PICTORIAL IS THEORY

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Pictorialism as Theory

The contours of the category *picture* are neither as obvious nor as firm as they may seem. Tracking them over time betrays subtle historical shifts, oppositions, and particularities of meaning. As America passed from the nineteenth century to the twentieth, the category took on special importance for those extolling the merits of photography. For some, it rationalized shoehorning the new technology as an art alongside painting, drawing, and engraving. For others, it was a means of hailing the radically new relationship that photography had wrought between viewing and being viewed. Although boosters of both kinds often used the term *picture* as though it had a settled meaning, their usage was actually predicated on exploiting its plasticity. As I argue in this essay, some fruitful deformations of the term deserve more attention than they have received.

Understanding these deformations requires a brief return to the long history of *picture* and its kindred French term *tableau*. At critical junctures in the history of the Western tradition, the categories of *picture* and *tableau* have allowed writers to work across artistic boundaries to imagine new aesthetic paradigms. Two cases are especially germane to the present argument. Leon Battista Alberti (1404–1472) entitled his prodigious 1435 commentary on the art of painting *De pictura*. The standard translation of the title as *On Painting* is eminently defensible, but the move from the Latin *pictura* to the English *painting* can obscure the work that Alberti had the Latin term perform.

Robert Macpherson,
*Hall of the Candelabra—
Vatican* (detail, see fig. 1).

For Alberti, the value of *pictura* lay precisely in its capacity to transport insights across different arts. As Cecil Grayson observes in the introduction to his authoritative translation of *De pictura*: "In this treatise, and in *De statua*, Alberti is inclined at times to use the term 'pictura' to embrace both painting and sculpture. Certainly for him they had identical objects in imitating Nature; and one of the most important aspects of *De pictura* lies in the assimilation into the art of painting of ideas which he could only have known and seen to have been practiced in sculpture, either in antiquity or among his contemporaries."[1]

The term *pictura* allowed Alberti to bring the practice and theory of painting into a broader cultural scheme.[2] The linchpin of that scheme was linear perspective, a general set of principles designed to interlock representation, beauty, and knowledge.[3] These principles allowed Alberti to encapsulate in the term *pictura* a code of both representation and artistic conduct. As the art historian Jack Greenstein has suggested, Alberti understood *pictura* as demanding that surfaces be built syntactically into a semiotic representation of the substance of things.[4] Across different arts, Alberti made perspective a means of approaching an infinite limit on discrimination and mental ordering.[5] He thus pushed a European tradition of representation toward a new system of correspondence between pictorial signifiers and what they signify. *Pictura*, in short, was less an object category than a semiotic function and a polestar of aesthetic virtue.

The other germane case is that of Denis Diderot (1713–1784) and the French term *tableau*.[6] In his writings from the 1750s and 1760s on art, Diderot used *tableau* to fashion principles that could permit traffic between theater and painting. He was the principal negotiator of what Michael Fried has called the "comprehensive rapprochement between the aims of painting and drama" that occurred in France in the second half of the eighteenth century.[7] In works such as *Entretiens sur "Le Fils naturel"* (1757) and *Discours sur la poésie dramatique* (1758), Diderot urges playwrights to curb their use of coups de théâtre—surprising plot twists or revelations—and rely more on tableaux. Diderot's concept of the *tableau* exalts the display of figures expressively arranged. According to him, the *tableau* must have a seemingly accidental quality, as though its visual properties stem purely from an internal causal chain and not from any consideration of the spectator. "Think no more of the spectator than you would if he did not exist," Diderot advises actors. "Imagine a great wall at the edge of the stage, separating you from the parterre; perform as if the curtain never rises."[8] Bolstered by this imagined fourth wall, the concept of

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the *tableau* distilled and privileged the expressive power of sight to fashion a compositional unity.

Diderot employed the term *tableau* to improve painting as well as theater. He thought that the reliance of painting on stale theatrical conventions had led to stilted and inexpressive dispositions of bodies. Seeking to nurture a more refined and compelling visual intelligence in both arts, Diderot shifted emphasis from plot and language to the communicative possibilities of figures artfully orchestrated. As Alberti had used *pictura*, Diderot used *tableau* to reconfigure relations among the arts and to promote a new aesthetic paradigm. Both paradigms exalted the potential for figure groups to bear visual meaning.[9]

A crucial aspect of these categorical moves was their suppression of the viewer as a bodily presence. Alberti's perspectival scheme used geometry to imagine the viewer as the point of an unreal eye. Around it a figure could be drawn, but such illustration was literally beside the point. Diderot suppressed the viewer differently by imagining a wall or curtain excluding the viewer from the space of representation. In both cases, the unity of the fiction—as *pictura* or as *tableau*—required a disavowal of the viewer's corporeal existence. This disavowal established a radical asymmetry between the viewer and the viewed. Bodies viewed, even if configured under the pretense of being unseen, were systematically given over to sight, to the meaning that an inspired disposition of surfaces could convey. The viewer, by contrast, was hidden within a fiction of invisibility. The extreme reduction or buffering of the viewer rendered the viewer universal, even as that universality was reserved and constructed for a privileged few. The viewer was not in the picture, and thus these paradigms were conducive to hiding the social relations that formed him (or her, in the rare case in which such a possibility was entertained).

In return for this bodily suppression, viewers received two important promises. One was a more compelling visual experience. For Diderot, this suppression permitted the fully realized tableau to provide—as Fried has put it—"an external, 'objective' equivalent to [Diderot's] own sense of himself as an integral yet continuously changing being."[10] By accepting disregard, the viewer gained the hope of encountering a unity that shared the marvelous conjunction of mutability and constancy, the internal and infinite logic, that marked the soul. Viewers went unattended, but by attending to the meticulous care with which the painting had been lavished, they could experience an objective counterpart to their own investment with self-sufficiency and grace. A second important promise was an imaginative respite

from the trials of visibility. Even as the gallery was a place in which to be seen by others, the objects within it offered a sanctuary from the vulnerability that this condition entailed. Pictures framed viewing in a reassuring structure of asymmetry, whereby their dedication to visibility came with a promise not to invoke the viewer's own. The experience of a painting was structurally so private that the viewer became an absolute secret. The experience was less like looking through a window than like looking through a keyhole. This was the beautiful regression of pictures. Even as the picture gallery remained a place of public concourse and sociability, a path of retreat into a structure of radical privacy was assured. The fact that this privacy was reserved for a particular class made it a bonding form of privilege.

During the eighteenth century, *picture* and *tableau* were, of course, only two of a bevy of terms that regulated the fine arts. The rise of bourgeois art markets and the burgeoning of art academies contributed to a growing emphasis on other categories, particularly genre and medium. In 1707, the artist and theorist Gérard de Lairesse laid out the different genres of painting with unprecedented clarity in *Groot schilderboek* (published in English in 1738 as *The Art of Painting in All Its Branches*).[11] Later in the eighteenth century, aestheticians such as Gotthold Ephraim Lessing and Johann Gottfried von Herder analyzed the material qualities of different art forms or media, and raised the question of how those qualities ought to govern criteria for artistic success.[12] The analytic divisions of genre and medium tended to diminish the force of the broader terms *picture* and *tableau*.

The institutional emphasis on the categories of *genre* and *medium* did much to shape the reception of photography after it made its sensational debut in 1839. As a matter of course in the nineteenth century, paintings were grouped with paintings, engravings with engravings, and landscapes with landscapes, as a glance at most any contemporaneous exhibition catalogue from western Europe or North America will confirm. Under these overlapping protocols, terming a photograph a *picture* was insufficient to locate it within the institutions and discourses of art.

It should come as no surprise, therefore, that influential early writing on photography in both England and France often refers to the products of photography as *drawings* (or *dessins*), not *pictures* or *tableaux*. The painter Paul Delaroche, in an 1839 report on the daguerreotype submitted to the Chamber of Deputies, refers to the "drawings obtained by this means."[13] A report of the Académie des beaux-arts from the same year refers to Hippolyte Bayard's photographs on paper

as "drawings."[14] Across the channel, William Henry Fox Talbot (1800–1877), one of the inventors of photography, refers in his early writings on the subject to "photogenic drawings." The term *drawing* located photography within an art discourse organized around medium.

