



Hopper's Cool

Modernism and Emotional Restraint

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Edward Hopper remains one of America's most celebrated modern artists. Contemporary exhibitions of his work are guaranteed blockbusters: the Whitney Museum of American Art's 2010–11 survey *Modern Life: Edward Hopper and His Time* drew “enormously high crowds,” observes the curator Barbara Haskell.¹ So did the Bowdoin College Museum of Art's smaller 2011 show, *Edward Hopper's Maine*. Attendance figures in Europe have been astounding: in Madrid in 2012, a Hopper retrospective organized by the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza was seen by 322,437 people, setting a museum record. Audiences in Paris waited up to four hours to enter the same exhibition when it traveled to the Grand Palais, where “Hopper mania” drove the museum to extend its run by five days (with 24/7 accessibility during the last weekend) so that overflow crowds could view paintings such as *Hotel Room* (frontispiece) and *Nighthawks* (see fig. 2). More than 784,000 people attended the exhibition in Paris, outstripping the numbers for the museum's previously most popular show, *Picasso and the Masters*, in 2008–9.²

What accounts for Hopper's widespread recognition today? The scenes and subjects he painted, from isolated houses and industrial landscapes to figures perched on beds in bleak hotel rooms or sitting silently in all-night diners, are unremarkable, even banal; his painting style is reserved. This essay argues that Hopper's enduring appeal relates to his visualization of modern American feeling and, in particular, his navigation of an “emotional regime” that governed twentieth-century American life. Hopper's brooding and restrained pictures embody an emotional style that surfaced around 1900, flourished through the 1950s, and remains an iconic representation of modern American character, now vanished. As Peter Stearns explains, the early twentieth century saw the rise of “American cool,” an inhibited emotional culture “markedly different from its Victorian predecessor.”³

If, broadly speaking, late nineteenth-century Americans embraced especially intense affective modes, from passionate declarations of romantic love to obsessive rituals of mourning and grief, early twentieth-century American emotional life was tempered by expectations of disciplined self-control. Multiple factors contributed to this shift, including widely held assumptions that certain feelings, in particular those deemed heated, rowdy, or unpleasant, were adverse to modernist scripts of rational thought, or coolheadedness. New patterns of social regulation and economic organization, including changes in middle-class family and gender relations, increased reliance on experts for advice and guidance, and the growth of managerial bureaucracies that imposed certain standards of appearance, collegiality, etiquette, and propriety in the workplace helped shape a modern culture of emotional self-restraint and

Edward Hopper, *Hotel Room*, 1931. Oil on canvas, 60 x 65 ¼ in. Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid © Edward Hopper, United States of America, 2015. Provenance: Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza

social policing.⁴ New kinds of consumerism developed as compensatory outlets, encouraging Americans to transfer their unruly passions for pleasure, indulgence, and excess to modernism's regulated realms of shopping, entertainment, and spectator sports.

Born in 1882 (d. 1967), Hopper directly experienced this transition in American emotional life. Working as a commercial artist and a painter, he depicted its social and cultural imprint on himself and others in modern times. Drawing on popular and vernacular sources, including advertising and the movies, Hopper distilled the subjects and sights of this newly cool American scene into emotionally restrained pictures that reflected the changed conditions of class, communication, intimacy, and work in twentieth-century America.

Modernism

Often described as a painter of “modern life,” Hopper was acutely aware of the changes wrought by modernism, by what Marshall Berman explained as “any attempt by modern men and women to become subjects as well as objects of modernization, to get a grip on the modern world and make themselves at home in it.”⁵ Modernism, of course, was well under way by the early twentieth century when Hopper's art career began, and his paintings both characterized and contributed to its fundamental concerns. Challenging perceived Victorian-era defects ranging from fixed notions of truth and knowledge (such as unyielding natural laws and an absolute God) to sharply separated spheres of social interaction, many Americans sought liberation, release, and redefinition in cultural projects that embraced authenticity, change, diversity, and synthesis. Such disruptive efforts were often undermined, of course, especially by social, cultural, and political institutions—themselves “modern”—that aspired to contain and control them. American modernism may be best seen, then, as a paradoxical blend of resistance and reconciliation aimed at articulating and accommodating art and life, culture and experience.⁶ Modern American painters employed new pictorial strategies of montage, collage, overlapping, frenzied pacing, spatial flattening, inconsistent light sources, spontaneity, and highly saturated colors to convey modernism's fragmented, uncertain, inconsistent, and unstable conditions and to propose new ideas about nature, knowledge, art, and themselves. A dynamic continuum of flux and irresolution, modernism was essentially processual, a culture of becoming rather than of being.

Hopper's visual reckoning with modernism was one of stoic, if grudging, acquiescence: he was neither politically opposed to nor completely autonomous from the ways in which industrialization, urbanization, mass media, mass consumption, and corporate capitalism, among other processes of modernization, altered America in the early decades of the twentieth century. Unlike his contemporaries Thomas Hart Benton and Reginald Marsh, painters who feverishly registered modern America's animated, ironic, and contradictory features in correspondingly energetic styles and, in Benton's case, with liberal political objectives, Hopper's “grip” on modernism was more constrained.⁷ Perhaps because of the decades he spent working in advertising, Hopper well understood modernism's paradoxical aspects: the clash, for example, between its promises of individual freedom and the manner in which those freedoms were expertly managed by powerful bureaucratic organizations. Attentive to its unpredictable, contradictory, and disorienting dimensions—to what Karl Marx called “disturbances of all social relations, everlasting uncertainty and agitation” and Charles Baudelaire, in his 1859 essay “The Painter of Modern Life” described as “the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent”—Hopper's paintings evoke modernism's potentially damaging capacity for objectification and alienation more than its creative and liberatory possibilities for social and cultural agency.⁸

Still, Hopper was not an antimodernist. Focused on contemporary subjects, spaces, and signs—cars, trains, skyscrapers, apartments, hotel lobbies, movie theaters, gas stations, diners,

offices, billboards, neon lights—Hopper’s paintings betray no sense of nostalgia for earlier historical periods or for a better future. Cognizant but cautious, Hopper painted the cool affect of his times, examining how ordinary twentieth-century Americans, mostly white and middle-class like himself, physically and emotionally made themselves “at home,” if often uneasily, in the enigmatic conditions of modernism.

Consider Hopper’s *Automat*, an unexceptional nighttime scene of an undistinguished young woman sitting alone in a restaurant, drinking a cup of coffee (fig. 1). Dressed in a roomy green coat whose shawl collar and cuffs are trimmed in brown fur, Hopper’s figure wears a red chemise that shows off her shapely legs. A yellow cloche hugs her bobbed hair. Just above its floppy brim is a bow-like cluster of faux cherries: code, according to some, for female independence and availability. Made up in the face powder, rouge, darkly smudged eye shadow, and oxblood lipstick popular at the time, *Automat*’s anonymous female epitomizes the “new woman.”⁹ Perhaps a secretary, an office clerk, or a department store salesgirl, she is one of many women who flocked to urban America in the early twentieth century seeking the freedom of new jobs and new experiences while also negotiating the conflicted dimensions of autonomy, alienation, and class, gender, racial, and sexual bias that circumscribed modern life and labor.

- 1 Edward Hopper, *Automat*, 1927.
Oil on canvas, 36 x 28 1/8 in.
Des Moines Art Center Permanent
Collections, Purchased with
funds from the Edmundson Art
Foundation, Inc., 1958.2



Automats were inexpensive modern cafeterias where food and beverages were dispensed by coin-operated machines: streamlined, steel-cased appliances that shielded customers from the actual human beings toiling in the back kitchens. Horn & Hardart opened its first automats in New York in 1912, and several were located near Hopper's apartment and studio at 3 Washington Square North, in Greenwich Village. Automats were time-saving conveniences: clean, brightly lit places where urban moderns too busy or disinclined to cook could grab a cup of coffee and maybe something to eat before rushing back to work or heading home. The food was not only cheap and fast but safe and good, selling points at a time when many people were gripped by the "nationwide, gastrointestinal epidemic" of dyspepsia, known in the early twentieth century as an especially "American Disease" aggravated by poor food, unhealthy eating habits, and the "anxiety and anger" of modern life.¹⁰ Automats were also modern sanctuaries for "unescorted women" and social outcasts: safe spaces where single females could sit and eat without social or sexual harassment, and gay men could similarly meet without reprisal.¹¹

Looking blankly at her cup, absently resting her left forearm (and gloved hand) on a marble tabletop, the woman in *Automat* is alone, unidentified, and pensive, neither particularly distraught nor especially at ease. As Carol Troyen observes, "Hopper's figure wants to be modern, but she carries it off with a certain discomfort."¹² Hopper's visualization of these qualified yearnings articulates American cool: the tense emotional deportment that many Americans bore under the conditions of early twentieth-century modernism.

