



**Privacy, Publicity, and Gender in  
Amsterdam's Early Modern Urban  
Space**

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On 16 October 1742, the 76-year-old Wessel Barker and the 36-year-old Maria Houtrops were at the home of Hadrianus van Riel in the Tuinstraat in Amsterdam, in an alley called the Haringgang ('Herring Alley'), when the owner of the house appeared. This landlord entered, demanding a month's rent, even though the rent payment was usually due at the month's end. Van Riel refused to pay but offered to provide the money 'within three times twenty-four hours.'<sup>1</sup> Many such conflicts that made it into legal archives escalated into violence; and reading similar cases, one would expect the landlord and the tenant to have gotten into a bloody fight. Yet this case left nobody bleeding, although something akin to a gaping wound was created: when the landlord did not receive the money he was after, he took off with the front door of the house.

This act of material assault did not end up in the archive simply because life without a front door is inconvenient. Having one's front door removed abolishes the potentially locked boundary between house and street and undoes the sense of security required for a house to be a home. Being unable to close one's door collapses not just the demarcation between street and house, but also the control over the blending of their two spheres, over a type of gatekeeping. Removing a door had also been a medieval legal measure that creditors could take. It was a significant act because doors were not just mechanisms to keep people out, but also something that people used to communicate with each other.<sup>2</sup> An open door was an invitation to come in, and a closed door delivered a message as well. In his diary, the Dutch merchant Isaac Pool describes that when his niece passed away in 1674, an *aanspreker* (an announcer of deaths and funerals) came to his door and asked him to 'close his house', which meant shutting the windows and doors completely.<sup>3</sup> Someone seeing such a closed house would 'read' the *façade* and realize that someone had died. Closing a house during the day was thus an abnormality, a special ritual that was reserved for a form of funerary observance. Yet the complete openness of a house due to the absence of a door was also deeply problematic. The house made continuous connections to the outside world: not simply a public space, it was not simply a private space either.

Joachim Eibach describes early modern society as having a characteristic 'culture of visibility.'<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Arlette Farge writes of popular Parisian behaviour in the city's eighteenth-century streets: 'In Paris, everything lived, moved and died in endless succession

1 Stadsarchief Amsterdam, Inventaris van het Archief van de Notarissen ter Standplaats Amsterdam 5075 (Hereafter: 'NL-AsdSAA, Notarissen (5075)'), inv. nr. 11735, SF1742, scan 422.

2 See Daniel Jütte, *The Strait Gate: Thresholds and Power in Western History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 71 for the medieval practice where creditors were allowed to remove doors, and pages 175-208 for a chapter on communicative practices involving doors.

3 Isaac Pool, *De handelsgeest van Isaac Pool: dagboek van een Amsterdammer in de Gouden Eeuw*, ed. Laurence Duquesnoy and Jeroen Salman (Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 2018), 109. In the 1844 literary publication *een gesprek over onze manier van begraven* ('A conversation about our burial rites'), this custom is called the *huissluiting* (home closure), and it is explained that the family of the deceased (and in the case of preachers, his colleagues as well) were expected to close their house and that the house of the deceased was to be closed as well. In this fictional debate, one person is irritated by the outward spectacle of this custom, while another person defends the tradition. J. Boeke, "Gesprek over onze manier van begraven en rouwbetonen," *Vaderlandsche Letteroefeningen*, 1846.

4 Eibach, "Das Offene Haus," 651. In German: "Kultur der Sichtbarkeit."

before the eyes of everyone else in an open space where one's neighbour, whether friend or foe, was the permanent witness to oneself.<sup>5</sup> Farge's account conjures up an image of a *status quo* of everyday transparency and openness, albeit only for the masses. Some were able to shake off this sense of being permanently seen during select moments; as Mary Crane has shown with regard to early modern England, privacy was closely related to mobility, since the privacy sought for illicit activities such as sex, gossip, and the planning of political plots was 'most often represented as readily attainable only outdoors.'<sup>6</sup> Others certainly had access to privacy at home, since larger houses offered more opportunities to engage in activities away from the view of others; but the distribution of access to such spaces was skewed.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the everyday logics of opening and closing happened on different scales and the urban landscape itself was demarcated by gates and walls that granted and denied access to the city as a whole and steered the rhythms of everyday life.<sup>8</sup> Doors and locks had significant practical and symbolic functions, as we see in the case of the door that was taken away. Indeed, despite the relative openness of homes, demarcations were certainly important in early modern cities, but they followed a different spatial logic than the one we know today, which is something we will explore in this article. Everyday openness, far from being a spatial anarchy where people could go and be where they pleased, was a carefully upheld and administered system. The logic of who belonged where, and could or should be present, followed a different rationale than the public/private distinction that is the leading principle for thinking about spatial organization in present-day Europe.<sup>9</sup>

This article explores and describes the culture of transparency and its relative openness in which the early modern practices of movement within, through, and around the house were mediated by gender, class, and materiality.<sup>10</sup> It makes use of snapshots of everyday life, spatial scenes that were distilled from hundreds of notarial attestations that were drawn up for or used by the chief officer (*hoofdofficier*) of Amsterdam in the period between 1656 and 1791. These were collected in a database for the Freedom of the Streets

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5 Arlette Farge, *Fragile Lives: Violence, Power and Solidarity in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993 [French orig. 1986]), 6.

6 Mary Thomas Crane, "Illicit Privacy and Outdoor Spaces in Early Modern England," *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 9, no. 1 (2009): 5.

7 G. van Tussenbroek, "Functie en indeling van het Amsterdamse woonhuis aan de hand van een aantal zestiende-eeuwse boedelinventarissen," *Bulletin (KNOB)* 115 (2016): 125; Van Elk, *Early Modern Women's Writing*, 6.

8 Bob Pierik, "Urban Life on the Move: Gender and Mobility in Early Modern Amsterdam" (PhD Thesis, Amsterdam, Universiteit van Amsterdam, 2022), 60-65.

9 De Mare argues that the inside/outside dichotomy is relevant for the early modern situation but that the public/private dichotomy is a modern invention. Heidi de Mare, "Domesticity in Dispute. A Reconsideration of Sources," in *At Home: An Anthropology of Domestic Space*, ed. Irene Cieraad (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2006), 13-30. See also Danielle van den Heuvel et al., "The Freedom of the Streets. Nieuw onderzoek naar gender en stedelijke ruimte in Eurazië (1600-1850)," *Stadsgeschiedenis* 13, no. 2 (2018): 133-45.

