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A SARTREAN READING OF AMERICAN ARTISTS—
WALKER PERCY, EDWARD HOPPER, AND MIKE NICHOLS 1940-1970

By

Zhenping Wang
B.A., Beijing Second Foreign Language Institute, 1985
M.ED., University of Alaska Fairbanks, 1992

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Division of Humanities
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

August 2012

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A dissertation approved on

July 2, 2012

by the following dissertation committee

Osbourne P. Wiggins, Dissertation Director

Annette Allen

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Ying Kit Chan

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated
to my parents Chunfang Dong and Ning Wang

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Writing this dissertation was like walking a difficult path. I fell at a certain place. It was my committee chair Dr. Osborne Wiggins, and the program director Dr. Annette Allen who picked me up and accompanied me to the destination. Their knowledge and wisdom enriched me, and their understanding and support nurtured me each and every day through the last day I finished. I owe my sincere gratitude to both of them.

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ABSTRACT

A SARTREAN READING OF AMERICAN ARTISTS— WALKER PERCY, EDWARD HOPPER, AND MIKE NICHOLS 1940-1970

Zhenping Wang

July 2, 2012

Jean-Paul Sartre's existential philosophy concerns the free human individual, particularly his possibilities to continuously create his own identities. Human existence is never defined by objects, and he is only determined by his own actions. As long as he is alive, he possesses this freedom and never ceases to project himself into the future. The undefined nature of human existence is conceived as human beings on the move. A study of this sense as it is revealed in the art helps us feel and embrace the fundamental core of Sartre's thought.

In this dissertation, I examine selected works of American novelist Walker Percy, painter Edward Hopper, and director Mike Nichols with special attention to the depiction of the human being as a conscious being who is keeping a sense of wonder so as to stave off the everydayness, who is imagining a new world into the unknown so as to demonstrate his strong interiority, and who is searching for a true life so as to exhibit his authenticity. Binx in Percy's *The Moviegoer*, women in solitude in Hopper's oil paintings, and Ben in Nichols' *The Graduate* are reflecting the sense of human beings on the move in graceful manner.

My reading of artists' presentations of human consciousness links the chapters.

When the human being is conscious of his existence, he is able to transcend himself, and he lives in hope. My understanding of the concepts such as being-in-itself, being-for-itself, bad faith, and authenticity are primarily formed in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* and his *Existentialism Is a Humanism*.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

...art, like philosophy, reflects reality in its relation to man, and depicts man, his spiritual world, and the relations between individuals in their interaction with the world.¹

Historical Background

Art helps us understand and appreciate philosophy in a way that is more vivid, graceful, and aesthetical. Art can be “a method of establishing a certain relationship between the world and the self”² To Sartre, literature offers the opportunities to explore the possibilities of watching human beings make themselves, choose their being in the process of relating themselves to the outside world (Barnes, *Sartre* 68). His first novel *Nausea* depicts the existential hero Roquentin realizing his pure existence of him and the existence of the world. His most gripping play *No Exit* depicts three damned souls in the same room in hell, realizing that “Hell is Other People,” one of important themes in *Being and Nothingness*. Sartre experiences, in reading of a work of fiction, or in absorbed watching of a play or film, “a oneness of consciousnesses which has no counterpart in the real world.” An artistic work may serve to “illuminate human conditions” (Barnes, *Sartre* 71), bringing a fullness of human life, in which the idea of philosophy is revealed throughout.

¹ <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/spirkin/works/dialectical-materialism/ch01-s05.html>

² Originally published in *Cahiers du Sud* 235 (May 1941). Quoted in Dorothy Tuck McFarland and Wilhelmina Van Ness, ed. and trans., *Simone Weil, Formative Writing: 1929-41* (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987) 284.

In this dissertation I seek to bring to life the very essence of Sartre's existential philosophy through the artistic works of American artists, the daily events, the people's dialogue in novels, the inner activities of the solitary figures on canvas, the flesh and blood portrayal of characters on screen to present how the human being exists in the world, how he makes himself, and transcends his own being. I investigate and embrace the fundamental core of Sartre's thought to see how his existential freedom makes human life possible.

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) was a key figure of the twentieth-century philosophy and literature. As the icon of existentialist philosophy, Sartre presented numerous writings, rich in ideas, both to his contemporaries and to the generations that followed. His famous phrase "Existence precedes essence" claims that the human being is fundamentally free and no other being or God controls him, and he makes his own world through his project. Sartre proposed the view that centered on the notion of absolute freedom and choice. Conceiving each individual as empowered with this freedom and choice, this view was no doubt highly demanding and required not only private but also public engagement. Existentialism is a philosophy for the actual individual in the real world, a concrete practical philosophy (Daigle 1; Craib 4).

Sartre is a total intellectual who wrote vast literature that contributes to philosophy, literature, drama, and cinema. In 1936, his first philosophical essays were published: *Imagination: A Psychological Critique* (*L'Imagination*) and *Transcendence of the Ego* (*La Transcendance de l'Ego* 1937, 1965 as a book). In 1938, his most famous philosophical novel *Nausea* (*La Nausee*) was published by Gallimard, the publisher that published most of his works. Short story collections, *The Wall* (*Le Mur*), as well as his

Sketch for a Theory of Emotions (Esquisse d'une Theorie des Emotions), were published in 1939. *Being and Nothingness (L'etre et le Neant)*, the first important philosophical text was published in 1943, and the first two volumes of *The Roads to Freedom (Les Chemins de la Liberte)* were published in 1945, and in 1949 the third volume came into being.

Following the war, he discovered the theater's power of communication and started to write plays. The two important plays are *The Flies (Les Mouches)* in 1943, and *No Exit (Huoi Clos)* in 1944, which make the audience think about the human condition and reflect on important ethical problems, and which are an occasion for Sartre to revisit his philosophical ideas in a different form.

His other philosophical and literary essays include *Anti-Semite and Jew (Reflexions sur la Question Juive)* in 1946 and the important text of the public conference *Existentialism Is a Humanism (L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme)* in 1946. The 1950s was the decade to witness Sartre focusing his reflection on historical, ethical, and political issues. In 1957, he published *Questions of Method (Questions de Methode)*, a text that was used as a preface for his second major philosophical text in 1960, *The Critique of Dialectical Reason (Critique de la Raison Dialectique)*.

The emergence of Sartre's thought and writings came out of a certain intellectual context. He was originally trained as a traditional rationalist philosopher, following Plato, Descartes, Kant and Hegel, believing that the human being is rational. Sartre was influenced by existential thought in the writings of the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard (1813-55) and the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), which showed new approaches and focuses on the human individual. The study of German philosopher Edmund Husserl served as the basis on which Sartre elaborated his

view of consciousness for the first time, and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), the German philosopher, played an important role in Sartre's elaboration of his magnum opus, *Being and Nothingness*. Sartre became the representative of existential thought in the twentieth-century (Daigle 10-11; Detmer 15).

When Sartre first visited the US in 1943, he was not warmly welcomed. His philosophy was regarded only as a French vogue and later described by the magazine and newspaper reporters as despair. The title of the report itself "French and American Pessimism" by Albert Guerard in *Harper's Magazine* expressed clearly the leitmotif of pessimism (276). Sartre strongly denied this negative charge by the critics and commentators, however, Oliver Barres, a Yale Divinity School student in a review of *Existentialism* declared that "no matter how Jean-Paul Sartre tries to wriggle out of the accusation, his existentialism is a philosophy of despair" (14). The first article on Sartre in *Life* "Existentialism: Postwar Paris Enthrones a Bleak Philosophy of Pessimism" impressed the readers with a list of words describing the man in Sartre's philosophy, a very sad, hopeless man with no future. Bernard Frizell, a novelist and Paris correspondent for *Life*, wrote, "man is fearful, impure, hesitant, evil, guilty, egotistical, self-enclosed, unapproachable, tragic and worried" (59). Barres deplored Sartre's emphasis on individual isolation: "This is man's world, says Sartre, and no one can help him out of it. Here on this mysterious sea of drowning swimmers, arms trash the water in panic and voices cry out for help, but all in vain" (14). John Lackey Brown, a professor of French at Catholic University before the war who was a Paris correspondent for the *New York Times* between 1945 and 1948, argued in his article "Paris, 1946: Its Three War Philosophies" that "Few mortals can live the courageous and hopeless despair preached

by Sartre” (qtd. in Fulton 29).

Like the magazine and newspaper reporters, many professional philosophers viewed Sartre’s philosophy as an evanescent postwar mood that revealed no universal truth. His thought was viewed to be only a literary movement, being philosophically naïve, antiscientific, failing to place the individual within the world of sense data, away from American analytical philosophy. However, there were some voices that reminded people of this new thought from Europe. Columbia University professor Justus Buchler felt it necessary to remind colleagues: “To call it a mere reflection of modern confusion, [...], seems at best an oversimplification.” Buchler also found value in the attention Sartre paid to the moral categories of despair, absurdity, and the choice of oneself (449). William Barrett was one of the few American philosophers of this period who actively encouraged colleagues to consider the merits of existentialism. He said that Sartre’s philosophy’s “very somberness went against the grain of our native youthfulness and optimism” (9). This old theme surfaced once again in the response to Sartre. As the editorial board member of *Partisan Review*, Barrett was eager to introduce Americans to new currents circulating in Europe, and he himself wrote “What Is Existentialism?” and *Partisan Review* published it as a separate pamphlet in 1947. The five American philosophers Barrett, Buchler, Grene, Kraushaar, and Roy Sellars, though they revealed disagreements on different points at different times, they all highly praised Sartre’s reinforcement of the idea that the individual had a certain freedom to choose and an obligation to choose responsibly. They also positively responded to his effort to understand social interaction through the vantage point of the individual. They praised Sartre for recognizing that increasingly bureaucratic and technological societies tended to

produce a sense of social alienation and loss of personal identity. They applauded his attention to the difficulties of mass society for the individual. Buchler praised particularly the fact that existentialists “have caught forcefully the great fact of tragedy in modern life,” that is, the sense of purposelessness of meaningful activities as common contemporary problems in complex industrial societies (449).

In the 1950s as the popularity and fashion of existentialism increased, the American thinkers slowly moved away from the popular view of it and “demonstrated its relevance to American culture” (Cotkin 104). By the end of 1940s, New York City became the intellectual and cultural center of the United States. These thinkers started to regard Sartre’s thought as a philosophical endeavor to be taken seriously.

The translation of Sartre’s early works helped more people get familiar with his thought and the translation of other important works of Continental existentialism, such as Heidegger’s *Existence and Being* in 1949 and others, benefited American artists and philosophers.

Many aspects of an existential perspective among New York artists can be detected. Novelist Saul Bellow’s first novel *The Dangling Man* (1947) showed existential themes and had affinity with Sartre’s *Nausea*. Harold Rosenberg, a poet and drama and art critic, discussed existential ideas in his important article “The American Action Painters” (1952), where the term “action painting” was coined. He tried to connect the painter with the “existential zeitgeist,” situating those painters into an arena where they strived for self-realization. Jackson Pollock was the action painter representative “with his drip-and-spatter mode of painting.” The painter confronts the extreme situation while approaching the canvas, struggling against the unpredictable risk and choice open to him,

rejecting the confinement of the fixed style of painting. This self-struggle in the action is existential, meaning the artist “must exercise in himself a constant No” (Cotkin 132). As an aesthete at the University of Cincinnati, Van Meter Ames, in “Existentialism and the Arts,” an article published in the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* in 1951, applauded Sartre’s vision of art “as a creative activity in the service of freedom and control for a good life” (256). Catherine Rau, at the University of California, Berkeley, also praised Sartre in “The Aesthetic Views of Jean-Paul Sartre,” an article published in the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* in 1950, for presenting art as an engine for democratic social progress (146-47). The American scholars particularly appreciated Sartre’s emphasis on individual freedom, personal responsibility, and authenticity, which are interlocking concepts in Sartrean morality. The drift of American philosophy away from a priori ethical values meant that Sartre’s central moral premise would find resonance in the United States, and they acknowledged that the moral ambiguity of Sartre’s universe mirrored the situation in which many people in the mid-twentieth century Western society found themselves.

Marjorie Grene published in 1948 *Dreadful Freedom: A Critique of Existentialism*, which helped to popularize existentialism in America. She described existentialism as a “penetrating statement of our old disheartenment, a new expression of an old despair” (149). She especially appreciated its emphasis on revolt and responsibility. She decided Sartre’s main contribution was precisely its correction of philosophies that found values emerging from factors largely independent of human choice: “It is the attempt to show the genesis of human values from the core of humanity that makes some of Sartre’s ethical analysis—if not valid, at least terribly interesting” (10). She also noted that “What

the existentialist admires is not the happiness of a man's life, the goodness of his disposition or the rightness of his acts, but the authenticity of his existence" (Grene, *Philosophy* 50).

Hannah Arendt published her monumental work *The Origins of Totalitarianism* in 1951. In 1964 she published two essays "What is Existenz Philosophy?" and "French Existentialism" in *Partisan Review* and *The Nation*. She found French existentialism courageously refused to turn to the past for inspiration or nostalgia, engaged the problem of the world heroically and rebelliously, yet she detected a hint of nihilism in French existential philosophy. The professional professor John Wild produced *The Challenge of Existentialism* in 1955 in which he discussed that existentialism was a philosophy that concerns the individual's "freedom and dignity" (25).

In 1956, Walter Kaufmann's anthology *Existentialism: From Dostoevsky to Sartre* was published in America. This anthology became the course reading material for undergraduates in universities and it indicated that the interpretation of existentialism shifted from mere philosophy to both philosophy and literature. Kaufmann voiced high praise for Sartre on his thought, personality, and versatility. It is known that existentialism has come to the attention of a wide international attention through the work of Jean-Paul Sartre. "Even Heidegger's great prestige in Germany after the second World War is due, in no small part, to his tremendous impact on French thought" (40). Sartre was a philosopher in the French tradition, and it was hard to imagine how much attention he would receive in philosophical history in later years, however, it was no doubt that he would be remembered for his "unprecedented versatility: he is much more interesting than most of his contemporaries ..." (41).

Professor of philosophy at New York University William Barrett's *Irrational Man* (1958) is one of the most popular books of existentialism penned by an American and it becomes a "bestseller" in its field. Barrett explored not only the historical context of existentialism but its sociological significance as well. In his book he stated that "the essential freedom, the ultimate and final freedom that can not be taken from a man, is to say *No*. This is the basic premise in Sartre's view of human freedom: freedom is in its very essence negative, though this negativity is also creative" (215). He treated Sartre as a man in a moment of heroism. Barrett's book extended its readers from intellectual to a larger public circle. Like Kaufmann, this volume included literature, art and philosophy.

America has been carrying a tradition of optimism while Europe carried that of pessimism. Barnes, when she differentiated "Pragmatists" and "Existentialists" referring to Americans and Europeans in her lecture "Existentialism in America" (1960), humorously stated that the pragmatist "always seems to be just coming out of his cold shower, full of exuberance, while the existentialist is more likely to be hovering at the bridge wondering whether or not to jump" (n.p.). Now how can we understand the fervor of Americans in the postwar era about French existentialism since Sartre's ideas were so alien to optimistic Americans? One reason was that before the postwar era, Americans had "Europhilia," but in fact at that cultural moment American art and culture were starting to rise. Another reason was that America was in a situation that was changing. Americans had to experience what the Europeans had, the absurd and contingent nature of the world. To Americans, existentialism belonged to the present and future, not the past.

Hazel E. Barnes discovered French existentialism with fascination. She entered in

1948 on “her life quest to make French existentialism central to the discourse of American intellectual life” (Cotkin 151). She refigured the canon of existentialism by including the two rising French existentialists, Camus and de Beauvoir. Moreover, in her memoir *The Story I Tell Myself* (1977), she showed her French existentialism in a new light that gave great emphasis to the “optimistic aspects of Existentialism” (Barnes 162). Barnes translated Sartre’s fundamental work *Being and Nothingness*, which was a great success. Not only did she translate the language, but also the style of Sartre. She had the intention to translate the mood of French existentialism into something that Americans were familiar with and felt useful. Particularly fascinating to me, Barnes intended to transform the pessimistic elements of existentialist doctrine into a humanistic perspective. She asked readers to think about the commitments of Sartre to greater freedom. With her translation of *Being and Nothingness* (*L’Etre et le Neant*) into English in 1957, Sartre’s philosophy was introduced to the English world, and he gathered a reputation in the intellectual world. His name was increasingly becoming popular.

It is reasonable to claim, as Bernard-Henri Levy did in the title of his book *Le Siecle de Sartre* (2000), that the twentieth century was “Sartre’s century.” Again as Benedict O’Donohoe and Roy Elveton titled their book *Sartre’s Second Century* (2009), the twentieth-first century is very possibly “Sartre’s second century,” because his works of philosophy and literature continue affecting the minds of people and the world. It is the right time to come back to Sartre.

Literature Review

Sartre’s novels are as great as his philosophical works. So people like to compare his novels with other writers’ to observe the affinity with or differences from his

existentialism, or the paths of the existential heroes in their works. Some view Sartre's philosophy as a critical theory or an approach to analyze literary and artistic works. A glimpse of the impact of his thought on the minds of people can be viewed and appreciated through some critical works on American literature, art and popular culture.

As commented, Sartre and some American writers like Steinbeck, Richard Wright, Flannery O'Connor, Walker Percy and Tennessee Williams have affinity, and these American writers are existential writers. Sartre believed Steinbeck "to be the most rebellious, perhaps" of the American writers whilst Steinbeck so admired the French intellectual scene typified by Sartre that he spent nearly a year in Paris writing for *Le Figaro*. Both of them promoted individual freedom in their works, *The Age of Reason* (1945) and *East of Eden* (1952). Yet their emphasis on the changeability of human existence constantly destabilized any position they approached (Stephens 177-92). There have been noteworthy philosophical exchanges between Sartre and Wright. Before they actually met, Richard Wright published his short story "The Man Who Lived Underground," which depicted an existential hero, the black existential hero, who experienced flight, guilt, life and death, dread and freedom. They both inspired each other and the intellectual exchanges between them proved to be significant (Gines 42-59). Walker Percy's interest in existentialism and especially the work of Jean-Paul Sartre was no secret among literary critics (Hamner 181). Kathleen Scullin argued that *Lancelot* was "in effect Percy's response to Sartre in fiction" (110). *The Second Coming* is Percy's fifth novel for which *Nausea* and Sartre's existentialism could provide a crucial context for understanding it and in turn *The Second Coming* honestly and soberly represents the "nausea" of Sartre's novel. Kerr compared Flannery O'Connor's stories to Jean-Paul

Sartre's *Nausea*, which revealed a surprising number of intertextual parallels and shared themes. Despite the existential angst permeating the work of each other, however, the "lines of spiritual motion" found in O'Connor's work revealed redemption in the suffering of Jesus Christ, while Sartre, at best, found a sort of consolation in "good" faith and art (Kerr 67-96).

Tennessee Williams, the great American playwright admitted that he was strongly influenced by existential philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, and his plays *The Glass Menagerie*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* were particularly examined and the existential themes were clearly revealed (Crawford).

Sartre's existential philosophy, particularly the concepts of freedom, choice, bad faith, responsibility and authenticity are the most often discussed, and some other terms like violence, tragedy and failure are viewed through the lens of existentialism to bear new meanings. Existential freedom is the major theme in the article of William J Sowders "Colonel Thomas Sutpen as Existentialist Hero." He observed existential failures of the character in Faulkner's novel. Existence precedes essence. Unfortunately however, man "is more often than not swamped in his attempt to define himself" (485). Nearly all Sartre's characters at one time or another revealed existential failure in *Nausea*, *No Exit* or *The Flies*. Sutpen in Faulkner's novel experienced existential failure. He found himself at one time at the threshold of self encounter and free choice, and fortunately he was awakened to the existential freedom and made his choice, and finally made his life his own. Exploring freedom in the character in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Mawyer found in ways that the character deceived himself and got into "bad faith" like what Sartre described with his waiter in *Being and Nothingness*. The waiter overly acted as a

professional waiter as an act of accepting the identities the establishing power structures forced upon him. Ralph Ellison found it unable to maintain this freedom though he and Sartre both had the preoccupation of the freedom of individual consciousness.

Existential freedom is applied as a perspective to analyze violence by Neil Roberts in his essay “Fanon, Sartre, Violence, and Freedom.” Fanon and Sartre are compared when seeking a new interpretation for violence. For Fanon, violence was intrinsic violence, a necessary factor for “self-determination, and the absence of domination,” that was “valuable in the anti-colonial struggle for freedom” (140, 139). There has been a shift then from rights theory to freedom theory.

Agreed by Helen Frances Patey, he believed in his thesis that introducing the ideas of Sartre into the analysis of violence opened up a new field of inquiry that would lead to innovative critical approaches. He asserted that the new perspective of violence directed the search for freedom and autonomy, and his thesis “Freedom Fighters: The violent pursuit of existential freedom in selected 20th century American narratives” demonstrated that writers of William Faulkner, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and Toni Morrison were the freedom fighters.

The existential self in Sartre’s philosophy is the concern of some scholars (Crady, Huddleston). Crady was seeking the individual role of character in *The Sheltering Sky* by Paul Bowles based on Sartre’s concept of self. Sartre’s concept of individual consciousness was appreciated and Crady admired the idea that one’s action determines one’s nature. Huddleston discussed further that Sartre’s concept of individual self-consciousness is a positive concept that helps an individual build an awareness that his identity is made by his own choices. The American Indian protagonists in literature

have been struggling about their identity as they were frustrated by their mixed blood heritages which often led them to alienation and loneliness. Sartre's definition of identity relies upon the fundamental claim that one creates one's identity through a process of daily choices and actions. The American Indian characters in novels by James Welch, Leslie Marmon Silko and N. Scott Momaday have been searching for their identities through hardships and possibilities. "Quest for identity in Richard Wright's *The Outsider*, an Existential Approach" is the critical essay by Umar Abdurrahman, analyzing the search for an identity for Wright's black hero Cross Damon on his existential journey. He particularly quoted Sartre's words on definition of man, "Existentialism maintains that in man, and man alone, existence precedes essence. This simply means that man first is, and only subsequently is this or that. In a word, man must create his own essence: it is in throwing himself into the world, suffering there, struggling there, that he gradually defines himself. And the definition always remains open-ended: we cannot say what this man is before he dies, or what mankind is before it has disappeared" (qtd. in Abdurrahman 25). He presented Wright's hero as an existential hero following the path that humankind created himself and his own identity.

Responsibility and authenticity are the two closely related concepts in Sartre's philosophy, when one takes the responsibility of one's choice one follows a path of authenticity. Joan Didion is an American writer, whose novels are studied by Sharon Connes Felton (1990) focusing on the author's female protagonists. Though each female protagonist experienced some trauma which compelled her to be aware of her existence in bad faith, she finally chose to accept the responsibility of the choices she made and lived authentically. When one takes the responsibility of one's choice, he is living in

authenticity, a true life that bears meaning. This is echoed in the article on Sherwood Anderson's novel "Winesburg, Ohio," in which the small town inhabitants experienced the modern ailments of loneliness, isolation and frustration, as well as taking the heavy responsibility to lead an authentic life (Moreno). To investigate the patterns of authenticity, Anleean Vandora Smith studied American works, *Invisible Man*, *The Catcher in the Rye*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *The Bell Jar*, and *The Bluest Eye* along with the works of some of existential philosophers including Sartre for insights for understanding authenticity.

Relatively connected with authenticity, the term tragedy is studied from a new perspective. Tragedy is a passive and melancholy term to us. In general sense, however, it is redefined through the angle of existential philosophy as a term more positive and hopeful. Seung-Jin Baek has examined American playwright Eugene O'Neill as a social critic presenting new possibilities of human existence. Tragedy in an existential sense is studied to reveal not the dark side of human existence, but the efforts in overcoming the crisis and in showing hope for a human being. These philosophers believed in human will and courage facing angst. The Nietzschean Dionysian person and Sartrean authentic person are the ones who confront the tragic life, taking the authentic path on their life journey. For the same purpose of finding a way to face the tragic life after the Great War, Hemingway's early works attempted to search for a new value as well as a new personality, a private and individual sense of being compatible with the reality of the terrible Great War. Merritt Keith Coplin examined Hemingway's works, finding Hemingway confronted this post-war spirit and gave it a name: nada, what existentialist philosophers described as the existential void, the great nothingness coiled at the heart of

modern being. Hemingway's ultimate quest was for a way for human beings to be within the void. He must have come to believe that men and women must live and live fully.

The Sartrean existential way of looking at the world and of living lives that bear meaning deeply affects American novelists and playwrights, and it is immensely reflected in their literary works. Besides literature, in fields of art and popular culture, it also demonstrates great impact. Painters such as Jackson Pollock, Cy Twombly, and Mark Rothko are studied by scholars and their works reveal the central themes of existential self, choice and action, and nothingness (Neely, Oshima, Kosoi). The article entitled "Nothingness Made Visible: The Case of Rothko's Paintings" revealed to a certain degree that his painting possessed the nature of "nothingness" which made "the individuality of the artistic self visible only through the interaction between the work and the viewer" (Neely). Art critic Harold Rosenberg coined a term "action painting" in his article "The American Action Painters" (1952). In doing so, he "managed to attach the work of painters to the emerging existential zeitgeist, ... situating it within the space of the painter striving for self-realization" (Cotkin 126). In his essay "The Stages: Geography of Action" (1947), Rosenberg presented "existential images of the scene of action, of the notion of a drama in which the actor faces a situation." Painting like drama was "the way the artist organizes his emotional and intellectual energy as if he were in a living situation" ("American Action Painters" 29). This expression fits well the style of Jackson Pollock. He became a sensation in the art world when he began to work on large canvases, off the easel, with his drip-and-spatter mode of painting. ... Pollock, a type of existential man in the popular imagination, exuded a new artistic sensibility (Cotkin 131). Rosenberg commented on Mark Rothko's painting, "... that the artist approaching the

blank canvas confronts an extreme situation, predicted upon risk and choice. The artist struggles against “the anguish of the esthetic” lest he forecloses open-ended possibilities by confinement to an already defined style of painting. The existential struggle means that the artist “must exercise in himself a constant *No*” (“American Action Painters” 32).

American motion pictures such as *Cool Hand Luke* (1967), *American Beauty* (2000), and *Revolutionary Road* (2008) have been screened and paid great attention by art critics revealing much of existential thought of freedom, choice, and authenticity throughout the portrayal of characters and events. In each of these movies, the existential hero “confronts an absurd world while managing to find moments of grace within it” (Cotkin 240). Lucas Jackson in *Cool Hand Luke* was a war hero, not fitting into civilian life. He may be beaten up to a pulp by the prison authorities, but he refused to surrender his authenticity. Alienation and rebellion defined his existence. He escaped again from the prison, knowing fully well that when he was hunted down, he would be killed. He died unvanquished, an existential hero for the age (Cotkin 249-50). Lester Burham in *American Beauty* stayed in a coma for the past twenty years in life. Inspired by young man Ricky and beautiful Angela, he quit his boring job, bought a red sports car, rejected his domineering wife, leaving a dead life he had been enduring for safety and false comfort and for living a life of his own choice with vitality and youthfulness that bore meaning (Wang 230-246, Krithades 74-77). April, the beautiful young wife of Frank in *Revolutionary Road* has been dreaming with her husband that they could lead a life with enthusiasm and interest. However, the fatigue of Frank’s boring job and the embarrassing little actress she became in this small town gradually eroded away their passion for life. Their lives, unbearable and uninteresting, April decided to make a change, going to live

in Paris as they had long wished, only to find April dying in a self-abortion of the third child for the sake of freedom of choice against the empty gestures of the comfortable life all people in the town seemingly enjoyed (Henry & Clark 207-224).

The influence of Sartre's philosophy on American literature, art and popular culture has been reviewed this much although there is much more out there for scholars to search and examine. Though limited, it can indicate to some extent that Sartre has attracted scholars' attention in these fields as well as their energy for thinking deeply into the fundamental core of his philosophy. The author of this dissertation has a great interest in three American artists, novelist Walker Percy, painter Edward Hopper, and movie director Mike Nichols, in this period of 1940-1970 when Sartre's impact on America is relatively huge. Their works of *The Moviegoer* by Percy, oil paintings by Hopper, and *The Graduate* by Nichols will be the focus of this dissertation. Other scholars' critical studies on their specific works of art are valuable before the author discusses what she can contribute to the scholarship on Sartrean philosophy in American culture.

Walker Percy's *The Moviegoer*

Cold War culture is one of the major perspectives in the analysis of Percy's *The Moviegoer*. Early in 1997, Margot Henriksen in her study of American Cold War culture interpreted Binx in *The Moviegoer* as suffering from malaise, the evidence of Cold War anxiety. To elaborate more on Henriksen's study in Cold War culture, Virginia Nickles Osborne did another study in 2009. He did not believe that Binx was journeying through an existential search to deal with the alienation of the modern age, but thought that Binx was attempting to "negotiate" the "complex position" in the Cold War American south, however, unable to achieve it. Binx was aware of the war situation and the atomic anxiety,

and also made efforts to “reconcile the southern past with the present uncertain American culture,” but finally found no way out (106-25). They both doubted that southern culture has integrated it into the mainstream American culture.

Different from their ideas, however, in his analysis of the South’s modernization in *The New South* (1995), Numan Bartley argued that in *The Moviegoer* Binx’s experience pointed up an increasingly individualized society and that the American southern literature has moved away from its regional concern and joined the rest of the nation in the age of alienation. The southerners “shed [ding] the values of an older South, the New South had become a place where credit cards defined an individual’s identity” (266-267).

The following studies address the searches, especially existential searches of Binx Bolling. Stylistic analysis of the novel by Richard Pindell, “Basking in the Eye of the Storm,” discussed the role of Binx who exemplified Miss Flannery O’Connor’s statement “At its best, our age is an age of searchers and discoverers, and at its worst, an age that has domesticated despair and learned to live with it happily”(103). Binx became a searcher who learned to practice the arts of openness and kindness and found the true relationship with the community by the end of the novel; and who also, according to Percy, “enjoys his alienation” (Brown 7). Binx in both positive and negative ways performed his roles. Lewis A. Lawson, professor of University of Maryland at College Park in his “From Tolstoy to Dostoyevsky” interpreted that *The Moviegoer* demonstrates a philosophical transition from Tolstoy to Dostoyevsky in Walker Percy through his protagonist Binx Bolling. Percy stated that the artist needed to look “for truth within himself” which was manifested in his essay “The Man on the Train” (86). Percy regarded Dostoyevsky as the great artist on the depiction of the alienated person searching for God.

Lewis A. Lawson addressed from the perspective of dream and fantasy Binx Bolling's recollection of his search, believing that the movie screen was his dream screen where the typical stories of a man's life were shown (25-55). In his essay *Walker Percy and the Little Way*, John J. Desmond stated that Percy set this opposition between the comfortable life in the Little Way (refer to Gentilly) and the life of search. However, the real issue he argued was not to choose one or the other, but to pursue "the big search for the big happiness" within this "sad little happiness of drinks and kisses, a good little car and a warm deep thigh" (MG 110-11). Binx recognized the feeling of despair out of the everydayness of "drinks and kisses" and attempted to search for truth within himself to overcome despair. This Little Way, a language symbol, served as the means to reconcile the "big search" and the "sad little life" (Desmond 290). William Rodney Allen, in his second chapter "Self-Deception and Waking Dreams in Gentilly" believed that *The Moviegoer* showed the profound influence of European existential thought. It was the best French existential novel in our language (Allen 19).

Percy denies the major influence by American writers and the first novel convincingly shows the fact. Despair is a favorite term of the existentialists, and despair arises out of the human being's awareness of his freedom, however, "authentic" being faces it while "inauthentic" being hides it. *The Moviegoer* is a journey for exploration of existential anguish from start to finish and it is essentially Binx's progression from diversion to admission of despair or called from "inauthentic" to "authentic" choice. However, the essays do not apply closely to a certain existentialist theory in their analyses, but rather compare loosely with several other writers' novels.

The review of *The Moviegoer* can be roughly categorized into three parts: southern

culture depiction, the reflection of the nostalgia complex; the southern part of America has moved out of its own regional concern and has developed into a new south in which credit card defines identity and has been integrated into the rest of the country's alienation; and last the searches of Binx, especially his existential searches out of the everydayness for an authentic self. This limited review has shown that some research addresses the existential issue; however, it just loosely compares with other literature and few has applied Sartre's existential theory, specifically his theory of existential freedom to analyze Binx's search in *The Moviegoer*. This is what the author intends to do in this dissertation. Specifically, the ongoing existential search of Binx will be the focus that leads the discussion. Though not directly influenced by Sartre, Percy credited Sartre with his description of the predicament of being human: the feeling of inner emptiness, of nothingness; and agreed that to live authentically means to recognize the uniqueness of one's situation, and take responsibility for one's choices and actions (Scullin 110).

Edward Hopper and his oil paintings

When the six close friends recollected the 20th-century American painter Edward Hopper and his art, they all appreciated the uniqueness of his works. Hopper created his own form and design: light played a principal role in all of his works. Women figures of Hopper represented a solitude state of mind in the age of alienation. At the same time their eyes looking outside the window represented the yearning for breaking away the frame of the room (Goodrich, Clancy, Hayes, et al. 125-127). In the same year of 1981, Linda Nochlin wrote on Hopper's depiction of alienation. Her title "Edward Hopper and the Imagery of Alienation" itself told us the theme of Edward Hopper's oil painting, alienation. Edward Hopper's *Gas* 1940, for instance, depicted an image of a typical

condition of American alienation, a “thoroughgoing kind of rootlessness.” Hopper in his painting employed the rhetorical device of synecdoche, “the substitution of a concrete part for an equally concrete whole” (136).

The locations for Hopper’s alienation images are particularly the working field *Pennsylvania Coal Town* 1947, spaces of urban recreation *The Automat* 1927, and the urban work scene as well as the city night spot *Office at Night* 1940. Hopper’s images often revealed to us the sense of the impotence and disconnection of the human figure in the field; the isolated female figure sunken into her world the reverie, with the bleak space, situation around her; the hollowness of the office with no possibility that the figures may come together to talk or make contact. The alienation of Hopper was more than the alienation of human beings from each other, and it was that of individuals from themselves as depicted in *Morning Sun* of 1952, *City Sunlight* of 1954, and *A Woman in the Sun* of 1961. Empty room pictures, *Rooms by the Sea* of 1951 and *Sun in an Empty Room* of 1963, were based on the simplest ingredients: space, walls, air, light, and water. As Hopper says “I’m after ME” in these pictures, he was pursuing “an authentic sense of isolation and impending nothingness” (Nochlin 141). Hopper is telling much more than the state of alienation on his palate, and he has been courageously pursuing something that could overcome this anxiety by grasping his freewill to find what he really is.

The characteristics of simplicity and stillness of Hopper’s painting were revealed in the analyses of Troyen’s “Edward Hopper and Ryder’s House” (5) and Jackson’s “‘To Look’: The Scene of the Seen in Edward Hopper” (135) as well as in other critics’. Simplicity is the representation of modernism and stillness, the loneliness of the modern age. These techniques assist the portrayal of the state of alienation of the age.

Some works have argued that Hopper depicted in his paintings the psychological aspects of himself and his figures with the use of rooms, windows as the constraints and frames to lock them in, isolating them from contacting each other. They were unable to walk or move, being reduced to an inanimate object (Baigell 49-59; Taggart 1-24). The tonality was pessimistic. Hopper's figures were often in a state of "withdrawal." They did not communicate, and even the harmless relationship might overwhelm them in some way. The postures, attitudes, even the compositions all suggested the mood. The light and shadow used by Hopper were even believed to be oppressive. What they said about the isolation, alienation and muteness of the figures was true. However, to the author of the dissertation, they are portrayed the way they are to demonstrate exterior loneliness, yet interior contemplation. Those women figures sitting at the window or standing toward windows in the sunlight have a strong yearning for freedom, wishing any moment to be able to break away from this room, the centrality of the control. They are dreaming of a liberating self outside the window into the vast forest or sea. Wieland Schmied agreed in his book *Edward Hopper Portraits of America* (1995).

