REALISM AND THE BOUNDARIES OF GENRE IN DUTCH ART

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This essay poses some questions about the boundaries of genre in seventeenth-century Dutch art in an attempt to restore some depth of meaning to the vexing term 'realism'. Over the past forty years, faith in that word's viability as a label for this art has steadily diminished, as attention has shifted from surface appearances to symbols, codes and conventions as explanations of form and meaning.[1] Genre, of course, is one of the most basic artistic conventions of all. It provides the patterns and typologies that define subjects by 'kind' and hence many of the expectations we bring to them. Curiously, though, it has attracted relatively little attention as a problem in its own right, despite the unprecedented number of new genres and subgenres in Dutch art of this period. For this expansion of generic categories is a sign of fundamental instability, of artists' perceptions of reality outgrowing the capacity of established genres to impose order and limit. The same holds true for the weakening of the classical hierarchy of the genres during these years, as high subjects lost much of their automatic priority over low ones in the minds of patrons and painters alike.

In other words, beneath the seemingly straightforward descriptive surfaces of Dutch realist art, there appear to lie subtle, but persistent, forces of expansion and contraction, which open up new perspectives on realism as a mode of artistic thought. Seen in this light, questions of what constitutes realism depart fundamentally from the ways in which the issue has most often been framed up to this point. Scholars and critics in the field have generally understood it as a matter of fidelity to appearance alone. Ironically, this includes the two main antagonists in the ongoing debates over the purpose and meaning of Dutch art: Svetlana Alpers and Eddy de Jongh. Their conflict has turned on the priority of description or iconography – of surfaces or abstractions – for understanding these pictures. Where Alpers sees an 'art of describing', de Jongh sees *schijnrealisme*, or 'pseudo-realism'.[2] Since the publication of Alpers's book in 1983, other positions have emerged to straddle these two poles; but the basic assumption that the word 'realism' refers to visual appearances alone has remained unchanged.[3] Yet if this were so, the genres of Dutch art would have remained more settled than appears to be the case. A given generic category would correspond neatly to a given category of descriptive fact. Instead, one finds not just new genres, like cityscape, but mixed genres and, as this essay will show, cases of generic parody as well. This permeability of generic boundaries does not derive from symbolic abstractions. Rather, the unsettledness

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1 Eglon van der Neer, *Couple in an Interior*, *c*. 1675. Oil on panel, 73.9 × 67.6 cm. Boston: Museum of Fine Arts (Seth K. Sweetser Fund, 1941). Photo © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

arises from the seemingly self-evident fact that realism as an artistic mode necessarily encompasses dimensions of reality that are not exclusively visual. These 'surpluses' of reality largely account for the mutability and the ambiguities of seventeenth-century Dutch art. Recognizing the manifoldness of realism so defined may help to resolve many of the questions and confusions currently surrounding the term. But it also calls for dialogic interpretations that are more open to nuances of irony and contradiction than has often been the case in the past.

The generic lines in Dutch realism can become especially blurred and problematic in 'high-life' painting, where respectable portraits and thinly veiled scenes of erotic encounter often occupy the same upper-class milieu. A particularly apt example is a painting by Eglon van der Neer in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts dating from around 1675 (plate 1), which I discussed at length in an essay published

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2 Jan Steen, *The Harpsichord Lesson*, *c.* 1665. Oil on panel, 38 × 48 cm. London: Wallace Collection. Photo: Wallace Collection.

in 1987.[4] Then as now, the museum labelled the picture a marriage portrait, in keeping with its outward conventions of pose and composition. But to me it looked like a genre piece – or rather, a genre piece masquerading as a portrait. The obvious clue is the *Venus and Cupid* over the fireplace. Its unmistakable erotic message, underscored by a pair of copulating pigeons, hardly suits a marriage as staid as this one seems to be.[5] Van der Neer also undermines the scene's respectability in subtler ways, by creating frictions between open and closed and warm and cold in the forms and colours. Figuratively speaking, the colours and meanings of the voluptuous nude are pulling at the seated woman's stiff, upright pose and the dark, cold vertical of the hearth behind her. All the colour lies, in fact, on the margins of the composition: in a red and green tablecloth, wall hangings of swirling gold on blue, and, of course, in the greenery and bare skin overhead. The concentric squares of black floor tiles projecting into the room from the columns of the mantelpiece and the rectangle of the hearth effectively sum up the competing centrifugal and centripetal forces at work here. And it is from the peripheral realm of colour and delight that the informal, 'loosely' posed man leans into the woman's tight island of virtue.

Of course, it is understandable that the museum should cling to the portrait label: the picture follows such familiar portrait conventions. But *Venus and Cupids* on Dutch middle-class walls carry conventions of their own, nearly all of them inimical to the decorum of marriage portraiture – a critical flaw in a genre where decorum counts for so much.[6] Yet they fit the decorum of high-life genre painting quite well, as in Jan Steen's *The Harpsichord Lesson* in the Wallace Collection (plate 2). Despite the scene's ostensible refinement, the *Sleeping Venus and Cupid* over the young girl's head betrays the lecherous intentions of her bawdy old music teacher, who is himself a comic convention.[7] Closer to the Boston picture is Gabriel Metsu's *The Huntsman's Visit* in the Rijksmuseum (plate 3), where another respectable lady sits before a rectangular backdrop with an erotic art work above it, in this case a statuette of Cupid. As Eddy de Jongh showed long ago, the hunter entering the room is tempting her by offering her a bird, by now the most familiar sex symbol in Dutch art. Although she is reaching for her prayerbook, she looks distinctly interested, and the chances seem pretty good that she will opt for the bird instead.[8] This appears to be van der Neer's plot as well. My article in 1987 argued that the key to the woman's hidden intentions lies in the fan she holds poised above her lap. In upper-class etiquette of the time, a skilfully deployed fan could convey amorous messages from a lady to her admirers, as it clearly does in Bartholomeus van der Helst's *Portrait of a Promenading Couple* (see plate 7),

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3 Gabriel Metsu, *The Huntsman's Present*, *c*. 1658–60. Oil on canvas, 51 × 48 cm. Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum. Photo: Rijksmuseum.

discussed below.[9] The result is a self-consciously ironic parody of a highly conventional portrait type. These people are not what they appear to be.

Much more than in Metsu's painting, van der Neer's social play and sexual innuendo are rooted in generic mixing, not just description of individual misbehaviour or the threat thereof. In and of itself, mixing of genres is not uncommon in Dutch art, nor particularly surprising in view of realism's relative openness as an artistic mode. Where one subject takes up formal structures associated with another, as when biblical realism verges on secular genre imagery, the mixture can seem almost inadvertent, though this is not necessarily so in any given case.[10] Sometimes mixing just represents an awkward compromise, as with so-called *portraits historiés*, where portrait sitters retain their personal identities while playing literary or historical roles for one ulterior motive or another.[11] But van der Neer's picture belongs to another kind of mixture altogether, as he consciously uses one genre to parody another. In fact, he has actually set three genres against each other: a marriage portrait, a seduction scene and a mythological painting. A little whimsically, one could even say that the man in the picture is hoping to turn what looks like a portrait into what might become a kind of *portrait historié*! And that threat is as much a function of pictorial structure as of hidden narrative, since the painting over the mantel also embodies abstract horizontal forces that compete on a formal level with the upright vertical of the hearth. The composition's tight geometry is fraught with tensions.

In short, this *Couple in an Interior* represents a highly sophisticated artistic construct, built on multiple layers of irony and inversion. I labelled it 'counter-genre', a term borrowed from Rosalie Colie, who coined it for similar kinds of parody in Renaissance literature.[12] Not surprisingly, portrait parodies appear rather rarely in Dutch art, though there are other examples. One is Willem

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4 Willem Buytewech, *Fashionable Courtship*, *c*. 1617. Oil on canvas, 56 × 70 cm. Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum. Photo: Rijksmuseum.

Buytewech's *Fashionable Courtship* in the Rijksmuseum (plate 4), which in the past was often considered a portrait because of the escutcheon in the upper left. But Egbert Haverkamp Begemann has shown that it belongs to no known family and that the faces are more those of types than of specific individuals.[13] However unusual parodic portraits may be, though, counter-genre itself is not. Since 1987 more and more examples have come to light. As a group, they have important implications for the nature of Dutch realism itself. For my sense of what constitutes counter-genre has also expanded, so that now I think of it as a critical aspect of the realist enterprise in general. In the process I have likewise come to take much more seriously the word 'realism' itself, both as a stylistic label and as a mode of thought. It now seems to represent an internally coherent, transhistorical and transcultural artistic language, like classicism or the archaic.

This view would appear to be at odds with the growing tendency to see Dutch realism in particular as distinctly period-bound and highly relative. No doubt, realism is relative by its very nature, and critical definitions of it certainly have changed since the nineteenth century, when so many of the assumptions that long dominated Dutch art history were first carved in stone. But when today's revisionist scholars accuse their predecessors of imposing nineteenth-century paradigms on seventeenth-century art, they often are dealing with the realism of the critics, as one writer to another, more than with that of the painters themselves.[14] Early apologists like Thoré-Bürger and Fromentin, who saw Dutch paintings as simple 'slices of life', faithful mirrors of a world seen, unquestionably missed the hidden symbols that no longer figured in the realist discourse of their day.[15] But to see their version of realism simply as an extension of the supposedly positivistic aesthetics of the impressionists is to misconstrue the range of the latter's art and the larger imperatives of realism as a visual mode.

The commonplace notion that the impressionists strove for an optically correct vision has, of course, a certain basic truth.[16] But it is naïve to conflate this aspiration, such as it is, with critical platitudes of the time about realism as visual authenticity, let alone with the genuine diversity of nineteenth-century realist art in general. For one thing, this view rests on some outdated notions of what the

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5 Edouard Manet, *The Railway*, 1873. Oil on canvas, 93.3 × 111.5 cm. Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art (Gift of Horace Havemeyer in memory of his mother, Louise W. Havemeyer). Photo © 2007, Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

impressionists actually did. It is now better known, for example, that Monet did much of his work in his studio, not directly in front of the motif; and many of the seemingly instantaneous effects in these pictures were carefully thought out and composed.[17] Which is to say that even here the definition of realism cannot be reduced to questions of optical, so-called 'photographic' truth alone. That being the case, the sharp line that recent revisionist critics have sought to draw between the less-than-transparent realism of seventeenth-century Holland and that of nineteenth-century France becomes more than a little blurred. All realisms are relative: all are in some sense 'pseudo-realisms'.[18]

More to the point perhaps, impressionist paintings can also reveal some complexities of perception and meaning inherent in realism as a mode of artistic thought. For these artists' sensitivity to the enigmatic qualities of visual experience has lately become better appreciated, as has their own well-developed sense of irony. Edouard Manet's *The Gare Saint-Lazare* of 1873 in the National Gallery of Art (plate 5), for example, combines an unmediated, snapshot-like directness with a highly intentional ambiguity almost unparalleled in previous realist art.[19] Behind the banality of what seems to be a chance encounter on the street lie a whole series of questions. Why paint so trivial a scene in the first place? But then again, where does the line between triviality and ambiguity lie? Who is this

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woman? Is she the little girl's mother, or her governess, or are they connected at all? Does her expression indicate that she knows you, welcomes your interruption, or is this just one of those random, meaningless meetings of the eyes that happen all the time in the modern city? Given the fragmentary, disjunctive nature of the scene, we would also like to know a little more about exactly where we are.

