as has been suggested by various scholars on the strength both of an earlier tradition in which genre scenes and still lifes were invested with symbolic significance and of the moralizing verses that were often appended to contemporary engravings after Chardin’s canvases. Other scholars have resisted the suggestion, seeing in Chardin’s art the liquidation rather than the continuation of a moralizing tradition and insisting that the cast of mind at work in the verses is alien to the paintings themselves. However one resolves this question in one’s own mind, and there is much to be said for both positions, two observations seem to me of crucial importance. First, it is impossible to discern the least difference in Chardin’s attitude toward his subject matter between the pictures of games and amusements on the one hand and ostensibly more serious or morally exemplary scenes on the other. And second, far from seeming to have wished to characterize the activities depicted in the former as shallow pastimes or mere distractions, Chardin appears to have been struck precisely by the depth of absorption which those activities tended naturally to elicit from those engaged in them. At any rate, he appears to have done all he could to make that depth of absorption manifest to the beholder, most importantly by singling out in each picture at least one salient detail that functions as a sign of the figure’s obliviousness to everything but the operation he or she is intent upon performing. Thus in the Soup Bubble our attention is caught by

De Troy was brought to completion—though naturally painters such as Van Loo, Vien, and Greuze, along with others we have not considered, remained free to exploit religious subject matter for absorptive ends in the 1750s. Finally, he both naturalized and domesticated that tradition, by which I mean that largely owing to his endeavors the representation of absorption became a peculiarly French concern, and that, again following Northern precedents, he located the experience of absorption in the home, or at any rate in absolutely ordinary surroundings.

The special character of Chardin’s achievement is perhaps the most evident in his depictions of children and young people playing games or engaged in apparently trivial amusements—for example, The Soup Bubble (ca. 1753; Fig. 29), The Game of Knucklebones (ca. 1754; Fig. 30), and The Card Castle (ca. 1757; Fig. 31). This is true despite the fact that it is not at all clear to what extent Chardin himself intended such paintings to be seen as Vanitas images.
the tear in the young man’s jacket; in the Game of Knucklebones by the upper corner of the young woman’s apron that has come unpinioned; and in the Card Castle, in the immediate foreground, by the negligently half-opened drawer containing a pair of playing cards. The last of these in particular is a highly sophisticated device. By virtue of orienting the beholder and what is more opening toward him, the drawer serves to enforce a distinction between the beholder’s point of view and perception of the scene as a whole and the quite different point of view and limited, exclusive focus of the youth balancing the cards. There is even a sense in which the contrast between the two cards—one facing the beholder, the other blankly turned away from him—may be seen as an epitome of the contrast between the surface of the painting, which of course faces the beholder, and the absorption of the youth in his delicate undertaking, a state of mind that is essentially inward, concentrated, closed. (The radicalness of the difference between the two points of view does not seem to have presented the painter of the Card Castle with a fundamental problem; from the retrospect of certain developments of the 1750s and 1760s, however, it may come to seem that the elements of such a problem are already in place.)

Chardin’s paintings of games and amusements, in fact all his genre paintings, are also remarkable for their uncanny power to suggest the actual duration of the absorptive states and activities they represent. Some such power necessarily characterizes all persuasive depictions of absorption, none of which would be persuasive if it did not at least convey the idea that the state or activity in question was sustained for a certain length of time. But Chardin’s genre paintings, like Vermeer’s before him, go much further than that. By a technical feat which virtually defies analysis—though one writer has remarked
helpfully on Chardin's characteristic choice of "a natural pause in the action which, we feel, will recommend a moment later"—they come close to translating literal duration, the actual passage of time as one stands before the canvas, into a purely pictorial effect: as if the very stability and unchangingness of the painted image were perceived by the beholder not as material properties that could not be otherwise but as manifestations of an absorptive state—the image's absorption in itself, so to speak—that only happens to subsist. The result, paradoxically, is that stability and unchangingness are endowed to an astonishing degree with the power to conjure an illusion of imminent or gradual or even fairly abrupt change. In the *Soup Babble* the transparent, slightly distended globe at the tip of the young man's blowpipe seems almost to swell and tremble before our eyes; in the *Card Castle* the youth placing a card in position appears on the verge of drawing back his hand; while in the

Game of Knocklebones a single moment has been isolated in all its plenitude and density from an absorptive continuum the full extent of which the painting masterfully evokes. Images such as these are not of time wasted but of time filled (as a glass may be filled not just to the level of the rim but slightly above). Whatever their iconographic precedents or even their actual symbolic connotations, they embody a new, unmoralized vision of distraction as a vehicle of absorption; or perhaps one should say of that vision that it distills, from the most ordinary states and activities, an unofficial morality according to which absorption emerges as good in and of itself, without regard to its occasion; or perhaps it is simply that Chardin found in the absorption of his figures both a natural correlative for his own engrossment in the act of painting and a prophetic mirroring of what he trusted would be the absorption of the beholder before the finished work.
Available evidence suggests that Chardin, always the most private of artists, was during the 1730s and 1740s supported by little if any explicit communal concern with absorptive values and effects. He was not on that account unappreciated by his contemporaries. Throughout this period his art was admired for the truthfulness with which it depicted "les petits details de la vie commune" (the little details of ordinary life), a virtue in keeping with the "lesser" genres he practiced. Around the middle of the century, however, the reaction against the Rococo began to gather force; the persuasive representation of absorption emerged in the criticism of the time as a conscious and explicit desideratum; and concomitantly Chardin's genre paintings, including those of the 1730s and 1740s, were seen not only as satisfying such a desideratum but as exemplary, in that crucial respect, for the pictorial enterprise as such. The success in the Salon of 1759 of the *Drizzadeur*, a work based on a prototype invented ca. 1738, is a case in point. But the most dramatic instance of this sort concerns the exhibition of the *Philosophe occupé de sa lecture* in the Salon of 1753. Actually it had been painted in 1734, almost twenty years earlier. Thereafter it had been exhibited in the Salon of 1737 under the title *Un Chimiste dans son laboratoire*; in 1744 it had been engraved by Lépicié as *Le Souffleur (The Alchemist)*, an epithet sometimes applied to the painting itself, when it was shown publicly again in the Salon of 1753 Chardin changed its title to one that implied the primacy of absorptive concerns; and as we have seen, the persuasiveness of its representation of absorption was on that occasion specifically admired by Laugier and Huquier.
The early and mid-1760s are a watershed in the evolution of French painting. In fact, the advent of Greuze in 1755 marks a decisive turning in the development of painting in France—though it is not until the first half of the 1760s that his mature manner becomes stabilized. Even more than in the case of the *Père de famille*, we must resist the usual characterizations of his pictures of those years if we would grasp their motivation. For a long time now it has been traditional, almost obligatory, to remark that we, the modern public, no longer find in ourselves to be moved by the sentimentality, emotionalism, and moralism of much of Greuze’s production. But the truth is that we take those qualities at face value, as if they and nothing more were at stake in his pictures, and that we therefore fail to grasp what his sentimentality, emotionalism, and moralism, as well as his alleged mania for plotting, are in the service of, pictorially speaking—viz., a more urgent and extreme evocation of absorption than can be found in the work of Chardin, Van Loo, Vien, or any other French painter of the time. Let me try to clinch this point by discussing a few paintings by Greuze of the first half of the 1760s as they were seen by the greatest critic of the age, Denis Diderot. In *La Pitié filiale* (Fig. 32), which when exhibited in the Salon of 1763 literally moved beholders to tears, a paralyzed old man reclining in an armchair is fed by his son-in-law; the paralytic, touched by the younger man’s kindness, offers him his thanks; while other members of the family, themselves deeply stirred, break off whatever they are doing to look and listen. As always in Greuze, the various figures are differentiated psychologically and emotionally from one another. But as in the *Père de famille*, the primary emphasis is not on the variety and multiplicity of individual responses to a central event so much as on the merging of those responses in a single collective act of heightened attention. This is spelled out by Diderot in his defense of Greuze’s composition against certain criticisms:

On dit encore que cette attention de tous les personnages n’est pas naturelle; qu’il fallait en occuper quelques-uns du bonhomme et laisser les autres à leurs fonctions particulières, que la scène en eût été plus simple et plus vraie, et que c’est ainsi que la chose s’est passée, qu’ils en sont sûrs. . . . [But in fact:] Le moment qu’ils demandent est un moment commun, sans intérêt; celui que le peintre a choisi est particulier; par hasard il arrive ce jour-là que ce fut son gendre qui lui apporta ses aliments, et le bonhomme, touché, lui en révèle son amour et d’une manière si vive, si pénétrante, qu’elle suspendit les occupations et foua l’attention de toute la famille.

Some say too that this attention on the part of all the characters is not natural; that a few of them should have been concerned with the old man and the others left to their own occupations; that the scene would have been simpler and truer, and that this is how the event actually happened—of that they are certain. . . . [But in fact:] The moment for which they ask is commonplace, uninteresting; whereas the one chosen by the artist is special. By chance it happened that, on that particular day, it was his son-in-law who brought the old man some food, and the latter, moved, showed his gratitude in such an animated and earnest way that it interrupted the occupations and attracted the attention of the whole family.
Diderot’s statement is the most forthright assertion of the primacy of considerations of absorption that we have so far encountered. He seems almost to be saying that Greuze was compelled first to paralyze the old man and then to orchestrate an entire sequence of ostensibly chance events in order to arrive in the end at the sort of emotionally charged, highly moralized, and dramatically unified situation that alone was capable of embodying with sufficient perspicuousness the absorptive states of suspension of activity and fixing of attention that painter and critic alike regarded as paramount. I believe that such a formulation comes very close to the truth, and that it is precisely the lengths to

which Greuze was compelled to go, the measures he found it necessary to take, that have led modern scholars to condemn the Piété filiale as meretricious and Diderot’s admiration for it as jejune.

