STAGING ABSORPTION AND TRANSMUTING THE EVERYDAY: A RESPONSE TO MICHAEL FRIED

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In his recent essay on the photography of Jeff Wall ("Jeff Wall, Wittgenstein, and the Everyday," *Critical Inquiry* 33 [Spring 2007]: 495-526), Michael Fried suggestively amplifies the account of pictorial absorption that he first gave us almost thirty years ago and that has since become a landmark in art criticism.[1] But in showing how Wall--by his own account--meticulously *stages* his photographs of absorption, Fried prompts us to wonder if Wall thereby deconstructs the wall that Fried himself has erected--on foundations laid by Diderot--between absorption and theatricality. At the very least, Fried's analysis of Wall's work leads me to suspect that in spite of all he has written about absorption, it remains insufficiently interrogated. And the same, I think, applies to the everyday, the second major term of Fried's new essay. Even when rubbed by the hand of Wittgenstein, not to mention Fried himself, the concept of the everyday as an object of artistic transformation remains--to me at least-- insufficiently illuminated. It too needs the spark of further questioning.[2]

Let me begin with Fried's account of absorption, which he admirably recapitulates near the beginning of his essay. Summarizing what he has written about it not only in *Absorption and Theatricality* but also in two later books, *Courbet's Realism* (1990) and *Manet's Modernism* (1996), Fried defines it historically as "a central current or tradition in French painting from Jean-Baptiste Greuze's momentous Salon debut in 1755 to the advent of Manet and his generation around 1860." Conceptually, he defines it as "an ongoing effort to make paintings that by one strategy or another appear--in the first place by depicting personages wholly absorbed in what they are doing, thinking, and feeling, and in multifigure paintings by binding those figures together in a single unified composition--to deny the presence before them of the beholder or . . . to establish the ontological fiction that the beholder does not exist" ("Jeff Wall," pp. 499-500). Fried draws the concept of absorption from Diderot, but he has built his own

account of it largely by means of induction--with observations gleaned from paintings such as Chardin's *House of Cards* (1737), *Young Student Drawing* (ca. 1733-38), *The Young Draughtsman* (1737), and *Soap Bubbles* (1735-40).[3] In other words, Fried argues by example, and thus invites us to scrutinize his examples just as carefully as he does.

The problem with arguing by example, however, is that different examples--no matter how well subsumed by a categorical rubric--can prompt different inferences. In *Young Student Drawing*, *The Young Draughtsman,* and *House of Cards*, Fried finds a solitary figure so absorbed in his work or play that he ignores what is plainly revealed to us--as beholders-- in or near the foreground: a pair of playing cards standing up in an open drawer, a length of rose-colored string hanging over the edge of a table, a spot of red underwear peeping through a ragged hole in the back of a coat ("Jeff Wall," p. 502). These three paintings thus exemplify what Fried calls "the absorptive effect in its classic form . . . [wherein] a personage entirely absorbed or engrossed in an action, feeling, or state of mind is also quite unaware of anything but the object of his or her absorption, crucially including the beholder standing before the painting" ("Jeff Wall," p. 502). But do all three paintings exemplify the same kind of obliviousness? Is obliviousness to a hole in the back of one's jacket the same as obliviousness to something that may or may not swim just within the range of one's peripheral vision? No matter which way he turns his head, the bent-over young student whose coat displays a hole in the back could not possibly see that hole, much less be distracted by it. By contrast, either of the profiled young men in *The Young Draughtsman* and *The House of Cards* might peripherally see--without turning his head-- what we see in the foreground of those pictures, and since the head of the former figure is turned slightly *toward* the foreground, could he altogether avoid noticing the length of ribbon dangling there? How can we know for certain that he is "quite unaware" of it?

