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Abstract

This thesis examines visual devices that distort, invert and toy with the conventions of linear perspective. The main object of analysis is Samuel Van Hoogstraten’s *Perspective Box with Views of a Dutch Interior* (1655-1660), a work that is unique for its consummate application of three distinctive modes of visual representation: linear perspective, trompe l’oeil and anamorphosis. Drawing on recent literature with regard to renaissance and baroque perspectival theories and practices, this thesis argues that Van Hoogstraten’s *Perspective Box* exposes the manner in which baroque forms of perspective, such as trompe l’oeil and anamorphosis, reveal the invisible mechanisms of renaissance linear perspective through the manipulation of its methods. In this way, Van Hoogstraten’s perspective box interrogates, but does not invalidate, the inescapable structure of the perspectival system.

Résumé

Cette thèse examine les systèmes visuels qui déforment, inversent et jouent avec les conventions de perspective linéaire. Le principal objet d’analyse est *Perspective Box with Views of a Dutch Interior* (1655-1660) par Samuel Van Hoogstraten, un travail qui est unique pour son application consommée de trois modes distinctifs de représentation visuelle: perspective linéaire, trompe l’oeil et anamorphisme. En engagé avec la littérature récente sur les théories et pratiques perspective de renaissance et baroque, cette thèse se dispute que la boîte perspective de Van Hoogstraten expose la façon dont les formes baroques de perspective, telles que le trompe l’oeil et anamorphisme, révèlent les mécanismes invisibles de la perspective linéaire de la renaissance par la manipulation de ses méthodes. De cette façon, la boîte perspective interroge, mais n'infirme pas, la structure inéluctable du système de perspective.
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Introduction:
Baroque Perspectives: Unveiling the Perspective Paradigm

If I want to catch a glimpse of the operation of perspective in the visual field, I will have to look at painting from the place I cannot see…1

Looking into Samuel Van Hoogstraten’s *Perspective Box with Views of a Dutch Interior* (1655-1660) (fig. 1-5) the captivating attributes of this unique art form are readily apparent. When seen through the peepholes on either end, the painted interior of a domestic scene appears as if in three dimensions, replete with standing furniture and house pets. As the name of these peculiar art forms attests, perspective boxes were created through an intricate arrangement of perspectival mathematics. However, visual engagement with Van Hoogstraten’s perspective box is quite unlike the act of looking at an image painted in perspective on a flat surface. As this thesis aims to show, there is something revealed in the process of looking into Van Hoogstraten’s box, something which usually remains hidden in perspectival paintings. As a consummate display of baroque perspective, Van Hoogstraten’s perspective box not only affords the viewer with a glimpse into private domestic space, but also allows a glimpse into the mechanisms of linear perspective. Through its consummate arrangement of perspectival optics, trompe l’oeil accuracy, and anamorphic distortion, Van Hoogstraten’s perspective box stands as a prime exposition of how the perspective paradigm controls pictorial vision. This thesis looks to explore baroque perspective in a variety of forms in order to discern what is unveiled when looking inside this box.

In order to adequately define what I mean by “baroque perspective”, it is necessary to outline how the baroque mode of vision has been theorized. In Martin Jay’s examination of the scopic regimes of modernity he argues that the scopic regime of the modern era is a “contested terrain,” which is characterized by a number of “visual subcultures.”2 In his analysis Jay explores the possibility of existing modes of vision which work against the dominant, hegemonic visual model of what he terms “Cartesian

perspectivalism.” As developed in the renaissance, linear perspective posited representational space as a mathematical and geometricalized terrain, seen through an eye which was understood to be “static, unblinking, and fixated.” However, the hegemony of linear perspective was not without the possibility of its own “internal contestation.”

Borrowing from Svetlana Alpers, Jay contends that the Northern, particularly seventeenth-century Dutch, “art of describing” can be identified as a “second state of perspectivalism,” which is defined through its far more radical disembodied perspectival eye. In Dutch art, we see the world without a privileged gaze of renaissance linearity.

As Alpers discusses in *The Art of Describing*, Dutch art amalgamates seeing and representation as it is a notably Keplerian mode of artistic depiction. In the renaissance tradition, argues Alpers, the picture is considered to be “a framed window to which we bring our eyes,” whereas in the Dutch mode of representation the picture takes the place “of the eye with the frame and our location thus left undefined.”

In addition to Cartesian perspectivalism and the art of describing, Jay discerns a third mode of vision which he argues exhibits a sharper alterity to the hegemony of perspective, namely, “the baroque”. For Jay, the baroque model of vision demonstrates an explicit unease with the dominant paradigm and stands as a permanent and often repressed alternative model of vision throughout the modern era. In a later publication, *Downcast Eyes* (1993), Jay illustrates the dynamics of the baroque mode of vision through a discussion of Hans Holbein’s painting *The Ambassadors* (1533) (fig. 20). Jay points to the anamorphically distorted skull at the bottom of the painting, which he argues stands as both a reminder of the fleeting qualities of earthly possessions, and the presence of another “alternative visual order” which works against the painting’s perspective. He concludes that in this portrait painting, Holbein combines “two visual orders in one planar space,” in order to subvert the idea of a perspectively unified seeing subject.

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3 Ibid.
4 Ibid., 7.
5 Ibid., 11.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid., 12.
Contrary to Jay’s assertion that there are of two distinct visual orders residing in Holbein’s painting, this thesis argues that there were a number of early modern art forms which toyed with the conventions of linear perspective in order to heighten or disguise its illusionism. Rather than operating as “alternative visual orders,” as Jay would have it, I argue that these works actually implement and expose the mechanisms of the hegemonic paradigm of perspective. The pictorial conceits of these works may first appear to subvert the dominant model through distortion and inversion, but the visual traits of these forms of perspective ultimately reveal how the viewer is caught in the perspectival system itself.

Martin Jay draws on Christine Buci-Glucksmann’s work on the baroque aesthetic. For Buci-Glucksmann, the baroque stands as a visual and cultural trait that can be found in the spheres of philosophy, literature and art. Although she locates the origins of the baroque in the early modern period, Buci-Glucksmann regards it as a continuing impulse throughout the modern era. In regards to aesthetics, she characterizes the baroque as a process of becoming, as a new mode of spatiality which questions but does not escape the “homogenous, geometric” space of the renaissance, perspectival aesthetic.10 A baroque understanding of vision and representation stands as an oscillation between the playfulness of rhetoric and the grounding of a scientifically based awareness, which reflects an ever temporal and ephemeral mode of visuality that remains highly structured.11 However, while Jay interprets the baroque model in terms of its overt alterity, Buci-Glucksmann’s theories actually demonstrate how baroque forms of perspective question and interrogate the renaissance perspectival paradigm through the paradigm itself. These forms implement, rather than provide an alternative to, the structures of linear perspective. It should be noted that while this thesis refers to Buci-Glucksmann’s theories on the baroque throughout the body of each chapter, my study centers on the analysis of works of art from the early modern period exclusively.

In addition to Buci-Glucksmann, this thesis owes much to the recent study of Hanneke Grootenboer on the uses of perspective in seventeenth-century Dutch art. In The Rhetoric of Perspective: Realism and Illusionism in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Still-Life

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11 Buci-Glucksmann, La Folie Du Voir, 41.
Painting. Grootenboer theorizes that baroque perspective is a mode of representation which responds to the pictorial regime of renaissance linear perspective by toying with its premises.\(^{12}\) She argues that baroque perspective is characterized by a relocated, often oblique viewpoint which is not afforded to the spectator in the structure of linear perspective. Through the examination of Dutch still life painting, trompe l’oeil and anamorphic imagery, Grootenboer elucidates the manner in which Dutch art often foregrounds the invisible structures of the perspective paradigm. In regards to still life painting, she stresses the empty space prevalent in such works which she argues meditates on the status of the vanishing point as void in perspectival configurations. Examining trompe l’oeil painting, Grootenboer discusses how this genre inverts the perspectival schema which in turn affords the viewer a glimpse into another side of visual representation. However, it is anamorphosis, a form of distorted perspective which forces the viewer to move to the periphery of the painting in order to resolve the illusion, which Grootenboer classifies as the representative of baroque perspective. In anamorphosis, argues Grootenboer, we have moved to the side of painting itself and look “so to speak, from the painting’s point of view.”\(^{13}\) By modifying the painting’s perspective, anamorphic imagery exposes its conventions through purposeful and playful distortion. The peripheral viewpoint reveals not only the operations of perspective, but more importantly, how perspective shapes and controls our visual understanding.

Pushing Grootenboer’s analysis further, this thesis aims to show that baroque perspective has more than one “representative.” As the following chapters will elucidate, the genres of trompe l’oeil, anamorphosis and perspective boxes all demonstrate a particularly baroque understanding of perspective. Each genre exposes the conventions of linear perspective through the system itself, by manipulating and reorienting its structure in order to provide a unique point of view from which to grasp its mechanisms.

In order to provide an adequate foundation from which to explore the interrogative possibilities of baroque perspective, an examination into the demonstration and theoretical implications of linear perspective is of primary concern. Consequently,


\(^{13}\) Ibid.
Chapter one explores the manner in which linear perspective has been theorized as a dominant paradigm of pictorial vision by art historians Erwin Panofsky and Hubert Damisch, as well as psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. This chapter investigates the history and theory of perspective, and moves towards a theoretical understanding of the relationship between this system and the seeing subject through an analysis of Lacan’s theories on the visual field. Furthermore, chapter one will problematize the latent use of such heavily coined terms as “Cartesian perspectivalism”, and the “disembodied eye” in perspectival theory, through Lyle Massey’s recent critique in her book *Picturing Space, Displacing Bodies: Anamorphosis in Early Modern Theories of Perspective*.

In chapter two, I move into an examination of baroque forms of perspective that toy with the structures of the perspective paradigm. In this chapter I explore the genre of Dutch trompe l’oeil painting, which arguably inverts the perspectival schema through its evident lack of depth and narrative content. As will be argued, through the inversion of the perspectival construct, trompe l’oeil objects protrude into the space of the beholder, interrogating and mirroring the subject’s inquisitive gaze. By providing the viewer with a glimpse into the other side of vision, trompe l’oeil painting reveals the manner in which we, as subjects, are ‘pictured’ in the spectacle of the world as theorized by Lacan.

The pictorial possibility of revealing the other side of the visual field will be pushed further in the examination of anamorphosis in chapter three. By luring the viewer to uncover an oblique viewpoint, anamorphosis permits the viewer to look at painting from the side of painting itself. However, as will be shown, by affording the viewer a previously unoccupiable vantage point, anamorphic imagery does not reveal its difference from the perspectival paradigm, but works to remind the viewer of how caught he/she is in the perspectival system.

Chapter four explores the consummate display of linear perspective, trompe l’oeil, and anamorphosis in the construction of Dutch perspective boxes, specifically Samuel Van Hoogstraten’s *Perspective Box with Views of a Dutch Interior* (fig. 1-5). In addition to the unique integration of various baroque perspectives, Van Hoogstraten’s box best illustrates a particularly Northern understanding of perspective through the syncopated effect of multiple vanishing points. As will be shown, the various pictorial attributes that
punctuate the multitude of vantage points throughout the box’s interior mirror the
viewer’s interrogative and voyeuristic look.

As a means of conclusion, the final section of this thesis relates Van
Hoogstraten’s perspective box to my conjectures concerning linear perspective, trompe
l’oeil, and anamorphic imagery. Through the integration of all three visual devices, Van
Hoogstraten’s intricate manipulation of perspective consummately articulates the
relationship between the viewer and perspectival space.
Chapter One:  
Linear Perspective as Hegemonic Symbolic Order

There is an extensive amount of art historical literature on the “discovery, rediscovery, or invention” of linear perspective.\textsuperscript{14} Despite numerous disparate interpretations of the development and inception of this method of spatial representation, there are several threads of consensus running through this literature. Generally, linear perspective is seen as the peculiar renaissance answer to the problem of representing three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface. Due to the mathematical basis of this representational method, linear perspective often is theorized in terms of an accord between artistic practice and the burgeoning sciences of optics and space. As a formal system, linear perspective provided images with a codified set “of rules for generating an infinity of picture signs.”\textsuperscript{15} Scholars such as Erwin Panofsky, Jacques Lacan and Hubert Damisch have theorized about linear perspective in such terms. Each regards perspective as a mode of representation that has been codified as a method of visual communication. Linear perspective is thus regarded as more than a tool to sharpen the precision of an image, but as a structured order, like language, which constitutes the viewing subject and controls it via its unique set of visual mechanisms.

This chapter will focus on perspective as a paradigmatic structure which constitutes and communicates with the viewing subject in strictly visual terms. Drawing upon the theories of Panofsky, Lacan and Damisch I will argue that linear perspective is the “symbolic order of modern visuality.”\textsuperscript{16} I will begin by extrapolating on the new interest in linear perspective in the fifteenth century by detailing Brunelleschi’s perspective experiment as recorded by his biographer Manetti. I then will turn to the theories of Erwin Panofsky, who theorizes that linear perspective provided art history with a concrete object, a symbolic form which became “the condition of possibility for the art historical discipline.”\textsuperscript{17} Jacques Lacan’s psychoanalytic theories on the visual field

\textsuperscript{16} Bronwen Wilson, The World in Venice: Print, the City and Early Modern Identity (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 264.
\textsuperscript{17} Stephen Melville, “The Temptation of New Perspectives,” October 52 (Spring 1990), 11.
and the mirror stage will frame the discussion of linear perspective as constitutive of the modern subject. Finally, I will turn to Hubert Damisch’s theories in *The Origin of Perspective* as a means of integrating these seemingly disparate ideas, as well as demonstrating the hegemony of linear perspective as a symbolic visual paradigm.

**Perspectival Experimentation**

The early modern interest in linear perspective has been traced back to an experiment conducted by Brunelleschi in the early fifteenth century. As figures 6 and 7 illustrate, Brunelleschi formulated a unique empirical experiment devised to depict three-dimensionality on a two-dimensional plane. Because the physical results of this experiment have since been lost, it is necessary to turn to Manetti’s biographical account of Brunelleschi in order to articulate the procedure. According to Manetti, Brunelleschi’s first demonstration of perspective was created on a small panel half a braccia in size. The end result of this experiment was to be a realistic, three-dimensional depiction of the exterior of the baptistery of San Giovanni in Florence, and was to be viewed through a peephole, behind the painting itself. To begin, Manetti attests that Brunelleschi placed himself three braccia inside the central portal of the Florence Cathedral, which would have provided a full view of the baptistery. After having painted a detailed representation of the baptistery, Manetti accounts that a single, specific viewpoint had to be chosen in order for the procedure to demonstrate the highest level of illusion. He states that a hole the size of a lentil was carved into the painted panel at a point in the center of the baptistery directly opposite the eye of the person stationed inside the cathedral (in figure 6, one can see that this point was located in the door frame of the baptistery.) This hole was conical in shape and would have accommodated the actual contour of the viewer’s eye. Manetti explains that whoever wished to witness the illusion was asked to place their eye on the reverse side of the representation and look through the painting. The spectator

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was then told to hold a mirror with their other hand in parallel position with the painted panel so that Brunelleschi’s depiction of the baptistery would be reflected in it.  

Included in this three-dimensional depiction of the baptistery were the peripheral scenes of the market and piazza. Moreover, Manetti notes the addition of burnished silver to the top areas of the painted panel, which reflected the sky and movement of clouds. As Manetti testifies with his own eye-witness account, all of the aforementioned elements—the piazza, the burnished silver and the three-dimensional architectural illusion—allowed the spectator to feel as if “he saw the actual scene when he looked at the painting.” In summation, Brunelleschi’s experiment provided a means for the artist to go inside pictorial space in order to adequately verify the similitude between painting and actual vision.

It was not until Leon Battista Alberti’s publication Della Pictura (1435-1436), that the issue of unified space and three-dimensionality in painting was fully theorized. Alberti’s treatise on painting implemented Brunelleschi’s empirical experiment towards a theoretical model of proper painting technique. As Joseph Koerner argues, linear perspective was naturalized in this era as “the one true expression of the visible.” He argues that the pictorial techniques theorized by Alberti provided artists with the tools necessary to create paintings that looked remarkably equivalent to the things and spaces they represented. James Elkins attests that this theory of naturalization has not been contested in the discourse of art history, mainly due to its claims of scientific validity via mathematical means. One of the first art historians to question the idea that linear perspective was “the definitive method” of representing three-dimensional depth on a two-dimensional plane was Erwin Panofsky in his influential essay Perspective as Symbolic Form (1927).

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20 Ibid., 44: 190-199.
21 Ibid., 44: 180-184.
22 Ibid., 44: 198-203.
Panofsky’s Perspective

In *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, Panofsky sets out to prove that the illusory homogenous space that linear perspective fosters is not a given, but “produced by construction.” For Panofsky, truth in painting is a relative matter. The essence of Panofsky’s essay lies in his argument that linear perspective developed out of a specific moment in history and that pre-renaissance artistic practices had their own forms of perspective. Fundamentally, Panofsky views perspective as a historically shifting form of representation, moving from an antique (unmodern) understanding of perspective to a renaissance (modern) understanding of perspective. Borrowing from Reigl’s *Late Roman Art Industry* (1901), Panofsky contends that the antique understanding of perspective relied heavily upon overlapping, as opposed to foreshortening, when attempting to pictorially differentiate distance between figures. Panofsky argues that this overlapping style can be explained through the philosophical understanding of space at this time. According to Panofsky, the “Hellenistic imagination” conceived of space as a detached entity—as that which remains between individual objects and bodies. The idea of space as a homogeneous whole was not yet theorized in this era, and thus artists could not have devised a perspective that unified the relation between bodies and things.

For Panofsky, linear perspective, as developed in the renaissance, stands as the cumulative display of a particularly modern conception of space. In the first section of his essay, Panofsky illustrates how linear perspective systematically abstracts from the structure of what he terms “psychophysiological space,” which should be understood as experiential, bodily reality. He argues that the possibility for this mathematical abstraction was contingent upon new philosophical and scientific inferences about space that arose in this period. The development of systematic space, which for Panofsky found its summation in Alberti’s treatise, came to fruition due to the conceptualization of infinity. Space was seen as an indifferent “continuous quantity,” that was before and

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29 Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, 41.
30 Ibid., 30.
31 Ibid., 31.
beyond all bodies, and “thoroughly measurable.” As Margaret Iversen has discerned, linear perspective for Panofsky announces the modern understanding of space as “homogenous, infinite extended substance.” Panofsky acutely aligns the vanishing point with this new concept of infinity, as its primary role is to create the illusion of continuous recession beyond the painting. For Panofsky, perception cannot physically ascertain infinity, but perspective is able to mimic the idea of the absolute through this receding line of sight. In summation, the development of linear perspective occurred in tandem with new theories about space as an infinite and measurable entity. Renaissance artists thus had the philosophical and scientific tools necessary to translate psychophysiological space into mathematical space and thus to represent “an objectification of the subjective.”

In the fourth section of his essay, Panofsky’s humanistic interpretation of perspective comes to the fore. According to Panofsky, perspective relies on the will to create pictorial space “out of the elements of, and according to the plan of, empirical visual space.” In Panofsky’s view, linear perspective is a symbolic form, which we choose to enter into in order to communicate visually. Just as grammar structures our sentences, linear perspective structures our visual engagement with images. Panofsky views linear perspective as a “triumph of the distance-denying human struggle for control,” for it is an empirical extension of the external world itself. Thus perspective is a symbolic form designed and controlled by human intervention.