Even with the knowledge that Manet carefully staged the scene in his friend Alphonse Hirsch's garden and that the figures are Victorine Meurent and Hirsch's daughter Suzanne, it remains an enigma.[20] Clearly, Manet was out to make a point. Partly, it is a point about the anonymity of urban life in the brave new world of modern Paris; but on a deeper level the picture is about the limitations of vision itself. Visually, *The Gare Saint-Lazare* is almost impenetrable, but, at the same time, full of allusions to non-visual realities. In addition to the sounds and smells of the train yard, there is a carefully disguised, but highly evocative, reference to taste. The bunch of grapes in the lower right strongly implies that Suzanne has just plucked one and is putting it in her mouth with her unseen right hand.[21] There is also the completely internalized reality of the sleeping dog,[22] and, on a much higher level, the mental world of the book that Victorine has just looked up from. The fact that she has just marked a page with her right index finger shows how intensely absorbing her reading has been.[23] And finally, even though the two figures are mainly engaged in acts of looking, the character of their vision is almost entirely opaque. Suzanne looks out into the blank white of the steam, and Victorine gives us that unreadable gaze.

What is most needed to pull all these inferences and allusions together is a plot, a story line. One's inability to find one here is not just because a picture is a spatial rather than a temporal art form. This is a misconceived modernist cliché. All experience necessarily involves both space and time.[24] The lack of temporal coordinates for Manet's painting is due to its lack of a coherent genre. One might say it is a cross between a cityscape, a portrait and a genre scene; but none of these labels adequately contains it: none of them organizes the experience in the viewer's mind. As noted above, the genres in the visual arts often have been treated as descriptive categories alone, to the neglect of other aspects of generic form and meaning. In the case of landscape, or still life, or certain types of portraiture, this has sometimes worked moderately well. But the instability of generic boundaries in works like van der Neer's *Couple in an Interior* (see plate 1) indicates how inadequate mere description can be as a criterion for classification – how the problems and meanings spill over these limits and cause confusion. Nowhere is this more often the case than where pictures call forth implicit stories, as the human presence often does.

One way of rethinking genre and its meanings is through the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin, possibly the deepest and most original modern thinker on the problem of realism. It is true that he writes about literature, not art, but his concepts and terminology are generally broad enough to apply to both. One of his key concepts is that of the 'chronotope', or time-space. It is an awkward and unlovely word and could easily become oppressive with over-use, which this paper will try to avoid. But one of its virtues is that it comes from Einstein's Theory of Relativity, which of course deals mathematically with the inseparability of space and time. Bakhtin argues that a genre *is* essentially a chronotope, a more or less specific correlation of space and time. That is, a given type of space serves as a setting for a given type of story or pattern of behaviour:

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> 'In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot, history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope'.[25]

To be sure, where the visual arts are concerned, this redefinition of genre is not airtight. At first sight, subjects like landscape and still life would seem to resist the notion of the chronotope, although there, too, elements of time, place and human presence are unmistakably woven together. But the idea needs more development in such cases than is allowed by the scope of this paper. Where more explicitly human subjects are concerned, however, Bakhtin's literary formulation of genre appears to expand the range of interpretation in quite tangible ways. Modern scholars have sometimes criticized their seventeenth-century Dutch brethren for lacking a single term for genre painting. The implication is that they had no coherent general concept of the subject; though their critics have themselves had difficulty arriving at a workable definition.[26] But from Bakhtin's point of view, the Dutch practice of using specific labels, such as '*kortegaard*', or '*conversatie*', or '*kermis*', for the various types of genre scene is much more effective. Not only does each of these terms conjure up a specific scenario, but it points pretty accurately to what the people in the picture will be doing, what kind of story they will tell. Usually, one can also be fairly certain of what the moral will be. For, as Bakhtin would argue, each genre is essentially ideological in that it carries an implicit notion of the exemplary: drunken, loutish peasants for a tavern, satin-clad ladies for a drawing room, and so forth. Once again, it is a question of decorum.[27]

All the same, the word 'genre' remains indispensable, ironically because the *genres*, as specific subject *types*, so often do overlap and mix together in Dutch art. One needs a vague word to navigate this murky situation. Whether or not these mixed genres involve parody and inversion, as does van der Neer's picture (see plate 1), they implicitly point to the fact that there is always a surplus of reality beyond the imposed limits of genre and ideology. This, I believe, is what realism at its best entails. Once again, it is not primarily a matter of descriptive accuracy as such. Rather, a genuine realism necessarily deals in some fashion with the manifold character of lived experience, temporal as well as spatial, which means acknowledging the artificiality and permeability of generic boundaries.[28] Needless to say, Dutch artists still needed the genres to organize experience on any number of levels. None of them was willing to go as far as Manet in the pursuit of unintelligible ambiguity, though it appears some of them did travel down the same road.[29] At the same time, one can hardly do counter-genre without genre.[30]

GENRE AND COUNTER-GENRE: EXAMPLES FROM ARCHITECTURAL AND INTERIOR PAINTING

Once realism is defined in terms of multi-layered experiences that resist generic constraints, the boundaries of counter-genre become surprisingly open. For example, Jan van der Heyden's wonderful painting of the *Huis ten Bosch* in the National Gallery, London (plate 6) seems quintessentially a case of counter-genre.[31] The genre it counters is well represented by van der Helst's *Portrait of a Promenading Couple* in Karlsruhe (plate 7), painted about a decade earlier in 1661.[32] In this case, the object of the parody is not so much the genre of portraiture as

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6 Jan van der Heyden, *The Huis ten Bosch*, *c*. 1670. Oil on panel, 21.6 × 28.6 cm. London: National Gallery. Photo: National Gallery.

such, but its setting, the aristocratic garden, which in the Netherlands, as elsewhere, was an especially highly charged chronotope. It was an inherently idyllic milieu, associated for centuries with *amor cortois*, and in Dutch art it almost invariably calls forth a distinctive pattern of courtly behaviour. The couples shown by van der Heyden promenading in the gardens of the Huis ten Bosch are clearly close cousins of van der Helst's fashionable lovers. But he has looked beneath the surface of their aristocratic image, as it were, by assuming the stance of an outsider, peering at them over a hedge. Hence, he is not bound by the etiquette of either the genre or the game of love. From his realist viewpoint, he can see the otherwise invisible, lower-class gardeners, who do the rough work of keeping the weeds out. Van der Heyden's *Architectural Fantasy* in Washington (plate 8) makes the same point by bringing the elegant *seigneur* of another classical, sunlit villa face to face with a beggar woman in the foreground shadows at his gate.[33] In both pictures a moral contrast is also an aesthetic contrast between sunlight and shadow, fantasy and reality. But this aesthetic dimension is especially vivid in the London *Huis ten Bosch* by virtue of its small size (21.6 × 28.6 cm), which turns it into a tiny *objet d'art*, distinctively separate from reality. Or rather, its jewel-like artifice is in constant friction with the direct quality of the sunlight that makes it sparkle so, yet seems, in effect, to confirm the unmediated directness of the spectator's voyeuristic perspective. Van der Heyden has irreparably fractured the neat social and topographical unity of the garden chronotope, and thereby created an intrinsically ironic, multi-layered vision.

To speak of realism and artifice in the same breath is hardly a contradiction. Realism is almost always an inherently reflexive enterprise, in that the very attempt to create an illusion of reality necessarily makes the artist acutely aware that the picture *is* just an illusion, a work of art. And the best realist artists can

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7 Bartholomeus van der Helst, *Portrait of a Promenading Couple*, 1661. Oil on canvas, 186 × 148.5 cm. Karlsruhe: Staatliche Kunsthalle. Photo: Staatliche Kunsthalle.

turn this awareness into a creative dialogue between art and reality and the seen and the unseen.[34] Another case in point is Johannes Vermeer's *Lady Writing a Letter with her Maid* in Dublin (plate 9), which has been discussed with considerable subtlety by Lisa Vergara.[35] She points to just this kind of dialogue between the figures in the room and those in the picture on the wall, which is another version of the pastoral idyll. It depicts *The Finding of Moses*. Vergara observes that Pharaoh's daughter and the woman standing behind her (whom she identifies as Moses's older sister in disguise) more or less duplicate the poses and the relationship of the lady and her maid. The spatial structure of the room also resembles that of the picture on the wall. These and other parallels between life and art lead her to posit a kind of identity between the two, as well as between '*antiek* and *modern*' visions of femininity, in what she sees as 'a closed, self-sufficient world'.[36] Close as the parallels are, however, they entail frictions as well, which preclude a fully reciprocal harmony of art and reality. Only the biblical scene is closed and self-sufficient. The mistress and maid belong to a more open world that cannot finally

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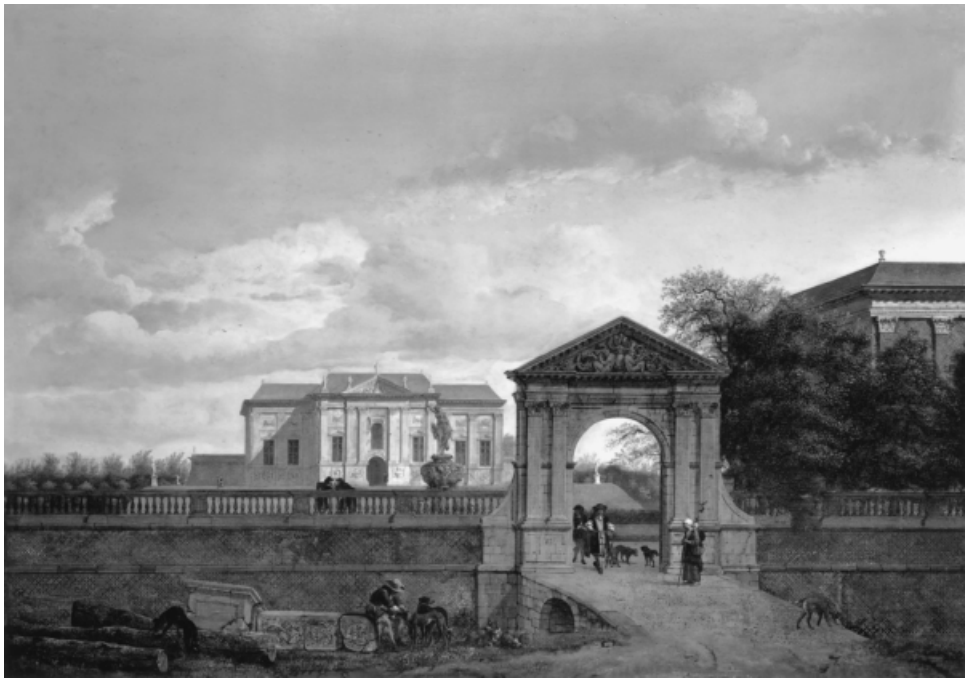

8 Jan van der Heyden, *Architectural Fantasy*, *c*. 1670. Oil on panel, 49.7 × 70.7 cm. Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art (Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund). Photo © 2006, Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art Washington, DC.

be contained or resolved by picture frames. One understated sign of this lack of closure is the empty chair in the right foreground, which corresponds to the male figure in the lower right of the painting on the wall. Here absence replaces presence, and it is not far-fetched to identify this chair with an absent husband or lover, the intended recipient of the epistle in progress.[37] The difference between the two groups is that the history painting represents a fully comprehensible reality, in which all the figures turn towards one another. Vermeer's two women turn away from each other towards invisible realities: the one to write her letter, the other to look out of the window. In other words, here too reality is, in a sense, parodying the visual completeness of the work of art, though this need not make 'reality', as such, superior to art. On the contrary, if the child on the lap of Pharaoh's daughter subtly alludes to the hoped-for result of the love letter's message, as Vergara implies, the picture would represent not just formal unity, but a kind of completion as well.[38] Be that as it may, the dialogue Vermeer has created here is an exquisite example of how life and art can interact in Dutch realism.