The problem of defining the absorptive effect in these "classic" examples of it multiply when we treat it as a synchronic phenomenon, when we try to identify it in paintings and photographs made outside its specified time and place in the history of French painting. In Gerhard Richter's *Lesende* [Reading] (1994), a painting based on a photograph, the subject--

Richter's daughter--is gazing down on the pages of a magazine that she holds in her hands, and her profiled face is turned slightly away from the foreground, giving her distinctly less visual access to our side of the picture than the figure in *The Young Draughtsman* has. Nevertheless, speaking of the photograph on which the painting is based, Fried concludes that "the (presumed) photographer's relation to the reading woman . . . feels too near and in the open for her to have been unaware of his presence" ("Jeff Wall," p. 504). Here Fried seems to forget that photographers have many ways of catching their subjects unawares: telescopic lenses, two-way mirrors, pure stealth. But even if Fried's feeling is right here, he inadvertently raises a fundamental question about absorption. If the reading girl could not have failed to notice the photographer, how could Chardin's absorbed young men have failed to notice the man with the paintbrush and easel? In other words, once we abandon the ontological fiction that *the painter or photographer* does not exist, once we make his or her activity an integral part of our experience of the picture, which is what it becomes in Fried's analysis of Wall's photographs, we prise open the Orgone box of absorption. Though we happen to know, from Wall's own testimony, that he staged his photograph of Adrian Walker drawing a specimen, is there any reason we should not conclude that Chardin staged the position of his models?

Fried answers this question by saying, in effect, that the modern pictures *look* staged. "Both Wall's *Adrian Walker* and Richter's *Reading*," he writes, "mobilize absorptive motifs that recall Chardin, but they do so in ways that expressly acknowledge what I want to call the *to-be-seenness*--by which I mean something other than a simple return to or fall into theatricality--both of the scene of representation and of the act of presentation" ("Jeff Wall," p. 504). So what is to-be-seenness?[4] In the case of Richter's *Reading,* it rests on the questionable claim that the girl "feels too near" to be oblivious to the photographer and on "the fact that the painting seems so clearly to have been based on a photograph," which "throws into relief the former's particular mode of artifactuality, which in its very technical perfection--I refer to the absence of visible brushstokes--conveys a sense of expert performance" ("Jeff Wall," p. 504). So what are we asked to believe about absorption here? That it somehow loses its absolute, Chardinian purity

when strained through the fine sieve of technical perfection? That it can't be captured in *any* painting based on a photograph?

Drawing back from the shaky borderline where absorption meets theatricality, we might restate the difference between them in terms suggested by J.S. Mill's antithesis of poetry and eloquence. "Eloquence," wrote Mill, "is *heard*; poetry is *over*heard. Eloquence supposes an audience."[5] By analogy, we might say that while theatricality is seen, absorption is *detected* (since "overseen" won't work here). But since seeing and detecting are both activities of the beholder, we must still explain just what--in the picture itself--provokes them. In *The House of Cards,* for instance, it seems to me that Chardin *displays* absorption in every sense. Fried reads the two standing cards in the foreground as contrasting symbols of what is and is not displayed: while the face card symbolizes the openness of the picture surface facing us, he says, the blank back of the other card "evokes the sealed-off consciousness of the young man absorbed in his apparently trivial pastime" ("Jeff Wall," p. 498). But how is his consciousness sealed off? If painting can disclose the "movements of the soul" by depicting "the movements of the body," as Alberti once wrote,[6] why can't we infer that this young man is thinking only of how to stand those vertically folded cards on edge at a precisely uniform distance from each other, like a semicircle of columns? So far from hiding the mind of its subject, doesn't the painting of someone plainly absorbed by an object depicted before him reveal that mind as well as any painting can?

My own answer to this question is yes--except when the subject is shown reading a text that is itself a blank card for us, as in Richter's *Reading*.[7] If words of any kind in a painting make it seem invaded by a rival form of signification, the image of a reader perusing a text illegible to us signifies a mind we cannot read, a mind "removed to another sphere of life," which for Fried constitutes "the absorptive effect in its classic form."[8] But if the mind of the subject in a painting such as *The House of Cards* can be at once readable and absorbed, is it not possible that even a subject painted in full face may likewise instantiate the absorptive effect?

