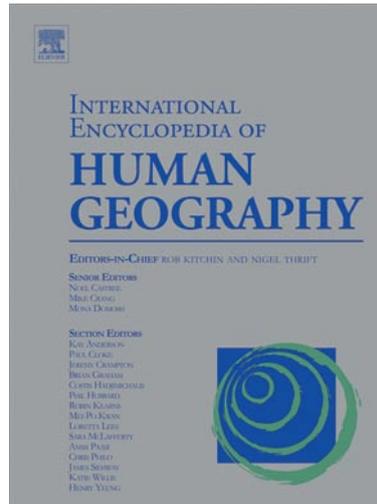


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Anti-Urbanism

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Glossary

Anomie A term popularized by the sociologist, Emile Durkheim in his 1897 book *Suicide*, and used to describe a condition in individuals characterized by an absence or diminution of standards or values (referred to as ‘normlessness’), and an associated feeling of alienation. He believed that ‘anomie’ is common when the surrounding society has undergone significant changes in its economic fortunes, whether for good or for worse and, more generally, when there is a significant discrepancy between the ideological theories and values commonly professed and what was actually achievable in everyday life.

Anti-Urbanism A discourse of fear of the city, produced and reproduced through a variety of negative literary, artistic, media, cinematic, and photographic representations of urban places.

Ash Can School An artistic movement that came into prominence in the United States during the early twentieth century, best known for works portraying scenes of daily life in poor, crowded urban neighborhoods. The movement is most associated with a group of urban Realists known as ‘The Eight’, comprising Robert Henri, Arthur B. Davies, Maurice Prendergast, Ernest Lawson, William Glackens, Everett Shinn, John Sloan, and George Luks.

Discourse A network of signs, symbols, and practices through which we make our world(s) meaningful to ourselves and to others.

Film Noir An American cinematic genre with roots in the fiction of Depression America, tabloid photojournalism, the bombed landscapes of World War II cities, and the anti-urban visions of European directors, cinematographers, and writers who emigrated to America in the 1930s. Film noir cities were usually blighted, dark, empty, threatening, miserable, and dystopian.

Realism A mode of representation in the visual arts and literature which was particularly prominent in Europe and North America in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In painting, the aim of Realists was to give a truthful, objective, and impartial representation of the real world, based on meticulous observation of contemporary life.

Transcendentalism A group of ideas in literature, religion, culture, and philosophy that emerged in New England in the early- to mid-nineteenth century. The ideas were rooted in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (and of German Idealism more generally), which the

New England intellectuals of the early nineteenth century embraced as an alternative to the doctrines of the Unitarian church. Transcendentalists desired to ground their religion and philosophy in principles not based on, or falsifiable by, sensuous experience, but deriving from the inner, spiritual or mental essence of the human. Nature was central to transcendentalist thought, and was viewed to have the powers, status, and authority traditionally attributed to an independent deity.

Introduction: 100% Urban Proof

In early 2007 Nissan launched a new model of sport utility vehicle (SUV), the Qashqai. The massive in-your-face marketing campaign described the Qashqai as “100% Urban Proof” – posters were designed showing a triumphant tank-like vehicle protected from gritty-looking streets, with the backdrop of walls plastered in menacing graffiti (Figure 1). The website takes the ‘urban proof’ theme even further, showing it roaring around a deserted industrial district accompanied by sinister music, where creepy characters in the graffiti come to life to throw out all kinds of obstacles (oil slicks, road bumps) for the Qashqai to negotiate. It does so with ease, for Qashqai “claims the urban environment as its own playground,” and its “dynamic profile, flared wheel arches and durable black cladding protect it from the trials and tribulations of urban life.” Furthermore, there is an optional “electronic

