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Presenting the Real: Hopperesque Updike in “In Football Season” (1962)

Kangqin Li

This paper offers a formalist analysis of John Updike’s visual composition in his 1962 short story “In Football Season” by putting him alongside the American Realist painter Edward Hopper. Applying Jose Ortega y Gasset’s perspectivist theory and Jean-Francois Lyotard’s Post-modernist definition of Realism, the paper will first look at how “the real” is presented in Updike’s short story and explore Updike’s approach toward Realism as a representational form. With a better understanding of the form of Updike’s short story and the relation between the form and the world beyond, the paper further explores the visual representation of form and space in the short story. The purpose of the paper, therefore, is not to claim how similar Updike and Hopper are in their artistic sensibility, nor to subvert Updike’s status as an American Realist writer. Rather, it is to see Updike’s short fiction in a different light and to understand his “visual” contribution to the short story form.

Visual art plays an important role in John Updike’s fiction. In *Picked-Up Pieces* (1975), Updike remarks that “my writing tends . . . to be pictorial, not only in its groping for visual precision but in the way the books are conceived, as objects in space, with events and persons composed within them like shapes on a canvas” (51). Critics have noticed the painterly techniques in Updike’s fiction too. James Plath compares Updike to the seventeenth-century Dutch painter Jan Vermeer whose equal treatment of objects and humans and whose “play of light within an interiorized space” are recalled in Updike’s “fictional portraits of upper-

middle-class domesticity” in the Rabbit tetralogy (209). Robert Detweiler studies Updike’s novel *The Centaur* (1963) and offers a Cubist approach to the novel’s double narrative (82). However, critics tend to focus on the visual aesthetics in Updike’s novels and little attention is paid to those in Updike’s short fiction.

Updike started his literary career as a short story writer for *The New Yorker* magazine and throughout his life produced several hundred short stories. Though critics acknowledge his talent as a short story writer – indeed according to Rachel Burchard “Updike reaches his highest range of accomplishment in this medium” – little sustained research has been done on Updike’s achievements in the short story form, let alone the visual aspect of it (133). Donald Greiner and Robert Luscher, two critics who devote serious attention to Updike’s canon of short fiction both agree that Updike’s major contribution to the short fiction form is that his stories contain little dramatic action, but at the same time offer “a coalescing network of incidents and images” (Luscher xii; Greiner 62, 164-165). Though they both acknowledge the importance of visual art in Updike’s short fiction, neither of them offers a formalist study to explain how the visual effect is constructed in Updike’s short fiction.

This essay will explore visual art in Updike’s short fiction by examining his compositions alongside those of the American Realist painter Edward Hopper. Juxtaposing Updike’s short story “In Football Season” (1962; rpt. *The Early Stories*) with a series of Hopper’s paintings, a formalist study of the visual structure in Updike’s short story will be given. Hence the essay serves two purposes. First, it will offer a deeper understanding of the form of Updike’s short story and the relation between the form and the outside world it refers to. In other words, we shall look at how “the real” is presented in Updike’s short story and explore Updike’s approach toward Realism as a representational form. Second, considering the notion of a special relationship between the short story form and visual art, the essay will explore Updike’s “visual” and “formal” contributions to the short story genre and fill the gap of previous Updike short fiction studies.

It is for three reasons that Edward Hopper is introduced here to illustrate the visual structure in Updike’s short fiction. In the first instance, Updike loved drawing and drew many cartoons for *The Harvard Lampoon*, an undergraduate humour magazine. He also studied art at Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art in Oxford. While Updike is considered a pictorial writer, Hopper is regarded as a painter with literary insight (Greenberg, *Collected Essays* 118). Douglas Tallack asserts that Hopper’s use of times of day and night as painting titles “provides a suggestion of narrative elements in an otherwise static scene” (“Edward Hopper” 121). The visual consciousness of Updike and the literary in-

sight of Hopper serve together as one basis for the juxtaposition of the two artists.

Secondly, both Updike and Hopper are most often considered American Realists. Aside from Updike's commitment to the "groping for visual precision," critics, whether agreeing Updike is a Realist writer or not, do not deny that Updike's writing, novels and short stories, is filled with accurate description of details (Luscher xiii; Versluys 33). Similarly, it is widely accepted that Hopper is a Realist painter of American scenes. His paintings remain "at least superficially, representations of ordinary American scenes" and "are immediately recognizable in the subject matter" (Levin, *The Art* 7; Tallack, "Edward Hopper" 107). And yet, despite their apparent approach to Realism as a representational form, Updike and Hopper are both conscious of the limitations of the medium. Hopper claims that "just to paint a representation or design is not hard, but to express a thought in painting is" (qtd. in Levin, *Complete Prints* 19). Updike believes "language approximates phenomena through a series of hesitations and qualifications" (Updike, *Picked-Up* 34). Their shared consciousness of the gap between the form and the world beyond offers a further basis for a formalist study of the visual structure of Updike's fiction by putting him alongside Hopper.

