present first in the male's childhood, when he unconsciously explains the absence of a penis in the female to be the result of castration.³¹ The female, having been castrated, possesses unfamiliar genitalia. This organ is so unfamiliar to the male that he views the

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Elizabeth Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism: a Reappraisal* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 10.

³¹ Ibid., 13.

woman as dangerous, objectifying her in order to control her.³² This is precisely what occurs with Hopper's female nudes: his repressed anxieties about women create a desire to destroy the threat they present. He does this by objectifying his female subjects, forcing them to function at the mercy of the male gaze. In all of the paintings to be considered, the women's nudity increases their vulnerability, as well as emphasizes their femininity.

Hopper also denies his female subjects any access to an exit from his painted scenes. Freud saw doors as symbolizing the "genital opening in women."³³ In every one of the pictures of female nudes to be studied, the women are featured against prominently displayed windows. Though some of the works hint at forms that may represent doors, such structures are never clearly depicted. Hopper deliberately leaves out such exits in order to confine the female to her interior. Women were becoming more sexually liberated in the twentieth century, a change that threatened American men. Hopper effectively removes this idea of sexual freedom by not including a representation (door) of the vagina, that thing necessary for female sexual pleasure. Hopper sets up a strict dichotomy between exterior and interior, implying that his female subjects are firmly rooted in the latter. The window, therefore, is a symbolic representation of the freedom denied the women: they can never actually exit through it, but can only gaze longingly out of it. Though culturally they were gaining greater autonomy, in Hopper's artistic fantasy, women must remain confined to their interior spaces.

The typically enigmatic Edward Hopper once revealed:

So much of every art is an expression of the subconscious, that it seems to

³² Kaplan, "Gaze," 311.

³³ Wells, *Silent Theater*, 61.

me most all of the important qualities are put there unconsciously, and little of importance by the conscious intellect. But these are things for the psychologist to untangle.³⁴

Hopper himself speaks to way in which art is often created by a hidden portion of an artist's mind. This is, in fact, what makes art so fascinating to study. Hopper's female nudes are most effectively studied using a combination of formal, historical, and biographical perspectives. All three of these theoretical approaches lead to the psychoanalytic readings that will dominate the second and third chapters of the thesis. The thesis will begin by examining the female nude that Hopper painted latest in his life. From there, it will move back in time to the first of his female nudes in order to untangle the complications that culminated in the final painting. Hopper may indeed have preferred that a psychologist "untangle" the depths of his works, but a psychoanalytically-inclined art historical analysis will serve as a desirable alternative.

³⁴ Edward Hopper, "Three Statements," in *Edward Hopper*, by Lloyd Goodrich (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1971), 152.

Introduction Image Bibliography

Figure 1, Hopper, Edward. *Office at Night*, oil on canvas, 1940. Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. canvasreplicas.com.

Chapter One:

A Woman in the Sun

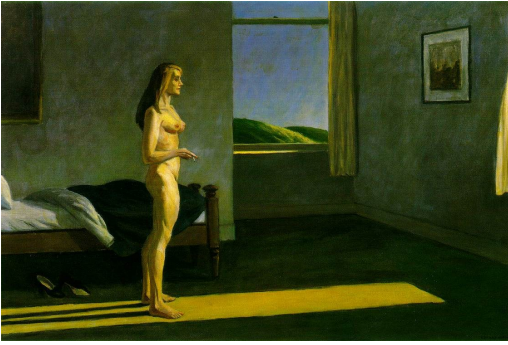


Figure 1

Edward Hopper's female nudes present a number of similarities that allow them to function as a collective series, albeit an informal one. Hopper created his female nudes in a rapidly changing America, a

reality not to be ignored when considering his work. Historical, biographical, and psychoanalytic perspectives necessarily intertwine as Hopper's works are considered in relation to the time period in which they were created. *A Woman in the Sun* of 1961 (Fig. 1) is Hopper's resigned solution to the anxieties that the modern woman of twentieth century America created. It is useful to begin exploring Hopper's series of female nudes with this painting, which chronologically comes last in the series. By first elucidating how Hopper resolved his anxieties, one can more clearly understand the foundations and development of such anxieties.

A nude woman stands in profile, bathed in a rectangle of sunlight coming from a window outside of the frame. She stares out of the window. A cigarette, which she seems to have forgotten, dangles from her right hand. The open window's curtains blow into the room, adding to the scene's natural feel. The woman turns her upper body toward the viewer, allowing the viewer to see both breasts. The figure's profile is visible. *A Woman in the Sun*, created six years before Hopper's death, features many of the same preoccupations as the works that came before it: centrally featured nude woman, prominent window, voyeuristic perspective, and an unmade bed are all present. And yet there are a number of essential differences that suggest the work represents a different moment in Hopper's psychology.

A Woman in the Sun displays Hopper's concerns about the independent, modern female, but functions as a kind of solution to the anxieties the female creates. Paintings that come before it place the female nude within an urban environment. *A Woman in the Sun* instead situates the female figure in the countryside. Hopper has solved the problem of female autonomy by removing her from the city: the woman is situated in a more natural environment than ever before seen in Hopper's female nudes. Hopper has returned the female to her most enduring stereotype by connecting her to nature. Soft, curved natural hills have replaced the tall, erect urban structures that dominate Hopper's earlier female nudes. The female figure in *A Woman in the Sun* is still the painting's compositional center, emphasized by the stark contrast between her angular body and the hills' curves. The light falling on her body further heightens the figure's centrality, functioning as a spotlight.

The composition is otherwise much more open than in the paintings that come before it; there is a greater sense of space in the domestic interior. A framed painting hangs on the wall next to the window out of which the woman gazes, personalizing the interior space. The woman stands in front of an unmade bed, yet the heels by the bed and the cigarette the woman holds allude to the woman's modern sexuality. Robert Hobbs finds that, "the middle-aged woman appears to be no virgin—even though she sleeps in a single bed."³⁵ The female's sexuality is evident from the cigarette she lets dangle from her hand and the discarded heels by her bed. One need only imagine the night that ended with the removed heels and lit cigarette. In order to best understand the painting, it must be contextualized within its time period.

³⁵ Robert Carleton Hobbs and Edward Hopper, *Edward Hopper* (New York: H.N. Abrams, in Association with the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1987), 142.

A Changing America

Twentieth-century America was overwhelmed by a number of social changes, changes that personally affected Hopper. As women began entering the workforce in greater numbers, contraception heralded the idea of sexual enjoyment, and the divorce rate increased, as America saw an increase in female autonomy. These are cultural sources for Hopper's anxiety regarding women, sources that began in the early twentieth century and continued throughout the 1900s. Hopper painted his first female nude, *Summer Interior*, in 1909, and created his last, *A Woman in the Sun*, in 1961. The years in between those two works were tumultuous, and rife with social change. Exploring Hopper's female nudes in light of the history surrounding them reveals the works as artistic representations of what was happening in twentieth century America.

A major change of the 1900s occurred in the professional sphere. America was accustomed to men occupying that sphere, but was unprepared for female intervention:

Between 1890 and 1920, the proportion of single women pursuing gainful occupations grew from 19 percent to 24 percent. With more women working within the public sphere, the Victorian distinction between the outside "male" world of work and the "female" domestic world at home broke down.³⁶

Women demanded professional equality with their male counterparts. Frederick Lewis Allen emphasizes the larger implications of this move toward equality by suggesting that it deviated from traditional ideas of a woman's "proper" environment. America was pulling away from its Victorian past and entering a new age. It was precisely during these

³⁶ Vivien Green. Fryd, *Art and the Crisis of Marriage: Edward Hopper and Georgia O'Keeffe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 20.

years that Hopper was painting his early female nudes. His representation of the gender can be contextualized around these historical developments. The paintings represent the anxieties of the male gender entirely, not simply those of Hopper alone. The seated woman in his *Eleven A.M.* of 1926 signifies more than Hopper's desire to control his wife, signifying instead every male's desire to control the women around him. The female subject in *Morning in a City* signifies more than just a threat to Hopper. She represents instead a threat to the male sex.

Frederick Lewis Allen describes the moral changes in the young people of the 1920s, particularly the way women were beginning to smoke and drink, disobey their parents, etc.: "Supposedly 'nice' girls were smoking cigarettes-openly and defiantly... They were drinking-somewhat less openly but often all too efficaciously. There were stories of daughters of the most exemplary parents getting drunk."³⁷ Smoking and drinking were behaviors acceptable for men, but jarring when taken up by women. Women drinking alcohol, particularly with the intention of becoming intoxicated, was scandalous. Allen suggests that the changes in female behavior were dramatic enough to cause rifts within family structures, and that the changes in young girls were only symptomatic of larger, more problematic ones: "For the revolt of the younger generation was only the beginning of a revolution in manners and morals that was already beginning to affect men and women of every age in every part of the country."³⁸ Allen broadens the idea of moral change to suggest that American society generally was changing. Women were moving into a world previously dominated by men, and the implications of such a move seeped into every corner of American life.

³⁷ Frederick Lewis Allen, "The Revolution in Manners and Morals," in *Only Yesterday, an Informal History of the Nineteen-twenties*, by Frederick Lewis Allen... (New York and London: Harper and Brothers, 1931), 90.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 94.

One such corner was the artistic sphere. The dramatic changes in American society did not escape Hopper's notice. His works, particularly in the 1920s and beyond, can be looked at through an historical lens as representing the changes that he saw happening around him. All of these changes challenged everything that America thought it knew about the way women were to behave. Women were drinking and smoking, becoming sexually liberated, and exerting their presence in the workplace: these behaviors affected the country's moral code, as the rest of America (males) was forced to react to a new way of thinking. Though many of the historical changes being discussed began during the 1920s and 1930s, they were trends that continued on well into the 1950s and 1960s. One such trend involved a greater interest in sex as an act of pleasure.

As contraception became more widely accepted, women began to express their sexual independence. The possibility for sexual experimentation as introduced by contraception, "opened the way for a new understanding of women as sexual objects in their own right, no longer simply recipients of male advances but beings with their own erotic needs, capable of making their own initiatives."³⁹ The idea that a woman could enjoy intercourse was liberating for women, allowing them to engage in sex for their own pleasure, not simply for their husband's. This is not to suggest that women never enjoyed sex during the Victorian period, but rather that they could not be open about their enjoyment.

The idea of birth control was simultaneously exciting and terrifying in its implications for female freedom:

both middle-class men and women had reason to fear the very

³⁹ Ann Barr Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson, eds., *Powers of Desire: the Politics of Sexuality* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 17.

contraceptive devices their circumstances dictated that they needed. For men, birth control evoked female independence. Free access to birth control would have allowed women to decide what portion of their lives they wanted to devote to motherhood and what portion to other pursuits.⁴⁰

Men were uneasy with the freedoms that contraception offered women. Women's newfound ability to delay, or ignore completely, raising children threatened the traditional idea of family that was so firmly rooted in American culture. This power took away from patriarchal authority, as women made their own choices regarding the family. Men were uneasy with this loss of power.

All of the changes that appeared to positively affect women's lives were not, in fact, without their problems. The changes shook America to its very core, threatening to destabilize the moral code that society had, for centuries, been taught to follow. Jay Kleinberg emphasizes that though women were experiencing new freedoms, they were still limited in their opportunities:

Premarital intercourse increased, as did the use of birth-control devices. Women participated in more athletic activities and were movie stars, but there were few women directors or producers; women rarely controlled the content or finance of the movies. . . . roles open to women were very limited. They were either vampish seductresses or innocent child-women."⁴¹

Kleinberg suggests that male anxiety curtailed female equality. Uncomfortable with allowing the women too much power, they instead sought to contain the expressions of

⁴⁰ Barbara Epstein, "Family, Sexual Morality, and the Popular Movements in Turn-of-the-Century America," in *Powers of Desire: the Politics of Sexuality*, by Ann Barr Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 121.

⁴¹ Jay Kleinberg, "American Women in the Twentieth Century," in *America's Century: Perspectives on U.S. History since 1900*, by Iwan W. Morgan and Neil A. Wynn (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1993), 219.

autonomy that women were beginning to demand. Just as female artists entering their guilds and exhibits made male artists uneasy, the male population generally was intent on controlling female involvement in roles or professions that would allow them a certain amount of power. The tension between what women wanted and what society (men) allowed them to be can be seen in Hopper's female nudes. The works are his means of controlling the independent female, relegating her to spheres of his own making. Hopper's earlier paintings position the female figure in the city, where she most explicitly expressed her modernity. *A Woman in the Sun* of 1961 removes the female from the city and situates her in the country, indicating the painting's attempt to reconcile itself with the way women had gained power in American society by allowing her a greater freedom (as expressed by the more open composition). By the 1930s, the trends that were only just beginning in the 1920s were fully expressed, and not all of them with favorable consequences, particularly to men.

