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How does the Reading of the Liminal within Selected Artworks Release Them from the  
Bounds of Time and Space?

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Preface

This dissertation aims to explore the concept of liminality and how elements of the liminal within art can release the bounds of imagination whilst revealing the artist's subconscious and psyche at the time of making. Influenced by my interest in escapism, I decided to explore unfixed, non-places that go beyond time and space. The limitation I encountered during this journey was the broadness of liminality. It encapsulates the in-between, the known and unknown, reality and non-reality, which generates a vast breadth of possibilities. It is neither focused on one place or another which is what made it a challenging exploration. I decided to focus on key aspects of the liminal which appear in the artworks of Todd Hido and Edward Hopper and within the case study of Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nausea*. The key liminal aspects have been separated into chapters exploring transition, non-places, and alienation.

### Transition

The term liminality, originated from the Latin word 'limen' meaning threshold. It was developed by Arnold van Gennep in *The Rites of Passage* (1960), which studies the naturalistic and transitional stages in an individual's life.

When we begin a rite of passage, a process of transition, we are firstly removed from our original state of being, our 'accustomed place in time' (Schechner, 2014, 24:49) which van Gennep classified as 'the rites of separation' (1960, p. 11). Now, we are within the liminal, transitional period, described by performance theorist Richard Schechner as 'bounded off from ordinary life' (2014, 25:33) where the 'liminal rites', (van Gennep, 1960, p. 11) or rituals are performed to evoke the change. Feelings of disorientation occur in the middle stage of a rite of passage, 'when participants no longer hold their pre-ritual status but have not yet begun the transition to the status they will hold when the rite is complete' ('Liminality', 2022). Once the liminal rites are complete, the transformed individual is reintegrated into society. Schechner offers the western example of attending University (2014, 24:41), as a liminal rite or ritual. You are no longer living with parents, yet you are still 'parentally protected' (2014, 25:42) to a certain degree, you are not entirely self-sufficient. As Schechner maintains, the Latin definition of education means to lead, from one way of thinking or acting into another (2014, 25:27). The Latin for liminal, 'limen', Schechner likens to a doorframe in order to define, 'that which is not in this room or in that room but between rooms' (2014, 25:02). When the liminal rites are complete, the transformed is now in the 'postliminal' stage (van Gennep, 1960, p. 11). Where one was once unqualified, they are now qualified. Once single, they are married. Once alive, they are now dead.



Fig 1. Hido, T. *Untitled #2256-A* (1999) Chromogenic print. 24 x 20 x 1 in.

Todd Hido's impressionistic *Untitled #2256-A* (1999) (Fig.1), is the impression of his return to spaces reminiscent of childhood memories, birthing this liminal impression of the crossover between both time and memory in the form of a photograph.

The artificial light, described as a 'force' (2016, p. 18) by David Company in Hido's book *Intimate Distance* (2016), feuds with the fog, shrouding the horizon more so than it illuminates it. Beams from the streetlight pierce the skeletal branches, the only light we are led by is what is reflected from the wet concrete, which follows a path to nothingness. The puddles bear no reflection but the black of night. It is this familiar streetlight which transforms the entire scene, giving life to reflections whilst shrouding the destination of the path which positions the viewer at the limen. We are not at one place, or another, but suspended in limbo. It is within these liminal periods of evocative weather and mood Hido chooses to shoot. Night is a period of transition in itself; traditionally slept through, less populated than the daytime, with elements of uncertainty and danger, it is the waiting room for the sun to rise again and life to continue as normal. Hido's captures of familiar suburbia, in an unreal, empty

ambiguous spaces create spatio-temporal scenes, where one can explore the place in suspense, which hold uneasy qualities, 'they are familiar, yet unknown; they are secure, and yet intimidating' (Downey, Kinane, Parker, 2016, p. 3). It is within these overlooked, isolated, in-between spaces where one can conduct an exploration into liminality.

*Untitled #2256-A* (1999) (Fig 1) was one of the many photographs Hido shot after he moved away from Ohio to attend art schools in California in 1994 (2016, p. 12). Within his own process of change, these photographs are artifacts from Hido's own period of limbo, a chipped fragment of time, the middle ground in-between the loss of his childhood and the integration into adulthood. It is in returning to that once 'accustomed place and time' (Schechner, 2014, 24:49) that Hido explores the hidden crossover between time and memory. As Schechner describes van Geneep's 'rites of separation' (1960, p. 11), an individual must be taken from 'their accustomed place and time' (2014, 24:54) in order to enter the throws of the liminal period. How would it feel for the aforementioned individual to return to that once 'accustomed place and time' (Schechner, 2014, 24:54)?