Hopper's palette and compositional style further intimate these modernist conditions. He was drawn to cool colors as an emotional register, quite literally: a chalk and pencil study for *Morning Sun* (1952, Whitney Museum of American Art), a spare image of an isolated woman sitting on a bed and staring out a window, features his detailed notations for the "cool grey," "cool shadow," "cool halftone," and "cooler green" that he applied in the final canvas.¹³ The spatial dynamics of his typically off-kilter settings, with their distorted perspectives and skewed designs, similarly suggest his wary take on modernism's mutable and uncertain character. *Automat*'s twinned rows of ceiling lights, for example, recede into a dark unknown and are configured only as bright buttery orbs reflected in the restaurant's huge and otherwise empty plate glass window. A visual jumble of barely discernible objects—the backrest of a wooden chair, the rounded forms of highly polished brass railings—occupies the far right corner of the canvas, while a similarly prosaic metal radiator stands out on the far left. A colorful bowl of fruit—completely out of place in an automat—is the only item perched on the marble ledge beneath the window, a shelf normally cluttered with brochures, advertisements, and other bits of eatery ephemera. While Hopper depicts the round Carrara marble tables and dark-painted oak chairs that were common in interwar automats, the bank of shiny machines dispensing food and drink is missing from his painting, as are the crowds that normally filled these self-serve cafeterias.

The subjects of his paintings, and the stories they tell, are similarly lacking or incomplete. Bodies are often only partially rendered, edited and diminished by other visual elements: a window frame in *Night Windows* (1928, The Museum of Modern Art) slices off the right side of a female figure clad only in a pink slip; the

- 2 Edward Hopper, *Nighthawks*, 1942. Oil on canvas, 33½ x 60 in. The Art Institute of Chicago, Friends of American Art Collection, 1942.51





3 Edward Hopper, *Manhattan Bridge Loop*, 1928. Oil on canvas, 35 x 60 in. Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Mass., Gift of Stephen C. Clark, Esq., 1932.¹⁷

headboard in *Hotel Room* bites into the lower back of the half-dressed woman sitting on the bed. In other pictures, counters, desks, pianos, sofas, and tables literally sever human torsos into tops and bottoms. Narrative legibility is typically vague: in *Nighthawks* (fig. 2), for instance, there is no discernible door through which to enter or exit the diner. Although brightly lit and sheathed in glass, tempting our visual scrutiny, the scene defies clear statements of fact. Likewise, the text of the accordion-fold train schedule held by the woman in *Hotel Room*, like that held by another woman in *Compartment C, Car 293* (1938, private collection), is invisible. Inexplicably, Hopper's figures tend to look at things or gaze into spaces, like movie screens and distant vistas, that are inferred off-canvas and beyond the viewer's range. Other characters glance at books, newspapers, or timetables that are identifiable only as generic objects, not specific titles.

It wasn't that Hopper couldn't paint these things: the preparatory drawings that he typically rendered for individual oils reveal a keen sensitivity to detail.¹⁴ Rather, he didn't want to: stabilizing forms and narrative clarity were antithetical to his larger artistic project of picturing the disorienting emotional conditions of contemporary twentieth-century American life. As Linda Nochlin observes, Hopper's "imagery of alienation" was "part of a larger American alienation."¹⁵ He included just enough visual information to convey the broader context of particular modern moments: the clothing that the woman wears in *Automat* quickly signifies the fashion styles of the mid-1920s; the signage in *Circle Theater* (1936, private collection) references the kind of commercial script common in the 1930s; the red metal pumps in *Gas* (1940, The Museum of Modern Art) are typical of that era's filling stations. He left the rest of his canvases incomplete and unresolved.

In 1932 the Addison Gallery of American Art purchased Hopper's *Manhattan Bridge Loop* (fig. 3). In a 1939 letter to the gallery's director, Charles Sawyer, Hopper explained his painting methods and intentions:

I spend many days usually before I find a subject that I like well enough to do, and spend a long time on the proportions of the canvas, so that it will do for the design, as nearly as possible what I wish it to do. The very long horizontal shape of this picture, "Manhattan Bridge Loop," is an

*effort to give a sensation of great lateral extent. Carrying the main horizontal lines of the design with little interruption to the edges of the picture, is to enforce this idea and to make one conscious of the spaces and elements beyond the limits of the scene itself. The consciousness of these spaces is always carried by the artist to the very limited space of the subject that he intends to paint, though I believe all painters are not aware of this.*¹⁶

As his rather labored statement suggests, Hopper's foremost pictorial interests were in reconciling what he wanted subjects and designs to "do" with his "consciousness" of their and his own limitations—and that process of reconciliation was often painstaking and slow. Sometimes he painted only one or two canvases a year. Although schooled under Robert Henri, who encouraged his students to make quick and direct pictures of modern life, Hopper adopted a painting style of cautious premeditation and control. He documented *Manhattan Bridge Loop's* unglamorous urban setting (a Lower East Side spot where trolley cars turned around) in a number of on-site drawings, but the picture itself, he noted, was the result of "considerable simplification." Hopper was neither a realist nor a social realist: his paintings were not beholden to mimetic schemes nor did they betray any particular affection for "the people," as Henri advocated.¹⁷

Hopper's visual concerns were primarily phenomenological, focused on structures of consciousness and experience such as looking and feeling: "the spaces and elements beyond the limits of the scene itself." Hopper sought to understand how the brain registers what our eyes see: how we make sense of the world through felt practices of looking. His remarks about "limits" were not intended to evoke the imaginary or fantastic but to relay his particular interests in subjective experience and mood: in modernism's emotional regime. As he elaborated in his 1939 letter to Sawyer:

*To me, form, color and design are merely a means to an end, the tools I work with . . . I am interested primarily in the vast field of experience and sensation. . . . My aim in painting is always, using nature as the medium, to try to project upon canvas my most intimate reaction to the subject as it appears when I like it most; when the facts are given unity by my interest and prejudices.*¹⁸

Likewise, writing in 1953 for *Reality: A Journal of Artists' Opinions*, he stated: "Great art is the outward expression of an inner life in the artist, and this inner life will result in his personal vision of the world."¹⁹ For Hopper, seeing and painting were matters of sensate self-knowledge.

His artistic interests aligned with modernism's "massive reorganization of knowledge and social practices," which, Jonathan Crary argues, included the shift to a radically new manner of "embodied" vision framed by the subjectivity of the observer. Blurring distinctions between "internal sensation and external signs," modernism's new scopic regime focused on "autonomous perception severed from any external referent."²⁰ This is not to suggest, of course, that modernism actually "severed" the hard-wired biology of human perception but that it recalibrated visual habits and insights toward the spectator's sensory register: a "sensorium," as Walter Benjamin observed, assaulted, shocked, and distracted in the twentieth century by the fleeting, fragmented, and dynamic stimuli of new media such as movies and advertisements.²¹ Modernism's mode of embodied looking was seemingly liberating, a "freeing up of vision," and hence of thought and action. Yet if loosened from the imperatives, for example, of mimesis, artists and observers were simultaneously restrained by modernism's disciplinary agenda of "imposing visual attentiveness,

4 Edward Hopper, *Room in New York*, 1932. Oil on canvas, 29¼ x 36⅝ in. Sheldon Museum of Art, University of Nebraska–Lincoln, Anna R. and Frank M. Hall Charitable Trust, H-166, 1936. Image © Sheldon Museum of Art



rationalizing sensation, and managing perception.”²² By extension, modernism’s volatile conditions of flux and irresolution frustrated clear or confident understandings of its disciplinary agenda, yielding a mood—an emotional regime—of uncertainty and unease.

