The Poetics of Imagination and the Threshold –

Locating Karin Mamma Andersson’s, Wallace Stevens’ and Edouard Vuillard’s Art through the lens of Poetics

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I hereby declare that this dissertation is entirely my own work and that it has not been submitted as an exercise for a diploma or degree in any other college or university. I agree that the Library may lend or copy the thesis upon request from the date of deposit of the thesis.

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Abstract

Poetics has been dealt with in many ways. Generally it is dealt with in relation to poetry and literature, and the imaginative impact of these arts on the reader. However poetics can be expanded beyond this limit. It is taken as a given that the visual image can also drive the imagination of the viewer. This thesis will take the imaginative drive of the viewer and assess it using the theoretical mode of poetics.

Examining the imaginative drive of the viewer has been written about via texts like Roland Barthes essay *The Death of the Author* (1977). These texts are about images from a Post-Structuralist perspective. In other words, the meaning of a literary text or an image is unstable. Its meaning can be found not in the mind of the author or in the world, but in the mind of the reader. Post structuralism kills the Author and puts the reader on a pedestal. Poetics, on the other hand, allows for a knowledge exchange between author and reader. Both inform the other, both are on equal footing. The author is no longer the God-like figure that post structuralism perceives her to be and she isn’t dead. This thesis will use poetics to consider the imaginative drive of the viewer and it will not eliminate the artist and the artwork.

Visual art is generally critiqued using aesthetics. This thesis will propose that poetics is a more effective mode for critiquing art. In order to poetically assess an artwork, the intention of the artist, the potential of the artwork and the imaginative reaction of the viewer are important. Aesthetics doesn’t allow for this particular triad. Poetry is derived from the word *poiesis*, which in turn comes from the ancient word ‘to make’. Poetry and thus poetics are foremost verbs. Poetics enables one to consider what the art does, rather than what art is.

The objects of this thesis, i.e. the artworks it will examine, include the two contrasting mediums of painting and poetry. It aims to give equality to both the literary and visual arts. These objects will be the paintings of Edouard Vuillard and Mamma Andersson, and the
poetry of Wallace. All of these artworks in some way will deal with interior spaces, particularly those of the domestic interior. In exploring the interior-exterior dialectic, the door or threshold will be considered an important point. This body of work proposes to deal with the image of the threshold in absolute detail. Both Martin Heidegger and Gaston Bachelard have written about this idea of the door or threshold before.

This thesis will try to use primary research as much as possible. The primary texts to be referenced, among others, will be *Poetics of Space* by Bachelard, *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination* by Stevens, *Poetry, Language, Thought* by Heidegger and *The Poetics of the Open Work* by Umberto Eco. Important secondary texts will include *Poetics of Imagining* by Richard Kearney, *Things Merely Are* by Simon Critchley and *Edouard Vuillard: Catalogue Raisonne* by Antoine Salomon and Guy Cogeval. Many of the paintings by Vuillard referenced will be referenced as secondary texts. Predominantly the other objects of this thesis will be referenced from their primary source.

In conclusion the aim of this research is to provide another method of looking at art. To show that visual art can be viewed by means of poetics rather than aesthetics. The threshold was chosen as a particular interest of this thesis because it is both symbolically and literally an image which anticipates movement. Poetry and poetics come from a verb, as words they imply action and potential. As a result, using images that anticipates movement is vital to this thesis.
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‘Imagination is the will of things....’ (Stevens, 2006, p.73)

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Introduction

‘The imagination plays a game of dissolution with all its forms’ (Benjamin, 2004, p.280)

Our imaginations are in the process of dissolving the forms around us. This dissolution is the poetic movement, which is the focus of my research. The paintings of Edouard Vuillard and Karin Mamma Andersson, and the poetry of Wallace Stevens will be discussed in relation to poetics. Both the painted image and the written image will be considered on an equal footing. Thus all paintings and poems will be examined simply as artworks. This thesis will challenge the perception that visual art should be judged on an aesthetic basis. Instead it proposes that art can be also judged on a poetic basis. The artworks of Vuillard, Andersson and Stevens will be examined from the perspective of the poetic and potential movement in their imagery. Poetics will be shown, to be a way of assessing artworks that is active, engaging and viewer centric. This thesis aims to involve itself in the details of the inner workings, movements or poetics of artworks.

The point of this argument is to define a mode of poetics, contrast it with aesthetics and test this mode of enquiry with Vuillard’s, Andersson’s and Stevens’ artworks. Gaston Bachelard’s poetic will-to-movement, which is the name he gives to what certain diverse and contradictory images do when they foster movement and becoming even when still. This will be discussed in detail in the subsequent chapters and a big focus throughout the whole thesis. The poetic will-to-movement is associated with human nature and desire as well as free will. Bachelard’s definition of the human being will be vital to the way the artworks will be discussed. These artworks will be discussed on a phenomenological and subjective level, as phenomenology and subjectivity have a great deal to do with poetics. This thesis will argue that the poetic mode of enquiry places the viewer as the most
important part of the triad between the artwork, the artist/reader and the viewer/poet.

The basis for the outlook of this body of writing is phenomenology. The major theorists whose work is developed herein include individuals who have been influenced by or developers of phenomenology, such as Martin Heidegger, Gaston Bachelard, Wallace Stevens and Richard Kearney.

The commonality shared between Vuillard’s, Andersson’s and Stevens’ art is a concern with the domestic interior, the threshold and the door. The threshold or the door as a transitory space of movement has connections with the poetic will-to-movement. This research will concentrate on how viewers or readers of artworks move through the inner space of the artwork. This sort of movement through an artwork will be examined as poetic. The experience of a domestic interior or home is common to most human beings and that is why this research focuses on the doorways of domestic interiors. The doorways of domestic interiors are the perfect theme for this body of work because it is so subject centric.

There are two specific writers whose ideas should be considered axioms with regard to this thesis. Roland Barthes in *The Death of the Author* (1977) proposes the death of the author/artist and the birth of the reader/viewer. ‘Once the author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile. To give a text an author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing’ (Barthes, 1977, p.147). Though the author/artist isn’t completely removed from consideration in this research because the author/artist is seen as the genesis of the image and the image is seen as the beginning of everything else, the author/artist is given a back seat. The reader/viewer is prioritised because there is
as little limitation on or enclosing of the artwork as possible. This prioritising of the reader/viewer should be considered an axiom throughout the thesis. Jacque Ranciere the other writer, in *The Emancipated Spectator* (2007) calls for a new type of theatre ‘where spectators will no longer be spectators, where they will learn things instead of being captured by images and become active participants in a collective performance instead of being passive viewers’ (2007, p.272). This call for a new type of theatre could be a suggested way of viewing artworks in general. Viewers should be considered active participants rather than passive viewers within the context of this research.

The critic Boris Groys proposes that –

‘Contemporary art should be analysed not in terms of aesthetics, but in terms of poetics. Not from the perspective of the art consumer, but from that of the art producer. In fact there is a much longer tradition of understanding art as poiesis or techné than as aesthesis or in terms of hermeneutics’ (2010, p.16).

Groys goes on to associate the poetic attitude with political art, believing that poetics is the aesthetics of political art. However this thesis won’t be dealing with Political art with a capital ‘p’ nor is it just interested in contemporary art. It is interested in formulating a contemporary way of assessing all art from the past and present. The intrigue of the active poetics or the participation that happens when any human being experiences any artwork will be examined. The seminal concern is the subjective poetic response of humans to paintings and poetry.

The first two Chapters of this thesis won’t be engaged in discussing the artworks of Edouard Vuillard, Karin Mamma Andersson or Wallace Stevens. Both these chapters instead will focus on the mode these artworks will be examined under. The aim of Chapter One is to define Poetics, contrasting it with aesthetics
and relating it to the imagination. The idea of a poetic image will be discussed. The theorists and philosophers used to define poetics will be Hans-Georg Gadamer, Plato, Martin Heidegger, Richard Kearney, Gaston Bachelard and Walter Benjamin. The poetic image and the importance of the artist to the work of art will be discussed using Gadamer, Bachelard, Wallace Stevens and Umberto Eco.

Though many theorists ideas will be examined in this chapter a concise definition of the poetic will be developed. This body of research however will specifically develop the poetics of Bachelard.

Chapter Two will explore the domestic interior and its threshold. The domestic interiors relationship to poetics and the imagination will be discussed. The connection between poetics and phenomenology will be made. Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space* (1994) and *Air and Dreams* (2011) and Heidegger’s *Poetry, Language, Thought* (2001) will be used to discuss the domestic interior and the threshold in detail. Jeremy Luke Hill’s *The Door, The Threshold, The Between* (2009) will also be considered as a point of departure for ideas around the threshold.

Chapter Three is divided into two parts. This Chapter will examine artworks depicting open doors. Bachelard’s will-to-movement will be developed as an expression of the continuing shifting and fluxing of reality. The doorway, with regard to Wallace Stevens’ poetry, will be discussed as a threshold between imagination and reality. The open door as a symbol of existential choice will be considered in respect to Andersson’s work. The open door will be investigated as a signifier for the potential poetic action of the stage-like artworks of Vuillard and Andersson. Bachelard’s ideas of the oneiric or dream-like house will be related to those two artists’ paintings also.
Chapter Four is shorter and in one part. It will consider artworks that portray images of half open (or half revealed) thresholds. A painting by Vuillard and a poem by Stevens will be compared and contrasted. Poetic action and Bachelard’s dynamic imagination will be thoroughly investigated. In relation to the will-to-movement of viewers within artworks, the idea of imaginative movement and real movement within the artworks will be discussed. Both the artworks in Chapter Four allow for this imaginative movement, rather than this real movement. The doorway in Stevens’ poem will again be seen as the threshold between the real and the imagined.

Chapter Five is in two parts and deals with paintings of closed doors. The artworks of Vuillard and Andersson will be compared and contrasted. The will-to-movement, the will to logos, poetic freedom and lack thereof will be examined in relation to the paintings of these two artists. There will be greater discussion of the artwork as a being that acts upon the viewer and of Bachelard’s oneiric house. The differences between Vuillard’s image of a closed door and Andersson’s will be highlighted. Rene Descartes concept of free will will be discussed in relation to human nature and the will-to-movement. It will be suggested that while Vuillard’s paintings allow for poetic action through the structure of their content, Andersson arranges her paintings in a way that questions the traditional poetic structure of paintings. The point of this argument is to not only look at artworks from the perspective of poetics, but compares the traditional structure of images with their contemporary structures.

In conclusion, there will be an assessment of Edouard Vuillard, Karin Mamma Andersson and Wallace Stevens’ artworks using our developed definition of poetics. The poetics in this thesis is subjective, phenomenological and focuses on
the poetic will-to-movement and the imagination. It develops Gaston Bachelard’s poetic theories in a particularly way using artists’ images of domestic interiors and thresholds. The different ways in which the open door, the half open door and the closed impact upon the viewers’ feelings will be considered. Using poetics to assess artworks will impact upon the way the creativity of viewers is perceived.

Though it is a less important aspect of this research, the change in image making that has happened since the Vuillard’s time in late nineteenth century to Andersson’s time today, will be highlighted. It will be suggested that this change comes from how contemporary art questions everything, including why an artwork needs to allow for the poetic action of the viewer.

From the outset this thesis aims to expand upon the field of poetics in its relation to painting. There is a literature gap in the area of poetics and the visual arts. The poetic act, as distinct from the aesthetic, has a potential of energy, of movement and of becoming. The aesthetic is static and doesn’t look at artworks in terms of the movement imbued within them. Edouard Vuillard, Wallace Stevens and Mamma Andersson’s still image artworks will be examined in respect to how they are ingrained within poetic movement. The poetic is the human act, the potential of this act, the potential of what thing the act will become. It isn’t the experience of something as such, but the excitement of what might happen.
Chapter One: The Aesthetic, the Poetic and the Poetic Image

This Chapter will examine the idea of the aesthetic, the poetic and the poetic image in the context of art and the imagination. There will be comparisons made between the aesthetic and the poetic. A definition of the poetic will be worked out thoroughly through a discussion using etymology, a phenomenology of imagination and Gaston Bachelard’s poetics. Further still this chapter will explore ideas of the ontology of the image and the exchange of knowledge between the artist/poet, artwork and viewer/reader.

