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Edward Hopper's Room in New York depicts an all-too-common analogue of *acedia*: resistance to the demands of human love.

Intimate Separation

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The American Realist painter Edward Hopper enjoyed painting detailed, revealing scenes of life in New York City from the 1930s to 1950s. His images create an alternate reality from the isolation and loneliness of city life. They can provide constructive solitude and meditative reflection for its inhabitants.¹ His city streets, totally devoid of people, can elicit a calm that touches and soothes the soul.²

But in a number of paintings Hopper depicted apartment interiors peopled with figures who share an intimate space, but not their lives. For instance, in *Room in New York* we see a man and woman whose facial features have been blurred, allowing them to serve as types rather than specific individuals. Perhaps they are the typical husband and wife in their living room at nightfall. At first glance they appear to be enjoying downtime at the end of a busy day, but when we look closely, something is out of kilter with that interpretation. Notice the body position of the woman: she is playing the piano with one finger and seems distracted by thoughts of something other than her music. (Since the couple owns a piano and there is sheet music visible, she most likely knows how to play the piano, but that is not what she is doing right now.) Is there something she is tentative to discuss with her husband? Whatever the distraction, she turns to the piano and his thoughts are focused on the paper. Neither is concerned with or even acknowledges the other person at this moment. "They are out of synch," the art critic Robert Hughes has noted, "and their distance from each other is figured in the simple act of a woman with a shadowed face sounding a note (or perhaps only thinking about sounding it) to which there will be no response."³

NOTES

1 See my discussion of Hopper's *New York Movie* (1939) and *Sunlight in a Cafeteria* (1958) in "The Field of Sensation and Experience," *Virtual Lives*, Christian Reflection: A Series in Faith and Ethics 38 (Waco, TX: The Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University, 2011), 40-45.

2 See my discussion of Hopper's *Early Sunday Morning* (1930) and *Nighthawks* (1942) in "An Ordered Neighborhood," *Cities and Towns*, Christian Reflection: A Series in Faith and Ethics 20 (Waco, TX: The Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University, 2006), 56-60.

3 Robert Hughes, "Art: Under the Crack of Reality," *Time*, 143:3 (July 17, 1995), 54.