‘Wavering Between Two Worlds’

The Doorway in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Genre Painting

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Doors and doorways orchestrate and arrange our movements in the urban world. They are the instruments of an architectural patterning – in, out, entrance, exit – that shapes and contains both the human and the social body. As limina, or thresholds, doors demarcate and delimit, but also allow the conjoining of, different spaces. They mediate between inside and outside, home and world, private and public, forming permeable boundaries between heterogeneous zones of experience. Perhaps because of their pervading presence, doors have long been appropriated as a site of symbolic or metaphorical meaning.[1] Within the history of western representation, the door crystallises an image of ambivalence or movement between states, signalling either a physical or metaphysical transformation.[2] It is, however, in Dutch genre painting of the mid-seventeenth century, that this visual fascination in the door appears to reach an apogee, and doors achieve a curious ubiquity within artistic representation.

Indeed, the interest of Dutch genre paintings (scenes of everyday life) in the representational possibilities of the door appears almost obsessive. Figures stand at it or in it, huddle aside to let it gape open at the back of a room, or work near it in the light reflected from the street outside. In the late 1640s, the turn to interiors, as the setting of genre painting, began to focus attention on the constitutive possibilities of the door within a domestic milieu. By the 1650s and 60s, doors – doorways, open doors, half-open doors, even closed doors – can be found in the paintings of each province and in the work of almost every known genre painter. They feature heavily in the interior paintings of artists such as Pieter Saenredam, Emmanuel de Witte, Nicolaes Maes, Jacob Ochtervelt, Pieter de Hooch, and Samuel Van Hoogstraten, opening out onto streets, courtyards, and other rooms. Doors constitute the representational limits of the interior, and consequently function in these works as the architectural medium through which domestic space is constructed and interpreted.[3] As a dynamic architectural aperture within the interior, the door emerges in Dutch painting as one of the central representational strategies of the period. And of the modalities of the door, it is the doorway in particular that appears to engage the seventeenth-century Dutch imagination.[4]

The doorway is the framing constituent of the threshold complex. It is an unmodulated aperture, the door itself being either missing or wide open. Though similar to the open door, the doorway is a modality of entrance inclusive of portals, doorway arches, and other door-less apertures.[5] It also differs from the

half-open door and closed door in its configuration of a space that is openly accessible and connected with its adjacent areas. Doorways open gaps in interiors, allowing outside in, and the quality of enclosed 'insideness' to escape. As the point of intersection, or interstitial zone between culturally inscribed places, the doorway forms the site at which differentiated areas brush against one another, and are mingled into an indistinct zone of exchange.[6] To borrow from Edward Casey's terminology, the doorway is a 'non-place', an extraterritorial zone of spatial experience without a specific topology.[7] Consequently, the space of the doorway takes on a character of 'in-betweenness', which it borrows from each of the areas it intersects. It is an area of transition, passage, and movement, a fluid area circumscribed by a static and immoveable frame. In this sense, the doorway can be thought of as a liminal *space*, an unstable area of flux between inside and outside or one room and another, and, unlike the other modalities of the door, it is a spatial position that can be occupied.

It is revealing that Dutch genre painting selects this specific modality of the door as its primary form of spatial inquiry, as, in so doing, it implicates the doorway's associations of flux and transition into a study of the home.[8] In Dutch genre, the home is appropriated as a domain of visual and pictorial experimentation, and in this context, doorways function to form dialectical relationships between inside and outside and contribute to the 'spatialisation' of figures as insiders or outsiders. Within the matrix of the domestic interior, doorways are appropriated as an architectural framework for narrative action, configuring different kinds of spaces and spatial subject positions. Mundane parts of everyday experience, doorways are elevated in Dutch art to signs of transition, transgression, and territorialisation.

It is my contention that the doorway is not merely a part of Dutch painting's 'setting', but, through an analysis of its visual deployment, can reveal much about the strategies and themes of seventeenth-century representation. Firstly, the doorway is often used in these paintings as a form of internal frame, which generates a dialogue with the physical frame around the representation, both affirming and questioning the limits of the image. In a way that is particularly evident in the illusionistic works of Samuel van Hoogstraten, the doorway can invite an exchange between the fictive space of painting and the field of the beholder, producing a liminal space of contact between representation and reality that destabilises their definitive separation.

Secondly, as I shall argue, the doorway in Dutch genre can also demarcate a site of liminal subjectivity within the image. In the work of Nicolaes Maes, doorways also operate as internal frames, but the placement of a figure within the liminal space of the doorway produces a different kind of narrative identity. Doorway-bound, this figure is kept apart from the unfolding of narrative events

within the work, but is central to our understanding of them. She functions as a 'figure of the frame' that invites our spectatorship, and instructs us in the way to view the painting. As the in-between space of the doorway is both inside and outside, this figure, the 'Eavesdropper', is equally protagonist and beholder, spectacle and spectator, both within and without the pictorial narrative.

Through these discussions of the work of Hoogstraten and Maes, it shall also become clear that Dutch genre painting is more complex and experimental than its banal subjects perhaps suggest. In its uses of the doorway, Dutch genre reveals a significant self-reflexivity that demonstrates a playful awareness of the apparatuses of representation. By examining the doorway's relationship to issues of liminality, representation, and the boundaries of the image, this paper analyses the production of pictorial space and modes of spectatorship in Dutch interior genre painting.