The divorce rate increased, due, as Ogburn concluded in his 1933 presidential report to President Hoover, to "the weakening of the functions which served to hold the family together."⁴² Though an increase in the divorce rate implied women's freedom to leave marriages in which they were unhappy, it also suggests the extreme prevalence of marital discord. This discord appears to have been strongest in the middle class, precisely the class that Edward Hopper lived in for most of his life. Further, the idea that men and women should be free to be sexually experimental within their marriage was equally problematic:

It was one thing to proclaim that married couples should be free to find sex adventure wherever they pleased and that marriage was something

⁴² Fryd, *Art and the Crisis*, 21.

independent of such casual sport; it was quite another thing for a man or woman in whom the ideal of romantic marriage had been ingrained since early childhood to tolerate infidelities when they actually took place.⁴³

Here is clearly the disjunction between the new ideas of sexual freedom and the Victorian morals of the past. Women (and men) had difficulty throwing themselves fully into a new moral code when the old was so firmly impressed in their minds. Allen reminds us that though it would appear that the twentieth century's changes meant only good things for women, the complications of those changes were difficult for Americans: both those who chose to partake in such things as open marriages and those who simply struggled to understand those around them doing so.

The family structure still rooted in Victorian traditions was beginning to crumble in the 1920s and 1930s. All of the changes occurred as Hopper was painting his female nudes, and when he entered into married life. Though he was in Europe for part of the early 1900s (Oct. 1906 to summer 1907 in Paris, again in 1909 for six months, almost entirely in France, and finally in 1910 for about four months in Spain and France⁴⁴), he was in America enough to be influenced by the dramatic changes overwhelming the country. Hopper, in fact, was working in New York for much of the 1910s, and was therefore situated in an urban center exposed to such changes.

There was, in the 1920s and 1930a, an entire generation that had been brought up with Victorian ideals. The fact that their offspring were so flagrantly disregarding such ideals was an outrage to them:

People who have been brought up to think that it is sinful for women to

⁴³ Allen, *The Revolution*, 121.

⁴⁴ Lloyd Goodrich, *Edward Hopper* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1971), 13, 14.

smoke or drink, and scandalous for sex to be discussed across the luncheon table, and unthinkable for a young girl to countenance strictly dishonorable attentions from a man, cannot all at once forget the admonitions of their childhood.⁴⁵

There is the sense that American society was incredibly divided in the mid-twentieth century between those who believed in the new moral code of the younger generations and those who were scandalized by it. Hopper was himself brought up with the Victorian ideals that were being so flagrantly challenged from the 1920s onward. A keen observer of those around him, Hopper would not have missed the friction that these changes caused. From a biographical and psychoanalytic perspective, earlier works like *Eleven A.M.* and *Morning in a City* aim to exert a control of Hopper's dominating wife Jo. Contextualized historically, however, the works depict Hopper's reaction to the ways in which women were fighting for their equality and autonomy. This is especially true of *Eleven A.M.* in which there is a clear distinction between masculine and feminine worlds. In reality, such worlds were broken up into the professional and domestic, a division that blurred in the early 1900s.

“Resolving” Anxieties

Returning to *A Woman in the Sun* of 1961, we see something very different taking place than in Hopper's earlier works. The composition is much more open, giving the sense that the painting is letting its female figure exist in greater freedom. She looks out of one window, but of greater interest to the art historian is the window behind her. Gone are the erect elements of an urban landscape. Luscious green hills roll against a wide

⁴⁵ Allen, *The Revolution*, 118.

expanse of blue sky. There is something feminine about the curves of these green hills, an element not echoed in the female figure's bony structure. The work juxtaposes the woman's harsh modernity with nature's soft curves. The painting has removed the female figure from her domestic interior within an urban environment and placed her in a domestic interior in the countryside. It is only here that the painting will allow its modern female figure any sort of freedom.

The female figure is no less sexualized than those figures that came before her. Michael Culver finds of *A Woman in the Sun* that:

Hopper's work is not lacking a good measure of traditional sexism. In fact, the nude in *A Woman in the Sun* is indirectly related to a traditional sexist pose employed to show the breasts and buttocks of the female figure simultaneously.⁴⁶

There is a way in which the painting exhibits the female figure's form more than ever before, implying the way in which Hopper was not willing to make his female figures any less vulnerable than he had in works in the past. By maintaining, and even increasing, the availability of the female's nude body, the painting suggests that Hopper's female nude will be forever at the mercy of the male gaze.

A Woman in the Sun removes the female from the urban environment in which she could do the most harm: domestically, sexually, and professionally. In the country, the woman can remain modern: she may smoke, even go out at night, but does so in an environment that is less affected by her behavior. In the last of his female nudes, Hopper has finally managed to truly relegate the female to the place where she can do the least

⁴⁶ Michael Culver, *The Image of Woman in the Art of Ernest Hemingway, Edward Hopper, and Howard Hawks*, diss., University of Louisville, 1986, 78.

harm. In his earlier works, Hopper aggressively reacts to the modern woman by displaying both a masculine and feminine environment and refusing to allow her to infiltrate the former. *A Woman in the Sun* suggests that Hopper, finally, has resigned himself to the idea that the modern American woman was not a passing phase. He deals with this by allowing the female to remain modern, but only away from the masculine city.

Chapter One Image Bibliography

Figure 1, Hopper, Edward. *A Woman in the Sun*, oil on canvas, 1961. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. dailyartfixx.com.

Chapter Two:

Summer Interior and Evening Wind

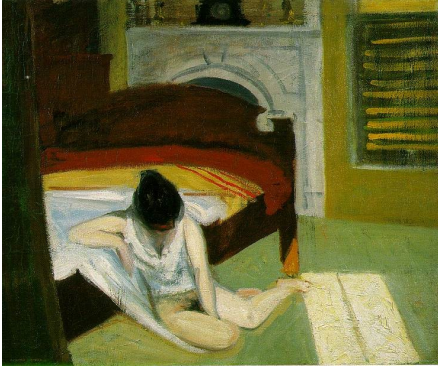


Figure 1

A young woman, head down, face obscured, sits on the floor slumped against her bed. She wears only a white sleeveless shirt, leaving her genital region exposed. Her left arm stretches down between her legs, emphasizing her pubic area. Her right arm is bent at the elbow, and rests on top of the bed against which she leans. Other than the bed, the figure's room is barely furnished. A white fireplace stands at the foot of the bed, hidden almost entirely by the bed's footboard. A window is in the painting's right background, letting a patch of sunlight stream into the room. This patch is the painting's sole light source, yet the white of the bedsheets and the woman's top prevent the work from complete darkness. The painting's forms are not abstract, yet there is something hasty about Hopper's brushwork. The woman's right hand, for example, appears as a conglomeration of paint rather than a distinct corporeal form. The window is merely a rectangle with horizontal lines running across it, as though Hopper repeatedly dragged his paintbrush across the frame's outline.

Hopper's 1909 *Summer Interior* (Fig. 1) introduces the way in which he illustrates his repressed anxieties about independent women and their place in his world: his female nudes depict his fantasy in which the vulnerable female is confined within her domestic interior. Having considered *A Woman in the Sun*, the painting with which Hopper resigned himself to the modern woman, we move back in time to see how it all began with the painting that opens the series. The female figure's pose in *Summer Interior* is despondent: everything about her body moves the viewer's gaze lower. There is, therefore, a rather despairing tone that consumes the painting. The female figure is the

painting's center: this "disconsolate" figure⁴⁷ is the work's focus. The woman sits on a sheet that is falling from the unmade bed, adding to the work's quiet chaos. The woman is entirely engaged in her own thoughts, taking no notice of the viewer who stares at her.

The viewer is indeed staring: at the painting's left foreground is a vertical marker placing the viewer in a voyeuristic perspective. Ivo Kranzfelder posits that, "...the scene is framed on the left by what appears to be a curtain- a formal element to be sure, but also a device seemingly aimed at placing the viewer in the role of outside observer or voyeur."⁴⁸ The painting's female figure denies the viewer access to her face, allowing him/her to gaze upon her nakedness without being confronted in return. The viewer's eyes are led downward, away from the female's averted gaze, and towards her vagina. This emphasizes the woman's sexuality rather than her individuality. The form that the viewer looks upon is a sexual being, but it is not only her state of undress that evokes a sense of eroticism.

The painting's colors indicate sexuality's presence. There are hints of a pinkish or red color throughout: on the barely visible side of the woman's face, on her right foot peeking out from beneath her left leg, on the blankets at the foot of the bed. Pink evokes a sense of the body, particularly the vagina. Red recalls passion, or even blood. Body and bodily fluid combine to signify sexuality: "all of it [the colors] archetypally hinting that passion has been here. Those stripes [on the yellow blanket beneath the red one] may even hint at the bloodied scratchmarks of sexual abandon,"⁴⁹ suggests Walter Wells. Wells acknowledges that the work's colors heighten the painting's sexual undertones, increasing

⁴⁷ Gerry Souter, *Edward Hopper: Light and Dark* (New York, N. Y.: ParkstonePress International, 2007), 43.

⁴⁸ Ivo and Edward Hopper, *Edward Hopper, 1882-1967: Vision of Reality* (Köln: B. Taschen, 1995), 38.

⁴⁹ Walter Wells and Edward Hopper, *Silent Theater: the Art of Edward Hopper* (London: Phaidon Press, 2007), 53.

the sense that the viewer is looking at an erotic scene. Wells also indicates the unhappy nature of the painting's sexual intimations, finding that the work's colors create a sense of violent physicality. Hopper has presented a scene that is simultaneously erotic and despairing. His female figure looks dejected, unable to even consent to the viewer's gaze. She is consumed by her own thoughts, perhaps remembering the lover who has just discarded her.

Isolated elements compose the painting: there is one figure, one light source. The window at the painting's upper right creates an imprint of sunlight on the floor that the woman's left foot just barely touches. Wells emphasizes that the woman cannot enjoy the sunlight: "Beyond reach, it [the patch of sunlight] can signal despair."⁵⁰ There are no doors in the painting, no way for the woman to escape what appears to be her silent pain. She can only reach, futilely, for the small portion of light sneaking in from outside the confines of her bedroom. It is telling that the only light the painting presents is from one small, almost abstractly depicted, window.⁵¹

Margaret Iversen reminds that Hopper painted from memory, always working in his studio: "For Hopper... painting from memory allowed the motif to become saturated with unconscious reverie."⁵² Iversen suggests that Hopper's work is, in a sense, an artistic manifestation of his memories. In the case of his female nudes, the work is an artistic manifestation of his repressed desires for control over women. Though this may seem an easy equation, it in fact is the most logical equation. Iversen articulates one of the most powerful defenses for psychoanalytically examining Hopper's female nudes. Before

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Souter, *Edward Hopper*, 43.

⁵² Margaret Iversen, *Beyond Pleasure: Freud, Lacan, Barthes* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 20.

delving too deeply into a psychoanalytic examination, however, it is useful to examine Hopper's childhood.

A Complex Upbringing

Edward Hopper was born in Nyack, New York on July 22, 1882 to Garret Hopper and Elizabeth Smith. Hopper had one older sister, Marion. Though their mother encouraged both children artistically,⁵³ it was Edward who loved to draw from the age of five,⁵⁴ and who began signing his artwork at the age of ten.⁵⁵ Edward's mother not only tended to her son's artistic growth, but also dominated every other aspect of the household. Gail Levin devotes a great deal of attention to exploring the "skewed" nature of Hopper's parental upbringing:

The prognosis for paternal imprint was not good, Garret never having known a father himself and failing to live up to conventional expectations of the male role, what with his meek demeanor and lack of business acumen, all overshadowed by his wife, with her inherited moral authority and wealth, her hold on the purse strings, and her confident and outgoing character.⁵⁶

Levin suggests that, due to Elizabeth's appropriating the roles traditionally exhibited by the male and Garret's willingness to relinquish such roles, Edward Hopper's early education about gender roles was reversed. Levin's analysis assumes that in a traditional nineteenth century education about gender roles, the male taught dominant and authoritative roles, while the female's task was aimed more at supporting her male

⁵³ Ibid., 15.

⁵⁴ Lloyd Goodrich, *Edward Hopper* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1971), 11.

⁵⁵ Kranzfelder, *Edward Hopper*, 7.

⁵⁶ Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper: an Intimate Biography* (New York: Rizzoli, 2007), 15.

counterpart. This generalization is problematic, but in the late nineteenth century, men were still expected to be financially responsible for their families, and as a result, to instill similar values in their sons. The Hopper family was middle class: Garret Hopper ran his own dry-goods store, and the family was able to send Edward to a private school until high school.⁵⁷ A middle class family in the late nineteenth century would have expected its patriarch, particularly one who owned his own business, to be the family's dominant leader. This was not so in the Hopper family. Garret may have owned a business, but Elizabeth controlled almost every other aspect of the household.