Todd Hido grew up in a 70's suburban development named Silver Meadows in Kent, Ohio (2016, p. 14). He fondly recalls playing in the corn fields next-door and riding his bike through 'lonely roads' (Hido, 2011, 0:26). His photography encompasses familial suburban scenes, even naming a portfolio after his childhood home Silver Meadows (2016, p. 14). 'Memory might be the thing that actually grounds the work' (Hido, 2018). Hido speaks of his methods in his lecture, 'Wish You Were Here' (2011), where he describes driving around for hours on the outskirts of cities at night or early morning until he saw a familiar scene that would resonate with him, whether that be homes at night, foreboding streetlights, or the ever-present 'lonely roads' (Hido, 2011, 0:31). Hido presents an elusive image of the crossover between past and present, investigating the liminality of transition, time and memory. Once cycling on the lonely roads as a boy, he is now an adult, driving. First encountered through the eyes of younger Todd, we are now guided through these nostalgic landscapes by the lens of older Hido. Even during the production of his photography, Hido is neither permanently back in his childhood space, rather, he is photographing what is reminiscent of it, therefore, he is not estranged from it entirely either.

The themes of western universal familiarity are another investigation into the liminal Hido conducts. Hido presents liminality as something located but interpersonal, 'people tell me that they connect with my work because it reminds them of something from their own past' (Hido, 2018). It is within the limbo of familiarity and obscurity that a viewer can associate memories with images they have never seen before.

#### Non-places

The transitional predisposition for liminality exists within liminal spaces. They are 'simultaneously place and space' (Downey, Kinane, Parker. 2016, p. 3). A hallway is an example of a liminal space as it exists as a mid-way point between two destinations. One must pass through the hallway, in order to get the next room. The corridor has no necessary purpose but to act as a transitional space. This idea of liminal space is what anthropologist Marc Agué builds upon in *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity* (1995). He develops this concept of what a 'non-place' (1995, p. 34) is through describing transgressional places as locations one arrives at, or crosses through, that hold the air of liminality. Examples of non-places are waiting spaces, those without necessary purpose but to exist, suspended in purgatory-type states, such as, hotels, airports, and train stations (Agué, 1995, p. 79). All of these are places we pass through in order to reach another destination.

Semantically, Agué cites Michel de Certeau's definition of space as a 'frequented place' (1990, p.79), the pedestrians transform a street, a place, into a space by their presence (Agué, 1995, pp. 79-80). Non-place inscribes a 'negative quality of place, an absence of the place from itself' (Agué, 1995, p. 85). He uses the analogy of someone describing a route. They can name the places along it, but they do not necessarily have knowledge about the places (1995, p. 85). The non-place is the unknown about the place. Humans rely on predictability to survive, in turn, the 'impossibility of seeing everything or saying everything' (Agué, 1990, p.84) causes this quality of uneasiness, ambiguity, and 'disorientation' (Certeau, 1990 quoted in Agué, p.84).

Through his photography Hido forms unreal locations. They appear empty like a backdrop, however, there is no foreground. David Company writes in Hido's, *Intimate Distance* (2016), 'The images are sumptuous and full of things to look at...But they give the equally strong impression that this factual-fictional world is less than full' (2016, p. 18). The absence of people in Hido's photography, whom by Auge's definition make a space (1995, pp. 79-80), reinforce that there are no expectations of reassurance from the suburban familiarity and western domesticity that can be found in Hido's photography. The emptiness and lack of life within the supposed domestic normality in suburbia, transforms Hido's photographic scenes into eerily familiar liminal spaces.



Fig 2. Hido, T. *Untitled #7552*  
(2008) Chromogenic print  
mounted to aluminium. 20 x 24 in.