I

Mid-seventeenth century Dutch painting primarily appropriates the doorway to mark out a transitional space between opposing realms of experience. In the genre scenes of Jacob Ochtervelt and Nicolaes Maes, the doorway is applied to the boundary between two social worlds: the civic and the domestic. Both artists render the doorway a site of exchange, of transaction, that momentarily joins the world of production with that of consumption. Situated at the architectural boundary dividing these two socially distinct zones, the doorway circumscribes a third space of flow between them, and as a result, creates a liminal area within the image.[9] The term liminal, meaning threshold or margin, was appropriated by anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep in the early twentieth century to describe the stage of transition within a rite of passage (social, sexual, spiritual, or spatial).[10] The liminal stage characterises the very moment of passage, the crossing of the threshold through which the self is integrated into a new existence. In Van Gennep's theories of liminality, the door comprises a liminal rite in its most reduced form, as to cross the threshold of the doorway is to "unite oneself with a new world".[11] For Van Gennep, doorways constitute the innermost aspect of the territorial passage, framing the moment of transformation itself. In the case of Dutch genre, liminal space is often depicted in terms of social 'worlds', with the doorway deployed to architecturally articulate the spaces between classes and genders.

Ochtervelt, a genre painter from Rotterdam active during the mid seventeenth century, appropriates the doorway as a dominant spatial sign in a series of works depicting entrance hall scenes. Although his oeuvre mainly consists of paintings of members of the patriciate class enclosed in finely furnished interiors, there are a

number of works that focus upon the gaps at the boundaries of domesticity – particularly the doorway – as a setting for interactions between the classes of Dutch society. In the first of these paintings, *Street Musicians at the Door*, from 1665 (fig. 1), the darkened interior focuses the viewer's attention on the doorway, which frames two roughly clad, smiling musicians.[12] A delighted child pulls the maidservant toward them, creating a pyramidal figural grouping within the space of the doorway. The light flooding the threshold unites the four figures within its frame, whilst maintaining a strict separation along territorial lines. On the exterior side of the doorway, the pinkish, hazy tones of the street stain the musicians with a ruddy light, whilst on the interior side, the limpid colours of the women's and child's dresses gleam brightly within the darkened room. The space and personae of the town are dramatically contrasted with that of the home through these implicit visual signals, without, however, allowing 'outside' to pose any threat.[13] Neither of the shabby musicians actually transgresses the boundary line created by the stoop: it is their music, and not their selves, which is received into the interior of the patrician home. Indeed, none of the 'insiders' actually look at the street musicians outside, and accordingly, the musicians themselves seem bent only on entertaining the little girl, who is the focus of all of the characters' gazes. As a result, the scene appears to celebrate a happy moment that transcends class boundaries, whilst discreetly affirming them. Though neatly contained within a spatial and social hierarchy, the doorway, however, allows a sanctioned exchange to occur between these figures from opposed worlds, whilst spatially reinforcing the class boundaries that separate them.

The doorway also divides buyer from seller in the work of one of Rembrandt's pupils, Dordrecht artist Nicolaes Maes. After 1660, Maes dedicated himself solely to portraiture, but during the 1650s, produced many genre works of significance, intricate images of Dutch urban life. One such painting is *The Milk Seller*, of 1657 (fig. 2). Seen from the street side of the domestic divide, an old woman carefully counts out coins into the hand of a brusque-looking mother on the doorstep, the Dutch two-part door reinforcing their spatial and social separation. Behind the milk seller and child, the city gates demarcate another point of transition – that into the town. The series of doors and gates in Maes' painting makes a study of the relationship between insiders and outsiders, establishing social order through spatial systematisation. In both Maes' and Ochtervelt's paintings, the social hierarchy is laterally arranged, with the doorway deployed as the point of transition or negotiation between each inner circle. Beggars and vendors are always kept outside the door, and their contact with the domestic interior

Fig 1 : Jacob Ochtervelt, *Street Musicians at the Door*, 1665, oil on canvas, The St. Louis Art Museum, St. Louis

Fig 2 : Nicolaes Maes, *The Milk Seller*, c.1657, oil on canvas, Apsley House, London

through the doorway is strictly governed by the rules of economic transaction.

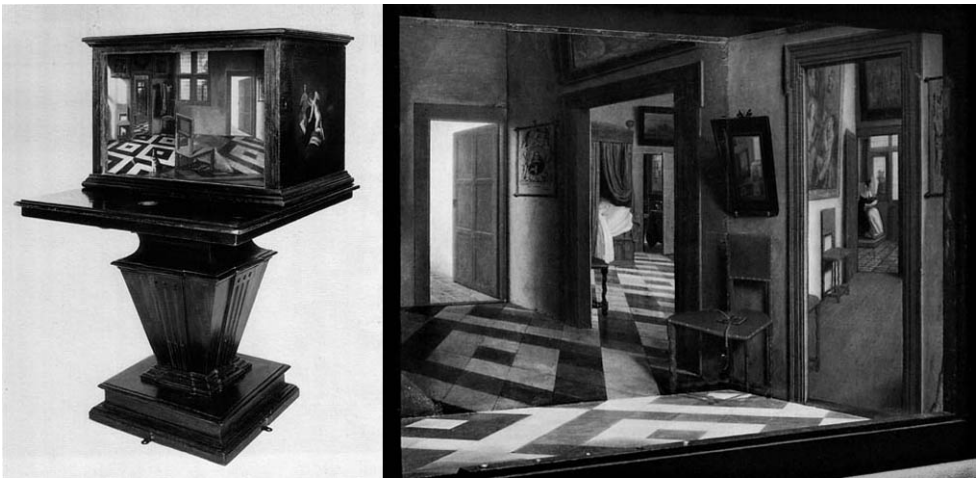
In Victor Turner's more complex exploration of Van Gennep's conceptualisation of liminal rites, liminality pertains to an 'interstructural' situation.[14] If we may interpret this situation as a *spatial* one, then the doorway in Maes' and Ochtervelt's paintings certainly functions as a liminal, 'in-between' area, as it is a zone that remains 'uncaptured' by either spatial institution – being neither inside nor outside, private nor public, civic nor domestic, upper class nor lower class.[15] Within these portraits of explicitly idealised class relations, the space of the doorway functions as a deterritorialised zone, an area culturally nullified by the exchange of goods or services for money.[16] Both Ochtervelt and Maes suggest the doorway to be an area in which spatio-cultural coordinates are momentarily suspended. There is no subjective 'transformation' of the figures, as they are never permitted to actually cross the threshold, but the doorway is strongly emphasised as an intercultural, liminal space between classes and, in Ochtervelt's painting, even gender.