Levin implies that Garret's absence was as much literal as it was figurative. Garret's inability to match his wife's superiority caused him to leave the household a great deal, abandoning his son to an environment in which he was surrounded by females: his mother, his sister, his grandmother, and the maid. When he felt too overcome, Edward withdrew, taking comfort in other pursuits. He played pranks on other children, and most often, girls were the objects of his cruelty, "suggesting equal parts of resentment at domination and desire to be noticed. These were patterns he never outgrew."⁵⁸ Levin attests to the profound effect that Edward's untraditional childhood had on him, causing him to feel emasculated by the strength that the women in his life exhibited. Levin also suggests that Hopper never escaped this sense of emasculation. He would instead spend his entire life attempting to compensate for what he perceived, perhaps unconsciously, as slights to his masculinity.

Increasing Edward's confusion as a young boy struggling to understand gender roles was the strict Baptist influence with which he was raised. This religious

⁵⁷ Berkow and Hopper, *Edward Hopper*, 15.

⁵⁸ Levin, *Edward Hopper*, 23.

preoccupation was placed on the family by Edward's maternal grandmother, whose father introduced the Baptist church to Nyack in 1854.⁵⁹ The following passage calls attention to the Baptist vein running through Hopper's family, which further complicated the way in which Hopper understood gender roles:

Hopper's religious education in the Baptist Bible School was at odds with the freedoms of adolescence. He absorbed teachings on the rewards of a frugal life style and the righteous need to step back from the gratifications of lust and sex and other "immoral behaviour"...his personality developed inward as if ashamed of his ascension in the face of his father's second-class situation within the upper middle-class success of the matriarchal Smith clan. This reticence and retreat into long silences later evolved into bouts of depression when his self-perceived skills failed him and the armour of his ego no longer appeared to sustain his ambition.⁶⁰

Hopper was heavily influenced by his religious upbringing. Unable to realize the sexual urges undoubtedly raging during his teenage years, Hopper pushed his fantasies into the back of his mind. It would seem too that Hopper himself did not personally adhere to any religious way of life,⁶¹ instead following it only out of respect for his mother. The women in Edward's family pushed the masculine Baptist tradition most enthusiastically, which would have confused Edward even further. Dominant women promoting a masculine line of thinking, ostensibly to maintain the wishes of Edward's great-grandfather, further intensified the Hopper household's gender inconsistencies.

⁵⁹ Souter, *Edward Hopper*, 13.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

Edward's grandmother not only determined the family's spiritual path, but also its financial one:

The fact that his [Edward's] father could not afford to move their family into a house of their own had to affect Edward's Victorian childhood during which men were expected to be the sole providers. His Grandmother Smith not only owned the house but also claimed the moral high ground in the community... The female side of the Hopper family provided for the family needs through rents and mortgage payments on other Nyack properties.⁶²

Here again is evident the effect that Garret's inability to act the role of traditional, Victorian male had on the Hopper household. Upsetting the patriarchal order, the strong women in the Hopper household efficiently took care of all that needed to be handled. What was so unusual was not simply Garret's inability to fill his part as master of the house, but that the women were so able to fill it. It was not simply that Garret's wife took on roles that society would have preferred him to play, but that even his mother-in-law supported the family in a way that he could not.

This depiction of Edward's childhood does not disapprove of the strength that his mother and grandmother exhibited, but instead demonstrates that his patriarchal society would have. It is the disjunction between the family's behavior and society's reaction to it that created Edward's subconscious confusion. Levin details Hopper's biography in a way that suggests any difficulties Hopper endured later in life were a result of the women in his family "undermining" patriarchal authority. Instead, it would seem that his biography indicates a tension between his matriarchal familial system and the patriarchal

⁶² Ibid.

world in which it existed. Edward's hostility toward his female companions indicates his hostility toward female power generally. Within a hyper-masculine Freudian framework, like the one Fryd employs, Edward's mother does seem the villain in his story, and yet, from a larger, feminist cultural perspective, she is not. What is most fascinating about Hopper's biography is his reaction to female autonomy, and it is precisely this aspect of his biography that is most relevant when examining his female nudes.

Sharon Burchett calls attention to a caricature of about 1886 that an adolescent Edward Hopper made of his mother and father demonstrating his father's attempt to rid himself of female influence. The captions read: *Act I, Act II Neck, The Escape*. The work shows Hopper's father attempting to flee from Hopper's mother's embrace. Burchett sees the work as representing an early tendency on Hopper's part to preoccupy himself with "the male's rejection of female attention,"⁶³ in effect suggesting how Hopper saw men becoming easily overwhelmed by women. This early work demonstrates that from a young age, Hopper used his art to illustrate how he perceived the world, and that those perceptions often involved the interactions between men and women. Burchett also points to the way in which the work represents Hopper's perception of his parents' marriage as one filled with tension and anxiety. This can be seen as a precursor to Hopper's later artistic attempts to contain the female whom he, in this early work, lets run wild after the male. The caricature is not meant to indicate Hopper's hatred for his mother. Hopper adored his mother, who doted on him and encouraged his love for art. While traveling around Europe in his early twenties, all of Edward's letters were directed to his mother,⁶⁴ suggesting the affection that Hopper felt for her. The caricature is therefore to be read as

⁶³ Sharon R. Burchett, *The Male/Female Dyad in the Oeuvre of Edward Hopper: Interpretations and the Issue of Alienation*, thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1970, 17.

⁶⁴ Wells and Hopper, *Silent Theater*, 57.

an honest depiction of how Hopper viewed his mother overpowering his father.

Hopper's childhood was rife with complexities. Growing up with a mother more masculine than his father, being overrun by a plethora of females, having to follow repressive Baptist tendencies: all of these impressionable experiences formed a boy destined to struggle with gender roles for the rest of his life. Hopper's acting out, particularly toward females, further suggests his attempts to control the gender by which he, in his own household, felt so controlled. It is impossible to deny the impact that these experiences had on Edward, who would spend his artistic career grappling with the complexities of his relationships with women. For psychoanalytic purposes, it is useful to spend time with Hopper's biography. In order to better understand his particular stylistic choices, however, it is most helpful to examine the canons and influences surrounding him.

Notable Influences

Hopper's women indicate a significant departure from traditional depictions of

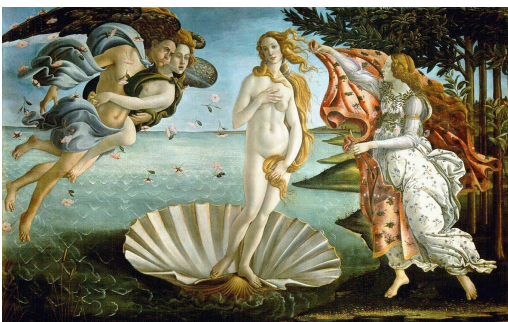


Figure 2

female nudes, as well as more modern ones. His female subjects do not recline languidly, coyly holding one hand against their faces while permitting the viewer to bask in their curvaceous sensuality. The canonical female nude is available primarily for the (male)

viewer's pleasure.⁶⁵ Botticelli's fifteenth-century *Birth of Venus* (Fig. 2) portrays the

⁶⁵ Sandro Botticelli, *The Birth of Venus*, tempera on canvas, c. 1486, Uffizi, Florence, enchantedenfant.blogspot.com.

goddess endeavoring halfheartedly to maintain her modesty.⁶⁶ Titian's sixteenth-century *Venus of Urbino*⁶⁷ (Fig. 3) features a nude woman's whose hand covering her genital area⁶⁸ draws more attention to her sexuality than her chastity. Hopper's female nudes do maintain this traditional passivity and openness to the viewer's gaze, but their eroticism is problematic. The woman in *Summer Interior* cannot even lift her head to meet the viewer's gaze, and the woman in his *Evening Wind* of 1921 is focused on a void beyond the window.



Figure 3

More contemporary artists like Manet and Picasso problematized the female nude by painting their women as aggressive and confrontational figures. Though Hopper's women are equally problematic, he does not follow this tradition. His women are in no way aggressive. On the contrary, they are entirely passive, but not passive in the way that Titian's languid nudes are. Hopper complicates the tradition of the female nude by removing any aspect of the female's consent. His compositions are not open like Botticelli and Titian's, but tight and confining. His women do not have beautiful faces or seductive eyes, only breasts and vaginas. Hopper's female nudes do indeed present themselves in a style distinctly his own.

One of Hopper's most influential teachers was Robert Henri (1865-1929), who encouraged Hopper to study the French artists of the time, particularly Degas and

⁶⁶ Marilyn Stokstad, *Art History* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2008), 651.

⁶⁷ Titian, *Venus of Urbino*, oil on canvas, 1538, Uffizi, Florence, oneonta.edu.

⁶⁸ Stokstad, *Art History*, 686.

Manet.⁶⁹ Henri was a member of the Ashcan School, a group of artists interested in depicting modern, urban life. The school's style was harsher and more realistic than that of the Impressionists. Henri was one of group's leading members.⁷⁰ For the purposes of this thesis, it is interesting to compare one of Henri's female nudes to Hopper's.⁷¹ Henri's *Figure in Motion* of 1913 (Fig. 4) depicts a nude woman who stands with her left foot crossed in front of her right. Her right arm rests against her hip, while she holds her left arm slightly away from her body. She is entirely exposed to the viewer: her genital region, breasts, and face are all frontally presented. The painting is only preoccupied with the woman's body. The female figure stands against a blue and gray background and on a black floor. Nothing surrounds her, nothing deflects attention away from her.

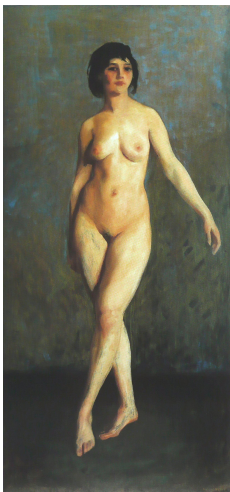


Figure 4

Hopper's early female nudes are, as Henri's, often situated in rather sparse environments, emphasizing the figures over their atmospheres. Hopper departs from his teacher's style by imbuing his own work with a greater possibility for narrative. Though in his works, the female subjects are far more important than what surrounds them, Hopper does include a greater sense of the environment in which he has situated his female figures.

Narrative ambiguity in Hopper's female nudes makes possible the psychoanalytic claims that this thesis proposes.

Another contemporary of Hopper's was John Sloan (1871-1951), an American artist. Sloan was a fellow student of Henri's. In 1910, Henri and Sloan organized an

⁶⁹ Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper: The Art and the Artist* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), 4.

⁷⁰ Ita G. Berkow and Edward Hopper, *Edward Hopper: A Modern Master* (New York, NY: Smithmark, 1996), 17.

⁷¹ Robert Henri, *Figure in Motion*, oil on canvas, 1913, Terra Foundation for American Art, Chicago, public-domain-photos.org.

exhibition together. Hopper showed in the exhibition, demonstrating his relationship with the Ashcan school.⁷² Sloan appears to have influenced Hopper most with his series of etchings. One of Sloan's etchings is particularly interesting to study as a possible influence for Hopper's work. Sloan's *Turning Out the Light* (Fig. 5) of 1905 depicts a couple in bed together. The man reclines on his back, almost hidden from view. The woman functions as the etching's central subject. She turns her head back toward her husband, while reaching her right arm to turn off the light at the end of their bed. The



Figure 5

still-glowing light illuminates her body, as she uses her left hand to hold up her slip. The viewer imagines that the slip will quickly be abandoned: the woman looks toward her husband with an expression suggesting that the imminent darkness will not signify sleep for the couple. The man, in turn, holds his arms behind his head, meeting his female companion's gaze. Though Sloan's female subject is neither alone nor nude, the etching, imbued with implied eroticism, is a precursor to Hopper's own etching *Evening Wind*, which would come sixteen years later. The female figure in Hopper's work is posed similarly to Sloan's, but remains alone in her bedroom.

Summer Interior

Having explored Edward Hopper's complex childhood and noteworthy influences, let us now return to his forlorn female subject in *Summer Interior* of 1909. The work, which Carol Troyen suggests marks Hopper's first substantial exploration of

⁷² Berkow and Hopper, *Edward Hopper*, 19.

the female nude,⁷³ can be looked at as an introduction to Hopper's preoccupation with the female figure. Hopper's anxieties about women manifest themselves in the work, which restricts the female subject to an imprisoning composition. The work is flooded by a number of diagonals. The figure is locked into a triangle: its sides are formed by the side of the bed and the leftmost vertical of the sunlight on the floor, and reach their apex at the bedpost. The bottom of the triangle is the bottom of the piece itself, where the viewer stands. This constraining composition ensures that Hopper's female subject cannot escape the painting. He has placed her within the confines of his canvas, and compositionally removed the possibility of fleeing. There is a way in which no subject within a painting can escape the work's borders. In Hopper's work, however, this essential aspect of paintings takes on a malevolence. The female subject does not sit among lilies in a field. The subject of such a painting as that would not wish to escape her canvas. Hopper's figure, however, crumbles to the floor in a barren bedroom. His painting denies its subject an escape.

