The Part and the Whole

Hubert Damisch

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Abstract

“What is the relationship between art history and its scientific subject?” Considering this question, Damisch discusses the methodological and theoretical approaches of Giovanni Morelli and Heinrich Wölfflin. Morelli was concerned with connoisseurship and attribution, while Wölfflin made a commitment to the project of a history or a “science of art” that could result in a theory of artistic evolution. It is argued that despite the obvious differences in methods, theoretical concepts, and aims, Morelli and Wölfflin shared common ground, in particular
in their emphasis on a systematic visual analysis of paintings, which considers the smallest details as symptoms of a larger system. Damisch also draws attention to the influence of Morelli’s innovative approach on Sigmund Freud’s writings.

KEYWORDS: art theory, methodologies of art history, connoisseurship, attribution, art history, Sigmund Freud, Giovanni Morelli, Heinrich Wölfflin, style, baroque, Renaissance, Titian, Raphael, Giorgione, Ruisdael

Introduction by Kent Minturn

Connoisseurship with Kunstwissenschaft? Hubert Damisch’s “The Part and the Whole,” first published in Revue d’Esthétique (1970), explores unforeseen connections between Giovanni Morelli’s innovative brand of empirical connoisseurship and Kunstwissenschaft, or the “science of art,” as practiced by Heinrich Wölfflin. Although at first the methods utilized by these two art historians seem incompatible—the former’s goal is positive attribution, to attach a specific artist’s name to a given work of art, while the latter seeks to establish a general history of art “without proper names”—Damisch demonstrates the extent to which both believed that “art must be studied in its works, not in books” and advocated the analysis of paintings based on their formal, concrete, and even materialist, attributes. Further, both paid close attention to the work’s smallest elements, and took into consideration the ways in which these details related to the whole. Secondarily, Damisch is interested in the ways in which Morelli’s revolutionary method re-formulates “in completely new terms the problem of the description, decipherment, and interpretation of the products of art” and in doing so “ushers in perhaps a new era in the history of ‘aesthetic’ perception,” which resonates with other late nineteenth-century epistemes. A full decade before Carlo Ginzburg argued for the existence of a late nineteenth-century cross-disciplinary “conjectural paradigm” in his famous article, “Morelli, Freud and Sherlock Holmes: Clues and Scientific Method” (History Workshop 9:1, Spring 1980: 5–36), Damisch broaches the subject of Morelli’s influence on Freud’s decision to focus on otherwise overlooked details “from the rubbish-heap of observation.” Indeed, Freud first read Morelli sometime between 1883 and 1895, and readily admits the impact this had on the development of psychoanalysis in his 1914 essay “The Moses of Michelangelo.” Damisch further expands on this topic in a closely related, yet still untranslated, article, “Le Gardien de l’Interpretation,” published in two parts in Tel Quel, which can be profitably read in conjunction with “The Part and the Whole.”
The Part and the Whole

Hubert Damisch

What is the subject \( l’object \) of art history? And what is art history’s relationship to its scientific subject, if indeed it can be said that this discipline—whose epistemological status remains to be determined—is in a position to define itself from its very activity, from the points of view it adopts, and the tasks that it assigns itself? The positivist illusion would maintain that the question, phrased precisely as such, makes no sense: the history of art operates on objects of study that were given to it from the outset as “works of art,” inside a domain delineated a priori (a domain of acts designated as “artistic”), and accordingly, it does not have to question its own cultural, ideological, or other conditions, which history, and in particular most recent history, would nevertheless denounce as having an always relative and illusory, if not arbitrary, character. But the very name of the discipline, given the ambiguity that is inherent to it, introduces into its field a divide whose implications go against positivist intentions. Is art history a history of artists? Is art history a history of works? These questions (which appear from the outset to be related to the repression of another question, one concerning the ideological function of what we call “art history” in our culture) give rise to positions located at two apparently contradictory poles: one that would define the point of view of the connoisseur, of the expert concerned with problems of attribution, of dating and of identification, who occupies himself with distinguishing the authentic painting from the fake, the original from the copy or the work from the studio of a certain artist, and who intends to know only those values associated with the proper name—values that are, it must be said, reassuring and marketable if the occasion presents itself. The other would correspond to the project of a history or even a science of art “without proper names” deliberately aligned with the production of a systematic theory of artistic evolution (of a history of art understood, following the Formalist project, as a succession, as the substitution of “systems”).

We would like to give a glimpse here into how the method of the connoisseur, contrary to appearances and declarations of intention, carries with it a theory and how, in its rigorous forms, the gaze that the expert brings to the works is constitutive of its subject \( object \) in the same way as the historic or scientific gaze; and how, more profoundly, a similar alliance is formed, here and there, between words and images, between saying and seeing, which determines the articulation of a discourse on art and its works and ushers in perhaps a new era in the history of “aesthetic” perception; we will reserve for another occasion the opportunity to show how this method, which as the hitherto
unacknowledged resonances that it awakened in a strategic sector of contemporary thought bear witness—notably in Freud's text—introduced in its general and actual epistemological outlook, within its limits and in its particularities, an important theoretical challenge that will have found a place in art history for almost a century, even though the discipline thought it could do without it.