Other genre paintings, however, do not restrict the two worlds that the doorway conjoins to social spheres of experience. In the work of Samuel van Hoogstraten, it also defines a point of transition between reality and representation.[17] In his works, the liminality of the doorway is appropriated to question the beholder's relationship to the art object itself, and is used to establish a new kind of viewing structure between the work and its beholder. Indeed, Hoogstraten's use of illusionism, an important aspect of Dutch art practices, when considered from this perspective, can itself be seen as inhabiting a space between the spectator's world and that of representation.

Painterly mimesis, it has been proposed, allows for spectatorial recognition, the image 'matching up' with a prior reality that the viewer re-experiences in their beholding of the painting.[18] In re-presenting and re-formulating the world of the spectator in paint, the mimetic work allows identification with the subject depicted to occur. In the case of illusionism, however, it would appear that that identification is pushed into an apparent *continuity* between the world of the spectator and the deictic reality of the artwork. World and image are momentarily and deliberately elided. This elision can be interpreted as producing a liminal zone that intervenes between the 'real' world and the represented world; a merging that is reinforced by the presence of the framing doorway.[19]

Illusionism was a mode of representation often incorporated into the predominantly mimetic strategies of Dutch genre painting.[20] Van Hoogstraten's perspective boxes are an extreme example of this particular aspect of Dutch art making (figs 3a. and b.). The perspective box is painted on the inside like a

miniature domestic interior, using distance point perspective and anamorphoses, so that when the inside of the box is viewed from a peephole bored into its side, the room 'magically' appears three-dimensional, and its figures life-size.[21] An open panel at the top or side of the box allows light into the tiny room, increasing its illusionistic power. The process of viewing the perspective box from the peephole required the beholder to position herself at the 'surface' or boundary of the image. With one eye located at the peephole, the beholder's vision is 'disembodied', allowing the illusion of her 'entrance' into the tiny room.[22] Situated on the threshold of the representation, the viewer finds herself admitted into the painted interior, as if standing in the doorway.



Figs 3a and b : Samuel van Hoogstraten, Perspective box and detail, c.1655-60, mixed media, National Gallery, London

Much of Hoogstraten's work revolves around the doorway and its possibility of conjoining our world of objects with the world of artistic representation, an illusionistic experience that seems to have appealed to the taste of his seventeenth-century audiences. *View down a corridor* of 1662 (fig. 4), is one of his 'threshold' works of mid century that appropriate the doorway as a painted repetition of the picture frame.[23] The painting depicts a long, tiled corridor, that moves through a series of doorways deep into perspectival space. A meticulously rendered stone doorway arch is the first of these framing apertures, which is followed by two more doorways, the view culminating in an empty room. Through its use of the prominent doorway arch, Hoogstraten's painting can be seen to experiment with the production of liminal space. Flush with the edges of the composition, the doorway, framing the plunging perspectival space of the room, reinterprets the picture frame as a kind of portal, and creates the illusion that the surface of the image is permeable. Compounding this sensation, a dog, cat, and bird in a cage, all look out from the painting, as if acknowledging the viewer's presence.

Furthermore, a folded letter (unwittingly dropped?) on the first step of the staircase at right awakens our curiosity and the desire to imaginatively enter the painting, and a key, hung on a nail on the right hand doorway post, seemingly suggests that we have the authority to do so, that we are given the power to access the spaces of the work.[24] At over two and a half metres high, Hoogstraten's work deliberately invites this sense of playful inter-penetrability, encouraging the viewer to imagine her- or himself able to enter the painting physically.

Fig 4 :
Samuel van Hoogstraten, *View down a corridor*, 1662, oil on canvas, Dyrham Park, Gloucestershire

The dimensions of the image, and the framing doorway, gain purpose when considered in relation to the work's original context of exhibition, known to us through the writings of Samuel Pepys, who viewed this painting in the collection of Englishman Thomas Povey in January 1663. According to Pepys' diary, Povey kept Hoogstraten's painting, not on display, but hidden in a cupboard. Whether this was Povey's ingenious idea, or a suggestion of Hoogstraten's is unknown, but this unusual mode of exhibition literally hinges on the painting's large framing doorway. Pepys was much impressed with this arrangement, writing on the 26th of January:

> But above all things, I do the most admire his piece of perspective especially, he opening me the closet door and there I saw that there is nothing but only a plain picture hung upon the wall.[25]

As Pepys intimates, Povey showed his guests this prized possession by opening the door of the cupboard. Attached to the painting's doorway, the cupboard door becomes a part of the representation. When the door is opened, the painted corridor is suddenly fused with the beholder's 'reality', and appears momentarily three-dimensional, stretching out vertiginously in an illusionistic distortion of space. This intermingling of object and image operates to dissolve the surface of the work, creating a third dimension through the merging of the beholder's space and the diegetic reality of the painted representation. As Pepys

suggests, however, the illusion belongs only to the instant, and indeed his own enjoyment seems to arise from his *disillusion*, in discovering that it is only a "plain picture hung upon the wall".[26]

In this instant, Hoogstraten's doorway painting arises as a space of rupture – a crack or fissure – between the worlds of lived experience and representation. Combining the objects of our reality with *trompe l'oeil* illusion, *View on a Corridor* reproduces itself as a liminal space that intercedes between reality and representation. Significantly, it is the painted doorway that forms the hinge between these worlds, and upon which the illusionism depends, as it creates an apparent contiguity between experiential and pictorial spaces. In this way, Hoogstraten's painting exploits the liminal aspect of the doorway, its pervading sense of spatial in-betweenness. It takes advantage of the way in which the doorway can open up an imagined mutual accessibility and flux between spaces and dimensions, in this case, producing a liminal continuity between image and world.

