

Gombrich, Art and Psychoanalysis

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Ernst H. Gombrich's most important studies on the psychology of representation actually have little to do with psychoanalysis. However, as we shall see, he was able to refer to Sigmund Freud's theories with considerable acumen and lucidity, thus favouring to some extent, at least in Italy, the spread of a psychoanalytically oriented psychology of art.¹ It is striking that this contribution should come from an art historian (art historian *sui generis* though he was) as the history and criticism of art have always been rather closed to engagement with psychoanalysis, much more so than the history and criticism of literature. As we know, Gombrich's familiarity with, and openness to, psychoanalysis – all the more evident considering that he could also be very stern in his critical judgments (see his reviews of Arnold Hauser's *The Social History of Art* and André Malraux's *La psychologie de l'art*) – was fostered by his friendship and collaboration with Ernst Kris, who before becoming an important psychoanalyst had been a respected art historian on the staff of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna.

But let us turn to what Gombrich says about psychoanalysis. We begin with his 1954 essay, '*Psycho-Analysis and the History of Art*', based on a lecture he had given the year before in honour of Ernest Jones. He opens by firmly but amiably (he was, after all, speaking before an audience of psychoanalysts, who had expressly invited him) distancing himself from applied psychoanalysis and its corollary psychobiographical method. This method, he explains, deals primarily with the 'expressive significance' of works, that is their content, rather than the 'historical progress of modes of representation'.² To consider a work of art as one would a dream is doubly ineffective, in psychoanalytical terms (as it lacks the essential support of free associations) and in terms of its comprehension as art. That is unless, the only authentic meaning of the work – what allows its viewers to appreciate it – lies exclusively in 'this private, personal, psychological meaning'³ which the psychoanalytical tool can reveal. Gombrich then illustrates this contention with a brilliant excursus on the possible interpretations of Pablo Picasso's *Dove of peace*: it would obviously be naive to wish to consider this celebrated image in the light of

¹ On the other hand, the text published by Einaudi that collects his three most important essays on psychoanalysis (*Freud e la psicologia dell'arte*) appeared in 1967, when Einaudi also published the extremely fundamental *Psychoanalytic Explorations in Art* by Ernst Kris. It was only in those years that studies on art, literature and psychoanalysis began to enjoy a significant circulation in Italy. The first edition of Michel David's book *La psicoanalisi nella cultura italiana* only appeared in 1966, as did the first volume of Freud's *Opere* for Boringhieri under the supervision of Cesare Musatti. Consequently, Gombrich's contribution was, at least for Italy, timely indeed.

² Ernst H. Gombrich, '*Psycho-Analysis and the History of Art*' *Meditations on a Hobby Horse and other Essays on the Theory of Art*, Ernst Gombrich, London: Phaidon, 1963, 30-31.

³ Gombrich, '*Psycho-Analysis and the History of Art*', 31.

Picasso's biography – his father, too, had habitually painted pigeons. If one wished then to find meaning in that work only in the symbolism implicit in the dove as object (for example as a phallic symbol) even were this plausible, it would make no difference if the picture were the work of any 'hack [artist] rather than Picasso'. Gombrich concludes: 'the relation between an artist and the world at large – between private and public meaning – are obviously much more complex'.⁴ In any case, Gombrich's objections to applied psychoanalysis, which I have here only very briefly summarized, really have a great deal of substance. He raises them without arrogance and with great lucidity and learning, and no one who deals with this subject matter can fail to consider his ideas. Nowadays they are in fact no longer a novelty but, in a sense, accepted wisdom. I prefer, then, to discuss the approach Gombrich does recommend to applying what we can learn from Freud and psychoanalysis to the study of art.