Wieland Schmied stated not only were the actual subjects presented, the issue of perception was also addressed. For instance, they included the viewer's eye, despite the fact that the figures appeared entirely self-absorbed and unconscious of being observed. They did not realize that they were seen and we the viewers remained outside their lives, looking in; for them we were non-existent and what they perceived remained hidden to us, beyond our field of view. The clear compositions of a woman at a window showed us that she gazed into a space that was either concealed from the viewer or outside the picture entirely. She might be looking into nothingness. She might be so preoccupied with herself

that she was oblivious of everything going on around her (74). Again regarding women figures at a hotel or room window, apparently awakened by the sun, they gazed musingly out the window as if wondering whether this might be the first day in a new life: *Morning in a City*, 1944, *Morning Sun*, 1952, *City Sunlight*, 1954, *A Woman in the Sun*, 1961.

Hopper's women were vulnerable, yet they still seemed to harbor hopes and expectations. It can be sensed that there was something undefined, perhaps unnamable. In *A Woman in the Sun*, the woman has reached the borderline. Hopper has put her in a situation beyond which she could not go. She has let the sun take possession of her. She has forgotten herself. Hopper's figures lowering their eyes seemed to be looking at themselves, and pursuing their own thoughts and dreams (76).

What Schmied states about Hopper's women figures and the sun light in a room resonates with Sartre's existential freedom. The human being has an undefined nature, and he is always projecting his own future, being able to expand and open his heart toward the possibilities. What will be investigated in Hopper's painting will be the existential ideas hidden in his empty rooms, and women figures, particularly the movement of their minds.

Mike Nichols and *The Graduate*

Benjamin was described in *The Graduate* (1967) as a confused and aimless youth who clearly would not be willing to accept his parents' expectations or friends' suggestions. He drifted in his parents' pool and drowned himself in Mrs. Robinson's bed. This might have been the first movie about the 1960s' youth to tell it like it is (Farber and Changas 37-41).

Most of the critics analyze Benjamin from the perspectives of culture, history,

morality, and psychology. Reviewed by Farber and Changas, Ben looked bewildered and didn't know what was going on when back home, only knowing that he wanted his future "...well ... different..." However, he didn't seem capable of going further. *The Sounds of Silence* so concise, lyrical and eloquent with Paul Simons perceptions of "people talking without speaking, people hearing without listening," the depth of it was supposed to be understood by Ben. However, in truth Ben was not able to put the world in that kind of order. He was just a harmlessly confused and awkward young man with a suffering face, an alienated generational hero. Farber and Changas believed that Ben was not sexually attracted to Mrs. Robinson, and only the sheer boredom brought him to her time after time. Mrs. Robinson was found later to be a boring woman. There was not much that could be talked about between them. Ben pursued Elaine not only because of her physical attractiveness, but because she was the person Ben found he can talk to, a pure, earnest loving girl. She was what Ben has been looking for (Farber and Changas 37-41).

In Hao Lun's "Interpretation of *The Graduate*," he argued that Ben's trapped sexual relationship with Mrs. Robinson was a kind of moral decline in his life, a time of shift in his growing up, however, the experience of which made him a true man. And his relationship with Elaine was a spiritual wish of maturity of heart where it could never be attained from Mrs. Robinson. His love toward Elaine was the test of his own strength and the manifestation of his own value (51-52). *Seduction and Dream* contrasted the two relationships in more details and more depth (Wu 73-74). Ben got seduced by Mrs. Robinson, a middle-aged woman who had no love in her marriage and experienced an empty life. Ben was lured by her attractiveness because he was curious about the adult world, and although nervous he was still eager to get into this world. With no other

sources of knowing the unknown, Mrs. Robinson crashed into Ben's confused world. Ben fell. Ben met Elaine, the girl of innocent heart, kind nature, and earnest love. Ben was a young man drowning in the aimless and confused world; however, he never gave up the pursuit of true love and beauty. Elaine erased all his soul dust and washed away his naked loneliness. "Elaine is his dream" (Wu 74). Several articles stated that Ben was going through a journey of confusion, oppression and rebellion (Xi 92-93; Li 174-177; Li "Youth Path" 71-72). Against a large cultural background, the countercultural movement, Ben was confused, telling his father he was just a little worried about his future though he was an excellent graduate, rich, and with a high social background. Ben was oppressed, feeling this way since his graduation from university. He had "this kind of compulsion that he has to be rude all the time" (*The Graduate* 1967). Ben was also resistant, insisting to meet with Elaine, to marry her, and to take her away from the wedding ceremony.

Psychologically, Ben was analyzed as a man who was going through a journey of personality construction (Yu and Zhou 88-89). These authors believed that Ben fell into a self-identity crisis when confronting the background of social change and the shift of his value system. After American psychologist Erikson, Marcia (1966) stated that when a young man didn't have any faith in religion or follow any traditional value, he might well fall into self-identity diffusion, meaning getting confused about who he was and what he should do, trying to avoid making any decisions and choices, being unable to have a proper personal relationship with other people, being unable to do anything for the future (551-558). He didn't have a proper dialogue with his parents, and he drifted in the pool, drowning himself in Mrs. Robinson's bed. All these proved that Ben was on the path of constructing his personality. As Marcia continued, if a man made efforts to build an

intimate relationship with another person, it would assist him in walking out of this crisis. His meeting with Elaine helped Ben find his own identity and his loneliness was much reduced by this tender love which was regarded as the great shift in Ben's personality construction. In his essay "Freud's Children and Destroyed Adults: Hollywood's Counterculture Movie," Xu Hailong argued that the Hollywood Counterculture movie employed the method of alienating the protagonist rather than involving him in a revolution. Alienation was the start of their rebellion. Their journey to the land of self pleasure was the sign the "original desire" of the human being, the "pleasure principle" of Freud. Ben's relationship with Mrs. Robinson was his Oedipus Complex (42-48).

The analyses above either from cultural or from psychological perspectives will not be the focus or approach of analyzing *The Graduate* in this dissertation. The approach of this dissertation is the existential freedom of Sartre, which is supported by what George Cotkin stated in his book when talking about the movie "...the existential hero confronts an absurd world while managing to find moments of grace within it" (240). Ben, the bright young man without any direction in life lolled about his parents' swimming pool and more or less had a crush on Mrs. Robinson, the mother of Elaine with whom he fell madly in love. Until he made the leap into true love, his life lacked meaning. Once he found love, passivity gave way to purpose. Ben whisked Elaine away from the wedding and they escaped aboard a city bus. On the bus, they looked into the far distance, "it is rather than a moment of triumph, it is a moment of recognition." Nichols has stated, in an interview, "I think that Benjamin and Elaine will end up exactly like their parents; that's what I was trying to say in the last scene" (qtd. in Cotkin 250). I will investigate Ben's authenticity in a life of his own.

Summing up the reviews above on Percy, Hopper and Nichols, there is research on different aspects of their works. Some research has touched on Sartre's idea and some has not. Furthermore, few has ever put Sartre's central theme in the context of multidisciplinary analysis, in a certain historical period and certain cultural context at the same time.

Research Purpose

Since Sartre is such a controversial, but important figure in philosophy, literature, and drama in the twentieth century, studies on his own works, his influence on literature, or his ideas manifested in certain literary works, have been numerous. Could I possibly find anything new to write about? Could I bring any contribution to this field of discussion? According to Sartre's ontology on human existence, there are vast possibilities for the human being to reconstruct, recreate and reconsider in this world; then in the same sense, there are possibilities for me to do something more on top of other researchers' works, adding a little to the existing literature and scholarship.

As Olafson (1967) suggested, Sartre's works as well as his career can be classified in three periods: the first period is that of phenomenological psychology; the second period is that of existentialism, the ontological inquiry into human existence, principally found in his *Being and Nothingness*; and the third period is that of Marxist existentialism. The author's interest focuses on the second period, the existentialism from years 1940 to 1970 in which Sartre's existential freedom will be investigated.

I will choose to analyze the artists and their works from the three disciplines of literature, art and motion pictures to seek the central idea of Sartre in his existential freedom, the human being never defined by others as an object. He is always possessing

nothingness to define himself into being through the course of his choices and actions of himself, a sense of moving on toward the future. The conception of human existence on the move will link the chapters and the upcoming discussions of the artists.

I am also inspired by Hazel E. Barnes, the well-known American woman scholar on Sartre. In her memoir *The Story I Tell Myself* (1977), she showed French existentialism in a new light that gave great emphasis to the “optimism aspects of Existentialism.”³ She intended to transform the pessimistic elements of French Existentialist doctrine into a humanistic perspective (Cotkin 152, 155). She asked the readers and scholars to think more about Sartre’s commitments to greater freedom. I intend to observe closely these literary works and the sense of human existence on the move conceived in his existential freedom. Human existence on the move demonstrates the positive tone of Sartre’s philosophy, which hopefully adds to the study of him.

Significance of the Study

My central concern is to apply Sartre’s theory of existential freedom as the theoretical framework for the analysis of American cultural moment within the period of 1940 to 1970. His major concepts depicted in *Being and Nothingness* as well as in his novels and plays will serve as the basis for the discussion of existential freedom. Then three American novelists and artists and their works are chosen within this period for the investigation of existential freedom. These three artists are justified to express existential themes in their works though they may be influenced directly or indirectly by Sartre. Walker Percy in *The Moviegoer*, Edward Hopper in oil paintings and Mike Nichols in *The Graduate* all present the existential theme, searching for the authentic self. Though

³ Hazel E. Barnes, *The Story I Tell Myself: A Venture in Existentialist Autobiography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 162.

seemingly pessimistic, the artists never stop their heroes at their angst or their anxiety, and they permit their works to give rise to a more positive tone. They always give hope to future becoming.

Walker Percy (1916-2005) is now best known as a novelist. His first novels have earned him sustainable fame. He is also a philosopher, a man who has special talents in understanding, humor and expression, a man who in his novels and essays explores deeply the existential theme. Walker Percy is a loner. He has immersed himself for years in the European existentialist tradition of both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In his articles and especially in his novels, he brought that tradition across the Atlantic to the United States of America. It has been his effort to show American readers how the thinkers Heidegger, Marcel, Kierkegaard or Dostoevski, Sartre and Camus, have a bearing on daily life in the country of America.

Edward Hopper (1882-1967) is one of the major Realist painters of the twentieth century. He is usually associated with the American Scene, a Regionalist movement of the 1920s and 1930s. Edward Hopper was regarded as the typically American painter by Alfred H. Barr, Jr., director of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and was described by his friend and fellow-artist Charles Burchfield as "...an American—nowhere but in America could such an art have come into being" (Troyen 2). Even Lloyd Goodrich, a former director of the Whitney Museum of American Art stated in his essay on Hopper, dated 1927, "It is hard to think of another painter who is getting more of the quality of American in his canvases than Edward Hopper" (Troyen 3) .

Hopper was believed to be motivated by an interest in the human condition. Being an artist who laid sharp and precise observation, he found problems or symptoms of this

universal condition in the specific world of his day and age. And his paintings contained the American quality in an unpremeditated manner which the viewers may feel intensively. And the depth of his American eye was sensibly recognized by his friend Charles Burchfield, who defined Hopper as a unique and pure artist who was interested in his material, and in the way his idea of form, color, and space division were employed (Troyn 5).

Mike Nichols (1931-) is a German-born Jewish American who moved with his family to the United States to flee the Nazis in 1939. He is a television, stage and film director, writer, and producer. Until 2010, Nichols was one of the only 12 people to have won each of the major American entertainment awards: an Emmy, Grammy, Oscar, and Tony Award (EGOT). He is an artist with the most awards in total. In 2001, he was awarded the National Medal of Arts, created by the United States of Congress in 1984 for the purpose of honoring artists and patrons of the arts. He received the Life Achievement Award from the American Film Institute in 2010. Mike Nichols is a versatile talent. In 1963 he was chosen to direct the play *Barefoot in the Park*, and he realized almost at once that directing was what he wanted to do for the rest of his life. He has won numerous theatre awards for directing. *The Graduate* is the biggest hit film released in 1967 for which he won the Best Director Oscar. Nichols' movies deal with people and the faulty, confused world they live in.

This dissertation is an interdisciplinary study with three disciplines of literature, art, and motion picture combined together, and with the three artists chosen respectively from these three disciplines. This is a new approach that no other research on Sartre has ever applied. This study explores Sartre's existential freedom as a whole through the works of

American artists, particularly the sense of human beings on the move of the core of the thought. This sense is argued by the author as a positive tone of Sartre's philosophy as against those who claim the philosophy as pessimism. This is to support the return of Sartre's study in the 21st century and to believe the philosophy is still giving hope to people in their daily lives.

My opening chapter, "Introduction" begins with a brief account of Jean-Paul Sartre who has enjoyed a world-wide reputation of his existential philosophy. His phrase "Existence precedes essence," positions the human being as the free agent, the initial power to create himself, always keeping the possibility, the hope of making himself anew. Then I introduce the reception of his philosophy in the US from the first stage of being regarded as in vogue, to later being viewed as a philosophy that draws special attention of American philosophers. Literature review of scholarly research on Sartre's thought in the fields of American literature, art and popular culture are synthesized.

Chapter Two, "Jean-Paul Sartre and His Existential Freedom," presents Sartre's major concepts related to existential freedom, such as being, nothingness, freedom and responsibility, anxiety and authenticity. The depictions of these terms are based upon the concepts in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (1943) as well as his novels and plays. One mode of being, being-for-itself, the ontological inquiry, provides possibility for human beings to be "condemned to be free." Nothingness, the consciousness of the human mind, emptiness, is the source of our projecting ourselves into the future. Though this free resolve is filled with dread, existential freedom is characterized by some existentialism proponents "optimistic," that the human being is what he makes himself, for "there is always, until death, another chance" (Greene 1). This positive tone is embedded in Sartre's

theory. Excerpts from his novels and plays are cited to demonstrate specifically what those abstract terms mean since Sartre's literary works have a philosophical perspective. These concepts serve as the theoretical basis for the analysis of American artists' works in the following chapters.

Chapter Three, "Walker Percy and the Ongoing Existential Search – *The Moviegoer*," discusses the novel *The Moviegoer*, the major source for our discussion of the young man Binx, engaging himself in a search. Walker Percy's younger brother Leroy Percy once talked to the writer David Horace Harwell who wrote the book: *Walker Percy Remembered*. "Well, everything that Walker wrote about—not everything, but most everything—can be summed up in one word: the search" (Harwell 5). Binx is a searcher, unwilling to be defined. It is the ongoing existential search, a sense of human existence on the move. Chapter Four, "Edward Hopper and the Mind in Motion – His Oil Paintings," discusses distinguished American painter Edward Hopper and his works between 1940 and 1970. Hopper is searching for the inward capacity of human beings to imagine, introspect, fantasize, and yearn for the future life beyond reality, which is the motion of the mind of the free individual. Or the search could be viewed as the search of the artist himself for the growing strength of his interiority and the vision of the world. Chapter Five, "Mike Nichols and the Exploration for Authenticity – *The Graduate*," discusses the modern American movie director Mike Nichols. *The Graduate*, which wins him the Oscar Best Director, depicts a young man Benjamin, being used as an object by Mrs. Robinson, and one day finds his true love and this gives his life meaning. The existential search of Ben is symbolized by the fish tank, the swimming pool, the scuba diving suit and Mrs. Robinson's bed. How Benjamin is escaping his parents' world and

seeking his own authenticity will be the focus of the analysis. Chapter VI is the conclusion of the entire dissertation.

The sense of moving on, conceived as human beings on the move, captures the core of Sartre's existential freedom that the human being is condemned to be free, with nothingness as its foundation and being-for-itself as its structure, the human being possesses infinite possibilities and opportunities to change, to create and to transcend his own being. This positive tone of Sartre's idea provides hope for the human being to think, to imagine, and to act, lifting himself up and sometimes even possibly standing up from the ruins of life.

CHAPTER II

JEAN-PAUL SARTRE AND HIS EXISTENTIAL FREEDOM

What is important in a vase is the emptiness of the inside.

Alfred Stern (67)

Sartre: his philosophy and existential psychoanalysis

Existentialism

One may say existentialism is “an intellectual mood or atmosphere, an outlook or ‘mind set’, or a method or approach...” (Charlesworth 1). Existentialism is hard to define; however, different descriptions of the term by influential existentialists or philosophers may help our understanding of Sartre’s concerns. According to Kaufmann, “Existentialism is not a philosophy but a label for several widely different revolts against traditional philosophy ... Certainly, existentialism is not a school of thought nor reducible to any set of tenets” (11). What Jean Wahl argued in his book *Philosophies of Existence* (1969) is that existentialism is an atmosphere, “a climate” (6). The human being is regarded as a whole man with subjectivity, human beings without faith in god, is the concern of existentialism addressed by these philosophers. Wild indicated in his book *The Challenge of Existentialism* (1955) that existentialism emphasizes individual’s “freedom and dignity.” In his famous *Irrational Man* (1961), Barrett argued “Existentialism, [...], has attempted instead to gather all the elements of human reality into a total picture of man” (19). Barrett is concerned about the “integral” man, opposing the Positivistic view

of a person as a merely rational being. What does Sartre say himself about existentialism? The title of his famous essay “Existentialism is Humanism” explains itself. Sartre claimed in the essay that existentialism is a doctrine that “makes human life possible” and “also affirms that every truth and every action imply an environment and a human subjectivity” (18). He believed that human life is made possible without God, the given authority in religious codes and traditional western philosophy, and the human being is the one who leads his own life. Existentialism is about human existence, the human condition. Sartre put the human being in a position ahead of any god or supernatural power and regarded him as the individual man, the one who makes his own decisions, makes his choices, takes his own responsibility, and projects his future being.

In this regard, Sartre philosophy is viewed as a positive philosophy. Marjorie Grene in her *Introduction to Existentialism* (1962) granted “the essential optimism of their doctrine that ‘man makes himself,’ for there is always, until death, another chance” (1). Simon de Beauvoir emphasized in an interview with Pierre Vicary that Sartrean Existentialism “is not a philosophy of despair and it aims at shattering quite a lot of myths and illusions” (Charlesworth 7). The philosophy was not easy for people to digest and it appeared as more pessimistic than otherwise (7). Professor Hazel E. Barnes in her memoir *The Story I Tell Myself* (1977) gave great emphasis to the “optimism aspects of Existentialism” (162). She said her first existentialism course (1950) was “both terrible and wonderful,” terrible because she was not quite familiar with existentialism yet, wonderful because both her students and she shared “the excited sense of discovering a new and satisfying way of looking at the difficulties, the possibilities, and the responsibilities of the human condition.” It was “an awakening” (144). Barnes took

Sartre's humankind creating his own value as "a message of liberation, not a counsel of despair ... an optimistic challenge to action" (145). To regard it as a positive challenge, she made several moves in new directions in her life. She stated that her major research orientation from Classicism to Existentialism was made possible by Sartre's theory, "we ourselves designate the particular causes and motives that prompt our actions" (145). In his discussion about character formation, Jonathan Webber argued that Sartrean existentialism was "an optimistic theory" though it was often described as "gloomy and pessimistic" and that was a misrepresentation. He said that the philosophy has taught us to accept the way we really are, to see one another as we really are, to let us embrace the value we each hold to avoid bad faith in order to pursue authenticity (xiii).

Sartre's Existential Freedom

Existence, Essence, and Nothingness

The notion that the human being is free can be understood in two senses. First, it can be understood from an atheistic point of view. The basic thesis of existentialism is "existence precedes essence." Existence is the concept meaning the "here" and "now" of being, and essence is another concept meaning the "what" of this being (Stern 50). The human being's existence is prior to his essence (Greene 2). In other words, his being in the "here" and "now" precedes his being "something" (Stern 50). The human being is first the "here" and "now" before being something. He will be what he will have made of himself and be responsible for what he is. According to Sartre, the human being is thrown into this world randomly, being contingent, absurd and anxious, and he exists. The atheistic Sartre assumes that the human being is not determined by any previously given essence, or human nature, since there is no God, no supernatural consciousness that could

preconceive it. Therefore, the human being is free in the sense of not being determined (Stern 51-53; Grene 47).

Second, it is understood from an ontological description. The concept of nothingness is central to Sartre's existential freedom. Nothingness is a "gap or separation" located between the human being and the world, or the human being's consciousness and the world of objects of which he is conscious. This is the external gap and it is outside the conscious being (Warnock 93-4). Nothingness is also an internal gap. Nothingness is emptiness inside a human being or the lack within him. It is internal to being-for-itself (*pour soi*) (the conscious being). The human being aims to "fill the gap or the emptiness" (94) by the actions, the thoughts, and the perceptions of him. With the emptiness in him, it is possible for the conscious being, being-for-itself (*pour soi*), to "perceive the world and also act in it" (94). As Stern said, the human being is compelled to perceive the world and to make himself into something (65). This nothingness is infinite, and in nature, the human being has the possibilities to "secrete a nothingness which isolates it--it is freedom" defined by Sartre in *Being and Nothingness* (24) (*L'Etre de le Neant* 1943). Nothingness in the sense is freedom, which has the nature of infiniteness and which is defined by "human potential" (Warnock 94). The human being is a being with unrealized potential, the desire to fill up the hole. Thus, the human being is free, free to fill the internal gap in his nature in whatever way he chooses. Nothingness, coinciding with human freedom, compels the human being to make himself into something. The human being is free in the sense of possessing this nothingness within himself.

Being-in-itself

We now know that the human being is free. Then Sartre's modes of being provide us with the ontological description on how the human being is free, how he is free to be what he wishes to be and why he is "condemned to be free." Different from Plato or Descartes' two different realms of being, Sartre presents two modes of being in one world to demonstrate the freedom embedded in each individual being. Sartre's most fundamental modes of being are being-in-itself (the world of object) and being-for-itself (human consciousness), the "two different ways for being to be" (Daigle 32).

Being-in-itself is its own foundation. It is founded upon itself and not upon any other thing. It is that which exists fundamentally in itself, in its own right, rather than being that which does not exist in itself and is dependent upon other things for its existence. It is self-sufficient, uncreated and unchanging. It has always been and will always be. There is no past or future for being-in-itself (Cox 13-14). Being-in-itself (*en soi*) is an object, an inanimate object, with the nature of a thing, which has a determined essence, like mountains, stones, or chairs, "all this is not human" and "unconscious being" (Busch 23) and it is "solid and massif" (Warnock 94). It is characterized as what it is, as being subjected to the principle of identity.

Why is it so? Sartre claimed that being-in-itself is full, a fullness of being without lack, the emptiness which makes changes possible, and it is "as full [...] as an egg" or "dure et pleine comme un oeuf" (RP 62; *Le Sursis* 52). Being-in-itself is so complete that the world of differences, categories, spaces and time, even an ideal or incipient difference never exist in it (Daigle 33; Macann 126).

Being-for-itself

Being-for-itself (*pour soi*) is not its own foundation. It does not exist fundamentally; it does not exist in its own right. Being-for-itself exists only as a denial or negation of being-in-itself, only as a relationship to being-in-itself. It borrows its being from being-in-itself and is entirely dependent on something other than itself (Cox 14).

Being-for-itself (*pour soi*), opposite to being-in-itself, is not an object with a determined nature, a fixed essence, or an identity. It is not like a mountain, rock, or table that is always what it is. It is the subject or human consciousness which is like a stream of fluid, flowing from one point to another, making turns at various occasions, locations, or situations; however, it never solidifies itself into a definite being. The human consciousness, or human existence for Sartre, is never what it is; he never coincides with himself and never coincides with the idea of what he has of himself. He is what he makes of himself.

Human existence is never as full as an egg. Human existence, or being-for-itself, is a “hole” by which “nothingness comes to things” (BN 22). The desire of human existence wishes to fill the hole, the internal gap, this “hollow,” is a being which is always future and is endless possibilities. The hole is the nothingness that is the source and foundation of consciousness and consciousness means being *conscious of*. This power of consciousness enables one to be conscious of “absence,” Pierre not in the café or the quarter of the full moon. Every question implies a yes or a no answer, and a person is able to “negate”, the power to say to oneself: “I am not such and such.” He continues to create himself in this constant “No,” which makes the openness, the expansion of human existence possible.

When Sartre said being-for-itself “is not what it is (being) and is what it is not (non-being)” (*BN* 81), he simply meant that human existence is not a “café waiter” in the same sense that a table is a table, or a mountain is a mountain. Rather than an object, a café waiter is a subject which I do not have to be, which I imagine, and from which I am separated as the subject is separated from the object. I am “separated by nothing [ness]”, said Sartre; however, “this nothing [ness] isolates me from it, so that I cannot be it. I can only play at being it” (Stern 57). As the human being is originally a mere existence, not having an essence, so that the human being is what he is not, he is what he will never be, for he is like the stream, winding its way toward possibilities, making himself in whatever way he chooses, projecting himself toward the future. He won’t cease to open and expand himself toward a possibility of being; he will never be able to fully achieve that possibility, for new possibilities always arise before he dies. Therefore, as long as he is alive, he is never subjected to the principle of identity. Thus being-for-itself is basically freedom, which also means that it is “transcendence;” for by its freedom being-for-itself is able to transcend or to surpass, to go beyond itself, and also to surpass or transcend being-in-itself (Stern 120).

The discussion of two modes of being, according to Sartre, demonstrates to us how human beings exist in this world. While being-in-itself is an object always being what it is, being-for-itself is a subject, as a totally free being, never being what he is, and being what he is not and he continues to open, expand and create him toward future possibilities. This freedom is absolute, and he is condemned to be free. Talking about one person’s relationship with others, however, Sartre has a third mode of being, being-for-others, which to some extent confines human freedom. That is worth our attention. Therefore, it

is necessary to see how being-for-others is specifically described.

Being-for-others

The third mode of being is being-for-others, referring to human relationships. While I see the other person who is a subject, being-for-itself, this subject appears to be an object, a mere being-in-itself who is congealed by my gaze, and who is no different from all the inanimate bodies I perceive around me. However, his gaze at me reveals himself to me as being-for-itself, a subject, a consciousness, a free agent, able to transcend itself and project to the future. And his gaze at me also makes him able to transcend me, to change me from a subject a moment ago, being-for-itself, into an object, being-in-itself, from a free project into a determined thing—as I can change him by my gaze. In Sartre's words, I am "objectified" by his gaze. When looking at the other person, I become the master, and when he is looking at me, the other person makes me slave, losing the power to project, indicating a conflict in our relationship, with two transcendences trying to get the dominant part.

Sartre's "gaze" does not mean precisely the gaze of the eyes of the other person, as physiological organs, which look at me: it means the other person as a subject, a human consciousness. We do not exist by ourselves, but we exist with others. We are living under the judgments and evaluations of others. This gaze of the other person includes all kinds of judgments and evaluations. When being gazed at, I become the object in the eyes of the other person, to whom I am reduced to the status of being judged and evaluated. He is able to describe me, to conceive me, and even to predict my thought and my act. He is making his assessment on me. I am deprived of any freedom to act, think or to perceive. I become a slave, for I depend in my being on the freedom of the other self, which is not

mine. I lose all my possibilities and become a “transcended transcendence” according to Hegel’s theory of knowledge (Stern 121). I am master when I make the other self depend on my freedom. Of course, I can gain back my freedom and transcendence by looking back at the other person, to reduce him from his subjectivity into a petrified object, losing the power to project toward possibilities. But then the other person can look again at me and again transcend and enslave my freedom and transcendence. Each being-for-itself of the two persons tries to transcend the other, trying to get dominance. Sartre realizes that this whole relationship between one human being and another is “a conflict.” The most fatal obstacle to my freedom is the freedom of another person and the look of the other is, Sartre says, “the death of my possibilities” (Warnock 117). That is why he says “Hell is Other People.”

Further explanation of how a gaze of one person “objectifies” the other person, how one person petrifies and changes this subject into an object, is presented here. Sartre’s theory states that being-for-itself or the subject *is* not, but always in the making, always becoming. When I am looking at the other person, when I am judging him, I do not judge him as far as he is becoming—because I cannot know his possibilities—but as far as he *is*, at the very moment of my judgment. Thus I am petrifying this moment of his evolution. In his analogy of seeing the projection of a motion picture, Stern described it as follows:

A person walking toward a certain goal, and, suddenly, I should stop unrolling the film, before the man has reached his goal. He would then be perpetuated, or petrified, in the momentary position of having, for instance, one foot raised to take the next step, which he would never make. He would no longer give the impression of a subject projected toward its possibilities, but would appear as an

inanimate object. (Stern 123)

The gaze of mine at him changes being-for-itself into being-in-itself, into a thing, with identity. It is congealed and petrified at the moment of the judgment. He pauses with no ability of any possible becoming, as if he were what he is and no longer in the making. However, this state of “objectification” is temporary, or “on reprieve”, and being-for-itself can never coincide with itself. It is always in the making since its future is its free project which is full of potentialities and possibilities that are unknown to us and that may refute our present judgment. Thus this judgment or evaluation on any living person is provisional, but vital, for it sets that limit to the freedom of the other self (Stern 123).

“Conflict is the original sense of being-for-others” (*BN* 431). To transcend or to be transcended is not any intentional attempt, and it is just the mere fact of existence. Being in relations with another person, I who exist set a factual limit to the other person’s freedom. I *am* the limit.

Freedom and Responsibility

Up to now, the notion of freedom is seen through Sartre’s atheistic point of view and ontological description as depicted in his magnum opus *Being and Nothingness*. We know that the human being is free and freedom is absolute. Now the atheistic and ontological freedom extends into an ethical, practical freedom which entails responsibility. Sartre’s famous phrase is “We are condemned to be free.” He explains this formula in this way: “Condemned, because he did not create himself, yet, in other respects is free; because, once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does” (*EH* 23). Freedom is absolute for Sartre and it is something we cannot possibly

escape. It is destined that the human being has to face it and to embrace it. His atheistic view on freedom proclaims that human existence comes prior to his essence, with nothing determined by god or any previously given essence. Human existence is not determined by other things, and he is only made by what he perceives, what he thinks and what he does, which means human existence is only determined by his actions in whichever way he chooses. His ontological view sets human beings free, with nothingness as its heart, and being-for-itself as its fundamental structure. I am necessarily and always free by virtue of the fact that I exist as a free consciousness. If a person is absolutely free, he is also entirely responsible; he is not determined by anything; there is no transcendent order determining him. He is his own determining agent. Sartre writes:

The situation is *mine* because it is the image of my free choice of myself, and everything which it presents to me is *mine* in that this represents me and symbolizes me. Is it not I who decide the coefficient of adversity in things and even their unpredictability by deciding myself?

Thus there are no *accidents* in a life; a community event which suddenly burst forth and involves me in it does not come from the outside. If I am mobilized in a war, this war is *my war*; it is in my image and I deserve it. I deserve it first because I could always get out of it by suicide or by desertion; these ultimate possibles are those which must always be present for us when there is a question of envisaging a situation. For lack of getting out of it, I have *chosen* it. (BN 708)

The passage clarifies Sartre's thought on freedom, the freedom of choice as fundamental and absolute. Since the freedom is mine, and the choice is mine, then I am to

be held responsible for the consequences that derive from this freedom and choice, for no one else imposes this on me (it is “I” who made it), since “Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself” (EH 15). Sartre makes it clear that no matter how much a person prefers, he cannot blame his situation or any other factor to find excuse for his way of being. An argument he makes in his lecture *Existentialism Is a Humanism* supports his point of view on freedom and responsibility. A coward is such that a person makes himself be and he himself should be responsible for his becoming a coward.

What the existentialist says is that the coward makes himself cowardly, that the hero makes himself heroic. There’s always a possibility for the coward not to be cowardly any more and for the hero to stop being heroic. What counts is total involvement; some one particular action or set of circumstances is not total involvement (EH 35).

From the perspective of Sartre’s atheist ontology, the human being is clearly aware that he is absolutely free. However, freedom does not necessarily make one willing to make oneself practically free because when one is free, he is not determined by anything else, he is depending wholly upon himself and what he will become is depending wholly upon his actions, upon choices he makes. He is the one to make his future and create his own value. This absolute freedom entails responsibilities for all his actions, and for the consequences derived from it. However, this responsibility is tremendous and weighty. One may find the responsibility too hard to bear. So the absolute freedom becomes the burden of freedom. Therefore one may flee one’s freedom and have recourse to bad faith to hide one’s freedom from oneself.

Anguish, Bad Faith and Authenticity

Ontological freedom is absolute. However, practical freedom is not. The anguish

that heavy responsibility generates is such that the human being may try to escape it by lying to himself, by what Walter Kaufmann calls “self-deception” (242), while Sartre calls it “bad faith” (*mauvaise foi*). Bad faith can be understood in two different ways. “First, ontologically, bad faith is said to be an unavoidable state for being-for-itself. Second, ethically, bad faith is presented as something being-for-itself ought to avoid while striving for authenticity” (Daigle 59-60).

Anguish

Being free, consciousness is anguished. The consciousness of freedom entails anguish. The individual realizes that he is responsible for all his choices and actions, that he is not determined in any way. This responsibility is indeed too heavy to bear. As Sartre puts it: “Anguish is precisely my consciousness of being my own future, in the mode of not-being” (*BN* 68). I am separated by the consciousness between being-for-itself as it “is” now and as it will be, between “me” (here and now) and my “self” (as an essence). As Sartre says, being-for-itself is what it is not, and is not what it is. It is always in the state of becoming and projecting. The possibilities are opened up and limitless, and these unlimited possibilities are only possible rather than actualized. They can only be actualized if I freely make them happen, and this making them happen is merely a possibility rather than a reality, which after all generates vast uncertainty, and anguish. Sartre writes of two types of anguish: anguish in the face of the future and anguish in the face of the past.

Anguish in the face of the future is experienced when being-for-itself realizes that nothing directs him to any course of action. It is all *up to man himself* to decide his thought and action, his future. He is himself facing the future. Now I am faced with the

possibility to jump off a precipice, “if nothing compels me to save my life, nothing prevents me from precipitating myself into the abyss” (*BN* 69). My thought and action will shape my self, and this self would have the capacity to bind me to a course of action; and I would like to be that self. However, I am not this self just yet; I am not bound to any course of action; I am totally free.

Anguish is also experienced in the face of the past. The gambler promised to give up gambling yesterday and now he is close to a gambling table that reminds him of his interest in gambling. He is tempted to gamble again. Inside himself there is a struggle of whether to gamble or not. What could he do when confronting the situation? The gambler appeals to his past resolution to not play in order to guide his action; however, he realizes that his past decision is not binding in any way. He realizes that he has to reiterate his decision not to play at this moment. He realizes a kind of anguish that he has to reiterate his decision of not gambling at every moment. He is realizing that he is absolutely free, free to choose to play or not to play. Neither his past nor future being ever comes to the rescue. When confronted with the decision of whether or not to gamble *now*, he must, in the present, decide (again) that he will not gamble. His present decision is absolutely free, and his future is absolutely undetermined, even by his present decision to gamble or not. He will, in the future, as in the now, have to decide again. This freedom is anguishing and inescapable. Sartre says: “It is certain that we can not overcome anguish, for we are anguish” (*BN* 82).

Bad Faith

It is natural that any individual would try to escape this anguish, to flee from the anxious state of mind. This is according to Sartre bad faith, the attempt by consciousness

to lie to oneself. Bad faith is a lie of specific type, a lie to oneself, quite different from a lie to other people. This lie to him is something true that he knows about the truth, a lie made up within himself. The lie to others is the lie projected outside of himself in which he intends to deceive others. An individual is of bad faith when he knows the truth and tries to hide it from himself. A person of bad faith is conscious of his bad faith. When he acts in his bad faith, a person is the deceiver and the deceived at the same time. He can run away from the truth in bad faith; however, he can never run away from the fact that he knows that he is running away; that is, he can never be ignorant of the fact that he is running away. We say that bad faith is an attempt to deny their freedom, to flee from anguish.

Sartre gives two different kinds of examples to illustrate the attitude of bad faith. The first one is about a young woman who is invited to go dinning with a man for the first time. The man has already in mind what he intends, and the woman for sure knows about it. However, the woman wishes to be not conscious of the intention, for she wishes to delay the moment that she has to make a decision. She wants to be admired as a free being, not as an object of some sexual desire. The man grabs her hand.

This act of her companion risks changing the situation by calling for an immediate decision. To leave the hand there is to consent in herself to flirt, to engage herself. To withdraw it is to break the troubled and unstable harmony which gives the hour its charm ... we know what happens next: the young woman leaves her hand there, but she *does not notice* that she is leaving it. She does not notice because it happens by chance that she is at this moment all intellect ... the hand rests inert between the warm hands of her

companion—neither consenting nor resisting—a thing. (BN 97)

The young woman enjoys the desire of the man, however, she “reserves the excitement” and delays the moment when she has to make a decision of saying “yes” or “no” to him (Warnock 102). She pretends to herself that she does not notice his intentions towards her. He grabs her hand, and the moment finally comes that the moment of decision would be upon her. She becomes all intellect, leaving her hand there, without noticing it. She has regarded her hand as the physical object, the *thing*, not as part of her expressive consciousness being, being-for-itself. She just rests her hand in his, “inert and thing-like,” “being-in-itself” (103). Had she removed it or deliberately left it where it was, she would have come to her decision in either case. However, she gives up that freedom to make a decision herself, putting aside the responsibility for her hand as well as what happened to it. She is in bad faith. She is denying her subjectivity.

