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> The everyday is a platitude (…) but this banalityis also what is most important, if it brings us backto existence in its very spontaneity and as it is lived– in the moment when, lived, it escapes every speculativeformulation, perhaps all coherence, all regularity [1]We need not look for Hopper in order to find him.We may encounter him by chance at random placeswhere his world intersects our own [2]

1 The notion of the everyday is entangled in a network of texts, images and experiences that constitute, and at the same time complicate the

understanding of what the everyday is, how to talk about it, interpret it and how to live it. The existential dimension seems crucial because, as Maurice Blanchot says, "The everyday, then, is ourselves, ordinarily" (1987 : 12). Hence, to know how to live the everyday is also to know how to live one's life. This is just a preview, a "false start", signaling the existential aspect of the experience of art, dormant in Lyotard's "embers of the everyday" (2008 : 75). What follows is a proposition to encounter the everyday through Edward Hopper's paintings, regarded as images which are always visually conditioned by the work of memory. Combined together, the issue of the everyday and the way Hopper's pictures keep functioning in our collective memory, are very likely to shed some light on what I propose to call the everyday "life" of Hopper's paintings.

2 More than fifty years since Hopper's death and almost twice as many since when his "mature" style is sad to have taken shape, many iconographic motifs that anchored his works in time and space of their creation have disappeared from the American landscape. However, Hopper's paintings still affect the way we, not necessarily Americans, but simply individuals familiar with his works, look at the world. As Benjamin Forgey remarked "Edward Hopper's work so precisely catalogues certain textures of American life, (...) has so nearly expropriated certain subjects, (...) that we think Hopper's reality is our own" (1964 : 58). Certainly, an important factor was a series of exhibitions launched by the Whitney Museum of American Art in the early 1980s, which revived both popular and critical interest s in Hopper in the postmodern era. Numerous reproductions of his works either used commercially on "Hopper souvenirs" or published both in art magazines and everyday press made Hopper's images the object of frequent quotations in art and visual culture [3]. However, this does not provide a satisfactory explanation as to why we remember these paintings so effectively, why they are often recalled in the most unexpected and ordinary moments of our lives or why we think about them while looking at seemingly unrelated photographs or films. I will then focus on the everyday as an aspect relevant not only to Hopper's iconography but also to the everyday experience of his works which, I believe, is related to the structural repetitions within his paintings. The first part of this short essay is a reflection on the complexities of the everyday in its philosophical dimension. It will frame the under-

standing of the experienced everydayness of Hopper's images, analyzed in the latter part of the essay.

I.

3 The semantic field of the everyday, sometimes synonymous with the quotidian, is very broadand generates rather negative connotations: the ordinary, commonplace, banal, stereotypical, repetitive, boring, passive or dull. According to the Oxford English Dictionary online, the everyday is related to the commonplace, "that exists everywhere", the eventless, "where nothing happens". In other words, the everyday is simply obvious, and yet it remains unnoticed. Hence, the everyday is ambivalent. If something is obvious, it does not deserve further investigation or special attention: it is taken for granted. As Henri Lefebvre suggested, it "is everywhere and on the margin as a remainder or residue" (1991: 97).

4 In his essay "The Everyday Speech" – the main frame of reference for my reflection on Hopper's "everydayness" – Maurice Blanchot draws our attention to the undecidable, unknowable character of the everyday: "Whatever its other aspects, the everyday has this essential trait: it allows no hold. It escapes. It belongs to insignificance, and the insignificant is without truth, without reality, without secret, but perhaps also the site of all possible signification" (14). The French philosopher argues,

> Despite massive development of the means of communication, the everyday escapes. This is its definition. We cannot help but miss it if we seek it through knowledge, for it belongs to a region where there is still nothing to know, just as it is prior to all relation in insofar as it has always been said, even whole remaining unformulated, that is to say, not yet information. (Blanchot, 1987 : 15)

