

Meditation 1

For some time I have entertained a suspicion of relation between Edward Hopper and Wallace Stevens. Both presented themselves to the world in a formal fashion; both retained an enduring interest in French culture; both produced texts that, on the surface, appear to respect the conventions of past “real” art while at the same time offering something other than, even contrary to, those conventions. Not least, they were almost exact contemporaries (Hopper is born in 1882, Stevens in 1879). In the course of my entertainment, however, I came upon Jacques Derrida’s sentence: “one text reads another” (Bloom et al. *Deconstruction And Criticism*, 107). Thereafter, my thought has been taken up not with proving a secret, previously unsuspected relation, but with the possibility of reading Stevens through Hopper.

There was to be a further redirection involving Derrida. This came through the cool, not uncivil, but finally uninviting voice of institutional authority. Wanting to examine Hopper’s work at first hand, I telephoned the Whitney Museum of American Art only to be told—by a not uncivil, but finally uninviting voice—that the painting I particularly desired to see, *A Woman in the Sun* (1961), could not be seen. It was being readied for an exhibition, although the voice wasn’t sure about this. The “original” rendered invisible, a mystery, there was nothing to do but to consider its reproductions. It is this which involves Derrida; for I shall consider them in terms of what he has identified as the supple-

ment. The characteristic or law of the supplement is that its operation can continue infinitely. Or, according to one of Derrida's more notable supplements, Jonathan Culler, it proceeds as an endlessly linked series (*On Deconstruction*, 105).

An example from Derrida's own practice is the band of commentary, largely concerned with the final impossibility of translating the French of what is "above" it, he provides at the bottom of each page of his "Living On" essay in the *Deconstruction And Criticism* volume. The band is a supplement to the essay. Reading the essay, the distinction between top and bottom, between "primary" secondary (the essay is "about" Shelley's *The Triumph of Life* as read by or through Blanchot's *L'arrêt de mort*) and "secondary" secondary (the band of commentary), a distinction "drawn" by a horizontal line printed on each page, tends to fade, and the two merge to become a continuous moebius strip. As the two become one, though, the result is not a seamless whole. Instead, there is self-consciousness and undecidability. The reason for this is that the bottom constantly questions and qualifies the top, although the top must still be read and considered to understand the bottom, which in turn cannot stand by itself. Presumably a device for distinction and definition, the line actually engenders their difficulty. It is on this strip of difficulty that readers of Derrida's essay must move like Escher ants with their tiny claws.

As consideration of the operation of the supplement has disclosed an unexpected fact about reading, so, too, has consideration of the reproductions of Hopper's *A Woman in the Sun* disclosed an unexpected, reversed relation. I began with the intention of reading a painting to read a poem. Instead, I have had to read reproductions of an invisible original, an only relatively infinite process that nevertheless takes on a complexity such that what was to have been the vehicle for reading becomes what is read. The supplements to the "subject" become the subject; the intended subject, the Stevens poem "The Woman in Sunshine," is displaced and deferred. As the supplements-turned-subject are read, they also require their own supplements, sub-supplements. One that has emerged in my reading of Hopper is Emily Dickinson.

Yet it is probably never the case that only one text reads one other text. One is always becoming more than one. These occur according to a matching or sharing of like-associated terms and according to a reader's experience in the world of texts. There can only be matching/sharing as the reader remembers parts of that world. Negative capability helps. If our experience were not limited, then the awareness of the reading process as an infinite operation of supplementarity would be unbearable. However difficult we may feel reading to be or to have become, non-negative capability would make it manifestly impossible. Besides Dickinson, some of those which have emerged in my reading are: Francis Bacon, Foucault, Edmond Jabès, Kierkegaard, Rodgers and Hart, Simone Weil, and Derrida himself. What follows is the record of my ant movement on a moebius strip of supplements and sub-supplements.

The reproductions of *A Woman in the Sun* are to be found in Lloyd Goodrich, *Edward Hopper* (1970); Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper: The Art And The Artist* (1980); Robert Hobbs, *Edward Hopper* (1987).

Goodrich: this is a picture of a labyrinth. The upright, quite vertical figure is trapped in a labyrinth of planes which, although a small sliver of exterior, "natural" landscape is visible through the window facing the reader, completely dominates the picture. Quantitatively, the picture is necessarily about these planes which depict walls, visible and implied windows, other pictures within the picture itself, a floor, and an elongated rectangle of cool, whitened yellow light on the floor and on which the figure of a woman stands.