Thirdly, Updike comments in an essay on Hopper that the painter "seems in his paintings to be on the verge of telling a story" (Updike, *Still Looking* 180). This acknowledges, as Greenberg notes, the narrative insight of the painter. But I would like to give Updike's comments a further twist by focusing on the term "on the verge of telling a story." How is a painting formed to be "on the verge of telling a story"? What is the difference between a painting that is on the verge of telling a story and one that tells a story? Does visual art tell us something special about the short story form?

In Updike's story "In Football Season," the narrator describes a few symbolic objects and moments and depicts both the atmosphere of Friday night football in small town America and subtly shows the psychology of an adolescent. Updike's atmospheric descriptions remind us of Hopper's paintings of American scenes. Indeed, one finds motifs and objects in Updike's short stories – seasons, times of day, trains, cars, streets, architecture, and couples – similar to those found in Hopper's iconic American paintings. But what is the typical compositional format of a Hopper painting? How is a Hopperesque atmosphere structured in a short fiction? This essay will look at two Hopperesque effects in Updike's short story: the "frozen moment" and the "flattened surface."

Frozen Moment

One of Hopper's distinct compositional features is that he tends to paint from an elevated or lowered point of view "with unusual angles of vision," introducing more diagonals into the picture plane (Levin, *The Art* 39). In his 1924 oil painting *New York Pavements*, the scene is viewed from an elevated viewpoint from an acute angle.¹ The house, the major object of the painting, is not rendered parallel to the picture plane and the diagonal lines in the painting form edges and angles, instead of converging to a vanishing point. A nurse pushing a baby carriage is placed at the lower left corner and only part of the figure and the carriage can be seen. This angular vantage viewpoint challenges the traditional Albertian standard of composition in which a horizon line or vanishing point should be located near the middle of the painting in order to keep the "linear perspective" (Dunning 125).² Linear perspective, then, is "a complex and interrelated system for depicting what appears to be a unified, mathematically correct illusion on a two dimensional surface" (Dunning 35). In other words, "linear perspective," which is typically found in visual Realism, narrows all verticals, horizontals, and diagonals to a compositional point that unifies the space and makes it recognizable, a window on to a world. The world seen through a perspective as such is a static one and offers a "timeless monumentality" (Dunning 127). By reducing the linear perspective, Hopper's angular viewpoint suggests movement and temporality, and renders the painting "as though seen through a shifting camera lens" (Levin, *The Art* 58).

In *New York Pavements*, one sees "the real"; that is, one sees the house, the nurse, the baby carriage. Everything inside the painting, together with the painting title, refers to reality. However, that reality is a moment suspended in time instead of a whole sequence of happenings. One may think about the possible context of the painting, that is, the pre-history and the post-history of the nurse pushing the carriage. Our

¹ Edward Hopper's oil paintings and prints referred to in the paper can be found respectively in Gail Levin's books: *Edward Hopper: The Art and the Artist* and *Edward Hopper: The Complete Prints*.

² In 1435, the Florentine painter Leon Battista Alberti formulated the rules of perspective which governed painting for four hundred and fifty years. According to William Dunning, Alberti's perspective is formed by four principles: "1) Straight lines are not distorted; 2) objects or distances parallel to the picture plane are not distorted; 3) diagonals (orthogonals) converge to a single vanishing point which corresponds to the position of the viewer's eye; and 4) objects diminish in measured increments in proportion to their distance from the viewer" (40). Alberti's rationale of perspective can also be found in Samuel Y. Edgerton's book *The Renaissance Rediscovery of Linear Perspective*.

eyes stay in the moment only because Hopper's edges and angles freeze and frame the moment and no more context is given.