10 Cf. Danielle van den Heuvel et al., "Capturing Gendered Mobility and Street Use in the Historical City: A New Methodological Approach," *Cultural and Social History* 17, no. 4 (August 7, 2020): 522-29.

project.<sup>11</sup> Notarial documents, recognized as a ‘sizeable, serial source of reliable quality,’<sup>12</sup> have been a rich source of information on everyday life for historians.<sup>13</sup> The Amsterdam city archive contains one of the largest collections of early modern notarial deeds, consisting of millions of cases divided over more than thirty thousand books.<sup>14</sup> The specific type of notarial deed in which witness statements were taken down is called a deposition or an attestation. Deeds are great sources for the study of practices and contain many details on everyday life. A.C.M. Kappelhof has convincingly showed that such notarial sources can be used to spatially reconstruct the activities people engaged in, and he was specifically able to study early modern women and their activities away from home.<sup>15</sup> The specific depositions used in this article were drawn up by the office of the personal secretary of the chief officer, a position always held by a sworn notary. Those depositions are particularly revealing because they often contain descriptions of people and their conflicts in and around the city, frequently in and along the street. They are full of rich descriptions of everyday events, people, locations, times of day, objects used – and, of course, conflicts. The result is a set of depositions that can be seen as ‘court-like records,’ a term introduced to broaden the scope of court records to include documents that, though not used in the courtroom, nonetheless supported the legal system in one way or another.<sup>16</sup> The depositions often contain descriptions of conflicts that never appeared before a court and were resolved either informally or extrajudicially, but nevertheless follow a particular standardized legal outline seen in the traditional statements found in court records.<sup>17</sup> Such depositions can thus be used in a way akin to how (church) court records have provided elaborate insights into everyday life.<sup>18</sup>

For this article, I have chosen scenes from these depositions that illuminate early modern logics of publicity and privacy in everyday urban life. The question considered is: what where the spatial logics of publicity and privacy in early modern Amsterdam? As we shall see in the next section, privacy and publicity have a complex relationship to space that I will discuss with my theoretical framework. In the sections that follow, I will turn to the empirical material from the depositions in which people interact with urban space,

11 For more information on the sources and methodology, see: Pierik, “Urban Life on the Move: Gender and Mobility in Early Modern Amsterdam,” 34–45; Danielle van den Heuvel et al., “Capturing Gendered Mobility and Street Use in the Historical City: A New Methodological Approach,” *Cultural and Social History* 17, no. 4 (August 7, 2020): 515–36, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780038.2020.1796239>.

12 Wim Heersink, “Zachte woorden op het platteland. Een verkennend onderzoek naar conflictregelingen in Noord-Holland,” in *Leidschrift*, vol. 12 (1996): 103.

13 Cf. Julie Hardwick, *Practice of Patriarchy: Gender and the Politics of Household Authority in Early Modern France* (State College, PA: Penn State Press, 2010); Dini Helmers, *Gescheurde bedden: oplossingen voor gestrande huwelijken, Amsterdam 1753–1810* (Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 2002), 328; Laurie Nussdorfer, “Roman Notarial Records between Market and State,” *Past & Present* 230 (November 1, 2016): 71–89.

14 Once they were notoriously inaccessible, but a large-scale digitization and indexing project called *AlleAmsterdamseAkten* is well on its way to opening up the notarial archive to historians, forming arguably the largest collection of Dutch-language subaltern sources.

15 A.C.M. Kappelhof, “Vrouwen buitenshuis in Breda en omgeving (1550–1650),” in *Jaarboek Centraal Bureau voor Genealogie*, vol. 58 (The Hague: Centraal Bureau voor Genealogie, 2004), 64.

16 See for example the use of the term in Maria Ågren, ed., *Making a Living, Making a Difference: Gender and Work in Early Modern European Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 14–17.

17 Cf. Pierik, “Urban Life on the Move: Gender and Mobility in Early Modern Amsterdam,” 34–45, 236–238.

18 Flather, *Gender and Space*; Eleanor Hubbard, *City Women: Money, Sex, and the Social Order in Early Modern London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 148–52; Mansell, “Beyond the Home,” 24–49.

be it through claiming it, sharing it, or excluding others from it. This will reveal the complex 'ownership' of urban space, which involves both privacy and publicity.<sup>19</sup>

### Gatekeeping and urban space

The key conceptual framework for this article is the idea that spaces were not fundamentally public or private but rather subject to constant renegotiation through daily practices of gatekeeping.<sup>20</sup> Ted Kilian argues that 'while spaces cannot be categorized as inherently "public" or "private," we cannot and should not collapse or eliminate the concepts of publicity and privacy. (...) [P]ublicity and privacy are not characteristics of space. Rather, they are expressions of power relationships in space and, hence, both exist in every space.'<sup>21</sup> I am following Kilian by trying to 'avoid a problem typical of empirical work in "public space" that almost always begins with a space that is assumed to be public or private, rather than analyzing spaces as sites of both publicity and privacy.'<sup>22</sup> For Kilian, we can better understand what happens within spaces by looking at 'the power of exclusion (privacy) and the power of access (publicity)', which can be at work simultaneously, rather than categorizing space *a priori* as either public or private, terms that lie at the opposite ends of a single continuum.<sup>23</sup> Kilian's conceptual framework offers a way forward that allows us to escape a rigid public/private distinction without entirely disregarding these terms.

In applying the two powers of exclusion and access described by Kilian to early modern urban society, I will refer to them as 'gatekeeping.' It is a fitting metaphor to describe the entangled nature of privacy and publicity in early modern cities, since early modern city gates were generally a symbol of demarcation and exclusion on the one hand, and a symbol of access and invitation into the city on the other.<sup>24</sup> It is a signal example with regard to Kilian's argument that space should not be looked at as either public/accessible or private/exclusionary. Access to the whole of urban space was negotiated via a passage through a city's walls, but it would not be worthwhile to uniformly declare the entire city to be either public or private. Simultaneously, 'gatekeeping' is a nod to the 'gatekeeper' as a gendered literary trope that refers to the way early modern women were seen as gatekeepers of sexual activity.<sup>25</sup> Gatekeeping contains both the material and social aspects embedded in the production of publicity and privacy. Furthermore, it refers not only to literal gatekeeping effected via city gates and walls but also to the sublayers of spatial negotiation that followed at the level of street, house, alley, *et cetera*, and more broadly to the gender politics of everyday spatial negotiation. The argument advanced in this article

19 On the idea of 'ownership' of space, Cf. Danielle van den Heuvel, "Gender in the Streets," *Journal of Urban History* 45, no. 4 (2019): 694.

20 Van den Heuvel, "Gender in the Streets of the Premodern City," 703-705.

21 Ted Kilian, "Public and Private, Power and Space," in *Philosophy and Geography II: The Production of Public Space*, ed. Andrew Light and Jonathan M. Smith (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 115-16.

22 Kilian, "Public and Private," 116.

23 Kilian, "Public and Private," 126.

24 Daniel Jütte, "Entering a City: On a Lost Early Modern Practice," *Urban History* 41, no. 2 (May 2014).

25 See Elisa Oh, "The Gatekeeper Within: Early Modern English Architectural Tropes of Female Consent," *Humanities* 8, no. 1 (March 2019).



is that gatekeeping in early modern Amsterdam was part of a complex and layered culture of everyday transparency and boundary-making. The powers of both accessibility and exclusion could be – and often were – at work at the same time.