Movie faces often do. When a movie character looks out at us from the screen, we seldom if ever imagine that he or she is looking at us. We imagine rather that he or she is looking at, and often wholly absorbed by, something the film has just shown us--and from which it has just cut to the face we now see.[9] Painting of course cannot do jump cuts. Since it normally represents just a single scene, it cannot expect us to see or imagine what its subject is looking at unless the object of his or her gaze is depicted in or somehow signified by the painting. But is there any reason why a painter cannot depict both the full face of an absorbed gazer and the object of his or her gaze? I stress this point because Fried finds absorption antithetical to what he calls "facingness," the theatricality of paintings in which the subject faces-- and thus inevitably seems to be looking at-- the beholder ("Jeff Wall," pp. 501-502). I quite agree that the nudes displayed in paintings such as Manet's *Olympia* and *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* are looking at us. But if Fried means by this that no subject who is shown fully facing out of a picture can embody absorption, I can only raise more questions.

What, for instance, is the painter in Velazquez' *Las Meninas* (1656) looking at? Though fully facing the beholder of the picture, he is looking at the royal couple who are outside the picture, standing (presumably) in front of the painter but reflected by the mirror shown behind him, so that Velazquez' art neatly becomes the mirror of the mirror of life. Patently ignoring the figures ranged across the foreground of the picture, looking resolutely at the couple posed beyond them, is he any less absorbed by this royal pair than is Chardin's *Young Student* by his drawing?

One could say, of course, that the theatricality of the picture as a whole dilutes any absorptive effect it might generate, that the Infanta in the center and the plump lady dwarf at right stare out so hard that we cannot avoid being conscious of our presence before them, cannot pretend that we--as beholders-- do not exist.[10] What then shall we say of the solitary figure in Jean-Baptiste Greuze's *Girl with a Dead Canary* (1765), which not only helped to launch the era of absorption but which Fried--following Diderot--considers an exemplary specimen of the absorptive effect? [11] In Greuze's painting, a young girl with face three-quarters exposed and left

elbow perched on the top of a bird cage rests her head on her left hand, which wholly covers her left eye. With her right eye hooded by its lid, her face droops down toward the dead bird lying before her "on top of the cage," as Diderot correctly notes, "its head hanging down, its wings limp, its feet in the air."[12] Since the only thing she could see through the lashes of her nearly closed right eyelid is the bird lying just beneath her face, she is wholly oblivious of the beholder. Yet Diderot claims that the girl faces us ("Elle est de face"), and by lengthy interrogation, or rather by imagining a dialogue with her, he extracts the "true" meaning of her melancholy, which is that the death of the bird may presage her loss of the young man who gave it to her—a figure conjured up by Diderot (*DoA* 1:97-99; *Salons* 2: 145-46).[13] Consequently, unlike the would-be inscrutable young man of Chardin's *House of Cards* (as Fried reads it), Greuze's absorbed young lady presents no barrier at all to Diderot's probing of her consciousness or to his own sense that she is looking at him: "Comme vous me regardez!" he says (*Salons* 2:146).[14]

Whether or not Diderot's explanation of the girl's sadness is plausible, his comments lead us to ask how a painting he *construes* as that of a girl looking at the beholder can also be categorized as absorptive and therefore anti-theatrical, denying the beholder's existence. This question rises still more insistently when we consider Fried's gloss on Greuze's *Young Girl Sending a Kiss by the Window* (1765). After quoting Diderot on the obliviousness of the painted girl ("she is intoxicated . . . she no longer knows what she is doing"), Fried writes that this paradigmatically absorbed subject *denies* the beholder by the way in which she *faces* him:

> "To speak of absorption in the face of a passage like this puts it mildly. What Diderot conjures up, and what Greuze sought to represent, is self-abandonment, nearly to the point of extinction of self-consciousness, via sexual longing. In the context of the paintings and criticism previously discussed, there is no question but that the young woman's involuntary or unconscious actions--in particular that of leaning and crushing the flowers--were meant to be seen as expressions of intense absorption. . . . Furthermore, the denial of the beholder that her condition implies is given added point by the way in which, although facing the beholder, she appears to look through him to

her lover. (Fried, *AT*, pp. 60-61)

Thus construed by the old and new masters of absorption theory, Greuze's *Le Baiser Envoyé* (to use its short title) seems if anything to level the wall between absorption and theatricality, or at best to make of it a permeable membrane. Paradoxically, the enraptured self-absorption described by Diderot and Fried not only prompts the painted girl to face the beholder (like a modern movie heroine) but also leads to maximum exposure--an unconsciously theatrical pose. Draping curtains on either side of her and revealing one of her breasts, Greuze offers her up to be consumed by the gaze of the beholder: a male gaze, as Fried himself seems to admit when he refers to the beholder as "him."