The most novel and original feature of Gombrich's contribution to this field (and that which cannot easily be isolated in general theoretical terms from that of Kris) lies in his focus on Freud's theory of the joke and in his adherence to the concept of controlled regression in the service of the ego. This had been introduced by 'Ego Psychology', to which Heinz Hartmann as well as Kris referred. This theory postulated that, in turn, the dynamics of jokes were seen to have anticipated and to offer a well-constructed confirmation. Characteristic of jokes, as Gombrich rightly notes, is their capacity to exploit through their immersion of the ego in the primary process, the formal potentialities of the unconscious. This is achieved through immediately seizing, for example, the opportunities for expression implicit in language as code. The concept of 'controlled regression' presupposes however that the ego of an artist (unlike that of the neurotic) is particularly well structured and is therefore able to tolerate this immersion in the unconscious (that is in the primary process), without this taking any toll on his psychic equilibrium. Moreover, as one may recall, Freud himself had spoken of a marked 'flexibility of repression' and a tendency to sublimate on the part of artists.

On the other hand, and looking beyond the arguments of Gombrich and Kris, the idea of an ego able to control the primary process can also be related to the Freudian notion of 'secondary elaboration', an oneiric mechanism attributed to the secondary process. This shows that a portion of the vigilant ego is present even within a dream and exerts a two-fold censorship⁵ (he who dreams, Freud reminds us, always knows he is dreaming). In my own research on art and reparation, I have associated this notion not only with the idea of a particular plasticity of the ego, which is able, for example, to tolerate splitting and doubling (as one sees in certain defence mechanisms active both in writing and in self-portraiture), but also with the concept of aesthetic illusion. The latter is in turn traceable to the mechanism of *Verleugnung*, described by Freud precisely in relation to the problems raised by the splitting of the ego – which I prefer to consider, more cautiously, simply a capacity for doubling.

⁴ Gombrich, 'Psycho-Analysis and the History of Art', 33.

⁵ Also (and, I should say, above all) active in dreams is the so-called 'censorship of dreams' (traceable to the super-ego) that denies unconscious contents direct access to the conscious self.

In any event, the theory of controlled regression in the service of the ego is also deployed by Kris and Gombrich in their 1938 essay on caricature, which as we know is the figural equivalent of *Witz*. But significantly, here this psychic mechanism is discussed in relation to people generally, rather than in relation to the distinctive ego of any particular artist. As they present it, this concept offers an answer to an important art-historical question: why it is that caricature appeared so late (around the end of the sixteenth century) in the history of art. They provide a very stimulating explanation.

Caricature is a play with the magic power of the image, and for such a play to be licit or institutionalized, the belief in the real efficacy of the spell must be firmly under control.⁶ Before that time then, historical and cultural conditions had not been ripe for the acceptance of, or more precisely control over, the subversive powers inherent in the magic of the image. This had still been felt to be too real and it had therefore still not been possible to engage in the sort of controlled regression that would have allowed caricature to become art. This resistance was compounded in a neo-Platonic context where art was no longer only the 'imitation of nature' but the revelation of the very essence of things, therefore caricature was perceived as truer than other portraits, able to penetrate any mask to reveal the truth of the personage it represented.⁷ I would point out however, that the fact that the magic of the image was (and still is) 'controlled' does not mean it was absent. On the contrary, precisely because it was controlled it could sustain itself and thus act at a deep level, even for example in the traditional portrait. In this respect Gombrich's position is entirely different from that of David Freedberg, who tends, in rather polemical terms, to deny the magical element of the 'power of images'.

We shall encounter further important implications tied to this notion of controlled regression, but for the present I should like to turn to another issue. Reference to the theoretical context of the jokes also permitted Gombrich to tackle (and in his view resolve) a delicate and intriguing problem; that of Freud's relationship with art. As we know, Gombrich stresses above all else the powerful contradiction between the Freud hailed by the movements of the artistic avant-garde as an ally, and the Freud who personally articulated strongly conservative aesthetic tastes. This was the Freud who would condemn surrealism and expressionism in no uncertain terms, as can be read in his letters, which Gombrich cites on numerous occasions. Why this contradiction? Is Freud's resistance to contemporary art to be attributed to the classical education then fundamental to the ideal of *Bildung*, or did his psychoanalytical theory lead to the same conclusions and thus sanction his rejection of the artistic avant-garde? As we know, according to Gombrich there is no contradiction between Freud the man and Freud the theoretician, and the formula of the jokes amply demonstrates this. Gombrich's reading, thoroughly enjoyable and generally convincing as it is, does leave the impression of a degree of unilateral simplification. The fact is that though Gombrich did significantly broaden the horizon of what the category of art encompassed (including not only surrealism and expressionism but also to some extent, cubism),