The aesthetic and the poetic have had a close relationship throughout history, with poetics having often been seen as a subfield of aesthetics. They can be viewed as opposite ways of thinking about the arts, but are also intertwined and overlap. Aesthetics is predominantly understood as being interested in what visual art is, while poetics on the other hand is understood as being interested in poetry. Both are just different modes of seeing and thinking. Neither should be concerned with a particular art. Both aesthetics and poetics should be open to a cross over between arts. This thesis is specifically interested in poetics, but in order to define the poetic it must be distinguished from the aesthetic.

As noted above the aesthetic is related to the visual. The aesthetic experience can be defined as ‘the experience of noticing and appreciating the qualities presented by objects that we are moved to find “beautiful” or aesthetically pleasing in other ways’ (Korsmeyer, 1998, p.2). The aesthetic deals not just with beauty, but with the sublime, the grotesque and the uncanny. Aesthetics is seen as a philosophy of taste, it tends to detach itself from understanding art on a deeper level, ‘beauty and other aesthetic values are pleasures that are definable in contrast to the
practical values of morals, science and functional necessity’ (Korsmeyer, 1998, p.2). There seems to be two kinds of views on aesthetics. Firstly aesthetics has been seen as the enjoyment and pleasure received from objects and secondly as a mode of knowledge received from objects.

Georg Gadamer in his book *Truth and Method* (1960) writes about aesthetics as a mode of knowledge. He explains what he believes the aesthetic experience leaves out ‘what it ignores are the extra-aesthetic elements that cling to it, such as purpose, function, the significance of its content’ (Korsmeyer, 1998, p.91). Gadamer then proceeds to explain why aesthetics is a mode of knowledge. It could be suggested though, that what he begins to reveal is a form of poetics rather than aesthetics. He crosses over from one to the other when he begins to see artwork as a being that acts and that changes the person who experiences it. He is no longer dealing with the surface of the artwork or the viewer as consumer of the artwork. Gadamer embroils the viewer into the process of the artwork. In his *Truth and Method* Gadamer leaves aesthetics and enters into poetics. However this is an example of how aesthetics and poetics overlap forming a grey area. Regardless of this grey area, aesthetics views art as passive or static, as something to be looked at, not engage with, while poetics sees art in a different light, as participatory. ‘The pleasures of the static aesthetic image are always going to be transient, outrun by the desire that is their creative source’ (Critchley, 2005, p.81).

The definition of the poetic to be used in this thesis is detailed in that it corrals different theories into one overarching idea. The word poetic comes from the Greek *poietikos*, which means "pertaining to poetry," literally "creative, productive," from *poietos" made," verbal adjective of *poiein" to make". Poetry comes from the Greek word *poiesis*. This definition uses Greek etymology because
of Plato’s connection as one of the first to discuss the poetic as linked to creation and production. Therefore the poetic or poetry doesn’t just deal with poesy or verse, but with all types of creation. In Plato’s Symposium it is stated that ‘there is more than one kind of poetry in the true sense of the word – that is to say, calling something into existence that was not there before; so that every kind of artistic creation is poetry, and every artist is a poet’ (1979, Plato, p.39).

Martin Heidegger’s definition of the poetic also becomes important at this point. Heidegger similarly to Plato and many other thinkers throughout history believed poetry to be a productive act. This productive act produces ‘something beyond itself’ (1995, Kearney, p.xiii). This ‘something’ is Being itself. The poetic act produces possibilities or potentials for being. Producing poetic things such as poems or paintings is the production of variations on how we as human beings might be. In this sense Heidegger thus expands the poetic. According to Hermeneutic Phenomenology our being-in-the-world can be seen as a possibility rather than just an actuality, we can exist in past, present and future. According to Heidegger, ‘for phenomenology possibility stands higher than actuality’ (1998, Kearney, p.23). The poetic act enables us to imagine this past, present and future.

As the poetic act can be seen to be as inexorably linked to the act of imagining, the imagination needs some consideration in this definition. Imaginations relation to the poetic act can be brought back to Edmund Husserl’s phenomenological imagination. Though Immanuel Kant and other German idealists tried to re-establish imagination as a productive act, it wasn’t until Husserl that ‘phenomenology formally disclosed its [imagination’s] function as a dynamic and constitutive act of intentionality that imagination was fully freed from its inherited conceptual constraints’ (1998, Kearney, p.13). The imagination then is a
conscious and intentional act. The poetic is the potential of what this act could be. Phenomenology allows imagination to be ‘a power capable of intending the unreal as if it were real, the absent as if it were present, the possible as if it were actual’ (1998, Kearney, p.17). The problem now lies in distinguishing the poetic from the imagination. If the imagination is the power, then the poetic is the capability of this power. The poetic is the dynamic act constantly in flux, constantly projecting potential images and producing possibilities in your mind.

This difficulty in detaching the poetic from imagination can be helped by reducing the amount of different imaginations the poetic can be attached to. Gaston Bachelard in Air and Dreams divides the imagination in two, into the Material Imagination and the Dynamic Imagination. The dynamic imagination is the kind associated with the poetic. The dynamic imagination,

‘harbours within itself a certain diversity or contradictoriness; and this means that it foments movement and becoming even as it approaches mobility and rest...It strives continually to subject matter to motion...all forms are furnished with perpetual movement. One cannot imagine a sphere without having it turn’ (1998, Kearney, p.98).

This dynamic will-to-movement is the part of an imagined image or thing that makes it poetic. The poetic is the will-to-movement. Walter Benjamin in his short essay ‘Imagination’, found in Walter Benjamin – Selected Writings Vol.1 1913-1926 (2004), seems to be discussing Bachelard’s idea of dynamic imagination, when he writes ‘the imagination knows only a constantly changing transition’ (2004, p.282). According to Benjamin the imagination is the deformation of what has been formed (2004, p.280). The poetic, as the act of this deforming, is then not just a will-to-movement, but the movement itself of an image in the imagination.
When we experience an art object of any kind we have an aesthetic consciousness, which distinguishes this art object from other objects. ‘By disregarding everything in which a work is rooted (its original context of life...function...significance), it becomes visible as a ‘pure work of art’’ (2013, Gadamer, p.77). Gadamer also recognises a difference between your experience of the art and the being of the artwork itself. He identifies the artwork as playing or acting the presenting of itself to the viewer. When an artwork is experienced it isn’t static, a viewer reacts to an artwork, therefore the artwork must act it isn’t just the artist that acts. The poetic act once freed from its creator still must act through the artwork or the poem. ‘The being of art cannot be defined as an object of an aesthetic consciousness because, on the contrary, the aesthetic attitude is more than it knows of itself. It is part of the event of being that occurs in presentation, and belongs essentially to play as play’ (Korsmeyer, 1998, p.97). This suggests that the poetic act has a life of its own beyond the individual who set it in motion. When a viewer or a reader experiences or reads an artwork or a poem, they take up the poetic act and imagine the art as they want to. The image is the genesis of the poetic act. This poetic imagining is perpetual, as the artwork or poem could be experienced or read countless times. ‘The movement of playing has no goal that brings it to an end; rather it renews itself in constant repetition’ (Korsmeyer, 1998, p.94). Thus the poetic act is unending.

Finally, in The Emancipated Spectator (2007), Jacques Ranciere compares the spectator or viewer to a poet. Ranciere suggests that a spectator in a theatre, or a viewer of an artwork, is not as previously believed passively consuming the art, but is actively creating.
'Looking is also an action...the spectator is active...he observes, he selects, he compares, he interprets...he makes his poem with the poem that is performed in front of him. She participates in the performance if she is able to tell her own story about the story that is in front of her. Or if she is able to undo the performance - ...by linking it with something she has read in a book, dreamed about, that she has lived or imagined.’ (Ranciere, 2007, p.277)

The important point Ranciere makes is that, you make your own artwork with the artwork that is in front of you. Using the word ‘poem’ implies that all artworks are poems and that poetic action is how individuals participate in artworks. There is a duality to the viewer/reader-artwork/poem relationship. Viewers/readers can learn things from artworks/poems, and they can also, loosely speaking, teach artworks/poems the things they know. The poetic act allows for this knowledge exchange between viewer/reader and artwork/poem.

Upon reading Ranciere, the poetic can be concisely defined as a dynamic unending act constantly in flux that projects potential images and produces possibilities, it is both a will-to-movement and the movement itself of an image in the imagination, and it allows for a knowledge exchange between the viewer/reader and artwork/poem. This definition will be used as the definition for the poetic throughout this thesis.

Both Bachelard and Gadamer pertain to the idea that the image has its own being independent of the artist or poet. This is a seminal concept regarding this thesis. The thesis will discuss images as living creatures, as active poetic beings almost independent of their creator, yet reliant on their viewer or reader. Bachelard believes ‘to study a particular image...we must also investigate its mobility, productivity and life’ (2011, p.2). Gadamer refers above to the idea that art has a being and that it is self aware, it knows it is being presented to the viewer and it
acts accordingly. In agreement Bachelard states ‘because of its novelty and its action, the poetic image has an entity and a dynamism of its own; it is referable to a direct ontology’ (1994, p.xvi). In other words an image can be referred to its own being and studied from that point of view. It can be studied without an origin as such. Richard Kearney believes that ‘the image is to be understood as a genesis not an effect; and this is possible only in a poetics where the suspension of causal preconceptions allows for, an assessment of the unpredictable nature of its being’ (1998, p.91). When you cease to think of an image as relating to any preconceived causes, such as the artist or poet making it, or what they meant the image to mean, and allow the image to be examined freely, the image can become the genesis of the poetic acts of the viewer or reader.

Of course the image is the progeny of its maker. As Wallace Stevens writes in his essay The Noble Rider and the Sounds of Words (1951) the poets ‘function is to make his imagination theirs [the readers]’ (p.29). The poet’s imagination is a jumping off point for the imagination of the reader. If this is the case there will always be a tie between the artist and his work because without the artist there would be no work. Therefore there would be no image to be poeticized by the viewer/reader. Umberto Eco, in his essay The Poetics of the Open Work (1989), defines an open work as an art work which allows ‘each individual addressee... [to] refashion the original composition devised by the author... the form of the work of art gains its aesthetic validity precisely in proportion to the number of different perspectives from which it can be viewed and understood’ (p.3). Eco takes an art work to mean anything that is created; an art work could be a painting, a poem or a piece of music. Any given art work has an infinite number of potentials. Whether
these potentials end up being similar to the intentions of the artist or not is void. All poetic potentials are possible. Within the context of this thesis all matter equally.

Throughout this thesis the triad of the painted image or the poem image, the artist and the viewer will be looked upon as having a close relationship with one another. Yet all three will be examined at times independently from one another. In the chapters to come the definition of poetics developed here will be used in relation to ideas about the threshold within paintings and poetry of interiors. The image existing as an independent being will be taken as an axiom and will be examined thoroughly.
Chapter Two: The Domestic Interior and Its Threshold

In this Chapter there will be an exploration of the uncanny and the domestic interior within the context of poetics. There will be specific emphasis on one feature of the domestic interior - the thresholds or doors into rooms. Discussion will be held around its relation to poetics and a strong connection between the two will be proved. The theorists used to explore these topics will be Gaston Bachelard and Martin Heidegger giving an understanding of both the childhood domestic interior and the threshold. The ideas of these theorists will be critically analysed, contested and also defended. The theories of author and teacher Jeremy Luke Hill will also be discussed.

Bachelard in his *Poetics of Space* (1994) wrote extensively about domestic interior space and its impact upon the human being. He comes from a phenomenologist’s perspective and that is why he is particularly interested in the human beings relation to space. There are many ways of describing phenomenology, as a discipline it has many creators and followers, such as Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau Ponty, Heidegger and Bachelard. For the purpose of this research, definitions relating to poetics will be used. Phenomenology, as defined by Simon Critchley is ‘a description of things as they are that seeks to elicit the sense or significance of our practical involvement with the world...Phenomenology gives us the meaning of meaning’ (2005, pp.29-30). The images we create in our mind are how we grasp the world, they are our perspective on how things are, but they are not how things fully are. We don’t know the meaning of things, we cannot, but we strive to know the meaning and end up endowing things with meaning. As you can see, all of this discussion about
phenomenology is very being centric. This is why Bachelard’s ideas about humans in domestic space, connects to a phenomenological way of thinking.

In *Poetics of Space* Bachelard writes from a personal viewpoint, using the words ‘we’ and ‘our’ to engage us in our own memories of our domestic interiors.