Since Fried is now tracking the history of absorption from eighteenth-century painting to the art of photography in our own time, let me cite--before returning to Jeff Wall--two photographs that further shake the wall between absorption and theatricality. The first is Sally Mann's black-and-white *Sunday Funnies* (1991), which shows two nude young girls and a boy clad only in shorts all lying on a large bed and reading the comics.[15] The boy and girls are each so absorbed in their reading that they pay no attention to each other, and the boy's absorption is particularly notable in view of what lies stretched out before him: his naked sister, whose well-formed body is well on its way to pubescence. Though the slightest raising of his eyes would let him see her curvaceous backside, he gazes resolutely down at the comics in his hand, oblivious of all else.[16] How should we construe this photograph? Does it ignore the beholder, negate or even attenuate our existence? Do the nude figures--especially that of the girl at right, whose face is three-quarters exposed-- merely exemplify "*to-be-seenness*"? To answer yes, we must ignore the girl's nudity--and the provocative way it edges up to child pornography--to focus on her absorbed expression.[17] Or must we simply say that the absorptive effect precludes nudity and cannot co-exist with it?

Consider then a recent color photograph of three women fully clothed, facing us, and fully absorbed in something we cannot see. For the past twenty years, Thomas Struth has been

making art by photographing the very people whose existence is fictively denied by the absorptive effect: museum visitors caught unawares in the act of looking at paintings.[18] In *Hermitage 1, St. Petersburg* (2005), a young woman standing slightly left of center and holding an audioguide to her left ear gazes straight ahead, simultaneously intent--one gathers--on the recorded words of a curator and on the painting before her, which is Leonardo's *Madonna and Child* (1490-91). At right, two middle aged women standing close together scrutinize the painting wordlessly, unaided by audiophones, lost in their own thoughts about it. Neither of them is conscious of anything else, and certainly not of us--the beholders' beholders. Does this photograph count as absorptive, or does it simply *exhibit* absorption as one more spectacle to catch the beholder's eye?

Jeff Wall's photographs raise a different set of questions by linking absorption to the everyday. According to Fried, Wall's *Morning Cleaning* (1999) not only exemplifies the absorptive effect in its purest form; in focussing (literally) on the background figure of a window washer bending down to change the end-piece of his mop-squeegee, it also illustrates the artistic transmutation of the everyday.

Treating "the everyday, or the commonplace" as "the most basic and the richest artistic category," Wall aims to make each of his works look like a documentary photograph: "a plausible account of, or a report on, what the events depicted are like, or were like, when they passed without being photographed" (qtd. Fried 506). To further explain the art of the everyday, Fried quotes Wittgenstein's 1930 account of a thought experiment: "Let's imagine a theatre, the curtain goes up & we see someone alone in his room walking up and down, lighting a cigarette, seating *himself* etc. so that suddenly we are observing a human being from outside in a way that ordinarily we can never observe ourselves . . . surely this would be uncanny and wonderful" (qtd. "Jeff Wall," p. 518). Here Fried finds a link between the everyday and absorption. Even though Wittgenstein asks us to imagine the solitary smoker on a stage and says nothing about his absorption, Wittgenstein implies--says Fried-- that a man "who thinks he is unobserved" and who is "performing some quite simple everyday activities as if in a theater" must be caught up

in absorption, unaware "of being beheld," and therefore "antitheatrical" ("Jeff Wall," p. 519). I am reminded here of the Greuzian girl whose way of looking at the beholder is said to underscore her denial of his existence. But the paradox is suggestive and perhaps unavoidable, for unless we happen to be window washers ourselves, peering at the smoker in his room, the only way we could normally see what Wittgenstein asks us to imagine is on a stage.