Like Hopper, Updike has an acute consciousness of viewpoint and a "fondness for exploring corners" (Updike, *Self-Consciousness* 143). In "In Football Season," one finds more Hopperesque angles and slanted planes than Albertian horizontal planes. The narrator recalls the fragrance that girls acquire in autumn and tries to locate the fragrance:

As you walk beside them after school, they tighten their arms about their books and bend their heads forward to give a more flattering attention to your words, and in the little intimate area thus formed, carved into the clear air by an implicit crescent. . . (122)

The constant use of positional expressions such as "beside," "tighten their arms about the books," "bend their heads forward," "the little intimate area thus formed," "carved" and "crescent" offers the geometrical perspective of a painter and forms a basic structure of Updike's description. There are many edges and angles. The narrator walks beside the girls and the girls are viewed from an angle which can be the equivalent of Hopper's "angles." Their "tightened arms" and "forward bended heads" introduce more angles. In the last sentence, with the fragrance being "banked a thousandfold on the dark slope of the stadium when, Friday nights, we played football in the city," the readers' eyes are brought to the stadium slope which is, if in a painting, a slanted horizontal plane. As one reads on, one encounters more angles when the narrator waits for his father "beside half-open doors of varnished wood and frosted glass" (122), when he sees his father "taking tickets at the far corner of the wall, wedged into a tiny wooden booth" (122), and when he escorts a girl to her door and bows his face "into that silent crescent of fragrance" (123).

Like Hopper's angular viewpoint in *New York Pavements*, angles and edges in Updike's short story offer temporal dimension in the otherwise static description. Readers are made conscious that there is something going on, but again the "going on" is, like Hopper's "frozen moment," framed and frozen within the visual edges. As we continue reading, those who expect a whole sequence of narrative may wonder about the words to which the girls listen by bending "their heads forward" in that "little intimate area"; they may be curious about what is being discussed inside the doors when the narrator waits for the father "beside half-open doors"; they may want to know what happens between the narrator and the girl before he is allowed to "bow his face into that silent crescent of fragrance." Indeed, the angles and edges in Updike's story visually offer narrative edges and clearly frame each moment at the

“verge” of telling a story. Each moment stops short, its pre-history and post-history untold. In other words, each moment offers a miniature narrative which reminds us of the limited space in short story form. “In Football Season” is a short story of only four pages. While reading a short story, a miniature narrative form compared to the novel, obviously enough because there is less “space” in the form, one meets the narrative edges, beginning and ending, sooner than reading a novel. As the result, whereas the “going on” of the novel can “sometimes seem to merge with ‘life,’” the short story as an economic narrative form “may be seen as an acknowledgement of, and defence against, language going on” (Tallack, *The Nineteenth-Century* 20). Indeed, Updike’s frozen moments in “In Football Season,” like those Hopperesque ones, make us aware of the space in representational form and “the real” beyond it. We see, as a result, a slice of reality instead of reality as a totality which readers of traditional Realist fiction would otherwise expect.

Updike’s and Hopper’s consciousness of form and their emphasis on non-linear perspective reflect their original approach toward Realism as a representational form. While still seeking a representational accuracy to depict reality, by introducing angles and temporality, they “prevent a total view of the scene, and equally prevent us from receiving a unified visual impression” (Renner 21). Hence they enter a perspectivist domain. Jose Ortega y Gasset, the theorist of perspectivism, asserts that “the ultimate reality of the world is perspective” (45). According to Ortega, a homogeneous space does not exist; nor does an immutable unified reality. Reality is each individual’s reality seen from each individual’s perspective. Influenced by Einstein’s theory of relativity and Nietzsche’s perspectivism, Ortega notes that “reality . . . can only reach us by multiplying itself into a thousand faces or surfaces” (171). When applying perspectivism to art, Ortega claims that “truth, the real, the universe, life – whatever you want to call it – breaks down into innumerable facets, into countless planes, each one of which slants towards one individual” (171). Updike’s and Hopper’s the frozen moments are those “facets” and “planes.” In a letter to Charles H. Sawyer, Hopper explained:

Why I select certain subjects rather than others, I do not exactly know, unless it is that I believe them to be the best mediums for a synthesis of my inner experience. (qtd. in Goodrich 152)

Similarly, in the afterword to *Rabbit, Run*, Updike talks about how he presents reality in his fiction:

Rather than arrive at a verdict and a directive, I sought to present sides of an unresolvable tension intrinsic to being human. Readers who expect nov-

elists to reward and punish and satirize their characters from a superior standpoint will be disappointed. (Updike, *Rabbit* 269-270)

Regardless of whether it is Hopper's "synthesis of inner experience" or Updike's "sides of an unresolvable tension intrinsic to being human," it is clear that through the "frozen moment" they present many slices of reality, in Ortega's words, "innumerable facets and planes." There is no such thing as one absolute space or reality that can give "a superior standpoint" because there is no absolute perspective.