Many scholars have noted the implications of Panofsky’s theories for the discipline of art history. By insisting that linear perspective is a mathematically based abstraction from psychophysiological space, Panosky infers that the study of linear perspective is an objective, scientific and humanist practice. As Panofsky sees it, by

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32 Ibid., 66.
34 Panofsky, Perspective as Symbolic Form, 68.
35 Ibid., 66.
36 Ibid., 71.
37 Ibid., 68.
38 See for example, Samuel Edgerton, The Renaissance Rediscovery of Linear Perspective (New York: Basic Books, 1975), 162-164. For Edgerton, the most significant implication of Panofsky’s theories is his arguments concerning the learned aspect of perspective. Edgerton discerns that while, for Panofsky, linear perspective is not naturally apprehended, the objectivity of its calculable principles constructs pictorial images which everyone, despite their cultural background, can learn to interpret on an equal level.
aligning this symbolic form with calculable principles, the development of linear perspective provided the art historian with a concrete object of investigation. The objectivity of art history is thus forged in the renaissance, because it provides the historian with the “means to elide questions of the becoming historical of art.”

Critiquing this premise, Stephen Melville stresses that this seemingly “nonproblematic access” to the rationalized space of the past is a notion replete with difficulty in our contemporary context. For Panofsky, the renaissance paradigm appears to free the art historian “out of any embeddedness in his or her own cultural/intellectual milieu.” In turn, argues Melville, the foundations of privilege are naturalized and made almost entirely invisible. Although Panofsky set out to prove that various epochs designed and implemented their own forms of perspective, he inevitably privileged renaissance linear perspective as a symbolic form that allows for detached, objective and unmediated study.

In The Origin of Perspective, Damisch weighs the significance of Panofsky’s views. While he largely agrees with Panofsky’s theory of perspective as symbolic form, Damisch does not view perspective as responsible for “freeing” art historians from their cultural milieu and providing them with a thoroughly objective means of study. Instead, as Iversen notes, Damisch holds that our cultural and intellectual embeddedness is ever present, productive and “replete with the intervening artistic and theoretical developments that inflect the way we understand the past.” Damisch considers critical and temporal distance from the object of study as a dynamic means of utilizing modern theories and methods in order to uncover the effects of history.

For Damisch, Panofsky’s idea that perspective is a symbolic form remains a sound theory. Indeed, he argues that it stands as a paradigm of representation. As Damisch contends, perspective “is given to our thought, not only as a “form” bound up with an entire epistemological constellation, but… as a singular paradigmatic structure.” Diverging from many contemporary and past theorists, Damisch holds that as a paradigm, perspective cannot be traced historically: “because it instantiates a model

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40 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
of thought, it has to be approached theoretically.”45 Damisch nuances Panofsky’s approach by drawing on the psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan, and thus critiques Panofsky’s humanist understanding of perspective. The commonality Damisch draws between perspective as a symbolic form and psychoanalytic theory rests in the overwhelming connections between the Brunelleschi experiment and Lacan’s theories about the constitution of the subject in the visual field. In order to adequately expand on Damisch’s arguments, it will be necessary to outline briefly Lacan’s theories. In doing so, I aim to uncover the commonalities between Lacanian theory and the perspective paradigm.

**Lacan and the Visual Field**

In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Jacques Lacan argues that the totality of the visual field exceeds mere perception. As Hanneke Grootenboer articulates, according to Lacan we will never be able to perceive the totality of the vision, “just as we are incapable of expressing everything we wish to say.”46 This inability is attributed to a split within the visual field—a split between the eye and the gaze. For Lacan, vision depends not only on what our eye sees, but also on that which positions us “under the eye of the seer.”47 Vision is a dual phenomenon: “I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides.”48 The visual field is thus characterized as schismatic: there is the side from which we see, “the eye,” and there is the side from which we are seen as “beings who are looked at, in the spectacle of the world,” which Lacan terms “the gaze.”49

In our perception of things, argues Lacan, something “slips, passes, is transmitted,” which is “what we call the gaze.”50 Although the gaze rests outside of our perception, beyond our grasp, it nonetheless reveals itself as a lack in the visual field, for

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48 Ibid.
49 Ibid., 75.
50 Ibid., 73.
it is “only visible in its absence.” This lack is pronounced through the manifestation of a blind spot which stains our perception, beyond which is situated the gaze. In Lacanian theory, the subject continually desires to uncover the gaze’s elusivity. For this reason Lacan calls the gaze an objet petit a. As Lyle Massey clarifies, the objet petit a “means an object, thing, or idea that signifies the psychoanalytic subject’s sense of loss.” Briefly put, satisfaction is sought by the subject through a constant recasting of this sense of loss, and thus he/she consistently seeks the gaze in the visual field. In this way we can understand the gaze as that which controls and solicits vision. It is pre-existent: the gaze lures the subject into seeing, all the while remaining completely invisible. According to Lacan, the power of the gaze reveals that there is something about vision that is not disclosed in perception. In subsequent lectures, Lacan expands upon the limits of perception by insisting on a phenomenological approach to vision.

In his third lecture on the gaze entitled “The Line and Light,” Lacan distinguishes between the classical understanding of perception, which he terms “geometral optics”, and a phenomenological understanding of vision. According to Lacan, the classical understanding of perception involves the apprehension of spatial dimensions which can be perceived via the sense of touch. In the classical, geometral understanding, vision can be mapped and measured. Unlike geometral space, a phenomenological understanding of vision resists such quantification. According to Lacan, there is something that escapes “the optical structuring of space” that is nonetheless present in the visual field. Vision encompasses more than spatial dimensions, which leads Lacan to question the phenomenological import of light in the expanded field of vision.

For Lacan, light is a fundamental aspect of vision that is responsible for more than the illumination of distances between object and eye. Light has an ambiguous quality to it—it can refract, deflect and diffuse. Light reveals that there is something beyond a spatial understanding of vision that exceeds the eye and is beyond the subject’s control. As Lacan states:

51 Grootenboer, The Rhetoric of Perspective, 52.
I am not simply that punctiform being located at the geometral point from which the perspective is grasped. No doubt, in the depths of my eye, the picture is painted. The picture, certainly, is in my eye. But I am not in the picture.\textsuperscript{54}

According to Lacan, light reveals an excess in vision, an excess that extends beyond the subject’s mastering look and perception of the geometral domain. As Massey discerns, light “erases the static spatiality of the geometric dimension,” and ushers in an ambiguity and mutability in the field of vision that “can in no way be mastered by the viewer.”\textsuperscript{55} It is through light that vision is made possible, solicited, and conditioned— as a pre-existent phenomena, light speaks to the controlling elusivity of the gaze.

In spite of this, the geometral domain of vision is not without its place. By insisting upon the spatial and geometrical configurations of vision, the geometral domain is responsible for the functions of the screen in Lacanian theory. The screen acts as a mediator between the variability of light (or gaze) that is beyond our control, and the subject’s attempt to master it. If we are anything in the picture of the world, it is “always in the form of the screen.”\textsuperscript{56} Lacan’s inclusion of a diagram of the scopic field (fig. 10) will render these theories more lucid.

In his discussions on “The Line and Light,” Lacan includes two diagrams which are designed to demonstrate the effects of the gaze in the expanded field of vision. However, it is not until his subsequent lecture “What is a Picture?,” that he extrapolates on their significance. As Massey notes, these diagrams are drawn after the seventeenth-century perspectival grids of Jean François Niceron, a perspectival theorist, who will be discussed in greater detail in chapter three of this thesis.\textsuperscript{57} For now, it is integral to stress this association, for the dynamics of the visual field, evidenced in this schema, speak explicitly to the connections made between Lacanian theory and the discovery of perspective.

In the first schema (fig. 8), Lacan diagrammatically demonstrates the dynamics of the geometral field. Here, the subject’s eye functions as the geometrical point, putting into focus the subject of representation, or the object of its look. In the second schema (fig. 9), Lacan reverses this construct to show how the subject is always more than the

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 96.
\textsuperscript{55} Massey, \textit{Picturing Space}, 127.
\textsuperscript{57} Massey, \textit{Picturing Space}, 127.
geometrical point “from which the perspective is grasped,” for through the point of light (the gaze), the subject is also “pictured.” Therefore, the first diagram shows the effects of one side of vision, the eye, and the second diagram shows the effects of the gaze. Lacan then merges these triangular configurations in order to illustrate what he terms the “dialectic” between the eye and the gaze (fig. 10).

In the middle of Lacan’s merged diagram is a line marked the “image/screen.” For the subject, the screen is a means to block the annihilating effects of the gaze, by insisting upon the flatness and geometry of vision. According to Lacan, the subject knows how to play with the screen “beyond which there is the gaze.”\textsuperscript{58} In regards to painting and representation, the mediating line is also the image, the representation of an actual object. Borrowing from Niceron’s perspectival grids, Lacan’s triangular schema can be seen to parallel the locations of the spectator, painting and vanishing point in linear perspective constructs. In this comparison, the viewpoint and vanishing point are located at opposite ends of the schema, with the painted representation standing in between. Thus, perspective, as evidenced in this diagram, is theorized by Lacan as “neither merely a framework for picturing, nor a shorthand technique for representing reality: it is a demonstration of the function of the picture as screen.”\textsuperscript{59}

Lacan’s theories have also been connected to the narrative of the origin of perspective associated with Brunelleschi’s experiment. In Lacanian theory, the subject’s inability to perceive the entirety of the visual field manifests itself as a blind spot, an absence in our perception, behind which is situated the gaze. Lacan attests that painting visualizes this blind spot in our perception, and argues that in a picture something of the gaze is always manifested. As Lacan states:

\begin{quote}
Indeed, there is something whose absence can always be observed in a picture— which is not the case in perception. This is the central field, where the separating power of the eye is exercised to the maximum in vision. In every picture, this central field cannot but be absent, and replaced by a hole—a reflection, in short, of the pupil behind which is situated the gaze.\textsuperscript{60}
\end{quote}

Many scholars have concluded that this cryptic passage in Lacan’s text refers to Brunelleschi’s perspectival experiment, where a hole was cut in the center of the panel.

\textsuperscript{59} Massey, \textit{Picturing Space}, 128.
\textsuperscript{60} Lacan, “Of the Gaze,” 108.
As figure 6 illustrates, Lacan’s hole can be understood as the lentil-sized opening cut into Brunelleschi’s painted panel, which reflects the pupil and painted image back upon the Brunelleschian subject. This similarity suggests that there may be important commonalities between the renaissance discovery of linear perspective and the post-Freudian reconstruction of the subject. As will be discussed below, one of the most resonant similarities between these seemingly disparate areas of study is the significance of the mirror as an integral factor in subject formation and perspectival discovery.

The Mirror Stage of Representation

The mirror plays a central role in the discovery of linear perspective in Quattrocento Italy. For his demonstration, Brunelleschi relied on the mirror in order to verify the verisimilitude of his painted image to the actual baptistery. By placing the mirror at arm’s length, facing the painted panel, Brunelleschi could check his depiction of space by moving the mirror in a variety of directions over the actual site in front of him. As the mirror moved, Brunelleschi was able to see different areas of the baptistery in real time and space, juxtaposed with his painted representation. In this way, Brunelleschi could precisely align perspectival space with “the optical space of perception.” It can be argued that a pictorial truth-effect was established when Brunelleschi compared his mirrored image with the actual baptistery. Just as the mirror played an integral role in the development and discovery of linear perspective, Lorens Holm notes that it also played an originary role in the psychoanalytic understanding of the post-Freudian subject. Holm states that both classical painting and theories of the subject “involve the projection of an image on a surface.” In order to understand the link between these two seemingly disparate developments, it will be necessary to elaborate on Lacan’s theories of childhood development and more specifically, the mirror-stage.

In his essay “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function, as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience,” Lacan states that a transformation takes place in the subject

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62 Ibid.
63 Ibid., 24.
when he/she first assumes an image. Lacan argues that when a child (at approximately eighteen months of age) first recognizes him/herself in a mirror, he/she assumes an image which fundamentally changes his/her perception and understanding. Through this mirrored recognition, the child realizes his/her body as a separate and unique entity from the body of its mother. Prior to the mirror-stage, Lacan attests that the identity of a child is inextricably linked with the mother, who is the primary provider of physical and psychic nourishment. In this stage, the child has not established an independent grasp of consciousness that would allow it to differentiate its existence from an other. It is the moment when the child first recognizes its reflection in a mirror, and achieves a separate sense of self, that the mother-child dyad is symbolically broken, and the child becomes “literally and figuratively split from its unifying sense of self.” That is, the reflective image the child recognizes as his/her own body is responsible for the traumatic severance from its previous understanding of selfhood as co-extensive with others, especially its mother.

As Kaja Silverman highlights, Lacan thoroughly stresses the fictiveness and purely exterior quality of the image that constitutes the subject. Lacan states that in the mirror-stage, the subject sees itself for the first time as a gestalt, coherent body. It begins, then, to see itself as others do. In regards to Lacan’s theories about the visual field, the mirror-stage can be understood as the subject’s first awareness of the gaze in the expanded field. Silverman notes that Lacan insists on the simultaneity of “otherness” and “sameness” within this recognition of one’s reflection. Although it may be the exact reflection of one’s unified body, the mirror image is a méconnaissance, “because the subject identifies with what he or she is not.” For Lacan, this misrecognition of the self in the mirror is traumatic; as it breaks up the dyad between mother and child through the

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65 Ibid., 1-2.
67 Ibid.
70 Silverman, Threshold of the Visible, 10.
imposition of the “narcissistic self of the imaginary.” As should be noted, the “imaginary,” “real” and “symbolic” are a triad of orders which organize the psychoanalytic field in Lacanian theory. Although the concerns of this study do not permit an in-depth examination of each order, a brief description will prove useful.

The realm of the imaginary can be understood in terms of the ideal, coherent image reflected in the mirror, when the subject first recognizes and identifies with his/her image. This image constitutes the ideal “I”, or ego of the subject, which is defined in opposition to the child’s pre-mirror, fragmentary experience of the world. This imaginary image is internalized and will act as a mediator for the subject between the internal and external world. The symbolic realm involves the formation of signifiers and language, which are predetermined before and beyond the subject’s existence, determining the manner in which he/she is situated. The symbolic order is associated with words, language, writing, and as this study demonstrates, painting and perspective. Finally, the realm of the real is characterized as that which resists representation and organization within the symbolic register and is experienced by the subject especially in the pre-mirror and pre-lingual stage. The real exists where the symbolic fails in articulation and maintains its existence beyond representation.

In summation, when the gesticulating infant recognizes its cohesive reflection in a mirror, he/she identifies with an imaginary representation of self-hood and is thus segregated from the order of the real. By identifying with their imaginary image, the subject is thrust into the realm of the symbolic, which imposes an ever-present interaction with an other. The subject must then identify itself in opposition to this second party.

**Lacan meets Panofsky: Damisch and The Origin of Perspective.**

With this we can return to the theories of Damisch, which integrate the Brunelleschi experiment and Lacan’s theories of subject formation with the art historical views of Panofsky. According to Damisch, Brunelleschi’s experiment is indicative of the “mirror-stage” of representation. Just as the child in Lacanian theory identifies with the...

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73 Damisch, Origin of Perspective, 116.
gestalt image before him/her, the mirrored representation in the hands of the Brunelleschian subject “will be substituted for the reality and will become confused with the ‘truth.’”\(^\text{74}\) The perspectival subject is thrust into this symbolic order of space and controlled by its rules and properties, in a manner similar to the way that the recognition of the imaginary image works to sever the child from the realm of the real and open it up to the realm of the symbolic. For Damisch, perspective has the same determining and controlling quality as Lacan’s symbolic order.\(^\text{75}\) He justifies this claim by insisting that the “vanishing point has the value of a look of the Other.”\(^\text{76}\) For Damisch, this dynamic is realized in Brunelleschi’s experiment through the unique collision of viewpoint and vanishing point.

In order for Brunelleschi’s experiment “to have any demonstrative impact,” the painted panel had to mirror and align with the actual baptistery.\(^\text{77}\) To do so, Brunelleschi had to align the spectator’s eye with a precise point in the building where all visual rays converge and recede. This point was located in the center of the baptistery’s door, which would later be understood as the location of the vanishing point. Thus, looking through the panel, the viewer’s eye would directly mirror the vanishing point located in the actual space of the baptistery. Notably, because Brunelleschi’s experiment involved looking through the painted panel, as opposed to looking at it, the spectator’s eye was simultaneously located in the position of the viewpoint before the image, and in the position of the vanishing point behind the image. Thus, the Brunelleschi experiment involved not only a direct mirroring of viewpoint and vanishing point, but a merging of the two.

Although Damisch stresses the geometrical significance of the convergence of the viewpoint and vanishing point, the theoretical effects of this experiment on the subject are of larger concern. Damisch attests that the only place that the spectator can obtain “self-confirmation” is behind the painting: “to move behind it to look at it in the mirror,

\(\text{74}\) Ibid., 117.
\(\text{75}\) Ibid., 19.
\(\text{76}\) Iversen, “Discourse on Perspective,” 200.
\(\text{77}\) Damisch, *Origin of Perspective*, 120.
through the screen, pierced by a hole, of that same painting.” According to Damisch, the Brunelleschi experiment served to ground perspective, to constrain the infinity aspect of depth by reducing the subject’s eye to a precise point in the painting. This point, this constraint of the eye, serves to create the synthesizing function ascribed to the Lacanian “I” in the mirror phase. Just as the Lacanian subject identifies with the coherent reflection of their mirror image, the subject in Brunelleschi’s experiment validates the painted representation with the actual space of the baptistery, due to the illusionistic cohesion between the two spaces produced in the mirror. In other words, the viewers of this experiment believed what they saw, ascribed a truth-value to it, for the perspectival construction replicated the conditions of adult vision. The mirror-image, reduced to a point, replicates the synthesizing nature of the mirror-phase, the way in which the subject acquires its individual identity through a unification of surfaces. As Damisch attests, the viewpoint mirroring the vanishing point enables the subject to believe that it is getting its bearings “as such, within the painting as if it were inside it.”

It is here that Damisch pays homage to Panofsky’s theories of perspective as symbolic form. Damisch, like Panofsky, sees linear perspective as a symbolic form of visual communication, which carries with it many of the same structures and rules as a sentence. As Iversen states: “for Damisch, perspective as a paradigm operates like the imposition of language on the individual and has, in the visual register, the same effect of subjectification.” Perspective is a coherent system with its own “internal logic” which enables us to understand and consider it “in its own terms and not only as a model of the visible world.” However, as evidenced in Damisch’s integration of Lacan’s theories on subjectivity and the symbolic order, he ultimately takes issue with Panofsky’s humanist approach. Unlike Panofsky, who views perspective as a willed human construct which positions the subject in a central, mastering role, Damisch’s perspectival subject does not

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78 Ibid., 121.
79 Ibid., 122.
80 Ibid., 123.
81 Ibid., 125.
82 Ibid., 127.
83 Ibid., 446.
85 Ibid.
have this kind of agency, but “holds only by a thread.”86 Through the “look” of the vanishing point, which addresses and constitutes the subject in the symbolic register, the viewer is caught and pulled, “like a fish on a line, into the picture.”87 Damisch holds that in the perspective paradigm the subject always finds him/herself addressed and subjugated by the painting.