Summer Interior falls into Mulvey's description of the three gazes that objectify women in cinema. While Mulvey's analysis is specifically applied to film, it is also relevant when applied to visual imagery in general. Hopper's works have been likened to film stills,⁷⁴ making his *oeuvre* particularly susceptible to Mulvey's analysis. Indeed, Ita Berkow, among others, finds much of Hopper's work to be influenced by Alfred Hitchcock.⁷⁵ The first and third gazes in *Summer Interior* are most easily satisfied: the painting was constructed by a male artist and, it is assumed, would have been (and still is)

⁷³ Carol Troyen et al., *Edward Hopper: [exhibition, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, May 6, 2007 - August 19, 2007, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, September 16, 2007 - January 21, 2008, The Art Institute of Chicago, February 16, 2008 - May 11, 2008]* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007), 177.

⁷⁴ Brian O'Doherty, "Hopper's Look," in *Edward Hopper*, by Edward Hopper, Sheena Wagstaff, and David Anfam (London: Tate Pub., 2004), 90.

⁷⁵ Berkow and Hopper, *Edward Hopper*, 5.

viewed by men. The unmade bed with its phallic bedposts symbolically fulfills the second gaze, that of the male within the narrative who makes his female companion the object of his gaze. An unmade bed indicates activity within the bed. Because the painting's only figure is partially nude, this activity assumes a sexual nature. The long, erect bedposts, symbolically acting as the counterpart to the female's genitalia, reinforce these sexual implications. His presence in the room is undeniable:

In Hopper's painting, there is no evidence of the male figure; yet the pose of the woman crouching against the bed frame with the bedcovers spilling onto the floor evokes the same emotional strain as in Degas' canvas *[Interior (The Rape) 1868-69]*... the pose of Degas' female figure was significant for Hopper, as revealed by the numerous variations he produced on the theme of women, frequently in the presence of their male lovers, shown with the imposing structure and evident sexual symbolism of a bed.⁷⁶

Both Ivo Kranzfelder and Sheena Wagstaff also locate Hopper's inspiration for the work in Degas' painting. Carol Troyen similarly suggest that Hopper was inspired by French realism in general, and suggests he was particularly interested in Degas' women.⁷⁷

Interior (The Rape) (Fig. 6) is especially relevant to Hopper's *Summer Interior*:



the similarity in subject matter between the two paintings is undeniable. These similarities make clear that Hopper did in fact see Degas' piece, most

Figure 6
Edgar Degas, *Interior (The Rape)*, "in Edward Hopper: [exhibition, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 2007 - August 19, 2007, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, September 16, 2007 - January 21, 2008, The Art Institute of Chicago, February 16, 2008 - May 11, 2008] (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007), 40.

likely while studying in Paris in 1906.⁷⁸ Degas' *Interior* depicts two figures. The male figure leans against the bedroom door, feet spread apart, blocking the female figure's exit. His body casts an ominous shadow on the door behind him. It as though two men prevent the woman from leaving. The female figure kneels, holding her right arm against her face. She turns away from the male figure and the viewer, as though desperate to escape them both. Everything about the male is erect and imposing. His hands are in his pockets: he is confident in his power. The female figure, with her dress falling from her shoulders, crumbles before him.

The nineteenth-century French work influenced Hopper's piece significantly: both female figures are partially clothed, denied exits from their bedrooms, and are in despairing poses. Hopper's work deviates from Degas' in one important way: Hopper does not include a male subject. Wagstaff finds that the male is still available in the painting by the sexual connotations of the unmade bed. The male is in the painting in two symbolic forms: the unmade bed and the rigid bedposts specifically. Both of these masculine symbols overwhelm the figure, who leans against the bed in seeming despair. This is not to suggest that Hopper's painting is as explicitly a rape scene as Degas' work. What differentiates *Summer Interior* from *Interior (The Rape)* is a greater narrative subtlety in the former. Perhaps Hopper's female subject has just been brutally violated, perhaps she has been left behind after a consensual sexual encounter. The painting excludes an actual male figure, making the entire scene less obviously violent than Degas'. This is also what makes Hopper's work so fascinating.

One who views *Summer Interior* expects a male presence: the unmade bed and half-dressed woman make this clear. The painting does not deny the viewer this, but

⁷⁸ Goodrich, *Edward Hopper*, 13.

rather invites him to assume a position in the bed: he *becomes* the male within the narrative. This fulfills the third gaze that Mulvey suggests objectifies the female: the male viewer taking on the role of the male within the narrative. Though the viewer is undeniably in a voyeuristic position, there is also a way in which the viewer himself is implicated in locking the woman into the triangular compositional formation, further defending Mulvey's claim that the third gaze takes on the first two gazes in objectifying the female. Part of the formation confining the female is one of the erect bedposts comprising the symbol of male, implying the way in which the male subjugates the female. Wells asserts that the male's symbolic presence does indeed resound throughout the room after his physical presence has departed: the reddish tinges throughout the work imply a recent sexual encounter. Hopper has created a painting in which the female is entirely subjected to the male's will: the male artist, the male lover, and the male viewer.

“Expressing a languid, fin-de-siècle sensibility, *Summer Interior* is a daring picture; it is clearly about sex and about the intertwining of eroticism, confinement, and vulnerability,” finds Troyen.⁷⁹ Hopper eroticizes his female figure as a means of objectifying her. He objectifies her to control her. Hopper confines the woman to her domestic interior, an environment in which she herself is unable to control Hopper or any other man. The window Hopper includes in the painting is closed, though in many of his later works, the windows are open. The woman does not seem to even acknowledge it as a means of escape, but only allows her foot to rest in the light that falls onto the floor. In this first painting, Hopper allows his female figure absolutely no means of escape: she is prisoner to her interior, an interior constructed for her by Hopper and his unconscious. There is also a way in which Hopper projects his own sense of violation and vulnerability

⁷⁹ Troyen, *Edward Hopper*, 178.

onto the image of the female figure: her despair is his own. Like her, Hopper has no escape from his feelings of violation. The painting can be read, therefore, both as his attempt to control the female and an artistic manifestation of his own inadequacies.

Continued Anxieties

Hopper's childhood is not the only influential portion of his biography. His childhood merely begins the narrative that so heavily dictated his artistic choices. Hopper enrolled in the Correspondence School of Illustrating in New York City after graduating from high school in 1899.⁸⁰ He later transferred to the New York School of Art to study illustration. Goodrich suggests that his real interests, however, lay in painting.⁸¹ It was at the New York School of Art that Hopper, aged seventeen, would have first seen the nude female body, where Gordon Theisen suggests, he would have been, "as a kind of voyeur while sketching nude models ... The experience apparently made a long-term impression on both his art and his libido."⁸² Theisen implies that Hopper's first experience with female nudity was one that stayed with him, a claim supported by the many female nudes that Hopper would depict in the years following his time in school.

In 1906, Hopper traveled to Paris, where he lived for nine months.⁸³ While in Paris, Hopper met Enid Saies, who boarded with the same Baptist family that Hopper did. She, like Hopper, was raised in a religious household, but, like Hopper, she was not nearly as religious as her parents. Hopper fell in love with Enid, and it would seem that

⁸⁰ Berkow, *Edward Hopper*, 15.

⁸¹ Goodrich, *Edward Hopper*, 11.

⁸² Gordon Theisen and Edward Hopper, *Staying up Much Too Late: Edward Hopper's Nighthawks and the Dark Side of the American Psyche* (New York: T. Dunne Books, 2006), 125.

⁸³ Goodrich, *Edward Hopper*, 13.

she was equally fond of him.⁸⁴ At the end of her studies in France, Enid returned to England. She also returned to her French fiancé. Hopper received permission from his mother to extend his studies in Europe, and followed her. He proposed, and she refused. He returned to America in August 1907,⁸⁵ where he continued to pursue Enid by writing letters to her. Enid sent back responses indicating sorrow at her upcoming marriage and happiness at remembering her time with Hopper: “If this was a plea for Edward to come to her rescue, it fell on scorned ears. He was not used to rejection,” writes Souter.⁸⁶ Hopper’s first love affair ended tragically for him. Though it would seem that the woman he loved did indeed love him in return, he was never to be with Enid. Though we can never know precisely what effect this had on Hopper’s psyche, it is enough to understand the profound effect that rejection would have on a man unaccustomed to rejection.

Though Souter argues Hopper’s first relationship was with Enid, he suggests that his first sexual experience was not with her: “Coming from his puritanical Baptist background, chances are that his first sexual experience was a fling with a French prostitute,”⁸⁷ Hopper’s introduction to sexual expression was not with the woman he loved, but rather with a woman who was simply available. Hopper’s relationship with women only became more complicated in adulthood. Unable to realize sexual fulfillment with his true love was difficult for Hopper to accept, and increased his desire to control the female sex in the only way he could: through his art.

After returning to America from his last trip to Europe in 1910, Hopper experienced a great deal of professional difficulty in his career as an illustrator, finding

⁸⁴ Souter, *Edward Hopper*, 32.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 69.

the work to be financially stable but unchallenging and unfulfilling.⁸⁸ Schmied indicates that however much Hopper despised his job, his experiences as an illustrator did teach him to keenly observe what he saw around him in order to later depict it.⁸⁹ Hopper continued to paint, and in 1921, he etched *Evening Wind*. The etching, done three years before Hopper's marriage, more powerfully exemplifies Hopper's desire to confine visually the female figure.

Evening Wind

Evening Wind (Fig. 7) depicts a lone, nude woman kneeling on an unmade bed. As in Sloan's 1905 *Turning Out the Light*, the female subject rests her knees on the bed while focusing on something else. While the woman in *Summer Interior* wears a shirt, the woman in this work wears nothing at all: Hopper has exposed his female figure even



Figure 7

further. She turns her head toward the open window to her left, letting her long hair act as a curtain between her face and the viewer's gaze. Her turned head forces the viewer's gaze toward the open window, granting the window an importance. The

piece is dynamic: the wind blows the curtains back into the bedroom and the woman appears to be in motion.⁹⁰ Alfred Barr, a contemporary of Hopper's, cites a 1910 etching by John Sloan (Fig. 8) as the inspiration for the curtains in Hopper's etching: "The drifting curtain in *Night Windows* and in the etching *Evening*

⁸⁸ Wieland Schmied and Edward Hopper, *Edward Hopper: Portraits of America* (Munich: Prestel, 1995), 39.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁹⁰ Kranzfelder, *Edward Hopper*, 40.



Figure 8

Wind are evocative to a degree far beyond their visual importance.”⁹¹ Barr was an important curator in the early twentieth century, and his review, written at precisely the time that Hopper was working, indicates Hopper’s affinity with artists like John Sloan.

Sloan’s *Night Windows* (Fig. 8) depicts an urban landscape at night. The viewer is situated outside of an apartment complex, watching the residents who stand in their windows. At the etching’s left, a voluptuous woman leans out of her window to hang laundry on a clothesline. To the right is another woman who stands directly in front of her window, adjusting her hair. Both women are etched in a lighter color, emphasizing their figures. A man, etched much more darkly than the women, sits on the roof above the woman hanging clothes. He looks down onto the woman who fixes her hair. Because he is etched so darkly, his form blends into the night, presenting him as a kind of voyeur. The man in the work and the viewer are both voyeurs, looking onto scenes they should not. Just as the viewer of *Evening Wind* feels slightly guilty for looking into the scene, so too does the viewer of *Night Windows* find his kinship with the work’s male voyeur unsettling. Barr indicates that the elements in Hopper’s work are, just as in Sloan’s, important in ways other than mere depiction. The curtain’s movement, for example, provides *Evening Wind* with greater possibility for narrative, and encourages the viewer to consider the work’s subject more closely.

Vivien Green Fryd sees in *Evening Wind* Hopper’s tendency to erase the female’s

⁹¹ Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Charles Burchfield, and Edward Hopper, *Edward Hopper, Retrospective Exhibition*. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1933), 15.

personality: “In these nudes, Hopper always obscured the woman’s face, thereby erasing her identity and individuality.”⁹² In later works, Hopper begins to allow his female subjects more facial individuality, and therefore greater self-individuality. In *Evening Wind*, Hopper objectifies the woman by removing anything that individualizes her. Further, there is again the sense of the woman’s confinement:

...by using the window to contain the subject...Hopper rendered each woman alone in a seemingly hermetically sealed room within the domestic sphere. In *Evening Wind*, for example, he showed the woman’s containment and imprisonment within the home; the empty space outside the window is a metaphor for her inability to escape the domesticity that both imprisons and protects her. It is also the location from which the artist observes her.⁹³

Fryd acknowledges that Hopper attempts to control his female subject, and elaborates on this idea of containment by implying that Hopper wishes to contain her specifically within the home, her “proper” Victorian place. She goes on to find that the window symbolizes the woman’s lack of escape, just as the woman in *Summer Interior* was denied the opportunity to abandon her confinement. This space beyond the window is an intriguing aspect of the etching, one that opens up the entire work to deeper examination.