‘The first, the oneirically definitive house, must retain its shadows. For it belongs to the literature of depth, that is, to poetry, and not to the fluent type of literature that, in order to analyze intimacy, needs other people’s stories. All I ought to say about my childhood home is just barely enough to place me, myself, in an oneiric situation, to set me on the threshold of a day-dream in which I shall find repose in the past.’ (1994, p.12)

Bachelard tries to occupy us with images and memories of our childhood home, describing it as ‘our first universe’ (1994, p.4). The home or the domestic interior at least is a place most human beings have experienced as a day to day familiar occurrence. Our familiarity with the domestic interior is the reason I chose to examine it; is the reason for choosing the paintings of Edouard Vuillard and Karin Mamma Andersson. This familiar intimacy with a particular type of place is what Bachelard unravels. Importantly he connects the oneirically definitive house with poetry. He does this by relating the function of poetry to giving us back the circumstances of our dreams, and possibly our memories. Dreams consider grandeur, immensity, vastness and infinity.

Although the domestic interior is a confined familiar space, perhaps closed away from the vastness of the Nordic forests or the ocean, holds possibilities, which within the imagination, allow for infinity. The complex wallpaper pattern or the unknown threshold, suggest infinity and grandeur. When you daydream or make an artwork these two elements of the domestic interior can be seen as transcendent. They transcend the familiar little sitting room or kitchen, the being of
the interior can be seen as a possibility rather than just the actuality of the four walls and ceiling. The domestic interior can extend out into the vast unknown. Such complex floral pattern or a door that leads to blackness can ‘make us sense clearly the progressive expansion of the daydream up to the ultimate point when immensity that is born intimately, in a feeling of ecstasy, dissolves and absorbs, as it were the perceptible world’ (Bachelard, 1994, p.194).

As stated above the domestic interior is very familiar to most of us, to the point that it can become uncanny. Particularly within the fictive context of painting and poetry, the uncanny can be purposely heightened by the artwork’s creator. The German word for uncanny is unheimlich, its opposite is heimlich, which means ‘familiar’ or ‘belonging to the home’. The uncanny therefore could be looked at to mean unhomely and unfamiliar. How an ordinary everyday place can become unfamiliar isn’t easy to grasp, but this is an aspect of the domestic interior.

The uncanny as defined by Sigmund Freud ‘undoubtedly belongs to all that is terrible—to all that arouses dread and creeping horror; it is equally certain, too, that the word is not always used in a clearly definable sense, so that it tends to coincide with whatever excites dread. Yet we may expect that it implies some intrinsic quality which justifies the use of a special name’ (nasaht, p.1). There are several things he names that as such could spur on an uncanny feeling in someone, notably the animation of inanimate objects, the doubling or mirroring of something and the omnipotence of though (which is the occurrence of coincidences). Some of the artworks to be explored have uncanny aspect. Predominantly these uncanny aspects include how they are mirrored or doubled and how they use repetition. This viewpoint of the domestic interior will be discussed briefly, but will be shadowed by the discussion around poetics and the interior. The facets of the uncanny
mentioned above allow for an opening up of the possibilities of the interior and that is why a discussion of the uncanny in relation to the artworks is important.

The specific features of the domestic interior that will be the focus of my research are the threshold, the doorway and the door. Whether in the paintings of Vuillard and Andersson or the poetry of Stevens, whether the door is wide open, half open or fully closed it is this particular feature of a domestic room that will be studied in detail. The door can be an aspect of many daydreams. Bachelard describes it as a primal image. It is an archetypical image for ‘desires and temptations: the temptation to open up the ultimate depths of being’ (Bachelard, 1994, p.222). It’s this relation between the door and desire that will be examined further later in this chapter. An image of a closed door wills the door to open, an image of a half open door wills us to slip through it.

This will-to-movement can be caused by desire and looked upon from a phenomenological perspective, which is integral to my argument because phenomenology ‘concentrates upon re-achieving a direct and primitive contact with the world...it also offers an account of space, time and the world as we ‘live’ them’ (2002, Merleau Ponty, p.vii). Phenomenology allows for an experiential perspective on all things in the world that relate to humans. Bachelard refers to the phenomenologist, as an artist or a poet. This view of a phenomenologist could be considered true. Phenomenologists create meanings for the things around them that are separate from symbolic meaning. Artists and poets could be seen as creators of meaning. A phenomenologist ‘brings the image to the very limit of what he is able to imagine...he tries to repeat its creation for himself and, if possible, continues its exaggeration. Here association ceases to be fortuitous, but is sought after, willed. It is a poetic, specifically poetic, constitution...’ (Bachelard, 1994, p.227). A
phenomenologist is an artist or poet and/or a viewer or reader of artworks. A phenomenologist is a creative, a creative in respect to either he creates an image or he uses an image as a genesis for a poetic act. S/he wills this desire to happen in the imagination.

The door or doorway of a room is the room’s threshold. The threshold has been often seen as the entry to beyond; to a more spiritual existence; to the afterlife as such. The ancient philosopher Porphyry believed that the ‘threshold is a sacred thing’ (Bachelard, 1994, p.223). Etymologically the word ‘threshold’ is associated with the word ‘subliminal’ which means, ‘below the threshold’ (of consciousness), formed from sub ‘below’ (see sub-) + Latin limen (genitive liminis) ‘threshold’. Subliminal can be seen as the receiving of information into/by a human being without their conscious knowledge of it. The threshold is a point where information is exchanged. The desire to have this information is the desire to will the door in an image open.

From his blog From Word to Word in the essay ‘The Door, The Threshold, The Between’ (2009), Jeremy Luke Hill highlights a point made by both Bachelard and Heidegger. Both these theorists believe the surface of the threshold is painful on both the inside and the outside. ‘If there exists a borderline surface between such an inside and outside, this surface is painful on both sides’ (1994, Bachelard, p.218). Heidegger describes the between of the threshold as something that has to be hard because it has to endure ‘the threshold, as the settlement of the between, is hard because pain has petrified it’ (2001, p.201). Heidegger’s thoughts behind the notion of the pain and hardness of the threshold can be criticised in the sense that the only example he supplies to support his theory is a line from a poem by Georg Trakl. This line being, ‘Pain has turned the threshold to stone’ (2001, p.201).
Heidegger describes pain as a rift that rends. Rend meaning, to tear (something) into pieces. On the other hand Heidegger believes as well as pain rending it gathers itself together. Though both Bachelard and Heidegger believe both sides of the surface of the threshold to be painful, it could be suggested that both sides of the threshold are full of love, desire and temptation. Bachelard, though he believed doors to be sites of pain, he also believed they were images of desire.

Etymological the noun ‘love’ is connected with the Sanskrit word lubhyati ‘desires’. In place of ‘pain’ in this quote by Heidegger you could put ‘love’. ‘[Love] is the joining agent in the rending that divides and gathers. [Love] is the joining of the rift’ (2001, p.202). Love and desire can both tear apart and gather together, whereas pain, despite Heidegger’s attempt to say otherwise, can only divide. It could be said that pain gathers people together at a funeral, but is not actually what gathers them, arguably it’s the love they have for the person who died that gathers them. With regards to love and the threshold – you desires, you are tempted, you have strong desire to know what is on the other side of a door. It is this that causes the poetic act of a will-to-movement, as oppose to pain as Heidegger suggests.

There is one phenomenon in relation to doors and thresholds that is interesting with respect to this argument. When you are about to walk from one room to another and can see the door looming in front of you, you begins to imagine, from memory perhaps, what you know to be, or what is most likely to be on the other side of the door. In other words humans can project themselves into spaces before they are in those spaces. Heidegger has given an example of this experience ‘when I go toward the door of the lecture hall, I am already there, and I could not go to it at all if I were not such that I am there. I am never here only, as this encapsulated
body; rather, I am there, that is, I already pervade the room, and only thus can I go through it' (2001, p.155). You need to already have imagined, or be able to draw from memory, what is behind the door before you can slip through it. This can also work in a sort of reverse, in that if someone is coming into a room, sometimes if it is a habitual for them to come through the door, you can already imagine them as they will be when they come through. John Keats in his poem *Isabella or The Pot of Basil* describes a feeling that the character Lorenzo has, ‘He knew whose gentle hand was at the latch, / Before the door had given her to his eye’ (1999, p.27).

As discussed herein the use of poetics is linked with our human use of the door or the threshold. We as humans *will* and desire movement in an image of a door; we imagine the door opening and shutting. Just as you cannot imagine a sphere without having it turn you cannot imagine a closed door without having it opened or vice versa. A closed door, a half open door or even around the corner of an open door produces possibilities for the viewers’ or readers’ poetic acts. In addition a threshold is a fulcrum for knowledge and information exchange between inside and outside. Love is the joining of both sides of the threshold, the strong feeling of desire to know what is beyond one side or another, is far greater than a dividing pain. The imagination of the viewer or reader surmounts any divide between an interior and an exterior. The domestic interior as a space experienced by most human beings is the site for the beginning of the poetic act. The image of the door is connected with the movement of doors and is thus the perfect image for the poetic act.
Chapter Three: The Open Door

Part One: Wallace Stevens and Karin Mamma Andersson

The poem *The Bouquet* (c.1950) by Wallace Stevens and the painting *Emo* (2010) by Karin Mamma Andersson will be considered in Part One of this Chapter. What these artworks have in common is that they contain images of open doors. It is the use of the image of an open door that will be explored in relation to these artworks. It will be suggested that the open door allows for the poetic act. The poetic act from my deduction in Chapter One is a dynamic and unending act, constantly in flux that projects potential images and produces possibilities. The open door allows for a sense of movement in still paintings. Within the poem *The Bouquet*, it allows for an opportunity, for movement to happen. It will be proposed that movement within art reflects the continuous shifting or fluxing of reality.

If you consider the mindset of a phenomenologist and bring the image of an open door to the limit of what it could possibly mean, regardless of any symbolic connections it might have. If you have an image of an open door with no one in its threshold as in *The Bouquet*, and *Emo* and as in the case of *Emo* with someone in the room the door leads to, you can imagine that at some point the person in the room had to enter the room through the door. As a result of this you usually perform the poetic act of imagining the person walking into the room. In some instances the image is not what it seems to be. For example them sitting in the room, but instead it’s them walking into the room. You imagine the poetic action rather than the still image you views in front of you. The view of the phenomenologist regarding an open door is that someone has opened it and perhaps gone through it.
Wallace Stevens was a poet that devoted a lot of his time to the philosophy of poetics, specifically where poetics was related to reality and the imagination. *The Bouquet* was published in *The Auroras of Autumn* in 1950. In this volume he expanded his ideas about poetry, the imagination and reality. *The Bouquet* offers an insight into these ideas. In this poem the real is touched by the unreal and becomes interchangeable, you cannot distinguish one from the other.

‘Of medium nature, this farouche extreme
Is a drop of lightening in an inner world
...
The bouquet stands in a jar, as a metaphor,
As lightening itself is, likewise, a metaphor
Crowded with apparitions suddenly gone
And no less suddenly here again, a growth
Of the reality of the eye, an artifice,
Nothing much, a flitter that reflects itself
...
One approaches, simply, the reality
Of the other eye. One enters, entering home,
The place of meta-man and para-things
...
Through the door one sees on the lake that the white duck swims
Away - and tells and tells the water tells
Of the image spreading behind it in idea’ (2006, pp.392-393)
The Bouquet has one hundred and eight lines, it is made up of five parts, each verse throughout has three lines. The poem is an expression of the thin line between reality and the imagination. Stevens creates an illusion, giving you a structured moving image that you take at first as reality. He gives the image of a bouquet in a jar in front of a door that is open. Through the door you can see a white duck swimming on a lake, as the duck swims it causes ripples on the surface of the water. After Stevens tells you about the red and white chequered table cloth, which the bouquet’s jar is on, the reality within the poem is well on its way to dissolving.

You are at first given the still image of the bouquet standing in a jar. Immediately you are informed of how it constantly disappears and then appears slightly and then perhaps sometimes in full. It is an apparition, it is ‘a flitter that reflects itself’ (Stevens, 2006, p.392). Establishing the bouquet as being in front of the open door where you can see the swimming duck and water through the door suggests and obvious sense of movement, ‘Through the door one sees on the lake that the white duck swims/ Away - and tells and tells the water tells / Of the image spreading behind it in idea’ (Stevens, 2006, pp.393). It is a movement which is contrasted against stillness. Stevens gives you ‘an image of shifting reality: the bouquet can be observed only against a changing background’ (Perlis, 1976, p.44) Alan D Perlis proposes that Stevens uses the doorway as a frame to blur the vantage point of the reader. He then focuses on the ripples the duck spreads out behind him in order to further confuse your perspective on the image. The reader is led to focus on the close up of moving ripples, in contrast to his original view point which was from inside the house near the bouquet. There is a shifting of focus as Stevens leads the reader from inside to outside to back inside again.
This shifting from one side of a threshold to another could be compared with Heidegger’s idea in *Poetry Language Thought* of how humans imagine themselves in spaces when they are not in them. Heidegger’s idea is not consistent with any physical biological reality, in a sense that to be in a place you have to be there in your physical body, otherwise you are not actually there. However his idea resonates with the poetic imagination. For his example he uses the old bridge in Heidelberg, Germany.