The second example that Sartre provides to illustrate the attitude of bad faith is a fascinating one, the one of the waiter in the café. This is undoubtedly his most famous example.

Let us consider this waiter in the café. His movement is quick and forward, a little too precise, a little too rapid. He comes toward the patrons with a step a little too quick. He bends forward a little too eagerly; his voice, his eyes express an interest a little too solicitous for the order of the customer. Finally there he returns, trying to imitate in his walk the inflexible stiffness of some kind of automaton while carrying his tray with the recklessness of a tight-rope-walker by putting it in a perpetually unstable, perpetually broken equilibrium which he perpetually re-establishes by a light movement of the

arm and hand. All his behavior seems to us a game. (*BN* 59)

This waiter is moving and gesturing a little too much, with his behavior essentially ritualistic. All these movements and gestures are all like the movements in a game. He is playing a game of “being a waiter” and he is quite conscious of this play. “The waiter in the café plays with his condition in order to realize it” (*BN* 59). To realize it means to make his condition real, to perform wholly and completely the role of waiter, so that he finds no more room left for him to perform, no more choices left for him to choose. His acting out the part of the waiter is attempting to make real the Being-in-itself of the café waiter. He has to be absorbed in being a waiter entirely; being a waiter he has to perform in certain ways. Therefore, he can escape from taking the responsibility to choose to be a businessman, or an ambassador that entails anguish. To avoid the anguish that the responsibility of the free consciousness generates, he is pretending that it is not he who imposes this necessity upon him, but in Bad Faith one feels bound by necessity, one has no choices open to him. Here the social role can “imprison a man in what he is” (*BN* 102). He has imposed upon him the role of being a waiter by the general public. The general public wishes to think of him as a waiter, nothing but the character required by the job; they would not wish to regard him as a free conscious being, being-for-itself. He is in bad faith. He is denying his subjectivity (Warnock 103).

Authenticity

Authenticity is the chief moral virtue of existential ethics. It is revealed to us that the human being as a conscious being tends to flee from anguish, since it is heavy and unbearable. Why should we nevertheless pursue authenticity? It is Sartre’s fundamental value and the core in his ethical thought. It is “what we should strive for as human

beings” (Daigle 66). Sartre states his canonical definition of authenticity in his classical writing *Anti-Semite and Jew* (ASJ) as follows:

If it is agreed that man may be defined as a being having freedom within the limits of a situation, then it is easy to see that the exercise of this freedom may be considered as authentic or inauthentic according to the choices made in the situation. Authenticity, it is almost needless to say, consists in having a true and lucid consciousness of the situation, in assuming the responsibilities and risks that it involves, in accepting it in pride or humiliation, sometimes in horror and hate. (90)

In the words of W. McBride, authenticity aims at “devoting oneself to one’s freely chosen project with full reflectiveness” (63). Sartre points out that there are three dimensions of authenticity. One needs to be fully and clearly aware about the actions he takes and choices he makes in the situation. That is, he has to acknowledge his own being as free. And that freedom lies at the heart of his being as a being that makes itself. One needs to take the responsibilities and risks of his actions although this freedom entails weighty anguish and fearful uncertainty. This responsibility is tremendous because he has to make meaning for himself and for the world. As Marjorie Grene explains “... the fact that the values by which I live depend not on divine fiat or metaphysical necessity but on myself alone” (266). One also needs to accept any consequences that his authentic exercise of freedom generates. Sometimes his authenticity brings honor and self esteem, sometimes however degradation, and very possibly horror and hate. To be authentic, one “live[s] up to” one’s situation and one lives one’s condition “fully” (ASJ 90).

Human beings *are*, ontologically, freedom and they are the one creating meaning

and value and they must make meaning for themselves and for the world. They have to recognize this freedom, for it is the requirement of authenticity. The influential Sartre's scholar Thomas Anderson beautifully addresses this point:

No human can cause herself or her world to be necessary. No human can create a meaning and justification for the world that would make it exist by right rather than by chance. In a word, no human can be God [although, as we have seen, this is what the for-itself desires]. However, this should pose no insurmountable problem, for after all, human beings are the only source of meaning in Sartre's universe, and a thoroughly human meaning can be given to one's creation. The authentic person recognizes and wills to do precisely this. [...] the authentic person gives her life meaning (sens) and value by accepting and affirming herself as the free creator of a meaningful world. (Anderson, *Sartre's Two Ethics* 58)

CHAPTER III

WALKER PERCY AND THE ONGOING EXISTENTIAL SEARCH —*THE MOVIEGOER*

I think a serious writer has to be: an ex-suicide, a cipher, naught, zero—which is as it should be because being a naught is the very condition of making anything.

Walker Percy (83-84)
“Questions They Never Asked Me”

Walker Percy

An existentialist, a philosophical novelist

“Walker Percy, I understand, was ‘an existentialist,’” said his brother Phin Percy in an interview with David Horace Harwell. “He had a fierce regard for man’s fate” (Harwell 179). He has become one of the few philosophical novelists in America. He started his career as a medical student. Unfortunately, he contracted tuberculosis during his internship at Bellevue Hospital. Fortunately, he got his turning point in life due to the misfortune. As a patient rather than a doctor, he read books by novelists and philosophers which his scientific education had prevented him from discovering. These were the existentialists and their thoughts. He learned from Kierkegaard that man is essentially free and from Sartre that man is free to choose how to live, one takes on a tremendous responsibility for the consequences of his acts. His discovery in the New Mexico’s desert, the “locus of pure possibility...[where] what a man can be the next minute bears no relation to what he is or what he was a minute before,” (*LG* 356) struck him as the motif for further thought on human condition of existence. Historian Lewis Baker wrote that

Walker Percy “emerged from the desert committed to exploring the inner side of life through art” (179-80). Percy’s novels are philosophy first, then literature. His first novel *The Moviegoer* (1961) published by Knopf tells the story of Binx Bolling, an existential hero who must decide how to live his life. As Percy’s breakthrough in writing, the book received the National Book Award in 1962. *The Last Gentleman* (1966), his second novel nominated for the National Book Award, received critical praise for the credible sensibility of its hero, Will Barrett, who, like Binx, tries to find a way to live in the world. The third novel, *Love in the Ruins*, portrays a hero called Dr. Thomas More, a deliberated choice of name, met his readers in 1971. By 1975, Percy had published nearly two dozens articles, essays, and reviews on language, alienation, and faith, which later were collected into a book called *The Message in the Bottle*. The two novels following the *Message* are *Lancelot* (1977) and *The Second Coming* (1980). Percy’s second nonfiction work is *Lost in the Cosmos* (1983), which takes the philosophical, linguistic, and psychological ideas he advanced in the *Message* and puts them in a more popular form. His other novel *The Thanatos Syndrome* (1987) is a sequel to *Love in the Ruins*.

Percy defined himself as the sort of novelist he has in mind in *The Message in the Bottle*:

I locate him not on a scale of merit—he is not necessarily a good novelist—but in terms of goals. He is ... a writer who has an explicit and ultimate concern with the nature of man and the nature of reality where man finds himself. Instead of constructing a plot and creating a cast of characters from a world familiar to everybody, he is more apt to set forth with a stranger in a strange land where the signposts are enigmatic but which he sets out to explore nevertheless. One might

apply to the novelist such adjectives as “philosophical,” “metaphysical,” “prophetic,” “eschatological,” and even “religious.” I use the word “religious” in its root sense as signifying a radical *bond*, as the writer sees it, which connects man with reality... and so confers meaning to his life... such a class might include writers as diverse as Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Camus, Sartre, Faulkner, Flannery O’Connor. (102-103)

A moralist

Critic Lewis A. Lawson wrote that Percy is primarily a moralist, and stylist and writer of poetic prose secondarily (509). Gail Godwin, writing in the *New York Times Book Review*, agreed that Percy is “a strongly persuasive moralist,” noting that he has a talent of “being able to dramatize metaphysics,” probing into the big questions: Where did man come from? What does he know? How does he know? Where is man bound for after life? (Godwin 23). His parents’ death and his own suffering from the disease tuberculosis gave him a unique experience and distinguished him from other writers. Most critics say that Percy is no wiser than other writers when he is writing, but he is subject to “species of affliction which sets him apart and gives him an odd point of view. The wounded man has a better view of the battle than those still shooting” (*MB* 101). With the background of a physician and scientist, the novelist Percy, diagnosed the spiritual illnesses of Western man. In his existential novels, he examined and dramatized the illnesses of his hero, and prescribed him steps to a cure. Percy’s novels usually end in fellowship. He built a dialogue of husband and wife, son and father-figure, priest and confessor, or psychiatrist and patient, creating a bond between these people, which is so powerful a medicine against the malaise of alienation and despair in a rootless mass society.

Affinity with Jean-Paul Sartre and his work

Though Percy is influenced the most by Soren Kierkegaard, the nineteenth century Danish religious existentialist philosopher, according to the commentators and himself, however, he no doubt has a great deal of affinity with Jean-Paul Sartre, the twentieth century French existentialist philosopher. His answers in the Self-Interview *Questions They Never Asked Me* revealed to us that his thoughts and ideas go in line with Sartre's concepts in *Being and Nothingness*:

A: ... (and what in this day and age I think a serious writer has to be): an ex-suicide, a cipher, naught, zero-which is as it should be because being a naught is the very condition of making anything. This is a secret. People don't know this. Even distinguished critics are under the misapprehension that you are something, a substance, that you represent this or that tradition, a skill, a growing store of wisdom. Whereas in fact what you are doing is stripping yourself naked and putting yourself in the eye of the hurricane and leaving the rest to chance, luck or providence. (Percy, "Questions They Never Asked Me" 82-83)

Percy states that zero, or naught is a precondition for a writer to make anything, to create anything new. Being zero or naught gives the writer the possibilities of being free, free to think and free to act. This sense of freedom derives from Sartre's central term to his existential freedom--nothingness. Nothingness is the emptiness inside the human being. With the possession of the emptiness in him, the conscious being is made possible to perceive the world and act in it. Nothingness brings freedom. Percy understands the meaning of nothingness, and the possibilities freedom could offer to writers.

Percy once wrote an essay called "Symbol as Hermeneutic in Existentialism,"

in which he praised Sartre's insight into the human condition. Percy credited Sartre with accurately describing the "predicament" of being human: the feeling of inner emptiness; of nothingness; the inability to know what one is, to discover an identity or name that fits; and the consequent desire to seek out ways of living in "bad faith"—assuming a false identity, an impersonation, to fill in the void. Moreover, both would agree that to live authentically means to recognize the uniqueness of one's situation, refuse to live in bad faith, and take responsibility for one's choices and actions (Scullin110).

Percy spoke highly on Sartre's thought on human condition, especially the "predicament" of being human: the human individual being thrown into the world with nothing as a guide; the burden of freedom constantly takes him away from being an authentic man, but being in "bad faith," which is self-deceiving, recognizing himself as a defined man. However, both Percy and Sartre applauded the uniqueness of any individual who takes responsibility when making authentic choices and taking actions.

Once Percy told interviewers that "What I admire most ... is the modern French novel. I like its absolute seriousness in its investigation of human reality. A novel like Sartre's *Nausea* (*La Nausee*), for instance, is a revolution in its technique for rendering a concrete situation, and it has certainly influenced me" (Brown15) and "I think the European novelist is much more metaphysically oriented than the American novelist; ...he has much more interest in the nature of reality, [and] what reality is like. I always was closer to Frenchmen like Sartre or Camus or Marcel" (Cremeens 31).

As he tried to remember, Percy believed that his interest in existentialism started from Sartre, through reading his *Nausea* (Carr 60). Percy said in an interview with Bunting: "I was influenced by Sartre in his first novel, *Nausea*, which is to me very good

and very well done. It influenced me because the idea of having a certain belief and then trying to communicate it through a novel, through a concrete situation -- a man set down in a certain situation--was very exciting” (Bunting 44). “It was precisely this interest in philosophy which led directly to the writing of a novel, “*The Moviegoer*,” Percy told Serebnick. Like French thinkers and novelists, “I use the fiction form as a vehicle for incarnating ideas, as did Jean Paul Sartre and Gabriel Marcel. I long ago decided that my philosophy is in the vein of the existentialist, as theirs were” (Keith 9).

These indicate that Percy has read Sartre’s works and greatly absorbed his essential thought.

Walker Percy’s novel writing on *The Moviegoer*

As a novelist, Percy is distinctive from other writers since he used to be a physician, a scientist. This provides him with double vision to view the world, and for his heroes to search in their lives. Hobson wrote that Percy “uses art to reveal truths about the human predicament” (12). According to Percy, science is unable to say anything meaningful about the individual but only about how the individual is *like* other men. Existentialism really concerns the human being as an individual. Percy believed that existentialism “[...] means a concrete view of man, man in a situation, man in a predicament, man’s anxiety ... I believe this view of man could be handled very well in a novel, and I was interested in phenomenology, which is very strongly existentialist: the idea of describing accurately how a man feels in a given situation” (Carr 61).

Percy took the term “everydayness” from philosopher Gabriel Marcel, a feeling of malaise of modern man, an alienation that people are so caught up to realize. Kierkegaard regarded this unawareness of everydayness, or alienation as “despair” (Hobson 13-14).

Percy set hurdles for the hero in his process of searching to find possibilities for his true self. To avoid everydayness or to transcend the alienation, Percy let his hero in *The Moviegoer* try methods of rotation, repetition, and zone-crossing, or vertical or horizontal search. Percy said if the hero should wake up enough to become dissatisfied with his life, willing to get out his everydayness, he would try one of these ways. This and other ways Percy's novel hero tries are all manner of easy and false escape from everydayness. They do not work for long and the old despair returns. Only when he is aware of his freedom as a human being, can he escape from despair.

The existentialist Percy tries to present to the readers a new view of human existence. He is the one who has the power to make independent choices about how he should live and think, and he is the one who is on the search, a lifelong search. Sartre says the human individual is free to make a choice and that choice bears responsibility. When he is making the choice, he is creating his value. If he is making a choice by taking the freedom given to him, he is following a path to an authentic self. If not, he is in "bad faith." Human beings are "condemned to be free," free in making choices, in making decisions and creating values. The human being has no defined nature as being-for-itself is not what it is and is what it is not, and the human being is always in the process of projecting a new identity as he is making new choices and creating new values. Percy's hero is not following advertisers or experts, and he is not willing to be defined by set values and judgment, and he is making his own choices, and projecting a new self, searching for a new self, the authentic self. This new view of the human individual by Percy is in Sartre's eye the authentic self, searching for a true life that bears meaning.

***The Moviegoer* and Binx's Ongoing Existential Search**

Nausea—hint for an existential search

Binx Bolling in Percy's *The Moviegoer* is depicted as an existential hero and has an awakening one morning about the existence of the things in the world and the inspiration of a search for himself. Binx says:

This morning, for the first time in years, there occurred to me the possibility of a search. I dreamed of the war, no, not quite dreamed but woke with the taste of it in my mouth, the queasy-quince taste of 1951 and the Orient... My shoulder didn't hurt but it was pressed hard against the ground as if somebody sat on me. Six inches from my nose a dung beetle was scratching around under the leaves. As I watched, there awoke in me an immense curiosity. I was onto something. I vowed that if I ever got out of this fix, I would pursue the search. (*MG* 15)

Binx suddenly realizes the existence of the things in the world and his own existence when dreaming of that war, the battlefield, his hurting shoulder, and the dung beetle scratching. He feels very clearly the uncomfortable and nauseating taste in his mouth. This bare existence of things reveals them as contingent, absurd, and reminds him of human beings' form of existence. He feels rather different this morning, different from what he feels on other mornings or days—the strong sense of curiosity. He is onto something, something metaphysical. He would get into a search.

What Binx feels has affinity with Antoine Roquentin's experience in Sartre's novel *Nausea*. Sartre writes that the existence of the world is contingent, and meaningless. Human beings are thrown into this world and exist as contingent and meaningless.

Antoine in Sartre's *Nausea* becomes aware of the existence of the world and human beings. His encounter with existence one day in a park tells the most of his realization. He sits on a bench under which the roots of a chestnut tree are sunk into the ground. Antoine has a vision that leaves him breathless. He says:

Existence had suddenly unveiled itself. It had lost the harmless look of an abstract category: [...] the roots, the park gates, the bench, the sparse grass, all that had vanished: the diversity of things, their individuality, were only an appearance, a veneer. This veneer had melted, leaving soft, monstrous masses, all in disorder – naked, in frightful, obscene nakedness. (N 127)

He becomes aware that things in the world have their pure existence. His existence goes further as he explains, "I was the root of the chestnut tree" (N 131). He realizes that human beings also exist in the bare form of existence. And they all exist as contingent, unnecessary, meaningless, and gratuitous, *de trope*. Nausea is the state Antoine is in when he sees the meaningless self in this meaningless world, and that is nothingness, and he is surprised to find this self is totally free, which is scary and a nauseating experience for an individual.

Binx is aware of the existence of the meaningless world and the meaningless self, and this meaninglessness is nothingness, which is freedom. Binx finds this contingent state of being. He starts to think about the questions: Who is he? Where does he come from? Why is he here? He finds he can not take life for granted and he has to search—to think.

Sartre claims that being-in-itself (*en-soi*), one mode of being, is like an object, inanimate and defined with a certain identity; however, being-for-itself (*pour-soi*), the

other mode of being, is intentional consciousness, which flows and is never defined, always in the state of becoming.

Another layer of Nausea is felt when this free conscious being defined by Sartre as being-for-itself confronts being-in-itself, where the pure being sucks everything into itself and causes being-for-itself to experience the feeling of nausea. This morning Binx confronts nausea. Binx in *The Moviegoer* has enjoyed each day all happy and comfortable times in Gentilly. He has been leading a life as all other people do. His life in Gentilly is very peaceful as Binx describes. He manages a small business, lives in an apartment where he is “a model tenant and a model citizen and take[s] pleasure of doing all that is expected of [him]” (MG 12). His “wallet is full of identity cards, library cards, credit cards.” He puts all his certificates of importance in an olive-drab strongbox, such as “birth certificate, college diploma, honorable discharge, G.I. insurance, a few stock certificates, and my heritage” (MG 12). He is taking great pleasure “to carry out the duties of a citizen and to receive in return a receipt or a neat styrene card with one’s name on it certifying, so to speak, one’s right to exist” (MG 12). Binx sinks into a type of set life, doing what everyone is supposed to do and enjoying it. Binx, leading a life of model citizen, gaining all these certificates to justify his “right to exist,” is living in a defined way of life, defined by social judgment and standards, which is in Sartre’s words a life of non-human being, an object way of life, congealed by other people. The intentional consciousness of Binx, being-for-itself, is given the identity by the non-human consciousness, being-in-itself. Then he is a person of no possibilities.

He feels everything gets upside down for him at the moment of the war dream that morning. “What are generally considered to be the best times are for me the worst time,

and that worst of times was one of the best” (*MG* 15). Binx believes that his past happy and comfortable times in Gentilly makes him static and definable, which is worse; and his worst time at the battle field makes him think about the world and himself again, which is the best. Binx’s consciousness is awakened after so many years of dormancy, living a life of a set pattern and ideas, which he believes is a sort of inanimate situation that encroaches on his ability to define himself and on intellectual and spiritual freedom. The ever non-changing life is a state of being-in-itself that sucks everything into itself, into the static state of being, like stone or rock. This makes Binx experience the nauseated feeling when his free conscious being, being-for-itself, feels being eroded by being-in-itself. The nauseated feeling can be understood as “everydayness,” (*MG* 17) a term for malaise besetting modern man (Hobson 13). Binx gains a new consciousness and decides to start a new life to transcend the malaise, the “everydayness” by a search, a metaphysical search when he recollects himself so that he can recover things anew and afresh.

Antoine in Sartre’s *Nausea* feels the same way. He writes a book about an 18th century aristocrat Rollebon as his research. However, while he is writing, he realizes that what he does is to find the meaning for his own existence. As Nietzsche thought, “human beings have a need for explanations and that they constantly seek to give meaning to their lives” while actually no meaning can be found (Gaigle 38). Antoine realizes that his intention of writing this historical figure is to justify meaning for his own existence. Looking for meaning for human existence itself is looking for essence that human reason has put on it. The experience of Rollebon has become something in the past, which means that it is already established and has nature and in ontological terms it is

being-in-itself, the non-human world, definable and complete. Sartre and Heidegger both believe that human beings' lives are led by the future rather than by the past. Antoine decides to give up the writing of *Rollebon*, and so rejecting *Rollebon* is rejecting living in the past, living in the defined and complete state. The feeling of nausea is the confrontation between being-for-itself and being-in-itself, the conflicts of the two. Being-in-itself is to congeal the conscious being, being-for-itself, but being-for-itself refuses to be congealed and defined into an object or a thing. Antoine decides to move to Paris to write a novel that has the character of creation to respite *Nausea*.

Binx feels the conflicts of being-in-itself and being-for-itself, that is the conflict of fullness and emptiness. The fullness erodes the emptiness, the free consciousness by objectifying him into a rock, which makes him feel uncomfortable. He will find possibilities to fight against the uncomfortable feeling, the malaise by a search.

He finds in so many years the possibilities of a search. There awakes in him an immense curiosity. He tells about the nature of the search: "The search is what anyone would undertake if he were not sunk in the everydayness of his own life ... To become aware of the possibility of the search is to be onto something. Not to be onto something is to be in despair" (*MG* 17-18). Binx means that if someone is aware of the existence of the world and himself, if he does not want to follow what all others believe what he ought to do, he is a person with hope. He is able to project toward a future being possible. If someone is not feeling dissatisfied about things in his life and not prepared to do something for a change, he is a despairing person. This is what Søren Kierkegaard says in his *The Sickness Unto Death* (the epigraph to *The Moviegoer*): "...the specific character of despair is precisely this: it is unaware of being in despair." Kierkegaard believes that

someone who is not aware of despair is in real despair. He has no hope. Binx is aware of despair. He is feeling dissatisfied already with all the good things, and realizes that such a life no longer brings him pleasure, and he has hope. He is able to find possibilities of a search.

This morning he finds his peaceful existence in Gentilly has been complicated as well as finding the possibility of a search. He describes that he feels different from usual when getting belongings into his pockets:

wallet, notebook, pencil, keys, handkerchief, pocket slide rule. They looked both unfamiliar and at the same time full of clues, sighting through a hole made by thumb and forefinger. What was unfamiliar about them was that I could see them. They might have belonged to someone else. A man can look at this little pile on his bureau for thirty years and never once see it. It is as invisible as his own hand. Once I saw it, however, the search became possible. I bathed, shaved, dressed carefully, and sat at my desk and poked through the little pile in search of a clue just as the detective on television pokes through the dead man's possessions, using his pencil as a poker. (*MG* 16)

It is incredible that this morning Binx has this feeling. He is surprised to find that the piles of things on his desk look so unfamiliar. They might have belonged to others. They have been here for thirty years, but it seems that he never once sees them. The interesting thing is that what is unfamiliar about them is that he can see them. Once he sees them, the search becomes possible. He sits down at the desk staring at the piles in search of a clue, to look for what is behind this unfamiliarity. He is going to search for something that he has never been able to see for the past thirty years about the world and about himself. Binx has

been in an inert state of being, the character of being-in-itself, which has the definable essence and completeness yet is not conscious of himself. This inert being is becoming conscious of the consciousness, being-for-itself, which is based on nothingness, the infinite possibility of freedom. The consciousness is awakened now and is uncomfortable about the inanimate situation that objectified his free consciousness, the ability to act and think. Binx would like to transcend the situation by way of a search.

A metaphysical search – a new way of looking at the world

It is significant for Binx to have this awakening and recovery. Binx has the awakening so that he starts his search, the metaphysical search that is initiated by a new way of looking at the world around him. Binx has a desire to preserve a sense of wonder, the spirit of exploration on the way things are and the way human beings are. He strives to find some kind of “lodgement and anchorage” in the world without giving in to the false standards and dead values and empty gestures of the world inhabitants (Tanner 9). Binx has been struggling each day with the pain of malaise, or the boredom of everydayness. He is led by a series of events and stories before settling down with his lover Kate.

Scientific research and scientific reading

Whenever Binx’s future career comes up in conversation, both of his families have the same answer for him. Everyone would say: Binx has the talent like his father, and that both of them would have been happier doing research. They have understood Binx is onto something they don’t understand, and it makes him a seeker. The only way they can see as a useful way to employ such a searching nature is to engage him in scientific research.

Yes, Binx himself has followed what the family members suggest, a scientific

research as a way to understand the world and human beings. His experience with it is the reason he rejects the assumption everyone makes, and points out that if he had “a flair for research,” he would, in fact, be doing research. He recalls the summer that he and his friend had proposed a research topic to a professor who enthusiastically gave them a lab for the summer to work out a solution. While his friend worked steadily on the problem, Binx suddenly found himself “bewitched by the presence of the building.”

But then a peculiar thing happened. I became extraordinarily affected by the summer afternoons in the laboratory. The August sunlight came streaming in the great dusty fanlights and lay in yellow bars across the room. The old building ticked and creaked in the heat. Outside we could hear the cries of summer students playing touch football. In the course of an afternoon the yellow sunlight moved across old group pictures of the biology faculty ... for minutes at a stretch I sat on the floor and watched the motes rise and fall in the sunlight. (*MG* 51)

Binx is seized by a sense of mystery of the building, unable to put his mind to the research at hand. He is more attracted by the presence of the building, by the mystery that surrounds him. He tries to call his friend’s attention to “the presence but he shrugged and went on with his work. He was absolutely unaffected by the singularities of time and place. His abode was anywhere.” Binx explains that he does not wish to be like his friend who “is no more aware of the mystery which surrounds him than a fish is aware of the water it swims in” (52). Binx is unable to become a scientist who only cares about what is under the microscope, the defined formula, and ignores the present concrete reality, the concrete situation that human beings are in. He wishes to reserve a sense of wonder,

which may keep him alert and awake as a conscious being, being able to think, act, and perceive.

When “regular” research does not work for Binx, he nevertheless does not end his experiment with science as a way to understand the world. His next step is to try to understand the world by delving into it through “fundamental” reading. Binx spends his time learning about the universe by reading only “key books on key subjects such as *War and Peace*, the novel of novels; *A Study of History*, the solution of the problem of time...” (MG 68). But this does not satisfy him either, because when he finishes reading those books all other problems have been explained but he himself was left over remaining mysteriously troubled.

During these years I stood outside the universe and sought to understand it.

I lived in my room as an Anyone Anywhere and read fundamental books and only for diversion took walks around the neighborhood and saw an occasional movie... The greatest success of this enterprise, which I call my vertical search, came one night when I sat in a hotel room in Birmingham and read a book called *The Chemistry of Life*. When I finished it, it seemed to me that the main goals of my search were reached or were in principle reachable ...

A memorable night. The only difficulty was that though the universe had been disposed of, I myself was left over. There I lay in my hotel room with my search over yet still obliged to draw one breath and then the next. (68)

To Binx, this scientific reading of books like *The Expanding Universe* and *The Chemistry of Life* has explained so well the problems of the universe, the existence of the object world, the objects like mountains, rocks, plants, and even human body based on

definitions, formulae, periodical tables, and lab tests. These are phenomena explicable in the universe with nature which are relatively stable, and unchanged. Binx discovers that human beings inexplicably remain in the world. Different from the object world, human beings are the subject world, the world of being-for-itself who has no fixed essence, or identity, and who has consciousness, with the possession of nothingness in it. It is a mystery. It can not be described scientifically with data or formulae. Binx is unable to find the answer from scientific reading as a way to understand the world. He wishes to keep his consciousness alert and active, not to be in the inert state of object, and he wishes to grasp the freedom being-for-itself grants. Nowhere in scientific reading is the sense of wonder of Binx found. His pain of loss or boredom of everydayness remains. This type of search does not suffice either.

Wanderers and moviegoers

When the vertical search does not work for Binx, he abandons it for what he calls the horizontal search. He wishes that this search may help him find ways to comprehend the world around him.

Binx is attracted to movies because he thinks that they are “onto something.” They are presenting certain realities of the people and the world and they involve the audience in those performed realities. Binx wishes that these performed realities can make a coherence of people’s lives and after watching them, he makes connections with these realities and makes a coherence of his own life. Movies have a peculiar power to make reality realer than it is. Even causal contact with movies can help to realize the world: seeing a famous actor walking down the street, and reality closes around him and makes the world coherent for everyone on the street. As Binx makes his way toward Emily’s

house to have the big talk he unexpectedly describes seeing William Holden on the street. Holden turns down a street “shedding light as he goes. An aura of heightened reality moves with him and all who fall within it feel it ... I am attracted to movie stars but not for the usual reasons ... it is their peculiar reality which astounds me” (MG 21). When Holden disappears, the fabric of the world wears thin again, and the coherence it makes on life becomes vague. Binx loses the dazzling reality that the actor seems able to carry with him wherever he goes. This is the kind of reality Binx longs to have for himself and the reason he is a moviegoer. This moviegoing helps him stay away from malaise for just a very short time. In choosing movie moments as the content of his past life, Binx is choosing a performed reality that he believes realer than real, but which is not the concrete reality out of the possibility opened to him.

Binx does not go to movies without a purpose. He makes them a part of his life in a way that he hopes will save the fabric of his world by staving off the everydayness and giving him a splendid reality that becomes his own. He is to replace all memories of his own past with moments out of the movies he has seen.

The fact is I am quite happy in a movie, even a bad movie. Other people, so I have read, treasure memorable moments in their lives: the time one climbed the Parthenon at sunrise, the summer night one met a lonely girl in Central Park and achieved with her a sweet and natural relationship, as they say in books. I too once met a girl in Central Park, but it is not much to remember. What I remember is the time John Wayne killed three men with a carbine as he was falling to dusty street in *Stagecoach*, and the time the kitten found Orson Welles in the doorway in *The Third Man*. (MG 7)

It is seen that other people can remember their past and use their memories as treasures carefully collected up, available for retelling at any time to make their lives meaningful and coherent. However, Binx is not so lucky to have this good memory to remember his important moments of the past when they count. He seems unable to remember what he needs to remember at key moments in his life, which makes impossible his coherent past. Therefore, he chooses memories that are already structured to be realer than real; now he does not have to remember his own moments and he already knows that they are poor, plain things with nothing particular to recommend them for saving up as treasures. It is not one of his talents to fix those past moments and make them correspond to literary expectations. He will just borrow moments from those movie stars like Bill Holden, John Wayne, or Orson Welles and let them structure a much more acceptable past for him than he can for himself. In choosing movie moments as the content of his past life, he is choosing an external “reality” that seems to have more coherence than his own past, but that has no real connections to him.

The best moments are those when Binx watches a movie and gets a feeling of certification, certifying the existence of him. Whenever something is shown in a movie as a reality that coincides with what Binx experiences, he finds a coherence of his own past life, getting himself a secure sense of familiar environment and ensuring his assumption that the movies and his world share the same structure. He is living a real life as someone somewhere, not Anyone Anywhere. Binx is watching the movie *Panic in the Street* which was filmed in New Orleans. There is a scene which shows the very neighborhood of the theater. Kate gives Binx an understanding look of his moviegoing which he has called certification.

Nowadays when a person lives somewhere, in a neighborhood, the place is not certified for him. More than likely he will live there sadly and the emptiness which is inside him will expand until it evacuates the entire neighborhood. But if he sees a movie which shows his very neighborhood, it becomes possible for him to live, for a time at least, as a person who is Somewhere and not Anywhere. (61)

Binx understands that if someone lives in a strange neighborhood with no one to know of, he must feel that he is lost in this town, in this world with nothing to identify with. He is anyone anywhere. Binx finds that if his own neighborhood is pictured in a movie, however, then the neighborhood must be really there and the pictured reality of movies can save the world temporarily by serving as a kind of identity card that “certifies” its existence. Just as the picture of Binx on his library card proves his identity. The performed reality in the movie duplicates the neighborhood that Binx lives in. He is living as a person who is Somewhere and not Anywhere. He will not be lost that much.

As a moviegoer, Binx likes to talk with people who are related to theater as a way of keeping himself not lost. He talks to the manager Mr Kinsella and to the ticket seller Mrs de Marco. For his own selfish reasons, Binx thinks:

No, I do it for my own selfish reasons. If I did not talk to the theater owner or the ticket seller, I should be lost, cut loose metaphysically speaking. I should be seeing one copy of a film which might be shown anywhere and at any time. There is a danger of slipping clean out of space and time. It is possible to become a ghost and not know whether one is in downtown Loews in Denver or suburban Bijou in Jackwonville. So it was with me. (72)

Binx is suspicious of his mother's advice of being unselfish. His talks with Mr Kinsella and Mrs de Marco who remind him constantly of at which theater he watches a movie and what it is about, which itself certifies a life of Binx in this town. He discovers a sense of place through watching movies and talking with movie people. He finds it secure, comfortable and gets a feeling of belonging. This certification of one's own existence as somebody at somewhere by movie moments and stars does not work very well to satisfy Binx as a conscious being for a conscious being is not justified by things, but by his action.

Binx is serious about his moviegoing because he knows that movies have the magic power to certify the world. He chooses movies as the basis of his new experiment, using their duplicating power to investigate the nature of time. He actually wishes to investigate the "taste" of time. Fourteen years ago, he went to see the western *The Oxbow Incident* in a movie-house on Freret Street. This Thursday night, he goes to see another western in the movie-house where he had seen *Oxbow* at exactly the same time of year. "Nothing had changed. There we sat, I in the same seat I think, and afterwards came out into the smell of privet. Camphor berries popped underfoot on the same section of broken pavement ..." (76). The experience of repetition is like another repetition Binx experiences. He reads an advertisement of Nivea Creme in the magazine in the library, and then he remembers he found the same advertisement of Nivea Crème 20 years ago in a magazine on his father's desk, the same woman, the same grainy face, the same Nivea Crème. All the events during these 20 years seemed to have not happened.

Binx wishes to regain the flavor of the past fourteen years by repeating an earlier movie experience. Though he calls it a "successful repetition" (77). All he finds are

“about the old seats, their plywood split, their bottoms slashed.” “...Nivea Crème was exactly as it was before” (77). The experience has not brought him new insight about the time elapsed. He becomes disappointed in that he finds that these fourteen years seem not to have happened, which is that he has not much to savor by looking back at it.

That Binx is not able to find the taste of his past fourteen years of life as he wishes in order to find his way of being in this world is because, to some extent, he has some misunderstanding about time. According to Sartre’s philosophy of freedom, this search fails Binx because he is looking back at something in the past for enlightenment rather than stepping into the future for inspiration. Sartre says “existence precedes essence” that existence is “here and now” meaning present, and essence is “what one makes of himself”, meaning future. The human being keeps making himself into the future, keeps projecting through actions into a future becoming. The essence at this moment becomes a moment in the past while new essence is being made. The essence is the nature of things that ontologically speaking have the feature of fullness and unchanging state, being-in-itself. When Binx looks back at the past experience for inspiration, he will not be able to because his active and alert conscious state, being-for-itself, is being congealed and fixed by established identity of things. If being-for-itself wishes to keep himself fresh and anew, he has to look into the future, as Sartre says, that leads his action. So looking back at the past experience will not work for Binx in his seeking a new way of being in the world.

Aunt Emily’s story telling

Binx remains peculiarly open to other people’s stories. Although he remains apprehensive about them, he has discovered the charm and seduction of properly told

stories. He wishes to find from their stories of past experience the coherence of a life, thus he can make his past life meaningful to his present state, to make his world an orderly world. This cooperation in other people's stories is a dangerous game however. When Binx becomes a character in other people's stories, he runs the risks of disappearing altogether when that story no longer holds.

Aunt Emily is a stoic preacher: "A man must live by his lights and do what little he can and do it as best he can. In this world goodness is destined to be defeated. But a man must go down fighting. That is the victory. To do anything less is to be less than a man" (53). Binx doesn't know how he accepts what his aunt preaches even it sounds so right. Her goodness does not provide enough ground for his search. What he needs is more than Stoicism can offer. Yet, he has not found any place to stick himself in the world. He finds his search absurd. He does not dislike his aunt and he is not disappointed at visiting her.

