

The Physiognomical Portraits of Johann Caspar Lavater

Joan K. Stemmler

The Swiss minister Johann Caspar Lavater (1741–1801) was certain that the wise physiognomist who studied and used the science of physiognomy with discernment could read the internal from the external, the character of humankind from the countenance and from its correct graphic representation.¹ His major physiognomic works and translations, *Physiognomische Fragmente, zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntniss und Menschenliebe* of 1775–78, *Essai sur la Physiognomonie, destiné à faire connaître l'homme et à le faire aimer* of 1781–1803, and *Essays on Physiognomy, Designed to Promote the Knowledge and the Love of Mankind* of 1788–99, expanded early writings and presented the “science” of his physiognomical theory.² By evaluating Lavater's comments in these volumes about representations of his face in portraits, silhouettes, and profile outlines, and by studying his interest in the production and dissemination of his image on the Continent and in England, we can clarify his point of view in regard to the human physiognomy and to the processes involved in its graphic representation.

Physiognomy in the sense of the expressiveness of a form or of a style has figured in those studies by Ernst Gombrich which call attention to the “physiognomical fallacy.”³ Concerned with both self-expression and the expression of an age, Gombrich cautioned that the initial clues derived from

physiognomic perception, though of value, are fallible. Reflexive, intuitive, or aesthetic response to the physiognomy of a person, an image, or a view of a historic age, is for Gombrich basic, compulsive, and ultimately regressive, neither communication nor understanding. He deplored the “physiognomical fallacy,” “the myth that the system of signs, the style, is not a language but an utterance of the collective, in which a nation or age, speaks to us.”⁴

Recent literary and art-historical studies have shown how references to physiognomy and to Lavater figure in the work of Reynolds, Goethe, Fuseli, Blake, and Girodet.⁵ The expanded descriptive presence of physiognomical detail in nineteenth-century literature has been studied by Graeme Tytler,⁶ and Mary Cowling cites Lavater in her investigation of how the Victorian public consciously or unconsciously acquired the cultural habit of perceiving and reading their contemporaries as physiognomical types, incorporating the subsequent systematization of Lavater's thought into an accepted code of interpretation.⁷ In a review of Cowling's book, Ludmilla Jordanova considers the modern intellectual stance on physiognomy, reminding us that we still judge and make assessments of people primarily on the basis of inferences from appearance.⁸ She states that account must be taken in discussions of physiognomy of the problems

I have presented some aspects of this paper in talks given to the East-Central American Society for Eighteenth Century Studies (1987) and the Mid-Western American Society for Eighteenth Century Studies (1990). I thank *The Art Bulletin*'s anonymous readers for their suggestions about expanding the material.

¹ The initial studies in English devoted to Lavater are the dissertation by Graham, his subsequent articles, and the book based on them. No complete bibliography of Lavater has yet been published. See also Gombrich, 1960 and 1970; Allentuck; Schiff; C. Hall, *Blake and Fuseli: A Study in the Transmission of Ideas*, New York, 1985. An interdisciplinary conference on Lavater organized by Ellis Shookman and held at Dartmouth College in November, 1991 brought together much new work on Lavater. Willibald Sauerländer's Mellon Lectures in the fall of 1991 at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., were titled “Changing Faces: Art and Physiognomy, A History of Representing the Passions,” as yet unpublished.

² These three sets of volumes will be referred to as *Fragmente*, *Physiognomie*, and *Physiognomy* respectively. I wish to thank the institutions where I have consulted these volumes, especially those which have sent me page copies and photographs with permission to publish them: Dartmouth College Library, Hanover, N.H.; the National Library of Medicine, Bethesda, Md.; the Rare Book Room of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; the Special Divisions at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pa.; and the Department of Prints and Drawings of the Zentralbibliothek Zürich.

³ It first appears in Gombrich, 1960, 45, 49, 50, 52; and in an expanded version in Gombrich, 1970, esp. 127, where physiognomics is treated as the art of reading character from the permanent traits of the face; and in Gombrich, 1966, esp. 73, 74, where the term “expression” is taken more narrowly to imply some kind of correspondence between inwardness and outward sign. See also Allentuck, 103–106, on Gombrich and Lavater.

⁴ Writing about the need for accurate scholarship in combatting false myth, E. Gombrich, “Art and Scholarship” (1957), in *Meditations on a Hobby Horse and Other Essays on the Theory of Art*, London, 1963, 107–112, esp. 107, n. 6, comments on the Nazi myth and the way an erroneous theory from the field of comparative philology was mistakenly transferred to 19th-century physical anthropology and 20th-century racial theory. For other observations touching this topic, see Riha and Zelle, 128–129; W. Sauerländer, “Überlegungen zu dem Thema Lavater und die Kunstgeschichte,” *Idea*, viii, 1989, 22.

⁵ See G. Levitine, “The Influence of Lavater and Girodet's *Expression des sentiments de l'âme*,” *Art Bulletin*, xxxvi, 1954, 33–44; J. Graham, “Character Description and Meaning in the Romantic Novel,” *Studies in Romanticism*, v, 1966, 208–218, for early appearances in literature; A. Mellor, “Physiognomy, Phrenology, and Blake's Visionary Heads,” in R. Essick and D. Pearce, eds., *Blake in His Time*, Bloomington, 1978, 53–74; B. Stafford's review of David Bindman's *Blake as an Artist*, in *Art Quarterly*, ii, 1979, 121, in which she suggested that certain statements on the part of Blake should be interpreted “in the light of late eighteenth-century theories of physiognomics”; Schroyer for Blake and Fuseli; M. Eaves, *William Blake's Theory of Art*, Princeton, 1982; M. Shortland, “The Power of a Thousand Eyes: Johann Caspar Lavater's Science of Physiognomical Perception,” *Criticism*, xxviii, 1986, for multiple references to Lavater in 18th- and 19th-century literature; Schlaffer, 21, for Goethe; N. Tscherny, “Likeness in Early Romantic Portraiture,” *Art Journal*, xlvi, 1987, 193–200, for Reynolds as a physiognomist; Essick, 1989, 99–101, for a mention of physiognomy in connection with Blake.

⁶ *Physiognomy in the European Novel: Faces and Fortunes*, Princeton, 1982.

⁷ *The Artist as Anthropologist: The Representation of Type and Character in Victorian Art*, Cambridge, 1989, 7.

⁸ “Reading Faces in the Nineteenth Century,” *Art History*, xiii, 1990, 571. This aspect of the rapidity of automatic evaluative responses to visual stimuli studied in behavioral psychology was also emphasized in the talk at Dartmouth 1991 by Siegfried Frey, “Lavater, Lichtenberg, and the Suggestive Power of the Human Face.”

inherent in consideration of language and linguistic inferences and the political implications of typology.⁹

David Freedberg, acknowledging Gombrich's contribution to our recognition of the "convention-bound nature of figurative illusion," addresses the power of the image and urges that the "time has come to acknowledge the possibility that our responses to imagery may be of the same order as our responses to reality,"¹⁰ thus widening the scope of the consideration of the physiognomic fallacy. Willibald Sauerländer, writing about art-historical methodologies, uses the example of Lavater's *Fragmente* as a vehicle to describe the problems of belief in direct clarity of expression in the historical artwork.¹¹

Barbara Stafford, focusing on issues of visual perception in an increasingly image-oriented society, notes that images require understanding and knowledgeable use. However, speaking of a common somatic existence of the human race, she believes in an "unspeakable and shared utterance not requiring translation into another written mode"; for her, imagery corresponds to that "intuitive ability of the mind to perceive the truth of some proposition that cannot be settled according to a formal system."¹² Seeking to identify and interpret visual strategies and theories put forward in the eighteenth century for ways of imaging the unseen, she proposes that the plates in the *Physiognomy*, the graphic images with their linear outlines and fragmented bodily features, are examples of the kind of abstraction, systematization, analysis, and emptying of substance she sees as pervasive in many eighteenth-century pictorial practices.¹³

Since Lavater's name has been invoked to support various positions in recent criticism about "physiognomical" reading, it is useful to return to his own words and images of him. We can grasp more accurately the complexity of his approach to physiognomy by focusing on representations of his own form. By 1801, the year Lavater died, many copies of his printed image, exact and inexact, had appeared in connection with the various editions of his physiognomical and pastoral works.

Lavater, along with his longtime friend, Henry Fuseli, was a pupil of Johann Jakob Bodmer and Johann Jakob Breitinger, leaders of the "Sturm and Drang" in Zurich; the two friends, early supporters of Rousseau, were ordained Zwinglian ministers.¹⁴ Lavater and Fuseli traveled to Germany in 1763, and by the early 1770s, Lavater knew both Herder and Goethe.¹⁵ Lavater's translation of two works of Charles

⁹ Jordanova (as in n. 8), 572, 573.

¹⁰ *The Power of the Image*, Chicago, 1989, 59, 201, 438.

¹¹ Sauerländer (as in n. 4), 15–30, esp. 28.

¹² Stafford, 471, 473, 474.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 12, 91–103, 477.

¹⁴ Chronologies, notes, afterwords, and bibliographies may be found in Swiss and German commentaries by Brednow, 1–47; Siegrist, 1–40; Riha and Zelle, 111–145, some of which I have used here for factual content without citation.

¹⁵ Brednow, 6–10.

¹⁶ For Bonnet, see Brednow, 4, 8; Schlaffer, 19; and, for the need for classification as a means to mastery and control, Jordanova (as in n. 8), 574.

Bonnet may have led to his own interests in classification.¹⁶ Coming of age in a city that valued the expressiveness of the portrait as much as that of history painting, Lavater popularized the aesthetics of Johann Georg Sulzer in his volumes.¹⁷ Lavater, along with some of his contemporaries, first became interested in the topic of physiognomy in the mid-1760s;¹⁸ he drew the profiles of two friends, noticing that they had noses whose shapes were similar to his.¹⁹

Although Lavater's first book, *Von der Physiognomik*, had no pictures,²⁰ the luxurious four-volume quarto edition of *Fragmente* was profusely illustrated. Included are a profile portrait, a silhouette, and a profile in outline (Figs. 1–2).²¹ His expensive German volumes were intended for an elite, discriminating, and enlightened audience; their purchasers were the aristocracy and library associations.²² Three richly illustrated volumes of the revised French quarto edition, *Physiognomonie*, were published before the Revolution in 1789; Lavater claimed to have personally supervised the revision and expansion of his German volumes, which were translated from manuscript into French.²³ The Eleventh Fragment of the second volume of 1783 was enlivened by four kinds of engraved representations of Lavater (Figs. 3–6).²⁴ Finally, the publication of the three-volume English translation, *Physiognomy*, undertaken in the late 1780s, contained copies of these French engravings.²⁵

These three sets of volumes, in whose production Lavater was closely involved, represent his intentions as far as text and image are concerned. In my references to these texts, I will try, where possible, to show the correspondences among the three editions and to note where there are important emendations of and additions to the German volumes in the French and English translations. In translations other than the ones I discuss and in pirated copies,²⁶ however, the systematized and abridged texts reflect the private agendas of the translators. For instance, the most popular English translation, that by Thomas Holcroft, reflects the views of Holcroft, a man characterized as a skeptic and atheist, an

¹⁷ Landsberger, 30–31. See the frequent references to Sulzer in *Fragmente*, II, "Ueber die Porträtmahlerey," 78–85.

¹⁸ See Brednow, 30, for Lavater's debt to Petrus Camper; Riha and Zelle, 112.

¹⁹ *Fragmente*, I, 8.

²⁰ Riha and Zelle, 141. I wish to thank Professor Carsten Zelle for sending me a copy of the newly edited *Von der Physiognomik*.

²¹ See Brednow, 4–6. The profile in outline, not reproduced here, heads a "Fragment on Family Resemblances," *Fragmente*, IV, 337. For Fuseli's role, see Allentuck, 90–97.

²² Brednow, 11; Schlaffer, 13.

²³ Translator's pref., *Physiognomonie*, x.

²⁴ *Physiognomonie*, II, 1783, "Onzième Fragment," 200–209.

²⁵ *Physiognomy*, II, 225–233. The *Physiognomy* is illustrated by more than eight hundred, accurately copied engravings, and some duplicates added from originals. Although the first volume is dated 1789 on the title page, see New York Public Library, *The Arents Collection of Books in Parts and Associated Literature: A Complete Checklist*, New York, 1957, 74, for the information that it was issued in forty-one parts between 1788 and 1799.