Publicity and privacy both contain aspects of social conduct and materiality. The interplay between social and material aspects emerges in sharper contours when we apply the concept of gatekeeping to the house and household. I refer to these two entities together as ‘house(hold)’ to stress that the physical ‘house’ and the social unit of the ‘household’ are highly contingent. Sometimes it is useful to differentiate between the social and material aspects, but in other cases it is exactly their contingency that makes their workings clear. This conceptualization is akin to Eibach’s concept of the ‘open house’, which covers a household that was not always restricted to the physical structure of the house, whose boundaries were relatively flexibly threaded by bodies, gazes, and sounds as the members of the household easily and continually went beyond the space of the physical house itself.<sup>26</sup> The ‘open house’ mounts a response to older approaches where the social norms of the patriarchal, strictly ordered idealized household was too readily accepted as a social practice.<sup>27</sup> But by retaining ‘house’, rather than referring only to ‘household’, we can uphold the material and communicative aspects of the whole assemblage. This way, we can consider how the (social) household moves beyond the (physical) house and see how both play an important part in the performance of everyday transparency and privacy.<sup>28</sup> In the following sections, this understanding of gatekeeping and house(hold)s will be used as instruments and lenses to analyse cases from depositions given for the chief officer of Amsterdam.

### **The house(hold) out on the street**

At 7 a.m. on 25 August 1750, Abraham Cohen Rodrigues’s maidservant spread out some clothes for bleaching on the hay barge of a neighbour, one Jan Scholten, on the Hooimarkt. Scholten’s son immediately came out onto the street and threatened to toss the clothes in the water. When the maidservant tried to stop him, he threw her onto the barge’s deck. After she had fled back into her house, some neighbours assembled. One of them asked Scholten: ‘Why can’t the maid put those goods in the barge?’<sup>29</sup> A violent standoff was barely prevented, but seven neighbours later gave testimony that this had been the last straw: Jan Scholten had ‘mistreated all of them from time to time so that the whole neighbourhood was constantly disturbed.’<sup>30</sup>

Here we see the logistics of a house(hold) and its daily routine becoming part of street life. Such cases reveal how neighbours staked claims to space and how everyday socia-

26 Eibach, “Das Offene Haus,” 621-24. See also: Riitta Laitinen, *Order, Materiality and Urban Space in the Early Modern Kingdom of Sweden* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 221-26.

27 Eibach, “Das Offene Haus,” 635-36.

28 Eibach, “Das Offene Haus,” 639-46.

29 NL-AsdSAA, Notarissen (5075), inv. nr. 13131, CS1750, scan 739. Original text: ‘hij zeiide waerom mag die meijdt dat goed niet in de pont leggen’.

30 NL-AsdSAA, Notarissen (5075), inv. nr. 13131, CS1750, scan 739. Original text: ‘alle molest van tijd tot tijd aen elk van hen heeft aengedaen zodat de geheele buurt geduurlijk door hem ontrust werdt’.

bility, transparency, and reputation in the neighbourhood worked in practice. Through such cases, we can see the neighbourhood as a site where women and men alike appear as gatekeepers of, or claimants to, spaces. Such episodes, of course, are visible to us because the – always delicate – negotiations between neighbours had taken a ghastly turn. For every failure of neighbours to grant one another access to shared spaces, there must have been many more instances of successful reciprocal cooperation on the streets and in the alleys and courtyards that, however visible they may have been in everyday life, remained unexamined by legal institutions until the equilibrium was disturbed.<sup>31</sup>

Claiming space for everyday life required a constant negotiation with one's neighbours. The limited shared space outside homes could not be fully appropriated by a single person or household. Apparently, most of Jan Scholten's neighbours felt that his hay barge should be a shared space available to other neighbours when he was not using it himself. By not accepting this, Jan Scholten had disturbed the subtle, and not-so subtle, negotiations over space in the neighbourhood. In this case, the actual physical violence involved only Scholten's son and Rodrigues's maid, but the conflict was primarily seen as a struggle between Scholten's and Rodrigues's households. Indeed, the entire Scholten household was there to follow the maid who fled into her house, and to challenge her to come back out onto the street. These matters were not private, but they were house(hold) affairs transpiring outside on the street; they were a form of collective strife between households that encompassed the wider community.

Challenging people to come out onto the street, or more forcefully dragging them out of their houses, was an important ritual of micro-mobility that reveals the volatile boundaries between house and street. In the depositions from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, causing a public disturbance was often called *pijpestelderij*, which literally meant 'tuning the pipes' (of an organ), signifying loud rowdiness. In one such case, the woodworker Sibbe Isacq was yelling on the street at dusk, 'tuning the pipes and causing a neighbourhood disturbance' – to wit, threatening a neighbour with a knife and challenging him to come out into the street. The neighbour turned out not to be home, but the point of the woodworker's action was of course to publicly attack his neighbour's honour. Crucially, everyone in the immediate vicinity would hear the commotion. Elizabeth Cohen has called similar practices in early modern Rome 'house-scorning,' in which not the person *per se* was shamed but rather their dwelling.<sup>32</sup> One of its forms was a ritual in which assaulters 'made a lot of noise: they shouted insults and blew "raspberries"; sometimes they sang, with or without instruments, and the lyrics were invariably rude and usually sexual.'<sup>33</sup> In Amsterdam, the metaphor of tuning organ pipes is apt for such loud practices, as it captures the cacophony of the ranting and raving that disturbed the neighbourhood peace. In Rome, the noisemaking was often followed by attacks on the door and windows using fists, feet, rocks, and – to leave visible marks – blood, mud, and excrement.<sup>34</sup> In Amsterdam, when

31 Sometimes neighbourly cooperation was formalized, for example in the use of rain cisterns. See: Marianne Foncke, "Water's Worth. Urban Society and Subsidiarity in Seventeenth-Century Holland" (PhD Thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2020), 57.

32 Elizabeth S. Cohen, "Honor and Gender in the Streets of Early Modern Rome," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 22, no. 4 (1992): 598.

33 Cohen, "Honor and Gender," 602.

34 Cohen, "Honor and Gender," 602.

a victim did not come out of the house, many assailants also broke windows and threw rocks, mud, or other items.

In both the Roman house-scorning cases and in those involving the ‘tuning of pipes’ in Amsterdam, attracting a neighbourhood audience proved key to the loud spectacle that unfolded in the street. In another case from 1656, ‘a certain shrimp girl [(*garneels meijt*)] called Anne with the Flat Nose (...) greatly tuned the pipes, saying that [the victim] was a thief and a crook, a dog and a cuckold.’ She added, ‘You do not dare to fight a man, so come out and fight me’, and spoke ‘words so cruel, godless and dishonest that they are not to be repeated, and that hundreds of people assembled.’<sup>35</sup> The victim of this treatment was trapped in his own house, because answering the summons and fighting a woman in front of a crowd would bring disrepute, and in any case the attention and publicity generated by the scene was also embarrassing.

Calling someone out onto the street to fight has also been described as a ritualized part of a masculine popular culture of honour, specifically in the cases of taverns and knife-fighting.<sup>36</sup> In this context, Dirk Lueb recently argued that the street was explicitly chosen as the place where fights were fought because it was a ‘neutral and public no-man’s-land.’<sup>37</sup> Yet we have also seen in the case with the hay barge that neighbours challenged each other to come out onto the street, and fought each other in the spaces they sought to claim. In those cases, the streets were far from a neutral no-man’s-land; who possessed the right to use them was precisely the core of the conflict. Challenging someone to come out onto the street could sometimes be a straightforward matter, where challengers had a clear goal: continued access to that specific street. This strategy was not limited to conflicts about masculine honour but was much more widely in evidence. As we have seen in notarial depositions, women also regularly dared each other to come out onto the street or were challenged to come out of their houses to defend their honour. Van der Heijden’s argument that ‘historians have been too quick to assume that the early modern culture of violence was exclusively male’ also applies to the specific ritual of challenging someone to come out of their house.<sup>38</sup> Her analysis of women’s violence is further relevant here, as she shows how a major portion of the violence between women consisted of violence between neighbours.<sup>39</sup> In the streets in their own neighbourhood, women could claim their domain with their fists.