Aunt Emily is the most powerful storyteller Binx knows, one whose stories surely will not dissolve before his eyes. And Binx is not disappointed. She is able to make everything she says come true before his very eyes, erasing all other narratives with a word and giving him a ready-made identity. Aunt Emily playfully calls him:

an ingrate, a limb of Satan, that last and sorriest scion of a noble stock.

What makes it funny is that this is true. In a split second I have forgotten everything, the years in Gentilly, even my search. As always, we take up where we left off. This is where I belong after all. (28)

Powerful influence as it is, Binx immediately forgets even his alienated life he experiences in Gentilly, he forgets the times he has woken up rigid as a stick with rage and despair in the Garden District, and he forgets the search. He is at the brink of losing

the ability to be aware of the reality. He belongs to this family anyway.

Emily has been playing roles in this family and played well. Emily has played all the proper roles with the proper emphasis. Her grey eyes are powerful. Emily enforces the roles played around her. She has requested Binx to talk to her about the problem of Kate and has shown him a row of bottles found in Kate's room. She with expectation waits for Binx to come up with the right answer. But Binx "finds that his new found clarity of vision has left him" (Reimers 235). "With her watching me, it is difficult to see anything," he remarks. "There is a haze. Between us there is surely a carton of dusty bottles---*bottles?*---yes surely bottles, yet blink as I will I can't be sure" (MG 30). When he falls back into Emily's version of reality, taking up where they had left off, he surrenders "willy-nilly" to her world and can no longer *see for himself*.

Sartre says "Hell is--Other People" (NE 47). He means that hell is a place that people are deprived of freedom in thought and action while other people are also a place where people are deprived of freedom in thought and action. Other people are hell. The moment when the other gazes at you, your conscious being becomes inert, stays inactive, and has no ability to perceive. Your freedom as a conscious being is confined by the freedom of the other. This is what Sartre says being-for-itself is turned by another being-for-itself into being-in-itself, an object with no ability to judge.

Emily is clear that to make a life real, to be someone, one has to take control of the stories oneself. She has the capacity to create her coherence in a world that doesn't make full sense by itself. She creates main characters and gives them their roles until her world has all the coherence in a history book. Here as Binx is studying the photos of his father and uncles, Emily approaches him and offers her version of what it means.

“We’ll not see their like again. The age of the Catos is gone. Only my Jules is left. And Sam Yerger. Won’t it be good to see Sam again?”

This is absurd of course. Uncle Jules is no Cato. And as for Sam Yerger: Sam is only a Cato on long Sunday afternoons in the company of my aunt. She transfigures everyone. Mercer she still sees as the old retainer. Uncle Jules she sees as the Creole Cato, the last of the heroes---whereas the truth is that Uncle Jules is as canny as a Marseilles merchant and a very good fellow, but no Cato ... So strong is she that sometimes the person and the past are in fact transfigured by her. They become what she sees them to be. (*MG* 49)

Emily is strong to transfigure others and make them play the roles she has decided for them. Here she is going to transfigure Binx, making him play the role she has decided for him. Kate has become resistant to her nature of reality. Now she has to get Binx as his target to shore it up. But she is smart enough to see that Binx is also not completely trustworthy. She is clever to choose her weapons with care and handle them strategically. These strategies worked well for her to soften Binx in the past. Emily sits at the piano and plays the tune creating a friendly atmosphere.

We talk, my aunt and I, in our old way of talking, during pauses in the music. She is playing Chopin. She does not play very well ... But she is playing one of our favorite pieces, the E flat Etude. In recent years I have become suspicious of music. When she comes to a phrase which once united us in a special bond and to which I once opened myself as meltingly as a young girl, I harden myself. (47)

This time Emily’s trap has not successfully caught Binx and she has miscalculated.

Binx is not taken in. It turns out that this seeker's observations of the world have not entirely forgotten and her careful and sweet arm of "we" has been resisted. He is unwilling to be passively and girlishly again melted into "our favorite pieces" and "our old way of talking." Binx's sense of wonder provides him with the awareness of the fact that determines the reality. He is aware that Aunt Emily is trying to mold him into a man of what she wishes him to be. Vaguely Nausea is emerging within him. Binx is not cooperating. He feels her words, music, and intention erode his free will, and his intellectual ability. His conscious being is in a danger of being petrified.

Aunt Emily misses this point momentarily that Binx is not cooperating. She unveils to Binx her plan for saving Kate and bringing Binx himself back into her sphere of influence: Binx will move back into her house, enroll in medical school, be around to save Kate whenever she becomes too abstracted from her life, and take the responsibility. Of course, she waits for Binx' response, but fails to get one. She starts her duty role of being a mother instructing him the doctrine of a noble man. However, her doing so with sweetness and soft tone fills Binx with discomfort and an obvious disguise of her determination to form Binx into the one who follows her version of life.

"What is it you want out of your life, son" she asks with a sweetness that makes me uneasy.

"I don't know'm. But I'll move in whenever you want me."

"Don't you feel obliged to use your brain and to make a contribution?"

"No'm"

She waits for me to say more. When I do not, she seems to forget about her idea. (52-53)

Binx is not willing to enter Emily's plan because he has seen through the game she plays. But in absence of a purpose in his own life, he compromises by offering to play the role anyway. This is not enough for Emily however. Emily realizes she has missed the mark, but is not ready to give up, yet continues her use of weapon to win his yielding to her reality. She tells Binx that she believes that the world is torn apart, but she does not understand why and what this destruction will bring to them, yet Binx as a young generation may save it: "I no longer pretend to understand the world. The world I knew has come crashing down around my ears ... It's an interesting age you will live in---though I can't say I'm sorry to miss it. But it should be quite a sight, the going under of the evening land" (53). Like Antoine in *La Nausee* when Anny describes her feelings of nausea and being "de trop," Binx believes that he has found someone who understands what is happening to his world and who has found a way to deal with it.

For her too the fabric is dissolving, but for her even the dissolving makes sense. She understands the chaos to come. It seems so plain when I see it through her eyes. My duty in life is simple. I go to medical school. I live a long useful life serving my fellowman. What's wrong with this? All I have to do is remember it ...she is right. I will say yes. I will say yes even though I do not know what she is talking about. (53)

But, to his own surprise, Binx hears himself saying: "As a matter of fact I was planning to leave Gentilly soon, but for a different reason. There is something—" (53) without simply saying yes to Emily. In her face of the story, his search has been absurd. He remains unable to acquiesce to her reality.

Emily believes that Binx is fully back on her side, yet, this is an error that wise

Emily makes. She also thinks that Binx's leaving Gentilly is a recovery from his wounded soul from the cruel battle of Korean war, and away from his *Wanderjahr* experiment for the past four years out of her sight. Binx's heart sinks. He realizes that they are in fact not talking about the same thing at all. "They do not understand each other after all. If I thought I'd spent the last four years as *Wanderjahr*, before 'settling down,' I'd shoot myself on the spot" (54).

Emily's stories do not make a coherence for her life for she is transfiguring stories into a false one that fits her reality and purpose. Her stories are not able to make a coherence for Binx's life either, for the transfigured ones do not make any sense. Her instruction of the doctrine of Stoicism is not enough to help him. Her convenient label for Binx as a spoiled young man playing around with secretaries, going every night to movies, abandoning his love of scientific calling and love of books and music during the four years in Gentilly bewilders Binx. Her label does not work for his search. Instead it makes Binx's already alienated life depart further.

Sartre's being-for-others is the third mode of being, referring to human relationship. Its very nature is a conflict. One being-for-itself, a subject is gazing at another being-for-itself, another subject, then these two subjects are not the equal subjects in this gazing game. The first subject is turning the second subject into an object under his look, which means the first subject is the master and the second a slave whose freedom is deprived of. He is deprived of the nature of being-for-itself, the human consciousness that has the power to project its very being to the future. He is now turned into being-in-itself, an inanimate object, which has the nature of a thing with the determined essence, full and solid, which makes change impossible.

Sartre's gaze does not precisely mean the physical gaze of the other person, but it means all kinds of judgments and evaluations of the other person. The second subject who is being gazed at is under the judgment and evaluation of the first subject. The second subject depends its being on the freedom of the first subject, which is not his. He is losing all the possibilities of his own toward future.

In the case of Binx, he is being gazed at by Aunt Emily, being transformed into being-in-itself, a solid thing which is unable to move. He is being judged and evaluated by his aunt Emily. He is even being formed by her into a man of what she wishes. While she is making judgment of Binx and when she is trying to persuade him to follow her doctrine and morality, in terms of Binx as a conscious being, she is depriving him of his free consciousness, his freedom to think, act, and perceive, his possibilities to create and change. In a word, he is deprived of his possibilities of wonder, of his own search. He is being dragged back to his alienated, inert state of life, with no differences from others. He is unable to do his search.

While Emily, as a doctrine preacher, a child raiser, and morality guardian, is saying that his abandonment of science and music and his acceptance of the common little suburb Gentilly have wasted his talent and intellectual ability, Binx tries to point out to aunt Emily that his love of science and books is not the idea of his. It has little to do with his own choices—it has always been Emily who discovered the ideas and the noble ideals *for* him. When Binx realizes that he has been living by *her* light, and not by his own, and he has been living like an automaton without being aware of his own consciousness and he has been congealed by Emily's fixed value system, Emily's classifications stop working on Binx once and for all.

It is rather significant for Binx to distinguish knowledge from choice. Emily believes that all it takes to do right is to know what right and good are. As for her doctrine of Stoicism, to be a man of noble deed, he must go down fighting for the goodness of the world. That is the victory and to do anything less is to be less than a man. To Emily, knowing what is right should automatically lead to doing what is right, that is knowing is doing. But for Binx, knowing is different from doing. Doing is action that is out of choice. Thus knowing is different from choice. Knowing is only knowledge. It is not yet man's action, and only when he is taking action, he is making a choice. As for the promise Emily wishes Binx to make on his 30th birthday, she thinks that Binx is old enough to know what he should do and what he will do. She says to him: "You will be thirty years old. Don't you think a thirty year old man ought to know what he wants to do with his life" (54) ? What Binx ought to know is knowledge and what Binx wants to do is choice. Knowledge is something already established. But choice is based on freedom. In spite of his promise to Emily, his resistance to her way of looking at things has not diminished for it is based in a different view of how to make one's way in the world. He keeps linking how he sees his own life and the people around him to the problem of *choice*. All those who have given themselves up to the world live and speak as automatons who have no choice in what they say and do anymore. He has now discovered that under Emily's influence, he has grown up not much different from those automatons—he has always let Emily make his choice, aesthetic, philosophical and life choices for him, surrendering to her particular power to organize the world for him. It is clear that this relationship has now changed, and that he will somehow have to find a new way of choosing the right thing to do. This is what Sartre states about freedom and choice: Human beings are

condemned to be free. Freedom is absolute and it is something human beings can not possibly escape. It is destined that human beings have to face it and embrace it. Human beings are not determined by other things, they are only determined by what they perceive, what they think and what they do, which means that human beings are only determined by their own actions in whichever way they choose. With nothingness as its heart and being-for-itself as its fundamental structure, ontological view sets human beings free. For Binx, grasping the freedom that derives from nothingness and making his choice for his action lead him to his authenticity, while escaping from the freedom by following social conventions or others' evaluations or judgments leads him to bad faith. Binx refuses to become an automaton and resists being in bad faith. "Bad faith" ethically speaking is presented as something being-for-itself ought to avoid while striving for authenticity. Binx keeps his sense of wonder as the way to keep his being-for-itself not slip into being-in-itself, which means that he is aware he is his own future and in the mode of *not being*. Sartre says that being-for-itself is what it is not, and is not what it is. It is always in the state of becoming and projecting. The possibilities are opened up and limitless. Binx's keeping his own way of seeing the people and the world is to keep himself open to the possibilities which propel him to become what he makes of himself rather than being defined by other things or people. He is a man who is always in the process of making himself a new self, a man with hope. He is a man on the move.

Binx marrying Kate: his authentic choice and responsibility

Binx's cousin Kate is Emily's stepdaughter. She is a young lady who has the talent that makes her to see through people's stories. This talent does not stand her in good stead in this conventional world in which she lives. Yet this talent does assist her to resist

Emily's reality, and to make her able to see Binx's predicament. Since the age of twelve, she has regularly plunged into the deepest of depressions from which only Binx seems to have been able to help her. She is also a seeker, not like Binx doing a metaphysical search, but a psychological one. She comes to her greatest discovery one day. "I had discovered that a person does not have to *be* this or *be* that or be anything, not even oneself. One is free" (108). She newly finds she has freedom to choose, so she gives up acting and juggling other people's realities, but she also refuses to choose for herself anyway. In despair she chooses to be no-one at all. She is giving up all her choices altogether.

Now Binx is truly alarmed for Kate and he is the only one who can understand her. He realizes that in refusing to choose, Kate is hurling herself out of the concrete world entirely. He knows that somehow *choosing* is what keeps one alive, and that all those who have allowed specious histories to define them are dead. The only way to be alive as a conscious being is to keep one's freedom to choose. Kate has accepted the idea that she is free, but then has slammed the door on herself by refusing to become anyone at all. She is choosing not to choose. This is what Sartre calls "bad faith." One is free, condemned to be free. One has freedom to choose, and he has to choose, but he can not choose not to choose. This bad faith is the inert state of being-in-itself, waiting to be defined by others, and of not being authentic. One actually denies that freedom one deserves in the first place.

Binx knows that in choosing to have no choice, Kate runs the risks of losing herself for good. To help her down to reality, he takes her hands and describes the life they might have if she were to marry him. He puts before her a real life choice, waiting for her to come back into herself here and now in the world. When Kate does come down, she still

lacks the energy to decide for herself what to do. Kate neither accepts nor rejects Binx' proposal, like the woman in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* who neither holds or releases her hand from her boy friend's, she begs Binx to just tell her everything will be alright, making him say it out loud to make it real. This request vaguely prefigures Kate's final discovery that she has to make a choice.

That Kate requests Binx to tell her everything will be alright is like requesting a promise from God. She says she is a religious person, though not the earnest faith in God, but she believes in Binx.

Don't you see? What I want is to believe in someone completely and then do what he wants me to do. If God were to tell me: Kate, here is what I want you to do; you get off this train right now and go over there to that corner by the Southern Life and Accident Insurance Company and stand there for the rest of your life and speak kindly to people—you think I would not do it? You think I would not be the happiest girl in Jackson, Mississippi? I would. (180-81)

Binx is the only one whom she believes honest, trustworthy, and who will not invent stories in order to paper over the void yawning at her feet. Honesty and trustworthiness are recognized at the base of Binx' nature. Binx is trusted to be the only one who can tell her what to do which is the only way she can make her way in the world.

Looking for roles in movies or other people's stories as a clue for his way of being in this world fails Binx altogether in keeping himself as a conscious and concrete being. Binx comes down to look for clues from other people in real life. Interestingly, he finds in

his uncle Jules what he needs in life as a man. Jules seems to live his life serenely and successfully, never worrying about anything. As Binx describes his uncle Jules as

the only man I know whose victory in the world is total and unqualified.

He has made a great deal of money, has a great many friends, he was Rex of Mardi Gras, he gives freely of himself and his money... I see his world plainly through his eyes and I see why he loves it and would keep it as it is: a friendly, easy-going place of old-world charm and new-world business methods where kind white folks and carefree darkies have the good sense to behave pleasantly toward each other. (33)

Jules is a hardworking man, making a large amount of money; he is a kind-hearted man, making many friends. He is living happily by giving his money to others, by helping people in need. He is contributing himself to his community, to the happy life of people around him. He is so generous and helpful that all people respect him and respect each other consequently. The world becomes harmonious, cheerful, solid, and strong. The clue is that Jules may get his inner strength from his faith in God. Binx can imagine that Jules' life is larger than his own life because he is making other people's lives possible by stretching out his hands to help. Binx is unable to believe in God; however, he is able to believe in the human being himself, believing in the freedom of the human being. With the infinite possibilities derived from nothingness within the human being himself, Binx is free to choose how he should live his life in order to make his life meaningful and others' lives possible. Sartre says the human being is free to make a choice, and that choice bears responsibility. When he is making a choice, he is creating his value. When he is making a choice by grasping the freedom given to him, he is taking a path to an

authentic being, searching for a true life that bears meaning. Human beings are choosing not only for themselves but also for the whole world.

Binx is ready to take Kate as his future wife. Not as Emily wishes that Binx should take care of Kate because she is suicidal, but Binx understands that Kate is a seeker who is searching for freedom, and who needs someone to support her, to give her strength, love, care, and most of all spiritual guidance. They build their close relationship and love toward each other over the trip to Chicago. Binx is making his own choice to marry Kate in order to make his life meaningful and Kate's life possible, a much happier life in a sense of the pursuit of freedom. His commitment itself bears responsibility that the authentic being is supposed to take.

Kate knows what she is and does the next best thing. She puts herself into the hands of the only one she can believe in, hoping that this will finally guarantee her existence. She chooses Binx as the one who can save her from herself.

She takes the bottle. "Will you tell me what to do?"

"Sure."

"You can do it because you are not religious. God is not religious. You are the unmoved mover. You don't need God or anyone else—no credit to you, unless it is a credit to be the most self-centered person alive. I don't know whether I love you, but I believe in you and I will do what you tell me. Now if I marry you, will you tell me: Kate, this morning do such and such, and if we have to go to a party will you tell me: Kate, stand right there and have three drinks and talk to so and so? Will you?"

"Sure."

Kate locks her arms around my chest, wrist in hand, and gives me a
passionate kiss. (181)

Binx's decision is offering Kate a life choice. With faith and trust, Kate is accepting the offer and Binx, as a brave hero, calmly responds to Kate's requests. Binx believes that he is in a role of "listen[ing] to people, and see[ing] how they stick themselves into the world and also hand them along a way[s] in their dark journey and be handed along for good and selfish reason" (213).

Binx has been wandering in order to keep himself alive, which makes nothingness within himself possible. Nothingness from the inside generates infinite power and strength for him to break out of the everydayness to pursue freedom. With this power and strength he is bold enough to make a choice, a choice of exploring the unknown. He comes to a revelation in life. Taking the responsibility of marrying a woman with suicidal tendency demonstrates that Binx is getting himself ready to take the burden of freedom. It does not necessarily mean that he is sure that Kate will recover from her problem, but it shows that he is taking his freedom granted to him as a conscious being, as a being-for-itself, as a man ridding himself of everydayness. He is searching for an authentic being even the future is totally an uncertainty. He is a man on the move, with no fear or wander, but with the awareness of the freedom, with the nature never defined by any other things, or people but by his own actions.

CHAPTER IV

EDWARD HOPPER AND THE MIND IN MOTION --HIS OIL PAINTINGS

Great art is the outward expression of
an inner life in the artist, and this inner
life will result in his personal
vision of the world ...
The inner life of a human being
is a vast and varied realm

Edward Hopper
Statement in *Reality*, no.1, Spring 1953, (8)

Edward Hopper

A loner, a realist painter searching for inner life

Edward Hopper wrote: "Great art is the outward expression of an inner life in the artist, and this inner life will result in his personal vision of the world ... The inner life of a human being is a vast and varied realm" (*Reality* 8). Hopper believed that great art was something not consciously produced by the artist, it was an unconscious creation. It was all about the artist's thought and feelings inside him. "Most of the important qualities' in art are put there unconsciously, and little of importance by the conscious intellect" (Hopper, "letter to Charles W. Sawyer" n.p.). It had to do with what Hopper called "personality." He believed that "personality" was unalterable and it was his one certainty. Regarding "the inner life results in his personal vision of the world," he quoted Goethe on "reproduction of the world that surrounds me by means of the world that is within me, all things being grasped, related, re-created, moulded and reconstructed in a personal form and an original manner" (Rodman, "Conversation" n.p.). When the artist is reproducing

a world that surrounds him, the world that is within him gives him the sense of feelings and understanding. Everything he has grasped, remolded, re-created is produced in a personal form and an original manner. "Every artist has a core of originality, and that is a core of identity that is his own" (Hopper, "Notes on painting" n.p.). Thus, his reproduction is his own creativity and identity, a very personal representation. When talking about the world within him, he characterized it as a "vast and varied realm," much of which was unknown to him. This world within him, the identity of that self is revealed only through that world reproduced, or that is to say he can only know that self through his work, which "returned to him some reassuring echo" (O'Doherty 86). Therefore, Hopper's work, according to himself, is a search for a definition of that self. He believed in this self quite fervently, however, he had imperfect knowledge of him. And this imperfect knowledge provides vast possibilities for him to search, continuously into the unknown. When he was asked by Brian O'Doherty about what he was after in *Sun in an Empty Room* 1963, he responded "I am after ME" (O'Doherty 86). He is painting on canvas his own personalities, the "definite personalities that remain forever modern by the fundamental truth that is in them" (Hopper, "Notes on Painting" n.p.).

In Hopper's paintings, lonely figures, quiet empty spaces, far distance roads, and single buildings are most frequently depicted subjects, for which he is often mistakenly understood as presenting loneliness, isolation, alienation, and solitude. In an interview with Katharine Kub, in response to the question: "Is there any social content in your work?" Hopper replied: "None whatsoever" (Kub 140). And in an answer to another question, he added: "I paint only for myself ... I never think of the public when I paint --- never" (Kub 141). Hopper once expressed that the loneliness was overdone. His best

friend Brian O'Doherty believed Hopper is a searcher, a lonely searcher for his own identity (personality) through his art. Hopper sought out those ignored places in which to pursue the self-knowledge. It is an isolated task of the artist rather than loneliness. The mystery of those city paintings proceeds from the search for an identity that is unknowable. Those paintings, the single women at their windows, the gas stations, the empty rooms, are all the cumulative self-portrait, if we believe his declared intention (86). His work, suggested by Hopper, is in exact consonance with an interior life that to the artist himself remained mysterious and partly inaccessible, and that the work itself reveals phases of a self-investigation. Hopper can be regarded as a lonely figure who is doing an isolated task, but he is pretty much comfortable in his isolation.

Hopper is a silent searcher, and he has the power of silence. His best friend and contemporary Lloyd Goodrich said: "He had no small talk; he was famous for his monumental silences; but like the spaces in his pictures, they were not empty. When he did speak, his words were the product of long meditation" ("Text" 85-87). Hopper admires the state of individual being, a man who seeks for isolation and self-contemplation. If he is in a place with crowds of people, he may find himself going against the grain and feels uncomfortable. He would like to look for a quiet place, which is characterized as an open door for pursuing peace. Lack of a clear distance between people in society brings too much pressure and suffocation, when there is no way for a person to think, to wonder, and to act individually. He must escape out of this worldly place and find himself. Staying out of the worldly place is not the purpose however, and the purpose is to be able to pursue individual feelings and thoughts. He would seek that interior world, full of sunlight, exuberance, and life. Hopper's rooms, like the interior

world, may look to the ocean, to freedom, to rediscover and regain. Different from alienation, or loneliness, usually a passive state, this is a positive move toward knowing oneself, and this is a process with aim and quest.

Edward Hopper is one of the major Realist painters of the twentieth century. Alfred H. Barr, Jr., director of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, called Hopper a typically American painter. His friend and fellow artist Charles Burchfield stated: “Edward Hopper is an American – no-where but in America could such an art have come into being” (Schmied, *Portrait of America* 7). Sherry Marker described Hopper as “one of the greatest and most challenging of twentieth-century American artists. Challenging, because his best works force viewers to think in ways that most conventionally ‘attractive’ paintings do not; challenging as well, because the feelings that inform his work are at once powerfully conveyed and ambiguous” (Front Cover). Technically speaking, he was fortunate that at New York School of Art he followed three of the best known teachers “who had quite different teaching methods and styles: Rockwell Kent once said that William Merritt Chase taught students to use their eyes, Robert Henri, their hearts and Kenneth Hayes Miller, their minds” (Marker 8). Edward Hopper was classified into “The American Scene” category. Even Lloyd Goodrich, a former director of the Whitney Museum of American Art, wrote in his essay (1927), “It is hard to think of another painter who is getting more of the quality of America in his canvases than Edward Hopper.” (qtd. in Marker, *Edward Hopper* 19.). However, Hopper refused to be grouped so, for he did not admire what those Regionalists did. He thought that they caricatured America, and he himself wanted always to paint like what French painters and English painters did. He believed that “the American quality is *in* a painter – he doesn’t

have to strive for it” (Schmied 8). One thing that is certain about Hopper’s art is that “the pursuit of specifically American traits was not a conscious artistic strategy on Hopper’s part” (10). Hopper is believed to be motivated by something more general – by an interest in the human condition itself. Burchfield defined Hopper’s art for his uniqueness, as “He is the pure painter, interested in his material for its own sake, and in the exploitation of his idea of form, color, and space division” (10). Hopper is particularly an expert in applying light, space, and color to portray the world that surrounds him through a world that is within him.

Hopper’s artistic feature

His creation of oil paintings

Hopper is a realist painter. However, his painting methods are not what we believe to be the literal copying of reality. After his early years, he composed his oils through a personal process, a process called “imaginative reconstruction” by critic Goodrich (Goodrich, *Text* 129). Observation and memory in this process played a very important role. He never selected the subject easily, but selected with great and extreme care. He spent a long time looking at actual motifs and pondering them. Various elements and different sources as the basic ingredients, he combined them together, and then transformed them into an image that was to be realized on canvas. Hopper described the imaginative and reconstructive process on how he composed his *Room in New York* 1932: “I’m always at a loss when asked for facts about any of my pictures or to describe how any one of them came to be made. It is so often a very complicated mental process that would not interest people. The idea for “Room in New York” had been in my mind a long time before I painted it. it was suggested by glimpses of lighted interiors seen as I walked

along the city streets at night, probably near the district where I live (Washington Square), although it's no particular street or house, but it is rather a synthesis of many impressions" (*Life* 6). When he was composing his other painting *Gas* (1940), he tried to look for a filling station like the one he had in mind. He could not find it, then he made one up out of parts of several stations, but the pumps were studied from real ones. The transformation varied for different paintings. But almost all his mature oils were composites. He would tell people that his subject of a picture came from "No Where" or "In here," which is from his mind. Therefore, we can see that his method was a creative process. Through his inner process, the reality was shaped into a pictorial image, and the subject transcended the specific. That is to say that this subject bore the quality of the actual thing, the imagination of the artist, and the thought of the artist, which was much more than the original reality. It took on a broader and deeper meaning itself.

Hopper was an artist who set high standard for his work. He said he never found the perfect methods and he was also known for expressing low opinions of some of his paintings. They were not really poor, but were just not quite what he had in his mind. What he said about the dissatisfaction was rather genuine and fundamental, and there was a real conflict between the inner image and the one on canvas. What he imagined the picture ought to be was never exactly like the one at last painted out. When he was giving his own work low evaluations, his doubts were not at all based on his feeling of inferiority, but on his own sense that he did not always realize the conception he would like to. And these words were from the serious, sincere, and introspective artist in search of his own kind of perfection, and Hopper was a modest man, a rare phenomenon.

Hopper was the pupil of Henri, but Hopper's painting did not display much of his

teacher's technical facility, which was fortunate. He developed his own sober atmosphere and became more sober. He demonstrated a kind of awkwardness and heavy-handedness, disregard of the technical refinements. There is no sensuous appeal in the pigment and the handling. He said he never found satisfaction in producing color and pattern for themselves, but he did find it in producing form.

Form and design, light

Hopper had a natural gift for operating on solid forms. His forms are massive, severely simplified, and without unnecessary details. The natural strength of the paintings are there striking you when you first see them; however, the strength is not on the surface, but in the elements of form, space, color, and design. They make the entire picture so much more powerful.

His design has certain marked characteristics. It is built largely on straight lines. The overall shape is quite often a horizontal rectangle. Horizontals provide the foundation of the structure and they are crossed and interrupted by strong verticals. The horizontals and verticals are interacting to each other to create the design. The angularity is typically evident and pronounced. As Alfred Barr has written, these horizontals "are like the edge of a stage beyond which drama unfolds" (Museum, *Edward Hopper* 14). The outstanding example of this horizontality is *Early Sunday Morning* 1930. A more complex kind of design is the horizontal wedge form, constructed in three dimensions, cutting across the picture and receding in depth, and the clearest example of the wedge design is *Nighthawks* 1942. Another development is in the use of diagonals. He selected a viewpoint from above the center of interest and at an angle with the central mass to produce a basic diagonal composition. *Office at Night* 1940 is a good example, and it

develops further. The viewpoint is from above, and the main structural lines are all diagonal to the four edges of the picture, and the angles are all oblique or acute instead of right angles. The picture is a closely knit diagonal design, still based on straight lines and their interactions, but avoiding obvious rectangularity. Hopper's design is a great achievement, the strongest, the most thoughtfully planned, and most fully realized in modern painting (Goodrich 141-143).

Over the years, Hopper's style softened not at all, but it became more solid and powerful. *High Noon* 1949 is almost pure geometry, with dominant straight lines, acute angles, the emphatic sunlight and shadow, the extreme simplification and utter clarity. *Rooms by the Sea* 1951 is even more geometric: an empty room with an open doorway looking out on blue water, sunlight falling in a diagonal pattern on the wall and floor. Then later he produced a more vigorous angular work *Second-Story Sunlight* 1960. Hopper said "What I wanted to do was to paint sunlight on the side of a house" (Goodrich, "Edward Hopper" 31; Levin, "Illustrator" 2).

Light plays an essential role in Hopper's paintings. Light is from outdoors and from indoors, natural and artificial. It is an active element in the pictorial concept. As Sheena Wagstaff analyzes in her article, Hopper's own depiction of light can be roughly grouped into three categories: the golden reflections of radiant sunlight, paintings such as *Cape Cod Morning* 1950, *Morning Sun* 1952, *Hotel by a Railroad* 1952, *Office in a Small City* 1953, and *New York Office* 1962; the unyielding brightness of electric light, paintings such as *Hotel Room* 1931 and *New York Movie* 1939; and the dazzling rectangular lightfalls matching each of the two figures in *Summer in the City* 1949 and its companion piece *Excursion into Philosophy* 1959 (Wagstaff 26). Each appears increasingly as a

geometric form. It takes the shape of a rectangle, parallelogram, rhomboid or trapezoid that always invokes an imagination of a window or a door – the aperture that separates inside from outside.

Sunlight that shines on the city's stone and concrete structures simplifies the stone and structures themselves; it turns them into kind of "massive monoliths"; it casts heavy shadows that have a somber, brooding effect. The patterns of light and shade created by Hopper are definite, taking the shape of rectangle and parallelogram, acting as an integral element of design. "Light is never allowed to break up forms," "rather, it defines and models them" (Goodrich, *Text* 113). It is shining and moving within the borderlines. Light in shapes reveals the strength of an inner world, the strength of existence, the power of thought and contemplation.

Light in Hopper's night scenes becomes a principal actor. The interplay of lights from various sources, in various colors and intensities creates pictorial drama. In *Office at Night* 1940, Hopper used three sources of light: "indirect lighting from above, the desk light and the light coming through the window." The cool lighting from above pervades the room; the light through the window is a warm secondary light from a street lamp. It falls on the wall in back, it is almost paining white on white, and it also makes a prominence of the edge of the filing cabinet by the girl. The light on wall emphasizes the wall's "angular thrust" (Levin, *Art and Artists* 60), which creates a very oddly shaped room and makes the viewer unable to position himself and locate his view. Here, the viewer confronts the players' psychic intensity.

Light falling on figures in the rooms reveals and at the same time isolates them. The shapes of rectangle, parallelogram, rhomboid, or trapezoid on the walls, on the floors, and

on beds invoke the windows or doors. This architecture aperture is set between the inside and outside, literally and metaphorically, representing the relations of emptiness and possibility, of within and without (Wagstaff 29). These compositional figures of abstract forms of light share the occupancy of a room with the human characters. They interact with each other. In *Summer in the City* 1949 and its companion piece *Excursion into Philosophy* 1959, the light shines on them, reveals them, and at the same time intensifies their self-meditations.

Oil paintings

Categories

Hopper's art has his "unwavering consistency" (Goodrich 149). His content, vision, and style remained fundamentally unchanged, and the main thing that develops is a constant growth in complexity and power. The categories presented here are among his major categories, particularly based on the themes Hopper repeatedly investigated, for they are rich in personal meaning for him, and they are my major concern in this dissertation.

Solitary figures

Starting from this theme seems most appropriate, for Hopper is a lone searcher, enjoying the state of quiet and solitude. The lone figures are usually presented in various settings, particularly interiors. It is believed that this is the most personal portrayal of the artist himself. A solitary figure is characteristically presented lost in thought, sometimes the figure is shown at work, at other times the figure reads, or just waits. Hopper's several paintings of solitary figures are those of women alone, often nude, or in a state of undress, posed before a window or waiting in a doorway. For instance, they are *Hotel Room* 1931,

New York Movie 1939, *Morning in a City* 1944, *High Noon* 1949, and *Morning Sun* 1952, *Carolina Morning* 1955, *Western Motel* 1957, and *A Woman in the Sun* 1961. They are in self contemplation, or are in a state of longing for future possibilities.

Traveling man

“To me the most important thing is the sense of going on. You know how beautiful things are when you’re traveling” (qtd. in Levin, *Art and Artists* 50).

Hopper enjoyed traveling when he found himself unable to paint. He went to visit those famous tourist attractions, and besides, he visited those extremely ordinary places. He could usually discover with his visionary eyes those interesting subjects from the commonplace surroundings. Wherever he was along the way, he observed closely how travelers felt in their environment, in hotels, trains, motels, highways, gas stations, and even restaurants. He found some settings and moods he thought may provide possibilities for his expressions and did produce some poignant paintings, such as *Hotel Room* 1931, *Gas* 1940, *Hotel Lobby* 1943, *Hotel by the Road* 1952, *Western Motel* 1957, and *Chair Car* 1965.

A train station could give Hopper a feeling of fascination and a sense of change. This sense of change is always imminent there. It is the quiet moment of anticipation, when the station is deserted or nearly empty. This is the moment that Hopper greatly favored. This is the moment in which he could create tension and drama through light and shadows. The result is usually “an aura of eerie expectation” (Levin, *Art and Artist* 47).

Railroad tracks were significant to Hopper for they carry symbolic meanings. In *Approaching a City* 1946, he said his intention was to express “interest, curiosity, fear”—the emotions one has arriving by train into a strange city (qtd. in Goodrich, *Text*,

Edward Hopper 106). The railroad tracks lead the viewer's eyes beyond the confines of the picture, suggesting for Hopper the continuity, and mobility of modern life. Things are ever in motion.

Theatre

Hopper and his wife Jo were moviegoers. Their frequent presence at theaters had two direct effects on his painting: his choice of theatre as subject matter and the development of compositions. The theatre set design, stage lighting, and cinematic device such as cropping and unusual angles of vision often influenced the compositions of his paintings.

One theatrical painting is *New York Movie* of 1939. Hopper's central concern is the figure of the usherette leaning against a wall, bored, presumably having seen the movie more times than she cared to remember. Another theatrical painting of Hopper is the most surprising one, *Girlie Show* of 1941, which depicts a nearly nude burlesque dancer seductively waving her skirt behind her as she prances across a floodlit stage above the members of an all-male orchestra. Such overt sexuality is unique in Hopper's work.

It is clear that Hopper regarded the theater as a metaphor for life, with he himself as a stage director, setting up scenes to paint based on events that took place around him, casting characters from different types of people he observed in life.

Couples

Hopper showed an interest in emotional interaction or, more often, the lack of it. In *Summer Evening* of 1947, a young couple, seen in the harsh glare of electric light, appears to be engrossed in a tense discussion while uncomfortably leaning against the wall of a porch.

Hopper also showed an increasing sense of estrangement of couple paintings over the years. His 1949 *Summer in the City* shows a woman, rather restless or depressed, with her arms tensely folded, sitting on the edge of a narrow bed, on which a man is asleep. In *Sea Watchers* of 1952 the couple in the sun gazes joylessly at a beautiful stretch of blue sea; their boredom and failure to communicate set the somber mood of this painting. In *Sunlight on Brownstones* of 1956 a younger couple not only glances away from each other, but do so with bored and disheartened stares. In his 1959 *Excursion into Philosophy*, Hopper demonstrated the sense of malaise intensively, a man with a troubled expression rests on the edge of an unforgivingly hard bed while a woman sleeps, turned away from him. He has just put down a book, the open book of Plato, reread too late.

