

THE METHOD OF MORELLI  
AND ITS RELATION  
TO FREUDIAN PSYCHOANALYSIS<sup>1</sup>

Giovanni Morelli (1816-91), the Italian connoisseur, in the 1870's and 1880's, writing under the pseudonym Lermolieff worked out a method for distinguishing original works of art from copies.<sup>2</sup> His method was a curious one, involving the study of small and unimportant details of the painting in order to discover the authentic touch of the master. An illustration from his book, *Italian Masters in German Galleries* shows ears from

<sup>1</sup> This essay is an expanded version of a lecture delivered to the Graduate Art history Association of Columbia University on March 1, 1968.

<sup>2</sup> For biographical details of Morelli's life, see Sir A.H. Layard's introduction to vol. I of Giovanni Morelli, *Italian Painters. Critical Studies of their Works. The Borgnese and Doria-Pamfili Galleries in Rome*. 2 vols. Translated by C.J. Foulkes, London 1892; Ivan Lermolieff, *Die Galerien Roms. Ein kritischer Versuch*. I. *Die Galerie Borgnese*. Aus dem Russischen übersetzt von Dr. Johannes Schwarze; *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst*, Wien, 1874, Lieferungen I, III, VI, VIII; 1875, Lieferungen IV, VII, IX, XI; 1876, Lieferungen V, VI.

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paintings by the Florentines Leonardo da Vinci and Lorenzo di Credi, and through the differences in form between these two details, Morelli believed he could distinguish two artists of the same school.<sup>3</sup> A second illustration from Morelli's book shows that conversely, two different parts of the body bear a family resemblance to one another—here the hand and ear are both long, thin and tapering forms.<sup>4</sup> In his study of paintings in the Borghese Gallery, Morelli explained how such details could help the connoisseur identify a master: "Copyists can never have any character or style, for 'form' in their works is not due to their own idea . . . As most men, both speakers and writers, make use of habitual modes of expression, favourite words and sayings, which they often employ involuntarily and sometimes even most inappropriately, so almost every painter has his own peculiarities, which escape him without his being aware of it . . . Anyone intending to study a painter more closely and to become better acquainted with him, must take into consideration even these material trifles (a student of calligraphy would call them flourishes), and know how to discover them . . ." <sup>5</sup>

From the first Morelli's method, which seemed utterly novel to his contemporaries, was a center of controversy in the art world; but his books reached beyond art circles, and attracted the attention of persons in fields remote from his own. Thus Freud, in his anonymous essay on Michelangelo's *Moses*, while stating that he was "no connoisseur in art, but simply a layman," maintained that he was acquainted with Morelli's method of studying works of art.<sup>6</sup> Since the following passage is the only

<sup>3</sup> See Morelli, *Italian Masters in German Galleries*, London, 1883. Translated from the German by Louise M. Richter. (Morelli's preface dates from 1877). Illustration, page 219, 1st ed., Ivan Lermolieff, *Die Werke italienischer Meister in den Galerien von München, Dresden und Berlin. Ein kritischer Versuch.* Aus dem Russischen übersetzt von Dr. Johannes Schwarze. E.A. Seemann, Leipzig, 1880.

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 111.

<sup>5</sup> Morelli, *Italian Painters*, I., pp. 74-5.

<sup>6</sup> Sigmund Freud's essay "The Moses of Michelangelo," was originally published anonymously in *Imago*, III, 1914, pp. 15-36. I have used the reprint in *Freud on Creativity and the Unconscious* (introduction by Benjamin Nelson, N.Y., 1958) of A. Strachey's translation, which appeared originally in vol. IV of the *Collected Papers*, London, 1925. The quotation is on p. 11.

place Freud mentions Morelli—he doesn't do so in his discussion of Leonardo (1910)—and since it will be central to my discussion, I would like to cite it here in full: "Long before I had any opportunity of hearing about psychoanalysis, I learnt that a Russian art-connoisseur, Ivan Lermolieff, had caused a revolution in the art galleries of Europe by questioning the authorship of many pictures, showing how to distinguish copies from originals with certainty, and constructing hypothetical artists for those works of art whose former supposed authorship had been discredited. He achieved this by insisting that attention should be diverted from the general impression and main features of a picture, and he laid stress on the significance of minor details, of things like the drawing of the fingernails, of the lobe of an ear, of aureoles and unconsidered trifles which the copyist neglects to imitate and yet which every artists executes in his own characteristic way. I was then greatly interested to learn that the Russian pseudonym concealed the identity of an Italian physician called Morelli, who died in 1891. It seems to me that his method of inquiry is closely related to the technique of psychoanalysis. It, too, is accustomed to divine secret and concealed things from unconsidered or unnoticed details, from the rubbish-heap, as it were, of our observations."<sup>7</sup>

Apart from certain suggestive resemblances between the two men, what is chiefly of interest to us in this passage is Freud's explicit comparison of his own technique of exploring human personality to Morelli's method of studying works of art. My purpose in this essay is first to examine the validity and meaning of Freud's comparison of the two approaches, and then to consider the more general problem of the relation of Freudian psychoanalysis to art history and connoisseurship.

The passage by Freud which I have just quoted and which informed us of his acquaintance with Morelli's method, continues: "Now in two places in the figure of Moses there are certain details which have hitherto not only escaped notice—but, in fact, have not even been properly described. These are the attitude of his right hand and the position of the two Tables of the Law." Largely on the basis of these two details

<sup>7</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 24-5. Apparently Freud's information is based on Layard's introduction to the *Italian Painters*.

