ON REPRESENTATION

VERMEER AND DESCARTES
A. K. Wheelock, Jr., *The Public and the Private in the Age of Vermeer*, p.184:

The character of the scene *Woman Holding a Balance* conforms closely to Saint Ignatius of Loyola’s recommendations for meditation in his *Spiritual Exercises*, a devotional service with which Vermeer was undoubtedly familiar through his contacts with the Jesuits. Saint Ignatius urged that the meditator examine his conscience and weigh his sins as though he were standing before his judge at Judgment Day. Ignatius then encouraged that one ‘weighs’ one’s choice and choose a path of life that will allow one to be judged favorably in a ‘balanced’ manner: “I must rather be like the equalized scales of a balance ready to follow the course which I feel is more for the glory and praise of God, our Lord, and the salvation of my soul” *<Spiritual Exercises>.*
“what is called a projection in this cartography context is never visualized by placing a plane between the geographer and the earth, but rather by transforming, mathematically, from sphere to plane. Although the grid that Ptolemy proposed, and those that Mercator later imposed, share the mathematical uniformity of the Renaissance perspective grid, they do not share the positioned viewer, the frame, and the definition of the picture as a window through which an external viewer looks. (…) The projection is, one might say, viewed from nowhere. Nor is it to be looked through. It assumes a flat working surface.”
Descartes, *Optics*:

“…there is no need to suppose [...] that there is something in the objects which resembles the ideas or sensations that we have of them.”

“We must take care not to assume – as our philosophers commonly do – that in order to have sensory perceptions the soul must contemplate certain images transmitted by objects to the brain (...) Their sole reason for positing such images was that they saw how easily a picture can stimulate our mind (...). We should, however, recall that our mind can be stimulated by many things other than images –by signs and words, for example, which in no way resemble the things they signify.”

“Indeed the perfection of an image often depends on its *not* resembling its object as much as it might. You can see this in the case of engravings: consisting simply of a little ink placed here and there on a piece of paper, they represent to us forests, towns, people, and even battles and storms; and although they make us think of countless different qualities in these objects, it is only in respect of shape that there is any real resemblance. And even this resemblance is very imperfect, since engravings represent to us bodies of varying relief and depth on a surface which is entirely flat.”
Descartes, *Optics*:

“Now, when this picture thus passes to the inside of our head, it still bears some resemblance to the objects from which it proceeds. As I have amply shown already, however, we must not think that it is by means of this resemblance that the picture causes our sensory perception of these objects…”

“But in all this there need be no resemblance between the ideas which the soul conceives and the movements which cause these ideas.”