‘If all of us now think, from where we are right here, of the old bridge in Heidelberg, this thinking toward that location is not a mere experience inside the persons present here; rather, it belongs to the nature of our thinking of that bridge that in itself thinking gets through, persists through, the distance to that location. From this spot right here, we are there at the bridge—we are by no means at some representational content in our consciousness. From right here we may even be much nearer to that bridge and to what it makes room for than someone who uses it daily as an indifferent river crossing.’ (2001, p.154)

Heidegger is implying that through simply thinking of a space or place, your thoughts bring you there to the real place. The place is just as real to the person imagining it, as it is to the person who is actually there, perhaps even more real.

The poetic act of shifting from inside to outside that the reader is compelled to do in *The Bouquet* is a testament to the capable power of dynamic imagination stored in a single image. The image Stevens paints for the reader of the bouquet in front of an open door tempts you to image going through it and seeing outside. You are able to imagine that outside by using Heidegger’s ‘thinking gets through’ idea.

Potentially you can be put into the space of any poem or painting in the context of Heidegger’s idea.

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1 ‘Thinking gets through’ idea relates to the above quote by Heidegger from *Poetry Language Thought*, 2001, p.154
Before discussing Part V of the poem, it is vital that the unfolding culmination of the poem’s narrative be told. At the end of Part II the reader discovers that perhaps the entire scene or image of the bouquet in front of a door with a view to a lake is just a pattern on a woman’s dress. Hence the image is ‘Crowded with apparitions suddenly gone / And no less suddenly here again, a growth / Of the reality of the eye, an artifice, / Nothing much, a flitter that reflects itself’ (2006, p.392). In other words the image is not still, it moves, it appears and disappears, as the skirt of the dress moves on the woman. This is where the reader realises Stevens is playing with the line between reality and imagination. Up until the end of Part II, you have no idea that the image is not a real life image, but a pattern.

There is one other mention in Part V of a door. At this point there is a change within the poems structure. It shifts from iambics to prose:

‘A car drives up. A soldier, an officer,
Steps out. He rings and knocks. The door is not locked.
He enters the room and calls. No one is there.

He bumps the table. The bouquet falls on its side.
He walks through the house, looks around him and then leaves.
The bouquet has sloped over the edge and lies on the floor.’ (2006, p.396)

In this part of the poem the door into the room with the bouquet is closed, but it is not locked. The soldier enters easily, literally destroying the picturesque image of the bouquet. There is violence to the way the soldier entered the room or the house, coming from the outside world to the inside world. The soldier, according to Alan
D Perlis, represents someone who orders reality as opposed to the meta-man who is a man among men, a poet or maker of metaphors (1976, p.44). Reality walks through the threshold into imagination. Stevens believed ‘The imagination loses vitality as it ceases to adhere to what is real’ (1951, p. 6).

In Part V of *The Bouquet* there is an exchange of knowledge between reality and the imagination. Without the poetic act of movement through a threshold, the exchange would not be as obvious or as important, when it is conceived as the soldier of reality walking through a door uninvited, and knocking over a jar of flowers it becomes a potent poetic image. The image created throughout the poem was an image aware of its own restlessness and imbalance. In some ways introducing the soldier of reality restores the equilibrium between imagination and reality that Stevens desires, instead of just ending the poem, on the uneasy, but picturesque image of the bouquet as a pretty pattern on a dress.

Karen Mamma Andersson, *Emo*, 2010, Acrylic and oil on panel, 84 x 122 cm
Karin Mamma Andersson is a visual artist who is inspired by period interiors, theatre sets and crime scene photography. The paintings that will be explored are her paintings of interiors. In her painting *Emo* the movement within the image is at a different stage to the movement in Stevens’ *The Bouquet*. *Emo* is a painting of a Swedish domestic interior. The room has an odd sense to it. The wall on the right hand side should technically be two walls. It should have a crease, shadow or line on it to show that it is a separate wall from the other one. Andersson has omitted a detail, unless the wall is a curved wall, it makes no sense. The room is a sitting room where there are armchairs, a coffee table and artwork on the walls. There is also an open door leading out into a dark hallway. On one of the armchairs is a figure, presumably the emo. He looks as if he has just sat down and has his hands clasped together. This is the movement within the painting - perhaps he has just opened the door to the room, left it open, sat down and begun clasping his hands together. He may not have, but his hands and position of his legs suggest so – there is a tension in them, he has yet to relax. Instead of being an image where somebody enters and disturbs the room, he has already entered, the action has just happened. This painting allows for the dynamic imagination, described by Bachelard, to happen to the viewer. This painting is the genesis for imagining what has happened in the past as much as for what will happen in the future.

In Stewart Oksenhorn’s article *Painting the Set, Not the Story*, Andersson is interviewed. She said regarding her artwork, ‘I never want to close any doors and say, “Here’s a story, and you must read it this way”’ (2011). With *Emo* no story line is set, but the open door suggests the figure has just moved from the hallway into the room to sit down. The painting by Vilhelm Hammershoi *Interior, Strandgade 30* (1908) has a slightly similar composition to *Emo*. In that the figure
sits on a chair in a room with a door wide open leading into a hallway. The major difference in *Interior, Strandgade 30*, is the figure has her back to us. She is facing the door and therefore has more of a connection with the door. It has been said of the open doors in the interior paintings of Hammershoi, that they suggest existential choice (Fonsmark, 2008, p.34). The open door in *Emo* could suggest the existential choices the figure has. There is a darker unknowable quality to hallway through the door in *Emo*, as there is literally no light, there are no open doors down the hall. The angle or viewpoint we are given in *Emo* is claustrophobic in comparison to the airiness of *Interior Strandgade 30*. The differences in both paintings perhaps show the historical and cultural gap which exists between 1908, when *Interior Strandgade 30* was made and 2010, when *Emo* was painted. In those hundred years society has moved from being positivist to being ironic and sceptical. In many of her paintings including Andersson has painted wide open doors that

![Image](image.jpg)

Vilhelm Hammershoi, *Interior, Strandgade 30*, 1908, Oil on canvas, 79x66cm
led to complete blackness. There are less poetic possibilities or choices in the twenty-first century, though there are still some. Andersson’s dark hallways lead the viewer to them.

Andersson’s and Stevens’ open doors are both different. Though the world of The Bouquet is unsettled throughout, Stevens reveals what is on the other side of the open door. Andersson does not reveal as much. She gives us as small shady glimpse into another room or hall. She framed the painting so that the viewer is only given the bottom half of the doorway. The angle is frustrating. In contrast Stevens’ invites us out the door showing us the lake and the duck swimming, even giving us the detail of the ripples the duck leaves behind. The Bouquet allows for Heidegger’s ‘thinking gets through’, whereas Emo makes our imaginations work a lot harder and perhaps in vain. Both The Bouquet and Emo project potential images and produce possibilities for the reader or viewer’s poetic imagination. In what has happened and what will happen, the transitory space of the wide open door in the artworks, promise action and potential. The open door points to existential choice no matter how limited a choice it might be, to both the figures found in the images as well as the readers or viewers.

**Part Two: Karin Mamma Andersson and Edouard Vuillard**

In Part two of this Chapter, two paintings will be considered, both of which include depictions of open doors. Karin Mamma Andersson’s Doll House (2008) and one of Edouard Vuillard’s Vaquez Panels, Figures in an Interior: Intimacy (1896) will be examined. Aside from both these paintings including open doors they both include female figures and are similar to stage-sets. Both Dollhouse and Intimacy
have theatre as their core influence. A strong link will be made between theatre and poetics through discussing these paintings. In *Dollhouse* there is a severe sense of the uncanny. Through the use of the doorway, *Intimacy* portrays an intriguing dialectic between the paintings flatness of the painting and the illusion it creates of depth. There will also be discussion of Bachelard’s oneiric house in relation to both paintings.

*Dollhouse* is a painting of a deconstructed dollhouse or three tiered stage-sets. The bottom stage set is the most interesting as it is the least bare. It contains not just furniture, but two female figures bent over table tops’ working, possibly sewing fabric, though it is hard to tell. Each stage has a door in its back wall on stage right. However the only door that is open is the door of the bottom stage. Out of this door and through all except one window in *Dollhouse* you can see only darkness. Andersson painted black around and behind each stage tier. This darkness and the lighting in the painting suggest a stage-like quality to the different layers of the dollhouse. The figures are stiff, odd and ghostly and one of them casts a shadow on the wall behind her.
Karin Mamma Andersson, *Dollhouse*, 2008, Oil on Panel in Three Parts,

229x122cm

Detail, Karin Mamma Andersson, *Dollhouse*
The stage-like quality of *Dollhouse* is no accident. Andersson is known to like the theatre and visits it regularly, but rather than being intrigued by the action on stage, she loves the sets without the actors on them. Her paintings are said to be ‘evocative of chamber plays and have the psychological charge of a scene from a *film noir*’ (Noring, 2007). It has also been said, regarding her work, that her paintings ‘are marked not so much by a lack of action, but by the potential of action’ (Oksenhorn, 2011). This potential of action, which is apparent in stills of theatre sets with figures or actors on them, is more apparent when a door is open on the set like in *Dollhouse*. This signifies that someone will enter onto or exit off the stage.

*Dollhouse* gives us a potential for action. Andersson makes it difficult for you to know what the female figures are doing, they are most likely sewing, but who knows. No matter how much you squint and stare at the painting, it is impossible to know what the figures are actually doing, so you can only imagine. The open door provides that potential as well. A figure could walk in, or one of the female figures could have just walked in and taken up her work. Gaston Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space* speaks about one’s first home or domestic space and calls it the oniric or dream house. ‘The oneirically definitive house, must retain its shadows. For it belongs to the literature of depth, that is, to poetry, and not to the fluent type of literature that, in order to analyse intimacy, needs other peoples stories’ (1994, p.13). Bachelard believes that your first domestic interior is poetic. You don’t need narrative to steep yourself in a sense of intimacy when confronted with an image of any domestic interior, you need a poetic movement. This is a movement each individual can produce in their own mind, independent from a strict narrative. Narrative movement needs a destination or an end point, poetic movement doesn’t,
it is dynamic and cyclical. It is an unending act that repeatedly dissolves and
reappears. You can imagine poetic movement over and over, with slight variations
its beginning is its ending. Poetic narrative is the narrative of *Finnegan’s Wake* by
James Joyce. The first and last sentence of the novel run into one another,
conveying the cyclical nature of it, ‘A lone a last a loved a long the river run, past
Eve and Adam’s, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a commodius
vicus of recirculation back to Howth Castle and Environ’(Joyce, 2012, p.1 &
p.628). It has no beginning or end just like poetic action. A viewer of *Dollhouse*
could imagine a figure on a loop walking through that door on the stage at the
bottom of the painting. That is what you could imagine every time you look at that
painting, however there is no sequential narrative in that movement, it is poetic
action. To reiterate, poetic action is a human action of the mind that is dynamic and
unending and it projects possibilities. These possibilities don’t follow a sequential
narrative. Bachelard in *Air and Dreams – An Essay on the Imagination of
Movement* proposes that ‘The poem is essentially an aspiration towards new
images’ (2011, p.2). If you consider what was mentioned in Chapter One where
Ranciere was quoted implying that all artworks are poems, you could say that
every image is an aspiration towards new images. If every image is only an
aspiration towards something, it never reaches the point where it becomes
narrative. It only suggests movement and change. It implies the possibility of
cyclical movement, your imagination can only go so far before it either departs
from the image altogether or relies upon it and imagines a cyclical movement.

