EDWARD HOPPER'S URBAN LANDSCAPES:

MODERN EXPERIENCE

AND ALIENATION

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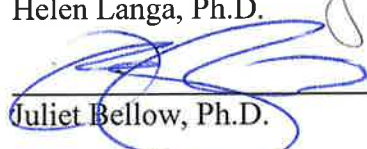the Requirements for the Degree of

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To my mother, father, and aunt. I thank them for always supporting and believing in me.

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ABSTRACT

Edward Hopper's works are generally associated with alienation, but the sources of this feeling are not studied extensively and in a comprehensive manner. Hopper's representation of deserted and bleak cityscapes focus on loneliness and isolation of urban centers to create this feeling of alienation, which is supported by subtle depictions of dangerous possibilities at night. This alienating modern experience is also related to the transition from rural to urban areas and the resulting adjustment period while this transition creates tensions between nature and civilization in Hopper's works. Hopper's use of light is another alienating aspect of his works, especially in artificially lighted scenes. Hopper also focused on new voyeuristic possibilities of urban life and the way he represented these qualities created alienating experiences for the viewers. All these aspects of Hopper's works are contributing to the feeling of alienation and they are all related to the modern experience.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Edward Hopper's works are generally associated with the feeling of alienation, but why do viewers feel that way? Numerous scholars have discussed aspects of Hopper's paintings that have alienating qualities. However, this concept has not been extensively explained and different aspects are generally discussed separately, without a comprehensive argument to combine them.

There are numerous qualities in Hopper's works that contribute to the feeling of alienation in relation to his thematic and expressive choices. Hopper is famous for his urban landscapes, so the aspects of these paintings should be considered as the starting point for understanding sources of alienating experiences. Hopper's cityscapes represent deserted and bleak urban centers, focusing on the human condition in relation to loneliness and isolation. John Hollander argues that narrative is not important in Hopper's cityscapes, because they are about the "urban mythology," which he refers as representing the modern life in urban centers.[1] However, urban life is only a part of the modern experience, which includes other aspects such as the adjustments of transition from rural areas or small-towns to the cities. This transition creates an alienating experience while causing tensions between nature and civilization, and this is another aspect of the alienated quality, which is suggested in Hopper's landscape paintings.

Hopper's unique and unusual use of light also reinforces the alienating aspect of many of his works, especially for artificially lighted scenes, connected with the modern experience, which often suggest eerie atmospheres. His interest in light can also be connected with the representation of memories, which acts as another source for the feeling of alienation. Finally, voyeurism is another aspect related to modern experience, as urban centers with their artificially

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[1] John Hollander, "Hopper and the Figure of Room," *Art Journal* 41, no. 2 (1981): 157.

lighted interiors provided new voyeuristic possibilities, which intensify the alienating qualities in some of Hopper's works.

Given these qualities of alienation, memory suggestion, and voyeurism, an exploration of psychoanalytic interpretations can also be important for understanding the feeling of alienation in Hopper's works. Pamela Koob argues that Hopper's works represented the "inner life" of the artist, which will reflect his experiences in relation to the subconscious.[2] It is important, because while Hopper denied aspects such as loneliness and nostalgia being conscious themes, in an interview with Katharine Kuh, he said that "I have no conscious themes."[3] These unconscious aspects also correspond to the human condition in his bleak and isolated urban scenes, as he said "Unconsciously, probably, I was painting the loneliness of a large city."[4]

Another important aspect, in relation to a consideration of inner experiences, is the question of the viewer's experience while looking at Hopper's works. This is a less studied aspect, yet considering it hypothetically allows further exploration of projected feelings of alienation so often described in discussion of his works. Margaret Iversen refers to "the nature of the encounter with Hopper's paintings" in her discussion of the psychological aspects of these works, as experienced by the viewer.[5] This argument is supported by Hopper's stance on this subject, as he mentions that "Any psychological idea will have to be supplied by the viewer."[6] It

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[2] Pamela N. Koob, "States of Being: Edward Hopper and Symbolist Aesthetics," *American Art* 18, no. 3 (2004): 63-64.

[3] Edward Hopper quoted in Katharine Kuh, *The Artist's Voice: Talks with Seventeen Artists* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 135.

[4] Hopper quoted in Kuh, 134.

[5] Margaret Iversen, "In the Blind Field: Hopper and the Uncanny," *Art History* 21, no. 3 (1998): 421.

[6] Hopper quoted in Kuh, 135.

shows the role of the viewer and the importance of psychological aspects of his works while it can also be regarded as a replacement for the absence of narrative.

This thesis will address these diverse issues and bring them together in relation to the modern experience. Therefore, it will provide a more comprehensive discussion and understanding of the alienating qualities of Hopper's works with a focus on the human condition in modern urban centers.

CHAPTER 2

MODERN EXPERIENCE

Edward Hopper's works represented a transitional period in United States from the early

to mid-twentieth century. American cities grew significantly during this period with increasing

population and technological developments, as urban life became the center of a new experience,

which played an important role in Hopper's paintings. His representations of the urban landscape

focused on feelings of isolation, loneliness and alienation related to the cold and bleak cities.

These feelings are also associated with adjustments of moving from rural areas or small-towns to

the urban centers, as Hopper's paintings have a sense of displacement that reflects this

transitional period. He also commented on the alienating qualities of this transition in his

paintings that contrast nature and civilization. All these elements and changes can be regarded as

parts of the modern experience with its alienating qualities.

Urban Life

Representation of urban life became a significant theme for American art in the twentieth

century. Urban crowds, dynamism, skyscrapers and city landmarks represented modern

American cities in works of Ashcan School artists, Georgia O'Keeffe and Precisionists including

Charles Sheeler among others. Edward Hopper is one of the most famous American artists of this

period, known for his cityscapes, but his representation of modern urban centers differ from

others. Robert Hobbs argues that "which is absent is as important as what is present" in

Hopper's works.[7] It is especially important in his cityscapes, because his exclusion of some

aspects of urban life also shows what he focuses on, which is the human condition in relation to

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[7] Robert Hobbs, *Edward Hopper* (New York: H.N. Abrams, in association with the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1987), 134.

the modern experience. Therefore, absences in his urban landscapes are related to the feelings of alienation, isolation and loneliness.

Urban crowds and the dynamism of cities are distinctive elements of the representation of urban centers in the early twentieth century, especially in works of Ashcan School artists, so their absence in Hopper's works becomes an important aspect that underlines their alienating qualities. In his early paintings such as *New York Corner* [Figure 1], Hopper included urban crowds as he represented cities with gloomy atmospheres.[8] That his early style and themes are similar to works by Ashcan School artists is not surprising since Robert Henri was one of his teachers. However, as Hopper developed a unique style, he started to avoid urban crowds even in his paintings of cityscapes, which are often portrayed without any human presence. Karal Ann Marling points out this absence of human element in Hopper's works as she compares them with John Sloan's cityscapes. She argues that Hopper focused on buildings while architectural structures are typically placed in the background of Sloan's paintings.[9] She supports her argument by comparing Sloan's *Picture Shop Window* [Figure 2], where people look at the lighted window displays, to Hopper's *Drug Store* [Figure 3] representing a lighted pharmacy in an empty and dark urban scene, which she argues to have a dangerous atmosphere.[10] The absence of urban crowds in *Drug Store* emphasizes the threatening qualities of this night scene, which is intensified by the haunting presence of the dark building in the background.

Another Sloan painting that uses these lighted shops as a background is *Six O'Clock, Winter* [Figure 4], which also emphasizes the contrast with Hopper's empty cityscapes, as it

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[8] Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper: The Art and the Artist* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, in association with the Whitney Museum of American Art, 1980), 45.

[9] Karal Ann Marling, "*Early Sunday Morning*," *Smithsonian Studies in American Art* 2, no. 3 (1988): 37.

[10] Marling, 34-35.

represents a dynamic urban crowd during rush hour. Hopper also represented store fronts and empty streets in *Early Sunday Morning* [Figure 5]. The title would suggest an explanation for the emptiness of this scene, but Hopper mentioned that it is not necessarily Sunday, which emphasizes the isolation and loneliness he saw as characteristic of urban centers in general.[11] These empty urban scenes that are normally associated with crowds cause an uncanny feeling, as they look unfamiliar in these circumstances compared to what we are accustomed to see, and this reiterates the feeling of alienation, isolation and loneliness in many of Hopper's works.[12] *Approaching a City* [Figure 6] is yet another painting related to the sense of uncanny, as it represents a cityscape without human presence. Again, this absence emphasizes the focus on human condition in modern experience, as Lloyd Goodrich points out that Hopper's intention was to represent alienating qualities of entering a city by train.[13] Tom Slater also focuses on the isolation and desolation of this cityscape, as he argues that this atmosphere is supported by the bleakness of the architectural elements, especially the industrial building.[14]

Hopper did not always exclude figures, but even when he portrayed them, he still focused on qualities of isolation and loneliness in urban centers. Gail Levin argues that when Hopper depicted figures in his cityscapes, "they are often diminished, insignificant in relation to the massive architectural environment," and she gives *Manhattan Bridge Loop* [Figure 7] as an

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[11] Kuh, 134.