To be sure, writers in this early moment also used *picture* to describe the photograph. The term appears frequently in Talbot's early correspondence and publications about photography, and other writers followed suit. Robert Hunt, for example, the author of the first photography manual in English, refers to "the photographic picture."[15] Nonetheless, early writers on photography did not refer to photographs as *pictures* with the regularity or presumption that later writers would exhibit. A preference for the term *drawing* persisted for some time. Reporting on the Salon of 1850, the critic Francis Wey writes that Gustave Le Gray, "one of the most talented practitioners of the new process of photography," has sent to the jury "nine drawings on paper, representing landscapes, portraits from life and from paintings."[16] Consistent with the conventions of his day, Wey used medium and genre to organize his discussion of the visual arts.

But shoehorning photography into such categories was an awkward business. Soon after referring to Le Gray's entries to the 1850 Salon as "drawings," Wey notes the difficulty that the jury had in classifying them, given that they "belonged in no direct way to the practice of drawing."[17] The Salon jury initially placed the works in the lithography section, but later they were classified as scientific works and dropped altogether from the definitive edition of the Salon handbook.[18] As this anecdote would suggest, early writers on photography struggled to find an adequate term for putting photographs into relation with other forms of representation.

By the late 1850s, the use of *picture* to refer to a photograph had become more customary in the English photographic press. In her canonical 1857 essay on photography, Lady Elizabeth Eastlake (1809–1893) uses the term twelve times to refer to photography or photographic reproduction and the word *drawing* only once. This new comfort with the term *picture* was by no means always accompanied by a willingness to assimilate photography into the fine arts. On the contrary, Eastlake—to stick with that example—was vociferously fending off such an assimilation. The situation in France was different. The word *tableau* was generally reserved for the traditional pictorial arts and for the self-sufficient easel painting in particular. It was associated with the highest forms of these arts, which entailed the representation of historical or literary scenes. In his review of the 1859 Salon, Charles Baudelaire

uses the term *image*, not *tableau*, to refer to photographs. In some ways, the bifurcation of *image* and *tableau* made the subordination of photography to traditional arts a cleaner affair in France than in England.[19]

The concession in the English press to the use of *picture* to describe a photograph weakened the case against photography as art. In his excellent book *The Making of English Photography: Allegories*, Steve Edwards claims that many Victorians accepted the photograph as a document but rejected it as a picture. The limitation of this argument is precisely that, as a matter of usage, they did not. Edwards writes: "Lady Eastlake was asserting, it seems to me, that photography was not just different from painting but also, crucially, that it was less than art. This 'new medium' was not a picture but a document produced by the automatic impress of nature."[20] Eastlake was indeed arguing that photography was less than art, but she certainly thought it produced *pictures*, as her use of that term demonstrates. This may seem like nitpicking, and Edwards himself acknowledges that the historical "opposition" he perceives between the document and the picture "is not always stated in these terms."[21] But refashioning historical nomenclature is a dicey matter. The fact that Eastlake clearly believed that both painting and photography produced pictures cut back the ground of her denigration of photography and invited pressure to explain why one picture was art while another was not.[22]

The potential of *picture* to unite photography with traditional modes of representation quickly made it a key term in the photographic press. Boosters of photography used it to insist that painting and photography delivered a similar product, rendering the choice of medium an arbitrary or inconsequential affair. "Our Picture" was what the editors of the *Philadelphia Photographer* entitled their regular feature singling out an individual photograph for reproduction and praise. The British photographer and critic Alfred H. Wall (n.d.–1906), who used the term *picture* frequently, went so far as to claim that the true medium of art was vision itself, a position that the pictorialist Peter Henry Emerson and others took up.[23] According to Wall, once the mind had perceived beauty or poetry in nature, what remained was merely translation, which could be accomplished by various means, including painting or photography. Those embracing such a scheme questioned whether the status of art should hinge on the particular process by which a picture is produced. In 1865, the Philadelphia photographer and painter John Moran wrote: "But it is the power of seeing and deciding what shall be done, on which will depend the value and importance of any work, whether canvas or negative."[24]

Robert Macpherson,
*Hall of the Candelabra—
Vatican*, 1860s.
Albumen silver print,
13 ¾ × 12 ⅜ in. (34.9 ×
31.4 cm). The J. Paul
Getty Museum, Los
Angeles, 84.XM.502.25.

The effort of these boosters to establish *picture* as a definitive category capacious enough to include photography led them to reaffirm broad principles of representation such as those that Alberti and Diderot had proffered. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, several photography advocates placed particular emphasis on linear perspective as a unifying requirement of pictorial art. Despite modernist transgressions in pictorial construction, that requirement remained largely intact, and photography was deliberately engineered to satisfy it. The crafting of lenses and cameras ensured that the resulting images

would abide by the rules of correct perspective, rendering photography, in a technical sense, an Albertian machine (fig. 1).[25]

Photography enthusiasts usually made their appeals to Albertian principles in a more contemporary name. As the art historian Paul Sternberger has noted, several American writers on photography in the latter half of the nineteenth century, including Moran, Enoch Root, and Edward L. Wilson urged their fellow practitioners to consult John Burnet's *Practical Essays on Art* (1822–1837).[26] Written just prior to the arrival of photography, Burnet's essays harken back to Alberti's watershed commentary by emphasizing the importance of mastering

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Oscar Rejlander, *Photomontage of Man with Vest and St. Peter's Basilica*, ca. 1860. Albumen print, 6 ½ × 4 ½ in. (16.5 × 11.5 cm). George Eastman House, Rochester, New York, 1972:0249:0001.

perspective and its geometric tenets, constructed around "the eye" of the spectator.[27] Although written for painters, Burnet's advice, which puts linear perspective at the center of the pictorial enterprise and stresses accuracy and correctness of representation, provided rich material for those arguing that photography satisfied the basic demands of pictorial art.

In England, several leading photographers of the Victorian era, including Oskar Rejlander (1813–1875), Henry Peach Robinson (1830–1901), and Julia Margaret Cameron (1815–1879), placed more emphasis, as Diderot had, on theater. This strategy had much to recommend it. One of the primary reservations about the aesthetic potentials of photography was its excessive reliance on reality, and one of the great strengths of theater was its capacity to transform real bodies into art. By arranging figures into tableaux, these practitioners of photography exploited the evocative power of gesture, pose, and composition. Rejlander and Robinson famously used composite printing to fashion pictures from discrete parts, enabling them to claim that they were exercising aesthetic judgment and synthesis, as academic standards required (fig. 2). In these various ways, loosely affiliated groups of ardent photography supporters appealed to the broad principles subtending *picture* and *tableau* to overcome the categorical barrier of medium.

Not all early writers seeking to elevate the photographic picture, however, stressed its conformity to venerable principles. A discerning few instead hailed its radical newness. Although photography had been technically engineered to deliver representations abiding by linear perspective, and although the resulting representations could incorporate the priorities of the tableau, these observers realized that photography as a social practice was nonetheless disrupting old regimes. In some respects, the work of these farsighted commentators is well known. Many scholars have examined the history of discourse on such matters as photographic transience, fragmentation, and indexicality. But in other respects the most farsighted early writing on photography has escaped our grasp. In particular, early commentary on the new relationship that photography forged between the makers and receivers of representations has received too little attention. This commentary, which envisioned the concept of the picture afresh, is crucial to understanding modern picture theory and its history.

Appreciating the implications of this commentary requires recognizing that the aesthetic paradigms that Alberti and Diderot proffered had a material basis. In particular, the suppression of the viewer in both paradigms was predicated on a social distinction or

boundary. Those who enjoyed an afternoon in a picture gallery or an evening at a theater were, with few exceptions, not engaged in producing works of art intended for either venue. Viewers of pictures or tableaux were exempt from the social limits or obligations of producers. This division underwrote the imaginative asymmetry between the viewing and the viewed that *picture* and *tableau* presumed. The viewer could be excluded from the work of art because he or she was excluded from the labor of art. This exclusion made visibility relatively easy to regulate and structural anonymity before a painting or sculpture the rule. It enabled the preservation of a class of people who could imagine themselves immune to the unwanted repercussions of being visible.