Moreover, Damisch attests that perspective governs every subject’s vision in the same hegemonic manner. Drawing upon Manetti’s account of the Duomo experiment, Damisch observes that Brunelleschi’s innovative technique carried with it the intention of repeatability. Spectators could place themselves behind the painted panel, mimic Brunelleschi’s discovery and experience its illusionistic appeal.88 According to Damisch, the reproducibility of Brunelleschi’s innovation created a kind of “ideal community,” which worked to suppress and reduce every participating individual.89 The crux of Damisch’s theory, centering on the Brunelleschi experiment, is precisely that this reproducible discovery formulated a rule of declension for all bodies involved. Because the experiment positions every spectator in the same precise location, every viewer behind the painted panel interprets the illusionistic space in an identical way. Brunelleschi’s experiment empirically demonstrates how linear perspective controls the spectator’s viewing position and determines, prior to the viewer’s engagement, how the space will be perceived. This rule of declension is precisely where perspective, discovered in the Brunelleschi experiment, derives its value as a singular paradigmatic structure.90 Thus, although Damisch largely defends and implements Panofsky’s theories, he diverges from Panofsky’s humanistic views of perspective as a willed construction. Damisch overturns Panofsky’s claims of free will and choice in terms of relative “perspectives” throughout the history of art, and attests that linear perspective is a “regulative configuration intended not so much to inform the representation as to orient and control its regime.”91

89 Ibid.
90 Ibid., 133.
91 Ibid., 233.
In tandem with Damisch, Martin Jay defines perspective as the dominant “even totally hegemonic” visual model of modern times. He likens perspective to Cartesian theories of subjective rationality, and calls this visual paradigm “Cartesian perspectivalism.” Jay theorizes on the various physical ramifications of this controlling visual structure. He argues that the eye of the spectator in perspectival representation, as is evidenced in the Brunelleschi experiment, is intended to be singular. This singular eye is often described as “static, unblinking, and fixated,” as opposed to the active mobility of actual vision. Jay finds support for this argument in Norman Bryson’s account of perspectival painting. According to Bryson, Western perspectival painting posits a singular eye that “contemplates the world alone” as the body is reduced to its “optical anatomy.” Bryson founds this claim upon the view that the spectator, in mirroring the vanishing point, is simplified into “a punctual site of reception.”

Furthering this discussion of a disembodied perspectival eye are Jonathan Crary’s writings on the issue of monocularity in relation to linear perspective. Crary asserts that prior to the nineteenth century, binocular disparity was not captured in representation. He notes that monocularity works in tandem with linear perspective as a mode of vision constructed with the aid of various “constants,” where any irregularities or discrepancies are “banished to insure the formation of a homogenous, unified, and fully legible space.” According to Crary, this mode of constructed vision works to suppress the human body and constitutes a purely ocular, controlled, observing subject.

These theories of perspective as a rational, Cartesian, and disembodied model of visual understanding have been critiqued by Massey in her book Picturing Space, Displacing Bodies: Anamorphosis in Early Modern Theories of Perspective. Through the study of anamorphosis, a representational method that skews the perspectival schema,
which I will explore in chapter three, Massey demonstrates how perspective is a fundamentally anti-Cartesian and predominately embodied method of representation. She argues that art historians who use such terms as “Cartesian perspectivalism” do so without any in-depth justification of this association. Massey contends that Descartes’s own theories undermine this superficial connection. Simply put, according to Descartes’s postulations, perspective cannot stand for the rational calculations of the mind, for as a pictorial method, it relies exclusively on embodied sense impressions, which are subject to deception.\(^\text{101}\)

Massey further argues that the idea that perspective posits a disembodied subject is flawed and misguided in a number of ways. As outlined in the theories of Crary and Bryson, art historians often have concluded that perspective fosters a disembodied viewing experience, where the subject’s interaction with the image is defined in purely optical terms. Departing from this idea, Massey affirms that “from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century, theorists did not ignore the body in favour of purely optical accounts of vision and representation,” but rather engaged with the issues of “embodied space” in many unique and intricate ways.\(^\text{102}\) According to Massey, nowhere are these contradictions more pronounced than in the artistic practice of anamorphosis. In her discussion of perspectival experimentalists like Jean-François Niceron and Emmanuel Maignant, Massey contends that anamorphosis actually works to “reground perspective in lived experience,” an issue I shall return to in chapter three of this thesis.\(^\text{103}\) In regard to the concerns of my study, Massey’s theories elucidate how the foundational structure of perspective can be exposed through genres that toy with or exaggerate its premises.

In conclusion, this chapter has outlined the manner in which linear perspective is theorized as a method of pictorial communication that imposes a strict set of rules and conventions on the viewing subject. The following chapters will examine three distinctive forms of perspective: trompe l’oeil, anamorphosis and perspective boxes. These forms interrogate and pictorially disclose how viewing subjects are controlled and constituted by the visual mechanisms of this paradigm, as analyzed in the theories of Panofsky, Lacan and Damisch. The idea of linear perspective as a hegemonic, symbolic paradigm

\(^{101}\) Massey, *Picturing Space*, 1.
\(^{102}\) Ibid., 2.
\(^{103}\) Ibid.
will therefore be referred to in subsequent chapters in order to investigate the hypothesis that baroque forms of perspective reflect, toy with, and contemplate its inescapable structure.
Chapter Two:  
Trompe L’oeil Trickery and Perspectival Inversion

The discovery of linear perspective in the fifteenth century provided artists with the means to illusionistically render depth on a two-dimensional surface. As outlined in the previous chapter, for the painted scene to appear as if it is receding into space, viewers must place themselves in a precise location mirroring the vanishing point. In this way, the painted surface becomes an “imaginary window,” intersecting the space depicted therein from that of the viewer. This classical ideal of painting, theorized by Alberti, posits pictorial space as that which “opens behind” the mediating frame of the painting. In the seventeenth century, artists began to experiment with these conventions, playfully pushing at their limits. Samuel Van Hoogstraten’s trompe l’oeil painting of a Feigned Letter Rack (fig. 11) is a case in point. Here, depth is noticeably absent. The painted image no longer acts as a window or frame, unveiling a scene receding behind its surface. Van Hoogstraten’s feigned letters, quills, and writing accoutrements protrude into the space of the viewer and appear to spill over the confines of the illusionistically rendered frame. The surface of this trompe l’oeil painting no longer conveys lucidity and depth, but exposes its opaque, material essence.

This chapter argues that trompe l’oeil painting, as a form of representation intended to deceive, possesses a certain jarring agency that fools its onlookers. By focusing upon selected trompe l’oeil images created in Holland during the seventeenth century, I will argue that trompe l’oeil painting toys with the perspectival paradigm in order to expose how we, as subjects, are structured in its makeup. Through the examination of three types of trompe l’oeil, it will be shown that trompe l’oeil as a genre garnered much artistic attention and public praise based upon its power to deceive. Besides trompe l’oeil’s hyper-realistic rendering, it will be argued that trompe l’oeil painting posits a unique relationship with its viewer, through the inversion of the perspective paradigm. By teasing out the dynamics between viewer and painting, I will

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105 Ibid.
argue that trompe l’oeil possesses the power to disclose the invisible mechanisms of visual representation through its excessive visibility, thereby participating in a baroque understanding of perspective.

Deceptive Beginnings

As the French term implies, “trompe l’oeil” is used to describe paintings that deceive the eye of the viewer. Trompe l’oeil accomplishes its deception by tricking the spectator into believing he or she is faced with a real, three-dimensional object as opposed to a two-dimensional representation of it. While a common art historical term today, “trompe l’oeil” was coined in reference to painting in the nineteenth century. This phrase finds its origins in 1800, when Louis-Leopold Boilly exhibited a painting at the Salon in Paris catalogued under the title “un trompe l’oeil.” Boilly’s work illusionistically portrayed a number of artists’ drawings and sketches behind a feigned glass panel. The illusion was so effective that a balustrade needed to be placed in front of the painting in order to control the hoard of awestruck onlookers.106

While linguistically coined in the nineteenth century, evidence of trompe l’oeil as an artistic practice dates to antiquity, as seen in the writings of Roman author Pliny the Elder. In his writings, Pliny recounts the tale of two acclaimed artists in Greece, Zeuxis and Parrhasios. In order to prove whose talent reigned supreme, Zeuxis and Parrhasios agreed to compete against one another in an artistic competition of imitative skill. Zeuxis’ entry consisted of a painted bunch of grapes, which were so realistically portrayed that birds flew down to peck at them. Seeing a curtain covering his opponent’s piece, Zeuxis ordered Parrhasios to draw it back in order to reveal his work. Upon discovering that the painted curtain was the work, Zeuxis immediately admitted defeat.107 Although the painted fruit had fooled nature, Parrhasios had fooled the eyes of an artist. An often recounted tale of artistic prowess, Pliny’s anecdote is referred to in various early modern art historical texts. It is believed the story written by Vasari of Giotto fooling his master Cimabue into swatting an illusionistically rendered fly off a fresco finds its origins in this

ancient parable. Moreover, in the seventeenth century, Netherlandish authors Karel van Mander and Philips Angel retold Pliny’s anecdote in their publications *Het Schilder-boeck* (1604) and *Lof der Schilder-konst* (1642).108

Although trompe l’oeil trickery has been traced to antiquity, it is largely agreed that trompe l’oeil as a distinct genre of painting emerged in Holland in the mid-seventeenth century.109 Strictly speaking, trompe l’oeil painting is a sub-genre of still life. Both types of painting took up similar subject matter, and artists often specialized in both areas.110 However, trompe l’oeil painting was largely distinguished from still life through its high degree of illusionary effect. In the Dutch context, trompe l’oeil paintings were often denoted as simply “pleasurable,” or “praiseworthy” representations, as their role was to deceive the eye in an agreeable manner.111 As Celeste Brusati discusses, artistic production was highly specialized in the Netherlands at this time, and thus trompe l’oeil works of art were subdivided into various motif types based upon their respective subject matter. In terms of their form, Brusati states that trompe l’oeil paintings roughly fall into three distinct subgenres: trompe l’oeil cut-outs or “chantournés”, feigned perspectives, and feigned paintings.112 This chapter will examine each subgenre and then move towards a discussion of the theoretical implications of trompe l’oeil as a whole.

**Ersatz Objects**

The first sort of trompe l’oeil consisted of pictures perceived as ersatz objects. These works often came in the form of painted cutouts, either in the shape of household objects or human figures. Painted with the highest precision and skill, these pieces were often cunningly displayed in their settings intending to be taken for a real object. As Brusati notes, few of these works survive today, but evidence of their popularity can be

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112 Ibid., 54-56.
found in the written accounts of Samuel Pepys and Arnold Houbraken. On October 3, 1660, Pepys wrote of witnessing “the most incomparable pictures” in the closet of King Charles II. Among the king’s vast collection, Pepys exuberantly noted “a book open upon a deske which I durst have sworn was a reall book.” It is important to mention that this feigned chantourné image was one of many extraordinary pieces in the king’s collection. Both Pepys’ enthusiastic reaction towards the feigned object and its place within a royal collection demonstrates the popularity and prestige of trompe l’oeil in the seventeenth century.

A further example of the taste for this form of trompe l’oeil can be found in the writings of the biographer Arnold Houbraken, and more specifically the anecdotes pertaining to his master, Samuel Van Hoogstraten. As detailed by Houbraken, the home of Samuel Van Hoogstraten was a direct testament to his interest in illusionism. Houbraken lists the countless chantourné pieces scattered throughout Van Hoogstraten’s quarters,

…there an Apple, Pear or Lemon in a rack for saucers; further on a slipper, or a shoe painted on a carved board, and placed in the corner of a Room or under a chair, along with dried salted flounders, painted onto a blackened canvas, and cut out, and hung on a nail somewhere behind a door, that you would easily be mistaken, and see it as actual dried flounders.

As detailed in these descriptive accounts, chantournés worked by catching viewers by surprise, deceiving them by impersonating everyday objects scattered amongst personal belongings.

**Feigned Perspectives**

A second form of trompe l’oeil, the feigned perspective, offered viewers deceptive enjoyment on a much larger scale. As seen in Van Hoogstraten’s *View down a Corridor* (fig. 12) feigned perspectives confronted viewers with an illusory view into receding space. Van Hoogstraten’s piece originally hung in the home of Thomas Povey,

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114 Ibid., 257-258.
Secretary to the Duke of York and a member of the Royal Society.\footnote{116} As Brusati notes, this work was made to hang behind a closed door in Povey’s dwellings, and could therefore only be enjoyed when the door was opened. Brusati pointedly remarks that Van Hoogstraten’s deceit “hinged quite literally” upon Povey’s action.\footnote{117} By opening the door, Povey would amaze his guests with this fabricated world. As visually illustrated in the subject of this large scale painting, Van Hoogstraten brought the spectator to the threshold of the world seen and that of the artist’s making.

The threshold between these two worlds is visually outlined by the black columns framing Van Hoogstraten’s scene. Moving up along the sides of the painting, they meet at a rounded ornate arch from which a bird cage hangs. As Brusati asserts, this bird cage hangs betwixt the feigned interior hall and the space of the viewer, as it is fixed on the delineating arch itself. The parrot perched on the threshold of its cage, Brusati argues, denotes the larger contextual meaning of the piece as a whole. Paired with the attentive dog beneath the columns and the alert cat near the doorway of the second room, Van Hoogstraten’s feigned perspective returns the gaze of the viewer. Aware of our presence upon the threshold, the figures in this piece stop to look, which implicates us “within the picture’s representational fiction.”\footnote{118}

Van Hoogstraten’s perspective presents the moment when the door to both the representation itself, and the fictional world within has been opened. As the alert reactions of the animals convey, the viewer is treated as an intruder stepping into a world which existed independently of them. As Brusati argues, this piece not only demonstrates the liminal space between the world of representation and the world seen, but also the fragile moment when the figures within the illusory space have caught sight of our presence. In addition to the animal figures, the second room displays a company of people seated at a table. In this room hangs a mirror which parallels the viewer’s line of sight. The seated company is just moments away from witnessing our presence reflected in the mirror. Brusati further articulates that the presence of a figure outside the domestic

\footnote{116} Brusati, “Honourable Deceptions,” 55.  
\footnote{118} Ibid., 203.
space, about to tap on the window pane (not quite visible in reproductions of the work) duplicates the beholder’s role as voyeur within this representation.\textsuperscript{119}

Like the chantourné cut-outs, feigned perspectives implicate the beholder within the dynamics of the work. They require the bodily presence of the viewer to test their validity and take part in their illusionistic game. The last form of trompe l’oeil that will be covered in this chapter works in very similar ways to the chantourné or feigned perspective, but arguably pushes the distinction between reality and illusion even further. As representations aware of their status as artifice, the following trompe l’oeil works foreground the structures of vision and representation. By inverting and reversing the classical perspectival schema, these trompe l’oeil images overtly question the truth in painting.

\textbf{Feigned Paintings}

The third form of trompe l’oeil consists of feigned paintings, or works that disclose themselves as painted pictures rather than illusions of objects or views into space. Typically these trompe l’oeil forms display objects attached to simulated flat surfaces such as boards, cabinets, wood panels or walls. The most popular formats for these works are letter boards, studio walls or \textit{quolibet}, a Latin term meaning “what you please,” “anything at all” or “all sorts”\textsuperscript{120}. The aim of these forms of trompe l’oeil is not to efface all clues of their artifice (as in the previously discussed forms of trompe l’oeil), but to make their fabrication visible.\textsuperscript{121} The letter rack, display cabinet, or wood panel, all challenge the viewer to confirm that the painted image is in fact painted. The fictive identification between the painted picture plane and the represented surface, whether it is a cabinet door or board, foregrounds the artifice of the work. In other words, the illusory rendition of a plane of representation (such as a canvas) tricks the viewer into perceiving it as true pictorial material. As Brusati argues, the fiction created differs from the genre of still life painting for it does not attempt to make the surface of the picture plane recede into three-dimensionality. Quite the opposite, this form of trompe l’oeil insists upon the

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{120} Koester, “Gijsbrechts: An Introduction,” 22.
\textsuperscript{121} Brusati, “Honourable Deceptions,” 56.
opacity of the pictorial surface “instead of transforming the picture surface into a transparent window.”

Many examples of this form of trompe l’oeil can be found in the oeuvre of Cornelius Gijsbrechts. After 1663, Gijsbrechts specialized solely in the genre of trompe l’oeil, illusionistically portraying objects such as letter racks, musical instruments, cupboards, hunting acoutrements and chantournés. The first of Gijsbrechts’s letter racks are two companion pieces dating to 1664, Trompe L’oeil. Letter Rack with a Kit and Pistol and Trompe L’oeil. Letter Rack with an hourglass, Razor and Scissors (fig. 13, 14). In both pieces a yellowish-brown board is tacked with red ribbon, running quadrants across its surface. Tucked beneath the tape are an array of letters, documents and writing accoutrements. The first piece includes a picture frame with broken glass to the bottom left, in the lower center a comb, to the right a kit and bow placed next to a small horn, and a pistol tucked in the upper right register. In the companion piece, amongst the letters and documents are an hourglass in the upper left register, a pair of scissors across the curtain and a shaving kit to the bottom right. A deep green curtain fixed to a rod covers a large area in both compositions. In the first, the left edge of the curtain is turned up over the rod revealing the lower right register of the illusionistic board. In the latter composition, the curtain is drawn to the right exposing a greater surface area of letters and writing accoutrements. These letter racks display the opacity of the picture plane by insisting upon the illusionistic verity of the pictorial surface. Letters and personal objects project into the space of the beholder and cast shadows upon the board to which they are strapped. This form of trompe l’oeil draws attention to the materiality of pictorial surface, by insisting upon the viewer’s distinction between what is painting’s surface, and what is painting.

Discussing the fascination of trompe l’oeil works, Arthur Wheelock argues that the seventeenth-century viewer would have responded quite differently to this genre of painting than contemporary viewers. Unlike the documented experiences of Pepys and Houbraken, today we rarely come upon trompe l’oeil pieces unexpectedly. They have

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122 Ibid.
123 It should be noted that these titles were not originally bestowed upon the works by their respective artists. This is evidenced by the fact that the term ‘trompe l’oeil’ was only coined in the nineteenth century. Most paintings were left untitled, and were later named through description.
now largely been segregated into museum spaces, cut off from their intended context. In
the museum they are seen as works of art rather than feigned segments of the real.\textsuperscript{124}
Furthermore, seventeenth-century viewers would have approached illusionary works with
a “suspension of disbelief” that would have enabled them to perceive an ersatz object as
reality.\textsuperscript{125} According to Wheelock, this suspension in disbelief is supported by several
theoretical writings of the period, specifically in the publications of Samuel Van
Hoogstraten and Philips Angel. In his 1641 lecture “In Praise of Painting” for the St.
Luke guild in Leiden, Philips Angel states:

If an artist manages to imitate life in such a way that people judge that it
approaches real life without being able to detect in it the manner of the master
who made it, such a spirit deserves praise and honour and shall be ranked above
all others.\textsuperscript{126}

Several decades later, Samuel Van Hoogstraten echoes Angel’s sentiments in his treatise
on painting \textit{Inleyding tot de Hooge Schoole der Schilderkonst} (1678) arguing:

The art of painting is a science to represent all the ideas, or concepts, that the
entire visible world provides, and with contour and color deceives the eye.... A
perfect painting is like a mirror of Nature, in which things that are not there
appear to be there, and which deceives in an acceptable, amusing, and
praiseworthy fashion.\textsuperscript{127}

Thus both theorists surmised that the highest aim of painting was to produce works that
trick the viewer into apprehending them as fragments of reality, and in doing so such
artists would achieve fame and praise.