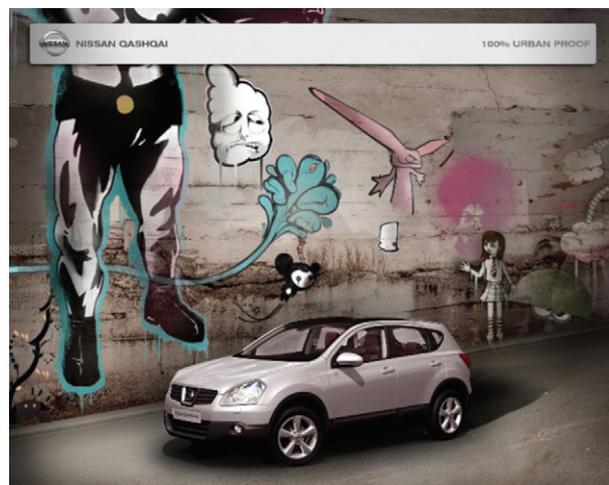


Figure 1 The Nissan Qashqai – 100% Urban Proof. Reproduced with permission of the Nissan Corporation.

stability program,” which “enhances this surefootedness by keeping on course when the unexpected happens.”

The Qashqai is a pure exemplar of the discourse of anti-urbanism materialized into a product that attempts to provide safety for consumers perceived as afraid of urban places. The message from Nissan is clear: in the dark and dangerous corners of the urban jungle, you will be fine inside this quasi-tank off-roader! The sense of being in control is amplified by the section of the website entitled “My Qashqai,” where you can even design your ‘own’ urban background for your vehicle. Urban fears can be eased or erased when you go out and buy a Qashqai – just wait and see!

Anti-urbanism is best defined as a discourse of fear of the city, and something fuelled by the impact of images of urban dystopia we see in a variety of media, cinematic, literary, artistic, photographic – and in the case of the Qashqai, corporate – representations of urban places. It is a discourse that has been around for a long time, in conjunction with the emergence of the industrial city, and often constructed in relation to the ‘good city’ of the ancient Greeks, and especially the perceived virtues of rural life. Anti-urbanism is particularly advanced in the United States in a variety of guises, from the celebration of rural small-town kinship and community to the fact that Los Angeles has been completely destroyed 138 times in various motion pictures from 1909 to 1999! Critical analyses of anti-urbanism are vital if the material consequences of widespread urban fears are to be exposed and challenged. As cultural geographers have argued for a long time now, if we leave powerful representations unquestioned, then supposedly fixed ‘evidence’ about how a society is organized can very easily become treated as overwhelming evidence of how it ‘should’, or ‘must’ be organized.

Origins: The Good Life

In order to understand where anti-urban sentiment came from, we must appropriately invert one of the key principles of the natural sciences (especially geology), uniformitarianism, often summed with the statement: ‘the present is the key to the past’. For our purposes, the past is the key to the present, and therefore we must acknowledge the widespread and deeply entrenched pro-urban sentiment of the past to grasp any anti-urban sentiment of the present.

Athens (c. 500–400 BC) was not only the birthplace of democracy, it was the birthplace of the arena in which democracy was born – the city-state or the *polis*, captured by Aristotle as a self-sufficient and self-governing group of villages in a narrow and closed region lying around an urban center:

The partnership finally composed of several villages is the city-state; it has at last attained the limit of virtually

complete self-sufficiency, and thus, while it comes into existence for the sake of life, it exists for the good life...it is clear that the city-state is a natural growth, and that man is by nature a political animal, and a man that is by nature and not merely by fortune citizenless is either low in the scale of humanity or above it. (P. Hall, 1998: 2)

For our purposes we are less interested in the morphology of the city than the moral geography of this statement – the city as the “natural” and “good” unit for the development of human society; indeed, Aristotle went on to say that anyone who lives outside such a unit must be “either a god or a beast.” He was not alone – Socrates and Plato before him had both treated Athens as the arena where ‘citizens’ were born and nurtured, a place where public and private life were in rhythmic interplay for the first time, and a place which supported an unprecedented flowering of art, music, intellect, politics, and love. The Athenians demonstrated for the first time the capacity, richness, and depth of the human mind in the theater of the city. It didn’t matter that Athens also harbored extremes of rich and poor – the possibilities for transcending inequality were legion because of the possibilities the city offered for human innovation.