⁶ *Psychoanalytic Exploration in Art*, Ernst Kris New York: Schocken Books, 1952, 201.

⁷ Caricature is able 'to reveal the true man behind the mask of pretense, to show up his 'essential' littleness and ugliness' (Kris, *Psychoanalytic Exploration in Art*, 190).

he largely shared Freud's reservations. These manifested themselves in the idea that there can be no art where a certain equilibrium is not maintained between unconscious material and preconscious elaboration. It is evident that both work from a distinct and preconceived idea of art, imposing a specific choice of poetics.

It would be useful, at this point, to summarize what Gombrich effectively has Freud say:

- a) Art is not the simple expression of contents from the unconscious.
- b) These contents may be expressed, if at all, only to the extent that they can be adapted to particular forms of expression⁸.
- c) Therefore, that which the unconscious is above all able to determine is in fact the form. This is insomuch as the primary process succeeds in singling out amongst the myriad solutions open to it that which is linguistically (or, in the case of caricatures, figuratively) best suited.
- d) This is possible to the extent that the artist's ego is capable of controlling, and thus harnessing the primary process (according to the formula of controlled regression noted above).

At this point I must add a brief note. There is a definite contiguity of the original concept of 'somatic compliance', used by Freud with regard to hysteria, which allows the symptom to express itself with what we may identify as the 'compliance of the code'. Freud refers to this the case of jokes, and Gombrich draws upon it on in his essay. Here too we discover an interplay of nature and culture whereby each conditions the other: on the one hand culture follows the same paths as nature ('somatic compliance'). However, at the same time, without the control on the part of the ego over the (historically defined) patterns of representation of nature the contents of the primary process could not arrive at culturally permissible means of expressing them. This interplay is also demonstrated by the way that neurotic symptoms and, more generally, the different ways in which psychic illnesses express themselves (the various clinical symptomologies) are strongly conditioned by their cultural context. As a symptom, hysteria for example manifests itself in entirely different ways in the harsh realities of the Salpêtrière or Freud's Vienna; and, in general, manifestations of psychic uneasiness exhibit modifications and adaptation in relation to their historical setting. It is as though the numerous dialects spoken by the unconscious which were noted by Freud, indicate not only the functional plasticity of the unconscious but also its responsiveness to historical conditions.

Let us now examine a bit more closely Gombrich's essay of 1954, *'Psycho-Analysis and the History of Art'*, from which we began. Pivotal to this essay, is the historicism and relativism of its idea of the processes of representation. This attention to the historical and cultural relativity of codes of expression (and above all, linguistic codes, as we have noted), was already present in Freud's work on wit. Having dealt with this, along with Kris, in relation to caricature, which is itself inseparable from its socio-cultural context, Gombrich now defines and describes it primarily in relation to the problem of artistic styles. The fact is that works, he

⁸ 'Only those unconscious ideas that can be adjusted to the reality of formal structures become communicable and their value to others rests at least as much in the formal structure as in the idea. The code generates the message' (Ernst H. Gombrich, 'Freud's Aesthetics', *Encounter*, January 1966, 36).

writes, 'acquired this meaning within [...] the context of the institution we call art',⁹ that is to say within the sphere of the 'historical progress of modes of representation',¹⁰ which entails a 'constant extension and modification of symbols'.¹¹ The originality and the specificity of Gombrich's contribution plainly lies in this effort to recast Freud's discourse in historical or better still, contextual terms.