Van Hoogstraten knew firsthand the acclaim and admiration one could foster
through trompe l’oeil trickery. On August 6, 1651, Van Hoogstraten was an invited guest
in the court of Viennese King Ferdinand III. He was presented with an invitation to
exhibit a selection of his work, a high honour for any aspiring artist. Having been trained
in most genres, Van Hoogstraten settled upon three distinct pieces to share with the king:

\textsuperscript{124} For a full discussion on the importance of context in regard to trompe l’oeil painting, see Ernst
Gombrich, \textit{Art and Illusion} (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969), 205-208. Gombrich states that the
deceptive quality of trompe l’oeil paintings is entirely dependent upon the mutual reinforcement of illusion
and expectation. According to Gombrich, the viewer always assumes what is most probable in light of their
experiences. Hence, if a trompe l’oeil work is segregated from its intended context, and placed in a
museum setting, the viewer will expect to see a painting, as opposed to actual objects or spaces.
\textsuperscript{125} Arthur Wheelock, “Illusionism in Dutch and Flemish art,” in \textit{Deceptions and Illusions: Five Centuries
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid.
a history painting, a portrait of a high official and a trompe l’oeil rendering of a still life painting. Although praised for all three works, Houbraken reports that the Viennese king was so enthralled with the trompe l’oeil image, he concluded he should “punish” the artist for having deceived him, and had him hand over the trompe l’oeil piece to the royal collection. In return, Van Hoogstraten was honoured with the royal gold medallion and chain as an appreciative gesture. As will be discussed further in chapter four, Van Hoogstraten repeatedly refers to this event by suggestively including this medallion and chain in future works.

**Turning Painting Around**

The dynamics involved in trompe l’oeil forms of representation act in a very unique way. Drawing attention to the opacity of the picture plane and the artifice of painting, trompe l’oeil paintings are self-aware images that foreground the enjoyment of deception, and the dismantling of pictorial truths. Arguably the most consummate display of the trompe l’oeil paradox can be found in a detail of Gijsbrechts’s *Easel with Fruit Piece* (1670) (fig. 15). In this painting Gijsbrechts cleverly displays an easel with a seemingly finished still life resting on its ledge, surrounded by tools of the artist’s trade such as a painter’s palette, a collection of brushes and a personal cameo. Resting on the feet of the easel, just beneath the finished painting, is what appears to be the back of a canvas (fig. 16).

As a separate component to this piece as a whole, the reversed canvas is mobile, and beckons the viewer to turn it around. Once turned, the seemingly true side of the painting reveals itself to be the actual backside of a painting, a wooden frame with stretched canvas. Now the viewer is made aware that the first image of the “back side” of a canvas was the image proper. This is a painting of the back of a painting. As a radical representation of this paradox, *Reverse side of a Painting* participates in two forms of trompe l’oeil. As Sybille Ebert-Scifferer notes, the painting’s outline and format collapse upon each other, “it is chantourné in a natural way.” However, unlike the feigned cutouts of books or fruit, this chantourné explicitly foregrounds the materiality of its

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artifice. Like the form of a letter board or trompe l’oeil cabinet, *Reversed Side of a Painting* fosters a fictive identification with the surface of the picture plane, and makes its fabrication visible. As Victor Stoichita conveys, once turned, the beholder is able to realize that this is not a canvas waiting for paint, image or significance, for the “object of this painting, is the painting as an object.”

What the spectator sees is a painting, but one which represents canvas and stretcher. Evident are the nails that join the two materials together, the shadows of the stretcher on the canvas, the joints in the wood, the marks of paint and the texture of the fabric. In this sense, Stoichita contends that this image epitomizes everything inherent to painting. By pictorially rendering canvas and wood, “this image is at one and the same time *nothing* and *everything*.” Gijsbrechts’s piece is the prime example of a paradox, which Stoichita states compels the spectator to check the validity of the assertion, or image, and to uncover the mechanism that made it possible.

According to Stoichita, this unique representation connects Gijsbrechts to a long tradition of self-reflexivity in painting. Stoichita states that this tradition began with the art of the vanitas in still life, and burgeoned in the philosophy of representation as a vanitas. As he notes, the motif of a reversed canvas has a very strong art historical lineage, centered on the idea of the canvas as object and more particularly, the reversed canvas “as a thematized object.” However Stoichita pointedly argues that Gijsbrechts’s work belongs to a more pertinent legacy than just artistic self-reflexivity. In the tradition of the paradox, *Reverse Side of Painting* can be said to artistically meditate upon the popular “eulogy of nothing,” which began in the sixteenth century and continued throughout the seventeenth. According to Stoichita, the published text titled the *Tractus philosophicus DE NIHILO* in 1661 provides insight into the philosophical climate in which Gijsbrechts’s trompe l’oeil works were produced.

As the eulogy articulates, “The Discourse on Nothing” is itself, a paradox:

Nothing cannot be found.
Therefore do not believe the bard who says he has.

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131 Ibid.
132 Ibid., 278.
133 Ibid.
For if he deigns, tell him to come
To battle with me, and I shall indeed prove
That when he thought to have found Nothing
He had indeed found Something….¹³⁴

Stoichita argues that Gijsbrechts’s painting presents a similar paradox. As stated above, *Reverse Side of a Painting* is the depiction of nothing in that its subject is the negation of narrative, but it also represents everything painting is: canvas and wood. In this sense, Gijsbrechts’s piece is aware of its paradoxical nature, “of its being and of its nothingness.”¹³⁵

In this way, one can understand Gijsbrechts’s piece as masterfully illustrating the paradoxical nature and theoretical ground of what Jean Baudrillard defines as “anti-painting”. For Baudrillard, trompe l’oeil does not find its origins in painting, but in metaphysics, as a ritualized practice that questions the line between representation and reality. In examining the art of trompe l’oeil, Baudrillard distinguishes several consistent features; namely, the absence of a horizon and horizontality in general, an oblique often unreal light source, lack of depth, a certain type of object and material, “and of course the ‘realist’ hallucination that gave it its name.”¹³⁶ He contends that the ritual of trompe l’oeil can be separated out from a history of art because, although it often “flirts” with conventional painting, it defines itself in opposition to it as “anti-painting.”¹³⁷ Baudrillard stresses that as a metaphysical ritual, trompe l’oeil functions in the same manner as an anagram in literature. It works to resist narrative and linearity by the compilation of seemingly random objects and lack of realistic three-dimensionality. By isolating these banal objects, trompe l’oeil extinguishes any narrative plot, and in doing so the discourse of painting. Baudrillard goes even further to suggest that these trite objects are stripped of any social referent, and stand as “blank signs, empty signs,” which figure as anti-representational.¹³⁸ As blank signs, these objects have been disassociated from their social setting and have been juxtaposed in a seemingly random fashion. For Baudrillard, this erasure of context is perceivable in the dark void surrounding the objects which cuts

¹³⁴ Ibid., 279.
¹³⁵ Ibid.
¹³⁷ Ibid.
¹³⁸ Ibid.
them off from any sense of meaningful order. As metaphysical, empty signs, trompe l’oeil objects function in opposition to “the whole representative space elaborated by the Renaissance.”

The agency of trompe l’oeil’s banal and strange objects is tantamount to their inversion of renaissance linearity. Baudrillard attests that only “these endless old journals, old papers, old books, old nails, old planks—indeed alimentary rubbish” are capable of retracing “the haunting memory of a lost reality,” the loss of lucid perspectival space. Far more than personalized accessories, these objects are the “ghosts that haunt the emptiness of the stage,” who procure pleasure by abolishing the real. Trompe l’oeil objects are not passive, illustrative props used to connote one thing or another. According to Baudrillard, their “insignificance is offensive”, as they defy any narrative context and are “emptied of their décor.” Their banality and opacity is a form of rebellion for Baudrillard, against the figurative and perspectival renaissance tradition.

However, there is more at stake in a trompe l’oeil image than the way that its objects defy narrative understanding. As Baudrillard states, these feigned objects create a sense of tactile vertigo, an effect of “decentering forwards,” which pushes a mirror of objects toward its viewers “to encounter a subject that resembles them.” The most telling attribute of trompe l’oeil images is their metaphysical pleasure, which can be distinguished from their aesthetic characteristics. For Baudrillard, the metaphysical attribute of trompe l’oeil is the “worrying strangeness” of the odd light it casts upon the world of perspectival linearity. Through their obverse and reverse views, trompe l’oeil images “undo the evidence of the world,” and appeal to a radical sense of enjoyment as they “take appearances by surprise.”

If trompe l’oeil objects garner a certain agency by defying renaissance linearity, then the question becomes, how does a trompe l’oeil image produce this effect? How can a painting such as Gijsbrechts’s *Letter Rack* undo the evidence of the world, as

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139 Ibid., 54.
140 Ibid.
141 Ibid.
142 Ibid.
143 Ibid.
144 Ibid., 56.
145 Ibid., 57.
146 Ibid.
Baudrillard claims? In order to address these concerns, it will be necessary to return to Lacan’s theories on vision and representation. As discussed in chapter one, the perspectival system imposes an order on vision and structures our engagement with painting. As will be demonstrated below, trompe l’oeil painting reverses the premises of perspective through the coalescence of the viewpoint and vanishing point. In doing so, this form of baroque perspective illuminates the invisible dynamics involved in the ways that perspective structures us as subjects.

**Inverting the Paradigm, Returning our Look**

As detailed in the previous chapter, Brunelleschi’s empirical experiment uncovered the means by which depth could be created in painting through the use of a viewpoint and a vanishing point. In this experiment, it is integral to stress that these points were collapsed one upon the other. Through his use of mirrored panels, Brunelleschi could both look at his painting reflected in the mirror, and look through his painting by means of the central hole. Interestingly, in the mathematical rules of perspective laid out by Alberti, the illusion of depth was created through the separation of the view and vanishing points (see fig. 17). No longer needing to “look through” pictorial space to verify the illusion of three-dimensionality, the vanishing point was placed behind the picture plane. In classic constructions, orthogonal lines fan out from this vanishing point into the picture plane in order to depict objects receding into space. The orthogonal lines then converge in the point of view, or space of the beholder, while the picture plane acts as an axis between the two spaces. Therefore, while Brunelleschi’s experiment provided an empirical means of creating and verifying the illusion of three-dimensionality, the coalescence of the view and vanishing points was no longer necessary once this system was tried and found true. However, the one instance where this collapse does occur, argues Hanneke Grootenboer, is in trompe l’oeil painting.

In order to illustrate this argument, Grootenboer points to the lack of depth within paintings such as Gijsbrechts’s works and Samuel Van Hoogstraten’s *Feigned Letter Rack* (fig. 11). She argues that perspective has been turned inside out in these works. They not only lack depth; rather, the perspectival schema is reversed. In trompe l’oeil painting, the imagined depth created by the orthogonal lines receding into the vanishing
point project to a point in front of the composition, and must be imagined as if they were in the space of the beholder. As Grootenboer articulates, we can visualize these dynamics “by imagining the two visual triangles being folded onto one another until the vanishing point and the viewpoint merge with each other.”147 (see fig. 18) The viewer’s gaze no longer looks into the picture as a window, but “ricochets off the surface” returning to the viewer and to its place of origin.148 Grootenboer relates this phenomenon to Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s metaphor of the reversed glove. As Ponty philosophizes, if the finger of a glove is turned inside out, the reverse side of the garment will be exposed without ever changing its structure. Whereas previously, the glove was encased in leather, the act of turning the glove inside out exposes its interior lining, all the while structurally remaining intact.149 For Grootenboer this example metaphorically demonstrates how the perspective diagram can be reversed without ever changing its basic configurations. In relation to the perspectival diagram, we can understand the tip of the finger as the vanishing point “which once pulled out reveals the other side of the point, which normally falls beyond the horizon.”150

According to Lacan, as well as Ponty, the field of vision, like the classical construction of linear perspective, has two sides. From one side we see the world, and from the other side we are seen as subjects in it. In relation to the linear perspective schema, the side from which we see can be understood as the viewpoint, and the side from which we are seen is the location of the vanishing point. It is integral to mention that for Lacan, the side from which we are seen, the gaze, is always already outside of our perception. Likewise with the vanishing point. As Brian Rotman notes, this point is made to appear infinitely far in the distance, and is “unoccupiable by a person or indeed any physical object.”151 Although we strive to see the gaze and the vanishing point, it is always outside our grasp and line of sight. According to Lacan, this other side of vision, which is unperceivable to us, stains our perceptual field, leaving an unseen residue that he

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148 Ibid.
terms the “blind spot.” This blind spot acts as the foundation of vision, as an organizational point that stands as a cue for what is beyond our perception.

As a reminder of our limitations, the blind spot epitomizes the structure that enables us to see. “Since we cannot see ourselves seeing,” explains Grootenboer, “we miss a part of vision, in the depth of our field of vision, where its outside and inside…meet.”\textsuperscript{152} The trick of trompe l’oeil cannot simply be explained by its hyperrealism, for its lure has more to do with an offering up of the reverse side of the visual field. Due to the inversion of the perspectival schema, trompe l’oeil painting offers us a visual glimpse of the other side; it stresses our position as viewed subjects in the world. From this dually occupied point of view, it appears as though objects “look back at us” from a location “we ourselves cannot occupy in order to see ourselves seeing.”\textsuperscript{153}

In this way, trompe l’oeil paintings such as Samuel Van Hoogstraten’s \textit{Feigned Letter Rack} annihilate the renaissance assumption that the viewing subject is, in Norman Bryson’s terms, “the universal centre.”\textsuperscript{154} The objects themselves seem to dictate their form; the artist and viewer are only responsible for repeating their existing makeup. Trompe l’oeil’s objects pierce our space and line of sight, a phenomenon explained by Lacan as the visualization of the blind spot. The lack of comprehension, or perception of the “beyond” that rests behind the horizon in perspectival paintings, is expected to be in a position ‘outside’ of ourselves. In trompe l’oeil, this lack of perception is shown to reside within us. Through the inversion of the perspectival schema, trompe l’oeil allows us to see how we are not only ‘observers’ in the field of vision, but also made into pictures by the gaze in the expanded field.

Trompe l’oeil images thus defy our perceived mastering look. In Lacanian analysis, we are “in” the picture, represented by the objects that stare back at us. This phenomenon is acutely illustrated by the presence of the eye glasses (fig. 11 a) located in the bottom right register of Van Hoogstraten’s image, a repeated motif in trompe l’oeil painting. Arguably, these objects articulate the manner in which this representation visually interrogates the viewer. Mimicking the effect of the pince-nez are the elongated

\textsuperscript{152} Grootenboer, \textit{Rhetoric of Perspective}, 55.
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid., 56.
scissors resting on the opposite end of the composition, whose looped handles peer back at us in an ocular fashion. The gaze that eludes us in the process of seeing is shown in Van Hoogstraten’s work to reside on the side of things that look back at us. A similar effect is produced in Van Hoogstraten’s *View from a Corridor* (fig. 12), for although depth is present, the animal figures stand alert and cross-examine our presence in this space. These figures draw attention to our perceived status as voyeurs in relation to images, and remind us that vision works both ways.

One of the most explicit displays of trompe l’oeil painting’s interrogative nature is Van Hoogstraten’s *Old Man at a Window* (fig. 19). In this painting, the face of an old gentleman peers out from the confines of a feigned window. It is possible this image was intended to be displayed on an actual window ledge in order to fool passersby. Devoid of depth and contextual framing, the face protrudes into the space of the beholder without any recourse to narrative understanding. The old man functions in the same manner as the pince-nez or alert domestic pets, but pushes the dynamic further by insisting upon the literal mirroring of human visual engagement. Through the inversion of the perspective paradigm, trompe l’oeil paintings such as Van Hoogstraten’s *Old Man at a Window*, renders explicit the manner in which perspectival painting “addresses me with an implicit look.”

Whether pets, faces, letters, quills or looking glasses, trompe l’oeil objects possess an agency that make us aware of our own lack in the visual field. They operate by jarringly demonstrating how incomprehensive our perception is; by fooling us into believing that what we see is real. As Grootenboer articulates, the deceptive quality of these objects “consists of lies that tell the truth about their own appearance.” They stress our lack through excessive visibility. As Bryson poetically discerns, trompe l’oeil objects “have the look of dead men’s clothes,” for they are the empty signs that disclose the invisible structures of vision. By reversing the premises of perspectival depth, trompe l’oeil painting uncovers not just what we see, but also how we see, by revealing what we miss. This genre discloses what is denied in perspectival paintings, by calling

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158 Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked*, 144.
attention to the manner in which we are seen as pictures in the world. By foregrounding the mechanisms of the perspectival system, and in doing so, the mechanisms of vision, trompe l’oeil paintings “undo the evidence of the world,” as Baudrillard puts it.\(^{159}\) Like Gijsbrechts’s reversed canvas, they work to show the other side of representation. Devoid of narrative, they are replete with paradox as they return our interrogative look.

\(^{159}\) Baudrillard, “Trompe-L’oeil,” 57.
Chapter Three:
Anamorphosis: Skewing the Perspectival System

At the foot of Hans Holbein’s portrait The Ambassadors (1533) (fig. 20) an odd, irregular shape floats above the marbled floor. If the spectator moves to the extreme right of the painting, this shape resolves into the image of a human skull. The skull appears to stand at odds with the perspectively rendered space of the portrait painting, and disrupts any sense of rational cohesion. As Martin Jay argues, Holbein’s painting combines “two visual orders,” which work to “subvert” and decenter the idea of a unified subject. If not a part of the “visual order” of the portrait painting, to which “visual order” does this skull belong? As this chapter will argue, contrary to Jay’s deduction, Holbein’s skull does not disrupt the perspective of the painting, but instead exposes its mechanisms through the distortion of its structure. By enticing the viewer to move about and uncover its peripheral, oblique viewpoint, the skull positions the seeing subject in a previously unoccupied location, not usually afforded by the perspectival paradigm. Through the lateral point of view, and the lure of its design, Holbein’s skull unveils the manner in which the subject is constituted and controlled by the visual mechanisms of perspective.