The Morellian Method: Difference and Its Place

Giovanni Morelli (1816–1891), the king of the “experts,” whose writings have for a long time stirred up the equivocal demons of connoisseurship, believed himself capable, it is said, of authenticating a drawing by Correggio or of reattributing to Giorgione a painting that had previously been neglected by critics, based on the observation of certain characteristics or reputedly tiny details, which he held to be determinant: the shape of an ear, the curve of an eyelid, the base of a finger, the form of a fingernail. The writings that he produced for some of the most famous museums of Europe could easily be mistaken as treatises on comparative anatomy. His conception of the history of painting was a curious one, entirely guided by the task of denomination, and one which would expose museums, like second-rate palaces, to revolutions where the length of a nose could be of the greatest consequence in a (nothing less than subversive) game of attributions. One knows the high price the expert can expect to pay for exercising his talents: the disrepute, if not the prohibition too often hurled at theoretical thought and work, from the beginning denounced as literature or philosophy; the reduction of art history to a collection of images the prescribed form of which one could teach “connoisseurs” to make and remake at their whim. But there is better (or worse): through its bias that would make one favor the part over the whole, by the indifference that it would suppose toward the work considered in its “organic unity,” this method, founded on a technique of visual dissociation and of fragmented reading, would appear as one symptom among others of a perceptive shift that extends well beyond the field of studies on art and the romantic cult of the ruin and the fragment, as well as the maniacal taste for the detail and the unfinished, characteristic of Symbolist and decadent culture, and would be sufficient to designate its own place in history.

Is this to say that theory, that art history itself has nothing to learn, today, from the works of perhaps the most original and least reverent of experts? And yet Morelli would not have been an “expert,” had he not decided that to become an art historian it was necessary to first become a connoisseur. Contrary to Berenson’s *Rudiments of Connoisseurship*, which presents itself as a simple set of procedures to aid professionals engaged in the practice of attribution, his writings (originally published in German, under the Slavic-sounding pseudonym of Ivan Lermoljeff: as
if it had been necessary for their author to anagrammatize his name and renounce his mother tongue before taking on the hierarchy of family names by means of a supposed translation and, occasionally, a fictitious interlocutor) contain the explanation of a method that Morelli himself foresaw as appearing too materialistic (zu materialistisch, GM, p. X) for those who intend to take advantage of the silence of the works (“A painting is such a patient thing”) in order to give free rein to one’s imagination. He declared his method experimental, in the same manner as Leonardo, Galileo or Darwin’s, and one which, in its willingly Cartesian tone, breaks with the prestige of erudition and dilettantism, and would lay the groundwork for a veritable science of art, solidly established on studies “of form and detail” and the most attentive examination of the material form of paintings. This method is not only materialist, but also, we should admit, Aristotelian, since it is founded on the postulate that there can be a science of the particular, of the individual, of the concrete object: the discovery, based on a corpus of indisputable works, of those formal particularities and signs characteristic of an artistic personality that would permit one to make judgments (and then to proceed to attributions), which would have value no longer as opinions but as empirical demonstrations. And the method thus defined has nothing arbitrary or caricatural about it. If it is marked in all appearances with the stamp of a reigning positivism, one still cannot write it off as simply as a document of the period: it brings with it, in effect, as a kind of corollary, a theory of its subject [object] and of the structure of visibility, of legibility on the basis of which this subject presents itself as scientific—the connoisseur, wrote Morelli, must have philosophical flair (den sogenannten Philosophenhöcher, GB, p. 25)—a theory that is revolutionary, properly speaking, the scope of which (Freud will make no mistake about it) exceeds the field of studies on art and which, because of its orientation which is at once formalist, semiological, and analytical avant la lettre, merits our attention today.

The expert in search of rigorous attributions must surmount two obstacles, one which concerns the poor state of the conservation of the paintings which he must learn, and the other which pertains to the very nature of the artistic act; an act that Morelli will not hesitate to classify as an act of language, a language of signs (Zeichensprache), that has an original relationship with spoken language. The majority of paintings conserved in museums have been restored, often several times, and the connoisseur, far from being able to know the “physiognomy” of a painter upon seeing it, perceives in fact only the mask with which the restorer has covered the original work or, in the best case a pictorial surface more or less altered, if not disfigured. But even if a painting were to be seen in its original state, it is still the case that an artist, as exceptional as he might have been, speaks the language of his time, or else the local dialect, and it is important to distinguish with care between that which belongs to him alone, the marks specific
to his style, and those of the characteristic expressions of taste of the
time period and the school to which he belongs. The recognition of the
specific traits of “artistic temperament” (according to the terminology
favored at the time) must lead, in matters of attribution, to assured
results. It is not an easy task, however, to learn how to discern these
traits. It requires an apprenticeship that Morelli associates with learn-
ning a foreign language, which would by no means confine itself to
the understanding of a few convenient procedures for identification:
on the contrary it is in fact the responsibility of the expert to discern
from the knowledge he has of the forms common to the artists of the
same time period or from the same school, to work to reconstitute in
each case that which Morelli designates as their idiosyncrasies (eines
Künstlers Eigentümlichkeit, GM, p. 112) and to construct, using dif-
ferent artistic personalities, a group of models that authorize, by way
of the comparative method, a reasoned distribution among the works
that might appropriately be assigned to them.