The liminality that the doorway produces in *View on a corridor*, however, is not just restricted to space. It also affects the relationship between the viewer and the work. Witness to the liminal space that Hoogstraten's painting produces, and subject to its 'trick', the viewer outside the frame can also be said to 'waver between two worlds' – between the world of objects and the world of the image.[27] The beholder of Hoogstraten's painting occupies the doorway itself, standing within the liminal zone produced by the painting's *trompe l'oeil* illusion. As a result, the viewer is momentarily 'liminised' by his participation in the ritualistic 'unveiling' of the image. Simultaneously belonging to our world and that of the image, the doorway, with its physical door, dissolves the distance and detachment the viewer usually maintains before a painting by temporarily disguising the fiction of the work. By liminising the spectator through *trompe l'oeil* illusion, Hoogstraten's work is rather exceptional in the Dutch genre tradition. More commonly, the doorway's liminality affects the painted figures within the frame. In another work by Nicolaes Maes, *The Eavesdropper*, of 1657, the doorway's elision of representation and reality is transposed onto a painted figure inhabiting its threshold, who ostensibly takes on its liminal implications.

II

A series of six paintings executed by Maes between 1655 and 1675 similarly appropriates domestic architecture for the means of visual experimentation. The series, known today as the 'Eavesdroppers', studies domestic relationships determined by the architecture of the home.[28] Each painting in the group depicts, in an interior setting, a figure standing at the threshold of two spaces, 'listening' to

an illicit engagement, either their employees' seduction, or their employer's rage. The playful charm of the paintings resides in their internal contrasts of spaces and behaviours, and the humorous tone with which these moral or sexual indiscretions are exposed to view. Each work mobilises the domestic interior as its structure of narrative contrast, and in every one, the doorway is deployed as the aperture that frames the scenario opened up to view.

Fig 5 : Nicolaes Maes, *The Eavesdropper*, 1657, oil on canvas, Dordrechts Museum, Dordrecht

Of the group, the most ambitious and spatially complex is Maes' *The Eavesdropper*, dated 1657 (fig. 5). The space of this painting is composed of a series of perforated architectural layers superimposed on one another, each revising and fragmenting the other until the composition is entirely framed within the arch or rectangle of a doorway. The doorway is the central motif among a series of architectural frames that allow the eye to enter deep into the space of the house. A total of eight apertures articulate the architectural 'joints' of the interior, and produce a formal play between light and dark, and inside and outside, creating a series of boundary lines which our eyes are encouraged to transgress.

Within the dense architectonic space of the painting, contrasting groups of figures can be seen, framed within the apertures of the doorways.[29] On the left, a flight of stairs channels the eye upward to a genteel dinner party, the people

gathered around the table conspicuously bourgeois in dress and pose. On the right, a darkened corridor ushers our gaze down to a well-dressed fellow who is eagerly embracing the maidservant. Standing within the left-hand doorway, but between these two diagonally opposed groups, is an eavesdropping housewife. Raising a finger to her lips, she acknowledges our viewing presence, and wryly motions us to silence as she gestures to the sight of the maid's seduction. Her gesture also draws attention to a cat eating from plates perhaps destined for the party upstairs, visible through another doorway at the far right; the consequence of the maid's distraction.[30] The eavesdropper functions to bring the disparate narrative elements of the composition together, and her appeal to our viewing presence calls upon us to connect them as a series of causally related events.[31]

Doorways function compositionally as internal frames in *The Eavesdropper*, containing and presenting each episode as an object of the spectator's gaze. The elevated burgher party, the embracing couple, the opportune cat, and even the view outside, are all caught within the apertures of the painting's many doorways. Each is thus simultaneously separated and connected by the flow of architectural space, and systematically held within the structure of the house. Within the spatial network of the painting, however, the eavesdropper is positioned at the margins of the architectural grid that organises pictorial space.[32] In movement on the stairs, which, in conjunction with the doorway, create an architectural zone of transition, she is literally unfixed from the framed spaces. Rather, the eavesdropper appears to be liminally aligned with the space of the doorway itself. Leaning against the central column, and positioned in the foreground, she is removed from the recessed figural groups. Thus contained within the space of the doorway, the eavesdropper appears to be extraterritorialised from the social spaces of the painting, and consequently liminised within the narrative space of the painting.[33] Standing at the border line of one of the internal frames that organises the narrative structure of the work, she can be considered a 'figure of the frame', a rhetorical personage who, according to art theorist Louis Marin, is aligned with the boundaries of the work, and functions to draw the viewer's gaze to the events unfolding within the painting.[34] She is both marginal and crucial to our perception of the painting's narrative, a paradoxical role that is reinforced by her placement within the liminal space of the doorway.

In addition to their literal usage as framing devices, the doorways in *The Eavesdropper* also operate as a liminal sign of contact, or connectedness. Through Maes' use of doorways, a sense of spatial interpenetrability is made a decisive aspect of the image. Visually, this is signalled by the way in which the doorway at the rear of the composition punctures the boundary between inside and outside, house and street. This perforation of spatial boundaries is further emphasised by

the open door at the left of the foreground, which seems to anticipate the entrance, or suggest the watching presence, of another figure yet to come into view. These doorways not only open up to sight, but also to a network of potential human movement. Defying our sense of the home as an enclosed, private sphere, the doorways break down the interior into a maze of corridors, dispersing our gaze across a multitude of visual pathways.[35] These pathways form channels of communication between the spaces of the interior, creating a sense of instability and flux within the painting. Indeed, the embracing couple's insensibility of the presence of the eavesdropping housewife captures literally the perhaps undesired flow of contact and communication the doorway opens up.