Gombrich goes on to point out other art historical factors traceable to a sort of metapsychological dynamic. One example is the fact that 'the pleasure principle that favours repetition, the recognition of similarities rather than differences'. This is what Freud, precisely in his theory of jokes, traces to the pleasure of 'rediscovery of what is familiar'.¹² Here he finds confirmation 'in the representational and ornamental stereotypes of many primitive cultures; the reality principle, which proceeds by assimilation of the unknown to the known, in the countless instances in which tradition colours perception or expression'.¹³ In other words, according to Gombrich, the primordial pleasure of repetition characterizes certain stereotyped formulas in decoration. This is while the assimilative power of tradition, in accordance with the reality principle, tends to condition modes of representation and of perception, which it aligns with the principle of the already known, that is impelling the artist (and with him the viewer) to draw upon firmly established stylistic norms. It is precisely this attention to history, to the evolution of modes of representation, that distinguishes art from dreams: 'It is this fact,' notes Gombrich, 'I believe, which explains that art has a history, a style, in contrast to perception and to dreaming which have not.'¹⁴

Especially interesting is the fact that Gombrich then seeks to discern the role played by these culture-historical factors in shaping modes of representing the human body, something which can be understood physiognomically only through respect for, and the sharing of, particular stylistic conventions. Gombrich maintains that the representation and comprehension of the human figure is conditioned first and foremost by the proprioception, the awareness every individual has of his own body, and it is significant that here he explicitly cites the research on the 'body image' by Paul Schilder, an eclectic scientist who wove into his studies psychiatry, psychoanalysis, neurology and the physiology of perception. That artists were traditionally men would explain, according to Gombrich, why the representational archetype of the body is generally male, as one sees in the thirteenth-century figure of Eve in the Cathedral of Bamberg. However, Gombrich also stresses that the representation of the body derives from schemes and conventions fixed at every step of the way by tradition, and that these emerge only within that framework. In western art through the middle ages these conventions were drawn from classical art, so that whereas Botticelli's *Venus* still shows a rather uncertain command of its schemes, Raphael's figure of Galatea and Titian's of Europa display their perfect

⁹ Gombrich, 'Psycho-Analysis and the History of Art', 33.

¹⁰ Gombrich, 'Psycho-Analysis and the History of Art', 30.

¹¹ Gombrich, 'Psycho-Analysis and the History of Art', 33.

¹² Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. VIII, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960, 120.

¹³ Gombrich, 'Psycho-Analysis and the History of Art', 33-34.

¹⁴ Gombrich, 'Psycho-Analysis and the History of Art', 33-34.

assimilation. But this also applies to appreciation: only to the extent that the viewer shares the artist's schemes of representation will he be able to relate to a work: 'Up to a point we have to work from clues and repeat in our mind the imaginative effort of the artist if we are to build up the figures for ourselves'.¹⁵ This is, of course, the theory of 're-creation,' which Kris derived from Freud's work on jokes, and which entails a psychic and cultural commonality of the creator and the viewer.¹⁶ If modes of representation are complex the viewer must be just as mature and well-prepared as he states concerning Raphael's *Galatea*: 'Now it is well to remember that such a complex image is not only more difficult to paint but also more difficult to read than the primitive representation of Botticelli. Up to a point we have to work from clues and repeat in our mind the imaginative effort of the artist if we are to build up the figures for ourselves.'¹⁷

This again is Kris's theory of re-creation (Gombrich explicitly cites Kris a few lines below), but here it is considered in a more detailed and functional way, due in part to the influence noted above of Schilder's theories on the concept of body image. Herein, I believe, lies one of its most significant differences with respect to Gestalt-oriented psychology of perception, for Gombrich stresses that even the laws of perception and their results are culturally and historically conditioned and are to be considered within the framework of particular representational conventions. This concept recurs throughout his studies, where Gombrich never tires of reminding us that in art, man tends to see what he expects to see.

