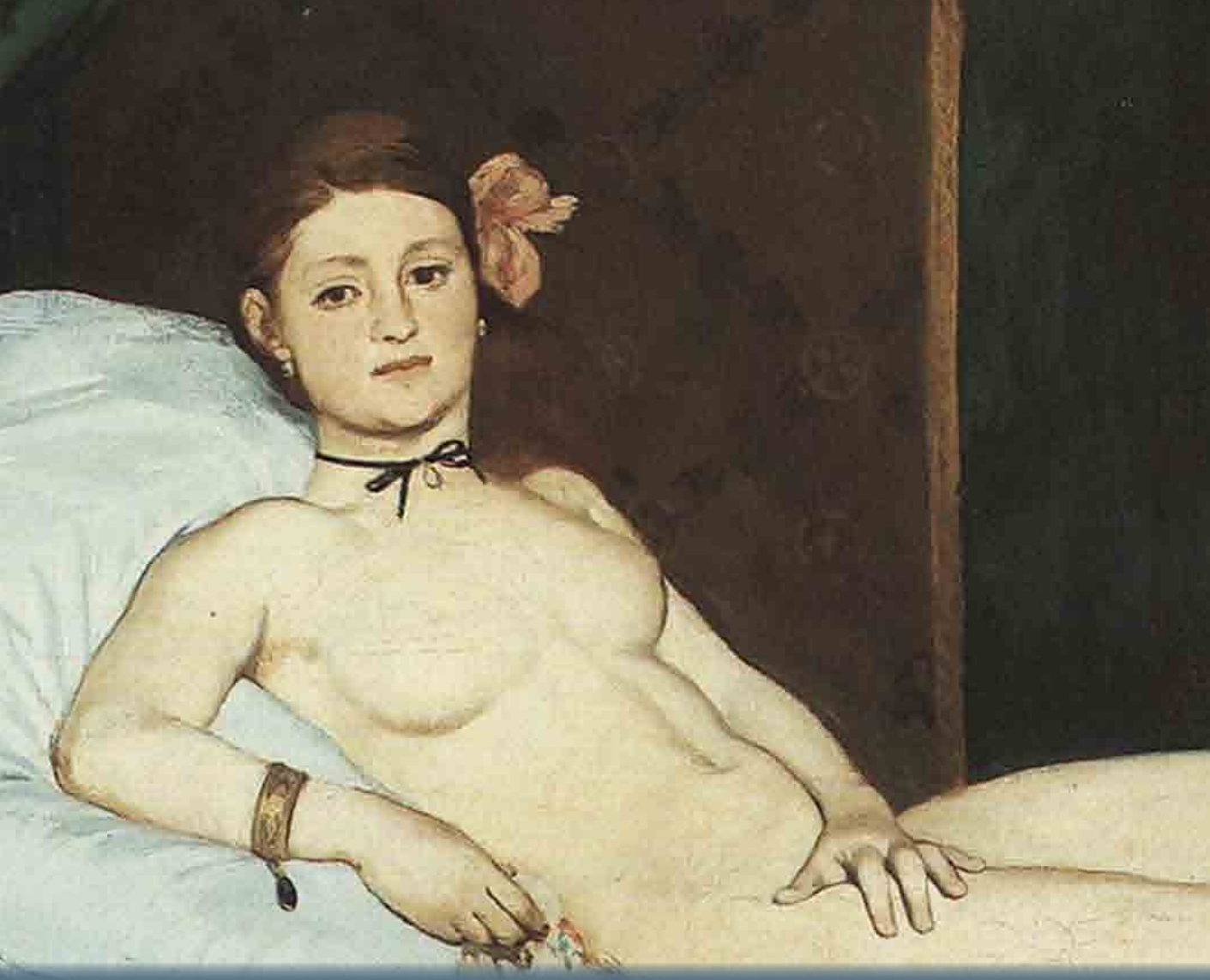

Jeanne Wolff Bernstein

THE LURE OF THE GAZE AND THE PAST

A Psychoanalytic Exploration of Édouard Manet's Works

Photo @ Marnie Wilkinson

Jeanne Wolff Bernstein, Ph. D., lives and works as a psychoanalyst in Vienna. She is Vice President of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Association, former President of the Psychoanalytic Institute of Northern California (PINC) and Chair of the Scientific Advisory Board of the Sigmund Freud Museum in Vienna. She teaches at the Vienna Psychoanalytic Association, the New York University Postdoctoral Program for Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy and she is on the faculty at PINC.

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A Psychoanalytic View of the Works of Édouard Manet

This book examines the works of the French painter Édouard Manet from an exciting and innovative perspective. As the primary tool for her analytic approach to understanding the enigmatic relationship between artist, painting and viewer, psychoanalyst Jeanne Wolff Bernstein has chosen Freud's essay *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905), in which the teller of a joke calls upon the audience to complete it through an absent but imagined third person. Wolff Bernstein argues that in much the same way, Manet incorporates the unconscious processes of his spectators to complete the scenes portrayed on his canvases. Drawing upon Jacques Lacan's theory about the gaze and the mirror stage, she suggests that viewers typically project aspects of themselves and their own desires into the painting they are looking at. Unlike traditional painters who privileged the position of spectators by inviting or excluding them from the painted spectacle, Manet regularly unsettled the viewers' identificatory longings, subverting their passive gaze by luring them into scenes of ambiguity. This in turn made them aware of the voyeuristic role in which they had been engaged.

In contrast to standard psycho-biographic approaches that tend to neglect the artworks themselves and use them merely as clues to delve into the artist's unconscious, the author develops a psychoanalytic pictorial analysis of Manet's oeuvre which emphasizes his painterly genealogy rather than his personal past. In this way, three distinct perspectives are combined: the personal, the historical and the viewers' own identificatory processes, leading to a new understanding of Manet's work.

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Édouard Manet (1832–1883) was a French modernist painter. He was one of the first 19th-century artists to paint modern life, as well as a pivotal figure in the transition from Realism to Impressionism.
Although his own work influenced and anticipated the Impressionist style, Manet resisted being a leader of the Realist and Impressionist movement.

»I am influenced by everybody.«
Éduard Manet

»Our fathers mocked Courbet, and now we go into ecstasies before him. We mock Manet and it will be our children who go into ecstasies before his canvases.« Emile Zola

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Page 221: Pablo Picasso, *A Parody of Manet's Olympia with Junyer and Picasso* (1902) © Succession Picasso/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn, 2024
Page 221: Judy Fox, *Olympia* (1996/2001). Photo by Frank Bergund

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Contents

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Jeanne Wolff Bernstein
Vienna, January 2025

Abstract

This book examines the works of the French painter Édouard Manet from a psychoanalytic perspective. Unlike standard psychobiographic approaches that tend to neglect the artworks themselves and instead use them merely as clues to delve into the artist's unconscious, this treatise develops a psychoanalytic pictorial analysis through an exploration of Manet's oeuvre from three distinct viewpoints: personal, historical, and identificatory.

Rather than speculate about the artist's childhood experiences, this treatise matches the available biographical data against the paintings in which Manet frequently posed relatives and friends as models, and adopts the psychoanalytic technique of a dream or joke analysis to study the relationship between the painterly depictions and the biographic descriptions of the figures portrayed.

Manet's references to Old Masters are interpreted as memories from his painterly heritage. Comparing the techniques used in painting with those of the joke-work compresses a multiplicity of such references into a single work achieved through condensation, displacement, and indirect representation. In this way, Manet's recontextualizations of traditional sources are discussed in terms of the artist's personal interpretation of his era's painterly genealogy. This technique reveals how Manet's expression of the contradictions inherent to his epoch subtly veiled his criticism of the world around him.

For the analysis of the artist-painting-spectator relationship, the primary model is Freud's essay "Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious" (1905), whereby the joker calls upon his audience to complete a joke regarding a third figure: here the artist implicates the viewer's unconscious processes to complete the scene portrayed in the canvas. Much like the way an infant identifies with the mirrored representation of their own or their mother's body, the viewers seek aspects of themselves and their desires in the painting before

them. This book will show how, unlike traditional painters, who tend to invite or exclude the spectator from the painted spectacle, Manet unsettles his viewer's identificatory desires by drawing them in and out of the scene depicted, thereby making them aware of the process in which they are engaged. Together, the three perspectives open a new domain for psychoanalytic studies in art, suggesting a methodology that can expand the interpretive techniques of both psychoanalytic and art-historical discussions of painting.

Introduction

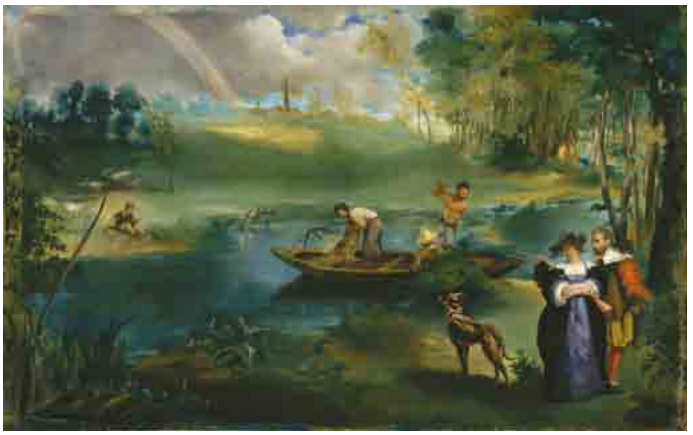
Art historians and psychoanalysts alike have lamented and criticized the paucity of psychoanalytical contribution to the field of aesthetics. Following in Freud's footsteps, many psychoanalysts have relied upon highly speculative psycho-biographies to interpret a given painter's artwork. This line of approach not only raises the question of whether such a transposition can be affected with sufficient methodological rigor, but also whether it delivers any significant insights into the artwork itself.

Such standard psychoanalytic biographies have been used largely as a pretext for clinical studies of particular personalities and have shed scarcely any significant light upon the artworks themselves.

Does this mean that psychoanalytic criticism cannot make a significant contribution to the realm of aesthetics? The answer is clearly "no," as this treatise on Édouard Manet will show.

Using Freud's "Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood" (1910) as the primary model for aesthetic psychoanalytic investigations, post-Freudians have more or less shunned other crucial texts by Freud, despite the fact that these could have offered an alternative approach to painting than the psycho-biographic model. Consequently, as an object the artwork has been indicated merely as a clue for the psychological portrait of a painter.

A strictly pictorial analysis can only be undertaken if one sheds the constraints of a psycho-biographic approach, and instead consults texts like Sigmund Freud's "The Interpretation of Dreams" (1900); "Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious" (1905); "Delusions and Dreams in Jensen's Gradiva" (1907); and "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" (1908). In conjunction with writings by Jacques Lacan and D.W. Winnicott, in addition to different sources drawn from the world of art history, sociology, and semiotics, these texts form the wider body of writings which have enabled me to undertake a largely pictorial analysis of Édouard Manet's work.