Morelli therefore did not in any way claim that an expertly conducted
appraisal did not have to take into account the totality of elements that
contribute to the effect of the whole (der Totaleindruck) produced by
a painting: the conception of the landscape or the handling of the sky
which serve as the background of a certain composition, as much as the
treatment of the figures, the repertoire of symbols and techniques, the
“pictorial system” (das System der Malerei) used. The operation sup-
poses on the contrary that there are concepts produced without which
all description is reduced to a series of empty sentences and common-
places. But the analytic facts on which the science of art operates are
of different orders and surface on different levels of expression: some
correspond to the general taste of the time period or of the school (and
it is a lost cause, at this level, to claim to be able to disentangle the
game of influences and borrowings so that the development of art, as
with natural languages, takes place in an organic manner: as much of a
“connoisseur” as he was, Morelli had nothing but contempt for the bal-
let, the to and fro that art historians, since Vasari, had the artists dance
in the name of a supposed theory of influences). The others originate
from individual performance; and it is only at this level that one will
have a chance to disclose their particularities, the distinctive signs that
can aid in the identification of a painting. This rule is true in principle
only for those artists worthy of this name (worthy of a name), those
who possess a style, that is to say a mode of conception and expression
that is their own and which alone merits being considered, and not for
the majority of the imitators, those who—in the history of art as well as
in the sciences—count for nothing.

Such are the two sides of the coin Morelli gives us to consider: on
one side anonymous taste (sense) (and la langue which is the organ
of taste, the linguistic metaphor functioning like the necessary evil of
the gustative figure inscribed in the lexicon); on the other, the works
marked by the stamp of a personal style that allow themselves to be recognized and defined only by comparison, in their significant difference, and which borrow nothing from the order of expressivity (one could have imitated and sold the smiles of Leonardo’s figures; but neither pupil nor copyist would have been able to reproduce exactly the anatomic particularity that characterizes them). Between the organic process that afterwards engenders the successive epochs of art and the personal invention that constitutes its permanent source, between the inexorable path that develops the vernacular language of a school into a living totality—from its birth and first stammerings to its coherent articulation in its major works, until its decline, its final extinction—and the exemplary mark which imprints itself in exemplary productions, in short, the “genius” (and so, for the Venetian School, the work of Giorgione even more than that of Titian, which he regarded as being of a less fine “seed” [grain]). Morelli did not claim to establish a bi-univocal correspondence. It will have been enough for him to have shown how art history has its germ [germe] in the work of the connoisseur, work that, as applied to individual productions, supposes as its precondition a profound knowledge of the “languages” of art, of which the majority of historians are unaware.

The identification of characteristic traits and the elaboration of methodological procedures permitting one to distinguish between the real and the fake, between the original and the copy, appear in Morelli’s eyes to be a decisive goal. He effectively emphasizes only those works that he judged had introduced something new into the matrix of artistic evolution, to the point where one asks the question of the articulation of two complementary points of view and the levels of analysis which they demand: that of collective taste (of langue) and that of individual styles—or the problem of the role of difference and, altogether, of the field of innovation, of the change of the relationship between the order of the “system” (the “taste,” the “langue”) and that of individual acts of expression. This relationship is necessarily paradoxical, if it is true that the angle from which the question can be expressed implies that the two orders might be defined as heterologies (in the manner Saussurian linguistics, by the distinction it introduces between language and speech [langue et parole], so that the whole of language is unknowable). If there is a language of art, and if the art historian is a connoisseur first and foremost, Morelli’s text does not conclude that the germ (and nothing but the seed) of all change is to be looked for in singular works. But the fact that the productions that are explicitly designated solely as significant are to be found where collective practice, anonymous and free from expressivity, gives way to the work of style (and here once again we have only individual style, marked by a name—at least in our culture: we will return to this) and indicates on which grounds the question must be posed.
Preoccupied as he was above all with defining an experimental procedure of attribution, Morelli would not have cared about the elaboration of a formal theory that gave rise to his method. For him it will have sufficed to liken the significant to the “characteristic” and to uncover the indices upon the observation of which a painting could be assigned in complete certainty to a nominally designated artist. This could be done without looking into whether these indices distributed themselves in some arbitrary manner or if they manifested on the contrary a certain coherence, without which one would not know how to speak of style. Even less so will he have claimed to free any such philosophy of style from its relationship to individuation: of style defined as a modality of integration of the singular, of the individual, in a concrete process of production itself dependent on formal structures, if not imperative codes. And nevertheless art history as he conceived it and practiced it did not allow itself to be boiled down to a collection of names. In fact, far from surrendering to the neurosis of denomination, this connoisseur judged that it was not a correct method to allegedly pin a name to all the works that art history wants to know. Only that which is different can be distinguished: eclectic works, in proportion to the extent that they are without character, do not offer a solid starting point for the analysis of forms. Further still, some other works do not exhibit determinative elements in sufficient number: only novices in the science of art or charlatans intend to confer a nominal identity to every work gathered in a museum. The organic life of art is not to be confused with a theory (in the sense of a procession) of patronymics: but rather, it is only by starting from meticulous studies, based on the material form and the technique of production, themselves likely to be attributed to a clearly distinguished and nominally designated individual, will it be possible to define little by little without any reference to the biography of artists, art history’s scientific subject [object], its theoretical body, and to penetrate into its physiology (to use Morelli’s completely positivist term), after having first learned its anatomy.