At this point it might be interesting to draw together or re-examine these last assertions by Gombrich on the theory of fruition as re-creation, this time in terms of what Freud suggests in his essay on jokes.

As we have seen, in certain circumstances man exhibits an intrinsic capacity to listen to and exploit the prerogatives of the unconscious in order, for example, to take control of certain potentialities inherent in the code of language (in the case of jokes) or to analyse and decipher the movements and expressive characteristics of the human figure, immediately grasping their 'physiognomic secret' (as occurs in humour or figural art). Gombrich repeatedly refers to this opportunity in his 1966 essay, where he uses the term 'divination' or 'physiognomic reaction'.¹⁸ He also speaks of this in relation to Freud's approach to art, which is characterized, in his opinion, by a need to penetrate (again physiognomically) to the 'spiritual content' of the works. This has been discovered in Freud's letters to his fiancée and as Freud himself demonstrated in his analysis of Michelangelo's *Moses*. Actually, one can also relate this prerogative to the concept of controlled regression in the service of the ego; that is to the artist's capacity to harness the mechanisms of the unconscious, more as regards form than content.

It is no coincidence that Freud describes this very capacity for 'physiognomic divination' in connection with what he calls 'representative mimicry'. Indeed on this occasion the 'physiognomic reaction' is in a sense analysed and broken down to its

¹⁵ Gombrich, 'Psycho-Analysis and the History of Art', 35.

¹⁶ 'Every joke calls for a public of its own and laughing at the same jokes is evidence of far reaching psychical conformity' (Freud, *Jokes*, 151).

¹⁷ Gombrich, 'Psycho-Analysis and the History of Art', 35.

¹⁸ Gombrich, 'Freud's Aesthetics', 33.

smallest articulations. Gombrich does not mention this Freudian concept, but I think it can readily be related to his arguments on modes of representation and fruition; the more because Freud himself considers 'the matter as a really important one' and explicitly states 'that if ideational mimetics are followed up, they may be as useful in other branches of aesthetics as they are here for an understanding of the comic'.¹⁹ Let us now examine precisely what we are dealing with by considering the extract below:

But how is it that we laugh when we have recognized that some other person's movements are exaggerated and inexpedient? By making a comparison, I believe, between the movement I observe in the other person and the one that I should have carried out myself in his place. The two things compared must of course be judged by the same standard, and this standard is my expenditure of innervation, which is linked to my idea of the movement in both of the two cases [...].

An impulsion of this kind to imitation is undoubtedly present in perceptions of movements. But actually I do not carry the imitation through, any more than I still spell words out if I learnt to read by spelling. Instead of imitating the movement with my muscles, I have an idea of it through the medium of my memory-traces of expenditures on similar movements [...]. The way is pointed out by physiology, for it teaches us that even during the process of ideation innervations run out to the muscles, though these, it is true, correspond to a very modest expenditure of energy. Now it becomes very plausible to suppose that this innervatory energy that accompanies the process of ideation is used to represent the quantitative factor of the idea: that it is larger when there is an idea of a large movement than when it is a question of a small one [...].

Direct observation shows that human beings are in the habit of expressing the attributes of largeness and smallness in the content of their ideas by means of a varying expenditure in a kind of 'ideational mimetics'.²⁰

Freud's words remind me of those 'mind readers' especially in vogue in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, who were able to discover a person's secrets by deciphering so-called minimal movements (breathing, a blink of the eye or any other involuntary movement), thanks to exceptional powers of intuition and identification. Representative mimicry also presents us with an empathetic identification which is at once automatic and 'controlled' in that its basis is both physiological and psychic. The fact remains that thanks to this functional empathy, which is able to decipher the slightest movements of another person's body, one is able to identify with that person, almost living the same experiences. But, again, this identification is not simply automatic; it is not a so-called hysterical identification whereby one loses (if this is really the case) his critical distance from the person in question. No, in this case that critical distance holds, and this is precisely what

¹⁹ Freud, *Jokes*, 193.

