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(Re)visioning Heterotopia: The Function of Mirrors and Reflection in Seventeenth-Century Painting

The enigmatic term “heterotopia,” popularized by Michel Foucault in his text *The Order of Things* (1966), describes sites that undermine stable relationships, disrupt conventions of order, and negate straightforward categorization. Heterotopias also reflect a curious slippage between the familiar and the unfamiliar, a property expressed by Sigmund Freud’s notion of the ‘uncanny.’¹ Heterotopic sites seem familiar, as they are subsumed within a society’s conventional ordering system that links them to other sites, yet they are unfamiliar in that they simultaneously contradict the premises by which these relationships are sustained.² By using heterotopic theory to analyze the function of mirrors and reflections in seventeenth-century Dutch paintings, it is possible to illuminate the spatial complexity of these scenes, a characteristic that is initially masked by the paintings’ seemingly accurate transcription of an observed reality. The purpose of this visual play between nature and painterly artifice is to challenge vision’s role in producing empirical knowledge.

Foucault’s interest in the breakdown of order characterizing heterotopias was inspired by his response to Borges’ passage from a Chinese encyclopaedia, which uses an alphabetical ordering system to narrow the distinction between fantastic creatures of the imagination and those that exist in reality. Thus, the effect of this passage is to “disturb and threaten with collapse our age-old distinction between

1 Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny,” in *Art and Literature*. The Penguin Freud Library vol. 14. (Harmondworth: Penguin, 1990), 363 – 64. Freud claims that linguistic usage has transformed *das Heimliche* (homely, familiar) into its opposite, *das Unheimliche*: “this uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression.”

2 Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 24.

the Same and the Other.”³ Similarly, Freud’s discussion of the doubling effect as a source of the ‘uncanny’ also explores the dissolution of the ideological bounds separating the Same and the Other, a phenomenon with important ties to mirrors and reflection, as indicated by Jacques Lacan’s renowned essay “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function” (1949).⁴ The parallels between Freud’s theory of the ‘uncanny’ and Foucault’s literary study of heterotopia, culminating with this common interest in mirrors and reflection, underscore the underlying complexity of these visual devices through their ability to destabilize the seemingly straightforward transcription of real space that characterizes many seventeenth-century depictions. By using Foucault’s explanation of heterotopia, I intend to show how mirrored surfaces in Diego Velázquez’s *Las Meninas*, Clara Peeter’s *Wunderkammer*, Gabriel Metsu’s *Young Woman at the Virginal Playing with a Dog*, and Johannes Vermeer’s *Allegory of Faith* maintain and dismantle pictorial order to heighten the viewer’s awareness of vision itself. In this context, the term “vision” refers to both its literal and metaphorical implications. Taken literally, it describes the process of looking; in its metaphorical sense, it indicates the artwork’s role as a product of the artist’s imagination. Each of these paintings uses mirrors in a different way to destabilize, in the same manner as Foucault’s heterotopias, the viewer’s initial reading of these works as unequivocal depictions of real space.

It seems pertinent to borrow Foucault’s concept of heterotopia from its more pervasive application in literary theory and apply it to seventeenth-century aesthetics, as the opening chapter of *The Order of Things* is devoted to an analysis of Diego Velázquez’s painting, *Las Meninas*. While Foucault’s explication of *Las Meninas* discusses the heterotopic nature of the painting’s spatial configuration, the term “heterotopia” itself is never used. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to expose the complexities of seventeenth-century verisimilitude and uncover the

3 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), xvi.

4 Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny,” in *Art and Literature*. The Penguin Freud Library vol. 14. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), 356.

ideological links that structure Foucault's theory of ordering systems. Foucault describes the significance of resemblance and repetition as means of generating knowledge in Western culture, and cites representational painting, i.e., painting as a "mirror of nature," as one example.⁵ Mirror imagery surfaces again in his discussion of *aemulatio*, the idea that patterns of resemblance can occur between things despite the spatial distance separating them: "There is something in emulation of the reflection of the mirror: it is the means whereby things scattered through the universe can answer one another."⁶ This sense of interconnectivity is articulated by Foucault's archaeological study as a whole. He claims, "Archaeology, addressing itself to the general space of knowledge, to its configuration, and to the mode of being of the things that appear in it, defines systems of simultaneity."⁷ The similarity between Foucault's concept of heterotopia and the construction of space in seventeenth-century aesthetics constitutes one such "system of simultaneity." By exposing the mirror's function as the ideological parallel connecting Foucault's literary model of heterotopias to the construction of space in seventeenth-century art, I intend to fill in the interstices of his conceptual framework.