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Freud proceeded to reinterpret the complex state of mind of the great law-giver. Such analysis corresponds to the technique as presented in the *General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, a series of lectures delivered just after the *Moses* essay was written, between 1915 and 1917. In them he stated that the purpose of studying apparently trivial and accidental errors and slips "is not merely to describe and reclassify the phenomena, but to conceive them as brought about by the play of forces in the mind, as expressions of tendencies striving towards a goal, which work together or against one another. We are endeavouring to attain a *dynamic conception* of mental phenomena."<sup>8</sup>

Evidently Freud's main interest in the work of art—as Ernest Jones his biographer pointed out—was curiosity to know what moved him, and what moved the artist to produce the particular work.<sup>9</sup> In the case of the *Moses*, more than by Michelangelo or by the statue *per se*, Freud was attracted by the problem of determining the mood of the great leader represented at the critical moment when his followers disobeyed him. In Freud's interpretation, Moses "will neither leap up nor cast the Tables from him. What we see before us is not the inception of a violent action but the remains of a movement that has already taken place. In his first transport of fury, Moses desired to act, to spring up and take vengeance and forget the Tables; but he has overcome the temptation, and he will now remain seated and still in his frozen wrath and in his pain mingled with contempt."<sup>10</sup>

In illustration of his thesis, Freud had several diagrams made showing the hypothetical rest position, the hypothetical beginning of the movement, and the actual position of the statue. These diagrams and the accompanying discussion show clearly that Freud's concern is not with small static forms, as is Morelli's, but in large dynamic (one might even call them dramatic) postures and gestures. Rosenthal has called Freud's series of diagrams "cinematographic," and has shown that seen

<sup>8</sup> Freud, *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*. Transl. by Joan Riviere. N.Y., 1962, pp. 70-1. (This ed. was first published in 1924).

<sup>9</sup> Ernest Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*, N.Y., 1957, vol. III, p. 413.

<sup>10</sup> Freud, "Moses," p. 33.

from the angle intended by Michelangelo, all the postural tensions reported by Freud are compensated for.<sup>11</sup> Freud developed his interpretation with such breadth of reading and display of Talmudic subtlety that even the famous Michelangelo scholar de Tolnay was impressed with its brilliance.<sup>12</sup> But with regard to its objectivity, we should remember that both Jones and Hans Sachs, Freud's prominent disciple, pointed out quite convincingly that his analysis of the *Moses* served—probably unconsciously—as a screen on which to project some of his own anxieties and dreams. Jones, following Sachs,<sup>13</sup> showed how similar Freud's situation in 1914 was to his picture of the self-restrained Moses confronting his faithless people: "Was Moses on descending Mt. Sinai unable to control his anger as the Bible related, or could he attain the heights of self-control which Freud maintained Michelangelo had depicted? We know that this preoccupation coincided with the time he was suppressing his own indignation at the way his Swiss followers had suddenly repudiated his work . . ." <sup>14</sup> I might add that in the same year (1914) Freud published (and this time signed) his polemical *History of the Psychoanalytic Movement*, in which he expressed his antagonism to Jung and others. If his essay on Moses expresses the unrealized wish to become—like the Moses he depicts—serenely superior to party strife, can his anonymity reflect an even deeper idea, one which might be worded; "If I were to give up my name, *then* I could identify myself with my Moses."<sup>15</sup>

Freud's curiosity about art was—as we have seen—almost wholly limited to the artist's thoughts and feelings. He felt

<sup>11</sup> Earl E. Rosenthal, "Michelangelo's *Moses, dal di sotto in su*," *Art Bulletin*, XLVI, No. 4, Dec. 1964, pp. 544-550.

<sup>12</sup> Charles de Tolnay, *Michelangelo: The Tomb of Julius II*, Princeton 1954, pp. 40-1, p. 103.

<sup>13</sup> Hans Sachs, "'The Man Moses' and the Man Freud," pp. 132-144, in *The Creative Unconscious*, Cambridge, 1942.

<sup>14</sup> Jones, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, p. 368. Jones had read *The Creative Unconscious*, and he adopted a similar point of view about Freud's essay, but — surprisingly — he fails to note Sachs' work in this contest. Jones, *op. cit.*, noted that Freud become interested in the statue even before 1901; but, Freud's actual preparation of the essay evidently was precipitated by his personal situation in 1914.

<sup>15</sup> See Sachs, *op. cit.*, for other aspects of Freud's identification with Moses.

that poetry—which he preferred by far—was better suited to such study than art.<sup>16</sup> Small wonder that Jones felt uneasy about the chapter in his biography treating Freud's relation to art. He mentions that "Both Ernst Kris and Freud's artist son Ernst counselled me not to write this chapter, giving as their reason that since Freud had little aesthetic appreciation, there could be nothing worthwhile to say on the subject."<sup>17</sup> What, then, did Freud have in common with the connoisseur Morelli? In part that in their similar obsession with "betrayal" through neglected details, both men belong in the same post-Enlightenment context of a "psychology of interests" presupposing—in the words of Karl Mannheim "that men were given to 'feigning' and to deceiving their fellows..."<sup>18</sup> However, since the value of the overlooked detail for Freud was not for its elucidation of the artist's style (as it was for Morelli), but as a clue betraying the artist's repressed feelings and ideas, Freud's comparison of his method with Morelli's is not wholly accurate. Whereas the analyst, assuming that beneath the formal surface lie the depths of emotion, looked *through* the detail, and used it as a peephole onto secrets of the mind, the connoisseur, assuming that in art the formal surface is the main thing, looked *at* the detail, and grouped it with other details to establish the artist's stylistic identity.

The two men diverge even more in their views of personality. Morelli, concerned to distinguish original works of art from their copies, believed first of all that only the works of original artists consistently reflect the artist's personality;<sup>19</sup> and secondly (and closer to Freud, as already mentioned), that what distinguishes the original artist's work are not such consciously controlled devices as composition, but the unobtrusive minor details where the artist relaxes his attention; he finds ears and noses more revealing of temperament than the whole head, and

<sup>16</sup> See Jones, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, p. 408.

<sup>17</sup> Jones, *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> See Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, N.Y., 1957 (1st German ed. 1929) p. 63. In his subsequent discussion, Mannheim links this feeling of being deceived to the desire to "unmask" and "debunk."