Photography and the burgeoning middle class that embraced it, however, quickly closed this divide. By 1900, members of this new class, availing themselves of handheld cameras and industrial film processing, had made a routine of depicting others and serving as subjects of depiction in turn. The makers and viewers of everyday pictures had collapsed into the same population. Even in the early years of photography, some astute thinkers, including the inventors Talbot and Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre (1787–1851), had anticipated this outcome. Although early photographic processes were too difficult for all but the most dedicated to master, restricting production to a small class of experts, Talbot and Daguerre had both envisioned a technology that would enable the unskilled to make pictures.[28] George Eastman fulfilled technically what had been the idea of photography from the start. Before photography, skill had been a means of maintaining the social divide between the makers and users of pictures or tableaux. A skillful touch had been the burden of the producers of art, while appreciating its exercise (the greatest mark of skill often being the rendering of its exercise difficult to trace) had been the preserve of those who had no particular need of skill.

Nowhere was the vision of photography as a widely practiced and reciprocal medium received more enthusiastically than in the United States, and no one welcomed it more presciently than the American abolitionist and orator Frederick Douglass (1818–1895) (fig. 3). Recent scholarship on Douglass and photography has flourished, and Marcy Dinius in particular has demonstrated how the peculiar qualities of the daguerreotype enabled Douglass to associate its popularity with social progress.[29] The fact that the daguerreotype appears as positive or negative depending on the viewing angle, turning light skin dark and dark skin light, seemed to bear the promise of a more empathetic national conscience. So, too, did the fact that the viewer of a

3
Frederick Douglass,
ca. 1855. Daguerreotype,
2 ¾ × 2 ³⁄₁₆ in. (7 × 5.6 cm).
The Metropolitan
Museum of Art, New
York. The Rubel
Collection, Partial and
Promised Gift of
William Rubel, 2001,
2001.756.

daguerreotype caught glimpses of his own face mingling with that of
the depicted. As Dinius notes, Douglass found in the daguerreotype
not only an affordable means of obtaining self-portraits but also a logic
of reciprocity and inversion that seemed both to display the structure
of racism and to provide a means for its mitigation.

For Douglass, the emergence of the daguerreotype confirmed
that the principal social function of pictures is to foster a more capacious
and honest self-consciousness. In his writings, this aim supplements
or displaces the provision of traditional aesthetic pleasure as the main
service of pictorial art. The picture for him becomes a site of negotia-
tion between self and society. He writes: "A man is ashamed of seeming
to be vain of his personal appearance and yet who ever stood before a
glass preparing to sit or stand for a picture—without a consciousness
of some such vanity?"[30] The indifference of photography was an
agent of social leveling that challenged the authority of the privileged
classes over representation. One could not count on the camera, as

one could on the commissioned portrait painter, to flatter vanity and to acknowledge status. During the Civil War, the importance and timeliness of honest self-reckoning was so great that Douglass interspersed his public orations on abolition and freedom with lectures on pictures.

Although Dinius and others have done a fine job explaining the historical importance that Douglass accorded the daguerreotype, one dimension of his thinking about pictures bears more study. We can bring this dimension into view by attending to a neglected passage in "Pictures and Progress," a lecture manuscript from the early 1860s written in Douglass's hand and residing in the Library of Congress.[31] In the manuscript, Douglass acknowledges his discomfort with lecturing on pictures while young men are dying in droves to save or break the Union in the name of freedom.[32] He admits that under the circumstances it is "almost an impertinence to ask . . . attention to a lecture on pictures," referring elsewhere in his introduction to "this seeming transgression."[33] In his defense, he claims that the intensity of the war and its coverage might justify a momentary and well-considered digression. "One hour's relief from this intense, oppressive and heart aching attention to the issues involved in the war," he writes, "may be a service to all."[34]

Having labored to justify his choice of topic, Douglass then relates a curious but unexpectedly vital anecdote. He writes:

> *Wishing to convince me of his entire freedom from the low and vulgar prejudice of color which prevails in this country, a friend of mine once took my arm in New York saying as he did so—Frederick, I am not ashamed to walk with you down Broadway. It never once occurred to him that I might for any reason be ashamed to walk with him down Broadway. He managed to remind me that mine was a despised and hated color—and his was the orthodox and Constitutional one—at the same time he seemed endeavoring to make me forget both.*
>
> *Pardon me if I shall be betrayed into a similar blunder tonight and shall be found discoursing on negroes when I should be speaking of pictures.*[35]

The anecdote enacts a reversal. Whereas in the preceding paragraphs Douglass exhibits considerable self-consciousness about talking about pictures when he should, according to circumstances

and expectations, be talking about the plight of the negro, in this passage he asks for forgiveness if he ends up speaking about the negro and not about pictures. This reversal suggests a deep conceptual bond between pictures and social justice. Each topic may slip unexpectedly into the other. Once again, the daguerreotype, with its structure of inversion and reversal (including the lateral reversal of left to right), exemplifies this relation.

The anecdote that Douglass relates enables him to take the paradigm of *picture* in another direction as well. He suggests that pictures are about shame, about being made to feel out of place. When he notes that it never occurred to his friend that Douglass "might for any reason be ashamed to walk with him," he implies that his friend has failed to imagine himself in the picture from Douglass's perspective. This is evidently a fundamental reason that Douglass understood social justice and pictures in the age of photography to be entwined. Getting the picture, as he understood it, required the capacity to imagine oneself as an object for another subject. It required a willingness to accord others a point of view and to acknowledge that one could not presume to belong in the picture so defined.

This interpretation puts a different spin on the many accounts of Douglass's celebration of the daguerreotype as a means of allowing "men of all conditions and classes" to "see themselves as others see them."[36] Writers have tended to assume that Douglass was celebrating the egalitarian empowerment that photography delivered, its success in—to use Dinius's words—"making a full experience of subjectivity available to all."[37] But Douglass's use of the anecdote and his words about shame and vanity suggest that his enthusiasm for the daguerreotype stemmed also from its insistence on a shared vulnerability. In the age of photographic pictures, those accustomed to experiencing an asymmetrical and privileged mode of looking would face a new regime. The daguerreotype promised to make the experience of being caught in the presence of others universal, and the universality of that experience would yield, Douglass hoped, the social empathy for which he longed.

In this regard, Douglass anticipated later psychoanalytic thought linking the emergence of photography to a more analytically reflexive approach to the position of the subject. As Marshall McLuhan has written, "The age of Jung and Freud is, above all, the age of the photograph, the age of the full gamut of self-critical attitudes."[38] The self-consciousness and reciprocity promised by photography receives a particularly compelling articulation in the

work of the psychoanalytic theorist Jacques Lacan (1901–1981). In his seminars, Lacan defines *picture* as "the function in which the subject has to map himself as such."[39] This definition inverts the traditional understanding of the picture as enabling the observer to stand outside of visibility and to occupy a dislocated point. It insists that the picture define for the subject a position *as* a subject, a task that requires the subject to become an object. It is in this sense that Douglass's friend failed to picture himself.

It is worth teasing out the relationship between what Douglass and Lacan had to say about pictures. In his discussion of the gaze, Lacan brings up Alberti and Diderot in quick succession. To Alberti, he attributes an epochal articulation of laws of perspective establishing vision as a privileged domain ruled from the geometrical point of the Cartesian subject. To Diderot, he attributes the insight that the geometrical system of perspective could be understood by a blind man, revealing that the system is about the mapping of space, not sight. Indeed, Lacan suggests that it is precisely the suppression of visibility and its uncontrollable intrusions that undergirds the paradigm of perspective. Lacan accordingly faults the Albertian tradition for making the subject a disembodied point of origin. "I am not simply that punctiform being located at the geometrical point from which the perspective is grasped," he says.[40] The figure at the keyhole cannot rule out the possibility that he or she is being watched. "I see only from one point," Lacan remarks, "but in my existence I am looked at from all sides."[41]

Lacan understands that Alberti's reduction of the viewer to a point was a power play, a means of keeping the privileged viewer in control and out of sight. The threat combatted is that of the gaze, the operation by which the subject "is caught, manipulated, captured, in the field of vision."[42] The impulse to stay out of sight thus extends to other species, a fact that for Lacan explains the prevalence of mimicry in nature. According to Lacan, "Mimicry is no doubt the equivalent of the function of which, in man, is exercised in painting."[43] In establishing the terms of painting in the Western tradition, Alberti and Diderot had sought to permit a form of viewing free from the hazards of being trapped in an unmasterable field of vision.