35 NL-AsdSAA, Schout en Schepenen (5061), inv. nr. 267, Attestatieboek, scan 281. Original text: ‘seecker garneels meijt, genaemt anne mette platte neus (...) voor des requirants deur groote pijpestelderij bedreef’, ‘scheldende den requirant uijt voor een schelm, een dief en hont een hoornbeest’ and ‘comter uijt, gij reeckel gij durft tegen geen man staen, maer comter uijt, ende slaet tegens mij gaende soo gruwelijck aen ende spreucken soo godlose ende oneerlijcke woorden, dat het niet om te verhalen en is, sulx datter honderden van menschen vergaderden.’

36 Pieter Spierenburg, *Men and Violence: Gender, Honor, and Rituals in Modern Europe and America* (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 1998); Dirk Lueb, “Komt voor de deur op straat! De ruimtelijke dynamiek van achttiende-eeuws kroeggeweld in Amsterdam,” *Tijdschrift Voor Geschiedenis* 130, no. 2 (May 2017): 153-71.

37 Lueb, “Komt voor de deur,” 171.

38 Manon van der Heijden, *Women and Crime in Early Modern Holland* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 91.

39 Van der Heijden, *Women and Crime*, 87.



These acts of violence reveal another dimension of transparency and privacy: the way the body was covered was also an important part of an individual's self-presentation to the outside world in the course of everyday life. Despite everyday transparency and public visibility, there was a stricter covering up of the body itself so as to safeguard its intimacy. Gowing writes: 'Early modern bodies were mostly kept well clothed, covered in layers of inner and outer garments that were worn so long they were likely to become part of both the visible self, and inner subjectivity.'<sup>40</sup> To uncover the body was to perform a lack of modesty, which 'demonstrates a lack of neighbourliness and hence credit.'<sup>41</sup> This is also an apt example of how gatekeeping (the body itself) involved aspects of publicness and privacy at the same time: relatively visible people had their bodies covered more strictly. Hats, bonnets, and other headwear were nearly ubiquitous across social classes, although differences in style accentuated differences in social distinction and there was, of course, gendered attire. Streetscape illustrations suggest that almost everyone – save for small children – would wear headwear outside.<sup>42</sup> The ubiquity of hats and headwear is a signal example of something that was assumed without question that it only became visible in written sources when the ordinary situation was (violently) disrupted. Although the depositions only infrequently describe the clothing of suspects, victims, or witnesses, when we do find it mentioned, we most often encounter hats and bonnets that were described as being torn off, thrown onto the ground, or torn apart. Such violent removal of clothing was a fairly easy way for attackers to humiliate someone, and the way it was described (along with physical injuries) makes it clear that such details were deemed highly significant in accounts of assaults. To note, for example, that one victim had been left 'without wig, hat and with a bleeding face' was to point out the severity of an attack.<sup>43</sup> A hatless person was an eye-catching sight, a sign of disruption and violence: witnesses knew something was afoot when they saw Roelof Verderes 'fleeing without hat into a house' in the Goudsbloemstraat.<sup>44</sup> Although both men and women were described as being dragged by their hair, such victims were more often women and the act was described more explicitly than with their male counterparts. For example, Catrina Grusers was 'thrown onto the ground, where she lost her bonnet and was dragged by her hair up to the doorstep of [the suspect's] lodging house.'<sup>45</sup> Either way, for women and men alike, there were clearly sensibilities about having one's head uncovered to the outside world, which further highlights how publicity and privacy could work in concert rather than being opposed to each other.

40 Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 34.

41 Gowing, *Common Bodies*, 36.

42 Bert Gerlagh et al., *Kijk Amsterdam 1700-1800: De mooiste stadsgezichten* (Bussum: Thoth, 2017), 80-251.

43 NL-AsdSAA, Notarissen (5075), inv. nr. 11735, SF1742, scan 198. Original text: 'sonder Paruijk of hoed op t hoofd en met een bebloed aangesigt.'

44 NL-AsdSAA, Notarissen (5075), inv. nr. 11735, SF1742, scan 104. Original text: 'sonder hoed zeer kort daer op in huijs quam vlugten zijnde zeer ontsteld.'

45 NL-AsdSAA, Notarissen (5075), inv. nr. 11735, SF1742, scan 448. Original text: 'op de straet op de grond smheet en als haar de muts van het hoofd raekte bij het hair tot op de drempel van zijn logement sleepte.'

### The open house: transparency, class, and privacy

In many of the cases for the chief officer, we see Eibach's theory of the 'open house' in practice. Houses were not tightly shut off from the street. Many urban inhabitants regularly engaged with the streets from their homes – standing on their doorsteps, or leaning out of windows or atop the closed part of double doors with the upper portion opened, fittingly referred to as 'Dutch doors' in American English. It was not just the household that spilled out into the street; the outside world also entered into the spaces of the house with relative ease. And not just in social practice: in the physical design evident in the city, the passage from house to street (and vice versa) was more of a transitional space than a fixed boundary.<sup>46</sup> An important insight from architectural history holds that the typical seventeenth-century front house (*voorhuis*), the accessible room next to the street where people often kept a shop, was 'also considered part of the street.' Its windows and upper doors were regularly open and 'the blending between the house and street took place here.'<sup>47</sup> The front house was 'where business was conducted, as well as important social events, and people from outside the household were invited to enter.'<sup>48</sup>

Daily life in the neighbourhood readily brought people into the houses of others. Often, witnesses would already have been present in someone's house before a conflict broke out, and it was also true that people could easily walk into a neighbour's house if they heard any commotion. In many non-elite houses, physical access – during the day – was basically a matter of opening an unlocked door and walking in (or walking through an open doorway). As a result, determining who was given access to a particular space was often much more of a social issue than a material matter determined by locks, gates, or fences. Johanna Grijpenstroom was clear about her authority to decide who could be in her house when on 11 April 1750, Hendrik Albertze angrily entered her home to ask why she did not want to take his male servant (*knecht*) into her house. Johanna had been present in her house with her maidservant and a neighbour, perhaps with the door open so that neighbours and acquaintances could come in. But Hendrik was an unwelcome guest. Johanna did not want to provide lodging for his servant, a man she did not know. 'I don't want strange fellows in my house,' she told Henrik. When Hendrik started threatening her, she took him by the arm to throw him out, saying, 'Buzz off from my house, bloke.' He then 'knocked her dizzy.'<sup>49</sup> This case was of course about both an incidental, short-term access to the home (achieved by walking through the door) and a more continuous, structural access to a household in the form of lodging.

46 Christoph Heyl argues for London that there was a large difference between the 'open liminal structures' of pre-Great Fire houses and the post-Fire terrace houses, the latter marking 'a trend towards cocooning off individual families. (...) - in many respects the prototype of modern urban life.' Christoph Heyl, "We Are Not at Home: Protecting Domestic Privacy in Post-Fire Middle-Class London," *The London Journal* 27, no. 2 (November 1, 2002): 13.