In the preface to his book Anamorphic Art, Jurgis Baltrušaitis defines the visual device at play in Holbein’s painting as anamorphosis, which he calls the “absurd side of perspective.” He articulates how perspective is largely assumed as a method used to infuse an image with a heightened sense of depth and realism, to re-establish the third dimension within a two dimensional surface. However, as this thesis aims to show, perspective is above all a constructed visual device which shapes and conditions pictorial understanding. In this sense, just as perspective claims to offer a lucid grounds for interpreting depth, it also carries with it the potential to conceal and distort pictorial meaning within its mathematical makeup. The present chapter examines an “absurd” side of perspective: anamorphosis, with the aim of uncovering what it reveals about this paradigm. I will first present a brief history of this little studied visual device, and then seek to tease out the theoretical implications of anamorphosis in regards to the manner in

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which it unveils the controlling and constituting quality of Lacan’s “gaze” in the visual field. By way of conclusion, the performative and temporal quality of anamorphic viewing will demonstrate its status as a representative form of baroque perspective.

It should be noted that the anamorphic images this chapter analyzes, although belonging to the early modern era, are not of Dutch origin. Despite the fact that there is little pictorial evidence of Dutch engagement with this visual device, an examination of this representational method is essential to the concerns of this study. To begin with, anamorphosis stands as a particularly powerful form of baroque perspective through its explicit distortion of linear perspective. By luring the viewer into its visual game, anamorphosis most pointedly unveils the hegemonic and controlling attributes of the linear perspective paradigm. Furthermore, anamorphic mathematics play an integral role in the construction of Dutch perspective boxes. Thus, an examination of this distorted form of perspective is necessary in order to provide adequate grounds to study Dutch perspective boxes in the following chapter.

**Distorted Beginnings**

The origins of anamorphic images coincide historically to the development of linear perspective in the fifteenth century. One of the earliest known examples of anamorphosis is attributed to Leonardo da Vinci. Included in his *Codex Atlanticus* (1478-1519), a twelve-volume bound set of Leonardo’s drawings and writings, are two drawings that experiment with anamorphic projection. One is of a child’s face (left) and the other an eye (right) (fig. 21). While the drawings appear distorted and skewed from a frontal viewing position, they realign in proper proportion when viewed from the far right, close to the image. These are the only extant examples of Leonardo’s experimentation with this method and it is believed that this form of perspective stemmed from his investigation of foreshortening and the relation between embodied (actual) and artificial perspective. As Lyle Massey argues, although Leonardo did not include or advocate the use of anamorphosis in painting, the fact that he explored this method demonstrates a larger interest in the possibilities of perspectival mathematics. The very

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idea, according to Massey, of toying with perspective to produce an image only perceivable from an oblique viewpoint “was obviously attractive in its own right.”

Generally speaking, anamorphosis plays with the principles and structures of linear perspective by projecting forms outside of themselves, distorting them to such a degree that they resolve into intelligibility only when viewed from an oblique angle. The system of anamorphosis, according to Baltrušaitis, was established as a technical curiosity, and inspired wonder in its observers. He argues that although anamorphosis historically belonged in the realm of curiosities, which often were segregated to the spaces of cabinets, it nonetheless is deserving of further art historical investigation. Not just leisurely forms of entertainment, writes Baltrušaitis, these “scholarly ‘games’ are, by definition, something more.” In addition to conjuring pleasure and amazement in the eyes of its viewers, anamorphosis speaks to the spectator’s engagement with painting by controlling his/her visual understanding and luring the body to move about its form.

Although experiments with anamorphosis had been carried out since the end of the fifteenth century, the German Jesuit Gaspar Schott, a pupil of the anamorphic artist Athanasius Kircher, first coined the term in his 1657 publication *Magia universalis naturae et artis*. Etymologically speaking, “anamorphosis” is a composite of the Greek term “morphe”, meaning form, and the preposition “ana” meaning “again.” Together, this denomination literally translates to “reform” or “distortion”. A more descriptive account of anamorphosis appeared nearly a century later in Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d’Alembert’s *Encyclopaedia* of 1751. The article on anamorphosis described it as follows:

In painting, anamorphosis refers to the projection of an unnatural image or a distorted representation of an image which is made on a plane, and which, nevertheless, seen from a certain viewing-point, appears normal and executed with the correct proportions.

As Baltrušaitis notes, this entry not only includes a succinct definition of the term, but also provides readers with a method for creating such imagery. The *Encyclopaedia* entry is accompanied by an illustration of a satyr’s face disguised as a landscape, which closely

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163 Ibid., 43.
165 Ibid., 118.
166 As cited in Baltrušaitis, *Anamorphic Art*, 118.
resembles a sixteenth-century engraving by Erhard Schön (fig. 22), an image we will return to below.

In Kim Veltman’s article on the history of perspective and optics, she argues that the development of anamorphosis may have arisen from practical concerns. As she relays, by the early fifteenth century, it had become customary in Europe to paint frescoes on the interior walls of chapels. Although these spaces were restricted to privileged families, the congregation could nonetheless catch oblique glimpses into these sacred spaces by kneeling as close as possible to the altar. From this position, the viewer could see from an extreme oblique angle into the chapels on either side of the church. Anamorphic, or perspectively distorted, frescoes may have been painted on these chapel walls in order to accommodate this extreme viewing position.167

In order to fully appreciate the illusionistic intricacy of anamorphosis, it is necessary to delve into its technical specifics. An anamorphic image is essentially achieved by stretching and elongating an image constructed through the mathematics of linear perspective. This is only possible through the manipulation of the distance point. In a regular perspectival grid, a distance point is positioned outside the frame of the composition at the same height as the intended viewpoint (fig. 24). The distance point works to address the presumed space between the viewer, picture plane and vanishing point. This point determines the scale of the increments of lines extending from the picture plane into the vanishing point, and therefore is a determining factor for the location of the horizon line in any composition. The further the distance point is placed from the frame of the composition, the further the image recedes into illusory space. If the distance point is placed closer to the frame, the painted scene more closely approximates the viewer’s position. In this sense, the manipulation of the distance point provides the artist with a certain freedom in relation to the intended depth of the painting.

Massey notes that since the 1960s the history of the distance point has been a much disputed topic. One question in this debate is whether or not Alberti included or alluded to the use of an anterior distance point in his perspectival treatise. The second issue concerns the distance point’s possible distinctness from the Albertian tradition

altogether. Some scholars argue that the distance point was developed from workshop traditions. As Massey articulates, both debates center on the question of whether the origins of the distance point was a purposeful application of geometrical and optical theory, or whether it was empirically discovered through practical artisanal application.\textsuperscript{168} According to Massey there are some allusions to the distance point in Alberti’s perspectival method. Alberti largely based his mathematics upon Euclidean geometric principles, which provided a rationalized ground from which to extract an explanation of the relationship of the viewpoint to the pictorial field. However, Alberti does not explicitly discuss or explain the relationship between his centric point and what we now term the distance point.\textsuperscript{169} Thus, due to the vague allusions made to the distance point in Alberti’s treatise, it is difficult to know whether or not this point was used in perspectival configurations at this time.

Despite its ambiguous origins, the distance point was nonetheless explicitly used and discussed as the crucial factor for creating anamorphic images in Jean François Niceron’s treatise of 1651, \textit{La Perspective Curieuse}. Dedicated to perspectival distortions, \textit{La Perspective Curieuse} discloses a precise method for constructing anamorphic images and explicitly speaks to the importance of distance point manipulation. As figures 25 and 26 show, Niceron began by pictorially demonstrating how a chair drawn in normal perspective could be skewed into its anamorphic rendition. In the first image, the orthogonal lines extend up towards point Q on the diagram, which should be understood as the vanishing point; while the distance point is signified by point R in the upper right hand corner. In Figure 26, the principal point Q and distance point R have been pushed to the left side of the composition, and rest next to each other. Due to this manipulation, the chair appears to be stretched longitudinally. Because the vanishing point and distance point have been rearranged, the proper viewing position shifts as well. As a result of the perspectival distortion, the viewpoint no longer lies in front of the composition, as in fig. 25, but is now located next to distance point R. In order to occupy this new viewing position, the viewer must move about on either end of the anamorphic image, to reach the peripheral area of the distance point. In this case, the chair is now

\textsuperscript{168} Massey, \textit{Picturing Space}, 161-162.
\textsuperscript{169} Lyle Massey, \textit{The Treatise on Perspective: Published and Unpublished} (Washington: Yale University Press, 2003), 162.
appropriately seen by turning the page about and looking at it from the direction of point Q.  

Niceron further illustrates this phenomenon in a diagram of a blank grid (fig. 27). Diagram xxxiii is understood as the primary, linear perspective grid which will become the trapezoid, diagram xxxiv. Here P should be understood as the principal, vanishing point, and R as the distance point. As is shown, the primary grid is highly elongated, and the distance point cuts across the grid diagonally. The image is no longer legible from the central point of view, but from the new vantage point P, which is also moved to the periphery. Niceron then completes this method by inserting a figure’s head in order to demonstrate the distortion (fig. 28).

In addition to visual demonstrations, Niceron discusses in detail the effect anamorphosis has on the viewer. In Book II of *La Perspective Curieuse*, he asserts that until now we have only considered “le plan situé entre l’oeil & l’objet, mais nous le considerons desormais indifferemment, soit que l’objet ait sa place entre l’oeil & le plan, ou derrière le plan.” In anamorphic images, Niceron perceives that the object can reside in between the picture plane and point of view and therefore reverses the premises of perspective by enabling the object to protrude out of the picture plane and extend towards the viewer. In other words, whereas in linear perspective the viewpoint is separate and unique from the distance point, in anamorphosis the viewing point is “conjoined with the distance point, which itself is nearly congruent with the principal point.” As a result, the image no longer recedes into illusory space, as the distance point no longer works to create a representation of depth. By collapsing the distance point and viewpoint, anamorphosis evacuates any sense of depth for the viewer, bringing him/her so close to the image and its material surface “that the image itself almost disappears from sight.”

One of the earliest disseminated anamorphic compositions dates to 1535 (fig. 22). Known as a puzzle-picture, or *vexierbild*, this anamorphic woodcut print was completed

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172 Massey, *Picturing Space*, 56.
173 Ibid.
by Erhard Schön, a Nuremberg engraver and pupil of Albrecht Dürer. The “puzzle-picture” is made up of four trapezoidal rows between which appear several unique landscapes. Replete with human and animal figures, the landscapes string along the slanted lines and lose visibility in a mess of obscure designs. However, if the viewer takes up a position at either side of the image, in close proximity to the engraving itself, four framed portraits appear within the jumble of lines (fig. 23). As the disparate landscapes disappear in the process of oblique looking, the portraits “emerge from linear chaos.”174 Due to the German and Latin inscriptions included in the print, these figures are identifiable as: Emperor Charles V, Ferdinand I of Austria, Francis I and Pope Clement VII.175

Although the image splits into two unique genres, landscape and portrait, they are nonetheless connected by a similar theme. The small figures dispersed in the landscapes recall anecdotes relating to their appropriate figure-head. For example, behind Charles V is a military scene of horses led by soldiers; behind Ferdinand I, a depiction of the siege of Vienna (1529-32); behind Pope Clement VII is a representation of God threatening a Turk; and finally, behind Francis I are Oriental figures referring to his relation with the Turkish Empire. 176 Thus the four contrasting landscape scenes are uniformly marked with the invisible power of their sovereigns, cunningly concealed yet ever present.

As Niceron relays in his treatise, anamorphic images were not only created on a small scale in woodcut prints such as Schön’s, but also were widely used for mural decorations in large architectural settings. It can be argued that the larger the scale of the anamorphic image, the greater the effect on its intended audience. In his treatise, Niceron lists three forms of architectural anamorphic projection. The first type is listed as ‘optical’ where the viewer looks horizontally along a hall or gallery. The second type is ‘anoptric’ where the viewer is meant to look up at the illusion on a high wall or ceiling. Finally, the third type is termed ‘catoptric’ where viewers must direct their look downwards to appreciate the anamorphic image. Included in Jean Du Breuil’s *Practical Perspective* (1649) are numerous prints that demonstrate the manner in which these architectural anamorphic illusions were realized and viewed. As figure 29 illustrates, skewed,

175 Ibid.
176 Ibid.
elongated heads were either drawn or painted on the walls of a spacious room, or occasionally represented on table tops. Panels with peepholes were often arranged in front of these images, as seen on the table in figure 29. These peepholes aligned the viewer’s gaze with the resolving angle of the anamorphic demonstration. However, as the illustration of the other three figures show, the resolving viewpoint more often than not was dependent upon the movement of the spectator, who resolved the image through a trial and error process. Describing the physical experience of these anamorphic rooms, Baltrušaitis poetically discerns that these spaces “are like rooms of ghosts in which faces rise up on every side and vanish as one moves about.”\footnote{Ibid., 49.}

One of the most virtuoso demonstrations of anamorphosis executed in an architectural setting is Emmanuel Maignan’s fresco, *St. Francis of Paola* (1642) located in the cloister of San Trinita dei Monti in Rome (fig. 30, 31). If viewed frontally, this grisaille fresco depicts a cartographic image of a bay with desolate stretches of plains and sinuous mountains in the far register (fig. 30). Upon close inspection, the landscape reveals a townscape in the left register, isolated houses and plant life in the bottom register, and numerous figures scattered about its entirety. Several sailboats float in the body of the water, while the figure of St. Francis walks miraculously above the bay. Olive trees stretch along the top of the composition, framing the landscape scene within. As one exits the cloister, walking to the left of the composition, a portrait of St. Francis kneeling in prayer appears anamorphically from the serpentine lines of the landscape (fig. 31). The body and cloak of the saint are outlined by strong, dark contours that delineate the edges of the water and roads in the previous view. For the contemporary viewer, this image of the saint must have been a miraculous appearance. As a visual device that both reveals and conceals pictorial meaning, anamorphosis bears the power to astonish and potentially persuade it viewers. As such, it was often used for political and religious ends in the early modern era, a matter I now turn to.

**Political and Social Reforming**

In his 1642 publication concerning optical oddities, *Apiaria universae philosophiae mathematicae*, Mario Bettini includes a print of an eye both distorted and
re-aligned in its semi-cylindrical mirror image (figure 32). Unlike Leonardo’s anonymous eye, the identity and history of Bettini’s rendition explicitly speaks to the metaphoric and rhetorical nature of anamorphic imagery. Bettini portrays the eye of Cardinal Colonna, Bologna’s archbishop in the early seventeenth century. After suffering much hardship under the heavy hand of the Bolognese church, Cardinal Colonna was able to reform the Bolognese government and restore order to its populace. Bettini’s print metaphorically implies the reformatory powers of the Cardinal and his ability to “straighten out” distorted governance. One can understand the skewed anamorphic eye as the “wrong” point of view, or governance under the control of the church, leading the Bolognese people into a corrupted state. In this sense, the realigned eye starring back at us “signifies the literally reformed as well as reforming view of the cardinal” under whom the proper perspective of the church was renewed.178 According to Hanneke Grootenboer, the ambiguous status of anamorphosis, as demonstrated in this print, allows for a rhetorical mixing of metaphoric and literal language in order to make a political statement.

The rhetorically playful nature of anamorphic imagery of Bettini’s print can be related to the discourse of play in the realm of science in the early modern period. As Paula Findlen argues, anamorphosis stood for a larger social message; it was “an intellectual metaphor for the age.”179 Findlen discerns that after the Thirty Years’ War and numerous other political and social upheavals, thinkers and artists alike held that no political position was absolute or transparent. It was a widely held view that anamorphosis stood for the political and social confusion threatening Europe at this time.

Likening anamorphosis to the drives of early modern science, Findlen states that as the boundaries of nationhood and political alliances were being crossed, so too were the boundaries of the natural world. Contemporary accounts of anamorphic spectacles, argues Findlen, indicate that viewers not schooled in perspectival mathematics would have been convinced that these images were magical manifestations or the work of demons.180 She takes as an example the accusations of witchcraft against Athanasius Kircher during a demonstration of his optical anamorphic illusions in the early stages of

180 Ibid., 324.
his career. Kircher was inevitably forced to disclose the methods supporting his “magic” in order to avoid prosecution. However, Findlen notes that artists such as Kircher and his pupil Schön had little reason to fear prosecution due to their ties with the Jesuit community, which was invested in the development of anamorphic mathematics. Through their connections to this sect, Kircher and Schön demonstrated how anamorphosis served religious ends by provoking the “ignorant into obedient awestruck silence,” and by demonstrating how even the perceived work of the devil could be mathematically and scientifically dissected. These tricks of perspective were exercised in order to demonstrate how “natural operations that had been categorized as beyond plausibility and therefore dangerous to know” could be rationally demystified.

In sum, anamorphosis was a method of artistic “magic”, which crossed the boundaries of visual understanding through scientifically derived means. I should like to push Findlen’s historically based analysis further by asking how anamorphosis theoretically captivates its viewers. If anamorphosis uses perspective to achieve its ends, how does this impact the process of looking in relation to the viewing subject? What is unveiled by anamorphic unfolding? In order to unpack these issues, I return to Hans Holbein’s *The Ambassadors* (fig. 20), which arguably best illustrates the mechanisms of anamorphosis in both its form and content.

**The Ambassadors**

While in England, the German artist Hans Holbein was commissioned to paint a portrait of England’s two French ambassadors, Jean de Dinteville (left) and Georges de Selve. The ambassadors are portrayed on each end of a large table covered by an Oriental tapestry. A silk curtain hangs just behind the figures who stand on a floor of inlaid marble. The ages of the men are inscribed on various objects in their possession: the number twenty-nine appears on de Dinteville’s dagger, while the number twenty-four appears on the book closest to de Selve. The objects on the shelf next to the ambassadors are carefully chosen. Beginning at the top right we see a celestial globe, various
astronomical and geometrical instruments, a book and a sundial. On the lower ledge we see a terrestrial globe lying on its side, a pair of compasses, a lute and two books. The book on the right is identifiable as *Arithmetic of the Merchants* (1527) by Petrus Apianus, while the book to the left reads *Gsangbuchlein* (1524) by Johann Walter. It is fitting that the book closest to the Bishop is a compilation of German hymns, for de Selve was a learned music-lover who spoke fluent German. Furthermore, de Selve was known as an avid supporter of the Reformation and hence, not surprisingly, the hymn book is opened to Martin Luther’s Chorale.

According to Elly Dekker and Kristin Lippincott, the scientific instruments represented in this work speak more to the status of the artist than his patrons. They argue that all of the scientific accoutrements are of German origin and of current design, so that any audience viewing this painting in Holbein’s time would have immediately recognized these instruments as “new, quite expensive, and German.” For Dekker and Lippincott, the origin of the accoutrements, and the intended audience of this painting adds a layer of complexity to the work. Many scholars believe that the work was commissioned by de Dinteville for his chateau in Polisy, and would have accompanied de Dinteville back to his native France. Therefore, Dekker and Lippincott note the unique and complex dynamics involved in the creation of this painting between the French commissioner, his British residency and the German artist.