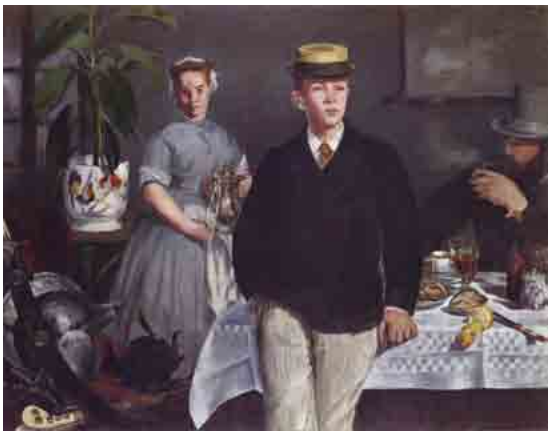


Plate 1:
Édouard Manet,
La Pêche (1861–1863)
Plate 2:
Édouard Manet,
Le Déjeuner dans l'atelier
(1868)

It is no coincidence that I have selected Manet's oeuvre: his paintings irresistibly invite a psychoanalytic study precisely because they raise fundamental issues relevant to the analytical field of study such as the process of identification, the constitution of the subject through the Other, the status of the subject/interpreter in relation to the Other, the production of meaning, and the search into the past for an understanding of the present. In contrast to traditional aesthetic psychoanalytic examinations, which attempt to unlock a painting's unique hidden meanings, this book proposes that layers of meaning are continually created and re-created through a dialectical relationship between the painter, the painted object, and the spectator. In this relationship, a painting shares key characteristics with the structure of the spoken joke. For a joke to achieve its desired outcome, there also has to be a joker, along with the object of the joke, and not least a listener. While the common elements linking a painting with a joke will be discussed at greater length in Chapter I, it is important to note from the outset that I will use the same methods to explain Manet's paintings that Freud established in his research into humor in "Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious" (1905) and in "The Interpretation of Dreams" (1900).

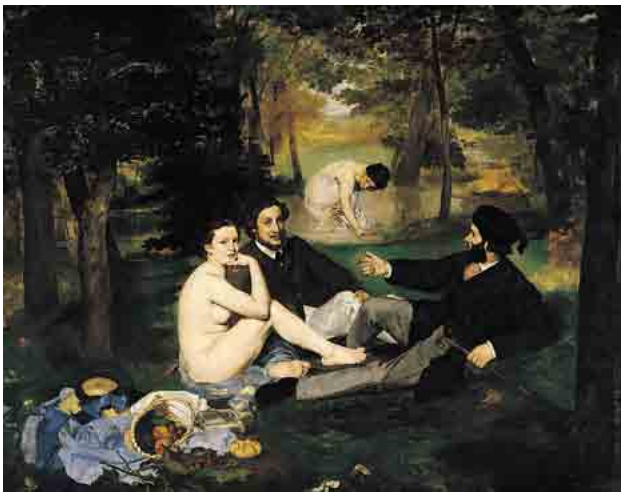
In Chapter II, I will examine the principal details of Édouard Manet's life and artistic career. As I embarked on my research into the life of Manet, a few biographical oddities emerged. Recent research has revealed an indecipherable relationship between Manet

and his alleged godson, Léon Édouard Koëlla Leenhoff. Was he Édouard Manet's son born out of wedlock, or was he instead his half-brother, the product of an alleged affair between his father and the then unmarried piano-teacher Suzanne Leenhoff, who would later become Édouard's wife? Léon's paternity has never been definitively resolved, and even his maternity was left cryptic since his mother Suzanne Leenhoff declared him to be "her younger brother" and only acknowledged him as her son in 1906, shortly before her own death. Notably, Léon Leenhoff appears as Manet's model in no less than seventeen of the painter's 420 works, but two of these in particular, *La Pêche* (1861–1863) **[Plate 1]** and *Le Déjeuner dans l'atelier* (1868) **[Plate 2]**, might shed some light on Léon's elusive parenthood.

Meanwhile, Manet's paintings themselves constitute a major source for our psychological portrait of the artist, along with the many anecdotes narrated by his friends and contemporaries, letters written by him, and reviews of his works. Since Manet was in the habit of getting family members and friends to model for his paintings, the artworks themselves offer insights into Manet's private and social life. However, in order to situate Manet squarely in his epoch, we also need to look at the social environment in which he grew up and worked as an artist. By contextualizing our investigation we can reflect not only upon socio-historical events, but also probe the debates, conflicts, and issues dominating artistic circles during the man's life.

Chapter III examines the themes of Manet's paintings with a special focus on the artist's shrewd use of references taken from past painterly tradition: unlike earlier or contemporary painters, Manet strategically borrowed specific themes, figures, motives and compositions from the Old Masters, such as Velázquez, Goya, Rubens, Titian, Giorgione, and remodeled their themes and depictions for his own time.

A great many modern art-historians have researched Manet's references in considerable detail and have demonstrated convincingly which early paintings served as resources for his works. Hence, today one can no longer look at Manet's *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1863) **[Plate 3]** without comparing it to Giorgione's/Titian's *Le Concert*



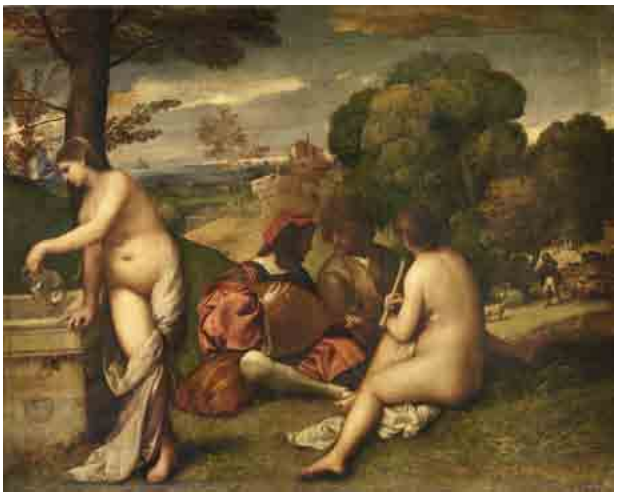


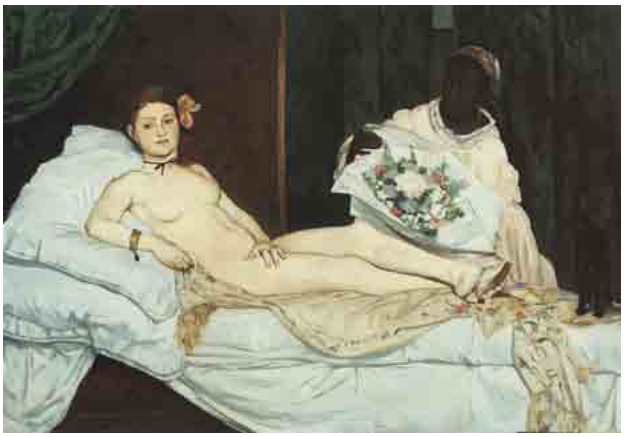
Plate 3:
Édouard Manet,
Le Dejeuner sur l'herbe
(1863)
Plate 4:
Giorgione/Titian,
Le Concert Champêtre
(1509)

Champêtre (1509) **[Plate 4]**, or Manet's *Olympia* (1863) **[Plate 5]** without referencing Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (1538) **[Plate 6]**.

Conventional art-historical research questions whether these past reference points were the true inspiration for Manet's works, or whether still others might be included, and if Manet effectively drew upon Velázquez or Goya, given that his first visit to Spain was not undertaken until 1865.[1]

I believe the correct question to address is why Manet so explicitly borrowed themes from earlier painters. While his contemporary critics either failed to recognize his use of traditional references or believed that Manet lacked imagination and therefore had to "copy" the Old Masters, more recent scholars have generally agreed that his use of existing compositions was itself a deliberate stratagem rather than a remedial device. While they also agree that Manet remained so modern because he was able to insert daily contemporary life in the place of historical subjects, few critics have discussed the specific methods by which he transformed traditional themes into scenes of modern life. With the exceptions of George Mauner's study *Manet, Peintre-Philosophe, A Study of the Painter's Themes* (1975) and Michael Fried's article "Manet's Sources, Aspects of his Art,

1 Notably, at the time, reproductions of any kind were virtually inexistent.



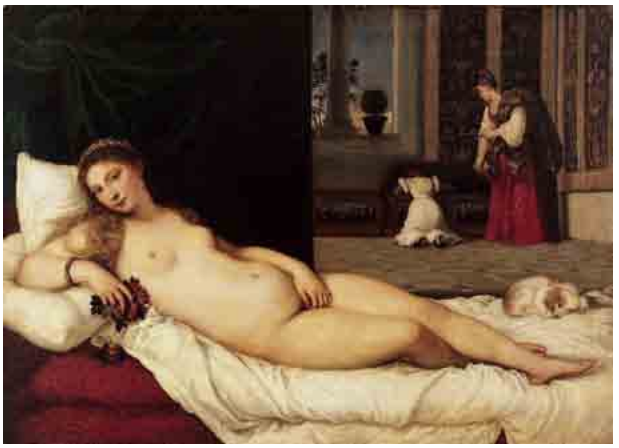


Plate 5:
Édouard Manet,
Olympia (1863)
Plate 6:
Titian,
Venus of Urbino (1538)

1859–1865" (1969), few critics have explored the particular meanings embodied in Manet's transformations.

What I intend to demonstrate here is that psychoanalysis proves to be a particularly incisive method to decipher Manet's transformations of old into new. Manet's creative translations of classical prototypes into contemporary modern scenes parallel the mechanisms at play in the unconscious activity of dreams. As the dreamwork uses the process of condensation "to combine all the sources which have acted as stimuli for the dream into a single unity in the dream itself,"[2] so the painter has to fuse various references and current impressions and transfer them to a one-dimensional picture plane. Since the painter/dreamer also injects key latent meanings into details that seem insignificant, the same goes for the process of displacement. "[T]he psychical intensity," noted Freud, "passes over from the thoughts and ideas to which it properly belongs on to others which in our judgment have no claim to any such emphasis."[3] Moreover, like a dream, a painting cannot express causal relationships, logical connections or "either/or" options. Instead, "they [the dreams] reproduce *logical connections* by *approximation in time and*

2 Freud 1900: 179.
3 Freud 1900: 654.

space, just as a painter will represent all the poets in a single group in a picture of Parnassus."[4]

These metaphoric and metonymic relationships will be analyzed in detail below, and—as Freud suggested when he described his method of interpreting dreams—not en masse.[5] Manet's paintings lend themselves to such a pictorial analysis precisely because he regularly provides his viewer with explicit references to the original and canonical pictorial scenes. An analysis of *Olympia* (1863) therefore invites a comparison with Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (1538), which in turn allows us to unravel the deliberate distortions and transformations that Manet bestowed upon the finished works.