The urban concentration of indisputable genius exhibited by the Athenians had a lasting impact on how future societies throughout human history treated cities. No city in history has ever been devoid of human suffering, but that hard reality was for centuries trumped by the fact that no city that followed the Athens example has ever been starved of the same basic conditions for societal advancement brought about by the clustering of citizens with divergent thoughts, abilities, talents, and politics under a democratic model. From Imperial Rome to Renaissance Florence to Elizabethan London, pro-urban sentiment was articulated and reproduced through artistic, dramatic, and musical representations. The good city for the good life, an immensely powerful Athenian invention, diffused through time and space and left a legacy of pro-urbanism difficult to dislodge.

Dislodging the Good Life, Disrupting the Rural

Industrialization proved to be the force that dislodged widespread pro-urbanism. The good city for the good life morphed into Frederick Engels’ Manchester, Henry Mayhew’s London, and Upton Sinclair’s Chicago, to name but a few representations of the industrial city as dirty, dark, crowded, anonymous, threatening to the weak, a jungle of brick, stone, and smoke. These representations were powerful in part because their audiences could see how far things had fallen, how much the industrial city had become the brutal opposite of the

Athenian model. Gone was the city of intellectual discovery, artistic achievement, and political progress; in its place was L. S. Lowry's city of mighty factories sapping the life out of its faceless citizens (Figure 2). However, another factor was in place in conditioning anti-urbanism – it is impossible to trace the emergence of urban fears without considering 'pro-rural' sentiment. Even though the Industrial Revolution transformed both urban and rural areas, the burgeoning system of capitalist accumulation in the nineteenth century and its manifestation in intense urbanization was viewed with dismay by subscribers to traditional rural values (and it is important to note that, prior to the nineteenth century, the vast majority of humans lived in rural areas), who saw the cities as places which encouraged a rejection of the basic human values behind the formation of an inherently moral existence.

For example, in the United States, a negative discourse of the city, which began with the pastoral musings of Thomas Jefferson and was furthered significantly by the transcendental contemplations of Ralph Waldo Emerson, grew stronger and became embedded in social life through powerful representations of urban malaise in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century American literature, art, and social theory. Far from being celebrated as signs of industrial and economic progress, American cities were often viewed as dirty and disease-ridden arenas of degenerate, immoral, and corrupt behavior, the exact and unruly opposites of small-town and rural America, and therefore places which middle-class Americans would be wise to avoid for their own well-being. Raymond Williams' *The Country and the City*, a magisterial survey of the dialectical tensions between the country and the city in English literary representations, reminds us that the celebration of the rural in contrast to the castigation of the urban is not something confined to America, and through centuries of celebrated poetry, fiction, and philosophy this contrast has become



Figure 2 *Coming from the Mill*. L. S. Lowry (1930). Reproduced with permission of the Salford Museum.

extraordinarily pervasive, to the extent that it is “one of the major forms in which we become conscious of a central part our experience and of the crises of our society.” While Williams was careful to point out that the rural–urban contrasts were varied and sometimes inverted, for example, by Marx’s observations of ‘rural idiocy’ and Baudelaire’s city of ‘feverish joys,’ arguably the most powerful and lasting representations were those of rural tranquillity and urban hostility.