Other paintings of the period such as *Une Jeune Fille qui a c assisted son miroir* (Salon of 1765, 110 Fig. 33), *Le Tendre Ressoir* (Salon of 1765, 111 Fig. 34), and *Une Jeune Fille qui pleure son aïeau mort* (Salon of 1765, 112 Fig. 35) represent female figures wholly absorbed in extreme states and oblivious to all else. Mathon de la Cour, in a long rapturous commentary on the last of these, notes that the young girl’s costume is artlessly arranged and comments: “Le soin de son ajustement ne l’affecte plus; elle n’est occupée que de son chagrin” (The appearance of her dress no longer concerns her; she is preoccupied only by her sorrow). 113 And Diderot, whose admiration for the picture was no less keen, observes of the young girl: “Sa douleur est proonde; elle est à son malheur, elle y est route entière” (Her grief is profound; she is immersed in her unhappiness, she is totally given over to it). 114 After touching briefly on various
THE PRIMACY OF ABSORPTION

Mais, petite, votre douleur est bien profonde, bien réelle! Que signifie cet air
nerveur et mélancolique? Quoi! pour un oiseau vous ne pleurez pas. Vous êtes affligée,
et la pensée accompagne votre affliction. Ça, petite, ouvertement votre cœur; parlez-moi
vrai. Est-ce bien la mort de cet oiseau qui vous retire si fortement et si tristement en
vous-même? . . . Vous baissez les yeux; vous ne me répondez pas... 116

But, my child, your sadness is very profound, very considered! What is the meaning
of this abstracted, melancholy air? What! For a bird! You are not crying. You are
grieved, and thought accompanies your grief. There, there, my child, open up your
heart to me. Tell me the truth. Is the death of this bird really what makes you
withdraw so firmly and sadly within yourself? . . . You lower your eyes; you do not
answer me. . . .

(As these remarks suggest, Diderot finds in Greuze's canvas a scarcely veiled
allegory of the young girl's loss of virginity, an interpretation he extends retro-
spectively to the Jeune Fille qui a causé son sourire in the previous Salon.) In
the same spirit Malthon de la Court writes: "[O]n voudroit voir-tout sur la consoler. J'ai
puiser plusieurs fois des heures entières à la considérer attentivement; je m'y
suis enlevé de cette tristesse douce & tendre, qui ressemble à la volupté; & je
suis sorti pénétré d'une mélancolie délicieuse" (One would like above all to
comfort her. Several times I have spent whole hours contemplating her atten-
tively; I have been intoxicated by that sweet and tender sadness that is akin to
voluptuousness; and I have gone away imbued with a delicious melancholy). 117
Both commentaries have been ridiculed as typical specimens of the excessively
"literary" and sentimental art criticism of the period. I believe, however, that
Greuze's painting was intended at once to elicit and to resist such attempts at
consolation, and thereby to make perspicious the depth and intensity of the
young girl's absorption in her grief. (If I am right, Greuze reckoned without
Diderot's formidable powers of enticement; long before the end of the passage
in question the critic succeeds in engaging her in conversation.)

Both the sexual theme and the refusal to acknowledge the beholder's pres-
ence are made even more explicit in another painting of 1765, Une Jeune Fille
qui cause au baiser par la fenêtre, appuyée sur des fleurs; qu'elle braise, familiarly
called Le Baiser envoûté (Fig. 36). The young woman, in deshabille, has just
received a more from her lover. Diderot's account of her condition includes the
following:

Il est impossible de vous peindre toute la volupté de cette figure. Ses yeux, ses
pupilles en sont chargés! ... Elle est ivre; elle n'y est plus; elle ne sait plus ce
qu'elle fait; ni moi, presque ce que je l'ai... 118 Ce bras gauche qu'elle n'a plus la
force de soutenir, est allé tomber sur un pot de fleurs qui en sont toutes blessées; le
billet s'est échappé de sa main; l'extrémité de ses doigts s'est allée reposer sur le bord
de la fenêtre qui a disposé de leur position. Il faut voir comme ils sont mollement
répétés ... et la mollesse voluptueuse qui règne depuis l'extrémité des doigts de la
main, et qu'on suit de là dans tout le reste de la figure. . . .

It is impossible to depict for you all the voluptuousness of this figure. Her eyes, her
eyelids are fraught with it! . . . She is intoxicated; she is no longer there; she no

[38]
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-aban-
donment, nearly to the point of extinction of 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 on and crushing the flowers—were meant to be seen as expressions of intense absorption. (Note too that Greuze chose to call attention to that action in the picture’s title.) 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. It is hardly necessary to remark that such a conception is a highly sophisticated one and that we are by no means far from the Greuze of common repute.

The decisive turning in the evolution of French painting that Greuze represents is epitomized by his relationship to Chardin. On the one hand, Greuze was unquestionably the chief continuator in his generation of the absorptive essence of Chardin’s art. On the other, the sentimentalism, emotionalism, moralism, exploitation of sexuality, and invention of narrative-dramatic structures characteristic of Greuze’s treatment of absorption contrast sharply with the concentration and “purity” of Chardin’s rendering of absorptive motifs. The impression Chardin’s paintings convey is that the persuasive representation of absorption is the result simply of the objective representation of ordinary absorptive states and activities. Whereas in Greuze’s work absorption emerges as something else entirely, a specifically artistic effect which the painter was compelled to pursue and to speak build into his paintings if it was to be there at all. And the means by which this was accomplished suggest that by the first half of the 1760s absorption was increasingly becoming assimilated to expression rather than the other way round, as had been the case in the early and mid-1750s. Furthermore, absorption in Chardin strikes us not only as an ordinary, everyday condition but as that condition which, more than any other, characterizes ordinary, everyday experience: as the hallmark of *une vraie nullité* of the everyday as such. In contrast the seeming incapacity of Greuze’s figures to become absorbed in the everyday—the impression they convey of not being at home in it—accounts for our conviction that Chardin and Greuze represent different worlds. (In this connection it is significant that around 1760 Chardin gave up genre painting almost completely, concentrating for the remainder of his career on still lifes and, starting around 1770, portraits chiefly in pastel.)

All this might be summed up by saying that by the first half of the 1760s if not earlier deliberate and extraordinary measures came to be required in order to persuade contemporary audiences of the absorption of a figure or group of figures in the world of the painting, and that consequently the everyday as such was in an important sense lost to pictorial representation around that time. The latter was a momentous event, one of the first in the series of losses that together constitute the ontological basis of modern art.
With these developments in mind, let us look briefly at one of the most famous paintings of the early 1760s. Vien’s La Marchande à la toilette (Salon of 1763; Fig. 37) has traditionally been considered the key work of early Neoclassicism in France and it is not my intention to take issue with this view. The setting, costumes, and accessories bespeak an effort of historical reconstruction; the system of drapery, far from seeming to have been based on actual observation of living models, plainly alludes to antique prototypes; the figures are arranged in a single plane parallel to that of the picture-surface while the composition as a whole has an almost geometric clarity; and the actions and expressions of the figures are marked by a quality of deliberate restraint—some have said coldness and immobility—which Vien’s contemporaries regarded as antique (or “Greek”) in inspiration. Even more to the point, Vien’s canvas is based on a specific source in ancient art—a Hellenistic fresco of the same subject discovered near Naples in 1759 and reproduced in an engraving by Nolli published in Le Antichità di Ercolano in 1762 (Fig. 38).

It is hard to say to what extent Vien could have assumed that his audience would be familiar with that engraving and thus would be in a position to recognize his source. In any event, he not only explicitly acknowledged the connection in the Salonlivre but also—and this I find particularly interesting—went on to invite his audience “à remarquer les différences entre les deux compositions” (to remark the differences between the two compositions). In what principally do those differences consist?
resentations of antique subjects turn out to be two faces of the same coin, two complementary expressions of a single state of affairs.

It has become clear, I think, that the developments analyzed in this chapter involve a major shift in the relationship between painting and beholder. I shall have a great deal more to say about that shift in the next two chapters but something at least should be said about it here. We have seen that for French painters of the early and mid-1750s the persuasive representation of absorption entailed evoking the perfect obliviousness of a figure or group of figures to everything but the objects of their absorption. Those objects did not include the beholder standing before the painting. Hence the figure or figures had to seem oblivious to the beholder’s presence if the illusion of absorption was to be sustained. In Chardin’s art that necessity remained mostly implicit: it was

satisfied by seeming merely to ignore the beholder—the torn jacket, unpinned apron, and half-open drawer that I have characterized as signs of absorption show that Chardin himself was not forgetful that his paintings would be beheld—and by portraying ordinary absorptive states and activities with remarkable fidelity. By the first half of the 1760s, however, the presence of the beholder could no longer be dealt with in this way; it demanded to be counteracted and if possible obviated in or by the painting itself; and the deliberate intensification of absorptive effects that we have traced in Greuze’s paintings of those years, as well as the combination of those effects to form a drama-
tic compositional unity in works such as the *Prêtre filiale*, were, I wish to claim, means to that end. Put just barely figuratively, it is as though the presence of the beholder threatened to distract the dramatic personae from all involvement in ordinary states and activities, and as though the artist was therefore called upon to neutralize the beholder's presence by taking whatever measures proved necessary to absorb, or reabsorb, those personae in the world of the painting. (A similar argument can be made for Vien's *Marchande à la toilette*, in which the absorption of the figures in the world of the painting seems patent—and, I suggest, was meant to seem—a work of artifice.)