5 The everyday is not a sphere of "master" knowledge with fixed and specified meanings. It exists but it cannot be examined, contained nor precisely described. Blanchot emphasizes that it has no source, it is both primary and repeated, always spoken or written – and perhaps also seen. Blanchot seems to anticipate Jacques Derrida's deconstructive thinking which negated the idea of an origin, finite truth and presence [4]. In order to grasp the everyday as a remainder, a su-

perfluous quality, exceeding the limitations imposed by structural and socio-cultural norms, one could also use Derrida's critical categories of supplement and parergon, which question the binary opposition between the supplement and what it supplements as well as between the inside and the outside [5]. The everyday fundamentally constitutes our being in the world. However, the fundamental substance of our life is also pushed to the margin, neglected, and regarded as something easily forgotten and dispensable. As a result, the ambivalent, unknowable status of the everyday, as suggested by Blanchot, generates tension and causes frustration. Following Derrida, the Polish philosopher Michał Paweł Markowski suggests that "meaning emerges from time and with time" (2010 : 45), implying that misunderstanding is the beginning of interpretation: deconstruction and endless interpretative processes open up temporality and grant us new temporal spaces to experience. Thinking and experiencing the everyday would then operate in an indeterminate area of meaning making, and in the significance of time and being, which Markowski calls "ife, carefully avoiding confusion with Heideggerian ontological notions.

6 However, Martin Heidegger's notion of being in relation to the everyday can be illuminating since it brings to light the contradictory status of the everyday as a dialectics of function and dysfunction. In his later writings, Heidegger touches upon the issue of everyday seeing, which, in his view, became instrumentalized by modernity: seeing, as much as the existence of things, is ontologically reduced to its function of being useful, at hand (zuhandene). As Michael David Levin wrote in his interpretation of the problem of visuality in Heidegger's work, "we might say that the esent [Seiende – F.L.] which is zuhandene is seen only peripherally, or rather that its being is being-seen but not being looked at. The Zuhandene is noticed, really seen, really made visible only, as Heidegger says, when there is an instrumental breakdown." (1993 : 201). That means that we register being (things, the objectified world) as it is perceived in its usefulness, but do not notice its ontological dimension. It becomes visible only when it is needed. When we walk down a street, it has no meaning to us other than reaching our destination. We are then surrounded by elements of reality, which constitute a visual blind spot because we do not have any interest in them. Every day, on our way to work or

school, we pass numerous buildings but we do not pay attention to them unless someone we know lives or works there or they catch our eye with their unusual aesthetics. They operate as a concealed dimension of the everyday, which lies in waiting to be noticed. The proper seeing of what is at hand (useful) as well as what is inconspicuous and therefore overlooked, can only take place when the images our vision produces are somehow displaced, destabilized and their objects become elusive. This is the moment of the instrumental breakdown Levin talks about: we start to notice a flash of what is manifest as it vanishes. Such a fracture of the Heideggerian instrumentality of seeing occurs most successfully when the actual perception is paralleled by the work of memory it activates, especially the memory of a compelling image such as a work of art. This doubling of the seen acts as an unsolicited repetition putting us on guard. Something essential is taking place. To quote Heidegger, "In the nearness of the work we were suddenly somewhere else than we usually tend to be" (1993 : 161). Being close to a work of art can also mean being reminded of it despite its physical distance.

7 Hopper's paintings seem to trigger these epiphanies of the everyday more often than other images. They make us see places we thought we knew from a different perspective and change the way we see ourselves in the world. Elusive everydayness can be felt or experienced when, thanks to our vision and memory, the visible reality meets another image, even if it is a virtual, immaterial memory-image. One of the most interesting models of such an experience was the interaction of perception and memory as described by Henri Bergson, who claimed there was no perception which would not be infused with memories: "the memory-image itself, if it remained pure memory, would be ineffectual. Virtual, memory can only become actual by means of perception that attracts it. Powerless, it borrows life and strength from the present situation in which it is materialized" [6]. Following this logic, we tend to recollect images more effectively when we come across the object that activated them and this object thus becomes a screen onto which we project our visual memory. More recently, the German art historian Hans Belting argued for the importance and functionality of immaterial images:

> Perception alone does not explain the interaction of body and medium that takes place in the transmission of images. Images [...] happen or are negotiated, between bodies and media. Bodies censor the flux of images via projection, memory, attention, or neglect [...] Bodies perform images [...] as much as they perceive outside images. In this double sense, they are living media that transcend the capacities of their prosthetic media. (Belting, 2003 : 11)