This transition from literature to aesthetics can be signalled by turning once again to Freud's essay on the 'uncanny.' Freud states, "The imaginative writer has this licence among many others, that he can select his world of representation so that it either coincides with the realities we are familiar with or departs from them in what particulars he pleases."⁸ By analyzing how Foucault describes the spatial construction of *Las Meninas*, it is evident that Velázquez has strategically manipulated the laws of pictorial construction, the ordering principles that encourage us to view the scene as a realistic space. As a result, multiple 'realities'

5 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 19.

6 Ibid., 22.

7 Ibid., xxv.

8 Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," in *Art and Literature*. The Penguin Freud Library vol. 14. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), 373.

are juxtaposed. It is even more intriguing that Foucault explains the importance of the mirror in uniting these realities. The mirror's surface reflects the figures that Velázquez observes in the objective, physical reality in which he is painting. They are identified as King Philip the IV and Queen Mariana. However, these figures also gaze back at the painter from a different material reality – the reality of the painted surface itself, composed of a careful arrangement of coloured pigments.⁹ Thus, Foucault claims, “The mirror provides a metathesis of visibility that affects both the space represented in the picture and its nature as representation.”¹⁰

Yet, the mirror in *Las Meninas* does not only self-referentially signal the reality of the work as a representation in paint. The gaze of the figures within its frame is also significant in establishing how the painting functions as a heterotopic space. Roland Barthes defines the gaze as a visual tool through which time becomes endless. By means of the gaze, “you [the viewer] keep on being born, you are sustained, carried to the end of a movement which is of infinite origin... and which appears in an eternal state of suspension.”¹¹ This unceasing continuum signals an “absolute break with traditional time,” a quality that Foucault characterizes as a fundamental feature of heterotopias.¹²

Moreover, the function of the gaze in *Las Meninas* also relates to Foucault's definition of heterotopias as sites that are always defined by a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and renders them accessible. Foucault suggests, “Everyone can enter into these heterotopic sites, but in fact that is only an illusion: we think we enter where we are, by the very fact that we enter, excluded.”¹³ This statement is directly echoed in his explanation of *Las Meninas*. Foucault claims that

9 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 9.

10 Ibid.

11 Roland Barthes, “The World as Object,” in *Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 12.

12 Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 26.

13 Ibid.

Velázquez's gaze focuses on the viewers only because we seem to occupy the same space as the painter's subject: "We, the spectators, are an additional factor. Though greeted by [the painter's] gaze, we are also dismissed by it, replaced by that which was always there before we were: the model itself."¹⁴ Since the surface of the large canvas in *Las Meninas* remains invisible, a definite relationship between the gazes can never be established. As a result, the roles of subject and object, model and spectator are infinitely interchanged in a relationship that recalls the heterotopia's link to indefinitely accumulating time.¹⁵

The mirrored gaze of the king and queen plays an integral role in maintaining this unceasing spatial exchange between viewer and subject. In his essay "Of Other Spaces," Foucault expands upon the complex relationship between mirrors and space, describing mirrors as unique sites in which the fictive space of utopias and the real space of heterotopias converge. The mirror is a utopia in the sense that it projects a virtual space behind its surface, a space in which the observer is misperceived as being present.¹⁶ Conversely, the mirror is also heterotopic due to the oblique manner in which it affirms the observer's position in real space: "it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there."¹⁷

The mirror in *Las Meninas* constitutes a utopian space in that it shows us the king and queen in what is essentially a "placeless place." They appear in the space behind the surface of the mirror, which is itself not a physical object but rather an image crafted in paint. Yet, the mirror also functions as a utopia in a different respect. While the previous example relies on the definition of *utopia* as

14 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 5.

15 Ibid.

16 Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 24.