In terms of both how and what he painted, Hopper evoked these tensions between modernism’s codes of visual autonomy and emotional restraint, and its unsettling and unpredictable dynamics. Painting was a struggle for Hopper, an arduous exercise whose demands on his undivided attention generated a good deal of personal anxiety. In 1933, in a statement accompanying his first major exhibition (at the Museum of Modern Art), he wrote: “I find, in working, always the disturbing intrusion of elements not a part of my most interested vision, and the inevitable obliteration and replacement of this vision by the work itself as it proceeds.”²³ Painting, in other words, was a worrisome balancing act between Hopper’s desired “vision” and the “inevitable” distractions and impositions of modern life. Even his pictures of leisure are fraught, Alexander Nemerov argues in his discussion of Hopper’s *Ground Swell* (1939, National Gallery of Art, Corcoran Collection), a sailing scene contextualized by the impending threat of global war and the manipulative currents of mass media like radio and the movies.²⁴ Hopper’s pictures embodied his uneasiness with these modern conditions and his grasp of their similarly affective sway over others.

Brian O’Doherty remarks that Hopper “had a deep pessimism about human nature, which he liked to observe endlessly.” Peeking at people through windows—the format of paintings such as *Night Windows*, *Room in New York* (fig. 4), and *House at Dusk* (1935, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts)—or spying on them in automats, bedrooms, hotels, and offices, Hopper visually stalked modern America, often

transgressing private and public boundaries to gather data on the nation's emotional milieu. Spying is customarily defined in terms of hostile intentions, and Hopper's furtive watching was more than mere observation. J. A. Ward likened the artist's visual practices to voyeurism: "looking at scenes that he is not intended to see. The self-absorbed figures do not know of his presence; otherwise, they would be embarrassed, startled, or otherwise uncomfortable."²⁵

Hopper's surveillance did not yield especially salacious subjects: the ungainly bodies he painted, with their stooped shoulders, potbellies, saggy flesh, and vacant expressions, are hardly sexy. One critic notes that the figures in Hopper's later paintings are "crudely drawn and out of proportion," and even *Girlie Show* (1941, private collection), a portrait of a burlesque dancer, is less an erotic picture of sexual display than a revelation of the artist's cool scrutiny of middle-aged female flesh.²⁶ His secretive visual operations were their own form of disciplinary authority: in Foucauldian terms, the "docile bodies" he stalked were the targets of modernist schemes of order, regulation, authority, and subjugation.²⁷ Often depicted in moments of gloomy silence and imponderable waiting, Hopper's figures are typically withdrawn and wary, physically present but emotionally distant. Sitting near one another but separated and disengaged, the modern middle-class couple he spied on in *Room in New York* exemplifies this unsettling mood of emotional detachment.

Biographers have characterized Hopper as taciturn and aloof, a "depressive personality." Although he was not a recluse—he frequented theaters and galleries, went on road trips with his wife, maintained a small circle of friends—Hopper was socially awkward: tall, stiff, direct, cerebral, and distrustful, with little aptitude for small talk. The actress Helen Hayes, who commissioned a picture from him in 1939, recalled: "I guess I had never met a more misanthropic, grumpy, grouchy individual in my life. . . . I was utterly unnerved by this man."²⁸ But Hopper wasn't interested in social niceties. Attuned to the felt experience of looking, he concentrated on how moderns were uncomfortably faring with the twentieth century's changed emotional landscape of American cool.

American Cool

To be clear: Hopper's cool was not hip. It was not the emotional style personified by the oppositional swagger and rebellious self-expression of charismatic modern American musicians and movie stars like Frank Sinatra and James Dean—among the celebrity subjects of the photography exhibition *American Cool* at the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery in 2014. Nor does Hopper's cool resonate with the nonchalant self-possession, and self-defense, of American jazz artists like Lester Young and Miles Davis.²⁹ Rather, Hopper's cool evokes the transition to an American emotional style of tense inhibition characterized by control, discipline, and restraint.

As Stearns argues, the early decades of the twentieth century saw a major break from Victorian-era "feeling rules," or the norms by which Americans expressed their emotions.³⁰ The 1920s are typically viewed as a decade of frivolity and overindulgence, as the "roaring twenties," pulsating with fast-dancing flappers, finger-snapping jazz, and loud, drunken parties like those staged in *The Great Gatsby* (1925). Yet the age was also one of edgy uncertainty as Americans faced the psychological fallout of World War I, the failure of the League of Nations, the

horror of racial terrorism, the Red Scare, the steady advance of Taylorism—the new corporate ethos of “scientific” management and labor market “efficiency”—and, in 1929, the collapse of the stock market. Likewise, while the period experienced a significant loosening of sexual (specifically, heterosexual) constraint, rules for emotional conduct and body image that demanded new habits of self-control and consumerism were crafted by experts ranging from etiquette writers to advertising agents.

“Intense” feelings like anger and grief were censured, viewed as detrimental to the preferably “nice” disposition of the modern family and the calm, steady, and hierarchical operations of modern business, from factory floors to offices. New child-rearing manuals advised parents to firmly reprimand “unacceptable” emotional outbursts from their children: to control their tempers. “People skills” combining emotional restraint and affability were counseled in managerial and service sectors, encouraged by “organizational development” and “human relations” studies that were conducted to improve corporate collegiality—and productivity—by reducing “emotion-driven irrationality.” Best-selling books like Dale Carnegie’s *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (1936) promised to help readers “handle complaints, avoid arguments, keep your human contacts smooth and pleasant.”³¹

Concurrent with these admonitions against emotional intensity were aversions to the undisciplined body. While American women gained the independence of suffrage in 1920, they were also expected to comply with new modern standards of appearance and grooming that demanded corporeal discipline and an increased commitment to consumerism: exercising, slimming down, shaving body hair, following a beauty regimen that included ever-changing makeup styles and frequent trips to the hair parlor, using recently introduced consumer products to mask body odor and using still others to manage the “problems” of “feminine hygiene.” Middle-class men were similarly expected to conform physically by participating in team sports, cultivating well-developed muscles, and dressing for white-collar success. Sales of Listerine, advertised as a mouthwash, a cure for dandruff, and a deodorant, skyrocketed in the 1920s, and the Old Spice line of male toiletries, introduced in 1938, was similarly successful. And everyone was expected to enthusiastically take up new norms of personal cleanliness including regular bathing, hand washing, and tooth brushing.³²

Importantly, these modern imperatives of self-control posited emotional and physical management chiefly as matters of *personal* responsibility, while also positioning subjects within institutionally regulated hierarchies of class, gender, race, and sexuality. Modern concerns with emotional and physical discipline, in other words, were aligned with modern power relations: with pressures to conform to appropriate social attitudes and behaviors, to be increasingly productive, to measure up, to fit in. Resistance was discouraged: the righteous wrath of working-class Americans seeking labor reform and a living wage, for example, was viewed by many in the middle class as a dangerous problem of “bad feeling” rather than as substantive evidence of systemic inequity in the American workplace. Even during the Great Depression, when middle-class Americans would also be victimized by the economic imbalances of modern capitalism, many blamed themselves for their grim circumstances, “tending to feel shame at their inability to cope rather than overt hostility to a technological and economic order they did not always understand.”³³ In paintings such as *Hotel Room* and *Room in New York*, Hopper depicted the internalized emotional regime of failure, fright, and humiliation, of the quiet disgrace and stoic agony, which dominated the era.