It follows that the very characteristics of Greuze's art which modern taste finds most repugnant, and which are usually attributed to a desire to solicit as wide an audience as possible, had virtually the opposite function—to screen that audience out, to deny its existence, or at least to refuse to allow the fact of its existence to impinge upon the absorbed consciousnesses of his figures. Precisely that refusal, however, seems to have given Greuze's contemporaries a deep thrill of pleasure and in fact to have transfixed them before the canvas. We have arrived at a paradox, one made all the harder to grasp by the utter transformation of sensibility between Greuze's age and ours. Those aspects of Greuze's art traditionally perceived as appealing most egregiously to the beholder functioned largely to neutralize the latter's presence. And because his presence was neutralized in that way, the beholder was held and moved by Greuze's paintings as by the work of no other artist of his time. It is also true that in certain of his multigure genre paintings—the *Oeuf casse* is an early example—one or more small children are allowed to make eye-contact with the beholder. But this chiefly serves to throw into relief the absorption of the principal figures and thereby to confirm, not contradict, the interpretation of the painting-beholder relationship that I have put forward here.\(^{131}\)


In this respect too the early and mid-1750s are a watershed. Laugier's observation of 1753 that Chardin's philosopher appears so deeply absorbed in his reading and meditation that it would be hard to distract him not only indicates that Chardin's contemporaries perceived the philosopher as unconscious of their very existence but comes close to identifying the beholder as a potential agent of distraction. But perhaps the most telling evidence of an incipient problematic involving the beholder is provided by two paintings shown in the Salons of 1753\(^{132}\) and 1754\(^{133}\) respectively, Chardin's *L'Avantage* (Fig. 39) and Greuze's *L'Avantage transformé* (Fig. 40). Greuze's canvas depicts a young wife and her lover wholly engrossed in an
effort to deceive her blind and aged husband. Indeed, the young man apparently is so intent on not making a sound that without knowing it he has begun to spill the contents of the jug he carries in his right hand. In short, the theme of blindness is made the basis for a narrative-dramatic structure which, as frequently in Greuze’s art, asserts the primacy of absorption. Chardin’s painting of a blind beggar and his dog, on the other hand, does not represent an absorptive activity or condition (though probably the beggar’s attitude should be seen as one of patient waiting and listening). I suggest, however, that the depiction of blindness in L’Aveugle implies a relation to the beholder that goes beyond that implied by the depiction of absorption in his other genre paintings—more precisely, that the blindness of the beggar is in effect a guarantee that that figure is unaware of the beholder’s presence and is likely to remain so. In this regard the painting is a harbinger, if nothing more, of the problematic summarized above. It is characteristic of Greuze’s relation to Chardin’s art that he sought at once to improve on his great predecessor’s invention—to make it all the more resistant to the presence of the beholder—by exploiting the theme of blindness for manifestly absorptive ends.

A concern with absorption continues to play a major role in French painting and criticism throughout the rest of the eighteenth century and on into the nineteenth. In the course of the 1760s, 1770s, and 1780s, however, it is more and more assimilated to a concern with action and expression as the latter are traditionally understood—though we have only to turn to Diderot’s Salons and related writings to see how important specifically absorptive considerations remain. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that the emphasis both in criticism and in painting itself shifts from the representation of absorption to the representation of heroic or grandly pathetic action and expression. The contrast between the paintings by Greuze that we have examined and his dramatic masterpieces of the second half of the 1770s, Le Fils ingrat (1777; Fig. 41) and Le Fils poni (1778; Fig. 42), may be taken as illustrating this shift. Only after the final collapse of the Davidian tradition, a tradition which itself epitomizes that shift of emphasis, will absorption return with a vengeance in the art of Courbet.

In this chapter I attempt to reinterpret a notorious crux in the theory and criticism of painting. The crux is this: How, ultimately, are we to understand the renewed importance given to the sister doctrines of the hierarchy of genres and the supremacy of history painting in the writings of Diderot and his contemporaries? As Rensseler Lee and others have noted, both doctrines were implicit in humanist theory of painting from Alberti onwards, received explicit formulation in the writings and institutions of the Académie Royale de Peinture, and were central to the classical system that dominated artistic thinking in France until the death of Louis XIV. Both were eclipsed in practice by the rise of the Rococo, whose emphasis on intimacy, sensuousness, and decoration effected a sharp though only partly conscious revision of classical values. And both became crucial once more shortly before the middle of the eighteenth century when a powerful reaction against the Rococo in the name of artistic and moral reform began to take shape along a broad front.

Locquin and subsequent scholars have shown that the anti-Rococo movement was promoted at the highest levels of the government by the Directeurs Généraux des Bâtiments du Roi Lenormant de Tourneheim and Matigny, in part as a deliberate attempt to recreate the grandeur of the reign of Louis XIV. For example, the official scale of fees was altered so that artists would be paid more for history paintings than for portraits; a new Ecole Royale was established to provide young painters with the background knowledge that history painting required; and altogether royal patronage was exploited to encourage history painting over other genres. As Locquin recognized, however, the reactivation of the doctrines of the hierarchy of genres and the supremacy of history painting was not simply the result of official policy. From the
NOTES TO PAGES 8–10


16. No. 146 in the Salon livret for that year.


18. Contenus sur plusieurs des tableaux exposés cette année au grand salon du Louvre (1755), p. 15; consulted in the unique collection of eighteenth-century Salon criticism and related writings assembled by Mariette, Cochin, and Delaunay and at present in the Cabinet des Estampes of the Bibliothèque Nationale (hereafter cited as the Delaunay Collection). The Contenus sur plusieurs des tableaux is signed D——p——— P.D.M.; according to Delaunay the author is Abbé Joseph de La Porte, “professeur de mathématiques.” For the contents of the Delaunay Collection see Georges Dupleix, Catalogue de la collection de pièces sur les beaux-arts imprimées et manuscrites recueillies par Pierre-Jean Mariotte, Charles-Nicolas Cochin et M. Delaunay (Paris, 1881). A recent article on critics and criticism through 1759 based on material in the Delaunay Collection is Hélène Zmijewski, “La Critique des Salons en France avant Diderot,” Gazette des Beaux-Arts, 6e péri., 76 (1970), 1–144. Throughout this chapter an effort has been made to transcribe directly the quotations from eighteenth-century critics.

20. The persistence of this view may be gauged by comparing Louis Hautecorre, Greuze (Paris, 1913), and the monograph by Brooker cited in n.1. See also Hautecorre, “Le Sentimentalisme dans la peinture française de Greuze à David,” Greuze, Art and Architecture, 4e péri., 51 (1909), 139–76, 269–86. The tendency to perceive the distinction between “literary” and “pictorial” qualities and values, which continues to bedevil studies of eighteenth-century art, has its locus classicus in the Goncourts’ brilliant essay on Greuze, where it expresses the Flaubertian, art-for-art’s sake esthetic of the French avant-garde of the 1860s and 1870s. Such an aesthetic, resting as it does on historical assumptions about the nature or essence of painting, is hardly a reliable guide to the situation of painting in France more than a hundred years before.

21. The OED defines “absorption” as “the entire engrossment or engagement of the mind or faculties”, and defines “to absorb” as “to engross, or completely engage the attention or faculties.” This is consistent with the definitions given in Diderot’s article “Absorber” in the Encyclopédie (1751):

11. For Grécataux see the brief remarks in chapter three of this study, p. 154, as well as the discussion of his art in Michael Fried, “Thomas Couture and the Theatricalization of Action in 19th-Century French Painting,” Artforum, 8, No. 10 (1970), 43. In that essay, too, one observes that Manet’s great paintings of the first half of the 1860s “may be said to take account of the beholder; in any event they refuse to accept the fiction that the beholder is not there, present before the painting, which Diderot a century before had insisted was crucial to the convincing representation of action” (45). See also Fried, “Manet’s Sources: Aspects of His Art, 1859–65,” Artforum, 7, No. 7 (1969), nn. 27, 46, 72, 74. Theodore Reff on the other hand finds in Olympia’s gaze merely an adaptation of “one of the most familiar conventions of the erotic prints and photographs of the time, the enticing of a coyly inviting or contempluously cool glance” (Manet: “Olympia” [London, 1976], p.58). On Courbet’s self-portraits see Fried, “The Beholder in Courbet: His Early Self-Portraits and Their Place in His Art,” Glyph: Johns Hopkins Textual Studies (1978), pp. 85–129.

12. It may be objected that the concept of “artistic level or quality” is merely ideological, at once a specimen and an instrument of bourgeois mystification. This is not the place to address that issue, but it should be noted that the pioneering study of late eighteenth-century French art and literature, G[orgij] V[ladimirovich] Plekhanov’s essay “French Dramatic Literature and French Eighteenth-Century Painting from the Sociological Standpoint” (1905), closes with an attempt to reconcile a social-historical interpretation of the art in question with a Kantian view of the nature of aesthetic judgment (Andrew Rothstein, ed., Art and Social Life, trans. Eleanor Fox and Eric Hutter [London, 1953], pp. 169–65). The Kantian elements in Plekhanov’s thought have been repudiated by Lentin and others, but it may be doubted whether the questions raised by Plekhanov concerning the status of the individual’s experience of works of art have ever been answered satisfactorily from within a Marxist perspective.


CHAPTER ONE

The Primacy of Absorption

TO ABSORB, TO ENGLlF, synonyms. To absorb expresses a general but successive action, which, beginning only in one part of the subject, continues Thomasly and spreads over the whole. But to engulf indicates an action whose general effect is rapid, and seizes everything at the same time without breaking up or into parts.

The first is particularly related to consumption and destruction; the second properly designates something that envelops, sweeps away, and causes suddenly to disappear. Thus fire absorbs, so to speak, but water engulfs.

It is according to the same analogy that one speaks in a figurative sense of being absorbed in God, or in the contemplation of some object, when one gives oneself up to it with all one's thought without allowing oneself the least distraction. I do not think that to engulf can be used in a figurative sense.

7 [Louis-Guillaume] Baillet de Saint-Julien, Lettres à un partisan du bon gout sur l'Exposition des tableaux faits dans le grand salon du Louvre le 28 août 1755, p. 10. Attributed by Mariette to Estève in the Deloynes Collection; the present attribution is by Zénobiusa, "La Critique des Salons," 139.


16. Jugement d'un amateur, p. 43.


18. No. 119.

19. It is worth noting, too, that the theme of reading occurs with some frequency in Greuze's oeuvre, as for example in his La Retour du sou-méne (ca. 1760, whereabouts unknown, engraved by Binet), La Bonne Education (ca. 1760, engraved by Moreau and Ingouf from a drawing by Greuze), and Une Petite Fille ESSant la Croix de Jean (announced but not exhibited in the Salon of 1763, whereabouts unknown). In fact the activity of reading, whether aloud to others or silently to oneself, emerges in French painting and criticism of the 1750s and 1760s as paradigmatically absorptive, though of course not all representations of reading during those years had that significance.

20. The pioneering study by Louis Réau, "Carle Vanloo (1705–65)," Archives de l'art français, nov., p., 19 (1938), 9–96, has recently been superseded by the informative catalogue—in effect a catalogue raisonné of the artist's oeuvre—by Marie-
33. Ibid.
34. For English tendencies see Ronald Paulson, “The Pictorial Circuit and Related Structures in 18th-Century England,” Peter Hughes and David Williams, eds., The Varied Patterns: Studies in the 18th Century (Toronto, 1971), pp. 165–87; and idem, Emblem and Expression: Meaning in English Art of the Eighteenth Century (Cambridge, Mass., 1975). It cannot be stressed too strongly that there is a fundamental difference between the English predilection for multiple, diverse, and incomparable responses to a central object or event that Paulson analyzes—see in particular his chapters on “The Poetic Garden,” “The Conversation Piece,” and “Wright of Derby” in Emblem and Expression—and the French preoccupation with absorption that is the concern of this chapter.