[12] The concept of uncanny is about the unsettling feeling caused by something being familiar and unfamiliar at the same time. For more information see Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003), 123-125.

[13] Lloyd Goodrich, *Edward Hopper* (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1971), 105-106.

[14] Tom Slater, "Fear of the City 1882-1967: Edward Hopper and the Discourse of Anti-Urbanism," *Social & Cultural Geography* 3, no. 2 (2002): 148.

example of these urban scenes.[15] The solitary figure in this painting is pushed to the side and plays a small role, which corresponds to his scale in comparison to the large architectural elements that covers most of the scene. *The City* [Figure 8] is another example of these paintings and even though there are several figures in this case, they are scattered and tiny compared to the buildings around, so the overall atmosphere still reflects isolation and loneliness. Gerry Souter argues that this scene lacks usual crowds of Washington Square, which emphasizes the bleakness typical of so many of Hopper's portrayals of urban centers.[16] This situation also refers back to the feeling of uncanny in his unusually empty urban landscapes.

Skyscrapers are regarded as a unique element of American cities in the early twentieth century and their representations became a distinctive aspect of American art, but they are surprisingly absent in Hopper's works. Ivo Kranzfelder points out this absence in *The City*, as he argues that Hopper focused on older architecture and often chose not to portray the top levels of high-rise buildings, which represents his attitude towards skyscrapers that have been around for about forty years at that point.[17] This absence becomes more significant considering other artists such as Georgia O'Keeffe and the precisionists who are painting cityscapes focusing solely on unique architectural elements of skyscrapers. They represented distinctive qualities of these massive structures with an emphasis of their sheer height. Anna Chave argues that O'Keeffe only painted upper levels of these skyscrapers and excluded street level in her cityscapes such as *The Shelton with Sunspots* [Figure 9] to achieve the sublime experience of looking at these tall

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[15] Levin, *The Art and the Artist*, 45.

[16] Gerry Souter, *Edward Hopper: Light and Dark* (New York: Parkstone International, 2012), 104.

[17] Ivo Kranzfelder, *Edward Hopper, 1882-1967: Vision of Reality*, trans. John W. Gabriel (Koln; New York: Taschen, 2002), 116-117.

buildings.[18] Therefore, Hopper's exclusion of upper levels becomes more significant as these are the parts that represent unique qualities of skyscrapers. His works share the quality of omitting human presence that is typical of O'Keeffe's urban paintings, but where her works excluded street level elements to focus on skyscrapers, Hopper omitted the soaring shapes of tall buildings and focused instead on deserted streets to emphasize bleakness of urban centers and how it affects the human condition. Levin also cites *City Roofs* [Figure 10] as an example for Hopper's negative approach towards skyscrapers, as the partially depicted tall building "takes up space and air and blocks the view and the light."[19] Even though their styles, atmospheres and representations of urban aspects differ, Hopper's *City Roofs* and Charles Sheeler's *Skyscrapers* [Figure 11] create a similar feeling of alienation associated with the modern experience of living in bleak urban centers with towering buildings. Sheeler's painting is covered with high-rise buildings and there is no empty space to see the sky or the street level, while Hopper reduced the partial view of a high-rise building to merely a blocking element in contrast to the open space on the other side of his painting, where viewers can see the sky over the roofs. Both paintings lack human presence, as if to suggest the hardship of living in this alienating environment.

Just as Hopper omitted urban crowds in his cityscapes, he created a similar sense of loneliness, isolation and alienation in his paintings of urban interiors through the omission of narrative, which can be regarded as a comment on the daily experiences of modern urban life. Mark Strand points out this absence in *Automat* [Figure 12], as he argues that narrative details could have suggested thoughts of the female figure and provided more information about her in

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[18] Anna C. Chave, "'Who Will Paint New York?': 'The World's New Art Center,' and the Skyscrapers of Georgia O'Keeffe." *American Art* 5, no. 1/2 (1991): 96.

[19] Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 247.

this lonely scene.[20] However, not knowing her thoughts or anything about her for that matter is a common experience in daily life in urban centers. Therefore, the feelings of isolation, loneliness and alienation in *Automat* are not just about the pensive and solitary figure but also about the encounter in general connected with the viewer's experience with this lack of information about her. Hobbs points out the mundaneness of this scene, as the isolation felt in automats in relation to mass production and mechanization of food services became a common experience in urban centers.[21] The chair in the foreground is also an important element in the composition. Empty chairs and tables are used for creating a connection with viewers by inviting them into the scene, as Vincent van Gogh's *Café Terrace at Night* [Figure 13] is an example of this use.[22] However, the chair in *Automat* takes the role of a barrier, creating a buffer zone between the personal space of the female figure and the viewer in the foreground of the painting, which strengthens the feeling of isolation.

Sunlight in a Cafeteria [Figure 14] represents a similar scene, but in this case the encounter is between the figures in the painting while the viewer witnesses it as an outsider. Gail Levin argues that there is a tension in this painting, as the male figure is looking in the direction of the woman, but neither of them has caught the other's glance yet.[23] This tension between the figures suggests a narrative for the painting, as there is a possibility of communication between them in which case they will learn more about each other. However, it is only a possibility and there is not actual communication between them. Wieland Schmied suggests that nothing will

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[20] Mark Strand, *Hopper* (Hopewell, NJ: Ecco Press, 1994), 41.

[21] Hobbs, 72.

[22] Josephine Cutts and James Smith, *Van Gogh* (Bath: Parragon, 2001), 88.

[23] Levin, *The Art and the Artist*, 52.

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happen between these two strangers as they will leave without talking to each other, which is a common occurrence in cities, making this form of alienation and distancing a part of the modern urban experience.[24] Hobbs also mentions the connection between *Automat* and *Sunlight in a Cafeteria*, as they both represent isolation between strangers in public spaces.[25]

In relation to psychoanalytic theory, the experience of the viewer looking at *Automat* is similar to daily life experiences in public spaces, so it can be considered in connection with the Freudian term "repetition compulsion."[26] This term can be associated with the viewers' encounters with Hopper's paintings and with other artworks in general. Usually artworks provide a more controlled setting for the viewers with narrative, details, references or symbols, so that they know or learn more about the situation than they experience in real life. However, Hopper did not include narrative elements and details, which created situations that are closer to daily-life experiences instead of providing a controlled environment for the viewers who are accustomed to it in their encounters with artworks. Therefore, Hopper's paintings that lack narrative, especially when there is no communication between figures, such as *Sunlight in a Cafeteria*, create yet another type of alienating feeling in his works. The feeling of alienation is strengthened when the viewer is directly faced with a real life situation without being in control while encountering with the painting, such as *Automat*.

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[24] Wieland Schmied, *Edward Hopper: Portraits of America*, trans. John W. Gabriel (Munich; New York: Prestel, 2011), 90.

[25] Hobbs, 88.

[26] Repetition compulsion is a defense mechanism for dealing with traumatic experiences, as the experience is repeated over and over again in a controlled environment which provides a sense of control over the event. For more information and examples see Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1961), 8-11, 29.

Another intriguing kind of reference to alienation in Hopper's works concerns the dangerous possibilities of urban centers, especially at night time, and he also used absence in his representations of these scenes to show other negative aspects of modern life in cities. Slater argues that Hopper's representation of empty streets at night creates a pervasive sense of danger instead of revealing threatening elements in an extreme style.[27] Gordon Theisen also points out that Hopper's scenes represent moments before a dramatic action could happen, which creates an unresolved tension.[28] It refers back to the absence of narrative and shows that he created dangerous atmospheres without necessarily depicting any visible threat, but implying that it is imminent. This is the case in *Nighthawks* [Figure 15], as the figures seem to be safe inside the lighted diner with no immediate threat and even though there is a tension in the scene, there are no signs of fear in their faces. However, as Joseph Stanton points out, they will eventually step outside to the empty streets of a dark city where dangerous events could happen.[29] Therefore, Hopper created a tense moment and implied threatening possibilities of urban centers at night in a subtle way, similar to his representation of other negative aspects of cities. Slater supports these possibilities in *Nighthawks* as he argues that the male figure seen from behind and the composition of the scene, with the lighted diner as opposed to the dark streets, intersection, and buildings in the background are similar to visual effects associated with film noir.[30] These movies also represent dark cities where dangerous events take place, but Hopper's subtle style

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[27] Slater, 145.

[28] Gordon Theisen, *Staying Up Much Too Late: Edward Hopper's Nighthawks and the Dark Side of American Psyche* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2006), 195.

[29] Joseph Stanton, "ON EDGE: Edward Hopper's Narrative Stillness," *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 77, no. 1/2 (1994): 25.