Together with the floor, the walls take up, define, and dominate the pictorial space. Perhaps only Giotto has so emphasized a like absolute blankness of walls. It is this blankness, the complete lack of any inscription, which contributes to what can be read as a spiritual condition, i.e., a deliberate inattentiveness to the things of this world. As Brian O'Doherty has noticed, objects in Hopper's work become dumb, blank, and mysterious (*American Masters: The Voice and The Myth in Modern Art*, 22). It might be argued that the walls are richly rendered, that there is a complex

interplay of blue, violet, and thinned-out yellow across their surfaces. All those colors are present. We can follow their intermingling, and the result will nonetheless be that we are brought back to a sense of their "wallness," their absolute blank, planar quality. Another way of putting this is that there is nowhere to go, the walls allow for no exit from the room. Indeed, they define the space of the room and, consequently, the capture of the female figure and of ourselves as her readers.

There are interruptions of the walls: pictures and windows. Pictures within a picture are like plays within a play. We are familiar, in Shakespeare, with their operation. Per *Hamlet*, they can test the actors as actors, they can function as self-conscious vehicles for investigating the nature and purpose of theater itself, they can even seek to establish the truth. Yet nothing, finally, can be learned from these internal paintings. Both the large, tenebrous one on the wall directly behind the woman and the smaller one on the far right wall toward which she faces are too indistinct to be made out. They are unreadable pictures within the picture that momentarily interrupt our sense of the controlling blankness of the walls only to reinforce, now even more powerfully, that sense.

The windows make a similar reinforcement. While we can see the green slope and blue sky outside the room, we have to see also that the window is firmly shut. The curtain or drapery on the right side of the window is lifeless, almost a shroud. The slight appearance of movement of the curtain belonging to the window toward which the woman faces is not a positive alternative. We do not see this window, it is not within the reproduction, but we do see the severely elongated rectangle of light that is apparently organized by this "virtual" window. The point is that the rectangle of light is as severe as any of the planar walls. The dark grey-green floor, whose texture seems both harder and smoother than carpet, is yet another wall.

The rectangle of light: although it has definite, severe boundaries, it is reproduced in such a way as to be as flat-seeming and as smooth as the floor. The yellow contains slight amounts of green and white so that it is remarkably

cool. It is neither the white aisle-carpet that a bride walks down nor the sheet upon which a Danae reclines. Bonnard has commented that there can never be enough yellow in a painting. Yet this cool yellow light is not to be mistaken for the almost overwhelming warmth of the French painter's *Nude Against the Light* (1908). Further, the rectangle comes to a curtailed end in the room, well short of the apparent window-light source. In other words, the woman is stuck in this space, defined and determined, "overdetermined," by all these planes. She has nowhere to go; she is stuck, without either thread or exit sign, in a labyrinth.

Not only is she stuck, she is also framed. The light, itself the product of the framing action of the intersection of all the other planes—walls, windows, internal pictures, floor—is her frame. Derrida remarks that frames support and contain that which, by itself, collapses (*The Truth In Painting*, 78–79). Here the emphasis falls on containment. We are made even more aware of her stuckness by the shadows that begin at her heels and extend to the left margin of the reproduction. Not black, the shadows are extremely dark, as dark as the floor, and have to remind us of the legs of Giacometti's tall, burnt-out women who, whether "single" or in groups as in *Women of Venice* (1956), are always terrifically alone. She has nowhere to go and couldn't go anywhere, save perhaps up and down the both short and narrow rectangle of light, if she tried. It is the light which is responsible for all this containment and darkness.

We are accustomed to making judgements based on our reading of faces and gestures. The face in this reproduction is not conventionally beautiful, is oddly mask-like and yet individual. (Goodrich refers to it as "hard-faced.") The darkness around the eye, the set of the jaw, the neutral position of the lips: all suggest, at best, resignation and perhaps a kind of quiet despair. The shadows along the cheekbone and neck, reduplicated in the modeling of the hair, have a harsh, angular quality. This is someone who, however old she may actually be, is definitely over thirty. Her age tells us, in another way that is consistent with the light, that she cannot be a Danae or an about to be virgin mother. She *could* be Munch's frightened adolescent, no longer so abjectly

terrified on the edge of a bed, some twenty years later.

Such an identification is reasserted in the right arm and hand. Forming a seemingly relaxed yet still rigid right angle, the arm and hand are in a position of wariness. There's a certain contradiction involved: the bend of the wrist and the angle of the cigarette imply casualness; shoulder, elbow, and forearm, however, are locked in resolve. The red-pink of the forearm, extending through the wrist and highly defined fingers, is interesting. I read it as a trace of the bloodied skin in Eakins' *Gross Clinic* painting or, more specifically, of the splayed salmon-pink ligaments of Rembrandt's *Anatomy Lesson*. It is a trace and a reminder of mortality. The face and gesture belong to an older woman—not young, not elderly—who, if not “expecting”—is still expectant.