17 Ibid.

a non-place, the example to follow will combine this definition with another aspect of the term: the description of society in an ideal form. According to Joel Snyder, the mirror in *Las Meninas* is a visual conceit that recalls a type of book known in English as “the mirror of the prince.” The purpose of these texts was to edify royalty, informing them of model behaviour, character, and thought.¹⁸ Thus, the “mirrors of princes” attest to the longstanding correlation between mirrors and the construction of the self. Moreover, they reinforce the mirror’s connection to the definition of utopia as an immaterial place, as these ideal traits are not visibly present. By representing the king and queen in the mirror within the painting, metaphorically suggesting their status as ideal rulers, the painting visually presents the courtly values discussed in contemporary literature.¹⁹

The mirror in Velázquez’s painting also acts as a heterotopic space by operating within the parameters of naturalistic pictorial representation while simultaneously calling attention to these constraints. According to Foucault, *Las Meninas* is a representation of representation.²⁰ There are numerous pictorial devices that elicit this notion, such as the painter standing with his palette poised in front of a large canvas with its back to the viewer, the numerous depictions of paintings that hang in the room, and the reciprocal gaze shared by spectators and several of the painted figures. Lastly, Foucault describes the mirror as “the frailest duplication of representation” because its reflection is so distant, so deeply entrenched in an unreal space that is disconnected from the gazes of the figures staring out into the ‘real’ space beyond the picture’s frame.²¹ As a representation of representation, the painting itself functions as a mirror, i.e. as an intermediary between illusory utopian space and the perplexing space of heterotopias.

In her text *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (1983),

18 Joel Snyder, “*Las Meninas* and the Mirror of the Prince,” *Critical Inquiry* 11, no. 4 (June 1985): 558.

19 *Ibid.*, 559.

20 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 335.

21 *Ibid.*

Svetlana Alpers observes that seventeenth-century Dutch paintings undermine the conventional mode of reading pictorial realism as an Albertian window to the world. Instead, Dutch paintings display an emphasis on surface, making them analogous to “a mirror or a map, but not a window.”²² Like mirrors, Dutch realism creates the illusion of depth on a two-dimensional surface. Yet, like heterotopias, which undermine the set of spatial relations to which they belong, the realistic appearance of seventeenth-century Dutch scenes is contested by the very devices that were initially employed to conjure the illusion. As a result, they reveal the artifice of pictorial construction, focusing the spectator’s attention on the act of viewing itself.

One convention used by Dutch artists to exploit the contrived nature of seemingly realistic scenes is the reflected self-portrait. An early example of the use of this device is Clara Peeters’ reflected image in the gilt cup of *Wunderkammer*, her still-life painting from 1612. As art historian Celeste Brusati indicates, Peeters’s self-images were not mere renditions of the reflections she observed in the goblet’s surface. By depicting herself with her palette in hand, Peeters indicates to the viewer her role in cleverly contriving the realistic scene, “[duplicating] the mirrorlike artifice of the picture as a whole.”²³ This visual conceit causes the painting to function as a heterotopic space through its conformation to the conventions of the realist canon while simultaneously exposing the true reality of the scene, i.e., its existence as a two-dimensional image in paint.

Furthermore, Peeters’ self-image is reflected multiple times. This detail is significant in light of Foucault’s observation that “representation – whether in the service of pleasure or of knowledge – was posited as a form of repetition.”²⁴ He also underscores the importance of resemblance as an underlying ordering principle

22 Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), xxv.

23 Celeste Brusati, “Natural Artifice and Material Values in Dutch Still Life,” in *Looking at Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art: Realism Reconsidered*, ed. Wayne Franits (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 151.