[30] Slater, 145.

and absence of extreme elements marks his different approach to representing the modern experience by focusing primarily on alienating qualities rather than any overt threat of violence.

Another work that could remind viewers of film noir scenes, because of its elevated viewpoint, dynamic composition and stark representation of a lonely figure is *Night Shadows* [Figure 16]. Rolf Gunter Renner discusses the tension created by this viewpoint and dynamic composition. He argues that the figure is walking towards a dangerous area even though it is lighted, which contrasts with other scenes where danger is associated with darkness.[31] However, the source of the threat is again outside of the scene and the lighted area poses a threat only in contrast with darkness of the urban streets. These works show that Hopper viewed the danger of the city at night as another negative quality that attracts our attention through his portrayal of the emptiness, isolation and bleakness of urban centers.

These deserted urban landscapes can also be associated with qualities that suggest the psychological effect of the uncanny. Margaret Iversen argues that an interpretation of qualities of the uncanny in Hopper's cityscapes represent what she calls "the surfacing of the death drive in life."[32] The destructive qualities of the Freudian concept of death drive can be seen in relation to negative aspects of urbanism, which contributes to the feeling of alienation in works that refer to this connection.[33] Iversen argues that the death drive becomes visible in Hopper's works by depictions of black voids, and she gives *Summertime* [Figure 17] as an example where a blowing

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[31] Rolf Gunter Renner, *Edward Hopper: Transformation of the Real,* trans. Michael Hulse (Koln: Taschen, 1990), 41.

[32] Iversen, 412.

[33] The death drive (instinct) is a complex concept, which refers to an instinct of going back to the inanimate state through death, as the original state is inorganic. For more information and its relation to other instincts (drives) see Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 32-34.

curtain reveals a black void in an urban setting.[34] Hopper previously painted a similar urban scene in *New York Pavements* [Figure 18] where he included black voids, one seen through an open window and another at the entrance of the building. Iversen also points out the dark tunnel in *Approaching a City* as another black gap that refers to the death drive.[35] These paintings represent more noticeable examples of black voids, but there are other examples of Hopper's cityscapes that have dark windows and entrances. Therefore, surfacing of the death drive in cityscapes with relation to urban elements reflects the psychological effects of modern experience and its alienating qualities. These black gaps or dark endings can also be seen in works that comment on displacement and relationship between nature and civilization.

Displacement

The transition from rural areas and small-towns to urban centers in the twentieth century marked a period of adjustments in people's lifestyles and a sense of displacement. Edward Hopper experienced this transition as he moved from Nyack, a small-town in New York to New York City. Milton Brown argues that Hopper had seen the city as an outsider and for him it was only a desolate place, which would only be suitable for staying temporarily.[36] This argument shows that negative aspects of Hopper's cityscapes can be associated with the sense of displacement. Theisen focuses on the struggles of this adjustment, as he discusses alienating qualities of the transition from small-town morals to a new lifestyle in modern urban centers.[37]

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[34] Iversen, 417.

[35] Iversen, 418.

[36] Milton W. Brown, "The Early Realism of Hopper and Burchfield," *College Art Journal* 7, no. 1 (1947): 5.

[37] Theisen, 221.

The sense of displacement is suggested in Hopper's paintings of roads and railroads that are running along rural landscapes, as they are meant to connect small-towns with urban centers. However, there are no visible destinations, and one could connect this absence with the situation of the people at this time as they are possibly stuck between the desolation of their past rural experience and what Hopper saw as the alienation of urban life. Schmied argues that Hopper's figures are "not really at home anywhere."[38] It refers to the feeling of displacement, as this transitional period urged people to leave their homes to find new ones. He also points out that roads in Hopper's paintings do not seem to be going anywhere; they are either shown parallel with the scene or leading to darkened ends.[39] His railroads are represented in similar compositions and Schmied argues that the absence of a specific destination is even more indicated with railroads, as the tracks typically run parallel to the picture plane.[40] Actually, one of the railways he depicted seems to have a destination, as it is going into a city, but it does not make it less problematic. Because of its darkness, with connotations as previously shown to the death drive and negative aspects of urban life, the tunnel in *Approaching a City* [see Figure 6] can also be interpreted as referring to displacement, because it represents the city as an undesirable destination. However, most of the scenes that depict roads and railroads without visible destinations are taking place in rural landscapes. *House by the Railroad* [Figure 19] is the most famous example of these paintings and it represents several aspects of this transitional period, in relation with the feeling of displacement. Levin argues that Hopper's railroads represent "rootlessness of modern life as they merely pass by small towns and rural areas all but

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[38] Schmied, 84.

[39] Schmied, 84.

[40] Schmied, 94.

forgotten by the forces of progress."[41] Levin's point is true for this painting, as the railroad runs past a house, which looks like it has been abandoned. The position of the Victorian house is another element which supports the feeling of displacement, as Renner argues that it is "lost, and out of place" in this deserted rural setting.[42] Souter highlights the role of the railroad as he argues that it separates the house from the land, which corresponds to displacement and rootlessness, while explaining the awkward position of the house. He also argues that this painting represents the transitional period in modern life, as the need for efficiency replaced elegance, which he connects with Hopper's move from Nyack to New York City.[43] However, Levin also argues that the old and desolate house is a reminder of simpler times in contrast to the complexities of modern life.[44] Therefore, while cities provide efficiency and economic opportunities, they also bring more complexities and negative aspects to deal with compared to small-towns and rural areas, but as these places are economically declined and desolated, there is no going back.

Displacement is shown in some of Hopper's paintings through an ambiguity of the setting, which refers to the alienating experience of this transitional period. He combined elements of nature, rural areas, small-towns and urban centers together to create these settings that correspond to the modern experience of seeing or living in these variety of places. *South Carolina Morning* [Figure 20] shows one of these settings as the house looks out of place in a natural landscape. Renner refers to the house and the surrounding concrete section as "a

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[41] Levin, *The Art and The Artist*, 47.

[42] Renner, 34.

[43] Souter, 93.

[44] Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper* (New York: Crown, 1984), 49.

manmade island in a natural setting" close to the beach.[45] However, the concrete section looks more like a sidewalk in a city rather than a pathway surrounding a house, while the architectural element can be seen as the ground floor of a building. Therefore, this painting shows urban elements that are taken out context and placed into a vast rural landscape, which represents a strong sense of displacement. Moreover, both sides seem inaccessible for the viewer, as the female figure blocks the doorway to the building and the rural side is not welcoming even though there is a wide open space on that side. *Seven A.M.* [Figure 21] is another painting that represents an ambiguous setting. Souter argues that the shop with its dark interior and the dark forest next to it create an eerie atmosphere.[46] The unsettling feeling of this painting is also related to displacement, as the shop seems to belong to a small-town setting instead of being next to a dark forest. Again, Renner argues that both the forest and the shop are not accessible for the viewer, which supports the argument of displacement, as we are "excluded from both areas."[47] This painting not only creates a feeling of alienation with a sense of displacement but uses the tension between nature and civilization, which is another subject used by Hopper, in relation to the modern experience.

Nature and Civilization

The tension between nature and civilization is a part of modern experience as there were significant changes in this relationship in the twentieth century. The transition from rural to urban life with increasing population in cities shows the importance of this changing relationship as more people moved further away from nature. Hopper's paintings that represent both the

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[45] Renner, 52.

[46] Souter, 166.

[47] Renner, 60.

natural and the human-made world show the tension in this relationship between nature and civilization which is an important source of the alienation found in Hopper's works. Technological developments also changed how people experienced natural landscapes as an increasing number of human-made elements, such as poles and signs, changed the landscape itself while cars and trains provided new viewpoints and fleeting images of nature.

One way in which Hopper suggests these tensions between nature and civilization is through his depiction of hostile looking forests. Brian O'Doherty refers to Hopper's forests as "impenetrable" and having "a distinct organic force," which shows their hostile nature against elements of civilization.[48] *Gas* [Figure 22], is an example of these paintings where he depicts a dark, dense forest that seems to block the road ahead while the human-made world is represented with a lighted gas station. Kranzfelder mentions the road and the forest as representing civilization and nature and he argues that the forest becomes more threatening as night is about to fall.[49] Schmied refers to the gas station in this painting as the "last outpost" on the border of nature and civilization.[50] There is also an attendant standing by the gas pumps. The place of this figure is important because Hopper always placed human figures on the side of civilization in these types of nature versus civilization situations. This placement can be seen in connection with the choice of moving away from nature towards human-made urban centers. Therefore, it can be argued that Hopper viewed the forest as hostile because of a sense of alienation from nature, while he seems to have seen the human-made world as offering safety for the figures in these paintings. However, Strand argues that the gas station does not offer much comfort and

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[48] Brian O'Doherty, *American Masters: The Voice and the Myth* (New York: Random House, 1973), 24.

[49] Kranzfelder, 74.