There is more to this woman than a face and a gesture. She is nude and, as her readers who have become witnesses, we have no choice but to come to terms with what her nudity, played off by her only accessory, the cigarette, reveals. First of all, she is almost alarmingly thin, anorexic. In contrast with Bonnard's sun-drenched maidens, not to mention those of Renoir, her ribs show. In fact, her bones everywhere show through. This is evident from the position of shoulder and collar-bone, from the line of the pelvis, from the edge of the tendon spiraling up from the ankle. What we have, then, is a skeleton made all the more skeletal by the “sparseness” and paleness of the skin covering. The skin is so taut and pale as to suggest injury, bruising. She could be the speaker in one of the Talking Heads songs from the *Remain In Light* album: “Born under punches./I'm so thin.”

This is neither the female as reproduced by *Playboy* nor the female as reproduced by Tom Wesselmann. The breasts are relatively high, but are beginning to fall; they, too, are pale and are in no way “spectacular.” It is possible that we are reading a version of *Death and the Maiden*. Contrary to the theme's persistent medievalism, death isn't given an allegorical embodiment—is, in fact, invisible—and precisely because of that the figure and the reproduction as a whole take on more interest. For all its quietness, it is “dramatic.” If this is an annunciation, it isn't good news. That death could come in “broad daylight,” mid-morning or late after-

noon, is frightening. It is surely more frightening than either Hans Baldung Grien or Schubert.

The Goodrich woman, however, is not without a certain courage. Her very erectness shows resolve; she is ready, alert, wary. Michael Fried has called attention to the relation between representations of positions of absorption and realism (*Realism, Writing, Disfiguration: On Thomas Eakins and Stephen Crane*, 47). It is as though a painting is verified as belonging to the conventions of realism, conventions which culminate in the denial of the painting's existence as a work of art, by the inclusion of such representations. Perhaps this explains, even as she is far from the swooning of Rossetti's *Beata Beatrix*, why the Goodrich woman is so haunting. The figure is only that of "a woman"—as opposed to "the women" of other publications. She doesn't have a name, she doesn't even have a month. Paradoxically enough, she becomes in this way "really" human.

I have written that she is ready. Much about her, though, indicates resignation, even a willingness to have the shroud-like curtain drawn over her. In the second volume of *The Book of Questions*, Edmond Jabès has an old tailor enquire of the young lover Yukel: "when you can't cut the speech of silence short, you've got to resign and give up words, don't you think?" (*The Book of Yukel*, 140). I connect the supplement of the Goodrich woman with the sub-supplement of Jabès by way of shared terms: the reproduction is uncannily quiet, silent, and the woman appears resigned. Yet such connection always provides us with additional, different, "excess" terms. In this case, "words" is such a term. The woman isn't talking; her lips are sealed, almost tightly neutral. She may well be giving up words. Human beings are language animals. To give up language is to resign oneself to giving up one's humanity. This, if not physically terminal, is a kind of death. The question we are left with is why should this woman make such a choice. What is it that compels her to make such a choice?

A final peculiarity of the Goodrich reproduction is an almost 5" wide fold which "contains" the far right portion, beginning at the right half of the unseen window. A partial frame, the fold does not produce a pocket of externality or an

unsuspected secret center. Its cropping does produce a more "positive" reading. The rectangle of light is made to extend, when it is folded over, from one side to the other. It is as though the woman is standing on an unending magic carpet/conveyor belt which at least has the potential to transport her from the labyrinthine room. The author of this reading, its instigator, is of course not Hopper, but Goodrich. He may also be considered responsible for the cancellation of such a positive reading when the fold is opened and the rectangle of light is found to be "ended" and more a threshold which cannot be crossed than a transcendental transportation device.

Levin: The reproduction is both smaller, in itself and in relation to the book's overall page size, and darker than in Goodrich. (The dimensions of the Levin reproduction are $6\frac{1}{16}$ "w \times $4\frac{7}{16}$ "h on an $8\frac{3}{8}$ "w \times 11"h page. In comparison, the dimensions of the Goodrich are $17\frac{1}{4}$ "w \times $11\frac{3}{4}$ "h on a $20\frac{3}{8}$ " w \times $12\frac{7}{8}$ "h page.) The reduction in scale and the darkening of tone promote intimacy in the Levin reproduction. It is almost as though we have to peer into it. The walls seem to be component parts of a picture rather than a stage set. They now have a fairly uniform mottling of ochre-umber with grey-robin's egg blue. These walls are not so absolutely planar, so cool, or so forbidding. Consequently, the feeling of being captured is less evident.