Hido's *Untitled #7552* (2008) is photographed through his car window during naturally moody weathering patterns. The glass of the car windshield acts as a film or filter, Hido utilises the rain that sticks to it, blurring spots around the image (Fig 2). The movement of wind and rain are suspended in time by the capture of this photograph. What we presume to be in flux, is in fact, still. The sound and movement of the rain blurring the vision of the glass is silent and motionless. In the very act of shooting a photograph, Hido captures time stood still. We are, again, on a winding, liminal road with no destination in sight. The colours are diluted, and the trees have lost their detail, bleeding into a pool of ambiguity. This fogginess mirrors our memory recall, flawed and unclear. The colour in Hido's work, he described as adding an air of 'artificiality' (2011, 3:03). There are aspects of the colour that become pronounced or drained, 'sometimes it didn't look real' (Hido, 2011, 3:07). The scene is mouldable, archival, historic and documented, consistent with Hido's portfolio evidenced by 'searching and returning' (Hido, Company. 2016, p. 17) to reminiscent spaces devoid of regularity. It is a moment of standstill which allows us to place ourselves within this space, which is paused for us to explore.

David Company distinguishes Hido's photographs as 'prompted by flashes of recognition' (2016, p. 17). The scenes Hido shoots are impossible for him to ignore. There is an understated sense of urgency or attraction that draws him towards them. Although devoid of all life, the familiar construct of universal place and the sense of familiarity, 'half-remembered, unstated, but insistent' (Hido, Company, 2016, p.17) makes the scenes Hido creates impossible for the viewer to ignore also. Much like in the way Hido is attracted to shooting these scenes, the viewer is attracted to the investigation of them, naturally resonating with a part of their own history.

Flashes of recognition are similar to memories triggered by smell or touch. Using such familiar scenes which are recreated to appear ambiguous and unreal, disseminates auto-noetic consciousness, the ability to mentally place oneself in the past of present, a form of 'mental transportation' (Evans, Reyes, Wildschut, Sedikides, Fetterman, 2021) which the observer can then align with their own memories, or experiences of liminality.

In David Company's essays in Hido's *Intimate Distance* (2016) he adopts a casual, conversational style of writing, which makes the reading of Hido's work accessible, naturally aligning with the use of universal familiarity, which Hido uses to open his work up to the viewer, thus maintaining the importance of universal understanding, and, therefore, allows for the involvement of the viewer in relation to the artwork. This is important when considering why Hido makes his photographs. They rely on the observer to create their own

narratives, choosing how they will relate to this work. In this emptiness and obscurity, Hido lends these places to the observer as a playground for the subconscious. Evoking a narrative allows us to align with our own experience of the ubiquitous scenes of domesticity and childhood. 'If these photographs and their arrangement seem narrative; it is because they suggest untold tales and possibility' (Campany, Hido, 2016, p.17).

'Fill the gaps as you wish; perhaps your subconscious already has' (Campany, Hido, 2016, p. 18).

Campany speaks to us directly through the writing, similarly to the way Hido communicates with us through his scenes of familiarity. This style of writing I am attempting to employ when speaking about Hido's work engenders the same intention, so that the reading of the liminal can be widely understood and interpersonal. Although, it is important to note that the conditions of it remaining a liminal space is that it should be partly inaccessible also.

Hido maintains this antonym of *Intimate Distance* (Hido, 2016), where the scenes are familiar, and yet there are limitations. Whether that be shooting through his car window, or the presentation of the traditional photography prints with borders, dimensions, edges and boundaries. 'He stays in the car with his camera, looking out, shooting out, a chamber within a chamber' (Campany, Hido, 2016 p. 18). Framed and frozen in time, these desolate scenes do not offer the immediate stimuli of sound or movement which a viewer can rely upon to direct them towards a narrative. If one does not relate to a childhood in suburbia, which a huge number of the world will not, there is this playing field of opportunity to take another narrative from Hido's environments. One can allow their subconscious to draw aspects of their own memory, purely in the emptiness of the scenes. There is no life within the photographs, therefore endless narratives could be created, relying on the personal history, memories and life of the viewer. The versatility within the emptiness truly encapsulates a liminal space, suspended in limbo, as it is neither familiar or unfamiliar, or with a directional narrative, or without one. 'The suggestions are as much yours as they are Hido's'. (Campany, Hido, 2016, p. 17) It is both open for the mind to explore and closed off by the boundaries Hido bestows upon the presentation of them. We are in-between submersion and voyeurism.

Michel Foucault builds upon non-space theory, developing the term 'heterotopias' (1986, p. 24). They are described as discursive spaces, constructs and institutions which are related, but also mirror and warp, the reality and norm outside of them. Foucault named them in relation to his consideration of 'utopias' (1986, p. 24), which are 'sites with no real place' (Foucault, 1986, p. 24). Utopias simply present society in a 'perfected form' (Foucault, 1986, p. 24) and have a 'general relation' (Foucault, 1986, p. 24) to the real space of society.