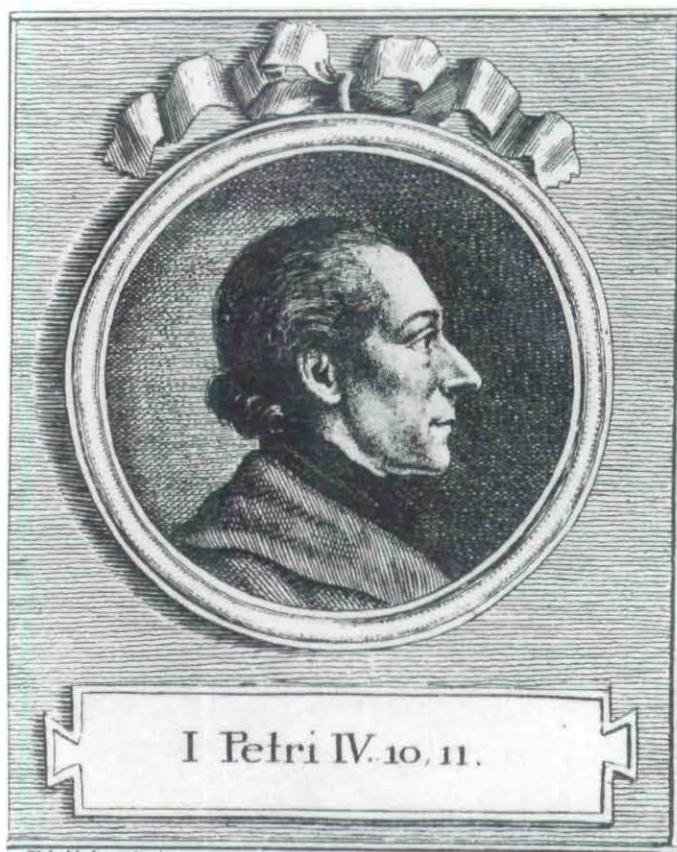
²⁶ For an indication of these numbers, see J. Graham, "Lavater's *Physiognomy*: A Checklist," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, LV, 1961, 297–308.

idealist who wanted to rearrange the world, and a careless and hasty translator.²⁷ Holcroft, who may not even have read German, produced a secularized version of Lavater's essentially theocentric message and gave it a systematized form.²⁸ The reengraved plates are imperfect copies of the original graphic images or conflations of several plates into one; many images are omitted. The reproductions of Lavater's image are strikingly different from those in the deluxe edition.²⁹ Thus, today's researcher who relies on Holcroft cannot fully understand Lavater's position.³⁰

For Lavater, analysis of his own physiognomy involved far more than an objective practice of the science of physiognomy. He viewed the face as a presentation of moral and spiritual truth, expressing distance from or closeness to the divine ideal. The essential Christological beliefs of Lavater and his emphasis on the form of matter clarify the fundamental importance to him of physiognomy and its place in a physical, moral, and spiritual universe. As an image of God, his face and its graphic representations were of major importance in the communication of information about himself. The divine essence and the physical were connected.

In an age of artifice and pretension, Lavater believed in physiognomy as a science that would help people know truth and love one another. He himself did not propose a universal system, nor did he suggest that the work of the one he called the *physiognomiste philosophe* was either simple or easy.³¹ For him, physiognomy referred to the bony skull and the measurements derived from it, not to the expressions of muscle and flesh, for which he reserved the name "pathognomy." A selective reading of his texts allows us to follow the processes of his thought to discover why the physical being and its representation were so important to him.

The motto of the *Fragmente* is "Gott schuf den Menschen sich zum Bilde." Lavater opens the text with a long extract from Johann Gottfried Herder's *Älteste Urkunde des Menschengeschlechtes*, a commentary on the creation of man in the image and likeness of God.³² Basic to Lavater's physiognomical theory is the belief that the physical body is an image of the spiritual essence of God and the necessary form of the



1 Georg Friederich Schmoll, *Johann Kaspar Lavater*, etching and engraving by Johann Heinrich Lips, 10.2 × 8.2cm, from *Fragmente*, 1968, i, 271 (photo: author)

²⁷ See E. Colby, *A Bibliography of Thomas Holcroft*, New York, 1922, 21, 11, 13.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 60. Holcroft's translation eliminates many of Lavater's references to Christ.

²⁹ See, besides the frontispiece in Vol. I, pl. VIII, 174; pls. IX, XII, XXXIV, 240. The accompanying commentary on pp. 173, 231, 232, 240, not in the original German, is greatly abbreviated from the French.

³⁰ Shortland (as in n. 5), in spite of his recognition of problems of translation (384, n. 35, 385, 386, n. 45), chooses Holcroft's eighteenth edition for his goal of recuperating a key "Lavaterian text" to provide a secure and solid foundation for future research into the social and cultural history of physiognomy. Shortland's choice of a late edition, an edition even more curtailed than that of the original translation by Holcroft (the same choice as that made by Graham and Cowling), does enable him to show what mid-19th-century English-speaking readers knew of Lavater. It does not, however, allow him to discuss the volumes actually published and supervised by Lavater. To conclude, as Shortland does (p. 396), that reliances on the Bible and on God are secondary in Lavater's thinking is therefore erroneous.

³¹ *Physiognomie*, I, vii, 24.

³² The motto and extract are found in the first pages of Vol. I in the *Fragmente*, *Physiognomie*, and *Physiognomy*.

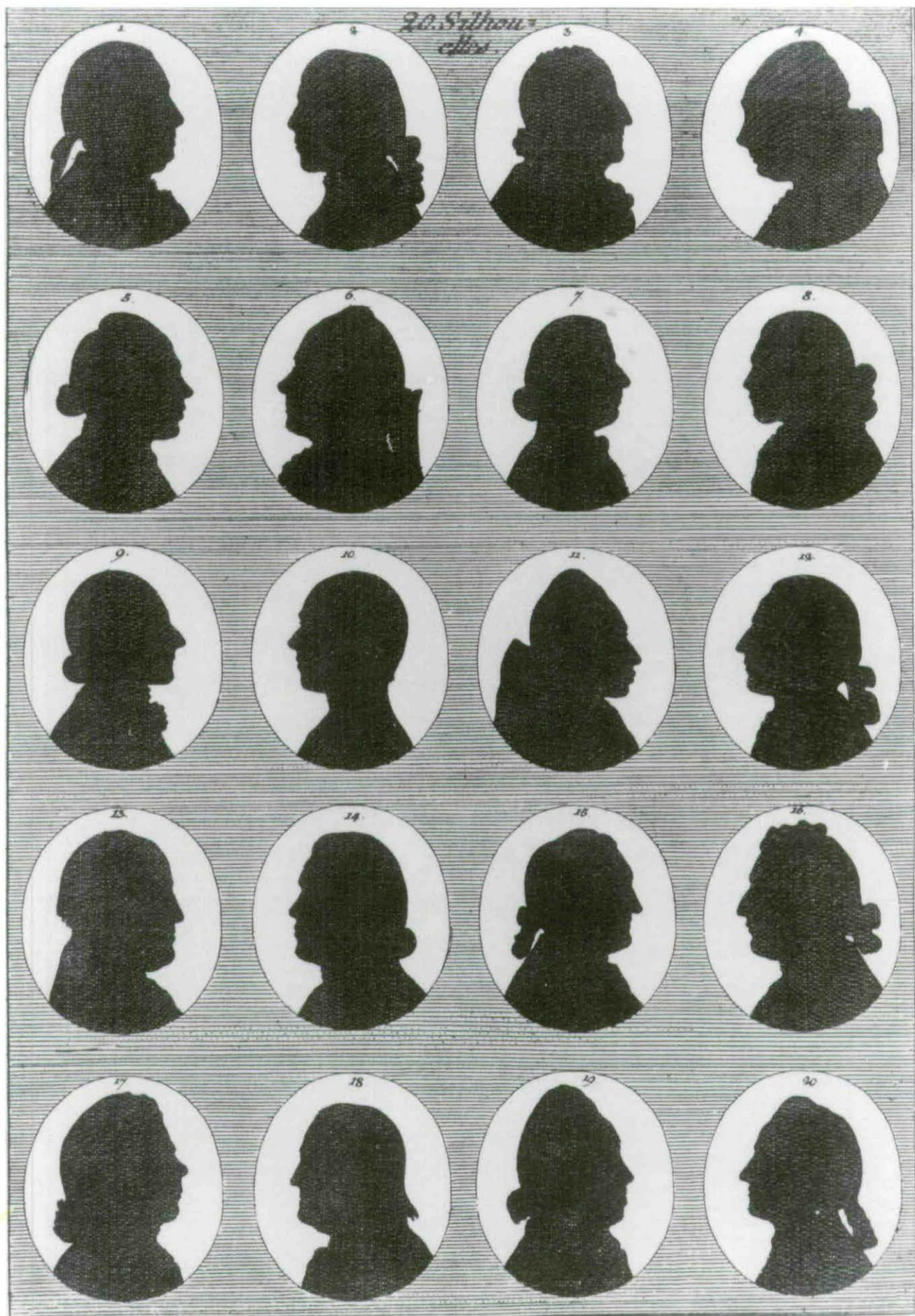
essence of the divine in the material world. Believing with Emanuel Swedenborg that there is a spiritual basis for physiognomy, Lavater expanded the definition of language to include the idea that human physiognomy is or was a form of wordless speech.³³ That he depended on Swedenborg was proposed in 1938 by Ernst Benz, who produced and analyzed evidence showing that, in the 1760s, Lavater was interested in and influenced by Swedenborg's writing. For proof that Lavater had sought out Swedenborg by 1768, Benz cites two letters from him to the theologian and suggests that it was fear of the disapproval of Emanuel Kant that prevented Lavater from acknowledging his debt to Swedenborg.³⁴ Lavater drew on Swedenborg's belief in the communicative capacity of the unmasked natural physiognomy as a universal language.

Swedenborg believed that physiognomy showed the inner man based on his idea of a correspondence between the spiritual and the earthly world as one of original and copy.³⁵ For him, the original speech or language, the *Ursprache* of the *Uralten*, was physiognomical, consisting of minute move-

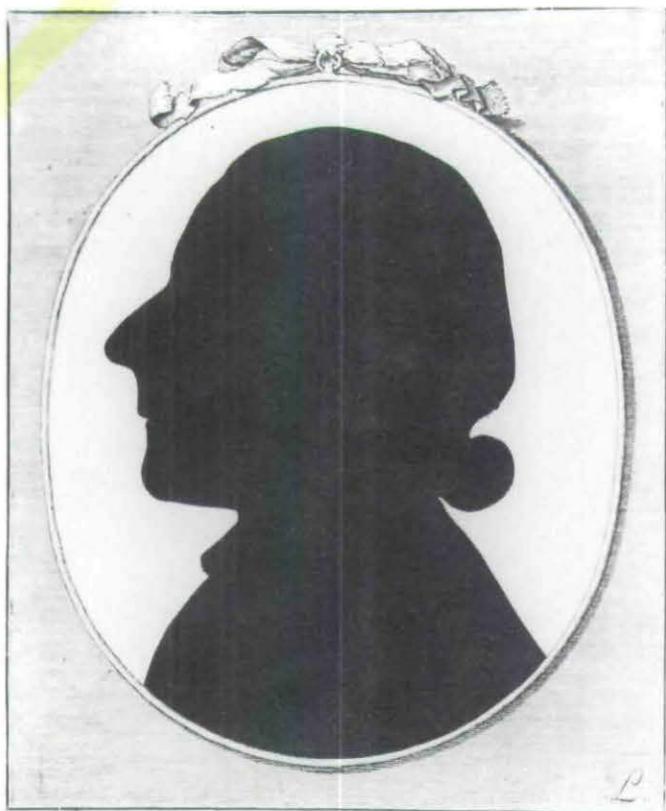
³³ Benz, 153–163.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 163–164.

³⁵ For this and the following, I rely on direct quotations of Swedenborg's work in Benz, who cites the German translation of Swedenborg's *Arcana Coelestia* by F. Riehm, *Himmliche Geheimnisse*, n.p., 1867, hereafter cited as HG 2988–89. Lavater could of course read Latin.



2 Johann Heinrich Lips(?), 20 Silhouettes: Lavater is no. 9., from *Fragmente*, 1968, III, facing p. 36 (photo: National Library of Medicine, Bethesda, Md.)