Times of day

Many of Hopper's paintings represent a specific time of day, emphasizing a mood through the varying effects of light. He named his works with an hour or time of day. There are definite associations with the various times of day in paintings.

Hopper's major association with morning is a sense of longing for the far sight out of the window, something bright and possible out there. We can see this sense of longing in *Eleven A. M.* of 1926, where a nude woman sits in a chair looking out of the window. We can also see this sense in *Morning in a City* of 1944, where a standing nude woman gazes out of a window. Again we see this in *Cape Cod Morning* of 1950, where a woman in a red dress leans out to observe the world from her bay window. *High Noon* of 1949 gives out the positive sense of expectation in the full midday sunlight.

Sunlight

"I like to paint the sunlight on the side of the house" (qtd. In Goodrich, *Text* 107).

When Hopper and his wife were living on the Cape, Hopper indulged his love of sunlight in an area where the summer light is especially intense. Yet his interest in painting sunlight dates back to his acquaintance with Impressionist painting in Paris. His mature attempts at painting sunlight resulted in *Rooms by the Sea* 1951 and *Sun in an Empty Room* 1963. *Rooms by the Sea* was actually inspired by the spectacular view from the Hoppers' house on the Cape down over the dunes to the vast stretch of sea beyond. Hopper claimed his *Second Story Sunlight* of 1960 was only

an attempt to paint sunlight as white with almost no yellow pigment in the white. Any psychological idea will have to be supplied by the viewer ... There is a sort of elation about sunlight on the upper part of a house. You know, there are many thoughts, many impulses that go into a picture. (Levin, *Artist* 65)

Although he occasionally denied the existence of meaning in his paintings, Hopper once sent Lloyd Goodrich a letter he received from the critic James Thomas Flexner praising *Second Story Sunlight* 1960 and interpreting it as an allegory of "winter and spring, life and death" (Levin, *Artist* 66).

His oil paintings and the Mind in Motion

The poet and critic John Hollander has pointed out, "light playing inside a room is an ancient metaphor for thought in a human head" (qt. in Wagstaff, "Elation of Sunlight" 26). Hopper's figures of light interacting with the figures of human being in the light within the space of room reveals the flow of human consciousness, and the motion of human thought. He depicts the inward reality rather than the outward reality of the subject. He concerns the state of mind of the figure in his paintings, which yearns for this longed-for satisfactions and brilliance of inwardness, which he can not find in his

interaction with most people. Wagstaff states that “Edward Hopper offers us a modern metaphysics, a philosophy of being and knowing” (“Elation of Sunlight” 27). What Hopper pursues in his paintings is always the motion of the being. While his figure is waiting, reading a book or a tourist guidebook, looking deeply out the window into sunlight lost in thought, or dancing on the stage, she is expecting someone to come, arriving at a new town, longing for new possibilities outside the room, and anticipating certain changes, and walking across the borderline to the unknown. Hopper loves the feeling of moving on, of stepping into the uncertainty, of seeking the knowledge of himself, the self of whom he has the imperfect knowledge, and he desires to search for the identity of this self.

Silent spaces – the sense of moving on

Artistically, Hopper’s design of paintings has distinctive characteristic: his application of straight lines, horizontal rectangle as the foundation of the structure, the interaction of the verticals and horizontals, the evident use of angles, oblique and acute, extreme simplification and clarity, all bring the sense of silence and stillness. His figures in the paintings are speechless and frozen, enhancing silence and stillness. J. A. Ward describes Hopper’s paintings as silent and still. Hopper has given more emphasis to buildings that are formidable and uniquely silent. That he likes the massive lighthouses, exceptionally large houses, and the thick masonry of turn-of-the century doorways, walls, and window frames intensifies the stillness. However, his “silence is more active than passive,” suggesting tenseness and strain rather than “calmness, tranquility, or placidity” (169), suggesting motion rather than quiescence. David Anfam came to an understanding from W.H. Auden’s remark in Henry James’s *American Scene* (1907), “Outside of fairy

tales, I know of no book in which things so often and naturally become persons” (qtd. in Anfam, “wholeness” 41), “buildings even speak” (41). Hopper gave his fundamental assertion “I was always interested in architecture, but the editors wanted people waving their arms” (41). By Hopper’s words, Anfam believed that “Architecture, not people, should have a voice” (41). Architecture has been envisaged as a model of human space since at least the time of Vitruvius, the Roman architect. Hopper’s architectural spaces of blank walls, vacant windows, and dramatic facades can be seen as the organs of human beings, and they can “speak” in lieu of his mute figures. It seems that Hopper’s buildings are silent, but they actually convey messages. Hopper’s people in these spaces seem frozen and speechless while reading, waiting, and expecting, however, they are in deep contemplation, dreaming, and their thought is moving. To Hopper “silence is action” (Anfam 45). Outwardly, these silent spaces and human figures are silent and still, inwardly, they are in motion. The analyses of the following paintings of Hopper will seek to find the motion state of mind of the portrayed figures in the silent spaces.

Outward still, inward active

Hopper’s reading figures

Hopper’s paintings are silent spaces and some of his figures in these silent spaces are engaged in reading, doing a lonely isolated activity. These paintings model Hopper’s reversals: while his figures are outwardly amazingly passive, they are inwardly intensely active. Their passiveness is the state of outward stillness in the viewers’ eyes, while their activeness is the state of inward movement.

In *Chair Car* 1965, the environment is silent, and none of the four passengers in the car is making any communication with one another. One reads, another stares at the one who reads, another's head is tilted to the right, and another to the left. The train car does not seem to move, instead it looks still. Though the vanishing

Fig. 1

point leads our view forward from the aisle to the door, the closed door with the missing handle denies the continued progress, and there is nothing outside the window to suggest motion. The woman figure with a book in her hands looks static which suggests a moment like the motion picture projector suddenly stopping when the actress on the stage of the train car reads the book. Silence and stillness pervade the entire train car while the woman who is reading the book is in another world, a world of going on. She might be reading a novel of love stories with the protagonists going through events, experiencing sweet, sometimes painful life phases. She is feeling what they feel, anticipating what might happen to them, while at the same time reflecting about her own life. Compared with the outward reality of silence and stillness, the woman's inward reality is full of activities, contemplation, and future possibilities.

Hotel Lobby 1943 shows another woman reading. In this silent lobby, three people are waiting. We don't know exactly what they are waiting for. And there is also a fourth person, almost completely hidden behind the reception desk, a silent witness of Hopper. The elderly

Fig. 2

couple seems to be ready to go out, and perhaps they are waiting for a taxi or a friend to pick them up to go to a party or to take them to the theatre. A young woman sitting alone opposite this elderly couple is waiting. The purpose of her wait is even more obscure than the couple's destination. She seems to have plenty of time on her hands. She is a beautiful blond, wearing dull blue dress, and flesh colored stockings. While waiting she is reading a book or quite possibly a guidebook in which she might find places that she would like to visit and find people she would like to meet, or events that she might be interested in engaging in, full of possibilities. She is actively imagining that she comes to a place that fascinates her, enlightens her, keeps her going back to that place more than once, and imagining that she meets somebody who surprises her, and maybe loves her. Her future trip will be full of colors, surprises, and sweet memories, and possibilities, leading her thought to the next day, the day after the next and the next. Whatever those possibilities are, they are what she is longing for and what she is expecting. Hopper's young lady, however alone, silent, and passive outwardly, is active inwardly when reading. She is interacting in a world with people she for the first time meets, talks to, and laughs with.

Hotel by the railroad 1952 portrays a silent hotel room by the railroad, with a couple, one standing by the large window and one sitting in a blue colored sofa. The husband, with graying dark hair, dark blue trousers, vest, and white shirt sleeves, is standing facing the window, while the wife in pink slip and grey straight hair is reading a book. Nothing may suggest sound or movement: there is no

Fig. 3

communication between the couple, and the railroad outside looks like it has been deserted for a long time. The atmosphere feels freezing. However, the woman who is reading is not at all freezing in her mind. She might be reading a guidebook, looking for nice places to visit, events to participate in, and people to meet with like the young woman in *Hotel Lobby*, or she might be reading a novel to fill her time while waiting for their next train. This interaction with the events and people in the book moves her ahead continuously toward the future.

We meet a young secretary here, reading an office letter. *New York Office* 1962 is one of Hopper's suspended moments of the animation of urban life. Haste and unrest come to a standstill for a brief moment. The building besides this office building looks like it is deserted, with nobody working in it and no people walking on the street, only the viewer himself is looking at the scene from a

Fig. 4

distance. Viewing from outside this office through a large plate-glass window, the blond woman in blue sundress, a rather casual office attire, is the only one in the office. The buildings, the street, and the woman figure are grasped by silence and stillness. No physical sound or movement is possible. While standing static and holding the letter in her hands, the woman is in her contemplative gaze, suggesting that she is lost in her thought, a thought elsewhere. She is in her wild fantasy. This beautiful blond woman is expecting time off from work, and she can't wait to watch the Broadway Musical that she has been dreaming for a long time. From her childhood, she has heard about the fantastic

shows of Broadway and the great performances of those professional dancers. She even images that she herself one day may become one of the dancers, traveling to different cities, towns, states, countries to give performances so that people there may enjoy the American traditional stage art in musical form. Her life will be out of this New York office and into one of the troupes of a theatrical company in New York City, full of colors, excitement, and possibilities though not much certainty or stability.

People in the Sun 1960 portrays a male figure reading while other people sitting on the patio basking in the sun, looking leisurely ahead on the field and rolling hills. The quiet road, the quiet field, and the far away quiet hills are quiet enough to make you believe that

Fig. 5

this is a piece of painting, a painting of landscape. The weather is so fine that it suggests no rain, no storm coming close. The silence freezes the air and the people sitting in the sun. Only this man sitting a little behind the row seems deeply absorbed into an activity, reading a book. Dressed in office suit and tie, neglecting the beauty of nature before his eyes, he is contemplating, thinking, reflecting about culture, the development of the human world. It might be a book of western civilization describing the history of how human beings have strived their way from ancient Greek to postmodern societies. While recalling the past, the great artistic achievements in Renaissance, the religious dominance and the Gothic architecture of the Middle Ages, the war between France and England, the brilliant minds of Enlightenment, the love of nature of Romanticism, the two world wars, he is challenging himself with a question. Does culture get along with nature, or are they

a pair in conflict? He also thinks about the future of the human world, which is full of uncertainty and possibilities.

Hopper's reading figures in the above paintings are engaging themselves in a certain kind of inward activity while the outward spaces, train car, hotel lobby, hotel room, office, hotel patio, are all silent and still. The activity is their inner world activity, and it is moving forward in a progression. These figures' minds are in movement.

It is possible to say, according to Sartre, that the reading figure in each painting is a conscious being, a being-for-itself who is not what it is, or who is what it is not. He has no determined nature, or fixed essence. It will never solidify itself into a definite being or a massive thing. He never coincides with himself, or coincides with the idea of what he has of himself. He will never cease to be open and expand himself toward a possibility of being. He is what he makes of himself. Their reading moves them ahead toward a new world with a new identity. It is an ongoing projection of himself, of his future identity.

Hopper's work as well as his thought is in exact consonance with an interior life, and the work itself reveals phases of a self-investigation. His reading figure is believed to be an investigation of the inner life of himself, an identity of a "lone searcher." This search for possibilities and the search for new identities of Hopper in his paintings please and satisfy him, helping him find the pleasure that he could not have in interaction with most people. The reversal of Hopper's paintings of the outward stillness and inward activeness reveal a tension between the two. The more silent and still the outer space is, the more active and powerful the inner world becomes.

Women figures, seated, standing, leaning toward

Hopper's other figures, especially women figures in her silent and still spaces, are

usually seated, standing, leaning forward toward the window, all are looking deep out the window and deep into the sunlight. Placed in different places, in different poses, nude or half dressed, these women are in their introspection, meditation, and solitude. They are dreaming of the exhilaration of active life in a new town, expecting the excitement of seeing the man in her dream last night, imagining the beautiful life out there, and projecting her future. These figures are usually posited alone, but they are not depicted as lonely. Being in outward solitude, they are allowed to enjoy the inward freedom to desire, to imagine, and to act. The dreaming, imagining, expecting are indications of women's desires, which display their interior possibility or individual agency. Desire is an act that turns women from being an object to being a subject, connoting women's ability of self-determining and self-possession. Artistically, Hopper's women figures are often painted with "curiously bland and anonymous facial features," as if it is the artist's intention to remove from the face its predicable centrality (Tomasic 41), the means to express the unfulfilled desires and possibilities that are uncertain. Hopper's type of women were identified in 1948 by James Thrall Soby, a curator and trustee of the Museum of Modern Art, as "the hard, muscular girl, sturdy of leg and breast, bulging in her clothes...forthright in her sexy reality" (38).

This suggests the ability of solitude, freedom, aggressiveness and undefined.

In *City Sunlight* 1954, a woman is seated in a room alone. There are three large windows, with no glass windows, only window shades rolling up high, leaving the window wide open. They are in

Fig. 6

clear geometric shapes of square. The room is on an upper floor. Through the open window, the blue sky is seen toward the far left of it. The outside and inside of the room is rather quiet. The lone woman in blond hair and pink slip is seated beside a table, turns herself toward an open window, gazes musingly out the window into the sunlight, contemplating and introspecting. Full of wonders, she might ask herself whether this might be the first day in a new life. Empty chair suggests that she is living alone no longer with a partner. Her life will have a total change in this new city, a city of hope. She believes that in this city there is something that awaits her and she will step into this unknown place, but with possibilities, to explore for signs of light for life by herself.

Another seated woman is in *Morning Sun* 1952. Hopper puts this seated woman in the center of the canvas, in a single bed near the window. The roofs of the buildings outside the window on the left are in red bricks and in geometrical shapes of rectangle, and the window,

Fig. 7

the sunlight on the wall, and the bed of the room described are in parallelogram, which create stability and stillness. The city in the morning is still early and no noise of cars and buses has started yet so that the city is in extreme tranquility. The woman in her pink slip, obviously the night gown, with her blond hair tied up in a bun, is sitting up in a bed, gazing out the window in meditation. The unframed window is getting larger and clearer, allowing more sunlight into the room, onto the woman. Morning is a time that renders more opportunities and possibilities to people. The viewer has the impression that the woman harbors great hope, and expectations. Her bland eyes are focusing on something

that is far beyond the window realm, something that is undefined and unnamable, to which she wishes to surrender. She may ask the question what the *City Sunlight* woman asks: Is this the first day of her new life? This woman is directly facing the window, and sunlight has shown more assurance of her desire of stepping out into the exciting and adventurous life in this new city.

Western Motel 1957 portrays a woman sitting on the motel bed waiting, with her packed suitcase by the bedside, her overcoat on the sofa arm, herself dressed up ready to leave. Visible through the window, there are the low

range of hills and higher plateau lying in shadows, which looks stationary. Everything about the room seems hermetically silent and massively stable. The plate glass window is just one piece in the shape of a large rectangle, and the orange curtains are straight down. The double bed and the sunlight on the side of the wall are in the other geometrical shapes of parallelogram and trapezoid. The colors are deep and strong, red, purple, brown, yellow, and green. The entire picture is an impeccable organization of Hopper's vertical and horizontal style, and it achieves its sense of weight and monumentality. Within this silent, stationary space, the woman figure sits straight up very formally and appears a little stiff. However, her outward pose and stare demonstrate a strong inward act, the imaginative future of being a subjective self. Her pose is different from other of Hopper's women gazing outside the window into distance. This woman stares back toward the hidden viewer, the implied woman's companion or possibly the artist himself. Her stare is open, vigorous, positive, and

Fig. 8

interactive. Her command of herself and her retrospection connote a self-determination that Hopper appears to admire.

Women in the following pictures are posed standing. Two women are inside the room and they look deeply out the window in introspection, and solitude, and two are standing at the doorway and they look into far distance, into the sunlight longing for new possibilities.

Morning in a City 1944 portrays a woman figure standing in a small hotel room, facing the cool morning sunlight. The single bed in the corner is unmade, so obviously it is early in the morning. The morning sunlight on the wall is still pale, and the blue sky is still in thin mist. The building outside through the lower window of the room shows part of its top floor and two windows that are in exact shapes of rectangles. There seems to be no one living in there or people in there have not got up yet.

Fig. 9

The building sends out the message of stillness and quietness and this morning city is extremely tranquil. The standing woman looks like she is just out of the bath holding her towel in front of her, a little frightened, yet with more assured determination to look for new possibilities, and in the silent space, she is gazing out the window toward the sunlight in complete contemplation, entirely absorbed in her self-meditation. She has light brown hair over the shoulder line, nude. ...As in *Morning Sun*, the woman is portrayed alone, the viewer has a sense of sharing the scene with an unseen figure. This is the understood voyeur. However, the woman is not aware of this being seen for she is

totally sunk into an imaginative dreaming and longing for a probable new life in the new city. The act of dreaming and longing is the strong inward desire that the woman is willing to fulfill, and the freedom to act displays her interior possibilities or individual agency. Her curiously bland facial expression, and hard body, big breasts add the power of her ability of solitude.

A Woman in the Sun 1961 like *Morning in a City* shows us a standing woman in a room facing the window. This woman is a bit closer to nature than the big-city woman as the top of rolling hills can be captured through the left open window and the fresh air breezes in through the front window.

Fig. 10

This moment unable to fall asleep, she gets out of the bed to smoke a cigarette. She holds the cigarette, but she forgets to light it as she forgets herself in meditation and introspection. The natural environment provides the silence, the power for action, the ability to grasp the freedom to act and imagine. Facing the sunlight, she is lowering her gaze a bit as if looking into herself, pursuing her thoughts and dream, which leads her far from here and now. The nude lady is completely not aware of being voyeuristically observed since she is totally immersed in future projection. The hard, muscular girl, with sturdy legs and breasts, has a strong inner desire, but this desire goes beyond sexual desire, and the way her body is portrayed by Hopper indicates the desire for the ability of self-determination and self-possession.

The following two standing women wearing red and blue sexy long dresses step out of their rooms, the enclosed spaces, and get into the larger spaces for their dreams and

fantasies, looking far into the blue sky and vast land which embodies various opportunities and possibilities.

The lady in *Carolina Morning* 1955 has a sexy curved figure, protruding breasts, fleshy arms and sturdy legs, and pretty pink face. She is wearing a large red sun hat, matching beautifully with her long red skirt. She is holding her arms, quietly leaning on the wooden doorframe. Her eyes are drawn into the far distance,

Fig. 11

into the vast blue sky, and the clear land. She is standing alone, dreaming, and fantasizing what life is waiting for her. She is not passively waiting and accepting what is to come, but positively searching for her new life, and a new identity. Her beautiful, happy, and cheerful life is all in the future projected by herself alone. The lonely figure is demonstrated together with this lonely house, which stands in the middle of the large empty space, under the clear blue sky, conveying a message of peace, free from disturbance, silence, and stillness. The horizontal line at the bottom of the sky coupled with the vertical lines of the house achieves the sense of stableness. Silence is action for Hopper. The larger silent space foresees the red lady's eager move inside her desirable body and free mind. Early morning in Carolina, the red lady is waking up fresh and confident, ready to walk out of the old life and welcome the new one. All possible wonderful events, activities, and hope are gestated in future uncertainties.

The next lady standing in doorway in long blue dress is integrated amazingly with the entire painting, the blue sky, the white house, and the red chimney. Isolated, the house is standing in the middle of the vast land in great solitude. The isolated figure in the

isolated house is matching the state of the house being in her solitude. This is Hopper's famous painting *High Noon* 1949. Its style is solid and powerful. *High Noon* is mostly pure geometry, with dominant straight lines, acute angles, the emphatic sunlight and shadow, the extreme simplification and

Fig. 12

utter clarity. As blue, deep and vast as the ocean, the sky is cooling down the entire space, and the white house against the blue sky and under the high noon sunlight looks even whiter, and the purity and clarity add to the stillness of the painting. The red chimney, however, is a touch of fire beautifully decorating the blue space, and delicately sparkling in the cool air, pretty much reflecting the active thought and wild dream of this young blond in blue. The color blue of the dress and of the high heel shoes correspond to the color blue of the sky, delivering the sense of quietness and solitude of the girl. Yet her heart is as open and free as her open robe, and as her gesture of the hand touching the exposed breast. Standing out in the doorway and tilting her head toward the sunlight demonstrates a welcoming attitude of her new beginning of the day. Her inward yearning for moving forward and engaging herself into the community life seems irresistible.

Hopper's women sit, stand, and then lean forward. He had the woman in *Cape Cod Morning* 1950 leaning forward toward the large bay window. Part of the lone white house is revealed by the side of the forest, and the densely lined up trees on the left are standing solemn and still against the blue sky,

Fig. 13

with no gleaming of the fields but some strip of light across the grass and on tree tops. It is a new silent morning at Cape Cod, and in her silent house the woman is looking out the window to the far distance dreaming and expecting. No one knows exactly what she is looking at for the object of her attention is out of our sight, and we can witness only its effects, and how the woman's pose manifests her attraction to it. That the woman leans toward the window and gazes looks "as if at the prow of a ship" (Tomasic 26), steering to a destination beyond picture. Hopper quite often locates his "focus on something out of sight" (Marker 19), which is confirmed by Mark Strand who added that "it seems there is always something beyond the picture that works its influence on those within the picture" (34). The external events beyond the picture stir up the internal events of imagination, meditation, and future dreaming. Her thought is transported, and her soul transcended. Hopper once said he loved the feeling of moving on when traveling. It is believed that this moving on itself takes him to meet things unfamiliar, unexpected, unknown, and uncertain. Rather than fear that these unknowns might have brought to him, they brought surprises, exhilaration, thrill, and hopes. This leaning forward, gazing out the window is signaling an urge of moving on as well as a state of moving on. Jo noted in her diary that Hopper believed this *Cape Cod Morning* (Bay Window) would be better than *High Noon*. And later he mentioned this painting as one he liked "very much" (Levin "Complete Oil" 334). Hopper told Katharine Kuh in the interview: "it comes nearer to what I feel than some of my other paintings" (134). Hopper expressed the same thought to Morse in 1960 that "it comes nearer to my thought about such things than many of the others..." (Morse 63). Hopper's paintings are a search for his inner life, and this inner life results in his personal vision of the world, of which he has imperfect knowledge. Therefore, the state

of moving himself on to the unknown world sounds rather exciting and fulfilling. Edward Hopper stated by Wagstaff offers us “a philosophy of being and knowing” (27). The state of moving on makes the search for new knowledge and new self possible.

Hopper’s reading figures in their outward silent spaces move forward in their inward active reading, their thought interacting with the stories they read, either meeting people for the first time, participating in activities in a remote town, arriving at a new city, imagining the performance in the theatre, or examining the effects of human civilization. Hopper’s women figures of seated, standing, and leaning forward in their contemplation or solitude all looking deeply out the window or into the far distance, focusing on something beyond the picture, move forward in their active desiring, dreaming, imagining, and longing for future possibilities. Their outward silent spaces foresee and reinforce their inward action.

Women figures out to work

Hopper has other women, women out in social environment, and women not in introspection alone but with man figures present at the scene, injecting a new tension into the situation, while at the same time leading the viewers to a more positive and

Fig. 14

more complex reading of these paintings. Hopper himself loved this painting *Sunlight in a Cafeteria* 1958 and regarded it as one of the best of his works. Hopper wrote to his patron Stephen Clark in Sept 1958: “I’m very pleased that you have acquired my picture ‘Sunlight in a Cafeteria’ I think its one of my very best pictures” (*Hopper, Draft of a*

Letter to Stephen Clark, qtd. in Levin, "Complete oil" 360). The inner reality or the narrative of the woman unfolds within this large, quiet, clean roadside cafe. *Sunlight in a Cafeteria* 1958 takes us into a public space, a cafeteria, where a woman is sitting at one table near the window in full sunlight and a man is sitting at a separate table across the aisle in shade. There are no other customers in this cafeteria. There is no communication between the two people for they look like strangers to each other. However, if we look closely at Hopper's painting, the detailed depictions of each individual, there is an inward communication in its outward tranquil and static state. The woman in her blue sundress and leather shoes with blond hair might be an office secretary, having a simple lunch in the café, or she might be a waitress who works in this café and now is enjoying her break. With her eyes lowered a bit and her head tilted a little toward left, she is in contemplation on something. The man is looking in the direction of the window, specifically at the pot of plant. However, he seems to be just turning his attention from the woman a moment ago and pauses at the plant on the windowsill while his thought is still on the woman. Hopper is portraying a male gaze here. Women can be painted as passive recipients of a viewer's gaze and as a possession of a male viewer, or they can be painted as active within the painting's narrative. Hopper's male gaze or look is not a possessive, but an interactive one, casting the female not as a passive recipient but as an active individual agent. The women possess desires and desiring is the act through which a woman turns from an object to being subject. By desiring, women initiate the narrative of their own life, which is an active state, rather than passively accepting the events of their lives when they occur to them. Hopper's woman here has shown her interior strength, brilliant inwardness, and self-determining ability. Her lowered eyes and tilted head demonstrate

her determination not to be defined by the male gaze as a sexual object, not to be defined by the society as confined to be a domestic career. This is a rejection of being petrified as a being-in-itself, an inanimate object. She would keep her consciousness, the being-for-itself, to maintain her subjectivity. Her life will be determined by her own thought and action. From the perspective of the female configuration, the hard body with muscular arms and legs, and the sturdy breasts also connote a great degree of self-possession and individual agency. In this large space of a cafeteria, the huge one piece window on the left makes the cafeteria an open space, allowing the woman with dreams and desires infinite possibilities. She does not have to be confined in one place or in one position, that is, she does not have to be in a fixed identity. According Sartre, “existence precedes essence.” The human being has no fixed nature or essence and in this sense he is free. He will be what he will have made of himself. Sartre believes that the individual being is the one, the only one who can make decisions, make choices, take responsibilities, and project his future being. Therefore, this woman is always in her becoming, always on the move toward the future. For Hopper, the mind of this woman is in motion.

Another painting with a woman as a social creature is *Girlie Show* 1941, which is Hopper’s toughest and most sexually charged image. Hopper had a great interest in movies, plays and burlesque, and he and his wife Jo went to movies and theatres frequently. In this painting he paints his fascination with these art forms. The girl on the stage is performing an erotic theatrical display.

Fig. 15

While the interiority and inner imagination that is present in paintings of single woman remains, theatrical display becomes a complex representation of the relation between performer and audience, performer and painter. Such a complex representation serves to highlight what Hopper must perceive to be the women's inner states. *Girlie Show* invites us into the theatrical space, with stage light, curtains, the girl burlesque, pretty makeup, and male audience. The painting depicts that the girl is trading on her availability, yet Hopper keeps his subject distant and isolated from the audience, for he wanted to portray that women at that time were in command of their sexuality" (Troyen, et al, ed "Women" 182). While Hopper portrayed his women, his taste in theater was more highbrow. His exploration of the subject of burlesque reveals a perceptive reading to two conjoined issues: the overt display of women's sexuality and men's "wistful yet dispirited" view of that display (183). The tension between the two parts, performer and audience, or woman and man, is sharply exhibited on the canvas.

As women in *Morning Sun*, and *A Woman in the Sun*, the woman in *Girlie Show* is physically hard. Her anatomy is exaggerated: her breasts are extremely large, firm, and domineering with two nipples in the color red; her arms and legs are muscular; her face is a mask. She is striding up on the stage with her eyes looking up and forward with confidence. She is in no way flirtatious or ingratiating and is embraced not by the audience but by the circle of light that surrounds her. The swirl of blue cloth (a skirt or wrap) emphasizes her containment within her own performance. More than those women with lowered eyes or tilted head in contemplation, this woman with raised head is openly announcing her desires, sexual and beyond. The desire beyond is not satisfied by the male gaze, but the gaze by the woman herself into her inner world to ensure the capabilities of

saying *No* to man and the possibilities of determining her future life by herself. Her entire posture is tough and challenging, exuding sexual energy and control, dominating the stage, sending out a strong message of her interiority and individual agency, the ability of inner power and strength to be liberated and self-determined. In *Girlie Show*, there are barely any men, and their presence seems almost incidental. The few numbers of them and the unimportance of their location on canvas are also Hopper's intention of the inability of men to objectify women as sexual objects, and to define women in their lower profession as burlesque dancers, and to determine their life altogether. As Robert Allen argues, burlesque represented a subversion of women's role as being inferior, domestic, and passive, and to flaunt one's sexuality while performing burlesque could be considered liberation at its most social, as well as private, individual level. For Allen, this performance is the act of an agent, not the empty flaunting of the body as object of others' consumption (Allen, "Horrible Prettiness" 1991 n.p.). For Hopper's women, theatricality is empowering. The agency of the woman dancer is a being-for-itself; this is a conscious being with nothingness inside that creates freedom and takes responsibility. She is able to continuously dance on the theater stage as well as life stage to act as an independent, positive individual, unwilling to accept passively the identity defined by society, and willing to think, to create, and possibly imagine her own future. The freedom endowed by nothingness gives her infinite opportunities and possibilities to project and define herself. Her mind is in motion.

Bright sunlight – the sense of moving on

Hopper developed a love for light when he traveled to Paris, France in 1906. He painted along the Seine and in the parks streets, buildings, and bridges. Hopper's painting

was “closer to impressionism, in its emphasis on light, its fresh vision, its blond color” (Goodrich, *Text*19). Hopper once said to Alexander Eliot, “The light was different from anything I had ever known. The shadows were luminous –more reflected light. Even under the bridges, there was certain luminosity. Maybe it is because the clouds were lower there, just over the housetops. I’ve always been interested in light – more than most contemporary painters” (19). He told Goodrich at the interview that “Maybe I am not very human. What I wanted to do was to paint sunlight on the side of a house” (Goodrich, *Text* 31; Kroll 88). Hopper was interested in painting houses and Goodrich found that different from academic American impressionism, in Hopper’s paintings, there was a concentration on architectural form and insistence on large masses, freely brushed in (19). Sunlight that shines on a city’s stones and concrete structures simplifies the stone and structures themselves. It turns them into “massive monoliths,” which creates a sense of silence, stability, and stillness. Sunlight casts heavy shadows of the buildings that create somber and brooding effects, reflecting the introspection of human figures, their internal power of imagination and action. Like the architectural apertures of windows and doors, geometrical forms of light in shapes of a rectangle, parallelogram, rhomboid or trapezoid falling on the wall or floor that invoke windows or doors, demarcate inside from outside, literally and metaphorically.

Light is believed to be an ancient metaphor for thought, the great sunlight outside the cave by Plato. While the passages of light, the carefully painted presence in rooms, share the occupancy of the space with painted human characters, they represent the relations of emptiness and possibilities, and that is the hollowness or nothingness of the human mind and the opportunities and possibilities of individual action. Hopper’s

paintings emphasize the internal reality rather than external reality, and that is the “state of being or state of mind.” This is achieved through Hopper’s use of light. Contemplation is a state of mind and the contemplation in his paintings is transformed by sunlight, which falls as a central focus of the painting in many of Hopper’s works, often across the path of a lone, contemplative figure. Jones Morse commented on Hopper’s light and its power of transformation: “his love of light literally transformed the darkness ... Hopper’s people turn toward the sun as though it were the redeeming force in their lives” (60). The authority of sunlight in these paintings is such that it leads the viewer to ponder the meaning of the contemplation, the interiority of human figures painted.

Light is the central factor in Hopper’s paintings, and it is an active element in the pictorial concept. Light itself is in motion and light represents human thought, so those figures in contemplation and introspection are in moving state of mind. Here in this part of the analysis, sunlight is the author’s focus. The first type is the golden reflections of radiant sunlight, such as the sunlight in *Office in a Small City* 1953, *Hotel by a Railroad* 1952, *New York Office* 1962, *High Noon* 1949, *Cape Cod Morning* 1950, and *Second Story Sunlight* 1960. The second type is the dazzling rectangular lightfalls on the walls, on the floors, and on human figures, such as the sunlight in *Morning Sun* 1952, *Morning in the City* 1944, *New York Office* 1962, *Sunlight in a Cafeteria* 1958, *Sun in an Empty Room* 1963 and *Room by the Sea* 1951, *Summer in the City* 1949, and *Excursion into Philosophy* 1959. The analyses of the following paintings of Hopper will seek to find the motion of the minds of the portrayed figures in bright sunlight.

Sunlight on the outside wall of the building

The painting *Office in a Small City* 1953 depicts a corner of an office building in which a man is sitting before a desk looking forward in retrospection. The corner of the building is taking the most part of the picture plane. The building wall is turned white, and into “massive monoliths” by the bright sunlight, which creates the extreme simplicity.

Fig. 16

This simplicity conveys a sense of stability and tranquility. While the shadows cast by the sunlight have a somber and brooding effect, they correspond to the state of the man who is in deep contemplation. Sunlight on the wall is not static, but in great motion. The motion of the sunlight represents the thought of man whose mind is in active contemplation within himself.

Summertime 1945 portrays a woman who is featured in summertime, an image of a young blonde, her head erect and confident, her arm resting against a stone pillar, her skirt blown against her thigh by the warm breeze. She is standing on the sunlight step before an open doorway, one foot balanced on the edge of a step, and gazes outward, as if expecting someone. The building and the lady are

Fig. 17

under the bright sunlight, and they are both in the color white. There is a very strong sense of purity, clarity, and geometric simplicity. The shadow cast by the sunlight is equally strong and clear. The mood of contemplation of the lady is evidently demonstrated, and her active thought is interacting with the flow of sunlight. The same

mood is created in paintings *Hotel by the Railroad*, *New York Office*, *High Noon*, and *Cape Cod Morning*. In *Hotel by the Railroad*. The outside wall of the hotel and the roof of the other house are shone in light yellow by the golden reflection of the radiant sunlight. There are shadows cast by the sunlight on windowsill, sidewall, roof, and inside the room. The man holding a cigarette in his right hand pauses and reflects about their travel days. The sunlight on the office building, and on the sidewalk in *New York Office* is so bright and the shadows cast so dark. Both the sunlight in motion and brooding effect of shadows send out an air of movement of thought of the office girl. *High Noon* is the most geometrical painting, with sunlight and shadow the most emphatic, the extreme simplification and utter clarity. The lady in her blue dress is at the time of high noon in great expectation of her future life, her mind moving forward. The lady leaning forward in *Cape Cod Morning* is in a more evident state of imaginative action that is represented by the bright sunlight on the outside wall and shadow on the windowsill, window shade, and the shaded forest.

Second Story Sunlight 1960 in a way is like *High Noon*, with the houses in extreme geometrical shapes. The façades of the houses are pure white under the sunlight, which stands out in the shadows of the roof and the shaded forest to the left. In the picture a young woman sits on the edge of a balcony, straining forward apparently toward the world beyond. In the background, seated in a chair an older woman, withdrawn from life it seems. Like the woman in *Summertime*, everything about the young woman in this painting, her pose, her

Fig 18

glance, her costume, suggests that she is eager to embrace life. Being asked about *Second Story Sunlight*, Hopper said: "This picture is an attempt to paint sunlight as white with no or almost no yellow pigment in the white" (Marker 89). This picture named *Second Story Sunlight* is to portray sunlight, about which Hopper successfully achieves the effect. The sunlight in this painting is "A.M sunlight" (Levin, "Complete Oils" 366), the sunlight in the morning that is believed to be clear, fresh, hopeful, and desirable. The bright sunlight on the facades, on the window shade, and on the tree tops transmits the thought of these two figures' internal world. The young woman in her two piece blue sundress, with the long golden hair coiling on her shoulder, turns her head and body toward the sunlight with the left hand resting on the balcony and the right hand on the right leg. Her face shows a serious and determined look. Her breasts are large and firm, legs and arms strong, exhibiting the strength of inwardness and individual agency. If this balcony is regarded as a stage, she seems to be performing on it, holding strong desire and getting ready to step out into life. Her active thought is enhanced by the morning sunlight. The older woman at the back holding an opened book is looking forward to the sunlight. Though she is not thinking about stepping into life like the young woman, she is content seeing the young life of the woman, and recognizing the desires of her acting as an independent figure with full possibilities of projecting her future self. While the sunlight in which they are bathed transmits the message of hope, the shadows of the roofs and the shaded forests produce the brooding effect of the two people in the sun. The two women are both shone by the sunlight, and their thoughts are interacting with the flowing of sunlight, and their minds are in active motion.