If the time of day could have been mid-morning or near-dusk in Goodrich, it is decidedly the latter in Levin. There is a touch of Claudian glow on the edges of the exterior slope and of the interior curtain. The pictures within the picture have receded into rich ambiguity. Even more notable is the alteration the light undergoes in the rectangle on the floor and with regard to the woman's skin tone. It has become a warm, almost tender yellow ochre. The Giacometti shadows are still there, but the eye tends to neglect them in favor of the warmer part of the rectangle extending from her feet to the curtailed boundary still some distance from the wall and implicit window she faces. The floor, now a dark chocolate, gives the rectangle even more warmth.

A detail not mentioned in my reading of Goodrich: her shoes, black pumps, lie under the bed. Derrida, attempting

an apology for Heidegger's reading of van Gogh against the charges of Meyer Shapiro, has a great deal to say about shoes (*The Truth In Painting*, 255–382). Rather than graft upon (or draft behind) that discussion, I would argue that the shoes belong to the bed (single) as parts of its "clothes," which are turned back so that it could be a bed she has just risen from or one she is about to enter. The clothes, sheets and blanket, have been reproduced with a degree of detail such as to endow them with their own, separate existence. (Whether there could be a body under the blanket is a good question. Cf. Hopper's *Summer in the City*, 1944.) The end of the rolled or folded-back sheet resembles the sleeve of a blouse, the spread of the blanket has the curve of a skirt. The severity of such clothing is curious. What sort of occasion merits or requires such a combination of black and white? There could be several. However distinct from one another, all would be serious, formal; all would be events, rituals. The soles of her shoes, after all, are barely worn. Whichever one the woman has undergone, it has probably, in the language of Emily Dickinson, involved "great pain."

Allow me to combine Derrida and Foucault in attempting to consider this question more thoroughly. Derrida has written that the frame cuts out and yet it also sews back together (*The Truth In Painting*, 304). We have seen how the very composition of the room captures and "cuts" the woman. That is, the composition of the room cuts her away from other spatial possibilities, from the possibility of a less composed space or a differently composed space. It isolates her from such possibility, keeping her stuck on an uncrossable threshold, and in doing so it cuts her without showing the literal disfiguration of Eakins or Rembrandt. (Cf. Jabès in the first volume of *The Book Of Questions*: "for in the beginning, the wound is invisible," 13.) What remains to be seen is her restitution.

As Foucault writes of the soul, it is born out of methods of punishment, supervision, and constraint.

This real, noncorporeal soul is not a substance; it is the element in which are articulated the effects of a certain type of power and the reference of a certain type of knowl-

edge, the machinery by which the power relations give rise to a possible corpus of knowledge, and knowledge extends and reinforces the effects of this power.

(Discipline and Punish, 29)

The soul of the woman is "something," but it is not simply a positive gained as the result of having undergone a ritual involving great pain. It is the indicator of a power that was sufficient to bring such a ritual about. The woman may be said to have gained an identity, but the identity is as one who stands as evidence of a cutting and a wounding power. The agent of that power, in the vocabulary of the reproductions, can only be the light: "heavenly hurt it gives us."

If this does not answer our question as to why the Goodrich woman apparently makes the choice to give up words, it does suggest what is the motivating compulsion behind her choice. In Goodrich the cutting is more apparent, in Levin the sewing back together. In each of the reproductions the power of the light remains. As the poet is careful to distinguish, the hurt leaves no scar; what we find, instead, is "internal difference,/Where the meanings are" (Thomas H. Johnson, ed., *Final Harvest: Emily Dickinson's Poems*, 36). The difference between the reproductions locates the meanings which, even as they are different, share the light as a common term. It is such sharing that locates differences, i.e., the additional, excess terms which are what constitute the meanings.

With the reduction in scale and alteration of tone, the Levin woman's face becomes more enigmatic, a shadowy mask of the initiate. The hair has become an undifferentiated mass though still possessing some of the abrupt, almost jagged contours of her jaw and body generally. Still angular, the body has been softened, equally divided between lighted front and shadowed back. Both are warm. The skeletal quality of the Goodrich has been translated into what might be described as a Degas bather with central heating. The raw, anatomical forearm has disappeared in shadow, as have the projecting ribs and pelvis.