This contact, of which the door is both sign and instigator, also manifests in the figure of the eavesdropper. Capturing our attention with both look and gesture, the housewife makes contact with the viewer. With raised finger, she demonstrates how we should 'look' at the painting, gesturing to the maidservant's seduction, and guiding the viewer to perceive its clandestine quality in relation to the civil group upstairs. She solicits our gaze through her own role as a *beholder* within the work: only she has the power to 'see' the microcosmic structure of the painting, and the ability to theatrically reveal the maidservant's seduction.[36] In meeting our gaze and responding to our presence, she appears to transgress the boundary between the representation and the perceptive field of the beholder, establishing an impossible community with the other side of the frame. This startling solicitation has prompted art historian Victor Stoichita to argue for the eavesdropper's similarity to a figure conceptualised by the self-designated founder of art theory, Leon Battista Alberti.[37] Alberti famously consolidated the experiments in linear perspective conducted by his Italian Renaissance contemporaries into what was to become one of the most influential art treatises in the western tradition, *De Pictura*, published in 1435. Alongside his discussions of perspective, however, Alberti also set out, in great detail, instructions for making a painting. Among these, he argued that painters should include a 'commentator' as an instructor and guide to the painting's beholder. This rhetorical persona communicates the message of the painting by directing the viewer where to look and what visual connections to make. Alberti defines this commentating figure as someone

> …who tells the spectators what is going on, and either beckons them with his hand to look, or with ferocious expression and forbidding glance challenges them not to come near, as if he wished their business to be secret, or points to some danger or remarkable thing in the picture, or by his gestures invites you to laugh or weep with them.[38]

The Albertian commentator acts equally and simultaneously as protagonist and beholder. A figure *in* the work, but not *of* the work, the commentator activates a dialogue between the 'text' and its 'context'.[39]

The eavesdropping housewife has a similar function. She is both a protagonist in the painting, and yet an ostensible beholder, one that exchanges a glance, and seemingly identifies, with the viewer outside the frame. She is liminally placed between the deictic reality of the painting and the field of the beholder – a figure of the frame that is both looked at and looks back. In contrast to the painting's other figures, who go about their business apparently unaware of the viewer outside the frame, the housewife deliberately catches our eye, initiating a playful dialogue with the viewer that seems to transgress the surface of the painting. Acting as our pictorial ambassador within the work, she enters into a teasing and illusory intimacy with us, mediating our perception of the painting. Maes' eavesdropper seeks to invite us into the work much in the same way that Hoogstraten's doorway opens up a space of continuity between beholder and painting. In the eavesdropping housewife can be discerned an essentially personal or figural interpretation of the doorway's liminality, and she has the same pictorial role in engineering a sense of contact between painting and spectator.

In the eavesdropper's initiation of the contact usually established by the doorway, it appears that this 'figure of the frame' can also be interpreted as a 'personage of the doorway'.[40] Participating both within and without the deictic reality of the painting, the eavesdropper enacts the liminal indeterminacy of the doorway's spatial 'in-betweenness'. Furthermore, through her communication with the viewer, she generates the contact between heterogeneous zones that we have seen to be the doorway's architectonic and pictorial function. And, like Hoogstraten's framing doorway, the eavesdropper is placed on the threshold of representational and experiential space. Not only does she connect the contrasting narrative spaces within the painting through her rhetorical role as commentator, or 'figure of the frame', but also brings the painting into dialogue with the external space of the spectator, establishing a radical collusion with the field of the beholder. In this, she is *doubly* liminsed, both within the narrative space of the work and through her contact with its 'outside'. The many doorways of Maes' paintings, with their function of opening up the spaces of the house, culminate thematically in the figure of the eavesdropper. Maes' painting has seemingly gone a step further toward manifesting the doorway's thematic and representational

meanings in the work by depicting the eavesdropper as the interlocutor of the doorway's liminality.

This appeal the *Eavesdropper* makes to our spectatorship finds an affinity with the modes of viewing invited by Hoogstraten's *View on a Corridor*. Both works combine the framing role of the doorway with a kind of witness figure; the eavesdropper, in Maes's painting, who directs our gaze to the illicit scenario, bears a strong likeness to the unveiling role of the door opener who exposes Hoogstraten's representation to its viewers. In each painting, the interaction of the framing element of the doorway with this witnessing figure appears to make an aesthetic statement about viewing, or beholding. Both 'witnesses' demonstrate a kind of viewing that takes part in the act of representation, and this is a mode of spectatorship that is shared by the beholder of the work. Through their uses of the doorway, both Hoogstraten and Maes stretch vision into *contact* through the illusion of spatial continuity or figural communication. The experience of viewing these works is augmented by a sense of pictorial penetrability. It is not enough, it appears, for the beholder to simply perceive the painting, but necessary to enter into a dialogue with it, to partake in the painting's 'calling structure'.[41] Both works create a sense of connectedness or continuity between painting and beholder, and in each instance, this illusion of contact is achieved through the manipulation of the limits of the representation. Hoogstraten's work deliberately effaces the painting's frame by adding a physical door that reinterprets it as a doorway, and its surface as permeable. Maes' eavesdropper purposely ignores it, gazing implacably out from the deictic reality of the work into the external world of the beholder. Both techniques work to dissolve the distance the viewer usually maintains before a painted representation, and produce a crucial confusion between viewing subject and viewed object.[42]

Consequently, both paintings can be said to be eminently aware of the apparatuses of representation that determine their relationship to a viewer, and actively manipulate both the external and internal frames of the work to shift the position of the spectator into a less commanding and distanced mode.[43] These are aesthetic considerations that suggest a significant interest in the perception of paintings by their audiences, which can be related to the popularity of perspectival experiments in the seventeenth century that required the viewer's active participation in the beholding of an image.[44] Dutch art practices, like the 'curious perspectives' popular at the time, certainly privileged the viewer's engagement with the painting through primarily visual means.[45] Though experimental, Maes'

and Hoogstraten's paintings are not anomalies, but rather belong to a mode of representation typical of seventeenth century images, that exercised the visual perception of its viewers and played with the boundaries of pictorial fiction.