If art should be thought of—like language itself—in terms of a game of difference, then the determination of the place of this difference takes on a decisive importance. And where will the individual reveal himself most in his singularity, in his specificity, if not where his hand breaks free of all control and reveals itself without any hindrances—convention of the school, mark of the studio, repainting or restoration—that could have constrained or obscured it? So it is that Cosimo Tura has a manner of drawing the ears and hands of his figures that belongs to him alone and by which he distinguishes himself without equivocation as a painter distinct from another one otherwise very close to him, such as Lorenzo Costa. Thus among the well-represented characteristic traits of Botticelli are bony and elongated hands, down to the black-polished squarish fingerprints. It is further still, to stay with the topic at hand—an essential topic if it is true that the hand is, after the face, the most individualized
part of the human body, the most significant in its form, that which only the greatest artists represent in a satisfying manner, each one of them having, so to speak, his own “type” of hands that constitutes one of the most certain trademarks of his “hand.” 

So the hands painted by Raphael furnish a good index of his style, from those of the bourgeois appearance, “domesticated,” with the large and flat palm and the short and fat fingers of his beginnings, to the aristocratic hand, or in other words the *ideal* that denoted his Roman period (and in the same way the ear for him is always distinctive). But the attention thus given to details does not imply in any way—to reiterate—that Morelli ignored the whole of the work in favor of arbitrarily privileging its parts. He simply decided that it was necessary not only to pay attention to the merits of an artist, to those aspects that most often escape observation and barely lend themselves to demonstration, and especially to his habits, his tics, even to his most visible faults (to a material impropriety to which he is accustomed, to a certain graphical error), and to focus on these reoccurring lapses throughout his production.

A good example of this is offered by a purely material *sign* but one which Morelli considered very characteristic of Titian (*eines der charakteristischsten Merkmale*) having observed it in more than fifty authenticated works of this painter: the hands of the masculine figures painted by his brush offered indeed a particularity wherein the base of the thumb would be abnormally developed with the finger itself appearing as a simple excrescence. This is an error, writes Morelli, that any student or copyist would have tried to avoid. Yet it is precisely in such marks, or lapses, strangers to the order of expressivity, that the individual would betray himself unexpectedly.

It is the same in the majority of men who have, when they speak as well as when they write, their favorite words and phrases and their habits of language that they introduce without paying attention and often without justification, indeed sometimes in an improper way, so it is for each painter who has his specific mannerisms that issue forth without him knowing.

But this is not to say that the task of attribution as Morelli understood it implies a return to the ordinary process of aesthetic perception: wherein the viewer is satisfied with an impression of the whole, from the perspective which takes from a painting only the most apparent structures, the most immediately recognizable figures, and the message that is proposed to him in a pictorial manner, the expert will be drawn instead to indices of another order. For him, nothing is more misleading than the impression of the whole, wherein the critic sees the norm of all aesthetic perception. While it permits the geographical localization of a painting, and the establishment of the school to which it belongs, cognitive intuition would not suffice to decide on its author. And the
same goes for written sources that only have, in this field [en la matière], a supplementary value. For the connoisseur, the work itself, and more profoundly the detail of the characteristic forms one can discover therein, constitute in final analysis the only valid evidence.29 As in graphology where the analysis is based less on the contents of the messages that are given to be read than on the scriptural traits by which the “character” unwittingly betrays himself, the connoisseur will neglect the components of the works that he shows to reveal a code or a system of collective norms in favor of considering the elements that are the least likely to have been elaborated or falsified within the canons of a school.30 It is here, through the network more or less constricted by the conventional rules that preside over the composition, over the arrangement of the figures, over the distribution of the colors, to the play of attitudes and expressions, that the sense of the form specific to an individual will unmask itself. It appears, for example, in the least deliberate recesses of the hands because they seem the least significant; in a certain habit or quirk of writing, in a tic or pictorial embellishment, in a morphological anomaly—it is possible to find in these trifles, by one who knows how to see without letting himself be deceived by the most immediate outstanding aspects of the painting, the veritable invariants of a style.

Figure 1

Connoisseurship and Kunstwissenschaft: Style and Its Marks

The theoretical implications of Morelli’s method will appear more evident when considered in the context of those of Wölfflin. It is true that
nothing could be more foreign to a patron of a history of art “without proper names” (Kunstgeschichte ohne Namen) than the stubbornness that propelled Morelli to make an inventory of the indices of a personality (as if painting were nothing but vanity as long as the author does not reveal himself under the guise of a proper name). The singular works, even those of an artist or of a school, if they retained his attention, it was less by their originality, or their specific difference, than by their “common optical denominator” by which they allow one to glimpse the general forms of representation (die allgemeinsten Darstellungsformen) and those which obey the productions of the same period of art.

Nevertheless, by the emphatic insistence on the intimate detail and the texture of the works, in contrast also to its differentiation between form and expression, Wölfflin’s method is not without similarity to Morelli’s. It is not so much that the author of The Fundamental Principles (more accurately translated: Concepts) of Art History claimed that the art of the Flemish landscape painters completely revealed itself in the distribution of the foliage, the structure of a wall, or the plaiting of a basket, typical of a painting from this school, or likewise that the contour of a nostril appeared for him sufficient to disclose the specific character and, at the same time, an individual style, of that of Botticelli or of Lorenzo di Credi.³¹ For one cannot ignore that, far from opposing the part to the whole and claiming to rediscover in the lacunae of the conventional text of art the traces (the vestiges) of another text that would escape its norms and perhaps contradict it, Wölfflin affirmed to the contrary that “style” should manifest itself as much in the details of the works as in their wholes. Such an observation did not have for him any meaning or validity unless it could be generalized.³² It remains no less than the project of a history of art founded on the examination of the “the smallest parts” (eine Kunstgeschichte der kleinsten Teile) and on a mode of fragmentary analysis which was to have, in the end, found its conclusion in a veritable Atlas of Forms (Formenatlas)—collected for the purpose of comparing the diverse varieties of the representation of hands, of branches or clouds, lines in the grain of wood, as were evinced in the history of painting.³³ Such a project carries with it a certain number of questions that one is justified in posing, which touch on the foundations of the connoisseur’s method as defined by Morelli.