8 A human being is a portable gallery where the stored images do not lie intact but are continuously brought back to life, activated by actual perceptions. As I will show in the second part of the essay, Hopper's paintings tend to be seen or recollected according to the same principle of visible reality, which is normally overlooked. Consequently, those inconspicuous views become objects of conscious perception just because they bring Hopper's works to mind. The elusive everyday turns out to be an area of not so much the visible and tangible as the virtual, and manifests itself in the form of a transitory trace of the difference between the ordinary, everyday view of reality and what is no longer commonplace. Because the recollected image is ephemeral, we experience the everyday in a paradoxical dialectics of revealing and concealment. It becomes manifest as a self-differing presence, which to a degree clarifies Blanchot's words that the everyday is a "category, utopia, idea" (15). This lengthy but necessary rumination on the everyday brings us to the point where we need to focus not only on what allows us to theorize on the elusive everyday but to experience it in the form of a fissure on the "screen of seeing" which Edward Hopper's paintings provide.

II.

9 Hopper's work tends to be classified as realistic. However, the sheer number of attempts to specify this term successfully indicates that one should be careful when using it [7]. It is true, though, that despite very dynamic changes in modern art over the course of his career – cubism, avant-garde, abstract expressionism, pop-art, hyperrealism – the artist had never veered off the road of representational, figurative, formally well-defined painting. His subjects have always been considered banal, ordinary, connoting the everydayness of American cities and countryside. The list of recurring motifs includes repres-

entations of lonely houses, shop windows, single figures in almost empty hotels and theaters, at restaurants or on a train, often seen through a window from the outside. There are also hardly any historical themes or explicit social messages [8]. Except for a few selected landscapes, they cannot be said to be very picturesque either. They are, however, Hopperesque. In fact, comparing the idea of the Hopperesque to the late eighteenth-century idea of the picturesque is quite revealing. The notion of the picturesque was related to the experience of reality, a view of nature (a landscape) as a constructed image or a picture. Rosalind Krauss pointed to the following paradox: the uniqueness of a picturesque landscape was based on repetition – the recognition of a painting or painterly conventions in nature (1986, 162-168). In other words, nature was considered unique and worthy of admiration only when it revealed its connection with a preexisting representation – a mediated, constructed image – which came to the mind of the viewer at the moment of seeing. Quite rightly, one of the leitmotifs in discourse on Hopper is "seeing Hopper" or "seeing with Hopper". His art makes us notice, or see the world, which, before his paintings, remained unseen, overlooked and inconsequential.

10 Critics have always agreed that Hopper's subjects "form the background of the majority of adult Americans. Ugly, sordid, commonplace" [9]. His works showed, to use the artist's own expression, "hideous beauty" – not a naturalistic ugliness but images of what did not seem worth painting, what we never bother to contemplate or admire. As Katherine Kuh argues, "He painted what others ignore, or ignore until they see what he painted" (1987 : 3). However, it was not just the ennobling context of art that made a given motif so conspicuous. As Henri Lefebvre wrote, "should we define the everyday as the petty side of life, its humble and sordid element, a description or inventory of things and repeated social practices, the issue of the everyday would be indeed trivial" (1991 : 42). An image that would simply exhaust its meaning in the faithful repetition of the view of reality would be equally banal. Instead, the crucial aspect of the impact his paintings have on a viewer are the solidity of pictorial structure in which objects are embedded and the rendering of the abstract appears within a realistic depiction. More importantly, this structural and compositional quality of Hopper's works is subject to consistent repetitions within his oeuvre, which effectively anchor the images in

our memory and make us see "Hopper" outside of the context of his art. This is confirmed by the number of critics who, like Perrault, remark: "After seeing a lot of Hopper paintings, the world begins to look Hopperesque for a while. This is a case of nature imitating art, an artist providing schemata of perception" (1980 : 63). The artist and theorist Victor Burgin argued that, "To know Hopper's work is to be predisposed to see the world in his terms, consciously or not" (2009 : 23) and D. Lyons similarly wrote, "We may be most drawn to Hopper's work by the odd sensation of having seen such a thing many times before – a mundane view, which, when painted by Hopper, suddenly becomes a cause for epiphany".(1995 : 12). The feeling of deja vu exactly occurs at the moment of the elusive everyday. The perceived object thus appears to us as a doubled, actual-virtual image. Our gaze frames the previously unnoticed on no other ground than the act of recollecting Hopper's image, even if after a while it gradually disappears, due to a number of differences we spot when looking more carefully.