In their ironic juxtapositions these pictures by van der Heyden and Vermeer play out dialogues between inside and outside and between fantasy and reality that increasingly shaped Dutch realism in a multitude of ways during the latter part of the seventeenth century. Admittedly, both also stand a little apart from the social and visual mainstream of this art, and to that extent neither provides a general model for the meanings of counter-genre. But another of van der Heyden's paintings strikes more directly at the kind of frictions in Dutch culture that inspired this kind of dialogic thinking. This is his *Canal Scene in Amsterdam* in

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9 Johannes Vermeer, *Lady Writing a Letter with her Maid*, *c*. 1670. Oil on canvas, 72.2 × 59.7 cm. Dublin: National Gallery of Ireland (Beit Collection). Photo: National Gallery of Ireland.

the Wellington Museum (plate 10).[39] To call this scene a case of counter-genre may sound perverse, as it appears to exemplify the new genre of cityscape, which van der Heyden himself was in the process of creating. But once again, that would mean reducing a genre to a descriptive label. Given the social and political meanings implicit in the city as a subject, cityscape lends itself to chronotopes and ideologies even better than other genres. The urban metaphors are especially clear in Gerrit Berckheyde's *View of the Town Hall* of 1673 in the Rijksmuseum (see plate 11), which represents one of the most symbolic and '*generic*' spaces in the Netherlands. As he so often did, the Haarlem artist here confronts us with Amsterdam's three centres of power and authority: the state, the church and the market in the Weigh House on the right. From this point of view, the Dam Square appears as a closed, unified and fundamentally normative vista, in which our vision is shaped and dominated by the classical, civilizing axis of the new Town Hall (now the Royal Palace), just finished in 1665. The city fathers and Jacob van Campen, the architect, must have hoped that this view would persuade Amsterdamers to be better citizens, and indeed people

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10 Jan van der Heyden, *Canal Scene in Amsterdam*, *c.* 1670. Oil on panel, 48 × 58. London: Apsley House. Photo: Victoria and Albert Museum/Art Resource, NY.

have congregated here in large and well-behaved numbers. Genre and civic ideology have become virtually inseparable.[40]

In contrast, the Amsterdam in van der Heyden's Apsley House picture (see plate 10) is a quite different city of vernacular architecture and curving canals, where any unity of perspective is broken up by trees and patterns of shadow. Yet his subject is, in fact, the same, for the cupola of the Town Hall appears far away in the distance to the right. At this distance, however, it is a feeble symbol of urban unity at best, and this is not simply the by-product of a more casual realism. What allows us to recognize this as counter-genre, as a questioning of the new Town Hall's classically conceived public values, is the building that pokes out of the frame in the left foreground. It is a detail of the St Elisabeth Hospital and the gothic Town Hall adjoining it, which had burned down in 1652 as the new building was going up. What precise meaning this architectural fantasy had for van der Heyden we do not yet know; but it seems clear that he is posing a comparison between old and new images of the city, and with it alternative sets of urban values.[41] Evidently, the informal street life seen here belongs with the old Town Hall. Others of the artist's architectural fantasies juxtapose old and new, classical and vernacular more freely, and together they confirm the deep intentionality of the theme. What van der Heyden most likely considered that theme's moral aspect is suggested by his painting in the Virginia Museum of Fine Art

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11 Gerrit Berckheyde, *View of the Amsterdam Town Hall*, 1673. Oil on canvas, 33.5 × 41.5 cm. Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum. Photo: Rijksmuseum.

(plate 12), where the Town Hall mutates into a huge urban palace that seems to contradict the humbler civic values of the neighbourhood around it.[42] The message is quite similar to that in the imaginary country-house scene in Washington (see plate 8). Evidently, Jan van der Heyden had at best an ambivalent attitude towards the new classicism, with its connotations of wealth, power and high social status.[43]

Unlike Berckheyde, van der Heyden was a citizen of Amsterdam and deeply involved in its civic life. Yet he never painted the frontal, axial view of the Town Hall that seems virtually to be built into the building's classical aesthetic and to which Berckheyde returned time and again. Instead, he sought out odd angles, like the view from the Kalverstraat in his painting in the Louvre of 1668 (plate 13).[44] To be sure, Berckheyde painted several views of the Town Hall quite similar to this one. But in the latter's versions, the Dam Square is as crowded and as sociable as it is in his frontal view in the Rijksmuseum (plate 11), effectively confirming the Town Hall's classical public ethos.[45] In contrast, van der Heyden appears to have taken this off-centre stance in order to free himself from the powerful, authoritative axis by which the great building frames and dominates the Dam Square. From this viewpoint he not only has an essentially informal relationship with the Town Hall, but can cast an ironic eye at the urban life taking shape in front of it. Compared to Berckheyde's scenes, it is remarkable how few

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people populate the Square and how cut off from each other, how private, they are. The elaborately courtly greeting exchanged by the two men in the central foreground testifies to the etiquette and conspicuously elegant behaviour that was all the rage in the late seventeenth century.[46] One might look on it as a product of the civilizing influences of the Town Hall, a prescribed civic decorum. But because they are so isolated and set in shadows, they seem instead to demonstrate the fragility of social bonds in Amsterdam's public life. No doubt, scenes like this were common enough, just as the encounter in Manet's *Gare St. Lazare* (see plate 5) must have been in late nineteenth-century Paris. But the point is that van der Heyden's realism in this regard has brought him into conflict with the generic and ideological imperatives of this space as a chronotope.

Van der Heyden's cityscapes make the ideological aspect of counter-genre especially clear, because they are so intrinsically bound up with public life. For this very reason, however, they are distinctly secondary to Dutch realism's prevailing concern with the private world of the domestic interior during this period. This is, in fact, widely considered the most characteristically Dutch subject, with its roots in the Northern Renaissance of the fifteenth century.[47] It is also where most of the battles over the nature and meanings of Dutch realism have been fought out over the past generation. One might venture to say, too, that the main pivot of these arguments has been the art of Gerrit Dou and his Leiden School followers, which is heavily invested in domestic themes and social values. That is where art historians have found many of the hidden symbols that so preoccupied them during the 1960s and 1970s. More importantly, though, Leiden School pictures have been at the centre of the debates over whether Dutch art is truly 'realistic'.

The rise of emblematic interpretation has not only broadened our understanding of Dutch art's range of meaning. For many historians and critics it also has altered their understanding of realistic representation itself. Panofsky's iconological method, as applied by Eddy de Jongh and his followers, largely relies on convention, on recurrent patterns of form and meaning that intrinsically run counter to older views of Dutch realism as unmediated 'slices of life'. Nowhere in Dutch art are such conventions more entrenched and pervasive than in the work of Dou and his school. Yet the Leiden style also features a meticulous transcription of descriptive detail that unquestionably constitutes realism of a kind, but which earlier critics frequently dismissed as dry and barren of feeling – in a word, as 'conventional'. For many scholars the Dou revival that accompanied the iconographical turn in Dutch art history has meant reducing Dutch realism in general to a narrowly construed period style, not the direct and liberating mode of thought that earlier critics associated with names like Hals, de Hooch and Vermeer.[48]

Few in the field today would deny that some of those older views of Dutch realism were as romantic and anachronistic as revisionist critics like de Jongh and Eric Jan Sluijter have claimed.[49] Yet simply to shift the paradigm for the style from the 'modern' masters admired by the likes of Thoré-Bürger to those whose conventionality supposedly makes them more 'representative' hardly seems a viable alternative. The real problem lies in the expectation that there should be a narrowly defined paradigm or period style at all.[50] And here the notion of genre as chronotope offers a means of reframing the issues involved, in the domestic interior no less than in cityscape painting. In general, Leiden School painters tend to produce a more closed vision than many of their contemporaries. This sense of

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12 Jan van der Heyden, *View of Amsterdam*, *c*. 1672. Oil on panel, 44.76 × 55.24 cm. Richmond: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (The Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams Fund). Photo ©Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.

13 Jan van der Heyden, *View of Amsterdam from the Kalversraat*, 1668. Oil on canvas, 72 × 86 cm. Paris: Musée du Louvre. Photo: RMN/Art Resource, NY.

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14 Gerrit Dou, *The Young Mother*, 1658. Oil on panel, 73.5 × 55.5 cm. The Hague: Koninkliijk Kabinet van Schilderijen Mauritshuis. Photo: Mauritshuis.

closure lies partly in their penchant for meticulously accurate description and licked-smooth surfaces, for which they have been dubbed *fijnschilders*, or 'fine painters'. But closure is also a function of their often highly didactic subject matter.

Two conspicuous examples of Leiden didacticism are Dou's *The Young Mother* of 1658 in The Hague (plate 14) and *The Distinguished Family* of 1663 of his protégé Pieter van Slingelandt in Copenhagen (plate 15).[51] Both deal with motherhood, which, needless to say, is a stock bourgeois theme. What is especially striking, though, is how each artist has turned this multi-faceted subject into a simple exemplum. Dou's young mother is surrounded by images and symbols of love, family and household diligence as she sits at her sewing, itself a familiar biblical symbol of female virtue (Prov. 31: 10–31).[52] Slingelandt has so homogenized maternal virtue as to be able to liken his upper-middle-class mother to her faithful canine counterpart and, one infers, her blond, smiling offspring to a basket of warm puppies. Exemplarity and

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15 Pieter van Slingelandt, *The Distinguished Family*, 1663. Oil on panel, 43.5 × 30 cm. Copenhagen: Statens Museum for Kunst. Photo: Statens Museum for Kunst.

didacticism are, of course, common in the seventeenth century. They crop up time and again in biographies and autobiographies, as well as in some of the more tritely pious early novels, which can sometimes come close to Slingelandt's sentiments.[53]

More to the point, this kind of exemplarity is closely bound up with Bakhtin's notion of the chronotope. That is, a certain kind of behaviour, a certain kind of story, goes with a certain kind of space, in this case the domestic interior. Home and the family hearth equal Motherhood.[54] Of course, even in seventeenth-century Holland, not every mother was a paragon of virtue; nor did domestic life necessarily run as smoothly as it does in these pictures. What has allowed Dou and Slingelandt to create the illusion that it did is the way they have tightened the relationship between space and time, so as to make the experience fully visual and internally complete. As is usually the case in the Leiden School, the figures act

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16 Jacob Ochtervelt, *Family Portrait,* 1670. Oil on canvas, 96.5 × 60 cm. Budapest: Szépmüvészeti Múzeum. Photo: Szépmüvészeti Múzeum.

out their roles with fairly transparent gestures and expressions. They also generally turn inward towards the middle of the composition, as they do here, so that the action is almost entirely confined to the picture space. Along with this centring effect goes a preoccupation with arched frames, which is one of the trademarks of the Leiden style. This, too, has the effect of focusing the composition on the central axis of the picture and forestalling any questions one might have about larger spatial or temporal realities beyond the 'space-time' of generic convention.[55] The relationship between spatial closure and moral clarity is not unlike that in Berckheyde's frontal views of the Dam Square (see plate 11).