However, is reality a multitude of perspectives? Or above all, is it possible that we locate each perspective and see "the real" through it?

Flattened Surface

"In Football Season" is a short story about a "season." One may easily sense the atmosphere of a particular season but find it difficult to describe it as a whole, especially when it comes to the description of the intangible. Olfactory sensation, in the short story, plays an important role in presenting us with the football season atmosphere. To locate the "fragrance girls acquire in autumn," we may refer to the positional expressions and the geometrical perspective discussed above. But when it comes to the description of the fragrance itself, the use of viewpoints and perspectives appears to be more complicated:

As you walk . . . by an implicit crescent, there is a complex fragrance woven of tobacco, powder, lipstick, rinsed hair, and that perhaps imaginary and certainly elusive scent that wool, whether in the lapels of a jacket or the nap of a sweater, seems to yield when the cloudless fall sky like the blue bell of a vacuum lifts toward itself the glad exhalations of all things. This fragrance, so faint and flirtatious on those afternoon walks through the dry leaves, would be banked a thousandfold on the dark slope of the stadium when, Friday nights, we played football in the city. (122)

One component of the fragrance, the "elusive scent that wool . . . seems to yield," seemingly gives the readers an elevated "bird's-eye" viewpoint to look at the earth from the sky (Dunning 125). However, when the fragrance "is banked . . . on the dark slope of the stadium," the readers' eyes are brought back to the earth from the sky. If one viewpoint gives one surface of viewing, a window on to a world, two different viewpoints offer two viewing surfaces of the fragrance and render the illusion of inaccessible depth. If, through the angular viewpoint, one has a glimpse of the visible, the juxtaposition of two different viewpoints pre-

sents us the invisible of the football season such as fragrance which is intangible and formless.

However, the invisible of the football season is not simply the fragrance. It is a synthesis of many unattainable components. In the second paragraph, when the narrator describes the atmosphere of a football game, similar but more complicated visual inaccessibility appears:

In a hoarse olfactory shout, these odors ascended. A dense haze gathered along the ceiling of brightness at the upper limit of the arc lights, whose glare blotted out the stars and made the sky seem romantically void and intimately near, like the death that now and then stooped and plucked one of us out of a crumpled automobile. (123)

While the “odors ascended,” we encounter words such as “the ceiling of brightness at the upper limit of the arc lights,” “the stars” and “the sky.” We are given a lowered viewpoint, what William Dunning calls “a worm’s eye view” in his study of pictorial art (Dunning 125). But the simile given in the second half of the sentence “. . . like the death that now and then stooped and plucked one of us out of a crumpled automobile” introduces an elevated viewpoint and makes the reader view these human beings and “crumpled automobiles” as if from high above. The juxtaposition of two contradictory viewpoints creates a stretching tension and challenges the illusion of depth in the story. One’s eyes stay on the visual surface of the description stretched by the two viewpoints and the atmosphere of the football game remains invisible. If, according to Ortega, “a perspective is perfected by the multiplication of its viewpoints,” one may wonder whether perspective in this passage presents itself through “lack of perspective,” as obviously enough lowered and elevated viewpoints exclude each other and deny us access to see (45).

Indeed, Updike noticed the limitations of Realism as a representational form as well as the awkwardness of being a representational artist in postwar America. Upon acceptance of the National Book Award for *The Centaur* (1963), he delivered a speech on accuracy, that is, “lifelikeness”:

Glancing upward, one is struck by the dispersion of recent constellations, by how far apart the prose masters of the century – say, Proust and Joyce, Kafka and Hemingway – are from one another. It may be partly an optical illusion, but modern fiction does seem, more than its antecedents, the work of eccentrics. . . . Our common store of assumptions has dwindled, and with it the stock of viable artistic conventions. (Updike, *Picked-Up* 34)