*Figures in an Interior: Intimacy* is a painting of three female figures in an
interior that is covered in patterns. There are patterns on the walls, floor and
furnishings and on the dresses of the figures. Two of these figures are in an open
doorway to our left hand side. This door leads out into another room or hallway with patterned wallpaper walls. The figures blend into the patterned background, but also look weightless and two dimensional, similar in a lot of ways to the women in Anderson’s *Dollhouse*. The patterns, subdued colours and use of distemper flatten everything in the painting. This is the same for the other four paintings in the Vaquez series. However *Intimacy* is slightly different as it is the only one in the series with a doorway. The open doorway creates a pictorial depth. The shadow formed on the inner left hand side of the door against the wall beyond gives the illusion of three dimensions.

Edouard Vuillard, *The Vaquez Panel –Figures in an Interior: Intimacy*, (1896), Distemper on canvas, 212.5x154cm
The reddish-pink hue of the wallpaper pattern in the room contrasts with the dark green hue of the pattern on the wall of the hallway beyond the open door. Visually, red protrudes and green recedes, and a contrast between them creates an illusion of depth. An open doorway not only allows for poetic depth, but also pictorial depth.

Similarly to Mamma Andersson, Vuillard also had a significant interest in theatre. He played a hands-on role, becoming involved in Symbolist theatre during the 1890s by designing playbills and sets. He loved the atmosphere in the rehearsal room. The mood of many of Vuillard’s early paintings seems to have been influenced by this atmosphere. For most of his life Vuillard lived with his mother. During the 1890’s his sister Marie was unmarried and lived with their mother also. Vuillard used his mother and Marie as his models, painting them in unnatural contorted poses, theatrical situations and gestures. He created drama within the family, such as Marie’s engagement and marriage to his friend Kerr Roussel, which he then proceeded by painting scenes of this drama, such as The Suitor (1893). In this way his love for theatre expanded out beyond lighting and sets, to the orchestration of scenes as a means for further creative production.

*Intimacy* similarly to *Dollhouse* can be seen as a stage set. Within all the Vaquez panels there is a great sense of physical space in comparison to other decorative panels by Vuillard such as the Natanson panels. The stage-like area of the painting is framed by a fabric covered table, cushions, rugs and the beam of the ceiling. The door to your right hand side is like one of the many doors on the set of the Henrik Ibsen play *A Doll’s House*. The figures look as if they are quite deep into the room and could be upstage performing a play. One of the figures in the doorway is obscured in shadow. Vuillard’s paintings have been compared with the sets of plays by Maurice Maeterlinck. It is said that Vuillard was interested in a
play by Maeterlinck called *L'Intreuse*, which directly translates to English as the intruder or death.

‘The morbid themes...that pervade Maeterlinck’s subsequent plays...can be said to characterise several of Vuillard’s early interiors in which figures are shown....hovering in half-open doorways...The way in which Vuillard’s figures gradually emerge from the shadows, their presence uncertain, ambiguous amid the overlapping shapes and muffled tonalities of their surroundings may be attributed to those experimental productions’ (Thomson, 1988, p.84)

*Intimacy* has the atmosphere of one of Maeterlinck’s domestic interior stage set – the figures in the doorway of the painting are obscured in shadow and the tones in the painting are muffled and subdued.

The stage-like set of *Intimacy* is different to the stage-like set of *Dollhouse*. Both provide us with varying perspectives of the stage. *Intimacy* gives an intimate viewpoint, as if you were sitting three or four rows from the front of the stage.

*Dollhouse* presents us with an odd perspective of the stage as each stage tier has been painted at a different angle. Although, in viewing the bottom stage you could be up on the balcony of the theatre gazing down at the stage. The intimacy of *Intimacy* allows the viewer to be closer to the stage in the painting. It is easier for the viewer to act poetically, imagine movement and moving.

Vuillard’s interiors have been described as actionless (Thomson, 1988, p.84), but it could be remarked that his paintings suggest action. He orchestrated *Intimacy* so that it evokes movement. The two figures in the doorway are on the verge of leaving the room, one has turned her head and glances back into the room and the other is almost fully submerged into the hallway beyond. Vuillard made many images of women on their way through doors such as *Misia in the Doorway at Le Relais* (1897) and *Woman Coming Through a Door* (1897). These images
suggest a movement through the space from one place to another, from inside to outside or vice versa.

The women in *Intimacy* move deep into the image beyond what you knows; for example you can only imagine the hallway and the rest of the house. Unlike Andersson who paints her doorways black, Vuillard suggests what the room through the door looks like by allowing the viewer to see the dark green patterned wallpaper. Revisiting the theories of Wallace Steven, there is a definition of the imagination as an ‘activity...of forming concepts beyond those derived from external objects’ (Critchley, 2006, p23). This definition of imagination proposes that things you imagine can be formed from things you do not know. To illustrate this idea; the viewer of *Intimacy* can walk into that hallway, it is narrow and completely lined with that dark green patterned wallpaper, there is a dark wooden floor, you hear your shoes on it, there are dark wooden doors off the hall, all closed. At the end of the hall there is you door wide open leading to a bright room full of light from a window... This imagined scenario or poetic narrative is one that comes from an old house from my childhood. Your imagination doesn’t imagine things you don’t know, but acts upon external objects remembered in your subconscious. My grandparent’s lived in an old Bianconi mail coach house, which had a long narrow corridor on the first floor and this is what spurs my poetic imagination in relation to corridors. The house according to Bachelard is the cradle for your being in childhood, he believes that ‘...the house is one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind’ (1994, p.6). The houses of your childhood are the sites for the beginning of knowledge that you will always carry through life. Every viewer of *Intimacy* will imagine their
own oneiric houses when they walk through the doorway in the painting. Vuillard gives the viewer a starting point of the wallpaper and you begin from there.

As was stated before, Mamma Andersson paints the space beyond her open doors pitch black or in dark shadowy tones. There is an uncanny feeling to most of Andersson’s painting. These black doorways add to the eeriness of her images. *Dollhouse* is an image of three tiered stages surrounded by darkness. As discussed in Chapter Two the uncanny has a dual meaning, the uncanny is an unfamiliar familiar feeling. *Dollhouse* gives the viewer an unfamiliar familiar image. The images are of a home. This home, though it is oddly sparse, has tables, chairs, a bookshelf and curtains, it could be the viewer’s home, the viewer can relate to it. However it has an unfamiliar strangeness to it, it is engulfed by a repellent, but absorbing blackness that confuses the viewers sense of perspective and space. In the same way that two houses that are semi detached mirror one another, each tier of the house mirrors and repeats itself, each tier similar to the next. This gives the viewer of the painting a sense of disquiet. According to Freud the mirroring or doubling of something brings out an uncanny feeling for the person who experiences it. You realise ‘one possesses knowledge, feeling and experience in common with the other, identifies himself with another person, so that his self becomes confounded, or the foreign self is substituted for his own’ (Freud, 1919, p.9). Feeling that others are in the exact same position as you are, is uncanny and Andersson’s interiors tend to provokes that feeling.

The confusion of the viewer’s sense of perspective and space, for the viewer to lose what is familiar, reminds you of how much humans don’t know about the world they inhabit. If you overcome this confusion and sense of the uncanny in *Dollhouse* you can use that to your advantage. The unknown allows for
all possibilities, it allows for uncontrolled poetic action on the part of the viewer. The viewer can imagine wandering out through the door on the bottom level of the dollhouse into the blackness and seeing what you please. Andersson’s dark doorways are the thresholds to anything the viewer wants to imagine.

The open doors in the paintings of Karin Mamma Andersson and Edouard Vuillard’s in contrast of the poetics which they express, however, upon reading Bachelard and Freud, both paintings possess powerful poetic energy. Andersson’s open door in Dollhouse leads to the absolute unknown, whereas Vuillard’s doorway in Intimacy reveals the room beyond. ‘Contemporary art has become – in its forms and its contents, its meanings and its usages –thoroughly questioning in nature’ (Smith, 2009, p.2). Andersson questions more than Vuillard. She expects nothing to be as she perceives it. In contrast to Andersson, Vuillard confined his world to interiors. Instead of questioning this world, he expressed it and he described the stifling feeling of the nineteenth century French apartment. He didn’t overtly question the world by leaving gaps in it like Andersson does. This is the difference between Andersson’s doorway and his. She is more wary of the world and he is still under the spell of positivism.
Chapter Four: The Half Open Door

Edouard Vuillard and Wallace Stevens

The half open door is the most intriguing of all doors. It resides in between, neither open nor closed. The work of Vuillard and Stevens will be discussed in this chapter. *The Half Open Door* (1891) by Vuillard and *Angel Surrounded by Paysans* (1949) by Stevens are the artworks that will be considered. Both these artworks include doors, although in *Angel Surrounded by Paysans* the door is not necessarily half open. The door in Stevens’ poem is probably physically fully open, but things are only half revealed through it. The figure in Vuillard’s painting *The Half Open Door* looks as if she is on the verge of dissolving into the wallpaper and disappearing, she is in a sense only half revealed. This chapter will examine this phenomenon of the half revealed. Bachelard’s ideas on the half open door will be looked at in relation to this phenomenon, as well as the theorist Bonnie Costello who has written about Stevens’ poetry.
The Half Open Door is a little known painting. It is difficult to even attain a photograph of it. However it is a perfect example of Vuillard’s use of the door motif and of pattern. The painting presumably is of his sister Marie. The door itself is possibly the same door used for another later painting The Suitor (1893). The doors in both The Half Open Door and The Suitor are secret doors. Secret doors are doors that are wallpapered over, or covered or decorated in a way so that they blend into the wall and are almost imperceptible when closed over. The image in the painting is of Marie half way through a half open door so that only her upper back, one arm and her head are visible. The pattern and colour of the wallpaper and her dress are similar and both almost meld into one another. Her skin is even a yellowish tint and matches the predominantly yellow patterned wallpaper.

Many of Vuillard’s paintings use complex, but harmonious patterns and colours and they have been compared to tapestries. In 1901 in L’Art Moderne Emile Verhaeren wrote, ‘he seems to embroider his canvases with marvellous old wools’ (1991, p.29). Vuillard’s use of patterns and colours in this way enabled him to blend his figures into the background of his interiors seamlessly. The pattern and colour of The Half Open Door, ‘absorbs objects, notably the human figure, into an atmosphere, just as in a certain kind of music voice dissolves into a symphony’ (Salomon, 2003, p.235). Vuillard evokes his figures rather than describing them, the fringes of their bodies intermingle with the fringes of their interiors. A patterned web of yellow paint, as well as a second web of orange paint, runs through the whole image of The Half Open Door. The only distinguishing colour between the figure and the wallpaper is that her dress has a blue pattern on it, and the wallpaper is flecked with green. The door itself is indistinguishable from the
wallpaper and both are almost perfectly blended together. The figure and ground are essentially absorbed into the one flat surface of the painting.

Because the figure is half way between two rooms as well as nearly being fully dissolved into the background she evokes poetic action in the painting. She flickers between disappearing into the wall and reappearing as a solid figure. The viewer is given the choice to imagine her as a solid three dimensional figure or as a sylph that is barely visible. The dynamic imagination is the type of imagination the viewer uses in this instance, ‘it deforms what we perceive; ...it frees us from immediate images and changes them’ (Bachelard, 2011, p.1). There are endless possibilities in this movement, of imagining the figure solid and then sylph-like. In this instance ‘matter does not signify an intractable and viscous resistance to freedom. It is rather a call to our freedom, the very paste of possibility from which we must wrest new forms’ (Kearney, 1998, p.99). You act poetically and structure the matter perceived in the painting how you want to. The poetic will towards movement in The Half Open Door is a forming and de-forming of matter rather than an actual movement which could occur in reality. From examining The Half Open Door and based on the writings of Bachelard, it could be suggested that poetic movement can be the type of movement that thus far cannot physically happen in reality, but can and does happen in our imagination.

It is important to highlight the difference between the wide open door and the half open door. I believe the wide open door allows for a certain kind of poetic movement, which is close to the movement that happens in reality. From an image of an open door, you can imagine walking through it, like with the door in Stevens’ poem The Bouquet or the doors in Andersson’s Emo or Vuillard’s Intimacy. Walking, hearing your footsteps, feeling the air on your skin and forming three
dimensions in your mind, which can be sensed when you imagine going through an open door. However with a half open door you are stuck. It’s harder to imagine in this physically real way. You imagine in a dynamic way – the image moves in order to change. As was already stated in Chapter One the dynamic imagination is highly poetic and it forms part of the poetic. Dynamic poetic movement cannot happen in reality because it involves matter moving of its own accord or matter moving by force of the mind rather than the body. In the 1999 film The Matrix a young boy causes a metal spoon to bend in order to show the protagonist that the world he thought was real was just a computer simulation. You can easily bend a spoon in your imagination. The transforming of substance or matter in our imagination is a particularly poetic movement - we can ‘transform imaginary mass’ (Bachelard, 2011, p.259). It is the willing of matter to motion, through the power of imagination that is truly creative and productive. Dynamic imagination calls something into the existence within our minds, which could not exist in reality. As is discussed in the previous paragraph, The Half Open Door presents an ideal environment for dynamic poetic imagination to occur. Vuillard’s use of pattern and colour makes it easier for the mind to imagine movement in a still image.