11 Hopper painted in famous places, mainly in New York and at Cape Cod, and many of his works have distinctive geographical provenance. However, despite Hopper's strong affinity for his nearest environment, he "was able to command reality to such an extent that he was free from history" as Lanes suggested (1967 : 44). This is because the spatio-temporal specificity of his best works is neutralized and universalized by daring, sharp compositional strategies. This is visible in Early Sunday Morning (1930) where the parallel lines of the street and the rows of houses dominate the impression the painting has on viewers. Other features such as broad areas of colors (Sunlight in Cafeteria, 1958), interrelated geometrical planes (Hotel Room, 1931) or dramatic internal and external framings (Rooms by the Sea, 1951), provide a sense of a universalized abstraction, which, at the same time, modifies the figurative character of the image. This is intensified by the repetition of a few compositional patterns, recurring in his oeuvre regardless of the changing iconography of his paintings. These involve the aforementioned parallel compositional bands taking up the whole surface of a canvas (also in Road and Trees, 1962), the arrangement of elements on a diagonal structural "elevation" at the bottom part of the picture (House by the Railroad, 1925; The Civil War Campground, 1926) as well as diagonals that give the illusion of

spatial recession (Route 6, Eastham, 1941; Approaching the City, 1946; First Row Orchestra, 1951). A distinctive feature of Hopper's work is internal framing, structuring both the composition and the focus of vision, which creates the effect of a pictorial mise en abyme with windows, doors, fields of color and other framed spaces (Office in a Small City, 1953; Cape Cod Morning, 1951). One should also note the works in which the artist reduced representation to minimum, especially Sun in an Empty Room (1963). Consequently, in many paintings, Hopper leads the viewer's "remembering look" not so much on specific, realistic motifs such as on the recurring Hopperesque structures, within which he placed his preferred motifs, such as a lonely house or a solitary human figure [10]. The "how" of the picture is, however, inseparable from "the what", seems to predominate and leave a long-lasting impression in our memory, described by the general term "hopperesque".

12 In Hopper's works, to cite Blanchot again, "Nothing happens. This is the everyday. But what is the meaning of this stationary movement?" (15). The narrative is withheld, and it has never really begun. Hopper "always encourages the search for a plot, no matter that he unfolds very few if any legible stories", as David Anfram argued (2004 : 45). Empty streets, rows of houses and shops, lonely buildings against the background of a landscape or just a sky. In paintings with more than one human figure, people are rather near each other than with each other: they communicate through pictorial structure rather than gaze, facial expressions or gestures. More frequently, Hopper painted single-figure scenes whose anecdotal dimension can be described in a few words: they look through a window of an apartment but their gaze goes beyond the "window" of the actual painting; they read a book or a letter or fixate their absent gaze on another object. Their appearance in different paintings is relatively similar, generic, undifferentiated in terms of expression or ethnicity, it resists in-depth interpretation of their personality or emotional state (unless we settle for "melancholy" or "solitude") in any other way than by referring to their pictorial environment. Their situation can be compared to the impersonal character of the everyday described by Blanchot: "In the everyday we have no name, little personal reality, scarcely a face, just as no social determination to sustain or enclose us" (36). If Hopper's people are alienated, as his mythology has it [11], it is the "alienation by

the picture", the way they are represented, remaining in a simple situation of concentration and looking. Their stare has no pragmatic aim and any attempt to give an account of what they are doing is frustrated [12].