Nevertheless, Fried's way of defining the everyday generates further questions. What is the relation between what *happens* every day, what can be *seen* every day, and what can be seen every day *in public?* In general terms, Fried traces the subject of *Morning Cleaning* back to "seventeenth-century Dutch paintings of ordinary persons performing everyday tasks in domestic settings" such as Pieter Janssens Elinga's *Interior with Reading Woman and Sweeping Maid* ("Jeff Wall," p. 511). Sweeping the marble floor of an elegantly furnished house was no doubt an everyday task in Elinga's time and place, but how often could those who did not live in such a house--i.e., the vast majority of his contemporaries-- have seen this task performed? Wittgenstein himself admits the *privacy* of the everyday (as he conceives it) when he asks us to imagine a man lighting up "alone in his room," not on a street corner. But in Fried's account of Wittgenstein, the question of privacy does not arise, and Fried stops short of furnishing his own definition of the everyday. Does it include only manual tasks like sweeping and window-washing? Does it exclude lighting a cigarette? Does it include private as well as public acts, such as Leopold Bloom's defecation in Chapter 4 of *Ulysses*, something he presumably does every day, or nearly every day? [19] Could it include anything done in the nude, such as reading in bed or making love, as long as it's done every day by people of no particular distinction?

Though I can't answer these questions with any certainty, I can hazard a guess. First of all, it is clear that Fried's "everyday" includes one's occupation. Unlike Henri Lefebvre, who defined the everyday as " 'what is left over' after all distinct, superior, specialized, structured activities have been singled out," whatever remains after one has eliminated all specialized activities," Fried treats the specialized labor of the window washer as an everyday event.[20] Secondly, I gather, Fried's "everyday" denotes what routinely and inconspicuously happens in a

publically available space. As such, it recalls Coleridge's use of the term in *Biographia Literaria*, where he writes that in *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth "sought to give the charm of novelty to things of every day" --such as the natural phenomena that anyone (theoretically) can see but are commonly overlooked because veiled by "the film of familiarity." [21] Fried's concept of the everyday, I take it, is something like this. But if it's fair to infer that he conceives the everyday as a public matter, I am led to wonder how public is the space photographed in Wall's *Morning Cleaning*.

As the interior of a public museum, it is of course open to the public every day, or almost every day, at specified hours. But it is most certainly closed to the public in the early morning, when Wall took the photographs that he digitally assembled to make this one. Unlike the museum spaces photographed by Thomas Struth, therefore, Wall's space is barren of beholders, empty of anyone but the window washer in the background. The emptiness could signify the banality of everyday labor taking place in a space seen only by those who clean it. Yet Wall's composite picture offers us what he himself no doubt obtained by special permission: a private viewing of an act performed each day outside the public eye, before the crowds arrive.

I stress this point because the space and time in which the window washer is photographed at work strongly enhance the hieratic effect of the picture. In light of what Fried says about the absorptive effect--that it translates commonplace actions such as playing cards or blowing bubbles into signs of a "spiritual state" ("Jeff Wall," p. 498)--we do well to remember that the primordial transmutation of the everyday in the Christian tradition occurred at the Last Supper, when Christ consecrated bread and wine. In *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), Stephen Dedalus turns this act into a metaphor for art when he calls himself "a priest of eternal imagination, transmuting the daily bread of experience into the radiant body of everliving life." [22] Regardless of the cultural status of their subject matter, all artists--one could argue--yearn to achieve something like this kind of transformation. The late Hugh Kenner, whose many books included some distinguished studies of Joyce, once observed that Andy Warhol turned soup cans into sculptures by the simple act of "transubstantiating" them with his signature.[23]

But Wall starts with much more than soup cans. Photographing a temple of art designed by the high priest of functionalism (Mies van der Rohe) and supported by a single column in the center of the foreground, he catches this space just as the rising sun paints anew--since light is indispensable to color--the yellow-amber rivulets in the marble wall at left.[24] When Thoreau declared that "each day contains an earlier, more sacred, and auroral hour" than we have seen before, he was thinking of dawn at Walden Pond, but his words could certainly fit this picture of what no ordinary museum visitor has ever seen. [25] Everything about the carefully staged scene works to signify and sanctify art, to create a context for the transmutation of the window washer. The solid black carpet is a modernist icon evoking--among other things-- the nearly black paintings of Ad Reinhardt; the large white benches ranged across both sides of it suggest pews, and the seven tall windows spread across the background--one of which actually frames a female nude sculpted by Georg Kolbe standing just outside it--suggest the panels of a polyptych. Even natural objects appear here as art. The thin strip of foliage running across the top of the marble wall outside the windows looks like a frieze.