The promise of painting to hide the subject, however, is never completely fulfilled. Even in front of a Dutch or Flemish landscape without figures, Lacan says, you will feel, "in the end," the gaze.[44] What is required, therefore, is a tacit understanding, a trust that art will keep the secret of visibility safe. In front of a painting, according

to Lacan, this implicit contract entails an invitation to lay down the gaze, as "one lays down one's weapons."[45] A traditional painting offers an Apollonian moment of respite, and in return the viewer is expected to pacify his or her looking. This social contract allows the viewer of a painting to occupy a sanctuary within the visual field. This payoff requires proceeding "as if." Like an indulgent parent with a child trying to hide behind a small object, the social practice of painting pretends that the viewer cannot be seen.

Lacan associates the gaze with photography. The gaze, he says, is the "instrument through which light is embodied and through which . . . I am *photo-graphed*."[46] Lacan uses the phrase in an etymological sense, but his logic betrays the imbrication of the gaze and photography as a social practice. To be photographed is to be located, pictured, seized, perhaps unwittingly, perhaps awkwardly, in a visual field. The photographic camera is a kind of trawling net of light, capturing everything along the surfaces before it. Because photography is a democratic medium that erases the boundary between the makers and viewers of depictions, everyone finds herself or himself caught willy-nilly in the nets of others. Subtending Lacan's understanding of the gaze is thus a new sociology of photography that had dismantled the traditional pictorial scheme and rendered every viewing subject prey to disabling disclosure. Douglass's friend, by not understanding himself to be subject to that sociology, to a net that Douglass might drag through the light, had failed to don a self-critical attitude required by his time.

Lacan's discussion of being *photo-graphed*, in other words, has a historical precondition that he neglects. Although photography in technical conception is an Albertian machine, its social structure counters the Albertian paradigm. The photographic apparatus invites the photographer to indulge in the fantasy of being a point-like eye taking in the world as if through a keyhole, but the social reality of photography contravenes this fantasy. Within that reality, every subject occupies a visual field in which the possibility of being caught by another always looms. The probability that an actual camera is aimed at the subject is less the issue than the historical shift that photography has effected regarding the immutable condition of being vulnerable to the gaze. The discovery that matter left to its own automatic ways could manifest how the subject might look to others altered the human condition. Even as the photographer photographs, he or she is *photo-graphed*.

It may seem that the historical arrival of photography is not a necessary prerequisite to this state of affairs. After all, as long as there have been human subjects, coming under the gaze of another has been possible. On the one hand, this is true, and for this reason Lacan can connect the gaze to mimicry in nature and regard it as fundamental to human subjectivity. On the other hand, photography, by making the gaze into a picture, fundamentally altered its operation within psychic and social registers. The gaze no longer remained under the subject's imaginative command, and its downstream effects were uncontrollable. When Douglass notes the anxiety that the soon-to-be portrait sitter experiences while gazing into a mirror, he is invoking not only the worry that the photograph might match the image in the mirror but also the worry that it might not. This lack of control over images of the self only worsened as photographic technology shrank and accelerated. The Kodak snapshot was a potentially endlessly circulating caricature, a random exercise in grotesquerie, that laid bare the subject's lack of self-mastery.

For these reasons, something like what Fried calls, following Diderot, theatricality—that is, the acknowledgment of the body of the observer—became in the age of photography a historical necessity. In that age, the class of viewers of pictures could no longer be distinguished from the class of producers. Imagining the viewer as a geometric point or as behind a curtain became a fantasy without a social basis. Although writers have often suggested that photography drove painting to abstraction by taking over the task of representation, the abandonment of illusionistic space by painters doubtless also stemmed from photography's destruction of the social conditions of unreciprocated viewing. A laying down of the gaze was no longer possible. Illusionistic space could only remind the subject of his or her unavoidable role as an accidental or unwanted intrusion in pictures for others. This historical reasoning puts the emergence of cinema in a different light. Its development during the final abandonment of illusionism in painting appears to be a desperate effort to renew the traditional pictorial contract. If the presence of the body in an encompassing visual field could not be denied in the age of photography, then at least that body could be shrouded in darkness.

We can clarify the relationship between the writings of Lacan and Douglass on pictures by considering the anecdote that Lacan uses to convey his understanding of what a picture is. The story he tells runs as follows:

I was in my early twenties or thereabouts—and at that time, of course, being a young intellectual, I wanted desperately to get away, see something different, throw myself into something practical, something physical, in the country say, or at the sea. One day, I was on a small boat, with a few people from a family of fishermen in a small port. At that time, Brittany was not industrialized as it is now. There were no trawlers. The fisherman went out in his frail craft at his own risk. It was this risk, this danger, that I loved to share. But it wasn't all danger and excitement—there were also fine days. One day, then, as we were waiting for the moment to pull in the nets, an individual known as Petit-Jean, that's what we called him—like all his family, he died very young from tuberculosis, which at that time was a constant threat to the whole of that social class—this Petit-Jean pointed out to me something floating on the surface of the waves. It was a small can, a sardine can. It floated there in the sun, a witness to the canning industry, which we, in fact, were supposed to supply. It glittered in the sun. And Petit-Jean said to me— You see that can? Do you see it? Well, it doesn't see you!

He found this incident highly amusing—I less so. I thought about it. Why did I find it less amusing than he? It's an interesting question.

To begin with, if what Petit-Jean said to me, namely, that the can did not see me, had any meaning, it was because in a sense, it was looking at me, all the same. It was looking at me at the level of the point of light, the point at which everything that looks at me is situated— and I am not speaking metaphorically.[47]

Lacan then writes:

The point of this little story, as it had occurred to my partner, the fact that he found it so funny and I less so, derives from the fact that, if I am told a story like that one, it is because I, at that moment—as I appeared to those fellows who were earning their livings with great difficulty, in the struggle with what for them was a pitiless nature—looked like nothing on earth. In short, I was rather out of place in the picture. And it was because

*I felt this that I was not terribly amused at hearing myself
addressed in this humorous, ironical way.*[48]

To account for the picture, Lacan and Douglass offer similar
anecdotes, featuring asymmetries encountered while socializing across
racial or class lines. Whereas Douglass walks with a Euro-American
friend down Broadway, Lacan fishes with a hardscrabble fishing family
in Brittany. In both cases, the asymmetry erupts in an ostensibly
convivial moment of everyday conversation. When Douglass's friend
says that he is not embarrassed to walk down Broadway together, the
words mean something entirely different to Douglass than they do
to his friend. When Petit-Jean cracks his joke about the sardine can,
it is funny to him but not to Lacan. In both cases, the communication
is an act of picturing, a sorting of perspectives, a determination of
who belongs within a picture and who does not.

Douglass and Lacan approach the condition of "looked-at-ness" in
the age of photography from different social positions. Whereas Douglass,
as a member of an oppressed class in the 1860s, celebrates that in the
age of photography all must account for how they look to others, Lacan,
as a member of a privileged class in the 1960s, considers the difficult
consequences of this exposure for those unaccustomed to it.