35. Jugement d’un amateur, pp. 11–12.
36. In Jugement d’un amateur Laugier writes: “Enfin c’est de l’expression qu’on demande. Un Tableau sans expression est un corps sans âme. Il n’y a que l’expression qui plaise, qui intéresse, qui attache. C’est là le but essentiel à quoi tout le reste doit se rapporter. Il faut que tout serve à l’expression, que tout lui serve sacrifice” (Finally, it is expression that one requires. A painting without expression is a body without soul. Only expression pleases, interests, transfixes. That is the essential aim to which all the rest must be related. It is necessary that everything serve expression, everything yield to it, everything be sacrificed to it) (p. 66).

39. Another tableau de prédication painted at this time, Joseph-Marie Vien’s St. Thomas prêchant aux Indiens (whereabouts unknown), was criticized by Marigny in terms that show that the new emphasis on absorption was not yet universally understood and appreciated. In Vien’s words, quoted by a nineteenth-century scholar with access to autographical writings by the painter that have since been lost: “Marigny ne trouvait pas les expressions des différentes figures assez variées; il me reprocha que presque tous les auditeurs avaient l’attention portée sur le prédicateur, et il ajoutait que M. Corpet aurait plus varié les sentiments des personnages. Alors, prenant fermement la parole, je lui dis: ‘Ô truyere, monsieur le marquis, que le sermon du prédicateur devait être assez bon pour que les Indiens y fussent attention.’” (François Aubert, “Joseph-Matte Vien,” Gazette des Beaux-Arts, 3rd ser., 22 [1867], 506)
40. Marigny did not find the expressions of the various figures sufficiently varied; he complained that almost all the listeners had their attention fixed on the preacher, and he added that M. Corpet would have introduced greater variety of expression. Then, speaking firmly, I said to him: “Marquis, I thought that the preacher’s sermon should be good enough so that the Indians would pay attention to it.”

Vien’s reply plainly asserts the primacy of absorptive considerations. For obvious reasons, tableaux de prédication were especially well suited to the representation of absorption. The canonical work in that genre for French painters and critics alike seems to have been Le Sueur’s Prédication de Raymond Didier (Fig. 22), then at the Charterhouse of Paris and today in the Louvre, while the work in which the revival of interest in tableaux de prédication may be said to have culminated is Vien’s St. Denis prêchant la foi aux Francs (Salon of 1767; Fig. 46), to be discussed in chapter three of this study.

One other example of the discomfort that certain critics appear to have experienced in the face of highly absorptive compositions may be cited. Discussing Carle Van Loo’s Les Secrets de St. Augustin, exhibited in the Salon of 1751, Jacques Gauzier d’Agoy writes: “J’aurais voulu qu’il y eût moins de têtes posées de profil, surtout sur le devant, et que quelques-unes... essentiellement les jeunes, fussent moins tournées vers l’action pour tacher la Composition” (I would have liked there to be fewer heads in profile, especially in the foreground, and I would have wished that some of them, essentially the young ones, were less turned toward the action in order to add contrast to the composition) (“Observations III. Sur les tableaux exposés dans le salon du Louvre au mois d’Aout 1751,” Observations sur l’Histoire Naturelle, sur la Physique et sur la Peinture, 1752, 45, quoted by Sahut, Carle Van Loo, p. 65).

40. No. 13.
41. Lettre à un partisan du bon genre, p. 4.
42. No. 6, Sahut, Carle Van Loo, Cat. No. 133.
43. See for example Le Blanc, Observations sur les ouvrages, p. 10; Laugier, Jugement d’un amateur, pp. 17–18; Guerigues de Fron comet, Sentiments d’un amateur, pp. 8–9; and Husnier, Lettre sur l’expression des tableaux, p. 10.
44. No. 18, Sahut, Carle Van Loo, Cat. No. 147.
45. No. 5; the painting is called au Lecture in the Salon des Arts (Sahut, ibid., Cat. No. 174). It is sometimes assumed that because the Lecture épargnule was not exhibited until 1761, it was painted around that time. But it seems more likely, as Bérou ascerts (“Carle Van Loo,” p. 52), that it was painted at roughly the same moment as probably just after—the Conversation épargnule. This would appear to be the implication of the remarks to Grinim with which Diderot begins his discussion of the Lecture épargnule in his Salon of 1761: “Il y a longtemps que le tableau de notre amie madame Geoffrin, connu sous le nom de la Lectre, est jugé pour vous” (Our friend Mme. Geoffrin’s painting, known under the title of the Reading, was judged for you a long time ago) (Sahut, 1, 110).
46. Cf. the description of the Lecture épargnule by the Abbé de La Garde, Observations sur l’École des amateurs, sur les tableaux exposés au salon cette année 1761 (Paris, 1761), pp. 10–11; this originally appeared as an article under the same title in La Porte’s Observations Littéraires. For the attribution to La Garde see Seznec and Adhémar, eds., Salons, 1, 76. Cf. also Diderot’s commentary on the Lecture épargnule, which includes the remarks: “Quant à la gouvernance qui examine l’impression made by the reading on her young students... she is marvelous; my one reservation is that I would have preferred that her attention not interrupt her work. Such women are so accustomed to scolding and saying at the same time that one does not prevent the other (ibid., 110). The novel young man is reading aloud, Mme. de Lafayette’s Zélide (1670), is discussed at some length by Van Loo’s friend Grinim in the Contr. litt. for 15 May 1755, III, 28–31, a fact that lends further support to a dating of the Lecture épargnule in the mid-1750s.
47. It is possible that the Conversation épargnule was a first attempt at such a structure. Grinim’s description of it reads as follows:

M. Carle Van Loo a fait pour le cabinet de Mme Geoffrin un tableau qui a réuni les sujets de tous les connaisseurs, et qui est regardé comme le meilleur ouvrage que nous ayons de ce peintre. Ce tableau, ordonné par Mme Geoffrin et exécuté sous ses yeux, représente une comtesse flamande, reine, qui tient un papiers de musique et qui chante. Derrière son fauteuil
on voit la soubrette qui l'accompagne de la guitare. A côté d'elle, on voit sa fille qui tient le brin gauche de sa mère dans les siens. Devant la comtesse vous voyez son amant qui arrive, elle fouille ses plus beaux yeux du monde, et en voit le papier de musique lui échapper de la main. (Corr. litt., II, 410–11)

M. Carle Van Loo a fait pour Mme. Geoffrin a painting that has obtained the unanimous approbation of the experts and is considered the best work he ever did by this painter. The painting, commissioned by Mme. Geoffrin and executed before her eyes, represents a Flemish countess, a widow, who is holding a sheet of music and is singing. Behind her armchair, a maid accompanies her on the guitar. Next to the countess, her daughter is seen holding the mother's left arm in her arms. In front of the countess you see her lover arriving. She fixes on him the most beautiful eyes in the world, and the sheet of music is seen to fall from her hand.

There is an approximate parallel between the action described in this passage and Van Loo's treatment of absorption in the group of secretaries in St. Augustin disputant avec les Donatistes: viz., the countess and the soubrette have been making music (an absorptive activity); the soubrette continues to pursue that activity as if oblivious to everything else; but the countess has broken off singing or is about to do so, gazes adoringly at her lover, and, at least according to Grimm, is on the verge of allowing the sheet of music to fall from her hand—another instance of the sort of involuntary behavior the pictorial representation of which Van Loo and his contemporaries seem clearly to have relished. Despite the parallel, however, the Conversation espagnole has serious weaknesses or inconsistencies as an image of absorption, if in fact it was intended as such.

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57. Aubert, once again quoting Vien, provides the following account of the genesis of the Ermine endormi:

[Vien] avait beaucoup cherché dans Rome des têtes pouvant lui servir de modèles pour ses divers portraits. Un jour, en se promenant hors les portes, il avait reconnu un ermite qui lui paraissait parfaitement: celui-ci avait consenti à le suivre et à se tenir pendant quelque temps à sa disposition. Comme il aimait beaucoup la musique, son pensionnaire lui avait fait présenter devant lui un violon dont il avait lui-même joué après le dîner et dans les moments de repos que le peintre lui avait laissés. Un jour, pendant qu'il écoutait ses airs, Vien se mit à peindre un pied après lui, au bout de quelque temps, Vien n'entendant plus le violon, lève les yeux et voit le modèle endormi, son violon et sa main reposant sur son genou. "Je quittai à l'instant ma palette; je prends du papier et un crayon et je fais un dessin de toute cette figure qui était vraiment pittoresque. À son réveil, je lui montrai mon dessin: Ah! s'écria-t-il, que cela ferait un beau tableau!—Oh bien, lui dis-je, nous sommes à l'époque du carnavalesque, il n'a pas lieu, parce que l'année prochaine est l'année sainte (1753); si vous voulez, notre divertissement sera de faire ce tableau." En huit jours L'Ermité endormi était terminé. ("Joseph-Marie Vien", 285)

[Vien] had searched a great deal in Rome for heads that could serve as models for his various portraits. One day, while walking outside the gates, he had met a hermit who surprised him perfectly. The hermit had agreed to follow him and to remain at his disposal for a while. Since he loved music, his pensionnaire had given him a violin which he would play after lunch and during the moments of rest that the painter allowed him. One day, while the hermit was playing his tunes, Vien began to paint a face using him as a model. After some time, Vien, no longer hearing the violin, raises his eyes and sees the model asleep with his violin lying on his knee. "I immediately put down my palette; I take some paper and a pencil and make a drawing of that entire figure, truly picturesque. When he woke up, I showed him my drawing. "Oh! What a beautiful painting that would make!" he exclaimed. "Well, I said to him, 'we are at carnival time; it will not take place, because next year is a holy year (1753). If you are willing, our entertainment will be to make this painting."

In eight days the Sleeping Hermit was finished.