Those who would read the Levin reproduction as an annunciation can feel a little more comfortable. The news

has gone from no news, bad news, to some news however melancholy. But, as Kierkegaard writes in *Stages On Life's Way* (389), there is a difference between melancholy and melancholy. "There is a melancholy which in the case of poets, artists, thinkers, is a crisis, and on the part of women may be an erotic crisis." Let us put this questionable distinction under erasure and yet keep its principal identification: melancholy = crisis. The Levin woman has been cut and sewn back together. In comparison with the Goodrich woman, the light clothes rather than disrobes her. She has a soul/self, but she is nonetheless melancholy, not exultant. She has something, but she has also lost something. This is her crisis.

The Levin book contains another reproduction which should be read in conjunction with that of *A Woman in the Sun*. That is, it is part of its immediate "milieu of belonging." This is *Sun in an Empty Room* on the facing right page of a double-spread. According to reading conventions, moving from left to right, this second reproduction is the product or effect of the first, a later moment in the process that is identified as the art of Edward Hopper. Such reading is encouraged by the dating assigned to each reproduction: 1961 for *A Woman in the Sun*, 1963 for *Sun in an Empty Room*. The reproductions are different in their dimensions and in their overall tonality. There is no figure in this later reproduction. There is only beige/bone-white light and shadow in a room whose composition leads us to focus, equally, on the light and on a corner prism-shape that, ironically enough, is filled with darkness.

If there has been an annunciation, then this reproduction can be read as an assumption. Such a reading brings melancholy into greater focus. This is a crisis of faith: *either* you profess belief in an absence that signifies a presence *or* you don't. The composition of the room is as complex as before and the light, however different in tonality, still marks a gap between itself and the far right wall and window. It tends toward something of a free-standing abstraction, not unlike some of Rothko's umber-oriented late acrylic works on paper. If we can read ahead to constitute a causal process, we can also read backwards. This backwards mo-

tion could be extended to include several other Hopper rooms and other Hopper women. Restricting ourselves to the immediate context of the Levin double-spread, we are reminded that, assumption or not, the woman is no longer in the room and the light is.

Sun in an Empty Room has been described as a crisis of faith. According to Kierkegaard, faith is “that the self in being itself and in willing to be itself is grounded *transparently* in God” [my italics]. In contrast, sin is “before God in despair not to will to be oneself, or before God in despair to will to be oneself” (*The Sickness Unto Death*; 213, 212). A crisis occurs when all the possibilities are reduced to a single choice, a single either/or; when it takes place in a spiritual context, the choice is between faith or sin. What the Levin double-spread suggests is that choice has consequence. What we see in *A Woman in the Sun*, read backwards through *Sun in an Empty Room*, is her choice *not* to be grounded transparently, subsumed, in the light. The ritual, however identified, involves a coming before the light, “coming clean,” nude if not naked; it involves a coming and a choosing.

The authors of the reproductions provide us with repetitions of the ritual. Yet as each woman is a different woman, so each choice is also different even as the ritual is “the same.” It is possible, in Goodrich, that a soul/self is being willed in despair, sin acknowledged but not apologized for, forgiveness not prayed for, words not used for those purposes. Depending on which moment of this moment is read, i.e., it could be before, during, or after the “apex” of crisis—condition of being brought to a standstill—, the Goodrich woman has chosen negatively and may be waiting or expecting the annihilation of soul/self, the total and complete hurting of the light, a negative assumption. The Levin woman has chosen similarly, but there is no apparent annihilatory expectation. It is possible that she has chosen not to be oneself, her soul/self, but rather in despair to be oneself. She is melancholy, she is in mourning. What she mourns for, like Hopkins’ Margaret, is precisely that self. She mourns for her pre-crisis, pre-self-conscious self. Perhaps the Levin woman would like to have believed, to have professed faith.

It is true that Goodrich also composes an immediate context in his book. In that context, though, the reproduction is less obviously part of a causal process. For the opposite reproduction, *New York Office*, is much smaller and is chronologically later (1962) even though it is read “first,” appearing on the left side of the spread. The two form an unequal diptych. Here we find a coiffed and fully, almost formally clothed woman attending to (reading) a document in the darkened interior of what could be a bank. Not taking them as instances of the same woman, not contrasting moments in the life of the same woman, it nonetheless establishes an opposition of public/private, clothed/nude, active/passive. (Curiously, according to Levin, shortly after their marriage in 1924, the artist’s wife, Jo Hopper, insisted on posing for him, “and for the rest of his life she modeled for all of his female figures,” 38. It is to be regretted that France Borel does not include any consideration of the Hopper “team” in her interesting study *The Seduction of Venus: Artists and Models*.)