Lacan's understanding of the gaze, it is worth recalling, emerged
from an engagement with Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*,
first published in France in 1943. In that work, Sartre defines the Other
as "the one who looks at me."[49] While acknowledging that the look
of the Other usually manifests itself as two directed eyes, Sartre notes
that it can arrive just as well "when there is a rustling of branches, or
the sound of a footstep followed by silence, or the slight opening of a
shutter, or a light movement of a curtain."[50] For Sartre, such signs
operate less as evidence of fact than as reminders of possibility. "What
I apprehend immediately when I hear branches crackling behind
me is not that *there* is someone *there*," he writes. "It is that I am vulner-
able, that I have a body which can be hurt, that I occupy a place and
that I can not in any case escape from the space in which I am without
defense—in short, that I *am seen*."[51]

In 1943, this emphasis on the vulnerability of the subject to the
look of others has obvious historical moorings (fig. 4). As an active
participant in the French Resistance in occupied Paris, Sartre under-
stood the perils of visibility. One of Lacan's many insights was his
realization that this vulnerability, as a general matter, had historically
found alleviation in the norms of painting. I consider in this essay

4
Glenn Ernest Grohe,
He's Watching You,
ca. 1942. Poster, 12 ¹⁄₁₀ ×
16 ¹⁄₂₅ in. (30.75 × 40.75
cm). National Archives
and Record Administra-
tion, Still Pictures Branch,
College Park, Maryland,
ARC identifier
7387549, local identifier
208-AOP-119.

the possibility that this historical function came into view because photography had more or less nullified it. Before photography, the access of the elite to fantasies of remaining unviewed while viewing seemed a normal condition. The historical turn that photography delivered surfaces in the language of twentieth-century theorizations of the subject. Whereas Lacan discusses being *photo-graphed* from all sides, Sartre describes the "pure interiority" of the Other as it appears to the subject as "something comparable to a sensitized plate in the closed compartment of a camera."[52] For both writers, photography had become essential to understanding subjectivity.

At times, practitioners of photography have made picturing, in this psychosocial sense, a focus of their work. A particularly complex

case involves Alfred Stieglitz (1864–1946) and his famous photograph *The Steerage*, made in 1907 (fig. 5). Decades later, in 1942, a year before *Being and Nothingness* appeared, a short account by Stieglitz was published entitled "How *The Steerage* Happened." By then, *The Steerage* had come to represent for Stieglitz and for his critics an apotheosis of his aesthetic sensibility and ambition. In his account, which was evidently based on years of offering similar versions orally, Stieglitz traces his production of the photograph to an experience of class alienation.[53] His retelling of that experience recalls Douglass's understanding of photography as a means of locating the self within a riven social field. Stieglitz writes:

> Early in June, 1907, my small family and I sailed for Europe. My wife insisted upon going on the Kaiser Wilhelm II—the fashionable ship of the North German Lloyd at the time. Our first destination was Paris. How I hated the atmosphere of the first class on that ship. One couldn't escape the nouveaux riches.
>
> I sat in my steamer chair the first days out—sat with closed eyes. In this way I avoided seeing faces that would give me the cold shivers, yet those voices and that English—ye gods!
>
> On the third day out I finally couldn't stand it any longer. I had to get away from that company. I went as far forward on the deck as I could. The sea wasn't particularly rough. The sky was clear. The ship was driving into the wind—a rather brisk wind.
>
> As I came to the end of the deck I stood alone, looking down. There were men and women and children on the lower deck of the steerage. There was a narrow stairway leading up to the upper deck of the steerage, a small deck right at the bow of the steamer. . . .
>
> On the upper deck, looking over the railing, there was a young man with a straw hat. The shape of the hat was round. He was watching the men and women and children on the lower steerage deck. Only men were on the upper deck. The whole scene fascinated me. I longed to escape from my surroundings and join those people.
>
> A round straw hat, the funnel leading out, the stairway leaning right, the white drawbridge with its railings made of circular chains—white suspenders crossing on

the back of a man in the steerage below, round shapes of iron machinery, a mast cutting into the sky, making a triangular shape. I stood spellbound for a while, looking and looking. Could I photograph what I felt, looking and looking and still looking? I saw shapes related to each other. I saw a picture of shapes and underlying that the feeling I had about life. And as I was deciding, should I try to put down this seemingly new vision that held me,—people, the common people, the feeling of ship and ocean and sky and the feeling of release that I was away from the mob called the rich,—Rembrandt came into my mind and I wondered would he have felt as I was feeling.

Spontaneously, I raced to the main stairway of the steamer, chased down to my cabin, got my Graflex, raced back again all out of breath, wondering whether the man with the straw hat had moved or not. If he had, the picture I had seen would no longer be. The relationship of shapes as I wanted them would have been disturbed and the picture lost.

But there was the man with the straw hat. He hadn't moved. The man with the crossed white suspenders showing his back, he too, talking to a man, hadn't moved, and the woman with the child on her lap, sitting on the floor, hadn't moved. Seemingly no one had changed position.

I had but one plate holder with one unexposed plate. Would I get what I saw, what I felt? Finally I released the shutter. My heart thumping. I had never heard my heart thump before. Had I gotten my picture? I knew if I had, another milestone in photography would have been reached, related to the milestone of my Car Horses, made in 1892 [known generally as The Terminal], and my Hand of Man made in 1902, which had opened up a new era of photography, of seeing. In a sense it would go beyond them, for here would be a picture based on related shapes and on the deepest human feeling, a step in my own evolution, a spontaneous discovery.

I took my camera to my stateroom and as I returned to my steamer chair my wife said, "I had sent a steward to look for you. I wondered where you were. I was nervous when he came back and said he couldn't find you." I told her where I had been.

She said, "You speak as if you were far away in a distant world," and I said I was.

"How you seem to hate these people in first class." No, I didn't hate them, but I merely felt completely out of place.

As soon as we were installed in Paris I went to the Eastman Kodak Company to find out whether they had a dark room in which I could develop the plate. They had none. They gave me an address of a photographer. I went there. The photographer led me to a huge dark room, many feet long and many feet wide, perfectly appointed.

He said, "Make yourself at home. Have you a developer? Here's a fixing bath—it's fresh."

I had brought a bottle of my own developer. I started developing. What tense minutes! Had I succeeded, had I failed? That is, was the exposure correct? Had I moved while exposing? If the negative turned out to be anything but perfect, my picture would be a failure. . . .

The first person to whom I showed The Steerage was my friend and co-worker Joseph T. Keiley. "But you have two pictures there, Stieglitz, an upper one and a lower one," he said.

I said nothing. I realized he didn't see the picture I'd made. Thenceforth I hesitated to show the proofs to anyone, but finally in 1910 I showed them to [Paul] Haviland and Max Weber and [Marius] de Zayas and other artists of that type. They truly saw the picture, and when it appeared in Camera Work it created a stir wherever seen, and the eleven by fourteen gravure created still a greater stir.[54]

Few accounts of the making of a photograph are more elaborate, psychologically inflected, or self-aggrandizing. Jason Francisco has called it "a shameless piece of self-hagiography."[55]

In the quoted passage, Stieglitz uses the term *picture* in multiple ways. He initially uses it to mean a promising momentary configuration of things in the world. As he races back to get his camera, he fears that "the picture" that he had seen would "no longer be." He then uses it to mean a pictorial outcome he has foreseen. "Had I gotten my picture?" he asks. Shifting again, he uses the term to mean the actual outcome of his work. "If the negative turned out to be anything but perfect," he writes, "my picture would be a failure." Finally, he shifts to using the term to mean the aesthetic experience that people of

requisite sensibility could find in that outcome. Keiley failed to see "the picture I'd made," Stieglitz informs us, whereas Haviland and Weber and de Zayas "truly saw the picture." For leading photographers of aesthetic ambition, the plasticity of the term *picture* was crucial. It gave the intimate and intricate interplay that photography fostered between work and world a positive aesthetic value. A picture had to be both found and made, and its materials were both forms (e.g., an oval) and things (e.g., a hat). It was both a physical object and an aesthetic experience.

Stieglitz associates making the photograph with feeling "completely out of place." The history of photography is rife with examples of practices or work driven by conditions of alienation. From the colonial subject returning to the imperial center and reimagining its nationalist mythologies (e.g., Julia Margaret Cameron, Peter Henry Emerson) to the wandering émigré who explores the friction of estrangement (e.g., Robert Frank, Lisette Model, André Kertész), much of the history of photographic aesthetics could be written through the concept of displacement. Indeed, one might say that in the age of photography this concept and that of the picture are inseparable. When Lacan frames his discussion of the picture by linking the concept of being "*photo-graphed*" to the story of his estranging response to the joke of Petit-Jean, he encapsulates this insight.