It is this equation of moral convention with enclosure that Eglon van der Neer is parodying in his pseudo-marriage portrait (see plate 1), where the central hearth frames and defines the domestic ethos that the peripheries of the picture call into question. The detail's deep conventionality is borne out by Jacob Ochtervelt's *Family Portrait* in Budapest (plate 16), in which a rather formally posed mother is framed by the hearth in almost exactly the same way as van der Neer's

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17 Nicolaes Maes, *The Naughty Drummer*, 1655. Oil on canvas, 62 × 66.4 cm. Madrid: Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection. Photo: Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza.

woman – and many other more virtuous ladies in Dutch art. Granted, the casual pose of Ochtervelt's husband indicates that male informality outside this boundary was no less conventional, but also no less a target of van der Neer''s parody. The flock of happy putti in the picture over Ochtervelt's mantel shows that he at least took at face value the values attached to the chronotope of the hearth. There is little chance that his woman will be subject to the same centrifugal forces of temptation as her counterpart in Boston.[56]

The parodying impulse in Dutch realism that lies behind van der Neer's picture cuts deeper than moral snickering. As this paper has suggested, it also unsettles the representational enterprise itself by creating frictions between different levels of reality and between picture and illusion. An especially telling case in point is Nicolaes Maes's *The Naughty Drummer* of 1655 in Madrid (plate 17). At first sight, this distinctly low-level drama of crime and punishment appears to be no less a cliché than the works by Dou and Slingelandt discussed above (see plates 14 and 15). Indeed, both the subject and the very simple spatial structure might have come straight out of the Leiden School, and until recently scholars saw the picture in just that light.[57]

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18 Gerrit Dou, *Self-Portrait*, *c.* 1665. Oil on panel, 48.9 × 39.1 cm. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art (Bequest of Benjamin Altman, 1913). Photo: Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Yet Victor Stoichita calls the work 'without a doubt a paradoxical painting'.[58] He is responding to a detail that sharply subverts Maes's apparent message. 'The artist appears reflected in a mirror over the mother's head, engaged in painting this very picture. Optically, it is not a very good image of a reflection; his visage is too large and too high for his apparent standpoint. But as an idea the device itself is brilliant. The immediate implication is that these are the artist's own wife and children.[59] But what is he doing sitting behind an easel while all this beating of drums and whipping of drummers is going on? Can we assume that Vrouw Maes will next hop up and take a few swings at her husband? Certainly not, as it is all play-acting. But Maes presumably chose this punishment theme, which is rather uncommon, because it makes his own status as a detached observer so incongruous.[60] Not only does his presence in the mirror make this simple, box-like space vastly more complicated, but it parodies the simplistic formal and didactic conventions of the genre. He forces one to recognize that the scene is staged, that it is all an artifice. As Daniel Arasse has pointed out, Vermeer did much the same thing in *The Music Lesson* (in Royal Collection in London), where the artist's easel appears reflected in the background mirror. The couple standing at the virginal are not lovers, but posing models; and the painting is finally more about art than about reality. Indeed, Arasse argues that it is essentially 'a representation of a representation'.[61]

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19 Gerrit Dou, *The Quack*, 1652. Oil on panel, 112 × 83 cm. Rotterdam: Museum Boymans Van Beuningen. Photo: Kavaler/ Art Resource, NY.

To be sure, Gerrit Dou was fond of representing representation too, most commonly in the illusionistic stone niches with sculptural reliefs that frame many of his scenes and those of his followers. One such picture is his *Self-Portrait* of around 1665 in New York (plate 18), which uses his image as a working artist to play upon the paragone between painting and sculpture. Both are arts of deception, which explains Dou's partiality toward the particular relief seen here by François Duquesnoy, which appears repeatedly in his work. The goat charging the satyr's mask has been tricked by frolicking putti into taking an artefact for reality. Appearing at his window with palette and brushes in one hand and turning the pages of a book with the other, Dou implicitly makes a claim for painting as a higher form of mimesis. Part of his authority for that claim lies in his learned, Renaissance dress and his reference to books and mythological subject matter. But what buttresses the superiority of painting most of all is the mastery of illusionism displayed by the picture. Not only Dou's meticulous grasp of texture and detail, but the colourfulness, the variety and the sheer naturalness of the objects he depicts far surpass the sculptor's repertory of illusion. The cloth draped over the window ledge and relief, an effect he used time and again, makes an especially subtle and persuasive case for painting's powers.[62]

Dou leaves little room for paradox, however. His consciousness of his own virtuosity does not undermine the authenticity of the illusion he creates, as the self-portrait in the mirror does in Maes's *The Naughty Drummer* (see plate 17).

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Questions of 'deceit' go no deeper than the relative veracity of the two media of painting and sculpture. Nor would Dou have had much opportunity to pose contradictory versions of reality in the first place, given the tightly enclosed character of his picture space, with its arched frame and sharply defined frontal plane. Where moralizing themes do crop up in his work, this kind of interplay between artifice and illusion may lessen the artist's moral urgency somewhat, but it does not, in and of itself, undercut his deep-rooted didacticism. A familiar example is *The Quack* of 1652 in Rotterdam (plate 19), where Dou appears again in a window, evidently posing a comparison between his artistic deceits and those of the charlatan working the lower-class crowd in the street below. Only the quack, it seems, deserves censure. Art is a higher calling, free of the moral stigma ordinarily associated with a deceiver's trade.[63]

The way *The Quack* juxtaposes social and moral opposites makes the picture a veritable paradigm of Bakhtin's notion of the chronotope. Close as they are to each other, the painter and the quack exemplify distinct genres, settings and social types, which do not mix. Perhaps in Dou's mind they *could* not mix. The one is a street person of ne'er-do-well costume and demeanour.[64] The other resides comfortably indoors, once again dressed and posed as a gentleman artist at a moment in Dutch social history when conspicuous gentility was becoming a prized social ornament. Probably Dou borrowed his pose and costume from his teacher Rembrandt's etched *Self-Portrait Leaning on a Sill* of 1639 (B.21) or, less likely, the painted version (Br.34) from the following year (now in London). Both are based on courtly portraits by Raphael and Titian that had passed through the Amsterdam art market.[65]

THE CHRONOTOPE OF THE THRESHOLD

Interestingly, Rembrandt was also Maes's teacher, albeit around 1650, more than twenty years later than Dou. Moreover, just as he may have provided the model for *The Quack* 's self-portrait in a window, Rembrandt was also the source for one of Maes's best-known pictures, *The Eavesdropper* of 1657 in Dordrecht (plate 20). The split perspective and the interplay between upstairs and down in this painting appear to derive from the older master's etching of *The Return of the Prodigal Son* of 1636 (see plate 26).[66] At the end of this essay, there will be more to say about this connection, which has so far gone unnoticed. For the moment it is enough to observe that *The Quack* and *The Eavesdropper* both draw a sharp and satirical line between high and low in the social order. Each puts a middle-class householder in a position to look down, literally and figuratively, on a misbehaving social inferior, who occupies a lower space, a lower chronotope. Like the street hustler outside Dou's window, the kitchen maid was a conventional low-life type, whose bad reputation was closely bound up with the carnal and menial associations of her milieu.[67] The cat stealing the roasted bird – a transparent symbol of illicit sex – in the same kitchen where the visiting gallant seduces the all-too-willing servant girl makes that connection especially clear. And by the same token, Maes ties the listening housewife to a chronotope of social propriety and established morality in the dignified dinner party behind her, 'above stairs'. Not surprisingly, both paintings figured prominently in Eddy de Jongh's *Tot Lering en Vermaak* exhibition of 1976 as models of the didactic bent of Dutch art.[68]

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20 Nicolaes Maes, *The Eavesdropper*, 1657. Oil on canvas, 92.5 × 122 cm. Dordrecht: Dordrechts Museum (on loan from the Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage, Rijswijk/Amsterdam). Photo: Dordrechts Museum.

21 Nicolaes Maes, *Eavesdropper with Woman Scolding,* 1655. Oil on panel, 45.7 × 72.2 cm. London: Guildhall Art Gallery. Photo © Corporation of London, Guildhall Art Gallery, London.

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Yet there is more laughter in *The Eavesdropper*, and the moralizing consequently seems lighter, less scornful. In 1994 Martha Hollander offered an alternative reading of the painting, which sets it on the side of the more open and ironic forms of realism focused on in this paper. What softens the laughter, she believes, is an essential ambivalence, a quality of equivocation, in the eavesdropper herself. For example, though she plays the guardian of domestic morality, her bemused expression conspicuously contradicts the mournful bust of Juno, goddess of the household, over her head, which turns upwards to the left. In fact, this housewife does not fully belong to either side of the composition. She can as easily be seen as entering into her maid's space as occupying the high ground of established morality upstairs. In effect, she inhabits both worlds at once: the patriarchal order, with its clear social and moral boundaries, and the more informal and personal feminine community of shared gender that often cut across class divisions in Dutch households. That mistress and maid both wear red, unlike the sober black of those upstairs, probably hints at just such a commonality. So does the fact that Maes reversed their positions in another version of the eavesdropper theme from 1655 in the Guildhall Gallery in London (plate 21). There the maid puts her finger to her lips with an identical smile as she spies on her mistress giving vent to unseemly wrath in the upper room to the right. High and low, it seems, do not accurately measure good and bad.[69]

Neither these nor others of Maes's eavesdropper scenes suggest that he was some kind of proto-revolutionary, out to demolish the class structure of Dutch society. Rather, he just seems to be trying to loosen its bonds, so as to make its moral imperatives and patterns of relationship more open and flexible. And here his realism verges on counter-genre. Hollander does not use the word chronotope; nor does she draw sharp lines between Maes and Dou. But their differences are nonetheless acute on just this point. In the latter's picture, painter and quack, close as they are, remain in separate chronotopes, the home and the street, which lie on separate planes in the picture space. High-life portrait and low-life genre scene are juxtaposed, but not mixed. Hero and anti-hero are exemplary figures, each circumscribed and defined by genre. In contrast, the relationship between character and setting in Maes's composition is inherently more indeterminate, as the vertical axis dividing its two social spaces allows his eavesdropper to stand so equivocally between them.