Sunlight in geometrical shapes

This type of sunlight is shining through the windows onto the interiors. From the depiction of windows in Hopper's paintings, such as the curtained windows and uncurtained ones, small windows and larger ones, one can recognize the artist's intention of inviting more light into the rooms. The more light into the rooms indicates the more power of the human internal world and the human thought. Paintings in 1940s such as *Morning in a City* and *High Noon* show curtained windows. The windows in *High Noon* are extremely small and only one curtain on the second floor is slightly open. The curtain in *Morning in a City* is drawn open with two sides tied up; it lets in more light; however, the light looks dim and vague in that morning. In paintings of the 1950s, a few curtains are used but they become very straight ones falling on the sides, in no way blocking the sunlight entering in. Window sizes in paintings are increasingly expanding from medium sizes to very large ones, such as in paintings from *City Sunlight*, *Morning Sun*, *New York Office* to the painting *Sunlight in a Cafeteria*. The window in *Sunlight in a Cafeteria* is as huge as one sidewall. The extraordinary size of the window welcomes infinite sunlight which represents the infinite power of the inwardness of the woman bathed in it. Windows are the recognized avenue for Hopper to transport the strength of human thought and ability of human action.

It is recognized that the patterns of light and shade produced by Hopper are definite, taking the shape of rectangles, parallelograms, acting as an integral element of design. In his discussion of light by Hopper, Goodrich states "Light is never allowed to break up forms," "rather, it defines and models them" (*Text* 113). Hopper's geometrical forms of light correspond harmoniously with the entire design of the painting, such as the

horizontal and vertical lines, the shape of beds, curtains, windows and doors, representing a sense of stability, stillness, and silence, while at the same time the potential of movement. It does not shake the power of the sense; it instead confirms and reinforces the power. The power of light in shapes is not revealed by way of surge or impulse, but by way of energy and existence. The compositional light in shapes of rectangles or parallelograms invokes a window or a door, the architectural apertures that demarcate the inside from outside, the inner and the outer. While the compositional light, the carefully positioned presence in the painting, shares the occupancy with the painted human characters, it symbolizes a relation of the emptiness of human mind and the possibilities of human action. As John Hollander says that light playing inside a room is an ancient metaphor for thought in a human head thus light entering into human figure is to make points about consciousness itself (qtd. in Wagstaff 27). Human figures in Hopper's paintings are conscious beings in their contemplations. When light in shapes shines on them, it reveals and intensifies their self-meditation.

In the following paintings, shaped lights shine on walls, floors, and human figures. Light interacts with human thought, the active imagination, the contemplation of their past experience, and the projection of the future life of the conscious beings. While the interaction between light and human thought is observed, the degree of clarity and intensity of light and shapes can also be viewed. In *Morning in a City* and *City Sunlight*, the two single women are facing the windows toward the sunlight, both in their own expectations of a new tomorrow in that city. Sunlight on walls is dim and in the vague shape of a parallelogram. As in *Hotel by the Railroad*, the man holding a cigarette is thinking about their next journey, their next destination; the woman in her reading is

expecting the unique activity at the next town. Sunlight on the wall is dim, with the shape vague and shadow dark. *Morning Sun* is brighter. The woman sitting in bed is completely bathed in the bright sunlight. She is looking forward toward the sun and into the distance with assurance that her tomorrow is determined by her own choice and action. The light on the wall is very bright, in the clear shape of a parallelogram and in great motion, which signifies the intensity of the woman's thought, the degree of her determination, the possibilities of her action. Her strength of inner world is so powerful and irresistible. The light shape occupies the most part of the sidewall, and this corner of the room occupies the four-fifths of the entire picture plane, all of which gives prominence to the power of consciousness of the woman depicted in this painting. *New York Office* and *Sunlight in a Cafeteria* have shown us a much larger window, a larger and clearer shape of light on the wall, and a stronger sunlight. The young office secretary in blue dress stands in full sunlight is reading an office letter. Maybe she is reading the letter, or maybe she is dreaming about her off-work meeting with her boyfriend and the Broadway show. Her passion, her imagination, and enchanting dream are vividly, metaphorically demonstrated, revealed and intensified. Her thought is moving away from the present and getting into the future. The blue dress woman in *Sunlight in a Cafeteria* is completely immersed in bright sunlight, with the window as huge as a sidewall, the light shape covering four-fifths of the interior wall. The light on the wall is clearly shaped, definitely defined, and the message doubtlessly transmitted and exchanged through light, in which the woman is passionately, hopefully, and positively determined to make her own choice and project her own future identity, and not obediently or passively accepting what is to come in her life. The man sitting at another table is in no position to dominate her life and

career. The woman herself is an independent individual with the brilliance of inwardness and infinite possibilities of performing herself on the stage of life. The window and the sunlight enlarge and intensify the degree of the possibilities.

Hopper has two paintings people call companion pieces, *Summer in the City* 1949 and *Excursion into Philosophy* 1959. In *Summer in the City*, a woman sits pensively at the edge of a bed on which a naked man lies with his face buried in a pillow while in *Excursion into Philosophy* the

Fig. 19

man and the woman have reversed roles. The two paintings are put together here because both narratives unfold between the couple; and more importantly because the lights Hopper used are similar, on the wall, on the floor, and partly on the figures. This painting *Summer in the City* depicts sunlight. It shines through the window, medium size with no curtain or shade. It falls on the wall in the shape of a parallelogram, with an acute angle pointing to the figures. “Angular thrust” on the wall indicates the couple’s psychic intensity. The light falling on bed covers the lower part of the man’s legs and the woman’s seated body. Before the bed on the floor, light falls in shapes of rectangles, and the woman’s feet are stepping on the borderline of one rectangle. The light in shapes is interacting with the human figures in contemplation. The thought represented by light exchanges with the thought by human mind. The light is illuminating the human figures partly in shade. Hopper is providing us a philosophy of “being and knowing” here. The man in bed largely in shade whose shoulder muscles look too tense to suggest any peaceful sleep, turns away from the woman and buries his head in a pillow for escape.

That the man is naked without underwear indicates the couple has just had sex. The woman is more obviously depressed, seated on the edge of a narrow, hard bed in a Spartan interior. She must have sexual desires, yet her desires are quite possibly not satisfied by her partner. Beside the sexual desires, she must have desires beyond that she is willing passionately to achieve. Both of them are encountering difficulties, starting to meditate on questions like who they are, what they do, how they may deal with the conflicts and whether they can finally resolve the conflicts. The man's body, figure, mood, and gesture demonstrate an attitude of an inability to face the facts, of a lack of courage and strength in dealing with the confrontation, and of an escape from the life focus. The woman, whose hard, muscular figure looks very strong to suggest her interior strength and power of inwardness, faces light, steps onto the light, and is in serious solitude and introspection. She is recalling their past, their love, their current quarrels, and different values. With the high degree of luminosity of light, she has little fear of facing them, and little fear of negating her unhappy experience and relationship. She has the independent mind, and the firm belief in her own capability to make a turn in the course of her life.

Excursion into Philosophy 1959 produced a decade later is a masterpiece. Hopper's wife Jo wrote to Lloyd Goodrich in a letter: "Edward's picture came along easily. I'm so anxious for you to see. Edward thinks it his best. Maybe. It's new note for him. I'm so happy he could do it. Its a valliant thing to fight down inertia ..." ⁴ Later Jo wrote to collectors Mr. and Mrs. Malcolm Chace about Hopper's canvas: "We'd love to hear what you think of Edward's *Excursion into Philosophy*. It's a new direction for E. H. & he was so pleased with it himself." ⁵ As a companion to *Summer in the City*, the story told

⁴ Jo Hopper to Lloyd Goodrich, letter of September 23, 1959.

⁵ Jo Hopper to Mr. And Mrs. Malcolm Chace, letter of January 15, 1960.

unfolds again between the couple but with reversed roles. Through an open window enters light in shapes of rectangles, falling on the wall, on human figures and on the floor. The entire room is bright with yellow shade on the walls and on the floor. The man bends under the weight of troubled thoughts, his face frozen in a grim expression, with half of his left foot stepping on light, while the woman her turns back on him, her nude derriere blatantly exposed and ignored. He has just put down a book on the bed. "The open book is Plato, reread too late" (Levin "Complete Oil" 362). "He had been reading Plato rather late in life" Hopper once remarked (qtd. in Levin, "Catalogue Raisonne" 80). This painting is a new note for Hopper. Clearly, there is a story here, however,

Fig. 20

unlike most of the paintings analyzed before, it is a story not achieved by brilliant techniques of forms and design only. It is a story with the burden of meaning falling on the man, the woman, and the book, and to read the painting, a narrative of their relationship to each other has to be constructed. What is unique about this painting is that the viewer is invited into its "static center" where the protagonists of man, woman and book are gathered "in an odd triangulation of forces" (Strand, "Hopper" 59). The tension among the three forces is evidently presented and clearly felt. Silently lying toward the wall, the woman's internal struggle is fierce. Does she love this man? Is she willing to satisfy this man's sexual desire? Is she already tired of this man or is she still waiting for the man's love? How is she going to face the reality if no more desires exist in her or in him? The man sitting on the edge of the dark, hard bed has a look of disillusionment on

his face. His concerned look under the severe placidity conveys a message of struggle pertaining to pursuit. The man is dressing neatly, wearing a white shirt, a pair of black trousers and a pair of shining leather shoes, which gives the viewer an idea of a serious man in serious thought. What is he thinking? Does he love the woman? Why does he ignore her? What does the open book of Plato tell him? That the book lies open on the bed leaves one to consider the dilemma puzzling this man who stares into an almost abstract patch of light on the floor. The woman besides him is a modern, young, and very sexy angel who should be the man's lover, the physical beauty. The reference to Plato makes one wonder if the man is contemplating the meaning of reality and appearance. Plato praised the realm of ideas as the ultimate form of reality and relegated physical manifestations of them to a lower realm, as the appearances. The man seems to be struggling between the pursuit of true beauty, the realm of ideas, and the physical manifestation of beauty, the appearance. The man seems to be questioning the idea of light versus an actual beam of it. There is no assured answer to the question confronting the man and the woman, however, the bright sunlight in the room shines on them, especially on the man who shows his potential of understanding and the power of thought. However static the picture looks, the human figures in the painting are in great motion of mind.

The following two pictures *Rooms by the Sea* 1951 and *Sun in an Empty Room* 1963 portray rooms and sunlight without human figures in them. I believe that light represents illuminating factor for enlightening human beings, and the power of human beings' inner world. The emptier the room is, the more powerful the inner world of human beings becomes. Nothingness in the conscious being generates more freedom and

possibilities for this being to think, to imagine, and to act. Hopper is searching for inner light and strength of inwardness. Hopper is believed to be emptying his painted rooms of objects in order to provide a “stage” for sunlight. The more focused on light it seems, the more assured of the compelling appeal and stalwart nature of inwardness.

In the painting *Rooms by the Sea*, the most striking feature is the large open doorway and the flood of sunlight entering the room. The lights falling immediately on the wall and on the floor while entering join together, forming perfect geometrical shapes of two trapezoids, and connect precisely the inner and outer world. Though the sunlight in defined shapes looks static, it moves within the borderlines of geometrics if one observes carefully the strokes of thick paint that symbolize the motion of human

Fig. 21

thought. The depiction of bright sunlight and the doorway occupying $\frac{3}{4}$ of the picture plane tells us about the importance of human thought and the capabilities of an inner world. The light here in shapes signifies a certain power, not the power of impulse, but the power of existence, the power of inwardness. The light is also like an arrow leading the viewer's view from right to left where the second room is seen. It is filled with simple, comfortable, and clean furniture: a sofa, bureau, and painting on the wall, on which sunlight shapes a parallelogram. When looking out the doorway to the right, the sea, a large inviting expanse that is typically Hopper and true to the Truro, Cape Cod area where he painted it, arrives, at high tide, almost directly at the doorstep of this room, which was, if fact, his studio (Levin, *Hopper's Places* 73). The rooms are like a houseboat moving forward into a deeply rich

and benevolent sea. Hopper beautifully depicts the motion of mind of himself and gracefully reveals the search for his own identity at the vast realm of the universe.

Hopper's identity, if sought in painting, is in his last great work *Sun in an Empty Room* 1963. The furniture has been removed completely and Hopper is only concerned with sunlight as it falls through a window into an empty, silent space. The yellow bright sunlight through the window strikes two places on the

Fig. 22

wall and the floor, producing two rectangles with straight angles. It creates a rich sense of contemplation and solitude, a firm belief and certain faith in one's interiority, the individual agency. The two continuing geometrical shapes of light lead our view to the outside highlighted leaves of a nearby tree, especially to the sunlight on top of it, and to the source of it from afar. Hopper is expanding his vastness of the inner world and his inner vision through sunlight, the ultimate source of the infinite power of his inwardness. The emptier the room is, the larger his internal world becomes, and the deeper his vision of the world has formed. When being asked about what he intended to express in *Sun in an Empty Room*, Hopper famously responded: "I am after ME"

What Hopper is really after is himself. The painting *Sun in an Empty Room* is a typical one for his search. In fact through all his paintings, he has been searching for the self that he fervently believed in but had the imperfect knowledge of, and he would like to step into the mystery for the unknown part of that self. His depictions of solitary figures, traveling man, theatres, and couples are to observe the inner reality rather than outer reality, the motion of mind rather than the obligation to community. He is

concerned with the higher level of philosophy. The real interest of Hopper is to seek the interiority that is his own. His works are in exact resonance with his interior life, the phases of self-investigation.

Viewing those pictures analyzed in sections of silent spaces, and then in sections of bright sunlight, we realize there appears a gradual increase in the intensity of the investigation of inner life. In silent spaces, the reading figures are imagining and anticipating new towns they will arrive at or new people they are going to meet in their reading of novels, magazines or travel guide, and their thoughts are interacting with the figures in books or magazines. They keep themselves as conscious beings while reading books, never to be congealed as unconscious beings by the outward reality. Women figures who are seated, standing, or leaning forward are looking out the windows toward sunlight into far distance in retrospection. They are performing much more than just imagining or anticipating the future activities they might get involved in. They are demonstrating their strong desires sexual and beyond for self-determination through their own perceptions and actions, exhibiting their ability of solitude, freedom, aggressiveness and the undefined. Women out to work are facing life in society, in which they encounter men's gaze, and that gaze creates more tension between men and women's social roles. Women are not willing to be objectified by men's gaze as their sexual objects. They are determined to hold their self-possession, individual agency and maintain their subjectivity. Women are not willing to accept passively the events when they occur to them in their lives, but willing to project positively their lives through their own actions. They return their gaze to men as a rejection of being defined as domestic career or burlesque dancer, the traditional role of women, they are capable to become what they wish to become by

maintaining their consciousness, being-for-itself.

In section of bright sunlight, the intensity of the investigation of inner life continues to increase as sunlight plays a central role in Hopper's paintings and the focus more concentrates on human thought. Sunlight reflected radiantly on the outside wall of buildings simplifies its structure creating a sense of stillness and stability, while the shade cast by the sunlight on the building creates a brooding effect, reflecting the contemplation of human figures, their internal strength of imagination and action. Sunlight is the ancient metaphor for thought. While sunlight entering through windows and doors falls on interior walls, on floors and on human figures, it shines, reveals, and intensifies human thought. Sunlight in shapes of rectangle, parallelogram, rhomboid, or trapezoid, that invokes windows or doors, the architectural aperture, demarcate the inside and outside and represent the relation of emptiness and possibilities. The thought of light exchanged with the thought of human figures, the bright sunlight as a redeeming force enlightens the human figures in their solitude. Those solitary women figures bathed in sunlight all look out the window into the far distance focusing their eyes on something beyond the picture plane. They are looking for the source of light, the source of thought, and the source of internal strength and hope. The working woman in *Sun in a Cafeteria* is immersed in vast and warm sunlight, being embraced by the glory of light and awakened by the power of freedom given to her. The couple of pictures, *Summer in the City* and *Excursion into Philosophy*, are exploring a more complex and troubled relationship between man and woman at the level of thought, and the latter one with one more thing, the book of Plato. The picture of *Excursion into Philosophy* presents to us a triangulation of forces between the man, the woman, and the book. The man is reflecting on Plato's praised realm of

ideas, being in a struggle of pursuing true beauty, or the physical manifestation of beauty. It seems that the man is having a conversation with Plato at the metaphysical level.

The most abstract and the most powerful presentation of the investigation of inner life of Hopper is the painting of *Sun in an Empty Room*. Sunlight is the only subject here, clearing off all the objects of material world. Hopper concentrates all his attention to the spiritual world, in which full emptiness of the room signifies the full power of inner life.

While he is searching for his inner life, while his paintings are investigating the internal power of himself, and while this power is found continuously increasing, Hopper is unconsciously pursuing the sense of moving on, the sense of making breakthrough in his art creation. He was never satisfied with what he has found in his search about himself, he was not always happy about what he has painted so far, like the impression he gave to others that what he has imagined about the painting ought to be was never the one last painted. His doubt was not based on the feeling that he was inferior, but on the sense that he did not always realize the conception he would like to. The satisfaction can be regarded as a label of being good, a sort of fixed level of the artist, a kind of fullness that a man has reached, and a sort of artist he can be and he is. Hopper did not nod at this label, give in at the level, or say yes to “fullness,” or accept willingly the sort of artist he can only become. He continued to search in this “vast and varied realm” for the unknown part of himself, for the infinite possibilities that he can be. Sartre claims that the human being does not have a fixed nature or identity, and he will not be objectified as this, being-in-itself, but the human being possesses nothingness that infinitely secrets freedom that allows him to become what he will make of himself, to maintain being-for-itself who is always conscious of his own opportunities and possibilities.

Over his later years after the 1940s, Hopper's style becomes more solid and powerful due to his use of geometrical design of light, and the fewer external objects being posited in the rooms, which all create a sense of simplicity. The stones of the outside walls are turned white and become a massive monolith under sunlight for extreme simplicity; and small windows are replaced by a huge one piece window of a sidewall. Tables are removed leaving only a bed in the corner near the window; and pictures on the wall are replaced by the clear geometrically shaped sunlight for clarity. Human figures are all gone with a few pieces of furniture in one room; all material things are cleared off leaving sunlight as the only subject on canvases and the room is empty, seeking the entire inner world. There appears a tendency that the paintings' exteriority looks increasingly simpler, and thus it is possible for Hopper to leave more room to seek the power of interiority. Heavy and complicated exterior look of canvases can be seen as the impossibilities for further search, for the sense of moving on, and for final breakthrough. The impossibilities are the inertia state of being, the nature of objects like the inanimate stone or rock with no possibility of change, as what Sartre calls the nature of being-in-itself, as full as an egg. It is defined completely. Only to reduce the degree of complexity of exterior look, can Hopper give his paintings possibilities to express the interiority of human figures, with the nature of being-for-itself, the conscious being, as empty as a hole, which the human being desires to fill. It is never defined.

CHAPTER V

MIKE NICHOLS AND THE EXPLORATION FOR AUTHENTICITY --*THE GRADUATE*

...the existential hero confronts an absurd world
while managing to find moments of grace within it.

Gorge Cotkin (240)
Existential America

Mike Nichols

An unorthodox director, a soul explorer

Mike Nichols has an unorthodox mind that created novel situations. *The Graduate* might have been “the first movie” about American youth in 1960s to “tell it like it is.” It is bold as well that “a hero has slept with a woman and married her daughter” (Farber and Changas 182, 188). Choosing an actor, in the eyes of Art Grafunkel, Adrian Lester and Hank Azaria, is a particularly daring, less than obvious choice of Nichols. Dustin Hoffman was both unknown and physically wrong for the preppy Benjamin Braddock, but he was chosen and he was made the greatest success. Nichols stated that Hoffman was just Nichols himself, “dark, Jewish, anomalous presence.” Hoffman said, “I was a paralyzed person. I had come from a paralyzed background—suffocation of that family. I was not acting” (Lahr 279). Hoffman is just the right person for the role of Ben whom Nichols is creating in *The Graduate*. Ben is Nichols’s “explorer,” exploring a life “different” from what he is expected by the society. Nichols’ movies deal with people and the faulty, confused world they live in. In *The Graduate*, he depicts a confused young

college graduate Benjamin Braddock. In the words of Nichols himself in a conversation with Gelmis that he is telling a story of “a not particularly bright, not particularly remarkable but worthy kid drowning among objects and things, committing moral suicide by allowing himself to be used finally like an object or a thing by Mrs. Robinson because he doesn’t have the moral or intellectual resources to do what a large percentage of other kids like him do—to rebel, to march, to demonstrate to turn on. Just drowning. Then finding himself to some extent, finding a part of himself that he hadn’t found, through connecting with a girl. Finding passion because of impossibility. Impossibility always leads to passion, and vice versa. Going from passion to a kind of insanity: saving himself temporarily from being an object, through the passion and insanity. Getting what he thinks he wanted and beginning to subside back to the same world in which he has to live, with not enough changed” (Gelmis 284).

Nichols’ thought has some affinity with what Sartre claims in his existential freedom that human beings are free because they have no fixed essence or identity and they can become whatever they make of themselves through their own actions. They are not willing to be identified by others. Also, humans are ontologically free because central to being-for-itself, the conscious being with nature of change, nothingness gives the infinite possibilities of freedom for them to think and act, while being-in-itself is the state of an object like a stone or rock with the nature of fixed essence or identity. When two modes of being confront each other, being-in-itself is sucking being-for-itself in to objectify it. Being-for-itself may feel very uncomfortable, being eroded and objectified.

Ben feels nervous and weird when being crowded by his parents and their friends, and further feels suffocated by what they tell him and expect him to be. In Ben’s eye, his

parents' world is a superficial world, a materialistic suburban existence. Everybody seems to be interested in and driven by the material wealth and everybody can be labeled as a member of that material world. To Ben, that is a life he fears conforming to because he sees that that life is a contrived, constricting, unreflective, suburban malaise, and a life which he feels like escaping. In terms of ontological freedom, the world of conformity of Ben's parents is a mode of being-in-itself that has an established and fixed nature and identity, which is encroaching Ben's consciousness, being-for-itself, of being a man of his own. He feels nauseated. He is managing not to be congealed by the non-conscious state of being, not to be defined as one of their members of the established world. He wishes to keep his own consciousness and search for a life of being "different." Yet he is rather confused and a bit worried about his future. Still without clear purpose in life, he is used and maneuvered by Mrs. Robinson. He is losing himself as a conscious being and becoming a petrified object in a contrived world. He is drowning himself in the swimming pool and Mrs. Robinson's bed. He does not feel happy or proud of himself. In terms of practical freedom, Ben is not willing to fall into "bad faith," and he is pursuing a life of true meaning. Through connecting with a girl, he finds a passion that makes it possible for him to explore the authentic life, in words of Sartre, the authenticity. He is exploring an authentic self. He can be regarded as Nichols' soul "explorer," for Nichols is exploring through his character what he believes in.

Mike Nichols' talents in directing

Mike Nichols (1931-) is a German-born Jewish American who moved with his family to the United States to flee the Nazis in 1939. He is a television, stage and film director, writer, and producer. Until 2010, Nichols was one of the only 12 people to have

won each of the major American entertainment awards: an Emmy, Grammy, Oscar, and Tony Award (EGOT). Winning all four awards has been referred to as winning the Grand Slam. Nichols received his fourth distinct award in Nov. 2001 and between 1961 and 2001, Nichols got a total of 14 awards which is the highest in award number among the 8 people who attended the competitive categories. Nichols is the first winner to have won multiple awards for directing and has the most Tony awards (8) of any Grand Slam winner. He is an artist with most awards in total. In 2001, he was awarded the National Medal of Arts, created by the United States of Congress in 1984 for the purpose of honoring artists and patrons of the arts. He received the Life Achievement Award from the American Film Institute in 2010.⁶

Nichols has remarkable talents in directing. Leonard Bernstein put his arm around Nichols, “Oh, Mikey, you are so good. I don’t know at what, but you’re so good” (Lahr 273). It is believed that his training at the University of Chicago, his acting classes with Strasberg, his improvising, and his comedy act with Elaine May have all been a preparation for his directing. One example shows Nichols with the quality of calmness. The Broadway producer Arnold Saint-Subber shopped Nichols for Neil Simon’s “Nobody Loves Me.” The notoriously nervous Simon was about to call off the play when he found the play made no one laugh after the first reading. Nichols was unruffled, “The play was so light, so sweet, so funny, that my job was to make it real. I was absolutely confident about what everything should be and where everybody should be.” When the play was performed before the audience, it was a success. Simon was impressed by Nichols’ extraordinary calmness. Nichols said to Simon who never worried again, “I had instant maturity” (274).

⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mike_Nichols

Nichols' film technique is not showy, and Nichols is a director's director. Well-known film director Steven Spielberg said, "He tends to get actors to give him their finest hours" (278). Nichols has learned that the director's job is to help the actors turn psychology into behavior. He is generally oblique, when he talks to actors and to students, offering up examples from his own life to clarify a theatrical moment. The veteran director Billy Wilder said, "Mike's scenes have a kind of inner content, which the audience feels and follows. He is very lucid." Nichols talks about directing "It's like seeding a cloud and hoping it will rain." Nichols knows that the process of directing requires patience, luck, and a gentle touch. Richard Burton, the actor in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* once says about Nichols, "He appears to defer to you, then in the end he gets exactly what he wants. He conspires with you rather than directs you, to get your best." Nichols has his goal of matching the actor to the part and he really has the keen eye to do it. He said, "If I can cast the right people and figure out the things they should be doing in the scene, they don't have to do anything but show up, and nobody has to act." Dustin Hoffman is the perfect example to illustrate this point. Dustin Hoffman was himself a young man who felt alienated and suffocated, so when he acted, he was playing himself very easily, the young man Ben who is confused and lost. Dustin said later, "There is no piece of casting in the twentieth century that I know of that is more courageous than putting me in that part," and he considered the film "the most perfect movie [he's] ever been part of" (Lahr 279).

Steven Spielberg valued Nichols' talents in cinematography. He called *The Graduate* "a visual watershed," which invokes the moment when Benjamin races home ahead of Mrs. Robinson to tell her daughter Elaine about his affair with her mother. "All

of a sudden, the mother appears in the door behind Elaine. Elaine turns, and the focus racks to the mom. But when Elaine turns back, the focus stays – Elaine is actually out of focus – very slowly comes back until she is sharp... I have never seen long lenses used that way to illuminate a character moment” said Spielberg (Lahr 280). Other cinematic innovations appreciated by Spielberg are the handheld camera in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* which “further complicated” the anxiety and turned the couple’s war into “a dance”; the “brilliant use of light” in *Day of the Dolphin* when the aquarium lights are turned on and a dead body is discovered floating inside the tank (280). Steven Spielberg said, “Every development executive, every studio president, has a list of directors, and Mike has never been off the A-list.” This puts Nichols survival at the top of the Hollywood tree at thirty-four years, and counting longer than such legends as Preston Sturges, Billy Wilder, John Huston, and Frank Capra. Spielberg added, “You want him because you know that he’s going to tell the story better than it was told in the screenplay you bought. You’re going to be getting basically two scripts for the price of one” (282).

Nichols, who is a person who keeps no diary and few mementos in his home of his extraordinary life, is still all future. Spielberg commented on Nichols moviemaking career, “He can go on and on until he chooses not to go on anymore. But the greatest of Nichols’ mise-en-scene is himself, and he has created a person who lives well in the world (Lahr 285).

***The Graduate* and Ben’s Exploration for Authenticity**

Meaningful movies, like philosophy, say something important about the human condition. Philosophers articulate theories that spell out what life is like and how we might confront it. Movies show us through a depiction of characters and events how

people live. They give us concrete portrayals of specific circumstances. The elements of movies – script, acting, mise-en-scene, cinematography create effects and express attitudes and insights (Pamerleau 2, 40). More than a novel can do to tell a story, as a medium, a movie can deliver visual information contained in a single frame. It can deliver information and meanings contained in specific angles, light and shadow (Chatman 433). More importantly, the movie qualities make the narrative even more concrete, appealing to our own experiences in similar circumstances. We watch actors, flesh and blood persons as they confront situations (Bordwell 212). The music, the songs and lyrics, the voiceover, the images, and editing all help to deliver the meaning of themes depicted. The artistic nature of movie provides a unique perspective on the same theme that interests people.

Confusion – an awareness of being-in-itself and being-for-itself

When Sartre's two modes of being, being-for-itself (*pour-soi*), the intentional conscious being, confronts being-in-itself (*en-soi*), an object with fixed identity, the human being feels nausea, the uncomfortable feeling of the soul, because the pure being sucks everything into itself and causes being-for-itself to experience the feeling of nausea. This deep feeling of the soul is an awareness of the conflicts of the conscious being of a person and the non-conscious being of an object. Walker Percy's Binx Bolling in Chapter Three confronts this feeling of nausea when he dreams of wartime and realizes that his past comfortable, good life in Gentilly is the life all other people live, a type of set life that puts him into dormancy, and the experience of wartime starts him to think in a new way. In *Nausea* Sartre's Antoine suffers the confrontation when writing the biography for a historical figure, when he recognizes that looking for meaning for his own existence in

writing is looking for essence that human reason has put on it, which has a fixed nature. He decides to go to Paris to write a novel that has the character of creation to respite nausea. That is an awakening.

Benjamin Braddock in *The Graduate* confronts nausea when he speaks on the podium of the amphitheatre at the graduation ceremony. He is looking for the purpose for their past years of demanding work, the sacrifice of parents, and the fierce competition, and trying to deliver that purpose to the audience. If there is no purpose, all those efforts will be meaningless. However, to the surprise of the audience and himself, Ben can not state the purpose he wishes the audience to remember and himself to carry forever. He gets stuck and a whirl of confusion sweeps him. If he finds it easy, that purpose must be going to graduate school, or going to a prestigious company that carries their family lines, or going to a prosperous industry that guarantees fortune and social status, all of which are the expectations of parents and the larger society. However, Ben finds that these purposes are fixed patterns and ideas that have the identity of a thing, definable, unchanged, and unreflective, which he believes is a sort of inertia that erodes his free consciousness and his ability to judge and act. These established purposes are a state of being-in-itself, a static state of being. They are the fullness of a thing, in conflict with the emptiness of the consciousness. The fullness encroaches on the emptiness, his free consciousness, by congealing him into a stone, which makes him feel uncomfortable. The encountered nauseated feeling can be understood as “confusion.” This is an awakening.

Confusion echoed in The Sound of Silence

The captain is announcing to the passengers while they are approaching Los Angeles airport. The weather over Los Angeles airport is clear, however, Ben’s facial

expression is not. With a close-up of Ben, his face is covered with a mist of blank expression. Ben has graduated from a prestigious college in the East with honor and now is heading home in the West. He is not clear about the purpose of the four years' hard work and fierce competition. Rather than being excited about his achievements or being happy about everything his parents did for him, he feels rather at a loss of what he should do in the future. While he is being carried by a moving sidewalk through the airport with other passengers, Ben stares straight ahead and is motionless. He and his suitcase are separately and interchangeably shot, indicating a sense of Ben as inanimate as the suitcase itself. Ben's predicament of being thrown back to a confining existence is demonstrated. The song by Simon and Garfunkel, *The Sound of Silence*, is played to accompany Ben's feeling and emotion while he is carried along. The lyric matches the condition of Ben:

Hello darkness, my old friend
I've come to talk with you again
Because a vision softly creeping
Left its seeds while I was sleeping
And the vision that was planted in my brain
Still remains
Within the sound of silence

(1st stanza)

Darkness is the image of loneliness, wandering, and alienation, which bring people the feeling of coldness, distance, and apathy. In darkness, silence is the only sound, for there is no communication between people. Ben is isolated in the darkness of his own, finding no one to talk to. He is walking alone on the street in darkness.

In restless dreams I walked alone
Narrow streets of cobblestone
'Neath the halo of a street lamp
I turn my collar to the cold and damp
When my eyes were stabbed by the flash of a neon light

That split the night
And touched the sound of silence (2nd stanza)

Coldness in the dark night makes Ben thrill, and he is pulling up the collar to prevent the harsh wind and damp air to keep himself from being too cold. Suddenly the flash of a neon light thrusts his eyes, and splits the night and touches the sound of silence.

Darkness and light are used in the song as imageries to show how people's ignorance and apathy destroy the ability to communicate even on the basic level. The theme of the song is the inability of communication with man, and the light out of darkness represents only a certain degree of communication, and yet that is only on the superficial level, which is the "commercial level," neon light as the representative. Between people, there is no serious understanding because there is no serious communication.

And in the naked light I saw
Ten thousand people maybe more
People talking without speaking
People hearing without listening
People writing songs that voices never shared
No one dared
Disturb the sound of silence (3rd stanza)

The lyric "People talking without speaking, People hearing without listening" exhibits exactly how the communication is failing. When they communicate, people who are talking are not seriously thinking, caring, and speaking, and they are just saying what other people might say rather than speaking what they really believe; people who are hearing are not seriously listening, understanding, or caring, but are just turning a deaf ear to the meaningless talk. When the meaningful communication fails, the only sound is the silence.

"Fools," said I, "you do not know

Silence like a cancer grows
Hear my words that I might teach you
Take my arms that I might reach you"
But my words like silent raindrops fell
And echoed in the wells of silence (4th stanza)

The failing communication is like a malignant tumor, enlarging each day and corroding the body and the soul of human beings. I really wish to let you know. No one dares to take the risk of reaching out to disturb the sound of silence. The poet's attempts are equally futile for his words are the "silent raindrops" that are falling yet no one hears, and only echo in the "wells of silence."

And the people bowed and prayed
To the neon god they made
And the sign flashed out its warning
In the words that it was forming
And the sign said "The words of the prophets are written on the subway walls
And tenement halls
And whispered in the sound of silence (5th stanza)

All these people worship their god, the neon light that represents the brilliantly colorful material world. However, it is the superficial and illusionary world, in which the god of light is false. The sign gives out warning about the false god of light, and the truth is written everywhere on subway walls, in tenement halls, however, no one cares to see it, no one dares to break the sound of silence, and no one is willing to make any changes. Though the song is not written specifically for the movie, it echoes the mood of the young people who are confused and lost in this world.

Suffocation by the party crowd

Ben's request of having to be alone for a while and his wish to be "different" are uttered to his father, but no real attention is given to them. Ben is speaking, but his father is not listening. Ben is suffering, yet his father is not making efforts to understanding. The

celebration party has started downstairs where friends of Ben's parents have been waiting to see this star to come out shining.

Ben is not ready to meet them. He meets them. They are old well-wishers, family friends who want to know his future plan, and older guests who provide "kind" suggestions and "good" pieces of advice. He tries to escape, feigning the need to go to his room, or outside to "check on the car," but these escape plans are thwarted. Ben's predicament is fully demonstrated herein.

Mrs. Terhune is reading Ben's Year Book loud down the hall.

– associate editor of the college newspaper in his junior year -
managing editor in his senior year
...

Mr. Carlson: Hey – there's our award winning scholar.

Mrs. Carlson: We're all very proud of you.

Ben: Thank you, Mrs. Carlson.

Mr. Carlson: Is that the new car out there? The little red Wop job?

Mr. Braddock: That's Ben's graduation present.

...

Ben: Excuse me – I think I'd just like to check something on
the car for a minute –

Mr. Loomis: Here is the track star himself. How are you, track star?

Ben: Just fine, Mr. Loomis.

Mr. Loomis: I want to get a drink and then I want to hear all about that
thing you won. That Hopperman award.

Ben: Helpingman.

Mr. Loomis: Helpingman! Right! Now you wait right here.

...

Three ladies come out. One takes Ben's right hand, another takes his left, and the third fingers the front of his jacket.

Lady 1: Ben – we're all so proud of you.

Lady 2: Proud, proud, proud, proud, proud.

Lady 3: What are you going to do now?

Ben: I was going to go upstairs for a minute –

Lady 3: No – I meant with your future.

Lady 2: With you life.

Ben: Well – that’s a little hard to say –

Mr. McQuire appears at this moment.

Mr. McQuire: Ben!

Ben: Mr. McQuire

Mr. McQuire: Ben

Ben: Mr. McQuire

Mr. McQuire: Ben – I just want to say one word to you – just one word –

Ben: Yes, sir.

Mr. McQuire: Are you listening?

Ben: Yes I am.

Mr. McQuire: Plastic.

Ben: Exactly how do you mean?

Mr. McQuire: There is a great future in plastics.

Think about it. Will you think about it?

Ben: Yes, I will.

Mr. McQuire: Okay. Enough said. That’s a deal.