[50] Schmied, 30.

protection because it is only a stop during the journey which will continue down the road, covered with dark, hostile looking woods.[51] This situation shows that the tension is growing and the choice of staying on the human-made world is questionable, as it seems that the journey ultimately ends with nature. Again, it is connected with earlier discussion of displacement regarding the modern developments and transition to urban centers. The choice of moving away from nature becomes questionable in these paintings, making them unsettling and alienating.

Jean Gillies focuses on the formal analysis of *Gas* as she also addresses the issue of alienation in this painting. She argues that Hopper's decisions about compositional design affected the way viewers perceive the situations he depicted. For example, the vanishing point in this painting is not on the center and the line of the road does not correspond to the direction of other lines. As a result, she argues that these formal elements make the viewer's position problematic in relation to the painting.[52] While the formal elements of *Gas* contribute to the feeling of alienation, the off-center viewpoint also underlines the idea of displacement, so considering these elements together creates a stronger argument for the reason behind the feeling of alienation in this painting.

The contrast between nature and civilization, which represents the tension between these two worlds, is not always as clear as in *Gas*. *Railroad Crossing* [Figure 23] is another example, where elements of both nature and civilization are represented in the same landscape. However, the contrast between danger of natural elements and safety of human-made elements is not emphasized in this painting. Even the compositional differences between these two paintings underline the more subtle approach. Elements of both worlds are represented on the same side of

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[51] Strand, 14-15.

[52] Jean Gillies, "The Timeless Space of Edward Hopper," *Art Journal* 31, no. 4 (1972): 406.

the scene as well as the road in *Railroad Crossing* while they are separated to different sides in *Gas* which emphasize the tension. Regarding the composition of *Railroad Crossing*, Kranzfelder argues that the natural and the human-made elements merge into each other as they create a continuous flow.[53] This situation can be connected with the title as it also works as a crossing between nature and civilization. However, Renner points out the difference between tamed nature around the house and the hostile nature, which is again represented with a dark, thick and threatening forest.[54] This difference is also underlined in the composition as the hostile part of nature is separated with the railroad even though they are still on the same side of the painting. Therefore, even in more subtle representations of landscape with human-made elements, there are still references to the tensions between nature and civilization that cause feeling of alienation in these paintings.

Hopper's works also emphasize the ways in which, as the American society becomes more developed, an increasing number of human-made elements begin to appear in natural scenes. Hobbs argues that these human-made elements obscure the viewer's experience of nature as the landscape is only visible behind roads, signs, poles, railroad tracks, houses and cars.[55] In addition to these limitations, travelling by car or train also provides new and different viewpoints, as they offer glimpses of the landscape in motion, creating blurry images of the landscape for travelers.[56] *Compartment C* [Figure 24] shows the interior of a train compartment with a window revealing a blurry landscape even though the passenger is not interested in

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[53] Kranzfelder, 81.

[54] Renner, 33.

[55] Hobbs, 91.

[56] Hobbs, 93-95.

looking out as she sits away from the window.[57] This painting not only shows this new way of

experiencing landscape but it also shows the effects of human-made elements, because the road

and the bridge covers a significant portion of the visible landscape while dark woods are seen in

the background. In *New York, New Haven and Hartford* [Figure 25], Hopper focuses directly on

the view seen from a moving train, without showing interior elements. The slightly out of focus

quality of this landscape image gives the sense of movement, as this blurry scene refers to the

modern way of experiencing natural landscapes. This experience is also affected by the human-

made elements such as the opposite track of the railroad in the foreground and houses up on the

hill. *Route 6, Eastham* [Figure 26] represents the seeing out of an automobile version of these

new ways of experiencing nature. Hobbs argues that automobiles isolates people and separates

them from nature even when they are used for getting to countryside.[58] It is visible in this

painting, as it uses the isolated view out of an automobile but there are no signs of movement

and the view is not centered on the road, which suggests that the car is parked on the roadside.[59]

The landscape of this scene is also dominated by human-made elements including the road,

houses, and poles while nature only serves as a backdrop with the dark forest behind houses.

In painting cityscapes, Hopper also seems to refer to this troubled relationship between

nature and civilization, as he excludes most natural elements from these images, which relates to

these tensions in a different way. Gordon Theisen points out the lack of natural elements both

inside and outside in *Nighthawks* [see Figure 15]: he notes that there are no flowers or fruits

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[57] Levin, *The Art and the Artist*, 47.

[58] Hobbs, 11.

[59] Renner, 23.

inside the diner while there are no trees, moon or stars outside.[60] Furthermore, there is not even

natural light in *Nighthawks* as the artificial light coming out of the diner is the only light source,

which also illuminates the otherwise dark outside. Even the night sky is possibly excluded, as

Theisen argues that the small patch of black paint over the sign is either a building or the night

sky.[61] However, considering that the building in the background continues at the street level, it is

most likely the building, which would confirm that there is not even a patch of the night sky in

this painting. The exclusion of natural elements in cityscapes and urban interiors becomes more

significant considering the tension between nature and civilization in other paintings. Therefore,

only representing human-made elements in most of his cityscapes can be connected with the

alienation from nature, as a result of moving into urban centers. Theisen suggests that the lack of

natural elements could be the cause for the sense of desolation in *Nighthawks,* so this absence in

connection with the tension between nature and civilization intensifies the feeling of alienation in

this painting.[62]

Nature is not always excluded in Hopper's cityscapes, but even when natural elements

are included, they tend to emphasize isolation and alienating effects of urban life, as the

combination of these two realms is not represented in a celebratory style. Examples of his

cityscapes with natural elements include *Shakespeare at Dusk* [Figure 27], which represents a

park with buildings in the background, and *House at Dusk* [see Figure 28], which shows a forest

behind the building in the foreground. Levin suggests that Hopper's use of dusk is connected

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[60] Theisen, 69.

[61] Theisen, 69.

[62] Theisen, 70.

with melancholy and pessimism.[63] The overall atmosphere of melancholy and pessimism typical of Hopper's portrayals of this time of day is supported by the lack of human presence and bare trees in the foreground, which can be seen in connection with the alienating modern experience. Furthermore, even though the park is represented in the foreground, as an element of the natural world, this painting still shows alienation from nature, because the human-made elements such as the statue and lamp posts in addition to the buildings in the background, especially the one with the billboard on top, catch viewers' attention. A similar atmosphere is used in *House at Dusk*. Kranzfelder argues that this painting represents another scene of tension between nature and civilization with contrasting aspects of both worlds.[64] In this case, Hopper portrays an urban setting, but similar to his landscapes, the contrast with a dark, thick and threatening forest shows humans' alienation from nature, as they are again depicted on the side of civilization represented by the lighted apartment building. Hopper's use of similar elements in landscapes and cityscapes to refer to these tensions shows the alienating aspects of this transitional period, leading to urban centers. *The City* [see Figure 8] is another cityscape with natural elements as corner of a park is included in the scene dominated by rigid buildings. However, Avis Berman argues that Hopper excluded trees in this painting, showing Washington Square in New York City where he lived.[65] Therefore, in this painting Hopper excludes trees from the composition to emphasize the bleakness of this cityscape. Trees that are specifically excluded in this painting show that excluding natural elements could be used in connection with the feeling of alienation in several ways.

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[63] Levin, *Edward Hopper*, 57.

[64] Kranzfelder, 94.

[65] Avis Berman*, Edward Hopper's New York* (San Francisco: Pomegranate, 2005), 28.

On the one hand, these paintings represent humans moving away from nature, which causes a feeling of alienation with separation from nature and on the other hand they represent moving towards urban centers, emphasizing desolation and isolation of this modern experience, which strengthens the feeling of alienation in them. They also show the connection of this feeling with the sense of displacement as a result of the transition from rural areas to urban centers. These aspects are also interrelated with Hopper's representations of urban scenes, as negative aspects of city life intensify these tensions and the feeling of displacement, while they reinforce alienating experiences of living in modern cities.

CHAPTER 3

LIGHT AND MEMORIES

In many of his paintings, Edward Hopper experimented with unusual light effects that shaped the emotional qualities associated with his thematic choices. At the same time, visual elements in many scenes, including his use of light, suggest that he painted them from memory rather than direct observation. Both Hopper's use of light and his evocation of qualities related to memory and its distortions and exaggerations have led to the sense of alienation in his works.

Natural and Artificial Light

Early in his career, Hopper used an impressionistic type of light, which relates to his trips to Paris. However, in his mature style, he used a strong and harsh light, which became a characteristic aspect of his paintings. In his interview with Katharine Kuh, Hopper put emphasis on the role of light in his artworks, as he said "Light is an important expressive force for me, but not too consciously so."[66] This statement not only underlines the importance of light in his works but also suggests a connection between the feeling of alienation and use of light, as it has expressive qualities. Light becomes an even more significant source of alienation in Hopper's paintings with artificial light, which is a distinctive aspect of the modern experience. Furthermore, similar to his thematic choices, his use of light has unconscious possibilities as well, which underlines its connection with alienation.