3 Johann Heinrich Lips(?), *Johann Caspar Lavater*, from *Physiognomie*, 1783, II, pl. XXXVIII (photo: Dartmouth College Library, Hanover, N.H.)

ments of fine muscular filaments in the countenance, which could transparently convey inner thoughts and feelings in a minute from one individual to another, "as the angels still do."³⁶ Gradually, however, in Swedenborg's formulation, the *Urmensch* in different planetary worlds fell away from God, and their facial physiognomies were transformed, becoming different from the image of God's essence; their physiognomies then hardened, hiding the transparency of thought and feeling.³⁷ This necessitated the invention of word-speech (*Wortsprache*), lengthening the process of instantaneous communication, so that what used to take moments to communicate later took hours.³⁸ This process made man capable of deception; the mask-like face and word-speech destroyed the correspondence between inner and outer man and the freedom of direct expression made possible by the *Ursprache*.³⁹

Lavater drew upon Swedenborg's visionary and physiognomic ideas in his earliest writings, *Aussichten in die Ewigkeit*

³⁶ HG 1119, HG 607; Benz, 168.

³⁷ HG 7360, HG 8250; Benz, 172, 176–177.

³⁸ HG 607, HG 8249; Benz, 168, 171–172.

³⁹ Benz, 174. Compare Gombrich, 1970, 110, for the central paradox in the field of physiognomic perception, the one implied in the distinction between face and mask, the experiences of the underlying constancies in a person's face. See also in Gombrich, 1966, the distinction between symptom and symbol, as the natural and the conventional.

⁴⁰ Benz, 154, 155. J. C. Lavater, *Aussichten in die Ewigkeit* in *Briefen an Herrn Joh. Georg Zimmermann*, 4 vols., Zurich, 1768–78; for *Von der Physiognomik*, see Riha and Zelle, 1991, esp. 121–122, for Lavater's concept of speech.

and *Von der Physiognomik*,⁴⁰ but with two important differences. He did not mention the mask, and he believed that the divine dwells in man.⁴¹ In a letter of 1773 in *Aussichten*, partly retaining Swedenborg's beliefs about *Ursprache*, Lavater wrote of visual and verbal speech in Heaven. Different from that on earth, heavenly speech is *successiv* and *momentan*, with time and space instantaneously fused. Earthly speech, however, is divided; word-speech is successive and painting and symbolic speech are simultaneous.⁴² In his notes to *Aussichten* of 1778, Lavater defined the kingdom of Christ and the body of Christ not only as moral and spiritual, but as corporeal and physical as well.⁴³ Earlier, Lavater had written about the essence of this corporeal being. "The other Adam, namely Christ, is from heaven, his body is formed from the matter [*Stoffe*] of the most elevated heaven; a material, the *pneuma*, a spirit, a spiritual essence, and when he is formed as an organic body, *pneuma zoopoion*, he will be named a living spirit. And from the same matter [*Stoff*] our bodies will also be formed."⁴⁴ This *Stoff*, dense in its organic aspect, is nevertheless perfectly malleable and expressive. "As Christ is the most expressive, most active, most perfect exact image of the invisible God, . . . so is each person entirely expression, simultaneous, genuine, all-inclusive, . . . he is entirely nature-language [*Natursprache*]."⁴⁵ Ernst Benz's conclusion inserted at this point, "for this world the physiognomy is the speech of humanity," indicates that he held the kind of dangerous assumption against which Gombrich speaks in describing the "physiognomical fallacy."⁴⁶

In *Von der Physiognomik*, Lavater emphasized that morality and beauty are in harmony, calling this a nature-speech of moral and intellectual genius, of wisdom and virtue.⁴⁷ In this

⁴¹ For Swedenborg, see M. Paley, "'A New Heaven is Begun': William Blake and Swedenborgianism," *Blake Quarterly*, XIII, 1979, 64–90.

⁴² Benz, 198–199, citing *Aussichten*, III, Letter 16, 104. The translations are mine; I thank Professor Carol Hall for her suggestions on these translations. "Jede, auch die vollkommenste Wortsprache der Erde, hat die sehr wesentliche Unvollkommenheit—dass sie nur *successiv* ist; wie die Bilder- und Zeichensprache für das Auge nur *momentan*. Die Sprache des Himmels, soll sie vollkommen seyn, muss *successiv* und *momentan* zugleich seyn; das ist, sie muss einen ganzen gleichzeitigen Haufen von Bildern, Gedanken, Empfindungen, wie ein Gemälde zugleich und auf einmal, und dennoch die *successiven* mit der grössten und wahrhaftesten Schnelligkeit darstellen. Sei muss Gemälde und Sprache zugleich seyn."

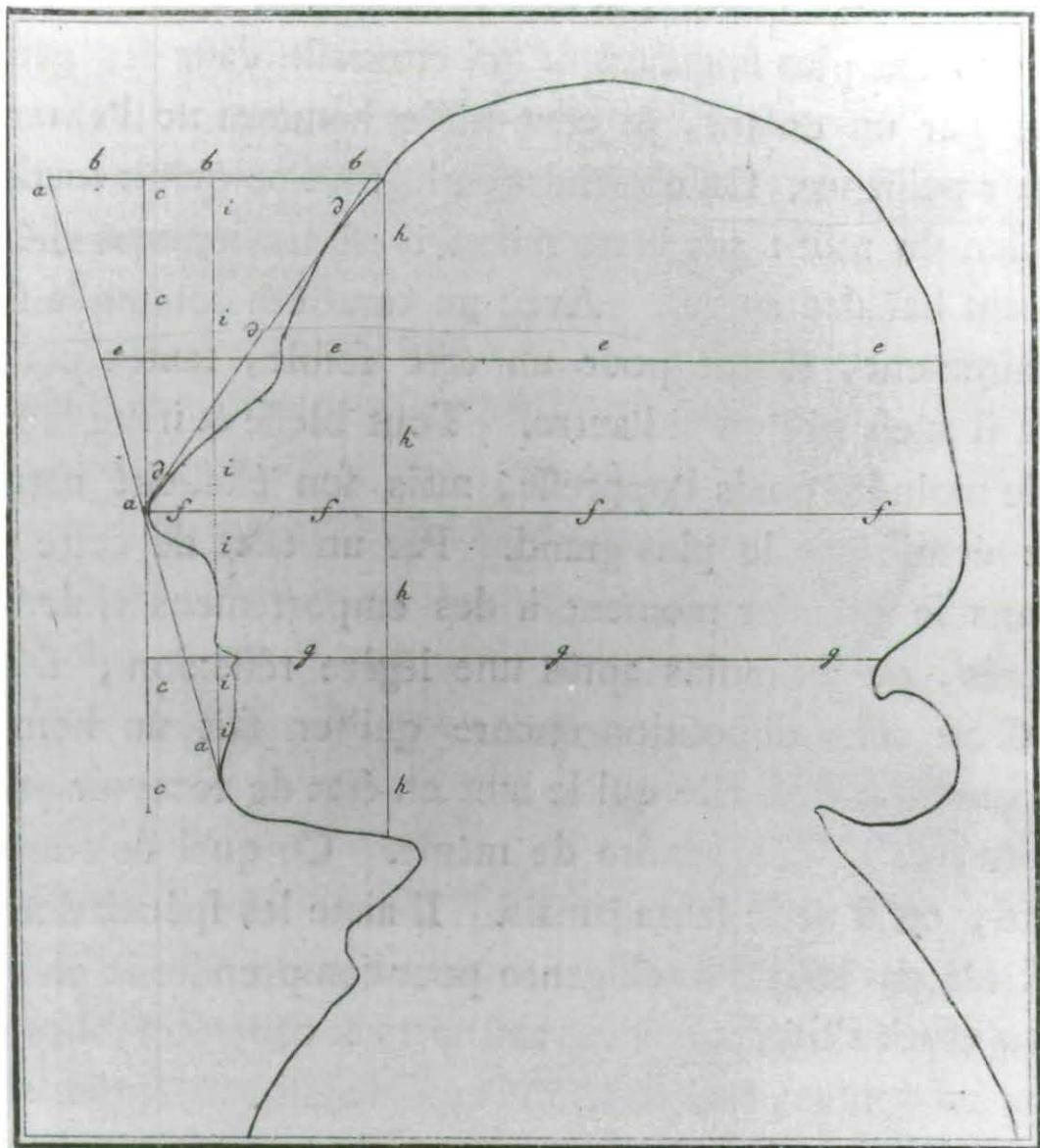
⁴³ Benz, 190, citing *Aussichten*, IV, 146. "So gut Christus ein moralischer König ist, so ist er ein physischer. . . . Ein unphysischer Christus ist kein Christus. Ein unphysisches Reich ist kein Reich."

⁴⁴ Benz, 192, citing *Aussichten*, II, Letter 11, 61. "Der andere Adam, nämlich der HErr, ist aus dem Himmel. Sein Körper ist aus dem Stoffe des erhabensten Himmels gebildet; aus einem Stoff, der *pneuma*, ein Geist, ein geistiges Wesen, und wenn er zu einem organischen Körper gebildet ist, *pneuma zoopoion*, ein belebender Geist genent wird. Und aus demselben Stoff werden auch unsere Körper gebildet werden."

⁴⁵ Benz, 199, citing *Aussichten*, III, Letter 16, 108. "Wie Christus das redendste, lebendigste, vollkommenste Ebenbild des unsichtbaren Gottes ist, . . . so ist jeder Mensch so ganz Ausdruck, gleichzeitiger, wahrhaftiger, vielfassender, unerschöpflicher, unnachahmbarer Ausdruck; er ist ganz Natursprache." See also Brednow, 5, and Riha and Zelle, 122, for more precise transcriptions which insert "(-ein Ebenbild Gottes und Christi)" after "Mensch."

⁴⁶ Benz, 199. See n. 4 above.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 208, citing *Fragmente*, 13 [n.p.], which copies a passage from *Von der Physiognomik*; for the latter, see Riha and Zelle, 30, 128, which locates the copied passage in *Fragmente*, I, 9th frag., 57–77.



4 Silhouette in line engraving of Johann Caspar Lavater, from *Physiognomonie*, 1783, II, 201 (photo: National Library of Medicine, Bethesda, Md.)

equation of beauty of form with virtue and divine perfection, Lavater followed Winckelmann.⁴⁸ In the *Fragmente*, Lavater expanded these earlier writings but omitted mention of the spiritual world.

Lavater always maintained that the principal object of his research was the "constitution, the form, and the curvature of the skull [sic]."⁴⁹ The natural and essential bony skull and its carefully measured proportions are the true indicators of the character of man, whereas the face and the flesh are the accidentals.⁵⁰ In the expanded French and English translations from the original German, the section "On the Human Scull" was fully rewritten and rearranged. One passage remained, however, in all editions. With a small but signifi-

cant substitution of the verb "to speak" for "to see," Lavater asserted that "inspection of the bones of the scull, of their forms and contour, speak, if not everything, at least most frequently, much more than all the rest."⁵¹

In Lavater's personal reading, the features of his face can make statements. How do these bones of the skull speak? In a section on the temperaments in the *Physiognomonie*, he explained.

As every one of us has his proper form, and proper physiognomy, so also every human body, or rather, every body, in general is composed, according to fixed rules of different ingredients, homogeneous and heterogeneous;

⁴⁸ See *Fragmente*, IV, 171, in which Lavater calls Winckelmann's writings a basis for the physiognomic study of characteristic expressions; *Physiognomonie*, III, 44, "Les Ecrits de Winckelmann sont une ménée d'or pour le Physionomiste."

⁴⁹ I cite the English translation, "On the Human Scull." Compare the similar passages in *Fragmente*, II, 143–174; *Physiognomonie*, II, 129–156; *Physiognomy*, II, pt. 1, 145–176.

⁵⁰ *Fragmente*, II, 145; *Physiognomonie*, II, 131; *Physiognomy*, II, Pt. 1, 147.