47 Henk Zantkuijl, *Bouwen in Amsterdam: Het woonhuis in de stad* (Amsterdam: Architectura & Natura, 2007), 82.

48 Van den Heuvel, "Gender in the Streets of the Premodern City," 699.

49 NL-AsdSAA, Notarissen (5075), inv. nr. 13131, CS1750, scan 350. She literally said 'Kerel scheer je weg uijt mijn huijs' which is difficult to translate literally, so I have chosen this perhaps ahistorical translation to stress the informal language. He had hit her 'dat zij zuijzebolde'.

The fact that spaces were not physically demarcated quite so strictly as today did not mean that access to and ownership of space were straightforward matters. Quite the contrary. In the absence of strong physical barriers, there was constant negotiation about which space was appropriate for whom, at what time, and under which circumstances. In a case from 1750, Jacob Harmeling was sitting in his front house reading a newspaper together with Grietje Gerritz, who was likely an older woman. Jacob Harmeling was challenged to come out of his house by a master cooper. When he refused, another man called Dirk Voogelenzang tried to drag him out but was stopped by Grietje Gerritz, who pulled Jacob back in and pushed Dirk out saying, 'you [Jacob Harmeling] get inside, and you [Dirk Voogelenzang] get out.' Dirk Voogelenzang then insulted her and said, 'You old *donder*, are you defending him? Then let your husband come out!'<sup>50</sup> However, Dirk Voogelenzang further respected her door-keeping and stayed outside. The process of gatekeeping was not merely a question of erecting *physical* barriers, but above all one of drawing *social* boundaries. As physical entities, doors were physically easily permeable, but socially they could be closed off. Even though he was ready to use violence on the man he was challenging, Dirk Voogelenzang respected the social boundary drawn by an older woman and would not commit violence against her, which would have been judged as much more severe and inappropriate behaviour.

Examples such as those given above show how life at home was in direct contact with the street, mediated by a culture with rules about the opening and closing of spaces and the drawing of social boundaries. Interestingly, the situation contrasts starkly with Simon Schama's characterization that "[h]ome" existed in the Dutch mentality in a kind of dialectical polarity with "world," and in particular the street.<sup>51</sup> Instead, we see significant overlap between house and street, and there was no shortage of activities that spanned both home and street. Yet it is important to account for differences between people of different classes. Schama's narratives, one should note, have been challenged because his 'starting point is the basic assumption of a broad cultural unity [and he interpreted] this unity as a sort of conscience collective';<sup>52</sup> he failed 'to differentiate between groups within a given society.'<sup>53</sup> In this regard it seems plausible that the strict division between home and street, or in Schama's words a 'struggle between worldliness and homeliness,'<sup>54</sup> represents a mentality possessed 'mostly [by] ministers of the Reformed Church and self-appointed critics of contemporary morality,'<sup>55</sup> and thus more a mentality of the (aspiring) upper classes. For most people, everyday practice was oriented differently. Indeed, the openness and everyday transparency characteristic of most households was not always replicated by elite house(hold)s. The urban mansions of elites on the canal belt and elsewhere in the city were some of the few places where people succeeded in fostering

50 NL-AsdSAA, Notarissen (5075), inv. nr. 13131, CS1750, scan 543. Original text: 'zeijde jij er binnen en jij, spreekende tegen gem Dirk Voogelenzang, jij er buijten' and 'jou ouwendonder neemt gij het er voor op, laet je man dan koomen.'

51 Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (New York: Vintage, 1997), 389.

52 J.L. Price, "The Dangers of Unscientific History. Schama and the Dutch Seventeenth-Century," *BMGN - Low Countries Historical Review* 104, no. 1 (January 1, 1989): 40.

53 Peter Burke, "A Delicious Satisfaction with the Material World," *London Review of Books*, November 12, 1987.

54 Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, 389.

55 Price, "The Dangers of Unscientific History," 40.

what we might call a culture of everyday privacy, or at least stronger seclusion from the street.<sup>56</sup> Houses built on the canal belt after the second half of the seventeenth century had higher front steps and separate entrances for servants, explicitly planned for an elite spatial logic.<sup>57</sup> While many lower- and middle-class people could be found sitting, socializing, and selling on the stairs down into cellars or up on the front step, the fronts of the larger, upper-class houses would often have luxuriously decorated, veranda-like raised stairs with cast-iron handrails, much further removed from the street than what we see with other residences in the city.<sup>58</sup> Of course, people elsewhere also kept secrets and tried to keep events hidden from neighbours and others, but to do so was judged negatively and suspect. In contrast, the urban upper classes possessed a 'heightened awareness of the need for privacy,' explained and justified in etiquette manuals.<sup>59</sup>

This culture of transparency's clash with a desire for secrecy is well illustrated in a case from 1750, involving Jan Anthoni Klemrink who lived on the Singel, the former outer canal that was more or less integrated in the elite canal belt when the city was expanded. Klemrink was visited by the sawmiller Jan van der Oudemolen to discuss a debt on behalf of one of the many people that Klemrink had been authorized to represent. The sawmiller came to the door and was invited inside – but he refused, remaining on the front step (*stoep*). 'You can speak to me here,' he said, to which Jan Anthoni Klemrink replied, 'I request that you come inside, because I do not speak to people on the front step or in the door opening,' then demanded that Jan van der Oudemolen come into his side chamber.<sup>60</sup> Further details from this deposition show that it was specifically the front step that Jan Anthonie Klemrink found problematic: He testified that he had previously requested his clerk to ask Jan van der Oudemolen which coffeehouse he frequented, so that they could speak there.<sup>61</sup> The meeting being 'public' was not the problem; what bothered Klemrink was that a discussion on the doorstep might allow his neighbours to see and hear what was transpiring. Here, the location where one spoke seems to be influenced by

56 Phillips, *Well-Being in Amsterdam's Golden Age*, 144. For a more general idea of the elite culture of privacy, see Hanneke Ronnes, *Architecture and elite culture in the United Provinces, England and Ireland, 1500-1700* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 135-37.

57 R. Meischke et al., *Huizen in Nederland. Amsterdam* (Zwolle, Amsterdam: Waanders Uitgevers and Vereniging Hendrick de Keyser, 1995), 73.

58 Clé Lesger, *Shopping Spaces and the Urban Landscape in Early Modern Amsterdam, 1550-1850* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020), 44-45; Theo Rouwhorst, "Oog voor detail: Stoepen," *Binnenstad*, August 2009.