Natural light creates a distinctive atmosphere in Hopper's paintings and it is associated with the feeling of alienation because of its cold and harsh qualities. Sunlight is an important aspect in his paintings throughout his career and it is especially clear in his later works, as sunlight became the only theme in *Sun in an Empty Room* [Figure 29]. Lloyd Goodrich argues

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[66] Hopper quoted in Kuh, 140.

that the sunlight creates a haunting feeling with its strong presence in an otherwise empty room.[67] The atmosphere of this painting is similar to his earlier works, which shows that his use of light continued to play an important role in connection with the feeling of alienation that shaped his visual interpretations of modern experience. This connection is also supported by Sheena Wagstaff. She points out the structural role of light in Hopper's compositions alongside other figures, not only in *Sun in an Empty Room*, but in his urban interiors where sunlight enters the room through a window.[68] Goodrich also discusses the effect of Hopper's light on his urban landscapes, as it defines architectural structures of the city, highlighting their rigid and colossal qualities.[69] However, structural qualities of buildings emphasized by sunlight also strengthen the feeling of isolation and loneliness in his cityscapes. Milton Brown argues that Hopper's use of light emphasizes his unique style of realism, because it is cold and harsh which does not give warmth to his scenes but only reveals them in a highlighted realism.[70] These qualities underline bleakness, which is previously discussed as another significant aspect of his cityscapes, including *The City* and *Early Sunday Morning*.

Hopper's works also exploit qualities of artificial light to convey this sense of alienation. Artificial light is one of the most noteworthy changes that defined a new, modern experience in urban centers. Introduction of electric lights in the late nineteen century provided security and welcomed people to go out and enjoy cities at night.[71] However, there are also negative aspects

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[67] Goodrich, 151.

[68] Sheena Wagstaff, ed., *Edward Hopper* (London: Tate Publishing, 2004), 26.

[69] Goodrich, 113.

[70] Brown, 5-6.

[71] David Nasaw, "Cities of Light, Landscapes of Pleasure," in *The Landscape of Modernity:Essays on New York City, 1900-1940,* eds. David Ward, Oliver Zunz (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1992), 276.

and feelings that are associated with artificial lights. Sharon Hirsh argues that the ghostly faces in Edvard Munch's *Evening on Karl Johan Street* [Figure 30] are connected with his experience of crowd anxiety in a trip to Paris, related to the atmosphere created by the bright electric lights.[72] This painting combines two aspects of urban centers, crowds and artificial light as it shows a negative side of the modern experience. Hopper also dealt with these aspects but he did it in a more subtle way. He excluded urban crowds and instead of directly showing artificial light as a source of anxiety, he created eerie atmospheres with electric lights to convey a feeling of alienation in his paintings. Linda Nochlin refers to the "cold light" in *Automat* [see Figure 12], as sources of artificial light are reflected in the window.[73] In *Nighthawks* [see Figure 15], Hopper used recently introduced fluorescent lights, which created a similar atmosphere, as Robert Hobbs referred to them as "intimidating, alienating, and ultimately dehumanizing."[74] Avis Berman also mentions this unsettling atmosphere of *Nighthawks*, created by the "eerie greenish light."[75]

Hopper also used artificial light coming from an outside source such as streetlamps into urban interiors to create a dramatic composition through the subtle difference in the effects produced by these light sources. In *Office at Night* [Figure 31], Hopper combined interior artificial light with the electric light coming from a streetlamp, which is visible on the wall behind the male figure. This combination of different sources of artificial light is an important compositional element for Hopper, as it emphasizes the tension by creating an uncomfortable atmosphere and directing the viewer's attention on a possible exchange between the figures in

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[72] Sharon L. Hirsh, *Symbolism and Modern Urban Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 72.

[73] Linda Nochlin, "Edward Hopper and the Imagery of Alienation," *Art Journal* 41, no. 2 (1981): 137.

[74] Hobbs, 129.

[75] Berman, 102.

this painting. However, dark urban interiors that are only illuminated by the electric light coming from outside create an even more dramatic scene with a strong feeling of alienation. Franz Kafka described a similar composition in *Metamorphosis,* at a moment of alienation when the protagonist is alone in a dark room, which is partly illuminated by "the pallid gleam of the electric streetlamps."[76] Artificial light creates a dramatic atmosphere and works as an alienating element that represents feelings of the main character. Hopper used this idea in *Conference at Night* [Figure 32], as the electric light coming from outside illuminates an otherwise dark room. The angle of electric light is different in this painting, but the overall quality is similar, as it intensifies the scene and creates an alienating experience for the viewer. Another connection is that Kafka had chosen dusk to represent that alienating moment and Hopper also used dusk for its transitional qualities.

Artificial light is used in transitional moments to create dramatic atmospheres in Hopper's works. Stanton argues that *House at Dusk* [see Figure 28] represents a moment on the edge of day and night, as artificial lights starts to take over the scene, even if there is still plenty of natural light outside.[77] Brian O'Doherty argues that Hopper specifically chose these transitional moments with "waning lights" and artificial lights, which creates a more dramatic scene as opposed to "midday glare."[78] He achieved this effect, because it is not only a visual transition but also a symbolic one, as the day comes to an end, which could refer to the end of an era. In this case, it is the artificial light that replaces the natural light, which refers to the alienation from nature, as a result of the transition from rural areas to urban centers. This

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[76] Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, trans. Susan Bernofsky (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014): 52.

[77] Stanton, 30.

[78] O'Doherty, 21.

transition is previously discussed in relation to displacement and the tension between nature and civilization in Hopper's paintings including *Gas* [see Figure 22]. In addition to the tension, this painting is another example of a transitional moment, as the dimming daylight is gradually replaced by the bright electric lights of the gas station. Wieland Schmied also focuses on the contrasting qualities of natural elements of the painting and white fluorescent light coming from the gas station, which he referred to as "almost painful to look at."[79] It refers back to the alienating qualities of bright artificial lights, especially fluorescent light, which intensifies the dramatic qualities of this transitional scene. Therefore, Hopper's use of natural and artificial light together in these changing circumstances emphasizes the alienating experience of modern life in his works, relating to this transitional phase between nature and civilization.

Artificial light is also used as an isolating element in Hopper's paintings, heightening the drama of his scenes while supporting the feeling of alienation in them. In most of his night scenes, lighted interiors or sections of urban settings contrast with the surrounding darkness. *Nighthawks* is an example of this composition, as the artificially lighted diner and the figures inside are isolated from the dark city at night. Joseph Stanton suggests that the diner could be regarded as an "island of light," even though he argues that the relationship between inside and outside is more complicated, because of other elements such as the large window.[80] In *Summer Evening* [Figure 33], a couple is standing on the artificially lighted porch, which is surrounded by the dark night. Levin argues that the electric light is "overly bright," while the scene suggests an unspoken instance of tension between the couple instead of a romantic moment under

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[79] Schmied, 30.

[80] Stanton, 25.

moonlight.[81] The use of artificial light in this painting isolates and highlights the couple, which emphasizes the tension of the moment. Hopper's compositional use of artificial lights and shadows is also supported by his techniques to isolate figures or places, which is visible in his etchings. *Night in the Park* [Figure 34] is an example where he used the contrast between the light coming from the lamp post next to the bench and rest of the scene in shadows. Stephen Coppel points out that Hopper used shading in the foreground to isolate the figure "within a pool of light."[82] References such as island and pool used for the lighted areas in Hopper's paintings also emphasize their compositional role of isolation. Therefore, his use of artificial light contributes to the feeling of alienation in his works by isolating the figures and dramatizing the scene.

The alienating qualities of artificial light in Hopper's paintings can be connected to the concept of the uncanny. Rolf Gunter Renner argues that in *Rooms for Tourists* [Figure 35], artificial light plays a dual role.[83] The artificially lighted house offers a safe and comfortable sanctuary for the tourists at night. However, while artificial lights suggest human presence, there are no actual figures or other signs of their existence in this scene. Absence of residents, combined with the eerie light and atmosphere of the house also gives a sense of mystery, danger and uneasiness to the painting.[84] Therefore, artificial light is both assuring and haunting at the same time, which gives the uncanny feeling in the painting. There is another unsettling element in this painting, again in connection with artificial light. Two houses in the background are

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[81] Levin, *Edward Hopper*, 58.

[82] Stephen Coppel, *American Prints: From Hopper to Pollock (*Burlington, VT: Lund Humphries), 95.

[83] Renner, 42.

[84] Renner, 42.

completely dark without any light sources in them, which supports the haunting feeling in the painting. Their contrast with the artificially lighted guest house in the foreground isolates the lighted sanctuary while emphasizing its role and creates a dramatic composition. The dual role of artificial light and other unsettling elements create the feeling of alienation in this painting.