(The Graduate screenplay 28-30)

Ben has felt confused and he has been awakened. His being-for-itself is not willing to be congealed to be a thing, with an identity that has no capacity to change. Being-for-itself is not what it is and is what it is not. The human individual is totally free. He is never what he is, and he is what he makes of himself through his thought and action. He is not determined by others’ opinions and judgments, but by his own perceptions and decisions.

People’s reading of yearbook honors and their questions of his future plan pressure Ben with set beliefs that honor students have to choose a certain occupation that matches the expectations of the society; the occupation must correspond with what he has learned and achieved in the past years and must conform to what is believed to be the most promising industry, and the most satisfactory salary. To Ben, these thoughts and expectations present the character of being-in-itself, contrived, constricted, and unreflective, objectifying his free will of an individual who is condemned to be free, to be

able to think, perceive, and act. He is suffocated by their dry, inanimate wishes, mediocre questions, as well as the soulless material success pursuit.

The entire scene is captured in a series of close-ups in which the camera in a sense “crowds” Ben much as the partygoers do, creating an effect which, as Man notes, highlights Ben’s “feeling of suffocation” (Man 37).

The root cause of the sense of suffocation of Ben is summed up most succinctly by the partygoer Mr. McQuire’s advice. He corners Ben by the backyard pool, suggesting that Ben think in this regard of “just one word ... *Plastic*,” when Mr. McQuire offers up unwittingly the metaphor that characterizes his generation, whose lifestyle is seen as materialistic, contrived, a plastic existence. The shimmering backyard swimming pool is used here to symbolize not only the materialism, but also the superficial, temporal nature of existence.

Escaping from the party crowds, Ben hides himself in his room wishing to get some air to breathe. One shot of Ben staring into his aquarium is presented. The recurring symbol exhibits vividly Ben’s feelings of entrapment and loneliness. Like the fish in the tank, Ben is trapped in the world of an enclosed space circling around aimlessly and futilely. Unable to emerge from the depth of water, he is confined by the adult world’s beliefs and pronouncement. Suffocated, without clear purpose of life, Ben sweats to word out “I want it to be different.” Vaguely though, there must be an unwillingness to accept the false standards, empty gestures, and dead values of the world of his parents’ generation. He has a sense of breaking away from a congealed being, being a conscious individual, a human existence on the move.

Suffocation by his parents

The 21st year's birthday party arranged by Ben's parents has shown another drama further depicting Ben's suffocation, the highest level of suffocation. From inside the house, Ben's request to talk with his father, to discuss the matter of demonstration of scuba gear is put forward, but no real attention is given to it. Another plead "can you listen" is made, unfortunately, Ben is given only 10 seconds before he has to come out, demonstrating his father's present for his birthday. Ben is speaking, yet his father is not listening. Ben is suffering, but his father is not making efforts to understand. The guests at the backyard pool are awaiting the arrival of the guest of honor.

Ben is being treated as an object that can be manipulated as wished by his parents, for an object is not regarded to have its own ideas or thoughts, and it has to follow other people's ideas and thoughts. It does not have its own freedom, and it is unable to perceive, and to act. Ben's father takes Ben, the son graduating from a prestigious college as a shining star, as something of display, as something that may manifest his own existence, his own pride, and his own achievements. The dialogue scene of Ben and his father Mr. Braddock presents this relationship.

Mr. Braddock: Are you ready in there, feature attraction?

Ben's voice: Could I speak to you for a second, Dad?

But Mr. Braddock has already moved away from the window and is readdressing his audience.

Mr. Braddock: Right. Hey- I'm glad to see you're paying attention. A feature attraction that will be one of the most astounding events ever to take place in this particular backyard.

They all laugh and some applaud.

Mr. Braddock: Now I'm going to ask for a big round of applause to bring this boy out here – wait a minute – let me amend that – to

bring this young man out here – because today he is
 twenty-one-years-old -

Ben's voice: Dad – could we just talk about this for a second?

Mr. Braddock: Twenty-one-years-old, ladies and gentlemen; four of those
 years spent accomplishing some rather extraordinary
 things at one of our nation's leading seats of learning -

Mr. Braddock: (to the window)
 I can't hold them much longer, Ben. You better get out here.

Ben's voice: I'd like to discuss this.

Mr. Braddock: (to the audience)
 This boy –I'm sorry -this young man – is soon to continue
 his education as a Frank Halpingham Award Scholar – but
 before he does –

Mr. Braddock: before he does -
 (to the window)
 You're disappointing them, Ben.
 You're disappointing them.

Ben's voice: Dad – can you listen –

Mr. Braddock: I'll give you ten seconds,
 (to the audience)
 He is going to give us a practical demonstration of what I
 feel safe in saying a pretty exciting birthday present – and it
 better work or I'm out over two hundred bucks – so let's
 hear it for –

(*The Graduate* screenplay 42)

That Mr. Braddock keeps calling Ben “boy” shows us that he has been treating Ben as a child who needs parents to tell him what to do and who has to follow parents’ advice. Ben’s achievements in all these years are regarded as parents’ achievements, which satisfy their vanity and bring their life meaning. Today is Ben’s 21st birthday, the official mark of manhood in the United States, however, Mr. Braddock is not clearly aware of his son’s coming of age even as he is arranging and celebrating the day. Though sometimes he is aware of his improper calling of his son and amends it as “young man,” he is more willing to call his son “boy” in that he may find it easy to give orders and instructions to him. He is not consciously ready to treat Ben as a grown-up young man who has the independent mind, his own observation, judgment, decision, and action.

Mr. Braddock is ignoring Ben's requests as Ben is begging that his father could talk, and discuss the matter with him before calling him out to perform. Mr. Braddock is presenting Ben as a dazzling display that can be utilized for his own purpose before the guests. To brag about Ben is to brag about him as a successful father deserving praise and admiration. Mr. Braddock boasts his son as a big honor, winning the Frank Halpingham Award, accomplishing extraordinary things in the nation's leading seat of learning and becoming a huge sports star. His words win a big applause from the audience. Mr. Braddock never sees Ben as a young man who has thought, emotion, mood, and his own choice, and a man who has the consciousness to decide what he needs and wants.

Ben's father controls the action, proudly proclaiming to the guests that Ben is about to thrill them with a "practical demonstration" of his birthday present – a set of scuba gear that the materialistic Mr. Braddock informs his guests "I am out over 200 bucks." Ben is picked by his father as the best person to show off his own material wealth and material success. If Ben is not out performing well or the scuba gear is not working properly, it will be his shame of losing that amount of money. Materialistic Mr. Braddock is paying his only attention to material worth, but not any bit to Ben's self-esteem as a man. Not only is the scuba gear a symbol of physical suffocation of Ben wearing it, but also a symbol of suffocation of Ben's spiritual freedom.

Ben is not ready to meet the audience. He is embarrassed, making attempts to delay or to avoid appearing on the scene. But his father pushes the screen door open and leaves Ben exposed to the audience. Ben stands at the back of the hall, dressed in a full length skin diver's wet suit, flippers on his feet, the oxygen tank strapped to his back, the mask pushed up his forehead, the air hose dangling. He holds a spear gun in his hand. The look

of Ben exhibits an air of suffocation.

The remainder of this scene is shot from Ben's perspective, an innovative shift in "narrative focalization" (Beuka 166) that emphasizes Ben's sense of isolation while also underscoring the suffocation brought by his parents treating him as an object rather than a human being. The camera man puts the spectators together with Ben, so as Ben moves out the house, moves down the water, emerges up and moves down the water again we are all the time moving together with him. We have been viewing how Ben is called out of the house, pushed down to the water, to the deep end and pushed down again when he emerges up. The series of shots of the scenes are vivid descriptions of Ben's suffering and suffocating experiences.

We are looking through the mask of Ben. As Ben makes his way to the pool, past the crowds of poolside well wishers and his father, who is gesticulating excitedly and delivering his unheard instructions, the only sound is that of Ben's breathing through scuba apparatus. After he plunges into the pool, Ben quickly attempts to emerge again, only to be thwarted by his father. As Ben makes his way to the surface, he is greeted by the smiling faces of both of his parents, who are kneeling by the poolside. The father reaches out and grabs Ben's mask, in what seems like a playful fashion, but then aggressively uses his grip to push Ben back underwater. Ben again attempts to escape from the water, only to meet the same fate – once again is forced back underwater by the hand of the father. After this second rebuke from his father, he retreats to the bottom of the pool. The perspective shifts to a shot of Ben, standing alone at the bottom of the pool in full scuba gear and staff in hand, in an image that portrays him as a fallen explorer. "As the underwater camera pulls away from a medium to a long shot, Ben recedes into a little

figure in the watery bomb, isolated and insignificant,” argued Man (35). Ben deeply experiences the inability to breathe in that scuba gear, under the water, in grip of his father, the inability to think, to perceive, and to act as a conscious being when being treated as an object. He wishes to escape from the state of inanimate being. As a fallen explorer, Ben feels more comfortable drifting on the pool water and drowning in Mrs. Robinson’s bed.

Rebellion – Ben’s first escape from suffocation

Confusion and suffocation start his rebellion. Not willing to be confined to the fixed patterns of ideas and expectations, not willing to be treated as an object of non-conscious being, Ben who still has no clear purpose in life falls into Robinson’s bed. Mrs. Robinson tells Ben that she is available to him and he can call her up anytime he wants. Ben feels dissatisfied about his life, which indicates his awakening and his wishes to get out of confusion, as Nichols says, Ben wishes to find “the part of himself he hadn’t found” (Gelmis 284). Percy states about his existential hero that if he should wake up enough to become dissatisfied with his life, willing to get out of his everydayness, he would try one of the ways to escape. Ben makes a choice.

Possibility of an escape

At the graduation party, Ben is terribly crowded by his parents’ friends, their wishes, questions about future, and their kind advice. Escaping from the noisy meaningless words, Ben runs back to his room upstairs, staring at the aquarium idling in temporary peace. Suddenly the peace is interrupted by the opening of the door, from which enters Mrs. Robinson, a beautiful wife of Ben’s father’s partner. She is different from other guests downstairs, not rushing to Ben with wishes, greetings, expressions of

pride, or questions about future, but she is only observing. Having noticed that Ben runs up stairs, she believes that this confused young man can be her target, the very prey of her hungry stomach. Crowded, suffocated, and confused by all their praises, applauses, appreciations, Ben is in a daze, not knowing what is real and what is not real. He becomes the easy target of the hunter.

Mrs. Robinson, a sexually attractive woman, who is bored, experienced, and dominant, forms a sharp contrast with Ben who is, confused, inexperienced, and innocent. She takes advantage of Ben through a series of commands to lure him, asking him to take her home, to accompany her in the house and to entertain her. Ben reluctantly and irresistibly follows Mrs. Robinson's commands since he is deeply worried about his future, he has no one to talk to, and he has no clear purpose in life. Mrs. Robinson throws the car key into the fish tank and Ben's retrieval of the key from the bottom of the tank marks the beginning of their relationship.

Mrs. Robinson: Will you take me home?

Ben: What?

Mrs. Robinson: My husband took the car. Will you drive me home?

Ben: Do you know how to work a foreign shift?
You don't?

Mrs. Robinson: No.

Ben: Let's go.

(The Graduate screenplay 32A)

Hearing Ben say that he is sort of disturbed about things in general, Mrs. Robinson can guess what situation this young man is involved in, and what mood he tends to have. She knows that Ben is in the most vulnerable state, at which time he has a strong tendency to turn to someone for an answer. Mrs. Robinson grasps this crucial moment to act. Ben follows. Ben parks his car in Mrs. Robinson's driveway and opens the door:

Mrs. Robinson: Will you come in, please?
Ben: What?
Mrs. Robinson: I want you to come in till I get the lights on.
Ben: What for?
Mrs. Robinson: Because I don't feel safe until I get the lights on.

(Robinson hall and sunroom—night)
Mrs. Robinson: Would you mind walking ahead of me to the sun porch.
I feel funny about coming into a dark house.
Ben: But it's light in there now.
Mrs. Robinson: Please.

(The Graduate screenplay 35-36)

Ben is brought up to be a man with the knowledge that he should be courteous toward women, especially toward older women, so now he is very politely helping Mrs. Robinson get home and get into the house safely. Though feeling a little confused and awkward about Mrs. Robinson's request asking him to come into the house, turning the lights on, accompanying her to the sunroom, he is performing the man's duty. At the same time, Ben is not quite willing to do so for he has so many things on his mind, which troubles him to a degree that he has no mood to continue talking with this middle aged woman, his parents' partner's wife. He is kind of retreating, but finds it hard to refuse this woman's command. Ben does what she wishes him to do.

Getting into the sunroom, Mrs. Robinson starts to offer Ben drink. Ben is not prepared for this, or he is not in the mood of sitting down for the drink while his mind is fully occupied by his personal worries. Mrs. Robinson's forced offer makes Ben a little upset. He tries to explain to her still with courtesy why he can't stay and wishes her to understand. She understands.

Mrs. Robinson offers the drink again. Looking at Ben's doubting eyes, she intentionally pretends to feel sad if left alone, and begs Ben to accompany her until her

husband comes back for she is afraid of being alone in this big house. However, the tone of her request sounds undoubtedly tough. Ben becomes softened by her words and turns to comfort her. Quite unexpectedly, Ben is shocked by the weird question from Mrs. Robinson, and he becomes rather nervous.

(Mrs. Robinson turns on the phonograph.)
Mrs. Robinson: May I ask you a question?
What do you think of me?
Ben: What do you mean?
Mrs. Robinson: You've known me nearly all of your life. You must have formed some opinion.
Ben: Well – I've always thought that you were a very – nice person.
Mrs. Robinson: Did you know I was alcoholic?
Ben: What?
Mrs. Robinson: Did you know that?
Ben: Look – I think I should be going.
Mrs. Robinson: Sit down, Benjamin.
Ben: Mrs. Robinson – if you don't mind my saying so – this conversation is getting a little strange. Now I'm sure that Mr. Robinson will be here any minute and --
Mrs. Robinson: No.
Ben: What?
Mrs. Robinson: My husband will be back quite late.
He should be gone for several hours.
Ben: Oh, my God.

(The Graduate screenplay 36)

Ben is still facing his parents' partner's wife while Mrs. Robinson is asking, "May I ask you a question? What do you think of me?" But the next question, "Did you know I was alcoholic?" shocks Ben who starts to feel like what he says "this conversation is getting a little strange." Immediately her next statement that "her husband will be gone for several hours" frightens Ben. This "not particular bright, not particular remarkable, but worthy kid" (Nichols 284) is half standing and retreating around the other side of the chair. This woman in front of Ben's eyes is turning into someone unfamiliar,

unimaginable, dangerous, but sexually attractive. The frightened Ben keeps saying “Oh, no. Oh, my god. No, Mrs. Robinson.” The innocent Ben unbelievably states “... You didn’t really think that I would do something like that... Mrs. Robinson – you are trying to seduce me ...” However, Ben feels he is somewhat offensive to this adult woman. Ben asks Mrs. Robinson to forgive him for saying something that he doesn’t think proper. Not to the knowledge of Ben, this is what the experienced and seductive Mrs. Robinson exactly wishes Ben to think, to say, and to act. She is seducing him, and she wants this youthful, energetic, muscular young man to satisfy her lust, to fill her empty heart, and to enliven her boring life. She waits for him to fall into the trap willingly himself. Nichols says he is portraying Ben as someone “who allows him to be finally used as an object or a thing by Mrs. Robinson because he doesn’t have the moral or intellectual resources ... for him to rebel, to march, to demonstrate to turn on” (284).

Ben: Please forgive me. Because I like you. I don’t think of you that way.
But I am mixed up.

Mrs. Robinson: All right. Now finish your drink.

Ben: Mrs. Robinson, it makes me sick that I said that to you.

Mrs. Robinson: We’ll forget if right now. Finish your drink.

Ben: What is wrong with me?

Mrs. Robinson: Have you ever seen Elaine’s portrait?

(The Graduate screenplay 36)

Yes, Ben is rather confused about his future and he is terribly confused about the woman before him. He does not have the clear consciousness to distinguish what he should do and what he should not. He is dropping himself down to a state where he has no clear vision to judge himself, to judge others. He is struggling between moving forward toward the thing that attracts him and retreating backward toward the principle of morality.

Mrs. Robinson: Will you unzip my dress? I will go to bed. 37
 Ben: Oh, well, good night.
 Mrs. Robinson: Won't you unzip my dress?
 Ben: I'd rather not, Mrs. Robinson.
 ...
 Mrs. Robinson: What are you so scared of?
 Ben: I'm not scared, Mrs. Robinson.
 Mrs. Robinson: Then why do you keep running away?
 Ben: Because you're going to bed. I don't think I should be up here.
 ...
 Ben: I know that. But please, Mrs. Robinson. This is difficult for me.
 Mrs. Robinson: Why is it?
 Ben: Because I am confused about things. I can't tell what I'm imagining. I can't tell what's real. I can't –
 Mrs. Robinson: Would you like me to seduce you?
 ...

(The Graduate screenplay 37)

Mrs. Robinson is skillfully manipulating Ben. She is supremely confident of her sexual power and mercilessly casual in the face of Ben's adolescent fear of her. Alone with him in her house, she takes calm delight in exposing her legs, while he exclaims moral misgivings. She is quite certain that Ben will follow her commands, though he is not yet completely willing. Ben is being challenged by two different voices in his mind, one of which is the manhood that is the ability of a mature man to satisfy the sexual need of a woman from which man gets the basic confidence, and another is the discipline or morality he is supposed to follow as an educated man. The two voices are interchangeably rushing into his ears, attacking his mentality and spirituality. Suffocated from his parents' friends' empty wishes, from his parents' patterned expectations, and from the larger society's false standards, Ben is looking for an answer, a search for an escape from his suffocation and suffering, a demonstration of a rejection of being an object. Since there is no clear purpose in life and not enough "moral resources to turn

on,” Ben morally collapses, becoming a “fallen explorer,” consumingly attracted by Mrs. Robinson’s words. Ben answers nervously, “I’m not scared, Mrs. Robinson.”

To follow Mrs. Robinson’s command, Ben walks into Elaine’s room and puts the purse down. As he turns back, Mrs. Robinson, naked, is shutting the door to the bedroom behind her. Ben is scared.

Ben: Oh God. Let me go.
Mrs. Robinson: Don’t be nervous.
Ben: Get away from that door.
Mrs. Robinson: I want to say something first.
Ben: Jesus Christ!
Mrs. Robinson: Benjamin – I want you to know I’m available to you. If you
won’t sleep with me this time –
Ben: Oh my god.
Mrs. Robinson: If you won’t sleep with me this time, Benjamin, I want you
to know you can call me up any time you want and we’ll
make some kind of arrangement.
Ben: Let me out!
Mrs. Robinson: Do you understand what I said?
Ben: Yes. Yes. Let me out!
Mrs. Robinson: Because I find you very attractive and any time –

(The Graduate screenplay 38)

The horrified Ben could not breathe. He is overwhelmed, and he has to run. However, it is clearly stated by Mrs. Robinson to this confused young man that she is available to him, and he can call her up anytime. This availability is not only vague but also scary to Ben, for he never sees any woman naked, so close so real before his eyes, and so attractive, and irresistible. This availability is providing an opportunity for Ben to indulge himself, and a possibility to escape from suffocation of all sorts.

First betrayal to his parents’ will

The 21st birthday performance of the scuba gear underwater surfaces the predicament of Ben, who resents the dead pursuit of material conformity of his parents’

generation, who hates the imposing of the false standards and values on him, and who believes that these static thing-like ideals freeze him into a rock. He could not breathe in the tight scuba gear, he could not breathe underwater, and he could not think like a free man and decide for himself. Therefore, he dials Mrs. Robinson's phone for some fresh air and comfort. The camera shot of Ben alone at the bottom of the pool matches Ben making the call in the phone booth outside the Taft hotel.

With the dropping of a dime into the phone slot, Ben gets himself connected with Mrs. Robinson, initiating the first sexual encounter with this woman. Ben is quite hesitating and nervous when talking to her, "I don't quite know how to put this... I was wondering if I could buy you a drink or something ... No. Now I know it's pretty late and if you'd rather..." On the contrary, Mrs. Robinson's words are rather firm, "Where are you? ... Did you get a room? ... Give me an hour. I will be there in an hour" (*The Graduate* screenplay 47). Seated with Mrs. Robinson in the hotel bar, Ben is still undecided and nervous, "Nervous. Well, I am a bit nervous. I mean it's – it's pretty hard to be suave when you're ... I haven't [got a room]. No.... Well, I don't. I mean I could. Or we could just talk ... Why don't I get it? Well – I will then. If you'll excuse me" (*The Graduate* screenplay 54). For Ben, both feelings are equally strong, to fall into Mrs. Robinson's bed to get comfort, and to retreat back to the principle of morality for spiritual wrap up. Due to the lack of confidence and clear purpose in life, he tends to be pushed further by Mrs. Robinson to the fall. One question from Mrs. Robinson pulls the trigger that Ben decides to go forward.

Ben: This is all terribly wrong.
Mrs. Robinson: Benjamin, do you find me undesirable?
Ben: Oh no, Mrs. Robinson. I think – I think you're the most attractive of all my parents' friends. I just don't think we

could possibly –
 Mrs. Robinson: Are you afraid of me?
 Ben: No – but look – maybe we could do something else together,
 Mrs. Robinson – would you like to go to a movie.
 Mrs. Robinson: Benjamin, is this your first time?
 Ben: Is this – what?
 Mrs. Robinson: It is, isn't it? It is your first time.
 Ben: That's a laugh, Mrs. Robinson. That's really a laugh. Ha ha.
 Mrs. Robinson: You can admit that, can't you?
 Ben: Are you kidding?
 Mrs. Robinson: It's nothing to be ashamed of –
 Ben: Wait a minute!
 Mrs. Robinson: On your first time –
 Ben: Who said it was my first time.
 Mrs. Robinson: That you're afraid –
 Ben: Wait a minute.
 Mrs. Robinson: - of b[r]eing – inadequate – I mean just because you happen
 to be inadequate in one way –
 Ben: INADEQUATE!
 Mrs. Robinson: (starting to dress)
 Ben: Don't move.

(*The Graduate* screenplay 61)

The question “Is this your first time?” hits Ben, for “the first time” means “inadequate” to a man in sexuality, which is commonly believed a shame for any man. Ben immediately feels embarrassed, and then tries to protest by saying, “That’s a laugh... Are you kidding?... Who said it was my first time. Wait a minute.” This protest continues but remains in vain before experienced Mrs. Robinson, and until the word “inadequate” is really uttered by Mrs. Robinson, the most fearful moment arrives, and Ben would not let him be inadequate or incapable if other things could not prove him vigorously competent. He falls into Mrs. Robinson’s bed. Countering his parents’ will of becoming an upright promising young man, Ben reduces himself to be a morally deteriorating mediocrity, dwelling in free sexual comfort. It is the first betrayal of his parents’ will. It is an escape from the suffocation and suffering. It is a rebellion to the fixed patterns of ideas and

expectations.

A classical cinematic technique montage chronicles Ben and Mrs. Robinson's sexual encounters. The use of the rapid succession of images highlights "Ben's confusion, drifting and lost state of mind, and the disorder of his life" (Li, Yijun 176). Ben is utterly used by Mrs. Robinson as an object (Gelmis 284). Rolling off the raft, Ben walks to the back door of his room. While going through it, he walks into the bathroom of the Taft hotel where Ben and Mrs. Robinson meet. As he walks across the room, he walks past Mrs. Robinson who is standing in front of the bureau taking off her bracelet and watch. Mrs. Robinson starts to unbutton Ben's shirt while he is sitting on the bed in a daze. Sitting in a chair facing the television set in the den of his parents' house, there is a close up of Ben in the Taft hotel room sitting on the bed, leaning against the headboard, watching the television set, Mrs. Robinson walks into the shot, half dressed. She passes between Ben and the television set and goes out of frame. Ben continues to stare at the set. Mrs. Robinson passes back the other way again. Back in Ben's room at home, he gets up and moves to the windows, picking up the bathing suit and putting it on. Swimming toward us, he surfaces and in one movement, pulls himself up on the raft, he lands on top of Mrs. Robinson on the bed. Without dialogue but with Simon's *The Sound of Silence* as the background, these fast shifting scenes from Ben's room to the Taft hotel room demonstrate Ben's indulgence in sexual affairs, and drifting on a water raft and jumping on top of Mrs. Robinson on the bed exhibits Ben's drowning in despair. He feels "comfortable just to drift here in the pool."

Ben feels very comfortable drifting on the pool and drowning in Mrs. Robinson's bed. Ben is "drowning among objects and things, committing moral suicide" (Gelmis

284). Ben is hearing without listening, talking without speaking, and he is doing without thinking. He is totally petrified into a non-conscious being, a being-in-itself which is as full as an egg with no possibility of change. Ben is not aware of his stone like nature, not aware of his impossibility of thinking consciously until one day he has a quarrel with Mrs. Robinson in the Taft hotel room.

Their topic of Mrs. Robinson's daughter Elaine ignites the quarrel, where Mrs. Robinson doesn't like the idea that Ben should take Elaine out. The reason is that he is not good enough for her; however, Ben feels furious because he thinks he gets degraded by associating with this woman, the "broken down alcoholic." His self-esteem is terribly hurt.

Ben: You go to hell. You go straight to hell, Mrs. Robinson. Do you think I'm proud of myself? Do you thing I'm proud of this
...
Ben: No sir. I am not proud that I spend my time with a broken down alcoholic!
...
Ben: And if you think I come here for any reason besides pure boredom, then you're all wrong.
...
Ben: Because – Mrs. Robinson this is the sickest, most perverted thing that ever happened to me. And you do what you want but I'm getting the hell out.

(The Graduate screenplay 91)

Ben doesn't feel happy or fulfilled indulging in his sexual relationship with Mrs. Robinson, who is a rotten, neurotic, and problematic middle-aged woman, and who has no intention or interest to communicate with Ben. Mrs. Robinson's debasing remarks awakens Ben to the fact that he has been consumed by Mrs. Robinson and been eroded into a non-conscious being who has no ability to see, to judge, and to act by himself. Having sexual affairs with this soulless creature can not satisfy his spiritual need, rather it

further distances him from the purpose of his soul exploration. His longing for a free mind has been crushed into pieces. Ben doesn't know what to look for. Ben walks back, "Oh no, look – I like you. I wouldn't keep coming here if I didn't. ... It's not! I enjoy it! I look forward to it. It's the one thing I have to look forward to" (*The Graduate* Screenplay 91). He falls back into "bad faith," the state of mind of being-in-itself in terms of practical freedom. Sartre says bad faith is the attempt by consciousness to lie to oneself. A person is of bad faith when he knows about the truth and tries to hide it from himself. A person of bad faith is conscious of his bad faith. Bad faith is an attempt to deny one's freedom. Ben is falling back into confusion like Binx in Percy's *The Moviegoer*. Binx finds the possibility of a search and finds ways to keep the sense of wonder in order to maintain the conscious mind, the nature of being-for-itself, which provides the possibility for him to think, to judge and act. Before he goes to his aunt Emily's house, he has that sense of wonder of breaking away from everydayness, the way of life he lives in Gentilly; however, when he has some talk with Emily about his future, he forgets his search and sinks back into everydayness, the state of mind in nature of being-in-itself. Ben's willingness to be used by Mrs. Robinson as an object is in a state of being-in-itself, showing the nature of a thing, described by Sartre "as full as an egg." There is a lack of nothingness. Nothingness is the emptiness within the human being. With the emptiness in him, the conscious being is made possible to perceive the world and act in it. Nothingness in the Sartrean sense is freedom and the possibility the freedom could offer. Ben has no possibility to make a choice as a conscious being and to project himself into the future. He is in bad faith or self-deception. He is not aware of his freedom. He is being confined into the world of non-conscious existence. The choice he makes is a choice in bad faith

and he is making a false escape from his confusion. Only when he is aware of his freedom, can he escape from confusion, and transcend himself.

True love – a connection with an innocent heart

Ben meets Elaine. With no intention to treat her nicely due to his rebellion to any demands against his will, Ben hurts her, only to find that Elaine is an innocent, kind, and honest girl, who can understand him, listen to him, and talk to him.

Ben: I've had this feeling – ever since I've graduated – this- kind of compulsion that I have to be rude all the time. Do you know what I mean?

Elaine: Yes, I do.

Ben: It's like I've been playing some kind of game, but the rules don't make any sense to me.

Elaine: (She is watching him carefully.)

Ben: They're being made up by all the wrong people – no – I mean no one makes them up, they seem to have made themselves up.

(*The Graduate* screenplay 116)

Ben reveals his own troubled thought to Elaine, the person he feels trustworthy. His compulsion to be rude comes from his confusion about rules followed by people in the society including himself. But he finds that these rules don't make sense to him, which means they may not provide clear, reasonable, or meaningful guidance to him; rather they look like something that people make up, or no one really makes them up, but they make themselves up, just existing there. To Ben, they are something that fools people, making them believe they are true. Elaine knows what he means and nods to agree. For the first time Ben talks about his dissatisfaction about the society, his source of confusion and suffocation. He finds that this girl understands what he is confused about.

Ben: Elaine – I like you. I like you so much. Do you believe that?

Elaine: (She nods.)

Ben: Do you?

Elaine: Yes.

Ben: You're the first – you're the first thing for so long that I've liked.
The first person I could stand to be with.

(The Graduate screenplay 122)

Ben never gets any real response from anyone before. Elaine is the one, the only one that gives him the response. “You're the first, you're the first thing for so long that I've liked. The first person I could stand to be with,” Ben assures her that she is the only person in this world whom Ben can communicate with, to get support from, and to rely on. There is a spiritual connection between the two young minds and he takes her as the hope for lifting himself up from the ruins. He ascertains that he loves her, and she is the one thing that he wishes to pursue. For such a long time Ben is confused about what he wants, or what is worthy for him to make efforts to attain. There is no possibility for Ben now as an object to make any change, however. Nichols says, “Impossibility leads to passion” (Gelmis 284). Ben's love toward Elaine gives him passion and courage that serve as the significant factors for Ben to lift himself up from “the whole waste” of his own life (*The Graduate*). This bond of fellowship is the passport to the possibility for true self.

Exploring authenticity – Ben's authentic choice and responsibility

Nichols tries to present to the audience a new young man. He is the man who wishes to live a “different” life, to make his independent choices about how he should live and think. Sartre says human beings are free to make a choice and that choice bears responsibility. When they are making the choice, they are creating a value. If they are making a choice by taking the freedom given to them, they are following a path to authentic selves. If not, they are in “bad faith.” Humans have no defined nature as being-for-itself is not what it is and is what it is not, and they are always in the process of

projecting a new identity as they are making new choices and creating new values.

Nichols's hero Ben is not following his parents' will, or his parents' friends' wishes, or the expectations of a larger society, he is not willing to be defined by set values and judgments, and he is making his own choices, and exploring a true self, the authentic self, whose life bears meaning. He can be regarded as a human existence on the move.

Authenticity is the chief moral virtue of existential ethics. It is Sartre's fundamental value and the core of his ethical thought. Authenticity as stated by Sartre in his classical writing *Portrait of an Anti-Semite (PAS)* is:

If the reader agrees with us that man is "a freedom within a given situation," then he will easily grasp that this freedom may be defined as authentic or as inauthentic according to the choice it makes of itself within the situation whence it arises. Authenticity, it goes without saying, consists in assuming a lucid and true awareness of the situation, in accepting the responsibilities and risks incurred in that situation, in maintaining it in the moment of pride or of humiliation, sometimes in the moment of abhorrence and hatred (75)

Authenticity is the mode of being-for-itself in terms of practical freedom. If a human being strives for authenticity, he is making a choice by taking the freedom granted to him, taking responsibilities and risks for what he will become, for any consequences of getting into the unknown and uncertainty, and also accepting the results of any sorts. This burden of freedom and responsibility entails anguish; however, this is, according to Sartre, "what we should strive for as human beings." That is the way we can make human life possible.

Breaking off the affairs with Mrs. Robinson

The quarrel about Elaine with Mrs. Robinson upsets Ben. Yet Ben is not clear about his goal in life, having no interest in anything, he does not feel disappointed staying with Mrs. Robinson. He does not have the ability to resist the physical attractiveness of Mrs. Robinson, he begs her to stay. He is not able to figure out why Mrs. Robinson does not want him to take her daughter Elaine out, not wishing to continue the meaningless and absurd quarrel, Ben has promised her, "All right, for Christ's sake. I promise I will never take out Elaine Robinson." He is making a choice, but an inauthentic one. Sartre has described those inauthentic Jews in his essay *Portrait of the Anti-Semite* (PAS 91) that "This painful and inextricable situation may lead a certain few of them to masochism—simply because masochism appears, fleetingly, as a solution, as a sort of respite, a lull ... masochism is the desire to be treated as an object. Humiliated, despised, or simply neglected, the masochist delights in seeing himself pushed about, handled and utilized like a thing. He tries to reach self-fulfillment as an inanimate thing, and, by so doing, renounces his responsibilities. ... is complete abdication" (90-91). Falling back into Mrs. Robinson's bed is a gesture that reveals Ben's fullness of his being as a thing, unable to observe with his own consciousness to make any judgment. He is dwelling in inauthenticity, bad faith.

Ben's taking Elaine out that evening really upsets Mrs. Robinson. Ben does not have the intention, but his parents force him to do so. Not wishing to worsen the situation, Ben tries to comfort Mrs. Robinson and promises again not to take Elaine out again, "Now listen, this was not my idea. It was my father's idea. ... I have no intention of ever taking your precious daughter out again in her life. So don't get upset about it." No power

to resist his parents, and no power to say goodbye to Mrs. Robinson, Ben is playing a kind of game with them, being an obedient boy before his parents, and being a docile lover before his dominant woman. Ben is playing like Sartre's overly acted waiter in the café, playing a waiter as a waiter, seemingly unable to play any other role in his life, no possibility to make any change whatsoever. He is in bad faith.

Meeting with Elaine makes Ben realize what he needs is someone who can satisfy his soul with passion, someone who understands him, and someone who values his worth. He is ready to meet Elaine again. This is his choice, a different choice. Mrs. Robinson gets extremely upset this time. She gives out her warning, "You are not to see Elaine again. Ever. Those are my orders. Is that clear? ... I can make things quite unpleasant." She is "prepared to tell Elaine everything in order to keep Elaine away from [Ben]." Mrs. Robinson is not only merciless, but also destructive. Having been commanded and manipulated by Mrs. Robinson, Ben has now discovered that he has been used as a thing. He will not surrender to her orders this time to let her decide his fate. He would make his own choice and decide by himself. Facing Mrs. Robinson, the one who objectifies him, Ben is determined to choose Elaine, the one who awakens him from being an object. To choose Elaine is his own decision and choice made by him, not made under the pressure of others' command. This is what Sartre says about freedom and choice. Human beings are condemned to be free. Freedom is absolute and is something human beings can not possibly escape. It is destined that the human being has to face it and embrace it. The human being is determined by what he perceives, what he thinks, and what he does, which means he is only determined by his own action in whichever way he chooses. Making a choice by taking the freedom granted to an individual being is the first step to

authenticity, while following others' commands leads him to bad faith. For Ben, grasping the freedom to make a true and lucid choice leads him to his authenticity, while escaping from freedom by following Mrs. Robinson leads him to bad faith. Ben refuses Mrs. Robinson's order and resists being in bad faith. Ben is, as Sartre says about the first dimension of authenticity, being fully aware about the actions he takes and the choices he makes in the situation. He is acknowledging his own being as free, not being confined by his parents or by Mrs. Robinson. And as Sartre's other two dimensions, he is going to take the responsibilities and risks of his actions and choices, and also he has to accept the consequences of his actions. That is he might quite possibly ruin his own fame and relationship with Elaine as he reveals his shameful and immoral behavior to Elaine and might lose her. Striving for authenticity takes the courage to face humiliation, horror, and sometimes hatred (*PAS* 76). He would tell Elaine about the truth himself before Mrs. Robinson does. However, before he could, Mrs. Robinson ruins everything. With the scream of Elaine, Ben loses Elaine, his love, and then with the sad and firm words of Mrs. Robinson, "Goodbye, Benjamin," he leaves Mrs. Robinson, the woman he indulged himself in. The camera close shot at this moment is focused on Mrs. Robinson's face, and then the long shot on the entire figure standing in a very long hall, which distances further Mrs. Robinson from Ben. To lose Elaine is painful to Ben. To leave Mrs. Robinson is giving Ben a chance to be away from being in bad faith. Breaking off the affairs with this spiritually poor and morally corrupted middle-aged woman leaves Ben infinite possibilities to pursue his authenticity. He is able to explore his true self, who has the freedom to act, and to keep projecting himself into the future. He is a human being on the move.