It seems modern writers no longer offer realistic writing, through which one sees “the real.” As a result, their work appears to be “the work of eccentrics.” We may think Updike is an eccentric too, considering the two exclusive viewpoints discovered above. However, as Updike himself maintains, this may be “an optical illusion” and modern Realists want to present “the real” as much as did the nineteenth-century Realists. Their work appears eccentric only because presenting “the real” becomes more and more difficult because of the fact that “our common store of assumptions” and “stock of viable artistic conventions” are at stake and are more diffuse. One may have an idea of something, the totality of what it is, but one does not have the capacity to present it in accordance with our, both his and his audience’s, common assumptions. The conflict between “the faculty to conceive of something and the faculty to present something” faced by modern Realists makes us see in their work, what Jean-François Lyotard describes as the “‘lack of reality’ of reality” (77). Modernity, according to Lyotard, “in whatever age it appears, cannot exist without a shattering of belief and without discovery of the ‘lack of reality’ of reality, together with the invention of other realities” (77). Through “the invention of other realities,” modern artists make us see that there is something which can be conceived but can not be presented (77). Every presentation of an object meant to make visible the totality of that thing appears to be painfully inadequate (78). Updike’s “lack of perspective” is an example as such and it makes us see the “unpresentable” atmosphere of the football season (78).

Again, Edward Hopper’s work may help us understand better Lyotard’s, and Updike’s, “unpresentable” and “lack of reality.” Apart from paintings with uncanny perspective such as *New York Pavements* (1924), *American Village* (1912) and the 1921 etching *Night Shadows*, many other Hopper paintings play with perspective in a more complicated way. Hopper’s *Stairway* has a very confusing perspective. Similar to what he does to *New York Pavements*, traditional rules of proportion are not followed and there is no vanishing point.³ However, there is something more to say about this painting. Also, the foreground seems flattened. One would expect the steps to be steeper as the viewpoint seems to be floating and is higher than the viewpoint of someone who would stand on the stairs. The position of the wooden beam above the top of the painting is hard to locate too. If it is a beam above the doorframe, it seems too close and too imposing; if it is a beam above the stairway, the

³ A vanishing point in Realist painting is achieved by diagonals (orthogonals) which are parallel to the line of sight but perpendicular to the picture plane. Though parallel to the viewer’s line of sight, the diagonals at mid-height in the painting seem to meet as do the parallel railroad tracks in elementary drawing books (Dunning 40).

view outside the doorframe should have been blocked off a little more. Similar questions can be asked about the dark mass outside. Is it a storm? If so, why does one see the blue sky beyond? In the end, all these questions converge on the question of viewpoint. And the question remains unsolved as whenever we assume one viewpoint, we always find something that contradicts it.

Like Updike's juxtaposition of the "bird's eye view" and "worm's eye view," which keeps the readers' eyes on the visual surface of the description, the confusing perspective in Hopper's *Stairway* makes the painting "visually impossible" and prevents us from looking into the depth of the painting (Tallack, "Edward Hopper" 118). In the end, one sees only the two-dimensional painting surface and wonders whether the representational objects, the walls, the door, the beam, the stairway and the landscape outside, are only painted spaces.

Realism as a representational form always has to deal with the relationship between the form and the outside world it represents. Realist writing or painting, as Old Masters see it, should approximate "the real" as much as possible. Artists in modern times, who also present "the real," approach the issue with more frankness. While Old Masters claim a piece of art that fails to bring us the real is a bad piece of artwork, such as Hopper's *Stairway* and Updike's visual description in "In Football Season," modern artists and critics, on the contrary, "regard these same limitations as positive factors that are to be acknowledged openly" (Greenberg 6). This does not mean that modern artists renounce Old Masters or have abandoned the "representation of the recognizable objects" (6). Indeed, Updike and Hopper stay with the traditional medium, at least when viewed at first sight. Rather, they treat the readers/viewers equally and make them aware of "seeing" and "space." The readers/viewers have long taken it for granted that a painting or a descriptive passage is a window onto a world and often forget that it is only a representational form. Modern artists treat form and content equally and make us see both. Updike and Hopper are such artists.

As we read on, we discover in "In Football Season" more flattened surfaces in the visual description. After describing the moment when he bows his face into "that silent crescent of fragrance," we find one passage which brings the narrator's past and present together:

The other day, in a town far from Olinger, I passed on the sidewalk two girls . . . and sensed, very faintly, that flavor from far off carried in their bent arms like a bouquet. And, continuing to walk, I felt myself sink into a chasm deeper than the one inverted above us on those Friday nights during football season. (125)

Perspective, again, as in the descriptions discussed earlier, is put into play and has in itself an intrinsic tension. It is impossible for us to picture the narrator sinking into a “chasm” deeper than “the one inverted above” him as the two chasms exclude each other and gravitate toward opposite directions. As a result, the readers/viewers perhaps perceive nothing but two spaces similar to what is outside the doorframe (or to be more precise, the painted spaces framed by the doorframe's shape) in Hopper's painting *Stairway*. Perspective in this description is no longer accepted as a given. It is an invented one, a new presentation, in order to present “the unrepresentable,” that is, the “lack of reality” of reality (Lyotard 80). If we take a look at the quoted verses in the earlier text, the meaning of the juxtaposition of the two “chasms” becomes clearer.