<div align="center">Memories</div>

Memories, remembering and imagination play important roles in Hopper's works, as they are related with inner experiences of both the artist and the viewer, while bringing unrealistic elements that are associated with the subconscious into familiar scenes of daily life. Carter Foster argues that memories and "the act of remembering" are among main themes of his paintings and even though they affected his painting process, they are still subtle.[85] O'Doherty also points out the importance of the part played by viewers' memory for understanding effects of Hopper's works, in relation to the notion of déjà vu, which he refers to as "a troubling sense of familiarity."[86] This troubling familiarity is connected with the uncanny, which is emphasized by psychological elements associated with the unconscious that Hopper included in his paintings. It also corresponds to the argument that his paintings represent memories. Gail Levin points out Hopper's interest in and knowledge of the works of Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung, especially in connection with the association between dreams, inner experiences and the subconscious.[87] These interests can be applied to his paintings that suggest representations of memories, as he included imagined elements. This could also suggest that he was aware of

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[85] Carter E. Foster, "Hopper in Paris and *Soir Blue*," in *Hopper Drawing* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 68.

[86] O'Doherty, 21.

[87] Gail Levin, "Edward Hopper's '*Nighthawks*', Surrealism, and the War," *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 22, no. 2 (1996), 182-183.

psychological aspects of these imagined elements, which he included consciously or unconsciously in scenes he depicted from memory.

Hopper included unrealistic elements that have psychological connotations in his paintings. Inclusion of these elements can be seen as a result of the process of remembering memories, which creates an uncanny sense. This sense corresponds to the viewer's experience of encountering with Hopper's paintings, as familiar scenes of daily life became unsettling with the addition of elements that are related to memories and the subconscious. Margaret Iversen focuses on the uncanny elements in Hopper's paintings. She argues that the female figure in *Chop Suey* [Figure 36] looks like a china doll with her blank face and porcelain skin, which makes her a disturbing figure in this daily life scene.[88] This imagined figure can be seen as a part of the remembering process, referring to the alienating experiences of modern urban life, as we see many faces that we cannot recall fully.

Other unsettling elements can be seen in paintings where there is no human presence. Foster argues that Hopper played with the scale of some elements in his paintings to create an unsettling atmosphere. He points out the scale of the barber's pole in *Early Sunday Morning* [see Figure 5], as he argues that it is significantly larger than its actual size in comparison to other elements in the painting, which makes it possible to see it as a replacement for the lack of human presence.[89] This subtle replacement and the unfamiliar role of the large barber's pole correspond to Hopper's choices in general, as he avoided human presence to create unsettling scenes. Another aspect of this painting, which related to memories, is the blurred texts on shop windows. Foster argues that they should normally be readable from that distance, but it is a choice made by

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[88] Iversen, 419.

[89] Foster, "City Pendants: *Early Sunday Morning* and *Nighthawks*," in *Hopper Drawing* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 104.

Hopper in the process of remembering the actual scene.[90] These subtle changes create an eerie atmosphere and show that painting memories of scenes instead of actual scenes provide more emotional content for the viewer with the addition of the unconscious associations, which is one of the reasons behind the strong feeling of alienation in his works.

Another unrealistic element that can be associated with the uncanny qualities of Hopper's paintings is his use of sunlight in some works in a rather unnatural way. It is previously stated that he combined natural and artificial light and different sources coming from inside and outside in the same scene to create a more dramatic atmosphere. However, Carter Foster argues that Hopper also used more than one source for sunlight in some of his paintings, including *Early Sunday Morning*, where inconsistencies of shadows that are cast in different directions represent an imagined version of this scene with various sources of sunlight.[91] It creates an uncanny atmosphere, connecting these paintings with memories, as they combine reality with imagination. Even though he used different sources of sunlight, as an unsettling element, it is subtle and hard to recognize in an otherwise familiar scene, which causes the feeling of alienation.

The connection between Hopper's use of light and the evocation of memories is not just limited to using dual sources, as previously discussed qualities of his light in general are also associated with memories. Mark Strand argues that Hopper used an imagined version of light in his paintings instead of the light in actual scenes, which makes it harsher.[92] This understanding of his depiction of light also supports the argument that his scenes represent memories rather

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[90] Foster, "City Pendants," 104.

[91] For a more detailed explanation of several light sources in Hopper's paintings, see Foster, "City Pendants," 101.

[92] Strand, 31.

than observed reality. It is also associated with the process of remembering memories, as intense and harsh light illuminates the scene and defines objects that are being recollected. Milton Brown argues that Hopper's paintings combine a sense of showing a "fleeting moment" with "permanent quality of matter," which is achieved with harsh, bright light.[93] This argument supports the association between his artworks and the act of remembering, as he seems to concentrate light on certain objects to give them permanent qualities that serve to solidify his memories. Linda Nochlin also focuses on this connection, as she argues that Hopper represented scenes of daily life that are "briefly remembered," and that it is linked with the feeling of alienation.[94] This process creates an alienating experience, because reconstructed scenes create a sense of familiarity while not fully remembering the memory creates an ambiguity, relating to the concept of the uncanny. Iversen argues that these brief memories are related with the modern experience, as temporal images that are created while travelling either in countryside with cars and trains or in urban centers with elevated trains, are later recreated from memory, which in the process involves unconscious elements in relation to the uncanny.[95]

Hopper's use of light and inclusion of imagined versions of elements in realistic scenes encourages a comparison between his paintings and metaphysical works of Giorgio de Chirico. Schmied argues that, even though Hopper used a more naturalistic approach compared to de Chirico, they both created cold and eerie atmospheres with the use of light in their works.[96] Hopper's more naturalistic approach and his creation of more realistic scenes while still creating

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[93] Brown, 7.

[94] Nochlin, 136.

[95] Iversen, 425.

[96] Schmied, 36.

an eerie mood can be connected to the representation of memories, which could have qualities similar to dreams. Berman compares Hopper's empty streets with de Chirico's piazzas, as she also mentions eerie qualities of deserted scenes of both artists.[97] Hopper's *Early Sunday Morning* and de Chirico's *The Red Tower* [Figure 37] show empty scenes with harsh light and long shadows, which create an unsettling atmosphere, while there are possible substitutes for human presence in both paintings. Another similar composition that they both used represents small figures being surrounded by large buildings, creating an alienating feeling in Hopper's *The City* [see Figure 8] and de Chirico's *Gare Montparnasse (The Melancholy of Departure)* [Figure 38]. Berman argues that while Hopper represented realistic scenes, he also used his imagination to alter some elements and create specific atmospheres.[98] Therefore, he provided these feelings in a more subtle way, which is closer to the daily life situations, representing modern urban experiences.

All these aspects of Hopper's works are related to the subjectivity of memories and they show the important role of the remembering process, which led Hopper to include imagined elements and alterations in his compositions to create eerie, unsettling atmospheres. Hopper's unique use of light helps create these eerie moods, especially in artificially lighted scenes, and it is also connected with memories as he also used imagined versions of light in his works. Therefore, light and memories are important aspects that create these unsettling atmospheres and unconscious elements that cause the feeling of alienation in Hopper's paintings.

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[97] Berman, 26.

[98] Berman, 26.

CHAPTER 4

VOYEURISM

Historical changes in opportunities for urban voyeurism and the connection of such activities with feelings of alienation in the early twentieth century, and consideration of these changes in connection with social history and psychoanalysis, all offer important contexts for understanding the development of Edward Hopper's paintings. The modernization of urban life, with crowded apartment buildings and new forms of transportation that allowed previously impossible opportunities for unregulated viewing of intimate scenes, provided new possibilities for voyeuristic experiences. Carter Foster discusses some of these developments as he focuses on the new viewpoint provided by elevated trains and the density of urban centers.[99] Increasing numbers of high rise buildings and even skyscrapers combined with intensified urban density to provide more voyeuristic viewpoints while increased usage of artificial light made it possible to observe lighted interiors from outside. The contrast between artificially lighted interiors and outside darkness also provided viewers with a chance to observe intimate scenes without being seen themselves. These opportunities might occur when apartment dwellers or travelers in hotels looked across air shafts or streets into other people's spaces, or while people were riding the elevated trains or observing from a car. These developments, which Hopper observed and portrayed in his works, did not just provide new voyeuristic possibilities but made voyeurism a part of urban life on both conscious and subconscious levels.

Voyeuristic representations of twentieth century urban life in United States can be seen in works by Ashcan School artists, especially by John Sloan. An analysis of similarities and differences compared to Hopper's approach to such subjects is helpful for understanding the

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[99] Carter E. Foster, "*Office at Night*, the El Train, and Urban Voyeurism," in *Hopper Drawing* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 151.

feeling of alienation in the latter artist's paintings. Rebecca Zurier argues that Hopper and Sloan represent similar voyeuristic qualities in urban scenes with relation to looking from a window and seeing through a window which also shows their different approaches in representing these scenes. She points out another shared element which is the lack of relationship between figures in their works and viewers, because even when figures look outside a window, they are not looking towards the viewer.[100] *Night Windows* [Figure 39] is an example of Sloan's etchings that show voyeuristic images of urban life. It shows the voyeuristic potential of looking out of an apartment window in a dense urban center. Sloan allows the viewer to look towards female figures that are busy with their own activities in front of their open windows. Although they are not directly looking at the viewer, they are facing that direction. Zurier further suggests that the male figure in this etching refers to voyeuristic possibilities as he becomes a stand-in for the viewer.[101] Sloan explored these possibilities in a more direct way as he focused on the experience of looking out of a window in an urban center. Elements in this etching such as viewpoint, and the distance between the viewer and figures are clear, which pinpoints the difference between Sloan and Hopper's works. Sloan represented daily life scenes, but they are not as intimate as Hopper's paintings with voyeuristic qualities. Sloan focused on more immediate experiences of living in an urban city, which does not create as strong sense of alienation as in Hopper's paintings, where there is more ambiguity about voyeuristic elements and how they affect the human condition in relation to the modern urban life.