<sup>19</sup> Morelli, *Italian Painters*, vol. I, Layard's introduction, pp. 31-2, 45; and Morelli's text, pp. 74-6.

unpremeditated quick sketches more than elaborately finished paintings.<sup>20</sup> For Morelli the small details, the identifying marks of the artist, are like fingerprints impressed by the creator upon his work. Freud on the other hand considered the trifling slip and the unnoticed error symptoms of an underlying emotional drama which help to identify not the individual but his state of mind: two different persons might have identical symptoms and the same person might have different ones at different times. Although the two men behaved like detectives, as noted by Hauser, the “crises” they considered were very different.<sup>21</sup>

How innovative was Morelli’s method, which seemed so novel to some of his contemporaries? Morelli’s emphasis on originality and the sketch, words which sound quite Romantic, encouraged eminent scholars such as Edgar Wind to think that the approach emerged primarily with 19th century Romanticism.<sup>22</sup> Wind was especially impressed by the “Romantic” use of fragments by Morelli, meaning the resemblance of ears and similar details to the jagged pieces of ruined sculpture dear to the Romantics.<sup>23</sup> But Wind overlooks that in his illustrations, Morelli presents these details as complete rather than as broken or fragmented forms interesting in themselves, and that a tradition already well-established in the 18th century (and to which Goethe adhered) considered such details as ears and hands not as bits of ruin with Romantic overtones of the odd or unfamiliar, but as parts of an organic whole which resemble one another and the whole which they compose.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, a more careful examination of the sources of Morelli’s methods of the 19th century have a history which begins at least in the 18th century with Winckelmann. It is true that there was relatively little Romantic fanaticism for originality before the end of the 18th century, but already in the middle of the century experts relied on drawings as personal and characteristic expressions

<sup>20</sup> Morelli, *ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Arnold Hauser, *The Philosophy of Art History*, Cleveland, 1963 (1st ed. 1958), pp. 109/10.

<sup>22</sup> See Edgar Wind, *Art and Anarchy*, N.Y., 1964, p. 43 (1st ed. London, 1963).

<sup>23</sup> Wind, *op cit.*, p. 42.

<sup>24</sup> For Goethe’s organic conceptions, see below, note 37.

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helpful in authenticating paintings, a procedure recommended also by the classicist Winckelmann, who preferred drawings not for their emotional directness, but for their purity of contour, as in Raphael's sketches.<sup>25</sup>

Resemblance to Winckelmann occurs even in Morelli's defense of his so-called ear-lobe method. Morelli extended his method to the study of paintings which had been badly restored and disfigured, and which he compared to the ruins studied by the archaeologist: "In such a ruin there is no possibility of recognizing the hand of the master, or of distinguishing an original from a copy. Only a close observation of the forms peculiar to a master in his representation of the human figure, can lead to any adequate results."<sup>26</sup> Winckelmann, struggling to identify the ruins of antiquity, observed in 1764 that "It was customary with the ancient artists to elaborate no portion of the head more diligently than the ears. The beauty, the execution of them is the surest sign by which to discriminate the antique from additions and restorations.." In criticism of Winckelmann's methods, Lessing exclaimed: "What a poor science archaeology would be if it offered no more than this kind of information... We should not confuse the second-hand dealer in antiques with the connoisseur of antiquity. The one has collected debris, the other the spirit of the ancients."<sup>27</sup>

Whatever parallels one might draw between Winckelmann's method and Morelli's—limited obviously by the great differences between their fields of study—it is clear that in its specifics

<sup>25</sup> As early as 1719 the Abbé Dubos compared the ability of the connoisseur with that of the handwriting analyst in distinguishing originals from copies, in *Réflexions Critiques sur la Poésie et sur la Peinture*. 7th ed., Paris, 1770, p. 241 (Book II, Sect. XXVII, p. 405). First ed., Paris, 1719, 2 vols. While he doubted whether either expert was very reliable, he felt the handwriting expert had more chance of success. Another example of 18th century attitudes can be found in the Count of Caylus' *Lecture on Drawings* of 1732. On Winckelmann, see Carl Justi, *Winckelmann und seine Zeitgenossen*, Leipzig, 1943, (First ed. 1923), II, 385. On his attitude toward Raphael, see Justi, *op. cit.* I, 466.

<sup>26</sup> See Morelli, *Italian Masters...*, p. 2.

<sup>27</sup> Johann J. Winckelmann, "Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums. 1763-8. Fünftes Buch. Von der Kunst unter den Griechen," chapt. 5, n. 29. For Lessing's remark, in *Wie die Alten den Tod gebildet*, Berlin 1769, see J. Bialostocka, *Lessing. Laocoon, suivi de... Comment les Anciens représentaient la Mort*, in the series "Miroirs de l'Art," Paris, 1964, p. 164.



Morelli's method stands closer to two distinct though allied disciplines highly esteemed during the 19th century, namely physiognomy and graphology. Like Morelli, physiognomists such as the famous Lavater were especially interested in the permanent qualities of personality, rather than in pathography or the momentary moods and passions; hence, they chose bony or cartilaginous forms like the ears, and only studied mobile features like the lips when at rest and undistorted by emotional stress.<sup>28</sup> Outward differences in form, especially in the facial features, were correlated to the individual's mental disposition—an approach which Lavater in part owed to Winckelmann.<sup>29</sup> Generally the physiognomist relied on isolated signs to which fixed interpretations of character were applied by intuition. Thus, of four profiles from Lavater's book, grouped as "Exquisite judgment and superior talents, and extreme weakness of mind," the author says: "...it is impossible not to discern in the first and second exquisite judgment and superior talents... in the third and fourth extreme weakness of mind... the impression which they produce is as irresistible as that of the voice of God. The least and the most experienced will immediately pronounce the same judgment upon them, and that by a sort of instinct... Consult the *sentiment of truth*..., a sentiment which precedes all reasoning, and it will instantly decide. On what ground?... on the mien, the gesture, the movement or the look? No, on none of these; but on a simple, immovable, and inanimate outline."<sup>30</sup>

Notions about physiognomy, passing from the suggestions of Leonardo to the ritual of Lebrun's academy, became quite popular by the 18th century, leading at last to Gall's historically important phrenology, a pseudo-scientific study of head-bumps as revealing mental aptitude.<sup>31</sup> August Wilhelm Schlegel rejected the "crass

<sup>28</sup> John Caspar Lavater, *Essays on Physiognomy*, London, 1797, 4 vols., I. p. 15.