Hopper and Advertising

Hopper learned the visual codes of American cool in the advertising industry, in which he worked as a freelance illustrator for more than two decades. In 1899, before studying painting and drawing with Henri, William Merritt Chase, and Kenneth Hayes Miller at the New York School of Art, Hopper spent a year at the Correspondence School of Illustrating (also called the N.Y. School of Illustrating) studying commercial art. In 1905 he was hired at the New York advertising agency C. C. Phillips & Company; in 1907 he began working for another agency, Sherman & Bryan; in 1912 he listed himself as an “illustrator” in the city directory.³⁴ From the 1910s through the mid-1920s, he was commissioned by several of the largest advertising firms of the day, including Barton, Durstine & Osborn and J. Walter Thompson. He carefully tracked his commercial commissions, listing clients, jobs, and billings in a series of record books. On January 20, 1915, for example, he noted that J. Walter Thompson had asked for two line drawings to advertise Eno’s Salts (a popular antacid); a few weeks later, on February 11, he recorded a twenty-dollar payment for his work.³⁵

As a freelancer, Hopper often worked only three days a week and sometimes took off for months to travel overseas (he visited Europe three times between 1906 and 1910, spending most of his time in Paris) or to summer in Gloucester, Massachusetts. As Michele Bogart explains, borders between advertising art and “high” art were fairly porous in the early twentieth century, and Hopper, like many other commercial artists, painted oils and watercolors, made etchings, and competed for gallery and museum exhibitions (he was included in the 1913 Armory Show, for example) while also working in graphic design. Later in his career, when commercial art was widely denounced by modern artists and critics, Hopper remarked, “Illustration didn’t really interest me. I was forced into it in an effort to make some money.”³⁶ Yet he was shrewd, prolific, and versatile, typically adapting his style to meet the requirements of each commission. Hopper also often signed his illustrations “E. H.” or “E. Hopper,” thereby claiming (and copyrighting) them as unique works of art, and himself as an artist of recognition.³⁷ Hopper also saved a good deal of his commercial art, another nod to its developmental importance in his career.

Many of Hopper’s advertisements were targeted at the nation’s growing numbers of white-collar workers, a new middle class of salaried professionals that included office clerks, managers, and salesmen who occupied modest positions in corporate hierarchies and yearned for greater status and success.³⁸ Advertisers counseled consumers’ ambitions by showing them the things to buy and the ways to behave in order to climb the corporate ladder. Hopper’s 1908 ad for Bringham Hopkins straw hats, for example, included the line, “these sterling hats will multiply both your prestige and profits” (fig. 5). His contemporaneous illustrations for Brandegee, Kincaid & Co. (“Makers of ‘Modern’ Clothes”) and for Brighton Garters, Knothe Unseen Suspenders, and Litholin Collars—stiff, detachable shirt collars that designated the class difference of their white-collar wearers by signaling aspirations of cleanliness, refinement, and respectability—likewise showed striving male moderns how to dress for success.³⁹ His 1915 drawings for Eno’s Salts—marketed as a cure-all for “Men of Powerful Personality”—addressed the gastrointestinal and emotional maladies that were associated with the accelerated pace of modern life.

Advertising itself accelerated during the years Hopper worked as a commercial artist, increasing in the United States from a total sales volume of \$682 million in 1914 to almost \$3 billion by 1929.⁴⁰ Stimulated by the introduction of new products (from cars to deodorants) and new forms of mass media, advertising’s incredible growth came from its alliance with the changed social,

- 5 Edward Hopper, front cover of brochure advertising Bringham Hopkins Straws, 1908. Reproduced from Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper as Illustrator* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1979), 392





"ASSIGNED to the drafting room, he combined his practical and theoretical knowledge in a new design for the lathe on which he had worked. The design reduced the cost of one part sixty-five per cent"

Helping Men to "Make Good"

How Individual Efficiency is Secured by Shifting,
Training and Keeping Track of Employees

By CARROLL D. MURPHY

Illustrations by EDWARD HOPPER

PARDON me for calling your attention to it, madam," said a saleswoman in an Atlantic coast department store, to a lady who had been looking at Easter gowns in her

delayed only a few minutes and there will be no charge."

A half hour later, the lady was making her report in the office of a rival store for which she was a regular "shopper."

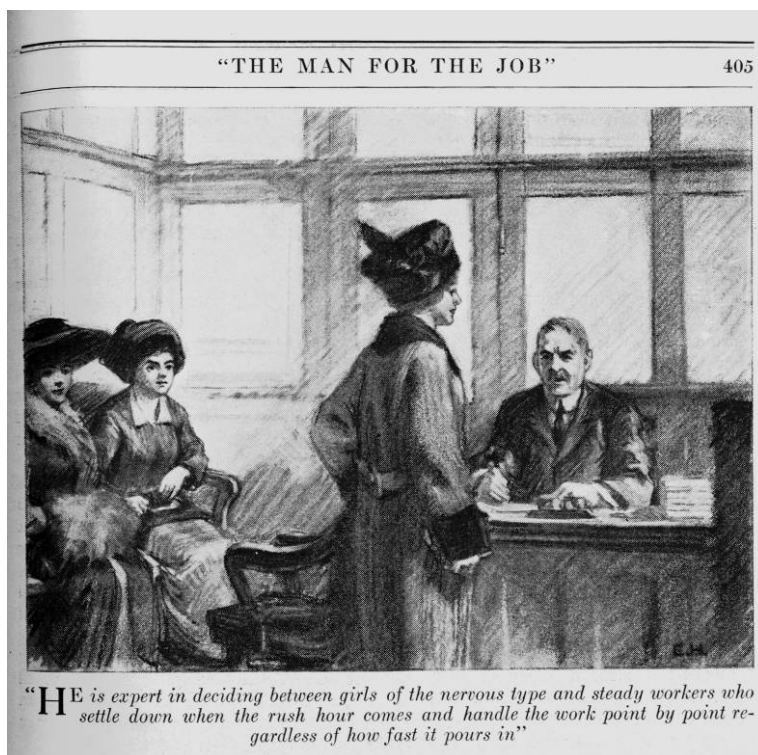
political, and emotional conditions of modernism. Placing goods and spending at the epicenter of modern American identity, the advertising industry forged consumerism as a shared national culture and as the epitome of citizenship. Ads did not simply sell products; they sold Americans the idea that consumption on all levels was essential to personal well-being and to national progress. Led by powerful agencies like J. Walter Thompson, advertisers "theorized, located, surveyed, and interpreted consumers" by gathering data on their incomes, tastes, and habits "in public, in the marketplace, and in the home."⁴¹ Assuming omniscient authority, advertisers scrutinized and surveilled modern Americans as they simultaneously fueled their escalating consumer appetites.

Concurrently, new emotional codes developed to reinforce consumerism's expanded importance in American life. Envy, for example, became increasingly acceptable, particularly when channeled as a form of emulative consumerism and aspirational social mobility—as in "keeping up with the Joneses." Contentment, by contrast, was disparaged as the miscarriage of success, as a kind of lazy complacency that thwarted self- and social improvement.⁴² Advertising catered to discontent, motivating purchasing by cultivating feelings of inferiority and inadequacy. Hopper's menswear ads framed this discontent by representing the things, experiences, and social status that modern Americans were encouraged to want, and legitimizing their emotional desires to have them. His later paintings of emotionally alienated Americans suggest that he also understood that such consumerism did not always or often satisfy or transform lives.

Hopper's magazine illustrations similarly articulated modern codes of consumption, social behavior, and emotional management. During the 1910s and 1920s, Hopper illustrated stories in popular fiction magazines—pejoratively called "pulp" or "slicks" depending on their paper stock—such as *Adventure*, *American Magazine*, *Associated Sunday Magazine*, *Everybody's*, and *Scribner's*.⁴³ He also made drawings and designed covers for the industry organs *Printer's Ink* (the first national magazine for advertising, started in 1888), *Wells Fargo Messenger* (the employee magazine of the American bank), *System: The Magazine of Business* (later *Business Week*), *Tavern Topics*, and *Hotel Management*. His commercial styles varied according to assignment need: working for *Everybody's* from 1921 to 1922, Hopper painted a dozen moody canvases illustrating "Sacrifice," a "story of love, mysticism, and adventure" set in New York and Africa. Working for *System* from 1912 to 1916, he rendered line drawings for articles titled "What Makes Men Buy?" and "How I Sell Life Insurance." Whether visually supplementing sensational adventure tales or detailing the routines of American salesmen, Hopper's commercial work conveyed modernism's "feeling rules."

His illustrations for *System*, for example, focused on the cooperation and confidence expected of American businessmen (fig. 6). A monthly published from 1900 to 1928 by the marketing industry pioneer Arch W. Shaw, *System* typically featured upbeat articles on skillful salesmanship, workplace efficiency, and other forms of business "betterment."⁴⁴ Hopper's drawings of earnest clerks, attentive managers, and eager yet polite salesmen—all

6 Edward Hopper, illustration for Carroll D. Murphy, "Helping Men to 'Make Good.'" From *System: The Magazine of Business* 23 (May 1913): 466. Collection Stanford University Libraries



signaling their aspirational class status in neat, well-fitting suits with white-collared shirts—captured the calm, collegial, and conformist conditions of the ideal modern office.