²⁰ Freud, *Jokes*, 193-194.

makes for the comic effect. In that in a very brief lapse of time, one identifies with another person and measures the energy of the nervous impulses he has expended against that actually required. This measurement, this calculation, would not be possible without a distance, a mediation between the ego and the self that is observed. Here too, then, there is a controlled regression in the service of the ego, or, if we prefer, a 'controlled identification'. It is evident that in the fruition of works of figural art something analogous occurs. But given the problematic historical relativity of representational processes repeatedly highlighted by Gombrich and the whole Warburg school, the viewer must also share with the artist a common set of norms and expressive formulas, as occurs in the case of jokes.

The theory of representative mimicry, some aspects of which are rooted in Freud's dream of a *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, seems to have found a sort of reconfirmation in the all too oft-cited discovery of the celebrated mirror neurons. These appear to offer almost a 'photograph' of this innate human capacity to relate to others. In this case that of the viewer, but the same applies even more so to the case of the artist, who must attune himself to the reality of the 'other', say to make a portrait. This, then, is a 'functional identification' – as we have noted, at once functional and controlled. But precisely inasmuch as it is mediated by the ego it is not only a mere physiological phenomenon, but also something psychically and culturally more complex that can scarcely be weighed and measured only in neurological terms. Or at least, in order for the viewer's neurons to be activated by a response mirroring those of the artist these must, as Freud explained, have a common psychic configuration or, in terms closer to Gombrich, they must both have internalized the same set of representational modes and stylistic conventions. This qualification also holds for other tempting, but equally simplistic, so-called neuroaesthetic approaches.

But let us return now to the 1954 essay. Another example of how culture (and therefore history and tradition), can influence and condition perception is the question of taste and in particular 'the compensatory nature of aesthetic satisfaction'.²¹ With this formula Gombrich does not intend to refer to the Freudian concept of art as a substitute gratification of a desire, which of course concerns the content of a work. Rather he means that the enjoyment of a pleasure he defines as 'regressive', necessitates some compensation at the formal, aesthetic level. For instance, the erotic pleasure bound up with the representation of nudity must not be too exposed, too explicit, but must be mediated and, so to speak, 'complicated' by the aesthetic form. Gombrich gives the example of William-Adolphe Bouguereau's *Birth of Venus*, where 'the erotic appeal is on the surface and it is not compensated for by this sharing in the artist's imaginative process. The image is painfully easy to read, and we resent being taken for such simpletons'.²² At this point Gombrich introduces 'the synaesthetic metaphor' of 'a surfeit of oral gratifications', thus highlighting 'the importance of oral gratification as a genetic model for aesthetic pleasure'.²³ This 'genetic' and 'synesthetic' conception of the pleasure of art is undeniably effective and, I believe, would not have displeased Freud.

²¹ Gombrich, 'Psycho-Analysis and the History of Art', 36.

²² Gombrich, 'Psycho-Analysis and the History of Art', 37.

²³ Gombrich, 'Psycho-Analysis and the History of Art', 39.

The idea, in short, is that 'we find repellent what offers too obvious, too childish, gratification. It invites regression and we do not feel secure enough to yield'²⁴ — which is to say that the gratification in question is too cheap, having asked of us no mental effort whatsoever. This is essentially a variation on the Freudian notion of the 'psychical damming up'²⁵ that, as we know, by increasing the psychic expenditure needed to appreciate the humour of a remark, it intensifies the pleasure comprehension confers as tension is released.

We find the same sort of mechanism in the experiment proposed by Gombrich using the *Three Graces* by Bonnencontre. If we try placing over that egregiously 'transparent' and gross depiction a sheet of wavy glass, the picture will seem more acceptable: 'we have to become a little more active in reconstituting the image, and we are less disgusted'.²⁶ If, then, this functional and economic conception of aesthetic pleasure is very close to Freud, we note once again that Gombrich tends to carry psychoanalysis back into the realm, as it were, of history and of culture. The 'psychical damming up' Gombrich speaks of here has primarily to do with aesthetic superstructures: in other words, in this case too, the censorship that presides over the artistic process belongs to secondary elaboration and is part of an ego that controls the primary process.