The hypothesis that is from the beginning central to Wölfflin’s analyses is itself anything but original. To declare, as he did even in his original dissertation on the psychology of architecture, that the essence of the Gothic style was as much manifest in a piece of clothing (a poulaine slipper, taken as an index of a style characteristic of the man of this period) as it was in a cathedral³⁴ returned to modulate in psychologizing language a previously postulated position. This was the theory of Einfühlung [empathy], which Viollet-le-Duc, in his time, had proposed for the concept of style to account in systematic terms for the most general traits of thirteenth-century art. Style is the manifestation of an ideal established on a principle and developed in such a way that there exists
between the different expressions an agreement, a harmony, a necessary link. Importantly, this link should be established not only to relate the productions of the same time period to a “model” (in the epistemological sense) and to common principles, but also to reconstruct the most salient traits of a structure upon seeing any one of its individual elements, in the same manner that Cuvier intended to deduce the entire plant or animal from an isolated leaf or bone. In the same way, the mature Wölfflin will be able to state in strictly structural terms the question of the differential relationship between the elements of a plastic or architectural composition, either that the unity of this one adapts (as the classical order would demand) to a relative autonomy of parts or that it implies their subordination to a privileging motif (as will be the case in baroque art). The formula of the Prolegomena is related to a more elementary epistemological level: it did not aim for the articulation of homogeneous elements inside a constituted whole but rather brought together two heterogeneous objects taken as representative, in different respects, of the same style of the period. It is this, then, that was of concern for the young historian who recommended focusing our gaze on objects, on figures as free as possible of all emotive resonance, on a simple vestimentary accessory which appeared to him, by its very insignificance, to lend itself better to a formal characterization than a cathedral. We would be tempted now to discuss this assertion and to recognize in an object something that is less governed by style (in the sense that Wölfflin means it) than by fashion [la mode] with its strong expressive connotation. But if the Prolegomena had mostly psychological implications, that did not diminish its ability to foresee the central thesis of formalism as it would be articulated, thirty years later, in The Principles of Art History: it is not so much the “material” of styles that is of continued importance to the historian, but a deeper layer of concepts that relate to the very history of “vision,” to the form of representation as such.

The scientific history of art would commence at the point where one recognizes that even the most inventive of artists composes according to his “temperament” alone and adapts to his own ends the general form of representation which stands as the art of his time, just as those who speak relate to language. The evolution of the vision of the classical type to the baroque type no longer refers to any exterior determinants (the appearance of new “contents”), but rather it is the result of free differentiations. If this is so, then it would seem that the points of view of Wölfflin and Morelli are not incompatible, both having claimed to situate, to localize theoretically the distance between the collective norm and individual practices, between convention and invention. Moreover, the etymology would justify accentuating the link between Kunstwissenschaft and connoisseurship: because if Wölfflin was able to write that the prodromes of a new style, its “birthplace” needed to be looked for in the spirit of the times, the formal sensibility
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will be found (if we are to believe him) most evidently,\textsuperscript{38} in the minor arts, ornamental figures, decor, calligraphy ("style," from the Latin \textit{stilus}, a pointed object, an awl serving to trace lines, and by metonymy the work of the st(i)le, the manner, the language of an author), in contrast, Morelli claimed to discover at the extremes of major forms of art, the marginal lacunae where the "character"—which he assimilated to style\textsuperscript{19}—betrayed itself unexpectedly and escaped the network of agreed upon rules ("character," from the Greek \textit{χαραχτηρ}, he who engraves or the instrument for so doing; an engraved or distinctive sign, an imprint, an inscription; the engraved \textit{name} under a bust or on a tomb). Both will be applied to the register of marks, the trademarks of the (or of a) \textit{style}. But this is not to say that the concept has here and elsewhere the same reach, nor that the analyses which it demands be of the same type.

Indeed, while Morelli did not question on the register of generalities the viability of the analogy he established between spoken language and the language of signs—to which, according to him, painting belonged, it is remarkable that when it came to the concrete, material analysis of the works, he only utilized the concept of style in one very strict sense: far from enabling him to rediscover the totality of the productions of a time period or of a school (the Gothic style, the Florentine style), the word served to mark the work of an individual who appeared to break away from the insignificances of serial production. There is no style, for Morelli, that is not individual; the concept denotes at once a gap, a specific difference, and the quality of a form that confers to a work its singular value. In no case would it apply to a given period of art, the specificity of which can only be translated in terms of \textit{taste}. The distinction between \textit{characteristic} and \textit{insignificant} productions, the game calculated on the figures of \textit{taste} and on \textit{la langue} (sense/organ), the very narrow reach assigned to the concept of style (which contrasts with the central position that art history will soon confer on this notion): such are the many theoretical oppositions that are sufficient to indicate the distance between Morelli’s undertaking and Wölfflin’s.

The opposition negotiated between collective taste and individual styles allows us therefore to affirm that Morelli recognized in the "\textit{langue}" the final goal [\textit{object}] not of the \textit{history}, but of the \textit{science of art}, just as he took as a norm the manifestations that the connoisseur, and the art historian after him, would have to study.