But they also illustrated its biases. In drawings for a 1913 article ironically titled "The Man for the Job," Hopper supplemented passages on how to hire "a man of the right caliber" with a sketch of an exchange between a male office manager and a female job applicant. The sketch was captioned: "He is expert in deciding between girls of the nervous type and steady workers who settle down when the rush hour comes and handle the work point by point regardless of how fast it pours in" (fig. 7).⁴⁵ Decades later, in his painting *Office at Night*, Hopper returned to both the theme of gendered hierarchy in the workplace and the image of the typecast female most sought in modern business: deferential, efficient, good-looking, and emotionally "under control" (fig. 8). As etiquette expert Elizabeth Gregg MacGibbon—nicknamed the "Emily Post of Business" by *Time* magazine in 1936—advised, working women—and their bosses—should "parcel-check" their emotions "on the way to work."⁴⁶ Yet in *Office at Night*, Hopper's focus on the female secretary's tight dress, shapely legs, heavy makeup, and future performance—her gaze down at that piece of paper peeking out from under her boss's desk begs a narrative—"encapsulates the contradictions in popular advice literature" by visibly alluding to the tensions of sex and power in the modern workplace.⁴⁷

Working in advertising honed Hopper's understanding of typology: the system of stock figures and common tropes whose repetitive familiarity conditioned audience





- 7 Edward Hopper, illustration for Carroll D. Murphy, "The Man for the Job." From *System: The Magazine of Business* 23 (April 1913): 405. Collection Stanford University Libraries
- 8 Edward Hopper, *Office at Night*, 1940. Oil on canvas, 22 ³/₁₆ x 25 ¹/₈ in. Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Gift of the T. B. Walker Foundation, Gilbert M. Walker Fund, 1948. Image courtesy Walker Art Center
- 9 Edward Hopper, *Hotel Management* 7 (January 1925): cover. Reproduced from Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper as Illustrator* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1979), 350

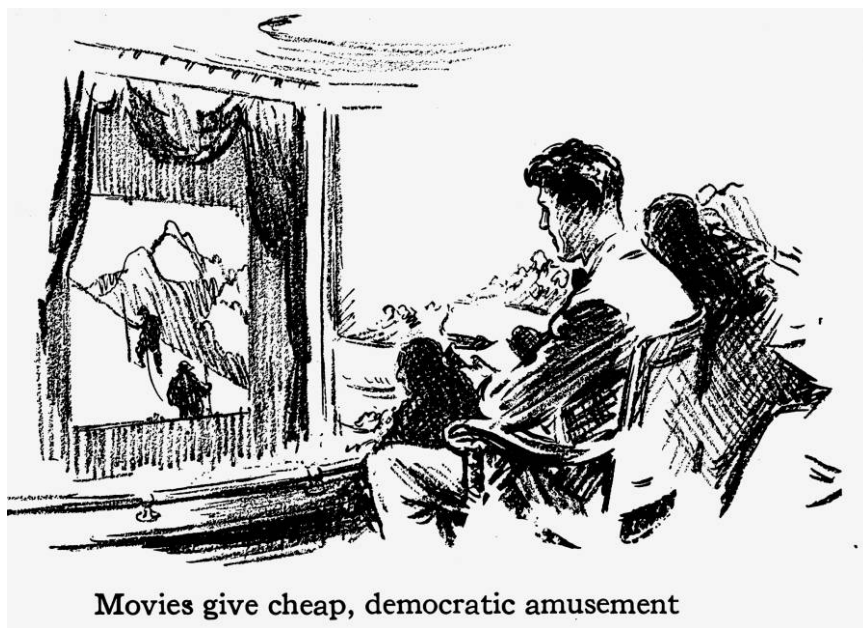
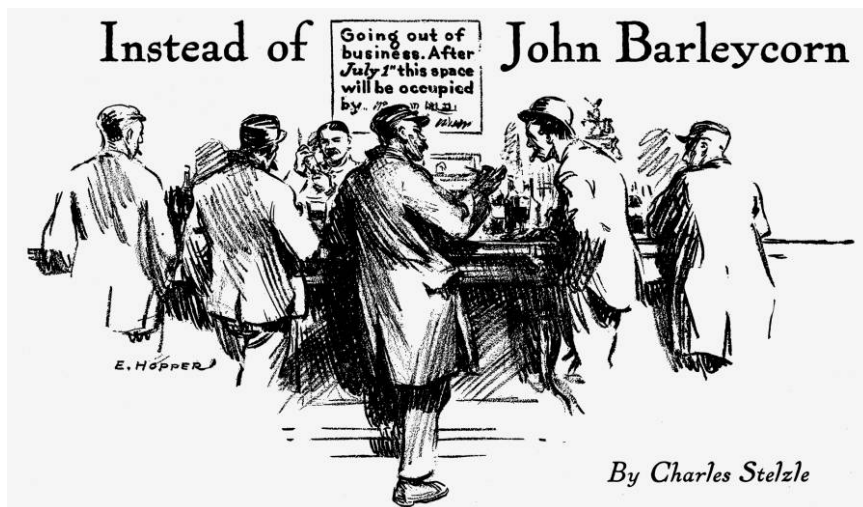
retail shops for growing numbers of tourists and vacationers.⁴⁹ Yet whether dining, dancing, or playing pool, Hopper's aloof *Hotel Management* subjects are exemplars of emotional restraint.

His 1925 drawing of a New Year's Eve party in a swanky hotel ballroom, for instance, includes balloons, streamers, a trio of musicians, a vaudeville act, and several tables of disengaged couples (fig. 9). The stylish woman in the picture's foreground has her back to the viewer; her tux-outfitted companion avoids her gaze—and the entertainment behind him—and casts his lackluster eyes down at the tablecloth. The scene's only gesture of emotional frivolity is the upraised arm of a woman—only partially visible, her body sliced down the middle—on the far left. We might see this as nouveau-riche sangfroid, but Hopper's figures are less nonchalant than inhibited, silent, and estranged. Depicting a celebratory setting of bubbly drinks and merriment, Hopper's magazine cover evokes a mood of muted intimacy—a reserved emotional regime that he returned to again and again in his paintings.

Parties, in fact, or pictures featuring more than a few people are practically nonexistent in Hopper's oeuvre: after painting *Soir Bleu* in 1914 (Whitney Museum of American Art), a scene of seven wine and absinthe imbibers in a Paris café, Hopper restricted the number of figures in his canvases to isolated individuals and detached couples, with nary a drink in sight. Alcohol and, more particularly, excessive drunkenness deeply challenged modern American provisos of emotional restraint. "Demedicalized" as a disease (or inherited disorder), alcoholism was chiefly understood throughout the twentieth century as a matter of self-discipline and "moral responsibility" in terms of both "cause and cure."⁵⁰ During the 1910s Hopper provided drawings for several cautionary tales that detailed alcohol's damaging

understandings of specific products, brands, and ideas. His illustrations for *Adventure*, for example, a fifteen-cent monthly magazine launched in 1910 that featured "stories set in a romantic or fantastic past, in the American west, or, with white men as heroes, in Africa, Asia, or the South Seas," consisted of easily recognizable images of cowboys, gunfighters, gangsters, and explorers as well as a host of other characters identified through racial and ethnic stereotypes—African tribesmen holding spears, Chinese men with braided queues, Mexicans wearing sombreros.⁴⁸ His illustrations for *System* and other corporate organs similarly featured stock representations of businessmen and clerks. Typecast characters populate his paintings as well: the working women in *Office at Night* and *New York Office* (1962, Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts); the estranged couples in *Room in New York*, *Summer in the City* (1949), and *Hotel by a Railroad* (1952, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden). Stripped from specific commercial references or easily deducible narratives, such paintings succinctly thematize Hopper's particular interests in modernism's cool emotional regime.