24 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 19.

that facilitates knowledge formation. Thus, the multiple replications of Peeters' self-portrait in the bosses of the gilt cup function as a means of ordering the pictorial surface and, like the mirror in *Las Meninas*, they signal the correlation between mirror imagery and self-construction. In addition, it has been suggested that the act of recording her image in a work of art was a possible attempt to overcome the transience of human life by sustaining her presence over time.²⁵ This reading aligns the painting with Foucault's description of heterotopias as sites that are associated with the indefinite accumulation of time.²⁶

The painting's title also indicates how the work relates to the theme of accumulated time. *Wunderkammers*, or cabinets of curiosities, were perceived as microcosms of the world, as they contained artifacts from different global locales in a single space. These artifacts included wonders of nature and technological feats of human craftsmanship, as well as painterly illusions.²⁷ In Peeters' painting, the stoneware vase holding the flowers is identified as German, the three shells are from Asia and the Caribbean, and the celadon bowl was imported from China.²⁸ Moreover, the vase of flowers in itself acts in the same manner as a *wunderkammer* by bringing together species of flowers that originated in different parts of the world.²⁹ In Foucault's discussion of the garden as a heterotopic space, he mentions how the gardens of the Persians were meant to symbolically link the four corners of the globe by incorporating vegetation from these disparate locations within a singular rectilinear confine.³⁰

25 Pamela Hibbs Decoteau, *Clara Peeters 1594 – c. 1640 and the Development of Still-Life Painting in Northern Europe* (Lingen: Luca Verl, 1992), 24.

26 Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 26.

27 Angela Ndaliansi, *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press, 2004), 172 – 73.

28 Celeste Brusati, "Natural Artifice and Material Values in Dutch Still Life," in *Looking at Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art: Realism Reconsidered*, ed. Wayne Franits (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 151.

29 Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990), 107.

30 Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 25.

Yet, Foucault contrasts this type of heterotopia, directed toward the eternal, with heterotopic spaces that are “absolutely temporal,” connected to “time in its most fleeting, transitory, precarious aspect.”³¹ Curiously, the reflective objects in Peeters’ still life combine the concept of heterotopia related to the eternal with heterotopia in its temporal form through their illustration of the *vanitas* theme. The moral message conveyed by *vanitas* images is that one should not place undue worth on material goods, which will soon fade and decay. This message is presented in *Wunderkammer* through the vase of flowers. Many of the blooms are beginning to wilt and one flower has even been displaced from the vase, lying in an atypical horizontal format on the table’s surface. In other words, Peeters’ painting appears to collapse the notion of an eternal heterotopic space with that of the absolutely temporal – it is a doubling of heterotopic space.

In addition, the dual signification of the flower bouquet, as a sign of the *wunderkammer*’s unceasing preservation of culture on one hand and an emblem for life’s ephemeral nature on the other, shares an important connection with Foucault’s theories. Norman Bryson underscores the similarity between Dutch still lifes and Foucault’s research on ordering systems by stating, “As the work of Foucault emphasises, several modes of knowledge production can co-exist in a single era (and a single work).”³² The duality implicit in seventeenth-century Dutch painting is manifest in a variety of ways. Therefore, while it complicates what is ostensibly a faithful representation of nature, as a constant element of Dutch representations it also paradoxically contributes to the underlying system of order according to which these images were interpreted by seventeenth-century viewers. For current scholars, perhaps the most controversial manifestation of duality occurs in *vanitas* scenes. According to Bryson, *vanitas* imagery is flawed by an inherent contradiction. While these scenes attempt to convey the moral message that material goods are

31 Ibid., 26.

32 Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990), 107.

mere indulgences that will fade over time, they present this message in the form of a painting, which is itself a material pleasure.³³ It is interesting to note that Dutch paintings, characterized as “mirrors of nature,” share with the mirror its value as a luxury item. Sabine Melchior-Bonnet’s study reveals that mirrors were still rare prior to 1630 and therefore highly prized.³⁴

In *Wunderkammer*, reflections play an important role in emphasizing the richness of the materials, thereby subverting the moral message of the *vanitas* theme. As Bryson observes, the objects in Dutch still lives are often rendered so that they appear finer than the real objects they duplicate. Consequently, the painter’s technical virtuosity is shown to be superior to that of the craftsman or metalsmith responsible for the initial fabrication of these objects.³⁵ This hierarchy is reinforced to an unprecedented degree in Peeters’ still life through the inclusion of the reflected self-portrait in her painted rendition of the elaborate gold cup. Her ability to heighten the opulence of the objects in *Wunderkammer* is the result of a technique that Carel van Mander describes as *reflexy-const*, “the art of depicting reflections.”³⁶ Part of the mastering of *reflexy-const* includes working to “conform painting to mirroring, the process of natural imitation that ensues on smooth lustrous surfaces.”³⁷ Evidence of this technique is visible in Peeters’ treatment of the gilt cups. In addition, the pile of golden coins alludes to the value placed on these artifacts.