<sup>29</sup> Lavater often cites Winckelmann's *History of Ancien Art*; e.g., Lavater, *op. cit.*, vol. III, pp. 169-70, 238-40, 286. It is probable that Lavater's extensive discussion of ears (e.g.; vol. 3, pp. 319-22), owe something to Winckelmann.

<sup>30</sup> Lavater, *op. cit.*, vol. I, lecture 24, p. 213 has the illustrations.

<sup>31</sup> On Leonardo, see André Chastel. *Léonard de Vinci. La Peinture*, in the series "Miroirs de l'Art," Paris 1964, pp. 148-9. On the physiognomic ideas of Le Brun and their source in Descartes and others, see Jurgis

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materialism" of Gall, and the visionary nature of Lavater, while even earlier the satirical Sterne (actually regarded as an excellent physiognomist by Lavater) ridiculed the whole approach by solemnly proposing in *Tristram Shandy* that an 'Institute of Moses' be established, and by postulating that "... the excellency of the nose is in a direct arithmetical proportion to the excellency of the wearer's fancy..."<sup>32</sup>

Comparing Morelli's method to graphology, the second discipline, Layard in his introduction to the *Italian Painters* observed that Morelli identified the author of a picture "... as a specialist in handwriting identifies the author of a written document by the peculiar forms of some of the letters."<sup>33</sup> One might also compare Morelli's methods of detecting forgeries obviously to the work of criminologists, but also to the increasingly popular genre of detective stories.<sup>34</sup> One thinks especially of Poe, whose methods of detection included cryptography along with graphology, and who made small overlooked details into the major clues.<sup>35</sup> The graphologists, like the physiognomists, attempted to read character from a small sample of personality, in this case the handwriting.<sup>36</sup> The principle of *pars pro toto* was expressed already by the first to go thoroughly into the relation of handwriting to character, Baldo, a Bolognese, who in 1622 wrote an *Essay on how to recognize the nature and quality of the writer from his letter*. In support of his method, Baldo cited "*ex ungue leonem*" ("you can recognize a lion from its claw,") a proverb of great antiquity

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Baltrussitis, *Aberrations. Quatre essais sur la légende des formes*, Paris, 1957. On Gall, see Brett's *History of Psychology*, ed. by R.S. Peters, London, 1953, pp. 592-3.

<sup>32</sup> For Schlegel's remarks, see his Berlin lectures, *Vorlesungen über schöne Literatur und Kunst* (1801-4), I, 78 ff. For the Sterne, see his *Tristram Shandy*, Book III, chapt. 38, p. 168, London 1912. 1st ed. 1761. For nose-analysis, see Lavater, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, pp. 290-7, and pp. 300-1.

<sup>33</sup> See Layard, introd. to Morelli, *The Italian Painters...*, vol. I, pp. 31-2.

<sup>34</sup> The standard book on the criminology of handwriting forgery is A.E. Osborne, *Questioned Documents*, Albany, N.Y., 1929. For a discussion of the detective story, see Boileau-Narcejac, *Le Roman Policier*, Paris, 1964.

<sup>35</sup> Aside from such celebrated stories as *The Gold Bug*, Poe wrote "A Chapter on Autography" (ca. 1835).

<sup>36</sup> For a more sophisticated approach to graphology, see the writings of Ludwig Klages, especially his *Handschrift und Charakter*, Leipzig, 1932, 1940.

which Goethe used in his capacity of morphologist, applying it equally to plants and animals.<sup>37</sup> Lavater, who studied handwriting as an expression of character, explicitly linked graphology, physiognomy and art in his remark: "... over painting, and every figure in a painting, indeed for the connoisseur... every stroke has the character of the master who made it. Is this less true of those drawings and figures which we call handwriting?"<sup>38</sup>

If so much of Morelli's method was already practiced earlier, we may well wonder why it created a sensation when first announced in his publications. The most obvious reason for Morelli's causing so great stir in contemporary art circles is that he convincingly criticized well-known authorities, including even the renowned Crowe and Cavalcazzelle's *New History of Painting in Italy* (1886), boldly reattributing famous works and assigning obscure ones he considered mislabeled to famous artists such as Correggio and Giorgione. Furthermore, he established important facts about a number of great artists, facts which now are accepted without question, such as that Timoteo Viti and not Perugino was Raphael's first teacher.<sup>39</sup> Many of his ideas and attributions have withstood the assault even of his enemies like von Bode (who grudgingly admitted that Morelli had made some lucky guesses,) and Max J. Friedländer, whose *Der Kunstkenner* (1919) abused Morelli with sarcasm.<sup>40</sup> In addition, Morelli made a genuine con-

<sup>37</sup> Baldo's *Trattato...* and the quotation from it are cited in J. Crépieux-Jamin, *Handschrift und Charakter*, Leipzig, 1901. First ed.: *Traité pratique de graphologie...* Paris, n.d. (ca. 1885). For Goethe's views on plant morphology, see, e.g., *Goethes Werke*, Band XIII, Hamburg, 1958, "Morphologie, 1817," p. 57. Goethe agreed with Lavater that the different parts of an organism resemble one another, but his initial fascination with the physiognomist gave way to scepticism and rejection of him. See Eckermann's *Gespräche mit Goethe* conversation of Feb. 17, 1829. Goethe used the expression "Man... den Löwen an den Klauen erkennt" in "Briefe," Weimar Ausgabe of *Goethes Werke*, Weimar, 1887-1919, 50 vols., 4. Abth. XX, 159, 7 ff.