The opposition is neither symmetrical nor balanced. Goodrich has chosen *A Woman in the Sun* as the more important of the two (as Levin has chosen *Sun in an Empty Room*). But the smaller—and, as implied by layout, “earlier”—reproduction provides in its “opposition” the rationale for that choice. Goodrich has chosen this moment of self-revelation as the more important moment. To read motivation on the part of the woman by way of this author’s choice, she has chosen not to be a reader but to be that which is read, even if she constitutes a sinful text, by the light. She has given up words to become words.

Hobbs: this reproduction is *between* Goodrich and Levin. It is not so cool/bright as the former nor as warm/glowing as the latter. This is also true for scale. Laid out across two 9” × 12” pages, the Hobbs is noticeably larger than Levin, smaller than Goodrich. Peculiarly, though, the figure of the woman seems larger, more foregrounded in Hobbs. However trapped, captured she may be, she is still *the* actress in this ritual drama. The room, in comparison, seems to recede, to become a stage set that is only a set. This may be because the overall tonality is darker in the sense of being more muted

than the other two. It conditions our sense of the time of the moment as definitely toward evening, dusk. The light on the floor is definitely yellow ochre, but muted by whites and greens. The Giacometti shadows extending from her heels are essentially identical with the surrounding floor, a dark grey-green that is more suggestive of carpet than of a hard surface.

The face of the Hobbs woman is compelling, because we are seemingly "closer," but remains mask-like and hard. There are graduations in her hair: pale red-blond, some grey, then the dark mass down her back. Evidence of ribs and of the raw forearm-wrist remains, but it is modified by a pastel quality to the skin tone. From the waist down, everything divides neatly in two: thighs, knees, shins, "fronts" of the ankles and feet are quite soft and relatively bright; buttocks, backs of thighs, calves, ankles and heels are uniformly darkened in shadow. The result is a feeling of greater weight, "bodyness."

There is a heightened sense of flesh about this figure. The breasts appear slightly fuller and, with this greater weight or density of flesh, comes the realization that the Hobbs woman must expend some effort to maintain her upright posture. She has to hold herself up, she has to stand against the enclosure of the planar walls. Then again, to follow Derrida, it may be that the multiple frames of the reproduction are actually supporting as well as containing that which, by itself, would collapse. Whether she stands by her own efforts or by virtue of the frames, what predominates is the muted grey tonality, the tonality of indecisiveness.

Covering two pages, the Hobbs reproduction constitutes its own general context. This would seem to assure the work's autonomy; there is nothing to compete with it on the space of these pages. Even as we thus read the reproduction "exclusively," though, we are reminded by the division of the pages, the result of the printing process (folding, cutting, binding), that it is part of a book. Hobbs' gutter and Goodrich's cropping crease occur at essentially the same point, make essentially the same vertical line about halfway across the window through which the green slope and blue sky are

glimpsed. Both offer a double and a sequential reading: first the possibility of transcendence by way of the magic carpet/conveyor belt of light, *then*—as we cross the gutter/crease in our left to right reading—its denial. It, therefore, makes us doubly self-conscious.

We have to maintain the fiction that the reproduction *is* the original work, and we have to maintain the fiction that there is a single original maker of the work. Or: that nothing stands between ourselves and the thinking of the original maker as represented by the reproduction. The gutter of the two pages forces us to cross them, to maintain the fiction of continuous space. As we make this reading motion, which is a kind of literal translation, a carrying across or over, we are necessarily made aware of the fiction. No amount of bending or straightening will make the pages into a page, i.e., *no page, no book, no one autonomous surface* for the art-denying premise of realism: this isn't a picture, this is a real woman in a real room. Hobbs has placed us, no doubt with the best of intentions, in the gutter of self-consciousness.

The Hobbs reproduction makes us further self-conscious as readers by placing his own reading, however nondescript, on the page space of the reproduction. This is rather more than the usual title/date/owner caption: "the image . . . suggests isolation and resignation rather than a woman finding her place in the sun" (*Edward Hopper*, 13). Not only are we readers, we are reading what has already been read; we are re-readers of a non-original work featuring a non-real woman by a non-existent maker. The result is that the mystery of the "painting itself," given as a gift to the museum-shrine which determines when it will be made visible, grows and grows.

The Hobbs meta-caption is not the only commentary of interest in his volume. What follows is a "passage" from one of the ledger books used to record the artist's work by his wife, Jo Hopper. As cited by Hobbs: "A *Woman in the Sun*—1961—E. H. called her 'a wise tramp.' Begun cold, very early Oct. 1. Tragic figure of small woman, blond straight brown hair, grabs cigarette before the shimmy skirt—brightest note at R. seen off stage, on curtain of window off stage right. . . . Cigarette and sad face of woman unlit" (*Edward*

Hopper, 19). What stands out in this passage is the adjective “wise.” It is surprising, and we have to consider what wisdom this woman could possess.