Just as the female figure in *Summer Interior* is oblivious to the viewer’s gaze, so too is the woman in *Evening Wind* unable to return the viewer’s gaze: she is too busy gazing out of the window, feeling the breeze on her skin. The only object in the room other than the bed is a dresser on which a vase is set. The scene, therefore, is sparse,

⁹² Fryd, *Art and the Crisis*, 93.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 95, 96.

allowing the viewer to focus on the female's body. The composition is foreshortened, drawing in the viewer. There is the sense, as was the case in *Summer Interior*, that the viewer is situated voyeuristically, peering into the woman's private sphere. Hopper relegates her to the confines, not only of his canvas, but also to the tight space of her domestic interior, just as in *Summer Interior*. Levin notes a vulnerability in the woman similar to that of another one of Hopper's female subjects, writing of the latter, "The total absorption of the gesture [threading a needle] and the reddish hair falling loose in front of her shoulders convey an image of defenselessness like that in *Evening Wind*..."⁹⁴ Levin emphasizes the extent to which the female figure in *Evening Wind* is at the mercy of both Hopper and the work's viewer, supporting the claim that Hopper positioned the female figure in a way that emphasizes her helplessness.

Critics debate the female figure's eroticism: most find the figure to be sensual, others argue that she is in no way explicitly sexual. Matthew Baigell contextualizes many of Hopper's paintings around sexual repression, and specifically considers *Evening Wind*: "... the nude woman in his *Evening Wind*, aroused by the warm breeze streaming through the open window, seems barely able to control her emotions."⁹⁵ The female figure, in Baigell's eyes, desperately desires a physical connection with someone. Unable to realize this physicality with another human being, she turns to the wind's caress. What is important about Baigell's analysis is his claim that the woman is presented as a sexual figure. Indeed, the woman's sexuality appears obvious, but some critics see the figure through a different lens.

Lloyd Goodrich suggests that there is not, in fact, any sort of explicit eroticism

⁹⁴ Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper: an Intimate Biography* (New York: Rizzoli, 2007), 139.

⁹⁵ Matthew Baigell, *A Concise History of American Painting and Sculpture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1996), 253.

present in *Evening Wind*. Goodrich finds in *Evening Wind* that, “[the female figure] is instead painted with complete honesty.”⁹⁶ This may be true, but by situating the woman naked on an unmade bed, a sense of her sexuality is unavoidably evoked. Wagstaff disagrees with this interpretation, seeing a sexual symbolism in the curtains blowing back in the wind: “...the billowing curtains—a traditional indicator of carnal sensuality—can be seen and felt in bodily terms.”⁹⁷ She, like Baigell, locates within the etching a sensuality that begs further exploration. It is crucial to understand the female subject in an erotic manner, as Hopper’s eroticizing her is one of his means of controlling her through objectification.

The figure in *Evening Wind* is objectified in much the same way as the woman in *Summer Interior*, demonstrating the depth of Hopper’s preoccupation with presenting the opposite sex in a specific fashion. He again presents a work in which the female is the subject of three different male gazes. Hopper controls, orchestrates, the entire work. The viewer’s gaze, and therefore the artist’s, appears to be from within the same room as the woman,⁹⁸ creating a sense of intimacy to which she herself does not consent. The viewer cannot see the woman’s face; she turns her head away from the viewer and focuses instead on the exterior world from which she is excluded. She is, then, impersonal. No distinguishing facial features are visible, only her naked body. This gives the viewer even greater access to her voluptuous body without being confronted in return. This further allows the female to be dominated by both the male artist and viewer.

⁹⁶ Goodrich, *Edward Hopper*, 69.

⁹⁷ Sheena Wagstaff, "The Elation of Sunlight," in *Edward Hopper ; [on the Occasion of the Exhibition at Tate Modern, London, 27 May - 5 September 2004 and Museum Ludwig, Cologne, 9 October 2004 - 9 January 2005]*, by David Anfam, Edward Hopper, and Sheena Wagstaff (London: Tate Publishing, 2004), 26.

⁹⁸ Vivien Green. Fryd, *Art and the Crisis of Marriage: Edward Hopper and Georgia O'Keeffe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 97.

The second gaze, that of the male viewer who stands outside of the piece, identifies with the symbolic male within the work; the unmade bed again symbolizes the male presence. *Summer Interior*'s female subject leans dejectedly against the symbolic male, demonstrating Hopper's desire to overwhelm the female with the male. In *Evening Wind* the female appears over the bed, and angles her body and head toward the exterior world as represented by the window: she longs to be outside, away from the confines of her bed. Just as her compatriot in *Summer Interior* is consumed by an absent male presence, so too is the woman in *Evening Wind* trapped by the masculine manifestation holding her captive in her bedroom. The only way out of the bedroom is through the window, yet the only thing beyond the window is emptiness. The etching therefore both provides and removes an escape.

Based on the title, one expects the area beyond the window to contain darkness indicating nighttime. Oddly, the only thing to be seen outside is bright light. Fryd believes that the window symbolizes the escape denied the female subject. Kranzfelder too locates a void in the space outside of this window: "...Hopper created an indeterminate exterior space, a void that has something mysterious, enigmatic about it. Its unexpected brightness only serves to heighten this effect."⁹⁹ Kranzfelder finds something unsettling about the space beyond the window, not only in its emptiness, but also in its undermining of the work's title.

The lone female figure in *Evening Wind* signifies the female gender as a whole. Hopper was indeed uncomfortable with the entire gender. Perhaps one could argue that his anxieties were centered around his mother, or perhaps around Enid, the love who rejected him. The female figure's lack of individuality, however, implies that at this point

⁹⁹ Kranzfelder, *Edward Hopper*, 40.

in his career, Hopper anxieties were so repressed that they expressed themselves as a desire to dominate the female sex generally. This will change in Hopper's later works, in which his anxieties become more specific and his female figures become more individualized. The women in the painting and etching studied thus far are also unlike the woman in Hopper's caricature, who is identified as Hopper's mother.

It is also worth comparing the way in which Hopper depicts the male and female in his caricature to his representation of the male and female in *Summer Interior* and *Evening Wind*. Hopper's portrayal of the female changes over time. In Hopper's early caricature, the female is far more active than her male counterpart. In *Summer Interior* and *Evening Wind*, the female figures are presented as passive forms. As he got older, Hopper began to present the female figure as one who lacks autonomy and free will, demonstrating his anxieties about real women who exhibited such qualities. Hopper's caricature also contains a male figure. In his later female nudes, the male is depicted symbolically, suggesting a greater preoccupation with the female figure.

Summer Interior is a lonely work not meant to evoke a joyful or excited mood. It is instead a painting determined to accentuate its lone figure's despondence, ultimately representing the sublimation of Hopper's anxieties about women and his desire to relegate the female to the confines of his canvas. He allows male viewers to do the same. The various symbolic elements that Hopper will later paint are tentatively present in this work: the male's presence in the unmade bed and phallic symbols, for example. *Evening Wind* continues to present these symbols. The etching then contains the symbolic and artistic confinement by the male artist of the female subject in much the same way as *Summer Interior*. As Victor Burgin suggests he does in 1940's *Office at Night*, Hopper

raises tensions by creating an erotic image and resolves them by clearly relegating the female figure to a defined space where she can do no damage. Both works are artistic manifestations of the uncertainties that Hopper felt for women.

Chapter Two Image Bibliography

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Figure 8, Sloan, John. *Night Windows*, etching, 1910. Delaware Art Museum, Delaware. artlex.com.

Chapter Three:

Eleven A.M. and Morning in a City

A woman, hands clasped together, sits in a blue armchair looking out of her apartment window. She is naked except for a pair of flats on her feet, and sits in profile. The viewer is, as always, denied any real access to the female figure's individuality: her hair falls over her face, allowing the viewer only a glimpse of her nose. Though the armchair is angled in the viewer's direction, the figure's body is angled away from the viewer and toward the window. The viewer gazes at the female's body without being confronted in return. There is a lamp atop a table in the painting's foreground, and a



Figure 1

discarded coat is in the left background. A small framed painting hangs over a dresser behind the woman. Hopper's *Eleven A.M.* (Fig. 1) of 1926 comes five years after *Evening Wind*, and continues to demonstrate his desire to relegate the female to his canvas.

Eleven A.M.'s female figure dominates the composition, in large part because the paleness of her skin contrasts so strongly with the other colors in the painting: the blue of her chair, the deep red of the lamp in the work's foreground, and the green of the curtains in the left background. She is also the work's compositional center, anchoring its tightly constructed space. Foreshortened, the painting draws the viewer into the woman's intimate space. Fryd finds, "The same sense of containment and regulation of female sexuality appears in *Eleven A.M.* of 1926."¹⁰⁰ Fryd suggests that Hopper curtails the threat of female sexuality by repeatedly locking his female nudes into their domestic interiors. The diagonals created by the light falling into

¹⁰⁰ Vivien Green. Fryd, *Art and the Crisis of Marriage: Edward Hopper and Georgia O'Keeffe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 96.

the living room contrast with the horizontal and vertical linearity of the window's curtains and exterior architecture.¹⁰¹ These opposing compositional juxtapositions, combined with the peculiarity of the woman's abandoned coat and worn shoes, provoke the viewer's curiosity. The woman is the painting's feature, and its sole player. Why are we to watch her, this naked woman who sits staring out of her window in the middle of the morning? Who is she, and why do we care? In *Summer Interior* and *Evening Wind*, the women's sparse environments generalize them as subjects. Though the female figure in *Eleven A.M.*'s face is still hidden, her room contains more objects indicating her personality: the framed painting, coat, even the woman's shoes all provide a greater sense of her identity. This move toward individualizing the female figure creates greater narrative possibilities for *Eleven A.M.* We are still denied any real access to the woman herself (her hair falls over her face), and yet the painting is full of formal oddities that distinguish it as a transitional work for Hopper. He was moving away from a general depiction of the female toward a more specific one.

The "New Woman"

The introduction of the *femme fatale* in 1930s and 1940s American popular culture and literature presented the female as, "the dark female force invading the realm of men, taking jobs and gaining a political voice while becoming sexier, looser, more available: irresistible."¹⁰² Hopper's female nudes are not presented as such *femme fatales*, yet Hopper, who loved cinema, was undeniably aware of this new kind of woman. This

¹⁰¹ Emily O. Thompson James, *Changing Times: Edward Hopper in the 1920s and 1930s*, thesis, Vanderbilt, 1998, 11.

¹⁰² Gordon Theisen and Edward Hopper, *Staying up Much Too Late: Edward Hopper's Nighthawks and the Dark Side of the American Psyche* (New York: T. Dunne Books, 2006), 135.

would have intensified Hopper's fears, and made him even more desperate to dominate the female figure as he does in *Morning in a City*. Gordon Theisen suggests that the women in Hopper's works represent the changing role of women from conventional, Victorian housewife toward modern, sexual beings: "They [Hopper's female subjects] have left motherhood behind and taken on a merely erotic interest, Hopper's women, or, more precisely, modern women in Hopper's portrayal of them."¹⁰³ Hopper's female nudes, with their exposed genitals and bare breasts, are indeed sexual beings in Hopper's eyes. He portrays the modern woman as he saw her in the early twentieth century.

The "new woman" in the early to mid 1900s did not have to be a *femme fatale* in order to be unfamiliar to men. She simply had to be educated, smoke, drink, and vocalize her opinions when she had them. Such qualities defined modern women in the early twentieth century. They stopped submitting to their fathers and husbands, and instead began acting on their own interests. This caused men a great deal of anxiety: "the new woman evoked such antagonism and scorn... the ideal [of the modern woman] attempted to close the biological and social gaps between men and women."¹⁰⁴ This terrified men who had never before considered the possibility of equality between the sexes. It is in part this masculine, historical anxiety that Hopper responds to with his female nudes. Hopper's marriage only intensified this anxiety.

An Unstable Marriage

Edward Hopper met fellow artist Josephine Nivison in Gloucester, Massachusetts during the summer of 1923. Prior to being formally introduced, however, he had seen her

¹⁰³ Ibid., 133.