His color covers for *Hotel Management* further embody modernism's aversion to emotional intensity. The commercial hotel industry boomed in the 1920s to accommodate the demands of business and leisure alike, adding "sample rooms" for traveling salesmen, vast exhibition halls for trade conventions, special floors for women (who represented 25 percent of hotel guests by the late 1920s), and ballrooms, lounges, restaurants, and



effects on work and family and emphasized the importance of self-control, including illustrations for the article “How I Saved My Husband: A Temperance Document” for *American Magazine* in 1913.⁵¹

In 1919 he illustrated Charles Stelzle’s essay “Instead of John Barleycorn” for *World Outlook*, a monthly periodical of the Methodist Episcopal Church. An oft-described “Apostle to Labor,” Stelzle was a popular Presbyterian pastor whose inspirational editorials centered on expectations of upward mobility and working-class respectability. Not surprisingly, Stelzle was a staunch advocate of alternatives to the “amusement, comfort and desire” of the neighborhood tavern, which was soon to close (in January 1920) under Prohibition.⁵² His essay opened with Hopper’s depiction of workingmen—an ethnically mixed crowd identified by their slouched shoulders, lolling gestures, rumpled jackets, and flat caps—standing at a bar drinking beer, a large “Going out of business” sign looming on the back wall (fig. 10). Stelzle’s suggestions of saloon “substitutes” were accompanied by Hopper’s drawings of movie theaters, restaurants, and concert halls, all occupied by white men dressed in considerably more refined garments—tailored suits with detachable collars, for example—and exhibiting markedly more restrained mannerisms and conduct (fig. 11). The

message was clear: if America’s uninhibited working class represented the “problem” of modern drunkenness, the “solution” was visualized in the disciplined ranks of a socially superior middle class that had learned to curb such impulses.

Hopper and the Movies

Not surprisingly, modernist pressures to conform yielded a good deal of anxiety among Americans—which new forms of consumerism both mitigated and reproduced. Leisure activities like going to the movies offered an emotional outlet: escape in the shadowy spaces of the theater, excitement and passion on the screen. As Stelzle asserted in the *World Outlook* essay that Hopper illustrated: “movies give cheap, democratic amusement,” adding: “The motion picture house possesses many of the virtues of the saloon and practically none

10 Edward Hopper, illustration for Charles Stelzle, “Instead of John Barleycorn.” From *World Outlook* 5 (May 1919): 12. Reproduced with permission from the Methodist Library Collection, Drew University, Madison, N.J.

11 Edward Hopper, illustration for Charles Stelzle, “Instead of John Barleycorn.” From *World Outlook* 5 (May 1919): 12. Reproduced with permission from the Methodist Library Collection, Drew University, Madison, N.J.

of its vices. In it is the free, normal atmosphere to which the average man is accustomed.”⁵³ Yet however “democratic” the movie house, mainstream movies tended to project mainstream modernism’s consumer ethos, its rationalization of heteronormativity, its racial biases, and its reification of middle-class standards of respectability and taste. As an avid moviegoer, Hopper saw and experienced these conflicted yet complementary modernist conditions in the theater and on the screen, and drew on them to evoke American cool’s structure of feeling in his paintings.

Reminiscing with his friend the artist Richard Lahey in the 1960s, Hopper remarked: “You know, Lahey, when I don’t feel in the mood for painting, I go to the movies for a week or more. I go on a regular movie binge!” Lahey replied that Hopper’s movie experiences “had not been time wasted.”⁵⁴ Indeed, movies were significant resources for Hopper throughout his career, providing the visual motifs and affective conditions that, like the emotional codes he learned and practiced in advertising, helped shape his disaffected views of modern America. *New York Movie* (fig. 12), for example, depicts the rituals of midtown Manhattan moviegoing during the Great Depression, from being guided to a plush theater

- 12 Edward Hopper, *New York Movie*, 1939. Oil on canvas, 32 ¼ x 40 ½ in. The Museum of Modern Art, given anonymously. Digital image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, N.Y.



- 13 Edward Hopper, *Conference at Night*, 1949. Oil on canvas, 28 ¼ x 40 ¾ in. Wichita Art Museum, Wichita, Kans., Roland P. Murdock Collection, M100.52
- 14 Edward Hopper, illustration for Svetezar Tonjoroff, "Vamps of All Times: Potiphar's Wife." From *Photoplay* 20 (December 1921): 75. Available at Media History Digital Library, www.mediahistoryproject.org
- 15 Advertisement for *The Gap of Death and Horrors of War*. From *The Moving Picture World*, June 20, 1914, 1649. Available at Media History Digital Library, www.mediahistoryproject.org



seat by a smartly uniformed female usher, to sitting in the dark and watching patterns of light flicker on the big screen. *Conference at Night* (fig. 13), an office scene featuring two men and an odd-looking woman, coheres more to the kind of movie Hopper often “binged” on. Capturing three figures in a conspiratorial cage, framing them against a stark white wall, and confining them in a narrow gap between a crowded mass of desks, Hopper’s painting looks like a still from the postwar genre of crime and detective movies called film noir, and feels similarly tense and uncertain.⁵⁵

In the early twentieth century, the movies developed as a phenomenally popular, profitable, and powerful form of modern mass entertainment: by 1920, 50 percent of Americans saw at least one movie a week.⁵⁶ Between 1912 and 1920 American movie studios—first situated on the East Coast in places like Brooklyn, New York, and Fort Lee, New Jersey, and then headquartered in Hollywood—produced some 5,200 feature films and 31,300 shorts (one, two, and three reels each). Foreign film companies such as Nordisk Film (Denmark), Cines (Italy), and especially Pathé (France) produced thousands more.⁵⁷ Movie theaters multiplied in size and scale to meet escalating audience demand and, especially, middle-class interests. Beginning in the 1910s, palatial cinemas like those Hopper depicted in *New York Movie* and *The Sheridan Theatre* (1937, Newark Museum) were built to accommodate one to five thousand patrons for nonstop screenings that began around noon and continued until late at night. Many of these movie palaces were erected in the upscale urban neighborhoods where their aspirational audiences liked to shop.⁵⁸ By 1926, the movies were the fifth-largest industry in the United States, grossing over \$1.5 billion a year and accounting for 90 percent of worldwide film production.⁵⁹

The new mass medium’s meteoric rise was deeply attached, of course, to the aggressive promotional strategies of modern advertising, and Hopper, as a commercial artist and a motion picture fan, was a direct participant in this marketing. He undertook several movie-related assignments. In 1920, for example, the Norma Talmadge Film



Corporation hired him to design a color cover for "Town Tell-Tales," a vanity project for Talmadge, who was one of the most popular silent film stars of the day. In 1921 he was commissioned by the movie magazine *Photoplay* to illustrate a six-part series titled "Vamps of All Times," a parody of popular silent-film sirens such as Theda Bara that involved casting a "modern spot-light" on "ancient legends." Hopper's stylized drawings, rendered in black ink à la Aubrey Beardsley, spoofed legendary femmes fatales like Aphrodite, Isis, and Potiphar's wife (fig. 14).⁶⁰

Hopper's wide-ranging graphic skills were also called on to market foreign films directly to American audiences. In 1914 he was hired to design ads for Éclair, the U.S. branch of a French film company, which aimed to lure American movie fans to screenings of *Trompe-la-mort* (released in the United States as *The Master Criminal*, adapted from a story by Honoré de Balzac) and *Le système du docteur Goudron et du professeur Plume* (*The Lunatics*, directed by Maurice Tourneur). Hopper's familiarity with French (honed during his trips to Paris) might have generated these commissions; in any case, he was paid \$10 per drawing—and an extra \$2 to watch the movies.⁶¹ Two of the many movies he was hired to advertise—*The Gap of Death*, an action-packed drama about the romantic misfortunes of a daredevil bicyclist, and *Horrors of War*, a three-reel short about the 1870 Siege of Paris—were featured in a June 1914 print advertisement that appeared in the industry organ *The Moving Picture World* (fig. 15). Blending pencil sketches and film stills with dramatic text proclaiming "Powerful acting, realistic scenes," "Paper that will bring the crowds in," and "Wonderful lithographs," the ad, although unsigned, bears a strong resemblance to Hopper's other commercial work at the time.⁶²

The movies that Hopper watched and advertised were serialized melodramas:



thrilling, histrionic short films (each reel was 10–12 minutes long) packaged in detective, western, working girl, and other subgenres. Most featured typecast characters—bad guys, virtuous women, crazed villains—and plot devices like cliff-hangers to draw audiences back to the theaters, week after week.⁶³ Similar to the advertising campaigns that fueled them, such movies were aligned with modernism's mode of embodied perception and emotional management. Their formulaic codes of storytelling, stereotype, and feeling habituated moviegoers to the era's hyperstimulated sensory environment while simultaneously conveying its core values and expectations. That is, while the movies thrilled their pleasure-seeking audiences, their narrative and stylistic conventions also channeled them toward socially appropriate norms of behavior and belief, from expectations regarding public respectability to an allegiance with consumerism.⁶⁴ These normalizing codes would be sustained in the longer feature films (five or more reels) that dominated mainstream movie production by the 1920s. Going to “the movies for a week or more” and being exceptionally familiar with how the movies were marketed, Hopper absorbed their styles and directives and simultaneously critiqued their cultural and affective authority in various paintings.