In this context, the window washer becomes a figure for the artist--or rather for the kind of artist displaced by the digital photographer. Unframed, bending over in front of the strut that divides one window from another and thus distinguishing himself from the sculpted figure framed by the window at left, he has just finished sudsing a window--his canvas--and now holds the long handle of his washer as carefully as Chardin's *Young Draughtsman* fingers the long tube of his chalk-holder. The window washer's stance also recalls that of J.M. W. Turner in a cartoon of 1846: staining his canvas with yellow wash drawn from a bucket at his feet, Turner actually holds a long mop with both his hands.[26] Of course Turner could not have liked this cartoon and did not see himself as anything like a window washer. A few years before the cartoon, he bridled at an unnamed critic who saw nothing but "soapsuds and whitewash" in *Snow Storm: Steamboat off a Harbour's Mouth* (1842).[27] Nevertheless, Wall's window washer rejuvenates Alberti's master trope for art as an open window through which the artist sees the world (Alberti, p. 56). At the same time, window washing calls to mind Shelley's observation that poetry is

both figural and revelatory, spreading its "figured curtain or withdraw[ing] life's dark veil"--Coleridge's "film of familiarity"--"from before the scene of things."[28] Sudsing and wiping, veiling and unveiling, art paradoxically reveals the world by means of figured curtains. The more we think about the window washer as a figure for the artist, the more he reveals about art--or at least the art of painting.[29]

Is *Morning Cleaning* truly a study of everyday absorption? Of absorption, surely. Unlike Greuze's young women, Mann's children, and Struth's museum visitors, Wall's window washer unequivocally displays the absorptive effect. We must work to detect him in the background of the picture, and as he bends to change the end-piece of his mop-squeegee, he shows not the slightest awareness of us as beholders. But if washing the windows of a museum is a task that only a privileged observer can see in the early morning, when the museum is closed to the public, what does it mean to call the subject of this picture "everyday"? If everyday includes what happens daily in private, out of the public eye, is there no generic difference between window washing and defecating as an "everyday" subject of art? Or is an "everyday" subject fit for art only if it can be ritualized (like the breaking of bread), reconfigured as symbol, or transubstantiated?[30] And what then of Chris Ofili's elephant dung?

These are some of the many questions that Fried's absorbing essay provokes. In showing how the work of a contemporary photographer can revive an effect that distinguished French painting for over a century, he adds a new chapter to his ongoing history of absorption. In linking this effect--with the aid of Wittgenstein--to the representation of the everyday, he offers us new ways of thinking about artistic transmutation. But in the process of doing these things, he also raises questions that fundamentally destabilize the category of absorption and the meaning of the "everyday."

Notes

[1]Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1980)--hereafter cited as *AT*.

[2] For detailed comments and suggestions on this response I am deeply grateful to Garrett Stewart, Adrian Randolph, and Angela Randolph.

[3]Curiously enough, all three of these paintings antedate by at least fifteen years the starting date for the "current" of absorption that Fried gives in the passage quoted just above.

[4] It is evidently not the same as "to-be-looked-at-ness," Laura Mulvey's well-known term for the "traditional exhibitionistic role" played by women in film ("Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Visual and Other Pleasures* [London: Macmillan, 1989], p. 19).

[5]"What is Poetry?" (1833), in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, ed. M.H. Abrams and Stephen Greenblatt, 7th ed., vol. 2 (New York: Norton, 2000): 1143. Mill himself applies the antithesis to painting and sculpture, which manifest "poetry, if the feeling [therein expressed] declares itself by such signs as escape from us when we are unconscious of being seen," and "oratory, if the signs are those we use for the purpose of voluntary communication" (p. 1148).

[6]Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. John R. Spencer, rev. ed. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1966), p. 77. The silent mimicry of hand-washing performed by the sleepwalking Lady Macbeth

struck Diderot himself as one of those "sublime gestures that no oratorical eloquence will ever express" (*Lettre sur les sourds et nuets*, ed. Paul Hugo Meyer, *Diderot Studies* 7 [1965], pp. 47-48, qtd. Fried, *AT*, p. 78.)