The fact that the same analytic method developed by Freud for the interpretation of dreams is used here for Manet's oeuvre does not imply that a painting functions like a dream. Nor does it suggest that the *Venus of Urbino* should be regarded as the latent content vs. the manifest content of Manet's *Olympia*.

Instead, "The dream thoughts and the dream content are presented to us like two versions of the same subject-matter in two different *languages*."[6] In this sense, the meaning of *Olympia* does not reside in the notion that she represents a nineteenth-century version of Titian's *Venus of Urbino*. Actually, the links arising from the comparison of these two paintings reveal a multiplicity of meanings embedded in the new work. Analogous to Bakhtin's conception of a text "as a mosaic of quotations […] and as the absorption and transformation of other texts,"[7] Manet's paintings are replete with quotations of the past that represent reinterpretations of the Old Masters as well as oft-hidden, satirical, and sometimes political commentaries on the artist's contemporary world. Adopting Lacan's concept of language as a sliding chain of signifiers to the realm of painting, I argue that Manet's subject matter constitutes a link in the ever-shifting interconnection of pictorial representations across

4 Freud 1900: 661 (emphasis in the original).
5 See Freud 1900: 104.
6 Freud 1900: 277 (author's emphasis).
7 Kristeva 1986: 37.

generations. As a result, his paintings cannot be interpreted as mere representations of his own particular personal and social environment, but—as the painter himself well understood—as elements in the sliding circuit of pictorial productions. Meaning is generated therefore not only by sifting through past resources, but also in the relationships that the artist's paintings evoke and arouse in the spectator, then and now.

The way in which his figures gaze out of the canvas has puzzled art critics and often disconcerted his admirers—from the first viewers of his day to his critics of more recent date. The apparent immediacy of the figures is belied by the aloofness of their gaze, a factor that prompts our awareness that not only are they involved in the process of returning our gaze, but that our "voyeurism" is predicted by the figures themselves.

This process of observing/being observed is explored further in Chapter IV and reveals how Manet strategically positioned his spectators in his compositions. While previous painters tended to maintain a certain distance from their future viewers—never overtly challenging the relationship between the artwork and the beholder—Manet makes this crucial bond part of the work itself, endowing it with an innovative emotional thrust. While the viewer is at first drawn into some private relationship with the figures in the painting, they soon become aware that they are privy to a form of public exposure that also involves their own.

I maintain that the reason why Manet's paintings elicit such a complex and enigmatic relationship with their viewer is that they thematize the process of identification, which Lacan defines as the process through which the subject is constituted by the Other.

One of the texts behind Lacan's mirror stage may have been Freud's analysis of Michelangelo's statue of Moses in Rome. Freud did not intend his text to focus on identification (unlike his "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego" of 1921), but rather as a covertly autobiographical essay in which he reveals his distrust toward his followers after the rift with C.G. Jung in 1913. Yet, as he stands there in the Vincoli church in Rome, Freud unwittingly identifies with the sculpture discussed in his essay "The Moses of Michelangelo" of

1914. Freud relates a scenario based upon his painstakingly detailed evaluation of the statue's specifics, in which

> Suddenly the clamour strikes his ear; he turns his head and eyes in the direction from which the disturbance comes, sees the scene and takes it in. […] His rage, distant as yet from its object, is meanwhile directed in a gesture against his own body.[8]

While traditionally the "Moses of Michelangelo" text has been viewed as one of Freud's most telling autobiographical revelations, few theoreticians have considered examining the identificatory process as a necessary and unconscious process by which the viewer interiorizes a work of art and at times *"completes"* it, filling in the blanks, as it were.

The objective here is to show how Manet's paintings require a closer study of the viewers' identification with the figures portrayed, and how the artist implicates and enframes the spectators' participation, particularly in his most enigmatic works. While he invites his viewer to cross the threshold and don the guise of one of the figures portrayed, at the same time he makes it clear that the scenario he or she enters is the viewer's own invention. While previous painters arrested their viewers in an imaginary position, Manet upends this approach and makes us aware of the complex and intricate dynamic he applied in order to induce his audience to engage with the work before them.

It is my hope that this book will contribute to the enduring legacy of Édouard Manet's work, which remains unrivaled in its enigmatic use of classic works of the past while prompting a complex and baffling challenge regarding how the viewer engages with any artwork, both past and present.

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8 Freud 1914b: 225.

Chapter I

PSYCHOANALYTIC APPROACHES TO ART

> If in making these statements I have provoked the criticism, even from friends of psycho-analysis and from those who expert in it, that I may have merely written a psycho-analytic novel, I shall reply that I am far from over-estimating the certainty of these results. Like others I have succumbed to the attraction of this great and mysterious man […].
>
> Sigmund Freud, "Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood" (1910)

> […] Freud's essay on Leonardo […] is primarily a study in psychoanalytic biography: and the connection with art is *almost* exhausted by the fact that the subject of the biography happens to be one of the greatest, as well as one of the strangest artists in history.
>
> Richard Wollheim, *On Art and the Mind* (1974)

Sigmund Freud's essay on Leonardo continues to offer the cornerstone of psychoanalytic art criticism, despite Freud's own misgivings about "the certainty of these results."[1] The question that logically arises for any contemporary investigation is to what extent the techniques developed by Freud in the Leonardo paper offer an explanatory force, such that post-Freudians saw no reason to question their methods when analyzing a work of art. It may be that some

1 Freud 1910a: 134.

post-Freudians recognized the flaws in Freud's essay on Leonardo, but decided that the psychoanalytic theory itself was inherently limited to offering a series of more or less subtle psycho-biographic accounts of the genesis of works of art. The issue, then, for those writers who seek to challenge the privileged status of the artistic psycho-biography is primarily methodological in nature, that is, in addition to those elaborated by Freud, what other methods can be introduced to widen the horizon of psychoanalytic art theory.

To answer this question, one has to revisit Freud's text on Leonardo da Vinci and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of his procedure. Freud's primary goal was to solve the riddles that had already perplexed Leonardo's contemporaries. Like them, he was intrigued by Leonardo's complete withdrawal from painting after a successful artistic career, and by his seeming indifference to the fate of his artworks once he had begun to devote himself to scientific research. Puzzled by the contrast between Leonardo's striking lack of concern towards his paintings and drawings, and his fierce pursuit of scientific research, Freud believed that his psychoanalytic method might explain these inconsistencies and gaps in Leonardo's life and oeuvre.

Such a decision was, of course, a natural extension of Freud's prior work, since the analysis of inconsistencies, contradictions, and lacunas in human behavior had led Freud to revolutionary discoveries in his works on dreams, jokes, and the myriad pathological phenomena of everyday life. Following the same strategies as the ones pursued in these studies, he suggested: "If a biographical study is really intended to arrive at an understanding of its hero's mental life it must not—as happens in the majority of biographies as a result of discretion or prudishness—silently pass over its subject's sexual activity or sexual individuality."[2]

Freud subsequently concluded that Leonardo's artistic inhibition was paralleled by a sexual inhibition, even though Leonardo is rumored to have actively practiced his homosexuality. Freud deduced that Leonardo's sexual energy was now being primarily channeled into his scientific research. Having established these two important

2 Freud 1910a: 69.

elements in Leonardo's life—the artistic and sexual inhibition on one hand, and the alleged homosexual proclivity and thirst for scientific knowledge on the other—Freud drew upon his research of childhood sexuality to establish a structure for his own investigation. Yet, before he began the reconstruction of Leonardo's childhood in terms of fixation points and successive regressions, he searched for material from the artist's early years that could provide him with the necessary insights into his fantasy life. He found such a source in the man's only documented childhood memory: "I recall as one of my very earliest memories that while I was in my cradle a vulture came down to me, and opened my mouth with its tail, and struck me many times with its tail against my lips."[3]

In the same manner that the analyst's work involves the dream-text narrated by a patient, Freud dissected this statement into its component elements, and drawing upon his research in mythology, anthropology, and archaeology, he arrived at the following analysis: the vulture is a replacement for the mother, and the insertion of the vulture's tail is a fantasy that conceals "a reminiscence of sucking—or being suckled—at his mother's breast". The symbol of the striking tail, corresponding to the act of fellatio, is an act that Freud most characteristically associated with homosexuality. This explanation led Freud to assess that Leonardo, as an illegitimate son, initially experienced the undivided love of his mother, who seduced him into sexual precocity; in the absence of a father, the mother became the only object of Leonardo's desire. The move to the household of his noble father and stepmother, however, led to the repression of Leonardo's erotic feelings toward his mother. Leonardo preserved these feelings for his mother by identifying himself with her and by seeking sexual relationships with other boys. This way, he could hold onto his mother and only love boys, in the same way as he was loved by his mother. It is with this childhood reconstruction in hand that Freud reviewed the successive stages of Leonardo's adult life. Freud linked the initial phase of the man's artistic career to the first years of unbounded love for his mother. But gradually, parallel to the loss

3 Freud 1910a: 82.

of his love object and entrance into his father's house, Leonardo withdrew from painting and devoted himself to the rigid pursuit of scientific research. Freud found that "the effect which Leonardo's identification with his father had on his paintings was a fateful one. He created them and then cared no more about them, just as his father had not cared for him."[4]

In a sense, Leonardo's thirst for knowledge not only emanated from his early sexual curiosity, but it also served as a defense mechanism against his erotic desires toward his mother. Even a seeming violation of this schema—Leonardo's brief return to painting toward the latter part of his life—is incorporated by Freud without any noticeable strain on the general argument. He suggests moreover that the model for the *Mona Lisa* portrait—the Florentine lady Lisa Gherardini del Giocondo—elicited memories of his mother's love in a way that unleashed new creative forces in him. Yet, before I address Freud's analysis of the *Mona Lisa* and the *Madonna and Child with St. Anne* paintings per se, some comments are required about the general reliability of Freud's interpretive methods in the essay.