⁵¹ *Fragmente*, II, 148: "Zeigen, dass aus blossen Bau, der Form, dem Umriss und des Beschaffenheit der Knochen—freylich von Menschen nicht gar alles, aber sehr viel, und vielleicht mehr, als aus allem andern, gesehen werden kann." "To show that from the uncovered structure and form, the outline and the constitution of the bones [of the skull] can be seen—of course not all of man, but very much, and perhaps, more than from all others" (my translation). *Physiognomonie*, II, 139, D; *Physiognomy*, II, Pt. 1, 154, D. This passage is omitted by Holcroft.

and I cannot doubt for a single instant, if I may be allowed the expression, that in the great magazine of God, there exists for every individual a formula of preparation, a special ordinance, which determines the duration of his life, the species of his sensibility and activity; hence it follows that every body has its own individual temperament, its peculiar degree of irritability and elasticity.⁵²

This "formula of preparation" is, I believe, associated with the *Stoff*, the divine essence, which is described in the *Aussichten*. In another Fragment, Lavater dipped briefly into embryology, from which he assimilated the idea that the fetus is composed of a "soft and mucilaginous substance" in which the bones are first a "transparent and delicate jelly," only later becoming more opaque.⁵³ We then find that "the cavity of the skull is visibly fitted to the mass of the substances which it contains, and follows their growth at every age of human life. Thus the exterior form of the brain which imprints itself perfectly on the interior surface of the skull, is at the same time the model of the contours of the exterior surface."⁵⁴ Every work of the hands of the Sovereign Creator of all things is assigned an order, and if one should be assigned the order of the human form, one has the chance to develop to perfection the individual temperament of one's *Stoff* in a human way. Internal forms are the work of Nature, characterized by Lavater as the effect of an "inexplicable predestination."⁵⁵ (It is interesting to compare Lavater's presentation of the predetermined *Urform* of *Stoff* with two modern views: the modern biological explanation of the transmission of genetic material as the determinant factor in the development of the human body and Gombrich's sociological interpretation of character development: "We assume a persona assigned by life and we grow into our type till it moulds all our behaviour."⁵⁶) In Lavater's view, it follows that the bones of one's skull, soft at first, are continually worked upon from the inside by the developing brain and from the outside by the muscles, those expressers of the passions. By middle and old age, one has actually created the form of one's own face, within natural limits. For Lavater, these

⁵² *Physiognomy*, III, 1, 2nd frag., "Physiological Miscellanies," chap. 1, "Of the Temperaments," 93; *Physiognomonie*, III, 2nd frag., chap. 1, "Des Tempéramens," ". . . je ne doute pas un instant . . . que dans le gran Magasin de Dieu il n'existe pour chaque individu, une formule de préparation, une ordonnance particulière, qui détermine la durée de sa vie, le genre de sa sensibilité et de son activité; d'où il suit que chaque corps a son propre tempérament individuel, son propre degré d'irritabilité et d'élasticité. . . . dans le gran Magasin de Dieu il n'existe pour chaque individu, une formule de préparation, une ordonnance particulière, qui détermine la durée de sa vie, le genre de sa sensibilité et de son activité; d'où il suit que chaque corps a son propre tempérament individuel, son propre degré d'irritabilité et d'élasticité." Holcroft translates the same passage, which did not appear in the German, using the metaphor of a dispensatory of God (iv, 63).

⁵³ *Fragmente*, II, 144; *Physiognomonie*, II, 130; *Physiognomy*, II, Pt. 1, 146; where he cites Albini, *Icones ossium foetus humani*, and Bidloo, *Anatomia corporis humani*.

⁵⁴ *Physiognomonie*, II, 133; *Physiognomy*, II, Pt. 1, 149. I cannot find this passage in the German.

⁵⁵ The original text in *Fragmente*, II, 146, differentiates *Urform* and *Ausbildung*, "original form" and "development." The emphasis changes slightly in the revised text of *Physiognomonie*, II, 132; *Physiognomy*, II, Pt. 1, 148.

⁵⁶ 1970, 111.

speaking bones tell the truth; they make a statement about character.

By the time the *Fragmente* text was underway, Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, the Gottingen intellectual noted for his wit and for his own physiognomical studies, realized the negative effect of Lavater's work on the credulous populace.⁵⁷ Lichtenberg attacked the comments on the skull that Lavater made in *Von der Physiognomik*. "What! exclaims the Physiognomist—could the soul of Newton inhabit the scull of a Negro? an angelic mind dwell in a hideous form?—Unmeaning jargon! the declamation of a child."⁵⁸ In response to this and other criticism, Lavater removed his racially explicit reference to the Moors in *Von der Physiognomik*; in the *Fragmente*, he substituted instead the Laplanders, another group of mysterious "others."⁵⁹ In another public response, first published in the *Deutsches Museum*, and then in all editions of his *Physiognomy*, Lavater was drawn into accepting certain satiric hypotheses.⁶⁰ Commenting on Lichtenberg's statement: "One says: people with arched pointed noses are witty; people with snub noses are not," Lavater pedantically tried to rebut. He noted "that persons with delicate, narrow, sharply drawn, angled noses pointing somewhat down towards the lips are rich in wit [*witzreich*]," but that the reverse is not true. "Certain flat noses have an entirely other sort of wit."⁶¹ However, taking Lichtenberg's statement seriously for the moment, Lavater found that "our way of thinking is usually analogous to the form of our body,"⁶² concluding that "the nose is at once the *sign*, the *cause*, and the *effect* of understanding."⁶³ Revealing his visionary bias in the *Fragmente*, Lavater wrote that we see not only the form, but also the *Stoff* that makes the form; this *Stoff* is perhaps the *Urgrund* of form.⁶⁴

⁵⁷ See Gombrich, 1960, who quotes parts of Lichtenberg's "Fragment von Schwänzen" reprinted from *Vermischte Schriften*, Göttingen, 1867; for Lichtenberg's satire, see J. Graham, "Lavater's *Physiognomy* in England," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, xxii, 1961, 570; Schlaffer, 20–25.

⁵⁸ *Physiognomy*, I, 236; Brednow, 27; Riha and Zelle, 14, 128–129. Compare Lavater's translation of Bonnet on brain fibers and the relationship between skull and soul. "Wenn die Selle eines Hurons das Gehirn eines Montesquieu hätte erben können, so würde Montesquieu itzo noch schaffen." C. Bonnet, *La Palingénésie philosophique*, 2 vols., Geneva, 1769, 35, 36; Lavater, *Herrn C. Bonnets . . . Philosophische palingenesie*, Zurich, 1770, 43, 44.

⁵⁹ *Fragmente*, I, 46; Riha and Zelle, 129. Lapland was the fabled land of witches and magicians.

⁶⁰ Among Lavater's articles replying to Lichtenberg are: "Über einige Einwürfe gegen die Physiognomik, und vorzüglich gegen die von Herrn Lavater behauptete Harmonie zwischen Schönheit und Tugend," *Deutsches Museum*, Mar. 1778, 191–198, and "Johann Kaspar Lavaters Anmerkungen zu einer Abhandlung über Physiognomik im Göttingischen Taschenkalender aufs Jahr 1778," *Deutsches Museum*, Apr. 1778, 289–317. See *Fragmente*, IV, 106–114; *Physiognomonie*, III, 51–61; *Physiognomy*, III, Pt. 1, 56–67, for excerpts from these articles.

⁶¹ *Fragmente*, IV, 106, "Man sagt: Leute mit gewölbten zugespitzten Nasen sind witzig: Leute mit Stumpfnasen eben nicht. . . . Wahr's ist's, Leute mit zarten, feinen, scharf gezeichneten, eckigen, unten spitzen, etwas gegen die Lippen niederhängenden Nasen sind witzreich. . . . Aber nicht umgekehrt durchaus wahr. . . . Es gibt äusserst witzreiche Stumpfnasen, deren Witz freylich von ganz anderer Art ist, als der Spitznasen." *Physiognomy*, III, Pt. 1, 56.

⁶² *Fragmente*, IV, 106; *Physiognomy*, III, Pt. 1, 55.

⁶³ *Fragmente*, IV, 107. "Ich antworte—Zeichen, Ursache und Wirkung zugleich." *Physiognomy*, III, Pt. 1, 57.

⁶⁴ *Fragmente*, IV, 107; *Physiognomy*, III, Pt. 1, 57, where this is translated as "Matter is the primitive principle of the form."

In the expanded and amended French translation of the *Fragmente*, the *Physiognomie*, the publication of which began in 1781, Lavater attempted to trace some of the characters of the divine alphabet—the original language of nature—written on the face of man.⁶⁵ He continued to answer his critics, clarifying aspects of his proposal that had been criticized and denying that he espoused a kind of spiritual pre-destinarianism.⁶⁶ To Lichtenberg's criticism, "I wish to know not what man may become, but what he is," Lavater replied, "I wish to know both."⁶⁷ For Lavater, "Truth and Physiognomy," that is, "the voice of God," say: "Be thou which thou art, and become what thou are able to be."⁶⁸ He made far clearer his criteria for differentiating between the face at rest or "physiognomique immédiate" and the countenance in action or the "pathognomique."⁶⁹ Fuseli made these distinctions more forceful in the English edition, for which he wrote the "Advertisement": calling the influence of "the immediate effect of form on every eye" a self-evident truth, he took pains to remind the reader that the principle of perfectibility is considered by Lavater. Fuseli pointed out that although physiognomy "estimates power and capacity," it is pathology that "judges of their produce and application."⁷⁰

Even as his expanded masterwork was translated into French, however, Lavater's reputation based on his physiognomical writings was discredited in enlightened circles on the Continent. He was deserted in the mid-1780s both by Herder and Goethe, who had been his early supporters.⁷¹ Herder felt that Lavater misrepresented him as a religious man in the *Fragmente*; Goethe, in a personal letter, accused Lavater of intolerance, not in his person, but in his book.⁷² Lichtenberg published the devastating "Fragment von Schwänzen" in 1783.⁷³ However, on meeting Lavater for the first time in Göttingen in 1786, Lichtenberg wrote to a friend: "I hold him truly for an excellent man, whom weak company has somewhat crazed. . . . I cannot describe to you enough, how good this man is."⁷⁴

In light of Lavater's thinking, his own physiognomical portraits were of utmost importance for him. His image, correctly represented, ought to be capable of asserting the

⁶⁵ *Physiognomie*, I, vii; important here is the talk at Dartmouth in 1991 by Christoph Siegrist, "'Letters of the Divine Alphabet': Lavater's Concept of Physiognomy."

⁶⁶ An analysis and comparison of pages of the French and German texts, which I have undertaken only superficially, would reveal the general direction of Lavater's changes to meet his critics' objections. See Schroyer, ix, for an uncited reference to the turbulent part that Fuseli played in the preparation of the French work.

⁶⁷ This exchange first appeared in *Deutsches Museum*, Apr. 1778, 311.

⁶⁸ See *Physiognomie*, II, 20–21; *Physiognomy*, II, Pt. 1, 22–23.

⁶⁹ *Physiognomie*, I, 21.

⁷⁰ *Physiognomy*, I, "Advertisement," n.p.

⁷¹ For accounts of this period, see Brednow, 22; Schiff, I, 251–253; Schroyer, IX, x.

⁷² Johann Kaspar Lavater, *Beiträge zur näheren Kenntniss und wahren Darstellung Johann Kaspar Lavater's. Aus Briefen seiner Freunde an ihn, und nach persönlichen Umgang*, ed. U. Hegner (Leipzig, 1836), Bern, 1975; for Herder, 1777, see 106, 136; for Goethe, 1782, see 149.

⁷³ Gombrich, 1960, 45.

⁷⁴ Brednow, 26, 27.

same truth about him that his physical form could.⁷⁵ For Lavater, "excellent portraits" depend on accuracy of structure and proportions.⁷⁶ More than most representations, Lavater's have their own repertoire of signals and messages.⁷⁷

On the last page of the first volume of the *Fragmente*, concluding a section on portraits, is a picture of the youthful Lavater, engraved in a stipple technique by Johann Heinrich Lips (1758–1817) after a drawing by Georg Friedrich Schmoll (Fig. 1). Illustrations appearing in Lavater's book were solicited from many sources. As Joachim Kruse has shown, however, Lips was Lavater's protégé and the principal engraver of the plates for the *Fragmente* as well as for the *Physiognomie*.⁷⁸ The motto below the engraving is taken from I Peter 4:10, 11: "This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another." The text connected with the picture says next to nothing about the portrait. The last words are cautionary ones: "Judge not that ye be not judged."

The first plate of the third volume of the *Fragmente* contains twenty silhouettes, flat black profile shapes, or "shades" of "loving and beloved men," arranged in four columns of facing pairs (Fig. 2). Lavater's silhouette is in an oval medallion facing to the viewer's right, the first in the third row of four, numbered 9. Closely related to the Schmoll portrait, the profile of Lavater's head is easy to distinguish by the line of the almost perfectly rounded skull broken at the nape of the neck by a roll of hair, the sloping forehead, and the slightly arched nose. Only the mouth is changed, to show a slightly receding lower lip and somewhat jutting chin. These are the unmistakable marks that define the later graphic versions of Lavater's physiognomy. No name is signed to the page of silhouettes, but it must be by Lips because of its similarity to the silhouette in the French edition (Fig. 3).

In the text accompanying the plate of silhouettes in the *Fragmente*, Lavater wrote about his nineteen friends, commenting extensively upon the precise nuances of his feeling for each of them and calling attention to the degrees of closeness among the others. He describes himself in the third person: "A man of notorious imagination. More hated and

⁷⁵ Compare Lavater's assumption to Gombrich's caveat: "Logicians tell us . . . that the terms 'true' and 'false' can only be applied to statements, propositions. . . . A picture is never a statement in that sense of the term" (1961, 67). This also applies to artist's marks on paper (1960, 53). See the extension of this by R. Brilliant, "Portraits: The Limitations of Likeness," *Art Journal*, XLVI, 1987, 172: "Works of art are not propositional in this sense [of truthfulness] and cannot make true or false statements in the manner of language." See Freedberg (as in n. 10), 438, on responses to imagery and to reality.