While it is seemingly paradoxical to present the *vanitas* message through sumptuous visual display, Bryson suggests that the appeal of *vanitas* images may

33 Ibid., 116.

34 Sabine Melchior-Bonnet, *The Mirror: A History*, trans. Katharine H. Jewett (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 28.

35 Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990), 124.

36 Walter S. Melion, *Shaping the Netherlandish Canon: Karel van Mander's *Schilder-Boeck** (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 70.

37 Ibid., 72.

result from their self-conscious acceptance of this intrinsic contradiction.³⁸ He states, “The genre changes at once if we begin with the hypothesis that the *vanitas* is *deliberately* built on paradox, and that the conflict between world-rejection and worldly ensnarement is in fact its governing principle.”³⁹ While it is only possible in the precarious non-space of language to connect the incongruous categories in Borges’ excerpt from the Chinese encyclopaedia, it is similarly impossible except in the pictorial field of *vanitas* imagery to superimpose society’s affinity for material wealth with the reminder that these objects are spiritually insignificant. Curiously, Bryson’s comment that this contradiction is the “governing principle” of *vanitas* scenes suggests that, rather than subverting a sense of order, it in fact establishes order.

Therefore, *vanitas* paintings, like heterotopias, are linked to the cultural codes that define them and yet they subvert these codes in order to reveal order in its pure state. According to Foucault, “it is on the basis of this newly perceived order that the codes of language, perception, and practice are criticized and rendered partially invalid.”⁴⁰ Evidence of this partial invalidation of ordering systems is apparent in how seventeenth-century Dutch artists construct pictorial space. While they employ Renaissance theories of perspective to generate a naturalistic setting, their pictures often display an acute attention to surface detail rather than spatial depth.⁴¹ This observation is substantiated by Clara Peeters’ still life of 1612. The position of the objects in space appears realistic, but spatial recession is restricted by the dark background and, instead, the viewer’s gaze is captivated by the artist’s meticulous differentiation of the objects’ respective surface textures. Brusati indicates that

38 Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990), 117.

39 Ibid.

40 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), xxii.

41 Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), xxi.

“through the play of light differentially registered on these surfaces, the *reflexy-const...* serves to mobilize the beholder’s gaze and facilitate the eye’s movement through the image.”⁴² The ordering impulse signified through reflective surfaces alludes to a new system of viewing that emphasizes careful empirical observation as a means of generating knowledge. As Alpers’ study suggests, Dutch artists’ heightened interest in empirical detail was undoubtedly influenced by the technical proficiency of lens grinders in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic, whose efforts led to considerable advancements in the science of optics.⁴³ This correlation between the treatment of space in Dutch art and the scientific developments in that culture relates to another characteristic of heterotopias: they are spaces that are characterized by a precisely defined function within the society in which they operate.⁴⁴

Despite the contextual specificity of heterotopic spaces, the correlation between seventeenth-century Dutch paintings and Foucault’s theory of heterotopias underscores Foucault’s insistence on the recurrence of certain ideological similarities over time. He attributes this phenomenon to a continuous Hegelian counterbalance between sympathy and antipathy, which “explains how things grow, develop, intermingle, disappear, die, yet endlessly find themselves again.”⁴⁵ Interestingly, this underlying “system of similitude” is inherent in the concept of the “baroque,” reinforced by Gilles Deleuze’s explanation of “the fold”⁴⁶ and Henri Focillon’s statement that “the Baroque state reveals identical traits existing

42 Celeste Brusati, “Natural Artifice and Material Values in Dutch Still Life,” in *Looking at Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art: Realism Reconsidered*, ed. Wayne Franits (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 153.

43 Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 25.

44 Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 25.

45 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 28.

46 Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993). The baroque “fold” is the notion that fragments of matter, space, and time are linked in a complex series of interrelations that are continuously defined and redefined, thereby underscoring the non-linear nature of knowledge production.

as constants within the most diverse environments and periods of time.”⁴⁷ This claim underscores the relevance of drawing conceptual parallels between art of the seventeenth-century (the historical period that has been termed “baroque”) and Foucault’s twentieth-century theory of heterotopias.