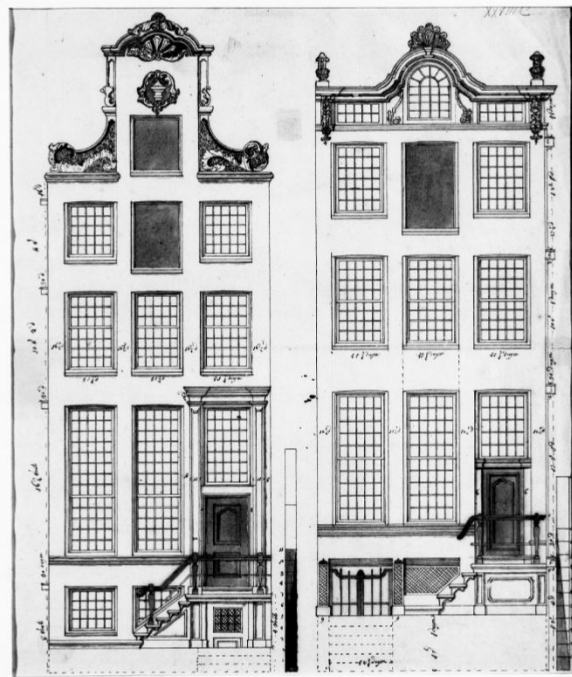
59 John Loughman and John Michael Montias, *Public and Private Spaces: Works of Art in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Houses* (Zwolle: Waanders, 2000), 28-29. Loughman and Montias see this etiquette as part of imported French tastes and fashions. In a way, the view that the Dutch upper classes wanted more privacy then becomes an extension of Norbert Elias's view that a self-constraining code of conduct was first part of court cultures and gradually spread to wider society. A crucial difference is that here it was not a court culture but a culture of rich merchants and urban patricians. Cf. Roger Chartier, "Introduction," in *A History of Private Life. Passions of the Renaissance.*, ed. Roger Chartier, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, vol. 3 (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989), 15-16.

60 NL-AsdSAA, Notarissen (5075), inv. nr. 13131, CS1750, scan 465. Original text: 'ik verzoek dat je in huijs komt want ik spreek geen luijden op d'stoep off in de deur'

61 NL-AsdSAA, Notarissen (5075), inv. nr. 13131, CS1750, scan 465. Original text: 'off hij dan gelieffde te seggen in wat coffij huijs off waar hij quam.'



the unequal social status between the two men.<sup>62</sup> It could be the case that whereas poorer urban inhabitants required ‘open sociability’ and publicity because the affirmation of their public honour by neighbours was a form of social capital, the urban upper classes affirmed their honour precisely through their avoidance of such open sociability.<sup>63</sup> Of course, the upper classes especially avoided those they deemed socially inferior. Gender may have been a factor. Sandra Cavallo has shown how in seventeenth-century Roman residential palaces, privacy was mostly achieved for male members of the household but not for its female inhabitants.<sup>64</sup> Another instance of elites raising themselves above the streets are their increased use of urban vehicles in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>65</sup> But the development was not straightforward and in any case quite complex: the raised steps of elite houses also often contained a bench to sit on, in-between house and street. So even elites did not fully detach themselves from the street. Cases such as Klemrink’s are rare, as these depictions do not often depict the everyday life of the upper classes. Research on other source material must be done before we can conclude on a new spatial logic where street and house were becoming more separated for the elite, and the question of the role played by gender is also a topic for further study.<sup>66</sup>



**Figure 1.** An example of a plan for two canal belt houses with a raised *stoep*. Unknown, Amsterdam City Archive, circa 1750.

62 Spatial custom and social status were closely connected. Heyl also emphasized the middle-class character of the domestic privacy sought through post-Fire London architecture. Heyl, “We Are Not at Home.”

63 For the point of public affirmation of honour of the lower classes, see Herman Roodenburg, “Eer en oneer ten tijde van de Republiek: een tussenbalans,” *Volkskundig bulletin* 22, no. 3 (1996): 143.

64 Sandra Cavallo, “Space, Privacy and Gender in the Roman Baroque Palace,” *Historische Anthropologie* 26, no. 3 (December 1, 2018): 301-302.

65 Cf. Bob Pierik, “Coaches, Sleighs and Speed in the Street: ‘Vehicularization’ in Early Modern Amsterdam,” *Journal of Urban History*, forthcoming, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00961442221117856>.

66 Property inventories may offer one way into this problem, for a study using those for 16<sup>th</sup> century Amsterdam, cf. Van Tussenbroek, “Functie en indeling van het Amsterdamse woonhuis aan de hand van een aantal zestiende-eeuwse boedelinventarissen.”

In contrast to Jan Anthonie Klemrink, people all over the rest of the city discussed all sorts of things on their front steps and in their doorways. The notarial depositions show many urban residents with the upper part of their double doors open for sociability, and their front steps sometimes contained benches or stools. This way, men and women were at home and in their street simultaneously, and it is clear that many people passed time leisurely like this, chatting with neighbours and passers-by. A regularly recurring description in the depositions was that of people ‘lying over the door’ (*over de deur leggende*), meaning that a person had the upper part of their double door open and was leaning on the lower part. The half-opened double door and the front step served the same role in supporting open sociability that has been convincingly attributed to the balcony in Italian cities and the *Geräms* (a cage-like framed structure between house and street) in Frankfurt am Main.<sup>67</sup> An illustrative scene on the Nieuwendijk on a late summer evening, taken from a 1750 deposition, reveals the maidservant of the surgeon Nicolaes van der Meulen lying over her door while neighbour Dorothea Dolt, also a maidservant, did the same. The surgeon’s maidservant shouted inside to a male servant: ‘Boy, shut up, the crazy woman would laugh at that.’<sup>68</sup> Dorothea Dolt then got in a quarrel with the surgeon’s maidservant because she felt offended.<sup>69</sup> This small episode shows how conversations within households could carry across the street into other houses and how people could speak to each other from house(hold) to house(hold).

Interestingly, this open and transparent sociability persisted into the nineteenth and even twentieth centuries for the lower classes. Ruitenbeek has argued that a strict ideal of domesticity was certainly not applicable for lower class women in the (largely working-class) Jordaan quarter in Amsterdam in the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, Vrints found a culture of openness in the first half of the twentieth century in Antwerp: ‘just like in “traditional” societies, characterised by an oral culture, the voice of women in Antwerp’s working-class neighbourhoods was an important regulation and controlling mechanism.’<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, the spatial regime of lower class inhabitants of Antwerp that Vrints described looks a lot like the spatial regime of premodern and early modern cities, where a public/private dichotomy did not apply or applied only to a limited extent, and there was no rigid gendered separation of spheres.<sup>72</sup> These observations suggest that social class could be a more important factor than time, and that one city housed multiple ‘modernities’ at once.

67 Alexander Cowan, “Seeing Is Believing: Urban Gossip and the Balcony in Early Modern Venice,” *Gender & History* 23, no. 3 (November 1, 2011): 721-38; Jeannette Kamp, *Crime, Gender and Social Control in Early Modern Frankfurt am Main* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 108.

68 NL-AsdSAA, Notarissen (5075), inv. nr. 13131, CS1750, scan 521. Original text: ‘jonge houdt u stil de sottin zou er om lachen’.

69 NL-AsdSAA, Notarissen (5075), inv. nr. 13131, CS1750, scan 521.

70 Olga Ruitenbeek, “‘Hem – de waereld, haar – het huis’? De intrede van het huiselijkheidsideaal onder de Amsterdamse volkswomen 1811-1838” (MA Thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2009), 78-81.

71 Antoon Vrints, *Het Theater van de Straat: Publiek Geweld in Antwerpen Tijdens de Eerste Helft van de Twintigste Eeuw* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011), 195.