⁷⁶ *Physiognomy*, II, Pt. 2, 241, 242.

⁷⁷ R. Brilliant, *Portraiture*, Cambridge, Mass., 1992, 8. Gombrich remarked that no one has investigated the "whole vast area of portrait likeness in terms of perceptual psychology," but Freedberg and Brilliant have undertaken aspects of the investigation. See Brilliant, 9, for the distinction between "unstable" physiognomy and symbolic conceptualization.

⁷⁸ For Lips and Lavater, see Kruse, *passim*, esp. 22–28, and for a history of the portraits by Lips, 140, 141; for Schmoll, see 172. I thank Frau Rutz of the Zentralbibliothek Zürich for calling this catalogue to my attention. See Thieme-Becker, *Allgemeines Lexikon*, for the fact that Lips engraved 370 plates for the *Fragmente* and 230 for the *Physiognomie*.

more loved than he believes is deserved. He loves all nineteen and is loved by all.⁷⁹ Nothing explanatory is said of the various physiognomies. But Lavater ends by asserting that,

I am fully convinced, that he who will study this page, and especially the proportions of 9 [Lavater] whom I know best, as well as all his relationships with the others,—his physiognomical proportions I say to all other physiognomies—that he will learn to find precisely from lines and outlines, those which determine the proportion of the state of friendship.⁸⁰

The text of the Eleventh Fragment in the *Physiognomie* expands the nascent ideas contained in the German text associated with the plate of twenty silhouettes. The number and type of engravings of Lavater's face also increase. The nine-page section features Lavater's profile marked by lines and letters, the same silhouette enlarged, a shaded portrait of the same subject, and a caricature.⁸¹ The first image gives the impression of a scientific diagram. The most schematic, it is a profile in outline marked by horizontal, vertical, and diagonal lines touching crucial anatomical points to form varying angles (Fig. 4).⁸² The linear style of the profile combined with the geometric analysis signals a method that objectively establishes precise measurements that can be observed and recorded.⁸³ The second "shade," almost identical in profile to the one first seen in the German edition, differs slightly in that the shape of the wig covers the skull (Figs. 2–3). Here, the large flat black shape faces to the viewer's left; the plate is inscribed in the lower right corner with the initial "L," probably standing for Lips. The third portrait in the *Physiognomonie*, a modeled portrait with a motto in Greek, "To tell the truth in love," is a carefully finished work based on a portrait of Lavater made in 1781 by J. H. Wilhelm Tischbein (Fig. 5).⁸⁴ The view, not a pure profile, has a slight indication of a three-quarter turn; the inferior aspect of the nose is represented as closer to a right angle to the upper lip than in the profile. The fourth

⁷⁹ For this and the following, see *Fragmente*, III, 37, 38. The translations are mine. "Ein Mann von verrufener Imagination. Mehr gehasst und geliebt, als er zu verdienen glaubat. Liebt alle 19. und wird von allen geliebt."

⁸⁰ *Fragmente*, III, 37, 38. "Ich bin völlig überzeugt, dass der diess Blatt studieren wird, und besonders das Verhältniss von 9, den ich am besten kenne, so wie alle seine Verhältnisse mit den übrigen, sein physiognomisches Verhältniss sag' ich zu allen übrigen Physiognomien—dass der lernen wird. Grade von Linien und Umrissen zu finden, die das Verhältniss der Freundschaftlichkeit bestimmen."

⁸¹ Here and below, I cite the translations in the *Physiognomy*, II, 225–233, which faithfully translates the *Physiognomonie*, II, 200–209.

⁸² In *Physiognomonie*, II, 201. See Stafford, 149, 150, for a meaning assigned to the impulse to simplification.

⁸³ See R. Rosenblum, *Transformations in Late Eighteenth Century Art*, Princeton, 1969, 176–179, for a discussion of the conceptual, linear style; its use by Flaxman, Goya, and Blake; and the style's capacity to transmute transient, visual complexities into immutable linear essence.

⁸⁴ My thanks to Professor Zilkowski for the translation from the Greek. See Kruse, 22, 140, for the date of 1781 and the attribution. For Tischbein's stay in Zurich, his admiration for Sulzer, his connections with Lavater, the "instantaneous" drawings he made of Lavater, see Landsberger, 30–39.

engraving, designed and engraved by Lips, is labeled *Caricature* and exaggerates the long, narrow nose, with the point acutely angled as in the Tischbein portrayal (Fig. 6).

More explicit explanations are given in the text about the association between anatomical feature and character. Lavater uses the relationships between the representations of his own physiognomy and the observations of his own character as manifest examples of the validity of his assertions. "In order to prosecute with advantage the study of Physiognomy, it is necessary to begin with silhouettes . . . [which] are very exact: intersect them by several horizontal, vertical and oblique lines; then look for the relations of these lines."⁸⁵ In connection with the silhouette (Fig. 3), Lavater describes himself in terms similar to those in the German volume. He is "tenderly loved by some, and mortally hated by others."⁸⁶ . . . His imagination . . . is wild and extravagant, prodigiously eccentric and of consequence greatly decried . . . but it is under the dominion of two severe guardians . . . good sense and an honest heart."⁸⁷ For Lavater, the silhouette was of "all portraits the feeblest and least finished but justest and most faithful,"⁸⁸ and he is much more explicit on how to read one. Poetic expression, nothing but a fertile imagination joined to a subtle sentiment, is "to be found particularly in the contour and position of the forehead, and more particularly still in the almost imperceptible arch of that ferret nose."⁸⁹ The use of the descriptive word "ferret," unflattering though it seems, is oddly appropriate to one who teases out such meaning from obscurity. To the total absence of straight lines and acute angles in his gently rounded contours and to his advancing lip, Lavater attributes good nature, while the long interval between the nose and the mouth is a sign of a want of prudence. The inferior contour between lip and chin signals a man of application and a friend of order.⁹⁰

When Lavater comments on Lips's finished engraving based on Tischbein's portrait, he is critical of the drawing, suggesting that it is not exact.⁹¹ For instance, the portrait announces more wisdom and penetration than the subject actually has because "the angle below the nose is more obtuse": there is "much less poetic expression because the underpart of the face projects not so much as in the silhouette." He criticizes the lack of harmony, noting particularly the immoderate length of the under part, the violent straining of the entire face, and the haggard eye that seems

⁸⁵ *Physiognomonie*, II, 200; *Physiognomy*, II, 225: "Je le répète encore: pour bien étudier la Physiognomonie, il faut commencer par les silhouettes.— Choisissez—en pour cet effet de bien exactes; coupez-les de plusieurs lignes horizontales, perpendiculaires & obliques; puis cherchez les rapports de ces lignes."

⁸⁶ *Physiognomonie*, II, 202; *Physiognomy*, II, 227.

⁸⁷ *Physiognomonie*, II, 203; *Physiognomy*, II, 227.

⁸⁸ *Physiognomy*, II, Pt. I, "Of Silhouettes," 176.

⁸⁹ *Physiognomy*, II, 230; *Physiognomonie*, II, 205. "L'expression poétique, c'est-à-dire, une imagination fertile, à laquelle se joint un sentiment subit & délicat—on la retrouve surtout dans le contour & la position du front, & plus particulièrement encore dans l'arc presqu'imperceptible de ce nez de furet."

⁹⁰ *Physiognomonie*, II, 205; *Physiognomy*, II, 230.

⁹¹ *Physiognomonie*, II, 207; *Physiognomy*, II, 231.

to pursue visions rather than search after reality.⁹² This fault-finding is particularly interesting in view of the instructions Lavater himself gave to Tischbein during the latter's sojourn in Zurich between 1781 and 1782.⁹³ During the many sittings that Lavater provided to Tischbein, the goal was to catch as quickly as possible the momentary, to transfix nature in an instant, an aim incompatible with the precision of measurements Lavater deemed essential to the correct drawing.

In regard to Lips's portrait, whether it was intended as a demonstration of a caricature, it was labeled as such.⁹⁴ In an early reference to the subject, Lavater commented that images of the antique gods are caricatures of beings that formerly existed in reality.⁹⁵ In an additional fragment titled "Caricaturas, after the Anthropometry of A. Durer," Lavater notes that "disproportion in the parts of the face has an influence on the physiological constitution of man; it decides concerning his moral and intellectual imperfections."⁹⁶ An anonymous reviewer of the *Physiognomonie* had written in 1783: "Portraits of great men are always unfaithful, . . . the too much or the too little, produce always caricaturas, of which vulgar heads are less susceptible."⁹⁷ For Lavater, such changes in line or proportion resulted in major distortions in the representation of character.

With this in mind, it is easy to see why neither the highly finished engraving after Tischbein nor the portrait by Lips met Lavater's standards. Lavater asserts the supremacy of nature over art,⁹⁸ saying that art either relaxes or compresses too much and is not faithful to nature.⁹⁹ In comments on the importance and difficulty of portrait painting, he remembers Goethe's assertion that "the presence of man, that his face, his physiognomy is the best text of all that can be said about him."¹⁰⁰

In addition, later controversies over the meanings attached to facial traits may have affected Lavater's satisfaction with these portraits. For instance, the nasal shapes of both portraits—stressing narrowness and the near right angle between upper lip and the inferior aspect—are different from that shown in the silhouette. For the informed reader and viewer,¹⁰¹ the shape of the nose would have afforded the

widest scope for the satirical exercises of his opponents. When we realize all that is contained in Lavater's idea of the physiognomical portrait, the assertion that he intentionally sought to reduce individuality misunderstands his way of thought and method.¹⁰²

Outside the Continent, interest in Lavater's theories was high. English readers had direct access to his ideas beginning with articles in *The Monthly Review*, where the editions of the *Physiognomonie* were reviewed as they appeared,¹⁰³ bringing to those for whom the German language was difficult the first glimpse of the contents of Lavater's work. Although cautioning that physiognomical science would encourage the propensity "to judge and censure our neighbors" and "nourish vanity," critics devoted generous space to its discussion.¹⁰⁴ In the 1787 review of the third volume, the anonymous author notes Lavater's treatment of temperaments or constitutions I cited above, but uses the concrete terms "mould or form" rather than the words "formula" or "rule."¹⁰⁵ Three pages later, Lavater's conclusion that "everyone of us has a primitive physiognomy whose origin and essence are divine" is presented.¹⁰⁶ Thus, by 1787, the metaphor of God's great military warehouse of moulds as the provider of predetermined physiognomical forms for the divine essence is misleadingly presented to the English reading public as representing Lavater's idea of a primitive physiognomy.

Fuseli played a role in the early stages of the enterprise of translating the *Physiognomonie* into English, a project announced in a "Prospectus" of 1786 by the publisher, Joseph Johnson (1738–1809).¹⁰⁷ Lavater grandiosely wished the treatise to be brought out in folio size: to this end he prepared several drawings on folio sheets.¹⁰⁸ Only with difficulty did Fuseli persuade him that the quarto size best suited the English public. The persuasion was by letter, as Fuseli saw Lavater in person for the last time in 1778; their final communications were written ones.¹⁰⁹ Lavater sent an effusive dedicatory letter to Fuseli in October of 1787, along with the manuscript for the *Aphorisms for Man*. Fuseli's last recorded letter to Lavater was written on December 22, 1789, after the five or six months' visit to London by Johann Heinrich, Lavater's son.

At some point close to this time, William Blake (1757–1827) engraved the portrait of Lavater that is now in the

⁹² *Physiognomonie*, II, 208; *Physiognomy*, II, 233.

⁹³ Landsberger, 32–34; C. Lenz, *Tischbein: Goethe in der Campagna der Roma*, exh. cat., Staedelsches Kunstinstitut und Staedtische Galerie, Frankfurt am Main, 1979.

⁹⁴ Gombrich, 1970, 105, cites a 17th-century definition of caricature as "a method of making portraits which aims at the greatest likeness of the whole of a physiognomy while all the component parts are changed."

⁹⁵ *Physiognomonie*, II, 328; *Physiognomy*, II, Pt. 2, 368.

⁹⁶ *Physiognomy*, III, Pt. 2, 271.

⁹⁷ *Monthly Review*, LXVIII, 1783, 621. The reviewer may have been Fuseli; his lectures present almost verbatim passages from earlier writings.

⁹⁸ *Physiognomonie*, II, 318, 325; *Physiognomy*, II, 356, 366, "Art has been, and always will be, below [Nature]."