¹⁰⁴ Louise Mich Newman, "The "New Woman" (1890-1915)," in *Men's Ideas/women's Realities: Popular Science, 1870-1915*, ed. Louise Michele Newman (New York: Pergamon Press, 1985), 300.

at various “New England artists’ haunts.”¹⁰⁵ Jo was born in 1883, and grew up in New York.¹⁰⁶ As a child, she adored reading, and at seventeen attended the Normal College of the City of New York (a school for women). Jo immersed herself in the academic environment, as well as in an artistic one, drawing for a few of the school’s publications. Eventually, Jo realized that art was her true passion, and enrolled at the New York School of Art. Like Edward, Jo studied under Robert Henri, whom she would later deem her greatest inspiration. After finishing her studies at the New York School of Art, Jo was not content to immediately marry and start a family. She instead began teaching at an elementary school, but continued to engage with the art world. When Jo was thirty years old, she moved away from her family for the first time. In moving in with another single female, Jo represented a new breed of independent women that was emerging in twentieth century America.¹⁰⁷ That Jo continued to work on her art while maintaining her teaching job demonstrated a professional autonomy that was becoming more common among American women during the twentieth century.

In 1914, Jo showed her work in an exhibition titled “Small Oils by American Artists,”¹⁰⁸ demonstrating a serious interest in pursuing her career as an artist. Jo also published drawings in various New York newspapers, particularly radical ones, demonstrating what Levin deems Jo’s value of “individuality over conformity.”¹⁰⁹ Eventually, Jo began showing her work regularly. In 1923, both Jo and Edward found themselves in Gloucester for the summer. The two began painting together, and when

¹⁰⁵ Gerry Souter, *Edward Hopper: Light and Dark* (New York, N. Y.: ParkstonePress International, 2007), 101.

¹⁰⁶ Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper: an Intimate Biography* (New York: Rizzoli, 2007), 146.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 148, 149, 151, 153.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 154.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 155.

they returned to New York at the summer's end, they were a couple. Jo was invited to show her work at the Brooklyn Museum, and per her insistence, the museum also showed six of Edward's watercolors. A questionable move: critics adored Edward's works and paid little attention to Jo's.¹¹⁰

Despite whatever resentment Jo may have felt as a result of Hopper's increasing success and the dwindling nature of her own, the two were married in July 1924.¹¹¹ Wells suggests that the marital move was problematic:

Not only until he was forty-two did Hopper marry, shifting his filial dependence from an indulgent, protective mother to a differently indulgent but similarly protective wife (of whom Elizabeth [Edward's mother], unsurprisingly, did not entirely approve).¹¹²

The marriage intensified Hopper's anxieties. Edward and Jo courted and married amidst changing social conventions. Women were eager for greater equality, and men were often equally eager to prevent it. Patricia Junker sees Jo as representing the mix between the Victorian traditions from which women were deviating and the modernity in which women desperately wished to engage: "She [Jo] was herself a woman who bridged the two worlds that Hopper saw colliding in twentieth-century America, for Jo was a woman born in the Victorian age but shaped by the forces of modern times."¹¹³ Hopper, already uneasy with female autonomy, married a woman who was a product of the transition from Victorian ideals to modern aspirations. Jo's tendency toward modern ideals

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 168, 171.

¹¹¹ Souter, *Edward Hopper*, 101.

¹¹² Walter Wells and Edward Hopper, *Silent Theater: the Art of Edward Hopper* (London: Phaidon Press, 2007), 57.

¹¹³ Patricia A. Junker and Edward Hopper, *Edward Hopper: Women* (Seattle: Seattle Art Museum, 2008), 50.

increased Hopper's anxieties about being married to a woman who was willing to exert her independence, like so many women were doing in the 1920s.

Making the union even more difficult was the way in which Jo seemed to dominate Edward. The difference in personality between Jo and Edward was troublesome: While Hopper was often taciturn Jo was always vocal. Brian O'Doherty writes of the couple, "Mostly, his wife did the talking for him, and he watched her curiously as if to discover what she thought he thought."¹¹⁴ O'Doherty's anecdote suggests that Edward Hopper married a woman who exhibited the same dominating tendencies as his own mother. Jo was strongly opinionated, educated and well-read, and presented herself in a way both vivacious and energetic. Hopper had, as Wells believed, moved from one "too-capable" woman to another. It is interesting to consider why Edward and Garret Hopper were attracted to women who exerted such dominating tendencies. For Edward, it would seem that he took an odd comfort in marrying a woman who exhibited so many similar qualities as his mother. Whatever reason the Hopper men had for marrying their respective wives, Elizabeth Hopper and Jo's abilities to take care of themselves were difficult for Garret and Edward to handle.

Adding to the complexity of the Hopper's marriage was its mutually abusive nature: "...their vitriolic exchanges came to slapping and biting, kicking and screaming, battles available to all her [Jo's] neighbours through the thin walls of Three Washington Square."¹¹⁵ Though Edward was less garrulous than his wife, he was no less passionate. The many fights between the two indicate trouble within the marriage, trouble that came from Hopper's inability to cope with a wife who exhibited a power rivaling his own:

¹¹⁴ Brian O'Doherty, *American Masters: the Voice and the Myth*. (New York: Random House, 1973),13.

¹¹⁵ Souter, *Edward Hopper*, 114.

“Edward’s comments conveyed hostility toward women in general and his wife in particular.”¹¹⁶ This hostility led to Hopper’s attempt to prove his superiority with his art, which expressed his desire to regain the control he felt himself losing each day in his marriage.

Edward and Jo’s sexual relationship was just as fraught with tension as the rest of their marriage. It is believed that Jo and Edward did not have sex until after their marriage in 1924.¹¹⁷ The sexual relationship that began then only intensified their marriage’s tumult:

According to her diaries, she [Jo] arrived at the marriage bed a virgin... Hopper on the other hand, apparently freed of any moralistic codes of good Baptist conduct or biblical sins of the flesh, discounted any sensitivity he might have had to her first and subsequent sexual experiences with him. He even forbade her from discussing sex or seeking information among her married female friends, considering it “gossip” that was no-one else’s business.¹¹⁸

Souter’s assertion that Hopper felt sexually repressed by the limitations of his Baptist upbringing on his sexual expression strengthens previous claims about the inhibiting effect that the religion had on his life. More importantly, Souter emphasizes Hopper’s need to control Jo, particularly when it involved their sexual relationship. By not allowing Jo to discuss her sexuality with friends, Hopper maintained a power over part of their marriage. It also indicates Hopper’s reluctance for Jo to become more knowledgeable about sex, worrying, perhaps, that such insights would lead to a “too-

¹¹⁶ Fryd, *Art and the Crisis*, 44.

¹¹⁷ Souter, *Edward Hopper*, 105.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

modern” Jo. For Hopper, who grew up following strict Baptist traditions, the modern woman capable of learning about and enjoying sex was an unfamiliar, and therefore terrifying, reality. Beyond simply being unfamiliar, a woman’s sexual enlightenment implied an autonomy that made Hopper anxious. A sexually active woman would have a number of sexual partners. Each subsequent male partner, therefore, could potentially be compared to those that came before him. Though there is no evidence to suggest that Jo had any sexual partners before marrying Edward, the possibility of comparison to other men would have unnerved Hopper.

Despite his fear of Jo’s increasing modernity, Hopper was equally displeased with her unwillingness to engage in sex: “For Jo, sex became a marital duty rather than a true exchange of affection.”¹¹⁹ Jo soon tired of Hopper’s physical needs, particularly because he was often too forceful. Returning to their wedding night: “...Hopper carried with him the Victorian baggage of male sexual domination and simply and directly took her, preferring, as her diaries shouted, “...attacks from the rear!”¹²⁰ Hopper simultaneously did not want his wife to become more sexually aware, yet wished for her to be more sexually involved: he wanted Jo to be both virgin and whore. This paradox depicts Hopper as a man confused by his wish for power but also human connection.

The Hoppers lived amongst the bohemians in Greenwich Village, who rebelled fiercely against traditional gender roles. Fryd juxtaposes Edward’s “rather Victorian notions about woman’s roles at home and in the bedroom”¹²¹ with Jo’s dominant role as Edward’s manager¹²² in order to indicate a disjunction between what Hopper expected

¹¹⁹ Souter, *Edward Hopper*, 105.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Fryd, *Art and the Crisis*, 49.

¹²² Ibid.

from Jo and how she actually behaved. Though Jo was subject to Hopper's power in the bedroom, it was a small victory. Jo's lack of physical desire for her husband could not have escaped his attention. Junker suggests that it was, in fact, this tension that made Hopper's paintings so dynamic:

But in the artist's studio, the tensions that flowed from the tumultuous marriage of this sullen man and this fiery woman energized Hopper's art, inspiring unmatched pictures of human longing-for human contact, for sexual fulfillment-the kind of longing that this painter could never comfortably express in his own life.¹²³

Junker sees Hopper's inability to realize sexual expression with Jo as stimulating his work. Junker is not specifically referring to Hopper's female nudes, but rather speaks of the energy that Jo added to his *oeuvre* generally. In an odd way, Jo's reluctance to provide her husband with the physicality he desired pushed him to create psychologically-imbued works. Hopper's female figures not only represent his attempt to punish the female, but also, perhaps, represent Hopper himself. Hopper presents the female figure's threatening nature, as well as her vulnerable one, somehow indicating a way in which he perhaps related to the female figure who desires physicality.

Historical and biographical perspectives intertwine when the Hoppers are considered in relation to all of the changes dominating America in the 1900s. They did not escape the tension that gripped the rest of the country, but were instead affected by it:

Jo shared with other women a discomfort with her Victorian upbringing and an inability to reconcile it with the newer, more open sexuality that encouraged experimentation and pleasure; she expressed unease about sex

¹²³ Junker and Hopper, *Edward Hopper*, 50.

with her husband.”¹²⁴

Jo was a victim of the division between adherence to old ideals and expression of new ones: she was not comfortable with either, and therefore existed, as many women did, in between two spheres. The Hoppers lived during a time in which women were simultaneously experiencing new freedoms and still controlled by Victorian limitations imposed on them by anxious men. Hopper was just such an anxious man. Though Jo was not running around the streets of New York scantily clad, proclaiming her sexual freedom, historians emphasize Jo’s modernity. This modernity was precisely what threatened the traditional roles that men valued. Hopper’s response to the changes he witnessed, both in society and in his own marriage, functioned in several ways: first he removed his wife from the professional art world, then artistically placed her within domestic confines in a way that suggested it was precisely where women belonged.

After their marriage, Jo became the model for most of the women Hopper painted.¹²⁵ Fryd suggests that she is, in fact, the model for the female figure in *Eleven A.M.*¹²⁶ There is therefore a way in which one can begin to consider Hopper’s artistic containment of the female as being more specific to his unconscious desire or fantasy to imprison his own wife:

His paintings of women exhibiting themselves in windows...or in sexually-charged situations continued throughout his entire career. The fact that almost all were based on poses by Josephine Hopper made it seem natural for him to tell her to take off all her clothes and look like a

¹²⁴ Fryd, *Art and the Crisis*, 105.

¹²⁵ Junker and Hopper, *Edward Hopper*, 33.

¹²⁶ Fryd, *Art and the Crisis*, 97.

stripper.¹²⁷

Souter implies something sadistic about Hopper's decision to use his wife as his model, believing it was Hopper's way of forcing his wife into acceptably sexualized roles. It was "natural" indeed for an artist to request that his model perform certain roles in certain guises. Before his marriage, Hopper symbolically dominated the female gender, using one female figure to signify the entire sex. Though one could argue that before his marriage, Hopper's anxiety was specific towards his mother, his female subjects are too anonymous. This is particularly true when compared to his female subjects after his marriage, female subjects who become increasingly individualized. After marrying and using his wife as the model for his female subjects, Hopper's desire to keep the female within his canvas indicates his anxieties about his wife specifically. *Eleven A.M.* is the first work studied thus far to demonstrate Hopper's move from a generalized anxiety to a specific one.

Hopper's childhood and marriage were not the only things to complicate his relationship with the opposite sex. In the 1930s, a number of psychological tests were conducted to determine how artists ranked amongst other professionals. These tests continued into the 1960s, and found that the male, heterosexual artist was feminine in nature. Howard Singerman writes that avant-garde artists supported this idea, believing that a male artist was only male physically. His soul, according to such proponents, was that of a woman's.¹²⁸ Hopper's insecurities and feelings of superiority regarding women could only have been heightened by this generalization, a generalization that positioned heterosexual, male artists like Hopper in a feminine light. One can therefore see his

¹²⁷ Souter, *Edward Hopper*, 196.

¹²⁸ Howard Singerman, "Women and Artists, Students and Teachers," in *Art Subjects: Making Artists in the American University* (Berkeley (Calif.): University of California Press, 1999), 43.

attempts to dominate the female figure in his female nudes as a reaction against the feminine label that society was attaching to male artists.