From this perspective, we can better appreciate the valuable role the doorway plays in seventeenth-century Dutch painting. In the work of Maes and Hoogstraten, the doorway is appropriated, and its associations enacted, to open up the representation to the presence of the beholder. Doorways are manipulated to extend the space and communicative force of the work beyond the boundaries of the frame. Primarily, however, it is the doorway's liminality that is used to forge the desired contact between viewer and painting. As both Maes and Hoogstraten demonstrate, the doorway's liminality in Dutch genre paintings is not a matter of subjective transformation, or spiritual or social development, but a sign of flux and connectedness within the image. Each painter positions this liminal motif, or enacts its associations, in the foreground, right at the juncture of image and world, in order to reconfigure the surface of the painting as open to the entry of objects and bodies outside the frame. Hoogstraten's and Maes' works are each characterised by this desire for visual contact with the spectator, and employ the doorway to achieve it thematically and representationally.

Consequently, the importance of the doorway as an interpretive frame for Dutch art becomes clear. This seemingly modest architectural aperture provides a valuable paradigm for understanding the complex viewing structures these paintings establish. An analysis of doorways renders space eloquent in the apprehension of issues of framing and liminality – matters of meta-representational concern – as well as the social 'zoning' of spaces within the image. As Ochtervelt's *Street Musicians at the Door*, and Maes' *The Milkseller* suggest, doorways also reveal the architectonic construction of inside and outside, insiders and outsiders, and, in the case of Maes' *Eavesdropper*, also identify the figures who waver between. Doorways put into dialogue the construction of pictures and their narrative content, thus enabling an integrated interpretation of the representational and meta-representational dimensions of seventeenth-century Dutch art.

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[1] From an architectural point of view, the metaphorical dimension of the door in Romanesque churches has been explored by Calvin B. Kendall, in *The Allegory of the Church: Romanesque Portals and Their Verse Inscriptions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998). Kendall argues that verse inscriptions around Romanesque portals allude symbolically and architecturally to Christ's assertion "I am the door" (see esp. chapter four).

[2] For an example of the door's historic significance in visual culture, see Brit Haarlov, *The Half-Open Door; a Common Symbolic Motif in Roman Sepulchral Sculpture* (Odense: Oslo University Press, 1977), esp. 56 and 100, where the half-open door is treated specifically by Haarlov as a symbol of transformation.

[3] For an excellent, though brief allusion to the meta-pictorial function of doors in early modern oil painting, see Victor Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image: an Insight into Early Modern Meta-Painting*, Mary-Ann Glasheen, trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 46.

[4] It has also been argued that the door played a significant role, not just in painting, but also in the social uses of seventeenth-century Dutch architecture. Heidi de Mare claims that the door belonged to a domestic frontier understood by the Dutch as a crucial conceptual divide between inside and outside, home and world, and also functioned as a site of social ritual between house and street. The door and doorstep were ritually cleaned, and the door itself decorated to communicate a birth or death in the family. See Heidi de Mare, "The domestic boundary as ritual area in seventeenth-century Holland", in *Urban Rituals in Italy and the Netherlands: historical contrasts in the use of public space, architecture and the urban environment*, de Mare and Vos eds. (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1993), 124-5. Though de Mare's attempt to link this phenomenon with the art and literature of the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic is commendable, the relationship between the social and architectural uses of the door and is prevalence in Dutch art still needs to be fully analysed. This is not, however, the issue of my essay, which focuses rather on the representational strategies of seventeenth-century picturing and its use of the door as a framing device and a liminal space.

[5] The modalities of the door, as I see them, are: doorway, open door, half-open door (which includes a door that is ajar), and closed door. These types manifest in different ways in Dutch paintings, and are often ascribed with differing associations. Each configures pictorial space in alternative ways.

[6] In a recently translated and little-known article, critic and sociologist Georg Simmel considers the door to be a significant sign and space of connection in modern life that reveals how "separating and connecting are only two sides of precisely the same act". See Simmel, 'Bridge and Door", Mark Ritter, trans., *Theory, Culture and Society*, 11 (1994), 7.

[7] Casey distinguishes between 'non-place' and 'no-place-at-all', the latter designating a sheer void. 'Non-place' I have taken to refer to a dimensional space without locating coordinates or characterising 'landmarks'. See Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 3-4.

[8] In my research I have been unable to locate a specifically Dutch conceptualisation of the doorway that would contradict my discussion of its features above. There is, however, evidence to suggest it functioned strongly as a sexual metaphor in some paintings. On this, see Nanette Salomon, "Early Netherlandish *bordeeltjes* and the construction of social 'realities'", in *The Public and Private in Dutch Culture of the Golden Age*, Wheelock and Seeff eds. (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2000), 141-163.

[9] Liminality is now a commonly used term for describing spatial effects in artworks. For an application of liminality to the study of early modern paintings, see Claude Gandelman, "Penetrating Doors", in his *Reading Pictures, Viewing Texts* (Bloomington and Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1991), 48-53. Gandelman summarily discusses the door as a liminal area in 'aesthetic space' in relation to Velasquez's *Las Meninas* (51). He also briefly suggests that in Dutch paintings, the door produces a liminality that is "the sign of the essential liminality of the artistic gaze"(51). Gandelman's meaning here is unclear, but I have taken it as support for the idea that painting itself can inhabit a liminal space between reality and representation. David R. Smith has also discussed liminality in relation to Dutch genre painting. He uses the term to describe the tension between 'rhetoric' and 'prose' in Dutch painting, the official images of the Dutch and their everyday counterpart in genre scenes. He also appropriates liminality to describe relations between figures and space within genre painting, and sees doors as points of rupture in their visual and narrative schemes. See David R. Smith, "Rhetoric and Prose in Dutch Portraiture", *Dutch Crossing*, 41(1990), 72-109.