New York Movie especially conveys Hopper's interests in the emotional tenor of moviegoing and movie theaters. Inside a cavernous auditorium, a few patrons watch a black-and-white film while an exhausted usherette, dead tired after a long shift on her feet, slumps against a wall. Movie palace rules, in fact, prohibited their working-class ushers—typically young men and women hired for their friendly dispositions, good figures, and impeccable public manners—from actually watching films while on the job, restricting them to nooks and niches off the aisles.⁶⁵ Hopper devotes much of the painting to the deeply carved plaster columns, flamboyant ceiling fixtures, and velvety seats of the ostentatious theater, with the movie screen edging the frame on the left. We are visually compelled, however, by his focused confinement of the female usher on the far right, her blonde hair haloed by a wall sconce, a vivid red stripe running down the pants leg of her tailored blue uniform, her gaze directed down at the floor—not up at the screen or out toward the theater.

Separating her working-class body from the leisure-class space of the movie theater, Hopper articulated and reproduced modernist discourses of social order, class management, and emotional control. Isolated in her off-aisle niche, the usherette in *New York Movie* exhibits the same pensive discomfort as the working woman sitting alone in *Automat*. Reginald Marsh's *Usherette* (fig. 16), also painted in 1939, similarly depicts a blonde, blue-uniformed female usher inside a movie theater, albeit a seedier one than Hopper's movie palace. Yet while Marsh zeroes in on her voluptuous body and defiant expression—note how she critically inspects the viewer with a hard stare, like a prostitute assessing a customer—Hopper's diffident usher personifies the emotionally regulated and restrained compliance of American cool.

Hopper's affinity for the movies is widely recognized. “He went to the movies all the time,” O'Doherty observes in *Hopper's Silence* (1981), a documentary that recounts interviews with the artist and compares his paintings with film stills. Hopper went to many different kinds of movies, too, from psychological dramas like *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1945) and *The Heiress* (1949) to the comedy *Mon oncle* (1958) and the art film *Orpheus* (1950).⁶⁶ He regarded movies as significant cultural indexes, remarking in 1962, for instance, “If anyone wants to see what America is, go and see a movie called *The Savage Eye*.”⁶⁷ An inventive hybrid of drama and documentary, *The Savage Eye* (1959) is set in a particularly sordid Los Angeles and follows an emotionally estranged divorcée as she visits a beauty parlor, strip bar, religious revival, and wrestling match.

- 16 Reginald Marsh, *Usherette*, 1939. Watercolor on paper, 22 x 30 in. Rockford Art Museum, Rockford, Ill. © 2015 Estate of Reginald Marsh/Art Students League, New York/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



In addition to acknowledging their revelatory cultural meanings, Hopper admitted that films inspired him: “I got the idea in one of the movies around here,” he casually divulged about *Intermission* (1963, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art), an airless scene he painted of a woman sitting alone in a theater.⁶⁸ Critics and filmmakers have long linked Hopper’s painting style with cinema. In 1957 Parker Tyler described Hopper’s pictures as “camera-shots consciously framed to give us a purified version of that strange blend of communicativeness and incommunicativeness that is ‘Hollywood.’”⁶⁹ The German filmmaker Wim Wenders, who credits Hopper as a huge influence, remarks, “More than anything else I liked his sense of framing. It was very cinematic and reminded me a lot of classic American movies, of Anthony Mann or John Ford.”⁷⁰

Hopper’s frequent attendance at films (and plays) made him well versed in dramaturgy: in staging, lighting, set design, and, more specific to the movies, framing and editing. His mostly horizontal paintings—the same shape as a movie screen—feature a number of compositional strategies seemingly lifted from cinema. In *Nighthawks* and other works he established scenes and subjects in the middle ground, avoiding intimate close-ups and distance shots. Many pictures allude to out-of-frame spaces, much as movies suggest “blind” or off-screen narratives and settings beyond the camera’s field of view. His “cinematic camera-eye,” as Bryan Robertson called it, also took in interior and exterior views simultaneously—as shown in voyeuristic canvases like *Night Windows* and *Room in New York*.⁷¹ Relying on strong horizontals and overlapping vertical elements, Hopper surrounded and trapped his subjects, fixing them so firmly, O’Doherty remarks, “that his pictures seem like solid frames in some slow-motion, life-long movie.”⁷²

In many of his pictures, the “movie” in particular was film noir, a bleak and uncompromising style of American film that emerged in the early 1940s and resonated



throughout the postwar period.⁷³ From *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) and *This Gun for Hire* (1942) to *The Big Combo* (1955) and *Touch of Evil* (1958), noir movies articulated the anxiety, insecurity, and pessimism of modern life in a shadowy, unglamorous style fortified by fragmented narratives (flashbacks and voice-overs) and distorted, slanting compositions (figs. 17, 18). In the diner in *Nighthawks* and the office in *Conference at Night*, among other paintings, Hopper's forcible designs underscore oppressive and emotionally restrained states that echo the similarly claustrophobic sets of such noir classics as *The Fallen Idol* (1948), *Night Has a Thousand Eyes* (1948), and *The Third Man* (1949), all movies that Hopper himself watched in various New York theaters.⁷⁴ As Slavoj Žižek muses, "the paranoia of the *noir* universe is primarily visual, based upon the suspicion that our vision of reality is always already distorted by some invisible frame behind our backs—which is why Edward Hopper should also be included among the *noir* auteurs."⁷⁵

Links between Hopper and the movies, especially film noir, are well established; the critical point here is that in terms of both style and sensibility, paintings like *Nighthawks* and movies like *The Maltese Falcon* and *The Big Combo* exemplify twentieth-century American cool. Hopper's nighttime scene focuses on a diner plunked in an oddly empty urban landscape. In a 1960 interview, he remarked, "Nighthawks seems

17 Digital frame from John Huston's *The Maltese Falcon*, 1941. Warner Brothers

18 Digital frame from Joseph H. Lewis's *The Big Combo*, 1955. Security Pictures, Inc.

to be the way I think of a night street . . . I simplified the scene a great deal and made the restaurant bigger. Unconsciously, probably, I was painting the loneliness of a large city."⁷⁶ Utterly still and oddly suffused in yellowish-green tones—fluorescent lights became commercially available in 1938—*Nighthawks* centers on the cast of four trapped inside: three customers leaning over a highly polished countertop and a white-capped busboy methodically attending to some kitchen duty. Silent and self-absorbed, the troupe is emotionally and physically detached from one another and the outside world. The icy female in the red dress stares at her fingernails or whatever she's

holding in her right hand—a pack of cigarettes? a book of matches? a compact?—while the sharp-faced figure next to her, a tight-lipped tough guy in a dark suit and steel-gray fedora, gazes into space and smokes a cigarette.

Dominated by themes of distrust, miscommunication, and hopelessness, the film noir universe similarly featured disaffected characters—hard-boiled detectives, femmes fatales, psychotic killers, tormented grifters, doomed lovers—entangled in enigmatic and fatalistic plots. Like many of Hopper's paintings, film noir focused on isolated individualism: the lack of intimacy in *Nighthawks* and other canvases is echoed in hundreds of noir films whose characters are similarly incapable of prolonged human contact, connection, or communication. Both refuse narrative certainty, leaving viewers with more questions than answers. Grappling with issues of purpose and meaning, *Nighthawks* and film noir evoke and embody modernism's emotional regime of restraint and alienation.