Oh, you can't get to Heaven

(Oh, you can't get to Heaven)

In Smokey's Ford

(In Smokey's Ford)

'Cause the cylinders

('Cause the cylinders)

Have to be rebored.

(Have to be rebored.)

Oh, you can't get to Heaven

(Oh, you can't get to Heaven)

In a motel bed

(In a motel bed)

'Cause the sky is blue

('Cause the sky is blue)

And the sheets are red.

(And the sheets are red.) (123-124)

The original verse is from a Christian song where in the place of “Smokey's Ford” and “motel bed,” there is a “rocking chair.” The original song carries a moral warning: yielding to temptation prevents one from getting to Heaven. However, by changing “rocking chair” into “Smokey's Ford” and “motel bed,” two possible temptations for adolescents, the narrator and his friends treat the song in a playful way. The verses, therefore, help us understand the juxtaposition of “a chasm” beneath “the one inverted above.” Knowing that in submitting to temptation one might be damned, just as the adult narrator feels himself “sink into a chasm,” the sixteen-year-old narrator feels he “is permitted” and the “chasm” is an inverted one above appearing “romantically void and intimately near” (125, 123). This interpretation is confirmed by the sentence after the quotation:

Few of us had a license to drive, and fewer still had visited a motel. We were at that innocent age, on the borderline of sixteen, when damnation seems a delicious promise. (124)

While the phrase “damnation seems a delicious promise” offers the semantic paradox of the two “chasms,” “on the borderline” offers the visual. Again, due to the lack of a right perspective, readers stay at the visual surface of the passage and can only acknowledge how novel is Updike’s visual writing. In addition, the fact that the verses are placed as independent quotations and each line repeats itself in the parentheses reinforces the flattening effect.

While a “frozen moment” gives a window on to a world, a slice of reality which is presentable, a “flattened surface” in Updike’s and Hopper’s work blocks the window and presents “the unrepresentable,” which is also a slice of reality. Again, this reminds us of Ortega’s perspectivist view of reality that “reality . . . can only reach us by multiplying itself into a thousand faces or surfaces” (171). Ortega’s definition by no means contradicts that of Lyotard. On the contrary, they are complementary to each other. Lyotard’s “lack of reality” as part of reality is well suited to Ortega’s thousands of “faces or surfaces.” Updike and Hopper’s “frozen moment” and “flattened surface,” therefore, approximate us toward the totality of “the real.”

Hopperesque effects, the “frozen moment” and “flattened surface,” in Updike’s short story offer us a deeper sense of the atmosphere of the football season. However, those who expect a narrative may still pose the question: what happens in the story? The question seems superficial, yet it is by no means easy to answer. Trying to answer it brings back the issue of the spatial form in short fiction.

In the “frozen moment,” one senses the potential of “going on” and stops short on the “verge” of the narrative because the non-linear perspective gives visual as well as narrative edges. In the case of the “flattened surface,” one is not only denied access to linear perspective, but also non-linear perspective. Therefore, it is hard even to assume the potential of “going on” as there is no proper perspective to start with. Indeed, “In Football Season” does not read like a short story, because it is not a traditional story, which, regardless of the length, should above all include a narrative arc. Rather, Updike’s short story reads more like lyrical prose with anecdotes and descriptions. This makes us wonder whether there exists “a lack of form” in the short story form seen through the “flattened surface,” just as we see limited space and form through the “frozen moment.”

Conclusion

The position of Updike and Hopper in representational art is not easy to define. On the one hand, they approach the medium traditionally, but their art is different to nineteenth-century Realism, which tries to present an unquestionable reality; on the other hand, unlike their modern contemporaries, Updike and Hopper do not treat the medium “with the swift abbreviated strokes” or simply substitute content with form (Mecklenburg 5). Rather, having a strong consciousness of form and space, Updike and Hopper choose a difficult path, adopting recognizable artistic techniques of Realism in each minute segment, while exploring domains beyond the traditional Realist framework. They search for new presentations and make us see both the presentable and the “unpresentable.”

Hopper’s paintings can offer a better understanding of the visual structure in Updike’s short story “In Football Season.” Yet more importantly, Hopper helps us see the visual representation of form and space in short fiction and the special relationship between the short story form and visual art.

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