Ben marrying Elaine – Ben's authentic choice in life

Elaine is the one whose understanding, innocent personality, and love awaken Ben from his inert state of being as an object manipulated by his parents and Mrs. Robinson. She is now Ben's only friend and lover. Ben has recognized that the only way to be alive as a conscious being is to keep one's freedom to choose. The recognition of this freedom is the requirement of authenticity. He is the one, the only one that can make his life meaningful. As Sartre's scholar Thomas Anderson in his *Sartre's Two Ethics* states, "human beings are the only source of meaning in Sartre's universe, and the authentic person gives his life meaning and value by accepting and affirming himself as the free creator of a meaningful world" (see p.53). Ben decides to marry Elaine. Though it sounds really absurd to his parents, Ben is determined about what he has decided to do.

Mr. Braddock: She doesn't know that you're coming up to Berkeley?
Ben: No. Actually, she doesn't know about us getting married yet.
Mr. Braddock: Ben, this whole idea sounds pretty half-baked.
Ben: No, it is not. It's completely baked. It's a decision I've made.

...

(The Graduate screenplay 140)

Ben regards himself as a free creator of his meaningful world. He is no longer an obedient boy listening to his parents' instructions, no longer a passive performer of his father's command, and no longer a presenter of his parents' pride. Instead, he is the human being who has the free consciousness deriving from nothingness, taking the responsibility of making his own choice and making meaning for his own life. This is the decision he has made and it is the first authentic choice he has made in his life.

In terms of cinematography, the first half of the film emphasizes the swimming pool, the fish tank, the backyard, symbolizing the boring, closed, confining materialistic

existence. With a clear marked contrast to the first half, the cinematography of the next half of the film underscores the wide San Francisco Bay Bridge, the UC Berkeley campus, the Berkeley's student thoroughfare, Telegraph Avenue, signaling the exciting, open, and liberating sense of pursuit of human freedom. Simon's *The Sound of Silence* again plays its tune to echo Ben's emotional state of mind on his road to Berkeley.

Elaine loves Ben. But the affair between her mother and Ben crushes her tender love cruelly into pieces. Later Ben's true and honest words against her mother's version of story win her heart once more. She is a nice, disciplined girl at home usually listening to parents, never confronting any situation that she has to choose for herself. Her parents are rushing her to marry a medical student in order not to let Ben meet her again. Elaine does not think they would possibly work out because her father is rather angry about Ben's behavior and believes that Ben is "filth, scum, and a degenerate." (*The Graduate* ...) Her parents think Elaine and the medical student would fit. She is confused, not knowing what to do. She comes to Ben's apartment.

Elaine: Will you kiss me!
(He goes to her and they kiss.)
Ben: Will you marry me?
(She shakes her head.)
Ben: You won't?
Elaine: I don't know.
Ben: But you might.
Elaine: I might.
Ben: Is that so? You might marry me?
Elaine: Yes.
Ben: When?
Elaine: I don't know.
Ben: How about tomorrow? I don't mean to be pushy but—
Elaine: I don't know. I don't know what's happening.
Ben: You mean you are confused.
(She nods.)

(The Graduate screenplay 187)

Elaine is the one to be confused now since she has no one to turn to for resources for her decision. Under the pressure of her parents as well as with the boy friend's promise, "they would make a pretty good team," Elaine could not breathe. Yet, she vaguely feels that she does not really love Carl, her boyfriend, and not ready to marry him. She is not able to make a choice. She is much confined in the limited world of her parents, not able to break through that restrained existence of life, not courageous enough to reject the authority of parents, or the strong social conventions and reality.

Ben is the only one she trusts and the only one who can understand her. Ben realizes that refusing to choose will make one fall out of the concrete world entirely. He knows that choosing somehow makes one alive, and all those who have allowed others to define them are close to death. Not like Ben, Elaine does not have the awakening of the human beings as a conscious being, the free being who ought to become what he makes of himself, not to become what the established conventions or authority wish him to become, for the human being is totally free. She is waiting to be defined by others. Ben is the one who can help Elaine out of this confinement since he realizes that in choosing to have no choice is choosing to be in "bad faith" that might make Elaine run the risks of losing herself for good.

Ben: Well – look, don't be confused. We're getting married.

Elaine: I don't see how we can.

Ben: We just can.

Elaine: I have to go back now.

Ben: Elaine – are you serious about this?

Elaine: I'll think about it.

Ben: You really will?

Elaine: Yes.

(The Graduate screenplay 187)

Holding Elaine in his arm, Ben comforts her telling her that he wants to marry her.

Stretching his hand to Elaine is providing a real life choice before her in this world. Rendering love to another person may make one's life meaningful and the other person's life possible. He may live a life larger than his own. Ben is waiting for Elaine to come down to her reality and make a choice by herself to make her life to become what she wishes to be. Elaine's answers "Yes, I might.... I don't know.... I don't see how we can. ..." demonstrate her uncertainty about herself and future. She is not taking Ben's idea, nor rejecting him, only leaving the decision open to others to make. Elaine like Sartre's girl in bad faith in his *Being and Nothingness*, leaving her hand there neither holding nor retrieving her hand from her boy friend, avoiding making any decision by herself. Elaine seems to be waiting for Ben to promise that her future world will be one with security and certainty. Yet, Ben's "We just can" cannot convince her with complete possibility. Her father's huge anger and her mother's fierce hatred toward Ben set an insurmountable hurdle. Elaine cannot possibly transcend herself by breaking away from the confinement of her parents. Elaine states in her note to Ben, "Dear Benjamin, I promise you some, say I will write a long letter about everything but right now I can't think and all I can say to you is please forgive me because I know what I'm doing is the best thing for you. My father is so upset you've got to understand. I love you, but it would never work out" (*The Graduate* screenplay 213). Elaine is sure about Ben's love and her love to Ben, but she is not sure about marriage with Ben. She is confused about love and marriage. Lacking the energy to decide for herself what to do, she falls back into bad faith, following her parents' wishes to marry Carl Smith.

Ben has been pursuing his authentic self since he is awakened by Elaine's love, and staying alert not to be congealed by any stone-like nature of being. He breaks away from

Mrs. Robinson, who objectifies him as a thing, and pursue Elaine, who understands, listens to, loves and treats him as her only friend. Encountering the harsh reality, and the humiliating situation that Elaine is marrying Carl Smith, Ben is facing a harder choice. Is he going to give in and escape from any more humiliation and shame, or should he stand brave to face the reality and continue striving for what the authentic self ought to pursue? He believes in the freedom of humans. With the infinite possibilities derived from nothingness within the human being himself, Ben is free to choose how he should live his life in order to make his life meaningful and others' lives possible. Sartre says that the human being is free to make a choice, and that choice bears responsibility. When he is making a choice, he is creating his value. When he is making a choice by taking the freedom granted to him, he is taking a path to an authentic being, searching for a true self that bears meaning. The human being is choosing not only for himself but also for the whole world.

No one would be able to stop Ben from pursuing authenticity, and no one would be able to stop him from pursuing his love of Elaine. Ben says to Mrs. Robinson, "You can't stop me from seeing her, Mrs. Robinson. I'll find her." In the First Presbyterian Church on Allan Street, the wedding ceremony is taking place. The minister is just closing the book, and Carl and Elaine kiss. "Oh, Jesus, God, no" gasps Ben standing against the glass window on the balcony shouting toward Elaine inside the church, "Elaine, Elaine!" This is Ben's first cry of his own voice, the outburst of his strong desire of freedom, and the longing for what he dreams to have. He then starts pounding on the glass. Ben's shadow is thrown across the celebrants. They all turn around and look up at him. A long shot from the front of the church, Ben is like a trapped moth, beating on the window and

yelling soundlessly. Facing the reality and without any fear or shame, Ben continues pounding on the glass. He is cursed by Mr. and Mrs. Robinson, whose faces are showing their twisted looks utterly discomfited. In a frozen frame, Ben's face twists with passion, his body spread-eagled against the glass. Elaine seems touched at the moment by the passion of Ben and awakened from her own dormancy of lying to herself, the state of being in bad faith. She can no longer deceive herself by choosing not to choose, escaping from the freedom to which she is given. She has to make a choice, an authentic choice in whichever way she wishes and becomes what she makes of herself. She is free to project herself into the future. She screams out "Ben!" With the scream of Elaine starts the sound of *Organ*, which echoes the moment of awakening. Mrs. Robinson tries to take Elaine's wrist and says, "Elaine, it is too late." Elaine firmly pulls her hand away and says, "Not for me." Both Ben and Elaine rush to the door, trying to escape from the people blocking their way to the outside of the church. Ben rescues Elaine from the horrors of her conventional wedding that confines her into the rock-like nature of being with no possibility to consciously act, or create.

The couple boards the Santa Barbara Municipal bus and collapse into laughter, and then deeper contemplation, in the back seat. A long shot of the camera shows the bus driving down an unremarkable, tree-lined street, which echoes the opening scene. Ben expresses a blank face followed by Elaine's. Some critics say that Ben and Elaine's escape is in vain since they ride on the bus that drives back on the road in the direction that they come from or the same road of their parents (Beuta 170, Li 168). Some people may ask if these young people really love each other, and whether they will enjoy a happy life (Wu 74). Chen firmly believes that they are not sure where they are going to

because the face of Ben and then Elaine's show the expression of total lost⁷, and some believe they win the freedom of love; however, they are on their road of uncertainty (Lun 52).

Holding the hand of Elaine, Ben offers her a life choice of living herself out of the conventions and parents' limited, superficial material world. Overcoming and accepting all the humiliations and shame of taking Elaine from her wedding, Ben is taking a path to an authentic self, exploring a life that bears meaning. That he is making this choice of living differently from his parents and the larger society creates meaning for his life in the sense of freedom that derives from human beings themselves; that he is offering the choice to Elaine shows that Ben understands that Elaine trusts him as the only friend and herself as a potential rebel and explorer. Not as his parents' wishes, but he himself loves her and wishes to make her life possible. He is creating a much happier life in pursuit of freedom. His action of dragging Elaine away from the conventional wedding itself is the commitment that bears responsibility that the authentic self is supposed to take. Ben is choosing not only for himself but also for Elaine, a life much larger than his own. Their ride on the bus does not necessarily demonstrate their "triumph, but rather a recognition of their freedom" (Cotkin 284), a start of a new journey on the road into the uncertainty and the unknown, but with possibilities. Though it is quite possible that they might fail and fail again, but failure is not fearful. "No matter. Try again," writes Samuel: "Fail Again, Fail Better" (qtd. in Cotkin 283). Existential awareness helps the individual to endure. Ben is the human being as Sartre claims regarding himself as free, daring to be

⁷ <http://life.fhl.net/Literature/AmericaAge/04.htm>

different, as being-for-itself not what he is and is what he is not, he is always in his becoming through his own thought, perception, and action. He is creating his own identity and is the human existence on the move.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

There is always, until death, another chance.

Majorie Grene (1)
Introduction to existentialism

Cotkin's findings of attitudes of American artists and writers discussed in his book *Existential America* (2003) on European existentialism inspire me. Those artists and writers have not put a happy face on European's pessimism and despair, nor sink into their despair, but regard the existential anguish and despair as motivations of their own actions (7). Hazel E. Barnes's life quest "to make French Existentialism as the central discourse of American intellectual life" (Cotkin 151) encourages me. And the most important factor that stimulates Sartrean research is my love of his philosophical idea of existential freedom. Reading Percy, Hopper, and Nichols' art works through Sartre's existential freedom reveals his philosophy as a doctrine that "make[s] human life possible" (EH 18). Human beings are free to make a choice. Human life is a process of making oneself into someone in whichever way one chooses and becomes what one makes of oneself through perceptions and actions. One never ceases to create one's own identity, for new possibilities always arise before him. Human beings find hope in their choices and actions. This spirit of keeping oneself moving forward is conceived as "human beings on the move," which this author observes to be the positive tone of Sartre's philosophy. That is the fundamental core of Sartre's existential philosophy. The sense of moving on of human kind as the link of the three American artists has been sought and embraced through chapters.

Motivated by his discovery in the desert about the pure existence of things, the

existential philosopher and novelist Walker Percy determines to put further thought on man's condition of existence in the universe. He depicts Binx Bolling in *The Moviegoer* as his existential hero undertaking a metaphysical search, searching for a new way of looking at the world. Binx has been living in Gentilly comfortably and happily like others for years and it has been taken for granted that this is a best life. Starting from the wartime dream one morning, he suddenly realizes that his best life in Gentilly is not the best. He has been a model citizen but not a man with awareness of his own existence. He starts to think about how a human individual should live in this world, how he would not fall into the world of others, how a human being could keep himself alert to the inanimate state of being, and how he is able to grasp the freedom granted to him, and take responsibility of his own choices. He is not willing to become a person defined by false standards, set values, or empty gestures, and determined to become an individual undefined, a human being on the move.

Percy sets hurdles for his hero on his way of searching for the new view of looking at the world and at him. Percy says if the hero wakes up enough to become dissatisfied with his life, willing to get out of his "everydayness," he would try one of the ways. However, Binx finds that this and other ways that he tries are all manner of easy and false escapes from everydayness for they do not work for long to keep himself alert as a conscious being before he falls back again into the old despair, into the state of inert being, a being-in-itself, or a person defined.

Binx tries scientific research as a way of understanding the world and human beings. Instead of following his friend to solve the research problem they proposed together, he is immediately seized by the mystery of the old laboratory building, his eyes

watching the motes rising and falling in the summer sunlight. The strong sense of mystery surrounds him. He is totally taken aback by the concrete situation that human beings are in. He is unable to concentrate on the defined formula under the microscope. He wishes to reserve himself a sense of wonder which may keep him alert as a conscious being rather than congealing himself by the set formula to become unconscious. The set formula of sciences is established rules according to which scientists usually solve their problems. However, to Binx, fixed rules can not solve his problems, and they may objectify him. Binx then tries scientific reading of books as the experiment with science to understand the world. He finds that after reading those books of science, all the problems in the universe have been explained, and only he is left over remaining mysteriously troubled. Binx finds that the problem of the universe is the existence of the object world, the objects like trees, chairs, even the human body based on definitions, the formulae, periodical tables, and lab tests. These objects are phenomena explicable in the universe which are relatively stable and unchanged. Binx discovers that human beings inexplicably remain in the world, a subject world with no established essence or identity. It is a mystery. It can not be explained with scientific data and his sense of wonder is nowhere to be found in scientific reading. This type of search does not suffice.

Binx tries moviegoing as a way to stave off the everydayness, to get away from despair, and to help him comprehend the world around him. Binx loves movies because he thinks that they are “onto something,” and that they can save the fabric of his life and certify the existence of him. However, they can only save him temporarily. Movies are presenting certain realities of the people and the world and they involve the audience into those performed realities. Binx believes that the performed realities can make coherence

of people's lives and after watching movies, he can make a coherence of his own life, finding the meaning of his existence. However, in choosing movie moments as the content of his past life, he is choosing an external "reality," which is not the concrete reality out of the possibilities opened to him. It is not the reality that helps him comprehend the world and transcend the everydayness. Seeing in the movie the familiar neighborhood, Binx feels that he has a reason to live and a secure sense of environment, ensuring him he is sharing with the world the same structure and that he is living a real life as someone somewhere; talking with the manager and the ticket seller of the theatre gets him a secure, comfortable feeling of belonging, reminding him of ever living in a certain town. This may certify the existence of his life, being someone somewhere rather than Anyone, Anywhere. However, this certification of his existence of somebody somewhere by movie moments and theatre people does not work very well to satisfy Binx as a conscious being, for a conscious being is not justified by things, but by his own action. Movies have the magic power of duplicating the past experience. Binx wishes to find the taste of the past time. However, his experience of sitting at the same theatre at the same seat does not bring him any inspiration for life as he wishes; instead it seems that nothing has ever happened during the past 14 years, all remain the same. Binx's understanding of time is reverse. Sartre would argue that anything in the past has been established with the unchanging nature, and only future may lead man's action. If someone wishes to keep himself fresh and anew, he has to look into the future and project himself through actions into the future becoming. Looking back at the past will not work for Binx for his seeking a new way of being in the world.

Binx wishes to find from other people's stories the past experience to make

coherence of his past life for the purpose of making his life meaningful to the present, and to make his world an orderly world. Binx's aunt Emily is a stoic preacher, telling him what he should do as a man, but what Binx's search needs is more than Stoicism can offer. Emily is a powerful storyteller who can make Binx forget his search, and forget his new vision to observe the reality. Her story is transfiguring him into a role that she wishes him to be, to be a man that Aunt Emily wishes Binx to become. When he falls back into Emily's version of reality, he can no longer see for himself. He is given a false identity by aunt Emily who confines Binx into a being-in-itself, a person defined. This is when Sartre says the freedom of a conscious being is deprived by the freedom of the other. The one being-for-itself is being turned by another being-for-itself into an object with no ability to judge. However, the seeker Binx has not completely forgotten his new found clarity of vision. He does not fall into the Emily's trap this time, and his sense of wonder warns him that Aunt Emily is molding him into a man of her wishes. He could feel that his free will and intellectual ability are being eroded, the feeling of nausea emerges. Binx is not willing to enter Aunt Emily's plan, but he finds now no way to stick himself in the world and has to compromise by following the role set by her. However, Binx is not fully back to her side as she wishes, and he realizes that they are not talking about the same thing when they mention Gentilly. Aunt Emily's stories, transfigured roles, convenient labels for Binx do not work for his search because these are the realities created by Aunt Emily that do not fit for Binx, who has to continue searching for ways if he wants to keep himself alert to the sense of wonder and become a human being undefined.

Kate is another seeker, who refuses to accept or reject Binx proposal of marrying her. She is making no choices altogether as the girl in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*

does in her bad faith. Making no choice runs the risk of losing herself for good. Binx reaches out his hand to put before her a real life choice, which may save her from losing herself altogether. She believes in Binx who possesses the quality of trustworthiness and honesty, who would not invent stories to paper over her the void yawning at her feet. He is the one who can tell her what to do which is the only way she can make her way in the world. Binx fails to find roles in movies and other people's stories as a clue to keep himself as a conscious and concrete being. He has to come down to look for clues from other people in their real life. He has found out that reaching out his hand to provide money, help to other people may make his life meaningful, larger than his own and at the same time make other people's lives possible. He believes in human beings, and he believes in their freedom. With the infinite possibilities derived from nothingness, human beings can make their own choices in whichever way they wish, and they take that responsibility for their choices. This is an authentic human being. Binx marries Kate not because he follows Emily's Stoic instruction as a man, but because he understands he is grasping his freedom granted to the human being and projects himself into an individual being through his own perception and action, following a path an authentic self is taking and searching for a life that bears meaning. He is the human being on the move, keeping himself alert all the time and the sense of wonder toward people and the world around him. He finds the way of living in this world happily. He is living not only for himself, but also for others.

Edward Hopper, the lone searcher is searching for his own identity through his art. His art is in exact consonance with his interior life that to the artist remains mysterious and inaccessible and his work reveals phases of his self-investigation. He said, "I am after

ME.” The inward reality rather than the outward reality of the subject is being depicted. The strength of the interior world is realized through his artistic presence, the use of straight lines, horizontal and vertical, shapes of rectangle, parallelogram, sunlight, and large empty space. He is concerned about the state of mind of the figures in the pictures which yearn for longed-for satisfaction and brilliance of inwardness. To Hopper, the minds of his figures are in motion.

The motion of the minds of Hopper’s figures is pursued and exhibited by silence and stillness of the outer world. Hopper’s figures’ inner world is powerful and active while their outer world appears quite silent and still. The outward silence and stillness create more tension and strain rather than quietness and tranquility, creating the power and the motion of the mind. The human figures look frozen and speechless while reading, waiting, and expecting; however, they are in deep contemplation, and dreaming. Outwardly, these silent spaces and human figures are silent and still, inwardly, they are in great motion. Silence is action. Hopper’s figures are existential and independent, searching for the infinite possibilities beyond the scope of pictures, beyond the present life. They seem to project toward the future in their imagination, in their fantasies toward the new event in the new town, their yearning for a new life by themselves, their excitement in the work of a new job. All of these demonstrate their motion of the mind, the possibilities with which they are able to project themselves into the future becoming.

The motion of the minds of his figures is also sought through the use of light. Light on the exterior wall of the buildings simplifies and silences the atmosphere, and shadows cast by light create sober mood of human figures in contemplation. Sunlight on the wall is not static, but in great motion. The motion of sunlight represents the thought of the

human being whose mind is in active retrospection within him. The eyes of the figure are led by the sunlight far beyond the picture into the vast possibilities and the unknown. The body of women figures looks strong and hard, demonstrating a strong interiority and individual agency, with the power to determine their lives and project into the future becoming. Light, the ancient metaphor of human thought, is beautifully applied to Hopper's pictures, interacting with the human figures in room in solitude. It represents the relations of emptiness and possibilities, or the nothingness of the human mind and the opportunities and possibilities of human action. Light, shining on the interior wall, the floor, and human figures, taking the shapes of rectangle and parallelogram, is definite and powerful, which reveals energy and existence. Light on the human figure makes certain points of human consciousness that is flowing and spreading, and enforces and intensifies the movement of human thought. Two pictures with sunlight but no human figures in rooms are Hopper's best and most influential ones in seeking the interiority. Emptying the objects of the painted room leaves room for "sunlight," and sunlight is believed to be the illuminating factor for enlightening human beings and the power of human beings' inner world. Hopper beautifully depicts the mind in motion in his houseboat description, in *Rooms by the Sea* and *Sun in an Empty Room*, and gracefully reveals the search for his identity in the vast realm of universe. The emptiness in *Sun in an Empty Room* conveys a rich sense of contemplation, firm belief in solitude, and certain faith in one's interiority, the individual agency.

Mike Nichols, the modern unorthodox director, portrays Ben as his soul explorer, exploring an authentic self. Can he become a person who grasps the freedom given to him to pursue authenticity, or be a human being on the move? Ben is confused, but

awakened, being aware of the conflicts that his conscious being is being congealed by the non-conscious being. Rather worried about his future, Ben wants to be just “different.” He is deeply troubled and confined by the party crowds’ “kind” advice, “good” suggestions, sending out the messages of fixed ideas, and inanimate thought of the nature of a thing. The word *Plastic* highlights the concept of the pursuit of material success, which, to Ben, is superficial and with temporal nature of existence. Ben is again suffocated by his parents’ expectations, objectifying him as a thing rather than a conscious being. He is being manipulated, being called a boy rather than a young man, being tightened in the scuba gear, and being required to give performance under the water. He is put on the stage acting as a sport star, honor student, and scholarship award winner to win the applause from the audience. His parents treat Ben as their pride, the honored thing, rather than the conscious being with his freewill. Ben feels hard to breathe. He is being congealed and petrified like a stone, with the inability to think and judge.

He is looking for a place to get some fresh air. He is sexually attracted by Mrs. Robinson, he is resisting her lure, and he is manipulated by her and is drowning himself into her comfortable bed. Quite against his parents’ will to become an upright promising young man, Ben reduces himself to a morally deteriorating mediocrity, dwelling in free sexual comfort. This is a betrayal to his parents, an escape from the suffocation, and a rebellion to the fixed patterns of ideas and expectations. Yet, Ben is “drowning among objects and things, committing moral suicide” (Gelmis 284). Indulging himself in sexual relationship with Mrs. Robinson, the soulless broken alcoholic, does not fulfill his spiritual need, but pushes him away from his soul exploration. He is aware that he has been consumed by Mrs. Robinson and been encroached into a non-conscious being who

has no ability to see. But since there is still no clear purpose in life, he retreats into Mrs. Robinson's bed again, into what Sartre calls "bad faith," which is an attempt by consciousness to lie to oneself. A person of bad faith is intending to escape from the true self, but to stay in the state of inertia being defined by non-consciousness. Only when he is aware of his freedom granted to him, can he escape from confusion and be able to transcend himself.

Meeting Elaine, Mrs. Robinson's daughter, starts Ben his true soul exploration. Never before is there anyone who responds to Ben's questions, who is willing to listen, and able to understand. Elaine is a girl with a kind, honest heart who wishes to communicate with Ben, to feel his impulse, and to understand his confusion. She is trustworthy, and is taken by Ben as his soul mate. There is a spiritual connection between the two young minds. Ben decides to take her as the hope for lifting himself up from the ruins. Ben loves Elaine. The bond of true fellowship will become the avenue to the possibility for a true self. This is his choice.

Authenticity is the mode of being-for-itself in terms of practical freedom. If a person strives for authenticity, he has to be a person of consciousness with possibilities deriving from nothingness to make a decision, to become a person of what he makes of himself through his perception, and action. Ben has to break off the affairs with Mrs. Robinson in order to avoid bad faith. Exposure of his affair with Mrs. Robinson brings humiliation to Ben, and it takes Elaine away from him. Striving for authenticity takes the courage to face humiliation, horror and sometimes hatred (*PAS* 76). Ben would not retreat, but would face the burden of freedom and take responsibility for the choice he makes. He would marry Elaine to make his authentic choice for his life. Ben's honesty, trust, and

true love touch Elaine and give her courage to break away from the marriage arranged by her parents and pursue with Ben their life that bears meaning.

In different artistic forms, each artist's work presents human beings on the move, the individual being proclaimed by Sartre that he is never what he is or is what he is not. The person has no fixed nature or essence. He is always in the process of making his new identity through his actions, and he is always becoming. It is also found out that the works in vertical order first of Percy, second of Hopper, and third of Nichols present Sartre's freedom from abstract to concrete, and from pure metaphysical wonder, to more practical action. Walker Percy uses his pen to set his hero Binx on a metaphysical search, searching for a sense of wonder that keeps a person alert and able to view the universe with his own vision and find his new way of living in this world. Sartre's existential need for freedom can be seen on a level of a search of an idea, a philosophical thought of human beings. It can be seen as the sparkling light of the thought. Edward Hopper uses his magic paint to create great art as a way to search for his inner world, to search for the strength of the interiority. His painted figures, especially those women figures are internally strong to yearn for the possibilities in the uncertainties. Sartre's existential need for freedom can be seen on a level of a search of a heart, the inside world investigation of human beings. It can be viewed as the sprouting seedling of the thought. Mike Nichols uses his camera to portray his hero Ben as a confused young man, feeling suffocated by his parents' expectations, drowning into Mrs. Robinson's comfortable bed, being manipulated as an object, and finally pursuing his authenticity through his own choice of marrying an honest girl. Sartre's existential need for freedom can be seen on a level of a search of an action, the practical exploration for a soul of the human being. It can be

regarded as the presentation of a strong entity. Sartre's existential freedom is increasingly demonstrated to be a philosophy theoretically and practically nurturing and instructing people in their daily lives.

I argue in this dissertation that Sartre's existential freedom has a positive tone in a sense that human beings always have the opportunities to make a change, to step out from their past experience, to face the new challenges, to make new choices, to yearn for new possibilities in the unknown, and to search for a new life that bears meaning. Human beings are given hope to live. Sartre's philosophy was the crisis philosophy that intended to give people hope in France after the WWII to stand up from the ruins and to make their destroyed lives possible again. Now in peace time, Sartre's philosophy is still alive and is continuing to support people in their spiritual soul and physical action.

Critics stating that Sartre's philosophy carries a pessimistic tone have their reasons to believe so for Sartre's existential freedom is a radical doctrine in which the human being is completely alone when making decisions that entail great responsibilities. The existential anguish is hard to bear for most people and the burden of freedom can be extremely heavy.

However, I believe that the hope, the belief, or the strength endowed in the philosophy can not be missed. Instead, it is worth being promoted and encouraged, for this philosophy can give people power to believe, especially people in despair to believe, that they are able to make a change in their lives, to step out and move forward again. This research, to some extent, makes a contribution to promoting the positive tone in Sartre's existential philosophy, having resonance with George Cotkin that "American artists take existential anguish as motivations for their actions"(7). Percy, Hopper and

Nichols all present with their wisdom their existential heroes who keep the sense of moving on and cease to be defined by objects. The research echoes Barnes' words that Sartre's human kind creating his own value is "a message of liberation ... an optimistic challenge to action" (145), and it echoes the idea of Majorie Grene who values the doctrine believing "there is always, until death, another chance" (1).

This research limits its scope on the period of 1940 to 1970 when Sartre's philosophy carried immense influence in the United States, and it focuses on three American artists Walker Percy, Edward Hopper and Mike Nichols with their selected works. It takes the interdisciplinary approach in literature, painting, and motion picture to investigate the sense of humankind on the move, the core spirit of Sartre's existential freedom. These three artists are great ones who are good representatives of the period and in the respective disciplines; however, if more artists were selected, it would exhibit a solid representation of the period. If more works of them were chosen, it might enrich the findings and make the findings more convincing.

This research may serve as a basic research start up for other researches on Sartre's existential freedom in the United States. Researchers may follow the same approach by selecting the same artists, but selecting more of their works to investigate. Or they may observe in separate disciplines by going into each artist and concentrating on the works of art for richer and deeper presentation of Sartre's thought. In literature, Walker Percy has other novels *The Last Gentlemen*, *Love in the Ruins*, and *Lancelot*, depicting existential ideas and he wishes to be categorized as a philosophical novelist influenced by European existential philosophers, rather than as a novelist affected by American southern writers. These novels reflect immensely that his works are first philosophy, then literature. In oil

painting, Edward Hopper has great paintings in 1920s, 1930s and 1940s that are of same and different categories in 50s and 60s. Observing Hopper's painting from early 20s to 40s or to even later can give us a fuller picture of the artist himself as well as his development in artistic techniques and the development of thought. In the popular culture motion picture, Mike Nichols directs other movies *Who Is Afraid of Virginia Wolf?* (1966), *Catch-22* (1970), and *Carnal Knowledge* (1971), that all mainly deal with the sub-culture of college experience of 1960s. Further observation of this unorthodox director may help us see more of his pioneering thought on the change of this particular decade. Or if the future researchers are more interested in other artists in the United States whose work manifest Sartre's existential philosophy, novelist Saul Bellow, action painter Jackson Pollock, sculptor George Segal, novelist Ralph Ellison and Norman Mailer, and photographer Robert Frank should be considered. These artists are all Americans who bear existential thought in their works of art that greatly affect the periods of 1940s to 1970s and beyond.

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APPENDIX I

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BOOKS WRITTEN BY JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

<i>BN</i>	<i>Being and Nothingness</i>
<i>NS</i>	<i>Nausea</i>
<i>PAS</i>	<i>Portrait of the Anti-Semite</i>
<i>ASJ</i>	<i>Anti-Semite and Jew</i>
<i>NE</i>	<i>No Exit</i>
<i>RP</i>	<i>The Reprieve</i>

APPENDIX II

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BOOKS WRITTEN BY WALKER PERCY

<i>L</i>	<i>Lancelot</i>
<i>LC</i>	<i>Lost in the Cosmos: The Last Self-Help Book</i>
<i>LG</i>	<i>The Last Gentleman</i>
<i>LR</i>	<i>Love in the Ruins: The Adventures of a Bad Catholic at a Time near the End of the World</i>
<i>MG</i>	<i>The Moviegoer</i>
<i>MB</i>	<i>The Message in the Bottle: How Queer Man Is, How Queer Language Is, and What One Has to Do with the Other</i>
<i>SC</i>	<i>The Second Coming</i>
<i>TS</i>	<i>The Thanatos Syndrome</i>

APPENDIX III

ILLUSTRATIONS

Chair Car
1965
101.6 x 127 cm (40 x 50 in.)
Private Collection

Fig. 1

Hotel Lobby
1943
Oil on canvas
82.6 x 103.5 cm (32 1/2 x 40 3/4 in.)
Indianapolis Museum of Art;
William Ray Adams Memorial Collection

Fig.2

Hotel by the Railroad
 1952
 Oil on canvas
 79.4 x 101.9 cm (31 1/4 x 40 1/8 in)
 Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden,
 Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.;
 Gift of the Joseph H. Hirshhorn
 Foundation, 1966

Fig. 3

New York Office
 1962
 Oil on canvas
 101.6 x 139.7 cm (40 x 55 in.)
 Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts,
 Montgomery, Alabama;
 The Blount Collection 1989, 2, 24

Fig. 4

People in the Sun
 1960
 Oil on canvas
 102.6 x 155.4 cm (40 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 60 $\frac{3}{8}$ in.)
 National Museum of American Art,
 Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.;
 Gift of S.C. Johnson & Son, Inc.

Fig. 5

City Sunlight
 1954
 Oil on canvas
 71.6 x 101.9 cm (28 $\frac{3}{16}$ x 40 $\frac{1}{8}$ in.)
 Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden,
 Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.;
 Gift of the Joseph H. Hirshhorn

Fig. 6

Morning Sun
 1952
 Oil on Canvas
 71.4 x 101.9 cm (28 1/8 x 40 1/8 in.)
 Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio;
 Museum Purchase, Howald Fund

Fig. 7

Western Motel
 1957
 Oil on canvas
 77.8 x 128.3 cm (30 1/4 x 50 1/8 in.)
 Yale University Art Gallery
 Bequest of Stephen Carlton Clark, B.A. 1903

Fig. 8

Morning in a City
 1944
 Oil on canvas
 112.5 x 152 cm (44 5/16 x 59 13/16 in.)
 Williams College Museum of Art
 Bequest of Lawrence H. Bloedel, Class of 1923

Fig. 9

A woman in the Sun
 1961
 Oil on canvas
 101.6 x 152.4 cm (40 x 60 in.)
 Whitney Museum of American Art, New York;
 50th Anniversary Gift of
 Mr and Mrs Albert Hackett
 in honour of Edith and Lloyd Goodrich

Fig. 10

Carolina Morning
 1955
 76.2 x 101.6 cm (30 x 40 in.)
 Whitney Museum of American Art, New York;
 Given in memory of Otto L. Spaeth by his family

Fig. 11

High Noon
 1949
 Oil on canvas
 69.9 x 100.3 cm (27 1/2 x 39 1/2 in.)
 The Dayton Art Institute, Ohio;
 Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Anthony Haswell

Fig. 12

Cape Cod Morning
 1950
 Oil on Canvas
 87 x 101.9 cm (34 1/4 x 40 1/8 in.)
 National Museum of American Art
 Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.;
 Gift of the Sara Roby Foundation

Fig. 13

Sunlight in a Cafeteria
 1958
 Oil on canvas
 102.2 x 152.7 cm (40 1/4 x 60 1/8 in.)
 Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven;
 Bequest of Stephen Carlton Clark, B.A. 1903

Fig. 14

Girlie Show
 1941
 Oil on canvas
 81.3 x 96.5 cm (32 x 38 in.)
 Private Collection

Fig. 15

Office in a Small City
 1953
 Oil on canvas
 71.1 x 101.6 cm (28 x 40 in.)
 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York;
 George A. Heam Fund, 1953

Fig. 16

Summertime
1943
Oil on canvas
74 x 111.8 cm (29 1/8 x 44 in.)
Delaware Art Museum;
Gift of Dora Sexton Brown, 1962

Fig. 17

Edward Hopper - "Summertime", 1943 - Oil on canvas - © Estate of Josephine N. Hopper, licensed by the Whitney Museum of American Art. Collection of the Delaware Art Museum. On view in "100 Works for 100 Years" from June 23rd until September 16th.

Second Story Sunlight
1960
Oil on canvas
101.6 x 127 cm (40 x 50 in.)
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York;
Purchase, with funds from the
Friends of the Whitney Museum of American Art

Fig. 18

Summer in the City
1949
Oil on canvas
50.8 x 76.2 cm (20 x 50 in.)
Private Collection

Fig. 19

Excursion into Philosophy
1959
Oil on canvas
76.2 x 101.6 cm (30 x 40 in.)
Collection of Richard M. Cohen

Fig. 20

Rooms by the Sea
 1951
 Oil on canvas
 73.7 x 101.9 cm (29 x 40 1/8 in.)
 Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven;
 Bequest of Stephen Carlton Clark, B.A. 1903

Fig. 21

Sun in an Empty Room
 1963
 Oil on canvas
 73 x 100.5 cm (28 3/4 x 39 1/2 in.)
 Private Collection

Fig. 22

CURRICULUM VITAE

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PUBLICATIONS:

Books

- Wang, Zhenping, Chunbo Zhang, and Dong Zhao, eds. *An Advanced Video Course*. Student Book and Teacher's Edition, Editor in chief. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2006. Print.
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