58. The connection between sleep and absorption is actually made by Diderot in the article "Animal," which appeared in the first volume of the Encyclopédie (1751). There Diderot remarks that the soul is subject to a sort of inertia, in consequence of which it would remain perpetually applied to the same mind, perhaps to the same idea, if it were not drawn away by something outside itself that diverted it, without however doing away with its liberty. It is by virtue of the latter faculty that it stops at times swiftly from one contemplation to another. When the exercise of this faculty ceases, the soul is directed by the passion of the moment, even of someone who is sleeping, and of someone who mediates very profoundly. If the last of these happens to contemplate several different objects successively, this is brought about not by an act of his own will, but by the connections between the objects themselves. And I know of nothing so mechanical as a man absorbed in profound meditation unless perhaps it is a man plunged into a deep sleep.

More generally, it should be noted that sleep as a lived condition emerges as
 thematic in French natural history at precisely this moment. In the Corr. litt. for 1 October 1753 Grimm discusses the recently published fourth volume of Buffon's Histoire naturelle, praising in particular the "Discours sur la nature des animaux" with which it opens:

"L'animal, dit M. de Buffon, a deux manières d'être: l'état de mouvement et l'état de repos, la veille et le sommeil, qui se succèdent alternativement pendant toute la vie. Voilà résumé le plan de son discours. Cette division parait d'abord ordinaire, commune, à portée de tout le monde: mais elle est de ces vérités qui, plus elles sont simples et lumineuses, plus elles sont du ressort du génie seul. Tout le monde est tenté de dire: 'J'aurais envoyé cet objet sous ce point de vue.' En y réfléchissant un peu, et surtout en voyant le plan admirable que M. de Buffon a têé d'après cette seule idée, on voit que cette idée ne peut être que d'un homme de génie. Le sommeil, qui parait être un état purement passif, une espèce de mort, est donc au contraire le premier état de l'animal vivant et le fondement de la vie: ce n'est pas une privation, un abandonissement, c'est une manière d'être, une façon d'exister tout aussi réelle et plus générale qu'autre. C'est par le sommeil que commence notre existence; le fetusc dort presque continuellement, et l'enfant dort beaucoup plus qu'il ne veille. Tout ce que notre auteur dit sur ce sujet est admirable. (II, 287–88)

"The animal," says M. de Buffon, "has two modes of being: the state of movement and the state of rest, waking and sleeping, which succeed each other alternately throughout its life." That is the entire scheme of his discourse. This division at first seems ordinary, commonplace, within everyone's grasp; but it is one of those truths which, the simpler and more luminous they are, the more they belong to genius alone. Everyone is tempted to say: "I would have considered the matter from that point of view." After some reflection, and especially upon seeing the admirable scheme that M. de Buffon has elaborated on the basis of this single idea, one realizes that this idea could only have been conceived by a man of genius. Sleep, which appears to be a purely passive state, a kind of death, is thus on the contrary the first state of the living animal and the foundation of life. It is not a deprivation, an annihilation, it is a mode of being, a mode of existing just as real and more general than any other. It is with sleep that our existence begins. The fetus sleeps almost continuously, and the child sleeps much more than he stays awake. Everything our author says on the subject is admirable.

Grimm's remarks are basically a tissue of quotations from Buffon. The phenomenon of dreaming epitomizes the animalic nature of sleep, and the special interest in and sensitivity to dream states that we find in Diderot’s writings and Fragonard’s paintings are a further index of the concern with sleep that I have tried to characterize. Cf. my analysis in chapter three of this study of Diderot’s account of Fragonard’s Corceau et Callinéche.

55 No. 8. Sauter, Carl Vanlom, Cat. No. 129.
56 Sentiments de l'amateur, p. 12.
57 No. 147.
58 No. 105.
60 La lettre d'exposition, p. 118.
61 No. 105. The full title of that picture in the official list is Un Tableau représentatif le Bâton, caractérisé par une Fumée qui s'empare silence à son fil, en lui montrant ses autres enfants qui dorment. As this designation makes clear, the disruptive behavior of the eldest boy is contrasted with the sleep of the other children, a tactic that recalls the use of contrast to underscore intensity of absorption in the Pere de famille, St. Augustin priant, and L'heure espagnole. In this instance, however, the gist of the contrast—that the young children can easily be wakened—compels an awareness that their sleep is not an "absolute" or "universal" condition like death, but one in which they are to speak merely absorbed. Cf. the description of Le Repos by the critic for the Journal Encyclopédique, ibid., pp. 117–18.
62 Nos. 112 and 114 respectively. The full title of the Oeufs casse as given in the list is Une Merre gendant un jeune homme pour avoir renversé un panier d'oeufs que sa servante avait péché du marché. Un enfant tente de ramasser un œuf cassé. The painting's sexual connotations are self-evident; cf. Brookner, Greuze, pp. 97–98. Brookner also cites specific Dutch sources for the Tristeuses endormies (p. 100), Le Repos (ibid.), and the Oeufs cassés (pp. 97–98).
64 See La Font de Saint-Yenne, Réflexions sur quelques causes de l'état présent de la peinture en France (La Haye, 1747; rpt. Geneva, 1790), pp. 74–76.
65 Both are listed together as No. 10 in the list. Pertinent information concerning them is summarized by Alexander Ananoff, François Boucher (Lausanne and Paris, 1976), II, 108–115, Cat. Nos. 422 and 423. See also the discussion of those paintlings by Levey, Art and Architecture, pp. 113–14.
66 Lettre à un ami, p. 2.
67 Ibid.
68 Sentiments sur quelques ouvrages, p. 38.
69 Ibid., p. 39.
70 Ibid., 11, 76.
71 Ibid., 11, 76.
72 Cf. in this connection Diderot’s proposal, in the Corr. litt. for 15 September 1755, for six scenes to ornament a tablière in enamel to be executed by Durand. The subject of the ensemble was to be "L'Ecole des amours" (The School for Cupids). The first scene to appear on the top of the tablière is described as follows:

Mercure leur donne leçon en présence de leur mère. Les uns s’exercent à écrire sur des rouleaux, les autres lisent, tous étudient et recourent leurs leçons. La scène est un paysage. Vénus est assise. Elle tient un fouet de roses sur ses genoux; elle paraît attentive et éblouie à châter ceux dont le maitre se réjouit. Mercure est assis sur un tronc d’arbre. Il donne leçon à un de ses écoliers, et lui marque ses lettres avec un stylo sur un rouleau posé sur ses genoux. L’Amour éclot à l’endroit de la droite sur le rouleau vers le bout du stylo de son maître. Mais au lieu de faire attention à ses lettres, le petit libertin s’occupe, de la main gauche, à tisser un ruban à une de ses petits frères, qui est à sa portée, et détache son salon dans le dernier à un autre qui en est presque dévoué. Le maître a les yeux sur le rouleau, l’écolier les sur le visage du maître. (III, 95)

Mercury is giving them a lesson in their mother’s presence. Some are writing on scrolls, others are reading, all are studying and learning their lessons by heart. The setting is a landscape. Venus is seated: She holds a whip made of roses in her lap; she seems attentive and determined to punish those with whom the master is displeased. Mercury is seated on a tree trunk. He is giving a lesson to one of his students, and is writing his letters for him with a stylus on a scroll placed on his lap. The student Cupid has the forefinger of his right hand on the scroll near the end of his master’s stylus. But instead of paying attention to his letters, the young libertine is busy, with his left hand, pulling the hair of one of his younger brothers who is within his
Such a conception is absorptive, despite its Rococo cast of characters, and may be taken to exemplify the sort of scenario Diderot looked for mostly in vain in Boucher's art.


88. All seven sketches are listed together as No. 4 in the Livret.

89. Ibid., 76.

90. All this is not to say that Boucher himself was unaffected by the new emphasis on absorptive values and effects or at any rate that none of his paintings could be seen as satisfying the new demands. For example, his Souvenir de l'Enfant Jeune, exhibited at the Salon of 1759 (now in the Livret) and today in the Pushkin Museum (Ananoff, François Boucher, II, 173–74, Cat. No. 498), is described as follows in the Observateur Littéraire: "Il représente une Vierge contemplant, avec une sienne et agréable joie, l'Enfant Jésus pendant son sommeil, tandis qu'elle impose silence au petit Saint Jean, dont les transports innocents pourroient troubler ce divin repos" (It represents the Virgin contemplating, with a holy and pleasing joy, the baby Jesus in his sleep, while imposing silence upon the young St. John, whose innocent transports might trouble this divine rest) (Tome IV, p. 108). For all intents and purposes, Boucher's picture is thematically equivalent to Greuze's Le Repos, shown in the same Salon. See also the description of Boucher's Naturelité, exhibited in the Salon of 1750 and today in the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon (Ananoff, II, 38–39, Cat. No. 340), by Bailleau de Saint-Julien in his Lettres sur la peinture, à un amateur (Geneva, 1751; quoted by Ananoff, I, 480). (But cf. the criticism of that description by the author of the "Réponse de l'amateur à la première lettre sur la peinture," also quoted by Ananoff, ibid.)

91. "Gravure," Mercure de France (November 1757), p. 157. The subject of the painting is taken from Lucian's T<Voidar>, a dialogue on friendship: Eudamidas, citizen of Corinth and very poor, dictated as he was dying a will in which he left the care of his mother and daughter to two friends, who accepted the charge. The passage from the Mercure de France continues: "Ce groupe, qui dit précisément ce qu'il faut... se lie naturellement à un autre, dont les expressions vont droit au cœur. Il est formé de la mère du mourant, & de la fillette. La première assise sur le pied du lit, & baignée de ses larmes, soutient sur ses genoux sa fille abattue sous les poids de sa douleur" (This group, which says precisely what it should... is linked naturally with another, whose expression goes straight to the heart. It consists of the dying man's mother and daughter. The former, seated at the foot of the bed and bathed in tears, supports on her knees the daughter, collapsed under the burden of her grief) (ibid., pp. 157–58). There is a plain sense in which the mother and daughter of the dying man may be characterized as absorbed in their grief; and when, scaring in the early 1760s, French painters came increasingly to exploit overpowering emotion as a vehicle of absorption, they found in Poussin's treatment of the mother and daughter a model for what they were trying to do. The Testament d'Eudamides, bought for Count Molèse and taken to Denmark in 1759, hangs today in the State Museum of Art, [192] Copenhagen. For discussions of that painting which emphasize its relation to Steoc thought see Walter Friedlaender, Nicolas Poussin: A New Approach (New York, n.d.), p. 168, pl. 35; and Anthony Blunt, Nicolas Poussin. The A.W. Mellon Lectures in Fine Arts, 1958 (New York, 1967), pp. 166, 306, pl. 224. The article in the Mercure de France announces the publication of an engraving by Marcenay de Ghuy after a gouache copy of Poussin's canvas. Gouache and engraving are compared with the original by original by Verdi, "Poussin's Eudamides: Eighteenth-Century Criticism and Copies," Burlington Magazine, 113 (1971), 513–17. The mother and daughter are cited for their pathos by Diderot as early as 1758 in his Discours de la poésie dramatique, p. 276.