But what kind of alienation does Stieglitz offer us? In his text, a smug and indulgent one. His account of his voyage is precisely the kind of modernist fantasy that Lacan lampoons in his fishing anecdote. Like the young Lacan of the anecdote, Stieglitz wishes to escape his social stratum and participate in what he imagines are the more genuine and uncorrupted ways of the working class. Like the young Lacan, he associates this participation with the bracing freshness of the sea. But whereas Lacan, through the joke of Petit-Jean, comes to realize that he has entered a picture in which he does not fit, that his fantasy is nothing more than that, that he will encounter no dangerous wild fish but only the glint of a sardine can, Stieglitz has no such moment of disillusioning social contact. He stays on his deck, removed from the steerage by a gap, keeping the working class at a distant focus, and thus never putting his longing to "join those people" to the test. He comes back to his wife triumphant, believing himself to have reached a "distant world" when he had never left the comfortable confines of his class. The dialogue between the stories of Lacan and Stieglitz extends to the objects that they sought or found. A fish,

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a sardine tin, and a photographic plate are all smooth and glinting entities emerging from the darkness. But whereas the tin is the negative of the fish, the photographic negative is matter transformed into art. Negative in hand, Stieglitz returns from the sea with the great catch that the young Lacan never makes.

The stale modernism of Stieglitz's account borders on comedy. Allan Sekula, in his essay "On the Invention of Photographic Meaning," skewers Stieglitz for the flimsy and uncritical terms of his imagined liberation. He writes of this origin story:

> As I see it, this text is pure symbolist autobiography. Even a superficial reading reveals the extent to which Stieglitz invented himself in symbolist clichés. An ideological division is made; Stieglitz proposes two worlds: a world that entraps and a world that liberates. The first world is populated by his wife and the nouveaux-riches, the second by "the common people." The photograph is taken at the intersection of the two worlds, looking out, as it were. The gangplank stands as a barrier between Stieglitz and the scene. The photographer marks a young man in a straw hat as a spectator, suggesting this figure as an embodiment of Stieglitz as Subject. The possibility of escape resides in a mystical identification with the Other: "I longed to escape from my surroundings and join those people." I am reminded of Baudelaire's brief fling as a republican editorialist during the 1848 revolution. The symbolist avenues away from the bourgeoisie are clearly defined: identification with the imaginary aristocracy, identification with Christianity, identification with Rosicrucianism, identification with Satanism, identification with the imaginary proletariat, identification with imaginary Tahitians, and so on. But the final Symbolist hideout is in the Imagination. Stieglitz comes back to his wife with a glass negative from the other world.[56]

Sekula's critical analysis is characteristically trenchant. Stieglitz, by holding his identification with the working class at a distance that his photographic imagination permits, offers us an indulgent and superficial form of deliverance.

End of story? Not quite. To begin with, there is something more complicated in Stieglitz's formulation than Sekula acknowledges.

Consider again this passage:

> *On the upper deck, looking over the railing, there was a*
> *young man with a straw hat. The shape of the hat was*
> *round. He was watching the men and women and children*
> *on the lower steerage deck. Only men were on the upper*
> *deck. The whole scene fascinated me. I longed to escape*
> *from my surroundings and join those people.*

Stieglitz claims that he wishes to join "those people," yet his wish is channeled—as Sekula observes—through his identification with the man in the straw hat. That man, the protagonist of the picture, is himself an alienated subject, separated, as Stieglitz is, from the familial order, looking on others from a distance. Stieglitz's identification may be delusional, but he does not identify with "the imaginary proletariat" writ large. He identifies with a subject imagined to be alienated within his class as Stieglitz is alienated within his own. To be sure, ideology is at work: any implication that being alienated within the one class is like being alienated within the other runs roughshod over vital differences. At the same time, the very assertion that the condition of being alienated, which Stieglitz associates with a rich and sensitive subjectivity, is available to working-class subjects is historically not without its progressive dimension.

The formula works to complex effect in the photograph itself. [57] The straw hat is the most magnetic element in the picture, drawing and holding the attention of the viewer like nothing else. This fosters a sense of identification with the figure despite the fact that the vehicle of that identification—the hat—hides the figure's face. This puts *The Steerage* alongside other photographs by Stieglitz, most famously *The Terminal*, in which identification with a member of the working class proceeds paradoxically via a blockage. Whether delivered via a hat-wearing head or a turned figure, this blockage both licenses an imaginary identification with the figure and suggests that the object of that identification remains unknowable as a subject. Whether one ought to interpret this use of blockage as a way to maintain a safe distance and preserve the mystery of the Other, or instead as a respectful acknowledgment of the limits of identification, cannot be resolved readily.

The structure of *The Steerage* adds yet another level of complexity. After spending time contemplating the man with the straw hat, it comes as a surprise to note that the figure standing immediately to his

right, a figure bearing a mustache and a dark cap, looks directly at the camera. At this distance, the man's expression is hard to read, but it seems cool if not hostile. Close observation reveals that several other men in the upper steerage appear to be looking toward the camera as well. It is notable that the figures that Stieglitz imagines abstractly as forms—the man with the straw hat and the man wearing suspenders on the level below—direct their looks elsewhere. Their objectification is facilitated by, perhaps even predicated on, their averted gaze. By not confronting Stieglitz and his camera with a demand to register as fellow human subjects, they fall prey to formalist appropriation and romantic identification. Because their averted gazes are accompanied by the formal attractions of sunlit hat and suspenders, even the viewer unaware of Stieglitz's account of the making of the photograph establishes a relationship with these figures first, rendering the confrontational looks coming from those around them an uncomfortable surprise.

This structure leaves us with a curious contradiction between text and image. Although Stieglitz's account of making *The Steerage* is a modernist fantasy of the kind that Lacan lampoons with his story of fishing with Petit-Jean, the structures of story and photograph are actually similar. Both begin with a romantic identification between a privileged intellectual and one or more members of the working class but proceed to a jolting recognition of a returned and threatening gaze. Neither Lacan nor Stieglitz belonged where they were. Whereas the joke of Petit-Jean reveals to the young Lacan a lack of belonging, the returned gazes of several inconspicuous passengers reveal to the viewer of *The Steerage* a similar state. Like the glinting sardine can, the secondary figures in the photograph, although they do not see us, look at us all the same. That look catches us by surprise, locating us in a picture we did not expect, drawing us into the shame of voyeuristic desire. As Douglass understood decades earlier, photography was about positioning oneself in a riven society.

For these reasons, we should augment or amend Sekula's account of Stieglitz. Sekula argues that the "final Symbolist hideout" is in the imagination, and we can certainly find ample support for that proposition in what Stieglitz wrote. But for Lacan the imagination is no safe hideout from being *photo-graphed*. "The gaze I encounter," Lacan says, "is, not a seen gaze, but a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other." [58] While looking through the keyhole, a rustle of leaves or a glint of a can may remind us that we are in a picture for which we are not the point, perhaps one in which we appear as a stain.

The imagination is precisely where those reminders give rise to the gaze. In *The Steerage*, the man in the straw hat establishes the pictorial keyhole, that secret formalist grasp of an aesthetic opportunity. The other eyes looking upon us are not a seen gaze—these bits of silver gelatin, or carbon black, or halftone ink, or glowing pixels do not see—but precisely for this reason they invoke the gaze Lacan imagines. Invited to enjoy the pleasures of Stieglitz's identification across class lines, we find ourselves caught in unwelcoming looks meant for him. The formalist arrangement is punctured by this unexpected confrontation, which reveals the imagination of the photograph to be no hideout at all.