[10] Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960). Van Gennep breaks down the study of rites of passage, or ceremonies marking the transition between stages or levels of existence, into a tripartite structure. Preliminal, liminal, and postliminal rites each constitute a stage in the fully elaborated passage from one category to the next. Preliminal rites are those of separation, liminal rites are those of transition, and postliminal rites are those of incorporation, each describing a distinct aspect of ritual passage. For the definitions of the triple stages of rites of passage, see Gennep, 11.

[11] According to Van Gennep, "The door is the boundary between the foreign and domestic worlds in the case of an ordinary dwelling, between the profane and sacred worlds in the case of a temple. Therefore to cross the threshold is to unite oneself with a new world". See Gennep, 20.

[12] For a discussion of Ochtervelt's entrance hall scenes, see Susan Donahue Kuretsky, *The Paintings of Jacob Ochtervelt, 1634-1682* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1979), 34-39.

[13] Simon Schama has discussed the idealism of this exchange in the context of Holland's policies on poverty and vagrancy. See Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (Harper Perennial, 2004) 570-2.

[14] See Victor Turner, "Betwixt and Between: the liminal period in *Rites de Passage*", in his *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), 93.

[15] My application of liminality, it should be noted, is a spatial interpretation of Van Gennep and Turner's conceptualisation that I see appropriate to the study of works of art.

[16] Marx has claimed in *Capital*, vol.1, that money operates like a crystal prism, obliterating diversity into a single, undifferentiated stream: "Just as every qualitative difference between commodities is extinguished in money, so money, on its die, like the radical leveller that it is, does away with all distinctions". Cited by Christian Enzensberger in *Smut: An Anatomy of Dirt*, trans. Sandra Morris (London: Calder and Boyars, 1972), 81.

[17] Hoogstraten was the author of an influential treatise on painting, and his works of *trompe l'oeil* illusion were widely celebrated, earning him accolades from the English and Austrian courts. His *Inleyding tot de Hooge Schoole der Schilderkonst, anders de Zichtbaere Werelt* (*Introduction to the Academy of Painting; or the Visible World)* was published in 1678. For an excellent account of Hoogstraten's life and an insightful analysis of his art, particularly in terms of its illusionism, see Celeste Brusati, *Artifice and Illusion: the Art and Writing of Samuel Van Hoogstraten* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press,1995).

[18] This is the argument proposed by Ernst Gombrich. For a discussion of the relationship between 'making' and 'matching', see his *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (1960; repr., London: Phaidon Press, 1962), esp. 154-169. For a critique of this 'perceptualist' account of mimesis and recognition in the viewing of paintings, see the semiotic approach of Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze* (London: Macmillan, 1983), 38.

[19] This idea has been prompted by Gandelman's suggestion that "representation itself could also be said to be liminal". See Gandelman, 51.

[20] For a discussion of the role of illusionism in Dutch painting, see Celeste Brusati, "Natural artifice and material values in Dutch still life", in *Looking at Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art: Realism Reconsidered*, Franits ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 129-43.

[21] Hoogstraten's most elaborate perspective box is in the National Gallery, London. See Neil McLaren (revised by Christopher Brown), *The Dutch School, 1600-1900* (London: National Gallery Publications, 1991), No. 3832, 204-6. On the role of perspective boxes in the tradition of Dutch illusionism, see David Bomford, "Perspective, anamorphosis, and illusion: seventeenth-century Dutch peep shows", in *Vermeer Studies*, Studies in the History of Art, 55, Gaskell ed. (Washington: National Gallery of Art, in association with Yale University Press,1998),125-136.

[22] Brusati argues that "the box's seductions and possessions are not available to an embodied beholder but only to the eye placed at the peephole", Brusati, *Artifice and Illusion*, 182.

[23] An earlier work from Hoogstraten's oeuvre, *The Slippers*, of 1658, in the Louvre, is constructed pictorially by a similar progression of doorways, but on a much smaller scale.

[24] This is, of course, withheld by our inability to actually inhabit the painting. On the iconographical significance of keys in Dutch genre painting, see Peter L. Donhauser, "A key to Vermeer?", *Artibus et Historiae*, 14:27 (1993), 85-101.

[25] Robert Latham and William Matthews eds., *The Diary of Samuel Pepys, vol 4: 1663* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1971) 26.

[26] Ibid. This kind of viewing is considered by Wolfgang Kemp to be a historical mode of beholding characteristic of the seventeenth century. He defines it as 'disillusion', rather than illusion, as the practice of viewing such *trompe l'oeil* pictures focussed on the levels of reality that could be deciphered by its viewers, and on an understanding of how the trick was performed, rather than a belief in the illusion. See Wolfgang Kemp, "The work of art and its beholder: the methodology of the aesthetic of reception" in *The Subjects of Art History: Historical Objects in Contemporary Perspectives*, Cheetham, Holly and Moxey eds., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 193.

[27] Van Gennep uses this phrase to describe the status of someone in the liminal stage of a rite of passage. He writes: "Whoever passes from one [territory] to the other finds himself physically and magico-religiously in a special situation for a certain length of time: he wavers between two worlds". See Van Gennep, 18.

[28] Most of the *Eavesdropper* works are dated from between 1655 and 1657. William W. Robinson argues that from their formal and thematic similarities the works can be considered a series. See William W. Robinson, "The *Eavesdroppers* and Related Paintings by Nicolaes Maes", *Hollandische Genremalerei des 17 Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: Mann Publishers,1987), 291.

[29] From Maes' preliminary drawings for the Eavesdropper works, it can be seen that the architecturally derived structure of the composition was rendered first, and figures added after its completion, thus suggesting that the spatial contrasts generated by the levels and apertures of the home were Maes' primary concern. In his sketch *Man descending a staircase,* the interior is fully realised, showing the importance of domestic architecture for the narrative tensions of the work. See William W. Robinson, "Nicolaes Maes as a draughtsman", *Master Drawings*, 27 (1989), 152.