It was to a sizeable transatlantic body of anti-urban literary sentiment, deriving its power from the contrast to the pro-urbanism of the past and pro-ruralism of the age, that European social theorists such as Ferdinand Tonnies, Emile Durkheim, and Georg Simmel delivered their classic studies of the social and psychological effects of rampant urbanization. While it would be incorrect to describe their immensely influential and diverse perspectives on the changing patterns of social life in the city as somehow anti-urban, it would be equally incorrect to downplay the role they had in reinforcing anti-urban sentiment. Tonnies’s elaborations of the impersonal and superficial human associations of an urban *gesellschaft* society, the opposite of community (*gemeinschaft*); Durkheim’s plaintive projections of the urban condition of ‘anomie’ and the deviant behavior which might accompany social isolation and confusion; and Simmel’s accounts of individuals protecting themselves from the startling disruptions and discontinuities of the metropolitan milieu (leading to what he called ‘psychic overload’) all added fuel to the legacy of urban fear left by Emerson, Thoreau, and the transcendentalists in the US; and Thomas Hardy, William Wordsworth, George Gissing, and the Victorian writers in England. The ideas and attitudes of the sociologists may have differed, but their writings on what can happen to societies and individuals when cities expand did little to reverse the tide of anti-urban thinking which had penetrated the public imagination, even if the city was not always portrayed as the maelstrom of noise, suffering, and individual isolation like it was by those who came before them.

But why does this discourse of anti-urbanism matter, and why is it of interest to urban geographers? The answer is simple – if cities are repeatedly depicted as places devoid of compassion, care, and community, or worse, as dreadful, dark, and dangerous, then it becomes all too easy to treat them as places which must be avoided, or even places which must be tamed and seriously modified in the image of those possessing the appropriate powers. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the United States. In 1962, Morton White and Lucia White wrote a landmark book entitled *The Intellectual Versus the City*, a remarkable survey of what they called the ‘powerful tradition of anti-urbanism’ emanating from the pens of several generations of leading American writers. They concluded that the collective criticism of urban life coming from

distinguished American intellectuals such as, *inter alia*, Thoreau, Edgar Allan Poe, and Henry James, “helps explain America’s lethargy in confronting the massive problems of the contemporary city in a rational way (p. 200).” In 1962, White and White were not able to write with the benefit of insights from cultural geography, which have taught us to understand how landscapes are part of a system of social regulation and reproduction due to their dual properties of material form and discursive sign. However, in their book we begin to detect how anti-urban discourse becomes materialized into a particular ‘way of seeing’ the American city, and a way of treating it. A case study involving representations of New York serves to illustrate the power of the discourse of anti-urbanism.

Case Study: Edward Hopper’s New York

Great art is the outward expression of an inner life in the artist, and this inner life will result in his [sic] personal vision of the world. Edward Hopper, 1953 (quoted in Hobbs, 1987: 64)

Edward Hopper (1882–1967), an artist with a huge posthumous following (a traveling retrospective of his work in the summer of 2004 drew massive crowds to galleries worldwide), is often seen as the quintessential American ‘Realist’, not least because he studied with Robert Henri, the teacher of the famous Ash Can Realists at the New York School of Art, which has often led to erroneous associations of Hopper with the Ash Can school. Hopper was certainly a Realist, yet his brand of Realism was unique, and very different from his contemporaries who sought to fulfill Henri’s injunction to his students to paint the crowded life of the modern city, implicitly that of its poor and immigrant communities. Hopper never painted urban crowds – quite the opposite, as we shall see. A brief biographical sketch helps us understand the foundations of the anti-urbanism visible in Hopper’s art.

Hopper was a recluse who spent a lifetime reading poetry, literature, drama, and philosophy, absorbing what he learned from books and observed from life, and applying it to canvas. His childhood was spent in an upper-middle-class Dutch settlement, Nyack in upstate New York, a world away from the expanding metropolis to the south where he would make his name and live permanently from 1910 to his death in 1967. The roots of his approach to the city can be found in the place in which he was raised, one where nature, community, religious education, patriotism, and duty were seen to lead to a solid moral existence. The 1890s, the decade of Hopper’s adolescence, marked the acceleration of urban and industrial development that eroded traditional ways of life and challenged that solid moral existence of rural