Heterotopias, however, are both 'outside of all places', (Foucault, 1986, p. 24) but also possible to locate in reality.

Foucault uses the analogy of the mirror. It is a utopia because it is a 'placeless place' (Foucault, 1986, p. 24), you can see yourself in a place 'where I am not' (Foucault, 1986, p. 24), in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface' (Foucault, 1986, p. 24). The mirror therefore becomes a heterotopia, as it exists in reality, but does in fact counteract the position you occupy in the space. Foucault accepts that that the mirror is both 'absolutely real' (1986, p. 24) and at the same time, 'absolutely unreal' (1986, p. 24) because in order for it to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point.

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In order to establish and describe heterotopias and the meaning they hold, Foucault developed six principles. The first principle is that every culture or society constitute heterotopias, which is why they can take many different forms. Within 'primitive' (Foucault, 1986, p. 24) societies, there exists 'crisis heterotopias' (Foucault, 1986, p. 24), for those considered in a state of crisis, or undergoing change. Foucault offers the examples of adolescents, pregnant women, and the elderly

(1986, p. 24). The institutions in place, such as boarding schools or military schools, are to manage those in this state of crisis, or transition away from the regularity of normal life (1986, p. 24). Using the example of the boarding school, a child is in the in-between transitional period of puberty and adulthood, removed from everyday society, which in turn, could threaten everyday order. They are therefore, separated, and the transition is conducted and dealt with. Although some crisis heterotopias still exist, such as the aforementioned boarding school, Foucault states these are being replaced with 'heterotopias of deviation' (1986, p. 25). Places such as prisons, or psychiatric hospitals contain individuals who have deviated from the order of society, in order to make a utopian space possible outside of it (Foucault, 1986, p. 25). These places localise behaviour out of the norm; but are not restricted to those seen as a threat to the utopia outside of them. Theme parks and leisure centres are structures where one can act in such a way that are contrary to their normal routine. Heterotopias are both related to what is outside of them, but adversely different, and are therefore, spaces within the in-between (Foucault, 1986, p. 25). As mentioned previously, in van Geneep's *The Rites of Passage* (1960), he too acknowledges that liminality exists within a transitional period. Foucault proposes these are contained within the heterotopias of crisis and deviation (1986, p. 25).

In the definition and exploration of liminal spaces so far, we return to this idea that they are an opposition or aversion to normality. This break or upset in the regular running of society, promoting utopia, which exists within these heterotopias, are much like Hido's contained scenes. Exploring the crossover of childhood, memories and adulthood, this transitional 'crisis' (Foucault, 1986, p. 24) is contained within the boundaries of a photograph. It is encouraged to explore as such, with the ambiguous scenery and emptiness, they can become a heterotopia in relation, but again wholly separate to the normality of society.

Foucault's second principle states that as time progresses, the function of heterotopias can change (1986, p. 25). Foucault uses the example of western cemeteries, once located next to churches in the centre of towns and cities, which were then relocated to the borders (1986, p. 25). In a time of genuine religious belief, it was believed the soul was immortal and that the body was decaying matter. When people became more 'atheistic' (Foucault, 1986, p. 25), the term 'cult of the dead' (Foucault, 1986, p. 25) was established, the body was soulless and decaying. Following the vast amount of disease during the eighteenth century, it was believed that death was an 'illness' (Foucault, 1986, p. 25), a threat to the living, 'it is the presence and proximity to life that propagates death itself' (Foucault, 1986, p. 25). At the beginning of the nineteenth century, cemeteries were located on the border of cities. They became a 'dark resting place' (Foucault, 1986, p. 25), where the dead body is afforded more attention.

I consider Hido's work as interchangeable. Much like Foucault's second principle (Foucault, 1986, p. 25), the places Hido revisits have changed over time, as has he. When Hido returns there is no life there anymore. Maybe one is expecting to see themselves in these scenes that are reminiscent of past times. However, there is no younger Todd, or bike. It is a background of that memory. Hido shoots many roads, many houses, but they are all absent of the life that once occupied the space.

Although suburbia is a western familiarity, which excludes those knowing nothing but the environment around them in different parts of the world, everyone can relate to how memories feel, often shrouded in a midst of blurriness or fog. Recalling feelings when returning back to a place in the past surpasses our familiar construct of time and space. Our significant memories are all based upon the undergoing of a transition, from no longer being accustomed to that previous place, it becomes a memory.