13 Let us have a closer look at one painting, Woman in the Sun (1961), representing a nude woman in a modestly furnished bedroom, standing, looking to the right, and smoking a cigarette. While thinking of a narrative or a description, viewers are trying to locate the object of her gaze and repeatedly scan the picture, usually with no resolution. Instead, they notice details which seem irrelevant and redundant in terms of a narrative. Such an active act of looking exhausts the image in the attempt of a verbal translation and is doomed to fail. Following the gaze of Hopper's characters, we are coerced into considering the planimetric (two-dimensional, related to picture plane) relationships between seemingly unrelated objects. If the woman in Woman in the Sun is looking towards the invisible window, signified by a curtain "attached" to the right edge of the painting and a band of sunlight on the floor, we both relate the figure to the imaginary object of her gaze and scan the picture in between these two points, connecting everything on the line of her gaze: the window showing a green hillock uncannily similar to the woman's thigh and a little picture on the right, which seems to play an intermediary, metapictorial role between Hopper's painting, the view in the window, and the hidden object of the woman's gaze. This reading of the painting offers an alternative to the attempt to automatically translate a pictorial work of art into reality and explain it by "naturalizing" it, making it familiar and self-explanatory. That can also serve as a pictorial analogy to the experience of a de-instrumentalized, ambiguous, elusive everyday as opposed to translating a painting into a more self-explanatory, and hence obvious, real-life situation.

14 The austerity of Hopper's paintings tends to create a different temporality, some immeasurable duration that is not restricted by the economy of immediate necessities. For Brian O'Doherty, "Hopper paints intervals in which unimportance is located" (1964 : 76). One could say they are pictures between pictures – empty spaces in an extended narrative sequence. The evidence of that is when we recall Hopper's images while watching movies by such directors as Michelangelo Antonioni, Wim Wenders, Chantal Akerman or Yasujirō

Ozu, in scenes in which little happens, the action is slowed down or deferred and the camera remains still for long stretches of time. Gilles Deleuze defined such moments as "purely optical situations" (2006 : 17), lacking the cause-effect or motor-sensory relations and removed from linear, temporal sequence. Notably, one of the main characteristics of these situations is making the normally inconspicuous everydayness visible and felt. These are the fragments of a film that are often described as either incongruent or simply boring; they do not so much contribute to the main narrative as give the viewer time to reflect on the image on screen. "Boredom – says Blanchot – is the everyday become manifest [...] silent but with a silence that has already dissipated as soon as we keep still in order to hear it" (16). We are held still and silent by the stilled image that is filled with temporal density and makes one wait for something to happen. The immobility of the image on screen puts our patience to the test and challenges the narrative continuity and cohesiveness. That is consistent with the quality of Hopper's works, which have often been compared to film-stills. They are suggestive of an audiovisual context but never provide it, remaining inconclusive or inconsequential, forcing spectators simply to look at what is usually overlooked and, like the Deleuzian "purely optical situations", what cannot be easily "consumed" in the mode of instrumental vision [13].

15 If, as Georges Perec claimed, we generally overlook the everyday, which functions as a kind of "infrastructure of our life" (2006 : 49), Hopper's images seem to recover their visibility. Archived in our memories, his works act like a special filter and let the transparent screen of the invisible everyday tarnish and thicken into a form inseparably combined with the remembered image. It does not mean that Blanchot's elusive everyday, in itself invisible, is trapped there: a Hopper image and the everyday, experienced in a flash, undergo a process of displacement and differentiation, leaving only ephemeral traces of such an encounter. This is why, when describing the experience of seeing Hopper's work, many critics mention a feeling of déjà vu, referring to a moment of recognition of something that we could not have possibly seen before, an impression that wears off too quickly to be rationalized.

16 To conclude, the exceptional actuality of Hopper's painting can be related to the connection of his pictures with the notion of the every-

day developed here : the images Hopper occasionally manifest through visual epiphanies when the remembered and the perceived overlap. The everyday provides Hopper's painting with its own "life" as it constantly appeals to viewers beyond the context of art. His work participates in the experience of the everyday as theorized by Blanchot on many levels. Numerous paintings representing humans make the act of looking at something either unspecified or uninteresting their main subject. These paintings also engage viewers as they emphasize the act of looking itself – often making them see rather than just look. Hopper's works are often experienced when physically absent, as memory-images – triggered by ordinary, everyday views and objects which suddenly become strangely special. Consequently, the elusive everyday reveals itself in a dialectical tension between the perceived and the remembered. Hopper teaches us how to see reality with a disinterested, non-instrumental eye. His works reach beyond the confines of museum walls or book pages and circulate freely wherever we go, with our own bodies functioning as media. We remain deeply engaged in this pictorial dialogue with the world we are part of: it overcomes the apathy of everyday existence in favor of truly unprejudiced vision and fullness of experience, between interpreting whatever we describe as reality – and living it.