It has been widely documented that Freud committed two major factual mistakes in his interpretation of Leonardo's childhood memory. The first error is his mistranslation of the Italian word "nibbio"[5] as vulture rather than as kite. This initial mistake led him to the erroneous assumption that the Egyptian hieroglyph for the word mother ("mut"), which correctly represents a vulture, would further confirm his findings. The fact that the very core of Freud's analysis of Leonardo da Vinci—the interpretation of the artist's childhood dream—is itself governed by a mistranslation into German of the dream text's crucial symbol, has by now become a commonplace in discussions of the Leonardo essay. But the full implications of this error have received surprisingly little rigorous scrutiny. Indeed, once one becomes aware of the factual mistake, the truly curious

4 Freud 1910a: 121.

5 For a detailed discussion of Freud's mistranslation of the Italian word "nibbio" as "vulture" rather than as "kite", see Schapiro 1956; Spector 1974; Fuller 1980; and Strachey 1978.

thing is how Freud actually pays very little attention to the symbolic significance of the vulture image. He selects an ancient legend, by which female vultures are said to be inseminated by the wind, in order to underscore the significance he attributed to the illegitimacy of Leonardo's birth and the absence of the father during the artist's infancy. At the same time, however, Freud does not refer to the vulture as a bird of prey or, figuratively speaking, as "something which preys upon a person, the mind, etc.; a consuming or torturing passion; a person of a vile and rapacious disposition" (*Oxford English Dictionary*). Since vultures are more commonly associated with predatory beasts rather than with their particular method of becoming impregnated, Freud's decision to treat only the most arcane of the bird's characteristic associations is itself a leap that requires some explanation. Meyer Schapiro is one of the few art historians who evaluates the implications that a correct translation would have had on the interpretation of Leonardo's childhood fantasy. He states:

> "Of the kite we read that when it sees that its children are too fat, it pecks their sides out of envy and keeps them without food." The kite here is not the model of the good mother who wishes to have her child her own forever; she is the opposite of the vulture which, according to tradition (ignored by Leonardo) is the best of all mothers, protecting her young for a hundred and twenty days and scratching herself to give her blood to her young—an emblem of compassion like the pelican which symbolizes Christ's sacrifice. […] A psychologist could infer […] that Leonardo did not forgive Caterina his illegitimacy and her willingness to abandon him to a step-mother.[6]

While the correct translation of "kite" might have led Freud to a different interpretation of Leonardo's childhood, what this error demonstrates most strikingly is the deliberate manner in which Freud assembled his material relating to the discussion of Leonardo. Without pursuing the issue of the multiple interpretations of the vulture image, one may justifiably be surprised by Freud's decision

6 Schapiro 1956: 156–157.

to choose the sole interpretation which would support his basic argument for Leonardo's homosexuality. In response to the factual mistakes Freud made in his essay and troubled by the insufficient biographical information available to him, post-Freudians have tried to refine their methodology so that the same criticism could not be leveled against them.[7] As a result, painters like Van Gogh, Picasso, and Michelangelo are preferable as subjects of study, because they left behind a wider range of biographical data. While recognizing Freud's somewhat halting research, few psychoanalysts have questioned the psycho-biographic method per se as a privileged approach to art criticism. On the contrary, they have extended Freud's claim even further by arguing that psycho-biographic techniques might be applied to analyze not only the artist, but also the art object.

Since Freud never presumed to write a psychoanalytic study of Leonardo's works but only of his character, one is struck by the post-Freudians' insistence on using the Leonardo paper as their model for aesthetic studies. Freud himself emphasizes throughout the Leonardo text that "[t]he aim of our work has been to explain the inhibitions in Leonardo's sexual life and in his artistic activity."[8] In other words, the Leonardo monograph is not primarily a study about art. Instead, the artist's life history serves as an excuse for Freud's real purpose of showing how adult capacities are dependent upon early infantile experiences.

The study of Leonardo emerged from Freud's desire to exhibit another case history that could demonstrate the universal importance of early infantile sexuality as postulated in "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality" (1905), and to show clearly that psychiatric research was not limited to the study of "frailer men," but could equally examine

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7 The minutes of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society which document Freud's first presentation of the Leonardo material to his psychoanalytic circle also indicate that neither Freud nor his colleagues were primarily interested in the artistic aspects of Leonardo da Vinci. Instead, their discussion focused on the diagnostic aspects of Leonardo's personality. See *Minutes of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society*, eds. Herman Nunberg and Ernst Federn, vol. II, 338–352 (New York: International Universities Press, 1976).

8 Freud 1910a: 131.

"one who is among the greatest of the human race […]."[9] Furthermore, the particular case history of Leonardo furthermore gave Freud the opportunity to set the stage for two theories he would develop later in more detail: the theory of homosexuality and that of narcissism. In a sense, therefore, the Leonardo text served several purposes, and paradoxically it is the least significant of these for which it has subsequently become best known, namely, for the study of art.

Despite the fact that Freud never intended the Leonardo text to serve as a template for psychoanalytic studies of art, this is precisely what it has become. As a result, post-Freudians have continued to argue that a work of art cannot be adequately understood without an in-depth knowledge of the artist's life history. And more importantly, they have persisted in treating the artwork per se as an object whose hidden meanings are to be unlocked by establishing the secret autobiographical key to its structure. By this reckoning, an artwork cannot signify formal terms on its own, but must be examined for clues about the artist's inner life. This conviction not only vitiates the analysis of an artwork on its own formal terms, but it also severely hampers the potential to analyze the oeuvre of artists who have not left behind significant biographical material to work from. In the absence of exploring verbal statements as they might with a patient's free associations, psychoanalysts have tended to remain silent when discussing artworks on their own. Instead of seeking a suitable methodology vis-à-vis a painted object, psychoanalysts have been inclined to limit their attention to those artists who left behind an abundance of biographical material—such as letters, diaries, and autobiographical documents—and then used these particulars to analyze a particular artifact. And yet, numerous texts by Freud lend themselves for the interpretation of objects of art, irrespective of whether they are publicly acknowledged as inquiries into aesthetics.

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9 Freud 1910a: 63.

The Moses of Michelangelo

At first glance, Freud's "The Moses of Michelangelo" (1914) appears to focus solely on aesthetics. Unlike the Leonardo paper, in which Freud probes the artist behind the work, and the canvases themselves are marginal to his analysis, in the Michelangelo piece Freud focuses on the statue's expressive character as well as on the spectator's personal reaction to the monument. Interestingly enough, Freud confines his observations to the statue itself and strangely omits any considerations on Michelangelo's personal life, although a far greater amount of biographic material is available on Buonarroti than on his contemporary Leonardo da Vinci. To my mind, Freud so keenly identified with the figure of Moses that he failed to reflect upon the person who had created this magnificent sculpture. In a way, Freud neglected his own inclination to craft a psycho-biographic tale and instead remained fixated on the sculpted figure itself.[10]

Since the Moses study represents an alternative to the psycho-biographic method, the question arises why this text is so rarely treated as a study in aesthetics, whereas the Leonardo paper—which was written largely as a psycho-biographical case study—is still considered the standard psychoanalytic text for any discussion on art. The conventional neglect of "The Moses of Michelangelo" paper is largely due to the text being identified as an autobiographic statement by and about Freud himself. It is a well-known fact that the Moses study was writ-

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10 Freud published the Moses study anonymously in 1914 in *Imago*. It was only in 1924 that he agreed to publish it under his own name. According to Ernest Jones, Freud gave three reasons for his decision to write the essay without signing it. "The reasons he [Freud] gave for his decision seem rather thin. 'Why disgrace Moses by putting my name to it? It is a joke, but perhaps not a bad one.' To Abraham he gave three reasons: (1) 'it is only a joke,' (2) 'Shame at the evident amateurishness of the essay,' (3) 'Lastly because my doubt about my conclusion is stronger than usual; it is only because of editorial pressure (Rank and Sachs) that I have consented to publish it at all'." (Jones 1953, II: 366). It is interesting to note that *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* (1905) was also published with a delay. Freud wrote down the Dora case in 1901, but waited four years before publishing it. The curious coincidence might be explained by the fact that Freud in both papers inadvertently exhibits his transference relationship to Dora, his patient, and to Moses, the human figure externalized in the Michelangelo statue.

ten at the height of the controversy and eventual break-up with C. G. Jung. Like the Moses he describes, in 1914, Freud was ready to throw down the Tablets of the Law (i. e., his psychoanalytic works) and take vengeance upon his faithless followers. As Ernest Jones aptly puts it:

> Was Moses on descending from Sinai unable to control his anger, as the Bible related, or could he attain the heights of self-control which Freud maintained Michelangelo depicted? We know that this preoccupation coincided with the time when he was suppressing his own indignation at the way his Swiss followers had suddenly repudiated his work, and that merely confirms what his intense preoccupation alone would have taught us: namely, that he had emotional reasons for identifying himself with his mighty predecessor.[11]

Peter Fuller adds another interesting note to the historical circumstances surrounding Freud's conception of the Moses study. Since the Moses text was written at about the same time as Freud's essay "On Narcissism: An Introduction" (1914), Fuller argues that the Moses study represented Freud's counter-piece to the more "revolutionary" study "On Narcissism," and that in it, Freud pledged his allegiance to scientific methods and the truth. While "On Narcissism" was a purely speculative, meta-psychological endeavor, the Moses essay was devised to be a "strictly scientific enterprise." All these viewpoints suggest that in the course of this exegesis, the Moses of Michelangelo was subsumed into the Moses of Freud.

While personal interests and attractions seem to have influenced both of Freud's studies in aesthetics, the Michelangelo paper remains the one most typically linked to his personal concerns. Classifying the Moses paper as an autobiographical document has resulted in a widespread disregard for the important aesthetic issues Freud raises in the essay. In a sense, the traditional perspective on this study is fairly justified, since Freud himself clearly intended the text to be a thinly disguised warning to his errant followers and allowed his tendency for polemic to derail the development of a more strictly pictorial psychoanalysis. However, potential traces of that reluctant

11 Jones 1953, III: 368.

analysis can be found amidst the more transient concerns of the essay, and it is those traces that a closer reading of "The Moses of Michelangelo" can help bring to the surface.

Freud is guided by a complex mesh of motives in his study of Michelangelo's statue, which contained multiple strands that are absent from his earlier texts on art. Whilst he emphasized his personal fascination with the figure of Leonardo da Vinci and studied the painter/scientist from the perspective of "the conscious communion of one great man with another,"[12] in the Michelangelo text Freud admits that "no piece of statuary has ever made a stronger impression on me than this."[13] From the beginning, Freud establishes a relationship not so much between himself and the hidden artist, as between himself and the visible sculpture. Unlike the distant clinical stance Freud assumes when he analyzes Leonardo's paintings, he commences the Michelangelo piece with a powerful emotional confession:

> Nevertheless, works of art do exercise a powerful effect on me, especially those of literature and sculpture, less often of painting. This has occasioned me, when I have been contemplating such things, to spend a long time before them trying to apprehend them in my own way, i. e. to explain to myself what their effect is due to. Wherever I cannot do this, as for instance with music, I am almost incapable of obtaining any pleasure. Some rationalistic, or perhaps analytic, turn of mind in me rebels against being moved by a thing without knowing why I am thus affected and what it is that affects me.[14]

By seemingly taking the reader into his confidence, Freud establishes two important principles which hitherto had never figured in his speculations on art: first, the study of works of art as self-sufficient entities; and second, the effect of the artwork upon the observer.