As in Hopper's earlier female nudes, *Eleven A.M.*'s composition imprisons its female subject. The focus on Hopper's confining compositions may seem repetitive at this point in the analysis, but cannot be over-emphasized. His formal decision to consistently lock his female nudes into such compositions indicates his pathological need to control the female. The greater the number of his female nudes who are confined to such compositions, the greater the evidence of Hopper's desire. Emily Thompson James analyzes *Eleven A.M.*'s composition:

The arrangement creates a strange tension, as the woman seems trapped by her own inertia. She seems desirous of escaping, but incapable of doing so. The inside represents safety and a place from which to observe. The outside represents risk and exposure.¹²⁹

James indicates the compositional impossibility of the female realizing her wish to escape. The composition indeed gives the sense that the woman is entirely at the mercy of her interior environment. She looks out of the window, indicating her wish to be outside, yet the painting insists that she remain firmly in her chair. James suggests that the woman's domestic interior is the place where she is safest, and perhaps can do the least harm. The painting implies that women would do best to remain in the home, where there is least "risk."

The possibility for women to step outside of the home in the 1900s was indeed great. Men in the early-mid twentieth century were confused by the growing sense of female independence: "The era of submissive wives was wilting beneath the surge of

¹²⁹ Thompson James, *Changing Times*, 11.

empowerment as more women attended college, earned degrees in the professions and insinuated their way into the workplace.”¹³⁰ Men therefore attempted to control women by not allowing them a great deal of power in the workplace. Such restrictions were placed on female artists, like Hopper’s own wife Jo: “...women artists were tolerated, but not invited to exhibit with the “serious” men.”¹³¹ Just as other men resisted female artists, Hopper curtailed female independence by demanding his wife’s transition from artist to model: “Jo forfeited her career as an artist for her husband’s sake...she did not give up her artistic career willingly, nor did she enjoy cooking, cleaning, and other household duties.”¹³² As an artist, Jo was professionally, and financially, independent. As her husband’s model, Jo was at his mercy.

Jo and Edward’s relationship implies mutual abuse: both became angry, both yelled. Yet Edward Hopper continued to work as an artist, while Jo gave up her career to help with his. That she did so unwillingly suggests that Jo is a casualty of patriarchy’s hold on American society in the 1900s. Though women were indeed beginning to assert their independence more prominently, many, like Jo, were still ultimately subject to male domination. Jo’s biography demonstrates this, as do Hopper’s female nudes. Hopper’s desperation for control over his fiery wife manifests itself in these works, particularly in *Eleven A.M.*

Eleven A.M.

¹³⁰ Souter, *Edward Hopper*, 93.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹³² Fryd, *Art and the Crisis*, 47.

Though Hopper transforms Jo into a naked woman in *Eleven A.M.*, he removes the obvious eroticism that the previous two female subjects possessed. The figure's nudity implies her sexuality, "yet the figure lacks libidinous energy...."¹³³ At the time of the painting's completion, Hopper had been married for two years to a woman uninterested in sexual contact. This spurred Hopper's need to artistically express his unrealized sexual fantasies. By representing a naked female, Hopper presents a figure for male consumption. If she is not eroticized, lacking "libidinous energy," however, she is simply a seated woman who happens to wear no clothes. If Hopper's fantasy is controlling a female who is sexually available for him in the way his wife was not, why not eroticize his subject? Jo was not interested in a great deal of sexual contact with her husband. Perhaps Hopper was unable to fully eroticize a female subject for whom his wife, sexually uninterested, modeled. It would seem that Hopper's interests in *Eleven A.M.* are more about creating a sense of unease with the woman's nakedness, as though reminding male viewers of the continuous need to control women. Yet Schmied reminds:

Many of Hopper's paintings contain a covert eroticism. It is not explicit, merely hinted in numbers of tiny details. This is especially true in the depictions of women... The erotic suspense in these scenes derives from the absence of a partner...¹³⁴

Even if the female in *Eleven A.M.* lacks "libidinous energy," the painting is no less eroticized. The mere fact of the woman's lone nudity is erotic in itself: a woman wearing nothing but shoes will be an appealing image to male viewers. Schmied suggests that the

¹³³ Carol Troyen, "Hopper's Women," in *Edward Hopper: [exhibition, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, May 6, 2007 - August 19, 2007, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, September 16, 2007 - January 21, 2008, The Art Institute of Chicago, February 16, 2008 - May 11, 2008]* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007), 178.

¹³⁴ Wieland Schmied and Edward Hopper, *Edward Hopper: Portraits of America* (Munich: Prestel, 1995), 74.

woman's nudity is enough to tempt the viewer's imagination. James furthers this idea of an interesting narrative ambiguity by drawing attention to the dichotomy between the seriousness of the woman's pose and the "impropriety" of her nakedness. James finds this to be one of many opposed concepts in the painting. The work is even further complicated by the male's symbolic presence.

While the male's symbolic presence was found in the suggestiveness of the unmade beds and phallic bedposts of *Summer Interior* and *Evening Wind*, there are no such beds to be found in *Eleven A.M.* Instead, the male's presence can be found in the erect verticality of the urban landscape outside of the female's apartment: the female is imprisoned in her interior, the male is represented in the freedom of the exterior world. The male's symbolic presence substitutes for the male's physical presence within the narrative, maintaining Mulvey's third gaze. If the urban exterior signifies the male, then the female appears to return the symbolic male's gaze. Yet she is naked, vulnerable. Though she meets "his" stare, the painting still presents the female as inferior to the male signifier's gaze. This gaze is available in the urban exterior, which signifies the male presence. The woman is, as James suggested, subject to this masculine exterior world. She is destined to gaze out at it longingly, but will never be able to exist in it.

It is also interesting to consider the way in which the female figure is on view for people in the adjacent urban buildings. The viewer cannot see much beyond the window, but does catch a glimpse of buildings that are right across from the woman's own. Perhaps men who have returned home for an early lunch gaze out at the nude woman who sits so exposed in front of her window. The painting's voyeuristic possibilities are endless, not only from the perspective of the painting's viewers, but also from the unseen

viewers within the work itself. This increases the female figure's vulnerability: not only does the viewer stare at her, but so too, perhaps, do other urban residents.

Viewers of *Eleven A.M.* are in a strange position. James writes that a connection between the viewer and the female within the work is impossible:

“The cropping of the image creates the sense that the viewer is standing in the room with the woman, quietly observing her. Yet, her body and face turn away...establishes complete psychological distance between the two [viewer and sitter]. Physical closeness and psychological distance exist simultaneously.”¹³⁵

The painting refuses to allow its figure to meet the viewer's gaze, instead depicting her as immersed in her own thoughts and the view outside of her window. The female can never actually connect with a viewer, but is instead forced to endure his gaze while considering the erect architecture outside of her window. The painting suggests that the female will be perpetually seated in that blue chair, alone, forever gazing out of her apartment window. This feeling of relentless stasis comes from the contrast between the diagonals of the light and the linearity of the window and the green curtain behind the figure. This composition traps the female figure within it, creating the work's static nature.

Before his marriage, Hopper's works symbolized the male using an unmade bed and bedposts. In *Summer Interior*, the bed overwhelmed the female subject who leaned against it in despair. In *Evening Wind*, the etching's subject appeared to long for the outside, to be away from the constraints of the bed. After Hopper married, his works relocate the male's symbolic presence to the exterior world, a world men were still

¹³⁵ James, *Changing Times*, 12.

controlling.¹³⁶ Hopper's works became more interested in exhibiting the "proper" dichotomy between the masculine and feminine world. *Eleven A.M.* suggests that Hopper still believed that a woman's place was in her home. The painting depicts his desire to keep the female from occupying the "masculine," exterior world.

Earlier works, like *Summer Interior* and *Evening Wind*, are not as concerned with this dichotomy. The masculine signifiers in those works similarly suggest a male's overwhelming presence, but do not construct two clearly differentiated environments the way *Eleven A.M.* does. In *Eleven A.M.*, the female figure occupies her domestic interior while looking out at the masculine exterior that she can never inhabit. Though *Evening Wind* also depicts a figure looking out the window, there is nothing beyond the windowpane, nor is it odd that the woman is in her bed at that time of day. The female figure in *Eleven A.M.* remains in her home, naked, at a time of day in which most are out of the home. This makes even clearer that the painting insists upon the woman remaining enclosed in her domestic interior.

Eleven A.M., then, painted after Hopper's marriage, lacks something and changes another crucial element in the first female nudes examined: the eroticization of the naked female and the unmade bed symbolizing the male's presence. The paintings in this thesis therefore fall into two distinct categories: those that came before Hopper's marriage and those completed after. Hopper endows his female figures with greater individuality after his marriage; his wife was his model. He presents the woman's nakedness without obvious eroticism: his desire, which initially combined a wish to contain the female and represent a kind of fantasy sexuality, became more interested strictly in the female's

¹³⁶ Ellen W. Todd, "Will (S)he Stoop to Conquer? Preliminaries Toward a Reading of Edward Hopper's "Office at Night"" in *Visual Theory: Painting and Interpretation*, by Norman Bryson, Michael Ann. Holy, and K. Moxey (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 51.

containment than her sexuality. Hopper maintains a sense of her vulnerability and objectification by removing her clothes (she is still the object of the male's gaze), but the painting is much more intent on juxtaposing her imprisonment within her domestic interior with the freedoms of the exterior (signifying the male).

Morning in a City

Eighteen years after painting *Eleven A.M.*, Hopper created *Morning in a City* (Fig. 2). A naked woman stands alone in a bedroom looking out of her window onto an adjacent urban building. To her right is a single, unmade bed. The woman stands in profile, allowing the viewer access to her rear end, left breast, and facial profile. The woman holds a white piece of fabric in her hands as she gazes out of the window. Kranzfelder suggests that this is the piece's "salient detail,"¹³⁷ and Hopper's means of playing with the dichotomous concepts of "concealing and revealing."¹³⁸ Many scholars consider the way in which Hopper's paintings raise more questions than they answer.

Morning in a City grabs the viewer's attention just as the painting *Eleven A.M.* presents



Figure 2

several interesting formal dichotomies. Details like the fabric the woman holds allow the viewer's imagination to run wild.

The work's composition is tightly constructed, with strict verticals enclosing the female figure, such as the corners of the walls

and the two wooden frames at the painting's far right. Just as in the other paintings,

¹³⁷ Ivo Kranzfelder and Edward Hopper, *Edward Hopper, 1882-1967: Vision of Reality* (Köln: B. Taschen, 1995), 50.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

Hopper acts as, and therefore insists that the viewer functions as, voyeur:

The artist's (and our own) proximity to this naked woman who stares onto a city street during the daytime, when we expect her to be engaged in other activities, increases our unease over her sexuality and our voyeurism, and establishes reasons for her containment and regulation.

She is a threat to herself, the artist, and to us, the viewer.¹³⁹

Fryd cites the woman's sexuality, particularly given the time of day, as the reason for the viewer's discomfort. She acts against what society expects from her, and the painting punishes the female figure by refusing to let her move from the confining interior. Fryd's assertion that the woman is a threat to herself, however, is debatable. Fryd's position is almost hyper-masculine, as though the woman's "unnatural" modernity not only imperils the men around her, but also her own, "natural" feminine self. None of the painting's formal qualities suggest that the woman threatens herself.

Morning in a City invites the viewer to act as voyeur, subjugating the female even further. Hopper relegates the female to the confines of his canvas as a means of resolving the anxieties women raised in the early mid-twentieth century. Just as Burgin suggests that the male in Hopper's 1940 *Office at Night* solves the problem of erotic tension by refusing to meet the female's gaze, so too is the "problem" of female autonomy in *Morning in a City* alleviated by clearly indicating the woman's imprisonment within her bedroom.

Though *Morning in a City* contains an unmade bed, it is a twin-sized bed. The urban exterior more powerfully signifies the male, just as it did in *Eleven A.M.* Again, the female gazes out of the window, ostensibly returning the male's (as signified by the

¹³⁹ Fryd, *Art and the Crisis*, 97.

window) gaze, but her nudity implies the way in which she is still subject to the male's gaze. Hopper's female subject represents a threat. Not only to Hopper, but to the male gender generally.

There is another masculine symbol in *Morning in a City*. Michael Culver finds Hopper's use of light in the work to be a disturbing formal element:

The clear, harsh light seems to intrude on the woman and her darkened room, creating bold contrasts of light and shadow. The light literally divides the woman in half; one side is in full sunlight, and the other in dark shadow.¹⁴⁰

Light penetrates the room, seeping into the woman's atmosphere. The painting rejects female power by subjugating its female subject to light's invasion. Culver sees light as an aggressive force, barging in on the exposed woman. Indeed, Judith Barter finds that the woman appears threatened,¹⁴¹ strengthening the idea that light signifies an aggressive, masculine presence.