American painter Edward Hopper's subject matter is truly within a heterotopia, a pausing of traditional time; frozen like Hido's photographs. Edward Hopper paints imprisoning locations and buildings, presenting figures within them. Unlike a non-place, devoid of people, and more like a heterotopia, these places are contained, away from society, like the automat and diner. In spite of Hopper's wife, Josephine, physically aging, Hopper would paint her looking youthful, his first painting of her being when they were students. Even today, the character of Josephine has not aged, she is still suspended in time, making the scene of the painting a non-moving place, time does not exist within it.

There is a fine art sensibility in Hido's photography, 'I photograph like a documentarian, but I print like a painter'. (Hido, 2011, 05:14) He is a fan of Hoppers work (Hido, 2018) and they share this mutual understanding of non-places that exist out of sociality which mirror the themes of alienation. The sublime artwork they create is relative to the world around them, and it expels the contextual elements of their work, and projects an idea about their psyche at the time of making. We know Hido was in a period of transition himself and responding to the world through photographing these non-places, piquing interest in the overlooked. Hopper used elements of his real life within his painting, his wife being the model, but he would place her in unreal places. People tried to track down Hopper's infamous *Nighthawks* (1942) diner, (Fig.4) only to find it never existed (2021, 11:00).

The relationship with reality is important in the study of liminality, as the liminal itself is not quite real, but not quite unreal either. They must hold elements of the two in order to be liminal, 'they are familiar, yet unknown; they are secure, and yet intimidating' (Downey, Kinane, Parker, 2016, p. 3). What we perceive to be the real and unreal, which affords purpose to our lives are key ideas in the philosophy of existentialism, which will formulate

some new ideas, alongside the reading of Hopper and Hido's liminal artwork to learn what the artists project through their creation of these liminal artworks.

Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophical novel, *Nausea* (2021) introduces some of these powerful ideas. He details the story of the character Antoine Roquentin, who devoted ten years to writing a history book about French aristocrat Marquis de Rollebon. Sartre details Roquentin's downward spiral into a deep existential crisis, he dubbed 'nausea', (2021, p.23) when he comes to the realisation that he has dedicated a large majority of his life to revive the historical figure, Rollebon, who no longer exists. Faced with the 'true nature' (Sartre, 2021, p. 115) of the terrifying present, he is confronted with the second death of Rollebon, as Sartre's character concludes, 'the past did not exist' (Sartre, 2021 p. 115). Roquentin begins to see things stripped of their essence, the meaning or purpose man imposes on them. He places his hand on a leather seat and sees visions of dead animals that were slaughtered for their hide instead, (Sartre, 2021, p. 150) thus stripping the essence and what allows us to recognise it, by seeing the seat for what it truly is, which is the fact that it simply 'is' (Sartre, 2021, p. 48). He is nauseated by the absurdity in everything he has become normalised to, 'I am in the midst of Things, which cannot be given names' (Sartre, 2021, p. 150) leaving existence itself 'superfluous' (Sartre, 2021, p. 48), meaningless.

If we view the thematic devices in Hido's artwork through a Sartrian lens, the streetlight would simply be a piece of metal that emits light, and perhaps the essence, that Hido bestows on it through the medium of photography, or fine art, is an inference to nostalgia and memory. However, it is understood that memory was a fluke to Roquentin; all we could see was what existed, and all that exists simply does – these obscure and obscene purposes we give to objects and things are simply a distraction from the emanating nothingness that engulfs our very consciousness. 'Things are entirely what they appear to be and behind them ... there is nothing' (Sartre, 2021 p. 115).

Although, Sartre does offer a glimmer of hope in this realisation of the meaningless of existence when Roquentin discovers a cure to this existential nausea. If he can unveil something beyond; he can be free, through a novel is how he will do this. Rather than writing about something that has existed, like the history book, he must write about something that has never existed, an imagined story. 'It would have to be beautiful and hard as steel and make people ashamed of their existence' (Sartre, 2021 p. 212). Which leads us to question whether this character was Sartre the whole time, and what we read is a door to realising this transcendental beauty and Roquentin had to be used as a vehicle in Sartre's imagined place. It could not exist; in order to make people 'ashamed of their own existence' (Sartre, 2021, p. 212).

Liminality surpasses the bounds of existence, it is spatio-temporal. The liminal spaces Hido and Hopper explore can exist as a photograph or painting in reality, however, they expel greater ideas about the artists' psyche at the time of making, their personal history and navigation through reality. Through these liminal spaces they create something beyond existence, the medium of art is simply a portal to make the exploration of these ideas possible.