Let me now turn to the first principle and examine the methods by which Freud approaches the artwork in questioning the statue of Moses in the church of San Pietro in Vincoli, Rome. In a letter

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12 Wollheim 1974: 205.

13 Freud 1914b: 213.

14 Freud 1914b: 211.

Plate 7: Michelangelo, *Moses* (1513–1515)

to Eduardo Weiss, Freud emphasizes the empirical undertone of the Moses paper: "For three lonely September weeks in 1913 I stood every day in the church in front of the statue, studied it, measured it, sketched it until I captured the understanding for it which I ventured to express in the essay only anonymously."[15]

In his attempt to unravel "the meaning and content" of what is "represented"[16] in Michelangelo's *Moses* (1513–1515) **[Plate 7]** from a scientific psychoanalytic viewpoint, Freud finds support for his project

15 Jones 1953, II: 367.
16 Freud 1914b: 212.

in the research of Giovanni Morelli, an Italian art connoisseur, who had invented a new method for distinguishing original works of art from copies.[17] Freud succinctly describes Morelli's method, which consisted of:

> […] insisting that attention should be diverted from the general impression and main features of a picture, and by laying stress on the significance of minor details, of things like the drawing of the fingernails, of the lobe of an ear, of halos and such unconsidered trifles which the copyist neglects to imitate and yet which every artist executes in his own characteristic way.[18]

Freud uncovered certain similarities between Morelli's and his own psychoanalytic technique, in their common refusal to be swayed by the general impression of a painting/dream, and insistence upon the examination of details as opposed to facile global themes. Based on this, Freud concludes that the Morelli method of inquiry "is closely related to the technique of psycho-analysis. It, too, is accustomed to divine secret and concealed things from despised or unnoticed features, from the rubbish-heap, as it were, of our observations."[19] The impression that these two methods share common features is seemingly further sustained if one compares the Morelli technique with Freud's description of the interpretation of dreams:

> Our first step in the employment of this procedure teaches us that what we must take as the object of our attention is not the dream as a whole but the separate portions of its content. If I say to a patient who is still a novice: 'What occurs to you in connection with this dream?', as a rule his mental horizon becomes a blank. If, however, I put the dream before him cut up into pieces, he will give me a series of associations to each piece, which might be described as the 'background thoughts' of that particular part of the dream.[20]

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17 For a detailed study of the Morelli method, see Richard Wollheim's essay, "Giovanni Morelli and the origins of scientific connoisseurship," (Wollheim 1974: 177–201).

18 Freud 1914b: 222.

19 Freud 1914b: 222.

20 Freud 1900: 103–104.

I believe, however, that these apparent similarities obscure the fundamental differences between the Morellian and Freudian techniques. Whereas Morelli was keen to distinguish copies from originals and to establish the authenticity of authorship, Freud was not concerned with questions of attribution. Rather, he wanted to analyze rationally why this particular statue exerted such a powerful effect upon him. In fact, Freud not only used the Morelli method for a different purpose than its creator intended, but applied it to unravel the *meaning* rather than the *provenance* of the Moses statue, and failed to take into account the theoretical contradictions between the hermeneutic essence of psychoanalysis and the natural-scientific orientation of Morelli's method. Jack Spector argues:

> […] 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.[21]

What were the principal features of the Morelli method? According to the Italian scholar, the task of a connoisseur consists of the study of individual works, what they represent, and to whom they should be attributed. He criticized art historians for their lack of scientific research and believed that

> […] all art-historians, from Vasari down to our own day, have only made use of two tests to aid them in deciding the authorship of a work of art—intuition, or the so-called general impression, and documentary evidence; with what result you have seen for yourself.[22]

Showing ill-concealed contempt for his fellow art historians, Morelli developed complex schemata of so-called *Grundformen*, those signa-

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21 Spector 1969: 68 (emphasis in the original).

22 Morelli 1892, I: 21.

ture forms and shapes characteristic to each artist. He drew up a series of schedules, each based on independently authenticated works of art which illustrated how a particular detail of the body—an ear, a hand, a foot or thumbnail—were painted by individual artists. Based upon this catalogue of hallmarks, Morelli could, for example, distinguish a Bellini from a Botticelli depiction. Morelli's method was based on the belief that each artist possessed signature traits, and that these traits were consistently repeated throughout the artist's entire oeuvre. This quest for distinguishing hallmarks is reminiscent of the very popular nineteenth-century discipline of graphology, and, as Spector argues, also of the science of physiognomy.

> 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 […].
> 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. One thinks especially of Poe, whose methods of detection included criptography along with graphology, and who made small overlooked details into the major clues.[23]

When Morelli studied a painting, he essayed to detect the artist's stylistic identity—in other words, his signature—by examining isolated details within the canvas. Had Morelli been commissioned to examine the Moses statue for authenticity, he would have been satisfied to certify that it was an autograph work of Michelangelo, and unlike Freud this would have been the purpose of his examination.

Driven by his life-long need to appear scientific, especially after the rather speculative and emotive text "On Narcissism" (1914), in his own scrutiny of the monument Freud was prompted to choose a technique that closely resembled his own detailed observational style, and he settled upon Morelli's procedure and approached the statue of Moses in the role of a scientific observer. Like a physician, Freud "treats" the Moses as a specimen figure that undergoes a close

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23 Spector 1969: 71–72.

physical examination, not unlike the bodily inspections that the title character had to endure under the doctor in Georg Büchner's famous play, *Woyzeck*.[24]

Where Morelli would cross-reference specific patterns shared between different paintings, Freud instead establishes and analyzes the connections between the particular elements within the single statue. Freud's method of linking specific configurations within the Moses statue and creating an imaginary scenery for Moses's prior movements before he was captured in the pose in which Michelangelo portrays him has been compared to a cinematographic technique.

"Others have prised Freud's methods even further away from the early 19th century spiritual modes of analysing a work of art," notes Peter Fuller, "and claimed, I think convincingly, that Freud's interpretation is '*cinematographic*': i.e. the very way in which he looks at the Moses and perceives it as forming part of a 'readable' continuum of events suggests that his perception has been conditioned by the photograph."[25]

Indeed, Morelli's failure to analyze the juxtapositions of the bodily details represents one of the major flaws in his theory. As Wollheim observes: "[T]he same configuration can in different circumstances, that is to say in different contexts or in different wholes, look very different."[26] It is precisely this "adjustment" of the Morellian method that leads Freud to an entirely different analysis of the artwork, one that Morelli would likely never have endorsed. Moreover, since it was not Freud's goal to confirm the authorship of the Moses statue, but rather to explain the discrepancy between the statue's "outward" calm and "inward" emotions,[27] Freud interpreted Michelangelo's characteristic traits not as signatures validating authenticity, but as

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24 Doctor: "Woyzeck, you have the finest *aberratio mentalis partialis* of the second category, quite pronounced. Woyzeck, I'm going to give you a raise. Second category: fixed idea but otherwise rational. Apart from that, going on as usual? (...) Eating your peas? (...) Carrying out your duties? (...) You're an interesting case, Woyzeck. You'll get a raise. Just keep it up. Let me feel your pulse. Yes." (Büchner 1996: 22–23).

25 Fuller 1980: 46 (author's emphasis).

26 Wollheim 1974: 188.

27 Freud 1914b: 221.

signs of a specific artistic intention. In other words, each detail encumbered meaning, and it is only through a rigorous examination of these details that the statue's intentions and effect upon the spectator can be unveiled.

From the outset, Freud agreed with those art historians who argued that Michelangelo had portrayed a particular moment in Moses's life rather than "a timeless study of character and mood."[28] Had Michelangelo captured the instant before Moses springs to his feet and takes action? Or had he portrayed Moses in the moment before he hurls the Tablets of the Law to the ground upon seeing his people dancing around the Golden Calf? This psychological inscape trapped in the figure was what intrigued Freud.

While Freud ostensibly adopted the Morellian method to uncover the true meaning—or, as I prefer, the underlying *plot* of the Moses statue—, he in fact used this scientific discipline to screen his identification with the mythical story of Moses's deeds and character.[29] This ostensible scientific method served a deeper function, however. In Freud's clinical recommendations, crafted around the same time as "On Narcissism" of 1914 and "The Moses of Michelangelo," he strongly warned against the influence of the analyst's countertransference in the analytical process. Countertransference, the analyst's personal, emotive responses to a given patient, were in his thinking something to be overcome, an interference with the analyst's dispassionate, "neutral" and objective view of the patient. Succumbing to a highly emotional reaction in front of the Moses sculpture had to be counterbalanced and disguised behind the kind of dispassionate tone employed by Morelli.

What makes Freud's text on the Moses statue so crucial, is that it provides us with a formidable document in which Freud unintentionally illustrates the conflict between a purely pictorial and a

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28 Freud 1914b: 215.

29 As Ernest Jones observes: "There is every reason to suppose that the grand figure of Moses himself, from Freud's early Biblical studies to the last book he ever wrote, was one of tremendous significance to him. Did he represent the formidable Father-Image, or did Freud identify himself with him? Apparently both, at different periods." (Jones 1955, II: 364–365).

highly subjective analysis of a work, foreshadowing the later much more extensive discussion about the relevance of countertransference in the comprehension of the patient's unconscious dynamics. Was the analyst the sleuth or the co-author of the patient's/art object's construction?

A close reading of Freud's procedure reveals how intimately the two seemingly antithetical types of evaluations are often related. In the first part of his investigation, Freud still adheres strictly to the dictum of the Morellian and psychoanalytic principle of paying close attention to the minutiae of an artwork. He observes, for instance, that, "the thumb of the hand is concealed and the index finger alone is in effective contact with the beard," or that the "other three fingers are propped upon the wall of his chest and are bent at the upper joints […]."[30]

This itemization of the sculpture uncovers certain seemingly insignificant inconsistencies, such as the precarious position of the tablets held against the body and the anatomically implausible droop of Moses's beard. In addition, Freud is perplexed by the position of the man's right hand, his fingers threading through a clump of beard that trails down from the left side of his jaw. He remarks "how strangely unsuitable as a means does the pressure of a single finger appear to be!" Assuring the reader that "[t]here is a solution which will remove our difficulties", Freud infers that "there had been a retreating motion of the right hand. This one assumption necessarily brings others with it. In imagination we complete the scene of which this movement, established by the evidence of the beard, is a part […]."[31]

The change in Freud's language from a pedestrian physical description to the informal style of inviting the reader on stage "to complete the scene" is paralleled by the different stance Freud himself assumes vis-à-vis the sculpture.[32] Drawing up sketches of the imagined previ-

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30 Freud 1914b: 223.