72 Vrints, *Het Theater van de Straat*, 197-99.



Figure 2. Several instances of everyday life on and around doorsteps. H.P. Schouten, 1790. Amsterdam City Archive



Figure 3. The *Bijbelhofje* in the Anjeliersstraat in the Jordaan quarter. H.P. Schouten, 1797. Amsterdam City Archive



In the culture of openness of the long eighteenth century, exchanging information, gossiping, or complaining on the front step or in the doorway was an important instrument of collective surveillance and social control. On another summer evening in 1750 at half past ten, Pieter Meijer, lodging-house keeper in the Jan de Vriesensteeg on the Oudezijds Voorburgwal, stood by his door and talked to his neighbour. He complained 'about the bad times, among other things about his neighbours who owed him money and now passed his door and got their drinks elsewhere.'<sup>73</sup> One of those neighbours, Jurriaan Grummel passed by and asked if Pieter Meijer was talking about him. Pieter Meijer replied, 'Yes monsieur Grummel, I also speak about your wife and whether you know she owes me money.' Pieter Meijer then followed Grummel into his house.<sup>74</sup> When Jurriaan Grummel still refused to discuss his debt, Pieter Meijer asked if Grummel's wife was 'his wife or his whore', reminding him of his financial obligation as a husband and unkindly connecting a woman's sexual chastity to her husband's marital obligations.<sup>75</sup> He further said that 'he would consider him a defaulter' (*kwade betaelder*). After this, Jurriaan Grummel's wife rose from her bed and punched Pieter Meijer in the face. The case shows a man gossiping about his neighbours and spreading rumours about them as a way of pressuring them to pay a debt. Such gossip at the doorstep was a powerful instrument, often associated with women but also wielded by men.<sup>76</sup>

Besides adhering to a culture of everyday transparency on doorsteps, many households shared various alleys, staircases, and hallways, and it was very common for houses to contain several households. Many houses built in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries throughout the entire city had upstairs rooms that could be rented out separately.<sup>77</sup> Certain conflicts provide insightful snapshots into such residential situations. For example, in a house above a grocer in the Dijkdwarsstraat near the Nieuwmarkt, the woman Grietje Witte shared a staircase with another woman called Caetje, 'who lived in a room in the same house.'<sup>78</sup> When two other women came to visit Grietje Witte, they encountered Caetje in the staircase, and she complained that 'you people always come here, what kind of *konkels* are you?' (a *konkel* was a malicious gossip or a wasteful person, or served as a more general slur for women) and proceeded to say, 'Why are you always coming to that *Noordse konkel*? I do not know if she is home.'<sup>79</sup> Grietje Witte heard the exchange and responded to her neighbour: 'Popish devil, can you not leave me in peace? The people that visit me are not *konkels*.' After this, Caetje's sister Lijstje, 'who lived in the cellar under the house', ascended the stairs and attacked Grietje Witte, which prompted two men 'who

73 NL-AsdSAA, Notarissen (5075), inv. nr. 13131, CS1750, scan 633. Original text: 'over de slegte tijd, onder andern aenhaelde dat zijn buuren die hem geld schuldig waeren zijn deur nu voorbij gingen en hun drank op een ander haelden'.

74 NL-AsdSAA, Notarissen (5075), inv. nr. 13131, CS1750, scan 633. Original text: 'Ja Monsieur Grummel ik spreek van nu ook, wegens je vrouw off je weet dat zij mij geld schuldig is'.

75 Original text: 'vroeg off het dan zijn vrouw off hoer was'.

76 Bernard Capp, *When Gossips Meet: Women Family and Neighbourhood in Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 59-60.

77 R. Meischke et al., *Huizen in Nederland. Amsterdam*, 47-49.

78 NL-AsdSAA, Notarissen (5075), inv. nr. 13131, CS1750, scan 629.

79 NL-AsdSAA, Notarissen (5075), inv. nr. 13131, CS1750, scan 629. It is likely that Grietje Witte was of Scandinavian origin. *Noordse* could mean 'Norwegian' or 'northern' and as such was also used as a more general term for Scandinavian.



lived in the same house' to intervene.<sup>80</sup> The tableau sketched above shows a house filled with very different people, with different religious and migrant backgrounds. At least three women who lived there in separate (cellar) rooms were present, and then there were the two men, indicating that there were at least four – but perhaps even five or more – separate residential units in the house, along with a grocery shop. Perhaps Caetje and her sister Lijstje considered themselves to be a household unto themselves, but they lived on different floors in separate parts of the house. Voices easily carried from one room to another, as we see from Caetje's initial irritation that her neighbour was having visitors over.

A 1742 case from the depositions about a conflict over an attic space shows the practices of shared living arrangements in further detail: Helena Nulle and her husband Alexander Ewald ran a textile shop on the Rechtboomsloot, and Barta Kool lived with her husband in a room upstairs. They had separate doors to enter their residences but they shared the attic space, which was a common arrangement.<sup>81</sup> When Helena Nulle and Barta Kool argued about the hanging of laundry in the attic, the heated discussion could be heard from the front room downstairs by a seamstress, who then intervened. Later that month Helena Nulle assaulted Barta Kool in her room with a stick. This time, a neighbour from an adjacent house heard the violence and tried to intervene but found the door from the street to the stairs to Barta Kool's room locked. Barta Kool also testified that after this violent incident, when she wanted to go out she found that the door to the street was locked even though she had unlocked it in the morning and the door 'normally only serve[d] as exit for herself and not for Helena Nulle or her husband, who have their own exit.'<sup>82</sup> It was clear that Helena Nulle had planned her act of violence and by locking the door had ensured that neighbours would not be able to interfere, although the sounds of the altercation had carried through the neighbourhood nonetheless. The case shows a mix of arrangements where space was compartmentalized and claimed for exclusive use – the separate doors – while other spaces, such as the attic space, were semi-collective and shared. We also see that a locked door was an irregularity that indicated the likelihood of malicious intentions, as people would normally unlock their front doors in the morning.

A conflict in the Jordaan further shows how houses and alleys were delicately shared spaces where voices easily travelled into other households. The violent and tragic case in the Blauwegang in the Oude Looierstraat started with a quarrel between women, on 26 January 1750: 'How could you treat that old woman like that?' Maria Borman yelled from her room through the walls and floors at Jannetje Faggala, who lived one floor below her.<sup>83</sup> Subsequently, Maria went downstairs because Jannetje's daughter had been mistreating (*quaelijk bejegenende*) Engel Sijbrants, another woman living in the house. As the verbal abuse turned into physical abuse, the house in this small alley of the Jordaan was soon transformed into a crime scene. Maria had grabbed a piece of wood; Jannetje, a knife, with which she stabbed Maria, right in front of the window where she had been

80 NL-AsdSAA, Notarissen (5075), inv. nr. 13131, CS1750, scan 629.

81 R. Meischke et al., *Huizen in Nederland. Amsterdam*, 47.

82 NL-AsdSAA, Notarissen (5075), inv. nr. 11735, SF1742, scan 78. Original text: 'Welke in die tijd alleen tot een uijtgang diende voor haar eerste getuige en niet voor haar Helena Nulle of haer man welke een andere uijtgang hebben'.