Dutch art of the baroque shares an important similarity with Foucault’s writings that makes comparison between the two particularly relevant. While Foucault’s explanation of heterotopic spaces retains a literary focus, Dutch paintings also feature a particular emphasis on text. As Alpers reveals, the text in Dutch images is part of the scenes themselves; the paintings are not visual illustrations of a narrative that exists prior to their fabrication.⁴⁸ The inscription on the virginal in Gabriel Metsu’s painting *Young Woman at the Virginal Playing with a Dog* acts as one example of this integration of text and image common in seventeenth-century Dutch paintings. The text on the virginal flattens the pictorial field and draws our attention to the surface of the painting itself, similar to the use of *reflexy-const* in Peeters’ still life. This attention to surface, in contrast to the illusion of recessive space suggested by the angle of the floorboards and the open doorway, causes the painting to function like a mirror in that it is a flat surface that simulates spatial depth.

The correlation between Dutch realism and mirrors is reinforced by the inclusion of the mirror on the back wall of Metsu’s painting. Like the mirror in *Las Meninas*, this mirror also signals the painting’s role as a heterotopic space by alluding to the work’s simultaneous inclusion and exclusion of the viewer’s presence. The angle of the floorboards, the door frame, the broom, the arms of the two women, and the red drapery all point to the mirror, leading the spectator’s eye through the threshold marked by the dog and into the contrived pictorial space of the back room. Thus, the painting seems to covertly take the viewer into account by presenting a

47 Henri Focillon, *The Life of Forms in Art*, trans. Charles Beecher Hogan and George Kubler (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1942), 15.

48 Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 169.

space that appears to extend from the “real” space in which the viewer is positioned. Because of the painting’s convincing illusionism, the viewer may expect to see his or her reflection in the mirror. However, the drapery is strategically positioned so that it covers the mirror’s surface. The mirror was a typical symbol of painting as a reflection of the world;⁴⁹ thus, covering its surface symbolically suggests that the viewer is denied access to this pictorial space.

The duality between “real” space and pictorial artifice suggested by the mirror is further indicated by the window that is partially cut off by the doorframe. The similar symbolic role of the mirror and window is signalled visually by the artist’s decision to position the top of the mirror’s frame at the same level as the horizontal division separating the window into equal panes. These two pictorial elements are also linked by the swath of red drapery that extends from the top of the window to cover the mirror. Like the mirror, the treatment of the window emphasizes the two-dimensional nature of the painted canvas where the viewer would expect to see a projection of seemingly three-dimensional space beyond the surface of the glass. While the window should look out onto a street, the grid of rectilinear shapes presented to the eye does not depict an identifiable object: “This detail of Metsu’s picture discreetly articulates that... before being a reflection of the tangible world or the creation of an illusory space, a painting is a geometric composition of colours, an organization of colored surfaces.”⁵⁰

This ordering principle is reinforced by the entirety of the composition, which is structured through the geometric configuration of various framing devices, including the virginal, the doorframe, the window, and the mirror.⁵¹ Based on this carefully conceived order, the picture of the domestic scene can perhaps be characterized as a “heterotopia of compensation”: a “real space, as perfect,

49 Daniel Arasse, “Vermeer’s Private Allegories,” in *Vermeer Studies*, eds. Ivan Gaskell and Michiel Jonker (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 347.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.

as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill-constructed, and jumbled.”⁵² Therefore, while Peeters’ reflected self-portraits in the gilt cup openly reveal the artist’s role in crafting pictorial order, the covered mirror in Metsu’s painting signifies more covertly the rational ordering of space through artistic virtuosity. This difference in representation exposes the variety of forms that heterotopias can take and emphasizes the subtle complexities of Dutch pictorial construction in the seventeenth century.