The literary critic Patricia Meyer Spacks discusses the kind of feminine relationships implied by *The Eavesdropper* in her book *Gossip*, which is partly about forms of realism in the eighteenth-century English novel – a not-unrelated subject. She argues that both gossip and the novel exist at the intersection of the individual and the social: in other words, between the personal and the exemplary, or the private and the public. Neither can be circumscribed by the official norms and moral codes of society, and frequently they serve to subvert those norms by looking beneath outward appearances, which, for the novelist, opens up rich possibilities for characterization. Spacks concedes that there are nasty, negative forms of gossip, but she insists on its positive functions as well. Among the latter is its capacity for creating forms of community and empowerment for the outsider and the dispossessed, especially among women, whose social positions often have been more ambivalent or peripheral than those of their male counterparts.[70]

Issues of gender aside, most examples of counter-genre cited in this paper share this kind of outsider's perspective to one degree or another. Van der Neer,

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van der Heyden and Maes all achieve their effects of openness and relativity – their realism – by refusing to be bound by the social and artistic norms of generic decorum. In this context, it is significant that Martha Hollander likens Maes's listening housewife to the traditional figure of the fool, one of whose roles was that of spy or trickster. Partly, her kinship to the fool lies in the tolerant bemusement in her smile, which leaves little room for Dou's scornful moralizing.[71] Gabriel Metsu's *View into a Hall with a Jester and a Child with a Dog* of around 1667 in Toronto demonstrates that the role was still very much alive in seventeenth-century Dutch culture.[72] As many scholars have pointed out, it is the essential nature of the fool and the jester to stand outside the social order and its constraints. This is what gives him his licence to mock, as Metsu's fool and child do here as they spy upon what appears to be an unfolding sexual intrigue between the elegant couple parting at the doorway in the background.[73]

These pictures by Maes and Metsu have more than voyeurism and outsiderhood in common. They share a distinct chronotope, which is particularly common in Dutch art in the third quarter of the century. Bakhtin calls it 'the chronotope of the threshold', and he considers it one of the key elements in realism and the novel. As he points out, narrative scenes associated with doorways usually involve themes of encounter, rupture, crisis and transformation.[74] A century ago, the anthropologist Arnold van Gennep made much the same observation in his seminal work *Les Rites de passage*, where he noted how often symbolic thresholds mark rituals celebrating major life passages (birth, puberty, marriage, pregnancy, death and the like) in pre-modern cultures around the world. For this range of symbols and metaphors, he coined the term 'liminality', derived from the Latin *limen*, meaning 'threshold'.[75] Of course, the liminal divisions in Dutch paintings are of a somewhat different character, but they seem to grow out of the same psychological roots. After all, we ourselves use the word 'threshold' metaphorically for crises of one kind or another – as in 'thresholds of pain' or 'thresholds of disbelief'. The term almost irresistibly implies crossing boundaries of a more-than-physical sort and with them, as often as not, the constraints associated with those boundaries. In this respect threshold imagery is closely related to counter-genre as a vehicle for inversion and ambiguity. Significantly, stable subjects and situations like those in Dou's *The Young Mother* (see plate 14) or Slingelandt's *The Distinguished Family* (see plate 15) generally take shape away from doorway settings. Indeed, aside from tightly framed niche pieces like Dou's *Self-Portrait* in New York (see plate 18), threshold imagery is uncommon or at best peripheral in the Leiden School, with its decided tendency towards spatial and temporal closure.[76]

If the image of the threshold represents a chronotope, it must also represent a genre in some sense, albeit an uncommonly broad and loosely defined one, with many diverse subcategories. That certain artists, like Maes, were drawn to the theme, and others, like Dou, much less so, strongly implies, moreover, a common thread of meaning and association that transcends specific subjects or problems of doorway construction as such. In essence, it hinges on a dialogue between open and closed space that is perhaps inherent in the domestic interior as a formal and narrative structure. For, either explicitly or implicitly, such spaces are almost always incomplete, or, as Bakhtin would say, 'unfinalized', in that they so readily posit intervals and potential connections between the room depicted and a larger, unseen and indeterminate world outside.[77]

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22 Pieter de Hooch, *Woman and Child in a Courtyard*, 1658–60. Oil on canvas, 73.5 × 66 cm. Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art (Widener Collection). Photo © 2007, Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

Not surprisingly, some of the commonest 'threshold dramas' in Dutch genre imagery turn on scenes of sexual encounter, most often with the amorous male stepping into a room to woo or seduce a demure, but often not-unwilling, young lady. Metsu's *The Huntsman's Present* (see plate 3) belongs to this subgenre, though it is only one of many variations on the same plot. Indeed, another example is Maes's *Eavesdropper* (see plate 20), where the soldier leading the maid into the kitchen plays much the same role. Both these and other intrusive lovers represent comic variations on the threshold theme, with deep roots in traditions of medieval and early modern farce, as Hollander has observed. In smirking at her audience as she does, Maes's housewife tacitly pays homage to this inherited theatrical mode.[78]

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23 Pieter de Hooch, *The Bedroom*, 1658–60. Oil on canvas, 51 × 60 cm. Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art (Widener Collection). Photo © 2007, Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

Pieter de Hooch, on the other hand, in his *Woman and Child in a Courtyard* in the National Gallery of Art in Washington DC from around 1658 (plate 22), uses Maes's double-threshold effect for another kind of domestic narrative altogether. It belongs to a loose group of courtyard and household scenes by the Delft master that follow this compositional formula. As they began to appear a year or two after the *Eavesdropper* paintings, it is not unlikely that he borrowed it from Maes.[79] But different dichotomies and different values are at stake. In the earlier group voyeurism and comic revelation are the primary themes, and the composition divides at the figure of the eavesdropper in the foreground. In de Hooch's courtyard scene, the critical figure appears to be the little girl with the birdcage, whom the maid is leading away from the drinking party in the darkened bower on the right. The caged bird no doubt symbolizes her innocence, and the stairway rising towards a patch of light on the left, the path to virtue. This is one of the most conspicuously didactic of de Hooch's pictures, but it differs from works like Dou's *The Young Mother* (see plate 14) in focusing more on a temporal process than on static symbols at rest in themselves. This child is not just behaving; she is growing up, discovering the world, playing out a story. In other pictures in this group, like *The Bedroom* (plate 23), also in the National Gallery in Washington, children are poised on thresholds, about to venture into the unseen world in the background, which in this case exists in dialectical opposition to the closed rectangle of the bed behind the mother on the right. This is no longer the wholly visual, spatially self-contained narrative of the theatre, but the more open-ended time of the novel, which would come to maturity around some of these same themes in the following century. In de Hooch's pictures the chief parallel seems to be with the novel of education, the *Bildungsroman,* in which space and time are woven together with unusual richness.[80]

Clearly, the ruptures and crises associated with threshold imagery raise any number of issues of behaviour and ethics, which vary from one subject to another. But if the threshold truly does represent a Bakhtinian chronotope, and hence a meaningful genre, we should expect to find some recurrent characteristics in the figures who stand at these boundaries. Moreover, to the extent that liminality is

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related to counter-genre, as this paper has suggested is often the case, such patterns of characterization might point to a larger ethos underlying important aspects of the realist mode in general.

Needless to say, tracing unities and continuities of this sort in such a wide range of subjects is at best problematic. People act differently from one threshold scene to another, and not all doorways are equal either formally or metaphorically. Unquestionably, some such doors and the figures in them are merely incidental or anecdotal, with little or no narrative resonance. More importantly however, the openness and relativity inherent in the threshold as narrative milieu militates against the tight, 'ideological' bonds between setting and behaviour in other genres, other chronotopes. And this is precisely where a recognizable ethos takes shape. An important common element in most examples of both liminality and counter-genre discussed so far has been their ironic treatment of conventional generic decorum. At least where scenes of upper-class private life are concerned, however, the most telling expression of this ironic stance is not humour, but ambivalence. This is the one quality that Maes's bemused eavesdroppers and de Hooch's quasi-innocent children hold in common. To the extent that they find themselves 'betwixt and between', their characters and identities are not fixed by genre and setting alone. This is not to pose some sharp polarity between outward identity and inward self. Rather, the irony and ambivalence in these paintings arise from the necessary interplay and the subtle frictions between the personal and the exemplary in the highly socialized milieu of Dutch middle-class life.[81]

Drawing distinctions between understated irony and mere polite decorum has not been one of the strengths of recent iconographical practice, as its misreading of so many Dutch pictures amply attests. Part of this essay's purpose has been to suggest how the structures and permutations of genre itself can help bring these subtleties to light in ways that do not depend on free association or vague intuition alone. Some of de Hooch's seemingly model children (see plate 22) are, if anything, less expressive than those of Dou (see plate 14) or Slingelandt (see plate 15). What makes them potentially more complicated beings than their outward behaviour might suggest are the kinds of expansion of space into time and narrative that the threshold theme makes possible. The deeper question, which cannot be fully answered here, concerns the extent to which irony and ambivalence might be intrinsic to the realist enterprise in general.[82] Particularly in the Leiden School, but elsewhere too in Dutch art, genre painters often rely heavily on explicit gestures and expressions, as well as on symbols and generic conventions to make their meanings clear. But faces and poses can also be psychologically opaque, as is so often true in the art of Vermeer or Gerard ter Borch. In the absence of liminal devices or generic mixing, what entitles one to read understated irony or hidden narrative behind a polite façade? Might it be useful – might it be valid – to redefine the notion of a threshold on occasion? Does it have to involve architecture? One could argue that the letter-writer theme, which grew up side by side with doorway scenes in the second half of the century, often has some of the same liminal qualities.[83] For instance, Vermeer's *Lady Writing a Letter with her Maid* (see plate 9) is built on highly charged intervals that reverberate from the unseen substance of the letter in progress: inward versus outward, art versus reality, now versus then, here versus there, presence versus absence. And in the mind's eye any number of imagined dialogues and narratives

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24 Ludolf de Jongh, *Lady Receiving a Letter*, 1663–65. Oil on canvas, 59.6 × 73.3 cm. Ascott: Anthony de Rothschild Collection. Photo © The National Trust Photographic Library.

crowd in to fill those gaps. For all intents and purposes, Vermeer has created a liminal situation. Nor is it surprising that letters sometimes generate threshold narratives of a more literal sort in Dutch art of this period. Ludolf de Jongh's *Woman Receiving a Letter* of around 1665 at Ascott House (plate 24), for example, uses a letter delivered to a coolly elegant lady to turn three open doors, two barking dogs and a picture of *Diana and Acteon* into what looks like a muted variation on the battle of the sexes. Wayne Franits notes that the three women, two hounds and one hapless, outnumbered male in the mythological painting exactly match those in the entrance hall below.[84]

One might ask whether this sophisticated doubling, splitting, and mixing of spaces, genres and levels of reality are purely a function of the social milieu of Dutch high-life painting. Without question the emergence of these devices closely coincides with the rise after mid-century of the refined private sociability that the pictures illustrate. Likewise, much of the ambivalence and the irony that characterize this art seem inseparable from social situations that are at once very intimate and very genteel.[85] Yet confining the ethos and meaning of the works examined here to this historical moment and cultural context inevitably narrows their scope. In closing, I would like to suggest that the roots of this social and generic relativity in Dutch realism go deeper and are more specific than changing tides of fashion. As this essay has already suggested, they lie in the art of Rembrandt, for whom the image of the threshold held a particularly strong

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25 Rembrandt van Rijn, *The Expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael*, 1637. Etching and drypoint on paper, 12.6 × 9.9 cm. Boston: Museum of Fine Arts (Harvey D. Parker Collection). Photo © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
26 Rembrandt, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, 1636. Etching on paper, 15.8 × 13.8 cm. Boston: Museum of Fine Arts (George Peabody Gardner Fund). Photo: © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

attraction. Susan Kuretsky has shown that doorway subjects emerged in his art quite early, fully twenty-five years before they attracted the attention of high-life genre painters. That so many of his narratives are biblical, of course, sets them sharply apart from the everyday prose of a Pieter de Hooch or Ludolf de Jongh. But Rembrandt's threshold scenes nonetheless share with most of the genre paintings an underlying theme of insiders versus outsiders that is virtually inherent in this setting.[86] Since Rembrandt's student Nicolaes Maes seems to have been the main conduit for these ideas amongst artists after the mid-1650's, the connection appears to be quite tangible.