This brief account of the concept of *picture* in the age of photography has implications for recent mobilizations of the term. The artist Jeff Wall (1946–), in his much reproduced and discussed essay "'Marks of Indifference': Aspects of Photography in, or as, Conceptual Art," offers a different story. He defines the "Western Picture" as "that tableau, that independently beautiful depiction and composition that derives from the institutionalization of perspective and dramatic figuration at the origins of modern Western art." [59] Because Wall seeks to draw the authority of painting into the medium of photography, his succinct appeal to the paradigms set forth by Alberti and Diderot— paradigms designed precisely to allow for invigorating traffic between different arts—makes complete sense. Wall introduces his definition by way of asserting that a "new version" of the Western Picture appears in photography's "post-Pictorialist phase," which he says could be termed its "post-Stieglitzian phase." This new version of the picture, he says, found value in reportorial images emphasizing immediacy, instantaneity, and evanescence. By subjecting this new version of the picture to trenchant critique, conceptual artists, according to Wall, matured photography as a modernist medium, enabling it finally to take its place among the arts. As a new mode of tableau, photography thus carried out the "restoration" of the concept of "the Picture." [60]

The differences between Wall's account and mine are stark. Whereas Wall suggests that the notion of the picture remained essentially intact until the documentary turn of the 1920s and 1930s, I argue that photography had by then already transformed that notion by establishing a new relationship between makers and viewers. As Douglass articulated, picturing was now a social process predicated on a universal visibility within pictures for others. This new set of conditions was precisely what Alberti and Diderot had sought to foreclose. As we have seen, the viewer of *The Steerage* becomes keenly aware that

6
Cindy Sherman,
Untitled Film Still #35,
1979. Gelatin silver
print, 10 × 8 in. (25.4 ×
20.3 cm). Edition of 10.

he or she is not occupying a geometric point or the position of an anonymous viewer in darkness. By moving "as far forward" as he could, Stieglitz surrendered the privilege of invisibility that the fictions of Alberti and Diderot had reserved for his class. From the vantage of this account, Wall's insistence on a restoration of "the Picture" willfully ignores the social preconditions of any such development.[61]

   We can track the effects of this disregard by attending to Wall's work *Mimic* of 1982. This light-box mounted image depicts an encounter across the social divides of race and class, thus partaking of the catalyst of alienation or displacement described above. The encounter is replete with signs of vision. The man who looks of European descent uses his middle finger to pull his eye into a narrower form, mimicking the physiognomy of the Asian-looking man. The eye is both aggressive agent and plastic object. But even as the eye is so invoked, the gaze is tamed. As Walter Benn Michaels has noted, the work quotes the idiom

of so-called street photography while emptying the camera of the bodily comportment associated with that genre.[62] The work is a scene made for the pleasure of a viewer not subject to the operation of the vision depicted within it. It revisits what Wall deems a new version of the Western Picture while returning the viewer to the comfortable place behind the imaginary curtain of the tableau. In doing so, it eschews any acknowledgment that photography has rendered that curtain a social impossibility, a relic from another era. Indeed, by working with actors, Wall reestablished the social divide between viewers and viewed that photography in its everyday mode had put to rout.[63]

If pursued, this brief new history of the concept of the picture could link up constructively with other pathways in critical literature. For example, it could raise questions concerning the popularization of the home movie camera in the 1950s and the interest in cinematic forms of subjectivity in art of subsequent decades. From the "screen tests" of Andy Warhol (1928–1987) to the film stills of Cindy Sherman (1954–), artists during the 1960s and 1970s questioned how the subject would bear up as an object of the gaze when tokens of that gaze could circulate as moving images (fig. 6). In the context of this history, the commonality of the early work of Wall and Sherman is largely a red herring. Although the work of both is about the construction of a theatrical scene, Wall sealed off the viewer and alluded to historical forms in hopes of restoring an older notion of the picture while Sherman critically participated in new circulations between the viewer and the viewed. Her work affirms a strange and resourceful mastery over the still image, even as her imagery invokes the unavoidable new condition of the subject as an object of motion pictures.

This history can also be grafted onto accounts of the relationship between photography and performance art. Douglass, both in his writings and in his extensive service as a subject of photographic portraiture, associated the picture in the age of photography with a self-consciousness before the camera. In his formulation, the performance of the portrait sitter is as much a part of the picture as is the resulting photograph. In early performance art, as Carrie Lambert-Beatty has demonstrated in the case of Yvonne Rainier, photography was by no means merely an afterthought or convenient mode of documentation.[64] Photography was inscribed within the practice from the beginning. As a social form, picturing in the age of photography locates both viewers and viewed, while insisting on a self-critical assessment of their relative positions. Photography thus engenders a performative subject.

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The rise of surveillance, of course, refracts this history to a substantial degree. Over the course of the twentieth century, the gaze took on an institutional cast. Just as corporations came to be deemed persons for many legal purposes, the power of looking was increasingly accorded to institutional entities. The sense of looked-at-ness thus spread from the scenario of the individual within a social group to the tracking of the individual within geopolitical spaces. The issue of belonging largely gave way to the issue of social control, and less anxiety was attached to being a stain and more to being a profile of data or a target of violence. With thermal cameras and other devices, the catching of the individual in a cone of detection extended beyond the visible. By now the subject has become a confusing mix of individuated bodily presence, unit of continually reassembled data, and interactive network node. Much contemporary art and criticism has grappled with these new conditions.

This history also opens onto broad questions concerning what happens to aesthetic experience when the privilege of the keyhole can no longer be reconciled with serious art, when the endless efforts to recuperate the authority of painting through large color photography result mostly in tedium, and when perhaps the only sure way toward

rapture, as Jeff Koons has suggested in his work, is to drive viewers into insignificance through a spectacular display of big capital pandering to their infantile desires (fig. 7). Self-fashioning before the reflective surfaces of Koons's sculptures seems less vain than in vain, as if the daguerreotype had morphed into something beyond human measure. In the meantime, the hopeful vision that Douglass proffered for the age of photography remains woefully unfulfilled. Millions of African Americans sit before the camera, not to perform the anxious but possible selfhood that he imagined, but rather to mark through an instrument of legitimated violence their abjection yet again. For those free of that particular subjugation, the alienation that concerned Sartre and Lacan has taken a backseat to the effects of a coerced enrollment in a surveillance apparatus that never lets anyone out of its site (pun intended). A question driving much of the best of recent art is, how can we imagine *that* picture?

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1   Cecil Grayson, introduction to *On Painting and Sculpture: The Latin Texts of "De pictura" and "De statua,"* by Leon Battista Alberti, ed. and trans. Cecil Grayson (London: Phaidon, 1972), 10.

2   As the architectural historian Mark Jarzombek has put it, Alberti was seeking to "unite literary and cultural phenomena." Mark Jarzombek, "The Structural Problematic of Leon Battista Alberti's *De pictura*," *Renaissance Studies* 4, 3 (Sept. 1990): 277.

3   On linear perspective as an integrated cultural scheme, see Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, trans. Christopher S. Wood (New York: Zone Books, 1991).

4   Jack M. Greenstein, "On Alberti's 'Sign': Vision and Composition in Quattrocento Painting," *Art Bulletin* 79, 4 (1997): 669–98.

5   As Greenstein has put it, "A signal character-istic of [Alberti's] commentary is that the rules of art apply equally to works of different scale, format, medium, subject, and use." Ibid., 670.

6   Like many art historians, I have come to know Diderot's thoughts on the tableau primarily through the writings of Michael Fried. See, for example, Michael Fried, "Toward a Supreme Fiction: Genre and Beholder in the Art Criticism of Diderot and His Contemporaries," *New Literary History* 6, 3 (Spring 1975): 543–85.

7   Ibid., 552.

8   Diderot quoted in Julie Stone Peters, *Theatre of the Book, 1480–1880: Print, Text, and Performance in Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 270.

9   As Fried has said of Diderot and "the Albertian tradition" generally, "the human body in action was the best picture of the human soul; and the rep-resentation of action and passion was therefore felt to provide, if not quite a sure means of reaching the soul of the beholder, at any rate a pictorial resource of potentially enormous efficacy which the painter could neglect only at his peril." Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 75.

10   Ibid., 91.

11   Gérard de Lairesse, *The Art of Painting in All Its Branches*, trans. John Frederick Fritsch (London, 1738).

12   See Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laokoon oder Über die Grenzen der Mahlerei und Poesie* (Berlin: C. F. Voss, 1766), or various later translations; Johann Gottfried von Herder, *Selected Writings on Aesthetics*, ed. and trans. Gregory Moore (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

13   Paul Delaroche quoted in Beaumont Newhall and Robert Doty, "The Value of Photography to the Artist, 1839," *Image* 11, 6 (1962): 26.