Conclusion

Reflecting on a 2004 Hopper retrospective at the Tate Modern in London, Annie Proulx observed: "Torrents of words and phrases fall on Edward Hopper's paintings. Deadly silence, erotic despair, haunting ambiguity, irony, symbolic decoding, metaphysical, mysterious. Almost every critic . . . sees in his mature paintings solitude, alienation, loneliness and psychological tension."⁷⁷ Such interpretations stem from the inherently affective character of Hopper's paintings. Navigating the transition from Victorian to modern "feeling rules," Hopper's typically spare and tightly controlled pictures embody American cool: the dominant emotional style of twentieth-century America. Hopper's response to this emotional transition was cautious and critical. Working with a repertoire of banal, ordinary subjects in unglamorous settings, tending toward off-kilter compositions, disorienting perspectives, cool tones, and ambiguous and incomplete narratives, he pictured modern American life in terms of the tense uncertainty and emotional restraint that so many people, including himself, felt.

Uncovering the "feeling rules" dominant at certain times, and identifying their shifting standards, emotions history positions and qualifies the methods and styles of individual artists within larger contexts and discourses. Emotions history recognizes that feelings have "social and political implications and can shape public realities."⁷⁸ In 1942, for example, pondering the popularity of Hollywood movies abroad, Siegfried Kracauer queried: "What would an intelligent European observer learn about American life from American films?" He speculated that modern Europeans assumed that American movies made visible "the direct and realistic way in which Americans feel, think, and behave."⁷⁹ Edward Hopper's widespread appeal today among American and European audiences similarly turns on assumptions that the paintings he produced from the 1920s through the 1960s mirror modern American character: a cool, reserved, and repressed character far removed from the bristling disdain and furious rage that seem to define America and Americans in the twenty-first century. Anger is the nation's *contemporary* emotional currency, visibly pervasive in its vituperative and vindictive politics, public culture, and social norms alike. Hopper's cool invokes a different emotional regime, prompting questions about what changed, and why, in modern times.

Notes

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- 1 Barbara Haskell, email conversation with author, January 28, 2013.
- 2 *Modern Life* was among the “most popular shows” of 2011, with an attendance figure of 217,141; see “Exhibition & Museum Attendance Figures 2011,” *Art Newspaper*, no. 234 (April 2012): 35–43. On Bowdoin’s show, see Beth J. Harpaz, “Crowds at Bowdoin Museum for *Edward Hopper’s Maine*,” *Huffington Post*, August 25, 2011, <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/huff-wires/20110825/us-travel-trip-maine-hopper-and-more/> (accessed January 28, 2013). On the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza’s Hopper exhibition, see Nina Sangimino, “¡Viva Edward Hopper!” *Questroyal Art Blog*, September 18, 2012, <http://www.questroyalfineart.com/blog/2012/09/viva-edward-hopper/> (accessed January 28, 2013). On the Hopper show at the Grand Palais, see Matthew Curtin, “Edward Hopper: A Surprise Star in France,” *Wall Street Journal*, December 13, 2012, D7, online ed.; and “Edward Hopper Draws More Crowds than Picasso in Paris,” *ARTFLXdaily*, February 4, 2013, http://www.artfixdaily.com/news_feed/2013/02/04/3733-edward-hopper-draws-more-crowds-than-picasso-in-paris (accessed February 17, 2013).
- 3 William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001), xiii; Peter N. Stearns, *American Cool: Constructing a Twentieth-Century Emotional Style* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1994), 9.
- 4 Peter N. Stearns, *Battleground of Desire: The Struggle for Self-Control in Modern America* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1999), 118.
- 5 Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Penguin, 1988), 5; on Hopper as a modernist, see, for example, Barbara Haskell in collaboration with Ortrud Westheider, *Modern Life: Edward Hopper and His Time* (Munich: Hirmer Verlag, 2009).
- 6 Daniel Joseph Singal, “Towards a Definition of American Modernism,” *American Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 7–26.
- 7 On Benton’s liberal political views, see Erika Doss, *Benton, Pollock, and the Politics of Modernism: From Regionalism to Abstract Expressionism* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1991), 67–145.
- 8 Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), as quoted in Berman, *All That Is Solid*, 31; and Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon Press, 1964), 13.
- 9 Ellen Wiley Todd, *The “New Woman” Revised: Painting and Gender Politics on Fourteenth Street* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1993), xxvi, 33–34.
- 10 Michael Lesy and Lisa Stoffer, *Repast: Dining Out at the Dawn of the New American Century, 1900–1910* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2013), 12–13, 72.
- 11 George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890–1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 164–65.
- 12 Carol Troyen, “‘The Sacredness of Everyday Fact’: Hopper’s Pictures of the City,” in *Edward Hopper*, ed. Troyen et al. (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 2007), 118.
- 13 Study for *Morning Sun* (1952), in Carter E. Foster, *Hopper Drawing* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2013), 215, fig. 382.
- 14 See, for example, Hopper’s sketches for *New York Movie* (1939) in *ibid.*, 123–47.
- 15 Linda Nochlin, “Edward Hopper and the Imagery of Alienation,” *Art Journal* 41, no. 2 (Summer 1981): 136.
- 16 Edward Hopper to Charles H. Sawyer, October 29, 1939, “Statement Two,” in Lloyd Goodrich, *Edward Hopper* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1971), 163–64.
- 17 Hopper, “Statement Two,” 164; on Hopper and Henri, see Rebecca Zurier, “Urban Visions: The Ashcan School and Edward Hopper,” in Haskell, *Modern Life*, 14–27.
- 18 Hopper, “Statement Two,” 163–64.
- 19 Edward Hopper, *Reality: A Journal of Artists’ Opinions* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1953): 8, “Statement Three,” in Goodrich, *Edward Hopper*, 164; on *Reality*, see Erika Doss, “Sharrer’s *Tribute to the American Working People*: Issues of Labor and Leisure in Post-World War II American Art,” *American Art* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 2002): 76–77.

- 20 Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), 3, 14, 24.
- 21 See, for example, Benjamin's 1936 essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1968), 217–51.
- 22 Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, 24.
- 23 Edward Hopper, "Notes on Painting," "Statement One," in Goodrich, *Edward Hopper*, 61. Lloyd Goodrich also reflected on Hopper's struggle with painting: "I remember that when he was painting *Morning in a City* he told me the great difficulties he was having with it, how he had worked and worked on it, how he felt that he was not getting what he wanted." Goodrich, "Notes of Conversation with Hopper, April 20, 1946," in Foster, *Hopper Drawing*, 224.
- 24 Alexander Nemerov, "Ground Swell: Edward Hopper in 1939," *American Art* 22, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 54–55.
- 25 Brian O'Doherty, in "Six Who Knew Edward Hopper," *Art Journal* 41, no. 2 (Summer 1981): 132; and J. A. Ward, *American Silences: The Realism of James Agee, Walker Evans, and Edward Hopper* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1985), 171.
- 26 Richard Dorment, "Where It All Went Wrong," *Telegraph* (London), May 26, 2004, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/3617734/Where-it-all-went-wrong.html> (accessed January 12, 2014). Hopper's wife, Jo, posed for the picture; Vivien Green Fryd, "Edward Hopper's *Girly Show*: Who Is the Silent Partner?" *American Art* 14, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 52–75.
- 27 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (1977; New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 136.
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- 61 Hopper records making pencil and line drawings for movies listed as “The Master Criminal,” “Dance of Mammon,” “Mende Beull’s under Arrest,” “She of the Wolf’s Brood,” “The Lunatics,” “Petrof the Vassal,” “Horrors of War,” “Whom the Gods Destroy,” “Chasing a Million,” and “The Gap of Death”; see Edward Hopper Record Book IV, 96.211f through 96.211j, March 4–June 22, 1914. On Éclair studios, see Richard Koszarski, *Fort Lee: The Film Town* (Rome, Italy: John Libbey Pub., 2004), 100–117.
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