What sets Rembrandt's doorways apart is that so many of them deal not just with tales of estrangement and rejection, like *The Expulsion of Hagar* (plate 25; B.30), but with mercy, charity, or reconciliation, as in *The Good Samaritan* (B.90), *Beggars at a Doorway* (B.176) and *The Return of the Prodigal Son* (plate 26, B.91; Br.598).[87] Yet these values are latent in most narratives of outsiderhood, as they are in the relaxation of moral strictures and boundaries so often associated with threshold imagery. Partly because it is Rembrandt's only double threshold, the early etching of *The Return of the Prodigal Son* (see plate 26) is, from my point of view, the most significant of these liminal images, and not just because this was Maes's source for *The Eavesdropper* (see plate 20). To be sure, Rembrandt drew his double threshold from a woodcut of the subject by Maerten van Heemskerk from nearly a century earlier. But the dialogue between the inner and outer doors is less striking, less liminal, in Heemskerk's version, mainly because the background is

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so subordinate to the large figures in the foreground. He seems, in fact, to have added the arch on the left purely for the purpose of illustrating the slaughter of the fatted calf. Rembrandt's doorway is proportionally much larger and manifestly about the state of 'outside-ness' itself. The embrace of father and son, God and sinner, however, takes place neither inside nor outside the house, but in between, like so many of the other threshold narratives cited in this essay. This is not to imply, of course, that standing in doorways necessarily makes one moral, let alone holy. But Rembrandt does seem to have recognized this inherently ambivalent, indeterminate setting as a place where such qualities could be operative. In the artist's paraphrase, God is no respecter of boundaries. In this Rembrandt undermines the very basis of generic decorum and, ultimately, of conventional morality itself. Lacking the theological twist provided by the parable, none of the double thresholds by later Dutch artists is nearly so radical in its implications. As in so many other cases, however, drawing upon Rembrandt's example helped them to expand the range of realism as a mode of story-telling and to enrich the meaning of ambivalence as a moral stance and a state of mind.

Notes

This essay expands upon a paper I read at the symposium 'Genre and the Genres in Dutch seventeenth-century Painting: Exchanges and borderline Cases' at the Department of Art History, University of California Los Angeles on 30 May 1997. My thanks to Lyckle de Vries for inviting me to participate, and to David Kunzle, his collaborator in organizing this exceptionally interesting and surprisingly merry event. I am also indebted to my friends and colleagues Catherine Levesque, David Levine, Lincoln Perry, Christine Sellin, Susan Kuretsky, Martha Hollander and Aneta Georgievska-Shine, as well as two anonymous readers for *Art History*, all of whom read drafts of the article and offered very useful comments, criticisms and advice, which have improved my argument.

1 For example, Eric J. Sluijter, 'Hoe realistisch is de Noordnederlandsche schilderkunst in de zeventiende eeuw? De problemen van een vraagstelling', *Leidschrift*, 6, 1990, 5–38; Lyckle de Vries, 'The Changing Face of Realism', in *Art in History, History in Art: Studies in seventeenth-century Dutch Culture*, eds David Freedberg and Jan de Vries, Santa Monica, 1991, 209–44. De Vries does not actually reject 'this irritating label' (209), but points to the ambiguity and confusion surrounding its use.

2 Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the seventeenth Century*, Chicago, 1983, *xix–xxi*, 229–33; Eddy de Jongh, 'Realisme en schijnrealisme in de schilderkunst van de zeventiende eeuw', in *Rembrandt en zijn tijd*, exhib. cat., Brussels: Paleis voor schone Kunsten, Brussels, 1971, 143. For a discussion of Alpers's and de Jongh's competing points of view and of some of their respective underlying fallacies, see David R. Smith, 'Irony and Civility: Notes on the Convergence of Genre and Portraiture in seventeenth-century Dutch Painting', *Art Bulletin*, 69: 3, 1987, 407–8, 425–7. Also see David R. Smith, 'Willem Buytewech as a Journalist: Perspectives on Description and Narration', *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift*, 60: 3–4, 1991, 190–1 and note 99.

3 See Reindert L. Falkenburg, 'Recente visies op de zeventiende-eeuwse Nederlandse genre-schilderkunst', *Theoretische geschiedenis*, 18: 2, 1991, 119–40, who compares de Jongh's ideas to those of Josua Bruyn, Peter Hecht, and Eric Jan Sluijter.

4 Smith, 'Irony and Civility', 411–9.

5 It is true that the Venus and Cupid theme could carry connotations of love, beauty, and even marital fidelity in Renaissance humanism, but the down-to-earth household setting of this scene contradicts and effectively cancels these mythic dimensions of meaning. For more high-minded Renaissance alternatives, see Erwin Panofsky, *Problems in Titian, mostly iconographic*, New York, 1969, 109–38.

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6 The most obvious sign of the iconographical conflict involved is that a later owner had the *Venus and Cupid* replaced with a landscape signed 'JRuisdael'. The alteration was only discovered in the course of a routine cleaning in 1963. See Smith, 'Irony and Civility', 411. There is one rather peripheral exception to the opposition between marital virtue and the Venus-and-Cupid theme in Dutch art. This is Ferdinand Bol's *Paris, Venus,* and *Cupid* of 1656 in the Dordrechts Museum, which is manifestly a *portrait historié* of a couple and their child in these roles. It seems self-evident that they have no bearing on pictures like van der Neer's, where the erotic meanings of the myth clearly are at odds with domestic associations of the household interior. See Albert Blankert, *Ferdinand Bol: Rembrandt's Pupil*, Doornspijk, 1982, 46, 103, no.34; Eddy de Jongh, *Portretten van echt en trouw: huwelijk en gezin in de Nederlandse kunst van de zeventiende eeuw*, exhib. cat., Frans Halsmuseum, Haarlem and Zwolle, 1986, 312–5, no.78. Rudolf E.O. Ekkart, 'A *portrait historié* with Venus, Paris and Cupid: Ferdinand Bol and the patronage of the Spiegel family', *Simiolus*, 29: 1–2, 2002, 14–41, recently identified the couple as Wigbold Slicher and Elisabeth Spiegel, though he thinks it unlikely that the Cupid in the portrait represents one of their children.

7 Mariët Westermann, *The Amusements of Jan Steen,* Zwolle, 1997, 215.

8 Eddy de Jongh, 'Erotica in vogelperspectief. De dubbelzinningheid van een reeks zeventiende-eeuwse genrevoortstellingen', *Simiolus*, 3, 1968–69, 35–7.

9 Smith, 'Irony and Civility', 416–19, and David R. Smith, *Masks of Wedlock: seventeenth-century Dutch Marriage Portraiture,* Ann Arbor, MI, 1982, 81–9.

10 See, for example, Christine Petra Sellin, *Fractured Families and Rebel Maidservants: the biblical Hagar in seventeenth-century Dutch Painting and Literature*, New York and London, 2006, 69–90, on close parallels between Dutch images of Sarah presenting Hagar to Abraham and procuress and unequal-lovers imagery in contemporary genre scenes. See also Lyckle de Vries, 'Jan Steen zwischen Genre- und Historienmalerei', *Niederdeutsche Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte*, 22, 1983, 113–28, on these and other forms of generic hybridization in the work of Jan Steen in particular.

11 See Rosa Wishnevsky, *Studien zum 'portrait historié' in den Niederlanden*, dissertation, Munich, 1967.

12 Rosalie L. Colie, *The Resources of Kind: Genre Theory in the Renaissance*, ed. Barbara K. Lewalski, Berkeley, 1973, 7–33, 75–128.

13 Egbert Haverkamp Begemann, *Willem Buytewech,* Amsterdam, 1959, 28, 64–7, no. IV; *Willem Buytewech 1591–1624*, exhib. cat., Rotterdam: Museum Boymans van Beuningen, and Paris: Institut Néerlandais, 1974–75, 3–5, no. 1; Eddy de Jongh, *Tot Lering en Vermaak: Betekenissen van Hollandse genrevoorstellingen uit de zeventiende eeuw*, exhib. cat., Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum, 1976, 64–7, no. 10. Pieter J. J. Van Thiel, 'Willem Buytewech's *Dignified couples courting*: a rule of conduct for young noblemen entangled in Venus's trap', *Simiolus*, 32, 2006, 35–57, offers an overly didactic interpretation of the painting, based in part on a dubious distinction between refined and reprehensible behaviour that ignores the widely recognized subtle humour found in much of contemporary high-life painting. On the ironic and parodic aspects of the picture, see especially David R. Smith, 'Courtesy and its discontents: Frans Hals's *Portrait of Isaac Massa and Beatrix van der Laen*', *Oud Holland*, 100: 1, 1986, 11–2; Smith, 'Willem Buytewech', 185, and Smith, *Masks*, 33–4 and note 83. The latter passage argues that the painting is on some level a parody of Buytewech's own *Portrait of Two Couples* in the Rathaus of Friedrichstadt. Smith, 'Irony and Civility', 418–9, cites another example of parodic portraiture by Eglon van der Neer himself, his early *Young Woman with a Plate of Oysters* in Vaduz dated 1665.

14 De Jongh, 'Realisme en schijnrealisme', 143–6; Sluijter, 'Hoe realistisch', 5–6.

15 Eugène Fromentin, *The Masters of Past Time. Dutch and Flemish Painting from van Eyck to Rembrandt* (1876), ed. Horst Gerson, trans. Andrew Boyle, New York, 1948, 97: 'Dutch painting … was not and could not be anything but the portrait of Holland, its external image, faithful, exact, complete, lifelike, without any adornment. The portrait of men and places, of *bourgeois* customs, of squares, streets, and countryside, of sea and sky – such was bound to be, reduced to its primary elements, the programme adopted by the Dutch School.'

16 For a brief, but adequate, account of the impressionists' pursuit of optical truth, see Phoebe Pool, *Impressionism*, London, 1967, 10–18.

17 See John House, *Monet: Nature into Art*, New Haven, 1986, 135–46; Robert L. Herbert, 'Method and Meaning in Monet', *Art in America*, 67, 1979, 90–108.

18 See note 2.

19 Robert L. Herbert, *Impressionism: Art, Leisure, and Parisian Society*, New Haven, 1988, 28–9. See Harry Rand, *Manet's Contemplation at the Gare Saint-Lazare,* Berkeley, 1987, 4–29, for the picture's close connection to photography in Manet's mind and the confusion and ambiguity it has generated among both critics of the time and modern art historians.

20 Rand, 'Manet's Contemplation', 17–22.

21 Rand, 'Manet's Contemplation', 29–36.

22 Rand, 'Manet's Contemplation', 37–41.

23 Rand, 'Manet's Contemplation', 27–9.

24 See David Summers, *Real Spaces. World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism,* New York, 2003, 341–2.