14   Académie des beaux-arts quoted in J.-C. Gautrand, *Hippolyte Bayard: Naissance de l'image photographique* (Amiens: Trois Cailloux, 1986), 193–95, cited in Henri Zerner, "Gustave Le Gray, Heliographer-Artist," in *Gustave Le Gray: 1820–1884*, ed. Sylvie Aubenas (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2002), 216.

15   Robert Hunt, *A Manual of Photography*, 3d ed. (London: J. J. Griffin and Co., 1853), 300.

16   Francis Wey, "De l'influence de l'héliographie sur les beaux-arts," *La Lumière*, no. 1 (1851): 2–3, quoted in Zerner, "Gustave Le Gray," 209.

17   Ibid.

18   Ibid.

19   The dichotomy of *image* and *tableau* would become important in the emergence of abstract painting. See Hubert Damisch, "L'image et le tableau," in *Fenêtre jaune cadmium* (Paris: Seuil, 1984), 49–120.

20   Steve Edwards, *The Making of English Photography: Allegories* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 2006), 161.

21   Ibid., 153.

22   Although it is marginal to the present argument, Victorians were not at all apt to use the term *document* to describe photographs. In this respect, Edwards's argument, to which I am much indebted, troubles me as well.

23   "Before entering upon the question of Literal or Art-Photography, I will explain my views of Art, which,

summed up in a few words, consist of a *faithful* translation of the beauty and poetry of Nature, as rendered to the perception of the human mind through the medium of the sense of vision; and, whether embodied upon canvas by the 'artist' proper, by the mechanical aids at his command, or by the 'artist-photographer' upon a chemically-prepared plate, with much less mechanical labour, through the means at his disposal, yet both are dependent upon extraneous assistance—'mechanical'—whether manipulatory or otherwise." [Alfred H. Wall?], "Art-Photography," *Photographic News* 5, 133 (Mar. 22, 1861): 134. On Emerson, see Robin Kelsey, *Photography and the Art of Chance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 129–30.

24 John Moran, "The Relation of Photography to the Fine Arts," *Philadelphia Photographer* 2, 15 (Mar. 1865): 3.

25 As A. D. Coleman has written, "Photography institutionalizes Renaissance perspective, reifying scientifically and mechanistically that acquired way of perceiving which William Ivins called 'the rationalization of sight.'" A. D. Coleman, "The Directorial Mode: Notes toward a Definition," in *Light Readings: A Photography Critic's Writings, 1968–1978* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 248. See also Joel Snyder and Neil Walsh Allen, "Photography, Vision, and Representation," *Critical Inquiry* 2, 1 (Autumn 1975): 89–90.

26 See Paul Sternberger, *Between Amateur and Aesthete* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001), 1–5. Wilson published a compilation of the essays in 1888. See John Burnet, *Practical Essays on Art* (New York: Edward L. Wilson, 1888).

27 Burnet wrote: "Though the varieties of painting are endless, yet the properties of which these varieties are composed are, as in music, few in number." John Burnet, *An Essay on the Education of the Eye with Reference to Painting*, 4th ed. (London: Henry Sotheran, 1880), vii. As the titles of the sections of the essay ("Measurement," "Form," "Perspective," "Lines," "Diminution," "Angles," etc.) would indicate, these properties, according to Burnet, are principally Albertian and geometric.

28 Daguerre wrote: "Everyone can use the daguerreotype to make views of his chateau or country house." L. Daguerre, "Daguerréotype," prospectus, ca. Mar. 1838, reprinted in F. Reynaud,

ed., *Paris et le Daguerréotype* (Paris: Paris-Musées, 1989), 22 ("Chacun, à l'aide du daguerréotype, fera la vue de son château ou de sa maison de campagne").

29 Marcy J. Dinius, "Seeing a Slave as a Man: Frederick Douglass, Racial Progress, and Daguerreian Portraiture," in *The Camera and the Press: American Visual and Print Culture in the Age of the Daguerreotype* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 192–232. For another account of the imbrication of pictures and social progress in Douglass's work, see John Stauffer, "Frederick Douglass and the Aesthetics of Freedom," *Raritan* 25, 1 (Summer 2005): 114–36. See also the essays in *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African-American Identity*, ed. Maurice O. Wallace and Shawn Michelle Smith (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

30 Frederick Douglass, "Pictures and Progress," undated lecture manuscript, p. 9, Frederick Douglass Papers, Library of Congress, 9.

31 Ibid. Other versions of the lecture exist.

32 As James McPherson has observed, the same words—or lyrics—concerning freedom were cherished and exalted by both sides of the war. See James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

33 Douglass, "Pictures and Progress," 1.

34 Ibid., 4.

35 Ibid., 5–6.

36 Douglass quoted, for example, in Dinius, *Camera and the Press*, 208.

37 Dinius, *Camera and the Press*, 209.

38 Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 197.

39 Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, 100.

40 Ibid., 96.

41 Ibid., 72.

42   Ibid., 92.

43   Ibid., 109.

44   Ibid., 101.

45   Ibid.

46   Ibid., 106.

47   Ibid., 95.

48   Ibid., 95–96.

49   Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Estella Barnes (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 345.

50   Ibid., 346.

51   Ibid., 347.

52   Ibid., 385.

53   On the history of Stieglitz's accounts of the making of *The Steerage*, see Elizabeth Anne McCauley, "The Making of a Modernist Myth," in *The Steerage and Alfred Stieglitz*, by Jason Francisco and Elizabeth Anne McCauley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 18–19.

54   Alfred Stieglitz, "How *The Steerage* Happened," in "Alfred Stieglitz: Four Happenings," *Twice a Year: A Book of Literature, the Arts, and Civil Liberties*, nos. 8–9 (Spring–Summer and Fall–Winter 1942): 127–31.

55   Jason Francisco, "The Prismatic Fragment," in Francisco and McCauley, *The Steerage and Alfred Stieglitz*, 77.

56   Allan Sekula, "On the Invention of Photographic Meaning," in *Thinking Photography*, ed. Victor Burgin (London: MacMillan Press, 1982), 99–100.

57   One weakness of much Foucault-era photographic criticism is an excessive estimation of the framing powers of discourse, a word that never loses its verbal connotations despite efforts to extend its reach. Before taking Stieglitz to task for his tired Symbolist moves, Sekula argues that "the photograph, as it stands alone, presents merely the *possibility* of meaning. Only by its embeddedness in a concrete discourse situation can the photograph yield a clear semantic outcome." Ibid., 91. This is certainly true, but if we infer from this proposition that photographs are wholly governed by the textual framing of them, we have gone astray. Like a painting or song, a photograph forever remains open to new inspection, which may deliver new meanings and inflect the discourse surrounding it in new ways. A photograph never operates independently of discourse, but it is not merely a passive and plastic outcome of discourse either. This is particularly important in the case of Stieglitz, who produced some extraordinary photographs despite being a pompous and often unconvincing writer.

58   Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 84.

59   Jeff Wall, "'Marks of Indifference': Aspects of Photography in, or as, Conceptual Art" [1995], reproduced in Douglas Fogle, *The Last Picture Show: Artists Using Photography, 1960–1982* (Minneapolis, MN: Walker Art Center, 2003), 33.

60   Ibid., 44.

61   The irony of Wall's assumption that photography did not substantially change the "Western Picture" until after pictorialism is that his enterprise structurally repeats pictorialism. Like the pictorialists, Wall seeks to draw on the authority of painting through imitation. Whereas the pictorialists mainly did so through signs of preparation and labor, either surface based (e.g., brushed gum prints or composite printing) or by way of theatrical staging, Wall hews to the staging option while seeking to match the capacity of painting to yield a large and charismatic presence on the gallery wall.

62   Walter Benn Michaels, "The Politics of a Good Picture: Race, Class, and Form in Jeff Wall's *Mimic*," *PMLA* 125, 1 (Jan, 2010): 180–81.

63   Needless to say, many artists today continue to follow Wall in using the large color photographic format in an effort to restore the tableau. Other artists use that format to carry out the project that Douglass forecast, using portraiture to insist that people of all forms and formations take a place before the camera. This normal art—to riff on Thomas Kuhn's notion of normal science—does tedious if necessary cultural work.

64   Carrie Lambert-Beatty, *Being Watched: Yvonne Rainier and the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008).