It may aid our consideration if we use one text—the lyrics of the Rodgers and Hart song “The Lady Is A Tramp” in its pre-canine/Disney manifestation—to read another, Hopper’s reported phrase. In the song, the speaker laments missing the Beaux-Arts Ball “and what is twice as sad” never being at a party where they honored Noel Coward. “But social circles spin too fast for me.” And, accordingly, “hobohemia is the place to be.” In the refrain (“Gaily, but not fast”) we’re given a number of rhymed conditions—she gets too hungry for dinner at eight, she likes the theater but never comes late, she never bothers with people she hates—that lead us to the self-reflexive conclusion: “That’s why the lady is a tramp.” These and other conditions define the lady/tramp speaker as someone who chooses to move on the margin of society where she can feel the “free fresh wind” in her hair. On the move, on the margin, life is “without care” (*The Rodgers and Hart Song Book*, 166–171).

The wisdom of Hopper’s women, however, is otherwise. They know that there may come a moment when motion comes to a standstill, when there may be confrontation and crisis; they know that the odds are not all that good for a life without care. What there may be confrontation with, what generates the crisis and care, is the light. Their wisdom, considered collectively, consists in acknowledging—not embracing, not pretending to ignore—the light. Yet acknowledgement in itself goes only so far; the power of the light and the need to choose are constant. The Hobbs woman has a quite limited wisdom. Having made acknowledgement, she can go no further; she is stuck on the threshold of crisis.

The theater references in the Rodgers and Hart song and in Jo Hopper’s ledger note remind us of the stage-ness of Hopper’s work and of *A Woman in the Sun* in particular. I have written that the Hobbs reproduction presents a room which is only a set. It is, of course, only a set in all three reproductions. We are made to feel this, and to be defined as witnessing members of an audience by the painter’s “point

of view” as presented to us by the authors of the reproductions.

A room can be represented in a number of ways. In the reproductions, it is always as though we are looking at/into a room as a horizontally bisected shoe box whose “frontal” edges bulge out slightly toward us. That is, we are looking at/into a room which is a stage. Peter Brook’s encompassing phrase for theater, “the empty space,” remains suggestive. Theater circulates power as it renders usual, “occupied” space empty. The emptying out allows for composition, re-composition, to take place and for it to be noticed, consciously read by an audience. Without such an emptying out, there is no art as there is no consciousness. While all art may be said to do this, some art foregrounds its emptiness (its stage-ness) more than others. A Francis Bacon painting such as *Two Figures* (1953) “powerfully” circulates power not merely because of sensational subject matter, a copulating couple, but also because the space in which the couple acts has been completely “cleared,” painted black, and the angles of a room opening out toward the reader superimposed on the space with thin white lines. The lines define the stage area, black space, and the set, the room, at the same time. As Bacon has remarked, “the more artificial you can make it, the greater chance you’ve got of its looking real” (David Sylvester, *Interviews With Francis Bacon: 1962–1979*, 148). And “it’s in the artificial structure that the reality of the subject will be caught, and the trap will close over the subject-matter and leave only the reality” (Jacques Dupin, *Francis Bacon: Peintures Recentes*, n.p.). The self-conscious, because artificial structure is the room as frame.

The Hopper reproductions function in a like manner. The reality of the subject matter—once one has got beyond the various nonrealities of realism—is the power of the light. For it is the light which defines both the rooms and the women; it is the light which makes each of their choices necessary and significant. It is the light which, to use one of Bacon’s preferred words, makes for “poignancy” in all three of the reproductions.

In Bacon’s language, the ritual narratives that have been teased out of the reproductions constitute the subject

matter. It is the power of the light, however, which is the residual reality. To locate that power more exactly, I shall return to Emily Dickinson. It is this power, in her "There's a certain Slant of light" poem, which oppresses. It does this "like the Heft/Of Cathedral Tunes." Cathedral tunes mean Gregorian Chant. While we could point to such specific chants as "Lux aeterna" or to the "God of God, light of light" language in the Credo section of the mass, this is not what is being referred to. Heft or oppressive weight is the result of where and how the tunes are sung: in enormous structures which produce reverberation rates that are noticeably more prolonged than in ordinary rooms, in rising and falling wave motion all together at the same time (monophonic). The cathedral structures themselves are not only enormous, they are also heavy.