Like *Young Woman at the Virginal Playing with a Dog*, Vermeer’s *Allegory of Faith* highlights the duality between painterly illusion and the “real” space beyond the picture’s frame. In Metsu’s painting, this contrast is signalled through the covered mirror, whereas in *Allegory of Faith* it is indicated by the artist’s treatment of the reflection in the glass orb. The orb’s reflection functions as a heterotopic space through its juxtaposition of multiple, seemingly incongruous realities. On one level, it seems to occupy the illusionary space within the picture’s setting, as it hangs by a ribbon from the ceiling rafters. The orb’s position within this pictorial space is reaffirmed by the woman’s gaze, which is directed towards it. Yet, this reality is contradicted by the orb’s existence as a two-dimensional object crafted in paint, a reality that the viewer confirms through his or her presence in front of the work. A third reality is introduced if we consider the orb’s reflection. Depicted in the glass is a reflection of a window in Vermeer’s studio. One of the window’s shutters has been closed, which eliminates the appearance of a cross formed by the mullions separating the panes of glass. Had the shutter been opened to produce the reflection of the cross, the painted orb would remain true to the conventions of mimetic representation, while simultaneously acting as a visual symbol adopted from Willem Hesius’ *Emblemata* to signify the soul’s ability to “comprehend” through Faith that which transcends the capacities of the human mind.⁵³ Nevertheless, the deliberate

52 Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 27.

53 Daniel Arasse, “Vermeer’s Private Allegories,” in *Vermeer Studies*, eds. Ivan Gaskell and Michiel Jonker (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 343.

elimination of the cross places greater emphasis on the fact that the painting was constructed in the “real” space of the painter’s studio.

However, if Vermeer’s aim was to indicate his role in crafting the mimetically convincing representation, it is peculiar that he does not depict himself in the orb’s reflection, as this was a common trope used by Dutch artists to underscore their skill as masters of pictorial realism.⁵⁴ Vermeer’s absence is important to the creation of a heterotopic space, as it eliminates the painting’s affiliation with a particular point in time. Consequently, it is seemingly possible for viewers to perceive the reflection in the orb as a visual approximation of the space in which they stand. However, as Foucault’s theory of heterotopias explains, the viewers’ access to this space is an illusion because they too are excluded from the orb’s reflection in a manner similar to the effect of the covered mirror in Metsu’s painting.⁵⁵ Furthermore, the one identifiable object in the orb’s reflection is the window; yet, this feature is absent from Vermeer’s painting, as it would appear on the wall that is covered by the large tapestry in the foreground. Its absence from the picture further emphasizes the incompatibility between the illusory space of the painting, the “real” space of the painter as he constructs the image, and the space occupied by the spectator who observes the work.

The mirrors and reflective elements in the four aforementioned paintings – *Las Meninas*, *Wunderkammer*, *Young Woman at the Virginal Playing with a Dog*, and *Allegory of Faith* – all signify how these works function as heterotopic spaces in different respects. Like Foucault’s literary application of the concept, which illustrates how heterotopias serve to “desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, [and] contest the very possibility of grammar at its source,”⁵⁶ these “visual heterotopias” problematize the ostensibly straightforward relation between viewers and mimetic representations. The purpose of subverting this relationship is to

54 Ibid., 344.

55 Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 26.

56 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), xix.

underscore how vision operates to produce knowledge.

As mirrors and reflections show, vision can be manipulated; the eye can be fooled. According to the seventeenth-century artist Samuel van Hoogstraten, “A perfect painting is like a mirror of nature which makes things which do not actually exist appear to exist, and thus deceives in a permissible, pleasurable, and praiseworthy manner.”⁵⁷ His statement suggests that the underlying principles by which empirical knowledge is ordered are as tenuous as the aphasiac’s categorical groupings of coloured wool that Foucault mentions in the preface to *The Order of Things*.⁵⁸ Yet, new systems of order can be developed by calling attention to the structural underpinnings of order itself: this is the objective sought by heterotopias. The function of heterotopias as a means of unveiling ordering systems is echoed by baroque aesthetics, as revealed by Deleuze’s clever observation that “the essence of the Baroque entails neither falling into nor emerging from illusion but rather *realizing* something in illusion itself.”⁵⁹

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57 Celeste Brusati, *Artifice and Illusion: The Art and Writing of Samuel van Hoogstraten* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 159.

58 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), xix – xx. Foucault mentions that aphasiacs will ceaselessly re-order the groups in which they have placed the skeins of wool because the relations according to which order is imposed are always “too wide not to be unstable.”

59 Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 125.

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