### Alienation

Both Hido and Hopper's work explore an element of isolation. Hido's work investigates the in-between of past and present, neither at one point in time or another. The scenes he shoots are noticeably desolate and empty. Hopper expresses a greater form of alienation and liminal sense of feeling alone whilst in the company of others.

Hopper lived and worked in the densely populated city of New York. In spite being surrounded by people, Edward Hopper and his wife Josephine lived a 'hermetic existence' (Wood, 2004). Their relationship was reportedly abusive and strained, Jo writes in her diary, (Wood, 2004) yet she remained the model for all of Hopper's works. Both painters, Josephine's career took off before Edward's. When her work was shown in the Brooklyn Museum, she recommended Hopper to a curator. His painting was sold, which kickstarted Hopper's career, however, Josephine began to lose all recognition. 'What has become of my world. It's evaporated – I just trudge around in Eddie's'. (Hopper, McColl, 2018)

Hopper's personal notions of isolation and the inability to connect were projected through the art he produced. 'Even a buzzing city doesn't remedy isolation but heightens it'. (Peacock, 2017) They both share the complicated feelings of how one can feel lonely, even with someone inexplicably close by your side.

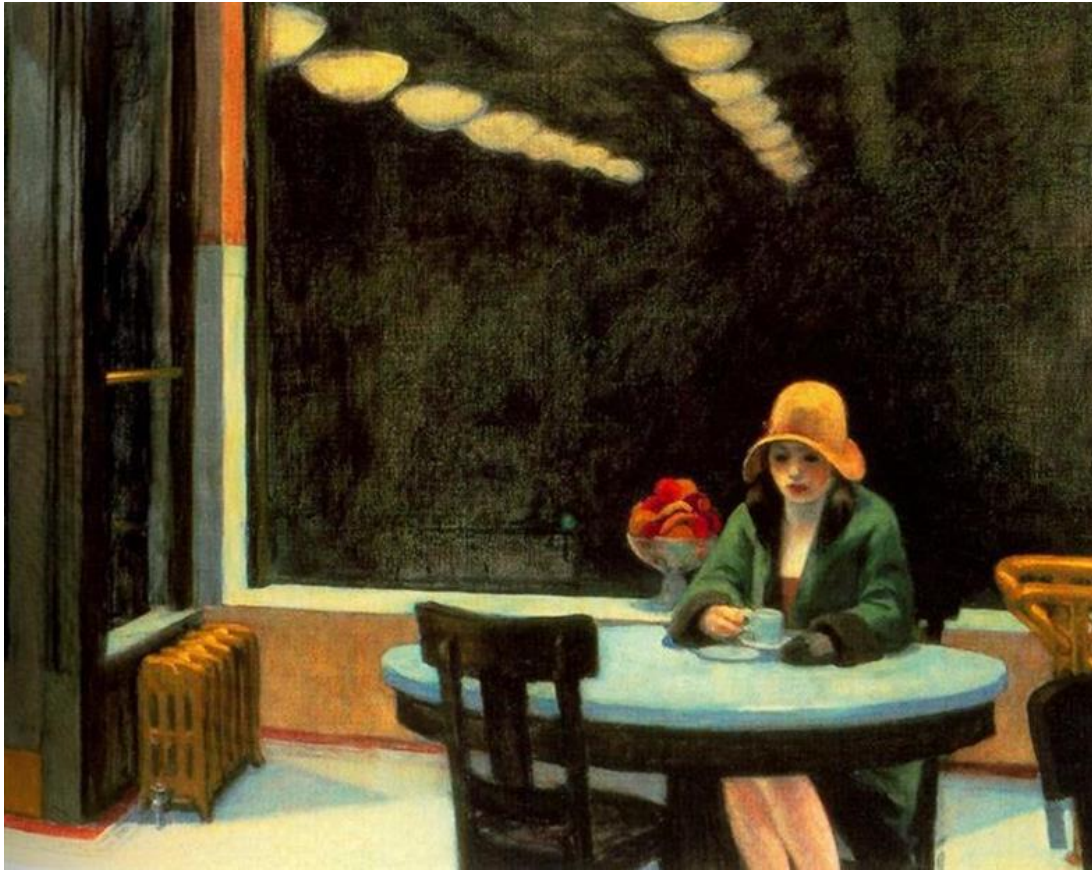


Fig 3. Hopper, E. *Automat* (1927)  
Oil on canvas. 20 x 24 in. 35.9 x  
28.1 in.