31 Freud 1914b: 224.

32 Freud used a similar terminology in his studies on hysteria. Describing the hysteric's remembrance of repressed incompatible ideas, he frequently described this process as the patient's reproduction of past scenes. The theatricality of his language might have been partially influenced by the rhetoric of Anna O. (Josef

ous movements of the Moses sculpture, Freud suddenly imbues the statue with life and creates a stormy, even melodramatic scenario:

> […] 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. Nor will he throw away the Tables so that they will break on the stones, for it is on their especial account that he has controlled his anger; it was to preserve them that he kept his passion in check. In giving way to his rage and indignation, he had to neglect the Tables, and the hand which upheld them was withdrawn. […] He remembered his mission and for its sake renounced an indulgence of his feelings.[33]

Freud becomes so entangled in this fictional account that at one point he expects to see the statue rise, "dash the Tables of the Law to the ground and let fly its wrath." Almost doleful, Freud affirms that "[n]othing of the kind happened," and "that something was represented here that could stay without change."[34] At the point at which he feels compelled to hazard a solution and decipher the content and meaning of the sculpture before him, he conjures up a dramatic backstory and mistakes his subjective experience for an objective account of the work. In other words, he confuses the two principles he set out to study, the meaning and content of the work and the emotional effect the Moses statue exerted upon him. While he began to unravel the former, he enacted the latter and used this emotional enactment in place of an analytical interpretation. Freud's interpretive technique of intermixing his subjective experience with the objective representation of an artwork and using the former as analytical evidence for the latter, is a strategy that he also employs in "The Interpretation of Dreams" (1900). In his paper "Freud and the Inter-Penetration of Dreams" (1979), David Willbern exposes how Freud frequently in-

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Breuer's famous hysterical patient), who described her systematic day-dreaming as her "private theatre" (See Freud 1895: 21–47).

33 Freud 1914b: 229–230.

34 Freud 1914b: 220–221.

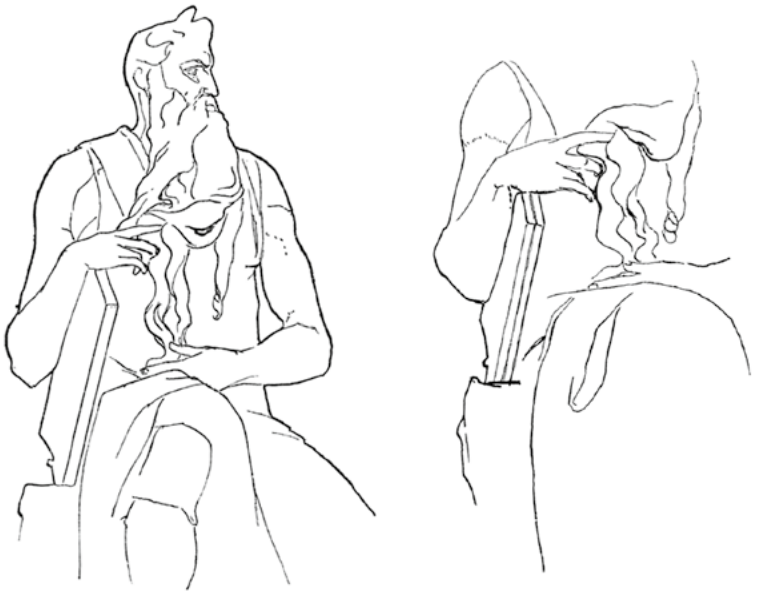

Plate 8:
Sketches of Michelangelo's *Moses* (1513–1515) in Freud's *The Moses of Michelangelo* (1914)

troduces his own associations into the reported dream text, translates that text into his own terms, and reconstructs the dreamer's dream by way of his own interpretive inclinations. Willbern remarks that Freud tends to interpolate his own idiomatic phrases whenever he observes a gap in the patient's account—which he then reverses and interprets. In the final analysis, Freud "re-presents the dream to its dreamer […] in such a way that the dreamer accepts the representation as her own creation."[35] It is important to recognize that Freud not only interjects his own associations, but his relationship to the patient as well. In this way "the dream under investigation, the text which is subjected to interpretation, becomes in practical reality a co-creation of the dreamer and the interpreter."[36]

Whilst Willbern considers Freud's interpretive style as "a technique of interpolation and interpenetration," Freud defined his interpretive process as the constructive task of the analyst: "His task is to make out what has been forgotten from the traces which it has left behind

35 Willbern 1979: 105.
36 Willbern 1979: 105.

or, more correctly, to *construct* it." These constructions "constitute the link between the two portions of the work of analysis, between his own part and that of the patient."[37]

In this text, "Constructions in Analysis" (1937), Freud recognizes that much less attention has been directed towards the position of the analyst than to the behavior of the patient. Although he realizes that the work of analysis involves "two separate localities" with two distinct tasks, he does not pursue the ramifications of this complex relationship in any detail. Freud's remark that "the task performed by the analyst, has been pushed into the background,"[38] eventually led to the crucial, ongoing, and central debate that emerged after Freud's death regarding the importance of the transference-countertransference relationship between the analyst and the patient, as noted earlier. For fear of losing an objective and hence "neutral" stance, Freud had always urged psychoanalysts to analyze away any subjective and personal feelings. For him, such responses invariably clouded the full picture of the patient's psyche. However, thanks to post-Kleinian evolutions and writings by the Relational school, this offspring of the psychoanalytic process eventually begat the royal road toward a fuller understanding of these unconscious parts of the patient.[39]

But back to Freud's reaction to the marble sculpture of Moses. We can detect that he had unwittingly engaged in a compromising counter-transferential process by identifying with the Moses figure. And while at the time he dramatically enacted his identification in the original analysis of the Moses statue, later he explicitly thematizes the process in two papers: "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego" (1921), and "A Child is Being Beaten" (1919). In the first text, Freud describes different types of identification, and it is the "identification via a symptom" and the "identification through the introjection of the lost object" that most closely parallel his identificatory process with the statue.

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37 Freud 1937: 258–259 (emphasis in the original).

38 Freud 1937: 258.

39 For a more in-depth discussion of the unfolding history of the use of countertransference in psychoanalytic practice, see Wolff Bernstein 1999: 275–300.

In the identification via a symptom formation, Freud states that this type of identification "leaves entirely out of account any object-relation to the person who is being copied."[40] He cites the example of a young girl who reacts hysterically to "a letter from someone with whom she is secretly in love which arouses her jealousy […]."[41] Her girlfriends react with the same fit of hysteria, not because they are sympathetic towards their friend, but because they desire to put themselves in the same situation. Experiencing a sense of guilt over their rival feelings, they accept the suffering involved and identify themselves with the symptom.

By the same token, one may argue that Freud does not really identify with the physical mass of the Moses sculpture since it is, after all, just a piece of statuary and not the living prophet. Yet, he undeniably identifies with the emotions elicited by the sculpture. As Freud explains: "One ego has perceived a significant analogy with another upon one point […], an identification is thereupon constructed on this point, and, under the influence of the pathogenic situation, is displaced on to the symptom which the one ego has produced."[42]

The analogy that Freud perceived in the figure of Moses was the shared frustration with their faithless followers. Yet, it is important to keep in mind that Freud did not identify himself with the biblical Moses, who "actually fell into a fit of rage and broke the Tablets," but rather with the sculptured representation of the prophet. Based upon his reconstruction of Moses's movements, Freud creates an idealized version of the prophet, but attributes—in other words, re-introjects—his own idealized image of Moses onto the statue's creator. " […] Michelangelo has placed a different Moses on the tomb of the Pope, one superior to the historical or traditional Moses."[43]

Previously, I have argued that Michelangelo's Moses became Freud's Moses. Let me expand this statement now by saying that Freud identified with the sculpture by projecting his own idealized self-image

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40 Freud 1921: 107.
41 Freud 1921: 107.
42 Freud 1921: 107.
43 Freud 1914b: 233.

of a man who was "struggling successfully against an inward passion for the sake of a cause to which he has devoted himself."[44]

The process of identification that we witness in Freud's analysis of the Moses sculpture is crucial for an analysis of a similar process, unfettered by the figures in Manet's paintings. Freud's essay "A Child is Being Beaten" (1919) goes even deeper into the analysis of identification, as it focuses upon the triadic process of a fantasy formation. In this text, Freud attempts to explain why so many of his patients reported a fantasy about "a child is being beaten." In order to make sense of this fantasy, he subdivides the process into three stages:

(1) My father is beating the child;
(2) I am beaten by my father;
(3) A child is being beaten.

Upon further analysis, Freud extends the first phase to:

My father is beating the child whom I hate.[45]

Between the first and second phases, Freud remarks that a profound transformation has taken place, "The person beating the child remains the same (that is, the father); but the child who is beaten has been changed into another one, and is not invariably the child producing the fantasy […] Now, therefore, the wording runs: 'I am beaten by my father'."[46]

In other words, the witness of the fantasy has become the author of the fantasy. The third fantasy resembles the first, with the exception that it is no longer the father who is beating the child, but some *representative* of the father—such as a schoolteacher—a shift that can be translated into the phrase "a child is being beaten." In this last phase, "the child who is producing the beating" fantasy no longer itself features in it, but steps back into the role of a spectator,

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44 Freud 1914b: 233.
45 Freud 1919a: 185.
46 Freud 1919a: 185.

distancing him/herself. In short, the position of the child changes with each stage: from (1) the author of the fantasy, to (2) the object of the fantasy, to (3) the spectator of the fantasy.

While the first and third phases represent fantasies reported by his patients, the second phase, which Freud calls the most important, is a theoretical construct that Freud introduces to make the fantasy of "a child is being beaten" intelligible. Freud leaves it somewhat unclear whether the second phase existed but "never succeeded in becoming conscious," or, as he says, "is a *construction* of analysis, but […] no less a necessity on that account."[47] In "The Moses of Michelangelo," Freud follows a strikingly similar path to the one mapped out in "A Child is Being Beaten." In the first part of the essay, Freud assumes the fictional role of an art critic: he introduces the sculpture to the reader and presents a detailed art-historical account of the Moses statue. He is the one who examines the statue on the reader's behalf. Yet, when he begins to decipher the intention and movement concealed within the marble figure, he seems almost to change places with Moses, and is no longer the one looking at the work, but the one looked at by Moses: "Sometimes I have crept cautiously out of the half-gloom of the interior as though I myself belonged to the mob upon whom his eye is turned […]"[48]

Two events have occurred here: (1) Freud has taken the place of Moses (by identifying with him) in order to scrutinize what lies behind the affective power of the statue. As mentioned earlier, the shift from Stage I to Stage II—that is, from author to object of the fantasy—was also reflected in the change in Freud's own writing style, which turned from a strictly scientific discourse into a speculative and affect-laden narrative. (2) By identifying with or "putting oneself in the same situation"[49] as Moses, Freud temporarily turned himself into a sculpture, an object that can be contemplated by the readers of the Moses study. It is only at the end of the Moses essay that Freud re-adopts the position of the spectator/interpreter. He illustrates this

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47 Freud 1919a: 185 (author's emphasis).