Schmied similarly finds light to be a problematic feature of Hopper's works generally. He looks specifically at light in Hopper's works of women, finding:

Yet light can be even more merciless than darkness...Hopper's light can be blinding, but it has no warmth. It can awaken the hope of a new life only to disappoint it a moment later- think of the many female figures who bask in the sun, receptive and full of expectation, but who are apparently destined to remain alone...Hopper's people are continually deceived by it

¹⁴⁰ Michael Culver, *The Image of Woman in the Art of Ernest Hemingway, Edward Hopper, and Howard Hawks*, diss., University of Louisville, 1986, 77.

¹⁴¹ Judith Barter, "Travels and Travails: Hopper's Late Pictures," in *Edward Hopper: [exhibition, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, May 6, 2007 - August 19, 2007, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, September 16, 2007 - January 21, 2008, The Art Institute of Chicago, February 16, 2008 - May 11, 2008]* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007), 219.

[light].¹⁴²

Just as Culver is troubled by the harsh light in *Morning in a City*, so too Schmied finds Hopper's works tease their subjects with light. Hopper does not allow his figures to enjoy the sunlight streaming in. He divides them with it. He does not permit his women to take pleasure in the light, only offers them its warmth without actually giving it. As Schmied suggests, Hopper deceives his figures with light. He allows just a hint of it to penetrate his work, leaving both the female subject and the viewer wanting more. He transforms a typically pleasurable formal element into a violent one. This deception is yet another means of quelling his anxieties about women. Hopper's naked subject cannot enjoy anything about her environment, not even the light that has the potential to warm her.

For Hopper, the female is the ultimate threat, illustrated by *Morning in a City*. Yet the female figure in the painting appears, to female viewers, unthreatening:

Hopper's women are vulnerable, marked by disappointment, in need of protection. Yet they still seem to harbor hopes and expectations. We have the impression that there is something undefined, perhaps unnamable, but at least beyond our comprehension, to which they wish to surrender themselves.¹⁴³

For men straddling Victorian ideals and more modern ways of thinking, women's burgeoning sexuality represented the ultimate move in favor of equality between the sexes. For many women, however, deviating from Victorian thought was appealing and liberating. Schmied's passage suggests that Hopper's female subjects represent this new kind of woman, poised on the brink between old, limiting ways of thinking and fresh,

¹⁴² Schmied and Hopper, *Edward Hopper*, 100, 105.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 74.

more open ideas. This limbo, this inability to move, makes the female in *Morning in a City* appear even more powerless against the men who stare at her.

The female figure in *Morning in a City* is more individualized than others studied thus far. She bears a close resemblance to Jo Hopper, implying Hopper's specific anxieties about his wife. Robert Hobbs wonders, "Was he [Hopper] so repressed that he could only fantasize about other women by first imaging Jo in these guises, or was he really so dominated by Jo that he could not hire young models if he wished?"¹⁴⁴ Hobbs addresses those works of Hopper's in which the female figure appears as an office vixen (*Office at Night*, 1940) or a stripper (*Girlie Show*, 1941). Hobbs' statement implies not only Hopper's repressions, but also his feelings of inferiority when compared to his wife. Though the woman in *Morning in a City* is not so explicitly erotic as the women in those works, one can still see Hopper's tendency to put his wife on display, forcing her into vulnerable positions.

In an interview with O'Doherty, Hopper once said, "Freud says the devil is a woman."¹⁴⁵ Shortly thereafter, he remarked, "Aristotle says women are undeveloped men."¹⁴⁶ Hopper's reticence was infamous, giving added weight to those statements that he did make. His disparaging remarks about women indicate his anxieties about them. Hopper contains the female subjects in his works, confining them to tight compositions and inescapable interiors. After marrying Jo, his desire to contain became less general. It was not enough to simply keep Jo from chatting about her sex life. Hopper needed more: more power, more control. He turned to his canvas to find it, creating works like *Eleven*

¹⁴⁴ Robert Carleton Hobbs and Edward Hopper, *Edward Hopper* (New York: H.N. Abrams, in Association with the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1987), 122, 123.

¹⁴⁵ O'Doherty, *American Masters*, 18.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

A.M. and *Morning in a City* in order to alleviate his anxieties.

Chapter Three Image Bibliography

Figure 1, Hopper, Edward. *Eleven A.M.*, oil on canvas, 1926. Whitney Museum of

American Art, New York. leninimports.com.

Figure 2, Hopper, Edward. *Morning in a City*, oil on canvas, 1944. Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown. inspiredposters.wordpress.com.

Conclusion

Examined formally, historically, biographically, and psychoanalytically, Hopper's female nudes are complex works. *Summer Interior*, *Evening Wind*, *Eleven A.M.*, and *Morning in a City* share a number of qualities that illustrate Hopper's attempt to exert an artistic authority over women. *A Woman in the Sun*, chronologically the latest piece studied, is more problematic, and resists categorization with the others. The thesis explored this work first, hoping to better interpret those pieces that came before it. In all of these works, women are either nude or half-dressed, indicating their vulnerability to the male's gaze. The women therefore function as sexual fantasies for Hopper, who, until 1924, did not have a sustained outlet for his sexual expression. The works' compositions are all tightly constructed, formally illustrating Hopper's desire to confine the female figures to a sphere of his complete control. The pieces force the viewer into a voyeuristic perspective, indicating the way in which the women are objects of a gaze to which they cannot consent. All of the works contain a symbol of male presence: unmade beds, bedposts, and urban structures. The male presence within the bedroom serves as a means of inserting the male gaze into the narrative to further objectify the female figures.

All of the subjects in Hopper's female nudes are situated within the home, specifically the bedroom for two of the works. This suggests Hopper's desire to relegate his female figures to the place he felt they were meant to occupy. The viewer never gains full access to the women's faces, robbing them of their individuality. Though it is believed that Jo was the model for several of the works, the viewer never sees her face entirely, only her red hair. One can view such pieces as indicating Hopper's anxieties about his wife.

Hopper's desire to contain the female within his tight compositional structures

functions as a kind of Freudian fantasy in which the female is entirely under his control. As has been established, Hopper had, from an early age, a complicated relationship with the opposite gender. Caricatures done during his teen years imply his fear of female aggression. Later caricatures indicate Jo's lack of attention toward her husband. Thus, Hopper's mother was a too-present figure, while his wife neglected his needs. Sharon Burchett finds that in all of Hopper's caricatures depicting such anxieties, "it is the male...who is consistently wronged or pitiable."¹⁴⁷ Fryd locates several more caricatures that indicate Hopper's feelings of inferiority in his marriage with Jo. *The Sacrament of Sex (Female Version)* from 1935 depicts Hopper, wearing an apron, bowing down to Jo, who reclines regally in her bed. A third caricature, *Non-Anger Man and Pro-Anger Woman* of 1925-35 features a man in the garb of an angel towering over a miniature woman who has claws for hands. The man's hands, however, are folded in prayer. Fryd finds the work is Hopper's means of indicating, "the man's innocence and goodness and the woman's rancor and danger."¹⁴⁸ All of these caricatures indicate Hopper's feelings of essential submissiveness to his wife: they represent his reality. His female nudes, however, represent his fantasy of a world in which women are completely within his control and vulnerable to his bidding. It is useful to compare Hopper's caricatures to his female nudes. There is a way in which the caricatures function as strictly autobiographical depictions. His female nudes, however, function as his desires.

Fryd further suggests that such caricatures also indicate Hopper's specific anxiety about the new type of marriage that was present in mid-twentieth century America¹⁴⁹ to

¹⁴⁷ Sharon R. Burchett, *The Male/Female Dyad in the Oeuvre of Edward Hopper: Interpretations and the Issue of Alienation*, thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1970, 18.

¹⁴⁸ Vivien Green. Fryd, *Art and the Crisis of Marriage: Edward Hopper and Georgia O'Keeffe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 44, 45.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

which he saw his own marriage falling prey. Biography and history combine to motivate Hopper's desire to create his female nudes. Women were spending less time in the kitchen and more time exploring professional opportunities outside of the home. Some scholars, like Robert Hobbs, suggest that given the private nature of the caricatures (they were never publicly exhibited), one cannot read them as serious indications of Hopper's feelings.¹⁵⁰ Hopper nonetheless created not just one such caricature but several caricatures. Though he did not choose to publicly exhibit the caricatures, their content indicates the intensity of Hopper's feelings. Perhaps, in fact, that choice suggests that such explicit, autobiographical representations had no place in the public sphere.

Summer Interior, the earliest work studied, exhibits Hopper's wish to artistically remove the threat that the female poses. The painting's imprisoning composition and somber tone indicate the female figure's despair. Hopper triumphs over his despondent female figure by forcing her into a submissive position. Examining Hopper's childhood, specifically his experiences with women, reveals complexities that only further defend the claim that *Summer Interior* represents the first of many of Hopper's attempts to reclaim authority over the female. Degas' influence in this piece is undeniable, demonstrating the effects of Hopper's years in Europe and the influence of Robert Henri, who himself emulated the Impressionist style.

Evening Wind continues to demonstrate Hopper's preoccupation with the female figure. The viewer is again placed in a voyeuristic position in order to heighten the sense of the female figure's vulnerability. As in *Summer Interior*, the female figure denies the viewer access to her face. Hopper barely individualizes his female figures in his early

¹⁵⁰ Robert Carleton Hobbs and Edward Hopper, *Edward Hopper* (New York: H.N. Abrams, in Association with the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1987), 120.

years, presenting his women as sexual objects and little more. In *Summer Interior*, the male presence is symbolically available in the unmade bed and phallic bedposts. In *Evening Wind*, the male is present in the unmade bed. In each of Hopper's female nudes, there is an element that demarcates it from the rest. *Summer Interior*'s unusual element would seem to be its colors, which heighten the work's eroticism. *Evening Wind*'s unique element is its void beyond the window, which functions as an unsettling and ambiguous narrative quality.

Eleven A.M. is the first female nude after Hopper's marriage to Jo, and acts as a transition work between Hopper's representation of his anxieties regarding women generally and his wife specifically. The female figure becomes more individualized, and Hopper becomes more preoccupied with depicting the necessary separation between the masculine exterior world and the feminine interior. Is it with this painting that woman's burgeoning modernity is clearly depicted. Her nudity, in the middle of the morning, recalls activities from the night before. The male is again symbolically present, this time in the urban exterior.

Morning in a City continues to relegate the female to her domestic interior, and continues to represent the male symbolically in the erect urban exterior seen outside of the window. Just as was the oddity in *Eleven A.M.*, the reader wonders what the woman in *Morning in a City* is doing standing unclothed in the middle of the day, idly staring out of her window. Historically contextualized, the painting demonstrates Hopper's awareness and fear of the new, modern woman. Hopper removes the threat that such a woman poses by placing her within her "proper" domestic confines.

Woman in the Sun resolves many of Hopper's anxieties regarding women. The

female figure is still nude, reminding of the female figure's subjectivity to her male artist and viewer. Hopper removes the female figure from an urban setting and places her within a natural environment, in a sense accepting the female's modernity without actually allowing her to take full advantage of it. Her heels and cigarette, signifying her modernity, remind the viewer that Hopper was well aware of the ways in which modern women in the middle of the twentieth century were conducting themselves. But Hopper has returned the female to her "natural" place, dulling the threat that she would pose in an urban setting. This final female nudes brings together many of Hopper's anxieties, and, in a sense, solves the problem that women created for Hopper. It is not so simple as to say that Hopper resolved all of his anxieties with this last female nude, but rather that with it, Hopper made a greater attempt to resign himself to the realities of his society.

"Looking at Hopper's art is akin to voyeurism, to a type of seeing that is aggressive and passive, intimate and distant, sexually stimulating and safe."¹⁵¹ In all his female nudes, Hopper forces the viewer into a voyeuristic perspective. The viewer feels guilty for watching these women, but cannot look away. The female figures are not able to consent to the viewer's gaze, but are instead entirely subject to it. A great deal too has been made of the fact that Hopper's paintings appear to represent snapshots, moments in time in which the narrative ceases to flow. Hopper's works freeze the female figure. She cannot move outside the realm of his control.

"In Freud's revised model of psychic functioning, the dream, literature, or art can be something other than compensatory pleasure; it can give form to inchoate ideas, primitive fears, anxieties, and childhood traumas."¹⁵² Hopper's female nudes do precisely

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 123, 127.

¹⁵² Margaret Iversen, *Beyond Pleasure: Freud, Lacan, Barthes* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 24.

that: visually manifest his anxieties about the way in which he specifically, and society generally, was so dominated by the fairer sex. Edward Hopper's female nudes comprise a fascinating portion of his *oeuvre*. It is impossible to study the works without studying too Hopper's own experiences with women. His female nudes both demand the viewer's gaze and shy away from it. The works' ambiguities only increase with greater examination. Having analyzed the pieces from a variety of theoretical perspectives, only one thing is certain: Hopper's female nudes are the only women he could ever completely control.

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