Within an automat, (where everything was served from vending machines) as the title would suggest, there is no human contact (Fig. 3). The woman is alone. What has permeated non-places, according to Augé, is the modern influx of transactional, abstract encounters, (supermarkets and ATM's used as another example) these wordless communication systems create places that are 'surrendered to solitary individuality' (Augé, 1995, p. 78) which evoke feelings of the 'temporal' and 'ephemeral'. (Augé, 1995, p. 78)

Isolating the scene further, the subject cannot even be communicated with by the viewer observing the scene, her gaze is downturned towards the only warmth in the painting; the hot drink she is holding. We are reminded that even the light is artificial, a stark reminder of the constant inflection of life surrounding Hopper, in spite of the separation he feels from it. Everything within these structures is man-made. It is impossible to be separated from reality, despite how distant one may feel from it. 'The rows of artificial lights reflected in the blackened glass lead no-where, compositionally and psychologically' (Nochlin, 1981, p. 136). The inside is depicted as so artificial, Hopper draws a literal defining of the two worlds in

terms of liminality within this scene - the sharp angles of rectangles, the brutal juxtaposition of the colourful interior light, and the darkness of the outside. She is visibly there, but so far away and hard to reach at the same time. There she remains, permanently suspended where time cannot touch her in this little frame Hopper has made for her.

The idea of inaccessibility is approached by Foucault in the fifth principle of heterotopias. 'Heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable' (Foucault, 1986, p. 26). There is either the compulsory entry into these places, such as a prison or school, or one must submit to other 'rites or purifications' (Foucault, 1986, p. 26), which permit them entry, such as, having a job within a prison or school.

Hopper isolates the characters he paints, in 'imprisoning rectangles of windows and doorframes' (Nochlin, 1981, p. 137), alienated from the world outside of it. These boundaries Hopper uses to enclose the figures distance them from the observer, not only through the medium of painting but by physically painting the characters at a distance, and painting scenes which do not exist, they cannot be visited in real life, the only glimmer of reality is Josephine as the model. This distance highlights the inability we have to fully understand one another. The spaces both artists create provide insight into their psyche at the time of making, forming psychological spaces. These spaces, much like our inability to fully understand one another, are closed off from the observer. The scenes are unreal and exist within an impassable print or canvas. We will never know the true intention for making the work, however, we all have an understanding that our past grows distance from our present self.

Sartre originally wrote *Nausea* (2021) in 1938, concurrent to the period Hopper was making his art. The character of Roquentin feels dysphoric about himself taking up physical space, wishing that what existed could 'exist less strongly, in a drier, more abstract way, with more reserve' (Sartre, 2021, p. 152). This acknowledgement leads him to even consider suicide, 'I dreamed vaguely of killing myself to destroy at least one of these superfluous existences. But my death itself would have been superfluous' (Sartre, 2021, p. 154). The boldness we have to exist is based on the assumption that we have a purpose and deserve to exist. 'I realized that there was no halfway house between nonexistence and this rapturous abundance' (Sartre, 2021, p. 146).

The Fine Arts was another senseless masquerade of the macabre that Roquentin criticised. Mocking those who found consolation in the Arts, 'They imagine that the sounds they receive flow into them, sweet and nourishing, and that their sufferings become music...they think that beauty is compassionate to them. The mugs' (Sartre, 2021 p. 151). However, it was in the transcendentalism of the Fine Arts where Roquentin caught a glimmer of hope for his

existence. He listens to his favourite song on the record player and an 'exemplary suffering' (Sartre, 2021 p. 208) is born. He feels ashamed of his existence. The absence of this music previously left Roquentin, 'morose and calm' (Sartre, 2021 p. 208). He was comforted that everything earthly was made up of the same material as him; and 'the very existence of the world so ugly' (Sartre, 2021 p. 208) that he feels, 'completely at ease, at home.' (Sartre, 2021 p. 208) This greater transcendentalism is revealed. It is 'beyond— always beyond something, beyond a voice, beyond a violin note'. (Sartre, 2021 p. 208) He concludes this surely isn't consoling; this beauty is not compassionate to Roquentin, but he is finally moved. This 'conceited little suffering' (Sartre, 2021 p. 208) only highlights the superfluous nature and imperfection of his existence. Even the notes of the saxophone, suffer as a 'layer of existence' (Sartre, 2021, p. 208) which unveils it. It remains underneath something that is so beyond it doesn't exist, 'you must be like us, suffer in strict time' (Sartre, 2021 p. 208).