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3 For an analysis of the impact *Nighthawks* had on popular culture and American society, see Filip Lipiński, "The Virtual Hopper. Painting between Dissemination and Desire", *Oxford Art Journal*, 37 (2), 155-171. A more extensive discussion of this issue can be found in a chapter of my book: Filip Lipiński, *Hopper wirtualny. Obrazy w pamiętającym spojrzeniu*, Toruń 2013, p. 429-479. For a cultural analysis of *Nighthawks*, see Gordon Theissen, *Staying Up Much Too Late. Edward Hopper's Nighthawks and the Dark Side of American Psyche*, New York, 2007.

4 See: Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Baltimore 1999; *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass, Chicago 1981.

5 On the idea of supplement see: Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, esp. p.141-157. Derrida re-writes the conception of the Kantian *parergon* in *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod, Chicago 1987, p. 37-82.

6 Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. Nancy Margaret, Paul and W. Scott Palmer, New York 1990, p. 36-37.

7 On the issue of Hopper's realism, see W. Fluck, "Hopper's Paradox" in : Bieger&Voel. *Romance with America? Essays on Culture, Literature, and American Studies*, Heidelberg 2009, p. 319-331.

8 Two exceptions in terms of iconography are *Dawn at Gettysburg* (1934) and *Light Battery at Gettysburg* (1940)

9 Unsigned article: "Hopper Interprets America. Well-Known Painter Shows Recent Versions of American Scenes at the Rehn Galleries", Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 20 January 1929, p. E-7.

10 "Remembering look" is a term used by Kaja Silverman to describe the look (or gaze), which is always infused with memory. Vision, she claims, is a result of seeing and transforming the energies of remembering. See: Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World*, New York 1996, p.181.

11 See for instance Linda Nochlin, "Edward Hopper and the Imagery of Alienation", *Art Journal* 41 (2) 1981, p. 136; Gregory Crewdson, "Aesthetics of Alienation", *Tate Etc.*, no. 1, 2004, p. 43.

12 For an interesting interpretation of looking in Hopper's images see Wallace Jackson, "The Look. The Scene of the Scene in Edward Hopper", *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 103 (1) 2004, p. 133-148.

13 For comparisons with film-stills, see for instance: O'Doherty, "Portrait: Edward Hopper", *Art in America*, 52 (6) 1964, p. 68-88; Robert Hobbs, *Edward Hopper*, New York 1987, p. 16; Karal Ann Marling, *Edward Hopper*, New York 1992, p. 4; Roberta Smith, "The Father of Giants. Hopper Enlarged", *The New York Times*, 23 June 1995.

English

The following paper focuses on the work of Edward Hopper and its interaction with the everyday. The everyday is discussed here in terms proposed by Maurice Blanchot as something that escapes, that is elusive and insignificant but acts, at the same time, as a source of significance. I propose to connect Blanchot's notion of the everyday with the experience of Edward Hopper's painting. The critics have often remarked that Hopper's images are unexpectedly remembered in everyday situations outside the context of a gallery and for those familiar with his work, the world tends to look Hopperesque. I argue that his paintings activate the visibility of the everyday beyond its instrumental functionality at moments of apparent unimportance and generate unexpected dialogues between the actual object of perception and the remembered Hopper image. I suggest that such an eph-

emeral experience of different layers is akin to what Blanchot described as "the elusive everyday".

Français

La contribution suivante considère la peinture d'Edward Hopper dans le cadre du quotidien en partant de la définition qu'en propose Maurice Blanchot : un cadre éphémère et insignifiant qui reste néanmoins marqueur de sens. Si les critiques notent que les images peintes par Hopper peuvent surgir hors du contexte de leur visibilité première, il s'agira de définir ce qui rend « hopperesque » le monde réel à travers le prisme de la peinture de l'Américain. La proposition mettra en évidence les conditions de visibilité définies par les tableaux de Hopper, qui parviennent à mettre en parallèle l'objet perçu et l'image remémorée. C'est le principe premier du quotidien, l'indétermination, tel que mis en évidence par Blanchot, qui sera ainsi observé.

Mots-clés

Edward Hopper, le quotidien, peinture, vision, mémoire

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