Standing at the transept of the National Cathedral in Washington, for instance, one has to feel very small, very ant-like. In fact, one especially feels the weight (tons) of the structure by way of the constant and continuous wave motion of the chant which so fills the structure, piling word upon word and phrase upon phrase which become so many standing waves, that there is nowhere to go. Enormous as it is, the space has been super-saturated. Sound has put the space of the cathedral in motion; sound has transformed its mass into energy (power). All those tons of stone have been made to bear down upon those in the cathedral interior. The contemporary composer György Ligeti gets a dense enough texture in his setting of "Lux aeterna" (North German Radio Chorus, Deutsche Grammophon, 1968). It does not compare, though, with that of the Benedictine monks of the Abbey St. Maurice & St. Maur, Clervaux (Philips, n.d.). The singing of the monks has more heft, just as it is more ethereal and serene, and it has more oppression.

Yet when we seek to demonstrate this oppression of the light, we can find no scar. *The wound stays invisible*. There is only "internal difference/Where the meanings are." Of all the sub-supplements I have recalled and which have been interwoven with Hopper's strip, this would seem to be the most valuable. Previously, difference between the reproductions has been discussed with regard to scale and tonality.

Dickinson's phrase "internal difference," however, leads to a consideration of the space defined by the room of each reproduction.

The Goodrich, with its fold extended, is the largest in scale and the brightest in tonality. Consequently, the space of the room is the most apparently open of the three. The planar walls do close in, do act as a labyrinth, but they do so "gradually." The figure of the woman, though, is the most diminutive and the most isolated; she is the smallest in the largest space. The gap between the right boundary of the light rectangle and the off-stage window is the most pronounced. With an increase in space, there comes a heightened sense of emptiness and the aloneness of the woman in that emptiness.

The Levin reproduction is the smallest in scale and the warmest in tonality. The walls seem to close in the most, to make for the most confining space. The woman is not made small by this space, but she has nowhere (no room) to move. She is utterly trapped, suffocated. She could almost be in one of Beckmann's traumatized interiors. Given the autumnal tone, her utter confinement is combined with something approaching tenderness, subjunctive regret, melancholy.

The Hobbs room is not as open as Goodrich nor as closed as Levin. Its tonality is dark, cool, muted. The walls appear "taller" and thinner, more like stage walls, flats, and the woman's figure appears more substantial. She is the sole actress in this production. She is not all that alone nor is she all that closed in upon. She could decide either way, but she can't or won't make a decision. She is Ms. In-Between.

But we are forgetting another room, a still more internal frame of space, the rectangle of light, threshold of crisis. In Goodrich it is a pale, cool/cold yellow, extremely narrow and quite far from the source window. There is the possibility of an exit only if the fold is left folded over. In Levin it is a much richer yellow ochre, and it appears to grow slightly broader as we follow it to the right boundary; the gap nonetheless remains. In Hobbs the rectangle is cool and somewhat warm at the same time so that a neutral grey of indecision is produced. The rectangle is bisected by the gutter crease of the full spread. This places the Hobbs woman

in a Zeno's paradox situation: before she can get to the end of the threshold she has to get to the half-way line of the crease, before she can get to the half-way line, etc.

We have located where the meanings are: in the difference of the rooms, in the difference of the rectangles of light. I want to delay the announcement of what these meanings, expressed in terms of excess, might be considered to be in themselves to attempt, again, to make a more exact location of what each difference shares in common, what each difference underwrites: the power of the light. This will be done by way of another term from Dickinson's poem. The term is affliction: the slant of light is "an imperial affliction/Sent us of the air."

The affliction specialist in our time, the reader who made it her special text-subject and who may be said to have attempted to become its text-subject, is Simone Weil. In "The Love of God and Affliction" essay, it is the equivalent of death, an acute state, something that necessarily involves social degradation, the great enigma of human life. Perhaps most "striking" is her image of the nail. Affliction is the nail. "The point of the nail is applied to the very centre of the soul, and its head is the whole of necessity throughout all space and time" (Panichas, ed., *The Simone Weil Reader*, 452). What the nail's application serves to do is "to introduce into the soul of a finite creature that immensity of force, blind, brutal, and cold." Further, "the infinite distance which separates God from the creature is concentrated into a point to transfix the centre of a soul."

Much of Weil's language anticipates that of Foucault. If the point of the nail is to be applied to the very center of the soul, then it is affliction which determines that center; without affliction, there can be no center, no soul. This anticipates not only the language of *Discipline and Punish*, but also of *Death and the Labyrinth*. In the latter we read that the labyrinth is linked to metamorphosis, that at the center of the labyrinth lies "the birth," its origin "separated from itself by the secrecy and returned back to itself by the discovery" (88). Weil's language anticipates the groping language of our own ritual narratives for the reproductions as well: "affliction, when it is consented to and accepted and