<sup>38</sup> Lavater's remark is in *op. cit.*, III, 111. Lavater analyzed handwriting in *op. cit.*, III, pp. 196-204. He was also aware of the use of graphology in cases of forgery "as a guide... towards the truth." See *op. cit.*, III, p. 199-200.

<sup>39</sup> See especially, Layard's introduction to the *Italian Painters*, I, 23 ff, and 27-8.

<sup>40</sup> W. von Bode, "The Berlin Renaissance Museum," pp. 506-15, *The Fortnightly Review*, Vol. L, London, July 1 to Dec. 1, 1891, p. 509. For qualified praise of Morelli, see von Bode, *Mein Leben*, II, 62.

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tribution—despite criticism by von Bode and especially by Friedländer on this point—in rejecting the “general impression” as a basis for identifying a work of art.<sup>41</sup> Morelli wished above all by studying isolated and comparable details to substitute concreteness and precision of observation for vague feelings and inexact impressions of the entire composition. Unfortunately, he aroused bitter opposition by such ironic remarks as: “Art historians in Germany and Paris only attach importance to intuition (or the general impression,) and to documentary evidence, and regard the study of works of art as purposeless and a waste of time.”<sup>42</sup> In fact, Morelli had a grudging admiration for men of von Bode’s quality, and was really exercised over pedantic theorists lacking sensitivity for art, and the swarms of impudent dilettantes who based their opinions about art on first impressions, not because they were capable of quick perception deepened through experience but because they were superficial and incompetent for detailed research.<sup>43</sup> Friedländer’s dogmatic counterstatement that “It is one’s own impression of the entire picture which decides; the dissecting contemplation serves at most as check and argumentation”, contradicts only the dogma bristling in Morelli’s statement; in fact, Friedländer, like all successful connoisseurs including Morelli, follows the actual practice of grounding his intuition on careful comparison of detail (of course, without restricting himself to Morelli’s ears and hands).<sup>44</sup> One must distinguish the disagreement of their language from the agreement of their practice.

Another reason for Morelli’s impact on his contemporaries depends on the increasing ascendancy of science over the humanities (including aesthetics) in the second half of the 19th century. Among the most influential thinkers of his generation were the French positivists Renan, Taine and Fustel de Coulanges

<sup>41</sup> Von Bode’s opinions on Morelli’s “one-sided” method are strongly put in *Mein Leben*, II, pp. 24, 61-2. Also, see Friedländer, *Der Kunstkenner*, pp. 24 ff.

<sup>42</sup> See Morelli, *Italian Painters*, 1, 19.

<sup>43</sup> Von Bode’s name appears repeatedly in the correspondence, published in *Italienische Malerei der Renaissance im Briefwechsel von Giovanni Morelli und Jean Paul Richter*, 1960.

<sup>44</sup> Friedländer’s remark is from *On Art and Connoisseurship*, p. 196.

who wished to study religion, literature and history as branches of science. Taine especially was impressed with organismic metaphors for whole civilizations as well as for works of art and literature, and transplanted Cuvier's "law" of the dependence of one organ on another in animals from biology to history and criticism.<sup>45</sup> An attitude much more profound and pervasive than the fascination with Romantic fragments Wind mentions is involved here, one which the sociologist Mannheim traces to the development of modern science in which a "mechanistic dehumanization" has led to the exclusion of "every significant formulation of a problem."<sup>46</sup> In many places Morelli, too, sounds like a 19th century scientist; e.g., in his emphasis on direct and close observation, his reliance on photographs for accurate study and comparison of details, and his concern about methodology. The scientism of this connoisseur must have impressed contemporaries heatedly discussing whether a biological ground for all culture could be discovered. The influential Zola took a strongly affirmative view of the question in his essay on *The Experimental Novel* (1880) based mainly on the biologist Bernard's writings, but also on Darwin's. Zola declared that "Some day the physiologist will explain to us the mechanism of the thoughts and passions..."<sup>47</sup> This is not an extreme position compared with some scientists; e.g., the physiologist Karl Vogt in 1847 already likened the function of the brain to the secretion of bile by the liver and of urine by the kidneys.<sup>48</sup>

Morelli was himself trained as a physician, and become acquainted through his teacher Döllinger, a forerunner of Cuvier,

<sup>45</sup> Renan's *L'Avenir de la Science* (1848, pub. 1890), and Fustel de Coulanges' *La Cité Antique* (1864) are landmarks of French positivism. For Taine's reliance on Cuvier, see his preface to the *Histoire de la Littérature anglaise* (1863), and to the 2nd ed. of the *Essais de Critique et d'Histoire* (1866).

<sup>46</sup> See Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, N.Y., 1957 (1st ed. Bonn, 1929), p. 43.

<sup>47</sup> Zola, *The Experimental Novel and Other Essays*, translated by Belle M. Sherman, N.Y., 1964 (1st ed. 1893), p. 20.

<sup>48</sup> See Karl Vogt, *Physiologische Briefe*, 1847, 206. This dictum derived from the originator of physiological psychology, Cabanis (1757-1808). A curious adaptation of those materialist parallels between brain and mind occurs in the Romantic Novalis' comparison of the brain to the testes, as a metaphor describing the procreative aspect of thinking. See Novalis, *Schriften*, III, 171.