Adding to the level of complexity in *The Ambassadors* is the strange image looming in the center of the painting. In front of the table replete with various worldly instruments is a curious object shaped “like a cuttle-fish bone” floating above the marble floor. As we have noted, this oddity is an anamorphic projection of a skull. The skull resolves when the viewer moves to the right of the painting, close to the canvas. Numerous interpretations of the meaning behind this anamorphic depiction of death circulate in the discourse of art history. Fred Leeman argues that the skull acts as a rebus, or pictorial pun on the artist’s name: Holbein, or “hollow bone.” Leeman discusses

184 Ibid.
186 Baltrušaitis, *Anamorphic Art*, 91.
how puns and word games were popular forms of intellectual entertainment in Holbein’s time, and that it was characteristic of this era to “attach as many meanings to things as possible.”\textsuperscript{188} As evidence, Leeman points to the other metaphorical representations of death in this scene. At the top left hand corner of the composition a crucifix peeks out from the edges of the heavy green curtain. On de Dinteville’s hat rests a brooch decorated with a skull, bearing a close relationship to its larger anamorphic twin in the center. According to Leeman, the depictions of death speak to the vanitas theme of the painting. The instruments of worldly knowledge, painted in the manner of a still life, are connected to the skull as a reminder of the limits of earthly experience and enjoyment.

Baltrušaitis, by contrast, considers the complex iconography of this painting as indicative of far more than a momento mori. He stresses how every object and figure represented in this scene is executed in a trompe l’oeil fashion, for each item is painted in a most true-to-life manner, with no detail left unpronounced. The trompe l’oeil objects represented in this piece have often been described in terms of their relation to the four liberal arts: arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music. However, Baltrušaitis distinctly notes the connection that many of these instruments have to demonstrative explanations of linear perspective found in perspectival treatises. For example, Baltrušaitis notes Holbein’s depiction of the clock and globe, which he regards as strikingly similar to those represented in Dürrer’s treatise. More specifically he points to the celestial globe, in and amongst various other astronomical instruments, as indicative of the early modern belief that astronomy acted as “perspective” for the heavens. Finally, while the skull can be seen to connote a vanitas reading, warning of the dangers of worldly excess, Baltrušaitis stresses how it is ultimately used to demonstrate the technique of anamorphosis to Holbein’s viewers, for this perspectival method was commonly included in early modern perspectival treatises. Thus, while this image may superficially serve as an allegory for the liberal arts and the limits of worldly inquiry, it can also be read as a demonstration of perspective’s illusionistic supremacy in visual representation.\textsuperscript{189}

Interestingly, there is a way in which these seemingly disparate art historical interpretations overlap. As mentioned above, Holbein’s painting illustrates the

\textsuperscript{188} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{189} Baltrušaitis, Anamorphic Art, 93.
mechanisms of anamorphosis in both form and content. As will be discussed below, the perspectival emphasis of Baltrušaitis’ understanding of The Ambassadors in effect becomes more pronounced and concretized when complimented by a vanitas reading and when considered together with recent theoretical work on anamorphosis.

Anamorphic Revelations

As one of the most recent scholarly interpretations of anamorphosis, Massey’s book Picturing Space, Displacing Bodies posits this form of perspective as the key to dismantling such misguided perspectival terms as “Cartesian perspectivalism” and the “disembodied eye”. Massey critiques the longstanding assumption that linear perspective posits a viewer equivalent to Descartes’s rational, centered, thinking subject. According to Massey, the term “Cartesian perspectivalism” is often misused in discussions surrounding perspective.190 She acutely points to the fact that Descartes’s “own formulations undermine the premise on which this comparison rests.”191 According to Descartes’s philosophies, perspective cannot stand in for rational calculations of the mind, for perspective is based upon the sense of sight which is an embodied phenomenon. In an earlier article, Massey articulates that although perspective and anamorphosis have an anti-Cartiesian quality, they nonetheless figure into Descartes’ elaboration on doubt “as the proving ground of certainty,” for the thinking subject.192 The deceptive quality of anamorphosis demonstrates that even a seemingly rational, centered mode of vision like perspective contains within it the “possibility of its own de-rationalization.”193 Instead of solidifying the subject’s centered self-certainty, anamorphosis works to cast doubt upon the sense of sight. Therefore, as Massey concludes, “the perspectival viewpoint within a Cartesian frame work is defective and cannot be understood as metaphorically equivalent to Descartes’s ‘thinking subject’.”194

Moreover, in regards to the assumption that perspective is perceived through a “disembodied eye”, Massey points to the fact that the subject’s body is explicitly in play

190 Massey, Picturing Space, 1.
191 Ibid.
192 Lyle Massey, "Anamorphosis through Descartes or Perspective Gone Awry” Renaissance Quarterly 50, no. 4, (1997), 1165.
193 Ibid., 1168.
194 Ibid.
when viewing a perspectival image. The theory of perspective as a disembodied mode of vision, argues Massey, is often founded on its association with such optical devices as the camera obscura. However, as Massey discerns, the mechanisms of linear perspective are quite different from this early modern visual device. The camera obscura posits an image as an exact reflection of the external world itself. But “perspective,” states Massey “has never been able to claim a similar form of detachment.” Perspective always implies a form of mediation between the hand and eye, and thus any pictorial representation of the world seen requires the body as a conduit.

For Massey the dynamics of anamorphic viewing effectively reveal the embodied character of the perspectival subject. According to Massey, anamorphism re-grounds perspective within embodied phenomena and lived experience, confirming its anti-Cartesian quality. Anamorphism entices the subjective body to move about in a performative manner in order to clarify the visual illusion. However, once resolved, the anamorphic image does not reestablish a connection between vision and reason as may be assumed. Instead, by displacing the subjective body during its performative unveiling, anamorphosis reveals the “arbitrary and constructed relation between vision and the visible.” Massey articulates how the collapse of distance between the subject and the anamorphic image aligns the viewer with the actual surface of the painting, making “him/her both subject and object of the configuration.” As with trompe l’oeil painting, anamorphic images stare back at the viewer, objectifying and absorbing the subject into the perspectival configuration. Arguably, this objectification of the viewer within the anamorphic configuration is accomplished through the dynamics of what Lacan theorizes as the schism between the eye and the gaze.

In Lacan’s discussions of the gaze in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, he analyzes Holbein’s *Ambassadors*, and more specifically its anamorphic skull, as a prime demonstration of the gaze’s annihilating power. Unlike the look, or the eye, the gaze is a pre-existent phenomenon, explained by the fact that “I see

197 Ibid.
only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides.”\textsuperscript{198} The gaze is more than a matter of vision or perception, it is for Lacan an \textit{object}, and more specifically, an object of the drive as a version of the \textit{objet petit a}.\textsuperscript{199} As Lacan writes, “the \textit{objet a} in the field of the visible is the gaze.”\textsuperscript{200} We constantly look for the gaze to assuage our desire; however, it perpetually eludes our grasp, for “it is precisely in seeking the gaze in each of its points that you will see it disappear.”\textsuperscript{201} This elusiveness is explained by the fact that the gaze is not to be understood as a property of the subject nor of the things on which he/she directs his/her look. As Charles Shepherdson articulates, the gaze is not a “natural phenomena, a feature of the empirical world, or even a characteristic of light.”\textsuperscript{202} It is something that comes before, and forever precedes the world of the visible “and opens it up to our look.”\textsuperscript{203} The gaze looks at me as I look at the empirical world, it is accountable for my vision even before I begin to see. As it is not located in worldly objects themselves, or in the perceptive abilities of the subject, the gaze originates in the Other. Through the desires of the Other, the gaze solicits sight and calls it forth, “such that it imposes my vision upon me,” rendering the act of vision a passive, controlled phenomena.\textsuperscript{204} In this sense, the subject is annihilated by the gaze, for we are subjected by its desirous pull yet never capable of controlling it or even locating its presence.

Painting, for Lacan exposes the mechanisms of the gaze. In spite of the fact that we can never see the gaze, as it is the invisible structure that solicits vision, Grootenboer argues that anamorphosis actually does posit a precise location for it. Anamorphosis enacts the dynamics of the gaze by positing an invisible point beyond the limits of the painting which we as viewers inevitably seek out. This location can be understood in anamorphic configurations as the distance point, which, as discussed, plays an integral role in the distorting process of anamorphic imagery. Grootenboer demonstrates how this

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\textsuperscript{201} Ibid., 89.
\textsuperscript{202} Shepherdson, "Pound of Flesh," 79.
\textsuperscript{203} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{204} Lacan, “Of the Gaze,” 131.
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point stipulates depth and point of view in pictorial configurations, whilst remaining
exclusively exterior to the compositions themselves. In other words, through this
peripheral location, the distance point determines the structure of the painting whilst
remaining invisible. Unlike the vanishing point and point of view, which arguably also
maintain a form of invisibility, the distance point “will neither be occupied nor looked at
by a spectator.” 205 However, as Grootenboer contends, it is in the structure of
anamorphosis that the viewer is afforded this “impossible lateral view.” 206

As viewing subjects, we are determined, argues Grootenboer, by two “eyes” in
perspectival configurations; by the figurative eye of the vanishing point, and the eye of
the distance point. The eye of the distance point can be understood in a Lacanian sense,
as the eye of the Other, always remaining outside of the picture, where no viewer ever
looks, nevertheless conditioning the structure of what we see. This distant, elusive point
that frames visibility can be understood as the locus of Lacan’s gaze. For Grootenboer,
the distance point, as gaze, is introduced in the perspectival system as a kind of third
person. As viewing subjects we are solicited by the painting through the vanishing point
which acts as a second person acknowledging our visual engagement. The lateral distance
point acts as an invisible third person, who “‘looks’ at both the spectator and the painting
from the side of the painting,” from an exterior, oblique angle. 207 In this way Grootenboer
concludes that although anamorphosis is popularly known for its concealing quality,
anamorphosis also shows “the complexities of perspective’s function in the field of
vision.” 208 By positioning the viewer in a perceivably unoccupiable position, the subject
is able to catch a glimpse of how implicated they are in the perspectival system, and
likewise annihilated as subjects in the visual field.

Annihilating the Subject

We can now understand the conflation of form and content in Holbein’s
anamorphic skull. As a representation of death, the skull is both a picture of death, and
also represents what death encompasses; “the disappearance of the viewer in the field of

206 Ibid.
207 Ibid.
208 Ibid., 129.
the gaze.” As Lacan writes, “...at the very heart of the period in which the subject emerged and geometrical optics was an object of research, Holbein makes visible for us here something that is simply the subject as annihilated...” As a skewed form which stands as incomprehensible from a frontal viewing position, Holbein’s anamorphic skull eradicates the subject’s visual agency. Moreover, by affording the viewing subject another angle of pictorial “seeing,” Holbein’s anamorphosis exposes how perspective and the gaze solicit and control vision. As a de-centered, anti-rational depiction of death in and amongst objects of worldly, scientific inquiry, the skull visually and figuratively questions the picture’s perspective.

By way of conclusion, I see the duality in Holbein’s work as demonstrative of what Christine Buci-Glucksmann terms the “double view” of baroque aesthetics. A baroque way of seeing for Buci-Glucksmann implies a double position, as it is both playfully rhetorical and scientifically grounded. In reference to painting, the baroque form departs from the renaissance paradigm as it plays with levels of illusion by merging visual trickery with and through the scientific underpinnings of perspective. The baroque form reflects an ever temporal, almost chaotic state, but nonetheless remains highly structured. This dual activity solicits a doubling gaze for Buci-Glucksmann, similar to Lacan’s schismatic understanding of vision. In this sense, the baroque eye for Buci-Glucksmann is characterized “as an anamorphic gaze.” Unlike paintings constructed through linear perspective, anamorphic images appear “in the process of unfolding,” tantamount to the character of the baroque form. As Grootenboer pronounces, in performatively viewing an anamorphic image, it is as if “perspective itself, unfolds itself and shows itself.” By enticing the viewer to uncover its lateral viewpoint, anamorphosis catches the seeing subject in its perspectively derived illusion. Once uncovered, an anamorphic image reveals nothing of its difference from perspectival space, but stands as a captivating reminder of the hegemony of perspective in pictorial vision.

213 Ibid., 131.
214 Ibid.
Chapter Four: “Thinking Inside of the Box”: Consummate Perspectival Display in Samuel Van Hoogstraten’s Perspective Box

Located in the National Gallery of London, Samuel Van Hoogstraten’s Perspective Box with Views of a Dutch Interior (fig. 1-5) stands as a cumulative display of the possibilities of perspectival illusion. One of only six extant perspective boxes, Van Hoogstraten’s work consists of a rectangular wooden cabinet, about two feet high, three feet wide and two feet deep, which stands above a heavy wooden pedestal. On each end of the box are two coin-sized peepholes for viewers to look through. The front panel of the box is left open in order to accommodate a light source. In Van Hoogstraten’s time, this open front panel would have been fitted with some form of translucent material in order to maintain the mysterious nature of the box’s interior display. Looking through the peephole, the viewer sees into an illusionistically rendered domestic space, depicted on the box’s three interior panels. Painted thresholds, doors and windows offer multiple views into an interior which contains a total of nine rooms.215

Van Hoogstraten’s piece is unique in this genre of art forms in a number of ways. To begin with, in keeping with the self-referential character of his oeuvre, Van Hoogstraten innovatively includes various motifs in the interior and exterior panels of his box which refer explicitly to the status of its maker. Secondly, due to the rectangular shape of this particular perspective box, Van Hoogstraten was able to accommodate views into more spaces than any of its kind. Thirdly, the multitude of private interior spaces is punctuated by specific pictorial motifs that draw our attention to the voyeuristic character of the viewer’s visual engagement with the piece. Finally, in order to maximize the aggregate of views present in his perspective box, Van Hoogstraten included a second peephole directly opposite the first. In this manner, the London perspective box stands as unique in its genre due to the particular viewing experience it sets up for the spectator.

As the name of these peculiar art forms attests, perspective boxes are created through an intricate arrangement of perspectival mathematics. I begin this chapter by

detailing the history of these boxes and the theorized origins of their making. I then explore how the viewing experience generated by these perspective boxes reveals and interrogates the mechanisms of linear perspective. By way of conclusion, this chapter will argue that the aggregate of views composed by Van Hoogstraten in this peculiar perspective box posit pictorial vision as a process of mobile unfolding. In the final analysis, I will argue that Van Hoogstraten’s *Perspective Box with Views of a Dutch Interior* consummately exhibits all features of a baroque understanding of perspective detailed in this thesis.

**Inside the Making: Putting it all Together**

According to Susan Koslow, after the discovery of perspective in the late fifteenth century, various areas of Europe responded in different ways to this new scientific tool. The Dutch, argues Koslow, responded in a unique way by developing a completely new art form now known as the perspective box. Like dollhouses created in the northern Netherlands, perspective boxes were intended to depict a miniaturized version of reality. However, unlike dollhouses, which aimed to present a diminutive rendition of household interiors, perspective boxes “transmuted reality” using perspectival illusion. Koslow discusses how the spectator’s scale is adjusted and miniaturized when looking into a perspective box, due to the dynamics of monocular vision. By restricting vision to one eye, it is difficult to judge scale or depth. Therefore, through the complex arrangement of anamorphic configurations and reduction in scale accommodated by the peephole, the two-dimensional paintings on the box’s panels illusionistically appear in three dimensions. For these reasons, Koslow contends that this complex system of perspectival optics permits the viewer “to ‘enter’ the painting.”

Although the precise date of each of the six extant perspective boxes is unknown, they are believed to have been made between the years 1650-1675, corresponding to the first written documentation of this art form found in the writings of diarist John Evelyn. The box he describes depicted a view of “The Great Church of Haarlem in Holland” and was triangular in shape. In his diary entry dated February 5, 1656, Evelyn remarks:

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217 Ibid., 36.
Was shown me a pretty perspective and well represented in a triangular box, the
Great Church of Haarlem in Holland, to be seen through a small hole at one of the
corners and contrived into a handsome cabinet. It was so rarely done that all the
artists and painters in town flocked to see and admire it.218

Thus perspective boxes sparked immense curiosity in the eyes of their seventeenth-
century viewers and became a much talked about form of illusionism.

Although the perspective box Evelyn enthusiastically describes is no longer
extant, six surviving boxes of its kind reside in museum collections in both Europe and
North America. Three of them are located in the National Gallery in Copenhagen: two
triangular views into a Reformed Church (fig. 33, 34) and Catholic Church, and one
rectangular View of a Voorhuis (view into a front room).219 The remaining three boxes
are: a triangular View of a Dutch Interior (fig. 35) located in the Bredius Museum in The
Hague, a pentagonal View of a Vaulted Vestibule (fig. 36) attributed to Samuel Van
Hoogstraten in the Detroit Institute of Arts, and the rectangular View of a Dutch Interior
(fig. 1-5) by Van Hoogstraten located in the National Gallery London.

Despite the fact that the method and manner in which these perspective boxes
were constructed is largely unknown, several scholars, including Koslow and David
Bomford, have proposed detailed theories about their making.220 As figure 33 illustrates,
the triangular perspective box with a view into a Reformed Church was decorated on its
exterior. Trompe l’œil painted opened drawers, quills, pearls and coins render the box a
feigned representation of a personal cabinet. It is as if the painted exterior alludes to the
illusionistic display hidden within. The peephole is located halfway up the front exterior,
hidden behind a metal plate. Above the painted drawers and viewing aperture is an open
window, which would have originally been fitted with some form of translucent
material.221 Painted on the interior panels is a view into the nave of a Protestant church.
Looking towards the apse we see two pulpits on each end and a minister preaching to the

218 As cited in Ibid., 37.
219 David Bomford, “Perspective, Anamorphosis, and Illusion : Seventeenth-Century Dutch Peep Shows,”
in Ivan Gaskell & Michiel Jonker, Vermeer Studies (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press,
1998). As Bomford notes, this rectangular box is missing its front panel, and is therefore no longer on
display.
220 David Bomford in particular has written extensively on the physical attributes and mathematical
workings of these devices. I owe the below descriptions and conjectures to his findings.
221 Ibid., 126.
right. Located in the left register is the depiction of an open book; an illusionistic fly rests on its bindings.

When looking at figure 34, it is important to remember that we are actually looking at two angled paintings brought together at their apex. Therefore, the horizontal lines of the tiled floor in the church interior are not, in actuality, horizontal at all. They appear horizontal from this viewpoint, but are actually a pair of angled lines that join at the apex of the two compositions. This optical trick illustrates the fundamental principles of how perspective boxes are constructed. According to Bomford, if two lines meet at an angle, they will appear colinear and straight if they are viewed from along the plane that contains them both. With regards to the Bredius perspective box, figure 37 shows how lines AC and BC will appear straight and continuous if viewed along the line ADB. In a parallel manner, lines AD and BD will appear colinear if viewed from line ADB, as well as lines AE and BE from angle AEB. In this diagram point P indicates where all three pairs of lines intersect. In this sense, when the perspective box is viewed from point P all three pairs of lines appear straight and continuous with each other. Ergo, the peephole is cut out in this precise location.