and small-town America. Gail Levin, Hopper’s most prolific biographer, identified this period as the root of the conflicts that Hopper lived throughout his life between traditional and modern, rural and urban, American and foreign ways; conflicts he would explore again and again in his work. Crucial to the development of Hopper’s attitude toward the city were the writings of Thoreau and (particularly) Emerson, two individuals known for their dislike and distrust of city life in favor of romantic notions of the entwining of humans with nature, and with whom Hopper felt close intellectual affinity. On Emerson, Hopper once said: “I admire him greatly. I read him a lot. I read him over and over again.” Hopper held Emerson in such high esteem that many have argued that he sought to express the Emersonian vision through his art. In *The Intellectual Versus the City*, White and White refer to Thoreau’s classic *Walden* (1854) as a

bible of anti-urbanism... The values it espouses are essentially those of the isolated individual, living in nature and free of social attachments. (1962: 30)

The connections are striking – most of the people in Hopper’s urban paintings are isolated individuals who appear out of place, detached from the city both socially and spatially as it changes around them, and seemingly bewildered by the threat to ‘nature’ posed by the built environment. Another writer who harbored an approach to the city to which Hopper could relate was Henry James, whose *The American Scene* (1907) was full of negative portrayals of a New York placed in cultural opposition to European cities. Hopper spent his early twenties in Paris, which he described to be “very graceful and beautiful... after the raw disorder of New York,” and the year James’ book was published was the same year Hopper returned to New York from Paris. *The American Scene* was avidly consumed by Hopper as it viewed urbanization with suspicion, and returning to New York after a lengthy absence made rapid urban change all the more tangible and unsettling to the artist. The appearance of skyscrapers in New York’s cityscape was seen by James and then Hopper as representative of encroaching, unwelcome modernity – a theme which is never far from a Hopper painting and usually depicted with trepidation and uneasiness. Take the following observation, again by Levin:

He rarely represented skyscrapers at all, and when he did, he reduced them to fragmentary glimpses or intrusions on the cityscape... His recurrent visual ironies on the manifestations of modern life suggest his highly ambivalent attitude toward the changes occurring in twentieth-century society; it is his profound alienation from contemporary life that makes his art so characteristic of modernity itself. (1995a: 229)

Skyscrapers, to Hopper, were signs of unruliness and dislocation – serious violations of all that he had been brought up to believe, that humans should be in harmony with nature and situated away from disruptions to this almost puritan way of existence. The workings of modernity were antithetical to a man who disapproved of social and structural change, of overcrowding, of disorder. Although not an outright misanthrope, Hopper was a deeply private man lost in the worlds of his art and his passion for reading. He lived in New York City for most of his adult life, yet it is hard to find a Hopper painting where this city is celebrated or loved, or presented with any optimism. Much of this arose from his observations of social life in New York during the inter-war years of Prohibition and Depression; strikes, unemployment, protest, poverty, and uncertain futures had a profound effect on his vision of the city. Hopper saw what could happen to a city when its growth was explosive, when its economy collapsed, when some of its people were left behind and struggled to make sense of the transforming world in which they lived.

Hopper's *Sunday* (1926) provides an instructive illustration (Figure 3). It shows a solitary man in contemplative mood sitting in front of a store. Hunched forward and appearing bored and disconsolate, it is a forlorn and lonely scene which deals with themes of emptiness, isolation, and loss. Although the man is shown on a Sunday, his day of rest, the store behind him is empty, lacking window displays or any other suggestion that it is ever open for business. We are left wondering if this is the storeowner, his livelihood in tatters, who is living his life in perpetual Sunday, reflecting on his losses and worrying about what to do next. While the painting predates the Depression, it is a