In Half Open Door there is a desire to see behind the door. The figure in the painting slips through the door in a sort of unnatural way so that you cannot see through the doorway at all. There is a poetic will to pull this door wide open. The viewpoint of the painting is close to the door and the figure gazes directly at you inviting you into the space of the painting. With a half open door in general ‘we have only to give it a slight push [or pull]...And our fate becomes visible’ (Bachelard, 1994, p.223). In the case of Half Open Door it seems as if you could simply pull the door open. As Bachelard writes in Poetics of Space ‘a mere door,
can give images of hesitation, temptation, desire, security, welcome and respect...And then, onto what, towards what do doors open?’ (1994, p. 224).

Vuillard’s *Half Open Door* certainly gives an image of hesitation with the figure hovering on the threshold. It’s an image of desire, temptation and impatience. When the figure finally decides to enter the room she will have to push the door open some more and the viewer will finally perhaps be able to see beyond. The viewer’s imagination wills it to happen.

Wallace Stevens’ poem *Angel Surrounded by Paysans* contains a similar image of a half-open door to that of Vuillard’s painting. This poem is known to have been first written and published in a magazine in 1949. Subsequently it was published in 1950 in Stevens’ book *The Auroras of Autumn*. It comprises of a dialogue between one of the countrymen and the angel. The poem is divided into eleven non rhyming couplets. The door or threshold is an important part of this poem. It is the threshold between the real and the imagined. However there is no mention of whether the threshold is wide open or half open, you get the feeling it is physically wide open however it is metaphorically half open. *Angel Surrounded By Paysans* was inspired by a painting Stevens bought, a *Still Life* by Pierre Tal-Coat. This painting is of an assortment of vases and bowls. According to Bonnie Costello these vases and bowls represent the characters in the poem. The angel is the Venetian glass bowl on our left hand side of the painting with the sprig of leaves in it and all the other vessels are the paysans or peasants. Painting is central to Stevens’ poetry. In *The Necessary Angel* (1951) he wrote an essay called ‘The Relations between Poetry and Painting’. Bonnie Costello suggests that Stevens’ passes ‘to and fro between the imagination and reality, poetry and painting.'
Pierre Tal-Coat, *Still Life*

The doorway in *Angel Surrounded by Paysans* is more of a metaphorical threshold than a phenomenological doorway. It is a threshold between two different modes of seeing or being, the mode of the imagination and the mode reality. The angel in the poem is the angel of reality. Stevens is suggesting that the paysans live in an imagined world. Reality comes fleetingly to visit them:

‘One of the countrymen:

There is

A welcome at the door to which no one comes?

*The angel:*

I am the angel of reality,

Seen for a moment standing in the door...
...Am I not,

Myself, only half a figure of a sort,

A figure half seen, or seen for a moment, a man

Of the mind, an apparition appareled in

Apparels of such lightest look that a turn

Of my shoulder and quickly, too quickly, I am gone?’ (2006, p.435)

Bonnie Costello, in The Cambridge Companion to Wallace Stevens Edited by John N Serio, writes about the power of the imagination, ‘the power of imagination, the way art “apparels” the ordinary world in human feeling and significance’ (2007, p.179). In this case ‘ordinary’ means ‘real’. If the imagination embellishes or conceals reality in human feelings and phenomenological significance then the world of the imagination is the world humans live in every day. People have a tendency to put significance (or meaning) upon anything that happens around them, it is an imaginary significance. Reality lurks beneath this facade of the imaginary, sometimes perhaps it peaks its head up, so that people might see it. Reality is thus part of the imagination and reality keeps the imaginary in check. This is the message that Angel Surrounded by Paysans speaks of. ‘The angel [of reality] is at once at the centre of the peasant group, as if one of them, and also apart, standing at the door’ (Serio, 2007, p.179).
The angel of reality is invisible to the paysans, they open a door and no one is there, and yet the angel is there because he speaks ‘I am the angel of reality, / Seen for a moment standing in the door’ (Stevens, 2006, p.435). The angel, as Stevens writes, is a half figure, an apparition appareled in apparels of such lightest look. In other words the angel is an illusion or a phantom decorated in a light that bounces off the wearer and help them invisible. If the angel turns his shoulder he quickly disappears. In this sense reality is an illusion that flickers, our human reality is an illusion created by our imaginations. The angel of reality is an illusionary figure standing in a doorway. He is heard for a split second because the paysans do open the door, and then not heard or seen again, but is present. The angel figure is comparable with Vuillard’s female figure in *Half Open Door*. Both figures are only half there. The figure in Vuillard’s painting is more solidly there, but both figures are visual illusions, being there and not there all at once, they are very much in the spirit of the half open. In Stevens’ *Angel Surrounded by Paysans*, the spirit of the half open is the spirit of opening up to the unknown. Reality is beneath everything you do, but is not visible in our daily life. My take on what was quoted above is ‘art [imagination] ‘apparels’ [covers] the ordinary world’ (Serio, 2007, p.179).

In reading this poem you imagine either a fleeting flickering image of an angel, a solid angel or nothing at all depending. You are given no access to beyond the doorway, it is, or reality in this case is, out of bounds, you cannot imagine it, but you keep trying anyway. The interesting point about the poetic act of the reader or viewer is it is unending, it is a will-to-movement as much as actual movement and every time you read *Angel Surrounded by Paysans*, you will continue to will your own movement through the doorway, whether it will ever happen or not. The dynamic will-to-movement of every substance in the imagination makes the reader,
if they cannot imagine movement, at least will movement. The dynamic imagination has its impact upon the angel figure. You continually imagine the angel with a turn of his shoulder disappearing, just as with a turn of her shoulder Vuillard’s figure could slip back through the half open door and vanish. ‘A turn / Of my shoulder and quickly, too quickly, I am gone...’ (2006, p. 435).

A half open door is full of possibility. It will eventually be opened fully or be shut closed. With both Vuillard’s Half Open Door and Stevens’ Angel Surrounded by Paysans there is a possibility of both doors opening fully or closing fully, or of the figure in both artworks appearing and disappearing. The viewer and the reader are kept in ambiguity whilst experiencing both artworks. Half open artworks neither tell you what is through the door, nor cut off all the chances of you knowing what’s through it. The viewer or reader is teased in a sense - given everything and nothing. In this chapter it has been established that with images of half open doors you uses your dynamic imagination over other types of imagination. When you see a half open door it must be opened or closed. With a half figure, you imagine them being there, and then not being there. The dynamic imagination, as has been said before, loops poetic movement. Poetic action is distinctly associated with dynamic imagination because dynamic imagination allows movement to happen, which is not possible in real life, to happen in your own mind.
Chapter Five: The Closed Door

Part One: Karin Mamma Andersson and Edouard Vuillard

Within this part of the chapter there will be an examination of paintings by Andersson and Vuillard that have both open and closed doors in the one image. The dialectic between an open and a closed door in the one image will be considered. Anderson’s *Tick Tock* (2011) and Vuillard’s *The Dressmaking Studio I* (1892) will be considered in relation to this dialectic. However both *Tick Tock* and *The Dressmaking Studio I* are completely different. In the context of dynamic imagination the viewer in *Tick Tock* is placed in a frustrating position and unable to move or breathe, whereas in *The Dressmaking Studio I* the viewer is more like an audience member, seeing the painted scene from a relative distance.

Karin Mamma Andersson, *Tick Tock* (2011), mixed media on panel, 114.5x116.5cm
*Tick Tock* is a painting of somebody’s bedroom-living space, it is devoid of figures. The clothes, cups, newspaper and other objects highlight the rooms missing inhabitant. There are two doors in this room. There is one closed one on the back wall to our right hand side and an open one in the wall to our left. The open door is non-descript, it is left blank with a blur of brown paint. Elfriede Jelinek suggested the blur looked like ‘the movements created in a photograph that has been exposed for too long – as if someone has been in the room and left again during the exposure’ (Hentschel, 2012, p.23). Upon reading Jelinek’s theory regarding the blur, there is a hint towards movement in this painting, which otherwise is stifling. The closed door at the back of the interior is described precisely. The viewer cannot see the door knob of this door – it is blocked by a black coat and white shirt that hang from a piece of string that stretches across the room like a washing line. You get the sense of being cut off from being able to leave the room. The viewer is blocked from escaping through either door, positioned behind a table in the foreground of the painting. One desires to move so as to get out. There is an overwhelming feeling of entrapment. Rather than allowing for the viewers poetic creation, *Tick Tock* provokes frustration.

*Tick Tock*, regardless of the movement written about by Elfriede Jelinek, is a painting that constricts movement. Luckily the poetic imagination pulls through this constriction. Because Andersson has painted the viewer into a position that makes them feel as if they are unable to move, therefore the viewer wills movement. Bachelard connected the will-to-movement with what he calls the will to logos. The will to logos is ‘the will to attune yourself to the speaking of Being itself’ (Kearney, 1998, p.99). Logos is the Greek word for word, speech or discourse. The will to speak then, is the will to be able to speak about being and
existence. When one experiences an artwork, the feeling for poetic will-to-
movement is the will to speak or to make it known to the artwork that you exist and
that you have influence. ‘Bachelard situates the will-to-logos at the root of dynamic
imagination. It is a projection of our creative logos that is at the same time a
discovery of the creative logos of the world’ (Kearney, 1998, p.100). In a sense
Bachelard wanted to ratify the irrepressibility of the imagination in every single
human being. The will to logos and thus the will-to-movement, is a will of every
human being, every viewer and reader, to speak up and say ‘I am here’, to be
poetic. Tick Tock forces the viewer to become aware of themselves, in relation to
the artwork, in constricting your freedom to move poetically within the painting, it
highlights the poetic freedom you are at liberty to have with other artworks.

The artwork acts upon the viewer by restricting the viewer’s position within
the artwork. According to Georg Gadamer the work of art exists as a Being
because it changes the viewer who experiences the work. Gadamer in Truth and
Method takes the subjectivity away from what play is. ‘The mode of being of play
is not such that, for the game to be played, there must be a subject who is behaving
playfully. Rather the primordial sense of playing is a medial one. Thus we say
something is “playing”’ (Korsmeyer, 1998, p.94). If the subjectivity of viewing an
artwork is taken away, you could say an artwork is art-ing or being an artwork.
Regardless of the fact that someone originally made the art, art and play exist
without human consciousness of them. Aesthetics, which is noticing and
appreciating of art, doesn’t offer an active view on the part of the viewer and
especially the artwork itself. Poetics is art imagining art and people imagining from
art, more art. Art and play both act within a loop, they are both unending. There is
an unending cycle of viewers imagining going through doors, or being unable, to
go through them, like in *Tick Tock*. Art-ing is the way in which an artwork is visually or even psychologically composed in order to influence the viewers’ feelings. In the case of *Tick Tock* the artwork is the one (not the viewer or even the artist) who imposes poetic movement restrictions on the viewer. With other artworks like *The Bouquet* by Stevens or *Intimacy* by Vuillard, the reader and viewer are given a bigger psychological space and more choice. In this thesis, thus far, it has been established that the viewer/reader influences the artwork with poetic movement, but also now you can see an artwork influences its viewer/reader.

Edouard Vuillard, *Demarais Panels – The Dressmaking Studio I*, First Panel, (1892), Oil on canvas, 48.5x117cm

Edouard Vuillard, *Demarais Panels – The Dressmaking Studio I*, Second Panel, (1892), Oil on canvas, 48.5x117cm
Vuillard’s *The Dressmaking Studio I* is part of the Desmarais Panels, a series of six decorative panels. These panels are little known in comparison to the Vaquez or Natanson Panels. The six panels are divided into three themes. *The Dressmaking Studio I* comprises of two separate panels that depict the interior of a dressmaking studio. The two panels are painted in a flat two dimensional style and the groups of figures portrayed are all parallel to the picture plane. On our left hand side of the first panel there is a door just opened and a little girl in red has just come through it. On our right hand side of the second panel is a closed door. The little girl in red is banging against the door, wanting to get out. The viewer can see through the open door into a brightly lit hallway where you can see another door and a strip of floral wallpaper. The sense of movement and time in *The Dressmaking Studio I* panels is very apparent, you don’t need your imagination, the door – for it is the same door – can be viewed both open and closed. It is the little girl in red’s will to want to move through the rooms, to come in and then go out, or vice versa go out and then come in, that expresses the viewers will to move.