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with the methods of comparative anatomy.<sup>49</sup> Like Zola, Morelli exaggerated his objectivity, comparing his approach to that of Darwin and other scientists, and wrote in 1877 that “Whoever is opposed to my experimental method, but sees in it a way to get out of dreary dilettantism, and aspires to a real Science of Art, let him take up the cross and follow me. Whoever, on the contrary, finds my method too materialistic and unworthy of a lofty mind, let him leave the heavy ballast of my work untouched, and soar to higher spheres in the balloon of fancy.”<sup>50</sup> Considering Morelli’s claims to a scientific approach, it would be well to keep in mind that outside his narrow sphere of Italian Renaissance painting, Morelli was often by no means open-minded or impartial; e.g., he neglected or despised that strain of realism that passed from Courbet to Manet, Zola and the Impressionists, and even considered Titian’s *Danaë* vulgar for the realism of its nude (what must he have thought of Manet’s *Olympia*!)<sup>51</sup>

The aim of achieving a Science of Art to which Morelli refers was commonplace in 19th century Europe, arose largely from the attempt already mentioned of biologists (and to some extent of physicists) to extend their dominion over other disciplines (Darwin interpreted beauty as a factor in sexual selection, Spencer developed his “play theory,” and the psychophysicist Fechner launched an Experimental Aesthetics.)<sup>52</sup> These scholars approached art in such a way that for them at least free appreciation was replaced by accurate observation, and enjoyment of beauty (a hard term to define or quantify) into a survey of elemental facts (such as Fechner’s studies of preferences of geometric proportions.)<sup>53</sup> Just how pervasive this viewpoint was can be judged from the

<sup>49</sup> For Morelli’s educational background, see Layard’s introduction to *Italian Painters*, I, 3 ff. Ignatz Döllinger (1770-1841), not to be confused with the great theologian of that name, followed Schelling in philosophy.

<sup>50</sup> See Morelli, *Italian Masters*, I., p. vii, and cf. *Italian Painters*, I, 11.

<sup>51</sup> See Morelli, *Italian Masters...*, 166: “Titian’s Danaë is so realistic, nay, to be candid, so vulgarly imagined, that the old woman at her side makes us involuntarily think of a common procuress.”

<sup>52</sup> For good, brief accounts of Darwin, Spencer and Fechner, see K. Gilbert and H. Kuhn, *A History of Esthetics*, N.Y., 1953.

<sup>53</sup> On Fechner’s experiments with rectangles, etc., see Bernard Bosanquet, *A History of Aesthetics*, London, 1892.

attitude of connoisseurs like Berenson who, whatever their criticisms of Morelli, essentially continue his method of careful perception.<sup>54</sup> Berenson adopted a theory of “pure visibility” which in practice cut art off from life and permitted its forms to be studied *in vitro*, in relation to each other, rather than to the artist. Some such technique is indispensable—as Morelli already maintained—when trying to discover the unknown author of a work, and to define the qualities of a given artist’s *oeuvre*.<sup>55</sup> But it seems to me that the connoisseur at his best aspires to rise through the *catalogue raisonné*—the catalogue of the artist’s works—to an understanding of the spirit that shaped the *oeuvre*. Friedländer explicitly stated that the connoisseur aims constantly to write biography, in order to complete what style analysis starts.<sup>56</sup>

Freud too, in his study of the artist’s personality aimed at biography. Yet there is a sense in which as a scientist he shared the opposite goal—with all its scope and limitations—of Darwin and Marx, who were interested in man as a species or as a class rather than as an individual human being, and who wanted above all to bridge the gap between the rawest biological and economic aspects of man and the subtlest refinements of his culture.<sup>57</sup> But when Freud put aside his 19th century scientific models, he could very sensitively delineate the complex character of an artist. Even the subjectivity of this brilliant man in his excursions outside his own domain had at least the validity of great writing. This is the human side of his psychology, which is essentially concerned with shaping profoundly integrated biographies of men.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. F. Hartt, “Bernard Berenson, 1865-1959,” *Art Quarterly*, 24, No. 1, 89-91, Spring 1961, p. 90: “Berenson’s enduring contribution... represents” above all “the triumph of sharpened perception as an instrument of humanistic research.”

<sup>55</sup> See Wind, *op. cit.*, pp. 25, 35, 50, for a discussion of “visual dissociation” as a common heritage of Berenson and other connoisseurs following Morelli. Also, cf. below, note 78 and text.

<sup>56</sup> M. J. Friedländer, *Der Kunstkenner*, p. 194: “Wir arbeiten unter allen Umständen mit der Schönsucht nach Biographie.”

<sup>57</sup> Freud’s first writings were in the field of biology, and this science undoubtedly colored his earliest thoughts on psychology; yet one of his greatest contributions was to realize that insight into human psychology must be based on a study primarily of mental and only secondarily of biological phenomena.

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Freud approached the biography of artists from the opposite direction to that taken by Morelli; for, he started from the artist and worked toward the art, whereas Morelli started from the art. This difference is quite understandable since for Freud the art grows out of the man, whereas for connoisseurs like Morelli the man becomes meaningful mainly as a background for his art. While the connoisseurs were willing to remain on the surface of the artist's productions, Freud plunged deeply into the personality of the artist, viewing him—as he did all human beings he studied—in terms of a dynamic interplay of ideas and feelings.<sup>58</sup> Evidently, Freud's approach to the artist closely resembles the technique of psychoanalysis, with which he sought to expose more or less deeply buried (repressed) psychic material. There is a curious parallel between Freud and Morelli in this connection, inasmuch as both compare their methods with those of archaeology; but, whereas the comparison had a practical relevance to the connoisseur, it had rather personal and metaphoric significance to the psychoanalyst.

Building his interpretation of the artist outward from a core of personality, Freud is willing to select a few works that fit well his psychoanalytic insights; moreover, he focuses on symbolic aspects of the works, paying little attention to formal considerations. Despite his apparent neglect of large aspects of the artist's work, Freud believed that all human behavior is meaningful and explainable, and that every gesture, every slip of the tongue, every mannerism, is a valid expression of personality.<sup>59</sup> However, his partiality for studying symbolic aspects of the work led him—despite his reference to Morelli—to ignore utterly the rich literature on expressive form to which Morelli's method is allied, including (as we have seen) graphology and physiognomy. Thus, although he once pointed out a relation between his own physiognomy and handwriting (in a letter to Weizsäcker), he rarely made such observations, and never provided his writing with illustrations to support them.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>58</sup> See Freud, *A General Introduction...*, pp. 70-1.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Freud, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

<sup>60</sup> For von Weizsäcker, see B. Nelson, *Freud and the 20th Century*, N.Y., 1957.