One instance of the adaptation of the Testament d'Eudamides by a French painter of the later eighteenth century deserves special mention. To the best of my knowledge, it has never been remarked how profoundly the composition of David's Serment des Horaces, with its physical and emotional separation between the principal figure group of men swearing an oath and the subsidiary one of grieving women, is indebted to that of the Eudamides, in which an analogous separation between groups underscores the absorption of each in its respective activities and states of mind. But just as the Eudamides was seen by the Mercure's commentator and others, including Diderot, as a singularly unified work, so David's adaptation in the Horaces and related paintings of the 1780s (e.g., the Sacrifice) of the "divided" composition of Poussin's masterpiece should not, I think, be understood as intended to call into question the value of unity as such. On the contrary, David seems to have found in the Eudamides the inspiration, if not a new, more assertive or emphatic ideal of pictorial unity, according to which the discreetness, realism, and isolation of the principal figures and/or figure groups would make almost diagrammatically perspicuous their recovery in a single, life-size, intensely dramatic tableau. (The role of the notion of unity in the writings of Diderot and his contemporaries is treated at length in chapter two.)

82. Fouquet's early discussion of the St. Bruno series see [Jean-Baptiste] de La Curne de Saint-Palaise, Lettres à M. de B. [Bachamont] sur le bon goût dans les arts et dans les lettres (Paris, 1751). There La Curne suggestively compares the extreme simplicity and absence of artifice or exaggeration—in short the naturé—of Le Sueur's paintings of "ces figures pieuses, Solitaires debout, à genoux, ou dans d'autres attitudes, chacun conformément à la situation de son âme, dans la méditation, dans la prière, dans des exercices intérieurs de pénétration ou de dévotion" (some pious recluse standing, kneeling, or in other positions, each according to the situation of his soul, in meditation, in prayer, in inner exercises of penetration or devotion) with the figures on an "Enfrancan" vase that belonged to his friend Bachamont (pp. 7–8). See also Diderot's remarks on Le Sueur's paintings at the Charterhouse in his Salon de 1759 (Salons, I, 64) and on the Préflection de Raymond Decroix in particular in his Salon de 1761 (ibid., 117–18). The St. Bruno pictures are treated by Gabriel Rouché, Estampe Le Sueur (Paris, 1923), pp. 77–92.

83. Discussing a painting of L'Etude by the recently deceased Deshays in his Salon de 1765, Diderot writes:

C'est une femme assise devant une table. On la voit de profil. Elle médite; elle va écrire. Sa table est éclairée par un oeil-de-bœuf. Il y a autour d'elle des papiers, des livres, un globe, une lampe. La tête n'est pas belle, mais elle est bien coiffée. Son linge tombé à merveille de dessus les épaules de la figure, et ce néglige est d'esprit. Ce tableau ne vous mécontentez pas, si vous ne vous rappelez pas la Ménecolle du Petit. (Salon de 1765, No. 35; Salons, II, 99)
It shows a woman sitting at a table. She is seen in profile. She meditates; she is about to write. Her table is lit by an enfil-de-bouf. Around her are papers, books, a globe, a lamp. Her head is not beautiful, but her hair is well arranged. The clothing falls marvelously over the figure’s shoulders, and this casualness is intelligent. The painting will not display you as long as you do not recall Piet’s Melancholy.

84. For an analysis of Diderot’s (and others’) views of that work see chapter three of this book.

85. The publication of Surugue’s engraving is announced in the Mercure de France, March 1735, pp. 152–53. The painting is described in part as follows: “Il représente un autre Philosophe [Surugue had earlier engraved a similar painting under the title Philosophum en mèditation] assis devant une table tout proche d’une fenêtre, d’où vient la lumière qui éclaire le sujet; l’attitude attentive de la tête & des mains jointes posées sur ses genoux, font voir qu’il est absorbé, pour ainsi dire, par la contemplation de quelque idée abstraite.” (It represents another philosopher seated before a table, near a window through which comes the light that illuminates the subject; the attentive attitude of the head and the hands clasped in his lap reveal that he is absorbed, so to speak, in the contemplation of some abstract idea) (p. 152).

86. Publication announced in the Mercure de France, August 1735, pp. 210–11. The announcement includes the remarks: “La singularité qui souvent a déterminé Rembrandt dans ses pensées, l’a fait écrire ici du texte de l’Ecriture pour transformer le jeune Tobie en oculiste, qui, l’aiguille à la main, leve la cataracte à son père. Il est très-attention à cette opération délicate, & le veille fort sensiblement à la douleur dont il est affecté . . . .” (“The singularity that often determined Rembrandt’s pictorial ideas led him to depict here from the text of the Scriptures in order to turn the young Tobit into an oculist who, needle in hand, removes his father’s cataract. He is very attentive to this delicate operation, and the old man is extremely sensitive to the pain he is suffering . . . .”) (ibid.). For a discussion of Rembrandt’s attraction to subjects from the Book of Tobit, with special emphasis on his treatment of the theme of blindness, see Julius Held, “Rembrandt and the Book of Tobit,” in Rembrandt’s ‘Arts dénés’ and Other Rembrandt Studies (Princeton, 1969), pp. 101–29.


88. In a stimulating essay, “Describe or Narrate? A Problem in Realistic Representation,” New Literary History, 8 (1977), 15–41, Svetlana Alpers discerns what she sees as a realistic representational mode in seventeenth-century painting which combines “an attention to imitation or description with a suspension of narrative action” (15). From the perspective of this chapter it becomes clear that the suspension of narrative action that Professor Alpers discerns in paintings by Caravaggio, Velazquez, Rembrandt, and Vermeer is in most of those cases a function on the emphasis of the representation, and that what emphasis was indeed linked with a new realism.

89. The Enseigne de Gersaint (1720–1721, Berlin, Charlottenburg Castle) is perhaps the most striking example of an absorptive painting in Watteau’s oeuvre.

90. For Drey see Cochon’s engraving after La Lecro Pau de passage sous l’ombrage (1735, whereabouts unknown); Beauvallet’s engraving after La Toilette pour le bain (probably Salon of 1737, whereabouts unknown); and Surugue’s engraving after Une Feme Faux sage à la fauver d’un hongrie et l’Ornement de l’esprit et le coeur (perhaps Salon of 1737, whereabouts unknown). For La Tour see his Portrait of M. l’Abbé . . . . [Hubert] assis sur le branc d’un fauteuil, visant à la lumière un in folio (Salon of 1742, Geneva, Musée d’Art et d’Histoire), reproduced by Levey in Art and Architecture, pl. 156. Pierre Francastel has interesting remarks about Drey in the context of his time in “L’Esthétique des Lumières,” in Unipol et institutions au XVIIIe siècle: les programmes des Lumières, ed. Pierre Francastel (Paris and La Haye, 1963), pp. 331–57.

91. See for example Subleyras’s ‘The Painter’s Studio’ (after 1740, Vienna, Académie), reproduced in Levey, Art and Architecture, pl. 126. It should also be noted that throughout the 1730s and 1740s French engravers reproduced the work of Dutch and Flemish artists, work which was often absorptive in character. Even the Flemish painter David Teniers (d. 1690), whose anecdotal scenes of peasanl life were much admired and engraved, had his absorptive moments.

92. The most cursory survey of Chardin’s genre paintings will bear this out. It is worth noting that the absorptive character of those paintings is in some respects heightened in the numerous contemporary engravings that were made after them: both the translation of color into value and (in certain instances) the minimizing of surface qualities in favor of an enhanced illusion of atmosphere tend to “foreground” absorptive effects. Modern monographs in addition to that by Wildenstein first cited in n. 8 include Georges Wildenstein, Chardin (Paris, 1933); and Pierre Rosenberg, Chardin, trans. Helga Harrison (Geneva, 1963). See also Levey, Art and Architecture, pp. 135–41; and idem, Rococo to Revolution: Major Trends in Eighteenth-Century Painting (London, 1966), pp. 140–46, esp. p. 142 where Levey emphasizes the apparent absorptions of Chardin’s figures in their tasks and activities.


94. Wildenstein, Chardin (1969), Cat. Nos. 74, 164, 207. It will be noted that Chardin depicts not just children but young adults engaged in those amusements, further evidence for what Philippe Ariès has argued was the active involvement on the part of adult society throughout the Ancien Régime with baubles and pastimes.
which we would describe today as childish, probably because they have now fallen for good and all within the domain of childhood (Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life, trans. Robert Boniick [New York, 1962], p. 70). Ariste’s fundamental study makes abundant use of evidence drawn from paintings and other visual images; regretfully he mentions Chardin only once, in connection with the custom of saying grace before meals (p. 361), and in fact says relatively little about the eighteenth century. I might add that my own phrases “young adults” and “deliberate young people” are deliberately vague. Cf. Natalie Zemon Davis’s analysis of the age groupings in sixteenth-century France, in the course of which she takes issue with certain claims by Ariès, in “The Reasons of Miseule,” in Society and Culture in Early Modern France: Eight Essays (Stanford, 1975), pp. 97–123.


96. See for example Paulson, Emblem and Expression, pp. 104–08. Commenting on the moralizing verses printed under an engraving of Chardin’s Minuscule, David Garrett writes: “It is impossible to say whether Chardin encouraged or merely tolerated this interpretation which projected a kind of image very shortly to be elaborated and further moralized by Greuze” (p. 106). An early warning against exaggerating the significance of symbolic or allegorical meaning in the art of seventeenth-century Dutch painters was given by Seymour Slive, “Realism and Symbolism in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting,” Dandale, 91, No. 2 (1962), 465–500. Cf. also Alpers, “Describe or Narrate?”, on the question of the role of visualizing symbolism in the art of Vermeer (23–26).