As a viewer of the artwork and literature I am studying, I feel this element of shame Sartre references. I have no choice but to take a back seat whilst assuming the role of the viewer. I exist in reality, whilst viewing these pieces of work that take one to an unreal, liminal space. Especially in Hopper's work, as people we have lived in opposite environments; and this inference of loneliness within these isolated architectural rooms, leaves the viewer to take on the new role of an outsider; I am not invited.



Fig 4. *Nighthawks* (1942)  
Oil on canvas. 33 x 60 in.



*Nighthawks* (1942) (Fig. 4) was completed just days after America's entry into World War II. Which further contextually divides the two worlds of Hopper's bleak, devoid psyche, and the fruition of chaos in the real world. I do not believe it reflects existential dread, more hopelessness. A direct reflection of the war Hopper and his wife were in whilst both feeling totally isolated, even in a marriage. There was so much strife and fighting on the surface level; however, deep in his subconscious he felt truly alone, even though she was always there as a model in the paintings. There is such isolation that even the chaos of the outside cannot touch the inexplicably loneliness Hopper feels inside himself and inside these imagined places.



Fig 5. Hido, T. #2133 (1998)  
Chromogenic print. 38 x 30 in.



Fig 6. Hopper, E. *Cape Cod Morning* (1950) Oil on canvas. 40 x 34.5 in

There is a parallel of voyeurism in both Hido's and Hopper's scenes. They indulge in the intimacy of viewing a woman alone, hotel rooms, or strangers' homes at night, all of which are heterotopias and private spaces. Although there is an absence of human warmth in both

artists' work, the intimacy of observing and focusing in on these private spaces, inadvertently bring themselves closer to the subject they are presenting the distance of.

Hopper's painting are performances for the spectator which will never break the fourth wall. There is a blockade for the viewer to become a participant, in the same way there is a wall between the subjects of the painting. They are architecturally isolated by 'imprisoning rectangles of windows and doorframes' (Nochlin, 1981, p. 137) The outside of the painting, the only freedom to the subjects, is contained within a canvas also.

In *Nighthawks*, the diner is lit up like a stage; Hopper's paintings all have a theatrical sensibility. This includes Hopper's last piece he painted before his death, *Two Comedians* (1966) (Fig. 7), where he exhibits once again, his relationship with Josephine as a performance from two clowns. 'Hopper was not only portraying Jo and himself: he was also looking back with melancholy and irony on his own life' (Renner, 2002, p. 19). Hopper's existential alienation is referenced in this same absurdity that Sartre mentions Roquentin faced, when he realised he was wasting his life writing, resurrecting a historical figure that was dead. Hopper's repeated paintings of Josephine still appear isolating and lonely, they document a futility, a performance of absurdity, which produces an air of hopelessness, all of which has been observed by the viewers on a stage throughout his painting career. The relationship of Edward and Josephine, although now physically deceased, will forever be suspended within time as these paintings have become archives.

In the transitional process of death, in van Geneep's terminology, the reintegration at the end of the changing process is for life to continue without the existence of that person who was undergoing death. However, they are painted together, documented throughout Hopper's career. Although in that sense they are to permanently remain by each other's side, they will still be, in the same non sensical way, isolated, the antithesis of this disparity forever framed within *Two Comedians* (1966) (Fig.7).



Fig 7. Hopper, E. *Two Comedians* (1966)  
Oil on canvas. 29 x 40 in.

### Reflection

My study has examined liminality and how elements of such, within the artworks of Todd Hido and Edward Hopper, inspire creativity, liberate the imagination, and offer insight into the artist's psyche. It is their personal, transitional experiences that influenced the artists to make these works, demonstrating that liminality inspires greater creativity. Their artwork exists, but the moments they capture do not. We view the works through our own experiences, becoming the observer of the in-between. Liminality surpasses the bounds of time, space and reality, unleashing the creative imagination. Foucault's final principle mirrors my own conclusion without heterotopias our creativity remains suppressed and stultified. The boat heterotopia; a 'floating piece of space; a place without a place' (Foucault, 1986, p. 27) without which our 'dreams dry up' (Foucault, 1986, p. 27) précises my research - without liminality these artworks may not exist.

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