The essays on Michelangelo and Leonardo have stimulated some of Freud's followers to apply his theory to the visual arts, often with disastrous results. Freud himself, unlike many of his followers, spoke quite plainly about visual details in art, although he was for a few years fascinated by his close friend Fliess' theory of the sexual nature of noses, which could have opened to Freud staggering possibilities for interpreting art.<sup>61</sup> (Jones reports that the two men spent considerable time commenting on each other's noses!)<sup>62</sup> Lacking Freud's scruples and scholarly self-discipline, some followers have lunged on ahead of him, rarely understanding the artist or his period, and treating the work of art as a collection of symbols to be read and interpreted. Daniel Schneider's interpretations have been easy prey for critical art historians for twenty years, but they are sober compared with some of Groddeck's or Sterba's.<sup>63</sup> In 1925, Groddeck interpreted the *Sistine Madonna* of Raphael as a family constellation, with some queer overtones. After long discussion of the mystery of the painting and its relation to Goethe's "*Ewig weibliche*," Groddeck notes on one side of the painting a man and on the other a woman, and remarks: "...near the man, but not touching him lies a crown, the symbol of the female, and near the woman, not touching her, stands a tower, the symbol of..." and so on, up to climactic description of divine androgyny. How simple-minded Morelli now seems, for whom an ear was an ear, a nose a nose.<sup>64</sup> Sterba, a highly respected psychoanalyst has, in Frankl's amusing account "discovered the psychoanalytic background of Gothic architecture." The arch, he says, originated in the barrel vault, which "represents in its round vaulting an obvious substitution for the womb... The arch can be regarded as the product of an inhibitory impulse,

<sup>61</sup> Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*, Chapt. VI has his most detailed discussion of sexual symbolism. On the sexual theory of noses, see Jones, *op. cit.*, I, p. 289. Fliess claimed that "there is a relationship between the mucous membrane of the noses and genital activities."

<sup>62</sup> Jones, *ibid.*, p. 309. Both men suffered from nasal infection, "and an inordinate amount of interest was taken on both sides in the state of each other's nose..."

<sup>63</sup> Schneider's best-known work is *The Psychoanalyst and the Artist*, N.Y., 1950.

<sup>64</sup> See Georg Groddeck, *Exploring the Unconscious*, London, 1950 (addresses delivered originally from 1925 to 1933), p. 3 ff.

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of an attempt at release from the compulsive reminiscence of the primal intra-uterine situation.<sup>65</sup> Towers are treated as various symbols—the Madonna's legs, the womb, and (singly) as a phallus. Frankl demolishes with ease Sterba's fabrications, and advises him to return to his own discipline.

These interpretations strike us as silly because the analysts have their eyes—and noses—in their psychoanalytic guidebooks, and—unenlightened by the art historian or connoisseur—are talking to themselves in a language borrowed from Freud but not understood. What is needed is not their inflexible and simplistic reduction of artistic meaning to the sexual, or of the forms of art to secondary sex characteristics (long, hard and angular vs. compact, soft and curving seen like a pidgin-English version of Wölfflin's style-pairs), but a method of study closer to the actual many-leveled procedure of the artist, which would necessarily come to grips with the art itself.

A survey of Freud's impact on American psychology by the knowledgeable Gardner Murphy shows—as one might have expected—that Freud affected studies of imagination greatly, but studies of sense-perception only slightly.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, a recent review by a psychoanalyst of Freudian writings on form in art, admits that “the basic problem which Freud posed for psychoanalysts, i.e., what is the nature of the emotional pleasure aesthetically sensitive people derive from contemplation of formal relations, has come little closer to solution.”<sup>67</sup> A good corrective to the Freudian difficulties with formal and perceptual aspects of art is offered by the views of Gestalt psychology, which emerged from the 1890's as one of several critiques of the fragmenting approach to perception of the associationist schools of psychology then dominant.<sup>68</sup> It was probably this viewpoint that schooled connoisseurs like Friedländer in their criticism (already referred to) of the method of disconnected details (which has its own

<sup>65</sup> See Paul Frankl, *The Gothic...* Princeton, 1960, pp. 748-51, for Sterba's and other ridiculous theories of the origin of the Gothic style of architecture.

<sup>66</sup> See Murphy's “The Current Impact of Freud upon Psychology,” in B. Nelson, *op. cit.*

<sup>67</sup> See Marshall Bush, “The Problem of Form in the Psychoanalytic Theory of Art,” *The Psychoanalytic Review*, Spring, 1967, p. 28.

<sup>68</sup> See *Brett's History of Psychology*, pp. 676 ff.

parallel in associationist psychology,)<sup>69</sup> and which guided W. C. Constable, who wrote that “A work of art is not merely an assemblage of parts; its essence lies in the ordered relation of those parts. The first impact of a work of art on the spectator, before he has become occupied with detail, is of the greatest value for enabling this relation or system of relations to be grasped...”<sup>70</sup> The Gestalt psychologist Köhler made a similar point with regard to physiognomy when he remarked that “...if in a friendly-looking face we try to separate the friendliness from the characteristics of the face as such, we find the task quite difficult. So long as we consider the face as a whole, rather than as a mosaic of colored spots, the friendliness seems to remain an intrinsic characteristic of the face...”<sup>71</sup>

Setting aside its questionable and antiquated speculations about “isomorphism,” the Gestalt school has not only contributed to our knowledge of artistic perception, but in the work of men like Arnheim has led the way in the study of the artist’s unfolding ideas through chronological arrangement of the series of sketches for major works such as Picasso’s *Guernica*.<sup>72</sup> In the playful free association of Picasso and of other, differently endowed artists, non-verbal imagery plays a dominant role, perhaps not unlike the visual-motor imagery reported by mathematicians such as Einstein.<sup>73</sup> Wertheimer, and other students of productive thinking have considered such phenomena.<sup>74</sup> The well-known limitations of the Gestalt school have been closely tied to its virtues: it concentrates on present perception and practically neglects the past; it studies the development of patterns mainly insofar as they tend toward the “good Gestalt,” ignoring the rich variety

<sup>69</sup> For a critique of the Associationist method from a Gestalt viewpoint, see Wolfgang Köhler, *Gestalt Psychology*, N.Y., 1959, 1st ed. 1947.