The third triangular perspective box, located in the Bredius museum, portrays the interior of a Dutch home and has been attributed to the artist Pieter Janssens Elinga (fig. 35). This piece depicts a room with high vaulted ceilings and large windows that look out onto a balustrade flanked with statues. The floor is checkered with black and white tiles, moving out towards walls lined with paintings of various genres. In the far right register of the room the mistress of the house sews, while a maid sweeps the floors close by. Looking into the open door in the left register, one notices a man descending a staircase. In the front most register, encroaching upon the space of the viewer, are several chairs placed beside a table set for tea. As Bomford notes, the front panel of the box has not survived, therefore a speculative peephole had to be reconstructed in the plexi-glass which now covers the open end.222

Figure 35 captures this scene head-on, without the peephole’s realigning illusionistic appeal. From a frontal viewing position the walls of the intended rectangular shaped room appear to jut out towards the viewer in a sharp triangular fashion. Although

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222 Ibid., 127.
the apex of the triangle appears to move towards us, it must be stressed that these walls are painted on two panels angled away from the viewer. Figure 38 diagrammatically explains this visual phenomenon. First, one must imagine the rectangular shape that the space is meant to convey. Next, one must visualize the actual triangular shape of the perspective box placed inside the imagined rectangular form, with the apex of the triangle projecting away from us. From the peephole located at the viewer’s end, lines of sight can be traced towards the far corners of the ceiling, and the top end of the back wall. According to Bomford, the point where the lines of sight intersect with the faces of the box is where the top of the back wall must be painted. As demonstrated in the diagram, these intersections form an upwards triangle, as perceived from the frontal viewing position. However, when this space is viewed from the peephole, “and only from the peephole,” the two lines meeting at the apex of the box (B) appear “straight, continuous and horizontal.” Hence, the plane that contains this apex is where the peephole must be placed (P). All other points that intersect with the faces of the box indicate the shape that the painting must form. In this way, every part of the painting can be mapped out point by point.

Bomford explains that the artists responsible for these ingenious art forms would have had to adequately judge and actualize these lines of sight in the process of their making. One of the fundamental devices of a perspective box is thus anamorphosis. As discussed in chapter three, anamorphosis involves the creation of a distorted image, which resolves into proper form from an oblique, premeditated angle. However, perspective boxes employ a unique and complex arrangement of anamorphosis, relying on multiple executions of this form of distorted perspective. It is integral to the box’s illusionistic conquest that all anamorphic projections align in the precise location of the peephole. Therefore, this consummate display of perspectival optics must have relied upon numerous trial and error based experiments and geometrical calculations.

The smallest extant perspective box is pentagonal in shape and represents the interior of a large room (fig. 36). Residing in the Detroit Institute of Arts, this uniquely shaped box is attributed to Samuel Van Hoogstraten. Unlike any of the other boxes, Van

223 Ibid.
224 Ibid.
Hoogstraten’s pentagonal construct still has its viewing aperture intact. This light aperture is a pivoting glazed mirror located just above the peephole. It reflects only a narrow band of light into the painted scene. As the viewer moves the mirror around, more areas of the scene are uncovered “like shining a torch up and down an unlit room,” translating the viewing process into an individual experience of “gradual discovery.”

In addition to the six boxes just described, we should consider the remnants of a seventh potential example. The intended function of Carel Fabritius’s View of Delft (fig. 39) has spurred much scholarly debate. Although Fabritius himself was well known for his skillfully depicted wide angle views, the specific conditions under which this painting was seen are largely unknown. The basis of the quarrel about this painting’s function is the curved angle of its landscape view. Martin Kemp speculates about a number of viewing possibilities. First, he contends that Fabritius’s image may have functioned as the painted panel base for a cylindrical mirror anamorphosis. Kemp’s second conjecture is that the painting, despite its curved representational space, was intended to be viewed frontally, strictly as an easel painting. Kemp favours this argument, for he discerns that if this was the case then Fabritius’s painting challenges “the assumption that standard perspective corresponds to our normal manner of seeing.”

Although there is no direct evidence to prove this supposition, Kemp regards it as fruitful to think of Fabritius’s work as an experiment in “natural perspective.”

Walter Liedtke has opposed this interpretation, and argues that Fabritius’s image originally would have been viewed in the confines of a perspective box. As figure 40 demonstrates, Liedtke maintains that the effect of Fabritius’s painting was best achieved when bent into a semi-circular shape. His findings do correspond to the actual shape of the site and the perspectival schema of the painting itself, for the semicircular picture “is the only one in which the scene as a whole and all of the individual forms appear to be free of any distortion.” Whether Fabritius’s work was originally intended to fit within the confines of a perspective box or stand on its own as an easel painting, this image

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225 Ibid., 126.
227 Ibid.
nonetheless reveals the intricacies of perspective box design and the complexities of its intended viewership.

Now let us turn to Samuel Van Hoogstraten’s perspective box in London’s National Gallery. As the most complex example of this genre, Van Hoogstraten’s Perspective Box with Views of a Dutch Interior (fig. 1-5) has received much attention in the scholarship on vision and science in the early modern era. Mainly studied as a prime example of a “marvel”, this box has been explained in terms of interest in experimental demonstration as a method of investigating nature and depicting what was often referred to as “natural knowledge.” Celeste Brusati argues that Van Hoogstraten’s particular illusionistic prowess was due in part to the keen interest he took in the camera obscura. The fascination with this pre-photographic device lay not only in its entertaining qualities, but also in the manner that illustrated the associations between vision and artistic representation. Johannes Kepler was widely known to have equated the camera obscura with the inner workings of the eye. For Kepler, the retinal image “pictures” the world just as the camera obscura “pictures” the space beyond the aperture. In this way, the camera obscura could be understood as a tangible, mechanical extension of the eye itself, ultimately providing artists with the opportunity to equate vision and painting.

While many artists are thought to have been inspired by this invention, Van Hoogstraten is the only artist of his time known to have explicitly advocated its use as a tool for painting. In his treatise, Van Hoogstraten firmly states with regard to the quality of the camera obscura image:

I am certain that the sight of these reflections in the darkness can be very illuminating to the young painter’s vision; for besides acquiring knowledge of nature, one also sees here the overall aspect which a truly natural painting should have.

Thus, whereas Kepler equates the camera obscura with the inner workings of the eye, Van Hoogstraten declares that this visual device produces an image analogous to an ideal painting.

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229 Brusati, Artifice and Illusion, 172.
231 As cited in Brusati, Artifice and Illusion, 71.
According to Brusati, the evidence of Van Hoogstraten’s fascination with this device is not only found in his writings, but also in his artistic production. Specifically, Brusati likens Van Hoogstraten’s *Perspective Box with Views of a Dutch Interior* to the visual dynamics enacted by the camera obscura. She contends that like the camera obscura, the perspective box posits a disembodied viewer due to the manner in which the peephole confines and segregates the eye from the subject’s body. The eye is held “captive,” argues Brusati, in order for the box to provide “privileged ocular access to a normally invisible world.”

Although one cannot deny the manner in which perspective boxes isolate the eye from the body in order to accommodate their illusion, I do not entirely agree with Brusati that perspective boxes posit a disembodied viewer. On the contrary, although the ocular voyeuristic appeal of Van Hoogstraten’s work corresponds to a privileged viewing position, this art form also draws attention to the spectator’s embodied presence within a feigned domestic space. This awareness is intricately generated by several attributes unique to this box’s making. In the following pages, I will detail the devices of this box, which work to create an unparalleled viewing experience for the spectator. Firstly, the self-referential quality of Van Hoogstraten’s oeuvre demonstrates how the viewer is voyeuristically positioned and thereby “pictured” in the visual field. Secondly, the multitude of rooms contained within this interior encourages a syncopated sense of space, corresponding to a specifically Northern understanding of perspective. Finally, the unique addition of a second peephole draws attention to the dominant mode of vision this art form aims to interrogate: the hegemonic paradigm of perspective.

**Perspective Box as Emblem of its Maker**

In Brusati’s study of the art and writing of Samuel Van Hoogstraten, she details the manner in which this Dutch artist parlayed his artistic virtuosity into a tool for gaining social favour in royal courts abroad. After Van Hoogstraten left Rembrandt’s studio, he set his sights on the court of Ferdinand III in Vienna. The successful reception of one of his trompe l’œil pieces won Van Hoogstraten a royal gold medallion and chain. From this moment on Van Hoogstraten incorporated these gifts in his paintings as a means of

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232 Ibid., 181.
elevating and reifying the value of his artistic prowess. As an example, Brusati points to Van Hoogstraten’s *Feigned Cabinet Door* (fig 41). At the center of this composition, peeking out from under a white towel is Van Hoogstraten’s gold medallion. Moreover, in the pockets of a guilt leather case, the artist has included a trompe l’oeil rendering of the receipt for his services, reading: “Received by Samuel Van Hoogstraten the 12th of February 1655 in Vienna.” Although he did not obtain a permanent paid position as court artist to Ferdinand III, this painting demonstrates how Van Hoogstraten deployed the success he received there to lure prospective patrons in Holland and England for the next two decades. In this sense Van Hoogstraten placed a large emphasis on the role of self-representation as an art of pleasing, which ultimately “informed his own behaviour and pictorial practice.”

The self-referential character of Van Hoogstraten’s work after 1655 shows itself most explicitly in the making of his perspective box. In keeping with his quest to solidify his artistic fame through self-representation, the London perspective box includes various motifs that point to the identity of its maker. In the front left end of the box lies a self-addressed letter bearing the artist’s name. A portrait complete with Van Hoogstraten’s family crest hangs on the wall adjacent to the bedrooms. Also, a stained glass window containing his wife’s family arms appears in a room at the far left. Brusati argues that through the inclusion of these various personal accoutrements, Van Hoogstraten codifies this space in a possessive manner.

Arguably, the most explicit display of the self-referential nature of Van Hoogstraten’s box can be seen in the three painted putti on its exterior panels (fig. 42-44). These putti may illustrate Van Hoogstraten’s ideas about the desires that accompany the will to art, as discussed in his published treatise *Inleyding tot de Hooge Schoole der Schilderkonst* (1678). He explicitly states in this text, that there are three urges which pull artists towards their craft: “the love of art, the desire for gain, and to be admired by one and all.” The “love of art” is represented on the box’s exterior through the depiction of

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235 Ibid., 177.
236 Ibid., 181.
237 Ibid., 213
an artist painting an image of the muse Urania (fig. 42), whom Van Hoogstraten describes in his treatise as the inspiration leading the artist “to climb the stairway to the stars.” On the opposite end of the box, the “desire for fame” is represented by an artist who receives a golden chain and crown of laurel from a putto (fig. 43). On the back, Van Hoogstraten depicts the “desire for wealth” through the representation of a crowned putto, holding a scepter in one hand, and opening a bag of gold coins in the other (fig. 44).

In this way, the putti represent ideals spelled out in the *Inleyding*. Indeed, the perspective box as a whole seems to strive towards the same goal as Van Hoogstraten’s nearly four hundred page publication. Much like the peepbox’s consummate display of painting, Van Hoogstraten’s treatise declares itself as nothing less than “a comprehensive description of painting and all that pertains to it.” A further example of this equivocation can be discerned in the relationship between the structure of Van Hoogstraten’s treatise and the spatial organization of the perspective box’s interior. We have already noted that the London perspective box depicts disparate views into a total of nine rooms. Likewise, Van Hoogstraten’s *Inleyding* is organized into nine chapters, which Van Hoogstraten terms “classrooms”, adding that he will guide the student’s hand through each.

Within the plethora of rooms, the viewer sees a “veritable encyclopedia of images” (fig. 5) including an array of landscape, history and portrait paintings, in addition to a printed map located under the broom on the far right end. The variety of images depicted in this space can be situated within the tradition of *kunstkammer*, or paintings of art collections, which foregrounds the value of art in the home as a display of social and cultural wealth. Here, the exhibition of art in the domestic sphere can be seen as an attempt on Van Hoogstraten’s part to flaunt the importance of his own artistic practice. In addition to seeing this collection of paintings, the viewer’s eye is enticed to penetrate a number of architecturally framed views into space. As one looks through myriad

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238 Ibid.
239 Ibid., 220.
240 Ibid., 178.
241 Elizabeth A. Honig, *Painting & the Market in Early Modern Antwerp* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1998), 189. Honig discusses how the tradition of the *kunstkammer* was also a means for collectors to preserve the value of their pieces for future generations.
doorways, windows and mirrored reflections, a seemingly endless number of framed “pictures” comes into view. These multiple views into space are not unprecedented in Dutch interior genre scenes. In order to unpack the manner in which the London perspective exemplifies a unique relationship to these spaces, it is necessary to look at several images from Van Hoogstraten’s oeuvre. In doing so I aim to articulate the manner in which we as viewers are also ‘pictured’ in the image-making processes of pictorial vision.

**Standing on the Threshold, Looked at from Within**

The array of thresholds represented in the London perspective box is akin to a number of perspective paintings that Van Hoogstraten created throughout his career. A prime example is *Perspective of a Dutch Interior Viewed from a Doorway* (fig. 45). The viewer approaches this image from what appears to be an opened doorway. A change in tile patterns, and open entrances divide the interior into three disparate spaces. Marking each space are various household objects, beginning with what appear to be a maid’s cleaning tools in the foremost room, a pair of slippers resting in the hallway, and a clothed table next to an upholstered chair in the boudoir. Hanging above the table and chair is a re-representation of a work by Dutch painter Gerard Ter Borch: an interior scene with a man and two women. By including a partial glimpse of this painting, Van Hoogstraten coyly reflects upon the nature of his own work as representational artifice. A similar viewing experience occurs in Van Hoogstraten’s *Perspective with a Young Man Reading a Book* (fig. 46), as well as in his full scale trompe l’oeil piece *View from a Threshold* (fig. 12), which is discussed in chapter two. In both instances, the viewer is again enticed to peruse the layers of interior and exterior spaces framed by doorways, windows and architectural detail. In this genre of work Van Hoogstraten characterizes the domestic interior as a series of enfolded spaces that the eye must locate and penetrate in the process of looking.

According to Martha Hollander, threshold paintings follow from the Dutch Mannerist tradition of including “doorsiens”, or views into distant spaces, in order to maximize the amount of narrative conveyed in paintings. This term finds its origins in Karel van Mander’s treatise *Het schilder-boeck* (the painter’s book) of 1604. In this
treatise Van Mander qualified the act of looking as an aggressive and erotic activity. Hollander discusses how the doorsiens were intended to permit the eye to penetrate the picture, which speaks to “the erotic nature of looking.” Hollander discusses how the painted doorsiens often functioned as a way of dividing and establishing various social and moral relationships in the Dutch home. Through an examination of a number of interior scenes by Nicholas Maes, Hollander demonstrates the manner in which these paintings of the Dutch home strictly articulated the relationships between servants and their employers, “by describing the household as a cluster of territories.” Hollander takes as an example Maes’ Eavesdropper (fig. 47) which depicts a housewife who looks at us with a finger to her lips, calling attention to the erotic encounters of her maid servant viewed through a doorsien at the lower left of the painting. Through this intricate placement of doorsiens, the viewer is invited to penetrate domestic space and enjoy a titillating view of private activity.

In the London perspective box, as in the threshold paintings, Van Hoogstraten gives this privileged viewing position to the beholder of the work. In all three threshold compositions, there is a direct allusion made to the viewer’s immediate presence in the image, seen in motifs such as the keys dangling in the upper right registers. As spectators, we are made accountable for having opened the door into the depicted interior scene. Although the perspective box does not include such a motif, it nonetheless refers explicitly to the viewer’s embodied presence on the threshold through the watchful gaze of a curious dog who looks back at us. Through the awareness of this domestic pet, Van Hoogstraten has literally placed the viewer at the threshold of his painting and confines of his home.

Indeed, the perspective box uses a range of visual devices to make viewers aware of their own voyeuristic activity. Looking from the left peephole, we see a woman seated near a window absorbed in the act of reading. On the other side of this window stands a man who watches her through panes of glass. According to Brusati, this male figure

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243 Ibid., 104.
244 The same pictorial formula is applied to Van Hoogstraten’s Perspective with a Young Man Reading a Book (fig 46). We, as viewers, are interrogated by the dog resting on the tiled floor. Although he is not erect, he has nonetheless lifted his head upon noticing our presence.
duplicates the viewer’s act of looking. The spectator is not only invited to witness the deeds of the Peeping Tom, but also has visual access to another woman who is depicted asleep in an adjacent bedroom (which is also seen from the left peephole). These visual cues concerning transgressive visual activity should be understood in relation to larger social anxieties concerning the sexuality of the female body and the fluid boundaries of private space, implicitly referred to in many Dutch genre paintings.

In Hollander’s examination of Pieter de Hooch’s Woman Receiving a Letter from a Man (fig. 48), she makes several acute inferences about the intricate relationship between domestic space and gender norms in seventeenth-century Holland. Beyond the simple categorization of women and men in terms of interior and exterior spaces, Hollander points to the manner in which domestic boundaries are crossed in this instance, alluding to a larger social anxiety about the availability of the female body. The open door motif, as an example, suggests that the woman is open and available for sexual gratification; she is “open to penetration.”245 The metaphor of “woman as house”, as evidenced in de Hooch’s painting, also infers that feminine space is “an interior world open to masculine influence.”246

The anxiety surrounding the perceived vulnerability of the female body also is implicitly referred to in a number of Dutch genre paintings, which include the peripheral presence of a male figure. In de Hooch’s Woman Preparing Bread for a Boy (fig. 49), a barely discernable male figure is depicted behind an inner window in the voorhuis, or entrance of the home. According to Hollander, masculine presence in such images could serve to anchor the perceived danger of female solitude through the allusion of paternal influence.247 Returning to Van Hoogstraten’s perspective box, I think it highly unlikely the male figure depicted therein is a family relation. Unlike de Hooch’s reference to masculine presence, the male voyeur peering into the perspective box does not stand in the voorhuis of the home, nor does he gaze out towards the codified male, urban society. The male voyeur gazes explicitly into the home and spies upon the activities of the unsuspecting woman. In his perspective box, Van Hoogstraten thus alludes to anxiety about the masculine penetration of feminine domestic space. Furthermore, I would argue

245 Hollander, Entrance for the Eyes, 163.
246 Ibid., 164.
247 Ibid., 173.
that the Peeping Tom mimics the viewer’s own voyeuristic activity, gazing into the perspective box’s entirety. Although the Peeping Tom has ocular access to the woman seated near the window, the viewer has visual access to both women; and both seem unaware that they are being watched. In this way I hold that Van Hoogstraten is ultimately commenting upon the erotic nature of artistic engagement, by rendering the female figures open to the voyeuristic visual activity of desiring eyes. Indeed, this interpretation is in keeping with artistic commentary of the time, to which I now turn.

**The Love of Art, the Eroticism of Vision**

The erotic nature of art alluded to in the depiction of Van Hoogstraten’s Peeping Tom has a strong literary and pictorial history, wherein the act of vision and painting are characterized as amorous, seductive activities. In Philips Angel’s treatise *Lof der Schilder-konst*, which Eric Sluitjer designates as an “encomium to the art of painting,” Angel characterizes art appreciation as a lustful conquest. In his introduction, Angel states that the power of art is its capability to arouse insatiable desire in the eyes of art lovers. He characterizes the act of artistic enjoyment as an “endless (yet pleasant) maze”, the viewer “constantly seeing a new and different wish springing from the end of one desire” to the next. Decades prior, van Mander anecdotally referred to the erotic nature of art in his biography of Bartholomeus Spranger. He claims that Pictura (the muse of painting) had fallen in love with Spranger, and chose to marry him. Van Mander therefore characterizes Spranger’s paintings as the amorous offspring of this union: children “who will guarantee his eternal fame.”