[7]Fried says she's reading the German magazine *Der Spiegel* ("Jeff Wall," p. 504), but nothing of the text can be seen in Fried's reproduction, and so far as I can recall, little or nothing of it can be seen in the original. In any case, paintings such as Jan Vermeer's *Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window* (ca. 1657) show us not a single word of the reading matter they depict. For more on what I have elsewhere called *lectoral* art, see James A. W. Heffernan, *Cultivating Picturacy: Visual Art and Verbal Interventions* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006), pp. 36, 319n50, hereafter cited as *CP*; and Garrett Stewart, *The Look of Reading: Book, Painting, Text* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2006).

[8]"Jeff Wall," p. 502. In an interview with Wall that Fried quotes, Martin Schwander applies the first phrase to the man photographed in Wall's *Adrian Walker* ("Jeff Wall," p. 497).

[9]Alfred Hitchock once described film editing as a process of manipulating the viewer's responses to what we see. If, for instance, two separate shots of a smiling man are intercut with a shot of a

baby, we see him as a nice guy. If the same two shots are intercut with a shot of a nude woman, we see him as a dirty old man. (I cite this example from memory; I don't have the reference.)

[10]According to Fried, Diderot and the anti-Rococo critics believed "that not just each figure but the painting as a whole, the tableau itself, [should] declare its unconsciousness or obliviousness of the beholder" (*AT*, p. 101).

[11]Of the painted girl Diderot wrote: "Sa douleur est profonde; elle est à son malheur, elle y est toute entière." (*Salons*, ed. Jean Seznec and Jean Adhemar, 2nd ed. 3 vols. [Oxford: Clarendon, 1975-83] 2: 145--herafter cited as *Salons*). According to Fried, this is one of several pictures painted by Greuze in the 1760s which "represent female figures wholly absorbed in extreme states and oblivious to all else" (*AT*, p. 60).

[12]Denis Diderot, *Diderot on Art*, trans. John Goodman, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1995), 1: 97--hereafter cited as *DoA*.

[13]"Parlez," he says near the end. "Je ne saurois vous deviner. . . . Et si la mort de cet oiseau n'etoit que le presage! que ferois-je? Que deviendrois-je? S'il étoit ingrat. . . ." (*Salons* 2: 146).

This is the final reason Diderot finds for her weeping, though he has earlier imagined that she weeps because her mother scolded her for neglecting the bird.

[14]For recent commentary on this much-discussed picture, see Emma Barker, *Greuze and the Painting of Sentiment* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005), 1; Mira Friedman, "On Diderot's Art Criticism," http://www.tau.ac.il/arts/projects/PUB/assaph-art/assaph2/articles_assaph2/08Friedman.pdf [accessed 23 July 2007], pp. 117-23; and my own *CP*, pp. 51-54.

[15]The picture appears in Sally Mann, *Immediate Family* (New York: Aperture, 1992), n.p. It is also reproduced in my *CP,* p. 36, where I discuss it at some length (pp. 36-38).

[16]So far as I know, Mann did not "stage" this photograph in anything like the way Wall stages his. She simply invited her children to read on a bed with their clothes off and then snapped them. Given the frequency with which she photographed them at this point in their lives, they evidently learned to ignore the camera.

[17]With her knees tightly folded and with the hand of her fully extended left arm childishly hooked around the big toe of her right foot, the girl's pose stops just short of being erotic.

Nevertheless, the contrast between the partly clothed boy and the wholly nude girl subtly recalls the foreground of Manet's *Dejeuner sur l'Herbe*. And in displaying herself while reading the Sunday funnies, she also recalls Nabokov's nymphet reading the Sunday funnies under a June sun while clad only in a two-piece bathing suit. According to Humbert Humbert, "she was the loveliest nymphet green-red-blue Priap could think up." Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita* (New York: Berkeley Medallion, 1966), p. 41.

[18]See Michael Kimmelman, "Art's Audiences Become Artworks Themselves," *New York Times,* April 10, 2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/10/arts/design/10stru.html?ex=1185. So far as I know, Struth does not stage his photographs--in the sense of placing his figures-- any more than Mann stages hers, but he evidently manages to take his pictures without being seen.