⁹⁹ *Physiognomonie*, II, 207; *Physiognomy*, II, 232–233.

¹⁰⁰ *Fragmente*, II, 78–84, esp. 79; *Physiognomonie*, II, 214–223, esp. 215; *Physiognomy*, II, Pt. 2, "Of the Art of Portrait Painting," 239–250, esp. 240.

¹⁰¹ See, e.g., R. Walker, "A Sign of the Satirist's Wit: The Nose in *Tristram Shandy*," *Ball State University Forum*, 1978, 52–54, for the classical tradition whereby the length of one's nose was equated to the extent of one's wit, and for other more ribald correspondences. Sterne's portrait was included in Lavater's *Fragmente*.

¹⁰² For this assertion, see Stafford, 120.

¹⁰³ See *The Monthly Review*, LXVI (1782), App., 481–498; LXVIII (1783), 615–624; LXXVIII (1788), App., 545–555, cited in Graham (as in n. 57), 564.

¹⁰⁴ LXVI, 492.

¹⁰⁵ LXXVIII, 547. "There is, says our Author, in the great magazine of God, a particular mould or form for every individual, which determines the duration of life, and fixes the degree of sensibility and activity; hence it is that every body has its proper individual constitution, its peculiar measure of irritability and elasticity."

¹⁰⁶ LXXVIII, 550.

¹⁰⁷ For this and the following, see *The Life and Writings of Henry Fuseli: The Former Written, and the Latter Edited by John Knowles*, intro. D. Weinglass, I, Millwood, N.Y., 1982, 79; see also Schiff, I, 223.

¹⁰⁸ For the great number of drawings Lavater himself made, see Riha and Zelle, 145, n. 25.

¹⁰⁹ For these letters, see D. Weinglass, ed., *The Collected English Letters of Henry Fuseli*, Millwood, N.Y., 1982, 38, 565.



5 Johann Heinrich Lips after J. H. Wilhelm Tischbein, *Johann Caspar Lavater*, from *Physiognomie*, 1783, II, pl. XXXIX (photo: Dartmouth College Library, Hanover, N.H.)

collection of Leo Steinberg (Fig. 7).¹¹⁰ Robert Essick calls it a first state and dates it to 1787 based on the scratched imprint on the plate.¹¹¹ In the inscription to the second and third states of the print, Johnson claimed that the portrait was taken from a drawing in his possession in 1787; the publication date is given as May 1, 1800 (Fig. 8).¹¹² Two suggestions have been made to explain why this engraving was made: it was either connected with Johnson's involvement as pub-

¹¹⁰ See L. Steinberg, "Remarks on Certain Prints relative to a Leningrad Rubens on the Occasion of the First Visit of the Original to the United States," *Print Collector's Newsletter*, v, 1975, 97–102, in which he describes his print as an unknown proof state. I thank Professor Steinberg for allowing me to publish the photograph of his print and the inscription. See Essick, 1983, 150–157, for a complete discussion superseding that of Sir G. Keynes of this engraving.

The plate mark of the etching and engraving measured by Professor Steinberg is 36.5 × 30.3cm; the image 27.8 × 23.9cm. The imprint reads, "Published December 26: 1787 by J. Johnson, St. Pauls Church Yard," and the faint pencil inscription is "Lavater/Engraved by William Blake."

¹¹¹ Essick, 1983, 150, fig. 65. "Published December 26: 1787 by J. Johnson St Pauls Church Yard." Inscribed in pencil below the image on the impression is "LAVATER," and below the imprint is "Engraved by William Blake."

¹¹² See Essick, 1983, fig. 66, for an illustration of the second state, and 150, 151, for the later inscriptions. On the second state is "Blake sculpt/REV. JOHN CASPAR LAVATER/of Zurick born 1741, died 1801. Pubd May 1. 1800, by J. Johnson, in Saint Paul's Church Yard, London, from a Drawing in his possession, taken in 1787"; on the third state are minor changes. Professor Essick's measurements of his third state impression are 27.7 × 23.9cm for the image. In Essick, 1983, all



6 Johann Heinrich Lips, *J.C.L., Carricature*, 1780, from *Physiognomie*, 1783, II, pl. XL (photo: Dartmouth College Library, Hanover, N.H.)

lisher of the *Aphorisms* or with the appearance of the English edition of the *Physiognomy*.¹¹³

The English artist and poet, introduced to the *Aphorisms* by Fuseli, revered yet critically annotated Lavater's words.¹¹⁴ A sketch drawn by Fuseli in 1787 was designed to guide Blake when he engraved the frontispiece for the *Aphorisms* (Fig. 9).¹¹⁵ In the margins of this sketch Fuseli drew his own profile and that of Lavater.¹¹⁶ Angled lines defining the shape of

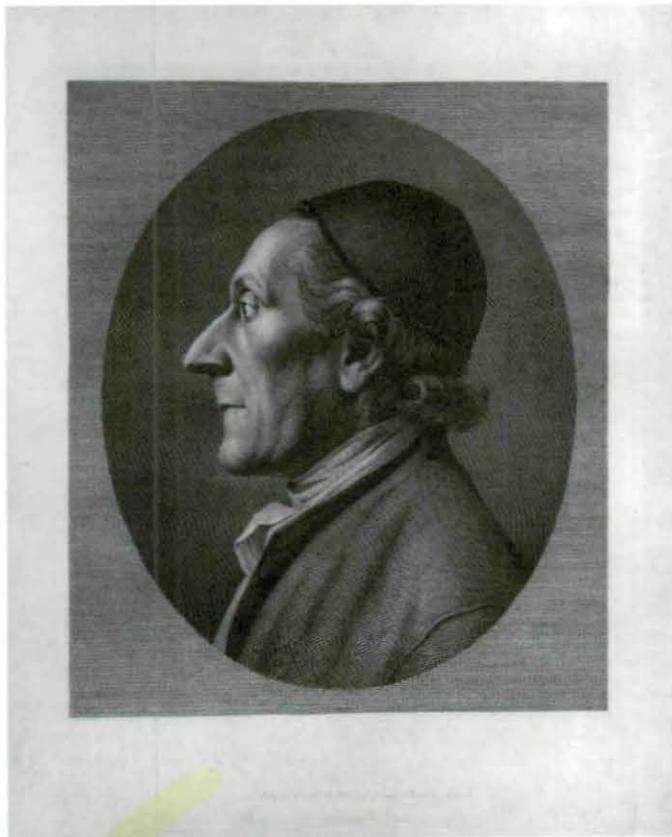
plate marks are said to be the same size as in the first state, but inconsistencies in measurements in the described impressions of later states are not accounted for. For Johnson's friendship with Blake and Fuseli, see Schroyer, "Introduction," esp. xi–xii.

¹¹³ For the first suggestion, see Essick, 156, and the second, Bindman, 88, no. 29. Bindman implies that Johnson published the *Physiognomy*, writing, "it [the print] is too large to fit comfortably in Johnson's book as published."

¹¹⁴ See Schroyer, "Introduction," and Hall (as in n. 1), 127–137. For the dating of the English translation of the *Aphorisms* as 1788, see R. Schroyer, "The 1788 Publication Date of Lavater's Aphorisms on Man," *Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly*, xi, 1977, 23–26. Lavater's *Aphorisms* were translated from Lavater's "Vermischte Unphysiognomische Regeln," "Mixed Unphysiognomical Rules." I thank Professor Hall for pointing out to me the problems connected with these small, privately printed pamphlets, which exist in many forms.

¹¹⁵ See R. Todd, "Two Blake Prints and Two Fuseli Drawings," *Blake Newsletter*, v, 1971/72, 173. The drawing now in Essick's collection is reproduced in Essick, 1980, fig. 35, and in greater detail in R. Essick, *William Blake's Commercial Book Illustrations*, Oxford, 1991, fig. 60.

¹¹⁶ The sketch for Lavater's profile is an exaggerated and distorted view of the Tischbein portrait engraved by Lips in the *Physiognomie*. The sketch of Fuseli is close to his self-portrait in a pencil sketch in the Zentralbibliothek Zürich (Schiff, ii, no. 352, 1760–63).



7 William Blake, *Johann Caspar Lavater*, 1787, etching and engraving, 1st state, 36.5 × 30.3cm, 27.8 × 23.9cm. New York, Collection of Leo Steinberg (photo: Scott Bowron)

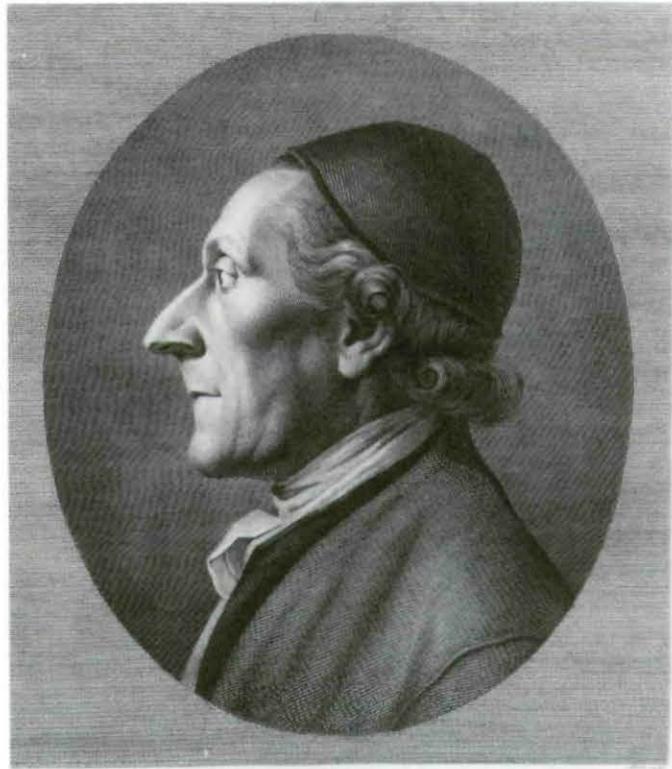
these profiles recall those in the line engraving in the *Physiognomonie*. The sharp angulation of their profiles and the exaggerated noses suggest "the too much," that quality of the unfaithful representation that produces caricatures of great men of wit and intelligence.

I suggest that the portrait engraved by Blake during the same period is connected with Lavater's ambitious hopes for the English translation of the *Physiognomy* and the "folio" edition. Bindman noted that the large size of Blake's plate made it unfit for the quarto edition.¹¹⁷ Blake had also engraved after Fuseli the *Head of a Damned Soul* or "Satan," which had first appeared in the *Physiognomonie*, but which Blake enlarged.¹¹⁸ One explanation for these two large plates is that either Fuseli or Johnson asked Blake to make two reproductive engravings in 1787. Blake may have worked under the assumption that a folio edition of the *Physiognomy* would be prepared. However, by May of 1788, there were "terrible misunderstandings" among Lavater, Johnson, and Fuseli over illustrations for the book and financial arrange-

¹¹⁷ Bindman, 88. The quarto edition has pages of about 25.4 × 30.5cm (10 × 12"), with images about 19 × 22.8cm (7½ × 9"), and thus is much smaller than the 36.5 × 30.3cm (14½ × 11¾") size of Blake's plate.

¹¹⁸ Bindman, 86, and Essick, 1980, fig. 54, 35 × 26.5cm. For *Head of a Damned Soul*, see M. Jaffé, *William Blake and His Contemporaries*, exh. cat., Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, 1986, 36.

¹¹⁹ Schiff, 1, 223, citing a passage from a letter quoted by W. Wartmann, *Johann Heinrich Füssli*, Zurich, 1941, 19–20.



REV. JOHN CASPAR LAVATER
of Zurich. Engraved 1800.
Engraved by W. Blake in 1800. Shaded portrait from a drawing in the Jefferson Library in 1797.

8 William Blake, *Johann Caspar Lavater*, 1800, etching and engraving, 3rd state. Altadena, Calif., Collection of Robert N. Essick (photo: Essick)

ments.¹¹⁹ Ultimately, the deluxe volumes, corresponding almost exactly to the French ones, were published in parts by John Murray, faithfully translated by Henry Hunter, with quality illustrations supervised by Thomas Holloway.

Although Johnson's connection with the project ends, Blake's and Fuseli's did not. Fuseli made several new drawings; these and other plates of his were reengraved for the portrait section. Four small engravings by Blake appear in Volume I of the deluxe quarto edition,¹²⁰ but his name is not attached to any of the four engravings based on Lavater's head in Volume II of the *Physiognomy*.¹²¹ That these two time-consuming plates of Lavater and "Satan" were engraved but unused must have been a factor influencing Blake

¹²⁰ See G. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Records*, Oxford, 1969, 611–612.