25 Mikhail M. Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a historical Poetics', in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, Austin, Texas, 1981, 84–5. See also Gary S. Morson and Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail*

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Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics, Stanford, 1990, 366–75.

26 Lydia de Pauw-de Veen, *De begrippen 'schilder', 'schilderij' en 'schilderen' in the zeventiende eeuw*, Brussels, 1969, 79, lays out the seventeenth-century terminology for Dutch genre and its subcategories. For discussions of the problems of definition raised by the subject in contemporary Dutch scholarship, see Albert Blankert, 'What is Dutch seventeenth-century Genre Painting? A Definition and its Limitations' (1987), in *On Dutch Painting*, Zwolle, 2004, 191–204; Hessel Miedema, 'Over het realisme in de Nederlandse schilderkunst van de zeventiende eeuw', *Oud Holland*, 89, 1975, 4; Falkenburg, 'Recente visies', 119–40; and Peter Hecht, 'Dutch seventeenth-century genre painting: a reassessment of some current hypotheses', *Simiolus*, 21, 1992, 85, who speaks of 'the conceptual morass called genre painting'.

27 Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time', 243–52; Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 369–72, 374–5.

28 Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time' discusses this aspect of realism in literature from several points of view in 'From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse', another essay in the same book.

29 T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Contemporaries*, Princeton, 1984, 10: 'Something new happened in the history of art around Manet . . . . Perhaps the change can be described as a kind of skepticism, or at least unsureness, as to the nature of representation in art.' Clark notes that '[c]ertain painters in the seventeenth century' had shared Manet's sense of perplexity and visual paradox, and that some of them – he mentions Velázquez and Frans Hals – had served as his models.

30 On the dependence of generic mixing and parody, or what she calls 'generic play', on pre-existing systems of genre, see Colie, *Resources*, 26–31.

31 Helga Wagner, *Jan van der Heyden, 1637–1712*, Amsterdam and Haarlem, 1971, 96, no. 133; Neil MacLaren, *National Gallery Catalogue: the Dutch School, 1600–1900*, rev. Christopher Brown, London, 1991, no. 1914, 173–4.

32 J. J. de Gelder, *Bartholomeus van der Helst*, Rotterdam, 1921, 113, no. 860; Smith, *Masks*, 85–6, 145–9.

33 Wagner, *Jan van der Heyden*, 101, no. 151; Peter C. Sutton, *Jan van der Heyden* (1637–1712), exhib. cat., Greenwich, CT: Bruce Museum, 2006, 164–6, no.24; Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: an Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*, New York, 1987, 573, comments briefly on the contrast between rich and poor and fantasy and reality in this picture.

34 See Rosalie L. Colie, *Paradoxia epidemica: the Renaissance Tradition of Paradox*, Princeton, 1966, 273–99.

35 Lisa Vergara, '*Antiek* and *Modern* in Vermeer's *Lady Writing a Letter*', in *Vermeer Studies*, eds I. Gaskell and M. Jonker, New Haven and London, 1998, 235–55.

36 Vergara, '*Antiek* and *Modern*', 245. Her view of the harmony between art and life in the painting ultimately leads Vergara to tie Vermeer's work to the classicistic theories of Gerard de Lairesse, who posed the dichotomy of '*antiek* and *modern*' in her title. But this connection cannot be sustained. Not only is Lairesse's *Groot schilderboek* of 1707 much later than Vermeer's painting, but the conservative classical ideal he sets forth there is far too remote from Vermeer's realist idiom, no matter how loosely one might try to define either artist's position.

37 Vergara, '*Antiek* and *Modern*', 238–44, argues for just such an amorous scenario, though she also suggests that the empty chair may in some sense be set aside for the artist himself, who would thereby assume the role of the absent lover.

38 Vergara, '*Antiek* and *Modern*', 243.

39 Wagner, *Jan van der Heyden*, 32, 85, no. 79.

40 Cynthia Lawrence, *Gerrit Berckheyde (1638–1698): Haarlem Cityscape Painter*, Doornspijk, 1991, 52–6. She takes note of the many symbolic connotations that the Town Hall carried in seventeenth-century Amsterdam, particularly as vested in this frontal view.

41 Details of the two buildings appear repeatedly in van der Heyden's work as architectural fantasies. See Wagner, *Jan van der Heyden,* nos. 87, 88 and 210. Aside from the obvious nostalgic connotations the old Town Hall must have held in Amsterdam, its connection with the St Elisabeth Hospital no doubt carried charitable associations that probably contrasted with the conspicuous wealth and ostentation of the new Town Hall in the minds of many citizens, not least a Mennonite like Jan van der Heyden. As a sect, the Mennonites deliberately distanced themselves from the state and its trappings of power. See N. van Zijpp, *Geschiedenis der Doopsgezinden in Nederland*, Arnhem, 1952, 145–9.

42 Lyckle de Vries, *Jan van der Heyden*, Amsterdam, 1984, 37–41. Two other cases of van der Heyden reinventing the Town Hall in this fashion are his *Square with a Church recalling St Andreas, Düsseldorf* in the Guildhall Gallery, London, and his *Baroque Palace on a Square*, now in the Kunsthaus, Zürich. See Wagner, *Jan van der Heyden*, nos 121 and 123, and Sutton, *Jan van de Heyden*, 120, notes 8 and 184, 30, fig. 1. Besides adding the cupola of the Town Hall to both buildings, he has also borrowed the small house on the far left of the Zürich scene from one that stood at the corner of the Dam Square and the fish market in Amsterdam. This latter detail also appears in his fantasy cityscape in the Staatliche Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe (Wagner, *Jan van der Heyden*, no. 85).

43 See de Vries, *Jan van der Heyden,* 19–23, 27–30, 33–5, 37–41 on deliberate infelicities and incongruities in the artist's depictions of classical architecture. On the strong bonds between the classical buildings and elite taste at the top of the Dutch social, cultural and economic hierarchy, see especially Eddy de Jongh, '"'t Gotsche

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krulligh mall''. De houding tegenover de gotiek in het zeventiendse-eeuwse Holland', *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek*, 24: 1973, 88–92, 101–11.

44 Wagner, *Jan van der Heyden*, 67, no. 2; Sutton, *Jan van der Heyden*, 126, no. 10.

45 See Berckheyde's views of the Town Hall in the Fitzwilliam Museum and the Amsterdam Historisch Museum, both dated 1674 (Lawrence, *Gerrit Berckheyde*, 57–8). They show the building from the same angle seen in van der Heyden's Louvre painting (plate 13), but Berckheyde's Dam Square is as crowded and as sociable as in his frontal view in the Rijksmuseum (plate 11).

46 See Pieter Spierenburg, *Elites and Etiquette: Mentality and Social Structure in the early modern Netherlands*, Rotterdam, 1981, 22–6; Norbert Elias, *The Court Society*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, New York, 1983, 78–116. Like the other figures in van der Heyden's painting, the two courtly gentlemen were painted by Adriaen van de Velde, who often supplied the staff for his colleague's works. Presuming that van der Heyden was closely engaged in van de Velde's figural additions, it seems relevant that Mennonites like himself scorned courtly ostentation and other conspicuous displays of wealth and social status. See van Zijpp, *Geschiedenis der Doopsgezinden*, 152–6.

47 See, for example, Otto Pächt, *Van Eyck and the Founders of Netherlandish Painting* (1989), trans. David Britt, London, 1994, 188–90, on the *Birth of St John* page of the *Turin-Milan Hours* as a precedent for the domestic interior in seventeenth-century Dutch art. See also Lucy von Weiher, *Das Innenraum in der holländische Malerei des 17. Jahrhunderts*, Wurzburg, 1937, 1–4, and H. F. Bouchery, 'De ontwikkeling van het binnenhuistafereel in de Vlaamse en de Hollandse schilderkunst van de XVe tot de XVIIe eeuw', *Gentse Bijdragen tot de Kunstgeschiedenis*, 17, 1957-58, 157–74.

48 See Arthur K. Wheelock, 'Dou's Reputation', in Ronni Baer et al., *Gerrit Dou, 1613–1675: Master Painter in the Age of Rembrandt*, exhib. cat., Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, ,2000, 12–24.

49 See note 14.

50 See Ernst Gombrich's critique of Hegelian and Burckhardtian understandings of culture and their influence on art history in *In Search of Cultural History*, Oxford, 1969, 6–14, 25–38, and especially the distinction he draws between movements and periods in cultural history (35–8). From Gombrich's perspective the attempt to merge the Leiden style with Dutch realism in general would mean confusing a movement with a period.

51 Peter Hecht, *De Hollandse fijnschilders*, exhib. cat., Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum, 1989, 52–5, no. 7; 218–20, no. 46.

52 Baer, *Gerrit Dou*, 106, no. 21.

53 See J. Paul Hunter, *Before Novels: the Cultural Contexts of eighteenth-century English Fiction*, New York, 1990, 225–302; John Richetti, *Popular Fiction before Richardson. Narrative Patterns: 1700–1739*, Oxford, 1969, 211–61.

54 See Wayne Franits, *Paragons of Virtue: Women and Domesticity in seventeenth-century Dutch Art,* Cambridge, 1993, 111–60, a chapter entitled '*Moeder*', in which he surveys Dutch household scenes in the light of domestic ideals and imperatives attached to notions of motherhood in seventeenth-century Dutch moralizing emblems and advice books.

55 On Dou's use of arches and niches, see Ronni Baer, 'The Life and Art of Gerrit Dou', in Baer, *Gerrit Dou*, 40–2; Martha Hollander, *An Entrance for the Eyes: Space and Meaning in seventeenth-century Dutch Art*, Berkeley, 2002, 53–67; and Richard W. Hunnewell, 'Gerrit Dou's Self Portraits and Depictions of the Artist', dissertation, Boston University, 1983, 85–130. Baer and Hollander note the degree to which Dou replaces narrative with allegory, and spatial illusion with a sense of the relative autonomy of the picture surface as aesthetic construct.

56 Susan Donahue Kuretsky, *The Paintings of Jacob Ochtervelt*, Montclair, NJ, 1979, 43, no. 61; 79; Smith, 'Irony and Civility', 414.

57 See Mary Frances Durantini, *The Child in Seventeenth-century Dutch Painting*, Ann Arbor, MI, 1983, 89, and Franits, *Paragons*, 138–41. Both place the painting in Dou's orbit, Durantini by constructing an allegorical interpretation based on notions of the active and contemplative life that she specifically likens to those in Dou's *The Quack* (plate 19), which is discussed below. Franits legitimately compares Maes's composition to a quite similar one by Slingelandt, which lacks, however, Maes's ironic twist (see below), and he, too, explains the Madrid painting in rather abstract, allegorical terms that closely reflect the characteristic patterns of Dou's iconography. See also Ivan Gaskell, *The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection: Seventeenth-century Dutch and Flemish Painting*, London, 1989, 244–7, no. 53.

58 Victor I. Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image. An Insight into early modern Meta-Painting,* trans. Anne-Marie Glasheen, Cambridge, 1997, 197.

59 Wilhelm R. Valentiner, *Nicolaes Maes*, Stuttgart, 1924, 42, first identified the figures in the painting as Maes's family. See also Franits, *Paragons*, 234, note 97.