98. This is a delicate point. I have already remarked that during the 1730s and 1740s, artists like De Troy and La Tour produced works that may be characterized as absorptive. It should also be noted that Salon listings for the late 1730s and 1740s list a number of titles that involve notions such as seeing with attention (Corpus, Salon de 1738, p. 13), reflecting while holding a book (La Tour, ibid., p. 19), occupied in watching a top spin (Chardin, ibid., p. 25) or in reading a book (Desportes, Salon de 1746, p. 12) and so on. Perhaps the most striking indication that at least some of Chardin’s paintings were seen, and presumably admired, as images of heightened attention is provided by a list of titles published in the Mercure de France for October 1758. The list includes three pictures by Chardin whose titles are given as Jeunes élèves, assis, tenant son crayon, appliqué à regarder le dessin qu’il copie; Jeunes ouvrières sur une chaise de paille, travaillant en tapisserie, interrompant leur ouvrage, as regards fais à la déterminante; and Ecolier appuyé sur une table ayant une attention singulière à voir tourner un tonde (quoted in André Pialat and Roger Gaucher, eds., Documents sur la vie et l’œuvre de Chardin [Paris, 1931], p. 71). In addition the Mercure de France, in a com-

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all the more aware of their absorption in his words. Diderot also notes that the old man’s wife seems hard of hearing (“Je suis sûr qu’elle a l’oreille dure, elle a cessé son ouvrage, elle avance de côté sa tête pour entendre” [I am sure she is hard of hearing, she has stopped working, she leaves her head to one side in order to hear]). (ibid.) b) a characteristically Greuzean touch to the same effect. The theme of suspension of activity, used by painters of the 1750s as a sign of intense absorption, is repeated in the action of the married daughter whose husband is the object of the old man’s gratitude. She has been reading the Bible, but now “elle a suspendu la lecture qu’elle faisait au bonhomme” and “écoute avec joie ce que son père dit à son mari” (she has broken off her reading to the old man and listens joyously to what her father is saying to her husband) (ibid.).

108. In Diderot’s words:

Chacun ici a précisément le degré d’intérêt qui convient à l’âge et au caractère. … Les enfants les plus jeunes sont gais, parce qu’ils ne sont pas encore dans l’âge où l’on sent. La commisération s’annonce fortement dans les plus grands. Le geste paraît le plus touchant parce que c’est à lui que le malade adresse ses discours et ses regards. L’âme marquée par chaque pleur, par plaisirs ou par douleur. L’intérêt est sinon éteint, du moins presque insensible dans la vieille mère, et cela est tout à fait dans la nature. … (ibid., 234–35)

Each person here has precisely the degree of interest that suits his age and character. … The younger children are gay, because they have not reached the age of feeling. Compassion strongly manifests itself in the older ones. The son-in-law appears to be the most touched because it is to him that the sick man addresses his remarks and his looks. The married daughter seems to be listening with pleasure and sadness. The involvement of the old mother is, if not extinguished, at least almost imperceptible, and that is completely natural.

109. Ibid., 235.
110. No. 139.
111. No. 138. For the suggestion that the painting in the Wallace Collection known as La Vierge Inconsolable is identical with that listed in the inventaire for the Salon of 1763 as Le Tenture Resurrection see Rossembom, Transformations, p. 40, n. 125.
112. No. 110.
114. Salons, II, 145. Cf. the praise of Chardin’s figures by Garrigues de Froment in 1753: “… non-elles pas toutes leur action? Ny sont-elles pas toutes entières?” (see above, n. 12).
115. Ibid.
116. Ibid.
117. Lettres à Monâtre — — , p. 53.
118. Salons, II, 205–06. The Bârard version was not exhibited at the Salon of 1765; Diderot may have seen it in Greuze’s studio. By the time it was shown in the Salon of 1769, Diderot’sardon had cooled (Salon, IV, 107).
119. I do not say that the impression conveyed by Chardin’s genre paintings is to be taken at face value. On the contrary, our analysis of Chardin’s use of signs of obliviousness in his paintings of children and others engaged in games or diversions has shown that the nature of his art is rather more complex and the contrast with Greuze rather less stark or absolute than may at first have appeared to be the case. But the fact remains that Chardin’s exploitation of signs of obliviousness and related devices in no way calls into question the objective tenor of his representations. In this sense Chardin may be seen as standing between the absorptive tradition of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries and the problematized continuation of that tradition in the art of Greuze and his successors.

It is interesting to note that Grimm’s proposed revision in the Corr. lett. for 15 February 1756 of a composition by Domenichino in the interests of brightened absorptive effect anticipates Greuze’s single-figure inventions of the 1760s and after. Il y a un fameux tableau du Domenichino, dont le sujet est la Communion de la Maddelena: elle approche le saint Sacrement des mains d’un ange dans un désert; elle est à genoux, les cheveux épars, et couverte à demi d’une draperie légère et déragée; derrière elle sont deux anges qui la soutiennent. La composition est peinte sur le visage des trois anges: pour celui de la pénitente, c’est un chef-d’oeuvre d’expression: on y lit l’amertume et la profonde tristesse dont elle est déchirée par le souvenir de ses péchés. On y voit la pâleur et la langue caressée par une langue puissante; on y voit un mélange de sentiments de confusion, d’humilité, de désespoir, de joie et d’espoir rennaissant, enfin de reconnaissance dont elle est pénétrée à l’aspect du saint Sacrement. Je crois qu’on pourrait rendre la composition de cet admirable tableau encore plus touchante. Laisser la pénitente dans cette attitude, vole au milieu d’un paysage solitaire qui inspire la tristesse sans horreur: chez tous ces anges; que la pêcheresse tourne ses beaux yeux languissants, tels qu’elle les a dans le tableau, vers le ciel, qu’elle voit venir d’en haut l’ange qui lui apporte l’Eucharistie; qu’à cet aspect elle fasse un effort comme pour se relever, et que ce soit l’effort d’une personne exténuée par les rigueurs de la pénitence; qu’on voie sur son visage tout ce mélange de sentiments et d’affections que le peintre a su lui donner; qu’on y découvre, surtout au milieu des impressions de la tristesse et de la pénitence, les nuances subites d’une joie douce et d’un espoir rennaissant: je crois la composition de ce tableau encore plus heureuse que l’autre, et qu’un plus grand effort, surtout si le peintre sait lui donner un fond touchant par la solitude et le sombre du paysage. (III, 181–82)

There is a famous painting by Domenichino whose subject is the Communion of the Magdalene; she receives the Holy Sacrament from the hands of an angel in the desert; she is kneeling down, her hair dishevelled, and is half-covered with a light, disordered tunic. Behind her are two angels who support her. Compassion is depicted on the faces of all three angels. As for the protagonist, it is a masterpiece of expression: one reads in it the bitterness and the profound sadness with which she is tormented by the memory of her sins. One sees in it the pallor and languor caused by a long penance. One sees in it a mixture of feelings of confusion, humility, desire, joy, and reviving hope, and finally the gratitude with which she is filled at the sight of the Holy Sacrament. I think the composition of this admirable painting could be rendered even more touching. Leave the penitent in that position, alone in the midst of a solitary landscape that inspires sadness without horror; remove all the angels; have the saint turn her beautiful languid eyes, such as she has in the painting, toward the sky; have her see the angel who is bringing her the Eucharist coming from above. At this sight, she should make an effort as if to rise, and it should be the effort of a person exhausted by the rigours of penance; on her face should be seen the entire mixture of feelings and affections that the painter has succeeded in giving it; one should find in it, especially amid the impressions of sadness and penance, sudden nuances of sweet joy and reviving hope. I think the composition of this painting would be even more successful than the other, and would have a greater effect, especially if the painter knows how to provide a background that would be moving by the solitude and somber character of the landscape.

More generally, an analogous pursuit of absorptive effects characterizes French literary pictorialism in the 1760s. Such effects are especially vivid in Diderot’s novel La Religieuse (composed 1760, about which he wrote to Meister in 1768: “Il est rempli de tableaux pathetiques. Il est tres interessant, et tout l’intéret est rassemblé sur le personnage qui parle. … C’est un ouvrage à feuilleter sans cesse par les peintres, et si la vanité ne s’y opposait, sa vérité épigraphique serait un pittores anch in ft is filled with pathos-laden tableaux. It is very interesting, and all the interest is
focussed on the character who is speaking. ... It is a work to be perused ceaselessly by painters; and if we were not bothered by modesty, its true epigraph would be no peintre marchand (quoted by Herbert Dieckmann, Inventaire du fonds Vandenbrouck et vinicles de Diderot [Geneva and Lille, 1951], p. 391). Cf. Georges May's fine study Diderot et "La Religieuse" (Paris, 1954), esp. pp. 197--237; and Arthur M. Wilson, Diderot (New York, 1972), pp. 382--91. The entire topic of pictorialism in eighteenth-century writing, especially as it relates to the larger issue of theatricality, stands in need of reconsideration; on this point see chapter two of this book, n. 132 and 143; the brief remarks in chapter three on two aspiratory tableaux in Marmontel's Bilans, and the discussion in Appendix B of passages from Rousseau's Lettre sur les spectacles and Goethe's Die Waldhornversuchungen.

120. An alternative description of the contrast in this regard between the respective genre paintings of Chardin and Greuze would be to say that it registers a change—more exactly, a deterioration—in the nature, quality, or structure of the everyday itself. Thus Martin Heidegger in Sein und Zeit associates what he calls "everydayness" with "that state-of-mind which consists of a pallid lack of mood" (Being and Time, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson [New York, 1962], p. 422) and continues: "In everydayness Dasein can undergo dull 'suffering,' sink away in the dullness of it, and evade it by seeking new ways in which its dispersion in its affairs may be further dispersed" (ibid.). I suggest that something of that pallid lack of mood may be found in Le Partisan italien and Les Onzi clips: that the bulk of Greuze's genre paintings may be seen as dramatizing precisely the sort of acts of evasion and dispersion that Heidegger has in mind; and in general that everydayness in Heidegger's sense of the term may be held to characterize the "world" of Greuze's paintings but not that of Chardin's. Cf. the remarks on Heidegger's concept of the "worldliness of the world" in Stanley Cavell, "Leopards in Connecticut," The Georgia Review, 30 (Summer 1976), 240--41.