The difference between Andersson’s paintings in general, and specifically *Tick Tock*, and Vuillard’s paintings in general, is that Vuillard wants the viewer to experience the interiors he gives them as if they were the oneiric house of their childhood that Bachelard speaks about. The girl in red eternally comes in and out of the dressmaking studio, doing what the viewer imagines doing, what the viewer used to do. According to Bachelard, when the oneiric house is remembered the warmth of our young being comes back. ‘We dream of the house we were born in’ and our ‘being reigns in a sort of earthly paradise of matter, dissolved in the comforts of an adequate matter...’ (Bachelard, 1994, p.7). *The Dressmaking Studio I* is an ‘earthly paradise of matter’, richly descriptive with its patterns colours and
tones. Andersson’s *Tick Tock* does not want to give you the oneiric experience. Elfriede Jelinek describes *Tick Tock* as ‘a scene of isolation’ and ‘there can be no doubt, someone is spending his last years and days here in joyless penury’ (Hentschel, 2012, p.23). There is a feeling with this painting of old age and dying rather than of youth. Vuillard’s paintings are full of wonder. In contrast, Andersson’s painting shows a lack of such interest in anything. The open door to your left in *Tick Tock* leads into a blank white space, whereas *The Dressmaking Studio I* shows specifically what is beyond the door frame. It could be argued that Vuillard leaves less up to the viewer’s imagination and on the other hand Andersson allows for all poetic possibilities. However, particularly with *Tick Tock*, there is a sense of isolation and the mundane, and as the name implies, that time is running out. *Tick Tock* depicts a nightmarish scene rather than an oneiric one.

The closed door in the second panel of *The Dressmaking Studio I* does relate in a small way to *Tick Tock*. The little girl in the second panel wants to leave the room, she looks as if she is banging against the door and she is too small to reach the door knob. The older female figure with her hand on the door knob is just about to let her out. The frustration of the little girl to get out could be interpreted as similar to the frustration the viewer feels in *Tick Tock*. The difference is that the viewer knows the little girl will get to leave. In *Tick Tock*, the viewer feels stuck between the fourth wall of the painting, and the table in the foreground. Bachelard in *Poetics of Space* suggests meaning encloses and poetic expression opens up (1994, p.222). Having an open and a closed door in a painting both these aspects. A closed door or a closed room (i.e. a room so full of paraphernalia that it’s hard to navigate) speak of frustration. Therefore according to Bachelard, an open door speaks of freedom and allows for poetic action on behalf of the viewer. *Tick Tock*
and *The Dressmaking Studio I* allow the viewer to experience the feelings related to both open and closed doors. Having both open and closed doors heightens the poetic will-to-movement in an artwork. The two panels of *The Dressmaking Studio I* could be images for a story board - they represent motion and easily will it. The open and the closed door in *Tick Tock*, adds to the frustration of not being able to move or to imagine any other possibility.

Depicting a closed door in a painting is closing off the painting and restricting its possibilities. Having a closed door creates a fixed meaning in a static aesthetic image. Traditionally art history spoke of the meanings of artworks.

‘The most pervasive theory of the art object in art history...was its conception as a medium of communication or expression. The object was constructed within the communicational or linguistic paradigm as a ‘vehicle’ by means of which the intentions, values, attitudes, ideas...of the maker...were conveyed by design or chance...to beholders’ (Preziosi, 1998, p.15).

Whether an artwork could convey such information or meaning, such as the intentions or ideas of the artist, was important. Even now art history is divided into categories by which artworks can be assessed and made meaningful for the viewer, some of these include semiotics, psychoanalysis, critical theory, feminism, socialism, Marxism and post colonialism. These categories are there to put a structure on the work of art – to enclose it for instance as a feminist sculpture, a Marxist painting, or to show that the art has some semiotic significance. In enclosing a space within a painting, in having a closed door in an image of a domestic interior, the artist restricts the artwork’s meaning to the kind of art historical meanings mentioned above. Without its first panel and without the little girl figure, the second panel of *The Dressmaking Studio I*, might be considered just an image of a fin de siècle French dressmaking studio, an illustration of what a
dressmaking studio was like in a specific time and place. When you include an open door in the image and especially an open door with a little girl, you are given a sense of movement and adventure which surpasses any art historical relevance. The paintings context no longer matters. What matters, when there is an image of an open door, is what the viewer can do. ‘Through meaning [language]…encloses, while through poetic expression it opens up’ (Bachelard, 1994, p. 222). Thus according to Bachelard, the result of poetic expression or action does not have any specific meaning. The artist who produces the language of the poetic action or the viewer, who acts poetically, doesn’t hold to any one meaning. An image of a closed door reduces the viewers’ ability to be poetic. You cannot move through the image and the meaning of it is fixed.

Through examining the two paintings *Tick Tock* by Andersson and *The Dressmaking Studio I* by Vuillard, there have been points established regarding the viewer and the artwork. The viewer of *Tick Tock* is influenced by their position or viewpoint of the artwork. The artwork, because of this, influences the viewer’s feelings. It has been established through my research that having both an open and a closed door in a painting heightens the feelings of the viewer and the will-to-movement within the artwork. Another point was made in this chapter in relation to the contrast between Andersson and Vuillard’s work. Vuillard’s paintings of domestic interiors follow Bachelard’s feelings about the childhood home as an oneiric or dream-filled place. Anderson on the other hand paints nightmarish interiors, such as *Tick Tock*, tinged with the uncanny and reminding you of old age. Finally the image of a closed door in a painting was compared with the enclosing of meaning on an artwork. Meaning is kept open by having an image of an open door.
Part Two: Edouard Vuillard and Karin Mamma Andersson

The poetic will-to-movement will be examined thoroughly in Part Two of this Chapter in relation to Vuillard’s *Large Interior with Six Figures* (1897) and Andersson’s *Hangover* (2008). In contrast to Vuillard’s interior, which has a lot of figures in it, Andersson’s domestic interior is deserted. These paintings of the interiors are stage-like, they recede deeply inwards and there is a closed door in their back wall. Vuillard leaves the viewer a pathway to this door, whereas Andersson’s painting is cluttered with so many objects that the closed door in the background is blocked off. It’s this contrast between Vuillard’s and Andersson’s closed door that will be addressed.

Edouard Vuillard, *Large Interior with Six Figures*, (1897), oil on canvas, 88x193cm
Detail, Edouard Vuillard, *Large Interior with Six Figures*

*Large Interior with Six Figures* is a painting thought to originally have been commissioned as a decorative panel for someone’s home, but for unknown reasons remained unsold. Instead it was exhibited in 1897 in the Vollard Gallery, Paris as part of a Nabis exhibition. The closed door in *Large Interior with Six Figures* will be used as a vehicle for discussion of Bachelard’s poetic will-to-movement. This painted interior like many other interiors by Vuillard looks like a scene from a play. ‘The open, proscenium-like composition allows the viewer to be the *voyeur* in a room in which the figures interact as if players in a domestic drama by the Belgian and Scandinavian playwrights’ (Groom, 1993, p.96). As already
discussed in a previous chapter these playwrights who influenced Vuillard were Maurice Maeterlinck and Henrik Ibsen. The proscenium is the convex part of the stage that extends out beyond the stage set into the audience. Thus the audience is closer to the action on stage, similarly to other paintings previously discussed. The perspective in the interior is odd because of the way the various rugs lie slightly curved on the ground, as if you were partially viewing this scene through a fish eye lens.

Before delving deeply into the specifics of Large Interior with Six Figure it is important to briefly consider another painting by Vuillard called The Suitor (1893) and its relationship to animation.

(From left to right) Edouard Vuillard, The Suitor, (1893), oil on board, 31.7x36.4cm, Charles-Emile Reynaud, Pauvre Pierrot, (1892), still from animated film.

It has been suggested by Guy Cogeval that Vuillard was strongly influenced for his painting The Suitor by one of the first ever animated cartoons, a sketch called Pauvre Pierrot by Charles-Emile Reynaud. In this cartoon a male figure opens a secret door in a wall and a female figure stands in front of the doorway
where the male figure is. This comparison between *The Suitor* and the animated cartoon *Pauvre Pierrot*, made in 1892, the year before the painting was produced, highlights Vuillard’s interest in the movement of the door. His paintings of doors could be considered specifically related to their movement. He draws inspiration from an animated film of a door in contrast to still image of one. When you see the figures in both *Large Interior with Six Figures* and *The Dressmaking Studio I* with their hands on the door knob of the closed door, you can be sure Vuillard did this to suggest the movement of the doors. The doors in both paintings have either been just closed or are about to be opened.

Returning to *Large Interior*, having established Vuillard’s concern for the movement of the doors he depicts, the closed door can be interpreted as preventing the transition between one room and another, but allowing for a will-to-movement. The door in *Large Interior* is an image of the archetypical door. The Neo-Platonists believed the archetypal image was immutable or unchangeable. Carl Jung believed images are ‘an innate response to the Collective Unconscious’, he saw the archetype as ‘the expression of an instinctual intentionality in humans’ (Kearney, 1998, p.99). It could be true that the archetypical image of the closed door or blocked threshold is a primordial, instinctual image innate within humans, but the fact of it being unchangeable is impossible. Phenomenology, rather than thinking of the final image of the closed door, considers ‘the onset of the image in individual consciousness’ (Kearney, 1998, p.90). In other words it considers how the archetypical image became the archetypical image. Considering the image of a door in this way allows you to think of the image subjectively. The image of the female figure in *Large Interior* with her hand on the door knob, in the process of opening or closing the door is an expression of our free will-to-movement. It is
important here to give Richard Kearney’s definition of the Bachelardian human being. Bachelard posited ‘the human being as a de-centred subject nourished by a poetic power which transcended its control’ (Kearney, 1998, p.88/89). Bachelard is articulating how the poetic power that transcends humans’ control is that of free will. According to Bachelard this will is predetermined in human nature. René Descartes speaks of controlled free will. ‘He [Descartes] thought free human behaviour was completely controlled. A person’s behaviour was free if it was controlled by his own nature or essence as a thinking being...human behaviour is not really free unless it expresses thought’ (Rée, 1974, p.120). Descartes theory regarding free will and thought is related to ideas within phenomenology that Kearney considers in Poetics of Imagining. Thoughts and perceptions, according to Kearney, are often mixed up with images. After his first grouping of thoughts and perceptions together as one and the same, he continues on, excluding the word thoughts, saying that it is just perceptions and images that get mixed up. Phenomenology sees images as acts of consciousness. Thoughts can be acts of consciousness, particularly when you decide to move a door in your mind. When you imagine the will-to-movement in an artwork you are expressing your thoughts. Regardless of whether you are expressing your thoughts by willing movement, you are also expressing humanities predetermined nature of having free will. The will to motion of an image is what makes an image poetic, it is an expression of your thoughts and it is part of a humans predetermined nature. Willing the door in Large Interior open is what makes you a human being.

Vuillard invites you into the space of Large Interior. There is a pathway made from your viewpoint to the door. The room is packed with figures and furniture. However, between the table, filled with papers, on our left and a chair to our right
there is a path, that leads to the figure with her hand on the door. It is difficult to see whether she has just pushed the door shut or is turning the knob to open it. This ambiguity adds even more possibility to the dynamic will-to-movement of the painting.

Andersson’s *Hangover* in contrast to *Large Interior* is devoid of figures and there is no pathway made for the viewer to the door. *Hangover* is a painting in two parts. She doubles the painted scene using a monotype print method. Andersson has painted one scene in *Hangover*, the image on the right and then using the aforementioned monotype print method makes an impression of the scene next to the painted image, this is the image to our left. The impression is paler, there are slight differences in it and it is a mirror image of the original. The room depicted in *Hangover* is a sitting room cluttered with paraphernalia – a wicker chair, couch, cushions, blanket covered chairs and other imperceptible things block the viewers’ path to the closed door. The printed image on our left in *Hangover*, is less cluttered; a lot of the objects obscuring the viewer’s path have been removed. However there is still only a vague impression of half a white door that blends into the creamy white floor.