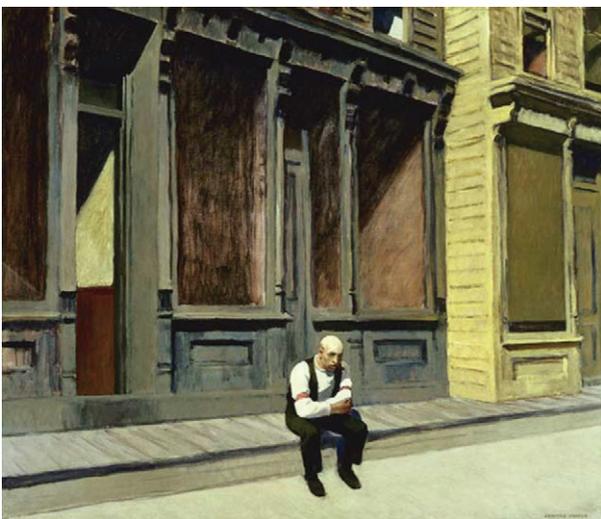


Figure 3 *Sunday*. Edward Hopper (1926). Oil on canvas. Reproduced with permission of The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC.

portrayal of an individual bypassed by the optimism and opulence of F. Scott Fitzgerald's 'Jazz Age', someone struggling to make sense of what has happened to him and his business as the world has changed around him. Hopper's profound suspicion of modernity is suggested by the nineteenth-century storefronts – they have become the walls of a twentieth-century ghost town, and like the man who sits before them, relics of an age which Hopper preferred, an age of small, modest businesses and architecture of a more human scale. While it could be argued that the painting has a small-town feel, it was in fact based on Hopper's frequent sojourns to the city of Hoboken, New Jersey, just across the Hudson River from New York.

Early reactions to *Sunday* were notable for their tendency to describe its 'Americanness' in both place and subject. Perhaps this is because the title has universal significance, or because the location is unidentifiable – this could be any city in the USA. Most relevant to this discussion, perhaps the Americanness comes from the depiction of a city street that has come to exclude and alienate one of its residents. The storekeeper is left helpless and idle, exhibiting vulnerability rather than confidence by staring into a space to which he no longer belongs, and the viewer is left almost wanting to console him. It is this side of the painting which tells us much about Hopper's unique brand of Realism. The viewer becomes more involved than in earlier American (Ash Can) Realism for two reasons. First, the city is completely devoid of any optimism, depressing rather than liberating, lamented rather than celebrated; and second, city people appear emotionally weak and lost in their own melancholy thoughts, detached from the world around them in a near-catatonic state. Is this man socially isolated because he is suffering from Durkheim's condition of 'anomie'? In *Sunday*, we begin to imagine the inner situation of the man in the painting, how the city may have fashioned that situation, and reflect upon why this man appears to have been left behind by the optimism of the time. This is concentrated Hopper – lonely, silent, reflective, melancholy, empty.

The same themes can be detected in the New York night that is the setting for Hopper's most famous work, *Nighthawks* (1942) (Figure 4). Hopper contested those viewers who looked beneath the surface, saying that the work showed little more than "a restaurant on Greenwich Avenue where two streets meet," but was later forced to admit that "[u]nconsciously, probably, I was painting the loneliness of a large city." Some key indicators help us to generate disquiet in a scene which has a calm surface appearance, and situate the composition firmly within the anti-urban mould. It is a scene of contrasting qualities of light – the only light for the empty streets comes from inside the restaurant, amplifying the motif of darkness