121. Chardin appears to have given up still lives for genre subjects around 1736 and to have begun painting them again only in 1752, as noted by Chatelet, raisonn from Le Nain to Fragonard, p. 204. It is sometimes suggested that Chardin's decision around 1760 to stop making genre paintings expressed an awareness of a shift of taste away from his work in favor of that of Greuze. But the only criticism consistently levelled against Chardin in the 1750s was that he produced too little. And as late as 1767 we find Diderot writing of Chardin in a survey of the current state of the French school: "Le plus grand magicien que nous ayons eu. Ses anciens petits tableaux sont deja recherches comme s'il n'etait plus. Excellent peintre de genre, mais il s'en va" (The greatest magician that we have had. The early small paintings are already sought after as if he were no longer with us. Excellent painter of genre subjects, but he has given that up) (Salons, III, 317). In short I see no reason to believe that Chardin would have lacked a market for his genre paintings had he continued to paint them.

122. No. 123. By the early ninet Teens the painting came to be known as Le Marchande d'amon. See Rosenblum, Transformations, p. 3, n. 1.

123. The most important recent discussion of the Marchande à la toile is Rosenblum's in Transformations (pp. 5--10). Rosenblum emphasizes the extent to which Vien's painting "still fits most of us into a Rococo milieu" (p. 6). By doing so he wishes not to call into question its designation as a key work of Neoclassicism but rather to show that Neoclassic and Rococo tendencies often coexist in paintings and other art objects of the later eighteenth century. More generally, Rosenblum is at pains to demonstrate the formal and expressive variety of the art that may be termed Neoclassic. My own emphasis in this discussion that follows on the aspirative character of the Marchande à la toile is meant to amplify but not to contradict Rosenblum's account.


127. One detail in the painting is an exception—the obscene gesture made by the chief cupid. Of that detail Diderot writes: "C'est dommage que cette composition soit un peu dépeinte par un geste indécent de ce petit Amour papillon que l'inclavile tient par les ailes; il a la main droite appuyée au pil de son bras gauche qui, en se relevant, indique d'une manière très-significative la mesure du plaisir qu'il promet" (It is a shame this composition is a little marred by an indecent gesture of the young Cupid whom the slave holds by the wings. His right hand is pressed against the fold of his left arm, which, being raised, indicates in a very expressive manner the measure of the pleasure he promises) (Salons, I, 210). I believe that Diderot objected not so much to the sexual suggestiveness of that gesture as to its inconsistency with the hermetic character of the composition as a whole.

128. Ibid.

129. Ibid., 211.

130. Compare for example Chardin's Girl Returning from the Market (1739, Louvre) with Vien's Greek Girl at the Bath (1767, Ponce, Museum of Art). The latter is reproduced in Levey, Art and Architecture, 129.

131. In other genre-type paintings by Greuze—e.g., La Crevol casse (1775, Louvre) and La Laitière (ca. 1780, Louvre)—a single figure is portrayed gazing directly at the beholder. Paintings of this type tend to occur relatively late in Greuze's career, and are rather uncommon compared to what is often supposed. In the 1750s and 1760s he characteristically diverted the gaze of the figure so as to emphasize his or her absorption in thoughts and feelings, as is plainly the case in the Portrait de Madameville de — sentant une Rose (Salon of 1759, No. 111, Brunswick, Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum) and Us Jansen Berger qui tente le sort pour jouer foi c'est aimé de sa Bergère (Salon of 1761, No. 101, Paris, Musée du Petit Palais). (For the last two paintings see Mus halluc, GrenZe, pp. 60--61 and 68--69, Cat. Nos. 20 and 24.) There are of course numerous specimens of the type of painting Brookner calls the "être de jeune fille" (young girl's head), many of which depart in the main from his example, but there is still a great deal of the late 1770s and after (Greuze, p. 126).

132. No. 61. Wildenstein, Chardin (1969), Cat. No. 234. In a lecture of 9 November 1979 at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, David Carritt argued persuasively that Chardin's Amorelle was painted as early as 1737, and that the version in the Fogg Art Museum, usually considered a replica by the artist, is the work of a lesser hand.
134. The painting is described by an anonymous critic as representing
un Vieillard aveugle, dans lequel les ans ne paraissent pas avoir éteint un penchant si naturel que l'habitude fortifie; il tient avec volupté la main d'une Moitie, victime peut-être insouciante par des regards avides à l'issue de d'oe. La compagne du Vieillard parait avoir pour un gatcon végétale vigoureux qui sort de la cage, des sentiments qui ne peut lui inspirer son visage symbole
creuse, l'amour, tout y est rendu, on s'appareille que ce gatson reverse le jaud de biere qui
représe; la présence du bon homme l'enjoue. (En espérant en son delin de
1735, adresse à ceux qui la verront [Amsterdam, 1735], pp. 42–43)

135. The currency of the theme of blindness in late eighteenth- and early
ninteenth-century French painting ought to be remarked. In David's oeuvre alone
we find two Belinarias subjects, blind figures in the Serment du Jeu de Paume and
Léonidas à Thermopylas, and several drawings of subjects involving Homer, one of
which, Homère récitant ses vers aux Grecs (Cabinet des Dessins, Louvre), is of great
importance. I believe that throughout that period blindness serves as an
ostensible guerante that the figures in the painting are unaware of the beholder's presence
and so are acting and suffering just as they would if he did not exist. On the presence of
a blind figure based on Appius Claudius in the Serment du Jeu de Paume see Andrew A.
Magazine, 116 (1974), 395–96. See also the article by Jon Whiteley, “Homer Aban-
doned: A French Neo-Classical Theme,” in Francis Haskell, Anthony Levi, and
Robert Shuckleton, eds., The Artist and the Writer in France: Etudy in Honor of Jean
59, No. 2 (1977), 287–91; and my discussion of several versions of the subject of
the blind Belinarias receiving alms in chapter three of this study. In addition David's
Homer drawings are analyzed in Appendix C.

136. See below, chapter three.

137. See Munhall, Gрезkr, pp. 170–73, Cat. No. 84, and 178–81, Cat. No. 88.
Sketches in brush and ink for both paintings were shown in the Salon of 1705, for
which see ibid., pp. 112–15, Cat. Nos. 48 and 49.

138. The development and collapse of the Davidian tradition are adumbrated in
Michael Fried, “Thomas Couture and the Theatricalization of Action in 19th-Century French
Painting,” Artforum, 8, No. 10 (1970), esp. 40–46. There I describe the withdrawal from outward
action and expression that begins in David's Salons (finished 1799) and reaches its farthest term in his
Léonidas (finished 1814), a painting whose subject consists essentially in the chief protagonist's entire absorption
in his thoughts and feelings. One source not cited in that essay illustrates the pertinence of
the concerns developed in the present chapter to our understanding of David's art. In a text published in 1835, Alexandre Lenoir quotes David's account shortly before he
died of Léonidas's action:

"Léonidas est, en effet, dans l'attitude d'un homme qui réfléchit. En voyant tout l' Orient
fonder sur sa patrie, il a jugé qu'il était nécessaire d'étonner les Perses et de ramener les Grecs;

Il a calculé que sa mort et celle de ses compagnons produirien ces deux effets. Il était
absorbé dans ces grandes pensées lorsque la tromperie a sonné. A ce signal, la main qui tient
l'épee a dégainé, et le mouvement presque machinal, la jambe droite s'est comme involonnaire-
ment porté en arrière; ce mouvement ne s'est pas passé que dans le corps; l'âme est encore
entière au grand dessein que l'occupa, mais en sort qu'elle va sortir de sa méditation et
que le héros va remplir sa destitution. . . . " (David. Souvenirs historiques, "Journal de l'Institut
Histoire, 3, ler livr. [1835], 12–13)

"Léonidas is, in fact, in the posture of a man who is meditating. On seeing the entire Orient
descended on his native land, he judged that it was necessary to alarm the Persians and to rally
every Greek, that he calculated that his death and that of his companions would produce this double
effect. He was absorbed in these great thoughts when the trumpet sounded. At this signal, the
hand holding the sword quivered with an almost mechanical movement; the right leg moved
backward as if involuntarily; this movement transpired only in his body; his soul is still totally
engulfed in the great conception with which it is preoccupied, but one feels that it is about to
emerge from its meditation and that the hero will accomplish his destiny... ."

Grécat too is at times a powerfully absorptive artist, although his primary
commitment is plainly to the persuasive representation of action and expression. The
absorptive essence of Courbet's art remains to be demonstrated, in a study now
in preparation I argue that it is central to his accomplishment.

CHAPTER TWO

Toward a Supreme Fiction

1. Rensselaer W. Lee, Utopic Pictura: The Humanist Theory of Painting (Art Bulle-
ten, 1940); rpt. New York, 1967), pp. 16–23. See also André Fontaine, Les Discours
d'Art en France, Peintres, Auteurs, Critiques, de Poussin à Diderot (1909); rpt. Geneva,
(1909), 40–123.

2. In addition to the works cited in chapter one, n. 67, see Fontaine, Les Discours
d'Art, pp. 213–8; and Jean Lecapet, La Peinture d'histoire en France de 1747 à 1785
(Paris, 1972), pp. 1–40, 137–73. Another ground-breaking study of ideas about
art in the eighteenth century that has not yet been mentioned is Wladyslaw Folkerski,
Entre le classicisme et le romantisme: étude sur l'esthétique et les évolutions du XViile siècle
(Paris, 1923).

3. Other writers on painting who may be characterized as participating to a greater
or lesser degree in the reaction against the Rococo include Caylus, Bachaumont,
La Curne de Saint-Palaye, Cochin, Watteau, Marmontel, and most if not all of the
critics quoted in the previous chapter. Let me emphasize that these men did not
constitute a single homogeneous body of opinion. They disagreed strongly among
themselves, and represented a number of points of view which we are learning to
respect more precisely in terms of the social and political realities of the age. Cf.
the important study by Lionel Gossman cited earlier, Modernism and the Ideologies of
the Enlightenment: The World and Work of La Curne de Saint-Palaye (Baltimore, 1968),
especially the discussion of the relation of the views of La Curne de Saint-Palaye,
Bachaumont, Caylus, and La Font de Saint-Yenne to those of the philosophes (pp.
125–49).

4. See for example Jean Seznec, "Diderot and Historical Painting," in Earl R. Was-
serman, ed., Aspects of the Eighteenth Century (Baltimore, 1965), pp. 129–42; idem,
introduction to the selection of texts by Diderot, Sur l'Art et la litteraire, ed. Jean
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