One of the ambiguous voyeuristic elements of Hopper's paintings is the way in which he sets up the viewer's gaze. Foster points out that riding on elevated trains became commonplace

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[100] Rebecca Zurier, *Picturing the City: Urban Vision and the Ashcan School* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 309-310.

[101] Zurier, 282.

in New York and other American cities in the first half of twentieth century and he connects the viewpoints used in some of Hopper's paintings with the new voyeuristic experience of seeing upper levels of buildings from elevated trains.[102] However, he argues that elevated trains provided a new experience of voyeurism in relation to distance and space, because they offered glimpses of interiors from a close distance while the rider is situated in a vehicle that is moving quickly away from those scenes.[103] Furthermore, he argues that Hopper created an even more ambiguous viewpoint in *New York Interior* [Figure 40] as he excluded any visual reference of an elevated train and the window of the apartment. This leaves a vertical black line on one side and a more structural black outline on the other side of the painting as subtle formal elements referring to the apartment building.[104] Exclusion of these elements, which would have otherwise clearly separated the interior space from the inside of the elevated train, creates a more intimate scene with a closer distance between the viewer and the figure, while the ambiguity of the viewpoint could be seen as a source for the feeling of alienation. *Room in New York* [Figure 41] is another painting with a similar setup and elements but in this case the architectural elements are represented more visibly, as Hopper portrays the column and part of the wall. However, while these architectural elements clearly show that the viewer is situated outside, Hopper still excludes any visual reference of the window, which creates more connection between outside and inside, while causing ambiguity about the distance and the viewpoint.

These paintings can also be seen as representative of Hopper's memories of seeing urban interiors from an elevated train, which could explain the ambiguity of distance and viewpoint.

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[102] Foster, "Urban Voyeurism," 151-153.

[103] Foster, "Urban Voyeurism," 153.

[104] Foster, "Urban Voyeurism," 153-154.

Walking around the city or riding an elevated train would provide this close distance for viewing urban interiors, while elements such as architecture, windows that will create the separation between inside and outside could be eliminated in the process of painting from memory. These kinds of omissions serve to create a sense of ambiguity, which provokes feelings of alienation in the viewer. Therefore, these elements support the earlier discussion of connection between Hopper's paintings and his memories derived from glimpses of daily life while travelling, which contribute to the feeling of alienation in his works. *Office at Night* [see Figure 31] is another example of this kind of connection, as Hopper mentioned that he had seen similar office interiors from an elevated train ride. However, as Foster points out, the scene is not depicted as seen from outside the window which is shown in the painting, but instead from an unusual viewpoint inside the room.[105] This viewpoint shows that while the office interior was probably observed by Hopper on an elevated train ride, the scene was most likely reconstructed from his memory of a voyeuristic glance.

The intimacy of daily life scenes emphasizes the voyeuristic qualities of Hopper's paintings and for the viewer, experiencing these intimate scenes as an outsider strengthens the feeling of alienation in them. *Night Windows* [Figure 42] is an example of these paintings and in this case the viewpoint is closer to Sloan's etching by the same name. However, there are still significant differences, because Sloan focuses on what is seen from the viewer's window while Hopper focuses on what is seen through the figured subject's window, which suggests a more intimate scene. Gail Levin focuses on the similarities of representation of urban voyeurism in Sloan and Hopper's works by the same name, but she also argues that the scene depicted by Hopper is more intimate, because the viewer looks through the apartment window into a private

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[105] Foster, "Urban Voyeurism," 151, 155.

moment of a woman in her bedroom.[106] There are three open windows that make it possible to voyeuristically experience this private moment. Joseph Stanton underlines the importance of these windows, which create a connection between inside and outside.[107]

Another element in *Night Windows* that shows the connection between inside and outside is the blowing curtain. Ivo Kranzfelder focuses on a related element in *Office at Night* as he argues that wind coming from outside refers to the voyeuristic qualities of this painting in which a private moment becomes visible in the public sphere.[108] Open windows and blowing curtains can be seen in some of Hopper's other paintings, such as *Summertime* [see Figure 17] and *New York Pavements* [see Figure 18], which are previously discussed in relation to the 'death drive' as they open into darkness. However, even if open windows do not show anything in these paintings with the given viewpoints, they still suggest the potential for voyeurism, hinting that a person walking past could look inside. Furthermore, the blowing curtains act as if they invite viewers to look inside. Therefore, these open windows and blowing curtains also function as elements that cause alienation in Hopper's paintings, as they intensify the ambiguity of connections between inside and outside while revealing intimate scenes to viewers.

The lack of relationship between the viewer and the figures is an important aspect of voyeurism. This lack becomes a significant reason for the feeling of alienation while underlining the intimacy of Hopper's paintings. Wieland Schmied argues that not only in paintings where viewers are situated in another space but even in paintings where they are situated in the same space with the figures, they are still provided with a voyeuristic role, as Hopper's figures

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[106] Levin, *An Intimate Biography*, 218-219.

[107] Stanton, 28.

[108] Kranzfelder, 154.

typically do not seem to be aware of being looked at.[109] The hidden state of viewers also supports intimacy of the scene they are witnessing. In these intimate scenes, instead of realizing the viewer is present, figures that are being looked at are generally preoccupied with their own thoughts and they often look out from a window on the other side, which is not visible to the viewer.[110] *Room in New York* represents a male figure who reads a newspaper while the female figure seems preoccupied with her own thoughts as she leans on the piano and touches a key. Both figures seem to be unaware of the viewer, which emphasizes the intimacy of this scene as experienced by the viewer. However, as mentioned earlier, the viewer is placed outside the scene, which is viewed through a window.

The lack of relationship between the viewer and the figures becomes more significant when they both seem to be situated in the same space. In *Hotel Room* [Figure 43], the female figure looks thoughtful as she reads a letter, unaware of the viewer who is imaginatively positioned as if within the same room. The window which would have normally provided a voyeuristic opportunity to experience this scene is placed on the other side of in this painting. This situation is similar to *Office at Night* which is also viewed from inside the room instead of through the window depicted in the painting. Therefore, this placement suggests that in paintings where viewers are seemingly located in the same space with the figures, Hopper represents memories of voyeuristic experiences, which intensifies the feeling of alienation in these paintings. *Eleven A.M.* [Figure 44] is another example of this type of voyeuristic scene where the viewer and the figure are seemingly present in the same space. The female figure looks outside the window pensively as if she is unaware of the viewer's gaze. This painting is also an example

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[109] Schmied, 68.

[110] Schmied, 74.

of Hopper's interest in portraying solitary and usually nude female figures, which intensifies the intimacy of the scene while also creating a sense of sexual tension. Observing these intimate moments suggestive of sexual tension without being recognized creates an alienating experience for viewers especially when they seem to occupy the same interior space with the figure.

Hopper's works complicate the experience of viewers concerning their position, viewpoint, and relation with the depicted figure (or the lack of it) as they voyeuristically observe an intimate scene. This situation becomes even more problematic when the figure is portrayed as if she realizes that there is someone else in the room. Mark Strand argues that *Western Motel* [Figure 45] is the only Hopper painting in which the figure looks directly at the viewer and he mentions the awkward pose of the figure as if she is anxious and uncomfortable.[111] Strand argues that she is thinking of doing something else as she pauses for posing, while in this scenario both the artist and the viewer take the role of a photographer.[112] However, Strand does not take into account the relationship between this scene and Hopper's other voyeuristic paintings in which the viewer takes the role of voyeur without being recognized. The connection between the viewer and the figure in this painting is important because while the composition is similar to some of his voyeuristic scenes, others lack this connection, which makes the female figure's role more significant. In *Western Motel*, the female figure seems to realize the viewer's presence just at the moment depicted, so she stops what she is doing, which causes her awkward and uncomfortable pose. Her uncomfortable pose and anxiety shows that she is not happy with the situation as the viewer interferes with her intimate moment and occupies her private space.

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[111] Strand, 43.

[112] Strand, 43.