I would like to recommend the study of all the individual parts that constitute the form of a work of art (\textit{alle der einzelnen Teile welche die Form eines Kunstwerk bilden}) to all those who will not be satisfied speaking as dilettantes but rather will want to know the pleasure of penetrating, with hatchet and sickle in hand, into the thick undergrowth of the history of art, and to achieve, if it is possible, a science of art. Because just as there exists a written language, there also exists a language that expresses itself by
means of forms (Denn wie es eine Schriftsprache gibt, so gibt es auch eine Sprache, die sich durch Formen ausdrückt). 40

Just as an infant succeeds in making himself understood by gestures and stammerings, the overall impression produced by a work will suffice to satisfy the public at large; “but no one will be in the position of completely understanding and savoring a work if he is not already familiar with the language through which art expresses itself.” 41 The historian is therefore placed in a methodological circle, if it is true that one can learn the diverse languages of art history only through contact with individual works and, in turn, a knowledge of the language a work “speaks” gives access to that which it contains most characteristically and permits judgment of the respective contribution of the various artists when it comes to invention or choice of subject, to the representation of forms, to the harmony of colors. 42 Vasari would never have written that Dürer, had he been born south of the Alps, would have been Raphael’s equal, if he [Vasari] had taken care to compare point by point the works of these two painters. 43 The comparison, in fact, would have made apparent “the angular” as one of the characteristic traits of the art of Dürer and would have permitted the best explanation of it. But this same trait can serve to characterize not only the work of Dürer but also the art of the fifteenth century in its entirety. And he who wishes to fully appreciate the style of a Raphael, of a Titian, of a Correggio, must have familiarized himself beforehand with “the angular” masters and obsolete fashions of the quattrocento, and to have learned to converse in spirit with them. 44 But how can we not see that Morelli introduces here, under trappings that are admittedly not very systematic or elaborate, the rough outline of what will appear in Wölfflin as one of the categorical poles between which the guessing game of the art of the Western Renaissance would be played (linear as opposed to painterly)? From Dürer to Correggio, the difference does not come down to a series of individualistic marks: it throws itself plainly into relief only at the level of the language which their productions speak; but if it is necessary for the connoisseur to learn to discern the signs through which an artistic personality allows itself be identified, this is not to say that one can hope to isolate the characteristic ways of a painter (which only ever have the value of indices) in order to constitute the system. For this would only be a slightly perverse fiction, akin to the notion called idiolect by Roman Jakobson, as advanced by certain linguists, which designates all the habits that characterize the speech of an individual to the exclusion of all that he refers to or borrows from the language of others. 45 Perverse as well are the comments of the connoisseur in a number of respects. But we can only conclude from this that art history, which here finds its germ (and nothing more, once again, than its seed), draws the line at such similar fantasies.
It remains true, nevertheless, that Morelli created a very original notion about the relation between the whole and the parts of a painting and that he introduced into art historical studies the beginning of a scandal (a perverse one), which is important not to ignore. It is not necessary to insist, as did Morelli himself, on the paradoxical, if not truly scandalous character of a method of attribution founded on indices apparently so derisory that it implies a radical questioning of the notions of “art,” of “work of art,” of “artist,” of “creation,” etc. But there is more: by the intermittent mode of reading that it imposes, this method breaks with the ideology—this is much less perverse—which would have it that a painting is the subject of an instantaneous epiphany—of a revelation. For there is a suspicion that leads us to see a rupture, that is to say a possible contradiction between the universal message and the particular information that the image conveys. It makes evident, beyond the manifest order of the representation, the indications of a latent game of contrary determinations that allow traits foreign to the order of expressivity to burst through, and at the same time cancel their formal alliances. And yet it is precisely here that the concept of style, as Wölfflin understands the word, does not permit reflection. In spite of the division that it introduces between the order of the form and that of the expression, The Principles of Art History still depends in fact on the category of expression. The point that Wölfflin made about the relation between the whole and the parts of a work relates in effect to the Hegelian tradition of the expressive totality, as Althusser perfectly defined it: an expressive totality in which the different parts are as much as the parts in total, each as expressive as the totality they contain. If the explication of the work is no longer looked for in its “contents,” the essence of the formal sensibility that characterizes an artist is perceptible in the slightest detail of his productions as much as in the work grasped as a whole: a branch, or a fragment of a branch is sufficient to distinguish the hand of Ruisdael from that of Hobbema: each part appears as a container in itself, under the immediate form of its expression, the essence of the totality.

That a painting, or the whole of an artist’s productions, even those of a school or of a time period, should be conceived of as so many expressive totalities does not, however, exclude that a contradiction can make itself known between the whole and the parts, between the ensemble envisioned as such and the details through which it allows itself to be understood. The Wölfflin of Renaissance and Baroque (1888), who set himself to the task of rediscovering in the most accomplished creations of the Renaissance—from Raphael to Michelangelo—the anticipatory signs of a new style, practiced in his own way a mode of symptomatic reading which can be defined as semiological. For semiology is not only the science of which Saussure spoke, which studies the life of signs at the heart of social life. In its medical use, the term must encompass a variety
of signs—symptoms—of which the value is itself relative, differential, bound to the constitution of a grammar or descriptive code that also includes the signs of “health” and those of “disease.” And if the baroque is born from the dissolution of classical form, then the pathological connotation that Wölfflin, following his contemporaries, believed possible to attach to it from its particularities, should come as no surprise. One understands that when the opportunity presents itself, the systematic search for symptoms takes on the allure of a clinical inquiry proceeding from the detail to the ensemble, from the part to the whole, from the sign to the system, for the purposes of moving from a configuration of given traits to the new form it will take.48