83 NL-AsdSAA, Notarissen (5075), inv. nr. 13131, CS1750, scan 194.

sitting. Without getting to say goodbye to her daughter who had just gone out on an errand, Maria died in the chair where her neighbours had sat her down after Jannetje had stabbed her. This was a case where a conflict within a house was heard and seen from the very beginning by those who lived in the alley. Not only the house but the whole alley seems to have been filled primarily with women. Six women, of whom four were widows, gave witness statements. We find descriptions of their voices sounding through walls, floors, and streets. The women watched one another and the alley through the windows, which shows them living close to one another and sharing a relatively small space. They were part of one another's direct social environment in a neighbourhood where the current concept of privacy was not only practically unavailable but perhaps even undesirable or suspect. It is useful to return to Kilian, who distinguishes between the liberal view, where privacy is a privilege, and the civic republican view, where it is a deprivation. The absence of privacy and the constant publicity of life in the Jordaan can be understood through both perspectives: the ever-present gaze of neighbours has aspects of both the 'empowering activity of a community and (...) the repressive surveillance of the panopticon.'<sup>84</sup> Here it is amply demonstrated that in the neighbourhoods where scarce space was intimately shared, community was not optional, and the permanent attention one received from one's fellow neighbours provided both an assuring social safety net of community and an ever-present gaze that followed one's every step.<sup>85</sup> Alleys were open living spaces filled with neighbours whose eyes and ears were attuned to what went on there.

As we have seen, then, one's own house, the doorstep, alleys, and the neighbourhood as a whole were places where events would often be seen and heard by many others. The house and its immediate surroundings were highly transparent to onlookers, especially neighbours. This environment was not 'public' in the sense that it was for anyone to see; rather, it was accessible for a very specific group of people, such as neighbouring households. The structure of the streets and houses fostered a community of neighbours, with the important consequence that for people to engage in clandestine or secret activities, they would either need support or tacit toleration from neighbours or have to divert their doings to a location further away from home. Crane's argument that privacy was something found outside follows this logic as well, connecting privacy closely with mobility.<sup>86</sup> For activities that one would want to keep out of public view, mobility was a key to privacy and secrecy. Hardwick has shown how there was an 'intimate economy of reproduction' in place for pregnant but unmarried early modern French women, who could discreetly rent a room with a landlady for the purposes of giving birth, sometimes very near their own neighbourhoods and sometimes much further away, even out of town.<sup>87</sup>

A structural privacy was found by people just outside the city walls, beyond the fortifications, a zone where urban inhabitants could reliably escape the gazes of their fellow city-dwellers. Those who could afford it could visit various locations such as gardens,

<sup>84</sup> Kilian, "Public and Private," 119.

<sup>85</sup> Eibach, "Das Offene Haus," 628.

<sup>86</sup> Crane, "Illicit Privacy and Outdoor Spaces," 5.

<sup>87</sup> Julie Hardwick, *Sex in an Old Regime City: Young Workers and Intimacy in France, 1660-1789* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 140-68.

*kolf* courses (where a sort of precursor to golf was played), pubs, and *speelhuizen* (literally ‘playhouses’, but often this term denoted a type of brothel). These locations functioned like ‘the gardens and other outdoor spaces [that] provided privacy for conversations that participants did not wish to be overheard,’ as described by Crane.<sup>88</sup> Maarten Hell writes that in Amsterdam from ‘1696, the government started imposing bans on playhouses and the chief officer started jailing or banning those who held playhouses.’<sup>89</sup> As a result of the 1696 prohibitions, a landscape of playhouses emerged in areas outside of the city. While these areas are not very visible in the depositions, and the location might thus have successfully evaded the attention of the chief officer, a case from 1710 confirms that the garden houses and playhouses outside the city served as locales for discreet sexual encounters.<sup>90</sup> Similarly, Van de Pol writes that the Plantage (a green space within the city walls, but distinctly different from other areas) attracted prostitution: ‘in the alleys and porches, the chance of being discovered was large.’<sup>91</sup> Erotic encounters (both paid and unpaid) were widely associated with greenspaces on the edges of European cities, as is evident from narratives surrounding Berlin’s Tiergarten and London’s Vauxhall, Hyde Park, and St. James Park.<sup>92</sup> Of course, sex work also took place within Amsterdam’s city walls. A major locus was around the harbour area, where maritime workers could be serviced. That many sailors found sufficient privacy for sexual escapades within the city further supports an argument of the contingency between mobility and privacy, or between mobility and anonymity.

## Conclusion

This article has considered the interplay of publicity and privacy within early modern urban space. Through an examination of conflicts and their spatial contexts, we have been able to see how spatial and social boundaries were drawn and transgressed, revealing a rich public life unfolding in streets, alleys, and houses. Everyday sociability took place in doorways and on front steps, and the boundaries drawn were often social rather than material.

Kilian’s framework, in which publicity and privacy is as multi-layered as the spaces where they could be found, has been very useful in arriving at a more detailed understanding of early modern spatiality. It also offers a way out of the narrative in which the premodern situation was followed by a modern situation characterized by more strictly demarcated public and private spheres. It helps us understand the described culture of everyday transparency not as a type of public life that we have lost and ought to reclaim,

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88 Crane, “Illicit Privacy and Outdoor Spaces,” 14.

89 Maarten Hell, “De Amsterdamse herberg (1450-1800): Geestrijk centrum van het openbare leven” (PhD Dissertation, University of Amsterdam, 2017), 393.

90 NL-AsdSAA, Notarissen (5075), inv no. 8068, GE1710, scan 78-80. The particular case concerns severe sexual violence in a garden house, which was the reason why the case ended up in the notarial depositions.

91 Lotte van de Pol, *Het Amsterdams hoerdom: prostitutie in de zeventiende en achttiende eeuw* (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 1996), 116.

92 Antonia Weiss, “A mobility regime for the modernizing city: Class, gender and motion in Berlin’s Tiergarten, c. 1742-1830” (Unpublished paper, 2021); Crane, “Illicit Privacy and Outdoor Spaces,” 12.

but rather as possessing a different spatial logic that deserves detailed understanding in its own right.<sup>93</sup> What I have here called gatekeeping formed a complex geography of publicity and privacy in which gender and class played an important role. We have especially seen how lower- and middle-class people used transparency and openness to assert themselves as honourable and to gain social credit, and there are hints that the upper classes distanced themselves from this sort of openness and developed a preference for types of seclusion enabled by their doors and their high front steps raised above the street. Yet, for the vast majority of the city's inhabitants, open sociability was neither suspect nor undesirable; it was at once a social and a material aspect of everyday life. This also shows how spatial change was uneven across time and social class.

The process of gatekeeping involved the granting or denial of access to space, but also encompassed strategies that served to instigate or avoid publicity. Inviting others to watch and hear a spectacle, or alternately trying to keep it out of the public gaze, could be strategies. When boundaries were transgressed, both in the prescriptive and in the physical sense, the response of the urban audiences on the street was always important for the course and the outcome of the conflict that had broken out. Witnesses, neighbours, and bystanders easily inserted themselves into the intimate conflicts of others, displaying a mentality of openness. Although both publicity and privacy were forces at work on the street and in houses, a more complete form of secrecy and privacy required mobilities of a larger scope, prompting people to move outside the city or at least to its fringes. Behaviour that one wanted to keep secret would, under most circumstances, have required the mobility to stay secret, and the attainment of privacy was often sought outdoors rather than indoors.

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93 Cf. Kilian, "Public and Private," 115.



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