48 Freud 1914b: 213.

49 Freud 1921: 107.

return to the third state (the spectator of the fantasy) by citing an art-historical essay that largely confirms his own interpretation of the statue. Thus, by rejoining the ranks of art historians, Freud once more becomes the spectator of the sculpture. By now it seems as though I have used the process of identification as additional evidence to confirm the standard opinion that Freud's "The Moses of Michelangelo" is essentially no more than a thinly disguised autobiographical statement. While this opinion undoubtedly contains a strong measure of truth, my own reasons for focusing on the process of identification are of quite a different nature. While the Moses text has been rather exclusively seen as a biographical document and ignored as an important essay about the identificatory process between a spectator and a painted figure, I want to argue that this subtle process of identification is crucial to an understanding of the relationship Manet constructs between his painted figures and his imagined spectators.

Freud seemed to recognize that an artwork could not be understood if one merely studied its thematic and descriptive content, but that its true meaning could only be unlocked if one included the effect the painting or sculpture exercised upon its beholder.

Jokes and their relations to aesthetics

Stéphane Mallarmé, a close and faithful friend of Manet's, had already claimed for his own field that the aim of poetry was "peindre non la chose, mais l'effet qu'elle produit" (do not paint the thing, but the effect it produces). In other words, the content cannot be separated from the reaction it elicits. Mallarmé, whom Manet later depicted in *Portrait de Stéphane Mallarmé* (1876) **[Plate 9]**, also advocated that the medium through which the effect was produced "was to be so thoroughly enmeshed in the fabric of the work that the reader would be unaware of the mechanics by which the poem was created."[50]

This same principle has governed the realm of painting for centuries. Spectators were always to be aroused and emotionally moved by the

50 In Harris 1964: 559.

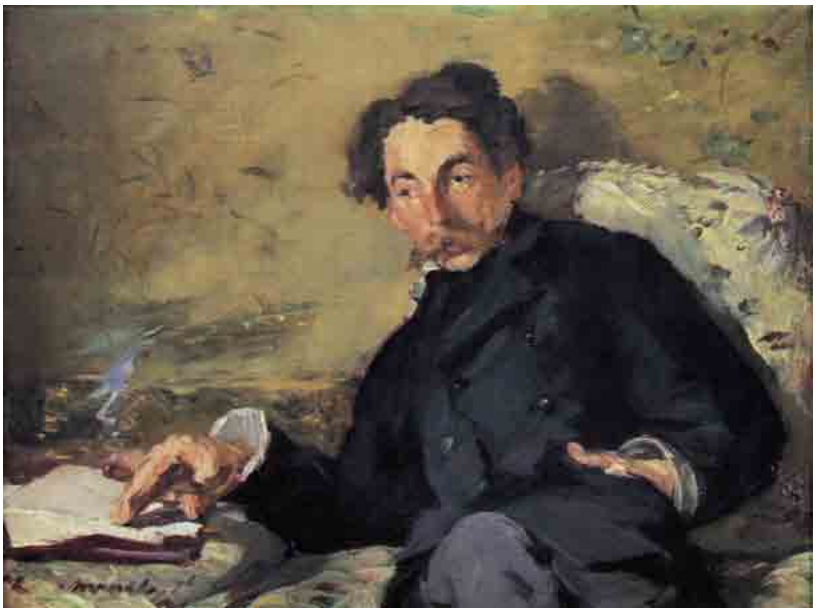

Plate 9:
Édouard Manet,
Portrait de Stéphane Mallarmé (1876)

subject matter represented in the artwork. But the techniques through which the painter achieved these emotional effects were disguised, because it was believed that the conspicuous presence of the artist's personal imprint upon the painting would destroy the very effect the painting was designed to elicit. If the painter focused too blatantly on the means by which he manipulated the viewer's emotional response, he was considered an unaccomplished and technically clumsy artist.

Manet broke with this long-existing convention. Unlike his predecessors, he openly revealed the methods by which he enmeshed the observer in the painted spectacle. He deliberately drew attention, both to his position as the painter having intended the effect, and to the spectator as the recipient and object of his intention. Michael Fried argues that Manet heightened the spectator's self-awareness *qua* spectator by making his own self-awareness "an essential part of the content of his work."[51] By narrowing the distance that is usually maintained between a painting and its beholder—a distance that allows the viewers to unleash their own fantasies—Manet restrained

51 Fried 1969: 49.

them from engaging in their fantasy world. He methodically drew attention to the fact that the viewer was not looking at a real figure, but at a painted representation of a figure. Paradoxically enough, by collapsing the distance between the painting and the spectator, Manet heightened the inner tensions and anxieties within the viewer, which in turn leads to the general impression that his figures possess an estranging and enigmatic quality. By shortening the distance between the painted canvas and the spectator, he contracted the symbolic realm within which his viewers could retreat into their separate fantasy worlds and muse about their desires. Manet was too confrontational, however, too engaging with the outer world to allow room for that separate internal space. It is my contention that with this ploy Manet was unknowingly addressing the identificatory process which develops once a spectator is confronted with a painted figure.

His unconscious use of this complex identificatory process between spectator and painted figure can be analyzed particularly well from a psychoanalytic perspective. Accordingly, the identification Freud was enacting when looking at Michelangelo's *Moses* can offer a potentially fruitful portal into the complex problematics of a psychoanalytic study of Édouard Manet's oeuvre. Freud's texts "On Narcissism" (1914), "A Child is Being Beaten" (1919), and "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego" (1921) will serve as further material for analyzing the process of identification, even though none of them were planned for this purpose. The same is true for Freud's early paper "Jokes and Their Relations to the Unconscious" (1905), which was devised to analyze the unconscious structure of jokes and provide a companion to "The Interpretation of Dreams" (1900), his grammar of the unconscious. In 1914, Freud himself recognized, however, that the structure of the joke could also offer a richly powerful key to the structure of an artwork. "The first example of an appliciation of the analytic mode of thought to the problems of aesthetics," he wrote, "was contained in my book on jokes."[52]

The tendentious joke, in particular, lends itself to comparisons with an artwork, especially in so far as it highlights the relationship

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52 Freud 1914d: 37.

between the spectator and the art object. In contrast to the jest, the puzzle, the pun, or the un-tendentious joke, the tendentious joke requires the same three positions or objects as those Freud adopts when he scrutinizes the Moses statue.

"Generally speaking," he writes, "a tendentious joke calls for three people: in addition to the one who makes the joke, there must be a second who is taken as the object of the hostile or sexual aggressiveness, and a third in whom the joke's aim of producing pleasure is fulfilled. […] it is not the person who makes the joke who laughs at it and who therefore enjoys its pleasurable effect, but the inactive listener."[53]

Even though the painter is rarely if ever present when his artworks are exhibited, he nonetheless abides by a similar three-figure dynamic. The obscene joke—or, as Freud calls it, "*Zote*" (smutty insinuation)—illustrates this structure particularly well. In a smutty story, a particular person—usually a woman whose attention the relator wants to gain—is shoved under the spotlight and teased. The woman is anything but impressed by such antics, whereas the men (in the exclusive company of other men) enjoy swapping smutty tales as a means of staving off the act of seduction. "A person who laughs at smut […] is laughing as though he were the *spectator* of an act of sexual aggression."[54] The longer the woman rebuffs the man's overtures, the more he turns to obscene banter and derives perverse pleasure from the rebuttal. In this scenario, it is the third person who acquires particular importance in the successful telling of an obscene joke. While at first merely an outsider intruding on the man's erotic pursuits, he later becomes the narrator's most significant ally.

Freud summarizes this process as follows:

> In the case of smut, the three people are in the same relation. The course of events may be thus described. When the first person finds his libidinal impulse inhibited by the woman, he develops a hostile trend against that second person and calls on the originally interfering third person as his ally. Through the first person's smutty speech

53 Freud 1905b: 100.

54 Freud 1905b: 97 (author's emphasis).

> the woman is exposed before *the third*, who, as listener, has now been bribed by the effortless satisfaction of his own libido.[55]

When smutty insinuations become a joke proper, all the technical rules of humor need to be obeyed. In other words, the more refined the joke, the subtler the allusions to the original obscenity. Moreover, the object of the original sexual inferences retreats even further into the background of the tale. Meanwhile, the woman necessary to the original seduction scene in the joke is actually felt in and through her *absence*—by the effects she continues to generate upon the joke-teller and the listener. Thus, what is now only *implied* gives substance to the joke.

Freud's detailed description of the mechanisms of humor allows us to look not only at the spectator's role, but also at the relationship between the artist, his object, and the spectator. Freud's theory about the joke and its relation to the unconscious introduces another angle from which one can analyze the matrix a painter like Manet constructs to enlist the attention and engagement of the spectator in a shared play at the expense of the depicted object. Taking Manet's work *Olympia* **[Plate 5]** as an example, we may argue that Manet takes possession of his model Victorine Meurent as she lounges back on the couch, embodying the role of the mythical Olympia. Manet somewhat bluntly makes us realize that we as the viewers will never be in a position to possess this prized object the way he did. In this way, the artist whets our appetite while vicariously satisfying his own erotic impulses, indirectly luring his spectators to share the awkward pleasure of gazing at an exposed yet unattainable naked female object. Although I have chosen *Olympia* to illustrate the parallels in the dynamics between artist-object-spectator and joker-object-listener, this does not imply that such a triadic relationship exists only in paintings whose contents are considered lewd or provocative. On the contrary, I intend to show that the joker-object-listener dynamics that Freud analyzes as being necessary for the successful outcome of a tendentious suggestive joke is equally valid for other paintings. Simply put,

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55 Freud 1905b: 100 (author's emphasis).

this underlying triadic structure holds true not only for paintings with sexual or confrontational subtexts, but also for paintings that contain no overt sexual or audacious contents, such as Manet's *Le Balcon* (1868–1869) **[Plate 10]**, *Le Buveur d'absinthe* (1859) **[Plate 11]**, or *Le Déjeuner dans l'atelier* **[Plate 2]**. For each of these paintings, an analysis of the spectator's position vis-à-vis the depicted scene is crucial in order to comprehend fully the emotional as well as the structural force of each canvas. As Lacan notes:

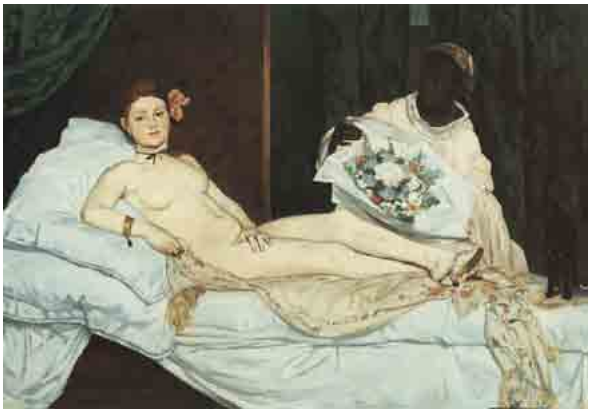


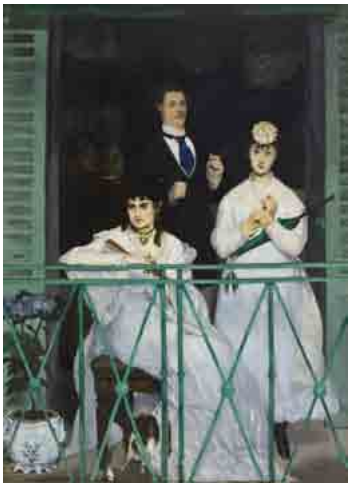
Plate 5:
Édouard Manet, *Olympia* (1863)

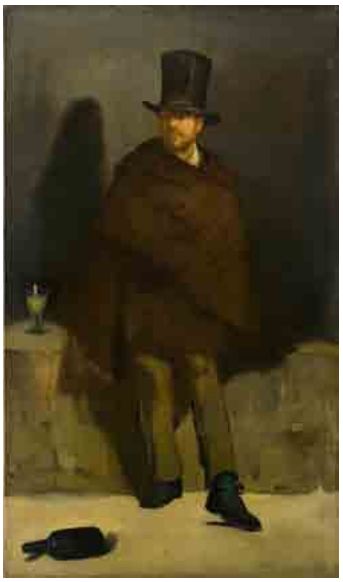
> "[…] in the picture, something of the gaze is always manifested. The painter knows this very well—his morality, his search, his quest, his practice is that he should sustain and vary the selection of a certain kind of gaze. Looking at pictures, even those most lacking in what is usually called the gaze, and which is constituted by a pair of eyes, pictures in which any representation of the human figure is absent, like a landscape by a Dutch or a Flemish painter, you will see in the end, as in filigree, something so specific to each of the painters that you will feel the presence of the gaze.[56]

When Freud compares the joke with a dream, he emphasizes that "as a result of the part played by the third person, jokes are bound by a certain condition which does not apply to dreams."[57] Unlike the joke, the dream is

> […] a completely asocial mental product; it has nothing to communicate to anyone else; it arises within the subject as a compromise between the mental forces struggling in him, it remains unintelligible to the subject himself and is for that reason totally uninteresting to other people. […] A joke, on the other hand, is the the most social of all mental functions that aim at a yield of pleasure. It often calls for

56 Lacan 1978: 101.
57 Freud 1905b: 173.





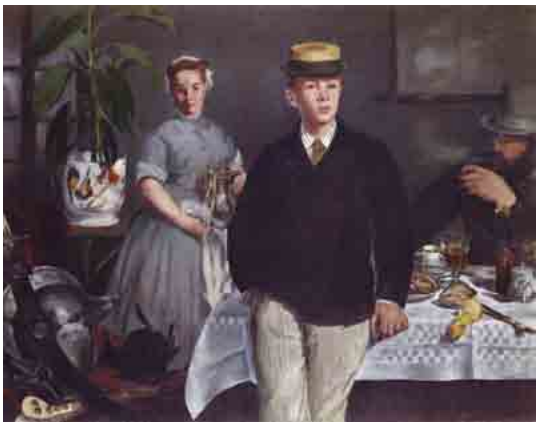


Plate 10:
Édouard Manet,
Le Balcon (1868–1869)
Plate 11:
Édouard Manet,
Le Buveur d'absinthe
(1859)
Plate 2:
Édouard Manet,
Le Déjeuner dans l'atelier
(1868)

> three persons and its *completion* requires the participation of someone else in the mental process it starts. The condition of intelligibility is, therefore, binding on it; it may only make use of possible distortion in the unconscious through condensation and displacement up to the point at which it can be set straight by the third person's understanding.[58]

The position of the third person which Freud claims to be critical for the *completion* of a joke has also become a central issue for the literary theoreticians of the Reader-Response School. They argue, for the field of literature, that a text cannot be fully analyzed without a knowledge of its effects upon its readers. Janet Wolff observes:

> The reader, viewer, or audience is actively involved in the construction of the work of art, and without the act of reception/consumption, the cultural product is incomplete. This is not to say that consumption is simultaneous with production, but that it complements and completes it.[59]

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58 Freud 1905b: 179 (author's emphasis).
59 Wolff 1981: 95.

Manet's paintings greatly complicate this need to make sense of interactivity with the object, unlike the interaction with the *Moses* statue, whose representational inconsistencies invited Freud to fill in the gaps and establish the missing connections by creating a miniature drama fueled in large measure by Freud's own projections, whether conscious or inadvertent. Manet's canvases are constructed like a modern text, in which, as Wolfgang Iser describes, "one detail appears to contradict another, and so simultaneously stimulates and frustrates our desire to 'picture', thus continually causing our imposed '*gestalt*' of the text to disintegrate."[60]

It is interesting to note that the Reader-Response theoreticians not only focus on the actions in responding to a text, but, like Freud, they also stress the importance of the reproductive and recreative aspects of the reader's interpretive response. Defining a text as a dynamic entity, they argue that a work of art can only be constructed by the mediation of past and present and of author and reader, and that creation is inherently a recreation of previous entities. The scene which Freud asks his readers to imagine when he proposes a solution to the contradictory configurations in his Moses essay is equivalent to the scenario that the joke-teller invites his listeners to construct. It is in this in-between realm—or what D.W. Winnicott calls the "transitional space"—that the self-object boundary between the artist and the spectator becomes blurred. While the passage through the transitional space is usually an unconscious process in the spectator–object relationship, Manet consciously thematizes this process and captures viewers in this "precarious play" which wavers precariously between subjectivity and objectivity. As a consequence, viewers are simultaneously engaged and caught in the transitional realm when contemplating Manet's paintings. They are both spectators of and actors in the mise-en-scène that Manet establishes in his covert and largely unconsciously assumed role as the director. We know that Manet made use of friends and family members in his scenes from urban life (see Maryanne Stevens, 2013), but we also know, as noted by Michael Lüthy, that "the scene of the picture is much less […]

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60 Iser 1980: 59.

the internal stage upon which the spectator looks. Rather, the space in-between the painting and the spectator becomes the actual stage."[61]

The psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott devoted much of his writings to this intermediate space, an element that becomes critically important for our understanding of Manet's canvases. With his concept of the transitional object and the transitional space, Winnicott injects a new vocabulary to conceptualize the fluid interchange between subject and object, in other words between the artist, his object (the painting), and its beholder. Winnicott defines the transitional object as an

> "intermediate area of *experiencing*, to which inner reality and external life both contribute. It is an area that is not challenged, because no claim is made on its behalf except that it shall exist as a resting-place for the individual engaged in the perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated."[62]

This transitional object, according to Winnicott, serves as an important stepping-stone in the gradual differentiation of inner and outer world, of me and non-me, of illusion and reality testing. Weaning the child from its omnipotent illusion that the mother's breast is an extension of itself, the child uses the transitional object to "master" the separation from the mother's breast, and to experiment with the "me" and "non-me" parts of itself. Later on, the infant's acquisition of verbal language fulfills a function similar to that of the transitional object. In this way, the transitional object becomes the mother's magical symbolic representative lending assurance to the child in the absence of the mother. The transitional object is the child's first non-me possession, an object that simultaneously symbolizes the child's desire for union with and the drive for separation from the mother. Through the use of the transitional object, the child begins to be able to form images and to think symbolically.

While I would not describe a painting as a transitional object per se, I would argue that a painting shares certain characteristics

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61 Lüthy 2016: 14 (author's translation).

62 Winnicott 1980: 3 (emphasis in the original).

with a transitional object. Unlike early transitional objects, such as a blanket or a teddy bear, a painting is not a found object but an object deliberately presented by the artist to his audience. As Winnicott emphasizes:

> Of the transitional object it can be said that it is a matter of agreement between us and the baby that we will never ask the question: "Did you conceive of this or was it presented to you from without?" The important point is that no decision on this point is expected. The question is not to be formulated.[63]

Similar to the transitional object, the painting exists in the intermediate area where it belongs neither to the artist's inner world nor to the externally shared world of the spectator and the artist. Yet, while it does not belong to either, it nonetheless encompasses attributes of both. Moreover, the viewers project their fantasies onto the painted canvas and bring the figures alive, just as little children project their fantasies into a transitional object. In this way, we might venture to state that the scenario which Freud constructed when contemplating the Moses statue, compares to the child's creation of a transitional object. Both phenomena arise from the need to bridge the gap between the external object and oneself, that is the need to make the unfamiliar familiar. Winnicott recognized that transitional phenomena exist throughout life and are not limited to the child's early development. "This intermediate area of experience, unchallenged in respect of its belonging to inner or external (shared) reality," he notes, "constitutes the greater part of the infant's experience, and throughout life is retained in the intense experiencing that belongs to the arts and to religion and to imaginative living, and to creative scientific work."[64]

It is my contention that it is this intermediate transitional area that is repeatedly addressed, questioned, and challenged in Manet's paintings. The beholder of his works is regularly diverted in and out of this intermediate space, and suspended between subjectivity and

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63 Winnicott 1980: 14.

64 Winnicott 1980: 16.

objectivity, the world of the me and the not-me, the realm of illusion and reality. Winnicott defined psychotherapy as "the overlap of two areas of playing, that of the patient and that of the therapist. Psychotherapy has to do with two people playing together."[65] This idea of a common field of play is reminiscent of Freud's famous notion of transference as a playground ("Tummelplatz," 1914: 154), the space of rough-and-tumble in which one "is allowed to expand in almost complete freedom"[66] and permitted to unfold one's fantasies and desires, as he himself did while contemplating the Moses statue. This freedom of play, of actor and director, of subject and object, of projection and introjection in Manet's works will be examined later, with a particular emphasis upon the artist's intricate way of engaging the viewer in an uncanny play of provocation and estrangement, unleashing all the familiar rules by which the spectator-artist relationship had existed thus far.

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65 Winnicott 1980: 44.

66 Freud 1914a: 154.