<sup>70</sup> See W.C. Constable, *Art History and Connoisseurship*, Cambridge, 1938, p. 15.

<sup>71</sup> See Wolfgang Köhler, *Gestalt Psychology*, p. 131.

<sup>72</sup> Rudolf Arnheim, *Picasso's Guernica; The Genesis of a Painting*, Berkeley, 1962.

<sup>73</sup> See Albert Einstein, “Letter to Jacques Hadamard,” in J. Hadamard, *The Psychology of Invention in the Mathematical Field*, Princeton, 1945.

<sup>74</sup> See Max Wertheimer, *Productive Thinking*, N.Y., 1945. See also Hadamard, *op. cit.*

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of formal qualities other than its “Gestalten,” and—not unlike some connoisseurs—offers an emotionally flat picture of the artist. Clearly, the Gestalt school lacks the richly dynamic view of personality offered by the Freudian approach.<sup>75</sup>

While most analysts have ignored alternatives to their verbal-symbolic methods (except for occasionally handling projective techniques), one of them has shown himself quite aware of the need for a broadened approach to the exploration of art. An art-historian turned psychoanalyst, Ernst Kris, while critical of the results thus far achieved by cross-disciplinary approaches, has remained sympathetic to possible bridges between Gestalt psychology and psychoanalysis, and has also attempted to couple art-historical and psychoanalytic methods in his own approach to visual materials.<sup>76</sup> Kris’ work is especially valuable for its consideration of changes of style as an accompaniment of personal crisis. But Kris—although much more sensible than his friend and colleague Sterba—is mainly concerned with distortions in art (such as caricature) or with psychotic productions and not with normal or “good” art. He does not adequately distinguish the creation of art from dressing or even from pathology, so that instead of questions of form or of artistic quality he prefers to discuss degrees of skill and intelligibility as criteria with which to diagnose mental illness.<sup>77</sup>

The efforts of Kris, and the gropings of other—mainly less successful psychoanalysts and art historians—to connect their own disciplines to others touching art, indicate a major problem: none of the approaches to art now current—even those that are effective

<sup>75</sup> The neglect of developmental processes and of sensori-motor activity in perception by the Gestalt school has been sharply criticized by Jean Piaget, *The Child’s Conception of Space*, London, 1956 (1st French ed., 1948), p. 10-245. An attempt to add dynamic concepts to the perceptual emphasis of the Gestalt psychologists was made by Loretta Bender in *A Visual-Motor Gestalt Test*, Research Monograph, 3, N.Y., 1938.

<sup>76</sup> Ernst Kris, *Psychoanalytic Explorations in Art*, N.Y., 1964, 1st ed. 1952.

<sup>77</sup> For a criticism of Kris, see J.P. Hodin, in *The Dilemma of Being Modern*, London, 1956, pp. 79-80, “E. Josephson... A Study in Schizophrenic Art. Its Formative Tendency and Social Background.” For a searching criticism of Kris’ views on the creative experience (and of post-Freudian ego-psychology in general), see E. G. Schachtel, *Metamorphosis. On the Development of Affect*, etc. N.Y., 1959, esp. p. 244.

and valuable—satisfactorily educates the student to see the work of art both as a human expression and as a visual statement. Freud's failure in his study of the *Moses* to do more than pay lip service to the formal aspects of Morelli's method is symptomatic of this problem, as are his often penetrating and imaginative, but one-sided interpretations of symbolic content. Morelli's method itself, in the opinion of Wind involves a "visual dissociation" which constitutes "an extreme case of the kind of detachment that makes our perception of art a strictly marginal experience."<sup>78</sup> As recent criticism has shown, Freud created a powerful tool for the understanding and healing of pathological conditions of depression, neurotic conflict and sexual inhibition, but one not easily applicable to joy, love or artistic creativity without some modification.<sup>79</sup> Perhaps the weakness of Freud's and some of his followers' approach to art, and of "Morelli dissociation" are aspects of a broader crisis of western society, a crisis whose bearing on art is revealed by the searching question asked thirty years ago by Gilbert and Kuhn in their excellent *History of Esthetics*: "Can we restore the pattern of the mind within which art holds its proper place and rank, neither idolized nor slighted, related to what is greatest in human life, but not arrogating to itself a false predominance?"<sup>80</sup> It seems to me that those who are attempting through collaboration to combine the psychoanalyst's insight into the artist, the art historian's perspective and the connoisseur's formal perception are essentially trying to answer that question affirmatively.

<sup>78</sup> Wind, *op. cit.*, p. 35. The general thesis of Wind's book is supported by William Barrett, "Art and Being," in *Art and Philosophy*, ed by S. Hock, N.Y., 1966, pp. 170-1.

<sup>79</sup> See Schachtel, *op. cit.*, pp. 39 ff, also pp. 242-4.

<sup>80</sup> Katherine E. Gilbert and Helmut Kuhn, *A History of Esthetics*, Bloomington, Indiana, 1954 (1st ed. 1939), p. 547. The authors ask their broad question after deploring the split in art studies between the aesthete or amateur and the scientist, both of whom had "lost contact with the esthetic knowledge of the past."