The erotic nature of artistic creation also was explored in early modern works of art. Albrecht Dürer’s woodcut print *Draughtsman Drawing a Recumbent Woman* (fig. 50) is a well known example that seems to stress the sexual connotations of art making. Mieke Bal characterizes this scene as an act of voyeurism wherein the female body is

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exploited for the ends of perspectival study. Bal notes the asymmetrical relationship between the upright draftsman located behind the perspectival grid, and the reclining nude figure exposing her “rhetorically covered genitals.” In Dürer’s print, art making is explicitly denoted as an erotic, voyeuristic activity, and the technique of perspective stands as the scientific (and masculine) means to penetrate feminine space.

A further example of the erogenous nature of picture making is a print by Hendrick Goltzius entitled *Allegory of Visus and the Art of Painting* (fig. 51). In this work, a nude model contemplates her image in a mirror held up by small putto identified as Cupid. Behind Cupid sits a painter who captures the nude female’s likeness on his canvas, as he peers down at her through his spectacles. Eric Jan Sluijter argues that this image emblematically reveals an intricate relationship between the act of painting, female beauty and the sense of sight, to which art owes its inception. Sluijter asserts that the classical tradition of depicting Venus before a mirror is superimposed in Goltzius’s print with the allegorical figure of Visus, the muse of sight. Consequently, the print explores the overlapping relationship between the sense of sight and sensual love. Through the merging of the Venus figure, the paradigm of beauty and sensual seductions, with the figure of Visus, Goltzius shows how art making conjures a pleasure that is primarily sensual. Furthermore, by consolidating the allegory of sight with the well-known pictorial motif of Venus before a mirror, Goltzius’s print exemplifies the amorous and desirous quality of seeing and picture making described in Dutch art treatises.

Indeed, we see this philosophy of erotic visuality in Van Hoogstraten’s perspective box. Besides the voyeuristic man who peers into the space of the unassuming female reader, Van Hoogstraten includes several other pictorial motifs that mimic the visual dynamics of Goltzius’s print. Multiplying the variety of views seen from the left peephole, Van Hoogstraten includes the depiction of a mirror placed just above a chair, which reflects a string of pearls and a comb. Brusati argues that these feminine objects are the emblems of Venus. In this sense, as in Goltzius’s image, Venus is metaphorically

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252 Ibid., 173.
254 Ibid., 116.
255 Ibid., 146.
“reflected” in a mirror. Arguably, the most explicit allusion to the erotic nature of this art form is seen on the top exterior panel. Calling attention to his perspectival talent, Van Hoogstraten has included an anamorphic rendering of Venus’ close companion Erato, in bed with a diminutive Cupid (fig. 52). In Van Hoogstraten’s treatise, he explains that Erato is the muse of “procreative pairings in nature,” to whom Venus assigned Cupid for all eternity. According to Brusati, this motif explicitly emphasizes the erotic nature of art creation through its allusions to procreation. This box probably was made for an elite art collector, well-versed in the artistic discourses of the time. Peering into the box, this knowledgeable viewer would certainly understand the beholder’s complicity within the sexual dynamics of the visual field.

**Aggregate of Spaces, Syncopated Viewing**

With regards to the concerns of this thesis, the link between Van Hoogstraten’s perspective box and Goltzius’s print runs deeper than thematic similarities. As evidenced in his treatise, Van Hoogstraten was aware of Goltzius’s work and admired the aggregate of views produced in his allegorical print. In *Allegory of Visus and the Art of Painting*, we see Venus in different views: the main frontal figure, the reflection of her face in the mirror, and the painted representation of her likeness on the artist’s canvas. This accumulation of disparate perspectives led Van Hoogstraten to explicitly compare Goltzius’s print with the oeuvre of Hans Vredeman de Vries. Van Hoogstraten admired the sequential understanding of space in de Vries’s work and implemented this method of visual representation in his perspective box.

To begin on a purely stylistic level, Van Hoogstraten’s perspective box and threshold paintings bear striking similarities to works in the oeuvre of de Vries. As figure 53 demonstrates, de Vries specialized in detailed renderings of imagined architectural views. As in Van Hoogstraten’s works, the viewer’s eye is enticed to move through the intertwining of interior and exterior spaces of de Vries’s making. These imaginative drawings reflect de Vries’s written theories on the complexities of perspectival

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256 Brusati, *Artifice and Illusion*, 212.
257 Ibid., 213.
258 Ibid., 213.
configurations published in his treatise *Perspectiva* of 1604. In the opening section of his treatise, de Vries discusses the relationship between perspective and natural perception. He begins by illustrating, from a bird’s eye view (fig. 54), how the horizon line of a square space is perceived as circular from the viewer’s vantage point. In this image viewers are to imagine themselves at the center of both shapes, circularly pivoting about the axis in the center. De Vries then demonstrates how this space is perceived from the eye of the spectator (fig. 55). Notably, only one quadrant of the space’s entirety is perceivable. These two prints demonstrate the manner in which space, according to de Vries, can never be fully perceived by the human eye in a homogenous manner. In a later print (fig. 56), de Vries pictorially fleshes out these ideas through the depiction of a room laden with multiple vanishing points, which leads the viewer’s eye in a plethora of directions. The multiple vanishing points are further accentuated by the human figures who interrogate the space from disparate locations and points of view.

Although Van Hoogstraten’s theories on perspective are by no means comprehensive, Alpers notes the acclaim he bestowed on de Vries’s treatise in the *Inleyding*. Van Hoogstraten is known to have made several paintings reminiscent of de Vries’s work for English collectors.260 According to Alpers, these paintings, like the perspective box detail a specifically Northern understanding of perspective. Unlike Southern Italian perspective, which posits one specific point of view, Alpers argues that Northern perspective offers an experience of “sequential viewing.”261 While Alpers’s assessment of the dissimilar attributes of the Dutch and Italian traditions is in my view too polarized, the emphasis she places upon the syncopated effect of Northern perspectival traditions is intriguing, and provides fruitful insight into the viewing experience created in Van Hoogstraten’s perspective box.

According to Alpers, Van Hoogstraten’s box innovatively reifies de Vries’s syncopated understanding of space. Due to the London box’s unique shape and inclusion of a second peephole, its construction requires the amalgamation of numerous vanishing points. These vanishing points should be understood as extending through the three painted panels at the level of the peephole. The viewer is therefore made to look through

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an interior space similar to de Vries’s print, wherein any homogenous vantage point is made impossible. The viewer cannot “step back” and look at the scene in one instance, for they are made a constituent factor in the act of looking and required to peer into the many rooms and spaces of Van Hoogstraten’s making.

As the viewer’s eye explores the array of thresholds and aggregate of views, it encounters “little pictorial stops to punctuate its every move.”262 These pictorial “stops” are notably the motifs that acknowledge and mirror our presence within the representation, such as the dog and Peeping Tom. In a footnote regarding the knowing look of domestic pets in Van Hoogstraten’s paintings, Brusati argues that this choice was purposeful. Instead of depicting a human figure that acknowledges and returns the spectator’s gaze, Van Hoogstraten intentionally chose animals. She writes that the nature of animals “precludes the possibility of rhetorical address such as that effected through the gesture or gaze of a depicted human figure.”263 In this way, the picture does not entice the beholder into a linguistic form of communication, but posits vision as “the beholder’s principle form of self-consciousness.”264 I find this footnote telling, for it describes the manner in which Van Hoogstraten’s perspective box communicates with the viewer on purely visual terms. Our bodily presence within the domestic space is not addressed through the “rhetorical” acknowledgement of a human, but granted in a visual manner by a being incapable of linguistic expression.

By jarringly reminding the viewers of their presence within the scene, the “pictorial stops” communicate in purely visual terms the manner in which the subject is implicated and caught in this syncopated space. I propose that the attributes unique to this perspective box’s making, outlined in this chapter, contribute to a larger visual dynamic in which the perspectival conventions utilized to construct this art form are manipulated and thereby exposed. Through the consummate display of perspectival, trompe l’oeil and anamorphic imagery, Van Hoogstraten’s perspective box ultimately emphasizes the manner in which the perspectival paradigm controls our vision and constitutes us as subjects in the visual field.

263 Ibid., 311.
264 Ibid., 311.
Questioning the Paradigm, Through the Paradigm

As discussed in the beginning of this chapter, perspective boxes employ the mathematical and optical devices of linear perspective, anamorphosis as well as the realistic precision of trompe l’oeil painting. This art form therefore should be understood as a consummate display of all of the three methods of representation discussed in this thesis. By means of conclusion, I will demonstrate the manner in which Van Hoogstraten’s perspective box displays the theoretical underpinnings of each method, and therefore exposes the mechanisms of linear perspective through the unique exposure of its structure.

Linear perspective

In order to adequately render recessions into space and the diminution in scale of its objects and figures, perspective boxes employ a complex arrangement of linear perspective. Van Hoogstraten’s perspective box employs multiple vanishing points in order to create the array of spaces, and the aggregate of views therein. Like perspectival paintings, peepboxes are constructed to accommodate a fixed and monocular eye. In perspective, it is necessary that the viewpoint mirror the vanishing point, in a predetermined, central location. This fixed position is essential in order for the representation to recede into illusory space. In Van Hoogstraten’s peepbox, the viewpoint must mirror numerous vanishing points, relying on a consummate unification of multiple surfaces from a fixed location.

In addition to the numerous vanishing points, which the viewer’s eye seeks to align and mirror, is the collateral presence of a second peephole located on the opposite end of the box. Although not pictorially included as a motif of the painted scene, this open, coin-sized hole mirrors the viewer’s eye and is noticeable when scanning the box’s interior. It is possible to imagine that two spectators potentially could enjoy this interior display at the same time. Consequently, the viewer’s eye would not only be mirrored by the second peephole, but also by the eye of the second spectator. I surmise that this mirrored ocular activity, granted by the unique presence of the second peephole, reenacts the dynamics of the origins of linear perspective. In doing so, Van Hoogstraten’s
perspective box speaks to the manner in which the subject is constituted by this paradigm of vision and therefore subject to its laws and principles.

As discussed in chapter one, it has been estimated that Brunelleschi’s pictorial experiment (fig. 6 & 7) enabled him to discover, through empirical means, the optical underpinnings of the perspectival method. In order to verify the truth of his representation, Brunelleschi chose “to move behind it to look at it in the mirror, through the screen, pierced by a hole, of that same painting.” Moreover, through the device of the mirror, the spectator sees an eye in the peephole, which looks back at him/her. In so doing, argues Damisch, Brunelleschi demonstrated an uncontestable paradigm of visual representation. Through a unification of surfaces, the subject of representation was able to get its bearings “as such, within the painting as if it were inside it.” In Van Hoogstraten’s perspective box, a similar dynamic of vision is enacted. I would argue that the viewer’s eye is figuratively “mirrored”, as in Brunelleschi’s experiment, by the hole of the opposing peephole, or potentially the eye of the second spectator. By assigning the peephole as the point at which all levels of illusion align, Van Hoogstraten assures a unification of surfaces for the viewing subject, just as Brunelleschi’s viewer could cohesively grasp a comprehension view of space through a hole in his picture.

Moreover, I would argue that the addition of a second peephole in Van Hoogstraten’s perspective box mobilizes the dynamics of the binary nature of vision, as theorized by Jacques Lacan. According to Lacan, vision is a split, two-sided phenomenon. There is the side from which I see, and “on the side of things, there is the gaze, that is to say, things look at me.” As seeing subjects we are only fully capable of perceiving one side, “since we cannot see ourselves seeing,” explains Grootenboer, “we miss a part of vision, in the depth of our field of vision, where its outside and inside…meet.” I contend that Van Hoogstraten’s perspective box makes us aware of this aspect of vision, which is normally beyond our view. The second peephole “mirrors” in a Brunelleschian sense, our own eye, and arguably allows the viewer to “see oneself

266 Ibid., 127.
seeing oneself." Furthermore, I contend that the second peephole stands as a material reminder that the entirety of vision cannot be understood through one unified perspective. The subject is literally split between the two peepholes and also moves between the multiple vanishing points of Northern perspectival practice. The complex mechanisms of vision thus are activated by the box. While the eye is fixed by the peephole, it is also offered the possibility of movement, as it darts between the aggregate of views within the box, and then potentially repeats this exercise when taking up the position afforded by the second peephole. As discussed in chapter one, the conventions of linear perspective rely upon a fixed monocular viewpoint. The eye does not escape these conventions within the box; rather this work makes the viewer aware of how the structures of visual representation are ordered.

*Trompe L’oeil*

Van Hoogstraten’s perspective box displays a number of relevant features which mimic the interrogating qualities of trompe l’oeil objects, and the manner in which they “picture” viewers as subjects in the visual field. As discussed in chapter two, the feigned objects represented in trompe l’oeil paintings exhibit a certain jarring agency due to the inverted quality of their perspective. By folding the vanishing point onto the viewpoint, trompe l’oeil paintings create an effect of “decentering forwards,” whereby their banal, everyday objects illusionistically pierce the space of the viewer. From this dually occupied point of view, it appears as though trompe l’oeil objects “look back at us” from a location “we ourselves cannot occupy in order to see ourselves seeing.”

This phenomenon was alluded to in works like Van Hoogstraten’s letter rack painting (fig. 11) through the inclusion of motifs like the pince-nez, and more explicitly in the jarring presence of a human face in his painting of a feigned window (fig. 19). In this way, trompe l’oeil painting offers a visual glimpse of the other side of vision, for we are made aware of the manner in which we are looked at in the spectacle of the world. Trompe l’oeil wittily draws attention to our usual inability to perceive what is “beyond”, or behind the vanishing point in the perspectival schema. By inverting the structure of

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269 Ibid., 53.
270 Ibid., 56.
271 Ibid.
perspective and positioning the viewer in the space of the vanishing point, trompe l’oeil painting objectifies its subject. Through trompe l’oeil we are able to see that we are not only ‘observers’ in the field of vision, but we are also positioned as pictures, or objects that are looked at in the spectacle of the world. Trompe l’oeil images defy the perception of a single mastering look. In Lacanian analysis, we are “in” the picture, represented by the objects that stare back at us.

Van Hoogstraten’s perspective box of course is rendered in three-dimensional depth. This is unlike the flat two-dimensional surface of a typical trompe l’oeil. Therefore it does not perform trompe l’oeil’s trick of “decentering forwards”. However, it seems to me that the self-aware motifs of the dog and Peeping Tom encourage an interrogative reading of this highly realistically rendered art form. These motifs mimic our inquisitive, gazing activity. They reveal the perspective box’s awareness of its own status as representational artifice. Because they look back at us, and call attention to the act of viewing itself, such motifs make us see ourselves as we are looking and as we are pictured by the gaze in the visual field. Moreover, I would argue that the trompe l’oeil rendered façade of such perspective boxes as View into a Reformed Church (fig. 33) adds another level self awareness for the viewer to encounter. As if providing a preview for what is to be seen inside the box, the feigned cabinet meditates on the viewer’s expectations and its own position as visual artifice.

**Anamorphosis**

Perspective boxes also employ the devices of anamorphosis, for they arrange a series of anamorphic projections in order to accommodate the level of illusion seen therein. In Van Hoogstraten’s piece, the red chairs painted at the corners of the box, as well as the dog seen from the right peephole are anamorphically rendered. As outlined in chapter three, anamorphic projections are derived through the manipulation of the distance point in perspectival schemas, which determines the diminution of depth within a given painting. The distance point structures how we see a painting whilst remaining exclusively exterior to its material limits. The distance point for Grootenboer acts as in language, as an invisible third person who “‘looks’ at both the spectator and the painting...
from the side of the painting,” from an exterior, oblique angle. This elusive distance point is also the locus for Lacan’s gaze in the perspectival schema, as it both solicits and structures the field of vision. In anamorphic configurations, by positioning the viewer in this previously unoccupiable position, the subject is able to catch a glimpse of how they are implicated in the perspectival system and simultaneously annihilated as subjects in the visual field.

In Van Hoogstraten’s perspective box, viewers are positioned to look into the multi-paneled painting from an exterior, oblique angle. We are not intended to approach the box from a frontal position, as some form of translucent material originally would have covered the open end, concealing the inner surfaces. Unlike anamorphosis, we need not seek out the elusive, invisible, oblique angle from which the illusion aligns. The perspective box literally does this work for us. In this sense, it could be argued that perspective boxes do not convey an anamorphic understanding of pictorial space, for they dictate to the viewer, through the inclusion of the peepholes, the precise location where the illusion aligns. However, I contend that Van Hoogstraten’s perspective box is similar to anamorphic imagery in the way that it posits the act of looking as a temporal activity.

As demonstrated in relation to Hans Vredeman de Vries’ perspectival treatise, the perspective box encourages a syncopated experience of perspective. As one looks through the peephole, the eye is met with a complex layering of thresholds, doorways and windows. Each of these spaces contains paintings, figures, and self-referential motifs. As with anamorphic paintings, the visual grasp of Van Hoogstraten’s piece cannot be attained in an instant or a single glance. The eye must dart around seeking the series of vanishing points, and must pause to ponder the self-aware motifs that punctuate these spaces. Although the position of illusionistic alignment is pre-determined for the viewer, the subject must still exercise ocular mobility in order to grasp the entirety of the space. Moreover, I would argue that the presence of a second peephole solicits the subject to move about the art form itself, as in anamorphic imagery, seeking out the other side of its making. Consequently, I would characterize Van Hoogstraten’s perspective box as a quintessentially baroque pictorial conceit that reveals itself in a process of unfolding. As Christine Buci-Glucksmann articulates, the baroque aesthetic is characterized as a

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272 Ibid., 130.
process of becoming, a new mode of spatiality which is opposed to the “homogenous, geometric” space of the renaissance, perspectival aesthetic.\textsuperscript{273} The baroque aesthetic, like Van Hoogstraten’s perspective box, is characterized as a serial form of spatiality, with movement.\textsuperscript{274} Therefore, despite the ways that the eye is restricted by the confines of the peephole, the syncopated effect of unfolding spaces and ungraspable areas of vision emphasizes the baroque properties of this art form, and therefore the manner in which it self-reflexively experiments with the dominant, perspectival mode of vision.


\textsuperscript{274} Ibid., 76.
Conclusion

In summation, I see Van Hoogstraten’s perspective box as not only a consummate display of the perspectival method, but also as a comprehensive artform that ultimately interrogates this paradigm of vision. Through its cumulative display of perspectival, trompe l’oeil and anamorphic effects, the London perspective box innovatively exposes how we are conditioned as subjects in the perspectival system, through the system itself. This activity best illustrates the characteristics of the baroque aesthetic that I have explored in the body of each chapter. As Martin Jay has argued, the baroque aesthetic demonstrates an unease with the dominant model of vision as posited by perspective. This unease motivated new forms of visual communication characterized by an interrogative alterity, which nevertheless works within the parameters of the dominant visual paradigm.275 For Buci-Glucksmann, a “baroque” way of seeing implies a certain oscillation between the playfulness of rhetoric and the grounding of a scientifically based understanding. While the box generates a temporal mode of visuality, and a serial form of spatiality, it nonetheless remains highly structured.276 By questioning its own perspectively grounded makeup, Van Hoogstraten’s perspective box wittily allows us to see how we are caught in this hegemonic paradigm of pictorial vision. Ultimately, when looking into Van Hoogstraten’s Perspective box with Views of a Dutch Interior, it is as if perspective itself “unfolds itself” and unveils its conventions.277

Illustrations

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