¹²¹ Essick, 1983, 156, not mentioning the physiognomical plates I discuss, notes that, "None of the three volumes, usually bound as five, contains a frontispiece." The plates in the English volumes are very close to, but not exact copies of the French ones. In the Table of Contents of Volume II of *Physiognomy*, these plates are listed as "Z. Profile (the Author) marked by lines and letters . . . 225 . . . AA. the same silhouette enlarged . . . 227 . . . BB. Shaded portrait of the same subject . . . 232 . . . CC. Ditto ditto caricatura . . . 233." The extant volumes of the *Physiognomy* have different title pages. In the two sets I consulted at the University of Pennsylvania, in the edition in which the title pages are dated 1789, 1792, 1798, Z, AA, and BB are in Vol. II, Pt. 1, and CC is in Pt. 2. In the edition in which the title pages are dated 1792, all the plates are in Pt. 1.



9 Henry Fuseli, preliminary ink sketch for frontispiece to Lavater's *Aphorisms*, 22.6 × 18.3cm. Altadena, Calif., Collection of Robert N. Essick (photo: Essick)

in his own future pursuits.¹²² The finished portrait by Holloway and the caricature by Rhodes¹²³ were reengraved after the French plates, with no credit given to the original engravers or designers. Johnson, Blake, and Fuseli continued to maintain a close relationship. Johnson had printed in proof the first book of Blake's *French Revolution* in 1791.¹²⁴ Fuseli continued to contribute to Johnson's *Analytical Review*,

¹²² See D. Bindman, *Blake as an Artist*, Oxford, 1977, 39–43, for 1787/88 as the year Blake began to relief-etch and print his own books in illuminated printing to bring his work before the public.

¹²³ For these engravers, see S. Redgrave, *A Dictionary of Artists of the English School: Painters, Sculptors, Architects, Engravers and Ornamentists ... [1802–76]*, Bath (Somerset), 1970. Rhodes is probably Richard Rhodes, d. 1838 at age seventy-three.

¹²⁴ See D. V. Erdman, *Blake: Prophet against Empire: A Poet's Interpretation of the History of His Own Times* (1st ed. 1954), 3rd rev. ed., Princeton, 1977, 156. Although Erdman here calls Johnson the printer and publisher, it is clear from John Stedman's correspondence in 1795 and 1796, with Blake, Johnson, and Luke Hansard, Johnson's printer, that Johnson had a printer on whom he called. See Erdman, 157, citing *The Journal of John Gabriel Stedman, 1744–1797*, ed. S. Thompson, London, 1962.

where Lavater is frequently mentioned, but between 1788 and 1799 no reference to the Murray edition of the *Physiognomy* appears.¹²⁵

The problem of finding the source for Blake's unused engraving of the Lavater portrait has a short history.¹²⁶ Bindman correctly links Blake's engraving to a drawing by an unknown hand in Princeton, suggesting it as the source (Fig. 10).¹²⁷ However, the original of this Princeton drawing is the recently published large black-chalk drawing by Lips now in the Kunstsammlungen at Weimar (Fig. 11).¹²⁸ At issue is the identity of the artist who made the Princeton drawing and the way in which the drawing by or after Lips reached London by 1787. It is possible that Lips had made two such detailed drawings,¹²⁹ but there is a more probable alternative.

Kruse proposes that Lips made his drawing in 1786 and that Lavater had the drawing for a period of time, during which he inscribed on it some unexplained letters and the date 22 March 1787 (Fig. 11).¹³⁰ Lavater, forty-five years old,

¹²⁵ For Fuseli's part in the reviews, see F. Antal, *Fuseli Studies*, London, 1956, 105–106, and E. Mason, *The Mind of Henry Fuseli: Selections from His Writings with an Introductory Study*, London, 1951, 356–358. I thank Professor Weinglass for providing me with these references. Johnson publishes reviews of other translations of Lavater's physiognomical volumes by Thomas Holcroft (v, Sept.-Dec. 1789, 454–462; vi, Jan.-Apr. 1790, 426–431) and Samuel Shaw (xiii, May-Aug. 1792, 427f) and also mentions Lavater's nonphysiognomic writings. See also Graham, 64–71, 103–107.

¹²⁶ The first published mention of the problem of source is by C. Hall, "Henry Fuseli and the Aesthetics of William Blake: Fuseli as Transmitter of J. J. Winckelmann, J. J. Rousseau, and J. C. Lavater," Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, 1979, 151, 175, suggesting the Blake plate was after a "portrait" by Marcus Dinkel. Following the citation in the frontispiece reproduced in *Johann Caspar Lavaters ausgewählte Werke*, ed. E. Staehelin, III, Zurich, 1943, she was not aware that the "portrait" by Dinkel was not after a painting in the collection of the Zentralbibliothek Zürich. I thank Frau Rutz of the Zentralbibliothek, who kindly told me in a letter of April 9, 1991 that this is a line engraving "coloured with masking paint" made by Dinkel after the 1790 engraving of Lavater by Lips. This colored engraving by Dinkel was brought to the attention of Essick by Geri Schiff: Essick subsequently listed it in his supplement to the *Separate Plates*, in *Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly*, xvii, 1984, 142. I thank Professor Essick for calling this to my attention in a letter of April 2, 1991. He correctly rejects the colored engraving by Dinkel as a source. As a model, he suggested that an engraving by Felix Maria Diog (or Diogg), published in G. Schiff, *Henry Fuseli 1741–1825*, exh. cat., Tate Gallery, London, 1975, 41, is very close to Blake's plate, but see below.

¹²⁷ Bindman, 88. Dale Roylance, Curator, Iconography Collection, Graphic Art, Princeton University Library, informed me by telephone that this is catalogued as a pencil drawing by Johann Heinrich Lips. Unfortunately, no other information is recorded, and at the time of publication of this essay the Princeton drawing was not available for inspection. Essick reports that this portrait drawing of Lavater, illustrated in the 1969 catalogue of the London bookdealers, Grinke and Rogers, item 175, cut to an oval, 40.9 × 33.2cm, is attributed by Paul Grinke, who sold it to Princeton, to Lips (1983, 155–156, and letter of Apr. 1991). Essick suggests that this drawing is the work of a copyist of Blake's plate.

¹²⁸ See R. Barth, *Da Dürer a Bocklin: Disegni tedeschi, svizzeri, olandesi, fiamminghi dalle Collezioni di Weimar (XVI–XX secolo)*, exh. cat., Museo Correr, Milan, 1987, 119, no. 129, inv. no. KK 2250.

¹²⁹ Until the Princeton drawing is available, it is impossible to compare the two. One 1793 copy after the Lips drawing of 1786 by A. L. Möglich is mentioned by Kruse, 140.

¹³⁰ Kruse, 140, identifies the handwriting as Lavater's and states that there is an effaced signature and the dating "JCL den 22.3.1787." For Lavater's practice of mystery writing, see Siegrist, 1.



10 Artist unknown, *Johann Caspar Lavater*, 40.9 × 33.2cm. Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Library, Iconography Collection, Graphic Art (photo: Library)

had entirely white hair; lines of sadness were etched deeply around his mouth and his shoulders were hunched forward.¹³¹ He wore a skull cap as his physician-brother had ordered.¹³² By this time, his physiognomical theories had been attacked as dangerous superstitions and onetime friends had deserted him. Paradoxically, this period also was the high point of Lavater's popularity in aristocratic circles.

Lips's drawing served as the model for a similar-sized engraving by Adam Ludwig Wirsing made in 1787 (Fig. 12).¹³³ Wirsing's engraving after Lips's drawing is a reversal of the image. Copying the large ear partially covered by the peculiar curl of the hair, Wirsing alters the profile to accentuate the bird-beaked aspect of Lavater's nose.¹³⁴ Strained, sharp, and severe, the profile emphasizes traits that Lavater had named as weaknesses in the shaded portrait and in the caricature in the French texts. The absence of gently rounded contours with definite angles between forehead and nose and the sharply pointed nose contradict Lavater's self-description as good-natured. The angle below



11 Johann Heinrich Lips, *Johann Caspar Lavater*, 1786?, black chalk drawing, 41.1 × 33.3cm. Weimar, Kunstsammlungen zu Weimar (photo: Kunstsammlungen)

the nose is slightly more acute and the projection of the chin slightly changed, differences into which Lavater would read significant meaning and to which he would have reacted unfavorably.

Surely dissatisfied with Wirsing's engraving, Lavater may have made a copy of Lips's drawing while it was in his possession, sending it on to London as a model in the early phases of planning the *Physiognomy*. The Princeton drawing might be this copy. The harsher lines of the Lips's drawing are altered so that the bony prominences and the abrupt contrasts in the jowl area are softened.¹³⁵ Although slightly smaller than the first two drawings and the Wirsing engraving, Blake's engraving has in common with them the three particular identifying marks: skull-cap, large ear, and peculiar curl. Blake's engraving also demonstrates the same type of softening that appears in the Princeton drawing.

Fuseli's physiognomical sketches in the margins of the *Aphorisms* drawing, made at the same time, are dependent on

¹³¹ Kruse, 141.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 172.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 140, no. 71a. Kruse's dating of the drawing is based on the inscription on the engraving, "gezeichnet von Joh. H. Lips in Zürich 1786—und gestochen von Ad. Ludw. Wirsing in Nürnberg 1787."

¹³⁴ Kruse, 140.

¹³⁵ For comments on Blake's engraving style, see Steinberg (as in n. 110), 99, 100; R. Essick, "Blake and the Tradition of Reproductive Engraving," *Blake Studies*, v, 1972, 59–103; M. Eaves, "Blake and the Artistic Machine: An Essay in Decorum and Technology," *Publications of the Modern Language Society*, xcii, 1977, 903–927.

the plates in the *Physiognomie* volumes (Fig. 9). When Blake began work on the folio-size engravings, Fuseli's drawings probably served Blake as rough demonstrations both of Lavater's construction methods and of his outlook on portraits and caricatures.¹³⁶

In the meantime in 1789, Lips himself engraved a new shaded and highly finished plate, much smaller than the 1786 drawing. Inscribing his name as "del. & sc.", he sent the small plate to his publisher in Berlin by January of 1790 where it served as a frontispiece for a book by Lavater (Fig. 13).¹³⁷ The form of the skull in Lips's new engraving is the almost perfectly rounded one first seen in Schmoll's portrait and the "shade" published in the *Fragmente* (Figs. 1–2). Lips, removing the peculiar curl and skull-cap of the 1786 drawing,¹³⁸ reduced the size of the eye and slightly changed the contour of Lavater's nose. Highly praised by Lavater, who wished only that his hair might be made more picturesque,¹³⁹ Lips's engraving represses the indications of an aged, lined, haggard visage and softens the linear aspects of the jowl. The removal of the cap allows the physiognomy of Lavater's skull to be shown in an undisguised form, almost the precise arc of a circle, a form identified as belonging to the most wise.¹⁴⁰ As a faithful follower, Lips presented to Lavater an image that satisfied Lavater's own self-perception and self-judgment.

In 1776, Lavater had answered his own rhetorical question: "What is the *Art of Portrait Painting?*" He wrote: "The representation of a particular acting human being, or of a part of the human body—the communication, the preserving of his image; the art of saying in a moment all which one says of a partial form of human being and can really never say with words."¹⁴¹ His early insistence on the possibility of achieving the virtual equivalence of portrait and person, the idea of the portrait as a speaking image, and the nobility of the enterprise of portraiture were supported by multiple

¹³⁶ Compare Essick's comment (156, n. 4) about the "Lavater" profile, that the nose is not similar to that in Blake's engraving.