60 Franits, *Paragons*, 138–41, on the other hand, sees the self-portrait as an allusion to contemporary analogies between painting and child-rearing. This reading strikes me as somewhat tortured, especially in that neither side of the dichotomy is illuminated or enriched by their supposed combination in the picture.

61 Daniel Arasse, *Vermeer: Faith in Painting,* trans. Terry Grabar, Princeton, 1994, 33–9. At the centre of Arasse's argument is his recognition that the beholder's perspective is effectively separate from that of the artist himself, as calculated from the position of the easel in the mirror and

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the orthogonal lines that establish the viewer's position. The same separation of artist and beholder takes place in Vermeer's *The Art of Painting* in Vienna, which establishes the theoretical concerns that underlie this anomaly. Arasse also notes possible associations between the artist and the man gazing at the woman in the painting, again within a larger art-theoretical construct.

62 Hollander, *An Entrance,* 49, 61–76; Hunnewell, 'Dou's Self Portraits', 154–201; Peter Hecht, 'Art beats nature, and painting does so best of all: the *paragone* competition in Duquesnoy, Dou and Schalcken', *Simiolus*, 29: 3/4, 2002, 184–201. Hollander interprets Duquesnoy's relief as an allegory of *pictura* and the theme of the niche piece in general as a commentary on the art of painting, but, unlike Hecht, she does not see it as a play upon the paragone debate as such.

63 Eric Jan Sluijter, 'In Praise of the Art of Painting: On Paintings by Gerrit Dou and a Treatise by Philips Angel of 1642', in *Seductress of Sight. Studies in Dutch Art of the Golden Age*, Zwolle, 2000, 258–9; Baer, *Gerrit Dou*, 100–3, no. 19. On the superiority of art to nature in Leiden-School painting, see Elisabeth de Bièvre, 'The Urban Subconscious: the Art of Leiden and Delft', *Art History*, 18: 2, 1995, 234–6.

64 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World* (1965), trans. Hélène Iswolsky, Bloomington, IN, 1984, 153–4, 160–1, 185–7, discusses the figure of the quack in relation to what is in effect the chronotope of the marketplace and its associations with the rowdiest forms of popular culture.

65 David R. Smith, '"I Janus": Privacy and the Gentlemanly Ideal in Rembrandt's Portraits of Jan Six', *Art History*, 11: 1, 1988, 42–63.

66 At one point I argued that Maes's source for *The Eavesdropper* and its variations was a lost *Family Portrait* by Carel Fabritius, and still think that Fabritius's image played a role in shaping Maes's invention, most obviously in the view of a country estate seen through the background doorway in *The Eavesdropper*. A similar view appeared in the same place in Fabritius's painting. In any case, as another of Rembrandt's followers, Fabritius doubtless was equally indebted to the double threshold in the etching for his own design. See David R. Smith, 'Carel Fabritius and Portraiture in Delft', *Art History*, 13: 2, 1990, 151–74.

67 Jochen Becker, 'Are these Girls really so neat? On Kitchen Scenes and Method', in Freedberg and de Vries, *Art in History*, 139–73.

68 De Jongh, *Tot Lering*, 87–9, no. 16; 149, no. 34.

69 Martha Hollander, 'The divided household of Nicolaes Maes', *Word & Image*, 10, 1994, 138–55; see also Hollander, *An Entrance*, 103–48. She devotes considerable attention to the increasingly fluid, in some ways egalitarian, relationships between mistresses and maids in seventeenth-century Dutch society. See also Sellin, *Fractured Families*, 48–52, 57–8, 115–7, 125–7. There are also some parallels to Hollander's observations in Jürgen Müller, 'Vom lauten und vom leisen Betrachten. Ironischen Bildstrukturen in der holländischen Genremalerei des 17. Jahrhunderts', in *Intertextualität in der frühen Neuzeit: Studien zu ihren theoretischen und praktischen Perspektiven*, eds Wilhelm Kühlmann and Wolfgang Neuber, Frankfurt am Main, 1994, 621–8.

70 Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Gossip*, New York, 1985, 3–46, 147–70.

71 Hollander, 'The divided household', 1994, 147. William Willeford, *The Fool and his Sceptre*, Evanston, 1969, provides a particularly insightful and comprehensive discussion of fools, jesters and the traditions and meanings associated with them. See especially his chapter on 'Some basic Characteristics of the Fool', 9–29. The trickster is a character found in cultures throughout the world, and is in some ways a more universal embodiment of qualities of social inversion and subversion associated with the fool. For example, the Greek god Hermes is a trickster figure. On this subject, see Paul Radin, *The Trickster: a Study in American Indian Mythology* (1956), New York, 1972, 124–69. In the same book, see also the essays by Karl Kerényi, 'The Trickster in relation to Greek Mythology', 173–91, and Carl Gustav Jung, 'On the Psychology of the Trickster Figure', 195–211. Another especially interesting anthropological discussion of the trickster theme is Barbara Babcock-Abrahams, '"A tolerated Margin of Mess": the Trickster and his Tales reconsidered', *Journal of the Folklore Institute*, 11: 3, 1975, 147–86.

72 Joaneath Spicer, 'An Experiment with Perspective by Gabriel Metsu', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 51: 4, 1988, 574–83.

73 Willeford, *The Fool,* 129–47, discusses the specific association of fools with doorways and thresholds, another connection that ties them to Maes's eavesdroppers.

74 Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time', 248–9.

75 Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (1908), trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee, Chicago, 1960, 1–13, 19–25, 57–61, 157–9. For further anthropological insights into the theme, see Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: symbolic Action in human Society*, Ithaca and London, 1974, 23–57, 231–98.

76 Both Dou's *Young Mother* (fig. 14) and Slingelandt's *Distinguished Family* (fig. 15) feature background doorways, with servants working in the kitchens behind them. But here and elsewhere in art of the LeidenSchool, the effect is the opposite of Maes's split perspective. Instead of creating a liminal interplay between upper- and lower-class life, these darkened, hard-to-read kitchens serve to reinforce class division and social hierarchy. On these artists' preoccupation with arches and niches and their accompanying sense of closure, see note 55. See note 53.

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77 Bakhtin discusses threshold imagery in such broad metaphorical terms in the writings of Dostoevsky, whom he considers the supreme master of the theme in literature. See Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson, Minneapolis, 1984, 61–3, 73, 111, 170–1, 175–6. Also see Heidi de Mare, 'The domestic Boundary as Ritual Area in seventeenth-century Holland', in *Urban Rituals in Italy and the Netherlands,* eds Heidi de Mare and Anna Vos, Assen, 1993, 109–31, and Kuretsky, *Jacob Ochtervelt*, 34–9.

78 Hollander, *An Entrance*, 110–12. See also David R. Smith, 'Privacy, Realism, and the Novelistic in seventeenth-century Dutch Painting', in *L'Art et les révolutions: Acts, XVIIe congrès international d'histoire de l'Art,* 3: *L'Art et les transformations sociales révolutionnaires*, Strasbourg, 1992, 36–9.

79 Peter C. Sutton, *Pieter de Hooch*, Oxford, 1980, 86, no. 39. Other paintings in this group include the two versions of *The Bedroom*, in Karlsruhe, 86–7, no. 40A, and the National Gallery of Art, 87, no. 40B (plate 22); *Figures drinking in a Courtyard with an Arbour* in Edinburgh, 1658, 84, no. 33; *Courtyard of a House in Delft with a Woman and Child,* in the National Gallery, London, 1658, 84–5, no. 34; *A Woman and a Child in a Pantry,* in the Rijksmuseum, 83, no. 31; *A Woman delousing a Child's Hair,* in the Rijksmuseum, 88, no. 42; and *A Woman lacing her Bodice beside a Cradle,* in the Staatliche Museen, Berlin-Dahlem, 91, no. 51. All these compositions have two apertures in the background, though in several cases one is a map, a picture, a hearth, or a bed, not a doorway. Nevertheless, they present what is, in effect, an opposition and a choice, as do the double thresholds in Maes's paintings (plate 20). On de Hooch's debts to Maes, see Walter Liedtke, *A View of Delft: Vermeer and his Contemporaries*, Zwolle, 2000, 169–70, 173–5, Hollander, *An Entrance*, 50–1, 188–9, and Sutton, *Pieter de Hooch,* 20–2. De Hooch may also have been indebted to Fabritius's lost *Family Portrait,* mentioned in note 66. See Smith, 'Carel Fabritus', 160.

80 Smith, 'Privacy, Realism', 37–42, 47–8. Also see Mikhail M. Bahktin, 'The *Bildungsroman* and its Significance in the History of Realism (toward a historical Typology of the Novel)', in *Speech Genres and other late Essays*, eds Caryl. Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Vern W. McGee, Austin, TX, 1986, 23–54.

81 Alison McNeil Kettering, 'Ter Borch's Ladies in Satin', *Art History*, 16, 1993, 95–124, deals at length with the subtleties of social behaviour and aesthetic form in Dutch high-life painting, as well as with the methodological problems they have provoked among scholars. She does not, however, explore the issue of irony as such. On this matter, see also Smith, 'Irony and Civility', 419–29. Also see note 70.

82 I have, however, dealt with this question from a variety of perspectives in many of the writings cited in these notes. See Smith, 'Irony and Civility'; Smith, 'Courtesy and its Discontents'; Smith, 'Willem Buytewech'; Smith, '"I Janus"'; Smith, 'Carel Fabritus'; and Smith, 'Privacy, Realism'.

83 For a useful survey of the letter-writer theme in Dutch art, see Peter C. Sutton, 'Love Letters: Dutch Genre Paintings in the Age of Vermeer', in *Love Letters: Dutch Genre Paintings in the Age of Vermeer*, exhib. cat., Greenwich, CT: Bruce Museum of Arts and Science, 2003, 14–49. In this same catalogue see also Lisa Vergara, 'Women, Letters, Artistic Beauty: Vermeer's Theme and Variations', 50–62, on Vermeer's epistolary paintings in particular. Also see Alpers, *Art of Describing*, 192–207.

84 Wayne Franits, *Dutch Seventeenth-Century Genre Painting*, New Haven, 2004, 194–5. The picture on the wall is based on a print of the subject by Antonio Tempesta, but de Jongh edited it to make the figures in the two spaces equal and metaphorically interchangeable. See also Dieter Beaujean, *Bilder in Bildern: Studien zur niederländischen Malerei des siebzehnten Jahrhunderts*, Weimar, 2001, 141–2.

85 Kettering, 'Ladies in Satin', 101–15.

86 Susan Donahue Kuretsky, 'Rembrandt at the Threshold', in *Rembrandt, Rubens, and the Art of their Time: recent Perspectives*; *Papers in Art History from the Pennsylvania State University*, 11, eds Roland E. Fleischer and Susan C. Scott, University Park, 1997, 60–105. On Rembrandt's threshold imagery in relation to his portraiture and, indirectly, to some of the social concerns reflected in Dutch high-life genre scenes, see Smith, '"I Janus"', 43–57. On Rembrandt's distinctive use of themes that transcend individual story lines, see Julius S. Held, 'Rembrandt and the Book of Tobit', in *Rembrandt Studies*, Princeton, 1991, 131–43.

87 Kuretsky, 'Rembrandt', 68–9.

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