In Hopper's other paintings with voyeuristic qualities, viewers are provided with a safe position as they are not seen, so they can freely observe other people's private moments. However, *Western Motel* shows that these people would not be happy if they find out that their intimate moments are being observed by viewers. Therefore, this painting reveals an awkward moment between the figure and the viewer, which can be understood as an alienating experience. Furthermore, it shows that Hopper's other paintings create a more subtle experience of alienation and isolation because of their voyeuristic qualities, as viewers can safely observe the scene without being seen. However, the awkward situation in *Western Motel* shows that viewers are also feeling this tension in other paintings as they are not supposed to be there, witnessing those intimate moments, which makes them more aware of their isolated position in those scenes and that causes a sense of alienation. It also shows the dilemma that is experienced in modern urban centers because they provide a lot of opportunities for voyeuristic glances into other people's lives. This makes us interested in seeing and learning more about their lives, but we also know that we are not supposed to witness their intimate moments, as they will not appreciate that. Therefore, this dilemma is another source of alienation that viewers experience while looking at Hopper's paintings.

The increased possibilities for voyeuristic looking in urban settings create a dilemma that is central to Hopper's works: the desire to look out of curiosity while knowing that this action is not approved. The tension this creates has connections with the subconscious in general. Another, more direct connection with the subconscious can be seen as a further cause for the feeling of alienation in Hopper's paintings. Margaret Iversen discusses this connection using the term "unauthorized looking," as she relates these practices to children's curiosity to find out

what their parents are doing at night.[113] There is a similar tension in the childhood counterpart of voyeurism as children try to learn more by looking while they fear that they will be caught in the act. Therefore, this connection on a subconscious level could intensify the tension that viewers experience while they are looking at Hopper's voyeuristic scenes. However, while the action is similar, the circumstances are different so that this experience is connected with the previous discussion of the uncanny. That these voyeuristic scenes are both familiar and unfamiliar at the same time strengthens the feeling of alienation in these paintings.

Voyeuristic possibilities in urban centers cause dilemmas for Hopper's viewers, but even when they choose to look and to learn more about others' lives, it is not resolved in Hopper's works. Robert Hughes argues that Hopper provides voyeuristic experiences to viewers through these intimate, private scenes but because he is not providing information about his figures' thoughts, actions and lives, these works leave viewers puzzled.[114] Similar to Hopper's other paintings, his voyeuristic scenes lack details in the scene to suggest the thoughts of the figures portrayed, so there are no obvious narrative details to help viewers to learn more about lives that they are looking into. Avis Berman discusses this situation as she argues that while windows provides glances into private moments, there is more to relationships and psychological elements than we can see through them.[115] She argues that the viewer does not know if there was a dialogue between the couple that led to this silent moment with tension in *Room in New York*.[116] In this case, there are some details to suggest that tension between the couple but the viewers do

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[113] Iversen, 422.

[114] Robert Hughes, *American Visions: The Epic History of Art in America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 427.

[115] Berman, 15.

[116] Berman, 18.

not know origin of this tension and they will not see how it is resolved. This frustrating situation for the viewer, however, is part of the urban experience discussed earlier in relation to Hopper's painting *Automat* [see Figure 12]. Voyeuristic glances only provide momentary scenes of other lives that we encounter in urban settings, and these glances are unable to provide more details about what we have seen. Therefore, these experiences cause frustration for the viewer which intensifies the feeling of alienation as a part of modern urban life. Moreover, the frustration of not knowing in these voyeuristic scenes is more problematic because although we wish to learn more about Hopper's figures by looking into their private lives, we also do not get to know them in public spaces where we encounter them in his other paintings such as *Automat*.

This situation is also connected with the earlier discussion of repetition compulsion, because viewers expect voyeuristic paintings to provide a controlled setting that gives more information about the scene. However, Hopper's voyeuristic scenes do not provide this controlled environment for the viewers; instead his scenes are closer to the daily life experiences and frustrations of voyeurism, which connects his paintings with the viewers' alienating experiences of modern urban life. *Eleven A.M.* shows another aspect of this situation. Kranzfelder argues that is an example of Hopper's paintings where the female figure looks outside the window, but the view is not accessible to the viewer, which makes it another unknown element of that private moment.[117] Therefore, Hopper's voyeuristic scenes of intimate, private moments suggest that they could provide more information to the viewer, but in the end they create more unknown elements, ambiguity and frustration related with the uncanny and feeling of alienation.

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[117] Kranzfelder, 44-45.

Artificial light, discussed in the previous chapter, is another important element that provokes experiences of voyeurism in Hopper's paintings. The use of artificial light is not only necessary for observing interiors in paintings such as *Room in New York*, as it is only possible to see into lighted interiors, but it also attracts more attention while passing by on an elevated train, driving around by car or walking around the city. Contrast between artificially lighted interiors or sections of an outside scene and darkness of outside at night is an element frequently used in Hopper's paintings. In night scenes, Hopper always represents his figures in lighted areas where they can be clearly seen and there are no figures in shadows. *Night Shadows* [see Figure 16], *Night in the Park* [see Figure 34] and *Nighthawks* [see Figure 15] can be given as examples of works in which figures are either depicted next to a streetlamp or in a lighted diner at night. However, these scenes seem to locate us as viewers in darkness, so they provide another example of Hopper's exploration of voyeuristic qualities. In these works shadows provide cover for the viewer's gaze. Gordon Theisen points out this aspect in *Night Windows* as he argues that the viewer is watching from darkness of a higher up window and he emphasizes the importance of voyeuristic role and placement of the viewer in this painting.[118] *Night Shadows* places the viewer in a similar position as the scene is observed from a higher viewpoint in darkness, but in this case the figure is outside and walking on the street towards the light source. As discussed earlier, there is a feeling of danger in this etching, underlined by the tension between light and dark. The feeling of danger is evoked even if the figure is going towards the lighted area, which is generally associated with safety, so it could be connected with the voyeuristic qualities of the scene. The male figure gets exposed to voyeuristic possibilities as he walks towards the light

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[118] Theisen, 108.

source while the rest of the scene is dark, making it possible to observe the figure, which could even lead to harmful consequences.

Observing others from darkness is an unsettling element, which is also used in film noir, so it can be associated with the feeling of alienation in these artworks. There is a similar situation in *Nighthawks*. In this case, figures are safe in the lighted diner but there is still a feeling of danger as the large glass window exposes them to the dark city, outside. *Night in the Park* offers a more immediate threat as the male figure, sitting under the light post and the viewer, observing from the darker side of scene are both outside. *Rooms for Tourists* [see Figure 35] is another example of these works but in this case the viewpoint is not just from darkness but also from a car which adds up to the cover for voyeuristic observations while making a further connection with film noir. Robert Hobbs points out the viewpoint from the car as a possible narrative for motorists who are deciding whether to stay in this tourist home, but this view can be extended to a wider understanding of observing the house from a car across the street.[119] Therefore, the viewer's position and role of observing from darkness create an alienating experience, surrounded by aspects of modern life that make these voyeuristic scenes possible. These scenes also combine familiar settings with unfamiliar roles and positions which create an uncanny experience that further supports the feeling of alienation in Hopper's paintings.

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[119] Hobbs, 96.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

As this thesis has demonstrated, Edward Hopper's portrayal of various aspects of the modern experience such as city life, the transition from rural areas to urban centers, the introduction of new forms of artificial light, and new voyeuristic possibilities, all contributed to the feeling of alienation in his paintings that is often remarked on by both scholars and the public. As I have shown, Hopper usually incorporated several alienating aspects together, further intensifying these effects. However, all the qualities I have discussed are interrelated, since they represent significant aspects of the human condition in this transitional period of developing modernity. The isolation and loneliness conveyed by Hopper's depiction of deserted and bleak cityscapes are associated with the feeling of alienation, which is intensified because of the necessary adjustments in changing lifestyles and a sense of displacement related to the transition from rural to urban areas. This transition also led people to experience tensions between nature and civilization, which becomes another source for the feeling of alienation in Hopper's works. Artificial light is another aspect of the modern urban experience and Hopper, as I have shown, created eerie atmospheres using electric lights in urban centers at night. Representation of memories also supports the feeling of alienation while introducing unconscious elements in to Hopper's works. The new voyeuristic qualities of urban life further emphasized the alienating experiences of modern urban centers.

Hopper's unique style and his complex aesthetic and thematic choices combined with the absence of specific elements that were typical of most other early twentieth century urban imagery, such as lively crowds, looming skyscrapers, and narrative details, created experiences for viewers that foreground the alienating qualities associated with many aspects of modern urban life. Moreover, his images also provoke viewers to consider their personal experiences and

psychological connections, and this also intensifies these effects. Most of these urban aspects that are represented in Hopper's works still apply to an increasing number of cities around the world. Therefore, while I combined social and cultural contexts with the psychoanalytic theory in this thesis to provide a comprehensive argument on the connection between the feeling of alienation in Hopper's works and the modern experience in relation to the city life, it also shows the importance of studying these urban aspects and their effects in a similar manner, which could help us to better understand the human condition not only in modern but also in contemporary times.

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