Quite different are the comments in The Principles of Art History (1911) and also the goal to which the fragmentary analyses that illustrate its argument respond. It is no longer of concern for Wölfflin to describe a historical process but rather to produce the theoretical schema through which the evolution from the “classical” to the “baroque,” can be understood and explained, the comparison of two types, two completed wholes (Typus mit Typus zu vergleichen, das Fertig mit dem Fertigen). But the “baroque,” considered more as a concept than as an empirical reality, is no less tied to the “classical” by a logical connection. The passage from the one to the other is in no way reversible, each of the categories that define the idea of the baroque represents the negation of the corresponding classical category (linear/painterly, plane/recession, closed/open form, multiplicity/unity, etc.). One could not assume, consequently, that the baroque norm does not borrow from the margins of the transgression, and this is not only in a historical perspective, with regard to the classical order, but in the same methodological field, the “painterly” conception contradicts in principle, it would seem, a project of an “art history of the smallest units.”

And how to proceed then to an analysis—ultimately, how to describe?—that point where art gives up separating forms, isolating them, delimiting them, and surrenders to a movement that extends itself to all the elements in the composition, where the impression of the whole appears to dominate without recourse to the perception of the detail?49 From one expressive totality (the “classical” work) to the other (the “baroque” work), the relation between the whole and the parts is radically modified. But, paradoxically, this modification makes only more relevant the mode of symptomatic reading applied to the works, which themselves have value as indicators.50 The linear style satisfies the need to distinguish precisely between objects: Holbein painted ruffles and jewels in their finest detail; the painterly style appears to recreate only that which strikes the passing glance: for a lace collar, Franz Hals makes a simple whitish gleam; it is enough for him that the viewer be persuaded of the existence of details; imprecise as they may be.51 So the “baroque” defines itself as such, in its positivity, from a double distance: a distance in relation to the norms of classical vision to which it confers,
by its negation of them, in high relief; and a distance in relation to a norm of reading that seems better adapted to classical works, but which the theoretician of the baroque continues to apply to his field in such a manner that the stylistic transformation which shows itself in the work of Hals (or others) appears, as an effect of deliberate contrast, in its high relief. As if the analysis did not necessarily have to follow the paths that the work itself delineates nor adhere to the principles of the reading which it claims to impose; as if the formal, fragmented approach preserved itself, its theoretical efficiency, even when a universal vision is aesthetically required; as if, when the effect of the whole is deliberately looked for, this itself had to be the object of a symptomatic reading, attentive to the condition of the detail; and to the perspective of the work as a whole which, as soon as it lets itself go back to an effect (a produced effect), appears in turn as a sign, an index, which demands to be interrogated, deciphered, and interpreted as such.

In this way the distance between the respective positions of Morelli and of Wölfflin is radically diminished as soon as one arrives at the concrete analyses, whereas their enterprise reveals itself then for what it is: an effort to directly consider products of art themselves, in their concrete, material reality. In this return to the works, Morelli will assert many times the necessity of examining, in terms that are not open for discussion, at least for the productions that are intimately linked to our culture (die mit unserer eigenen Cultur im innigsten Zusammenhang stehen), the only ones that we can fully understand (because they are the only works to which we can pin a name, unlike those, anonymous works, by the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Egyptians, etc.?). Art must be studied in its works, not in books, and this study is not in line with psychology or the history of ideas, any more than it is with aesthetics: this assertion, continually restated, suffices to make Morelli, and in the same way Wölfflin, one of the initiators of the theory, itself of an inspiration so completely positivist, that the Russian Formalists were to designate it as the “theory” of the “Formal method.” Beyond the theoretical difference shown by the inventory of functions assigned in their respective works to the concept of style, a similar conversion of the gaze appears in both Morelli and Wölfflin, which will bring them to formulate in some completely new terms the problem of the description, decipherment, and interpretation of the products of art. No longer in terms of contemplation, reverie, and erudition, but rather in terms of work, analysis, and production: the analytic task implies the substitution for the false depths of intuition with a systematic engagement with the levels of reading: a reading that will proceed to a closer engagement with the pictorial surface, until it produces, through its own development, a space, if not a conceptual arena, where the question of style and form will find enunciation outside of any reference to the order of expressivity, in strictly theoretical terms, which is to say—in the sense that Morelli would have wanted it—materialist.
**Translator's Notes**

(b) In French, as in English, “tongue,” *la langue*, connotes both the body part and spoken language.