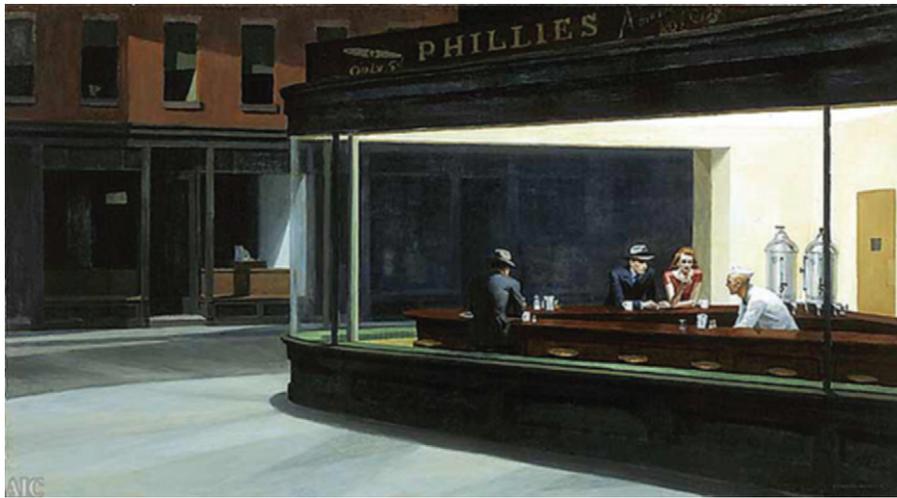


Figure 4 *Nighthawks*. Edward Hopper (1942). Oil on canvas. Reproduced with permission of the Art Institute of Chicago.

outside and intensifying the painting's communication of loneliness. Nowhere is this more effective than in the darkness behind the couple at the counter, which sits uneasily with the restaurant's bland cream interior and its glaring lighting. Hopper scholar Robert Hobbs contends that it is the use of light that is responsible for the mood of the entire scene:

Circular in form, this building is an island that beckons and repels; and the fluorescent lighting is intimidating, alienating, and dehumanising. It creates an unreal and artificial feeling of warmth, an atmosphere that is clinical and more in tune with a laboratory than a restaurant. (1987: 129)

There is contrast within the restaurant too – the third character at the counter with his back to us, nearest the street, seems more in tune with outside than inside relative to the others, and less of an extra on a deserted stage, perhaps because of his positioning and solitude. This creates a sense that the couple facing us are alienated from their surroundings, literally out of place in a space which stands for little other than isolation.

Hopper was fascinated with cinema, and it is no coincidence that *Nighthawks* was painted at a time when the film noir genre was beginning to penetrate American public discourse. The genre's dark, dramatic scenes and generally pessimistic, almost paranoid outlook on life appealed to Hopper, and the Hopper city has much in common with the noir city as articulated by Frank Krutnik's subtle reference to Marx:

Dark with something more than night, the noir city is a realm in which all that seemed solid melts into the shadows, and where the traumas and disjunctions experienced by individuals hint at a broader crisis of

cultural self-configuration engendered by urban America. (Krutnik, 1995: 99)

Film noir embodied and fed the anti-urban sentiments of increasingly suburbanized moviegoers through its depiction of cities as disorderly, corrupt, dark, abysmal, threatening, and most relevant to this essay, curiously empty. While many of Hopper's urban representations could be stills from a noir thriller, it is in *Nighthawks* where references to the noir city can be discerned with most ease – the strong theatrical light, the curiously empty streets, the mysterious figure with his back to us, the dark, forbidding spaces of the corner and buildings behind the diner. The title of the painting also suggests noir themes of people preying on others in the dark spaces of the unsafe city. The interlocking scripts of alienation, isolation, loneliness, fear, and a suggestion that something disorderly might occur outside immediately generated a sympathetic response from art critics and the public alike – the painting was soon recognized as an important American artifact and sold to the Art Institute of Chicago soon after its completion, where it remains today. *Nighthawks* also demonstrates a technique which Hopper used again and again in his work. He could have painted a far more threatening city, with more dubious characters, with litter on the streets, signs of crime, more suffering – yet he refrained, preferring to avoid extremities and thus 'suggesting' that these scenes might be around the corner by way of the emptiness of the cityscape. An empty city at night, captured at standstill, is always more threatening, more sinister, than an animated or extreme portrayal of urban fears.

Nighthawks is one of the most famous paintings in the history of American art, and has been reproduced on countless formats from coffee mugs to mouse mats.