Karin Mamma Andersson, *Hangover*, (2008), oil on panel in two parts, 62x140cm
There is less of free will-to-movement in *Hangover* than there is in *Large Interior*. Still there is a small chance someone might walk in through the door. Mamma Andersson’s artwork in general and *Hangover* in particular, is difficult for the viewer to move within poetically, in comparison to Edouard Vuillard’s artworks. *Hangover* has no pathway to the door. The viewer’s eyes are not directed towards the door to the same extent as they are in *Large Interior*.

As has been stated before, the will to motion of an image is what makes an image poetic. It is an expression of your thoughts and part of human nature. Similarly to *Tick Tock*, *Hangover* acts upon the viewer. It blocks the viewer off from the door. The frustration and feeling of entrapment felt in *Tick Tock* isn’t strong in *Hangover*. Bachelard’s will to logos and the struggle of the viewer to say assert their presence is weak. The viewer of *Hangover* is given the position of an audience member looking at a stage set. The viewer cannot move within the
painting, but she doesn’t want to move either. This painting provokes the viewer to ask certain questions – is it poetic and is it ignoring its audience? No one can move in or out of that room, the door though it is there is not a threshold, it is not a transitional space. The couch and the wicker chair have their backs to us. Andersson has positioned the viewer in such a way that the room is ignoring them.

Contemporary art questions the traditional and presumed structure of art. ‘Contemporary art has become...thoroughly questioning’ (Smith, 2009, p.2) Mamma Andersson questions this presumed structure, notably in Hangover and Tick Tock. According to Kim Levin in ‘Under the Influence’ an essay in Mamma Andersson (2007), the new figurative painters like Andersson, create newly disruptive unrealities, ‘they exploit their own weaknesses. They thrive on the inexplicable, the ambiguous...the unstable’. Andersson changes our perception of painting. Hangover questions why there has to be a path, why the viewer has to be able to move through the space and why the image has to be poetic. All these questions come from a painting of a cluttered interior with a closed door. As I have suggested previously with regard to Vuillard’s The Dressmaking Studio I, a closed door restricts meaning. A closed door blocked by objects, two of which have their backs turned towards the viewer, suggests more than just a restriction of meaning, but rather an avoidance of wanting the artwork interpreted at all. The painting blanks the viewer. Andersson questions the way figurative paintings are constructed. Usually objects like tables, chairs and figures are placed within the painting so as to be viewer friendly. Large Interior with Six Figures, The Dressmaking Studio I and Figures in an Interior: Intimacy are all viewer friendly in the sense that they have a path, a space or a cyclical movement within them,
which allows the viewer to exercise the poetic will-to-movement and dynamic imagination.

Andersson uses crime scene photographs as the sources for her paintings. She says she uses these photos so she can get images of ‘a run-of-the-mill Tuesday, when the dishes are piled up in the sink, the carpet is crooked, the newspaper is strewn all over the floor, the weather is bad and the TV is on’ (Hentschel, 2012, p.19). Her paintings retain some of the residue or atmosphere of the crime scene photographs. There is an odd uncertainty and a sense of the uncanny in her work that is inexpressible. She has said herself ‘I’m seeking a vibration, a vibration you cannot read or describe, you can only feel them’ (Oksenhorn, 2011). There is a disquiet unfriendliness that lurks in her paintings. The sense of the uncanny in *Hangover* cannot be sorted into any of Freud’s categories of the uncanny. With *Hangover* you do not feel the poetic will-to-movement, you do not want to participate in or engage with the painting.

The viewer does not tend towards engaging with this painting by moving through it or transforming it poetically. If you adhere to the Bachelardian definition of a human being, which states humans are nourished by poetic power, it could be suggested that an image like *Hangover*, which is not poetic, will not move the viewer to engage with it and its threshold in the traditional poetic manner. If humans are nourished by poetry, the image of the un-poetic door in *Hangover* will not move us. *Hangover* is a dynamic image because it is a double image. It is two of the same yet very different images. This poetic dynamism has nothing to do with the door or the interior, but rather, according to Elfriede Jelinek, to do with time passing and what she calls imaginative remembering (Hentschel, 2012, p.25) - in other words not remembering something in the exact way it was, but imaginatively,
poetically. This sort of poetics is on the surface of the painting rather than within it. Thus far this thesis has dealt with the poetics within an artwork rather than on its surface.

Part Two of Chapter Five has highlighted the major difference between Vuillard’s and Andersson’s interiors. The figures and objects in Vuillard’s closed door painting *Large Interior with Six Figures* are differently placed or structured within his painting in comparison to the placement of the objects in Andersson’s *Hangover*. *Large Interior* has a clear path through the painting, it welcomes the viewer in. *Hangover* clogs the path into the world of the painting with furniture, cushions and blankets it obstructs all the entry points available to the viewer as a means of contrasting the two artists there was discussion around Vuillard’s early interest in the movement of doors and how it was human nature to will poetic movement in an artwork. There was attention drawn to the lack of will-to-movement in Andersson’s painting *Hangover*, which potentially came from the questioning nature of contemporary art. The question why an image must be poetic and why an image must engage with a viewer poetically was posed. It is in the nature of humanity to possess and use poetic power. Therefore if an artwork does not have poetic power, it does not attract the curiosity of humans in the same way as it would otherwise.
Conclusion

‘The human being in all his grandeur, displays his will. He is a creature that consults both his own past and his brother’s wisdom. He groups his own thoughts and advice from others by engaging, a polymorphous psyche in a carefully chosen action’ (Bachelard, 2011, p.257). This is what you do when standing in front of a painting and reading or listening to a poem. You engage with the artwork and create from it. This research on the poetic imagination and the domestic interior has developed this very human aspect of the experience of art.

The images of the paintings and poetry in this thesis have been examined from a subjective, poetic and phenomenological perspective. To re-state Simon Critchley’s definition of phenomenology as, ‘a description of things as they are that seeks to elicit the sense or significance of our practical involvement with the world’ (2006, pp. 29-30). This research gave a deeper understanding of our human involvement with images. Humans tend to poeticize when confronted with a painting or a poem, in other words they tend to produce and create more from the images they are given, they extend the image beyond what it is in actuality, they meditate on the image and they become aware of themselves in relation to the image. According to Bachelard in *Air and Dreams* (2011) humans are ‘creators of our own becoming,’ with our minds we can ‘transform imaginary mass’ and we can ‘become in our imagination matter suitable for the development of our present duration’ (p.259). Humans can transform with their imagination the matter of paintings and poetry. The doorway was used as a vehicle for this transformation or movement. Whether the door in a painting or poem was fully open, half open or closed determines the type of motion you experience when viewing/reading the artwork. The way the patterns of the wallpaper and the dress in Vuillard’s *The Half*
Open Door form and de-form in front of your eyes highlights the power the imagination has in transforming matter. Humans can imagine becoming a different sort of matter. You can step out of your flesh and blood body into a body in a Stevens’ poem that’s as light as air or into Andersson’s Tick Tock and become heavy from the muted tones of paint, confined and frustrated. When you meditate before an image, you enter into the imagined atmosphere of that image, whether it’s a stable or unstable image, whether it’s heavy or light, you feel the image.

This research claims to be looking at art in a fresh light and suggests a new subjective, poetic, phenomenological way of critiquing it. It approaches images from peoples’ dynamic relationship with them. Rather than viewing the surface of the image from the outside my aim was to enter into the image and assesses it from the inside out. In conclusion, suggesting that art images should be viewed by the critic from the perspective of a figure within the painting, from the perspective of a female figure hovering in a doorway. A reversal of perspectives is in order.

Though researching the theories of Heidegger, Bachelard, Gadamer and Stevens this thesis has begun critiquing art through a different mode of enquiry, poetics. In contrast to aesthetics, poetics is a deeply personal way of understanding art. Poetics can only be discussed from the standpoint of the individual viewer, reader or listener. It is the will-to-movement of the viewer’s/reader’s imagination that is the backbone of this thesis.

This thesis develops upon the poetic imagination of the domestic interior. It associates how humans move through rooms with poetic movement. Domestic interiors have the poetic potential for a certain kind of movement. Rooms in a house lead into one another and are essentially a system of pathways. Unlike the streets in a city, which are also strict pathways in a sense, the interior space
represents a particular intimate potential for movement. You have to move through the intimate transitional space of the doorway to leave the room, people have to enter or exit a room through one or maybe several specific doorways.

Poetics is the dynamic unending act that is constantly in flux that projects potential images and produces possibilities, that it is both a will-to-movement and the movement itself of an image in the imagination, and that it allows for a knowledge exchange between the viewer/reader and artwork/poem. This poetics, when applied to the poetry of Wallace Stevens and the paintings of Edouard Vuillard and Karin Mamma Andersson, allows for a refreshingly personal viewpoint on these artworks. Postmodernists will argue against the unified subject in this thesis who experiences artworks. This unified subject contrasts with the fragmented subject discussed by the postmodern theories of Jean-François Lyotard and Fredrick Jameson. Postmodernism fragments the subject, believing ‘not that the “unified” subject is unreal or undesirable and inauthentic, but rather it is dependent for its construction on a certain kind of society’ (Jameson, 1997, p.136). In other words the individual subject is a conglomeration of social and cultural phenomena rather than an individual whole person who repels all influences. Currently the wider public sees this fragmented subject as the truth regarding ideas about the subject. Jameson wrote the chapters for Postmodernism (1997) throughout the eighties up to 1990, the book was first published in 1991. In 1991 the public were perhaps ‘sick and tired of the subjective as such in its older classical forms’ (p.150), but now twenty-two years later the public might want to return to the subjective. It isn’t the case that the subject isn’t fragmented, that the subject isn’t influenced by factors outside of themselves, but rather that artworks can be seen differently by different individuals, acted upon or poeticised
differently. The human act of poetics allows for the production of imaginative movement, which connects human beings to the world surrounding them. Rather than starting from the outside in (postmodern aesthetics) this thesis proposed beginning from the inside out (Bachelardian poetics). The postmodern theories of Jameson and Lyotard are well founded, but this thesis shows an alternative way of seeing and understanding artworks. Seeing the artwork through the actual eyes of the viewer (as an individual looking in at the image or immersed in the image) and going back to the sense of what it is to be, and what it is your mind does, when you stand in front of a painting or read a poem – this is another approach to artworks. This research has disregarded societies influence over the subject and instead focused on the poetic existence an individual has while experiencing an artwork.

Through researching the paintings of Vuillard and Andersson, this thesis has filled in a literature gap. It is known that Andersson admires the paintings of Vuillard, but nothing has been written to highlight the relationship between the two painters. Vuillard’s influence on Andersson is significant, but not overly important. Both artists are concerned with the psyche of the figures in their paintings.

The ideas of poetics could be further researched by exploring Bachelard’s theories in more detail, particularly his theories in *Air and Dreams – An Essay on the Imagination of Movement* (2011). Though his ideas on movement in images have been the main fulcrum of this thesis, there’s far more to discuss. Bachelard wasn’t the only theorist used to decipher the poetic movement in art. The French philosopher Henri Bergson influenced Bachelard’s poetics a great deal, specifically his theories about the concepts of drive and aspiration. Bergson focused on the immediate experience of individuals and so it would be very interesting to relate his work to painted and poetic images. It would also be intriguing to further
examine the postmodern theories briefly discussed in this conclusion and to contrast them more directly with the poetics developed herein. In a way the contrast between the fragmented subject and the poetic unified subject is the crux of this body of writing. This thesis poses that the movement imagined by the individual enables the creation of a new image, whereas postmodernism believes that when someone creates a new image it comes completely from outside of them. Imagined will-to-movement is an innately human characteristic that comes from within. Analysing this difference further could have a significant outcome.

What happens in your mind when you are simply being in front of a painting or listening to a poem? You use your poetic imagination. You use the painting or the poem to wander off in your own mind. Certain images are more susceptible to this wandering. This thesis examines the artworks of Vuillard, Stevens and Andersson that deal with the domestic interior. It suggests that these artworks are susceptible to this poetic wandering. Before suggesting these artists’ works, various ideas about poetics were developed into a concise definition and theories on poetics and the domestic interior were discussed. Humans have a predetermined will to imagine and to poeticize. Though the human subject is fragmented, each individual, as René Descartes believed, has a predetermined nature. Part of human nature is to poeticize.
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