**Notes**

4. Morelli’s first work (on the Borghese Gallery) appeared from 1874 to 1876, in the *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst*. In 1880, Morelli published in Leipzig a revision, under the title: *Die Werke italienischer Meister in den Galerien von München, Dresden und Berlin. Ein kritischer Versuch von Ivan Lermoljéff, aus dem Russischen übersetzt von Dr Johannes Schwartz*. In 1890 there appeared, preceded by an important theoretical introduction in the form of a dialog, the first volume of *Kunstkritische Studien über italienische Malerei. Die Galerien Borghese und Doria Pamphili in Rom*, and in 1893, Gustav Frizzoni published the final volume, *Die Galerie zu Berlin*, to which he added a biography of Morelli. The two final volumes add some important modifications to the first edition. We will cite from the work consecrated to the German museums after the edition of 1800 (*GM*) and the one consecrated to the Italian galleries after the edition of 1890 (*GB*). One should consult with equal interest the correspondence between Morelli and J. P. Richter, *Italienische Maler der Renaissance in Briefwechsel von Giovanni Morelli und Jean-Paul Richter, 1876–1891* (Baden-Baden, 1960).
5. Morelli, *GB*, p. 18, “*Um Kunsthistoriker zu werden, muss man vor allem Kunstkenner sein.*”
6. Morelli, *GM*, p. 157, “*In ein so geduldiges Ding, wie eine Gemälde ist.*”
8. Morelli, *GM, avant-propos*, p. IX, “I quickly arrived at the conclusion that there are few things to learn about art in books,” ibid.
10. Morelli, *GM*, p. 4, “The relation between articulated language (*Lautsprache*) and the language of signs (*Zeichensprache*) or, more specifically, between spoken language and the language of painting or sculpture, between the form in which the same spirit expresses itself by way of articulated language and the one through which it
expresses itself and allows itself to be understood in art—this relation, I say, between one and the other mode of expression is not peripheral or accidental: it is part of its original nature (nicht etwa äusserlicher, sondern ursächlicher Natur)."

12. Morelli, GM, p. 3, “In the same way that the acquisition of a foreign language demands time and effort, the eye itself, like the tongue, demands a very long practice to learn how to see correctly.”
21. Morelli, GB, p. 57, “Nur Neulinge in der Kunstwissenschaft oder Charlatane wissen jedem Kunstwerk einen Namen zu geben.” Cf. the letter to Jean-Paul Richter of November 9, 1877, where Morelli advises his correspondent not to succumb to the craze to give a name to each and every work (die Manie, allen Bildern gleich einen Namen geben zu wollen), op. cit., p. 17.
28. Morelli, GB, p. 94, “Wie die meisten Menschen, sowohl die redenden als die schreibenden, beliebte Worte und Phrasen, angewöhnte Redensarten haben, die sie, ohne dessen sich zu verstreuen, absichtslos oft anbringen, und nicht selten auch da, wo sie gar nicht hingehören, so hat auch fast jeder Maler solche angewöhnte Manieren, die er zur Schau trägt und die ihm gleichsam entschüpfen, ohne dass er derselben gewahr ist.”
30. Morelli, _GB_, p. 95, “He who wants to study a painter more precisely and intimately must fix his gaze on these trivial things, those which a specialist of calligraphy would use to identify forgeries.”


33. Heinrich Wölfflin, _The Sense of Form in Art: A Comparative Psychological Study_, trans. Alice Muehsam and Norma A. Shatan (New York: Chelsea Publishing Company, 1958), pp. 3–4. “Zeichnerische Parallelen von Hand und Hand, Wolke und Wolke, Zweig und Zweig bis hinunter zur Zeichnung der Maserlinien in Holz—eine Kunstgeschichte der kleinsten Teile. Doch das ergäbe einen Formenatlas für sich,” _Italien und das deutsche Formgefühl_, Munich 1931, Vorwort, pp. V–VI. Translated as: “It would be desirable, of course, to be able to base such investigations to a still greater extent on single formal details, with comparisons of designs of hands, of clouds, of branches, down to the design of the grain of wood—an art history of the smallest parts. But this would result in a veritable atlas of forms.”


37. Wölfflin, _Principles_, p. 259, “Of course, art has presented, throughout time, very different subjects but this is not enough to explain the variations which took place in the modes of their appearance; it is the language itself, which was transformed in its grammar and syntax. And not only because it was spoken differently in different places…but because it evolved in its entirety in a manner which belongs to it alone, and which a certain form of expression exceeded only a few general possibilities.”


39. Cf. Morelli, _GB_, p. 94: “The character, or style (Der Character oder Stil) of a work of art is produced at the same time as the idea, or more precisely stated, it is the idea of the artist that engenders the form and consequently conditions the character, or style. The copyists (Copisten) absolutely do not have any character or style, because it is not their own idea which, in their works, creates the form.”

41. Morelli, GB, pp. 96–97.
42. Morelli, GB, p. 13.
47. Wölfflin, Principles, p. 6.
48. Heinrich Wölfflin, Renaissance et Baroque (1967), pp. 40–42, “The analysis of the form will show the whole of the symptoms which constitute the baroque and those which only afterwards one will be able to discover their source…to find these symptoms, this is our task…After 1520 there is no longer a single pure work. Already appearing here and there are harbinger signs of a new style: they multiply, until they take over, and influence those that follow: the baroque style is born.”
49. Wölfflin, Renaissance et baroque, pp. 22–23.
51. Wölfflin, Renaissance et baroque, p. 25.
52. Morelli, GB, pp. 21–23.
53. Morelli, GM, “L’École d’Ombrie.” In its works, which is to say in those principally in museums, and in terms of art history’s dependence on the museum, to its (linear) space, to its (nominal) order, this cannot be emphasized enough. The “connoisseur” works on art already in the book of culture, art which provides the substance for notices, etiquettes and catalogs; art which also makes it, since Stendhal, the province of tourism: to understand Perugino, it is necessary, according to Morelli, to have in one’s head the sound of the voice of the women of Perugia and a recollection of the vertiginous views which appear in its streets and its chateau above the surrounding valley.