[30] The presence of the cat is interpreted by Martha Hollander as a symbol of seduction. See Hollander, "The divided household of Nicolaes Maes", *Word and Image*, 10:2 (April-June, 1994), 139.

[31] The painting, in this sense, creates a number of gaps, which call upon the spectator to supply the anecdotal evidence for the painting's images. In literature, the creation of gaps or blanks has been considered as an appeal to the reader to take part in the narrative, however, these ideas have been successfully applied to painting in a visual branch of Reception Aesthetics, and characterise the way in which the viewer's imagination comes to cohere the elements of the painting into a meaningful whole. On the role of the blank in painting, see Wolfgang Kemp, "Death at work: a case study on constitutive blanks in nineteenth-century painting", *Representations*, 10 (1985), esp. 107. For a more generalised discussion of the role of 'blanks' in images, see Kemp, "The work of art and its beholder", esp. 188.

[32] Much discussion of Maes' painting has centred upon the femininity of the housewife, and the conflict between her social and sexual roles in the painting. See Hollander, "The divided household of Nicolaes Maes"; and Elizabeth Honig, "The space of gender in seventeenth-century Dutch painting" in *Looking at Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art: Realism Reconsidered*, Franits, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). Although these arguments have produced some intriguing observations, neither apprehends fully the meta-representational role of the eavesdropping figure.

[33] Sasha Vojkovic's reading of feminine extraterritoriality in the Alien series has inspired my reading of the eavesdropper as situated outside the symbolic order of the painting. Vojkovic appropriates this term to define the unsymbolisable female monster as a constitutive outsider to the Lacanian law of the father. See Vojkovic, "What can she know, where can she go? Extraterritoriality and the symbolic universe in the *Alien* Series", *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 1:1(2003), 101-30.

[34] Marin is not referring to Maes' painting, but he proposes the 'figure of the frame' to be a pictorial device, and therefore more widely applicable to diverse works of art. See Louis Marin, "The frame of representation and some of its figures", in *The Rhetoric of the Frame: Essays on the Boundaries of the Artwork*, Paul Duro ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 83-4.

[35] Martha Hollander has discussed the presence of these visual pathways as 'insiens' or 'doorsiens', (in Dutch) a look through or into space. These are the terms seventeenth-century Dutch art theorist Carel van Mander uses to describe the ideal relationship between viewer and painting – the work must encourage the viewer to 'enter' the work through the provision of distant views. See Martha Hollander, *An Entrance for the Eyes: Space and Meaning in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), esp. chapter one.

[36] William Robinson has noted the theatrical role of the eavesdropper, and her rhetorical relationship to the role of the fool in seventeenth-century comic theatre. The fool remained invisible to the protagonists of the play, and was employed to parody the actions of the protagonists as a kind of moral commentator. See Robinson, "The Eavesdroppers and related paintings", 302-4.

[37] Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image*, 63.

[38] Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. Cecil Grayson (Penguin Books, 2004), 77-8.

[39] Wolfgang Kemp, from the perspective of reception aesthetics, sees this dialogue between 'text' and 'context' as occurring between the 'inner workings of the work of art' with its 'surroundings and its beholders'. In the eavesdropper's communication with the viewer, I think she can be seen as initiating this dialogue. See Wolfgang Kemp, "The work of art and its beholder", 186.

[40] On the motif of the figure in the doorway (who is not, however, necessarily a *personage* of the doorway), see Andre Chastel, 'La figure dans l'encadrement de la porte chez Vélazquez' in his *Fables, Formes, Figures* (Paris: Flammarion, 1978), 145-154.

[41] For this mode of spectatorial solicitation, see Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image*, 63.

[42] In terms of Michael Fried's multipurpose terminology, these works can be considered to be eminently 'theatrical' in their refusal to ignore or 'see through' the viewing subject. The distance often established between viewer and painting can similarly be attributed to the representation of 'absorption', where figures are so consumed or involved in their activities that they essentially reject the viewer's desire to be included within the work. Seventeenth-century Dutch works, like these, exhibit strong theatrical tendencies as part of their experimental viewing structure. For the defintion of absorption, see Michael

Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press,1980), esp. chapter one.

[43] The distance I am alluding to is that established by the Albertian mode of picturing which is metaphorically emblematised by the window, through which the spectator looks onto another world. See Alberti, 54. Albertian perspective also requires the viewer to stand at a prescribed distance from the painting to perceive it correctly, thus establishing a more prescriptive relationship between painting and beholder. Of Albertian, or single point perspective, there are a vast number of critical explanations. The simplest is probably Samuel Y. Edgerton, *The Renaissance Rediscovery of Linear Perspective* (New York: Basic Books, 1975); and the most erudite Hubert Damisch, *The Origin of Perspective*, John Goodman trans. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994). Both are equally significant. It should be noted, however, that Dutch artists typically used 'distance point' perspective, which does not institute the same distance and separation between viewer and work. On this distinction and its implications for Dutch art practices, see Brusati, *Art and Illusion*, 169-217.

[44] In a comparative study of literature and visual culture in seventeenth-century England, Ernest Gilman has described this impetus for experimentation with visual perception as the 'curious perspective'. It is largely characterised by a manipulation of Albertian, or single-point perspective, that requires the viewer to discern a double image or correct an anamorphosis within the picture. See Ernest B. Gilman, *The Curious Perspective: Literary and Pictorial Wit in the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978). The playfulness of these experiments, made popular in manuals by Jean Dubreil and Jean Francois Niceron, and the discussion they engender about their tricks of perception, bears a strong genetic resemblance to the viewer's involvement in these paintings by Maes and Hoogstraten.

[45] On the status of Dutch art as a specifically visual, rather than symbolic or emblematic, form of picturing, see Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1983).