[19]A short history of the artistic transmutation of shit might begin with Virgil's *Georgics* (late first century B.C.E.), where—as Joseph Addison notes--he "tosses the dung about with an air of gracefulness" ("An Essay on Virgil's *Georgics,"* in *The Works of . . . Joseph Addison* [Birmingham, 1761] 1:244). Citing this remark, Joshua Reynolds applies it to Titian: "whatever he touched, however naturally mean, and habitually familiar, by a kind of magick he invested with grandeur and importance (*Discourses on Art*, ed. Robert R. Wark [New Haven and London:

Paul Mellon Centre/ Yale UP, 1975], p. 197.) Our own time offers more. After tracking Bloom to his airy outhouse, where he defecates with considerable dignity while reading a newspaper sketch and planning to write one of his own, the historian could turn to Chris Ofili's *The Holy Virgin Mary*, exhibited at the Brooklyn Museum in 1999, where gobs of elephant dung are shaped to recall the seraphim and cherubim that commonly surround the virgin in traditional paintings of the Immaculate Conception and Assumption.

[20] Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life,* trans. John Moore with preface by Michel Trebitsch, 3 vols. (New York: Verso, 1991), 1:97. (Lefebvre's definition is often quoted as "whatever remains after one has eliminated all specialized activities," but this is actually a paraphrase.) Curiously enough, however, Lefebvre later wrote what sounds like the prescription for Wall's photograph: "Let everyday life become a work of art! Let every technical means be employed for the transformation of everyday life" (*Everyday Life in the Modern World* [London: Allen Lane, 1971], p. 204.). Lefebvre's *Critique*, which Fried nowhere cites, first appeared in 1947, some years after Wittgenstein set down his own views on the everyday, and the definition quoted above first appeared in the forward to the second edition (1958). But both editions appeared long before Wittgenstein's notes were first published in *Culture and Value* (1998).

[21] *Biographia Literaria*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, Bollingen Series LXXV, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983) 2: 6-7.

[22] James Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (New York: Viking, 1967), p. 221.

[23]*The Counterfeiters: an Historical Comedy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1968), pp. 77, 82.

[24]The bond between color and light was recognized at least as early as the fifteenth century, when Alberti wrote: "Colours take their variations from light, because all colours put in the shade appear different from what they are in the light. Shade makes colour dark; light, where it strikes, makes colour bright. The philosophers say that nothing can be seen which is not illuminated and coloured" (Alberti, p. 49).

[25]*Walden and Civil Disobedience*, ed. Owen Thomas (New York: Norton, 1966), p. 60.

[26]Drawn by Richard Doyle, the cartoon appeared in Doyle's Monthly Almanac for June 1846 and is now in the National Portrait Gallery. For a reproduction see *Turner Studies* 3:1 (Summer, 1983), p. 29.

[27]According to Ruskin, Turner muttered "soapsuds and whitewash! What would they have? I wonder what they think the sea's like? I wish they'd been in it." Qtd. Martin Butlin and Evelyn Joll, *The Paintings of J.M.W. Turner,* 2 vols., Text and Plates, rev. ed. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1984), Text, p. 247.

[28]"A Defense of Poetry" (1821) in *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers (New York: Norton, 1977), p. 505.

[29]Though Wall constructed this picture from photographs taken every morning for about two weeks, Fried says that Wall has so far "found no means of acknowledging in his art the prolonged and repetitive labor that goes into the making of " it ("Jeff Wall," p. 524). But the repetitiveness of the artist's labor seems to me signified by the *dailiness* of window washing, reinforced by the offstage fact that for two weeks the artist and the window washer worked together. I read the photograph also as a digital artist's homage to his brush-wielding precursors.

[30]One might add that repetition is essential to sacrament and ritual. In the Roman Catholic Church, the Eucharist is consecrated every day in imitation of the Last Supper, whose sacramental status was confirmed when the transfigured Christ broke bread again with the disciples at Emmaus and thereby revealed himself to them (Luke 24:30-31)-- in a scene that has led to paintings such as Caravaggio's *Supper at Emmaus*--with its trio of wholly absorbed figures.