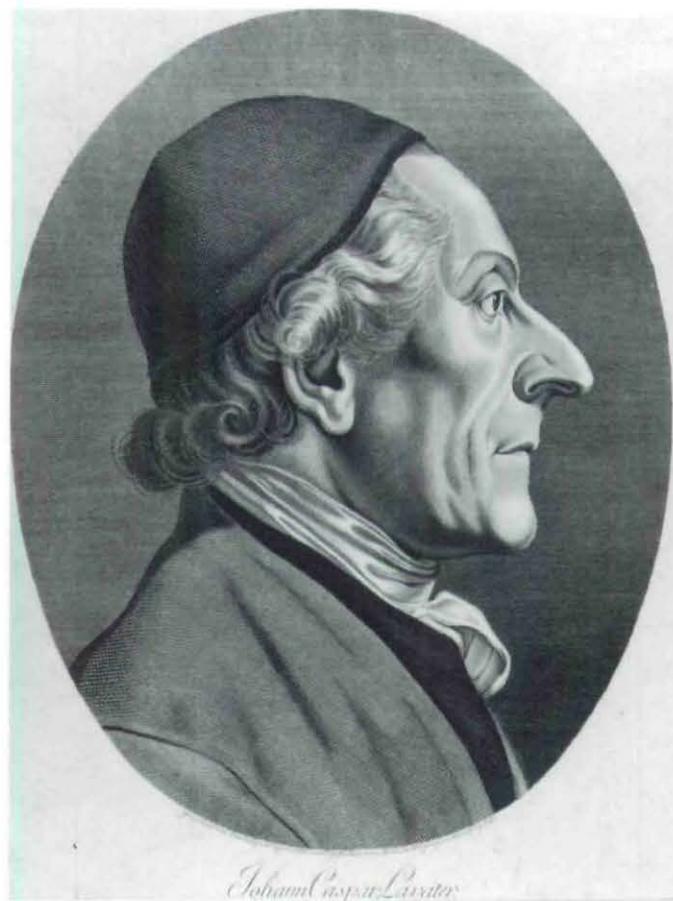
¹³⁷ Kruse, 172, no. 87. The plate was sent at the latest on January 22, 1790 to the Berlin publisher H. A. Rottmann. The book, *Antworten auf wichtige und würdige Fragen und Briefe weiser und guter Menschen . . .*, Berlin, 1790, was known in England, where it was described as nonphysiognomical in the *Analytical Review*, vii, 1790, 240, from a review in the *Jenaische allgemeine Literatur-zeitung*. It is the print on which the Dinkel line-engraving is based.

¹³⁸ Kruse, 172. Other profile portraits of Lavater that relate to this engraving are by Heinrich Pfenninger, Johann Rudolf Schellenberg, and Daniel Berger. For Lips's malleability, see Goethe, *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, as cited in Schlaffer, 14.

¹³⁹ Kruse, 172. He wrote on March 11, 1790 to Lips: ". . . My portrait is masterfully handled. I hope indeed yet to receive a few impressions, in which perhaps my hair will have received a few picturesque strokes" (my trans.).

¹⁴⁰ For the diagram of the perfectly rounded skull, see *Fragmente*, IV, 25; *Physiognomie*, I, 273.

¹⁴¹ My literal translation of Lavater's German text repeats Lavater's triple use of "sagen." *Fragmente*, II, 79; *Physiognomie*, II, 215; *Physiognomy*, II, 240. Hunter's translation is: "It is the representation of a real individual, or of a part of his body only; it is the reproduction of our image; it is the art of presenting, on the first glance of the eye, the form of man, by traits, which it would be impossible to convey by words."



12 Adam Ludwig Wirsing, *Johann Caspar Lavater*, 1787, etching and engraving, 40.7 × 32.6cm (photo: Department of Prints & Drawings, Zürich Zentralbibliothek)

appeals to the aesthetics of Sulzer. A decade later, Lavater became involved in the shaping of his own portrait, a perfect example of using art "as a significant mode of self-fashioning."¹⁴² Fuseli's intimate knowledge of his friend had led to his keen observation that "he is many fine things . . . [but for his fatality of] unbridled will in composing at all times . . . [and his desire of] unmixed praise."¹⁴³

On October 25, 1799, under unclear circumstances Lavater was shot by one of the French soldiers then occupying Zurich; he lingered over a year in a mortal illness.¹⁴⁴ Lips surreptitiously worked on a commemorative engraving including a portrait and poem about Lavater, since he was preparing for publication immediately upon the death of the Zurich pastor.¹⁴⁵

The same circumstance must have rekindled interest in Blake's engraving. Bindman assumes that the plate remained in Johnson's possession.¹⁴⁶ Comparison of the

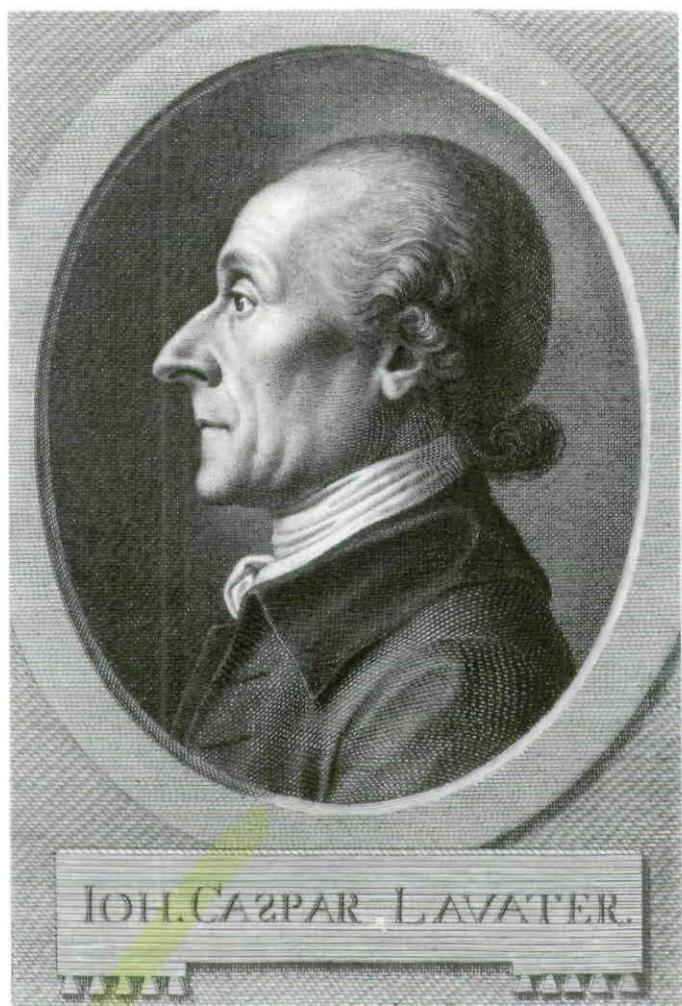
¹⁴² See Brilliant (as in n. 75), 11, for this concept.

¹⁴³ *Physiognomy*, I, "Advertisement," n.p.

¹⁴⁴ Kruse, 312, 313; Siegrist, 17.

¹⁴⁵ Kruse, 312–318.

¹⁴⁶ Bindman, 88.



13 Johann Heinrich Lips, frontispiece, *Johann Caspar Lavater*, 1790, etching and engraving, 14 × 9.5cm (photo: Department of Prints & Drawings, Zürich Zentralbibliothek)

photographs of the first and third states shows the new inscriptions (Figs. 7–8).¹⁴⁷ The prominent penciled inscription, "Engraved by William Blake," is reduced to the small and conventional "Blake sculpt." Soft highlights on the forehead, nose ridge, lower eye orbit, upper lip, and chin in the later state indicate some light burnishing of the plate, minimizing the sharpness of the network of engraved lines. Blake's role in the final publication of the engraving must have been slight. On August 26, 1799, Blake had complained to George Cumberland, his longtime friend: "Even Johnson & Fuseli have discarded my graver."¹⁴⁸ Blake wrote to his

¹⁴⁷ That Lavater died on the second day of the new year, January 2, 1801, explains the anomaly that the publication date is 1800, even though the date of death is 1801. Essick, 1983, 155, suggests that the plate cannot have been completed until the inscribed date of Lavater's death.

¹⁴⁸ See D. Erdman, ed., comm. H. Bloom, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, rev. ed., New York, 1988, 704.

patron Thomas Butts on January 10, 1803 that he was considered only as a reproductive engraver: "I find on all hands great objections to my doing any thing but the mere drudgery of business. . . . This from Johnson & Fuseli brought me down here & this from Mr. H will bring me back again. . . ."¹⁴⁹ This pairing of the names of Johnson and Fuseli may point to the revival of interest in the Lavater project and to the plate, over which Blake had little artistic control.

Essick has shown us that during the next four years, Blake heavily reworked his other engraved plates of the 1780s and 1790s, reprinting some of his most important, large, engraved and color-printed plates in transformed states that reflect profound changes in his intellectual and emotional life.¹⁵⁰ Blake, imbued with a Swedenborgian sense of a material and spiritual world, seen through the natural and the spiritual eye, learned from Lavater's "science," but valued the visionary art of the imagination as more truthful than an art based on direct observation and imitation of the forms of nature.¹⁵¹

Fuseli, still believing in physiognomy, intended to publish a biography of Lavater, but nothing came of it.¹⁵² Two of his *Lectures on Painting* delivered at the Royal Academy, those on Design and on Portraiture, show the closeness of his dependence on physiognomical theory.¹⁵³ He names Lavater last in a list of authorities on proportion.¹⁵⁴ Distinguishing between representation in form and vocal imitation, he clearly separates visual and verbal expression; he asserts that "in forms alone the idea of existence can be rendered intuitive and permanent."¹⁵⁵

The posthumous publication of Volume IV of the *Physiognomie* under the supervision of Lavater's son followed in 1803. In 1789, Lavater had circulated to friends a handwritten book of rules, published in an unauthorized version in 1793 as *Hundert physiognomischen Regeln*;¹⁵⁶ this was added to

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 724.

¹⁵⁰ See Essick, 1980, 179, 180. I am greatly indebted to Professor Essick, who in *Language of Adam* discusses Blake's language, the semiotics of the graphic image, and motivated signs, and who has clarified for me some of his points about physiognomy, graphic signs, and "a semiotics of Adam." Blake's later visionary portraits and his poetry continue to reflect specific influences of both physiognomy and phrenology. See R. Essick, *The Works of William Blake in the Huntington Collections, A Complete Catalogue*, San Marino, Cal., 1985, 74–88, esp. 75.

¹⁵¹ For Blake's views on art and nature, see Bindman (as in n. 122), 153, 154; on art, imagination, and physiognomic form, see Eaves (as in n. 5).

¹⁵² Schiff, i, 251.

¹⁵³ J. Knowles, *Lectures on Painting Delivered at the Royal Academy by Henry Fuseli, P.P., with Additional Observations and Notes*, London, 1830, 2nd ser., Lectures 7 and 10.

¹⁵⁴ Knowles, 70.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁵⁶ Riha and Zelle, 142, 145, n. 33.

the 1803 volume. These *Règles physiognomique* were included in Holcroft's four-volume edition of 1804, the abridgement of which was the "Victorian text." A fourth volume of the Murray quarto *Physiognomy* was not completed, as far as I can determine.

Lavater held a fundamental belief that man is made in the image and likeness of God and that man is perfectible within natural limits. Relying on his adaptation of the Swedenborgian concept of original speech and transparent countenances, Lavater assumed it is possible to know the interior from the exterior. Blind to the reflexive, aesthetic, and morally dictated aspects of what he thought was his intuitive response, Lavater was unaware of the ways his theories could be misinterpreted. He analyzed living physiognomies and visual representations as though both were the same. Both could present propositional statements answerable as true or false in regard to a final utterance about the nature of an individual.

Sauerländer, referring to the problem of belief in the physiognomical, in the unmediated "clarity" of the image, warns today's art historians "to fight the Lavater in themselves and to pay attention to their Lichtenberg."¹⁵⁷ He reminds us that "as little as the skull of Lavater" the exterior form of art does not work a direct and unmediated proof; it is silent regarding an inner metaphysical truth of art. What to us is the direct clarity of the artwork proves itself to be as conditional as all other sign systems that human beings in the course of time have invented according to their own cultural orientation.

It is important to heed the warnings about the deceptive power of the assumption that our perception of images intuitively yields truth. Gombrich insisted on the psychological principle that "organisms are equipped to probe and learn by trial and error, by switching from one hypothesis to another till one is found that ensures our survival in a three-dimensional world."¹⁵⁸ Gerald Edelman, the controversial neuroscientist and biologist, in his hypothesis of the way our brains are formed in part through biological perception and response, raises questions of how we may relate physiology to psychology, how values and categorization, both perceptual and conceptual, and of grammar in a wide sense, arise.¹⁵⁹ Such studies will lead to a better understanding of

the way our brains give rise to our minds, where our "forms" and our "truths" are structured, stored, and modified. We must certainly learn to become more aware of the putative transparency of the visual image and its power in a world increasingly dominated by and interpreted through potent images.

*A University of Pennsylvania Ph.D. and an independent scholar now working in Washington, D.C., Joan K. Stemmler has taught and lectured on European art of the 18th and 19th centuries and on William Blake. Her articles have appeared in *Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly* [3540 Winfield Lane, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20007].*

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¹⁵⁷ Sauerländer, 28–29.

¹⁵⁸ Gombrich, 1961, 327, 338. Gombrich believed that when he engaged in his "foraging expeditions" in search of new ideas about the human mind, he was moving in exactly the right direction.

¹⁵⁹ See G. Edelman, *Bright Air, Brilliant Fire* [New York], 1992, esp. 134.

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