These categories, Gombrich concludes, are certainly not sufficient to determine what is art and what is not: 'but while I think that taste may be accessible to psychological analysis, art is possibly not'.²⁷ Indeed even Freud, before the enigma of art, said that analysis must lay down its arms.

There is however another dimension in Gombrich's reasoning that concerns the way he sees Freudian psychoanalysis, and it is one that I would like to note as we approach the end of this paper. We have seen that, with Freud and Kris, Gombrich is particularly attentive to the functioning and economy of the mechanisms of identification and re-creation that govern the fruition of art. Actually, these mechanisms are accompanied by a significant charge of pleasure, which Freud in his essay on jokes, calls *functional* and which is, in general terms, tied to the free play of psychic processes (pleasure derived from perceiving the operation of the mental machine, as it were). Freud expressly speaks of 'the need which men feel for deriving pleasure from their processes of thought'²⁸ and Kris notes that 'the shifts in cathexis of mental energy which the work of art elicits or facilitates are [...] pleasurable in themselves'.²⁹

Alongside the regressive pleasure that retrieves the freedom of childhood activities (that love of experimenting with one's own psychic potentialities through play with thoughts and words that characterizes the processes of wit and can readily be associated with the workings of literary creation), there may be other, equally regressive pleasure tied to play with images. One example would be the processes of physiognomic decipherment we discussed above. In this perspective,

²⁴ Gombrich, 'Psycho-Analysis and the History of Art', 39.

²⁵ Freud, *Jokes*, 121.

²⁶ Gombrich, 'Psycho-Analysis and the History of Art', 40.

²⁷ Gombrich, 'Psycho-Analysis and the History of Art', 43.

²⁸ Freud, *Jokes*, 123.

²⁹ Kris, *Psychoanalytic Explorations in Art*, 63.

representational mimicry itself, in addition to the economic pleasure conferred by the difference between the psychic expenditure of the subject who observes and the object he observes (and which finds expression in comic laughter), would in and of itself bestow a certain percentage of functional pleasure in conjunction with the very process of identification.

Gombrich himself, as we have seen, proposed a sort of oral genesis of pleasure, which would be intensified by the psychic bottleneck caused by some form of opacity that makes appreciation more complicated and less naive. We can also imagine an additional kind of pleasure from figural art. This is a pleasure that would be derived from abandoning oneself, though under the protection of controlled regression, to the magic of the image, with precisely that protection granting access to the deeper roots of one's drives. Freud, in fact, had already noticed that functional pleasure is intensified in proportion to its derivation from the primeval dimension. Here too, however, Freud's primarily economic explication is transposed by Gombrich to become an essentially cultural explication. As we have seen, the psychic bottleneck, the heightening of tension that augments pleasure, does not originate so much in drives as in culture: this is the cultural factor that besides conditioning the processes of fruition and defining their relativity also makes them more satisfying economically. Nature and culture exert reciprocal influences according to the 'principle of aesthetic aid or exaltation' proposed by Gustav T. Fechner, whereby each enhances the other. This principle is of course proposed by Freud both in *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* and in *Creative writers and day-dreaming* in connection with the dialectic between 'preliminary pleasure' (tied to form) and 'final pleasure' (tied to content). This is where the reference to sexuality, albeit a pregenital sexuality and therefore less focused and nearer to a functional dimension, heightens and deepens the pleasure of art. But in light of the considerations Gombrich stresses, it is, above all, the crucial culture-historical influences that make even these sources of pleasure accessible and effective.

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Amongst his books are:

La psicologia del ritratto nell'arte e nella letteratura, Laterza, Bari-Roma 1998;

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