Levin perfectly described the painting as communicating a “nocturnal urban disquiet,” opening up *Night-bawks* to closer iconographic inspection exposes the symbolic meanings of the painting to cement its position as a landmark of twentieth-century anti-urbanism. Like *Sunday*, it condenses (with a little more suspense) all Hopper’s influences and views on modern cities into a single image. Broadly defined, then, Hopper’s urban work is a joining of nineteenth-century transcendentalist beliefs with the tendency of Realists to document and interpret city scenes in a relentless quest for a hidden ‘truth’. The products are ‘stills’ of the American city that evoke senses of loss, loneliness, and alienation – mournful commentaries on the unhappy material consequences of rampant, erosive modernity. Hopper’s besmirchment of the entire modern age attracted attention because it appealed to the anti-urban imaginings of much of middle-class America, most glaringly exhibited in the paranoia and angst that led to the mass evacuation of the central city known as ‘white flight’, and the clearance of ‘slum’ neighborhoods now known as ‘urban renewal’.

Hopper’s work also struck a chord with Americans seeking to express their nostalgic yearnings for past times and places – a desire to see something American, and by inference, something virtuous, in an idealized landscape being steadily eroded. The American landscape idealized by Emerson, Thoreau, and their many followers was disturbed by modernity’s leading edge of urbanization, and in the visual arts it is the work of Edward Hopper that documents this process with the most regular and solemn introspection. Whether it was Hopper’s intention to tap into the anti-urbanism of his viewers is open to debate, and indeed something we may never know, but there can be little doubt that Hopper ‘fed’ the American anti-urban imaginary with forlorn scenes (all of Hopper’s places are in fact anonymous ‘nonplaces’) that speak volumes about pro-rural, small-town suspicions of the modern metropolis.

Conclusion

In his magisterial book *Voices of Decline*, Bob Beauregard (1993) traced what he called the “discourse of decline” affecting urban America following World War II and, like White and White 30 years earlier, concluded that the sheer volume of negative journalistic and intellectual representations of city life was inhibitive toward a sensible, sustained agenda of tackling America’s urban problems. The “100% Urban Proof” Nissan Qashqai with which this article began is the latest example of that anti-urban discourse materialized – the message from Nissan is clear: don’t bother solving problems in the urban jungle, just protect yourself from them in this tank!

It is quite simply Nissan’s reaction to an ever more extreme form of anti-urbanism penetrating cities in a time of heightened hysteria created by the ‘War on Terror’. There is a term, ‘urbicide’ (coined by Marshall Berman to describe the destruction caused by ‘urban renewal’ in the Bronx in the 1960s, and used more recently by political-urban geographers analyzing US and Israeli military tactics) to capture what happens when extreme anti-urbanism is taken to its logical conclusion. Discourses of urban fear, if left to grow and spread, can have these sorts of annihilation effects.

Derek Gregory has helpfully defined a discourse as:

the ways in which we communicate with one another, ...that vast network of signs, symbols, and practices through which we make our world(s) meaningful to ourselves and to others. (1994: 11)

One of the key contributions of post-structuralist theory to human geography has been sustained attention to the ways in which discourses are laden with the power to affect social change, and in this case, to affect the way we think about urban places. Urban fears feed into policy from the right, but more recently, it has been argued that some respected leftist writers on urban affairs are implicated in reproducing this anti-urbanism discourse. Tom Angotti’s scathing critique of Mike Davis’ recent book *Planet of Slums* is notable for its observation that the book’s apocalyptic rhetoric “feeds into longstanding anti-urban fears about working people who live in cities,” and the book itself is essentially a “windshield survey of cities in the South by a stranger from the North.” If Angotti is onto something here, then two lessons can be learned: first, that writers concerned about urban problems ignore entrenched anti-urbanism at their peril (they play into the hands of conservative political agendas if they do not think carefully about how they describe urban problems), and second, that intensive, long-term ethnographic immersion coupled with sensitive analyses is a possible way to dispel anti-urbanism, and the worrying implications of widespread fear of the city.

See also: Discourse; Industrial City; Landscape; Poststructuralism/Poststructuralist Geographies; Representation, Politics of; Urban Representation/Imagination.

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